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Weekly Internet Poll # 401

Q. What should king Gyanendra now do?
Total votes: 6,921

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Q. How confident are you that a republic will be declared on 28 May?

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Changing of the guard

MALLIKA ARYAL

When the newly-elected constituent assembly sits for its first meeting at the BICC on 28 May, it will ratify the abolition of the monarchy before it even starts drafting a new constitution.

To make things easy, king Gyanendra could vacate the palace on 27 May itself. If he wants to make it difficult, he could try to stick it out and face protests at the gates, which could turn ugly.

"When Nepal was declared a federal republic last year, the king was given a grace period to leave the palace and he has had ample time to plan how he was going to go," says political analyst Krishna Hachhethu. But the king has tried to cling on till the last.

Right-wing Hindu groups and royalists haven't given up, and say only a referendum can abolish the 240-year-old institution. "The decision to remove the king came from a reinstated unelected

parliament that had no legitimacy," deputy royal high priest Madhav Bhattarai told *Nepali Times*.

The RPP (Nepal) has been a vocal champion of monarchy and its leader Kamal Thapa has been trying to buy time for the king. "This country will plunge into crisis if the monarchy is removed in haste," he says.

The election was an overwhelming win for republicanism, with the royalist forces seeing a rout, so it can be expected that a referendum wouldn't save the monarchy even if it was tried. Even palace insiders say the king should see the writing on the wall and exit gracefully while there is still time. But they fear his decision

may be "too little too late".

Jurist Nilamber Acharya dismisses speculation that the king has something up his sleeve. "The king is powerless, he has no support from the political parties, the international community, the Nepali people or even the Nepal Army," says Acharya.

Some monarchists advise king Gyanendra to negotiate a deal with the prime minister and the Maoists on his security and a privy purse, and to keep Queen Mother Ratna in her present cottage in the palace, a place she has not left since her marriage to King Mahendra. He can then make a proclamation and step down on the day the new parliament sits.

Acharya and others say the end of the monarchy can be marked by a ceremony in which the royal standard within the palace is lowered and replaced symbolically by the national flag. He adds: "Most countries have a republic day, ours could be 15 Jetha." ●

Eviction day nears at Narayanhiti



DISTANT THUNDER: Storm clouds brew over the palace on Wednesday evening.

SAM KANG LI

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Sore losers

Democracy seems to work differently in Nepal

PROCRASTI NATION

Depending on whether you see the glass as half full or half empty, some of us are waiting for Nepal to enter a brave new era of democracy and progress, while others are convinced that we are headed towards a totalitarian abyss.

The argument is well made that the Maoists won the elections, and they should be allowed to lead a government. The NC and UML should get over their self-obsessed misery and deep suspicion of each other, and look at the nation's future instead of their partisan ambitions. And in a vestige of the Old Nepal they take to the streets and declare a shutdown, punishing the people to get back at the Maoists. So set are they in their ways, that to change seems to be asking too much of them.

But it is not entirely fecklessness at the helms of the NC and UML. There is deep-set paranoia and distrust about true Maoist intentions. The comrades, it must be said, have done nothing to allay these fears. They have kept up their tactics of violence by beating up those they beat in elections. They have even taken a victimised businessman to a UN-supervised camp to torture and kill. We gave Pushpa Kamal Dahal the benefit of doubt, but it is no longer believable that terrorising opponents is not a part of his strategy.

Why is it so difficult for Pushpa Kamal Dahal to say sorry? He owns up to the killing, says there will be an investigation, the guilty will be punished and the victim's family will be compensated. But not a word of remorse or contrition. And it is the same with all other acts of YCL brutality. The standard operating procedure is first to go into denial, and when the evidence becomes too glaring, dismiss it as the work of a few rogue elements. And if public outrage mounts, a statement is released promising compensation and blaming ireactionaries and icounter-revolutionaries for a iconspiracy.

Revolutions devour their own children. If the Maoists aren't careful this is what will happen to them. The Nepali people in their wisdom voted for the Maoists, but didn't give them the majority to run things on their own. In a democracy, they have to learn to work together with the other parties in a coalition. The other parties have some understandable concerns and have set pre-conditions to joining the government.

Ultimately there is no way but to give up the culture of violence and cooperate. That can start with the Maoists leading the government, making the NC a ceremonial head of state and giving the speaker's post to the UML. After that, who gets what ministry isn't that important.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Residents of the Koteswor area have been protesting against the Maoist murder of Ram Hari Shrestha since Saturday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

If democratic values are to be respected, the Maoists should lead the next government. The established practice of parliamentary democracy all over the world is that the government of the day, when defeated in the election, must resign.



GUEST COLUMN
Tapan Kumar Bose

But this not how democracy functions in Nepal. The political parties who were trounced in the election, particularly the NC and UML, have together formed a cartel to hold on to office. They are arguing that the Maoists must first prove their 'democratic credentials'.

The Maoists are continuing with their efforts to form an interim government, but the NC and the UML have put forward rather tough conditions for their support. Meanwhile, the media carries daily reports about abduction, illegal confinement, torture, extortion and murder of political opponents, media

persons, landowners and businessmen by the Maoist YCL.

Explanations provided by the leadership don't convince most newspaper readers of the Maoists' innocence. On occasion exaggerated reporting by the media and NGOs, and misreporting of Maoist statements have also emerged.

The Maoists secured 30.52 percent of the votes in the FPTP segment of the elections, giving them 120 seats. In the PR they got 29.28 percent of the votes which translated into another 100 seats, making a total of 220 out of the 575 seats so far declared in the constituent assembly. They are 48 short of an absolute majority.

The NC got 37 seats in the FPTP segment and 73 in the PR with a total of 110, exactly half of the Maoists. The UML got 33 in FPTP and 70 in PR, with 103 in total. What these two parties lost since the previous elections went to the Maoists. The two Madhesi parties, the MJF and the TMLP together polled 9.5 percent of the total votes in the FPTP.

In the political hothouse of Kathmandu rumours grow every minute, with a mix of fact and fiction. And in Nepal things always seem to come full circle. In 2003 when GP Koirala met the Maoists in a secret venue in India, they offered him the first presidency in exchange for the NC's support for the Maoist demand for a constituent assembly and republic. Koirala refused. Today he wants to be president, and the Maoists are

not willing.

With the approval of India and America, the NC has secretly conveyed to the Maoists that it will support them in the formation of an interim government provided they agree to the creation of a position of head of state who would be the commander in chief and have power to dismiss the prime minister, and that they give the position to GP Koirala. Apparently this is a pressure tactic to force the Maoists to disband the YCL and surrender all the arms in their possession to the government.

The UML has demanded that the Maoists disband the YCL as a price for their support in the government making. The Madhesi parties have agreed to be a part of a Maoist-led government if they agree to a single Madhes spanning the Tarai.

India doesn't want the Maoists to form a government till they have disbanded the YCL and surrendered all their arms. All the major political parties secretly support the army in their opposition to the proposal of integrating the Nepal Army with the Maoist PLA.

Tailpiece: a friend of mine, who plays tennis with colonels and majors, said that a section of the army brass has become well skilled in political negotiations. ●

Tapan Kumar Bose is the secretary general of the Kathmandu-based South Asian Forum for Human Rights.

LETTERS

PRASHANT JHA

Prasant Jha's articles are good but he is relying more on rhetoric than on real analysis (ēPost-identity politicsī, #400). He wrote before the election that Madhesi parties would do badly because their disunity had infuriated Madhesis, but the result came out with MJF as the biggest party from the Tarai. He wrote that people in the Tarai thought of Ram Baran Yadav as the Pahadisī dalal, which is little more than mud-slinging at a Madhesi leader who is liberal and did not follow the radical path of Mahanta Thakur. In any case, Ram Baran won. Jha also failed to catch wind of Jwala Singh's loss of control of his outfit, despite the fact that Madhesi FM stations and newspapers have been reporting on the storm brewing around Singh for two weeks.

Prasant Jha should start reading Madhesi newspapers to understand the ground reality of the Tarai. A bigger danger than Islamic militancy here is caste-based groups from Bihar influencing the local population in the Madhes. The Ranvir Sena and the Saravana Liberation Front have declared that they will fight against the Maoists in the Tarai who they see as a party of Dalits. These groups should not be ignored as they have been involved in massacres in Bihar which

would make Gaur look like child's play.

