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Over the rainbow



KIRAN PANDAY

p3 Prashant Jha unpicks the strategic selfishness of the biggies in the Big Three

p4 Muni Devi Damai speaks of the trauma of being labelled a witch

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RAINBOW HIGHWAY: As the politicians tussle to get to the famed pot of gold, the monsoon finds its way to the Mugling-Narayanghat stretch above the Narayani river

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HITTING THREE CENTURIES

One could argue, if we really wanted to put a positive spin on the whole thing, that the nation’s future being decided in parliament is a good thing. At least we are not blowing each other up like we were doing till four years ago, and we are trying to decide who will rule this country based on a majority in the house. Stalling, double-crossing and back-stabbing, after all, are accepted norms of politics everywhere, not just in Nepal.

Still, most Nepalis are watching the shenanigans in the CA with growing dismay and apprehension. It was the leaders of two small parties, Chitra Bahadur KC and Hridayesh Tripathi, whose words should have made everyone in the House on Wednesday hang their heads in shame. Or they would have if any of the politicians in the three big parties still had a capacity to feel shame anymore.

The two articulated the cynicism, apathy and outrage felt by a majority of Nepalis at the people they elected in 2008 to write a new constitution and work towards long-term peace. KC jabbed his finger down at the assembly and said: “All you have done is spend your time pulling each other down, all you are interested in is the chair, you have forgotten why you are here.”

While he spread the blame across the three parties to appear even-handed, the Nepal Jana Morcha leader had a special message just for the Maoists. Your behaviour has brought the country to the verge of chaos, he said, you

have infected the polity with your culture of violence and corruption, and you are pushing the nation towards fragmentation and possible annihilation with your proposal for ethnicity-based federalism.

The most recent Himalmedia nationwide public opinion poll conducted in April shows that KC has his finger on the pulse of the people. Most Nepalis said they would support the Maoists being in government because they don’t trust the NC or UML to improve their lives, but also because they think leading a coalition government would force the comrades to ‘tame’ their wild ways. But the message is equally clear that they will only allow that to happen if the Maoists first abjure the systematic use of violence and intimidation.

The more immediate question before the second round of voting on Friday afternoon is how to break the two-way checkmate that is preventing the NC and the Maoists from garnering the needed 301 votes. The Maoists can’t form a government without the support of the 80 or so Madhesi MPs, while the NC will need both the Madhesi and the UML to hit three centuries.

While tectonic forces pull the UML apart, it is unlikely the party can agree to back a NC coalition without the danger of a split. The Maoists are trying to do just that, and woo away what they consider the ‘progressive’ wing of the UML. It is also highly unlikely that the bulk of the Madhesi parties would ever back the godless Maoists.

So the bottom line is what the Maoists and the NC can offer the fence-sitters by Friday noon in return for joining the government. Both are banking on the temptation of plum posts for both the UML and Madhesi being too much to resist. There is a strong possibility that neither Poudel nor Dahal will hit 301 on Friday, and the interim constitution is a bit vague on what happens after that.

May we make a suggestion? Have a rotational prime ministership that a group of four or five deputy prime ministers share till the constitution is written and the next election is held. It has worked in other countries where there have been similar stalemates.

But there is one surefire way to end this deadlock immediately and move ahead. That is for the Maoist party to make a credible, timebound commitment to agree to the conditions laid down by the other parties (and by the southern neighbour) on publicly renouncing violence, disbanding the YCL, returning seized property, etc. Doing that will remove the political obstacles to allow the Maoists to lead their own government.

If they want it bad enough, the conditions should be relatively easy to fulfill for the comrades. The only question then is whether the other parties will trust the Maoists because they have failed so often to deliver on their promises.

KD

ON THE WEB www.nepalitimes.com

WHO LOVES PRACHANDA?
Ranjan Adiga’s ‘I Love Prachanda’ (#511) resonated with many of our readers, though his observations rubbed some up the wrong way. A selection:

There is no dearth of romantic fascination in the West for some of the third world thugs and mass murderers, seen by some as the new age messiahs. I have worked in different countries and come across very interesting personalities fascinated by revolutionaries around the world. Jan Myrdal supported the Khmer Rouge with all his intellectual might but realised his naiveté after almost 30 years, and went back to Phnom Penh to apologise to the Cambodians. Some of these dreamers may never realise what is wrong with a totalitarianism inspired revolution.

kabulekanchho

● I had gone to one of those stores in California. I chatted with the store owner, and he was very excited to learn about his ‘idol’. I told him right to his face that Prachanda is nothing but a terrorist leader. The owner got mad and asked me to leave the store. I told him it is fun to read about wars, horror and revolution in books. But when you’re really part of it, have suffered and witnessed murder, torture then you realise how evil those philosophies are!

Ajay

● I’ll look up these old ladies and mail them a sample of a T-shirt: “Prachanda started a revolution in Nepal that left 15,000 dead (front). And all I got was this lousy T-shirt (back)”.

Nepali-American

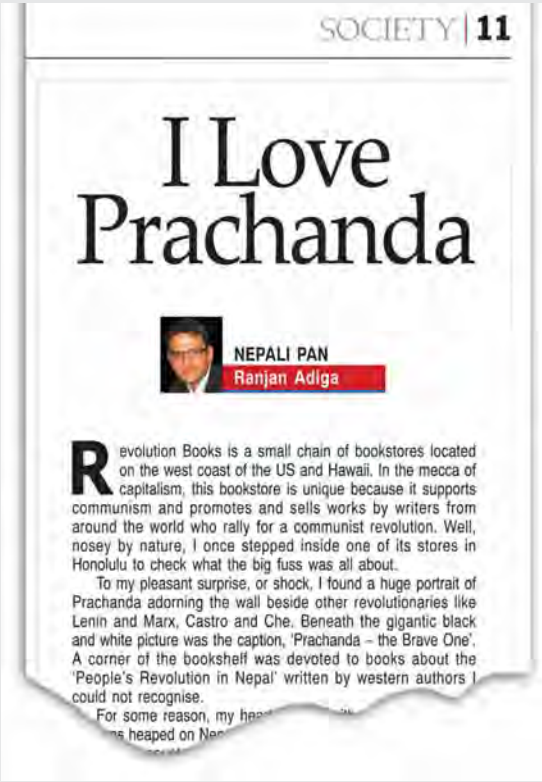
● Have you ever wondered who made them take up weapons, to kill their own fellow citizens? We are not that cynical to go on randomly killing like Americans...

Still we have a poverty rate of 65%, and we can only imagine what the situation was 10 or 20 years ago...that’s a shameful fact for all these people who ruled and looted the state coffers during those times....

The problem is not the Maoists, it never was. All the problem is in the class of our society. As long as the wealth of the nation continues to be accumulated within the few so-called-high-class people there are bound to be killings and bloodshed and anarchy....if Prachanda goes another comes, and this time maybe 15,000 lives is not enough....

chasing_che

● Perhaps if the author and commentators mixed among a wider circle of Nepalis they would be less astonished that there are Americans in Hawaii and foreigners in Nepal who admire Prachanda.



After all Maoists are the largest party in Nepal, and according to a current poll more than 40% of online readers of even this strongly anti-Maoist publication believe Maoists should lead the next government. So why the contemptuous surprise at these “old ladies”?

The surprise comes because everyone you know and talk to agrees with you in hating the Maoists and Prachanda. By repeating this to each other you confirm your belief that you are right and are able to pretend to yourselves that you are not a rather small and isolated minority in your own country. If you want to understand better, mix with some people who disagree with your views instead of just sneering at them.

Arthur

● People have always been amazed by revolutionaries since the beginning of time and westerners are no exception. The

more gruesome their acts and the tighter their control of power the more they are remembered. Western communists are a funny bunch. They live in modern capitalist nations with all the available facilities and democratic rights. This is not enough for them, they have a lot of time on their hands compared to most Nepali people who don’t have the time for anything else but to provide for their families. In the comfort of their thriving democratic states these western communists are bored and need some meaning in their lives so they read all kinds of idealistic impractical philosophies and idealise modern leaders who share their views, while still enjoying the comforts of the capitalist nation that provides for them.

rishav

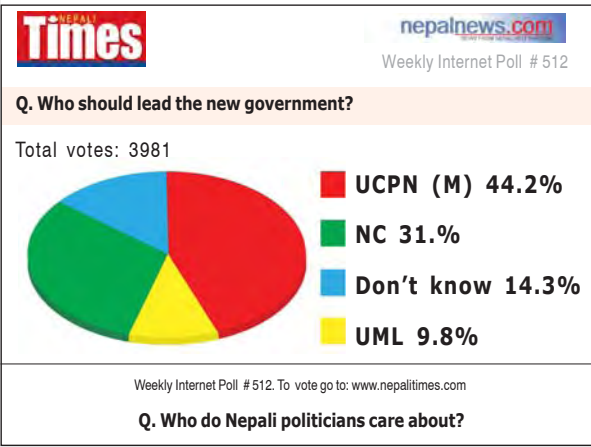
● Two American ladies’ fascination for the Maoists of Nepal is causing such a stir! We Nepalis suffer from selective amnesia, don’t we? Until a few years ago our own Nepalis were fascinated by the Maoists too. Led by our ‘intellectuals’, media and ‘civil society’, we the Nepali people hailed the Maoists as Robin Hoods of the poor, then the Messiahs of Peace, and red-carpeted them onto the centre-stage of Nepali life, society, politics. ...or didn’t we?

