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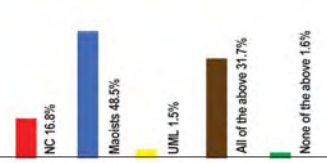
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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 383

Q. Who is most to blame in the delay in setting an election date?

Total votes: 5,191



Group	Percentage
NC	16.8%
Maoists	48.5%
UML	1.5%
All of the above	31.7%
None of the above	1.6%

Weekly Internet Poll # 384. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. With regard to the militant groups in the tarai, the state should?

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SAM KANG LI

Going for broke

How will the government fund the elections?

KIRAN NEPAL

Now that it has the elections sorted out, the spendthrift governing alliance is finding it difficult to pay for all its promises.

There is a gaping shortfall of Rs 3 billion to pay for elections and requirements of the 23-point agreement. And at a time when money is so short, the seven parties have awarded themselves Rs 1 million per MP as pork-barrel funds for election expenses.

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat was hard pressed to answer

concerns from Kathmandu-based donor representatives on Wednesday about the expenses. He clarified that the Rs 1 million had already been budgeted as expenses for VDCs and the ruling parties had decided to give the money to their MPs. Donors said this would give an unfair advantage to incumbent parties, and they were not satisfied about how this money would be accounted for.

Mahat calculates that the government will need Rs 5 billion to finance the elections, pay for Maoists in the

cantonments who haven't been paid since April 2007, compensate conflict victims and provide security in the tarai. But he can only muster Rs 2 billion. Mahat called the meeting with party leaders to ask donors to meet the shortfall.

"Even if we pay only Rs 100,000 per conflict victim, then to meet all the other expenses included in the 23-point agreement we need another Rs 3 billion," Finance Secretary (Revenue) Rameswor Khanal told *Nepali Times*.

The Finance Ministry is massively in arrears on payments to Indian Oil for petroleum imports, and domestic borrowings have already exceeded Rs 8 billion at a time when interest rates are going up due to a liquidity shortage in the market.

The government's main source of revenue is next week's share auction of Nepal Telecom, which is expected to yield Rs 10 billion. The government is selling its 150 million shares at a minimum of Rs 600 per share. But there is a writ in the Supreme Court about discrepancies in the pricing of the shares for the public, who will have to pay six times more than the company's employees.

Representatives of Kathmandu-based embassies were encouraged by the presence at Wednesday's Finance Ministry meeting of Baburam Bhattarai from the Maoists, Jhalanath Khanal of the UML and the NC's Chakra Bastola.

Said one donor representative: "Now that they were there to discuss money, it looked like elections were finally for real." ●



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Just do it

Things to do right away to avert a national crisis

MADHES CHECKLIST

It's time someone gave the Prime Minister a wakeup call on the madhes. Two NC ministers who should be warning their boss about the tarai, Peace Minister Ram Chandra Poudel and Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula, are both in deep denial.

Poudel is under the impression that all the demands of the madhesi parties for regional autonomy and representation in the army and government have already been met. For the MJF led by Upendra Yadav, the rump Sadbhabana of Rajendra Mahato and the Tarai-Madhes Loktantrik party of Mahanta Thakur, this is a slap in the face.

If there is such a wide communication gap among moderate madhesis who are committed to non-violence and elections, imagine the distrust of the state felt by armed groups in the tarai.

True, not all madhesis agree with all the demands made by Yadav and recent defectors from the mainstream parties. The madhes itself is multi-layered, divided by caste, language, religion and ethnicity. Here is an opportunity to address the grievances of the southern plains at one go, but the government is squandering that chance.

However dire it may look from Kathmandu, however radical the demands of the madhesi leaders, things haven't got to a point of no return. Madhesis are sullen and angry at Kathmandu, and they're not hiding it. But instead of negotiating with moderate forces, Baluwater is letting things drift dangerously. This will only help residual reactionaries who want to disrupt the elections at all costs, and make it more difficult for the madhesi leadership to wrest the tarai torch from the hands of the militants.

Elections can be held on 10 April. Anyone who doubts that will provide excuses to those who want to avoid polls. Sections of the international community and UNMIN mustn't allow misgivings to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Of course, it won't be as smooth as a referendum in Switzerland, where people cast their ballots in the post office on their way to work. Our elections are sure to be messy. (But at least we will have a greater turnout than in the Swiss cantons.) Elections will provide closure and clarity, and many of the pending demands for identity and representation can be debated and addressed in the elected assembly.

Many of the madhesi grievances are at the level of perception, but the three Brahmins of Baluwater seem not to have understood that. Here is a simple three-point checklist:

- restart the negotiation process
- send positive signals to the tarai
- announce concrete steps to redress grievances right away

Kathmandu's status-quoists have to realise that the days when the valley's rulers decided on the future of the country are gone. Now, the rest of the country will decide Kathmandu's future.

Madhesi politicians have shown responsibility and maturity by underlining the non-violent nature of their struggle and by expressing support for elections. They must now speak out just as openly to condemn the violence being perpetrated in the name of the madhes struggle by the militant groups.

To see an example of what could happen in the Nepal tarai, one only has to look at Sri Lanka's 25-year agony that shows no sign of ending.

Why is the government making life difficult for moderate madhesi leaders? Surely it knows they are the only force which can pull things back together. Like the madhesi extremists, does the state want polarisation? Is the



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

inertia a deliberate ploy to incite conflict? Does it stem from an unwillingness to share power? Or is it merely the sheer incompetence of those in charge?

What else is one to make of the recent statements of the man who is in charge of bringing peace, Ram Chandra Poudel? In Biratnagar, at a time when he needs to sound conciliatory, he is belligerent and speaks about the armed groups in a threatening tone. In a recent interview, he pretends to be exasperated with the tarai parties and says: "If there are demands, we can talk. There are no demands. What is there to talk about?"

Here is what the madhesis are talking about: madhesis did not get into the police again this time. Look at how the media celebrated Prashant Tamang just because he is a pahadi while we are seen as Indians. Matrika Yadav may have overdone the swearing in, but look at how

Kathmandu dismissed it as an antic. The government only wants to divide and rule. Why isn't it starting a dialogue with the armed groups? Kathmandu hasn't even implemented promises made to Upendra Yadav. The 43 who died in the Madhes Uprising last year were never honoured. The STF is harassing us. Is the prime minister in charge only north of the Chure?

Maybe these sentiments are difficult for the insular ruling class to understand. But it is all about identity and representation. Madhesis want to be assured that they will make it to the constituent assembly in numbers that correspond to their population; that the government is not cheating them again; that the nature of the state will now revolve around a political principle that recognises them as equal citizens; that wearing a dhoti and speaking broken Nepali will not deprive them of opportunities.

All other demands are peripheral. This actually gives the government immense space to play. For all their maximalist rhetoric, the madhesi groups also have an ill-defined agenda because they want to keep the room open for possible face-savers. All the state needs to do is embark on symbolic measures and substantive steps to begin the process of healing.

Communicate with the madhes, appoint senior madhesi ministers, start talking with all groups, tinker with the electoral system, send madhesi CDOs to the tarai, implement promises, act with humility

and respect for madhesi concerns, express commitment to autonomy. Do it like you mean it and see the change in the mood of the madhes.

But the real blame lies not with Poudel, but his prime minister. He has time to make provocative statements about Maoist assimilation in the army and hatch plans for his daughter's coronation, but he has no time to respond to urgent madhesi demands.

Koirala is known to be concerned about his place in history. At this rate, he will just be remembered as a petty manipulator who presided over the beginning of a bloody and prolonged identity conflict in Nepal.

Where does that leave those madhesis who argue for calm, who are shocked by the raw violence and hate politics of the extremists, and who want an institutionalised mechanism to address aspirations? Weak and vulnerable, that's where. It will be more difficult to take the message of harmony and justice outside closed doors in district headquarters. It will silence Biratnagar's Sanjay Yadav, a marketing manager who knows attacks on pahadis do not make economic sense even for madhesis. It will, as Chandrakishor, a courageous journalist in Birganj, put it, make life increasingly difficult for those who speak with logic.

