

NEPALI Times

#591

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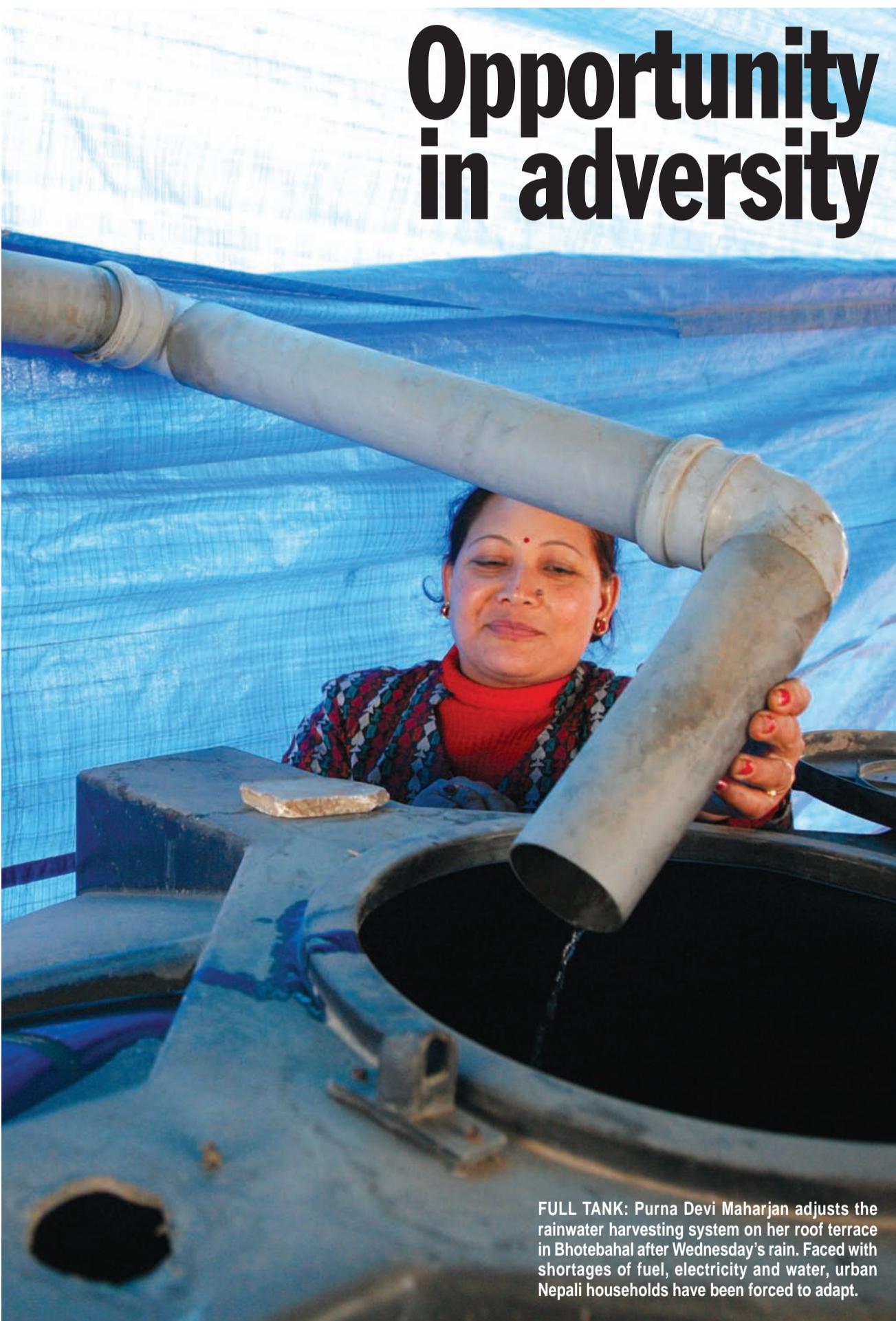
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Opportunity in adversity



FULL TANK: Purna Devi Mahajan adjusts the rainwater harvesting system on her roof terrace in Bhotebhal after Wednesday's rain. Faced with shortages of fuel, electricity and water, urban Nepali households have been forced to adapt.

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Despite reckless apathy and negligence of successive governments after 2008, Nepal's young entrepreneurs, the private sector, scientists and community groups are overcoming crippling shortages of electricity, fuel, food and water.

Nepal leads the world in biogas technology, community micro-hydro projects, and captive solar systems. Nepali companies are forging ahead with innovative alternative energy installations, rainwater harvesting, and organic farming.

Times
ecofair

Inside: ECOLOGYSPECIAL

Technology is available to make us less dependent on fossil fuel imports, polluting brick kilns and garbage disposal.

Nepali Times is organising the first-ever EcoFair 2012 this weekend to showcase examples of ecologically-sound and sustainable lifestyles. Visit Nepal Academy from 11-12 February and learn to be self-sufficient and live with shortages of everything.

Energy emergency p4

The real story behind the shortages of petrol, diesel, cooking gas, water and electricity

My Two Paisa p5

by Paavan Mathema

Forget about inviting new investors or encouraging new FDI in 2012, we will be lucky to keep the ones we have

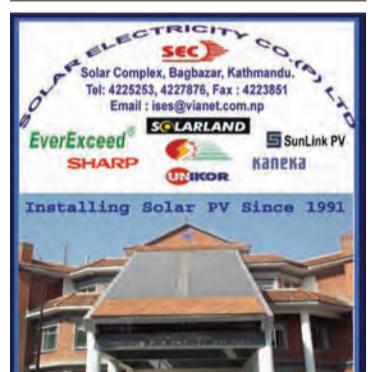


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OPPORTUNITY COST

For an example of an elected leadership that has exhibited utter disregard for the national interest, the welfare of its citizens, and the country's reputation and standing in the international arena none surpass the successive governments that have (mis)ruler Nepal since 2008.

For a country reeling under a crippling power shortage, no new hydropower generation capacity has been added in the past two years. The construction of the last big power project began 11 years ago. Investors in major river schemes have pulled out due to local opposition, lack of political support and the obduracy of the bureaucracy. Power cuts are therefore going to last at least till 2020 (see p4).

The foreign investors who have braved it out are battling political extortion masquerading as unionism. A major exporter of designer mountaineering apparel has had its raw material stuck in customs for over a month because the Maoist minister is sitting on the files for no good reason (see p5).

Looking at the chronic fuel, food, power and water crises, one would think that anyone deliberately out to destroy this country and sabotage the economy couldn't have done a better job.

The opportunity cost of all this is hurting every sector. Even in areas where this country had earned international recognition,

like community forestry, the past three administrations have been responsible for wholesale plunder and setting the clock back 30 years. There are nearly a million Nepalis working in Qatar, yet our national airline only has three flights a week to Doha and Kuala Lumpur.

Nepal has repeatedly missed the deadline on ratifying the amendments to the Montreal Protocol on the phaseout and control of refrigerants and other chemicals that warm the atmosphere. We are the only country in Asia not to have ratified them, and this means we can't draw on \$2 million dollars in technical assistance from the United Nations. The draft law was approved by the previous government, but successive governments have been just too distracted to push it

Anyone deliberately out to destroy this country and sabotage the economy couldn't have done a better job than successive governments after 2008

through the CA.

In 2009, the cabinet decided to set up a Disaster Management Authority to oversee a \$120 million plan to prepare Nepal for earthquakes, but the legislation has been languishing in the parliament ever since.

Next week, Nepal will be internationally blacklisted for failing to ratify two crucial international conventions of which it is a signatory: the Mutual Legal Assistance Bill and Extradition Bill. It is a cruel irony, but sadly not at all surprising, that for a country that is so dependent on remittance transfers and during Nepal Investment Year, we may be declared a pariah for international financial transactions.

Yet, despite such reckless apathy and negligence, Nepal's young entrepreneurs, private sector, and local organisations are forging ahead with innovative alternative energy installations and building a sustainable future. In urban solar power, garbage recycling, micro-hydro power, biogas, organic agriculture, Nepalis have shown what can be achieved with a forward-looking problem-solving approach. We have created opportunity out of adversity. It is to showcase these examples of ecologically-sound and sustainable lifestyles that this newspaper is organising the Nepali Times Ecofair 2012 over the weekend in what we hope will be an annual affair.

We hope to see you there.



BIKRAM RAI

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

IDENTITY CRISIS

Thank you for pointing out how very few women are speaking on the floor of the House or having discussions on facebook ('Identity crisis', Editorial, #590). It's always the big boys doing the big talk, and neither the media nor the leaders seem concerned that a large portion of the population is completely silent on matters of national interest. Perhaps it's not such a bad idea to have a women's province or 'Stristan' like the Ass called it. A Stristan of the women, by the women, and for the women.

Rita Shrestha

- Despite our ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity, we are the sons and daughters of mother Nepal. We are Nepalis first with a common citizenship. Although the dignity of the individual is of absolute importance, a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood is essential in a pluralistic and heterogeneous society. There can be no progress without unity.

