



Times

Weekly Internet Poll # 359

Q. Should the YCL be part of the election security arrangements?

Total votes: 4,584

Weekly Internet Poll # 360. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com
Q. In light of recent developments, what is your opinion of the Nepal Army?

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

Meet the press

The Maoists are coming under intense criticism for their latest attempt to disrupt the production and distribution of private newspapers through their labour union.

After shutting down *Nepal Samacharpatra* (See: 'Stop press', # 354) and disrupting work at *Kantipur* through their union last month, they now have the APCA group in their crosshairs. APCA publishes Nepal's widest-selling English daily, *The Himalayan Times* and *Annapurna Post*. Distribution of both had been

severely curtailed this week.

After publishing a hard-hitting front page editorial on 22 July, APCA officials on Thursday played down the crisis saying a deal was close to being struck. The Maoist union had used alleged exploitation of cycle boys by distributors to close down the paper, but many in the industry say it was just another blatant attempt to warn the media off critical coverage.

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists, the Press Council and publishers took a joint delegation to meet the Maoist Minister for

Information, Krishna Bahadur Mahara on 25 July. Mahara washed his hands of the affair, saying the matter was between the publishers and their workers, and denied that his party was trying to undermine press freedom.

But one media publisher who has been threatened by the Maoist YCL told us: "What they are really telling APCA, *Kantipur* and all of us is, if you dare criticise us we'll hit you where it hurts."

Said FNJ's Bishnu Nishturi: "It is ironical that in a week when parliament passed the bill on the right to information, we see that right being taken away. Workers' rights have to be addressed through legitimate channels, not by stopping production."

The attacks on media come as the Maoists prepare for their

NOT US: Minister for Information, Krishna Bahadur Mahara tells a delegation of senior publishers and editors that his party has no hand in union activity disrupting media.

central committee meeting during which the leadership represented by Mahara, Chairman Dahal, and ideologue Baburam Bhattarai is expected to come under intense pressure from dissidents like Comrades Badal, Kiran, and Biplab who are supported by the YCL, Maoist trade unions, and local commissars. ●

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UNITED THEY STAND

There is more to the war of words between the military and the Maoists than meets the eye. Prime Minister Koirala told the former rebels in his cabinet that he had no prior information about the change of the security detail provided by the Nepal Army to Maoist ministers. The Army's explanation was vague.

Apparently, elite guards were provided only to Maoist ministers. Messrs Mahara, Gurung, Yami, and their comrades in cabinet had reasons to be miffed. But that doesn't excuse their immature reaction. After all, members of the CPN-M continue to be protected by their own comrades too.

If the former insurgents see as little significance in continuing to be in government as Baburam Bhattarai would have it, that is a matter of ideological difference, and should be addressed as such. Not by stirring a storm in a teacup over personal security. As if they didn't have other more pressing matters that need urgent attention.

If anything, the ruckus appears to stem from tensions within the Maoist party just as their effort to paralyse the private media even though a Maoist is Minister of Information. This is a dicey transition for the comrades. Minors lured into cantonments with promises of monthly cash allowances risk being sent out by the UN verification team.

Youngsters in cantonments are getting sick of their boy scout lives. Desertion rates have gone up, a rift between hardliners and pragmatists has emboldened local commissars to do as they please.

The Maoists need to salvage their revolutionary image before they go to face the electorate. The Madhes Uprising and janajati discontent have seriously weakened their past mobilisation. Even freed kamaiyas and newly-empowered dalits, traditional Maoist strongholds, have begun to explore other alignment options in national politics. The Maoist leadership is under severe stress as it prepares to face the fifth meeting of the party's central committee. The public rhetoric indicates tectonic pressures building up within the movement.

The seven parties need to help the peacemakers among the Maoists prevail, not gloat over their disunity. The Nepal Army must also be attuned to the compulsions of the ex-guerrillas. The uprising in the tarai diverted the attention of the nation away from the fact that we are just coming out of a decade-long violent insurgency.

There will be a heavy price to pay if parties play politics with the travails in the Maoist camp. United, they stand. If they splinter, the country will be back to square one fighting a radical faction.



KIRAN PANDAY

A conflict environment

Darfur proves the link between ecology and war

Anyone interested in peacemaking and poverty reduction should read the new United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) report *Sudan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment*.

This is not just a technical report, but a vivid study of how natural environment, poverty, and population growth interact to provoke terrible manmade disasters like the violence in Darfur.



GUEST COLUMN
Jeffrey D Sachs

When a war like Darfur erupts, policymakers look for political explanations and solutions. This misses the basic point that by understanding the role of geography, climate, and population growth in conflict, we can find more realistic solutions than through politics alone.

Extreme poverty is a major cause, and predictor, of violence. UNEP says, "There is a very strong link between land degradation, desertification, and conflict in Darfur."

Extreme poverty has several effects on conflict. First, desperation among parts of the population, as competing groups struggle to stay alive in the face of a shortage of food, water, pasture land, and other basic needs. Second, the government loses

legitimacy and citizens' support. Third, the government may be captured by one faction or another, and use violent means to suppress rivals.

Darfur, the poorest part of a very poor country, fits that dire pattern. Livelihoods are supported by semi-nomadic livestock-rearing in the north and subsistence farming in the south. It is far from international trade and ports, lacks infrastructure such as roads and electricity, and is extremely arid. It has become even drier in recent decades due to less rainfall, probably at least partly the result of manmade climate change, caused mostly by energy use in rich countries.

Declining rainfall contributed directly or indirectly to crop failures, the encroachment of the desert into pasturelands, the decline of water and grassland for livestock, and massive deforestation. Rapid population growth, from one million in 1920 to around seven million today, made all this far more deadly by slashing living standards.

The result has been increasing conflict between pastoralists and farmers, and migration from the north to the south. After years of simmering conflicts, clashes broke out in 2003 between rival ethnic and political groups, and Darfur rebels and the government, which has supported brutal militias in 'scorched earth' policies, leading to massive death and displacement.

While international diplomacy focussed on peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts to save displaced, desperate people, peace in Darfur cannot be achieved until the underlying crises of poverty, environmental degradation, declining access to water, and chronic hunger are addressed. Soldiers will not pacify hungry, impoverished people. Peace here can only be

sustained with improved access to food, water, healthcare, schools, economic development, and income-generating livelihoods. People and livestock need assured water supplies. In some areas, this can be through boreholes that tap underground aquifers. In other areas, rivers or seasonal surface runoff can be used for irrigation. Elsewhere, longer-distance water pipelines might be needed. The world community will have to help pay for this, since Sudan is too poor to do so.

With outside help, Darfur could increase the productivity of its livestock through improved breeds, veterinary care, collection of fodder, and other strategies. A meat industry could be developed for Darfur's pastoralists to multiply their incomes by selling whole animals, meat products, processed goods (like leather), dairy products, and more.

Social services—healthcare and disease control, education, and adult literacy programs—must also be promoted. Living standards could improve significantly and rapidly through low-cost targeted investments in malaria control, school feeding programs, rainwater harvesting for drinking water, mobile health clinics, and boreholes for livestock and irrigation in appropriate locations.

The only way to sustainable peace is through sustainable development. To reduce the risk of war, we must help impoverished people everywhere meet their basic needs, protect their natural environments, and get onto the ladder of economic development. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey Sachs is professor of economics and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Brain deficit

Affirmative action is an excellent way to counter brain drain

This won't surprise most of us, but a recent study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) confirms that brain drain is intimately linked with chronic underdevelopment.

When a society's best and brightest move away in pursuit of better opportunities, the prospects of progress in their home countries diminish. Nepal's experience is similar to that of any other



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Least Developed Countries (LDCs) dealing with a crippling outflow of competent individuals. And no amount of remittances compensates. An adequate pool of skilled professionals is as important as aid and investment for LDCs to get out of poverty.

The UNCTAD study notes that 65 percent of all newly graduated doctors in Bangladesh seek jobs abroad. Talk to interns at Bir Hospital and you realise the situation is even worse in Nepal.

But contrary to what many of these

bright young things, often from comfortable backgrounds believe, brains aren't only about natural endowment, but also about the investment that makes intelligence marketable. Parents contribute only part of the resources that produce a skilled professional. The rest of it comes from social investments that fund schools, colleges, training institutes or scholarships abroad.

Economic loss aside, the outflow of skilled personnel seriously damages national priorities. Educational institutions tailor their syllabi for overseas markets. Students prepare for a career abroad from the moment they finish school. The best go west, and the brightest go east. Leaders, planners, and administrators have less and less emotional stake in national development as their entire families too start lining up at embassies.

Normally, brain drain occurs when a country lacks skills due to the emigration of specialists. But in Nepal there is a contradiction: both unemployment of trained manpower and a shortage of skilled professionals. Health professionals don't want to serve in rural

areas. Engineers freelance. Scientists are more interested in not-always-practical state of the art tools rather than more mundane matters—helping people plough their fields more efficiently, raise better quality cattle, or better harness natural resources. The clincher is the supposed higher standard of living overseas.

