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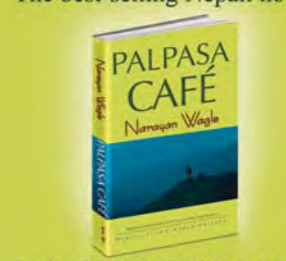
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DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

Poll drama

Candidate, cash and caste will decide Madhes vote

PRASHANT JHA IN BIRGANJ AND RAXAUL

Not even a week after the agreement with the government, the central Tarai is already gripped by election fever.

Asked if elections will happen, Bidyanand Sah, a Saptari native who works as a hotel guard here replies without hesitation: "This time the government will do it. But no one will win a majority and results will be a *khichdi*." At Ghantaghar Chok an APF sentry, rifle slung over his shoulder, says: "Nothing will stop it now, but we will have to provide security. The local police is useless."

Parsa district will elect five

members to the constituent assembly. The NC has the organisation and established faces but the cadre is demoralised. The UML has a base, especially among the town's Muslims and Tharus. The Madhesi parties have skeletal structures but the 'Forum' is a known brand, and with smart campaigning can translate ethnic consciousness into votes. No one gives the Maoists any chance here.

Even candidates of mainstream parties are desperate to prove their Madhesi credentials. Babu Jan Ali of the UML is up against friend-turned-foe Bimal Srivastava of the RPP. Ali sits on his bed, forming election committees and planning mass meetings.

"We participated in last year's Madhes movement, this time I gave my moral support, I will refuse any party whip that goes against Madhesi interests," he says. Ali takes a dig at his opponent: "Look at Bimal. His family has married Pahadis, their lifestyle is Pahadi. And he is a royalist." It looks like communal mudslinging will be a hallmark of his campaign. There is concern about armed groups who are opposed to the deal with the government, and candidates admit they don't go out at night.

The militants are uncertain about how the public will perceive their use of violence to disrupt elections, and they do need an exist strategy.

People here expect them to set off blasts to show their presence,

A crowd watches an election awareness street drama at Ratna Park on Sunday, standing in front of a poster of the Election Commission.

but they will strike deals with candidates to get money in return for security and support.

Across the border in Raxaul, the Hindu right is divided on the question of Nepal. Baba Sanjay Nath, a local priest, has often taken processions of sadhus to oppose secularism in Nepal for which he is rumoured to have got money from royalists. He is supposed to be behind the Nepal

EDITORIAL
Half the sky p2

Women's Day Special p10-11

Defence Army. But Anil Sinha, a BJP state committee member and head of Seema Jagaran Manch, is in touch with both armed and unarmed Madhesi leaders. Sinha says: "Restoring the Hindu rastra and weakening the Maoists is more important than saving the monarchy in Nepal." ●



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HALF THE SKY

The real revolution that has swept Nepal in the past 12 years is not of the political kind. It is the dramatic strides this country has taken in women's empowerment.

Across Nepal on village trails, along highways, amidst the ripening terraces of wheat at 9.30 every morning you see something that you seldom saw 15 years ago: long lines of uniformed girls carrying books, going to school holding the hands of their little sisters.

The value placed by their parents on education, the enormous social pressure for literacy lies at the heart of Nepal's current transformation. Rising female literacy is the main factor leading to improvements in the whole spectrum of development parameters: reduction in the percentage of child marriages, better mother and child survival rates.

Nepal's under one infant mortality rate has gone down by half to 50 per 1,000 live births since 1990. Maternal mortality has come down by 40 percent in the same period. Nepal's birth rate is down to 3.3 from 5.2 in 1970.

All this did not happen by chance, and it did not happen overnight. It was the direct result of the priority given by successive governments since 1990 to education for girls. Time and again it has been proven across the developing world that the best return on investment comes when you spend money on female literacy. There is direct correlation between girls' education and higher living standards of families.

In Nepal, what is surprising is that gains in health and education have happened despite bad governance, corruption and a devastating ten-year conflict. We like to bad mouth the post-1990 democracy period, but it was the accountability of elected officials at the VDC and DDC levels that improved health and education at the grassroots.

To be sure, there are formidable challenges ahead. The child marriage rate is still a high 60 percent in rural areas. Despite rapid strides in literacy, more than half of Nepali women still can't read or write. There are pockets of Nepal, especially in the eastern tarai and western hills, where the maternal mortality rate is as bad as sub-Saharan Africa.

Crime against women and domestic violence has seen a worrying rise, possibly because of the prolonged absence of family members due to migration as well as the greater assertiveness of educated young women ('No safer', #388). There are tens of thousands of women who head households because their male breadwinners were killed, disappeared or injured during the war.

The health problems of Nepal are not just a medical issue, but a direct result of the low status of women in society, as we learn from our special International Women's Day coverage (p 10-11).

With the greater participation of women in decision-making and their involvement in the elections to a constituent assembly, Nepal has an opportunity to finally bestow on half its population the justice that it has been denied for centuries.



KUNDA DIXIT

No matter where

Women in the hills and plains suffer equally from gender bias

One of the great regrets in my life will always be that I was not able to donate blood for a 35-year-old mother in Birganj in 1999 who was bleeding to death after a botched abortion.

I was with the gynecologist. The doctor who examined her told the patient that she needed an immediate operation but only if her relatives donated blood. The



WOMEN'S DAY
Aruna Uprety

woman had lost a lot of blood and it was a risky operation, but without it she would die anyway.

As it turned out, the woman's family members declined to donate blood to save her life. The doctor was furious and went out to the corridor to scold the relatives. The mother-in-law relied: "We are not giving blood, if she dies it is her fate,

what can we do?"

Six hours later, the woman died. Cause of death: internal haemorrhage due to perforated uterus. The doctor tried to assure me that I couldn't save the lives of dozens of mothers who died in his care every year because relatives would not give blood. "How can you personally donate blood to all of them?" he asked.

The doctor was right, of course. Today, on International Women's Day, I wonder if things have really changed in Nepal. That patient in Birganj did not die because of lack of medicine, or lack of doctors. She died because she wasn't valued as a woman and a mother of five children. Her fate was in the hands of her husband's family who decided that if she died "it was her fate".

I have worked in the Tarai and the hills, and I have found that Nepali women everywhere face the same discrimination. Newly-wed wives are treated like slaves by their in-laws. At least household servants earn a salary. The gender discrimination and the ostracisation is the same in the Tarai and the hills.

We thought women had to work harder in the hills, but their lives are no easier in the plains. We talked to women in Siraha and Mahottari, and found most Tarai women didn't complain about reproductive health problems because most doctors were men.

They keep suffering in silence. I once overheard Madhesi and Pahadi women at a meeting comparing their sorrows. They were competing to compare their hardships. Hearing about the life of a woman in the mountains, a Madhesi woman said: "You are so lucky, at least you can go out and talk to other people. We can't even go out of the house to go to the toilet, we have to wait till night."

A woman from the hills replied: "At least you don't have to work like a donkey fetching water up the mountain and risking your life cutting fodder from the tops of trees. A bullock in the Tarai and a woman in the hills are equally cursed." It is clear the discrimination and suffering is common.

Women in the Tarai suffer from vitamin-A deficiency and have night blindness. Given the vegetables and fruits that grow in the Tarai this shouldn't happen, but pregnant women can't even eat the papayas and bananas that grow in the garden because of a belief that it will cause an abortion.

Much worse is the health status of women from the 'untouchable' Dom, Chamar or Mushahar castes. Severe malnutrition caused by poverty and taboos, lack of health care and ignorance about family planning trap them in a vicious circle of pregnancy, high maternal mortality and death.

When will the men who dominate the political discourse for autonomy ever understand and address the problems of the women of the mountains and Madhes and their basic human right to be treated like human beings? ●

History and geography

New Madhesi parties must correct past injustices

Eight more kangresis have quit the party to join the MJF (Madhesi Janadhikar Forum). This time they belong to a mix of ethnicities: Tharu, Madhesi and even Pahadi and janajatis.

They may have been driven by pique over not getting tickets, but they said they wanted to "emotionally integrate the Tarai with the whole nation" and to "fight for geography". The MJF's Upendra Yadav has called it only the "first step towards inclusiveness to join the people of hill origin".



GUEST COLUMN
Bihari K Shrestha

The MJF plans to hold a national convention after the polls to give itself a new name to ensure countrywide membership. For the first time in Nepal's history, a new national party rooted in the Tarai is being crafted to be led by Madhesi politicians themselves.

This development is also likely to take

the wind out of the sails of Mahanta Thakur's Tarai Madhes Democratic Front (TMDF), hoisted with such flourish less than a month ago. Similarly, the Mahato-led Nepal Sadhabana Party and the newly formed tripartite United Madhes Democratic Front (UMDF) may also lack relevance.

Even the Chure Bhawar Ekata Samaj (CBES), the upstream neighbours of Madhesi, may find it sensible to make common cause with the MDF because of their shared habitat.

Geography inspired recent defections, but how is the MJF going to deal with history? The defections by Mahanta Thakur & Co from the NC were justified on grounds that the parent party had failed to address Madhesi grievances. But their own advocacy of the Madhesi cause when they were kangresis never made headlines.

Besides, the simultaneous desertion by TMDF leaders from their otherwise mutually antagonistic parties suggests an unseen go-between at work. As reported by a blogger recently, NC vice-present Sushil Koirala chided Mahanta Thakur for having

been guided by the Indians. Upon which Thakur reportedly tendered his resignation from the party and parliament only to be dishonorably discharged by the party in retaliation.

History shows us that the defecting leaders have been no less responsible for deprivation in the Tarai. The region's leaders generally come from the holy trinity of upper caste groups: Brahmin, Rajput and Kayastha, plus a creamy layer of Yadavs.

Together, they have appropriated economic and political power and privileges in the Tarai for generations despite their relatively small population size. Indeed, it is quite common to run into high caste Madhesi officials in the corridors of national educational institutions, judiciary and bureaucracy in the country. Their total number in the population is a fraction of the total number of three elite Pahadi groups: Chettri 3.6 million, Brahmin 2.9 million and Newar 1.2 million.

Many other Tarai ethnic groups remain historically deprived due mainly to caste-

based exclusion, like the Chamar, Dhanuk, Mushahar, Dushad and the 30 or so others that together number over 6 million. Of the 24 different ethnic groups reported as 'educationally disadvantaged' in 2000, as many as 15 were Tarai-specific.

The 1.5 million strong Tharu community and the indigenous Rajbanshi, Dhimal and Kisan have continued to be dispossessed due to Nepal's clash of civilisations. Traditionally egalitarian, they have depended on a few large landowners and have been ill-equipped culturally to deter the perniciously acquisitive 'upper' castes which made inroads into their terrain in the past 50 years.

