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Weekly Internet Poll # 443

Q. What do you think about the government's handling of the Tharu agitation?

Total votes: 2,751

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Q. What do you think of the Maoists stopping the extension of tenure of eight generals?

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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

## Eye of the storm

J B PUN

Six months after coming to power, many political analysts agree that the state of drift in the country looks too systematic to be happening by chance.

It is as if the Maoists in the ruling coalition are allowing things to fall apart, or at least not doing anything to stop it. There are only eight hours of power a day, the inflation rate is irrationally high, there is anarchy on the highways and businesses are on the verge of mass-closure.

Yet, inside Singha Darbar

there are no indications that any of this unduly concerns the government. Instead of assuaging the public, politicians from the prime minister down issue daily warnings of state collapse or wild threats of takeover.

The Maoists are not even trying to hide the fact that they want to use social upheaval for complete state capture. They have said they want a constitution that establishes a one-party people's republic, and will seize power by force if anyone opposes it.

Baburam Bhattarai said in Butwal last week: "We have 40 per cent (in the CA) so not one word in the constitution can be written without us.

Either it will be the kind of constitution we want, or there will be no

constitution."

To many, such demagoguery shows that the Maoists have never been serious about democracy. In the past six months they have tried to bring the economy to a standstill through militant unionism, unleashed high-profile attacks on media, tampered with religion, deliberately interfered in the bureaucracy, judiciary and now the army.

Business is thoroughly demoralised and private schools that educate two million students are on the warpath. On foreign policy, the Maoists are actively playing the 'China card', antagonising India. The Madhes, which was settling down, was set on fire again with the feckless decisions to move service centres and then lump the Tharus with the Madhesis.

**FIREWORKS:** Kathmandu's six-month drought ended on Wednesday evening with a thunderstorm. More storms are predicted over the weekend.

"Even after being elected to power, they still think power comes from the barrel of a gun," says Pradeep Gyawali of the UML, "there is no room in their ideology for the universal values of democracy."

### EDITORIAL Talking points p2

After the Maoists swept the elections last year, there was hope that they would be dynamic and different, but there is growing frustration at the lack of delivery.

Political scientist Krishna Khanal predicts: "The Maoist strategy of seizing power by creating chaos will not just cause further suffering for the people, it will consume the Maoists themselves." ●

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## TALKING POINTS

By now, the Maoists have given us enough proof that their aim is to establish a one-party people's republic through the new constitution. And they have warned all political forces to get out of the way. If not, they'll sow anarchy and seize complete power.

This is not the view of reactionary red-baiters. It's not us saying it. Just read the draft constitution on their website and follow the soundbites: "We are in government, but not in power", "Out of disorder comes order", "It is through anarchy that we attain revolutionary transformation", "If anyone opposes us we will start a rebellion", "How dare the big media criticise us"...

We don't know if Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's Nordic interlocutors next week will quiz him on these pronouncements. If they do, he will employ his by now legendary inter-personal skills to tell them what they want to hear. He'll say: "We're in transition", "These things take time", "It is not our policy to gag the press", "We believe in multi-party competition". What he will not do is make a commitment to renounce violence as a political tool, and follow democratic norms. It is time to call the bluff.

In a dictatorship of the proletariat, the party vanguard knows what is best for everyone else. So the nomenklatura and apparatchik advocate destruction of the old to build a new. Not that

much effort is needed to destroy what remains intact in Nepal. Just letting things crumble would be enough to create conditions for an organised takeover. So, law and order problems are left unattended. Ethnic grievances are allowed to fester until they erupt violently. Businesses are harassed and

taxpayers ridiculed with harebrained schemes. There are perpetual shortages of everything: power, water, food. Prices are permitted to soar as coalition partners bicker over spheres of influence. And now, there is direct interference in the army. This mess is just too complex to be unplanned.

The UCPN-M has this scenario ready to implement if and when it assesses that geopolitical realities are favourable. Its YCL is now geared to trigger an urban uprising. Maoist labour and student wings can bring tens of thousands of people into the streets. Combatants have in the past come out of cantonments at short notice. The media has been intimidated and primed. Whole-timers have been recruited wholesale to take over the formal government machinery.

Norwegian and Finnish leaders should have these in the list of talking points with Nepal's prime minsiter. No more platitudes: show us by your actions that you are serious about democracy. Prove to us that you can ensure law and order. Show us that you are serious about welcoming investors, especially in hydropower. It would be naïve to be sanguine about the intentions of Maoists unless there are satisfactory answers.



CHONG ZI LIANG

# Press post mortem

Uma Singh was killed for her investigative reporting: IFJ

Early in February 2009, a representative of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) visited Janakpur to inquire into the state of the investigation into the murder of Uma Singh. The visit took place following an announcement by the Nepali political authorities that the murder was related to a property dispute, and Uma Singh was killed because she allegedly had the title to a large part of the family's assets, mainly land.

However, the IFJ found that Uma Singh's work as a journalist, in particular her significant investigative reporting on the wrongful expropriation of land during Nepal's decade-long insurgency, was a major factor behind her murder.

On the basis of its inquiries and interviews, the IFJ believes that this element of confusion about the motives for the murder of Uma Singh, though inherent in the situation, is easily dispelled. Property issues and familial rivalries were undoubtedly a part of the reason that Uma Singh was killed. But there is little question that her work as a journalist and the investigative reporting she had done on the expropriation of land in the Tarai was a major reason for her killing.

In her journalism, Uma Singh began to document extensively several instances of land-grabbing by Maoist cadres. With the ceasefire and the transition to a democratic government, there has been considerable public pressure building for returning seized land to prior owners. This is deemed an essential part of the process of national reconciliation in Nepal, until lawful land reforms are instituted. The Maoist-led national government, formally committed to national reconciliation, has issued necessary directives for the return

of expropriated land. But it has often proved unable or unwilling to enforce its writ on local cadres.

In an article in the Nepali language monthly *Sarokar* in October 2008, Uma Singh reported: "The Maoists 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 1,200 bigahas of land captured during the people's war is still under Maoist control."

She followed with a detailed cataloguing of land seizures and an enumeration of the people affected by property expropriation. The intent of her campaigning journalism was clear: to render justice to all people in Siraha and Dhanusha districts in particular and the Tarai region in general who had been dispossessed and displaced on account of land seizures.



Punish Uma Singh's Killers  
END IMPUNITY

In the same article, Uma Singh named a powerful person from the Maoist political hierarchy in the Tarai, now alienated from the party because of tactical and strategic differences. This leader had, she reported, defied central directives from his party and the cabinet and persisted with forcible land expropriation. He was unwilling to adapt to the realities of the ceasefire and the new democratic compact in Nepal.

Seemingly taking his appointment to the key Ministry of Land Reforms as the sanction for unilateral decisions, this individual had been mobilising disadvantaged sections in the Tarai in large numbers to forcibly

seize and resettle land. The Land Reforms Minister would not tolerate any opposition, ignoring directives from the Prime Minister and the cabinet that he cease his campaign.

With a number of interviews and first-hand accounts to buttress her reporting, Uma Singh wrote that this political campaign of forcible land seizure was motivated by fairly mundane calculations. Far from altruism, it was in fact extortion.

The motivation for Uma Singh's murder seems to have been her journalism, which consistently took up the issue of restitution of illicit land seizures. Uma Singh was also fearless and outspoken in her reporting on the operations of the numerous armed groups that had sprouted in the Tarai since the end of the insurgency.

The problems that women journalists faced were Uma Singh's special focus and she was, through her commitment and courage, an example for many younger women who chose to enter journalism after the 2006 transition to democracy.

Professional morale (in the media) has been severely dented by Uma Singh's murder. Most women reported intense pressures from their families to give up journalism and settle for relatively low-risk professions such as teaching. ●

*Excerpts from the investigation report were released by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) this week. The IFJ was part of the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal 5-8 February.*

*Full report: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/ifj-demands-justice-for-uma-singh-and-an-end-to-impunity-in-nepal>*

## LETTERS

### TIBET

I don't understand how this article on Tibetan protests in Kathmandu ('The tale of two protests' by Chong Zi Liang, [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)) went through your editorial filters. Is *Nepali Times* going the way of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* causing more bad than good to democracy in a country which touts itself as the sole flagbearer of freedom while its countrymen's public opinion is never reflected in the administration's policies? Out of the damage done by such corporate sources of news that 'manufacture consent', to quote Noam Chomsky, is the unproductive, misleading and seductive propaganda of 'Free Tibet'. International refugees don't have the right to engage in political activities in the host country. The bandas and strikes in Nepal are not good and wanted, but they were called by Nepalis for their own purpose. They have the right to do so. How can you compare this to the protests by refugees? There is one line in the article I agree with,

though: 'It will take political will, not muscle, to unblock the highways.'

**Bibek Poudel, email**

● Thank you for running Chong Zi Liang's opinion piece on your website about the Tibetan protests. It takes a foreigner to see the paradox in our police being so determined and brutal in suppressing the Tibetan protests at Boudha and the complete lack of interest in opening up the highways when the country is crippled by strikes for two weeks. It just goes to show that it is actually the Chinese who are running this country.

