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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

VENICE OF THE EAST: The Jamal intersection of Kathmandu after a downpour on Tuesday. The chronic flood here could easily be resolved by draining the water into the nearby Rani Pokhari. Kathmandu is perhaps the only capital in the world with no municipal water supply to speak of. Full coverage of Kathmandu Valley's water woes on page 12-13.

No one expects much to come out of the new round of negotiations between the three big parties that started on Wednesday in which they promised a deal by mid-September. Although the leaders who want a resurrection of the Constituent Assembly were most vocal, there is also a strong lobby against it. The leaders want to agree on a package deal before reconvening the CA briefly to pass a new constitution, but it is hard to see where they can meet when they failed so miserably before.

A proposal to form a technocratic government has also been put forward, but even that seems unlikely to happen because there are so many aspirants for prime ministership. The most likely scenario seems to be the formation of an interim government before Dasain that will announce new elections early next year.

Editorial page 2
One year itch

The school under the bridge
by Gopal Gadtaula

Enclosed by the Chisang River on one side and a dense sal forest on the other, Janata Primary was started 15 years ago by squatters on the eastern banks of the river who make a living sifting sand and breaking stones. The parents started this school because they wanted their children to have a better future. However, as there is not enough space, students from nursery till Grade 3 attend classes under the East-West Highway bridge.



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ONE YEAR ITCH

The anniversary of Baburam Bhattarai's year as prime minister was marked by eulogies, disparaging condemnation, or political obituaries. Analysts have weighed the good, the bad and the ugly aspects of his time in office.

Bhattarai himself marked the milestone by public self-scrutiny of his own performance in a televised address to the nation on Tuesday. Not surprisingly, he patted himself on the back for getting some momentum into the peace process, for efforts to build investor confidence, and even for his pet road-widening campaign in Kathmandu. But the prime minister seemed hard pressed to recall any other achievements worth mentioning.

So he did what every other politician before him has done on occasions like this: blame rivals. The leaders of the Nepali Congress naturally topped the list, with the UML coming a close second. Once more, he charged them with derailing the Constituent Assembly when by now it is pretty clear that the actual decision was taken by Bhattarai himself. Being an acolyte of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Bhattarai seems to follow his dictum: "Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes the truth."

He also hurled gratuitous barbs at President Ram Baran Yadav even though he knows he needs the president to legitimise decisions during this period of political ambiguity. He condemned the courts, and came to the peculiar conclusion that an assertive judiciary could undermine democracy.



If the opposition cannot agree on a prime ministerial candidate there is no sense asking the prime minister to step down

Although he did not refer to this during his speech, the prime minister has previously said he averted an eruption of street violence by dissolving the CA and announcing elections on 27 May, because compromises on the constitution would have put competing forces on a collision course. In this he is probably right.

Bhattarai became prime minister last year mainly because the NC and UML didn't raise any major obstacles to his candidacy. In fact, the real resistance to his prime ministership was from his own party. Nevertheless, Nepal's first PhD prime minister assumed office amidst tremendous expectations. His early efforts at populism by riding a Mustang jeep, travelling economy and inspecting highway stops gave way to a more realistic assessment of his limitations.

By far the biggest blot on the Bhattarai administration has been the corruption and blatant ransacking of the treasury by members of his government. This has been by far the most corrupt and least accountable government we've had in a long time, and that is saying a lot considering the sleazebags we have seen in office in the past. Not surprisingly, the graft and malfeasance have now seeped right down the

line to the bureaucracy, district administrations and the political cadre at the VDCs. Despite his own upright reputation, Bhattarai's inability or seeming unwillingness to deal with corruption is bound to rub off on him and could have a lasting impact on his future political career.

Having said this, the prime minister must be commended for his emphasis on the economy and in at least trying to boost investment. The political impasse affected the passage of the budget and this has dampened what little economic growth was expected for this fiscal year. Nevertheless, the PMO with the Nepal Investment Board have put large infrastructure projects on the priority list. West Seti has go-ahead, the new Pokhara Airport has been delayed for not following proper procedures but may soon get a green light. The prime minister has recognised the energy emergency, but his own line ministries are working at cross purposes, threatening to cancel licences of Korean, Chinese and Brazilian joint ventures that are about to take off.

We don't expect much to come out of the new round of negotiations between the three big parties that started on Wednesday. All that will happen is that they will agree to have an agreement, but what is holding back an agreement is disagreement about a new government and who should lead it. Out of desperation, some leaders are veering towards a resurrection of the CA, but the forces arrayed against that option are strong.

When political parties among themselves and within themselves cannot agree on a prime ministerial candidate, there is no sense asking the prime minister to step down. There is a way to make a clean break from all this and agree on a government of technocrats, but that would demand vision and common sense which is in short supply.

ON THE WEB

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AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET

Load-shedding is a way of life in Nepal and it doesn't surprise me to learn that we will be living without electricity for 20 hours this winter ('You ain't seen nothing yet', Editorial, #619). If it wasn't for our inept politicians, we could be selling electricity to energy-starved India and Nepal's middle-class would be thriving. But look at where we are now.

Santosh KC

- Since the power crisis is here to stay (for at least 10 or 20 years), investing in alternative energy is the only short-term solution. Why not install solar PV panels in all urban and rural homes and offices across Nepal that will provide both hot water and constant supply of electricity? This way, households and businesses can cut down their electricity bills and lower their dependence on the national grid. Those who can afford the technology should convert to solar on their own and for those who can't, the government and NGOs should step in to subsidise PV panels and support local user groups.

Sabitri Karki

- The greed and short-sightedness of the planners, bureaucrats, and politicians have destroyed Nepal's immense hydropower potential and made a complete mess of the situation. By now every household in the country should have been connected to the grid and we should be using electricity at half the cost of the present tariff, but we are being made to suffer for the state's failure.

Krishna Chhetri

- Since changing the country's electricity policy will take a long time, we can work towards curbing our

consumption habits in the meantime. If each one of us could save energy by switching off our computers and TVs or replacing tungsten bulbs with CFLs or using lower wattage bulbs it would help balance the demand-supply rate.

Babu

DANGEROUS RACISM

I do not agree with David Seddon when he says dominance in Nepal is class-based and not caste-based ('A dangerous racism', Interview, #619). If you look at the Hindu caste-system all Janajatis, Dalits and other marginalised groups fall under the lowest caste, shudra. This dominant Hindu philosophy which assigns jobs based on caste rather than ability has fostered discrimination and inequality for centuries. It is high time the state recognised and respected the identity of all caste, ethnic and religious groups. Ethnicity-based federalism is the only system that will devolve power and resources from the centre and deliver social justice.

Gagan Kulung

- David Seddon's assessment of identity-based federalism is misplaced because he fails to understand that class disparity in Nepal is primarily a function of caste hierarchy. Cleavages along ethnic and caste lines run much deeper in our society and the Maoists figured this out early on during the war and concluded that class could not be the basis of their revolution. Yes, class division (inequality) cuts across ethnic and caste lines. There are Gurungs, Magars, Newars, Rais, Limbus, and Tamangs who are doing well, often at the expense of Janajatis who are poor. But most of the well-off Janajatis are simply puppets of the ruling Brahmin-Chhetri hill elites. Therefore it is naive to think that class alone will solve ethnic issues.

United Nepal

- I am sure David Seddon means well, but his views will be distorted and exploited to suit the interests of feudals who have exploited innocent Nepalis for centuries. The caste-elites used everything from religion to army to subdue others spiritually, financially and socially. People like Seddon need to use their pens to erase such kind of archaic mindset and usher in a new, more equitable Nepal.

Deepak Shah

- David Seddon hits the bull's eye. As a self-avowed Marxist he sees class as cutting across ethnic and caste lines. Those who don't see that don't want to because they have hitched their wagons to identity politics. What a tragic cul-de-sac for Nepal. How can you possibly liberate the country from ethnic domination by going back to Year Zero?

S Lama

Ethnicity and caste issues are politically useful for some opportunists, but not for a large majority of Nepalis, and targeting these two factors will not lead to meaningful development. Of all the factors contributing to Nepal's 'underdeveloped' status, the primary variables are wealth, education, influence, and opportunity (often highly correlated with one another). Caste and ethnicity are insignificant factors confounded with these four primary variables. For Nepal to truly advance and prosper, politics and policy have to focus on how to level the playing field as far as these four variables are concerned.

Nepali

- I would like to request David Seddon to contribute regularly through columns in *Nepali Times*. He seems to have a deep-rooted understanding of

Nepali society and politics and I would like to read his suggestions for viable alternatives to peace and progress.

Nirmal

TEXTBOOK HISTORY

It bothers me that Anurag Acharya seems to have no problems with a seven-year-old letter written by Nepal's current leaders to India's then leaders to allow them to stay on in New Delhi, while they waged war back home ('Textbook history', #619). Anyone who asks help from a foreign government to wage a war in their home country to kill fellow citizens and in return be willing to serve as stooges and work for the foreign government would be considered a traitor by most people. But Acharya wants us to believe that there is nothing wrong with that.

Niranjana Regmi

- The Indians were training the Maoists while operating against the government of Nepal and killing thousands of Nepalis and the writer wants us to take that as India's shrewd observation of the changing political landscape in Nepal? No thanks, I will use my own judgment and call it state-sponsored terrorism.

Funky Monkey

- I agree with the columnist's conclusions about identity-politics, but his casual dismissal of SD Muni's expose of India's role in fomenting war in Nepal against a democratically elected government shows where he comes from. His analysis is not only flawed, but lacks credibility.

Brahma

- Good work Anurag Acharya, I wish there were more journalists like you who are unbiased and can see both sides of the coin. It's naive of us

to believe that DFID and the UN are the responsible for identity politics in Nepal and suppressing the identity issue will bring social harmony.

Sushil

RESORTING TO POLITICS

Resorts located inside the Chitwan National Park have shown how tourism when done right is an incredible asset to protect wildlife and benefit local communities ('Resorting to politics', Lucas Grimm, #619). And it's an utter disgrace that policy makers are allowing politics and red tape to get in the way and possibly dissolving such a winning formula.