Privileged Madhesi on the other hand have hobnobbed with fellow Pahadi elites within the mainstream parties and did precious little to uplift the Tarai poor. The political parties failed the nation, but Madhesi politicians in it must share the blame.

The promised inclusiveness by the MDF must correct that historical wrong and reaching out to the vast multitude of geographically deprived groups both in the plains and the hills. ●

LETTERS

MADHES

It's a historic achievement that the SPA and the UDMF finally struck a deal, and all Nepalis should rejoice ('Madhes Street', #389). The people must prepare for the polls with energy and enthusiasm, as they address the issues of all groups in the country.

Dhananjay Shah, TU, Kirtipur

Some people are arguing that the UDMF does not represent the majority of Madhesis, but the mass demonstrations in the Tarai last week show that this view is mistaken. The government and Kathmandu-centric media do not represent the situation in the Madhes fairly. They claim that the Tharu are opposing the demand of 'one Madhes one region' is also not accurate. The Madhes does not want to be a separate nation, it wants to be a federal state. That is the only way to make a country without discrimination and injustice.

Amit Ranjan, Janakpur

I think we (including Prashant Jha) need to accept that whereas Mahant Thakur is a responsible and principled leader, Sarbendra Nath Sukla (Janashakti Party) held senior portfolios in the Panchayat cabinet and was a central committee member of the RPP (Thapa group). Now he is proclaiming that the Nepali political establishment, which he was happy to serve before, is responsible for the oppression of Madhesis. Who is he to advocate Madhesi rights?

It is very important that people like him are not allowed to manipulate excluded and impoverished people in the Tarai for their personal benefit. They are all to some extent responsible for the continuation of an unjust society.

'Bhusal', email

Your survey showed a slight increase in public opinion in favour of monarchy ('Pre-poll poll',

#386). In my view, there was no serious decline in the image of monarchy even after Jan Andolan 2, which definitely was for peace and end of hostilities, but not against the historic institution of monarchy. The rest of the world does not want to see Nepal fall into the political abyss which will result from demolishing a culturally unique country for an uncertain alternative.

Pradeepta Sharma, Mumbai

Nepal lost its geostrategic importance in 1980s after Sino-US rapprochement. ('The king castles', Editorial, #389). And whatever remained was lost after Sino-Indian reconciliation. Consequently, Nepal now is under India's sphere of influence. But does it matter? Nepal's political parties are patriotic and focussed on solving Nepal's problems, though they differ on how to do it. They are just as capable as others and we need to help them come out of the confusion. Please stop harping on about dark nights.

Kishor Kamal, email

The SPA government under PM Koirala has done things which will have consequences more harmful for Nepal than either the Panchayat or Rana regimes. He has sowed the seeds for the disintegration and communalisation of Nepal. This government has taken long-term decisions which were not within its mandate.

Abhi Karki, Pune

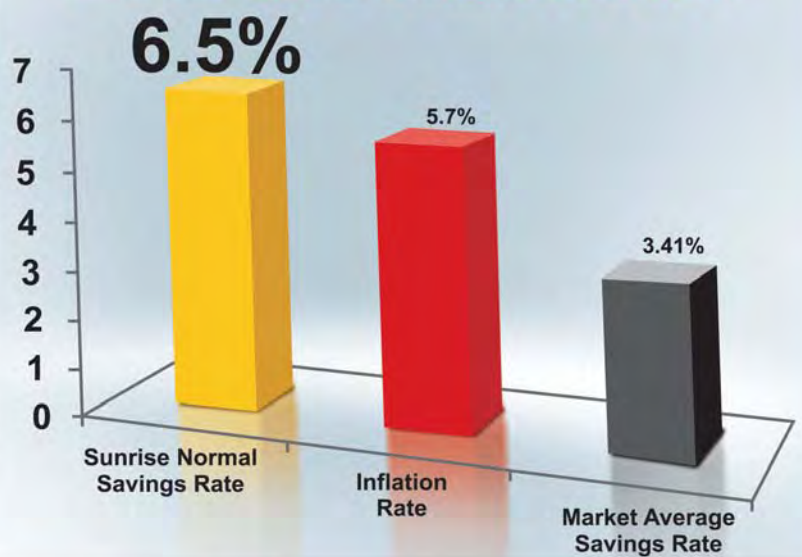
HOMESICK

This is regarding Kalpana Shrestha's letter ('From the Nepali Press', #389). Being an immigrant is not like being a citizen in one's own country. Nowhere in the world is there true peace, and people just have to learn to live in the environment which exists. Nepali people who are lucky enough to have good jobs in Nepal are better off than Nepalis anywhere else in the world, so my advice is just be happy in the motherland.

Khagendra Timilsina, USA



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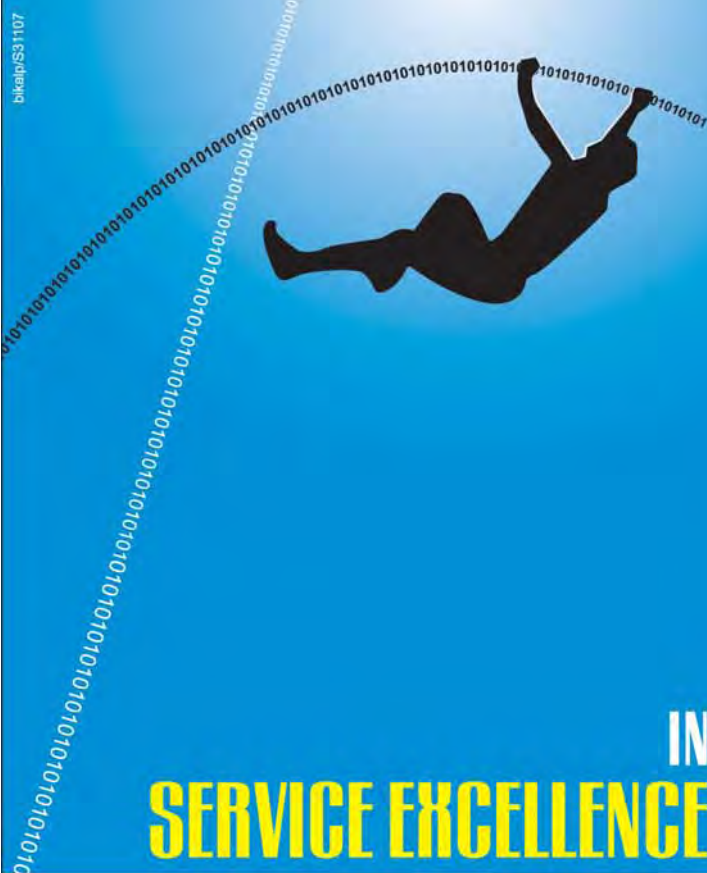


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Rural Nepal survives on remittances, but at what cost?

WONG SHU YUN in MYAGDI

Women sip tea outside their homes while children play badminton and cricket on the streets of Beni. It's Democracy Day and everyone gets to enjoy the public holiday, except the men. Up to 80 percent of them in Myagdi have gone abroad to work: the highest proportion in any district in Nepal. They are in the British or Indian armies or in Singapore or Brunei. Others are in Qatar or Malaysia.

Those who go to the Gulf send home about Rs 10,000 a month, in Japan it may be as high as Rs 50,000. If a young man decides to stay home, he may earn only Rs 5,000 a month as a bus driver or shopkeeper. The temptation and social pressure to go abroad to work is immense.

And even if they wanted to stay home, there just aren't enough jobs here in the hills of central Nepal. The conflict took its toll, and besides existing businesses closing down, infrastructure like highways and hydropower projects were scrapped or delayed. For example, if it hadn't been for the war, the



WONG SHU YUN

highway to Jomsom would be completed by now and Beni would have benefited as a transit point.

"Our economy is fully dependent on remittances," says Surya Margani, vice-chairman of the Ministry of Commerce in Beni. He says Myagdi alone gets Rs 40 million worth of money from abroad through official channels. Adding hundi and private transfers, the total may

be double that.

The effect of the remittance economy can be seen everywhere. More than ten banks have sprung up since the 1990s and there are a surprising number of jewelry shops as families of migrant workers invest in gold.

A family here that receives money from abroad save up to Rs 4,000. Most of the money is invested into land to build houses or hotels, with wealthier

families going on to buy land in Pokhara and Kathmandu, sometimes migrating to these cities for better prospects.

There is also a boom in schools. Men folk working abroad find the value of learning English and want their children to also be fluent, so there has been a boom in private English-language schools. In a private school here, up to 80 percent of the children in a Grade Eight class had their

father working abroad.

But prolonged absences of the men in the family have also led to family dislocations. Baburam Chhantyal was in Saudi Arabia for nine years when his wife left him for another man. With two children aged six and 11, Chhantyal returned to Beni three months ago so that he could rebuild his family.

"I'm working hard so that my family can prosper, but look what has happened," he says. Chhantyal has since remarried but will be going overseas again. "I have to," he puts simply, "it will be tough, some nights I just close my eyes and imagine that I'm in Nepal."

The 39-year-old father says he will tell his children to study hard and not play so much. "I tell them that their father is going away for their future," he adds.