DG

- Having ministers or powerful politicians in Kathmandu from particular ethnicities has not helped the concerned communities in anyway. So instead of fighting over the number of Brahmin, Chettri, Madhesi ministers, it would be more worthwhile to count the number of good schools and teachers in the districts, or the number of jobs that are being created so that thousands of Nepalis don't have to migrate

to foreign countries. What Nepal really needs is visionary and capable leaders who will put the interests of the people and the country first regardless of their ethnic and regional affiliations.

Rabi

FATHER

Thank you Rubeena Mahato for a hard hitting and timely article ('In the name of the father', #590). The focus should instead be on granting a mother the right to pass on her Nepali citizenship to her children regardless of whether the 'father' is absent, unknown or an Indian, Chinese, Mexican, or German. Yes even the son of a Nepali woman and an Indian man is a Nepali.

Indira Oli

- One thing that Rubeena Mahato missed out which is sadly not a priority on the national agenda, but which is personally important to me, is what happens when there are two mothers involved? What happens when a Nepali lesbian couple decides to adopt a child or conceive one through medical intervention? How does the child get citizenship, or will he/she be rendered stateless as well? At a time when same-sex marriages might be legalised in the new constitution, this is an important question. But since our country is in political turmoil, and since we are still a very intolerant society when it comes to sexual minorities, I guess this issue will have to "wait" and remain in the closet just like us.

Astha K

- At a time when same-sex marriages might be legalised in the new constitution, this is an important question. But since our country is in political turmoil, and since we are still a very intolerant society when it comes to sexual minorities, I guess this issue will have to "wait" and remain in the closet just like us.



- Children of mothers who conceived after being raped, children of single mothers, children of lesbian mothers, children of parents with mixed nationalities, adopted children: all have full rights to citizenship. Enough of the ultra-nationalist, 'we must protect the purity of mother Nepal' propaganda. Denying citizenship to innocent children many of whom come from very disadvantaged backgrounds is not going to safeguard our country's sovereignty.

Renu Shrestha

- My mother is Nepali and father is an Indian ('State of limbo', #590). I consider myself a true Nepali because I was born from a Nepali mother's womb in Nepal. However, the state has denied me the right to citizenship for 20 years and I have to live like a refugee without any national identity. My friend, on the other hand, whose father is Nepali and mother a Japanese holds first-class

citizenship. This is against my human rights and the 601 CA members don't have the right to tell me I don't belong to Nepal.

Suraj Hazare Dahal

RIGHT QUESTIONS

I see ominous dark clouds on the horizon: ethnic wars, displaced populations, genocide ('Asking the right questions', Anurag Acharya, #590). Only time will tell if Nepalis have the wisdom to say no to dangerous identity politics. But if the fires of ethnic strife are lit and people start going at each other on the pretext of all kinds of imagined grievances, then we shall soon see Indian troops on the streets of Nepal 'enforcing peace'. And then Nepalis will loose in a big, big way.

Nepali Kancha

- In a democracy, our personal responsibility is to work to elect good, local leaders who represent our views. Then we have to trust our representatives when they get to the capital, otherwise it's very frustrating to worry about things beyond our control.

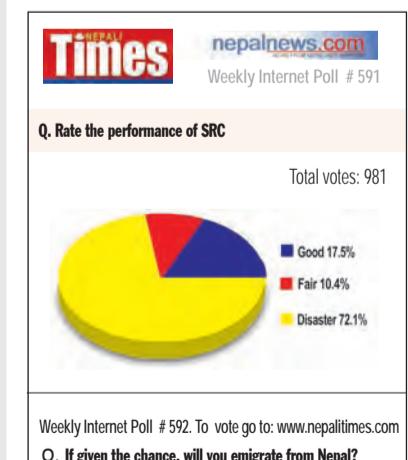
David Stengel

KATHMANDU SPRING

One thing Ashutosh Tiwari did not mention in his column ('Kathmandu Spring', #590) was that people who express frustration with the current state of affairs will have to join the political process and change the system from the inside if they are really serious. For example, wouldn't someone like Tiwari be able to impact the direction of this country more if he

joined one of the parties, worked hard, rose through the ranks and took his debating and persuasion skills to the decision making bodies of these parties? To demand change but not be an active participant in the long and arduous process of implementing that change would be like what our so-called civil society leaders did. They initially stepped up to the plate and gave legitimacy and boost to Jana Andolan I and II but retreated into their cocoons once the movement was over. The result was the absence of capable and committed people at different levels of the political structure which in turn created a vacuum that was filled by the very thugs and goons that people love to complain about today. If Nepalis want to change the country, perhaps it's time to put down that placard and re-focus their energies towards policy and politics rather than protests.

Aideeah





BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

We are into the fifth year of the first Madhes uprising and if Girija Prasad Koirala was alive, he would have looked back and admitted his failure to gauge local sentiment cost this nation dearly. The estrangement of Nepali politics with the Madhes outfit him.

This week when Minister JP Gupta warned about severing ties with the state, it drew howls of protests. But he was not speaking his own mind, he was echoing the larger sentiment across the Tarai. If lawlessness, refusal to recognise the Madhesi identity and suspicious eyes of Kathmandu's hill establishment was not enough, state apathy towards the misery faced by the Madhesi people has pushed this constituency towards the tipping point.

The power struggle in Kathmandu makes headlines everyday, but this is in shameful contrast to how little people in the capital are aware of the woes of those living in the plains. There are hundreds of villages across 20 districts of the Madhes with no roads. There are villages right on the East West Highway that are not on the national grid. Few have drinking water and sanitation. Thousands of Madhesi youths have been denied education, and those who have gone to schools don't have jobs because they can't prove they belong to this land. Hundreds languish in jails, guilty or innocent, with no legal remedy because 'officially'



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

A gathering storm

Kathmandu is choosing not to see another gathering storm over the Madhes

they don't exist. With no hope for a better future, many have migrated or resort to cross-border crime.

Many in eastern Tarai froze to death this winter. But the fatalities were reduced to statistics in the media, the numbers masked the glaring ostracisation of a people who don't count because they are dirt poor. There is a gathering storm over the Madhesi and choosing not to see will not wish it away. The Madhesi Janadikar Forum, which led the first and the second Madhesi uprising has since disintegrated into three factions and there is a political vacuum in the Tarai. Public opinion polls have shown that the Tarai people are as disillusioned with their own

leaders as the traditional rulers in Kathmandu.

Madhesi leaders including Gupta are themselves facing corruption charges and there is seething anger that in spite of being in power for most of the period since CA elections, Madhesi parties have done little to improve the lives of those they claim to represent.

Rajkishor Yadav of MJF-Republic admitted to me: "The political leadership including those in Madhesi parties have failed to even symbolically integrate Madhesi with the Nepali state." While thousands of Maoist combatants are being integrated in the army as a political compromise, the state failed to appease Madhesi with even a symbolic gesture.

The unreasonable delay in the implementation of the Inclusion Bill by the Public Service Commission is another case in point.

For a while, the fact that the president and vice-president were Madhesi diminished the anger in the plains, but many still see Nepali nationalism defined by the traditional Kathmandu rulers in daura suruwal. The humiliation of being called a traitor in your own land is something 65 percent of the population will never understand.

The burden of stateless and exclusion is at the heart of the demand for 'One Madhes'. Leaders like Yadav admit that the Madhes may be embroiled in resource conflict with upstream

provinces in a future federalist structure, but they find identity more important in the here and now.

The fault lines of ethnic politics are real and the bigger parties are faced with twin challenges of balancing issues of identity with maintaining social harmony. It may be relatively easy to address the demands of the agitating hill ethnic groups by ensuring radical changes in the state structure that grants autonomy.

But the real challenge is still what it was three years ago: can Kathmandu convince half this country's population which lives in the plains that they are not second-class citizens?