Sanjay

- Tiger Tops not only put Nepal on the international tourism map, but created a great working model for eco-tourism and conservation, provided employment to locals and funded many of the communities. The government is committing a huge mistake by not renewing the licences of the resorts.

Jane Poretsis

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #620

Q. The President's refusal to approve election related ordinances is:

Total votes: 1,563

Correct	67.8%
Incorrect	28.3%
Don't know/Can't say	3.8%

Weekly Internet Poll # 621. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How do you rate Baburam government compared to previous governments?



RAMESWOR BOHARA

Disappearance of truth

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission overseen by perpetrators will not bring us closer to truth and reconciliation

STILL LOST: Ram Krishni Chaudhary of Banke holds the citizenship certificate of her son, Bhuban, who was disappeared by the security forces during the war in 2002.

through ordinance would simply confirm their worst fears that the state is out to protect and support perpetrators of war crimes while denying victims' basic demands for justice and sustenance assistance.

This regime is more likely to destroy remaining evidence and manipulate the truth, thereby killing any hope for truth, justice, and reconciliation. A Truth Commission overseen by perpetrators is no Truth Commission, it doesn't even meet the minimum international standard for a transitional justice mechanism.

Nepal's post-conflict period has seen the politicisation and commodification of victimhood. The movement towards reconciliation is fragmented

by vested political interest groups, holding hostage the grief of thousands of victim families. Various players have instrumentalised the victims' agenda, exploiting their pain for political and economic benefit.

The politicians have intentionally ignored the victims, while civil society has selective attention. We in the victim community now find ourselves squeezed in the middle: with an inert government laden with perpetrators of atrocities on one side, and on the other a civil society concerned primarily with perpetuating its own existence.

The transitional justice debate in Kathmandu over the last six years has been between a government advocating impunity and a human rights community advancing the global discourse of 'truth, justice, and reparation'. The families of victims and survivors have had little voice and agency in the

proceedings.

Distracted by daily political wrangling, leaders in Kathmandu have forgotten the pain of our recent past. As a result, impunity is deeply rooted and the politics of revenge is polarising society. The interrupted peace process and the dissolution of the CA have left a dangerous void.

The transitional justice process must not just address crimes of the past, but also avoid a future conflict. If this wilful ignorance continues, Nepal may have to pay an even higher price than it did during the 1996-2006 war. ■

Ram Kumar Bhandari, whose father was disappeared in Lamjung in 2001, is the president of the National Network of Families of Disappeared and Missing (NEFAD).



COMMENT

Ram Kumar Bhandari

the carpet.

The families are justifiably outraged not just about their own personal tragedies and the remote possibility of finding out what really happened to their relatives, but also because it will prevent closure for them and for the nation as a whole.

The 10 year war brutalised society and caused incalculable damage to the country. It inflicted deep psychological trauma on victims and their families who still suffer the legacy of violence in their daily lives.

Aside from the tens of thousands who were killed, wounded, raped, tortured, and displaced, perhaps the most enduring legacy of the conflict is the missing and enforced disappeared. Families still wait for information about the fate of their loved ones and for the chance, if they are dead, to retrieve their remains and perform appropriate rites.

While the original ceasefire agreement and many subsequent agreements committed to address the issue of the disappeared, six years after the signing of the CPA, no progress has been made. Beyond merely ignoring the demands of victims, the government has added insult to injury by continuing to support direct perpetrators and even promoting known abusers.

The regular promotion of Kuber Singh Rana who was in charge of the infamous Dhanusha case where five students were disappeared, and other attempts to obstruct the path of justice by the state have encouraged impunity and given the Maoists an excuse to get away with their abuses. From the victims' perspective, forming a Truth Commission

The caretaker government on Tuesday approved an ordinance which includes a provision to pardon those involved in extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances during the conflict. This is against democratic norms, prevailing international practice, previous political agreements, and violates the Supreme Court directives.

Those who were expecting a full airing of war atrocities by both sides in the transitional justice process to help the healing and reconciliation process are deeply disappointed, but not surprised. News of the ordinance came as the nationwide network of families of about 1,400 people who were disappeared by both sides gathered this week to mark the International Day of the Disappeared.

Reconciliation is an important goal, but it cannot be built on a foundation of impunity for serious crimes under international law, and it cannot be achieved by coercing victims. The ordinance forces the victims and their families to artificially 'reconcile' and give up their rights to truth, justice and reparations.

The draft ordinance also tries to make it a two-in-one arrangement by merging the Disappearance Commission bill into the Truth and Reconciliation Commission bill, thus diluting the provisions further and sweeping the dirty secrets of the war under

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Giving conflict victims a voice, #610
Truth without justice is an insult, #607
Forgotten futures, #568

The politics of foreign aid

The government's new assertiveness on aid focus has brought it in direct confrontation with some donors

SUNIR PANDEY

Leaks to the media earlier this month of the government's objections to a World Bank-DFID report on social inclusion and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) document have been indicative of Nepal's new assertiveness about aid.

Government officials suspect donors involved deliberately leaked the documents to the media, and this has further strained relations and hardened positions. Donor officials, on the other hand, say the Foreign Ministry and the National Planning Commission (NPC) are trying to take out all mention of exclusion, discrimination and impunity from the documents.

The government's approval of an ordinance this week on setting up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission by watering down its mandate with provisions of amnesty for wartime atrocities and combining it with a Commission on Disappearances is sure to anger other donor groups which support human rights in Nepal. The Foreign Ministry has lately increased its scrutiny of international NGOs operating from Nepal, and has been telling donors that they should help Nepal in infrastructure and development, and get away from constitution, governance, and social justice sectors.

The NPC had objected to the use of words like 'statelessness' and 'impunity' in the UNDAF document, among others, stating that use of such words were not well-founded and did not reflect well on the government which was part of the joint document.

The NPC's Dipendra Bahadur Chhetri told *Nepali Times* this week, "Accusations that the NPC is against federalism and social inclusion are baseless, as are the allegations of hill-elitism." Chhetri denied that Prime Minister Bhattarai did not agree with the Planning Commission's stance on the document, clarifying that



the PMO had never told him to lift the objections.

The UNDAF document's reference to 'statelessness' draws attention to 2.3 million Nepalis who do not have citizenship certificates because if a Nepali man marries a foreigner, his wife instantly gets citizenship but if a Nepali woman marries a foreigner, her children are not entitled to citizenship. The problem is more acute in the Tarai where women often marry across the border, and when divorced come back to their parents with children, who then become stateless.

Chhetri insists that as long as aid falls in line with national policy, the NPC will not object. Most countries try to channel bilateral and multilateral assistance to their priority areas, but what surprises many is why the NPC and the Foreign Ministry are getting so assertive and whether or not they have a wink from the Prime Minister to do so.

Donor influence in prioritising and managing aid in Nepal gets stronger at times when governments are weaker. And

past governments have rarely questioned the donor agenda, making the approval and signing of joint documents with line ministries a mere formality. In the past, donors have got what they wanted while the government looked the other way.

The change in the government's approach seems to have been partly caused by a turf battle between the Ministry of Finance, which used to be the final arbiter on aid, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which now also wants a say. In fact, the Cabinet recently decided that henceforth it will be the Ministry for Foreign Affairs that will decide on aid policy and donor relations.

"Since foreign aid comes from outside, it is only natural that we should be involved," argues the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Arjun Bahadur Thapa.

The controversy earlier this year surrounding Rupantaran Nepal, an NGO which was awarded a large forestry project grant from DFID, the government of Finland and the Swiss SDC, spotlighted aid policy and execution. Critics say

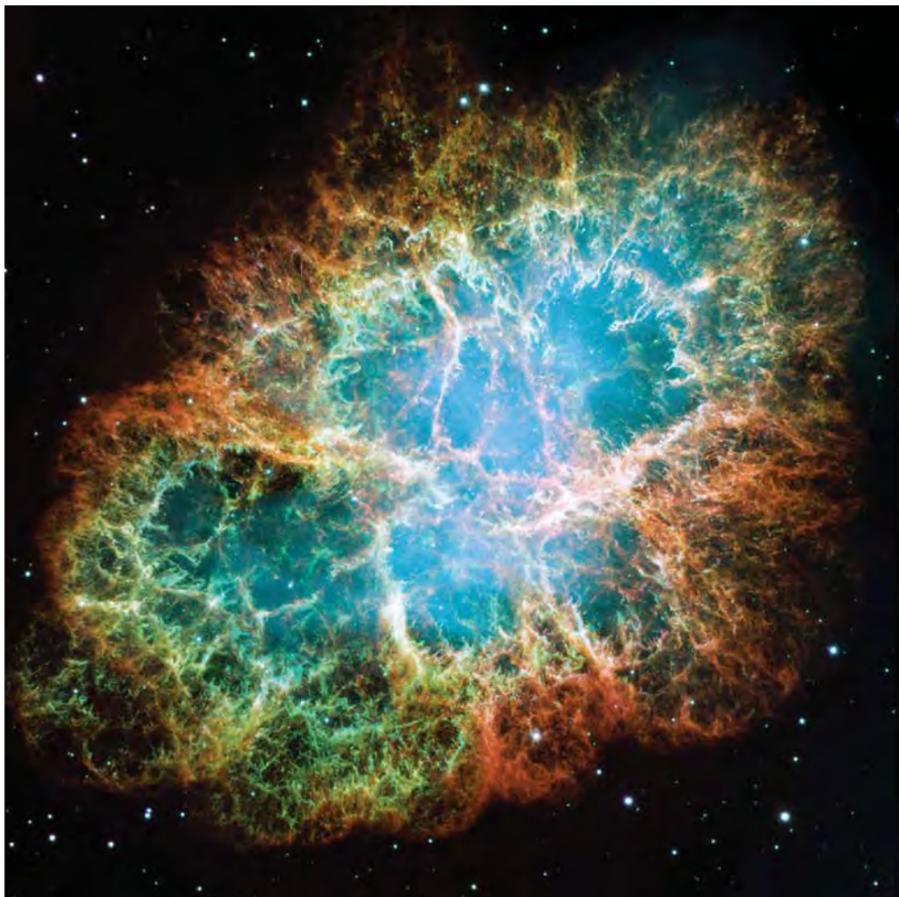
donors are in violation of the Paris Declaration 2005, the Accra Agenda for Action 2008 and the Fifth High Level Meet on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in 2011.