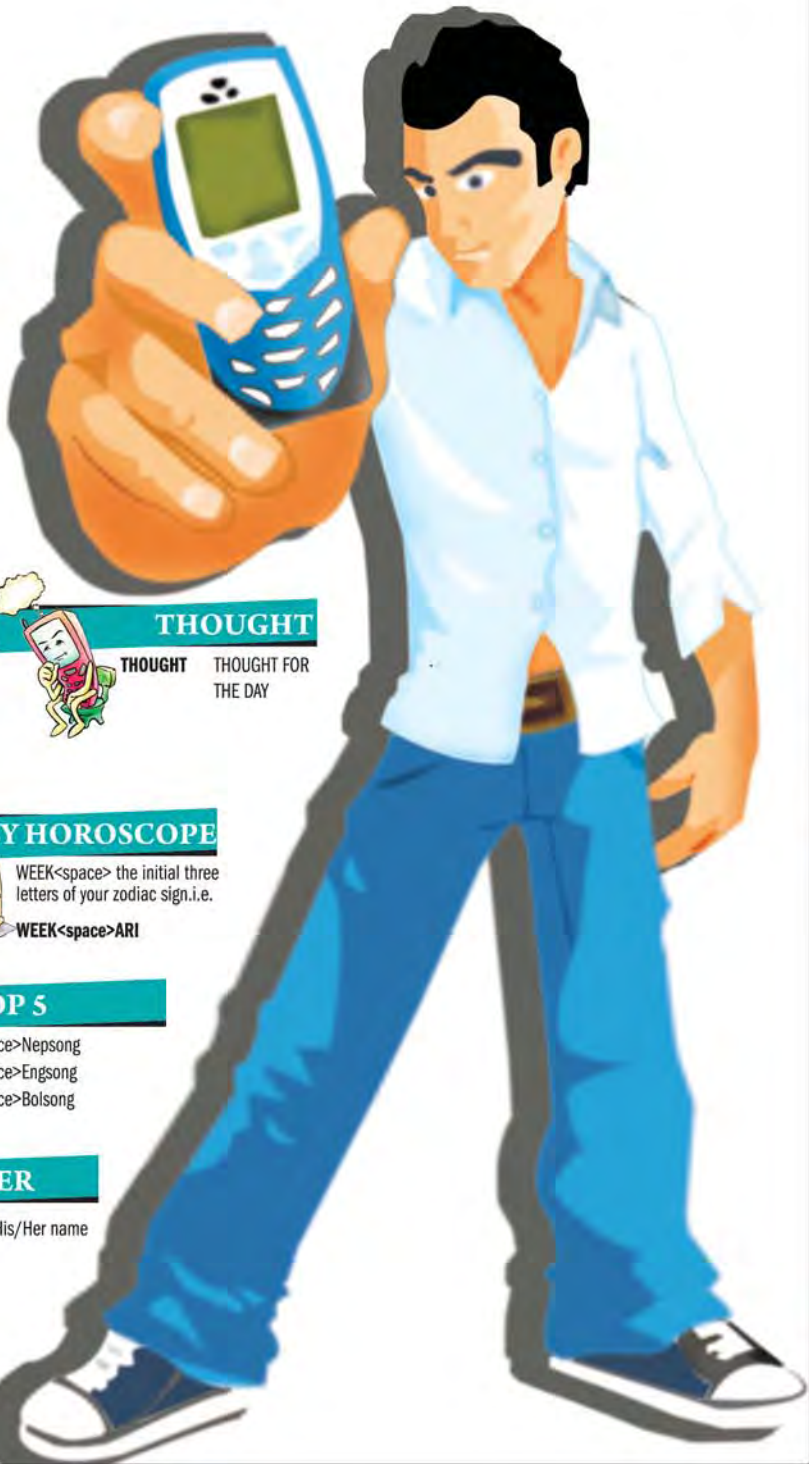
Most teenage boys here dream of becoming soldiers like their forefathers. "I want to join the British Army," says Yeependra Tilija, 17. His father is abroad in Saudi Arabia, and he knows how hard he has to work whatever the money. There is much more prestige in becoming a Gurkha soldier.

Yeependra has been preparing for his SLC exams, and runs every morning to keep fit so he will pass the recruitment physicals. His teacher Roshan Rana worries about him and his other pupils.

Says Rana: "I don't know if the men who have gone abroad will ever return. How will the country benefit? Who will look after Nepal?" ●



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THOUGHT
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Iron plus

The Government of Nepal, Nepal Flour Mills Association and the Micronutrient Initiative (MI) are launching an iron fortification program as part of the government's five year plan of action for the control of anaemia among women and children. Under the program, mills will be adding iron, folic acid and vitamin A to the flour they produce.

24 for Everest

Everest Bank's latest branch opened at Lekhnath in Kaski. This is Everest's 24th branch. The bank has 10 ATM counters and connects to all branches through the Anywhere Branch Banking Systems. Everest Bank also plans to open branches at Narayanghat, Tulsipur, Bhaktapur and Besisahar.

Merchant meet

At the sixth annual general meeting of Royal Merchant Banking and Finance, the company claimed a net profit of Rs 6.7 million in the last fiscal year. It also announced a 10 percent bonus share and that deposits, borrowing, loans and investment were Rs 598.8 million.

Armani phone

Samsung's Giorgio Armani phone is now available in Nepal. At 10.5mm thick, it has a 3 megapixel camera, 2.6 inch touchscreen display and comes with a Giorgio Armani leather carrying case. IMS TeleTrade is Samsung Mobile's authorised distributor in Nepal.

Malaysian taste

A week-long festival was held by Tourism Malaysia at the Soaltee Crown Plaza, with exotic cuisine flown in especially from Malaysia. Last year, 38,022 Nepalvis visited the country, a 200 percent increase. Tourism Malaysia will continue to highlight the country as an idyllic getaway.



The American dream

Maintaining a topdog position is always challenging

Washington DC: Consumers in the US are paying the highest prices for oil, but we do not see angry protests like in Nepal. They know it is a product which is governed by market forces, and if the prices increase more than they can afford, they will reduce consumption.

Food prices have also started to climb, and for poorer people who comprise of nearly a third of the population, life is becoming increasingly difficult. Home prices have plummeted as mortgage companies are busy foreclosing properties

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

and writing off loans, thus creating unprecedented losses for the banks and other financial institutions.

The US government has plans to rescue the economy: taxes have been cut to actually dole out money to taxpayers so that they can spend more to stimulate economic activity again. It is a country which has always believed that so long as the cash registers at supermarkets stay ticking, the economy will keep going.

If we feel that the banking and financial industry in Nepal is not regulated and there is room to dodge the regulator, then what has been going on in the US for once makes us look like a molehill in front of a mountain.

This Beed's seven-year-old daughter recently advised her dad on a way to make more money: it was to sell money, so that he could buy more money and sell that money thus making even more money. It seems this is what has been happening in many big banks which keep on churning out innovative products.

A bond issued by one division of the bank is rated by a subsidiary, to be bought by another group company and sold to another division, at the same booking profits, paying fat bonuses to staff and giving good returns to the shareholders. But



SAM KANG LI

the weak foundations of this system have started to crack, and huge losses are being reported as the base of money from which more money is made is now gone.

The presidential primaries this year are witnessing a bitter battle in the Democrat camp. The bile unleashed in the show-down between Obama and Clinton may turn out to be greater than the actual election next year. But for the US, the present is not the main worry, it is the future of the country keeping the think tanks busy.

The acceleration of economic growth in both India and China, the bouncing back of the EU and the demographic shift that lies ahead are challenging the US' ability to maintain its dominance for the next 50 years as it has for the last 50. In what may be the start of a more outward-looking worldview, there are plans for massive

study abroad programs for US students. There is also much talk of the growing influence of Asian Americans, who have close links to growing markets, and their potential role in the future of the United States.

On the other hand, the looming scarcity of money may mean that the US scales back its aid budgets, which could also lead to belt-tightening in countries like Nepal.

Of course, the Americans won't go cheap on expenses which directly benefit themselves though, which is good news for Nepal. To our own blessing and curse, we will remain a strategic point for the US to sit at 10,000 feet and watch what is happening to the north and south, where its key competitors will be for the next fifty years. ●

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WONG SHU YUN

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Besides creating awareness how else does Malaysia promote tourism?

We are here in India and Nepal to promote the 'Malaysia Truly Asia Kitchen' to wind the hearts and minds and stomachs.

Marketing campaigns are important, but it doesn't end at communications. We have to be ready to receive people on our side. If we campaign well, and people visit Malaysia and see it isn't as nice as they think, we haven't really been successful. If people visit and they go back speaking well about the place, it's good news. In fact, word-of-mouth is more effective than any publicity materials. If they go back disappointed it renders the publicity campaign useless. The important thing is to tell the truth.

For example, we say that Malaysia is affordable, which is true. People come here for hotels that are cheap yet have five-star standards.

How can tourism development make sure that indigenous cultures do not get displaced?

Indigenous cultures will be constantly threatened if you don't protect them. There's a need to make sure that various ethnicities are not disregarded. Also, it depends on what is strong and what is not. If you're strong, any kind of temptation is not a problem. Protection is only effective to a certain degree. Let these indigenous cultures be tested, allow them to grow in strength. Let's talk about cultural performances around the world today that used to be traditions. What brings them up on stage again

is the tourism industry.

Wherever you go, if there are tourists, old things get revived again. It's easy to blame tourism for allowing foreign influences into a local culture, but look at television and the mass media – these penetrate even more. Everybody watches TV all the time for four to five hours a day. Also consider festivals, which are a positive way of presenting a country. If you don't have festivals, how can you speak about culture? It's just like plants – if you have no flowers, how can you differentiate the plants? Festivals are the flowers of every culture.

Will Malaysia's tourism board strive to develop eco-tourism?

Any projects made in Malaysia that involve development are done according to strict adherence to environmental standards. Eco-tourism is very much crucial to the survival of the tourism industry, you need to protect and sustain first in order to promote growth. There's no such thing as introducing eco-tourism, it has always been there and it will only be more and more important from now on.

What is going to be critical in tourism development in Asia in the future?

Technology is an important aspect in tourism development. Look at Singapore – it has 4 to 5 million people but 10 million tourists. That's because the country utilises a lot of technology to draw people and to make things easy and smooth. If you have to handle things manually, it's impossible and you won't see a fast turnover.



Naumule now

Tila Bhandari in *Himal Khabarpatrika*,
28 February-13 March

हिमाल

Once deserted Naumule is now bustling with people who have returned to their homes. The local electricity project is back in use while the land is once again planted with crops. The 300 families displaced after the Naumule incident have returned. Local businessman Laxmi Chand says: 'Business has boomed since people came back.' The secondary school that was closed after the Naumule attack has also reopened. 'Many children were displaced and there was no environment to study,' says local teacher

Bhumika Hamal.

During the war, the Maoists went around the area recruiting one person per family. That forced many people to leave their villages and move to the headquarters of Dailekh and Surkhet. According to police sub inspector Hari Sijapati, all the displaced have come back after the Maoists joined the peace process.

Although the people were previously reluctant to re-establish the police office, the police and the political parties went ahead with it. Today people are happy with the work of the police. Sijapati says, 'If there are any complaints, we call an all party meeting to solve the problem. That way it is easier for us.'

Don't forget

Editorial in *Rajdhani*, 3 March

राजधानी

The government has clinched a deal with not only the agitating Tarai bodies but also with the United Democratic Republican Front. Now that the Front's various ethnic and regional bodies will also take part in the elections, almost all the parties will now be involved in the mass undertaking that is the Constituent Assembly elections. But amidst all the excitement, it seems that a few key elements that the parties and government should not have forgotten have fallen by the wayside.

