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MIN RATNA BAURACHARYA

CYBERSPHERE

More Nepalis today are getting information online than the number of readers of all dailies combined. This digital community is making up Nepal's new public sphere. Social media accords its users much more power to participate in the production of information, it is interactive, immediate and has multimedia content. Many of the estimated 3.5 million new voters in the next election will be Internet users. This crowd to protest a Maoist five-day strike in Kathmandu in 2010 (above) was mobilised largely by net activists. As with all media content, there are the good, the bad and the ugly. The Internet is a double-edged sword whose very freedom provides a forum for those against freedom.

EDITORIAL

Antisocial media
page 2



Digital multiply
by Rubeena Mahato
page 4-5

BREAK AWAY

There is more to the CPN, M breaking away from the UCPN-Maoist than a move from a dash to a comma. The cause of the breakup was less ideology and more centralisation of brute power, state power and wealth in the hands of the Maoist chairman.

BY THE WAY
by ANURAG ACHARYA page 11

ANALYSIS
by KANAK MANI DIXIT page 12-13

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ANTISOCIAL MEDIA

The global digital divide between those who are wired and those who are not is mirrored within Nepal. Affordability and accessibility issues have kept large sections of the population out of reach of the Internet. The digital divide, in fact, is just an extension of the income divide and education divide in Asia’s most unequal country.

However, things are changing fast. The number of Facebook users in Nepal has crossed 1.4 million and is growing fast, there has been a sudden surge in Twitter accounts among Nepalis, and more and more people are reading news online. Many of the five million or so Nepalis who live and work abroad are hooked up to social media so they can keep in touch with home.

The Nepali media has so far not been affected by the migration of eyeballs to online sites, although print is suffering from advertisers moving to tv. But as the number of people getting news on PCs, laptops and smart phones increases, paper media will shed readers in the coming years. The new media is born, but the old is not dead yet.

Into this transition has arrived social media: blogs, email groups, online media, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and what-have-you. Like it or not, this is going to affect politics because the young middle-class is getting wired in increasing numbers. A roundtable on social media organised this week by Himalmedia heard that more than half of Nepal’s population is under 21. One way to look at this is as an alarming demographic bulge, but it also has huge political implications and opportunities. However, political parties and most leaders seem to be behind the



In this dynamic, interactive and instantaneous public cyber-sphere, opinions being made and spread are good, bad and sometimes ugly.

curve in understanding new media even though it is going to have an increasingly important role in future elections.

For now, social media is a free-for-all. It is still dominated by the personal, but is increasingly being used as a political platform by citizens to air their views. It is in this dynamic, interactive and instantaneous public cyber-sphere that opinions are increasingly being made and spread. News of the Maoist split spread right across Nepal and to the diaspora through Twitter and Facebook, long before it “broke” on mainstream media sites.

But, as with all media there are the good, the bad and

the ugly. At a time when the mainstream press is being co-opted, coerced or bought off by political parties not known for their adherence to democratic and free press values, social media holds out the hope of keeping the democratic space open.

The Internet is a double-edged sword. Just as it can help mobilise pro-democracy uprisings, its very freedom also provides a forum for those against freedom. Not just in Nepal but across the world, social media instead the levelling the playing field and being a marketplace of ideas, fragments society into thought ghettos. Instead of building bridges, it fosters echo chambers for corrosive dialogue.

Nepali language social media, instead of bringing society together has turned increasingly into a carrier of hate speech across ethnic lines. Racism, intolerance, incitement to violence and open threats characterise many of the postings on social media sites. They range from absurd biological determinism to support for supposed superiority of certain castes, to vitriolic postings that resemble anti-Semitic rhetoric elsewhere.

This may be a way to let off steam, dissipate anger, and Nepal’s strong inter-ethnic bonds may be able to withstand the onslaught, but it does have the potential to devastate social harmony and take communal ties to breaking point.

Fortunately most Nepalis, wired or otherwise, value peace and harmony and want grievances addressed without violence and conflict. This silent majority must speak out and interact more on social media to drown out the voices of hatred and racism.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

THE ASSASSIN CREED

A very appropriate editorial about the growing impunity in our country, however, I disagree with the writer’s suggestion that we should “come to our own conclusions on what [the assassinations] portend, and who was responsible” (‘The assassin creed’, editorial, #609). This will lead to too many fingers pointed at too many directions, and add to the panic. The solution is to demand a prompt investigation and the Supreme Court should take the lead because a member of the legal fraternity was murdered.

Gyanu Adhikari

- Our police force is inept and corrupt just like most government agencies. So who do ordinary and defenseless Nepalis turn to for security and protection?

Kiran Rai

SINGING FOR NEPAL

I find a rare voice of compassion and rationality in Amrit Gurung’s writing, something that is lacking in the discourse of cynical couch potatoes in Kathmandu (‘Singing for Nepal’, #609). Gurung is doing the work of the traditional troubadour, travelling the country and bringing the voice of the silent majorities to those who want to push the country into violent ethnic conflict. Nepal is fortunate to have him.

Jan

- Thank you Amrit Gurung for being the voice of hope and reason in a country that seems to have lost it. Our Brahmin and Janajati leaders have failed us; it’s time for

people like him to lead Nepal.

Purba Rai

- I fully agree with the writer’s views. We need more people like him in place of Dahal, Nepal, Poudel and Ang Kaji Sherpa. Today if anyone talks about unity, they are immediately accused of ‘bahunbad’. But those who want respect and recognition must first understand that they too need to respect others.

Nagarik

- This is a very well-written and heart-felt piece. It should be translated into Nepali and printed in *Himal* and other dailies. ‘Unity’ and ‘nationalism’ have suddenly become bad words. But who benefits from undermining Nepali nationalism and unity? Not us Nepalis.

Hem Thapa

- Amrit Gurung speaks the truth. Many Nepali “nationalistic” songs are products of the Panchayat era where patriotism was manufactured in large scale. Nepal’s true unity lies in the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity that Gurung is celebrating.

Rabin

- I like how Gurung expresses his love for the motherland and encourages us to remain united despite our ethnic differences. Like him, generations of Nepalis worldwide have been inspired by Siddhicharan’s words. However, I disagree when Gurung calls certain nationalistic songs “hollow” and derides them for celebrating “insecure nationalism”. It is his personal opinion, but many other Nepalis like those songs.

Sanjay Shrestha

- Gurung’s beautiful songs have always brought Nepalis together and I appreciate his article’s message. However, without correcting historical injustices, the meaning of unity and nationalism is pointless. For centuries, marginalised groups have been deprived of their rights in the name of unity while the privileged classes continue living with their false sense of entitlement. Our society cannot thrive on such superficial foundation. We must first get rid of our historical baggage and then talk about nationalism.

Abc

- It’s nice to talk about patriotism and love for one’s country. But claiming that ethnicity-based federalism will rob the country of its unity is just baseless and very biased.

Saran

- I feel that waving flags and singing about unity aren’t enough. True nationalism and unity are possible only when there is equality and respect among all Nepalis.

SL

PARADIGM SHRIFT

Kudos to Rubeena Mahato for boldly highlighting the political story behind the recent change of editors in one of the largest media houses in Nepal (‘Paradigm shrift’, #609). No wonder a paper that was known for taking a strong position on democracy, democratic values and norms, suddenly switched to the left. Selling shares to a politician earned the publishers big bucks in the short-term. But newspapers run by politicians and parties are not really newspapers,

they are political pamphlets. And the media house will lose both money and readers in the long run.

Dinesh

- To have a really independent media, Nepal must switch to digital media. This way, publishing houses will be free from the pressures of dwindling revenues and journalists won’t have to beg or become preys of criminal politicians. All you need is a good computer and fast internet.

Srijana Shrestha

- Politicisation of the media is not just a Nepal-specific problem, it happens all around the world. Until journalism is perceived as a business, and not a social service, this trend will exist. More than the media houses, we should blame the capitalist system we live in.

