Moving the goalposts, foul play, refereeing blunders and own goals. Will our politicians ever achieve the goals the Nepali people set for them? As the wrangling drags on, it’s all too easy to turn away in disgust and towards the rather more goal-oriented strategic play that will dominate the TV screens of the world for the month to come. In fact, football fans across the country are sure to expend much of their mental energies debating the rights and wrongs of the men in shorts. This is not to grant our politicians yet another opportunity to fritter away our collective future. The excitement of South Africa’s achievement will not mask the failure of our own.

Lifetimes World Cup Special
Stick up our World Cup tiesheet or take it with you to the many impromptu sports bars around town. Yes, we can tell you where to go.

GOOOOOAAAAL?

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5 June

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GOOOOOAAAAL?
Why can't the Maoists and the intellectuals what joining the constitutional process means?

have a tendency to tolerate, excuse or wish away their excesses. This is why the Maoists have got a free ride in the mainstream media. The problem is that the support of a majority in parliament can lead the government, according to the Interim Constitution that the Maoists themselves helped write. The UML-led government got to power constitutionally because the Maoists lost the support of their coalition partners. The Maoists then tried to get power via the streets, but failed and are now threatening to restart their rebellion. If you have abandoned armed struggle into constitutional processes, you have to use due process to get into government. More surprising than the Maoists not understanding this is the inability of our so-called intellectuals to grasp it. This is not to say that there aren’t credible, independent and democratic-minded civil society leaders. Nepal’s intellectual class can be divided into three groups: those who support the Maoists out of an ignorant nostalgia for revolution, those who have either been bought, coerced or threatened to support them, and the intellectuals who recognize the convergence of interest with the Maoists. Somewhere within these three groups are intellectuals who have joined the Maoist cause because they identify with their ideology but because they have dreams of getting into government or high positions. Such behaviour, of course, is not uniquely applied to the Maoists; we have seen the Nepali intelligentsia taking up the NC or UML in the past. Lately we see even respected and independent analysts supporting erroneous Maoist policies and actions, and the reason could be a lack of intellectual clarity. Engels once said: “In general, traditionalist thinkers latch on to wrong beliefs.” For example, the Maoists started their armed struggle in 1996 because they thought the existing order could not be changed without a protracted revolutionary war. That is what Marxism-Leninism taught us. But there is another Marxist-Leninist line that says: “The objective conditions must be right before an armed struggle is launched in any country.” In other words, an armed struggle can be an extremist blunder. A party that has to rely on counter-revolutionaries and for support in itself weak and can crumble at any moment. The Maoists should realize that what they see as an intellectual solidarity from the intellectual class is actually undermining them. It is only when the Maoists realize they have taken the wrong turn in history that once you join a democratic process there is no turning back to violence, that the party will make progress and be honest with itself.

Mohan Bikram Singh is the General Secretary of the Nepali Communist Party (Maoist). Translated from a longer version in Himal Khaharpanita, 30May-16 June.
Losing ground

PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

On May 28, top Madhesi leaders could be seen strolling around outside the CA complex. Senior TMDP leaders went to the nearby Beijing Roast Duck restaurant for a bite. MP’s like Prakash Gupta, Sadbhavana’s Anil Jha, and TMDP’s Heradun Sonawar were chatting with journalists about what could happen. Others were sitting on the lawns or in the makeshift canteen.

The absence of Madhesi leaders in negotiations that would determine the future of the country was striking. It was symbolic of the steady erosion of Madhesi political strength.

Madhesi parties complain this is because the ‘pahadi parties’ have monopolised decision-making. Their exclusion from the now-defunct High Level non-Yadav OBCs and Tharus is a pointer to how there will be even more forces in the future. These parties are also top-heavy and the egos of all leaders cannot be reconciled within a single party framework.

But the India-encouraged split in the MJF last year was a turning point. It shrunk the MJF’s bargaining power drastically, and led to widespread popular disillusionment in the Tarai. It also resurrected the conservative social forces of the region. Note that most ministers from MJF(D) in this government had nothing to do with either of the Madhes movements, are implicated in massive corruption cases, come from feudal “jimindar” backgrounds, and only joined Madhesi politics before the elections to cash in on popular sentiment.

The second reason is that Madhesi parties have been subsumed under the ‘national’ Maoist-run Maoist polarisation.

