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Weekly Internet Poll # 441

Q. How do you grade the six months of the coalition on development issues?

Total votes: 3,181



High pass: 7.5%
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Weekly Internet Poll # 442. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com
Q. How confident are you that the constitution will be written by April 2010?

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Present arms

The tit-for-tat recruitment by the Maoist army this week in response to the Nepal Army taking in 3,000 new soldiers has escalated tensions between the two armies, but it has also exposed a serious rift within the Maoist party.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's mediation skills, praised even by his adversaries, will be severely tested this week as he tries to bridge the gap between the two armies he commands, while simultaneously trying to appease his own restless guerrillas.

Last month, while addressing the PLA in Chitwan, Dahal told them they were no longer a Maoist army but would take orders from the Army Integration Special Committee. This didn't go down well with the fighters, and party hardliners quickly cashed in on the murmurings of discontent.

The announcement by PLA commander Nanda Kishore Pun that the Maoists would begin their own recruitment appears to be more of an effort to quell internal dissent rather than challenge the Nepal Army. Pun is regarded as a staunch Dahal loyalist.

The PLA recruitment is a symbolic gesture, admitted one Maoist

insider, who said applications were being sought but the PLA did not necessarily want to follow through with actual recruitment.

The other reason the PLA recruitment may be a moot point is because up to 6,000 soldiers from various cantonments have voluntarily retired since UNMIN's verification process, according to PLA sources.

Even so, Dahal is playing a two-track game. He hopes to also use the threat of PLA recruitment to improve his bargaining strategy vis-à-vis Army Chief Katawal who has stubbornly refused to bow down to Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa's insistence that the army's own recruitment process be aborted.

The high-level Political Coordination Committee, chaired

FORWARD MARCH: The Nepal Army (top) and the Maoist army are bogged down in a dispute over recruitment and integration.

by Narayan Kaji Shrestha, endorsed the Nepal Army recruitment on Saturday. The battle moved to the courts after a single bench gave opposing decisions on the case on Tuesday, forcing the issue to a full bench of the Supreme Court.

The Special Committee is meeting again on Friday to resolve the issue once and for all, but indications are it will not go away until the two armies learn to trust each other more. ●
Dewan Rai

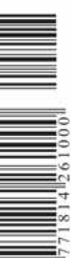
EDITORIAL
Doublethink p2



Enjoy the moment
a swing at a time



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Forward march

The Nepal Army should reflect the diversity of the nation it defends

DOUBLETHINK

With only a year to go for writing a new constitution, teams of CA members have fanned out across the country this week to collect folk wisdom.

In many places, this is the first time that elected representatives have gone back to their constituencies for a year. The questions from voters are more about jobs, inflation, health and education than about demarcating the boundaries of Nepal's proposed federal units. They are flummoxed by the questionnaires.

There was always a mismatch in this country between the obsession with politics of Kathmandu's rulers, and the people's overwhelming desire for development. That gap, instead of narrowing after the most inclusive election in our nation's history last April, has actually widened. The rulers look for power and how to retain it, and haven't made the correlation that the best way to stay in power is to deliver on promises made to improve people's lives.

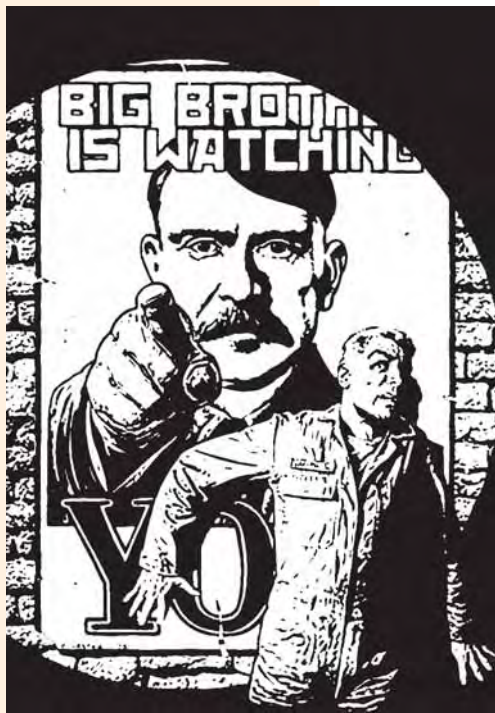
The Maoists beat everyone else by proposing a federal structure, and this week they scored again by leaking a draft constitution. Even if it is not accepted in totality, the draft will now set the agenda for future discussions. By putting the prototype constitution up on his website, Baburam Bhattarai could be pre-empting an even more radical formulation from warriors in the camps.

But even this 'soft' draft gives an ominous whiff of totalitarianism with its provision to ban all groups with 'feudal' and 'imperialist' tendencies. This is newspeak for ensuring that only the group that reserves the right to declare others 'feudal' will prevail. The Maoist draft envisions an Orwellian world where ignorance is strength and thoughtcrimes are punished by Big Brother.

Just about every clause of the draft statute prepared by the coordinator of the Maoist Constitution Suggestion Collection Committee is objectionable. Ok, its stated objective is to spark debate, but the timing is suspicious. It has come out just as the CA members have gone forth to collect inputs from the people.

Those familiar with the working style of Maoist organisations know what to expect when opinions are solicited by young toughs with red bandanas who ask for a unanimous show of hands.

In one revealing passage in Orwell's *1984*, a member of the Thought Police explains to Winston Smith how the system functions: "The motivation of the Inner Party is not to achieve a future paradise but to retain power, which is an end in itself."



In the late 1980s, while working at a college in Kathmandu, I had gone to the then-Royal Nepal Army's Bhadrakali recruitment centre with an applicant from my village in the eastern Tarai.

This young man's dream was to be an officer in the army. A major had endorsed his application, a requirement for



GUEST COLUMN
Pramod Mishra

recruitment. I had heard that Madhesis were not taken, but I didn't quite believe that.

I walked into the office and placed the application before an amiable young officer in charge of

handling recruitment. He looked at me, looked down at the application and said: "Where is he from?" I told him. He smiled and said that although he would give the documents to his boss, as far as he knew nobody from the Tarai had ever been given commission in the army.

I still don't know if it was written policy not to recruit Tarai people in

the officer rank or an unstated but understood code to disallow Madhesis. The army is still struggling to march with the cultural and political heterogeneity of a 'new' Nepal.

Army Chief Rukmangat Katuwal wants to keep the Nepal Army politics-free and professional during this confusing transition, and this deserves support. But eyebrows were raised when he told the National Interest Preservation Committee recently that army recruitment was like mountaineering expeditions hiring only Sherpas.

This was an unfortunate statement and showed that many in the Nepal Army still harbour the colonial myth of genetically-determined bravery, that courage is intrinsic to specific ethnic groups. The army needs to seriously rethink its history and role if such myths are still held as given. The composition of armies in multicultural democracies shows that bravery is not genetic but depends on the creation of historical circumstances and needs.

In the United States, the Blacks were not considered battle worthy until they took part by necessity and demonstrated their courage while fighting for their liberation during the Civil War. It took two World Wars, Vietnam and Korea to make the US military inclusive and change the idea of bravery associated with ethnicity.

The Mahars and Bengalis in India were thought to be 'not man enough' and 'unwarlike' by the British in comparison to the mythical valour of the Marathas, the Sikhs and the Rajputs. But there are Bihari, Mahar and Bengali regiments in the Indian Army. Nehru and Ambedkar made sure that the Indian Army represented all castes and ethnicities to make it truly inclusive of Indian diversity. Has the Punjabi domination of

the Pakistan Army been the reason for Pakistan's recurrent military rule? Has the Sinhalese domination of the Sri Lankan Army been the cause of Sri Lanka's long civil war? A budding democracy like ours must ponder these questions.

There was a time when only Ranas could be high ranking officers. In the Panchayat period, the scope was widened to include Thakuris. Then on, a mix of hill ethnicities were inducted into the officer corps. And even the Bahuns, whom the British expressly barred from its Gurkha regiments, went into combat roles. But there have been few visible efforts to open its doors for Tarai people in its officer corps despite changes in the political system since 1990.

Change, however, doesn't mean that anything goes in the name of inclusivity. However, what defines capability in a colonial or authoritarian political culture may not work in a pluralist democracy. It may not produce the kind of bravery and courage needed to defend a heterogeneous state and its complex sovereignty. A multicultural army that represents all groups and classes is the best safeguard for democracy.