Naran

- It’s ironic that *Nepali Times* is writing about publications losing their political independence, when its sister publication *Himal* has become UML’s mouthpiece. We used to take *Himal* seriously when growing up, but no longer. Until someone starts a professional and non-partisan media outlet in Nepal, Rubeena Mahato and other good journalists should take a break.

Sajin

DESPAIR AND HOPE

This is an excellent article by Dewan Rai on the predicaments of yarsa collectors (‘Despair and hope in Dolpo’ #609). We have similar stories from Manang where yarsagumba pickers from Gorkha

district come in thousands, poorly dressed, wearing only flip-flops, and completely unprepared for the high altitude cold. There are long queues outside the Himalaya Rescue Association aid post in Manang where people suffering from pre-existing conditions come in hopes of finding a quick cure so that they can continue their search for the caterpillar fungus.

Buddha Basnyat

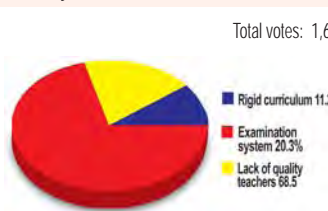
- Dwindling yarsa harvests point to the failure of the state’s agricultural policies. If the government can devise scientific and sustainable ways to increase and regulate production, yarsagumba has the potential to massively boost Nepal’s economy and help attract foreign investors. They could even be sold as value added products not just to China, but health and pharmaceutical industries around the world.

Raju Adhikari



nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #610

Q. The number of students passing SLC test has been consistently low because of:



Weekly Internet Poll # 611. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you think the split in UCPN-M will weaken the largest party?



SIMON ROBINS

As Nepal's entire system of governance creaks to the point of collapse, it may seem a strange time to go back to the conflict and ask about its victims.

But the problem with Nepal's politics is exactly that the legacy of violence remains unaddressed. Nepal's politics is the exclusive realm of parties that are top-down and undemocratic, with no accountability to their members, never mind their electors. This political culture allows the interests of ruled and rulers to be so divergent.

The history of efforts to address Nepal's violent past has been a stalemate, with no action taken for victims beyond a series of highly politicised payments that appear to be an effort to buy their silence. Victims of the conflict who have been most impacted by violations have been passive spectators to this non-process, objects of transitional justice rather than agents of it.

Civil society, supported by foreign donors, has been advocating a judicial process and truth about the past, but this had been done on behalf of victims rather than with them, emphasising and reinforcing the marginalisation that both facilitated violations and heightened their impact.

Human rights activism has come largely from the urban elite, while most victims of the conflict are poor and rural, with marginalised communities over-represented. After five years of advocacy a Truth Commission or an inquiry into disappearances, never mind a judicial process, seems as remote as ever. The end of the CA means the end for the moment of the struggle for legislative routes to truth, justice and reparation for victims.

The families of the disappeared are one of the defining legacies of Nepal's conflict and of the failure to address the violence of the past. More than 1,400 families still wait for news of loved ones missing from the conflict. In many districts families of the disappeared have come together to share their experiences, find



NEFAD

Giving conflict victims a voice

Those most directly affected by the war can play a role in addressing its legacy

solidarity and ways both to cope with the ambiguity of their loss and to campaign for an addressing of their needs.

In Bardiya, where more than 250 are missing, the Conflict Victims Committee (CVC) has brought families together in solidarity, making links to other organisations that can assist, offering financial support, campaigning locally and representing families in Kathmandu.

This represents an alternative modality for the fight for their rights to that of a civil society largely based in the capital, with victims representing themselves as part of a democratically constituted membership organisation that

can reflect their own hopes and ambitions. CVC has been joined around the country by other district Family Associations, all rooted in their communities and seeking to make a difference for families where they are and on their terms. The impact they are having is significant, not just in addressing the emotional and social challenges families face, but achieving reconciliation across the divides of the conflict as victims realise their shared interests.

To have a voice in Kathmandu, 25 district Family Associations of the disappeared have come together as the National Network of Families of the Disappeared and Missing (NEFAD) to gain a national

presence. Their aim is to show that dealing with the past is not something confined to the capital, but must be done in the rural communities where conflict was most intense.

The impact of mobilisation can be dramatic: Family Associations have seen family members from the most disempowered sections of Nepali society, Janajatis, Dalits, Madhesis, and above all women, radically changed by their participation. One woman described herself as 'transformed by action' through her engagement with her local Association. Such activity is socially transformative, challenging the traditional roles that women and others play in

society and the stigma that has resulted from their sons and husbands being missing.

Poverty characterises the lives of most victims, worsened by the loss of breadwinners. How can a woman doing daily labour to feed her children be expected to sacrifice a day's wages to attend a meeting or hold a placard outside the CDO office? As a result, the leaders of the Family Associations are predominantly men, despite most active members being wives and mothers of the disappeared. Livelihood issues must therefore be addressed first.

The challenge now is for donors who constantly talk of their commitment to building peace in Nepal, but who have to date largely ignored victims and their organisations, to show their support to ensure that those most affected by Nepal's conflict can play a role in addressing its legacies. 📌

 Simon Robins has worked with conflict victims in Nepal since he worked with the International Committee of the Red Cross in Nepalganj from 2005-7.
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The next people's war, by Simon Robins #572

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Digital multiply

The silent majority with moderate views need to counter hate speech on social media

RUBEENA MAHATO

Amidst hype about the recent surge in social media use in Nepal, there is legitimate scepticism about its role in a country where the literacy rate is barely 65 per cent.

Can the Internet ever be the panacea that it is made out to be given the huge digital divide? After all, it is mainly urban, middle-class Nepalis who are wired, and most of those live inside Kathmandu's Ring Road.

But everything is changing so fast that the impact of social media and the Internet needs to be re-addressed. Technology has played a part in boosting the Internet penetration rate to over 15 per cent. The other factor is the large diaspora population, especially gulf migrants which uses it for news as well as to communicate with families back home.

There are now over 1.45 million Facebook users in Nepal and although this is less than five per cent of the country's population, it is still greater than the readership of

all major daily newspapers in Nepal combined.

There are also significant number of Nepalis who throng to blogs, internet fora, online news portals, Facebook, Youtube and Twitter to keep tabs on national issues, usually with sharp, no-holds-barred opinions.

Together, this online community of social media users makes up Nepal's new public sphere which used to be limited to a small section of newspaper readers and writers. Social media accords its users much more power to participate in the production of information, it is interactive, immediate and has multimedia content.

As participants of a Himalmedia Social Media Roundtable this week noted, it is no longer possible to ignore the power of social media and its influence on forming and shaping public opinion. And this influence will only grow in the years to come.

"Social media rose to prominence once it made a transition from the personal

to the political," explained Santosh Sigdel, a human rights lawyer, "many Nepalis are using Facebook and Twitter to express and discuss political opinions, not just to post family pictures."

However, Nepal's established media houses continue to treat online as an after-thought because advertisers still prefer hardcopy. This is also reflected in the greater importance journalists accord to hardcopy deadlines.

"My first concern when uploading exclusive news online is how much to reveal so that a rival paper won't use it in tomorrow's edition," says Binita Dahal, a political reporter with

Nagarik.

Increasingly, as elsewhere, Nepalis are first hearing of an event on Facebook or Twitter. The Maoist split made it to Twitter long before it was on news portals, or breaking news on tv. And by tomorrow morning's hardcopy editions, it was old hat. Timelines of tech-savvy reporters routinely carry scoops that do not even make it to the mainstream press.

YouTube



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: Sunita Rai and Amrita Rai of Deusa, Solu use internet for work and entertainment.

The run up to the constitution deadline saw a spike in postings, and the Internet became a virtual battleground as netizens engaged in debates on federalism based on identity.

Economic researcher and analyst, Chandan Sapkota, says

that comments are determined by the surnames or ethnic background of the writer rather than by the issues being addressed. "There is a clear clustering of people on the basis of ideological leanings and people are being increasingly intolerant and radicalised."