**Chandra Kant, email**

● I was wondering why the *Nepali Times* was ignoring the Free Tibet protests when I noticed the tailpiece in Backside ('Holi's

hydro-terrorists', #442). It is clear that Nepal is not a truly independent country and will never be, so we should stop complaining and get our pound of flesh from the Chinese for helping quell the protests.

**Lina Sorensen, email**

### ECONOMIC SENSE

I agree 100 per cent with Artha Beed ('Where is Nepal', #442). There should be some sort of law and order and some civic sense in our citizens before we can invite another 500,000 tourists to Nepal. Do Nepali politicians have any idea what's happening in the country? They don't seem to have a clue, and worse, don't seem to care.

**Name withheld, email**

### DEMAND SUPPLY

Bravo to Achyut Wagle for calling a spade a spade in his Guest Column ('Demanding supply', #442). There is no reason for

Nepal's high inflation rate—14.5 per cent (official) 60 per cent (unofficial). At a time when world oil prices have gone down, there is lack-lustre demand and India is showing low single digit inflation so there is no reason for inflationary pressures in Nepal. The only reason, as Wagle says, is price gouging by transport cartels and the mafia-style price fixing of all essential goods. A government that can't control this has no right to stay in power. And selling rice door-to-door is just a gimmick.

**Roop Shrestha, email**

● Thanks for Achyut Wagle's piece on inflation and the translated story on the scam involving bypassed calls. Both smack of a lack of oversight and accountability in government that fosters corruption. Call bypass is a huge scam that involves a government corporation and is on a par with fuel adulteration in its scope.

**Yog Sharma, Pokhara**



The writing on the wall



# General understanding

It's hard to play by the rules if no one knows what the new rules are

Earlier this week, the Maoist defence minister Ram Bahadur Thapa spurned his former foe and present underling CoAS Rukmangad Katuwal's proposal to extend the term of his generals. Katuwal then rushed to his Supreme Commander, who happens to be the first president of this country. In line with the dignity and decorum of his post, President Ram Baran Yadav directed his deputy to present his case to the government of the day.

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

Playing by the rule, Katuwal then went and vented his frustrations with the prime minister and then the defence minister. Due process is being followed and an outcome acceptable to all can be expected.

The relationship between organs of the ancien régime and a post-revolution government is nowhere easy. It takes time for old animosities to die and new understanding to develop. In Nepal, the process is further complicated by the unsettled issue of Maoist combatants interned at temporary camps who anxiously wait for their final fate. There is also proof that the decision not to accept the tenure extension of the generals was a Maoist party decision and did not have the nod of the members of the coalition.

However, it was hasty of Girija Prasad Koirala to hit the panic button and urge his supporters to oppose what he called this "political intervention" in the army



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

by the Maoists. During his every stint in Singha Darbar in the past 15 years, Koirala put the interest of the instruments of state over political priorities.

His enduring attachment with elements of status quo began the day he declared from the Khula Manch in 1990: "This is also the victory of Panchas" and was booed by the crowd. More recently, he took a huge political risk by appointing Katuwal as CoAS in August 2006 despite protests from human rights groups, civil society, the media and his own cadres. Earlier, the Rayamajhi Commission had named Katuwal among those responsible for

excesses repressing the April Uprising.

The love-hate relationship between the army and the Koirala family has a long history. Matrika Prasad, the eldest of the Koirala brothers who became the first civilian prime minister of the country, tried his best to improve his political fortunes by flouting the 'General' honorific title bestowed upon him by King Tribhuban. The army brass laughed it off, and the best Matrika managed in his later years was an ambassadorship in Washington.

The second brother BP Koirala became the first elected prime minister of the

country. BP was emboldened by the charm offensive of army generals and was led to believe that his attempts of institutionalising civilian control over the army would not be resisted. But when he began to modernise the army, officers of the force conspired with the king to put him in jail. Despite his stature, popularity and closeness with King Mahendra and King Birendra, BP could never lead the nation again.

Girija Prasad, the third of the Koirala brothers to head the government, had to bow out in disgrace when the army kept him in the dark about the Narayanhiti Massacre in June 2001 and ignored his order to rescue a besieged police force in Holeri soon after. Still, he wooed the brass. It is ironic that the Koirala father-daughter duo is so despised in the Officers' Mess at Bhadrakali.

It's an uncomfortable reality, but the NC and UML leadership need to accept that they lacked the courage to face the Nepal Army when generals refused to obey the civilian command, ignored decisions of the government and made snide remarks about politics and politicians.

It's hard to play by the rules if no one knows what the new rules are. If the Maoist Defence Minister is bent upon exacting revenge for his humiliation during the row over recruitments in the army, this needs to be exposed politically. Personal pique can't be the basis for government policy decisions. But blindly supporting the generals every time they decide to throw a tantrum doesn't help either in restoring the morale of the Nepal Army. ●

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# Generals in the labyrinth

At a recent private gathering a few top generals of the Nepal Army said: "The Maoists want to emasculate all institutions. Another round of confrontation is inevitable. We have been restrained, but we really want to go after them."

A month ago, while returning from the PLA celebrations in Nawalparasi, a Maoist divisional commander told us: "It is a suicidal decision by the army (to defy the defence minister on recruitment). Now they will have to face the people's wrath."

The Maoist-Nepal Army relationship is complex, there are informal channels of communication. Maoist leaders are delegated to build individual ties with key army officers. Ethnicity and

hierarchy within the army have been factors in shaping perceptions.

But at its root, there remains a wide trust gap between the Maoist leadership

and the NA. They have different and often conflicting interests and there is a personality clash between the defence minister and the army chief.

COAS Rukmangad Katuwal scored a point on the recruitment issue. Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa knew his credibility and political future was on the line, and he needed to act. He struck back with the extension decision this week.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who played the good cop on recruitment (privately blaming his defence minister for mismanaging the issue, and distancing himself from the PLA decision to begin recruitment) backed Thapa this time around.

## Here's an opportunity to narrow the trust gap between the Maoists and the Nepal Army

His calculations were possibly based on the fact that this would weaken Katuwal within the army, irrespective of the eventual compromise. The older officers would perhaps blame him for taking the confrontation with Maoists too far. A few officers would be happy at getting a chance to rise up. And everyone would know who's boss.

It would appease the PLA, which in the past few months has been asserting itself as an autonomous political stakeholder. Even if Dahal is hand in glove with the PLA commanders, there is an attempt to portray it as an independent force as this increases the bargaining power of the Maoists.

At press time, the politics is still playing itself out. The Maoists can't be seen as backtracking yet again but they don't want this to be a pretext for anti-Maoist consolidation. And despite the NC's support, it will be more difficult for Katuwal, who has steadily been exhausting his political capital, to rally forces around him. Whether the Indians try to broker a compromise or adopt a more hands-off approach, they will have a role.

The army is continuing as if it is business as usual. What was the screening process for an extension for these eight officers? Was there a serious evaluation about immediate needs of the army and abilities and indispensability of these officers? Was this shared officially with the political leadership? When will they bring about a culture of transparency?

On the government side, the original villain for not setting up institutions is Girija Prasad Koirala who seriously believed he was the state. He centralised all decisions related to the army, calculating this would give him control. A committee headed by defence minister (himself) and a few government secretaries would decide on key military decisions. The Maoists just continued this political culture of not consulting the cabinet, or the legislature oversight committees.

At a time of transition when civil-military relations are strained, when non-Maoists suspect that the Maoists are trying to take control, why be reckless and not engage in broader consultations if your intent is right? What if the army and the country need some of those eight officers at the leadership level right now?

This episode erodes the trust between Maoists and non-Maoists, and pushes back the possibility of substantive discussion on integration. Is that the Maoist intention all along?

But it also presents an opportunity. The Maoists are mistaken if they think they can bulldoze their way and exert partisan control over the army, there are just too many balancing factors. If they want a stable political system, which will allow them to exercise power with legitimacy, they have to focus on building independent civilian institutions to control the army. Emulating Koirala won't work.

The Nepal Army needs to see that there has to be a major overhaul of its organisational culture. The rules of the game have changed, they should reconcile themselves to it in practice. ●



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

# Power cuts, labour and insecurity impacting on economy

Alexander Pitt, the resident representative in Nepal of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) speaks to *Nepali Times* about the impact of the global recession, the regulatory role of the Nepal Rastra Bank and the banking sector.

***Nepali Times:* The Finance Ministry says revenue generation is up sharply. What is the IMF's take on this, especially its impact on the macro-economy, and capital flight in particular?**

The IMF has long supported the government in raising more revenues to enhance the government's ability to invest, and reduce dependency on external funds. Nepal's tax income as a share of the economy has been quite low by international standards: around 9.5 per cent of GDP on average in the past five years. The ministry's successful efforts show that a large potential of additional tax revenue has so far remained untapped. The challenge now is to put these additional funds to good use by executing growth-enhancing investments, primarily in infrastructure.

