

NEPALI Times

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The sight of these two porters carrying computers into the Election Commission building in Kathmandu on Sunday is emblematic of the challenges ahead for Nepal.

The constituent assembly election, a key demand of the Maoists to end their ten-year war, was scheduled for June but the timetable is looking increasingly doubtful. Dilly-dallying on five key pieces of legislations, continuing unrest in the tarai, un-ending strikes and shutdowns have affected preparations for polls.

"If the government and the parties start working with us immediately we can still hold elections by June, otherwise it will be difficult," says Chief Election Commissioner, Bhojraj Pokhrel.

This means an interim government should be set up this week, date for polls announced by mid-March, registration of parties by end-March, delineation of constituencies by mid-April, beginning of campaigning in mid-May, and elections by 15 June.

Although the government is dragging its feet on polls, the tempo has picked up on setting up a new government that includes the Maoists. Prime Minister Koirala met the Indian and US ambassadors on Thursday, but cancelled a scheduled meeting with Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Koirala is under pressure to delay inducting the Maoists into the interim government until the Maoists stop using force against opponents. ●
Dhruba Simkhada



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Getting there

KIRAN PANDAY

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 338

Q. What do you think about an ethnic federalist structure for the Nepali state?

Total votes: 4,083

Weekly Internet Poll # 339. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How important do you think it is to address the demands of indigenous rights groups?

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DISARMING CANDOUR

The Nepali people have a hope that the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) headed by Ian Martin will follow international standards to ensure that the Maoists arms and army are 'managed' in a way that the public can go into the constituent assembly elections free of fear and intimidation. This involves both the successful technical task of disarmament as well as monitoring current threat levels Nepalis are exposed to.

Last week, Martin presented a report (see picture) that referred to the completion of the 'first stage of registration of combatants and weapons'. What that means to us is that the job is not finished. Yet, the impression is given that the figures provided are essentially correct. We are told 3,428 weapons registered by insurgents are in containers.

We don't want to be alarmist about the quality of the arms management process. It is well known that the Maoists have mostly relied on looted arms and ammunition to conduct their war. We also don't believe that they ever controlled '80 percent' of the countryside, or held huge arms caches. So we believe Martin when he refers to the 'high degree of correspondence between the types of weapons listed by the (Nepal Army) and the types of weapons registered'.

But there are questions UNMIN would nevertheless need to answer to prepare the public for upcoming elections. Where are all the assault rifles? What of all the pistols? Does UNMIN have a view on the fact that a majority of hardcore guerrillas are not in the cantonments? And how will all this affect the conduct of elections in an environment free of fear and intimidation?

UNMIN's count of 'Maoist army combatants' in the cantonments is 30,852. We have reported large numbers of civilians joining the Maoists after the Ceasefire Code of Conduct was signed in August. Does UNMIN regard all of them as combatants? If it has yet to 'verify' who it calls the Maoist army combatants, how can Martin already call them that and give the impression that whoever the Maoists say are combatants are to be regarded as such?

In the run-up to elections, UMIN's task is not just to de-arm society but also work to defuse the military mindset of the Maoists. Until a situation evolves where the king and a reactionary army are able to create instability, it is the Maoists who will be seen as the chief threat to peaceful competitive politics.

There may have been a need to deal with the Maoists gingerly in the past as they risked all to join the mainstream. But UNMIN must now make a more public demand of the former insurgents. This way, it will also help them to evolve into a legitimate political party.

The sooner that happens the better it will be for Nepal's future.



KIRAN PANDAY

Arms control

Missing the forest for the trees

A week after UNMIN chief Ian Martin announced the number of Maoist fighters and weapons registered so far, controversy is still raging. The weapons-to-fighter ratio, which is about 1:9, appears too little. Many analysts have questioned how is



EYES WIDE SHUT
Sheetal Kumar

it possible that the Maoists have only 3,500 odd weapons when their fighting strength is nearly 32,000? Some experts and politicians are asking whether the ratio be more like 1:1?

This debate, though justified in many ways, misses a few key points about the Maoists. While it is important to account for each and every Maoist fighter and weapon to move the peace process forward, it would be foolhardy to expect that the Maoists will register all weapons in their possession.

No rebel force in the world does that. The level of mistrust

between the rebel and government forces is still too high at this early stage of the peace process for the Maoists not to have concealed some of their weapons. And besides, as anyone who followed the conflict over the years should know, the Maoists' main weapons were threats, intimidation, socket bombs and other improvised explosive devices, rather than the antiquated three-nought-threes.

Second, while the number of government weapons lost to Maoist rebels during the conflict and the number of Maoist weapons registered so far by UNMIN do not match exactly, they are tantalisingly close. Little attention has been paid to senior Nepal Army officers who have recently publicly said they are satisfied with the Maoist weapons. They say this because the number comes close to their own figures and also estimates of Maoist weapons by various research and intelligence agencies. There are some weapons which are still missing, of

course, but they can be explained: the Maoists too lost some of their weapons, to rebel groups like Jwala Singh and Jai Krishna Goit.

The most important point, however, is that even if these numbers appear low, they were enough to hold the country hostage for ten years. The Nepal Army and police forces could not defeat the Maoists despite having superior firepower. And the Maoists didn't win either. That is why we have this peace process. Focusing on low weapons figures is missing the forest for the trees.

None of this means that the Maoists should be let off the hook lightly. The government, UNMIN, and civil society should keep pressing for a full accounting of all their weapons. But realistically speaking, this will only happen if all sides begin to trust each other. Right now, trust is still tenuous, as was underscored by Martin before he left for New York last week. The UNMIN chief stressed the need for both the government and Maoists to immediately reach agreement on providing security for the Maoist leadership.

That they haven't been able to do so points to the continued mistrust. The Maoists don't trust government security forces to provide them adequate security, and the government doesn't trust the Maoists to carry their own weapons for security purposes. Until this key agreement is reached, the Maoists will have plausible reasons to continue moving around armed, and UNMIN cannot declare that weapons registration and storage is over, and we won't have an interim government, and there won't be a date for constituent assembly elections, etc, etc. ●



Not everything matters

If we look beyond arms and fighters, we'd see the other dangers

Dates for the constituent assembly could be announced any day.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal is waiting to hear from Baluwater so he can send his nominees into the interim government. But in the public mind, the fear of Maoist combatants persists. The process of arms management and the flaunting of weapons by Maoist cadres have raised doubts about the real intentions of the CPN-M. The



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

manner in which decommissioned combatants behave in the coming days will determine the fate of peace process and democracy.

UNMIN has declared complete the first phase of its job—registering and verifying Maoist combatants and weapons. But there is something remarkable at work in the figures released by UNMIN. For the 30,852 combatants registered at the seven main and 21 subsidiary cantonments across the

country, only 3,428 weapons have been locked up for joint monitoring. That's roughly one weapon for every ten fighter. It pushes the limits of one's credulity.

When the media asked Nanda Kishore Pun, the no-nonsense Maoist deputy commander who liaises with the monitoring team, to explain the inconsistency between these two figures, he was visibly uneasy and averted his gaze from the tv cameras. He then mumbled that on occasion his fighters had humbled the then Royal Nepal Army on the strength of improvised socket, pipe, and pressure cooker bombs.

Dahal went one better. In an explanation as ludicrous as that of automatic guns going off 'accidentally' in Narayanhiti, he swore that some of his weapons were lost. Others were taken away by the police, and more were washed away by floods. By this time it all sounds preposterous. But the Nepal Army has accepted UNMIN's figures without reservations. Apparently the people in power know something the

rest of us don't.

Clearly, the Maoists ran a frantic recruitment drive after the 12-point understanding with the seven-party alliance in order to raise their profile for the international community. CP Gajurel admitted as much in New Delhi last month. Most combatants in the camps are therefore untrained militia and political cadre rather than battle-hardened fighters. They lack the ideological commitment to a cause that comes from facing adversity together for a long time. Some already left the camp once. There is no reason to believe that others will not do so again. New recruits are unlikely to develop the self-control necessary for living in camps and on an allowance of under a dollar a day.

When the king's direct rule was at its strongest, a retired RNA general suggested that lasting peace in Nepal was impossible unless the Maoists well-trained irregulars were repatriated to their home country. The India-baiters have not yet insinuated that the weapons have gone

back to where they believe they come from: the jungles of Chhatisgarh, the ravines of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand's hills, and Bihar's floodplains.

The number of combatants in cantonment and the type of weapons in the UN-monitored containers suggest that the Maoist leaders can't withdraw from the peace process unless they are offered safe passage and sanctuary once again. Given various geo-strategic reasons, that seems unlikely. Dahal is staying put in Kathmandu—a Ramshah Path firm was just awarded a Rs 2 million contract to furnish the residence of the person after whom Prachanda Path is named. That's a pittance compared to the extravagance of other leaders, communist and otherwise. The man needs a spacious desk to write his long speeches. That should keep him busy for a while.

But if the monarchy, democracy's main enemy, were to get ambitious, there is no telling what Maoist cadres living in rudimentary cantonments will do. What, after all, do they have to lose? ●

LETTERS

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

CK Lal has touched my heart this time ('The ties that bind', State of the State #337). I always felt he was against the Nepali identity in his writings (especially for pahadi bahuns like me who are the focus of multipronged attacks in present day Nepal). But being somebody who thinks discrimination can be annihilated by educating people and not by trampling upon the dhaka topi, I totally agree that we need to find common ground amidst our diversity and learn to celebrate both. Hats off to Mr Lal.

Sandeep Dhungana, Lancashire, UK

● I would like to congratulate CK Lal and his analysis on maintaining the integrity of Nepal. We should all respect each one other's uniqueness, but try to bring commonalities in the front if there is an eruption of differences. For co-existence we have to accept common principles. Madhesis were right to bring out their issues. Does it matter if Upendra Mahato of the MJF speaks Nepali instead of Hindi? After all, Hindi is a more likely threat to Maithali than Nepali. Maithali is more respected in Nepal and has a potential to flourish in Nepal rather than in Bihar. The root language of all these dialects are the same anyway.