Aakar Anil, a blogger and tech enthusiast makes a similar observation. "You are not judged on the basis



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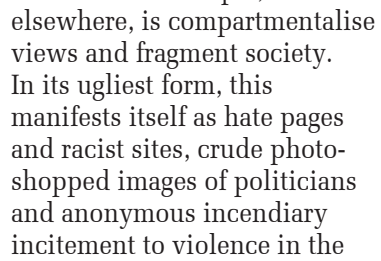
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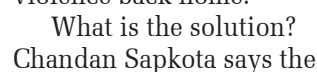
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Often it becomes difficult to deal with targeted attacks by groups and lobbies with political and ideological leanings. The result is that few people with extreme opinions, and those who shout the loudest, dominate the discourse



Arjun Dhakal, coordinator of the popular, intellectual and academic listserv, NNSD, says even there debates often have a way of getting boiled down to their lowest denominator. He tries to regulate that by moderating posts, but inevitably as the discourse gets more polarised, postings on NNSD have also become



“Gagan Thapa has more than 50,000 likes on Facebook,” he says, “he can mobilise this mass for great causes if he tries.” There are going to be some 3.5 million newly eligible voters in the coming election which is also the group that uses social media the most. 

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STUTI SHARMA



While families splurge on furniture and decoration for their bedrooms and living rooms, bathrooms are usually an afterthought, tucked away in a dark dingy corner of the

house. But thankfully, things are changing as urban Nepalis realise the importance of hygienic and airy bathrooms. Bathrooms reflect an owner's lifestyle. And it doesn't make sense to have a luxurious,

professionally designed living room, if your guest can follow her nose to the bathroom. "Architects and home-owners are slowly beginning to give priority to bathrooms," says Yogendra

Bajracharya of Nepal Marble Bath House which has been in business for the last 15 years. He adds, "Urban Nepalis are becoming increasingly conscious about design and use of space and are even willing to

spend big bucks." Sanitary ware stores in the capital offer a extensive range of products in contemporary designs with high safety features, catering to the demands of urban homes. While



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durability is still the most important factor, store owners say customers now think about aesthetics as well.

"Most of our customers still look for mid-range sanitary products and prefer durability over style," says Sanjay Kedia of Rajesh Sanitary Ware. "However, there is a gradual rise in the demand for high-end goods like Jacuzzis, steam cabins, and shower enclosures."

With an diverse range of innovative products, clients don't have to compromise on design and even smaller bathrooms can be cleverly utilised. "Products like shower enclosures have revolutionised bathing and added elegance to bathrooms," says Rajesh Budhiya of Rukmani International.

Slippery tiles and sharp edges make bathrooms accident-prone spaces especially for the elderly. Now new designs can be incorporated to improve safety. "Coarse bathroom tiles made of non-glazed ceramics can be used to minimise slipperiness of bathroom tiles," explains Birbal Dugar of Dugar Iron and Steels.

Even something as trivial as burn accidents caused by hot water can be avoided. "We offer innovative taps which automatically set the water temperature below 40° C," says Budhiya.

Hygienic and easy-to-clean features are also widely available. "Rust-proof PVC pipes which do not allow bacteria to breed inside their inner surface are very popular these days," says Bijaya Ray of Mangalam Industries.

Nepal's sanitary ware industry relies heavily on imports from China, India, Spain and Italy. While custom duty on bathroom installations is low, duty on tiles can reach up to 70 per cent.

Prakash Bajracharya of Bajra and Bajracharya says, "Construction business has slowed down recently



and this has affected our business. Political instability also increases the risk of our investments."

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EVENTS



NOMADS OF WESTERN TIBET: THIRTY YEARS OF CHANGE, a talk and powerpoint presentation by Cynthia Beall about Tibetan nomads and their way of life. *22 June, 7pm, Indigo Gallery, call Rabintra Shakya at 9851072333 or Indigo at 4412580 to reserve seats*

Collision, artist Binod Pradhan presents a series of paintings which depict nature fused into urban landscapes. *5 June to 30 June, 5.30 pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Babar Mahal*

Exhibition on Everest, a photography exhibition by Jeff Botz which showcases Mount Everest in its true glory. *6 June to 6 July, 9.30 am to 5pm, Image Ark Studio, Kulimha Tole, Patan, 9813186573*

Third Pakistan Products Exhibition 2012, from kitchen ware to jewellery, visit this exuberant fair which also features authentic Pakistani food. *20 to 26 June, 11am to 6pm, DECC, United World Trade Centre, Tripureshwar*

In Search of Peace, Bhairaj Maharjan depicts various forms of Buddha in his art exhibition. *5 to 30 June, 5.30 pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Babar Mahal*

Maya, M. Art Theatre and Sarvanam present *Maya*, a drama written by Hari Maya Bhetwal. *Rs 100 (50 per cent off for students), 15 June to 29 June, 5.30 pm, Sarvanam Theatre, 4438947, www.sarvanam.org*

Football Mania, enjoy the Euro Cup semi finals at Le Sherpa with Dj KD and drinks to last the entire game. *Rs 1000 (two complimentary drinks), 22 June, 8.30 pm onwards, Le Sherpa, Pani Pokhari*

Gazaab Social Ventures, a five-day competition and workshop where participants will get to network with prominent Nepali entrepreneurs. The winners of the competition will receive Rs 500,000 to start their own venture. *Deadline for applications is 24 June, 2 July to 6 July, 9am to 6pm*

MUSIC

Nepfest IV, Nepfest is set to return to delight music enthusiasts with Decapitated this September. *8 September, 12.45 pm, Fun Park, Bhrikuti Mandap*

Letting off Steam, Indian Cultural Centre presents a live performance by Abhaya & the Steam Injuns. *22 June, 5.30 pm onwards, Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari, 4412715, icc.kathmandu@gmail.com*

World Music Day, celebrate World Music Day with Broken Butterfly featuring Prakriti Deuja and other performances. *23 June, 6.30 pm to 10pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel*

Fete de la Musique, enjoy a classical music program to celebrate the festival of music. *23 June, 3pm, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka*

Nojazz Concert, what better way to enjoy fete de la musique than to attend a nojazz concert. *28 June, 6pm, Nepal Academy Hall*

DINING

Lorry's, let Italian, Mexican and continental dishes excite your taste buds in this cosy restaurant. *Jhamsikhel*

Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Café, enjoy wood-fired pizza, homemade pastas and the one and only Tibetan gyakok. *Boudha, 012130681, 9841484408*



8 DEGREES, from lemon lassis to spicy pork stews, 8 degrees is a great place to try continental dishes. *Jhamsikhel*

Imago Dei, be it casual hangouts or business meetings, Imago Dei is the place for you. *Nag Pokhari*



EVEREST STEAK HOUSE, an old-school joint for everything steak. A sanctuary for meat-lovers. *Thamel, near Chhetrapati Chok, 4260471*

Kaiser Cafe Restaurant & Bar, have a BBQ lunch and a glass of wine or beer inside the peaceful Garden of Dreams. *Thamel, 4425341*

Café Soma, enjoy scrumptious brunch and indulge in crepes with sugar and lemon. *Jhamsikhel*

New Tushita Restaurant, relaxing ambience and good food. Don't miss out on their penne with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. *Lazimpat, 44432957*

Salt and Pepper, a resto-lounge with a wide variety of dishes to choose from like Hakka Noodles, Hong Kong Chicken and Honey Chili Potatoes. *Lakeside, Pokhara*

Black and White Café, a great place to spend a quiet afternoon surfing the net with exquisite bakery items like the Swiss apple pie and chocolate crepe with homemade icecream. *Lakeside, Pokhara*

Café Du Temple, famous for its delicious food, warm ambience and a beautiful roof top view. *Patan Durbar Square, 5527127*

Saigon Pho, spacious interior with authentic Vietnamese dishes. *Lazimpat*



THE HERITAGE, escape the hodgepodge of the tourist hub as you relish delights like paella and panna cotta. *Thamel*

Bronco Billy, a new restaurant in town offering Tex-Mex and Indian dishes. They make their own corn tortillas, which gets a big thumbs-up. But make sure to also try their margaritas. *Pulchowk, opposite Namaste Supermarket*



VESPER CAFÉ, has a quaint outdoor patio good for leisurely weekend brunch. Serves good salads, and steak-wraps. *Jhamsikhel*

ANOTHER MONDAY

MOLLY JO GOREVAN

It's Monday night in Lazimpat, traffic slows, shop windows darken. Live music pulls you down an alley to a lit doorway. Up the narrow stairs, the music swells, and then you are inside. People are seated at low wooden tables with beers. Fumes from the kitchen below mix with cigarette smoke.

