The expansion of the new cabinet is taking longer than expected. No one expected this to be easy for Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, given that this was a marriage of convenience between two ideologically polarised groupings.

But Bhattarai’s bigger problem seems to be not so much accommodating the demands of the Madhesi alliance, but to satisfy factions within his own Maoist party. And then he has to also ensure caste, ethnicity and gender diversity within the cabinet.

“We have lot of senior leaders in the party who deserve to be in the cabinet,” explained Bhattarai’s adviser, Devendra Paudel, “We want to make sure they all feel involved in the process. Hence, the slight delay.”

Analysts say that in their hurry to get into government, the Maoists may have given too much away to win over the Madhesis. For their part, Madhesi leaders deny this is about getting to power. MJF-Republican leader Rajkishor Yadav acknowledges the Maoists have been generous in power sharing, but adds: “This coalition is based on issues, not on power, whatever the cynics may say.”

The Maoist decision to postpone handing over the keys of their weapons containers to the special committee is a missed opportunity. It could have been a breakthrough in the peace process and cemented public perception that Bhattarai is a do-er. But he can still send positive signal by taking the opposition into confidence while moving ahead on the peace process and constitution drafting. Even a majority government needs consensus.

Anurag Acharya

More on p12

Life after living goddess

Former Kumari Rashnilla Shakya is working in a software company and pursuing a masters in information technology... p6-7

AUTO SPECIAL

p15-19

A FUSION SO EXQUISITE
IT’S ENJOYED BY BOTH BLenders AND CONNOISSEURS.

Antiquity

DIWAKAR CHETTRI
Devisara Oli’s husband, Suresh, was last seen in the district police office in Bardia nine years ago after being taken in for questioning. Nearly a decade on, Devisara still keeps her husband’s clothes in the hope that security forces are concerned, it’s over. They want to sweep out the past, the two former warring sides have an identical response: “Digging up the past now will endanger the peace process.” In fact, the peace process is endangered precisely because there is no closure for the relatives of those who were summarily executed, or were disappeared during the war—even in cases when the perpetrators are known by name.

On the occasion of aborning for war-time atrocities, leaders from both the Maoists and the other parties have an identical response: “Digging up the past now will endanger the peace process.” The peace process is endangered precisely because there is no closure for the relatives of those who were summarily executed, or were disappeared during the war—even in cases when the perpetrators are known by name.

To add insult to injury, the second clause in the four-point agreement between the Maoists and the Madhesi Alliance that was signed in Gadda Bhaluwa Bhandara on September 22, 2006, actually allows a general amnesty for wartime atrocities. The exact wording (our translation) reads: “In government, we will immediately dissolve all court cases against Maoist leaders or cadre and declare a general amnesty in cases where the courts have passed sentences.”

In the general relief over the formation of a new government, and the euphoria over a prime minister who rides Mustangs, this and other conditions in the agreement have gone almost unnoticed by human rights activists, other political leaders and some Kathmandu-based members of the international community.

But for the relatives of the disappeared, this is a slap in the face. On Wednesday, Devisara Oli wrote as she told us: “The killers of our husbands are walking freely and threatening to kill us if we raise this issue. It’s not up to the government to pardon anyone. Only we the victims can pardon those who tortured our hearts.”

To shame the government and to show what pardoning and healing really mean, Devisara, whose husband was disappeared by the police, and Laxmi, whose husband was disappeared by the Maoists, are working side-by-side for a victims support group in Bardia called the Committee for Affected People.

Shame on a state that doesn’t have the heart to follow the example set by Devisara and Laxmi.

All the families of the disappeared are asking for truth and justice. Information on whether their loved ones are dead or alive, the circumstances of their deaths and for the guilty to answer for their crimes. The two former warring sides have stood-still on information, there is a common conspiracy of silence about war crimes, and elected rulers have tried their best to water down the terms of reference for a future commission on disappearances.

Focusing only on preventive care does not address the immediate needs of patients in the hinterland. I think a model which addresses both preventive and curative health care is possible and Nepalis should not be deprived of these essential services at the cost of one over the other.

LHAKPA SHERPA
Nepal needs more Nepals like LHAKPA Sherpa to create opportunities for fellow Nepalis through social entrepreneurship. (“Making paper while the sun shines”, #568). Thanks to Nepal Times for starting the new Making a Difference section, bringing this and other uplifting stories about ordinary Nepalis who are making a difference despite overwhelming odds, and not just sitting around complaining. Let me shake your hand, LHAKPA.

Kitan L

Keep the Flame of Truth burning

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Peace or ceasefire?

Time to move beyond symbolism to real progress on integration and rehabilitation of ex-guerrillas

I
n the end, when nothing else worked, the Maoists came up with a proposal for a one-and-half month work schedule on integration in an effort to win support for its prime ministerial candidate. That proposal and a four-point list of populist promises to the Madhesi alliance brought them back into government.

Winning the 2008 election was the easy part for the Maoists. The party had to struggle so hard, give so much away, to get into a coalition that it doesn’t seem to matter that they lead it. The fun and games are just beginning for Dr Baburam Bhattarai.

One week before the Maoists declared their proposal to complete the integration and rehabilitation of the ex-combatants within a month-and-half, the International Crisis Group (ICG) released its latest report ‘Nepal: From Two Armies to One’ which discusses the present status of the Nepal Army and the ‘PLA’ with regard to the commitments made by the state and the ex-rebels about the future of each.

‘It is tempting to see integration and rehabilitation as a technical issue, but it is deeply political,’ the ICG notes. It stresses the need to ensure a dignified management of the ex-combatants, not necessarily as an acknowledgement of the ‘PLA’ role in the epochal change, an idea which other parties are against, but as a calculated political gesture for greater aim of transforming the parent party.

Without specifically entering into sensitive issues like the need for social reconciliation and psycho-social support for those opting for retirement and rehabilitation, the report recommends flexibility in response to multiple options in order to reduce risks of derailment. It is unfortunate that there is no open debate about the issue and everybody wants the cantonments to be empty as soon as possible at any cost. However, the ICG’s concern about the potential infusion of large compensation amount into the Maoist coffers is well-founded. It calls on donors and the government to design an incentive-based payment in small installments.

And although the idea of providing skills development training is a welcome one, the mass exodus of combatants to employment abroad opens a pandora’s box of corruption. It also sends the message that the state can absolve itself from responsibility of ensuring their rehabilitation into society.