More than 60 per cent of Nepal's development budget comes from bilateral and multilateral donors, of which 70 per cent goes through the Finance Ministry. The rest is channeled through the Social Welfare Council to NGOs and civil society groups.

The UN is understood to have sent a new text for UNDAF with some of the words changed. But given Nepal's dependence on foreign aid and the government's new assertiveness on its priorities, the politics of foreign aid is bound to generate more heat in the future. 

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Load on the economy

Besides the inconvenience, long hours of load-shedding will severely stunt the country's economic growth



IT'S THE ECONOMY
Chandan Sapkota

Looking at the poor monsoon rains, rising demand and close to stagnant electricity production, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) projected that without immediate remedial measures load-shedding during winter could reach as high as 20 hours per day.

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai convened a meeting of stakeholders and asked them to limit load-shedding to 12 hours like last year. The Ministry of Energy (MoE) then floated a proposal whose immediate implementation would help the government reach its target. The plan includes construction of a 15 km transmission line to carry electricity from India during winter, operation of multi-fuel plants in Duhabi and Hetauda, construction of the Khimti-Dhalkebar transmission line, reduction of leakages, purchase of additional electricity from India, and expediting work in hydro projects.

However, as it stands now, the reality is that load-shedding will definitely go beyond 12 hours. There are no quick fixes to our power crisis unless production catches up with soaring demand. Meantime, as in previous years, hours of darkness will continue to erode the competitiveness of Nepali goods and services, weaken the industrial sector, widen trade deficit, and jeopardise fiscal balance.

Currently, electricity demand during peak time is around 1000MW, but supply is barely 700MW during summer and 400MW during winter, which includes total NEA production from hydro and thermal, purchase from the private sector, and import from India.

Of the total availability, NEA sup-

plies 55 per cent (including both hydro and thermal), private sector contributes 27 per cent, and 18 per cent is imported from India.

As a result of increase in purchasing power boosted by remittances, trading services are booming. Furthermore, new consumers, which doubled between 2005 and 2011, seeking electricity from the grid are also increasing annually. While demand increases by around 100MW every year, electricity production is moving at a snail's pace.

First, due to the inadequate supply of electricity, firms will be forced to depend on petroleum products (especially diesel, which carries the most weight in NOC's losses and whose consumption more than doubled between 2007-08 and 2010-11) to power



up their factories and offices. This will increase the cost of production and erode competitiveness of Nepali goods and services. Since cost of domestically produced goods might be higher than the cost of imported goods of similar nature, industrial activities may continue to further slowdown. Besides, power generated from diesel run generators can fulfil only 25 per cent of total electricity demanded by firms.

Nepal is already ranked as the least competitive economy in South Asia with high cost of doing business. According to Enterprise Survey (ES) 2009, lack of electricity is the second biggest obstacle to investment and is inflicting losses of 27 per cent of annual sales.

Second, exports, especially those of the manufacturing sector, will continue to be hit by mounting costs, leading to further slowdown of manufacturing output, which has already declined from 7.6 per cent of GDP in 2004-05 to 5.8 per cent of GDP in 2011-12. Meanwhile, new investments except for in services and hydropower sectors might decline as in the past. Worse, some of the existing firms will go out of business and most will operate below potential. All of these will hit economic activities and employment opportunities.

Third, the rise in demand for petroleum products will mean long queues at petrol pumps and rationing of LPG cooking gas. The NOC will see its balance sheet deteriorate as it is forced by the government to subsidise diesel, kerosene and LPG. The increasing import of petroleum products, which was about Rs 96 billion against total merchandise export of about Rs 65 billion last year, will further widen the trade deficit. Generally, consumption of petroleum products is inversely related to the supply of electricity.

Fourth, the government will have to fork out more money for petroleum subsidies (around Rs 10 billion last year), putting extra pressure on fiscal deficit, which stands at about four per cent of GDP. A portion of tax revenue collected from taxpaying citizens will unfairly be used to subsidise diesel consumed in large quantity by those who can afford it in the first place, making it the most off-target subsidy.

Based on the current pace of construction, demand will continue to outstrip supply at least until 2017. Excessive politicisation of the hydro sector and inefficiencies within NEA have been the two biggest hurdles so far. And unless construction of hydro projects and new investment are ratcheted up drastically, the outlook remains grim.

www.sapkotac.blogspot.com
www.chandansapkota.wordpress.com

BIZ BRIEFS

Investment first

International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, is partnering with the government of Nepal to introduce the e-portal www.licenseportal.gov.np with a comprehensive inventory of 130 licences and related information on starting and operating a business in Nepal. The portal aims to encourage investment in the country.

Power play

Hulas Power, the authorised distributor of Exide Brand in Nepal has introduced Exide Home UPS. Exide is a pioneer brand which provides a comprehensive range of stored electrical energy products and services for industrial and transportation applications.

Victory for Beefeater

Beefeater Gin has won the Gin Trophy at this year's International Wine and Spirits Competition (IWSC). It also won gold medals at the International Spirits Challenge this year. The brand is available in more than 100 countries.

Office solutions

Xerox India, a part of Xerox Corporation, business process and document management services enterprise, demonstrated its products through the Xerox Real Business Live program. Its wide portfolio of office products including WorkCentre 5325, WorkCentre 7530 were showcased at the event.

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The school under the bridge

A squatter community of stone crushers sets up its own school to ensure a brighter future for children

GOPAL GADTAULA in MORANG

Bimala Kattel teaches her students at Janata Primary School in Keraun here in the eastern plains of Nepal to use the latrine and wash their hands with soap or ash during health science classes. But when nature calls, both students and teachers rush to the nearby forest because the school has no toilet.

Enclosed by the Chisang River on one side and a dense sal forest on the other, Janata Primary had no classrooms either for the first two years of its existence. Students would bring straw mattresses from home and gather under a bridge over the East-West Highway for class. Today, the school has a two-room building which houses the office and a combined classroom for Grades 4-5. But since there is not enough space, students from nursery till Grade 3 still attend classes under the bridge.

The school was started 15 years ago by squatters on the eastern banks of the Chisang who make a living sifting sand and breaking stones. The nearest school was five km away, so none of the children went to school, helping their parents crush stones instead.

"We didn't want our children to become like us, crushing stones all our lives," recalls Lok Bahadur Adhikari, "we started the school hoping that if our children learn to read and write they will be able to find better jobs."

They hired Yamnath Kattel

(pic, below), a SLC graduate farmer from a neighbouring village to teach the children. None of the families had space to accommodate 30 children, so the classes were held under the bridge.

Collecting Rs 500 each month to pay Yamnath's salary from parents who were living hand-to-mouth was also a huge struggle. "It was very hard for us to pay, but we managed, even if it meant skipping a meal," recalls local leader Chabilal Adhikari.

The trouble didn't end there. School administrators had to endure six years of bureaucratic red tape before the District Education Committee finally approved the licence for Grade 1 in 2005.

Soon after the school was registered, a group of Korean workers who were visiting Nepal donated Rs 150,000 for the construction of classrooms. Households got together to contribute two truckloads of stones. A management committee headed by Chabilal oversaw the construction. By the time the two-room building was completed, there was no money left to build a toilet or classrooms for nursery till Grade 3.

The squatter residents are happy to see their children reciting ABC even if it is under the bridge. The school struggles to support its 165 students and five teachers, but is trying to find new ways to pay for its upkeep. 🇳🇵



DIFFICULT LESSONS:
Students gather for classes under a temporary shed



Yamnath Kattel conducts classes for students from nursery to Grade 3 under a bridge over the East-West Highway.

PICS: GOPAL GADTAULA

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No time for school

Despite the progress in female literacy, young girls in the Tarai are taken out of their classrooms and forced into early marriage

“We married off our daughter when she was 12. She’s been staying with us for the past five years, but now that she’s 17 we will send her to her husband’s home,” confesses a mother who asked not to be identified. She is aware that child marriage and the dowry system are illegal in Nepal, but says such arrangements between families is common in Mahottari district, 300km east of the capital, where a high number of child marriages still take place.

Despite a ban on the practice, over 34 per cent of new marriages in Nepal involve brides under 15 years of age, according to the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare. In some districts in eastern Tarai, like Rupandehi, Dhanusha and Mahottari, more than 50 per cent of marriages involve girls under the age of 12.

“We recently heard that a five-year-old girl was married,” says Helen Sherpa of

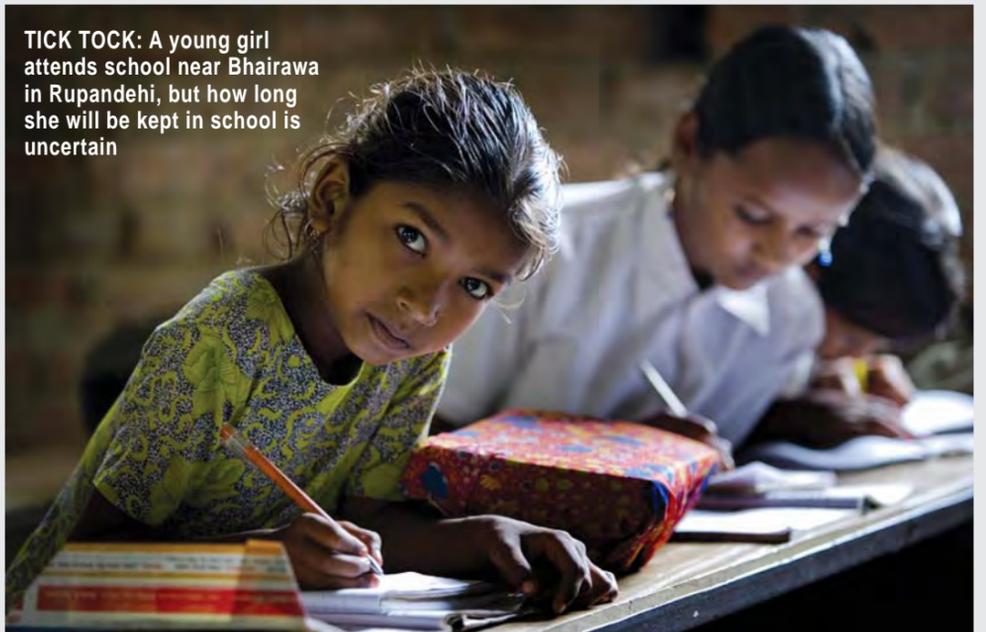
their health, self-confidence, and future prospects,” says Sumon Tuladhar, an education specialist at UNICEF.