Steaming plates of alu dum or momos are ferried to customers through the squeeze of people. The wall space is crammed with fading black and white photographs of Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Parker, and Duke Ellington. An enormous poster of Miles Davis's face, eyes closed in ecstasy, is plastered behind the drummer. This is Jazz Upstairs, and Ramshackle, the blues band which plays every Monday, has just launched into a mournful, swinging rendition of Jerry Reed's *Bright*



Lights, Big City.

Marcus Dengate plays moody slap-bass solos, referring to his bass as his "wife". In the middle of a song he'll sometimes call out for "fuel" (a refill of whisky.) He is a familiar face on the Kathmandu music circuit. Rishav Acharya is a young drummer born and raised in Kathmandu, and plays with four bands including Silver Wind Quartet, the jazz band that performs at Jazz Upstairs every Wednesday and Saturday. Acharya is a versatile player, adaptable to any style

and always dynamic.

The singer and guitarist Desmond is rail thin. He brings his face close to the microphone with a kind of wonder you'd expect from a man much younger. Long, wavy white hair tucked under a straw fedora, his mouth invisible beneath his white moustache, Desmond sings every song with disarming innocence. His voice is made for the blues: half-growl, half-sweetness—always on the verge of breaking—a twangy ribbon of sound. He has the swagger of a man who has lived

through everything. His guitar solos are moving and powerful and yet there is always a lightness to Desmond's playing that infuses even the blackest tune with levity—a sudden guitar riff that sounds insubstantial as The Beach Boys.

This balance of deadly seriousness and playfulness is at the centre of Desmond's understanding of the blues. "Inside it," he says softly, "there's this wellspring of joy. People might think the blues are gloomy, but you don't listen to the blues to sit and weep into your beer." Over the course of the night, Ramshackle performs Freddie King's *Hide Away*, Buddy Guys's *Nineteen Years Old*, Neil Young's *Hey Hey My My*, Hendrix's *Little Wing*, and many others.

Ramshackle's unpolished style infuses old hits with rawness. One song Ramshackle performs is haunting—it has a bare-boned, gentle melody that repeats, gathering emotional resonance with each repetition. Most of the song's momentum is provided by the lyrics. "Sirens wail / words all fail / to describe the thunder / of your blood in my head." Afterwards, Desmond confesses the song is his own composition, entitled *Gone Girl*.

Jazz Upstairs may be demolished soon, its days are numbered. Desmond says before bowing out: "Let's hope we'll be back here for another Monday." 🇳🇵

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Caffe Concerto, for the best pizzas and ice-cream in town, their Italian dishes and Australian red wine are a must. *Lakeside, Pokhara*



FLAVOUR, this newly opened restaurant promises to pack a punch with its Chicken Sub and Bratwurst. *Pulchowk*

Monsoon Bar, try the monsoon bar for grilled delights and mouth watering pizzas. *Lakeside, Pokhara, 9841244704, 9804172540*

La Pizzeria, while the eatery stays true to its name it also has some added charm like Italian coffee, pizza delivery services and a wide selection of wine. *Lakeside, Pokhara*

G Café, spic and span with a palatable menu, this restaurant is definitely worth a visit. *Bouddha*

Comfort Zone, expansive restobar with a host of cocktails and barbeque meals. *Thamel*



CAFEREENA, the extensive menu has something for everyone. Try their famous chips chili. *Sherpa Mall, Durbar Marg*

Dhaba, for an excellent range of North Indian delicacies, try their unbeatable Kashmiri Gosht. *Thapathali*

Bhojan Griha, traditional Nepali restaurant that serves great local food with folk music and dance. *Dillibajar*

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SOMEPLACE ELSE

VOOTOO



PICS: RUBY TUESDAY

Vootoo Food Voutique in Lazimpat is owned by DJ Raju along with Ashutosh Shrestha and Sanjay Gupta. They claim to be avid foodies and this is their endeavour to bring fine food at affordable prices to fellow Kathmanduites. Vootoo, which is an anglicised version of the Newari bhutu or kitchen, is a snazzier and more expensive version of the bhattis that dot the streets of Kathmandu.

It boasts a large open terrace and comfortable sofas and is a good spot to kill a few hours with a glass of beer while soaking up the sounds of the city. It's clean and spare and the owners have made efforts to give it a Nepali touch by having lamp shades made out of iron kadais and aluminum wash bowls- ubiquitous items in every self-respecting Nepali kitchen. Soothing music streams

through the speakers, and the ambience is inviting and non-intimidating.

The menu sports items that will shock, excite and disgust patrons, depending on how much they are used to Newari delicacies. There are stuffed and fried goat lungs, buffalo tripe filled with said animal's bone marrow, raw minced meat, tongue, brain, ears. Think of any organ and in all likelihood it's on the menu. There is also Nepali style BBQ (sekuwa) and fried soya beans (*bhatmas sadeko*) and roasted peanuts (*badaam sadeko*) along with spicy potato pickle (*piro alu ko achar*). And all of this can be washed down with a multitude of beverages from the very well-stocked bar.



But, and this is a big but, a restaurant is ultimately judged by its food and sometimes more importantly the service. If I walked into a bhatti, I could have ordered the same dishes, and the surly *sauji* or *sauni* would probably plunk the plates in front of me and not say a word. I got pretty much the same treatment at Vootoo albeit slightly more hygienic. Having to wait for a glass of water, dealing with a brusque waiter who would rather be doing something else and to top it all, a strand of hair floating in my momo sauce completely dampened my experience.

The rest of the meal was satisfactory. I recommend the Vootoo Alu (Rs 120), thick potato wedges in a crispy, crumbly

crust served with spicy tomato sauce and mayonnaise. The buff momos (Rs 120) themselves are quite tasty and not saturated with masala, the achar, without the offending hair, is nice, cold and tangy. The pork chop (Rs 390) is tender and well seasoned. The chicken curry with rice (Rs 190) could have been better. The pieces of meat were succulent and delicious, but they were doused in sauce overpowered with cloves that just served to drown all the other flavours.

Vootoo is definitely a nice place and I would tell people to give it a try because of its accesibilty and reasonable price. However, a fancy name and fancier premises do not guarantee a fine dining experience. It's about delivering what is expected and showing commitment towards your guests. Vootoo would do well to invest in training its staff to be friendlier and more hospitable.

Also, there is a 40 minute wait for *yomari*, the traditional Newari sweetmeat made of rice dough stuffed with molasses, so skip the only other option- ice cream and head downstairs to Coffee Escape and indulge in some creamy cheese cake with a pot of Earl Gray tea, remedies guaranteed to banish thoughts of the not-so-nice meal you just endured upstairs.

Ruby Tuesday

At the mouth of Lazimpat, near the rear end of Narayanhiti Museum, inside the big white gates opposite Hotel Ambassador. Go around the back after the parked cars and up a flight of stairs.



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MUST SEE

Sophia Pande

Ridley Scott, the undeniable genius, who has made films like the first *Alien* (1979), *Blade Runner* (1982), *Thelma & Louise* (1991), *Gladiator* (2000), and *Black Hawk Down* (2001), is also the author of some unfortunate, downright terrible films like *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), and *American Gangster* (2007). Nonetheless, his place on the list of groundbreaking, exceptional filmmakers is guaranteed due to his astonishing contributions to cinema. *Blade Runner* is a science fiction classic, beautiful to look with a heart-breaking examination of what it means to be human. As for *Alien*, well, any sci-fi film you'll see today has been influenced by its sets, its combination of action and horror, and of course by the casting of the iconic Sigourney Weaver as Ripley, the first female action hero that can hold her own. And then we have *Gladiator*, a breath-taking action filled epic that is as close to perfect that an action film can get.

