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#331

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**Q. Is the government addressing basic madhesi grievances?**

Total votes: 2,339



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**Q. Were protesters right to disrupt the Prithvi Jayanti celebrations on Thursday?**

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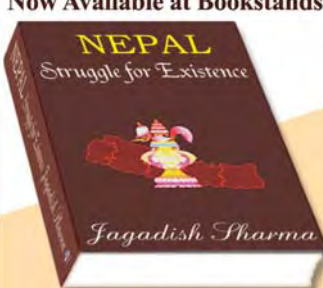
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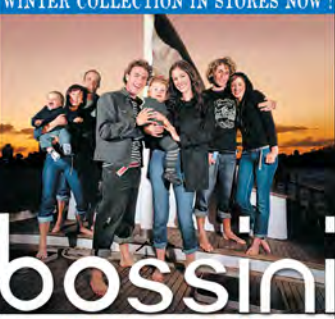
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**NATIONAL DISUNITY DAY:**  
Supporters of the monarchy  
marched to the statue of King  
Prithvi Narayan Shah on  
Wednesday to prevent it from  
being defaced by Maoists.

KIRAN PANDAY

# Into the fray

UNMIN, better get used to this new acronym

**ANAGHA NEELAKANTAN**

**T**here's a name for it now: UNMIN, the United Nations Mission to Nepal. The mandate: monitoring 'arms management' and elections to the constituent assembly.

The proposal for UNMIN was presented to the Security Council on Thursday for budgetary approval and comes as the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour prepares to visit Nepal this weekend. The UN

under a new secretary general in 2007 needs a success story after Rwanda and East Timor, and Nepal may just be it.

But if the mission is to help restore lasting peace it will now have to be asked to focus on four issues: fighters, not just weapons, the terms of an acceptable constituent assembly election, potential spoilers such as the situation in the tarai, and pending human rights issues.

Ian Martin and his tiny team kept arms management in

the spotlight throughout negotiations in 2006 until the signing of the peace accord and the tripartite agreement. But the new mission's mandate will be restricted by what the seven parties, the Maoists, and Nepal's neighbours want: the almost obsessive focus on cantonments and containers.

Partly it is theatrics. The UN will be here to add credibility to a dramatic homegrown process that is acceptable to the parties and puts the Maoists in the best

possible light. But it is also a formula that had to be acceptable to India, which didn't want a precedence for UN peacekeeping so close to home.

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**UN-doing our past**

**Full story p4**

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## UN-DOING OUR PAST

The irony was lost on most who were at the Nepal Army base at Panchkhal on Wednesday. At a time when Nepal is readying to welcome the full strength of a United Nations monitoring mission, there was the chief of army staff inspecting Nepali soldiers readying to leave for UN peacekeeping duties in Congo and Haiti.

No one should have any illusions about the involvement of the United Nations in arms management in Nepal's peace process. The UN's role was the face-saving way to get the Maoists and the army to agree to stop fighting. For the guerrillas it offered an opportunity to lay down arms without making it appear like it was a surrender. And for an army dragged into a dirty and unwinnable war, it was a neat way to come out smelling like roses and at the same time save its own lucrative UN peacekeeping contract.

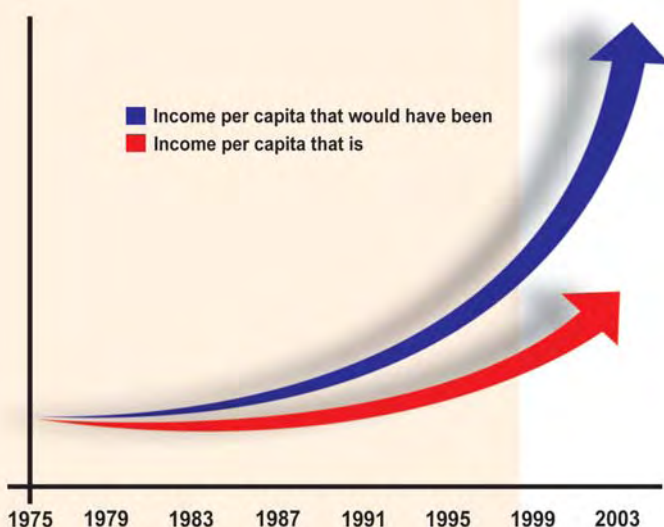
It took a lot of shuttle diplomacy and behind-the-scenes effort to get the Indians to overcome their hang-ups about letting the UN in. Delhi finally agreed as long as the UN was not a 'peacekeeper', but a 'monitor'. Ian Martin's team is hobbled with a limited mandate: both for arms management as well as to prevent new conflicts from igniting, for example, in the volatile tarai.

The UN is a popular institution in Nepal, the blue flag has a good reputation and people have high expectations about its role. But this is a conflict we got ourselves into and we must solve it ourselves. The UN can help, but can't force us to shake hands.

Even so, the UN must be allowed to tackle potential spoilers to the peace process. After all the bad press it's got in Rwanda and East Timor in recent years, the UN needs Nepal as much as Nepal needs the UN. Here is one place where the world body has arrived before things have completely fallen apart.

There is a lot of cynicism about the UN, especially among Kathmandu's well-heeled who like to poke fun about how slow it is. What they forget is that the UN is us, it reflects the inefficiencies and sloppiness of its member states. We mustn't forget that 'arms management' is a euphemism for disarmament.

The containers in the cantonments are a step towards ultimate decommissioning and the renunciation of violence as a political weapon. There is no going back on that, and the UN is here to help us undo our past.



# Rethinking growth

## An aid splurge by itself can't propel economic growth

Charting the course of economic and social transformation during the most violent period in Nepal's modern history is no small feat. But the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) has done just that by showing flexibility in these uncertain times.



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Sailesh Tiwari**

A testament to the document's technical durability is the fact that successive governments, starting with pre-regression (Deuba), regression (Chand and Thapa), partially-corrected regression (Deuba), deep-regression (Gyanendra) to post-regression (Koirala), have drawn their economic and social policies entirely from it. These governments may have been preoccupied with politics to worry about where the economy was headed. But as at least two of them could have declared the document void, their inaction can be interpreted as approval.

Now in its final year of usable life, the PRSP will feed into a three-year interim development plan. Despite continued friction over powersharing in Kathmandu, the political climate over the next couple of years is likely to provide a far more benign context for economic development. The state, which had been effectively restricted to district

capitals during the conflict, can now assert a deeper presence. Non-government agencies are already consolidating and extending their networks. If the post-1990 donor behaviour is any indication, this energy is likely to be matched by a commensurate inflow of aid money.

However, experience has shown that while an aid splurge which follows public euphoria over peace can stoke the egos of those in power, and give them confidence and a sense of international validation, it cannot by itself, propel economic growth. One of the PRSP's biggest shortcomings was that it placed inordinate faith in the ability of aid-induced public investment to generate growth.

For a projected annual growth target of 6.2 percent over five years from 2002-07, it specified an investment requirement of Rs 609 billion. National savings, including remittances, could cover Rs 506 billion. Planners intended to source the remaining from foreign grants and loans. At the macro level, the economics motivating this 'financing gap' approach to development planning is the belief that public investment will lead to a proportionate growth in domestic income.

However this aid-investment growth linkage is generally weaker than believed and its theoretical foundation was abandoned by academics a decade ago. Yet it continues to remain the primary framework of analysis for policymakers in Nepal.

How much would Nepal's per capita income be today if all of the Rs 260 billion Nepal has received in aid since 1975 had translated, rupee-for-rupee, into

public investment? The historical path that Nepal's income per capita has taken (red line on graph) can be compared with how it would have evolved if aid had translated fully into public investment and the investment rate dictated growth as predicted by theory (blue line). Our per capita GDP would be roughly five times what it is now if all the aid we have received had gone into investment which in turn had spurred growth.

There is nothing wrong with subscribing to a particular theory or ideology, however defunct. But the misplaced confidence can't come at the cost of attention to the real drivers of economic growth. It is widely accepted, for example, that the 1990s saw the best growth performance in Nepal's recent macroeconomic history when the private sector capitalised on a liberal trade regime. Yet, the government still bloats its public investment portfolio as its primary growth strategy.

