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Prachanda's choice

PRASHANT JHA

In more than twenty years of heading a 'revolutionary' party, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has had to make difficult decisions on several occasions. But the next month may well be the ultimate test of his political judgment, priorities and leadership.

At Khula Manch this week, Dahal made it clear there could be no peace or constitution as long as this government is in place.

To oust Madhav Kumar Nepal, Maoists could table a no-confidence motion and get 301 seats. This approach has been under consideration in the party, but senior leaders like Dr Baburam Bhattarai have opposed replacing one majority government with another.

He is reported to have argued that the country needs a national unity government to complete the transition, not merely a Maoist-led government with the support of a few smaller groups. Bhattarai believes that the Maoists should project this government as a total failure, wage a public campaign to discredit it further, and then assert its claim to the leadership as May 28 approaches.


For a national unity government to be formed, NC and UML have laid out strict conditions – an agreement on the future of former Maoist combatants, and the dismantling of the YCL. Even then, non-Maoist parties and India

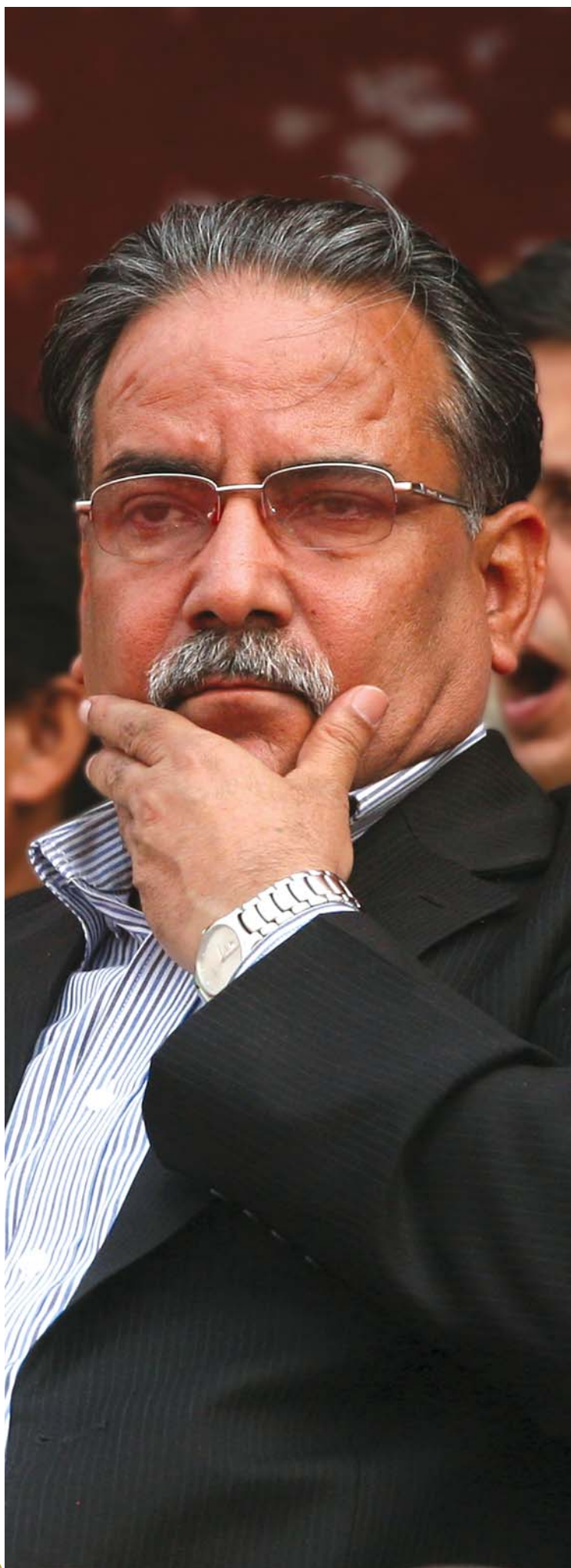
will not be willing to accept Dahal as the Prime Minister. Bhattarai's name has been thrown up as a compromise candidate.

Since the peace process began, the party has been driven by Dahal's leadership and Bhattarai's political line. But this would overturn that formula.

Dahal is understandably insecure. He has told aides that a 'deep conspiracy' is underway to sideline him and divide the party. Critics allege that this insecurity is essentially a result of Dahal's excessive ambition and fear that Bhattarai could develop his own power base and emerge as a better PM than he was. But Dahal supporters say that he is more concerned about the implications on party structure and the balance between its various factions.

Dahal is being asked to give up on certain key instruments of the party machinery (like the PLA and YCL); dilute his political agenda; convince the cadre about the need to transform; sideline dogmatists; and accept Baburam Bhattarai or someone from another party as the compromise prime minister of a national government.

It is a tough check-list, requiring statesmanship, sacrifice, confidence about one's own personal strengths, and faith in colleagues. Dahal's decisions and political skills will determine the future of Nepali politics. 



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

NOT IMPOSSIBLE

In all the distraction of the political meanderings and shadow boxing of the past month, what is often forgotten is that the Maoist party hasn't abjured violence. In fact, it is just the opposite.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal, in his speech to supporters at Tundikhel on Wednesday, once more threatened fire and brimstone, and the mother of all rebellions. His speech, of course, wouldn't have been complete without a threat to unleash another bloodbath if his party was not allowed to capture state power. And sure enough it came: "This time it won't just be 15,000 people who'll be killed but 30,000."

One could only take perverse satisfaction in the downsizing of the threat. Six months ago the Chairman said 1,000,000 would be killed. And this time he mercifully didn't threaten to "swim in the blood" of

the dead.

There hasn't been a public reorientation of the party to peaceful pluralism. And until that happens, there just won't be the requisite trust among the non-Maoist parties and the main international players to agree to hand over the responsibility of power to them again.

What is bizarre is the tolerance shown by missions of supposedly democratic and civilised countries in Kathmandu to such incendiary rhetoric. Anyone calling on the Maoists to give up violence is immediately labelled a 'rightist status quoist'. Or fingers are pointed at the relatively docile youth wings of other parties, which sprang up in reaction to the YCL. Since when did speaking for *ahimsa* become reactionary? Why does a party that won power through the ballot still need the bullet?

The argument usually is that the Maoists need to say such things (and lie to the UN about guerrilla strength) to appease their hardcore cadre. That argument may have worked before, but it doesn't anymore. This is the familiar Maoist method of blackmailing with the threat of going

back to war unless they get total power. The portrait of Stalin on the walls of Maoist leaders isn't there just for show.

A majority of Nepalis don't really care if the constitution is written by the deadline or not, they just don't want to die in another war, and they want their lives to improve. The priority now is to defuse the explosive uncertainty over May 28. The meeting between the president and the three parties (including the Maoists) on Sunday cleared the air a bit. More needs to be done.

If the Maoists now publicly commit to non-violent politics a lot of things will fall into place, and could pave the way for a Maoist-led national government. Such a coalition can then quickly agree on integration numbers and the operating principles of a new constitution to be announced on May 28, the details of which can be fleshed out later.

KD

Diplomatic disaster

GUEST COLUMN
Bhekh B Thapa

The year 2066 will go down in history as a time when Nepal became more dependent than ever before on the outside world. Diplomatically speaking, it was a year of uncertainty, difficulty and a lack of clarity.

Our immediate neighbours India and China and indeed the rest of the international community had hoped that after the restoration of peace in 2006, Nepal would reap the peace dividend, and there would be stability, development and the rule of law. Now that hope has been replaced by concern, if not fear, that the country may slide into an ethnic or sectarian conflict. Nepalis themselves are not just wondering if the constitution will be written on time, but whether it will be written at all.

Nepal may have been poor, but it was always regarded with affection in the international community. Nepalis were



In 2066, Nepal became less independent than ever before in its history

thought of as law-abiding and benign. Not any more.

At a diplomatic level, the national interest has been replaced by our selfish, clannish and partisan behaviour. Instead of selecting representatives to other countries on the basis of merit, character and competence they are chosen through inter-party swapping. This has not just weakened our foreign relations but also muddled Nepal's international reputation.

The past year saw a marked increase in the activity of foreign powers in Nepal. India has traditionally had a greater influence on Nepal, but China has also increased its interest, as manifest in the greater number of visits by Chinese dignitaries and security delegations.

When there is internal instability, outsiders will be more vigilant and active to safeguard their own national interest. India and China are global geopolitical rivals, and some of this competition is reflected in Nepal as well.

