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Coils of fear

BARBED COMMENT: Despite a year of ceasefire, the country is still crisscrossed by barbed wire and many Nepalis are trying to get on with their lives the best they can.

See p4

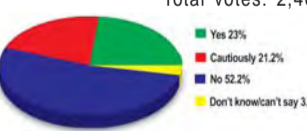


KIRAN PANDAY

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 346

Q. Are you optimistic about the outlook for the economy for the rest of the year?

Total votes: 2,409



Weekly Internet Poll # 347. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. A Do you think people in Kathmandu have similar priorities and political views as those in other parts of the country?

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A PEOPLE WAR
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A new order

Use the smarts of the Nepali people

A PUBLIC REPUBLIC

Loktantra Day on Tuesday was supposed to be a celebration, but it warned us about the danger of replacing one form of dictatorship with another.

Self-professed young communists hurled missiles at a speaker and tried to storm the stage. They nearly turned what was supposed to be a commemoration of freedom into a farce. The Maoists are clearly not yet ready to enter the arena of competitive politics.

Wanting all or nothing, preventing those with dissenting views from expressing them and using the threat of violence to get their way proves this leopard hasn't changed its spots.

Across the country, Maoist cadre are already on the campaign trail and their refrain is: "Vote for us in the election or else we will go back to war." In Hetauda this week, they threatened to burn down a media office for critical coverage. In Dailekh they harassed two reporters who had interviewed locals resisting Maoist intimidation. In Bajhang, local warlords openly defy their own party policy.

This is not the democracy that we struggled to restore. Nepal's people power uprising last year wasn't about replacing a royal dictatorship with an obsolete brand of totalitarianism. The Maoists are now in government, but their MPs behave as if they have been dragooned to parliament just to shout slogans.

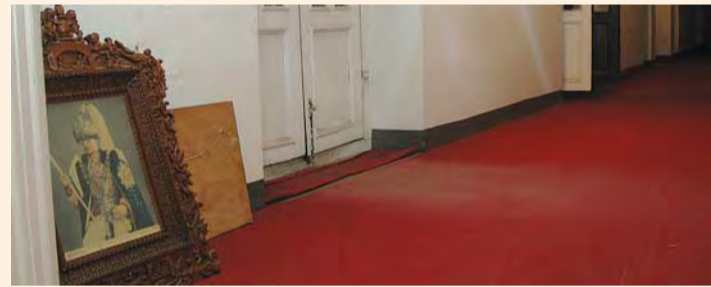
Meanwhile, the Seven behave like traditional politicians with their opportunism and hypocrisy intact. The people gave them a second chance last year by installing them in power, but we see a familiar myopia and narrow-mindedness. It shouldn't be politics as usual. The election is not about dominating the next government, but about deciding the future governance structure of this country.

The seven parties and the Maoists find it politically expedient to have a universally reviled monarch as a whipping boy. But there is a limit to how long they can stoke populism and extravagant republicanism to mask their insecurity and ineptitude. With this lot, how is a republic going to be any different than a kingdom?

For all intents and purposes Nepal is already a republic even though the king tries to make his presence felt—most recently by getting his guards to play the royal anthem in Dakshinkali. It would be best for all concerned if Gyanendra was cut, and cut cleanly.

It is a foregone conclusion what the first sitting of the constituent assembly will decide about the monarchy. Even if, by some miracle, the throne is retained it will have no role, responsibility, or authority. So why flog a dead horse?

Instead, the Eight should demonstrate to the people the state exists, re-establish the rule of law, and allow Nepalis to finally experience the peace dividend.



KIRAN PANDAY

A year after the historic Jana Andolan II, the contours of a new political order are emerging in Nepal.

The political parties and the Maoists have made significant progress towards ending the conflict. Political structures and decision-making mechanisms have been created. There is a



GUEST COLUMN
Ashraf Ghani

timeframe for the transition and consensus on key reforms. A high degree of trust has been established in this homegrown process between the prime minister and the Maoist leadership.

Given the complicated transitions precipitated by the People's Movement, and the size and scope of Nepal's problems, the successes are significant. Nepalis are in an open historic moment in which they can shape their own future.

