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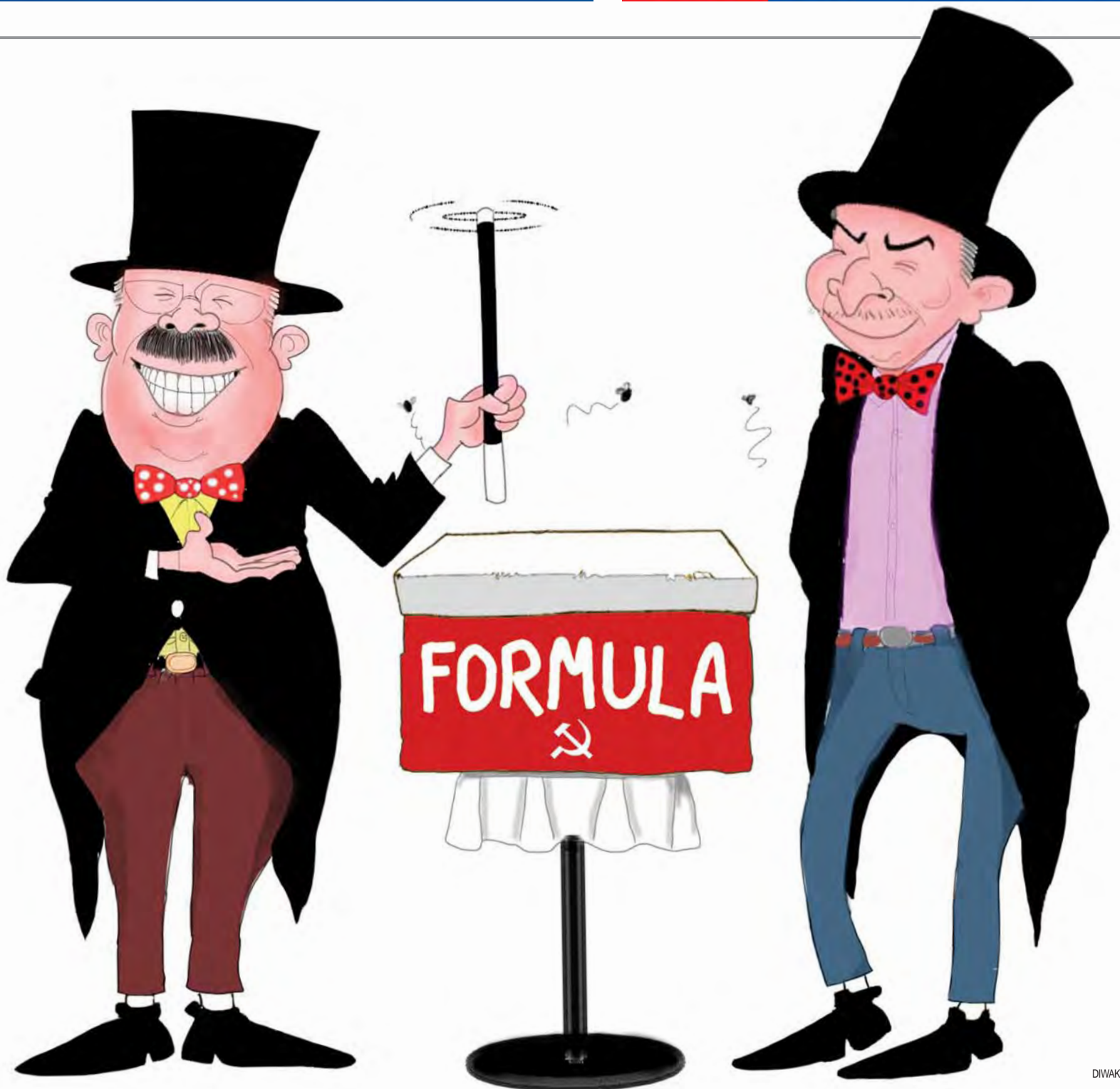
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DIWAKAR CHETTRI

The top secret new 'formula' to set up an election government led by the Chief Justice that the Maoists formally proposed on Thursday at their General Convention in Hetauda is not likely to find takers.

Constitutional lawyers and opposition parties flatly rejected it saying it was the latest move by the former revolutionaries to undermine the independent judiciary. Others said it was a red herring to allow the Maoist-


MAGIC SHOW

Madhesi coalition to buy time and postpone elections. The proposal is expected to be bitterly attacked at a big rally that opposition parties are organising in Kathmandu on Friday.

"It is unconstitutional, it is against the separation of powers of the executive and judiciary

in a democracy, and it won't resolve the deadlock," political scientist Krishna Khanal told *Nepali Times*.

Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal told reporters in Hetauda that there was a 'conductive atmosphere' for the appointment of the Chief Justice to head an election government.

Opposition figures and lawyers say the Maoist proposal could also be a ploy to let the deadline for holding election by May-end lapse so the coalition can stay on in power. 

Sunir Pandey

YEAR ZERO

The current government has dismantled all the constitutional checks and balances of Nepal's democracy one by one

Editorial page 2

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YEAR ZERO

A year-and-half ago when Baburam Bhattarai came to power on the back of a four-point deal reached with his Madhesi coalition partners, we cautiously welcomed the move. We had doubts that an alliance made up of unlikely bedfellows such as a centre-right ethnic party and ultra-communists had a future, but we hoped it would end instability.

'The public rates Bhattarai's intelligence, diligence, and honesty highly,' we wrote in this space, quite naively in retrospect. The prime minister started well with populist, yet popular, decisions. Bhattarai was tainted by his proximity to crooks, yet we gave him the benefit of doubt because the alternatives were so uninspiring.

Nearly two years into his administration, we admit that we seriously over-estimated the PhD prime minister's managerial skills, his personal integrity, and commitment to democracy and justice. Baburam Bhattarai has presided over the blatant plunder of the state by his party, tricked the opposition, run circles around the president, hoodwinked the international community to prolong his rule by systematically dismantling democratic institutions.

Historically around the world, Maoist rebels from the Shining Path to the Khmer Rouge have tried to take their countries back to 'Year Zero' through violence and armed struggle. After their convention this week, Nepal's Maoists have decided that attaining and retaining power is much easier by the ballot if they can co-opt constitutional organs.

The double-speaking Maoists have now weakened all the three main pillars of democracy. They dissolved the legislature on 27 May last year, and tried to pile the blame on the opposition. They consolidated their hold on the executive, manipulating the fear of



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

The constitutional checks and balances of Nepal's democracy are being systematically disassembled

persecution for war crimes among the security agencies to command their loyalty. They let the judiciary dangle by allowing the 25-member Supreme Court shrink to six justices. Now, Bhattarai has proposed appointing Chief Justice Khilraj Regmi as prime minister to head a technocratic government to supervise elections.

There are precedents in the region for chief justices

to lead election governments, but such a move here would further emasculate the Supreme Court. With its bold decisions, the latest in overturning the prime minister's instructions to stop the investigation into the wartime murder of journalist Dekendra Thapa, the Supreme Court has been the defender of last resort of democracy, free press, and the rule of law. Turning the judiciary into the executive would remove this last standing pillar.

Bhattarai's next target is the fourth estate. His party has tried to buy, intimidate, and infiltrate Nepal's main media. He has exhibited his contempt for free speech and justice by openly intervening in the Dekendra case. He has shown his disregard for the electoral process by leaving the Election Commission headless and without members. In short, all the constitutional checks and balances of Nepal's democracy have now been deliberately disassembled. Bhattarai is also hoping the talk of elections will take the focus away from the war criminals he is protecting.

The tragedy in all this, of course, is that the opposition parties which are supposed to be defenders of democracy, free press, pluralism, and non-violence have not been able to take the moral high ground and launch a credible defence of those core values.

But it should by now be clear to everyone, including the internationals, that the Maoist revolution was never about empowering the oppressed, about inclusion or democracy. They say they are a 'civilian party', but have simultaneously announced they can resort to violence if they aren't allowed to reach their goals. In Hetauda the party also unveiled a 'production' ideology patterned after Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward.

They have us all fooled: it was always about absolute power.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

THE INVISIBLES

Thank you Hari Bansha Acharya for your honest, heart-felt piece ('The invisibles', #641). Having been born and raised in the capital, I cannot even begin to understand the pain of fellow Nepalis living in the far-west and Tarai. The state as well as we the people of Kathmandu act as if we are the centre of the universe. Those who live outside the Valley must feel they don't belong to Nepal most of the time. The Maoists funneled this frustration and disillusionment of tens of thousands of Nepalis into a decade long war, and now that they are in power they have turned their backs on the people just like countless parties before them. Who is to say we won't see history repeating itself?

Renu Shreshtha

- As a foreigner, and having only been to places like Kathmandu and Pokhara, I have yet to see the extreme conditions in which people in the countryside live. I thought that Nepalis in Kathmandu are poor, but it seems what I've seen so far is just the tip of the iceberg.