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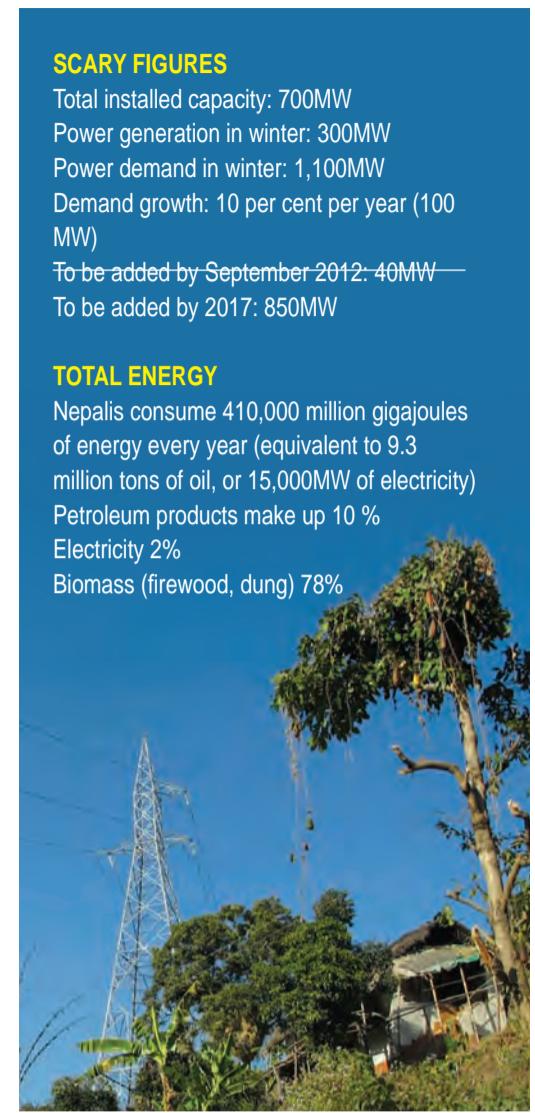
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PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

Energy emergency

You don't need to go far these days to see proof of gross mismanagement and government incompetence.

The dark cities, long queues of cars and motorcycles at gas stations, locals commandeering LPG delivery trucks contrast sharply with the political wrangling over power, the peace process and constitution. The economy is a wreck, and investors have crossed the tipping point.

OIL

The petroleum shortage is due to the state-owned Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) not paying its bills to Indian Oil. NOC's monthly losses are a staggering Rs 1.2 billion despite the increase in fuel prices last month.

"The bottom line is that the selling price is way below the buying price," says Mukunda Dhungel of NOC. The utility loses Rs 14 for every litre of diesel it sells, Rs 454 per LPG cylinder and Rs 3 per litre of kerosene. It makes a small margin on sale of petrol and aviation fuel, but five times more diesel is consumed than petrol.

In the past five years, crude oil prices have roughly tripled from around \$30 per barrel to around US\$110. The supply chain has also been disrupted because of a gas and fuel crisis in India as well.

The figures just keep getting worse:

DEWAN RAI

The real story behind the shortages of petrol, diesel, cooking gas, water and electricity

Nepal's diesel consumption has grown three-fold in the past five years mainly because of the electricity shortage. Nepal's fuel bill grew by 36 per cent last year to Rs 80 billion, and that was Rs 10 billion more than all our exports put together.

The government buckled under student protests last month and offered a 33 per cent subsidy to students and 'poor people' on petroleum products. No one knows what constitutes 'poor' and how to organise the distribution of subsidised fuel.

A cabinet meeting last week decided to release Rs 2 billion to NOC to clear its bills with Indian Oil. But that money hasn't yet reached NOC, besides it owes the Indians Rs 4.5 billion.

ELECTRICITY

If you thought the petroleum scenario was scary, the electricity crisis is worse. Even the chief of general services at Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), Gosai KC throws up her hands in despair: "I will

not live to see load-shedding free day in my life time."

No power has been added to the national grid for the past two years, even though demand has grown 20 per cent in that time. Five hydro projects are expected to start operation in the next five months, but they will add only 40 MW to the grid when the winter shortfall is over 700 MW.

"After we produce enough to meet present demand, we need generation capacity to grow at 100MW per year," says NEA board member Krishna Prasad Dulal. "But lack of planning and poor execution has landed us in the present situation."

The government is trying to encourage investors into hydropower. Nepal Rastra Bank has made it mandatory for commercial banks to make 10 percent of their total lending to the agriculture and energy sectors within the next three years.

The cabinet last week endorsed a 10-point work plan to reduce power rationing, offering a 30 per cent increase in the PPA rate for ongoing and new hydro projects

from domestic investors. The new rate is set at Rs 4.80 during monsoon and Rs 8.40 during winter per unit.

"The work plan has addressed our demand but it would be better if it could also include projects which are already operational," says Subarna Das Shrestha of the Independent Power Producers Association of Nepal (IPPAN). "We want the government to implement it, we will do our part."

Then there are the so-called Super Six projects that total 190 MW which are expected to gain momentum after this agreement. NEA itself has another five big projects (including Upper Tamakosi and Chilime) totalling 840 MW to be completed by 2017. By that time, Nepal will have surplus power during rainy season but there will still be a shortage in the dry season because demand will also grow.

"Load shedding will remain well beyond 2017," explains Sher Singh Bhat of NEA, "we need at least 4,000 MW of run-off-river projects or a 1,000 MW reservoir project to end power cuts."

But local opposition, extortion, labour militancy have all delayed existing projects, including the construction of critical transmission lines.

Sunil B Malla at the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat paints an apocalyptic picture: "The economy will collapse when power cuts reach 18 hour coupled with fuel shortage."

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Mind your own business

Mixing business with politics is driving investors away



MY TWO PAISA
Paavan Mathema

A hydropower drought, labour union storms, blizzards of local opposition, and the constant tornados of extortionist politicians—that about sums up the investment climate two months into the government's self-declared Nepal Investment Year 2012.

This is not just the result of outdated policies, it is also because there are deeper ethical problems with a rent-seeking government apparatus. The current Maoist-led coalition has given a whole new meaning to the phrase 'red tape'.

Since January, we have looked at the business environment in this fortnightly space. The disturbing thing is that every other week there are new bad examples to cite.

The latest victim is Unilever Nepal, whose factory has been forcibly locked out this week after workers launched a strike demanding double salaries and allowances, interest free housing

loans and house maintenance fees. There is a limit to labour demands, but these are so outrageous that it wouldn't be surprising if Unilever follows in the footsteps of Surya Nepal which closed down its state-of-the-art garment factory in Morang last year after similar suicidal demands by unions. For an illustration of what such militancy can do, just look at over-unionised West Bengal and how far it is lagging behind other states in India.

Genuine labour problems can be solved through dialogue. But when labour wings of political parties use strikes for payoffs, negotiations don't work. A consignment of raw material of Sherpa Adventure Gear, the internationally recognised Nepali brand has now been stuck at customs for over 45 days. The production line has come to a halt, orders promised are in a limbo simply because the Minister of Commerce and Supply is too busy playing ethnic politics and organising banda in far-western Nepal on Friday.

"I can deal with load shedding, I can deal with strikes, but having to deal with kleptocrats in power

is beyond my capacity," an exasperated Tashi Sherpa of Sherpa Adventure Gear told us this week from Europe where he is promoting his spring lineup. "It is impossible for honest investors to prosper or work in such an unhealthy environment."

Nepal has slipped heavily in the global index of transparency, accountability and corruption in recent years, falling eight places to 154th from 2010 to 2011 in Transparency International's annual report.

Nepal also faces the risk of being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a global anti-money laundering body, as the Parliament sits on the three acts that were supposed to be approved within

2010. Of the three acts, the Mutual Legal Assistance Bill and the Bill on Extradition Treaty have been registered at the parliamentary secretariat, while the bill on Organised Crime is stuck in the cabinet. At present, illegal outflow of capital from Nepal has outpaced official development assistance Nepal receives, precisely because of the risky investment climate within the country. If blacklisted, Nepal's financial

system will lose its credibility as FATF has warned its member countries to take strict measures against blacklisted countries that pose substantial money laundering and terrorism financing.

These should be terrible news for Nepal's rulers. But do they know? Do they even care?

Forget about inviting new investors or encouraging new FDI in 2012, we will be lucky to keep the ones we have. ☺



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A win-win situation

A JICA community mediation project in Sindhuli and Mahottari may have lessons for resolving national-level disputes

NAOKO KITADATE in MAHOTTARI

Nepal's protracted transition to a new nation building process at the national political scene could take pointers from rural communities which have found new ways to resolve local disputes.

In the absence of elected representatives, disputes over unmet development needs have to be resolved by the people themselves. The formal justice systems are not accessible enough, especially for the poor and the marginalised. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms managed by community elites are too hierarchical.

Besides, when a third party intervenes to resolve a community dispute, it often results in a one-sided punishment to make winners and losers, sowing a new seed of long-term animosity in the community.

For the past two years, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been working with the Ministry of Local Development, DDCs and VDCs in Mahottari and Sindhuli to implement a project to strengthen dispute management capacity at the local level.



For each pilot VDC, 27 volunteer mediators (3 persons including at least 1 woman from each ward) are selected through a socially inclusive process and trained in dispute resolution.

Community Mediation Centers within VDCs offer free mediation services to locals to resolve disputes. Mediators are trained to be impartial facilitators who don't pass judgment but listen attentively, ask pertinent questions, clarify issues, assist in seeing the dispute

from the point of view of the other side, empower disputants to generate optional scenarios by themselves and to eventually resolve disputes in a win-win way. An agreement therefore addresses concerns and interests raised by both sides (see box).

Mediators focus not only on how to resolve contentious issues but also on how to rebuild relationships between two parties. This is particularly important because in almost all cases, community disputes arise among neighbours or family members who have to continue to live side-by-side.

