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BIKRAM RAI

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SHED SOME LIGHT

As the politicians jostle for space in the new government, Nepalis are in the dark in more ways than one. Closing in on three years since the Constituent Assembly was tasked to lay out a template for Naya Nepal, we still don't know what is in store for us; the only certainty (and not always) is the loadshedding schedule and increments in the dark hours week on week. This year's CAN-InfoTech was instructive. Hordes of young Nepalis swarmed the stalls, and nowhere were they more numerous than where pen drives and solar-inverter hybrids were being hawked. The twin desires of the modern Nepali are symbols for each other: information and light. Alas, neither seems to be forthcoming from the state. A plethora of agreements sprinkled liberally with buzzwords fails to illuminate the path forward or the mental states of our Machiavellian leaders. Every event is hailed as a milestone, then inevitably falls prey to a hail of criticism, misinterpretation,

and confusion, so much so that it is hard to tell if we are moving forward or not. Meanwhile, as our comprehensive survey on the state of play of the energy sector in Nepal indicates, we are on track for far worse loadshedding in the years to come. If you thought last year's 18 hours a day was bad, how about 22 hours a day? This is not fear-mongering, it is the likely future, all thanks to the myopia of this generation of politicians across the spectrum. Habituation can be a useful mental state when faced with such political and infrastructural challenges as Nepal offers. But it can also



BIKRAM RAI

allow some to get away with murder. You may sigh, push away the day's headlines, and light a candle, but we run the risk of being the frog in a pot of water that doesn't know it's slowly being boiled to death. What we need from our leaders is information for light, light for life. Tell us what you really want to do with the state of Nepal, and if you cannot come to an agreement, then let the people decide on the more crucially fraught points. Don't obfuscate, dissemble, vacillate. But while the finer points of politics are being discussed, remember that your people can't dine on modalities and consensuses. We reluctantly accept that you prioritise politics over the economy, but how about some multi-tasking?

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

KHANAL THE TROJAN (KANAK MANI DIXIT, #540)

Sir, you have missed the train by at least five years. This is not the first time that the Maoists have deployed tricks to get their way and it will not be the last. In the near future they will be ahead and they will very likely be in control of the country in the coming year. That no resistance will bear fruit for now is something that you must accept. This time should be spent in understanding what happened and finding out the truth about both motives and causes. You will need to work hard not just for this country's sake, and therefore ours, but also for yourself. To, dare I say, redeem yourself.

Slarti

There are few articles that have the ability and the strength to capture and analyse a present story that is truthful and honest to the situation at hand. And this is exactly what Mr. Dixit is able to do. The analysis successfully brings into light the failure of our nation in a way that addresses the jeopardisation of the democratic institution in Nepal by a group of political forces working together. Are we as a nation looking backward toward another authoritarian monarchy in the form of the Maoists? In a time where freedom of speech still exists for the people of Nepal, we must both comprehend and spread awareness about the 'dirty' politics that the Maoist party is playing, especially in and amongst the lower strata of society. For if Maoists are able to come to complete power, censorship of media and the brutal repression of freedom of expression will have to be liberties that we as a nation must forego for the crime of ignorance and inaction that we pursue today.

Aditya Todi

Just four quick points:
1. How come the Khanal govt. duly elected on the floor of the CA House is not democratic but Madhav Nepal's govt. was?
2. Maoists will of course use Home or for that matter any other ministry to buttress their political constituencies and agenda.

But so will any other party and leader. What is the difference except our own political prejudices and preferences?
3. Yes perhaps, Nepali people will suffer under the present and the future govt. As they did under the past ones led by Madhav Nepal, Girija Koirala and of course the kings.
4. Yes Jhala Nath made unethical moves to come to power, but what about others. Were they all very pious and democratically credible? Politics has always been a game of scoundrels and it remains so, in Nepal and elsewhere in the world. We cannot allocate different values to different people and forces when the conduct is similar.

Democracies these days are games of manipulations and malpractices.

S.D.Muni

He is right. We don't want yet another 30 year regime as happened in Egypt. Communism is a disease. When the whole world is marching forward with democratic norms and values, why do we prefer Maoism?

B Sharma

It was clear for quite a long time that all Khanal wanted to do was be the prime minister. There should be no expectation

from him. He is an incarnation of Girija who did similar manoeuvring in the past to bring down the Congress government so that he could ultimately become the prime minister. So Muni is right is saying that Khanal is not the first opportunist politician in Nepal or for that matter in India. There are enough of them in his country which is still ruled by a dynasty. We Nepalis can at least be proud that we kicked out the Shah dynasty for good and hopefully will be able to do the same to the Koirala dynasty. By the way when is Muni's country going to do the same to the Gandhi dynasty?

As for the Maoists, they know very well that they cannot do anything good for Nepal and the Nepali people by following Maoist philosophies. Even Mao's China abandoned it 30 years ago. See what they have achieved by doing so. Hope the Maoists understand this and join mainstream politics for their and Nepal's sake. Choosing to do otherwise will only bring pain and suffering to the Nepali people and the Maoist cadre. The leaders of course won't have to worry. Their children will study in the West as in the past and the

leaders will be able to hide in Delhi as they did during the previous insurgency. Or will they choose Beijing this time?

BKM

Shouldn't that be Khanal the Greek? They were the ones behind the wooden horse project - the Trojans got sliced up and burned. Mr Dixit's paranoid analysis is rooted in the fear that he'll end up playing the Trojan.

Kiran

This article is RIGHT on. Finally telling it how it is. No point blaming Nepali Times for previous opinions. At least they gave the murderers the benefit of the doubt. But now that all the cards are on the table, it's time to figure out how to take the country back from these murderers/ criminal organisation disguised as a political party.

rick flair

Yet again, a member of the Kathmandu elite demonstrates not only how much they don't get democracy, but the extent to which they are responsible for abetting the political forces that seek to ensure that nothing changes in the country, and for whom the current deadlock is an optimal scenario. For the largest party (by a factor of two) in the legislature to be part of a coalition is apparently a 'threat to democracy' - it would be interesting to see what arrangement of forces in government Mr Dixit would consider representative of the electorate. The 'imperial progressives' of whom the author is so dismissive would beg to point out that the '6% growth' of the mid-1990s was invisible to many Nepalis, including those who supported the People's War and who voted for the CPN-M. Such blindness in Kathmandu was exactly what caused the conflict. This article appears to be a plea to ignore both such facts and to have breathtaking contempt for those Nepalis who cast their votes for the current Assembly. The commitment articulated here to no change at any price is a recipe for the continued exclusion of most Nepalis from their politics and society and a one way track to continued violence.

This article suggests that there remains a constituency in Kathmandu that still refuses to accept the fact of the Maoists as part of the political environment, despite their demonstrable support, and appears to prefer a breakdown of the peace process to their participation in civilian governance.

Simon Robins

I dislike foreigners like Simon Robins. I really do. They should really stick to hiking and

trekking.

chandraGurung

Regarding NT's support to the Maoists in the past: Let's see it this way, before the Maoists joined open politics, many poor had faith in them and NT too believed in them, that the Maoists really wanted to change the life of the poor. After their entry into open ground, the Maoists have been exposed so their real supporters (the poor) as well as NT no longer believe in them.

After the Maoists joined open politics - criminals, smugglers, looters, rich, business community, gangsters, many so-called civil society members all joined the Maoists. What does this mean? It means NT supported the Maoists in the early days because they believed in them, not for personal benefit like those who joined later. NT as well as the poor dumped the Maoists because the Maoists have been lying to them. NT could have cashed in for their past loyalty to the Maoists just like many others are doing, but they are not because they are genuine patriot Nepalis.

So NT should be respected for not being opportunists, and don't forget that they took a really big risk by supporting the Maoists during Shah rule. Now they are being attacked by the Maoists for going against them.

My suggestion to NT is, while criticising the Maoists, it would be really good if they keep on saying, "Once we (NT) believed in the Maoists."

who cares

Editor's note: We would like to clarify that Kanak Mani Dixit is not on the editorial team of Nepali Times, but is an occasional contributor.



nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 541

Q. What do you think of the secret seven-point deal between PM Khanal and Dahal?



Weekly Internet Poll # 542. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. Do you believe in compulsory military service for all Nepali adults?



Same-same



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

Irrespective of whether the government succeeds on the peace and constitution front, Jhala Nath Khanal will probably fail in his other stated objective – ‘of strengthening institutions of governance’.