Nepal doesn't have a very long democratic history. The agenda that was established by the people in 2007 is only now being implemented. The demand for a constituent assembly was a key principal then but slowly, even that has fallen into a whirlpool of conspiracy. Only a few of the people's demands have been implemented but not to our satisfaction. Even during this crucial election time, there is very little happening according to the people's desires. The documents released by the Election Commission and the Ministry of Information do not answer many of the public's most important questions. Although the effort is laudable, it is still not enough. It is necessary that the entire nation understand the technicalities behind the elections and their importance. If awareness campaigns to explain these terms are not conducted then there will be no difference between parliamentary elections and constituent assembly elections.

The political parties still have not explained how the inclusive electoral process will work. Nor have the Election Commission or other governmental and non-governmental bodies. The CA election is not something that will happen every time its mandate runs out. It is an undertaking that will happen once in the nation's lifetime and for which all should unite. The parties should not only be promoting their own party politics like in every other parliamentary election. People from all the nation's sectors should also step forward and try to spread awareness about it.

Rival

Interview with Sanu Kumar Shrestha, UML candidate from Kathmandu-10 in *Sanghu*, 3 March

साँघु

How do you feel about standing up against Prachanda in the elections? He might be the Maoist chairman but for the locals in Kathmandu he is just another leader. Prachanda's standing is very feeble against the UML force in Kathmandu.

The Maoists have declared Prachanda their new president, why do you think he is weak?

According to my understanding, this election will choose the representatives for our new institution. What is the point of declaring yourself president when the CA polls haven't even been held? I don't think he is going to win the elections just because he is the chairman of the Maoists. Winning elections requires an integrated party and the support of the party workers and the people. In Kathmandu Prachanda lacks both.

With talk about poll sharing going around, you have been called a dummy candidate. Will you stand down if the UML has to make way for Prachanda?

Firstly, I don't see poll sharing happening, at least in Kathmandu. Secondly, he also stood for candidacy from Rolpa. Kathmandu, specifically region no.10, is a stronghold of the UML. The UML is certain to win in Kathmandu, so I feel that towards the end he will look towards Rolpa for a victory.

What is Prachanda's position in Kathmandu-10?

Every candidate thinks that they themselves will win. As for the position of Comrade Prachanda, it might be too soon to talk about it. While Prachanda's personality might have led many to think that he is the UML's chief competitor, our main competitor still remains the NC.

Prachanda is an international personality, you on the other hand are a district level leader, how will the people come to know and vote for you? I am a local of this region. I have worked in the construction of the 10 electoral regions of Kathmandu. I do not need to tell the people who I am. They already know me. The party chose me to stand against Prachanda because of my image.

How are your preparations going?

Although Comrade Prachanda might be more experienced in matters of warfare, we are far ahead of him in the elections. There is a huge difference between getting involved in a war and winning people over through elections.

There are rumours about the Maoists turning Kirtipur into their area.

It is good to dream about making Kirtipur a Maoist area. Kirtipur is the native town of the Newars. While the Maoists are talking about ethnic self-governance, the candidacy of Prachanda in a native Newar town will raise many questions. Prachanda's candidacy might backfire on him.

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CHAUDHARY GROUP TOUCHING LIFE EVERYDAY IN A MORE GREENER WAY



It is known to all that Chaudhary Group (CG) is one of the largest corporate houses in Nepal. Over the last sixty five years of operations, growing in size and strength, the CG today is a conglomerate of over 40 businesses. The CG touches every aspects of public life – with presence in industries like food and beverages, apparel, health care, education, tobacco, real state (housing development), financial services, steel, automobiles, hydro and electric power, and hospitality – tourism.

THE TLE SERIES

CG coins all of its initiatives as TLE which is abbreviated after its corporate slogan *Touching Life everyday*. The TLE series catalogs all initiatives of CG related to Corporate Social Initiatives, Relationships Management, and Corporate Communications. This is an innovative method of branding selflessly the initiatives for increased drive and acceptance. YGC being one of the initiatives, CG has done various programs which can not be fully accommodated in some pages., However, its vision in the social front and its fair trade intent has architected the programs so well that the model itself given a clear picture of CG's image for its stakeholders.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CG TLE-CSR)

Carrying out business in socially and environmentally responsive manner

Sharing its good fortune with the people, Chaudhary Group has been fulfilling its social responsibility even before it got actually institutionalized as Corporate House. Even then as an Enterprise, it was conducting a lot of activities in the filed of health, arts and sports. It had also hosted ample no. of initiatives- small and large for community as charity and welfare. Today, CG has structured its CSR Initiatives and established standard

THE GREEN FUTURE

It can be termed as an extraordinary approach towards doing things that the future of its TLE initiatives has been made open for all other organizations as well to participate in all possible ways. TLE is now not only CG's brand, but it is a name for corporate social responsibility across the nation. While being asked on the context, the young Executive Director Mr. Nirvana Chaudhary said- "I believe that rather than doing things in bits and pieces, it will be very wise to make any program bigger, then better, for its increased effectiveness. That is why we believe in doing things together. The industrial relations can also be better that way and the fair trade intent will be institutionalized. We are never bothered about who takes the credit because we have raised a level above where we just believe in making things happen in the best way. That is why I invite all institutions, agencies, establishments to join hands in making a difference and giving ideas a shape. We can form a strong team and the TLE flag can be used for a socio-economic unification."

CG is also planning to put down further activities on TLE and the TLE team is working on it. It has been made clear that an index of the total spends on TLE project to the total turnover of the business will be maintained for TLE in the near future so that there is a total transparency as well as clarity.

The e-mail ID tle@chaudharygroup.com has been created especially to welcome feedbacks and suggestions. All stakeholders can post their complaints, queries, and suggestions which will be addressed and processed in the best way possible, timely.

It is quite appreciable that CG, despite of just harping on CSR, has drawn this macro scheme adding to the social responsibilities- the customer satisfaction attributes, communication as a responsibility to all stakeholders and fair trade intents. Needless to mention, CG will definitely sustain all these activities and set it up as a best practice, for others either be a part of or to give a beginning to.



operating procedure for CSR. In the beginning of every year, the CSR and Code of Conduct Committee sits together to decide on the activities and programs to be taken up for the year under the long term plan framework. The focus areas for the year with defined beneficiaries are agreed and then the execution starts after a proper evaluation of the proposed effectiveness.

CG has identified the various areas as under mentioned and adopts one area per year as focus. However, regular activities and ongoing programs remain continuous. The following is just a quick summary of CG's initiatives under its respective headings:

CG TLE-CSR.H-Health

CG TLE-CSR.H.1 Norvic Escorts International Hospital
Established in 1994, Norvic-Escorts International Hospital is guided by the philosophy that "service to humanity is the best work of life".

CG TLE-CSR.H.1.a It organizes two medical camps every year named "Mega Camp".

CG TLE-CSR.H.1.b Continuous Medical Education Program organizes an awareness program every three months.

CG TLE-CSR.H.1.c Free medical camps are organized every month under its Community Out Reach Program since 1998.

CG TLE-CSR.H.2 Shree Lunkaran Das Ganga Devi Chaudhary Charity Hospital
Established in 1994, it provides subsidized medical treatment to the underprivileged people of Duhabi area in Eastern Nepal.

CG TLE-CSR.H.3 CG Medicare
CG Medicare center, an NGO has been set up at the industrial village, Chaudhary Udyog Gram to provide primitive, preventive and curative medical facilities to its manpower and the local.

CG TLE-CSR.EE- Education, Employability and Empowerment

CG TLE-CSR.EE.1 The Chand Bagh School

Located in Bansbari, Kathmandu, the school aims to produce highly efficient and focused youth willing to maximize their physical, cognitive and spiritual potential for the betterment of the society

CG TLE-CSR.EE.2. Chaudhary Education Foundation
Chaudhary Education Foundation has established "CG Scholarship" and other programs to support poor and meritorious students.

CG TLE-CSR.EE.3. For imparting employment skills to students, different faculties' internships and industrial exposures are provided every year

CG TLE-CSR.EE.4. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with SAIM: Chaudhary Group and South Asian Institute of Management signed a MoU for forging collaborative efforts in making productive and permissible use of the system, resources and infrastructure by each other.

CG TLE-CSR.SE. - Sports and Entertainment

CG TLE-CSR.SE.1 Chaudhary Group has always been keen to support the talents in the field of sports. It partially as well as fully supports the sports at national and international level

- Baichung Bhutia, the Captain of Indian Football
- Binod Das, the Captain of National Senior Cricket Team of Nepal
- Shakti Gauchan, the Vice-president of National Senior Cricket Team of Nepal
- Shiva Ram Shrestha, professional golf player

CG TLE-CSR.SE.2 Chaudhary Group is the sponsor of the U-19 National League Cricket Tournament since 2005.

CG TLE-CSR.SE.3 Chaudhary Group sponsors the LG PoY Awards since 2 years.

CG TLE-CSR.SE.4 Chaudhary Group is the sponsor of the Women's Cricket Tournament from 2008 for the next 5 years.

CG TLE-CSR.SE.5 A Golf Course has been set up at CUG to attract golf lovers and to develop a corporate environment, which will help to lure the investors to set up industrial units in the estate.

CG TLE-CSR.ID-Infrastructure Development

CG TLE-CSR.ID.1. Aid to build the classrooms for local school in Divyapuri VDC.

CG TLE-CSR.ID.2. CG has supported with huge pipes in the process of constructing road in the Divyapuri VDC.

CG TLE-CSR.ID.3. Significant numbers of waiting stand has been built for the convenience of the passengers in the Nawalparasi Area.

CG TLE-CSR.ID.4. Colbert construction to Divyapuri VDC.

CG TLE-CSR.ID.5. Pillars for the extension of electricity to Divyapuri VDC.

CG TLE-CSR.ID.6. 24 hour filtered water supply to the surrounding neighbors at CUG.

CG TLE-CSR.ALC- Art and Literature, Culture and Heritage

CG TLE-CSR.ALC.1. Shree Lunkaran Das Ganga Devi Chaudhary Academy for Art and Literature

Established in 1994 for the promotion of art and literature honors Eminent Personalities for their contribution in music, art and research every year. The Academy has instituted 3 annual cash awards with citation carrying a purse of Rs.51000 per award.

CG TLE-CSR.ALC.2. Literature and talent show

Many programs have been organized to give an outlet to the expressions of the hidden talents of children, youth and others.



CG CSR Policy

CG is committed to operate and conduct all its business activities in socially and environmentally responsible manner.

CG understands the importance of a good relation of with all its stakeholders-employees, customers, partners and community at large and prioritizes its initiatives towards sustainable development focusing on areas within its local spheres of influence first.



CG TLE-CSR.NE-Nature and Environment

CG TLE-CSR.NE.1 Agro-forestry has been set up at CUG with the purpose of minimizing pollution and maintaining ecosystem

CG TLE-CSR.NE.2. Effluent treatment plant has been established to make the industrial water usable for other purpose at CUG.

