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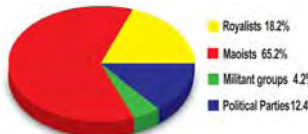
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**Times**

nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 393

**Q. If there is violence in the elections, who will be behind it:**

Total votes: 6,597



Weekly Internet Poll # 394. To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

**Q. Who still doesn't want elections?**

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**ALL SMILES:** State security with submachine guns and armed bodyguards of Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal share a joke at a well-attended Maoist campaign rally in Dang on Tuesday. Elsewhere, YCL continued its violent attacks on rallies by other parties.

RAMESWOR BOHARA

# Insecure

Coordinated attacks on rival rallies prove Maoist nervousness on poll outcome

**KUNDA DIXIT**

The recent escalation of campaign violence was not totally unexpected, but what is worrying is that it seems to be part of a deliberate plan to derail elections two weeks before polling date.

The khukuri attack on ex-NC minister Bal Bahadur KC in Solu on Wednesday was only the latest in a series of violent attacks on the UML, RPP and RJP rallies all over the country.

"The YCL's intimidation and attacks are much

more widespread and serious than it is reported in the media," UML leader Amrit Bohara told *Nepali Times*, "it was getting too much, and in Solu we saw that people are beginning to resist."

Most politicians are convinced that it is not likely that the top comrades don't know what is happening given the coordinated nationwide nature of the attacks.

Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal has said his cadre have also been killed in Rolpa and Solu, and blamed

the media for being in the payroll of "foreign powers" to give the Maoists bad publicity.

Election rallies by Maoist leaders are well-attended and the crowds have warmed up to their message of change. If it wasn't for the YCL and Dahal playing

victim, the Maoists seem to have a fair chance of doing well.

What is puzzling to many is that the only one who will benefit from the polls being put off a third time is king Gyanendra, and why the Maoists helping him.

At the Election Commission, officials are visibly worried about the violence. But the Maoists seem so panicked about possible humiliation at the polls

that they don't care what the EC or international observers think about their behaviour.

The UML's Madhab Kumar Nepal urges the Maoists to learn from the JVP in Sri Lanka and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

**EDITORIAL**  
**Their own worst enemy** p2

"They should realise that in a democracy there is life after elections," he said.

Political analyst Nilambar Acharya says it is too early to conclude that the Maoists don't want elections. "But they are definitely getting worried that they may not do too well," he says, "and this nervousness is manifested in the violence." ●



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# Children first

Being born in Nepal is a death sentence for many children

## THEIR OWN WORST ENEMY

When local newspapers published an 11-point directive by the Maoist leadership to its district units two weeks ago, many said it was part of a disinformation campaign by electoral rivals. Even the Maoists disowned the circular and threatened to sue the paper that published it ('Booth youth', #391).

They needn't have bothered to deny any of it. In the past weeks, the YCL has been behaving exactly according to instructions in the circular. They are following the 11 points by the letter.

'Make it difficult for NC workers to stay in the villages': Point 3. 'Make the oppositional forces fight amongst each other': Point 4. 'Don't care for your life ... use all the tricks known to turn elections in our favour.': Point 8.

That is exactly what is happening on the ground with stepped up attacks on the campaign rallies of the NC, UML and RPP. By making a mountain out of a molehill over a regular consignment of security material from India on Tuesday and shutting down central Nepal, the cadre prove they will stop at nothing to prevent an election that they think they will not win.

Number 4 of the directive is: "Work to divide the international forces especially India, America and the European Union so that they cannot monitor our activities."

To be sure, Maoist cadre have been killed but in violence provoked first by the YCL. It is high time the international community spoke out with one voice and in clear words to counter this deliberate attempt to sabotage polls. UNMIN, especially, can't be stuck in its usual diplomatese when elections are once more being held hostage.

Throughout history, politicians who have pronounced "peace in our time" have been accused of appeasing war-mongers. Unfortunately, history has often proven critics of peaceniks right.

By their use of threats and violence in this election campaign, the Maoists have bolstered the argument of those who say the comrades were never serious about the vote. Their actions are jeopardising the peace process and aiding and abetting absolute monarchists who want to turn the clock back.

Privately and in closed-door meetings of the Big Three in Baluwatar, Pushpa Kamal Dahal makes commitments to shun election violence. But at the hustings the very next day he repeats his threat to resort to "civil revolt" if his party loses. He defends YCL excesses, lashes out at royalists and Indo-Americans of trying to undermine his chances in the polls. This week, in classic blame-the-messenger style, he has lashed out at us in the media.

The Maoists have a good chance of doing well in next month's elections because they represent real change. But their refusal, or inability, to rein in the YCL is seriously undermining that chance.

Children represent half of Nepal's population, but all of its future. Last week our political parties committed themselves to make children their first priority in building a New Nepal.

When I left Nepal 40 years ago, 400,000 children were born every year in this country. Of



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Kul Chandra Gautam**

them, 100,000 died before the age of five. In 2007, nearly 800,000 children were born in Nepal, but less than 50,000 died.

It is all the more remarkable that such great strides were achieved even in the middle of a violent conflict. Nepal is now on track to reach the Millennium Development Goal for reducing under-five mortality.

Children of Nepal today are healthier and better educated than in any previous generation. Yet, children in many other countries that were in a comparable situation with Nepali children 60 years ago have made much faster progress.

We rightly mourn the killing

of nearly 14,000 Nepalis during the past decade of conflict. But we seem to take it for granted that even now 14,000 Nepali children continue to die every 14 weeks. A Nepali child dies every 10 minutes, 130 children die everyday. Being born in Nepal is a death sentence for many children.

The fact that these deaths do not arouse public outrage doesn't lessen the tragedy and pain to the parents and families involved. It is also a shame for our nation because many of these deaths can be readily prevented.

Nearly half the children who appear in SLC exams every year 'fail'. This is a serious blow to the self-esteem of students, a huge loss of investment by poor families, and a great waste of public funds. We train our children to accept being losers, rather than motivating them to be winners.

This must change in the New Nepal. Education is a key measure of a government's commitment to meet the needs of its citizens. Investment in children must start when they are very young. Damage caused by malnutrition, infection and poor child care in early childhood often lasts for the whole life. With almost half of Nepal's young children suffering from chronic malnutrition, the challenge is immense. Investment in the health and education of a girl child is the most effective way to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

An educated girl tends to marry later, she is more likely to space her pregnancies, she will seek medical care for her child and herself, she will give better child care and nutrition, and will ensure that her

children attend school.

Some of our good ideas can wait until we sort out our political system and governance structures. But children can't wait. Children have only one chance to grow. If they miss that chance, they can be doomed for life.

I have read the election manifestos of quite a few political parties. Let us remember that among the deprived and marginalised groups, the needs of their children must command our most urgent priority. The next time you are tempted to call a strike, a chakka jam, and other agitation in the pursuit of some worthy political objectives, please think of its impact on children.

Nice slogans and empty promises during elections do not constitute real priorities. The test will be how consistently the parties give priority in allocating resources for children. That requires real political will and vision.

The Joint Declaration the parties signed this week states that all children are holders of human rights. The basic needs of children should be seen as their fundamental human right, which every state, including Nepal, that has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has a legal obligation to implement. It is vital that these rights are enshrined into the future Constitution of Nepal. ●

*Kul Gautam is a former UN Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Executive director of UNICEF. Adapted from a speech delivered at the signing of a commitment by political parties on the Children's Manifesto in Kathmandu on 16 March.*



KIRAN PANDAY

# The proletariat and the Praetorian Guard

It's time to think about a defence minister who wears a dhoti and chews pan

Every political party believes its manifesto is different, if not better, than those of rivals. But they all have underlying similarities.

No party is advocating an activist monarchy. And even the Maoists don't dare support a dictatorship of the proletariat in public. Between these two extremes, major political actors differ only slightly over name, election method and the



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
**C K Lal**

authority of the chief executive. However, very few care to mention the elephant in the room: the Nepal Army.

The recent war of words between the Directorate of Public Relations (DPR) of the Nepal Army and the Central Information Bureau of the CPN-Maoists hides an ugly fact: both have worked in the past to subvert parliamentary democracy in the country. Either through the "understanding"

that Maoist ideologue-in-chief Baburam Bhattarai says there was with slain King Birendra, or by working separately for the same cause.

The end result was that both undermined the parliamentary system, subverted democracy and took the country to the brink of civil war. It was the discredited political parties that brought the country back on track and are now trying to mainstream the Maoists and reform the military.

Making the Maoists stick to the path of non-violent politics hasn't been easy. Even after becoming a part of the ruling establishment, the former rebels still behave like they belong in the jungle. In the midwest, there is still 'one country, two systems' where kangaroo courts pass judgements that are enforced by YCL cadres. Maoist renegades have formed ethnic and tribal militias in the hills and Tarai. The Maoist leadership must own up to the responsibility of igniting a fire that has begun to engulf their own politics.

