

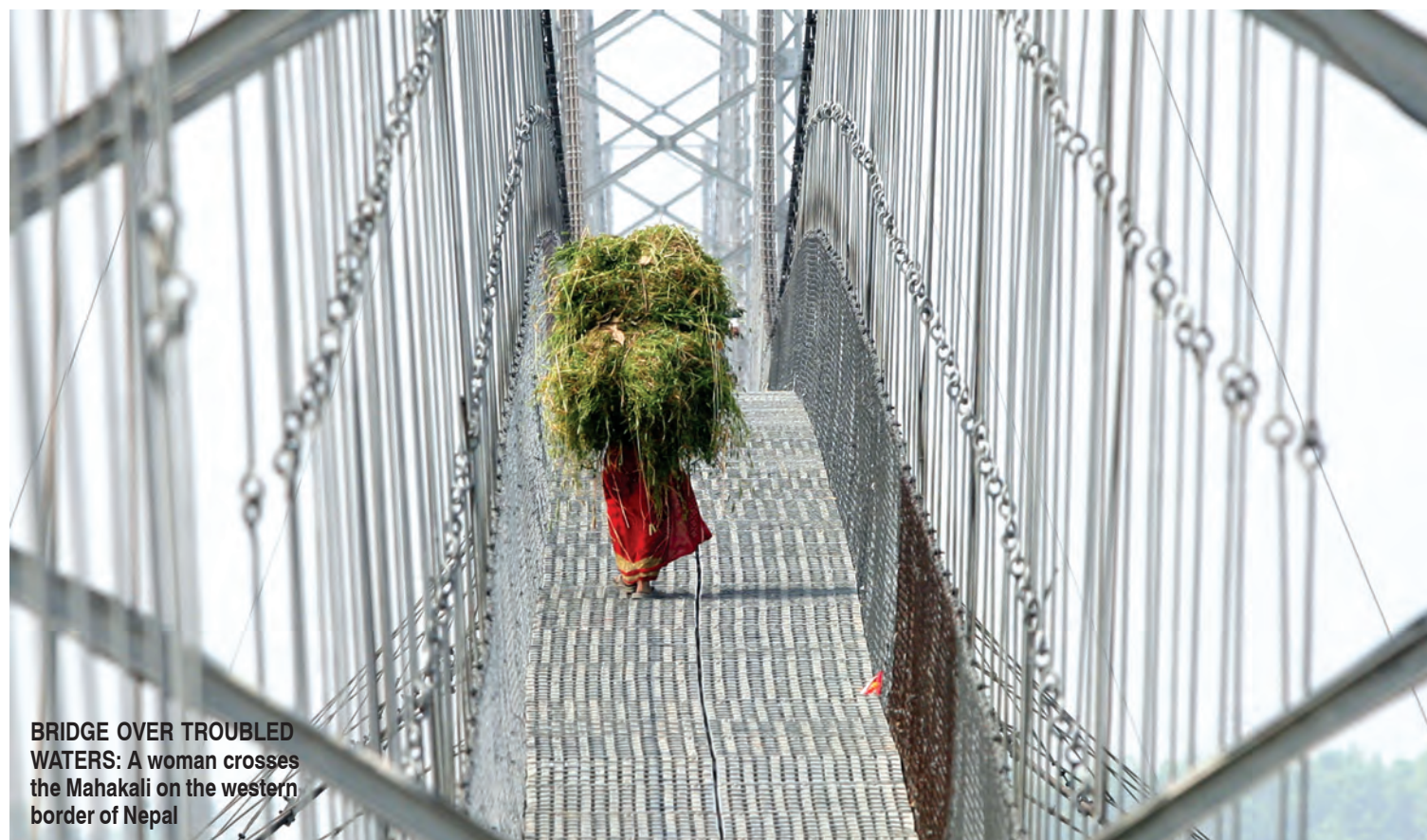
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**BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS:** A woman crosses the Mahakali on the western border of Nepal

KIRAN PANDAY

## Proximate breakthrough

Appearances can be deceptive. In the space of a week, the public has been treated to the spectacle of Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal flinging invective at Kathmandu's middle class and media, followed by a contrite apology to a selected 'civil society' group at the Yak & Yeti hotel on Wednesday.

After listening to a range of opinions on what his party had to do, Dahal promised the UCPN (Maoist) was willing to proceed with compromises on the peace process and constitution-writing. This included placing the PLA under control of the Special Committee, disbanding the YCL barracks within a few days as required, and resolving disputes related to the constitutional draft.

To the cynic, this would seem to be merely another ploy to mollify Kathmandu's business and intellectual elite, who were simultaneously emboldened by last Friday's peace assembly and

offended by Dahal's attack on them the following day. Indeed, Sher Bahadur Deuba was quick to respond to Dahal on Thursday with a "we will believe it when we see it" response.

But it is clear that the Maoists are on the back foot, and more amenable to a deal than before the general strike. "This is positive, because the main obstacles to the peace process and constitution-writing have in fact been put up by the Maoists," says journalist Kanak Mani Dixit. "Despite the Maoist bluster of not talking with the government, there have been relentless backroom parleys over the last week that have taken us closer to a package compromise than ever before."

It was thanks to the hardliners that the party went in for the indefinite general strike, not heeding the advice of leaders like Baburam Bhattarai and Barshaman Pun. This adventurism, akin to the

commander-in-chief episode of a year ago that forced the Maoists to exit government, served to dramatically weaken the Maoists. Their cadre is disgruntled, and the party leaders are seen to have buckled to the peaceniks and the international community, especially big-brother India.

Equally, the solid alliance between UML and NC leaders to resist the Maoist attempt to force a government change through street protest is credited with forcing Dahal to pull back, added to the Kathmandu public's refusal to heed his call to join in, and the danger of a snowballing backlash countrywide.

There are two sticking points as we go to press. First, the ruling alliance of 22 parties is unwilling to concede to the Maoist demand for a quid pro quo in the form of the resignation of the government in response to the Maoists calling off their general strike. Prime Minister

Madhav Kumar Nepal is in a mind to leave once the peace process deal is sealed, after which he will formally propose extension of the Constituent Assembly's term.

The main disagreement revolves around the immediate fate of the ex-combatants in cantonments. The other political forces want the Maoists to specify a number for security force integration, and will consider between 3,000-7,000. The Maoist leaders would rather that all 19,000-plus ex-combatants be considered for integration, with a final selection made according to the existing standards of the Nepal Army, Armed Police and Nepal Police.

There is a detailed agreement document of a couple of pages doing the rounds, worked out by NC and UML leaders, and what is needed now is further parleys and the Maoists signing on. We are closer to an agreement than the political static would have us believe. ☐

**LIFETIMES p7-9**  
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

# RELIEF AND DESPAIR

Nearly a week after the withdrawal of the Maoist strike, and till press time, the political parties are still going around in circles.

The popular mood is one of relief that the unnecessary and ruinous shutdown is over, but despair that the country is headed for another major showdown. The average citizen watches aghast as national leaders claw at each other for the prime ministership while the country suffers and is mired deeper in crisis.

The Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll this month, as well as sound bites on the street this week, prove that the people are fed up with this deadlock. They are not at all reassured by the names being thrown up as alternatives to Pushpa Kamal Dahal. The national mood is for change to a dynamic, youthful, visionary leadership that can take the people towards prosperity and justice. Unfortunately, every formula being put forward as an alternative to the Maoists is made up of

the same tired, discredited faces from the past. Most people are now so worn out, opposition to the Maoists for having punished the people with the strike is now being replaced by resentment against the prime minister for refusing to step down.

The real dilemma here is that the Maoists, who most people think are the ones who can and should set things right, are untrustworthy bullies. The Maoist candidate for prime ministership himself is someone who openly threatens civil society leaders with harm, and promises fire and brimstone against a business community that his party has already bled dry. His ominous threat to the media ("we are keeping a close watch on what you are writing") at the rally on Sunday was followed through the very next day by his cadre with selective and systematic attacks on reporters covering the protests near Singh Darbar. There have been threats and intimidation against businesses, media and professionals who supported and took part in the citizens' protest last Friday.

Chairman Dahal is his own worst enemy. The people are still willing to give him a chance if he starts behaving

like a statesman, heals rather than hurts, and unites rather than plays his rivals against each other. Yet we see a leader increasingly trapped by his own rhetoric and under pressure from within his own party for the cult of personality he has unleashed.

There is wide agreement among all the parties that the first order of business is that they should quickly and collectively move to extend the mandate of the CA to avoid a dangerous constitutional void on 28 May. No leader we know is against consensus and the setting up of a national government. As far as we can make out, the disagreement is only over procedure, sequencing and who should lead the government.

But the heart of the matter is that the Maoists keep reminding us every day through words and action that they are not a party to be trusted. They seem unwilling or incapable of giving up their self-destructive habit of using threats, intimidation and extortion to get their way.



# Less revolting



The Himalmedia Poll a fortnight ago showed that the Nepali people are enormously concerned that the constitution will not be written in time, and that the country may lapse back into war.

With only two weeks to go, it is important to note that most Nepalis want the tenure of the CA to be extended to conclude constitution-writing and the peace process. This is a clear message to those on the extreme left and right who are hoping to benefit from the expected constitutional void after 28 May.