B Bhandari, email

● Re: Mark Turin's excellent article 'My tongue or yours' (#336). The briefest and simplest answer should be an emphatic: 'BOTH!' It is unfortunate that language policy and linguistic rights, and in particular, mother tongue education in Nepal are 'thorny political issues', as Turin correctly observes. In fact, language is not in the first place a political issue, although it is used and made as such. Language has to do with all that is 'culture', literature, art, history. It is also about the cognitive process of each individual. Perhaps because the rights of minority language groups have been neglected for so long, activists are now set to fight for their rights to the degree of being unreasonable. The reaction of the government to demands for mother tongue education has been changing over the years from definitely negative to carefully positive to even trying to provide textbooks for 12 languages. Indeed, the task is overwhelming if seen from the perspective of a central government: many of the minority languages are not well known in Kathmandu. Even less known are the real needs of the people, because for each language the situation

is different, each has a different need. Before any action can be taken, surveys have to be undertaken to assess the language attitudes, the actual situation and the actual need in the mother tongues.

It does not hurt the position of Nepali as the prestige language if other languages are also used as medium of instruction. Linguists can testify that many of the languages spoken in Nepal have inbuilt mechanisms to coin new words, or fill terms with new content. How much, or rather how little, Nepali is really understood by speakers of other languages is reflected in the high dropout rate of students whose mother tongue is not Nepali. Children can handle several languages at the same time without getting confused, in fact, their cognitive abilities are strengthened compared to monolingual children. Even if the mother tongue is not



the language of higher studies, it will not be forgotten if there is a good foundation early on. Education in the mother tongue will be the base of language preservation, and this is what we wish to happen in Nepal where we still have an immense treasure of diverse languages.

I Toba, email

UNMIN

UNMIN's report on the first phase of registering 3,428 guns and 30,852 Maoist combatants leaves a lot of unanswered questions. We are seeking a political peace model solution, also known as the 'pieces of peace' with many political and social intra-linkages currently tied up its overall success. Ian Martin says 'the UN can't say if the Maoists returned all their weapons' which leaves two possibilities: either not all arms were registered or else the Maoists were merely fighting a psy-ops war for the past decade. Forget the weapons countdown issue, what is more important is for the Maoists to be on board

the political mainstream.

Conflict prevention and peace-building efforts in other countries show that the process of peace-building starts once government and the rebels sign a peace agreement for comprehensive political settlement and post-conflict reconstruction, followed by the donor community developing a framework for rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, after which it passes through three overlapping yet distinct phases: the initial stabilisation of a war-torn society, the transformation or institutional building and the consolidation of the peace effort. Where ever we are on all three, it must address the Nepal's desire for peace.

Surya B Prasai, email

● Whether you like Chairman Prachanda or not, one should give the devil his due. If there is any leader who has the audacity and capacity to outsmart everybody then it is P K Dahal. The Maoists have everything to gain from the peace deal whereas other parties have everything to lose. Even if the whole peace deal fizzles out there is only one party which would gain from both eventualities. The parties have dug their own grave conceding to all the demands of the Maoists without understanding the repercussions on their own political future. These blunders are impossible to retract or amend. Thanks to the government, the Maoist increased their numbers from 9,000 to 35,000. It is the most significant gain the Maoists have made. This will work as a safety valve in the eventuality of going back to jungle and if they want to face the election then they still have the arms, human resources and money (provided by the government) to win single handedly, putting all three to good use. Now our government is even more vulnerable to Maoist diktat. Shree Girija Koirala has to choose between devil and the deep blue sea.

P B Rana, email

CHELIS

I'd congratulated the Charitrahin Chelis in your paper when they first appeared with their daring agenda four years ago. But then they just vanished into thin air. Their sudden comeback has been a little worrying, are they limiting their roles as anti-males, that too, by emulating the same self-destructive macho male image? When will they move away from this Freudian penis-envy? Their proposition of 50 percent representation in the house is certainly relevant and they are right in carrying out various shock-therapies on the pathologically sex-obsessed mindset of our society. But why pass such revolutionary resolutions through rounds of whisky and cigarettes in an

underground midnight bhatti? Can't they make an open declaration in broad daylight so the message is delivered to all sections of society, including that large percentage of their sisters who do not read papers? If they really wish to change the discriminatory and hypocritical attitude of the society they must play a consistent pro-active role, not just by venting off reactive outbursts once in a while.

D Divas, email

● Way to go CHC! Yeah, show 'em that the toonas of your cholis and jiar of your petikots are staying tied until they meet all of your demands. Next step: how about a video titled 'Nepali Girls Gone Wild'?

Nirmal Niroula, email

TRASHY

Re: 'Nepal in New York' (#337). Is your newspaper a legit news outlet or a gossip mag? This article is pure trash that you would find in grocery line gossip section and is a disgrace.

Name withheld, email

UNION OF BIDESHIS IN NEPAL

In my on-going effort to adapt as much to local culture and customs as possible, and to blend in with and respect local traditions and actions in Nepal, I have decided that it would only be logical to form a union of my own: the first union of Bideshis in Nepal. I say 'first', because, as all things in Nepal, it is certain to: be copied (perhaps the greatest 'poverty' in Nepal is that of initiative, creativity, and professional ethics, among Nepal's and international 'development' workers) It is also likely to splinter into a variety of factions with complaints, issues, oppositions, public resolutions, and much tea drinking and speeches between us, while we work as hard as possible to skim as much funds from the community as we can. As an opening action to announce our presence, and demand our rights we demand a 10 percent tax from all Nepal's (in addition to 13 percent VAT). Then we shall stop all Nepal's on the road, and demand donations to our various 'temple construction' projects. Once unionised properly, it would only be natural for us to start back-biting and betraying each other, splinter off in to other groups with similar aims, and compete in declaring nationwide bandas.

Someone explain to me how a nation can work so diligently at self-sabotage and self-destruction, and in the same breath, demand international assistance to correct those same misguided efforts?

Johnnie Chai, email



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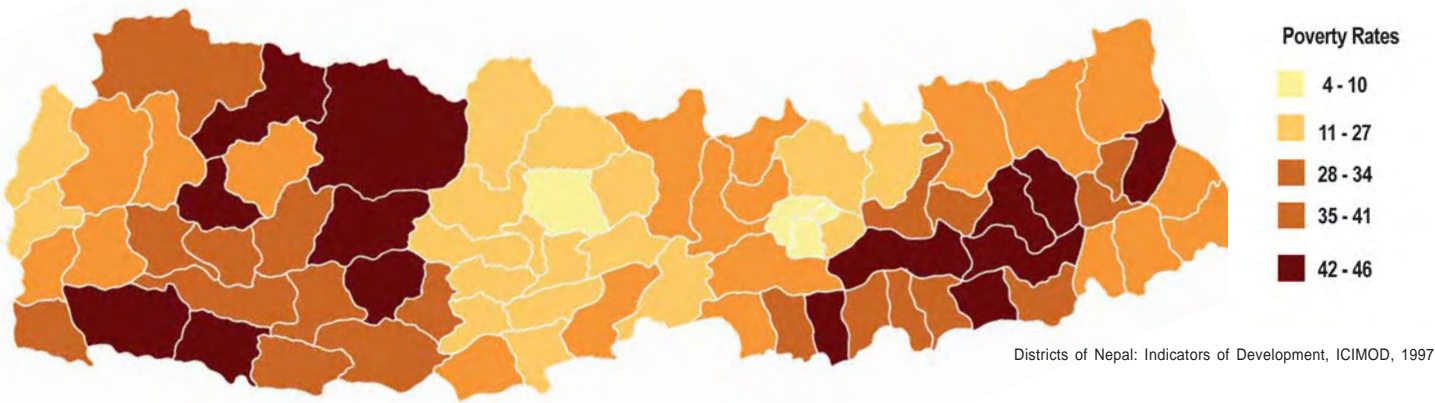
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Equal opportunity poverty



Identity politics obscures all-round deprivation

ALOK BOHARA and MANI NEPAL

Nepal's enormous geographic, ethnic, and biological diversity throws up many opportunities for economic development, such as through hydropower, tourism, agriculture, and the like. Yet most Nepalis today remain as poor as they have been for centuries. Look at the poverty figures and you realise that a New Nepal will not come by dividing the country along the lines of ethnicity, colour or creed, but by addressing this basic inequity.

Our rugged geography and the fact that we are landlocked, our feudal practices, and Kathamandu-centric politics and policies all contribute to our misery. While it is true that Nepalis of madhesi origin have been on the receiving end of much social and economic injustice, so

have many other groups not from the tarai. Of the 25 poorest districts, 16 are in the hills and the mountains and two in the eastern tarai.

Poverty mapping by using the headcount (percent of people below the poverty line) as a measure of poverty status shows that deprivation is pervasive, from east to west and includes both the 'madhesi' tarai and 'pahades' hills'. The districts in the mid-west and the far-west spanning all ecological belts have the most people under poverty. Even the relatively prosperous eastern and central regions have pockets of poor districts in the hill and tarai regions.

Rural Nepal accounts for 83 percent of the total population—some 19 million people. Of these, 35 percent, or seven million fall below the poverty line. The figures for per capita consumption

expenditure make more sense if you also look at the disparity within each group in the bar graphs for poverty rate by ethnicity. Millions are poor and deprived regardless of their ethnicity.

In absolute terms, the vast majority of hill dalits, tharus, and lower caste madhesi (2.5 million in all) are under the poverty line. Pahade bahuns, chhetris, and janajatis each have more than a million poor. Madhesi Yadavs are doing poorly compared with madhesi bahuns.

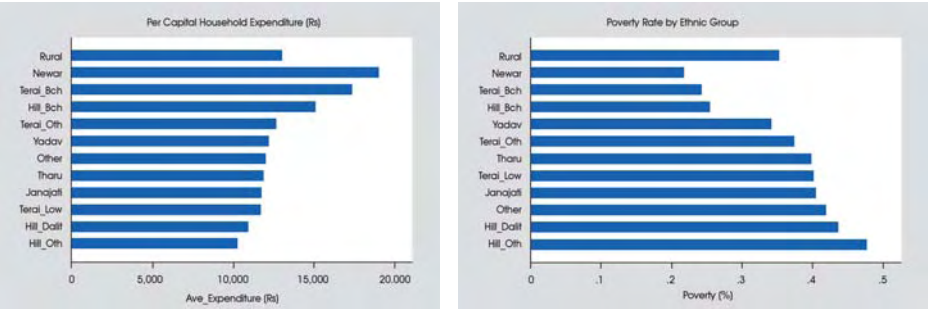
Ethnically-clustered administrative entities are not a practical way to address the enormous socio-economic imbalances in a diverse population that has 100 ethnic groups and 80 languages. The proposed federal structure on the basis of the five pahad versus madhes regions also does not take into account comparative advantage, economy of scale, carrying capacity, or the diversity of resources. As an example, what destiny can the people of Humla, Jumla, and Rolpa chart when all they have are rugged mountains? The lumping together of, say, Rai and Magar, dalits and Sherpa, Bahun and the Chhetri would only exacerbate ethnic tensions further and prompt migration down to the plains, should hardship in the hills continue. Will the new state solve such problems by creating a culture of centrally-controlled fiscal handouts?