The Nepal Army dropped its 'Royal' tag after the April Uprising. Since its complicity with the autocratic ambitions of various kings during the military coup of King Mahendra in 1960, the Nepal Army has acted as the palace's praetorian guard. And it isn't being apolitical just because it's not royal anymore. The aggressive tone and blatantly political tenor of the army's statement in the runup to the elections sounds a lot worse when seen in the context of its past record.

The challenge of reforming the Nepal Army will probably be even more complex than rehabilitating Maoist combatants. Despite its aggressive denials, the army is composed of even more politically indoctrinated members than the Maoists.

Loyalists to the crown continue to dominate the army brass. The force is still largely feudal and considers itself the custodian of religious rites that used to give our monarchy the divine right to rule. But our national unity and integrity can now only be sustained with a vibrant and

broad-based democracy.

The reform of an institution as ossified as the Nepal Army will be long-drawn. More inclusive recruitment policies, better orientation of soldiers and socialisation of officers will take time. But there are symbolic gestures that can send a signal to the army brass that Nepal is determined to take the republican road towards more inclusive democracy.

For a start, Prime Minister Koirala may want to think of appointing a defence minister who wears a dhoti, chews pan and has no hesitation in issuing instructions in his native language rather than in the king's Nepali. Even Matrika Yadav, perhaps. Yadav's tantrum this week against his army guard was an electoral gesture to his home constituency as much as an effort to deflate the ego of a force that has done little to justify its expensive upkeep.

The smooth transition of the military from a Gorkhali Army to the modern force of a new federal Nepal must underpin Nepal's democratic future. ●



## LETTERS

## TIBET

Nepal is a sovereign country, we don't have to follow orders from China ('Mt Olympus', #391). We should not even consider stopping mountain expeditions which are one of the biggest earners for our economy just because a neighbour says so. We should consider our own national interest, not somebody else's.

*N Phunkang, email*

I can understand Chinese officials leaning on Nepal to ban expeditions on Mt Everest and to stop protests by Tibetans in Kathmandu ('Cold Blood', #392). But who told them they must break the heads of monks, kick nuns and drag them by their robes to be stuffed inside vans to be taken away for detention. Such brutality, broadcast worldwide, brings nothing but shame on Nepal.

*Roshan Thapa, Bangkok*

## MADHES

I really understand Prashant Jha's concern when he says if the Madhesi moderates don't win, the extremists will take over ('Murkier and murkier', #392). But why can't they stay united when there was such a big movement supposedly to support them? When will the newly-powerful Madhesi leaders stand up for their populace? Gross under-representation of marginalised groups

(dalits and women) in their closed PR list shows that their parties are still controlled by traditional local elites. The NC is not bathed in milk, but at least it has an inclusive PR list. I would vote for a national party and urge everyone else to do the same.

*Sandeep Dhungana, email*

## MUSTANG ROAD

Lovely story, 'A road runs through it' (#391). I'm excited to ride the new road, but also full of memories of the old route. There are 10,000 new opportunities on road: service

industries, new trekking options, hotels, orchards and farms that can export products, natural resources, new educational opportunities, and much more. A tip of the hat for the old towns though.

*John Child, email*

Kunda Dixit takes a non-committal middle path in analysing the road from Beni to Jomsom. He should have pointed out how the highway is going to completely destroy the trekking potential of the world's most precious place. Even if the more remote parts of Myagdi and Mustang are opened up, the question is: would they benefit from tourism? These are culturally fragile places and we have seen the potential of tourism to soil its own nest.

*Andre Bennett, Paris*

## CLEAN AND GREEN

Reading about the renewable energy and recycling of domestic waste in Gorkha ('Clean and green', #392). I wish the same could be said for the Kathmandu Valley. The Bagmati is stinking and flowing with domestic waste of all kinds. We too could make compost manure and generate alternative energy from our waste, but sadly Kathmandu seems to be behind Danda Gaon in this respect.

*Rabin Rachalica, Bhaktapur*

## CORRECTION

Yonhap (mentioned in Ass, #392) is a South Korean news agency, not North Korean.

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# Making things happen

## Suraj Vaidya of VOITH adds value to the Nepal brand



When Suraj Vaidya returned to Nepal from the United States after being trained in automobile assembly 25 years ago, he put in a proposal at the Ministry of Industries to manufacture fiberglass three wheelers in Nepal.

Given the light volume of traffic in those days and the need for public transport, the Mr Bean type cars could have been a hit.

"I still remember the man in the ministry looking at me like I was mad," Vaidya recalls, "maybe I was a little bit. But I never got the approval."

Today, Suraj Vaidya and his family's Vaidya Organisation of Industries and Trading Houses (VOITH) is into exporting tea, importing vehicles, agro-industries, construction and education and employs more than 7,000 people.

"In Nepal it is not enough to



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

be a successful businessman, you have to ask yourself what value are you adding to your country's brand?" Vaidya told *Nepali Times* after VOITH was selected as the paper's Company of the Month for March.

VOITH's tea venture has taken off and the company is getting ready to install a third factory in eastern Nepal. It will soon be promoting its own export brand of herbal and regular teas called Shangrila Tea that will make the Nepali brew instantly recognised in Japan and other markets.

VOITH is also partnering with a

Philippine company to set up a nursing school in Biratnagar that will open in 2009.

The firm was set up in 1967 by Suraj's father, Vijaya G Vaidya, who is currently chairman of the group. All the new ventures have been pushed back five years because of the instability in Nepal, but the company is now trying to make up for lost time.

One section of the VOITH business empire that has really taken off is United Traders Syndicate that imports Toyota cars. The spread of highways in Nepal in the past five years,

increased mobility of Nepalis after the end of the conflict in 2006 have meant there was a huge pent-up demand for public transport in the 16-20 seater category.

The Toyota Hi-Ace van fit the bill and became an instant hit with operators and passengers throughout Nepal because of its fuel efficiency, capacity and widebody comfort. United Traders has sold nearly 800 of the vans nationwide in the past year alone and can hardly keep up with demand.

"We took a huge risk, we didn't know how the market would respond and we work with the banks with our guarantee," says Vaidya.

But won't all these cars make Nepal more dependent on expensive imported fuel?

"Ultimately we have to raise fuel prices, there is no other way," says Vaidya, "and the only way to do that is to take politics out of our national energy management plan. But until alternate fuels are available we have to go for more fuel-efficient cars that cost less to maintain."

Indeed, the pace at which the Toyotas have replaced Tatas on city bus routes and highways, it is clear bus owners and

passengers now want speed, comfort and efficiency. United Traders have also set up a network of dealers who conduct regular workshops for mechanics and regular follow-ups up to three times a year.

Even Corollas doing surprisingly well considering cheaper Indian and Korean models currently in the market. Imports of Toyota brands like the Prius, however, will take time because of the lack of charging stations and other infrastructure.

Vaidya says the unique selling point of his vehicles are where they are made. "In the end, a made in Japan brand is a made in Japan," he says.

VOITH, of which Suraj Vaidya is President, is also involved with a slew of social service projects throughout Nepal: supporting the Jawalakhel Zoo with a Rs 4 million upgrade, making proper bus stops in the capital, supporting schools for the handicapped and most recently with the Save the Bagmati campaign.

Says Vaidya: "Maybe it's just as well they didn't give me a license to build three-wheelers back then, it showed me we can't wait for things to happen to us, we must make them happen." ●

# Expeditions in limbo

## Political uncertainty still shrouds Chomolungma this spring

BILLI BIERLING

Mountaineering is always unpredictable because of weather, avalanches and the effects of altitude. But climbing the world's highest mountain this year has an added uncertainty: China.

Hundreds of climbers are already in Kathmandu to begin their long-planned expeditions to the south side of Chomolungma. However, whether or not they will be able to scale the world's highest peak this season is still shrouded in mystery.

Earlier this month the Chinese government decided to ban all expeditions other than its own, which will take the Olympic torch to the summit. It then pressured Nepal to follow suit on its side of the mountain. With escalating protests worldwide against the Olympics by Tibetan activists, Beijing is apprehensive about someone waving a 'Free Tibet' banner at the summit just as the torch gets there. (See 'Mount Olympus', #391)

For the past two weeks the Nepal government has been dithering over a decision on how to impose restrictions on the mountain. But with elections looming, ministers are distracted.

"We are expecting a decision soon and I have told the ministers involved that the expedition leaders are getting a little bit nervous here in Kathmandu," Ang Tshering



Sherpa, president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association told *Nepali Times*.

Some optimistic expedition leaders and their teams are already on their way to Base Camp. "We have talked to our clients and they are aware of the fact that we might not be able to climb this year. They are willing to take the risk and that is why we are heading off," one expedition leader said.

The Cabinet is examining a compromise proposal that nobody will be allowed to climb beyond Camp 3 before 10 May, the latest date for the Olympic torch to reach the summit. It is not yet clear whether that would be acceptable to the Chinese.

However, some climbers are worried that this cut-off date will pose some dangers as

the Hillary step, the famous rock wall at 8,760m, could become a bottleneck if too many people are bidding for the summit at the same time in late May.