The impact on capital flight is naturally difficult to gauge, as numbers are hard to come by. However, the continued balance of payment surpluses and reserve accumulation of the Nepal Rastra Bank suggest that this is only a limited problem. Also, capital flight has many reasons, and I don't think that taxation is the main issue here. Tax rates are relatively low in Nepal.

**Despite everything, Nepal's macroeconomic indicators are sound. What would you attribute this to?**

Nepal's solid macroeconomic position is largely due to two factors. First, remittances, which supply large amounts of foreign exchange, and second the government's cautious fiscal policy, with low domestically financed deficits. These two factors enable the Nepal Rastra Bank to maintain the peg to the Indian rupee, which is an important anchor for stability, and

keep public debt at manageable levels.

**How worried are you about stagnant GDP growth and inflation?**

I am not very worried about inflation, despite current high levels. Historically, Nepali and Indian inflation have moved closely together and with the decline in Indian inflation we can expect to see a decline in Nepal as well. However, there are a number of structural factors that impede a rapid reduction of inflation as observed in India. The most important of these is the pervasive carteling of economic activity in Nepal, for example in the transport sector. These cartels need to be broken.

Regarding GDP, we of course would like to see higher growth, and we are worried that a substantial part of GDP growth comes from the real estate and financial sectors, which are prone to instability. We would like to see growth to be broader based, on productive investments in agriculture, industry, and services at the same time.

**There are dire predictions of the bursting of the real estate bubble and its impact on the banking sector. Is this the IMF's assessment as well?**

The IMF is very concerned about the development of real estate prices and the financial sector's exposure to them. The prices of these assets have been fueled by continued inflows of remittances—though structural factors such as continued rural-urban migration also play a role—and can decline at any time. That would create difficulties for those banks, development banks and finance companies that are highly exposed, but could also represent an opportunity for consolidation of the financial sector, if handled well by the authorities.

**What do you think will have a bigger impact on the country's economy; the ongoing global and regional financial crisis or local issues like power, labour and security?**

I think the local problems that you have mentioned have a much larger impact on Nepal's economic performance than the global financial crisis. We have not seen the impact of the financial crisis in the numbers yet. For example, remittances are so far holding up well, though that could change, and the financial sector is largely insulated from international capital markets. In contrast, the power shortages, labour conflicts and insecurity are very real and have an immediate and discernible impact on the economy and jobs. Addressing these issues at a fundamental level, that is, not with quick ad-hoc fixes, should be the government's highest priority, and would, incidentally, also go a long way to cushioning any effects of the global crisis that may yet unfold.

**Would the IMF like the Nepal Rastra Bank to take its regulatory role more seriously?**

We would like the NRB to play a strong regulatory and supervisory role, and to some extent that is happening. Already the Rastra Bank is using moral suasion to reduce exposure to the real estate sector, and it has introduced prompt corrective action policies to address banks' weaknesses. However, more could and needs to be done. In particular, stronger supervision of the risk profile of individual banks is necessary. The Rastra Bank should also develop a strategy to consolidate the financial sector into fewer but stronger financial institutions. A tightening of monetary conditions—higher interest rates—would also help in this regard, and would also assist to contain the rise in real estate prices. Lastly, the two state-owned banks, Rastriya Banijya Bank and Nepal Bank Limited, need to be guided towards a sustainable solution. We are open to how this solution should look like, but their current situation is not satisfactory, as they are not meeting the minimum capital requirements prescribed by the NRB.



## Boost food production

The Ministry of Agriculture is planning to invest Rs 2.7 billion in an agricultural sector development program that includes improving food security, dairy and agro products, and cereal production. The proposal for the three-year campaign is being sent to the Planning Commission.

## Middle East budget flights

Private airline Bahrain Air began flights to Kathmandu on 17 March. The relatively low cost airline currently has four Airbus 320/319s in its fleet and flies to 16 destinations. It is starting with three weekly flights direct to Bahrain, but plans to make them daily by October this year. Managing Director Ibrahim Abdulla Alhamer, said, "The flight will open up neglected tourism possibilities to Nepal from the Middle East."



## Banking on conservation



ACE Development bank is to raise awareness about the plight of the one-horned rhino and invest in its conservation with the launch of the Ace Rhino Account. The account is targeted chiefly at children, encouraging families to invest on their behalf as it has a relatively high interest rate.

### NEW PRODUCTS

**FAST WASHERS:** Sagtani Exim, which imports the IFB brand of appliances, has launched a new range of domestic and industrial dishwashers. The stainless steel industrial dishwashers can wash and rinse 4,000 glasses or 1,800 plates using nine units of electricity, 240 litres of water and 900 ml of detergent.

**MAKEUP:** German cosmetics company Consta, which uses natural ingredients in its products, has launched 30 face and body creams including a day cream and anti-wrinkle cream in Nepal.

# Shareholders vs stakeholders

## Multinationals need to think nationally, too

Last week, a multinational consumer goods company shut down its operations after being in Nepal for 11 years. Deciding to move to India, Colgate Palmolive blamed both chronic labour problems and dwindling sales of its products in Nepal.



**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
Ashutosh Tiwari

What was striking about the company's announcement was how little media attention was paid to the company's plight. The FNCCI did not rally in support of the company. Labor union leaders did not bemoan the loss of jobs or wonder aloud how more jobs are to be created when multinationals leave the country in a steady stream one after another.

At a time when the finance minister says that he wants, however improbably, to make it easier for foreign investors to come to Nepal, this company's departure throws ice water on the minister's plans. And it's tempting to use this example to further blame our politicians and the policy-makers for continuously failing to create an amenable business climate for domestic and foreign companies to thrive in Nepal.

But what if we say that despite the opportunity that Nepal offers in terms of a young, growing population, relatively

inexpensive labour and access to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh markets, sometimes it is the companies who may have themselves to blame for their own departure? They go overboard to please their shareholders around the world, but bungle dealings with their stakeholders in areas where their factories are located.

Despite the anti-multinational rhetoric of Nepal's left, the fact is that most Nepali managers covet jobs at multinational companies. All things being equal, multinationals pay higher salaries, offer better benefits, bring in international standards and qualities to ways of working, and are more regular about sending staff away to training programs in and out of the country. For upwardly mobile Nepali professionals, post-MBA jobs with multinationals offer instant prestige and influence.

Their bosses are usually expatriates, who stay in Nepal for a few years, which are spent, not surprisingly, on improving the bottom line. If profits go up during the tenure of a particular country manager, his (and it's usually a he) career graph goes up within the global company. If profits go down, then, his career will not do well.

The big boss's incentive is such that he does the relatively easy part of raising revenues with a lot more energy. But he

does not usually spend much time engaging deeply on strengthening relations with the communities of stakeholders: labor, ex-employees, NGOs, trade unions, media, vendors, suppliers, farmers, politicians and policy-makers. Even when he does meet them, the meetings have either a perfunctory, even superficial, feel to them or the phrase "desperate crisis management" hangs in the air. Needless to say, such interactions do not inspire long-term trust and confidence.

That is why, instead of rushing to blame Nepal for all the problems, the burden of which, let us not forget, are borne by all domestic companies as well, the country heads of multinationals in Nepal need to widen the lens of how they view business opportunities in both the short- and the long-run. And that means learning to engage openly and iteratively with the local stakeholders even when such engagements do not add any immediate number to the net profit figure.

Sure, pleasing shareholders offers immediate job-related rewards. But doing that well, while earning the honest respect of the local stakeholders offers both themultinational and its management a recipe for continuing to do well in admittedly problem-ridden and rife-with-uncertainty countries, such as Nepal, in years to come. ●

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# Demobilise and disarm

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 14-28 March

After the success of Jana Andolan II, the public and other political parties made no demands for the Maoists to dissolve their army. The word 'disarmament' was dropped in favour of almost meaningless euphemisms like 'arms management'. There was widespread tolerance for the Maoists because the people and political parties alike wanted the peace process to work and for the Maoists to enter mainstream politics. Jana Andolan II had already proved that change doesn't come from the barrel of the gun, but from the will of the people. Few raised objections when the Maoists declared that there were 31,000 PLA combatants—four times the number they themselves admitted to during previous talks. Even when UNMIN stated that there were only 19,000, we went along with it. When an un-disarmed political party was allowed to contest elections and won, we tolerated that too.

The country should by now have been moving towards democracy and focussing on the constitution-drafting process, but it is in crisis. The public's dissatisfaction with the government is growing. There is only one way for the peace process to succeed—the lawful demobilisation of the PLA and dissolution of cantonments. The interim constitution talks about the care,



SAM KANG LI

readjustment and reintegration of the combatants. There has been a lot of 'care' already, now what we need is readjustment and reintegration. For this, a special committee of the Kangres, UML, MFJ and the Maoists has already been formed. The most important factor that needs to be taken into account while demobilising the combatants is the assurance of their future, and of employment. There has already been political agreement about this ahead of the elections, and India and other countries are aware of it.

There should now be strong steps towards demobilisation which will simplify current politics. Post-demobilisation, the Maoists, like other political parties, will have truly embraced democracy.