Raghuvir Singh Thakur, Rautahat

● I don't think Muslims in the Tarai will start communal violence because they know that with India as their neighbour they will have nowhere to hide if the majority Hindus go after them. I don't know why Prasant Jha is predicting a doomsday scenario (ēPost-identity politicsī, #400). Muslims have a role in society and they will get it peacefully, not by threatening militancy.

Roshan, email

CK LAL

All the points made by CK Lal in ēThere be dragonsī (#399) are true. Nepali politicians and all Nepalis should bear these in mind and work for the good of the nation rather than personal gain. Nepalis have been cheated for a long time and we will not stand for selfish intentions anymore.

DR Gurung, email

● Kudos to CK Lal on completing 400 columns. One may not agree with your foremost op-ed opinionist, but you have to give credit to the man, he is consistent. After eight years, one would have thought Mr Lal would have run out of things to say, but he comes up with original analysis week after week. Thank you.

J Oliver, email

● Congratulations to CK Lalji for being so

regular in *Nepali Times* over the past eight years. He should be required reading for all policy-makers in Nepal.

Gyan Subba, email

● Thank you *Nepali Times* for being our eyes and ears on Nepal for the past eight years. Reading NT every Friday morning has become such a habit that I think we are all hopelessly addicted. Please never stop.

Tara Thapa, Sanepa

ASS

I enjoyed the Assī ēMr Rajais neighbourhoodī (Backside, #400).†There is very little difference between Kingji and Awesomeji.

The king's former military adviser Bibek Shahī†deputy military secretary, General Phudung, is now Prachanda's chief military adviser.†Many†former anchaladishes are now Maoists, including Surya Bahadur Sen Oli who was close to the king during the royal regime and is now close to Prachanda.†The late†King Mahendra used to talk about youth mobilisation with the ēBack to the Villageī Campaign, the Maoists want a Ministry of Youth. Mahendra and Birendra believed in a†Panchasila foreign policy, so does CP Gajurel.†The monarchy used mandale goons to threaten and intimidate people, and they have been reincarnated as the YCL. Both Gyanendra and Prachanda are pro-Chinese†and anti-Indian, both†are unpredictable, and†both still have†an army under them. It seems the only difference between them is that one has a moustache, but who can forget that Gyanendra also experimented with fuzz last year?

I think it is even possible that the two may unite some day. As the wise Ass reports, who knows what deal was made in April 2006? It wouldn't surprise me if we slipped back into military rule again.

Rassendra† Ram Aryal, Munich



Caste, class and religion

Mithila's mythology of monarchy and militancy

JANAKPUR—The capital of Mithila looks like a boomtown gone bust. There is haphazard growth and the infrastructure has almost collapsed. But the magnificent Janaki Temple continues to be the centre of everything.

Compared to the festivities of Ram Navami, celebration of Janaki Navami is a low-key affair. Other than a session of bhajans in temple premises, there is no



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

sign of birthday of Janaki being marked in what is believed to have been her hometown. But Maithil women are now conscious enough to see a "male, royal and high-caste conspiracy" behind this tradition.

Inside the temple premises, a modern Sita pointedly asks her Ram, "Why do we still have a national holiday on Ram Navami but not even a mention of Janaki Navami though she is the daughter of our soil? Is it because she was merely the consort of a ruler rather than a reigning Queen? Does her indeterminate caste as the offspring of Mother Earth make her less sacred?"

Ram's answer: "It has been a Pahadiya conspiracy. They celebrate Chaite Dasain, and Ram Navami holiday is merely a cover to get an extra day." When asked whether he is a Maoist, this particular Ram



responds that his politics are closer to NC and TMLP rather than the Maoists or MJF.

Mythology is stronger in Mithila than history. Janak is the synonym for king in Maithil legends. Maithili language and literature are believed to have reached their apogee in the courts of minor kings of the region. Maithil pundits went to Gorkha and other Baise-Chaubise kingdoms to draft their laws. They were the mainstay of Malla courts in Kathmandu Valley.

When Durganand Jha threw a bomb at King Mahendra after he usurped all powers in a royal-military coup in 1960, he became

the first Brahman to get capital punishment in Hindu Nepal. Continued neglect of Durganand by successive governments in the post-1990 period rankled the Madhesis. The TMLP has now honoured Jha by nominating his widow to the constituent assembly.

The love-hate relationship of Maithils with monarchy persists. The king will probably find that he has sizeable support in the town where a Shah king was physically attacked but has been neglected since. The attendant of municipality guesthouse reverentially touches the couch

on which King Gyanendra reportedly rested during a brief visit to the town two years ago.

Perhaps it's the monarchical bent of the Maithil mind that refuses to accept the Maoist ideology. That could be the reason journalist-turned-politician Roshan Janakapuri almost lost his deposit even though he is quite popular and commands the respect of local intelligentsia for his literary pursuits.

But adherence to tradition does have its pitfalls: caste is much more important than either class or religion. Your surname is a marker of identity. Mainstream Nepali society has long pretended that the issue of the Madhes didn't exist, but the uprising was waiting to happen.

After the national language controversy over the use of Maithili in Rajbiraj municipality, the conspiracy against citizenship laws, and the Hritik Roshan riots in 2001, denouement has been long overdue. Despicable though they may have been, the demolition of Bhanubhakta's statue in Janakpur and anti-Maoist violence in Gaur represented the rage of the oppressed.

Popularity based on resistance to authority may win elections, but will that be enough to secure justice for Madhesis? That's a question Upendra Yadav will have to face as he works on electoral arithmetic to share power at the centre. Mithila has existed for over 5,000 years. It can wait for the restoration of its mythic glory. ●

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The new Madhesi woman

Make way for these articulate, aggressive assembly members

Earlier this week, human rights activist Dipendra Jha organised an interaction of the 13 women who have made it to the constituent assembly from the MJF. The experience was a revelation.

You can easily travel across the plains, hold meetings with politicians and civil society



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

leaders, get a sense of the macro political dynamics, write reports, and not meet a single woman. Women's participation in politics is passive at best: as a voter told by her father, husband or son which way to cast the

ballot, and as fodder when street agitations are launched.

Discrimination against women exists across the country. But in the Madhes the preference for a son is higher, female infanticide is growing alarmingly and girls usually drop out after primary school. Dowry is widespread with education only reinforcing the practice and hiking up the rates for grooms. Widows are treated as sinners and deprived of the most basic human dignity, and a premium is placed on women being confined to homes. They may be treated as symbols of izzat, but rarely does this translate into autonomous decision-making and personal agency.

When quotas were allotted for

women in PR, Nepali male politicians hated the idea of sharing the slice of power. A senior Madhesi politician confided, "We have got a 33 percent reservation for Madhesis but will have to give half to women. They don't know anything. What a waste."

Cynics pointed to the Indian experience in local governance. Since a law was introduced in the 1980s to have 33 percent reservations for women in all Panchayat posts, India has witnessed a 'bibi-bahu-beti' brigade. Men have got their closest female relatives to stand as proxy candidates while calling all the shots from behind-the-scenes.

At this week's program, it looked like they were right. The



WOMAN'S VOICE:
Basanti Jha has been elected for the TMLP from Mahottari, after campaigning for women's votes for many years.

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA



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first two women MPs to arrive came with their husbands who began doing most of the talking. The women had their heads covered. One of them asked for the day's *Kantipur* and said shyly, "I will return it in a minute. I just want to look at the horoscope."

But when the discussion started, we saw the real, assertive face of the new Madhesi woman. They may have lacked Kathmandu seminar etiquette by interrupting other speakers in the middle. They may not have structured speeches and power point presentations. Maybe they were more comfortable because it was an all-Madhesi gathering where they could speak in their own languages, with Hindi as the common medium. But what was undeniable was that the women knew what they were talking about.

The group was diverse in terms of caste - Karina Begum, Durgadevi Mahato, Rambha Devi, Savita Yadav, and the most vocal of them all, Kalavati Paswan, a middle-aged Madhesi Dalit woman. Many of them had been beaten up during the Madhes movement. They spoke about the discrimination against the Madhes, the oppression of women, the cry for education, the challenges of being a woman activist, the need to take advantage of the India

connection.

What was striking was the anger against Kathmandu as well as the Madhesi social structure. Kalavati Paswan said, "We are as strong as iron. We are ready to die and kill for Madhes. If they do not listen to us, we will break the chairs of the CA." Upendra Yadav clearly has his secret weapon in these articulate, angry members.