When asked for their opinion, or at election time, Nepalis usually show optimism and great wisdom, always preferring the moderate, non-violent and democratic path. In April, too, most of the 5,005 respondents polled evinced a

firm belief that things will get better, the political parties will resolve their differences, and move ahead.

People want the Maoists to reform themselves by giving up threats, violence and weapons and joining peaceful politics. They blame them for obstructing constitution writing and the peace process, but they also showed support for a 'reformed' Maoist party. They reject the 'capture of state power through people revolt' and 'promulgating a constitution from the streets' and less than one per cent of respondents favoured a new Maoist rebellion. The people want to move on, and they have a fairly clear idea of the way ahead.


There is strong support for an inclusive political system and consensual politics. There is overwhelming support for the Maoists, NC and UML working together for peace and prosperity. They reject a revival of the 1990 constitution, dissolution of the CA and presidential rule post-28 May, and don't want to rescind the declaration of the republic.

The survey results blame CA members for the delay in writing the constitution, and take a dim view of the politicisation of the body. Nearly one third of the respondents, most of them educated, blamed the Maoists for the delay. They also found fault with the government for not doing enough, but displayed a lack of trust in the Maoists over

with mostly educated people for federalism, and more people against ethnic demarcation of provinces. The reason for the scepticism seems to be worries about national integrity: more than three fourths said Nepali nationhood was under threat, and more people in the Tarai than the hills seemed to think so. A surprisingly high proportion of

this would point to a solid challenge to the 'Prachanda' brand within the Maoist party. The lesson for Dahal may be that the people could be more impressed with intellect and honesty than manipulation and deceit. The fact that all other leaders scored in single digits proves that NC and UML really need to get their act together and revamp the party leadership with fresh, young faces.

The Maoists score well because the psychology of 'we have seen the others, let's try the Maoists' is still at work. People want to see the Maoists join peaceful politics and for the immediate future, there was much more support for a Maoist-led coalition than for Madhav Nepal's coalition. Nepalis are fed up with government neglect, inflation and deteriorating law and order.

The main message from the Nepali people seems to be: we want the Maoists to have responsibility and we want them to act more responsibly. Work together, and no more threats of rebellions. 

## The people want the CA extended and peace process concluded

the sacking of the army chief last year, the integration of combatants, or the disbanding of the YCL. They are however willing to strongly support the Maoists if they 'change'. Educated, older, Nepalis seem more suspicious about Maoist intentions.

While federalism is yet to be endorsed officially, public opinion is divided on the issue,

Janjatis, Newars and Madhesis were not supportive of ethnic federalism.

The Nepali people don't trust political leaders, and although respondents favoured Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal they were not ready to give sole responsibility for the new constitution and peace process to him. Baburam Bhattarai also scored well on this count, and

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#### STAND UP

If anybody wishes to truly challenge the Maoists, they should be willing to stand up to them, engaging them at all levels, intellectually (first) as well as in the streets, winning arguments and battles, consistently ('All for one man', #501). It is only after that that you are likely to see real change.

*Slarti*

#### MR NEPAL, RESIGN

I wish you had done this exercise 20 years ago when Mr Madhav Nepal and company made the banda into a fine art of political protest ('Rs 15,000,000,000', #501). Remember how they tried to bring down the first elected government of the post-1990 period when it had not even completed three months in office? Mr. Nepal should resign not because of Maoist pressure, but because he has

failed to do what he was supposed to do.  
*Nick Sharma*

#### TWO-THIRDS

The Maoists are not going to stop until they get that absolute majority ('The 2/3 strategy', #501). A coalition government is not what the Maoists count as being given 'a chance'. For them, having a chance means having complete control. And they will not rest until they have that. They will exhaust the Nepali populace into giving them that 'chance' as per their definition of the word.

*Satya Nepali*

#### THE BIG PICTURE

What a superb piece of analysis to say that it is naive to think all the protestors have come only because of pressure from Maoists ('Mainstream media', #501). People tend to forget that this party won almost 40

per cent of the votes and that its policies have been the vehicle for change over the past few years. No doubt the Maoists have problems of their own. But to blindly follow whatever the mainstream media – which is run by a few oligarchs in every country, not only Nepal – is to miss the bigger picture.

*Biplab*

#### SHARE THE BLAME

The business community is also equally responsible for the problems ('The business of extortion', #501). Besides weak government policies, misbehaving political parties and our culture, it is also worsened by the short-sightedness and short-term profit-seeking nature of the business community. So no one in our country is free of blame and not a single community seems to have the perfect solution.

*Bibek*

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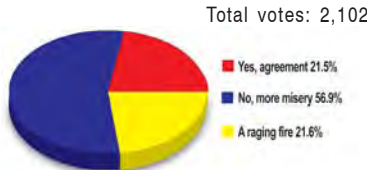
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Q. Do you see the light at the end of the tunnel?



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Q. Should PM Madhav K Nepal resign?





# Letting go



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

Despite last week's retreat, and the alienation of a section of the Kathmandu population, the Maoists remain the most powerful political party in Nepal.

And that is the problem. Unless they are weakened, they will not be allowed to govern the country, for their agenda is too dangerous to be allowed a free reign. The past year has essentially been a battle to this end. Non-Maoists are trying to weaken the Maoists by stoking their internal divisions and co-opting sections of their social base. The Maoists are countering this by expanding their organisation on the ground, keeping up popular agitations, and creating one enemy after another to keep the flame of 'revolution' alive.

To expect a political force to become weaker voluntarily is naïve, but in the liberal democratic framework, espousal of non-violence and the rule of law are two tools used to keep parties in check, ensure the destructive impulses of large groups are controlled, and slow down the process of political change.

The Maoists derive a degree of their strength through their coercive apparatus. The logic of the peace process was that they would have to give up these structures, primarily the PLA. The Maoists feel they have done so by keeping them in cantonments. They claim that their support is totally based on popular mobilisation rather than force, and accuse other parties of not keeping their promise on integration. The non-Maoists feel

that it is by keeping the PLA intact through state resources that the former rebels have become stronger, and allege that Maoists do not want to move on integration themselves.

The constellation of anti Maoist forces – the president, NC-UML, Nepal Army (NA), and India – means that until the Maoists make substantive movement on the PLA question, they will not be given space in the formal state apparatus.

It is an interesting moment, for the same leaders who till six months ago were insisting that there could be absolutely no

They are being asked to move on integration at a time when they are the most insecure. The Maoists are isolated domestically and unsure of whether the constitutional process and their agenda will be implemented, so do not know whether this is the best time to give up the PLA. This is why they are seeking credible guarantees on other issues through a package deal.

Secondly, the question of the PLA, for the Maoists, ties in with the 'democratisation of the NA', which in their estimation has not taken place at all. Integration was a method to change the structure and character of the NA and make it a 'friendly force', but that is not possible anymore given the balance of power.

And thirdly, the PLA ties in with the internal power balance in the party. Certain leaders do not care much for the PLA anymore as their support comes from elsewhere. But there are leaders whose sole strength comes from the existence of the PLA, and they feel they need to extract something now from any agreement on integration.

The Maoists seem to recognise that playing a double game on the PLA (saying it is under the Special Committee while maintaining an iron grip) is no longer possible. In the taskforce discussions, there is in fact a remarkable degree of convergence. However, the non-Maoists insist that numbers be decided on before the Maoists are allowed to join government. The Maoists insist that this should happen through a process of consultations, and that it should not be a pre-condition to a national unity government.

The Maoists appear to have done a cost-benefit analysis and decided it is worth making certain unilateral concessions, for unlocking the PLA issue will alter the political game quite drastically. ■

**The Maoists may be ready to give up the PLA, but need credible guarantees it won't weaken them as much as the other players want**

integration of the Maoists now emphasise that integration must happen. They have become extremely flexible on numbers: from talking about 3,000 in the security forces, NC leaders now privately speak of how 8,000 former combatants can be taken in and a generous rehabilitation offered to the rest.

For the Maoists, this concession by others is a victory. The fact that the PLA is not in fact their core source of strength (rather than its fraternal organisations and the YCL) is allowing them to be flexible, as Prachanda's speech demonstrated on Wednesday.

But they face three problems.

## THIS WEEK

### UNMIN's tenure extended

The Security Council extended the tenure of UNMIN by four months on Wednesday, which means the body will remain in operation until at least 15 September. The Council voted unanimously in favour of the extension. However, the Council also asked Nepal to make arrangements for UNMIN's withdrawal, including a 'timetable action plan' on PLA integration.



### All aboard

The banda may have ended last Friday, but it has lent a renewed sense of urgency to negotiations. On Wednesday, Pushpa Kamal Dahal said a deal on PLA integration could be reached within four months, telling Speaker Subash Nembang that a comprehensive deal was close at hand, and agreed to put ex-combatants under the supervision of the Special Committee on Army Integration. "We

are ready to sever the relationship between the party and barracks," he said. He also promised to dismantle the Youth Communist League within four days. NC and UML have responded positively, but want the Maoists to submit a proposal on PLA integration within two days. However, the Supreme Court refusal to stay the Nepal Army's recruitment of technical personnel may spoil the bonhomie. Advocates had challenged the recruitment after vacancies were announced on 20 April.