According to the UN, Nepal has achieved gender parity of about 0.99 per cent in primary education enrolment, but even government officials are sceptical about the number.

“Gender parity in education is only limited to enrolment, not retention, continuance and performance,” explains Dibya Dawadi, deputy director of the Department of Education. She admits the state needs to do more about getting girls back into the classroom, but it should also work on ways to eliminate discrepancies in the quality of their education.

Nepal’s literacy rate for 6 to 15 year olds is 60.9 per cent, of which 72 per cent are boys, and only 51 per cent are girls. The literacy rate declines as children get older and the sex discrepancy widens. Among

TICK TOCK: A young girl attends school near Bhairawa in Rupandehi, but how long she will be kept in school is uncertain



KATE HOLTIRIN

World Education, which has been working on educational projects to combat child labour in Nepal.

Thousands of Nepali girls drop out of schools every year to get married, missing out on their education. While many girls are pulled out of school before marriage, a large number are never sent to school in the first place. Out of the 240,000 Nepali children who don’t attend schools, most are girls. Educated, older daughters are big liabilities for parents when it comes to dowry.

“The younger the bride, the cheaper the dowry,” explains Sherpa. Many impoverished families in the Tarai often have no choice but to pay a higher dowry to marry off their older daughters. Prices range from \$200 to \$20,000, depending on the age of the bride, and can be prohibitively expensive if she is a qualified teacher, engineer or doctor.

Although the number of child marriages has plateaued in the past decade, and more parents are sending their daughters to their husbands’ homes only when they are 16, there is still no guarantee that the girls can continue their education after marriage. And parents are often unaware of the impact that trying to save money spent on school fees and dowry can have on the future of their daughters.

“Girls hardly return to school after marriage, and even if they do, their performance is very poor. Early marriage not only affects their education, but also

those aged 15 and above literacy is at 56.5 per cent, with around 71.6 per cent being young men, but only 44.5 per cent being young women, according to the Central Bureau for Statistics.

These differences can be partly explained by the fact that public school fees are more affordable at the primary level, whereas higher grades are often beyond the reach of parents. However, it’s the patriarchal mindset which is really keeping girls out of school. In a culture where girls are still seen as the responsibility of their future husbands, investing in their education is the last priority for families.

“Child marriage changes the children’s life options, especially their educational investment by parents,” says Sherpa. “As soon as girls become someone else’s ‘property’, the parents show little willingness to invest in their education. This is total abuse of their rights.”

Child rights experts agree that the only way to stop early marriage is to prosecute guilty families. Although putting a mother in jail is not helpful when she has children at home, but Sherpa believes the crime will not go away unless the state punishes parents and sets an example for other families. www.irinnews.org



“We used to have a farm nearby, but the flood in 1995 took everything away and we were homeless overnight. I came here and started working as a stone crusher. My family has contributed Rs 500, one truck sand and pebbles to the school. I don’t want my daughter to follow in my footsteps. I can’t read or write, but I want Ranjana to be highly educated. Every morning I go out to work with my hammer, while Ranjana goes to school carrying her books. This makes me very happy.”

Ambika Nepali, Parent



“I have been teaching at Janata Primary School for the last five years. Teaching is not just a profession, it’s my passion. I like teaching here. I feel terrible whenever I have to miss classes due to illness or emergency. The parents started this school because they wanted their children to have a future. I want to help them achieve that.”

Dhan Laxmi Rai, Teacher

nepalitimes.com
Karnali’s daughter, #323

EVENTS



REAL SCHOOL OF NEPAL, regional finals of the Central Region of an inter-region school-level competition in extracurricular activities followed by grand final in Kathmandu. 5, 9, 12 and 25 September, Kathmandu

Call for Ideas, Youth Action Fund is seeking individuals aged 19 to 27 to pitch ideas that will make positive impact over a range of social issues. Apply by 15 September, 9801038093, ram.yaf11@gmail.com



SIZZLER PROMOTION, the launch of a new wing Terrace Garden at the Radisson Hotel. Rs 499, 1 to 30 September, 1 to 9pm, Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu, 4411818

Bird Conservation Photography, exhibition and competition of bird photography. 31 August to 1 September, 11am to 5pm, Nepal Academy of Fine Arts, 4417805, 4420213, bcn@birdlifene.org

Photo Circle LII, Delhi-based Indian photographer Sohrab Hura will be

presenting his work as well as a selection of works by young Indian photographers and also discuss new directions in the Indian photography scene. 1 September, 9.45am to 12.45pm, The Bakery Café, Sundhara

Farmers' Market, sale of fresh bread, cheese, vegetables, and fruits. 31 August, 9am to 12pm, New Orleans Café, Patan, 5522708

The Rise of the Collateral, art exhibition by Manish Harijan. Runs till 20 September, 11am to 5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal, 4218048



HIGHWAY, charity screening of the acclaimed film. 1 September, 3pm and 5pm, The British School, Lalitpur

Master Training Workshop, training for teachers who want to make their class rooms lively. Rs 600 per session, runs till 31 August, only Fridays, 8am to 1pm, The British Council, Lainchaur, 4410978

Photo Exhibition and Auction at Cuppas, aiming to create a platform where photographers and potential patrons can interact. 31 August, 3.45pm, Cuppas, Putalisadak

DINING

Public Cave, while their continental and Italian dishes like pizzas, sizzlers and springrolls are a hit among customers, their main attraction is karaoke. Dihikopatan, Pokhara, 9856032958



MAGIC BEANS, coffee, cakes and sandwiches with a magical touch and taste. Sherpa Mall, Durbar Marg, 4230914

Moksh, it may be well know for it's cultural events but the food in Moksh is mighty fine. Jhamsikhel

Pumpnickel Bakery, get an early breakfast or brunch with interesting choices of bread and sandwiches. Experiment with their goat cheese or yak cheese sandwiches, or have a sip of coffee in the classy indoor dining area. Thamel, 7.30am-7pm, 4259185

Comfort Zone, restobar with a decent range of cocktails and barbeque meals. Thamel



SOL DELICATESSEN, a range of gourmet food that will satiate the most refined palates. 10am to 6pm (closed on Mondays), Babar Mahal Revisited, 4216433, soldelicatessen@gmail.com

Grill Me, a restaurant with a warm ambience and delicious grilled delights. Jhamsikhel, 5535294



BLACK PEPPER CAFÉ & PUB, cosmopolitan dining and drinking in a traditional style courtyard, try the apple sauce pork chops and enjoy the good service. Kopundole Height, Lalitpur, 5521897, 5536926



THIK THAK RESTAURANT, this restaurant boasts live fish from the lake which means the fish dishes are always fresh and delicious. Lakeside, Pokhara



FUJI BAKERY, tucked in Chakupat this bakery offers homemade goodies like apple pie, pain du chocolat and banana cake. Chakupat

Cosmopolitan Café, located in the heart of Basantapur, this cozy café offers arguably the best chicken sizzler in town. Basantapur (along Kathmandu Darbar Square), 4225246



HIM THAI RESTAURANT AND BAR, for authentic Thai cuisines in town. Lazimpat, 4418683

Dragon Café, enjoy momos, sizzlers and vegetable coins at the most reasonable prices. Kumaripati

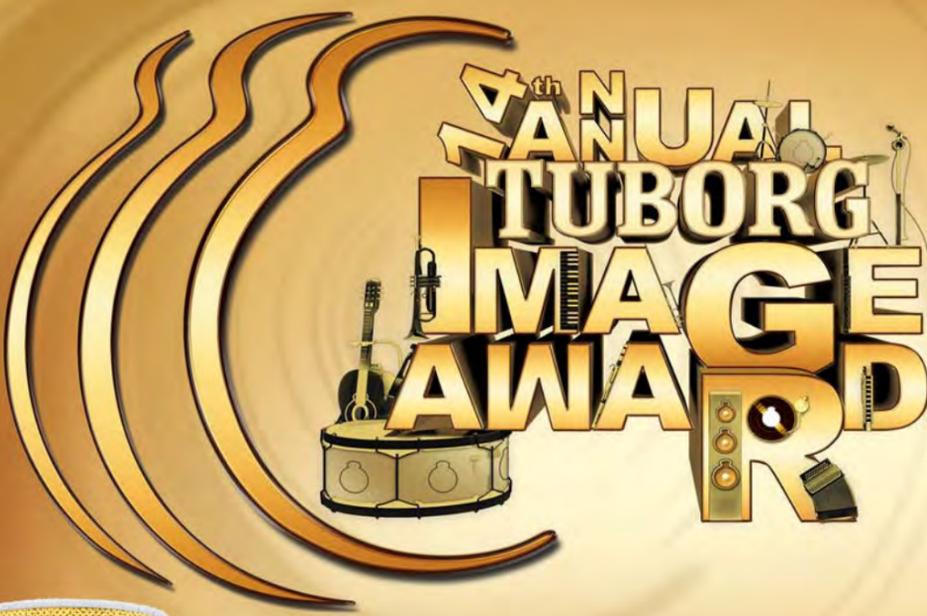
Lhasa Bar, enjoy a beer or a splash of cocktail at this springboard for excellent young musicians starting out on the Thamel circuit. Thamel, 985101043