The Nepal Army has so far shown professionalism during the transition from monarchy to republicanism. It has had to overcome naysayers to respond to the changing times as it adapts to help in the birth of a new, inclusive Nepal and a new, vibrant army that reflects the nation it defends. It needs to continue its flexibility and dynamic history while maintaining its core values to meet the needs of a diverse democracy. ●

LETTERS

TARAI

So much time has passed and yet there's no respite in the problem faced by the people of the Tarai. Instead of things becoming better, lawlessness and anarchy is increasing. Prashant Jha's piece ('The centre can't hold,' #440) is the vivid portrayal of what is actually happening out there. The Tarai has lost its guardian and the state has turned deaf and blind towards its problem. The so-called Tarai leaders have forgotten their duty towards their region. In the name of rights of the people, the plains are becoming fertile ground for criminal activities whose mere intention is to amass as much wealth as possible. The saddest part of all this is that the government is nowhere to be seen in the Tarai. Is this a deliberate attempt by the state to let criminals flourish? For those in Kathmandu who think that they can continue to live comfortable lives while the Tarai burns, they seem to forget that Tarai politics is closely linked with Nepali economy. People are feeling insecure in their own land, how long can that be tolerated?

Akesh Jaiswal, Gujarat

● This is in response to the recent declaration of 8,000 martyrs by the Maoists: the government acting in irrational ways just to garner populist support is not new to Nepal. We have 601 CA members, 8,000 additional martyrs and 330 million gods. May they help us.

Praswas Shakya, USA

ANGRY GODS

Kishor Rimal's 'The gods are angry' (#440) is a poignant piece illustrating the realness of climate change. It is ironical it is that Himali people who are the least responsible for climate change are the ones suffering the consequences. And then you turn the page and begin reading 'Organic growth' and you cannot help but wonder at the carbon footprint of those organic veggies being shipped all the way to Singapore. There is an inescapable relation between the melting glaciers and the organic movement, where vegetables and fruits get shipped across oceans and continents to the 'health food' section but their high price does not account for the cost to the environment of burning fossil fuel during transport. This is why the latest movement

is going 'local' than 'organic'. Eating local foods means access to fresher foods, burning less fuel and supporting the local farmers, not to mention that it is also possible to convince your local farmer to begin organic farming. I am not against the organic movement, and congratulate Hans and Cynthia for their admirable endeavour, but it is important to draw the link between flying fruits and veggies around and the world and receding glaciers in the Rolwaling.

Priya Joshi, email

MONKEY BUSINESS

There goes *Nepali Times* with another politically correct polemic about banning the export of rhesus monkeys ('Monkey business', #440). Vaccines that have saved the lives of millions of children around the world today would not have been possible without lab testing on animals. The research into HIV vaccines is only possible

with bio-medical tests on lab animals like rhesus monkeys. The animals are not from the wild, but bred in captivity as lab animals. It is hard to see how anyone who values human life could have anything against this. Animal rights activists are showing fascist tendencies.

Govind Gurung, email

● Congratulations to groups like Roots and Shoots for spearheading the campaign to stop the export of Nepal's rhesus macaques to the US for testing bio-terrorism agents. It is not just cruelty against animals that is at issue here, it is also a travesty for a country that reveres monkeys as incarnations of Hanuman to export them for money.

Lina Sorensen, email

● So, Nepalis are so jealous about monkeys getting to emigrate to the US that they want to stop them. That figures.

KJ, email



Maiming the messenger

This Women's Day, let's salute Nepal's brave women journalists



In a posthumously published editorial, Lasantha Wickrematunga, the slain editor of Sri Lanka's *Sunday Leader* newspaper rued that of all professions in his country, soldiers and journalists were the



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

only two who had to be prepared to die in the line of duty.

You could say the same about Nepal. Radio journalist Uma Singh's brutal murder in Janakpur in January underlined

the fact that more journalists have been killed since the ceasefire than during the war. Women journalists, especially in the Tarai, are under pressure to quit the profession. Rishi Dhamala's conspiratorial imprisonment and the nationwide sense of fear and self-censorship today show that life and liberty of journalists are seriously threatened.

After the Maoist were elected to power, we all thought that the ex-rebels no longer needed to resort to violence and intimidation. Instead, in government, they have become

even more belligerent bullies.

And to distract attention from the attacks on media and the country's pressing development needs, Nepal's two armies are engaging in dangerous political brinkmanship. In a clear bid to sabotage the compromise reached between coalition partners not to intervene in the recruitment of Nepal Army, guerrilla commanders have declared that they too are enlisting fighters. To do what? And who will foot the bill?

Prime Minister Dahal needs to aim his rhetorical prowess towards his own cadres rather than the press. He is still blaming the messenger and this week let off another tirade against the influence of "big media outlets" and "large circulation" newspapers. He needs to be careful: airing his insecurities in public makes him appear weak. It may unleash storm troopers of his YCDL by beginning to attack 'class enemies' in the media again.

That said, big media does need to do its own introspection, especially about the exclusive nature of their workforce. Journalists need to examine their role in the current constitution debate and whether they are confusing citizens even more by focussing just on the quarrel-of-the-day.

The belief that journalism,

like soldiery, is more suited to the warlike male temperament still finds currency. But Nepali women journalists have shown that when it comes to grit, determination and integrity they are as professional as their male colleagues.

In addition to common concerns of the profession (personal safety, work conditions and job security) women journalists have to struggle against at least three other factors: balance family with a profession in which deadlines are sacrosanct and working hours unpredictable; in the newsroom they have to overcome strong gender bias and perform better to prove their worth; but the most dispiriting is feedback that degrades their contribution. No wonder only the determined women survive in journalism long enough to make a mark.

Who can forget Durga Karki of Sagarmatha FM facing rifle-wielding soldiers during the



royal-military rule? Nirmala Acharya of RSS, who has made the rights of stringers her cause. Usha Titikshu, the photojournalist who goes boldly forth where no man has gone before. Yashoda Timilsina has to overcome YCDL threats in her reporting while simultaneously bringing the cause of women journalists to the notice of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists. Our own Shailee Basnet climbed Chomolungma and pushes the envelope in her journalism. And, in these pages, Mallika Aryal tries to make sense of interesting times with flair, sensitivity and fairness.

This Women's Day, let's salute Nepal's women journalists who have struggled against great odds to do the profession proud. ●

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Election mode down south

As India gears up for polls, it's our turn to wait and watch

NEW DELHI—India is officially in election mode. Speculation is rife about the possible results as alliances are re-engineered.

As India's Election Commission prepares for what is the most ambitious democratic exercise in the world, the best and worst of politics is on display.

No one quite knows what to expect from the polls. With the rise of regional parties and the absence of a single overarching issue, the final outcome will actually be an aggregation of results in 28 states. The recent delimitation of constituencies, with an increase in urban seats, has added to the uncertainty.

But here is the big picture: the Lok Sabha will continue to be fragmented. As the BJP's prime ministerial candidate, the venom

spewing Ram Yatri turned moderate. L K Advani said that what will matter most is the "alliance index".

Neither of the big fronts, the Congress led UPA in its present shape or the BJP

led NDA or the disparate 'third front' consisting of left and a few regional parties, are expected to have the numbers on their own. So, it will boil down to the post poll partnerships when loyalties will swing.

The conventional wisdom here is that the UPA has an edge. The recent state assembly defeats have left the BJP demoralised. The government's deft handling of the Mumbai aftermath with a mix of belligerence and restraint has deprived the BJP of the one issue they could have made their own: national security. Hindutva is not selling anymore. The UPA's social schemes, particularly the employment guarantee act, may also swing the rural votes in its favour.



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha



The problem for the UPA is that it is not looking good in the four states that matter the most. DMK is weak in Tamil Nadu (the state has 39 seats). The Congress- Samajwadi Party alliance has not shaped up yet in UP (80 seats). And in Bihar (40 seats), even with a Congress-Laloo-Ram Vilas Paswan alliance, Nitish Kumar has the momentum for having delivered on development. And Congress already peaked in Andhra Pradesh (42 seats) last time.

That leaves the polity in the hands of two mercurial ladies: Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh and Jayalalitha in Tamiul Nadu. Both are closer to the third front at present but the absence of any ideological character allows them to switch sides whenever they want. And the third front is not looking too good anyway with the left suffering in both West Bengal and Kerala—it will be lucky if it can keep even 35-40 seats, a massive dip from its 60 plus seats last time.