On Saturday, a movement begins in the madhes. Irrespective of its intensity, it will cripple the capital by blocking supplies. It will shift the centre of debate to the streets. And, as agitations are prone to do, it will unleash another wave of extremism. Even in the face of unrest, the state must not respond with brutal force. The only way out lies in a more sensitive Kathmandu. ●



SAM KANG LI

LETTERS

BACK IN THE SSR

Re: Back to the SSR, Editorial, #382. I don't agree that the army wasn't an indoctrinated group before. The army still has a majority of Chhetris. As long as CoAS Rukmangat still puts a red tika on his forehead, I won't believe that the army is a neutral force. Nowhere else in the world does the army general, serving in a secular country, put on a religious symbol whenever he appears in public. I'd like to recommend that you engage in regular visits to the barracks. Feudalism, casteism, nepotism are all rampant there.

Nirmal Ghimire Sharma, email

- If you believe in democracy then why not give the monarchy a chance as well? Before you criticise the NA, show me one Nepali organisation that is more professional than the NA. Which other institution is more inclusive than the NA? If the war hadn't tarnished the democratic credentials of this country then I think the NA is still dignified. If the last two years

of authoritarian rule by the seven parties are respectable, then so is the NA. Our democratic leaders can't even say a word against the encroachment on Nepali soil by India. What kind of democracy is this?

Name withheld, email

LAL

Why is CK Lal defending the Indian stand on Susta? (State of the State, 'The sigh of Susta' #382)? We need inclusive visions of nationality, democracy and our own identity as Nepalis. Although I admire your deconstructive approach to many current issues, I also begin to see your vantage point being dualistic and perhaps deceptive as a result of your overly parochial language games.

Bal Chandra, Australia

- I understand Matrika's grievances but Nepal is a multilingual country so we cannot please all language groups ('Matrika's antics', From the Nepali Press, #382). The only remedy is to declare

English as the official language. This would allow us to be globally competitive and we should formulate our education and national policy accordingly. That way we won't keep bickering about language.

Name withheld, email

YETI

It is being over-analytical and pretentious to simply explain the yeti reports in terms of linguistics, myths and worldviews of the Himalayan peasant who is often portrayed as living in an irrational world of his own. ('Chemo or yeti', #380) To paraphrase the biologist Edward Cronin, it is an insult to the spirit of science to declare that an unknown thing doesn't exist. Binnendik cites Reinhold Messner to debunk the yeti reports. But what about the reports on the southern flanks of the Himalaya where there are no chemos? Especially the little explored cloud forests of the Eastern Himalaya and particularly, the watershed of the Barun? When I was there last year, I came across a few hunters and the

occasional herders who go into the Barun Valley. They describe an ape-like creature that they simply refer to as 'ichhapani', alluding to the peculiar shape of its head resembling the helmet-like utensil used locally to brew alcohol. Unlike Sherpas further west they can't be accused of selling yeti stories as very few outsiders visit the area. Importantly, these people have never heard of the word 'yeti', which for them is simply a strange name for a creature that is as real and distinct to them as a bear.

Rai Thulung, email

POWER TO EDUCATION

'Hydropowered education' (#377) is the way to go in our local development arena. We can learn across the nation from this project about financing the local development.

Congratulations to the people of Sankhuwasbha. We are proud of you.
A Sarup, email

Family business

A new dynasty emerges to replace the monarchy

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala must have been aware that the appointment of Sujata Koirala as de facto deputy prime minister was unlikely to go down well in his own party, let alone with his coalition partners in the seven-party alliance. Clearly it was a considered risk. Perhaps there is something he wants done that he can only entrust to his daughter.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

It is equally unlikely that minister without portfolio Sujata Koirala didn't consider the anger her remarks about the monarchy and the 1990 constitution would create. She carefully calculated the likely repercussions of her seemingly intemperate observations and decided to court controversy anyway. Obviously,

Such a step would confer ex post facto legitimacy on the 'doctrine of necessity' that King Gyanendra used to usurp all constitutional authority. Royalists hope the amity between the Shahs and Koiralas would enable the constitutional monarchy to reign supreme once more.

Leftists are more cynical. They believe Koirala will use his daughter to bully, bribe and bamboozle various insurgent groups in the tarai to make them fall into line for the elections. Mission accomplished, Sujata will be told to fend for herself in the cutthroat battle for the NC leadership. This is the reason kangresi stalwarts have been rather muted in censuring Girija's decision and Sujata's statements.

The prime minister is, after all, accomplished in the political art of use and discard. Shailaja Acharya tried to reconcile her private monarchism with the

little premature to connect Koirala's wishes and his actions. Sujata may already be a grandmother, but in the political school of hard knocks she is no match for Sher Bahadur Deuba or Sushil Koirala.

That is not to say that Nepal is not ready to accept a female head of state or government. Far from it: Nepali women have earned the right to lead this nation by their grit and determination rather than by relying on the will of a patriarch. There is no dearth of competent and committed women who could lead Nepal.

With her professional qualifications and long history of political struggle, Hisila Yami would have been the ideal candidate. But she is in the wrong party: male domination in Marxist and Maoist parties does not allow women to rise beyond a certain level in power politics.



ROBIN SAYAMI

to her, the political stakes are high enough to warrant the irrational advocacy of such an irrelevant, unpopular institution.

The rumour mill has begun working overtime, and almost everyone has a conspiracy theory to explain the weird ways of the Koiralas. Some believe papa feels honour-bound to protect the monarchy and wants his daughter close so she can advance his agenda. Others even believe Sujata wants to be queen herself.

Remnants of the royal regime contend that the prime minister has consented to support a military-backed civilian government headed by his daughter if the scheduled elections fail to take place again.

public republicanism of Uncle Koirala. Clan membership has its advantages, but the cost of belonging can also be high. Just ask Shashank Koirala. He used to be a top-notch ophthalmologist with a significant presence and a respected voice in public life. Now he is a marginal participant in his party's internal power games.

Addressing the women's wing of NC on the last day of 2007, Girija assured his audience the country would soon see a female prime minister. It wouldn't be a day too soon for Nepal if his predictions were to come true: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have all had women presidents or premiers. But it's a

A democratic framework is the sine qua non for gender justice.

Chitralekha Yadav could have been another contender, but there is no shortage of pretenders to the leadership throne in her party. To improve her chances, she should look at the possibility of jumping on the Mahanta Thakur bandwagon.

Sujata's critics—and there are many—may not like it, but if she can refrain from spoiling her chances further by not associating herself too closely with the monarchy, she may yet emerge at the top of the heap to claim her father's crown. The royal dynasty may be sidelined, but long live the democratic dynasty. ●

