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Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 332

**Q. Were protesters right to disrupt the Prithvi Jayanti celebrations on Thursday?**

Total votes: 4,406

Yes	25.5%
Maybe	3.9%
Not at all	74%
Don't know/can't say	1.8%

Weekly Internet Poll # 333. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

**Q. How well do you think the Maoists will work in the interim parliament?**

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**BOXED AWAY:** PLA Deputy Commander Nanda Kishore Pun and UN Senior Military Advisor Jan Erik Wilhemsen discuss weapons storage details inside a container at the Maoist Third Divisional cantonment site in Chitwan on Wednesday.

SAGAR SHRESTHA/UN OPRSG NEPAL

# Containment

On the cards: everyday politicking and an arms management process that learns as it goes

SHIVA GAUNLE

The next phase begins now for Nepal. The outcome of the coming few months will depend on how party politics plays out in the interim legislature, whether the interim constitution will hold, and how effectively the UN-monitored arms and army management will pave the way for reform of the security sector.

There are already signs that all eight parties are rolling their sleeves up for power struggles and perhaps horse-trading. It took them three days after the interim constitution was promulgated to agree on the Speaker. This was

despite the agreement reached on Monday morning in Baluwatar to appoint an NC prime minister, UML speaker, and a Maoist deputy prime minister.

But the parties are yet to agree on how many deputy prime ministers should be announced, and there is wrangling on the allocation of ministries to parties, as well as appointments to parliamentary committees.

Inside parliament, the parties are not in their final configurations. If the NC and NC(D) were to unite, they would have a significant advantage, though that could be countered by an admittedly unlikely Maoist-UML coalition in a

parliament that, for the first time in Nepal's political history, already has a leftists majority. If speculation of a backroom deal between the NC and the Maoists, and possible high-level defections from the UML to the Maoists bears out, the UML will in effect be frozen out. What could result from this is a reasonable-sized opposition, though, which the current parliament lacks.

Parallel to the everyday business of party politics, the critical issue of arms management and verification of fighters has already begun. The criteria for verification are still fuzzy. Not everyone who walks

into a camp in uniform will be a bonafide guerrilla, and an inflated count of the Maoist army will affect any proposed integration of PLA members into the Nepal Army. Determining the exact organisation of the PLA is also essential.

If managing both sides' armies is on the cards, there is no information on what will happen to the now-bloated NA. The paramilitary Armed Police Force, which should have limited utility in a post-conflict scenario, is instead, according to the peace agreement, in readiness to provide election-time security.

With the verification process now started, the monitors will have the chance to clarify a number of these factors, especially with regard to the PLA. The parliamentarians will have to find the time between power struggles to ensure the conditions for a free and fair election. ●

Editorial p2  
Halfway house

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**Times**  
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editors@nepalitimes.com  
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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Editor: Kunda Dixit  
Executive Editor: Anagha Neelakantan Desk Editor: Jemima Sherpa  
Design: Kiran Maharjan Web: Rupendra Kayastha  
Director Sales and Marketing: Sunaina Shah marketing@himalmedia.com  
Subscription: subscription@himalmedia.com  
For Subscriptions: 5011628/29  
Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur  
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013  
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018



# Nepali too

## Community identity doesn't preclude belonging

This is not a saga of victimhood. To think of it in those terms would be an inaccurate representation of my life. I was born into an upper-class Kathmandu family. My parents are well ensconced in the capital's professional and social circuit. I went to good



**GUEST COLUMN**  
Prashant Jha

schools here, moved to India for higher education, got a job in Delhi with a Nepal-based magazine, and have rarely been made to feel like an outsider, at least publicly.

But things are never quite that simple. My forefathers on both sides are from Bihar, where we still have deep family links. My paternal grandfather settled in Rajbiraj, became a Nepali citizen six decades ago, and made the great leap to Kathmandu as it was getting out of the Rana rut in the 50s. I speak a mix of Hindi, English, and Maithili at home, in that order. My spoken Nepali is heavily interspersed with English and Hindi words.

Reading the national language is a struggle and I don't plan to attempt writing in it anytime soon.

Language is a more substantive marker of distinction than we often acknowledge. In school, anticipating the move to India for further education, I opted for Hindi over Nepali. In class six, the significance of that hit home. While eating lunch, a friend said, in a mix of seriousness and jest, "You are a dhoti". When I discovered that the term—definitely derogatory—was associated with madhesi, who in turn were equated with Indians, I tried hard to run away from my identity. I hung around with Kathmandu kids, called the other Indians in school 'dhoti', and rationalised studying Hindi by saying it was what my parents wanted.

But I couldn't run too far. The differences were too many: we went vegetarian during Dushera as Kathmandu feasted on meat; we didn't do tika; Tihar was the one-day Diwali for me. My father, short and on the darker side, made it a point to wear kurta-pyjama. It was a dress I took to later and that, with the accented Nepali and the surname, often provoked the remark that we don't look Nepali. Telling people constantly that you are indeed a Nepali citizen is not pleasant.

It's taken me time to come to terms with my identity. My liberal education and understanding of how the homogenising tendency works in society, and a sense of security, no doubt helped by the present political discourse of inclusiveness, allows me to be candid about my background. It gives me the confidence to give

the brush off to those who question my 'Nepaliness'. In the last few years, I have reported occasionally on Nepal politics, which also gives me an added sense of citizenship and belonging.

My story is not representative. My family migrated from south of the border, while others' ancestors have been in the tarai for centuries. I was comfortable in English, the language of power, and moved out, which together allowed me to escape the handicap of not being Nepali enough for the Valley. Besides some taunts and subtle insinuations, I was never deprived of opportunity. But spare a thought for the person who speaks only Maithili, Awadhi, Bhojpuri or, at best, Hindi, who lives, in the tarai, with the stigma of not 'being Nepali', has cultural practices distinct from the mid-hill mainstream, does not have access to the power structure, has memories of being mercilessly exploited through history, and whose identity brings discrimination and deprivation even today. Don't blame them for being alienated from the system. Understand the anger. Empathise with the bitterness.

A few weeks ago, a columnist in these pages, in a style reminiscent of national integration Panchayat textbooks, carped against the 'divisiveness' sparked by politicians, and asserted that he was a 'Nepali first'. Whatever that means. How about creating conditions for those down south to have the comfort of saying that? ●

*Prashant Jha is the Delhi-based assistant editor of Himal Southasian.*

## HALFWAY HOUSE

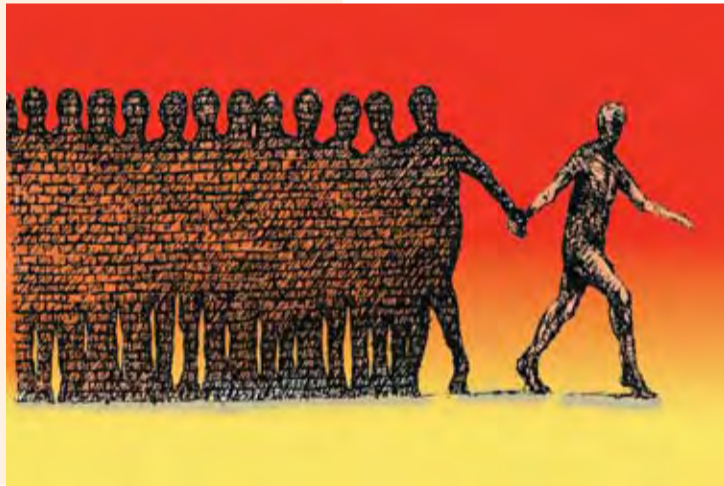
It is natural for an underground guerrilla force in the process of reinventing itself as a political entity to send out mixed messages. Some things need to be said for internal party consumption, others to newly-nominated members of the interim parliament and then there are antiquated chants that are obligatory at seminars of international communists.

Within the span of a few days this week we heard Ram Bahadur Thapa tell a television interviewer we are prepared to take up arms again if necessary, Matrika Yadav say the past has proven to us that problems can't be solved through the barrel of the gun and then CP Gajurel of the Maoist International Command tell a conference of regional revolutionaries that the Nepali people are marching forward to a decisive victory over their enemies while US imperialism, the main enemy of the people of the world, is getting bogged down in its wars of aggression.

We may as well get used to this sort of language. But more worrying are their deeds that show the comrades haven't abandoned the threat of violence and coercion. This week, the Maoists shut down the Chilime hydropower plant, a showcase for an indigenously-financed, designed and built energy project. As soon as Chilime was reopened after public pressure, in Khandbari local Maoists forced the closure of a model community-run hydropower plant that was ploughing its earnings to run three colleges in Sankhuwasabha. The reason: they wanted 25 percent of the profits from the sale of power to the NEA. The people of Khandbari, civil society and political parties reacted with outrage and locked up the local Maoist office in revenge. The comrades better get used to not getting their way through force and intimidation.

No doubt, the installation of the interim parliament was a momentous event, one of those rare occasions in world history in which an armed revolutionary group has begun the process of entering mainstream politics. It may take some time for the honourable members in grey coats to give up their old ways, but let the leaders realise that actions like Chilime and Khandbari are unacceptable. After all, there are more pressing matters for the new House to resolve, like addressing tarai grievances before they boil over into another full-scale conflict.

When speaker Subhas Nembang welcomed the Maoists into a transitional parliament on Monday night, the moment underlined the moral primacy of peaceful competitive politics over the politics of violence. The next step is to take arms management to its logical conclusion and get the Maoists to formally forsake violence. Only after that can they join a transition government with other parties to jointly steer the country towards a constituent assembly election.



