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Weekly Internet Poll # 349

Q. Do you think there will be talks between the MJF and the eight-party government?

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SAGAR SHRESTHA

Fluid situation

RUNNING DRY: Many Kathmandu residents are already facing a crippling water shortage.

The limbo will last a little longer and create more complications

ANALYSIS by **SHIVA GAUNLE**

Everywhere you look, there is uncertainty. There is no consensus on any major political issue. The will to find political solutions to problems seems to be at an all-time low.

The follow-up to Girija Prasad Koirala's visit to Biratnagar was lackadaisical. Yesterday the prime minister met with UML leader Madhab Kumar Nepal, and the two are said to have agreed tentatively on dates for the election to the constituent assembly. What those dates are is not yet certain. The longer a decision on dates for the election is delayed, the more

difficult the November scenario looks.

In any case, agreement on poll dates must come after consultation with the other six parties too, and there is no sign of the much-discussed eight-party meeting either. The coming week could see the interim parliament sitting again, and an all-party government meeting, but issues such as minority representation, ensuring a reliable petrol supply, and reopening closed schools appear to be on the back burner.

The vacuum in decision-making is exacerbating the already fragile law and order situation.

The YCL continues its intimidation, ransacking

district administration offices. The violence between the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha's Goit and Jwala Singh factions claimed its fourth life this week yesterday. In the cantonments, the Maoist fighters are getting restless, while the verification process remains stalled. Madhesi, janajati, adibasi, and tharu groups across the country are stepping up demands for representation. New groups, some of them militant, are mushrooming, further destabilising the state.

The fuel crisis will not go away until the subsidy-supported price differential is removed. Until then, the erratic supplies could prove to be a flashpoint for more street action. The murder of a World Bank engineer yesterday by the JTMM (Goit) is a serious setback to the energetic resumption of development

projects. Schools remain closed because the government could not implement an agreement its immediate predecessor signed with protesting teachers.

The bargaining between and within parties looks set to continue, as does the inability to find political, rather than

Editorial
Same old Nepal

p2

Nation
Talk shop to political party

p4

bureaucratic or law and order solutions to the myriad issues being thrown up. The longer the country remains in limbo, the more political, ethnic, social, and economic problems rear their heads. The process to get back on track is becoming even more difficult and complicated. ●

Signature
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SAME OLD NEPAL

So Girija Prasad Koirala has paid another flying visit to Biratnagar. Every time this happens it is followed by some dramatic pronouncement. This time the only drama was that he made a statement about how declaring a republic is not 'easy', which pleased neither the republicans nor the monarchists in his party, nor the NC's fellow travellers, the CPN-M and the UML.

This is what Koirala should be spending his time and energy on:

1. Resolving the deadlock in parliament
2. Finding a comprehensive framework to address the demands for representation most prominently from the madhesi
3. Getting his government to get cracking on delivery
4. Devolving powers and finding another way to run the nation. The situation is getting just too complicated for the country to be governed from Koirala's bedroom in Baluwatar.

The non-inclusive structure of the political parties, their lack of consensus-building within parties and between them, as well as the inability of the 7+1 to prove to Nepalis that there is government and that it can deliver have given the governing alliance a major credibility handicap. What we are seeing is not a promised 'new' Nepal but an 'old' Nepal run by the 'same old' faces.

The one party that fought and suffered long and hard to liberate the 'people' with violence has been unable or unwilling to make a smooth transition to mainstream politics. Its ministers in government are perceived to be no different than past ministers who loved to pontificate from the pulpit rather than show by actions that they are serious about improving the living conditions of the people. Nepalis, long used to being let down by the *thulo manchhes* in the capital, are not surprised. But they are deeply disappointed.

Sometimes it's not real implementation but the perception that the government is serious about implementation that will satisfy the people. Given how little we have come to expect of Singha Darbar, launching a few fast-track infrastructure schemes or a national campaign to raise the quality of government schools or upgrade staffing in all district hospitals would do the trick. But there isn't even the collective intelligence to do such showcase activities.

And who will believe all the rhetoric about inclusiveness from the Big Eight when their own internal party structures are so dominated by high castes? As the most revolutionary member of the alliance you'd expect the Maoists to at least show tokenism, but they are even worse than the NC and the UML. Of the 35 member CPN-M central committee 25 are bahun-chhetri. Even in the western region where the Maoists declared autonomous Gurung and Magar zone, nine of the 13 districts have bahun or chhetri chiefs. Of the 37 central committee members of the NC, there is only one dalit. Of the 15 permanent members of the UML, 13 are bahuns.

We are not going to have a new Nepal unless the parties first start putting their own houses in order.

THE PAST IS ANOTHER COUNTRY: Members of the YCL and the ANNISU (R) destroyed statues of past kings around Nepal on Tuesday.

Got Plan B?

The onus is on all Nepalis to steer the country back on track

For three years, since first visiting Nepal in 2003, I worked to stop US aid to Narayanhiti. With the Nepali diaspora, we campaigned in Washington DC on human rights, started a website, lobbied the US Congress, organised forums, worked with the media, and



GUEST COLUMN
Daniela Ponce

protested in front of the White House. I say this to hopefully get your 'okay' in allowing yet another arrogant foreigner to talk. Come up with a plan B, that is.

Don't expect the UN to tell you that the peace process is failing. There are jobs, and a world reputation to keep. But it is no small matter that UNMIN's second phase of arms/ armies registration and verification has been 'delayed.' Neither is the lack of political will in parliament to pass basic legislation that would

have perhaps enabled the elections to the constituent assembly.

It is clear that the same issues underlying the conflict permeated into the peace process. The tarai uprising changed the power equation and also highlighted the need to democratise the peace process so all marginalised communities can feel ownership of it.

The lack of inclusion is felt across the board. Within the NC, the Koirala dynasty still kicks. It's business as usual that Prime Minister Koirala took his daughter Sujata, and not his foreign minister to meet Sonia Gandhi at the SAARC summit last month. Or that the party district presidents' meeting wasn't able to ask for more than "clarity on the monarchy". The UML isn't much better. Despite the lack of consensus within the party, Madhab Nepal does not seem bothered by an un-elected, un-representative parliament deciding the fate of the monarchy.

Why do the leaders feel so empowered to speak on behalf of the people? Ironically, though most Nepalis tend to associate with one political party or another, those very parties are generally dismissed as corrupt and irrelevant. Why not make them accountable instead?

The Maoists have never bragged about their love for democracy, but they have lied about their 'commitment' to the poor, and to their own cadre. In the countryside, they have replaced the semi-feudal system with yet another system of fear and exploitation: their own. But they should at least be loyal to their own supporters, and stop using the inhuman conditions in the camps as a bargaining chip.

And please, send the kids home.

Without acknowledgment, punishment, and compensation (truth, justice, reparations) for crimes committed, insecurity will remain. After the war in Guatemala, vast impunity led to the mushrooming of gang activity. That's where the YCL is going. If not them, who is next? Impunity is rampant here, and blatant. Maoist leader and Minister Matrika Yadav recently said: "all prisoners must be granted general amnesty in the wake of a new Nepal." No one has ever been prosecuted for war crimes or crimes against humanity in a court of law in Nepal or elsewhere. Deals have been made to keep it that way, as is clear in the secrecy surrounding the Rayamajhi report. Violators didn't just walk away unpunished, they were rewarded with positions of power.

In Latin America we'd never dismiss airily the forces controlling an army. And as democracy day in Dakshinkali pointed out—with the army's 21-gun salute, band, and fanfare for the king—you shouldn't either.

In addition, there are new advisories for US citizens travelling to Nepal. The CPN-M is still on its list of terrorist organisations. And that's a legal basis for Washington to funnel money to the king's allies again.

I advocated against US aid to the palace—military and otherwise—because I was encouraged by the Nepali people's determination to shape their own future. Now, again, there are serious issues to address. The Nepali people must come up with a plan B: make human rights a priority, democratise, educate, mobilise. Continue to inspire people all over as you did with the Jana Andolan. ●

Chilean Daniela Ponce conducted her graduate research on the role of student movements in Nepal. She was most recently with the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington DC.



SAGAR SHRESTHA

Biratnagar's bookkeepers

This mercantile town is a hotbed of nation-defining politics

Biratnagar, settled in a glade less than 75 years ago, still bears a potted-plant look. Unlike old tarai towns such as Janakpur, Birganj, or Nepalganj, which grew organically, the settlement here is predictable.

Neat little plots by roads running at right angles to each other, sedate bungalows,



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

orderly shopfronts, no children playing football in the street, not even on a Saturday evening. There are no abrupt turns, no blind alleys, and no surprises for a visitor taking a leisurely stroll. The dullness of the cityscape, however, is made up for by the rumour-mongering around Traffic Chok.

Local journalists eagerly await every homecoming of Girija Prasad Koirala. These are their chances to scoop national headlines, and Koirala often obliges with pithy soundbites on issues of national

importance.

Early this week, speculation was that Koirala would deliver the final blow to the monarchy and effectively steal the Maoists' thunder.

Instead, he delivered a damp squib, saying that it was not as easy to establish a republic as many of the lesser politicians believe in the coalition that he heads.