Nepal's decade-long conflict held back both the state and the private sector. Now that durable peace appears a real possibility, the private sector is eager to rebound. The upcoming development plan would spur greater growth if it focused on relieving the policy and institutional constraints which shackle the private sector, than by charging the public sector with more than it has proven to be capable of. The effect of aid on growth also needs to be recalibrated if the country is to reap the peace dividend. ●

Sailesh Tiwari is pursuing a PhD in economics at Cornell University in the United States and previously worked for the World Bank in Nepal.

# Putting off the future

## Dismissing the provisional constitution as merely a political text is hypocrisy

Nepali's intelligentsia is too preoccupied with the challenges of the present. Like most societies in a similar predicament, we want to swiftly bury history and put off the future for as long as possible.

The lawyers at the Nepal Bar Association (NBA) and the honourable judges at the Supreme Court have minutely



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
**C K Lal**

analysed the provisions of the interim constitution while it is being fine-tuned. The NBA says the proposed draft squeezes out an independent judiciary. The judges say they just don't want to have anything to do with politicians. But leaders of the seven-party alliance and the Maoists have decided to go ahead and promulgate the statute anyway on 15 January which also happens to be Maghi, the day when new kamaiyas

are traditionally recruited by old masters.

When the interim constitution comes into force, politicians will no longer have to play that role with respect to the palace. But they will have to watch out for encroachment upon their turf by the old guard which still runs almost all estates of the realm. One reason the 1990 constitution collapsed was the non-cooperation of institutions of state steeped in traditional loyalty to royalty.

Despite the April Uprising, the mentality of some judges remains unchanged. A few royal nominees on the Bench have reservations about the mention of 'people power' in the supreme law of the land. That is to be expected. But we should discuss the comment of Shambhu Thapa, NBA president, member of the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee and civil society activist who fought on the frontlines against Gyanendra's autocratic rule. Thapa reportedly dismissed the proposed statute as a mere 'political document'.

All constitutions are political

documents. They establish inviolable principles of fundamental freedoms, for example, and set the rules of the political game. Constitutional supremacy, rule of law, an independent judiciary, and human rights are often issues made sacrosanct, beyond the ambit of revisions by the executive or the legislative.

The proposed interim constitution has flaws. It does not prepare for a federal future. It does not guarantee proportional representation in the constituent assembly. A number of constituencies, madhesi, janajati, dalit, women, are justifiably dissatisfied with its unjust provisions, and their concerns will have to be addressed by the interim legislature. But to reject the proposed constitution as a mere political text is hypocrisy.

With the promulgation of the provisional statute and the formation of the interim legislature, the Maoists will have to learn that parliamentary democracies run as much by convention as by legal provisions. And those remnants of the discredited

regime who still populate state institutions would do well to remember a hallowed principle of parliamentary supremacy: the doctrine of difference.

Sometimes called the doctrine of respect, this requires courts to recognise, that there are situations where the national legislature or the executive are better placed to make the difficult choices between competing considerations than the national courts.

This is especially relevant when traders who hire leading lawyers are mostly royalists. Judges come from families that have worshipped the king for centuries. Senior bureaucrats have been trained and socialised to swear by the crown. The less said about the security forces the better. The media too has to go a long way to prove its loyalty to progressive politics and inclusive democracy.

The SPA-Maoist alliance deserves the benefit of the doubt to promulgate the provisional constitution they deem fit for the country. ●



## LETTERS

## SLOW DOWN

Your editorial last week (Born-again democracy #330) and Sheetal Kumar's column (Draw the line, Eyes wide shut, #330) might be alarmist, but you have a point. What is the hurry for elections when people are legitimately questioning the very composition of who is voting and for what. The least these jokers in government and the scary clowns who gave us this 'revolution' can do is, have the courtesy to listen to doubts. If they weren't too busy feathering their own nests high above the ground, maybe they would see that though we Nepalis passively paid the price for what they did, it is still our country and our right to decide how we rule it.

Ujjwala, email

It would be fatal for the parties to form a government with Maoists without convincingly solving the issue of weapons. Party cadres will bear the brunt of the Maoists' ire if arms management is not pursued as the topmost priority. What catastrophe will occur if the constitutional assembly elections are postponed by a month? Maoists rationalise the use of arms and violence as a means that justifies the ends. For them it is logical to retain arms. But who will participate in the electoral process if it is conducted under the shadow of guns? Most Nepalis don't underestimate the power of the Maoists' underhand tactics and organisational skills. In history, rogue forces have never been reliable, especially not in coalition governments.

PB Rana, email

Why won't people just accept that elections held in June will be a farce. But then almost everything in this country has become a wretched joke. To the leaders of the land: you've already squandered most of your chances in the last six months. Mess

up one more time and it will be back to Mangal Man, you fools.

KM Shakya, email

## RED 'REVOLUTION'

On a recent visit to Nepal, I was confused about the achievement of Jana Andolan II. I didn't get why people were calling it 'loktantra' and when I asked a taxi driver to explain it to me and he called it *imanpari tantra*, which I understood to mean anarchy. So where is the revolution? Everyone must say that it was a revolution, or risk being branded a royalist. In response to my question about what he



was, the cabbie answered that he liked the king better than loktantra but he could not say that openly. I think loktantra and the revolution must be like the emperor's new clothes. No one dares say anything. Only a child can come out and say that this was a paid-for, forced revolution. When will this child emerge from the crowd?

Dev, Hannover

## UP IN THE AIR

I guess the airport just reflects the general state of the country. The pilot could not have said it any better than that (Up in the air, #330). The April movement has come and gone. Maybe ten more such movements

will come and go. But as long as we make choices and decisions that in some way connect to corruption, short-sightedness, and laziness, the TIA symptom will be seen in all facets of the Nepali economy.

Niraj Ojha, Marquette University

It is time to privatise Tribhuvan International Airport and have able hands manage and expand it. Though I am glad to be returning home after ten long years, I am not looking forward to the harassment at the airport and the hassles of travelling to and from TIA.

R Paudel, email

## NYANOPAN

Captain Vijay Lama's 'I am a Nepali first' (Nepali Pan, #328) was a great tribute to nationality and patriotism. It will help us overcome the vested interests that are dividing us in the name of ethnicity and vested interest. Captain Sahib, I agree we are Nepali and let's also learn the principle of 3D: we must perform our Duty with Discipline then Democracy will automatically prevail.

Indra Kshattrya, University of Texas, USA

I was so moved by 'I am a Nepali first' that I forwarded the article to all my friends at home and abroad, we would all like to help the Captain's Nyanopan initiative wherever we are.

Manju Uprety, Vientiane

## ENVOY ENVY

The Nepali embassy in London reflects the dire state of our public services. Visitors have worryingly bad experiences with embassy personnel. The few times I have rung the embassy, the person who answers can't manage a full sentence in English. How do these people field calls from non-Nepalis?

I think the whole mechanism probably in all our embassies from ambassadorial level to front staff, needs a complete overhaul. The country eventually

would also benefit because these incompetent officials representing the country abroad are probably restricting tourism and other inward investment opportunities.

Name withheld, email

## PLUTO

Please grant me the liberty to use the US word of 2006 'plutoed' exclusively for the first time in *Nepali Times*, as in, 'Undoubtedly, King Gyanendra's attempt to suppress the Nepali people's aspirations for peace proved a colossal failure. Instead, the popular mass movement, historic parliamentary proclamation and subsequent developments prove that he has effectively been 'plutoed' by the Nepali people circa 2006.'

SK Shrestha, email

## SAD ASS

Sad to see that the Ass at Backside has become so wary of everything he (she?) sees (Animal Farm in 1984). Read the situation, my friend, not the tea leaves. It's not as bad or complicated or misleading as it looks.

JR, email

## LETTERS

*Nepali Times* welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter' to the editor in the subject line.

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# Farewell to Annan

## Lessons from a man who learnt on the job



UN

Kofi Annan passed, with 2006, into the realm of former UN secretary-general two weeks ago. We now have Ban Ki-Moon, a Korean, ruling from the 38<sup>th</sup> floor of the UN headquarters in New York. As is customary, many articles have appeared here and abroad detailing Annan's 10-year-long stint as the top UN official.



**EYES WIDE SHUT**  
Sheetal Kumar

Almost all have praised him for his robust leadership of the UN, though there has also been occasional criticism, as for the oil-for-food scandal and sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers. In Nepal, the coverage of Annan's tenure has focussed almost entirely on how his personal interest got the world body involved in resolving the conflict.