The pull factors are also compelling. Industrialised countries need the hardy individuals required to do poorly paid, dirty, difficult, and dangerous jobs that their own nationals scorn. But, being countries with an ageing population, a selective workforce, and shorter working weeks, they also need highly qualified specialised professionals in engineering, technology, medicine, and the sciences to keep the system humming 24x7x365.

Brain drain is unlikely to slow down anytime soon. The challenge lies in devising coping mechanism in developing countries. Dual citizenship is no solution. Luring expatriates back with higher incentives ends up demoralising competent locals and in any case, their loyalties divided between their host and

home countries, returnee professionals are the most frustrated lot in any capital city in the developing world.

One of our best bets is to delay the outflow of trained professionals. Universities could award diplomas to health professionals only after they have served for a certain period in field hospitals. Internships can be made compulsory for the final bestowing of engineering or technology degrees.

But nothing matches the benefits of affirmative action and positive discrimination: when more women, dalits, janajatis, and madhesis become doctors, engineers, technologists, and scientists, it will matter a lot less that the Bahun-Chhetri-Newar elite is trooping out of the country. As it is, we could do with fewer of them in almost every discipline.

Arrangements can be made to ensure some returns on the investment made in the production and export of professionals who leave. There are a number of options, from one-time exit taxes to bilateral tax arrangements with host countries. That's one way to turn a challenge into an opportunity. ●

LETTERS

LET'S JUST GET ALONG

Your poll result last week (#358) said over 60 percent of people thought this government had not done anything in its first 100 days. Look at the flipside: in such a chaotic situation, it has still managed to hold together, put out a budget, and promised to conduct the elections. You can't expect a coalition government as diverse as this one to achieve more. It would be great if this government could peacefully organise the elections and then promulgate a constitution—which will still be based on compromise.

The media needs to look ahead positively, make people believe in the democratic process, keep political parties on their toes, and help build a positive atmosphere for social movements to be bold but non-political. You need to help build a mass movement in support for national unity. We have to believe each other, and be tolerant, compromising, and forgiving.

Name withheld, email

DISBELIEF

'Securing a future' (#358) reminded me of the Pied Piper. The soldiers have unthinkingly followed their leaders who were fighting, in fact, for money and power. Now that they are corralled, I wonder how the government expects people who were out for each other's lives to join hands and pray? What about the casualties on both sides? Are they all martyrs or just more nameless bodies?

J, email

● I agree with the Foreign Hand ('Damned if you do', Moving Target, #358). The Maoists think the entire country backs them up, while in fact no one actually trusts them. The YCL continue their rampaging activities, vandalising party offices and beating up their members. They may talk about arresting criminals, planting trees, and building roads, but their humanitarian activities are overshadowed by their aggression. Looking at their behaviour now, it seems very likely that they will reject the poll results if they lose—and the only way they're going to win is by coercion and spreading terror. Either way, we're going to hell.

Surya Thapa, email

HOT AIR

CK Lal's 'Lost in seminar space' (State of the state, #358) hit the nail on the head. This hot air convection is being powered by donor money, while the government and political parties condone it and the media is pampered and buttressed by it. In those stale discussions about inclusiveness, democracy, and poverty alleviation, whatever, some of the most vocal people only really want to project an image of commitment and say things the bigwigs want to hear. They won't do anything about anything. In this country everybody loves to tell others what they should do.

Thanks CK, keep spilling ink, and some day a leader will stop talking and Just Do It.

Neeranjan Rajbhandari, email

BACKSIDE

Keep up the good work. You guys have the guts required in journalism. However, as for the online version of your newspaper, the site goes haywire at times which can be a real pain in the posterior. Hope you can fix that soon.

Eric Shrestha, email

● I'm confused by the Ass. Sometimes it is plain unvarnished (boring) gossip and editorial-type comments, while other times it is nastiness central. We're all trying very hard to be goody-goody serious citizens of the New Nepal. Please give us a break, be as mean as you can be. It's amusing.

Arati, email

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– Kanak Mani Dixit

... Madhes rises
– Prashant Jha

... Bidesi in Nefal
– C K Lal, Bilash Rai

ALSO IN THE AUGUST ISSUE:

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– by Beena Sarwar

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– by Saad Hammadi

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BECAUSE EVERY GIRL IS SPECIAL

From *dukha* to Dhaka

Life in the hills and villages of Nepal has always been harsh. For generations, that difficulty has led many Nepalis to leave their families behind and go to the plains in search of opportunities—food, service, security, and a better life. In the face of continuous stagnation at home, that search process opened different life trajectories for migrants, taking them



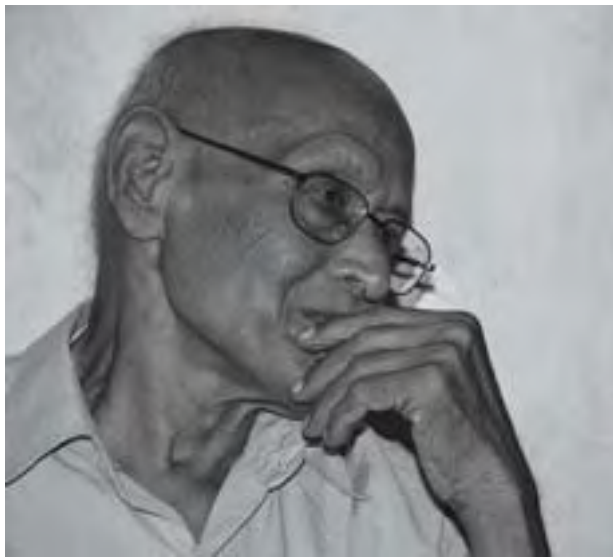
**FOCUS ON
BANGLADESH**

and their children as far away from their ancestral villages as Surinam, Fiji, and Guam.

Closer to home, Ashutosh Tiwari recently caught up with Nepali migrants and their children in Bangladesh. What follow are some of their stories in their own words.

Bhakta Bahadur Thapa Chettri, 80, Dayagunj, Dhaka

“I was born in Pokhara. I left Nepal the year Juddha Shumshere died in the late 1940s. I was 14. There was a *gallawala* (manpower agent) from Gulmi who took a group of us to *lahur*, Assam to work for the British army. Many people from Nepal’s hills were in Assam at the time, and Assam was a big state that included large parts of today’s Bangladesh. Passports and visas were not required. We



could move from Nepal to any part of the greater Indian plains easily. We worked as coolies, labourers, and security guards. In 1953, I started working as a security guard in a ship-repair company in Narayanganj, on the outskirts of Dhaka. Many Gorkhalis worked nearby in leather tanneries and textile, and sugar mills. We had a large community, and regularly held *puja* gatherings, just like in the villages of Nepal.

“My wife is a Nepali. She was born and brought up in Bangladesh. We’ve stayed together as a family with our eight children, five of whom are married to other Bangladeshi Nepalis. We’ve always lived close to Hindu temples, which aren’t easy to find these days in Bangladesh. We wanted our children to grow up learning about our festivals such as Kali Puja and Bhai Puja.

“When I think of Nepal, I think of *dukha*, of brutally hard work one has to do to survive there. Up in the hills, you work very, very hard to collect fodder for the cattle and to gather firewood. In Shillong, India, I once met a group of Nepalis. Seeing how hard they worked made me realise how lazy I had become living in the plains.”

Mir Bahadur Upadhyay (Galu Dai), 51, Nakkhal Para, Dhaka

“My father was from Ramechhap. Like many young Gorkhali men, he came to Assam to work as a security guard. He married and I am a second-generation Bangladeshi Nepali. Here in Nakkhal Para we have about 42 Bangladeshi-Nepali family. Across Bangladesh, there are about 1,000 or so families of about 7,000 Nepalis who are



permanently settled here. We are in touch with one another because we need to know who is where in order to get our children married to others of Nepali ancestry. Whenever possible, most young Nepalis marry other Nepalis of any caste. But lately, some have married Bangladeshi Hindus and Muslims too. From time to time, we have tried to get a Bangladesh Nepali Council going to air our concerns to the government here, but we have not made progress due to misunderstandings amongst ourselves. We Gorkhalis can be too touchy about perceived slights and insults.

“Bangladeshi Nepalis are gradually doing better. One Bangladeshi Nepali, Bir Bahadur Chakma (Lama), represents Bandarban district as an Awami League member in parliament. The younger ones are better educated. Some won DV lotteries and moved to the US. Others have worked in the Middle East as maids, security guards, and drivers. Some have visited their relatives in ancestral villages in Nepal. I have a government job. Most Bangladeshi Nepalis do not have their own land or homes. This is partly because Gorkhalis did not understand Bangladesh’s land laws, and did not want to get into unnecessary trouble with the law.

