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So close, so far



BILASH RAI

Plain Speaking

Prashant Jha looks at the road ahead of the May 28 deadline, and warns that in the light of their past conduct, Maoist threats shouldn't be dismissed entirely.

p3

ID-ing Nepal

MRP or no, biometrics are on the cards for the next elections.

p13

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

GANDHIANS WITHOUT GUNS

In her lengthy field report from India's Chhatisgarh state just before 75 federal paramilitary were massacred by Indian Maoists on 6 April, Arundhati Roy described Naxalites as 'Gandhians with guns'. She has since been ridiculed by commentators in the mainstream Indian press for her statement.

For us in the Nepali media, there is a sense of déjà vu. There was similar ignorance, apathy and disinterest in the Kathmandu establishment following the first attacks on police stations in Rolpa in 1996-97. The political parties in Kathmandu were too preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires feeding it.

If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more jingoistic than we in the Nepali media ever were. It

regularly uses the phrase 'blood-thirsty terrorists' to describe the Naxalites, and the federal state appears to be in favour of making the same mistake as our own Home Ministry did with Kilo Sierra 2 in unleashing an indiscriminate crackdown, that ended up helping Maoist recruitment here.

Whether we like it or not, a hardline Indian response to the Naxalites will have a bearing on us. New Delhi now sees its domestic security issue linked with the possibility of a Maoist-led government in a neighbouring country with which it has an open border. Our own Maoists see the Nepal government's recent climbdown from the Indian-backed MRP deal as proof that there are limits to Indian influence in Kathmandu, and think they can propel themselves to power though a street uprising in May.

What is holding things up here is that the Maoists are digging in to defend their position of not allowing an extension of the CA if they are not allowed to lead a new government. The Nepal government has said no problem, but give up the threat of violence first. And everyone is

blaming everyone else for the lack of agreement.

It is not in the interest of any of the political parties in the CA (including the Maoists) that the post-May 28 constitutional vacuum be filled by an illegitimate 'might is right' force. Extending the CA's term is no answer unless the parties demonstrate that they can find a power-sharing agreement. Which is why, even at this late hour, they must focus their energies on:

- amending the interim constitution to buy time to finish the new constitution
- agreeing on an all-party national government, preferably before May 28
- getting the peace process back on track

The YCL chief describes himself as a 'Buddha'. No one is going to believe him unless his gunmen first turn into Gandhians.

K&D

Homeland



GUEST COLUMN

Upendra Mahato

People often ask me: "You could live anywhere in the world, why have you decided to invest in Nepal?" Actually, I have a very selfish reason for doing so. It is in my self-interest that my country becomes prosperous.

Because of globalisation, countries are vying to attract the best, brightest, richest investors with offers of citizenship. But whichever citizenship you finally decide to take up, deep down, your features, complexion, behaviour and culture still keep you a Nepali.

Even a Nepali with American citizenship remains a Nepali. If you answer "I am an American" to anyone, the next question is invariably: "But where are you from originally?" Even to Nepalis born in America, the question is: "Where did your



It is in my own self-interest to make Nepal prosperous

parents come from?"

And the way you are treated will depend on your ancestry, on where your family originally came from. Which is why when we meet an Afghan, we see that person through the prism of that country's tragic conflict. In other words, you can change your citizenship but you can't change who you are.

Just because I become an American, I can't stake my claim to that country's success. Until my country of origin becomes more prosperous, neither I, nor my children and their children can hold their heads high. Today,

you may be a professor, a successful businessman, a labourer, but the Nepal tag comes with a slight stain. All because of the state of the motherland.

If Nepal were on the path to progress and prosperity, we wouldn't be so tempted to seek our fortunes elsewhere. And even if we became citizens of another country our origins would get more respect. This is why I am investing in Nepal, I want to be proud of my homeland.

Nepal can be put on a path of rapid growth and development within 10-12 years. It is not so difficult. Just look at where Russia was in 1990 after the Soviet collapse. If you were Russian in those days you were automatically associated with the mafia. Russians suffered because of what Russia had become. But all it took was a strong leader to set things right within a few years.

Nepal is a compact country, it is easy to get results. You don't need oil, gas or minerals to be developed. If we were as aggressive about development as we are about politics, and adapted culturally to changes, we would be far ahead. Many Nepalis who used to say Nepal is

finished, it's too corrupt, there is no security, are now contributing to Nepal's development. You don't need a whole lot of money to do it, your heart has to be in the right place, and you have to invest where it makes a big difference.

At meetings of overseas Nepalis, there used to be a debate about whether we should speak in Nepali or English. I always pushed for Nepali: it is our link language. My mother tongue is Maithili, but without Nepali I can't speak to my compatriots. You may be able to explain Nepali culture to a foreigner in English, but unless you speak your language you won't understand your culture. The Nepali language is the window to Nepali culture.

I don't think any ethnic group will be better off by fragmenting Nepal. Ethnic groups all have their own unique culture and heritage and these should be preserved but not at the cost of a prosperous, united Nepal. 🇳🇵

Upendra Mahato is Chairman of the NRN International Coordination Committee. This is a translated excerpt from an opinion published in Himal Khabarpatrika, 14-28 April.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

GO LOCAL

Prevention is better than cure; hence this article is an appropriate early warning ('Learning from Jajarkot', #498). However, in a highly centralised country where the government fails to provide water (forget safe drinking water) to denizens in the capital city, it is naive to think that better hygiene is the solution. Rather, more stress should be laid on decentralisation and improved local governance.

unknown

TEACHING LEADERSHIP?

I run a small company which works mostly with college students on, for lack of a better term, 'Leadership Development' ('Learning leadership', #498). We do this through outdoor games and motivational lectures as

well as in-class reflection sessions, which are necessary to bring about a behavioural transformation. I believe that leadership and professional skills can be taught in such a manner. The question that we at our company's learning centre struggle with is how to find a methodology that produces the changes we want.

Swastika

- What is it that makes one a successful leader? It's easier said than practiced but I believe there are some core components that are very important: integrity, vision, the innate humility to be able to learn from anyone, extreme intelligence and wisdom, a personal sense of accountability for one's decisions, endurance, the inner strength to build a culture from the bottom up for excellence and a passion to succeed.

TS

WE KNOW BETTER

I get your point that the middle/upper class Nepalis are trying to emulate Bollywood and trashy American franchise-type life styles ('Bollywooding in Nepal', #498). I guess we have to learn to appreciate and identify the qualities around us than just following what market forces i.e. the TV tell us to do.

rishav

ONE OF A KIND

The kind of success Prabal Gurung has achieved is on the same level as that of Samrat Upadhyay ('Do your homework', #498). Ten years after Upadhyay published his first collection of stories, there hasn't been another Nepal-born writer doing the same or better in the West. That's because Upadhyay's success, like that of Gurung, looks and sounds simple, but is incredibly hard to pull off or imitate.

FT

The blogs

nepalitimes.com/blogs

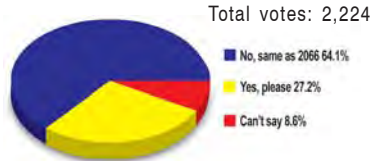
East West

A look at volcanic eruptions past, and those still to come



Weekly Internet Poll # 499

Q. Will 2067 see a breakthrough in Nepali politics?



Weekly Internet Poll # 500. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What does the Maoist training of cadres signify?





KIRAN PANDAY

Blustering reality

PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

In the middle of 2007, there were murmurs from the Maoists that they would quit the interim government unless a republic was declared immediately and a full PR system adopted. No one believed them, but they did walk out. Last year, the city was abuzz with speculation about whether the Maoists would sack Katawal. For whatever reason, they went ahead with their threat.

Over the past ten months, the Maoists have fluctuated a lot but throughout, they have been consistent about three things – we will not cooperate with Madhav Nepal; the next government should be under our leadership; and we will hit the streets to achieve our goal. The present stalemate persists because the Maoists have not budged.

There is a simple lesson here – take Maoist rhetoric seriously. They do not operate using the same strategies and tactics as other ‘normal’ liberal democratic parties, and usually end up doing what they say they will.