It's no surprise, therefore, that *Prometheus* has been anticipated for so long and with such bated breath. It's storyline was held close to the vest by the production team, and after *Alien* spawned three other sequels (none of which were directed by Scott) and acquired an avid cult following, *Prometheus* – marketed as its prequel was bound to be the movie of the summer.

The film is stunning to look at. Shot with proper 3D cameras and with the epic and archetypal sets that one has

come to expect from Scott's aesthetic, the film is a glorious visual wonder.

It is hard to relate the story without the inevitable 'spoiling' of the plot, so let me just say that the film centres around the discovery of a cave painting dating back more than 35,000 years ago that reveals a large figure pointing to a star map also found in other caves across cultures. The discoverers, a husband-wife scientific team with Noomi Rapace (of the Swedish version of *Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*) as Elizabeth Shaw, and Logan Marshall-Green as Charlie Holloway are working in the not so distant future of 2089 AD when space travel is already possible. Convinced that human life was created by these so-called 'Engineers' from another planet the scientists, in true scientific form, are determined to visit our creators.

Three years later, in 2092 AD they wake up on board the *Prometheus*, a ship funded by the possibly nefarious Weyland Corporation that has reached the said star system. On board are the couple, an assortment of other scientific weirdo nerds, many of whom are unpleasant and highly forgettable, the captain, Janek, played by Idris Elba, Charlize Theron as the cold cyborg-like Meredith Vickers – an employee of the Corporation bent on making sure things get done the 'right' way, and 'David' – a highly sophisticated man-made robot played by the ever-exceptional Michael Fassbender.

While the premise of the film is wildly promising, things devolve soon enough – mainly due to sloppy dialogue, irritating characters and strange casting decisions. It is a mystery to me why one would choose an incredibly annoying, swaggering, hip-hop type to be the scientist husband of a religiously inclined Noomi Rapace.

Elizabeth Shaw's character provides the perfect foil to start a clever dialogue about the origin myth that lies at the heart of the film, but Scott bungles the opportunity to make a sci-fi masterpiece underlined with clever philosophical themes by allowing Shaw - a reportedly exceptional scientist - to blindly 'believe' without a modicum of real analytical questioning.

The Internet has already spawned numerous blogs trying to answer some of the more obvious gaping holes in the narrative (see www.vulture.com/2012/06/10-open-questions-after-watching-prometheus.html). But the question that bothered me the most was why do supposedly 'smart' people in films do really stupid things like pump electricity into an alien head till it explodes?

The film is worth watching, however, mainly for its visual qualities, and one mind-blowing scene involving Noomi Rapace performing self-surgery. Despite its obvious weaknesses though, the end of *Prometheus* left me yearning for its sequel. Especially since the last two people left alive are the two most enigmatic and captivating. 🇳🇵

Prometheus is currently playing at QFX Cinemas.

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer

Worse than cigarettes

DHANVANTARI

Buddha Basnyat, MD

Imagine burning a thousand cigarettes in a room and inhaling this smoke everyday. This is what happens in many households across Nepal which burn wood and dried cow dung to use as cooking fuel in their kitchens. No wonder many Nepalis especially women who do the cooking are afflicted with chronic lung disease as early as 40. Many die prematurely because of heart failure, which is secondary to chronic lung disease.

Kirk Smith from the University of California in Berkeley who has been working on indoor air pollution for decades, estimates that each year two million people die worldwide from this pollution. This figure is stunning because it rivals the annual deaths caused by either tuberculosis or malaria, two age-old scourges

of humans.

But why has there been no substantial improvement in this area when people have been aware of this problem for decades and clean stoves are easily available? Even in Nepal, researchers including senior physician Migrendra Raj Pandey published an extensive monograph called



Chronic bronchitis and corpulmonale in Nepal. This was an epidemiological study conducted in the early 1980s in four areas of Nepal's three different geographical regions.

Yet medical records from hospitals around Nepal (and across South Asia) still point to a disproportionate number of women in their forties and

fifties who suffer from chronic lung disease due to wood and cow dung smoke.

Just replacing old stoves with newer, cleaner ones or installing efficient chimneys does not seem to solve the problem. Many national and international organisations are already doing this.

In Nepal a problem is considered only if it has immediate consequences. Smoke in homes takes years to cause permanent physical ailments like chronic lung disease. People do not seem to mind the initial burning or tearing of the eyes. Some feel that smoke keeps rooms warm, while others believe the roof will cave in with termite infestation in the absence of smoke.

In addition, most researchers barring a few, are foreigners based outside Nepal who are far-removed from this problem. We need young, local, medical and engineering professionals and social workers to solve this unique problem and save the lives of thousands of Nepali women. 🇳🇵

WEEKEND WEATHER

The monsoon has been a week behind schedule and weak. This is not just for Nepal, but right from when it made landfall in Kerala on 1 June, off the Konkan coast and the Bangladesh delta. But it is picking up steam (literally) as the furnace heat of northwest India goes through its pumping action to draw the moisture in from the sea. Precipitation rates are still low, and there are no signs of a monsoonal trough to bring days of non-stop rain yet. Expect clear mornings with afternoon buildup and night rain.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
30-18	30-19	30-19



UNITED NO MORE: The dissident faction of UCPN Maoist led by Mohan Baidya formally announces a new party, Communist Party of Nepal, Maoist, at the Academy Hall on Tuesday.



DANGEROUS TURN: An oil tanker collides with a passenger bus on the Biratnagar-lthari highway on Sunday morning, blocking the road for over two hours.



HEADING DOWN: Nepal loses to Yemen 1-0, and crashes out from the qualifying games for the AFC U-22 Championship at the Dashrath stadium on Monday.



LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR: A Pakistani trader shows off fabrics at Made in Pakistan, an exhibition of Pakistani products in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

A few days after the dissolution of the CA just before midnight on 27 May, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai had said, "This has hurt everybody and fingers will be pointed at each other, but once things cool down there will be no alternative but to come back to the table and forge a consensus."

One indication that things were cooling down and the leaders were ready to re-engage was the big parties meeting at the NC office in Sanepa on Wednesday. But the Maoist split, though expected, may complicate the work of a future unity government.

The 2006 Jana Andolan succeeded for two reasons: first, because the Maoists came out of the jungles to wage peaceful street protests alongside those opposed to an autocratic monarchy. Second, the NC, UML and other democratic forces were willing to engage with the Maoists in reimagining the structure of the Nepali state to include hitherto marginalised



BIKASH DWARE

Split ends of a revolution

What was surprising about the great Maoist breakup this week was the lack of fuss

sections.

Had the Maoists insisted on overthrowing the state through violent means and Girija Prasad Koirala and Co refused to engage with them back then, more people would have been killed and the nation may have still been under royal-military rule.

After the CA dissolution last month, the NC and UML had retreated from agreements with the Maoists and this threw everything that followed the 12-point agreement of November 2005 into doubt. But the Maoist split seems to have galvanised

the rump of the Maoist party and the others into action.

The interesting thing about the Maoist split is how disinterested everyone is. Prime Minister Bhattarai seemed to say he doesn't give a damn, by flying off to Brazil. There was a singular lack of drama and almost no reaction from the parent party.

It appeared by last week, Pushpa Kamal Dahal had come to accept what seemed to be inevitable and realised he can't have his feet on two boats anymore. With Bhattarai's

growing international stature and Indian support, Dahal now realises he must do what he must do.

There was some jubilation in the NC and UML ranks after the Maoist breakup, but their hopes that the parent party will now be weaker may be premature. With the hardline wing having broken off, the NC and UML may have little to criticise the Maoists for.

After the formal split was announced, I spoke to leftist analyst Shyam Shrestha, who keeps a keen eye on goings-

on within the Maoist party. "The Maoists will increasingly mainstream their programs in order to appease wider sections of the population," he told me, "they will look to form a long term coalition with the Madhesi parties and Janajatis based on their shared agenda on federalism."