Nobody understands the staying power of the monarchy better than the man who has been fighting it for over six decades. He knows that for a declaration of a republic to be significant, the objective conditions that support the king have to change.

The April Uprising has severely weakened the five M's that have always supported the monarchy—the military, the mandarins, the merchants, the mendicants, and the mediators. Some of these traditional forces now support some form of democracy for tactical reasons, but it will take a lot more for them to turn republican.

The merchants continue to be the most

committed supporters of monarchy in whatever form. Nepal's mercantilists have been cosy with the rulers since Jung Bahadur. Chandra Sumshere refined that the relationship further, and Juddha, who benefited from the boost in trade during World War II, invested some of the loot in industry. Biratnagar was home to some of his entrepreneurial ventures.

King Mahendra courted Mananges and Marwaris in his efforts to build a parasitic economy based on the vulnerabilities of state protection in neighbouring India. King Birendra gave continuity to the tradition, and screwdriver manufacturing, repackaging of exports, re-routing of imports boomed in Morang. During the 1970s, almost all the country's big business houses thought it essential to have a presence in Biratnagar.

In these glory days, Matrika Prasad Koirala schmoozed with Marwaris. The Golchhas had a close relationship with Surya Bahadur Thapa. The Madan Lal-Chiranjivi Lal duo patronised Bhupal Man

Singh Karki, and Tolaram Dugar brought Kirtinidhi Bista to Biratnagar.

The town also came to be known as the home of various prime ministers. It has been the stomping ground of all three Koirala brothers, Man Mohan Adhikari, Nagendra Prasad Rijal, Surya Bahadur Thapa, Mahesh Acharya, and Bharat Mohan Adhikari. Not too many are proud of Badri Prasad Mandal, but he too has an independent support base here.

That pahadi domination of this town is being questioned after January. For an emerging group of madhesi, Upendra Yadav is Biratnagar's new icon. He is now a sworn republican, but his distaste of the mainstream parties and Maoists is even stronger than his anti-monarchy sentiments. His connection with Morang's influential Marwari community isn't yet clear. The monarchy has powerful backers in this mercantilist town and Koirala seems to have reluctantly accepted this for now. But he has to balance this with his republican constituency. ●

LETTERS

ROCKY ROAD

Who would have thought it would come to this: that one of the most respected papers in the country would call Pushpa Kamal Dahal a 'moderate', and that we'd not split our sides or hurl ('Peace train', #348). As distasteful as it is to admit this, you are right. I might extend that assessment to add that he's a middle-of-the-roader because he's as greedy as the rest of them.

The fellow-passengers analogy is a good one; after all, not long ago communists in states that were left-unfriendly identified themselves as 'fellow travellers'. In this case, we are all journeying together all right, on what appears to be a road to nowhere.

Sanjeev, email

I was impressed by CK Lal's well-researched 'Rocky road to republic' (State of the state, #348). The article comes at a time when Girija Prasad Koirala has presented us with a stark choice between two dictatorships—one under the rule of his own Nepali Congress, with the eight parties in tow, and the other, reverting back to the previous model, which was shunned by the eight parties for being exclusionary.

Do the Nepali people really have no choice other than this chronic republicanism? Most of us really just want to chug along the middle democratic path. Lambasting the king alone won't help GPK this time, although my sympathies are with him, since the UML's Bharat Mohan Adhikari is threatening to pull out from the interim parliament and the government, if things do not start taking shape as conceived during Jana Andolan II.

The honeymoon phase is now over, eight-partywallas. The people want to see the democratic baby kicking and well, and bawling out a new mantra for political nirvana. And this is not as simple as the rebel's republican ruse which won't succeed in any case, given our geopolitical limitations and pressure from the international community, which wants to see a peaceful democratic dispensation in Nepal, ceremonial monarchy and all.

Surya B Prasai, email

Right now, the Nepali people blame the prime minister for protecting the king. After all, so many lives were lost with the goal of removing the king from power and from the country. But as it turns out, the true hindrance to peace is not kingji or Girija babu. It is ethnic

violence, and the YCL, which is run by morally and ethically corrupt people with mental issues.

Prachanda is not at all in control of his quasi-political military party and seems more intent on taking over the country, rather than following party guidelines. And so, for his own safety, he's promising the world to the fools below him. But we should all know one thing: republic or no, poor and rich people will continue as they are now.

Living in a third world country means having to deal with huge trade offs between limited choices. But the Maoists, while they still have the support of many people, continue to promise us heaven so we feel that it's all the other parties who are responsible for the recent setbacks. Sure,

take legal matters into their personal discretion. Then who will tame them?

Nubina Shrestha, Lancaster

The YCL makes me sick. My spouse is from mainland China and I've heard enough stories from my in-laws (who were 'bourgeois', i.e., educated professionals) to know how these things spiral into insanity of the kind propagated by the Red Guard.

Nima T, Shanghai

PAST LESSONS

History cannot be rewritten or destroyed, which is why I am so concerned about the demolition of so many historical monuments and statues, no matter of which religious group or king. We need to preserve them at least to respect the workmanship of the artists. Yes, we are deeply angry at the monarchy, but why waste energy on lifeless objects? The monarchy will be gone one day, and it will be good to have its relics in a museum, so future generations can know about the elites who treated their own countrymen like animals.

Gaurav Nepali, email

OLD BIASES

Fukuyama fundamentally fails to define 'democracy' or 'liberalisation' ('The history at the end of history', opinion, #347). Bush and his cronies also fail to do so, and we've seen the outcomes. He presents a modernist position of liberalism that is a western, protestant economic and socio political theory that has clearly failed in

many places (just look at the current political issues in the UK). Instead of arguing superiority, such academics should focus on the postmodernist success stories in South Asia, such as the development of legal theory in India, and acknowledge that modernism is not the answer to all.

O Spencer-Shrestha, Nepal Society, School of Oriental and African Studies, London

BAD LANGUAGE

Your newspaper's opinion poll "What is the best option for King Gyanendra?" (#347) is highly flawed, considered from the perspective of how to make a good research question. The fourth option, 'hang on tight' is understood in many different ways by several readers I spoke with.

This struck me when I saw that the largest number of respondents chose 'hang-on tight'. After all, this is at a time when the masses are overtly expressing anti-monarchy views. Most people I asked said that to them the phrase meant that he

should be executed—hanged. I also asked which option they would pick and all of them—republicans included—said 'hang on tight.'

Do be careful while using idioms. Or it starts to seem as if you want to garner support for the monarchy in a clandestine manner by fooling the people in favour of the monarchy.

Badri P Bastakoti, email

UPSIDE DOWN

Yea, and verily I say unto thee, the Ass speaks the truth. All the fears of the impending apocalypse in Nepal aside, it really does often feel as if the country has fallen into some bad film about medieval theatre, where the ass is the wise one. You're spot on about no one taking night buses to conventions any more. Having had the opportunity to observe the slowly changing habits of some of my new neighbours (certain comrades who shall not be named), I can safely say that while power does not necessarily corrupt, it can buy you modest middle class cars, schools for your kids, flashy boots and t-shirts, and mirrored sunglasses. Not so much a proletarian revolution as a somewhat tasteless assault of middle class aspiration, complete with hideously upholstered plastic-covered sofas.

Name withheld, email

My family-by-marriage is, I soon found out, very sober indeed. My regular hysterical snorts of laughter on reading *Nepali Times*' back page were greeted with an alarmed silence in my first few weeks living with them. Now, six months later, the father-in-law is also a devout reader of the Ass. This is something, given that these good people are otherwise very suspicious of anything that seems like a flippant, good time.

Anusha, email

LETTERS

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

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you can build castles in the air, but do you know how difficult and time-consuming that is?

Effective development programs come from rigorous testing and cross-checking of strategic plans, and keeping government staff in check. I wonder how Maoists are going to do all that.

Dino Shrestha, email

CLUELESS

Pranav Budhathoki is more or less bang on about our puerile communists ('Young Clueless League', #348). I don't recall reading anything coming out of Nepal which suggests that we should be embracing the YCL comrades rather than ignoring and abominating them, and believe that such articles underline *Nepali Times*'s even-handed reporting.

But the article raises eyebrows too. I don't think paying YCL gangs for neighbourhood watch-style patrols is going to do any good. It will only encourage people and groups, violent or otherwise, to

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The rise of a party

In a decade, the MJF has gone from being a talk shop to one of the most powerful forces in national politics

MALLIKA ARYAL

In 1997, a group of madhesi intellectuals and students banded together to discuss their concerns and issues. There was no formal membership in this Biratnagar-based group and participants included leftists and members of other mainstream parties. The common denominator was their disenchantment with the big parties and the sense that their debates were largely ignored. The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum soon emerged as the most-respected, representative platform for madhesi issues.

In the same year, the Maoists celebrated their first anniversary underground by intensifying their struggle in the mid-west, Nepal had three unstable coalition governments, and the human rights situation deteriorated as scores were detained by the state.

Ten years later, the Maoists have entered into the peace process, and the MJF has turned relatively violent. Both, however, are now registered as parties with the Election Commission and much of the fight for influence in the madhes is between these two fronts.

Insiders tell us that the Maoist leadership was sympathetic to the Forum at the start, and even instrumental in organising it. Around 1999 Upendra Yadav, then a regular member of UML, started becoming closer to the Maoists.