# A crossroads, a chance

## The challenge for the parties is to broaden their leadership and support base

Girija Prasad Koirala excused himself from the first sitting of the historic interim legislature. It was left to Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula to table the proposal for the endorsement of the interim constitution adopted unanimously shortly before at the last sitting of the restored House of Representatives. Viewers glued to the live telecast of that momentous event probably thought it was time we started looking for another prime minister.



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
C K Lal

There are reasons Koirala's transitional leadership will be remembered—the marginalisation of the Shah rulers on the strength of the April Uprising; the mainstreaming of the Maoists through negotiations; ending the statelessness of madhesi by enacting civilised citizenship laws; and promulgating the interim constitution and forming the interim legislature. If he were to take Maoists on

board in the interim executive and hold the constituent assembly election on schedule in a peaceful manner, Koirala's place among the political greats will be secured.

But no nation can live on the force of history alone. Nepal needs a leader who can steer the country ahead in the coming days. In an entry made on 25 January 1977 in his Sundarijal jail diary, BP Koirala lists five qualities desirable in a Nepali leader. The person must:

- Enjoy the support of the people and be able to govern the country with their consent
- Be conscious of national identity and be recognised as a nationalist inside and outside the country
- Be committed to slightly left-of-centre domestic policies
- Be acceptable to India
- Not be opposed to China.

Three decades later we can add two more prerequisites—not be persona non grata in the US, and enjoy the confidence of major European donors. For now, these conditions rule out the emergence of a national leader from among the Maoist or UML politburo. We'll either have to accept a

leader from the Nepali Congress or embrace some former pancha the UML thrusts upon us.

The influential international community seems to want a unified Congress with Sushil Koirala as chair and Sher Bahadur Deuba as parliamentary leader, the idea being that such a rightwing formation will be easier for the Nepal Army to accept. The UML has worked with Deuba in the past and Maoists won't be too uncomfortable with a person renowned for his pliancy. The loophole: Deuba lost all credibility when he became a pawn in Gyanendra's autocratic experiments and as fourth-time prime minister will be the laughing stock of the country.

Leftwing Indian politicians would love a Maoist-UML coalition. If Sitaram Yechury of CPI (M) could facilitate that, it is possible that Speaker Subhas Nembang will emerge as a universally acceptable janajati prime minister.

Chitralekha Yadav could similarly be the first woman prime minister if the UML, taking broad hints from the Indian socialists, played the populist card. The party has lowest madhesi representation in

the interim parliament—only 14 percent of the UML lawmakers are madhesi, compared with the Maoists' 25 percent. To broaden its support base, the UML must make a bid for Nepal's three largest unclaimed vote-banks—backward communities, madhesi, and women. No one fits the bill like Yadav, the Siraha woman who could neutralise firebrands like Jwala Singh, Jay Krishna Goit, and Matrika Yadav on their home turf.

Of course, all these permutations are merely in the realm of possibility. For now, anybody Koirala deems fit will be the new leader.

Unlike most political parties that follow at least a semblance of democratic practice, all the NC chairman has to do is fish out a list from his pocket and the central committee goes quiet. The mantle of NC leadership will probably stay within the Koirala clan. But should the prime minister so desire, a loyal stopgap leader from outside the family isn't impossible. It could be BB Tamang, KB Gurung, or Mahanth Thakur. One thing is certain. If the NC and UML stick with their traditional Bahun-Chhetri-Newar male leadership, they will soon be history. ●

**LETTERS**

**TARAI DEMANDS**

Finally, some journalists and politicians have started to accept the fact that madhesi have been discriminated against by Nepali rulers. But no one talks about what a solution should be.

Nepali leaders need to design a system in which every dhoti-wearing, dark-skinned, pan-eating, Hindi-speaking, Bihari-looking person with Nepali citizenship is treated as respectfully (both on paper and in practice) as any daura surwal and topi-wearing Bahun or Chhetri. Madhesi won't feel assured that discrimination has come to an end unless they are given their own state. Do not mean a separate country. The tarai can be divided into one or more states that have significant powers such as revenue collection, policing, budget decisions, and so on. This is among the JTMM's main demands, and the Maoists got madhesi support based on this agenda.

The JTMM may not have many supporters willing to die for the cause at the moment, but they do enjoy the tacit support of a significant part of the madhesi population, which by conservative estimates is 35-40 percent of Nepali's population. The

longer the rulers in Kathmandu take, the more concessions they will have to make in the future. Just as Gyanendra is on the verge of losing his throne forever, rulers sitting in Kathmandu might soon have to face losing the tarai forever.

*Anand Jha, email*

**ROGUE FORCE**

Endorsing a Maoist deputy prime minister would be a blunder we can't afford, considering Prime Minister Koirala's ill-health and the fact that the interim constitution makes the prime minister irreplaceable. The Maoists still justify their armed revolt and consider being part of the interim parliament as just another platform for their revolution. As a Nepali, I will not endorse a rogue force with blood on its hands. For the sake of peace, the Maoists need a chance to cleanse themselves of their sins, but let's not go so far as to crown the butcher.

*Sanjay Tuladhar*

**UN**

We shouldn't think UN involvement means our problem is half-solved. Just look at Sudan. Genuine peace should come from within the country, and this is what seems to prevail in the present political turmoil. Arms management and

de-militarisation of the Maoist cadre and the army are important ahead of the constituent assembly. But will I, as a non-Ropali, be able to walk through Rolpa in the months to come? This is what all leaders should be thinking about if they are truly democratic.

*Nirmal Ghimire, email*

As I wrote in the farewell to Annan and UN-doing our part (#331) all point out, UN involvement is a complex issue. It's important not because it's a wonder drug for our problems, but because our own people are also experienced in UN work overseas and know how problematic it can be. While you did a good job of concisely presenting the issues connected to the UN role here, I found the voice of Nepalis working in senior positions in similar UN missions abroad missing. How do they assess what the mission can do here?

*Chandan Shrestha, email*

**NEW PANTHEON**

What great satire! The Nepali public reveres the great Prachanda, killer of 14,000 Nepalis, looter of countless persons, destroyer of billions worth of infrastructure, the feared stocky little guy (a new pantheon, Foreign Hand, #331).

And the prime minister, how skilfully he and his family have sold off our country to India. Who needs a foreign hand when we can self-destruct?

*Rishav, email*

**CORRECTION**

ëTicking away ( #331) contained the following errors:

- The brochure illustrating the article is distributed by the Mine Action Working Group (a network of 16 NGOs), Red Cross Society, the UN, the Nepal Army, and the PLA.
- UNICEF and INSEC reported 146 civilian casualties in 2006 from victim-activated explosions. Of the 146 casualties, 33 were killed.
- In February 2006 there was at least one explosion every two days.
- The Nepal Army has 15 Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams on standby that can deal with any type of explosive device, including all types of improvised explosive devices and landmines. However, the complete clearance of 49 anti-personnel minefields is a huge and very specific task that will probably require additional international support.

*Hughes Laurence*

*Mine Action Focal Point, UNICEF*

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# Nepalis want to stand up and be counted



But the debate between ethnic- and geographic-based federalism has only just begun

Maoist proposed federal zonesó population breakdown by ethnicity:

**Seti Mahakali éPradeshí**  
Total pop: 1,196,734  
Hill upper caste\*\*: 74.61 percent  
Hill dalit: 15.28 percent  
Others: 10.11 percent

**Bheri Karnali Pradesh**  
Total pop: 957,680  
Hill upper caste: 58.77 percent  
Hill dalit: 20.15 percent  
Others: 21.08 percent

**Tamuwan Pradesh**  
Total pop: 1,028,204  
Gurung: 20.57 percent  
Hill upper caste: 41.11 percent  
Others: 38.32 percent

**Newar Pradesh**  
Total pop: 1,645,091  
Newar: 35.40 percent  
Hill upper caste: 37.76 percent  
Others: 26.84 percent

**Kirat Pradesh**  
Total pop: 2,064,833  
Rai: 21.24 percent  
Limbu: 12.09 percent  
Kirati: 33.33 percent  
Hill upper caste: 28.73 percent  
Others: 37.94 percent

**Magarat Pradesh**  
Total pop: 2,613,968  
Magar: 28.36 percent  
Hill upper caste: 44.89 percent  
Others: 26.75 percent

**Tamang Pradesh**  
Total pop: 2,452,458  
Tamang: 31.57 percent  
Hill upper caste: 33.01 percent  
Others: 35.42 percent

**Madhesi Pradesh**  
Total pop: 8,996,328  
Tarai upper caste: 33.65 percent  
Tarai dalit: 11.55 percent  
Tarai ethnic (incl tharu): 10.76 percent  
Hill mountain cohort: 32.64 percent  
Others (incl Muslim): 11.40 percent

**Tharuwan Pradesh**  
Total pop: 2,255,465  
Tharu: 25.63 percent  
Hill mountain cohort: 48.14 percent  
Others: 26.23 percent

\*Hill mountain cohort: *Chhetri-Bahun, hill dalit, mountain, hill, and inner tarai ethnic*  
\*\*Hill upper caste: *Chhetri-Bahun*

**NARESH NEWAR**

Not all groups calling for greater ethnic- and language-based autonomy are as militant as the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha (JTMM), which is demanding an independent madhesi state. But all debates, radical and moderate, academic and political, turn on the same argument—that if Nepal is to thrive, it would do well to adopt a federal system of governance. The difference is whether these regions should be divided on the basis of ethnicity or geography.