The Maoists are now preparing for their biggest show of strength ever, in both Kathmandu and other urban centres. From Ramechhap to Saptari, village committee members have been told to collect food and be ready to come to the capital at a moment’s notice. Some from within the party have been sent to the cantonments to receive basic military skills (something UNMIN should flag up if it has come to their notice). In internal training sessions, comrades have been told this is the ‘decisive battle’. Even as the

other parties are asking the Maoists to become a ‘civilian’ party, smaller party units have been reorganised on ‘military’ lines.

So what is the aim? Those at the bottom of the pyramid do not quite know. They have been told it is time for ‘janabidroh’, a people’s revolt, but are ignorant of the larger political game.

At the top, everyone agrees on the need for mass protests and that there is no question of ‘surrendering’. But there are differences about what this entails.

Those who dismiss Maoist threats should know they usually do what they say they will

Kiran and company seem to think mass mobilisation, infused with a semi-violent apparatus, can enable them to capture the state. But the pragmatists within have argued that for a janabidroh to succeed, four elements are necessary – popular mass upsurge; a militant party apparatus; a division within the state security forces, especially NA, with the lower levels refusing to shoot; and support of sections of the international community. At best, the Maoists have the first two. Even there, the popular support of the middle

and lower middle class in Kathmandu cannot be guaranteed given their ‘vacillating’ nature. Moderates in NC and UML, one might argue, would also get pushed towards the right-wing, ruining existing achievements.

Prachanda is shrewd enough to recognise that a unilateral seizure of power is not possible. But he also knows that the sole basis for a lot of Maoist bluster is the claim that they have a solid organisational and popular base. This is the time to prove it. Maoists say they will get 400,000 people out on May 1, which is definitely an over-estimate. Many in government are probably underestimating Maoist strength when they think the turn-out will be less than 100,000. But as soon as we get into that range, who really knows how to count?

The Maoist premise is that the non-Maoist politicians will get cold feet, the security organs will not want to get into a confrontation, and India will then try to stitch together a deal rather than risk a conflict with unknown results. If they do arrive at an agreement, the calculated gamble will have paid off. But if the non-Maoist camp does not blink, given that many feel the Maoists are bluffing (since they need a CA extension the most), then this could well go over the brink.

Rationality, logic and objective conditions suggest that there will be protests, but then the netas will hammer out something that allows them to continue to loot the state. But common sense is not the hallmark of Nepali politics, making predictions a hazardous task. Either way, the next few weeks will be critical, with long-lasting consequences for the nature of the state and who will dominate it.

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False alarm?



LISTEN CAREFULLY: In Doti, Asha Shahi explains how to use WFP's vitamin powder sachets

DEWAN RAI and RABI THAPA

DOTI – A lorry full of rice sacks screeches to halt where the dirt road ends in Kalikasthan, 27 km from Dipayal. Women and children, dogged by swarms of flies, surround the vehicle. They clap and scream in joy and soon volunteer to offload the sacks as a two-man band beats drums.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is distributing food. Under its Food for Assets intervention, the immediate food needs of the population are met while mobilising them to build assets that will contribute to local enterprises, income generation and improved agricultural production.

As the clamour dies down Asha Shahi, a social facilitator from local partner Maxpro, orients the women by instructing them how to use micronutrient powders for children under the age of five. “Do not mix it with liquid food,” she cautions.

In the light of the terrible diarrhoea-cholera epidemic that swept over parts of mid and far western Nepal last year, killing 282 (WHO, August 2009), it’s a warning they’d do well to heed. WFP is especially keen to get the message across.

This is understandable. Last summer WFP, which provides food to 3.5 million Nepalis in 40 districts, was accused by

The World Food Programme was a scapegoat last year, but government negligence and unhygienic local practices will be firmly in the spotlight in the event of a diarrhoea outbreak this year

several rights organisations, most notably INSEC, of providing sub-standard food that contributed to the epidemic. The government initially seemed to go along with the story rather than concede that it was its slow response and totally inadequate preparation that prolonged the public health disaster. Though it later issued statements denying the link between WFP and the epidemic, the damage was done. An uncritical media fraternity, too, appeared willing to cast unsubstantiated aspersions upon a donor.

This is as attributable to the tenor of journalism in Nepal as the plain ignorance of many reporters. At a March press conference held by Sameer Dixit’s Centre for Molecular Dynamics to announce the results of tests on last year’s stool samples from Doti, many mediapersons seemed palpably confused. Faced with evidence that cleared WFP, some protested, “But government told us WFP food was responsible!”

A much larger investigation was commissioned from the Natural Resources Institute in London by WFP last year. This was also categorical that WFP food could not have been responsible for the epidemic.

In Doti’s Kalikasthan, meanwhile, Basanti Kumari Bhatta cuts her rice sack open and examines the contents. “Look, this is so fine,” she mutters. She is well aware that this year, too, there have been rumours that WFP food is causing diarrhoea. But DR Bhatta, who coordinates food distribution in his ward, says there haven’t even been any cases of diarrhoea in his VDC. “We’ve already talked with

members of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists in the district about this. It’s just a rumour.”

Diarrhoea was also falsely reported in Tikhattar VDC. “We have already digested WFP rice without getting diarrhoea. People here want more rice,” says resident Saru BK. Padma Devi Shahi, a health volunteer in the VDC, says she has not found a single case of diarrhoea caused by consuming vitamins or rice. She says volunteers have visited every village of the VDC twice since the rumours began.

The situation in Basudebi VDC is similar, and in Barbata, locals are angry about the false reports of an outbreak in their VDC. Ramesh Rokaya wants to know who spread the rumours in the first place. “The offender should be booked,” he says, “We know what to do with the fraud reporter.” Tula Ram Bhatta of Kalikasthan believes such rumours will ultimately put poor people at risk, and should not hamper WFP projects. The dirt road from Dipayal to Kalikasthan was constructed under the Food for Assets program, after all. Further, many Dalit communities in the region can only produce enough food for two to three months a year, so one can understand Bhatta’s anxiety.

While some newspaper reports claimed that locals were wary of WFP food because of last year’s controversy, the ground realities do not appear to bear this out. Ultimately, they divert attention from the real triggers of diarrhoea outbreaks – the lack of potable water, sanitation facilities, and proper hygiene in affected areas.

Ram Ikbal Shah of Kalikasthan’s health post says villagers, especially in the Dalit communities, lack hygienic practices. When the water sources dry up and the number of flies increases, risk is heightened. “Food is not the cause of diarrhoea, unhygienic practices are,” Shah says. “They excrete in the open space around their houses because they don’t know any better.”

Bishwa Raj Khanal, senior public health administrator at the Department of Health Services, acknowledges that diarrhoea is a common seasonal phenomenon. His recent visits to Jajarkot and Rukum didn’t indicate a full-scale outbreak was imminent. “The government has been doing everything it can,” he says, “by filling in health worker vacancies and providing medicine stocks. But we need support.”

The near-daily reports of diarrhoea cases, with fatalities on the rise, can’t be dismissed wholesale. But if an epidemic does gather momentum, coordinated support rather than the all-too-easy blame game might be better appreciated at the end of the dirt road to Kalikasthan. 🇳🇵



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Columnist's curse



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

Barat Bhurtel didn't leave a note explaining why he killed himself. Anecdotal evidence suggests he had been under immense stress. He had recently finished a commissioned biography of President Ram Baran Yadav.



Barat Bhurtel, rest in peace.

The recent suicide of a popular columnist may have something to do with the state of the profession in Nepal

Rather than being content with his achievement, the conclusion of a challenging assignment appears to have frightened him instead. Writer Khagendra Sangraula went as far to say that the office of the president sucked his creative juices dry and then left him in the lurch. Dead men tell no tales. But what struck a chord among fellow columnists was Bhurtel's decision to complete his weekly piece for *Nagarik* daily. Even while contemplating death, the popular columnist didn't want to violate the sanctity of a deadline. It was a death in harness above all else. Sangraula may have had a point, but Bhurtel probably took his final decision on an impulse. No precaution is ever enough to save a person from his own rage. Rage, however, is the motive force of most independent columnists. Occasional contributors analyse subjects that interest them. Reporters fill their columns with the leftovers

of their field notes. But a general columnist has to mine his own heart and mind to find grist for the mill. That could be the reason columnists generate so much hostility: everyone thinks that they could do better if only the publisher believed in their talent. The reality is somewhat more complex. Commercial publishers feel that columnists take away useful column inches. Some fifteen years ago, the chief

authorities or interest groups may take umbrage at hugely popular columns. If a columnist took into account the controversy a piece could create, she would be unable to put pen to paper. Columnists are not popular even in the newsroom, where most of them are considered parasites that thrive on the sweat of reporters. Editors barely tolerate them: columnists often impinge upon their freedom to choose the tilt of the publication. Columnists survive in the media only because committed readers associate certain periodicals with the mugshot of their favourite writers. Shorn of all pretensions, columnists are essentially writers who succeed in establishing an amicable relationship with their readers.