The new Maoist party, although relatively small, include ideologues, wartime strategists and a substantial cadre base. It is ironic that even after pushing for the line of 'people's revolt' for all these years, when he got a new party for himself Baidya said armed struggle is not on his priority list for now.

The large number of weapons suddenly recovered from various places in the last few months suggests the parent party has made sure the comrades don't go back to the jungles.

In the coming days, there will be a unity of two diametrically opposing forces on the streets: the non-secular, anti-republican force led by Kamal Thapa and the anti-parliamentary party led by Mohan Baidya. Both will try to bring down the government. The question is will the NC and UML join forces against secularism, federalism and republicanism?

For their own sake, and the country's sake, let us hope they continue to engage the Madhesi and the Maoists and find a consensus on having closure on the constitution. The prospect of getting to power only makes sense when there is constitutional legitimacy to rule. 🇳🇵

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The revenge of the radicals

Mohan Baidya spinning off from UCPN-Maoist represents more than an interchange of punctuation marks



ANALYSIS

Kanak Mani Dixit

The split that had Mohan Baidya jumping off the UCPN-Maoist wagon and opening the rival CPN, Maoist was not just a move from a dash to a comma. Most significantly, it has weakened the rump party and constricted the ability of Pushpa Kamal Dahal to run roughshod over the polity as he has since 2006.

Till the last, many thought talk of a split was one more ploy by the wily Dahal to get his way with the peace process and constitution-drafting. Certainly, the cause of the breakup was less ideology and more the centralisation of brute power, state power and wealth in the hands of the UCPN-Maoist chairman.

The Baidya faction, today the Baidya party, suffered as the UCPN-Maoist 'establishment' took plum posts and Dahal became personally powerful and prosperous on account of years of extortion and loot of the

exchequer, economy and ex-combatants.

In autumn 2005, while Baidya stewed in an Indian gaol, Dahal decided to abandon his underground royalist line and make common cause with Baburam Bhattarai's India tilt. Baidya was left fuming at the betrayal of his line of 'revolution', and as the party came above ground he pushed for reinstatement of the radical agenda through the Kami Danda, Kharipati and Palungtar conclaves. He seemed not to understand that what Bhattarai and Dahal sought now was not revolution, but capture of state power by whichever means.

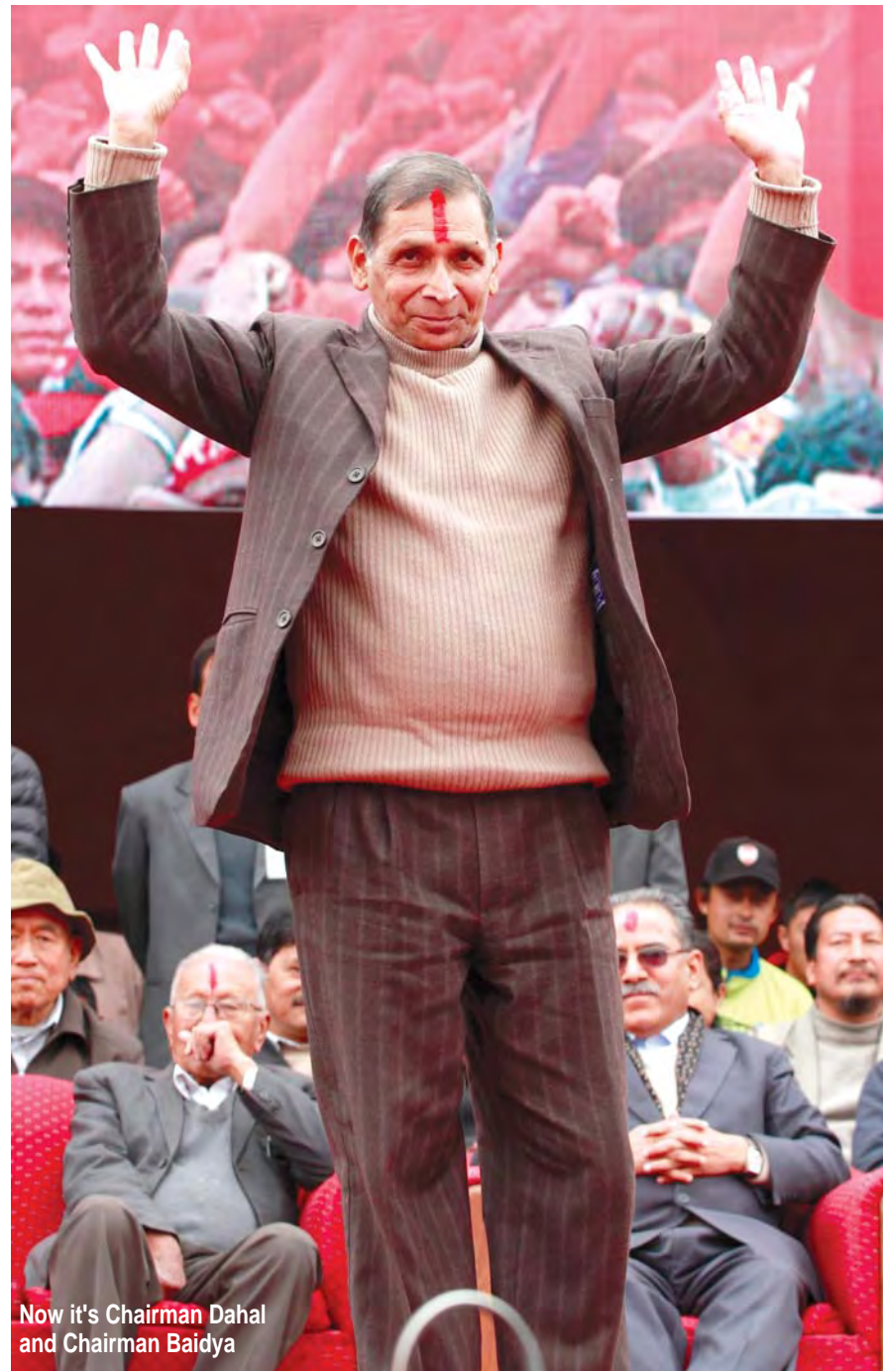
Dahal was willing to use Baidya line as long as it served his career track, and he would have enjoyed building a one-party state if that became a possibility. For this, he made the people suffer what in retrospect was a six-year charade of election, peace-process and constitution-writing. Dahal also sought to avoid a split in the party because of the ability of the splinter group to expose his cross-border shenanigans,

wartime blunders and the stashing of plunder.

While underground, the party had the ability to limit factionalism through selective violence, 'self-criticism' and non-transparency. The dynamics changed with the emergence into above-ground politics, with journalists at the gate, which could not but widen the rift between the former mentor (Baidya) and pupil (Dahal).

The split would have been less disastrous for Dahal had he stayed true to the spirit of the 12-point agreement of November 2005 by formally abandoning political violence and democratising the Maoist party. Instead, he balked on his promises, intimidated the populace during the 2008 elections, bamboozled the gullible leadership of UNMIN, worked assiduously to weaken every institution of the state, and sought to buy back the prime ministership in 2010 with a Rs 500 million injection.

When he became the elected prime minister in April 2008, Dahal's position was unassailable as the uncontested leader of the Maoist party, the



BIKRAM RAI

toast of overseas internationals and the New Delhi intelligentsia. With such backing, he could have led the Maoists into a democratic makeover and forced Baidya and his cohort of radicals to join up or depart. He would have emerged a statesman and won the right to long-term stewardship of the country over successive elections.

But Dahal lacked personal guts and democratic vision. Unwilling to ensure a democratic future for his party, he sought instead to be its chairman-for-life. Whether it was due to insecurity or megalomania, he tried to use the Constituent Assembly for his personal project of being crowned directly-elected

Moving beyond buzzwords

SIDDHANT RAJ PANDEY

'Climate financing' has been a buzzword ever since the international community decided on a shift in investment towards low carbon, climate resilient options to limit global warming to 2°C in the coming century.

Developed countries have committed to mobilise \$100 billion per year by 2020 to enable poor countries for two new buzzwords: mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation is any action taken to permanently eliminate or reduce the long term effects of climate change, while adaptation is the ability of a system to adjust and cope with climate change.