All true but, as he departs the world stage, Annan's career graph, particularly in the later years, has lessons for Nepal's peace process.

Annan was the UN under-secretary general for peacekeeping when the Rwanda genocide exploded in 1994. The record shows that if he, and the

UN, had acted with sanity then, rather than with their deadly bureaucratic mindset, the genocide could have been averted.

In 1994, General Romeo Dallaire, a Canadian general in command of the UN's puny peacekeeping force in Kigali, was informed by a government source that Hutu extremists, backed by the Hutu government, intended to murder thousands of Tutsis in the coming months. This was an intelligence scoop of the first magnitude. The source offered to tell the UN where the arms caches were hidden. All he wanted in exchange was safe passage for himself and his family.

The general (who later went crazy because of his inability to stem the genocide), immediately faxed the information to the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations, headed at the time by Annan. He urged safe passage for the source and appealed for authorisation to take out the arms caches. What did Annan's department say in return?

Cool off! You have no business, General, interfering in the internal affairs of a member state. We advise you to relay whatever information you have to the Rwandan government. Then UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros Ghali could have overruled his subordinate, but he signed off on the cable prepared by

Mr Annan's department.

What happened next needn't be recounted in detail. With the UN taking a hands-off approach, extremist Hutus did exactly what the source had warned they would. From 6 April to mid-July 1994, Rwanda was hell, as hordes of Hutu extremists, egged on by the government, slaughtered 800,000 unarmed Tutsi and moderate Hutu civilians. The arms cache sure came in handy, as did the community FM stations that spread communal hatred in realtime.

General Dallaire was reduced to defending his UN compound, in which he managed to give refuge to 20,000 Tutsis. Unable to reconcile himself to what had happened in Rwanda under his watch, he took to drinking heavily. He was later found a broken man, drunk and sprawled on a park bench in Quebec.

This dark episode in mankind's history did not stop Annan's progress. Two years later, all was forgotten and he was chosen to lead the UN as its new secretary-general. The man certainly learned on the job though. In the later years of his tenure, he pushed hard to avert crises in Darfur and Iraq, but without much success. Annan deserves praise for bringing early UN attention to Nepal, but in his heart, the souls of those Rwandan dead probably haunt him.

This story is told not as a critique of Annan or the UN, but as a reminder to everyone that the UN is not the mother-of-all-solutions. Its intentions are almost always noble, but it is not what we want it to be, when we want it to be. It cannot perform miracles when miracles are not wanted.

There is a lesson in this for us: How Nepal manages the future will ultimately depend on how we Nepalis behave, not on what the UN does. ●

# Those who asked for UNMIN pose the biggest challenge to it

from p1

The drama is necessary. UN involvement in other world hotspots show that a UN-led peace process is sometimes the only way to provide a face-saving way for warring sides to reconcile. The UN's mission in Guatemala is probably closest to the Nepal situation—the UN directed a peace process after the conflict had wound down, so the country could recover from decades of war.

But Guatemala also provides a cautionary tale of the public security fallout in the long-term when a UN-administered demilitarisation and demobilisation is not accompanied by an overhaul of the security establishment. When they are flashed worldwide next week, Maoist weapons being packed into white containers will be an impressive public relations image. But the fighters will remain.

Those in camps have been told by commanders they will be integrated into the Nepal Army. The parties have not said anything on this and no one is talking to the generals anymore. Security reform could therefore have long-term implications to the peace process, but it isn't part of the UN's mandate to address it.

Neither is defining the parameters of an acceptable election. Secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon's proposal includes technical assistance for the electoral process, but like the arms management, clause this could remain a cosmetic role.

Madhesi concerns are still being framed by the government and Maoists as law-and-order issues, rather than calls for inclusion. Even if tarai violence flares threatening a return to conflict, the UN mission's current terms of reference will not allow it to do much. The situation in Nepal may be different than Sudan, but there are complexities here that could catch all sides off guard.

In the current situation, the mandate of the UN can only be enlarged if the seven parties and the Maoists want it. What they appear to have settled for is a set of conditions that will see Nepal through this transition rather than guide long-term change. Civil society, which is now vocal on issues such as impunity and the interim constitution, could be the factor that swings public debate.

Fears that the changeover from Kofi Annan to Ban Ki-Moon will reduce UN engagement here might be unfounded, but the resolution presented to the Security Council Thursday will be subject to the usual tensions between the interests of India, the US, and China and the attention the Council is willing to give Nepal between bigger wars elsewhere.

The UN might be in a 'monitoring', rather than a 'peacekeeping' mode here, but its commitment to ensure due process in elections takes the mission into the realm of 'soft' peacekeeping proposed by the landmark 2000 Brahimi Report on UN peacekeeping. That report also proposed intelligence and the use of 'necessary force' as acceptable strategies. The first might come in handy here, especially in preventing a different conflict. ●

SUNSILK



# Goodbye

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Open greenhouse

Dabur Nepal has re-opened its greenhouse for rare and endangered plants in Banepa. The greenhouse was shut down on 21 December after the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Trade Union threatened employees and made repeated demands that its members be given employment. Dabur says the issue was resolved through the mediation of Banepa's VDC representatives. The greenhouse creates thousands of jobs and helps preserve 12 endangered species of rare herbs, through over 40 satellite farms and cooperatives in 22 districts.

Certified

Machhapuchchhre Bank has been awarded the ISO 9001:2001 certification by the UKCAS Quality Management Company for all its 12 outlets around Kathmandu. The bank plans to open a new branch in Itahari.



Qatar travels the world

Qatar Airways is now also flying to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The new route on its international network takes Qatar's global reach to 71 destinations across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and the Far East.

Fortune cookie

Fortune Cookie Ventures was launched this week at CAN Info Tech 2007. The company is an international joint venture set up by successful ICT entrepreneurs in Nepal and Intelligent Capital LLC, a US-based international venture capital firm. Fortune Cookie plans to both provide venture capital to deserving innovators and work as an incubator for start-ups in the ICT sector. Fortune Cookie intends to invest up to Rs 100 million in Nepal's ICT sector over the next two years, and hopes that by creating successful ventures, it can attract much-needed foreign investment in ICT.

Strategic

National Campus for Business Studies (NCBS), Baneswor has signed a strategic alliance with KJ Somaiya Institute of Management and Research in Mumbai, to allow Nepali students access to a top class business education and the opportunity to gain employment in the competitive Indian market.

NEW PRODUCTS

PREETI: Asian Thai Noodles has launched the new Preeti brand of noodles. The brown chicken-flavoured noodles are priced at Rs 12.50 for a 70gm packet, and the introductory offer encourages consumers to buy two get one free.



Democracy dividends

That which gives can also take away

These days, people talk about the 'peace dividend' and the 'diaspora dividend'. But, the Beed wonders, what about the real nature of the democracy dividend. The democracy dividend is not the use of one's democratic rights to encroach



ECONOMIC SENSE  
Artha Beed

upon the rights of others. It is not the freedom to burn tyres and vehicles and disrupt traffic on a daily basis. Neither is it an opportunity to put pressure on the government through petty violent means.

The real test of democracy for the eight parties getting into the new government—and the plethora of political forces that will still stay outside—is to see how they can bring discipline and governance within their own parties. Democracy thrives best when parties are subject to strict internal governance, and this is replicated at the nation level of government. Student and trade unions are the arms of their political masters and the leaders should know how and when to rein them. Destroying government property is not acceptable in any country where political sanity prevails. When people supposedly part of the government torch vehicles and vandalise buildings regularly as a matter of course, what can one do but think that they are destroying public property so they can make some money in the next purchases or construction.

Law and order is deteriorating and the cops don't give us enough of a

sense of security. Where's the sense in not re-installing police posts, when citizens can only be protected by their security apparatus?

The perception of the state of security, and the publicity one gets in the international press, determine the country's international image, and that's what tourism and investment flows depend on. That's clearly not the message conveyed by pictures of torched vehicles and student protests in the dailies. Perhaps peace is back, but who will come, hearing of strikes at hotels in Pokhara at the beginning of a global holiday week and a possible potential strike on New Year's Day. Many countries and cities in the world are peaceful, but are still perceived as cities of disruption. Kolkata may have managed to redefine its image as an investment-friendly destination, but it's still seen as a city under siege and so, despite being a very friendly city, is hardly a preferred destination.