Maoist violence, radicalism, and anti-Indianism as stumbling blocks towards any understanding with them. The unstated reason is also the conflicting social bases of Madhesi parties (largely upper and intermediate castes) and the Maoists (extremely backward castes, Dalits, landless, janjatis and pahads) in the Tarai. India’s real or perceived leverage over Madhesi parties has also harmed its standing in Kathmandu power politics. NC, UML, and even the Maoists do not quite see the point of engaging with Madhesi leaders when the sense is that Madhesi parties will toe the Indian line. By and large, this is a correct assessment. A Madhesi leader told an Indian official recently, only half-jokingly, “We have put all our issues in a basket and handed it to you. Now it is your responsibility. Once you have dealt with the Maoists, address those as well!”

Support from India helps Maoist parties convince individual leaders in many ways, and is based on the extremely strong and dense links between India and the Tarai. But the resulting lack of autonomy has its pitfalls. The Madhes is but a card for India in its larger strategic objective of having a friendly regime in Kathmandu. The dip in violence by armed groups in the Tarai since Madhav Nepal took over is not a coincidence and reflects how India will use, or defuse, Madhesi forces according to its convenience.

As the controversy over the next PM sharpens, there is a buzz in Madhesi circles about how it is their turn to lead since Mahant Thakur’s name as a compromise candidate has been floated. Nothing can be ruled out in Nepali politics, but he or some other Madhesi leader would have stood a far greater chance if they had been more pro-active, united, autonomous, and connected to their roots.
Connectivity and growth

Nepal Times: What is the business rationale for your investment in the Nepali telecom market at a time when most foreign investors are not very optimistic?

Pasi Koistinen: As with the case of a rapidly growing business player, TeliaSonera needs to spread its wings. Where better than countries with low penetration and good growth prospects? Nepal has a sizeable and young population, low fixed-line and mobile penetration, and good prospects for economic growth. We are a long-term strategic investor, and look decades ahead. TeliaSonera invested in Kazakhstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union and now has a billion dollar business there.

What was the strategy behind the Ncell rebranding and has the response fulfilled your expectations?

We recently rebranded Mero Mobile to Ncell, though our previous brand was very young. The rebranding has revitalised our image and increased the energy and enthusiasm of our employees. It has also been a fresh change for our customers. Ncell, its colour, logo and the whole outlook have generated the desired curiosity and expected feedback. The response has been very rewarding, and our purple colour has set the trend for the country’s fashion. The idea behind the new brand was to position Ncell as a part of a big international group of leading mobile operators, owned by a leading European telecommunication company, TeliaSonera. The message is that we are here for Nepal, we are a reliable and committed industrial investor, bringing much-needed communication services to the people living here. However, although we are part of an international group, striving to implement and maintain all the relevant international standards of fair and equal business practices, employee and customer treatment, we are at the same time a company with a strong local Nepali identity that respects the local culture, traditions and heritage.

Customers have a lot of complaints about connectivity and the quality of mobile phone services in Nepal. Why are services still below international standards?

Over the past year, Ncell has dramatically improved its network quality. We have extended our network to cover about 60 per cent of Nepal’s population, a major leap in the country’s telecommunication industry. We are continuously working on improving connectivity and I believe our customers have been experiencing this. Building mobile communication infrastructure requires sizeable investment, so we are making improvements gradually according to our business plan. However, I believe that with our latest efforts, we already have very good network quality and in-network connectivity. And we are in continuous talks with our industry partners in Nepal and abroad to improve inter-network connectivity.
The partisan press

He may be a newsagent, but Deep Sah has seen and heard enough to recognise that independent journalism is merely an ideal.
Organisational governance: It’s an open secret that most private companies are not good at the practice of corporate governance, which is about how effectively a company is directed and controlled for the benefit of its own, a network of financiers, lawyers, accountants, mentors and help upgrade their members’ negotiation skills while educating parties to rein in their militant labour unions, entities such as unions could be tamed so staff members are focused on knowledge platform or network to plug into for advice and laws, and on ways of negotiating with labour unions. Even when because of price or quality issues, but because of politically efficiency. The company claims the new technology can reduce electricity bills by 44 per cent, which makes it economical and efficient. The company claims the new energy efficient. The company claims the new Large Home Appliances segment, an LG Air conditioner with inverter compressor technology. Unlike conventional AC cooling systems, the inverter technology in LG’s ac is air conditioners is Stay cool

Pepsi Mania

Apparatus from Morang and Orhiya Traders from Narayanganj who won this week’s lucky draw of a 32" Samsung LCD TV with Pepsi Football Mania. The promotion will continue till 11 July. Two Samsung 32" LCD TVs will be won every week in addition to Nokia mobile phones, Timex wrist watch, genuine T-shirts, key rings and cards of footballers. The next lucky draw will be held at Pizza Hut, Darbar Marg, on 13 June. The grand prize winner will take home a Hero Honda Karizma ZMR at the end of the promotion.