Shall we hold a mirror up to our own selves, my friends? How did we get here? Who got us here? And why?

Satya Nepali

● I don’t exactly know why, but this sentence - “myheart swelled with pride for the glory that was heaped on Nepal in this tiny shop” - made me very sad. Perhaps because we are so used to Nepal never being highlighted for many positive things. The writer actually felt pride to see Prachanda’s picture, and the best part is, that the writer doesn’t even agree with the ‘joonga man’.... sad.

Gutumutu



Strategic selfishness

The main principle motivating the stalwarts of Nepali politics is individual interest



Sher Bahadur Deuba and Ram Chandra Poudel were pioneers of Nepali democratic student union politics. Jhalanath Khanal spent an austere underground life building the party for years; KP Oli was part of a group that believed in class annihilation. Pushpa Kamal Dahal spent three decades on the run, and built and maintained an underground organisation. Baburam Bhattarai left a comfortable career as a planner and academic to translate his ideas into practice.

When today's top leaders joined politics, they were inspired by larger ideologies, group interest and made innumerable sacrifices – in the name of the people. Perhaps the supreme irony of Nepali politics is that as the same leaders became stronger and entered Kathmandu's power maze, the principle of individual interest became supreme.

There are broader social forces at play and alliances are based on more than merely individual dynamics. But a simple principle to understand Nepali politics is – look at the actor, his background, follow the money, how he wants to position himself, and you will know why he is doing what he is doing. Last week's politics shows why this is a useful guide.

For everyone else, the majority was 301; for Khanal, it was 401.



KIRAN PANDAY

Was it because those who forced the condition in the UML central committee were really interested in the constitution, and wanted to get two thirds for that purpose? Clearly, Oli and Madhav Nepal were driven by other interests.

Oli remains in revenge mode for his loss in Butwal. He was banking on the fact that Khanal would not get the required number, weakening his position internally. In the event of Khanal winning, Oli would have had his pound of flesh: getting nominated to the CA, making someone from his camp acting party chair for greater control over the large corporate structure that is the UML, and key portfolios for some of his people. Madhav Nepal wanted to pay Khanal back for giving him a tough time in the past year.

Khanal wanted to be PM, because who doesn't want to be, and had spent the last year

appearing relatively 'softer' towards the Maoists precisely for this day. Oli and Madhav wanted to squeeze him, for they were worried he and the 'pro-Maoist' lobby would become powerful, which in turn would have shrunk their patronage networks, control over cadres, and money.

Dahal had three aims: become PM; if that's not possible, prevent Bhattarai from becoming PM; and either win over or split the UML. His interest was not allowing what he feared would be an alternative power centre that would weaken his grip over the party. He was also acutely aware that if he backed Khanal and he won, he would be kingmaker, get access to state power, and it would be a setback to India.

Dahal played the Khanal card a bit too early and so Bhattarai argued that the party should nominate a candidate. He was confident for the Madhesi parties had supported him, and

he had a solid external constituency of support. Dahal acted according to the larger party mood, but threw an ace by saying he would contest, leaving Bhattarai speechless. The next morning, Dahal said that the Maoists should support Khanal if he was able to get two thirds, since Khanal was the next best alternative to break the existing 'democratic alliance'. The party fell in line.

Dahal had lived up to his promise to Khanal, left Bhattarai with no option, and got his own party's backing once again to become a candidate – something that was not certain till even Tuesday afternoon. His ploy may or may not succeed, but showed perfect political timing, cunning, and explained how this man has managed to remain head of the Maoist party for so long.

Sher Bahadur's Deuba act of proposing Poudel was seen as a great sacrifice by some, but was

calculated self interest. Well-wishers told him not to commit suicide by challenging Poudel at a time when he had limited internal support. He would lose once again, close on the heels of the parliamentary party defeat last year, and find it hard to get anything in the upcoming convention. And he would then be left with little choice, for he couldn't split – even his loyalists would not have walked away with him. Deuba also calculated that Poudel might not succeed, so he could afford to back him; if he won, he at least would gain the moral high ground for his 'sacrifice'.

Nepali politics today is controlled by half a dozen men, all in their mid-50s to 60s, with about three to four decades of political experience, and thus a similar degree of ego and ambition. They balance and block each other, leading to even greater uncertainty. ■

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“That day will come”

If I were a witch, would I have spared those who humiliated me?

MUNI DEVI DAMAI
in KAILALI

It has been eight years since my neighbours began calling me a witch. With every allegation that I battled against, I understood that witches are poor, witches are Dalits, and witches are helpless like me.

When I was a child, I had heard that witches used magic to manipulate and trick people. There were rumours of girls being possessed by witches in those days. I too was under the impression that witches were dangerous and did as they pleased. However, one day in my 40th year, this society called me a witch.

I was heading out to harvest wheat one afternoon when my neighbours called me over, saying they had to talk to me. I'd hardly come up to them when they hit me on my head with a bucket. As I fell, they kicked me, called me a witch and forced faeces into my mouth. I fainted then.

As I awoke on a bed in Dhangadi Hospital, I couldn't

recognise myself. There were wounds all over my face. Luckily, another neighbour, Chandra BK, had taken me to hospital. I panicked when I saw my face in the mirror. There was blood in my vomit and faeces. Had I really become a witch? How did my neighbours see a witch in me? I thought hard but couldn't come up with an answer.

After 15 days of treatment, I returned to find that the village was no longer the same for me. People stared at me and talked amongst themselves. No one spoke to me. Even now they claim that I am a witch and that I can destroy anyone. But if I had such powers, would I have spared the people who forced faeces into my mouth? I still don't have a spell to avenge myself on those who almost killed me.

Two years ago, I was walking past a Thakuri's house. Feeling thirsty, I approached their tap. But he beat me up, shouting "You witch, you low-caste woman, how dare you touch my tap," When I

lodged a complaint, the police arrested him, but he was immediately released through the intervention of an MP. In turn, my own sons were locked up on false charges of thuggery. No one in the village said I had been treated unjustly. Without any support, I could not muster the courage to fight for justice.

I hear news from the east and the west of women being abused and burnt alive because they have been labelled witches. I know that this is because they too are poor, Dalits, and helpless like myself. I can vouch for the fact that if we were rich, and those women, no one would have called us witches.

Given the little income we got from our land, my husband was forced to go to India to work. But he has been confined to our home since his eyes grew weak. My eldest son, who went to India to support the family, got killed there. Here in the village, I was made a witch. I have to travel far from the village to find work. After eight years of suffering, the



DIRGHARAJ UPADHYAY

childhood ideas I used to have of witches have been destroyed. Only those without goodness in them accuse others of being witches. Poor people who don't have enough to eat are accused of being witches.

I have a younger son and a daughter, both of whom have grown up now. There are also some in the village who empathise with me. It is only

with the support of my son and daughter and a few good souls that I have found strength. I did not leave my village despite the discrimination and disgust people showed towards me. I believe that someday, this society will realise that I have been wronged. The day will surely come when society will say to me, "Muni didi, an injustice was done to you."

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Trial by media

When journalists ignore the excesses of the security forces but pounce upon Maoist crimes, their neutrality comes into question



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

Pushpa Kamal Dahal loves to flaunt his rhetorical flourishes. Baburam Bhattarai has scholarly explanations for everything, and can pinpoint cause and effect in an academic manner. Chairman Dahal turns the elucidations of his deputy into melodramatic soundbites that the media laps up hungrily.

Unlike his supreme leader, Nanda Kishor Pun aka Pasang is rather soft-spoken. He has earned credibility through his exploits during the armed conflict, so doesn't really need to show off his oratorical skills. Even so, Pun has proved that he is as adept at manipulating political rhetoric as he was at mounting armed attacks.

