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Weekly Internet Poll # 434

Q. Did the Maoists miscalculate by replacing Pashupati priests?

Total votes: 3,457

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Q. What is your reaction to soon-to-be 20-hour power cuts?

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Flame of truth



CHONG ZI LIANG

KANAK MANI DIXIT
in JANAKPUR

It was only in death that one got to know what a fine journalist Nepal had lost in Uma Singh.

Working in the most lawless part of Nepal, Uma Singh was fearless with her written and spoken word. She reported in particular against violence and discrimination against women. She did this with a sense of immediacy and professionalism in radio and print and in three languages.

Uma Singh was committed to bring to book the Siraha-based Maoist cadre who had disappeared her father and brother during the war. She wrote the truth and she named names. The insecurity all around her in the past years seemed to make her all the more fearless.

Someone decided that she could not be allowed to live and on Sunday night a gang of

barbarians entered her one-room dera and hacked her to death.

Ground-level journalism, especially in the lawless middle-eastern Tarai, takes guts these days. At the frontlines are reporters and editors who wage a daily struggle amidst relentless political instability. Our nation wide FM radio revolution has filled the airwaves with energetic discourse, their print colleagues constantly push the envelope. Uma Singh was one of the best among them, a journalist who understood her calling intuitively and deeply.

Singh's murder must push us to oppose the infrastructure of violence and impunity in Nepal, which has put innocent citizens in the line of fire. By extinguishing a journalist, the criminals have violated the public's right to know.

The Maoist leadership, it has to be said, set a sad example by serving as a role model for opportunists who seek to use

violence to various ends, by having given violence a cruel sheen of political respectability. We must demand from those who lead the government today that they transform into practitioners of democratic politics. We ask them to publicly renounce violence as a political tool.

And yet, an elected prime minister threatens armed revolt. Against whom?

The death of Uma Singh will inspire more young women and men to take up journalism because Nepalis now know the vital need for free media. The pull of good journalism has become irresistible, because free media can assure the public that the future can be better than our past by enabling an accountable government.

In the other direction, in the meek submission to violence and the appeasement of those who continue to use it to get their way, lies stasis, silence and the feudalistic state.

STOP PRESS

Prime Minister Dahal has postponed his trip to Norway and Finland that was to begin on Saturday, citing crises at home. The editorial on page 2 ('Happy holidays') had already gone to press when the announcement was made.

After we emerge from mourning the tragic circumstance of her passing, Uma Singh will shine like a beacon to those who will become tomorrow's committed young journalists. She is the true exemplar. ●

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SPORTAGE
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HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is jetting off again, this time to Norway and Finland.

We can't see the purpose of this visit at this time, unless with all the crises at home he wants a break. Whoever has been advising the prime minister of late has given him another bad piece of advice: you don't leave your country when there is an energy emergency, when the peace process is stuck, there is a breakdown in law and order and a mutiny is brewing within your own party.

The ostensible reason for the visit: to inspect hydropower plants just doesn't hold water. If he really wanted an urgent fix for the energy crisis, it would have been better to go to Lucknow and Patna. Building trust with India to immediately import 200MW and getting the necessary transmission lines strung up from Gorakhpur to Butwal would have made much more sense.

Ensuring that transmission lines damaged by the Kosi should have been this government's priority five months ago. If those pylons were up, power cuts this month would have been only 10 hours a day. If a proper ferry had been installed, 24 women and children wouldn't have died in the boat disaster on 4 January.

It is just as well that an inspection of Danish windmills is off the itinerary. The PM may want to check out the Nordic power pool as a model for regional energy sharing. Norwegian hydropower investment is important for Nepal, but any new major project in the Tama Kosi basin is going to take another five years to come on line. And Finnish IT companies aren't about to set up BPOs in Nepal with our current labour relations, skills incapacity and energy famine.



SHRUTI SHRESTHA / KANTIPUR

The only real issue for us is whether the PM is going to get the message from his hosts to start behaving like the elected leader of a country that he is, and not like a paranoid party boss. His threat this week to take power by force if his government is brought down should be proof to the Scandinavian democracies that this man hasn't purged himself of totalitarian tendencies. In the lineup of portraits at the party unification ceremony, just look at where the Maoists get their inspiration from.

Prime Minister Dahal needs a quick crash course in democracy next week in Oslo and Helsinki. And if he can retain even a fraction of what he learns about the functioning of democratic institutions, the role of the media as a check and balance to authority, and about delivering services then the visit may just be worth the trouble and expense.

We hope Norwegian and Finnish diplomats here have briefed their home governments about what this elected leader has been up to back home: saying one thing and doing another.

Happy holidays, Mr Prime Minister. The country will await your return in pitch darkness.

Untangling the knot

Some lessons from other peace processes

The 'mood of doom' surrounding Nepal's peace process is not only affecting Nepalis. The UN Secretary-General is 'disappointed' by limited progress here. He told the Security Council last week of his particular concern about the parties' failure to convene the Special Committee on army integration, and about tensions between political actors which 'imperil completion of the peace process.'



GUEST COLUMN
Elizabeth Sellwood

The Secretary-General is well aware that peace agreements often come unstuck when parties begin to implement them. Between 1945 and 1999, 40 per cent of agreements to end civil wars broke down within two years. One scholar, Elizabeth Cousens (who also held a senior position in UNMIN) has set out several reasons for the risk of a relapse into violence in the post-agreement phase: tough issues that were deliberately avoided in the initial search for consensus (like army integration) re-emerge; differing interpretations of what was agreed must be accommodated; and parties must often deal with eruption of localised conflicts.

Political conditions also tend to change when the euphoria of a peace agreement wears off. People become frustrated that economic and security conditions do not improve.

Nepal's leaders must implement divisive elements of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement at a time when they may be facing diminishing control over their own constituencies. According to Jean Arnault, who led UN missions in Guatemala, Burundi and

Afghanistan, the weakening of previously powerful leaders is common as societies move from war to peace: while the 'bipolar' atmosphere of war forces people to choose one side over the other, in peacetime this atmosphere changes. Leaders' authority over their more radical followers often declines.

Nepal's leaders face an additional hurdle: difficult negotiations on security arrangements. The parties must convince their armies either to demobilise, or to work with former enemies in a common security framework. Mediators often seek agreement on security arrangements as one of the terms of the ceasefire. In Nepal, this negotiation has yet to take place.

Party leaders and Special Committee members have substantial challenges ahead of them in agreeing on how to integrate and rehabilitate Maoist combatants and reform the Nepal Army. Since 1945, military integration has been a component of 34 peace agreements. While Nepal's situation is unique, the questions it needs to consider (numbers to be integrated, training, civilian rehabilitation) have been addressed many times elsewhere.

Nepal's Special Committee will have no shortage of advice in developing a plan. The US and UK have already offered support, and a UN team which visited recently found that the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Chief of Army Staff and Maoist army commanders all sought UN support for the Special Committee. The UN has extensive experience in helping former adversaries to agree on the process, timetable and outcome for army integration, and has succeeded in several circumstances that were initially less promising than Nepal's.

In other peace processes,

negotiations on military reform have stalled for months. In El Salvador, where FMLN guerrillas and government forces fought for a decade, a huge gulf divided the parties. The FMLN wanted to abolish the national army, while the government sought to restrict discussion to 'restructuring'. After nine months of deadlock, UN mediator Alvaro de Soto presented the parties with a UN-drafted working proposal on the future of the armed forces, which drew on both parties' demands. It took a further 14 months of negotiations to persuade the parties to agree on the most sensitive issues.

Nepal's leaders will also need to clarify the line between political and military, and build trust between military commanders. Jean Arnault argues that peace agreements cannot be implemented without establishing trust between belligerents' force commanders, because the 'capability of the armed wings of the belligerents, and particularly the governmental Army, to harm their former adversary will not go away, even in the case when both armed forces are merged – one could add: particularly in the latter case.' In light of this observation, reported exchanges between the Minister of Defence and the Chief of the Army Staff are worrying.

Concerted international support can help Nepali leaders to understand their options and reach agreement on army integration. Pressure from civil society might push Maoists and the NC towards realising that although agreeing on security arrangements and other unfulfilled will be difficult, it is time to get on with it. ●

Elizabeth Sellwood has worked for the United Nations, the UK parliament and NGOs. She lives in Kathmandu.

LETTERS

FRUSTRATED

Finance Minister Bhattarai seems to believe that ignorance is bliss, otherwise why would he say that the situation for business is not getting worse ("I am not frustrated, and no one should be" # 433). There are 16 hours of power cuts every day, the security situation is getting worse, business owners are treated like dogs and his own party goons are the front runners in that. Maoist unions are creating havoc. Everyone was optimistic about economic reforms when Bhattarai became finance minister but that sadly has been converted to despair by his government's lax policies and focus on vote-bank politics. I cannot recall a worse crisis than this for Nepal.