Everest gives

On the occasion of the second anniversary of EBL Bhaktapur Branch, Everest Bank Limited donated a hydrocholator machine to Siddhi Memorial, Chabahil. The machine is used for physiotherapy. Siddhi Memorial Foundation runs Siddhi Memorial Hospital and Siddhi Shaligram Briddhashram with the donation it received. RK Ummat, General Manager of the bank, handed over the hospital equipment to Shayam Sundar Dhaubadel, founder of Siddhi Memorial.

Mega Sipridi

Sipridi Trading, the authorised dealer of Tata Motors in Nepal, is organising an 18-day Sipridi Mega Exchange Camp, an exposition of Tata vehicles along with an exchange facility. On the spot finance will be available for the purchase of new vehicles. The camp will kick off in Nepalgunj on 10 June, and tour Butwal, Pokhara, Narayanganj, Birganj, Dharan, Birtamor and Birtamod, concluding in Kathmandu on 27 June.

SDN

Siddhartha Development Bank announced a ‘Khaci deposit’ scheme for women, allowing them to open an account with a minimum deposit of Rs 500. The bank provides 8 per cent annual interest along with a one-year subscription to Nari magazine. Depositors will also get a 50 per cent waiver on a locker system, a free ATM card, e-banking, SMS services, free accident insurance worth Rs 100,000, and a 25 per cent discount at the Kathmandu Revolving Restaurant.

Dabur’s goals

Uttam Maksay from Narayanganj won the monthly bumper prize of a SONY BRAVIA 32” LCD TV for Dabur’s ‘Score the Real Goal’. Jay Prakash Tandukar won a SONY BRAVIA 22” LCD TV as the highest correct SMS sender for week 9. Dabur’s ‘Score the Real Goal’ campaign started on April 30, for a chance to win, identify the ‘Real Ball’ and SMS to 5004.

New CG models

CG Motors launched two new models, C763 (CDMA) and D990(CDMA + GSM). C763 is a full touch screen mobile equipped with a music player, Bluetooth and a digital camera. D990 is a dual SIM slot phone with a QWERTY keypad, equipped with a 1.3 MP Camera, FM, Bluetooth, internet modem and Java. They are priced at Rs 6,890 and Rs 9,790 respectively, and come with warranties and a free 1 GB memory card.

Top boss

BOSS Magazine announced the Seventh BOSS Top Ten Business Excellence Awards on Tuesday, honouring the who’s who of Nepal’s business fraternity. CEO of NDB Prachanda Man Shrestha, Kamal Gyawali of Kist Bank and Om Raj Bhardari of Comfort Housing were conferred with the best CEO awards. Lunk Karandas Chaudhary of Chaudhary Group was recognised with the Lifetime Achievement award.

Colours of sport

Asian Paints organised ‘Colourful Meet 2010’, a three-day trip to Pokhara. Dealers and their families from various locations across Nepal attended the meet. Fun games, a lucky draw, live entertainment programs, dancing and a stay at Fohari Resort were the attractions. Budhaili Mukherjee, General Manager of Asian Paints Nepal, participated with company employees.

Ninja unveiled

Kawasaki Ninja 250R was officially launched on Wednesday at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. The

An ecosystem of support is needed if businesses and public enterprises are to flourish

complain bitterly that the tendency of politicians to float rules to appoint heads as per their whims and party-political requirements is destroying many of these entities. Moreover, such arbitrary changes mean that public enterprises function more like unofficial centres of mass employment for party cadres.

Entrepreneurship: Every new bank says that it exists to help entrepreneurs. But entrepreneurs regard the banks as the handymen on dutying paperwork and light on advisory support that most say no thanks to banks. International financial agencies, usually interested in just another lecture on the importance of entrepreneurship does not exist in vacuum. It needs an ecosystem headquarters at a later date. say no thanks to banks. International financial agencies, usually interested in just another lecture on the importance of entrepreneurship does not exist in vacuum. It needs an ecosystem headquarters at a later date. say no thanks to banks. International financial agencies, usually interested in just another lecture on the importance of entrepreneurship does not exist in vacuum. It needs an ecosystem headquarters at a later date.
After a wait of four years, kick-off is here. At precisely 7:45pm Nepali time today, South Africa and Mexico will face off in the opening fixture of the 19th World Cup at the Soccer City Stadium in Johannesburg. Even for the nation that successfully hosted the 1995 Rugby World Cup and the 2003 ICC Cricket World Cup, 2010’s FIFA World Cup is seen as a unique opportunity not only to thrust itself into global prominence, but also to honour the entire African continent.