However, the past year's accomplishments are under-appreciated or misunderstood because of a failure of communication between the political elite and the Nepali people, and an unpredictable political process. In a highly politicised environment where rumour and innuendo substitute for deliberation and discussion, a perception of inefficient or unfair process has a high cost. The people's impatience with the disconnect between Nepal's decision-makers and the movement which brought them to power has begun to manifest in violent actions, such as the madhesi uprisings.

Significant risks must be managed to create conditions for

a new, prosperous, democratic Nepal. First, the Maoists must indicate a true commitment to a pluralistic, multi-party political system. A test will be how far the leadership can control the violence and extortion still carried out by the rank and file.

Second, demands for inclusion from communities mobilised on the basis of group identity must be channelled through a legitimate political process, not extra-legal means. This requires a two-way process for communication and management of expectations between the nascent government and the Nepali people.

Third, development, rule of law, and security of property are essential to ensure the economic environment for investment and job creation, which in turn support political progress.

Fourth, elections for the constituent assembly must be as free and fair as possible, and be the mechanism used to address exclusion. If the parties field sets of candidates that will result in an unrepresentative assembly, the potential for further unrest will be extremely high. They must learn from the Maoists' efforts to ensure that their candidates reflect Nepal's diversity.

The security risk posed by the cantonment of Maoist and government troops must be mitigated through a coherent, adequately funded reintegration plan to ensure sustainable disarmament and demobilisation efforts. Ex-combatants go back to arms again if they do not have the opportunities needed to become productive members of society.

A centrist consensus is emerging predicated on the idea of the state as an instrument for inclusive development and the

realisation of collective goals. The message from the Nepali people, who have not yet reaped a peace dividend, is clear: govern with us and for us, not despite us.

The people want to be partners in a system that recognises and relates to their concerns. This requires redefining the political system, and radically restructuring the relationship between citizens and state. At the village level, Nepal has in many ways reversed the tragedy of the commons. Impressive community micro-hydroelectric power, forestry, and education programs demonstrate the power of collective action. This energy and ingenuity needs to be mobilised at the national level.

It is important that leaders within civil society, the business community, and the government jointly articulate a vision for the future that is both credible and actionable. This is a precondition for the support of the international donors and partners who can assist in making it a reality. Hesitation or failure may freeze Nepal in a state of stalled development or prolonged insecurity. The collective will, determination, and resourcefulness of the Nepali people must be drawn upon to work towards shared national goals and to overcome the risks that threaten progress to a new political order. The opportunity is too important, and the consequences of failure too great. ●

Ashraf Ghani is former finance minister of Afghanistan. He has advised the governments of Sudan and Lebanon on peace-building and state effectiveness.

The price of radicalism

The MJF has created a political vacuum it can't fill any time soon

JANAKPUR – Towards the end of the Rana oligarchy, this religious town and its surrounding areas emerged as a centre of oppositional politics.

The Nepali Congress, which was instrumental in mobilising the movement, consolidated its position here through the 60s. Since then, the larger Mahottari area—Mahottari, Dhanusha, Sarlahi—had been the heartland of the party's support base.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Not any more. The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) has done more damage to the Congress than the monarchists, the Marxists, the Leninists, the Maoists, and all other opportunists put together. A mere call for a three-day banda by the MJF forced Girija Prasad Koirala to cancel his big speech here.

What has changed to give a new forum so much influence? Why is the NC losing ground everyday? Clearly there were

various local, regional, national, and international forces at play. But there was seething anger.

Kameshwar Yadav runs a posh shop selling televisions and refrigerators on Station Road. Like most shopkeepers, he detests bandas, doesn't differentiate between his pahadi and madhesi customers, and would stay away from politics if he could help it. But after the Tarai Uprising he has noticed changes the MJF has brought in his life. Earlier, his pahadi customers would ask in a bullying tone: "O bhैया, how much do you sell this for?" The language of enquiry is now much more polite: "Sahuji, how much does this cost?"