## End the games

Sambhu Shrestha in *Drishti*, 17 March



The ground hasn't moved, but the Maoist-led government is shaky. Even seemingly innocent visits to India by Gyanendra and Girija make the Maoists nervous. Why should this revolutionary party that once launched a 'tunnel-war' with India be scared of India now?

It was the Maoists who planted the seeds of ethnic identity politics. In the six decades of communist uprising in Nepal, no other communist party used ethnicity as a tool to incite the people. A class-based revolution is turning into an ethnic one. If this isn't nipped in the bud, Nepal might turn into another Soviet Union or Yugoslavia. Both the people, and the representative parties in the constitutional assembly, should be alert. The Maoists must keep one thing in mind: they may have the weapons, but that doesn't make them infallible.



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chairman and prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. "My son-in-law told me that he would come to Tribhuban University in Kirtipur today, so I came here to meet him," Muktiram says.

However, after waiting for quite a while, it seems the prime minister is not coming after all. Wiping away the tears from his face, Muktiram says: "I rushed here immediately the minute I knew he was coming."

Muktiram stayed with his son at the chairman's Naya Bajar house, and has spoken to him twice on the phone since, but hasn't seen him since he became prime minister. Muktiram says he doesn't want to go to Baluwater. His younger son is also out of the country so he longs to see the son that is here. "I am getting older, I want to see my son before I die," says the father of Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Muktiram Dahal lives with his daughter, son-in-law and grandchild in Kirtipur.

# Rishi Dhamala

*Himal Khabapatrika*, 14- 28 March



Public opinion about journalist Rishi Dhamala changed dramatically after his arrest on 3 February. President of the reporter's club for the last 11 years, Dhamala now faces charges of possession of arms and ammunition, kidnap and murder. The allegations made by the police against Dhamala were formed on the basis of a telephone conversation Dhamala had with Ramsubhak Mahato, who heads Ranbir Sena in the Valley. Mahato, who was arrested the day before Dhamala, says he secretly recorded his conversation with Dhamala in which someone sounding like him makes a deal with Mahato to extort Rs 3-4 million from an unidentified businessman. Dhamala's lawyer Tikaram Bhattarai says the tape doesn't prove he is guilty of possessing arms, of kidnap or



RSS

murder. Dhamala has also claimed that the recorded voice is not his. Courts do not accept cassettes as a form of evidence under Nepali law. Lawyers also say the police is shifting the goalposts by changing the charge against Dhamala when there was no evidence to back the original charge.

Most people both within the country and in India know Rishi

Dhamala for his close relationship with India's political leaders. Colleagues say Dhamala has always shown an interest in political activities. He was said to have a close relationship with Sujata Koirala, daughter of Girija Koirala and later even with Prime Minister and Maoist commander Pushpa Kamal Dahal. On 13 September, before his visit to India, Dahal reportedly told Dhamala: "If India is ready to help me then I am ready to help India in any way possible." Dhamala secretly recorded this conversation and is said to have played the tape to Dahal's rival with the party, Mohan Baidya. Dahal was reportedly furious.

A source close to Baidya denies there was any tape. But Rajendra Upacharak, editor of Dhamala's column in *Bimarsa* says Dhamala has the cassette and will make it public when the time is right.

In the midst of the crowd, Muktiram Dahal's old eyes search the grounds for a glimpse of his son. Called up to the stage by the organiser, Muktiram waits eagerly for the arrival of his son, Maoist



"Is this a conspiracy to bring down the government?"

कान्तिपुर Batsayan, Kantipur, 15 March



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# Nepal's multi-ethnic future

## A purely ethnicity-based federal structure will not work

Nepal is a country of ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities. Out of 75 districts, only 14 have majorities of any particular ethnic group. Thus, autonomy of a single ethnic community is impossible.

There are three main reasons for Nepal to opt for a federal structure: ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. This is a



**COMMENT**  
**Shyam Shrestha**

country of 82 languages, 100 castes and ethnic groups, and 10 religions. And this diversity is not represented in the structure of government at any level.

The other rationale for federalism is so that there is a truly decentralised decision-making mechanism. This is necessary to redress the imbalance and to take development to remote places so that the people have access to state services. Federalism would also ensure national unity of castes, creeds, religions, languages and cultures while giving their identities representation.

In short, the new federal state should address the issues of inclusion, decentralisation, balanced and sustainable regional development and a sense of national unity. But there are certain prevailing realities:

**First:** There is no nationwide majority of any particular ethnicity but there are pockets where particular ethnic groups have a relative majority.

**Second:** Certain ethnic groups have a relative majority in 14 districts whereas no particular group has majority in the remaining 61 districts.



CHONG ZI LIANG

Whichever way federal units are carved out, they will ultimately be multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural. Ethnic autonomy is impossible in Nepal.

Therefore, there is no alternative to sharing power in proportion to the relative size of each group, and to ensure good governance. District demarcation already address ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity we need not divide them further.

**Third:** there is an absolute majority of a particular ethnic groups in one third of the VDCs and municipalities. Even Dalits and minority groups have majority in certain VDCs. Similarly, 84 per cent of VDCs are dominated by a particular language. In this way, the provincial autonomy should be mixed whereas the autonomy in VDCs and municipal level can be based on the absolute majority of a particular ethnicity.

**Fourth:** the Tarai itself also has a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural character. Therefore, a single cultural

regional autonomy like One Madhes Pradesh is not possible.

The federal structure of Nepal should therefore take the following criteria into account:

Ethnic, lingual and cultural dominance or settlement, availability of natural and economic resources, geographical situation and proximity, administrative viability, inter-provincial economics and trade. Ethnic composition alone should not be a factor in demarcating federal units. We should also look if the provinces have enough resources and other facilities, if not, think how to distribute these facilities among all proposed 15 provinces. The unequal distribution of resources could lead to future conflict.

Representation of marginalised communities within federal units can be guaranteed through a system of proportional representation. Affirmative

action could reserve jobs for them in the public sector.

If a particular ethnic group can have a majority within certain VDCs and municipalities, they can be given cultural and local autonomy. Dalits and minority communities can thus have a sense of being autonomous within the province. Since Dalits do not have separate geographical region there has to be an alternative electorate to ensure their representatives.

There are 11 languages spoken by less than one per cent of the total population, which can be allowed to be official language in the provinces. Besides, holidays for minorities on their festivals can ensure cultural inclusion. A multi-lingual policy could promote one link language, one dominant local language and one international.

Foreign affairs, national security and monetary policy should be under the central government. Similarly, postal and communication, international trade, projects in which more than one provinces are involved, international transportation, highway and mega hydroprojects should be the responsibility of the federal government while the rest should be given to the provinces.

The crucial agenda for the CA to decide will be the kind of federalism Nepal should have. It will not solve all our problems, and we should have no illusions that federalism will come with its own set of problems. We can not create a perfect federal structure, but it has to be seen as work in progress. ●

*Shyam Shrestha is a political analyst and editor of the monthly magazine, Mulyankan.*

# “A mini-referendum”

## Despite complicated questionnaires, tour gives CA members chance to meet the people

DHRUBA SIMKHADA

The 601 CA members have divided into 40 groups and have fanned out across the country to collect the people's suggestions for the new constitution through questionnaires and public hearings.

Some 3.4 million sets of the 60-page long questionnaire have been printed, and there are 45 for each VDC and 10 for each municipality ward.

Carrying bundles of questionnaires, CA members are finding out the people's opinions on state structure, governance, federalism, inclusion and election system.

CA chair Subas Nembang says the enumerators in this 'mini referendum' are instructed to be objective and not politically motivated while they carry out this exercise. However, Maoist CA member Narayan Kaji Shrestha and Rashmiraj Nepali of National People's Front (NPF)

have already been spotted being blatantly partisan. Shrestha was giving public speeches in his home district Gorkha while Nepali was campaigning against federalism in Dang.

However, some CA members believe it provides a vital opportunity to build relations with the people. Nabindra Raj Joshi, who has been collating views in the capital says door-to-door visits have helped him understand feelings at the grassroots. "People have spoken out about democracy, federalism and the country's peace and prosperity, which will be helpful in drafting the new constitution," he says.

CA member Bishnu Rimal says people in Bhaktapur are participating in the campaign enthusiastically while in Chhaling VDC, 391 people filled out questionnaires. The process was disrupted in Tarai districts by the Tharu movement, but the CA secretariat claimed it was peaceful in other districts.



DEB PACHABHAIYA

Initially the questionnaires were designed to seek opinions only about some basic and theoretical issues. But the CA members wanted to go further, making the questionnaire long and complicated.

Mukunda Sharma, spokesperson for the CA secretariat says the members

designed the questionnaires themselves. "The data collection and processing will also be done by CA members, helping build up the people's ownership of the statute," Sharma says.

In a press conference in Nepalgunj, Maoist CA member Mohammad Istiyak Rai questioned why the

questionnaires were not in Urdu. TMLP Mahanta Thakur said the questionnaires were too complex for Madhesi and indigenous people to understand. In a statement he called for the collection in the Tarai to be postponed. But Sharma counters: "This questionnaire was prepared by them (CA members). Nobody talked about the language then."