There are lessons here for dispute resolution at the national level as well. Having observed the ways in which Nepali political leaders come to an agreement, they are more likely to fall back on a 'package deal' involving a series of different points, such as a 4-point deal or a 7-point agreement. When one contentious issue emerges, the leaders will not just focus on that single issue, but use the occasion to delve into past grievances or future concerns to finally come up with a multiple point resolution.

Curiously this pattern is also reflected in community mediation. The disputants, who are either neighbours or family members, revisit their past and explore their future together when resolving a dispute at hand by a multiple 'package' agreement which addresses issues in the past, present and future. The disputants realise that it is the only way to resolve a conflict between the two in a truly sustainable way.

Next time there is a clash in the national politics, the experience of the villages of Sindhuli and Mahottari may offer an inspiration for creating a win-win scenario and rebuilding a harmonious relationship for the betterment of all. ☺

Naoko Kitadate is a consultant with JICA's Strengthening Community Mediation Capacity for Peaceful and Harmonious Society Project (COMCAP).



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AMICABLE SETTLEMENTS



In Mahottari, local Hindu and Muslim groups had planned religious functions at the same spot on the same day. Neither side was giving in and friction was growing. Mediators stepped in to navigate the opposing arguments and helped both groups to realise that the Hindu festival could be held on any day, whereas the Muslim festival, which is determined by the phase of the moon, had to be held on a particular date. The Hindu group showed flexibility by agreeing to organise their function after the Muslim event. Moreover, both the groups (pictured, right) also agreed to respect each other's religion and thus, the potentially serious inter-religious dispute was amicably resolved.

Three brothers were quarrelling in Sindhuli over the inheritance of family property while their elderly father was not willing to give it up as long as he was alive.

Mediators found out that the father, who was ill, was willing to divide the property to the sons provided that he and his wife, the mother of the three sons, would be well taken care of in their old age.

Finally the sons and the father came up with an agreement that incorporated the needs and wants of all sides: the partition of the property and the role of each son to take care of their parents. After each of them signed the agreement paper, the three sons bowed deeply and took the blessing of their father. The frail father, who was overjoyed, stroked the heads of his sons, a sign of restored family unity.

Dolakha high

Nepali-Swiss couple fulfill their life-long dream of running a resort in Charikot



When Judith and Top Thapa were working on a Swiss-aided project in Dolakha in the 1980s, they used to pass the town of Charikot often.

Situated on a ridge overlooking the Tama Kosi and in the lap of Mt Gauri Shankar, they were mesmerised by the scenic beauty of the place. In particular they had an eye on the hilltop outside town from where there is a 360 degree view of the surrounding mountains.

Judith is from Switzerland and Top's parents, who had migrated to Burma, returned to Nepal when he was just 11. Both were employed in rural development projects of Swiss Development Cooperation in Dolakha, and they had just got married.

"We had worked in rural development and we came to realise that for future sustainability, jobs had to be created," recalls Top, "and we felt we had to get into tourism."

They decided to buy the hilltop above Charikot and start a small hotel. But as with everything in Nepal, there were obstacles every step of the way. It took two years to battle the red tape, three more years to organise water supply.

Says Judith: "We enjoyed the place so much, the view was so dramatic that we were convinced the place had



CONJUGAL PEAKS: Top and Judith Thapa pose at their Charikot Panorama Resort that offers a view of dramatic sunsets over Gauri Shankar and Melungtse.

potential, and while waiting we started collecting building materials."

Their patience paid off, and Charikot Panorama Resort was finally opened in 1995. Designed by Swiss Nepali architect Kai Weise as a series of small chalet-style bungalows, a dining area for 30 guests and a conference room, the Resort had just started getting bookings when the conflict broke out. Nepal's tourism industry tapered off, and there were no guests. The Thapas closed down, and just maintained the buildings in the hope of better days.

Better days did return after the 2006 ceasefire, and traffic has picked up especially in the past two years. Kathmandu-based expatriates started coming here for long weekends,

and with four major hydropower projects going up in the district, Charikot has the feel of a boomtown.

"We never had any ambition to be big, we want to remain small, hire local staff, buy local produce," says Judith, who wants to specialise in niche tourism offering village walks, bird-watching and one-day hikes in the surrounding forests.

With a new dirt road to the 3,800m high Kalinchok, the shrine on its summit has suddenly become accessible for day trippers. Kalinchok offers one of the most spectacular panoramas of the Himalaya in Nepal with a sweep of the northern horizon from Annapurna to Khumbu.

"This is the most peaceful and scenic places I have ever been to in Nepal," said a Kathmandu businessman after spending new year's at the resort, "it is only four hours from Kathmandu and doesn't feel touristy, the resort feels like home."

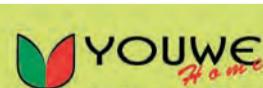
For the Thapas, it has been a lifelong dream come true to run the resort. Says Top: "We don't want to get rich doing this, we live modestly, provide jobs for local people, and that makes us happy."

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EVENTS



VALENTINE'S DAY SPECIAL, celebrate love with dance, face painting, photo booths and special sweet dishes this Valentine's day. Rs 200, 14 February, 3pm onwards, Bagacha, Jawalakhel, 9841721736, 9841593121

Valentine's Eve, Ambition is organising a special pre-Valentine masquerade with fun filled activities for you to enjoy with your better half. 13 February, 6pm onwards, Poolside, Woodland Complex, Durbar marg, 9841515761

Contemporary Forms, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre presents 'The Prakriti Project Eternal Visions - Contemporary Forms' by Rabindra Shakya and Maureen Drdak. 9 to 26 February, 5.30 pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

Noh Drama, the Japanese Embassy will be hosting a special Noh

performance to promote Japanese culture followed with an exhibition until 17 February. Tickets are available at the embassy, 12 February, 4.30 pm onwards, Japanese Embassy, Panipokhari

Saturday Birdwatching at Gokarna Forest Resort, organised by Bird Conservation Nepal. 11 February, 7am, call Vimal Thapa (9841330576)

Expression of Repression, an art exhibition expressing the many emotions, rights and issues related to HIV AIDS. Dress code: black and red, 10 February, 5pm onwards, Cafe Brown Sugar, Jhamsikhel

Ultimate Photography Workshop, Artudio presents the 12th session of digital photography workshop. Rs 3000, Starting from mid-February, 7am to 9am, Artudio, Lazimpat, 9841498425, 9841379780



DOC AT SATTYA, watch special documentary screenings centered around African American history. Free Entrance, 6pm to 9pm, Satty Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel



MUSIC

PINK FLOYD TRIBUTE CONCERT, a tribute to the one of the most influential rock bands in history. 11 February, 2pm to 7pm, Bagaicha, Jawalakhel

Let There Be Lights, get out of your seats and unite against loadshedding with 1974 AD, Albatross and Abhaya and the Steam Injuns. Free Entrance, 18 February, 4pm to 7pm, Lainchaur Ground

HIP HOP AT HOUSE, enjoy Lyrics Indy and his hip hop moves as part of the Black History Month celebrations. Rs 200, 7.30 pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel

Ides of March, be a part of the epic concert with bands like Antim Grahani, Jindabaad, Severe Dementia and Laakhey performing for a good cause: the Nepal Hemophilia Society. 31 March, 1pm to 8pm



DINING

Latin Nights, dance the night away with Latin tunes while enjoying special discounts on great food and drinks. Manny's Eatery and Tapas Bar, Shaligram Hotel Complex, 5536919

Kilroy's Restaurant, wine with two free glasses of wine and a red rose on the Valentines Day. Thamel



CHONGQING FAST FOOD, gear up for some mouth watering Chinese dishes like Sour and Spicy Pork and Kung Pao Chicken. Thamel

Casa de Cass, offers continental delicacies, baked goodies, brewed coffee and everything in between. Jawalakhel

Pumpernickel Bakery, get an early breakfast or brunch with interesting choices of bread and sandwiches. Experiment with its goat cheese or yak cheese sandwiches, or have a sip of coffee in the classy indoor dining area. Thamel, 7.30am to 7pm, 4259185

Just Baked, a cozy café with amazing pastries and friendly ambience. Old Baneshwor



Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Café, enjoy wood-fired pizza, homemade pastas and the one and only tibetan gyakok. Boudha, 012130681, 9841484408.

Buddha Bar, offers a warm and cozy space for intimate conversations over a large selection of drinks. Thamel, 9851053235



CINNAMON GRILL AND LOUNGE, mouth watering delicacies with live music. Try the grilled tenderloin steak and quiche lorraine with fresh fruit salad. Jhamsikhel, 5521339



THE FACTORY, a trendy restobar for a refreshing stopover in the chaos that is Thamel. Great food and drinks,

Inspired by Miss Moti



Kripa Joshi's Miss Moti takes a plus-size woman's anxiety about her body and turns it into a comic book with a strong message: size does not matter.