With an all-too-imaginable weak central government in Kathmandu resourceful regions could refuse to share benefits with less-privileged areas. Imagine the Limbuwan province bypassing the tarai to sell hydropower to India region and keeping all the proceeds, or other pahadi regions seeing no incentive in preventing flooding to their south. Or the tarai keeping for itself all the profits from employment, tax receipts, and custom revenue from the industrial parks along its border. These are important questions because of the unique ecological interdependence between Nepal's different regions. This discussion does not even touch upon the millions of dalits and low-income indigenous people, and an ethnic division says nothing about what happens to women.

Conflict masks conflict, and once the political issues are settled, the economic ones will again surface. What we should be designing now is a political solution that addresses economic realities. It's time for tarai-basis and hill people to look to each other's regions and see how the potential in the bio-diversity, natural resources, water, hydropower, minerals, forest products, herbs, and cash crops of the north can complement the tarai's agriculture, fisheries, and industrial activities. The ecological comparative advantage of the three belts, if harvested properly, can be a factor in solving the problems of all communities.

Each regional unit in such a north-south federated system could also be balanced in terms of ethnicity and population to create a more representative electoral system. Other institutional mechanisms to bolster such an arrangement include the division of tasks, mixed proportional representation system of election, a strong, responsive central government, internal democracy, stable governance, and rule of law. Our guiding principles should be sound policy prescriptions, concern for genuine grievances, strong, transparent and fair institutional mechanisms, and long-term pragmatism. ●

Alok Bohara is professor of economics at the University of New Mexico, and Mani Nepal is a doctoral student at the university.



ALL GRAPHS: Authors' computation from Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2004, and Population Census, 2001, Central Bureau of Statistics, Kathmandu.

"We need to streamline the peace process"



The Peace Secretariat is supposed to provide backup for the peace process, but has been overtaken by unrest in the tarai. Nepali Times asked Secretary Janak Raj Joshi if his mandate has changed.

Nepali Times: We do not hear much about the Peace Secretariat these days. What are you busy with?
Janak Raj Joshi: The saying goes 'still waters run deep', We run deep. The Peace Secretariat is primarily mandated in four major areas: facilitate the negotiators, provide

technical support to the government and peace institutions, design policies and programs for post-conflict management, and give logistical support to the peace process. The services of the secretariat are in-built in to the system. We do not appear as a separate entity. Achievements so far in the peace process are a collective effort of the political parties, the Peace Secretariat, civil society, media, and the international community.

At present we are working on a plan of action to implement the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA), designing policies on the internally displaced, drafting the terms of references and the organisation structures of the various commissions stipulated in the peace accord. The secretariat is also involved in negotiations with the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum and the Tarai Mukti Morcha Goit Group, etc. We are designing a system under which the demands of all sectors are paid attention to in the Constitution Assembly election.

Is there a feeling that the politicians drive the peace process, and use the Secretariat only when it suits them?
To an outsider it may appear so, but the fact is that political negotiations need to be done at the political level. We are working as a catalyst by providing the technical backup for the negotiators. For instance, it was the secretariat that developed a draft of the CPA and it was negotiated at the political level. We provide the politicians the references on cross-country experiences so that they can make informed decisions. While the working groups of the eight political parties were negotiating on the electoral process, some of the members had difficulty in understanding the complex electoral system such as the parallel and mixed proportional process. It is up to the political parties to make a choice, but the secretariat can be involved.

What is your secretariat's strategy for dealing with new challenges to the peace process?
Yes, there are challenges to the peace process. The government has already formed a talk team to negotiate with the respective groups. The secretariat has been collecting opinions from all sectors. We are doing content and context analysis of the demands of the agitating groups. Some groups have found it difficult to initiate dialogue with the talk team directly so we establish informal links with them and brief the talk team about the technicalities involved with the negotiations.

What would you say are your most difficult obstacles, and are you getting the cooperation you need from all quarters?
I wouldn't call them obstacles, they are challenges. The most pressing one before the secretariat is to streamline the activities of the peace process. Peace is such an alluring subject that everyone wants to be involved. As long as it is at the participation level, it is fine with us. However, institutions seem to be interested to take up the job of the secretariat. We are the focal point for the peace process, we don't want to be squeezed from any side. And we are sorry if we can't accommodate everyone.

Different government agencies are entrusted with the activities of the peace process at present. There are areas where we have a shared responsibility such as in policy and plan formulation, and the other agencies are implementing agencies. It has created some confusion. In order to further streamline the activities we need to have separate ministry of the peace process with multi-partisan representation. A steering committee can then solicit the participation of different sectors of society.

Imagine



KIRAN PANDAY

Imagine every girl child in Nepal going to school, it isn't hard to do

Listening in on the conversations in the national media, we hear 'politics' and 'New Nepal' together all the time. What we don't hear about is 'imagination'. This is not surprising. We view imagination as something that belongs to poets and artists, and we think of New Nepal as a project best left to our careerist politicians. But what if the New Nepal needed more imagination and less squabbling party politics?

In a *New Yorker* article about what distinguishes star performers from those who are competently good, writer Malcolm Gladwell reports that it is imagination which makes all the difference. The best eagerly discuss their mistakes without blaming others, and "have the ability to rethink everything that they've done and imagine how they might have done it differently".



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

Those who perform the best in every domain of human endeavour—the arts, research, sports, business, and politics—as

very imaginative people. Yes, they are technically competent. But more than that, they are experts at forming clear pictures in their mind about what they want to accomplish, and how they want to go about achieving their goals. It's the interplay of that kind of imagination that's sadly lacking in our public conversations about the New Nepal.

Think, for instance, how at a time when urban Nepalis suffer through power blackouts for upto seven hours a day in this water-rich country, and rural Nepalis' dreams for better lives end in Malaysian chicken processing factories, our politicians continue to make a fool of themselves by parroting the line about turning Nepal into Switzerland.

What our netas never understand is this: Nepalis don't want a second-rate Switzerland or a duplicate Singapore when they can have a first-rate Nepal. Such a Nepal does not require that musical chairs be played by those who want to replace one self-proclaimed godman with their own parties' deities. But it does require a sense of contagiously shared imagination about transforming Nepal within a generation.

Imagine, then, providing primary education to every girl child in Nepal. The benefits from completing this goal alone far outweigh those from just about any other bikas work.

Imagine creating diverse institutional spaces that give decentralised national, regional, and local political access to any Nepali child of any caste and region in such a way that she can realistically dream of being the nation's chief executive someday.

Imagine connectivity as the new mantra, making us connect every village with other villages by roads, cable cars, ropeways, phone lines, and the internet.

Imagine letting diverse, transparent, and effective financial intermediaries flourish in such a way that Nepal's wealth is converted into usable capital not only for electricity, drinking water, highways, healthcare, and improvement of the arts, but also for insurance, so Nepalis' deaths do not remain cheap, anonymous, and routine.

Imagine measuring the government's performance by one primary indicator: the number of jobs it creates to keep the youth off the streets and in the workforce.

Imagine Nepal using its location between the world's two thriving economies to re-commit itself as the venue for tourism, education, and leisure in South Asia.

It's possible to imagine all this and more and then achieve it in the New Nepal only if we reframe what's ahead of us as an opportunity to transform 27 million lives in a country where the median age is just 17. ●



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The missing guns?

Madhab Basnet in *Dristi*, 27 February



There were 30,852 Maoists registered in cantonments but only 3,428 weapons. And even among these, the number of automatic rifles is negligible. The security forces had told UNMIN that the Maoists had 3,430 of their weapons. The Maoists appear to have handed in just that number. In Butwal Prachanda said: "Some were washed away by rivers, others were reduced to ashes." The whole process as well as repeated Maoist warnings

61 machineguns, 61 sub-machineguns, 2,403 rifles, 212 shotguns, 253 other guns, 232 muskets, and 114 sidearms. The Maoists are allowed to use 524 of these weapons for the security of their camps and 70 for the security of top leaders.

According to a source, the Maoists have captured a total of 4,514 weapons from the army, armed police and civil police in the ten years of war. From the Nepal Police they got: 2,365 .303 rifles, 322 Magnums, 291 shotguns, 238 Hornet rifles, 319 Chinese pistols, 159 revolvers. From the armed police they captured 240 SLR, 24 LMG, 24 SMG, 4 two-inch mortars, four .303s, nine pistols, and one Chinese pistol. From the Nepal Army, they captured: 303 SLRs, 234 INSAS rifles, 113 LMGs, 15 81-mm mortars, five GPMGs, one Minimi, 590 SMGs, 11 SLW, two M209 grenade launchers, two Colt commandos, five Galils, 16 M-16s, one G-16 rifle, one Chinese sniper rifle, one Indian sniper rifle, and 25 pistols.

Maoist leader Nandakishore Pun says the numbers of registered

weapons are low because some of the captured guns were useless, others were re-captured by the army during battles and some were taken away by deserters. Besides these, the Maoists have also bought a large quantity of weapons in the Indian and Chinese markets, including the AK-47s and rocket launchers. For now the government has no option but to accept the Maoist figures for weapons because there is no proof either way.



KIRAN PANDAY

about resuming their revolution if elections can't be held by June cast doubts about their integrity. The Maoists have also been accused of keeping their battle-hardened guerrillas outside and filling up the camps with new recruits to whom they promised salaries and allowances. Along with the guerrillas, it looks like the Maoists have also kept their modern guns outside.

Of the weapons registered are 91 mortars,

Maobadi & Co, Pvt Ltd

Madan Lamsal in *Abhiyan*, 26 February-4 March

अभियान

Many of Nepal's businessmen are engaged in politics. Which is why some political parties are doing much better than businesses. This is also the reason why Prachanda, Baburam, Mahara, and company have started a political party instead of a business. In a practical sense, the Maoists operate as a business rather than a political party. In fact, it is proven by the lifestyle of some of its leaders. The watch on his wrist and the fountain pen of the Maoist CEO, it is no less than the CEO of a multinational company.