Bhurtel was perceived as a 'democratic' writer and was at his acerbic best while lambasting UML or Maoist personalities. At a reception hosted by *Naya Patrika* daily some time ago, a friend chided Bhurtel for moving his column out of a weekly newsmagazine, pointing out that "in the magazine, you had a page facing the reader all to yourself. In a broadsheet, your column has to compete with the editorial, among other articles. Your reputation will save the column for a while, but you will have to innovate constantly to retain the loyalty of readers."

Only a columnist of Saurabh's stature could have been so blunt. He then tempered his observations with some empathy, "But I guess you had your compulsions." In retrospect, that statement seems to have been an understatement.

The contradiction of hobnobbing with the rich and powerful while struggling to make ends meet can weaken the will of even the most resilient among us. If the blame for Bhurtel's death has to be laid somewhere, it has to be the accursed profession of punditry. 🇳🇵

executive of a media house made this amply clear to a columnist: "The scarce space that I give you is compensation enough. Do you realise I could have given it to Pradip Nepal, Prakash Chandra Lohani or Narahari Acharya and earned their goodwill instead of publishing your rants and making enemies all around?" Columnists generate deep antagonism among the bean counters of media houses. Everyone knows what an editor, a reporter, an advertising executive, or even the mailing clerk is expected to deliver. But other than a deadline and a word limit, there are no conditions placed upon independent columnists. They don't even punch in the timecard. The quality of a columnist's output is even more difficult to measure. Some excellent columns do not generate enough response from readers but are acknowledged as authoritative. Advertisers, lobbyists,

THIS WEEK

NA recruiting again

The Nepal Army (NA) is at it again. Unfazed by a stay order issued by the Supreme Court (SC) on any further recruitment, it announced 271 vacancies for technical positions on Monday. Defense Minister Bidhya Bhandari said the recruitment does not violate the stay order, if it is read "between the lines", as it doesn't make the NA any larger than it was when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was first signed. She



added that it is part of the regular upkeep of the army. The Maoists have come out strongly against the move, decrying it as a patent violation of the CPA. It is joined in its exasperation by a group of lawyers representing NGO Inhured International, which submitted a writ petition against recruitment at the SC. The SC has summoned the petitioners and the NA a week from now. Inhured International filed the writ petition that prompted the stay order on recruitment last year.

Squeezing stones

The last-minute scramble to put together a constitution by May 28 suffered a setback on Wednesday as the High Level Political Mechanism failed to reach an agreement, yet again. The lingering stalemate adds to snowballing fears that the CA's tenure will have to be extended after all. Just a day earlier, Jhalanath Khanal of the ruling CPN-UML party said the "constitution can't be drafted by May 28 at any cost."

But how to go about extending the deadline is still an open question. Nepali Congress leader Ram Sharan Mahat suggests dissolving the CA and holding fresh elections if the Maoist don't agree to a 'mission' and 'timetable'. The Maoists, on the other hand, will only agree to a deadline extension if the current government steps down. Embattled Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal is entertaining the idea, but submitted a list of pre-conditions to his resignation, including that the Maoists should return all captured property, dismantle the YCL, and be honest in its dealings with regard to PLA integration, among others.

But he will be feeling the heat as the Maoists have threatened a 'people's revolt'. Reports that Maoist cadres have resumed military training across the country suggest the threat may not be an empty one. Ominously, the training of an 'assault group' which will allegedly lead the revolt has already been concluded. For its part, the Maoist party says the training is purely political and for the purpose of party mobilisation. The cabinet held an informal meeting on Thursday to discuss the matter.

Sudan scam

The parliamentary State Affairs Committee will submit its report on the multi-million rupee scam involving the procurement of equipment for the Nepali mission in Sudan on Friday, and appears to have uncovered a web of corruption reaching the highest levels of government. The committee summoned former Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula and former Home Secretary Umesh Mainali on Tuesday, but the duo claimed they couldn't have been involved as the Home Ministry had no jurisdiction over the deal. The committee also summoned former Inspector General Om Bikram Rana. The committee suspects that nearly Rs 400 million was embezzled during the purchase of eight armoured Personnel Carriers.

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Destination overhaul

 **ECONOMIC SENSE**
Artha Beed

POKHARA—Nepal Tourism Year 2011 was launched with much fanfare and people seemed happy to see this tourist city bustling with activity. The city has transformed quite a bit in the past decade, with ‘bulldozer and excavator terrorism’ razing hills to create flat land for sale. There is less observed greenery and as the Beed has earlier, Pokhara is aping the wrong model: Kathmandu. For tourism to really make sense, we need to see not only

increasingly using plastic money, we can’t hope to be a tourist destination if we only accept cash deals. Further, the banks have to ensure that ATMs dispense money on demand if we are to rely on cash. Similarly, Internet connections are not meant for business hotels alone. The Internet is akin to mobile phones in the early days of the technology: a necessary tool for travellers to stay connected with the wider world. Having sloppy Internet connections or charging a bomb for connectivity is not tourist friendly. Of course, the most important transformation we need to see is in service delivery. Since the

establishments seem to think they are gods and we, the customers, are at their mercy. We need to understand that workers are paid to provide good service. Productivity and wages need to be linked. In some places in Pokhara, we actually felt we were a big burden imposed on employees who would rather sit around twiddling their thumbs. There are of course exceptions. One need only observe the staff at the highly successful Busy Bee Café to wonder why other restaurants aren’t the same. But Pokhara must also make more of its incredible natural beauty. Simply dumping tourists there is not enough. Planning is necessary to determine how the lake can be used for more than just rowboat rides. How about a pathway around the lake for walks? The challenge is to find more options to keep visitors busy.

What better time than now to think about destination overhaul? It’s not more construction that we need, it is sprucing up the constructions we have and upgrading our soft skills. Why not more training programs, more awareness programs and of course, a paradigm shift on how we think about service and service delivery?  www.arthabeed.com

We need to change the way we think about tourism

physical transformation of places, but also the transformation of mindsets. After two days, one runs out of eating options as the ‘tomato puree’ culture predominates the restaurant industry here. There have to be more restaurants that provide good food at fair prices. Maybe it’s time for the specialty restaurants in Kathmandu to expand. It was also surprising to see most of the restaurants rejecting credit cards. With Nepalis

tourism slump of the conflict years, despite a recovery, it seems we have forgotten how to service full restaurants or hotels. Our politicians, who run the unions and like to impose the philosophy of a state-owned seller’s market, would probably like to see employees in private enterprises work like those in government monopolies. Like the staff at Nepal Electricity Authority or Nepal Airlines, employees at some tourist

Cleaning up Everest

There have been expeditions on Mt Everest before to pick up the rubbish left there by climbers, but for the first time a Nepali-financed expedition with Nepali climbers is going to the very top of the world’s highest mountain to clean up the trail. The clean-up is financed by Nepal Investment Bank (NIB) and the Golchha Group as part of their joint corporate social responsibility drive and is being carried out by an all-Nepali team led by Namgyal Sherpa. The expedition is not just going to bring back shredded tents and abandoned oxygen bottles but also the bodies of some climbers who died on Everest and are still entombed in ice along the summit ridge.



“What we are trying to do is to clean up Mt Everest not just because it is partly in Nepal, but also because it is a world heritage,” says Prithvi Pande of NIB. “We hope the expedition will spread awareness and also spur others to clean up our cities and towns.” Much of the rubbish on Mt Everest is now visible because of shifting snows and global warming melting the snow on exposed parts of the mountain. The expedition will be bringing down upto two tons of garbage from the ‘death zone’ above 8,000 metres on the southern (Nepal) side of the mountain.

