Half way through the extended CA term, the peace process and constitution drafting is being delayed by a seemingly intractable intra-party feud within the Maoists.

Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who had been grappling with other parties ever since he resigned as prime minister in May 2009, now has to deal with intense pressure from within his party. There is a three-way personality clash within the Maoists, and a feeling that Dahal has wielded too much power for too long.

The goal of cutting Dahal down to size has made Baburam Bhattarai and Mohan Baidya unlikely allies.

The Bhattarai-Baidya alliance threatens to unseat Dahal from parliamentary party leadership. Currently, Dahal is the party Chairman, parliamentary party leader, organisational head as well as the commander of the PLA. The central committee meeting has been put off for nearly three weeks now, and Dahal loyalists still command a majority in the central committee.

Ram Karki, who is close to Bhattarai, says the real rift is over party structure, not ideology. “This is the largest party, so if the problems persist it will ultimately have repercussions for the peace process,” he says.

Dahal’s detractors want devolution of the chairman’s power, and have also been critical of corruption and the extravagant lifestyle of the party leadership. Dahal is squeezed by the opposition piling pressure for integration of ex-fighters on the one hand, and by his own rank and file on the other.

The NC and the UML, for their part, feel the Maoists are trying to dictate terms on the numbers of fighters to be integrated into the Nepal Army. “Although, we have agreed to consider relaxing age limit, educational qualification and entry of married women combatants, there can be no compromise on the physical eligibility criteria set by the Nepal Army,” the UML’s Pradeep Gyawali told us.

The NC’s Arjun Narasingh KC says: “The Maoists have a split personality; there is a big gap between their public statements and their actions.” He has counted the number of times the Maoists have committed to return seized property (18) and to disband the YCL (12). Says KC: “They just don’t walk the talk.”

Caught between the intra-party dispute and an interrupted peace process, the ball is now in Dahal’s court. He has an enormous responsibility, not only to bring together a bitterly divided party but also to end the political stalemate that threatens a constitutional void in August.

Anurag Acharya

New time frame

Electricity, or rafting?

Nepal’s need to generate hydropower must not destroy the potential of its rivers for adventure tourism. We need to find a fine balance.
A
fter the Maoists emerged as the largest party in the April 2008 elections, a garlanded Prachanda and vermilioned Maoist chairman spoke to the media at the BICC. “This is not just a victory for our party,” Pushpa Kamal Dahal said, “it is a victory for the Nepali people and it is a victory for peace.”

That was when many thought Prachanda had made the final transformation in his metamorphosis to Pushpa Kamal Dahal. It was a magnanimous speech, Mandalasque in its message and tone. As it turned out, Prime Minister Dahal instead of being a leader of all Nepalis, became just another party aparthik riding the personality cult of Prachanda Path. As time wore on, he turned into a tragic figure who had lost the trust of the other parties, Kalamunda’s diplomatic corps (even those who hung to every word), the governments of our two great neighbours, and also the most trusted allies within his own party.

Prachanda has no one to blame but himself. His chronic contradictions, compulsive lying, his deviousness and too-clever-by-half attitude finally did him in. All the wheeling-dealing, sneaking off to Bangkok and Singapore, exposed his naked ambition to get back to power by hook or by crook, and the nation be damned. He squandered his trust of the other parties, Kathmandu’s diplomatic message and tone. As it turned out, Prime Minister Dahal seems to have forgotten all about the five-point agreement that he had promised to step down to make way for a unity government. And with these distractions, it isn’t a surprise that the new budget is a wishy-washy, populist one designed to distribute cash to cronies.

The churning within the Maoists also indicates a necessary democratisation of a former underground party that was warped. The free way rift should be easy to fix because it isn’t ideological but a multiple personality clash between comrades and disaffection with Dahal’s penchant to go it alone. (Proof of this is the unnatural and opportunistic alliance between Bhattanai and Baidiya.)

At press time it looked like Dahal loyalists still commanded a majority in the central committee, but the Chairman should still take this as his cue to divest power. The party could then keep the eye on the ball and get on with proposing a candidate who can lead a national unity government, unblock integration once and for all, and help finalise a framework constitution by August-end.

THE NEXT MOVE

HEALTHY MAJORITY
Excellent editorial (A healthy majority), Editorial, #561. Rural health workers and doctors deserve praise for whatever Nepal has achieved in improving its health status in the last decade. There is no lack of committed, honest and hard working people in this country. If only the politics was not so bad, imagine what this country could have achieved.

