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The CPN-M has planned a series of protests. Over 300 Maoist fighters from the Chulachuli camp in Ilam came out of the cantonments in protest, and Maoist central committee member Jayapuri Gharti told us that her party plans to bring the bodies of the 28 dead to Kathmandu and organise a parade. ●

Eyes wide shut
Only fools rush in p4

WARNING SIGNS: Businesspeople protesting Maoist excesses shut down the capital for two days earlier this week. Before that ended, the clashes in Gaur happened.

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McDonald's Nepal Limited



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STEP AWAY FROM THE POLLS

This is not peace. When 28 people die in violence in a single day while a 'comprehensive' peace agreement still holds, something is seriously wrong.

Between the disaster in Gaur and the business-led shutdowns this week, the dynamics of post-peace politicking and protest in the country have again moved from the realm of the messy, petty, and unfair, to that of tragedy and travesty. And after a week like this, the idea that elections of any credible kind can be held soon looks like the most dangerous kind of wishful thinking.

The responsibility for Gaur lies in equal parts with a paralysed local administration and state security apparatus, provocateurs in the Maoists' Youth Communist League and Tarai Mukti Morcha, and the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum, which will do anything to cement its position at the forefront of the tarai movement.

Informally, the Maoists argue that their continuing extortion drive and parallel policing through the YCL are tactics to put indirect pressure on the government to speed up the formation of the interim government, and hold the constituent assembly elections in June, no matter what.

Yet they know two things. First, a government as inert as this one will not respond to such convoluted reasoning. The parties continue to ignore warning signs in the tarai. They offer little more than bromides to indigenous groups demanding equal representation, which lead, again, to threats of violence. Schools remain vulnerable to Maoist whims. The parties have never been able—or shown the will—to stop extortion and intimidation of the business community.

Second, the longer the Maoists use brute force and coercion, the more they will lose in the upcoming election. If, that is, they really want an election. The CPN-M leadership might publicly stick to the elections-in-June line, for the most part. But their simultaneous position that immediate declaration of a republic is the only way to delay the elections, the 'mistakes' they keep making and half-apologising for, and most markedly, the behaviour of the league around the country, all sabotage any hopes of an election-friendly environment.

The Maoists' behaviour reinforces the belief, no longer just 'regressive', that the comrades are not entirely comfortable in a democratic set-up. But people are turning against their politics of demagoguery in increasingly dogged and violent ways.

The business and entrepreneur community, for example, long sick and tired of bandas and strikes, found that it was even more tired of Maoist intimidation and extortion. In their impotent and frustrated anger, the Valley's businesspeople adopted their tormentors' tools of protest, and unwittingly cut off their nose to spite their face.

To be sure, there are consequences to delaying the elections. But it would be disastrous to hold an election when the order of the day is a free-for-all wherever you look.

It is time the parties acknowledge that the constituent assembly elections need to be postponed. Before we can have anything else, we need law and order and accountability.

A peace compromise, or compromised peace?

One year itch

There must be something in our national psyche that makes the Nepali mood swing so swiftly between irrational exuberance and incorrigible pessimism. Those who joined the April Uprising to overthrow the royal regime and those who subsequently assumed the reigns of power exuded



GUEST COLUMN
Saubhagya Shah

irrepressible confidence and spoke of righting all the wrongs and writing up a brave New Nepal. Ordinary citizens, who'd suffered through such promises in the past, were wary, and those who had lost out in the royal debacle were forlorn. Nearly a year later, the national mood is back to self-doubt and despondency.

Much has happened politically in the past year that has generated immense enthusiasm for the future. The whole state machinery, the political parties, civil society, and regional and ethnic forums had begun to focus their energies on the task of holding the elections to the constituent assembly. For a moment it seemed as if we could all live together happily ever after.

Alas, except for just the small matter of the South that had been forgotten during the celebrations. The sudden violence that engulfed the eastern tarai left April's triumphant paradigm in tatters. There was the sight of mighty leaders and their auxiliary intelligentsia first dismissing the madhesi uprising as the handiwork of a few

miscreants, then threatening the use of force to put out fires supposedly ignited by fundamentalists and reactionaries, and finally making a 180-degree turn to embrace the same revolt as their own—all within a week.

While it is understandable that the eight-party ruling coalition should differ on ideology and policy, it displayed consensus on the nature of the malaise that has been afflicting the Nepali nation. Over the years, especially during the past year, the '238-year old monarchy' has been identified as the single most unremitting evil that has plagued the country politically, economically, and culturally. According to this explanatory matrix, subscribed to by the political parties and civil society formations, and endorsed by the Indian establishment and the west, this country can not hope for salvation as long as the author of the unitary state and the 'feudal' Hindu culture, the House of Gorkha, is done away with.

If this is the considered and principled conclusion of the victors of the April Uprising, what is delaying the declaration of a Nepali republic? What the king offered on 24 April 2006 after 19-days of urban uprising was an unconditional surrender: the crown has already put its head on the chopping block. It is now up to the victors to carry their conviction to its logical conclusion, roll up their sleeves, and get on with the real task of creating jobs, health care, and education for the masses. Enough pulpit pyrotechnics: people need bread, not just circuses.

As the Speaker has reminded the politicians on several occasions, parliament that has been resurrected on the strength of the revolt has unlimited powers, including the one to terminate the monarchy permanently. If this is the political reality, the constituent assembly might turn out to be another dogmatic fetish that serves no practical purpose. What can the constituent assembly possibly accomplish that the existing legislature can't do? Since the communist and the liberal parties that have passionately espoused the anti-monarchy line have complete control over the 330-member interim parliament, a proposal for a federal republic or any other restructuring that is deemed fit could sail through with an absolute majority.

This ambivalence is encoded, perhaps unwittingly, in the 2006 treaty that was signed between the seven party government and the Maoists. The historic deal was not christened *shanti sahamati* (peace agreement) or *shanti sandhi* (peace treaty) but *shanti samjhauta* (peace compromise, or compromised peace). Does the choice of words convey that the deal was a negative convenience for both parties rather than a positive consensus? The interpretive slippage between compromise and agreement perhaps reveals something about the quality of the new peace. ●

Saubhagya Shah teaches at Tribhuban University. This is the first of a three-part analysis of the year after the April Uprising.

A small, shrinking centre

Mainstream parties and civil society must challenge the extremists

The UML and the NC have considerable influence in Gaur. In this hometown of Madhab Nepal, his party's supporters include small farmers, traders, and entrepreneurs, and traditional priests. The NC's support base here is a mix of minorities, dalits, wage-earners, professionals, and retirees, initially mobilised by Sheikh Idris for democratic struggle.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

If free, fair, and independent elections were held today, the NC and the UML would probably gather over two-thirds of all votes cast. But both parties appear paralysed on their very home turf. Like other central tarai border towns, Gaur has become the battleground for collisions between the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum and the CPN-M.

Wednesday saw the highest casualty figures for a day since the government and the Maoists signed the ceasefire deal last year. The Maoists were the victims this time. But there is no telling which way the

wind will blow if the situation deteriorates further—the Maoists have over a decade of experience running an effective armed insurgency.

The situation in Kathmandu Valley is also alarming. In a cavalier display of their disruptive power, businesspeople closed the town down without any warning. In 'normal' societies, shutdowns and strikes are the tools of trade unions. When employers have grievances, they turn to the law of the land.

The physical assault by the Maoists of a hapless hotelier deserved to be condemned. But the loyal royalists of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Chamber of Nepalese Industries, and the Nepal Chamber of Commerce do not seem to have thought through the negative consequences of their rash reaction.

By shutting down nursing homes and internet services, the private sector has shown that it can't be depended upon to provide essential services in times of crisis. During the insurgency, banks deserted the countryside citing security concerns. This week they closed their ledgers in cities. What do those who

oppose government interference in business have to say about this display of class solidarity at the expense of service to customers?

Nationalisation of essential service providers may not be practicable, but monitoring and tax mechanisms need to be tightened to ensure better functioning of private airlines, banks, nursing homes, ISPs, and gas stations. Workers' cooperatives would probably run such operations more efficiently and reliably.

It's time for political parties to include a socialist agenda in their democratic manifestos. The absence of that is the reason the radical right and extreme left dominate national politics. Since political parties have deserted their constituencies, non-political alliances are filling the vacuum. They de-legitimise political parties but can't replace them, and their activism weakens democracy.

Conspiracy theories are attractive during uncertain times. It's convenient to blame the disturbances in the tarai, the disruptions in the Valley, and the murmurs of dissatisfaction in the midhills on palace strategists, as Pushpa Kamal Dahal does publicly. It's also tempting to see ghosts

all around Baluwater, as Baburam Bhattarai does in his newspaper columns. But if the monarchists were that smart, the Maoists' Bahun Brigade would probably still be in the jungles. Palace strategists are the beneficiaries, rather than the instigators, of anti-democracy eruptions all over the country.