In February 2004, Upendra Yadav, Maoist leaders Matrika Yadav and Mohan Baidya were arrested in Delhi. Upendra Yadav was let go after a couple of months, while Matrika Yadav and Mohan Baidya were handed over to Nepali authorities and were released in 2006. Those close to Upendra Yadav say that during the time of his arrest he was already trying to distance himself from the Maoists because of discrimination he felt in the ranks within the Maoist hierarchy and



RAM SARRAFF

TARAI RISING: This mass demonstration in Birganj, one of the many during the Madhes Uprising, was attended by almost 100,000 participants from all over Parsa.

because he did not agree with the Maoist plan to divide madhes into 'Madhes Autonomous Region' and 'Tharuwan Autonomous Region'. Vijay Kant Karna, chairperson of Jagrit Nepal says, "No one was happy in the tarai with the Maoists because they called it Madhes Government but high ranks in their party were given to pahadis."

After the 1 February 2005 royal takeover Upendra Yadav and Jaya Prakash Gupta, former general secretary of the MJF and present Nepali Congress MP started travelling back and forth between India and Nepal to prepare for a movement in Nepal. After last year's April Uprising Upendra Yadav returned to Nepal and in the eight months after Jana Andolan II, the MJF had successfully held meetings in almost all the districts of Nepal.

Since then, the forum and Yadav have been accused of both flip-flopping and forming alliances with Hindu

fundamentalist groups in India, such as the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In December Yadav attended a meeting of rightwing Hindu groups in Gorakhpur and spoke out publicly about making Nepal a Hindu nation again. A month later he was leading the movement for a secular federal republic.

"He can be highly influenced by others," says Nepali Congress MP Amresh Kumar Singh, adding, "If you try to play with all the powers, you forget the cause you were fighting for." Like most madhesi leaders who do not actively profess membership in the MJF, Singh too is said to have had a falling out with Yadav.

Jaya Prakash Gupta, who is close to Yadav, says the accusations of alliances with the palace and Indian fundamentalist groups are misguided. "If mainstream political parties meet with big Indian leaders, no one calls that an 'unholy alliance'," Gupta told us from Biratnagar.

Gupta said that since Gaur, Yadav has not been allowed to move freely or explain "his side of the story".

That Gupta and other moderate madhesi leaders took a careful line on Gaur while speaking to us is an indication of the pan-madhesi appeal that the forum still has. On the one hand, they argued, Gaur was 'retaliation' for months of harassment and disruption of MJF meetings by the Maoists Tarai Mukti Morcha. On the other, most admit it was a tactical mistake.

"If the MFJ had been willing to sit for talks right after the Madhes Uprising, they could have bargained their way into more madhesi representation and investigations of Lahan and Nepalganj, and pressured the prime minister to implement the promises made during his second address," says Chandra Kishore, editor of *Terai News Magazine* in Birganj. "Now, after Gaur, everyone fears the forum as a

criminal organisation."

Sarita Giri of the Nepal Sadbhawana Party-Anandi Devi, says the MJF is not in the least militant. "They are not armed, Gaur was retaliation against the Maoists because they had disrupted their activities in Bhairahawa and Nepalganj," she argues.

Meantime, there is said to be a few faultlines showing in the forum, one between the more left-wing members and Yadav, and the other between Yadav's supporters who believe this was the right time to register a party and Gupta's group, which argues that fundamental issues need to be settled before deciding to contest elections. There are signs of a split in the ranks—an insider tells us that of the 25 members in the working committee, only 13 members' names were on the list given to the Election Commission during registration. Gupta pooh-poohs this and says that though his proposal lost out, he will support the MJF as a party.

Yadav gets the most publicity, but there are other prominent figures in the forum, such as veteran leftist leader Sitananda Raya, and MJF secretary general Ram Kumar Sharma. There are two vice chairmen Bhagyanath Gupta, a professor at Birganj's Thakur Ram Bahumukhi Campus, and Kishore Biswas Tharu, a former member of Nepal Sadbhawana Party.

"As a political party our agenda is pretty clear—we want democratic system of governance, autonomous federal structure, proportional elections, and we want Nepal to be a republic" says Jitendra Sonal, MJF's secretariat member.

Analysts say that given the lack of commitment seen on the part of the government to resolving madhesi issues, the MJF as a political party could take off stronger than those who call the forum irresponsible might imagine. ●



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“A new war strategy”

KIRAN PANDAY

Nanda Kishore Pun ('Pasang'), Maoist central committee member, PLA deputy commander, and vice-chair of the joint arms management committee spoke with *Nepali Times* about arms verification and the Maoists' performance in government.

***Nepali Times:* Why are the Maoists under attack from all sides?**
Nanda Kishore Pun: When we pushed for a republic, national and international powers felt that the Nepali people would lose faith in other political parties. We were expecting these challenges when we gave up the war and joined mainstream politics. That said, it is difficult to oppose an alliance that is conservative, regressive, and highly influenced by foreign forces.

Your proposal that the interim parliament declare Nepal a republic didn't garner support.
We don't expect everyone to agree with that proposal. If there is consensus, we will go forth with that. Those who want to save the monarchy are worried that the Maoists will lead once Nepal is a republic. They are using this issue to create obstacles.

Is there revolt simmering within the CPN-M?
Our 'people's war' was long and difficult. So many came to it and and so many more left. There were many ups and downs, some did really well and reached high up in the party, while others escaped. Laxman Tharu, who escaped from our party, had links with regressive and other power centres. We were discussing whether or not to take action against him when he decided to quit the party.

Why has your relationship with India blown cold now?
India did not like us talking about Nepali nationalism. When we said Nepali is being Sikkimised, they fuelled the madhes movement and turned on us. They are trying to turn Nepali into another Bhutan. We don't want to be enemies with India, but they also have to understand our difficulties.

Have you brought about any changes since you joined the government?
The roots of the 'bureaucracy' were deep in the old Nepal. We have always known that, and realise that we cannot do much unless there is a transformation in that sphere. We joined the government to successfully conduct elections to the constituent assembly and move parliament to declare Nepal a republic. When we know that we cannot do either, we will take a different path ahead.

They say there are thousands of minors in the camps.
The media associated with the UN said that there are 9,000 minors in the camps. Even Ian Martin has said that, but that is just a rumour. The UN should understand that it has taken on the role of a guardian and be careful before making blanket statements that could hamper the peace process. If they do not respect the tripartite agreement, we can also criticise the UN. We know what kind of people are in the UN, who they are loyal towards, whose money is running the organisation, and what kind of force has entered in the name of peace keeping.

Why has the arms verification process stopped?
The government has a new war strategy. It thinks that withholding money and rations from the fighters will make some of them escape the harsh conditions and others try to revolt. The main obstacles in the arms verification process now are the ministries of Home Affairs, Finance, and Peace and Reconstruction.

The art of spin

Let's talk about all the good things

Washington DC – At a conference here, attended by people from over a hundred countries, the Beed was asked the same questions repeatedly. How the 'civil war' situation in Nepal is, and whether the Maoists are taking over the country.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Now these people are clearly not ignorant about Nepal's recent history. What they are is ill-educated. Can't blame them. After all, look at the primary sources of information out there—the Indian papers, the websites and wire services give the impression of continuous disturbance in Nepal, and the US has issued another travel advisory.

There are no good stories out there, because we haven't been telling them effectively. Why aren't we letting the world know how, since April last year, we've been undergoing a transition few countries in the world have managed. The former rebels are in government, and the fate of an over 200 year-old institution, the monarchy, awaits decision by a constituent assembly. Also in this short time we've agreed on federalism in principle, and communities that have been excluded for decades are finally being allowed a voice. People are travelling freely within their own country. It's hard to get a seat on a plane coming into Nepal. Public offerings of shares are over-subscribed, the stock exchange index is climbing, and

people are thinking about investing again. And virtually all these developments are homegrown, the result of Nepali efforts.

It's true enough that the business of media thrives on sensationalism, but who says we just have to sit quiet, resigned to our fate? There are any number of strategies we can cobble together to build a positive communication strategy for Nepal. There are ways to counter the impact of what the Beed likes

girls appearing for SLC in the last few years.

The failure of the government of Nepal to appoint ambassadors is unpardonable. But our diaspora isn't doing very much for the motherland either. The talk is still about problems rather than solutions. It seems that, as Nepalis become more upwardly mobile, they get more and more cynical about Nepal. One bidesi Nepali recently admitted as much, saying "it doesn't really matter what happens in Nepal,



KIRAN PANDAY

IMAGE BUILDING: A peaceful poetry recitation in Kirtipur by students during Jana Andolan II gave a hopeful message about the situation in Nepal to the rest of the world.

to call "Thursday columnists"—reporters who translate the gossip in the midweek tabloids and file them as legitimate stories on the international wires. We may be used to reading such speculative, mud-slinging pieces, but what do you think the world makes of them? Especially when that is all they read, and almost nothing on our successes, such as how the emphasis on education for girl children has led directly a 50 percent increase in the number of

Nepal-bashing is a habit.”