Ruth

- This article reflects the true situation of the country and deserves to be on the front pages of national newspapers so that our leaders can read what the people really think of them.

Anonymous

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

While I agree that making Nepalis trilingual is the best way to preserve

our linguistic diversity, this is easier said than done ('Speaking in tongues', Editorial, #641). The state has probably zero interest in looking after languages when it has 'bigger' issues to deal with. The only reason parties bring up language is to play identity politics, I don't think they have any real desire to protect mother tongues. So it really comes down to the interest of local communities and schools. They have to take the initiative, but then again there is the question of money and resources. Maybe private schools should take the lead?

Nepali Ket



As if the Panchayat era's "euta bhasa euta bhesi" (one language, one dress) drive wasn't enough to push away hundreds of mother tongues from the mainstream, we are smothering our once-rich linguistic heritage further with our obsession with English ('Mind your languages', Mark Turin, #641). To make things worse, we Nepalis feel embarrassed speaking in our mother tongues.

As Mark Turin and Amrit Yonzon say, elements of local culture are important while developing curriculum but if the speakers aren't keen to learn in their own language and feel "pakhe" speaking their local languages, efforts made by the school sector reform program will be in vain.

Pakture

DISAPPEARANCE OF TRUTH

I appreciate Anurag Acharya's relentless calls for investigation into war crimes

applause.

Having fought a war of liberation on the basis of language Bangladeshis are very proud of their mother tongue. I feel we Nepalis don't feel the same pride in speaking our mother languages whether it is Nepali, Newari, Thami, or Bhojpuri. There is a language shaming along the lines of: "Chhi raamro English pani bolna audaina". Yes I agree that the responsibility of protecting our linguistic diversity lies with the state, but we need to start becoming prouder and loving our mother/local tongues as well.

Priya R

and justice for victims and their families ('The disappearance of truth', #641). His point about the Army banning the film *Badshala* because of fears that its dirty war secrets might be revealed, is spot on. However, his remaining analysis is flawed and very one-sided. He makes it seem like the Army was the only one involved in war-time atrocities. Such analysis does not help in the truth and reconciliation process in any way. The only way we as a nation can truly recover from the wounds of war is to have a just system which will investigate and punish atrocities committed by both the Maoists and the Army, no if's no but's.

Sangeeta

IN PERPETUAL RAGE

I enjoy reading Ajaz Ashraf's columns, he is very concise and manages to hit the bull's eye every single time ('Nation in perpetual rage', #641). I also like that he focuses on people and issues on the periphery and raises uncomfortable questions like this one about Indian media's obsession with big cities at the cost of telling the stories of Indians living on the fringes. The same could be said of us in the Nepali media. Our world begins and ends in Kathmandu. The only time we bother to look outside is when big parties decide to travel beyond the capital like this past weekend with the UCPN(M)'s convention in Hetauda or the territorial fight in Dailekh two weeks ago.

JB

- Is *Nepali Times* going to have Chinese columnists too, or is the guest column reserved for the Indian parade? 'Nepali' Times, indeed.

Anonymous

BROKEN WINGS

I am saddened to hear about the brutal and untimely demise of Catherine "Kitty" Houghton who was an immense inspiration for women pilots not only in Nepal but throughout the world ('Broken wings', #641). She deserves great praise for her hard work in making the skies safer and more women-friendly. May her soul rest in eternal peace.

Arguman

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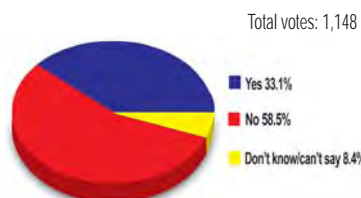
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Weekly Internet Poll #642

Q. Was the government right in banning the film *Badshala*?



Weekly Internet Poll # 643. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What do you think of the current chief justice Khil Raj Regmi as the next prime minister?

Trilateral Track Two

Thinkers from China, India, and Nepal explore a new common agenda for prosperity for their 2.5 billion people



GUEST COLUMN
Bhaskar Koirala

Setting aside the sophisticated discourse of international relations theories and all the 'isms' which we allow ourselves to be dictated and constrained by, one of the most compelling reasons to foster meaningful trilateral cooperation between China, India, and Nepal is to begin a process towards an 'Asian values' paradigm.

The term 'Asian values' has got a lot of bad press because of the perception that it undermines democracy and is against basic individual freedoms. It is often seen as an antithesis to 'Western values' of individual political freedom and pluralism.

But Nepal, together with the two Asian giants it borders to the north and south, all share a quest to generate more wealth and spread prosperity more equitably among their peoples. Maybe there is a new path and a re-definition of value systems that stem from the rich cultural and philosophical legacies of these three nations.

From Mumbai to Shanghai, from Lhasa to Lumbini, from Xi'an to Bhaktapur, from New Delhi to Beijing, the three countries subsume the medieval to the ancient, the past, present, and future. Can the blend of a rich cultural legacy with modern technological advancement bring about progress, both material and spiritual?

We have become accustomed to relying on a certain body of knowledge which prevents us from thinking outside the box, as it were. Our acculturation, education background, and upbringing may predispose us



NISS

to accepting certain values as inalienable. But can we create a different constellation of beliefs that we could truly call an 'Asian resurgence' that combines the possibility of spectacular material well-being without sacrificing human dignity and freedoms?

Within all three of our countries we find common beliefs and practices that could be described as 'medieval', features which are apparently inconsistent with mainstream understanding of development, or incongruous with prevalent notions of democracy.

However they are not necessarily so and an earnest effort must be made to calibrate a new ideology for progress from the common cultural substrates in China, Nepal, and India. What contribution can the three states make that will translate into actual day-to-day cooperation in international relations and the promotion of regional peace?

The concurrent rise of China and India is a geopolitical event that presages a new epoch in international relations. Much of the commentary on this issue, however, is cast in terms of competition and rivalry. The notion of how these two states

might collaborate in a practical sense, and perhaps involving a third country like Nepal with which both are geographically linked, has not received the attention that it deserves.

Last week, academics and thinkers from the three countries came together in Kathmandu in a unique trilateral meeting organised by the Nepal Institute of International and Strategic Studies (NISS) to begin to discuss, starting from a clean slate, a common approach to

THREE'S COMPANY: Academics and thinkers from Nepal, China, and India attended a trilateral meeting on 30 January to discuss a common approach to development and progress.

development and progress.

It was an open exchange of ideas in which nothing was considered impossible or taboo. It was a modest step on a shoe-string budget to see if there is a Track II tripartite dialogue that takes a fresh new look at the philosophical underpinnings of a

future partnership that can lead to progress and prosperity for the nearly 2.5 billion people in the three countries.

How can the vast majority of people in the three countries gain from a structured, calculated, and realistic cooperation? What are the untapped complementarities in a future China-India-Nepal trilateral framework?

NISS partnered with the Centre for South Asia-West China Cooperation and Development Studies of Sichuan University, the China Institute of International Studies in Beijing, the Institute of Chinese Studies in New Delhi, and the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences in Lhasa.

This trilateral partnership, which will meet next in Beijing, will not just be a talk-fest, but explore concrete ideas for cooperation in energy with the possibility for trans-boundary power trade agreements, security, fighting crimes across borders, and jointly addressing disaster management. ■

Bhaskar Koirala is the Director of the Nepal Institute of International and Strategic Studies.
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“Money from remittances should be used to create jobs at home”



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Everest Bank, a joint venture with India's Punjab National Bank, is heavily involved in helping finance Nepal's trade with India and other countries. CEO PK Mohapatra, spoke to *Nepali Times* this week about the difficulties in keeping tabs on remittances from India, Nepal's inability to boost capital formation, and why agriculture in Nepal needs a boost.

Nepali Times: Most official figures for remittances from Nepalis working abroad ignore Indian rupees sent from India. Do we have a ballpark figure on remittances from India?

PK Mohapatra: We feel that approximately 60 per cent is received through official banking channels, and our bank channelises around NPR 20 billion a year. SBI Nepal gets another NPR 45 billion approximately. In addition there are withdrawals made from ATMs in Nepal by family members in Nepal from account holders earning in India. The system doesn't catch all of that.

How important for Nepal are remittances from India?

See, it's a simple correlation. Approximately 67 per cent of Nepal's imports come from India, and since there is a big deficit in the country's balance of trade with India, remittances are crucial to pay for the said imports. The shortfall is made up for by exchanging US dollars for Indian rupees. Nepal's economy has large dependence on remittance.

But the shortage of INR has set off a black market for Indian currency, putting pressure on the fixed exchange rate with NPR.