The ICG is concerned that commitments about democratization of the Nepal Army to make it more accountable. It is too large and too independent for a democratic state. It wants Nepal’s military and security framework to be reviewed, engaging more civilian expertise. However, the most interesting bits in the report deal with the decline in political utility of the ‘PLA’ for the mother party. At a time when the political parties as well as the international community are worked up about the 19,000 in the cantonments, the report notes: ‘Its military importance has diminished steadily since 2006, and the party is not going back to war.’

The ICG’s Anagha Neelakantan, says that people who throw up their hands in despair at the peace process fail to see how much progress has been made. “Who would have thought a deal on integration would be so close, differences on constitutional issues narrowed so much, and people from across the political spectrum so welcoming of an ex-guerrilla Prime Minister,” she told me this week.

After months of stalemate, there is renewed hope for meaningful engagement among the major stakeholders to bring the peace process on track. The integration and rehabilitation process may very soon enter a decisive phase, which would have a huge symbolic impact on the peace process. But if the bloodiest chapter in the nation’s history is reduced to just symbolism, it could well be the prelude to another conflict.
It’s the economy

“Nepal’s toughest challenge is not concluding the peace process or drafting the constitution, but rather building an economic future”

DURING my 16 months here, I have been continually surprised how little public debate and discussion there is about Nepal’s economic challenges. I have met with dozens of senior political leaders during my time in Nepal – from prime ministers to local party cadres – and invariably the discussion focuses on the peace process, the constitution, and, more often than not, their party’s plans to retain or gain control of the levers of political power. Getting control of power, however, is a mixed blessing if you are not prepared to exercise that power on behalf of the people and on building a democratic, prosperous and stable nation. Thus, my surprise, and at times dismay, that so many of those who aspire to lead the nation appear to have not devoted the same degree of attention to the nation’s development strategy, the strengthening of the economy, and the creation of jobs, as they have to their political agenda.

I believe that Nepal’s toughest challenge is not concluding the peace process or drafting the constitution, but rather building an economic future for the young people of Nepal. Today, when we look at a Nepal where 73 per cent of the population is under 35 years of age and 50 per cent is under 18, we have to ask: do they feel invested in their nation? Do they see a bright future for themselves in their homeland? Nepal situated between India and China, two of the fastest growing economies in the world, that’s an enviable location. Just the spillover effects from these two economies should create thousands of jobs and expand trade. But, in reality, Nepal’s economy will likely grow this year by an anemic 3.5 per cent, one of the lowest growth rates in Asia. Investors are scared off by the political instability, labor problems, and power shortages.

At the same time, Nepal’s own business houses are focused only on short-term profits. Many seek to avoid paying taxes and maneuver to sneak their money out of the country. Many state-owned enterprises, which often are staffed through political favoritism rather than as a result of merit, are badly managed, draining resources from the country while failing to provide services.

Surya Nepal, one of the few companies that remain competitive in Nepal’s readymade garment sector, has closed down its factories due to labor problems. More than 2,000 people, mainly women, employed directly or indirectly through Surya’s operation, have lost their jobs. The closure was a setback for the country’s economic development and diminishes our efforts to convince foreign investors that Nepal is open for business. Equally troubling, some political leaders seem to view businesses as sources of funding for their parties, or even worse, as targets to be exploited for their personal gain. The private sector accepts this not only as the price of doing business in Nepal. Both the exploitation and the acquiescence undermine Nepal’s long-term economic prospects and ultimately democracy.

Against this backdrop, young Nepalis look abroad for their future and for hope. The most privileged of them never imagine staying in Nepal for their education. Every day I see hundreds outside my embassy seeking to study in the United States. Thousands of less privileged youths flee the country each month to work in the Middle East or Malaysia. Remittances may currently be the lifeblood of Nepal’s economy but those who suggest that remittances are positive for Nepal in the long run fundamentally misunderstand economic realities. Nonetheless, despite the many challenges, there are reasons to be optimistic about Nepal’s economic future. IT outsourcing is one industry ready to take off, and Nepal has only begun to tap the massive potential of the tourism sector. And if just a tiny fraction of the tourists from neighboring China and India started coming to Nepal, the effect on the economy would be massive.

The failure to develop hydropower is a story of failed potential that undermines economic growth. I applaud the government’s efforts to enact coherent, rational policies to develop hydropower. The recent selection of a technocratic head of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) through open competition sends a positive signal about the commitment to reform. Agriculture is another sector with huge opportunities if the right policies are put in place: a rational seed policy, contract farming, and efficient fertilizer distribution systems.

We are committed to do our part to promote trade and investment. We recently hosted the high-level trade delegation from the American Chamber of Commerce which left intrigued and impressed. The United States and Nepal recently signed the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) to facilitate trade and investment and resolve disputes. We are working to prepare for the second TIFA council meeting in the coming months in Kathmandu.

Our USAID program is focused on growing the economy. No longer content just to be involved in community-based programs, our Nepal Economic, Agriculture and Trade program is working to reform outdated trade and agriculture policies, improve the business and investment climate, increase access to finance, and build export markets in the region for products where Nepal has a distinct advantage. Not only is growth good for the country; its goal is job creation. The smart politician will focus on the economy and advocate for policies to create growth. I am confident that the leader who figures this out – whatever the party – will reap massive political rewards.

We know that some of the needed policy reforms are not easy. We also know that the Nepal contest is complex. Growth must be equitable and inclusive. But government alone cannot address these inequalities. Generating strong growth through the private sector and foreign investment must form the cornerstone of any coherent economic plan. Policies that would seek to limit the role of the private sector are fundamentally misguided. Only an open, liberal economy can spawn economic growth. It is the private sector, in partnership with government, that must create jobs. At a time when India and even communist China have learned this lesson, it would be ironic and self-destructive for Nepal to move in the other direction.

Duty on duties

The hefty taxes we pay for automobiles should be reflected in better roads and highways

When the world’s cheapest car made its entry in Nepal, custom duties increased its price by seven fold than in India. The premium price vehicle owners pay in Nepal, however, doesn’t translate into improved road conditions or traffic management. Motorbike riders find that the crisscrossing skills required for the license trial exam actually come handy in dodging pot holes and weaving past other cars on the road. Even those who can afford the luxury of a luxury sedan can’t savour it.

At 238 per cent, Nepal has one of the highest tax rates on automobiles. If this high tax rate intends to discourage automobile import, then it hasn’t worked very well. Car sales dipped a bit with the banking crisis, but there is still demand. Car dealers argue that in absence of an effective public transport system, private vehicles are no longer a luxury and public transport system, private vehicles are no longer a luxury and the high tax rate cannot be justified if it gives no additional returns.