### Looming food crisis

A food shortage is imminent in the mid and far west, where dwindling food supplies haven't been replenished in over a month. The government's food transportation budget has been slashed, and food prices are also likely to rise as stocks shrink. The government, however, has approved an ad hoc subsidy to the Nepal Food Corporation to stave off a crisis. With agricultural production slowing, more will be needed in the years ahead. Alert to the looming food crisis, the United States has picked Nepal as one of 20 countries in President Barack Obama's \$3.5 billion 'Feed the Future Initiative', that seeks to reduce hunger in developing countries.

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GREETINGS: Pushpa Kamal Dahal came to intellectuals open-armed and thick-skinned, Yak&Yeti, Wednesday.

KIRAN PANDAY

# Edging closer?

DEWAN RAI

As Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal intensified consultations with political parties to extend the tenure of the CA, which has been non-functional for four months now and expires on 28 May, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal appeared to be giving ground in the interest of breaking the protracted political deadlock.

Addressing a gathering of intellectuals at the Yak & Yeti on Wednesday, Dahal said his party was open to discussion on the conditions put forward by the government. "We are ready to keep the combatants under the supervision of the Special Committee and conclude the integration and rehabilitation process within four months before UNMIN's term expires," he said.

Dahal also said his party was ready to dismantle the YCL within four days, return confiscated private property, form a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to look into cases of disappearances, and resolve disputes in constitution writing. Apparently, the ball is now firmly in the government's court.

Not so fast, warns TU professor of political science Kapil Shrestha. "This was a

stage-managed show, with certain intellectuals hand-picked to speak, to whom Prachanda could make promises. The Maoists are not sincere or trustworthy, and the government will not feel pressured in any way."

But though Madhav Nepal is still resisting the Maoist demand for a national unity government before integration, he should keep in mind that he will need a two-thirds majority even to amend the Interim Constitution to extend the CA.

This means the government will have to compromise with the Maoists at some point, whether it desires to continue in power or announce fresh elections. The latter is highly unlikely of course, and everyone seems agreed on the need for CA extension.

What is holding up a deal then, despite repeated assurances on the part of politicians that a deal is imminent?

The non-Maoist parties believe the constitution cannot be written under the shadow of the gun, that is, the PLA. This is why they have consistently advocated for integration at the earliest. "We should be assured that the Maoist party is detached from its combatants," says UML leader Pradeep Gyawali. "Everything they have done so far, including their contributions to constitution writing, indicates that the Maoists still want to establish an authoritarian people's republic."

process passed on the watch of the Maoist-led government. This has convinced the other parties that the Maoists are not serious about relinquishing their hold on the PLA.

For their part, the Maoists have been given ample room to suspect the intentions of the political parties. Defence Minister Bidhya Bhandari declared that the Nepal Army was not beholden to the decisions of the special committee, and Deputy Prime Minister Sujata Koirala too spoke out against federalism, which the Maoists hold dear.

Maoist nominee CA member Hari Roka emphasises that the PLA is the foundation on which the Maoist party and its achievements rest. "So it is only natural that the Maoists will try to keep the PLA or secure the best possible deal for them in terms of integration and rehabilitation," he says.

But Roka also notes the Maoists have realised nothing will happen on this count as long as they are not in government. They will have realised now that street protests are not enough to propel them into power. Thus their apparently newfound flexibility on the conditions laid out by the other political parties. Believe them or not, this may be one promise the Maoists will want to keep. ■

## The political stalemate shows some signs of easing, at least for the hopeful

NC leader Ram Saran Mahat, who is also on the Special Committee on PLA integration, agrees. "The integration process should be started for our satisfaction," he says. "The Maoists should be divested of arms and armaments first, then we can discuss the issues, including the formation of a new government."

In fact the deadline for the integration

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# Television politics



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

The first televised debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, during the 1960 presidential race, influenced the preferences of voters so much that television cameras became an integral part of US elections. Within a few years, historian and social critic Arthur Schlesinger Jr. was to contend that television had replaced the political party because it set the political agenda and ensured a favourable turnout on voting days.

Nepali society is too complex for the small screen to be the decisive factor in electoral politics. But cameras do play an important role in swaying public opinion. The public assembly at Basantapur Square last week was a staged-for-television event. With the involvement of television personality Bhaskar Rajkarnikar, who popularised telecasts of staged street events almost two decades ago, the presentation was foolproof from the word go.

There were weightier factors at play – lobbying by diplomats,



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

## The Maoists haven't quite mastered the glitzy medium of TV, but neither have their rivals

phone calls from foreign capitals and pressure from fatigued cadres, for example – during the final moments of the stand-off between Maoist and anti-Maoist forces last week. However, the clincher was perhaps the spectacle captured by television cameras at the peace assembly.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal had good reason to foam at the mouth while cursing the media during his speech at Khula Manch the following day. Newspapers did play some role in demonising the Maoists. FM radio stations had to be loyal to advertisers and their target audience. However, at least part of the reason behind the Maoists' media debacle lies in the

medium: television is ineffective in depicting ideological conflicts. Issue-based politics belong to the print media, but microphones want sound clips and cameras love media personalities.

Leftwing politics held a competitive advantage when its arguments made audiences think. It held its ground during the radio boom in Nepal. Those who made the loudest and most inflammatory speeches hogged the limelight. Television cameras, by contrast, have little time for nuances and even less inclination to report verbosity.

It was the press that transformed Maoist fugitives into heroes during the decade of armed

struggle. Ironically, those journalists who lionised violent insurgents are now their biggest critics. There is a reason for their somersault: Nepal's Maoists have failed to oblige the middle class by abandoning their political agenda as UML did in the mid-nineties. The animosity of the 'reformed' Nepali media towards its former idols is thus understandable.

Through his inflammatory speeches from Khula Manch, Dahal was playing a game that lost its efficacy years ago. In the early nineties, the late Madan Bhandari courted courtiers by night and hit back at them through fiery speeches during the

day. The tactic helped UML retain some of its mass base even as it transformed itself into a party of the urban bourgeoisie. But it worked mainly because there were no television cameras to magnify the contortions of Bhandari's face for the middle class in their living rooms. This time, viewers watched Dahal fume from dozens of channels live and, simply put, became very afraid.

The Maoists need not despair, however. They may be novices at playing to the gallery through the medium of television, but their rivals are no professionals either. TV cameras exaggerate the nervousness of Ram Chandra Paudel, the aggression of Sher Bahadur Deuba and the helplessness of Sushil Koirala. Madhav Nepal looks cuddly, but fails to inspire confidence. Khanal is telegenic and Oli dresses well for the press, but both appear inauthentic.

Among Madhesi politicians, Upendra Yadav bumbles his way through television interviews and Mahanta Thakur is perennially defensive, the mark of a weak media personality. In comparison, Dahal oozes confidence and Baburam Bhattarai comes across as a somewhat cranky university don: perhaps too self-righteous, but not that unreasonable.

The Maoists have lost this round, but the media war for the attention of television viewers has just begun. 🇳🇵

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# Get the message across




KIRAN PANDAY

**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
**Ashutosh Tiwari**

However one views the Maoists' holier-than-thou attitude when it comes to the poor and downtrodden, there's no getting around the fact that they did put Nepal's poverty on stark display on the streets of Kathmandu for six long days. True, thousands of poorly dressed, ill-fed, sick and confused-looking villagers trucked in from various parts of Nepal could have been brainwashed and

now busy seeking forgiveness and redemption from the usual civil society partisans, it's tempting to shrug off the Great Banda as yet another political nightmare that middle-class people across urban Nepal had to suffer through. But that would be wrong. What if Nepal's poverty – about one third of 27 million Nepalis live below the poverty line – comes back to disrupt the comforts of the middle-class again and again, either through the Maoists or through other potentially violent political forces? Besides chanting platitudes about peace and

allows them to bring innovations and cheaper goods and services to both the rich and the poor. Sure, these could be interpreted as textbook-friendly statements. But here the FNCCI and other business promotion bodies should borrow the tactics of the Maoist leaders: repeat such self-serving statements many times in public with vivid and verifiably true examples drawn from Nepal's economy so that some Maoist adherents start doubting the very ideology that's been fed to them. The point is not to challenge Maoist thought and get into a verbal morass out of which there's no escape. Especially for non-Brahmins who are not fluent in the sort of politically charged Nepali language in which you get to make all the right noises and mean absolutely nothing! The point is to steadily offer convincing and easily repeatable alternative sound bites that chip away at the dominant and true-sounding dogma that holds that private sector capitalism is inferior to public monopolies. Eventually, a tipping point can be reached, and this helps recast, say, a banda not as the usual peace-and-consensus issue, but as something that destroys jobs, incomes and taxes – harming *all* Nepalis alike, from vegetable farmers in Palung to lodge owners in Bardiya.