With Cho Oyu and Shishapangma also closed because of the ban on foreigners visiting Tibet, a total of 40 expeditions that were poised to climb mountains from the north this season are affected.

"A few hundred people have lost their jobs this spring, which is the time they normally earn most of their annual income," said Russian expedition leader, Alex Abramov who has taken expeditions to the North side of Chomolungma for five years. He had 15 clients booked on his expedition this season and would have employed 20 Nepali Sherpas.

British expedition leader Phil Crampton was faced with a similar dilemma but his team decided to defect to the Nepali side of the mountain.

"For many leaders this was not an option as the price is much higher (in Nepal) and logistics are a lot more complicated," Crampton said. His clients, who are all experienced mountaineers, have agreed to pay a little bit extra. "I am very happy to have the opportunity to climb in Nepal this year as it means that I do not have to leave my staff in the lurch."

For the Tibetans the cancellations aren't that much of a problem because they are involved in the torch team, Crampton said, the people who suffer much more are the Sherpas. ●



FNCCI elections



Kush Kumar Joshi (left) has been elected president of FNCCI. On 26 March, at FNCCI's 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting, second vice-president Joshi won with 1,468 votes. Joshi's

predecessor Chandi Raj Dhakal (right), had also contested the elections and got 1,348 votes. Krishna Prasad Tamrakar, Pradeep Jung Pandey and Bhaskar Rajkarnikar were elected vice presidents.

Real winner

The winner of Real's 'Guess the Real flavour of the week' contest is Deelasha Rana from Lamatar. The flavour for week four was pineapple. The contest is open to all and based on clues in advertisements, contestants have to guess the flavour of Real fruit juice.

Hurling Etihad



Etihad Airways will be sponsoring the Ireland Senior Hurling Championship as the official airline for the tournament. The sponsorship will last for two years. Starting 30 March, Etihad will

also be conducting daily flights from Abu Dhabi to Dublin. Etihad flies to 45 destinations around the world and conducts four flights a week from Abu Dhabi to Kathmandu.

Canon Roadshow

Canon is presenting a roadshow of all its products. The roadshow will be at Pashupati Plaza from 28-31 March, from 11AM-6.30 PM. All purchased cameras will come with one year warranty and will get gifts worth upto Rs 4,000.

NEW PRODUCTS

VIEW: Samsung has launched its multi-featured Samsung Easy View television series. The Easy View boasts five new features: channel minimiser, channel scheduler, channel grouping, half mute and music mode. Marketed by Him Electronics, the DNle Easy View is available at every Samsung showroom.



Black swans

The real force controlling our lives

**What makes God laugh? People making forecasts!** We smile at this joke because we think we know what's different between the way we plan for life's events and the way those events occur. But we don't.



STRICTLY BUSINESS  
Ashutosh Tiwari

We make plans linearly, as if digging a tunnel under a vast field. But events that have the largest impact on our lives, writes Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book *Black Swan*, occur randomly outside of that tunnel. Since our mind is not designed to handle everything that goes on in the field, we don't allow room for unexpected events, and when those events do happen we are caught unawares, only to make up explanatory narratives later.

For example, think how you first met the person you later married, or how you were derailed in your career, or how you lost or made money on the Nepse Index. Could you have predicted any of those events before they actually happened? No, but after they took place, it was easier to give explanations why. Take another example: Two weeks ago, Bear Stearns, a New York bank with 80-plus years of history, collapsed in a matter of days. No one could have predicted its demise even a month ago.

Taleb, a contrarian former Wall Street trader, argues that our world is disproportionately shaped more by what happens to us once in a while than by what

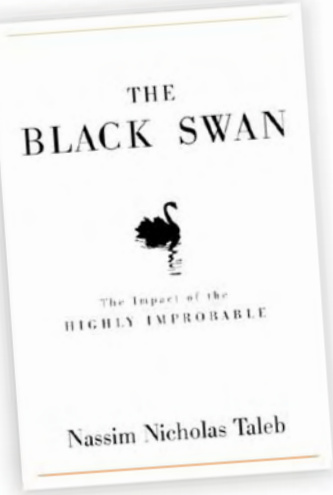
happens to us regularly, and that life is ultimately a cumulative effect of a handful of significant shocks. Taleb calls these shocks Black Swans, which can be beneficial or harmful.

Taleb defines Black Swan as an event that's an outlier. The probability of its happening is so low that nobody expects it, and it remains outside the reach of all available statistical models. But once it happens, it carries such a

really do. In Mediocristan, variables are non-scalable, constrained by physical limits, and fit under a bell curve. For instance, if you tabulate five hundred adult Nepalis' height, the numbers will range anywhere from four to six feet. No single observation dominates the total. But if you take the annual incomes of five hundred Nepalis, it's likely that there is no even distribution, and that the incomes of a mere handful make up more than 95 per cent of the total. Aside from income, weather, stock prices and surprise opportunities are all Extremistan variables. They are scalable, unconstrained by physical limits, and hard to predict from past information.

When dealing with Extremistan variables, our inability to allow even a possibility for a low-predictability/high impact event from happening makes us blind to positive or negative Black Swans that may come up.

Taleb concludes that because nature itself contains multiple unknowns in any given Extremistan domain, no planner can anticipate all the possibilities ahead by using everyday statistics. As such, we should learn to pay more attention to what lies outside of what we know, even when we do not know its precise nature. This way, when we step outside of our comfort zones to use Extremistan variables to make plans, we account for what we know while leaving room for what we don't. ●



large impact that it completely rearranges the existing order. You can think of the royal palace massacre of 2001, the 9/11 attacks, and the 2004 Asia-Pacific tsunami as three Black Swan events.

Routines of everyday life lull us to live in Mediocristan when, given how much randomness there is in nature, we should be appreciating Extremistan as well. The longer we live in a Mediocristan state of mind, the more we think that we understand more than we

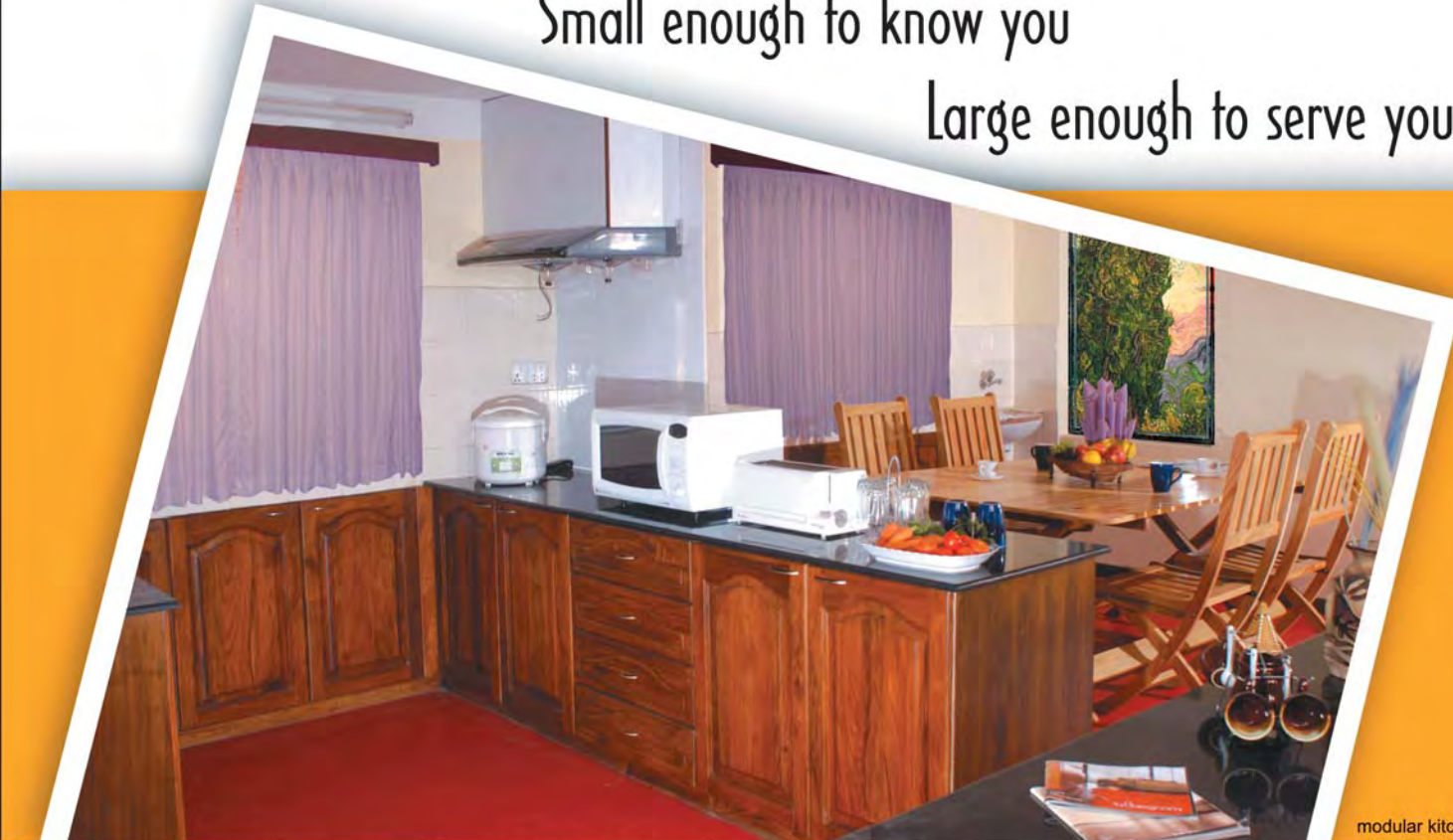
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# Press bashing

Editorial in Kantipur, 25 March

कान्तिपुर

The Maoists are angry with ‘big media houses’. They have said the Nepali press is only reporting news that shows the Young Communist League in a negative light. By raising their voice against the free media, the Maoists are not looking analytically at the situation, but are being swayed by emotion and anger. It can be surmised that the only reason they are reacting in this manner is because they are trying to justify the violent activities of the YCL.