Early this week, Pun insisted that Kali Bahadur Kham (*pic*), the absconding Maoist commander of Shaktikhor camp, is innocent until proven guilty by law. Kham had earlier been accused of torturing and murdering businessman Ram Hari Shrestha, and more recently of looting a Chinese trader. But Pun's statement is an artful dodge from the charge that former insurgents are not helping the police with investigations. The Maoist commander created a second line of defence in his next sentence by claiming that the party shouldn't be held responsible for the misdemeanours of its members. In a manner of speaking, he told the press that he believed Kham to be innocent, but if he was found guilty, that would be his problem, not the party's.

The Nepali media, however, has ceded the moral high ground to the former insurgents due to its own obsession with hype and feeding frenzy. Journalists do not seem to be able to restrain the urge to pounce upon Maoist-related incidents and turn them into controversies.

The police's allegations against Kham are just that: mere allegations, until investigating agencies collect evidence worthy of scrutiny in a court of law. Trial by the media is an inappropriate way of securing justice



for victims or ensuring punishment for the guilty.

The fallibility of the media was also exposed when the abductors of Dr Bhaktaman Shrestha were found to be hardcore criminals. Even when his family paid a huge ransom to secure the release of this highly regarded physician, the media continued to harp on the Maoist connections of his suspected abductors. It was only when the Judicial Commission suspended the judge who had released Dr Shrestha's abductors earlier on bail that the media allowed the controversy to die down.

The metropolitan media fails to find favour with its critics, like Pun, for yet another reason. The Maoists believe, and perhaps rightly so, that the media tries to hang them for the misdemeanours of their wayward combatants but allows for similar transgressions on the part of the security forces with no more than a rap on the knuckles. In 2007, prosecutors charged Major Nirajan Basnet and three other Nepal Army personnel with the illegal detention,

torture, and murder of Maina Sunuwar. Kavre District Court issued an arrest warrant and summons. The army acquitted Basnet of all charges. The media greeted the news with a wall of silence.

Similarly, the heart-rending story of two Dalit women and a child, allegedly raped and murdered by Nepal Army personnel in Bardiya National Park in March this year, disappeared from the headlines as if by magic. When journalists treat government forces with kid gloves and pounce viciously upon former insurgents, the Maoists are emboldened enough to question their impartiality.

Pun may have his prejudices against the free press. He may even be unwilling to cooperate with the police. Investigative agencies can call his bluff by coming up with irrevocable proof against the accused. But the media would do well to refrain from publicising unsubstantiated allegations as open-and-shut cases. The law needs to be allowed to take its own course. Media is politics, but it works best with pretensions of impartiality.

THIS WEEK

PM vote

Parliament on Wednesday announced a re-election for the post of prime minister on Friday as both candidates, Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and NC vice president Ram Chandra Poudel, failed to obtain the required majority during Wednesday's delayed election.

Maoist candidate Dahal obtained 242 votes from the 592 members present in the house while NC candidate Ram Chandra Poudel received 124 votes in his favour. The required number for a simple majority is 301. The Madhesi alliance and other fringe parties abstained from voting for a majority government.

The UML had fielded party chairman Jhulanath Khanal on condition that he garnered a two thirds majority, or 401 seats, before the election. Despite the UCPN (Maoist) promise to support him with 237 seats as part of that two thirds majority, Khanal fell short of the magic number and withdrew his nomination.

Since the UML has withdrawn from the race for the premiership, the Maoists and the NC will contest the second round of voting on Friday.

The undecided Madhesi alliance, with 82 seats, continues to hold meetings to decide how to proceed. The UML has been saying it will participate in the second round only if there is a national unity government at stake. The Maoists will need the support of either the Madhesi alliance or the UML to win, while the NC will need the support of both the Madhesi alliance and the UML to win.

Meanwhile, the constitution...

The Constituent Assembly amended its calendar of events for the eleventh time on Sunday to complete its tasks within the deadline of 28 May 2011.

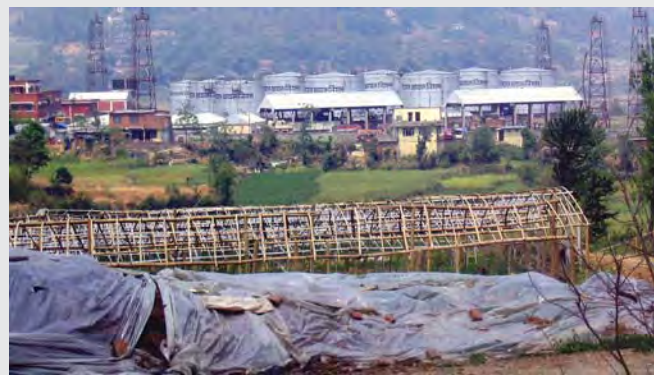
As per the calendar, all reports of the thematic committees will be transferred to the Constitutional Committee (CC) for preparation of an integrated draft constitution by mid-October. The CC will then prepare an integrated draft of the constitution within a month, which will be taken to the public for consultations. The newly amended calendar aims to complete all work related to constitution drafting by mid-April 2011.

The thematic committees have already completed their tasks, but political parties still have to resolve differences on fundamental issues and the basic principles of the constitution.

Oily bonus

Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) has backtracked on its decision to provide a bonus to its employees after criticism from all quarters on Thursday. The NOC board of directors scrapped the decision to provide a bonus until gross losses are recovered.

NOC had decided to distribute Rs 198.8 million as bonus to its staff



out of its profits from the fiscal year 2008/09. The decision to distribute a bonus had come only a few days after NOC increased prices of petroleum products, citing mounting losses. The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has begun a probe on NOC, which has been declaring losses for almost a decade and is indebted to the government.

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Ecosystem Nepal



INSEAD students before they set out on a social entrepreneurship trek around Pokhara

JAYA BURATHOKI

INSEAD students confirm it is possible to do business beyond politics

In early July, Entrepreneurs for Nepal – an organisation of Nepalis who promote an ecosystem for entrepreneurs through discussion series, networking events, boot camps and advisory help – hosted a group of MBA students from the Singapore and France campuses



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

of the INSEAD Business School. Led by Professor Mahmood Mahboob, the students were in Nepal for a week to explore potential areas for social entrepreneurship.

In the course of their activity-packed visit, the students visited NGOs in Kathmandu and Pokhara, interacted with farmers to understand how agricultural value chains work from procuring seeds to selling crops, visited communities to see how water distribution and solid waste are managed locally, met with some of Kathmandu's leading businesspeople and social entrepreneurs, and got a sense of how, despite seemingly unending political problems, it is relatively easy to do business in Nepal.

On the last day, the students made a presentation, from which four issues are worth discussing further: (i) challenges for development, (ii) the markets that surround Nepal, (iii) how Nepal can promote a Nepal-specific brand to drive growth in tourism, agriculture and hydropower, and (iv) how private equity funds can be set up to finance development work.

Development challenges: These include political instability, mismanagement of human resources, and a growing dependence on aid. When politicians quarrel for days on end over who's going to head the government, and the bureaucracy, civil society and the

media are reduced to being mere spectators, it signals that those who are supposed to lead the country lack direction themselves.

Without raising literacy levels to produce a skilled workforce that in turn helps create jobs locally, going abroad to work will always be a priority for Nepal's talented youth. And successful variations on the aid model work best as ways to prime the pump, to transfer know-how, and to get things started locally. When aid uses the same set of interventions for many years, Nepal's transition from an aid recipient to being aid dependent is characterised by a general lack of accountability, thereby providing a disincentive to start companies that create jobs.

Markets all around: Development elsewhere affects Nepal, and there are some positive trends. The rise of China and India opens up opportunities for Nepal in ways Nepal has yet to exploit on a nationally coordinated level. The Gulf and the Middle East, only five hours away from Kathmandu, are growing in terms of population and economy. They are another untapped market for Nepali goods and services. The rest of Asia has populations that are now more prosperous and want to visit new destinations. Besides, the globally growing interest in organic food, green lifestyles, and sustainable commerce play to Nepal's potential, just as the shortage of electricity in the region lends an urgency to turning Nepal's hydroelectric potential into commercially viable services.

Credible Nepal: Nepal does a poor job marketing itself to the world. In many cases, it lets other people define what it is. But Nepal has certain characteristics, of which Nepalis are justifiably proud, and which ring true to visitors. These characteristics can be used when developing a sort of Brand Nepal that imparts Nepal-specific

images, feelings and values to customers worldwide.

Sherpa Adventure Gear has done just this. This apparel company has taken the story of what's unique about Nepal and married it to western retailing practice. Its products appeal to customers whose idea of Nepal is a series of adventures in the mountains. Similarly, given the growing demand for sustainable tourism, Nepal could carve out a niche by using Green Nepal as a way to appeal to tourists who value greenery and nature over conveniences found in hotels in the concrete jungle.