The government has spent Rs 85 million on printing the questionnaires, alone. On top of that are transport expenses and the travelling and daily allowances of the CA members. Although the idea of going to the people attracted widespread praise, the procedure is coming under fire. What if the people speak out against secularism and federalism, which have already been decided upon, will such opinions be rejected?

Even CA members admit that the questionnaires are not scientific and many people don't know how to fill them out. ●



# Want to snowboard down Annapurna?



DOUGH JOHNSON



SEB LEON

Heli-skiing has made it possible to ski down slopes that could previously only be climbed

RICHARD RAGAN

Nepal's mountains remain the ultimate destination for the planet's adventure addicted athletes. From all corners of the globe people come here to test their will, wits and stamina in the most intense playground that mother-nature has to offer.

Until recently, Nepal's mountains were mainly the province of mountaineers. Today, heli-skiing is here, allowing enthusiasts to ski down slopes that could previously only be climbed.

Japan's Yucichiro Miura in 1971 was the first person to attempt skiing down Nepal's mountains, a feat shown in the Academy Award winning film, *The Man Who Skied Down Everest*. True ski descents of Chomolungma are difficult for a number of reasons, but the biggest obstacle is that an attempt should be made during the fall monsoon season when snowfall cover is the greatest.

In addition to being an outstanding skier you've got to be a topnotch winter mountaineer. Miura's descent, as pioneering as it was, took place in spring and only covered approximately 2,500 metres down the steep ice of the Lhotse face.

Previously, skiing in Nepal meant two grueling months on a mountaineering expedition getting pounded by bad weather and altitude sickness. Today, the use of helicopters has changed

the mix. Skiers and snowboarders can now ascend to 5,800 metres, and with a little climbing, go even higher. Nepal's snowline doesn't start until 3,500 metres, which is already higher than the summit of any ski resort in other parts of the world.

Admittedly, stepping out of the helicopter at 5,200 metres on the first run can leave a person panting, but soon the body acclimatizes. Using the mountaineering principle of climbing high and sleeping low, skiers ride high and rest low, and this formula seems to work.

Aside from the altitude concerns, avalanche conditions and difficult terrain are the norm for skiers and boarders here. In the likelihood of an emergency, it is critical that one have some training in avalanche safety and be equipped with avi-beacons, probes and shovels. Having myself been caught in an avalanche last year on Annapurna South, I can attest to the importance of being ready for anything.

The heli-skiing season runs from late February through early April and trips so far have been taken to the Humla/Dolpa area, the Annapurnas and the Khumbu. This year, lack of snow and increasingly expensive helicopter rates means nobody will be skiing or snowboarding in Nepal during the 2009 season. For the sport to really take hold, flying costs have to become competitive. Local helicopter operators are charging three to



RICHARD RAGAN

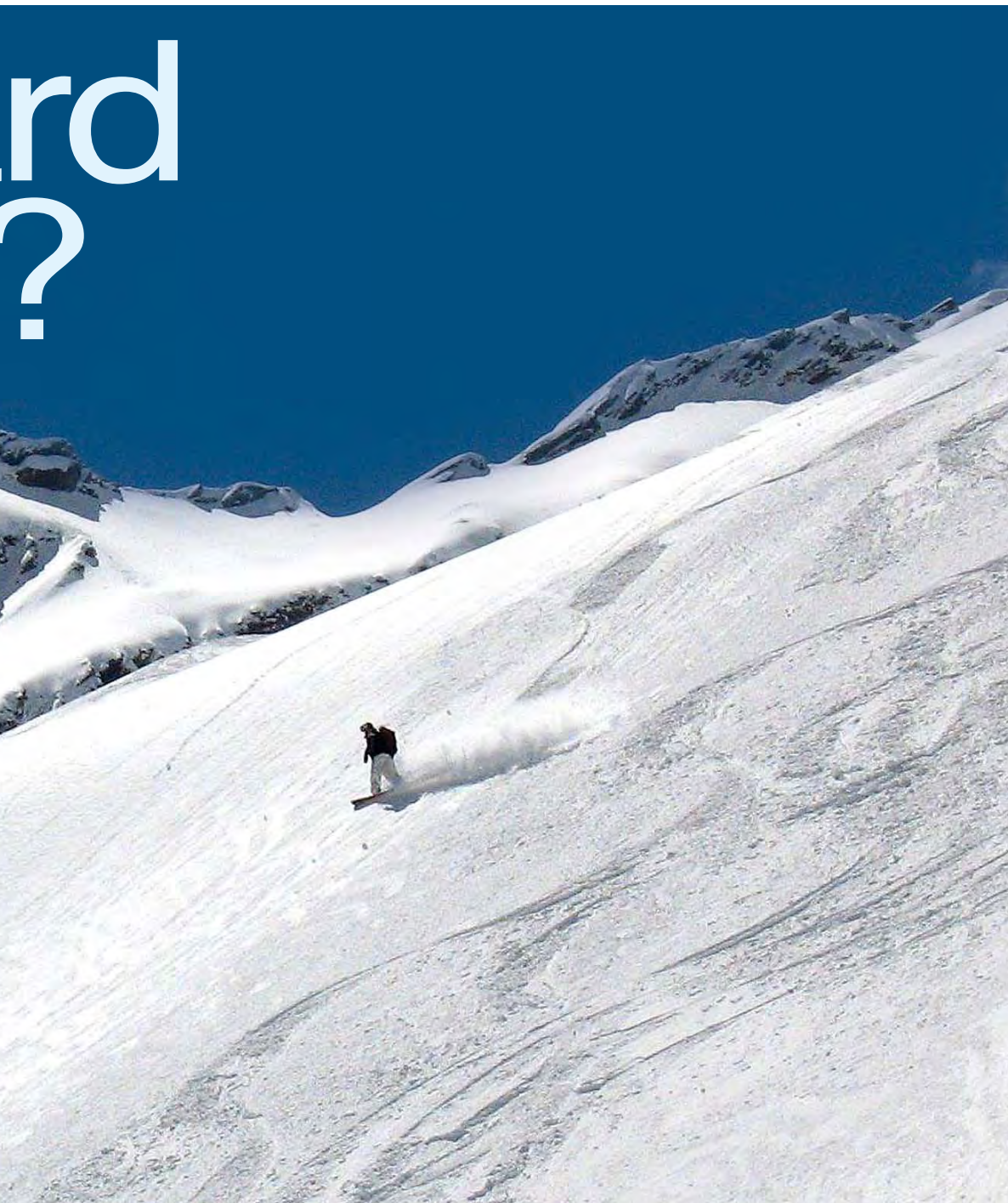
**VIRGIN SNOW:** A MI-17 helicopter drops off skiers high up on the Annapurna sanctuary. Skiers then snowboard down a gentle slope (above), and then a steeper section (left) amidst a backdrop of Machapuchre from the north.

four times more per flying hour than their competitors in other counties thereby pricing themselves out of the market.

Nepal isn't a place for people learning to ski or snowboard. These are formidable mountains where avalanche danger, fast changing weather patterns and difficult terrain, are the norm. But if you're experienced and have a sense of adventure, there is no better place on earth to take some turns. ●



# rd ?

A full-page photograph of a snowboarder descending a steep, pristine white snowfield. The snowboarder, positioned in the lower-middle section of the frame, is wearing dark clothing and is captured mid-turn, kicking up a spray of white snow. The mountain slope is expansive and mostly featureless except for some subtle tracks and shadows. In the background, more snow-covered peaks are visible against a solid, deep blue sky. The overall composition is dynamic and emphasizes the vastness of the winter landscape.

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# Disunion

Shouldn't the main agenda of student unions be education?

For the past week Kathmandu has been rent with the beat of drums, revolutionary songs, speeches and slogans around college campuses. There were banners everywhere, the streets were littered with student union pamphlets.

Students came out in large numbers to listen, talk and understand the process, using acronyms such as ANNISU, NSU and ANNISU-R quite comfortably. The elections were finally held on Thursday.

Historically, students unions were formed in Nepal as a form of resistance against the Panchayat system and worked with the people in the democratic struggle to overthrow it. The NC-affiliated Nepal Student Union's roots go back to 1971. The UML-affiliated

All Nepal National Free Student Union was started in 1965 and has survived many splits and alliances over the years.

Young students who were

leaders in the 1970s and 80s went on to become powerful party leaders. Sher Bahadur Deuba, Govinda Raj Joshi, Ram Chandra Poudel all emerged from student politics. Student union elections is where future politicians cut their teeth.

Senior political party leaders exploit the young students to extend their party's reach. During a banda, it is the affiliated student union that is mobilised to make the strike 'effective'. So

powerful are the student unions that they can close down colleges, postpone exams and re-schedule sessions. For a political party, students are effective cadres: they have hope, they believe in radical change, they are creative,

restless and highly ambitious. Classes may not run in colleges, schools may shut down for days, but there is always some political mileage to be made.

"It is easy to think that revolution is more important, and education can wait when you don't have to worry about where the next meal is coming from," says a former student union leader in the 1990s.