Last year alone, the government collected over Rs 7 billion from the import duty on automobiles, making up nearly a quarter of the total revenue from taxing imports. In addition, over Rs 3 billion was collected on vehicular taxes and Rs 800 million from driving license fees. Besides these regular charges, the government also earns everyday through highway fees, road improvement taxes and fines for traffic rule violations.

This year’s budget allocated only Rs 2.52 billion in infrastructure development, periodic repair and maintenance of roads. The taxes we pay for our vehicles is bundled together into the national revenue, instead of being channeled towards improving road conditions and traffic management. The allocation is not enough to address the sorry state of the roads, and even the little money that does get spent leaks out in corruption and shoddy construction. So, as vehicle density continues to rise (there are almost 600,000 vehicles in the Valley alone) the roads booby-trapped with holes are choked with traffic. Few new link roads have been added, and the maintenance of existing roads has not been prioritised.

The government needs to direct its attention towards systematic and scientific traffic management, using the tax collected from the automobile industry. Other line ministries need to work in coordination, so the electricity department doesn’t dig up a road that has just been paved by the road department. Better roads and improved traffic management means less traffic jams and monumental savings on fuel and time. It also means less expenditure for vehicle maintenance. If the Japanese could do it on the 9.14 km stretch from Tinkune to Surya Binayak, there is no reason we can’t do it elsewhere.

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai has shown refreshing symbolism by adopting a Mustang as his official vehicle. But what good is that if the roads he is going to drive on will be congested and rough. He has shown refreshing symbolism by adopting a Mustang as his official vehicle. But what good is that if the roads he is going to drive on will be congested and rough.

The hefty taxes we pay for automobiles should be reflected in better roads and highways.
Rashmila Shakya is probably one of the best known ex-Kumaris of all time. This is mainly due to the success of her autobiographical book, From Goddess to Mortal, co-authored with Scott Berry in 2005. Walking through her house looking at walls decorated with her own childhood photos, visitors are astounded by the life of a small girl who has gone on to become a goddess, and then to grow up to be a young woman.

“Scott found me through a local photo printing shop where he happened to see a picture of me,” recalls Rashmila. Berry, an anthropologist, remembers photographing her a decade previously when Rashmila was still a Kumari.

“After hearing that I wished to publish my experiences, he volunteered to do the interviews, that is how the book came about,” Rashmila recalls with a fond smile.

Six years later, Rashmila is the first ex-Kumari with a bachelor’s degree despite being nearly illiterate when she stepped down as Kumari at age 12. “It was difficult,” she confides, “and even after graduation it has been difficult to find a job.” After working for a support group which shelters the urban poor, Lumanti, she is now working on banking software in a computer company.

Rashmila is also continuing with her masters degree in information technology. Asked about whether she is stressed by juggling work and studying at the same time, she easily shrugs it off with a smile: “I still have some personal time, and the knowledge from the masters degree is helping me in my current job.” Rashmila’s predecessor, Anita Shakya, on the other hand, is a more traditional ex-Kumari, hardly venturing outside the house. Slightly shy, she says she enjoys cooking and doing household chores for her tightly knit extended family. She has passed Grade 10 and watches tv dramas during her spare time, and is supported by her loving relatives.

“I miss being a Kumari,” Anita’s cheerful niece translates on her aunt’s behalf. “I was treated like a princess and I have fond memories of a carefree childhood and my loving Kumari caretaker family.”

Another niece, who now lives in the US, says she thinks Anita may have been slightly more outgoing if she had more childhood friends. Berry himself remembers Anita in the early 1980s as always stone-faced, as required by tradition. Rashmila, on the other hand, told him that as soon as she donned her naga necklace she felt like she was in “a different world.”

The traditional belief is that Kumaris should not get married, and Anita’s parents say she is likely to respect that. But, Anita’s elder sister pipes in from across the room: “Or maybe she just hasn’t met her Mr Right.” Everyone bursts into laughter.

Rashmila and Anita know each other well and as former Kumaris are required to visit incumbent living goddesses. The criticism from child rights groups doesn’t seem to bother these two ex-Kumaris who say they treasure the unique opportunity that tradition bestowed upon them and their society.

Says Rashmila: “Being a Kumari allowed me to experience a double life and possess a double identity. I will always cherish that.”
She is always dressed in festive red, glittering jewel accessories, long and heavy eye makeup and a striking third eye on her brow. This image appears in guide books on Nepal, postcards, NTB brochures and websites.

As the live representation of the Hindu goddess Durga, the Kumari is by far the most important tourist attraction in Nepal after the mountains. But she is more than just a tourist icon: she is a living embodiment of the Kathmandu Valley Newar culture and its harmonious mixture of Buddhism and Hinduism. It is also an important part of Nepali history because it was on Indra Jatra day more than 250 years ago that the Gorkha conquest arrived in Kathmandu Valley.

This year, Indra Jatra is on 11 September. The day the Kumari Chariot procession will be pulled past dignitaries, including the president, at Hanuman Dhoka as it has for centuries. Till then, the faithful of Kathmandu and curious foreigners will throng the Kumari Ghar every day, hoping to get a glimpse of the goddess as she looks down from her ornate window.

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EVENTS

Mélange Evening, Manjushree Pradhan and Rock Star performing. 2 September, 7pm onwards, Alliance Française, Tiptopnesh, 4241163

Sri Ganesh, an exhibition of arts on Ganesh. Till 7 September, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, 5546705

Aftermath, DJ K-World performing. 2 September, Casablanca, Babar Mahal, 4422089

Saving Dolma, monthly lectures. 2 September, 9.30 am, Shanker Hotel, Lazimpat

Let’s Get Crazy, live life today and enjoy. 2 September, 7pm onwards, The Rave Lounge, Pulisadak

Miss Teen 2011, Brace yourself for a new beauty queen. 2 September, Nepal Academy Hall, Kamaladi, 4246299

Anbug Drive 2011, Volkswagen Beetle Drive from Kathmandu to Gyantok in Sikkim. 6 September to 13 September, 4222636

Eye camp, eye camp which will focus on curing cataract patients. 3 September, 9am to 2pm, Buddha School, Badagaun, Lalitpur

Coping with Grief, talk session by Swami Avadhutananda. 3 September, 11am, Battisputali, 4471957