The YCL began threatening and attacking the representatives of other parties before the ink of the seven parties’ agreement was even dry, and they have injured many rival candidates. Those who believed that the elections could not be conducted in a free and fair manner because of the YCL have been proved right. These attacks are going to backfire on the Maoists because they will reduce the number of votes they will get. They say the way in which the Nepali press portrays the YCL is not correct. If they want to prove us wrong, they need to stop these activities immediately. Not only do they have to give clear orders to their party workers to stop violence, but also take action against those who do not listen to party orders. It would be a brave and commendable act by the party’s centre if they can take such a decision to stop the ongoing atrocities.

## Poor Prachanda

Budhabar, 26 March

बुधवार

After his visit to Rolpa, Prachanda appeared very despondent in his meeting with the prime minister at Baluwatar on Sunday.

According to the sources, the Maoist chairman, who arrived in Baluwatar with Baburam Bhattarai, talked for a long time with Koirala. Prachanda complained that Madhab Kumar

Nepal has turned his back on him. Quoting him a source said, “At first you said we could come together and I talked to my party accordingly. But in the end you and Madhab Kumar Nepal deceived me. I even proposed to go to the elections with the same election manifesto.”

In reply the prime minister said that everything does not always happen according to one’s own wishes. “My party has its own problems. I have not been able to solve these,” he said.

The same evening, in his meeting with senior leaders of the NC, Koirala said, “I found Prachanda very dejected today.” A senior NC leader said, “Even Baburam Bhattarai was silent.” During the hour long meeting, both Prachanda and Baburam sipped their coke only twice.

## Why Vote?

Ishworraj Dhakal in Nepal Samacharpatra, 22 March

शेखर समाचारपत्र

Seven kilometres away from Kathmandu, Damaigaun is untouched by election fever. There have been no election campaigns and people here are quite unaware about the elections and the constituent assembly. Locals wonder if the reason is because politicians are too scared of losing.

“If this place was a city there would be hordes of election campaigners but here no one is interested,” says local Narayan

Bohara. “Neither the government nor the candidates have made an effort to educate us about the elections.”

“We cannot vote if there is no one campaigning. I am not even sure whether I will vote or not,” adds Mohal Bhusal.

It is surprising that a village so close to the capital is so unaffected by the elections. Pramila Singh (NC), Rajendra Shrestha (UML) and Hisila Yami (CPN-M) are contesting for elections in Kathmandu-7, the constituency in which Damaigaun is situated. “They just aren’t campaigning here,” the locals refrain.

## Conspiracy

Drishhti, 25 March

दृष्टि

It has come to light that the verdict in the corruption case against Nepal Rastra Bank governor Bijay Nath Bhattarai and executive director Surendra Man Pradhan was given before the hearing was completed. Last Tuesday, Judge Tahir Ali Ansari announced the verdict from a single sheet of white paper, shocking many.

Removing the paper from his coat pocket, Ansari copied out the verdict into the decision book. Even if Judge Ansari himself had written the note, a decision cannot be made before the hearing and legal debate is completed. The note, clearly written beforehand, shows the deep



KIRAN PANDAY



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conspiracy against the governor.  
Ever since the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority started legal proceedings against Bhattarai, the World Bank has been keeping a keen interest in the matter. After the case went to court, the Bank declared that the paper produced as proof by the CIAA was counterfeit. It also made clear its belief that the decisions made in the previous proceedings too were wrong, expressing discontent with the points used by the court. Just as the CIAA used a counterfeit paper to start proceedings, the Supreme Court also gave its verdict based on a piece of paper with a decision made outside the courtroom. This action has already become a topic of international debate.

It was CIAA Chief Lalit Bahadur Limbu who registered the case against the governor and executive director on behalf of the CIAA, following phone conversations with the so-called finance mafia. Even though prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala urged the CIAA not to proceed with the case, Limbu went ahead anyway, disregarding his advice.  
After the special court, under influence of the finance mafia, was unable to decide on a verdict, the case was referred to the Supreme Court, although corruption charges are under the special court's jurisdiction. Now it seems that the Supreme Court has also been influenced by the same quarter.



KIRAN PANDAY

# Election monitoring

Naya Patrika, 25 March

गयाँ पत्रिका

From former American president Jimmy Carter to the son of former Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, one and all are coming to observe the constituent assembly elections.  
The Election Commission has permitted 28 international and 148 national organisations to monitor the elections. Seven hundred observers from international organisations and 100,000 from national organisations will be deployed during the polls.  
The EC has already handed out 21,000 identity cards to monitors and is fast issuing more. This time there will be observers at every polling station.  
A delegation from the European Union, Australian and Malaysian chief election commissioners, the South Asia Foundation's Sita Ram Yechuri and five Indian MPs will be present during elections.  
The EU group has already arrived. Composed of nine experts and led by MEP (member of European Parliament) Jan Mulder, the group will be observing polls in 62 districts. The European Union sent out a press release last Monday, according to which 122 people from 22 European countries, including Norway and Switzerland who are EU members, will be present in the group. Seventy of the team are temporary monitors. They will work from 1 April, the coming Tuesday, and will be present during voting and vote counting.



Suitcase: party  
Placard: Maoist Base Area, No Entry  
"I'm so tired from beating up our opponents! That's why I put up this sign."

राजधानी Rajdhani, 23 March

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ Even those who favour the monarchy do not like Gyanendra because he behaves like a despot. ”

Chairman of Rastriya Janashakti Party Surya Bahadur Thapa, quoted in Kantipur, 25 March.

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- Forms will be given out from 28 March through 4 April and again from 15 through 21 April.
- Completed applications must be submitted by 22 April.

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# Fishy business

## Freshly fried rainbow trout, anyone?

**PRANAYA SJB RANA**  
in NUWAKOT

**P**adam Rumba reaches into the water, where hundreds of fish swim in circles, and scoops one out. The fish gasps and struggles in his hand, but Padam maintains his hold on the slippery creature. The fish writhes, and its scales glint blue, gold and red in the bright sunlight. Padam puts the rainbow gently back into the water and the fish swims away with a wet flick of its tail.

Padam started his trout restaurant in Betini six years ago,

and it has now grown to be the biggest and most popular in the area. Just 38km from Kathmandu near Kakani, the restaurant is drawing huge hordes of hungry picnickers from the capital.

Barely twenty years ago, these scenic mountains of Nuwakot were just a place you passed through on the ride to Trisuli. Today, it is bustling with restaurants that serve fish reared in quick-flowing local streams. Betini today rivals Malekhu, and in terms of taste outpaces it.

“Raising fish is just like any other job, you need hard work, dedication and a lot of patience,”

says Rumba who looks after the 17 pools that hold three tons of trout at any given time.

As a customer you can pick out a fish and Rumba’s wife will cook it in anyway you like. From crispy deep-fried to thick aromatic curry, the trout tastes heavenly. The meat is tender and soft and there are no bones to pick out. But like all good things, it comes at a price. A kilo of rainbow trout, raw, costs Rs 750. Add Rs 150 to that if you want it fried.

When Purna Bahadur Lama first started raising trout back in 1997, he had 400 fish and one



pool. Lama used to work for the government fishery in Trisuli and there he saw Japanese rainbow trout for the first time. Supported by the Nepal Agriculture and Resource Centre, Lama raised Rs 60,000 and started his own farm and restaurant. The site in Nuwakot was perfect because of its cool temperature and abundant running water. Proximity to Kathmandu meant a never-ending stream of customers willing to pay for the rare treat.

“When I told people I was raising fish they all laughed at me,” recalls Lama. “They’re not laughing anymore, they’re eating my fish.” In the past 11 years, Lama’s business has grown exponentially.

Lama and Rumba’s restaurants are small and homely, and surrounded by concrete pools full to the brim with rainbow trout. They are built along the contours of terraces and fed by streams. The higher pools hold the spawn

while the lowest ones have the biggest trout, ready to be plucked out and thrown into the frying pan.