This momentous event has materialised as a result of three years of hard work and massive investment on the part of South Africa. A new international airport north of Durban and 10 new stadiums of 56,000-capacity to host 64 matches along with other investments (such as a high-speed rail link) have cost the state $3.7 billion. This is in addition to the $800 million spent by FIFA. It is estimated that tourism and business receipts will earn the South African economy close to $4 billion, boosting growth from 3% to 3.5%.

The global event will also influence the future of the African continent’s economies, social development and politics. Participating nations such as South Africa, Algeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Nigeria, which have all gone through growing pains since independence, will take the opportunity to rejuvenate their nationhood and improve regional relations.

As far as who will end up hoisting up the FIFA World Cup Trophy, the usual suspectsloom large. Brazil fancies its chances of winning the event for the sixth time, but perennial dark horses Spain are considered by many the real favourite this time around, having won all 10 of its qualifying matches. Stars such as Argentina’s Messi, Portugal’s Ronaldo, and England’s Rooney will no doubt give their fans plenty to hope for, and there’s no dismissing the dangerous African teams, well known for regular upsets.

And Nepal? We may be be light years away from qualifying, but the World Cup has become a festival to rival any other. The football craze here will feed on the incredible range of promotions by companies such as Coca-cola, Pepsi, LG, Carlsberg and Samsung, with some lucky so-and-so’s going all the way to South Africa. Restaurants and hotels will entertain the rest of us with massive screens and stores are all stocked up on football jerseys. Nepali football lovers may live in Nepal, but their hearts will be in South Africa for the next month.

Dreams come true

SURESH NEUPANE

A billion condoms? Believe it or not, the South African government is making arrangements for 1,000,000,000 condoms for the duration of the FIFA World Cup. This is ten times the supply made available during the Winter Olympics in Vancouver this year. Is it the weather? Whatever it is, the South African state’s prescience has meant that in this country where almost 12% of the population has HIV/AIDS, those visitors worried about their team will have to worry about one thing less.
Sport Bar, the only sports bar in town boasts a 109-inch screen with surround sound and the usual cocktails and drinks menu. Cover charge is Rs 500, but that will mean you won’t have to worry about loadshedding. Kamaladi, 4491234

Rox Bar, watch the matches on the big screen at the bar and drink special cocktails prepared just for the occasion. For the sophisticates among you. Hyatt Regency, Bouddha, 4491234

Imago Del, relaxed and friendly, it will be projecting the games with a 250-watt sound system. Seats only 50 so come early and stay on. Lazimpat, 4442464

Buzz Café, will kick off the World Cup with a barbecue in the gardens and special cocktails from 3pm on Friday. Baluwatar, 4439853

The Factory, a special chef is being flown over to create a menu corresponding with the countries battling it out. There will be games, prizes and pitchers of beer. Thamel, 485107972

1905, it’s also about the food at 1905 in Kantipath, which will feature a special menu throughout the World Cup with country-themed food or snacks. Expect margaritas, empanadas, and good old-fashioned beans and sausages. Kantipath, 4225272

Buzz Café, a well-stocked bar and an airy patio to cool off during the intervals, and intense cheering. Jhamel, 5546179
Café Mitra was already renowned as a foodie haven grace of owner Kunal Lama’s deft culinary touches, the last few Wednesday evenings with Chef Mohit have been the icing on the cake. On these warm summer nights, guests have been treated to a four course set extravaganza of culinary delights.

It is always interesting to see a Nepali with global experience try to make an impact back in Nepal. Chef Mohit worked in London and Washington DC and earned fame as one who can make desserts that melt in your mouth. Back home, he has tried to bring the best of

Syeda Farhana Exhibition, photographs by Bangladeshi artist, writer and filmmaker Syeda Farhana, whose work is entirely conceptual, exploring ideas of the movement of people in very personal and sensitive ways. Saturday 12 June, 9.45am, The Bakery Café, Sundhara

Tavern Tales, a reading from The Oriental Cazebook of Sherlock Holmes by Ted Riccardi, Professor Emeritus at Columbia University, Sunday 13 June, 5pm, Quixote’s Cove, Jawalakhel

In Between Uncommon Factors, yet another exhibit by Kathmandu University’s BFA graduates, in which Sheelasha Rajbhandari explores the relation between uncommon factors. Runs till 14 June, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal

Geometrics, an exhibition of paintings about the intuitive responses of elements, geometry and colours in Thangkas by American artist Pario Passacantando. Opens Sunday 13 June, 11am-6pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited.