Frequent changes in government after 1990 resulted in frequent changes in personnel and the rapid circulation of elites. At times, there was slight tweaking of policy. But the real tragedy of politics in the last two decades has been that no dispensation had the political commitment, will or strength to reform the administrative apparatus, fight interested lobbies, and formulate and implement policies with the broader public interest in mind. The real aim has been survival, in order to extract and use state resources to expand one’s base and consolidate power.

Khanal will not be able

to do much for the simple reason that he will have to invest all his energy in political management and balancing conflicting interest groups to survive. To think that he has any time or incentive or skills to invest in resolving issues like power cuts and unemployment is naïve.

Second, his cabinet consists of old-timers like Bharat Mohan Adhikari and Bishnu Poudel, who have

Maoist ministers will be even higher as their political base has waited patiently for years, if not more than a decade, to gain the patronage that others have capitalised on. Some ministers may have new ideas, but the constraints of their parties will diminish their ability to act independently.

Even if Khanal and his cabinet try to steer reform, through cracking the whip on certain public sector

apparatus, and the media, which is an entrenched part of the establishment, will begin saying this is all a conspiracy to ‘take over the state’. A cry for ‘democracy’ will be raised to force Khanal to play along with the status quo.

Nepal’s best-known television anchor, Vijay Kumar Panday, has a reservoir of political anecdotes. One such story is about the time he went to meet a prime minister, soon after 1990, in his office chambers. It was morning, and the PM was inside, taking a nap. Panday was amazed, and said aloud, “Sir. There has been such a remarkable political change. Expectations are so high. Don’t you have to work and deliver instead of sleeping?” The PM laughed and adapted an old vernacular metaphor to denote insignificant change: “It is all the same. If I work, the result will be 19; otherwise 18.”

Call it fatalism, but that may well have been among the most profound political insights into running this

country. It explains why there was little substantial difference for the common man when GP Koirala was in office, working four hours a day, or when Dahal or Madhav Nepal were heading government, working 12-14 hours a day.

For an overhaul in governance, old patronage networks have to be broken down; fresh politician-bureaucrat equations must be created; ruling parties need to have a degree of security so that they can stop worrying only about survival; constituents have to begin demanding ‘public goods’ and not merely ‘private goods’; and a consensual political compact on certain issues needs to be worked out. It is unlikely Khanal will be able to do any of this. And even if he does, the opponents will raise the cry of ‘democracy is in danger’, or ‘state capture’, to block any effort at governance reform – since governance reform is so inextricably linked to which political constituencies get what resources.

The ‘18-19’ framework will remain unbroken. And Khanal will join the line of PMs who, despite the support of ‘revolutionaries’, reinforced the status quo in the way this country is run. 🇳🇵

Khanal will be hard-pressed to survive, let alone force change

the backing of key business interests and have developed their political base by catering to their interests. The first-timers, mostly from the Maoists, have gained access to state power after a long wait. If the first Maoist stint in power is any indication, the priority will be less to think of ways to radicalise administrative structures than to steer them towards catering to their political base. The pressure on these

institutions, introducing new personnel, making the administration more accountable, or breaking the cop-criminal nexus, a coalition of established interests will raise the alarm. Most of these moves will have a hint of partisan motives. The NC-inclined bureaucracy, the commercial interests that will lose out if public schools or health institutions even begin to succeed, the corrupt security

THIS WEEK

Yes, ministers

Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal on Wednesday agreed to give 11 ministries including the Home Ministry to UCPN (Maoist). Along with Home, Khanal announced that the Maoists would be in charge of foreign affairs, general administration, physical planning and works, and peace and reconstruction, while UML would retain eight ministries including defence, finance, and water resources. Khanal and Maoist Chairman Dahal agreed to offer the remaining ministries to MJF and TMLP (N). A cabinet of a maximum of 26 ministers has been proposed. The party central committee meeting scheduled to be held on Thursday will nominate the names of ministerial candidates.

UN calls

The United Nations on Sunday urged the verified minors and late recruits (VMLRs) among the discharged Maoist combatants to enrol in the United Nations Inter-agency Rehabilitation Program. The final date for enrolment for the program is 22 March. There are four rehabilitation packages available for the VMLRs: educational assistance, micro enterprise development training, vocational skills training, and health service related training. Altogether,



4,008 Maoist combatants were verified as VMLRs based on their age and date of recruitment and discharged from the cantonments. However, as of 10 February, only 2,393 VMLRs have contacted the UN office.

Membership scrapped

The Supreme Court on Friday scrapped Shyam Sundar Gupta’s CA membership as he was nominated without his party’s consent. After hearing various writs filed by Khusilal Mandal and Sarita Giri on behalf of Nepal Sadbhawana Party (A) a joint bench of Balram KC and Bharat Raj Uprety scrapped Gupta’s CA membership. NSP (A) has recommended Mandal for the post. Gupta was nominated CA member by the cabinet led by erstwhile Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on 4 July, 2008.

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 **GUEST COLUMN**
Biraj Bahadur Bista

Nepal’s politicians pay homage to one definition of politics while exploiting another

How does one define politics in Nepal, especially when it comes to the use of power? The definition of politics before the 1990 era can be explained by the Nepali term *rajniti*, which in its literal sense means *raja ko niti* – the king’s policy. This definition implied that all ordinances came from the king, one who was above the law, and could not be contested because any policy that came from the royal institution was also by its literal Nepali definition, *sabai bhanda ramro niti*, that is, ‘the best of policy’. Of course the king had his advisors to guide and caution him but fundamentally there were no constraints on his use of power. Power at the time was in the literal sense the ‘king’s authority’.

The second definition of politics follows the 1990 democratic movement. This movement introduced the western concept of liberal politics, where ‘politics is the constrained use of power’. Constraints include the parliament, judiciary and the various bureaucratic institutions, providing different levels of checks and balances within the governing system. Most importantly, no one is considered above the law.

The 1990 movement in its democratic essence should have brought about



PICS: KIRAN PANDY

the end of the first definition of politics. But in the years that followed, including after the 2005 movement, the dual implementation of the first and second definitions has brought about a moral decadence in the overall polity and society of Nepal. Regardless of what happened before 1990, the current definition of politics cannot be said to be adhering to the fundamental principles of democracy.

Quite contradictorily, our leaders straddle both definitions, using whichever is convenient for them. They use the first definition to dodge accusations, lapses of duty, or to delay decision making that may not be in their favour and to avoid punishment for any unlawful

act. They use the second definition to prop up their false democratic rhetoric for the people. Besides other explanatory variables, the interchangeable use of these two definitions also accounts for why nepotism, favouritism and ‘partyism’ continue to run rampant; why coming to a consensus in writing a new constitution seems so difficult; why it took 18 elections to choose a prime minister; why Devi Prasad Regmi was thrown into jail for the slap case while minister Begum escaped punishment for a similar incident; why we hear commitments from successive governments that the loadshedding problem will be solved in five years; and why improvements in

security are hyped up when we know our borders are in their most vulnerable state to date.

Some may argue that since politicians are rational they obviously juggle these two definitions for an optimum outcome. But rationality, and most importantly democracy, cannot operate without a set of rules where the game is fair and everybody is equal in the eyes of the law. The leap into the democratic era, or the republic, is a symbolic rupture between the old and the new. It should herald a transformation in which, according to Weber, power should be embodied in the formal organisations of rationality, by which he meant power governed by a set of rules.

Flipflopping on both definitions makes for a dysfunctional system of governance and fosters moral decay in the people who believed in and voted for them, only to be let down. Raising the price of oil one day and sending one’s own student union to the streets the next day is akin to a split personality disorder. Similarly, there can be no justification for keeping the country hostage for almost seven months as 18 elections ran their course. This is a modus operandi worse than the rulers of the pre-1990s would have chosen. Ambiguity in political actions sends out a message of futility and fickleness of governance, stalls any hope of development and progress, and generates frustration in the people that will inevitably lead to the demise of the regime.