Trout restaurants have sprung up all along the roadway, and there are more than 20 fish farms in Nuwakot alone.

Japanese rainbow trout are notoriously finicky and difficult to raise. They require water temperatures between 3 and 20 degree celsius with regulated oxygen levels. The pools need to be cleaned once a week and older fish need to be kept away from the young.

Most of the trout diseases come from poor feed, but Rumba has eliminated that by making his own and breeding his own fingerlings. Rumba has no qualms selling his feed and spawn to rivals, it just makes the fish pie bigger and everyone benefits.

Rumba sells at least 5kg of fish each day and on weekends, more than 20kg. He also supplies 40kg of trout each month to three hotels in Kathmandu. ●



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY



# Bringing back the paubha

**P**aubha painting is a style unique to the Kathmandu Valley, and predates Tibetan thangkas.

People often assume paubhas are an offshoot of the thangka, but Newari legend has it the other way round. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century when Bhrikuti married Tibetan king Sron Tsan Gampo she took paubha artists with her to Tibet. This style later evolved into the thangka and ended up being more popular than the original paubhas.

Lok Chitrakar, Patan's noted paubha artist, admits there is a fine line between thangka and paubha.

"Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century the thangka was strictly a Newari style of painting," he says, surrounded by paintings in his Patan Dhoka studio, "but from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards the thangka came under heavy influence of Chinese styles."

Thangkas depict Buddhist subjects or even deities from the pre-Buddhist Bon faith, paubhas contain Hindu and Buddhist deities, reflecting the ancient symbiosis of Hinduism and Buddhism in Kathmandu Valley.

Newcomers to the art forms

## Exhibition revives a devotional art form that predates thangkas

may not immediately perceive these differences, but they are what sets this uniquely Nepali style apart from the wider known Tibetan thangka.

In recent decades the tradition of paubha painting has been in decline. "This is a tragedy not just for Nepal, but for the whole world," says Chitrakar.

In an effort to preserve and revitalise the ancient art form, the National Heritage Society is organising an exhibition of paubha paintings this weekend (28-31 March) at the Kathmandu Guest House as part of the effort to revive this ancient devotional art form.

Paubhas are a visual representation of religions philosophy. They always feature a central deity who is the subject of the painting and sets moral and spiritual significance. The background and the details are up



to the artist, but for the deity there are strict standards: body postures, facial expressions, skin complexions and hand gestures all carry important symbolism, developed over many centuries.

The deity's eyes are always painted last. The paints are traditionally made from crushed stones and vegetable dyes such as indigo, and sometimes silver and gold dust are mixed. The

predominant colour of most paubhas is red, while blue, green and gold are used for accentuation. (See also: 'Paubha', #5, 'Nepal's biggest paubha mural', #32)

Chitrakar hopes the exhibition will bring back the paubha. "The tradition is disappearing everywhere, if it dies, it will never come back." ●  
RC Cone

A total of 31 Paubhas will be displayed and for sale at the Kathmandu Guest house in Thamel 28-31 March. Admission is free.  
Friday, 28 March: 4:30-6PM  
Saturday & Sunday, 29-30 March: 10AM-6PM  
Monday, 31 March: 10AM-4PM  
National Heritage Society on 01-4248610.

**F**ollowing the massive success of Jazzmandu, up-coming international festival Nepal Jazz Jatra swings into town this weekend for the first time to appease the hunger for more soul acts in the city. Starting 28 March, performances will take place at four different locations around Kathmandu, ending 30 March.

Organised by the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory in conjunction with Party Nepal and the Hyatt Regency, the musical fiesta will see 10 different groups of local musicians as well as international acts-hailing from Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Curacao, Germany, Norway and Spain-romancing the crowd.

Apart from just jazz, this time the festival is broadening the musical platform, introducing blues, rock, eastern classical, folk and fusion into the arena.

Acts include jazz/fusion band Chris Poulsen Trio from Australia that has played all over the world and released



## All that jazz

two full-length studio albums. With Chris Poulsen on Fender Rhodes keyboards, Jeremy O'Connor on bass and Trent Bryson-Dean on percussion, the energetic group will rock the crowd with songs from their latest studio offering, *Common Sense*.

Nepali trio Sukarma will also take the

stage, with Dhrubesh Regmi on sitar, Shyam Nepali on sarangi and Pramod Upadhyaya on percussion. Sukarma fuse folk and raga, allowing the two genres to enrich and embellish each other. Regulars in the Nepali jazz scene, this time they will be performing with Norwegian jazz pianist

Jan Fadnes.

The festival will also see seasoned Nepali bands Trouble Clef, Baja Gaja, Inner Groove and 1974 AD belting out their grooves.

### 28 March

7.30 PM at 1905, Kantipath with Baja Gaja, Inner Groove, Vajra and New Revolution. Rs 400

7.30 PM at Moksh, Pulchok with the Chris Poulsen Trio. Rs 400

### 29 March

5PM at Hyatt Regency with KJC Student Combo, Sphatic, Abhishek and Jigme, 1974 AD, Baja Gaja, Inner Groove and Sukarma with Jan Fadnes, Chris Poulsen Trio. Rs 700

### 30 March

12PM at Hyatt Regency with Trouble Clef and international guests. Rs 1050  
5PM at Patan Museum with Sukarma, East-West Grand Finale. Rs 600

## Nepal Jazz Jatra

presented by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Party Nepal and Hyatt Regency Kathmandu

### March 28, Friday

Venue: 1905, Kantipath  
Time: 7.30 PM  
Price: NPR 400  
Featured Artists:  
Trouble Clef, Inner Groove, Vajra, New Revolution, Percussion Jam

### March 30, Sunday

Venue: Hyatt Regency Kathmandu  
Time: 12 PM  
Price: NPR 1050 (With Brunch)  
NPR 250 (Without Brunch)  
Featured Artists:  
Trouble Clef & International Guests

### March 28, Friday

Venue: Moksh, Pulchowk  
Time: 7.30 PM  
Price: NPR 400  
Featured Artists:  
Chris Poulsen Trio

### March 30, Sunday

Venue: Patan Museum  
Time: 6.30 PM  
Price: NPR 600  
Featured Artists:  
Sukarma, East-West Grand Finale with world renowned bamboo flutist Manose

### March 29, Saturday

Venue: Hyatt Regency Kathmandu  
Time: 5 PM Till Midnight  
Price: NPR 700  
Featured Artists:  
Sphatic, Abhishek & Jigme, 1974AD, Inner Groove, Baja Gaja, New Revolution Sukarma with Jan Fadnes, Trouble Clef, Chris Poulsen Trio, Jam Session

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# Climactic change

## Seen and unseen dangers as global warming thaws the Himalaya

**TOM OWEN-SMITH**

The snowline is moving higher, mountain streams are rushing earlier in the year, the monsoons are erratic and giant ropes of glaciers throughout the Himalaya are retreating rapidly, swelling newly-formed lakes at their snouts.

These Himalayan symptoms of global climate change are happening within one generation. And their impact won't just affect countries like Nepal, but also the wider Asian region.

Alarmed by the rapidity of warming and the lack of reliable data on which to make predictions, the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development is hosting an international conference on the cryosphere starting Monday.

"The cryosphere," explained Mats Eriksson of ICIMOD "is the part of the earth which is frozen — icecaps, glaciers, snow cover, permafrost, and frozen lakes and rivers." As temperatures rise around the world, the effects on mountain ice and snow are just as serious as those on the polar icecaps.

Over 50 scientists from Asia, North America and Europe will attend the ICIMOD conference to share information, plan future monitoring activities among the world's highest mountains and discuss risk management strategies.

ICIMOD has led efforts to raise awareness of the effects of climate change, and this month is also sponsoring the Eco-Everest Expedition, which aims

to collect data on shrinking glaciers like the Imja and Khumbu below Chomolungma, and publicise the issue internationally. Political tensions and much of the Himalaya being a war zone make cross-border collection of snow precipitation data and mapping difficult.

The conference will look at what will happen when Himalayan glacial lakes burst, and other hazards such as subsidence of land caused by melted permafrost. ICIMOD's Vijay Khadgi said: "Many of

these dangers are not immediately obvious and may not manifest themselves until there is a major earthquake, but we have to be prepared for them."

The Himalayas are one of the world's most earthquake-prone regions. This fact combined with fragile glacial lakes and destabilised mountain slopes poses grave and growing danger of flashfloods and landslides.

Long-term changes to the seasons, temperature and precipitation are also making the precarious lives of people here

even more insecure. More water falls as rain and less as snow, and at different times of the year. In dry areas such as Ladakh and northern Pakistan, which depend on snowmelt for much of their water, agriculture is already suffering from reduced water in the growing season.

And it's not just people in the mountains who are at risk. 1.3 billion people living downstream in the Indo-Gangetic plains, Burma, Southeast Asia and China will also suffer when glacial ice on the Tibetan Plateau is depleted.