These permutations throw open all kinds of possibilities. A Manmohan Singh led UPA again but with newer allies; a non-Manmohan Singh led UPA with left support (left will be averse to him after the nuclear deal acrimony); a third front government backed by Congress (led by a regional satrap like Sharad Pawar or Mayawati); or in case things change in the next few weeks, a BJP led government. Whatever the outcome, there is a possibility of an inherently unstable arrangement at the top.

What does all this mean for Nepal? Whoever comes to power, including the BJP, the engagement with the Maoists will continue. BJP spokesperson Ravi Shankar Prasad told *Nepali Times* this week: "We respect the democratic aspirations of the Nepali people but will oppose any attempt to disrupt the social, cultural, ethnic, religious and spiritual ties between the two countries." Prasad was present at Pushpa Kamal Dahal's meeting with BJP president Rajnath Singh last September. Dahal also has good relations with Sharad Yadav, who is now the convenor of the NDA.

But there will be a review of policy, and positions may harden on Nepal. That has more to do with the domestic situation in Kathmandu. The Indians are worried about Maoist consolidation, and the China card which many see as having gone beyond just balancing India.

"We factor in a bit of balancing anyway. But if it is used to help the Chinese establish their presence near the border and cut down our role, there will be a reaction. We may also be forced to review the open border relationship," a top official told us.

Some others in the policy establishment however are more sanguine and say the Chinese are more worried about western-backed Tibet protests, not India. ●



KONG YEN LIN

A costly freedom for kamalaris

Tharu children freed from slavery are shackled by poverty and illiteracy

KONG YEN LIN in BANKE

If one were to judge the age of Rima Chaudhari by her hands, you could think she was four times older.

The 13-year-old kamalari was working in Nepalganj as an indentured domestic slave for six months before being sent to Surkhet by her landlord to toil in a bread factory. She worked 16 hours a day without wages until a Tharu child labour monitoring committee rescued her.

The committee was set up four months ago and consists of 11 Tharu villagers and has support from groups like the Active Forum for Human Rights Awareness (AFHA). Sixteen kamalaris from 6-14 years have been rescued so far. The children are sent to school where they pick up leadership and employment skills.

"The new constitution should provide opportunities for equal

participation of Tharu communities in education," says activist Budghar Birshingh Tharu, "we should bridge the gap in education quality between government and private schools."

The new Tharu settlement of Loknagar near Kohalpur on the East-West Highway is where freed bonded labourers learn to be independent. There are schools and medical facilities catering for 600 households, and income-generation activities include farming, livestock rearing, construction and carpentry.

However, in another Tharu settlement 10km away the situation is much more haphazard, with some families living under flimsy wooden structures. Income generation is almost non-existent.

Ever since the official emancipation of kamaiyas in 2000, 18,400 Tharus were freed, half of them landless. Government rehabilitation

programs were sporadic, and most kamaiyas still live in poverty and illiteracy, and continue to be exploited.

"The drop-out rate of ex-kamaiyas in schools is high," says counselor Shakuntala Chaudhari of Room to Read, "it's not just because of family poverty but also psychological trauma experienced during bondage that affects children."

"Activists say most ex-kamaiyas are resistant to learning new skills and applying them. It is therefore easy for them to fall back into low-paying manual labour.

Says AFHA's Bishu Dhungana: "Traditional mindsets are the greatest obstacle to progress."

Durga Tharu, of the Tharu welfare group, BASE, blames bad governance. "I've encountered cases of even human rights activists and journalists employing child labour as status symbols," she tells *Nepali Times*.

Yet, there are ex-kamaiyas like CA member Shanta Chaudhari, who have made their mark in society. She was a kamalari since she was eight and was only liberated three years ago. After being freed of bondage, the 28-year-old joined the National Land Rights Forum and became a UML activist.

"Ex-kamaiyas should not be fatalistic about their outlook," she says, "there's no point lamenting the past, we must build our own new future."

Madhuri Singh, a human rights specialist with USAID, says the key is to create an enabling environment for ex-kamaiyas to be reintegrated into society.

"Providing training is one thing, while ensuring that they find proper employment is another," she says, "if they remain jobless, ex-kamaiyas just slip back into slavery." ●

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New papers merge

The publishers of two new newspaper groups decided on Wednesday to merge even before they were to begin publication next month. Binod Gyawali, the publisher of *Nagarik* and Hari Shrestha, the publisher of *Dainik* decided to pool their resources and bring out only *Nagarik*, the Nepali daily. Gyawali had earlier split off from *Kantipur*, taking away many of its top journalists. But he split again and had decided to go it alone. Insiders said the reason was a contracting media market and the need to challenge the combined circulation lead of *Kantipur* and *Annapurna Post*. *Nagarik's* English sister paper is *Republica* and *Nagarik's* sister paper is *Newsfront*. It is not yet clear what will happen to the English publications.

Yubaraj Ghimire, has been designated 'Group Editor' while Narayan Wagle will be editor of *Nagarik*. *Republica's* editor Prateek Pradhan says, "With a vision for long-term sustenance and development of journalism, we have taken this step."

Hassle-free

Travellers taking international flights no longer have to queue at Tribhuban International Airport to pay airport taxes before boarding. The Civil Aviation Authority has incorporated the tax in the ticket itself. Before the service was introduced on 1 March, travellers had to pay taxes at the airport through a coupon from Nabil Bank.

Health show

HIV/AIDS prevention and safe motherhood organisation Nepal Contraceptive Retail Sales has partnered with AV News Channel, which is launching a daily programme that aims to raise awareness about health, particularly highlighting problems in remote areas.

Race in India

Morang Auto Works, the sole authorized dealer of Yamaha motorcycles in Nepal is giving YZF R15 owners the chance to take part in R15 Championship in Chennai, India on 8 March. Customers may apply through local dealers or contact Yamaha Club, Kathmandu. Participants will be selected through a draw and all expenses will be paid for by MAW.

Top of the game

Deepak Thapa Magar won the Surya Nepal Eastern Open Golf championship at the Nirvana Country Club in Dharan on Friday, 29 February. Thapa Magar also won the tournament in 2000.

Bike hike

Sykar Company and Everest Bank have launched a joint finance scheme for Honda Motorcycles customers outside the Valley. Borrowers can get a 10 per cent interest loan and a one per cent rebate if they abide by the company's repayment conditions. In order to qualify for the scheme, buyers need to have a monthly income that's at least double the monthly instalment sum.

Employing skill

The British Council is to work with the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training on a project that aims to encourage skill development in Nepal. The Skills for Employability project seeks to link education with industry.

Red and white

Three ways to change rigidly held perceptions

A few months ago, sitting down for a conversation with four well-mannered representatives of the Lalitpur District Maoist Trade Union 'whole timers' it was clear they see the world in black or white, or maybe red or white. You were either with them or against them, it was either-or. The world was divided between their friends and enemies.

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

The friends (the poor, the downtrodden, the disadvantaged and the anti-feudal) could do no wrong, and any amount of violence could be justified in the name of aiding such friends. When those friends were somehow wrong, they could criticise themselves publicly, and learn from the mistakes. But the enemies were to be given no such recourse. They had to be defanged and destroyed. This was a very clear worldview, and the Maoists sitting across the table seemed entirely sincere in their belief that their view was not only true, but also superior.

In business, as in life, how

the world appears to the other person or to the other group influences what is to happen next. And the managers who do not understand this are headed for a life of frustration, because they will always be throwing their hands up in the air to ask, "Why don't others understand the gravity of this x or y problem?"

Take the chronic national shortage of electricity. The way it seems to our political leaders is not that it is deeply shameful for a country that is supposed to be wealthy in water resources to be keeping its citizens in darkness on most evenings, and that something must be done urgently to solve the problem so that tomorrow's voters will look upon them kindly.

The way this problem appears to our political elite is that, first, it's an opportunity to continuously blame those who were in power yesterday, and, second, if it gets any worse, donors and others will somehow come to the rescue through some hastily arranged bailouts. How else is one to explain the lackluster campaign to promote the usage of energy-saving CFL bulbs?

In Nepali companies, too, it

matters how the world is viewed by the employees. If the employees' worldview is that the owners are wealthy and will somehow find the money to pay the bills even when costs continue to go up and revenues continue to dwindle, then, it affects how the employees offer to help their own companies to ride out the bad times.

There are three ways to change how the world is perceived by others. First, is the acceptance that the same problem can be viewed differently by different people, and these different views can determine the responses to solve or not solve the problem. Second, transparency with regard to sharing relatively neutral indicators such as financial statements can go a long way to help those who need to know what is what. And third, one can puncture the certainty of others' views by throwing logical doubts supported by veritable facts that contradict the world view that the other person holds.