NEW DISH, grab filling meals like pork momos, spring rolls and chop seuks with excellent value for money. Khicchapokhari

Summit Hotel, savour the succulent ribs basket, and add the finishing touch with a hot Dutch apple pie. Jhamsikhel, 5521810

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Left after Cold War
Lekh Nath Poudyal
Useless opposition
Jainendra Jivan
Why cooperative?
Khag Raj Sharma

REPORTS

New chief in town
Blacklisted businesses
Glamour market

INTERVIEW

David Seddon, co-author of Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery (1980), The People's War in Nepal: Left Perspectives and The Struggle for Basic Needs in Nepal, Peasants and Workers in Nepal

GETAWAYS

Pokhara Grande, a swimming pool to escape from the tropic heat, a massage parlour and spa to loosen up and a gymnasium to release stress, a great option to unwind. *Lakeside, Pokhara*

Last Resort, canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking—challenge yourself and be adventurous at the Last Resort. *Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchowk, 4700525, 4701247*

Temple Tree Resort and Spa, a peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna— it also hosts three different restaurants to cater to your needs. *Gaurighat, Lakeside, 977-61-465819*



EVEREST PANORAMA RESORT, a great view of the Himalayas from the top of the Mahabharat. *Daman, 4412864, info@everestpanoramaresort.net*

Moti is back in town

Illustrator and comic artist Kripa Joshi recently launched the Miss Moti anthology, *Miss Moti and Her Short Stories* which chronicles the adventures of her plus-sized heroine and deals with diverse themes from romance to horror to fairytale to porn. “My anxiety about my body inspired me to create Miss Moti who I feel is a role-model for women of all sizes,” she explains.

Joshi whose creations are influenced by traditional Mithila art, says it was a challenge to tell stories in a limited space, but it allowed her to grow as an artist, experiment with design and also explore secondary characters. Her previous works include *Miss Moti and the Cotton Candy* and *Miss Moti and the Big Apple*.

www.missmoti.com
www.kripakreations.com



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Yak Restaurant

SOMEPLACE ELSE



PICS: RUBY TUESDAY

My quest for good food led me to a dingy little joint in Boudha, that many had sworn served the best Chinese food to be had this side of the border. No chop suey drowning in tomato ketchup or chili this and chili that which make up most menus at so called ‘Chinese’ restaurants, Yak serves authentic Chinese cuisine I was warned.

Well, they certainly weren’t lying when they said the place was dingy. It is also grimy, sooty, and very basic. This however, did nothing to put me off from giving the place a fair chance, for I have been

to enough fine-dining eateries where too much attention was given to décor, and none to the food.

Yak’s menu is extensive and offers a lot of exotic items. We decided to play it safe and asked for the cucumber salad (Rs 140) to start with. Spicy and crunchy, this salad was the perfect start to the meal and went a long way in allaying our initial fears. This tiny hole in the wall is the real deal and might just turn out be the answer to my prayers: good food at reasonable prices. And the prices are definitely something to write home about. At Rs 20 a pop for a bowl of rice and Rs 10 for a tingmo, it



seemed I had travelled back in time.

The tingmos are the perfect accompaniment to mala tofu (Rs 130), silken cubes of the humble bean curd in a lush red chili sauce. The chicken with fungus (Rs 240), which are basically strips of stir fried meat with woody agaric, holds a crunch and could very well dethrone chicken chili from the top of

my ‘snacks that go perfect with alcohol’ list.

One of the most expensive dishes on the menu is the spicy pork spare ribs at Rs 580 and it is a heaped platter of meaty goodness. The flesh falls off the bone and it comes all spiced with Sichuan pepper, spring onions, fermented soybeans, and chili flakes - nary a drop of tomato ketchup in sight.

Our table was creaking under the weight of all these edibles, and the fried white fong (Rs 170), spinach greens with mushroom (Rs 160), chicken fried rice (Rs 120) were yet to come.

Yak Restaurant is a place to

go to with like-minded foodies who are ready to overlook the dirt and grime and who understand that to seek out good food, you have to explore dark and seedy alleys for the pleasure of digging (or in this case chopsticking) into bowls of gastronomic delights. Ruby Tuesday

How to get there: Walk clockwise around the Bouddhanath Stupa until you see an alley beside a huge gumba. Walk through the alley pass the street-side shops until you see Yak Restaurant on your right.



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The West Wing



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Could there ever be a television show that changed your life? Well, no, I wouldn't go that far, but I will say *The West Wing* which ran for seven seasons from September 1999 to May 2006 came pretty close to changing mine.

The show chronicles the two-term tenure of the fictitious, democratic President of the United States (POTUS), Josiah 'Jed' Bartlett, and his trusty, plucky, idealistic White House Staff.

Jed Bartlett played by the great Martin Sheen is a Nobel Prize winning, bible quoting, world-class economist and the epitome of what a POTUS ought to be. Every time he opens his mouth he says something witty, smart and tear jerking. He is the heart and soul of the series in which there are an



almost astonishing number of widely beloved characters ranging from the statuesque Allison Janney as CJ Cregg, the wise-cracking White House Press Secretary (and also my personal favourite); Rob Lowe as the young, handsome, brilliant, and kind-hearted Sam Seaborne – the Deputy Communications Director and former hotshot lawyer with a brilliant political future of his own; Richard Schiff as the grumpy, bear-like, but also brilliant Toby Ziegler – Sam Seaborne's boss; Bradley Whitford as the wise-ass, arrogant, and sharp as a knife Josh Lyman the Deputy Chief of Staff to the late, great John Spencer's loveable Leo McGarry, the Chief of Staff and the man who persuaded Jed Bartlett, formerly a retired New Hampshire Senator to run for President.

There are a large number of other unforgettable characters in this series, but I'll leave those for you to discover on your own.

The West Wing was groundbreaking in so many ways that it is hard to summarise everything here. For instance: it was the first show to introduce and perfect the 'Walk and Talk'. Using a perfectly re-created White House set, the characters often introduce complex problems, and then proceed to argue and quip their way through a long tracking master shot during which they turn corners, duck through other White

House Staffers and occasionally get involved in numerous other peripheral conversations while never breaking their stride and always with a plethora of clever jokes littering their conversation.

For those who may think the show is just about glib, clever people, I would like to say it is quite the opposite. Sometimes endearingly naïve, but always unfailingly honest, and idealistic, the characters in *The West Wing* tackle all the important issues in the world from terrorism to sexism, abortion, racism, and of course the slightly more mundane passing of the budget.

Is it silly to say that I learned more about the workings of the United States government from this show than I could ever have imagined? Always lauded for its complex storylines and accurate jargon, the plot lines and excellent dialogue in the series are the inventions of the great Aaron Sorkin who has the uncanny ability to make even the birth of Facebook seem riveting.

An example of one of my favourite exchanges in the show occurs during a negotiation between a Russian diplomat and Sam Seaborne:

Nikolai Ivanovich (Russian negotiator): Why must every American president bound out of an automobile like as at a yacht club while in comparison our leader looks like ... I don't even know what word is.

Sam Seaborne: Frumpy?

Nikolai Ivanovich: I don't know what 'frumpy' is but onomatopoeically sounds right.

Sam Seaborne: It's hard not to like a guy who doesn't know frumpy but knows onomatopoeia.

If you want to learn more fascinating things like the above (who knew 'onomatopoeia' became 'onomatopoeic'?) buy a copy of the complete *West Wing*. You'll be hooked and more than a hundred TV hours later, you'll find yourself somehow smarter.

On a side note, you'll probably also find yourself weeping at some point in time, either during or after the series, that Jed Bartlett is fictional, and can therefore never really run for President someday which is particularly poignant in these days of Romney and Ryan. 🇺🇸

All DVDs reviewed in this column are available at:
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nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer

Pit falls of old age



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

The cause of ageing is a subject of vigorous debate worldwide.

Some people believe it is just wear and tear while many think ageing is genetically determined. Although a more modern concept, the genetic determination theory is not scientifically borne out.

For example just because your parents lived until they were very old does not genetically endow you with longevity. In fact, only a measly six per cent of your lifespan is determined by your parents' longevity. Even genetically identical twins on average have a difference of about 15 years in their lifetime (in sharp contrast, almost 90 per cent of your height is influenced by how tall your parents are).

So the older concept of wear and tear does seem to hold sway to a large extent. Our bodies accumulate harmful products

like lipofucin and DNA mutations and numerous other microcellular problems over the years, and just like an old car, we tend to fall apart physically.

Regardless of the cause of ageing, one of the most frequently occurring problems faced by the elderly are falls leading to orthopaedic injuries



like hip fractures which may make them bed-ridden and cause other complications. So preventing falls is vital in taking care of the elderly.

An important study of the elderly pointed to three primary risk factors for falls: poor balance, a regimen of

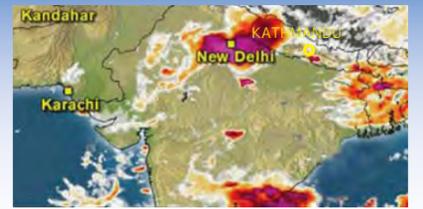
more than four medication, and muscle weakness. In general elderly people even without any of these risk factors have a 12 per cent chance of falls in a year, but if all three factors are present then the likelihood of falls is 100 per cent.

Taking elderly family members for regular eye and ear check-ups helps. Making sure they drink adequate amount of fluid to stave off the side effects of some drugs like diuretics which cause dehydration and dizziness, is also vital. Ensuring their daily nutritional intakes are balanced in terms of calories, proteins, and vitamins will go a long way in limiting muscle weakness. And simple measures like making them wear proper footwear and keeping floors dry will prevent falls.