CG TLE-CSR.NE.3. Tree Plantation has been done on both side of the road in Narayanghat to make the town green and pollution free.

CG TLE-CSR.NE.4. Chaudhary Biosys (Nepal) Limited (CBNL), a project in area of Herbal Medicine has been launched for biodiversity loss.

CG TLE-CSR.NE.5. Chaudhary Group has joined "Youth Green Circle" to promote environmental friendly and economically sustainable paper usage practices.

CG TLE-CSR.NE.6. CG supports the Bagmati Eco-Challenge (Jal Yatra) to create awareness about the status of Bagmati River.

CG also involves its employees in its community and environment welfare endeavors. Employees are encouraged to volunteer in CG's community and environment activities in different capacities. Initially, Employees interested in volunteering such activities register themselves and later participate whenever convenient.



PICS: CAPTAIN ANEES KHADKA

So near, and yet so wild

An instant trek to Panch Pokhari

PRANA Y A SJB RANA

Saraswati Puja has come and gone, the days are getting warmer in Kathmandu (the air dustier and the smog thicker). We can now say that spring has arrived for this year. But up in Sindhupalchok, on the trekking route to Panch Pokhari, to most intents and purposes it is still winter, at least it was several weeks ago when we visited there.

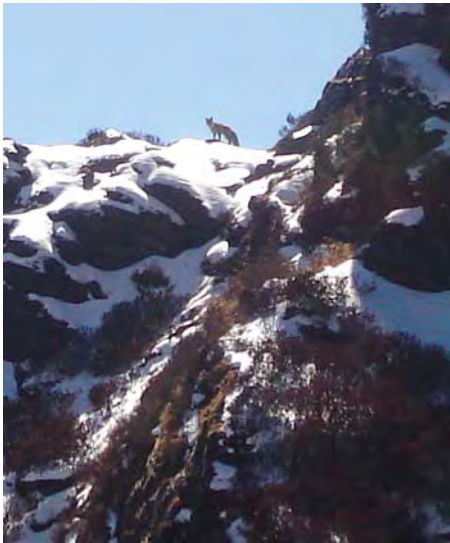
The rhododendrons were not out, there were still large stretches of unmelted snow, and it was bitterly cold as soon as the sun went down.

Admittedly it was early in the year for trekking, but we got the chance to see everything still pristine from the winter. With clear skies, there was not a wisp of cloud, not a hint of rain. Just a bright and pale sun. As long as it was shining, the air was cosy - warm, even. But the nights in the tent were subzero.

The trail used to start at Chautara but now there is a rough track all the way to Sano Okhrene, which saves four hours of walking. At this point, I must warn you: there is absolutely no water on the main trail to Panch Pokhari, as it follows the ridge and there are no springs. Being this early in the year though, we were able to melt and drink snow.

Early on there are one or two uphill stretches of moderate steepness, but then the monster hits you. From then on it's *ukalo* for the rest of the day until, with luck, you arrive at Bhanjyang.

Despite our GPS, compass and map, we got lost along the way, wandering for three or four hours among dwarf bamboo and thorn bushes. That's what happens when the single-track path you are following disappears beneath an avalanche of snow and you only have five head torches among a group of 11. Bhanjyang, which is one cowshed, had two human occupants when we arrived,



and they were the only other people we saw during the entire trek.

Day two was steeper. The choice was a straight 60-degree climb over boulders, or a longer, more leisurely path to Hille Bhanjyang, announced by the presence of two more cowsheds. We boiled snow and drank tea.

If you take the steep, direct route, you can get beyond Hille to the pass at Narsingpati by evening. Here the Jugal Himal seems within touching distance. There was soft, powdery snow all around, a shed to sleep in, and even dry firewood. And the view from here is indeed one to die for, assuming you haven't already passed away on the steep path up.



At this time of year, you can watch the big orange sun slowly slide through a clear sky into the western horizon, flashing rays of yellow light straight on to the mountains. And far off below to the south is Kathmandu Valley with its twinkling lights.

On the third day, we reached Panch Pokhari. It's a three or four hour walk from Narsingpati or a day's walk from Hille Bhanjyang. At last the gradient is easier, the snow not so slippery. And, it must be said, Panch Pokhari is worth the torture.

The five tarns lie in a sheltered vale below Dorje Lakpa, the largest surrounded by the other four. There is a temple, from the base of which flows a freshwater spring. You can easily camp here for a day or two, although the evening winds can be strong and chilly. Peg out your tent properly or you'll be running after it in the night.

From the lakes, it's a day's walk to Dudh Pokhari, and one day more to Tilman's Pass, more than 1,000m further up, which offers a difficult way over to the Langtang valley and Kyanjin Gumpa. From the hilltops flanking Panch Pokhari, the pass can be seen clearly - a glacier guarded by Gang Chhenpo. The return is easier, slithering and sliding down the icy paths. It should take two days, one to Bhanjyang and another to Lamidanda.

As spring arrives, the route comes alive. The cowsheds will have friendly cowherds and mooing yaks. There are even a few seasonal shops along the way that sell strong *chyang* to put an extra jolt into your step. You can meet people coming down or going up, often followed by a big hulking mastiff. As the weather warms, the route becomes easier and more sociable. But spring trekkers will not experience the quiet solitude that we knew. ●

Election fears dampen trekking industry hopes

Waiting for spring

Trekking and mountaineering companies hoping to capitalise on the recent resurgence of tourism in the country may be slightly disappointed with the coming spring season that begins in March.

Despite peace efforts and improved security, very few teams have applied for permission to climb various mountains. Election uncertainty and the recent spate of protests in the Tarai seem to have reduced the usual deluge of mountaineers to a trickle. “We should have received more than two dozen applications by now,” says Gyanendra Shrestha at the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation’s mountaineering and trekking section. But Shrestha hopes that March will see more applications to make up for the unusually low funk right now.

Last spring saw 77 Chomolungma-bound teams, whereas this year up till now, only four have applied for permits. “We were expecting at least 40 expeditions to Chomolungma this season but it may now be difficult to go from four to 40” says Shrestha wryly. Trekkers still have the entire month of March to apply for their permits but it doesn’t look like the numbers will come close to last year. There are three teams to Makalu but none so far to Manaslu, Ama Dablam, Lhotse or Thamserku, usually popular mountains. “There is a definite buzz about many expeditions, but none have applied for their permits yet. Maybe they’re waiting for something,” says Shrestha. Planned expeditions that have been in the news like the First Inclusive Women’s Sagarmatha Expedition and 77-year old Min Bahadur Sherchan bid for Chomolungma, have yet to file their applications.

Despite the slow mountaineering season, officials at the ministry and the Nepal Tourism Board seem positive that trekking will see an increase. According to Deepak Raj Joshi at NTB, this year should see more trekkers in the Annapurna and Langtang regions while Chomolungma numbers should remain the same. NTB reports a 95 percent increase in hotel and lodge bookings along the trekking routes, a sure sign that trekkers will show up.



Last season’s Maoist tax collection drive may have put off potential trekkers but it doesn’t seem to be the only reason for uncertainty in the trekking market. “Unless our political situation stabilises and the government works at projecting a better image of Nepal abroad, our business cannot increase as expected,” says Hira Dhamala of Karnali Excursions, a Kathmandu trekking agency. Dhamala claims that despite burgeoning political stability, many countries have still not relaxed their travel guidelines to Nepal. “Our trekkers now are those who’ve already been to Nepal before and know that the situation is not as bad as their governments make it out to be,” says Dhamala. “We are not luring in new tourists.”

According to the Trekkers’ Information Management System (TIMS) implemented by the Trekking Agencies’ Association Nepal (TAAN), this January and February saw a total of 1883 trekkers to various regions. This number is usually expected to double in the spring. There were more than a thousand trekkers to the Annapurna region while Everest saw a little over 530. This season, more tourists seem to prefer to go into Tibet than trek around Nepal. But Rara, Dolpo and the Manaslu region are seeing more trekkers than before, says Deepak Raj Joshi.

Spring may not look so bright but with elections out of the way in April, peak mountaineering season later in the year looks optimistic. NTB expects trekking and mountaineering to increase in a big way and if the politics are under control by then, there’s no reason why it shouldn’t. ● (Pranaya SJB Rana)



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Mobile clinics in remote western Nepal provide relief, but are a drop in the ocean

Treating pain



A RARE CHANCE: Nanu Devi Joshi, of Bajedi Bajura suffered a uterine prolapse 18 years ago but lived in shame until the mobile health camp doctors sent her for surgery in Nepalganj. Local women from Melbisauna (*right*) share their experiences after a check-up.

PICS: SAM KANG LI

SRISHTI ADHIKARI
in KABHRE

It is nine in the morning and Soma Tamang, 26, is busy attending to a patient. Her small clinic consists of two rooms: one with medical cabinets and a waiting bench for patients and another with a bed where she carries out her medical check-ups.

Soma is a trained Auxillary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and has been running a clinic in her hometown of Kusadevi for three years now. She also works with a local micro-credit institute and has a group of 15 women members to whom she provides small loans up to Rs 5,000 for animal husbandry and education.

The problem in Nepal has always been the retention of health workers like Soma in rural areas. Now, a unique Rotary project aims to augment ANM income through microcredit so the healthcare workers stay where they are needed most.

Soma was training as an ANM in the Kabhre Health Training Institute (KHTI) when she came to know about the



project on safe motherhood. Half of her educational expenses would be reimbursed if she signed a five-year contract to establish a mini-clinic and work in her own village, so she jumped at the chance.

Despite the initial struggle to sustain herself on what she earned, she is now economically independent and earns about Rs 500-1,500 every day. She manages to meet all her costs from her own income. She has asked for a loan from Nepal Youth Business Foundation and has plans to privatise her clinic.

Soma specialises in family planning and caters to mothers and children, but she has also

established herself as a reliable medical adviser. "I go and examine people in the villages. When I see how much people trust me, I feel really satisfied. My ultimate dream is to establish a nursing home here. I know it won't be easy but I have the foundation and I am ready to work hard to achieve it," she says with conviction.

After the success of the pilot project of which Soma was part, the initiative was upscaled with the help of the Rotary Club of Darmstadt Bergstrasse in Germany and UNFPA to train 52 girls from 10 remote districts of Nepal.

A group of 15 girls are already being trained at KHTI. Although lacking in

confidence, that Soma has all of them are committed.

Ramlaxmi Acharya, 17, says, "I couldn't continue my studies but I have got this opportunity to get trained and I want to make the best of it."