All these reasons are why we need, in whatever capacity we can, to tell our stories and tell them well. The old shangri-la story was tired enough. Do we really want to be saddled with little more than a 'shangri-la gone sour' image—the royal massacre and the Maoists, relieved only by Everest. It's incredible how much more you can do, if you have some control over how you are perceived. ●

New Millennium

The nomination period for the 2008 Millennium Technology Prize has begun. The prize is awarded for any innovation that improves the quality of human life and encourages sustainable development.



THE MILLENNIUM
TECHNOLOGY
PRIZE

Previous winners include Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the worldwide web. Candidates can work in any technological field, anywhere in the world. Nominations can be submitted by scientific academies, universities, and research institutions. The nominations should be made by regular mail, no later than 1 October. Detailed instructions are at www.millenniumprize.fi. The winner will be announced and awarded on 11 June 2008.

Go Liverpool

It's time again for Carlsberg's annual 'Win a football trip to Liverpool' campaign. Participants



fill out a coupon available at selected Carlsberg outlets. The winner, who will fly to a Liverpool FC game at their home stadium on an all-expenses paid trip, will get to present the Man of the Match award. Last year's winner was Yugesh Bhakta Shrestha.

Dream holidays

Marcopolo Travels is offering new packages for holidays in Malaysia under the 'Dream Holidays' package with a two day- three night stay at either Kota Kanabalu or Kuching. Also on offer are seven day-six night Egypt vacations starting at Rs 32,000 on twin-share basis. Two- and three-night Star Cruise Singapore package are available for Rs 54,000 on twin-share. All prices are subject to tax.

Life

Life, billed the biggest fashion store in Kathmandu, recently opened at the United World Trade Centre. The store offers branded clothes, shoes and accessories for men, women, and children from Nike, Reebok, Bossini, Pepe Jeans, and Puma, and a section devoted to kurtha-suruwal. Life is owned by Soap and Chemical Industries.

New food

The Soaltee Crowne Plaza recently launched a new restaurant, Kakori, which serves traditional north Indian Awadhi-style kebabs, curries, pulaos, and biryanis. Nawab Haider Kazmi is an advisor. Soaltee Crowne Plaza is a five-star deluxe hotel spread across on 11 acres of land, and hosts Nepal's biggest casino and Kathmandu's only 24-hour shopping mall.



I dissent

Laxman Chaudhary ('Roshan') in Nepal, 13 May

नेपाल

When we announced that we were splitting from the CPN-M and organising our own struggle, the Maoists started a systematic smear campaign against us.

Those who question our decision think we will start a new armed movement in the name of ethnicity. Yes, this is a struggle, but we will not take up arms. During arms verification, we were ordered to hide some of our weapons and technical equipment. We did so, but now we still have them. We will not use them, nor will we hand them over to the Maoists. If the government is ready, we are willing to talk to them and hand over the weapons. If we really wanted to spread ethnically motivated terror, we could provoke the Tharus to do so. But that would be unfortunate for the entire country.

We know so much about so many Maoist leaders that we could expose them if we wanted to. But our struggle is not against a person or a leader in the party. We do not trust the party's current policies—they can neither capture power via armed struggle, nor be a part of the government and bring about radical transformation.

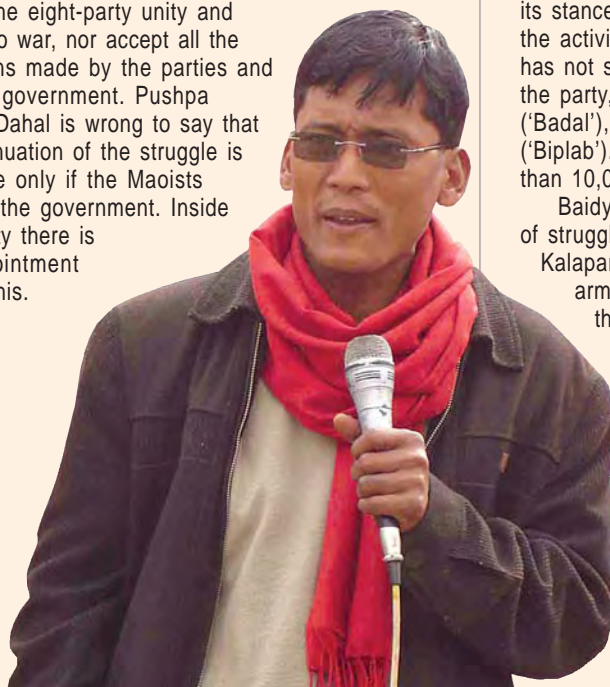
The Maoists used ethnic issues during their movement, and are now doing the same with other issues to lure some people and assure others. They want to show their flexibility and so sign all kinds of agreements, but this hurts the party. There is also no longer the feeling of sacrifice that drove the party until a year ago. The leadership is simultaneously espousing a peaceful policy and encouraging party workers to accept a 'new' model that promotes terror and violence. The people will only trust the Maoists if they publicly accept that their war was a failure, and work towards setting a progressive, constitutional path.

The CPN-M's leadership is desperately trying to hide the inconsistencies within the party,

particularly the financial crisis. The fighters are in camps that are quite different from the luxurious city life some of the leaders are getting used to. This inequality is not a result of the 'people's war', but of the broadly consensual reformist line the party is taking.

Forget about the days of Mao, Lenin, and a socialist world. We must now focus on what the people want. The only hope in Nepal for any transformation is unity between the eight parties, and in civil society. To abandon the wishes of the people and for one party to dominate politics would lead to failure. Janajati and adibasi voices are no longer weak. The Tharus have also risen. Yet there are still kamaiyas in the homes of Maoist leaders. Questioning such practices is considered tantamount to being against the struggle. But one must always speak out against inequality, even inside one's own party. The leaders make mistakes too, and it's wrong to say that all their decisions were good. Our struggle is against this culture of unquestioning acceptance of leaders' decisions.

For the Maoists now, both flexibility and rigidity could be suicidal. They can neither break the eight-party unity and return to war, nor accept all the decisions made by the parties and stay in government. Pushpa Kamal Dahal is wrong to say that a continuation of the struggle is possible only if the Maoists stay in the government. Inside the party there is disappointment about this.



KARNA SHAH

Left in disarray

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 16-22 May

घटना-बिचार

While CPN-M chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been lobbying to declare Nepal a republic before the constituent assembly elections, there are rumours of a struggle against him within his own party.

A highly placed source told us that members of his party are criticising him for not being able to announce election dates. They are also not happy with the arrangement for the fighters in the camps. They are frustrated about the party's uncertain future, and say Dahal made concessions to India that went against nationalist feeling.

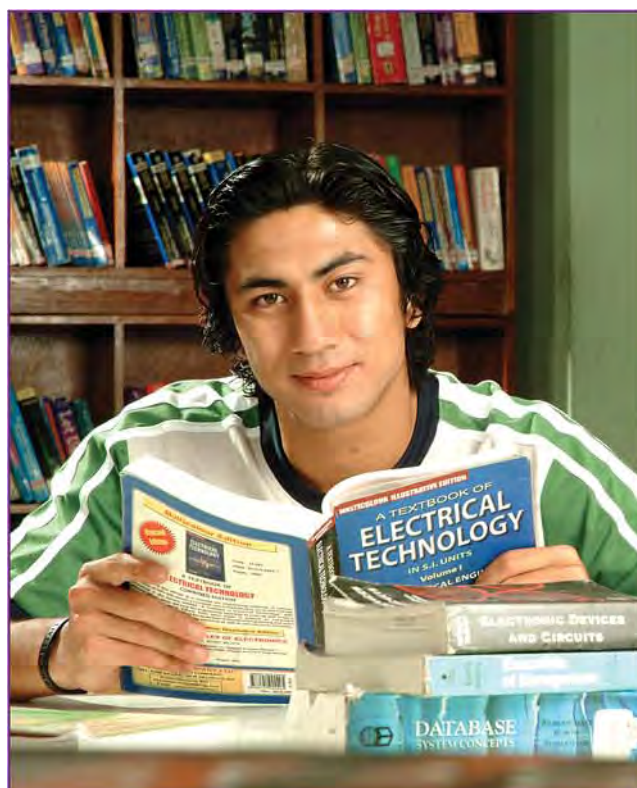
Even staunch supporters, such as Mohan Baidya ('Kiran') are becoming critical of him. When Baidya was released from an Indian prison seven months ago, political analysts predicted that this could disrupt the CPN-M's internal politics. At the party's recent central working committee meeting in Kamidanda, Kabhre, Dahal was again criticised. Observers say that an internal struggle against Dahal will have serious consequences.

The CPN-M is under pressure from the other parties to change its stance on the return of the property seized during the conflict, and the activities of the YCL. Baidya maintains that the Maoist movement has not stopped and that seized property will not be returned. Inside the party, his supporters are said to include Ram Bahadur Thapa ('Badal'), Janardan Sharma ('Prabhakar'), and Netra Bahadur Chand ('Biplab'). A highly placed source told us that Baidya believes more than 10,000 fighters will support him in a campaign against Dahal.

Baidya blames Dahal for not pushing nationalism, the 'third level' of struggle now emerging. He wants to address issues like the Kalapani argument. Many believe that this new phase will also be armed and that the Maoists will use the 5,000 modern weapons they reportedly hid in 13 different places in the first round of the arms/armies verification process. The recently-ousted [sic] Laxman Tharu [sic], who is said to be faithful to the 'third level' struggle group, is said to have over 500 of these. (See 'I dissent'.)