Swagat R Pyakurel, Biratnagar

ARMY

CK Lal's column was ambiguous ('It is Nepal's army,' #433) There is no doubt that the army is Nepal's Army but the question is how to keep politics out of it. The army may have some flaws but its

contributions to the nation are much more.

As far as the Madhesi's discontent regarding racial composition of Nepal Army is concerned, the selection of Gurkha soldiers by the British Army gives us some insight as to why a certain institution prefers a certain group of people. The size of the army was increased to counter the Maoists after the police failed miserably. The threats from Maoists have not yet ended as we are witnessing in our everyday lives. here are number of terrorist groups evolving in the Tarai.

Neeraj Roy, Asian College of Journalism, Chennai

PASHUPATI

Culture does not create power. Power, the quest for it and the use of it, creates culture. Take for example the current institutionalisation of anarchy ala competing interest groups within Nepal. This culture of violence was created as a result of the quest for power by the Maoist cliché and the ambition's eventual fulfilment. The idea of an all encompassing

national deity in the Pashupatinath temple was used by the monarchical Nepali state to push this policy of homogenisation. However, realities of power differences meant that national identity would have to be sacrificed while choosing the priest for this particular symbol of national identity.

The Maoists are playing on the historical idea of using the Nepali identity to keep their power status through the support of a larger majority. In a system such as Nepal, which lacks strong authority, all actors vying for power feel insecure and want to increase their quest for survival.

Nishant Acharya, email

SPINNING OUT

Lying, it is said, is a mark of a good politician ('Spinning out of control, # 433) but when you hear it every day it gets boring. Inflicting such boredom upon the majority of informed and generally excitement-loving Nepalis may be the route for ultimate demise for the Maoists. They live in a parallel universe. Back in the jungle, it probably went like this: the big

guys spoke, rest listened, nobody questioned. It took Tarzan a while to learn the ways of the civilised world; it will take the Maoists some time too.

Arun Neupane, Texas



THE OX

Nandi is not an ox (page 1 picture, #433). Nandi is Shiva's carrier, gatekeeper but definitively a bull, a glorious example of bovine malehood. My translator's sensibility is disturbed by your calling him an ox. Poor Nandi shouldn't loose his virility in translation.

Kalpana Ghimire Nourisson, email

The moral wasteland

We couldn't save Uma, but we need to save her Mithila homeland

In between 30 years of royal authoritarianism and 15 years of Maoist insurgency and counter-insurgency, the Nepali media exercised unfettered freedom for hardly five years in the early 1990s. Journalism has always been a dangerous field, attracting only the committed, obsessed and the occasional desperado.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

A career in the Nepali media usually implies a lifetime of hardships. Journalists are accustomed to threats and

mighty during difficult times. Living and working in a small town, she lacked access to sympathetic aidocrats, the international press or diplomatic missions. She was a reporter, commentator, editor and news reader all rolled into one, grinding the wheels of a local FM radio station in a town where moneybags and musclemen are inextricably intertwined.

Terrorists normally don't mess with females for the fear of losing their 'saviour' image. Even criminals who have little hesitation in abducting children for ransom mostly stay clear of women. When Maoists abducted Uma's father, mother and brother

is not a tea party.

The second message of Uma's murder was truly terrifying. The attackers seemed to be telling the residents of her Rajaul neighborhood in Janakpur, "Look, we can come for your sister or daughter and no one can protect you, not even the government you have elected."

Maoist minister for Pashupati affairs, Gopal Kirati, is perhaps correct in arguing that the government should provide every citizen with a gun rather than pretending to offer them security. But how about children? Should we arm them too?

Then there is the complete breakdown of social cohesion in the Tarai. The 'us' is the family and everybody else is 'them'. There are Pahadis, Madhesis, Janjatis, Dalits, upper castes, lower castes, forward castes, middle castes, the casteless Jogis and Sanyasis, Muslims, Christians. But no Maithils, Bhojpuriyas, Awadhiyas or Tharus, let alone Nepalis, in the politically charged plains of Tarai-Madhes. If attempts of political agglomeration are not made with some urgency, society risks descending into the Hobbesian world of perpetual war.

Fortunately, the search for a political solution seems to have begun with the formation of a unified political front of Jaikrishna Goit and Jwala Singh who have come together again to form the Tarai Jantantrik Party. They could establish their credentials by first helping to track down Uma's killers.

Nothing debases a movement like the blood of the defenseless and nothing degrades politics like needless violence. Jaikrishna and Jwala need to junk Mao and go back to Marx to save Mithila, Uma's homeland as much as theirs. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

physical assaults especially if they are rural reporters or editors. But the gruesome murder of Uma Singh in Janakpur this week was shocking by all standards.

By all accounts, Uma was an exceptional person. She stuck to the calling despite repeated threats to her life and ultimately perished pursuing some of the highest goals of the mission journalism: activism, belief, courage, doggedness, energy and faith.

She was not someone who had the ears of powerful and could call up the high and

from Siraha three years ago, they released her mother. Women are considered too weak to be worth killing.

It is inconceivable that either Maoists, or any of their offshoots masquerading as messiahs of Madhesi freedom, considered a radio journalist a threat worthy of physical elimination. The lack of apparent motive and the brutality of her murder has shaken every mediaperson in the mofussil. It is possible that the message was in the method. Apparently there is an armed group in the Tarai, which believes that a revolution

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"Why?"

Uma Singh's last word

JANAKPUR—It was impossible to believe that Uma Singh at Ganga Sagar Ghat on Tuesday morning, an FNJ flag draped over her still body, face bandaged, cuts on the head visible, was the same Uma I had met two months ago.

Uma's looks were deceptive, her tiny frame contained abundant energy. By the time I strolled into Radio Today's studio at 6AM in mid-November, Uma had wrapped up her morning bulletin. She was running around the office and passing instructions in a matter-of-fact, professional way.

She briefed me on the format of Janakpur's most popular Maithili political discussion show, *Garma garam chai*. Uma said to both her co-anchor and me: "Please avoid English words. The program is meant for people in the villages." I nodded, a little ashamed my Maithili was not as fluent.



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

We discussed the day's news: Girija Koirala's Birganj rally, Peace Minister Prabhakar's impending visit for unofficial talks with armed groups and the security situation. Her questions showed a sharp political understanding. The sympathy for the Madhes cause was obvious but she was firm in her denunciation of the criminality and violence raging in the name of Madhesi rights.

It is a rare sight in the Tarai: a working woman journalist. And I stayed on to chat a bit more. She told me how opportunities for women were limited in the district, how field reporting was dangerous and how she wanted to move to Kathmandu. I took her number before leaving, thinking I would interview her for a profile at some point.

That will not happen now.

At the cremation site, others who knew her more intimately could not hold back. FNJ president Dharmendra Jha, who is from Dhanusha, broke down. Siraha editor Rajesh Verma, who initiated Uma into journalism at Siraha campus and made her sub-editor of his *Dhrishthikon* weekly, blamed himself for her fate. Sahadev Karki, who put her up at his home in Janakpur, was too stunned to react.

We do not know who killed Uma, but we know her murder was different. Most groups in the Tarai, including Maoists, prefer to use local pistols, available across the



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

border for Rs 1,100. Why did 15 men have to attack Uma at her house, stab her, mutilate her body and leave her unrecognisable? Was the manner of the murder a message in itself?

We know Uma's father and brother were disappeared and killed by the Maoists when her family resisted Maoist attempts to grab their property. She wanted to pursue the case, but the culture of impunity has meant that those killers remain scot-free.

"If they had been arrested, this would never have happened. No one is scared here," her close friend and Siraha colleague, Rajesh Verma told us. We know Uma wrote critically of the Maoists. She had told some friends: "Journalism is a way for me to take revenge and seek justice for my family's suffering."

We also know that there was a major squabble in Uma's family. Uma's father was a landowner in Siraha's Maheshpur village, besides having property in Mirchaiya bazaar. The Maoists had captured it in the past, but some other family members were eyeing it now. These relatives had a cold relationship with both Uma and her mother.

All this was happening in a region where there is no law and order, journalists face constant threats, the culture of silence is deepening and a death is a mere page 3 brief in a newspaper. A deep anger runs across sections here. Many in the Tarai feel that the state has willingly abdicated its responsibility to protect lives because Madhesis, not Pahadis, are dying.

The government could change that perception by acting. District activists say they are never offered the same protection as those in Kathmandu. The capital's civil society can remedy it by continuing to push this issue like they did this week. More than one journalist could be overheard saying, "If we cannot take this case to an end and win justice, there is no point in working here anymore."

As she was breathing her last on the way to Bardibas, Uma's only question was, "Why? What crime did I commit?" If she had stayed on as a meek, submissive woman in her village and accepted existing power and patriarchal norms, Uma may have survived. Her crime was that she spoke up. She fought for her rights: as a citizen, as a journalist. And she carved an independent path. She paid the ultimate price fighting for values we cherish. ●

"Stability is key to investment"

Outgoing Australian ambassador, Graeme Lade spoke to *Nepali Times* about delays in West Seti, resettlement of Bhutan refugees and growing interest among Nepali students to enrol in Australian universities.