NC leaders had failed to read accurately the quest for respect among the emerging madhesi elite. The MJF gauged this correctly and is trying to capitalise on it. It's too early to say whether reluctant radicals like Kameshwar will be tempted by the identity politics of Upendra Yadav, but their disillusionment with the likes of Ram Baran Yadav and Bimalendra Nidhi, and with the NC leadership is conspicuous.

The structure of the NC in these districts does not in the least reflect the region's changed political economy. Although agriculture continues to be the tarai's mainstay, a class of migrant workers—dismissed as 'Malaysian-lahures' by pahadi landlords—has emerged and wants social respect commensurate with its economic muscle. The NC, the UML, the Maoists, the RPP, and even Sadbhabana failed to notice that restless youth from Qatar, Korea, or Malaysia lahure families were looking for dignity, and willing to pledge political loyalty to those who'd give it to them. That's what the MJF mobilised.

But identity politics gives rise to contradictory aspirations. The marginalised want recognition, but also want to be mainstreamed. Their desire to get into the establishment is stronger than their anger against it. And once the rage is exhausted, issues of ideology, agenda, and leadership again come to the fore. And here the MJF will lose out because it is basically a ragtag band of party-hoppers, political has-beens,

frustrated technocrats, and ideological speculators. The Forum has created a political vacuum that it will not be able to fill anytime soon.

The Tarai Uprising had such broad support precisely because its mission didn't clash with party affiliations. That situation has changed after the postponement of the constituent assembly elections and the possibility that the MJF will emerge as an independent political party.

Longtime supporters of the rightwing parties of Surya Bahadur, Pashupati Shamsheer and Rabindra Nath have gone back to their respective flocks. Diehard UML loyalists have formed their own madhesi wing. The Maoists already have the Madhesi Mukti Morcha. Sadbhabana's traditional base remains intact. The biggest loser in the contest for spheres of influence in the tarai has been the NC.

And this weakening of moderates will haunt the intellectuals of this town who initially thought that the MJF would help check Maoist influence in the Madhes. ●

LETTERS

LAST CHANCE

Yash Ghai's 'One more chance' (Guest column, #345) hits the right note on the delayed, postponed, what-have-you elections to the constituent assembly. What he calls the leisurely style of the transition has been in part due to the initial promises of fast change. The only thing that was fast was the descent into 'democratic' mudslinging. No surprise that the issue of constitutional reform itself was not taken seriously. In their fear of electoral defeat, the parties, instead of supporting the work of the Election Commission, are willing to amend the interim constitution as often as it takes to prolong the life of the interim parliament.

Ghai is right—the party hacks have lost one good chance to show their commitment to a democratic, peaceful, progressive, and culturally diverse Nepal. After a year of politicking and date debates, we're back to square one. What will happen when the anger of the people boils over?

Surya B Prasai, email

As unfortunate as the current situation is, I believe that we are still, albeit shudderingly, on the right path towards long-term stability. The sporadic protests we are seeing now happens in all post-conflict countries, possibly due to the power vacuum caused by sudden political change. I don't think the country will ever go back to an outright civil war, but if the lawmakers get it wrong this time round we will be in a big, big political mess. After enduring so much hardship the Nepali people deserve better than destructive politics akin to Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, and Pakistan. All the parties—including the Maoists—need to rise to the occasion this one time.

Santosh Khanal, Glasgow

Yash Ghai presented a thoughtful analysis of what needs to happen, why, and by when. But as heartbreaking as it is to admit this, many of us who have lived and worked in Nepal for a couple of decades or more, have given up. If there were any way to see how this beautiful country and its resourceful and resilient (non-politician) citizens could reclaim the opportunities and innocence it once had, I'd jump to it. But what I'm starting to acknowledge is that it's becoming just another grubby little country and that the people who are its biggest strength will in a generation look like your standard issue aggressive, selfish citizens of miserable countries.

J Smith, email

ALL THE PEOPLE

Your front page editorial ('Bridge-building', #345) was timely and put across a message that we cannot hear often enough. Now, more than ever, we need to pay attention to development and delivering a peace dividend. My question is this: if we all agree as wholeheartedly with this as we claim to, why is no one doing anything about it? If you can answer that, the oracle at Delphi has stiff competition.