In management communication, understanding how others perceive problems is the first step toward solving issues that require a wide range of support. ●



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Every day a banda

1 February

- Banda across Attariya and Lamki-by Mukta Kamaiya (6 days)
- Protest in Darchula by locals (1 day)
- Jaleswor banda by the Joint Struggle Committee, Jaleswor (1 day)

2 February

- Bardibas, Mahottari banda by businessmen and civil society (9 days)

4 February

- Birganj banda by local businesses (2 days)

5 February

- Demonstration from Nijgad to Bara by local struggle committee (1 day)

7 February

- Doti, Dadheldhura banda by temporary teachers (1 day)
- Eastern Tarai banda by Tharu Kalyankarini Sabha (TKS) (2 days)

February 16

- Banda in Fikkal Road Section along Mechi highway local residents (2 days)
- Banda in Gorkha by transport entrepreneurs (1 day)

February 17

- Janakpur Cigarette Factory banda by staff (1 day)
- Indefinite banda in Rasuwa by locals (5 days)
- Indefinite banda in Rauthat by transport entrepreneurs (3 days)

February 18

- Banda in Kosi Highway by Kosi Victim’s Struggle Committee (1 day)

February 19

- Madhes banda by Madheshi Student Union (3 days)
- Okhaldhunga banda by YCL (4 days)

February 20

- Banda in Bhanubhakta Higher Seconday School, Damchaur, Salyan by Maoist Aligned All Nepal National Independent School Union Revolutionary (ANNISUR) Students (1 day)
- Banda by Kosi Flood Victim Struggle Committee (9 days)

February 21

- Sunsari banda by locals (3 days)

February 22

- Banda in Fikkal by students (1 day)
- Mechi zone banda by transport entrepreneurs (1 day)

February 24

- Tanahun banda by Youth Force (1 day)

February 25

- Banda in Rupandehi - Lamjung Road Section by locals (1 day)

February 26

- Banda in Butwal by locals (1 day)

February 27

- Banda in Tarai region by Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party (1 day)
- Indefinite banda in Eastern Region by transport entrepreneurs (2 days)

www.nepalbandh.com



DURGA LAL KC/KANTIPUR

FORWARD MARCH: CA member Shanta Chaudary, a former Kamlari, carries questionnaires to collect suggestions for the constitution to Siujat, Dang. Chaudary is a CA member representing the landless.

Northern interest

Sudhir Sharma in *Kantipur*, 29 February

कान्तिपुर

When China recently sent its vice-foreign minister Hu Jinggui to Nepal as a special envoy, the visit prompted much speculation. Jinggui arrived with a proposal for a new peace and friendship treaty and even submitted a three-page draft to the foreign ministry. Why is China initiating a new relationship at this time?

China was always going to change the present relationship with Nepal, regardless of who was in government. The Chinese say they have proposed a new treaty to ‘make the relationship between the two countries timely and strong’. The Chinese embassy spokesperson has said that the agreement is directed only towards Nepal and not any other country.

All Chinese visits to Nepal in the last six months have focussed on studying and observing the situation here. High level Chinese officials were at the UML and MJF party conventions. The vice-commander of the Chinese army and his team and Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi also made a trip to Nepal. Jiechi’s brother and head of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, Pro Yang Jemin followed him here, heading a non-governmental team.

What all these visits have in common is the focus on controlling ‘free Tibet’ activities on Nepali soil. In the words of a Chinese diplomat: “The issue of Tibet might not be that important to you in Nepal. But for us it has become a top priority matter of national security.” The Chinese believe that Nepal is the conduit for many free-Tibet activities because access to Tibet is easier through Nepal than India. In the present context, when China is challenging the US as a global power, Tibet has become China’s Achilles heel.

For Nepal’s Maoist

government Tibet has become an opportunity to win China’s trust and cosy up to the northern neighbour. However, it is unlikely that the Maoist government will become an ally as strong as the monarchy was to Beijing in the past.

Shifting ground

Narendra Peter in *Naya Patrika*, 1 March

नयाँ पत्रिका

Nepali society is in the process of metamorphosing. The media would be fooling itself if it tried to ignore this and get away without engaging in self- evaluation, assessment and reform. However, some Nepali media houses are not embracing the change. It’s perfectly acceptable for a paper to show partiality to a certain ideology or governance. A paper’s editorial may empathise with a certain party, but when it comes to issues of national responsibility, the media should unite. The press plays an important part in setting out national goals. Civil society may strengthen internal unity, but the media gives a sense of national consensus and nationalism. The media has a large role to play in strengthening the country so that outside forces don’t have the power to intervene.

Issues such as the government’s commitment to a Federal Democratic Republic, a logical conclusion to the peace process and the drafting of the constitution must receive most media attention at present. Not the personal lives of a few political personalities. Some papers try to divert attention away from these central issues with trivia. Nepali media can’t limit itself to mere preaching without thought. It must not only decide which issues take centre stage in media coverage, but assess and question its own code of conduct and ethics. Discourse in the press cannot be without boundaries or accountability.

(Peter is a consultant to the Ministry of Information and Communications)

Bandhs in February, 2009						
February, 2009						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 3 Bandhs	2 2 Bandhs	3 2 Bandhs	4 3 Bandhs	5 4 Bandhs	6 3 Bandhs	7 3 Bandhs
8 4 Bandhs	9 4 Bandhs	10 5 Bandhs	11 4 Bandhs	12 4 Bandhs	13 3 Bandhs	14 2 Bandhs
15 1 Bandh	16 2 Bandhs	17 4 Bandhs	18 3 Bandhs	19 4 Bandhs	20 5 Bandhs	21 5 Bandhs
22 5 Bandhs	23 2 Bandhs	24 2 Bandhs	25 2 Bandhs	26 2 Bandhs	27 3 Bandhs	28 2 Bandhs

8 February

- Tatopani customs office banda by Chinese goods entrepreneurs (6 days)

9 February

- Banda of Indrawati IV and Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), Melamchi locals (4 days)

10 February

- Banda in Butwal by students of Glorious College (2 days)

12 February

- Gaur banda by Dumaria VDC locals (1 day)
- Mahottari banda by MJF (1 day)

13 February

- Indefinite banda of Sunsari Pakali section of the East-West Highway by Janachetana Aama Samuha (Mother’s Group) (3 days)



Shailee Basnet in *Himal Khabarpatrika* 27February-13 March

High fashion



ongoing crisis, many designers have started losing their jobs. Opportunities are scarce in the fashion world but Prabal’s new label is already taking off in New York.

Prabal’s designs attracted a lot of attention at the recent New York Fashion week with praise in *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Times* and *High Society*. *The New York Times* wrote: “Nepali Designer Prabal captures a youthful attitude. His style and finishing is promising”.

Prabal completed his SLC at St Xaviers in 1980, and went on to study design at Delhi’s Nelson Institute of Fashion Technology and worked with designer Manish Aurora. Later, he joined the Parsons School of Design in New York and has since worked with designers such as Cynthia Roli and Bill Blas.

Prabal wants Nepali style to be part of the fashion world. He uses colours that dominate Newari and Dhimal clothing in his designs. Prabal has now become an inspiration for other Nepali designers.

On the cover of January 2007 Vogue Angelina Jolie was featured in a red gown designed by Nepali designer Prabal Gurung. Under the fashion house Bill Blas (which has since closed), Prabal has designed clothes for celebrity women like Jolie, Oprah Winfrey and Laura Bush. And it looks like Prabal’s fashion career is just beginning. With the

Mother tongue

Nepal's linguistic diversity should be seen as a strength

Ethnic identity is encapsulated within its language. Language is the link to its history, culture and customs. According to the 2001 census, there are 82 languages spoken in Nepal, but this diversity is being eroded, threatening the cultural identity of the people who speak them.



COMMENT
Mukta Singh Tamang

The Khas language, which until the Rana regime was known as Gorkha, is used in government, administration and education. It is drowning out other languages. Language activists say Gorkha language speakers were biased and exclusivist towards other languages branding them as uncivilised. They imposed their language on other groups thereby weakening them by not acknowledging them. Some languages of indigenous groups are now on the verge of extinction.

Languages require non-interference and support from the state for their development and continuity. The state needs to have a single official language for administrative purposes, for national unity and to create a single political society. But the state made a mistake when it imposed a single language in the name of unifying the country because it infringed on multilingual rights.