Nepali Times: Your three year tenure in Nepal has been very eventful. What is your assessment of Nepal's political transformation?

Graeme Lade: It has indeed been an engrossing and interesting time to be in Nepal and witness history in the making, especially with Jana Andolan II and the peaceful end to the monarchy. Australia has welcomed the conclusion of the peace accords and the Constituent Assembly election outcome. Australia's principal interests in Nepal are all linked to contributing to Nepal's economic development. We hope that all parties to the peace process can work together cooperatively and create the conditions for building a strong and economically prosperous Nepal.

Yet, political instability remains elusive. What does this do to the investment climate?

It is one thing to talk about encouraging foreign investment, but much needs to be done to create a conducive investment environment. Political stability is a key factor for this.

As the Australian ambassador, I have been pleased to support the Australian Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation (SMEC), in trying to take forward the West Seti Hydro-power project. This project will show other foreign investors that a large-scale engineering project on this scale is feasible in Nepal. It will also open up the development of Nepal's rich hydropower potential and help Nepal earn revenue and better address its own longer term power needs. I am proud that an Australian company is acting as a catalyst in bringing Nepal together in a cooperative venture with its two big neighbours, India and China.

Yet, the project is still stuck.

It has indeed been a long and tortuous process to get the West Seti project up and running. I am very hopeful that following a meeting with the Asian Development Bank board in March, the way will be opened for commencement of the project later in 2009.



CHONG ZI LIANG

Looking back, what were some of the highlights of your Nepal posting?

There are a number of things that have given me great professional satisfaction. Perhaps the most significant was, in my former capacity as convenor of the Kathmandu-based representatives of the Core Group on Bhutanese refugees, being able to play a role in helping give the Bhutanese refugees hope after 17 years of languishing in refugee camps. Others also played key roles, including Kanak Mani Dixit in helping to demonstrate to key government officials that third country resettlement was the only viable humanitarian solution at the present time.

I have been pleased to maintain Australia's close links with the Tilganga Eye Centre, including officiating at a ceremony making Dr Sanduk Ruit an honorary Member of the Order of Australia. Other satisfying memories include the Embassy's role in launching cervical cancer vaccine in Nepal, support for the Kathmandu Model Hospital in improving microsurgery expertise and support for the efforts of an Australian doctor in opening the way for kidney transplants in Nepal.

And regrets?

My biggest regret is that as my assignment is soon ending I will not be in Nepal to see the commencement of the West Seti project. My successor will have that honour.

Australia has become a major destination for Nepali

students. What can be done to regulate this so unscrupulous recruiters don't dupe students?

I welcome the growth of Nepali students' interest in going to Australia, which offers quality education and a quality lifestyle. I want to see this interest continue. However, I have been concerned at the proliferation of new education agents and the increase in misleading information and document fraud. I have commenced working with the Nepal government to see if there are ways the activities of education agents can be better regulated. In the meantime, prospective students should do their own research. The Australian government offers free information services. Students should also be aware that no agent can guarantee visa issue or permanent residence and be wary of promises that seem too good to be true.

Any chance that Nepalis can get their Australian visas in Kathmandu itself and not have to apply in India?

The present immigration arrangement through a service delivery partner is working well, both in Nepal and in India, where VFS collects visa applications for Australia in nine locations, including New Delhi. Currently, there are no plans to re-establish an immigration processing office in Kathmandu. The Australian immigration team in New Delhi visits regularly to monitor the service and is always receptive to feedback about how services might be improved.



You can tech too

The annual IT fair, CAN Info Tech kicked off at Bhrikutimandap on Wednesday. More than 115 companies are showcasing various IT related services and products in this six-day long event, which is organised by Computer Association of Nepal. There are altogether 223 stalls along with 15 pavilions exhibiting a host of products like laptop computer, LCD monitor, iPod, pen-drive and hoover, among others. International IT brands like Logitech, HP, Toshiba, Lenovo and IMB are also showcasing their products.

Ringtones

Latest bollywood ringtones are now available for both NTC and Mero Mobile users from Digitainment and Music Nepal. The ringtones can be downloaded through SMS and the list of songs is available online at www.digitainment.com.np.

Lucky scratch

Two people have won Nokia's lucky draw competition organised by the distributors of Nokia phones in Nepal. They won a Nokia N 70 each.

According to the offer, customers get a scratch card on every purchase of a Nokia phone with a cash prize offer and inclusion in the lucky draw. The second lucky draw will be conducted in a month.

Branching out

Himalayan Bank inaugurated a new branch at Itahari on 4 January. The new branch is already running with all standard services.



The truth of Satyam

The lesson is that governance is important in the private sector too

KOLKATA—This is not the best city to talk about governance. West Bengal's capital has been ruled by a communist left front for the past 30 years and they created governance codes that are acceptable only in this bastion of the left.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Kolkata and Kathmandu are getting indistinguishable. Kathmandu is reeling under power cuts that are similar to Calcutta in the 1980s. The only area where we are better is at least we know when the power will be cut. Similarly, a red light is a suggestion for the traffic to stop just as in KTM. The gradual induction of distributive economic policies have created a state that will still love to limp while the rest of India wants to run. And, of course there are the endemic labour problems.

The \$1 billion scam that Satyam Computers pulled off has rocked investor confidence in India. The promoters of the company with the blessings of



the political elite (who are hastily distancing themselves) and the love of the masses for financial results created a company that rode not only the Mumbai bourse but also the NASDAQ.

The promoters literally 'minted' money by getting into real estate, where they did not have core competencies. Be it swinging the metro train deal for Hyderabad or the fast rise of Maytas, their private real estate operations, their greed knew no bounds. A share that was trading at over Rs 500 in good times, is today not worth the paper that the share certificates are printed on. Of course, it opens up opportunities for 'vultures' to attack the company and take over but the delusion for the common investor would remain for days to come.

For Nepal, we should take this up as a wake-up call. This is not another opportunity for the current government to prove why capitalism is wrong, but learn lessons on how we need to regulate the markets. In Nepal, while scams of such a scale has never happened there have been incidents in the past where companies like Neon Air, Nimrod Pharmaceuticals and others who took money from public and vanished but the government remained a mere spectator.

The Big One will hit us when banks begin to rupture. Our banks have been opened for the promoters to cash in through

pledging of their promoter shares and using the money for mostly real estate deals. Just like Satyam computers, websites exist for promoter share purchases in contravention of the Securities Regulations but the government seems happy with banks sprouting like mushrooms and couldn't be bothered with regulation. Unlike Satyam, where only investors and employees were hit with the scam, a banking sector collapse in Nepal would result in a breakdown of society.

The Satyam auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers in India may go the Andersen way in post-Enron USA. The Satyam debacle should also be a wake up call for chartered accountants in Nepal who have till now lobbied hard to get the government not to open the audit sector for international firms. No CA has ever been found guilty in Nepal though numerous complaints are filed against them with the Disciplinary Committee. So the fraternity has one good opportunity to introspect and mend their ways.

There are always lessons to be learnt in every crisis that hits the market. The global markets have matured with successive crises and the law of nature suggests that one can't avoid an Enron or Satyam. But the key issue is to ensure that the circumstances in which these firms duped the investors will not be repeated in Nepal. ●

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A minister out of control

Matrika Yadav loves making headlines—sometimes by confiscating red sandalwood and others by locking LDOs in the toilet. He is in the news again, this time for the seizure of land belonging to Birendra Sah of Mirchaiya, Siraha. If he thinks he can get away with it, he's mistaken.

This recent action by Yadav has led to souring of relationship between him and his party chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal. The Maoists apologised on his behalf and Yadav was made to resign from the cabinet and as a minister. After being relieved from his ministerial responsibilities, Yadav is busy participating in programs organised by his party's sister organisation, Madhesi National Liberation Front in various parts of Siraha and Sarlahi districts.



COMMENT
Uma Singh

Matrika Yadav seized the land belonging to 75 locals including Sah with the help of local YCL on 14 September, 2008. He has distributed 7.15 hectares and a house with 16 rooms to his party's 200 Dalit activists as part of his campaign to nationalise the property of former royal family members. He has alleged that the land actually belongs to former king Gyanendra's brother-in-law Mohan Shahi.

Yadav has ordered local Dalits and landless of Malhaniya, Raghupur, Kuthanama, Jiwa, Mirchaiya, Matiyawa, Rampur, Birta and Prayagpur to build huts and settle over the seized land.

Uma Singh strongly took on Maoist minister Matrika Yadav in this column written before she was murdered this week

The land seizure was initially done by Maoist cadres led by the party's district in-charge and Matrika's own son-in-law Dilip Sah, CA member Mahendra Paswan and local Maoist leader Jagat Yadav on 3 August, but had to be let go under the directives of the Home Ministry. However, it was captured again within less than 24 hours under the direct orders of Yadav.