Nepal Development Fund: A fund worth several million dollars could be set up, either by mobilising domestic resources or with international partners, to invest in entrepreneurs who are working on areas that have the potential to make economic transformations: agriculture, tourism, hydropower, renewable energy, and the like.

One caveat is that such funds, like many donor-supported incubation centres and venture funds, often fail because they are likely to be led by accountants and look-alike mainstream company professionals who are so afraid of failure that they play safe and end up hurting the very goal (i.e. promote innovations) for which they work. If this problem can be addressed by getting a mix of skill sets on board, such a fund could take calculated risks that identify areas for growth, promote entrepreneurship that creates returns and jobs, get involved in the management of some of the companies it invests in, and overall, help strengthen the ecosystem for doing business in Nepal.

A week was too short for the students to delve into the details. But their presentation provided a snapshot validation of what local entrepreneurs feel represents Nepal's challenges and potential.

Mega works

Mega Bank Nepal will finally open its doors this Friday. With an authorised capital of Rs 4 billion and paid up capital of Rs 2.33 billion, Mega Bank is the largest capitalised bank in Nepal and claims to deliver five-star banking services.



Share more

NMB Bank announced share allotment of Suryadarshan Finance Company. Applicants can inquire if they have been issued the shares through SMS. Type SFL <application number> and send to 7676.



Stunning addition

Syakar Company, sole distributors of Honda Motorcycles, launched the new CBF Stunner. Powered with a 125 cc air-cooled, four-stroke self-start engine, the new model will deliver a power of 11bhp at the rate of 8000rpm.



Washable walls

Berger Jenson & Nicholson has introduced Rangoli Easy Clean Emulsion, a paint formulated with cross-linking polymer that allows stains to be cleaned easily. The paint also has anti-fungal and anti-fading properties, and promises a long-lasting fresh look.



New players

LG has launched a new range of home theatres and DVD players. HT-924 (1200W) and HT-604SK (600 W) models are the two new upgraded models in the home theatre category while DV-456P, DV-426P and DD-447P are new super-slim DVD players with FM tuners.



Branching out

Bank of Kathmandu opened two new branches in Balkhu and Panauti. It now has a total of 36 branches and 6 counters across the country.



Fruitful predictions

Laxmi Intercontinental, an official partner of Hyundai for Nepal, distributed prizes to all the winners of Laxmi Hyundai World Cup Prediction Game. Sudishma KC, the first prize winner, took home a replica of the official World Cup Trophy and a 40-inch Samsung LCD TV.



HIMAL
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 - Competitive or incompetent?
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Baking hot

It's not just foreigners who are flocking to Nepal's bakeries

PAAVAN MATHEMA

Nothing beats the aroma that welcomes you when you walk into a bakery. The assortment of bread, muffins, croissants, doughnuts, cupcakes, and cookies give out such a warm, sweet and buttery smell it's futile to resist. And given the love of Nepalis for all food, homegrown or otherwise, it's no wonder the imported culture of bakeries is being cultivated in Nepal as well.

The history of bakeries in Nepal is relatively new. Krishna Puroti (now Krishna Breads), opened in 1948, catering to the elite in Kathmandu. Even up to 30 years ago, it was possible to count the number of bakeries in the Valley on one's fingers. Bread was the main fare in these establishments, while its more fanciful counterparts were yet to appeal to the masses.

Shyam Kakshyapati of Nanglo's Bakery Café recalls that when he first tried his hand at the restaurant business in 1973, it was difficult to find the

right buns for his burgers or bread for his sandwiches. "I was actually compelled to open my own bakery in 1982 just to supply my restaurant," he recalls.

Now, every major city area – and even trekking centres like Namche Bajar – has at least one bakery to boast of. Even local tea-shops have taken a liking to displaying doughnuts and fruitcakes. Older bakeries say that when they started out, their business was sustained by foreign customers. Kamal KC of Hermann Helmers in Jhamsikhel confirms this. Speaking to Nepali Times after the day's rush is over and the shelves are mostly empty, he says, "We used to cater mostly to

foreigners but now a substantially large number of locals also come in."


City lifestyles are changing, and with this so are eating habits. Bakery items are now sold and consumed alongside the more traditional Indian-style sweets. Bakeries also offer quick ready-to-eat options for those on the move.

The popularity of bakeries has grown further with the belief that many consider baked items a healthier snack choice than typically deep-fried items like samosas and jalebis and heart-stopping rasbaris. Nepalis are also becoming more adventurous as far as bread is concerned.

White bread doesn't cut it anymore. Bhumi Sakya of Chakupat's Fuji Bakery says, "People travel and acquire a taste for a variety of breads, and look for it once they come home." Bakers are now free to experiment without worrying overly about whether Nepalis have the palates to take up the challenge.

Tuning themselves to the demands of their customers, bakeries now provide sugar-free, egg-free and wheat-free products as well, though you will often find some of the more traditional snacks on offer, too. Many bakeries provide a small seating area so you can enjoy your croissants with a cup of tea or coffee.

Nepali bakeries could do much better if ingredients of a higher quality were readily available. Mitu Bhandari of Baluwatar's European Bakery says, "Baking needs a consistency which

is missing in the local flour." Given baking is a fairly recent addition to Nepal, the industry would benefit from training schools with intensive bakery courses. That way prospective Nepali bakers won't have to wait for foreign bakers to show them how the cookie crumbles, just like their predecessors waited on tourists and expats to keep the oven going. 



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY



European Bakery
Commands the business of this heavily residential area, and sometimes even putting in an order isn't quite enough to get your hands on their bread.
Baluwatar, 4422047

Fuji Bakery
Only marginally more visible than the restaurant upstairs, Fuji is spick and span and has its fans.
Chakupat, 5543678

Krishna Breads
So old it looked as though the building might collapse until recently, good old-fashioned Krishna Puroti has renamed itself and is still going strong.
Kamalpokhari, 4410067

Hermann Helmers
The grande dame of them all, even if appearances deceive. Bread (wheat, corn, millet, buckwheat), pastries, and yes, there's cheese beyond Yak. Get there early or leave empty.
Jhamsikhel, 5524900

Higher Ground Bakery
Linked to the Higher Ground Café in Jawalakhel, this bakery employs women at risk and does a nice line in bread, pretty cakes and sandwiches.
Bhanimandal, 5528505

Café Hessed
The delectable looking doughnuts and cupcakes on offer here are a sweet lover's delight, and what's

more, they offer refreshing drinks to go with them.
Jhamel, 9803608601

Pumpnickel Bakery
A perennial favourite for backpackers, Pumpnickel has moved on from its old-world charm (tables under loaded bhogote trees) by expanding indoors
Thamel, 4259185

Master Baker
Since it broke away from the older Mabacos, Master Baker has been doing quite well, especially with its muffins, sandwiches and Swiss rolls.
Kamalpokhari, 4418649

Julie's Cakes and Pastries
In addition to

the regular breads and cakes, Julie's displays a sinful assortment of Swiss chocolates.
Kupondole, 5539862

Weizen Bakery
Right outside the Weizen Restaurant, the Bakery fills its racks with an impressive range of cakes, pastries, cookies, chocolates and savouries, European style.
Thamel, 4265130

Hotbreads
The whole range of baked products and sandwiches, and

yes, a restaurant on the side.

Nanglo's Bakery
One of the original fast-food restaurants of Kathmandu, Nanglo's has expanded into a veritable empire and if you look beyond the momos, you may even eat cake.

Makoo Bakery
Tucked behind the NTC building, Makoo is a much-loved local bakery that has recently expanded into failsafe momos as well.
Jawalakhel, 5527207

German Bakery
This old school joint refuses to expand though its hot doughnuts, cheese plaits and patties have a huge fan following. For now, we're happy with the takeaways.
Jawalakhel, 5523789





उज्यालो ९० नेटवर्कमा

आर्थिक खबर

हरैक दिन बिहान ७:०० बजे







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Testimonies of conflict



SUPRIYA SHARMA

Sapanako Saabiti, written by CK Lal and directed by Sunil Pokharel, is a powerful drama that depicts a woman’s quest for identity and self-ownership in a milieu riven by casteism and ravaged by civil war. The play’s unconventional structure, consisting of a dichotomous protagonist in a circular narrative, is ultimately refreshing; the story is kept from becoming nebulous by the lead, Nisha Sharma, who brings the show together as the flippant yet endearing Sapan.

The plot chronicles the different manifestations of Sapan’s character as she journeys from home to become a young comrade after a lascivious lover heartlessly deserts her. Her character evolves slowly in front of the audience by means of two-way narrative: one conducted by Sapan herself, and the other by Drasta, played by Sanjeev Uprety, who appears to be Sapan’s subconscious or alter ego.