The word 'moti' in Nepali means 'fat' if the 't' is pronounced hard, and means 'pearl' if the 't' is soft.

The concept behind the character comes from a painting Joshi submitted as part of her MFA thesis for the School of Visual Arts in New York.

In 2006, she took the plump, self-conscious woman from her painting and transformed her into Miss Moti, the main character of the comic book. At a time when the definitions of beauty are becoming increasingly narrow with skinny and fair being the most important feminine qualities, Miss Moti is a role model for some of us heavies.

Joshi says, "I wanted to tell the story of an ordinary person with an extraordinary spark. My mother who is also full of life like Moti was my biggest muse."

Joshi was inspired to experiment with comic book format after reading graphic novels and meeting comic artists in the US. "In Nepal we usually think of comics as funny and light-hearted like the Tin Tin or the Archie series,"



she explains, "but after I saw the wonderful work of rising artists in New York, I realised that comics can be a great medium for serious storytelling."

Joshi is fascinated by traditional Mithila art, and has retained a similar style in her drawings. While she has completed the air-based *Miss Moti and the Cotton Candy* and the earth-based *Miss Moti and the Big Apple*, she plans on completing a five comic volume incorporating all five elements: earth, water, fire, wind and ether. She is currently working on the 'water' theme.

Apart from the Miss Moti anthology, Joshi wants to make a graphic novel about her great grandmother's life from the Rana regime to the present. "It's challenging to put 90 years of real life onto paper and cartoon," she says.

Joshi recently conducted a comic workshop at Satty Media Arts Collective where she met many promising Nepali artists and had words of encouragement for them: "Just because someone can't draw well does not mean they cannot have comic strips," she told them, "the key is to start small, self publish and distribute your own work."

Stuti Sharma



with zesty music. Don't miss out on the cheesecake, it's a must. *Mandala Street, Thamel*



CHOPSTIX, savory Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Begin your feast with the Dragon Chicken; it is one-of-a-kind. *Kumaripati, 5551118*



CHEZ CAROLINE, for business lunches and relaxed dinners. *Babar Mahal Revisited*

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*

Everest Steak House, an old-school joint for everything steak. A sanctuary for meat. *Thamel, near Chhetrapati Chok, 4260471*

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



Dhokaima Cafe, exquisite ambience, friendly service, cozy bar, place to see and be seen at. *Patan Dhoka, Yala Maya Kendra, 5522113*

Singma Food Court, for the best Singaporean and Malaysian cuisine in town. *Pulchok, 5009092 and Bhatbhateni, 4411078, foodcourt@wlink.com.np*

Lazy Gringo, fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine. *Jawalakhel*

GETAWAYS

Fulbari Resort, enjoy the scenic view as you pamper yourself with tennis, golf, drinks and dinners. Rs 6500 per person for 2 nights and 3 days, *Pokhara, 4461918, 4462248, resv@fulbari.com.np, sales@fulbari.com.np*

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Day 27

Apa Sherpa and his team who are on a 120-day long trek on the Great Himalayan Trail have resumed their journey (see arrow, above) after reaching Khandbari on 31 January. The team was felicitated by local officials, FNCCI, and media among others. Apa Sherpa and his team are traversing the country along the 1600 km trail which covers 20 of Nepal's Himalayan districts to raise awareness about the effects of climate change in the Himalayas.

The events leading to the trek will be telecast in a show 'Third Eye' on Sagarmatha Television on Friday at 9.30 pm which will feature the team and the Great Himalayan Trail. Among pictures of majestic mountains and starry skies, team member twice-Everest summitter, Dawa Sherpa has posted a photo of himself on Facebook with a beard (pictured). He adds: "We are planning not to shave or get a haircut until the end. Great Himalayan Beards!" The team is expected to reach Lukla by Wednesday next week and is accompanied by the German ambassador to Nepal, Verena Gräfin von Roedern on this stretch of the trail.

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SOMEPLACE ELSE

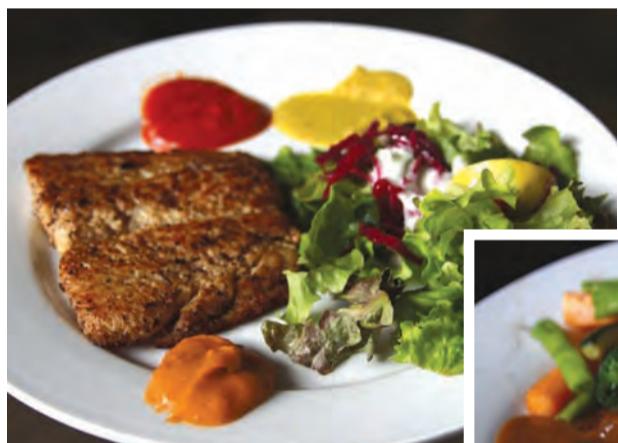
Blame the rain. Grey clouds Wednesday stormed out expectations for a carne cookout at the nearly year-old Station BBQ in Jhamsikhel, forcing us to shift indoors and sample kitchen-cooked viands in lieu of playing chef.

The eatery's trademark, tabletop grills for self-cooked barbecue, is limited to the front yard, where a copse of pomelo trees provides ample shade but doesn't shield patrons from the elements. Station BBQ's management says installation of awnings is underway, hopefully before the monsoon months.

But, the review must go on!

Perhaps, the rain was opportune. Cook-it-yourself ventures (aside from special preparations like Szechuan hot pots and Korean kalbi) are somewhat unconvincing for high-priced dining and have made me wonder: "Why did I leave home in the first place?"

For dreary days and for those prone



to burning or undercooking, the kitchen can prepare any of the options on its BBQ list like lamb chops, mutton skewers, pomfret and quail. As recommended, we opted for pork chops (Rs 310 for a single portion) and bekhti fish (Rs 240).

Fat-in and tender, the pork was sublime and well cooked; while the butterflied fish fillet was decent. Both came with smears of chili, mustard and barbecue sauce, which smacked more of a sweet curry paste than a smoky mesquite.

Mixed greens were served, but missing from the spread were complementary bread rolls or potatoes to



mop up the drippings. Overall, the menu can better emphasize its barbecue theme by offering combo meals with choice of cuts and sides. Think Peri Peri.

The Chicken Hawaiian Salad (Rs 275) dresses slices of poached chicken breast, apples and pineapple in mayonnaise. Almost too decadent to be a salad, it pairs well with the savoury marinades of the grill.

For mains, the chef's grilled tenderloin (Rs 485) smothered in a red wine reduction was subpar and cooked well done instead of medium rare. One could owe the miscalculation to the steak's cut, which was flat and resembled a flank steak fit for a fajita.

Inside seating at Station BBQ is comfortable but impractical for proper dining. Glass coffee tables and low-lying armchairs have us huddling over our plates. Frankly, the lounge feel is as overdone as cover bands in Thamel. Slap on a different name to Station BBQ and you'll easily get another res-turned-resto in the Jhamsikhel or Lazimpatt style.

As of January, we have instated a new rating system based on a ten-point scale that accounts for the total experience at the time of review, where a 5.0 is satisfactory. Station BBQ gets a 6.0 in my book because it was unprepared to withstand the downpour, nevertheless dishing out a delectable pork chop and making an attempt at a unique dining experience.

Marco Polo

Find Station BBQ in Jhamsikhel, across from Hermann's Bakery and two houses down



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The Artist



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

A marvelous mustachioed Clark Gable look-alike hero, a sylph-like heroine, a gangster-like cigar smoking studio executive, a loyal henchman/chauffeur/man of all work/substitute dinner companion, and finally, the adorable, loyal Snowy-like hyper intelligent dog. These are the indelible characters in Michael Hazanavicius's *The Artist* a silent, glossy, black and white tribute to the golden age of Hollywood when being eloquent was everything, and each frame was meticulously constructed to provide maximum meaning.

Yes, the film is silent. And no, it is the opposite of boring. The great French film-maker Robert Bresson insisted that "sound must never come to the help of an image, nor an image to the help of the sound". In today's world of Hollywood and Bollywood big-budget cinema this is almost unthinkable. "What, there's no talking?", and "Oh no! We have to read sub-titles?". Well, yes. Why shouldn't we take the time to watch a throw back from the grand-old age of cinema and learn to retrain our eyes to see the meaning in gorgeous, black and white (yes, *without colour*) images?

A case in point, when George Valentin (played by the suave Jean Dujardin) – a famous silent movie star rejects the advent of the "talkies", he finds himself without a job. On his way out from seeing the mafioso-like studio head Al Zimmer (the formidable John Goodman), he bumps into the newest ingenue Peppy Miller (played by the unaffected Berenice Bejo) who is on her way in. Peppy's star is rising as Valentin's

wanes. All of this is beautifully portrayed in a single wide shot of the studio stairs. The young and innovative are running up and down. In the center, perfectly symmetrical, Valentin stands on a lower step wearing a grey suit, Peppy stands just above him in a dazzling white dress. They talk, Peppy is in love with Valentin and she is newly confident in her success. Valentin finally walks away downwards from Peppy, charmed, but chagrined at their timing. As he goes down the stairs he becomes one of a few indistinguishable, suited figures.