RM

• Thanks for this well written and considered editorial, and also for the focus on rural health in this issue. Poor health care in Nepal is not a medical problem, it is a political one. How very true!
Kiran

• Health may be a political problem, but it is also a social one. The medical profession has degenerated into commercialism, and we invest on education based on that principle. Three decades ago, a very well known doctor was heavily criticised for making a statement that he entered medical field to make money. Today, it is taken as granted. When doctors forget their Hippocratic Oath what would you expect?
Kamal Kishor

• Beautiful front page picture (healthy progress), #561, and a positive report. Thank you.
R Rai
The clock is ticking

The Maoists have less than two months to resolve their internal rift and restart the peace process.
Sarah Sanyahumbi: Clearly the largest donor agency in Nepal. The Department of International Development (DFID) office in Nepal since 2009. She spoke to Nepali Times about the main challenges lie for your successor and for other donors in Nepal in the next five years? Lots of challenges, but I’d single out two. Firstly, dealing with corruption. DFID has a zero tolerance policy to corruption, so this means we investigate every single allegation of corruption we receive. This takes time and money and means we have to be very careful who we fund and how. We have one full time member of staff who spends 75 percent of his time outside Kathmandu following up with programs and partners, making sure our money is being well spent, and investigating any such reports of corruption or mismanagement.

Secondly, safeguarding the hope for the future. That’s better and give them more hope for the future. That’s really what it’s all about.

Sarah Sanyahumbi is leaving Kathmandu this week after heading the Department of International Development (DFID) office in Nepal since 2009. She spoke to Nepali Times about the main challenges lie for your successor and for other donors in Nepal in the next five years? Lots of challenges, but I’d single out two. Firstly, dealing with corruption. DFID has a zero tolerance policy to corruption, so this means we investigate every single allegation of corruption we receive. This takes time and money and means we have to be very careful who we fund and how. We have one full time member of staff who spends 75 percent of his time outside Kathmandu following up with programs and partners, making sure our money is being well spent, and investigating any such reports of corruption or mismanagement.

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The Nepali dream

I am the perfect example of someone who will never return to Nepal, but I will...
As intra-party wrangling over reintegration and rehabilitation of the 19,000 PLA combatants in cantonments continues, the Maoists are still harbouring more than 500 discharged combatants across the country. Disqualified, a short documentary directed by German, first-time filmmakers Jana Nolle and Stella Jung, shows the state of 42 discharged combatants (nine of them women) living in a Maoist-rented four bedroom house in Dhangadi. Local NGOs and relatives provide food and other essentials.

"They’re just there waiting,” Nolle says. “They’re perpetrators and victims at the same time, instruments of the Maoist party.”

The directors interviewed on camera 12 residents with official discharged status, UN Interagency Rehabilitation Program advisor Desmond Molloy, psychosocial counselor Ramesh Barret and Hari Jiwali, a Maoist district officer.

“There’s shame involved,” explains Jung. “They prefer not to return to their villages where others have jobs or are married. The Maoists devolve all responsibility to the government. It’s as if the Maoists are saying ‘the UN disqualified you, so you go to the UN to get support’, so they’re hopeless.”

UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) expelled 4,008 former combatants from Maoist cantonments, officially dubbed Verified Minors Late Recruits (VMLRs) on a twofold criteria: those under the age of 18 at the time of recruitment, or those who joined after the first ceasefire on 26 May 2006. As consolation, VMLRs were given discharged cards and the opportunity to enroll in vocational training programs.

Beads collected on the temples of an interviewee. The camera keeps rolling, and a tissue is handed. Behind-the-scene shots of Disqualified reveal the crew’s sweat and effort in capturing the tangled reality of discharged Maoist combatants.

“I wasn’t sure if it was possible to shoot there, if it would be supported or if they would be aggressive,” says Jana Nolle, whose collegiate fieldwork inspired the project.

Nolle led the four-member crew (including co-director Stella Jung (right) and translators Suhit Dhakal and Pratibha Khanal) to Kailali on the day of the constitutional deadline on 28 May relying solely on personal funds and equipment.