9th Annual Wine Festival, taste 15 wines from six countries. Till 15 September, Kilroy’s, Thamel, 4250440-41

Cycle 6: Life, nature and wildlife photography by Om Yadav. Till 30 September, Galleria CUC, Maharajgung

Vintage Vehicles, classic display of the oldest cars and bikes in Nepal. 3 September, 10am to 6pm, St. Xavier’s School ground, Jawalakhel, 9851043398

Click Click Party, be a celebrity for a day with paparazzi all around you. 3 September, 2pm to 10pm, Entry Rs 500 (with complimentary drink), Casablanca, Babar Mahar Revisited

Lyrics from the Junkyard, junkyard sculptures by Meena Kayastha. 19 August to 9 September, 11am to 6pm, The Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited

Staging of Bukhyacha, a Nepali adaptation of the Italian play About Face. 7 to 9 September, every day except Mondays, 5.30 pm, Archan Theatre, Gurukul, Old Baneshwor

Organic Farming Training, training on bio intensive farming. 14 August to 4 September, 10am to 4pm, EON farm at Mahankal, Fee: Rs. 4000, 9849685808

Opinionated, a workshop on editorial and opinion writing. 3 to 4 September, 11am to 3pm. Rs 1000/-, apply before 1 September, 9813485716, sadya.org

Nepali Ho, a Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory and Florida Atlantic University collaboration. 2 September, 6pm onwards, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamelkheti, 5013954

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The Blacksmith

A puna Creations, the film company behind last year’s Trophy Hunting is set to release its latest production, The Blacksmith. A preview hosted at the Russian Cultural Centre on Friday confirmed Director Gorakh Bista’s penchant for not only exploring unconventional storylines, but literally digging up unexpected treasures from remote corners of the country. The Blacksmith delves into the recent history of a community of Dalit blacksmiths in Phalamkani, Parbat, by following them into the iron mines they last worked 70 years ago. “They are the poorest of the poor now, as you might expect,” says Bista of the octogenarian miners he interviewed for the documentary. “The surprising thing is how much better off their community was back then, being the centre of the iron trade before it collapsed.”

The question The Blacksmith asks of old-timers such as Brave Kami as they recreate a day of mining and smelting is: could mining be a viable prospect for the community once more?

Whatever happens to Phalamkani’s mines, The Blacksmith is a timely reminder of the pioneering role the blacksmiths of this village and others like it played in modernising the state of Nepal. In The Blacksmith, viewers will be transported back to these early days. The Blacksmith (30 minutes) Director: Gorakh Bista Producer: Brendra Malla Script: Rabi Thapa & Prem Sharma Narration: Robin Sharma

Chikusa

Stepping into Chikusa Coffee Shop in Thamel is like stopping by a neighborly den in the boroughs, where regulars read the morning rag and kvetch about life, while sipping on large cups of hot, local drip. The former Japanese café, established in 1998, specialises in ‘real coffee’, breakfast items and pressed sandwiches—all made to order behind a narrow, diner-like bar straight out of an Edward Hopper painting. Bottles of American maple syrup and an exchange ‘Super Dad’ mugs line the shelves that yield a homespun charm, where all that’s missing is a white-topied carver yelling out orders at full bass. Every plate, prepared in plain sight, is just plain good. No green eggs and ham, the ham and eggs (as you like it) are a savory side that compliments any of the sweet, back-menu treats, including crepes, waffles and real flapjack pancakes topped with sliced bananas and syrup. The only drawback is that substitutes can’t be made for items in the fixed breakfast sets (Chikusa and English), and sides like baked beans and sausages can’t be ordered separately.

The sandwhiches are pockets of bliss served on thick toast sliced right on the spot. Whether you opt for tuna and ham, tomato and cheese or the egg salad—the variations are endless and made either hot in a cast-iron press, cold or on a half-open sandwich.

―Tired of Nescafe?‖
The sign hanging outside Chikusa recalls days where the only fix in town came in individual-sized, instant packs. Thankfully, those dry, dreary days are gone. Chikusa dips local, Nepali beans, freshly ground by the cup, mug or pot. And even its ice cubes are chilled from a batch of brew to prevent a watered-down cold coffee beverage.

In the last decade, an evident coffee culture has emerged in Kathmandu, dominated by franchised pleasure seats; whipped, sugared frappes and soundtracks on repeat. Luckily, Chikusa’s sign, however dated, reassures us that the real essence of the ‘coffee shop’ isn’t dead. Marco Polo

Jog south from the Moroccan Confectionery and look for “Real Coffee!” under the Lhasa Guesthouse

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An Evening with Kutumba, fundraiser for the Namche community health drik, 3 September, 5.30 pm onwards, Shangri-La Hotel, Lazimpat

Nepfest II, fledging bands showcase their musical talents, 9 September, 12.30 pm onwards, Fun Park, Bhrikuti Mandap, 9841721736, Break. 2 September, 8pm to 11pm, new ‘space rock’ band Space Cake refreshing stopover, great food and a trendy restobar for a
Face recognition

Apparantly the same area of the brain that deals with the memory of directions is also linked with face recognition. Some people cannot remember faces. Obviously, there are degrees of this problem depending on how our brains are wired with face recognition software.

Some of us are completely unable to recognise someone we had dinner with a few evenings ago! But once we are filled in on the conversation we had we are able to recognise the person.

My wife, who is very observant has been disappointed with me several times on these Kathmandu streets when I have driven past her (with my mind somewhere else) without any signs of recognition.

In these days of MRI scanners, people with overt prosopagnosia clearly show lesions on the underside of the temporal cortex of the brain when scanned. They say that the difference between the best face recognizers and the worst amongst the prosopagnosics is so pronounced that it is comparable to that between people with an IQ of 150 and those with an IQ of 50. But as with any bell curve, the vast majority are in the middle.

Severe, debilitating prosopagnosia is estimated to affect two percent of the population in the US. But relatively little thought is given to this problem compared to say dyslexia (remember Taree Zameen Par?). Teachers and others are increasingly aware of the special difficulties (and often the special gifts) that dyslexic children may have. But for people with severe face blindness, for now, there is not much else to do but share this problem with others who may suffer from this and rely on your ingenuity to get by in daily living.

The famous British anthropologist Jane Goodall who suffers from this problem says she would be better able to recognise her individual chimpanzees if she did not have mild prosopagnosia. 