Even the Maoists, who still officially back ethnic autonomy, seem to be having second thoughts. The demands of janajati, dalit, and madhesi activists thus now sound even more radical than those of the Maoists. Privately, Maoist leaders say they are finding it hard to keep radicalised ethnic politics and secessionism in check and this is why they are now espousing 'democratic centralism'.

Despite the high profile inclusion of women and disadvantaged groups in their representation in the interim parliament, some janajati and madhesi activists are accusing the Maoist leadership of showing the same traditional mainstream biases.

"This is not a war against the high castes by other ethnic groups but a fight against the long-held non-inclusive character [of the

state], and ethnic supremacy perpetuated by Brahmanbad feudalism," says Malla K Sundar, president of the Newar National Organisation. He argues that panic about Nepal disintegrating is being spread by those who stand to lose the most from federalism.

The Maoist proposal for nine autonomous regions or 'Pradesh' and the Janajati demands for up to 13 autonomous regions are based on identity politics that found space after the April Uprising rather than on federal principles committed to devolution.

Political analysts say the Maoists have never explained how their ethnic autonomy formula will work. "In theory the Maoists want a forward-looking and modern ethnic state, but in reality the attempt seems to be to mobilise mass support based on a generalised idea of ethnic homeland," says Pitamber Sharma, one of Nepal's foremost demographers.

While cautioning that issues of ethnic inclusion need to be addressed, academics express doubt whether autonomous regions based on ethnicity are feasible or desirable in Nepal. "The grievances of janajatis and madhesi should be considered, and government policies should favour them. But the crucial issue is whether ethnic autonomy is economically viable," says Deepak Thapa of the Social Science Baha and author of two books on Nepal's Maoist movement.

For one, academics argue, even in the regions designated for

particular ethnic groups they do not form a clear numerical majority. Janajati groups want that a certain ethnic group dominating a certain region to have more rights and privileges, whether political or economic, than the minority groups living in the same region.

Such moves, they say would open up dangers of ethnic cleansing by dominant local groups. "One should not, in order to right the wrongs of history, commit more wrongs. This is what will happen once there is a system of disenfranchising other people living in that area," explains Thapa. Sharma concurs, adding that, "the dominance of the Bahun ethos and extremism cannot be defeated by extremism imposed by the Limbu, Gurung, Newar, or any other ethnic group."

Even some janajati leaders admit there are big risks and challenges and that the future of ethnic federalism is uncertain. In the proposed Tamsaling autonomous region, incorporating the hills of the Bagmati, Narayani and Janakpur zones (excluding the Kathmandu Valley) there is only talk about Tamang rights, though the region is inhabited by a spectrum of groups—in Dolakha, there are the indigenous Jirel and Suryal communities, in Ramechhap Sunwals, in Sindupalchok, Thamis and Yolmos.

The case of Indian states, where federalism based on linguistic and ethnic autonomy has held, is cited by activists like Parsuram Tamang, who heads the

Broad National Democratic Republican Front which was established in August 2006 and is made up of five groups that advocate ethnic federalism. Anthropologists and geographers counter that federalism in India has more to do with devolution of political and economic power to local government units, and add that ethnic or linguistic federalism is no guarantee of inclusiveness.

Most independent analysts agree that the pros and cons of regional versus ethnic autonomous areas should be based on rational economic analysis and not get mixed up with politics and emotion. Gaurinath Rimal, former member of the Planning Commission, says plans for federalism should be aimed at devolving power to the lowest level and regional development.

Sharma warns that small ethnicity-based units will not be economically viable and could trigger demands for representation from other minorities within those autonomous regions. "Due to lack of economic strength of the federal units, the whole notion of autonomy would be shallow with consequent unease and strains on inter-state relations and rising dependence on the centre," he explains.

The Maoist leadership seems to realise it has opened a can of worms and worry that the diverse demands for autonomy will come back to haunt them in the interim government. The UML also favours ethnic federalism based on regions dominated by indigenous and ethnic groups. Nepal's only regional party, the Nepal Sadbhawana Party, demands tarai autonomy but has failed to come up with a concrete formula. The NC is still not in favour of federalism. Ethnic-based communalism is manifested most militantly by former Maoist factions of the JTMM based in the eastern tarai.

"Ethnic identity should not be conceived as a simple means of going back to history, which is neither feasible nor possible," Sharma adds. If, say, a Limbuwan

Front is formed, would all the Limbus (including those living in Kathmandu) really want to resettle in the eastern region? Should a Newar Autonomous Region bring the Newar diaspora back to the capital? "Federalism based solely on ethnicity and language can foment deep divisions and may lead to the break-up of the state for reasons of political expediency by sectarian political leaders," says Sharma.

Economics aside, the basic question is how the internal relations between communities will be managed, and how every group's rights will be ensured. However, janajati activists like Tamang say there is no way to address traditional oppression without ethnic autonomy. "Nepal may disintegrate not because ethnic autonomy is granted, but because it is not granted," he says. ●

## Status of hill-mountain cohort\* in tarai districts



MAPS: GAURINATH RIMAL  
SOURCE: POPULATION CENSUS 2001

# Against all odds

## Nepal needs small entrepreneurs to deliver on the promise of democracy

In high school, I thought my classmate Brajesh Nanda Vaidya would someday be an artist, not the self-made biotech entrepreneur that he is today. After completing higher education in the US, he returned home in the 1990s. Putting his



**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
Ashutosh Tiwari

science background to use, he started managing Nepal Biotech Nursery, a 17-person firm that produces tissue-cultured high-yield banana and orchid plantlets, which farmers snap up. I recently caught up with Brajesh in Kathmandu, and found out that his business experience is similar to that of many small-business owners.

The beginnings were tough, he said. "I was naive, fresh from the US, and didn't understand the Nepali system of doing business. I tried to do it the way I had learnt it in the US: hire the right people, give the right assignments, watch for results, that sort of thing. None of that

worked. I learnt the hard way that most people just wanted to take me for a ride. Without bothering to help me run my business, almost everyone, from government bureaucrats to business partners and associates, to workers, just wanted a piece of the pie I was struggling to create. It was both bewildering and frustrating."

It was also difficult to develop an appropriate trust-based long-term support structure, he added. "Often, my own business associates and others would take advantage of my ignorance. They'd say and do things to discourage me so I wouldn't be successful. The level of mistrust and pessimism that pervades most business interactions and the amount of bad-mouthing that goes on is depressingly high. Psychologically, you really have to remain very, very strong to stick to business in Nepal."

Surely that was not the case in the villages of the hills and the tarai, where he regularly travels to meet farmers and see how their plants are doing? Brajesh said

people have changed in the rural areas. "Everyone wants to make quick money. Village youth dream of one thing—to go abroad and make money as labourers. There is an acute shortage of people between the ages of 20 and 35 who can actually do the farming. And when overseas labourers return with a few lakhs in savings, they quickly spend it on constructing cement houses. They don't really seem interested in farm work."

So what keeps him going? Three things, Brajesh said. "Nepal's small size is a blessing. If you do good work, it gets noticed quickly. People in agribusiness know me well. When small farmers in Jhapa or Kanchanpur tell me they now earn more from selling more bananas, orchids, and flowers, I feel I'm doing something for the country. Nepal can take huge leaps and farmers' incomes can grow considerably with the introduction of high-yielding plantlets and better farming methods. We can't allow that potential to go to waste. That kind of hope keeps me going."

But such hope can be lost amidst today's superheated rhetoric about 'New Nepal'. Thoughtful discussion is missing about what to do about our number one problem—jobs for thousands. Unless we find ways to translate abstract principles of democracy into creating concrete jobs for young people by making it easier for thousands of Brajeshes to run businesses in various sectors, the day will not be far when those in the gap between democracy's promise and what it actually delivers reveal their discontent. ●



# Nepali North Americans

Overseas Nepalis in North America can become a stronger force for social and economic development in their home country only by actively participating in the NRN movement, a meeting of North American Nepalis has concluded.†

The Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) invited leaders of 18 organisations representing Nepalis in North America for a day-long conference in San Bernardino, California on 6 January to discuss diaspora issues.†

That such a conference was held, and well attended, points to the fact that the population of overseas Nepalis has reached a critical mass and is enthusiastic to contribute towards Nepal's development.

The internet allows Nepalis in different parts of the world to network, and today they are better informed about events and trends in their homeland. This, coupled with the education they have received abroad and their experiences, gives the Nepali diaspora a unique perspective and understanding of the Nepali situation. The main purpose of Nepali networking is now to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, resources, and skill among overseas Nepalis and with those in Nepal.

The overseas Nepali movement reaches out to the diaspora through its National Coordinating Council (NCC) which has been established in more than 20 countries around the world to keep tabs on issues that Nepalis face in their respective countries.†

But it hasn't always been smooth sailing in some countries because of pre-existing dynamics between Nepali organisations. Nepalis in North America are no different. Challenges arise because of the difficulties of meeting due to work pressures, as well as apprehension that one organisation will take the lead.

Under the leadership of the International Coordination Committee President Upendra Mahato and International Coordinator Bhim Udas, the meeting supported Nepalese Americas Council (NAC) in coordinating the activities of†Nepali organisations in North America through the National Coordination Council for North America.

