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Weekly Internet Poll # 410

Q. What should be the new government's main priority?

Total votes: 5,069

Weekly Internet Poll # 411. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How do you characterise the Maoist decision not to form the new government?

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MEDIA SPOTLIGHT: Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Baburam Bhattarai and CP Gajurel address a packed press conference on Tuesday to say their party had lost the "moral authority" to form a government. However, Dahal did not categorically rule it out.

KIRAN PANDAY

Yes, prime minister

Pressure is mounting on the Maoists to form the government

The Maoists are coming under pressure from the political parties and the international community to take what is rightfully theirs and lead the new government.

However, they appear to have recovered from their presidential defeat to pick up where they left off. On Thursday, they held a consultation with the 25 parties in the assembly who were said to be nearly unanimous in insisting that the Maoists lead the government.

When President Yadav

formally asks the largest party to form a government on Friday, it seems the Maoists want to be ready.

By allowing the UML assembly speaker to be elected unopposed on Thursday, the Maoists also have shown that they are open to government formation. The UML is trying to assure the Maoists that its alliance with the NC and MJF was temporary.

However, the level of distrust between the Maoists and the NC-MJF-UML combine is still deep.

"We are concerned about this alignment, they could go to the president and get him to call on them to form a government," says Maoist CA nominee, Hari Roka.

Arjun Narsingh KC of the NC dismisses this. "We don't want to form a government, it is the Maoists who have the first chance as the largest party," he told *Nepali Times*.

The kangresis seem content to have their candidate as president, and won't mind being in the opposition. The MJF, however, is still fishing to see if there is a

chance to also claim the prime ministership.

The real problem about government formation is not between the Maoists and the other parties but within the Maoist central committee where a group led by Mohan Baidya is said to be against forming the government now.

Whether the Maoists will form the government will therefore depend on how soon Pushpa Kamal Dahal can convince his hardline colleagues to do it. ●

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STATESMANSHIP, MR DAHAL

In the end, more by chance than on purpose, the right man became president.

It's been like that in the past two years of roller-coaster transition: the deadlock looks intractable, the peace process looks doomed, we teeter between totalitarianism and democracy. But it all works out in the end.

However bleak things may look in Nepal, somehow it gets sorted out at the last minute. The politicians take negotiations right to the brink, but some hidden force brings us back from the edge. If one analyses all the near-disasters since April 2006, there is one common denominator: the political decision that respects the popular mandate and follows the principles of pluralism and democracy is always the right one.

On Monday, we could have been saddled with a president chosen by a bunch of self-serving politicians in some backroom deal. That person could have been doddering ex-terrorist, it could have been a long-in-the-tooth prime minister, or it could have been a flip-flopping politician who lost the election from both constituencies.

But in the end, when it was put to the vote and we allowed our elected representatives to elect the president, they came up with the right man. Wish it could have been a woman, but it was a victory for democracy nevertheless. And because of what Ram Baran Yadav has stood for, it was a moral victory for non-violence, fundamental freedoms and for Nepal's integrity as a nation.

The big challenge now is not to allow the Maoists to run away from their responsibility. Pushpa Kamal Dahal is insulting the Nepali people if he refuses to lead the government just because his candidate for president lost out in the CA numbers game.

The president is ceremonial, after all, so it's no big deal. And all things considered, it was a victory for Dahal's struggle for inclusivity that a self-made farmer's son from the Madhes has now become the head of state. Ram Baran Yadav's election wasn't a defeat for the Maoists, it was one more indication that the people identify with the Maoist agenda for change.

Nepalis and Friends of Nepal now need to convince the hardliners in the Maoist leadership that they will never get an opportunity like this to realise their dream of a new Nepal. The cynical argument that a NC-UML-MJF coalition is sure to disintegrate and they can capture state power in six months is an example of the scheming mentality of the end justifying the means—no matter what it does to the people.

Mr Dahal, try once more to convince your colleagues to lead the government. Show statesmanship. Bring back a caring state and demonstrate to the long-suffering people of this country who chose your party that you can improve their lives.



KIRAN PANDAY

Madhesisation

If you squeeze the spring too hard, it can jump out of your hand

Karl Marx was wrong. The history of the world is not about class struggles, but the struggle for ethnic self-determination. The Soviet Union broke into 15 independent states, Yugoslavia into five (so far).

The restoration of democracy in Nepal has also thrown up the demands of Nepal's various



GUEST COLUMN
Trib Tharu

ethnic entities. Though Pahadis and Madhesis are not ethnic groups per se, they have a racial connotation. In the village where I was born, there was a Pahadi family. They are still called Pahadi. My family has been living in Kathmandu but we are still called Madhesis, even though we are Tharus.

Things started getting complicated after the Madhesi Movement flared up in January 2007, and for a good reason. Madhesis and Tharus have been marginalised from mainstream Nepali statehood. This is not to say that certain Pahadi groups were also not marginalised.

Madhesi representation in government, the diplomatic service, the army has been traditionally low. The Madhesi Movement seized on this historical sense of collective Madhesi grievance, and the struggle was (and is) quite justified. It has now culminated in the Constituent Assembly's election of Madhesis as president and vice-president of Nepal.

However, in the weeks before the CA election, it did look like the movement for Madhesi representation and autonomy was crossing the line where it could be called justifiable. Will this 'Madhesisation' actually create more problems?

The 64 CA members of Tarai-based parties took their oaths in Hindi, the Vice President himself took his oath in Hindi. People in the Tarai speak in Maithili, Bhojpur, Tharu, Abadhi, and many other languages, but who speaks Hindi? What is the point that our elected representatives are trying to make, and what kind of message does this send to other Nepalis? Don't they speak Nepali? Did they forget their own mother-tongues? Madhesi activists and politicians should realise that if you squeeze the spring too hard, it can jump out of your hand.

Most Madhesis have relatives across the border and there are close marriage ties with India, but this is not the case with the

Tharus. In fact, aside from those forced out because of past atrocities by Pahadi settlers, there are few Tharus in India. The Tharus have their own mother tongue although many now speak Nepali because of assimilation.

'One Madhes One Pradesh' may have been a useful slogan for the Tarai-based parties at election time, but for the Tharus it became the last straw in what they perceived as the Madhesisation process. Hence, the movement against it last month.

As a compromise to the One Madhes proposal, ideas have been put forward to create multiple autonomous ethnic regions as integral parts of a unified nation of Nepal that includes the creation of a Tharu province in the Tarai.

As a development economist, I also do not see anything wrong with using our comparative advantages in Himal, Pahad and Madhes, which are endowed with their own resources. The Tharus, being the original bhumiputra of Nepal, will struggle for their ethnic rights, pride and economic wellbeing.

But ethnicity-based autonomy will be counter-productive for the wellbeing of Nepal and Nepalis. Ethnic groups have enclaves where some may be in majority, but other ethnicities and castes are interwoven into those territories. Autonomous regions based on ethnicity will pit one group against another and become the cause for long-term animosity, further polarising society. ●

Trib Tharu is Principal Economic Development Economist with the Navajo Nation and teaches at the University of New Mexico and the Dine College.