Honda’s offer

Syakar Compay has announced a new scheme. On the purchase of any Honda bike, customers will get a ‘Scratch Card’ and ‘Bumper Draw Coupon’. The first will guarantee them gifts from Philips and Sukam, and the bumper draw will offer five lucky winners a 37-inch Philips LCD TV.

Happy Bajaj hearts

Hansraj Hulaschand Bajaj, authorised distributor and marketer of Bajaj motorcycles, has announced its ‘Bajaj Dil Khus, Dimag Kharab’ scheme. “They get a 21-inch Samsung colour television without any strings attached,” says Shekhar Golchha, Executive Director of the company.

Rum-jhum

Just as summer arrives, Scot & Scotts, Nepal has launched Blanca, Nepal’s first premium summer rum. The product is targeted towards Nepalis who currently imbibe imported brands.



Sleek ride

Morang Auto Works has launched a special Limited Edition R15 2010 model in red and white shades. The R15 Special Edition boasts performance worthy of a supersport model and a body design that evokes the YZF-R series. Visual expression and a quality ride!

Great Wall of Nepal

Himchuli Auto International Pvt Ltd opened a Great Wall Motors showroom in Kupondole, inaugurated by Qui Guohong, Chinese ambassador to Nepal, on Sunday. Great Wall Motors, through Himchuli Auto International, is offering three brands – Hover, Florid and Wingle.

Freeze!

Him Electronics Private Ltd has launched Himstar Refrigerator. The company claims its specially designed power compressor helps performance at extreme temperatures, with stabiliser-free operation to save power. Extra insulation helps maintain even temperatures during load-shedding.



NCell roadshow

NCell organised a gala street festival, ‘NCell Darbar Marg Festival 2010’, to introduce its recently changed brand name to the public. Food stalls, free balloons, face painting and live music were some attractions of the roadshow. Buyers also were given NCell branded gifts with every purchase of a new SIM and recharge card.

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LINEZ/10

Mobile nation

AHMAD ISKANDAR

The world is in your palm. Laptops have become passé, as smartphones are the lightweight champions of the world.

Smartphones went mostly unnoticed until Apple's iPhone was launched in 2007. Suddenly, everyone wanted a smartphone. The iPhone embodies the dreams of its consumers: responsive high-resolution touch screens, apps and games, and most importantly, instant web access on the go. It ushered in the era of 3G mobile services, with smartphones making the most of fast internet access. Converging technologies and services have propelled each other since. Google and Microsoft are making huge investments in the sector.

Nepal was lauded as the first in South Asia to offer 3G services, back in 2007, but progress has since been slow. Nepal Telecom

has only 2,100 3G clients, all within the Kathmandu Valley.

"3G hasn't really caught on here as the network coverage was limited, and the rates were considered expensive," says Kabindra Shrestha at the Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA). "A lot of improvements have to be made to the basic infrastructure so it can meet consumer needs."

But 3G is showing signs of a revival, with subscriber numbers tripling since February in response to more competitive rates and better coverage. Pokhara is undergoing tests for 3G coverage. With NCell poised to enter the 3G market soon, speculation is rife about competition benefiting subscribers. A boost in 3G subscription is likely to complement the smartphone market, too.

Smartphone sales are already gaining momentum. "More Nepalis are switching from basic handsets to smartphones," says Mansur Khamidov, chief commercial

officer of NCell. People from all walks of life have found their personal equilibrium in the use of smartphones (see p8).

Alas, the industry is under attack from a threat close to home. Sales of imitation smartphones, mainly from China, are stealing a large portion of the market share. NTA's Shrestha estimates that roughly 30 per cent of smartphone users have Chinese imitations with near-identical forms and functions. "Without regulation, copies will continue to be popular

with Nepalis, especially the low and middle income groups," says Shrestha.

NTA is currently looking into ways to curb piracy, and is assessing the Equipment Identity Register (EIR) that assigns unique International Mobile Equipment Identities (IMEI) to each branded phone and bars calls to or from pirated models. "As it is relatively easy to clone the IMEI, there are still doubts about its reliability," says NTA's Arjun Ghimire. India recently required mobile users to

register their IMEI numbers, shutting out 20 million imitation phones.

For now, distributors and retailers can only voice their frustration. "It's not fair," says Ramesh Shrestha, a general manager of the electronics division of Chaudhary Group, a distributor of LG phones. "While companies like us are paying duties and taxes, these pirates get away with it," he says.

It may be time to connect with the industry players again. 🇳🇵



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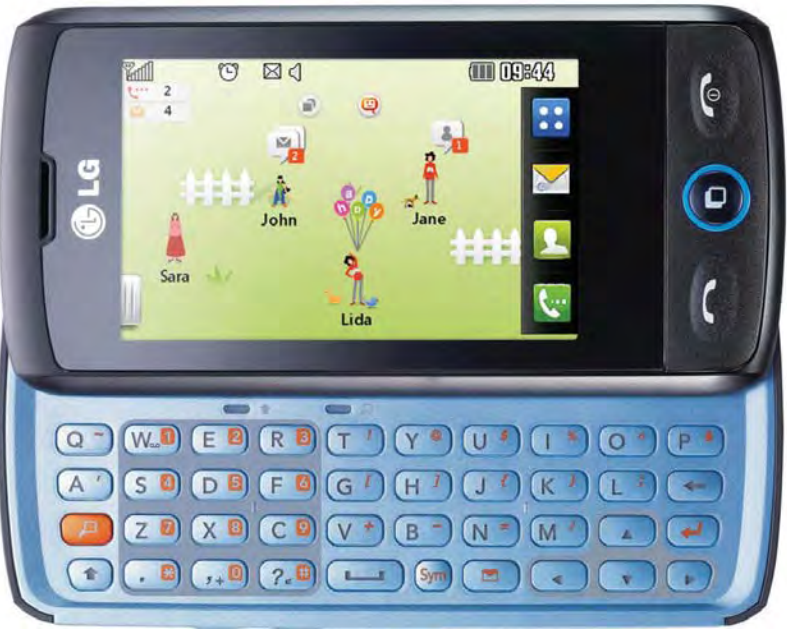


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HYBRIDS



LG
GW525
Pros: Has an excellent QWERTY keyboard and a large 2.8” touch screen. Memory is expandable up to 8GB. A 3MP camera is perfect for parties, and a 3G option is a bonus.
Cons: Keyboard isn’t the coolest looking.
Price: Rs 21,500 from Chaudhary Group, 5525039



Nokia
N97
The Nokia N97 is filled to the brim with goodies, and represents the high end of smartphones. Perfect for those who e-mail and send messages a lot and constantly need to stay connected.
Pros: Large, 3.5” touch-screen display, slide-out QWERTY keyboard for easy typing, full A-GPS support with Nokia maps, 5MP camera with Carl Zeiss optics, auto-focus, LED flash and video light.
Cons: Bulky, so will only appeal to those who need the features. Expensive.
Price: Rs 52,000 from Neoteric Computer, 4250001

Smartphone smarts

It’s all too easy to feel left behind in the frenetic information age. Smartphones are more than up to the multi-task. *Nepali Times* rounds up the hottest smartphones in town.