Some 50 participants attended the San Bernardino conference and suggested ways to connect to the rest of the diaspora. The meeting also recommended identifying representatives of organisations who could assist in reaching out to the grassroots of the Nepali diaspora. ●  
Sagar Onta

## Fairest in the land

This year's Dabur Vatika Miss Nepal pageant will be held on 7 April. Applications are open until 7 February. Those selected will go through a six-week training program, and the winner, first and second runners-up will get Rs 100,000, Rs 60,000, and Rs 40,000 respectively, in addition to the chance to participate in international competitions. The Hidden Treasure has been organising the event in association with Kathmandu Jaycees since 1994, and holds the Nepal franchise for Miss World, Miss Earth, and Miss Asia-Pacific International.



## New clothes

Construction has begun on the new Surya Nepal garment manufacturing facility in Biratnagar. The factory will produce garments for Surya Nepal's domestic John Players brand. Construction will end by November 2007 and once fully operational, the plant could generate employment for 2,000 people from the Biratnagar area. Surya Nepal's garment industry currently employs over 500 people, nearly 90 percent of them women.



KIRAN PANDAY

## Going Global

Global Bank's new corporate office in Kantipath has begun operations. The Birgunj-based Global Bank is Nepal's 19th corporate bank. In addition to offering internet banking facilities, ATMs, foreign currency accounts and locker services, the bank also uses the international-standard Finacle banking software. Global Bank currently boasts the largest investment ever made for a commercial bank, with Rs 1 billion in paid-up capital.



## New in Nepalganj

Everest Bank's new Nepalganj branch takes it to 19 outlets around Nepal. Two more are planned, in Balaju and Birtamod. Everest Bank began operations in 1994, and registered an 18.9 percent growth to Rs 375.2 million in operating profits in fiscal 2004/2005. Everest was awarded Bank of the Year-2006 Nepal by The Banker.





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# Palace and India in madhes

Interview with Matrika Yadav of Rastriya Mukti Morcha in Samaya, 18 January.

In 2001 Jay Krishna Goit was appointed chairman of the Maoist Madhesi National Liberation Front. Two years later, he was replaced by Matrika Yadav and publicly sidelined. In reiteration, Goit formed the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha (JTMM). In August last year, the JTMM split, and Jwala Singh formed a different 23-member committee. What started as a struggle against the Maoists is now a war against pahadis. Yadav maintains that the JTMM is supported by the palace and India.

### Can you comment on the JTMM's communal campaign?

This revolution is misusing the madhes. Nepal is divided into two distinct groups based on colour and communities. But these groups are themselves diverse. There are feudal and oppressive people, as there are victims, in both madhesi and pahadi communities. The JTMM is fighting the Maoist party when all parties, including the Maoists, are fighting against monarchy. If they are against us, they are supporting the royalists.

### Why do you accuse the JTMM of being influenced from various quarters?

The JTMM has been directly supported by the palace and India since it launched its war against the Maoist party. Jwala Singh's splinter group is closer to the palace, while Goit's JTMM answers to India. Many in Goit's group are unthinking blind supporters. A pahadi was killed in Saptari recently - was he an oppressor? Similarly, Govinda Neupane was killed in Sarlahi. If they say 'madhesi-pahadi bhai bhai', why are pahadis being systematically killed? JTMM wants to spread the message of communal hatred, which seriously undermines the madhesi revolution.

### Are you saying that India does not support the political changes in Nepal?

The JTMM is being supported by those who believe in BJP-style Hindu political power. Look at Nepalganj - the wrong political elements were involved there and the madhesi movement got a very bad reputation.



KIRAN PANDAY

### Madhesi leaders say such violence was inevitable because their peaceful demands were ignored.

The madhes problem started because of the Brahmin-centric attitude that gave birth to people like Goit. The present campaign was spread by royalists.

### Did this all happen because the Maoists couldn't keep a handle on things?

These groups were not born because we couldn't manage people. They were disenchanted and they betrayed us. We admit we have weaknesses, but we are finding a solution. I am trying. I haven't been able to talk to Goit directly, but I have been in touch with his advisors. I have suggested that if he does not want to talk to me, Chairman Dahal is ready to talk.

### Is it true that Jwala's group has taken over a large number of Maoist fighters?

During the royal regime last year there was always news about Maoist fighters escaping or surrendering. Those were rumours and so is this. Those who joined JTMM are thugs against whom the party was to take action.

### Should the tarai be called the madhes region?

There are discussions about this. I believe that there should be one madhes and there should be various units under this unified region.

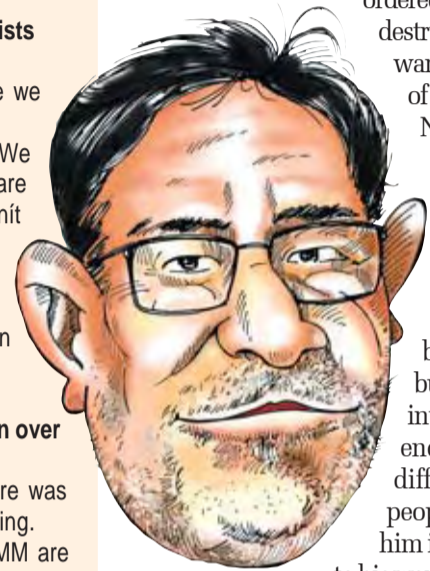
## Nom de guerre

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 17 January

A name doesn't represent a person's physical qualities or mental status. But when people are called by a certain name, over time, the name eventually becomes a part of them. Pushpa Kamal Dahal's name was perhaps chosen with love and care, but when he went underground and started the 'People's War', the Maoist chairman changed his name to Prachanda. Now, the war is over, but he is reluctant to let go of his alias. Is it because he takes more pride in the work he did as Prachanda than as Pushpa Kamal?

Pushpa Kamal Dahal was an admirable student, teacher, and friend. Prachanda ordered bloodshed, destruction, and war. In this time of peace, Nepal's expect Dahal to demonstrate the same courage that he did on the battlefield, but channelled into productive ends. It will be difficult for people to trust him if he holds on to his war name. When

Pushpa Kamal Dahal lets go of that, people will finally feel that the years of bloodshed are over. And he's not the only one. All Maoist leaders who used an alias during the war need to let go of the past and move on.



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# NEW LEGISLATURE FOR A NEW NEPAL



KIRAN PANDAY

surrendered their arms, and the Maoists' demand for a constituent assembly election. Never have armed communists demanded such an election. This insistence on the best of democratic exercise by the very Maoists who fought to end democracy sounds like the story of the Trojan War translated into Nepali politics.

## Here for good

Budhabar, 17 January

बुधवार

The 16-year-old constitution has been replaced by a new interim document. For the first time in the history of Nepal, the monarchy is defunct. The king's constitutional powers have been wiped out and the people's representatives have written an interim constitution.

Political parties, the international community, and civil society all hope for a better future for the country through this constitution. After this historic event, many believe that this change is here to stay.

## Indian rescue

Deshantar, 14 January

देशान्तर संकलन

Politicians in India are insisting that the monarchy remain in existence. The BJP recently sent a delegation to Nepal. Similarly, royal relative and Indian politician Karan Singh, who was sent to Nepal as a special envoy of the Indian prime minister during the April Uprising, will also arrive this week.

The BJP group led by Surendra Kumar Arora, the party's foreign affairs head, met Prime Minister Koirala last Friday. The group also met with former prime minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, RPP chairman Pashupati SJB Rana, and Maoist leaders Krishna Bahadur Mahara and CP Gajurel.

While the BJP wants Nepal to remain a Hindu kingdom, the new interim constitution isolates the king by seizing his constitutional powers. The failure of the king's 1 February 2005 takeover is largely attributed to the change in the government in India.

Though the BJP openly supports the king, the Indian government is silent on this matter and has made no statement about its views. India says it will accept the wishes of the Nepali people and political parties. Political analysts believe India's stance on the monarchy will play an important role in the king's survival.

## Way ahead

Editorial in Kantipur, 16 January

कान्तिपुर

That the Maoists returned to the same House of Representatives they abandoned a decade ago is proof that the country is heading in a new direction.

Sustainable peace and political stability will depend on how they play their role as another big parliamentary party, almost as large as the UML.

The Maoists will make their mark on the world if they can successfully participate in a 21<sup>st</sup> century democratic parliament after waging a war based on 20<sup>th</sup> century communist ideology. The international community would thank and congratulate Nepal for its stable, modern democracy.

The Maoists must cooperate in the management of their arms and army. They will find it difficult to run political activities without guns, but the other parties cannot practice free and fair politics unless arms are taken out of the picture.

All parties are responsible for the plans envisaged in the new constitution. The interim government must create an environment for a free and fair election to the constituent assembly.

## Trojan horse

Punarjagaran, 16 January

पुनर्जागरण

The Maoists have formally taken up the parliamentary procedures after 11 years of their 'People's War'. Political observers wonder whose victory this change of heart signifies: of parliamentarians over the Maoists, or of the Maoists in bringing the lawmakers over to their agenda.