A nation of Rams

President Ram's first order of business will be to work with the Maoists

As he waits in the drizzle at Bishnumati Bridge, Ram Shrestha is more worried about whether he will get his five litres before the petrol station at Teku runs out.

Ram Chaudhary is concerned about making a living in Bardiya, where highways have been closed now for a week because of a transportation dispute. But the Far West was always too far for Kathmandu to take notice.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Twelve hours ago and a world away, Ram Bhattarai was mopping the floor of a hotel lobby in Bahrain. He hated his job but didn't want to come back home. "What will I do there in Tanahu?"

At the boarding gate Ram Gurung was asking if money changers in Nepal will

accept Lebanese currency. He is now trying his luck in Malaysia after facing disappointments in the Gulf.

In the flight back to Kathmandu, Ram Mandal from Suga Nikas in Dhanusha was excited to hear about a Madhesi president, but he wasn't sure what it would mean for the future of his three sons back home. The youngest was only a year old when he left for Saudi Arabia four years ago. He wants to send them to school so that they can earn like his Egyptian supervisor at the mosque where he lays bricks with a Malyali mason.

It has taken four years of hard toil for Ram Mandal to pay off the loan he took to pay the manpower company and buy some land. For the first time in his life, Ram Mandal is not working someone else's field, he is going home to plant rice on his own land.

The presidential drama that unfolded this week had all the hallmarks of a soap

opera as the three Rams locked horns.

The final outcome was unfavourable to the Maoists but they took it gracefully. Pushpa Kamal Dahal was one of the first to congratulate Ram Baran Yadav. The aftermath of the polls, however, has been less convivial.

In a fit of pique, the Maoists decided to opt out of government and play the role of "constructive" opposition. Immediately, the MJF said if the Maoists won't form a new government, they will. The Forum isn't satisfied with being rewarded by the NC-UML-MJF alliance with the post of Vice President.

Apprehensions are rife that this coalition will not hold, and there are rumours that GP Koirala will continue to head the government with the backing of former kangresis in the Madhesi parties.

However, the political leaders of Old Nepal seem oblivious that their parlour

games do not interest Nepalis here or abroad anymore. The struggle to just survive is now so great that few have the time or inclination to follow who backstabbed whom in Kathmandu.

Businesses closed down in Janakpur for a day this week to protest crime and anarchy on the day that the town's most prominent son was at Pashupatinath to offer thanksgiving. The disconnect between rulers and the ruled makes Maoist's decision to remain out of power even more dangerous. President Ram's first order of business will be to work with the Maoists rather than against them. The alternative is chaos.

President Ram used to graze water buffaloes when he was a boy, he is now the president of Nepal's Ram Gurungs, Ram Shresthas, Ram Mandals, Ram Bhattarais and Ram Chaudharys. It is their wellbeing that should be foremost in his mind. ●

LETTERS

OUR FIRST PRESIDENT

We may have our first president, but after formally sending the king packing nearly two months ago, the country is still without a functional government ('The first president', #409). By playing upon the "patriotic" sentiments of a battered and demoralised populace, political parties have always tried to reach their petty goals. Just count how many years we have been on the streets. We run our government from the streets, we bring them down from the streets. We decide from the streets, we punish from there as well. Isn't it time for some serious introspection? Where are our priorities and programs for economic progress, opportunity, respect and equality? Where are the plans for investment and industrialisation? Every time Prachanda, Upendra Yadav or Girija open their mouths, it is to bad-mouth each other. Give us a break.

Bibek Paudel, email

● The historic election of Ram Baran Yadav as Nepal's first president is a victory for democracy and a defeat for totalitarian conspiracy. Yadav has indeed rekindled hopes of the Madhesi community and is a nationalistic figure. Yadav's steadfast stance in safeguarding territorial integrity and national unity and addressing genuine issues of the Madhes have been recognised. Since the Nepali politics has undergone a turn, the political parties should involve the Maoists in the formation of new government. Yadav's role will be decisive. We, the Madhesi people and all Nepalis are proud of our new president.

Dhananjay Shah, Dhapasi

● The country has taken 100 days to get a president to replace a king, who was shown a Red Card way back in May. Personal bias aside, our first ever President does not possess the political stature and doesn't have seniority of even a second generation leader. His greatest qualification was his origin as Madhesi. CK Lal struggles to justify that Maoists' agenda of inclusiveness ('Big Three vs Other Three', #407). We seem to be dangerously pursuing Madhesi

exclusiveness everywhere to appease the Tarai with the presidency and vice-presidency. When will this end? If political arithmetic holds the key to all the decision making, nobody should be surprised to see the MJF's Upendra Yadav being prime minister too.

Pradeepa Sharma, Mumbai

● It seems like the Maoists are never truly going to totally understand the ground reality. All those years in the jungle must have clouded their vision when it comes to diplomacy. Baburam Bhattarai says the reason his party is not forming the government is because the old feudal mentality remains. Who are they kidding? Nepali people are not dumb. They gave the Maoists a chance, made them the largest party and the Maoists find a pretext not to respect that trust. A small defeat and they start showing their true colours. And there are mixed signals. While PKD says he is happy to remain in the opposition, BRB says he is not. Who should the people believe? These are the people who will lead the government? The president is just going to be a ceremonial position anyway, the real power is actually with the PM.

Prerana Sthapit, Sinamangal

CLONES

An alarming notion is developing in the minds of party leaders, that they should have physically strong force inside their party ('YCL clone', #409). A civilised society requires a reasoning and helpful youth force, not a violent one. It is the duty of the government to ensure and encourage that the energy of the youth is channelled into constructive ways. When that fails, vigilante-ism takes over as is happening now.

Ishwari Pradhan, email

CORRECTION

Due to a translation error, the allowance amount for Bhutanis resettled in the Netherlands in the story 'Refugees finally find respect' (#409) was wrong. It should have been 53 euros per week.



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Not out of the woods yet

No one has come out clean from the presidency fiasco. The Maoists opened multiple fronts and tried to fool all the people all the time. Girija Prasad Koirala's ego and obstinacy held the country hostage. Upendra Yadav confirmed suspicions yet again that he is a political opportunist who wants MJF to be the RPP-type kingmaker.

But there is little point in going back to why events unfolded the way they did. What is certain is that the realignments spell bad news for the peace process,



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

democracy, constitution-writing, and even Kathmandu-Madhes relationship.

Depending on how you look at it, the peace process is either over or doomed to remain incomplete and flawed. If this exercise was only about getting the Maoists out of the jungle and 'locking them in', the job is done.

But if the process entailed sustained engagement on other issues (integration of soldiers, building a just state, tackling disappearances, ensuring accountability and reorienting economic policies) the political confrontation has made the task a lot harder. There is a possibility that PLA soldiers will drift out of the cantonments, and YCL will become more assertive.