And just like family-run businesses, leaders' relatives have important positions in the party. The party is run like Prachanda's private fiefdom where whatever he decides goes. Such is his personality cult that the party's mission, vision, and goal are all named after Prachanda himself. Posters depicting Prachandapath are plastered all over the country.

Like other companies, the Maoists follow the doctrine of the four 'P's. First is profit, in the pursuit of which they have actually sent a lot of people to the Pearly Gates and threatened, intimidated, extorted just about every other business in this country. This 'aggressive

marketing' technique has borne results.

The second P is power under which the party needs to get to power by hook or by crook. The third P is poster and they have draped the country in posters. The fourth P is the forthcoming poll, which the Maoists want to win at all costs. Congratulations to the Maoists & Co Pvt Ltd for carrying on with such a splendid business and successful business model.

Responsibility

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 28 February

कान्तिपुर

An emergency clause in the interim constitution allows the interim legislative parliament to direct the state until a constituent assembly is formed. Although it is an interim body, this parliament was designed, like the national parliament, to meet certain crises the country would face. If the interim parliament had shown that it was willing and able to amend the document, as per the demands of madhesi, janajati, and adibasi groups, the protests would not have turned ugly. Many Nepalis have taken to the streets to express their disagreement with the orientation of the interim parliament and its manner of representation.

Some parties say, irresponsibly, that they want to amend the interim constitution right away. Mainstream parties like the NSP-Anandi say

सबैभन्दा उचित नेतृत्व?



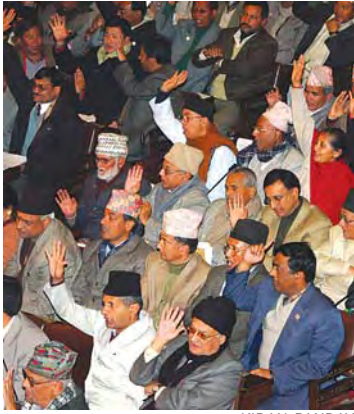
विश्वास नेपालीको... कीप्रति ?

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KIRAN PANDAY

amendment is a precondition to their joining the interim government. Meanwhile, the Maoists behave unjustly with the agitating madhesi, janajati, and adibasi groups and still think they can get their way through violence, pressure, and threats.

The street protests gain strength from the chaos caused by the interim parliament being unable to solve interim problems, or becoming a place for discussion, national consensus, and camaraderie. The government has not even considered the genuine and hopeful request from the Nepal Federation for Indigenous Nationalities for a roundtable. Because the interim parliament seems unconcerned about bringing lasting peace, fulfilling the people's demands,

and moving towards the constituent assembly election, Nepalis think street action works better than dialogue and the parliament.

An interim legislative parliament is not a traditional assembly, it has to deal with a country in crisis. The Maoists aren't taking it seriously—their leaders are not in the House of Representatives—and unconstitutional forces within the Maoists are continuing with threats and pressure, provoking protestors to take to the streets. The interim parliament must urgently take charge to find a peaceful solution out of this mess.

Revenue

Sanghu, 26 February

सौंदर्य

Recent news from the Tatopani customs office, one of the highest revenue earning ports in Nepal, suggests that millions of rupees have been embezzled there. It is understood that Bishnu Khatri, chairman of Himalayan Border Organisation is involved in misappropriating revenue. Instead of Rs 10 million charged for goods brought into Kathmandu, Khatri turned over

only one million rupees to the government. A highly placed source tells us that over Rs 4 million went to important politicians to keep the deal under wraps, and Khatri pocketed the remaining Rs 5 million. Once revenue officers place the seal on goods at the border, the shipment is not allowed to be opened again until it reaches its destination, where it will be unsealed by revenue officers. Khatri is using this provision to misappropriate revenue. If the government had given the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority the power to inspect the goods, such misuse would not have happened.

Meanwhile, Khatri, also known for smuggling sandalwood, has abandoned smuggling through the Tatopani border and begun using a different route. News has it that he transports lots of sandalwood to a place called '10 Kilo'. From there, when the time is right, he employs porters to carry the wood to a small bridge east of Kodari, over which it is smuggled into Tibet. He is said to have bribed custom and police officers, and re-uses the same document to take his goods across the border.

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Cock-a-doodle do!
Maoist in the camp: Eat stale rice, do!

Where are the weapons?
Pushpa Kamal Dahal: They were washed away by the river

Where is the river?
Pushpa Kamal Dahal: It dried up
Fire- interim government
Books-Maobad, People's War, armed revolution

हिमाल Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 28 February - 14 March

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ If the forum is really fighting for the right to self-determination, why is it interested in forming an alliance with foreign and royal forces, rather than with the Maoists who are fighting for the same cause? ”

Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Gorkhapatra, 28 February.

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Climb walls

You don't have to leave the Valley to get a taste of the outdoors, get fit, and de-stress

PRATIBHA SHRESTHA and PRANAYA SJB RANA

“Safety first,” says Dilip Kumar Rai, strapping himself securely into a harness and swinging onto a sheer 12m high rockface in the Nagarjun Forest. Dilip inches up slowly, looking like nothing so much as a languid spider. In fact, he’s concentrating intensely, exploring the surface of the rock for suitable footholds and handholds that

will be strong enough to take his weight and help him move up. His friend Tej belays him and Dilip edges along, looping the rope through bolts already screwed into the wall. He’s done this before, and pretty soon he’s at the top of the wall waving down at us. Rai and his friend Tej Khapangi, like other rock climbing enthusiasts, frequent the sanctuary, which is known for low limestone cliffs that are suited to beginners and experts. The friends are river guides by

profession, and climb here and in Pharping for love of the sport, not because it’s their job. “Once you get addicted to climbing, it’s very hard to stop,” grins Rai. “Rock climbing is just catching on,” says Padam Ghale, a pioneer rock climber in Nepal and a member of the original group that developed the Nagarjun route. Compared to other countries, Kathmandu’s routes may seem, well, puny, but they’re great places to start. “Rock climbing in Kathmandu and Nepal is

perfect for beginners,” explains Sunar Gurung, president of the Nepal Mountain Guide Association. “Low grade walls and short route lengths allow newbies to learn and perfect the basics.” Ghale and Gurung have been climbing for almost 25 years, exploring and building climbing routes in and around Kathmandu. The wall at Nagarjun offers 17-18 climbing routes, with varying levels of difficulty, from 5 to 7A grades. There are easy straightforward climbs, but also a

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couple of tricky overhangs that more advanced climbers can have some fun with.

The climbing at Pharping is harder, as the walls are steeper, there are numerous overhangs and larger gaps between the bolts. Sheshnagar nearby offers a 6A+ route, while Hattiban offers six routes at the 6A-6B+ grades. The route at Sheshnagar is not very popular, since most people find it too difficult and a little dangerous.

For young beginners, there is a new artificial indoor wall at the Mountaineer's Memorial Centre in Kakani. This is certainly different from the genuine outdoors experience—the texture you feel is stone and cement, rather than the gritty, sharp limestone and hand- and footholds protrude out from the wall. The 3-5 grade climbs are also where the National Mountaineering Association offers courses.

You meet a small but diverse group of people at Nagarjun and Pharping—trekkers, mountaineers and extreme sport junkies, as well as diplomats, marines, and security workers. For a relatively safe activity in a mountainous country, there seem to be few Nepali takers.

“People think rock climbing is just for mountain climbers,” says Endra Rai of Kathmandu’s Nodan Club. “Sure, it’s the first step to climbing mountains, but it is a challenging and rewarding activity in and of itself too. It’s a social sport and a great way to promote team building and trust,” he adds. Nodan Club runs personality and professional development courses using extreme sports such as climbing, canyoning, and kayaking as a way of

personality development.

If you’re a climber tired of Nagarjun head for Tarebhir on Shivapuri—it’s difficult to reach and offers tougher climbs. Outside the Valley, the nine routes at Bimalnagar in Dumre are also popular, and go from a low grade 10m route for beginners to a much harder 60m route for seasoned climbers. The walls at Chewang in Solu and Thame in Khumbu are usually used by experienced climbers to acclimatise for high altitude expeditions.

Nepal’s spectacular landscape has enormous potential for excellent rock climbing. But ironically, in a country known for, well, mountains and climbers, there is very little support for the sport, either financial or moral.

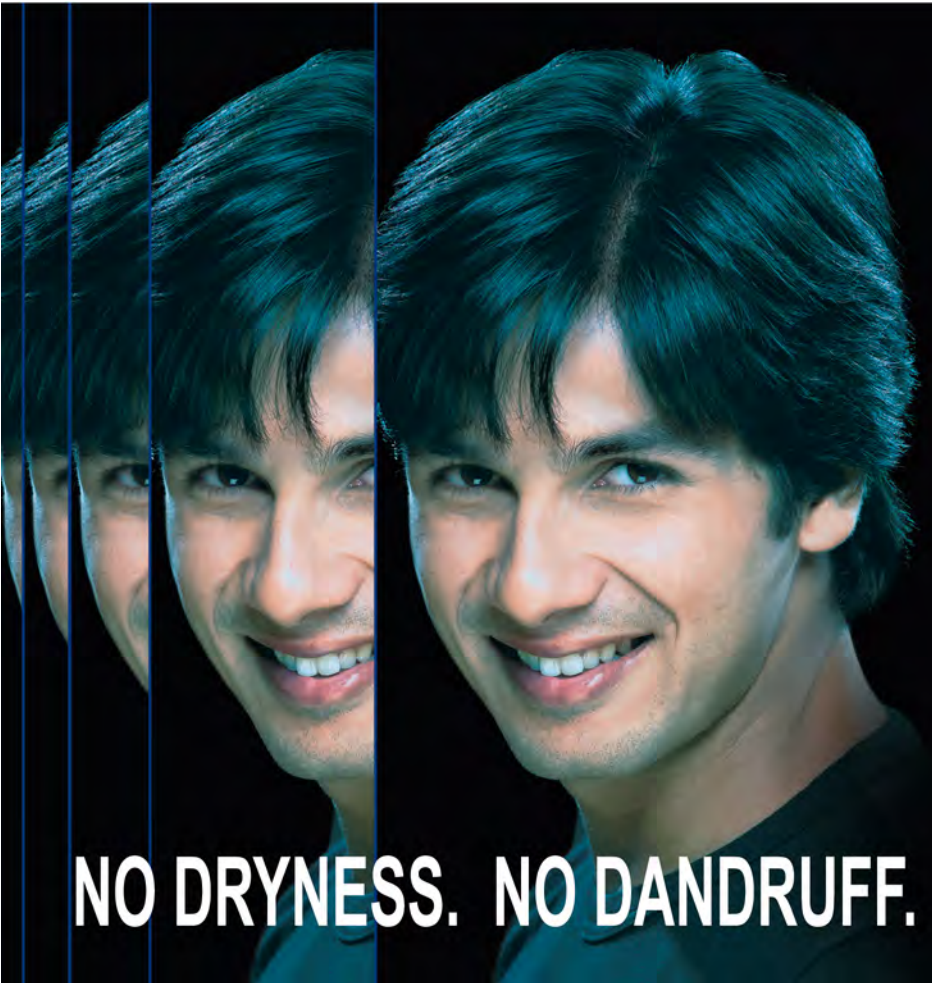
The Ministry for Education and Sports does not even recognise rock climbing as a sport, says Ngawang Nima Sherpa, head instructor at the NMA. The association says that while its climbing permit royalties do not generate enough funds to explore new regions and develop routes, it does receive support from overseas. The Yves Pollet Villard Foundation, for example, sponsors instructor upgrade courses and rescue training courses for climbers.