Peaceful politics need to be re-activated. The Maoist politburo will have to come down heavily upon cadres who create avoidable confrontations such as the one in Gaur. Maoist MP Prabhu Sah did not have to announce a rally at the same time and place as Upendra Yadav's appearance. No hotel owner in Kathmandu needed to be roughed up. Hisila Yami helps no one by condoning such acts in parliament.

The UML and the NC must reassert themselves. There may not be an apparent collusion between the regressive right and extreme left, but the middle ground is shrinking rapidly. Civil society must rally behind political parties again, despite their deficiencies. Weakened parties are an open invitation to extremists.

Meanwhile, Mr Prime Minister, could we please have some governance? ●

LETTERS

ROYALLY WRONG

It is the Maoists' responsibility, as a major political party, to create peace. Instead, they are lying to the people and pointing out a 'royalist hand' everywhere they themselves are responsible, whether the beating up of the businessman in Kathmandu or the incident in Gaur. In fact no matter who starts the violence, the Maoists, the JTMM, or any other organisation, Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his ilk blame the royalists.

Navin Nepal, email

- What a sad situation. On the one hand, the Maoists are preparing to join parliament. On the other, their cadres are still involved in forceful extortion and violence. Those who do things like beating up hoteliers need to be held to Nepali law, not that of the comrades. And Pushpa Kamal needs to stop smelling palace involvement everywhere. If he's so sure of it, why not show us the evidence?

Kunda Dixit was right when he said in London this week that the political parties have failed to live up to the promises of the April Uprising. The fight for positions continues and the Maoists are as bad as the others. It is a telling shame that the parties did not pass the bill prohibiting themselves from engaging in destructive activities.

It is the time to work together to address the root causes of our problems. We simply cannot afford to lose more time.

P Saria, Ljubljana

- Your 'long time royal watcher' does not get it either ('A stitch in time', #340). All the seven party politicians, including Girija Koirala, and the Maoists are using the royal bogeyman to deflect their own lack of governance in the country. Koirala, by his own admission, has no clue who to talk to and what to do about the tarai situation (other than blaming the palace).

The king may be unpopular among party activists, but the same cannot be said for the general public. How else would you explain the 20,000- 30,000 people—according to media estimates—who lined up for Dasain tika from the king a few months ago? And they are just the bold ones.

The seven-party alliance and the Maoists think the silent majority of Nepalis support them. But in a country where lawlessness rules the supreme, only those with the guns have the voice, the rest of us have no choice but to keep quiet. And your royal watcher seems to suggest that he/she has heard it all!

SK Aryal, email

MIS-EDUCATION

Will somebody tell Hisila Yami, it is her party, and not education that is driving people out of Nepal ("We will link education with labour", #340). As for nationalising universities, we Nepalis would be happy if the government first focused on things like governing and policymaking. Education is one sector which has done well in the hands of the private sector. People would rather pay a slight premium for quality education than giving a forced donation to Maoists for nothing. Moreover, the fact that our private schools turn out students who can compete in the international arena has stopped a lot of students from going to India even earlier. I think we should do the opposite of what Yami says and in fact turn public schools over to private management to improve their performance.

Rahul, email

- 'Not by promises alone' (#340) was an eye opener, especially for highlighting the fact that people are advocating the nationalisation of education. With this sorry state of governance? As for the talk of disparity, is it advisable to bring down the quality of education in private schools to be at par with the ill-run government ones? The thing to do now is control the fee structure of private schools and introduce scholarships for a certain number of poor children, based on the total number of students studying in the private schools and the fee structure.

Name withheld, email

- I agree with 'Not by promises alone'. What really can create any difference are the efforts of creative and skilled individuals. The government should rather concentrate on empowering teachers and educators than making any new policies. Random new policies and syllabi confuse and de-motivate teachers and educators. Teachers are the real implementers of all these policies and need to be consulted in their drafting.

Pratibha, email

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25th March 2007, "Freedom Day", is the bicentenary of Britain's abolition of the slave trade. But slavery is still with us on a massive scale - it's just not so obvious any more. The UK children's charity The Esther Benjamins Trust is working to end one aspect of the modern day slave trade, rescuing trafficked Nepalese children and teenage girls from a life of exploitation, physical and sexual abuse inside Indian circuses. So far we have brought over 230 former child slaves back to Nepal. Once home we help the returnees back into society through psychological support, education and training that leads to work. As part of this we are now training and employing girls in making mosaics - a new skill in Nepal.

To mark "Freedom Day" we are pleased to open an exhibition of mosaics made by some of the girls we've helped. You'll have a chance to commission your very own handmade mosaic or make a donation, helping these girls to earn a very good living and us to retrieve more desperate children from the circuses.

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Only fools rush in

Deferring the polls is the best way to save Nepal from future madness

The irony of Nepali politics today is that everyone knows that elections to the constituent assembly cannot be held in June. And still, no one wants to bell the cat. Girija Prasad Koirala, senior seven-party leaders, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal are known to have admitted in private that holding a credible election in three months is now nearly impossible. But publicly they still want to plough ahead, hoping someone will pull the plug at the last minute on grounds that the polls won't be credible.

To repeat why a June deadline is a folly, consider these factors:
Not enough security: The Maoists seem to have got through peace what they couldn't win through war: a license to go on a rampage all across Nepal's rural areas, towns, cities. Recent atrocities by their cadres, particularly the newly renamed militia, the Youth Communist League, has created a climate of fear and parallel policing mechanisms. Their trade unions have bulldozed through organised labour in hotels, restaurants, and student unions.



Their political activities on the ground are run by diehard military members pulled out of the PLA. The state has exacerbated the situation by wilfully neglecting its prime responsibility to foster a sense of security. Policemen in the districts hardly go out on patrol, much less arrest erring Maoists. When they do act, as against recent madhesi, janajati, and civil society demonstrators, they use disproportionate force that further stokes the fires. Worse, there is no credible mechanism to monitor the civil and political space for free and secure elections. The last such body was dissolved by the myopic Comprehensive Peace Agreement without a replacement in place. How can credible elections be held when the security vacuum is filled by one of the parties contesting the elections?

No progress on inclusion: The CPA and interim constitution have blown the lid off the pent-up frustrations of over half the population. Recent attempts at addressing grievances through amendments to the constitution are a positive first move. But this is only the beginning, not the end. Many more amendments are needed if participation to the CA polls is to be made truly inclusive. All attention has been lavished on the recent two amendments on federal government and adding some constituencies in the tarai, but none on how to reduce the barriers to entry in the constituent assmbley. Anyone who still wants to contest the polls, whether madhesi, janajati, dalit, a woman, or others, must still be officially endorsed by one of the major eight parties. This erects an artificial wall around the CA, which no one else can then enter. Not exactly inclusive.

A constituent assembly with such flaws could inflict the following kinds of grave damage to the nation:
A contested result: One or more of the losing parties could reject the election results by pointing to the above-mentioned flaws. This is particularly likely if any of the four major parties—the NC, NC-D, UML, and CPN-M—receive fewer votes than they expect. The Maoists in particular could refuse to let the constituent assembly sit. An assembly so elected will have little opportunity to carry out the critical task of constitution-making. Such an atmosphere will split the country along eight party lines, and anarchy and mayhem won't be far behind.

Ethnic separatism: An assembly elected without the free participation of major ethnic and regional groups will give rise to even more ethnic activism than we see today. And they will have a point: how can the assembly draft a long-term constitution without the free participation of more than half the population? As things stand today, the eight parties have ensured that registering new parties on ethnic, regional, linguistic, or communal grounds is almost impossible. And, as above, all candidates must be endorsed by one of the eight parties. The EPA has set itself up as the arbiters of who gets to represent Nepal's diverse communities. This could ignite ethnic separatism that will make the last Jana Andolan look like a cakewalk.

The solution is to defer the polls until a time when they can be held with sufficient security and credibility. Yes, 'regressive forces' will try to capitalise on this delay. But the risk posed by them is insignificant compared with the dangers of a hurried and flawed election. ●



MARK TURIN

Little Maoists

FOLLOW-UP

The Maoists are pushing for reform in education. Last week, CPN-M politburo member Hisila Yami talked to *Nepali Times* about nationalisation of private schools and other plans her party has for the educational system. “Our education policy will be inclusive and will merge

the natural and social sciences,” she said. “The emphasis will be more on polytechnic education because people who get such training can be employed quickly. Kathmandu-centric education may not work for rest of Nepal. Similarly we will link education with labour, because it is our biggest asset.”