Rotary is looking for girls who are either willing to or have already been trained as ANMs. Sarita Ghising, another woman trained through the pilot project is currently working as medical staff of a micro-credit group in Kabhre. Due to her affiliation to a local institution with 1,500 members, she has been able to reach out to a larger group of people. The institution carried out an eye camp recently and had a camp for sexually-transmitted infection a few

years back.

"I had no idea people especially women hid their health problems. There are so many cases of uterine prolapse in Paanchkhal, I am happy that people have become more forthcoming due to my advice," says Sarita.

Rotary believes projects like these will produce many more capable, independent women. The challenge is not to train girls, it is motivating them to stay and work in their own community afterwards.

Soma's words ring true when she says: "Completing the 18-month course is the easy part, establishing a clinic and sustaining it far more difficult." ●

Giving credit

Women are trained in nursing and micro-credit so they will stay where they are most needed

and shame



MALLIKA ARYAL in BAJHANG

Hira Thapa, 66, suffered a uterine prolapse 15 years ago. Mother of 10 children, she gave birth to them at home in Riluvillage. “My uterus was hanging, the pain I experienced every day was excruciating,” she says. She decided to seek treatment and walked for several hours in the winter sun to get to the mobile health camp. The doctors at the camp inserted a pessary ring to stop the uterus from descending. Unlike some of the other women who came to the camp, Thapa only suffered a second-degree prolapse, not the most severe form, and would not require surgery. “If the woman is under 50 and suffers from a third-degree prolapse, we would advise that she undergo surgery to remove the uterus,” explains Sita Jirel, Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM)

with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Nepal (ADRA) “but she is over 50 and may not be able to overcome the risks associated with the surgery.” ADRA is running five four-day camps in six districts of far west Nepal with UNFPA and the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO). A 2006 study estimated that 10 percent of Nepali women between the ages of 15-49 years suffer from uterine prolapse. There are many factors behind the high incidence in Nepal: women marry young and bear children at an early age, they give birth to many children but receive almost no pre- and post-natal care, they do heavy work immediately after delivery. “Many women in the villages are silently suffering because they think it is natural for all women of a certain age,” says Rajendra Gurung, a public reproductive health expert with UNFPA. Bajhang itself is remote, but

places like Melbisauna are in remote parts of the district. People here have waited for years for mobile clinics like this one to arrive, and although they are for women the doctors treat all kinds of other ailments as well. No one is turned away, which means the doctors see 200 patients a day. Severe cases are referred to Nepalgunj Medical College, a two-day journey away. Last year the mobile camps provided reproductive health services to 29,000 patients and operated on 118 prolapsed cases. This year, 50 cases of third degree uterine prolapse each from Bajhang, Bajura and Jumla were sent to Nepalgunj for surgery. “We only have funds to send a limited number of women for surgeries, but we often exceed the quota,” says Bidya Mahat of ADRA, “it is a dilemma because we cannot turn the others away.” Public health experts agree that the biggest challenge they face when it comes to uterine prolapse is poverty, insufficient information and lack of awareness about reproductive and public health in rural Nepal. “Uterine prolapse is not just a health issue it is about poverty, it is about rights, and empowerment of women,” says Gurung, citing how women with the affliction are often ostracised. But he adds: “We can only do so much, currently we can’t reach all the women with this condition in Nepal.” ●



LEFT ALONE: Sunamati, whose husband is missing since the war.

Deepa, Pushpa, Sita and Maiya

Deepa Pandey lives in Surkhet, Pushpa Chaudhary is from Kailali, Sita Thapa is in Rautahat and Maiya Mijar lives in Dhading. What they have in common is that they are all women in their mid-20s who suffered during the war and are now running small businesses to take care of their families. It was mostly non-combatants who were affected by the conflict, and above all women. Tens of thousands of families were displaced and many ended up being women-headed because they lost their husbands. Many families also now have disabled breadwinners, and have the added medical burden of taking care of them. Deepa was caught in a crossfire in 2003 and a bullet hit her back, turning her into a paraplegic. Her husband took a second wife two years later, and she now has to take care of her children and extended family. Pushpa’s husband was killed in 2002, and she lives with six other family members including two children. She is a landless kamaiya but has some unregistered land. Sita’s husband disappeared after being arrested five years ago, she now depends on her parents for support. Maiya’s son is missing and she has to meet the medical expenses of her husband who was injured in the neck during an attack on their village in 2003. All four women are now beneficiaries of an initiative by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Nepal Red Cross Society to help women whose livelihoods have been severely affected by the war with income-generating activities. The effort gives the women back some lost dignity by restoring household incomes so that the entire family benefits. Under this initiative women-headed households first get an in-kind grant valued at Rs 10,000, which serves as start-up capital so the families can meet basic needs. The grant can fund livestock, small-scale farming, trade or vocational training. The beneficiaries include households of the missing and killed, disabled, children affected by war, the internally displaced and returnees. Households facing serious difficulties to meet their basic needs get priority. Since ICRC and NRS launched the initiative in November 2006 women in 23 districts have benefited and 12 more will be added soon. Some 2,500 families, most of them women-headed households, have had help to restart their lives. With the seed grant, Deepa started a shop in Surkhet and sits on her bed selling grocery items. She earns Rs 1,000 a month and her business is growing and can send her daughter to school. She has also got a wheelchair now and is more mobile. Pushpa has done so well with her shop that her backers are extending her another Rs 10,000 grant. In Rautahat, Sita now has some goats and runs a shop so she can take care of her family. Maiya in Dhading bought a buffalo with her grant and took another to buy a buffalo calf. She now makes enough money to pay for her husband’s medical equipment. There are thousands of Sitas, Deepas, Pushpas and Maiyas all over Nepal. Many are widows who have the responsibility of supporting their families as well as the burdens of grief and bereavement. But these four women have shown that with very little help they can rebuild their lives and begin looking towards the future. ●

Moheindu Chemjong and Govinda Dahal

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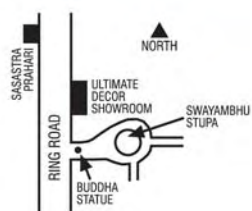


COMPETENCE IN THE COMMUNITY: Soma Tamang at her clinic in Kusadevi. Calendars promoting maternal health (left) are a common sight in the mini clinics promoted by Rotary.



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Nepal still in crisis



KIRAN PANDAY

David Seddon is the author of *Nepal in Crisis*. This Wednesday in Kathmandu he presented a discussion of the same name, examining ways for Nepal to move forward politically.

What were the signs you saw back in the 1970s when you wrote *Nepal in Crisis* (with Piers Blakie) that convinced you that the country was heading towards a crisis?

We saw a contradiction between a political system which was essentially top-down and constraining and the kinds of struggle that ordinary people faced in maintaining their own survival and livelihoods. It was a country where individual initiatives were not effectively rewarded, and a society with deep structures of discrimination, and hence very difficult for ordinary people to live and improve their lives.

At that time did you feel these conditions were leading towards a political confrontation?

No, I think our notion of crisis back then was not a political crisis. We saw it more as an economic and social crisis that the economy was not developing, and the level of inequality was such that Nepal would fail to resolve its problems. But we didn't foresee a political crisis at that time. In a later book called *Nepal: A State of Poverty*, which I wrote in the early 1980s I did begin to identify the beginnings of a movement which actually materialised in the Jana Andolan in 1990. By that time it was becoming more evident that politically the situation was unsustainable, but this realisation came gradually.

Have any of these underlying socio-political roots been addressed?

No. I think that there are underlying problems which remain: deep social inequalities and discrimination, the lack of effective representation of ordinary people. There have been certain changes. The Jana Andolan in 1990 did bring about a revival of party politics, but by the mid 1990s the hopes many people had of the parties delivering were fading and I think that gave rise to a feeling of despair, and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) began to think increasingly that armed struggle was the only way in which a major transformation would take place. There are at the moment the beginnings of a political will to address Nepal's social problems, but whether the current parties and leadership have the vision and the ability to transform the political framework remains doubtful.

So there has been no progress at all?

It has been uneven. Much of the hope of 1990 was squandered, and from where I stand one has to blame the politicians, particularly the Nepali Congress politicians who were in power in the early 1990s. There was a failure to really empower the people. Many social inequalities and injustices still remain, and are not fully addressed. The caste system gives religious justification to inequality and castigates lower castes as impure. There is also in many areas a semi-feudal society with large landowners, and tenants and serfs. So as long as those relationships remain, the creativity and energy of ordinary Nepali people will go merely into survival and not into changing things.

Do you think the human and physical cost of the Maoist revolution outweighed the gains?

I don't personally. I am not absolutely convinced that an armed struggle was necessary, but as I said the structural constraints on transforming Nepal are deep and lasting, and I think a major trust for transformation was required. The costs and human suffering have been very serious, but it did bring on to the agenda the issues of social inequality and the lack of political representation, and it enhanced the position of women, dalits and traditionally excluded ethnic minorities. It also alerted people inside and outside Nepal to the need for change. Now that the Maoists are returning to mainstream politics we can be optimistic, if the polls are free and fair, about the possibility of a new political era. But the structural transformation that's required remains to be achieved. If you can call a radical transformation a revolution, then a revolution is needed.