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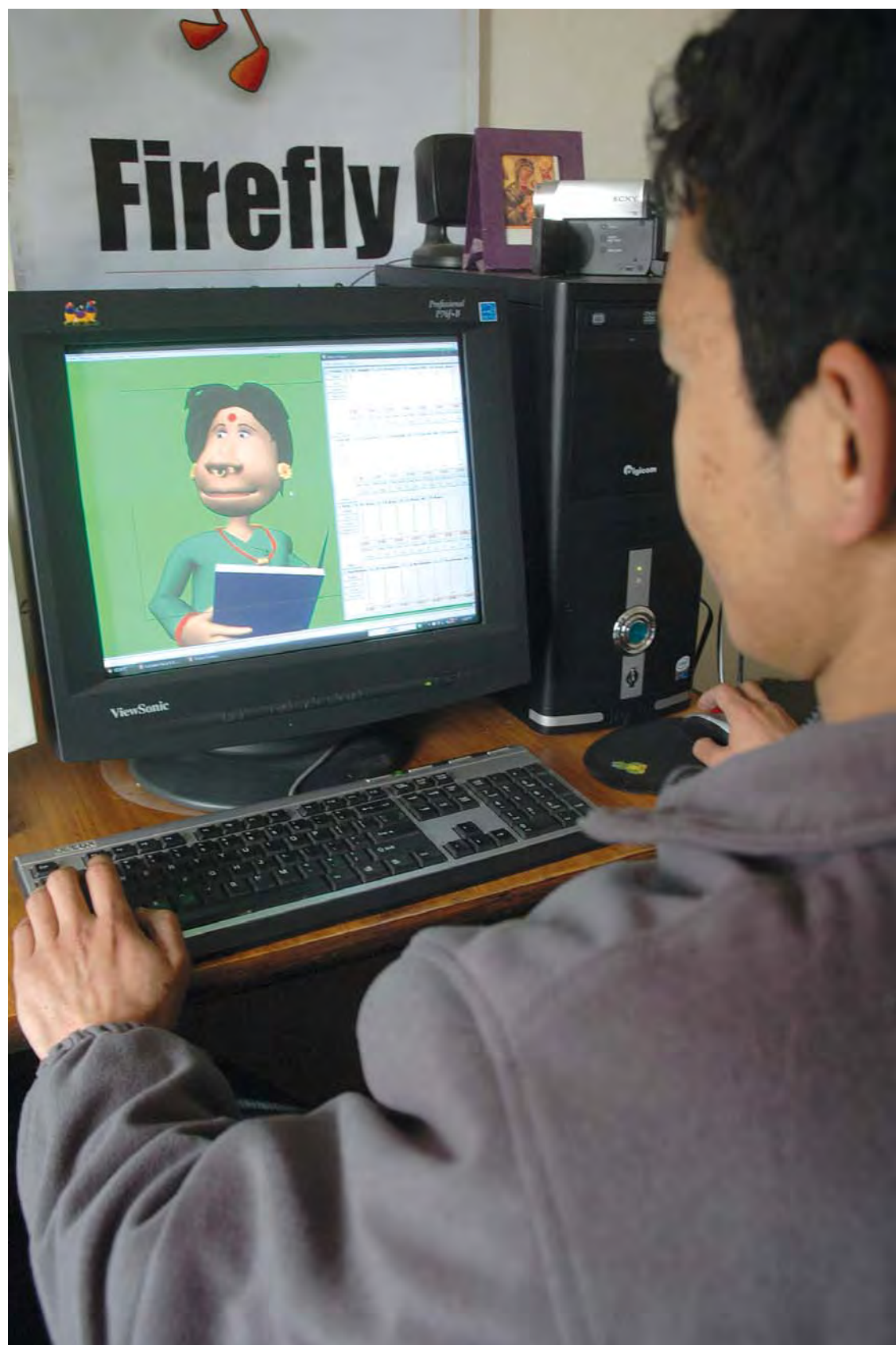
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KIRAN PANDAY

Entering another dimension

Nepal seeks to become world class in 3D animated film

Right now we don't even have high-performance computers."

Training institutes like Pentasoft and the Maya Academy of Advanced Cinematics are attracting growing interest from students, but expectations may be outpacing reality, warn some local experts.

"There are some schools that charge an exorbitant amount of money to teach 3ds Max in three months," says Prabhakar Chettri of Firefly Studios. He says it takes a year to master such tools. "To become an animator, one needs to be artistic. You can't just learn 3ds Max in three months and expect to be creating 3D animation."

Gurung, at the Pentasoft Academy, agrees: "First you learn the basics and then you specialise." He says Pentasoft gets about 15 new students every three months to study animation, of whom only a very few have sufficient time and money to allow them to specialise further in this field.

Kiran Joshi, an ex-Disney animator, came back from the US to open his own animation studio, Incessant Rain ('Outsourcing toons', #371). His production company, Pinkslip Productions, intends to outsource animation deals from companies like Disney in the US to Nepal to make the most of the

plentiful talent and comparatively low costs. In partnership with Mercantile, Incessant Rain is recruiting young talent at a blistering pace, taking students straight out of animation school.

There has never been much demand for animation within Nepal. "Most advertising agencies cannot afford us," says Yalamber Khairegoli, one of Chettri's colleagues at Firefly Studios. "Animation is hard work and very expensive." All Firefly's animators are self-taught and have gone into the field because they enjoy it, not because they think it will make them rich.

"We grew up watching Tom and Jerry and Disney cartoons, and all we wanted to do was create Nepali characters which are even better," says Chettri.

Decent equipment costs thousands of dollars, the reason why Joshi says he partnered with Nepal's best-known IT company, Mercantile. But if he and fellow enthusiasts in Nepal can produce works of world-class quality, they can expect a good return on their investment.

"Animation is expensive in terms of equipment and the amount of sweat we put in, but it's what we like to do," says Khairegoli, "and as long as we like doing it, we'll keep making animation." ●

PRANAYA SJB RANA

Jaharilal, in vest and dhoti, sits on a bench with Nhucheman, who is clad in the daura-suruwal. They talk of the coming elections. Maya, a smart schoolgirl asks Raju questions, a kindly teacher, while Kanchi prepares tea.

It looks like a normal enough Nepali scene, with birds and butterflies in the air and a bike speeding past. It's hard to believe this three-dimensional animated film has been made in Nepal.

Gone are the days of the classic two-dimensional cartoons, thanks to computer-generated animation by the likes of Pixar and Dreamworks. Now, Nepali cartoonmakers are using the same softwares as went into the making of films like *Finding Nemo* and *Ratatouille*, to craft the country's first 3D animated shorts, *Messengers of Change*.

Developed by Firefly Studios, the film is intended for use as a public service announcement to prepare people for the elections. The quality is astonishingly good, the attention to detail impressive—from Kanchi's red tika to Maya's phuli. If Nepali studios can produce this sort of quality, they could soon be knocking on Hollywood's door.

"Nepali animators have all the skill required, just not the tools," says Manish Gurung, who teaches students how to use 3ds Max, a professional-quality graphics

application at the Pentasoft Institute. "To create world-class animation we require better equipment, the likes of which Nepal may have never seen before.



Responsible Yeti

As part of their corporate social responsibility, Yeti Airlines will now provide a 25 percent discount to all employees of UN-affiliated organisations and INGOs till 30 April 2008. Yeti Airlines will also donate Rs 4 from each flight ticket to four social organisations, Tewa, OCCED, Sewa Kendra Leprosy Relief and Nepal Glaucoma Eye Clinic.

Etihaad flying full

UAE carrier, Etihaad Airways, which started flights to Kathmandu from Dubai in November has recorded its highest ever passenger figures carrying 19,000 passengers on 3, 4 and 5 January with average seat factors of 88 percent across its network. The best performing routes included Singapore, Brisbane and Sydney which were 96 percent full during this period.



New scheme

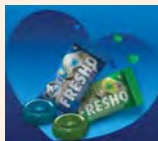
KIST Merchant Bank has introduced a new deposit scheme where customers can open an account for just Rs 1 deposit and the bank will deposit Rs 100 as a bonus, along with a free SSB Debit card. This scheme is only for the first 10,000 customers.

BoK meet

The 13th Annual General Meeting of the Bank of Kathmandu concluded on 14 January. The bank was able to increase net profit by 30 percent since last year, loans and advances increased by 29.45 percent at a total of Rs 11.14 billion.

Romantic menthol

Jaya Confectionary, makers of Crave premium candies, has launched a new campaign with a romantic theme. Called 'Freshness ko Romantic lahar,' the campaign is for the Fresho menthol candies brand.



NEW PRODUCTS

CONNECT: Ohm Solution launched the ZTE MZ16 USB EDGE Modem, which is a quad-band wide area wireless network modem. Along with the modem, Ohm also launched two data terminals, the MG 880 CDMA2000 and the MC 315+ CDMA2000.



The real world

The 'market' is not a theoretical concept but the phone call from a customer

My friends ask me: "You've been the CEO of a company for some months. How is running a company different from what you were doing earlier?"



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

As someone who made the transition from the profession of offering business advice to that of executing corporate decisions, I find it hard to respond easily. On the one hand, a few months add up to a pitifully short time in any company. But then, just as the morning signals the day ahead, the first few months at the helm of a company indicate the sort of management path the company is likely to take in the future. Still, here is what I have observed, learnt and adapted to so far.