Finally, finding compassionate and caring doctors for the elderly is critical. Unlike young patients, older ones have 10 main complaints rather than just one or two, which may have existed for over 50 years. Young doctors who may have joined the medical profession for its 'celebrity' status quickly learn that taking care of older patients is not a glamorous job and is actually very challenging. Doctors with enormous patience are the right fit. 🇺🇸

WEEKEND WEATHER

With diminishing cloud cover and high humidity levels, expect sticky and hot days ahead. Respite will come only with afternoon cloud cover and passing localised showers. The rain should be heavy in places accompanied by thunder. Elsewhere, it looks like August was also a precipitation deficient month. It is still too early to declare this year's monsoon a failure, but the rains that do come now wouldn't be much help if it comes in huge bursts because it would destroy crops. There are still chances of late frontal systems moving in from the Bay until the official end of the monsoon season in mid-September.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
30°-18°	31°-19°	29°-18°



NO SMOKING PLEASE: A member of Hotel Association of Ilam pastes a no smoking sticker at Ilam Municipality's gate on Wednesday.



HAZARDOUS HEALTHCARE: Relatives of Dolprasad Gautam from Kavre, who was paralysed due to doctors' carelessness at KIST hospital, demand for compensation on Tuesday.



TEHRAN BOUND: Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai bids farewell to member of his cabinet at Tribhuvan International Airport on Wednesday to participate in the 16th Non-Alignment Movement Summit in Tehran.



MEANWHILE.. : Activists of the UML-affiliated Youth Association Nepal wave black flags at Bhattarai at Tribhuvan International Airport on Wednesday demanding his immediate resignation.



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya



BIKRAM RAI

When the Constituent Assembly was dissolved at midnight on 27 May, there was general fear that the resulting vacuum would lead to anarchy on the streets. Hate speech on both sides was building up to an unpredictable scenario.

A lot has changed since then. Three months later, despite not having a new constitution the people are generally relieved that the tensions have eased and the country has moved on. There may be a political vacuum, the prime minister may be a caretaker, there may be no parliament and elections may be uncertain, but the people aren't complaining. Burdened by inflation, corruption, strikes, and power cuts even during the monsoon, most Nepalis are trying to just get by and don't seem even remotely interested in what the politicians are upto.

After sniping at each other for three months, the political parties have come back in full circle. They threatened each other, conducted competing mass meetings, and now the need for give and take seems to have finally sunk in. They may still snarl at each other through the media, but the leaders of the NC, UML, UCPN-M, and Madhesi Front know that ever since the CA was dissolved the

Coming back full circle

The debate on federalism has taken two extreme positions without sufficiently exploring the middle ground

country has been moving in the wrong direction.

The mutual hatred of the leaders, their clashing ambitions and larger than life egos have hindered reconciliation and dialogue. It is not that they don't realise the inevitable need to engage sooner than later, but the possibility of being seen as weak and losing electoral footing is a strong deterrent in politics.

The two volume report by International Crisis Group (ICG) released this week notes in summary that the whole exercise of the senior leaders in the last four years has been 'purportedly to save the peace process, but often about their personal futures or getting a share of the government'. It

questions the role of the two oldest parties, the NC and UML, for refusing to engage with the broader social base and only appealing particular caste and class. By creating an 'ethnic bogey' and fear mongering about identity, the two parties have done injustice to their own long standing historical legacy.

The young leaders within their own ranks have expressed displeasure over the way leadership has failed to clarify its position on federalism and contributed to the impasse.

After several rounds of lobbying, the leaders have agreed to sit for talks and Wednesday's all party meeting handed over the responsibility of deciding on the future of the CA to the same top leaders. But before they come to a decision,

there must be an agreement on the issues that led to the demise of the CA in May, with a particular focus on federalism.

The debate on federalism so far has taken place from two extreme positions without sufficiently exploring the middle ground for agreement.

There is a need to address the genuine fears as well as misgivings about federalism on both sides and forge a middle-way that is acceptable to all. One way of doing this, the ICG report suggests, is by making future negotiations more inclusive and transparent. This is not a bad idea, since many democratic countries have provisions of broadcasting their legislative proceedings live in the media.

In the absence of an elected

body, the all party meetings will take important decisions regarding the future of this country. So media coverage will not just ensure accountability, it may facilitate positive dialogue and prevent an endless blame game.

The politicians should know by now that there is no other legitimate way of promulgating the constitution except through a CA. The social movements that have kept democracy vibrant even in the absence of an elected body have underlined this.

The question is, are the alpha male politicians of this country willing to put aside their differences for once and seek a viable formula on identity federalism that is acceptable to all? 🇳🇵

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HIGH AND DRY

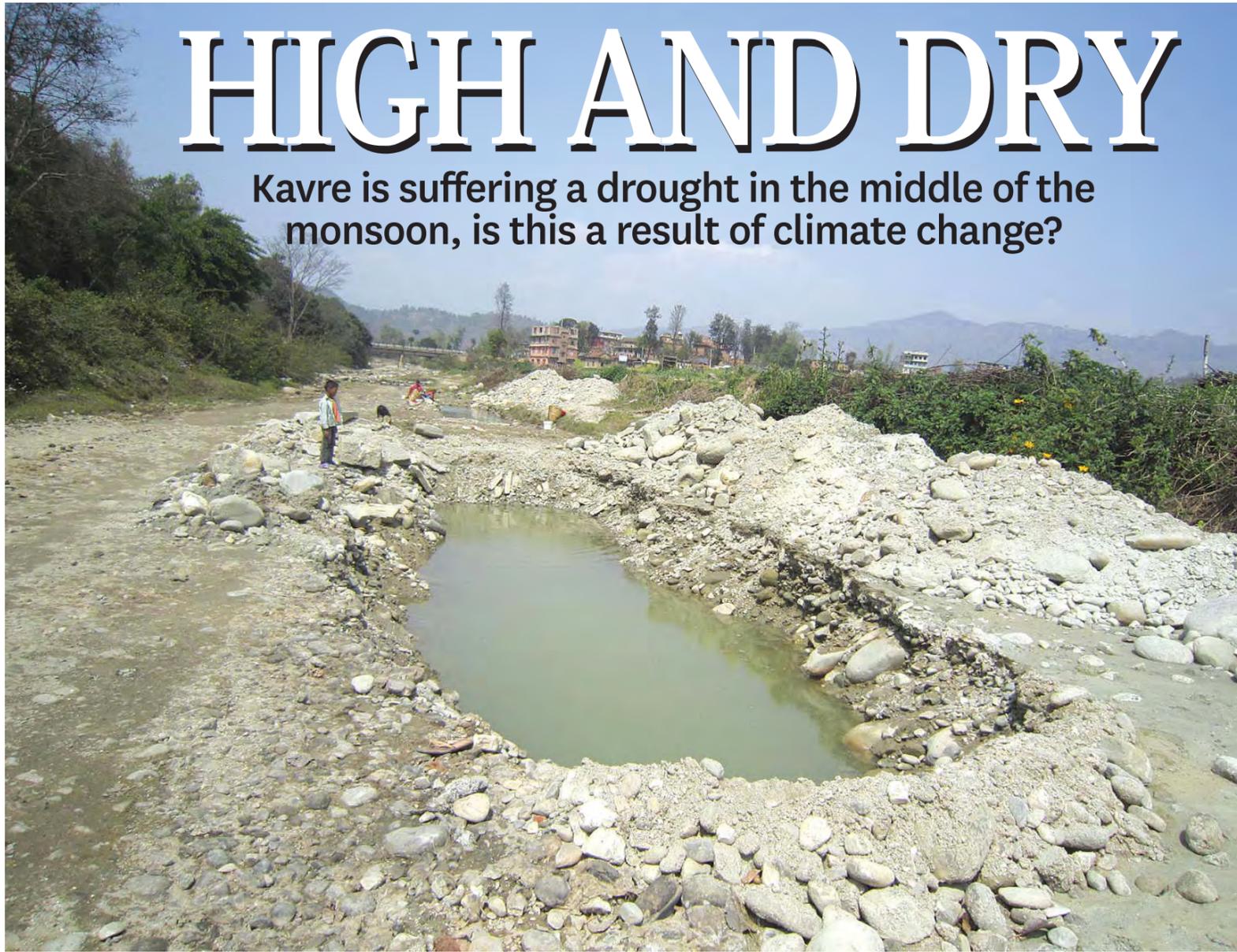
Kavre is suffering a drought in the middle of the monsoon, is this a result of climate change?

MADHUKAR UPADHYA in KAVRE

Farmers in Panchkhal Valley east of Kathmandu have been seen this season carrying kerosene jerry cans to run water pumps to irrigate their paddy fields. Ordinarily that would not be surprising, but this was the middle of the monsoon.

At a time when streams here in Kavre district would be swollen, they were dry. Jhiku Khola, the lifeblood of this valley, did not have a normal flow this year even in August, behaving more like a season stream. Much of the upland rice terraces would have remained fallow if it hadn't been for the water pumps, which run on kerosene because of the electricity shortage.

Natural springs, which should have been gurgling with water are still dry this year. The monsoon has been arriving late by up to two weeks for the last few years, which is delaying rice plantation, reducing ripening time and harvests. In Dhankuta in eastern Nepal, only about half the paddy has been planted this monsoon. Hill farmers wait till the first week of August, and if it still does



MADHUKAR UPADHYA

not rain adequately, the drop in harvest doesn't make plantation worthwhile.

The riddle for us was why the Jhiku Khola in Kavre was dry. Lakes, ponds, reservoirs, and aquifers in the hills are full in the four monsoon months

even when only a fraction of the precipitation seeps underground to recharge groundwater. That groundwater seeping out of mountain slopes (mool) is what people in the hills depend on for their water needs.

Traditionally, Nepalis have names for three types of springs in the mountains: the more or less permanent sthayi mool at the foot of hills, the one that comes to life in July called asare mool and then the saune mool that bursts in August. The

timing of springs indicates the extent to which the monsoon has replenished groundwater reserves in the hills.

After mid-September saune mool first begins to dwindle, whereas asare mool continues to flow for a longer

Private water for the public

By most international norms, the lack of adequate water supply should have rendered Kathmandu Valley uninhabitable by now

NIRENDRA BASNET

Kathmandu Valley's population has now surpassed 3 million, and it is probably the only major city in the world that has virtually no water supply utility worth its name.

Together with the huge electricity shortfall, the crisis of urban water supply represent proof of spectacular state failure. Successive governments have demonstrated that they have little political will or management capability to run modern utilities like power, water, or garbage disposal.