Yes, but the beauty of the fixed exchange rate is that the Nepali remitters in India do not have to worry about exchange rate fluctuation. The black market is due to a demand-supply mismatch which in turn is caused by the trade imbalance. Tampering with the exchange rate by devaluing the NPR would benefit the Nepali worker in India, but it would have an adverse effect on the economy as a whole with inflationary pressure right across all the sectors of the economy on a short to medium term perspective.

But the migrant economy also has downsides?

Precisely. I have been travelling throughout Nepal and one can see the social impact on communities and families of the migrant population. There is additionally the adverse effect on the availability of labour and on the agriculture sector. A major part of the money sent home is spent on consumption since there isn't much of a habit of long-term saving.

So the net contribution to the national economy is not so significant?

When remittances are mostly spent on consumption there is no commensurate capital formation. It is spent on buying consumer goods, which are mostly imported so the money goes right back out. Despite that the role can't be termed insignificant. The national strategy should however be to use the funds from remittances to create jobs so people won't have to migrate.

What should the government do?

From a banker's view, emphasis should be on financial literacy, that is people should be educated in saving for the long-term. This will help in investment which will lead to creation of new jobs. Secondly, the government should increase spending on infrastructure which will act as a catalyst for further growth and creation of jobs. The third important issue is skill upgradation. If the youth interested to migrate can even be taught simple skills, their capacity will increase resulting in increased remittance. And lastly, the industrial environment in the country should be improved to encourage new investment and capacity addition which will encourage the youth to work in their own motherland. Nepal has the potential to bounce back with investments in hydropower, IT, and service sector.

How badly is the banking sector affected?

Banking is a cyclical business. In Nepal, there was a spurt of growth in a short time. The system had to cope with new technology, young managers with limited experience, and promoter businessmen with limited exposure to running banks. This resulted in a large number of banks competing with one another for a restricted business potential. The problem was compounded by the issue of corporate governance. However, as is everywhere, the system is learning from past experience and getting through the process of consolidation. As the regulator, Nepal Rastra Bank is also on a learning curve and is taking corrective action to protect depositors and making the system robust.

On balance, it looks like you are cautiously optimistic about Nepal's future?

There is cause for optimism. Hydropower has tremendous potential, and with the Nepal Investment Board taking charge, a lot of hurdles are being removed. The country's fortune is linked to the service sector which includes hospitality, information technology, health care etc. But the sector crying for immediate help is agriculture. Investment in agriculture and agro-based industries is critical to create jobs and arrest migration of productive labour. And last, but most importantly, we need a paradigm shift in the mindset of the younger generation and that can only come about with long-term investment in quality education.

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A far-west side story

Nepal's backwater is slowly beginning to rebuild and rebrand itself



ECONOMY STUPID
Puja Tandon

Neglected by the state, the far-western region of Nepal and its people have languished in a corner for centuries. A visit to any one of the nine districts often leaves many wondering how a place endowed with great biodiversity and abundant natural resources fell so far behind in its economy?

The decade long civil war undeniably pushed the region's development back decades. Thousands were displaced, bridges were



burnt, cutting access to the markets, food supply networks were destroyed, and most development projects and businesses pulled out.

Investment came to a grinding halt and jobs vanished and the ones who stayed behind had to survive on aid and food rations. Remnants of this aid dependence can still be seen in the bajars where Mercy Corps boards still outnumber advertisement hoardings.

Transboundary relations with India, regulated mostly by the infamous Mahakali Treaty,

too has played a critical role in restricting progress in the districts.

The business community is weak (non-existent in certain places) compared to other parts of Nepal. the private sector is slack, the meaning of entrepreneurship is obscure with no one willing to take risks. Businesses talk big but are not ready to stand up to the challenges.

However, there are signs the far-west is slowly waking up from its slumber. The few entrepreneurs who took the plunge are doing well. Banking systems are well-developed and most major banks have branches from Darchula in the north to Kailali in the south. Although national

newspapers reach here the next day, the local Nepali dailies are showing hints of progress and their positive and inclusive coverage is exemplary. Lack of proper health care still plagues the people here, but service delivery by staff mostly trained in India is much better than in the western and central regions.

Tourism and far-western Nepal don't usually belong in the same sentence, but there is definite potential here to promote the 'Sundar Sudur Paschimanchal' brand.

Throngs of Indian tourists from neighbouring towns flock to the three casinos in the region, go back before sunset, only to return the next day, leading to a gambling industry boom.

Thousands more cross the border at Kanchanpur/Kailali on their way to Bardia. With good road networks, no water or electricity shortages, and plenty of natural beauty on offer the districts can easily attract transit passengers to stay over for a day or two. Exclusive products like rice wine, banana wine, allo (a local fibre), and Tharu and Rana handicraft just need better branding to capture a wider international market.

If tourism takes off in the region it will help inject much needed cash into the local economy and lift living standards. However, if it happens in an unregulated and unplanned manner, then tourism could end up destroying remaining forests, polluting waterways and lead to exploitation and overcrowding similar to central Nepal. This balance is imperative.

Who should lead the 'sundar sudur paschimanchal' campaign? I believe the private sector along with the locals themselves should be at the forefront. But unless people are weaned off aid they won't be motivated to take risks or start a business. The locals will also need some basic entrepreneurship training which is where grassroots NGOs can step in. And the state for its part should negotiate with India for better border management to facilitate trade and economic activities in the region. ■

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Saving our heritage

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IT power

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WATER WORKS

Lack of local elections makes local officials less accountable, jeopardising vital rural water supply


ANNA-KARIN ERNSTSON LAMPOU
in TANAHUN

Two hour drive from Pokhara is the small mountain village of Nagnagini, but its picturesque setting below the Annapurnas masks a severe shortage of water. Like most other remote parts of Nepal, women and young girls in this village of Tanahu district spend hours fetching water with gagri on their hips. Because of the lack of access to safe drinking water,

easily preventable gastric infections are still major killers of children. Nearly 85 per cent of Nepalis today have access to safe drinking water, and this has been a big improvement from the past. But only 18 per cent of state-run water supply systems are fully functional. With help from the Finland government, five years ago the government launched the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Western Nepal (RWSSP-WN) to improve access to clean water. Part of the solution is technical:

SPRING OF HOPE: A young woman from Nagnagini in Tanahun uses a tap nearby her house. Before the solar run water pumps were installed by RWSSP-WN, she would have to walk for hours to collect water everyday.

installing solar panels to power pumps to lift water directly into villages across nine districts. But in Nepal technology alone is never the answer, so the project tries to work closely with district and village councils to manage and maintain the new systems. To encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility, each household helped with construction and bore one per cent of the costs with the Nepali and Finnish governments providing the rest. However, lack of local elections have meant that VDCs are less accountable to the people. In some places, the new water system has helped generate income and employs coordinators, engineers, health promoters, technicians, and maintenance workers, many of whom are from local communities. And with water taps now a short walk away, women have more free time which they use to augment their earnings through organic farming, bee keeping, and raising livestock. RWSSP-WN has made inclusion of women and members of marginalised communities a high priority. Compared to other national-level programs the participation of large number of women in particular is encouraging. The project's gender and inclusion mobiliser, Sangita Khadka, says changing deep-rooted patriarchal and institutional barriers is an ongoing struggle. However, poor management and lack of transparency mean that communities have not benefited as much as they should and the long-term sustainability

of the project is at risk. Administrators at the DDCs and VDCs show interest during the construction phase, but once the physical infrastructure is in place there is insufficient monitoring of water use and user groups are not provided with technical support. The mechanism to collect water tax from users does not work, maintenance is shoddy, and workers are not always paid on time. "Construction was the easy part," admits Amrit Rai, head of the project's Pokhara office, "but the process afterwards of mobilising and supporting the locals is hard and they aren't being met." In the village of Nabrungdevi where the pumps are powered by electricity instead of solar, two out of the four pumps are out of order and the remaining cannot meet local requirements. Over at Nagnagini, the water supply is sufficient but neither the pumps at the source nor the solar panels are fenced to protect them from pollution and stray cattle and the pipes too are not fully covered. The village is yet to elect a pump operator and so far no fees have been collected. In Kathmandu, Finland's ambassador to Nepal, Asko Luukkainen admitted the problems, saying that the lack of locally elected councils affected accountability across Nepal, and was impeding the progress of development projects like the ones in Tanahun. Luukkainen added: "We have to make decisions based on meetings with government officials, but have no local point of contact. So those decisions are not very democratic and might not be what the communities actually want. This is why local election is so critical."  www.rwsspwn.org.np

nepalitimes.com 
The political will not to politicise everything, #636

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Conserving conservation

Nepal's showcase eco-tourism project in the Annapurnas is facing a delicate transition

SARA PARKER

In the monsoon of 1992 I was a volunteer at the Modern Annapurna High School in Siklis. I was young, enthusiastic, and eager to learn about life in rural Nepal.