A strong regime is one that conforms to a single definition of politics, sticking to the norms of a democratic republic, in which there is a set of rules based on the principles of equality and freedom. Unless the people of Nepal feel that everyone is equal by law, they won’t see a difference between the politics of Naya Nepal and the old Nepal. Real change does not necessarily stem from the election of a new prime minister, or by overthrowing governments. Real change will come when the people of Nepal finally sense the fundamentals of democracy being implemented. 🇳🇵

Biraj Bahadur Bista is a PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science in Seoul National University, South Korea

Playing safe



BIKRAM RAI

Nepali Times: Would you say that the life insurance industry in Nepal is growing?
Resta Jha: Life insurance began in Nepal with the National Insurance Corporation of Nepal in the early 1970s but private players did not enter the market until a decade ago. Now there are nine life insurance companies, and approximately six per cent of the population is insured. The industry is in its nascent stage, which means there is a lot of opportunity. People started questioning the credibility of life insurance companies after the recent Unity scandal. But the market is picking up, as shown by the premium collection of Rs 2.25 billion in the last quarter, up from Rs 1.5 billion collected in the same period a year before.

Why should an individual be insured?
When you insure yourself, the money you put in is not just an investment. Life insurance is firstly for the security of your family, who will be taken care of if anything unfortunate happens to you. Secondly, it is a mode of forced saving, and will give you returns in the form of bonuses. Lastly, insurance gives you tax benefits.

Which market is the industry primarily catering to?
The market for life insurance is still a push market; the insurance suppliers seek consumers rather than the other way round. Only 15 per cent of the insured population lives in urban areas, the remaining 85 per cent is based in rural areas.

What does the insurance sector need to do to attract urban residents?
There is still a need to raise awareness about life insurance among the urban population. While direct marketing has worked well in rural areas, different methods will have to be used to change the attitude of urban consumers. We need to introduce differentiated products that are customised to the urban lifestyle. On the other hand, agents also have to be trained to allow clients to make informed choices.

How can the growth of the industry be facilitated?
Right now, there is an asset-liability mismatch in the life insurance industry. The average period of a policy is 13.75 years – our liabilities are long-term. Meanwhile, our investment options are mostly short-term. There needs to be a regulatory change that will allow us to invest in real sectors such as health and education. Also, the government needs to increase the tax benefit insurance can provide, which at present is just Rs 20,000.

As part of KFA, can you tell us about the International Management Conference the institution is organising?
KFA is collaborating with the Nepal Academy of Management to organise this conference and we have invited more than 100 international delegates from academic and business backgrounds. We expect that during this three-day conference, the participants will not only learn about international management practices but establish international linkages that will help the business community here. We are trying to ensure that the right people attend the conference so that the talks will transform into actions.

Resta Jha is the CEO of Prime Life Insurance. Since its establishment in 2008, Prime Life Insurance has developed a network of 20 branches and 65 sales offices and has enlisted over 300,000 policy holders. Under Jha’s leadership, the company has been able to increase its market share from 5 to 13 per cent over the last two quarters. Jha also serves as the chairman of KFA, a financial training, research and consultant firm.

Adieu Time to say goodbye!



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

As I sat down to write my final column, I went through the collection of my articles online – after 10 years as a columnist, you forget how and where it all began. Kunda Dixit, the man who pushed me into starting this column from issue zero, told me that I was the last columnist to have been here from the first.

It has been a long time since I adopted the persona ‘Arthabeed’, in collaboration with Kunda Dixit and Binod Bhattarai. I enjoyed the anonymity in the initial years and the guessing game till Arthabeed’s first public appearance at the fifth anniversary of *Nepali Times*. The joy of living another character has been amusing, like an avatar you create online. You have the freedom to vent your anger, think aloud, and of course give advice as a personality that

people recognise. Arthabeed witnessed the most eventful phases of Nepali political and economic history. When the column began, we had a constitutional monarchy and the insurgency had started to get really nasty. Then the royal massacre took place, crowning a new monarch who later imposed direct rule. His failed attempt paved the way for a republican Nepal, and we elected a constituent assembly to write a new constitution for a new Nepal.

The ten years saw good governance and the national economy losing out to party politics and those keen on personal gain. While our neighbours grew at an express rate, our politicians were content in clinging to whatever power they could grab, providing jobs to family, extended family and party cadres and of course, hopping onto junkets abroad. Decentralisation took place, in corruption rather than power, and a new vocabulary

gained currency in economic analysis: bandas, unions, and extortion. Graft became more chic as deals shifted to the coffee shops of five-star hotels. Plundering natural resources for personal gain was the best business one could be in.

New age *chakari*, or the display of sycophancy



through messages of congratulations or condolence, provided good sources of revenue to media houses feeling the heat of a failing economy. The architecture of management changed as unions dictated to owners and the owners, instead of managing businesses, became busy managing associations and

chambers. The numbers of financial institutions soared; every second person was a promoter of XYZ Finance. It was a decade of taking speculative positions for gains that a sane financial and economic world would never deliver. Asset prices started to stagnate and non-performing assets at banks started to build up. Phew – how eventful.

But this beed enjoyed looking at the silver lining in the dark clouds — in the emergence of art forms, in lifestyle changes, in the bright lights of party palaces, in the launches of shopping malls, and in the lines of stores real international brands were opening up. Barefoot, ragged poster boys and girls for the donors were replaced by Nepalis decked out in cheap Chinese jackets and shoes. Mobile phone penetration brought in an unprecedented revolution of connection. The media prospered through community radio, broadsheet dailies, and some hard-

hitting television programs. Village roads connected more destinations and there was a significant increase in access to financial services. Lifestyles went through significant changes; people became open to holidaying abroad and spending money on hobbies. You just need to stand on a busy street and watch the movement of people, you’ll see things have definitely changed in the last decade. But whether it’s confidence or arrogance, one cannot say.

Meanwhile the remittance economy kept the decade afloat, upholding our economic history that survived on money sent by Gurkhas and Lahures. Aid continued to pour in (though I have consistently wondered aloud about the productivity of each dollar of aid). Despite the political mess, we still stayed afloat!

It was the readers who inspired me the most and the beed has now transformed into a brand-driven management consulting and advisory company (www.beed.com.np). There are many beeds now and there will be many more in the years to come. Thank you readers for encouraging me to go this far. I look forward to making occasional appearances. www.sujeevshakya.com

Mobile bank

Everest Bank has launched the Easy Mobile Banking Facility for account holders who use NTC mobile phones. This facility allows customers to fund transfers to desired EBL accounts by sending a SMS to 5688.

Cheers

San Miguel will now be available in 650ml Steinie bottles. The ingredients have been changed and now San Miguel is a Pale Pilsen.



International meet

KFA Business School and the Nepali Academy of Management are organising Nepal's first international conference on management from 10 to 12 March in Kathmandu. International delegates will attend the conference to present papers on management and take part in discussions.

Expanding CG

CG|EDUCATION has acquired Delhi Public School in Birganj. CG|Education operates five major educational institutions in Kathmandu, is working with K-12 Manipal Education, and has launched DIGI-Classrooms, a model for technology-based classrooms.

Double agency

NIC Bank has signed an agreement with Brihat Investment, which enables real estate marketing agents from Brihat to work as direct selling agents of the bank's home loan products. Under the agreement, they will facilitate prospective buyers in acquiring home loans from NIC Bank for purchase of the residential houses/apartments.

Economic drive

CG Automobiles, the sole authorised distributor of Suzuki, has launched Suzuki K10, which comes with advanced suspension, new cable-type transmission, superior brake system and more knee-room for rear seat passengers. The model gives mileage of 20.2 km per litre.

Pooling money

Bank of Kathmandu has partnered with Prabhu Money Transfer. All branches of the bank will now also represent Prabhu Money Transfer.

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MY TAKE

Damakant Jayshi



KIRAN PANDAY

Trust our political parties to act like ostriches while the common people struggle to carry on with their lives. There's a more pathetic scene to be seen than the one that the parties are currently indulging in over power-sharing and the calculation of gains and losses for the (upcoming) election - the queue of hundreds of passport-seekers outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in the capital. If you want a clear demonstration of people's lack of faith in those who

are supposed to make life easier for the citizens, look no further. The lines of those seeking a better life elsewhere is the most definitive 'no confidence' vote in the political parties by the people. But even the most basic right of acquiring one's passport is being made much more difficult, as if the people have not been punished

enough already. I spoke to some applicants outside the gates of MoFA and found that some are still unaware about the recent change of rules that requires them to have their applications endorsed by district administration offices (DAOs). Apparently, there's not been much publicity despite the notice in the media. The change that came into

Hassleport

The first step towards a better life is often the hardest one for Nepalis applying for passports

effect almost a month ago was because the ministry officials could not think of a better way to beat the criminals who found a way to get machine readable passports (MRPs) by forging documents. Another reason was to diminish the crowd at the MoFA gates. The result is people who come from all over Nepal have seen their hard-earned money go to waste. Some have had to stay in hotels in the capital for over a week, only to be asked to go back to their district and come again. MoFA officials, on the

other hand, are a harried lot. They are simply unable to cope with the pressure despite doing everything they can to make the process of acquiring a passport easier. Here's a list of things they could work on. First off, they need to revert to a single page application form and do away with the form that has print on both sides, available at MoFA and DAOs. If you fill out the form electronically (a mode preferred by MoFA), it is rendered useless unless you copy the DAO's endorsement onto the backside of the filled application form. To avoid this hassle, MoFA could ask the DAOs to verify applicants' papers, download the new single page forms, fill in the required endorsement details, and then have applicants fill them in.