The only reason water riots haven't broken out is because traditional water spouts built by the Malla kings 400 years ago are still working, and some of the Rana-era water mains laid down 80 years ago still function.

Modern urban water supply needs political, social, economic and administrative systems to be in place, and Kathmandu's present water crisis is caused by decades of failure in all these areas. While current demand has surpassed 200 million litres per day, the government supply is only 45 million litres in the dry season and 120 million litres in the wet season. Water supply is rationed to one hour every



BIKRAM RAI

third day if you live in one of the lucky neighbourhoods.

Just controlling leakage would partly cover the shortfall in supply since as much as 75 million litres a day are lost to rusty and leaky underground water pipes. By most international norms, Kathmandu Valley should

be considered uninhabitable by now. More than half the city's water supply is being met by a booming water tanker business that either pipes water in from streams on the Valley rim, or pumps it up from drilled wells.

Every day there are hundreds of water tankers lining

DRY SEASON: In winter, farmers dig pits along the Jhiku Khola river bed to irrigate their potato farms pumping the water collected overnight. But this is lowering the water table and affecting crops in the summer.

period, sometimes even until November. Interestingly, the saune mool does not burst every year, and farmers know that in such a poor monsoon year bumper winter crops can never be expected as the streams too will dry out sooner.

There has been a reduction in groundwater recharge in many parts of the country in the last few years. Some villagers in the hills of Taplejung and Ramechhap even had to shift to lowlands because their springs had dried out. The village of Dhe in Upper Mustang lost its spring and the entire village is in the process of being relocated across the Kali Gandaki. Villagers can move, but when entire regions begin to suffer as is happening in Kavre, it requires serious new thinking.

Farmers in Panchkhal had to use water pumps because asare mool did not come to life even in the middle of the monsoon. It is unlikely that saune mool will appear this year, which means Panchkhal will suffer yet another winter, sixth year in a row, of acute water shortage. All this is indication that Panchkhal, Ramechhap, Taplejung are facing rainfall variability, most probably due to climate change.

Some other factors may also have contributed to low discharge in springs. The

spread of road networks in the hills tends to disrupt natural drainage channels on slopes by diverting runoff elsewhere. The depletion of the groundwater table in the Tarai is being caused by over-extraction of groundwater not only within Nepal but also across the border. However, the case in the hills is different: water flows down due to gravity.

The springs have ceased to flow at a time when they are expected to be flowing in full capacity. If what is happening to springs is an indication of a fundamental shift in the timing of rainfall, its distribution, impacts of building road networks, and a lasting change in water regime, it will have major impact on hill agriculture. The crops we grow, the level of production, cropping cycle, dairy production, and overall food security will all be affected. It will take a long time before we adapt to the changed timing of the new water cycle.

The Himalayan mountains have been described as 'water towers' that store water as snow and ice and their melting in the dry season brings water to downstream areas. But it now seems like the Himalayan highlands are more like gigantic sponges that store groundwater, and erratic rains can deplete groundwater supply and affect a lot more people. 🇳🇵



Madhukar Upadhyaya is a watershed expert currently working as an adviser with Poverty-Environment Initiative in Nepal.

up to fill up near the scenic and historic Taudaha Pond on the Valley's southern outskirts. But there is no uniform rate, no documentation of revenue to the VDC, and no one pays VAT. There is no attempt to conserve the area from where water is pumped out, in fact it has become a garbage disposal site.

No one here knows or seems to care who is pumping water out and who is being paid for it. It is clear that the trade is in the hands of local toughies who enjoy political protection. No one seems particularly worried that this unsustainable water mining is lowering the groundwater table.

Across the Valley at its northern edge is Jorpati, the largest source of water for private tanker suppliers in Kathmandu which make at least 700 daily trips from here. All are members of the Khanipani Tanker Association which has 145 members. Much of the water is pumped out of wells drilled in the area since 1990, and it is clear that the water supply is a result of the ecosystem services provided by recharge from the Shivapuri catchment. But as far as anyone knows, no one is paying any royalty or tax.

Currently, there are 100-150 homes in the area which receive a daily water supply from 5am to 7pm from nine wells with reservoir tanks built by the tanker operators. This free household water supply is part of the deal the tanker owners have worked out with locals to allow them to operate in the area. The only construction they have carried out is to build a roadside temple.

Ironically, the road that connects Jorpati to the city is the same one along which the pipeline from the much-delayed Melamchi water supply project will run when it is finished (see adjoining story). There are many more localities like Taudaha and Jorpati on the outskirts of Kathmandu that have sprung up because of a spontaneous private sector response to the state's failure to ensure water supply.

A few water traders benefit, but the larger community, the municipality and the state get nothing from this unsustainable exploitation of a public good. 🇳🇵

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Not a drop to drink, #350
Pipe dreams, #335
Private water, public debate, #335



DANIEL M MAXWELL

The Melamchi side of Melamchi

DANIEL M MAXWELL in SINDHUPALCHOK

From Kathmandu, the troubled Melamchi Water Supply Project appears as just another development debacle similar to a number of stalled hydropower projects. Melamchi itself, however, has introduced a national conversation about the community's concern regarding project benefits and equitability.

The project was supposed to be completed in 2006, but work on the 26km tunnel that will bring water from a snow-fed river to Kathmandu is only 10 per cent finished. Many argue that the Melamchi project's inter-basin water transfer is too ambitious and expensive for Nepal.

There are also political concerns, as Nepalis debate natural resource exploitation under a future federal structure. The project costs half of the country's annual budget, yet it will only supply the capital's water needs. The Melamchi Social Upliftment Program (SUP) has been trying to promote local development in the region, but the debate continues: are the people of the Melamchi Valley merely project stakeholders, or furthermore, are they entitled to become project shareholders?

Benefit sharing of Melamchi water revenues with local communities will set the precedent for future mega-projects in Nepal

The SUP is only a small component of the overall project, and was conceived late into the project cycle to appease local groups demanding benefits. The unusual manner by which locals have won their demands carries unprecedented implications for Nepal's development path.

The project site office near Melamchi Pul Bazaar looks like a fortress, with a perimeter barbed wire fence, and an army base and police station nearby. Throughout the war, the project site was often attacked, further delaying construction work. Nonetheless, conflicts plagued the project years after the war. Blockades were staged by affected villagers, where the main office was sometimes padlocked by five different groups simultaneously. In 2010 alone, the office was padlocked for seven months.

Local groups secured most of their demands, allowing the project to move forward. The rural movement, facilitated by the Norwegian Norplan Consulting, led to the formation of a local NGO to implement SUP which was partly instrumental in amplifying the concerns of the community.

The local NGO is comprised of an autonomous committee, where each member represents one of the 14 VDCs eligible for SUP funds. The SUP

initiative outlined five objectives: the creation of a Langtang buffer zone, broader health and education services, formation of income generation programs, and rural electrification.

Such objectives may be an opportunity for local capacity building with a participatory approach, a remedy across rural Nepal where local autonomy is almost non-existent. Perhaps this is how project planners intend to present SUP to the mainstream in order to maintain public support for an increasingly unpopular program.

Unfortunately, there isn't much evidence this is happening. Despite the ability to efficiently allocate funds, the committee is often deadlocked about how to disburse them. The SUP's annual Rs 65 million is therefore handed to an arguably dysfunctional VDC, a politicised arena with competing economic interests.

The more troubling aspect of SUP is the unhealthy political space it opens, which affects participation. By channelling funds to the VDC, the SUP has further polarised local politics. This has been seen in VDC-organised Water User Committees which are used by members as an arena to 'gauge' their political strength. Individual members of the committee usually become prominent through oppositional politics against the VDC chairman. In such an environment, party politics takes precedence over local representation.

The future of SUP is uncertain, as only verbal agreements negotiate benefit sharing. Currently, the government has promised one per cent of Melamchi water revenues for local benefit sharing. The foremost demand from locals, however, is a written agreement from the government for 10 per cent of benefits, comparable to hydropower projects which provide 12 per cent of energy revenues to the DDC. There is a possibility that future SUP benefits may be far less than the current annual budget of Rs 65 million given fluctuations in the price of water.

The Investment Board of Nepal recently proposed 14 'national pride' mega-projects, which will all require some degree of social mitigation measures. Social upliftment is a vague and generic term, and Nepal does not have a legal framework to make such determinations. The case of the Melamchi SUP will set a precedent for what donors, NGOs, and political actors will expect from future social programs. 🇳🇵

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Water soluble, #351
Troubled waters, #350

'Land politics is the main reason for landlessness'

Interview with Minister for Land Reform and Management Chandra Dev Joshi, *Karobar*, 28 August

कारोबार

Karobar: How are you addressing the issue of land reform that has been at the heart of the current political process?

Joshi: First and foremost, we have to be clear that redistribution of land is no longer an option. Today land is used not just for agriculture, but also other productive purposes. So we have to create a national land use policy first, then identify the real landless and homeless families and secure their shelter and use of land. Creating commissions for political recruitment is not a long-term solution.

Four years ago the Maoists used the slogan of land redistribution to garner support. How are you working with the same party in the government with a different approach?

As a leftist, I believe power must be used to empower the powerless. It is unfortunate that for the last six years, the communist parties that came to power in the country failed to practice this principle. If you wield power by selling unrealistic dreams, it ultimately backfires. The UML used the land issue to mobilise support of the landless in the 1990s, the Maoists did the same and look what it has gotten them into.

The NC led government ended the kamaiya (bonded labour) system 12 years ago and in the last two decades two high level

commissions have been formed to address the issue of landlessness. How do you evaluate them?

Abolishing the kamaiya system was a historic achievement which must be appreciated. But the rehabilitation process was not handled properly and the kamaiya problem persists even today.

The land certificates that the UML distributed in Butwal during its nine months in government went mostly to wealthy families. The last commission formed by the Maoist government collected details of landless families from 25 districts and recommended them for land certificates. But I was not convinced with their study and did not extend the mandate of the commission. I do not believe that in a turbulent political environment, one party can impartially implement such major policy reform. It requires broader political involvement and consensus.