Rock climbers will tell you that there are few sports like this where your mind and body are in perfect harmony, and which combine stretching, weight-bearing, and cardio.

“Rock climbing is like meditation,” says Padam Ghale, “Both my mind and body need to be firmly under control and when I’m finished, I feel relaxed and at peace.” ●



ALL PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA



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Keep it together

Thinking that Nepal will fall apart or be colonised is pure hysteria

Among the dire warnings of doom bandied about by those afraid of Nepal's current ferment is that the nation will "break up" or will be "taken over" by India.

One of the things we know for sure it is that Nepal is here to stay. There will be no break up, so shattering into Janajatis or Madhesia. We can also predict with absolute certainty that India is not going to take over. Ever. It won't happen.

Let's consider the break-up canard first. It's presented as a fear, or a criticism, by those who object to the demands of excluded groups for political autonomy. People in the tarai or Kathmandu Valley or the far west can't have a province or state with its own regional government because that will lead to the entire nation falling apart into ethnic and geographic units.

This is patent nonsense, in defiance of history, geography, and reality. Modern nation-states don't just disappear or break-up because of internal crises. Yugoslavia never made sense and its tragic demise was hugely mishandled by the international community. Iraq may shatter because of the sectarian madness unleashed by the botched US-led invasion but equally, it may not. The map of Africa is dotted with post-colonial concoctions that

make no political or ethnic sense, and are frequently riven by strife and imbalances of power, yet borders are not redrawn and nation-states stagger on.

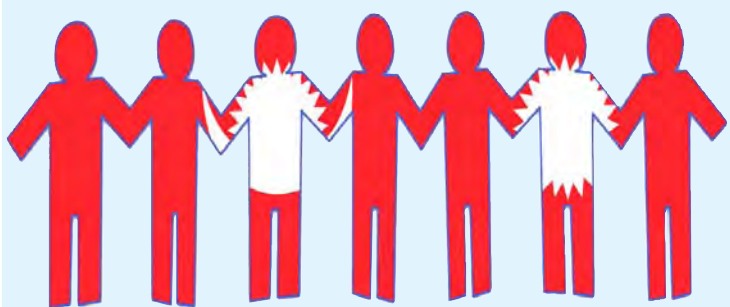


HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

Czechoslovakia broke into two ethnically-based nations after the collapse of Soviet communism in the final years of the 20th century. But its people always maintained that theirs was an uneasy union, forced upon them by external forces and never a situation worth defending against aggression or foreign pressure.

Nepal is not some fragile ornament left to a squabbling family by a departing colonial power. It is a nation that has existed for nearly three centuries—as long as or longer than many of the world's leading countries today.

Devolution of power and federalism is far more likely to strengthen the bonds of nationhood. Federal units like states or



provinces provide stability by giving people the means to address local grievances quickly through the ballot box and regional political process. Political talent is developed by the need to balance local demands and build consensus on complex issues. States compete with each other for investment, inward migration and attention from the national capital.

There are always challenges and grievances that never disappear. In fact, they multiply when the system opens up and provides opportunities for redressal. That's the business of politics: governing and balancing. It's about more than distributing the fruits of power and enjoying the accompanying privileges. Nepal needs to be federal and the sooner the better.

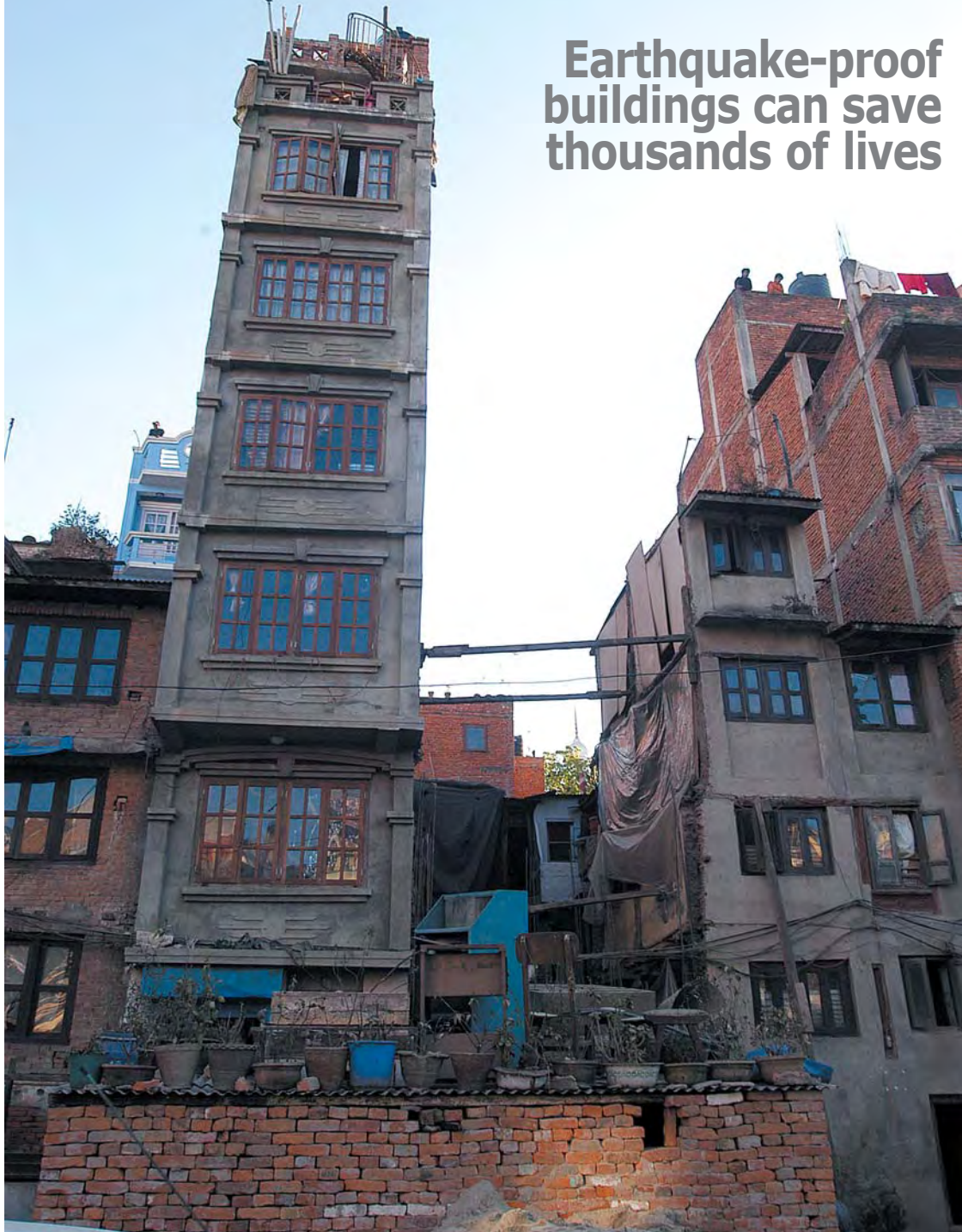
As for an Indian takeover, that needs to be banished as a notion forever. India does not covet neighbouring countries as real estate, nor does it measure itself as a global player by its prowess as a colonising power. On the contrary, India takes a modern view of nationhood. New Delhi gets its influence through its booming economy, the Indian diaspora and by playing the international diplomatic game. Multilateral institutions and trade earn you global influence, not gunboats.

That's not to say that India doesn't want influence over its neighbours. Of course it does. All countries have national interests that are pushed in different ways. Soft power—diplomacy, culture, business—is far and away the most effective of these and that's India's game in the 21st century. Nepal's task is to identify its own interests, build a consensus and use the same methods to advance the national cause.

There will be no takeovers or break-ups as this process of national redefinition goes on. Pitfalls lurk everywhere but none are fatal, so long as good will and common sense prevail. The Nepali people possess both in spades. ●

Unshockable

Earthquake-proof buildings can save thousands of lives



PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA

All fired up and

Meeting a small-time revolutionary in a small town hotel

LEO BLAZE in BIHAR

Jwala Singh, real name Nagendra Paswan, proves that you do not have to climb very high to become a powerful dalit in Nepal. In this case, the head of the most violent—but not the most important or largest—faction of the JTMM.

Recently we met Paswan in a bare hotel room off a muddy street in small-town Bihar, where everything he and his two companions had could fit into a small holdall. Out of consideration for his guests he left the room to smoke, though he had no compunction about spitting in the corner. He invited us to join him under blankets on the bed and passed around an old studio shot of himself, declining to be photographed as he currently appears.

Talking to Paswan is strikingly similar to speaking with a district level Maoist leader—albeit an especially friendly one—during the conflict. He reeled off the short list of killings and attacks he has commissioned with apparent indifference.