While travelling in Nepal, one is constantly amazed at how politically-aware young Nepalis are. For a country of young people, that is a very positive thing. But there's a difference between being a 17-year old politically-aware kid and actually getting involved in politics when you are 17 years old. But politics in government colleges is the main reason why more Nepalis who can afford opt for private colleges or go abroad.

From reading the interviews of the student leaders in past week's papers it is clear that the platforms of the student unions are photocopies of the manifestos of their parent parties. Student unions have played an important role in the past uprisings and in bringing changes to the country. The struggle for democracy is never over. But there comes a time when one has to move on.

Thursday's student union elections resembled last April's constituent assembly elections. The Maoist-affiliated student union is contesting for the first time, so student politics mirrors national politics. Since last week, all student unions have been padding up the numbers in colleges and universities with enrollments. Rumours are rife that Maoists from the cantonments have been enrolled en-masse in the campuses, some with fake certificates.

On Thursday, the Maoists disrupted elections in college where they were sure to lose, like Padma Kanya. Elections were smooth in places where the Maoist union is sure to win. However, reports of one person killed in Jhapa and over 50 beaten up all over Nepal trickled in during press time on Thursday. Maoists with red YCL bandanas formed a cordon at Bag Bajar to prevent polling from taking place, while students affiliated with the NC screamed in protest.

So, like the constituent assembly elections, it will be no surprise who comes out on top. ●



**INTERESTING TIMES**  
Mallika Aryal



## "Killed by hunger.."

By 8AM two weeks ago, the streets of Kolti were already humming with activity. Sunday is when the Nepal Food Corporation sells subsidised rice. People from far and wide began to gather at the depot, empty sacks in hand.

Food distribution begins at 10AM, and an unruly queue becomes chaotic. The police move in to restore some order, but such is the desperation that they have a difficult time. Villagers have to produce their citizenship certificate before they can buy 20 kg of rice. Chandra Jit Thapa needs to make a three-day roundtrip from Bichhya village just to get the rice, and he gets a double quota because he is from a far flung village.

"As a rule an individual can buy 10kg of rice a week," says Mekh Raj Ojha of NFC, Bajura. Last year the NFC distributed 1,700 tonne of rice in Bajura. This year it is not going to be enough.



PRAKASH JHA

The unprecedented drought this year has affected grain supply, with the winter wheat and barley devastated by the lack of rain. The smarter farmers who had planted potato have something to eat. The people of Bajura have coped with it in the traditional way and the only way they know how: migrating to India for work.

"Snow in winter means a bountiful harvest, and we used to get three snowfalls a year. This year there was very little snow,

so there is no food," explains farmer Hundi Rawat of Angaupani.

The surrounding mountains have a dusting of snow, but there used to be three feet of snow there in winter. There wasn't much rain in the valleys either, and even the apple orchards have suffered.

Says Rawat with resignation in his voice: "During the war, we could be killed by a bullet. In peace time we can be killed by hunger." ●

Mohan Mainali in Bajura



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Remote Bajura builds on the absence of conflict and violence

MOHAN MAINALI

# From war to peace

MOHAN MAINALI in BAJURA

Visiting Bajura three years after the war ended, the most dramatic change among the people here is the palpable lack of fear. Villagers who used to need 'visas' to go from one VDC to another can now move around freely.

Soldiers that used to rudely interrogate villagers are now seen chatting and giving newcomers directions. The Maoists who used to regard all visitors with suspicion and extort money from shopkeepers, now leave the people alone.

Jasi Ram Sahani, a shopkeeper at Bajura's airfield at Kolti, got it from both sides: the army detained him for two days for selling banned items like batteries and kerosene. And he often pretended to be sick when Maoists came around to force villagers to attend their meetings.

"The stress was unbearable, I used to be terrorised when I saw anyone with a gun," Sahani recalls. He suffered psychological

trauma and went to India for treatment, returning only after the ceasefire in 2006.

Bajura's schools were affected by the war. Teachers were on the frontlines, targeted by both the army and the rebels. Today, the classes are running again, and enrolment, especially of girls, is up sharply. The district, which had no colleges, now has three set up by the community.

"We are planning to make our college the best in Far Western Nepal," says Bir Bahadur Katawal, chief of Bajura Campus in the district capital of Martadi. The college was set up with support from the district administration and donations from individuals. Teachers contributed by working almost voluntarily.

The army had occupied a strategically-located school, and has now returned it to the community and even contributed teaching materials. Locals have helped build classrooms and toilets. Peacewin, a Bajura-based group,

has been on a school and healthpost-building spree setting up 173 new classrooms in the past two years.

"Peace was all we needed, there has been a big leap forward in health and education here," says Lal Bahadur Olio of Peacewin.

Road connectivity has also improved, with Martadi only a half-day walk from the road. But the cargo traffic is still one way: the tractors and mule trains only bring goods up to the town, Bajura has nothing to sell to the outside world.

And although schools and healthposts have been built, teachers and health assistants are usually absent. The healthpost in Pandusen has eight staff members, but there are only two health workers taking care of 60 patients a day.

Still, for people like Shahani, the greatest change is the gift of peace. He says: "Life is safe now, I don't wish it even on my enemy to have to go through what I went through." ●



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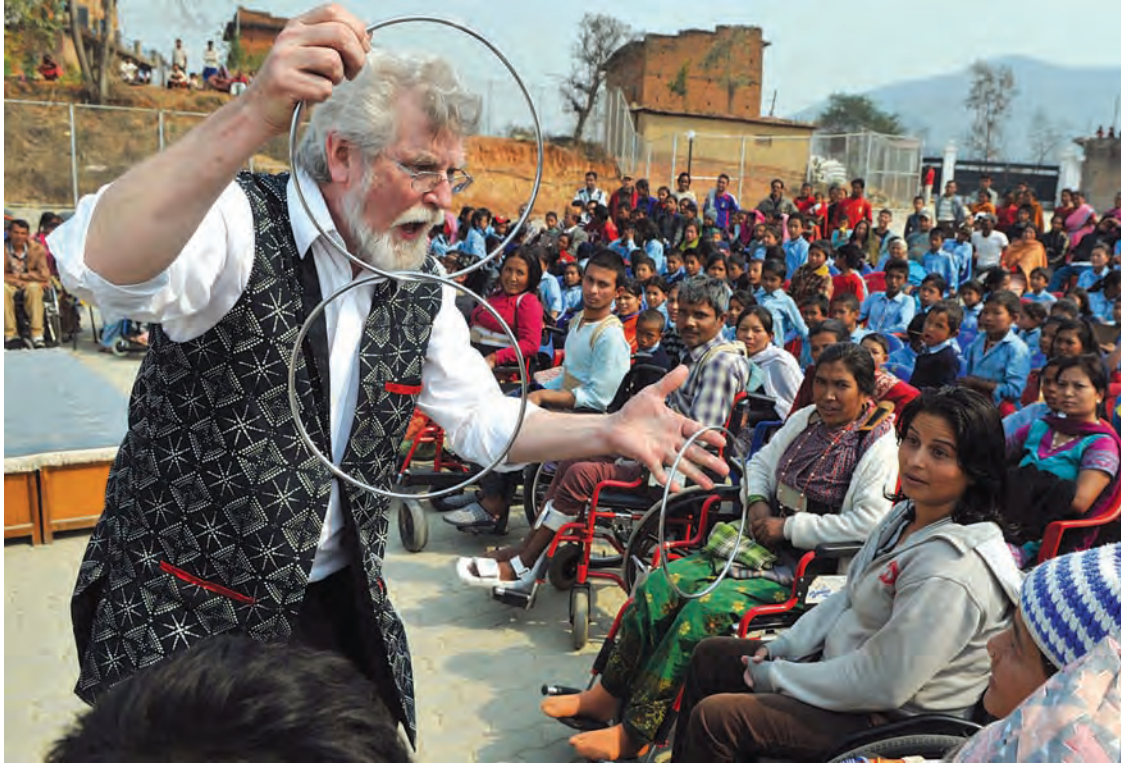


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Magicians Without Borders bring smiles to Nepali children

# The magic of hope



CHONG ZI LIANG

CHONG ZI LIANG

Tom Verner blows a white balloon, and then takes out a long needle. He tells the audience at the childrens' shelter in Maiti Nepal: "The balloon is the political parties, the needle is the Maoists. Do you think they can live together?"

Then he proceeds to pierce the balloon with the needle without making it burst. The children gasp, and then erupt into applause. "But if they can't live together," the white-bearded Verner continues, "this is what will happen." He pokes the needle into the balloon, which bursts with a loud bang.

Verner and his wife, Janet Fredricks have been touring the world, performing magic for refugee children and at orphanages for the past eight years. They have performed in Ethiopia, Sudan, Guatemala, in the slums of Mumbai and are in Nepal for the first time.

Verner set up Magicians

Without Borders after performing in Bosnia after the war. After being entertained with magic, some Roma refugees wanted him to multiply their gold coins, others wanted him to produce US visas out of thin air.