“We follow news from Nepal. When King Birendra and his family were killed, many of us mourned and did not eat one meal. We were ashamed, and we did not know how to explain the killings to our Bangladeshi neighbours. Last year, about forty of us protested the present monarch’s rule in front of the Nepali embassy in Dhaka. In the 1980s, Ganesh Thapa was a popular football player here, and Bangladeshis still talk about him in ways that make all of us proud to be Gorkhalis.”

Babu Bahadur Thapa, 36, Nakkhal Para, Dhaka

“I am a third-generation Bangladeshi Nepali. My grandfather was a soldier in the British Army. In 1950, after the war, some of my grandfather’s friends went to other parts of India. Some returned to their villages in Nepal. Some, like my grandfather, stayed in what is now Bangladesh. I was born and raised in Dhaka. I have a job with an international development agency here and am married to a Bangladeshi Nepali. I consider myself ‘Made in Bangladesh’.

“Nepalis have a short history in Bangladesh. Because of our facial features, we are often mistaken for tribal people from the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Our reputation here is that of peaceful, quiet, gentle people (*shanta jaat*). Nepalis are perceived to be reliable people who do not cheat and lie. We do not really have issues with Bangladeshis. When they demolished Babari Masjid in India in 1992, many of our Hindu neighbours were beaten up in Dhaka. But nobody bothered us Nepalis.



“I see Nepalis here living in harmony with one another not only in Dhaka but also in places such as Dinajpur, Faridpur, and Rangpur. In our Nepali communities, younger ones still take care of elderly parents by living with them, and relatives help cousins to get out of hardships. We have large community gatherings during Satya Narayan Puja, Saraswati Puja, Dasain, and Tihar. All of us speak Nepali, though it’s all mixed up with Bangla now.

“My regret is that, despite having lived in present-day Bangladesh for more than 50 years, we Nepalis have no permanent address here. Most of us have no land to our names. Nobody gave us any advice about how to make progress in this new land. We just drifted from one part of Bangladesh to another like nomads. Looking back, I wish our fathers had sought advice, or that someone at the Nepali embassy in Dhaka had given us suggestions so we could have done better than we have collectively done so far.”

Vunta Narayan Shrestha, Mymensingh, Bangladesh, near Meghalaya

“My father was originally from Pipaldanda, Dhading. He came to work as a security guard for the British army in the 1940s. At the time, there was a big concentration of Nepalis working in British-run factories in Narayanganj and near Dhakeswori Temple in Dhaka. Most first-generation Bangladeshi Nepalis ended up in Bangladesh after the requirements for passports and visas came into force in 1953. At the time, they did not know how to go about getting a Nepal government passport.

“In 1966, 16 Nepali families, mostly Chettris and Newars, moved to Mymensingh to work as guards at the newly-opened agriculture university. The location of the Nepali *tole* in Mymensingh has changed due to the laying of railway tracks, but it has long been popular with students from Nepal who came to study at the university. We used to play Holi with them, and celebrated all the Sakranti festivals. Every rickshawallah in Mymensingh knows where we live. In the 1980s, many Nepali families from Dhaka moved to other parts of Bangladesh—to Pubna, Kushtia, Sylhet, and Chittagong—in search of better jobs.

“Since most Bangladeshi Nepalis have no land of their own, they live the life of *jagiray*, surviving on salaries. My brother works as a medical representative. I work as a lab technician at the university here. Some Bangladeshi Nepalis are engineers, some have studied at the Bachelor’s level in India, and some have gone to Japan to study leather technology. But most are still cooks, drivers, and security guards. My perception is that we are liked here as long as we are security guards. If we try to get ambitious and try to move up in our careers, life can be a bit trying. My brother visited our relatives in Dhading for a month once. He was astonished that they thought we were big landowners in Bangladesh with high-paying jobs.”

Lal Bahadur Lama (Tamang), 78, Mymensingh, Bangladesh

“I am originally from Dolakha. I came here to work in a sugar-mill in 1946 with a group of 12 Gorkhalis. I loved the *jhili-mili* of Dhaka. We were illiterate, but we had plenty to eat, and I decided to stay here. Our reputation was that we did not steal, lie, or cheat, and we were treated well by our British employers.

“During the Pakistan-Bangladesh war, we guarded our neighbourhoods with khukuris. The Pakistan Army respected us as Gorkhas and left us alone. While Bengalis were killed all around us, not a single Nepali died. Sometimes, I wonder what I gained by settling here, I feel that, unlike in one’s own country, there is no *ijjat* here.”

With assistance from Rajeev Jha, a Nepali MBA student from Rautahat in Dhaka.

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"The madhes wants options"

Interview with Bijay Gachhedar (NC-D) in *Ghatana ra Bichar*, 25 July

So are the two Congresses close to unification?

The party should not have split in the first place. Even the unification is a year overdue. Only Girijababu and Sher Bahadur can tell us what is delaying it. This time around, I am hopeful, but I'll believe it when I see it. We never intended to split the party. We only wanted to make the party's leadership more democratic and to fight against bad practices.

Did you find there was more democracy within the NC-D?

We tried to make the new Congress more democratic, but the old ways and the old culture continued. That is why we have been speaking out against Sher Bahadur Deuba's leadership.

Do you think the elections will take place in November?

If the current law and order situation continues, a November election is impossible. Law and order must improve and the Maoists must honour their commitments. They have to sincerely tell us how they regard the election. The demands of different agitating groups including the madhesis have to be addressed, and the eight parties have to prepare a joint electoral program.

... ..

What's happening in the madhes—most major parties have lost their base there?

The madhes has sent two clear messages: they are in favour of democracy and opposed to the Maoists' style and perspective. Despite major changes in the country, the mentality of the eight-party leaders has

not changed. If they continue like this, the madhes will reject them. The Madhes has traditionally been the Congress's vote bank, but even this party will find it hard to salvage a decent position if it does not internalise the changes and adopt a new approach. The same goes for the UML. The madhes is looking for options.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

We hear you are launching a new regional party.

The big parties are more focussed on partisan interests, than madhesi rights. Instead of supporting the Madhes Movement, they are suppressing it. Madhesis are looking for a party that will represent them. We've frequently met with MPs from different parties, but I am yet to decide on a new party. My

colleagues and public opinion are both in favour of a new party.

What about the separatist calls?

Madhesis are demanding an autonomous federal state, not an independent one. Even we are against that. The communal tension is unfortunate. Our fight is with state not with the region or pahadi people.

Madhes regiment

Editor's note in *Punarjagaran*, 24 July

...

The Nepal Army is a national army, but its composition does not reflect this national character. Whatever reasons it might have been constrained by in the past, we should not now wait any longer in taking steps to make it more representative. The army has played an important role in the making of modern Nepal. Now, the responsibility of protecting Nepal's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as democracy, rests on the army's shoulders. For that reason, a madhesi regiment is essential. The Nepal Army is a professional and apolitical organisation and it does not need to wait until the reforms are instituted after elections to the constituent assembly. The madhes is demanding—reasonably—proportional representation in all the organs of the state. Political parties can calculate their gains and loses, but the army should remain be above this, and create a madhesi regiment right away.

Betrayed

Madhab Basnet in *Dristi*, 24 July

...

A recent decision to add state personnel to CPN-M chairman Puspha Kamal Dahal's security detail gives Dahal as many security staff as Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

With the deployment of these new personnel, the confidential basis the CPN-M generally works on has been compromised, since the personnel keep a close eye on their daily activities, behaviour, and other secrets. After the tape of the statement Dahal made against Baburam Bhattarai was leaked to the Nepal Army, it is clear that nothing is secret about the Maoists anymore.

There have always been moles inside the party. A highly placed source tells us, for example, about how Maoist Bhaktapur secretary Ranjit Maharjan was involved in the capture and arrest of many Kathmandu-based Maoists a few years ago, including Bhim Giri ('Ajaya'), deputy commander of Maoists' Valley special task force in December 2003, and Kathmandu commander Nischal Nakarmi. Most of those captured with the collusion of Maharjan are suspected to have been taken to Bhairabnath and have not been seen again.

Senior Kathmandu-based Maoist leader Krishna KC was also captured because his 'friends' betrayed him and the party and gave his name up. KC says the extent of collusion will only become clear when those who made the captures at Bhairabnath are questioned.

Some Maoists broke under torture and gave up colleagues' names. "If you were captured you had only two choices: prepare to die or be used by



THT Live

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Meri aamai	folk songs by Mira Rana	N2009
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Ishwor Talee	Muna Madan	N2121
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them (state security personnel),” says Bijaya Bhattarai, central committee member of the ANNFSU (R).

Smart voters

Interview with election commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav in *Jana Aastha*, 25 July

Why did you give the sickle and hammer to the Maoists? While filing for election symbols, the Maoists had put the sickle and hammer as their top choice. We just gave them the symbol of their preference. Even in India it



works in a similar way. We changed it when there was opposition from other parties.