Paswan started out as a journalist, mainly for leftist publications. For a while he ran his own newspaper, and was vice-president of the Siraha



MALLIKA ARYAL

The narrow gallis are dark and chilly even on hot afternoons, with all sunlight blocked out by the tall, narrow houses squished together on either side.

The side paths lead to small chowks enclosed by new and old buildings, some four storeys tall, stuck close together. The bahals open onto serpentine alleyways, barely broad enough for two people to walk side by side. Sunlight, fresh air, and open spaces are rarities.

So is safety. These houses in Patan’s Naag Bahal were not around during the 1934 Nepal-Bihar earthquake, and luckily escaped the 1989 earthquake unscathed. But disaster management specialists continue to warn, as they have done for some years that when the Big One strikes, as it surely will some time soon, areas like Naag Bahal will be destroyed, rescue and fire-fighting in them will be difficult, and disease will spread unchecked.

“We worry that more lives will be lost because people are buried under the debris,” says Niyam Maharjan of Lalitpur’s Earthquake Safety Section.

Lalitpur district laws insist on minimum standards as laid out in the 1998 Building Code, but Kathmandu does not. For older constructions, earthquake retrofitting, as offered by the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET), is a good idea.

New retrofitting technology offers two economical solutions for masonry buildings: splint

and bandage, and PP band retrofitting. In the first, which is advised for buildings taller than two storeys, vertical and horizontal bands of steel bar mesh are affixed to the exterior so the corners, wall and ceiling, floor and ceiling stay together—like with a splint and bandage.

PP band is the security tape used to seal luggage at airports. For retrofitting, the tape is woven into a net and affixed to both sides of walls. The two layers are tied together through holes drilled into the wall, and the walls are then plastered.

NSET has used the splint and bandage method, which costs over 20 percent of the building cost of a structure, to earthquake-proof schools here. The newer PP tape technology, successfully tested in earthquake areas of Pakistan, is much cheaper—a single-level house can be retrofitted for about Rs 2,000, says Ramesh Guragain of NSET.

The Institute of Engineering’s Centre for Disaster Studies recently developed a similar technology for use in rural Nepali homes. A grid of holes is punched into walls which are then covered with bamboo mesh on both sides. The net is secured to the wall using gauge gabion wire which is passed through the holes twice and fastened tightly. The mesh is then plastered with mud to ensure a longer lifespan.

“We wanted to develop a technology strong enough to withstand at least that first blow of the earthquake, and give people enough time to leave their houses and find a safe spot,” says Jiba Raj Pokhrel, who studies the technology and has launched

pilot projects in five districts. It’s a good solution, he says, because the only direct cost is for the wire, since bamboo and mud are available locally. The gabion wire is already distributed to villagers during the monsoon in areas prone to flash floods.

But though people in Kathmandu are considerably more aware about the dangers of earthquakes now than they were a few years ago, most still do not earthquake-proof their homes. One reason is cost—larger urban houses are expensive to retrofit. “There’s no incentive either for people to proof their homes,” says Guragain. He suggests tax breaks or subsidies to owners interested in retrofitting their buildings.

After the 1989 quake, state efforts expanded beyond merely commemorating the victims of the 15 January 1934 trembler, says Amrit Man Tuladhar of Department of Urban Development and Building Construction. Now, he says the focus is shifting again because the department is, together with municipalities, training architects and mid-level technicians and masons all over Nepal in earthquake-proofing. Government offices are also being fixed up. The Lalitpur Municipality is working on a disaster preparedness plan and has identified evacuation sites all over the area.

“We’re perhaps the only country in South Asia planning and developing precautionary measures before the big quake happens,” says Guragain. “But, planning is not enough—the government needs to start implementing the recommendations.” ●



nowhere to go

chapter of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists for six years. Paswan then had a stint with the Maoists, splitting from them in 2004 over the appointment of Matrika Yadav as head of the Maoist-affiliated Tarai Mukti Morcha. He formed the JTMM with Jai Krishna Goit, notionally to fight for complete tarai independence. His early battles after going freelance were against his former comrades.

To hear Paswan tell it, it was not so much a repudiation of Maoist ideas that led to the split as a divergence of interests. He still talks about revolution coming from poverty and suppression. But, he says, “the Maoists didn’t have a clear vision of madhesi rights. We don’t want to be devotees or partners of pahadis. If we do that, there won’t be any liberation of the tarai.”

Paswan soon parted ways with Goit who, he says, “was already 80, always sick, he couldn’t remember dates.” Paswan says he broke away because “the tarai movement needed sacrifice and youth”, and because it was what JTMM cadres wanted. According to one of his followers about 150 former Maoists are in the group, some with their original weapons. The JTMM-J says it has “full strength” in 13 districts and “agents” in five more.

The JTMM-J organised “some attacks and bandas” and during the tarai movement earlier this year hit at least three police posts, killing a policeman called “Karki something” Paswan recalls. The group lost some of its own people, including five in a single incident. By now, he says, “Our front has proved that we are brave and

revolutionary.”

Since mid-February, when the government invited madhesi groups for talks, Goit has not yet responded, and the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum’s ‘Uprendraji’ is putting increasing pressure on the government. Paswan, who has the weakest profile of the three, immediately accepted the offer. He issued a list of nine demands, and added another the next day as if as an afterthought. The first demand is an independent tarai state, which he insists must run the length of the country. But the second, fair representation for madhesis in the military, politics and administration, suggests that the demand for independence is rhetorical.

“We believe in negotiations and negotiations are about give and take,” Paswan explains. “If the government addresses these problems [of discrimination] and establishes a federal state with self-government, the negotiations might succeed.” The JTMM-J is still waiting for their tarai rivals to follow before the talking can start.

Given his apparent urge for credibility, does Paswan intend to contest the constituent assembly election? “Yes, if negotiations succeed and madhesi rights are guaranteed. Our fight is for power and rights,” he says, apparently to the surprise of the two boys sitting with him.

Paswan smoked another cigarette, explaining that he was under a lot of stress. We left the hotel together and he tramped off down the muddy street, with his two young followers and their little bag. ●

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In Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador a new left is thought to be coming into being. Their presidents call it '21st century socialism', but it seem to be replicating the self-destructive policies that have brought such agony to Cuba.



ANALYSIS
Roberto Laserna

Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, Bolivian Evo Morales, and Ecuadorian Rafael Correa came to power through the ballot box. Once in power, they have appealed to the masses and called for constitutional reforms to enlarge their power.

Chávez has strengthened his political position through a constituent assembly that changed the constitution. Morales has managed to impose a similar assembly, though with uncertain results, and Correa

is wielding the threat of constitutional change against "the traditional parties, the native oligarchies, and the empire"—the common enemies of all three presidents.

The CA approach has so far proven very effective in helping these new caudillos (strongmen) consolidate their power. Because the process calls for total reform, it helps them avoid debates about specific changes. Instead, social change is mingled with institutional reform in ways incomprehensible to voters. For example, Chávez's and Morales' assemblies are attractive not only to Venezuela's or Bolivia's radical groups that want to re-found their republics and reinvent history, but also to those who want a forum for democratic deliberation. But as they deliberate, more and more power is concentrated in the new caudillos.

The process frustrates both radical and democratic forces. The radicals soon discover that changing norms is not

Two leftist governments show that a constituent assembly can be a bad idea

Dissembling

enough to change reality, while the democrats find that heightened social mobilisation makes dialogue impossible. Most find that when the assembly gets to deal with specific proposals, which is rare, the proposals are disagreeable.

The establishment of a constituent assembly weakens all other institutions. Since its focus is the 'law of laws,' the assembly implicitly questions the status of all public norms and bodies, thus eroding the political system. This helps strengthen the presidency, enabling the incumbent's transformation into a caudillo.

Those who promote the concentration of power find justification for their acts in the revolutionary need to change structures, liberate the nation, and overcome poverty. But when this concentrated power begins to take action, the confusions of the left come back to life. The most flagrant conflates state and nation. Transferring resources to the state is seen as putting them in the hands of the nation. Thus, Venezuelans and Bolivians enthusiastically support the rebirth of state companies, without realising that this wastes resources which could have been spent better and more efficiently elsewhere, since few state companies ever rid themselves of bureaucratic inefficiency or corruption.

Another, perhaps more dangerous confusion, conflates 'the people' with the so-called 'masses' out in the streets. The logic of such mobilisation is that resources are directed to the group that shouts the loudest and can trigger social conflict. Attention is thus diverted from the weakest and those most in need to those

already are well-off enough to be organised. Often it is the state itself, controlled by a powerful president, which mobilises chosen groups, aided by the concentration of enormous resources in the government's hands which comes from greater state intervention in the economy.

The fight to control oil and gas revenues is paramount in this regard. Over 90 percent of Venezuela's export earnings come from these sectors, which provide about half of the government's income. In Ecuador and Bolivia, income from oil and gas is more modest, but still account for the largest share of total exports and provide about one-third of government revenue.

This concentration of revenues radically changes the relationship between society and the state. The government's financial situation does not depend on the economic fate of companies or workers. On the contrary, companies and workers depend on public services and the subsidies that the government provides with oil and gas revenues.

When social organisations are limited and weak, as in Venezuela, this resource concentration means concentrated political power perpetuates itself by reducing huge parts of the economy to dependent clients. When social organisations are strong, conflict arises to control public resources. In both cases, independent institutions are perceived as enemies, which the caudillos and their client corporate groups seek to destroy. ● (Project Syndicate)

Roberto Laserna is a social science researcher at CERES and Fundación Milenio, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

No alternative

Energy independence is a dangerous fantasy



**AF ALHAJJI and
GAVIN LONGMUIR**

The paradox of today's quest for energy independence is that pursuing it actually increases energy insecurity. The market has chosen oil as a staple energy source. So isolationist governments should ignore neither the valid interests of oil exporters, on whom consumers in their countries depend, nor exporters' reaction to the rhetoric of energy independence or to the steps taken

to achieve it.

The biggest threats to the world's energy security are not terrorist attacks or embargoes by oil-producing countries—short-term events that can be dealt with quickly and effectively through such measures as reliance on strategic petroleum reserves, increases in production, and diversion of oil shipments. The main threat to the long-term sustainability of energy supplies is the mismatch between investment in additional capacity

and energy infrastructure, and growth in demand for energy.