It was a time of much optimism in Nepal, village elections had just taken place and ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project) was moving into its second phase. I was able to see first hand the work being done by a small team of committed conservationists, who were motivated to environmental preservation, while ensuring that conservation did not impact the local communities with whom they worked negatively.

The late Chandra Prasad Gurung headed ACAP then, an eco-tourism project that he himself had pioneered. The 'boy from Siklis' had the charisma and vision to change conservation thinking not only in Nepal but on a global scale. ACAP teams motivated community activities and development of a ground-breaking environmental curriculum for schools.

Many hours were spent meeting, talking with and listening to local people, explaining the ACAP approach and how it differed from the then dominant National Park policy and approach to conservation. This was when conservation initiatives globally were based on the western perspective that the environment should be preserved whatever the cost, and that people were the problem.



LAXIMAN THAPA

Thankfully, voices from non-Western, indigenous communities emerged to challenge this view and a more holistic model of development emerged that integrated conservation and development needs. Nepal was at the forefront of this paradigm shift and made a significant contribution to the legacy of bottom-up, people-centred development. Conservation leaders such as Chandra and the late Mingma Norbu Sherpa contributed to this shift.

As a lecturer in the mid 1990's at Liverpool John Moores University I returned to Nepal for research in the Annapurnas. At first, I questioned the sustainability of ACAP and its ability to meet the needs of all the people in the area, while conserving the environment at the same time. The relevance of the non-formal education program was also in doubt. But discussions with local people, especially women, proved how empowering and relevant ACAP's literacy classes were.

I helped facilitate the introduction of the REFLECT program into the Siklis sector of ACAP, an approach to non-formal education pioneered by Action Aid and adopted by Education Networks in Nepal, and was used it as the central research topic of my PhD thesis.

Many people still ask "What has ACAP done? It only planted trees." It is true ACAP supported local communities in establishing community plantation sites, but that was only part of the story. ACAP also backed local demand for development projects for over 25 years. In addition to the trees, there are now locally-run conservation committees, lodge management committees, and a range of other locally based institutions which have helped to establish power and control of resources at the grassroots level where it is most relevant and effective. It is hard to imagine what the area would have been like if ACAP had not existed.

ACAP originally had a 20 year vision and in July 2012 the Nepal Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) was given one more year to manage the project. This could be seen as a wise move because after all the key mission of ACAP is to hand over resources to the locals. However, it has to be done responsibly and free from party politics that has plagued other conservation success stories in Nepal.

ACAP needs to be transferred to local communities in a phased-out manner in order to build on, rather than diminish, its achievements. A new agency is not needed to fulfil this role, the staff within ACAP have the knowledge, skills, and connections to manage this process, but they need to be given the time to do it in a professional and supportive manner.

There may in fact be a need for a pared-down version of ACAP to remain in place, to ensure that funds and projects are delivered in the area for the long-term. But it is time now for the project hand over. This was the original vision and it needs to be honoured, the question is how to do this.

Funds from tourism and external agencies with an interest in supporting conservation and development projects will still be needed in the area as new challenges emerge, such as road construction impacting on tourism routes and climate change impacting on agricultural production.

Rather than make a rash decision more time should be given to NTNC and the staff at ACAP to ensure the transition and handover are managed in such a way that local communities have the necessary support and skills to take full responsibility for the conservation of resources of the Annapurnas.

There is still a need for ACAP to act as a go-between, but one that plays a smaller role in the process and is led more by the demands of local people rather than the wider political situation in which it finds itself.

Sara Parker is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Liverpool John Moores University whose PhD focused on action research, non-formal education and women's participation and empowerment.

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Conservation of interests, #621
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EVENTS

HIMALISTAN, the Himal Southasian magazine relaunches itself in a new avatar: as the first quarterly 'bookazine' of Southasia. 8 February, 4pm, Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka

Podcasting and audio storytelling workshop, learn how to develop, produce, and edit a compelling and dynamic audio story and reach a wider audience through the internet. Rs 1,000, 13 to 27 February, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel



EVERYDAY EPIPHANIES, an exhibition of photographs on Nepal by Frederic Lecloux. 31 January to 13 February, 10am to 6pm, Sundays to Fridays, Alliance Francaise, Tripureswor

Earth, body, mind, find all the Nepali artists' work from the recently held Kathmandu International Art Festival in one place. Runs till 13 February, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal

Theatre training, gain a comprehensive grounding in the performing arts. 1 February to 29 April, Sushila Arts Academy, (01)4015643, www.sushilaartsacademy.com

Pondering moments, an exhibition of paintings by artist Seema Acharya. 3 to 8 February, Imago Dei, Naxal, 9841038675



ULTIMATE PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP, attend this intense workshop to get a extensive knowledge on creative post production and flash use from maestros Shahnawaz Mohammad and Rajeeb Maharjan; only four seats available. Rs 3,000, 14 to 16 February, 7 to 9.30am, The Image Park, New Road, Kathmandu, register by 10 February, 9841240341/9841497639

Nepal International Indigenous Film Festival, the seventh edition of the annual NIFF will explore issues related to Nepal's minorities. 25 to 28



April, City Hall, Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road, (01)4102577, ifa_festivals@yahoo.com, www.ifanepal.org.np

Comic relief, get ready for some great stand-up comedy with JLT, an up and coming group of talented comedians. 16 February, Manny's Eatery and Tapas Bar, (01)5536919



PRANAMAYA YOGA, join Sati for a day of Ashtanga Yoga and guided nature walk in the pristine forest of Shivapuri; then join Marion Werger in Patan the next day for a session of partner yoga. Rs 3,500, 8.30am to 6pm, 9 February, Shivapuri Retreat; Rs 800, 1.30 to 3.30pm, 10 February, Moksh complex, Patan; 9851002920

Startup weekend, pitch your ideas for new startups and stand to win prizes and sponsorships from established companies and entrepreneurs. 8 to 10 February, SAP Falcha, Babarmahal, Kathmandu, 6pm to midnight on Friday, 8.30am to midnight on Saturday, 8.30am to 9pm on Sunday, kathmandu@startupweekend.org, 9851084889

DINING



BARBEQUE BRUNCH BAZAAR, the delights of Lebanon, Mongolian, Indian, Japanese, and Nepali cuisine await you every Saturday. Rs 1,999 for adults, Rs 1,299 for children, 12 to 2.30pm, 9 February, Gokarna Forest Resort



YAK RESTAURANT, serves authentic Chinese food, try the mala tofu, chicken with fungus and spicy pork spare ribs. Boudha, Kathmandu



DRAGON CHINESE RESTAURANT, try the Kung Pao Pork if alone and the Mai Cao if with company. Lakeside, Pokhara

Chongqing Fast Food, gear up for some mouth watering Chinese dishes like Sour and Spicy Pork and Kung Pao Chicken. Thamel

Shangrila Kitchen, try the majestic Gyakok and a wide variety of cocktails. 9am to 10.30 pm, Hotel Tibet International, Boudha



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, (01)5551118

New Dish, grab filling meals like pork momos, spring rolls, and chop sueys with excellent value for money. Khiccha Pokhari

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Xin Nian Kuai Le

For those unfamiliar with the Chinese calendar, this week marks the traditional Lunar New Year, a time for fun, family, and feasting. 2013 is the Year of the Snake, replacing the Year of the Dragon in 2012.

According to traditional Chinese beliefs, each year in the calendar is assigned one of twelve animals, and it is thought that these may have an influence on one's personality, character quirks, and fortune for the year ahead. For example, those born in 1965, 1977, 1989, and 2001 are said to be 'snakes'. An additional element of fire, wood, water, earth or metal is also assigned depending on a two year cycle.

Astrologists have predicted that this year is particularly auspicious for 'Water Snakes'. All the other serpents will have a smooth sailing in their businesses and personal relations. If you are not sure of your Chinese animal avatar, enlightenment is only a mouse click away.

The Lunar New Year is one of the biggest holidays celebrated within China, and around the world where there is a significant community of ethnic Chinese, such as Southeast Asia or California in the United States. An estimated 700 million people in China alone will travel back home to their villages and towns to visit their ageing parents and relatives.

The Lunar New Year isn't an officially recognised holiday here in Nepal, but ethnic Chinese residents still find time to celebrate. Professor Zhang Shubin, director of the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University, recently threw a party on 26 January with traditional games, songs, and poetry recitals. Although you won't be seeing the popular lion dances and firecrackers



on the streets of Kathmandu, with more and more young Nepalis fascinated with Chinese culture and languages, the festivities are likely to catch up. And for those of you who want to experience the real deal, a short trip to China at this time of year might not be a bad idea. You will get a taste of the culture and tradition minus the crowd, chaos, and pollution.

For restaurants and caterers serving Chinese food, the New Year is traditionally the busiest and most profitable time of the year. Many Chinese families take advantage of their extended leave from work to travel abroad and neighbouring Nepal has

always been a popular destination.