In India, the Panchayat system has now evolved with women politicians coming into their own, taking independent decisions, and rising from the ranks. The gates have been opened in Nepal now and, seeing the new women MPs, it is only a matter of time before more independent women come to the forefront. The big question is whether they can present an alternative kind of politics, or will merely be pawns in the masculine norm of corrupt, violent, and manipulative politics.

This political revolution now needs to be accompanied by drastic social reform on the ground. Gandhi always attached his politics with a constructive programme: promoting khadi, eradicating untouchability, working on sanitation in villages. What the Tarai desperately needs is a similar social revolution that fights caste discrimination, builds inter-community relations, focuses on rural upliftment, and, of course, allows women across castes to break more barriers. ●

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Hansa experience



Home Furnishers has launched Hansa bathroom fittings from the Hansa Metallwerke AG Company, Germany. The products which come with a 10 year guarantee provided by the company are also certified in accordance with the ISO 9001. The prices range from Rs 6,390 to Rs 23,900.

Nepal Ice in UK

Sungold Brewery has recently exported local beer Nepal Ice to the UK. In 2006, it was launched in selected premium outlets of Kathmandu and other cities. The beer is brewed in Nepal with fine hops, water and barley malt and has an alcohol content of 5.5 percent.



Dream team winner



Pepsi has announced the first iPepsi-Meet the dream team winner. 28-year old Rahul Bajracharya of Samakhushi won Rs 100,000 through a lucky draw. He will also get to appear in a Pepsi ad.

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Himalayan Bank has opened its 17th branch in Nepalganj. The branch has an ATM, tele banking and various credit cards services. Amongst its other services are premium savings account, locker, home loan, auto loan and facilities loan.



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Quality quest

Saying that your company is for quality is not enough. How you put your systems in place to achieve quality is what matters. This was the conclusion of a recently held two-day workshop in Kathmandu on *Leading for Quality*. The event



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

was led by two American experts Pat Townsend and Joan E. Gebhardt, and organised by Nepal's Network for Quality, Productivity and Competitiveness. Around 80 managers from the profit and non-profit sectors attended the program.

Townsend and Gebhardt explained the seven required elements – top management commitment, leadership, 100 percent involvement with a structure, communications, training, measurement, and employee recognition – of a complete quality process (CQP).

Up to a point, top management's commitment to quality is self-explanatory. But commitment here indicates both persistence and constant follow-ups to make sure that pursuit of quality in terms of products, services and customer satisfaction remains high on the agenda of senior managers. Most Nepali managers want quality through statistics and measurements

without thinking about getting the internal culture right. They forget that machines do not produce anything by themselves. It's the people who must be persistently encouraged to work together to produce results.

Such persistence calls for both focus and the ability to let things go. Focus, because the goal to achieve quality is clear. Letting things go means taking a step back to authorise employees to make decisions at their levels. And that's another way of saying, "create mini-leaders throughout the organisation." It is these people—empowered to make mistakes and learn from them—who can help senior managers translate their drive for quality into tangible results.

With managers and employees on board, there needs to be a common structure on which they can perform. For instance, some employees may have ideas which are good, but not practical or in line with the organisation's larger goals. Others might have minor ideas that could make a small but important difference to customer satisfaction. A common structure allows all to discriminate between ideas that lead to quality, and ideas that are just good to have.

Townsend and Gebhardt stressed that senior managers spend much time leading internal communications via regular staff meetings, emails, and face-to-face conversations. In most Nepali

organisations, it's the employees who have to rely on rumours and office cliques to find out what their own company is doing or not doing. Regular internal communications give the same information to all, thereby making everyone focus on quality and not at each other's positions in office politics.

Most Nepali companies are hesitant to send their staff on training programs because they fear that the staff might leave for higher pay elsewhere. In other words, ongoing training is seen as a way to reward long-term loyalty, not necessarily to enhance specific job-related skills and knowledge. But quality requires a stream of training programs related to measurements, feedbacks and learning from other companies that lead to better ways of doing the same processes and procedures.

Finally, a commitment to quality requires that employees are recognised and rewarded, and that their efforts are celebrated in some form throughout the organisation. Since most Nepali companies are family-run enterprises, celebrating non-family employees' good work does not happen easily. But as Townsend and Gebhardt pointed out, who wants to do quality work if no one appreciates the person or the team behind it?

The workshop was instructive in the sense that it showed that while 'hard' tools such as statistical analysis are necessary, it is the repeated application of 'soft' tools such as communication, appreciation and the like that create a real climate of quality in an organisation. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat speaks to *Nepali Times* this week about the post-election power play and about the state of the economy.

***Nepali Times*: The Nepali Congress lost the election, yet it is reluctant to give up power.**

Ram Sharan Mahat: The PM is ready to handover power democratically and constitutionally. The constitution envisages a consensus government. If that is not possible, it should be a government with two-thirds support of the CA. As soon as such a scenario emerges, the NC will leave the government. The PM has already asked the political parties to start a consultation to form such a government. Furthermore, the Interim Constitution has ordained some responsibilities to this interim government, such as the implementation of the republican agenda. The cabinet making process will therefore have to await the start of the CA session. Instead of making irresponsible charges against the NC, the Maoists, as the largest party, should start negotiations with other political forces to form a government based on a common minimum program. At least to ensure necessary support to their government, as they lack necessary numbers to form the government on their own.††

“Constitutional politics and violence can't go together”

Aren't your conditions to join a Maoist-led government needlessly delaying the formation of a government?

Our seven pre-conditions are to ensure the survival of multiparty democracy in Nepal. The Maoists have unleashed violent activities and taken the law into their own hands, this is a real threat to peace and a democratic future in Nepal. We want to make sure the politics of violence and terror is given up for good. They still continue with their parallel administrative structures, hold arms, maintain militias and paramilitary forces. There isn't a day that goes by without some YCL atrocity being reported in the press. They are terrorising and looting property. Constitutional politics and violence can't go together.

How come the kangresis are demanding the presidency?

We are not, this is another canard. The constitution says the prime minister will perform the functions of the head of the state until the time the republican agenda is implemented by the CA. We do not have a separate head of the state now because the king is still there. Once the CA removes the king, you will have to have somebody to act as a head of the state. Otherwise there will be a constitutional vacuum. A separate head of the state is necessary also from the point of view of check and balance: to restrain the chief executive from crossing the limit and being an autocrat. This head of the state can be from any party or outside, based on consultation and consensus. But the chief executive can't be both.†

The Maoist chairman says your party is counter-revolutionary.

This is ridiculous. Prachanda desperately needed the NC and GP Koirala's leadership to facilitate his party getting to power. Now they are in a hurry to ditch him and drag him out of Baluwatari. This is blatant opportunism which betrays their real intention and disregard for the rule of law.

Aren't you being a bit mistrustful?

Just remember the Maoists have frequently made reference to Brest-Litovsk treaty and Chungking

negotiation as their classic models of peace deals. Mao Zedong made peace with the Kuomintang to fight the Japanese occupation in Chungking. Once they won the war, the Kuomintang was pushed out and the communists took over power. The Maoists joined hands with NC and other democratic forces to remove the king.† Now, they probably want to target the NC and other democratic forces to pave the way for total control of state power. The real threat now is the emergence of one party fascist autocracy.

As finance minister, what is your assessment of the state of the economy?

Investment is still suffering from agony of transition politics. The unrest in the industries, street politics and confusing and contradictory views of our Maoist friends have discouraged new investment despite tremendous potential. The political free-for-all has also hampered our competitiveness. Despite this, the overall macro-economy is in good shape. Deficit is under control. Impressive revenue growth has enabled us to meet large expenses on salary hike, security cost, CA election, oil subsidy and others. Development assistance is on the rise. The balance of payment is very positive. Public capital investment is high. The treasury situation is comfortable.

What do you think of the Maoist economic policy?

Lots of confusion and naivete. They talk of double digit growth, a 20 percent growth rate and economic revolution. But have no clue as to where and the required investment is to come from, given the low internal saving. They are only for selective private investment, especially FDI. They talk of capitalist development but want to do away with private investment in education and health. Some of them talk of nationalisation, not understanding the state and quality of public management everywhere. They don't seem appreciate the urgency of promoting major hydro projects as a means not only to develop national economic confidence and catalyse growth but also to augment national earnings and close trade deficit.

"Koirala must resign"

What is the mandate of the people?

Change. Radical forces, agitational forces, have won. The rest have been swept aside. The people voted for us because we led the Madhes movement and fought genuinely for Madhesi rights. The masses want us to continue fighting against Kathmandu.

Will you join the government?