The application form and instructions to download it on the Central Passport Office's website - www.cpo.gov.np - are not user-friendly either. Clicking on 'Download Forms' does not lead to the forms; instead it takes you to instructions on how to fill them in. Yet another click is required to locate the link that finally takes you to the form. This speaks less of the CPO or MoFA and more of the software developer who designed such a system in the first place. This is not all. You need to press the tab button on your computer each time before you type in a letter or digit. The cursor does not automatically place itself in the next box. How difficult can it be to fix this? While these technical problems can and should be fixed, the best way is to delegate the responsibility to DAO to collect application materials and issue the passport after it is printed at CPO at MoFA. This is already being done for Kathmandu valley citizens. It needs to be followed in other districts without further delay. This will not only ease the pressure on the MoFA but also save people coming to the capital for their passports a lot of trouble and money. Poverty, politics and the urgent need of people make for a compelling case to immediately review the passport distribution system. damakant@gmail.com



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ROBIN BOUSTEAD

The long march



There's been a lot of hype surrounding the Great Himalaya Trail (GHT) in the last couple of years. At least two separate entities have staked their claim on the GHT brand in Nepal, with Robin Boustead leading World Expedition's commercial venture and Dutch development organisation SNV recently handing over ownership of the official GHT to the Nepal Government. Ultimately, both have the same motivation: to promote sustainable tourism across the 1,700km length of the Nepal Himalaya, in a way that benefits both visitors and the communities of the visited.

On 17 February, the first ever commercial crossing of the Great Himalaya Trail kicked off. World Expeditions have been marketing the trail for the last 15 months in Australia, USA, Canada, UK and New Zealand, and now have over 40 participants who will walk parts of the trail. Two will trek the entirety of the GHT in one continuous 157-day push. Aussie Gregory Babbage (*pic, right*) and Brit Toni Wilson will be making history, as no one has ever completed the 1,700km route in a single season.

The various stages of the GHT will be led by a series of expert mountaineers, with the architect of the GHT Robin Boustead leading the first stage. Other guides include Sorrel Wilby, Stephen Venables, Greg Mortimer, and Carlos Buhler. The expeditions will employ porters and support staff from the regions they pass through, purchase food from the villages and of course, afford trekkers the opportunity to purchase traditional handicrafts. For Boustead and World Expeditions, this is sustainable tourism in practice.

"There are not many times in your life that you get an opportunity such as this," said Babbage before the GHT traverse began. If the GHT picks up, it won't be just trekkers who will be making the most of the opportunity. 🇳🇵

Five months, hundreds of mountains, seventeen hundred kilometres



nepalitimes.com
The Great Himalayan Trail, #472
Following the Karnali, # 531



PICS: RABI THAPA

Jardin - food & wine garden

Off Jhamel’s ‘restaurant lane’, Jardin is one of a flotilla of upmarket eateries that have mushroomed this side of the river in the last year. One could easily conclude that Jhamel is saturated with expensive restaurants offering generalised menus of oriental and continental fare, something in vaguely interesting combinations, with an insurance snack menu of momos and chicken chilli for the resolute Nepali beer monsters. Jardin contrives to keep its head above the masses with more cultivated fare, with a degree of success.

Jardin has taken some care in designing its outdoor



NEPALI KUKUR

and indoor spaces, soft furnishings, lights, greenery and all. So far, so Jhamel. It was a deserted Tuesday night, and we enjoyed prompt and attentive service. I don’t doubt the alfresco spaces will fill up come summer, by which time I hope they will still be serving the excellent Coblenzer beer.

We joined friends who were already a couple of

starters in. They described the Smoked Salmon Rosettes with Wasabi-infused Pannacotta and Soy Mirin Dressing, and the Rock Shrimp tossed in Spicy Mayonnaise as excellent. So we ordered the Tofu Pouches with house hot sauce and the Crackling Calamari with Smoked Chilli Aioli and Pickled Cucumbers. The former was a little insipid

(compared to the last time), and could have benefitted from a more generous lashing of the spicy sauce. The calamari looked good, and felt crunchy and juicy, even if some may have found it a bit heavy as a starter.

Onwards, and with three of us plumping for Hot and Sour Thai Salad with Roasted Rice and Crispy Onions, Jardin had a lot running on its reception. Personally I found the salads attractive and scrumptious, but gasps of ‘Piro! Piro!’ from around the table forced me to add an advisory for the feeble. I’d order one as a starter rather than an entrée. But the Japanese-style Steak with Wasabi Mash, Salsa Verde, Ponzu and Himalayan Salt was not to be faulted. The good-sized portions of meat were medium-done to perfection, and the dish combined well. The Roast Duck salad with Orange segments and Lychee tossed in Nam Jim sauce was exciting enough, but maybe it went a lychee too far. Dessert was a mixed dish;



the chocolate fondant with vanilla icecream disappeared in a jiffy, the fresh fruit millefeuille fell flat.

A good variation on the Jhamel scene, if on the pricey side; don’t let the bill catch you by surprise! *Nepalikukur*

Thadodhunga, Jhamsikhel. Keep going at the end of Jhamel's 'Restaurant Lane', pass Ideal Model School on left, turn right, on left.

Space	★★★★★
Bread 'n water	★★★★★
Service	★★★★★
Dealicious	★★★★
Rep-eat?	★★★★↓



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13-28 February

COVER

Get Down to Business
Opportunity to Be Honest
Dahal Loses His Way Again

Editorial

PM JN's Worksheet

Interview: Ishwor Pokhrel

Comments: Mumaram Khanal, Purshottam Dahal

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Nepalis in the French Foreign Legion
Tiger Translocation to Bardiya
Military in Business

INVESTIGATION

The Army's Orphans

BUSINESS

The Real Estate Defaults
Buddha Air's Lucknow Connection

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Aranyer Din Ratri (Days and Nights in the Forest, 1969), 112'

February 22
Joi Baba Felunath (Elephant God, 1978), 116'
Mahapurush (The Holy Man, 1965), 67'

February 23
Nayak (The Hero, 1966), 117'
Pratidwandi (The Adversary, 1970), 107'



February 24
Shatranj Ke Khiladi (Chess Players, 1977), 115'
Sadgati (The Deliverance, 1981), 45'

February 25
Charulata (The Lonely Wife, 1964), 120'
Kapurush (The Coward, 1965), 69'

Entry: Rs 30 Students, Rs 50 Regular
Available: Yala Maya Kendra & Dhokaima Cafe
Information: FSA Secretariat 5552141
fsa@filmsouthasia.org

EVENTS

Photo Exhibition by USAID, images from Nepal's development story, 1951-2011.
18 to 22 February, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal

Tavern Tales in Kathmandu, author Buddhi Sagar Chapain in conversation with Prawin Adhikari on his book Karnali Blues. 24 February, 4pm, Nepal Airlines Corporation Building, New Road Gate

The New World Rhizome, exhibition of paintings by Indra Raj Subba 'Soshu'. Till 1 March, 5.30pm, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamsikhel, 5521120, www.kathmanduarts.org

College Theatre Festival, plays staged by students from eight colleges. Till 27 February, 5pm onwards, Gurukul, Old Baneshwor

AmarJyoti Foundation, provides support through scholarships in art and sports, elderly daycare and grief recovery. 9851023958

Tai Chi 3 month course, 13-form Yang style with Gold medalist Ang Babu Lama. Starts 22 January, 9 to 10.30am, 1 week course, starting every Monday, Yoga: Monday and Thursdays 7 to 8.15am, Sunday 8 to 9.15am, Meditation class: Mon 6 to 7 pm, Thursday 7 to 8 pm, Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Ekantakuna, 9808891048 / 9841224368, hbmc.programs@gmail.com, www.fpmt-hbmc.org