Baidya's biggest strength is Janardan Sharma, who is very popular with the fighters. The fourth division of the 'people's liberation army' is allegedly holding secret meetings to strategise against Dahal's policies.

There is alarm that a potential split in the Maoist ranks would harm the peace process and democracy, by encouraging regressive forces.



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Poudel vs Yami

Jana Aastha, 16 May

आस्था

Minister of Peace and Reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel is telling to anyone who will listen that he had told “Girija babu” not to allow the Maoists to control the Ministry for Physical Planning and Works because they’d make a mess of Melamchi. Poudel also says Girija Prasad Koirala told the Maoists that Poudel’s ministry would take on some of the tasks of the Ministry of Physical Planning to create a rift between the Maoists and Poudel.

Any time Poudel and Minister of Physical Planning and Works Hisila Yami meet, they argue. They recently argued at a meeting to discuss how to spend the money allocated for the camps. The general opinion was that the committees, comprising the chief district officers of the districts where the camps are, PLA cantonment commanders, representatives from Department of Buildings, and district accounts officers, should approve spending on the building of permanent structures for the fighters in the camps. Yami said the budget should be coordinated just by Maoist army commanders. “We don’t know who the fighters are, how many there are, or how many want to return home, so why spend taxpayers’ money?” Poudel asked recently. He says the construction should

only start after the next round of verification, when the number of Maoist fighters would drop by over 50 percent.

Meanwhile, it is understood that the engineers who will be involved in the survey will be paid Rs 75,000 plus benefits. The country is paying Rs 3.1 million for the survey alone.

Land grab

Naya Patrika, 16 May

नयाँ पत्रिका

During the first emergency in 2001, the then Royal Nepal Army’s 23rd Brigade encroached on some land around their cantonment in Baglung. During the royal regime they took over two-and-a-half hectares to construct a helipad for the king. “It started during the first emergency, and by now the army has taken over almost a hectare of my land. I got no compensation, and nor do I think they will return it,” says Sahdev Rajbhandari, who is a central committee member of the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce. “During the royal regime we were scared to speak. But now, a year after the restoration of democracy, there still isn’t anyone listening to us?” he added.

Land belonging to Baglung’s former mayor Rishi Ram Sharma and deputy mayor Padma Chandra Rajbhandari has also been encroached upon and now lies inside the Nepal Army’s barbed wire-protected cantonment. The

land of most victims was captured in September 2005, when the king was visiting Baglung. Only a handful of them have received compensation from the district administration office, and they all say it was inadequate, given that 0.05 hectare normally go for over Rs 800,000 here.

Colonel Rabintra Shrestha of the 23rd brigade admits that land has been seized, but says in most cases the army was compelled to do so. Shrestha and Baglung CDO Krishna Prasad Lamsal say that they can only address people’s grievances if the orders to do come from ‘above’.

The Nepal Army has seized land in other parts of Baglung too. In Jhingate they seized another 1.25 hectares of land, and in Biyou they took 1.5 hectares. The army’s spokesman says that land was seized all over Nepal and that return and compensation will be agreed upon at the local level.

School scandal

Editorial in Kantipur, 16 May

कान्तिपुर

The Maoist-affiliated Nepal Education Republican Forum (NERF), which claims to protect the rights of teachers, has indefinitely shut down private and public school across Nepal because the Ministry of Education failed to implement the agreements signed in March. NERF is demanding that private educational institutions provide



MIN BAJRACHARYA

appointment letters and salaries linked to qualifications, and annulment of the Company Act.

The protesting teachers and the ministry signed a six-point agreement in March when UML’s Mangal Siddhi Manandhar was the minister. The government was to implement the agreement by 23 April. But soon after the deal was signed, the interim government was set up and the agreement forgotten. The present Minister of Education, the UML’s Pradeep Nepal, said publicly that he knew nothing about the agreement, which was widely publicised when it was signed. That was an irresponsible remark, and spurred NERF to resume its agitation.

As a result, schools across Nepal are closed indefinitely, while the Ministry does not even bother to talk to the teachers. Nepal should understand that as a minister he is obliged to implement the agreement signed

by his predecessor.

It’s been over a week since the Maoist-affiliated ANNISU-R padlocked the accounts sections of private schools demanding a fee ceiling. In higher education, the positions of vice chancellor of various universities have still not been filled. The entire education system has come to a complete standstill due to these agitations, and looks chaotic.

Those agitating should also understand the challenges the interim government is facing and that there is only so much that can happen during a period of transition. And while the government’s priority is elections to the constituent assembly, it doesn’t mean they can ignore the agreement made in March. The protesting teachers also need to understand that this is not the time to demand the cancellation of the three-year education plans, education strategy according to party policies, and so on.



The government is happy with the government’s work!

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट Basu Kshitij in Annapurna Post, 12 May

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Conspiracies are being hatched to send us back to war. But we will not leave Kathmandu. It is now the turn of feudal conservatives to go to the jungle.”

Deputy commander of the PLA Barsa Man Pun ('Ananta') quoted in Rajdhani, 14 May.

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A photogenic

Photojournalism has taken off in a big way in Nepal in recent years. The range of subjects receiving coverage, the quality of the images, and their use in print media for maximum impact have all improved dramatically.

These winning images of the first ever photojournalism contest organised by the National Forum of Photo Journalists (NFPJ) and Photo Concern are some of the excellent photographs taken in the last year. Ninety-one photographers submitted 328 pictures, but there were just 13 winners, three each in the news, feature, sports, and environment categories, and the grand prize winner 'press photo of the year'.

Sagar Shrestha's dramatic Jana Andolan II shot bagged the Rs 50,000 press photo of the year award. Winners of the top three spots in the individual categories were: Rajendra Manandhar, Ravi Manandhar, and Sundar Shrestha for news; Eakal Silwal, Chandra Shekhar Karki, and Sailendra Kharel for features; Sailendra Kharel, Janak Nepal, and Saligram Tiwari for environment; and Udipt Singh Chhetry, Tashi R Ghale, and Prakash Mathema for sports. ●

The contest was judged by veteran photographers Mani Lama and Nrip Dhoj Khadka, NFPJ president Bikash Rauniyar, Kantipur editor Narayan Wagle, and industrialist Gajananda Vaidya.



ENVIRONMENT, THIRD PRIZE

PLEASE MAKE IT STOP: A young girl finds time for contemplation in a brick factory in Kathmandu, 2006.

SALIGRAM TIWARI



GRAND PRIZE

NEVER TOO YOUNG TO BE PUT DOWN: A young boy fighting off members of the Armed Police Force during the April Uprising in Gongabu, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2006.



ENVIRONMENT, FIRST PRIZE

POLLUTED FAITH: It's business as usual for temple workers as devotees take 'purifying' dip in the Bagmati by Pashupathinath on Shrawane Sombar, 2006.

year



SAGAR SHRESTHA



SAILENDRA KHAREL



NEWS, SECOND PRIZE

BLIND PREJUDICE: Vision-impaired protestors demanding a quota in the interim parliament at Singha Darbar, Kathmandu, 2006.

RAVI MANANDHAR



FEATURE, FIRST PRIZE

BEARING IT ALL: Women and their children taking home firewood along the banks of the Narayani river in Gaidakot, Nawalparasi, 2006.

EAKAL SILWAL



SPORTS, SECOND PRIZE

CAN'T TOUCH ME: There's fierce competition at the annual horse race in Manang, 2006.

TASHI R GHALE

Deadly silence

A free media is essential for a free society

Most of us live our lives by years. We mark the passage of time with birthdays, anniversaries, and religious and secular holidays that come up each time the calendar cycles. Weeks follow weeks, months drift by, and New Year—whether Nepali, Newar, Nauroz, Lhosar, or Julian—is always a time of celebration. Another trip around the sun for our bruised planet and our stressed selves.

But a friend of mine is currently marking his mental calendar in much smaller increments: day by day, hours, minutes, probably even seconds. His name is Alan Johnston.

On 12 March 2007, Alan was driving home from his job as the BBC correspondent in Gaza City, Palestine. He was almost at the



HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

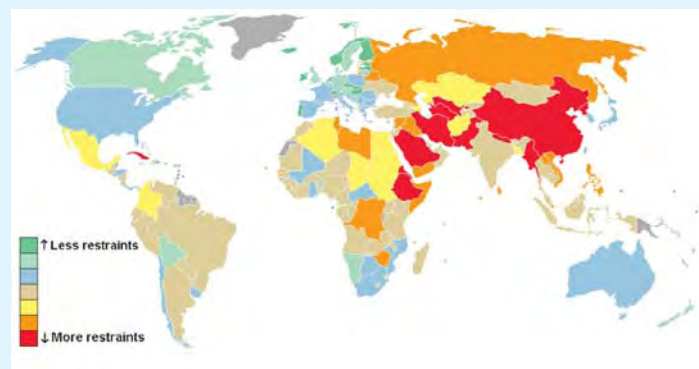
end of a three-year assignment reporting on the violence, politics, and tragedies of that tiny strip of embattled territory. He'd covered Israeli forces coming

and going, shelling and bombing, and Gaza militants firing back. Mostly he'd got to know the Palestinian people and the rest of us knew them through him.