BIKRAM RAI

You have decided to deny NRNs and foreigners to purchase and sell apartments in the country. Why did you do that?

I feel allowing foreigners to purchase and sell apartments is not in Nepal's best interest. Home ownership is a sensitive issue related to the country's internal security. As it is, we have foreigners interfering with our domestic matters and carrying out their activities on our land. If we permit them to purchase private homes, such unpleasant activities might increase.

The right kind of alliance

Narayan Wagle, *Nagarik*, 26 August

नागरिक

By creating the Federal Democratic Republican Alliance (FDRA) Pushpa Kamal Dahal has opened up a front against the opposition. The establishment of this alliance has made it clear that Dahal intends to polarise Nepal's political landscape by using the ethnic card and delaying the possibility of elections. This will provide his party another opportunity to plunder the government exchequer by bringing out a partial budget in a month's time.

The Maoists have been cleverly championing the federalism issue and painting the opposition as anti-federal forces. By solely defining federalism along ethnic lines, they have not only manipulated the agenda, but turned political fronts into an ethnic one by mobilising popular sentiments. They blame the opposition for dissolving the CA and delaying the constitution. They accuse the President for being an obstacle in holding elections, but at the same time do not want him to use special powers to end the constitutional deadlock by amending the constitution and making way for elections.



On the other hand, the NC's reluctance to participate in elections has stopped the party from creating an opposition front and provided impetus to the Maoist strategy. It is essential for the NC to head an opposition front by including Upendra Yadav and Mohan Baidya led factions against FDRA. However, as long as Upendra Yadav does not give up his Madhes Pradesh rhetoric and Baidya does not let go of the demand for ethnic states, such an alliance is unlikely.

There is little reason to trust those who are calling for the reinstatement of the CA and who want the constitution to be declared through the CA by consensus. The deadlock created by the demand for two Madhes Pradesh will not be resolved through balance of power in the reinstated body. So the opposition parties must seize the moment by creating an alliance in favour of new elections.

United in tax evasion



BIKRAM RAI

Sachen Gautam, *Naya Patrika*, 17 August

नयाँ पत्रिका

The private telecommunications company United Telecom (UTL) has been evading taxes by depositing 70 per cent of profits from incoming international calls to its parent companies in India and paying only 30 per cent of its total royalty by claiming it has been in loss all these years. Almost 80 per cent of UTL's shares is owned by three Indian companies MTNL, Telecom Consultants and Tata. The remaining 20 per cent belongs to Nepal Ventures. Since getting its permit in

2002, UTL has evaded Rs 1.6 billion in taxes. Even though the CIAA and the Public Accounts Committee of the CA had directed the government not to write off UTL's tax payments, the government did not comply.

During Gyanendra's rule, UTL used Indian diplomatic channels to pressurise the government so that it would be exempt from paying taxes worth Rs 189.4 million. An official who took part in the negotiations over the Trade and Transit Treaty between the two countries reveals, "After all negotiations were completed, the Indian party raised the issue of exempting UTL from taxes."

Later, on the king's orders, the cabinet decided to write off UTL's royalty payments and the Trade and Transit Treaty was extended until 5 January 2013.

A source at the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) says UTL is confident the government will once again make an exception because it feels a democratic government must yield to its demands when even an autocratic monarchy obliged. The source adds, "UTL has already received guarantees from politicians as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The resignation of the chairman of NTA is proof of this deal."

"When we requested the ministry to grant us permission to investigate and the security forces to close down UTL's operations, Minister Raj Kishor Yadav used his influence to stop our work," admits Bhesh Raj Kandel who resigned from the post of NTA chairman last month citing the state's unwarranted interference. "Since all high level officials are in cahoots, UTL will be given the green light to evade taxes once more."



अन्वपूर्ण पोस्ट Suman in *Annapurna Post*, 30 August

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Why can't the anti-graft body which arrested Khum Bahadur Khadka arrest Pushpa Kamal Dahal too?”

Mohan Baidya, Chairman, CPN-M



Mismanaging aids

Rameshwor Bohora in *Himal Khabarpatrika* 17-31 August

हिमाल

It has been two decades since foreign aid started pouring into Nepal for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. Major donors like the Global Fund of Geneva, USAID, UKaid, World Bank, and AusAid have spent \$114.7 million on HIV/AIDS programs in the last five years alone, but experts say the money has not reached the people who need it the most and majority of the funds are used to cover administrative and overhead costs.

According to National Centre for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC), there are 19,118 HIV infected people in Nepal as of 2011. But various organisations working in this field claim the figures are much higher and closer to 56,000. Anand Pun of Recovering Nepal, an NGO working with drug users, says given the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Nepal, the funding is insufficient.

The agencies have also come under heavy criticism for trying to bypass the government. Instead of working in partnership with the government, many donors are known to take unilateral decisions over which districts receive funding, what programs are prioritised, and which INGOs get to manage the fund.

In 2004, citing the lack of human resource and infrastructure at NCASC, the Global Fund transferred the funds to the UNDP instead. A high-ranking official at the Ministry of Health expressed his

BLEEDING DRY: A drug user being counselled for HIV/AIDS prevention at a local counselling centre in Dallu, Kathmandu. The centre is on the verge of closing down after donors stopped funding it.

displeasure and said, "Donors and INGOs have been running programs in Nepal like they are run in failed states."

Donors pulling out mid-way or not continuing projects in the long run have also become problematic because it puts the targeted community at further risk.

Local NGOs, however, are not without fault. NGOs are involved in an extremely unhealthy competition to bag the funds without caring about whether they have the resources and means to successfully carry out the projects.

While other donor supported programs like malaria eradication, and family planning have been exemplary in Nepal, HIV/AIDS programs are becoming increasingly controversial.





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From ordnance to ordinance

As the deconstruction of Kathmandu moves into high gear, parts of the city look like the aftermath of an eight Richter earthquake. Demolition along Lazimpat was delayed for a month because powerful people who live there got a stay order to stay on. But one has to hand it to the Babu government for going where no government dared go before in its pursuit of a Flat Earth Policy. The latest walls to be brought down are at Nirmal Niwas and the message has gone out that no one is more equal than the ex-Kingji. But now even BRB's bulldozer juggernauts have been brought to a grinding halt by the Japanese, French, American, and Russian embassies which have refused to move their Great Walls citing **diplomatic impunity** under the Vienna Conventions and Amendments Thereof in which nations agree to guarantee and protect the property of diplomatic missions in each other's countries. Which means the only solution to the bottlenecks along the new Lazimpat-Maharajgrunge Boulevard is for the municipality to tunnel under the embassies. Don't think the Vienna Convention says anything about embassies also having underground diplomatic rights.



So tourists to Nepal have also

joined the relay hunger strike to demand a new airport in Pokhara. They must be on a tight budget and skipping meals. **But thanks, anyway.**

The Maobaddies are so confident that the \$305 million project will go ahead that the Financial Minister signed an MoU with the Chinese contractor even before the bidding documents were opened, and now ex Baddie CA member from Kaski, Raj Kazi, has publicly admitted that he received a 50

at Chapali Heights. An insider tells Donkey, SBD's plan is simple: get Jhusil-Da and Puka-Da high on single malt and agree to reinstate the CA, so that Ram Babu will have to resign before the NY General Assembly trip. But what is making this donkey scratch his backside is: how is the **Loin King** going to reconcile his ambition to be PM for the fifth time with PKD's ambition to be PM for the second? Another sign that Chairman Ferocious is itching to get back into Balu

on public **'emotional terrorism'** against Com Daddy. Translation of a heart-wrenching FB status: "Is politics greater than the family? Where is the love? After all, I am still your little baby." For some reason that post was hastily removed, probably on orders from HQ.



Now that the CA looks like it may be revived, the UML is on the verge of splitting into the **Janai Jati Party** and a **Jana Jati Party**. Puzzling that the UML should be called a Bahunbaddie party because most Unfed Marxist-Leninist leaders have Newari wives. Legend has it that during their long years living underground during the Panchayat the revolutionary comrades all eloped with their landlords' daughters. Which is why Kathmandu Valley has always been a UML stronghold because just about everyone is an in-law.



If the UML is a **Bahun-Newar** party, then the Maobaddies are a **Bahun-Magar** party. Awesome Jr has just carried on that tradition with his third liaison with Comrade Bina. The cabinet doesn't seem to have much to do these days but ban things left and right, so why don't they just announce a blanket ban on Nepalis marrying within their

own caste and ethnic group? That will probably do more to integrate this country than the **impeyan pheasant** and Mt Everest.



On the first anniv of **Lal Dhoj's** prime ministership it would be useful to recap how he has made the uneasy transition from ruling by ordinance to ruling by ordinance. One proof that the Maoist ideologue-in-chief has arrived is him accusing detractors in the NC and UML of being 'anti-democratic'. Other undoctored prime ministerial nuggets from the past year:

"This country's keys are elsewhere."
"I gambled in New Delhi."
"This country could be merged."



In order to salvage her otherwise disastrous media chaperoning trip to China (during which Nepali hacks burped loudly during a banquet and demonstrated how civilised we Neps are) Comrade Yummy dashed off an op-ed on return in which she called herself an **'Executive First Lady'**. Could be a tongue of the slip for two reasons: a) She just can't let go of the word 'execution', and b) She really has executive powers in the PMO.



lack palm grease from three construction companies to get the project going. "I took it for the party, what's wrong with that?" he told a public hearing. The Baddies may be thoroughly corrupt, but at least they are honest.



The Brave Lion is on an African Safari this week, but before leaving he extended an open invitation to all the top leaders for a weekend of fun and frolic

Water is that he has now shed his flowery Hawaiian shirt for an embroidered Dhaka east-a-coat.



And still on the subject of loins, Awesome Junior seems to have got bored in his honeymoon and is missing all the action in Lazimpat Durbar. Either that or he has finished off what Daddy sent him out to do. The Sunny boy has been active on FB writing to friends, giving online interviews to journo. And now he has gone

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