While the Indians have traditionally been active across the board, the Chinese were focused more on trade and economic cooperation. Both

countries prefer to work behind the scenes to influence decisions. Recent years have shown that China may also be trying to exert influence not just to counter its traditional rival, but also to reflect its growing international stature.

Indo-Nepal relations are influenced less by what New Delhi wants and more by our leaders' beggarly conduct, based on selfish rather than broad national interests, even to the extent of inviting interference in interpersonal and intra party conflicts. The 'traditional' parties always behaved as if they couldn't get ahead without a nod from Delhi, and the new parties are also not immune to this attitude. As a result, in recent years, outside powers have also been consulting India in formulating their Nepal policy. Nepal is increasingly seen by other countries as a country that is incapable of taking care of itself.

For their part, the Europeans have always prioritised development and human rights. But they have been dismayed by Nepal's confusion and how political infighting has made even relatively easy activities much more difficult to implement. They thought they could be helpful to the peace process and constitution writing from afar, but even that is proving challenging.

It was because we couldn't manage our internal conflict that we had to invite the United Nations. We brought them here initially for six months, they have been here for two years. Until we have an internal agreement about army integration and the kind of military we want, no foreigner can give us suggestions, nor can we resolve those issues ourselves. Which is why we can neither keep UNMIN, nor can we do without them.

Not only do we have a weak foreign policy, it is looking like we don't have a policy at all. A country's foreign policy is the extension of its national interest, and it rarely changes with a change in government. But here we are assuring foreign powers that we will be their friend if they propel us individually or organisationally to power. Even those who use a different vocabulary sooner or later show that they are beholden.

Few had expected this country to be so dependent on the outside world as it is today. Which is why, instead of empathy, all we get from the international community is an attitude of pity. The challenge is within us, not beyond our borders. 🇳🇵

Bhekh B. Thapa, former foreign minister, was also Nepali Ambassador to the United States and India.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

GURKHA-LAND?
It's very sad to know that ex-Gurkhas are living a miserable life after resettling in the UK ('Final betrayal', #496). Why is it that only Nepalis have to suffer wherever they go, be it in the brothels of India, or as maids in the Middle East? Now, even our old soldiers haven't been spared.

Chetan Dahal

VACANCY
Here's an ad to encourage young Nepalis into politics ('A call to politics, #496):
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Feed press with rehashed patriotic rhetoric and implausible dreams of a glorious, new Nepal.

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That's pretty much it. If you can perform any of the above and are interested in a cushy life while pretending to do a job, which pays very highly and carries no responsibility, pls send in your (CVs not necessary) goons to firmly register your interest in, and prove your eligibility for, the position.

Unfortunately, we are pretty full up at the moment. We will short-list you but you may have to wait a long time until one of the old dons croaks. Strangely, perhaps due to the blessings of all the Nepali people, these old geezers seem to have pretty long lives. So if you are a young contender, you may no longer be young when you get to join the ranks. But do apply anyway.

Nepali Cynic

The blogs

nepalitimes.com/blogs

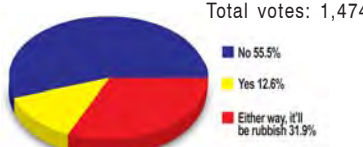
Heaven on earth:
Kunda Dixit gets higher than a kite



Times nepalnews.com

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Q. Will the HLP's promise to deliver the constitution hold?



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Q. How can we best meet the constitutional deadline?

India's war



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

The fear was palpable along the Konta-Dantewada highway in south Chhatisgarh in November 2007. In a village off the highway, very close to Chintalnar where Naxalite Maoists massacred 76 Indian security personnel on Tuesday, a tribal leader told us, "This war will continue for at least ten years."

Thousands of displaced tribals were housed in makeshift camps by the road under the government's ill-thought out and destructive Salwa Judum campaign. This involved forcing tribals out of their homes, creating strategic hamlets, then deploying tribal youth to fight against the Maoists. The Maoists viewed tribals living in these camps as government agents, and often attacked them.

Since then, the government has rethought the Salwa Judum campaign. But the alienation it bred is starkly visible. Sandwiched between an often absent, coercive state and brutal Maoists who were at least

embedded with villagers, many opted for the rebels. This week's operation would not have been possible without local support.

Kashmir, the Northeast and Punjab have shown that the Indian state is enormously resilient, can absorb shocks and has a high bleeding capacity. But the challenge from the tribal-dominated, mineral-rich areas of central and eastern India will test the government in newer ways.

In these pockets, young men and women do not see the state at all. Abujmadh, where Arundhati Roy travelled to write her gushing essay on the Naxals, is an area the Indian state has never even surveyed. If the government does appear, it is not in a welfarist but predatory avatar.

Inequitable policies, absence of justice, land issues, a corrupt administration, a dearth of mainstream political actors, forced displacement, and insensitivity to non-violent movements have helped create space for an armed outfit that questions the legitimacy of the political system. What is happening here is an exact replica of how the Nepali Maoist movement evolved.

Raise popular issues; mobilise people; eliminate key local rivals;



Those in the know understand where the parallels between Indian and Nepali Maoists begin...and end

exert exclusive control over key base areas; force the state to unleash a violent operation to expose its 'real character'; utilise human rights violations to expand the recruitment base; and pursue political and military tracks simultaneously. The

violence escalates until a stalemate forces a rethink.

There has also been speculation that India's internal conflict will harden its position on Nepali Maoists. Given Home Affairs Minister P Chidambaram's hardline security

focus, and the fiercely anti-Naxal mood among Indian parliamentarians and sections of the liberal media, this is possible. Right-wing hawks and some cops continue to assume deep operational links between the Nepal and Indian ultra-left movements. And it could be politically more difficult for the establishment to sell a reconciliatory line towards Nepali Maoists when they are waging a 'war' against Indian Naxals.

But this is not the whole picture. India's views on Nepal's Maoists did not change last year because of the Naxal factor. In fact, many in Delhi have been citing the Nepal example to lure Indian Maoists into 'mainstream' politics.


At the core, it was the perception that Nepali Maoists

were shifting goalposts on multiparty democracy that disrupted India's relationship with them. They were also seen as insensitive to India's security concerns on a China keen to expand its influence. Things went sour because of what was happening within Nepal, not the conflict within India.

As Professor S D Muni said in an email interview, "Indian Naxal concern is an issue but not of major proportions because the Maoists on their own would also be cautious in pitching themselves against India in the long run. Maoist links with the Indian Naxals never exceeded logistic support for themselves, ideological affinity for the international and South Asian image and limited personal sympathies."

This view was reiterated by Delhi-based security expert Ajai Sahni, who otherwise has been critical of India's post-2005 Nepal approach. He told us, "Policymakers here know that Indian Maoists have been critical of the Nepali Maoists. There will be no impact on Nepal policy."

Those in Delhi and Kathmandu who want to marginalise Nepali Maoists will indulge in some scaremongering. But informed officials know these are different boxes. Nonetheless, Nepali Maoists will have to be extra-careful in their dealings with Indian Naxals, and sensitive to what is being billed as India's newest 'war'. ■



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A fraying trade

Duty-free facility or not, the government must face up to homemade problems in the garment industry

SUVAYU DEV PANT

US-Nepal trade talks ended on a bittersweet note on Thursday. The two countries signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), which will help streamline US-Nepal trade, but nonetheless failed to agree to a duty-free facility on Nepal-made garments. A bill proposing preferential access for Nepali garments was first tabled in the US senate a decade ago, but has since collected dust. The disagreement is a blow to Nepali garment exporters, who have seen business plummet since the termination of the Multi Fibre Agreement in 2005.

TIFA, which was signed after two days of deliberations, will offer



PRESSING ISSUES: A worker at Heritage Fashions, Balkumari, Lalitpur.

FOO CHEE CHANG

some consolation at least. It will set up a joint council to oversee US-Nepal trade issues, promises to improve market access for Nepal-made goods into the US market, and offers Nepali businesses technical assistance to boost their export potential. Joint Secretary of Commerce and Industries and member of the Nepali delegation visiting the US Surya Silwal says, "TIFA will offer a framework within which US-Nepal trade

discussions can be furthered. It will help us to gain technical assistance." The absence of any special concessions to the garment industry will sting, but usefully redirects attention to local supply constraints that improved market access would not have erased. Garment exporters have struggled with power cuts, labour problems, the distance from a viable seaport, and the absence of large-scale domestic fabric makers. Most

exporters simply rework imported fabric, and at high cost. Sanjai Agrawal of Heritage Fashions, one of a few garment exporters that have done well amidst the slump, explains: "Some of the major problems are homemade. We have to use a generator for half the day, many exporters face labour problems, and Nepal lacks the infrastructure for the mass production of fabric. Obviously, all of this raises costs."