Experiences of other countries show that a multilingual policy also

consolidates national unity. In multilingual countries, school education is given in the mother tongue while other languages are taught alongside.

India has a long experience of multilingual education. Studies have shown that India's policy of schooling in three languages within a state has been very effective. Each Indian state teaches second and third languages alongside the state language. For instance, education is given in Bengali in West Bengal with Hindi taught as a second language and English as a third. India determined its federal structure primarily on the basis of language which has helped institutionalise democracy and bring about national unity.

South Africa mentioned nine indigenous languages along with English and Afrikaans as the official working language in its 1994 constitution. Similarly, New Zealand acknowledged the indigenous language Maori as the official working language in 1978. Under this provision, one can use this language in court, which has to provide an interpreter. Countries like Russia and China have also invested in the development of local languages and culture.

In Nepal, National Language Recommendation Commission 1994 studied the status of national languages and recommended a language policy. But not much has been done except the preparation of textbooks for primary level in a few indigenous languages.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Although its recommendation for a three language policy was made 15 years ago, it is still relevant today and the federal structure should adopt it. But which languages should be used in schools, the media and administration is the issue to be debated.

TU professors are undertaking a language survey which should be taken into account when drafting the new language policy. But we can theoretically determine four practical aspects already. Firstly, primary education should be in the mother tongue and secondly, autonomous provinces should choose their official working language and language policy independently. Thirdly, there should be translation services available in state health and legal sectors and finally the state—and local provinces in a federal structure—must preserve and develop threatened languages.

In a pluralistic society, the use of many languages makes democracy all the more meaningful. In the past, Nepali speakers were considered more Nepali than non Nepali speakers, who felt a sense of alienation in their home country. It is a positive sign that many feel that language can be one of the cornerstones on which the federal structure is constructed.

Now that the monarchy as a symbol of national unity is gone, we need to find another foundation. The new constitution with its inclusive structure and multicultural policy will make a new foundation for national unity. ●

Six equal provinces

Future federal units should be economically viable and include all ethnic groups within them

The real challenge in transforming Nepal into a republic is to restructure the state into a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural society while maintaining social harmony and national unity.

It is not easy to create federal states in a country with a topographic and geopolitical make up such as Nepal. Which



COMMENT
Gobindraraj Joshi

explains why there are so many opposing views from political parties, political scientists and other experts on how to create provinces and ensure true decentralisation.

The state has settled for a federal structure to basically ensure the representation of all communities in the state mechanism. But the decision should not be taken in a hurry because it will have a lasting impact on the nation and nationalism. The state restructuring should be practicable in terms of administration, distribution of resources and ensuring equal

rights of the people living there. A much more practical approach would be to set up the following six provinces:

Eastern Province (Ilam, Taplejung, Panchthar, Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Dhankuta, Tehrathum, Sankhuwasabha, Bhojpur, Solukhumbu, Okhaldhunga, Khotang and Udaypur) Capital: Biratnagar. This does not affect the existing settlement patterns of the various communities and geographic, administrative, educational, cultural as well as physical facilities can remain intact. There are two universities,

a regional police office, appellate court, regional administrative office, medical colleges and other institutions in the region. Transportation, electricity and telephone services are already in place.

Middle Province (Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Rautahat, Bara, Parsa and Makawanpur) Capital: Janakpur. There are universities, appellate court and hospital medical colleges in the region. Water resources include the Kamala, Tamor, Sunkosi, Tamakosi and Bagmati rivers.

Bagmati Province (Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Dhading, Dolkha, Sindhupalchok and Kabhre) Capital: Kathmandu. There are universities, medical colleges, courts, police and army headquarters and other institutions. Development infrastructure is relatively developed.

Gandaki Province (Chitwan, Gorkha, Lamjung, Tanahu, Shyangja, Kaski, Manang, Mustang, Myagdi, Parbat, Baglung, Palpa and Nawalparasi). Capital: Pokhara. The province would be linguistically very diverse, but it is well-endowed with tourism and water resources with the Kali

Gandaki, Marsyangdi, Seti, Madi and Chepe rivers.

Western Province (Rupandehi, Archakhanchi, Gulmi, Kapilbastu, Pyuthan, Rolpa, Dolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Surkhet and Jajarkot) Capital: Ghorahi or Tulsipur. Rapti and Bheri are some of the big rivers in this area and there are places of religious significance like Lumbini.

Karnali Province (Darchula, Jumla, Kalikot, Mugu, Humla, Bajura, Bajhang, Dailekh, Achham, Doti, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Dadeldhura and Baitadi) Capital: Dipayal. There is a regional police office and administrative office. There are appellate courts and army units. This region does not have a university but there are hospitals and most of the districts have roads. Khaptad and Rara lake are the touristic treasures of the region. Because of its underdevelopment this province will require more attention than others.



High wire act

Build team spirit and trust with Nepal's first tight rope adventure course



Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be Tarzan, swinging high up in the trees? Or how monkeys feel when they hover high above you on your visit to Swayambhu? Well, if you are interested in getting some fun high up in the forest canopy, just hop on a bus and go to The Last Resort, where Nepal's first high rope course has opened.

With eight challenging crossings reaching up to nine metres into the trees, this high rope course offers a new kind of adventure sports and team building exercise in Nepal.

"High Ropes is the brand name for a high wire forest adventure that challenges your personal boundaries, encourages teamwork and builds confidence," says Sam Voolstra, marketing director of The Last Resort.

For the launch of this new

adventure 12 people from Nepal and abroad met up and put their bodies and minds into the capable hands of the The Last Resort high wire staff, which is entirely Nepali.

"I felt completely and utterly safe at all times as we were always on a rope. The stations were pretty challenging but it was good to do as I felt so much better afterwards," said Nonna Lamponen, a participant from Finland.

The high rope course, which has enjoyed huge popularity in Europe over the past few years, was designed and built by Austrian Alex Schuchter together with The Last Resort crew.

Modern rope courses were first designed by French naval officer George Hebert 100 years ago as a method of physical education with the aim of



ALL PICS: ALEX TREADWAY

developing the physical, morale, and 'virile' qualities in an outdoor environment. However, the main purpose of such a high rope course is not necessarily the physical challenge or the adventure, but the team building exercise.

"Learning through experience has never been more relevant to organisations and individuals as the challenges we face are increasingly demanding, complex and often unpredictable. With the global economic crisis employees need to be motivated," says Voolstra.

"I would actually want to see politicians do it, especially from two different parties," says Mickey Mohan from Kathmandu half-jokingly.

A maximum of 12 people, who are divided into pairs, can join one session, which takes

between 2 and 3 hours, and even though the team is always nearby, the participants have to rely on each other during the exercise.

"It really made me realise how important it is to trust another person," said Maske, who took part in the first session.

For some, however, it was more of a physical test as the first ladder (named 'Hillary Steps') seemed to be quite demanding for some participants. "I think the

first station could be a challenge for someone who is not very physical," Maskey continued. "But with the help of the team everybody will get up."

However, no one can ever get stuck high up in the trees as participants can be lowered down from any station such as 'Helicopter Rescue', 'Mountain Flight', 'Bagmati River Crossing' and 'Nepali Taxis'. ●

Billi Bierling in Sindhupalchok

Specifications

Maximum number per session:	12
Maximum number per day:	36
Minimum height:	5'2"
Minimum age:	12
Special introductory rate, applicable till the end of May 2009: Rs 2,000 for Nepalis, Rs 3,000 for foreigners (lunch included, not transport)	





MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Ban bandas

Anyone, anywhere can shut down Nepal for any reason

On Sunday, the Koteswor to Maitighar stretch was blocked. Traffic had been particularly bad because of the motorcades of high-security dignitaries, but this was different. Several small cars and motorbikes were parked across the middle of the road. It became clear this jam was no traffic jam, it was an impromptu chukka jam.

No one seemed to know why or who blocked the road. "It must be the students, or the teachers," said one cab driver. "It is the Madhesis," said a student. "No, the Tharus," said another.

Biratnagar has seen only three working days in the past three weeks. There are overlapping bandas: Mahendranagar is on Day Five of a shutdown and curfew, the entire Tarai is on Day Four of an indefinite strike. The repair of the Kosi embankment is seriously delayed because of a shutdown by flood victims.

Bandas initially began following the first people's movement of 1990 when political parties in opposition called general strikes to pressure the Panchayat rulers to restore democracy. In the 1990s, the culture of enforcing a shutdown became the protest of choice by the political opposition of the day. The website www.nepalbandh.com records over 550 shutdowns in 2008 alone.