"The Home Minister interfered in my jurisdiction without informing me," Yadav had said. "I went there to help the Dalit community settle. What I have done is right."

The motive behind the seizure of the land and the house of Birendra Sah is extortion. When Sah failed to pay up an additional Rs 1 million as demanded by the Maoists, they seized this property. However, he maintains that he had already handed over Rs 4 million, and this has been confirmed by former Maoist district secretary Abinash.

Such activities by former minister Yadav have put his credibility on the line. His move has strained his relationship with the Home Ministry and the Maoist leadership has said they will take actions against him.

The Maoist have not returned the seized land in Siraha district even three months after Maoist chairman and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal directed his party cadres to do so. Some 729 hectares of land captured during the war is still under Maoist control.

The 2005 12-point agreement and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, both pledge to create conducive environment for the displaced to return and that the seized land and houses would be handed back to their rightful owners and a committee would be formed for that purpose.

But the committee has not taken shape yet due to political bickering among major parties. During the war, 225 people were displaced from the district. According to Insec, Maoists seized land belonging to 80 families here. Maoist Coordinator in Siraha, Dilip Sah, claimed the Maoist party has so far not issued any instruction regarding returning the seized land to the rightful owners. Sah says the seized land would be returned only after the government forms a Land Reforms Commission. ●

This column by Uma Singh was published in the October 2008 edition of Nepali Sarokar, and translated in myrepubica.com from which it was excerpt

Hunt them down

.....
Editorial in *Annapurna Post*,
14 January

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

On Sunday, reporter Uma Singh who worked in Janakpur Today FM was killed in her rented house. Threats, intimidation and terror against journalists have become common in recent years. In the eastern Tarai, the threats are the most serious yet the government isn't taking any action to address it. It is well



ARCHIVE RADIO TODAY

known that the press has been targeted by those who have waged an armed conflict with a political agenda and have adopted criminal activities as a business. They see press freedom as a direct threat. But, standing up for press freedom has exposed the media to attacks. The government shouldn't limit this investigation to finding the culprits of the incident, but to finding the source of the crime wave that has engulfed the Tarai so that in the future no one will ever think of killing a media person. The government has to give priority to the investigation and hunt down the murders not only to protect journalists but also to safeguard democracy.

Tarai terror

.....
Editorial, *Kantipur*, 13 January

कान्तिपुर

The very night that Uma Singh was murdered, another unidentified group shot dead

40-year old Pachu Hazara in Rautahat. In the last six months at least 100 people have lost their lives in the Tarai. Not a day passes in the Tarai without an explosion, abduction or murder. The government is busy with dialogues with shady groups that are hardly known. That may have its use, but the government doesn't seem to have recognised the terrifying violence that has engulfed the Tarai.

As armed activities increase, the situation becomes more and

Tarai from the non-political, the situation will not improve.

Uma is with us

.....
Editorial, *Himal khabarpatrika*,
14-28 January

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

The murder of radio reporter Uma Singh has shocked not just the media but all sectors of society. Life has become even more dangerous in the Tarai in a year. The press received death threats whether you broadcast news or not. Now, Uma has become a victim of these cold-blooded criminals.

Uma's murder is an indication of the deteriorating security situation in the country and the state of society. The nation is directionless. The murder questions not just the legal system but proves that violence is the order of the day. While citizens are murdered inside their homes, the government watches as anarchy takes over. The responsibility of this murder should be taken by those in the chair for reinstating the rule of law, guaranteeing press freedom and protecting civil rights.

Clearly, this is the responsibility of the present Nepal government.

Uma Singh was a committed and professional colleague. We can only hope that her brutal murder does not make other young reporters timid about coverage. Uma would have wished that Nepali journalists remain courageous and continue to safeguard press freedom by making its full use. May her soul rest in peace.

more unstable. The government should place this situation of increasing insecurity and anarchy as the top internal security challenge. The effort to bring in the rebellious groups peacefully into mainstream politics should not be stopped, but this does not imply that the administrative moves to curtail criminal activities should end. Until the government differentiates the political sources of the conflict in

Poisonous imports

Nepal, 18 January

नेपाल

Nepal imported 82,832 litres and 383 tons of pesticides in 2005. In 2006, that figure had jumped to 104,816 litres. These figures do not include the pesticides that enter the country illegally across the Indian border. Pesticides are in high demand in Nepal. But after India passed laws banning some pesticides, these chemicals have been imported into Nepal under new commercial names. Indian agents from various companies have been known to go directly to various farms to advocate the use of these agro-chemicals. The pesticides are finding themselves in the human food chain and the lack of awareness means many Nepalis face health risks. The areas of Nepal with the highest use of pesticides are the Tarai districts and the vegetable-growing areas around Kathmandu.

Whose fault?

Jana Aastha, 14 January

अस्थ

Whose fault is it that we have 16-hour power cuts? Is it the fault of past governments or the Maoists who are now leading it? The Maoists say it is the fault of past government and they are not responsible. But the Maoists are also to blame. The NEA has just sent a report to the cabinet secretariat with the power plants that the Maoists destroyed and damaged during the war with the cost of rebuilding:

Sankhuwasabha Small Hydro	Rs 4.3 million
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Gorahi Branch	Rs 3.8 million

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संविधानसभाको कार्यतालिका बमोजिम भावी संविधानको अवधारणा पत्र सहितको प्रारम्भिक मस्यौदा तयार गर्ने प्रयोजनको लागि नागरिक समाज, विशेषज्ञ र नागरिकहरूबाट संविधानसभा नियमावली, २०६५ को नियम ६६ बमोजिम यस समितिको कार्यक्षेत्र भित्रका देहायका विषयहरूमा नयाँ बन्ने संविधानमा के कस्ता प्रावधानहरू राख्न उपयुक्त हुन्छ राय सुझाव लिनु पर्ने भएकोले उल्लेखित विषयहरूमा आ-आफ्ना लिखित राय सुझाव मिति २०६५/११/१५ गतेभित्र यस समितिको सचिवालयको निम्न ठेगानामा आईपुग्ने गरी उपलब्ध गराई संविधान निर्माणको महान कार्यमा सहभागी भई आफ्नो सहभागिता जनाउनु हुन स्वदेश तथा विदेशमा रहेका आम नेपाली नागरिकहरू सबैमा समिति अनुरोध गर्दछ ।

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१. नेपालको राष्ट्रिय हितको पहिचान र परिभाषा

२. सार्वभौमसत्ता, अखण्डता र राष्ट्रिय एकताको संवैधानिक संरक्षणका उपायहरू.

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The Madhesi street

There is no consensus about One Madhes in the Madhes



PURNA BASNET

PURNA BASNET

Centralised politics of Madhesi parties and their publicised agreement with the government has done little to stabilise unlawful activities in the Tarai by armed groups. Security is absent here, but locals are still enthusiastic about the constitution although most arguments remain unresolved. *Himal Khabarpatrika* talked to a group of politically aware and involved participants at Sapahi, Dhanusa.

A Mithila state

Madhesi parties have demanded a united Madhes. However, people here are still uncertain even though Sapahi is just two hours away from Janakpur, where a majority of the population speaks Maithili.

Most participants argued against a Mithila sub-province. According to them, division on the basis of culture would break national unity. "If divisions have to be made," says one, "they should be on a regional basis."

The MJF's Satyadeb Yadab argues that the idea of a united Tarai was central to his party's doctrine and that division would benefit both the Tarai and the country as a whole. TMLP's Bindeshor Yadab envisioned a united Tarai from Chure to the Indian border, with one government and one chief minister.

For Kangresi Jagan Narayan Yadab, the country would be in trouble if it was to be divided the way the Madhesi parties claimed. He says: "If the hills are the head, the Tarai is the womb. One cannot be separated from the other." He adds that we should focus on improving the lay person's life and strengthening the constitution instead of being stuck on race and language politics.

Another member of the NC says: "It would be wrong to demand that people ignore someone they meet everyday and go

to the same school with, but be expected to feel unity with someone in Nepalganj whom he has never seen."

He argues that another civil war would break out if there wasn't a fair allocation of resources. Geographer Surdev Shah said that the Maoists' emphasis on race-based divisions was the backdrop for separatists. He adds that how the demand for a united Madhes came about must be explored, and the problem addressed at the source. "If we don't think about how to make these separate states economically independent now, there will be problems later on," he says.

Land reform

Rajendra Yadab, a farmer in Sapahi, says, "Our rights should not be limited to only the Madhes, but should cover the entire country." Two years after the people's movement, he feels there has been no

tangible improvement in the lives of farmers. "We need land," he says. "Each family needs at least two kathas of land. Land reform should be addressed in the assembly."

Those present weren't clear about the government's stance on land reform. "If they plan to push it in a hurry it could be dangerous," says Surdeb Shah. He advises that the government first address land reform in the constitution after consulting experts and create a legal method to distribute land. "Questions like how land will be used, how much of it will be used to farm and how it's going to contribute to national income needs to be addressed," he says.