Democracy is in danger not just from Maoist authoritarianism, but the lack of real political opposition to them

A top NC negotiator, who has played a role since the 12-point agreement, says: "Stop pampering the Maoists in the name of the peace process. We have suffered enough. Just treat them like other political party."

But they are not just another party. Democracy is in danger not only from the authoritarian impulses of the Maoists, but also from the lack of political opposition to them on the ground. Recent political events have further opened the space for the Maoists to consolidate even as NC and UML stick to manipulative and petty Kathmandu-centred politics.

If the Maoists stay out of government, it could be a collective self-goal for the others. The former rebels will use their effective organisation and propaganda machine to play the victim. They will monopolise the opposition so any government is bound to fail in dealing with popular expectations. There is little hope that the old faces in the new government will do anything to initiate progressive economic change. This can only mean that the



KIRAN PANDAY

extremists will emerge even stronger.

The relationship between Kathmandu and Madhes, and between Madhesi parties and the people has also got strained over the past week. Most Pahadis grumble that Madhesi have got more than their share by occupying both top presidency posts. The irony is that Madhesi are not too satisfied either.

MJF district activists find it difficult to explain why the MJF has allied with the NC, its main electoral competitor, and the UML, the main opponent on federalism with Jhalanath Khanal even rejecting the eight-point agreement. Upendra Yadav may have wanted to balance the Maoists and extract a top post from the alliance, but he risks being discredited like he was after signing the 22-point agreement last year unless he goes back to the Tarai and explains the logic of his decision.

Talk to Madhesi intellectuals and they are happy to see a Madhesi as president, but ask whether it had to be Ram Baran Yadav. Kathmandu's narrative of Yadav is that of a nationalist who resisted the pulls of identity politics. Many in Madhes perceive him as someone who did nothing for the Madhes movement, but used it to rise up. They remember him calling the agitation 'mass hysteria' and saying this is not the time for identity assertion. Madhesi may not turn radical, but don't be surprised if you find they are not thrilled with his elevation.

It is also important not to be complacent about the Madhes because the fundamental faultlines remain. The state-Madhesi trust gap will remain as long as CDOs and SPs are Pahadis. The inter-party competition in Madhes will only intensify. The Maoist-Forum relationship will become more strained. And inter-community tensions are slowly surfacing again.

We are at a dangerous moment. Maoists leading the government will help smoothen some of these issues. But unless the more fundamental aspects of the peace process, governance and state-Madhes gap are addressed, it may be premature to characterise Nepal as a 'post-conflict' country. ●

An ethnic presidency

ANALYSIS by PRAMOD MISHRA

Ram Baran Yadav's presidency may have been the result of political gamesmanship but it does represent the emergence of a New Nepal.

Instead of Girija Koirala, Madhab Nepal or any other person from the traditional Bahun-Chetri leadership becoming New Nepal's first president, Yadav's election has achieved a number of goals.

It could potentially knock the wind out of Madhesi separatists, probably the most dangerous of Nepal's ethnic movements. The people of the Tarai, alienated for so long and identified as "Indians" by Nepali-speaking ultra nationalists, will now have a stake in a Nepal that is equally theirs.

Yadav's track record against opportunist politics (when faced with political sunset, rake up

demonstrates lack of strategic foresight in the leadership of the parties and is a waste of electoral opportunity for added inclusivity.

One of the two posts should have gone to the hill or the Tarai nationalities, Dalits or women, especially since we know that the post of the prime minister is sure to go to the hill high caste. It would have made everyone feel included, and it would have made better history. Moreover, the fact that both posts went to the Maithili-speaking Madhesi does not necessarily demonstrate UML's or NC's unflinching commitment to redress Madhesi grievances. At best, it shows tokenism and remaindered commitment to the people of the plains.

After the candidacies of Madhab Nepal and Girija Koirala floundered in the face of Maoist

A good start, but Ram Baran Yadav became president by chance

ethnic issues) and separatist political agendas (One Madhesh One Pradesh) also bodes well for the framing of a new constitution for Nepal's inclusive democracy.

President Yadav's background in the peasantry of the plains rather than in the upper castes makes him not only a Madhesi, but a son of the tillers of the soil. And in this sense, this event marks a clear break both from the past of the Shah kings and the upper caste hierarchies of the plains and the hills, a phenomenon that has indubitably scarred the political and social life of Nepal and North India.

Nevertheless, President Yadav's election is only the beginning and it calls for critical thinking and soul searching. First of all, the way the presidential election was handled by the parties reveals the inability of the NC and the UML to unlearn their power games.

To elect both the President and the Vice President from the same Maithili linguistic group

opposition and they put up a Madhesi candidate, both parties scrambled to push Madhesi too. Ram Baran Yadav became president by chance, not by design.

Why didn't the NC and UML have a Plan B for a more inclusive election when Koirala or Nepal's candidacy became unacceptable to the Maoists? Such knee-jerk commitment to ethnic and regional issues is neither effective nor durable. However, this is still better than Panchayat-era or post-1990 symbolic politics in which ethnic groups got cabinet berths.

The need for genuine and balanced commitment to ethnic and regional democracy should emerge by the time the new constitution is forged. A New Nepal must reflect the people's genuine wishes rather than chance.

The party leadership needs to do some serious homework before it sits down to frame the constitution. ●

Pramod Mishra teaches literature and writing at Augustana College in Illinois, USA.



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A decade

Nepal Industrial and Commercial Bank recently entered its 10th year of service in Nepal. It also inaugurated a branch at Battisputali. The branch is the fifth in the Valley along with New Road, Kamaladi, Pulchowk and Bhaktapur branches, and several others across Nepal.



Players

JOHN PLAYERS A new John Players outlet, offering formal and casual wear for men, opened at Durbarmarg recently. The store has a collection of shirts, t-shirts and trousers in a range of sizes. John Players has three other outlets at Bluebird mall, WTC, and Putalisadak.

NEW PRODUCTS

SECRET SMS: Innovative has introduced a new service in Nepal which enables all mobile users to send encoded SMSs that can't be read by anyone but the recipient. Secret SMS uses cryptographic algorithms and costs Rs 50 per month.



LA VIVA: Viva, a new compact car from Perodua, is spacious from the inside, features a secure body structure, collapsible shaft mechanism and double air bags. It comes in high mileage of 650cc and 850cc, 1000 cc standard and premium models.



MOBILE: Sony Ericsson was officially launched in Nepal. Its authorised distributor, Future Tech, will introduce new Sony Ericsson mobile phones including Walkman, Cyber-shot TM and new-generation business phones, along with other accessories of the brand.

More budget blues

No one seems worried about the economy

In the land of Pashupatinath, we let the Lord of Animals take care of things.

The concept of living in the present and bearing the consequences of this life in the next one makes us fatalistic and tolerant of injustices. It also gives us elastic morals in which anything can be justified.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Take economic policy. We don't have one. Things are allowed to drift from one day to the next, come what may. For the first time in Nepal's modern history, we did away with the budget and substituted it with an advance to the government. The Economic Survey for 2007/2008 hasn't been published yet. So no one knows what our performance was in the past year.