Subhuman scum with guns picked up Alan as he drove towards his apartment that day, and they whisked him off into the darkness of captivity—probably a concrete box of a room in an obscure apartment block somewhere, either underground or with blacked-out windows. Until earlier this month, no public demands had been made by people purporting to be his abductors. Now they say they want militant prisoners released from UK jails. Reportedly, they also want money and weapons.

Those demands—whether from his actual kidnappers or not—are immaterial. What matters is the human plight of Alan Johnston, alone in a dark room, uncertain of his fate, counting off the seconds, minutes, and hours, living day to day, perhaps aware of the momentous occasions that pass by with the march of time.

Thursday, 10 May, was his 60th day in captivity. The week before was World Press Freedom Day and there were rallies by Alan's colleagues around the world, demanding his safe and immediate release. His 45th birthday was on 17 May and on Sunday he'll have been in captivity 70 days. Unless he's let go, which could happen at any time. Or not. The hours tick by in the darkness of his prison.



Alan's kidnapping is about the larger issue of press freedom, the rights of media workers everywhere to seek and report the truth. We have ways of dealing with governments who suppress information. In democracies, we take them to task or court and sometimes we win. Authoritarians are vilified in the media and by brave NGOs like Amnesty International and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

What do we do about faceless militants misguided enough to think that they achieve even an iota of their twisted agendas by depriving an innocent of his freedom. We hold rallies, we try to talk to them through middlemen, we suffer through our powerlessness.

Nepal has more than its share of nasties who cross the line and harass media workers. We've seen it recently in the tarai unrest and all too often during the civil war. Jitman Basnet's ordeal at the hands of the army; the murder of Gyanendra Khadka in 2003 by Maoists. There are many others. No one has paid any price for these atrocities and, probably, no one will.

I can only ask *Nepali Times* readers to join me in calling for Alan Johnston's release, and for freedom of any other incarcerated media worker anywhere, in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Congo. Let them go. Let the information flow. To sign an online petition from 70 countries demanding Alan's release, go to http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6518185.stm

A free media is the best weapon a free society can have. Free Alan Johnston now. ●



MANOJ SHRESTHA

Acid attacks

Men are waging chemical warfare on women and getting away with it

MANOJ SHRESTHA
in BIRATNAGAR

Poverty at home had forced Akriti Rai, 22, to move to Itahari to work. Santosh Rai, a soldier posted at the nearby Nepal Army barracks, fell in love with her and they got married.

Six months later, Santosh, his first wife and sister poured acid on Akriti. Local Maoists rescued her and took her to the women's rehabilitation centre, WOREC, in Biratnagar. The burns on her face had infected, and although she survived, Akriti is scarred for life.

"My future is finished, but my husband and the others must be punished," Akriti told a meeting in Biratnagar recently attended by the chief district officer, police chief, lawyers and doctors. The army said it would carry out an internal investigation, but Santosh has been recently discharged and his wife has been jailed pending investigation at the Sunsari District Jail. His sister has been freed on Rs 10,000 bail.

According to women's rights organisations there have been dozens of cases of acid attacks on women in eastern Nepal in the past three years, but there are

many more that are never reported.

Sadina Khatun was breastfeeding her baby near Biratnagar last year when her husband Mohamad Aslam poured acid on her accusing her of having an affair. Both Sadina and her baby were badly burnt. Her husband was arrested the very night of the attack, but was released on bail by the Biratnagar appellate court. "My husband is walking around as if nothing happened," says 20-year-old Sadina who now lives with her parents, "I have no money to take care of my daughter. Please help me to force him to compensate me."

Rita Debi Mahato was attacked last year by four men who accused her of having an affair. Her right eye was destroyed and one year later her face is still deeply scarred and wounds on her chest are suppurating. Police still haven't caught the perpetrators although they are well known locals.

In Sunsari, 18-year-old Indian national Punam Kumari Sabariya was raped by four men who later poured acid on her. Her husband and his family have disowned her. The culprits haven't been arrested. Palsi Debi Yadav, 17, was doused with acid by her

SCARRED FOR LIFE: Akriti Rai, (above) whose soldier husband poured acid on her, at a meeting of acid victims in Biratnagar this month. Rai and others like her said they were going public because their attackers have not yet been punished. Sadina Khatun and her baby were both injured in an acid attack by her husband and her father-in-law, who were acquitted by an appellate court.

husband and father-in-law who said she didn't bring enough dowry. Palsi Debi's family complained to police, but her in-laws forced her to withdraw it.

Not all the victims are young. Forty-year-old Janaki Debi Mehta was attacked with acid by a group of men for simply speaking up at a meeting to resolve a land dispute. Since a doctor at the Inaruwa district hospital registered the case as an 'accident' the attackers cannot be tried.

Two local organisations, WOREC and SIKSA, are helping the victims seek justice through the court system but are facing numerous legal hurdles. Since most victims survive acid attacks, the courts do not register the cases as 'attempted homicide'. Activists see acid attacks on women as just the outward manifestation of widespread hidden discrimination and cruelty faced by Nepali women.

Says lawyer Dilli Dahal: "There are legal complications, and the fact that police don't do proper investigation after the incidents means most perpetrators escape prosecution." ●

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New chapters in the long history of betrayal

Burned again

The signing of the peace treaty spawned two schools of thought, and a pleasant interlude when both theories had credibility and vied equally for our allegiance. The now-bankrupt Idealist hypothesis appealed to optimists who took the Maoists at their word, figured the war was behind us and better times lay



MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

ahead. Those afflicted with the logic syndrome also jumped aboard, arguing that the comrades needed a soft landing and would abide by the agreements since the government had obsequiously met their every demand. Surely their histrionic speeches at the signing means they'll behave like all the rest, work within the system, and think only of their next Pajero.

Many of us leapt to this conclusion out of desperation. The traumatic war had dragged on for so long, everyone badly needed a rest. Those who warned that you can't teach an old tyrant new tricks were dismissed as whiners and cynics. 'Our' totalitarians were less rabid and dogmatic than other ideologues and, given time, would embrace the tolerance and gentility so characteristic of Nepali society, and the harmless buffoonery so endemic in politics.

Having bought into this rationale big time, the Hand recalls first hearing the competing school of thought, recognising its grievous potential, and feeling his heart sink.

Instead of being humbled by the great duties of national statecraft, goes the now verified Realist theory, the Maoists will be

emboldened by their new-found legitimacy. The fact that they've moved from the jungle to the halls of power proves that their brutal methodology works, and they aren't switching strategies in the middle of a winning streak. More extortion, bullying, and militancy will be on their agenda, this time from an unprecedented position of strength, and there will be less need for sincerity and cooperation.

Since reality plays no role in the party's version of events, their minority status in parliament and the inconvenient fact the war ended in stalemate makes no difference; the cadre have been told victory is theirs, they are the government, and that's enough to change their behaviour for the worse.

The Hand has grown used to unexpected results and being proven wrong. Life in Nepal is fuller of surprises than most places, but this particular guessing game I really hated to lose.

We saw all too soon that things weren't exactly as we hoped. Supremo Pushpa Kamal Dahal not only signed the treaty in a false name, his statement that the Maoists accepted peace only to satisfy the will of the people also shamelessly obscured the fact that few wanted this bloody war in the first place.

That insincerity was to be the defining theme of post-war Nepal was soon driven home by a nationwide wave of extortion and militant unionism. Minds reeled, especially among the surviving Idealists, as to how such criminal activity could be perpetrated by members of a legal party in government. Even Maoist apologists stopped rationalising the offences, which has been

perhaps the only benefit for the public.

The list of broken promises is long and depressing (favourite headline of the week: 'Maoists seize farm, destroy vegetables'), but most of us only grasped the scope of this betrayal when the UN got so few guns for the containers and so many Maokiddies for the cantonments.

The recent unleashing of the 'Young Communist League' to burn government offices and beat up opponents has found employment for the real comrades supposed to be in the camps, and trashed the last vestiges of the Idealist Theory. A Red Guard by any other name is still a thug.

If all is fair in love and war, the comrades' lack of good faith in peacetime is deeply troubling and suggests that they see little difference between the two. Maoist doctrine promotes constant class warfare; signing a piece of paper simply shifts the venue. Instead of wasting time in the hinterland fighting the army, take the struggle to the doorsteps of those with something worth coveting. That Supremo Prachanda is chauffeured around in a stolen SUV, which would get him thrown in jail in most countries, indicates such policies originate at the top.

Betrayal of the people's trust is nothing new in Nepali politics, but there is a lot riding on the outcome of this particular venture. At the very least, we've learnt another lesson the hard way: you can take the comrades out of the jungle but you can't take the jungle out of the comrades. Some people never change, others get worse; especially those with deceit in their hearts. ●



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WAVE Mister & Miss University 2007



Mister University International 2006 Niraj Baral
(Nepal Commerce Campus)

WAVE magazine in association with World-CARP Nepal is organizing the WAVE Mister & Miss University Nepal 2007 (WMMU) to be held on 15 June in BICC, Kathmandu. The contest aims to bring together student representatives from various backgrounds from across the country, to present a model of one world family to all people through the medium of a contest.