The NC's Jagan Narayan argued, "The Maoists introduced the agenda of land reform in the constitution in order to create conflict between different segments." The MJF's Satyadeb Yadab

says: "There is no land left in the Tarai, what are we going to reform?" Others felt there was symbiosis between the Tarai and the hills with their agriculture produce which could be exchanged. Some said land should go to the tiller so that productive farms would not lie fallow.

Inclusive constitution

Surya Narayan Yadab says: "Unless there is proportionate representation of all groups at policy-making level, positive change is not possible." Most of the participants felt that the constitution must be inclusive in terms of race, ethnic group, language, region, religion and culture, and that there must be equal rights for men and women. Rajendra Yadab suggests constitutional members to go to the people and ask disadvantaged groups about their needs. "We need to be asked," he says.

14 committee chairs



KIRAN PANDAY

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4. Minorities and Marginalised Communities Rights Protection Committee: Lal Bahu Pandit (UML)
5. Legislative Organs Delineation Committee: Ramesh Rijal (NC)
6. State Rules Delineation Committee: Shambhu Hajara Dusadh (NC)
7. Judiciary Committee: Prabhu Shah (Maoist)
8. Constitutional Body Delineation Committee: Gobind Chaudary (TMLP)
9. Natural Resource, Economic Rights and Revenue Allocation Committee: Amrita Thapa Magar (Maoist)
10. Cultural and Social Solidarity Delineation Committee: Nawodita Chaudhary (RPP)
11. National Interests Protection Committee: Amik Sherchan (Maoist)
12. Civil Relationship Committee: Mina Pandey (NC)
13. Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee: Pramod Prasad Gupta (MJF)
14. Capacity Enhancement and Resource Management Committee: Mrigendra Singh Yadab (MJF)



LOVE THAT LAST: Educators Renu Basnyat Shrestha, a Chhetri and Ananta Sunder Shrestha, a Newar have been married for almost 30 years and live in Kathmandu with their two sons and a daughter.

persuade her. Now, my husband is her favourite son-in-law,” Renu says, laughing. Academics said there are benefits of societal cross pollination. Social networks expand beyond families to castes and ethnicities, weakening discrimination and divisions. And it helps that the media highlights inter-ethnic unions.

An example is *Pandragate*, a 1989 film produced by popular comedic duo Hari Bansha and Madan Krishna that advocated unity among Tarai and hilly regions against the backdrop of inter-ethnic marriages.

And Brahmin Hari Bansha’s 29-year partnership with Madhan Krishna, a Newar, is itself the best testimony of friendships transcending social boundaries. Furthermore, Madan Krishna himself is married to a Brahmin. “It’s a national record,” jokes Hari Bansha, “we’re probably the longest-running Bahun-Newar partnership in Nepal.”

Fears of cultural and caste dilution are irrelevant to couples *Nepali Times* interviewed. Sanjeevani feels she is able to carry her culture forward in an inter-ethnic family by raising her children with a balance of both customs.

Says Renu: “You should never impose an outsider mentality on yourself. I didn’t think I was Chhetri and others were beneath me. Inter-ethnic marriages teach us to treat each others as equals.”

Conjugal revolutionaries Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation Hisila Yami gained exposure to village life after she, a Newar, married Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai, a Brahmin from Gorkha.

They met as students in Delhi and when Bhattarai went underground in 1996, so did she. The war years were difficult as the couple traveled incognito across Nepal and across the Indian border. ●

Caste no bar

The boundaries of social hierarchy blur rapidly as inter-ethnic marriages catch on

TEXT and PICTURES by
KONG YEN LIN

When wildlife activist Sanjeevani Yonzon Shrestha got married last year to Abhijeet Shrestha, it was a colourful fusion of three cultures: Hindu rituals, Lama rites and Newari ceremonies. When the 29-year-old Tamang married a Newar, she had to overcome not just a long-distance courtship that lasted eight years but also obstacles of a traditional society. But all went well in the end, and on their wedding day, Abhijeet’s elder brother also wedded a Brahmin girl.

“Both of our families underwent countless meetings to decide on a common ground for wedding preparations,” Sanjeevani recalls, “marriage itself is difficult and when cultural differences enter the equation it makes it twice as difficult.”

A new generation of young Nepali men and women are increasingly meeting and marrying partners across caste and ethnic

boundaries. Cosmopolitan, well educated and widely-travelled, they are radically redefining traditional institutions of marriage and family and forging new social norms of inclusion.

Surya Raj Joshi is a final year masters student at Kathmandu University. He says his peers don’t believe in caste or ethnic restrictions anymore. “I had no problems dining at the home of a blacksmith I made friends with while traveling in Rolpa,” he says.

Education, migration, the impact of mass media and recent political changes have all accelerated the trend of mixed marriages. “With globalisation and increased mobility, inter-ethnic marriages were bound to happen,” says Sanjeevani.

Social anthropology professor at Tribhuban University, Suresh Dhakal, says the caste system has less meaning and the choice of a life partner becomes a personal choice as joint families fragment into nuclear ones. “With greater independence and earning power, young Nepalis tend to

stay away from their parents and create distinct value systems and identities,” he says.

Dhakal has seen the barriers to inter-ethnic marriages up close. He recounts childhood memories of how his mother, a Janajati married to his Brahmin father, faced ostracism and exclusion from family gatherings and religious rituals. He says that while urban Nepal is embracing more liberal attitudes towards inter-ethnic and inter-caste marriages, rural areas are still conservative and middle class values still prevail.

When Renu Basnyat Shrestha, a Chhetri, wedded her Newari husband 30 years ago, she lived away from her in-laws due to work demands. Both educators, they trained and taught at the Mahindra Ratna Multiple College in Ilam. The distance from home prevented friction. But it took time for her mother, a conservative family matriarch to accept the union.

“She was initially very resistant to the idea, but thankfully, my siblings helped to

CROSSING HURDLES: High school sweethearts Sanjeevani Yonzon Shrestha, a Tamang, and Abhijeet Shrestha, a Newar, overcame challenges of an inter-ethnic and long distance courtship when they wedded last year.



Conjugal revolutionaries



FAMILY BLISS: Hisila Yami, Baburam Bhattarai and their daughter Manushi in Germany in 1993, where Bhattarai was participating in a 'Save Gonzalo' campaign and Yami was pursuing her Masters degree in England.

Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation Hisila Yami gained exposure to village life after she, a Newar, married Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai, a Brahmin from Gorkha. They met as students in Delhi and when Bhattarai went underground in 1996, so did she. The war years were difficult as the couple traveled incognito across Nepal and across the Indian border.

"I've gained from our marriage not only in terms of knowing each other's cultural mindsets but also geographically we are so different. Being a Newar I feel more enriched now knowing about Brahmin society," says Yami.

Their daughter, 22-year-old Manushi, says she enjoys the best of both worlds growing up in an inter-ethnic family. "I never get sandwiched between caste sentiments of Brahminism and Newarism," she explains, "my family became more open to ethnic differences." Manushi, who is doing her masters in political

science at Tribhuvan University, lives with her aunt because both her parents are too busy.

But the whole family does get together whenever they find the time. Bhattarai and Yami don't just have ethnic differences: they also have opposite personalities. "This is probably why we have had such a smooth marriage, because we are so different," Bhattarai told *Nepali Times*.

Still poles apart



While inter-ethnic and inter-caste marriages are on the rise in the cities. Traditional mores are harder to dislodge in rural areas. In fact, prejudices and customs are so entrenched that even the supposedly progressive Maoists have been reluctant to accept inter-ethnic marriages.

Rajkumar Sada's (pictured) decision to marry a Janajati girl ended up in violence in his village of Katari was attacked by her community. The Dalit wanted to file a case with the local administration but was uncertain if any action would be taken at all.

The price was higher to pay for Laxman Dhami in Sindhuli who wed a girl from a lower caste. According to him, the Maoists extorted Rs 80,000 from his family in return for allowing him to return and allowed to "retain" his caste purity. The couple could only afford to pay one quarter of the sum to keep their home intact.

Ever since the abolishment of the Muluki Ain in 1963, there have been at least 40 constitutional codes banning untouchability and outlawing caste-based discrimination. But in reality, these traditions may take some more time before they disappear altogether.



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The invisible

There are no figures on Nepali women working abroad

Eleven per cent of the remittance money that comes into Nepal from abroad is the money sent by women migrant labourers. That data itself is eight years old. And, the 2001 Nepal Living Standard Survey and does not include money sent home from Nepali women working in India.

The 2001 census showed that more than 700,000 Nepalis worked in India. That figure is estimated to have at least doubled



INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

due to war, increase in population and fragile food security. We don't have more recent data on the total number of workers in India, so there won't be any new gender, age group, income level, types of profession or family size breakdowns.

Until 2007, when the new Foreign Employment Act was formulated it was illegal for Nepali women to seek work abroad. Women and children were lumped into the 'vulnerable groups' category and couldn't leave directly from Nepal if they found jobs abroad.