Everything that is to come is presaged in this sophisticated, beautifully choreographed scene. There are many more like it. *The Artist* is made with so much care and loving detail that it bears a few viewings. It has something for everyone. Music, dancing, star-crossed lovers, charming side-kicks, wit, and a valiant animal friend. Very occasionally it falls into the trap of maudlin melodrama, (yes, there is a lot of orchestral music). But this does seem a little inevitable when trying to emote high drama while not speaking.

Not that the Academy Awards is the greatest judge of cinema, still it would be interesting to see if a silent Dujardin can knock the socks off of the likes of George Clooney and Brad Pitt to win an Oscar this February. Even more terrific would be to see a silent film win Best Picture in the year of 2012. I'd be watching if I were you. ☺

All movies reviewed in this column are available in the writer's favourite DVD store: Music and Expression, Thamel, 01-4700092

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer



Hepatitis E vaccine



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

A potentially life-saving vaccine for our part of the world was recently approved by China's State Food and Drug Administration. The world's first commercial hepatitis E vaccine (Hecolin) is now available in China, and the Chinese are targeting the vaccine on their vulnerable population (women of child-bearing age and patients with chronic liver disease) who, if affected by hepatitis E often suffer life-threatening complications of this viral disease.

Hepatitis E, like typhoid fever, is a water-borne infection that has caused epidemics in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Central America. According to the WHO, one third of the global population may have been infected by the virus, and an estimated 14 million people have the symptomatic disease annually with 300,000 deaths and 5,200 stillbirths. Doctors who look after pregnant women



Often patients with cirrhosis (an example of a chronic liver disease) who has been stable will suddenly take a turn for the worse and succumb to their illness when infected by this virus.

Chinese vaccines have been used in Nepal with excellent results. The administration of the Japanese encephalitis (JE) vaccine which is made

in Chengdu, China has been instrumental in decreasing JE rates in Nepal, especially in the Tarai. Unlike its Western counterpart, the Chinese vaccine is very cost-effective, and importantly side-effects have been minimal.

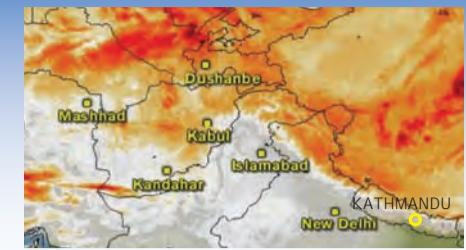
The Chinese don't do things in small numbers. The hepatitis E vaccine trial which was published in the Lancet in 2010 revealed that a total of 112,604 healthy adults

participated in the trial with 100 per cent effectiveness and good tolerance to the vaccine. Even women who became pregnant during the course of the trial showed no adverse effects of the vaccine. The US Army working together with the Nepali Army and GlaxoSmithKline did work on another effective hepatitis E vaccine almost eight years ago, but unfortunately this vaccine is unavailable. An exercise in futility.

As they did with the successful use of the JE vaccine, Nepal's health ministry will hopefully strongly consider making this vaccine available to the vulnerable population in Nepal. ☺

WEEKEND WEATHER

The wide westerly front dumped 35mm of rain over a 24-hour period Wednesday and brought heavy snow above 3,500 right across the Himalaya. These were also the first thunderstorms of the season, signifying that the precipitation was the result of the moist air rising along the mountains as it moved from west to east. The water vapour from this winter monsoon system will linger into next week, increasing cloud cover in the afternoons. Mornings will be misty in the Valley, daytime temperatures will edge up, and minimum temperature will stay low with a wide temperature gradient over the weekend.



RUN AWAY: Firefighters try to control the blaze in the grassland and bushes adjoining Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) in Kathmandu on Tuesday evening. The runway was briefly closed and the wildfire was contained after two hours.



LOUD AND OUT: Baliraj Shahi, a campaigner for Karnali Sinja Khas province, calling on supporters on Wednesday outside Bir Hospital, Kathmandu.



GAS-MAN: Students from Tri Chandra College protest price hike of petroleum products and LPG gas in Kathmandu on Sunday.



HOLY WASH: Devotees take a dip in the Hanumante River at Bhaktapur on the final day of the month-long Swasthani festival on Tuesday.

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BLOOD BRICKS

A new certification system for bricks aims to remove exploiting and pollution from brick-baking

LUCIA DE VRIES

A network of social workers, environmentalists, child rights and animal rights advocates who form the BrickClean Network (BCN) have termed traditional bricks 'Blood Bricks'. They say the industry is one of Nepal's 'dirtiest little secrets' and are lobbying responsible citizens to opt for clean and green bricks.

The kilns exploit the most desperate people, thousands of children mould bricks or work as donkey handlers. "Each time I visit a brick factory I am outraged," says Pramada Shah, activist with Animal Nepal. "The mules and donkeys are almost always overloaded, underfed, and made to work even when they are sick or pregnant."

BCN is trying to promote socially responsible brick-making and has introduced a certification system in which brick factories are labeled as red (worst), orange (improving) or green (excellent). The network uses 18 criteria related to environment, child labour, workers' conditions, and health and sanitation to rank factories. This year's certification shows that Nepal does not have a single 'green' brick maker. However, three factories, Shree Satyanarayan, Shree Brahmayani and Bungamati Itha Udyog, receive the orange label. Factories outside the Valley will also be certified.

"Middlemen or naikes prey on the most desperate: flood victims from Sarlahi, Tharus from Dang, Dalits from Kavre and Makawanpur, landless from Rukum and



PICS: SAM KANG LI



Rolpa," says Helen Sherpa of World Education, "any disaster can push a family into a cycle of declining poverty, marked by six months of work in a brick factory."

Child workers include those with disabilities. The workers' health tends to deteriorate in the factory's polluted working environment, in which people live in makeshift huts, with poor sanitation. Brick factories

move to places with lower rent and cheaper labour, leaving behind a trail of devastation. A recent government study shows that the industry annually scoops up 1 million cubic meters of fertile soil in the valley alone to bake into bricks.

Of the estimated 750 brick factories in the country, only 450 are registered with the government. Recently factory

Bricks are often produced by bonded labourers, including children

Brick factories are the Valley's number one polluters

Over 1,000 mules and donkeys haul bricks and are made to work till they drop



owners protested against having to pay VAT, arguing that the industry does not import raw materials and provides much needed jobs to countless people.

"We are speaking of a very profitable industry which runs on coal from India and is not exactly the best employer. Why should this industry be treated differently?" asks Usha Manandhar of BCN.

Manandhar says the BCN certification has the potential to end to this type of modern-day slavery and clean up the environment. www.brickclean.net



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"Back to

Yash Ghai and Jill Cottrell (left) are constitutional experts who have advised the governments of Kenya, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Nepal on their new constitutions. They are authors of *Creating the New Constitution: A Guide for Nepali Citizens* and more recently, *The Millennium Declaration, Rights, and Constitutions*.

Nepali Times caught up with them on their brief return to Kathmandu this week under the auspices of International IDEA.

Nepali Times: You were involved as a constitutional adviser in Nepal since 2006. How does it feel to come back to see that the process is still stuck?

Yash Ghai and Jill Cottrell: It is sad, when the country needs to move forward on many fronts. We feel anger at the reluctance of the traditional elites to engage in serious discussions with the marginalised groups on their concerns. Anger also at the betrayal of the people whose struggle enabled the four major political parties to grab power.

Were we perhaps a bit too ambitious in expecting peace and constitution process to move so fast?

No. The country was ready for a move to a new political order. The monarchy had been vanquished. The civil war

had come to an end. A popular uprising had rejected the old system and defined the agenda of reform. Some broad consensus had been established between the Maoists and the major political parties. But by the same token these political groups hijacked the jana andolan. Despite the earlier enthusiasm of the Maoists for fundamental social reform, they and their new political partners had little interest in change, as is obvious from their numerous 'x' point agreements. Politics quickly slipped back to the post-1990 constitution style, with intense rivalry among these elitist political groups dominated by a handful of old warriors. The exclusion and marginalisation of the Janjatis, Dalits and women continued.

Two levels of politics emerged: one between Maoists and the three parties, focused largely on the self-interest of

their leaders, complicated by intra-party disputes, and the other between them and the marginalised groups, where the former were the masters and the latter supplicants, almost always triggered by violence and other forms of disruption. This prevented a proper national discourse on political and economic reform. In the arrangements for the interim administration and for constitution making, the four parties excluded others and ensured their total control of the Constituent Assembly and prevented it from becoming a truly national gathering.

Still, it wasn't supposed to be easy.