Job vs Career: I used to believe that employees should focus on doing their jobs well. I have now started to believe that employees will do their jobs better if management takes time to explain and re-explain what career paths the company can offer. Given today's job market in Nepal,

skilled employees, especially those who have to produce ideas and have to play with numbers, do not work hard for the sheer love of late nights or because they want to make money for others. They work hard because their diligence is meaningful to them in the context of a career path.

The sooner management learns to frame narrow job-related discussions within broader career-related goals for each individual, the quicker a motivated employee sees how their present job, with certain results, leads to where they want to go next. I do not waste time these days explaining what jobs employees should do. I worry about not being able to show clearly which jobs are likely to lead to which career paths, and what employees can and should do to get there.

Weakness vs Strength: One thing I have noticed in many Nepali companies is that people are hired from outside for their strengths. Once inside, they are then hounded by management and colleagues for their weaknesses. But as the late management guru Peter Drucker never tired of explaining, for any

employee it is hard to improve on a weakness. It's much easier to focus on a strength and build on it. I have found this to be true.

The more an employee is taken to task for his weaknesses, the more his performance suffers. But the more management takes time to ask: "What are you really good at?" the better the result. After all, people take pride in what they do well – not in activities for which they have neither talent nor interest.

Secrecy vs Openness: Most Nepali companies are secretive to the point of being financially sick. This is not surprising. When management spends too much time hiding information and playing one group against another, employees have no choice but to use up their working hours to obsess over management's every gesture. Factions form, loyalties are fragmented, and products and customers are neglected. The antidote is to install a communication system that lets employees focus only on selling what the company produces.

Previously, the 'market' was a theoretical construct. These days, I find it in the phone calls of customers.

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"I couldn't just be a spectator anymore"

Interview in Sajha Sawal, *BBC Nepali Service*, 13 January

Mahanta Thakur, the madhesi politician who resigned from government, from parliament and from his Nepali Congress party last month to set up his own Tarai-Madhes Loktantrik Party, answered questions at a public hearing in Lahan this week. The event was part of the Sajha Sawal program provided by the *BBC Nepali Service*.

Jeevan Jha, Nawalparasi: You have been in powerful positions, but you never spoke a word about the tarai then. Why are you trying to project yourself as a saviour of the tarai now?
Mahanta Thakur: In our party's Jhapa convention, I had raised the issue of the under-representation of madhesi in state units, including the army. The prime minister admitted the weakness and had promised to rectify this.

Narayan Shrestha: But why did you have to set up a new party?
The madhes was burning. People were getting killed. I was elected as a madhesi leader. I couldn't just be a spectator anymore.

Sushil Sharma: You were a senior leader of a national party. Why did you choose to become leader of a regional party?
I object to the term regional. We are a national party. Our party will try to solve the problems of the madhes. And to say the madhesi problem is not a national problem is unfair. If even 10 percent of demands of the madhes were fulfilled, you wouldn't have seen the anger and resentment we are witnessing today.

Sushil Sharma: If yours is a national party, what is your roadmap for Nepal, not just madhes?
We have written it down in our mission statement. If you have any inputs, let us know, we will try to include them, if it is useful.

Sushil Sharma: You yourself were in a position to solve the tarai problems for last 15 years. You became the deputy speaker, you were

सबै
नेपाली



information minister. Don't you have to take a part of the blame?
Whenever we tried to raise the madhesi issue, we were ignored. The issue of Nepal's territorial integrity was raised to silence us. The army is 100,000 strong but there are only 264 madhesi in it.

Sushil Sharma: So why didn't you form a new party then?
We were being extremely patient and hoping that our demands would be met. You come to a tipping point.

Sushil Sharma: Why did it have to be so close to elections?
You can't consult an astrologer about these things. It happens when one can't take it anymore.

Mishrilal Harijan: There is communal tension. How are you going to bring the two communities together?
I think we can have a dialogue and solve our problems rationally.

Bidya Choudari, Bardiya: You have claimed that you represent the entire tarai. How can you represent us tharus?
We have always talked about the total population of the tarai, 49 percent of Nepal. It includes tharus, janajatis and people of hill origin.

Rashagan Choudari, Bardiya: There is violence in the tarai. Don't you think it will overshadow the problems here?
We have formed a new party partly because of the violence. We hope to work together with other groups to stop it. After we announced the formation of our new party, the leaders of the armed groups congratulated us. We haven't really met them in person yet.

Sushil Sharma: There is a history of madhesi groups splintering again and again. How can you ensure that your party will be an exception?
You have seen us becoming many from one. You will now see us becoming one from many.

Uncivil society
.....
Editorial in *Samaya*,
11-18 January

समाचार

Civil society played an important role in restoring democracy after the 1 February 2005 royal coup. People expected these activists to be vigilant about the seven parties which came to power. But civil society has turned out to be splintered and opportunistic, and has squandered its reputation even faster than the seven parties.

Instead of strengthening the institutions of democracy, civil society activists are now acting as the agents of the political parties in their extreme, unconstitutional activities. Some members of civil society pulled out altogether from the movement because of differences with the political leadership, but others have not uttered a squeak against the dictatorial aspirations of some leaders.

Some activists are even accused of supporting the agenda and personalities of the political parties and the exercise of unaccountable power. It is problematic that the activists have multiple identities of political figures, NGO representatives and journalists. By closing its eyes to human rights violations and to the madhes movement, and by not trying to bring the tarai, hills and mountains together, civil society has shown its failure. Some activists are even challenging Nepal's national unity by not

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speaking out against the vandalism of figures of Prithibi Narayan Shah, Bhanubhakta and BP Koirala. And when they used the Rayamajhi Commission to get back at political opponents, they did not understand why the people had turned their backs on them. Civil society can still salvage its reputation by severing its ties with the sources of political power.

Third gender
.....
Bhumika Shrestha in an interview with Biswa Mani Subedi in *Jana Aastha*, 16 January

The government has already directed the Supreme Court to give us, people of third gender, a separate citizenship certificate. However, not a single district administration office throughout Nepal has issued such a certificate. I myself have left an application at the office, asking to amend my citizenship status. My name is Kailash Shrestha in the citizenship certificate I received four years ago. I only want my gender to be changed to 'third gender'. But the CDO says I should get a new citizenship certificate. My date of birth will remain the same, my address will remain the same, my father's name will remain the same. The only thing different in this new certificate will be my gender. Now



KIRAN PANDAY

my question is: why do I have to get a new one when all the other information on the card is the same? I am sure it is not just me, but other third-gender friends who are facing the same problem. People do not molest and assault us as they used to in the past. More people at decision-making levels, in civil society, the administration, and among donors know about us and accept us. But people still think that those who stand around in Thamel late at night waiting for customers are the only people of third gender in Nepal. The biggest problem the third gender faces is unemployment. This is why so many of them have had to resort to working as sex workers.

Talk talk
.....
Editorial in *Rajdhani*, 10 January

After the failure to form the commissions as agreed under the peace accord, the Maoists and the government have reiterated the need in the 23-point agreement. Last year, the Maoists and the government agreed on the formation of commissions for truth and reconciliation, for peace and rehabilitation, for disappearance investigations, and for scientific land reform, and a high-level commission to monitor the comprehensive peace agreement. The peace agreement this time has set a deadline of a month to establish all the commissions and committees. However, even though 15 days have already passed, the government has not made any serious move to implement the plan. If the parties live up to their tradition of merely talking and fail to do anything substantial, the agreements and proposals will have no effect.

Tibet train to the border

Excerpts from an interview with Zheng Xianglin, Chinese ambassador to Nepal, in *Nepal*, 20 January

नेपाल

Are there any plans to extend the railway to the Nepal border?
The foreign minister has raised this issue on a number of occasions. The line will not end in Lhasa but will continue to other cities in Tibet. There are plans to extend the line to the Nepal border. In the future, the railway might be extended to Kathmandu itself.

When might that happen?
Nothing has been finalised, so I don't have much information about this. But I don't think that it will take very long to materialise.