Our joining the government is really a secondary issue. The crux is whether they implement past agreements, and whether they amend the constitution to incorporate the provision of an autonomous Madhes state. That is our key demand prior to any deal. As of now, we are not in favour of joining the government.

Do you think Girija Prasad Koirala should become a ceremonial president?

Girija Prasad Koirala must resign immediately to pave the way for a new government. He has no right to be president. His party has lost under his leadership. He is physically, emotionally, mentally, intellectually, morally not appropriate for the job.

How do you see the role of India in Madhesi politics?

Very negative. India, especially South Block and the Indian Embassy, have been against the Madhes and MJF. They created the TMLP to weaken us. In fact, one of the reasons the pre-election alliance did not happen was because India was trying to boost up TMLP. They also tried to defeat me in Sunsari by backing Sujata Koirala, funding her and getting people from across the border to support her. I am not saying anything against the Indian people or the entire Indian government. Sections of MEA, especially ambassador Shiv Shanker Mukherjee, were against us. As the counting started and results came, Mukherjee packed up and ran off. I don't know the new ambassador yet.



The MJF's Upendra Yadav is a political kingmaker and seems to know it. As aides scurried around fixing meetings and activists chatted loudly in Maithili, Yadav spoke to *Nepali Times's* Prashant Jha at the party office in Pulchok this week. Though guarded about government formation, relations with Maoists, and the future of Madhesi politics, he was scathing about India.

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Was RAW more positive?

I have never met any of them. Don't know them.

How do you see your relationship with Maoists shaping up given the past tension? What is your stand on issues like PLA integration?

We have met already. If the Maoists are positive towards the Madhes, I think we can work together. The army must be a politically neutral force. If the soldiers of one party join the national army, problems might come up. The PLA has to be managed and some way needs to be found. But I don't think integration will be appropriate.

The Maoists have said they will launch land reforms. This has implications in the Tarai. What is your stand?

These issues come later. First we have to fight a political battle against the internal colonialism in the Madhes.

What should be done with armed groups?

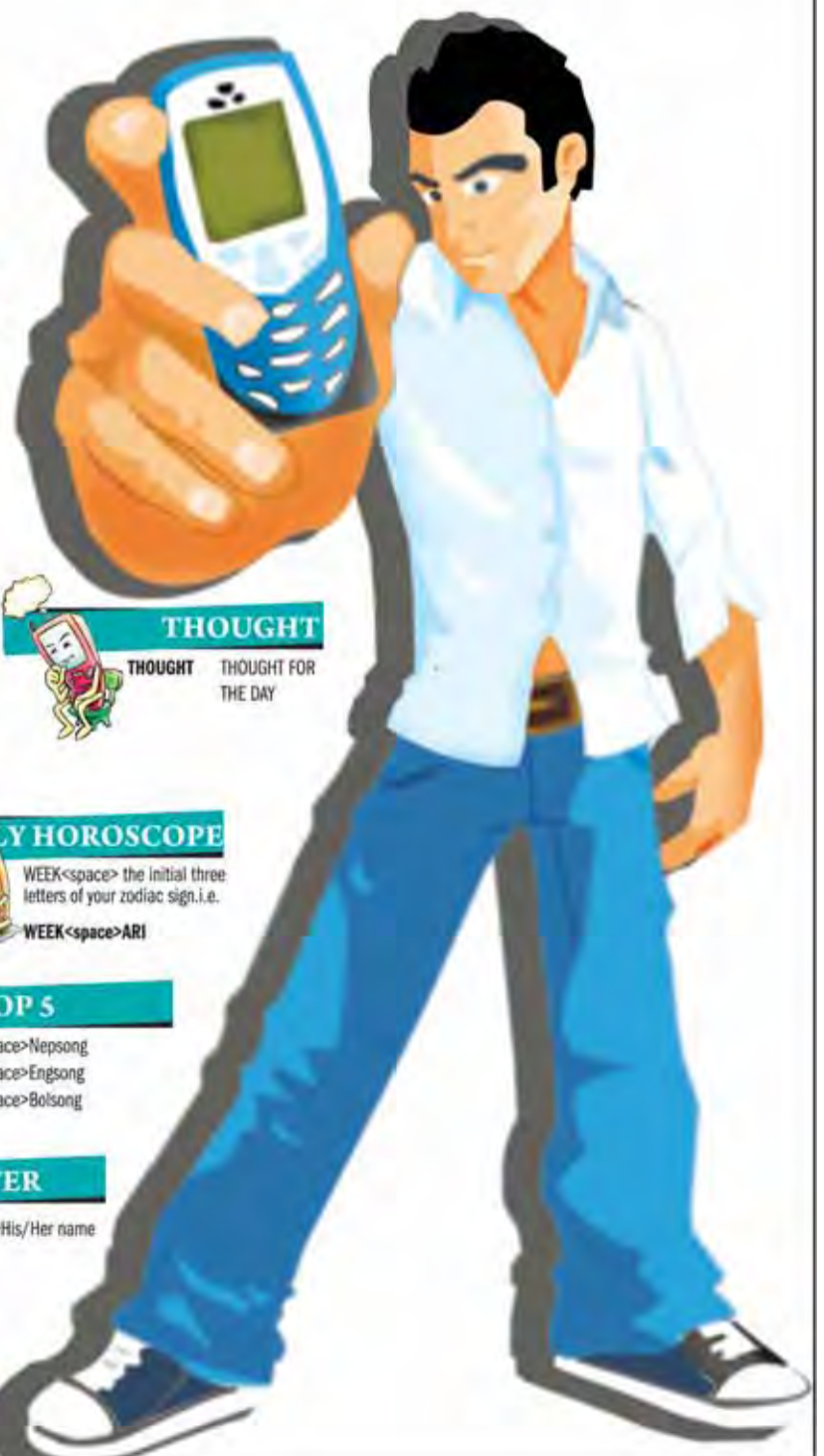
Talk to them. Do not ignore them. What can I do? It is the government which has to take the initiative. It is a part of the eight-point agreement.

Is a single Madhes province across the plains a feasible demand? Western Tharus want their own unit, there are mixed population settlements, other administrative issues will crop up.

See, the people of the Madhes want one province. This is a non-negotiable demand for us and not a bargaining chip. If we compromise on this issue, the Madhes will be finished. The Pahadi ruling class will divide up the Tarai and we will all be powerless little units. Tharus and others in the west are also with us. If there are internal issues within the Tarai, we will deal with it ourselves within one Madhes, that is our business. If the other parties do not agree, we will launch a decisive movement and go back to the streets.



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AST<space>the initial three letters of your zodiac sign. i.e.
AST<space>ARI

NEWS

NEWS National news
SPO Sports news
ENT Entertainment news
INT International news
LIVE Breaking news

JOKES

JOKE JOKE<space>DOC
JOKE<space>SILLY
JOKE<space>LAWYER
JOKE<space>SANTA
JOKE<space>BLONDE

THOUGHT

THOUGHT THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

STOCK

SHG Top 5 gainers of the day
SHL Top 5 losers of the day
SHH Stock related help

FOREX

FOREX<space>BUY
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WEEKLY HOROSCOPE

WEEK<space>the initial three letters of your zodiac sign. i.e.
WEEK<space>ARI

DICTIONARY

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CALENDER SERVICE

Calnep ddmmyyy Nepali to English
Caleng ddmmyyy English to Nepali

TOP 5

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cri

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CU<space>city name i.e.
CU<space>dharan

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LM<space>Your name<space>His/Her name

USE THE LISTED KEYWORDS AND SEND THEM TO 2722



Federalism

Abhiyan, 19 May

अभियान

Nepal's move towards federalism is now confirmed. The majority of the winning parties in the CA election are for it, including the CPN-M, NC, UML and MJF. However, Janamorcha and the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party are against it.

There have always been differences in opinions about how much power the states should have. In other countries the central government has sometimes faced problems because the states were too powerful. In India, the friction between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka on Narmada can be taken as an example. It is also possible that if means and resources are not distributed properly, goods produced in one state might not be permitted in another, and states might even impose blockades against each other.

King to obey

Sanghu, 19 May

सङ्घ

The CPN-M has sent a letter asking the king to leave Narayanhiti by 26 May. This sudden message after their earlier claim that the king would be asked to depart according to protocol has generated a lot of interest.

Rumour has it that some advisors of the king who are close to Gyanendra have recommended



KIRAN PANDAY

that he leave the palace before the first CA meeting. However, other officers and advisors in the palace want the king to wait for the CA's decision. A senior politician close to the palace said that the king was perplexed by the situation.