QWERTYS



Micromax
Q3
Pros: With the option of using two SIM cards – GSM and CDMA – in the same phone, you’ll never be stranded, wherever you go.
Cons: Memory is only expandable up to 2GB, small by today’s standards.
Price: Rs 6,500 from Network Solution, 4220128



G-Phone
G-588
Pros: Aside from its sleek and stylish looks, its dual SIM card option is useful for business trips out of the valley. Comes pre-installed with NimBuzz, great for social media applications such as Facebook and Skype. On-board camera is a plus point.
Cons: Not 3G-enabled, makes up for it with wi-fi.
Price: Rs 9,000 from Estel Network, 4221445

TOUCHSCREENS



HTC
HTC Hero
One can’t go wrong with an HTC phone. After all, the Taiwanese company has years of experience in the smartphone business, supplying handsets to telcos all over the world. The HTC Hero offers complete personalisation to satisfy the most demanding of users. With a slim profile, the Hero also screams style, making the transition from work to play seamless.
Pros: Slim. Complete customisation on Android OS. Long battery life.
Cons: Small built-in memory.
Price: Call TeleTalk, 4254546



Samsung
Omnia II
With a beautiful 3.7” touch-screen (one of the largest among smartphones) and expandable memory up to 32GB, the Samsung Omnia II will serve well as an entertainment device – think catching up on your favourite TV shows. Rearing its executive head, the Omnia II also features a business card scanner, along with the usual complement of connectivity options.
Pros: 3.7” touch-screen, long battery life, full connectivity options.
Cons: Price. Dismal applications store.
Price: Rs 49,000 from Virgin Mobile Showroom, 4260173

CLASSIC



Motorola
W7 Active Edition
Motorola smartphones often contain a feature that sets them apart from others in the marketplace, and the Motorola W7 Active Edition is no different. Targeted at health-conscious users, the phone comes pre-loaded with fitness applications and even a pedometer.
Pros: Fitness applications make this phone a niche product. Small and light.
Cons: Small screen. No internet browser.
Price: Rs 13,500 from Call Mobility, 4240886



Samsung B5310
Pros: Great combination of a full touchscreen and QWERTY keyboard. Expandable memory of upto 16GB, difficult to run out of space! 3.2MP camera.
Cons: Touchscreen not as fluent as it could be.
Price: Call IMS Tele Trade, 4441584

They don't tech-no for an answer



Bhushan Shilpakar, PhotoCircle, currently roaming around France

"iPhone has been my saviour on this trip, especially for maps. Getting in touch with friends and family back home makes me feel like I'm really travelling! Easily checking e-mails, uploading pictures and instant messaging have simply been great. Since finding a cyber café in Europe isn't easy, the free wi-fi negates this problem. It's much better than lugging a laptop around. Got this dreamy gadget as a gift. I also have a Nokia E73. While not as fancy as the iPhone, it still serves me well with basic tasks such as checking e-mails whenever I'm out of the office. As long as there's 3G and GPRS, it's still relevant."



Kshitij Regmi, Marketing & Communications Consultant

"I don't usually play games on the phone, but I spend a lot of time checking e-mails with my Nokia E63. It's really convenient to toggle between my three inboxes. I also use social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter and Fring a fair bit. Works fine every time.

The earpiece volume isn't great but it charges fast and has a strong body."

Clash of the titans

Two smartphone heavyweights are in talks to enter the Nepali market soon.

NCell, which recently took over Mero Mobile in grand style, will be focused on bringing in the BlackBerry. Known for its robust build and high reliability, the BlackBerry is the weapon of choice for most business people.

Rumours also abound of an iPhone deal between Apple and telcos here. The iPhone is renowned for its superlatively smooth user experience, as well as the large number of applications and games to choose from.

Watch this space.

Coming soon to a location near

HTC HD2

HTC Corp. produces powerful handsets that continually push the boundaries of innovation to provide true mobile freedom.

HTC is one of the fastest-growing companies in the mobile sector and has achieved remarkable recognition over the past couple of years. Business Week ranked HTC as the second best performing technology company in Asia in 2007 as well as giving the company the number 3 spot in its Global listing in 2006.

Since launching its own brand 18 months ago the company has introduced dozens of HTC-branded products around the world and **now officially available in Nepal.**

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- 750 pages per month
- One Year Warranty

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- Upto 1200 X 1200 dpi resolution
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- One Year Warranty

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EVENTS

Art Exhibition: Sojourn in Bangladesh, series of paintings by Jupiter Pradhan, opens 5.30pm, 23 April, until 12 May, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, 4218048

Peace is our aspiration, expression of peace through dance with performance by physically and mentally challenged children and youth in conflict, 23 April 5.15pm, Rastriya Nach Ghar, Jamal

Music Concert: Green Rocks – A Zero Waste Concert, aimed at educating communities about energy sustainability and the climate crisis. The concert will be kicked off by sports legend Deepak Bista, and will include games and songs with an environmental message, 23 April, 11am-5pm, Open Theatre (Khula Manch)

Movie screening: My Blueberry Nights, about a young woman on a soul-searching journey across America, by acclaimed director Wong Kar Wai, starring Jude Law and Norah Jones, 24 April, 4pm, GAA Lounge, Thamel, 4414785

Butterfly Effect: Breaking and Making in Chaos, screening of the Esther Benjamin Trust's latest film Lost and Found, and the opening of a new exhibition of mosaics and jewellery produced by survivors of child trafficking and graduates of the school for deaf children in Bhairahawa, 5pm, 25 April, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamsikhel, 5521120, www.kathmanduarts.org

Speaking many tongues: Nepali Literature in Translation, Nepali poets and writers join Manjushree Thapa in reading original and translated texts of her compilation 'The country is yours', a collection of contemporary Nepali literature in translation, 29 April, 5pm, Nepal-Bharat Library, NAC building, New Road

Bahini: Life of My Sisters, by photojournalists Edwin Koo and Debby Ng, a look into the lives of young girls at home and at school supported by The Little Sisters Fund, 17 April-30 April, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal



Mountain Bike Rally, grab a bike and make an environmental statement by riding from Pulchowk to Chobar, where there will be a cross-country race for advanced riders. Saturday 24 April, starts 6am, Laxmi Bank, Pulchowk, 4444684. Entry fee Rs 1000 (includes t-shirt and lunch)

MUSIC

Blast of Bar, organised by Planet Music Academy featuring Ashesh and Nekhvam, and Mahayana, 24 April, 3pm- 7pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172

Best of Sufi, chill out to soothing Sufi music by Hemant Rana with your choice of poison at hand, every Monday, Bourbon Room, Darbar Marg, 4441703

Dinesh Rai & The Sound Minds, jam it up at Fusion while you celebrate the start of the weekend and drive away the stress of the past week with a sumptuous buffet and drinks. Every Friday from 7pm, Fusion at Dwarika's Hotel, Battisputali, 4479488. Buffet at Rs 999 (includes a soft drink or beer)

Suvaprabhat, catch this talented band fronted by lead singer/guitarist Prabhat Manadhar while sharing a hookah with your friends, every Thursday from 7pm, Shisha Terrace Café & Bar, Thamel, 4701104

DINING



The Lazy Gringo, a favourite among expats, serves authentic tex-mex cuisine (Arizona mex, actually) to satisfy the hungry gringo within. Of note are the Arizona rice bowl and enchiladas with salsa. Wash it all down with free-flowing lemonade, Jawalakhel Chowk, 2210527

Himalayan Java, a Thamel establishment more known for its coffee, serves excellent sandwiches too. Picks – BLT (bacon, lettuce, tomtato) and tuna cheese, Tridevi Marg, 4422519

1905 Restaurant, feast on roasted delights within this converted aristocratic residence. Walled ambience and green surroundings make it an oasis within the city, Kantipath, 4215068



ChopsTix, serving excellent Chinese food from lunch till late, when the chic Tangerine bar, with its extensive menu of drinks, comes to life. Must try – 'Kung Pao' chicken and steamed chicken rice. Kumaripati, 5551118

Cosmopolitan Café, located in the heart of Basantapur, is a cozy café with arguably the best chicken sizzler in town. Frequented by famed guitarist Hari Maharjan, spot him there and you might get an impromptu performance with your meal. Basantapur (along Kathmandu Darbar Square), 4225246

GETAWAYS

The Great Escape, retreat from the hustle and bustle of the city to The Dwarikas' Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort in Dhulikhel. Just 45 minutes from Kathmandu, the short ride offers enchanting panoramic views and nature's best. Overnight packages available for local residents. The Dwarikas' Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, Dhulikhel, 4479488, www.dwarikashimalayanshangrila.com



The Last Resort: One-stop for Adventure Sports. Take your pick – a bungee jump over the Bhote Khosi river 160 metres below or mountain biking up to the Tibetan border, The Last Resort is a paradise for adventure sports junkies. Relax after a full day of fun with great food and a cold beer at the Instant Karma bar before retiring to deluxe safari tents. The Last Resort Sales Office, Mandala Street, Thamel, 4700525, www.thelastresort.com.np



KIRAN PANDAY

TEST OF FAITH: Representatives of the Christian community demand timely promulgation of the constitution and equal status for all religions at Khulamanch, Tuesday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

RUNNING ON EMPTY: Waiting for water in Nakabahil, Patan.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

FRONTLINE: Head of OHCHR in Nepal Richard Bennett launches Himal Books' 'Close Encounters' on Monday at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka.