But, Nepali women have been leaving their home villages to escape poverty, domestic abuse, political and social violence for decades. This trend increased during the conflict years. Since they couldn't fly from their home country, they travelled to India and left for the Gulf.



RAMYATA LIMBU

That is why there are no records of how many women get stuck in India, how many make it to Lebanon or Kuwait and how many are trafficked to brothels.

The only thing certain about the figures is that they are uncertain. Of the 15,000 Nepali labourers in Lebanon, 80 per cent are women. There are now over 70,000 Nepali women working as domestics in Saudi Arabia. All guesstimates.

Since 2007, Nepali women can legally seek employment in most countries. The government will also have a women labour attaché in the host countries where Nepali women work: There's a labour desk at the international airport in Kathmandu. And if workers want to fly via India, they will need to present a letter from Nepali

embassy in Delhi with details at the Indian immigration before they depart.

Good rules designed to check exploitation. But hardly ever implemented. Despite being legally allowed to go abroad to work, government rules make it as difficult as possible for them to do so.

This has again forced them to go through agents in India, exposing them to exploitation and adding to the cost.

"When I went to Kuwait the first time, I didn't follow my country's regulations," said one Nepali female returnee from Kuwait, "they say that it is now legal to go but those policies are in paper only. I have been running between ministries, agencies and organisations for five months, spent so much money, and I still haven't been

allowed to leave." She says she may have no option but to fly out via India again.

In terms of migration in India, there's a debate on whether or not female sex workers in India can be considered migrant labourers. There are those who say that because Nepali sex workers have been trafficked and are forced and exploited, they need to be rescued and protected. But because they add to the labour pool and are sending remittance home, they cannot be discounted.

One of the reasons why sex workers haven't been included in studies and official figures is because we simply don't know how many Nepali women are in the Indian sex industry. Researchers who have been studying migration say that the purchasing power of people in rural Nepal has increased, and significant portion of it is also because of the money sent home by sex workers in India. But no one has ever tracked how much money that is.

The 2007 policy made a gross mistake in not including migration to India under the category of foreign employment. The government's logic was that if you don't need a passport and a visa, you haven't really left. But there are hundreds of thousands of Nepali men and women working in India who send millions of rupees home and contribute to the economy. Their rights are not protected, there is no one to speak for them if they are exploited, abused or killed. They have been forgotten by Nepali law and have become invisible citizens. ●

Fleeing for dear life

New report looks at the push factors of migration to India

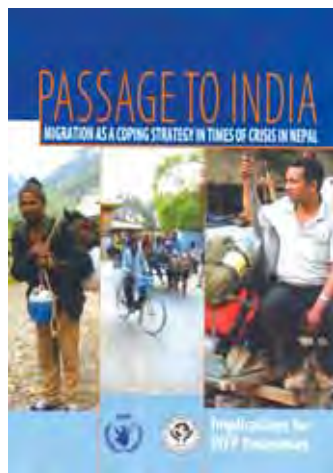
When Lil Bahadur Chhetri wrote the classic Nepali novel, *Basain*, in 1958 Nepal's population was only 8.5 million, and there was an exodus of Nepalis going to India in search of work.

Today the country's population is touching 30 million and hundreds of thousands of Nepalis still migrate to India for the same reasons as *Basain's* protagonists: lack of food and indebtedness. For centuries, out-migration has been the way Nepalis have coped with poverty, injustice and lack of opportunities back home. And when the war came in 1996, it was just another hardship that became a push factor.

Nearly 15 per cent of Nepal's population is now working abroad and this represents more than a quarter of the country's young adult male population. The 1.5 million Nepali workers in the Gulf, Malaysia and East Asia get all the attention in the media because of the remittances they send home but there are an estimated two million Nepali migrant workers in India at any given time. The money they send

home represents half of Nepal's remittances but never seems to be counted in official statistics.

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) and the Nepal Development Research Institute have tried to set this right with a new report, *Passage to India: Migration As a Coping Strategy in Times of Crisis in Nepal*. The reason WFP is involved is because the reason for migration



Passage To India
Migration As a Coping Strategy in
Times of Crisis in Nepal
WFP and Nepal Development
Research Institute, 2008
Available online at: www.wfp.org

to India has historically been the lack of food, especially in western Nepal. The average rainfed farms grow enough food to feed families for only 150 days in a year. Migration is the only way to survive.

Nepal's chronic food shortage has increased in recent years. In 2008, the food deficit got worse and was compounded by the global rise in the price of grain. The food situation for nearly four million Nepalis is very precarious and if it continues there could be another dramatic spurt in migration to India in the coming year.

The report has some remarkable findings. For example, nearly all the respondents surveyed in western Nepal said they would not migrate if they had enough food or if they could earn just Rs 1,200 per month in Nepal. This isn't asking for much, and it is a mystery why successive governments have failed to provide even this bare minimum.

WFP itself says its food assistance has reduced seasonal migration to India considerably. India is the cheapest destination for work, even cheaper than

travelling to other areas of Nepal. But the average annual remittances sent by workers from India is also the lowest, Rs 9,800 a year, whereas the money from the gulf and Malaysia averages Rs 83,000 a year. Still because of the sheer numbers of Nepalis in India, the money they send back keeps subsistence farming families alive back home.

The book details patterns of migration, where workers come from and where they go in India and the route they take to get there. Most of them work as porters, followed by security guards, waiters and in construction. Of the money they save, their families spend most of it on clothes (27 per cent) education (22 per cent) food (19 per cent). Rupaidiya, Gaddachauki and Bhairawa are the most popular border crossings and the reason is that 60 per cent of Nepali workers in India come from western Nepal.

While migration by itself may not be a negative phenomenon, the fact that most migration is involuntary and caused by lack of jobs and opportunities at home points to deep-seated structural problems in Nepal's society and

economy. Research has also shown that crop diversification and cooperatives to augment farmer income is the most effective way to reduce outmigration from rural Nepal.

Migration has also brought along a host of social problems that result from prolonged separation of family members. The reason HIV has reached crisis proportions in parts of western Nepal is that many workers come back with the infection from India. Six of the seven districts regarded as AIDS hotspots are in western Nepal. In one Dailekh village, 22 of 80 returning migrants were tested positive for HIV. In Achham, of 3,826 villagers tested, 403 were HIV positive, and 73 per cent of them were women.

With nearly half of Nepal's population less than 15 years of age, with unemployment and chronic food shortages, it is clear that even migration to India will not be enough of a safety valve in the future. Unless domestic job creation is stepped up and food security ensured, it is not difficult to foresee economic collapse with attendant political repercussions. ●

Julus in Hong Kong

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
in HONG KONG

Nepali permanent residents of Hong Kong marched this week through the centre of the city, obstructing traffic and shouting slogans demanding an end to discrimination.

As curious passengers peered out of the top of double-decker trams, Nepalis in daura suruwal marched with placards that read: 'Nepali Language is Hong Kong's Language', 'Respect Nepali Culture' and 'End Discrimination Against Minorities'.

Ever since Nepalis born in Hong Kong before 1983 got permanent residence rights 15 years ago, the number of Nepalis who have settled down here has swelled to 30,000. But there are an estimated 10,000 others without proper papers and in 2005, the Hong Kong authorities stopped issuing student and work permits to Nepalis.

The Hong Kong Nepalis' Foundation wants Nepalis to be treated like other Hong Kong citizens under the Basic Law, Bill of Rights and Hong Kong's obligations towards the protection of the language and culture of



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

minorities under international law.

The Foundation's Ekraj Rai handed over a petition to Hong Kong government head, Donald Tsang on 11 January and says he has got an immediate and positive response from the government that it will look into the demands.

"There is no question that our demands will not be fulfilled,

since the government is legally required to fulfil them," Rai told *Nepali Times*. From this month, some Hong Kong public libraries have started stocking Nepali language books and government parks, zoos and hospitals will soon have notice boards also in Nepali. Nearly 20 schools where Nepali students are enrolled have started compulsory Nepali

language classes.

However, Nepalis without proper papers are facing a different kind of problem. Some 10,000 Nepalis are in limbo after the Hong Kong government cancelled work permits in 2005. Maya Rai of the Domestic Workers' Union of Hong Kong says: "Many Nepalis have been forced to return to Nepal because

their permits were not renewed."

Rai joined forces with the Asian Workers' Union to hold rallies, but so far the government hasn't changed its mind. Local Nepali businessmen say Kathmandu has to raise the issue of the workers as well as the visa hassles for Nepalis visiting Hong Kong at the highest diplomatic level. ●



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ऐन त गजब!



GUARDING GRASS: Anti-poaching patrols have been stepped up at Sukla Phanta but the real threat is from encroachment into the reserve.

People vs park

Encroachment, not poaching, is the big threat at Sukla Phanta

LAXMAN TIWARI in KANCHANPUR

Last month, the Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve published a notice in a local newspaper stating that all the people who were illegally inhabiting the world heritage site had to vacate within a week.