While the value of garment exports to the US was a whopping \$50 million in 2005, that can in large part be attributed to our being in the right place at the right time: foreign garment makers flooded into Nepal in the 1970s when the US spared us the import quotas it had imposed across the region. When that arrangement was terminated in 2005, garment exports to the US came crashing down, arguably to levels commensurate with the fundamental strength of the domestic industry. Last year, the export industry was valued at just under \$5 million, and this has already dropped 60 per cent from January to February this year.

There are lessons to be learnt from Bangladesh, which, unlike Nepal, has seen US-bound garment exports grow briskly following the elimination of quotas. "In Bangladesh, there are garment-exporting zones in which all garment-related government offices are concentrated and strikes are forbidden. The garment makers also enjoy tax breaks," says Ashok Koirala, chief executive officer of Garment Association Nepal. The government has shown some sensitivity to such concerns. The Department of Industry and Commerce has forwarded a plan of action to spur industrial activity to the government, and an interest subsidy for exporters is on the cards. However, experts doubt if these measures will be sufficient to recreate the industry's heyday. "We're probably better off focusing on small orders," admits Agrawal. 🇳🇵

A photograph of a man in a black tank top climbing a rock face. He is looking up and reaching for a hold. The background is a blurred view of a mountain range.

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- **Wednesday** - Campus Plus - collegiate life ; Appointments - careers and jobs
- **Thursday** - School Times - everything kids should know
- **Friday** - Green - environment matters
- **Saturday** - Property Plus - weekend two pager focusing on real estate



Instigative journalism

Instigative journalism seeks to provoke events, rather than just report them



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

The post-1990 boom in the Nepali media pushed many established practices of the past into the shadows. Professional attitudes and commercial considerations made 'mission journalism' unfashionable. But the idea of the journalist as a stakeholder rather than merely a recorder survives in a different form.

Instigative journalism sounds like a neologism, but dates back to the circulation wars between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst in the latter part of the 19th century. The *New York Press* coined the term 'yellow kid journalism' in early 1897 to describe the combative coverage of rival papers. The expression was shortened to 'yellow journalism'

later.

However, instigative journalism perhaps best describes the techniques adopted by Hearst to provoke the population into action. As the story goes, Hearst sent author Stephen Crane and artist Frederick Remington to Cuba to report on Spanish atrocities. To Remington's request that he be called back as there was no war in Cuba, his boss cabled back: "Please remain. You furnish the pictures, I'll furnish the war."

The year 2066 BS began with a sensational peace of instigative journalism. In a front-page report, *Kantipur Daily* alleged that the Nepal Army was contemplating a 'soft' coup to pre-empt the dismissal of its chief by the Maoist-led coalition government. The NA public relations outfit took the story seriously enough to issue a denial the same day. It termed the report "imaginary and illusionary".

Himal Khabarpatrika responded with a provocative caption on its cover to accompany a cleverly manipulated image of Pushpa Kamal Dahal in military regalia. Other print media ran equally confrontational opinion pieces. The subsequent polarisation of public opinion, it could be said, led to the dismissal of the army chief, his restoration under presidential orders, the resignation of the prime minister and the formation of an anti-Maoist coalition. Politics has been going around in circles ever since, with President Ram Baran Yadav

at the centre.

The Kathmandu establishment loves President Yadav's penchant for Hindu rituals and his barely disguised anti-Maoist politics. But as the day of reckoning (May 28, 2010) nears and the possibility of completing the constitution in time recedes, everyone is feeling apprehensive as far as the president is concerned.

Premier Nepal recently urged the head of state to exercise restraint. The media have adopted a hostile tone. Constitutionalists close to UML have stopped defending presidential consultations. Even *Himal Khabarpatrika* ran an editorial sometime ago requesting President Yadav to calm down.

Ever since his vocal opposition to the Madhes Uprising, President Yadav hasn't been very popular in the Tarai. Now Pahadis too seem to have lost some of their initial enthusiasm for him. But one journalist has stood by the president throughout, defending all his actions and inactions with commitment and zeal. In the writings of Birganj-based reporter and columnist Chandrakishor, a whiff of the mission journalism of yore can still be found. He is often guarded in offering his views, but even his circumspection has the old-world charm of when it was unbecoming of a journalist to praise a politician openly. Chandrakishor is my choice for 'Journalist of 2066 BS' in 'The Year of Print'.

Instigative journalism undoubtedly rules the roost in Nepali media. For the old-timers of the profession however, the mere survival of mission journalism in some form is reason enough to celebrate. 🇳🇵

THIS WEEK

"Diplomatic pressure"

Early this week, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal conceded to authorities that the decision to commission an Indian company to print Machine Readable Passports was influenced by "political and diplomatic pressure". The statement appeared to confirm suspicions of irregularities in the bidding process, and prompted the filing of two public interest litigations challenging the decision on Wednesday. On Thursday morning, the Supreme Court ordered the government not to follow through with its decision until its legality is determined. It has summoned Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and Foreign Minister Sujata Koirala to appear in court on Monday. The political damage is already done, as opposition parties have jumped on the opportunity to lambast the 'puppet government'.

Guilty

The Nepal Army (NA) has been in hot water since the deaths of three women in Bardiya at the hands of its personnel on 10 March. On Wednesday, the Parliamentary Committee on Women, Children and Social Welfare said the women were not poachers, as the NA claimed, but were collecting tree bark. It added that the army killed the women

indiscriminately, and tampered with evidence to hide the fact. It was silent on whether or not the women were raped as medical examinations are not yet complete. The ruling echoes the findings of an investigation by the National Human Rights Commission, which on 1 April recommended the government prosecute the concerned NA personnel.

Clay feet

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal's government is fraying at the edges as opposing voices, even within his own party, grow more strident. Nepal Sabdhavana Party (Anandadebi) withdrew support from the government on 4 April, saying the government had failed to forge political consensus. Minister of Supply Rajendra Mahato of Nepal Sabdhavana Party threatened to leave the government, accusing it of not honouring its eight-point agreement with the United Democratic Madhesi Front. There are also voices within the NC, the most stalwart of UML's allies, calling for Nepal's resignation, and the Maoists have once more raised the spectre of a no-confidence motion. Hedged in, the prime minister saw an opportunity to save face amid public outrage over the MRP fiasco. He said the bidding process was scrapped to keep NC happy.

APRIL ISSUE ON NEWSSTANDS NOW!

Himal assembles a range of insightful and provocative voices to comment on **The Future of Caste:**

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WE CAN ONLY LOOK FORWARD...

Meena Kandasamy explosively imagines the personal annihilation of caste identity

NO REFORM

Kancha Ilaiah suggests that Hinduism will cede ground to Islam, Christianity and Buddhism unless it deals with caste

COMPLETING THE INSULT

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Vijay Prashad explains the US academia's interest in caste and its influence in the social sciences

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Applications must be submitted in the advised format to the following address no later than **April 25, 2010, 17:00 hrs.** Only short-listed candidates will be contacted for further process.

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Sustainable living



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Dehradun: What could be a better time to ponder the future than when you are surrounded by creative minds at a literary festival? Dehradun really inspires creativity. No wonder writers like Ruskin Bond have decided to live there.

The stark difference one can notice of course is that their greenery is dwindling at a far slower pace than in the Kathmandu Valley. What one can see from the window seat while taking off from Kathmandu is, simply put, sad. It seems that valley residents, real estate developers in particular, hate greenery and are looking to demolish anything that looks like trees.

If real estate development is to be sustainable here, then perhaps those who say they are responsible players and have ganged up as an association need to ensure there is self-regulation in this business. Else, we will be fighting to sell the last hillock. For Nepal what it also means is that conservation and sustainable utilisation of natural resources have not been internalised. Donors have lost interest in these subjects as ‘inclusion and exclusion’ and predicting another conflict have become hot topics.

One of the issues we discussed in Dehradun was man-mountain relationships. Compared to mountain people, people living in the valley are far

removed from nature. This is perhaps why they don’t have any qualms in being part of the destruction of nature. This may also explain why felled trees aren’t replaced in Kathmandu, or Gurgaon for that matter, and their residents are happy to convert rivers and rivulets into open sewers.