KIRAN PANDAY

WOW: WOW's 6th Top Ten College Women award ceremony at the Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, Sunday.

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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

There's a week left in April, but the mercury is almost at normal seasonal peaks. Simply put, we haven't had enough rain, with the Valley receiving only a third of its monthly quota of 60mm. The satellite image suggests a couple of showers on the weekend and early next week as a fresh westerly is still pumping in moisture through the usual westerly jetstream. We can expect more if the lateral position of the jetstream shifts to the southern side of the Himalaya while the low pressure system is still active. Valley residents should expect surprise afternoon thunderstorms over the weekend.

| FRI | SAT | SUN |
|-------|-------|-------|
| | | |
| 35-17 | 31-16 | 31-15 |

Rabi rocks! (The sun god, that is)



KALAM
Rabi Thapa

I'm only writing this now, in the depths of darkest loadshedding, because of the sun.

Thanks to a new 20W photovoltaic solar panel, I can not only charge my laptop and light a couple of energy-efficient bulbs, but also charge my internet modem. This allows for a quick background check on the nice people at ECCA who sold me my solar system (battery included) for Rs 18,500: ECCA meaning Environmental Camps for Conservation Awareness, which developed the Solar Tuki to replace kerosene tukis in rural Nepal ('Tuki-free country', #258).

It's no big deal, you may say. My inverter/generator does just as much, and I can run everything in my house for about Rs 40,000. And when I went around announcing that I was now greener than the average Ram Bahadur Nepal, it was somewhat deflating to see even fellow children of the sun shrug and go, 'Ey, ho...'

But I insist on making a big deal out of it. If I can tilt a panel less than 20"x20" across, run it through a small battery and have electricity pour out the other end, regardless of whether NEA has two hours of loadshedding a day or sixteen (at which point all your fancy inverters are just so much junk), why shouldn't it be a big deal? It's nothing less than magic. I had better point out that my panel is still indoors, as I haven't yet found a thief-proof spot, and works adequately.

It's easy to be blasé, but solar energy really is magic of the highest order

BREAKING NEWS
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MOVING ON: Here's to hoping inverters have reached the end of the line

In fact, it occurs to me that it is the rest of our energy-starved nation that is making a big deal out of solar energy, by not investing in it. Yes, solar energy is expensive—solar tukis cost Rs 3500 and are not affordable for many rural households without subsidies; larger home systems to run lights, a TV and a desktop computer can easily cost Rs 150,000—but prices are dropping steadily, and financing plans for Gham Power products are now available from companies such as the Clean Energy Development Bank. Without going into the nitty-gritty of how solar is worth it (I'll leave that to the experts), let me just say that solar is the only sure thing. Loadshedding may go up, diesel may be blockaded, hell, even the glaciers may evaporate and render hydropower obsolete, but the sun won't stop shining in Nepal. And photovoltaic panels last up to 25 years.

I confess also that while I was never blasé about the power of solar, the choice before me, a first-time buyer and consumer (discounting solar water), was paralysing. It didn't help when the front desk of one of the leaders in the field of solar energy, upon hearing I wanted a small system, nodded sadly and advised me to get an inverter, *here's a number you can call*. It was only when I saw a friend troop off to Doti with a portable package that I decided, definitively: I'm gonna get me one of them gizmos. And I did.

Like all innovations, it's not reading an article in a paper that'll get you on the phone to tap into *gham power*. It's your neighbour's house, inexplicably powered sans inverter or generator, while you miss out on World Cup 2010 and pray for an early monsoon. The system isn't going to work for you anytime soon. Don't wait for power, get your own. Now that's empowering.

ECCA—www.ecca.com.np
Gham Power—<http://ghampower.com>
Clean Energy Development Bank—www.cedbl.com/

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AHMAD ISKANDAR

Untangling banks

“Just because we’re Nepal, it doesn’t mean we’re behind where banking is concerned”

Twenty-eight-year-old Shivanth B Pande is head of the Research & Development department at Nepal Investment Bank. *Nepali Times* spoke to him about the financial sector and R&D in Nepal last week.

What sort of research do you do?
One type of research we do is financial analysis, focusing on issues that management is interested in. We generally go through Nepal Rastra Bank’s periodical papers, their surveys about the macroeconomic situation, and compilation of data in the banking sector. We analyse this to help our clients and the people in our bank who make decisions.

Any current projects?
Right now we’re creating a summary of the first six months of macroeconomic analysis of data published by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), so it will be easier to read and offer a point of view rather than just dry facts.

We just went through the inflation report last month. A problem is that the data is old and lags three to four months behind current events.

This is a relatively new field in Nepal. What role do you think it could play in maintaining the health of the financial sector?
Research helps in decision making. With more timely, accurate data, better decision making can happen. Also, research prevents you from moving in a herd mentality as you can be better informed than the rest of the pack. In terms of business development and innovation, without adequate research into the latest trends, thoughts and practices, you will be left far behind.

What caused the liquidity crunch?
This problem has been brewing for the past four years, and has many sources. We can summarise the main issues:

- too many financial institutions and cooperatives concentrated in the same places, bidding up deposit rates that are transmitted to loan rates
- low public confidence in the viability of some banks
- people keeping money at home and in bank lockers rather than in deposits
- unnecessary speculation about the viability of our exchange rate system
- sudden acceleration and sudden slowdown of remittance growth, which hits the economy
- sudden anti-money laundering tightening and tight regulation on sources of funds
- real estate speculation and share market speculation on excessive credit
- capital flight from Nepal
- excessive exposure of parties to credit and the subsequent unwinding of built-up leverage
- poor political outlook and lack of unity and a constitution, drastically lowering business and investor confidence in the economy
- lack of security
- lack of coordinated policy between government agencies and ministries

NRB has tightened regulation of the financial sector. What do you think about this, and what more would you like to see the government or NRB do?

The new governor has enacted a very necessary and sensible policy. NRB should have done this earlier. He has not restricted any new banks from coming in but he has made the process more transparent and logical. They should give banks a bit of leeway for the next two to three quarters. A bit more gradual tightening could ease the financial markets.
NRB should provide more data, reports and studies to both bankers and the public. This would help our decision making and awareness of the industry, and monthly updates if not weekly would be fantastic. NRB should also outline precisely how it intends to tackle the current stagflation.

While the banks come to grips with the liquidity crunch, are there other imminent problems and dangers?

The main long-term problem is misallocation of funds. The most productive sectors in terms of our comparative advantages are not being funded.
The banking system has not been successful in financial inclusion and national coverage of financial products. I am optimistic because we in Nepal Investment Bank have been working hard over the past year and half to address this deficit.
Mergers should happen in the sector and the capital base of banks should increase to Rs 5 billion and then to Rs 8 billion over the next five years.

What are your thoughts on the future of the financial sector and banking in Nepal?
Part of what we do for research is to look around for best practices, and figure out how we get to that level. Technology is now going to be at the edge of streamlining payments, making things cheaper and faster. It can help speed up money transfer within Nepal, which is very inefficient, and upgrade the skill base of our workers and services.
Within the next two to three years, we’ll see a huge change in the industry, and we’ll be comparable to anywhere in the world. One exciting thing about banking is that it’s fundamentally the same everywhere in the world, so it’s not like because we’re Nepal, we’re behind. We’re in a good place right now.