Bikram Rai

Ride to school: Children being ferried to school on a tricycle in Lahan Bajar, Sunday

New Queen: Miss Nepal Malina Joshi with runner ups Anupama Aura Gurung and Sarina Maskey at the crowning on Tuesday.
NEW DELHI - At the Poorvanchal Hostel in Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in the late-1970s, Baburam Bhattarai was a quiet student, working on his PhD. Older JNU-ites remember Poorvanchal as being a far-flung residence on the enormous campus, built to people the place, like an outpost of sorts. It soon coloured itself red, with the Students’s Federation of India, the student wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), staking claim.

Remember this was the post-Emergency period in India’s history, when the Janata Party was slowly destroying the dream, before Indira Gandhi made her comeback in 1980. All this much, much before Mannmohan Singh tempted India’s radical elite into forgetting that a certain revolution, both with or without the barrel of the gun, could transform India into a more egalitarian country, besides keeping the promise on which the Maoists came to power.

But even in Nepal, the enthusiasm for revolution has waned. Kathmandu, in fact, will always be one up on Delhi because it dared to push for a non-violent people’s movement in 2006. Delhi can only rescue itself by hoping history will remember the consequential role it played in the 12-point agreement between the Maoists and an alliance of seven democratic parties, thereby allowing comrades like Bhattarai to come above ground and go for a career.

But what of the future? Bhattarai became prime minister the same week as another JNU alumni, Jayant Prasad, arrived in Kathmandu to be India’s new ambassador to Nepal. He feels the pulse, not only because his father, Birat Prasad, was India’s first ambassador to Nepal after a previous people’s movement of 1990. Back in Delhi, the joint secretary dealing with Nepal affairs at the External Affairs Ministry, always a crucial man in the way the Indian system functions, is Akhilesh Mishra. He also knows Nepal well because he served in Kathmandu in the late 1990s, during what is sometimes called the “golden period” under I K Gujral’s prime ministership.

Meanwhile, check out Bhattarai’s interview to some Indian journalists in late May, to give us a glimpse of what he thinks about the India-Nepal relationship. Asked by the Business Standard where things went wrong in India-Nepal relations, Bhattarai replied: “The problem lies with both of us... we were too ambitious, we thought we could do things on our own, while India underestimated our strength.” There’s another gem that could have been written by the Indian prime minister, considering it echoes a favourite thought about how we can choose our friends and enemies, but not our neighbours. Asked what he thought of the Indian establishment, Bhattarai answered: “We can’t change our neighbour. We have to depend on India, both economically and geographically. There is now some tacit understanding within our party in this regard.”

Prophetic words, or simply lip-synching in front of Indian journalists, hoping they are naïve enough to believe him? I would bet on the former. Bhattarai knows that too much water has flowed down the Koshi and that in many ways, his prime ministership constitutes the last chance to improve living conditions at home. After all, isn’t that the promise on which the Maoists came to power?

He also knows that he can’t do this without India’s help, especially since India is the roaring economic engine in the neighbourhood (Beijing is too far). Meanwhile, Jayant Prasad will likely keep his head down and volunteer India’s help in doing whatever Nepal wants: whether in writing the constitution, in the integration of Maoist fighters into the Nepal army, in rehabilitating those who cannot be integrated, helping build multi-purpose projects on Nepal’s many rivers.

It’s a special relationship, and this is a fragile moment. Delhi seems to understand that, and will work with both the Maoists as well as a “constructive” NC-UML opposition in Nepal. The feeling here is that it is up to Nepalis to write Nepal’s destiny, and for the moment Baburam Bhattarai seems very much a part of it.
Prime Minister Bhattarai may soon have a lot less to smile about

DEWAN RAI

In its desperation to get to power, the Maoists made a huge compromises in the last week’s parliament election for a new prime minister. It offered half the ministries to the Madhesi alliance to ensure the victory of its candidate, Baburam Bhattarai. He won comfortably with a margin of 105 votes.

The popular move to ride on a Mustang was a perfect score, and confirmed to a public largely positive about the new prime minister’s intellect and honesty. However, any prolonged delay in giving shape to the cabinet will invite criticism at a time when people are desperate to see immediate changes.

The 4-point deal, signed at the eleventh hour with the Madhesi alliance, once again exposes the fact that leaders enter into agreements without adequate homework, or perhaps with the deliberate intention of never keeping their promises.

Adviser to Baburam Bhattarai and politburo member, Devendra Poudel, says the media should not have a knee-jerk reaction to compromises in coalition agreements. “There is a lot of give and take, and there are many factors that come into play,” Poudel told us on Wednesday.

Maoist lawmaker Jaypuri Gharti had refused to join the last government demanding 33 percent representation for the women, sparking off a debate in the party which ultimately led different factions to unite against party chairman’s unilateral decision. Bhattarai seems to have learned a lesson from this.

And there are the members of what has come to be known as the “Dhobighat Cluster,” the hardliners from the Kiran faction that met in Patan last month to clip party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s wings. For Bhattarai, it’s a payback time to them too, especially senior leaders who have not been in power before.

The Madhesi alliance is also engaged in finalising the list of those that will join the government. “We have differences within the alliance on issues, not over the portfolios,” explains Raj Kishor Yadav, co-chairperson of Madhesi People’s Rights Forum (Republican), adding optimistically that the cabinet will take final shape very soon.

Bhattarai met NC president Sushil Koirala on Tuesday in a bid to bring the NC onboard. Koirala is reported to have advised the PM to make a significant progress in the peace process and implement the past agreement within the promised 45 days before NC could consider joining the government.

Personally, we don’t have any doubts about Bhattarai’s capability to deliver, but we are not sure if his party will cooperate,” says Upadhyay. But Maoist leader Paudel told Nepali Times Bhattarai has the full support of his party. “This time, the party unanimously passed two things: Bhattarai’s candidacy and the issue of integration,” he says. “We are very serious about the peace process.”

The only differences the Maoists and NC have is about integration, he added, it is not about numbers but of modality. The Maoists argue for a “dignified integration” which means recruiting their fighters as full soldiers, while NC says they can not be taken as regular NA soldiers.

“Dignified integration means recruiting our fighters as full-fledged NA soldiers,” Poudel says. NA has already recruited as many number of soldiers in five years of peace process as the numbers the Maoists have been demanding to be integrated.

The NC also has severe reservations about the four-point agreement, particularly the provision for mass amnesty to those accused of excesses during the conflict and the Madhes movement.

But, Upadhay adds: “Politics is full of possibilities, if significant progress is made in the peace process in 45 days, it will create an environment for the NC to join the government.”