The government's regular expenses are soaring and total revenue collection doesn't match spending. We are borrowing and surviving on grants to meet development expenditure. With inflation going up and up, the government wants more money to subsidise the bureaucracy. Administrative reforms are not

planned, which means tax payers will still bear the cost of a bureaucracy that is already bloated and inefficient. The political entities treat the government like a recruitment centre, and add kith and kin to salaried jobs.

It's not just the left parties that want to dole out money on populist largesse. Even right of centre parties want to splurge tax payer's money on handouts. The issue the ideologues ignore is that one can't spend more than one earns. With so many business personalities represented in the Assembly, it will not be surprising if businesses also get tax rebates and subsidies. Allowances for the elderly or cash for legislators will have a long-term bearing, and the compounded effect of such spending can be drastic.

Petroleum subsidies have now added up to Rs 12 billion, and continuing this spending spree will mean losses amounting to five percent of GDP. The money lost on oil subsidies should be what the government should spend on education and health. There are two ways of handling this issue, one is to leave petroleum to the market and allow people who know the business to run it.

The other is to base the

petroleum prices on a fixed rupee tax rather than tax based on a percentage of the price. The government shouldn't be profiting from rising global oil prices at the expense of consumers.

Protectionist Nepali businesses always find ways to convince the government to raise duties, taxes or fees. Every increase in the tax rate benefits the informal trade more than the government. Higher taxes mean more incentive not to pay them. The revenue administration gets its cut, but the government loses out.

What it boils down to is that when the economy is as mismanaged as it is now, we will be even more dependent on foreign aid. The government may get some relief, but aid comes with strings attached, and this will increase foreign interference in our internal affairs.

Nepal will remain a guinea pigland for ODA experimentation, junkets, conferences and seminars at the cost of finally coming to grips with the hard economic realities. If we can rely on Pashupatinath, who needs a budget? ●

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Dhulikhel—Microsoft's Annual Partner Meet was organised at Mirable Resort from 18-19 July. The meet was attended by various dignitaries including director of Partnet Development for Asia Pacific Stephan Cadisch, and Incubation Partner manager Meei Fang Heng. The two-day event comprised of many training sessions for the participants from a variety of resource personnel. During the closing ceremony Rajendra Aryal, CEO of Cyber International Pvt. Ltd. was recognized as the largest sales and services organisation and was given the **Best Partner Award 2008** for Nepal. Cyber International Pvt. Ltd., established in 1996, is the largest sales and service organisation for Microsoft products in Nepal. In the past it has already been recognised with the Microsoft Gold Certified Partner for sales and service.

Grow up

Narayan Wagle in *Kantipur*, July 22

कान्तिपुर

The Maoist candidate may not have won the presidential election but the Maoist ideals did triumph. Now that we have a president in place, Nepal has become a republic in the true sense. However, when Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal left the assembly after the results were announced he did not look happy. In fact, he made serious accusations that the result was ‘unnatural’, ‘impure’, ‘a conspiracy’ and ‘non-political’. The fact that we now have a president and a vice-president, both from the Tarai, itself should be a sign of victory for the Maoists. It

was the Maoists who first pushed for the Tarai autonomy with the Madhesi Mukti Morcha. The Maoists should be proud that a peasant’s son from Janakpur has become the first president of Nepal, a historic achievement in itself. This is not a defeat for the Maoists also because they succeeded in preventing Girija Prasad Koirala or Madhab Kumar Nepal from becoming the president. Since the very first meeting of the constituent assembly, the Maoists had been against the idea of a major party leader holding the presidency. They made inclusion the main criteria for the choice of president. If the Maoists had not nominated Ram Raja Prasad Singh there was little chance that NC would have put up Ram Baran Yadav, and neither would the UML have fielded Ram Prit Paswan. Nepal’s first president is exactly the kind of person the Maoists wanted. Having an NC candidate in the presidency has paved the way for the Maoists to head the government. If the Maoists had won the presidency, the other parties would have ganged up for the prime minister’s post. If the Maoists had supported the NC and the UML for the presidency and speaker, they would not be seen as self-centered and arrogant. The Maoists played a pivotal role in abolishing the monarchy, and the election of the president is the culmination of that struggle. It would be wise for the Maoists to grow up and show that they are a mature political party. The NC, the UML and MJF do not want to form an alliance to head the government. In fact, they are asking the Maoists to lead the government. So why are they hesitating? The people elected the Maoists as the largest party. Now they can’t shirk from their responsibility from leading a government to build a new constitution for a New Nepal.



Populism

Shankar Sharma in *Nepal*, 27 July

नेपाल

If the current budget is populist one, lacking an economic basis, it could tag along a multitude of problems. A strong economic base takes time to create. During that time also we need to create jobs, especially through investments in infrastructure. Monetary rules must be followed. Whether the new government likes it or not, the IMF plays a significant role in ensuring macro economic stability. If not, we risk losing foreign aid and investments and our exclusion from the PRSP and PRGF categories. The new government can benefit from Nepal’s post-conflict status, but the problem lies not in the lack of aid but disbursement. Loan utilisation in Nepal falls just under 50 per cent, we can’t even use half the money allocated. Even when you add grants, we use only 67 per cent.

So how are we supposed to realise the Maoist’s goal of 10-11 per cent economic growth? The largest component of economic development for a country is its assets but obtaining them only from our own domestic sector wouldn’t be enough. There will always be a need for foreign aid. But there are necessary criterias for taking it: a guarantee over the ownership of assets should be included in the budget itself, the process of acquisition must be made simple and clear, and the government’s reputation as an eleventh-hour decision maker must be changed for good.

How to vote

Naya Patrika, 21 July

नयाँ पत्रिका

When more than a dozen votes were wasted as void on Saturday’s presidential election because they were not cast correctly, in separate meetings constituent assembly members from CPN(M), NC and MJF were taught how to cast votes. At the committee office in Singha Durbar, Maoist representatives practiced the voting procedure on a blackboard. Each parliamentary member was taught to write ‘Ram Raja Prasad Singh’ and put a tick mark next to the name. Some of the members said they’d unknowingly put two tick marks on their vote, some had put in their signature and one had even drawn in a hammer and sickle. Meanwhile, the NC directed its members to be punctual and to cast their vote on time if they wanted their candidates to win.

Budget advance

Editorial in *Abhiyan*, 21-27 July

अभियान

The Appropriations Bill announced a rise in government salaries, but it should have been left to the new government. The Finance Minister may have just included this clause to appease civil servants, but this may put a big burden on the treasury and trigger further inflation. Just because the employees get a raise

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doesn't really mean that they will be more productive, or that it will help in the economic development. The government should have make a decision only after studying the experience of other countries in civil service pay rise. The passing of Appropriation Bill for a budget advance means that the new government will have more time to make a new budget after analysis and discussion. If the government ignores the country's economic reality for populism, it will be very dangerous for the country. CA members who watch the economy, including businessmen, have to be particularly watchful.