Arati Shrestha, email

As our politics got more convoluted, we became poorer and poorer, eventually driven to seek work in foreign lands. If only we realised that if our economy developed, growth would follow, leading to greater awareness of all kinds, including political. Let the politicians do their politicking, let the people prosper. You're right—after all these centuries of oppression, Nepalis cannot be fooled again into supporting the same old mess.

Rishav, email

YOUNG COMRADES

'An armless army' (#345) was really interesting—and shocking. Young Communist League members used to hold important positions in the People's Liberation Army. Everyone was surprised when all of a sudden this new YCL thing emerged and started extorting, intimidating, and pressurising the government on a large scale. The truth, as the

article says, is that the league is old wine in a new bottle. How much can we trust the Maoists? They're repaying a sincere effort to mainstream them with deceit. The government has to be very strict in controlling the illegal and vigilante activities of hardcore YCL activists.

PB Rana, email

The reaction of the CPN-M to police raids on YCL offices in Kathmandu Valley is against the peace agreement, which sanctions state force against armed non-state actors who terrorise the public. Going by their yardstick, the entire country should be on the warpath to oppose Maoist excesses, including abduction, extortion and torture on civilians. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and the party he unfortunately leads, are only proving their short-sightedness and lack of trust in the rule of law. Why are the other parties not mustering the courage to oppose intimidation? The return of the confiscated vehicle used by their leadership is also an utterly shameful episode for these self-appointed guardians of society.

SK Shrestha, Kathmandu

CK LAL

Most of the so-called intelligentsia in Nepal are biased, but the degree can vary. C K Lal's 'An unfinished uprising' (#345) also falls in the same category. Mr Lal seems preoccupied with the notion of neglect of the tarai only and repeats this. But the truth is the neglect of development in the pahad is even worse. Everybody agrees that our rulers failed to fully integrate the tarai into the mainstream. To some extent, people of the tarai region are also to blame for not being interested in integration.

The spread of hatred by MJF activists against pahadis is unprecedented. Certain people in

Kathmandu pass derogatory remarks against migrants not only from the tarai but against all migrants. All forms of discrimination against our people by anyone must be stopped immediately.

Abhi, New Delhi

CK Lal has tried to draw some historic bases for the madhesi crisis. But the example of deputation of government officials should not be taken as ruling over the local inhabitants. It can be viewed from the angle of building harmony. For

example, most of the schools, government offices, and local businesses in the western hills are staffed by madhesi. Can it be concluded that madhesi have colonised the western pahad? Intellectuals like CK Lal should construct some indicative viewpoints in order to resolve current stereotypes and address all Nepalis with dignity.

Puspa Raj Pant, Aberdeen UK

Kudos to CK Lal for the wonderful and thought-provoking columns and also for the delightful Ass columns on the back page for coming up with 'Maoist monarchy'. Great job, folks.

B Bhatta, email

SPLENDID

What a splendid issue: great images, good writing, a good mix of subjects, and just the right note of scepticism without cynicism. Is Nepali Times getting sassier or what?

Gauri Pradhan, email

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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Still in the crosshairs



RAMESWOR BOHARA

WHERE IT ALL STARTED: The police station in Holeri that was destroyed in 1996 is still in ruins. The Maoists have refused to allow the police back.

"We'll fix you."

- Comrade Sharad

There had been an all-party agreement that villagers of Dahaban would get priority on water. But as water became scarce in the dry season, Maoists from the nearby cantonment started taking the water. When villagers complained to the local administration, the Maoists threatened to kill local leaders, including the vice chairman of Sakhi VDC, Ghanashyam Khadka. On 19 April, three journalists happened to walk into an all-party meeting in Dahaban to resolve the dispute in which many local villagers were also taking part. Maoist Fifth Division commander, Comrade Sharad was gesturing aggressively and threatening party leaders in a loud voice: "We'll fix you."

When CDO Topendra KC tried to calm him down, Sharad said: "Watch it, if you do anything I'll break your arms and legs."

Just as we had started taking pictures of the proceedings, Sharad and another Maoist named Abinash started roughing us up. We tried to say we were press, but they started shouting at us accusing us of being spies and took away our cameras. The CDO, political leaders and villagers were too afraid to speak up. We found out later this is standard behaviour of Maoist cadre in Rolpa and local politicians are terrified to even speak with Sharad.