This is what children in classes four and five will study, if Maoist plans are implemented.

| Course | Year 4 (9 yrs old) | Year 5 (10 yrs old) |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Philosophy (60 credit hours) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Introduction to philosophy● The two classes: the exploited and the exploiters● Concept of two classes (a) consciousness and dialectical materialism (b) physical and mental labour (c) the known and the unknown | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Introduction to philosophy: identifying the classes of capitalists and workers, and feudal landlords and peasants● Concept of two classes. Physical and mental labour. Material/ consciousness. Known/unknown.● Materialistic and idealistic philosophies● Introduction to materialistic philosophy: historical and dialectical materialism |
| Politics (40 hrs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Biography of Prachanda● Beginning of the 'People's War'● General introduction to human social development: the primitive stage, slave society, feudal society, capitalist society.● The constitution of village level People's Government, its rights and duties | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The life of Mao Tse-Tung● Biography of 4 people's war warriors● The Spartacus Revolt● the organization, rules and regulation, rights and duties of district people's councils |
| History (30 hrs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The history of the Communist movement in Nepal (foundation of Nepal Communist Party, its founders and beginning of the people's war.)● Biography of Dil Bahadur Ramtel● The Dang attack | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● History of Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) (From General Assembly of Unity to beginning of people's war)● Biography of Mitramani Acharya● The Achham action |
| Economics (30 hrs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Definition of labour and wages● Introduction to types and importance of cooperatives● What is production and consumption?● Exchange and barter of goods | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Introduction to value, distribution, capital● What are the means of labour?● What are the weapons of labour?● Private and social ownership● Introduction to cooperatives● Types of cooperatives and production |
| Culture (20 hrs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The song "I will keep my country in my 'eyes'"● Poetry about Maoist martyrs● Children's stories● General introduction to traditional festivals and people's festivals | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The song "Dear Jaljala"● Biography and poetry by national and local poets● Short stories, science stories and children's stories● Types of culture: feudalism, imperialism, capitalism, Communism and socialism |
| Military science (20 hrs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Exercise and marching● What is roll call?● Information, counting soldiers, reporting about their conditions● Introduction to being a sentry● Introduction to homemade guns● Communication in the battlefield● Introduction to explosives and exchange of information● Introduction to war | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Important tips for sentries● Rules for route finding● Exercises and marching● How to make and use guns● General introduction to explosives, grenades and booby-traps● Student's role in military information and communication● How to guide soldiers. Roll call.● Types of war — justified and unjustified |

Victim turned aggressor

For the first time since the start of the conflict, entrepreneurs have a written commitment from the eight parties promising a favourable environment for business activities. After initially refusing to meet with the agitating industrialists and businesspeople, Prime Minister Koirala relented on the second day of the business-called strike and met with representatives of the agitating groups.

A statement followed by the eight parties, in which they said they were “seriously concerned” about the demands raised by the private sector. The eight parties also called on the 7+1 alliance in government to do away with obstructions to business.

The business community announced that it would formulate future strategies of agitation based on whether or not the commitments made by the eight parties are implemented, and decided to form a talks team to sit with the government.

Entrepreneurs called for the shutdown after Maoists abducted and beat up Hari Shrestha, owner of Hotel Woodlands on Darbar Marg, when he refused to pay a donation. Industrialists and businessmen submitted a memorandum to the prime minister demanding security, announced the closure of industries, export and import businesses, educational institutions, banks, and air and other transport services on Monday.

Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal said the incident was a dispute between workers and employer, though the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Trade Union Federation (ANTUF) later suspended two members, Deepak Rai and Mukunda Neupane, for beating up Shrestha. Dahal also met the agitating business groups mid-week and said his party headquarters had ordered cadres not to use force. Home Minister Krishna Prasad Situala has ordered the arrest of those involved in Shrestha’s attack.

Fun Run done

The winners in the Nepal Investment Bank Run for Fun marathon’s three categories of the 21km race were Arjun Prasad Dhakal in the professional category, Laxman Malla Thakuri in the amateur category, and Derek Coogan in the foreigner category. The three won prize money totalling Rs 236,500. The winner of the 10km ladies category was Kanchhi Maya Kaju. Deepak Desai won the Schoolboys’ Category and Brinda Shrestha the Schoolgirls’. The winner of the Rs 41,000 for 1km handicapped race was Tulshi Baskota. The race was in aid of the Patan Darbar Heritage Conservation. NIBL’s total support and contribution to heritage and sports has been over Rs 3 million since 2002.

New counter

Bank of Kathmandu has opened a new counter at the office of the Nepal Stock Exchange, Singha Darbar Plaza. BoK shares can be purchased from brokers at the counter or online.

Movies for the homebound

Popcorn Movies, a new movie rental service in Kathmandu, offers customers a choice of 4,000 English films, with free delivery. The service costs Rs 375 per month after a Rs 500 membership fee.

NEW PRODUCTS

NIGHT: Goodnight Octagonal mosquito coil is the new insect killer from Goodnight Liquid makers Godrej. The coil’s eight sides, which spread vapours all around the room, are said to make it twice as effective as any other in the market. The coil is priced at Rs 20, with a Rs 2 discount as an introductory offer.



Enough This week we saw the cost of ignoring Nepalis who invest in Nepal

The thousands who converged in Basantapur on Tuesday this week did not come to support a specific cause. They came to express their anguish, frustration, and rejection of growing Maoist atrocities against people in business.

After the April Uprising and legitimisation of the Maoists, the former rebels’ extortion, kidnapping, and threats have not



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

ceased. This week, after two businesspeople were kidnapped and one beaten, people said enough is enough and took to the streets. It’s unfortunate that a prime minister who has the time to meet heads of bilateral agencies that pledge a measly one million dollars found it difficult to make time to listen to the grievances of people who have invested billions—and their lives—in Nepal.

The Maoists have always targeted entrepreneurs, because they view business as the opposition, and as elite who exploit ‘the people’. The fact that Pushpa Kamal Dahal still associates businesspeople with the king and regressive forces is proof of the comrades’ distrust of the private sector. Meanwhile, he continues to talk in riddles—no one can explain the phrase “national capitalist”.

There’s a simple way out of this muddle, if only the Maoists could see it. Governments—such as the one they are about to join—can only run on revenue. This in turn can be either received through

businesses or by sashaying on the ramps for the donor community. The government can only in theory earn revenue by conducting business itself. If the Maoists want to create more jobs for their disgruntled cadres or provide a longer-term economic solution for Nepal’s poverty, they will have to trust the private sector.

The Finance Minister was right to say that the Maoists’

sector. The Beed hopes this bonding continues in talks with trade unions to foster an acceptable labour regime that will boost enterprise creation and rebuild trust between employers and employees.

The people bandying around catchphrases like federalism, inclusion, and social equity can’t really explain what actions needed to be taken to achieve



KIRAN PANDAY

conduct has never been like that of a group on the verge of joining the government. The comrades are mistaken if they think they can get away with a Bihar-UP-style two-pronged approach: ruling legitimately and extorting illegitimately. People have given them the benefit of the doubt for the last ten months. These same people and civil society could corner a king who had the full military behind him. If they wanted, they could do the same to an unruly mob that has given up most of its arms. The Maoists’ over-confidence in the tarai cost them dearly. They really should think about whether they also want to lose the capital, where they have got used to living the high life.

Finally, group differences have been put aside in the private

these goals. The problem and solution on the economic front are much clearer—there is poverty across caste, ethnicity, gender, creed, and geography. Any future Nepal must create more economic opportunities. For this we need the private sector. Yes, right frameworks of governance are needed to regulate enterprises. If the government finds itself unable to regulate, it cannot cover that up by simply taking over business.

The events of this week give the Maoist a chance to introspect. They should take it, instead of just going around the districts making speeches like the failed monarch. Pluralistic democracy is about building rational supporters, not luring sycophants. For virtually all the parties, it’s now or never. ●

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NO

Keshab Suryabansi Magar

The fact that federalism is now the nation's common agenda shows how far we have come, and is proof that the country's future is devolving power to federal units. Decentralised governance is not separatism; it is accepted throughout the world as the way to ensure full-democracy. The debate is over the kind of federalism suitable for a particular country.

In Nepal there are demands for ethnicity-based federalism. The argument is that ethnic autonomy is accepted among indigenous minorities in Canada, Finland, Bangladesh, and Japan, for example, to ensure fair representation in national governance.

Nepal's situation is slightly different. Here, ethnic groups like Magar, Gurung, Tharu, Tamang, Rai, or Limbu are not minorities. Yet, they form only 15-25 percent of the population in the areas where they demand autonomy. There is a real danger that ethnic autonomy will sow discontent among the other groups that live in those areas. The 100 or so ethnic conflicts underway around the world today show how explosive such issues can be.

The real place to start would be to correct unbalanced representation of the ruling class groups in the state: the 84 percent Bahun-Chhetris (not counting Newars) in the civil service.

हिमाल

The agitation for separate states and self-determination or single-ethnic autonomy are slogans raised for short-term political gain. However, the call for redressing past wrongs can't be ignored and, if only lip-service is paid to federalism, the future looks bleak. The only way is to form genuine autonomous regions and a non-ethnically demarcated federal state structure.

Autonomous regions have to be regional or provincial. The rights of the ethnic minorities living in such units of government must be addressed locally. This would best guarantee long-term peace.

Keshab Suryabansi Magar is deputy general secretary of the Rastriya Janamukti Party.