In a country where over half the population is under 25, youth force counts for something, and

the Maoists have demonstrated how this power can be harnessed. But our youth leadership in the unions and parties hardly demonstrates its genuine commitment to doing something for the youth. Remaining a union leader by studying at the same campus, doing the same course for over a decade hardly makes one an iconic figure for youth who believe in education. A curious parallel is in political parties that are driven by age and provide a platform for young people to take leadership positions.

Yes, there is a visible peace dividend—the smile back on the faces of Nepalis around the country. But the perceived democracy dividend gives one the right to take away that smile. Leadership is not only demonstrated by knowing how to manage parliament and getting a plethora of legislation passed. It is also about managing one's cadre and having the power to restrain them. Without this, we can look forward to an extended fight for the ownership of the dividends of democracy. ●



You CAN tech too

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KIRAN PANDAY

The 13<sup>th</sup> edition of CAN Info Tech 2007 opened in Kathmandu this week at the Birendra International Convention Centre. A tech fair is by definition a

Nepal, New Nepali. Technology professionals, enthusiasts, and students are thronging the 170 stalls and over 250 people have attended a conference on Building e-Nepal for socio-economic development. We are talking about a new Nepal and

about inclusive democracy, at CAN we are talking about the possibility of eNepal, eGovernance, e-commerce, e-lobby, e-tourism and ultimately e-citizens, to improve access of each citizen to all sectors of the state, says CAN president Biplav Man Singh. Among the stalls are one for Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, which is spreading the word about NepaLinux, and Nepal Wireless Company, which is working to link Nepali villages to WiFi networks. One Laptop Per Child, Nepal (OLPC, Nepal), a local initiative of the global movement was also launched at the fair's opening on 10 January. These laptops, which cost \$100 each, are specifically designed with an open-source license. Browsing through the gadgets is interesting, but most of what is on display, including the CCTVs, anti-shoplifting software, iPod USBs, desktops, laptops, has been available in town for a while. D&D International has Mac products, such as the MacBook Pro, iMac, and the iPod, while JBL Products features high

performance loudspeakers, a home theatre projector, and digital photocopy machine. Mercantile's display includes Acer notebooks, and a range of Epson products, particularly printers. Worldlink is providing discounts on unlimited internet access with one and two telephone lines, discounts on installation, and night surfing. International speakers at CAN this year include professionals from Intel Singapore, AMI Singapore, and Mumbai Red Hat. Singh says of these diverse offerings, 'Our aim is convergence, which is why we are promoting this year's CAN as an event of ICE Technology (Information, Communications and Entertainment).' CAN's social outreach program this year includes a blood donation camp in which over 150 people participated on the first day. The event will be up again on Sunday. CAN also donated a computer to the Blood Donors' Association to aid in documentation and data collection. ● CAN Info Tech 2007 at Birendra International Convention Centre, New Baneswor 9-14 January 2007.






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January 13th, 2007  
Venue: Patan Museum  
Time: 6:00pm




**Salaam Bombay**  
January 14th, 2007  
Venue: Patan D. Square  
Time: 6:00pm



**Children Underground**  
January 15th, 2007  
Venue: The Organic Bistro, Baluwatar  
Time: 6:00pm

\* The film includes scenes of drug use and graphic violence, and is not recommended for children under the age of 14




**Ujeli**  
January 17th, 2007  
Venue: Bandipur Square, Bandipur  
Time: 6:00pm



**Salaam Bombay**  
January 18th, 2007  
Venue: SMD School, Boudha  
Time: 6:00pm



**The Devil's Miner**  
January 19th, 2007  
Venue: Dhokaima Cafe, Patan  
Time: 6:00pm



**Born into Brothels**  
January 20th, 2007  
Venue: Alliance Franciase  
Time: 2:00pm



**Innocent Voices**  
January 20th, 2007  
Venue: Patan Museum  
Time: 6:00pm

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# Undemocratic

Editorial in Kantipur, 10 January कान्तिपुर

The eight parties are exhibiting a dangerous trend, neglecting the society that lies outside their alliance. They have been vehemently dismissing suggestions made to them by aware citizens, professional groups, the judiciary, and ordinary people who have been cautiously watching the decisions the alliance has made. The manner in which the eight parties have been making binding decisions, without paying heed to other peoples' proposals is a sign that the democratic political process is shaping up in a dictatorial manner.

There aren't only eight parties in this country. The alliance can't afford to reject other parties in the democratic process merely on the grounds that they didn't participate in the People's Movement. The essence of democracy is not only to accept full support, but also to expect opposition. Yet, the parties have made no effort to hear the concerns of indigenous groups, madhesi or dalit communities. At a time when the interim constitution is said to take a strong position on the rights of these very groups, it is nothing but arrogance on the part of the alliance not to respect their suggestions and comments.

The parties have been also disregarding the judiciary. They totally ignored the recommendations that the Nepal Bar Association made at national assembly. Even worse, they protested the recommendations by the Supreme Court justices, whose sole aim in suggesting some amendments was to help shape a well-written constitution. The parties have basically signalled that they do not accept the importance in a democratic society of an independent judiciary. They are all set to establish a democratic Nepal, and yet they act no different than the royal regime.

Prime Minister Girija Koirala even refused to receive the recommendations that the justices prepared after intensive discussions. Surely it is inappropriate for the prime minister to not even give them time of day. Will the judiciary enjoy the independence it should in the future?

## Slack Sitaula

Sanghu, 9 January साँघु

Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula seems to come a close second after the king on the list of people busy fiddling with their flute while the nation burns. The man responsible for ensuring the safety of citizens and their property has failed to organise any meeting of the National Security Council since 21 November. Many have attributed the current chaos in the country to this negligence. A Nepalgunj SSP, Rajendra Singh Bhandari has been found to have instigated the riots recently, and proves Sitaula and the Home Ministry's incompetence. The Security Committee established under the chairmanship of the Home Minister is now nearly defunct. A committee member claims that the turmoil in the country could be minimised to a great extent if it could discuss the security situation and the role of the security forces. Members say that the home minister's late arrivals and early exits from the meetings have largely contributed to his

inability to address law and order. What is the point having a security committee that has no role in ensuring national security?

## Premier offices

Deshantar, 7 January देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

Looks like the structure/organisation of the Prime Minister's Office is to be changed, and a team has been set up to re-organise the space.

In the past the responsibilities of different ministries inside the office had not been clearly defined. Now each ministry will have a desk from where the ministries will be advised and monitored. There used to be no restrictions on the number of advisors the prime minister could have—in 2001, when Sher Bahadur Deuba was in office, he had 48 advisors, most designated as special first class officers with concomitant salary and allowances. Now there will be only five. A new department will be set up to invite intellectuals on a regular basis to advise the government on policy-related issues. Experts say that such a set-up will reduce the costs of running the office.

The interim constitution gives the prime minister 44 new responsibilities including: approving policies; designing programs; making recommendations for appointment to constitutional bodies; receiving applications for constitutional bodies; selecting envoys; and issuing pardons, for which the king was responsible in the past. To cope with this, the number of staff in the prime minister's office has been increased from 181 to 196.