WMMU seeks beauty not only externally, but also in the quality of character with which people carry out their lives. The participants are encouraged to pursue personal excellence through challenging one's limitations and to use their capacities for the sake of others by promoting a life of service dedicated to creating harmony in all aspects of life. WMMU encourages delegates to become campus peace ambassadors who can spread the culture of peace throughout their campuses.

This is also one contest where Nepal has been able to make a mark, for Mister University Nepal Niraj Baral is the reigning Mister University International. He outshone contestants from 27 countries to win the title on August of 2006 in Philippines. The winners of this year's contest will participate in the Mister and Miss University International to be held on July 7 in Seoul, Korea.

The entry form for this year is available in the May issue of WAVE magazine as well as in its website www.wavemag.com.np. The last date of entry is 18 May. Interested individuals or colleges can send in their participants. For further details visit www.mmui.org. Application form can be submitted at

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Double standards

The World Bank should know that good governance begins at home

The whole sorry Wolfowitz affair looks like it is finally drawing to a close. It is hard to believe that he will stay on much longer at the World Bank, and it is time to start thinking about the future of that institution. From the first, I was critical of the way he was chosen because I have long opposed the 'old boy' agreement between the United States and Europe, by which the US always appoints the head of the World Bank, and Europe, of the IMF. This unspoken arrangement dates from the founding of the Bretton Woods institution at a time when colonialism was still alive, and makes no sense in the 21st century.

There are reports that European leaders have told the US that if they get Wolfowitz to step down quickly and quietly, they will be allowed to choose his successor. Such a deal would amount to a wasted

opportunity. There is no better way to restore confidence in these two institutions than to finally open up the way their presidents are selected.



COMMENT
Joseph E Stiglitz

One of the lessons of the Wolfowitz debacle is that it does matter how stakeholders and employees feel about the bank's leadership. The world was prejudiced against him from the start because of his involvement in the Iraq War. But people were willing to give him a chance. Some said he could be another Robert McNamara, the US defense secretary who helped mire America in the Vietnam War, but used his service to the bank as penance.

There was reason for hope: Wolfowitz was forceful in arguing for debt forgiveness and an end to agricultural subsidies. But he also hired old friends and political allies—many of whom did not have experience in development—and sealed himself off from his staff, alienating the very people whose support he needed. As we learned from the case of Larry Summers at Harvard, relationships inside institutions matter, and not just those with donors and funders. In this respect, Wolfowitz, while an intelligent and pleasant person, did not do himself any favours.

Worse, he did not seem to have a grand vision for the bank. Instead of a development strategy, there was simply an expansion of the anti-corruption agenda initiated by his predecessor, James Wolfensohn.

As the World Bank's chief economist under Wolfensohn, I argued that failing to deal with corruption risked undermining growth and poverty alleviation. By the time I left the Bank, these ideas were widely accepted, and I was pleased that Wolfowitz planned to continue the bank's efforts. But the fight against corruption was always only one part of a more comprehensive development agenda. Aid effectiveness can be undermined as much by incompetence as by corruption.

Sadly, the anti-corruption agenda of the Bank also became politicised. There was a push to give money to Iraq—a country rife with corruption—while other countries were accused of corruption without adequate evidence or details. The aims of the campaign were laudable, but it generated hostility and ill-will, undermining its effectiveness.

The World Bank, in its efforts to support democracy and good governance, must insist on the highest standards of due process: charges of corruption should be treated seriously, and the evidence turned over to national authorities for use in open, transparent, independent proceedings. Wolfowitz's successor needs to bear in mind that for anti-corruption campaigns to be seen as effective, they must be fair and transparent.

The same is true of the selection of the president of the World Bank. A sad and sorry saga could have a happy ending if Wolfowitz's successor is chosen through an open, transparent process. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Joseph Stiglitz is a Nobel laureate in economics and author of *Making Globalisation Work*.

VACANCY



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Deadline to receive application no later than May 28, 2007. Applications received after the submission date will not be considered. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.

Newars, new and old

French scholar Gerard Toffin’s work on Newars is finally available in English

Newars are supposed to be Nepal’s early settlers, according to one theory even lending their name to the country. They form not a caste, but a complex community—in 1854, the Muluki Ain divided Newars into the equivalent of the four castes, from Brahmins (Rajopadhyaya and Vajracarya), to dalits (Pode and Cyama khalak).

BOOK REVIEW
Tri Ratna Manandhar

There were only scattered references to Newars in the classic accounts of Nepal (Kirkpatrick in 1811, Hamilton in 1819, Hodegson and Oldfield both in 1880). The first comprehensive piece of research on Newars appeared in 1923, in KP Chattopadhyaya’s *An Essay on the History of Newar Culture* followed, 25 years later by Dilli Raman Regmi’s *The Antiquity of the Newars of Kathmandu*. Western scholars started to focus on Newar communities after Gopal Singh Nepali’s full-length book in 1965. One of them was Gerard Toffin.

In the last 30 years, Toffin, now a director of research at France’s mammoth National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), has written a number of papers exploring different aspects of Newar culture. Most of Toffin’s work is in French (bar a two-page preface to the 1993 *Nepal: Past and Present*, which he edited), and non-speakers have long felt the need for translations. Himal Books’ new volume of selected papers by Toffin is good news for academics and laypeople.

The 13 research papers in *Newar Society: City, Village and Periphery* are based on extensive fieldwork and personal observation and constitute a significant contribution to the social study of Nepal.

Toffin begins with the Citrakars, Rajopadhyayas, and Maharjans of the city. In his work on the painter Citrakars, he focuses on their two main guthis (*si guthi* and *desla guthi*), kinship and marriage patterns and, of course, their art, which sometimes functions as medicine. Toffin describes how they treat *Jwanakai*, which is thought to be caused by snakes, by painting two lions on the sides of the affected area. The chapter on the Rajopadhyayas mainly deals with the history of the caste and their role as the priests of Hindu Newars. The author argues that, despite substantial changes in their tradition and rituals, the religious identity of the Rajopadhyayas is still largely intact. Toffin’s chapter on the social and territorial organisation of the Maharjans of Kathmandu city—their *twah* or *tol* system—and their vocal and instrumental music. To readers who equate Maharjans with farmers, this new information is fascinating.

The three papers on the little known Lalitpur Maharjan village of Pyangaon come from Toffin’s long periods of fieldwork. He makes a detailed study of Swagumi, who “adopted a Jyapu lifestyle and became Newarised” in one, and in another provides a picture of intercaste relationships, particularly between ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ castes, and the position of Swagumi within the Newar caste system. Toffin’s third Pyangaon paper is about the socio-religious structures of the Maharjans, this time as villagers. A detailed comparative study of the Maharjans in city and village would have been welcome.

Two chapters are devoted to the little-known Balami and Pahari communities who live on the ‘periphery’, defined here as “the intermediate space located between Kathamandu Valley and the middle hills of central Nepal and its forested areas”. Toffin convincingly identifies them with Newars, because their caste, kinship, and *guthi* rules are the same, as is their language.

Three papers focus on specific aspects of Newar society, the guthi system, the Mohani festival, and funeral rites in relation to the Newar castes. Toffin explains how guthis “regulate several aspects of Newar social and religious life, and even possess economic functions in some limited cases”. Similarly, he analyses how Panauti Newars observe the Mohani festival with special devotion to Asta Matrika, Nava Durga, Taleju, and Kumari, and how the 14 different Newar caste, from Rajopadhyaya to Pode, of the area perform funeral rites.

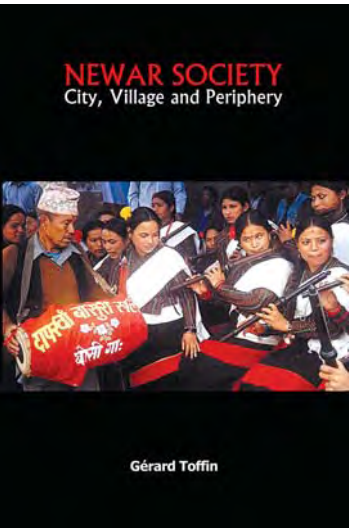
The last two chapters deal primarily with the recent changes in urban and rural Newar society. One focuses on the role of modern ethnic associations in constructing the identity of a particular caste or group, the other on the changing status and role of women in Newar society, in the context of recent amendments in the Muluki Ain.

All the papers were written at different times as independent articles. Together they sometimes

lack coherence, or can get repetitive. What pulls the volume together is Toffin’s 21-page introduction, which successfully synthesises the different themes explored and reflects an up-to-date understanding of Newar society and culture.

There are some omissions and errors. Except in a few cases, the data on population, household, and the like are dated. For example the 2001 census puts Citrakars and Rajopadhyaya at over 5,000 each, while Toffin’s essay says there are 1,200 and 1,500 respectively. The Jyapu Mahaguthi and Citrakar Samaj are mentioned, but not the Manandhar Sangh which was founded in 1954. The discrete index entries for Manandhar and Sayami, the same caste group, are confusing. *History of Nepal* was written by BJ Hasrat, and not RL Hasrat. The collection would also have benefited from a glossary of Newari terms.