Media bashing

Raju Thapa in *Himal Khabarpatrika* 16-30 July

On 30 June in *Aba Ke Huncha* program on Nepal Television, I asked the Maoist leader Netra Bikram Chand: "There's a sense that the Maoists are pushing for a president who will do what they say like a cow herder, would you like to comment?" The word 'cow herder' angered the Maoist NTV chairman, Rishi Raj Baral. The following week I explained on air why I used the term 'cow herder', which angered him even more and I was told my program was being pulled off air from mid July.

The program faced difficulty right from the beginning, but after the Maoists took over the Communication Ministry, I had to face the kind of censorship media houses faced during Gyanendra's direct rule. The Maoists say they will support press freedom, but they can't stand criticism. The control over my program was so extreme that I had no say over the subject of discussion, nor the people to interview.

There was a time when UML leader Madhab Kumar Nepal was ready to come to the studio but I was asked to not invite him. I had to call Nepal and apologise. Baral threatened to call the technicians to pull the program off air if I went ahead with the Nepal interview. Instead he asked me to call Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Mohan Baidya and Baburam Bhattarai to the program. But even within the Maoist ranks I was told not to invite Hishila Yami, Matrika Yadav and Barsha Man Pun.

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PADAM GHALE in DHAULAGIRI BASE CAMP

The traditional trekking model in Nepal is a two-week to one-month hiking holiday which requires visitors to trudge up and down mountains to reach a scenic valley and trudge back out along the same route.

Take Manang. Trekkers usually take one week to walk up the hot and humid Marsyangdi Valley. Finally they get to Pisang and zip through the most scenic part of the Annapurna circuit. Huff and puff up Thorung La so breathless that one is in no mood to admire the vistas, clamber down the other side to Jomsom and fly back.

The advantage of this was that the tourists had time to acclimatise and know Nepal in all its diversity not just the high mountains but also the lush, deep valleys. They also spread their wealth in tea shops along the way and employed porters. The disadvantage was that they had to rush through the best part.

As roads go up to some of the popular trekking areas, including the Kali Gandaki and Marsyangdi Valleys, the once remote trekking areas are now more accessible. Some people lament this, but the good thing is that trekkers now have the chance to spend more time at their destination to explore, or just chill out.

More and more trekking companies are planning to fly their guests in the autumn trekking season up to high valleys like Dhaulagiri, Langtang or Kangchenjunga so their clients don't waste time on the trek-in.

This remote and exotically unspoilt valley behind Dhaulagiri would take more than two weeks to walk to from Beni. But in a helicopter, it is a half-hour flight and after that trekkers can enjoy Nepal's nature in all its unspoilt glory and be choppered out after a holiday of a life-time.

The trek takes one through the Swiss Base Camp on the southwest slopes of Dhaulagiri to the Italian Base Camp: a valley that, so far, was only frequented by mountaineers. The sheer cliffs on both sides of the valley soar above, narrowing the sky. Waterfalls roar down hundreds of metres from rock ledges on either side, Alpine choughs fly in great flocks high above a landscape that remains as it has for millions of years.

Occasionally from a windy saddle between the Base Camps, one catches a glimpse of Dhaulagiri, unrecognisable because we are right below it and its familiar summit pyramid is foreshortened. And lined up to the western horizon are the lesser Dhaulagiris: lesser in height but all above 7,500 metres and all major massifs in their own right.

After two weeks of roughing it in the glaciers, walking along moraines and being in the wild, it's time once more to rendezvous with the helicopter at 3300m.

From the valley below comes the familiar thump-thump of the Ecuriel. The pilot gets out, opens the cabin door and refuels his aircraft from jerry cans he's flown up for the flight down to Pokhara. ●

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Heli-trekking adds a new horizon to mountain tourism

ALL PICS: PADAM GHALE

the wild



Garbage camp

The closer one gets to base camp on Himalayan peaks, the more you see garbage. In fact, Dhaulagiri Base Camp looks a bit like Thamel when Kathmandu's trash collection people are on strike.

There are mountains of garbage in sacks that have been moved down by the glacier, and judging from the content some of them are from expeditions 20 years old. Mysteriously, there are dozens of old tyres scattered across the glacier: Gorakhkali, Jet Rib from India, Seenma from China. Was there some kind of protest by porters in which they were burning tyres? Or were they laid out to cushion cargo drops from helicopters? No one knows, but it's an ugly sight.

There is even the carcass of a helicopter that crashed here last year, it has been stripped of all its avionics and only the aluminium skeleton remains. One day the glacier is going to deposit all this deep-frozen rubbish at the terminal moraine.

One is happy to get out of the squalour of Base Camp once more to the pristine valley below.



FLY TO ANOTHER WORLD: Chopper drop-off point in the Mayandi Valley offers breathtaking views of waterfalls, and mountains all around (far left).

Dhaulagiri Base Camp that would take a two-week walk from Beni is just a few days away from a heli-drop. This awesome view of Dhaulagiri from the north can be possible if trekking times could be shortened by flying part of the way.

A helicopter drops trekkers at Annapurna Base Camp (opposite), cutting the trek-in time by up to four days. After acclimatisation, they can explore hitherto inaccessible areas.

The power of water

ANALYSIS by PRABHU GHATE

NEW DELHI—The history of Indo-Nepal water resource cooperation is a litany of dashed hopes, shelved projects, unimplemented treaties, and mutual recrimination. The small-neighbour-big-brother syndrome that pervades relations in every sphere invariably arouses suspicion of unequal benefits when governments are involved.

India is now trying to get governments out of it. Hydropower seems to enjoy the support of all the major parties in Nepal, including the Maoists, whose manifesto talks of adding 10,000MW of capacity in mission mode over the next 10 years through domestic and external financing.

Two MoUs were signed before the elections with private Indian developers to build and operate hydropower plants for electricity export to India. GMR bagged the 400MW Arun III and Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam got the 300MW Upper Karnali. The World Bank's IFC announced on Tuesday that it would finance 25 per cent of the cost of both projects.



India lets private investors take the lead on sensitive Nepal projects

A third project, the 600MW Budi Gandaki, did not get proper bids and is being re-tendered. Bids were evaluated according to pre-announced criteria, including the share of free power the developer would make available to the domestic market, and the share of equity it would offer the NEA.

Based on the winning bids, and subsequent negotiations in consultation with a parliamentary committee, GMR will share 12 per cent of the electricity produced as free power and offer 27 per cent as equity to the NEA, while Satluj will share 22 per cent as free power.

The highly seasonal waters of Nepali rivers are largely wasted during the monsoons as they run down to the sea through the Ganges, causing floods on the way. Dry season flows are insufficient to irrigate even Nepal's Tarai. Meanwhile, Nepal is looking at 56-hour powercuts this winter. The irony is that power-rich Nepal imports power from India while a huge energy-starved market sits just across the border.