Many question the government's willingness to let the Maoists into parliament before they



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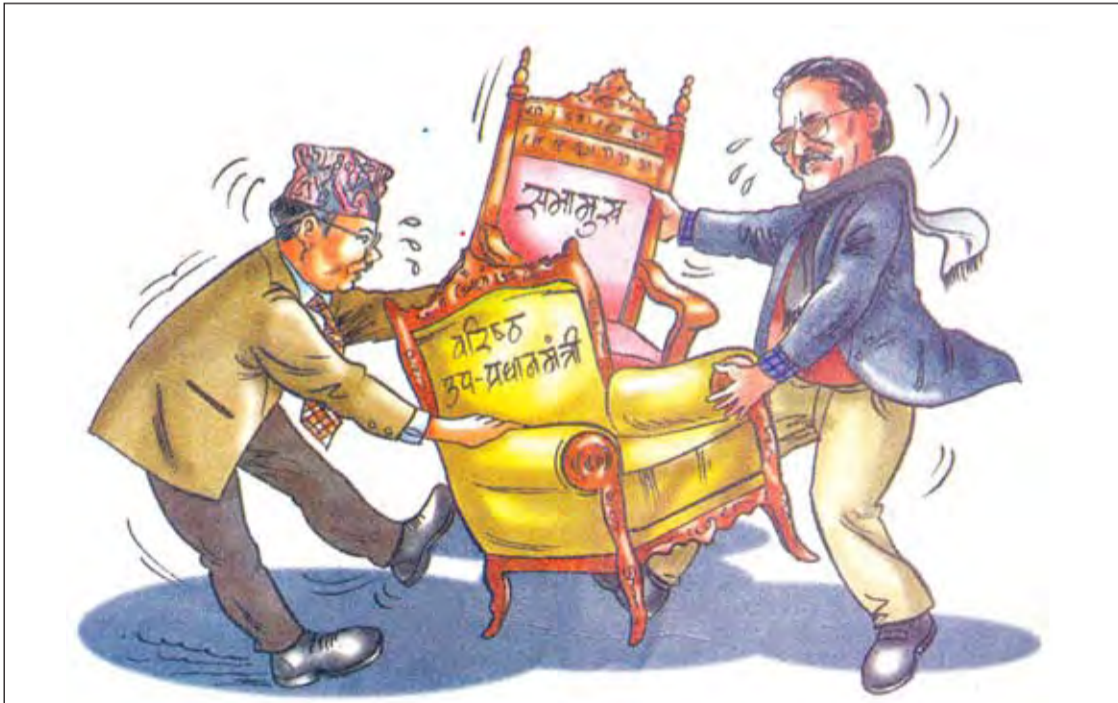
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कान्तिपुर Kantipur, 17 January

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The Maoists have accepted change in principle, but they have yet to prove the same in their behaviour.”

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat in *Himal*, 15-29 January

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MALLIKA ARYAL

As the sun sets behind the hills, Patan's Darbar Square slowly goes back to the people who live around it. The tourists leave and the antique sellers are packing up. The cafés are seeing an end-of-day spurt and Krishna Mandir, bathed in the light of butter lamps, looks otherworldly. Strains of music waft through and there is laughter and conversation as people gather in groups and talk about their day. Students still in their uniforms snack on peanuts and watch the neighbourhood go by.

These days, though, the crowds are bigger, the teashops have expanded into full-fledged food stalls, and there are vendors of not just vegetables and *pote*, but everything from electronic goods, to clothing, to books.

Since last summer, a vibrant night market has sprung up here from the southern end of the path leading to Krishna Mandir and all the way down to the waterspout. Vendors like Binita Dulal sell whatever they can get their hands on, leading to interesting product mixes, like

the fake designer t-shirts, facecloths, flashlights, table lamps, and battery-operated radios.

Some are hawk-eyed for a find and ready for a good bargaining session. Others are content to soak up the good mood and twinkling lights as an antidote to the chilly winter evening. "The evenings are colourful and pleasant," says Sheela Timilsina as she sips tea from a disposable plastic cup.

Nearby the Mobile Momo Store has a banner boasting of the best momos and chicken wings in the Valley. Fried sausage, fish, tofu, potatoes, drumsticks, and spring rolls are displayed under a partitioned glass counter. People are gathered four-deep around the stall, and the shopkeeper tells us that more than 150 people eat his food every night. The food is cheap—Rs 10 for sausage-on-a-stick, Rs 5 for roast potato skewers—and relatively fresh because of the high turnover. The oil may be yesterday's, but the meat is not. Basic teastalls cater to those who huddle together to analyse the state of the state.


Purna Kumari Shrestha, who has been selling peanuts at the square for 20 years, thinks the night market is a natural extension of the role the square plays in the lives of Patan residents. "We've gathered around here for a long time, and I have customers who've been buying peanuts from me for years," she says. There is a real camaraderie between Shrestha and her customers. By the light of her lantern, they exchange witty repartee even as off to the side her teenage daughter keeps a sharp eye on the accounts.

While most people we spoke to thought the market added some much-


Lively night bajars are fast becoming the

# To market,





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WEEK LEO	LEO	AST LEO
WEEK VIR	VIRGO	AST VIR
WEEK LIB	LIBRA	AST LIB
WEEK SCO	SCORPIO	AST SCO
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JOKE LAWYER	JOKES ON LAWYERS
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# to market



ALL PICS: SWORUP RANJIT

needed fun to community life, some of the old guard were not quite as happy. Every evening, Krishna Dutta Malla and his friends sit and chat quietly on the benches outside Patan Museum. It used to be peaceful and low-key, but now, he complains, "they sell goods, fry all kinds of meat, and play music in front of a holy place."

Since the market came up shortly after Jana Andolan II, the Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City, which used to strictly enforce a no-stall rule in front of the old darbar (now Patan Museum) because it is a World Heritage Site, has not paid the vendors a single visit.

Basantapur shows how night markets can be better managed. For the last five years, the Kathmandu Metropolitan City has rented out stalls to vendors on the tiled path leading to the square. Looking down at the market from a nearby highrise is a brilliant sight, and the lights from shops and cars make the bazaar look like a long, glowing caterpillar under the shadowy outlines of the old palace. With its neat rows of well-lit stalls, the market is a pleasant contrast to the higgledy-piggledy—albeit atmospheric—mess of Patan's night bazaar, though overcrowding is becoming a real danger as cars and motorcycles have free passage through Basantapur.

The vendors here focus on fashion, rather than household appliances. Between the lights of the cafés and ice cream shops that flank them, the stalls glitter with earrings, hair clips, sunglasses, scarves, trinkets, colourful mirrored bags, Indian slippers, purses, winter coats, shirts, and trousers. It's heaven for street fashion junkies who



like to bargain. Young women in particular come to buy clothes imported from Bangkok and China. Bhawana Kandel's jewellery stall, for example, regularly attracts designers and models on the lookout for inexpensive jewellery for photo shoots and fashion shows.

Veteran salesman Susan Pradhan says price is a great attraction here. "We can afford to sell cheap because we save on rent," he explains. Depending on the size of the stalls the vendors pay the municipality up to Rs 3,500 per month.

Night markets are turning into a fundraising venture too. The JP School in Thamel rents out its grounds to stalls every evening. In exchange, the vendors are to pave the premises. The main attraction here are the bands that play covers of contemporary Nepali rock tunes. The merchandise is similar to that in Basantapur, but a bit more up-to-date—funkier purses, skimpier summer dresses, better cosmetics. It hasn't quite come to life yet, but the vendors are wildly optimistic. "This is the perfect place for an open night market," says stall owner Rosi Gurung. "There is so much space for music, shops, and food, and I bet in a few months this place will be bustling with people." ●

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## Cold to death

Every winter there are reports of death due to *ecoldi*, usually from tarai districts. But a coldwave death has usually been long in the making. Acute respiratory infections including cough and cold, fever, and pneumonia affect nearly a million children under five and thousands of elderly people every year in Nepal. Such infections and malnourishment depress the immune systems of children and older people, and in the severe cold, respiratory infections take a turn for the worse. This is what kills people in the tarai and mountain regions in the winter.

In the past month, there have been reports of nearly 20 deaths *edue* to coldi in Dhanusa, Bara, and Rautahat, but the Department of Health in Kathmandu says it has not received credible information to that effect.

One of the major documented challenges in delivering appropriate health services to the districts has been an inefficient system of reporting and recording causes of death. Health experts say thousands of deaths in the mountain areas where there is a high incidence of child mortality due to respiratory infection *o*go unreported and un-investigated by government health agencies.

Narash Newar

## Counting vultures

In June 2006, the anti-inflammatory analgesic drug diclofenac was banned for veterinary use in Nepal, because vultures were dying after ingesting it from livestock carcasses. But a ban must be monitored. Conservation experts say diclofenac is still on the shelves, and that illegal production and import continues. CTL Pharmaceuticals of Bhaktapur continues to produce the drug under the name Molfen, says BCN. A recent survey by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) found that CTL's brand of diclofenac, Molfen, was still being sold in veterinary drug stores in Banke, Kanchanpur, Rupendehi, Dang, and Kailali.

"We have proof to show that Molfen is still being produced," says Hem Sagar Baral, chief executive of BCN. Molfen packaging in the possession of BCN has dates of production as recently as September 2006. (pictured)



"Why is the government not going after people involved in the production and import of an illegal drug?" asks Baral. Baral says it will take a few decades for the vulture population to come back to the size it was 25 years ago if deaths such as those from diclofenac are stopped.

Seven years ago, when the vultures in South Asia suddenly started dying, at different times the use of pesticides and lack of food were blamed. In late 2003, American researchers in Pakistan found the diclofenac connection. At a meeting in Kathmandu in February 2004, South Asian countries pledged to ban the drug. A new non-toxic drug, meloxicam, found to be safe for livestock and vultures, was to be administered instead. A month after the ban came into effect in Nepal, diclofenac producer Medivet started manufacturing meloxicam instead. (See also *Soaring again!* #286 and *No more circling!* #185.) Mallika Aryal

## Splittist tendencies

During Jana Andolan II there were seven communist parties. These have split and divided variously, and there are now 12 communist parties in Nepal. Except for the UML, the Maoists and the Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party (Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party), all the others have divided since parliament was reinstated.