“We had no budget, no car. Everywhere, we carried our equipment, bags with tripods and cables exposed, on rickshaws and microbuses,” she recalls. The crew’s equipment was limited to Nolle’s Sony A1, Tescom voice recorder and MacBook Pro. Two local film and media collectives, DocSchool and Sathya, provided additional support, peripherals and workspace.

Nolle and Jung are currently in postproduction with plans for a 20-minute short retaining raw footage, produced in a frill-free format of honest imagery and dialogue. The style inspired by a new generation of documentaries like Lixin Fan’s Last Train Home gives room for character development and observations of life played out in real time. The technique borders on conventional documentary and classic fiction film. Says Jung: “It’s a different way of storytelling, not a typical narrative reportage with a monotone voice.”

disqualifiedfilm@gmail.com

The making of Disqualified
by a lack of decentralisation in service delivery, which discouraged VMLRs to travel long distances. The UN’s humanitarian appeal to rehabilitate VMLRs also lacked an initial labour market analysis as well as a socio-economic profile, which the Maoists forbade. “The whole motivation for the UN interagency rehabilitation program for VMLRs was humanitarian,” Molloy says in the film. “A group of young people who partly deprived of their youth and education helped to get them back into their community to avoid that they become part of armed gangs. In this particular group (in Dhangai), there has been a strong disincentive to avail the opportunities offered to them coupled with the fact that it’s way below their expectations that they may have had when they joined the Maoist army.”

Questions remain unanswered: Are the Maoists housing the VMLRs as leverage if reintegration fails? Are VMLRs merely collateral to the success of the peace process? In a film clip, Anup, a VMLR, appears restless: “No one can stay indoors now. We’ve been inside all this time, and even the ministers have been indoors. This isn’t the time to be indoors.”

Marcus Benigno the opportunities offered to them coupled with the fact that it’s way below their expectations that they may have had when they joined the Maoist army.”

Reeling in politicos

Government ministers and CA members, including Maoist heavyweight Hisila Yami, the NC’s Chakra Bastola and member of the Technical Committee for Supervision, Integration and Rehabilitation of Maoist Combatants Shambhu Ram Simkhada, reacted with tacit gravity, after watching clips from the short film Disqualified at the Institute for Conflict Management Peace and Development (ICPD) office in Baluwatar last weekend.

Jana Nolle, director of Disqualified, was invited to present her documentary findings on discharged Maoist combatants as part of a two-day workshop. Veteran peace negotiator Ted Morse of USAID also took part.

The screening spotlighted comments by Anup, a discharged Maoist combatant, who in one clip warns of the possible remobilisation: “What we have wished for when we joined this revolution has not come true. Unless these dreams come true, the war is not over. Prachanda said we have the weapons. And just like that, we are ready with our triggers at full cock.”

NC members may have hoped the screening would demonstrate a rift in the Maoist party. Yami carefully skirted around questions from Nepali Times regarding the film. “It’s a political issue,” she said. “Within our party itself, there is disagreement among those who are not be able to grasp today’s objective, those who fall back to the old ways of doing things and then there’s one group who is always confused. The film is an effect of that confusion.”

The muted reaction to the film during the screening does not seem to bode well for the future of the discharged.

Surendra Prasad Bhat, a VMLR, shows his ID card during an interview with filmmakers.
When reading Days in the Life with me, my American friend Emily had her head tilted throughout. Now and then she looked up, stunned by the beauty of certain phrases and surprised that there were ways of thinking she had not considered, realities she might have missed had it not been for translation. This was her first anthology of Nepali poems and she memorized lines such as Shybu Sherchan’s:

day
like a flat mushroom
far from the vast display of earth and sky
planning his legs in a small place.

Days in the Life is a collection of poems translated to English from Nepali and Nepal Bhasa by Wayne Amritz, an occasional contributor also to Nepali Times. It collects poems by Shybu Sherchan, Baniva Giri, Poorna Vaidya, Benju Sharma, Dinesh Adhikari, Manjul, and many others.

The translation is lucid, often forceful, and always lyrical. Reading through one can see the ways in which history has and has not shifted over the last century in Nepal. The images are stark — Nepal, for example, is shown as a helpless landscape, mauled by its citizens, raped until it revolts. Through images are stark — Nepal, for example, is shown as a helpless landscape, mauled by its citizens, raped until it revolts. Through the nation creeps in, and with it comes questions about the nation’s own citizenry and what the citizen owes in response.

In their original language these poems would force the native speaker to become aware of herself and her surroundings, but in translation they force a larger audience, both native and non-native, to take notice.