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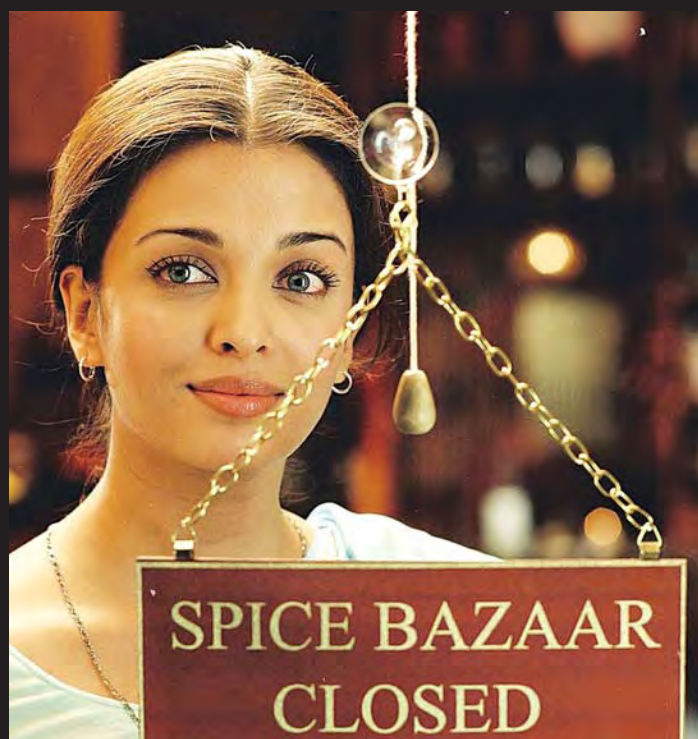


# Brit films

The British Film Festival is on its sixth outing in Kathmandu from 15-19 January at Gopi Krishna cinema. The festival, organised by the British Council, showcases a diverse selection of contemporary British cinema. All films start at 6.30 PM, and tickets are available free of cost and in advance from the reception at the British Council, Lainchaur. Any remaining tickets will be available the day of the film, from 6.10 PM at the theatre. The festival will travel to Pokhara where The Mistress of Spices, Nanny McPhee and Hotel Rwanda will be screened at Shree Krishna cinema hall from 26-28 January. The festival is supported and sponsored by the British Embassy Kathmandu, Gopi Krishna, Standard Chartered Bank, Water Communication, and Radisson Hotel.



**Hotel Rwanda**, dir: Terry George, 15 January. This film is the true story of one man's brave stance against savagery during the 1994 Rwandan conflict. As his country descends into madness, five-star hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina (Cheadle) sets out to save his family. But when he sees the world will not intervene in the massacre of minority Tutsis, he finds the courage to open his hotel to 1,200 refugees. With a rabidly violent militia at the gates, he has only his wits and words to help keep them alive for another hour, another day. Co-starring Spohie Okanedo, Nick Nolte and Joaquin Phoenix, Hotel Rwanda is the kind of film that can change the world.



**The Mistress of Spices**, dir: Paul Mayeda Berges, 16 January. Tilo (Aishwarya Rai), an outsider from India, runs a spice store in San Francisco. She has the gift to see into her customers' lives and desires, and give them spices to help them get what they want. But for the magic to work, Tilo must obey certain rules—never leave the store, never touch another human, love only the spices. When a handsome American (Dylan McDermott) with a secret past enters her store, Tilo's own desires are stirred. The more she falls in love and begins to defy the rules, the worse the lives of her customers become. Will Tilo choose forbidden love over her traditions?

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**Nanny McPhee**, dir: Kirk Jones, 17 January. In this wickedly charming tale, Emma Thompson portrays a mysterious woman with special powers who enters the household of the recently widowed Mr Brown (Colin Firth) and attempts to tame his seven very naughty children. The children have managed to drive away 17 previous nannies but, as Nanny McPhee takes control, they begin to notice that their misbehaving has magical and startling consequences.



**Joyeux Noel**, dir: Christian Carion, 19 January. It's Christmas 1914. When a conscripted opera singer in the German army (Benno Furrmann) displays his vocal skills during a Yuletide visit from his soprano girl friend (Diane Kruger), his rendition of Silent Night is soon accompanied by the pipes of a Scottish padre (Gary Lewis) and his regiment occupying the opposing trenches with their French allies. A brief truce is agreed on by officers of both sides, who discover they have unexpected connections. Officers and soldiers both discover a surprisingly strong kinship with their fellow combatants. This wonderful European film is a sobering tribute to the spirit of humanitarianism in dark days of conflict.



**Vera Drake**, dir: Mike Leigh, 18 January. Vera Drake (Imelda Staunton) features a working class heroine who harbours a deep personal secret, and explores the dramatic fallout after that secret is revealed. Mike Leigh painstakingly recreates postwar London and its atmosphere of austerity, and highlights its social divisions, double standards, and the moral controversies connected with Vera's charitable pursuit. But it is a pursuit that undoes her and makes of her a victim or, some would say, a martyr.






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Hotel Rwanda



The Mistress of Spices



Joyeux Noel: Merry Christmas



Nanny McPhee



Vera Drake

**15 Jan - Hotel Rwanda**  
Running Time 121 mins  
Certification above 12 yrs  
Director Terry George  
Cast Don Cheadle, Sophie Okonedo, Nick Nolte  
Genre War

**16 Jan - The Mistress Of Spices**  
Running Time 90 mins  
Certification PG 13 yrs  
Director Paul Mayeda Berges  
Cast Aishwarya Rai, Anupam Kher, Dylan McDermott  
Producer Gurinder Chadha, Deepak Nayar  
Genre Drama

**17 Jan - Nanny McPhee**  
Running Time 98 mins  
Certification Children  
Director Kirk Jones  
Cast Emma Thompson, Colin Firth, Angelia Lansbury, Kelly McDonald  
Genre Family Comedy

**18 Jan - Vera Drake**  
Running Time 125 mins  
Certification PG 12 yrs  
Director Mike Leigh  
Cast Imelda Staunton, Eddie Marsan, Alex Kelly, Daniel Mays, Anna Keaveney, Richard Graham  
Genre Drama

**19 Jan - Joyeux Noel: Merry Christmas**  
Running Time 116 mins  
Certification PG 13 yrs  
Director Christian Carion  
Cast Nikolaus Guillaume, Benno Furrmann, Dany Boon, Daniel Bruhl  
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# Worldly wisdom

## Nepal needs to get out and see the world for lessons on inclusiveness

One thing constantly lacking in Nepal is context beyond the country's borders. To understand a development today, people reach back into local history, to 1990 or 1856, but never to other lands, other experiences, or other periods in history. This is unhelpful, dangerous even.

Take the explosion of grievances at the moment. Madhesis finally asserting their feelings about loss of influence in the tarai, and no influence in Kathmandu. Dalits fighting Brahminical casteism; women fighting for a fraction of what they deserve in this hugely discriminatory society. Janajatis airing long-felt frustrations at being left out of the

mainstream.



**HERE AND THERE**  
Daniel Lak

All these are part of the process of historical natural justice. You simply cannot, in the absence of effective authoritarianism (and not the tinpot

variety that has been practiced here) bend people to the will of an inept ruling elite. Bahun-Chhetri domination is over in Nepal. Period. No arguments. But how to turn the unravelling of a bad consensus into a thousand flowers blooming, how to harness the honest energy of good people looking for a place in a more equitable dispensation—that isn't yet on offer.

Well it may rankle—and it shouldn't—but it is worth looking towards India's experiences. At independence in 1947, India was a strong, unitary state with power concentrated in New Delhi, mostly in the hands of an anglophile, westernised elite that was far from the concerns of the poor, heterogeneous populace. Dalits, women, non-Hindus, south Indians, all were rare in the circles of power, and



numerous among the disadvantaged.

There were epic struggles to correct this imbalance, and they continue. A few measures have hugely relieved the most dangerous

stresses and strains of inequity, and Nepal would do well to begin studying them.

In the 1950s, India began reorganising its states on the basis of language. Thus were born Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra, Gujarat, and others. Local grievances based on ethnicity were salved with a degree of political power that has only grown since then.

It's a no-brainer: Nepal must consider federalism, and quickly. Communities that are small on a national scale will have real influence in their own state or province, but will also have to work with minorities themselves, learning the ropes of compromise and handling power. Federations are the most advanced form of government because they are more democratic and allow people of various backgrounds and ethnicities a voice through different outlets of government.

Consider the USA, Canada, and Germany, where components of the federation have powers of taxation and domestic policy, while the national capital retains defence, macro-finance, foreign affairs, and a broad leadership role on large, national issues. India is moving in this direction too, as it soars economically.

As for inclusion, we don't need to reinvent the wheel here. We need a national debate on reservations and quotas for the excluded, as in India from independence onward. A few groups have held far too much clout in this country for far too long, and affirmative action is the only way to jumpstart the process of inclusion. In India, they drew up sweeping schedules of backward castes and tribes and added them to the constitution. They passed amendments requiring women to be part of the legislative process. There were imperfections, but it was historically necessary, and such steps have forced Indians of all degrees of inclusion to debate, compromise, and find ways to work together. It worked, however tentatively at times.