So if the other communist parties object to the new symbol, will you change it again? No. They have to agree.

What was the outcome of the mock poll? That’s for our internal use and we don’t intend to make it

public. We are testing our managerial ability. There were two different ballots, and we wanted to see if voters would be able to vote and what problems could arise. We have not analysed the outcome yet.

Can we assume that the election will go smoothly in November? The poll showed that people are conscious and alert. We won’t have any problems from a managerial standpoint.

But there is uncertainty about the polls. The political parties so far have reassured us that the election will take place. The dates won’t change.

You yourself are from the tarai, how can you say elections will happen without solving the problem there? Yes, the madhesi issue has become a cause for national concern. The government has assured us that the problem will be addressed, and talks are now taking place. The constituent assembly is of importance to everyone, so we believe all sectors will cooperate with us.

Have the constituencies been delineated? That is a constitutional process and won’t affect us. We look at the total number of voters as long as they don’t divide one VDC into two different constituencies, we do not have problem with even a last-minute delineation.



गुहार...गुहार ! लौन बाहिर कोइ
काभेड हुनुहुन्छ ? हचौं हाम्नाई
सुरक्षा दिन फेरि कोई
आ’नस्तो छ...!!!

Maoist minister: Help! Help! Are there comrades out there? It looks like someone is trying to give us security again.

राजधानी Uttam Nepal, *Rajdhani*, 25 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ The Maoists are creating problems to delay the elections because they know they will not even get the seats they have now in parliament if constituent assembly elections are held. ”

CPN-UML’s central committee member Raghu Pant quoted in *Naya Patrika*, 22 July

Bhai-bhai

Janadesh, 24 July

जेनादेश

When a Nepal Water Supply Corporation pipe burst in Khokana due to a flooded Bagmati, there was severe shortage of water in the Lalitpur area. While 80 percent of Lalitpur got almost no drinking water, those living in Khokana, Bungmati, and Bhaisepati were most severely affected.

The NWSC had people working on the burst pipe, but they weren’t successful. Then the Young Communist League came to the rescue and something shocking happened—the Nepal Army joined the YCL, and in a matter of few hours they had successfully carried the 18-inch pipe together up to the construction site. Khokana residents were surprised and thrilled to see this.

YCL’s Lalitpur coordinator Narayan said, “We have no qualms joining hands with those who are already helping the people. Such cooperation should also happen in the future.” When asked



MIN BAJRACHARYA

about the bitterness from the past, Narayan answers, “We will never bow down in front of the enemies of the people, but we will always assist those who are assisting the people.”

The army also had positive things to say about the YCL, but *Janadesh* sensed fear in their voices. Overall, though, this was such a positive story and yet it was not covered in the media. This side of the YCL is an answer to those who think that these helping hands should be living in barracks day after day at the expense of Nepali taxpayers.



Job Opportunities

CHILD WELFARE SCHEME (CWS)

CWS is an English International Non-Government Organisation (INGO) affiliated with the SWC, and has been working in Nepal for the past 12 years.

In its efforts to support more disadvantaged children, young people, their parents and communities, it is now expanding its activities and therefore, needs to expand its team. We are looking for:

- 1) Deputy Country Representative (Deputy CR)
- 2) Senior Administrator (SA)
- 3) PA to the Country Representative (PA)
- 4) Education Programme Officer (Education PO)

We encourage the following candidates to apply:

- 1) **Deputy CR:** needs to have had a minimum of 5 years working experience at a senior management level in the development sector, preferably an INGO. S/he should possess a Master’s degree in preferably one of the following: Business Administration, International Development, Social Anthropology, Social/Political Science, or Law. S/he will have excellent inter-personal,- & team leadership skills, a born motivator, dynamic and very good communications techniques, possess strong administration and computer experience/knowledge, a good understanding of budgeting and accounting, and have near to fluent spoken and written English.
- 2) **SA:** will have had a minimum of 5 years working experience at an INGO in a senior administrative/management position. S/he should hold an MBA or similarly appropriate. His/Her command of English should be excellent. S/he will have experience in proposal writing, writing up monitoring and evaluation reports, processing of business letters, have basic accounting skills, fluent in all IT processing technology (Word, Excel, Powerpoint, etc). The candidate will also be a team-player and will be able to supervise/manage junior administrators.
- 3) **PA to the CR:** should be a highly skilled senior business administrator (MBA qualification). S/he will have a very high standard of the English language, and preferably holding a British Council IELTS certificate with a high pass mark. This position requires flexibility: very strong communication,- and excellent computer skills, including MS Word, Excel, Powerpoint, proven experience working in a high pressure environment, be an enthusiastic team-player, and accounting skills. Previous INGO working experience is recommended. A sense of humour is welcome.
- 4) **Education PO:** should have preferably a Masters in Education, at least 5 years experience in teaching preferably at pre-primary, or primary level. Early Child Development and Learning-by-Play teaching techniques will be a great advantage. Training-of-trainers/teachers experience is recommended. As a PO, you will be required to analyse needs, adapt and develop programmes, train,- motivate,- and supervise our local implementing partners in the respective education programmes we support. You must be a: team player, work independently, and possess strong communication skills, adapt to circumstances and be flexible in character, have knowledge in Monitoring and Evaluation, good English writing skills to are a necessity. You will be required to spend time in ‘rural’ Nepal, and thus be mobile.

All positions based primarily in the Pokhara headquarters.

Applications to be addressed to: Operations Director, Child Welfare Scheme, P.O. Box 231, Pokhara, Nepal. An electronic copy should also be sent to email: cwsmarco@gmail.com and submitted by 12 August 2007

Work experience and/or academic knowledge in relation to gender and social exclusion will be an added advantage.

Women, Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis, people with disabilities, and other minorities are especially encouraged to apply.

Only those candidates who have been short-listed will be contacted for a follow-up by phone and/or an interview. No telephone enquiries will be entertained.



PRANAYA SJB RANA

It's not quite time to get out the party hats yet, but Kathmandu Valley is in damage control mode. After four ignominious years on the World Heritage Sites in Danger list, the Valley, with its distinctive collection of historic spiritual sites, has been taken off. Kathmandu has been on the World Heritage Sites list for 28 years, for being home to the darbar

squares of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur, Swoyambhunath, Boudhanath, Pashupatinath, and Changunarayan. The danger to some of these sites comes from one feature of many of these sites that makes them so attractive: their near-complete integration into the daily lives and physical environments of people who live around them. As the capital becomes more

urbanised, and growing immigration puts increased pressure on new and old focal points, the areas around these old sites too are changing. Older houses are being demolished in favour of towering cement structures that obliterate the well-planned vistas most old areas had. Fast food and cheap clothing vendors have sprung up where buildings could not, and places like Patan Darbar Square are subject to greater physical

strains than before. Along with UNESCO's warning came 55 recommendations, some of which were taken on board swiftly by the Kathmandu Metropolitan City and the Department of Archaeology. Vehicles were no longer allowed into the monument areas, stone markers were placed around the sites, hoarding boards and curio shops were removed from the premises, and maps of the sites marking

THE OASIS AND THE SPRAWL: From the air, Patan Darbar Square looks like a dream plonked in the middle of a concrete jungle.

them as World Heritage Sites were put up. This was enough for UNESCO and the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) to take the Valley off the list earlier this month, citing commendable efforts to preserve its heritage in the face of

An advertisement for Closeup toothpaste. The main visual is a close-up of a young man and woman smiling and embracing. The man is wearing a yellow shirt, and the woman is wearing a green tank top and a green necklace. Below them, two boxes of Closeup toothpaste are shown: one in red and one in blue. The text "Coffee? Movie? Dance?" is written above the toothpaste boxes, and "More questions. More confidence." is written below it. The Closeup logo is prominently displayed on the toothpaste boxes.

An advertisement for Wave magazine. The main visual is a woman with long dark hair wearing a red dress, standing with her hands on her hips. Above her, the text "COMING SOON!" is written in large, bold letters. Below her, the text "13th ANNIVERSARY Bumper Issue" is written. At the bottom, the Wave logo is displayed with the tagline "talkin' about our generation". The magazine cover is also visible, showing the woman's face and the title "WAVE".

Ours for the saving

To bridge the Valley's past and future, individuals need to care

outstanding urban development.

This doesn't mean we can celebrate, though, says Rohit Ranjitkar of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust. "We mustn't let being off the endangered list make us complacent," he argues.

Many problems remain to be tackled. "Kathmandu and Patan darbar squares are allowing vehicles in again, not to mention the night markets. Boudha is blocked from all sides by buildings," explains Riddhi Pradhan of the Nepal Heritage Society, which does everything from restoration and environmental improvement to awareness-raising walks.