Avatars and Interpretations, an exhibition of mixed media works by Erina Tamrakar and Asha Dongol. 13 February to 10 March, opening 5.30pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4218048 / 4438979

MUSIC



Bryan Adams live in concert. 19 February, 2pm onwards, Dasrath Stadium, Tripureswor

Sufi Songs with Zila Khan. 18 February, 5pm, Army Officer's Club, Sundhara, 20 February, 5pm, Patan Museum, Patan

Sunday Jazz Brunch, enjoy a relaxing Sunday in The Terrace at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu with barbeque and live jazz music by Inner Groove. 12pm to 3.30pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234/4489362

DINING

Krishnarpan, a specialty Nepali restaurant at The Dwarika's Hotel, 6 to 22 courses, an authentic Nepali meal. The Dwarika's Hotel, Battisputali, 4479488

Station BBQ, don the chef's hat, make your own BBQ. Jhamsikhel, 5522083

Saturday @ Hyatt, come and spend a day with your family this winter. Your children can enjoy on-site fun and games, as well as a kid-friendly menu. Hyatt Regency, Boudha, for reservations call 4491234

Sandwiches and Crepes promotion at The Lounge everyday from 11am to 6pm, **Vegetarian Buffet at The Café** every Tuesday from 6.30pm, and **Arabian Nights at The Café** every Friday from 6.30pm at Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234, 4489362

Kakori at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Kebabs, curries and more, enjoy Indian food at its best. Everyday 7pm to 10.45 pm for dinner, Soaltee

Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, call 4273999 for reservations

Singma Food Court, for the best Singaporean and Malaysian cuisine in town. Pulchok, 5009092 and Bhatbhateni, 4411078, foodcourt@wlink.com.np, www.singma.foodcourt.com

Mike's Breakfast, huge breakfasts and a never-ending supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting characterise this café, popular among tourists and locals. Naxal, 4424303

The Kaiser Cafe Restaurant & Bar, enjoy a pleasant BBQ lunch in the ambient settings of The Garden of Dreams and a glass of wine or beer. Every Sunday, 12pm to 3pm, Kaiser Mahal, Thamel, Rs 1,300 per person, 4425341, operated by The Dwarika's Group of Hotels & Resorts

GETAWAYS

Charikot Panorama Resort, enjoy mountain views and local culture in the historic town of Charikot. Special packages on offer. Charikot, Dolakha, 5529463, thapamaag@gmail.com

Overnight Package at The Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, for local residents, package includes accommodation in Himalayan room, dinner and breakfast. Dhulikhel, Rs 4,000 (Single), Rs 5,700 (Double). The package rates are subject to a 10% Service charge. For more information/reservations call 4479488 Dwarika's Hotel, Sales & Marketing Department.



Weekends Treks Out Package, for expats and locals, 3 Days Kathmandu Valley Cultural Treks (Kathmandu/Lankuri/Balthali/ Namobuddha/Kathmandu), includes 2 overnight stays in Lankuri and Balthali with meals, guide and drop & pick-up services. Himal Nepal Tours and Treks, Lazimpat, info@himanepaladventures.com, 9841766561, 012081099





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नेपाल सरकार
सँचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सँचना विभाग

Otzi the Iceman



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Imagine stumbling into the oldest moist mummy in the world while trekking. This is exactly what happened to a German couple in 1991 when they were hiking in the Alps in the South Tyrol region of Italy. They alerted the local police thinking it was a possible crime scene, but were shocked to discover that the body they had discovered was the well-preserved natural mummy of a man who lived about 5,300 years ago. Otzi was carrying an axe, a bear fur cap, and bow and arrows at the time of his death. A reconstruction of Otzi would have looked like what greets you at the Archaeological Museum in Bolzano, Italy (www.iceman.it). In the museum Otzi now ‘lives’ behind an eight centimetre thick pane of bulletproof glass.

The humidity inside the case is 98 per cent and the temperature is minus six degrees centigrade, to simulate the environment in the Alps where he was found. Extensive radiological exams indicate Otzi died of injuries sustained on the run, including being hit on his right shoulder by a flint-tipped arrow. He eventually succumbed to his wound in the Otzal Alps, hence his name. This mummy, thought to be between 35 to 55 years of age, has turned out to be a scientific treasure trove. It is hoped that Otzi’s DNA will shed new light on hereditary diseases, common neurological problems like Parkinson’s disease, and even infertility. Clearly there is also immense anthropological interest in the Iceman. Radiocarbon dating tests have confirmed that he lived in the early Copper Age and probably was a person of high standing in the community as he was over 35 years old before he died, a ripe old age back then. Amazingly, the Iceman has more than 50 tattoos on his body, mostly located in the joint areas. The tattooing technique seems modern, using tiny incisions made in the skin into which vegetal coal was rubbed; certain communities in Asia and Africa continue to use this technique to this day. Radiological examination of his bones showed age and strain-induced or wear-and-tear degeneration in the joints, and as the tattoos correspond to skin acupuncture lines, it has been postulated that tattooing may have been a form of medicinal treatment rather than a shamanistic practice. If true, we can sympathise with Otzi, who may have had age-related painful joints (osteoarthritis), and searched for an effective pain-relieving treatment, just as many of us do today. 🇳🇵

GREEN SCENE

Let there be light

Through the hours of loadshedding, a group of innovative students have been working to design an alternative energy option - a solar battery charger for areas with no access to the grid. Under the British Council’s first Skills for Employability project in Nepal, Balaju School of Engineering and Technology, Bharatpur’s Nepal Polytechnic Institute, and Nuwakot’s Trade School partnered with Dundee College of Scotland in 2008 to develop technical and vocational skills training for students. Dundee College is the sixth largest vocational education college in Scotland. The project involved sharing of research, skills and technical experience in order to develop an innovative and cost-effective product for Nepali villages, and to equip students with vocational skills. One of the outcomes of the project is a prototype solar battery charger with battery tester – the Munro Solar Power Pack. The pyramid-shaped portable solar pack weighs 10 kilos with a battery. A 24-watt product with a potential of 96 watts, the pack can power 25 LED light units for 15 hours.

“We believe that this product will be an asset for Nepali villages as a source of electricity, in places where hydroelectricity is not available or feasible,” says Anil Bajracharya, College Partnership Project Coordinator at Balaju School of Engineering and Technology. “It is a milestone in terms of learning, shaping the skills of trainees, and sharing knowledge and experience.” Over 100 students will be trained every year in the technical specifications of Munro and each of them will make at least one unit. The students are also trying to develop a solar battery charger to operate high voltage home appliances such as computers. The colleges intend to copyright this design and introduce it to the market commercially next year for Rs 12,000-13,000. They also have plans to recommend that the curriculum board of CTEVT introduce a course for solar technicians in the curricula of vocational and technical colleges. 🇳🇵 Paavan Mathema



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!: Prime Minister Jhal Nath Khanal and his new men at a program organised by Press Chautari on Sunday to congratulate the new office bearers.



COVER GIRLS: Norwegian Ambassador Thor Gislesen inaugurated ‘Avatars & Interpretations’, an art exhibition by Erina Tamrakar and Asha Dangol, on Sunday, at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal.



HOLY SPLASH: A local of Thecho is worshipped as Lord Madhav Narayan on Tuesday, as part of the month-long Madhav Narayan festival. Thecho is a village in the south of the Kathmandu Valley.



GOTCHA: Young boys enjoy the season's bounty in Pulchoki on Thursday morning.

WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

We are glad that last week's prediction went wrong and the country received its heaviest rainfall in months. On Thursday alone the Valley received 39mm rainfall against a monthly quota of 17mm. The storm has brought the snowline close to 2000m. The steady showers of over 24 hours have replenished dried surface water sources, thus reducing potential water shortages for the coming summer. The satellite picture of Thursday afternoon clearly shows the pressure trough (the centre of the low pressure zone) shifting eastwards towards Nepal's skies. Enjoy the bright snow peaks and warmer days ahead.

FRI

SAT

SUN

25-5

26-4

27-3



KALAM
Rabi Thapa

When I first left Nepal to further my studies, the idea that modern western democracies would force their citizens to undergo compulsory military conscription was novel to me. Of course I had heard of the American draft during the Vietnam War, and knew that all Israeli men and women got into uniform and goosestepped up and down their hard-won borders (before running amok along backpacker trails around the world). But being from Nepal, where there is no shortage of interest in voluntarily joining up (from all societal strata), I was simply ignorant of the phenomenon.