Last month entrepreneurs in Biratnagar called a banda to ban all bandas. In Butwal, journalists blocked the East-West Highway for two days when a local reporter was killed in a motorcycle accident.

The modus operandi of a banda is fear. Fear of a car being stoned, a motorcycle being cremated, a store being vandalised. Gone is the spontaneity of the protest and an expression of free will against genuine grievances.

While the impromptu strikes make life difficult for those who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, what is the cost to the people and the nation?

A recent report by UN's World Food Programme (WFP) focusses on food security and the livelihood impacts of bandas in Nepal. It says the country's poorest are the worst hit by these shutdowns. A quarter of Nepal's population spends more than 75 per cent of their income on food. If that population is prevented from earning a daily wage, this means they skip the day's meal. One day of banda causes losses of up to Rs 1 billion, according to the WFP's calculation.

When the highway is shut buses get stuck, often in a place where there is no market. Those who can afford may have to pay eight times more for a packet of noodles and spend a fortune for several days of accommodation.

Chukka jams became the only way to get attention from a disinterested government. You blocked the highway and the authorities took notice.

Had there been no bandas, popular movements like the April Uprising and Madhes Movement would not have gained momentum. But those shutdowns were voluntary and had popular mass support. It was the people who were protesting against the system and were refusing to work until something was done about it.

Bandas should be the last resort, not the only option. The way they are conducted, bandas are not non-violent forms of protest. They are compulsory closures enforced with the fear of violence.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has announced several times that bandas are henceforth banned. No one listened to him. Everyone thought, "They did it when they were underground, now it's our turn." You now have the absurd situation where political parties in the coalition, organisations affiliated to the ruling parties call for shutdowns.

Boiled down to its essence, a forced banda is a way for a pressure group or political party to punish the people in order to have their grievance addressed. For families already dependent on a daily wage earner for their precarious livelihood it means going hungry. Only people who don't care about the people force bandas on them.

Just three years ago we defied the government-imposed curfews and came out on the streets to struggle for freedom. Is this the freedom we fought for? The freedom to get away with the violence of a forced shutdown?

Unless we the people rise up against bandas we can't fight this scourge. If everyone drove on the road, opened their shops and opened schools despite threats, what would happen? How many shops would they vandalise? How many motorcycles would they set on fire? ●

CHONG ZI LIANG
in POKHARA

School teacher Ram Chandra Poudel grew increasingly alarmed 15 years ago by the number of children who were dropping out of school because their families couldn't afford their education.

As someone who had grown up in poverty and worked as a porter and domestic, Poudel tried ways to help the children but the inflexible government school system frustrated him. So, in 1995, he left his teaching job and with a group of friends set up a program to help drop-outs get back to school.

Today, Poudel's Children Nepal helps support 360 children's education by empowering their families with skills training. The only condition: the families must provide their children with food and time to go to school instead of work.

"This is so families take ownership of their children's well-being," explains Poudel, "we can't spoon feed them."

Families get loans to start income-generation so the children don't have to be sent to work. Next, CN finds an appropriate government school for the child to attend and the school too must give incentives like free admission or subsidised books.

Helping

A unique initiative to help families keep children in school



OUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN: It's not just children who benefit at Children Nepal. Mothers, like Sita Nepali (right), are taught skills and produce handicrafts that are sold in the fair trade market. Twenty-year-old Ishrat Prabin (above) leads a group of pre-schoolers in a nursery rhyme. She grew up reciting the alphabet in this very room ten years ago and has now herself become a teacher.

That way, the organisation is just one of the three pillars supporting the children.

Sita Nepali (above) works briskly on a sewing machine, making a doll. The stuffed animals are sold in free trade markets. With the income, Sita raises her nine-year-old daughter and when her son is old enough, he will go to school too with CN's help.

"I'm happy for the support for my daughter and the skills I've learnt here," says Sita, "I couldn't afford to send her to

school without CN."

The organisation also provides tuition for children who are struggling with their homework or exams. Ishrat Prabin was only nine years old when she learnt the English alphabet and other nursery rhymes in the teaching centre at CN. Eleven years later, she leads the children in their ABCs at the very same centre she grew up in.

"In this room, I made my decision to become a teacher so naturally I'm a social worker here now," says 20-year-old Ishrat.

During the war, Children Nepal

Changing Nepal



JOHN CHILD

A doctor, a businessman and a professor, who formed a unique trans-continental partnership to support education in Nepal, have proved how a little money goes a long way if it is invested in girl's

education.

California professor Jeffrey Kottler first came to Nepal in 2003 to teach counseling, but saw that girls weren't going to school and decided to do something about it. Kiran Regmi

is a Nepali physician and professor dedicated to improving health in rural Nepal. Digumber Piya is a businessman, philanthropist and community activist.

Together, the three set up the Madhav Ghimire Foundation,

families afford education



PICS: CHONG ZI LIANG

became part of a unique peace education effort by a Japanese group which teaches conflict management, non-violent communication skills and peace-

building training. “When we started this 10 years ago, the conflict was raging and young Nepalis were confused by the failure of development and

the violence in society,” says peace educationist, Yoji Kamata, who says he has noticed a marked change in behaviour of the children, who are less aggressive.

Outside support has also helped provide CN with computers and teaching aids government schools can only dream about. Says Paudel: “We

realised how important computer skills were becoming and decided we had to provide them with the resources their schools could not.” ●

one girl at a time



COMMITTED TRIO: Businessman Digumber Piya, doctor Kiran Regmi and professor Jeffrey Kottler set up the Madhav Ghimire Foundation to give girls in Lamjung a head start in school. The foundation is named after Nepal’s poet laureate. Scholarship students at the Sri Chandra School in Bahundanda last week (left).

named after Kiran’s father and Nepal’s poet laureate. Kottler says admiringly, “Kiran is the most accomplished woman I know, with a medical degree, masters degrees in public health and anthropology, and a doctorate.” Regmi’s experience working with poor families in rural Nepal matched what Kottler had seen while doing research in remote areas. Six years ago in Lamjung, he met the headmaster of a school who told him that an academically gifted girl was dropping out because her family couldn’t afford the fees. When he found out it was only Rs 7,000, he took out his wallet and paid

for a year’s support. From that first girl in 2003, the Madhav Ghimire Foundation now supports 73 students. It plans to add 25 more this year, some of them gifted Sherpa girls whose fathers have died in climbing accidents. Scholarship students are promised that as long as their work continues to be excellent, the foundation will pay for their education as far as they can carry it. The project has grown rapidly and the girls have started going to college. Now to meet the demand the budget will need to grow to Rs 80 million. “We’ll need big money eventually to keep the promises

we have made to the families,” says Piya. For now, the foundation operates on small donations and is run entirely by volunteers. Kottler brings counselors, educators, students and health professionals to Nepal each year. Participants are expected to raise funds and become “inspirational witnesses” back home for the foundation’s work. The volunteers visit foundation schools, such as Sri Chandra school, about 30 km from the nearest road in Lamjung’s Bahundanda, the birthplace of Madhav Ghimire. There are 250 children in the school in 12 classrooms, and the foundation supports scholarship students directly and also invests in improving the facilities at the schools where they study. The payoff for the foundation’s work is years away, when the girls graduate to become doctors, nurses and teachers. But, says Kiran Regmi: “It has been shown over and over again that investing in girls’ education is the most cost-effective way to bring development to a society.” ● John Child
www.ghimirefoundation.org



Himal Khabarpatrika
27 February-13 March 2009

Cover:
Is Nepali nationalism really in danger?
Danger of religious extremism

Editorial:
The military’s mandate
The Maoists and human rights

Report:
Why your international calls are being bypassed

Constitution Supplement:
Lessons from India’s Dalit movement
Is affirmative action desirable?
Nepal Muslims’ quest for identity

Justice delayed in Cambodia

SETH MYDANS in PHNOM PENH

Thirty years after the end of the brutal Maoist regime that took the lives of as much as a quarter of Cambodia's population, the court sessions of senior Khmer Rouge cadre will open in Phnom Penh this month.

The first defendant is Kaing Guek Eav, 66, better known as Duch, the commandant of the Tuol Sleng prison and torture house, which sent at least 14,000 people to their deaths in a killing field.

Duch confessed to journalists before his arrest nine years ago that he had committed atrocities but said he had been acting under orders and would himself have been killed if he had disobeyed. Known for his brutality, he is charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes, and with murder and torture in his prison, known as S-21.