He says NC will be supportive to the government even if it is in opposition and will evaluate its work on the basis of merit.

Prime Minister Bhattarai has his work cut out. Here is his check list in order of priority:

1. Complete the cabinet
2. Complete peace process in 45 days as promised
3. Keep NC and LML happy so they don’t throw spanner in works
4. Hand over keys as a symbolic step. But regrouping and compromises on integration will be more difficult to push through
5. Keep one eye on Chairman Dahal, so he doesn’t wreck things
6. Back track on amnesty provision on 4-point deal, this will be a major stumbling block with opposition and international community
7. Constitution, take the but by the horns on ethnic federalism and state structure
8. Show the presence of the state, tackle law and order
9. Improve investment climate, tame unions
10. Hunter down for 18-hour power cuts this winter
WVF Nepal, the global conservation organization leading international efforts for a living planet seeks applications from qualified Nepali candidates for the following full-time positions for a five-year USAID-funded project. If you are an achiever and willing to work with a diverse team in a multicultural environment with commitment and passion for what you believe in, you are highly encouraged to apply.

1. COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Major Responsibilities: The Communications Officer will be responsible for communicating success stories, managing branded image and overseeing the qualitative aspects of all communications and management.

Qualifications: A Bachelor’s degree, preferably in mass communications or a related field. It knowledge especially the use of Photoshop and other designing/web designing tools required. Candidate must have at least three years of relevant experience in a similar position or journalism/publications/communication works.

2. GRANTS & COMPLIANCE OFFICER

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of the Program Administrator, s/he will be responsible for the overseeing overall grants, consultancy and contracts. s/he will also be responsible for assisting the Program Administrator in carrying out financial functions.

Qualifications: A Bachelor’s degree in Business or a related field with at least three years of relevant experience in a similar position.

3. MONITORING & EVALUATION ASSISTANT - 3 (Based in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitwan)

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of the Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist, s/he will be primarily responsible for maintaining and updating the database system and will assist in implementation of monitoring framework and activities of the project.

Qualifications: A Bachelor’s degree in Environment Management or a related field with at least two years of work experience in monitoring and database management.

4. F&A Officer (Based in Pokhara)

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of the Project Manager, the F&A Officer will carry out all project accounting and administration duties including day to day office management, financial reporting and monthly bank reconciliation.

Qualifications: A Bachelor’s degree in Management and Knowledge on financial accounting and administration with at least three years of relevant experience. Experience in using TALLY software will be an added advantage.

5. DRIVERS - 2 (Based in Kathmandu and Pokhara)

Major Responsibilities: The Driver will manage the daily maintenance and servicing of office vehicles and assist with designated administrative duties in the office.

Qualifications: Middle school or higher education or SLC with at least three years of relevant experience in an International Organization including field experience. Must be competent in safe driving techniques with high manual dexterity, combined with auto maintenance skills. Knowledge of English language will be an added advantage.

6. MESSENGERS - 2 (Based in Kathmandu and Pokhara)

Major Responsibilities: The messenger will ensure good maintenance of the office at all times. s/he will ensure the timely delivery and collection of mail documents and banking transactions. s/he will also be responsible for submitting vis applications of staff to embassies and collection of passports.

Qualifications: Middle school or higher education or SLC with at least three years of relevant experience in an International Organization. Willingness to tackle a wide variety of tasks. Helpful, respectful, honest and a police attitude are essential. Some technical skills on minor repair works will be an advantage. Knowledge of English language will be an added advantage.

WVF Nepal also seeks applications from qualified Nepali candidates for the following full-time positions.

1. LANDSCAPE COORDINATOR - MOUNTAINS

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of the Conservation Program Director, s/he will be responsible for overall planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting on programs and projects. As an overall lead for the landscape program, s/he will provide visioning and leadership for effective implementation of programs and outcomes. S/he will actively assist the Conservation Program Director in developing and increasing partnerships and fundraising.

Qualifications: A Bachelor’s degree in Natural Resources Management, Environmental Science or a related field. Technically proficient and qualified in the field of conservation and natural resources management including a readiness to travel frequently to the project areas. At least eight years of relevant professional experience in program management and leadership.

2. PROGRAM OFFICER – CLIMATE CHANGE & FRESHWATER

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of the Program Manager-Climate Change, Energy & Freshwater, s/he will be primarily responsible for the planning and implementation of projects and activities of the Climate Change and Freshwater program. s/he will also be responsible for developing new concepts and ideas on Climate Change and Freshwater issues to facilitate fundraising activities.

Qualifications: A bachelor’s degree in Environment Management or a related field with at least three years of field experience in implementing and managing programs/projects with extensive knowledge and work experience on climate change and freshwater. Experience in wetland, river basin management and climate change issues is preferred.

3. PROGRAM OFFICER

Major Responsibilities: The Program Officer will be responsible for managing and administering WVF Nepal’s projects and will be involved in planning, implementation, coordination and communication with partners, stakeholders and donors. This position will require frequent field visits to interact with project staff and communities to get firsthand information and will also involve developing concepts and proposals.

Qualifications: A Bachelor’s degree or an MBA with at least three years of experience in a similar position. A position requires attention to detail, the ability to keep accurate financial records and the ability to effectively prioritize and work accurately under time constraints.

4. ACCOUNTS OFFICER

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of the Financial Controller, s/he will implement day-to-day accounting and financial functions in accordance with WVF Nepal’s accounting procedures.

Qualifications: A Bachelor’s degree in Commerce or an MBA with at least three years of experience in a similar position. This position requires attention to detail, the ability to keep accurate financial records and the ability to effectively prioritize and work accurately under time constraints.

5. FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION ASSISTANT

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of the Program Administrator, s/he will assist in all program administration duties and support the implementation of day-to-day financial and administrative functions including management of grants and agreements.

6. MARKETING & MARKETING ASSOCIATE

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of Communications & Marketing Manager, s/he will be responsible for writing, editing and overseeing the design of print and online materials such as case studies, publications and websites as well as maintaining the photo library. s/he will be actively involved in WVF’s business and industry engagement program and also provide support in organizing events and awareness campaigns.

Qualifications: A Bachelor’s degree, preferably in mass communications or a related field. Good photography skills will be an added advantage. Candidate must have at least three years of experience in marketing/communications/marketing.

7. FRONT OFFICE ASSISTANT/RECEPTIONIST

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of the Administrative Officer, s/he will perform all secretarial services including handling the reception, telephone inquiries, correspondence management and assisting in other administrative services.