PRODUCTS

Putaliko Ghar, a Nepali adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House, which has seen more than 180 performances in Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Denmark and Norway. Starts Friday June 4 (everyday except Mondays) 5.30pm, Gurukul, Old Baneshwor

Saturday’s Farmer’s Market, a weekly farmers’ market that is different from all the other farmers’ markets in town with lasagne, pies and Mediterranean treats along with organic fruits and vegetables. Every Saturday, 9am to noon, 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath

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WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The monsoon is well on its way, even if it is not quite the early bird we predicted it would be because of the effect of cyclone Phet. The westerly jet stream is weakening, and the Bay of Bengal arm of the monsoon is creeping up to the Himalaya. This should bring us heavy rains over eastern Nepal by Friday. The Kathmandu Valley should be getting its first precursor showers by the weekend, and it will start chucking down in earnest sometime next week.

SHELL SHOCK: A girl looks out after a socket bomb destroyed a car in Basundhara, Kathmandu, on Tuesday. Four people were injured and windows of neighbouring buildings, including Ishan Bal Nursing Home, were shattered.

COME DANCE WITH ME: A Magar chundi dance in Betanigaun during a trip organised by Gorkha Tourism along the Manakamana to Gorkha trekking route. Homestays are planned in the future.

TREE PEOPLE: People from various districts rallied for the 4th National Convention of the Federation of Community Forest User Groups, Tuesday.

CLEAN RIDE: Goma Dulal, a quadriplegic, inaugurates the Spinal Injury Electric Vehicle Rally from Maitighar Mandala to Sangha, Saturday, World Environment Day.
When Germany hosted the FIFA World Cup football tournament in 2006, there was no iPhone. Twitter was just preparing its launch. Books were only made of paper, and middle-aged folks had yet to discover, let alone join, Facebook.

Starting today, more than a billion people around the world will hear the sound of the vuvuzela, the South African plastic horn, as the World Cup hogs the fibre optic networks like nothing has done before. For the first time in history, coverage of this worldwide event will be delivered through live 3D, HD television, online streaming and mobile technologies, surpassing traditional media outlets like television, radio and newspapers.

A lot can change in four years. And events like these become not just an excuse for wearing bright nylon jerseys and drinking, but also milestones for measuring technological, political and social progress.

The biggest story this year, unless the United States wins the cup, will be about the host. Until 1994, the World Cup hadn’t even been televised in South Africa. This year, it has spent billions of dollars building world class stadiums for the multi-national event that Archbishop Desmond Tutu described being as “important as Obama getting into the White House.” As the country’s former President Thabo Mbeki has said, South Africa hopes the tournament will be another Mandela moment, “when Africa stood tall and resolutely turned the tide of centuries of poverty and conflict.”

More than 300,000 football fans from around the world will arrive in South Africa this week. Thirty-two teams and 736 players will play in 10 venues across the country. Did anyone living under apartheid, when 90 per cent of the population had no voice or voting rights, think this was possible? Did Nelson Mandela envision this day when he walked out of Robben Island prison in 1990? Today, South Africa carries the mantle of pride for the entire continent, as it welcomes the world to Africa.

Here in Nepal, the World Cup fanfare will be centred on urban areas, as when my father bought his first television for the World Cup in 1994, the same year South Africa held its first democratic and multi-racial elections. Most Nepalis will hear of the tournament through special advertising campaigns by noodle companies, even if they are delivered to their villages by mules.

For those of us who like to indulge in self-reflection, South Africa’s experience is not about when Nepal, or South Asia for that matter, will host the games. Nor is it about when our team will make it to the games, although just imagine how wonderful that will be if supporting proxies can be so much fun (Go England!). We got a peace agreement soon after Fabio Cannavaro kissed the World Cup trophy in 2006, and abolished the monarchy subsequently. But do we have anything to show for the years since, beside the utter political disarray and the proliferation of MSG-laden ramen brands? Perhaps the South Africans can lend us their vuvuzelas to wake us up from this slumber.
NEW YORK – Last year, FAO announced that the number of hungry people in the world increased over the last decade. In 2008, the World Bank announced a significant decline in the number of poor people up to the year 2005. But if poverty is defined principally in terms of the money income needed to avoid hunger, how can announcements such as these be reconciled?

In Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, poverty and hunger remain stubbornly high. International agencies estimate that more than 100 million people fell into poverty as a result of higher food prices during 2007-2008, and that the global financial and economic crisis of 2008-2009 accounted for an increase of another 200 million. Delayed job recovery from the global downturn remains a major challenge for poverty reduction in the coming years.

The mixed record of poverty reduction calls into question the efficacy of conventional approaches. Countries were advised to abandon their national development strategies in favour of globalisation, market liberalisation, and privatisation. Instead of producing sustained rapid growth and economic stability, such policies made countries more vulnerable to the power of the rich and the vagaries of international finance and global instability, which has become more frequent and severe due to deregulation.

The most important lesson is the need for sustained rapid growth and structural economic transformation. Governments need to play a developmental role, with implementation of integrated policies designed to support inclusive output and employment growth, as well as to reduce inequality and promote social justice.

Such an approach needs to be complemented by appropriate industrial investment and technology policies, and by inclusive financial facilities designed to support them. In addition, new and potentially viable production capacities need to be fostered through complementary developmental policies.

By contrast, the insistence on minimal government and reliance on the market led to precipitous declines in public infrastructure investment, particularly in agriculture. This not only impaired long-term growth, but also increased food insecurity. Advocates of economic liberalisation policies cited the success of the rapidly industrialising East Asian economies. But none of these economies had pursued wholesale economic liberalisation. Instead, governments played a developmental role by supporting industrialisation, higher value-added agriculture and services, and improvement of technological and human capabilities.

Structural transformations should promote full and productive employment as well as decent work, while governments should have enough policy and fiscal space to enable them to play a proactive role and to provide adequate universal social protection.

The last three decades also saw the divorce of social policies from overall development strategies as a consequence of the drive for smaller government. National economic development strategies were replaced with donor-favoured poverty-reduction programs, such as land-titling, micro-credit, and ‘bottom of the pyramid’ marketing to the poor.

Such fads have not succeeded in significantly reducing poverty. This is not to deny some positive consequences. For example, micro-credit has empowered millions of women, while important lessons have been learned from such schemes’ design and implementation.

Unfortunately, poverty remains endemic, with more than a billion people going hungry every day. There are also growing fears that climate change will more adversely threaten the lives of the poor.

The United Nations’ biennial Report on the World Social Situation, entitled Rethinking Poverty, makes a compelling case for rethinking poverty-measurement and poverty-reduction efforts. For the world’s poor, ‘business as usual’ has never been an acceptable option.

The author is United Nations Assistant-Secretary-General for Economic Development. Project Syndicate, 2010

Rethinking poverty reduction

JOMO KWAME SUNDARAM
Ex-combatants pass the time playing carom in a gazebo littered with communist paraphernalia. Maoist party indoctrination invades every corner of their lives, giving them no opportunity to begin their transition to civilian life.

After spending almost a week in Chitwan’s Shaktikhor cantonment, talking with members of the PLA’s 3rd Division, one thing is clear: their indoctrination runs deep.

Talking about what they want from the overdue peace process and constitution, they seemed literally incapable of straying from the party line. One platoon commander appeared unaware that he was using ‘we’ instead of ‘I’, even though our conversation was focused on his wishes for the future. As an Armed Police Force inspector told me in Kathmandu, integration is not a matter of numbers or physical standards, but changing the mentality of combatants. “They must entirely change their mentality to be effective,” he said. What happens to the PLA mentality once the PLA is dismantled?

As I talked to them, the ex-combatants told me about their rigid schedule, which includes daily exercise, shifts at guard stands, and ‘cleaning time’. The schedule has been designed simply to keep them busy, and the watch duties are next to useless, as no one is threatening to go anywhere, never mind come in. The inhabitants of Shaktikhor can be seen relaxing, watching TV, and sleeping with the help of a fan, fruitlessly trying to hide from Chitwan’s unrelenting summer heat.

While they boasted of their strict schedule and harsh camp rules, all other structures felt like a façade to show outsiders that they are staying busy. Stuck in UN cantonments, unable to talk about their desires or come and go as they please, it seems that the ‘freedom fighters’ of yesterday are no longer free. They simply wait for their leaders to determine their future.