The Chinese have given you the perfect excuse to party, so what are you waiting for? Gather your friends and family, head out to Tian Rui (see Page 9) or the nearest Chinese establishment this Sunday and ring in a Snaky New Year. Xin Nian Kuai Le! 🇨🇳

Sulaiman Daud



GETAWAYS

Waterfront Resort, on the occasion of its first anniversary, the hotel invites you for special barbeque dinners on Friday and lunches on Saturday. *Sedi height, Lakeside road, Pokhara (061)466303/304, www.waterfronthotelnepal.com*



Gokarna Forest Reserve, lunch, dine, or spend the night away from the noisy city on Valentine Day. *Rs 2,999 for lunch only, Rs 3,999 for dinner, Rs 11,000 for overnight package including dinner and breakfast, 14 February, Gokarna Forest Resort, (01)4451212, 9801051212*

Last Resort, canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping – test your limits at the Last Resort. *Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525/1247*

Mum's Garden Resort, head out to Pokhara for a peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages surrounded by a lush green garden with great views of Phewa Lake and the Annapurna range. *Lake Side, Pokhara, (061)463468, www.mumsgardenresort.com*

1000 trees



With Kathmandu's growing urban sprawl and recent roadscapeing, trees are quite a rare sight in the Valley these days. An NGO called Children of a Green New Nepal is taking the lead in saving our

leafy friends and reclaiming green spaces around the city. CGNN invites young and old, locals and foreigners, NGO and government workers to take a pledge on Friday afternoon to plant 1,000 trees around the Kathmandu so that the Valley is less polluted, more healthy, and beautiful once again. 1 to 3pm, February 8, Patan Darbar Square www.cgnn.org.np, (01)4443423, 9851112770, 9803173798



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SOMEPLACE ELSE

Many restaurants across the Valley claim to offer 'authentic' Chinese food, along with local fare, and other continental dishes. But their selections are usually limited to generic fried rice and chow mein, which would be unrecognisable to a true connoisseur of Chinese cuisine. Fortunately for those seeking something a little more true to form, the Tian Rui Chinese Restaurant and Bar in Thapathali steps up to the plate.

The restaurant is spacious with private tables upstairs, perfect for family gatherings. The walls are also decorated in traditional red paper lanterns and posters displaying choice recommendations from the



PICS: CINDREY LIU

menu, which might make you even hungrier than before you stepped in.

It's a good thing then that the service at Tian Rui is fast, polite, and efficient, with our food arriving in no time after

we placed our orders. The waiters even helped me tuck in my napkin properly and were quick to spot an empty glass on the table, filling it up with free refills of piping hot jasmine tea, the perfect accompaniment to

any Chinese meal.

The menu offers a range of starters, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. We decided to try a bit of both, ordering the golden fried mushroom (Rs 189) and the chef's special spicy fish (Rs 329). The mushrooms were immensely satisfying, fried in tempura batter but lighter and easier on the stomach than a meat dish. The fish was served with garlic and two different kinds of chilies for flavour, and fried whole. Crispy and crunchy, we gobbled it up, head and all.

Of course no Chinese meal is complete without plain white rice (Rs 89). Like in Nepal, the phrase 'have you eaten?' in Chinese literally translates to 'have you eaten rice?' Served in generous portions, one plate is quite enough for two people.

For the mains we ordered the sweet and sour chicken (Rs 349) and the green vegetables with carrots and mushrooms (Rs 219). Although the chicken was drizzled with sweet sauce



and served alongside chunks of capsicums and pineapple, it didn't have the kick I was used to from this particular dish. The vegetable dish had a little more oyster sauce than necessary, but it went well with the rice and the rest of the meal.

There were more delicious sounding items on the menu, like the crispy fried duck (Rs 649) and the chili garlic prawns (Rs 729), but we were simply too full to eat another bite. If you're looking for a good restaurant to celebrate the Lunar New Year this week or just to try some genuinely good Chinese food, Tian Rui is a safe bet. 🇳🇵

Sulaiman Daud

How to get there: cross the Bagmati Bridge in Thapathali, and walk towards Institute of Engineering, Tian Rui is on your left-hand side next to Skoda showroom.

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SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

This latest film by David O Russell caught me by surprise. His last, wonderful film *The Fighter* (2010) is in many ways seemingly the antithesis of *Silver Linings Playbook*, but on second glance it becomes apparent that, in fact, these two films share quite a few elements: the intricacies of the relationships between parents and children, the unconditional love between siblings, the maddening eccentricities of one's parents (and children), and the indisputable fact that indeed, no one's family is perfect.

While *The Fighter* is very firmly in the dramatic category, *Silver Linings Playbook* has been labelled a romantic comedy. Don't be fooled and put off by this categorisation though. While I am not willing to entirely slam this particular genre, I will admit that it has given birth to more mediocrity than excellence. Luckily, *Silver Linings Playbook* falls into the latter.

Outwardly the film follows the very mundane plot line of two people meeting, getting to know each other, overcoming several obstacles in their path to happiness, and living happily ever after. However, even from the very outset our two very star-crossed lovers are so much more interesting than the average Ryan Reynolds, Rachel McAdams types.

Bradley Cooper plays Pat Solitano Jr a school teacher turned mental asylum inmate who had previously thought his anger issues were run of the mill until he discovered his wife in the shower with her fellow history teacher. His reaction, involving extreme violence, lands him with a restraining order barring him from approaching his wife and said history teacher, as well as a mandatory period at the mental asylum.

When Pat's mother Dolores (played by the hilarious Jacki Weaver) rescues him from the asylum, Pat Jr returns home reluctantly to be anxiously monitored by his parents. Robert DeNiro does an equally comedic turn as Pat Sr, a man who himself has anger issues and has been barred from ever entering a football arena after having inflicted grievous bodily harm upon several people at an Eagle's game in his youth.

Enter Tiffany Maxwell (played by the extremely talented Jennifer Lawrence) a recovering depressive and sex addict who went into a decline after the death of her long suffering but stoically loving husband.

Even as Pat Jr resists, Tiffany's sharp tongue and prodigious intelligence captivate him, though Pat doggedly refuses to acknowledge that the growing friendship between them might become something more, were he only to accept that his wife will never take him back.

Of course the story goes through several ups and downs, as romantic comedies are wont to do. However, it is the sensitive, nuanced portrayal of both of these deeply flawed human beings as well as the droll, sometimes even farcical, trials and tribulations of the people around them that keep the viewer rapt.

Cooper, Lawrence, Weaver, and DeNiro have all been nominated for each of the Best Actor/Actress and Supporting Actor/Actress categories in February's Academy Awards ceremony; no mean feat for the seemingly 'light' film that *Silver Linings Playbook* initially purports to be. These nominations are more than well-deserved, backed though, of course, by the behemoth publicity machine behind the Weinstein production company. Watch the film and decide for yourselves if any of the four deserve to win.

nepalitimes.com
Watch trailer

Competent, compassionate, complete care



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

For years, Christian Medical College (CMC) Hospital in Vellore used to be the definitive medical centre for Nepalis who could afford a trip to south India. And Nepali doctors would frequently refer complicated cases to their counterparts in CMC.

For example, if a patient at Patan Hospital (back then Shanta Bhawan Hospital) was diagnosed with lung cancer, she would travel to Vellore (if she had the financial resources) to confirm or in many cases refute the verdict.

Today there are many other hospitals in Nepal and India that vie for Nepali patients, but CMC still stands out as one of the best. Competent and compassionate staff, and affordability mean that most patients stay loyal.

CMC hospital was started in the early 1900s by Ida Scudder,

a third-generation American missionary doctor. Initially, she had no interest in carrying on the family profession. However, one day while visiting her doctor father in south India, she saw the husbands of three pregnant patients refuse to show their wives to her father because he was a man. Tragically the three women died of obstructed labour (a major killer in



Nepal even today) and birth complications that night.

This incident proved to be a huge turning point for Ida. She went to the US, completed her medical studies from Cornell University in 1899, and returned to establish the CMC which continues to serve the health

care needs of many rich and poor patients in South Asia.

The hospital today boasts of departments like microbiology (study of pathogens such as bacteria, viruses, fungus) that are second to none in India. As microbiology is one of the most neglected areas of medicine in the subcontinent, many doctors prescribe drugs empirically based on clinical history and examinations. However, this prescription is often inadequate because in certain situations knowing a suspected organism's sensitivity or resistance to a particular drug can be vital, especially when one is dealing with 'killer' bugs like mycobacterium tuberculosis.

While hospitals like the well-appointed Hinduja in Mumbai also boast reliable microbiology laboratories, they charge exorbitant fees. New, modern Nepali hospitals with state of the art microbiology units are coming up, but it will take some time before they can replicate CMC's level of excellence and success.