The architectural landscape seems to be changing everywhere and protruding rebars have become contemporary styles. Indian architect Gautam Bhatia describes them as Punjabi


Dehradun makes one wonder about the possibilities of cities


Baroque, Marwari Mannerism, Bania Gothic, Anglo-Indian Rococo, Sindhi Hacienda and so on. We have our own Trigonometry Landmarks: buildings with more than four corners, chowk malls (traditional chowks that have been converted to shopping complexes) and heritage pasals (shops fronting traditional facades). As far as our surrounding valleys and the hills along our highways go, the day will not be far when you will actually have to go on a ‘tree hunt’.

But the next big question is: in order to make cities

sustainable, is it not necessary to have an efficient transportation system that does away with private car ownership to a large extent? This may not be music to the ears of the automobile industry, but the taxi pods experimented with at Heathrow airport could give us some pointers. It took us nine hours each way to cover 240 kilometres from Delhi to Dehradun, courtesy of the jams created by people who don’t want to follow traffic rules. Amitabh Pande, who was in conversation with the Beed on *Unleashing Nepal* noted that road rules are understood differently in South Asia. We Go, Look and Stop.

The problem in Nepal is that each urban centre is aping the development model of Kathmandu, which means unplanned growth that puts much pressure on urban infrastructure. The problems have been extensively written about and have featured in many donor reports, but when will we actually start implementing plans? While we talk about energy shortages, donors continue to fund an inefficient NEA. Melamchi is the best project we have for now. But politicians turn a blind eye to ghettos developing on the river banks as they are their vote banks and money banks.

Self-sustained new townships along the lines of what have been developed in some parts of the world could be the answer. This Beed prefers to keep his cards close to his chest, however. Anyone is free to dream up their own sustainable cities.  www.arthabeed.com



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FOO CHEE CHANG

One would be hard-pressed to find a clean, white-washed wall lining the streets of Kathmandu. If one appeared, it would soon be painted over with political slogans or plastered with posters. Something similar happened to the immaculate south perimeter wall of the Hyatt Regency Kathmandu from 4-8 April. Except this time it was at the behest of the owners of said wall, and a reputable artist was at the helm of the project to paint a mural spreading the message of peace and harmony.

Assisted by children from the Kailash Hostel, Buddhist Child Home, Mansarovar School and Young Hearts Bonding School, Andorran artist and educator Jordi Casamajor applies his design on the wall, while the children animate the stylised outlines with cheery hues of red, yellow and blue. The colours, as well as the images of figures joining hands, work together to complement the intent of



FOO CHEE CHANG

Message in a mural

the message.


It is a tall order to add to the grandeur of the Hyatt Regency, with its palatial architecture and luxurious ambience. But that is not the point. Kiran Adhikari, public relations executive of the hotel, explains that this is part of the hotel's corporate social

responsibility programme. "We want to give back to the community, and we feel that if a platform can be created for underprivileged children to have fun and spread a positive message at the same time, why not?"

The mural project was organised in collaboration with the

Himalayan Youth Foundation (HYF), Kathmandu, and the Mountaineers Himalayan Foundation of the tiny European principality of Andorra. "One of the advantages of this project is its visibility to the public," says Steve Webster, a HYF board member and coordinator of the mural project.

"We want our message to reach as many as possible and for the work of the artist and the children to be recognised."

This wish is not too far-fetched, for even the soot and the dust from passing vehicles will do little to obscure the enthusiasm and positivity on display. 



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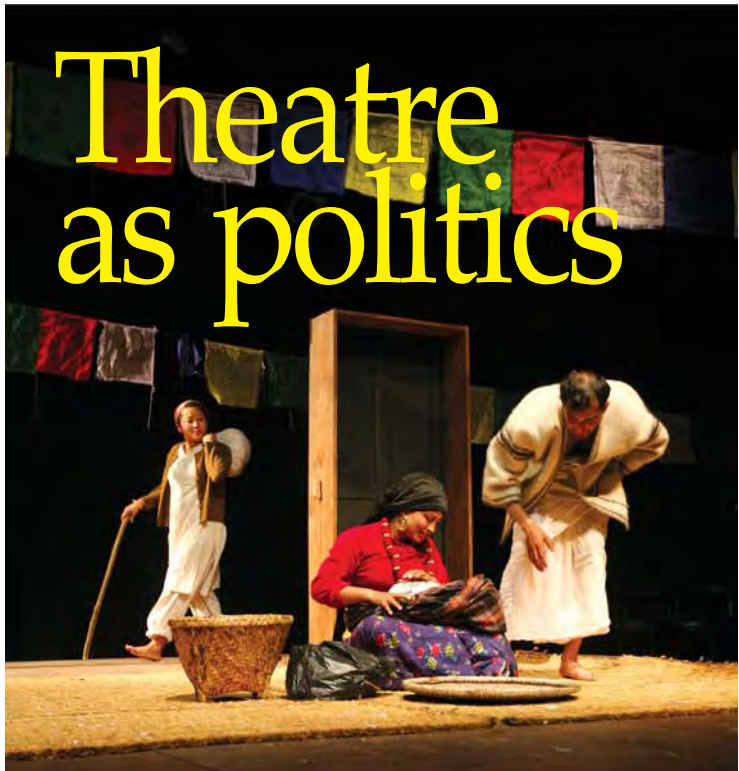
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Theatre as politics



The story of a peasant girl who rescues the abandoned child of a rich family, and raises him as her own at all costs is hardly a matter for comedy. But Max Webster and Mia Theil Have's Gurukul staging of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Khariko Ghero) is characterised by just that.

Well-known for his aversion to sappy emotions, Bertolt Brecht used theatre to experiment with political ideas. Perhaps the humorous lines are meant to balance the sadness of the peasant girl's plight and anarchical social reality, prepping the audience for the objective reflection that Brecht would have wanted. Either way, it suited the palate of the Nepali theatregoers present, who gave the play a warm reception.

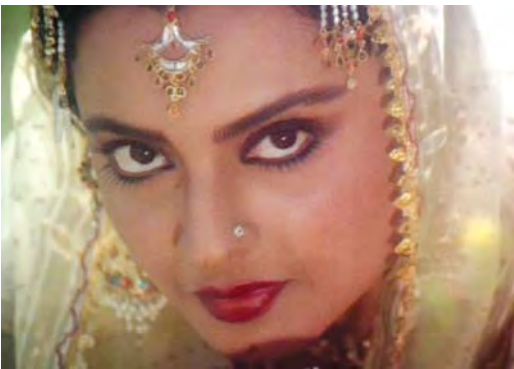
There is no doubt this play-within-a-play is a political study, which is as much as about the peasant girl as it is about the judge who eventually presides over her case. Pitching the classical nature vs. nurture debate, it is a story about what makes a good mother, a good judge, and at the end of the day, a good leader. It is as apt in our political scenario as it was in Brecht's portrayal of the Soviet Union following the Second World War.

In many ways, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* seems just perfect for Nepali adaptation. The play's original techniques – deadpan humour and storytelling through music – are tried and tested methods in Nepali artistic traditions. Sunil Pokharel continues to outdo himself as the judge Akal Bahadur, while Pashupati Rai's peasant girl is an endearing character. The finale seemed slightly anti-climactic, but seeing how Brecht was primarily interested in analyses, he probably would not have cared. 🇳🇵

Indu Nepal

Runs until 1 May at Rimal Theatre, Gurukul.