The Rio+20 Summit this week in Brazil is deliberating on the renewal of political commitment and promotion of a global green economy. A country like Nepal will need to clearly define how

Nepal shows that climate micro-financing can be endemic and deep-rooted

a green economy will fulfill its development goals. As an agrarian economy, our concern should be to leverage Nepal's position as a least-polluting nation to mitigate potential future environment degradation.

Nepal's focus will be more towards sustainability and adaptation of mountainous countries to climate variability, and how to increase international competitiveness to access available financial resources. We need to ensure that climate finance is used to catalyse and scale up public and private sector investment



needed to address climate change, and promote Nepal as an environmentally-friendly economy.

Nepal is the only country selected to participate in two Climate Investment Fund (CIF) Pilot Programs: the scaling up

of Renewable Energy Program (SREP) and Pilot Program for Climate Resilience (PPCR). Both involve joint design and implementation by the ADB (Asian Development Bank), IDA (International Development Association) and

the IFC (International Finance Corporation) as well as aid agencies from the UK, Denmark, and the United States.

The PPCR was approved in 2008 with a grant of \$50 million and loan of \$40 million towards sharing the experience and



himself using every means including the machinery of state.

Meanwhile, the blood-letting continued within the party as the politically motivated cadre and committed ex-fighters gravitated towards Baidya. Many late-comer opportunists and conflict era perpetrators (think ‘Bal Krishna Dhungel’) sought shade under the Dahal-Bhattarai tent.

When the Maoists came above ground in 2006, there was general belief that the party should remain united, in the hope that the leadership would ready the rank-and-file for peace and democracy. Six wasted years later, one would be forgiven for being indifferent to the breakup that has occurred.

Chairman Dahal and Vice Chairman Bhattarai of the UCPN-M and Chairman Baidya of the CPN, M are the threesome who crafted and implemented the ‘people’s war’ against parliamentary democracy in 1996. They led the country down the continuous path of political instability and economic decline. The

first two are in the process of opportunistic accommodation, while Baidya now plans to re-ignite revolt and revolution (“if required”).

Chairman Baidya should be informed that ten years of war and six years of deception have led to the further impoverishment of Nepal’s already poor. He carries at least a third of the blame. 🇳🇵

president.

Dahal sought once more to cultivate New Delhi after getting over his 2008-2010 bout of severe *anti-Indianitis*. His most significant peace *prasad* to New Delhi was the anointment of Baburam Bhattarai as prime minister in August 2011, only to watch aghast as the latter sought furiously to entrench

knowledge useful to designing scaled-up adaptation measures that are strategically aligned with other donor funded projects.

In Nepal, donor agencies are directly working with the government, but the private sector does not have direct access to global climate funds even though it has been involved in renewable energy projects such as microhydro, biogas, solar home systems, improved water mills, energy efficiency projects and other clean and low carbon technologies. Some private sector banks and financial institutions have even supported and financed renewable energy project in rural areas.

One example is the solar home system financing for rural households in Nepal in which the Ace Development Bank partnered with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Frankfurt School of Management and Winrock International to work with the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPCC). The target is to install 3,500 household solar systems by the end of 2012 with the help of local cooperatives. Already, the program has

saved 11,000 litres of kerosene monthly, with savings of \$11,000 for households every month. It has also indirectly benefited health and the environment.

This is a small step in finding alternatives to the 115 million litres of kerosene that is used every year by a quarter of Nepal’s population for lighting and stoves. It is a unique example of scaling-up that cooperatives are now able to advance loans for income-generation or small and medium enterprises with available funds at a negligible default rate.

The process is painstakingly slow, but the results are encouraging. If the private sector can tap into the Green Climate Fund, the multiplier effects can be replicated in many more projects involving solar or biogas. Nepal has already shown that climate micro-financing can be made endemic and deep rooted in rural areas. 🇳🇵

Siddhant Raj Pandey is CEO of Ace Development Bank and this is an excerpt from his paper at a conference on Climate Financing hosted by the Inter-American Development Bank and UNEP in Washington recently.



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“Parliamentary elections more appropriate”

12 June Mahesh Acharya of *Kantipur* interviewed former Indian ambassador to Nepal, Shiv Shanker Mukherjee in New Delhi.

कान्तिपुर

Kantipur: The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly without a new constitution marks the end of the road Nepal took after the 12-point agreement signed in New Delhi in November 2006. Do you see that as a failure of New Delhi's role in crafting that agreement?
Shiv Shanker Mukherjee: India never interfered in the talks between the political parties and the Maoists. That was their business. We provided the security and the locale for the talks, we had no role in the content of the talks. I am not associated with the government of India anymore, but I have seen that the policy remains the same. It was the Nepali people who brought about the changes with the 19-day democracy movement. Nepal's turned their absolute monarchy into a secular, democratic republic. Even rich countries take decades to achieve such change.

Still, isn't the dissolution of the CA a failure of Indian policy towards Nepal?

In a way, Kathmadu has become a hotbed of conspiracy theories. The historic transformation in Nepal is the work of Nepalis themselves, we supported democracy and were ready to help the political parties. But this was mostly logistical support. Frankly, there are no major foreign policy problems with Nepal. I have said elsewhere that a prosperous Nepal is in India's interest. Whatever is good for Nepal is good for India.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Nepal's politics has been complicated by the CA dissolution. What is your assessment?

There are two things to keep in mind. Firstly, although there is some disappointment that the constitution wasn't written, the political parties were able to make a lot of progress in a short period of time. There are only a handful of countries that have made such dramatic progress as Nepal has. The constitution was nearly 90 per cent complete. There is no need for everything to happen at once. Secondly, it may be more appropriate now to have elections for a new parliament instead of a new constituent assembly. Another CA election is like extending the CA again and again. When a new parliament is elected, it can also play the needed role of a constituent assembly.

There is also a proposal to revive the CA?

I don't think it is a good idea. It may be better to elect a new parliament. But the political parties know what needs to be done. Just look at India. Here parliament is the guardian of the constitution, and 60 years after independence there are still demands for new states like in Telengana. But we have a parliament to look at these demands, and there is a commission and the courts look at the legal aspects. This is how democracies and nations progress, not everything has to happen at once.

What are your views on the federalism debate in Nepal?

This is a very sensitive topic, it wouldn't be appropriate for me to comment. Even in rich countries, the issues of race and identity are serious issues, so it's not just in poor countries that we have this debate. And the only solution is democracy. Democracy provides the cushion and offers legal remedies. Nepal is a country with institutions of open society, and remaining under that umbrella, solutions can be found. It is understandable that exploited classes, Madhesis and Janajatis want their rights.

How do you see the role of the international community in Nepal?

It ranges from not helpful to stupid. Some have foolishly tried to extend their political influence through aid.

Like which country?

The western embassies, and especially the Nordics. They don't understand the ground reality in Nepal, and although it may not look like interference, I have noticed they work with the intention of influencing policy. India also has aid projects, similar to the ones it has in Afghanistan, and they are implemented with 100 per cent coordination of the Nepal government and with its agreement.

And China's role?

China is a big economic power. Chinese businesses and contractors are all over the place. So it is normal for them to be in Nepal as well. We don't think China is using Nepal to undermine India's security. Nepal can use the huge markets in India and China for its own development.



“Nepal's present state is like labour pain a mother goes through during childbirth”

Excerpts from Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai's speech to the heads of diplomatic missions in Kathmandu on 11 June

It is a matter of great dismay for us that when the Maoist Army and weapons were handed over to the Nepal Army for integration, the same political forces started creating hurdles in making the constitution. Despite the utmost and honest effort put on and maximum flexibility shown from our side, some political forces remained adamant not to accommodate the issues and aspirations of Janajatis, Madhesis, Dalits, and the oppressed classes.