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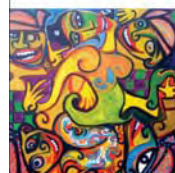
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HIMAL SOUTHASIAN'S MARCH ISSUE

Cover section: **Circles of sexuality**
The push for privilege, the danger of definition

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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

The Dutch connection

Erma Anema came to Nepal from the Netherlands for the mountains, but she fell in love with Kathmandu’s art. Anema was fascinated with the silver and copper work and the delicate intricacies of jewellery-making in Kathmandu. She came back, again and again, and worked with the Nepali artisans. She began wondering if there was potential for an exchange between Dutch and Nepali students. “The Nepali method is essentially different from the Dutch: in Nepal, artisans think in terms of traditions and techniques, often reproducing early styles and ignoring their own originality, whereas Dutch students learn to think in concepts,” she explains. Anema tried to organise an exchange program 10 years ago, but realised that although the students were curious and enthusiastic, their teachers were not very eager to experiment. Last year, along with another teacher,

Sophie Krier, she proposed a collaboration between students of Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and the Kathmandu University Centre for Arts and Design, and was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm of the teachers. “A lot has happened in Nepal in the last ten years, those in the Nepali art scene now are more open to thinking outside the box,” says Anema. The collaboration got off the ground with support from the Dutch embassy in New Delhi. Some 20 Dutch students wrote proposals about what they wanted to do with their Nepali partners for four-week collaborations, designed creative invitations which reflected their personal interests and the art they wanted to make, and sent them to Nepal. During their first week here, the students trekked together for a few days, attended workshops and

lectures, and then began to work together. Six Dutch and three Nepali teachers are supporting the project in Nepal. Their projects range from jewellery, bronze and copper casting and ceramics, to wood carving, basket-making, and even electric wire weaving. The students start from a word or a context, then try to find a personal focus, which can be observed and questioned. The projects can’t be completed solo and the students are encouraged to question their every decision. Now in their last week of collaborative work, the students are busy finishing off for exhibition on 14 March at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal. In September, five Nepali students from the group will go to the Netherlands for the other leg of the exchange. ● (Mallika Aryal)

In Between
Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal
14-15 March, 10:00-17:00
www.design.nl

Oriental affectation, Occidental disaffection

Wes Anderson’s passage to India

A film like *The Darjeeling Limited* is always suspect. Made by Wes Anderson in his trademark style, the film is showy, vain and utterly insincere. By extension, those of us who love this style are seen as occupying a pretentious and esoteric outpost against the cultural mainstream. This is a style that Anderson aced first in *Rushmore* (1998) and then more solidly in *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), perhaps one of the most memorable films of this decade, and the milestone by which all his films will inevitably be measured. Both admired and criticised for an incorrigible obsession with mannerisms and eccentricities, Anderson’s films stand out for how profoundly entrenched they are in human emotions. In the unabashedly artificial and decorative world of Anderson, though, these emotions are manifested not in the abstract but in actual, concrete objects, i.e. props, which Anderson uses meticulously. A quirky materialism, compulsive wit, delicate comedy, a contained melancholy of filial disaffection and a nostalgic longing for reunion are characteristic of his films. *Darjeeling* takes you into that world, aboard a fantastically festooned Indian locomotive. It’s a story of three brothers who have gathered for the first time since their father’s funeral a year before in order to heal themselves with a ‘spiritual journey’ across India, to bond, to mourn their father, and to find their lost mother. Eldest brother Francis (Wilson) is bandaged from a recent accident yet has an overbearing sense of authority. Peter (Brody) hides under a pair of shades he inherited from the dead father and broods over his marriage and expected baby. Youngest Jack (Schwartzman) lusts after the Indian cabin hostess and writes fiction. Together they travel across Rajasthan with their matching sets of luggage.



Anderson’s signature is all over *Darjeeling*, and he has received much flack for not offering anything new. But shot in India, *Darjeeling* does broaden Anderson’s palette, allowing him to elude the claustrophobia which stems from his staginess. If New York can look so fantastical in *Tenenbaums*, just imagine what India would allow him. Having undergone centuries of mystification and exoticisation, the tropes of India easily lend the caprice and curiosity essential to Anderson’s characters. A colourful train, boundless spirituality, a vintage village, a roaming man-eating tiger – India in *Darjeeling* is unapologetically contrived and over-the-top. But for ironist and satirist Anderson that is precisely the point. The idea of shooting in India apparently came after Martin Scorsese introduced Anderson to Jean Renoir’s 1951 classic *The River*, the film that initiated Satyajit Ray’s illustrious film career. You may also notice that *Darjeeling*’s soundtrack is crammed with music from Ray’s films. The fact that Anderson, at the age of 38, is already flirting with canonised geniuses like Ray may seem a bit narcissistic, something that critics have been quick to point out in addition to his self-referential style. But whether this is legitimate or not, Anderson does have the talent to back it up. He may only have five films on his resume, but Anderson is not just a rising auteur. He is a singular artist whose quirks have charmed even unadventurous, straight-laced Hollywood. ●

THE DARJEELING LIMITED
Director: Wes Anderson
Cast: Owen Wilson, Adrien Brody, Jason Schwartzman, Amara Karan.
2007. R. 91 min.



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Naya Aawazharu** art by Kailash Shrestha, Hitman Gurung, Rabita Kisi and Sandhya Silwal at the Nepal Art Council, until 10 March.
- ❖ **Musical reflections** collage paintings by Gaurav Shrestha at the Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 10-14 March, 10AM-6PM. 9841341810
- ❖ **Double vision** prints by Nan Mulder, Gea Karhof, Seema Sharma Shah and Ragini Upadhyay, until 15 March at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited.
- ❖ **Tibetan Lhosar photographs** by Daniel Collins at the Saturday Café, Boudhanath stupa, until 31 March.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Into the Wild** a film by Sean Penn at the Lazimpat Gallery Café, 4 March at 6PM. 4428549
- ❖ **Shastrartha** on women's issues in constituent assembly elections by Indu Tuladhar, 8 March, 3-5PM. 6910277
- ❖ **Weekly human rights** film screenings with *Chyama Deu Tara Nabirsa (Forgive but Forget Not)* at the Sama Theatre, Gurukul, 5PM on 9 March. 4466956



MUSIC

- ❖ **23rd Yala Maya Classic** with Dhrubesh Chandra Regmi and Pramod Upadhyaya, 15 March, 5 PM at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 5553767
- ❖ **Anil Shahi** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 8PM. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **Malaysian food festival** at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 7 March, 12-3PM and 7-10.45 PM, Rs 990 plus taxes. 4273999
- ❖ **The Kaiser Café open now** at the Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, open from 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Steak escape** with Kathmandu's premier steaks available for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- ❖ **Continental and Chinese** cuisine and complimentary fresh brewed coffee after every meal a Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.
- ❖ **Illy espresso coffee** at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails.
- ❖ **International four course buffet** at the Sunrise Café with a range of Boris' signature dishes at The Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Pan Asian evenings** every Wednesday at The Café, Hyatt Regency with food from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** with coffee, food, drinks and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **Saturday special** barbeque, sekuwa, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 9841250848.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

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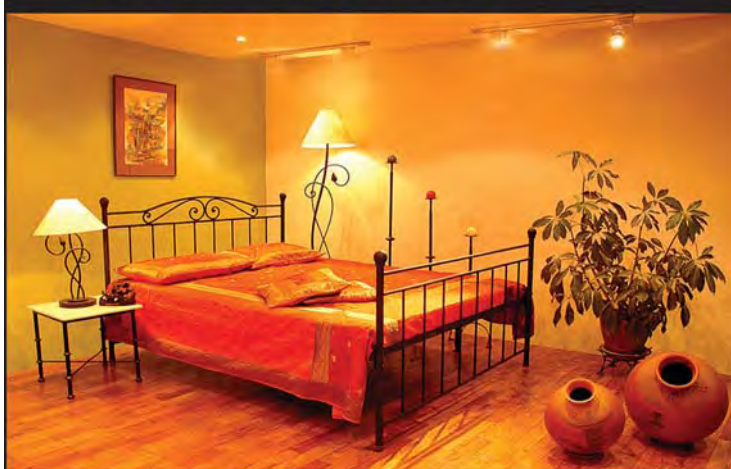
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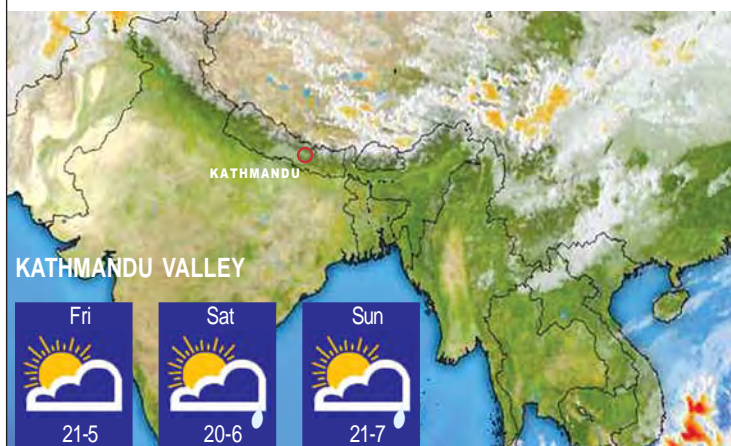
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The long awaited winter storm finally reached us this week, coinciding with the annual Shivaratri festival. The strong Siberian anticyclone is continuing to feed the westerly jet stream which is flowing over and warming up South Asia. The three consecutive rain bursts this week created a runoff flow first time in three months. In the Valley, the normal monthly quota (30mm) for this month has already crossed. As a consequence, daytime temperatures have dropped by 3 to 5 degrees and humidity levels in the air have risen. Satellite pictures of Thursday morning show a robust low pressure over northern India and Nepal that will continue to suck the moisture out of the westerly fronts, bringing more rain through the weekend. Expect brighter sunny days from early next week onwards followed by steady climb of temperatures.



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"रेडियो सगरमाथा नियमित सुन्ने, अंग्रेजी सुधारने"
(रेडियो सगरमाथा र अमेरिकी राजदुतावास, अमेरिकी केन्द्रको सहकार्य)

सम्पर्क: २२२८०८१, २२२८२२४ पोस्ट बक्स: १६२८, ईमेल: info@radiosagarmatha.org

हरेक विहान ५:०० देखि राती ११:०० बजे सम्म सूचना शिक्षा र स्वास्थ्य मनोरञ्जनका लागि भरपर्दो साथी रेडियो सगरमाथा १०२ थोप्लो ४ मेगाहर्ज



HEARTFELT CONDOLENCES



Lt. Col.
Bhim Bahadur Gurung
(Liaison Officer, Nepal)



Rabindra Khaniya
(Language Assistant,
Nepal)



Rajesh Maharjan
(Vehicle Mechanic, Nepal)



Lt. Col.
Hyung Jum Park
(Arms Monitor,
Republic of Korea)



Lt. Col
Sondang Irawan
(Arms Monitor,
Indonesia)



Maj. Famara Jammeh
(Arms Monitor,
The Gambia)



Maj. Mats Norhult
(Arms Monitor, Sweden)



Dzmitry Malyshau
(Crew Member, Belarus)



Nikolay Yamshchikov
(Crew Member, Russia)



Sergey Oreshenko
(Crew Member, Russia)



The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) and the United Nations family in Nepal offer their heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of our colleagues, and to those of the crew, who died in the tragic helicopter accident on 3 March, 2008.

The President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr Srgjan Kerim, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon have expressed their deep sadness about the tragic deaths of our colleagues, and extended their condolences to the families and the governments.

Our colleagues lost their lives while serving the United Nations and the cause of peace in Nepal. The United Nations Mission and the United Nations family in Nepal will honour their memories by continuing with our best efforts in this work.

The Secretary-General also expressed his appreciation to the Nepali authorities for their assistance provided to UNMIN in recovering the remains of the victims, and for the many expressions of sympathy the Mission has received from people in Nepal.