The International Panel on Climate Change has predicted that many Himalayan glaciers could melt completely by as early as 2035. Meltwater-fed rivers such as the Ganges, Indus, Huang He and Yangtze may be reduced to trickles or stop altogether in the dry season. This will precipitate a food crisis not just for the massive populations living in the river valleys, but for the whole world which imports grain from these regions.

Due to remoteness and lack of resources, the processes and effects of climate change have been researched less in the Himalaya than anywhere else in the world.

"There is a big need to understand what is happening here," said Eriksson. ICIMOD hopes more coordinated research in the Himalaya can provide the basis to prepare for the after-effects of climate change. ●



## Climate change is least understood in the Himalaya



**Richard Armstrong is a senior research scientist at the University of Colorado. He is in Kathmandu this week to participate in an international seminar by ICIMOD on ice and snow induced disasters. *Nepali Times* asked him about the dangers of climate change on our glaciers.**

***Nepali Times:* Is it now proven beyond doubt that carbon emissions are causing climate change?**

**Richard Armstrong:** We cannot prove the extent to which the artificial carbon in the air has contributed to climate change. However, if we combine the temperature and carbon dioxide records at the surface of the earth, we can easily see the correlation.

**Is climate change causing Himalayan glaciers to shrink?**

Glacial retreat is the most visually convincing evidence of climate change for non-specialists. Compare pictures from 50 years ago with today, you don't need complex data. But in the Himalaya a possible secondary aspect that might have contributed to the melting of the glaciers is the Asian Brown Cloud, or particles that change the reflectivity of the glaciers. But we have very little data on that, and need more research.

**How does glacial retreat here compare with**

**other mountain regions?**

Compared to other parts of the world, the pace of glacial retreat is slowest in the Himalaya. In the western hemisphere, the retreat rate is very high due to their climatic pattern which includes low precipitation and low humidity. The glaciers of the European Alps and the Rocky mountains of North America have lost 40 percent of their area in the last hundred years. The Himalaya is the least understood area with regard to climate change.

**Why is that?**

The elevation range in the Himalayas has no equivalent anywhere else in the world. We don't fully understand the climate above 6000m so at such high elevations, we can only make assumptions. We are fairly sure that European glaciers will continue to shrink, but it's possible that global warming could even increase the mass of some of the Himalayan glaciers, as if

the monsoon is enhanced there will be an increase in precipitation, hence more snow in very high areas.

**How will people in the Himalayas be affected by these changes?**

Water resources and human impact in terms of water aren't well quantified. What we need to know is to what extent are people taking advantage of excess water that wasn't previously available.

**We hear you have been working with Al Gore.**

Yes, two months ago Al Gore came for a half day visit. Since he uses our data in his presentations he had a lot of questions. He's doing a fabulous job in raising awareness about global climate change, and meeting him was an amazing experience. But it was also depressing, because there is no doubt that environmentally it would have been a different world if Al Gore had been elected president.



# The view from the other side

PRASHANT JHA in PATNA

The ‘Republic of Bihar’—as the veteran journalist Arvind Das termed the state in a seminal book—may soon be a next door neighbour of republican Nepal.

But in its middle class drawing rooms of Bihar’s capital, Nepali politics is of only fleeting interest. “People used to worship the monarchy there isn’t it? Look what this king has done. He will be over after your elections,” says a former government engineer in Muzaffarpur, 70km north of Patna.

While the awareness about Nepal’s Madhes problem is higher, it has not seeped into the popular Bihari consciousness except near the border. There is no large political constituency pushing it in Patna.

But a dangerous mix of emotive support and inaccurate information has made its way through. A zamindar from the Baneli estate near Purnea asked curiously: “Is it true that Madhesis get nothing in Nepal and are being pushed out?”

Sitting at his Bailey Road residence, a management professor at the L N Mishra Institute wondered aloud: “So who are these Madhesis? The tv channels keep showing images of them being beaten up by the police.”

## Under federalism, the Madhes could be another Bihar

On Patna’s Fraser road, the city’s Fleet Street, NDTV Bihar bureau chief Abhay Mohan Jha explains how national channels have little interest in cross-border issues. Instead, they rely on stringers in bordering districts. In the plush office studio, he shows visual footage sent by his Sitamarhi reporter, which has Rajan Mukti who recently split from Jwala Singh, accusing Singh of corruption and talking about plans to derail polls.

“I will need a lot more to weave a good Madhes story and pitch it to Delhi. Even here, people know little about the Tarai. How do I relay the nuances?” Jha asks.

For the upper castes in north Bihar, the Nepal Tarai is a dream gone sour. A land where there was little regulation over land ownership, few signs of assertion by the oppressed castes, with easy ways to enter into a neat compact with local politicians, has over the past ten years become too “unstable”, and therefore less important.

In the consciousness of Bihar’s opinion-formers, the Madhes is on the fringes.

Bihar is critical not only for the Madhes’ present, but also its future. Madhesi politicians need to closely look at the state’s federal experience, its political evolution and social engineering, and the crisis of governance if they want to avoid inheriting the worst features of Bihari politics. After all, the aim of the Madhesi movement is not to make the new Madhes state a ‘second Bihar’.

However, Bihar has undergone democratisation over the past decade and a half. Laloo Prasad Yadav may be a little more than a clown for Southasia’s chattering classes, but he symbolises the non-violent political assertion of the quaintly-acronymed OBCs. With his spotless record of providing security to state’s Muslim population even when north India was reeling under communal strife, and it is no surprise that

Laloo was in power for 15 years. As journalist Sankarshan Thakur writes in his book *The Making of Laloo Yadav, the Unmaking of Bihar* there has been institutional breakdown, a crime-politics nexus, ruthless caste wars, crumbling infrastructure and little economic dividend in Bihar. In Laloo-nomics, development did not matter because it did not fetch votes. Nitish Kumar has become

chief minister on a coalition of upper-castes, Kurmis and the extremely underprivileged. There is consensus that things have improved under his rule. There are fast-track criminal courts, better roads, more focus on higher education to stop the drain of Bihari students, corporate investment, higher attendance in schools. But there is a long way to go on state finances, rural electrification, limited agricultural

productivity, Naxalism, nascent manufacturing. Like Nepal, Bihar continues to depend on its huge migrant population. The Madhes will inevitably face similar problems, especially when the country turns federal. This will be compounded by Kathmandu’s discriminatory mindset, armed groups, and rising ethnic chauvinism. The Madhesi parties and civil society are unprepared for the way ahead. Understanding the Bihar-Madhes relationship, and learning from the experience in India could be a good beginning. ●

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# Absolute to constitutional

## Despite elections, Bhutan remains a royal stronghold



will spike with elected politicians.

The most delicate issue, however, is of the Nepali-speaking Lhotsampas. Lila Pradhan, 44, from DPT was the only woman among 19 Lhotsampa candidates, and won from the southern Samtse district.

Asked about the refugee problem, Pradhan told *Nepali Times*: “It is an important issue and our political manifesto states that we will look for a lasting solution to the problem, but first we need to form the government and look into our priorities.”

Another Lhotshampa politician, 45-year-old NL Rai who won his seat in Sarpang dared to be only a little more specific: “We will be working with international organisations in order to find a speedy and durable solution. We are all Bhutanis and do not have the same ethnic issues as Nepal does in their elections,” Rai said.

Since January, Bhutan’s Maoists (United Revolutionary Front of Bhutan) have set off ten blasts. Police blamed militant groups operating out of Nepal. Bhutani refugees in exile do not regard this week’s elections as democratic, saying many Lhotsampas were prevented from voting.

LINE WOLF NIELSEN in THIMPU

Five generations of royal rule ended on Monday as Bhutan became the world’s newest democracy, but the change is unlikely to resolve the plight of 110,000 Bhutani refugees living in Nepal for the past 17 years.

Voters had a choice of two political parties from which to pick 47 members of a lower house. The Druk Phuensum Tshogpa party (DPT) won a landslide over opponents from the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), winning all but three seats.

Because election rules stipulate that voters could only cast ballots in

the place of their birth, the capital Thimphu was almost deserted on Tuesday. Elections officials declared that 79.4 percent of the country’s 318,000 registered voters cast ballots.

One businessman in Thimphu said he was only voting because his king had asked him to, and that he feared the country will “become unstable as our neighbours”.

In December 2006 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck abdicated in favour of his son, 28-year-old Oxford-educated Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

Both parties had campaigned on the ‘Gross National Happiness’ plank, the former king’s blueprint for development that seeks to balance material progress with spiritual well-being.

International election observers said the similar platforms of the two parties did not offer voters a real choice between two clear ideological alternatives. The result therefore was a surprise because most expected a 50-50 result.

“People voted rather conservatively, supporting the party which offers strong leadership and experience,” said Tenzin Rigden of the private newspaper, *Bhutan Times*. The parties nominated 10 women candidates out of a total of 94. Four were elected.