GMR and Satluj now have to form JVs with the NEA, apply for survey licences, tie up the financing, enter into power purchase agreements with India's Power Trading Corporation or other buyers, and prepare detailed project reports. All this is expected to take two years, after which construction could take another five years.

Some civil society groups remain opposed, and one of them has challenged the MoUs in the courts on the grounds that under the interim constitution agreements entailing the export of natural resources require the approval of a two-thirds majority of the parliament. However the court refused to grant a stay, and may decide that while water is a natural resource, electricity produced from it is not.

A possible complication can be the federal arrangements the new constitution will propose for sharing benefits of hydropower projects. What will happen to projects already in the pipeline for the expected two years during which the constituent assembly does its work?

Dams and storage reservoirs decrease excessive monsoon flows, alleviating floods, while increasing flows in the dry season, rendering the water much more valuable for irrigation. Some activists argue that these regulated flows are a valuable byproduct of hydropower projects which India should be willing to pay for, just as it is willing to pay for electricity. This will be a factor in the huge high dam projects that have been under investigation for decades now.

It has arisen even in the case of the 750MW West Seti being promoted by the Australian Snowy Mountain group with Indian, ADB and Chinese investment. The promoters argue that they have no way of charging for downstream irrigation and flood control benefits in India. Irrigation water is a notoriously under-priced resource in India as it is in Nepal.

This is an area where the governments will have to come in, although investors are hoping it will not further hold up projects like West Seti, which has been 13 years in the making.

Prabhu Ghate is a columnist for the *Economic Times* in New Delhi.

Nepal's energy

Required immediately: more power to meet domestic shortfall and to reduce the trade gap by exporting to India

DEWAN RAI

Whichever government comes to power, the first thing it will have to start working on will be energy.

In any other country, this would be considered an emergency: Nepal is going through its first-ever monsoon power cuts. This winter load-shedding will go up to 56 hours a week. The generation shortfall will be 35 per cent below demand this December.

Not just this year, Nepal will suffer an average of to 6-8 hours of power cuts a day till 2013 because no new major power generation schemes are coming on line till then except the 70MW Middle Marsyangdi.

The other emergency is Nepal's widening balance of payments gap with India, which reached Rs 96 billion this year because of the higher cost of petroleum imports and falling export. The trade imbalance is expected to grow, and the only way to narrow the gap in the medium term is by launching

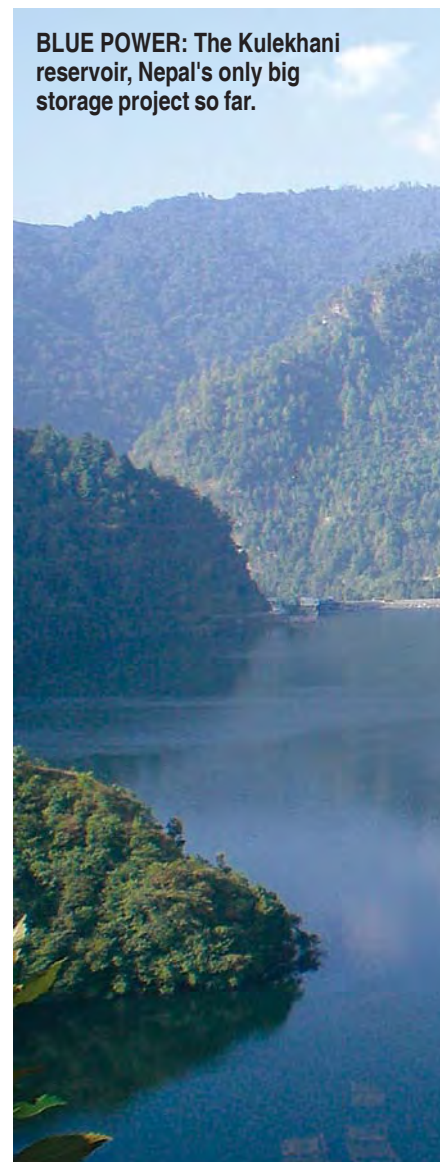
hydroelectricity export projects immediately.

There will be other benefits from aggressive investments in hydro infrastructure: it will generate tens of thousands of jobs. In their economic masterplan, the Maoists say they want to generate 10,000 megawatts in the next 10 years to meet domestic demand and to export to India. This would require investments at a time when most international companies are wary of doing business in Nepal because of political risk.

Nepal's electricity demand is rising at 10 per cent a year, but could increase if the peace dividend finally spurs economic growth. Domestic investors and community generation schemes could easily add up to 50MW a year. Industry analysts see a role for large foreign joint ventures in projects to export power to India.

They point to the Electricity Act of 1992 that allowed 300MW of power to be generated in six years in the mid-1990s, doubling

BLUE POWER: The Kulekhani reservoir, Nepal's only big storage project so far.





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emergency



PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

generation capacity, and say Nepal's new government needs to make a similar breakthrough.

"Ten year ago, no one even wanted to hear about investment in hydropower but now we have investors lining up to put money into this sector," says Gyanendra Lal Pradhan of Butwal Power Company, one of Nepal's new breed of entrepreneurs with stakes in seven hydro projects worth 350MW in pipeline.

"It's simple demand and supply," Pradhan adds, "demand is growing so we need to add supply. But we have to be fast, if we start today we may be able to bring load shedding down to zero in seven years, otherwise this shortage will last till 2016."

The time is right for new investments in hydropower to meet domestic shortfalls and to export to India. The Maoists have expressed a strong commitment to develop the sector, but investors are still wary.

Earlier this year, the government issued licenses to two Indian companies for big budget projects: Arun III (402MW) and Upper Karnali (300MW), both dedicated export projects. *(See box)*

On Monday, the World Bank's soft loan division, the International Finance Corporation announced in Kathmandu that would be financing 25 per cent of the cost of both projects.

The government is re-inviting bids for a storage project on the Budi Gandaki, and a slew of new

projects are coming on line that will generate 150MW in the next two years.

The earliest any of the export projects will start selling power to India will be 2015, and that is if work starts right away. The 750MW Australia-Nepal export joint venture West Seti project has been delayed by 10 years and will take another 10 years to be completed.

SN Power is exploring the Upper Tama Kosi II and III (500MW), while NEA, with public shares, is starting Upper Tama Kosi I next year to be completed by 2013.

Some, like Ajaya Dixit of Nepal Water Conservation Foundation, say that Nepal should concentrate on fulfilling domestic demand and promoting value-added industries first before expending time and money on export projects which have long gestation.

"Rather than just sell electricity, it would be better to generate downstream benefits from using electricity," he says, "electricity can be the primary mover of socio-economic progress in Nepal."

Others say meeting domestic demand should go hand-in-hand with exports to India to balance the trade gap. Says Balam Pradhan of the Nepal Hydropower Association: "We have to produce enough energy for domestic economic growth, but we also need to export electricity to bridge the trade gap." ●

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Olympic hopefuls

China enters the 2008 Olympics looking to compete for the overall medals title, and dominance by the hosts in a number of sports will help in that goal. China's overall haul will largely depend on their showing in sports where they usually dominate.