8. PROJECT CO-MANAGER (Based in Tera)

Major Responsibilities: The Project Co-Manager will be responsible for the implementation of overall project activities including coordination, planning, implementation and monitoring. s/he will work in close coordination with all major partners and stakeholders from local to central levels to ensure maximum project output. s/he will keep interest in changing socio-political environment and respond strategically.

Qualifications: Master’s degree in NRM, Environmental Science or a related field is required with at least six years of experience in implementation of integrated conservation and development projects.

9. FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION OFFICER (Based in Tera)

Major Responsibilities: Under the direct supervision of the Project Co-Manager, the F&A Officer will carry out all project accounting and administration duties including day to day office management, financial reporting and monthly bank reconciliation.

Qualifications: A Bachelor’s degree in Commerce or Accountancy or a related field and knowledge on financial accounting and administration with at least three years of relevant experience. Working with TALLY software will be an added advantage.

Detailed TOR and the application form for the above mentioned positions can be downloaded from our website. Interested applicants are requested to complete the application form and return it to the address provided below. The deadline for submission of applications is 15 September 2011 (for the USAID-funded project position) and 8 September 2011 (for the re-advertised WWF positions). Please mention the position you are applying for as the subject. Emails without an application letter and WWF application form will not be entertained. Only short listed candidates will be informed.

Website: www.wvfnepal.org
Email: hr@wvfnepal.org

WWF is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Women and minorities are encouraged to apply for all positions.

Please join us in our mission to save life on Earth.
The International Day of the Disappeared was marked in the capital with some 40 relatives of people disappeared during the armed conflict coming together to demand truth and justice. Debasini Oli from Bardiya fainted while watching a clip at the National Human Rights Commission of the exhumation of a body. Her husband is among at least 1,400 relatives of people who are still listed as missing five years after the war ended.

National Network of Families of the Disappeared & Missing Nepal (NEFAD) was established by the relatives of those who were disappeared by either sides during the armed conflict. It organised a series of interactions and briefings for three days in the capital for people like Debasini so that their plight is heard by the government. Many relatives expressed their dissatisfaction over the lack of progress on cases of their disappeared relatives. They raised a collective voice against collective amnesty provision in the agreement between the Maoists and the Madhesis alliance as well as the watered down content of the bill on disappearances. They were also critical of a Maoist lawmaker who publicly spoke out against relatives of victims raising their voices for justice, and for making a distinction between those disappeared by the state and those disappeared by their party.

“If collective amnesty is granted then it will be our turn to revolt,” said Ratna Bahadur Ghimire from Jhapa whose 19-year-old son was disappeared by the police in Biratnagar eight years ago. “All the relatives of the disappeared people will come together to oppose any pardon for those responsible for war crimes.”

The co-ordinator of NEFAD, Ram Kumar Bhandari also had his father disappeared by the army. “It is only the victims who can forgive, or decide whom to forgive,” he said, “it is not up to the victimisers to decide on pardon.” Bhandari said if left unaddressed, the grief of the relatives of the disappeared could turn to revenge.

At one interaction on Tuesday Amnestiy Nepal’s director Rameshwor Nepal accused the Maoists were not doing enough for the victims. He said, “They are telling victims’ families, we got rid of the king, that is your justice. This is just irresponsible and unacceptable.”

POKHARA--Colleges and schools in Pokhara have benefited from the fees tourists pay to visit scenic spots. In what could be a model for nationwide budgeting, visitors’ fees earn Rs 10 million a year from entrance fees to Gupteshwor cave. Pokhara’s other tourist attractions, Mahendra and Chamere caves, have also helped Bindhyavasini High School build infrastructure and provide free education.

Letters/Public Expectation

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“NC is in a wait and watch mode. If the Maoist led government is able to complete the integration and rehabilitation process in 45 days, we will join their government.”

Abin Shrestha in Kathmandu, 31 August

There have been many reactions following the newly appointed Prime Minister Dr Baburam Bhattarai’s decision to travel in Mustang, the only four wheel drive vehicle assembled in Nepal. People thronged the streets from the president’s office to Singha Darbar to see the new prime minister in Mustang. Some called it cheap publicity and some took it as a gesture encouraging local products. Despite the criticism, Prime Minister Bhattarai’s decision signals towards taking the country’s economy on a self reliant path.

Bhattarai, during his tenure as the finance minister in 2008-09 was also strongly focussed on making the Nepali economy self-reliant through economic programs inclined towards socialism. Even though those programs were discontinued by successive governments, his efforts left a mark.

Although the car used by the prime minister is assembled in Nepal, all its parts are made abroad. His decision to travel in a locally made vehicle like the Mustang is praise worthy. But the environment to manufacture vehicles locally in Nepal cannot be created easily. It requires a long term commitment to economic independence. For this, Dr. Bhattarai needs to take concrete steps that will be given continuity even in the future. The question however remains whether or not the vehicle used by the PM will be the ‘state car’. It is yet to be gauged if the safety features of Mustang are adequate for the head of government’s security.
The roads in Kathmandu may have reached saturation point, there may be periodic fuel shortages, but all that doesn’t seem to deter people from investing in cars. Nepal’s roads and highways have vehicles from all over the world, even Nepali made Mustangs and Safa Tempos, jostling for space with motorcycles, bicycles, rickshaws, push carts, cattle, dogs and monkeys.

THE FACT THAT SO MANY AUTOMOBILE BRANDS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES HERE SAYS A LOT ABOUT THE MARKET,” SAYS DEEPAK AGRAWAL OF MORAANG AUTO WORKS, WHICH DISTRIBUTES SKODA. “OWNING A VEHICLE USED TO BE A LUXURY, BUT NOW IT HAS BECOME A NECESSITY.”

Indeed, the customer profile for cars is no longer limited to the rich and newly rich. Customers are as diverse as the models available. The positive sales graph for entry-level cars indicates that many motorcycle owners are moving up the market. And those who already own a car are looking for new models. Competition is fierce, so it’s a buyer’s market in terms of choice of quality, features, style, and price. Car dealers are looking to sweeten deals by providing good after-sale service, including through warranties, bank loans, free servicing and exchange facilities.

It fact, it was easy loans from banks and finance companies that created the boom in the auto market five years ago. However, the banking crisis and the general slowdown in the economy has affected sales. “But the last few months have been a bit slow,” admits Bardan Basnet of Agni Incorporated that distributes Mahindra. “The liquidity crunch hit not just the financial market but other industries like us who are dependent on it.” But with Dasain around the corner, dealers are hoping that the market will pick up. “Sales has been slow,” says Rupesh Sharma Bhatta of Laxmi Intercontinental that sells Hyundai. “But we can expect the market to expand.”