The translations take these poems beyond the boundaries of Nepal and simultaneously push Nepal’s boundaries, forcing even the outsider to stand alert tilt her head and questioning is the first step to reform. It is also the first step to appreciation.

Smriti Jaiswal is a co-founding editor of the literary magazine The Raleigh Review.

www.raleighreview.org
Festival 2011

world. Till 15 July, 4pm, The Fun Cafe, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat
9th Annual Wine Festival, Kriky’s mono-monsoon wine festival will feature 15 varieties of exquisite wines from six different countries. July 15 to 15 September. Kriky’s of Kathmandu, Thamel, 4250440
Bu keba, the newest organic restaurant in town, offers continental and Indian food along with chef’s origins. Sanepa

Sometimes there’s something off about a restaurant that you can’t put your finger on. For Hankook Sarang in Thamel, it isn’t the ambience or the service or the price—those are all just fine, and the cuisine is bona fide Korean.

There’s kimchi, the spicy pickled cabbage; built-in tabletop stoves for cook-it-yourself (CIY) dishes; bibim-bap, a rice bowl mixture of fresh vegetables, cooked meat and egg; imported soju, Korean firewater; and even metal chopsticks (a feature unique to Korea).

But for one thing, I wasn’t satiated at the end of the meal, though the order was quite hefty and included free refills of banchan, or Korean side dishes like pickled cabbage, dicon, black beans, cucumbers and spinach; galbi, barbecued pork short-ribs with lettuce leads for wrapping; bulgogi, thin slices of raw beef for your grilling pleasure; kimbap, Korean-style sushi rolls; complimentary bowls of broth and short-grained rice and cups of tea.

Maybe, it was just my enormous appetite or my consistent failure with CIY adventures that turn out bland or unbearable (there’s a reason why I dine out). If you’re prone to burning or undercooking your meat, opt for a precooked meal. Plus, if you’re vegetarian, Hankook Sarang is not the best choice, although you can order the tofu or cheese kimbap, the Korean-style pizza or a large bowl of ramen.

Essentially, if you have never had Korean food or if you have already been to Hankook Sarang and are accustomed to its spread, then frequent the eatery, but be sure to save up for a trip to Seoul.

But if you were so fortunate to have sampled prime-choice barbecue and crunchy, tangy kimchi like those served in a Korean enclave or let’s say Korea, then expect a slight downgrade set in a laidback garden. For the price, (the cheapest Korean establishment yet) you won’t regret it.

Marco Pollo

Face the Roadhouse Cafe in Thamel, turn 180, enter the corridor and stay left.

Space ★★★☆☆
Bread ‘n water ★★★☆☆
Service ★★★★☆
Deal-icious ★★★★☆
Rep-eat? ★★★☆☆
Diabetic dilemma

Diabetes Mellitus which manifests as increased blood sugar in the patients is so rampant in Nepal that even nuances in the treatment have become important. Some years ago a robust trial (United Kingdom Prospective Diabetes Study, UKPDS) in over 5,000 diabetic patients revealed that with ‘tight’ blood glucose control, eye surgery for retinal hemorrhages, and even amputations for nerve problems were significantly decreased. The study population was Type 2 diabetics just like the vast majority of diabetics seen in Nepal, who are affected by the disease (not early but later in their lives).

As we are increasingly starting to find out in Nepal, uncontrolled diabetes more commonly requires dialysis due to kidney failure, eye surgery for retinal hemorrhages, and even amputations for nerve and vasculature related problems. In other words, conscientiously controlling blood sugar leads to fewer complications of the kidneys, eyes and nerves. In medical parlance these are called “microvascular” complications. Unfortunately in medicine what may seem to be an obvious cause (high blood sugar) and effect (complications) does not always pan out.

Indeed, as revealed in the same UKPDS trial what the tighter control of blood sugar did not do was decrease macrovascular complications in other important organs that diabetes has a serious impact on, namely the heart and the brain. So, despite a good control of blood sugar, the rates of heart attacks and strokes in these patients did not improve, although there was a decrease in kidney and eye problems. However, there was a silver lining in the study.

Hypertension or high blood pressure usually goes hand in hand with diabetes. Hypertension is an important risk factor for both heart attacks and strokes. So, those diabetics in the study who had proper control of blood pressure clearly had fewer strokes and heart attacks independent of their blood glucose control.