There are some who claim that China is secretly helping the Maoists.
We do not support any specific party. We see no

need for secret relations with any party. We have always had friendly, open relations with all the parties that are working for peace and stability, of which the Maoists are also a part.

As a member of the United Nations Security Council, what is China's opinion on the role of UNMIN in Nepal and the extension of its mandate?
We strongly support whatever UNMIN's current mandate is. We will respect the Nepal government's decision to extend or not extend its mandate.

The US has expressed its desire to resettle the Tibetan refugees currently in Nepal. What does China think of this?
We oppose this because Tibet is currently in the process of peace, stability and development. And the Tibet problem is China's internal matter. We won't let any foreign power interfere in this. Along with the Dalai Lama's group, there are some that are showing Tibetans a false dream of life in the US and Europe, where they would get better education. Tibetans who don't know the truth, and those who are misled by these groups, cross the Himalayas into Nepal. Most of them are minors. After coming to Kathmandu, they understand the situation and there are many who have contacted our embassy to return to Tibet. The Tibetan government and the Chinese people will never let such separatists continue with their actions.

To resolve the border debate at Kalapani between Nepal and India, India has proposed that China should also be involved since the region borders China. Is China willing?
The border debate between India and Nepal is something that the two countries should solve amicably by themselves.



QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“We will destroy those who try to create problems before the constituent assembly elections, and conduct polls over their ashes.”

Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal at the seven-party joint assembly, quoted in himalkhabar.com, 14 January



नेपाल *Nepal*, 20 January

Song of unity

Anushil in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-29 January

हिमाल

She may be a Gurung, but the way she sings in the Maithili, Bhojpuri, Dhimal, Tharu and Awadhi languages, one feels she's a native speaker of all those languages. Madhu Gurung, 38, has sung more than a dozen songs in Bhojpuri and recently released the Bhojpuri album, *Naya Sanes*. She also sings with Gopal Thakur in Bhojpuri in an album called *Nirmohiya*. Madhu's love for madhesi music led her to participate in Madhes Night, held in Kathmandu. She often travels to the madhes to sing in concerts, and doesn't believe people are being forced out of the plains. Small factions, bent on disturbing the kinship between madhesi and pahadis, are creating these problems. She says that madhesi communities with whom she works have always welcomed her and treated her as one of their own. I am proud that my music has become the bridge between the tarai and pahad, says Madhu. *Bato Roje*, an anthology of Madhu's songs has recently been published, and she teaches music in Kathmandu.



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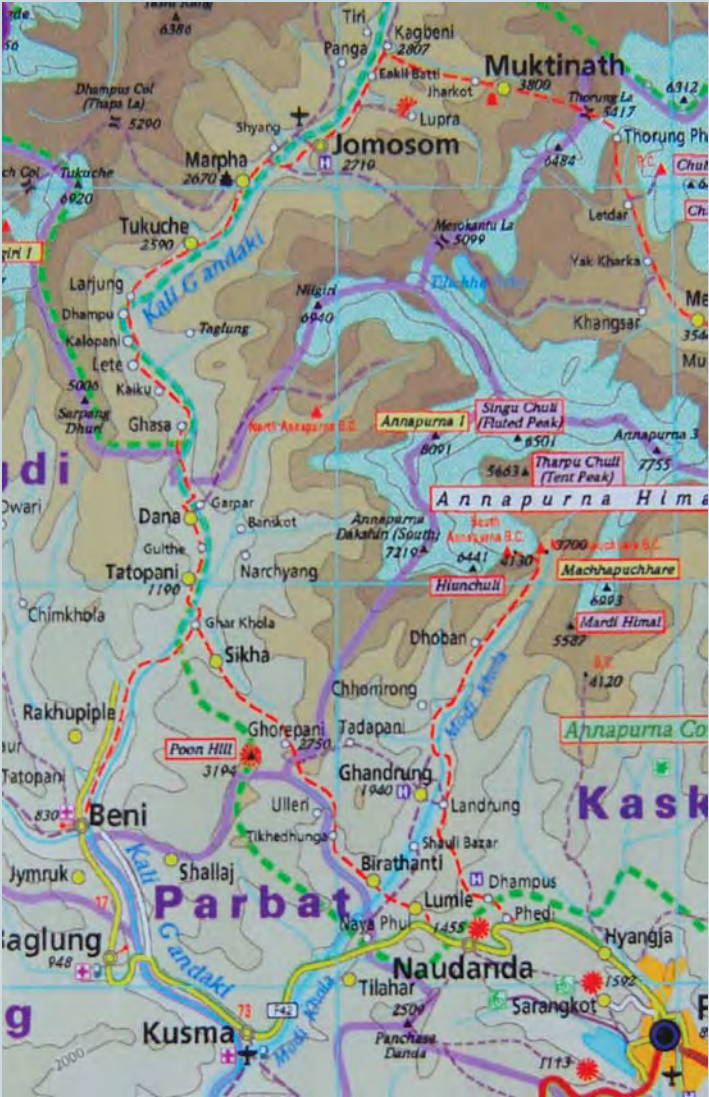
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TEXT AND PICTURES BY **MIN BAJRACHARYA** IN JOMSOM

Having travelled to Upper Mustang via Jomsom 20 years ago, the changes this time are dramatic.

After getting off the plane at Jomsom airport, one is greeted not by the sound of mule bells but by motorcycles revving up. Tractors roar along the cobblestone streets like steam locomotives. Diesel fumes assail the nostrils just as in Kathmandu. There is a traffic policeman, and in the past two years there have already been two vehicular accidents with four fatalities.

And the road hasn’t even reached Jomsom yet. All the motorcycles and tractors and the fuel to run them have been flown in by cargo helicopters.

Among locals in lower Mustang, there are two schools of thought about the road. The orchard owners who need a market for their apples, apricots and Marpha’s famous brandy think the link will give them better access to markets in the city. And other traders anticipate a boom in business.

But those who depend on trekking are worried that the road will destroy the unique selling point of the Kali Gandaki, which has carved the world’s deepest gorge as it flows between Dhaulagiri and Annapurna. The highway is presently being blasted by an army demolition team through cliff-faces that should have been declared a World Heritage Site, they say.

There are still trekkers walking round the Annapurna circuit, but they know they are the last visitors to see this stupendous gorge in its pristine state. Even as they walk towards Tatopani, the sound of dynamite blasting echoes and re-echoes in the narrow valley. There is only a 300m portion near Ghasa and another 700m north of Tatopani that remain to be cleared on the 83km road between Beni and Jomsom.

Some trekking entrepreneurs in Jomsom have already diversified to pilgrim tourism, which they hope will bring in more Indian and Nepali visitors once the road is open. Pilgrims can already buy a two-hour 28km pillion ride on a motorcycle from Jomsom to Muktinath for Rs 1,200. A jeep ride costs Rs 350. The jeeps were brought in by helicopter at a cost of Rs 470,000 and the transporters feel they can easily recoup the cost.

It is the low season in Jomsom, and there are only three flights a day from Pokhara. If the road is blacktopped, the airport will have little use. However, some hotel owners here are not so worried about the road. They say there is now more potential to sell walks to the side valleys like Meso Kanto, the pass to Dolpo, the east Dhaulagiri glacier and other areas of upper Mustang. They also say the airport could then be used for flights to Kathmandu and perhaps even to Banaras or Delhi to facilitate more pilgrim traffic.