A new way of thinking

Moving towards technological cooperation

In early February, the United States National Academy of Engineering released a report on “Grand Challenges for Engineering in the 21st Century.” The goal is to focus attention on the potential of technology to help the world address poverty and environmental threats.

The list includes potential breakthroughs such as low-cost solar power, safe disposal of CO₂



ANALYSIS
Jeffrey D Sachs

from power plants, nuclear fusion, new educational technologies, and the control of environmental side effects from nitrogen fertilisers, and highlights a new global priority: promoting advanced technologies for sustainable development.

We are used to thinking about global cooperation in fields such as monetary policy, disease control, or nuclear weapons proliferation. We are less accustomed to thinking of global cooperation to promote new technologies, such as clean energy, a malaria vaccine, or drought-resistant crops to help poor African farmers. By and large, we regard new technologies as something to be developed by businesses for the marketplace, not as opportunities for global problem solving.

Yet, given the enormous



global pressures that we face, including vastly unequal incomes and massive environmental damage, we must find new technological solutions to our problems. There is no way, for

example, to continue expanding the global use of energy safely unless we drastically alter how we produce electricity, power automobiles, and heat and cool our buildings to reduce CO₂

emissions.

The National Academy of Engineering identified some possible answers. We can harness safe nuclear energy, lower the cost of solar power, or capture and safely store the CO₂ produced from burning fossil fuels. Yet the technologies are not yet ready, and we can't simply wait for the market to deliver them, because they require complex changes in public policy to ensure that they are safe, reliable, and acceptable to the broad public. Moreover, there are no market incentives in place to induce private businesses to invest adequately in developing them.

Consider carbon capture and sequestration. The idea is that power plants and other large fossil fuel users should capture the CO₂ and pump it into permanent underground storage sites, such as old oil fields. This will cost, say, \$30 per ton of CO₂ that is stored, so businesses will need an incentive to do it. Moreover, public policies will have to promote the testing and improvement of this technology, especially when used at a large scale. New kinds of power plants, pipelines, monitoring systems and regulations will be necessary, all of which will take time, costly investments, and lots of collaboration between scientists and engineers in universities, government laboratories, and private

businesses.

Moreover, this kind of technology will be useful only if it is widely used, notably in China and India. This raises another challenge of technological innovation: we will need to support the transfer of proven technologies to poorer countries. If rich countries monopolise new technologies, the goal of worldwide use to solve global problems will be defeated. Thus, technological developments should involve a collaborative international effort from the start.

All of this will require a new global approach to problem solving. We will need to embrace international goals and then establish scientific, engineering, and political processes to support their achievement. We will need to give new budgetary incentives to promote demonstration projects, and to support technology transfer. And we will have to engage major companies in a new way, giving them ample incentives and market rewards for success, without allowing them to hold a monopoly on successful technologies that should be widely adopted.

Rich countries should fund these efforts heavily, and they should be carried out in collaboration with poor countries and the private sector. Successful technological breakthroughs can provide stunning benefits for humanity. This will be an exciting time to be a scientist or engineer facing the challenges of sustainable development. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Levelled fields

Fair contracts for poor countries

KARL P. SAUVANT

A number of countries in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere are abrogating or renegotiating contracts with multinational enterprises (MNEs), and others are likely to follow suit. The costs can be high. Governments may get better terms, but they may also become embroiled in international investment disputes and discourage other investors. For companies, renegotiations mean uncertainty and possible interruptions of production and revenue.

Significant shifts in power (typically as a result of changes in commodity prices)

and ideology, or changes in the economics of projects, can lead to renegotiations, especially when it comes to large investments in natural resources and infrastructure. But often the reason is that the host country considers a contract to be unfair.

While 'fairness' may well be in the eyes of the beholder, in some cases, the host country may not have had the expertise required to negotiate the best possible deal—a frequent situation when MNEs negotiate with the least developed countries. Mittal's 2005 deal with Liberia (renegotiated last year) and various contracts with Congo probably fall at least

partly into this category, as do some deals in ex-Soviet countries.

Suppose a \$500 million petroleum or copper contract needs to be negotiated. This will most likely involve a leading MNE, which can field a negotiating team that includes world-class lawyers, geologists, and financial analysts who understand, for example, the trade-offs between taxes and royalties and can put them in appropriate language. The host country, on the other hand, simply cannot match such a team. Perhaps it does not even know what to ask for.

The resulting contract is all the more problematic because it is likely to involve one of the host country's few important resources, which can generate more predictable (and probably higher) revenues than official development assistance – and over a long period of time. So, even without corruption, it is not surprising when a future government demands that the contract be renegotiated.

Clearly, the playing field with MNEs should be levelled. In theory, the host country could hire its own international experts to assist it in negotiations. But poor countries typically lack the funds needed to pay such a team's fees. Nor do the World Bank and regional development banks have the in-house expertise – or, as a rule, the funds – to provide technical assistance.

But what if MNEs provided the funds? Obviously, MNEs want the best possible deal for themselves; but they also want durable contracts that won't be repudiated by the next government. So they have an interest in negotiating a fair deal, and one

that is *seen* to be fair. Besides, in large deals, the negotiating team's costs are relatively small (or they could be reimbursed out of the project's revenue stream).

But, even if a company embraces this approach, problems abound. How can it be implemented without looking like bribery (in case the company gives the funds directly to the government)? And how can companies prevent some of the funds from being misused (say, if the government hires a third-rate team)?

Here is a proposal: an Investment Contract Aid Facility (ICAF) under the umbrella of a well-respected organisation. The ICAF would function like an escrow account into which the firm pays the funds required for the host country to hire a negotiating team. The escrow account manager then invites the country to select a team, suggesting what skills are required and perhaps even providing a roster of experts.

The country would be free to choose its own team, but the escrow account manager, aided by an international advisory board of expert volunteers, would need to agree that it is, in fact, world-class. One could even include a capacity-building element by adding to the team one or two local negotiators. The result should be a contract that is as fair as possible under the given circumstances – and perceived as such. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Karl P. Sauvant is Executive Director of the Program on International Investment at Columbia University and Co-Director of the UN Millennium Cities Initiative.





SURESH MAHARJAN

DONE DEAL: Upendra Yadav, Mahanta Thakur, and Rajendra Mahato, members of the United Democratic Madhesi Forum, sign a long-awaited eight-point agreement with the government last Thursday at Baluwater.



KIRAN PANDAY

MONKEY SEE MONKEY DO: A baba dressed as Hanuman poses for a photo during Shiva Ratri at Pashupati on Thursday.



MANI LAMA

TRAIL BLAZER: Rajeev Rai sprints for the finish line at a mountain bike race in Chisopani. Rai won the race having completed a 34km track in 2 hours and 3 minutes.



SHEERE NG

ACROBATIC ACT: At the week-long Malaysian food fest at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza, the traditional *teh-tarik* drink is not only a delicious treat but also a performance in itself.

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Dummy candidates

Nepalís tourism planners decided three years ago to hire a rather **horny-looking** Rhino Dai as its frolicking brand ambassador with the suggestive slogan ‘Visit Nepal, Once Is Not Enough’. This was just after Peru nearly severed diplomatic relations with Nepal because our tourism posters depicted Machupichu instead of Machapuchre.

With a mascot like Rhino Dai, it was only a question of time before Thamel started looking more and more like Pat Pong. Sure enough, there are now bars with showers all the way from the Moroccan Honorary Consulate to Sore Khutte. And trust the resident Economist correspondent to have done some undercover bar-hopping.†

But our **tourism wallahs** seem to believe even bad publicity is good publicity, and decided to dash off an irate Letter to the Editor to the Economist denying there was any sex tourism in Nepal. ‘Holidaymakers to Nepal are encouraged to enjoy traditional Nepalese dancing,’ they wrote, ‘where they can mingle freely with the dancers.’ Hmm. Are some of those dancers topless by any chance?

ॐ

Anyone who looks important enough can get into the VIP room at Kathmandu domestic airport these days, and that includes the Ass. The other day it looked more like an office of the Madhesi Front. Sipping coffee was Hridayesh the Tripathi who was holding forth on electoral delineation’s effects on his constituency. Kapilbastu’s Dan Bahadur Chaudhary and Brajesh Gupta of the Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party were waiting for their Bhairawa flight to file nominations. In the corner, the MJF’s Renu Yadav mulled over her shift from Saptari-3 to 4 to make way for a TMLP candidate. There was a lot of **back-slapping all around** and the mood was upbeat. But when asked, most said they were flying right back after filing their nominations. If the Tarai is too dangerous for Madhesi leaders wonder what it is like for the **hillbillies**.

ॐ

So the Americans have put out another Travel Advisory to cover their sorry legal asses. ‘The Department of State remains concerned about the security situation in Nepal and urges American citizens to obtain updated security information before

they travel and to be prepared to change their plans on short notice,’ it says. Good thing most Americans are smart enough to ignore it and go wherever they want to by **pretending to be Canadians**. The warning goes on to say that ‘road travel in Nepal is dangerous’. And Americans are reminded to remain ‘on high alert’ and ‘avoid minibuses’. And Safa Tempos are safe? The Maoists are in the category of ‘Officially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive order 13224’.

ॐ

Comrade Lotus Flower doesn’t want his party to be struck off the US terrorist list, it gives him an international notoriety and respect he would not otherwise get. El Presidente is still thundering on about how if his party loses in the elections, it will ‘grab power with or without bloodshed’. Back in his constituency of Kirtipur, Awesome is so scared he might lose that he has fielded 17 dummy candidates so his party is entitled to deploy 34 youths in the booths should there be a need to **bash anyone up**. However, there is one scenario the First Precedent of the Republic of Nepal hasn’t factored in yet. What if one of his

dummy candidates actually gets more votes than him?

ॐ

Over in Lalitpur, **Comrade Pamfa** is fielding seven dummy candidates besides herself. This just won’t do, comrade, you need at least 17 dummies to have even a remote chance of winning.†††

Meanwhile Brother Number Two is campaigning in Gorkha and is being hotly pursued by the ghosts of the people his party eliminated. Which maybe why Bhattarai Baje climbed up to the Gorakhnath Temple to **exorcise** himself, got blessed by the High Priest and gave him a Rs 500 offering. If royalists can be nationalists, I suppose religion is no longer the **opiate of the masses** in the New Nepal.

ॐ

Don’t get up your hopes of the petroleum crisis easing. The Madhes blockade may be over, but with crude oil staying above \$100 per barrel, NOC is losing Rs 1 billion a month in subsidies and will not be able to pay for March imports.

And the power crisis is so bad the UML couldn’t issue its Economic Strategy Paper this week because of load shedding at the printing plant.†

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