A constitution that did not address the issues and concerns of the backward communities was simply not possible. Major contentious issues remained unresolved until the last day of the extended tenure of the Constituent Assembly. The talks finally collapsed on the vexed issue of identity-based federalism which the traditional parliamentarians were not prepared to accept. The ruling coalition partners were even ready to go for formal democratic process in the CA, but the political parties outside the government did not allow such formal process to resolve the outstanding

issues. Further, we were unable to extend the CA due to the stricture issued by the Supreme Court.

Peace and democracy are not sustainable without economic development and prosperity. While talking of the economic agenda, the recently established Board of Investment is one of the initiatives taken by the present government to augment investment and to provide one window service to domestic and foreign investors. Declaration of Investment Year 2012-2013, designation of the Visit Lumbini Year 2012, identification of projects of national pride and recent decision to bring in certain high priority projects under the ambit of BOI are among the few initiatives that the government has undertaken for Nepal's rapid economic growth.

Unless we have fast rate of economic growth we would just distribute poverty and prosperity. Present government is also planning to convene an Economic Summit in the near future. Implementation of the 'Hello Government' mechanism for readdressing grievances and live radio interaction between the Prime Minister and common Nepalis every month are a few more examples of

responsive governance. Nonetheless, these instruments alone hardly mean anything if life is not blown into them by the very human beings who have to work for and through these instruments. Needless to say, instruments, environment and human resources should go in tandem.

Moreover, the government believes that bilateral investment promotion measures and instruments adopted to ensure the smooth flow of investment into the country in priority sectors like hydropower, tourism, physical and social infrastructure etc are very crucial for rapid economic transformation. My government is determined to do what it takes to bring about economic prosperity in Nepal that could be enjoyed by all Nepalis with dignity and national pride. Protection and promotion of human rights have, of course, always been at the core of this determination.

The international community is fully aware of the tremendous difficulties we have had to surmount in the present juncture of history. I believe most countries in the west and east had to pass through such challenging phases in their history. It's like labour pain that a mother goes through during childbirth.



नागरिक Robin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 19 June

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“It is Prachanda and Baburam who abandoned the party line and principles, not us. We are still Maoists, they are not.”

Mohan Baidya speaking at a press conference organised in Pragya Bhawan on Tuesday

Parting ways

The document submitted by the new CPN, M at its national conference on Tuesday *Annapurna Post*, 20 June

अन्वपूर्ण पोष्ट

1. Unmask the conspiracy of the UCPN-M leadership.
2. Call on stakeholders to forge consensus on a national unity government and constitution writing.
3. Appeal to democratic forces to stand united against totalitarianism.
4. Disagree with rumours that the UML is against federalism and identity, stand firm on social harmony and national unity.
5. Safeguard democracy, complete the peace process and ensure social justice.
6. Condemn the government's overt violations of the electoral code-of-conduct , and unlawful transfer of police personnel and other employees.
7. Condemn untimely foreign junket by a caretaker prime minister and police brutality on peaceful protestors.
8. Oppose the abuse of Article 43 and malignance shown towards seeking an agreement with other political parties before the ordinance was tabled.
10. Reject foreign interferences and back channel diplomacy leading to instability in the country and appeal to the government to take urgent note of it.
11. Express grave concern about violence against people of Nepali origin living in the north-eastern states of India and oppose their displacement from the land.

Unsettled accounts



Sagar Pandit, *Naya Patrika*, 17 June

गर्मी पत्रिका

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bijay Kumar Gachhadar has requested exemption from paying back medical loans worth Rs 848,000 that he took 15 years ago when he was Minister of Physical Planning and Works. Gachhadar also owes the government Rs 19,000 which he took unlawfully as festival allowance when he was Home Minister. Since his appeal was rejected, Gachhadar is trying to arm twist the state into changing its decision.



Along with the deputy PM, 123 ex-ministers have received notices ordering them to repay Rs 8.5 million out of which Rs 3.8 million was borrowed for medical expenses and more than one million as festival allowance. So far only 16 have paid back. President Ram Baran Yadav recently paid off Rs 25,000 he took as festival allowance 11 years ago when he was Health Minister.



But several ex-ministers including Ram Chandra Poudel, Ram Sharan Mahat, Arjun Narsingh KC, Khum Bahadur Khadka, Bamdev Gautam, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, Kamal Thapa, Mohammad Aftab Alam, Sharat Singh Bhandari and Sarbendra Shukla still owe the state.

Politicians are known to dole out millions to party loyalists from the state coffers in the name of 'medical benefits'. 15 years ago Sher Bahadur Deuba sanctioned medical allowance worth millions for his 13 ministers.

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Prime Minister Stoned

The headline that went around the world was not flattering to Nepal's international prestige: 'Nepal Prime Minister Stoned'. Nepal does have a reputation for being a bit lax when it comes to enforcing drug laws, and we do smoke pot, but this one went too far. In actual fact, BRB was not stoned, the German ambassador was. The Prime Minister decided to go to Rio anyway despite protests, and despite his own party advising him that the time was not right. Why then was Comrade Laldhoj so desperate to get the hell out of here just as his party was about to split and the opposition was on warpath? It definitely wasn't to save the global environment, since his declared policy is economic growth at whatever cost to the ecology.

BRB wants to shake hands with Raul Castro and Manmohan Singh, in that order. And there is the one-on-one with Ecuador's leftwing president, Rafael Correa, who hit the headline this week for his offer of political asylum to Julian Assange. Maybe if Ecuador doesn't work out, Nepal could offer Assange asylum provided he pays his visa extension fees (with necessary



handouts to immigration officials) as well as fork out \$\$ every time he enters Bhaktapur and Patan Dabar Squares.

The Ass, for one, is glad Bhattarai is meeting Correa because he can lodge Nepal's official protest at the canard being perpetrated by the govt of Ecuador that Mt Chimborazo is actually the highest mountain in the world. Measured from the centre of the earth, Chimborazo is apparently 2,000 m further away from the centre of the earth than Mt Everest because of the slight bulge our planet has at the equator. Be that as it may, Ecuador's attempt to rewrite history (and geography) must be swiftly and sternly

resisted by our prime minister who should make it clear that Nepal will not tolerate this kind of behaviour from a fellow non-aligned nation. If Correa refuses to back down, we should threaten to declare war on Ecuador.

The talk of the town this week is the split in the Maoist party between the UCPN-M and the CPN,M. This brings the total number of communist parties to 18, which must make Nepal the country with the highest per capita number of communist parties on earth. We should be in the Guinness Book. There is already a CPN (Matrika), a CPN-ML, CPN-UML, CPN-U, CPN (Mashal), CPN (Masal). The question we

have is whether the BRB-PKD establishment faction now has the right to call itself 'Unified', or should it also rename itself Disintegrated Communist Party of Nepal as opposed to the Freshly Split Communist Party of Nepal. Or to make it simple, maybe we should just call them Hyphen Communists, Bracket Communists and Comma Communists.

The question now arises what the election symbol of the Comma Communists should be. Well, since the Bracket Maoists have hammer and sickle already and the Hyphens have the Sun, how about the Baidya Baddies register hammer and tongs as their symbol with the Erection Commission? After all, they are always going at each other with hammers and tongs.

No sooner had the Baddies split than the two sides started throwing blame for the break. Interesting thing is that both sides blame the same three entities whose names begin with 'R': Raja Baddies, RIM and RAW. Meanwhile, the bifurcation of the Baddie party is already having major repercussions right down the line. Cranti Curry Journalists are now split into the PKD,

MBK and BRB factions. There is one good thing that has come out of the Baddie split: vacancies have opened up in the central committee. But, as usual, there is stiff competition from the PKD and BRB factions to fill those positions. All indications are that the interim camaraderie between Comrades PKD and BRB will be short-lived.

Trust the current Kangresi netas not to realise just how absurd it sounds for a democratic party to say that the prime minister's announcement of elections is "unconstitutional and dictatorial".

And here is a new one: Kathmandu-based embassies apparently have to seek the government's permission before they do any clean-up activities to mark World Environment Day or such. An Israeli diplomat seems to have been told in no uncertain terms by the vigilant rangers up at Nagarjun National Park that he couldn't pick up garbage strewn along the trail without a Foreign Ministry clearance.



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