The source said that the king does not intend to hang on in the palace if he is humiliated. Neither is he willing to bear the brunt of the people's wrath by going against their wishes. The king is likely to make his decision known before or on 26 May.

The CA oath-taking ceremony is scheduled for 27 May, and the first meeting for the next day. A source reports that having been given a 15-day ultimatum, the king is likely to move into his private residence in Maharajganj to gain the goodwill of the people. But before leaving Narayanhiti, he will consult prime minister Koirala, and the Indian and American

ambassadors. According to another source, the king is believed to have said, "Till now I have been doing whatever the prime minister has advised me to. I have sealed my lips on his request. I will talk to him."

On the other hand, some analysts believe that the king is looking towards the Madhes to create obstacles for the CA and havoc in the nation. Leaving the palace for a private residence may gain the sympathy of the people and raise his popularity to a point where the monarchy could be restored.

New Pushpa Lal?

Bishwadeep Pandey in Kantipur, 19 May

क्रान्तिपुर

There has been a lot of commentary, both positive and negative, about the Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai. His adamant stance on 'republican democracy' is history now. It is no longer just Maoist party doctrine but has become the policy of the entire country.

But now there are opportunists both inside and outside his party, who from the shadows call him an anti-republican. People want to know how seriously Bhattarai is taking these charges, and his well-wishers want to know why he is not retaliating.

Bhattarai is a republican through and through and he has been leading the republican agenda all along. Anyone who claims that



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he wants a ceremonial monarchy is just stirring up trouble for their own interests. Could this even be a plot to make Bhattarai the new Pushpa Lal?

There are also people spreading rumours about Bhattarai regarding the race to become number two in the party. His personality, sacrifice, capability and intelligence are known to the public. His life is an open book. Why are they mocking his sacrifice? True, all of us and all other parties have made sacrifices for the revolution and have helped us get to where we are today, but that does not come to the kind of sacrifices made by Prachanda and Bhattarai.

Still others call Bhattarai 'pro-India.' Just because one has studied in India doesn't mean one is pro-India. We challenge these people to show us proof to their claims. It is more likely that they are scared of Bhattarai's

political vision and are making these insinuations to curb his popularity.

Mohan Bikram said that Pushpa Lal Shrestha was pro-India and pro-Congress but history proved him to be wrong. Those who cannot compete on a political footing resort to calling their rivals traitors and lackeys. The true chain of events shows the emptiness of their words. People should be judged on what they do or don't do rather than what they say or don't say. Based on Bhattarai's actions, no one can call him pro-India.

Pushpa Lal was called a traitor because he wanted to join forces with the Congress to end the totalitarian Panchayat regime and the monarchy. His vision was later realised in the first People's Movement and in the recent 12-point agreement. And it is clear that the main force in ending feudalism and monarchy, and establishing a republican democracy has been Baburam Bhattarai.

He led the way for the 12-point agreement, negotiated with the political parties and international powers, and made republicanism possible. Those who were shown up by his capability are now trying to sully his name and image by spreading rumours and lies. If real revolutionaries are not able to unmask these false revolutionaries then the entire Maoist revolution and the People's War will be put to shame.



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ALL PICS: SAM KANG LI

Street

“Ready?” shouts Kabita Sah, one hand on her hips and the other casually tossing a lime green tennis ball in the air. There is an answering nod from the other side and Kabita gets into position. Taking a few steps backwards, she makes a running start along the dusty path and sends the ball rocketing over her head in a perfect bowl. It bounces

says Kabita, 12, who bowls and bats like a pro. Kabita started playing because of her brother. An avid cricket fan, he would gather his friends in the empty lots behind buildings and construction sites to play with a tennis ball and a piece of wood. “At least we have a bat now,” says Kabita, before turning back to her bowling duties.

Who needs playing fields

once on the hard ground, finds a snag and careens wildly, flying over the head of the batter. “No ball,” shouts Ramesh RC.

Every evening, on this small stretch of dusty path in the alleyways of Dhumbarahi, local boys and a few girls gather to play cricket, football and sometimes, marbles.

“If one of us has a bat or a ball, then we play cricket. If there is only a ball, then it’s football,”

With few parks, playgrounds or public spaces, the alleyways and empty lots of Kathmandu have become a sportsground for its children. Between the end of school and nightfall, the city kids congregate with tattered footballs, worn tennis balls and whatever else they can find.

Usually, the one who brings the ball gets to make the rules. In this evening’s cricket match at Dhumbarahi, a fly ball over a

spirit

nearby wall is a six, if it touches the back wall then it's one run and if it hits or breaks a window, you're out. Street football, too, has some rules of its own. The goal is small, usually just two bricks about five paces apart. The ball has to roll through the posts, it can't fly over. That is a "high goal" and doesn't count.

A few kids even play golf,

turned out they were in a scrum over an oval rugby ball. "I've seen this on tv," says Nirmal Pandey, 13. "Your team has to get the ball to the other side, and the other team tries to stop you."

They have no proper equipment or sports fields, and sometimes don't even know the rules, but Kathmandu's youngsters put boundless energy

s and sports equipment?

after acquiring a golf ball from somewhere. As children do, they improvise: a few holes in the ground, a hefty L-shaped pipe and they're teeing off. They don't know golf rules, except that the ball needs to go into the hole and whoever does it with the least number of strikes wins.

In the outskirts of the Valley, five children looked like they were wrestling in the middle of a field. On closer inspection, it

into their hotly-contested, makeshift games. A long boring day at school is relieved by a tussle in the grass, a sprint for the crease or a slide for the ball. Playing on concrete and litter-strewn surfaces means there are often injuries and often tears, but grazed knees are usually quickly forgotten to return to the game, until it's dark and their parents call them home. ●

Pranaya SJB Rana



Drive as you live

Good God, do we really live like that?

It is common knowledge in Nepal that foreigners do not know how to drive. And if any proof needed, do you see many of them driving around?

iDrive as you livei. I was reminded of this advertising campaign which took place in France 20 years ago while stuck in a traffic jam between Thankot and Kalanki one Saturday afternoon.

Blocked by line ahead, many drivers of cars, buses, micros and even a steam roller decided to take the matter into their own hands and beat the jam by going down the other lane. Did these people not consider that by going in the right-hand lane they would meet traffic coming from the opposite direction? The result: two hours from Naikap to the Ring Road.

A similarly unnecessary jam locked down Lagankhel for hours last week. Walking through the gridlocked vehicles I could see no

NEPALIPAN
Jean-Baptiste Monneau

conceivable reason for this mess, and surmised that someone will have done a u-turn and blocked the road, someone else will have tried to dart

through the space, another will have tried to go through the other lane, blocking that one too. There was no other reason than that.

Driving is an expression of our civic and social behaviour, and requires civility and respect for others. It shows to what extent a society respects law and order, and appreciates and applies democratic values.

The selfishness and lack of consideration evident in the way most Nepalis drive, including psychotic use of horn, threatening use of head lights (iget out of my way!) and disrespect for the most basic of traffic rules show that Nepal has a long way to go in this regard.

It's not just an annoyance—driving habits here are also really



KIRAN PANDAY

dangerous. It's not surprising that barely a month goes by without a major bus accident given the way that bus drivers overtake on the blindside on the edge of precipices and blaze through villages with children and pedestrians on the road.

Of course people rarely pay for breaking the rules or causing harm or damage to others. Traffic police are more than happy to look the other way if their palm is greased with a bribe, or the offender has a good connection.

I sometimes wonder if the driving can be linked to the social ills which have famously plagued Nepal: self-interest, in-group cronyism rather than a belief in society, and endless impunity for wrongdoing.

If there really is to be a new mentality in a new Nepal, this is one of the issues that should be addressed. At the end of the day Nepalis just make things more difficult for themselves by driving like morons. Traffic laws, like other laws, exist for a purpose, and if people here started abiding by their laws they might find the country functioned much more smoothly and painlessly.

As the old campaign said, iDrive as you livei, in a more respectful and egalitarian way, and the whole of society will benefit from it. And casualties and deaths on the road will decrease dramatically too. ●



SAM KANG LI

One size doesn't fit all

Providing education for Down's syndrome children is still a problem

SHEERE NG

Dipesh has slanted eyes, a low set nose, and ears with a slightly unusual shape. Born with Down's syndrome, his features set him apart from other children. Despite being mentally disabled, he was enrolled in a mainstream nursery school at the age of three.