Golfing heaven


It’s no ordinary week at the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort

Gokarna is buzzing again, and this time the stakes of top-flight golf are set for a record high. From April 21-24, golfers from around the region will be playing to win the Surya Nepal Masters 2010. The event boasts a prize purse of three million rupees, with the winner taking home Rs 486,000.
No wonder then that the Standard Chartered Pro-Am, held on April 20 as a curtain-raiser for the main event, was a little more charged than usual. On the day, Bangladeshi professional Md Shahid Khan led his team to victory at the par-72

Gokarna Forest Golf Resort, while local Mani Rai returned the second best card of the day. But there will be plenty of others who will fancy their chances.
Not to be forgotten is Mithun Perera, who in the 2009 edition of the Surya Nepal Masters ran down a stellar field before being trumped by his compatriot Anura Rohana on the final hole. Sixteen-year-old Indian amateur Ashbeer Saini, too, will be hoping to shed the tag of inexperience that follows him wherever he competes. But international professional golfers from as far afield as Dubai and Malaysia will also be contending for

Nepal’s most prestigious golfing title. They will provide the perfect foil against which Nepali golfers can gauge their talent. Tashi Ghale and Rupak Acharya, among others, will be hoping to replicate Deepak Thapa Magar’s 2007 win, the only time a Nepali won the Surya Nepal Masters.
The new benchmark for the prize money on offer is testament to Surya Nepal’s continuously growing support for the growth of the sport in the country, sown long ago by former MD of Surya Nepal (and keen golfer) Ray Noronah. *Khel Paryatan*, an initiative by Surya Nepal, offers Nepali sports people a unique opportunity to test their skills against

the best in the game. The Surya Nepal Golf Tour was launched four years ago with the sole objective of developing golf in Nepal. It has been

a great success, not only with professionals, but also with its golf development and coaching program. 



ID-ing Nepal

INDU NEPAL

In a week, the pilot phase of a voter registration project compiling a new voter list with photographs and fingerprints will be complete. Each voter will be given a unique identification number, which will be used to

concerns over national security in the recent Machine Readable Passport (MRP) debacle, anxiety about privacy is not far behind here. “We will have to pay special attention to how the data is stored and protected,” warns Dinesh Thapa of Privacy Nepal.

Since the NID card entitles access to public services, there are additional concerns about the cost

A national ID card system is cause for both good cheer and fear

deter false voting, detect and remove duplicate registrations and manage the internal migration of voters.

This also means we will be moving closer to a National ID (NID) card system. The voter list will include not just eligible voters but also citizens between the age of 16 and 18 in order to create a national civil registration list.

Inspired by similar schemes in neighbouring countries like Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the government introduced a provision for the creation of NID in the last budget. “It’s a matter of providing an identity card for citizens,” says Hari Prasad Nepal, joint secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. “We can prevent fraud and duplication if we have a central depository for such data.”

By the end of the fiscal year the Ministry for Home Affairs, which oversees the NID project, aims to issue cards on a voluntary basis in the pilot area. Initially the card will act as a voter identification card. “Eventually, we aim to make it a multi-purpose card and it can be used to hold information about property ownership, driving licenses and criminal records,” Nepal says. “People can access various public services using the same card.”

The Ministry has yet to draw up a plan to implement the use of NID and draft laws that will govern the use of these cards. However, the reaction to the NID card has been one of both relief and concern.

In the wake of Jamim Shah’s murder in February, Nepal Police blamed its slow progress on the lack of a national database. “The government needs to create a database with personal information on citizens in order to assist police investigations,” Rajendra Singh Bhandari of the Crime Investigation Department says.

Many countries including Spain, Germany and France use a multi-purpose national identity card. But such cards have been vehemently opposed in the United Kingdom and Australia over questions about its effectiveness in fighting crime, as well as privacy and civil liberty concerns.

A study by human rights watchdog Privacy International found “claims of police abuse by the way of the cards in virtually all countries” that use cards. Following

of lost or stolen cards and how it might affect those who can’t afford them. It will also require citizens to update the national database as and when events such as births and deaths take place. A special



effort may be needed to make sure everyone has access to such facilities.

The National Election Commission will complete its data

collection next year, but it is still unclear when the NID cards will be introduced nationwide. For starters, the Home Ministry needs to present draft legislation on NID

cards in parliament. In the meantime, it is worth investigating all these concerns, to determine whether we actually want, or need, a national identity card. 🇳🇵



Department for International Development

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DFID, the Department for International Development, is the part of the UK Government that manages Britain’s aid to poor countries. Our work is focused on achieving the Millennium Development Goals - the United Nations targets for fighting poverty that must be met by 2015. We work with the governments of poor countries, charities, and international organisations to find lasting solutions to the global problem of poverty. DFID Nepal is responsible for managing the British Government’s contribution to development in Nepal, set out in our new country business plan 2009 - 2012¹.

To ensure smooth running of the office, DFID Nepal requires:

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The post holder will be expected to have the following skills:

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- Deal and communicate effectively and courteously with each and every customers/visitors;
- Receive visitors in the reception area and ensure only authorised visitors enter in the office floors;
- Update DFID electronic telephone directory appropriately and leave the appropriate message at answering machine before leaving the office building during holidays;
- Be diligent at all times.

Knowledge on Other Office Services Functions:

- Mail Room Services, Support Services, Transport and Driver Duty and Estate Services.

Competencies required:

- Must be Intermediate pass;
- Good oral and written communication skills both in Nepali and English;
- Proficient in computer application;
- At least 3 years of working experience in Reception Area;
- Experience of working in Mail Room Services, Transport and Office Services useful.

Core competencies that DFID will assess as part of the selection process:

- Planning and delivery of work; Working with others; Communicating with others; Influencing and Managing change.

2. Driver (Grade: C3)

Expertise and skills

The post holder will be expected to have the following skills:

- Knowledge of Driving, Vehicle Maintenance and Vehicle Security;
- Preferably 3 years of working experience of Driving.

Competencies required

- Good oral and written communication skills both in Nepali and English;
- Proficient in computer application.

Core competencies that DFID will assess as part of the selection process:

- Planning and delivery of work; Working with others; Communicating with others.

Both positions will be based in DFID Nepal Office in Kathmandu. There will be an attractive and competitive local salary and benefit package. DFID is an Equal Opportunities employer and appoints on merit basis through open competition. We take a proactive approach to diversity in order to support positive social change in Nepal and are seeking to recruit more staff from excluded groups. Applications are welcomed from all parts of the community and we actively encourage interest from Women, Dalits, Disadvantaged Janajatis, Madhesis and those with a disability.

You can download an application form, diversity questionnaire and job description from <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/recruitment/> and send the completed forms to recruitment-nepal@dfid.gov.uk Only completed applications made on the prescribed application form and diversity questionnaire will be considered. If you are unable to access the forms contact recruitment-nepal@dfid.gov.uk Telephone enquiries after the deadline of the application will not be entertained.

Closing date for applications is day, 5 May 2010.

¹[http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/nepal-country-plan-brochure\[1\].pdf](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/nepal-country-plan-brochure[1].pdf)

Shadow-boxing

Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Janadisha, 18 April

The Maoist party is not just the biggest party, it is also the prime mover of the peace process. That is why it is important for our party to be part of a national government, so the people will be convinced that the constitution will be possible on May 28, or soon after. Last year, a lot of people were trying to push us back into the jungle. They are still trying to do this. But we are not going back to fighting a guerrilla war. The peace process came about after a lot of blood was shed by the children of Nepalis, we are not going to abandon our peace efforts. But some people are still trying to dissolve the CA, others want to encircle the cantonments. There are those who want to roll back republicanism and secularism and who are against progress and transformation. We will not be able to defeat these forces unless we have a consensus government. Unfortunately the present state of affairs is leading to revisionism, backsliding, and regression. My feeling is that after coming into this historic constitution-making process and after ushering in a republic, neither the guerrillas in the cantonments nor the Nepal Army want to return to conflict. If we remember this, we can reach an



LILA BALLAV GHIMIRE/KANTIPUR

agreement on the constitution and we will. There is no alternative. For this a national government isn't a condition, it is indispensable. The Nepali people will not tolerate any conspiracy to derail the peace process. *Excerpted from a speech at the National Association of Professors.*

Editorial in Rajdhani, 20 April

Prime Minister Madhav Nepal may not admit it publicly but he has reason to be distrustful of Maoist promises, and the people understand this. The nationwide

mobilisation by the Maoists of their cadre for military training is being taken seriously by a section of the international community. However, there are agencies that have closed their eyes to such Maoist behaviour while trying to extend their role. The end result is the possibility of a militant mindset driving extremism to dominate the country. In this struggle, those who will suffer are the pro-democratic forces that believe in pluralism and nationalism. It is because the UML and NC have been unable to challenge the agenda of the Maoists and other extremist groups that the country is now in the grip of ethnic, communal and

territorial fragmentation. Unless these two parties put up a solid, united front to deal with the Maoist threat of 'state capture' they will also themselves go down in history as parties that couldn't stop the extinction of democracy in Nepal.