Transition from war to constitution is seldom easy, but it is our impression that the issues that have bedevilled the process have not much to do with the aftermath of the



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square one . . . ”

war as such--after all a Comprehensive Peace Accord preceded the adoption of the Interim Constitution—and much to do with political rivalries among the elite. And their arrogance, manifested in their contempt of experts, and of people's participation in public affairs.

Shouldn't we have foreseen that the demand for ethnically-based federalism would be so polarising?
Yes. In the last few decades many countries have been confronted by demands for autonomy by minority and other marginalised groups, often with horrendous consequences. There is now some understanding of how to deal with grievances that lead to demands for autonomy, which require long and patient negotiations. No politician that we met showed the least bit of interest in establishing and managing a federation. In other words, the demands need not have been as polarising as they have been.

What can we learn from history and the experience in other countries in addressing the genuine demands of the marginalised communities while preserving national unity?

Social disruption is usually the result of social injustices. Without addressing injustices there can be no real social solidarity, essential to national unity. If the four-party alliance had taken the demands of the marginalised communities seriously, including political participation, negotiated solutions, and embraced them as full partners in the interim arrangements, there would not be the clamour for federalism and autonomy today, with its complexity and we fear divisions among the marginalised communities that serve no one's interest.

But can there be a compromise when positions are so rigid and it has become a zero sum game?

Compromise is unlikely if there is no trust, the elite group has not even tried to establish trust among themselves or with the others. Even if a compromise is reached, it is unlikely to lead to realistic and workable solutions, driven not by reason but threats of violence. A terrible legacy that the politicians have perpetuated is the disregard of negotiations and the art of compromise. And the proposal by some members of the elite groups now to adopt the interim constitution, with its manifold manifestations of the 1990 Constitution, as the new constitution, is bound to raise fresh suspicions of their motives. Back to square one...but compromise there must be, and when it is eventually achieved, the country will look back and ask why it took so long and who was to blame.

Is there also a compromise formula between directly elected executive president and parliamentary system? Is it workable?

The French version of it is workable if there is a political culture of negotiations and compromise, which is missing here. In practice in the mixed system, if the president has a majority in parliament, it works like a normal executive presidency, and if not, power shifts to the prime minister with significant parliamentary features, and considerable tension between the two top officials. If both are elected, conflict and deadlocks are surely guaranteed.

nepalitimes.com 

One more chance, #345
Constitutional ability, #320

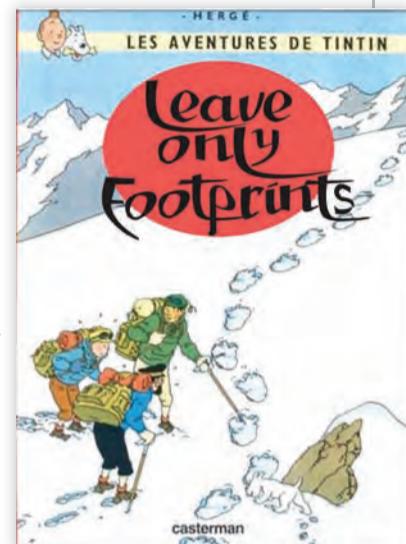
Plastic-free treks

The sight of plastic bags flying in the wind or stuck in the branches of a tree have become a common all over the Nepal Himalaya where hundreds of thousands of visitors come trekking every year.

This is not just an ugly sight, but since plastic bags are non-biodegradable they stay around for at least 1,000 years. Bags less than 20 microns are seriously harmful to health of human beings as well as wildlife as well. Ladakh and Bhutan have successfully implemented a ban on plastic bags, and Nepal could easily follow suit.

Saying no to plastic bags and using cotton or re-usable bags is one of the easiest responsible acts that anyone can do to preserve environment. Trekking companies, national park rangers, local lodges and tea shops need to be on board.

On the occasion of Nepali Times Eco-Fair 2012, Jerome Edou and Adhish Gurung of Base Camp Trek are launching a campaign to ban single-use plastic bags in all national parks and trekking areas, and put the Nepal Himalaya firmly on the map as a Plastic Bag Free Zone.



"We want to make sure our children will not ask if plastic bags grow on trees," says Gurung, who hopes the message will spread. He and Edou have just launched a Facebook campaign and are spreading the word along Nepal's trekking trails from this spring season.

To join, contact Adhish Gurung of Base Camp Trek
gurung.adhish@gmail.com
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Name	Organization	Topic	Date/Time
Bhushan Tuladhar	UN Habitat	Solution to Pollution	11th Feb 2012 1000-1030 hours
Susanne Badoch	Energy Efficiency Center/FNCCI	Energy Efficiency opportunities in Nepal - The neglected option to protect the environment	11th Feb 2012 1045 - 1115 hours
Ram Dhital	Alternative Energy Promotion Center	Prospects of Renewable Alternative Energies in Nepal	11th Feb 2012 1130 - 1200 hours
Mausam Khanal	Nepal River Conservation Trust	River Conservation Issues in Nepal	11th Feb 2012 1215 - 1245 hours
Franziska Huebsch / Bikash Adhikari	Nepal Biogas Promotion Center	Status of Biogas In Nepal	11th Feb 2012 1300 - 1330 hours
Surendra Bhakta Mathema	Nepal Micro Hydro Power Product Producers Association	Status of Micro Hydro Power in Nepal	11th Feb 2012 1345 - 1415 hours
Tyler Mac Mohan	Smart Paani	Drinking recycled rainwater . It is possible.	11th Feb 2012 1430 - 1500 hours
Jeevan Shrestha	Freelance environmentalist	Importance of ficus religiosa on environment	12th Feb 2012 1000-1030 hours
Bibhuti Man Singh	Society of Nepali Architecture (SONA)	Green Design in Buildings	12th Feb 2012 1045 - 1115 hours
Shardha Vaidya	WEPCO	Solid Waste Management	12th Feb 2012 1130 - 1200 hours
Judith Chase	Everything Organic Nursery	Enhancing Quality of life and income of farmers	12th Feb 2012 1215 - 1245 hours
Himadri Palikhe	GIZ Include	Intervention of GIZ in Organic Tea and Medicinal and Aromatic Plants	12th Feb 2012 1300 - 1330 hours
Sanu Kaji Shrestha	Foundation for Sustainable Technology	Empowering the communities through Sustainable technology	12th Feb 2012 1345 - 1415 hours
Raj Kumar Thapa	Solar Solution	Bridging Energy Deficit in Nepal with Solar Energy	12th Feb 2012 1430 - 1500 hours
PS Joshi	UN-Habitat	Eco-Cities	12th Feb 2012 1515- 1545 hours

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BIKRAM RAI

Minting money

Nepal, 5 February

नेपाल

Political parties have hundreds of full-time cadres across the country, but nobody really bothers to find out how they earn their living.

In terms of numbers, the UCPN (Maoist) has half a million, NC has 3,11,000 thousand and the UML has 1,50,000 full-time cadres. MJF and MJF (D) workers also make up half a million.

According to *Hamra Sansad*, a book on Nepali parliamentarians, 179 MPs (68 per cent) out of 263 said that they are 'professional' politicians. Similarly, 312 CA members (51 per cent) out of 601 mentioned politics as their main profession. If sister organisations and cadres from district to central level are included, the

number of members from all political parties will add up to 1.58 million which is 6 percent of the country's total population.

Donations and membership fees, the main sources of income for political parties, are not sufficient to cover the hefty costs of remuneration. However, despite the lack of steady income, many Nepali politicians enjoy lavish lifestyles which suggest that they must be involved in bribes, extortions and other illicit activities.

Politicians organise conferences, conventions, campaigns and mass gatherings to raise money for personal and party purposes. Many leaders have been implicated in dividing local development budgets among themselves and

secretly pocketing the cash. The Maoists in particular have been using the state coffers for the past five years to pay off YCL members and other cadres.

Although political parties need to submit their annual reports to the Election Commission, there is no authority to monitor the parties' expenses. The EC had instructed the parties to submit their reports by mid January, but only 30 of the 81 complied. Officials say that most parties are reluctant to present their report, because of a provision which requires all donors who make a contribution of more than Rs 25,000 to be named. It is likely that without stricter policies, investigating such transgressions and making parties follow the rule of law will be impossible.

Chequemate!

Gajendra Bohora in *Nagarik*, 9 February

नागरिक

Ex-Maoist combatants in Sakram sub-camp were handed over the first installment of their voluntary retirement packages on Wednesday. While some left the camps early with their children, others were busy packing. But all of them were disheartened at the prospect of bidding farewell to their comrades.



Two other Maoist groups, the YCL and disabled fighters, seemed equally unhappy but for different reasons. Holding a press conference, the YCL cadres demanded to be treated equally as former combatants and insisted on a similar package. Commander Abinash tried to pacify the outraged cadres, "Your demands are reasonable. We are with you. The state always suppressed us and now even the party is ignoring us." The disabled and injured combatants, on the other hand, want better packages than normal fighters, free education for their children, employment and provision for pension.