BIKRAM RAI

EXTRA CHEESE: A cadre takes photos of his friends gathered at Hupra Chaur, Hetauda for the UCPN(M)'s seventh general convention on Saturday afternoon.



CINDREY LIU

HERE COMES THE BRIDE: A band plays music and leads a wedding car down the street in Thamel on Tuesday afternoon.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

SHOWING OFF: School children admire a street mural depicting the Tarai at Swayambhu and ask questions to volunteer artists from Satya Media on Monday.

READERS' PHOTO

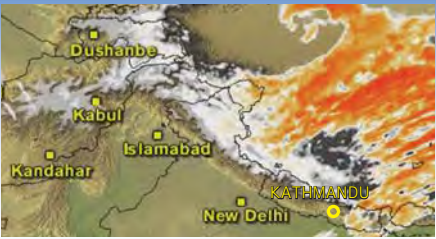


ANIL K MAHAJU

GOING GREEN: Villagers return after collecting fodder for their cattle from Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in eastern Tarai.

WEEKEND WEATHER

The westerly disturbance that brought the second winter spell this year was welcomed by farmers. But there just wasn't enough precipitation to make a big dent on the falling water level on Kulekhani Reservoir, or raise the flow of water in rivers. Which means the power cuts will be as bad as ever. The rains cleared up the haze, and after a few days with chilly mornings we can expect a gradual shift to spring weather as the maximum climbs to 22 Celsius over the weekend, but the minimum will hover at 4 Celsius. There will be some morning mist in Kathmandu Valley, leading to clearer and brighter afternoons.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
20° 4°	21° 4°	22° 4°

The post-Prachanda path

The first post-conflict Maoist general convention has finally departed from the communist doctrine of armed struggle



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

When Pushpa Kamal Dahal was addressing the 7th General Convention of his party in Hetauda this week, in the audience were international delegates from communist parties around the world.

By the time Dahal finished speaking, it was clear to them that the UCPN (Maoist) was finally letting go of the doctrine of violence. He was jettisoning justification of Stalin's atrocities and the mass deaths that followed Mao's Cultural Revolution.

"Revolution in the 21st century can neither emulate the Soviet model nor the Chinese one. We must find our own way as we move ahead," he said. Unlike his earlier speeches, which disguised an incongruous adherence to obsolete ideologies, the Maoist Supremo went on to chart out a post-Prachanda path for his party.

His political document declares that Nepal is no more a semi-feudal and semi-colonised society, and that the objective conditions for an armed struggle do not exist any more. It states that the relevance of the 'Prachanda Path' as a guiding principle is over, adding that the party will now work to institutionalise achievements gained after ten years of war and 19 days of people's movement by finalising and declaring a new constitution through the Constituent Assembly.

In an effort to gain international legitimacy, the



BIKRAM RAI

governing Maoist party fast tracked rehabilitation and integration of its armed wing last year, following which the party was taken off the list of terrorist organisations by the United States. The latest change defines the evolution of the revolution and the party's new civilian avatar.

The political document has no mention of class enemy, and unlike past documents does not decry Indian expansionism and US imperialism as the primary threat to Nepali nationalism. The concept of 'revolutionary' land reform has been replaced by a 'scientific' system, and the party has abandoned the earlier policy of confiscating private property and distributing it to the landless.

"Radicals will certainly be disappointed but social democrats who want a reformed Maoist party in peaceful competitive politics will welcome this change," leftist intellectual Shyam Shrestha told me as we discussed the document.

To be sure, Dahal's

position paper fails to clarify the party's position and commitment towards completing the peace process by establishing a Truth Commission and addressing war crimes. And there is still a long way to go before the party can truly behave like a non-violent democratic entity.

The leadership must reorient and discipline its cadre, especially in labour unions and youth wings, who are still gripped by a war era militant mindset and often resort to lumpenism. It must tolerate criticism and use democratic means to express dissent rather than threatening physical action against those who disagree with the party's conduct.

However, by renouncing violence as a means of acquiring power, the UCPN(M) has taken a bold step, and clearly the right one. For the first time, the party formally condemned left-wing extremism and dogmatism of its

former Vice-Chairman Mohan Baidya and acknowledged that anarchist behaviour of former leaders like Matrika Yadav hurt its image in the Madhes.

By reaffirming its pledge to the 12-point understanding and commitment to drafting the constitution in partnership with other parties through a Constituent Assembly, the Maoists have sent a message to sympathisers as well as the opposition that they are willing to negotiate long-term space in mainstream Nepali politics. To the dismay of agitating opposition in the streets, the spotlight was firmly on Hetauda and not on their sparsely-attended and rained-out gatherings in various parts of the country.

At a time when the political landscape looks as gloomy as the weather, this is a silver-lining for Nepali democracy, and one need not be a Maoist supporter to welcome it. 🇳🇵

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NO RIGHT OF PASSAGE

Lacking proper roads and sidewalks, Kathmandu Valley is one of the most difficult places to live in for those who are mobility-impaired

SULAIMAN DAUD

Kathmandu's streets are what nightmares are made of. The roads are narrow, there are pot holes at every corner, minibuses stop anywhere they want, and reckless drivers try to overtake one another like they are in a race. Like the rest of us, Bal Krishnan Ghimire (*pic, right*) too navigates through this chaos every day from his home in Jawalakhel to his work and back. But afflicted with polio from an early age, Bal Krishnan cannot walk and has to make this journey on a wheelchair.

With no accessible footpaths, his wheelchair is forced to compete for legroom with hundreds of cars, two wheelers, and tempos on the main road. When he wants to visit a shop,

he has to first get down from his wheelchair and crawl over the wooden threshold found at the entrances of most public buildings. If there was a 'most-disability-unfriendly cities in the world' list, Nepal would be in the top 10.

Despite these challenges, the 48-year-old weaver and craftsman considers himself fortunate. "I can get out of my wheelchair by myself," he states matter-of-factly, "I wonder how fellow Nepalis who are blind or have spinal injuries go about their day-to-day lives in this uncaring city."

According to the 2011 census, more than 500,000 Nepalis (nearly two per cent of the population) have some form of disability and those with mobility disability like Bal Krishnan make up nearly two-fifths of the total.



DANGER AHEAD: Bal Krishnan Ghimire waits patiently for the traffic to stop before attempting to cross the road in Patan.



However, under-reporting due to the shame attached to being disabled and the government's narrow definitions, mean that the actual numbers are higher.

Nepal became one of the first countries in the region to introduce a disability act in 1982 and is a signatory to the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Despite the numerous guarantees and significant aid, the state has little to show for its efforts.

There are no policies to assist those on wheelchairs at schools, hospitals, private and government offices, no

www.nagariknews.com

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*शर्तहरू लागूहुनेछन् ।



PICS: CINDREY LIU

building codes which make elevators, ramps, adapted toilets, and wider hallways mandatory. Instead, during the road expansion drive the state bulldozed the few sidewalks around the Valley and merged them into the main road.

The only relief for the physically-challenged comes from private organisations like the National Rehabilitation Society for the Disabled which distributes hundreds of free wheelchairs annually and the Nepal Disabled Association (NDA) which is giving Jorpati's streets a disability-friendly makeover (*see box*). NDA also

provides income-generating skills training so that Bal Krishnan and others like him can become financially independent.

"I left home at 24 because I felt unwanted by my family. I was depressed. I started learning how to make incense sticks and candles and weave baskets through NDA's support. Now I earn a reasonable income and being independent has improved my self-esteem," explains Bal Krishnan.

While physically challenged residents of Kathmandu overcome hurdles day in and day out, the lack of disability-

friendly facilities is also making Nepal an unpopular destination and keeping potential tourists at bay.

"We have been taught to think of people with disabilities as somehow lesser. They don't deserve the same resources and treatment as able-bodied people," says Navyo Eller, marketing head of Navyo Nepal, "even small changes like putting larger seats in buses can help, but we just don't bother." Navyo Nepal is one of the few travel agencies which arranges tours for disabled tourists by providing vehicles with ample space and mobile toilets for trips outside the city.

Despite the challenges faced by the disabled community, there are causes for optimism. The rapid rise and accessibility of communications technology such as mobile phones and the Internet have been crucial in improving educational standards, as well as skill training. Disabled children no longer have to drop out of school due to lack of facilities, if they can learn and study online. But this requires a more involved government and a change in societal attitudes towards people with disabilities.

For Bal Krishnan, any support is welcome. "There are signs of change, but progress is still slow," he says. 📧

nepalitimes.com 🖱️

Different, but able, #574
Educating children with disabilities, #568
Differently-abled, #179

Moving grounds

An entire two kilometre stretch from Jorpati chok to the gates of Khagendra New Life Centre (NLC) has been earmarked to undergo a major face-lift in the next 12 months. With wider, smooth walkways and guide-strips, the community-led project will make travelling much easier for the wheelchair bound and the visually impaired.