Outdoing all the others when it comes to divisiveness is CPN (Unified). This party has split three times, under the leadership of Mohan Bikram Singh, Prakash, and Rajbir, though it retained the same name, and also under Bijay Kumar as CPN 2006. Jana Morcha Nepal has also broken up into three different parties. Other such parties include the CPN (ML) under CP Mainali and Rishi Kattel, and the CPN (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) under Krishna Das Shrestha and Sitaram Tamang. Also on the verge of division is the CPN (Unified Marxists) led by Prabhu Narayan Chaudhary, a minister in the reinstated parliament.

Longtime communist leader Krishna Das Shrestha says it has become second nature for communist party leaders to divide parties based on minor differences. Nepali communist party, established in 1949, first split in two in 1962. In 1973, these two divided into over a dozen parties. While some have faded away, others have united, though the latter is the weaker trend.

Founding member Nara Bahadur Karmacharya says personal jealousy and hunger for power motivate the splits more often than differences in principles. He argues that of the numerous divisions, only two were grounded in principle: that between Kesar Jung Rayamajhi and Puspa Lal Shrestha in 1962, and between the CPN (Unified) and the Maoists in 1995.

NK Dahal



KIRAN PANDAY

# Life transfusion

## Good dialysis facilities are important, but transplants even more so

JEMIMA SHERPA

In Nepal, you don't often see graphs as impressive as this one (below), which shows the dramatic line rise in haemodialysis sessions over the last ten years conducted at the National Kidney Centre (NKC).

The centre is a textbook example of the progress that can be made in Nepal's healthcare sector despite challenges. From humble beginnings a decade ago—with four hand-me-down dialysis machines and a single rented floor in Putalisadak, the centre now has 30 machines and accommodates nearly 1,400 haemodialysis sessions a month, and has a brand new facility with over eighty staff in Vanasthali.

The centre uses its new facility, originally intended as a hotel, efficiently. As an NGO, it runs primarily on patient fees, with technical support from a group of German organisations and individuals. Overheads are high—in addition to rent, electricity bills run to over Rs 110,000 a month, and the centre uses as much as 30,000 litres of water a day—but the cost of dialysis sessions has reduced from Rs 3,500 per three to four-hour session in 1997 to Rs 2,000 today. The centre also

runs an outpatient department for people with kidney problems and follow-ups with transplant patients, and provides heavily subsidised blood and urine tests and ultrasounds. In contrast, the government-run Bir Hospital has just five working dialysis machines. The centre has also donated two dialysis machines to Nepalgunj Medical College and three to Dharan's BP Koirala Health Science Institute to run on a non-profit basis.

Dr Ram Krishna Dulal, the centre's administrative director and public health specialist, says that isn't enough. "I've never seen this kind of growth," he explains. "More are being reported because of increased doctor and patient awareness, but there's also a genuine rise in the number of cases." Dulal suggests that this is largely due to increasingly unhealthy urban lifestyles that contribute to diabetes and hypertension, two major causes of chronic kidney failure. Some 2.6 million Nepalis are estimated to suffer from kidney disease, and there are over 10,000 kidney failures each year.

Rather than expanding further, the centre plans to instead spread prevention messages and support centres outside Kathmandu. As the centre's chief nephrologist Dr

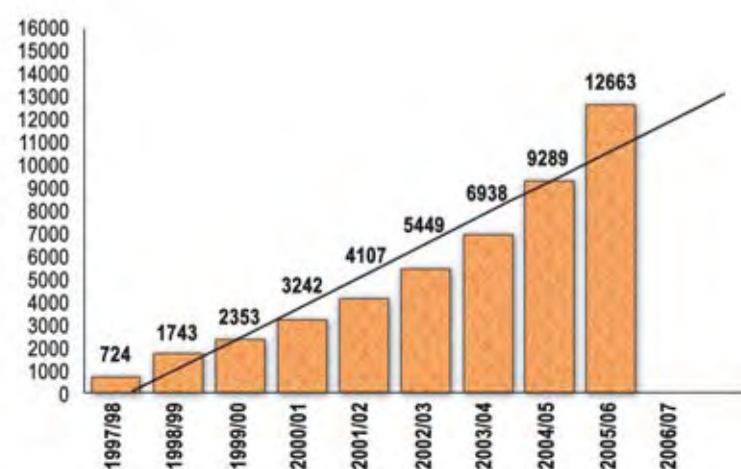
Rishi Kumar Kafle points out, even the best dialysis facilities are essentially a stopgap. Kidney failure is untreatable, and patients usually need dialysis twice a week to filter blood and remove extra fluid and toxins. This means that even though there are months where NKC conducts over 1,300 dialysis sessions, they're still seeing less than 200 patients. It also means these patients are paying over Rs 210,000 a year for dialysis, just to survive. Lab tests, hormone injections, and medicine for secondary illnesses can double that cost.

"Transplants are the best option," says Kafle, "most people can't support lifetime dialysis, and transplants allow them to become fully productive members of society." The centre, on average, refers two patients for transplants in India every week. Though the procedure is expensive—between Rs 700,000 to Rs 800,000 plus expensive post-op immunosuppressants—the greatly improved quality of life and ability to live without dialysis makes it worthwhile.

The next logical step, say Kafle and Dulal, is to start doing transplants in Nepal. "I'm confident we are competent to do transplants," Kafle says. None of the attempts so far have been successful, but he argues that the major obstacles are more bureaucratic and legal than technical. The Nepali 'Transplant Act' puts doctors at risk of hefty fines and jail time if a patient dies.

Until legislation changes, for patients like 28-year-old former policeman Ramesh Poudel, ('Staying alive', #209), survival is the focus. A transplant seems unlikely and he's been on dialysis for six years now. He lives alone in Samakhushi and makes the stressful trip to the National Kidney Centre twice a week. "Well, I'm still alive," he says, lying still as tubes of blood run between him and the dialysis machine. ●

### Total number of haemodialysis sessions conducted at National Kidney Centre



COURTESY NATIONAL KIDNEY CENTRE

# Dumb and dumber

## Now, our prime minister and lawmakers can do just about anything they want

**M**ake no mistake. The interim constitution promulgated Monday is 'interim' in name only. It will be in force until a new constitution, written by an elected constitution assembly is drafted, approved and put into effect—a timeline that could stretch to three years. But, this document is certain to provide the blueprint for the new one.

**EYES WIDE SHUT**  
Sheetal Kumar

There has been intense criticism of the interim constitution from many quarters. The lawyers and judiciary say that because the constitution is executive-centric and demolishes the independence of the judiciary. Janjatis, madhesis, and dalits can't stand it because of the meagre representation it prescribes for them in the future constituent assembly. Lawmakers are critical because the legislature now has no means to remove the prime minister.

These are all valid arguments, and a document that will govern Nepal for almost three years needs to be scrutinised and its kinks ironed out. But what did Prime Minister Koirala, his governing SPA alliance and the Maoists say to all these voices?

"You're right, but we don't have time to address all these issues. We are tied down by this artificial timeline we brought upon ourselves, so we have to promulgate this constitution on 15 January. Only then can we hold the all-important constituent assembly election by mid-June. Please allow us to promulgate this constitution now. We promise to look into your grievances and amend the document as we go along."

We, the people, being so trusting of our politicians, have given them the benefit of the doubt. Not that it matters, because the party-appointed parliamentarians would have approved the document anyway whether we agreed or disagreed. What can we do about this amateur document foisted upon our lives for three years?

There's nothing much we can do, actually, other than hope that Koirala and others deliver on the promises they made. Because, if you read the document carefully, you will see that the notion of accountability has been jettisoned. No one is really answerable to anyone.

Let's begin with the interim legislature itself. This is a body that is not elected, so its members are not answerable to the voters. The formerly elected lawmakers, whose mandate (if there was one) ran out on the night of 15 January, are now completely unencumbered from voter

pressure and only answerable to their parties.

The same is the case with the soon-to-be formed interim government. Yes, it will be a coalition between the SPA and Maoists, but it too isn't accountable to anyone. The ministers will answer to the prime minister alone but the prime minister—to no one. In case you haven't noticed, there is no provision to move a no-trust motion against the prime minister in the interim legislature. So there is no incentive for him to behave.

We have, in our hour of national delirium, put everything in the hands of one man: a frail 84-year-old who has repeatedly shown how lacking in vision he can be. The instability of the

1990s stemmed directly from his refusal to compromise with his party colleagues, and later with the communists. The appointments he made over the years to government and party positions unwittingly reinforced how insensitive he can be to minority communities.

And now, since Koirala is unsure how long his health will hold out, the country is set on an unnatural timeline for constituent assembly polls by mid-June. That madhesi, janjati and dalit concerns for greater representation are being sacrificed at this altar is the biggest irony of this new inclusive democracy we are supposedly living in.

How much dumber can we get? ●



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## Strategic aid

Japan is revising the objectives of its overseas development aid (ODA) program to help improve Japan's global visibility and maintain the regional security it needs for its own progress. Officials say the focus will now be on issues such as peacebuilding in the Middle East; regional rather than bilateral initiatives such as the Mekong regional development program; and promoting trade and investment to strengthen the role of the private sector in reducing poverty in developing countries.

Analysts say the revisions are to counter the growing aid contributions of emerging powers such as China and India, and to strengthen ties with the US and Europe, particularly in light of the North Korean nuclear threat. The strategy also includes debt relief to Iraq and reopening debate on the prohibition on Japanese military involvement overseas.