On Monday, attorneys asked the UN-backed genocide tribunal for permission to interview Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and former King Norodom Sihanouk.

Four senior Khmer Rouge officials are in custody, but court officials say their trials may not start until next year. They are Nuon Chea, 82, the movement's chief ideologue, Khieu Samphan, 76, who was head of state, Leng Sary, 82, the former foreign minister, and his wife, Leng Thirith, 75, a fellow member of the Khmer Rouge Central Committee.

The Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot, died in 1998. Many Cambodians say they fear that some of the defendants may also die before they are brought to trial, and the tribunal has been providing them the best medical care Cambodia has to offer.

The trials are being held by a hybrid tribunal supported by the United Nations

Finally, some truth and justice 30 years after Khmer Rouge genocide



KUNDA DIXIT

CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY: A visitor peers at pictures of the victims of the notorious Tuol Sleng Khmer Rouge torture house in Phnom Penh. At least 14,000 people were killed 30 years ago in this former school building that was turned into a prison.

that includes Cambodian and foreign judges and prosecutors in an awkward legal compromise that has drawn criticism from human-rights advocates and legal scholars.

"We wish to see this tribunal for at least these five, and this is the minimum of the minimum," said Kek Galabru, a leading Cambodian human-rights campaigner. "A lot of people ask: Why only five? Why only five? Why only five?"

In a fanatical attempt to create a pure peasant society, the Khmer Rouge turned

their country into a giant labour camp, evacuating cities, banning commerce and religion and trying to exterminate the country's educated class. From 1975 to 1979, at least 1.7 million people were executed or died of overwork, starvation, torture or untreated disease. The Khmer Rouge left behind an eviscerated and traumatised society, and some human rights advocates hope the trial can bring a measure of closure. A survey of 1,000 Cambodians last year by the Human

Rights Centre at the University of California, Berkeley, found that even after three decades, the traumas and hatreds persist.

In face-to-face interviews, nearly half the respondents said they were uncomfortable living close to former members of the Khmer Rouge. Two-thirds said they wanted to see former cadres suffer in some way. Forty per cent said they would take revenge themselves if they had the opportunity. Chum Mey, 77, who is among only a handful of people who survived Tuol Sleng, said he still feared Duch and was unable to look him in the eye at a pre-trial hearing in November. In the hearing room, he said, Duch behaved with the same air of confidence, disdain and command that had characterised his tenure as prison chief.

"They tortured me for three months," Chum Mey said, recalling his time as a prisoner. "They beat me. They removed my toenails. They gave me electric shocks in my ear—kup-kup-kup-kup, it sounded like a machine in my head, and my eyes were like burning with fire."

He is on the witness list to testify against Duch. "I want to stay alive to give evidence," he said. "Because I survived the Khmer Rouge, and if I die before the trial, what was the point of surviving?"

In an innovation, dozens of victims have enrolled as civil parties to the case. They have grouped themselves by ethnicity or by the nature of their complaints and will be permitted to demand symbolic damages.

One of them is Sok Chear, 42, an office worker whose father died under the Khmer Rouge. "We want to ask their leaders: 'Who ordered this? Why did you kill Cambodian people? For what?'" she said. • (NYT)

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Girls' night out

Women in Concert is back with a bang this year



In 2003 a group of girlfriends decided to try and raise money for a charity by indulging their own passions and staging a music concert. What started as an idea just for fun has now grown into a fully-fledged annual event. Although there was a break last year, Women in Concert VI is back with a promise to be bigger. "With no prior advertising or promotion, no sponsorship, and very little pre-sales of tickets, the first event was able to garner a crowd of over 250 people," says Vidhea Shrestha who has been involved with Women in Concert right from the start. Over the years, the concert has established a reputation for itself. Says organiser and performer Sapna Thapa: "The audience's expectations are sometimes

difficult to live up to but we make an earnest effort from our side." Along with Sapna, Rachana Gurung Sharma, Priti Kaur and Pooja Gurung, who have been a part of previous Women in Concert events, this year will also feature budding artist Astha Tamang Maskey. "The genres of music that will be performed will run the gamut from pop to rock to R&B and soul," says Vidhea. The audience will also get a chance to watch performances from members of Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC) which includes Shreeti Pradhan and a young trio of sisters. The all-women chorale group of seven members from KJC are sure to be a big draw. "The idea of Women in Concert is two-fold," explains Vidhea, "firstly it serves to be a

platform for aspiring young Nepali women musicians to perform and have their talent recognised. Secondly, the concert contributes a percentage of the proceeds towards a deserving social cause." In the past the proceeds from the concert have gone to support Nepal Child Welfare Foundation and Sewa Kendra. This year the women will sing to support Orchid Garden Nepal, a Maligaon-based group that runs a day care centre for children under five whose parents are daily wage labourers and come from under-privileged families. "We have always tried to raise funds for a genuine cause where the person concerned is passionate about what he or she is doing," says Sapna. "We hope that our collective experiences in these troubled times will in some way be a catalyst for a better future," Vidhea adds. And what a way to express that hope: through the voices of women, united in song and celebration. ● Paavan Mathema Women in Concert Saturday, 21 March, 7PM-9PM Gokarna Forest Resort Tickets: Rs 999

Binocular astronomy

If you can't afford a telescope, binoculars will do for star-gazing

Many of the readers of the Stargazing column have sent me emails seeking advice on where they could get telescopes in Nepal. Unfortunately, telescopes are not available here and even if you get one, it might be either expensive or not suitable for your observing requirements. In many ways, binoculars prove superior to a telescope for amateur astronomers. If you have never experienced binocular astronomy, you'll be thrilled at how easy objects are to locate and the speed and



STARGAZING Kedar S Badu

comfort at which you can observe. A whole new experience is waiting for you. Binoculars have a wide field of view and provide right-side-up images, making objects easy to find. They require no effort or expertise to set up — just sling them around your neck, step outside, and you're ready to go. They can reveal craters on the Moon, moons orbiting Jupiter, Milky Way star fields, and even other galaxies. But, before you purchase binoculars, you'll need to understand a few basics. Aperture is the most important binocular specification that describes the diameter of the front lenses. The larger the diameter, the brighter the resulting images. You can find the aperture simply by looking at the two numbers displayed on every binocular: in 10x50, for example, '10' refers to magnification and figure '50' refers to the diameter (in mm) of each of the front lenses (aperture). I suggest you buy binoculars of either 7x35 (for children) or 10x50 (for adults). And one last tip: go for binoculars that have a 'porro' prism design.



In March, there are two planets for you to enjoy during evening hours: **Saturn** (in Leo) is in the eastern sky and **Venus** (in Pisces) is low in the west. On 10 March, don't forget to observe the pairing of the ringed planet **Saturn** with the gibbous Moon. Regarding constellations, you could enjoy the stars of the "Winter Hexagon" which will be located just overhead during the evening. Direct your binoculars towards the belt of Orion the Hunter and you will be thrilled to see the brilliant emission nebula (M-42) also known as the Orion Nebula. Also enjoy the Great Saptarshi (Ursha Major) in the north-eastern sky. Try to find the Dhruba Tara (Polar Star) with the help of the 'pointers' of the Saptarshi. While looking at stars, pay attention to their colour, as it gives us a clue about their age. For example, in the Orion Constellation, identify an orange-red star just to the north of the Hunter's belt. This is Betelgeuse, a red-giant that has already used up its hydrogen fuel and may explode anytime into a supernova! Hopefully we'll be lucky enough to see this event in our lifetimes. And finally, we have the Spring Equinox that falls on 20 March when the Sun crosses the celestial equator (at 5:29 PM) from south to north, signalling the arrival of spring.

Mercury is rising only minutes before the Sun; it's at *superior conjunction* (almost directly behind the Sun) on 31 March. We're very unlikely to see this elusive little planet this month. **Venus** is well up in the western sky at sunset, but will be at *inferior conjunction* (almost directly in front of the Sun) on 27 March. At the very end of the month it is just starting to appear in the morning sky. **Mars** is still rising only a few minutes before sunrise. We won't be getting good views of the red planet until after the summer. **Jupiter**, like Mars, rises less than an hour before the Sun. Towards the end of March, we could see Jupiter very low in the south-east just before sunrise. **Saturn** is very well placed for viewing this month. It's at *opposition* to the Sun on 8 March, so it is rising as the Sun sets. It's due south at midnight and doesn't set until sunrise.