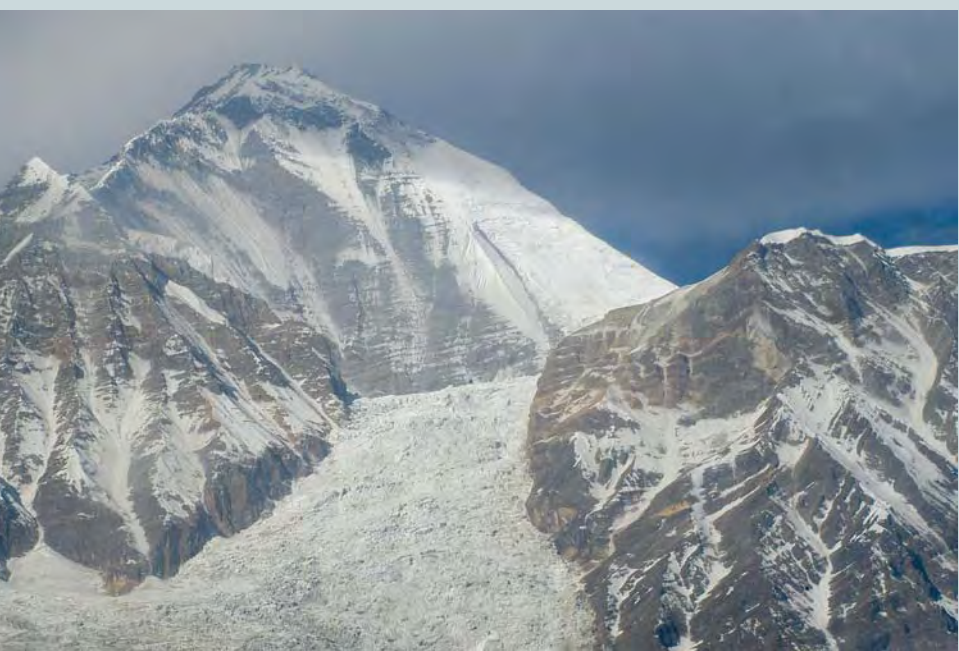
There is also anticipation here that the newly-released film *Kagbeni* will bring a flood of urban middle-class Nepalis to Mustang in the spring when the road is finished. ●



Last tre

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Link to Jomsom

Mustang to Mustang





DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

A dedicated British couple teach Nepali teachers

Feet on the pedals

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA in BIRATNAGAR

In Morang each day, locals are treated to the unusual sight of a middle-aged British couple pedalling their bicycles to or from the District Education Office, the Teacher Training Centre and various schools around the district.

David Spinney, 61, and Deborah Jordan, 59, have been following this routine for the past seven months in their work as teacher trainers. David, former principal of a school in London, is now helping improve the quality of teaching at three schools in Biratnagar. Deborah, his wife, has been a teacher for 33 years and is running a 10-month training course for teachers from Morang, Sunsari and Sankhuwasabha.

The couple came to Nepal with the British development charity VSO after a three-year teaching stint in Ethiopia. It is David's first time in Nepal, although Deborah once came to Pokhara on a school trip with her students. At that time, she admits, she had little interest in Nepal's educational system. But now, with a job to do, she has made sure she knows all about it.

Compared with Ethiopia, Nepal's education system is in good shape, she says. In Britain, more than 90 percent of students go to government-funded schools and the educational standard is generally high. Here it is the exact opposite: only the poor send their children to public schools, says David. Even middle-class people hesitate to send their children to government schools.

Deborah believes the poor student-to-teacher ratios and small classrooms often make teaching ineffective in Nepal's public schools. David, after seeing 135 students packed into a single classroom at the Janapath Higher Secondary School in Biratnagar, says: When you ask a question, 55 of them answer simultaneously.

But he feels the training he and Deborah provide can have a positive effect. They teach their students to speak in turn, and they show them how to make learning more fun for both the teachers and the students.

Deborah says many teachers here are dissatisfied with their jobs. Low pay and society's negative perception of teachers are part of the problem. She believes the government should make education a priority and give teachers more respect.

I could have been a doctor or an engineer, but I chose to be a teacher, says David. I've seen that many are dissatisfied with teaching here but I don't believe that I would have found satisfaction in any other profession.

He remembers how proud his parents were when he was appointed principal of a London school. Nepal's society doesn't respect the teaching profession, he says. This is why there are very few people who wish to become teachers.

PRIYA JOSHI in CHITWAN

Sauraha's main attraction for tourists and nature lovers is the adjacent Chitwan National Park, with its relatively abundant and easily visible wildlife. But it is also starting to draw growing numbers of students and researchers.

Chitwan Campground, run by the local Bird Education Society, is specially geared up for nature students and birders. It consists of two large, roofed, concrete camping platforms, raised to dissuade snakes from slithering into your tent, and a multi-purpose hall and kitchen area.

Unlike the nearby tourist resorts, there is no elephant waiting to take you for an early morning wander through the mist-shrouded forest in search of rhinos, deer and tigers. But guests do still have to get up early. Once they set off, they will not be looking down from a howdah for signs of other large mammals, but peering up into the tree canopy through binoculars in search of birds.



BIRDERS: Gokarna Khanal and Kapil Pokharel of Chitwan's Bird Education Society take visiting students on a trip to identify the national park's rich birdlife (right). The Chitwan Campground has a roofed, raised platform for visitors' tents to protect them from snakes and sun (above).

Guides Gokarna Khanal and Kapil Pokharel from the BES are enthusiastic birders and their passion for ornithology is contagious. They take visitors around the local community and along the river banks, point out the birds and allow them to identify them with the help of their heavily thumbled but lovingly preserved bird books.

Hem Subedi, head of the BES,

comes to the campground in the evening to talk to guests about the challenges of biodiversity conservation in Nepal.

The BES has been working with locals and visitors to spread awareness and appreciation of Chitwan's rich bird life, and in this way encourage the preservation of Chitwan's valuable wildlife habitat without cordoning it off as a no-

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about the birds and the trees



PICS: PRIYA JOSHI

go zone for humans.

Subedi says people must realise that the environment of Chitwan, as everywhere, is constantly evolving in response to the pressures on it, both natural and man-made.

“If we are to preserve nature’s diversity, we must make decisions based on research and understanding,” says Subedi. “That is where the campground

can make a valuable contribution, by providing an affordable research location close to the park.”

Chitwan Campground is the first of its kind in Nepal. Its proximity to Nepal’s richest biodiversity area, to several successful community forestry activities in the buffer zone, and to elephant and gharial breeding centres, makes it a valuable

place for field training and student research, Subedi says. It is able to host school and university field trips.

The campground can also encourage a new type of ecotourism, one that goes beyond preaching “take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints” and actually provides a place for people to stay with the

minimum of impact to their surroundings. This way “ecotourism” isn’t just a meaningless marketing tool but a chance to stay and learn about the environment while doing minimal damage. ●

Chitwan Campground
Bird Education Society
Sauraha, Chitwan
+977 056 580113
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Cost: Rs 450 per person per day. Includes three meals, tea and accommodation. Tents, sleeping bags and mattresses can be hired for a minimal cost.

The Chitwan Campground is a project of the Resources Himalayan Foundation in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation and supported by Wildlife Conservation Nepal. It is managed by Chitwan’s Bird Education Society.

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Sins of the sister

Stunning filmmaking atones for narrative shortcomings

As the strike by the Writers' Guild of America rolled into its third month, the Golden Globe Awards were announced early this week in an atypically unceremonial manner. It is ironic then that the top prize of best film went to *Atonement*, an adaptation of renowned novelist Ian McEwan's 2001 book that is, simply put, a deep reflection on the power of writing.

The story opens on a country estate during an idyllic, languid summer in pre-Second World War Britain, where 13-year-old Briony becomes the jealous witness of a romantic/sexual tension between older sister Cecilia (Knightley) and a servant's son, Robbie (McAvoy). Her own nascent sexuality, emotional confusion, narrative endowment, and a sense of rectitude combine into one solid lie that gets Robbie into the war and Cecilia estranged from the family. Having thus sabotaged a young love story, Briony is subjected to an agonising, unrelenting process of penitence.

The scenario may itself seem a bit trifling, but that is because by just watching the film you get a sense that you are missing out on a lot of what McEwan tackles literarily. The morbid presence of the war does give some weight to the narrative, and there is also a hint that the story is about much more than what it appears. To elaborate on this would require getting into the brilliant design of the story's climax. But it is easy to notice that our lying protagonist is also an aspiring writer. And in her dishonesty and need for atonement is coded a heartfelt commentary on literature and art in general (and perhaps also on their incompleteness).