Japan's ODA program was launched in 1954, and was one of the world's largest in the 1990s. Despite cuts over the last nine years, there has been an almost four percent reduction from the 2005 level alone—the budget still stands at \$6.13 billion. The majority of Japanese aid goes to southeast and east Asia, followed by south Asia and Africa.

Addressing concerns that recent ODA decisions stray from international aid objectives, foreign ministry officials say that while Japan won't increase its budget to meet the UN goal of donors spending 0.7 percent of Gross National Income on aid, there will still be significant contributions to the millennium development goals for poverty reduction.

Japan spends around 0.2 percent of its GNP on assistance programs, more than the US, but far behind the Nordic donors, France, and Germany, which give around 5 percent each.

## Queen bees, wannabes

Women bosses are significantly more likely than men to discriminate against female employees, recent research suggests. The study by a group of psychologists at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin found that when presented with applications for promotion, women were more likely than men to assess the female candidate as less qualified than the male one. They were also prone to mark down women's prospects for promotion and to assess them as more controlling than men in their management style.

The findings, based on experiments carried out among more than 700 people, suggest that the 'queen bee syndrome' of female rivalry in the workplace may sometimes be as important as sexism in holding back women's careers.

Female and older participants showed more prejudice against the (idea of a) female leader than male and younger participants, said Rocio Garcia-Retamero, lead author of the report.

The study showed female participants had a stronger tendency than males to view the female candidates as less qualified. The female participants also thought that the female candidate would fare worse in her job in the future.

Recent cases that have illustrated this problem include that of Helen Green, 36, a Deutsche Bank employee from London, who was awarded nearly \$1.5 million after two years of bullying by four female colleagues.

**FACING THE PAST:** This heritage site reminds South Africans of the human rights violations during the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, which was investigated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1998.



# At peace with the past

## Truth and forgiveness free societies to move forward

South Africa is now beginning to contemplate the retirement of Thabo Mbeki, its second president since the end of the apartheid era. This is an opportune moment to assess our achievements, note our failures, and see what elements in our reasonably peaceful transition from repression to democracy may be applied elsewhere.

apartheid regime, and his exhibition of moral courage by setting in motion our liberating revolution.

But ordinary South Africans should also be proud of themselves, their self-discipline, decency, and ability to forgive prevented a bloodbath. They are a model for other troubled parts of the world.

We, especially white South Africans, have tended to be dismissive of our Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which allowed those who had committed great crimes under apartheid to confess their acts and avoid prosecution. Truth, not punishment, was to heal. Around the world, the TRC is considered a benchmark against which other efforts to move from dictatorship to democracy must be judged.

Yes, the TRC was flawed—so are all human enterprises. But it was a remarkable institution, for many had thought a black-led government would signal the onset of an orgy of revenge and retribution against whites for all the degradations black South Africans had suffered from colonial times to the apartheid era.

Instead, the world saw nobility of spirit displayed every day before the TRC, as victims of gruesome atrocities forgave their tormentors and even embraced them on occasion. All South Africans were traumatised by apartheid. The TRC helped open and cleanse festering wounds, and pour balm on them to help in healing all South Africans.

It is easy to take the TRC's work for granted, until one looks at the Middle East and the chaos of Iraq, where revenge, reprisal,

and retaliation are fuelling a ghastly, inexorable cycle of violence. Likewise, South Africa was spared the horrors of genocide, as in Rwanda, and the endless conflict that has gripped Sri Lanka, Burundi, Sudan, the Ivory Coast, and many other countries. The harsh truths put before our people by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission drew the poisons from our politics.

South Africa's transition teaches that no divided country has a future if it goes forward without truth and forgiveness. Russia's transition to democracy began at almost the same time. The Berlin Wall fell in November 1989. Nelson Mandela was released in February 1990. But compare Russia today—with rampant organised crime, Chechnya, carnage like the theatre hostage disaster, the Beslan school catastrophe—with South Africa. By avoiding the truth of the Soviet past, Russians have stored up trouble for the future.

Political crimes never fade. We have not forgotten what was done to ordinary black people in the name of apartheid. Indeed, through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we know far more about the full horrors of that era than we would, had we sought to prosecute people or tried simply to move on. The truth has set us free to be at peace with ourselves. Remembrance and forgiveness have allowed our nightmares to be consigned to the past. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace.



**COMMENT**  
Desmond Tutu

We all remember the first days of that transfer of power to the black majority when most people believed we would be overwhelmed by a ghastly racial bloodbath. It was a desperate time, brief but seared in our memories, when indiscriminate killings on trains, in taxis, and on buses were common, a time of massacres at regular intervals, often owing to the bloody rivalry between the African National Congress and the Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party.

But catastrophe was avoided and instead, the world was awed by the spectacle of long lines of South Africans of every race snaking their way slowly to polling booths on 27 April, 1994.

Of course, part of South Africa's transition success was due to the moral colossus that is Nelson Mandela, whose calm and sagacity, and status as an icon of forgiveness, compassion, magnanimity, and reconciliation make us the envy of every nation. We were blessed that he guided our state through its rebirth. And we must also thank FW de Klerk, the last ruler of the dying


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If Nepal is to belong to all Nepalis, now's the time to get started

# A moment of truth

The word 'feudalism' is bandied about a lot. As a famous wit observed, everyone talks about the weather but no one does anything about it. Well it's about time Nepal took a long look at what's feudal and what isn't, and evolved a consensus on getting something done.



HERE AND THERE  
Daniel Lak

To be feudal is to have a vertical power structure, where birth and inheritance matter, and merit does not. There are no fresh opportunities in feudalism, just duties and burdens for the excluded, benefits for those born into privilege. Patronage is dispensed to a few in return for loyalty, and most people are left out.

Unaccountability and impunity are rampant. A feudal

elite is accountable only to itself. Patrons own everything—or so they believe—and do not recognise their own thievery, corruption or misuse of public funds. There is a monopoly on the use of violence. Only feudalism's top people can arrest, torture, maim and kill. All others who do so are 'terrorists'.

This society remains mired in feudalism, despite its layers of apparent modernity. Beyond a few cutting edge business enterprises, and some arts and crafts, merit still means little here. Birth, access to power, and tradition are everything

Feudals have governed this place since it became a nation. First the Shah family, then the Ranas, and latterly political parties that behave like royal courts, encouraging sycophancy, dynasties, and unaccountability. Instead of a single king, we had dozens, each with its own fawning coterie. Elections provided cover for

misgovernance and gave the illusion of

accountability. In the jungles, another form of feudalism grew in Maoist ranks, homage to a discredited historical outlook, impunity in the name

of People's War.

Meanwhile, the royal palace fumed, plotted and manipulated, planting seeds of discord. Intrigue is, after all, what feudalism does best. A patron-in-chief supported by a network of troublemaking cronies stirred an already simmering pot. Political parties were split and civil unrest was fanned. Diplomacy and government policy were second-guessed, even undermined. A discredited elite that lost much power in 1990 was hard at work to restore a hated status quo.

They succeeded in October of 2002, and cemented their position in 2005. Gyanendra's direct rule was the jewel in their crown. Again, the palace was at the centre of things, commanding the army directly and making executive decisions about press censorship and suppression of human rights.

For a time, Nepal was a theme park for tin pot feudalism. Military loyalties to 'king and country, in that order' were rewarded with even more medals and ribbons that bespoke nothing of substance. King and Crown Prince hurtled obliviously around a bemused, increasingly angry country. The world looked on, first with horror then with growing hope, as the Maoists made common ground with democrats, jumpstarting a long overdue people's movement for sanity.

Even the former king of Bhutan, whatever his other sins, ordered his own feudal elite to make way for democracy, musing in public that "you never know if you're going to get a bad king." At least a bad prime minister can be voted out, shamed in the press.

So with a new parliament in place, let the debate begin. Does feudalism belong in the 'New Nepal'? In palaces or political parties? If so, please justify. If not, what are we waiting for? ●



# Talking tough

Bloggers criticise the interim constitution for ignoring key issues

Constitutional amendments are enduring processes of any democratic polity. As long as there is general consensus, that can be done later. For now, we need to put forth more energy and ideas toward the election process, to write a more authentic and final constitution of the Nepali nation.

-Special Editorial on Nepal Monitor  
<http://www.nepalmonitor.com/>

The ruling class was so strong, whereas the oppressed class was economically and politically so weak that they could barely organise and raise [their] voice, fighting for rights was a far-away thing.

-Aazaad on Madhesh Blog  
<http://madhesh.com/>

With the Maoists now fully and formally part of the political mainstream, it's time to recognise that single seminal event that made all this happen: King Gyanendra's 1 February, 2005 takeover. Without the much-maligned palace intervention, the external dynamics impeding the resolution of the conflict would not have dramatically changed course.

-Maila Baje on Nepali Netbook  
<http://nepalinetbook.blogspot.com/>

The blogosphere this week is buzzing with comments on the interim constitution, the way forward, and the upcoming constituent assembly elections. A special editorial on Nepal Monitor says that despite real concerns over the monopoly the interim constitution gives the eight parties, the power it gives the prime minister, and its sidelining of minority rights, a new constitution is a good start.

Over at Blogdai ([nepalnow.blogspot.com](http://nepalnow.blogspot.com)) ZZZ is making similar arguments. He says that the interim constitution is a temporary arrangement. Soon we are going to have a constituent assembly election and have an elected assembly that will, for the first time in Nepal, write the constitution. He says it is absurd to expect to build a US-type democracy overnight and that there is a lot to learn and compromise if we want to coexist peacefully.