Beyond India, we have many other examples of attempts at inclusion succeeding and failing. Think Sri Lanka, South Africa and yes, the USA. Let's open our minds and start looking outwards. Most of the ideas that have brought lasting change in Nepal have come from outside, from Maoism to market economics. Let there be no nonsense about India and its nefarious designs. The world works by learning from the strengths and weaknesses of others. Let's join the process and set aside the uniqueness of exclusion and political stasis once and for all. ●





# Ticking away

## Peace doesn't always mean safety

**NARESH NEWAR**

Ceasefire or not, Nepal's countryside is still dangerous. Last year, 146 Nepalis died in explosions of socket, shrapnel, and cylinder bombs, and landmines stockpiled or planted by both the Maoists and the security forces. The 86 explosions were either triggered by natural causes, such as heat or lightning, or were victim-activated. February 2006 was the worst month, according to research by UNICEF, with nearly one explosion that injured civilians every three days.

A ceasefire and peace process do not mean that there is safety, says UNICEF mine and bomb risk expert Hugues Laurence. He explains that the danger from what are collectively called 'improvised explosive devices' is greater now, because civilians have greater freedom and flexibility of movement. Also, although the military positions of the Maoists and the security forces are being dismantled, not all explosive devices are being removed or defused.

Rough estimates say there are anything from 100,000-500,000 such devices waiting to go off. The estimates vary vastly, because no one is really sure how many explosives are in storage, and the Maoists aren't saying where their caches are.

As part of the arms management deal, both the Maoists and the Nepal Army have agreed to deposit all IEDs in planned storage areas about 800m outside each cantonment site around the country. The plan is to store 5,000 in each area, but

military experts say unstable devices such as commercial devices with detonators, simply need to be destroyed. It is more safe to store rifles than IEDs, warns Laurence, explaining that one bomb being triggered in a storage would set off thousands of others.

Maoist soldiers will be the most at risk if they smuggle bombs into the camps in violation of the agreement. In December, four Maoist combatants were seriously injured in the Chitwan cantonment and had to be airlifted to Kathmandu for emergency medical treatment. Three weeks ago, an explosion near the IED storage house in the Surkhet cantonment injured nine Maoists.

The arms management agreement states that bombs and landmines are to be removed from civilian areas and taken out of barracks and PLA camps to storage facilities within 60 days of the signing of the deal. That would make the cut-off date 27 January, which we are now told is not technically possible.

The Maoists say they have begun the process of finding and storing their bombs, while the Nepal Army have begun assessing their minefields. The NA, which uses both anti-personnel and command-detonated mines, has 49 minefields all over the country. These are now being fenced off, but local communities continue to be in danger, especially from anti-personnel mines, which are hidden and, because they are more sensitive, take more time to clear. The NA's 15 teams,

**BOMB EDUCATION:** This brochure, distributed by the UNICEF and Nepal Army, educates civilians about the risks of bomb and mine explosions.

which consist of 100 personnel with de-mining expertise, can only clear command-detonated devices. Clearing the deadly anti-personnel mines will need international experts.

Many IEDs are said to be planted in civilian areas near households, posing an especially huge risk to children, who are likely to come across the devices and try to play with them. In many districts, the bombs, like the mines, are still under the ground. For over six months last year, heavy traffic was regularly passing over a 56kg cylinder bomb planted by the Maoists under a section of Rautahat's Gaur-Chandranighapur road which had since been sealed. Proposed solutions included digging it up with a bulldozer, which would not just have killed the driver, but potentially spread shrapnel over a radius of a few kilometres ('Beneath the surface', #324).

There have been other incidents, such as where socket bombs have heated up and exploded, killing children playing nearby, and landmines have been set off by lightning. These all underscore the need for a risk awareness program like the one UNICEF runs until the explosives are destroyed. We will be organising a massive campaign starting at the end of this month to teach civilians, who are most at risk, about explosive devices, says Laurence. ●

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## Cruise control

A single rat provoked panic on the island of Santa Fe in the isolated Gal-pagos archipelago, where conservationists now strive to keep foreign wildlife at bay as effectively as hundreds of miles of open ocean did for millions of years.

The rat is alleged to have arrived on the MV Discovery, a giant British cruise liner that visited the islands in April. This weekend, the ship returns to the Gal-pagos, and arriving with it are 460 paying passengers, protestors and a campaign to protect the islands from mass tourism.

Conservationists on the Gal-pagos have also found swarms of foreign insects on the islands since the liner's last visit and fear its return today could introduce more alien species that might further disrupt the sensitive eco-systems.

The Discovery, the first large cruise ship to have visited the islands, is scheduled to return twice each year. Permits recently granted by the Ecuadorian government could see one cruise ship stop there a month.

Leonor Stjepic, director of the Gal-pagos Conservation Trust, warned that such an acceleration in visitor numbers would overwhelm efforts to keep out pests and disease. The more the people, the greater the risk of invasive species and less effective the quarantine system. Even with the best will in the world it's virtually impossible to search a boat that size thoroughly. If we can't protect the Gal-pagos then what does it say about other natural spaces in the world? We're not anti-tourism, but it's got to be high-value, low-volume tourism.

As well as the rat, and the insects, environmentalists say the Discovery's previous visit left the islands covered in litter, dropped by wealthy tourists who have no idea where they are or the impact their visit may have. Graffiti was scrawled at the visitor centre and one passenger reportedly asked where the local Starbucks was.

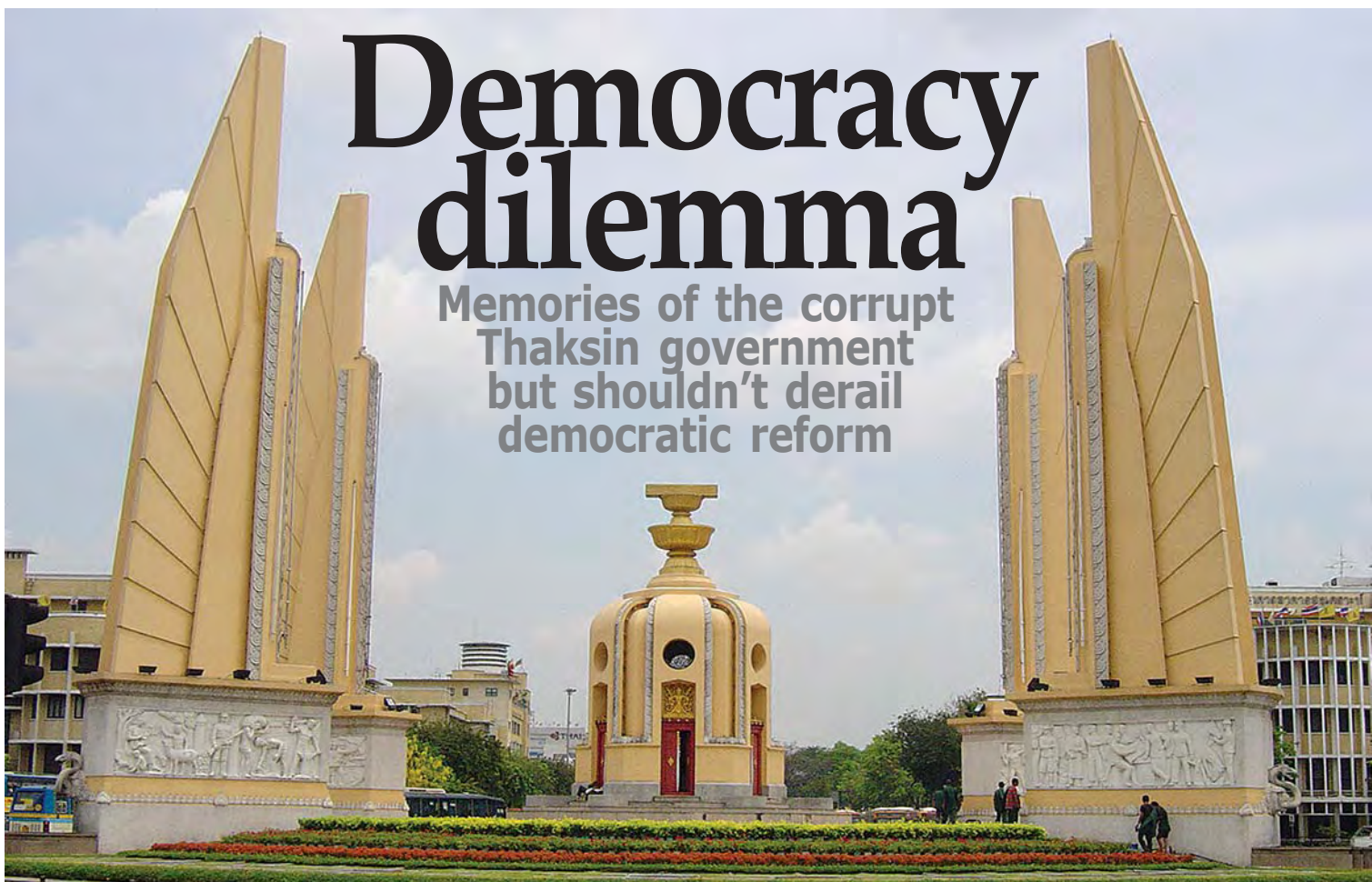
The study of the impact of the liner's first visit was carried out by the local Charles Darwin Foundation, the Gal-pagos National Park Service and the foreign wildlife, it found that sales for local businesses increased by 5 percent, a third of what was expected. Infrastructure was overwhelmed, they said, and local tour operators, who take visitors around the different islands, were forced to land large boats on fragile shorelines because elderly cruise passengers were unable to scramble in and out of rubber dinghies.