EVENTS



Roles of the Indian Film Heroine, film festival that looks at the changing ethos of Indian film heroines from Satyajit Ray's *Devi* to Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Michelle in *Black*. Also features talks from cinema-watchers, including actress-turned-director-turned-activist Nandita Das. *14-18 April at Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road, for tickets call 4412715*

Saturday's Farmer's Market, a weekly farmers' market starting in Kantipath this weekend promises to be different from all other farmers' markets in town with lasagne, pies and Mediterranean treats along with organic fruits and vegetables. *Every Saturday, 9am to noon, 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath*

Sub: Transition 2067, we don't know what the 'sub:' stands for but it's a New Year's party at the Factory. Two actually. Aditi Sharma will be playing

with her band in the Hall followed by DJ Ankit. Expect some fireworks on the roof – not literally – as DJ Nawed has been flown all the way from India to 'set the place ablaze'. *The Factory, Thamel, 7pm, Rs 2000 and Rs 1000 respectively, with complimentary drinks.*

Piano concert, Romaine Wheeler, who performed at the air base of the US space shuttle in New Mexico, will be doing a charity concert for Women's Wing Nepal. *Sunday 11 April, 2pm, Lincoln School, Rabi Bhawan, 9803039750*

Kabita Yatra, this paper once described poet Momila as "deeply interior and outspoken, expressing her political concerns through private, individuated expression." She will be reciting at Gurukul this weekend as part of a solo poetry recitation series. *Saturday 10 April, 3pm, Sama Theatre, Gurukul, 4466956*

Chaitya & Silent Flow, works of Kailash Shrestha and Sushma Shakya made during their one-year residency sponsored by the Australian Himalayan Foundation. *Runs until 21 April, Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4218048*

Khariko Ghero (The Caucasian Chalk Circle), a Bertolt Brecht play adapted into Nepali about a peasant girl and her adopted son set against our recent politically turbulent history. Directed by Max Webster and Mia Theil Have at *Rimal Theatre, Gurukul, until 1 May, 5.30pm, except Mondays, 4466956. See Review.*

GETAWAYS

Enfield Rendezvous and Poker Run, if you own an Enfield motorbike, you have no reason not to fire it up and head out towards Chitwan on a poker run. You may get the best poker hand. You may not. Who cares? It'll be a darn good ride to yarn about. *13-14 April, Registration Rs 2500, call 9841224103*

New Year Package, whether for a day picnic or an overnight stay to view the sunrise on New Year's Day, the Mirabel Resort is perfect for that quick city break. Pack some walking shoes to fit in a short hike before lunch. *Mirabel Resort, Dhulikhel, 4002557*



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DINING

Ghangri Café, a quiet place with comfortable sofas and a lovely courtyard, perfect for those sunny afternoons. Although famous for their open sui mai, they offer a few other great dishes as well.

Pulchowk (near the Suzuki showroom), 11am-10pm except Tuesdays.



Bronco Billy, a new restaurant in town offering Tex-Mex and Indian dishes. They make their own corn tortillas, which gets a big thumbs-up. But really, we can't wait to try their Margaritas.

Pulchowk opposite

Namaste Supermarket

The Factory, a trendy restobar for a refreshing stopover in the chaos that is Thamel. Great food and drinks, with zesty music. Don't miss out on their cheesecake, it's a must. *Mandala Street, Thamel*

New Orleans, offers a wide variety of western dishes that are scrumptious yet healthy. We got hooked on the rosemary chicken and hamburgers. *Jhamel, 5522708.*

Irish Pub, not only does it feel like one, but it's Irish all the way down to the original recipes from the owner's wife. Go green with their fish and chips. *Ananda Bhawan, Lazimpat, 4416027*

Aalishan, a newcomer to the Jhamel scene, serves a mix of both Indian and Chinese cuisines. The posh interior can be a bit intimidating, but don't let that put you off the food. *Jawalakhel (near the roundabout)*

MUSIC

Moksh Music Fest, a line-up of events running through four consecutive days leading up to the new year. *10-13 April, 5pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel 5526212. More info at <http://partynepal.com>*

Newaz, famous metal band from the 90s, reunited last August. They will be performing some of their originals at House of Music, as well covers of Hendrix and other guitar artists. *Friday, 9 April, 8pm, House of Music, Thamel*

Climate Champion's Concert, nature lovers and tree-huggers can revel in Rojesh Shrestha's new song in the first, and what seems like a long climate change concert in Nepal. Make a statement by being there. *Saturday 10 April, 10am-7pm, Basantapur*

4th Element, it's New Year's Eve and you can't decide where you want to go, or what to listen to. Then head to Electric Pagoda in Thamel where the Shillong band, 4th Element, is offering music with elements of R&B, soul, funk and jazz. Japanese DJ



Jet Stream then follows up with a blend of underground and house music. Seriously, we don't know who or what could beat that. *Tuesday, 13 April, Electric Pagoda, Thamel*

Sufi Night @ Tamas, you visit Tamas for the ambience as much as for its Sufi-fusion music. The music is soothing, and the cocktails smooth. The Cosmopolitans, however, could do with a little more vodka. *Every Tuesday and Saturday, 8pm, Tama Spa Lounge, Thamel, 4257658*

Email us with listings at editors@nepalitimes.com. Listings are free but inclusion is not guaranteed as space is limited.



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KIRAN PANDAY

HAPPY FEET: Celebrating diversity during the inauguration ceremony of the 7th National Congress of Indigenous People in Bhrikuti Mandap on Saturday.

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KIRAN PANDAY

HIGH ESTEEM: Climate Ambassador Apa Sherpa receives a banner from WWF on Monday that he will take with him to Mount Everest, which he is attempting to summit for a record 20th time.



KIRAN PANDAY

PRIORITISE: Visually impaired people participate in a rally in Babar Mahal calling on political parties to complete the new constitution on time, Monday.

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KIRAN PANDAY

DAZZLING: A display of flora draws visitors on Monday, the last day of the 13th Floriculture Trade Fair in Bhrikuti Mandap.

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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The Indian plains and Nepal got heat waves in March, drying out vegetation and making them prone to the forest fires now sweeping the midhills and Tarai. Smoke and wind-blown sand from the desert have cloaked the whole country in a thick haze upto 12,000ft. This won't go until washed away by rain or a change in wind direction to the northwest. This satellite/radar image from Thursday afternoon shows a westerly front advancing on central Nepal. The injection of moisture could turn into cumulus build-up and bring localised thundershowers mainly in the west. The Valley may see some weekend build-up with light rain and a wide variance in day and night temperatures.



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The Mangols are coming!

KALAM

Rabi Thapa



I've never understood beauty pageants. Yes, I know there are as many arguments for as there are against these glittery, chittery tamashas, both sides claiming they are speaking in the interests of womankind as a whole. On the whole, I've tended to regard them as rather harmless, gormless, aesthetically pleasing exercises in corporate promotion, but I wouldn't care to overly judge any such event – either from the picket lines or from the judges' panel.

I can understand, however, that a Miss Nepal event represents an opportunity for participants to develop character, empower themselves, or simply make a pile of cash. Ditto for the promoters. If the winner then goes on in the time-honoured tradition to promote certain worthy causes, good for them (and hopefully for us).

What I can't understand is the proliferation of ethnic beauty pageants. Miss Newa, Miss Sherpa, Miss Limbu, the list goes on. Ok, these too represent an opportunity for participants beyond that offered by Miss Nepal, ostensibly because they also represent historically disadvantaged ethnic communities. But I'm yet to hear of a Miss Chamar or Miss Chepang. There must be such a thing as being too disadvantaged to attract corporate backing. And the hypocrisy of the Maoist-affiliated groups who once shut down Miss Nepal for 'denigrating' women, but now allow a dime-a-dozen Miss fill-in-the-ethnic-blank-unless-you-are-Bahun-or-Chhetri pageants in the name of ethnic expression is, well, typical.




Beauty paegants may manage what the Great Wall of China never did

But what really gets my goat is the latest edition –

Miss Mangol. Who are the Mangols? Are they everyone in the country except for Bahuns and Chhetris? Is Miss Mangol a forum for indigenous women to express themselves – as opposed to Bahun and Chhetri women, probable migrants from India, who may have their own trouble expressing themselves? If Miss Mangol is a front for 'real' Nepali women, then why does the idiotic term 'Mangol' claim roots thousands of kilometres away, on the other side of the Great Wall of China?

I will be accused of resenting janjatis for their tun in the sun (being a non-janjati automatically disqualified from commenting on janjatis, just as the application forms for Miss Mangol imply Bahuns and Chhetris, and those lacking 'good moral character', are disqualified from competing). So I had better make it clear I have nothing against any ethnic community in this riotous Nepali garden of ours. What I do resent is attempts to calculate or not – to simplistically pit those Nepalis of Mongoloid ethnic origin against those of Indo-Aryan origin, and justify and augment the division by implying the former lack the privileges of the latter, wholesale, period. It's one thing to be proud of your ethnicity and culture – Newar, Chhetri or Limbu – it's quite another to create false Great Walls of China in our own backyard.

If, as this year's winner Barsha Rani Gurung declared, it is crucial to make youth culturally aware, and, as organisers Action Entertainment claim, "Unity in differences and equality in multiplicities are our common characteristics", then why is it necessary to exclude Bahuns and Chhetris, that is, to manufacture an event of their own? Perhaps no one really sees the irony in the dash for filthy lucre. It's no surprise that Miss Mangolian Kid was sponsored by the Chaudhary Group. Being plain Nepali has never been more difficult. 

Ashes to ashes

INDU NEPAL in CHITWAN


Badarjhula anyway.