Remember that years of bloodshed, merciless killings and looting by the Maoist [sic] will not be forgotten. We will only forgive you if you sacrifice yourself to develop and give life back to the families who remain without children, fathers and sons.

-Jesus on United We Blog!  
<http://blog.com.np/>

A number of vibrant madhesi-centred blogs criticise the interim constitution for blatantly ignoring the voice of madhesi groups.

Like the last constitution, this one has also ignored the issues relating to madhesis. This just goes to prove that whether it is a dictatorship, republic, democracy, [the] pahadia public, [or a] lecturer in college or media, no one seems adequately interested in taking [up] madhesi issues and provide them their proper privileges.†

-Subhash Shah on Madhesi- United We Stand  
<http://madhesi.wordpress.com/>

Bloggers on madhes.com say the Republic of Madhes will not be a small entity, as some dismiss. They cite comparative statistics and estimate that put together, the 20 madhes districts will be larger than Israel and have a population larger than Switzerland or Greece.

An open letter to Nepali Times columnist Sheetal Kumar writes, in response to eDraw the line! (Eyes Wide Shut, #330), that leaders from GP Koirala to Pushpa Kamal Dahal are conspiring to work against madhes-related issues. Changing the mindset of both madhesis and pahadis is not going to help the situation, as only drastic measures, possibly involving weapons and violence, is the only way to grab national and international attention and help madhesis speak up for their rights.



ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

❖ **Tantric Sculptures and Nude Croquis (Sketches)** Mixed media artworks by Park Geun Yong, until 23 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048

EVENTS

- ❖ **Vipassana Meditation** talk program at The Quest, Stadium Gate, Tripureswor, 1PM on 20 January. 4279712†
- ❖ **Children in the Shadows** free film festival until 20 January, information at [www.childrenintheshadows.com](http://www.childrenintheshadows.com)
- ❖ **Shastrartha** on 'farmer's rights in the context of the WTO' at Martin Chautari, 20 January at 3-5PM. 4238050
- ❖ **Dialogue Session** on 'The Root of Our Problems' at The Quest, Stadium Gate, Tripureswor, 1PM on 22-26 January†
- ❖ **Book Fair 2007** at the United School, Satdobato, on 23 January.
- ❖ **Mangalbare Discussion Series** at Martin Chautari on Nepal's economic agenda with Dilip Raj Khanal, 23 January at 5PM. 4238050
- ❖ **HIV and AIDS: A Social Issue** Youth Initiative workshop at Heritage Plaza, Kamaladi, 10-5 PM on 25 January. Registration by 21 January, 4107599
- ❖ **Youth Discussion Series** at Martin Chautari on 'Challenges and Opportunities of Youth in Journalism', 26 January at 3PM.
- ❖ **British Film Festival 2007** 26-28 January in Pokhara.
- ❖ **Kathmandu Chorale** rehearsals at the British School, every Monday 7-9 PM from 29 January. 5534737
- ❖ **Singing Bowl Demonstration and Concert** CSGN's annual event at the Shankar Hotel, Lazimpat, 5.30PM on 31 January.
- ❖ **Salsa Workshop** weekday and weekend classes available at Salsa Dance Academy, Bhat Bhateni. 4422019
- ❖ **Hata Yoga** classes for a 40 percent discount at The Self Awakening Centre, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4256618

MUSIC

- ❖ **Fusion and Classical Nepali** music by Rudra live at the courtyard, Le Meridien every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800.
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia CafÉ, Thamel every Friday, 8PM.
- ❖ **Classical Fusion Music** at Jatra, every Saturday, 7PM onwards
- ❖ **Gainé (Gandarbas)** perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680080

DINING

- ❖ **Shop Talk** drink and dine at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Radisson Hotel.
- ❖ **Gyakok** lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden CafÉ, Hotel Shangri-La. Minimum of 4 guests at Rs 450 per person.
- ❖ **Walk and Lunch** every Saturday until 27 January at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Retro Brunch Barbeque** at The Poolside with the Crossfire Band, Le Meridien from 12 noon-4PM, Rs 1000 inclusive of swimming and complimentary drink.
- ❖ **International Brunch** weekends, 11AM-3PM for Rs 499 per person (Rs 299 for children) at Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- ❖ **Farmhouse CafÉ** at Park Village Resort. Dine alfresco with the birds and the butterflies. 4375280
- ❖ **Te savour** Tibetan delicacies at the new Tibetan restaurant and Nepalis first noodle bar, Bluebird Mall Food Court
- ❖ **Calcutta's Famous** rolls, biryani, kebabs, and Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Japanese Food** at the Coffee Shop, Hotel Shangri-la, 12 noon till 3PM, Rs 499 per person. 4412999
- ❖ **Pizza** straight from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Some Like It Hot** cozy winter cocktails with live music from Side B every Wednesday at Fusion the bar at Dwarika's.
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768, Bhat Bhateni 4426587 and Pulchok. 5521755
- ❖ **AKA Pizza** at Moksh, delivery available. 5526212
- ❖ **Momo and Sekuwa Revolution** every Saturday at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048
- ❖ **Cocktails and Mocktails** happy hour every day 4-7PM at Kathmandu Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road.

For inclusion in the listing send information to [editors@nepaltimes.com](mailto:editors@nepaltimes.com)



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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



It's going to get colder. This Wednesday was the coldest of the season so far, with frost overnight in parts of the Valley. There is normally snowfall and winter rain this month, and mercury levels in towns like Jumla, Jomsom, and Jiri are well below freezing in the mornings. Thursday's satellite picture shows a fresh westerly front heading towards the central Himalaya and a persistent low over eastern Tibet that is pulling it in. This could mean light winter rains or snowfall early next week. Though it is difficult to assess how much moisture the clouds are carrying and whether they will retain it all the way to central and eastern Nepal, it is certain that a further drop in the mercury is in store. The Western tarai will again see thick fog when the hills to the north get snow.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

**GOING GREY:** (l-r) Khadka Bahadur Biswokarma, Lokendra Bista, Hisila Yami, Krishna Bahadur Mahara (standing), Deb Gurung, and Janardhan Sharma at a program to honouring the new Maoist MPs at Basantapur's Shiva Parbati Dabali on Thursday.



RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

**LEGAL:** Newly-elected president of the Nepal Bar Association, Bishwokanta Mainali (centre), talks to journalists outside the NBA office after winning the election on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY:** NC lawmaker Mahadev Gurung takes pictures of the parliament building to set as a wallpaper for his mobile phone on Wednesday.

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# Getting house trained

The Gallery Baithak was where the Ranas used to watch dances, plays, and movies. The seating was segregated, with **queens, princesses, ladies-in-waiting, and concubines** in a separate enclosure. The Nautch Ghar has obviously seen better days and should perhaps be turned into an art museum, definitely not a parliament for a country of 27 million.

The only reason the honourable members didn't keel over with hypothermia on Monday night was because they were stacked cheek to jowl and forced to **share body heat**. How this building is going to seat 425 members of the constituent assembly this summer is anybody's guess. Maybe Nepal should have a **three-tier parliamentary system** with the Upper Berth, Middle Berth, and Lower Berth.

ॐ

Tip Top Tailors on New Road worked overtime to finish grey blazers for the 73-member Maoist team in parliament, but could get only 41 ready by the time the session started and that was only because the proceedings were delayed by six hours. And in the spirit of gender empowerment that has become a hallmark of the Maoist movement, female comrade members got **first crack** at the rather fetching coats. Although the temperature inside the legislature probably made them wish they could have donned their **knockoff North Face fleeces** instead.

And who was that **suited booted guy** in the Maoist ranks? None other than Major General Kumar Phudung of our own ex-Royal Nepal Army. Eyebrows have been raised about how someone so close to former Chief of Army Staff General Satchit SJBR agreed to be a hand-picked Maoist nominee, and speculation is rife that he may have been a DPA all along. But Phudung told colleagues that the Maoists approached him saying they needed advice on restructuring the armed forces and he felt it was his duty to the nation to help. Whatever the case, getting Phudung was quite a **coup for the comrades**. The other seven parties didn't show any such imagination.

ॐ

The reason Krishna Sitaula, Pradeep Gyawali and Deb Gurung were looking **under the weather** was not just because of the cold, the Ass understands. All three have been suffering from suspected jaundice. Since they were part of the government-Maoist negotiating process, it should be fairly easy to trace the five-star establishment where kitchen staff are **hygienically challenged**.

ॐ

It wasn't just the Ass **freezing his ass off** on Monday. Also caught unawares by the frigid ambience inside the chambers were Kathmandu-based ambassadors, who were

seen huddled together for warmth in their balcony seats. Some were spotted sneaking off to the parking lot for smokes at regular intervals. But when they found out that 18 members were listed to speak and the microphone had malfunctioned, many dips called it a day and went home to watch **the Ash-Abhishek engagement** live on tv instead. One of the few who stayed till the end was **Big Brother Mukherjee**, silhouetted spookily against a backlit balcony.

ॐ

Bal Bahadur Rai first entered the Gallery Baithak as an elected member of parliament after the election in 1959. Being seniormost, it fell upon him to lead the collective oath-taking. Members dutifully repeated after him *ilŌdo solemnly swearŌto abide by the norms and rules of the houseŌ. When Rai got to the part **ias god is my witnessŌ** us Asses in the media gallery noticed that the first row of **Maoist atheists** didn't repeat that sentence. Backbencher comrades, however, seemed to have no qualms about invoking god.*



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ISSN 1814-2613