Major oil exporters could respond in a variety of ways to political posturing on energy, most of which would exacerbate the global energy situation. One plausible scenario in response to calls by governments and politicians around the world to reduce or eliminate dependence on oil is a relative decline in investment in additional production capacity in the oil-producing countries.

An energy crisis in this case is almost certain if those pushing for energy independence fail to provide a timely, workable alternative. But these efforts are not market-driven and require heavy subsidies, which mean they will almost surely not replace oil any time soon.

Confronted by politicians' hostile rhetoric, oil producers have a strong incentive to increase production to lower oil prices to levels which undermine the economic feasibility of alternative energy sources. A collapse in oil prices would be a death sentence for new energy technologies, and would increase demand for oil.

Even if oil producing countries do not intentionally bring about an oil price collapse, they might accelerate production in the short term, while oil still has some value. But lower oil prices, coupled with expectations of a decline in demand, would put pressure on oil-producing countries to reduce planned investments in production capacity or even postpone major projects, as they have done in the past, leading to a decline in oil supplies. If alternative energy technologies did not come on-line by the time oil production started to fall, global shortages would be inevitable, and closing the investment deficit would take years, even in the face of rising oil prices.

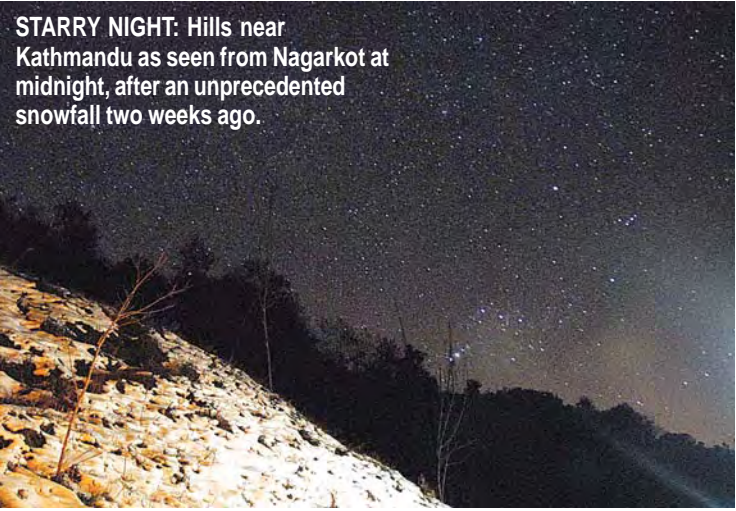
Despite these possibilities, let's assume that plans for energy independence succeed, and that several European countries, the United States, Japan, China, and

India become self-sufficient. Major oil exporters could then use their now less-valuable oil at home as cheap fuel for an expanded heavy industrial sector. Instead of exporting oil directly, they could export their energy embedded in metals, chemicals, and manufactured products at prices that undercut anything producers in the oil-consuming countries, especially Europe and the US, could match, given their dependence on higher-cost alternative energy sources.

Energy independence could destroy entire industries, especially petrochemicals, aluminium, and steel. Cheap energy in oil-producing countries might make their new industries competitive with those in China, India, and Southeast Asia. The net result would be a loss of jobs and weakened economies. Countries might end up energy-independent, only to become steel-dependent or petrochemical-dependent.

Oil is a finite resource. Only long-term, market-oriented, economically viable, and sustainable energy options can ensure economic growth in both producing and consuming countries. Isolationist policies always lead to shortages and discontent. ● (Project Syndicate)

AF Alhajji is an energy economist at Ohio Northern University. Gavin Longmuir is a petroleum engineer with the International Petroleum Consultants Association.



STARRY NIGHT: Hills near Kathmandu as seen from Nagarkot at midnight, after an unprecedented snowfall two weeks ago.

KIRAN PANDAY

Light, shade

A full lunar and partial solar eclipse in this glamorous month

In the early morning hours of 4 March, the Full Moon will be eclipsed by the Earth’s shadow for about four hours. The event starts at 03:14:52, when the Moon moves into the Earth’s shadow (umbra). The Moon will enter completely into the deep darkness of the umbra at 04:28:37 and take more than an hour to pass through this shadow until the northeast part of the Moon begins to emerge at 05:42:49. The time of greatest eclipse will occur at 05:05:44. In Nepal, though, we’ll have to watch the Moon set before the show is over.

 **STAR GAZING**
Kedar S Badu

Exactly half a lunation later, on 19 March, the New Moon will pass in front of the Sun causing a partial solar eclipse from 06:30:34 to 08:17:39. The maximum eclipse will be at 07:22:03, when the Sun will dim slightly and the stars will not come out. A partial eclipse could easily be mistaken as a cloudy moment. This isn’t only bad because you will miss out on observing the eclipse, but also because looking straight at a solar eclipse with the naked eye can cause total blindness. Always use special solar filters to watch an eclipse.

The young crescent Moon will be lovely in its position directly above Venus on the evening of 21 March, and when Saturn meets the Moon on 2 March.

Other highlights for March:
The Sun is in the constellation of Aquarius at the start of March, moving into Pisces on 12 March. The Spring Equinox falls on 21 March, when the Sun will cross the celestial equator from south to north at 05:52, making the day equal to the night in the northern hemisphere. This event signals the start of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, and is also called the Spring (or Vernal) Equinox.

Mercury is at its greatest elongation westwards from the Sun on 22 March which means that, in principle, it should be visible in the east before dawn. However, as it comes up just half-an-hour before the Sun, we’re unlikely to see this elusive little planet this month.

Venus is a brilliant Evening Star, visible in the west after sunset every day. It doesn’t set until three or four hours after sunset, by which time the sky is quite dark. Venus is more likely to be mistaken for an aeroplane, or a UFO.

Mars is still low in the south-eastern sky at dawn, and difficult to see, because it rises only an hour before the Sun.

Jupiter, in Ophiuchus, rises in the south-east about 3AM. By the end of the month, it will be coming up before 01:30 and by dawn almost due south, though still not very high in the sky.

Saturn, in Leo, is the planet best placed for viewing in the evening sky this month, high in the south-east at dusk and setting after sunrise.

The Virginid shower is usually active during March and April, and you may see some meteors they appear to radiate outwards from the constellation of Virgo.

Project Nepal

Sometimes you can be part of a truly uplifting story, one that makes you a better person. Four years ago when I visited Nepal, my sister had recently opened a small school in the house where we grew up in Kathmandu. She had 50 students from the neighbourhood, including five Bal Mandir orphans on scholarship. Each morning I awoke to the sounds of children learning and playing. The children from Bal Mandir in particular caught my attention—they were

 **GAME POINT**
Sujay Lama

immersed in all the school activities with an intensity that probably came from knowing about tough times in an orphanage. I knew I had to do something—the future of our country is in our children.

When I returned to the US, I brainstormed and spoke with friends, and decided that perhaps sponsoring children without parents to attend school was the way to go. It would cost \$200 for one child to study for a year at my sister’s Nabha Deepti School. My assistant pledged to sponsor the first child and I followed suit. Within a week we were supporting five children. Today there are 50 sponsored children from Bal Mandir and Prayas Nepal, a private orphanage run by dedicated young women.

Each year for what is now called Project Nepal, I help



KIRAN PANDAY

raise close to \$10,000, to provide for these kids’ tuition, books, uniform, and activities. Some also receive tennis instruction from my father, Hem Lama, and might well become Nepal’s next champion. My passion has always been tennis. My mission now is to do what I can for the young people of Nepal, especially in the areas of education, healthcare and, of course, tennis.

Project Nepal has taught me to dream big but to start small. If every Nepali family living abroad sponsored an underprivileged child back home, thousands of young Nepalis would have undreamed-of opportunity. There are so many people who truly care about our country and about our children who are not always fortunate. You just have to ask them for help. My mother always told us to give more than we receive—she was right. ●

If you are interested in helping Project Nepal, email slama@unt.edu.



Department for International Development

PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT ADVISER INCLUSIVE & EFFECTIVE STATE TEAM

The United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) is working with the Nepal government, multilateral, bilateral agencies and civil society sector to achieve the Millennium Development Goals through support that is consistent with the Government of Nepal’s development priorities.

DFID’s work in Nepal focuses support to the immediate implementation of the peace agreement; help lay the foundations for an effective and inclusive state; promoting inclusive economic growth and aid effectiveness.

DFID Nepal is currently developing an interim Country Assistance Plan and requires an Public Finance Management specialist to work within the advisory cadre to support the development and implementation of this plan.

The DFID Programme in Nepal is designed and supervised by a team of advisers including specialists in infrastructure, governance, social development, economics, health, education and conflict.

The Public Financial Management Adviser will be a member of the Inclusive and Effective State team. She/he will work with a range of other advisers and programme management staff in health, education and governance. Helping to build a state which is inclusive and effective will be critical to building a sustainable peace and a key area of focus for DFID Nepal in the coming years. DFID Nepal intends to increasingly channel assistance through Government systems while working to strengthen them. The Public Financial Management Adviser will play an important role in moving DFID Nepal’s work in this direction. The successful applicant will need to demonstrate:

- Commitment to development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Experience of working with government and civil society at national and district level on policy development and implementation.
- Strong understanding of public financial management, including budgetary analysis and service delivery, particularly as applied to government-led reform programmes.
- Experience of working as part of a multi-disciplinary team.
- Strong verbal and written English skills and a proven track record of presenting ideas orally and in writing, as research papers or briefs for government and/or donor agencies.
- A masters degree in Economics, Public Sector Management; Politics or Administration; or another relevant Social Science.
- At least 3 years experience of working on public financial management or public service delivery in a national or international development agency.

Applicants will also need to demonstrate that they are competent in: planning and delivery of work; analysis and use of information; decision making; working with others and influencing.

Located in the DFID office in Kathmandu, the PFM adviser will work in a fast paced multi-cultural environment that places a high premium on inclusive team working. You will have opportunities to work closely with all levels of Government and non-governmental agencies, and interact with Nepalis from all works of life and from all over the country. The position offers significant opportunities for professional and career growth. Though based in Kathmandu, some in-country and international travel will be required.

There will be an attractive and competitive local salary and benefits package. The successful candidate will be awarded a permanent contract.

DFID is an Equal Opportunities employer and appoints on merit by open competition. Applications are welcomed from all parts of the community and we actively encourage interest from women, Dalits, disadvantaged Janajatis, madhesi and those with a disability. For an application form and more information, including Terms of Reference, please e-mail: recruitment-nepal@dfid.gov.uk Please send a completed application form by e-mail to the same address. Only complete applications made on the prescribed application form will be considered. The closing date for applications is **30 March 2007**.