Conscription was really brought home to me in London, where I met Giorgos after Giorgos after Giorgos, each determinedly pursuing PhDs, partly because staying in Greece meant signing up for a 9-month stint in the army (or 17 months of alternative service). How ironic that an obligation to serve as a mindlessly obedient 'grunt' furthers the creation of doctors of philosophy! No dearth of future philosopher kings in the land of Plato.

Yet Greece is not the only country that requires its citizens to spend a couple of years training for war during peacetime. Far from it. About half of the world's 192 UN member states still practice some form of conscription, and that list includes nations such as China (no surprise), Brazil (fun in the sun?), Norway (peace mediators now, but Vikings of yore), and Thailand (so much for the land of smiles).



EKAL SILWAL

Jingoistic jerks

If the UCPN (Maoist) has its way, Nepal will join this list with the promulgation of the new constitution. According to Maoist leader Deb Gurung, compulsory military service for men and women above 18 years of age is necessary because "if we train all citizens, they will be able to protect our sovereignty." Excuse me? China and India may squeeze the little yam that we are, but they certainly don't look like swallowing us up. And if they were, a citizenry adept at wielding bamboo poles and farming implements will hardly prove an impediment to the People's Liberation Army (3 million para/military) or the Indian Army (2.6 million para/military). If we are to believe the Maoists, it's not that the world hasn't changed since

the time of Mao, the threats to our national sovereignty remain the same as they were since the time of Nepal's wars with China and the East India Company in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Nepal is already overmilitarised, the civil war is hardly past us, and the Maoists are proposing that every adult receive

to pay the trainers? Who's going to pay the trainees? Believe you me, no one will do this for free.

What is the intention here? If the collective bellies of Comrades Dahal, Ram Bahadur Thapa, and Janardan Sharma are anything to go by, physical fitness is not a priority. And even the Maoists must realise that they

with a sense of disciplined patriotism (for all militaries are about submitting to the state's objectives) will strengthen their position vis-à-vis Delhi, and force a change in the latter's policy towards Nepal. The Maoists also wouldn't mind having a hand in training not just their own cadre but the entire adult population so one day, when the 'historic moment' arrives, reactionary state forces will be easily overwhelmed by a true 'people's army'.

If they had their way, the Maoists would dump the whole lot of us into cantonments and have us do the Physical Jerks for the rest of our productive lives. They've already wasted the primetime of 20,000 of Nepal's youth for four years and running. They shouldn't bank on jerking the rest of us around. 🇳🇵

Don't join the army, do a PhD instead

military training? The Nepal Army, Armed Police Force, and Nepal Police make for a combined military force of about 200,000. Add the PLA, YCL, and any number of non-state armed groups, along with the proposal to create a separate force, and the folly of the Maoist stance becomes clear. Who's going

cannot wage an actual war for national sovereignty against India, much less China.

One has to conclude, then, that the Maoists hope to militarise the Nepali population as a whole. They probably feel that the very fact of having millions of reservists newly charged



उज्यालो ९० नेटवर्कमा

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No light at the end

DEWAN RAI and RUBEENA MAHATO

If you think 14 hours is bad, think of what lies in store: only two hours of power a day. At the rate at which demand is outstripping supply, this will soon be a reality.

The uninterrupted power supply on Wednesday illustrates why. Nepal’s hydropower generation is inadequate, but when the flow of Himalayan rivers goes down because of winter drought, it gets worse. Two days of rain temporarily solved the problem, but the future doesn’t look so rosy.

“It’s simple,” explains former Nepal Electricity

projects. During winter, these plants generate just a third of their capacity and things are worse when the winter rains fail like this year. Demand has now reached 967MW, and there is a winter deficit of 520MW. There is a deficit of 250MW even in the monsoon.

In five years, NEA projects demand to rise to 1500MW, so we will need an installed capacity of 4500MW to cover for the winter deficit. The projects expected to be completed in the next few years (Upper Tamakosi, Upper Trisuli 3A and 3B, and Chamelia) will only add 586MW to

The bad news is that the power crisis will get worse before it gets better

Authority (NEA) chief Uttar Kumar Shrestha. “We are having a 14-hour power cut in February, which will increase to 16 hours by April. With a minimum of an 80MW annual increase in demand, this will reach 19 hours next year and 22 hours the following year.”

The bad news is that things will get worse before they get better. It will take at least two years to build transmission lines to import power from India, and multi-fuel plants take at least a year to set up. That is, if we start now.

The country currently has an installed capacity of 697MW, all of which, except Kulekhani, come from non-storage ‘run of the river’

the grid. This still means a shortfall of over 200MW at full capacity. “Projects of 2000MW should immediately go into construction if we are to keep up with demand,” hydropower developer Gyanendra Lal Pradhan says.

Political instability, local unrest and financial insecurity complicate the equation. The open investment policy introduced after 1990 led to a brief boom in hydropower development, increasing capacity from 280MW to 615MW, but the war delayed new plants.

Local opposition has stalled three big projects with Indian investment: Arun III, Budi Gandaki and Upper Karnali. West Seti is facing

Even the optimistic scenario for 2015 looks gloomy

- NEA projects by 2015:
- Chamelia (30MW) 2011
 - Kulekhani 3 (14MW) 2011
 - Upper Tamakosi (456MW) 2015
 - Upper Trisuli 3A (60MW) 2011
 - Upper Trisuli 3B (40MW) 2013
 - Rahughat (30MW) 2013
 - Upper ModiA (42MW) 2010

- New NEA capacity by 2015: 672MW
- New private plants by 2015: 281MW
- Existing supply: 697MW
- Installed capacity by 2015: 1,653MW
- Capacity required by 2015: 4,500MW

of the tunnel

The export debate



Dipak Gyawali, water resource expert and former minister
People often cite Bhutan's example to show how it has been benefitting by exporting power to India, but Bhutan will be facing power cuts this winter onwards. This is because 80 per cent of Bhutan's electricity is exported to India, leaving just 300MW for consumption within the country.



Gyanendra Lal Pradhan, hydropower developer
There is no other way to balance the trade deficit than to export power to India. Bhutan has today an installed capacity of 15000MW but we, in the name of ultra nationalism, are hindering hydropower development. It does not make any difference who builds a project as long as it is built.



Ratna Sansar Shrestha, water resource analyst
Reducing the trade deficit with India by exporting power may sound tempting, but there is enough demand in the country itself to consume what the current projects will generate. The three industrial corridors have a demand of 200MW each and a study has shown that 648MW is needed to replace LPG gas in the Kathmandu Valley. This means we have 2200MW demand even now. Adding 10 per cent a year, peak demand in ten years will be 5700MW. Building projects that will export most of what they produce, we will not resolve the power deficit in Nepal. We should focus on using the energy for industrialisation if we want to reduce the trade deficit.

an uncertain fate due to opposition by the Maoists. But even if these projects were to be completed, they would not end Nepal's power woes because they are all for export.

"Our priority should be to build projects for domestic consumption. Building mega projects for export will do nothing for the deficit back home," water resource analyst Ratna Sansar Shrestha says (*see box*).

Experts say the best short-term solution is to improve the performance of state-run stations, which are all running at 20 per cent below capacity, equivalent to 500GWh worth Rs 35 billion. Cutting down the transmission losses, currently at 26 per cent, could save 56MW. Pilferage is also very high in the Tarai, and districts like Bhaktapur.

But the only long-term solution is to start building new plants right away. For this, Nepal needs to be investment-friendly, and tariffs need to be revised. Private developers say the NEA's purchase price of Rs 4.44 per unit is not sustainable. Independent Power Producers of Nepal (IPPAN) wants the rate raised to at least Rs 5.99 per unit.

"If NEA can import Indian electricity at Rs 7.28 per unit, there is no reason why it can't buy from local developers at slightly less," IPPAN President Subarna Lal Shrestha says. Private producers say the government has a negative attitude towards domestic investors.

NEA wants to import 125MW from India for 25 years, a plan ridiculed by experts. "It is absurd to be dependent on a foreign country for a resource that we already have. If NEA

bought electricity from local developers at the rate it buys from India, we would have projects in Nepal," Shrestha says.

Even so, there may be no option but to immediately put up transmission lines to import from India to make up for the supply shortfall. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Demand outstrips supply, #274
White gold, #356
Power struggle, #461



Invest in storage

The reason power cuts are so crippling in winter is that supply dries up as the flow of Himalayan rivers goes down in winter, just when demand is at its peak. The shortfall has been made worse by successive years of winter drought since 2000.