Home to Nepali Disabled Association (NDA) and SOS Children's Village, a school for the disadvantaged, Jorpati has a large disabled population and the renovations will make commuting safer and easier for the residents. The road will be named after Khagendra Bahadur Basnyat who founded NLC. Started almost half a decade ago, New Life Centre is one of the pioneer organisations in Nepal to provide physiotherapy and counseling to disabled people.



Arun Dev Pant, an architect with Design Cell, together with urban planner Anjan Shrestha, will turn this vision into reality. Trained in the USA, Arun won an award for designing

the disabled-friendly facilities at Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) in Kavre, and volunteered to help the government design the wheelchair accessible Gokarna Bagmati bridge.

"I once saw a man on a wheelchair who was nearly run over on the road. I wondered why he didn't use the sidewalk instead, until I saw that the sidewalk was uneven, full of pot holes, making it nearly impossible for him to navigate. As an able-bodied person I just did not realise how bad the situation was," recalls Arun. "I want to use my expertise to make lives a little easier for fellow Nepalis in my own small way."

With the government ready to cover 60 per cent of the construction cost, locals have begun door-to-door fundraising and organising charity events to meet the remaining expenses. If the committee can complete its fundraising goals, Jorpati will serve as a positive example that the worth of a society lies in how it treats its disadvantaged members.

"I am glad we didn't wait for the government to come around and started this initiative on our own," says an upbeat Danda Bahadur Budathoki, a wheelchair user who owns an electronics shop in Jorpati. "Right now there are three steps leading up to my shop which makes it is difficult for me to carry things inside. In a year, there will be ramps here which will let me move freely and I am sure my business will also pick up."

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Unwanted at home and abroad

Interview with Khagnath Adhikari, deputy chief of Nepal mission in Delhi, Mitra Lal Sharma chairman of International Nepali Unity Society and Loknath Bhandari, chairman of Non-Resident Nepali Association (India), BBC Nepali Service, 26 January

What are some of the problems faced by Nepali immigrants in India?
Mitralal Sharma: According to the 1950 treaty, in order for Nepalis to get jobs in India, they have to first reside in the country for at least seven years and be certified as ‘domiciles’. Without this certificate you cannot apply for a ration card and without a ration card you won’t be able to get a driver’s licence or send your children to school. It’s a vicious cycle.

What have your organisations done to address these problems?
Loknath Bhandari: Some Nepali workers, who are not in unions, don’t even have identity cards. They can’t open bank accounts and thus billions of rupees allocated for them have been frozen. We have continuously told Nepali and Indian officials of our plight, but nothing has happened so far.

LB: There are provisions for our rights in the 1950 treaty that we have been prevented from exercising. We are

constantly making demands so that Nepali workers are allowed to open bank accounts on the basis of their Nepali citizenship and rightfully receive money that has been currently frozen.

How has the Nepali embassy in India responded to these issues?
MS: Currently, the embassy does not even have an ambassador. But earlier too, the embassy would give us false hopes and turn us away. No matter how many trips we make, the officials take no notice of us.

What does Khagnath Adhikari, deputy chief of mission in Delhi, have to say about this?
Khagnath Adhikari: There are millions of Nepali workers in India and we try to get them together, hold discussions, and take their suggestions very seriously.

LB: The Nepali embassy just tries to sweet talk us. It hasn’t taken any initiative to improve the difficult conditions under which Nepalis have to live here.

What do you wish the embassy in India would do?

MS: There are two types of pensioners: those who receive pensions through banks, and those who receive from the treasury. The ones getting from the treasury get it directly because it goes straight to Nepal. Our suggestion is for the government to push its Indian counterpart to send all the pension through the treasury route.

LB: It would be easier if Nepalis could send large sums and high denomination notes back home using their Nepali citizenship IDs. Perhaps the embassy could open a counter inside its premises for this purpose. This would be a win-win situation for the government back home because it would receive millions in remittance.

Can this be done, Mr Adhikari?
KA: All of us know how strict India’s banking rules and regulations are not only for us, but also its own citizens. You can’t deposit or withdraw more than IRs 50,000 at once. But the Reserve Bank of India,

over a year ago, introduced a provision through which Nepalis can easily send up to IRs 50,000 home once a month. Also it was the Indian government who requested us to ban high denomination notes because it thinks the open border will be used to smuggle counterfeit notes into India.

You’re also demanding that non-residential Nepalis be allowed to vote during elections at home. Why?
MS: More than one-fourths of Nepal’s youth, who desperately want their country to develop, work abroad. They must be given a chance to practice their democratic right and make their voices heard no matter which corner of the globe they are in.

LB: Most countries in the world allow their citizens living abroad to vote through an absentee-ballot, it’s only our country which gives up even before trying.

nepalitimes.com

Listen to the interview

NEPALI TWEETS

Sagar Ghimire
युप नम्बर तिनमा हिजो देखि गएको बति अहिले सम्म आएन। डाक्टर साव ले बति लि हेटौडा लिएर जानु भयो कि के हो।
The lights went off in group three yesterday, a day later there is still no electricity. Did the doctor take all the power to Hetauda?

Milan Timilsina मिल्मिन
विगतले, भन्काउन माच होइन माओवादी बनाउन पनि सिएन छ भन्ने कुरा हेटौडाको तामझामले देखाउँछ। महाधिवेशनस्थल जस्तै देश पनि झकझकाउ बनाउन सके
The way the Maoists revamped Hetauda for their general convention shows that they are not only experts at destroying and ruining things, they also know how to build. If only they would spruce up the country just like the convention ground.

Newa Bhaju
प्रचण्डको नयाँ विक्षेपण सुन्नभयो? नेपाल अब अर्ध-औपनिवेशिक राष्ट्र हैन वरु राष्ट्रिय स्वाधीनताउन्मुख राष्ट्र बनिसक्यो रे! हा हा हा...
Have you heard Prachanda’s newest analysis yet? He says Nepal is now no longer a semi-colonial state, it is gradually becoming an independent state. Ha ha ha.

Ananta Koirala
नेपालका कम्युनिष्टहरू नेपाललाई स्विजरल्याण्ड बनाउने भन्दछन्, कम्युनिष्ट मुलुक भनेर चिनिने क्युप्रा र चिन जस्तो बनाउने किन भन्दैनन्? **Confused**
Nepal’s communists say they will turn Nepal into Switzerland, why don’t they say they will turn Nepal into an actual communist state like Cuba or China? **#Confused**

asmi
चाकडी, चाप्नुसी, सोसफोस, पाटी वीसेस को दरो सम्बन्ध छैन ? - उसो भए पासपोर्ट अप्पलाई गर्नुस- (दुइ युवा ले गफ गर्दै सुनेको कोटेशनमा)
A conversation between two youngsters in Koteswor that I overheard: “Flattery, bootlicking, source force, no strong connections to people in power? Then apply for a passport.”

Tanka Khanal
नेपाली राजनीति को रोग : कान खुल्दा आखा बन्द आखा खुले कान बन्द। दुवै खुले दिमाग बन्द। ओसचि मोर !!!
The disease that inflicts Nepali politics: when the ears are open the eyes are shut, when the eyes are open the ears are shut, and when both are fine the brain stops working. No cure.

Devendra R Bhattarai
उफ ! कुवेत आएर देखियो – एउटी महिला हुनु र पशु हटियाको भेडाबाख्रा हुनु एकै रहेछ । मोलमोलाइ छाती पिटेदै हुने रहेछ, मन विझाउने कुरा !!
Uff. After coming to Kuwait I realised that being a woman is the same as being a cattle in a marketplace. Bargaining for both happens by beating their chests. How upsetting.

Holy trinity locks horns

Subash Devkota, himalkhabar.com, 4 February

As Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Baburam Bhattarai, and Narayan Kaji Shrestha locked horns to appoint officials and central committee members of their choice, UCPN(M)’s convention in Hetauda this week brought the differences between the various factions out in the public once again.

It was clear that the chairman was speaking under some pressure and mincing his words. Even though more than 60 per cent of the representatives at the convention are on his side, Dahal was clearly trying to win Bhattarai’s support which is crucial if he wants to be re-elected as the chairman. After placating the PM by dropping hints that the current government could continue on at least until the end of the convention, Dahal cleared his path to the top post and Bhattarai and Shrestha will carry on in their posts as vice-chairmen.

The real power struggle, however, will manifest itself over the formation of the 150-member central committee. Dahal, Bhattarai, and Shrestha all want leaders from their respective factions to form a major part of the committee.

The top three remain undecided over who among Post

Bahadur Bogati and Krishna Bahadur Mahara should be appointed as general secretary. Both belong to Dahal’s bloc, but it is clear that Bhattarai will support the former because Bogati is likely to remain neutral and Mahara is not. Narayan Kaji Shrestha suggested his loyalist Giriraj Mani Pokhrel, but dropped Pokhrel’s name and is now eyeing the secretary post for his own faction.