Throughout the Tarai, fire destroys thousands of hectares of forest and hundreds of houses every summer. This year has been particularly bad. The dry weather seems to make everything combustible, but the fires are usually started by farmers to promote new green flushes. The 2600 residents of Badarjhula are especially vulnerable. Squatters in their place of origin and victims of floods and landslides, they moved here with the end of the Panchayat era when they heard the new democratic dispensation had promised them land.



HARVEST OF SORROW: A local girl sifts through the ashes for rice

The new school, however, seemed the most promising. The government had offered partial funding for the school building, and agreed to provide most of the teachers, giving rise to hopes that the settlement was on its way to being officially recognised. "We hope the school is a step towards making our settlement here legal," said Ganesha KC, who founded the first school in the village, where he taught in return for rice and eggs from the villagers. "We think the government won't uproot it after investing in it."

After Friday's blaze, the school looked even taller. The houses around it had been burnt to ashes. Villagers sifted through the ruins to see if the fire had spared anything. They slept in the open and talked about setting up tents until they could rebuild. It seemed like a ritual for after all, they have done this many times before. 

See pictures of Badarjhula before the fire on www.nepalintimes.com te. www.nepalintimes.com

They walked through the jungles with pots, pans, and little bundles of clothing, children in tow. They said they had been told this patch of forest 65 kilometres from the district headquarters had been released for agriculture. The government disagreed, and has asked them to move several times. In 2004, the army set the village on fire after warning them to leave. The residents soon returned and rebuilt their homes. Twenty years and a new People's Movement later, they have nothing more than pots and pans in their name.

For the dispossessed in Badarjhula, this year's inferno is one more disaster they will struggle to overcome

every year, carried by strong winds from nearby forests, consuming the grass-thatched wooden huts and everything in them. "There has been a fire every year since I moved here four years ago," said Devi Gurung, an NGO worker.

Fearing another inferno on the anniversary of last year's destruction, when 20 houses were gutted, locals went around last Friday reminding their neighbours to be careful. Some families were so scared they did not even cook their meals and ate dry beaten rice instead. But the fire came to

An aerial photograph showing a dense, multi-story informal settlement (slum) built on a steep hillside. The buildings are closely packed, with various colors and materials visible. In the foreground, a large, modern, multi-story apartment building with a grid-like facade stands out. The background shows a clear blue sky.

KIRAN PANDAY

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Delhradun: What could be a better time to ponder the future than when you are surrounded by creative minds at a literary festival? Delhradun really inspires creativity. No wonder writers like Ruskin Bond have decided to live there.

The stark difference one can notice of course is that their

slow pace than in the Kathmandu Valley. What one can see from the window seat while taking off from Kathmandu is, simply put, sad. It seems that valley residents, real estate developers in particular, hate greenery and are looking to demolish anything that looks like trees.

perhaps those who say they are responsible players and have engaged up as an association need to ensure there is self-regulation in this business. Else, we will be fighting to sell the last hilllock. For Nepal what it also means is that conservation and sustainable utilisation of natural resources have not been internalised. Donors have lost interest in these subjects as 'inclusion and exclusion' and predicting another conflict have become hot topics. One of the issues we discussed in Dehradun was man-mountain relationships. Compared to mountain people, people living in the valley are far



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Annapurna II and IV, as seen from 12,000ft above the Mardi Khola, and the January 1961 *National Geographic* photo (top left) of the same mountain, taken by UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld from a DC-3.

Ultra-marathon



PICS: ROBERT SPENCE

RICHARD BULL

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2km morning wake-up jog around Lakeside before we swerved abruptly up the steep 700m to Sarangkot village. The locals, as elsewhere, were out in force to wish the runners “Best of luck!”, “Very good!” and even “You’re last!”

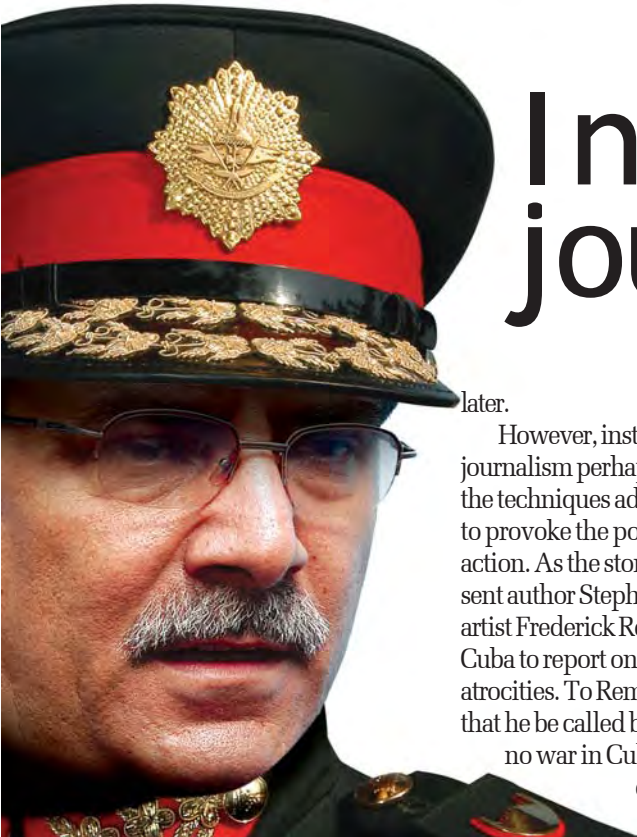
The track to Kaskikot offers stunning, only-in-Nepal views of Machapucchare and

Trekking? Try running up to Poon Hill and back

place on March 27. The race heads from Pokhara all the way to the Poon Hill and back to Birethanti, and is now down from 100km to 71km. It’s still a bone-crumbler.

My day began with a pleasant

Annapurna. After losing hard-won altitude, the runners finally arrive in Birethanti – arguably the real start of the race. Birethanti is both the 31km point and 71km finish. In



Instigative journalism seeks to provoke events, rather than just report them



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

The post-1990 boom in the Nepali media pushed many established practices of the past into the shadows. Professional attitudes and commercial considerations made 'mission journalism' unfashionable. But the idea of the journalist as a stakeholder rather than merely a recorder survives in a different form.

Instigative journalism sounds like a neologism, but dates back to the circulation wars between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst in the latter part of the 19th century. The *New York Press* coined the term 'yellow kid journalism' in early 1897 to describe the combative coverage of rival papers. The expression was shortened to 'yellow journalism'

later.

However, instigative journalism perhaps best describes the techniques adopted by Hearst to provoke the population into action. As the story goes, Hearst sent author Stephen Crane and artist Frederick Remington to Cuba to report on Spanish atrocities. To Remington's request that he be called back as there was no war in Cuba, his boss cabled back:

"Please remain. You furnish the pictures, I'll furnish the war."

The year 2066 BS began with a sensational

peace of instigative journalism. In a front-page report, *Kantipur Daily* alleged that the Nepal Army was contemplating a 'soft' coup to pre-empt the dismissal of its chief by the Maoist-led coalition government. The NA public relations outfit took the story seriously enough to issue a denial the same day. It termed the report "imaginary and illusionary".

Himal Khabarpatrika responded with a provocative caption on its cover to accompany a cleverly manipulated image of Pushpa Kamal Dahal in military regalia. Other print media ran equally confrontational opinion pieces. The subsequent polarisation of public opinion, it could be said, led to the dismissal of the army chief, his restoration under presidential orders, the resignation of the prime minister and the formation of an anti-Maoist coalition. Politics has been going around in circles ever since, with President Ram Baran Yadav

at the centre.

The Kathmandu establishment loves President Yadav's penchant for Hindu rituals and his barely disguised anti-Maoist politics. But as the day of reckoning (May 28, 2010) nears and the possibility of completing the constitution in time recedes, everyone is feeling apprehensive as far as the president is concerned.

Premier Nepal recently urged the head of state to exercise restraint. The media have adopted a hostile tone. Constitutionalists close to UML have stopped defending presidential consultations. Even *Himal Khabarpatrika* ran an editorial sometime ago requesting President Yadav to calm down.

Ever since his vocal opposition to the Madhes Uprising, President Yadav hasn't been very popular in the Tarai. Now Pahadis too seem to have lost some of their initial enthusiasm for him. But one journalist has stood by the president throughout, defending all his actions and inactions with commitment and zeal. In the writings of Birganj-based reporter and columnist Chandrakishor, a whiff of the mission journalism of yore can still be found. He is often guarded in offering his views, but even his circumspection has the old-world charm of when it was unbecoming of a journalist to praise a politician openly. Chandrakishor is my choice for 'Journalist of 2066 BS' in 'The Year of Print'.