The “take home message” for diabetics is that it is important to keep both the blood pressure and blood glucose under proper control so that the important organs (including the heart, brain, eyes, kidneys) that diabetes affects are protected.

Furthermore, unlike high blood sugar in a patient which usually manifests with excessive urination, thirst, and hunger, high blood pressure may essentially have no symptoms to start with until there is that catastrophic stroke or heart attack. The prevention of both diabetes and hypertension with “way of life” changes also needs to be emphasised.

The monsoon took a breather this past week, but it has now got “second wind” as it were. Central and eastern Nepal were under the spell of an area of relative high pressure which pushed the moisture coming in from the Bay south towards central India. This system has now moved on, and the moisture has returned with renewed vengeance. Expect clear mornings with hot and humid afternoons with evening showers, at times heavy.

It’s monsoon, have fun & sun at AFK, learn French!

Admission 4 – 18 July
New session 20 July – 28 September

Alliance Française in Kathmandu

Tripureshwor, Kathmandu | 42 41 163 | www.alliancefrancaise.org.np
D

Depending on how one perceives the profession, the last couple of years have been frustrating for Nepali journalists. Since the excitement of 2005-6, and the shock and awe of the 2008 elections, the Fourth Estate has found little worthy of its attention save approaching and extended deadlines, delayed budgets, and inter- and intra-party feud. As if sensing the sacks of culs that their charges have to deal with, editors have been compelled to back them up with editorials offering blandishments and threats to pave the road to peace, prosperity, and gross happiness. But the politicians, fat-clad in duck feather, merely shrug off the on meaning advice and calmly go about their wheeling and dealing, business as usual. I have sympathy for these journalists who, even as they tail the occupants of Singh Darbar, Baluwatar, and the Constituent Assembly, cannot be oblivious to the living that goes on in and out of Kathmandu in this not-so-very tiny and not-completely-Himalayan ex-kingdom, more ‘Sorry…laaa’ than Shangri-La these days. There has been plenty to report on, including disasters on such scales that they have received (sometimes belated) coverage, such as the Kosi floods of 2008, and the diarrhoea-cholera epidemic of 2009. Un-newsworthy people have made piles of money (and a few headlines) selling their country down the river, as well as their brothers, sisters, and co-species. But good things have happened, too, mostly on very local levels. Newsworthy people are making money (and fewer headlines) through entrepreneurial businesses selling a range of products from dairy to ginger to coffee, and not just in Kathmandu. Of course, I know of these non-political happenings because someone, somewhere has taken the trouble to report on them. But coverage is scant compared to the column inches devoted to the bilge at the helm of our ship of state, and no self-respecting journalist would dare suggest that agriculture (still accounting for about 40 per cent of GDP and three quarters of the workforce) deserves more attention than politics.

Court chronicles
Politics matters, but so does the rest of Nepal

Deuba feuds (as opposed to the Bhattaur/Dahai/ Baidya ménage) akin to gossiping about bickering neighbours? Even so, you might say, they have no choice but to play the game. And indeed, reportage is not just event coverage à la TGIF. Layers of analysis attribute various significances to this and that meeting, and attempt to divine the implications for the nation. Political journalism in Nepal also plays an important role in uncovering, or underlining, the misdemeanours that political institutions are increasingly associated with. If there were no press monitoring, one can safely assume that whatever is going on pretty much under the public’s collective nose would reach ever more grotesque proportions.

If the obsession with politics is set to continue in journalism, then, at least we can hope for more of a bottom-up focus, as well as regional coverage within Nepal. Undoubtedly this would broaden and strengthen our sense of being Nepali. What better platform for a cross-fertilisation of values and ideas, what better preparation for federalism? Such a breed of journalism would give Nepalis a much better sense of what their country consists of, in all its human and natural glory, beyond the dhaka-topi propaganda of the Panchayat era and the ethno-melas in Tundikhel. It would teach us that Gen Next is more about those queuing up for passports than those wondering what’s hot and what’s not. And it would prime the state to better respond to the needs of Nepalis across the country.