In Kathmandu and Patan, old houses that are part of the heritage and atmosphere of the area around the squares have been knocked down. "Zoning laws do not allow houses in the core area of the heritage sites to be demolished, yet this continues," Ranjitkar points out. Another construction bylaw does not allow buildings less than 35 feet from the monument site, and even these have to be of a certain height and should have no cantilevers. One look around some of the sites tells you how effectively that is being enforced.

The night markets, paradoxically promoted by the very municipalities



responsible for the preservation of heritage sites, are a real problem in Kathmandu and Patan darbar squares. "Anything can happen with these markets around," says Saraswati Singh of the Patan Darbar Heritage Committee. "Smoke from the food stalls stains the walls, garbage is everywhere, and there is always the fear of a fire breaking out. These are holy sites, not public hawking spaces, bulletin boards, or eateries."

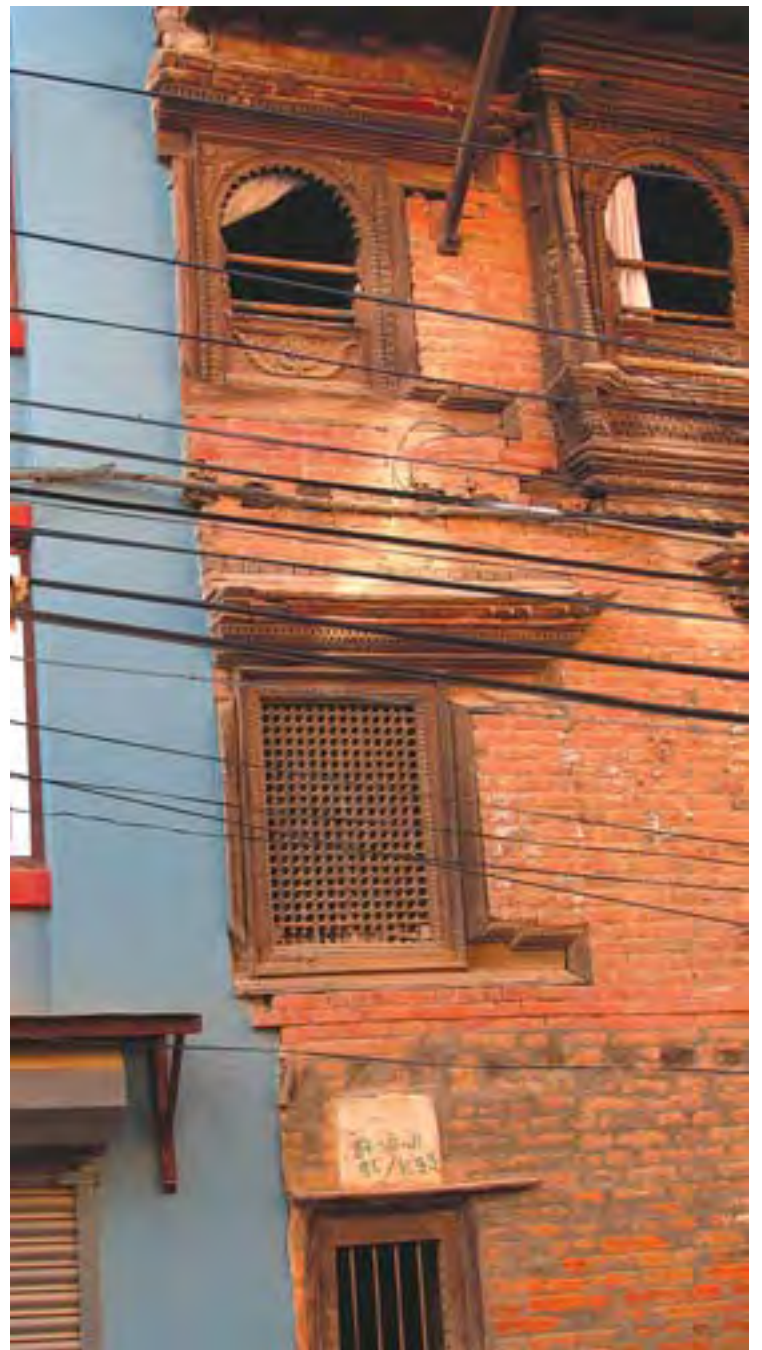
Singh also points to the disturbing trend of using these darbar squares for public gatherings and mass meetings that can and often do turn violent, endangering the sites. "There was a notice recently forbidding demonstrations in darbar squares," says Ranjitkar, adding bitterly, "But who pays attention? The prime minister himself recently attended a large Nepali Congress rally at Basantapur."

To be sure, in many parts of the city things are slowly changing, and new buildings are making at least an attempt to fit the ethos of old

Kathmandu, with traditionally-tiled facades. Prime Minister Koirala aside, support is also coming from the interim government, which has put heritage site conservation on its Priority 1 list and is giving it a large enough budget, says Rajesh Mathema at the World Heritage Section of the Department of Archaeology. The DoA will monitor an Integrative Management Plan drawn up with UNESCO and to be implemented by KMC. The plan deals largely with the private buildings around the sites, but also includes public awareness programs.

Getting the general public to appreciate the inherent value of heritage sites is essential, especially with regard to the private buildings around the heritage sites, say heritage consultants and urban planners. "Public awareness is paramount," says Riddhi Pradhan. "Whatever we've accomplished so far is all due to public awareness." Pradhan points to the conservation success in Bhaktapur, which she attributes to the love local residents have for their surroundings.

"We take our heritage for granted," says Ranjitkar. "People need to learn the value of our culture and heritage. Only that will make them stop these destructive activities." ●



KUNDA DIXIT

RUBBING SHOULDERS: Some exquisitely restored traditional residences, like the Shrestha House guest house, are cheek-by-jowl with modern monstrosities.

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The tarai issues must be resolved by Nepalis, not internationals

Leave it to us

Nepal has a new conflict and the 'internationals' can't wait to get involved. With no humility about their dismal failure in past conflict resolution efforts, and blinded by their distaste for Nepali political players, many donors are angling for a greater political role in the tarai. But Kathmandu's diplomatic corps, including UNMIN, would best keep their hands off the madhesi cauldron as their increased role could well be counter-productive.

Some well-intentioned diplomats, worried about the turbulence in the tarai, are keen to help. Others, especially within the UN, see an opportunity to step in as facilitators, a role they are used to and missing here. Madhesi groups egg them on, believing this will internationalise the issue and give them equal standing with the state.

They don't realise an outside role would be neutral and may even go against their interests—look at the Maoist-UNMIN tussle on verification. And anyway this is not the view of most madhesis, who

may be pleased with the attention but know they have to live and deal with Kathmandu politicians, not diplomats, UN peacemakers, or conflict advisors.

The problems in the tarai can still be resolved within the framework of the national polity by local actors. Only when the present establishment sits of its own accord with the protesting groups, reconciles interests, and implements promises can Nepal develop a stable political structure. The country is going through a necessary, albeit painful, phase of inclusive nation-building as a result of the opening up of democratic space. There are no neat solutions, and what will emerge is some form of compromise.

An interventionist international role could distort this fragile process by snatching political decision-making away from the ground, thus weakening local political institutions that need to be reformed and strengthened. In the case of UNMIN, closer engagement with the madhesi groups could further upset its relations with the Maoists and take focus away from its core mandate.

Many experts come to Nepal from the Balkans or Sri Lanka and view the madhesi issue solely through an ethnic prism. Their limited understanding stems from various factors: there is little literature (in English) to explain the tarai; most diplomats and donors have never interacted with madhesi political and civil society figures, who are comfortable in Maithili or Nepali; their sources are first-hand reports of violence and select interlocutors who represent only one view and have their own interests; and finally, they do not know the caste structure and district-level political dynamics. Until six months ago, most internationals had no clue about madhesis. A multimillion rupee World Bank project on inclusion barely mentioned the madhesi sense of exclusion, and a hasty postscript is now being funded and prepared.

The context is different but it is instructive to look to 1950s Nehruvian India. A democratic framework was being built in a diverse country; contentious issues were the shape of federal structure and linguistic policy. The Delhi elite faced protests ranging from street agitation in the south and west to armed struggle in the northeast. While problems remain, one of the reasons Indian democracy survives is because it was adapted to local conditions by local actors without outside mediation or solutions.

Internationals believe only they can effectively mediate in the tarai because there is a trust deficit. But the trust issue is not irresolvable. After all, the Nepali Congress and the Maoists, who have a history of acrimony, together carved out the 12-point agreement. Such dialogue on madhesi concerns will happen with initiative and pressure from the ground on leaders to talk, not with more activity, staff, or report-writing at UNMIN.

Like it or not, India is a critical player in the peace process and its distaste for international involvement in Nepal has to be considered. New Delhi grudgingly agreed to UNMIN. But the tarai is much closer to the Indian heartland across the open border. The internationals must out of pragmatism give up hopes of a greater role.