(The Guardian)



# Democracy dilemma

Memories of the corrupt Thaksin government but shouldn't derail democratic reform



**THE MORE THINGS CHANGE:** This Democracy Monument in Bangkok was put up in 1939 by military ruler Field Marshal Phibun to commemorate the June 1932 military coup, which led to the establishment of constitutional monarchy

**A**fter the September 2006 coup, the Council for National Security (CNS) abolished the 1997 'people's' charter, doing away with the democratic aspirations that had been nurtured since 1973. Over the next 10 months, Thais will find out whether there is a new democratic spirit emerging in the kingdom.



**COMMENT**  
**Kavi Chongkittavorn**

Since the coup, confusion and indecisiveness have reigned, as those in power have sought to gain legitimacy, define their roles, govern the country, and work towards the future. They've been muddling through and, if the same work ethos continues, the political situation in coming months could be chaotic. The New Year bombs and subsequent rumours of another coup show the lengths that the government's adversaries will go to undermine its credibility and terrorise the public. The government's response has been criticised as soft and laggard.

Last week, the 100-member Constitution Drafting Assembly was named. The committee is expected to complete its draft by July, kicking off much-needed political and government reforms. However, bones of contention remain: how to appoint prime ministers, the independence of checks and balance mechanism.

How much will the new document overlap with the 1997? Will the new charter empower civil society and, if so, how? Do these drafters share the democratic vision of their 1997 predecessors?

Legislators must also tackle decentralisation. Since 1997, local politics and expanded mandates at the provincial and district level have held back democratisation efforts. For better democracy, Thailand needs civic political education at the grassroots.

The government has been relatively open since the coup, but people fear for the competitive democracy we have become used to. The political excesses of the past five years, epitomised by Thaksin Shinawatra and money politics, haunt the government and the drafting assembly. They believe that without draconian

mechanisms, other autocratic leaders like Thaksin could emerge.

This would hamper politics, moving it from the extreme of expediency to that of rigidity. For instance, in the mid-1990s, the desire to get rid of old politics and weak leadership became hysterical, and drafters devised a charter that strengthened the executive branch and stifled politicians' mobility, which led to the kinds of abuse of power at which Thaksin was so masterful.

Thai democracy—its successes and failures—has much to do with the political intentions and actions of those in power. From 1997 to 2001, before Thaksin, the 1997 constitutional framework mostly served the country well. Former prime minister Chuan Leekpai followed the letter and spirit of the people's charter.

It is essential that the drafting process be transparent and accountable. If Thailand's past 17 constitutions are any indication, despite drafters' best intentions, loopholes often slip through or hidden agendas and potential minefields are embedded in constitutional clauses. The ambiguities in the 1997 charter

must not be repeated.

The basis of a democratic state is liberty. Any erosion of this from the 1997 level must not be allowed. Given the current sentiments and recent memories of Thaksin's malfeasance, the legislators might agree on a diminished form of democracy.

Some have already spoken of "sufficiency democracy" as part of the sufficiency economy. But though in Thai this (*pracha thippatai poh peang*) might sound reassuring, in English it is an antonym of freedom. Thai bureaucrats and developers treat the two concepts as mutually inclusive, which is dangerous. Conservatives and royalists will cite the sufficiency economy as the bedrock for all blueprints.

But sufficiency economy is a defensive response to predatory globalisation practices and should not be mingled with politics. Democracy is an open-ended political process where the rules are clear. As long as there are no abuses of or diversions from the norms and constitutional framework, democracy expands freedom in every way. ●

(The Nation)

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# A new pantheon

## for a new Nepal

The year in pictures (#329) brought back a flood of memories, most of them disturbing. My personal favourite features a stage littered with old leftist battleaxes looking equally concerned for the proletariat and their own self-importance. In the foreground are the once-revered icons of world communism: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao.

Slander the Hand at will, but never accuse him of being a morning person. When first laying eyes on this picture some months ago I furtively checked the date, anxious I'd woken up in a time warp. Latent hangovers made their presence felt as I recalled that the last time I'd seen this gang of five was on a CPN-Maoist receipt for donations



### MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

paid under death-threat. (Did the lightbulb just go on for readers who still wonder why Foreign Hand needs an alias?)

That fateful morning my lurking suspicions were

confirmed: the ancient gods had forsaken us and fled, no longer willing to intervene and save us from ourselves. Who could blame them for being fed-up, as the country teetered on the edge of an abyss, with violent crime, extortion and kidnapping spiralling out of control. Two revelations came to me on a wave of nausea: we have the dubious honour of living in the only country on earth where such a parade of reprobates isn't laughed off the stage, and I was staring at the wannabe New Gods of the New Nepal.

The transformation of the political landscape had mutated into a clash of belief systems. Like high priests of any faith, the politburo demands blind loyalty. Traditional religious practices are considered direct competition, to be brutally uprooted and eliminated. But thousands of years of culture cannot be wiped out overnight, and the human mind is bound to draw parallels between the old and the new. The Hand wondered what comparisons the masses would make when faced with these forbidding, alien images.

Karl Marx, who wrote the book that started all this, would surely be perceived as the new Brahma. His long hair and voluminous beard are reminiscent of the creator deity, while his stern expression makes us feel guilty for being born non-proletariat. The legend of Brahma growing four heads to keep his eye on a beautiful goddess dovetails perfectly with the spy-ridden police states created in the name of Marxism.

Next is Frederic Engels, who looks like Karl's better-groomed brother. The tiny minority in the know would recognise him as a *Baan*, the god's faithful helper. As Ganesh has his shrew offering sweets, Marx had Engels, offering financial support when the *Bhagavad Gita* of communism, *Das Kapital*, was penned.



Vladimir Lenin glares smugly from centrestage. The man who overthrew the tsars and created the USSR from the ashes would be the one to oust Shiva from heaven, as destroyer, regenerator, and destroyer.

Josef Stalin's picture looks to the future, perhaps to a time when people have forgotten the 20 million deaths he caused. The audience would likely assign him the role of Bhairab, terrible defender of the faith. Recognised the world over as one of the 20th century's worst criminals, the fact that Stalin was being honoured downtown led me to despair. There was no denying it any longer: wilful ignorance and denial of history had triumphed.

To complete the line-up, we have Mao Zedong, in whose name our civil war was launched forty years too late. An element of Kali is detected in that inscrutable visage; try to imagine a necklace of 100 million skulls sacrificed to his purges, famines, and Cultural Revolution.

Downsizing 33 crore gods to a mere half-dozen (no doubt Prachanda, already a legend in his own mind, covets a spot beside Mao) requires ruthless eradicating.

Down with Vishnu the Stabiliser, the greatest counterrevolutionary ever; pack Lord Krishna off to re-education camp for his errand waysome time to frolic with maidens in the workers' paradise. Once praying for good luck is a crime against scientific socialism, exile Ganesh to Siberia, and while you're at it put the Buddha to work in a munitions factory (that'll teach him).