Given our large and growing population base of unskilled youth, and given the visible disparity between Kathmandu and the rest of Nepal, business promotion bodies and business leaders should come out of their narrow confines, and start playing a more positively influential role rather than leaving it in the hands of narrow-minded politicians. After all, to paraphrase John F. Kennedy, if our society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich. 

consensus, are there specific roles for the business promotion groups and entrepreneurs? Despite wavering in the beginning, FNCCI ended up doing a good job in co-organising last Friday's rally. But its language stayed insular, and its tactics were diffident: good only until the next banda. Over the years, it has repeatedly failed to present a publicly convincing case for the role of private enterprise in Nepal's economy. A thriving private sector rather than a ballooning cabinet and oversize parliament is what creates jobs for our youth, so they can be in factories and at work desks rather than on the streets. Private enterprises pay taxes, which help pay for expanding water and sanitation coverage, education, healthcare and the like. Private enterprises compete, and competition

## If the business community cannot convince people of its indispensability, then peace assemblies won't stave off the next strike

coerced or paid to be in Kathmandu. True, they might have known but not cared much about how their hopes for a better future were being cynically abused to serve the power lust of their fire-breathing, mustachioed leader, whose Jekyll-and-Hyde persona is deserving of psychiatric analysis. True, with the rally against the banda over, and with the netas

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## Why don't we get it?

Business and economic experts spoke about the lack of timely and accurate statistics in Nepal during an interaction program organised by the Nepal Economic Forum on 10 May. 'Nepal Statistics – Why Don't We Get It' featured International Monetary Fund representative Alexander Pitt, Nepal Bankers Association president Sashin Joshi, and NEF chairperson Sujeev Shakya, who drew from their professional experience to describe the extent and consequences of the problem. Pitt said there was an improper division of labour between the various agencies responsible for recording statistics, leading to replication, and that the Central Bureau of Statistics hadn't kept good records. He added that lags in financial sector data had increased over the last few years. Joshi affirmed that this meant officials and experts had to rely on unreliable anecdotal data, and added that this uncertainty imposed high risks. The panelists drew attention to the surge in gold imports late last year, which wasn't detected until it had begun to level off, and inflation figures, which are based on an outdated basket of consumer goods, among other economic indicators. The second issue of NEFport, a quarterly report on Nepal's economy, was also released during the program.

## Classroom goes digital

After two years of experience in using Promethean's Interactive Whiteboard technologies, ActivClassroom, in primary grades, Ullens School team hosted a special event on Friday to demonstrate the nature and impact of utilising digital educational technologies in the classroom. A group of school leaders, teachers and students shared their experiences, the learning outcomes, the resources and opportunities that abound in making education go digital for Nepali students and Nepali teachers. Ullens is the first school in Nepal to use cutting edge digital educational resources in its teaching/learning practice. The impact in the past two years of using ActivBoard has been so compelling, according to school authorities, that they have invested further in equipping all 18 classrooms with ActivBoards.

## NMB Bank scores

NMB Bank posted a profit (before tax) of Rs 149.2 million during the third quarter of the last fiscal year, recording a growth of 87 per cent against the same period in the preceding year. Despite the ongoing liquidity crunch in the local market, NMB achieved growth in both deposits as well as risk assets of 11 per cent and 8 per cent respectively, compared to the previous quarter. NMB remains well capitalised with a very comfortable capital adequacy ratio of 18.03 per cent. The bank plans to gradually expand to new strategic locations in the next year.

## With LG

LG Electronics has launched 'LG Ko Saathma World Cup Haatma'. Customers who purchase a 14" or 15" LG TV will get an LG T-Shirt, and those who purchase a 21" or 29" LG TV will get an LG football. Customers who purchase a 26" LCD TV, or any bigger model, will get an LG DVD player. There's also a Live Lucky Draw that will take place during the World Cup for prizes of LG LCD TVs. What's more, if you correctly predict the winner of the World Cup, you stand a chance of winning a replica of the World Cup trophy made of five tolas of gold.

## Himstar football flu

To celebrate the World Cup in full fever, Himstar has announced the launch of 'Himstar Football Flu'. With every purchase of a 14", 15" or 21" Himstar TV, customers will get a jersey of their favourite team.

## MUM's

The Amrapali Group will begin a new venture in the FMCG Industry, under the name of M/S Amrapali Biotech India Pvt. Ltd., sister concern of Amrapali Group with the brand name MUM's. M/S Amrapali Biotech India Pvt. Ltd has launched its products in the brand name MUM's in eighteen states in India and also now introducing it in Nepal and Bhutan market.

## Game 2

Real launched Game 2 of the Score the Real Goal campaign on 1 May. Keeping in mind the overwhelming response from the Real consumers, the image from now will be changed every fortnight. Identify the Real Ball and sms it to 5004. Subscribers of Nepal Telecom, NCell and UTL can participate in this campaign. Game 1's monthly bumper prize winner, who will be getting a Sony Bravia 32" LCD TV and 10 monthly highest correct sms prize winners, who will each get a Sony MP4 player, will be declared soon.

**के कपाल पातलिंदै छ ?**

सहयोगका लागि

**सिंह 4110733**




AHMAD ISKANDAR

As I walk along the streets of Lakeside, Pokhara, I'm assaulted by greetings in various languages. "Konichiwa," says a local, mistaking me for a Japanese. "Ni hao," says another, wagering I'm from China. But I don't mind. Such friendliness only convinces me how open Lakeside has been to tourists from all over the world over the years. No wonder. The air is clear, the scenery superlative. And if milk and

honey doesn't run through the clean streets, the crescent of restaurants and bars that run along Phewa Lake may convince you this is paradise. "Between Italy and Pokhara, I would honestly choose here," says Basanta Gautam, owner of Caffe Concerto. Having travelled to Italy several times, Gautam admits it's Pokhara's mountain and lake vistas that compel him to stay. "Here, you can see the mountains clearly almost anywhere. Where else do you get that," he asks. As a Singaporean myself, I couldn't agree more. Yet Lakeside's immense popularity

has put other parts of Pokhara in the shade. Yes, there's plenty more, I was told. Seeking new thrills, I headed down to the much neglected Begnas Tal to the east of Pokhara. It's a blessed reminder of how Phewa itself must have been before the modern age, and how nature doesn't just mean mountains in Nepal. A lovely boat ride instilled in me a deep sense of serenity, away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Try fishing if you will. There's not much else to do, thankfully. Then there was the Bat Cave further up north. Although it can get a tad claustrophobic, the bats were friendly

hosts, and kept a safe distance during the tour. The Peace Pagoda, too, offers an alternative to punishing week-long treks. Just southwest of Lakeside, the pagoda itself is no great shakes, but the one to two hour walk to the vantage point over the city across from the Annapurna mountain range is well worth it. There's yet more. If you can possibly tear yourself away from that trekking map while sitting over a beer listening to reggae along Lakeside, you won't regret it. Pokhara is a destination unto itself. Have you really experienced it yet? 

# Lake aside

Pokhara's far more than just a launching pad for a trek



YES,PHEWA: But there's more on the horizon.

KIRAN PANDAY

**Gurkha Memorial Museum**  
A small exhibition showcasing the trials and tribulations of the noble and fierce Gurkha soldiers that offers insightful stories of untold acts of bravery and sacrifice. Some ex-Gurkha soldiers can be found on the compound, and will be more than happy to share some tall tales.

**Natural History Museum**  
Sure there is the new Mountain Museum that everyone is talking about. But the Natural History Museum, one of Pokhara's oldest, hosts the largest (probably only) collection of butterflies in Nepal, and local wildlife is represented by preserved specimens.

**Tashi Ling Tibetan Village**  
Pokhara has a sizeable Tibetan community. Tashi Ling Tibetan Village is south of the main city centre in Pardi, where you will find lots of small shops selling Tibetan handicrafts. If time is not a factor the Tibetan Village in Hyangja is highly recommended, where you can visit the carpet factory to see how Tibetan carpets are made or just spend some time at the large Gomba.

**Binda Basini Temple**  
You aren't a Pokhreli if you haven't spent a weekend afternoon near this temple with your date. Drive by Nala Mukh to soak in a little bit of Newari-pan.

**Mailiko**  
Visit Maili Didi for the best *thakali khana* in, dare we say, all of western Nepal. Despite Pokhara being one of the better organised cities in Nepal, we are going to make you work hard to find it because we don't want Maili Didi to be overwhelmed. North from Fishtail Gate near a chautara. Ask anyone.

**Open House**  
Despite losing its charm due to a failure to deal with wear and tear over the years, this cafe in Mahendra Pul is still a favourite among local teenagers and those unable to come to terms with their age. We hear their milkshakes are still pretty good.



# Lakeside story

Pokhara's Lakeside is one of the hippest places to wine and dine in the country, and is a kind of Thamel for beach bums. With a view of majestic Phewa Lake and paragliders dotting the skies, Lakeside is one reason to get away from the madding crowds of the capital. And is it a sign o' the times when Thamel favourites are to be seen not only in Jhamel but in Pokhara, too? The setting couldn't be more different, and the recent banda only served to highlight Pokhara's natural beauty. *Nepali Times* rediscovers the city of seven lakes, and opens up banda possibilities for the next time.



**Krishna's Kitchen,** North of Lakeside in Maya Devi Village lies a small Thai restaurant, hidden from view. But everyone knows where it is. Krishna's Kitchen is undoubtedly one of the treasures of the Pokhara food scene, for

the food is truly representative of the 'authentic'.