In early March, don't miss seeing the surprise **Comet Lulin** (pictured) with binoculars during the evening hours. Look towards the constellation of Leo, close to the Star Regulus. Wish you all a happy stargazing. ●

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Love in the Air**, art by Ragini Upadhyay-Grela at 5.30 PM till 8 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Feather friends**, an exhibition of paintings by Sanju Shahi, 6 March, 4PM, Kathmandu Gallery, Lazimpat



EVENTS

- ❖ **Doubt**, a film starring Phillip Seymour Hoffman, 6PM, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 7 March. 4428549
- ❖ **Lecture Series XXIX** by Ravi Bhandari, 5PM, 8 March, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka
- ❖ **Destination Thailand**, 8 March, Darbar Hall, Yak and Yeti Hotel, 9AM-5PM. 4371410
- ❖ **South Asian women networking event**, 7-9 March, evening event at Garden of Dreams. 4225272
- ❖ **Call for entries** for Film South Asia, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. For deadlines, visit filmsouthasia.org. 5552141

MUSIC

- ❖ **Women in Concert** at Gokarna Golf Resort, 6.30 PM, 21 March
- ❖ **OZMA concert** at the Army Club Auditorium, 6PM, 27 March
- ❖ **Final concert** of Miles Music Festival at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 28 March, 7PM.
- ❖ **Sunday Jazz brunch** barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz evening** at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM. 4260326
- ❖ **Strings Band** live every Tuesday at G's Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.
- ❖ **Wednesday Melody** at Jazzabell Café, Happy hour 6-8PM and TGIF party with live band Epic every Friday at 8PM. 2114075
- ❖ **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**, performance by Yankey every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234.
- ❖ **Fusion and Looza** Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- ❖ **Fusion and Classical Music** by Anil Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, sufi & raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **Gourmet trout** at Olive Garden, 6PM onwards at Rs 850+, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat. 4411818
- ❖ **Chez Caroline** for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited. 4263070
- ❖ **Fresh Himalayan rainbow trout** at Rox Restaurant all February 7PM onwards, Hyatt Regency. 4489362
- ❖ **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Strawberry Etagerie** at The Lounge from 4.30 PM- 6.30 PM. Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Nhuchhe goes Thai** at Nhuchhe's Thai Kitchen, Baluwatar. 4429903
- ❖ **Fusion** of Marcela Ragan's new menu and Mannie's new bar at Dhokaima Café. 5522113
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Pasta pesto passion** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **High tea** with scones and sandwiches everyday at the Lounge from 4.30-6.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234

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Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal
www.jainepal.com

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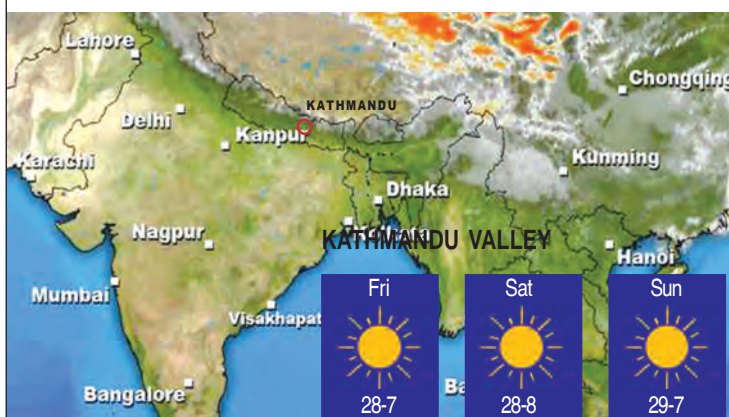
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

"Expect no change in current weather pattern till early next week," is the summary of the message from the Met Office, and your forecaster, unfortunately, is forced to concur. Moisture deficiency in the ambient air is now at the lowest level this season: relative humidity on Wednesday afternoon in Kathmandu dropped to 23 per cent. This satellite-radar image taken on Thursday morning shows the high pressure system in place, while the westerly fronts zoom across the Tibetan Plateau. One of them grazed western Nepal last week, dumping snow in Humla, but other than that we were left high and dry. With the westerlies now weakening, the only hope is for convection systems building up over the mountains as the temperature rises. But even that needs moisture, and with this dryness it is unlikely there will be rain-bearing clouds this weekend. Sorry.



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by PRERANA PAKHRIN





KIRAN PANDAY

SUMMIT: Heads of state of Sri Lanka and Nepal shake hands after their ministers signed an air services agreement linking Colombo to Kathmandu on Tuesday. Sri Lankan Foreign Minister and Nepal's Tourism Minister Hisila Yami.



KIRAN PANDAY

SEEKING FREEDOM: Asia Journalist Association president Lee Sang-ki (centre) and vice-president Ivan Lim Sin Chin met Prime Minister Dahal on Monday in Singha Darbar. They raised concerns about press freedom.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

WELL DESERVED: *Himal Khabarpatrika* reporter and *Nepali Times* contributor Rameswor Bohara receives the Yadu Gautam Award for human rights reporting on Wednesday from UML chairman Jhal Nath Khanal.



MARCELO BRODSKY

YOU ARE HERE: A picture taken this week in Punta Del Este, Uruguay, showing the distance to Kathmandu.

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Rotten eggs

What bad timing to schedule Traffic Week to coincide with the state visit of the Lankan president. It had got off to a fairly good start with volunteers acting like human road dividers, traffic cops threatening to **decapitate** motorcyclists if they ran the red light, and Baba-san distributing white gloves for police.

Traffic was actually getting smoother before disaster struck. Monday and Tuesday saw some of the worst traffic jams in living memory in the capital. Good thing the Sri Lankans cut short their visit, otherwise Wednesday would have been **bumper-to-bumper** as well. If this is what happens when there is just one visiting head of state, imagine the chaos the next time the SAARC Summit is held here. Security for the presidential

banquet at the Soaltee was so tight some invited guests couldn't even make it.



But that didn't stop big-name gatecrashers from not just making it to the banquet hall, but even trying to seat themselves at the head table. At the last minute, Foreigner Minister Upadro Yadav got a couple of his cronies' invitations and they just barely made it through traffic. And the secretary-in-chief in full ass-licking mode got the presidential secretariat to fork out invites for First Son Prakash and First Nephew Samir, the wilfully defaulting ex-egg tycoon, and three other Terrific relatives.



Bureaucratic and business circles in Kathmandu are currently

bristling with talk of the two cousins interfering in appointments, license procedures and bank loans by dropping the name of Comrade Uncle. PKD has enough problems in his hands without **rotten eggs** in his family raising another stink.



Just when we had started getting used to the western suit with topi or dhoti kamij, the rulers of the New Nepal are deliberately trying to confuse us with more variations on the national dress. At the guard of honour for the Sri Lankan president at the airport on Monday out comes the Foreign Minister in disheveled pajamas and chappals. If we are really already a **dictatorship of the proletariat** then night suit and slippers would be a perfectly acceptable national dress, but the

last we heard, we are still a Federal Democratic Inclusive People's Republic of Nepal. All this was fine, but after the anthems Touristic Minister Yummy was overheard telling the Firinghi Minister: "Tapai ta aja pukka Madhesi jastai dekhinu bho." Our mole didn't hang around to figure out if Upendra took that as a compliment.



After having been holed up in Nepal for nearly three years, Kingji is **letting his hair down** in India extending his trip to last a whole month. After the clan wedding in Bhopal, the naturalist ex-monarch went to check out the tigers at Ranthambore and a pilgrimage to Somnath in Gujarat. None of this should worry comrades in the **pipal republik** back home, but

Red Flag and Tremendous are getting rattled that royal cousin Arjun Singh is arranging meetings with Sonia and Lalmohan. Conspiratorial as the comrades are, they are imagining that the baby king proposal is being revived.



The cabinet, in its wisdom, approved the proposal to delete the month of Chait from the year 2066, but a committee of astrologers have so far refused to implement it. It's now getting late to start printing next year's calendars and most publishers are bringing out two variations of 2066 calendars: ones with Chait and ones without. The rumour is that the govt wants to prove that the Bickrum Sambat is **unscientific** and use this opportunity to introduce the Gregorian calendar. They may as well use this opp to declare Sunday a holiday and bring Nepal Time 45 minutes forward so we scrap this absurd 15 minute time diff with India.



Kathmandu-based embassies have decided to **cock the snook** at the Foreign Ministry's letter asking them to reveal who they rent premises from and how much they pay because it contravenes the Vienna Convention. Comrade Rambabu wants to leave no stone unturned to nab tax evaders, but he should have checked with the lawyers first.

ass(at)nepalitimes.com



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