They were meant to be freedom fighters, but they have neither physical nor mental freedom.

A PLA member stares at the camera during one of his watch duties. Along with his fellow ex-combatants, he has little to do but wait.

A Maoist gun pointing at the Nepali flag is symbolic of what the PLA fought for. But little has changed for the ex-combatants since they entered the camps four years ago.
"Time not ripe yet"

An interview with NC spokesperson Arjun Narsingh KC, Dristi, 8 June

Dristi: Though the CA tenure has been extended, the political deadlock has not been resolved. Arjun Narsingh KC: The extension has laid a foundation to make a fresh start towards forging a consensus and moving ahead. But the time has not matured enough for an agreement.

What is preventing them from forging a consensus? Maoist fighters in cantonments and the weapons they possess are the obstacle. The Maoists are not ready to put down their guns just yet. A party that has weapons cannot be a democratic force. The Maoists want to affect opinion through force. A constitution should not be written under the shadow of guns.

The Maoists have been demanding the resignation of Madhav Kumar Nepal. Resignation of the PM is not a problem. He has time and again urged the political parties to reach an agreement so that he can resign. He should not leave the post and push the country into uncertainty. There should be a guarantee that the past commitments will be implemented and the constitutional calendar should be finalised, then he can resign.

Are you saying the PM won’t resign unless the Maoists accept the package deal? Why should he? The package deal is to ensure the peace process and constitution writing. It is not only the commitment we are looking for but the implementation of the commitments.

Is a Maoist-led government acceptable to the NC if the Maoists accept your package deal? This opens an avenue for forging a consensus. A consensus leadership is one that is acceptable to all. How can we accept Maoist leadership in government if the party still possesses weapons and fighters?

Is NC claiming the post of PM then? Concluding the peace process and constitution writing are the real issues. NC will cooperate with a government without NC if it ensures peace and PLA integration. NC will not hesitate to take up the responsibility if all other political parties approve of our leadership. But our priority now is not the government, but constitution writing.

"Dangerous waters"

Chitlanga Thapa in Kantipur, 5 June

Everyday Shankar Dutta of Sunsera crosses the Mahakali river on a rickety ropeway to get to the neighbouring town of India in search of work and comes back the same way in the evening with his earnings. Crossing over a bridge would mean a whole day’s walk so instead he uses the ropeway, knowing that a little mistake could cost him his life. At least two locals from Darchula lose their lives every year trying to cross the dangerous waters of the Mahakali river on a weak and unstable hand-operated ropeway. The issue of constructing a bridge across the river has been raised during Nepal-India border meetings but like most agreements, it is yet to be implemented.

“We have been requesting the government to construct at least one suspension bridge in this area, but in vain,” says Mangal Singh Dhami, a teacher from Sunsera. At present there are three suspension bridges across the Mahakali in Darchula district, in Khalanga, Dattu and Joljivi. But for the locals from rural Darchula it takes a day to get to any of the bridges and the ropeway is the only alternative.

“I have used the ropeway many times to go to Sunsera,” says assistant CDO Dhan Prasad Poudyal Sharma, adding that there have been agreements to build two more bridges at Tiglam and Huti. Although the state government of India has agreed, the central government is yet to give the go-ahead. Funds for a bridge at Huti have been set aside in this year’s budget but no work has been started.

Costly cabinet

Sagar Pandit in Nayapatrika, 8 June

PM Madhav Kumar Nepal’s jumbo cabinet has spent more than what was allocated in this year’s budget. Rs 75 million has been expended on salaries, fuel and travel expenses for 43 cabinet members in the last 10 months. This amount is twice the budget allotted by the government. Initially, the government had allotted Rs 40 million for the cabinet but an additional Rs 60 million was requested within five months.

Pass the budget

Editorial in Karobar, 9 June

This year too, the budget is likely to be affected by the ongoing political wrangling over power. The budget delay will have a negative impact on the country’s economy. The Maoist-led government was unable to present the budget and its plans and policies due to a delay in forming a new government after the CA elections. The UML-led government budget that followed was also delayed by five months due to the Maoist obstruction of the parliament, and failed to bring the expected results. Many programs were not implemented.

Protracted political conflict tends to increase regular administrative expenses while freezing the development budget. The deficit budget every year has caused inflation, which is on the rise. We have not been able to achieve the expected economic growth rate, which is why we have had a double-digit inflation rate for three consecutive years. Policy makers should keep in mind how difficult life has been as a result.