Krishna and his team of chefs were trained by Chadhil Monkong, a respected Thai chef in his own right. With such standards in place, the expectations are definitely high, and Krishna does not disappoint. The quality and range of the food on offer is immense, and the fruits of staff labour are immediately apparent. Krishna's introductory recommendation of green curry and stir-fried chicken with cashew nuts left me impressed and craving for more. It's a pity one's stomach can only take in so much in one session!

Another highlight is a special section of their menu called 'Really Slow Food For The Gourmet'. The items on this menu require advance notice of a day, to give the chefs time

enough to track down all the fresh ingredients they need and prepare them painstakingly. If you can't be bothered to book, visualise this: herb-inebriated stir-fried squid with glass noodle? An impressive stock of wine will help you wash this delicacy down.

Don't be deterred by the fact that Krishna's Kitchen is 30 minutes walk from Lakeside. It's a pleasant stroll, and you'll soon taste the fruit of your own labours.

9846232501, [krishnaskitchen.com](http://krishnaskitchen.com)



**Maya Devi Village Restaurant**  
Situating away from and north of Lakeside, this quirky collection of huts is home to parahawking and the Himalayan Raptor Rescue Centre, as well as an excellent restaurant. Enjoy a BLT sandwich breakfast with fresh fruit, muesli and curd in the lap of a Phewa Tal sunrise, or mingle with a friendly bunch during social Sunday barbecues. Visit the magnificent raptors in their enclosures for a meet and greet before you leave, 9806647917, [www.mayadevivillage.com](http://www.mayadevivillage.com).

**Banda special:** Last week, Maya Devi Village was even more peaceful than usual, the silence broken only by the lonely cawing of the attention-deprived raptors and the act-tough routine of attention-deprived boys with red headbands, sticks in hand. Talk about bird-brained.



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रङ र जात पनि हुँदैन । काम गरेर खान लजाउनु  
पनि हुँदैन । चोरेर, ढाँटेर, छलेर, लुटेर खान  
पो लजाउनुपर्छ । जो जहाँ रहेर जुन काम गर्छ ऊ  
त्यसैमा रमाउनुपर्छ गौरव गर्नुपर्छ र समर्पित  
भएर गर्नुपर्छ । काम नै शक्ति हो, भक्ति हो र  
मुक्ति हो । कामको इज्जत गरौं,  
पसिनाको सम्मान गरौं ।

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# Lakeside dining

**Moondance**, serving a mix of Indian, Italian, Mexican and Chinese food, with a beautiful rooftop terrace for a bird's eye view of Lakeside. Mix beer with their pizzas, and you're in for a fine party. Their lemon meringue pie is legendary.

**Banda special:** The restaurant closes for an intimate session with the moon. Dance under the cover of night or bask under the moonlight. The moon may not be available on certain days.

**Boomerang Restaurant & German Bakery**, an expansive garden situated close to the lake makes this one of the best places to dine. Let the sombre mood of the nearby mountains sink in. Extensive menu, serving all kinds of cuisines. Try the in-house Boomerang specials, and don't forget the beer. 462978, [boomerangrestaurantpokhara.com](http://boomerangrestaurantpokhara.com)

**Banda special:** Keep coming back like a boomerang to try your luck.



**Chilly Bar & Restaurant**, a great hangout for drinks, especially for cold beers and cocktails with friends. Between 6-8pm, they have a great 2-for-1 deal on all cocktails. Grilled or London steak highly recommended. A relaxing place for Wi-fi surfing, too, 463614

**Banda special:** Sit on the steps day and night for free. If you're lucky, you'll catch a live badminton match between toddlers.

**Lemon Tree**, one of the loveliest bamboo porches overlooking the main stretch of the Lakeside road, provides a lovely setting for chilling out with beer and snacks. Famous for fresh fish caught from the lake. Friendly staff and excellent Western-style food at reasonable prices, 463246.

**Banda special:** The bamboo poles make excellent pull-up bars or props to monkey around.



**Olive Café**, excellent Illy coffee and a variety of popular dishes such as the grilled king fish, made boneless for maximum satisfaction. A great place for your Wi-fi fix, and the open-air café makes even catching up with work pleasant. Try the blended mocha, a seasonal item to cope with the summer heat. Look out for new items popularised by customers, 462575.

**Banda special:** Laptop users of every nationality are free to gather outside the gated doors to pray for the miracle of a wireless network.

**Mamma-mia**, as you might have guessed, their specialty is Italian food, and they pride themselves on excellent pizzas and pastas. Started by a couple with a love for everything Italian 18 years ago, this place is as classy as ever, 463582.

**nat-ssul**, a Korean restaurant for all things barbeque, from succulent pork to crunchy vegetables. You can have delicacies cooked right at your own table or partake of the dedicated barbeque pit, 229198.

**Banda special:** Tough luck. You'll have to fly to Korea for this one.

**New Everest Steak House** has a whole menu of steaks to choose from, so don't think you'll get off easy with 'steak khane'. The friendly interior is ideal for famished trekkers and families to feast in style, 9851057176.

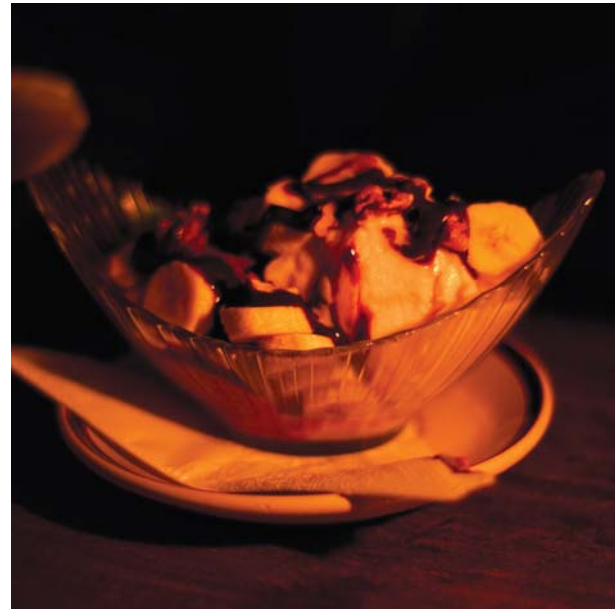
**Banda special:** It's bring-your-own-buffalo day. Just like a treasure hunt, you'll have to track them down from various locations in Pokhara.

**Koto**, Japanese cuisine of the highest quality, served with meticulous attention. Food fanatics will find themselves in a haven of familiar items such as sashimi and tempura. Don't miss out on the aromatic Japanese rice wine, sake.

**Banda special:** Fish food takes on a whole new meaning as you take a special trip down to Phewa Lake to feed the fish instead. Conservation at its best.

**Hankook Sarang**, Korean food that will serve to impress, with ample portions of rice and an endless supply of side dishes such as kimchi and fried tofu. If you like spicy food, the Kimchi Jigae will sweat up an appetite within the first few spoonfuls, 462390.

**Momotarou**, a homely setting to enjoy the sweet taste of Japanese dishes. Their Katsu Don will evoke a sense of nostalgia for those who have frequented its flagship branch in Thamel.



**Caffe Concerto Pizzeria Restaurant**, specialising in Italian cuisine and desserts, such as their homemade gelato, this restaurant has an excellent atmosphere and service staff. The product of a couple's love for Italian food, it is sure to leave a lasting impression, 463529.



**Newari Kitchen**, delighting in local cuisines, this place offers not only local Nepali food, but authentic Newari-style food as well. With the lakeside as its backdrop, evening dinners are just wonderful along the porch.

## Lakeside partying



ALL PICS: AHMAD ISKANDAR

**Busy Bee**, head over for live rock and pop performances in English, Nepali and Hindi, alternating between three local bands. Indulge in their beer and pizzas to waste the night away in good fashion. Don't miss out on their happy hour promotion between 12-6pm: buy one cocktail, get one free, live performance daily, 8-11pm, 462640.

**V-Jin's Absolute Bar & Restaurant**, local bands brighten the night in a traditional setting with English, Nepali and Hindi covers. Cool yourself down with their happy hour promotion from 12-5pm: beers at Rs 190, live performance daily, from 7pm.

**All That Jazz**, get in the groove with a live band performing sweet jazz from various bands, including Inner Groove, a popular item in Kathmandu. The bar blasts the stereo with every known jazz number day in, day out, live performance on Fridays, 8.30-11pm, 9846163095.

**Club Amsterdam**, with a spacious main hall and a large 42-inch LCD television precariously poised where all can see, this place has the atmosphere of a football stadium. Happy hour promotions between 4.30-7pm: buy one cocktail get one free. Live bands blast the cheers away with English and Nepal rock and pop daily, 8-11pm, 463427.



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**WE THE PEOPLE:** People from various walks of life, representatives of professional bodies, civil society members and others gathered for a peace assembly at Basantapur Darbar Square, Friday



**FRAUGHT TIMES:** Home Minister Bhim Rawal answering questions from members of parliament about the country's security situation on Tuesday.