But by the time the deadline was reached villagers had published their own warning. "We will resort to any form of protest if we are evicted by force." After that, the authorities backed down because it is common knowledge that the squatters have protection from political bigwigs.

The reserve is unique among nature reserves in Nepal because it has a grassland ecosystem that is home to dozens of species of deer, chital and antelopes.

So far, 23 commissions have been set up to look into the issue of those who were displaced when the park was expanded in the late 1990s. Many of those evicted in 2001 say they are tired of waiting for alternative land to farm and have come back to their settlements. They have also encroached into community forests and the park proper. So far, 1,355 hectares of Sukla Phanta's 30,500 hectares have been occupied by about 2,500 households of settlers.

Jana Morcha leader Lokendra Lamsal says it is all the government's fault. "They should have given them land to cultivate after evicting them from the park when it

was expanded in 2001. The only way to resolve this is by providing them with an alternative."

Jaya Roka is with the Victim Struggle Committee and says 10,000 people were evicted eight years ago. He says: "We aren't going to leave this place." The committee is demanding one hectare of land per household equal to what they have occupied now after clearing forests. They say they should be declared conflict victims and given compensation.

Kanchanpur CDO Kaladhar Deuja admits that there has been a dramatic rise in encroachment in the reserve and that it has political colour. "But the commission will resolve the problem by deciding on alternatives," he told us. The matter has gone back-and-forth to policy-makers in Kathmandu and Rs 22 million have been spent on various task forces to investigate.

Independent observers here say all it needs is a cabinet decision to decide on where to move the estimated 32,000 people involved and what kind of compensation package they should get. There is a discrepancy in the numbers because a previous commission had only identified 21,000 people.

Conservationists say Sukla Phanta needs a critical mass of native forest to support the biodiversity in its eco-system, but admit that the pressure on the land in the Tarai is now so intense that they are fighting a losing battle. ●

Not-so-charismatic mammals

The fact that the Nepali word bagh is used fairly interchangeably to mean both tiger and leopard across Nepal shows just how disinterested we have traditionally been in wildlife taxonomy.

Just as we couldn't be bothered to remember all the

names of Himalayan peaks, we lump them all together as bagh, even though there is a different word in our own language for leopard, 'chituwa'.

Hopefully, this lack of interest and a more general interest in mammal conservation will to some extent be addressed by a new book, *Wild Mammals of Nepal*.

awareness has been the domain of the educated elite, and conservation has followed a top-down approach.

But more and more, awareness about conservation in the buffer areas of national parks, nature clubs set by youth in rural areas and programs on the FM radio network have made people across Nepal much more aware of

(mostly bats) that should theoretically be found here but haven't been sighted yet.

The bilingual listings of mammals is informative even if it is just to browse through. Besides celebrity mammals like tigers (found only below 2,000m) and snow leopards (found as high as 5,600m) there are the less charismatic but rare ones like the Dhole wild dog that has been all but wiped out. And the rarest of them all: the Ganges River Dolphin, the only fresh water cetacean in Nepal of which there are only a handful left in the Karnali and Kosi (the barrage made them disappear on the Gandaki). The wild water buffalo, Arna, with the largest horns of any animal in the world, is also endangered in its last native habitat in the Kosi Tappu reserve.

Baral and Shah have a long preface in which they cite the importance of mammals in the ecosystem and how their presence shows us that the rest of the food chain is intact. They

explain in simple Nepali the threats to these habitats from poaching, encroachment and the disappearance of migratory corridors.

A must-read for all who should be interested in conservation in Nepal and aren't, and also for school libraries across the country. ●
Kunda Dixit

Did you know that bats are the most numerous mammal species in Nepal?

There are at least five books on Nepal's diverse birdlife, there are numerous volumes on butterflies and plants but somehow our mammals have fallen between the cracks. Naturalists Hem Sagar Baral and Karan Bahadur Shah have therefore not just done a great service by bringing out this volume, but also by producing it in Nepali. As has so often been the problem, environmental

Nepal's unique biodiversity.

Wild Mammals of Nepal shows us just how diverse the animal kingdom is in this country. Did you know that there are at least 55 species of bats and one fourth of all mammal species found here are rats and shrews? Also, there are at least eight types of flying squirrel in this country? There are 209 types of mammals found in Nepal, another 24



Wild Mammals of Nepal
Hem Sagar Baral
Karan Bahadur Shah
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New threat

Besides poaching and human encroachment on habitats, there is a new threat to the remaining jungles in the Tarai. Just as the banmara weed decimated forests in the midhills in the 1980s onwards, a new alien species of Mycnea is spreading across the plains. The banmara seeds are originally Mexican and entered the country with American wheat aid in the 1970s and have since spread wildly across the country. The Mycnea is also called 'A Mile a Minute' weed for the speed at which it spreads. It is said to have come from India with the first sighting in Kosi Tappu about five years ago where it decimated the forests in the buffer zone. Today, Mycnea is spreading westwards and has crossed Chitwan. Naturalists at the national parks in Bardiya and Sukla Phanta are bracing themselves for the onslaught. They are scrambling to find antidotes to the weeds that destroy the undergrowth and ascend trees like creepers and essentially strangle them.



How many tigers?

These tigers were caught on a digital trip camera in Chitwan during the nationwide tiger census currently being undertaken by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. The tigers in the picture have been identified as Dibya Pothi and her cub last month in Chitwan National Park as they went hunting together at night. Over the next two months, tiger experts will count the number of different tigers caught on candid camera in Chitwan, Bardiya, Sukla and come up with a total figure for the endangered cats in the country. "So far, it looks like the numbers are not as seriously down as we thought," says Conservation Officer Naresh Subedi from the National Trust for Nature Conservation, "we are very excited and hope that the decline in numbers is not too dramatic." It was previously thought that poaching in the lawless period after 2006 decimated tiger and rhino populations in the parks. DNPWC



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Catching the eye

Hyundai's i10 zooms into the Nepali car market

The roads in Kathmandu may be getting too narrow for the increasing number of vehicles and it now takes over an hour to cross Bagmati Bridge, but this hasn't dampened the appetite for new cars and new models. Streetwise, nippy and surprisingly spacious, Hyundai's i10 has finally made its debut in Nepal after collecting numerous awards worldwide. Binita

Pradhan of AVCO International says her phones are ringing off the hook in Nepal from potential buyers. AVCO International is the sole distributor in Nepal of the Korean car company, Hyundai, and has been in the business for 13 years. "A car is no longer a luxury for a selected few like it used to be. Owning a vehicle has now become a necessity," explains Pradhan. While Hyundai is fighting the

global stagnation in car sales worldwide, local sales in Nepal are on the rise. Pradhan says the i10 is perfect for the consumer who can't afford a luxury car but wants something a notch above the compact cars available. AVCO has brought in three models of i10- D-lite, Era and Magna but higher-end models Sportz and Esta are also available by order. ● Paavan Mathema

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Special Report:

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The way forward for the UML

Field Report

Gorkhaland heats up

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

❖ **Sacred spaces**, an exhibition of paintings by Binod Pradhan at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited till 5 February. 4-218048

EVENTS

❖ **Slumdog Millionaire**, a film by Danny Boyle on 17 January, 5.30 PM, Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549

❖ **Social Science Baha** presents New Nepal, New Ethnicities, 12 PM, 18 January, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka.

❖ **The Obama Ball**, unofficial Kathmandu inaugural celebration, 20 January, 8pm, Shankar Hotel ballroom, Rs.800 in advance, Rs 1200 at the door.



MUSIC

❖ **Wednesday Melody** at Jazzabell Café, Happy hour 6-8PM. 2114075

❖ **74 Twister** playing live every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchowk. 5526212

❖ **Robin and the New Revolution** playing live every Tuesday, 7PM onwards at Bamboo Club restaurant, Thamel. 470157

❖ **Some like it hot** every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488

❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, 5-7PM, Ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar

❖ **Live Sensation**, live performance by Yankey, every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency. 4491234.

❖ **Dance and Cocktails** at Cube Bar, Kamaladi. 4438017

❖ **Fusion and Looza** Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193

❖ **HyJazz** at the HyJazz Club every Friday from 8.30PM onwards. Hyatt Regency. 4491234

❖ **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.

❖ **Fusion and Classical Music** by Anil Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, Sufi & Raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8 PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5521408

DINING

❖ **Nhuchhe goes Thai** at Nhuchhe's Thai Kitchen, Baluwatar. 4429903

❖ **Organic Salad Bar and Steak** at Jalan Jalan restaurant every Friday from 6PM, Rs 650

❖ **Fusion** of Marcela Regan's new menu and Mannie's new bar at Dhokaima Cafe. 5522113

❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999

❖ **Pizza & Pasta** every Monday and Tuesday at Rox Restaurant. Hyatt Regency. 448936

❖ **Pasta pesto passion** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612

❖ **Steak special** with free Irish coffee at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4700043

❖ **Continental and cafe item** with Live band every Friday at Vintage Cafe and Pub, Woodland Complex, Durbar Marg.