One of the Chinese main strongholds has been **badminton** where the nation actually has seen the men and women world number ones - Lin Dan and Xie Xingfang - become a couple.

With a planned marriage coming after the Beijing Games, both Lin and Xie hope to bring a 2008 gold medal to their married life. But Chinese badminton possesses so many top talents that a number of the shuttlers left home are better than many of the competitors in Beijing.

The same is the case in Chinese **table tennis**, where both the men and women are expected to dominate the podium after 33 medals in 20 events including 16 golds since table tennis became an Olympic sport in 1988. The main story being the world's number one player Wang Hao, who will be looking to improve on his silver from 2004, when he lost in the final against South Korea's Ryu Seung Min.

The 2008 Olympics could also see a number of siblings share gold medal moments. The **wrestling** field has a trio of siblings, including two-time Olympic welterweight champion Buvasai Saitiyev and his younger brother Adam, who claimed middleweight gold in 2000 from the dominating Russia team.

The Japanese sister duo of Chiharu and Kaori Icho both won wrestling medals in Athens and are reigning world champions while American brothers Mike and Bill Zadick both collected freestyle medals at the 2006 World Championships.

Another American family story is in **taekwondo** where Steven Lopez is a two-time defending Olympic champion and younger siblings Mark and Diana are making their Olympic debuts in Beijing. And oldest brother Jean will be coaching Team USA for the second time.

A final pair of siblings looking for gold are the New Zealand identical twin rowers Georgina and Caroline Evers-Swindell, who could bring home another double sculls gold medal as the 2004 Olympic champions took silver at the 2007 Worlds behind the Chinese duo of Qin Li and Liang Tian.



With the Games less than three weeks away, who are the stars to look out for in Beijing?

In the **weightlifting** world, Hossein Rezazadeh will be hoping to clinch super heavyweight gold for the third straight time but Turkey's Halil Mutlu has decided against attempting to win a fourth straight gold medal after failing to lift his target weight in practice.

There is an absolute star-in-the-making in **triathlon** where Vanessa Fernandes of Portugal finished eighth at Athens 2004 as an 18-year-old and has since won five straight European titles and the 2007 World crown. The world of **gymnastics** always brings in new stars and Shawn Johnson of the US is the favourite for the much-cherished all-around individual gold. China's Yang Wei is the men's favourite.

The modern **pentathlon** women's competition promises a top-notch showdown between two-time reigning world champion Amelie Caze of France and Egypt's 19-year-old hopeful Aya Medany. Tony Estanguet and Michal Martikan will continue their ongoing canoe battle and the women's sport looks to move past the retirement of the legendary Brigit Fischer, the owner of eight golds and 27 world titles.

Perhaps the most dominating side in team sports is the US **softball** team. Team USA is fully expected to clinch their fourth gold medal in the fourth Olympics after putting on an amazing display at Athens 2004, out-scoring their opponents 51-1 in nine games.

Softball and baseball are both on their way off the Olympic program, definitely a disappointment for Cuba since they have captured three of the four Olympic golds along with silver in 2000 while also claiming 25 world titles including 12 of the last 13. In **field hockey**, all three nations Australia, Germany and Netherlands can sweep the men and women golds. And the US and Brazil are expected to battle Russia and China for gold in **volleyball**. ●



Nepal hopes for at least a bronze in Beijing

PICS: MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

well, and at least besting the national record in their events. Because they were selected through the Olympic wildcard system, most athletes have not been able to practice more than a few months.

“At this point, just participating will be a big experience,” says Chandrakala Thapa who was chosen for the 100 meter. Kamal Adhikari was informed of his selection in weightlifting only on 10 July and hasn’t had much time to practice. So he is looking at the Olympics as a practice for the South Asian Games in 2010.

The NOC is keeping its fingers crossed about Deepak Bista who won gold medals in three South Asian Games in a row as well as the American Governor’s Cup. In the Athens Olympics in 2008, Nepal’s great hope was Sangina Baidya (see: ‘Shining Sangina’, #199).

Unfortunately, the Nepali media so far has only been interested in the politics and quarrels within the NOC and not on profiling the athletes. NOC is planning to put up billboards of the players, but with time ticking away, it seems to be too late in the game. ●



“It really de-motivates our athletes”.

Although it’s easy to be jaded and cynical about Nepali sports, it’s the hard work, determination and optimism of the athletes that is the saving grace. Hopes are high, for example, that Deepak Bista brings back a medal for taekwondo like Bidhan Lama, who won the bronze in the 1988 Olympics.

Bista has probably undergone the most rigorous training among all Nepali athletes for this Olympics. He is in Korea for the final phase of training under a scholarship by the Olympic Committee that covers all his costs.

Another hopeful is Arjun Basnet, who is in the marathon. Arjun has run in international

competitions and done the high-altitude Annapurna marathon. Could this be the Olympics when Nepali runners finally break out like the Ethiopians and Kenyans have done? Running at high altitude could give Nepali marathoners an edge, if they had better training and diet.

The rest of Team Nepal is setting its eyes on performing

ROMAL ARYAL

She grunts. Sweat drops fly as Debu Thapa lifts her opponent, turns him over with her arms, balances him on her back—all the time keeping a straight face for the camera.

Debu is representing Nepal in judo at the Olympic Games in Beijing next month. She won the silver at the 10th SAF Games and is undergoing vigorous training.

“If not a medal, I hope to at least bring back a diploma,” she says modestly. Seven other Olympians will accompany Debu to Beijing along with 22 other ‘officials’ next week. But as the calendar gets closer to D-day, Nepali athletes are up to their ears in the politics involving the Nepal Olympic Committee.

NOC’s Jeevan Shrestha says it is sad that this happens before every international sports meet.



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EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Connection**, solo Charity Art exhibition by Juju kaji Maharjan, until 6 August, 2PM onwards at 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath, 9851050299