**SHE DID IT:** Mountaineer Reinhold Messner (*second from right*) endorses Korean climber Oh Eun-sun (*second from left*) as the first woman to scale all 14 8000m peaks, in Kathmandu, Sunday.



**NOT SO FAST:** CPN-UML standing committee members meet on Tuesday in Balkhu, and demand that the Maoists sign onto a package deal before the government considers resigning.



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### WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The heat has returned after a cold spell over much of the Himalaya and north Indian plains. The westerly front that caused the drop in temperature dumped more rain in the east than west. According to Kathmandu's meteorological forecasting division, the Valley has already received more than half of May's usual quota of rain. The satellite picture shows that conditions this weekend will alternate between sunny and cloudy with light showers at intervals. Maximum temperatures will rise three degrees.




FRI




33-16

SAT



33-17

SUN



35-18





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*A peek into the diary of  
Gunaraj Lohani  
President, All Nepal Teachers  
Organisation*

Recently, we held a week-long self-defence class for teachers in Surkhet, which we thought was very successful. The school was closed. The teachers didn't have anything to do anyway. We thought it would be a good extracurricular activity. Who knows, some singletons may have even met their soulmates.

Riding on that wave of success, we have decided to take this training countrywide and establish a security wing called Volunteer Teachers of Nepal. No! They will not be volunteering to help your children with after-school tuition. They will be volunteering for defence.

We will distribute membership forms to 10,000 teachers in Nepal and provide training. They will all be below the age of 40. People older than that do not really need to socialise after school hours because they can be immensely mind-numbing. "In my time... blablablah." Boring!

It's not as if such forces are a new thing. Did you not hear about



# Revolutionary teachers

the deserters who wanted to form a security force and help the police maintain peace by directing traffic in the capital? About 200 of them bought themselves blue tracksuits and started training in Bhaktapur. Unfortunately, their egotistical leader got a piece published in the papers and 75 of them were promptly arrested. Ours is a self-defence force. When did it

By training teachers to fight, we will create an environment for learning without fear

become illegal to defend yourself?

Who will we be defending ourselves from? That is a very good question. You see, our training will teach teachers how to protect themselves in the ongoing People's Movement. They will learn how to discipline those attacking the teachers in the districts. They will create an

**FIRST STUDENTS, THEN  
TEACHERS: The fight for a  
peaceful learning environment  
continues.**

environment for learning without fear. And, they will solve all problems that may arise in school management committees, district education committees, etc.

In the first round of self-defence, we will expose the exploitation of teachers in private schools. We will then proceed with disciplinary procedures against such schools.

Sure, Nepal Teacher's Association and Nepal Teacher's Organisation could run similar training programs. We are certain they will never be able to leave the district headquarters though. Just compare the Youth Force and Tarun Dal to our Young Communist League. To reach Surkhet, for instance, these teachers will probably all hire Pulsars in Kathmandu like the Tarun Dal did to get Khum Bahadur Khadka elected in Dang. Posers!

But it would actually be quite fun if they did come and join us. We could play kabbadi against each other. When they are on our side of the court, we will show them how we do our training.

Mao Zedong once said we should not read too many books because they petrify the mind. Self-defence exercises will free our minds. Just think of it as yoga. 🇳🇵

(as imagined by Indu Nepal)



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FOO CHEE CHANG

# Crushed

## The on again off again ban on sand and stone exports to India has all but wiped out local crusher industries

SUVAYU DEV PANT and DEWAN RAI

The ban on sand and stone exports to India was relaxed only 100 days after it was first implemented, but has dealt the crusher industry a near-fatal blow, shrinking it five-fold and putting thousands of labourers out of work.

The Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources and Means banned sand and stone exports to India on 8 January because of the massive environmental damage it had caused in the Chure Hills. The move was cheered by environmentalists, but bitterly protested by

industrialists, who warned of pernicious consequences for the economy. The Ministry of Commerce and Supplies then revoked the ban on 23 February because of the decrease in revenues, which amounted to Rs 2.5 billion in taxes a year.

The ministry’s decision led to a public spat with the parliamentary committee, but the two sides ultimately resolved to temporarily relax the ban while a commission consisting of members from several ministries decides how best to balance the economic and environmental interests at stake. “There is no ban currently, but the commission is discussing how to regulate sand mining in a

systematic manner,” says Jairam Ghimire of the Department of Mines and Geology. “A final decision is due in three months.” In the meantime, a 122 per cent increase on the sand and stone export duty has been imposed.

Although the ban has been lifted, the government’s messy handling of the affair has already crippled the crusher industry. Before the ban, there were 200 crushers transporting a total of half a million truckloads of sand and stones to India every year. About 80 per cent of those crushers are now out of business.


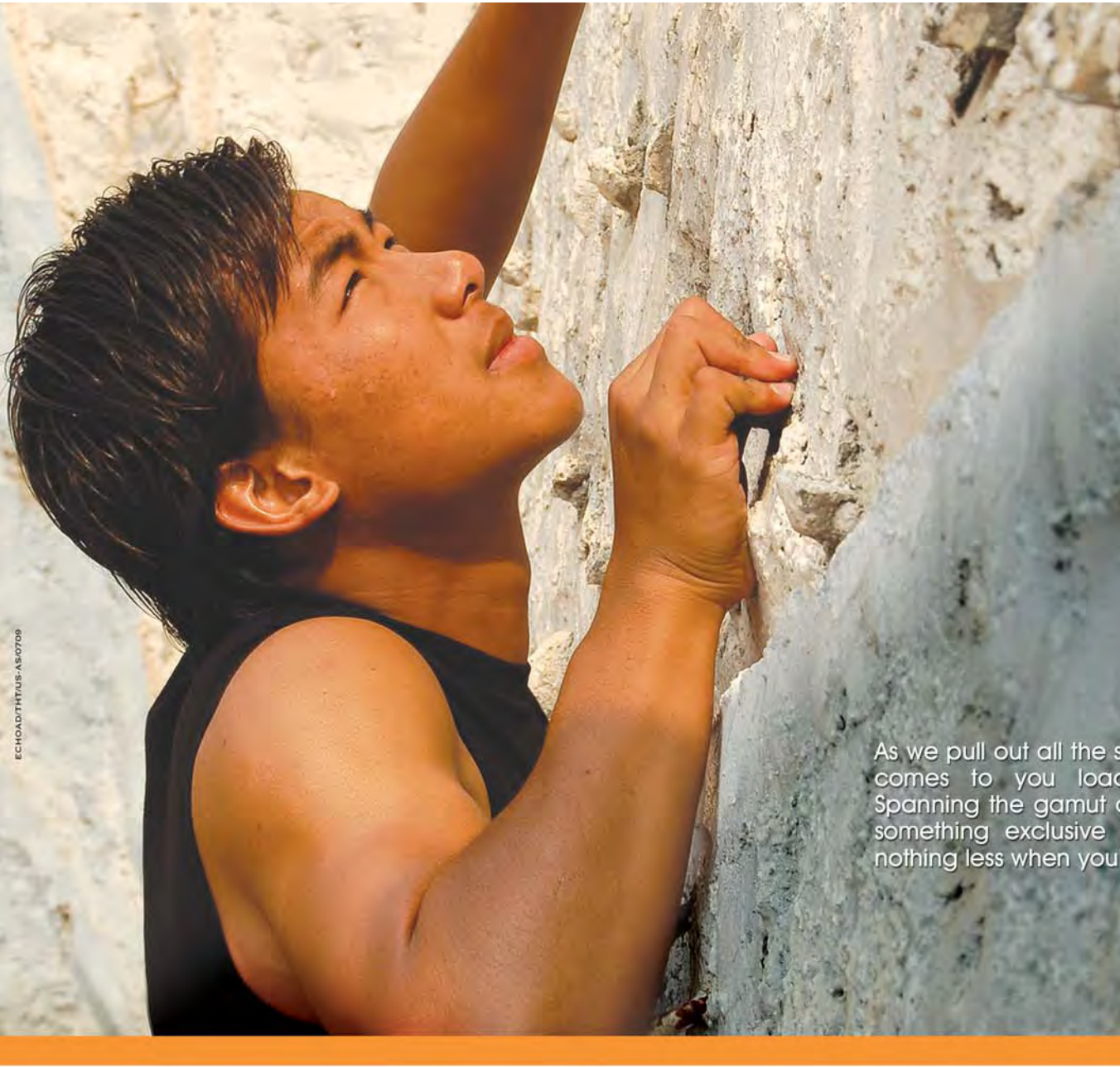
“The ban lasted 100 days. In that time, our Indian clients found other crushers

within India. We lost our main clients,” says Ram Adhikari, who operates a crushing plant in Butwal. Adhikari used to make a profit of Rs 3,000-3,500 per truckload of sand exported to India, but that has now dwindled to about Rs 200. That figure may come down further as crushers race to undercut one another to increase their market share. “As it is, Rs 200 is barely enough to survive,” says Adhikari.

Ominously, many crushers have been unable to pay back loans on equipment they purchased before the ban was put in place, straining the balance sheets of already beleaguered banks. About three quarters of crushers took loans from financial institutions. “Traders have not been able to pay back bank loans, and it is more than likely that they’ll have to sell their houses to do so,” says Krishna Prasad Sharma, President of the Crusher Industries Association. Last year, crusher industry owner Jugal Kishore Yadav of Kapilvastu committed suicide because he couldn’t settle his debts.