Both the groups said they would defy orders and refused to vacate the camps unless the party or the government conceded to their demands.

In between this uproar, stories about commanders seizing the pay cheques of many of the outgoing fighters have started circulating. Some cheques were seized inside the camp, while others were seized on their way to banks. But the party leadership has said the accusations are false.



Rapid fire with the young turks

Himal Khabarpatrika, 12 February

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका**Q: Do we need ethnically-demarcated states?****Gagan Thapa, NC:** Ethnic states without right to self determination and priority rights is the best solution.**Rabindra Adhikary, UML:** Ethnicity based states in this day and age makes no sense.**Hemraj Bhandari, Maoist:** Ethnic federalism will never work in Nepal. **Dhanraj Gurung, NC:** Ethnic states should be avoided at all costs. It won't benefit anyone.**Lekhnath Neupane, Maoist:** It does not suit a communist party to talk about ethnic states.**Rajkishore Yadav, MJF (Ganatantri):** We don't need ethnic states. Why do we want to repeat past mistakes of letting one group rule the other?**Badri Pandey, NC:** Ethnic states and preferential treatment to indigenous communities would create newer exclusions and band one group against the other.**Abhisekh Pratap Shah, MJF Nepal:** We can't go back on ethnic federalism now.**Amrita Thapa Magar, UCPN Maoist:** We want ethnic states with priority rights.

Former foes

Chadani Hamal, *Nagarik*,
6 February

नागरिक

Former war time enemies, Balananda Sharma, the coordinator of the secretariat overseeing the integration process, and Dhan Bahadur Maaski, Shaktikhor's Division Commander are working together to ensure the successful completion of the retirement and rehabilitation program. The two of them are currently in Shaktikhor camp overseeing the demobilisation of thousands of ex-Maoist combatants.

Sharma and Maaski came face to face in at least two major battles in the mid-western region. After their encounter in Dang's Ghorahi and Bhaluwang, Sharma left for the peace

mission to Israel-occupied Golan Heights and the two did not see each other until after the 2006 peace agreement.

"Eight years ago, if I had seen him I would have shot him and the other Maoists. But the situation has changed significantly and I am now helping with their rehabilitation and providing them food and medicine," says Sharma.

Maaski echoes similar sentiments, "If I had met him on the battle field, I would have killed him. Although we shared no personal enmity, we were on opposite sides of the war and that was our duty. But today when we stand together for the purpose of peace it's a very special feeling and even though we sometimes talk about the past, it is done in good spirit."

अन्तर्मुखी पोष्ट Suman Manandhar in *Annapurna Post*, 8 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



Most people see India as Nepal's big brother, but in reality Nepal is the elder one.

Indian Ambassador Jayant Prasad quoted in Nepal, February 5.

"We want a Khas state"

Interview with Commerce and Supply Minister Lekhraj Bhatta, *Annapurna Post*, 8 February

अन्नपूर्ण पोष

Annapurna Post: Why are you protesting against the government? Are you going to resign from your ministerial position?

Lekhraj Bhatta: I have no problem giving up this post. I am the son of the far west first and then a member of my party. The people of far west have been betrayed again. This protest is to ensure their rights. The way the SRC has divided far west is not acceptable to us. The entire region shares common history, culture and heritage. I have always said that the indigenous people of Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur are also Khas Aryans. Our demand is an integrated gar-west province.

Won't other ethnicities be deprived from their rights if the far west is declared as a Khas state?

We the Khas Aryans are the majority in this region. And yet we have no rights here. I have always maintained that carving the country into ethnic states is not good. But if they want to restructure Nepal on an ethnic basis, we should get a Khas state too.



Why didn't you protest against your party when it proposed a divided far west before?

I had and I was labeled as anti-federalist in my own party for saying this. I was also called anti-Tharu. I think our party did not act maturely enough at the time.

Are you trying to become a leader of the Bahun-Chetris?

Not at all. I am just saying that the rights of Khas people should also be respected. If Madhesis and Janjatis fought for their rights, should we not fight against being categorised as 'others' in our own land?



Successful Loot

Interview with actor Saugat Malla in *Saptahik*, 3 February

साप्ताहिक

Saptahik: Why did Loot succeed despite its dark characters?

Saugat Malla: The narration and the dialogue were not scripted, we improvised. That's what made the story believable.

But isn't the dialogue indecent?

It is a story of those living in the shadows of this so-called civilised society. The characters exhibit eroding social values through their dark ambitions and dialogue. If you knew one of these characters, you would know, there is no pretense in the way they speak.

Personally, you never bothered to complete your schooling,

yet you have made it to the big screen?

My father bought me a certificate from India after I refused to go to school. Not because I could not, but because I was not interested in what they taught there. I was more interested in people, their way of speaking, dressing and walking. You can learn more about acting by observing people around you than going through books. I only read what interests me. I have stacks of books that I like. Reading books and passing exams for a certificate are different.

Any ambitions?

Yes, to succeed, maybe get international offers. There will be money in my bank account as well, and all my dreams will come true.

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Minister Declares Bund

Homely Minister Gutch seems to think it is in his job description to coddle gangsters. An outlaw named Jayaraj who got a five year sentence for attempted murder and on whom the police have a warrant is on said minister's side every time he heads east. The police escorts have to look the other way as the criminal attaches himself to the entourage. Obviously, Gutch feels he can get away with it because his boss, the prime minister, shared the podium with **Comrade Ball** Krishna Dhungel and made him sit next to the DIG of police. This is the same BRB crony who served eight years of a life sentence for murdering a neighbour who dared have an inter-ethnic relationship. All we can say is: the man has balls.



PKD is now getting so impatient to remove his nemesis, BRB, from prime ministership that he is egging kangresi netas to make a power grab with a non-confidant vote. Awesome's left-hand-man is Supply Minister **Comrade "Red Hair" Butt**, who is deliberately prolonging the fuel crisis to make BRB look bad. Red Hair is also supporting PKD's bid for directly elected presidentship by appeasing the Bahun-Chhetri vote bank by threatening to do



the unthinkable: wear daura-suruwal-topi to work. But it gets even better: Comrade Butt has called for a far-western bund on Friday to protest the SRC report, the First Minister Ever to Call a Bund. The Tharus of the far west are organising their own counter-bund next week. Ethnicity-based federalism is getting to be a can of worms inside a Pandora's box for the Baddies.



Eavesdropping on the parliamentary committee hearings on new ambassadorships, the mule's mole heard an ambassador designate being asked about the population and per capita income of the country he was

being assigned to. His answer: "How should I know? I've never been there." Needless to say, his ambassadorship was approved. Meanwhile, Ram **"Comrade Partha"** Karki is now getting disheartened about the Indians dragging their feet on his agremo. Rumours Delhi is displeased with his past association with Gorkhaland and his role in smuggling arms across the eastern front during the war.



Methot it was only PKD who had foot-in-mouth disease, but it looks like BRB is equally prone to involuntarily blurting out what he shouldn't. After boasting that he "gambled" on BIPPA, he told a bunch of hacks

invited to Balu Water recently that Nepal may be "merged" into India or China. The PMO first said the remarks were "off the record". (Can a head of government speaking to a dozen Nepali editors ever be off the record?) Anyway, after all hell broke loose the PM denied ever having said "**merged**", then he backtracked and said he had actually said "**submerged**". This was greeted by even more cackling laughter from the galleries. Suggestion to the PM: he should now clarify he actually said "**emerged**".



Time for a brief recap: A rebel force that kills a whole lot of people in cold blood is arm-twisted by the very people down south who gave them refuge for ten years to sign a peace deal. They hoodwink UNMIN and inflate their numbers in the cantonments, and UNMIN winks back. The senior guerrillas are recruited into the YCL. With threats of returning to war, the Baddies drag on the demobilisation process (euphemistically called "integration"). Over four years, they take a 40% cut on the allowances of their own fighters, and pocket 100% of those who are missing. Finally, with their own prime minister and finance minister in place, they award themselves Rs 5 billion from

state coffers to those opting for golden handshakes, but commanders demand 40% from the pay cheques, saying it is party policy. Some fighters flee the cantonments with their a/c payee cheques seeking protection from the police, the very people they were butchering till five years ago. Then the paramilitary YCL raise hell, padlocking party offices, carjacking SUVs belonging to Central Committee members (vehicles which they themselves stole during the war) and cutting down trees to blockade towns to demand from their mother party the same compensation package as the comrades in the camps. That money will obviously also come from the exchequer. This govt has far outstripped any previous one in doling out money to its supporters from the state treasury, in fact the BRB govt is probably the most effective **poverty-alleviation** administration this country has ever seen. The war was costly, but the peace is turning out to be even more expensive.



Actual headlines this week (with the Ass' aside in brackets): **'Maoists Keep Mum'** (Dad Furious)

'Minister Goes Mad' (Others Follow Suit)



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