But India's displeasure is a sideshow. For a sustainable solution, this problem must be resolved by the Nepali political class. The cocktail circuit is abuzz with ideas—some donor officials recently suggested the EU offer its good offices on the tarai issue. One wonders whether they realise the absurdity of the idea of their sipping tea with madhesi leaders in Patna and Darbhanga hotels.

Let Nepali players—politicians and agitators—do their job, make mistakes, and carve out an accommodation. A Birganj-based analyst sounds a cautionary note: the more blue plate cars in the tarai, the longer this conflict stretches. Give Nepal, including the tarai, some respect. ●

TARAI EYE

Prashant Jha

Far from home



KIRAN PANDAY

NARESH NEWAR

Walking through the congested lanes of Samakhushi, 14-year-old Puja Nepali warns that her house will be swarming with people when we arrive.

"They're all displaced like us and are so desperate, ten rupees makes them happy," she says, leading us to the small room she, her father, and two brothers cook, sleep, and live in. (above, Puja and her father Gorkhay)

One brother lies on the family bed nursing a head wound he got from the local boys who resent the influx of displaced people.

The eldest brother has acute gastroenteritis, but has no cash to get to hospital. Their father Gorkhay, also ill, begs for help. "We have lost everything," says the 56-year-old.

Six years ago, Puja's mother was killed in the crossfire between the Maoists and army in Kalikot. The Rs 50,000 compensation the family received was the only aid they have ever received from the state.

Like the Nepalis, thousands of other internally displaced people in Kathmandu and elsewhere are at the end of their rope. It is becoming increasingly difficult to ask for help. Families are turned

away from government agencies and NGOs, who say that now the only place to get assistance is the Peace and Reconstruction Ministry which has 'lots of money' to help people like them.

Despite the peace agreement and a commitment by the CPN-M to guarantee the safe return of internally displaced people (IDPs), over 70,000 Nepalis still do not want to go home because of fear and a lack of trust in the Maoists, says a new report by the UN Office of the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), OHCHR, the Norwegian Refugee Council

Peace undeveloped

Development is held up the politics of the peace process

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

It's clear even in Kathmandu that the dividends of the year-old peace process are slow-yielding. Out in the districts, the pace seems glacial.

Some things have undoubtedly improved. "The psychological part of the peace dividend is intangible, but it's there. People are moving freely and those who were displaced are returning to their villages," says Jagdish Chandra Pokhrel, vice chairman of the National Planning Commission (see interview, right).

The availability and quality of services such as healthcare, communications, and education have improved in some districts. In Karnali, about 1,000 Maoist cadres have returned to school. In Jumla things are getting rapidly better with the area health posts and sub-posts, veterinary posts, and police and communications post being re-established, says Meghraj Neupane, a local development worker.

But these are the exceptions. In most districts, local bodies are still not up and running, with VDC secretaries striking, being



KUNDA DIXIT

HARDER TO REBUILD: A strategic bridge at Sarai Naka in Kapilbastu that the Maoists tried to blow up three times was once again being rebuilt in April.

threatened or locked out, or being arbitrarily transferred. The murder last week of a secretary in Siraha has had a ripple effect and shut down local government offices in as many as eight surrounding districts.

Many districts have no Local Development Officers (LDO). When we rang the Kanchanapur LDO's office earlier this week, a clerk told us that the officer, who was appointed in June, hasn't

arrived yet. In Parbat, seven LDOs have come and gone in less than a year, transferred according to the whims of the central government.

Particularly in remote districts, people continued to be deprived of basic services as a direct result of lack of local governance. For weeks there has been a crippling food shortage in Kalikot. In Mugu and Humla, health posts have been restored,

free Over 70,000 Nepalis, largely children and women, still cannot go home

(NRC), International Red Cross, and the IDP protection working group.

The majority of the displaced are children and young people. “Most of the children will never return home, as many have lost both parents, to the conflict and displacement,” says Bed Prasad Bhattarai of the National Human Rights Commission. Social workers say young internal refugees are exploited even more than other Kathmandu street children while hunting for work.

The biggest hurdle to starting over is the difficulty in getting citizenship certificates, since these are only issued in home district headquarters. This means not having a number of opportunities, including the right to a government scholarship. “Getting citizenship is a huge problem for the IDPs, as there is little chance the younger ones will ever return home,” says Angela Lenn of the Norwegian Refugee Council, which provides legal assistance to IDPs.

The NRC has been regularly requesting the Home Ministry and the Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction to direct local government authorities to prepare civil documentation for displaced people, but there has been no response. Earlier this year, the government formulated the ‘National Policies on IDPs’, but NGOs say implementation has been zero.

For families like the Nepalis and Kusum Raoul, a mother of six from Humla, things couldn’t get

worse. “My children are sicker in this city than they ever were in our village,” she says. All seven work as domestic labour in appalling conditions.

“In a society where there is already a lot of discrimination against women, inequities increase for internally displaced people,” says Lenn. Women IDPs whose husbands were killed or disappeared get the worst of it. For example, relatives might refuse widows their share of family property and threaten Maoist retaliation if she goes to court.

“My husband’s family said I’d face severe consequences if I returned,” says 25-year old Chandrakala Adhikari. Her husband was executed in Gorkha in 2004 for refusing to join the ‘PLA’. Adhikari and her two young sons live with 36-year old Sabitri Regmi, who has a similar story. The two women and their total of nine children live in one small room. Neither has land or savings, and together they earn about Rs 100 a day making candles.

Some women become commercial sex workers. “I’d do anything for my children, and I had no options,” one tells us. There are numerous instances of displaced women being sexually harassed, exploited, and raped.

Officially, some 200 displaced widows live in Kathmandu, say NGOs. But unofficial estimates count hundreds, even thousands, more here and in other cities who are afraid to speak out. ●

but health workers have not, says Aruna Uprety who just returned from running medical camps in the far-west.

Non-state agencies have returned to the accessible areas, but complain that now they cannot move freely due to the innumerable bandas. “The continuing shutdowns have seriously affected our work and that of our partners,” says Beena Kharel of the Lutheran World Federation, which works in 16 districts across the country.

The bandas are one symptom of the biggest obstacle to resuming development. The Maoists remain the only visible party force in many district headquarters and VDCs. People in the districts find this less than assuring. “We don’t have to get permission from the Maoists anymore to run our programs or to travel, but people are still wary of them,” says Madhav Raj Neupane a program coordinator with the Karnali Intergrated Rural Development and Research Centre in Nepalganj. Another local NGO worker adds: “People can’t trust the Maoists when it looks as if the other parties are still too scared to come out.”

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement required that local bodies be reconstituted through political consensus. Eight months after the deal was signed, this has still not happened. The failure to reach a consensus on the political leadership of the local bodies means budgets cannot be made

and projects cannot be started.

Minister for Local Development and Works Deb Gurung says an eight-party consensus on development committees at the village and district levels is in the offing, but cannot give us a timeframe.

“People are increasingly frustrated,” says Arjun Karki, president of the NGO Federation. Government officials insist development is sluggish because agencies are in wait-and-watch mode until the elections to the constituent assembly.

Meanwhile, money and international NGOs keep coming in. In 2006-07 Nepal received aid and grants worth about Rs 12 billion for development work, up from Rs 4 billion the previous year. In the past 11 months, 51 new INGOs have registered with the Social Welfare Council, increasing the number to 180. While local development workers struggle to understand how any of this translates into better service delivery, government officials are waiting for more. “This is insubstantial compared to what other post-conflict countries get,” one said.

For now, many Nepalis are just waiting for campaigning to begin, hoping some of the flurry of election promises will take the form of immediate changes. ●

See also, ‘Cost of conflict’, Book Review, page 13

Kids in limbo

The review of the adoption process is messy and unfair

MALLIKA ARYAL

Shortly after he took over in early April, Minister of Women, Children, and Social Welfare Khadga Bahadur Biswokarma suspended inter-country adoption. As a result, over 400 families with completed paperwork cannot take their children back with them.

The decision to suspend international adoptions followed the exposure of a market in ‘orphans’ and the taking of children away without their birth parents’ consent in a poorly regulated adoption process (‘On sale’, #339).



THOMAS BELL

Officials at the ministry confirm that no files have been processed since the suspension, and that those pending a final signature were sent back to the District Administration Office. Most adoptive countries are also no longer issuing visas to even those adopted children whose files are complete. A positive consequence of the indefinite suspension has been that many commercial ‘orphanages’ are returning children to their parents, now that there is no ‘market’ for them.

The ministry and the embassies seem to be saying nothing will move until the inter-country

adoption process is altered to make it similar to adoption procedures in the other countries (see also interview with departing French Ambassador Michel Jolivet, p12). The biggest changes will be the setting up of a centralised agency that will verify orphanages and vet prospective parents and deal only with other national agencies, and the acceptance that adoption is the last resort for a child. This could put a stop to the easier ‘freelance’ adoptions Nepal is known for.