"We found out that despite the hopelessness of their situation, magic gives people hope," says Verner, "it shows children anything is possible."

This week, Tom and Janet are performing magic shows at the eight Bhutani refugee camps in Dhaka and at orphanages in Pokhara. Despite performing to audiences who do not speak English, Verner feels they do not have any problems understanding the show. "The language of magic is universal," he explains.

After Verner began touring the world, Janet joined the show as a mime for comic relief. "I didn't want to be left all alone at home," she says, "performing all over the world opens your heart when you see children in such difficulty smile and laugh."

Magicians without Borders is based in Vermont in the United States where Verner is a professor at Burlington College

and Fredricks is an artist. It is supported entirely by small individual grants.

Their 45-minute show consists of simple magic tricks: pulling flowers from behind peoples' ears, rejoining a rope that has been cut, making sponge balls disappear and multiply. Each trick brought squeals of delight from young audiences at Maiti Nepal and other orphanages in Kathmandu as well as patients at the Spinal Injury Centre in Banepa last week. (pictured left)

Nearing the end of the show, Verner often brings it to a close with a magic trick carrying a moral behind it. "Sometimes, life can fall apart and bad things can happen," he tells the crowd as he tears up a white paper ribbon and swallows the pieces, "but if we work hard, life can become good again." He then pulls out an endless ribbon of rainbow coloured paper from his mouth.

But why refugees, we ask. Verner says the answer was given to him by an elderly Afghan refugee who had been living in a camp in Iran for 17 years. After his magic show, the refugee told Verner: "For 17 years, the world forgot us. Those who remembered treated us just as stomachs that needed to be fed. Thank you for treating us like human beings and feeding our minds." ●

[www.magicianswithoutborders.org](http://www.magicianswithoutborders.org)

## आईतबार, साताको प्रारम्भ संगै शुरु हुन्छ...

# अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

# गजब छ!

गजब छ है गजब छ!!

अब हप्ताको सातै दिन फरक विशेषाङ्क सहित

ऐन त गजब!



# The passing of two Jesuit Nepali scholars

Ludwig Stiller, historian

KANAK MANI DIXIT

At a time when the very idea of history is being challenged by demagogues who seek to paint the Nepali experience in monochrome, one interpreter of the Nepali past decided to call it a day. Ludwig Stiller was a Nepali historian who dug into society’s past to find answers for its present.

He stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Mahesh Chandra Regmi, the dean of them all, in the rigour and worldview that he invested in his craft. As with Regmi, Stiller was energised by the need to bring to light the suffering and experience of the peasantry. In doing so he added depth and texture to our understanding of what helped create Nepal as we know it, whether or not we like what we got.

Stiller’s study was concentrated on the expansionary wars and imperial ambitions of the Gorkhalis who emerged from an emaciated principality between the Marsyangdi and Budi Gandaki to touch (briefly) the Suttlej and Tista, and later to be confined between the Kali and Mechi.

Basing himself on original texts from the India Office Collection in London, Teen Murti in Delhi and Nepali sources, Stiller wrote with flair and command. *The Silent Cry* explained how Nepal’s present-day poverty has a legacy of exploitation starting with the unification and expansionist wars and later the Rana regime. His other oeuvre was *The Rise of the House of Gorkha*, which was also the title of his other seminal work.

Stiller sought to explain complex processes of history, focusing (as he wrote in the preface to *Nepal: Growth of a Nation*) on 'land and man, vision



and leadership, politics for profit, control and centralisation', seeking all the while to explain 'the root causes of the problems that we encounter' today.

In that book, Stiller was keen to emphasise ‘what we do not know’. For example, amidst the certitude of today’s identity-led movement, he suggested that we really do not know how Nepal was peopled in terms of who came and when, from the north, south, east and west.

Stiller held Prithbi Narayan Shah in high regard, without romanticising the unifier of Nepal. He suggested that the satrap of Gorkha did not originally have plans to create what became his kingdom. His eyes were only on Kathmandu Valley and its wealth. But his vision evolved as the expansion continued, first speaking of the state as a rock (*dhunga*) that provided the foundation for all citizenry, and then as a garden (*phulbari*) of the castes and ethnicities. Prithbi Narayan "sought union, not uniformity", wrote Stiller, a view that would be hotly contested by some today.

Among other things that would be of interest to the contemporary activism and discourse, Stiller wrote of Kathmandu's claims to the plains vis-à-vis Company Bahadur, he

described the central importance of Tarai revenue to the Kathmandu court, and suggested that the Gorkhalis, the Marhatta and the Sikh may have stemmed the British encroachment if the latter two had taken advantage of Kathmandu's challenge to the British.

Stiller wrote of how for a short period in the mid-1920s, Nepalis had it good. They were prosperous with the income of 100,000 First World War veterans, there was cash in the villages and Chandra Shumshere’s reforms had granted legal rights to the tenants. It all collapsed, claimed the historian, with the opening up of the economy to cheap Japanese goods which led to immediate impoverishment. The war vets ended up going to India as chowkidars and menial labourers.

Born in the town of Salem, Ohio, Stiller came to Nepal in 1955 to St Xavier’s School, helped start the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies and went on to be the first history PhD out of Tribhuban University. He sought perfection in his research and his books went on to be standard historical texts, but they have yet to be translated to Nepali.

Later, Stiller worked in the development arena promoting people’s participation. That term now sounds like a cliché, but for Stiller it came out of his deep pride in the ‘ordinary’ people of Nepal, a pride which emanated from his study of our history.

Mahesh Chandra Regmi once told Stiller, “You have taught us to respect us what is ours.” ●

Stiller’s works include: *Nepal: Growth of a Nation*, *The Silent Cry: the People of Nepal 1816-1839*, *Letters from Kathmandu: the Kot Massacre and Planning for People: A Study of Nepal’s Planning Experience* which he co-authored with Ram Prakash Yadav.

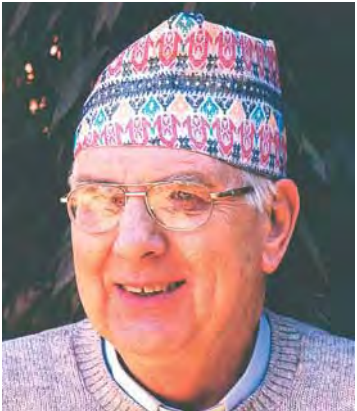
# John K Locke, scholar of Buddhism

GREGORY SHARKEY

For John K Locke died just after midnight on Thursday, barely a week after the death of his colleague at the Jesuit Research Centre, Fr Ludwig Stiller.

Locke was a gifted linguist, a diligent scholar, a renowned author and a committed teacher and mentor to hundreds of young Nepalis who were his students at St Xavier’s School. He came to Nepal in the 1959, became a citizen in 1976 and was the author of many books on Theravada Buddhism and Newari culture.

It is not an exaggeration to say that John Locke founded the field of Newar Buddhist studies, framing the questions that guide the research of later scholars to this day. In the past year I



worked with John to edit new editions of his books, *Karunamaya* and *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal*, which are still in constant demand. Again and again I was amazed at his modest and simple presentation of exhaustive, meticulous research. Days and even weeks of tireless investigation are often summed up in one, elegant,

brief sentence.

That matter-of-fact modesty was typical of John. He never pursued his intellectual work for the sake of gaining honour or great reputation. Nor did he do it out of a sheer love of learning, noble as that might be. Instead, his academic and research efforts were always oriented toward a practical end, the enlightening of others.


John’s students at Tribhuban University often marveled at the depth of his knowledge and sympathetic insight into their own religious beliefs and practices. ●

Locke’s books include: *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal: A Survey of the Bâhâs and Bahîs of the Kathmandu Valley*, *Rebuilding Buddhism: the Theravada Movement in Twentieth-Century Nepal*, *Karunamaya, the Cult of Avalokiteshvara-Matsyendranath in the Valley of Nepal*

# Ozmic connection

They claim their music is unlike anything any one has ever heard before. If Ozma, the French quintet jazz band, lacks modesty about its music it’s because it has every right to be proud of its sound. It’s difficult to bracket Ozma’s music as it varies from incomprehensible blabber to complex improvisations of various sounds to soft ballads. Ozma’s music compels music lovers to stop whatever they are doing and to sit up and listen. Their music, for the lack of a better word, is 'revolutionary'—a different kind of jazz from what most Nepalis are used to listening to.

Don't believe us? Get a taste of their music at the Chevrolet Miles Music Festival that kicks off from the 21 March. The five member band will be the main attraction of the festival which is jointly organised by the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Alliance Française in Kathmandu and Infinity International. The event is aimed at providing a platform for the band members of Ozma to share their musical know-how with Nepali and vice versa.



Ozma was formed seven years ago with Adrien Dennefeld on guitar, Edouard Séro-Guillaume on bass, David Florsch on saxophone, Guillaume Nuss on trombone and Stéphane Scharlé on percussion. Named after a character from The Wizard of Oz as well as the ‘extra galactic life research’ program of the NASA, Ozma, in the span of five years, was able to bag the award for the Best French group at the National Jazz Competition in 2006. Similarly, the band's trombone player Guillaume Nuss was awarded the Solo-ist of the Year the same year.