With a subject-matter this nuanced, layered and literary, it is clear why the movie adaptation will be somewhat resented. Director Joe Wright's previous adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* met with similar reservations in some quarters. Yet the film stood out for its vivacity and perspective unexplored in previous versions.



The same approach, however, appears shallow in *Atonement*. Wright concentrates on the mood and the texture, repeatedly overlooking the psychological and moral depth of the story. There is a real crisis of credibility. The romance between Cecilia and Robbie feels tentative, the themes are not soul-stirring, and Briony's efforts of reparation are unpersuasive. In other words, perhaps in reverence of the original novel, Wright's adaptation paradoxically ends up showing how fictional McEwan's fiction is.

Then again, what is good in literature is rarely the same as what is good in cinema. Thankfully, Wright is a brilliant filmmaker, capable of creating shots and sequences so beautiful that they will just bowl you over. Take for example the challenge Wright had of portraying Robbie's haunting experience of the war. Forfeiting the conventional depictions of war's horror, he opts instead for a minutes-long, heavily choreographed, almost illusory single shot, as the camera follows Robbie through the waiting soldiers at the Dunkirk beach. This utterly aesthetic choice is a point of controversy, making us wonder if art can ever contain politics in this manner. But the cinematic experience of it is also something to be taken into account. At the end, there is something in the movie that is genuinely tantalising. To Wright's credit, it's his filmmaking.

ATONEMENT

Director: Joe Wright.

Cast: Kiera Knightley, James McAvoy, Romola Garai, Saoirse Ronan.

2007. R. 130 min.

KUNDA DIXIT

Basain is the most-widely read Nepali novel, not because it was a big bestseller but because it has been required reading in the Tribhuban University curriculum for decades. Hundreds of thousands of Nepalis know the plot by heart because they had to cram it for exams.

The 70-page novel by Lil Bahadur Chhetri evoked a powerful response among Nepalis in Nepal and abroad when it came out in 1958. Chhetri, a descendant of Nepali immigrants, wrote the book in Assam where he still lives. Although he never really stayed in Nepal, he based the portrayal of rural Nepal on interviews with more recent Nepali migrants to Assam.

In his preface, Chhetri had said the main reason for writing the book was to familiarise *prabasi* Nepalis about the environment and culture of their homeland. "It occurred to me that although the future of people like us, who have made our homes outside Nepal, is tied to the country in which we dwell, our language, literature, and culture are still Nepali, and everyone's own literature and culture are dear to them," Chhetri says.

In 2005, *Basain* was made into a feature film and on the 50th anniversary of its first edition in 2008, Michael J Hutt has brought out a flawless translation. As professor of Nepali at the School of African and Oriental Studies in London, Hutt has taken great pains to make sure nothing is lost in translation. The slim volume with a preface, glossary,

afterword, bibliography and copious footnotes will open a window to Nepal to many for whom the book has so far been out of bounds. And through that window, we see the reality of rural Nepal that hasn't changed much in the five decades since the book was written.

The caste and gender discrimination, poverty and injustice are more or less intact. But so is the fortitude and generosity of the Nepali spirit portrayed in the book.

Entrenched oppression forced generations of Nepalis over the past century-and-half to migrate to the madhes or muglan. Persistent injustice ultimately created the conditions for the Maoist revolution. That struggle finally made Nepalis aware of their rights, but the violence made the economic desperation of many Nepali even worse and triggered a new wave of mass-migration in the past decade that is a modern-day 'Basain'.

"Do they leave their homes because they wish to?" Chhetri asks in the Nepali preface to his 1958 edition, "perhaps that is true for many of them, but for others it is quite a different matter. I chose the misery and mystery that lie at the root of this as the theme of *Basain*."

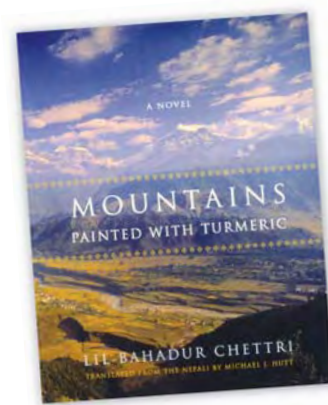
The story is set somewhere in the multi-ethnic hills of eastern Nepal. Dhane's family lives a precarious, but contented, existence. A family tragedy and the weight of subjugation by powerful village moneylenders forces him to migrate. This 'misery and mystery' is the story of millions of Nepali families through history. Today, Nepal's rural youth are selling off ancestral land to pay middlemen to take them to the Gulf or Malaysia, but the wrenching dislocation is the same.



KAMAL DIXIT/MPP

That is also the reason Hutt says he chose to translate *Basain*: "The way a family's dispossession and flight from Nepal are represented [in the novel] tells us something about the historical fact of migration from the Nepalese hills, as well as reveals the author's attitudes to the fact."

This is a moving and simple story of a universal family forced to leave home. Thanks to this translation, *Basain* will touch the hearts of many more people worldwide.



Mountains Painted with Turmeric (Basain)

Lil Bahadur Chhetri
Translated by Michael J Hutt
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translation



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Facts are even more dramatic than fiction in societies wracked by war. Nepal's conflict was no different. Nearly 15,000 people were killed and disappeared between 1996-2006, but a novel could be written about each one of them. The story of every family displaced by the conflict could be turned into a feature film.

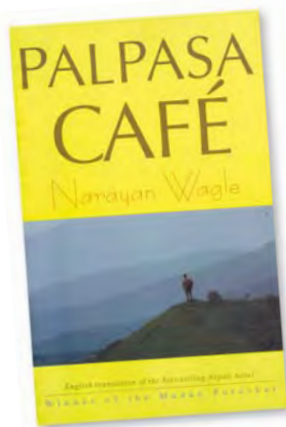
But we only remember the numbing numbers: 15,000 killed, 1,500 disappeared, 75,000 injured, 250,000 internally displaced and almost the whole country affected in one way or another.

As the editor of Nepal's largest-circulation newspaper, Narayan Wagle knew well the limitations of journalism in covering war. The news format wasn't the best way to get across to readers how the conflict was brutalising Nepali society. Wagle chose fiction to get closer to the truth.

When *Palpasa Café* came out in 2005, its unusual non-linear style was an instant hit with Nepali readers. It was a fictionalised account of Nepalis caught in the grips of war. Wagle makes a cameo appearance at the beginning of the book and hears of the abduction of a real-life friend by soldiers. He turns his

disappeared colleague into an imaginary painter named Drishya, and the rest of the book is about how the conflict sweeps everyone along.

Drishya falls in love with Palpasa, a Nepali American who has returned to the land of her parents after the post-9/11 America. Drishya meets with his childhood friend, Siddhartha, who has joined the Maoists and goes back to their war-torn village in the mountains. The two argue about the age-old questions of art and politics, about peace and



Palpasa Café
by Narayan Wagle
Translated by Bikash Sangraula
nepa-laya, 2008
240 pages
Rs 500 (hard cover)
Rs 300 (soft cover)

AUTOGRAPH SEEKERS: (above) Australian ambassador Graeme Lade and British ambassador Andrew Hall get their copies of *Palpasa Café* signed by Narayan Wagle on Tuesday. Lil Bahadur Chettri in a portrait taken in 1958 (above left).

justice, about whether the means justify the end.

In the novel's first chapter Wagle, as himself, is sitting at a café in Thamel taking dictation on the phone from a district reporter. There has been another battle in the mountains. "That was nothing new," Wagle writes, "we published stories like that every day. Today's newspaper already carried an almost identical story, tomorrow's would as well. It was the same thing every day...did newspapers exist here only to public body counts?"

Something is always lost in translation when novels cross the language barrier. Happily, this one, which got a final polish from Linda Trigg, preserves the original nuances. Narayan Wagle wrote a powerful anti-war novel, delving deeply through his characters at the human cost of conflict. Now, through this English translation, a larger international audience can read about what Nepal's war did to its people.

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HEALTH POINT

HEALTHY CHHA. TASTY CHHA.