YES

Mahendra Lawoti

Those who argue for only administrative federalism ignore Nepal's multi-ethnic nature. Administrative federalism will make Nepal's problems worse, not solve them.

In my book *Towards a Democratic Nepal* (Sage, 2005) I propose eight ways to resolve ethnic and other injustices against dalits, women, indigenous groups, and madhesi while addressing the rights of Bahun-Chhetris. They are: non-geographic autonomy, sub-autonomy, special areas for the extra-marginalised, reservation, elections with proportional representation, a justice system, rights for minorities and a powerful upper house. Only ethnic

federalism will not solve all problems, but that doesn't mean it is wrong. That is like saying democracy is wrong because there are problems with democracy.

Some argue that ethnic federalism won't work because of the lack of human resources, but this is an excuse for perpetuating centralism. If just the existing budget spent by the centre were given to the districts, it would be disbursed with much more accountability. Take the Karnali, where people are more capable of solving their problems than Kathmandu is.

Self-determination is the essence of democracy. Not giving people that right allows others to usurp their democratic rights. Self-determination won't lead to separatism, but prevent it. So far, no ethnic group has advocated separatism and to label them thus is ethnic prejudice.

There are also questions about Bahun-Chhetris who are spread across the country. Since they have the highest proportion of the population, Bahun-Chhetris could safeguard their rights with higher representation at the centre. They are already prominent at the centre and will remain so for some time, though perhaps not as dominant as they are now.

Those who are minorities in the centre can safeguard their rights through ethnic federalism. The whole idea is to get the maximum number of people included in decision-making. There is no reason people should be afraid of this.

Mahendra Lawoti is assistant professor of political science at Western Michigan University.



KIRAN PANDAY

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Humble abode

Jana Aastha, 21 March

The Maoists have been busy with real estate. Until just a few days they were still looking for a suitable premises for their headquarters. That’s been taken care of, and they’ve also decided that chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and leader Baburam Bhattarai and their families will live in Nayabajar, Kusibu. Dahal, Bhattarai, and their families have already moved into the house.

The neighbours had no idea who was moving in until they noticed Maoist ‘soldiers’ providing security all around the house. There is said to be discontentment about this development, because the Maoist ‘army’ starts training early in the morning, and their shouts awake the entire neighbourhood. Some who live nearby have filed complaints with the police saying they are tired of listening to the women soldiers yelling in the morning as they practice nunchuks. Others are giving in to curiosity and peer into the comrades’ compound from their rooftops and windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of the PLA’s early morning rituals.

The Maoists promised the landlord, Uttam Thakali, a businessman from Mustang, advance payment of six months’ rent. However, our sources say that only three months rent has been paid up, and that the leadership has asked Thakali to trust them and assured him that the rest will be paid soon. Although no paperwork has been signed, the rent of the house is understood to be Rs 55,000 per month.

The army lives in the lawn under a big tent, the Dahal family lives on the third floor, and the Bhattaraies on the second. The ground floor is occupied by high ranking commanders and those responsible for the security of the leaders. The soldiers roam the streets around the house, and the neighbours say they are scared of the men with guns who stand outside the house.

Not fighting

Interview with CPM-UML central committee member Bharat Mohan Adhikari in *Chhalphal*, 18 March

Is the formation of the interim government being delayed because the parties can’t decide on how to allot the ministries?

We haven’t yet reached that stage yet, which is why we suggested to the prime minister that the leaders from the seven parties discuss what the government will look like. That discussion took place recently and our general secretary said that the prime minister and deputy prime minister should not be from the same party. Since the prime minister is going to be from the NC, we suggested that the home minister be from the UML. We also have not yet agreed to the NC proposal that the prime minister should be elected first and the ministers later. The interim constitution gives the legislature

the power to choose the prime minister. We say that the ministers and the prime minister should be chosen at the same time, because doing it separately will give the impression that the parties are fighting over the positions.

So the UML and the Maoists both want the deputy prime minister post?

There is already a deputy prime minister from our party, why change that? If there is room for more than one, the other one could be from the CPN-M. The UML was given the deputy prime minister position after the success of April Uprising, and we see no reason to give it up. That said, let me clarify one more time: the delay is not because the parties are fighting over posts, but because the necessary documents are still being finalised.

Given this delay, do you still see the constituent assembly elections happening in June?

The elections must take place in June under any condition. Jana Andolan II made way for the elections, and the eight parties are committed to it. No one can go against what is written in the interim constitution. The UML is not going to agree on anything that will delay the elections, because we know that the situation in the country will worsen if that happens.



Paintings: Constituent Assembly
Autonomy
Federalism

Sculpture: Abnormal elections

“I don’t understand this new creation at all.”

नेपाल Nepal, 18 March

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“I am embarrassed to accept an award for good governance when the peace and security situation in Nepal is at its worst.”

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala quoted in *Kantipur*, 18 March, while receiving the Leadership and Good Governance Award given by Universal Peace Federation.

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS



Humanitarian Aid



Vacancy Announcement

Consultant for Disaster Preparedness and Response

UNICEF, with funding support from the European Commission - Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), is in the process of finalising a framework for earthquake disaster risk reduction in Lalitpur municipality in partnership with the Lalitpur municipal authority, NWSC, MPPW, MLD and MoHA and has identified and in the process of upgrading emergency drinking water supply facilities using existing deep wells. The Project includes preparation of a disaster preparedness and response framework, vulnerability assessment of existing deep tube wells, water quality testing and design of water treatment units, preparation of GIS location maps, improvement and renovation of pumping stations, installation of back-up diesel power supply and training of technical staff of municipality and NWSC authorities on operation and maintenance. The prospective candidate will have the responsibility to guide and assist the NGO engaged to implement this Project, monitor and control the contract obligations with the design consultancy firm and the construction contractor, liaison with government partners and ensure the planned results are achieved within the given timeframe.

The Project commenced March 2006 and must be completed by the end of July 2007. UNICEF intends to recruit a suitable international/national candidate under the Short Term Service Agreement (SSA) for the period of 3 months (with possible extension) **starting from 7 May 2007.**

The interested candidates should have the following qualifications:

Qualification:

- University Degree in Civil Engineering or equivalent, from a recognized college/university, preferably in Water Supply and Sewerage or in Environmental Engineering;
- At least 10 years work experience in development field in developing countries with particular exposure in urban water supply networks;
- Work experience in planning, implementation and monitoring of development projects in partnership with central, local government and line ministries and departments. Work experience in disaster preparedness and response will be given added advantage.
- Capable of effectively interacting with ECHO representatives and ECHO partners in Nepal;
- Technical skills and field experience on installation of deep tube wells, pumping stations, water treatment plants and knowledge on key water quality issues of ground water.
- Capable of establishing working partnerships with a number of government, NGOs and civil society organizations and organizing and effectively mobilizing these organizations to achieve the set goals and targets in a given short timeframe;
- Candidate should have excellent written and spoken English and should be able to prepare excellent reports in English. Preference will be given to the candidate who have better understanding about Nepal’s development situation and who can speak Nepali language as well.
- Applicant age should be between 30-50 years;

Application from interested and qualified candidates should reach the UNICEF Country Office by close of business (1730 hrs) on **6 April 2006.**

Please write clearly on the outside of the envelope “Consultant for Disaster Preparedness and Response” and send to:

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Artistic healing



For former circus children, life falls into place when they make mosaics

PRANAYA SJB RANA

A look of intense concentration on her face, Bimala turns her gaze from the wood framework she's filling in to the pile of colourful little pieces of bathroom tiles by her side. She selects a piece, cuts it deftly into the proper shape, slaps some glue onto its base, and sticks it into the final slot, completing her first mosaic. Bimala sits back, observes her handiwork and, smiles, satisfied with the pretty flower.

Just a few months ago, this shy 16-year-old was working in India's notorious Raj Kamal Circus, virtually enslaved.

In this sunny studio near Godavari, Bimala and eight other girls spend their days painstakingly creating mosaics for the virtually-untapped Nepali market. The patterns range from simple ones like the logo for the British Airport Authority, to complex designs with intricate patterns and colours schemes, derived from Mithila art. "I love making these," says Priya, echoing her friends here. "I could do this all day and not get tired."

It's a far cry from the physical and sexual exploitation the girls here were subject to in Indian circuses. "These girls are stigmatised. They are often rejected from their homes, and if restored to their parents, often end up as domestic help or prostitutes," says Lieutenant Colonel Philip Holmes, a retired dentist from the British Army. Holmes heads the Esther Benjamins Trust in Nepal, and was responsible for the rescue of these girls.

The Trust has rescued 234 children from Indian circuses. Most are back with their families, but the slightly older children, and those who have been in the circuses for five to ten years, have difficulty adjusting to 'normal' life and, often, nowhere to go. Most reject school outright as an alternative—they have to start in grade one alongside six- and seven-year-olds, which they find humiliating.