Few dispute that adoption from Nepal needs to be better regulated. But many of the 400-plus files in limbo belong to parents and children who have spent the last few months bonding with each other. This indefinite suspension is painful for all of them and is made worse by the difficulty in getting accurate information. The ministry has not been answering adoptive parents’ questions directly, and the boards of internet groups like Nchild and Adoption Nepal are filled with pleas for information, open letters to the ministries, and some wrenching tales of children left behind. Some adoptive parents are camping out indefinitely in Kathmandu.

Ministry joint secretary Vinod Adhikary will say only that the new ‘terms and conditions’ formed by a ministry review committee involve the best interests of the child and are in accordance with the Hague Convention on inter-country adoption. Asked if the new procedure would have provisions for families left in limbo, Adhikary says “it might”. The document is now at the Ministry of Law awaiting review before it is sent to parliament for approval.

Every day the government delays, means another day the children are held hostage, say the adoptive parents. “If they are so concerned about the best interests of the children, they should act fast,” argues one.

Some parents who have been waiting for the last three months say whatever the changes, the old rules should continue to apply to existing situations where the adoption was more or less completed. ●

“Too little, too slow”



KIRAN PANDAY

Jagdish Pokhrel, vice chairman of the National Planning Commission, spoke with *Nepali Times* about the pace of development in the districts.

Nepali Times: Has development resumed in the districts now?
Jagdish Pokhrel: The situation is moving smoothly towards normalisation, though not at the rate it was expected. Since the peace agreement, there are some positive indications, but the all-party committees that were supposed to be formed in the districts are not in place yet.

Is the peace process failing ordinary people?
One part of the peace dividend is psychological—people are moving freely and those who were displaced or who left have come back. They feel more comfortable. People are overcoming the past.

If development work is an indication of a peace dividend, that process has just started. Infrastructure is being rebuilt, but whether this rebuilding is helping people depends on the context.

If we compare our situation with other post-conflict countries, perhaps we have not delivered the kind of peace dividend we should have. This is because the peace process is ongoing, and many things have not been settled yet, and will take until after the elections. The international community has not come through in as big a way to help as we had hoped either.

There is also a gap between the state apparatus and the people. When the local bodies can bridge that gap, the situation will move closer to normal.

How will the momentum for elections affect development work?
It will build confidence and make it easier for other actors, state development agencies, and NGOs to go out and work. Even where there are disturbances, like in some parts of the tarai, development agencies can move with the political parties. The constituent assembly process will speed things up too. Eventually, politicians will be using development work to reach out to the people.

“Where are the young leaders?”

In a freewheeling interview outgoing French Ambassador, Michel Jolivet speaks about the changes he has seen in Nepal, the Nagarjuna murders, and mountaineering accidents.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Nepali Times: What has been the highlight of your tenure here?

Michel Jolivet: I have witnessed many historical events, but I will always remember 21 November at the convention centre. Everyone was happy, sitting together, talking, hugging, there was very little security. There was a strong sense of nationhood. On this night I thought Nepal could be definitely on a new path.

So does Nepal look very different than when you first arrived here in 2004?

The problems are largely the same as they were in 1990, and even in the pre-1950 period. Jana Andolan II was fairly successful, but Nepal still has a problem of national consciousness and solidarity. Most people are proud to be Nepali. But Nepal remains a patchwork of different ethnicities and caste and interests, and national feeling is perhaps not ripe enough to easily build a modern nation. The people can be modern, but the state and the government are not.

The parties too are not modern—they do not have programs or agendas. How can you tell the difference between them? Even the Maoists—they say we are a Marxist-Leninist party for the 21st century—what does that mean concretely? You can change a few words here and there in speeches and all the parties sound the same. As for the Maoist revolution, it was anachronistic as early as 1996 because the international revolutionary movement was already dead.

Nepal has always been a rather weak state. This means poor governance, even non-governance. Regarding non-governance some examples stand out. One is the inability to appoint ambassadors. Nepal, which has only friends, lost a golden opportunity to tell them: this is our new regime, this is our national achievement, please understand and help us.

Then there are the wilful defaulters. In my three years here there have been four or five finance ministers. All told me they'd tackle this, but I doubt a single rupee has been given back by wilful defaulters.

Another consequence of a weak state is widespread corruption. Just one example—a few years ago I had to call on a finance minister to tell him that a head of a government body was asking for a kickback in order to implement a cabinet decision. The minister said to me: “that is normal”.

You seem to be saying nothing has been gained in the past year.

It is a real issue that there are no representatives from a

younger generation at the decision-making level. In so many countries, after a big popular movement for democracy, talented, intelligent young people emerge. Where are the young leaders from last year? For a country to change, it has to give a role to younger people. The political parties have to do that.

What is happening in the tarai is a concentrate of almost all the problems that have not been addressed in Nepal for too long. Another one is that a powerful neighbour like India is an ideal scapegoat for everything. Nepal has to learn to live with an elephant at its door, so to speak. When an elephant is properly dealt with, it is a very kind, friendly, useful giant. I am also concerned about this strange custom of bandas, chakka jams, and blocking highways. Going on strike is a basic right, but you can't torch someone else's car. Such petty terrorism destroys democracy, not to mention the economy.

Regarding the peace process, Ian Martin and the UN have been doing a great job. It is unfair to criticise them or to make them scapegoats too. This reflects the inability of some other actors to do their own job. Is there any better alternative to UN involvement?

Overall, I am still optimistic. The most important thing by far for changes to gain momentum is elections. I think Nepalis have the backbone and political will to go to elections and set a mandate.

You've had to deal with some difficult situations for French citizens in Nepal, notably the murder of Céline Henri.

I was closely involved with the investigation of the Nagarjuna murder. I used to also train there and had been up the mountain 60 or 70 times. I have never thought the army was involved. Of course Nagarjuna is a military area and there are so many strange stories about the murder of the German woman and of Céline Henry. But I can tell you they come from people who have never set foot there. I think I know this story the best, I have been involved every step of the way, I recovered some of the clothing. To the best of my knowledge the two ladies were killed by the same man and this man is still at large. I must thank the Nepali authorities for their help in this investigation. At a time of war they had hundreds of soldiers and policemen combing the area with German and French police experts. The body of Céline Henri was found much later by a mushroom collector.

You've also dealt with problematic adoptions. Do you think the government response has been reasonable? Over 400 families with processed

papers can't take their children home.

Just over 50 French adoptive parents are in this position. Before adoptions were suspended, children were being taken away without the consent of their parents, and too much money was changing hands. It was good to stop that, and that an overhaul of the system is being planned. For the adoptive parents who cannot take a child back with them, their files will have first to be processed properly. Nepal needs to organise international adoption the way many other countries do, through a centralised national adoption agency that other national agencies can organise adoption through.

Your tenure has also been a bit 'disastrous' in terms of French mountaineering accidents—the bodies of four French climbers were found on Ganesh Himal just ten days ago.

This was a very bad series. We had no major mountaineering accident for years and years. Then we had Kangguru in 2005 where 18 climbers including seven French died. Shortly after, two French people died on Chulu. Jean-Christophe Lafaille, the top French climber, died on Makalu in January 2006, then a French gentleman on Everest in May 2006, and then the four young men on Ganesh last October. I appreciated the help and comradeship of Nepali mountaineers in the search operations. I also pay respect to the families of all the deceased. They showed great dignity.

And you yourself have a passion for mountains.

Yes, I've trekked and hiked in many places and went to Island and Mera peaks. I've travelled to many parts of Nepal. People are so helpful, welcoming and kind everywhere. On the way from Bardiya recently some women had closed the highway. They refused to reopen it for us, but the gentlemen did show us away around the blockade! I like this story, it proves again how everybody is kind in Nepal. Prime Minister Koirala, Prachanda, the king, everyone has been so kind to me!

So you have positive impressions of each of these people?

They all do what they think is the best solution. The only time I was really worried was between the king's two announcements last April. Today, my main concern is for the elections and the many very important issues that need to be sorted out before them—law and order, the tarai, marginalised groups. But Nepal has a true magic to move forward in complex situations that a foreign observer can hardly understand. Everybody seems to be trying hard.



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Cost of conflict

Time is running out to help businesses revive the economy

BILASH RAI



The books that have come out since the ceasefire last year have all concentrated on the politically interesting period in Nepal's history. But few authors have assessed the socio-economic impact of the armed conflict and recommend strategies for reconstruction.



BOOK REVIEW
Bhagirath Yogi

In *Nepal's Conflict: A Micro-Impact Analysis on Economy*, Bishwambher Pyakuryal, the economist and professor, and Rabi Shanker Sainju, program director at the National Planning Commission, fill this gap.

Aside from the loss of life, the country was beset by population displacement and political instability. The authors conclude that the impact of the conflict on the country's economic growth has been much more serious than we previously imagined.

Nepal's economy grew at 4.8 percent in 1995-96, but growth had plummeted to minus 0.3 percent in 2001-02. Even after the ceasefire last year, the economy has only bounced back by 2.5 percent.