As the translucent haze that fills the stage at the beginning of the play subsides,

we see Sapan plunge immediately into different environments – at once the whimsical belle finds herself at the epicentre of battle, and then again in the home of a family that has been destroyed by the very conflict she’s participating in; in lighter times, she is a schoolteacher, or is appointed as an animated traffic cop. The volatile variability of her professions carries over into her personal life, as she becomes a part of makeshift families, and flits through lovers true and false, all the while attempting to free herself from others and discover an identity that embodies the woman she is.

This deliberate variation in character and locale is reflective of Sapan’s own struggle, but it is also indicative of the condition of many kinds of individuals embroiled in everyday battles, both literal and metaphorical. Ultimately, the play’s success lies in Nisha Sharma’s ability to engage with the audience, and her capacity for the kind of delivery that poignantly communicates the plight of those who bear witness to the realities of conflict.

Supriya Sharma



Picturing food

The walls of Nepal Art Council are adorned with unique images this week. Organised by the World Food Programme, the exhibition showcases a collection of 46 photographs from 18 photographers across the country to catalogue the food culture of Nepal. The photographs capture the life-cycle of food in Nepal, through its cultivation, preparation, consumption and use in rituals. Richard Ragan, the outgoing WFP Country Representative, introduced the exhibition with the phrase, “We are what we eat”, and the pictures certainly reflect this truism in the diversity of Nepali culture on show. The beautiful images also managed to communicate the grave reality of the hardships that families in the difficult terrain of Nepal face to put food on their plates. The exhibition features a collection of short documentaries, including the first-ever 3D animation made in Nepal. *The Life of Food in Nepal*, 20-25 July, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal. Free admission

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EVENTS

Sapana ko Saabiti at Gurukul, CK Lal debuts as a playwright (see review) in the capable hands of director Sunil Pokharel. *Till 31 July (except on Mondays), Gurukul, Purano Baneshwor*

Life of Food in Nepal, a collection of unique portraits that portray the food culture in Nepal, organised by the World Food Programme. *Till 25 July, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal*

Voyage: an endless journey, paintings that traverse the creative journey of artist Sagar Manandhar. *Till July 28, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal*

Hami Art Group, exhibition of acrylic paintings made by the students of Lalit Kala Kendra. *Till July 26, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal*

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, certified arts teachers from Holland and the UK are offering free workshops at KJC on dance, film, theatre, band and rap. *For bookings contact 5013554 or email info@katjazz.com.np.*

Lazimpat Gallery Café, screening of the movie *A serious man*, directed by the Coen Brothers. *Friday 23 July, 6.30pm, Lazimpat, call 4428549 to make reservations*



Weekly Farmers' Market, a market like no other with organic and gourmet food, healthy breakfasts, fresh coffee and lots of socialising. *Saturday 10 July, 9am to 12pm, 1905, 4215068*



8th Annual Wine Festival, be there at Kilroy's for the biggest congregation of wine lovers in Kathmandu. *Kilroy's, Thamel, 4250440*

MUSIC

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, KJC brings renowned German musician Rainer Pusch to town to share his knowledge, an opportunity not to miss. *From Wednesday 21 July to 20 September, KJC, Jhamsikhel, 5013554, info@katjazz.com.np*

DINING

1905 Underground Bar, get into the latino mood with Latin American music, dance and food. *Friday July 23, 7pm, 1905, Kantipath*

Splash Bar & Grill, great weekend BBQ dinner. *Fridays and Saturdays, 6pm to 9pm, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, Rs 1200, 4411818*

Olive Garden, Mediterranean food fest. *Everyday, 6pm onwards, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, 4411818*

Saturday @ Hyatt, take a refreshing dip in the pool, soak away your weekday sorrows and sample the delicious barbeque in the open air. *Every Saturday from 12.30pm to 4pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234*

Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Café, enjoy wood-fired pizza and free wi-fi with an unparalleled view of Boudha stupa. *Every day from 9am to 9pm, Boudha, 2130681*

Chopstix, savoury Asian food cooked in

true Chinese fashion and sure to charm and impress. Begin your feast with the Dragon Chicken, it's one-of-a-kind. *Kumaripati, 5551118*

Lazy Gringo, fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine. Bring your own booze though. *Jawalakhel, Open daily 11am- 9pm except Mondays, 2110517*

Casa de Cass, out-of-Kathmandu dining in cosy surrounds with attentive service, what more could you ask for? A martini, of course. *Hariharbhawan, 5010100*

Lhakpa Chulo, a relative newcomer to Jhamel, but among the best for food – try the tender steaks and Thai-style salads. *Jhamsikhel, open for lunch and dinner daily except Wednesdays*

Comfort Zone, expansive restobar that needs to be full to come into its own. A decent range of cocktails and barbequed meats should keep you glued to the massive screen at one end. *Comfort Zone (rooftop of Bank of Kathmandu), Thamel*

Momotarou, nestled inconspicuously amongst the street shops of Thamel, this restaurant serves Japanese food that is top value for money. Extravagant taste yet humble in presentation. *Thamel, Bhagawatisthan (near Bhagawati Temple), 4417670*

Hankook Sarang, serves up the incredible tastes of Korea, including superlative steamed rice to anchor meals fit for kings. *Thamel, near Roadhouse Café*



Vesper Café, has a quaint outdoor patio good for leisurely weekend brunches. Serves good salads and steak wraps. *Jhamel, open daily*

Attic, newly transformed lounge/bar ideal for Friday night drinking before hitting the dance spots. Popular among local celebrities and passing politicians. *Uttar Dhoka, Lazimpat, 984161476*



Mike's Breakfast, huge breakfasts and a never-ending supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting characterise this café, popular among tourists and locals alike. *Naxal, 4424303*

Summit Hotel, posh Western-style dining area with candlelight and a romantic night view of the city. Get really busy with the succulent ribs basket, and add the finishing touch with a hot Dutch apple pie. *Jhamsikhel, 5521810*

Jazoo, a quiet place ideal for beer and relaxing conversations. Bring a friend and enjoy their special barbeque set for a mix of everything. *Jawalakhel (near the zoo), 5538321*

Hadock, big compound with ample parking space, their Western and Thakali dishes are done to perfection. *Jhamel, 10am-10am, 5546431*

Lhasa Bar, enjoy a beer or a splash of cocktail at this springboard for excellent young musicians starting out on the Thamel circuit. *Thamel, 985101043*

Buddha Bar has been an establishment since the days of the hippies and offers a warm and cozy space for intimate conversations over a large selection of drinks. *Happy hour 4-7pm, Thamel, 9851053235*

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*

काम सानो ठूलो भन्ने हुँदैन। पसिनाको कुनै रङ र जात पनि हुँदैन। काम गरेर खान लजाउनु पनि हुँदैन। चोरेर, ढाँटेर, छलेर, लुटेर खान पो लजाउनुपर्छ। जो जहाँ रहेर जुन काम गर्छ ऊ त्यसैमा रमाउनुपर्छ गौरव गर्नुपर्छ र समर्पित भएर गर्नुपर्छ। काम नै शक्ति हो, भक्ति हो र मुक्ति हो। कामको इज्जत गरौं, पसिनाको सम्मान गरौं।

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Transforming power

Micro-hydro projects light up homes

DAILEKH: Locals of Baluwater and Naumale, in a remote basin 28 km northwest of the district headquarters Dullu, have seen their lives transformed since a micro-hydro system was installed. CFL bulbs have replaced the hazardous kerosene lamps in their homes, women have been freed from the drudgery of milling grain, and men no longer need to struggle to irrigate their fields.

The micro-hydro project was constructed under the Food for Work scheme of the World Food Programme with the participation of the locals. Although designed to generate 22 KW of electricity, it produces only 11 KW as of now. The project has lit up 145 households of Baluwater and Naumule villages. A household pays just Rs 70 a month for unlimited use of electricity.

The change is obvious in Naumule basin. In this small developing town, houses have refrigerators, televisions and mobile phones. They also have fax and copier machines. “We could not have imagined this life two years ago,” says Ratna Prasad Jaisi, operator of the power plant.

Apart from the conveniences of electricity, the plan has allowed local entrepreneurs to upgrade their work. Local carpenters can now use electrical tools. “I am learning



DEEPESH SHRESTHA

carpentry,” says Laxmi Ram Darlami. “I can get work anywhere once I have the skill to operate electric-powered tools.” The villages also take pride in their new electric-powered mills and hemp-refining factories.

An electrical system irrigates 16.67 hectares of paddy field in Naumule basin. “Irrigation has increased the productivity of the basin,” says Santa Bahadur Chand, former VDC chair. “Micro-hydro has made life easier in many ways.”