I have sympathy for those journalists who, even as they tail the occupants of Singh Darbar, Baluwatar, and the Constituent Assembly, cannot be oblivious to the living that goes on in and out of Kathmandu in this not-so-very tiny and not-completely-Himalayan ex-kingdom, more ‘Sorry…laaa’ than Shangri-La these days. There has been plenty to report on, including disasters on such scales that they have received (sometimes belated) coverage, such as the Kosi floods of 2008, and the diarrhoea-cholera epidemic of 2009. Un-newsworthy people have made piles of money (and a few headlines) selling their country down the river, as well as their brothers, sisters, and co-species. But good things have happened, too, mostly on very local levels. Newsworthy people are making money (and fewer headlines) through entrepreneurial businesses selling a range of products from dairy to ginger to coffee, and not just in Kathmandu. Of course, I know of these non-political happenings because someone, somewhere has taken the trouble to report on them. But coverage is scant compared to the column inches devoted to the bilge at the helm of our ship of state, and no self-respecting journalist would dare suggest that agriculture (still accounting for about 40 per cent of GDP and three quarters of the workforce) deserves more attention than politics.

Doubtless these journalists have a very keen sense of how what happens at the top will affect everyone downstream, whether the upsteamers take the initiative to set up a hydropower plant or simply foul the waters. Those at the top control the resources (even if policy does not always follow people into their lives), and what is happening now, it is felt, will determine how those resources will be managed in the new Nepal.

Does this mean the primacy of politics should be taken for granted? That political journalists should continue to chart the ups and downs of what are in most cases not clashes of ideology – which evidently affects policy and practice – but personality clashes? On some level, is not reporting on the Oli/Khanal or Ko/Dr Ram自卑 is to report on the Bhakti/Blai, Deuba feuds (as opposed to the Bhattaur/Dahai/ Baidya ménage) akin to gossiping about bickering neighbours? Even so, you might say, they have no choice but to play the game. And indeed, reportage is not just event coverage à la TGIF. Layers of analysis attribute various significances to this and that meeting, and attempt to divine the implications for the nation. Political journalism in Nepal also plays an important role in uncovering, or underlining, the misdemeanours that political institutions are increasingly associated with. If there were no press monitoring, one can safely assume that whatever is going on pretty much under the public’s collective nose would reach ever more grotesque proportions.

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Generate electricity,

PAAVAN MATHHEMA in SINDHUPALCHOK

Nepal’s need to generate hydropower must not destroy the potential of its rivers for adventure tourism

Durga Shrestha of Sakkhuwa village is worried. There is talk of a new hydropower project on the Bhote Kosi and he is concerned about his adventure tourism job. The 102MW Middle Bhote Kosi project is a subsidiary of Chitime Hydropower and will have a gated diversion weir at Chaku, and a powerhouse 1 km downstream at Janbu village. With the feasibility done, construction is set to begin in 2013 and the project will be completed in four years.

The project will be the third hydropower plant on this stretch of the river, and has become the latest example of Nepal’s need for energy to combat the energy shortage. Destruction of nature is irreversible, once we lose it we cannot get it back. But tourism has also generated jobs. The suspension bridge built by The Last Resort for its bungee jumps saves villagers a five-hour detour. The resorts invest in local health and education.

The Bhote Kosi is a world-class river, important for the local people here and for tourism, explains Megh Ale of the Nepal River Conservation Trust. At Jambu it will significantly decrease water volume along the rafting route, and tourism will lose its most important attraction.

Power investor

Early this week, the government launched the Hydropower Investment and Development Company (HIDC). With an authorised capital of Rs 500 million and paid up capital of Rs 100 million, HIDC has pulled investments from the government, Employee Provident Fund, National Insurance Company and Citizen Investment Fund and will invest in hydropower projects of over 25MW. “The country needs investment in hydroelectricity but the market’s interest rate is very high,” explains Energy Minister Gokarna Bista. “This company will fill in as an investor in hydropower projects.”

Save our rivers

Protecting the Karnali, Madi and Tamor as free-flowing rivers will save them for future generations

It has become a cliché to say that Nepal’s greatest asset is its rivers. Besides our three main rivers, there are nearly 6,000 smaller ones that drain the southern slopes of the Himalayas. But when people speak of Nepal’s water resources, they tend to mean only hydropower. Yet, our rivers have great economic, social, cultural, and ecological significance. Geologists say Nepal’s main rivers are actually older than Himalaya, which is why many of them have their origins behind the main range in Tibet. And just as we revere the mountains, our rivers are also holy. With global warming, Himalayan rivers are going to be more and more important as a source of survival.