Down's syndrome is a genetic disability caused by a chromosome shift. It is associated with a range of medical conditions, including mental impairment. Despite this, studies have shown that early intervention can allow people with Down's syndrome to lead a reasonably independent life.

Unfortunately, in Nepal there is no institution that individualises education and training for these children. Parents are therefore forced to choose between the two equally unsuitable alternatives of mainstream and 'special' schools, neither of which provides Down's syndrome children with the kind of education they need.

Dipesh faced difficulties in a mainstream school, as the classes moved too fast for him. Special schools were just as difficult, as they inhibited his individual capabilities, causing him to retreat into himself. By the time he was 11, he had been enrolled at five different institutions.

Most parents of Down's syndrome children would rather send their children to a mainstream school, but some schools are reluctant to accept children with the condition.

"Many people think it is a contagious disease," says Shila Thapa, president of the Down's Syndrome Association. Even if they do get accepted, an extra amount of time and patience is required to integrate them into the school environment.

Pritam has been studying at the Abhiyan Boarding school for a year. Initially, the other

children's parents told them not to mix with him. His hyperactivity and outpourings of affection, which are characteristic of many Down's syndrome children, are baffling and even intimidating to many.

His mother Dhana Kumari Sunar hoped that he would be socialised out of it and become more 'normal'. "He has to learn normal behaviour to assimilate into society," she says.

Fortunately, he is picking up the norms of his classmates and is gradually learning to behave like the rest. Other parents are slowly changing their perceptions and beginning to accept him.

But not all Down's syndrome children respond well to a mainstream learning environment. Seven-year-old Samridi went to pre-school when she was three. However, she fell behind in her class and couldn't do most of her homework, and in her three years at the school, she made no friends because she was unable to express herself. Samridi eventually fell into depression and had to drop out of school.

Imran Ansari, a pediatrician at Patan Hospital, says that the environment in mainstream schools can highlight the abnormality of Down's syndrome children and cause them to feel inferior. But Shila Thapa thinks

this can be mitigated by keeping a close eye on the child's receptivity to the new environment. She says that getting them to socialise with other children is almost as important as giving them an education. The DSA currently sends children for short lessons at mainstream schools and only makes them continue to attend if they respond well.

But she says that this is only a stopgap measure necessitated by the current lack of provision available in Nepal. Down's syndrome children ultimately do need a different education, and in developed countries, she says, there are calibrated curriculums in designated schools to help Down's syndrome children advance their interest or talents into a career.

Dipesh, now 18, just dropped out from a special school which he had been attending for seven years. Unequipped with skills, he cannot take up a job to support himself. In Nepal, many people with Down's syndrome who have reached or passed working age are stuck either in schools or at home.

A late intervention is better than none at all. Dipesh and others like him are still waiting for assistance to help them live independently. ●

What is Down's syndrome?

A genetic condition caused by the presence of an extra chromosome 21. A baby born with Down's syndrome has three copies of chromosome 21 instead of the usual two.

Cause

Unknown, although mothers above the age of 35 stand a higher risk.

Characteristics

Mental disability, differing from child to child, it ranges from mild to severe. It is associated with a range of developmental difficulties, which include delayed motor skills (such as sitting, crawling and walking in infancy) and delayed cognitive skills (such as speech and language acquisition and short-term memory abilities).

Incidence

One in every 800 live births worldwide.

Experimenting with commune-ism

The Maoists can't decide whether to keep communes or scrap them

PRAKASH MAHATARA In RUKUM

While their leaders say the revolution will follow the path of "bourgeois capitalism", here in the Maoist heartland party faithful are planning to expand existing communes.

During the conflict, the Maoists set up four communes in Jajarkot, Rukum and Rolpa. Each has between 30-40 families, there is no private property, labour and harvests are shared. Marx's famous dictum, 'from each according to their ability and for each according to their need', is the credo here, and for the most part members of the communes seem happy with it.

"Life is easier living in a commune, work in the farm is easier since everyone helps out and agricultural productivity is higher," says Dipak Khadka, the head of the 'Balidan' commune in Rukum.

The 'Juni' commune in Jajarkot was set up after the police killed 20 farmers in two separate massacres in 1999 to take care of surviving family members, widows and orphans. Farmers handed over all their land and property to the commune.

In Thawang, the 'Ajambari' commune



PRAKASH MAHATARA

was set up by the survivors of an army helicopter raid which destroyed most of the buildings in the town. (See also: 'Rolpa is waiting', #389 and 'From Maoism to tourism', #340.)

The communes all have departments looking after health, education, culture, development and security. All the

members have to take part in physical exercise and there is military discipline. Alcohol is banned, as is untouchability. There are no religious festivals and 15 February, People's War Day is celebrated as the new Dasain. Funerals are marked by draping the body in red cloth and commemorating the dead with social

service.

Another famous member of the 'Balidan' commune is the head of the YCL, Ganesh Man Pun. "Everyone shares the burden, and that makes it easier to bear the hardships," Pun says. This is especially true of elderly parents who can't do back-breaking work. "The senior citizen department of the commune looks after us, and life is a lot easier," says 80-year-old Mangal Roka in Thawang.

Besides communes, there are more than 50 cooperatives that run eateries, manufacturing units, farms, schools and health posts in the Midwest. The big question in the Maoist party now is whether to convert cooperatives into communes, or the other way around, and there have been some contradictory statements.

"We have seen communes just as models, we will not try to replicate them, but will promote cooperatives," explains Maoist ideologue, Baburam Bhattarai. But Ganesh Man Pun thinks cooperatives should all be turned into communes, and there should be more communes.

Last year the Maoists organised a commune conference in Thawang in which they passed a resolution to 'preserve communes forever'. However, the prospects aren't good. The French Commune in 1871 didn't last more than 72 days and the Chinese communes didn't survive past Mao's death in 1975.

In last year's comprehensive peace accord, the Maoists agreed to disband their communes along with their local people's governments. After an election in which they emerged as the largest party, the Maoists now have to reconcile their commitment to a capitalist free market with the legacy of the communes here in the cradle of their revolution. ●



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Elephant and dragon

Can India compete with China?

It is fashionable these days, particularly in the West, to speak of India and China in the same breath. These are the two big countries said to be taking over the world, the new contenders for global eminence after centuries of Western domination.



ANALYSIS
Shashi Tharoor

Indeed, two new books explicitly twin the two countries—Robyn Meredith's *The Elephant and the Dragon: The Rise of India and China and What It Means for All of Us* and Harvard business professor Tarun Khanna's *Billions of Entrepreneurs: How China and India are Reshaping their Futures – and Yours*. Some even speak of “Chindia,” as if the two were joined at the hip in the international imagination.

Count me among the sceptics. It is not just that China and India have little in common, save for the fact that they occupy a rather vast landmass called “Asia”. It is also that they are already at very

different stages of development. China started its liberalisation a decade and a half before India, hit double-digit growth when India was still hovering around 5 percent, and, with compound growth, has put itself in a totally different economic league from India, continuing to grow faster from a larger base.

Moreover, the two countries' systems are totally dissimilar. If China wants to build a new six-lane expressway, it can bulldoze its way through any village in its path. In India, if you want to widen a two-lane road, you could be tied up in court for a dozen years over compensation entitlements.

When China built the Three Gorges dam, it created a 660-kilometer long reservoir that necessitated displacing two million people. Since India began the Narmada Dam project, it has spent 34 years (so far) fighting environmental groups, human rights activists, and advocates for the displaced all the way to the Supreme Court.

That is how it should be: India is a fractious democracy,

China is not. But, as an Indian, I do not wish to pretend that we can compete in the global growth stakes with China.

But if we can't compete, can we cooperate? The two civilisations had centuries of contact in ancient times. Thanks mainly to the export of Buddhism from India to China, Chinese came to Indian universities, visited Indian courts, and wrote memorable accounts of their voyages.

But it has been a while since Indians and Chinese had much to do with each other. The heady days of Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai (“Indians and Chinese are brothers”), the slogan coined by Nehru's India to welcome Chou En-Lai in 1955, gave way to the humiliation of the 1962 border war, after which it was “Hindi-Chini bye-bye” for decades.

The border dispute remains unresolved, and there are new irritants such as the anti-Chinese protests by Tibetan exiles who have been given asylum in India. To speak of a bilateral “trust deficit” might be an understatement.