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Ek Raat** an exhibition of paintings based on BP Koirala's short story, at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, until 11 March, 11AM-6PM. 4218048

EVENTS

- ❖ **Lazimpat Holi Festival** holi celebration and food festival at the Scouts Ground, Lazimpat, on 3 March.
- ❖ **Yuva Chalfal Shrinkhala** on 'Fagu Purnima,' 3 March, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107599
- ❖ **Celibacy and how to practice it** talk program, 5 March, 1PM at Mind Body Library, Tripureswor 4279712
- ❖ **Mangalbare Discussion Series** on the portrayal of women in Nepali drama, 5PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **The art of loving** lecture series, 2:30 PM on 5-6 March at Mind Body Library, Tripureswor 4279712
- ❖ **Building a Bridge over the Cultural Gap** CSGN monthly lecture on 2 March, 9.30 AM at the Shanker Hotel.
- ❖ **Civic Concerns** an effort to assess youth concerns and share views and ideas, 10 March, 10.30 AM-5.30 PM at PIC, Heritage Plaza, Rs 100 for registration. 4107599
- ❖ **Toastmasters** communication and leadership program, every Wednesday 6PM at the Institute of Environmental Management, Tripureswor.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Inner Groove** live at Moksh, 2 March at 8PM. 5526212
- ❖ **Holi Gazal Night** at Jatra Café and Bar, 3 March, 6.30-9.30 PM. 4256622
- ❖ **Yala Maya Classic** classical music series at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 5PM onwards on the second of every Nepali month, Rs 100 entrance. 5553767
- ❖ **Live Music** by Ciney Gurung every Wednesday and Rashmi Gurung every Friday, 7PM onwards at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex. 5521408
- ❖ **Fusion and classical Nepali music** by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien, Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800. 4451212
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Gaine (Gandarbas)** perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680080

DINING

- ❖ **Walk and lunch** every Saturday until 31 March at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Delightful weekend special** with sekuwa, bara, and barbeque, every Friday at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 4411706
- ❖ **Light nouvelle snacks** and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La'Soon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- ❖ **Continental cuisine** and wine by the fire place at Kilroy's, Thamel. 4250440.
- ❖ **Shop Talk** Drink and dine at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Radisson Hotel.
- ❖ **Café Bahal** at Kathmandu Guest House. 4700632.
- ❖ **Smorgasbord** lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- ❖ **Gyakok** lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum of four guests at Rs 450 per person, two hours order in advance.
- ❖ **Retro brunch barbecue** with the Crossfire Band at The Poolside, Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12 noon-4PM, Rs 1,000 inclusive of swimming and complimentary drink. 4451212
- ❖ **International Brunch** weekends 11AM-3PM for Rs 499 per person (Rs 299 for children) at Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- ❖ **Te** Tibetan delicacies at Nepal's first noodle bar, Bluebird Mall Food Court.
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Japanese Food** at the Coffee Shop at Hotel Shangri-la, 12-3PM, Rs 499 per person. 4412999
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Some Like It Hot** live music from Side B every Friday at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's. Rs 799 includes BBQ dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **Soul Warmers** Inner Groove live at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's, Rs 599 includes a Fusion platter and cocktail. 4479488
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768, Bhatbhateni 4426587 and Pulchok. 5521755
- ❖ **Cocktails and Mocktails** Daily happy hour, 4-7PM at Kathmandu Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Weekend package** at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4451212
- ❖ **Sun and Fun** Three days and two nights package at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, Rs 7,499. 4412999

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Quest Entertainment



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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



Last week's unsettled weather—the rapid rise in temperature and light, thundery rainfall—was a sure sign that winter was weakening, though not quite finished. As we get into spring, we will see more localised thunder fuelled by moisture infusion from westerlies. Temperatures will again rise at the end of the coming week. Thursday morning's satellite picture shows a massive low pressure system that is bringing in rain even as your weatherman writes this. Expect the sporadic showers to continue for a few more days, interrupted with bursts of bright sunshine.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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KIRAN PANDAY

FLAG-WAVING: Flags of SAARC member states at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza where trade ministers met on Monday to discuss the South Asian Free Trade Area. The meeting was deadlocked because of differences between India and Pakistan.



KIRAN PANDAY

TWO WHEELS BAD: Activists of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities stopped even bicycles from plying on the roads and vandalised cars to enforce their strike call on Wednesday. Diplomatic and tourist vehicles were allowed to ply. They later claimed the shutdown was "successful".



KIRAN PANDAY

ONE NIGHT: The theatre group Sarvanam performed BP Koirala's short story *Ek Raat* at the BICC on Friday. The play was directed by Ashesh Malla and was supported by the BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation.



KIRAN PANDAY

YOUTH POWER: Members of the Maoist Communist Youth League remove buses that were used to block the road in Kopundole on Tuesday to protest the beating up of a driver. The Maoists also attacked bus drivers with khukuris, wounding two, and damaged dozens of vehicles for daring to protest.

A star turn

Pawankali's story is pretty typical. A young woman from a village in west Nepal fails class nine and decides to make a future for herself in Kathmandu. In the city, she still wears chaubandi cholo and fariya and likes to chat with guests.

And this is where her story gets un-typical. This sassy, brassy woman interviews people from all walks of life and in her forthright manner asks them whatever she feels like. Politicians squirm and pop stars break out into a sweat on Pawankali's show, and audiences split their sides laughing, both because she researches her guests thoroughly and asks sharply funny questions, and because she says what is on everyone's mind.

Pawankali has an amusing riff on the 'village bumpkin' stereotype: she speaks in a rural accent and exaggerates her rustic personality. She uses this lack of affectation to expose people's hypocrisies, often by intentionally misunderstanding their responses. A memorable episode was when she waylaid Pushpa Kamal Dahal at an early public appearance last November, made him blush as she openly flirted with him.

If Pawankali looks different today than she did then, that's because

the character is in her third incarnation. Played by Loonibha Tuladhar ('Hen-pecked,' #252), Tara Kandel and now Mampi Ghosh, the fictional character is always supposed to be as much a star as her interviewees. Soon after it went on air last year, the show shot up into

Kantipur Television's top ten. "We wanted a show that would depict a certain kind of Nepali culture."

Pawankali's also the answer to all those who believe mistakenly that tv hosts have to be glamorous, show some skin, and wear modern clothes," says Ghosh.

That's not to say television hasn't changed her, though.

Since she moved to Kathmandu,

Pawankali's world and dreams have become bigger. She talks about going to the salon and complains about living in an old house.

Those who tune in to the show every Sunday at 7.30 PM for the celebrity factor needn't worry, though: Pawankali still wants to chat with GPK, MKN, PKD, and maybe even KPB.

"Pawankali can ask you anything, and you have to be like Pawankali to talk to her," says Pradeep Kaspal, producer of the show. "She is direct and bold, yet there is a kind of innocence about her, which makes the show special." ● Mallika Aryal



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The Republic of Utopia

While we in Nepal are trying to figure out what to do with the one king we have, we hear that in the Happy Kingdom of Bhutan there are now two kings. Until his abdication takes effect Jigme the Glad is known as the 'Fourth King' and his son, Jigme Jr, is known as the 'Fifth King'. So if you are ever in Thimpu don't just say 'His Majesty', specify fourth or fifth. Much simpler here in Nepal, we simply call ours the 'The Last King'.

Even the proposal to skip Paras (he's just bought himself a Great Dane to keep him company) and go straight to Hridayendra is now unlikely to save our monarchy. Bringing back Birendra's bloodline with its only remaining member would do the trick, but will three generations of go-getting incumbents at Narayanhiiti allow that to happen? Likely not.



Who needs royalty when we will soon have a Comrade President for our Federal Democratic Republic of Utopia? It's getting to be a race against time for the Maobaddies to get themselves into an interim government and have Ram Bahadur Thapa in place as deputy prime minister before the old man kicks it. Otherwise all their carefully laid out plans will go awry.

His Awfulness bad mouthed the media and did some damage control in the tarai this week, but his hard work was undone by his own cadre who roughed up a few madhesis. In Kopundole micro-bus drivers audacious enough to protest Maoist high-handedness were slashed with khukuris and hospitalised. Most Nepalis know the leopard hasn't changed his spots and not all the guns are in the containers.

But the Maoists know we know that they know the UN knows that there are quite a few PLA with their SLRs and INSASs missing. When the Nepali language press grilled UNMIN about it, including how many of the registered guerrillas were women, Ian Sah'b said they weren't "verified" yet. You mean you don't know if they're boys or girls?

So when Prachandaji says that some of the guns were "washed away by the river and others were reduced to ashes in a fire" the media went "yeah, sure". Everyone is playing along with the charade, however. That is the price of peace. Contrary to reports the Maoists were buying "crummy" guns in Darbhanga, it seems some were caught on candid camera selling off some of the 5.56 caliber rifles for which they have no ammo.

Comrades on a recent junket to Switzerland to learn about federalism told their hosts in Interlaken: "This is what a Marxist utopia will look like." Yup, a worker's paradise, and the Swiss cantonments didn't even need communism to build it.



Trust the Kathmandu-based donor community to keep tabs on all the Bunds and Chukker Jams. We Nepalis would be completely in the dark about all the overlapping hartals if it wasn't for this careful tabulation circulated by the UN:

- The Madhesi Mukti Morcha's transport strike and customs blockade till 5 March and an indefinite tarai bund after 6 march
- Three-day tarai bund called by the JTMM-Goit
- JTMM-Jwala's protest rallies to culminate in a khukuri rally on 7 March
- Superimposed on these were NEFIN's own hartals on 22, 24, 26 February in various parts of the country climaxing with the country-wide bund on Wednesday
- Coincidentally the Maoist Tamang Autonomous Democratic Front was also blocking the entry points to the Valley on Tuesday
- And, oh yes, the hitherto Chure and Bhabar Ekata Samaj shut down Sindhuli, Sarlahi and Makwanpur on the same days
- Not to be outdone, the Maoist trade union announced a three-day bund in eastern Nepal on top of all the other bund



And we haven't even heard from the dalits, women and Karnali yet. Stay tuned for next week's Loktantrik Bund Update. Same time same station.

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