"Teaching traumatised girls to sew and tailor clothes is an unproductive way of rehabilitation, as most aren't interested in such activities. Art is completely different," explains Holmes, who himself took up mosaic-making after he retired from the army. The years of long, taxing,





often dangerous hours in the circuses have wreaked havoc on the girls' attention spans and self-esteem, but making art stimulates the imagination, the painstaking attention to detail is calming, and the whole process gives them confidence in themselves.

Today Priya and Reena, the first two girls that Philip taught, are experts—their tiles are perfectly placed in elaborate patterns and they use bold colour schemes. They now use Italian mosaic tiles made out of glass. The idea Holmes came up with seeing the enthusiasm of these two—asking donors to commission mosaics—has taken off, and the workshop provides both rehabilitation, and allows the girls to participate in the fundraising that made their rescue possible.

A 30 by 30cm mosaic costs close to \$100. The maker received Rs 500 and the rest goes to the trust. Bigger pieces cost more and

the maker's share increases accordingly. Most girls complete about ten mosaics a month, earning Rs 5,000—more than most waiters, janitors, and clerks.

Holmes believes that the mosaics could become a significant Nepali export, particularly, as more girls learn how to make them. He envisions 50 to 100 women, living in a large home-cum-studio of their own, and managing their own business.

The girls we spoke to were shy at first, but their sharp awareness of the surroundings and the world shines through. For most, art is a way to regain their lost innocence and identities, to shine at their work and reclaim their place in society. ●

An exhibition of the mosaics opens at the Summit Hotel on 25 March, which is also the 250th anniversary of the abolition by Britain of the slave trade. The show runs until 30 March, from 10AM-6PM daily.

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Nepal desperately needs centrists to sit quiet, centre-stage

The middle path

What's truly amazing about human society is the degree of dysfunction that people and institutions are prepared to tolerate. Westerners assume any little crisis or collapse will bring things crashing down. Everyone else knows that life largely goes on, no matter what leaders, wannabe kings, and conquerors get up to.

Take Nepal at the moment. To all intents and purposes, there is no government in the country. There are political forces that engage from time to time with issues and problems, but there's little in the

way of governance, leadership, vision, and thoughtful policy-making. The tyre burner in the street has as much influence as the politician in parliament.



HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

To some, especially on the right side of the spectrum, this is disaster. All is unravelling, rightists proclaim. Nothing can function without a strong hand on the tiller; better that the hand be misguided or malignant, than the tiller be unmanned. The hard left feels much the same, craving like its rightward counterpart to be the hand inside the mailed fist.

Hardier centrists, whether tending right or left, have a little more sophistication. They know that things can slide along for quite some time without firm guidance or a long view on how to get to a distant policy horizon. What the late PV Narasimha Rao, former Indian prime minister, used to practice, an apparently Hindu concept called 'masterly inaction', got India well and truly on its way to today's miraculous economic growth. Faced with a series of hard choices, Rao made none of them and just waited for things to change of their own accord, stepping in only if necessary. Arguably, it worked.

At the moment, you'd think Nepal would be deep in economic freefall and descending into absolute anarchy. But bad as things are, they're not that bad, not yet anyway. There's a rickety shell of a civil service, a somewhat livelier civil society, and a whole network of families and other groups across the country that keep some things functioning in good times and bad. Politicians dither and blather and do dirty deals. Kings and their cohorts hatch empty plots. No one governs overtly, but it matters less than we might think.

Right now, the country is waltzing towards greater limbo as the June elections fade from the radar, Nepal's only natural resource, hydro, dries up, and people continue to queue up at foreign embassies to get themselves a job and a new life abroad.

Small comfort might be sought in the notion that it's worse elsewhere. Much of Africa squirms and suffers through much greater dysfunction and higher levels of violence. The components of the former Soviet Union, and much of Russia, are gripped by authoritarianism, corruption, and frustration. Pakistan and Afghanistan become ever more chaotic and Taliban-ready. Nepal's stasis du jour seems mild by comparison.

That's not to argue that anyone can afford much more inaction. In this country, in this polity, doing nothing is far from the masterly option. There's too much poverty and need. There are no Narasimha Raos to plot the crafty—if inactive—course down the centre. Now more than ever, Nepal needs its centrists to stand up and start working, to get up from the chairs and out of the meeting rooms, to avoid the nightly bhoj, and forego the raksi, to resist the overwhelming urge to just do nothing. Nepal's dysfunctional functionality is nearing its limits. ●

Change is in



Kicking politics out of schools is this Kabhre village's first step towards peace and development

DAMBER K SHRESTHA
in KABHRE

The most obvious sign of change here is outward. Until a few months ago, the walls of Chakreswor Secondary School in Chamringbesi were covered with Maoist slogans and announcements. Today, the walls are cleaned up and instead sport messages of peace, hard work, and cooperation.

During the conflict and even for some time after, Maoists used schools to demonstrate their weapons, other political parties used students to further their cause, and fights were constantly

breaking out between students affiliated with different parties. For the first time in years students feel safe in classrooms.

In Chamringbesi, local party workers, government body, parents, teachers, and students have come to an agreement on the graffiti and much more. They agreed that no parties would be allowed to form sister organisations or conduct political activities in the school. Students are not allowed to participate in political activities from 10AM to 4PM, and the schools will not be used as polling centres in the upcoming elections. There are three primary schools, one lower secondary school, and secondary

school in this village south-west of Dhulikhel.

What's happening here has become a model for five other VDCs, and 39 schools in Kabhre have been declared zones of peace by Partnership Nepal. This remarkable effort comes at a time when mainstream parties are lobbying to allow government employees at all levels to be members of political parties.

"Getting consensus was difficult at first," says Ram Prasad Dahal of the management committee of the school. "But eventually all parties signed a code of conduct, and we erased slogans off the wall in the presence of Maoist party cadres," he explains.

Valley of fear

Not even police and MPs are safe from burglary and mugging in the capital

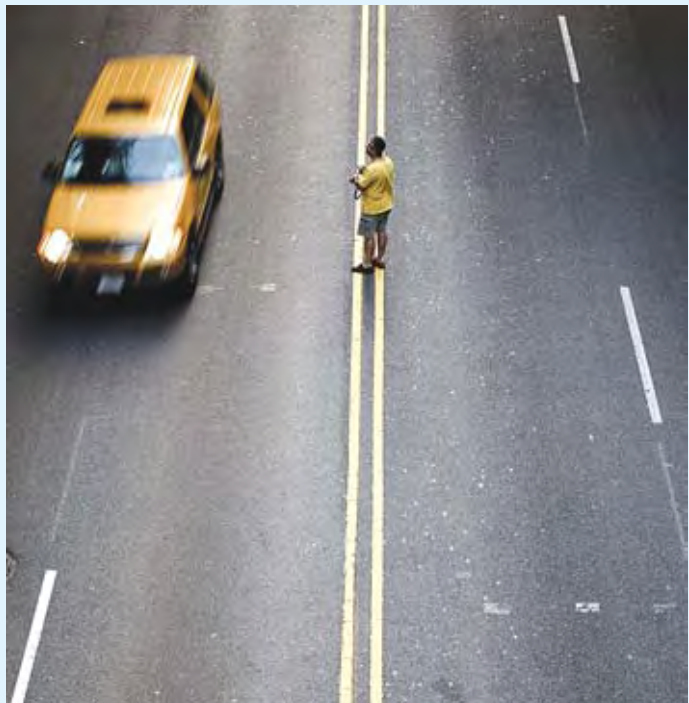
DIPESH KC

Although there has been a sharp spike in the incidence of burglary and looting over recent months, the police only stepped up investigation after senior police officers, ministers, and MPs themselves started to get robbed and mugged in Kathmandu.

From July to February there were 577 robberies and 316 lootings in the Valley. Hanuman Dhoka's Crime Investigation Branch says it received 55 complaints in August, and by February this was up

to 87. Many do not file complaints because they are afraid. The burglars use khukuris and usually fake pistols to threaten their victims, and then make quick getaways on motorcycles. Most cases of breaking and entering and looting are reported from Tinkune, Gongabu, Samakhusi, Baneshwor, Kuleswor, Lainchaur, Dhapasi, Sanepa, and Tasikhel.

The police suspect the involvement of organised groups in these robberies. Very few people involved in these crimes have been arrested, and those who have, police officers tell us informally, do not reveal the names of other group members. Investigation



the air



ALL PICS: DAMBER K SHRESTHA



The case of Chamringbesi's schools will be worth following. Maoist cadres, who once made schools their staging posts, are whitewashing over their own graffiti. 'Jamin', Kabhre Area One member, says these are initiatives at the local level, and he and his comrades here have received no feedback yet from the Maoist central command. He also warns that "if other parties go against the agreement, we will not sit still."

Meanwhile, Rupesh Pakhrin, former chairman of the NC-affiliated Nepal Student Union's school unit, says that he is unhappy with the decision to eliminate political organisations from schools though it is a "commendable" one. "Organisations that have been around for some time are not easily dissolved," he warns. "If students are not being treated properly or if teachers are involved in malpractices, we need unions to protest," argues Pakhrin.