Editorial in Nepal Samacharpatra, 20 April

This is not the time to quarrel. This is not the time to say that the peace process was a mistake. Since the constitution is not going to be written by May 28, the parties to the Comprehensive Peace Accord must at this late stage work together to find a peaceful fallback option. The alternative is further chaos and perhaps even a return to conflict. Which is why the army recruitment of 271 without exceeding its strength at the time of the peace accord should not be magnified out of proportion for political expediency. Political parties should stick to logic. Weakening the national army is weakening the state.

Sambhu Shrestha in Drishti, 20 April

The Maoists are dreaming of getting back to power precisely because they have made it impossible for the constitution to

be written. They have concluded that the situation post-May 28 will be dangerous, which is why they need to get into government before that by hook or by crook. For the nation, nothing could be more perilous than the Maoists coming to power in this way. The ascendancy of militancy will mean the funeral of democracy. This is the reason the other parties also don't see any other way to defend democracy. They understand that the Maoist goal is to set up a totalitarian people's republic. The Maoists must understand that this is impossible in the 21st century, yet they pretend not to understand.

Editorial in Kantipur, 22 April

The government's decision to open army recruitment at this sensitive phase of the peace process will only help make it even more fragile. On the other hand, what is the necessity for the Maoists to give khukuri and baton training to its cadre ahead of their May Day rally in Kathmandu? Why shouldn't we believe the Maoist leadership when it says all this is in preparation for an uprising? Are the Maoists preparing for an unconstitutional power grab? The leadership should clarify these questions. Like other parties, the Maoists have the right to hold peaceful demonstrations. But if rallies take an extreme turn and turn violent, it will take the country back to conflict. Both army recruitment and Maoist training are encouraging extremist politics, and must stop immediately.

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COMMENT
Dhruba Kumar

Addressing a mass gathering on Jana Andolan Day last year, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal labelled the opponents of PLA integration ‘murderers and criminals’. This year, he said the resignation of the current government would solve all the country’s problems. He also made it clear that his party does not have hard feelings against the Nepal Army (NA), and that the two could work together in the national interest.

This does not corroborate with what Dahal said to his cadres in Shaktikhor cantonment in Chitwan last year, according to which 10,000 PLA fighters would be integrated into the NA. This, he surmised, would be enough to ultimately control the institution. “The time has come when the country will be in your hands,” he told his cadres, “Why should we worry about your future when we will be running the government?”

The integration process did not gain momentum even when the Maoists were in government, which was a failure on their part, despite their blaming the non-cooperation of the other political parties. The Maoists were

not ready to release UNMIN-verified child soldiers and those recruited after verification for political and economic reasons. They finally agreed to discharge 4,008 disqualified PLAs to improve the party’s standing in the international community, but this was a decision taken under pressure from the UN and donor agencies. Only 2,394 PLA soldiers were discharged formally, while 1,614 fighters were not in the cantonments during the discharge process. There is no record of them.

There are 19,602 UNMIN-verified PLA fighters in the cantonments, on whom the state has spent Rs 60 billion in three years.

The peace process will be unstable until the integration and management of the PLA is complete

The peace process is stuck due to blame games. Technical and high level committees have failed to decide on the issue. The High Level Political Mechanism has been passive and proposed integration schemes have been ineffective. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal believes it is the Maoists alone who benefit from keeping PLA soldiers in the cantonments.

Although the integration, management and rehabilitation of the PLA is an integral part of the peace process, it is not

undisputed. The peace process will be disrupted until there are two armies. The integration and rehabilitation of PLA soldiers are very sensitive issues and require a consensus for resolution. But the leaders of the political parties do not have a specific plan to achieve this.

It has come to light that Dahal and Koirala had agreed to integrate 3,000 to 5,000 PLA soldiers into the NA during the signing of the CPA. But since the demise of Koirala, the Maoists have been saying that their demand was for 12,000 to 14,000 PLA soldiers to be integrated into the army. In the Special

matter with integration numbers still in limbo. Maoist objections to the chain of command and integration procedure proposed by the technical committee attest to this.

The latest Maoist demands include the possibility of integrating all 19,602 PLA soldiers. Those opting for rehabilitation or a political career, according to the Maoists, should receive Rs 2 million or 5 to 10 bighas of land. Alternatives include integration and rehabilitation, setting up a separate Maoist regiment, or creating a new security force comprising PLA fighters, army and police.

At first glance the alternatives don’t seem unreasonable. But how logical is it to increase the number of security institutions to address integration? Qualified PLA fighters should be integrated not on the basis of claims and counter claims but on the basis of the CPA and the Agreement on Weapons and PLA Monitoring 2007.

It should be noted here that in the agreement signed by Krishna Bahadur Mahara of the Maoists, nowhere is it mentioned that integration is mandatory. But the fact remains: we cannot avoid the issue of integration on these grounds. It is not just a Maoist but a national concern that will determine the future stability of the country. Those who are totally against integration are as wrong as the Maoists who attempt to put a price tag on their fighters. It should be a matter of shame for revolutionary leaders to confine their fighters to cantonments and then bargain for their release, at a price. 🇳🇵

PLA integration in constitution writing



Bowtick carbuy

‘Visit Nepal, And We’ll Squeeze Every Last Penny From You’ should be the slogan for 2011. Visa fee, ticket to enter Bhaktapur, ticket for Patan Darbar Square, ACAP fee, new trekking permit fee, Mustang royalty...visitors to Nepal can be forgiven for feeling like they’re being held upside down until the last coin drops out of their pockets. Just when they thought there were no more fees, tourists stranded here by the Icelandic volcano got a rude shock on Wednesday as they were fined for overstaying in Nepal. Every other country in the world, including Schengen states, automatically extended the validity of temporary visitor visas. But at our Imitation Dept, the cash counter was tinkling away.



In 1850 Jang Bahadur, who had just come to power following the Kot Massacre, became the first South Asian potentate to visit Britain and France. His intention was to gauge British military might so he could decide whether it was worth declaring war on England and, if that were to happen, whether the French would side with us. Which is why while there, besides inspecting the red light district,



he also visited cannon factories and the naval wharf. Impressed, he decided to be Britain’s friend and sent troops down to rescue them during the Indian Mutiny. Today, Pushpa Kamal (‘Comrade Jangay’) Dahal is in a similar conundrum about whether or not to declare war on India. He did nasal exercises alongside His Holiness the Ramdev last month to probe the possible fallout. He met another Soodsayer, who told him his Saturn was stronger than Mars. And now, before launching his Mahabharat Yuddha on May Day, he has sent everyone’s favourite emissary-at-large, Amresh Bhai,

to sound out Delhi Darbar. Only problem is that since the demise of his mentor, Amresh has been blabbering away to the local press, which is full of reports of how Chairman Fearsomeness is willing to do anything to fulfill Five Conditions so he can be anointed PM. This led one wag to mutter at a diplomatic do the other night: **“It will be worrying if the Indians stop worrying.”**



more like **flogging a dead ass**. The bottom line is that the Baddies are in no mood to allow the new constitution to be written until they are back in the saddle. But that can’t be done until PKD hears back from Dilli, so what to do while we wait? Well-publicised nationwide khukuri exercises and martial arts training. The long wait is making Awesome antsy, mainly because he suspects a plot is afoot to make his nemesis BRB PM instead of him. The sabre-rattling is therefore not aimed so much at making Makunay quake, but to warn Laldhoj away from any fancy ideas. BRB, however, is not

in any particular hurry and is patiently sitting it out. In fact, Comrade Red Banner is against being in any kind of govt before May 28 so that the blame for not drafting the constitution will go to the incumbents.



So, it’s official. **Mao Media Corp** is being launched soon with tv, radio and newspapers. There is considerable opposition to this from within the party, with some comrades arguing that **political power doesn’t flow out of a Sony HVR HD-1000**. The real reason PKD is interested in being a media mogul himself is that every wannabe warlord is buying up radios or newspapers, and the chairman is worried the party line is being diluted. Media consultants invited to a briefing told the comrades they could earn more propaganda points if they stopped threatening people with ‘bowtick carbuy’.



The other week, the Ass broke the story about the new department store being built inside Singha Darbar. It looks like the store will also have a Child Care Centre. Wouldn’t a **Geriatric Centre** be more appropriate?



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