Experts at Policy Dialogue on Hydro Power Development, recently organised by Niti Foundation, recently stressed the need for storage projects to address the winter power crisis. They said the government should now fast-track its reservoir projects that store monsoon runoff, and let private producers focus on run of the river schemes.

Kulekhani (92MW) is the only existing storage project in Nepal. NEA, with the support of ADB and Japan, has begun work on the Upper Seti dam, which can generate 127MW of peak power. The government is also looking at Seti Trisuli (128MW). West Seti (750MW) was touted as a multipurpose storage project for export. Experts now say it should be converted into a power plant to meet domestic demand.

The government's 20 Year Hydropower Development Plan has identified Tamor (380MW), Budi Gandaki (600MW), Kali Gandaki (660MW) and Nalshyagugad (400MW) to be implemented by NEA.

But reservoir projects take longer to build, and government involvement slows them down even more. Which means it will take

at least 12 years for these projects to generate power even if they are launched today.

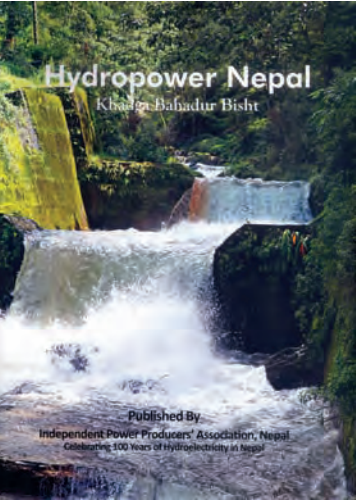
From light to darkness

Flipping though Khadga Bahadur Bisht's book celebrating the centenary of electricity in Nepal by candlelight this week, the absurdity of it all suddenly dawned on me. It also demonstrated how inured we have become to power cuts.

Crippling 14-hour power cuts in a country with among the highest per capita hydroelectricity generation potential in the world are an indication of shameless malgovernance, and just how completely our rulers have let us down since 1990.

Bisht is with the Independent Power Producers' Association of Nepal, which published the book, 'Hydropower Nepal', to mark 100 years since the commissioning of the 500kW Pharping power plant in 1911. In hindsight, the fact that Nepal was generating electric power for streetlights even before the UK had established a national grid could be considered something of an achievement. 100 years later, few of Kathmandu's streetlights work even when there is power.

'Hydropower Nepal' is a useful reference tool for the past, present and future of hydropower development in Nepal with a glossary of rivers, hydropower plants and a wishlist of projects.



Hydropower Nepal
IPPAN, 2010
ISBN: 978-9937-2-2732-2
Pages: 293

Domestic political squabbling among political parties contributed to the current power crisis. After Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala signed the Mahakali Treaty with India in 1994, UML mounted a nationalist campaign and overthrew him, but UML itself split when it went ahead and ratified the treaty.

Bisht lists other reasons for the power famine: fecklessness and political interference at the Nepal Electricity Authority, delays due to

the conflict, the state's negative attitude towards private producers, low tariffs and dollar-denominated deals. The book cites the World Bank's withdrawal from the Arun III project in 1995 as the watershed that precipitated the loadshedding crisis. But some Arun slayer activists would probably argue that Arun was the wrong project at the wrong time and more power was generated by cheaper, medium-sized plants in the ten years after it was scrapped.

Over reliance on run-of-the-river schemes is another reason. Water flow in rivers is lowest when demand is highest, and the only to get out of that trap is to build storage reservoirs to tide over peak winter and evening demand. It may be wise to turn West Seti into a domestic project, for example.

Whatever the merits of the case, it is clear that the country cannot sustain the current peak load shortfall of 400MW that is surely going to increase. The book estimates that the country loses \$1 billion a year due to loss of industrial production and cost of diesel generation. Bisht says: "To say this is simply a failure is an understatement...it is in fact a huge disaster."

The power crisis also masks other systemic failures and instances of poor decision-making that have resulted in the power-starved Nepali public having to fork out billions of rupees to pay contractors for cost over-runs because politicians pocketed kickbacks to get NEA to approve faulty FIDIC contracts for projects like Kali Gandaki A. The unending West Seti saga is another example of the result of political failure and lack of national focus.

So, what to do? The Pushpa Kamal Dahal government set out a goal of generating 10,000MW in ten years, and the Madhav Kumar Nepal government that replaced him was even more ambitious in aiming for 25,000MW in 20 years. A task force set up to look at power scenarios says it is possible to generate 2,000MW by 2014 through power projects for domestic consumption, another 10,000MW by 2024 through a combination of run-of-the-river and storage projects, and 18,000MW by 2029 through export multi-purpose mega projects like Karnali and Kosi.

At the end of his book, Bisht looks forward to 'a new hydropower century' for Nepal. Let's hope it will be brighter than the last. 🇳🇵

Kunda Dixit



“It will be a huge calamity”

Interview with Bob Parker, the mayor of Christchurch, in *Nagarik*, 16 February

नागरिक

Nagarik: How did you end up coming to Kathmandu?

Bob Parker: Last September we had a 7.1 magnitude earthquake, but no one was killed. A lot of people were curious to know why there were no casualties. It happened at 4am and most people were asleep at home, yet no one died.

Aside from that, my trip to Nepal has special meaning because Nepal and New Zealand

have historical ties thanks to the bond created by Hillary and Tenzing.

Has New Zealand always been so prepared?

Yes, there has been a lot of emphasis on preparedness since the great earthquake of the 1930s when about 100 people died. That is when we drew up a building code and we enforced it strictly. Infrastructure projects are also designed with earthquakes in mind. There is a mandatory insurance policy for urban housing. The September earthquake was very strong, it caused \$10 billion worth of damage.

We are still in the reconstruction phase, and will finish that in two years.

What would happen if a similar earthquake were to hit Kathmandu?

It is very unfortunate, but I have to say that there will be a lot of lives lost. Many historical buildings will be reduced to rubble, it will be a huge calamity. You need strict monitoring of building codes.

What should be the role of elected representatives?

Mayors are elected, and to be elected means they have to be accountable to citizens. There is a big role for local

councils in the post-earthquake scenario. I was re-elected after the earthquake, and perhaps wouldn't have been if I had not done my job.

What should the municipality do?

Nepal also has a building code. There are rules and regulations. But I hear the enforcement is very weak. The construction industry is also not up to mark. I believe municipalities and local bodies have an important role to play. We get everyone involved: sports clubs, schools. We treat every household as part of a family and empower each other to be prepared and to help after the earthquake.



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ILO 169: Nepal as a model

ILO Country Director for Nepal, Shengjie Li, spoke to *Himal Khabarpatrika's* Santa Gaha Magar about ILO Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the challenges in implementing it in Nepal.

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Himal Khabarpatrika: How was it that Nepal became the only country in South Asia to ratify ILO 169?

Shengjie Li: ILO Convention 169 concerns indigenous people, and 37 per cent of Nepal's population is made up of 59 different groups of indigenous peoples. Not many countries in the world have such indigenous diversity in their population. If you look at the decade-long conflict it is clear that the social exclusion of the indigenous people contributed to the war. This is why ILO promoted the ratification of this Convention for almost a decade and Nepal ratified the Convention in 2007. It is significant that Nepal is the first country to ratify the Convention in the South Asian region, and the second country in the Asia-Pacific region. There are a lot of indigenous people in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Philippines, but those countries haven't ratified the Convention yet. We hope that Nepal can use this Convention as a dialogue tool for the peace-building process.

But how satisfied are you with its implementation?

Ratification of this Convention by Nepal is significant. However effective implementation would be even more significant. It is always the case in Nepal as well as in elsewhere in the developing world that there is a huge difference between two legal framework and practice. ILO has provided technical support in preparing a National Action Plan on the implementation of the Convention. Unfortunately, the Cabinet has not yet endorsed the National Action Plan due to the political uncertainty. But different line ministries have gone ahead with activities, so I think there has been important movement on implementation of the Convention.

What does ILO 169 actually mean in practice for a country like Nepal?

Convention 169 emphasises several fundamental rights which the indigenous peoples should have in the new constitution, for example the right to be consulted and to participate in decision making and implementation. Indigenous peoples have their own traditions, culture and language and if they are not consulted or allowed to participate, these traditions are slowly lost. We need to protect their traditional occupations as well. Normally, people who live below the poverty line are socially excluded, so the Convention is also about giving priority to economic empowerment.