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Acrylic paintings** by Asha Dongole at the Park Gallery, Lazimpat, until 30 January, 10AM-6PM. 4419353
- ❖ **Tibetan Lhasar photographs** by Daniel Collins at the Saturday Caf  , Boudhanath stupa, 6 February-31 March.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Electrohouse** at the JBar with DJ DannyCool from Ukraine, 19 January, 9PM. 4418209
- ❖ **Youth Discussion Series** on trade, economic relations and our strategy forward with Raghab D Pant, 18 January, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **animalNEPAL community meeting** to discuss the street dogs of Patan, 4PM on 20 January at the Summit Hotel. 9841334537

MUSIC

- ❖ **Paleti** with Prem Dhoj Pradhan, 25 January, at the nepa-laya   ri sala, Kalikasthan, 5.30 PM. 4412469
- ❖ **Live fusion music** of soft rock and classical by Sfatik at Moksh, Pulchok, 15 January, 8.30 PM. 5526212
- ❖ **Ciney Gurung** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 7PM. 5521408
- ❖ **Catch 22** live at the Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.



DINING

- ❖ **Ily espresso coffee** at the Galleria cafe, Thamel with contemporary Art exhibition at the Galleria lounge, every Friday espresso coffee cocktails, also at Park Village, Buddhanilkantha.†
- ❖ **International four course buffet** at the Sunrise Caf   with a range of Boris  signature dishes at The Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Wine and Cheese** every Friday and Saturday at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, 5-8PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Saturday special** barbeque, sekuwa, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 9841250848.
- ❖ **Dice-licious brunch** at Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50% discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30PM. 4273999
- ❖ **Scrumptious wood fired pizzas**, cocktails and specialty coffees at Roadhouse, Bhatbateni 4426587, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4260187.
- ❖ **Cocktails and jazz** with the JCS Quartet and a choice of cocktails at Fusion    the Bar at Dwarika's. 4479448
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live  performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666.00 nett. per person, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 6.30 PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **LaVazza coffee** Italy's favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, †Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Little Britain coffee shop** fresh organic coffee, homemade cakes, WiFi internet, open all day, everyday. 4496207
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

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For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com

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Call 4442220 for show timings at **Jai Nepal**
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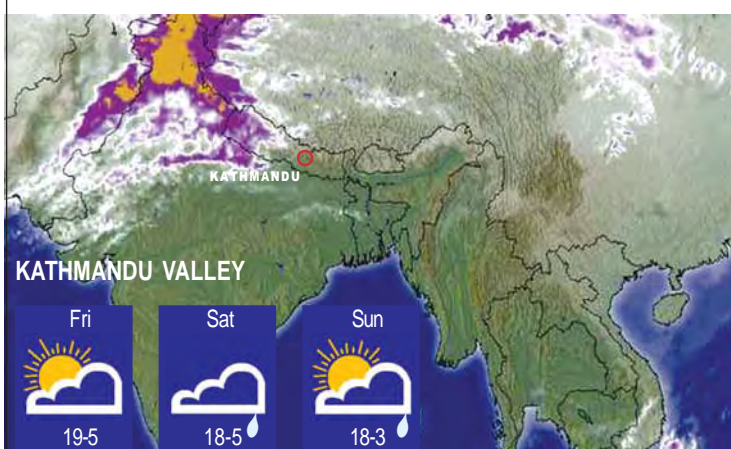
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BAR
Thamel
Phone: 4418209

WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

This westerly disturbance is moving rapidly across northern India, and will affect Nepal, bringing heavy snow to the mountains of western Nepal and a dusting in the east. Rain showers are likely in the mid-hills going into the weekend. Fingers crossed this will end the two-month dry spell. The cloud cover should last till Sunday and we'll be back into bright sunshine next week. The Valley will have an overcast weekend with light rain and foggy mornings into next week.



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Tuning In To Language and Culture
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हरेक आइतबार बिर्सो (१:४०-२:००)
"रेडियो सगरमाथा नियमित सुनी, अंग्रेजी सुधारी"
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हरेक विहान ५:०० देखि राती ११:०० बजे सम्म सूचना शिक्षा र स्वास्थ्य मनोरञ्जनका लागि भरपर्दो साथी रेडियो सगरमाथा १०२ थोप्लो ४ मेगाहर्ज



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

HOMECOMING: CoAS Rukmangat Katuwal is greeted by an officer of the Nepal Army at Tribhuban International Airport on his return from a week-long visit to China on Sunday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

OPEN MEDIA: Jesper Højberg, International Media Mission executive director, issues a 'Mission Statement' expressing concern about threats to press freedom in Nepal.



SHEERE NG

ROYALLY DECORATED: Revellers adorn the statue of King Prithvi Narayan Shah on Prithvi Jayanti with garlands and flags at Singha Darbar to commemorate Unity Day on Friday.



KIRAN PANDYA

PARTY PEOPLE: A volunteer looks on as supporters of Nepal's seven parties march towards Tundikhel for the seven-party gathering on Monday, shortly before a bomb exploded at Bhotahity injuring eight people.

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Arrest the Ass

With power cuts soon to go up to 11 hours a day, the Ass would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staying power of our rulers. Anywhere else they would have been strung up on poles.

Here we are, sitting in the dark and we still look on the bright side of things. Our national credo is: "It could be worse". Given the foresight of our planners, we can now sell **darkness** as a tourist attraction. 'Visit Nepal, Go Back To The Dark Ages'.

We count our blessings. We will wait for eight hours to get five litres of adulterated petrol once a week and we'll still say: "Hey, that's still better than no petrol at all." Our cell phones always have a network busy signal, but we are so happy to have iphones in which we can play Tetrix in traffic.



Speaking of which, the Traffic Police's campaign to eradicate congestion on the streets was doomed even before it started, but they have just extended it by a month. Have to give them credit for persistence.

You can get the cops to don the flashiest fluorescent jackets and give them those wands that glow in the dark, but it won't make an iota of difference as long as buses drop passengers in the middle of the road, taxi drivers think parking close to the kerb is an affront to their manhood, motorcycles are omnidirectional, and everyone from the Seven Party Conglomerate to the Federation of Disaster Preparedness insist on staging street rallies at rush hour. The Ass has a plan: on-the-spot public **flogging** of all violators.



The only good news is that the petrol station queues have started again in anticipation of the blockade of the tarai by madhesi groups from Saturday. That should bring down the traffic volume and make the capital's streets manageable again. Actually, why doesn't the government just close all gas stations, announce 24-hour load shedding, turn off the water mains, and shut the whole country down? Let's all **hibernate** till spring and wake up to vote in April.



Every time our political figures open their mouths, they get themselves into trouble. Fhut the suck up, already. The main problem in this country is the verbal diarrhoea pandemic among our leaders. Whenever a microphone is thrust on his face, the Fierce One can't help jeopardise the 23-point agreement yet again. Girja goes to Biratnagar and invariably says something so controversial that the media reverberates for a week. Like father like daughter, Minister-sans-Portfolio Frau Jost also goes to Koirala Nibas to shoot her mouth off. Comrade Makunay, of course, long ago mastered the art of publicly exposing the lacklustre performance of a government of which his party is a member. And every time General Ajaya P Nath goes off anywhere these days he can't resist putting his jack boot in his mouth. There should be a **moratorium** on public statements by all politicians and a media boycott of anyone who tries to even get a word in.



The Election Commission could include that in its **Code of Conduct** instead of having clauses in it that prevent the media from criticising the Commission. In fact, from next week we can't even poke fun at the Code of Conduct anymore. The Code of Conduct sucks. There, the Ass said it. Arrest the Ass.



The Maoists have the knack of coming up with real gems. The latest from Awesomeji is that he wants the EC to postpone the Code of Conduct (not the election this time). This must be so that the YCL has some more time to spread mayhem. The young commies make the Mandalays look like traffic cops. At the Kabhre Central Committee meeting, Badal & Co agreed to go along with elections only if they win. In other words, they said they'll go back to war if they lose. Naturally, therefore, they don't want a code of conduct to restrict their freedom of speeches.

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