And yet, there is some good news. Trade has doubled in each of the last three years, to an estimated \$40 billion this year; China has now overtaken the United States as India's largest single trading partner. Tourism is thriving. There are dozens of Chinese engineers working in (and learning from) Indian computer firms and engineering companies, while Indian software engineers support the Chinese telecoms equipment manufacturer Huawei.

In other words, the elephant is already dancing with the dragon. The only question is whether political tensions could bring the music screeching to a halt. There is no doubt that, whatever India's legitimate differences with China's Communist regime, cooperation is in the best interests of both peoples. ●
(Project Syndicate)

Shashi Tharoor, an acclaimed novelist and commentator, is a former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Round robin in the Valley

Golfer Pilots NPGA Classic

The Surya Nepal Golf Tour and the unwavering support of the local golfing fraternity continue to herald a bright future for golf in Nepal. The first event of the tour, the Surya Nepal Central Open, concluded last Friday and Shiva Ram Shrestha won with a brilliant score of 10 under par. The outstanding performance of many professionals at the event not only showcased their ability but also confirmed that given the opportunity they can enhance their skills and make a mark in international golf.



TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya

The next event lined up on the tour is Golfer Pilots NPGA Classic, which will run from 25 to 27 May. This will be a real test for the pros as they will have to compete over all three golf courses in the Kathmandu Valley, comprising a total of 54 holes. The first day will be played at Tribhuvan Army Officers' Golf Club, followed by the second round at Le Meridien Gokarna, and finally the 18 holes at the RNGC.

This event was initiated last year by enthusiastic pilot golfers, who envisioned scheduling it a week before the all-important Surya Nepal Masters to provide exposure for the competition and a chance to prepare for the bigger tournament. This paid off last year as we witnessed a Nepali winning the Surya Nepal Masters.

The two founders, Rabindra Dhakal and Deepak Thapaliya, are firmly committed to making this an annual affair. This year the prize money has increased three-fold and the winner of the event will receive Rs 100,000.

I caught up with Rabindra Dhakal who said, “The pleasure that golf provides is amazing. Apart from that, this sport really enriches your health too. We are trying to encourage young talent in golf because we want to give something back to the game.”

There will also be a Pro-Am event on 24 May. Here again amateurs will have to opportunity to play alongside professionals and experience a higher level of play than they are used to. We hope that the golfing community and sponsors will continue their support, to make the Surya Nepal Golf Tour bigger and better this year and in coming years. ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak(at)hotmail.com



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Travelling back to Kathmandu

Since early January, thirteen outstanding documentaries from South Asia, which were first shown in Film South Asia '07 last October, have been touring around the world. The Travelling Film South Asia '08 package features five award-winning films.

After successfully opening in Pokhara, Chittagong, New Delhi and Karachi in South Asia, Arizona, New Haven, Minnesota, and Virginia in the US, and Brighton in the UK, the films are coming back to Kathmandu next weekend.

Catch TFSA '08-Kathmandu at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka from 30 May to 1 June. The films will continue travelling until October 2009 and in the next few months will be shown in Islamabad, Goa, Guwahati, Shillong, Colombo, Colorado and New York.



6 Yards to Democracy (55 min)

India, 2006, dir - Nishtha Jain & Smriti Nevatia
Election promises of free saris leads to a stampede
(31 May, 11.30 AM)



Ayodhya Gatha (60 min)

India, 2007, dir - Vani Subramanian
Life in Ayodhya post-Babri Masjid
Winner of the Special Jury Mention Award at FSA '07
(30 May 1.30 PM)

Chaama Deu! Tara Nabirsa! (Forgive! Forget Not!) (59 min)

Nepal, 2007, dir - Pranay Limbu
A journalist's fight for survival in a Nepali barrack
(1 June, 3PM)

Eisenfresser (Ironeaters) (85 min)

Bangladesh, 2007, dir - Shaheen Dill-Riaz
Famine forces farmers to seek work as ship-breakers
Winner of the Ram Bahadur Trophy for Best Film at FSA '07
(31 May, 4PM)



Every Good Marriage Begins with Tears (62 min)

UK/Bangladesh, 2006, dir - Simon Chambers
Sassy Londoners sent to Dhaka for arranged marriage
(1 June, 1.30 PM)



From Dust (60 min)

Sri Lanka, 2005, dir - Dhruv Dhawan
Post-Tsunami exposé of state corruption
(31 May, 10 AM)

A Life with Slate (59 min)

Nepal, 2006, dir - Dipesh Kharel
Poetic dimensions of slate-mining in a Nepali village

Joint Winner of the Best Debut Film Award at FSA '07
(31 May, 2PM)

Living Goddess (96 min)

Nepal, 2006/07, dir - Ishbel Whitaker
Lives of the Kumaris during the People's Movement of April 2006
(30 May, 5PM)

The Miseducation of Pakistan (30 min)

Pakistan, 2005, dir - Syed Ali Nasir
Primary schools in Pakistan: an indictment of state and society
(31 May, 11.30 AM)



Motherland Afghanistan (74 min)

Afghanistan, 2006, dir - Sedika Mojadidi
An Afghan father's return to the home country
(31 May, 6PM)

Rabba Hun Kee Kariye (Thus Departed our Neighbours) (65 min)

India, 2007, dir - Ajay Bhardwaj
The scars of Partition in Indian Punjab
(1 June, 10AM)

Remembrance of Things Present (81')

India, 2007, dir - Chandra Siddan
How is a teenager supposed to deal with an arranged marriage?

Winner of the Second Best Film Award at FSA '07
(30 May, 3PM)

The Sky Below (75 min)

India/Pakistan, 2006/07, dir - Sara Singh
The India-Pakistan frontier six decades after Partition

Joint Winner of the Best Debut Film Award at FSA '07
(1 June, 11.30 AM)

Tickets - Rs 30 available at **Dhokaima Cafe**, Patan Dhoka, **5522113** & **Film South Asia Secretariat**, Patan Dhoka, **5547279**
Limited season passes also available for Rs 300

For screening schedule and further information, visit: www.filmsouthasia.org or contact 5547279.



Man of iron

A new Golden Age for superhero movies?

This summer another comic superhero joins the pantheon of box office smashes. Tony Stark dons his slick mechanised armour and becomes the eponymous Iron Man. His outfit is a gleaming shell of metallic red and gold that transforms its human resident into a hurtling missile.

As a summer flick, *Iron Man* provides the requisite CGI bombast, and its hero, a weapon manufacturing magnate turned peace warrior, has more than the usual tally of one-liners, imbued with devilish fun by Robert Downey Jr. Thankfully, Jon Favreau's *Iron Man* isn't a clunky, mechanical, lifeless assembly, but a lively piece of work that flits entertainingly through the customary motions of the superhero narrative.



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo DiSilva

In this first entry (the date of the sequel has already been announced), perhaps an inordinate time is dedicated to the origins of the character, in this case the development of Tony Stark's powered costume. As the billionaire magnate of weapons manufacturer Stark Enterprises, Stark enjoys a playboy jet-setting lifestyle before he is imprisoned in a cave by an ambitious warlord and has to show his true grit. Instructed to recreate his latest weapon, Stark instead constructs a mechanical suit which he uses to tank his way out, swiping aside or flaming down gun-wielding fighters.

Of course, the metamorphosis into a superhero is predicated by a more personal transformation. That is, from a conceited egotistical nihilist to a conceited egotistical humanitarian. The experience of seeing his weapon in the hand of the bad guys seems to show him the truth about the warmongering ways of his company and, conscience now firmly rooted, he publicly commits to ending Stark Enterprises' war-profiteering ways. He may have seen the light, but there are others who have plans of their own.

Stark is apparently unaware of the malicious machinations of his second in command Obadiah Stone, the burly regent to the Stark kingdom. Much has been made of Downey's performance and indeed he is excellent as Tony Stark but the real showstopper is Jeff Bridges as Stone, a beefed up lingo, all false paternalism and concealed envy.

Stark retreats to his workshop beneath his Malibu mansion, tinkering away at his new concept of a mechanised suit. He entertainingly tests the designs, intentionally and unintentionally demolishing parts of his mansion in the process. How his work may help the cause of peace is a question only partially answered when he flies to Afghanistan to rescue some refugees from the thuggish band that imprisoned him earlier in the movie. Eventually, he puts Stark Enterprises to replicate the first Iron Man which leads, unsurprisingly, to a final battle between two tin titans.

Comic book aficionados might be reminded of other superhero rivalries which have made it onto the big screen - Superman, Batman, Spiderman and X-Men to name a few. These titles represent very profitable movie franchises whose proceeds ironically eclipsed the profits from the comic book sales themselves.