There are ways to object to government policies and programs in parliament. These objections can be discussed in parliament, but it is undemocratic for the Maoists to say that they will not let the budget pass. The budget session was supposed to have started on 8 May for the budget to be presented on 9 July. The Maoists should well know what difficulties a budget delay can cause. An agreement should be reached on passing the budget while politics is negotiated at the same time. Who leads the government should not matter to economic development.
He 28th of May, 2008, was a momentous day for Nepal. The first meeting of the Constituent Assembly (CA) declared Nepal a ‘Federal Democratic Republic’. But much that followed that bold and historic declaration has been muddied not only by the ambitions of the political parties that make up the CA, but also the many contentious issues that have arisen in the last two years.

So what has actually been accomplished, and what does the CA have to deal with in the year’s extension that it has been granted?

Two years of the CA have passed, during which the following tasks were completed:

- declaration of the republic
- election of a president and a vice-president
- formation of 14 committees

(Congressional Committee, 10 thematic committees and 3 administrative committees)
- first collation of public opinion on the new constitution
- preparation of preliminary drafts by the thematic committees
- proposal of a 14-province model by the State Restructuring and Power Sharing Committee

CA Chairperson Subhas Nembang claims ‘80 per cent’ of constitution writing has been completed, and many other political leaders agree. But the reports of the thematic committees are like thesis papers that haven’t yet been submitted for peer review. Contentious issues have not yet been discussed, only compiled and stored in lawmaker Agni Kharel’s Report Study and Suggestions Committee. It may be the remaining 20 per cent that is the most difficult. The tasks that remain include:

- preparation of the preliminary constitutional draft by the Constitutional Committee
- receipt of 7 thematic committee reports by the Constitutional Committee (only three have been submitted so far)
- second collation of public opinion
- preparation of the constitution bill
- passing of each article of the constitution on the basis of consensus as far as possible, if not by a 2/3 majority of CA members
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Much of the delay in the submission of the thematic committee reports can be attributed to disputes related to:

- fundamental principles of the new constitution
- type of political system to be adopted
- basis of federal structures and province models
- structure of the judiciary and its independence
- management/integration of Maoist ex-combatants
- addressing concerns about ethnic and regional identity

Instead of forging ahead with the drafting process, the politicians continue to wrangle over who should succeed Madhav Kumar Nepal. Constitution writing is still not a priority, despite the last-minute extension of a fortnight ago. The song remains the same: integration first, or a national government?

According to NC central committee leader and CA member Man Mohan Bhattarai, we need to officially put an end to the ‘gun-loving culture’ by disbanded the parallel army of the Maoists. Only then, according to Bhattarai, can we embrace peace and give constitution writing some momentum. But Maoist politburo member Janardan Sharmas insists that Madhav Kumar’s resignation has to precede a timetable for concluding the peace process and forming a national consensus government. The clock is ticking once more.

DHRUBA SIMKHADA
Fifteen days after the breakthrough 3-point agreement between the 3 leaders of the 3 parties it is now clear that none of the 3 meant a word they said. The only reason they agreed to agree was because all 3 needed a CA extension: the NC and UML are promoting Com Cloudy and not resign now. Which is why Chairman Supremacist Makunay will continue to be PM. Long and short of it is that the Maoists and Pokhara command have been reset and the new countdown is 350 days to go for D-Day. You know the country is back to normal when the only news in the newspapers is that Maoists have said a word or two about who met whom and where. All this comes at a time when the Maoists are struggling to extricate themselves, they pinned the blame on a non-existent Hindu group. This was believed in and said so in the Nepali newspaper’s van. Then, to extricate themselves, they pinned the blame on a non-existent Hindu group. This was thought implausible and disinformation that it not even comrades in the party hierarchy could decide within themselves who should replace him. The Maoists and Royalists really have a lot in common: they can’t even come up with a believable fall guy, and both think they can fool all the people all the time. It looks like the Asian ambassadors have finally had enough and diplomatically reminded their Euro counterparts last week about which continent they were in, and that if they love communism so much how about staging revolutions in their own countries? This is probably the only place on the planet where the South and North Korean envoys are on the same wavelength. The cocktail circuit is also abuzz with rumours of the Everest Manhattan organisers snubbing a brown Hindu ambassador during the awards ceremony in Naxche while going out of their way to schmooze with a tall blonde beer fester. The trend of turning down awards is spreading. Now it’s Bollywood celebrities who have refused to take the Maoist-dominated National Film Board’s annual awards, the NOSCARS, even before they have been announced.

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