Micro-hydro has increasingly been used as an add-on or stand-alone system for the purpose of electric lighting in the last two decades. Nepal has made remarkable strides in micro-hydro with external technical assistance, indigenous

innovation, and facilitative government policies. There are already micro-hydro plants in 57 districts with a capacity to produce 12 MW of power in total and a plan is in the works to construct one in each VDC within two years using local fund, technology, and manpower.

Such projects can be a major source of energy for rural areas as they can be operated by simply diverting water from a stream or river and channelling it into a turbine through pipes. It does not require a dam or storage facility. Micro-hydro is affordable and can be a long-term power solution for Nepal. 🇳🇵



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

GIMME NON-FICTION: Ani Choying Dolma addresses the audience at Travelling Film South Asia after the screening of its opening film, *Children of God*, at Yala Maya Kendra on Friday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

TRAFFIC WRONGS: A 3-day photo exhibition on traffic awareness was held at Ratnapark last week. It was organised by Inspector Sita Ram Hachethu of the Darbar Marg Traffic Police Department.



KIRAN PANDAY

THE FOOD'S GOOD: *Life of Food in Nepal*, a photo exhibition organised by the World Food Programme, opened on Tuesday.



RSS

WARNING SIGNS: 39 of 56 gates at the Kosi barrage have been opened, following an alarming increase in the water levels. The control room at the barrage records levels every hour.



DHANYANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Gastroenteritis is a glorified term for good old diarrhea, the bane of our summer existence in Nepal. Unlike tourists, Nepalis need a bigger dose of the bacteria to get the symptoms. The lining of our intestines can usually withstand the ‘riff-raff’ bacteria that cause problems for tourists, but when you get an invasion on the scale of the hordes of Genghis Khan, even Nepali intestines will succumb to the onslaught, and profuse watery diarrhea will ensue.

One way of ensuring you suffer from this kind of gastroenteritis is to go to one of the many marriage parties this summer and stuff yourself silly with raw onions and salad, or partake of the unforgettable creamy desserts. Enjoy the meal while the going is great because there is a good chance you will be made to pay dearly when at 2 in the morning, you wake up with a feverish feeling, aching joints, and a Ganges churning in your belly. No wonder they call this the Delhi belly!

The important thing when diarrhea hits you like this is to make sure you continue to drink fluids even if you are nauseated. Nothing is worse than dehydration coupled with profuse diarrhea.

Valley belly



A banana or two will also help replenish the electrolytes (such as potassium) you lose with diarrhea. Of course, antibiotics may be necessary if watery diarrhea does not stop in a day or sooner. And usually, as with all things medical, the old and the young are the most vulnerable.

Prevention is key. Avoiding salads and uncooked vegetables is important. Always drink boiled water. Just filtering with a regular filter is not good enough. Avoid ice made from non-boiled water. Food is safe if it is steaming and burns the tongue as this guarantees death to bacteria, the main cause of the problem. Runner-up villains are

giardia, amoebas, and viruses.

Washing your hands with soap and water always helps. But food hygiene is not completely in your hands. The role of food handlers is very important in hotels and restaurants. In affluent countries, food inspectors check hygiene quality even in five-star hotels. With no food inspectors around, it is even more important to take personal preventive measures when you eat out. Unfortunately, this may detract from the enjoyment of your meal of chwoela and chiura in your neighbourhood restaurant. 🇳🇵

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WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Although we received a couple of good rainstorms this week, farmers are expecting more to get their paddy fields wet enough for their seedlings to survive. In terms of monthly quotas, except for the eastern region and pockets of other parts of the country, we still only have a weak monsoon at play. But the major concern of farmers is intensity rather than quantity of precipitation. Higher intensity rainfall means fields are less able to recharge their groundwater. The satellite picture suggests we will continue to get rains over the weekend at intervals. Since nearly two thirds of the monsoon rains occur during the night, we can look forward to cool and humid days.



FRI	SAT	SUN
		
31-20	31-21	32-22

Will history repeat itself ?



OPINION
Jakub Smutný

There are parallels here to Czechoslovakia in 1948, but geopolitics and ideology may preclude a Maoist takeover of the state

Are the Maoists aspiring to capture the state in Nepal? For those preoccupied with the group's radical political agenda, tactical commitment to democratic pluralism, and a semi-militant structure that reserves reverting to violence as a possible strategic option, this debate has continued to fascinate. As an outsider from a post-communist country (the former Czechoslovakia), where real-life implementation of Marxism-Leninism irrevocably altered the whole socio-economic makeup of the nation, there is a temptation to see Nepali Maoists as a South Asian reincarnation of KSC, the communist party of Czechoslovakia. It is the specificity of the environment I was raised in that makes me think of potential parallels and differences between the rise of Maoism in Nepal and the tumultuous year of 1948 that so drastically affected post-WWII Czechoslovakia.

The degree of ultra-left tendencies present in a given society is typically defined by the pervasiveness of feudal structures inherited from previous regimes. The greater the feudal oppression, the greater the likelihood of simmering social grievances being transformed into open revolt. In the land of the Czechs and Slovaks, the autocratic rule of the Habsburg empire collapsed in 1918. In turn, the ensuing inability of the First Republic (1918-38) to address key social concerns, coupled with the effects of the Great Depression and WWII, helped prop up strong communist sentiments in society. Czechoslovak communists were quick to capitalise on lingering disillusionment with the former 'rightist-oriented' regime and took over the state in 1948.

In Nepal, the CPN(Maoist)'s fight against the workings of semi-/feudalism lies at the heart of the movement. Given the country's domestic politico-historical context, communist ideals soon found resonance with ordinary, marginalised people. The Nepali Maoists learned how to mobilise the neglected rural population effectively.

The political dimension of


communism bears similarly interesting parallels. At the height of Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia, KSC sought to use multi-partyism to precipitate constitutional changes in the country. Upon a massive victory in the 1946 parliamentary elections, KSC began to penetrate all the Czechoslovak institutions while simultaneously discrediting opposition parties, citing their alleged incapacity to solve social problems.

This escalated into major political crisis, marked by the setting up of paramilitary 'People's Militias' (corollary to what the Maoists decided on in May 2003), the nationwide arrests of opposition leaders, infiltration of the state security apparatus, crackdowns on independent media and mass demonstrations to make then President Beneš succumb to the 'will of the people'. The state police, which was being gradually transformed into a KSC-loyal institution, was instrumental in legitimising this. This had profound effects on the functionality of the 'National Front', a coalition of all 'approved' post-1945 political parties, which was paralysed by late 1947 due to KSC's growing ability to bypass consensus negotiations. The state takeover was completed in February 1948 with the formation of an all-KSC government.



Despite such parallels, the political influence of CPN(M) is yet to reach such heights, the Cold War is long over, the respective domestic contexts are different and most importantly, the ideological agenda of Nepali Maoists is significantly different from what the Czechoslovak communists advocated more than 60 years ago. But both sets of communists attempted to ride on the weaknesses of democratic competition.

Electoral success legitimises government interference into rights under a working democratic framework. Further, engaging in a 'nonviolent overthrow of the state' looks far more pragmatic than waging an armed struggle today. Nepali Maoists have gradually embraced this tactic over time which, in turn, has enabled them to reach out to a much wider constituency than during the first phase of the 'People's War'. But there have been further obstacles on the way to 'glorious communism', as Prachanda once put it. The most recent is the current intraparty split over the choice of the next PM, which considerably weakens the internal cohesiveness of the organisation. In addition, the inability of the party to form coalitions across the political spectrum is another reason why the Czechoslovakian scenario is unlikely.

It would be a serious mistake to judge Nepali Maoists through the lens of George Orwell's totalitarian spectre. Even though they might have been pursuing a forcible change of the system in the first years of the insurgency, the party's willingness to promote socialism via multiparty symbiosis must be a reason for cautious optimism. On the other hand, the structural perils of the movement, mainly the reluctance to give up MLM as a guiding ideological precept, gives rise to suspicions and anxious polemics. Is resumption of civil war feasible? Nobody knows, but unless thorough de-militarisation, democratisation and accommodation of the CPN(M) is finalised, Nepal's political parties attain a desirable level of democratic consciousness, and India's inadequate policies vis-à-vis Nepal undergo serious revisions, it may be hard to dismiss the 1948 Czechoslovakian scenario as a historical parallel. 



Mind the children



POLITICALLY
CRACKED
Indu Nepal

From glass-slipped Cinderella to Harry Potter, folklore from across the world has maintained that just about the worst thing that can happen to a child is separation from its parents. Thirteen-year-old Kumar had to endure an even worse fate when he was whisked away from his village in Ramechhap to look after someone else's children. A whole school of them.