Even from an economic standpoint, a river’s tourism potential may be more important than hydropower. Nepal has already lost two rivers: the Trishuli and Marsyangdi. Nepal therefore cannot afford to destroy nature only for the sake of hydropower, no matter how severe the current energy shortage. Destruction of nature is irreversible, once it’s gone it is gone forever.

Save our rivers. Protecting the Karnali, Madi and Tamor as free-flowing rivers will save them for future generations.
or protect tourism?

rivers have been blocked off by businessmen who are sitting on licenses. This is a recipe to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. A resource that should belong to all Nepalis have been grabbed by a few individuals with connections. And since big projects mean big kickbacks, politicians and businessmen are in cahoots to back bigger and more destructive projects on our rivers.

Nepal’s topography is like a staircase rising from 80m above sea level along the southeastern plains to above 8,000m. Most of our rivers emerge from glacier snouts at about 6,500m.

This balance can be reached if we demarcate hydropower development on rivers between 1,200-5,000m, set aside rivers between 200-1,200m for tourism and conservation and sections of rivers between 80-200m for irrigation.

In addition, we must protect some rivers as free-flowing. Just as there are national parks to protect landscapes rich in biodiversity, we must protect certain rivers. The Humla Karnali could be declared a Himalayan River Heritage, while its tributaries can be set aside for hydropower and irrigation.

Similarly, since the Kali Gandaki, Marsyangdi and Trisuli in central Nepal have already been dammed for power, we should leave the Madi alone as a heritage river. In eastern Nepal, the Tamor deserves to be reserved as a free-flowing river.

Keeping the Karnali, Madi and Tamor free from hydropower development will not mean a big loss in generation capacity, but these rivers will be kept in their pristine state for future generations. In addition, discouraging construction of dams on major rivers below 1,200m will protect them for adventure tourism and rafting.

Current plans to build the Chilime project on the Bhote Kosi is a bad idea because it will block a stretch of river that is considered one of the top ten rivers for white water rafting and kayaking. Nepal can host international competitions on these rivers and generate much more revenue than one more hydropower plant can.

Nepal needs a long-term strategy for our rivers that balance our economic needs with our responsibility to protect the ecology of our rivers.

Megh Ale, an Ashoka Fellow, also heads the Nepal River Conservation Foundation.

AGAINST THE CURRENT: The proposed site at Jambu village for the new power house of the 102MW Middle Bhote Kosi project.

from ourselves

Megh Ale, an Ashoka Fellow, also heads the Nepal River Conservation Foundation.
**Fire in Kavre**

Nagarik, 13 July

On Monday morning, a huge fire broke out in a noodle factory in Kavre. A fire engine from Bhaktapur and two from Kathmandu rushed to the venue. Kavre’s own fire engine, however, sat useless at the municipality premises. This is not a first time. Whenever a fire breaks out here, help has to be called in from the Valley. Kavre’s only fire engine was gifted by the German government in 1993 but hasn’t been used even once. The fire engine does not have a tank and its pipe has to be joined to a tap. “In most areas, the source of water is a pond or a stream and so we were unable to use the fire engine,” says former President of Banepa Development Committee Rabin Shakya.

For years, the fire engine has been parked at the municipality’s backyard. In 2006 the vehicle was vandalised by protesters. There are several plywood, noodle, matchstick, sandal, biscuit and other factories in Kavre. There are four gas factories and over 20 petrol stations.

“Since 1993, we have always depended on Bhaktapur and Kathmandu whenever there is a fire incident,” says Satosh Tamang, a local police. “In case the roads get blocked and they can’t make the trip, the result will be disastrous.”

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**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

“When I stepped down, I did not know things would get so bad.”

Former King Gyanendra Shah speaking on a press conference in his 65th birthday

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**Face-off**

Chudamani Bhattarai in Nepal, 16 July

“Which side are you on exactly? It would be easier for us if this was clear.”

“I am Prachanda, the chairman of this party. The Chairman is the leader and party’s line is the leader’s line.”

That was the exchange between Maoist Chairman Prachanda and Mohan Baidya when the latter asked him to choose between him and Baburam Bhattarai in the party’s central committee meeting held on 24 June.

“Our destination is People’s Federal Republic and harping on a revolt will not take us there,” a central committee member quoted Prachanda as saying.

When Prachanda said that the party’s line was the leader’s line, Baidya accused Prachanda of “decadence.”