Most students and community activists desperately want this code of conduct to work out. It will be up to the parties to prove their good faith. ●

Model village

It's a two-hour drive to Dhungekharka from Banepa, and from there a three-hour walk to Chamringbesi. Part of the reason schools in this little hamlet are trying innovative ways to ensure their children get a decent education is due to the efforts of Partnership Nepal's campaign to make schools peaceful areas and UNICEF's Decentralised Action for Women and Children, says Goma Gole, chair of the village's paralegal committee. "Development shouldn't just be for the headquarters," she argues. Chamringbesi is the first of 27 villages in which DAWAC operates to have positively implemented all DACAW programs succesfully in a span of just one year, and will be awarded for its achievements by UNICEF this year.

The women in this region are slowly becoming aware of their rights, they are eager to learn new skills and are thinking about saving and investment via microfinance. "So much has changed for us here," says Tulasi Pakhrin "we may be a rural village but with awareness and skills we know we can be as modern as Banepa soon."

There are 10 youth and women clubs here, each that are actively involved in empowerment and awareness programs. Health and education are priorities in development plans for this VDC. DACAW has helped build toilets in every house, and the program's push for children to enrol in and attend school has been largely successful. These changes were hard-won, residents say, and they will do all they can to make sure they last.

shows that over 30 young men from Pasiban, Ramechhap are involved. Only three have so far been arrested. Deepak Singh Thangden, chief of Kathmandu police, says, "The groups involved in crime in Kathmandu are said to go to villages and hide until things cool down."

Meanwhile the police say that they do not have enough vehicles to respond rapidly, and are further hampered by the constant traffic jams in Kathmandu. Chief Thangden says we urgently need technology to monitor mobile phone networks, because that is how the gangs exchange information.

And the Nepal Police has its own weaknesses—corruption, cliquishness, and lack of expertise in collecting forensic evidence. "There have been instances where our moles have collaborated with the thieves," says a police officer. If a police officer is involved in a crime, the case is kept under wraps and further investigation is stopped on the grounds of 'inadequate evidence'.

The police also has a hard time keeping track of

all the new gangs that are springing, though members of the old ones are being arrested. It is especially difficult, they say, to infiltrate or find out more about gangs that use Indian SIM cards and email to contact each other and threaten their victims. In informal conversations police told us that gang members currently in prison remain part of the network of information, but that there is little or no way of getting evidence from them.

Even when the guilty have been arrested, the victims have little chance of retrieving their stolen property. Since there are few security checks along the streets, it is easy for criminals to move stolen goods around the city. A police officer says, "We really do need security checks to control all this, but we fear there will be protests if these are reinstated, and the process to do so is long too, so no one wants to do anything about it."

Police Chief Thangden says it's pretty much up to the public to make themselves less vulnerable to attacks and robbery. "Start by putting cash and jewellery in banks," he argues. ●

A private little war

Donation terror takes its toll

A dreadful intimacy differentiates extortion from other forms of robbery. While pickpockets and burglars rely on anonymity, extortionists make it their business to be highly personal. Armed with knowledge of family, home, and assets to back up their demands, they can recite your schedule, earnings, and where your children go to school. They brandish this information like a weapon, and for the CPN (Mafia) such research pays off in a big way. The victim realises there is no place to hide and that their loved ones are at dire risk, causing stress levels to increase dramatically. The more terrorised the victim, goes the extortionist's cynical logic, the higher the payoff.

Victims of coercive extortion feel violated to a degree second only to the horrors of kidnapping and rape, and the trauma continues long after monies are paid. An unexpected telephone call or knock on the gate can set off irrational panic. Nightmares and sleepless nights become the norm as fear and anxiety

pervade daily life. The psychological wounds are worsened by the perceived need for secrecy, as the Maoists never forget to warn their prey to keep their mouth shut—or else.

Donation terror, as it is eloquently called in Nepali *chun dan atanka*, is further distinguished from other economic crimes by the underlying jealousy and desire for revenge that motivate the perpetrators. The individuals who do Prachanda's dirty work are well versed in ideological justifications and openly malicious towards Kathmandu's bourgeois. Chilling echoes of the Khmer Rouge are evident in the party line that city dwellers must be taught a lesson for not supporting the revolution and will, in punishment, be looted until rendered 'naked'. This vendetta is intensely personal for both sides, and the hapless target of such rage is left not only poorer but profoundly traumatised. Those who resist are beaten with a purpose best described as perverse.

This racket had already funded the civil war for over eight years before Kathmandu was hit with a massive rise in demands last autumn, in what seemed a final fling before the party joined the mainstream.

Those of us handicapped by the 'logic syndrome' expected this scourge to disappear when the Peace Accord was signed. That such deviant behaviour is explicitly banned in the agreement must be worth something, and for a moment even incorrigible gimlet-eyed seen-it-all cynic/realist-cum-meddlers like yours truly saw a ray of hope.

Alas, those addicted to free money through coercion are weak before their vice. The millions of unaccountable rupees paid by the government to support teenie-bopper 'cadres' stuck in cantonments and plump leaders lounging in the capital aren't enough, it seems.

The latest wave of depredations targeting the business community is best illustrated by the vicious attacks on the Woodlands Hotel owner this past week. Mr Shrestha's brutal treatment should drive any thinking person to despair. Even those who hide behind ideology can never justify beating a man with iron rods to extract a 'voluntary' donation.

Politburo claims that this was an 'internal matter' between disgruntled staff and management ring pathetically hollow, and prove the Hand's theory we live in a Post-Truth society (see 'Post-Truth Nepal,' #339)

These latest avatars of extortion issue no receipts and ignore all proof of previous payment to the cause, denying any affiliation with the CPN-M. Those who were paid in



the past, when contacted with complaints about the latest demands, advise support for the revolution. The Maoists, in the finest Mafia tradition, have strong territorial instincts and cannot tolerate competition, yet this new 'extortioniste-du-jour' is exempt from their infamous wrath. The Hand allows the reader to draw his own conclusions.

The war once fought against the army is now waged against private citizens. Extorted cash is used to support more of the same activity, and many more innocents are left deeply traumatised as the cycle continues apace. Nasty threats and coercive intimidation leave scars that fester long after the money is forgotten, and the Maoist leadership might well reflect on the enemies they are making. Revenge is in the air for the years of abuse and someday there will be hell to pay for this arrogant, parasitical attitude. ●

Recent threats by the Bush administration to cut off billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan have sparked panic in government circles. The Pakistani ambassador in Washington is saying that military strikes by the United States aimed at al-Qaeda and Taliban havens inside Pakistan's tribal areas would destabilise Pakistan and "could bring [General Pervez Musharraf] down." How worried should Pakistani authorities be in the face of growing US pressure to root out Islamic militants?

It is unlikely the US will turn against a faithful—and dependent—ally, especially one whose leader enjoys cordial personal relations with Bush. Nor, due to a lack of organised opposition, will public anger at Musharraf's pro-US policy destabilise his regime.

COMMENT
Pervez Hoodbhoy

The wily general-president survives crises and has thrived as the result of a finely honed strategy that juggles US demands and the interests of local intelligence chiefs, mullahs, tribal leaders, venal politicians, and other fortune seekers. Webs of intrigue and murky players obscure details, but the priorities are clear.

First, American impatience must be checked. Pakistan is expected to deliver results on al-Qaeda and the Taliban. This will happen bit by bit. When US Vice-President Dick Cheney arrived in Islamabad in early March, threatening an aid cut and direct US action against Islamic militants, his message was not lost. Shortly before his unmarked aircraft landed, Pakistan announced the capture in Quetta of Mullah Obaidullah, deputy to Mullah Omar. Obaidullah carried a \$1 million reward and was the most senior Taliban captured since November 2001.

Tightrope act

Musharraf is trying to balance the Americans, Islamists, the military, and regular people



Obaidullah's reluctant capture underscores the Pakistani military's ambiguous relationship with the Taliban. Despite over 700 Pakistani combat deaths, many in the army want the Taliban as quasi-allies who, when the Americans leave Afghanistan someday, will give Pakistan 'strategic depth' against India. Thus, Quetta remains a hub of Taliban opposition to Afghan president Hamid Karzai's regime.

A second aspect of Musharraf's strategy is to create mutually beneficial relations with Islamists. He cannot permit the mullahs to become too strong and the

mullahs consider him an agent of the great Satan, America, and thus a traitor to Islam. Still, Musharraf's men have fractured the main Islamic opposition party, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), with bribes, blackmail, and internal dissension fomented by agent provocateurs. As part of the trade-off, terrorist leaders who are officially under house arrest have offices, address rallies, and freely preach jihad.

Such appeasement comes at a cost. In recent weeks, Kalashnikov-toting students have openly challenged the state, following a government order for the demolition of

dozens of illegally built mosques and seminaries. Unnerved by the wild-eyed students, the government surrendered. Musharraf's minister of religious affairs, former dictator General Zia ul-Haq's son, promised to rebuild damaged mosques and even symbolically laid the first stone at one construction site.