This is not to say the industry is blameless. The environmental impact of sand and stone mining in the Chure Hills has been devastating. Large parts of the range have been defaced and in consequence absorb less water, increasing the likelihood of floods and landslides. Thousands of livelihoods have been affected. Roads have also been damaged by trucks carrying twice the legal limit of gravel, and in some sections national highways have been reduced to dusty tracks with deep ruts in them.

What is necessary is a resolute policy stance. “We can’t ban sand mining altogether, but we can regulate it more tightly, so that tax revenue increases, the environment is protected, and industries stay afloat,” says Prakash Jwala, who chaired a 2008 commission that looked into the matter. “Right now we’re losing on both environmental and economic fronts.”



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- Monday - Hi Tech Plus - technology and gadgets
- Tuesday - Health Times ; Medical Board - Nepal's best doctors respond to queries ; Wheels - everything automobile
- Wednesday - Campus Plus - collegiate life ; Appointments - careers and jobs
- Thursday - School Times - everything kids should know
- Friday - Green - environment matters
- Saturday - Property Plus - weekend two pager focusing on real estate





FOO CHEE CHANG

## Bird of prey, take me on your flight

FOO CHEE CHANG

“While I was developing parahawking here, I never conceived of it as a commercial venture,” says Scott Mason (above), who pioneered the sport in 2001. “I simply wanted to combine my lifelong love for birds of prey with my then new-found passion for paragliding.”

Parahawking is a fusion, a crossbreed between the age-old discipline of falconry and the extreme sport of paragliding. Paraglider pilots fly alongside trained birds that guide them to ‘thermals’ (columns of heated air) for rewards, thus enabling the pilots to stay in the air for a much longer duration.

In this union the total is without a doubt more than the sum of the individual parts. Other than the sheer exhilaration of taking to the skies, one also gets to ‘share the sky’ with birds of prey such as Kevin, an Egyptian vulture and Brad, a black kite, while observing their grace and magnificence in their natural environment. The experience can be likened to being on an aerial safari – a unique environment in which man and bird interact.

It was during his first tandem paragliding flight that Mason, spotting a bird of prey he recognised, had an epiphany. On the day before he planned to leave Nepal to continue on his travels, Mason rescued two black kites and reared them. One of the kites, Sapana, still wows visitors during falconry displays to this day.

Aside than the literal, Mason emphasises that ‘share the sky’ is a symbolic call to acknowledge the plight of birds of prey all over the world and the importance of bird conservation in a world that has not been kind to them. Nepal, for instance, is rich in bird diversity and home to over 800 species, including the endangered Saker Falcon and Egyptian vulture. The problems are the same the world over – destruction of habitat due to urbanisation and climate change and poaching. Vultures are further susceptible to poisoning by a drug called diclofenac that is used to treat livestock, which these birds ingest when they feed on carcasses.

“Vultures are not easily accessible to people,” explains Hum Gurung, CEO of Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), the country’s premier authority on

avian conservation. “Even though they are regarded as nature’s rubbish cleaners and don’t have the same public appeal as tigers or pandas, it doesn’t mean that they don’t need protecting.”

BCN has helped various state and externally sponsored projects find their feet, for instance in the setting up of ‘Jatayu’ restaurants in Nawalparasi and Lumbini (which provide safe food for vultures near their nesting sites), and the construction of a Vulture

# Flock together

Conservation Breeding Centre in Chitwan.

There is potential for much greater awareness through activities such as parahawking. Given the prominence it has received in the international press and its one-of-a-kind nature, parahawking may well take vulture conservation, and bird conservation in general, to stratospheric heights.

“Once you have flown with these birds and interacted with them, it’s hard not to realise that each bird has its own individual character and feel affection for them,” says Brad Sander, an accomplished paraglider pilot who works with Mason. He believes that it is only when people experience birds of prey up close that they begin to appreciate their beauty and their place in nature.

But much like falconry, the sport of parahawking too has attracted controversy. A recent

*Repubblica* campaign accused Mason of infringing the 1973 National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, which states that “no private company can hold any animals or birds”. In the wake of the report, wildlife advocates demanded that Mason’s birds be released into the wild in the Annapurna Conservation Area and similar sanctuaries.

Mason maintains, however, that parahawking has neither a legal nor illegal status under Nepali law. He also points out that since the birds were rescued when they were young (following abandonment) and have been under his care since, they are now fully domesticated and will not be able to survive in the wild. He is currently in talks with the Nepali authorities to resolve the situation. Mason is also seeking recognition of his rescue efforts, and has proposed guidelines with regards to the care and treatment of birds of prey. 🇳🇵

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BHASWOR OJHA

# Media bashing

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 10 May

कान्तिपुर

“Don’t you dare ride around laughing in a car, if you write against us we’ll come and fix you,” is what Maoist demonstrators on the streets told a *Kantipur* reporting team during the strike. Two days later, party Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal let off another broadside against the media for having covered the anti-Maoist resistance in Kathmandu and having treated rural Nepalis with ‘disrespect’. He warned journalists and intellectuals that his party was ‘keeping tabs’ on what everyone wrote, which effectively amounted to giving his cadre the green light to attack critics. There have been numerous instances of the Maoists attacking the media, and even killing them savagely.

Such threats coming from a party that is making a democratic transition is not just extremely objectionable but also regrettable. A day after their chairman’s threats, Maoist cadre started physically attacking reporters. Such behaviour has once more demonstrated the Maoists’ totalitarian ways after they couldn’t get what they wanted. During the war and after the ceasefire, the Maoists have targeted media that has been critical of them. After attacks and murders of journalists, the Maoist way is to first deny it and when overwhelming evidence is produced, to say sorry and then to reiterate the party’s commitment not to infringe on press freedom. This has happened repeatedly.

If there is any political bias in the mainstream Nepali media it is for multiparty democracy and freedom, human rights and social reform, and journalists have always risen up in the past when these values were under attack from dictatorships. The Maoists need to remind themselves that the Nepali media will never bow to threats and intimidation. The Maoists have undermined their own stature and respect by projecting themselves against democracy and freedom through their anti-press activities. In a democracy, political forces need to be able to take criticism and respond without violence. If the Maoists change their behaviour the people will believe in them more.

# Loadshedding

Editorial in *Annapurna Post*, 10 May

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

A porter discovered an unusual way to lighten his load. Whenever he got to an incline he’d add some stones to his load, and continue on his way. When the burden became intolerable, he’d stop and jettison some stones and, feeling much lighter, would continue easily on his way. It seems lightening the load of those carrying heavy burdens, even by just a little, makes a big difference.

Our country is like a porter. In fact we don’t even know just how heavy our burden is, and how difficult it is for us to move ahead. Just last week we endured a six-day strike. It was so suffocating that once it was suspended, we felt as though we had no burden at all. This has happened time and again. Stones are added to our burden and then removed, and we feel as if we have obtained some peace. What other consolation do we have?

Our government, in the meanwhile, has focused on getting overloaded vehicles off the road. How about lightening our national burden a little?

# ‘We are troubled by Dahal’s words’

Narayan Sapkota and Bigyan adhikari in *Nagarik Arthik*, 9 May

नागरिक

Interview excerpts with Kush Kumar Joshi, FNCCI President

**How did you come up with the idea of organising a peace assembly?**  
We tried to bridge the gap between the three parties by organising the ‘*Nimayak Bahas*’ on 28 April, in the belief that the opportunity to air their views to the public would give them better mileage than a general strike. Although the leaders shook hands and promised to come to an agreement, they failed to do so.

After five days of the strike, uncertainty ruled, and clashes began to occur. The lack of agreement had generated much public frustration. We believed it was necessary to do something to avert disaster. So the peace assembly was organised to let the leaders know of the Nepali people’s desire for peace, not to oppose or support any party. We wanted to say that the parties had to win the people’s support through their ideas, not by force.

**There was pressure from the Maoists to cancel the strike?**  
They were worried about the assembly being infiltrated, and asked us to postpone it by two days if we couldn’t guarantee that. But if we hadn’t organised an assembly someone else would have.

**It’s said the rally that followed chanted anti-Maoist slogans.**  
This is wrong. At the assembly nothing was said against any of the leaders. Once the assembly was over, those returning home participated in a rally, it was not the organisers who did so. If anyone sloganeered against leaders it was against the spirit

of the assembly, and we cannot take responsibility for it. If this sort of things happen, then peace assemblies cannot be held in the future.

**Following the assembly, the Maoists suspended their strike and held a meeting in Khula Manch.**  
By suspending the strike the Maoists have respected the people’s wishes. But what we heard at the meet was disappointing. Industrialists are in favour of a strong economy and the country’s development, not any political party. We want peace, a constitution and a prosperous nation, and are trying to create trust between the political parties towards this end.

**What do you plan next?**  
We will continue to pressurise the political parties for peace, the constitution and a prosperous Nepal, and hope to avoid any adverse events after 28 May.