But Marvel Comics (the progenitor of X-Men, Spiderman and Iron Man) is now undergoing a transformation of its own - geeky comic book publisher by day, Hollywood production powerhouse by night! Having fully funded *Iron Man*, they are set to reap the rewards of another promising franchise. All this can only mean we will be seeing plenty more superheroes on the screen, of both cape and non-cape varieties. Super! ●

IRON MAN

Director: Jon Favreau

Cast: Robert Downey Jr., Jeff Bridges, Terrence Howard, Gwyneth Paltrow

2008. PG-13. 2hr 6 min.

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Brass art exhibition** at Susan's collection, Buddha Garden, Kathmandu Guest House 23-24 May. 4700632
- ❖ **Transformations** furniture exhibition 9-24 May at the Imago Dei Gallery CafÉ, Naxal.
- ❖ **Silhouettes in Time** paintings by Erina Tamrakar, 13-30 May at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- ❖ **Trees and Leaves** a painting exhibition by Samjhana Rajbhandari and Bidhata K.C, 24 May-13 June, 5.15 PM at Bario Fiesta, Naxal.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Machhendranath: on the road with the red gold** by Kesang Tseten on 25 May, 7 PM at Alliance Francaise.
- ❖ **Reineke the fox** a drama performed by Studio 7 at the Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra, 7.15 PM until 25 May every Friday, Saturday and Sunday.
- ❖ **Cinema Paradiso**, a film by Giuseppe Tornatore presented by Cine-Sankipa at Rimal theatre, Gurukul on 26 May, 5.30 PM. 4466956
- ❖ **American Gangster** a movie by Ridley Scott, 27 May 6.30 PM at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe. 4428549
- ❖ **Israeli Film Festival** organised by Embassy of Israel on 27-29 May at Russian Cultural Center, Kamalpokhari.
- ❖ **Traveling Film South Asia** showcasing 13 documentaries from South Asia at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 30 May-1 June. Tickets available at Dhokaima CafÉ. 5547279



MUSIC

- ❖ **Paleti** with Kumar Subba on 30 May, 5.30 PM at nepalaya 'r' sala, Kalikasthan. Rs. 565. 4412469
- ❖ **Live karaoke** with special thai cuisine, every Wednesday at Holiday Karaoke Restaurant and Bar, Lazimpat. 4445731
- ❖ **Rudra night** fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212

DINING

- ❖ **Lajawab** tandoori and kabab festival, 7-10 PM every Friday at the Hotel Himalaya, Rs 550.
- ❖ **Hot summer spicy food** at the Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Kupondole Heights. 5544872
- ❖ **The Kaiser CafÉ open now** at the Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, open from 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Sunday jazz brunch** design your meal with pastas, salads and barbeque, with jazz by Mariano and band, at the Rox Garden, Hyatt Regency. 4489361
- ❖ **Steak escape** with Kathmandu's premier steaks available for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson.
- ❖ **Bourbon Room Restro-bar** now open for lunch and dinner with over a 100 cocktails, Lal Darbar.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Illy espresso coffee** at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails.
- ❖ **International buffet** at the Sunrise CafÉ, and Russian specialties at Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Steak Fare** variety of steaks every Monday and Tuesday At the Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency, 7-10.30 PM. 4489361
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** with coffee, food, drinks and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 8.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **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 more at Roadhouse, Bhatbateni 4426587, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4260187.
- ❖ **Retro Brunch Barbeque** with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Dhamaka** a Nepali style barbeque with a pan-Indian fusion at the Splash Bar and Grill, Hotel Radisson, Rs. 1399 7PM, every Friday. 4411818
- ❖ **Starry night barbeque** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666.00 nett. per person, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Lavazza coffee** Italy's favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, Roadhouse CafÉ Pulchok and Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

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

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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Although according to the calendar we are now in pre-monsoon time, usually characterised by warm southerly winds and convective rains, the current weather pattern is exactly the opposite. An active westerly front supported by a strong low pressure over the Tibetan Plateau has spread south of the Himalaya, including into Nepal, bringing with it cool breezes and showers in the afternoons. The front is getting stronger and will most likely produce more rain. The Valley has now received 90mm out of its 116mm quota for this month. Satellite pictures indicate that the rest of this will fall this weekend. Together with the rain, expect cloudy skies and cool temperatures.

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"रेडियो सगरमाथा विचलित सुनी, अंग्रेजी सुधारी"
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KIRAN PANDAY

IT IS YOU: Publisher of Himal Khabarpatrika Kanak Mani Dixit points PM Koirala out to himself in a picture at the Himal Khabarpatrika photo exhibition held at the Nepal Art Council last weekend. The exhibition included photos taken since the People's Movement 2006.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

STRIKE AGAIN: The microbus-stops at Ratna Park were deserted during Wednesday's strike, called to demand justice for Ram Hari Shrestha, a businessman murdered by Maoists at the Chitwan cantonment.



KIRAN PANDAY

LIKE MOTHER LIKE DAUGHTER: Arzu Deuba and Pratibha Rana, wife and mother-in-law of former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, were felicitated along with other women elected to the CA at a ceremony on Monday. Deuba is representing the NC and Rana the RPP.



KIRAN PANDAY

BODY COOLER: In contrast to Kathmandu, Chitwan temperatures were soaring on Wednesday. Here a woman cools down with a slice of watermelon.

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Opiate of the asses

When Comrade Parsuram, accompanied by his sidekick Comrade Hanuman, accepted garlands and blessings from a republican Godman at the Marwari Brahman Society last month we thought that the baddies were well on their way to becoming goodies.

And sure enough, last week they attended a meeting of Christian evangelicals during which they said atheism didn't mean intolerance of minority religions. Then on Buddha Jayanti, the comrades all trooped off to Lumbini and, in the presence of a Maoist monk on the podium, Awesome once more underlined the many similarities he shared with Siddhartha Gautam Buddha.

There is a certain logic to all this: being an atheist means not believing in God, but there is nothing stopping an atheist from trying to be God himself. Lotus Flower really thinks he is the **reincarnation** of the Buddha. Wonder what the widow and children of Ram Hari Shrestha think of that.

The reason PKD needs divine

attributes is probably because he intends to perform a "miracle" in this country in the coming months. He hasn't really specified whether the *chamatkar* is going to be economic, political or spiritual but he sort of hinted that the nation was going to be brought back, Lazarus like, from the dead. For that he definitely needs a miracle, how on earth are we going to be Switzerland in the next 25 years at the rate we are going? And for this country of 28 million growing at 2.5 percent we need to attain an economic growth rate of 25 percent a year if we are to attain a per capita income of \$3,000 in ten year's time. Given the difficulties, YCLs armed with iron rods are having to discipline traffic at Kalanki, we may need more than a miracle. We may need a **Second Coming**.

Girjau also went to Lumbini for Buddha's birthday and it was **confession time**. "I'm not personally greedy anymore," the prime minister said. Glad he admitted that he has been greedy in the past.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch the feud between the Baburam loyalists and Badal loyalists seems to be reaching a crescendo. BRB has been writing passionate columns in the newspapers defending himself from allegations of being an **Indian stooge**, a front for the BJP by advocating cultural rights for the king and suggesting that Nepal may as well be merged with India if the open border remains open. After having been banished from the Pistachio Palace to Ekanta Kuna to live in with Comrade Infinity, Laldhoj is reportedly shifting residence again. The tension with Comrade Cloud goes back a long way to the beginning of the revolution, and the current slanging match is reminiscent of BRB and PKD airing their dirty linen in public two years ago before they were made to patch up.

From the 12-point agreement to the 7-point preconditions that GPK has put to PKD to join a Maoist-led government, now we have come to the 5-point prerequisite that Kingji

has set out before he vacates Naryanhi. KG wants security, protection of his assets, a royal allowance befitting an ex-king and cultural and religious rights. The plan seems to be to buy time for the monarchy at least till such time as the new republican constitution is not promulgated in two years time. The trouble is, because of his past bad behaviour, no one trusts His **ex-Majesty** anymore, not the parties, not the international community and the not the people.

This country is an example of *samanupatik* gone bonkers. The PR lists brought in the janajatis and dalits and women in overwhelming numbers, but now the remaining 103 ethnic groups want to be included in the 26 seats remaining for the assembly. It's high time we journalists also demanded a seat in the assembly: there isn't a single **hack** representing our profession.

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