Third, Musharraf knows he must do some good and be seen doing it. This is crucial for his image as a new world leader, promising moderate Islam in an ocean of extremism. Thus, relations with India have improved, the Kashmir insurgency supported by Pakistan has been scaled back, a women's protection bill was passed in the teeth of Islamic opposition, and a virulent public school curriculum that emphasised jihad and martyrdom has been toned down.

Musharraf knows the real threat to his power—and his life—comes from within the military, and micromanages every single thing. Hardline Islamists, favoured previously, are out, and soldiers charged with mutiny have received the death penalty. This has further deepened pro- and anti-US divisions within the army, among both commissioned and non-commissioned officers.

Still, Musharraf clearly expects to remain president well beyond the October 2007 elections, and to extend further his term as chief of the army. To achieve this end, principles and rules are elastic. Beyond pumping in dollars, supporting Musharraf and his military, the US appears clueless in dealing with Pakistan and its problems of social development. With the defeat of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, America's only visible goal, the US remains enormously unpopular among Pakistanis, forcing Musharraf to maintain his perilous balancing act. ●
(Project Syndicate)

Pervez Hoodbhoy teaches at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.

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 **50 years of European Union**

Mr. Eduardo Lechuga Jimenez, Chargé d'Affaires of the Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal welcomes the 50th anniversary of the European Union and on this occasion would hereby like to convey the message of Mrs. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy.



Fifty years ago six European countries came together to create a unique form of regional organisation. The objective was to ensure war would never again ravage the European continent, leaving a trail of death and devastation in its path.

It has undoubtedly been a tremendous success. For fifty years its members have enjoyed unprecedented levels of peace, prosperity and stability. And so they have pushed it to go further. Over the years it has evolved to be much more than a simple trading bloc coordinating members' trade policy and setting common tariffs. Now numbering 27 members, the European Union today is a political organisation active in all the areas that pose the greatest challenges to society in the 21st century.

For countries around the world that means we are no longer just a trading partner. Now we are a strategic partner for issues as varied as international terrorism, climate change, HIV/AIDS, and resolving the world's most entrenched conflicts.

In our relations with our international partners we project the values we believe have contributed to our own success. Our prosperity has grown out of a particular form of regional cooperation which has developed hand in hand with a deeper commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It is this experience, the secret of our own success, which we seek to offer to others.

The European Union acts in many different ways on the world stage, but a common EU foreign policy is a relatively new addition to our activities which we are still developing. We realise that sometimes makes it difficult for our partners to understand how to work with us. But even though we are not the most straight-forward of international partners, we are certainly one of the most influential. And our ambition is to contribute even more to the international community and to our partners around the world.

One frequently forgotten fact is that the European Union is already the world's largest donor of international assistance. We currently provide 60% of the world's official development assistance, the Commission alone provides over €7 billion. We aim to tackle poverty and provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is required.

We also deploy our resources to provide prosperity and stability to others. The EU has developed a unique set of skills in assisting countries in transition. Our expertise has

been crafted by our experience at home helping the countries of Southern Europe and then Central and Eastern Europe make the transition to market economy and an open society. We now seek to use those skills elsewhere, to ensure others benefit from the same prosperity and stability.

Around the world the European Union has a dense network of formal agreements and over 130 delegations, including the one in Nepal, to cooperate with countries on issues like trade, energy, the environment, human rights and international organised crime. We have a growing range of foreign policy instruments available, not just our trade and aid policies, but also our rapid response to humanitarian emergencies, and our police and military missions. In strengthening our role in the world our task is to deploy these instruments as coherently and effectively as possible, whether that be in Lebanon, the West Balkans or the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We are already making a difference – by playing a part in finding a solution to conflict in the Middle East and trying to resolve the international stand-off over Iran's nuclear intentions. We are leading by example on questions like climate change and energy security. All these questions will be at the heart of the international agenda in the months and years to come.

We believe that it's only through partnership that solutions to these questions can be found. That's why we put so much value on our relations with our partners around the globe, but it's also why we are so committed to multilateralism. We fully support the institutions of global governance such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation. We want to work with our partners to strengthen those organisations and the rules-based multilateral order they uphold.

The EU is not a finished story. Our institutions and powers are still evolving and nowhere is that more true than in the area of foreign policy. But it is already clear that our partners see us as a different kind of partner than the purely trading partner we once were. They see the strategic value of greater cooperation with us, just as we see the strategic value of greater cooperation with them.

Similarly, the EU's citizens expect their leaders to put Europe on the world map. They want us to create better lives not only for them and our neighbours but for everyone. So this is our objective for the next 50 years: using the achievements of the last 50 years - our wealth, peace and experience – not only to maintain our own standard of living, but also for the benefit of others.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner
European Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy

A re-issue of a classic critique of development remains, sadly, fresh Himalayan endeavours

Despite billions of dollars spent and increasingly complicated theories and 'best practices,' debates continue to rage over the meanings, processes, problems, and policies of development and environment. Yet, it is debatable whether there has been much development, sustainable or otherwise, whether we have come closer to understanding what the problems are, and whether correct strategies have been designed to address them, especially in the Himalayan region.



BOOK REVIEW Rajendra Pradhan

The controversial book *Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale* offers a bold theoretical understanding of the environmental perceptions and a strategic framework for action to promote sustainable development in the Himalaya. This lucid, well-written book raises questions and offers complex and sometimes innovative arguments that force us to examine our assumptions, pet theories and practices, especially in situations of diverse and colossal uncertainties.

The authors convincingly argue that the dominant theories, hegemonic perceptions, and strategies pertaining to environmental problems and sustainable development in the Himalaya are based on wrong science, questionable data, flawed definitions of the problem(s), and poor understanding of the region's historical and local contexts and heterogeneous institutions.

Data concerning bio-physical facts in the Himalaya are extremely uncertain and questionable. For example, it is still not clear whether forest cover in Nepal is increasing or decreasing, and expert estimates of per capita fuelwood consumption differ by as much as a factor of 67! It is therefore difficult to discover what the 'problem' is (or whether we should not instead speak about 'problems') and what the solution(s) are.

The authors suggest we shift our attention from uncertain nature to institutions, which "are the facts", and thus from cis-science or normal science as we know it, to trans-science, the science of 'messes', which uses the perspective of sociology of perception.

Using the lens of institutional



Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale: An institutional theory of environmental perception and a strategic framework for the sustainable development of the Himalaya. Michael Thomson, Michael Warburton and Tom Hatley. With a new introduction by Michael Thomson and Dipak Gyawali. Lalitpur, Nepal: Himal Books. 2007 (first published by Milton Ash Editions (1986)). Price not stated.

theory (cultural theory) the authors discuss how knowledge (facts, perceptions, cognition), definition of problems, and policies are created, mediated and sustained by a plurality of institutions such as international agencies, the state, and the 'villagers' of specific localities.

Even if reliable data are available, facts are mediated by institutions and some perceptions continue to dominate. A striking example is the myth that deforestation in the Nepal hills cause floods downstream. Research has shown that the 'sponge' effect of forested land during heavy rains may cause more flooding than is believed. Yet, we keep hearing that the hills have to be reforested to prevent downstream flooding. This perception suits many interests: those of international aid agencies, which have to justify their existence and disburse funds; the Nepali government, which is only too happy to receive aid for reforestation; and the Indian and Bangladeshi governments, who can blame Nepal for floods in their countries.

Unlike most development and environment experts who long for homogeneity and consensus, the authors make a case for a theory of plural rationalities of social and cultural institutions in the Himalayan region. Each has its own perceptions, definitions of problems, expectations, and rationalities which may contest or contradict each other. They

suggest, for example, that the perceptions and strategies of 'cautious cultivators' (Hindus) differ significantly from those of the 'adventurous traders' (Buddhists).

They argue that "diversity, contention, contradiction... are our ultimate resources" and "where there is heterogeneity there is hope." This is because plurality—in this case considering the diversities of local knowledge and entering into dialogue with the people supposed to benefit from projects—allows for different definitions of problems and different strategies to address them.

The new introduction by Michael Thomson and Dipak Gyawali makes a strong case for dialogues between the state, market, civil society, and the large mass of people. Each will have its own rationality: hierarchy, individualism, egalitarianism, and fatalism. They argue that all four institutions must work together and complement each other for suitable and sustainable solutions to be found for specific problems.