These minor shortcomings do not, however, lower the standard of the book. Toffin’s work is a significant contribution to the



Gerard Toffin, *Newar Society: City, Village and Periphery*, Lalitpur: Himal Books for Social Science Baha, 2007, soft cover, pp. xiv+443, Rs 790.

study of Newar society and culture, and, as the publisher’s note says, “will certainly be very useful to the Newar themselves to help them understand their own society differently, if not better. It will also prove extremely informative to non-Newars in understanding one of the most ancient, complex, and fascinating social groups of Nepal.” ●

(Tri Ratna Manandhar is professor of history at Tribhuban University.)

Gender and Development Specialist

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Nepal Resident Mission (NRM) was established to assist ADB Headquarters in processing and implementing projects and programs, country programming, and economic and sector work. It also coordinates ADB’s activities with other resident diplomatic and donor mission, NGOs, academic institutions, local think tanks, private sector, and other members of civil society in Nepal. ADB’s Policy on Gender and Development (GAD) provides the framework for addressing gender concerns in ADB’s program of activities. Under the GAD Policy, ADB is implementing the second phase of a regional technical assistance (RETA) project on *Enhancing Gender and Development Capacity in Developing Member Countries*. To assist with the implementation of the RETA, ADB is inviting applications from national GAD specialists to work as a long-term consultant (1 year, renewable) in NRM.

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Due to the volume of applications, ADB will not be able to respond to inquiries about application status and will only contact shortlisted candidates. Applications lacking the job reference number and job title or using the wrong e-mail address will not be considered.



ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Sacred realms** mixed media works by Seema Sharma Shah at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, until 26 May, 11AM-6PM daily. 4218048



EVENTS

- ❖ **1st International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Film Festival** organised by the Blue Diamond Society, daily screenings at 11.30 AM-6PM, 18 and 20 May at Sundhara Bakery Cafe and 19 May at Martin Chautari. 4443350
- ❖ **Travelers and Magicians** a film by Kyhentse Norbu at the Lazimpat Gallery Café, 6.45 PM on 18 May, seat reservation recommended.
- ❖ **Yuva Chalfal Shrinkhala** on 'environment friendly jute - the efforts of a young Nepali girl,' 3-5PM, 18 May at Martin Chautari. 4107599
- ❖ **The Honest Thief** performed by Studio 7, performances on 18-20 May, 7.15 PM at the Naga Theater, Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Pilgrim's Book Festival** until 20 May, 10AM-8PM at Pilgrim's Book House, Kopundole. 5521159
- ❖ **Mangalbare Discussion Series** on the plight of women in foreign employment, 5PM, 22 May at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **CSGN monthly lecture** 'A People War' - Photo Tour of Nepal by Kunda Dixit, 9.30 AM, 25 May at the Shanker Hotel.
- ❖ **Youth Discussion Series** on the democratic practices of political parties in Nepal, 3PM, 25 May at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Pottery course** by Santosh Kumar from the Delhi Blue Pottery Trust, at Newa Art Ceramics in Mdhyapur, Thimi, 25 May-24 June. 9841257968

MUSIC

- ❖ **Moksh Live** presents Inner Groove at the Moksh Bar, Pulchok, 18 May, 8.30 PM onwards. 5526212
- ❖ **Kathmandu Chorale spring concert** 19 May, 3.30 PM and 6PM, at The British School, Jhamsikhel. Admission free. 5521218
- ❖ **Paleti concert series** with Gayak Phatteman followed by release of his solo album, only 70 tickets available, Rs 500 plus tax, 25 May at nepa-laya, Kalikasthan. 4412469
- ❖ **Soul of Raga** live classical and fusion music, every Friday night at Nhuchhe's Kitchen, The Organic Bistro. 4429903.
- ❖ **Open mic night** at Via Via Café, every Friday, 8PM onwards.
- ❖ **Live music** at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 8PM with Yanki and Zigme Lepcha. 4416071
- ❖ **DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers** live at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234

DINING

- ❖ **Friday evening BBQ** with live music, at the Hotel Himalaya, 7PM, Rs 499 net. 5523900
- ❖ **Walk and lunch** every Saturday at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel, six to 22 course ceremonial lunch and dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **Weekend special** with sekuwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 4411706
- ❖ **Mongolian BBQ** Wednesdays and Fridays, 6.30 PM on at the Splash Bar and Grill, Radisson Hotel. Rs 1,000 for unlimited barbeque and beer. 4422828
- ❖ **Flavours** of the Middle East every Friday and the taste of Thailand every Wednesday at The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Smorgasbord** lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- ❖ **Gyakok** at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum four diners at Rs 450 per person, two hours' notice.
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- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Woodfired pizzas** at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel 4262768, Bhatbhateni 4426587 and Pulchok 5521755
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Jazzabell café** enjoy great food, exotic cocktails and music, Chakupat, Patan. 2114075
- ❖ **Goodwill Family Restaurant** happy price menu Rs 50, everyday, 1-6PM. 5544520

GETAWAYS

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



Metro is a story of intermingled lives and fast times. Shikha (Shilpa Shetty) and Ranjeet's (Kay Kay Menon) marriage has turned boring and Ranjeet has found solace in the arms of Neha (Kangana Ranaut). Rahul (Sharman Joshi) is another young man who is silently in love with his boss, Neha. Shikha meets Akash (Shiney Ahuja) a divorcee and a struggling theatre artist. Their romance blooms even as Shikha is torn between her love for this new man and her fidelity vows towards Ranjeet. With a host of other characters, the film takes off with an intertwining of their various lives.

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NEW ARRIVAL

NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

People have been complaining all week about the rain this month. Actually, though, if you look at Met office data, this is normal, or even below average for May—the Valley has received only 50mm of its 116mm monthly quota. What is significant this month is below normal daytime temperatures, a result of the cold moisture brought in by westerly jet streams from the Mediterranean. Thursday afternoon's satellite picture shows two opposing fronts heading towards the central Himalaya, a normal sign of emerging monsoon in the subcontinent, when the westerly jet gradually shifts north but keeps oscillating. Expect more short, localised showers over the weekend.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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हरेक आइतबार दिउँसो (१:४०-२:००)
“रेडियो सगरमाथाया नियमित सुनी, अंग्रेजी सुधारी”
(रेडियो सगरमाथा र अमेरिकी राजदुतावास, अमेरिकी केन्द्रको सहकार्य)

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KIRAN PANDAY

REALLY WANT A REPUBLIC: Maoist cadres gather at the Maitighar Mandala on Sunday to show off their signature campaign for the declaration of a republic by the interim parliament.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

ARE WE THERE YET?: Some 400 people march from Bhrikutimandap to Basantapur in a rally organised by the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities on Thursday to pressure the government to announce the dates for elections to the constituent assembly and declare a republic.



KIRAN PANDAY

GETTING ON WITH IT: Motorcyclists and bicyclists evade a demonstration to protest the killing of manpower agency owner Rajiv Shrestha by using the footpath instead at the Maitighar Mandala.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

DÉJÀ VU: In scenes reminiscent of the April Uprising, policemen guard the statue of King Tribhuban in Tripureswor, after Mahendra's statue in Kalimati was demolished by the Young Communist League on Tuesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

PUPPETRY: The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities and civil society build an elaborate palace—and then a prison cell—for an effigy of King Gyanendra at Basantapur on Thursday.

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From socket bombs to whips

The American State Department has updated its travel advisory for Nepal, and has warned its citizens to desist from all non-essential visits. Congratulations are in order, because of all the embassies located in the 'Mandu it is only the Yanks who have their priorities right.

The Ass urges Kaiser Mahal to also issue the following advisory for the benefit of the Nepali college students travelling to the United States during this academic year:

"GON remains concerned about the security status of campuses in the United States and continues to urge Nepali students already in the US or contemplating a visit there to obtain updated security information before travel. Despite a manifestation of **outward calm** in some campuses and universities, individuals continue to engage in acts of violence, assassinations, and massacres. In some states gunmen freely roam the countryside and cities, sometimes openly carrying their weapons. Given the nature, intensity, and unpredictability of disturbances, Nepali students are urged to exercise special caution in the dorms, classrooms, malls, parks, and restaurants, and wear protective bullet-proof gear at all times, avoid road travel, and maintain a low profile."



You have to hand it to the Baddies. None of us said it was going to be easy, but by George they did it. They have made a smooth transition from socket bombs to whips. The head of the Maoist parliamentary group and its chief whip, Dinanathji, is flogging his fellow-MPs into shape by forcing them to race to lay siege to the speaker's perch before the madhesis do.

It has become a matter of daily routine that no sooner has the opening gong of parliament sounded than they're off to gherao the rostrum yet again. Such **fun and games**. Much less destructive than laying siege to army bases and being needlessly killed.



The **Young Kangaroos League** is sure keeping itself busy. When it's not conducting 'people courts' or planting trees, it is tearing down statues of various kings throughout the country. They sure are on the right track, because how can we ensure the peace dividend for all Nepalis by reopening schools and health posts, building roads and creating jobs until all the statues of the Shah dynasty have been pulverised, right? We have to thank the young comrades for removing these idols, and while they are at it why not have a go at those hideous statues of BP, Pushpa Lal, and Grandfather of the Nation Tribhuban from various chokes in Nepalganj and replace them with Comrade Awesome doing a smart lal salam? The moral of the story should be: don't do unto **someone else's statute** what you don't want them to do to yours.



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