Which of these fundamental rights do you think are most important for Nepal?

All of these rights are equally important for indigenous peoples. On land reform in general there has been

less progress. It is not only about indigenous people, but the people of the whole country. This is one of the areas the government should take action in. The government has achieved a lot in the participation of indigenous people in politics. There have been pilot programs introduced to protect mother tongues. But in terms of economic empowerment, there is no national policy on how to generate jobs and income-generating programs for indigenous people. We have been running a few projects like the one with the Ministry of Local Development in Ramechhap, where the minimum benchmark on jobs creation was set according to the proportion of indigenous peoples in the district.



Which countries have successfully implemented Convention 169?

In terms of using the Convention as a dialogue tool to stabilise the country, Bolivia and Guatemala in Latin America are ahead. The percentage of indigenous people in Bolivia is more than half the population, and the country has actually seen economic empowerment through ensuring indigenous rights. Guatemala is another Latin American country that has moved ahead.

What are the challenges in implementing the convention in Nepal?

Generic challenges for the whole work of development aside, there are some specific challenges. We have to ensure effective participation and meaningful representation of indigenous people in the decision-making process. Although there are rules and regulations to ensure a minimum percentage of the participation of indigenous people, in reality it falls short.

The second challenge is the formal endorsement of the National Action Plan on indigenous people. If there is strong political will it can be done. Another challenge is to get the constitution out within the May deadline and ensure that the rights of indigenous people are enshrined in it. If these rights are not included in the new constitution, this may create another conflict.

Do you think the draft preamble is adequate?

What has been written in the draft on the chapter on fundamental rights falls short of what is needed, it is not as comprehensive as it should be. Even the interim constitution doesn't fully reflect the issue.

The India factor

Indian commentator cites security as reason for rejecting seven-point agreement

PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA

At the heart of the political deadlock in Nepal is an inability to achieve a security matrix that complements the political ambition of Nepal to become a genuine democratic republic.

The moment details of the seven-point agreement between Jhal Nath Khanal and the Maoists began being leaked to the local media, there was a furore even within the UML, let alone other parties like the Nepali Congress. The argument was that this amounted to retaining the Maoist PLA at government expense.

The Maoists, who had been floating this idea of a separate force for a while, had intentions of converting the PLA combatants into a paramilitary force meant to guard Nepal's borders. This obviously raised security concerns in New Delhi, because such a force on the open Indo-Nepal borders would have all kinds of implications for India, starting with support to Naxal elements here and the Gorkhaland movement, coupled with the smuggling of fake Indian currency notes among several other issues.

It was an understanding that was not acceptable to any other political formation, including the Madhesi, besides the fact that it would have had a destabilising influence on relations with India. The Maoist intentions came to the fore when

they demanded the home ministry portfolio during talks on government formation. They also argued that the UML had held charge of this ministry when Prachanda was head of government. But soon it became clear that, having burnt their fingers with the armed forces last time, the Maoists were gunning for the home ministry purportedly to raise this paramilitary force in the name of reintegrating erstwhile PLA fighters.

Given that the seven-point

over the home ministry portfolio with the Maoists squarely blaming India for being the obstacle.

Regardless of whatever other trouble, Nepal has rarely seen itself at odds with India's security concerns. It's a different matter that a lax security apparatus may have allowed anti-Indian forces to use Nepal to meet their ends, but this has never been the ethos of Nepal's own security outlook.

the China card against India has gained them nothing. Instead, it has helped justify the hardening of positions in New Delhi, which does not augur well for the relationship. Interestingly, China's primary objective in Nepal is to stop Tibetans from using it as a staging ground to quietly move in and out of Tibet; and for this it has been asking for more support from Nepal's home ministry.

Mutuality of security interests has been fundamental to Indo-Nepal relations. And even when India gave up its twin pillar approach, monarchy and multi-party democracy, and welcomed the formation of a republic with the Maoists at the helm, this principle remained vital.

However, over the past few years, the Maoists have sought to consciously undermine this security logic and sought to replace it with one that imbibes the ethos of the Maoist PLA. Anything short of that has not been acceptable to the Maoists. This explains why the integration of PLA cadre has not moved at a

desirable pace; and also why it was so important for Prachanda to take on Nepal's army chief, and now to break off talks on joining the government over the UML's refusal to part with the home ministry.

Needless to say, if security priorities are not sorted, governance is bound to be the first casualty and that's why Khanal, the fourth PM in three years, has more than just a coalition to handle. ■

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agreement also envisaged bringing as many parties as possible into the alliance's fold, Khanal realised that having a home minister from among the Maoists would only take him and his government away from other political parties and remove any possibility of broad-based political support. He had also given his word to his Indian interlocutors that he would not act against India's security interests.

The talks, therefore, broke down

The Maoists, on the other hand, repeatedly seem to place themselves at odds with India's security needs: and that's the potential game-changer, a serious cause for worry. The more the Maoists position themselves against India's security priorities, the more India will be compelled to push the envelope. And that, in effect, will have the undesirable outcome of framing Nepal increasingly in security terms.

Further, the Maoists' ploy to play

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Ministry of Interior Decoration



One of the most welcome pieces of news this week is the long-awaited announcement that the Municipality is going to finally install an electric crematorium in Pashupati. This will reduce the pressure on our forests and hopefully resolve the burial ground dispute. There is just one small problem. What to do during loadshedding? We could power the crematorium with a diesel generator, but what if there is one of those frequent diesel shortages? Dead people can't wait at gas stations. The other idea that is gaining currency is a solar incinerator. This would definitely be environmentally friendly and Nepal could cash in on **carbon credits** under the Clean Development Mechanism. But, again, what to do if folks die at night? Or during the monsoon? There may be a huge backlog of corpses waiting for a cloud-free day. So, despite opposition from the greens there seems to be only one solution: a nuclear-fuelled crematorium.



Lest there be any doubt, Maoist Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal and Maoist Chairman Lotus Flower have signed a **sworn affidavit** reaffirming their commitment to the seven-point pact. There is now an agreement to follow the agreement. What is not so well known, however, is that there was another, even more top secret, agreement between JNK and PKD. The unspoken 10-point pact is so secret that the Ass was sworn to secrecy and can only divulge it if you promise to keep it to yourself:

- We, Awe Some and Jhal Gnat, do solemnly swear that we will abide by the following points of agreement, cross our hearts and hope to die:
1. We won't ever let Baburam Come-red become PM
 2. We will dangle a bone to keep The Sher salivating
 3. We will not let anyone from the Oli-Makunay camp in our coalition
 4. We will extend the CA by two years on 28 May
 5. We will buy off more CA members and get a two-thirds majority
 6. We will charm the pants off the Europeans
 7. We will both say one thing and do the other
 8. We will stab each other in the back, but gently
 9. We will merge the Maoists with the ML faction of UML
 10. We will abide by communist principles and share the moolah

Jholnath has really inherited his guru's ability to talk simultaneously through both sides of his mouth. He signs a statement with PKD in the **Sand Castle** that the Home Minister should be a Maoist appointee, and he immediately turns around and tells the Hindoo that he made no such agreement. "I only said I'd consider it," quoth he. Must give it to Comrade JN, he is even better at this than Awfulness.



- If it is the appointment of the Home Minister that is holding things up, may the Mule suggest just carving up the ministry into five units headed by coalition members so everyone is happy? Call them:
1. Ministry of Interior Decoration
 2. Home Away from Home Ministry
 3. Home-made Ministry
 4. Make Yourself at Home Ministry
 5. Ministry of Home Sweet Home



Oh yes, the real reason the Baddies desperately want Commander Rain Man to head the home ministry is because this is the only minister who has official discretion to spend half a million bucks a day without showing anyone any receipts. That is why the anti-JN faction wants Lord Vishnu in the position, and JN is equally determined not to let that happen. In summary: we replaced one UML guy with another UML guy and the government is still deadlocked.



Brainwave of the Week: Get the Qataris to donate us a 1,000 megawatt multi-fuel power station and diesel for ten years in return for withdrawing Cool Gautam's candidacy for the UNGA.



Quote of the Week: "We used to be scared of helicopters, but look at us now. We ride choppers to come to see you here in Thawang." – Comrade Bigplop's speech in Rukum on the 15th anniversary of the War.



Co-Winners of the Headline of the Week Contest: "Physical Attack on Physics Department" "Subhas Nembang Awarded Honorary Karate Black Belt"



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