The authors zoom in on the impact of the conflict on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Banke, Rupandehi, Kaski, and Sunsari districts as case studies and extrapolate their observations there to the entire economy.

SMEs are the largest employers in the non-manufacturing sector and have brought in 40 percent of all industrial investment in the country. Industries with fixed assets of not more than Rs 30 million are designated small while those with up to Rs 100 million are medium industries.

The share of SMEs, including micro, cottage and small industries, in the total industrial output is 70 percent. Similarly, the shares of SMEs in total industrial establishment and total industrial employment are 96 percent and 83 percent respectively.

The study (conducted between July-September 2006) found that the flow of Chinese products in local markets has had a strong impact on these manufacturers. For example, one plastic sandal factory in Rupandehi that could not compete with Chinese sandals had to close down.

The study points out that the overall problem being faced by

the SMEs is related to production and market failures. The conflict destroyed not only physical infrastructure, but also human capital and tore apart the social fabric. This is likely to create instability in the short-run and lower growth in the medium-term, the authors say.

More ominously, the conflict destroyed business linkages and distribution channels of SMEs in



Nepal's Conflict: A Micro-Impact Analysis on Economy
Bishwambher Pyakuryal, Rabi Shanker Sainju
2007, pp 120, Rs 350

previous market areas. Although after the ceasefire raw material availability was not a problem, the cost of raw materials and logistics increased significantly.

The authors warn that a post-conflict period is very sensitive to

economic policies and will respond to them. So an over-emphasis on political reforms, elections and party politics eclipsing necessary socioeconomic policies may backfire on overall reform initiatives.

The book lays out

projections for various development scenarios under the state of continued conflict and under peaceful conditions from 2005-06 to 2017-21. It makes recommendations to revive economy and generate employment in general and support the SMEs to grow, in particular.

A recent annual report published by the International Development Department of the University of Birmingham says that conflict and security are critical issues for the development community. "By destroying economies, infrastructure, and societies, conflicts' impacts resonate long after the combatants have laid down their weapons," the report says.

Pyakuryal and Sainju's book is a must read for students of Nepali politics as well as policymakers, and a timely warning not to sideline economics. Whoever is in power after the elections will have to address economic issues, otherwise stagnant production, and lack of job creation will continue to haunt politics for decades to come. ●

Bhagirath Yogi is a journalist with the BBC Nepali Service in London.



Girl beats boy

Kathmandu's Korean wave purveys the discreet charms of domination

Ever since Kathmandu opened its bajars to pirated DVDs, Korean films have come flooding in. It is a bit of mystery why this is so, but if Bollywood's mush doesn't do it for you any more, turn to the sap fest of Korea.

Take *My Sassy Girl*, for example. After becoming the second biggest grosser of 2001 in Korea, and inspiring DreamWorks to produce a remake of the same name (slated for release soon), this cutesy romantic comedy is now one of the most widely circulated films in Kathmandu.

What is it about this film that not just teen girls, but even the laddiest of lads have sought it out, and often enough, loved it?

Comedy and melodrama in equal parts, the film tells of a romance between a shiftless student, Kyoong-woo (Tae-hyun) and an embarrassingly saucy, stropky, bellicose—rather than plain old sassy—girl (Ji-hyun). But let's not get into the plot. If you really care about plot, watch *The Godfather* trilogy or something.

Instead, watch *Sassy* for the antics that this love story lends itself to. If you have a thing for watching a hot chick beat, dominate, and humiliate a whimpering boy (who secretly digs it), this movie is for you. Consider the heroine's fantasies about rescuing her boy from lethal circumstances, their slapping game, her insistence that he trade his sneakers for her high heels. Perhaps it's simply innocent play; but given their sexless romance, one wonders whether it isn't a case of discreet S&M.

But the frolics end soon. And then comes the tearjerker drama with enough sugar to make a kilo of *jeris*. Early on in the film, Kyoong-woo mocks the Korean penchant for melodrama and not long after, the film itself turns into one. Suffice it to say, a romantic comedy isn't romantic anymore without some punishing emotional kinks.

Ad-boy and pop singer Cha Tae-hyun is charming in his first major movie role. But, really, all he has to do is be cute, and that is no challenge for him. Jeon Ji-hyun has more to work given her whacky character, but she isn't what you'd call terrific. But never mind. Watch director Kwak's wispy effort for what it is: *My Sassy Girl* is a film with killer charm and very engaging chemistry. ●

Dir: Kwak Jae-yong
Cast: Jeon Ji-hyun, Cha Tae-hyun.
2001. 137 min.



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KIRAN PANDAY

ALL TOGETHER NOW: Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokhrel and the parties talk about the code of conduct for the elections to the constituent assembly at the Election Commission on Wednesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

THE TROUBLE WITH VDCs: VDC secretaries and other civil servants protest the killing last week of their colleague Ram Pokhrel, in Siraha, on Monday. Local bodies are functioning only sporadically in many districts, hampering development efforts.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

AND ANOTHER THING: Indian communist leader Sitaram Yechuri tells correspondents at the Reporter's Club on Tuesday that Nepal should ask India for help on the tarai and that India needs to reconsider the importance of the monarchy and the army in Nepal. Yechuri arrived on Monday to pay his respects to the recently deceased Sushila Koirala.



DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

MOVING ON RAPIDLY: A post office employee in Rasuwa decides who should stay and who should go on the walls of the office, last week.



KIRAN PANDAY

THIS IS HOW WE DO IT: Pedestrians cross the street at Singha Darbar less suicidally than usual, as the Korea and Nepal Youth Red Cross Circles manage traffic at the intersection on Tuesday.

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SSR, DDR, YCL, & UNMEAN

Your weekly Ass rarely gets its facts right, preferring to bend them every week on this space. So it wasn't surprising that it got its backside namesake kicked last week by irate readers about the report that Matrika Babu had set an example for the class struggle by travelling economy roundtrip to Bangkok for a health checkup.

It turns out the **Minister of Jungles** was actually on business class with his better half (Seats 1J and K) and his retinue was at the back on steerage with the citizen journalist who reported this to us. What perplexes the Ass is: aren't the Gangalals and the Norvics of this country good enough for Comrade Rumble in the Jungle? Wonder if sick recruits in the cantonments will also get the same commune equality treatment in Bumrumgrad?



Comrade Ian must be doing something right, given how he is being clobbered by both royalists and Maoists. Last week's issue of the CPN-M mouth organ (**Janadesh**, not **Gorkhapatra**) sent vicious barbs directed at the UNMIN Chief, his interviewers in the cantonments accusing them of asking hostile questions. Janadesh even insinuated that there had been some international canoodling inside containers.

The same week, rightwing blogs erupted in a blistering attack on UNMIN and Ian's perceived mollycoddling of Maoists. The Ass's take on this is that UNMIN is falling into the same trap as the Norwegians in Sri Lanka where the rebel movement arm-twisted supposed peace monitors to get its way by threatening to abandon the peace process. It's pretty clear who is holding up the third round of verification and why, and it's time UNMEAN stop beating around the bush.



The reason Comrade Fearsome is obsessed with **DDR** and **SSR** could be because both acronyms have a Stalinist ring to them: Deutsche Demokratische Republik and the Soviet Socialist Republic. One sure sign of desperation on the part of the comrades is the open attack on our colleagues at the *Himalayan*

Times and *Annapurna Post*. Could this be a case of shooting the messenger before elections? The Ass's prognosis is the comrades will follow through with their threats to quit the government ahead of elections since an anti-incumbent advantage is the only thing that will save them. The Fierce One will dump Laldhoj if it gets too hot at the plenum.



Word reaches us that whatever might have been happening at Lord's cricket ground with the Indian tourists, the spirit of the game was not observed during our head jarsap's visit to the UK. Politeness and due protocol were much in evidence at the FCA and MoD but fair play and the ability to duck at the crease was not. The nasty opening ball was an Isabel Hilton op-ed in the Guardian that served as a curtainraiser for the visit. Hilton attacked our COAS as being a man who talked and promised a lot about reform and change but delivered little. It got a lot worse in the meetings were beamers and bouncers were the order of the day. Katuwal Jarsap was caught off silly point and even before the first over. Ouch. I say old chap, it's hardly cricket...



What the Asinine One finds ironical is that while the British press was accusing Katuwal Jarsap of mass disappearances, three weeks earlier sections of the Swiss media were also calling Chairman Lotus Flower a "butcher" in Berne. With human rights violators like these in power, no wonder truth and reconciliation is in no one's agenda. Meanwhile, disinformation via cyberspace is reaching a frenzy: the Maoists' Zurich connection got a flurry of email cross-postings by a Buddhist Swiss, the improbably named Halshi Bash, about a vast red stash of ill-gotten wealth in Credit Suisse. As we go to press, bloggers from left field have launched a counter disinformation campaign.



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