The challenges ahead for Bhutan are to lift one-fifth of the population out of poverty, tackle youth unemployment that has risen sharply. Many officials quietly worry that corruption, already a problem,

# April sky

## “Nepal’s topography is ideal for observational cosmology”

Rishi Shah of the Nepal Academy of Science & Technology (NAST) organises and promotes amateur astronomy groups and writes columns on the subject in national newspapers. Columnist Kedar S Badu spoke to Shah about the opportunities and challenges of stargazing in Nepal.

**Kedar S Badu: How did you come to be a stargazer?**  
**Rishi Shah:** Looking beyond our planet earth always fascinated me. I had an intense desire to reach for the Sun, Moon, the planets and the stars and know as much as possible about them ever since my childhood. Later I went to study in Germany and then I got the chance to really learn about astronomy.

**How is astronomy developing in Nepal?**  
The passing of Haley’s Comet in 1986 created a lot of interest in Nepal, but compared to the rest of the world, astronomy here is developing at a slow pace. However, some hard-core enthusiasts are carrying out activities, and



**YOUNG STARS:** Rishi Shah mentors young astronomy buffs at regular star-gazing activities in various parts of Nepal.

some teachers are taking the lead in schools.

**You tried to establish a planetarium and observatory in Nepal, but it has not happened yet. What went wrong?**  
Although Prime Minister Koirala officially initiated the BP Koirala Planetarium and Observatory Project in 1992, it is still struggling to get off the ground. Many factors such as political instability, unclear long-term vision and the inexperience of management staff have slowed down the progress of the project. If it could be linked to the amateur groups which are already conducting events this project could bring great benefits.

**Is astronomy really important in a poor country like Nepal?**  
Yes. Nepal needs astronomy to dispel superstitious beliefs that are deeply rooted in our society. Astronomy helps us to

think logically and to understand our evolution, our role in the universe, in our solar system and ultimately on earth. We in Nepal could contribute to international research on astronomy and space exploration by setting up an observatory, as our geographical location is excellent for observational cosmology. Such projects would help to develop human resources and infrastructure, and would thus help the country’s economy.

**How could we support students and amateur astronomers for stargazing activities?**  
Students and amateurs should be encouraged and supported to participate in astronomical activities as much as possible. Schools, government, NGOs and the private sector should all play a part in this, as it would fire the minds of many people in the country.

**April Night Sky Highlights**  
**Mercury** and **Venus** are both very close to the Sun, so they are more or less out of sight this month. **Mars** is high up in the western sky at dusk, and **Jupiter** is now playing the role of ‘Morning Star’: it rises in the east about three hours before sunrise. **Saturn** on the other hand is high in the east at dusk, and doesn’t set until shortly before sunrise. On 13 April don’t miss to spectacle of **Saturn** (in Leo) and **Mars** (in Gemini) with a crescent Moon suspended between the two. After a break of a few months, the meteors are back again. The Lyrid shower is active during the third week of April, and will peak in the early hours of 22 April, producing one meteor every 10 minutes or so.

kedarbadu(at)gmail.com



# Gross national sadness

Geo-politics is all about double standards and national interest. The Americans invade Iraq, ostensibly to restore democracy and get rid of Saddam, but everyone knows it is about oil.

India backs Nepal's democracy movement, but is in bed with the Burmese junta. Everyone knows it's about gas.

But how does one explain India's outright support for Bhutan's eviction of 100,000 refugees, and its help in transporting them to Nepal. It can't only be about hydropower.

Not just New Delhi, the 'international community' has been a mute by-stander to the world's biggest refugee crisis in per-capita terms—Bhutan's eviction of one-sixth of its population 17 years ago. There is more media coverage and outrage about 22,000 Tibetan refugees in Nepal than five times as many Bhutanis. Could it be because most Bhutani refugees are not Buddhists?

Finally, some Europeans seem to have taken notice that something is rotten in the kingdom of Bhutan. The Norwegian Refugee Council has timed its newsletter covering the refugee crisis for Bhutan's first election this week. And to set things right for past neglect, it is a sharp indictment of the gross violation of human rights of its citizens perpetrated by the Druk regime.

'Despite the extensive abuse of its own population, the country has—to a large extent—managed to avoid criticism in the international media,' writes NRC Reports editor, Richard Skretteberg. 'On the contrary, the media has often helped perpetuate the myth of an exotic land of happiness. However, what we have before us is a silent tragedy

## Norwegian Refugee Council sets record straight on Bhutan



NRC Reports: Bhutan  
Norwegian Refugee Council, Oslo  
January 2008  
ISBN: 978 82 7411 176 1  
www.nrc.no

occurring in a media-created Shangri-la.'

Better late than never to say this. Finally someone in Europe has picked up what the Nepali media has been banging its head on for nearly two decades to get the world to take notice.

NRC Reports goes on to highlight the threats, detentions, confiscation of property that led to the original ethnic cleansing in 1991, and the Bhutani regime's delaying tactics on their return with the direct collusion of India.

'India bears a significant responsibility for finding a solution for the Bhutanese refugees...but

the greater responsibility lies with Bhutan itself," adds Skretteberg.

The NRC Reports also pokes holes in Bhutan's 'democratic elections' this week. The 2005 census in Bhutan has defined 13 percent of the population, mostly Lhotsampas, as non-nationals which means 82,000 Bhutanis within Bhutan weren't allowed to vote in this week's elections.

'Exclusion of an ethnic group before an elections cannot be considered real democratisation,' says the Report.

The report says there can be only three durable solutions to the crisis: repatriation to Bhutan, local integration in Nepal or resettlement. On repatriation, it accuses the Bhutani regime of being intrasigent and not even allowing back those classified as genuine Bhutanis in 2003. Local integration would be Nepal's responsibility and Kathmandu has also been dragging its feet on extending citizenship even to those born in the camps and Bhutanis married to Nepal's after coming here.

The resettlement option for 85,000 Bhutanis to settle in western countries has created tension within the camps and the report calls on the resettlement to be entirely voluntary and the refugees allowed to retain the right to return to Bhutan.

What the report does not shed light on is the biggest mystery of all: how a tiny country of 700,000 people can arm-twist a giant neighbour of one billion people and charm western politicians and foreign aid bureaucrats to get away with ethnic cleansing. Not only is Bhutan not punished, it is now being congratulated for having 'democratic elections'.  
Gyan Subba



# Big fish

## Ecological and economic inequities in Tanzania

Welcome to Tanzania's 'fish city', Mwanza. Sprawled along the shores of Lake Victoria, the terrain of this town looks unwelcoming, but its tatty airstrip is uncannily busy. Enormous cargo planes arrive daily to collect tons of white fish fillets for European consumption.

The booming fishing industry is the pulse sustaining Mwanza's economy. What's the drama in this, you may ask. However Hubert Sauper's Oscar-nominated documentary *Darwin's Nightmare* does not care much about dramatic rummaging of the subject, and is engrossed instead in a pensive observation of the looming disaster in the town's ecology and economy.

The drama is the Nile Perch, a non-native predatory fish species weighing up to 200kg which was introduced into the lake in the 1960s as an experiment, and which has coupled well with another giant—global capitalism. In the deeper waters of Lake Victoria, the Nile Perch

multiplies at a rate that may please the IMF, its advocates and the industries they support. But the voracious fish remains highly elusive to the shallow water fishing technologies of local fishermen, while preying off to near extinction the rich variety of species on which the locals traditionally depended for subsistence.

For Sauper, though, the Nile Perch is only a hellish allegory for the nightmare that emerges from the desolate stories and experiences of people who inhabit the city. With the economic arrangement fostered by the Nile Perch, Mwanza's denizens include East European pilots, the prostitutes who entertain them, impoverished villagers who have come looking for work, orphans who fight for a fistful of rice, and street kids who take refuge in sniffing intoxicating glue made from the plastic waste of Nile Perch packaging.

Tanzania itself, the film informs us, is anticipating a famine, and locals are unable to afford the leviathan Nile Perch, which goes for export anyhow. Only the sweepings are left over, and in one harrowing scene, we see a woman stacking and drying rotten fish which was rejected for export, heaps of carcasses infested with maggots, which are then sold to the locals who eat the heads fried or smoked.

This shocking image of poverty has not cut ice with everyone, however, and several people have claimed it is merely an objectionable polemic. Sauper's film has been accused of being unbalanced, even untrue, and obscuring the 'positive side' of the global economy which, it is argued, increases in the GDP and expands the middle classes in countries like Tanzania.

But the moral conundrum of this economy does not end there. For what the cargo planes bring to Africa, Sauper argues, is even more devastating. In fact, the idea for the film came when pilots Sauper befriended during the shooting of his previous film *Kisangani Diary* admitted that they were bringing ammunitions to Africa. Pilots featured in *Darwin's Nightmare* make the same confession, albeit with great hesitance and ambiguity.

Sauper does not suggest a direct bullets-for-fillets exchange. After all, the arms trade occurs not in Mwanza but in other African stopovers. The argument—Sauper is aware—is extremely tenuous. Asking a group of prostitutes in one scene if they thought the planes could be importing guns, the women scoff at the notion, many Tanzanians have also protested at this suggestion, chastising Sauper for not finding in Tanzania the glories of wildlife beauty and political stability. Even so, Sauper manages to make us think about some of the more oblique ways in which things are related in the globalised world.