Sophisticated philosophy and belief, conceived over thousands of years to cope with the complexities of the human condition, is reduced to a few simple exhortations and rigid adherence to ideology. The Hand knows a bad deal when he sees one. Trading a rich heritage of diversity and spirituality for a tawdry gang of has-beens in outdated suits is a losing proposition, big time. Jai Nepal ●

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## ABOUT TOWN

## EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Masquerade** Masks and photos by Kathmandu University students, until 13 January at the British Council.
- ❖ **Heartbeat 2** Photographs at Tantra Pub, Thamel until 12 January.
- ❖ **American Roadside Architecture** Photographs of mid-twentieth century American roadside buildings at Sirjana College of Fine Arts, Kamladi, 16 January onwards. 4445577
- ❖ **Modern Art in Nepal** Must-see work of seven contemporary painters from Kathmandu, 10AM-6PM Sunday-Friday, 9AM-11AM on Saturday at Kasthamandap Art Studio, Kopundole. 5011573
- ❖ **Tantric Sculptures and Nude Croquis (Sketches)** Mixed media artworks by Park Geun Yong, until 23 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048

## EVENTS

- ❖ **The Present and Future of Nepali Football** Discussion at Martin Chautari. 3-5 PM on 12 January.
- ❖ **Children in the Shadows** free film festival 13-20 January, information at [www.childrenintheshadows.com](http://www.childrenintheshadows.com)
- ❖ **Salsa Workshop** 13-21 January with Binayek and Katia. Both weekday and weekend classes available for Rs 1000 per person or Rs 1800 per couple at Salsa Dance Academy, Bhat Bhateni. 4422019
- ❖ **British Film Festival 2007** 15-19 January in Kathmandu, 26-28 January in Pokhara.
- ❖ **HIV and AIDS: A Social Issue** workshop organised by Youth Initiative at Heritage Plaza, Kamaladi, 10-5 PM on 25 January, Registration by 21 January. 4107599
- ❖ **Hata Yoga** classes, 7.30-8.30 AM and 5-6PM, Sunday to Friday, 40 percent discount at The Self Awakening Centre, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4256618

## MUSIC

- ❖ **Inner Groove** at Moksh Live, 12 January for Rs 150. 5526212
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Caf , Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Classical fusion music** at Jatra, every Saturday, 7PM onwards
- ❖ **Gaine (Gandarbh)** perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680080

## DINING

- ❖ **Walk and Lunch** every Saturday until 27 January at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **International Brunch** weekends, 11AM-3PM for Rs 499 per person (Rs 299 for children) at Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- ❖ **Light nouvelle snacks** and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La'Soon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian Embassy. 5537166
- ❖ **Farmhouse Caf ** at Park Village Resort. Dine alfresco with the birds and the butterflies. 4375280
- ❖ **Te** savour Tibetan delicacies at the new Tibetan restaurant and Nepalis first noodle bar, Bluebird Mall Food Court
- ❖ **Calcutta's famous** rolls, biryani, kebabs, and Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Japanese Food** at the Coffee Shop at Hotel Shangri-la, 12 noon till 3PM, Rs 499 per person. 4412999
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768, Bhat Bhateni 4426587 and Pulchok. 5521755
- ❖ **AKA Pizza** at Moksh, delivery available. 5526212
- ❖ **Momo and Sekuwa Revolution** every Saturday at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048
- ❖ **Happy Hours** at the Lost Horizon Bar, Hotel Shangri-la, from 5-7PM.
- ❖ **Cocktails and Mocktails** happy hour every day 4-7PM at Kathmandu Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road
- ❖ **Some Like It Hot** Cozy winter cocktails with live music from Side B every Wednesday at Fusionthe bar at Dwarika's.
- ❖ **Drinks and Dancing** Theme Saturday nights at Jbar, 4418209

For inclusion in the listing send information to [editors@nepalitimes.com](mailto:editors@nepalitimes.com)

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by MIKU



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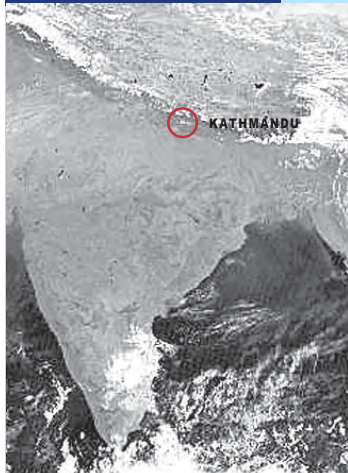
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## NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



The pressure system over the Tibetan plateau has led to a change in wind direction this week, sucking in cold dry air from the northwest. This has blown away the Indo-Gangetic haze that had enveloped the entire Himalayan foothills and shrouded the tarai in fog. The fog will remain, but there will now also be frost in Kathmandu as the temperature drops perilously close to zero most mornings. The first half of January will continue this dry trend. Valley residents should expect bright sun late in the morning and light breeze in the afternoon which will keep the night sky clear.

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NEPAL ARMY DPR

**RIOT CONTROL:** A contingent of the Nepal Army going on UN peacekeeping duty to Haiti and Congo is trained in crowd control at Panchkhal on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**LOTTERY LOSERS:** Demonstrators calling themselves "victims" of the American government's diversity visa lottery protest outside the US embassy on Wednesday, saying they have been unfairly refused visas.



RUPA JOSHI

**BERRY HOT:** Himalayan raspberries ripening three months ahead of schedule in Godavari this week. Experts see this as a sign of climate change.

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# The Blue Team

With the Security Council meeting on Friday to formally allocate a hefty budget for the expanded Monitoring Mission here and the arrival of five MI-8s from the Congo, Kathmandu is bracing itself for the Blue Team. Hotels in Kopundole are full, the bars in Thamel are filling up and the BICC has been requisitioned by monitors clad in flakjackets.

The Ass did a **quick calculation** in the back of a napkin the other evening and concluded that Nepal's GDP growth rate will have to revised upwards by one percentage point in fiscal 2007-8 due to heightened economic activity triggered by the beefed up UN presence. At last a UN endeavour that is actually going to contribute to economic growth in this country.



Having noticed the other day the number of large white vehicles with UN painted on the side all stuck in traffic at Thapathali because of some julus or other, your pet donkey got wondering about the rules governing who actually is allowed to fly the UN flag in this country. According to the UN's own in-house rules, it should only be the **head honcho**. That used to be the Resident Coordinator. But it never stopped the local head of every specialised UN agency from proudly flying their own flags as they sat in traffic at the Bridge. The Ass counted a dozen different flags of UN bodies in the parking lot during a recent national day reception: UNDP, UNICEF (both the South Asia office and the Nepal office), UNFPA (ditto), UNESCO, FAO, WFP, WHO, WHAT, WHERE and WHEN. And now we hear ICAO is opening a Nepal office. Enough already.



It's when the comings and goings become **frantic** that we in Nepal have learnt the hard way that something scary is brewing behind the scenes. So Karan ('The Jwaisah'b') Singh is headed back, a BJP delegation is in town, James Moriarty returned from holidays in Honolulu and

immediately flew off again to DC and His Fierceness is busy touring the hill stations in his SUV. While the Ex-Monarch of Kashmir probably wants to prevent a similar unceremonious fate from befalling his royal in-law in Nepal we understand the Americans are spooked about the Maoist gameplan in the runup to elections. But given the fact that desertions from the People's Liberation Army is now inversely proportional to the fall in minimum temperature in the cantonments, we think self-generated commie phobia may be trifle misplaced.



The growing AWOL problem in his rank and file doesn't seem to worry The Furious One, however. In fact, he seems relieved that there are fewer people to take care of with the Rs 24 karod he has got from the government to keep his guerrillas housed and fed. He was spotted in Jiri last week sweeping into town in a fleet of 4WDs just like past **thulo manchhes** used to do. By the way, the real owners of these vehicles don't dare ask the baddies to give the cars back to them. And we noticed the new paintjob on the license plate of Chairman Prachanda's Pajero had begun to peel off, revealing a different number underneath. The only thing that is not fake in his car seems to be the Blue Book and the Red Book. Maybe Prachandababu is staying beyond cellphone reach because he has come under blistering attack from just about everyone about his cadre padlocking the Dabur Greenhouse, the Chilime power plant and assorted bottlers.



And why, after installing a strobe light and new gates does the soon-to-be-nationalised Naryanhiti Raj Darbar need a **clock tower**? Or is it a giant stopwatch for the royal countdown?

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