Instigative journalism undoubtedly rules the roost in Nepali media. For the old-timers of the profession however, the mere survival of mission journalism in some form is reason enough to celebrate. 🇳🇵

THIS WEEK

"Diplomatic pressure"

Early this week, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal conceded to authorities that the decision to commission an Indian company to print Machine Readable Passports was influenced by "political and diplomatic pressure". The statement appeared to confirm suspicions of irregularities in the bidding process, and prompted the filing of two public interest litigations challenging the decision on Wednesday. On Thursday morning, the Supreme Court ordered the government not to follow through with its decision until its legality is determined. It has summoned Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and Foreign Minister Sujata Koirala to appear in court on Monday. The political damage is already done, as opposition parties have jumped on the opportunity to lambast the 'puppet government'.

Guilty

The Nepal Army (NA) has been in hot water since the deaths of three women in Bardiya at the hands of its personnel on 10 March. On Wednesday, the Parliamentary Committee on Women, Children and Social Welfare said the women were not poachers, as the NA claimed, but were collecting tree bark. It added that the army killed the women

indiscriminately, and tampered with evidence to hide the fact. It was silent on whether or not the women were raped as medical examinations are not yet complete. The ruling echoes the findings of an investigation by the National Human Rights Commission, which on 1 April recommended the government prosecute the concerned NA personnel.

Clay feet

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal's government is fraying at the edges as opposing voices, even within his own party, grow more strident. Nepal Sabdhavana Party (Anandadebi) withdrew support from the government on 4 April, saying the government had failed to forge political consensus. Minister of Supply Rajendra Mahato of Nepal Sabdhavana Party threatened to leave the government, accusing it of not honouring its eight-point agreement with the United Democratic Madhesi Front. There are also voices within the NC, the most stalwart of UML's allies, calling for Nepal's resignation, and the Maoists have once more raised the spectre of a no-confidence motion. Hedged in, the prime minister saw an opportunity to save face amid public outrage over the MRP fiasco. He said the bidding process was scrapped to keep NC happy.

APRIL ISSUE ON NEWSSTANDS NOW!

Himal assembles a range of insightful and provocative voices to comment on **The Future of Caste:**

NEW ORDER

Chandra Bhan Prasad argues the new economic realities is making caste obsolete

WE CAN ONLY LOOK FORWARD...

Meena Kandasamy explosively imagines the personal annihilation of caste identity

NO REFORM

Kancha Ilaiah suggests that Hinduism will cede ground to Islam, Christianity and Buddhism unless it deals with caste

COMPLETING THE INSULT

Rakesh Shukla writes on how the caste-prejudice of the Indian judiciary impedes justice.

HOW CASTE CAME TO AMERICA

Vijay Prashad explains the US academia's interest in caste and its influence in the social sciences

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Annapurna air



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safari



GUDMUNDUR PALL OLAFSSON



GUDMUNDUR PALL OLAFSSON

The unique geology of the upper reaches of the Seti below Annapurna IV.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

A fleet of ultralights takes advantage of a glorious morning above Pokhara, recently.



HEADING HOME: Ram Kumar Khatri knows his winning run leads to biscuit heaven

between comes a seemingly endless 2050m climb via 3080 steps up to Ulleri, the course up to the famous Poon Hill viewpoint, and back down again.

The high hilltops were blushing red with rhododendron, making for an extraordinarily beautiful distraction from the rigours of the trail. But despite the challenging course, the race was won in just 7 hours 30 minutes by Ram Kumar Khatri of Tribhuvan Athletics Club, who took home Rs 50,000 in prize money. No Nepali women entered but the first woman home was Moire O'Sullivan from Ireland, in 12.15. Forty competitors, mainly from the army and police, took to the trail with a number of local villagers and a hint of international flavour.

First run in 1995 with collaboration from British cricketer-turned-walker Ian Botham, artist Jan Turner and ex-Gurkha Ramesh Bhattachan,

the Annapurna ultra-marathon has only taken place in 2000 and 2009, due to political upheavals and the difficulties in finding sponsorship for such an offbeat sport.

This year's event was rescued from the brink by Roger Henke and the Summit Hotel, which stepped in as the major sponsor at the last minute. Henke, who is himself a keen trail runner and was the first foreigner to finish in 10.30, said, "I wanted to develop the race and turn it into a trail race because I believe that it has a future from an adventure tourism perspective. I convinced my board to sponsor this year's event and use the experience and contacts for a better event next year. We want much better international exposure and a bigger pot of prize money that can support the training of local athletes."

There's a lot of enthusiasm for the talent and potential of Nepali runners. Rob Cousins has teamed up with Ramesh

Bhattachan to train a couple of promising mountain runners for the prestigious Davos ultra-marathon race in Switzerland, the Nepal of Europe.

"That race is a very good comparison to what we've just done. It's less climbing and less altitude and the fastest runner finished that in 7 hours compared to 7.30 here. It compares very well. For these runners to be able to run that fast, at that altitude, up those steps and just keep on going, in that time – and still look good and fresh at the end – I think it's spectacular."

For this runner, who certainly didn't feel or look fresh by the end, it was as much about competing as it was about eating and drinking along the way. "Khanus! Khanus!" ordered a senior member of Ghorepani mothers' group, offering biscuits, Chinese apples and hot noodle soup. Ah...of course mothers understand everything. 🇳🇵



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Presidential line



Editorial in *Nagarik*,
6 April

नागरिक

President Ram Baran Yadav has initiated discussions with political parties at a time of political fluidity, raising hopes that there may be an agreement. A few days ago, there was controversy over the president's remark that he had a 'guardian' role. Some criticised him for having political ambitions. He

has told the prime minister that he is aware of the limits on presidential powers, and will not overstep his mandate even if the constitution is not written on time. If those who have executive powers fulfill their obligations responsibly, there is no need for them to be paranoid about the president's remarks.

Maoists attack media

Nepal Samacharpatra, 6 April

समाचारपत्र

Nepal Media Society has condemned the disruptions in the distribution of *Rajdhani* daily, and asked the government to provide security to the media. Two Maoist-affiliated staffers at the paper who had fake certificates threatened to kill staff and set fire to the office, and have not allowed the distribution of the paper for the last week.

Time running out for unity

Opinion by Phurpa Tamang Hyalmo, Rasuwa, in *Nagarik*, 31 March

नागरिक

If the new constitution isn't written by May 28, the CA will be automatically dissolved. There are two options: write it on time, or extend the term. The parties have no option but to agree on provincial boundaries, state restructuring, and the integration of Maoist fighters. Who gets to be in government is not a big issue. The people want peace, law and order and development. We want a short constitution that reflects the aspirations of all, but it can't be a collection of political slogans. If the parties can't do this will they take moral responsibility? Or will they just blame a rival party?

The Newars and others in Kathmandu and the people of the Madhes are all fortunate. Either way they win. How about us indigenous people living in the remote corners of the mountains? We are cursed by birth and by the neglect of the state. Our land has no value and we can't even farm on it. Now with these new provinces, we may even be restricted in our movement. What kind of constitution are these people writing, if it tears the country apart? It is going to create enmity not just between Bahun-Chhetris and others, but also among the indigenous people. The draft on ethnic federalism is a huge mistake.

Ethnic-based identity politics is leaving the country astray. Opposition to federalism is growing by the day. Any state structure can have good or bad aspects, it is the rulers who need to be honest. We are wedged between regional powers India and China and are trailing behind because of leadership failure. By splitting the country along ethnic lines, the country will be pushed towards destruction, not development.



Highest biogas

Gorkhapatra, 3 April

गोरखापत्र

Nepal has set up the highest ever biogas plant to turn livestock refuse into methane. The plant is located at 3,850m at Kyangjin Gomba in Langtang, and works even in freezing temperatures. There are now four experimental biogas plants in Langtang, and many cater to the increased demand for energy from tourism.



MRP scandal

Big umbrella: Nepal's security
Small umbrella: Mahav Nepal's security

कान्तिपुर

Abin Shrestha in
Kantipur, 7 April



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Ethnic provinces are impracticable



Harshajit Lama, NCCA member, Kabhre

Why was the Constitutional Committee meeting postponed?
The Study Committee led by Agni Kharel is studying the draft proposals of the thematic committee. There are contentious issues to be resolved, which takes time. The CA will soon resume.