All in all, *Darwin* is a momentous investigation, which refuses to see anything—ecology, economy or politics—in isolation. Excruciating it may be, but the film is not to miss. Catch it at Alliance Francaise, 6PM this Sunday.

Darwin's Nightmare  
Director: Hubert Sauper.  
2004. 107 min.



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## ABOUT TOWN

## EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Smiling state** a smiling portfolio of Nepali leaders by Pushpa KC, at Gallery 32, until 10 April, 10AM-6PM. 4241942
- ❖ **The Unspoken** paintings by Madan Chitrakar, until 3 April, 11AM-6PM at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Passing Through** paintings by Pramila Bajracharya, until 6 April, 11AM-5PM at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Collection One** paintings by Amir and Anup Chitrakar, 5 April-10 May, at the Saturday Café, Boudha. 9851106626

## EVENTS

- ❖ **Darwin's Nightmare** free screening by the Candid Society, 30 March at 6PM at Alliance Francaise.
- ❖ **Hiroshima Mon Amour** a film by Alain Resnais, presented by Cine-Sankipa, 31 March, 5.30 PM at the Rimal Theatre, Gurukul.
- ❖ **Weekly human rights** film screenings with *Night and Fog* a film by Alain Resnais at the Sama Theatre, Gurukul, 5PM on 30 March. 4466956
- ❖ **Toastmasters** a communication and leadership program, organised by Kathmandu Toastmasters Club every Wednesday 6PM at Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI) building, Tripureswor. 4288847



## MUSIC

- ❖ **Digital Samsara** live world music at Jatra, Thamel, 28 March at 7PM.
- ❖ **Nepal Jazz Jatra** with national and international artists, 28-30 March, at various locations around town.
- ❖ **Oriental night** with world music by Shani and friends, 30 March, 7-10PM at New Orleans, Patan. 5522708
- ❖ **Nostalgia Nite** with songs from the 60s-80s, live music by Dinesh Rai, Jyoti Ghimire, Pravin Manandhar and Sonam Tshering, 7PM, on 5 April at the Pulchok Bakery Café.
- ❖ **Rudra night** fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Sufi music** by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.
- ❖ **Yankee and friends** live acoustic music every Friday at the Bourbon room Restro-bar, Lal Darbar.
- ❖ **Anil Shahi** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 8PM. 5521408

## DINING

- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Jalan Jalan Restaurant** with a new Italian menu, Kupondole. 5544872
- ❖ **Cocktails and grooves** with jazz by Inner Groove at Fusion-the bar at Dwarika's, every Wednesday, at Dwarika's Hotel.
- ❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- ❖ **Continental and Chinese** cuisine and complimentary fresh brewed coffee after every meal a Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.
- ❖ **Iilly 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
- ❖ **Salmon promotion** with salmon delicacies at the Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency, from 7PM onwards. 4489361
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Dice-licious brunch** at Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50% discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30 PM. 4273999
- ❖ **Scrumptious wood fired pizzas**, cocktails and specialty coffees at Roadhouse, Bhatbateni 4426587, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4260187.
- ❖ **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
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## Quest Entertainment



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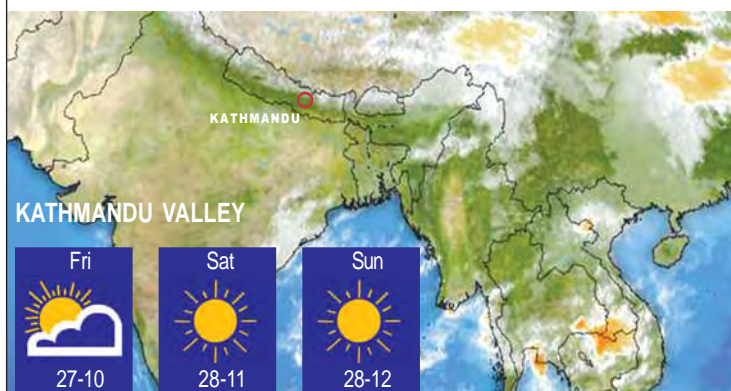
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## WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The mercury is steadily rising this week. Morning temperatures in most of the hill towns have climbed to double figures under the influence of a southerly warm front. The fall in daytime humidity levels is a direct consequence of the temperature rise. Satellite pictures on Thursday morning also show a westerly front advancing over Kashmir, which is likely to reach western Nepal early next week. The Valley has already had its expected quota of rainfall for this month (30 mm) and seems unlikely to receive more. Expect sunny afternoons with some cloud buildup over the mountains. Nights will still be cool over the weekend.



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"रेडियो सगरमाथामा नियमित सुनी, अंग्रेजी सुधारी"  
(रेडियो सगरमाथा र अमेरिकी राजदुतावास, अमेरिकी केन्द्रको सहकार्य)

सम्पर्क: २२२८०८१, २२२८२२२ पोस्ट बक्स: १६२८, ईमेल: info@radiosagarmatha.org

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

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SAM KANG LI

**READ ALL ABOUT IT:** A Tibetan protester brandishing last week's issue of *Nepali Times* is led away by police at a protest outside the United Nations in Pulchok on Thursday.



SAM KANG LI

**CHAIN REACTION:** Maoist supporters blocked the road at Thapathali on Tuesday, protesting the APF's alleged acquisition of new arms from India.



KIRAN PANDAY

**REMEMBERING:** Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat handing over a letter of appreciation to Rajib Raj Bhandari, son of the late Gopal Raj Bhandari, founder of the Mercantile Group of Companies, in appreciation of his outstanding contribution to Nepali industry on the occasion of the FNCCI's 42<sup>nd</sup> annual general meeting on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**SHINING MINDS:** Top Nepali achievers in A-level examinations were awarded certificates by the British Council on Tuesday. Pratham Raj Joshi, Aayush Khadka and Srishti Adhikari (*l-r*) topped the world in computing, English and psychology respectively.

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**Cover section:** The decline and fall of class analysis  
...and the rise of identity

**Also:**  
 Tibet's second uprising – Bhuchung K Tsering  
 Dignity and belonging in Tibet – C K Lal  
 The pan-Tibetan unrest – commentary  
 It looks like elections in Nepal – Prashant Jha  
 Darjeeling 'dictator' deposed – Niraj Lama  
 Cricket as an 'item number' – Boria Majumdar  
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**ON  
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# A swastika on the hammer and sickle

Kind of appropriate, isn't it, that if you are voting ultra-left in this election, you rubber stamp the swastika on the hammer and sickle. After all, it is getting difficult to tell the difference between fascism and what passes off as Marxism-Leninsim-Stalinism-Maoism-(and last but not least)-Prachanda Path in this country.

✂

Three days after the seven-minus-one political parties got together at Baluwatar to shake hands and agree to make campaigning peaceful (not that they'd agreed earlier to make it violent) there has been an escalation in the level of **election-related atrocities**. Maybe they should have just not met and left things as they were. Every time these parties try to fix anything they wreck it. The Ass' unsolicited advice to our leaders is: don't do anything. That way

there is less of a chance you will mess things up. The way it's going, Maoist cadre who have the pulse of the voters seem to have realised that there is no way they are going to win. So they have unleashed a deliberate nationwide campaign to **disrupt** voting and force the cancellation of elections. The only person who will benefit from this of course is our own king-not-for-too-much-longer-ji. Which makes one think, are the two in cahoots?

✂

The reason for the upsurge in Maoist mayhem is that they want to pressure the other parties to at least give them some seats so it won't look like they have been completely wiped out. The UML and the NC have tried to ensure that at least the main Maoist leaders will win one seat each, but they aren't about to hand over **on**

**a platter** 100 seats in an elected assembly to the baddies. Because they aren't getting what they want, the comrades are implementing their time-tested modus operandi of blackmailing everyone by threatening to go back to the jungles if they don't get their wish. In fact Forest Minister Matrika Yadav has already gone back to the jungle once. Why was Chabilal Baje so paranoid in his Base Area in Rolpa this week? He was there to campaign, but barely ventured out of Hotel Samjhana in Libang despite his 45-strong security detail. And when he did go out the chairman had to be carried **piggyback** across a river by a Whole Timer so he wouldn't get his feet wet. He then slipped into one of the Maoist camps, and people who wanted to see him had to line up to get frisked as if they were seeking a royal audience.

All this spotlight on politics and elections is great for those who are making hay as the sun shines. Away from it all, they're **raking it in** at the airport cargo shed, the Tatopani Bhansar, and all along the Indian border. Our customs chaps in Birganj start boozing at breakfast because there is so much free drink courtesy businessmen lubricating the state machinery to get their goods across without hassles. And that's just the small fishes. The Big Fish are stashing it away by the karods (IC not NC) on hydropower deals and the Ass has it on good authority that there is a sort of partnership between a former First Lady and current First Dotter to demarcate their spheres of influence between hydropower and telecom. The **cash register** just keeps tinkling.

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