**Are industries up and running again?**  
Yes, but the effects on the economy will linger, just as the impact on tourism. Everyone should be allowed to work and live if the nation is to be built, and we request all, including the parties, not to harass industrialists and businesspeople. But security must be provided. We cannot work with threats and extortion. From now on, we will not give donations

to any political party, whatever happens. We will pay our taxes and create employment, but won’t give in to any other threats.

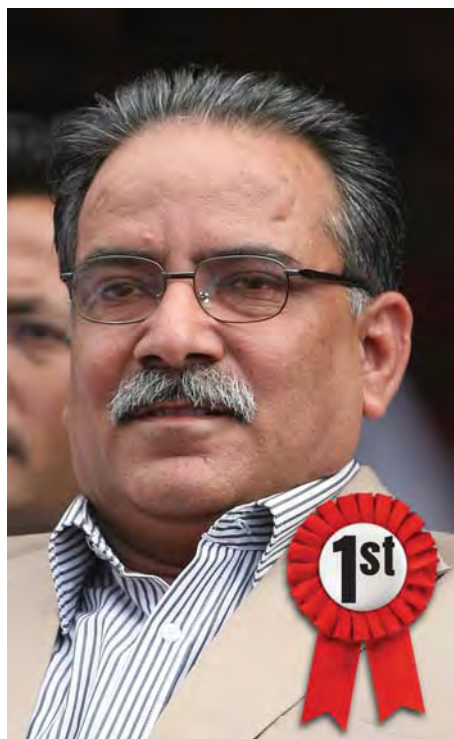
**What do you say to government?**  
We need security, but the government response has been lacking. Ministers were so scared they went to Singh Darbar at 3am. We will pressure government for security, and encourage them to move ahead through consensus.



Prachanda: The ball is in his court!  
Madhav Nepal: No, it’s in his coat!

कान्तिपुर Batsayan in *Kantipur*, 11 May





PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

# Wanted: leaders

KRISHNA KHANAL

The Himalmedia Opinion Poll carried out in April made it clear the Nepali people were not in favour of bandas, strikes or street revolts. But immediately afterwards the country was paralysed by the general strike called by the UCPN-Maoist. Readers may wonder what the use of such polls is in this case, but this interpretation is incomplete. Strikes are as much to mobilise party cadres as anything else, and the Maoist party has demonstrated that it has this capacity. However, the participation of people in the Basantpur peace assembly underlined the public's aversion to strikes.

Propaganda is part and parcel of political operation. But while the public may be influenced by such propaganda, and indeed by political events, public opinion is not the same as what is touted by political parties. Polls are a means to get to the heart of the matter.

## Nationalism threatened or propaganda?

Three quarters of the 5,005 polled felt that Nepali nationalism and its territorial integrity was under threat due mainly to the conflict within and among political parties. It is clear party propaganda has played a role in shaping public perceptions. There hasn't really been serious discussion about Nepali nationalism.

The idea of a people-centred nationalism only entered Nepal following the 1951 revolution, but within a decade, King Mahendra twisted the discourse so political parties and democracy became equated with the threat of India to Nepali nationalism. In this, Nepali communists have proven to be at one with the royalists. This equation was only strengthened over the course of the 30-year Panchayat regime, and

was used against the Nepali Congress. The public perception that Nepali nationalism is under threat is a legacy of the same. The political parties must move away from the limited understanding of nationalism as that manifest in street protests, and seek to develop a true nationalism.

## People's party and political image

The poll also indicated that Nepal's political parties, including the Maoists, are in transition. This is generally viewed as a positive thing, but is this a sign of true transformation? One cannot hope that the Maoists

Polls may surprise, but they also have the power to guide those willing to take their judgment positively

NC is still in the lead. But the lack of support for the latter's leadership indicates that the public values the party's commitment to democracy more than anything else. In any case, the Maoists, NC and UML are still considered the most important political parties. The Madhes-based parties have limited support, even in the Tarai, and are more likely to be involved in the power equations of larger parties than lead national politics themselves.

It is clear that there is a leadership void. When over 5000 respondents were asked to name the leader they most trusted to

leaders in all make the list.

However, the poll clearly shows up the divided nature of Nepali Congress and UML. Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba leads his rivals (6.3%) but with very little overall support, while Sushil Koirala, Ram Chandra Paudel and Gagan Thapa trail him with about the same level of support (<2%). Eighteen Congress leaders make the list, but the votes they received in sum are less than either that received by Pushpa Kamal Dahal or Baburam Bhattarai. It is clear Nepali Congress has to consider the weakness of its leadership, but it appears that there is no more room for family dynasties within the party.

One would think UML would not have a similar problem, having elected new leadership a year ago. The poll exposes the fact that UML continues to be divided. Madhav Nepal still has the strongest support (6.4%), and party president Jhalnath Khanal follows, but with much less support (1.9%). Here, too, 18 leaders make the list, but the total votes received is less than that of the NC leaders.

Poll are not definitive, but they have the capacity to surprise and edify. Taken positively, they can guide political parties. If national politics improve in quality, then the whole nation will benefit.

## Youth and instability

Sixty per cent of respondents were aged 18 to 40. And while they offered both negative and positive responses to the questions they faced, in sum their responses were on the negative side. It is a possibility that such negativity and the natural exuberance of youth could be used to destabilise Nepal, particularly in the face of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and political conflict. Our political parties should be especially careful to mobilise the enthusiasm of Nepali youth in a responsible manner.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

will transform in the manner UML and NC would like them to. The Maoists have abandoned guns and organised violence while acknowledging multi-party competition, but this in itself is not transformation. It is clear that the Maoists' activities do not hold the same significance for all Nepalis. The Maoists present two contrasting images. One image projected is that of a party that believes in peaceful politics and seeks to uplift the voiceless and the poor. The other is that of a

party that believes in violence and the principle of might is right. The public perception of the party is therefore conflicting, and proves that the transition within the party has reached the people. Such a transition can take a long time for a revolutionary communist party, but if this is to be achieved, the party must gradually become more accommodating.

The people rate the Maoists ahead of other parties, though in terms of a good, responsible party,

lead Nepal towards peace, prosperity and democracy, 60 names were thrown up, but all garnered less than 21 per cent of the total votes. This proves there are many politicians, but few who are considered worthy. Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal (20.2%) and Baburam Bhattarai (14.7%) may be far ahead of the others, and the party will be happy these two have earned some degree of public trust, but even they don't have much support overall and only 7 Maoist



# The bottom line

The Ass-like Broadcasting Corp (ABC) has just received the transcript of the conversation between Comrade Awesome and Jhusilo Koirala at the **Redisson Hotel** during the height of the Maoist strike last week:

PKD: The prime minister has to resign first.  
SK: No, you need to lift the strike first.  
PKD: No, we don't.  
SK: Yes, you do.  
PKD: No, we don't.  
SK: Yes, you do.  
[45 minutes later]  
PKD: No, we don't.  
SK: Yes, you do.  
[Next day]  
PKD: No, we don't.  
SK: Yes, you do.  
[Two days later]  
PKD: You two have runny noses.  
SK: No, we don't.

And that's as close as PKD got to forging a political consensus.



Can't really blame anyone. Our **political nuttas** are well-protected by a barrage of no-nos, as the following demonstrate:

BRB: "No CA extension until Maoists in government."



PKD: "No Maoist in government unless me PM."  
MKN: "No resignation until integration."  
JNK: "No integration until YCL disbanded."  
RCP: "No talk until property returned."



At his **Khole Munch** speech, Comrade Stupendous was buoyed by the massive applause he got after every threat he uttered against Kathmandu's middle

class. They applauded when he warned journalists and scribes that he was noting down everything they wrote so appropriate action could be taken. They applauded when he threatened the business community for daring to stage a peace rally. And when PKD said: "They even chanted hang Prachanda" the crowd burst into deafening applause. Hmmm...

The Ass was a little confused when he heard Maoist Amik Sherchan shout 'Hang Prachanda'

and 'Prachanda Chor Desh Chhod' in parliament. Turns out he was listing all the unmentionables the peace rallyists came up with. This has helped Comrade Awesome set a new record. He is now the only leader of Nepal to have profanities against him registered in parliament's records. The Baddies never lose.



And things appear to be getting worse for Comrade Super-califragilisticexpialidocious. A

post-mortem of the strike suggests that his position within the party has been further weakened, to the advantage of nemesis Comrade Red Flag, who was against the strike. Standing Committee members are now publicly hinting that the party could agree to an alternative candidate, and the Chairman even had to eat crow at a hastily organised gathering of professionals and pundits, where he unconvincingly pleaded that his tirade against Kathmandu's sukilo-mukilo had, in fact, only referred to one per cent of them. Anticipating a backlash, perhaps, the party leadership has figured out that the best way to keep cadres busy is to instruct them to start collecting data on all those who took part in the peace rally, and start figuring out how to **liquidate (sorry, intimidate)** them.



With all the hoo-haa about **whose balls are in whose coat**, it's about time we announced the Coat of the Week. And it goes to Baddie spokesperson **Diner Art Charmer** for this choice dinner-party fender bender: "What kind of a democracy is this when protesters are trying to infringe on our fundamental right to enforce bandas?"



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