Kumar is the youngest employee at a private school in Lalitpur. Tall and scrawny, Kumar and his oversized t-shirts are a regular fixture in

is the bad luck of children like Kumar that is to blame for their situation makes any changes in their lives tricky. Childcare workers say a majority of people that employ them think they are actually helping the children in their charge, making child employment less of a stigma. The operating principle of "at least they are getting fed" overlooks all other needs over and above basic physical needs.

Research shows such children are less happy than their counterparts from the same income group. Kumar may be 3,500 rupees a month better off than his friends in Ramechhap, but he is by no means happier. Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), a children's organisation that runs a child helpline and carries

Helping child labourers looks harder than it actually is

the neighbourhood as he starts his day running errands for his *sahuni*. He then travels on the school bus helping young children get on and off. Most afternoons he can be seen by an outdoor tap near his building – washing and cleaning. With few friends and hardly any time to play, the quiet boy trudges from one task to another like a zombie as his *sahuni* watches.


The difference between what Kumar's life should be and what it is presently is all the more stark for his placement at a school that is meant to help young people explore their potential.

Except Kumar's. Unless you believe people should be bred to wash dishes and serve tea. The children at the school, whose bus he washes everyday, go on to become doctors, teachers and artists, while his capabilities have been deliberated capped by his *sahuni*. It's not just him. According to ILO and children's NGOs, there are 50,000 domestic children workers in Nepal and an additional 1.6 million child labourers in other sectors, which adds up to 26.6 per cent of the total population of children in Nepal – all of them wasted human potential caught in the multi-generational cycle of child labour.

Complicity in the idea that it

out interventions to rescue children from risky work environments, says that children rehabilitated with their parents with their support show remarkable changes in their outlook.

After running an intervention, CWIN supports children to prevent them from "being a burden to the family". As child labour is the direct result of parental poverty, some childcare workers argue that a blanket ban on child labour should be matched with wage increments for the adult workforce and assistance to others. That would prevent children from being employed in a waged market because they can be paid less.

The first step to reversing the trend is to call child labour by its correct name and to recognise that continuing subordination also has an impact on the future of the nation and its economy. They are like the plants that grow in your garden. You don't imagine they will remain scrawny near-dead stalks, but you feed them and water them and hope for them. It is not easy but it is not a task for supernatural fairies either. You just need a little common sense and whole lot of compassion to turn an old chappal into a glass slipper. 

Power sharing, Nep

As the national utility wallows in darkness, local communities light up the way

RUBEENA MAHATO
in LALITPUR

Going by the number of households across the country that have wires illegally hooked to power lines, stealing electricity has become a national pastime.

Nearly 60 per cent of the electricity in the Tarai is stolen, and Jhapa and Bhaktapur have even higher pilferage rates. Rather than build expensive hydropower projects, experts say, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) could slash daily power cuts by reducing theft of electricity. Village and towns across Nepal have shown the way by getting local communities to manage power distribution and eliminate pilferage.

Here in southern Lalitpur, an electricity cooperative has a working model that has reduced loss to 15 per cent. In Mugling, along the Prithvi Highway, system loss has come down from 35 per cent to 9 per cent, showing that community distribution works even in urban areas.

"The 17 VDCs of South Lalitpur would still be in darkness if they hadn't joined the electricity cooperative," says Dilli Ghimire, who set up the South Lalitpur Rural Electrification Cooperative, and uses half the income from power sales to extend the grid to even more remote hamlets.

Within seven years of its launch, community electrification has brought power to 116,000 households across Nepal, and 86,000 more homes will be electrified in the coming year. More importantly, because of local oversight, few dare steal electricity anymore.

The way it works is simple. Local user groups sign an agreement with NEA to buy electricity at the wholesale price of Rs 3.60 per unit and retail it at Rs 4. With the profits, they pay for installation, maintenance and expansion. All this is in stark contrast to NEA, which is so badly managed and politicised that it suffers a chronic loss, can't control rampant power theft, and in 25 years has managed to connect only 40 per cent of the population to the grid. Even where it supplies power, it can supply power for only four hours a day in winter.

Years of lobbying, first by NC minister Shailaja Acharya, and later during the royal government, led to the Community Electrification by-laws in 2003. The National Association of Electricity Users in Nepal (NACEUN) has over 400 members and is now lobbying CA members to amend the Electricity Act to decentralise power generation and distribution and make the country more self-reliant in hydropower.

New user groups are to be formed with communities bearing 20 per cent of the total cost while government invests the remaining 80 per cent. The "20-80 Scheme" is so popular that NEA has not been able to keep up with demand for new members.

Community electrification doesn't just cut pilferage, it encourages local business (*see box*). In Bhattedanda, villagers use electricity to power a ropeway, once run on diesel, to bring milk and vegetables to market. Poultry farms, milk refrigeration centres, furniture shops, flour mills and lift irrigation have followed the electrification of the village. TVs and cell phones have become commonplace, and some schools



20-80 Scheme

Ayeta Singh Tamang, president of the Bhardeu Transformer Sub Committee (*pictured*) has no doubt his scenic village would still be in darkness had it not been for the "20-80 Scheme". Dil Bahadur Shrestha owns one of the six new furniture shops that have opened up here since the village was electrified. He used to work in Kathmandu but moved back to be close to family and friends. Next door is Bhim Bahadur Shrestha, who has 200 chickens in his poultry farm. "All this wouldn't have been possible without electricity," he says. Down the valley, lift irrigation powered by electric pumps has made off-season vegetables possible. Village health worker Chandra Shekhar Pokharel says refrigeration of vaccines is now possible in his health post. Nearly every house now has a TV and the local Baleswor Secondary School has four computers.

Still, there are some who think 20-80 is unfair. They say NEA should hook up rural areas to the grid for free, as it does in towns and cities where the formula is "0-100".

NO DIGITAL DIVIDE: Seventh grader Rina Tamang is using a computer for the first time since community electrification brought power to her school in south Lalitpur.



ali style



"NEA overseeing community rural electrification is like the fox guarding the chicken coop. We need a new Community Electrification Act to safeguard our achievements in taking power to the people."

- Dilli Ghimire
Chairman of the National Association of Community Electricity Users Nepal



have computers. So why can't the entire country's electricity distribution system be handed over to communities including municipalities? Former water resources minister, Dipak Gyawali, strongly pushed community electrification. He says there is no reason why this can't be done: "Communitising the grid is the most effective way of managing distribution and cutting loss, especially pilferage. It is the fastest way to get rid of load-shedding in this country."

NACEUN is confident community user groups can spread the grid to every part of Nepal in 10 years if given the chance. But NEA, which has a monopoly on the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity, is not too keen to lose its control over the market. "There are just too many vested interests involved," says Anup Kumar Upadhyay, Under Secretary at the Ministry of Energy. "NEA already feels threatened by the involvement of communities in the grid." 🇳🇵



MULTIPLIER EFFECT: Mobile phone maintenance shops are one of many downstream benefits of rural electrification in Bhardu of Lalitpur district.

Victim of its own success?

As community electrification extends the grid to remote areas, it has had a negative effect on micro-hydro projects. From Ilam to Jumla, small hydropower plants have been abandoned once the national grid has reached the villages. Despite power cuts, people prefer the grid because of the low power and unreliability of micro-hydro.

NACEUN's Dilli Ghimire says the way to save micro-hydro is to find a way to feed their surplus power into the national grid. Off-grid power has less technical losses and

combined with community electrification, can help redress the country's power shortage.

Former water resources minister Dipak Gyawali says combining community electricity distribution with private sector investment in small and medium scale hydro generation is the way to go. "There are already 22 entrepreneurs in the country who are quite capable of collectively putting together up to 100 megawatts within two years," says Gyawali. "We now need to set up a hydropower generation fund with a 5 per cent tax on petroleum."

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Hamro Akhabar, 12 July

Farmers in Surkhet have been reaping benefits from an agriculture training school that aims to implement integrated pest management (IPM) to fight the different diseases that plague vegetables and other produce.

At the school, the locals learn to plant according to the season, solve farming problems, and produce seedlings. Since the training began, more people have become interested in farming and the total produce of the area has increased.

According to the Agricultural Development Office, in the last fiscal year Surkhet produced 26,878 metric tonnes of vegetables while this

year, 27,419 metric tonnes have been produced already. Prem Bahadur Chaudhary of Manikapur says that the training has been very fruitful. "Right now I am very satisfied with my vegetable farming. I am now earning Rs 1.25 million yearly and production has risen considerably since I took the training."

A hundred and twenty-five farmers have benefitted from the training, 70 per cent of whom are women. They say the training has helped them produce organic vegetables at lower cost.