Do you think the constitution will be drafted on time?
The Interim Constitution has stipulated two years to draft the new constitution. However, it all depends on how seriously stakeholders take it. If the political leaders sort out their differences, we can still expect the new constitution on time.

How is it possible until there are still differences on fundamental issues of state restructuring and forms of governance?
The Maoists and UML proposed 14 provinces based on ethnicity, which is wrong. This is impractical in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural country. Besides, the country cannot sustain 14 provinces. Therefore, 6 to 7 provinces based on population would be ideal for us.

Coming from a Janjati community, are you not afraid of losing elections if you oppose the idea of ethnic provinces?
The future of the country matters more than my winning an election. What is the

point talking of ethnicity? Multi-ethnicity is the reality of the country. Janjatis' votes alone would never have elected me as a CA member. I got votes from all communities. So I am not in favour of ethnicity based provinces. This is just a slogan to trick the people.

Can the constitution work if we do not address the demand of identity?
Adopting a mixed (proportional and direct) electoral system can encompass the issue of identity.

If the CA cannot meet the May 28 deadline, what will be the status of CA members?
From time to time, we hear the public will not accept us as CA members after May 28. The leaders should take this seriously and act to meet the deadline. The constitution should be written on time.

Tamu province will ruin Tamus

Chandra Gurung, RPP (N) CA member

Why is your party demanding a referendum to decide the fate of the monarchy when the Interim Constitution settled on the monarchy, federalism and secularism long ago?
Our party has taken the constitution-writing process seriously as it is a historic task. This is an opportunity for people to write their own constitution. Constitutions were written in the past but the CA should come up with a constitution that people can call their own. Article 157 of the Interim Constitution states, 'any matter of national importance should be made through referendum.' On this basis our party has been demanding a referendum to decide the fate of the monarchy, federalism and secularism.

But pro-republicans think your demand is regressive.
Whatever we are demanding is in line with democratic norms. It is not fair to refer to it as an anti-federal, anti-democratic move. There are clearly two schools of thought regarding federalism: those who consider it a means to progress and prosperity and those who think it will break up the country.

Which category do you fall into?
We have been demanding a referendum to decide on it. We accept the verdict of the people whatever it might be. The people's decision should be inscribed in the constitution.

How should we interpret the charge against you of attempting to reinstate the old regime?
This is a baseless allegation. Change does not mean all established norms and values should be destroyed. Change means creativity. But the annihilation of all matters of national importance in the name of change will ultimately bring destruction to this country. The 12-point agreement signed in Delhi does not talk about the abolition of monarchy but the end of a tyrannical monarchy.

What about the demand for a Hindu state?
Our country is the land of the origin of eastern civilisation. There are Christian and Muslim states where there are Christians and Muslims. Why can't a country where 85 per cent people are Hindus be declared a Hindu state? More than a billion people worldwide are Hindu, this is our identity. No one raised voices against Hinduism during Jana Andolan II. The decision came all of a sudden under the influence of foreign forces. But it is against our identity. Therefore, we have been demanding it should be decided on through a democratic process.



The question of ethnic identity is being raised instead of the religious identity of the past.
This is an absolutely wrong move. The way communal issues are being raised in the name of ethnic identity, this will disintegrate national unity and ruin the social fabric, pushing the country into civil war. Consequently, Nepal could be the next Nigeria or Uganda. We need to be cautious about the possibility of such a situation in Nepal.

Do you think you will get votes by opposing federalism in the future?
The demand for economic, political and social rights was raised as the state denied us those rights in the past. We demanded representation of Gurungs at all levels of the state. But in the name of identity, a conspiracy is being hatched to ruin Tamus.

How?
What is the point of creating a Tamu province when a Dhakal will ultimately be the chief minister? About 85 per cent of the people in the proposed Tamu province are non-Tamus. If they unite, Tamus will not get even the job of a peon. Constitutional provisions will probably not guarantee the position of chief minister for Tamus.

“It doesn't mean we should pick up anyone from the street for the post of chief justice.”



Akabal Ahmad Sah, MJF CA member, Kapilbastu

Why is constitution writing on the backburner?
The Constitutional Committee should have prepared an integrated draft from the concept papers submitted by thematic committees by now. But the committee that comprises top leaders from the big parties failed to do so as they are busy with party activities and foreign trips. This is why the constitution-writing process could not gather momentum.

The Judicial System Committee, of which you are also a member, proposed that anyone outside the

judiciary service can be picked for the post of chief justice. How rational is that?
Yes, we proposed that anyone from within as well as outside the judiciary service could be eligible for the post of chief justice. It does not mean we should pick up anyone from the street for the post. Since parliament is accountable to the people, it would be better if a mechanism under parliament appoints the chief justice.

Are you saying the judiciary should be under parliament?
The judiciary will be under a mechanism of parliament. This will discourage corruption and delay in service delivery in the judiciary.

What kind of democracy will it be where provinces are created on the basis of ethnicity and the judiciary is under parliament?
The provinces should be created on a regional basis, not an ethnic basis. People within the provinces should feel they really have a stake in the provinces. Having the judiciary under parliament is aimed at discouraging corruption and irregularities.

Will the constitution be written by May 28?
The big political parties are racing for power, which has put the constitution-writing process at risk. People will surely point at us because of their inability.

What will you do if the constitution is not drafted by May 28?
I will follow the party's decision. I will resign if the party decides to do so. There is no point resigning alone.

Time to send out a Mayday alert for May. The Maoists are planning a decisive indefinite general strike (hey, didn't they agree to a moratorium for NTY 2011?) and a Valley Blockade to enforce a regime change in May. The Ass' thought on this, for what it's worth, is that if this govt has to go then 'tis better it went quickly and saved us all the trouble. Awesome's desperation to dislodge the 'puppet regime' showed in his Tundikhel speech, but in private he was overheard recently complaining that Mohan ('The Doc') Baidya was "getting too radical for his own good" by suggesting that they topple the govt and grab power on May 29. Meanwhile, **Bahun Baddies** are up in arms against Comrade Hitman for padding up his command with Newars. Hitman is hitting Newar businesses in town for donations, filling his warchest.



The Chinese are here to fix the height of Mt Everest once and for all. The negotiations have reached a delicate stage. This is the world's tallest border pillar and till presstime, Nepal was refusing to budge from the internationally

accepted height of 8848m, while the Chinese were sticking to 8844m. What's the big deal? If Qomolungma is equally owned by Nepal and China, why do the Chinese want the lower figure? What's in it for them? For some obscure reason the Chinese want to measure the bedrock, while

Nepal wants to count the **icing on the top**. Before a new Gorkha-Tibet war breaks out over this issue, let's find a peaceful negotiated settlement and get Apa Sherpa's expedition to pile some rocks and make a 4m high cairn on the summit. Everybody happy?

The long and short of the MRP (**Middlemen Refundable Passport**) saga is that we are now not going to get the new passports even by June. Which means the only alternative is that if we can't have passports printed in India, Nepalis may have no choice but to carry Indian passports. A certain institution that can't be named because the case is now **sub judice** (Latin: "We want our share") has just put a spanner in the works and sabotaged the whole deal so we will be deprived of the only document that proves that we are citizens of a sovereign nation. ICAO gave us 10 years to make new passports, and we couldn't even do that. We now have till 2015 to convert all MRPs to e-passports with chips, but the Ass bets his left buttock we'll botch that one too.

The latest from the Nepal Taekwondo Federation after Dipak Bista broke down and cried at the press con before his Singapore trip is that our illustrious martial artists vandalised the **Khel-Koot Mantralaya** and roughed up

the karnacharis. The reason: members of the Tae Kondo Federation were not selected for the Singapore tournament so they vented their ire by physically assaulting the doors, windows, chairs and tables of the Ministry of Youth and Sports to practice their gyeokpa. Said a Federation spokesperson: "They didn't listen to us so we were forced to do todfo." Instead of being called a Democratic Federal Republic, Nepal should just be renamed a Tae Kondo Federation.

This govt sure has its priorities right. The latest cabinet decision is to award a concessionaire a permit to set up a mall inside Singha Darbar. We all knew there is a supermarket epidemic in **Mallmandu**, but somehow the government secretariat had seemed to be immune to it. Now, civil servants will have access to a 24-hour convenience store, cyber café and a commie seri.

Nepal Police has belatedly decided to force **overweight cops** to shed kilograms by forcing them to attend Ram Dev's mass yoga. But that's never going to reduce their girth. A better idea would be to re-assign them to a food-deficit area in the Far West not yet served by road or air.



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