An indication of this faith in the market is an eagerness to bring in new models. “We recognise the potential of the market,” says Alok Joshi of Batas Brothers Motos, which recently relaunched Fiat in Nepal. “We are not short-term players and understand that as soon as the political and financial environments improve, the market will pick up.”

The automobile industry contributes 25 per cent of Nepal’s import duty revenues to the state’s coffers because of the staggering 238 per cent tax on vehicles which is comparable to Singapore. Considering the demand for automobiles, the expansion of Nepal’s road network, this is not likely to go down.

Says Honda’s distributor for Nepal and the head of NADA, Saurabh Jyoti: “What we want is for these duties to translate into infrastructure development, people will buy but the roads have to be expanded and improved to sustain the growth in the number of vehicles.” (See interview, p19)

Paavan Mathema

THE PRIME MINISTER HAS SET AN EXAMPLE BY GOING LOCAL, BUT WILL HE NOW INVEST SOME OF THE MONEY COLLECTED FROM AUTO TAXES INTO INFRASTRUCTURE?
NADA AUTO SHOW
7-11 September Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall, Kathmandu

SIMPLY CLEVER

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The Right Size For You.

From sleek European street to rugged roads of Nepal, manoeuvre it all with the multi-awards winning and highly praised compact, comfortable and courageous ŠKODA Yeti.
DIG Ganesh Raj Rai has just taken over as the capital’s traffic police, and realises that he is damned if he does and damned if he doesn’t.

The number of vehicles on the roads has increased 20 fold in the past 15 years, but the road network has remained more or less the same. Whatever Rai does, there is no way he can improve things dramatically unless some crucial link roads are added.

“Whatever we do will be piecemeal,” Rai admitted to Nepali Times in his office at the Metropolitan Traffic Police Division. “How long can we try to cope just by blowing a whistle?”

Rai also blames a lack of investment in advanced traffic management, poor traffic discipline on the part of drivers and pedestrians and lack of traffic police. “It’s a miracle traffic isn’t much worse than it already is,” he adds.

Rai says it all boils down to resources. “Adding manpower needs money, new traffic lights need money, adding roads and widening arteries need money.”

The capital’s roads are managed by, among others, the Department of Roads for repairs, the Department of Transport Management to register and regulate vehicles, the Traffic Police to supervise and enforce traffic regulations, the Ministry of Environment for monitoring air quality and the Metropolitan City has major stake in all this.

“There is lack of coordination and they don’t cooperate in traffic management,” Rai says, pinpointing the real issue.

The number of motorcycles registered in the valley has reached 500,000. To manage the traffic of about 1 million vehicles manually, his department has only 1,000 traffic police. “We need to at least double the number,” he explains.

The general sense of impunity also affects road users, who are not afraid to break the rules. Existing regulations need to be tightened and enforced.

“Our rules we made decades ago, they are all obsolete,” he adds.

A proposed new traffic bill is languishing in parliament because of other priorities. “I don’t know why the government is so indifferent to the traffic problem,” Rai says with visible anguish. “It affects everyone from the pedestrian to the president, they should all be trying to help out.”

Dewan Rai
Nepali Times: After the downturn earlier this year, are automobile sales picking up again?

Saurabh Jyoti: The market is in recession and it is at the lowest it has been in perhaps a decade. Car sales have drastically dipped by 30 per cent. The pre-Dasain excitement is yet to pick up.

What are the main reasons for this slowdown?

The foremost reason is negligence on the part of the government towards the auto industry. Road transportation is the engine of this country’s growth, it is the only option. Yet, the tax rates for vehicles in this country are among the highest in the world. Car dealers need to pay the road tax even before they sell the vehicle. But we see scant proof that all these taxes are being re-invested in infrastructure. In fact the opposite is true, the existing roads are falling apart. Secondly, the availability of auto loans has become difficult, with interest rates going as high as 18 per cent. The high price and lack of finance have made consumers cautious and skeptical.

So what role is NADA playing to jumpstart sales?

NADA has been working with government officials on the new transport policy and emission law. We have been pushing for 15 per cent reduction in the excise duty. People say that there are already too many cars on the road, but the problem is that the contribution of these vehicles to the national revenue is not being invested to expand and maintain the road network.

Now that we see the prime minister riding a Nepal-assembled vehicle, are we ready to move from solely retail to a manufacturing auto market as well? An auto plant requires huge investment. If the government provides a conducive and secure environment, then people will be willing to put in their money. More immediately, the sales volume of motorcycles we have can justify opening a local assembly plant.
Get on with it, Tonga

Don’t believe for a moment that a consensus government is not possible. After all, there are districts where the Kangrejas, Budhies, Ehmaleys and Madhesis are all working together in total harmony. In Biratnagar, the YCL, VM and Tarai militants all work together in extortion and protection rackets and divide up the spoils. Why can’t this be replicated in the national govt?

The prime minister’s decision to induct a Made in Nepal jeep as his official bahn has put other ministers, former prime ministers, and bureau-cats under the scanner. Ministers for whom carnapping SUVs has been SOP are in the horns of a dilemma. The list of ex-prime ministers, including the guy who used to distribute Pajeros to buy off MPs in the 1990s. But not only did he use to induct a Made in Nepal jeep as his official bahn but also took home his official Landcruiser, and then when it got too embarrassing had the Makunay Sarkar buy it for him for two karods. JNK got so attached to the 4WD he appropriated from the Chamelia Hydroelectric Project that he rode while in office and has decided to keep. NEA says there are now more than 70 Prados, Nissan Trails, Pajeros in the custody of former govt officials. Other offenders include successive home ministers, including Bhem Royal, Leftist God Bum Dev, Comrade KP and even Babuji. JNK got so attached to the Prado, what’s the point? I’d rather ride a mule.

After Gokarna Bista went home in a cab and Babuji started going around in a Mustang, there is strong moral pressure on some ministerial aspirants wanting govt posts. After all, they agreed to back the Com Laddhoj for the perks of office. “If there is no office, what’s the point?”

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After Gokarna Bista went home in a cab and Babuji started going around in a Mustang, there is strong moral pressure on some ministerial aspirants wanting govt posts. After all, they agreed to back the Com Laddhoj for the perks of office. “If there is no office, what’s the point?”

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