There may be reservations about the strategic framework and the 'structural' nature of institutional theory, but this book nevertheless helps readers understand why international aid for development, good governance, human rights, or conflict resolution is often in a quagmire. ●

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EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Another Me** photographs by Achinto Badra at the Indigo Gallery, until 26 March. 4413580
- ❖ **Retrospective** an exhibition of paintings by Shashi Shah, from 25 March-20 April, 11AM- 6PM at Siddhartha Art Gallery Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- ❖ **Bells** poetry by Megha Raj 'Manjul' Sharma, photographs by Herbert Grammatikopoulous, and mix media art by Manish Lal Shrestha, at the Gallery 32 at Dent Inn, the Dental Clinic, until 14 April.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Yoga Camps** at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 23-25 March. 9841371927
- ❖ **Community party** for the French-speaking with dinner and dance, 24 March, from 7PM at the Alliance Francaise, Tripureswor. 4241163
- ❖ **New Delhi Meltdown** with DJs Grenville, Jazzy Joe, Rafsa, B.Man, and Robin, 25 March at the Lounge Bar, Hotel Jaypee Vasant Continental, New Delhi, 9PM onwards, Rs 800. 011-41437031
- ❖ **Film@Chautari** showing and discussion of Gavin Hood's *Tsotsi*, 3PM on 29 March at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Civic Concerns** youth workshop by Youth Initiative at PIC, Heritage Plaza, 7 April, from 10AM-5.30PM. Rs 100 registration. 4107599
- ❖ **Toastmasters** communication and leadership program, every Wednesday 6PM at the Institute of Environmental Management, Tripureswor.



MUSIC

- ❖ **NMC Jazz 07** featuring Norwegian jazz band Motif, 23 March at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 7PM onwards.
- ❖ **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 (Gandarbhas)** perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680080

DINING

- ❖ **Cricket World Cup Promotion Program** food from all countries participating in the 2007 Cricket World Cup, 13 March onwards, at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Radisson Hotel. 4411818
- ❖ **Walk and lunch** every Saturday until 31 March at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Trendy martinis** and appetizers at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **North Indian** kebabs, curries, rotis and biryani at The Dhaba, Thapathali. 9840290619
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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 12-4PM, 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
- ❖ **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 and a beer. 4479488
- ❖ **Senoritas & Margaritas** Inner Groove live at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's, Rs 599 includes a Mezza platter and a Margarita pitcher. 4479488
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768, Bhatbhateni 4426587 and Pulchok. 5521755
- ❖ **AKA Pizza** at Moksh, delivery available. 5526212
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Experience the jungle** at the Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

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Arjun's (Akshay Kumar) joy knows no bounds when he marries the beautiful and sophisticated Jazz (Katrina Kaif). But his joy soon turns to despair when he realizes this marriage means nothing to her and she is determined to marry her British boyfriend. In Namaste London, an emotional and dramatic tug of war will determine whether love is more about giving or taking and whether Indian values must surrender to Western culture.

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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



As expected last week, there was steady rise in daily mean temperatures, signalling the advent of a warm spring. In one week, from last Thursday to this, temperatures in the 1,350 m-high Valley rose from 7 degrees to 11. Thursday morning's satellite picture shows two highs, one from the northwest and another from the southwest over Pakistan, colliding over the western Himalaya. That suggests no major changes in store for the weekend. Expect a blissful weekend with fragmented clouds floating in hazy layers, mild days with balmy breezes, and clear, crisp nights. Early next week the afternoons could be a bit more windy with light rain.

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KIRAN PANDAY

NOT ALL AYES: Political party leaders including Madhab Nepal, Girija Prasad Koirala, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and Amik Serchan at a meeting called by Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel (*right*) on Monday to discuss the constituent assembly elections planned for June this year.



KIRAN PANDAY

INHOSPITABLE: Binod Chaudhary, president Confederation of Nepalese Industries, Chandi Raj Dhakal, president FNCCI (*speaking*), Surendra Bir Malakar, chair Nepal Chamber of Commerce, and Hari Shrestha, owner of Woodlands Hotel, who was beaten up by Maoists, demanding talks with Prime Minister Koirala outside his residence in Baluwatar on Monday. Koirala did not meet the business community until Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

MASS HYSTERIA: The Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Trade Union Federation staged a massive rally on Wednesday protesting the banda called by the business community to protest the roughing up by Maoist-cadre Hari Shrestha. The crowd, estimated at 50,000, made its way to the Maitighar Mandala.



KIRAN PANDAY

BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE: Kathmandu's Kumari being carried to a viewpoint atop the Nepal Airlines Building on New Road to watch Ghode Jatra on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

OUT OF MY WAY: Over 2,000 participants ran distances from 5-21km at Nepal Investment Bank's fundraising Run for Fun on Saturday.

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Call for Papers

Grievance and Dispute Resolution Mechanisms Relating to Access to Justice for the Urban Poor

ADB invites papers describing existing or past projects, initiatives, or measures that actively involve poor urban communities in ADB's developing member countries (DMCs) in preventing or settling their grievances. These include grievances and conflicts that arise in relation to land and housing issues; access to basic goods and services, including water and power; and violence against vulnerable groups.

The papers should describe the urban communities' involvement; an analysis of past and continuing challenges to the effectiveness of these projects, initiatives or measures; how these challenges have been overcome, or can be overcome; and the lessons to be learned from the project proponent's, government's, and urban poor community's involvement and experience.

Selected papers will be included in an ADB study to collect, analyze, and disseminate knowledge from and among DMCs related to good practices and supporting policies for access to justice by the urban poor.

Government offices, local government units (LGUs), NGOs, schools, urban poor communities or groups that submit the selected papers will participate in one of four subregional conferences sponsored by ADB

in late 2007. A representative will be invited to present the project, initiatives, or measures described in their paper to a wide audience comprising members of relevant government offices, NGOs, academia, international organizations, and the donor community. For more information, visit: www.adb.org/Documents/_TARs/REG/39301-REG-TAR.pdf.

Submission guidelines

Papers can be submitted by any government office, LGU, NGO, school, urban community or group that has, or is directly participating in the development and operation of the grievance and dispute resolution mechanism being described in the paper.

Papers should be submitted no later than 15 June 2007. They should not exceed ten (10) pages when typed double-spaced on an 8.5"x11" paper. They should be addressed to Caroline Vandenabeele, Project Officer. Papers can be sent by e-mail to cvandenabeele@adb.org; by fax to +632 636 2501, or by regular mail to 6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City, 1550 Metro Manila, Philippines.



Let's kick ass

Ever wondered why tourists are no longer being harassed as they emerge from the departure lounge at the airport? No more taxiwallas trying to shanghai you off as soon as you fly in from Guangzhou, no touts and sadhus waiting to welcome you to Intoxicating Nepal. Just young men in red caps helping you with the luggage cart.

What's happening? Well, it looks like ex-gorillas of the Young Communist League have taken over the airport. The Maobuddies set up the YCL as a clever way to keep their real warriors out of cantonments and out of mischief. Besides the airport, they have been deployed to sweep sidewalks, forcibly widen the Martyr's Boulevard between Kalanki and Solti Mode and crack down on crime.

Just as it is getting difficult to tell a khaobadi from a maobadi the YCL has taken over the floor of a factory in Balaju, that had to close down because it couldn't afford Revolutionary Tax, to set up a special Narcotics Control Unit. Already we see Maobaddy Special Agents in red bibs patrolling the outskirts of Thamel to nab anyone they believe is a pusher or pushee.

Some have likened this to the fox guarding the chicken coop, which is an exaggeration. It is actually like the donkey carrying out load-shedding in its own shed. Which is why it looks like the Red Bibs are now giving their Chief Comrade a huge headache he doesn't need. Maoist extraction is nothing new, it has been going on underground for the past ten years. And after the ceasefire tax collection just became more open and house-to-house tax collection. The pressure was building up but when microbus drivers protesting YCL high-handedness were seriously slashed with khukuris last month it raised questions about whether Nepal's knational knife should also have been confined into UN containers.

The hotelier getting beaten up because he didn't cough up two karode was just the last straw. It wasn't supposed to be like this, the comrades were supposed to make a smooth transition from an underground militancy to above ground politics.



As astute readers will have gleaned, the Ass always had misgivings about the Maoist safe-landing mainly because of the portraits on the podium one sees at their bashes. The buddies painted the Khula Munch red for their big meeting last week, but they still had portraits of hirsute European philosophers gazing down at us. We didn't really mind Marx and Engels, not even Lenin. But Stalin? What special charm does Uncle Joe have in New Nepal's Gangster Capitalism?




So the donors are falling over each other to pour money into Nepal. The Japanese have been specially generous, the Danes have handed over a blank cheque and the Norwegians gave two million dollars and promised more goodies. The UN is setting up a special humanitarian peace fund. The Indians have clarified that, contrary to media reports, their aid to Nepal has actually gone up. The Americans also say they haven't cut aid. In fact, the Ass calculates that there has been a 200 percent increase in US spending in Nepal if one calculates the new \$90 million embassy in Maharajganj and the multi-million dollar refurbishment of Phora. High spending demands high security, and tourists have recently been arrested taking photographs outside this newest installation. But, methinks the Americans could have channeled some of those funds to build a more permanent structure for the DV-Pidits camped out in the sidewalk in Panitanki.



Looks like its time for all Nepalis to start kicking Ass. If the Chhetris conducted their first National Covention in Surkhet last week demanding proportional representation, can the Bahun Mukti Morcha and the Movement for the Autonomy of Aristocrats be far behind


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