The Directorate of Crop Protection and FAO have been jointly conducting IPM programs in various districts for the last four years.



KIRAN PANDAY

Meghraj Khadka in Rukum, *Kankrebihar Daily*, 14 July

कॉन्फेक्चर

Students at 'pro-people' schools opened by the Maoists during the insurgency no longer chant A for army or B for blast. Nor do they learn about military science as a subject. These schools have now switched to the government curriculum as the Maoists have come into mainstream politics, and the government has prohibited schools from operating without official permission.

The schools were opened to educate the children of Maoist leaders, the PLA and martyrs. They started by operating outside of the government's remit and soon adopted a different curriculum and teaching methods. Now, the schools teach regular government prescribed subjects and 'pro-people' subjects have been kept as optional subjects.

Martyr Basu Memorial Model School in Rukum has 111 students, a majority of whom are the children of those killed during the insurgency as well as those who are financially weak. The school only has students upto Class Four and doesn't have the resources to grow. Bal Krishna KC, the school's principal, says that adopting the official curriculum has allowed the school to avail itself of facilities from the state.

Prof. Hajime Yamsita in *Sikshak*, July-August

KIRAN PANDAY

Educational reform is one of the ways Nepal can be changed. Economic growth and education are intricately related. Only if people are educated and skilled can they work better and contribute to economic development. The problem with Nepal's education is that it is exam-oriented. It does not produce thinkers and innovators. Students should be taught in a way that motivates them to think about the problems of the nation and seek their solution. This does not require great resources, only a change in the teaching process.

Three things are essential for economic growth: confidence in oneself, determination to do something, and new ideas and innovation. Nepal's education fails to develop any of these qualities in students. If the political leadership today is dishonest and not committed to the nation's progress then it is largely because of the faulty education system. Nepal's education never taught them integrity, love for the country, or confidence in the capacity of the Nepali people.

I have been coming to Nepal for many years. In 12 years, I have visited Nepal over a dozen times. Every time I come here, I am fascinated by the optimism of the Nepali people. Even amidst abject poverty and deprivation, people have a deep faith in life, which keeps them going. There are many problems in Nepal at the moment but I am sure the positive attitude of its people will lead it towards progress in the future.

Japan went through major upheavals in the past but it bounced back, so there is no reason why Nepal cannot do it. And the first step to do so is through a massive change in its educational system.





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Chance for consensus, again

Editorial in *Nagarik*, 22 July

नागरिक

Although UML candidate Jhalanath Khanal has withdrawn from the PM elections, the prospect of a national consensus government has not dissipated. The next election to be contested between Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Ram Chandra Poudel has improved the possibility of consensus. The fact that more than a simple majority would have supported Khanal for the sake of building consensus is indicative of this.

After forcing Madhav Kumar Nepal to resign despite his majority, it was not morally justifiable for another candidate from the same party to form a majority government. But it was likely that another UML-led government would have been more effective, as it had the support of the Maoists. The UML now has the opportunity to push for a new consensus by supporting another party.

We cannot hope for a new prime minister soon because of the timing of the second round. Unless there is a miracle, the Maoists or the NC will not be able to garner a majority in this time, as the parties need to forge new alliances. But the parties can reconsider the prospect of a

consensus government.

However, the Wednesday election has not bridged the rift between the two factions of the UML, but made it worse. The UML is still the decisive factor, but it will be as hard for it to support the NC for a majority government as it will be for the four Madhesi parties to support the Maoists.

The UML will not have a direct role in the second round race, and its own condition for a two-thirds majority will keep hindering government formation. There is also no possibility for the UML to accept a majority government now. UML's non-participation will keep prolonging the process of elections, but for how long?

As the country struggles to form a new government, the internal divide between the UML will get worse. So the UML should either vote in favour of a majority government or make the necessary efforts to push the Maoists or the NC to lead a national unity government. If two thirds is what the UML wants, it should work for consensus amidst the ongoing elections. Only after the UML is out of the leadership race can it be directed by principles and a new ground for consensus built.

Advice to UNMIN

Editorial in *Himal*, 17-31 July

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Nepal-UN relations go back six decades. But today, because of UNMIN, this relationship is at a difficult juncture. Either directly or indirectly, UNMIN has repeatedly taken a stance in favour of the UCPN (Maoist), and even the reports it has been sending to the Security Council

the same UNMIN that didn't feel accountable when Ram Hari Shrestha was tortured in Shaktikhor camp was eager to defend the gun-toting combatants in Kapilbastu.

UNMIN, which responds with passion whenever the Maoists are accused of



KIRAN PANDAY

have been pro-Maoist. Their bias has influenced the global perception of the Nepali peace process.

UNMIN's main job was to facilitate the elections and peace process and monitor the combatants in the cantonments. But it couldn't control the irregularities and the use of force in the polls. Last week, UNMIN transgressed its authority by bringing out a 60-week schedule for combatant management. Whenever something bad happens, UNMIN redeems itself by misinterpreting its mandate or saying it has no authority. But

something, is always restrained when the Nepal Army faces accusations. It seems all the UNMIN leadership wants is to publicise its success story by signing on a mediocre document in Nepal.

Nepali politicians invited UNMIN so it could monitor the peace process according to international standards, but the standards UNMIN has adhered to are incapable of bringing lasting peace. A piece of advice to UNMIN - work according to your mandate for the two remaining months of your term, and respect the stances and ideas of other parties as well.

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Ass for prime minister

“There can’t be a crisis next week. My schedule is full.”
-Henry Kissinger

If only the eh-maleys didn’t have the if-we-don’t-win-we-won’t-play mentality, we’d have a government by now. If only Lotus Flower was less allergic to Laldhoj, the Maoists would have won hands down the vote in parliament on Wednesday. No wonder **Twitchy** was twitching more than usual as he nervously watched closeups of himself in the newly installed parliamentary cctv screen as the vote neared. BRB may have always wondered how his nemesis always seems to be one step ahead of him and knows his next move. Now we have evidence. PKD has been caught in flagrante peeking at Baburam’s SMS messages.



Those who watched Wednesday’s



high drama at the **Great Hall of the People** will all agree that it showed Nepali politics at its all-time best. No one in the world can stab each other in the back as we do. All three candidates for prime ministership were proposed by

their bitterest rivals within their own parties, PKD by BRB, RCP by SBD and JNK by MKN. It didn’t mean they had all buried their hatchets, however. It showed that the three proposed their arch enemies as candidates only after they were certain they all had the chance of a snowflake in hell of winning the vote. And so it turned out.



The whole point about Wednesday’s pseudo-drama was to waste time to buy time to haggle some more about who gets to power. You could say the netas just got themselves another 48 hours to do some more horse-trading, but then that would be an insult to horses. You could say Nepali politics is beginning to resemble a bull-fight, but the oxen would take umbrage. Some may say it’s like a cock-fight, but that would be a slur on all you good roosters out there. You could say the Mau Mau are behaving like wolves in sheep’s clothing, but that would belittle both predator and prey.

It looks like it will be the Madhesi Front that will be the kingmakers on Friday. And there is some major seduction going even as we speak as the Tarai peahens are wooed by the two baddie and kangresi peacocks. Apologies to both fowls. And before the serpents get upset at the speciesism, let me quickly say that the CA does resemble a snake pit. Henceforth, all hyenas, pigs, jackals (and yes even us asses) want to issue a public disclaimer to the effect that all resemblance that Nepal’s human politicians, living or dead, bear with us **animules** is purely coincidental.



Actually, the contestants should all stay away from Friday’s Finals of the All Nepal Free-style Wrestling Championships being beamed live from the BICC. We can do perfectly well without a prime minister or a cabinet because we haven’t really had a government for a year and we didn’t really miss it that much. Governments are invariably corrupt, inefficient and prone to making mistakes. So if we don’t have a government, we can’t make mistakes.

Of all the speakers on Wednesday, there was one plain-speaking neta who stood out for his common sense and articulated what a majority of the Nepal people think: Chitra Bahadur KC. He **refudiated** the tripartite trinity in no uncertain terms on behalf of the people. This man is my nominee for PM, that is if the Ass can’t be PM himself. Pity Chitra Bahadur’s party has only four votes.



If the three main political parties showed as much planning, foresight, strategic thinking and determination to improve the country’s economy as they have done to fight each other tooth and nail to get to the prime minister’s seat this week Nepal would be a member of the OECD by now.



Early warning: there will be another cash crunch by Dasain and it doesn’t look like we will get our passports even by December. The French winner of the MRP was the one that was printing our banknotes last year. And they sent it to Kathmandu by ship via Coalcutta. Is the intention to get us to switch to IC and get Indian passports?



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