Famous for the flights of imagination in their music, which they say is a fine balance between good homework and instant improvisation mixed with a generous amount of humour, fans of the band often refer to their music as 'ozmic' which rhymes with cosmic. The band believes that the wonderful relationship between the members, which helps in instrumental synthesis of their ideas, is their strongest point. Their compatibility on a human level is reflected in their music as ideas come naturally and is very original mainly because of their spontaneity.

So there you have it. This is your chance to be a part of the first jazz festival of the year to make your own judgment. We bet the band will win your heart in terms of originality and entertainment. ●

Shitu Rajbhandari

Ozma and the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory  
25-26 March  
Afternoon Workshops and meeting local artists at KJC  
\* free workshop

Ozma Concert  
27 March, 6PM  
Army Auditorium- Shava Mandap  
Rs 800 (1<sup>st</sup> Row), Rs 400 (others)  
\*Tickets available at Alliance Française in Kathmandu (AFK), Kathmandu  
Jazz Conservatory (KJC), Siddhartha Art Gallery, The Bakery Café  
Chez Caroline Restaurant, Sangeeta Thapa (9851030873), Pratima Pandé (9851022365) and the Army Club on the evening of the concert)

Ozma and Nepali musician  
A unique shared-repertoire concert  
28 March, 7PM  
Dhokaima Café  
\*Contact AFK or KJC to book you seat



## ABOUT TOWN

## EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Shastra**, art exhibition by Ramesh KC, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 29 March. 4438549

## EVENTS

- ❖ **French Film Festival**, 20 March, 2PM and 7PM, Alliance Française. 4241163
- ❖ **Frost/Nixon**, starring Frank Langella, 21 March, 6PM, Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Buddhism in a Nutshell**, one day course, 22 March, 8AM-6PM at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal Marg. 4410402
- ❖ **Reiki I and II**, two-day courses, 23-26 March, 10AM-4PM at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal Marg, 4410402
- ❖ **Paleti with Yogesh Baidya**, 27 March, 6PM, Nepa-laya r sala, Rs 565. 4412469
- ❖ **Call for entries for Film South Asia**, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. For deadlines, visit filmsouthasia.org. 5552141

## MUSIC

- ❖ **WIC concert** at Gokarna Golf Resort, 6.30PM, 21 March
- ❖ **Francophonie Night Festival**, 20 March, Alliance Française. 4241163
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Café, 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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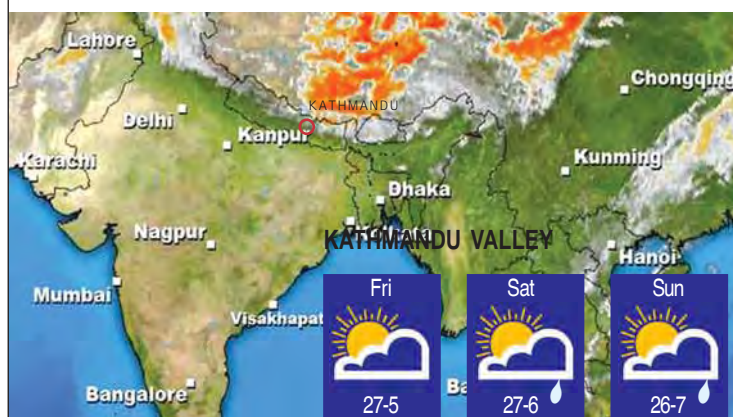
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## WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The season for localised thunder showers began with a bang on Tuesday in Pokhara and Wednesday in Kathmandu. The precipitation wasn't much but it did officially end the drought. The warm and humid air rises along the southern slopes of the mountains and falls as rain by late evening and night. Expect more isolated thundershowers during the week, accompanied sometimes by strong winds and dust-storms in the Tarai. Precipitation will remain low because of low moisture content in the air. The rise in daytime temperature has increased the chances of convection systems along the Himalaya.



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## 'MANDU MANDALA

by PRERANA PAKHRIN







KIRAN PANDAY

**FLYING VISIT:** OHCHR Chief Richard Bennett greets UN high commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay at Tribhuban International Airport on Wednesday as she arrives for a five-day visit to Nepal.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**WORDS OF COMFORT:** Former prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai visits senior NC leader Shailaja Acharya in Teaching Hospital, Maharajgunj on Friday. In spite of treatment in Bangkok, Acharya is still in a critical condition.



KONG YEN LIN

**EMBOLDENED:** A local attends the first reproductive health camp in Holeri, Rolpa organised by the Safe Motherhood Network, DHO and USAID last week.



KIRAN PANDAY

**UNREST:** Fearful of losing the elections Padma Kanya College students affiliated to ANFSU-R stage protests and boycott the elections on Thursday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**SECOND GENERATION:** Manushi Yami Bhattarai, daughter of Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai and Tourism Minsiter Hisila Yami contests student elections as the secretary for the ANFSU-R at Tribhuban University on Tuesday.

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Shreeti - Miriam - Nadine - Marloes    Kencho - Sonam - Sangay

Venue: Gokarna Forest Resort

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Date: 21st March, 2009 Saturday

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If the position appears interesting and challenging for you, we are interested to hear from you! Consulting arrangement can be decided on mutually beneficial terms. Please include explanation of how you can contribute to our Inclusive Business initiative in Nepal in the application. Your application and profile of consulting assignments/clients needs to be received before 1700 hours, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2009 to [srisal@snvworld.org](mailto:srisal@snvworld.org)



# Frog weddings

In these times of great uncertainty, when trust in government is at an all-time low, it is gratifying to note that there are a few things we can still rely on. I'm of course speaking about employing frogs as rainmakers.

On Tuesday, the people of Dolakha arranged an elaborate frog wedding with bride and bridegroom coming out of hibernation to tie the nuptial knots of holy matrimony at a local temple. The ceremony was followed by a lavish **jeri soiree** banquet for invited human guests from surrounding villages. And on Wednesday, while the amphibians were enjoying a honeymoon, a massive thunderstorm dumped rain on Dolakha. Thank heavens there are still things that work in this country.



Must say our prime minister is really on his toes. The other day he told a bunch of businessmen he was “thinking of doing something” about the power cuts. This is the kind of decisiveness we need in this country. It has been seven months since the government announced it would generate 10,000 megawatts of power in the next ten years, and Nepal's electricity generation has actually dropped in that period. At this rate, there will be **25 hours** of daily power cuts next winter. Since we can't rely on the government to do something about this, time for us to arrange a mass wedding of fireflies so we get the power back. Nothing else is going to work.



Comrade Tremendousness has his fingers crossed nothing happens again to cancel his rescheduled visit to Scandinavia next week. Eye brows are already being raised that he is leaving the day before parliament reconvenes since the legislature is supposed to address the Tharu and indigenous peoples' issue that paralysed the country for two weeks. The first draft of the new constitution is also supposed to get a reading in the house.

The Ass still can't understand the desperation to go on foreign jaunts when fences need to be urgently mended on the **southern front**, and the multiple-emergencies at home are even more serious than the last time the visit was put off.



Come to think of it, what happened to the promise not to attend any more inaugurations and speaking engagements? Just this week, PKD has found time to grace three ribbon-cuttings, two award ceremonies and watch a football match at the invitation of the **Republican Sports Federation**. Which is probably why he blew a gasket when he found out that his colleague, Comrade Cloudy, had actually signed the extension of the tenures of the eight generals on Sunday. He asked that the files be brought to Baluwatar for safe-keeping and gave the Secretary-in-Chief, Defence Secretary and the PMO Secretary a right royal dressing down for not telling him about it first. And the army, thinking this was a routine matter, sent a jeep over to the defence ministry to collect the signed files but was told there was a glitch. Smelling a rat, Chief Sab tried to call The Fierce One all day, but the prime minister decided to stay out of reach at the PLA gathering at Naya Bajar.




Are the kangresis finally thinking of joining the govt? This is the speculation that has given grist to Kathmandu's rumour mills. The internationals had always been pressing for it, and now it looks like that is the msg that Girjau also got when he allowed the Indians to feel his pulse in Delhi last week. But the old man is said to be bargaining for a plum post for his dotter, maybe even DPM, before giving the nod.



The Indians are rattled enough about the Baddie-Chini Bhai-Bhai to send a not-so-veiled warning to Kathmandu by giving the Kingji-Sonia meeting wide play. Contrary to media reports, however, Sonia's real interest in the meeting was to dissuade the ex-king from any mischief with the BJP during the current Indian election campaign. The added bonus for MEA was that it also sent a signal to the Baddies in KTM that the royalty could be resurrected if they didn't behave themselves.


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E-mail: info@ace.com.np URL: www.ace.com.np

**Birgunj Branch Office:**  
Link Road, Birgunj, Ward No. 10  
Tel.: 051-529650 Fax: 051-523600

**Kirtipur Branch Office:** Naya Bazar, Kirtipur  
Tel.: 4336123, 4336456 Fax: 4336444



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All over Nepal and India



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