There are many more appointments that need the consensus of the top three leaders. They need to decide on the party’s secretary from among the long list of aspirants: Top Bahadur Rayamajhi from the Bhattarai faction, Barsha Man Pun from Dahal’s faction, and Giriraj Mani Pokhrel from Shrestha’s camp. It might be difficult for the party to decide

on the number of secretaries, but given Dahal’s reputation he might take the easy route by elevating all three as party secretaries. Instead of opting for elections, Maoist leaders have sought to solve these issues through give and take bargaining in the closed sessions. The gathering was dubbed as ‘Unity General Convention’ and the Maoists have lived up to the billing by boycotting intra-party elections altogether.



Identity card: Press

नेपाल Rabindra in Nepal, 3 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“People’s rule has become more important than nationalism.”

Baburam Bhattarai addressing the closed session at UCPN(M)’s general convention in Hetauda, *Nagarik*, 7 February.

Political overkill

Social research in Nepal is in sharp decline because of political interference and government apathy



NEW ERA

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

It has been a decade since Agriculture Program Services Centre (APROSC) closed, but there has been no efforts to revive it or establish a similar research agency. In the last 20 years social research in Nepal has taken a back seat, making it difficult to understand Nepali society's changing dynamics. Although there are about 200 private research firms across the country, increasing political interference and lack of neutrality worries many. Professor Haridhwoj Pant of Tribhuvan University's Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA) says that research and investigation in Nepal are no longer as independent as they used to be. "People conduct research these days to use up donor money and to 'prove' the legitimacy of their their policies and programs," admits Pant, "there is no research

for the sake of studying and understanding Nepali society and culture." Swedish researcher Tony Hagen was one of the first people to conduct scientific studies in the region. He was followed by local pioneers like Harka Gurung who opened up a wealth of knowledge about the country's geography and demographics. His concept of regional development during his tenure at the National Planning Commission resulted in the formation of five development regions. With the establishment of CEDA in the 1969 many research agencies followed like Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology (RECAST), Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) under the Tribhuvan University. However, political appointments in the TU has led to a sharp downfall of these centres. Many well-qualified research associates

were either transfered, or moved abroad or started their own private firms in hopes of a better and more secure future. Cuts in state funds have only made things worse. "The government's apathy has stunted the growth of research culture in Nepal," says Mahesh Baskota, dean of Kathmandu University's school of arts says, Tribhuvan University saw many protests and closures in last August because of the differences of UCPN(M), UML, and Nepali Congress over appointment of the university's dean. Research centres that were working without chairs until recently had all posts filled as per the power sharing agreement between major political parties. CEDA has Ram Chandra from UCPN(M), CNAS has Naniram Khatri from Congress, RECAST has Ram Prasad Chowdhary from Madheshi Morcha and Krishna Chandra Sharma from UML has been appointed as the executive director for CERID. Professor Pant is sad to see the sorry state of social research in Nepal and says while parties are busy playing politics and dividing the funds, the loss of knowledge is hurting the entire society. "Since all appointments, plans, and projects have to be approved by politically affiliated groups, research has lost its integrity, but no one seems to care about the long-term damage," concludes Pant.

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Cheques and balance

The talk of the town in Hetauda (was it chosen because it rhymes with 'Hatoda'?) this week was whether the Maoists had indeed turned from a caterpillar to a butterfly, or whether the talk of metamorphosis was to take attention away from war crimes to elections.

Comrade Fierceness, who once sowed terror in the hearts of millions during a revolution that bore his name, was like a mouse that roared. Unlike the last general convention in 1991, this time he excised all mention of 'American imperialism', and did not threaten to go to do battle with 'Indian expansionists'. There was no mention of the 'Tunnel War' he declared on India in 2004 in which every school was asked to dig a trench to thwart an imminent Indian invasion. He said the Baddies were now Goodies, and firmly committed to a 'capitalist democratic revolution'. This great proletarian party may have abandoned the revolution, but it had firmly retained its gift of the gab.

It was a careful balancing act to break the bad news to the cadre that it is no longer a cadre-based party. What a disappointment to erstwhile killers that you can't go around anymore bumping



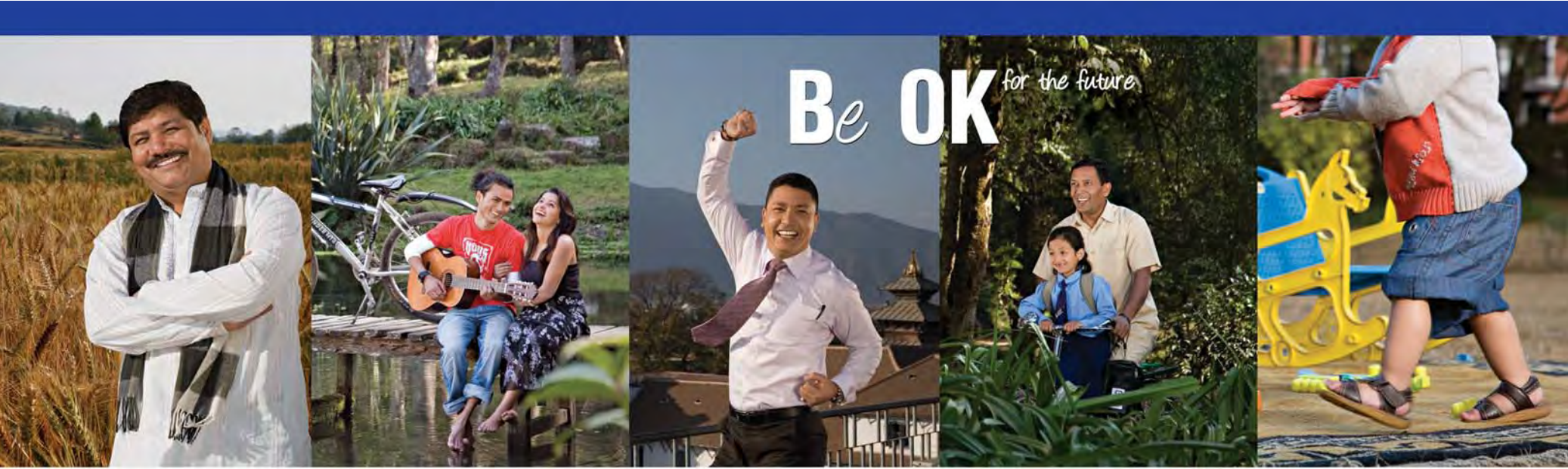
off people you don't like, you can only threaten to bump them off. There were quite a few verbal contortions like these to defend the new oxymoron of non-violent Maoism. He had to gently break it to cardholders that are now part of a 'civilian party', but they can still dismantle all the cheques and balances of democracy. The most difficult must have been to tell the YCLs that the party did not believe anymore in violence, intimidation, and extortion. But what took the cake was the proposal to resolve lingering border disputes with India with a referendum in Nepal. Whoa, here is how it is supposed to work: Nepalis

will vote in a referendum and overwhelmingly demand that India be nicer to us. That should do the trick.

All this narrowly coincided with word from Indian social media that newly-anointed Crown Prince Rahul is a man who passionately believes in foreign affairs. The last time he was going steady with a Colombian woman, New Delhi's aptly-named Ministry of External Affairs, which is entrusted with keeping track of the alien liaisons of political scions, vetoed it. Now, rumour has it, Rahul is secretly seeing a Nepali lass and keeping it under the radar for fear that the Babus will again pull the plug. But looking at it from Nepal, it's great news. A future prime minister of India and a future prime minister of Nepal married to each other would open up a new era of Indo-Nepal Friendship and Cooperation. We won't have to dig trenches anymore. There would never be a diesel shortage, and no load-shedding, too. Also, we wouldn't have to revise the 1950 Treaty because it would be automatically replaced by a Prenup.

Since the prime minister's official residence in Balu Water is just over the fence from the residence of the Chief Justice, BRB has apparently been summoning CJ Regmi to climb over the wall and come over for a chat. The mule's mole at the PMO says the prime minister often probes the Chief Justice on what his reaction would be on various pending cases, including those to do with the president's ultimatums and war crimes. It was during one of these tête-à-tête that BRB seems to have got a brainwave: why not let the CJ be the PM and stone two birds? To understand the prime minister's current mindset, one just has to consider the remark he made when cornered in Hetauda on Monday for being an Indian stooge by cadre from the PKD camp: "If we hadn't been in power, they'd have taken us to The Hague."

Can't quite make out when the prime minister is joking, and when he is being serious. When he called his Chairman a 'neta of netas' was he stroking the ego of a man he knew to be vain, or poking fun at him? And then in the closed door meeting, he compared Comrade Maximum Leader to 'Hanuman', the flying monkey god who set fire to Sri Lanka with his flaming tail.



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