In response, Prachanda said that the party has been following his line since 1990 when he assumed leadership. “How come you, who has been operating under the leadership’s policies, is a revolutionary and I a traitor,” Prachanda asked.

The Baidya faction has been blaming Prachanda of defeatism on issues of peace, constitution and combatant integration. Prachanda attacked Baidya by raking up issues from the past. “If it is the preparation for a guerilla war then guerilla war is not possible in these times anymore. If it is rebellion you are talking about, we have done that already with the People’s War. And if you mean insurrection, we are at that stage currently. But guerilla war will not take us where we want to go. The only way is by taking the route of peace, constitution and government.”
Farsighted Prachanda

Lalitakshak, 10 July

Prachanda is the greatest leader in Nepali politics today. He is a clever mobiliser and strategist of international standards. He evaluates external conditions, studies internal circumstances and moves to his goal with conviction and even his critics praise this capacity of Prachanda. Prachanda strongly believes in Marxism as a science. Whatever Prachanda has launched in Nepali society from a Marxist angle has never failed to hit the target.

Prachanda had predicted a miracle in the last CA elections. And like a tidal wave, the historic CA results swept away all doubting analysts. This is not a coincidence. It is the result of Prachanda’s political farsightedness, correct evaluation of the situation, careful planning and mobilisation.

After the Chunwang Meeting, Prachanda had declared to party workers that a great upheaval is going to take place. Less than six months later, the Maoists catapulted to the government’s seat on the foundation of the 12-point understanding. These forecasts in themselves are outstanding. History proves Prachanda is a revolutionary hero and Nepal’s revolution cannot move forward without him. The alliance between the right wingers and the extremists seen at present, stems only from their hunger for power. Prachanda is the real commander of the revolution, the only helmsman who can sail the nation’s ship towards its destination. The Nepali people would never accept any conspiracy against a historic leader like him.
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e ex-Majesty’s birthday last week was marked by celebrations befitting an erstwhile royal, including a life-size cutout of Kingji flanked by two real-life flunkies peering from above the Nirmal Nibas gate. Was this a decoy? Fans and paparazzi thronged the palace but one well-wisher was told it wasn’t such a good idea to come over. Chairman Awesome had sent feelers to Kingji for a tête-à-tête over a bottle of Chivas. The overture was turned down for now because the media would have got wind of it.

Natural for the formerly royal to be wary. Reporters are keeping track of all the covert meetings going on all over town at secret venues. Siddarth Cottage in Dhoibi Ghaut seems to be the favourite of the BRB faction, while the PKD wallahs prefer a private residence in Kumaripati and the KPO cabal of course just sits in Balkot. In fact the only news worth reporting these days is who secretly met whom and where. News of cloak-and-dagger gatherings of various factions of the Baddies, Kangresis and Eh-maleys are leaked to the press so that rival paranoid factions start imagining all kinds of gotu bundis. In case future historians want it for reference, the Ass has compiled a list of who met whom this past week.

Sunday: AKS+PKD, CPG+DPG+TBR, BMP+DK+DK+KFKC. Monday: PKD+NKS, NKS+BBR, BRB+MBK, MBK+NKS.

Tuesday: PKD+BMP+APS, BRB+RFT+NKS+MBK, PMS+PSM+SBD, RCP+RSM.

Wednesday: KPO+MKN, SBD+PKD, RSM+RCP, MMS+Jhusil.

In all the high tension excitement over the breakup of the Baddies, Comrade JN seems to have forgotten that he once promised to step down. In fact, the primordial minister seems so sanguine about being in Baluwatar for the foreseeable future that he has accepted an invite from General Ban Ki Moon to attend the UNGA in New York in September.

In desperation, new colleges have become adventurous and started naming themselves after inland bodies of water (Caspian), exotic places (Caribbean, LA, Maple Leaf), New York boroughs (Brooklyn) and famous universities (Oxbridge). These schools immediately saw a spurt in admissions, so others followed suit with names of landmarks belonging to the US federal government: Pentagon, White House, Capitol Hill, NASA, Watergate, Golden Gate, Glacier. (Ass’ footnote: None of these names are made up.)

With all terrestrial names now taken, colleges are going forth where no man has been before into outer space with schools named Cosmic and Galaxy, as well as heavenly bodies like Triton and Sirius. But the schools that are swamped are named after football teams (Chelsea, Liverpool).