EVENTS

- ❖ **Triplets of Belleville**, a screening by Alliance Francaise, 27 July, 7PM, 4241163
- ❖ **Dancing/yoga-latey** 1-14 September, Rs 300 per session, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan, 9803673551
- ❖ **Summer Cult Film Festival**, at the Lazimpat Gallery Café throughout July and August.
- ❖ **Monsoon madness package** at Shangri-la Village Resort, Pokhara Rs 5999 and get back Rs 5000 to spend on any hotel facilities. Also available is the Yeti Airlines Special offer. 4435741
- ❖ **Tantric Dance of Nepal** presented by Kalamandapa, every Tuesday 7PM at Hotel Vajra and every Saturday 11AM at Patan Museum.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Badri & Durga Kharel** a composer/singer duo from Darjeelling performing at nepa-laya's Paleti series, 'r'-sala theatre, July 25, 4412469
- ❖ **HyJazz Club** every Friday from 8.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu, 4489800
- ❖ **Fusion and Looza Band** every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat, 4412193
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Yankey and friends** live acoustic music every Friday at the Bourbon room Restro-bar, Lal Darbar.
- ❖ **Fusion and Classical Music by Anil Shahi** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, Sufi and raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 8PM. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **Walk and lunch**, 26 July, Shivapuri Heights Cottage
- ❖ **The Fun Cafe**, discounts available at lunch 12.30-2.30 PM and 6.30 -10.30 PM dinner at Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu, Rs. 800, till 31 July, 4411818
- ❖ **Sixth Annual Wine Festival** until September at Kilroy's, Jyatha. 4250440
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **New menu** at Dohkaima, Patan Dhoka, 552213
- ❖ **Masala**, an Indian restaurant on Jawalakhel, St.Mary's school road, 4421634
- ❖ **Steak Fare** every Monday and Tuesday, 7PM-10.30 PM, Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4489361
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600, 4412999
- ❖ **Asian Food Special** at Jalan Jalan restaurant, Kupondole height, 5544872
- ❖ **Steak special** with free Irish coffee at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel, 4700043
- ❖ **Continental and café item** with Live band every Friday at Vintage Cafe and Pub, Woodland Complex, Durbarmarg.
- ❖ **Lajawab** tandoori and kabab festival, 7-10PM every Friday at the Hotel Himalaya, Rs 550.
- ❖ **Home made pasta** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Hot summer spicy food** at the Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Kupondole Heights. 5544872
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Mango étagère** mango delicacies 4.30-6.30 PM at the Lounge, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Steak escape** with Kathmandu's premier steaks available for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- ❖ **Bourbon Room Restro-bar** open for lunch and dinner with over 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
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 8.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **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 LeMeritien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Dhamaka** a Nepali style barbeque with a pan-Indian fusion at the Splash Bar and Grill, Hotel Radisson, 7PM, every Friday. 4411818
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Lavazza coffee** Italy's favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, Roadhouse Café Pulchok and Thamel. 4700612



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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Nepal has been, and for another week, will be in the grip of a two-pronged monsoon pincer from the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. The two troughs are set to collide over northern India over the weekend, and this will involve copious showers over the midhills of central Nepal which includes Kathmandu. This satellite radar image taken on Thursday morning shows a large low pressure area hovering south of Kathmandu. Depending on how the two systems support or cancel each other out, one could get some hot and humid sunny spells during the day. But by evening there will be heavy localised showers in the Valley continuing into night drizzles.



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एफएम १०२ थोप्लो ८ मेगाहर्ज

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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

SHOW OF HANDS: CA members unanimously voting for Subhas Nembang as the Speaker of the Assembly on Thursday.



KIRAN PANDAY

JAGUARS AND HORSES: The stretched Jaguar that ex-king Gyanendra used to drive himself is now the official presidential limo. It waits at Sital Nibas on Wednesday to take President Ram Baran Yadav for a wreath-laying ceremony at the Martyr's Memorial.



KIRAN PANDAY

SIDE BY SIDE: First Daughter Sujata Koirala at the presidential swearing in on Wednesday with RP leader Kamal Thapa. Prime Minister Koirala handed in his resignation to President Yadav after the ceremony. Thapa met Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Thursday to convince him to lead the new government.



KIRAN PANDAY

DISCIPLINED DIPS: Kathmandu-based ambassadors wait patiently for their turn to congratulate President Yadav after the swearing-in at Sital Nibas on Wednesday.

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Spooked by spooks

From what the Ass has been able to piece together, here is a blow-by-blow account of the fast-paced events of this past week in which the Maoists double-crossed the UML, the UML double-crossed the Maoists and the MJF tripled-crossed everyone else.

Wednesday afternoon: JN and PKD still aren't able to reach an agreement. Out of sheer exasperation, PKD says ok, time is running out, we can accept Makunay as president. Jhallu thinks, hey that was easy, and immediately also demands Defence and Home Ministry as part of a package deal. Unbeknownst to the Eh-males, the Baddies have been working all along on **Plan B** with the Madhesis.

Thursday evening, Jhallu, Makunay and other sidekick comrades attend a dinner at the Chinese Embassy at which they are patted on their backs for forging **Bam Ekata**. The Chinese are said to prefer a united left that will be called just 'Communist Party of Nepal' so the Great Helmsman's name will be forever jettisoned.

Dinner over, the comrades hurry over to Pistachio Palace to meet PKD but are kept waiting for half-an-hour cuz he's meeting his handler. Finally, a white-haired guy emerges from El Supremo's bedroom, hiding his face behind the lapel of a trench coat. PKD comes out in his night

suit, but has suddenly gone cold on the deal.

Thursday morning, Jhallu calls Pukada to say he ain't insisting on the ministries, but it's too late. The Baddies announce a **talmel** with the Forum and back ex-terrorista Raja Ram for president. Makunay's hypertension acts up, Jhallu goes into shock and colleagues see steam coming out of his ears. Then the Forum drops its bombshell by dumping the Baddies to form an alliance with the UML and NC. Now, it is the turn of Pukada's ears for steam to come out of. With everyone stabbing everyone else in the back, the Baddies are too busy to do their math and therefore lose the runoff vote in the assembly.

So badly does **Giprako** want to exact revenge on Pukada for refusing to hand him the presidency he overcomes his own ambition and actually agrees to field a kangresi candidate other than himself. Thursday morning he summons Ram Chandra Poudel, Ram Sharan Mahat and Ram Baran Yadav and asks: "Which of you three Rams wants to be president?" Ram Chandra and Ram Sharan, being political animules, say "maybe next time". Girjau then forces Ram Baran to volunteer, figuring that since the other Ram has Baddie backing, he has as much chance as a snowflake in hell to get elected. The

rest, as they say, is historical. Moral of the story to UML, NC, MJF and the Maoists: shit happens.

Meanwhile, in Buddhanagar, the split in the Baddies got worse when **Mohan Sir, Netra Dai & Co** noticed nefarious foreign spooks infiltrating their party. By midweek things got so bad that the Biplab and the Baburam factions have a fistfight in Birganj, one accusing the other of being **Injun** stooges. The hardline faction that has control over the party mouthpiece, *Janadesh*, writes thinly veiled attacks

against foreign conspirators and their lackeys.

No sooner had the Maoists said they won't lead a new govt, Giprako's sagging ambition suddenly perks up at the prospect of being PM again. The Forum also stakes its claim to PM-ship if the Maoists decline: imagine President Yadav **and** Prime Minister Yadav. They will have to toss a coin about which one should attend the SHARK summit.

It looks like the Nepal police mutiny is spreading to Singapore. A dozen Nepali nationals in the

Singapore Police have already been deported for daring to question the salary discrepancy with farang cops. The Singaporeans promptly deported the lot. Maybe that's why they call Singapore a "police state"?

And the winning entry for this week's New Name Contest comes from Anonymous via email: 'If **Kantipur** is bought over by the Maoists, they will call it **Krantipur**.'

Entries to the New Name Contest: [ass\(at\)nepalitimes.com](mailto:ass(at)nepalitimes.com)



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