❖ **Unlimited wine offer** for Rs 990 at La Maison wine and cigar lounge. 9841333628

❖ **Home made pasta** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999

❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341

❖ **Strawberry Etagerie** at The Lounge from 4.30 PM- 6.30 PM. Hyatt Regency. 4491234

❖ **Steak escape** with Kathmandu's premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818

❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.

❖ **Retro Brunch Barbecue** with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212

❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999

❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619

❖ **Ily Expression Coffee** at Hotel Shangrila, Lazimpat and Mandap Hotel, Thamel

❖ **Socially Responsible coffee** at Himalayan Java, Thamel

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

Quest Entertainment



Chandni Chowk to China, is a Bollywood Kung fu comedy that takes Sidhu (Akshay Kumar), a vegetable cutter on a journey from the by-lanes of Chandni Chowk in Delhi, to Shanghai, the Great Wall and rural China. Sidhu longs to escape his dreary existence and looks for shortcuts- with astrologers, tarot readers and fake fakirs, despite his father figure Dada's (Mithun Chakraborty) best efforts. His luck finally starts to change when two strangers from China claim him as a reincarnation of a war hero in the past and take him to China. Along the way, he meets Sakhi (Deepika Padukone), who has embarked on her own journey to pay homage to the land of her birth and her dead father and twin.

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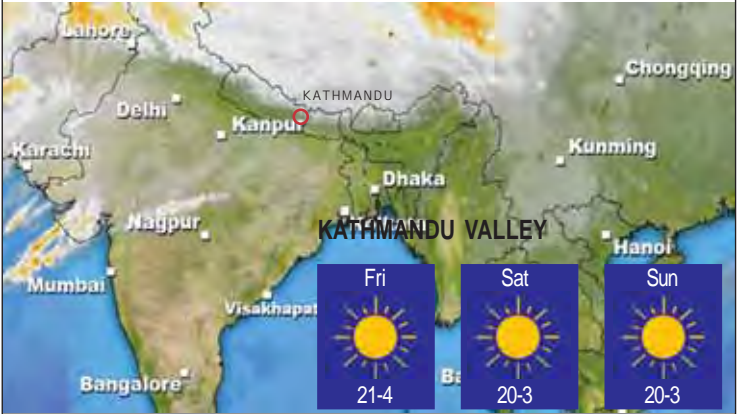
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WEEKEND WEATHER

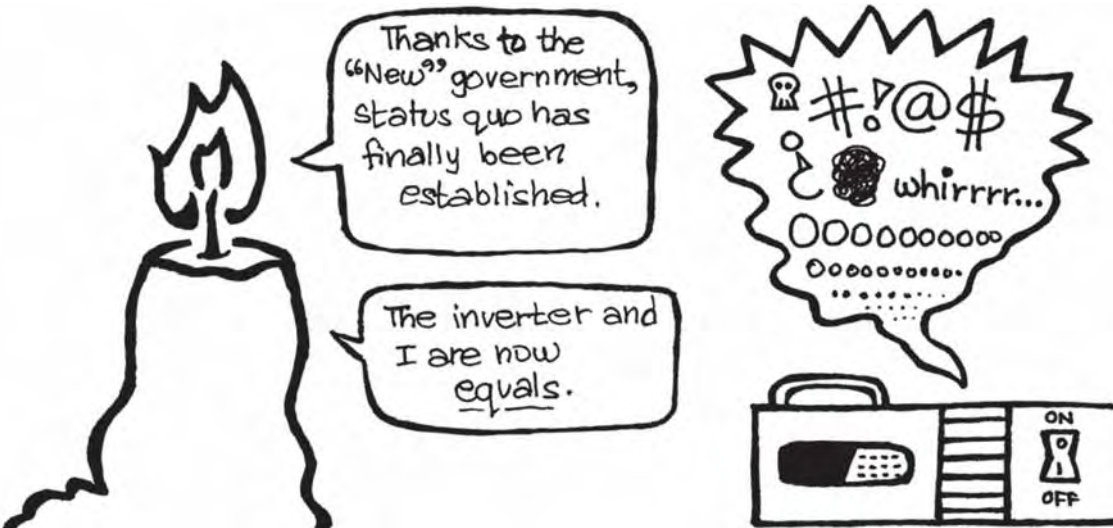
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Same story. No westerly front on the horizon to bring rain to break this four-month drought. Which means no replenishment of our reservoirs and rivers. Short of miracles, we are looking at only four hours of power a day very soon. This satellite-radar composite of South Asia taken on Thursday morning shows no hopeful moisture-bearing systems headed our way from the west. Some partly cloudiness on Monday next week, but hardly any chance of precipitation. It's not just this year, there has been a trend in the past decade of winter drought and one wonders if it is an effect of a change in climate patterns over the Himalaya. All this can have a devastating impact on rainfed winter crops besides worsening the energy crisis.



'MANDU MANDALA

by PRERANA PAKHRIN



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KIRAN PANDAY

AWESOME: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal inaugurates CAN Info Tech fair on Wednesday at Bhrikutimandap where he was presented with a Solar Tuki.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

COME TOGETHER: CPN (Maoist) and Unity Centre (Masal) unite at a formal ceremony in Khula Manch on Tuesday where Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal threatened revolt if his government is overthrown.



CHONG ZI LIANG

DISEMPOWERED: Operators of electric three-wheelers Safa Tempos protest near Ratna Park on Monday demanding end to power cuts as eight hours of electricity is not enough to charge their batteries and is affecting their business.

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Against the current

It's astounding that there are some of you out there still complaining about load shedding. You'd have thought people would have got used to it by now. And, after a while it doesn't matter anymore whether the power cuts are **12 hours** a day or **16 hours**.

Touristic Minister Comrade Yummy is on the right track. She told a meeting of NATO leaders over the weekend that Nepal should promote its darkness and market romantic candle-lit dinners to attract tourists to this medieval country.



To aid this new promo effort, the Ass is contributing gratis the following slogans so the **NTB** can start making posters: 'Get Back to the Pre-electric Age', 'Naturally Nepal Where the Nights Are So Dark You Can See The Andromeda Galaxy With Your Naked Eye', 'Once Is Not Enough If You're Against the Current'.



However, Comrade Parbati's plans to sell our darkness may be sabotaged by her own boss, Prime Minister Pukada who promised on Wednesday to "end load-shedding by next week". Awesome was taking "only" 15 people in his delegation and it didn't include his Computer Assistant progeny, **Prakash**, and a travelling secretariat made up of assorted family members. But he had dropped Nepal's ambassador to Norway from the official entourage to Norway because he had to make space for two bodyguards.

It seems PKD is not be satisfied overflying Russia and has expressed his desire to actually set foot on Russia on the next trip. He has visited Mao's birthplace and now wants to pay homage to Stalin's nativity site and learn more of his ways from a like-minded disciple, **Vladimir Spiridonovich**. The fact that a portrait of Uncle Joe was there with **Vladimir Ilyich** and Karl Marx at the podium after the ceremony marking the formation of the Unified CPN-M the other day shows where this new party's inspiration comes from. Putin should remember that we have a prime minister who loves to fly: he doesn't skip any opportunity to go paragliding or riding an ultralight. So on his visit to Russia, they should take him to the Baikonur Cosmodrome and blast him off for a spin on a Soyuz.



PKD's visit to Scandinavia to inspect windfarms was postponed after he had a stormy meeting with BRB on Thursday morning. Comrade Laldhoj was totally miffed that PKD photocopy Naryankaji has nudged himself into his (BRB's) #2 position in the party after unifying with Unity Centre. The unity of the Unity Centre with the Maobaddies is not going to stop until it unites with the Unified Marxists-Leninists, from what Awesome has been saying in private to confidantes. The idea is to form a monolithic leftist party with an even bigger central committee. The Politburo already has **175** members, and this includes at least six Mr & Ms, almost the entire top brass of the PLA including the accused in the Ram Hari murder case, Comrade Bibid.



Now that Makunay has been inducted nicely into the CA and even plunked as chair of constitution drafting, unity would at least end the endless squabbles between the comrades in the two parties about appointments. The **three-way tug-o-war** has intensified between the Forumwallahs, UML and Baddies over empty ambassadorial berths. The Maoists thought they had a deal with the UML on carving out the NPC and Rastra Bank, and are ready to appoint a new governor like they appointed Pashupati high priests. But the UML is refusing to budge on its candidate, Dr Khatiwada.



The good citizens of Bhaktapur have the right idea. They are not taking all this darkness lying down anymore and on Wednesday they vandalised six government buildings, ransacked the post office and gheraoed the NEA demanding that Bhaktapur be declared a load-shedding free district so that its young people could cram for their exams. All this would have been a fine display of spontaneous people power had Bhaktapur not been the district with the highest **electricity theft rate** in the country, being far ahead of even stalwarts like Rupendehi and Rautahat. So let me get this right: Bhaktapurians want power 24 hours a day but they don't want to pay for it. We should hand over the government to Nemakipa.

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