All three of us were forced to get down from our bikes by Abinash and detained. "You go when I tell you to go," he said. Two hours later, our cameras were returned and we were told we could go. ● Rameswor Bohara

The war may have ended, but there is no peace in Holeri

RAMESWOR BOHARA
in ROLPA

None would have ever heard of the tiny town of Holeri in Rolpa if this hadn't been where the war started 11 years ago.

In February 1996 the Maoists launched their 'people's war' by raiding this post. In July 2001, the station was attacked again and 71 policemen were abducted. Prime Minister Girija Koirala tried to mobilise the army to rescue them, and when the generals refused he resigned.

Now, with the Maoists in government the Holeri police station, like others across the country, should have been restored. But Rolpa's ex-rebels have a different set of rules for the district that they regard as the birthplace of their revolution.

"The only difference is that

the Maoists don't have guns, otherwise nothing has changed here," says Dambar Bahadur Roka of Balbang, "they still threaten anyone who doesn't agree with them."

It is the same story in village after village in Rolpa. Farmers who till last year were too afraid to talk now speak openly about Maoist intimidation. And by needlessly harassing locals, the Maoists seem to be undermining their own position in a future election. Most politicians in the mid-western hills say free elections are just not possible under these conditions.

Although there is now less extortion, abductions and instances of villagers being forced to feed guerrillas, the fear isn't completely gone. On 4 April, Maoists abducted the 76-year-old mother of Bal Prasad Buda who had just returned from the Gulf because he refused to give a 'donation'. She was released two days later after Buda agreed to

give them the jewelry his mother was wearing and Rs 60,000.

Incidents like these have convinced local leaders of the seven parties that the Maoists have not changed. A district leader of the Maoists told a public gathering in Balbang last month: "If you don't vote for us, we will go back to war." Local politicians say this has become the Maoist campaign slogan across the mid-western hills. The UML's Rolpa MP Gopal Dangi says the Maoists have still not developed a culture of tolerating dissenting views: "The threat levels are still high, we are under psychological stress and have to weigh our words before speaking."

Three reporters on assignment in Rolpa got a taste of this when they were subjected to threats and hostile interrogation while covering a story. (See box.) Another UML representative from

Rolpa, Nim Prasad Rokka says: "They will use threats or force to get their way, you have seen for yourself what they are capable of."

The Maoists may be in government in Kathmandu, but here they treat all other parties like they always have: as class enemies. "They may not wave their guns, but their methods have not changed," says Holeri civil society member Rishi Ram Shrestha, "the people are still afraid."

The Maoists have 4,500 fighters in their Fifth Division cantonment in Dahaban, but have also established sub-cantonments in Holeri and Kharse in contravention of the agreement with UNMIN. They haven't allowed police stations in Holeri in Rolpa and in Salyan to reopen. Asks a local Maoist: "We are providing security so why do you need a police station?" ●

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HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN

GO INDIA BANGLADESH

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Four looks at the crisis in Pakistan's largest and poorest province.

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Pokhara Laxmi

Laxmi Bank has opened its second branch in Pokhara, bringing the total number of

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branches it has to nine. The new branch, located in Pokhara's Industrial District in Kundahar, is Laxmi's fourth in the last six months.

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Wai Wai now comes fortified with Vitamin A, in addition to the extra calcium and protein the noodles already contain. Every flavoured oil packet inside all Wai Wai, Wai Wai Quick, and Wai Wai Tenz noodles contains approximately 150-200 IU Vitamin A. The vitamin helps improve the immune system and eyesight.



NEW PRODUCTS

ACE: Tata Motors has launched the TATA Ace in Nepal. After Sri Lanka, Nepal is the second international market for this pickup. Ace has a 16bhp IDI



700cc diesel engine, and is priced at Rs 690,000. The Ace is sold through Sipradi Trading and comes with a warranty of 36,000km or 12 months, whichever comes first. Over 95,000 units of the pickup have already been sold in India and Sri Lanka.

Best and brightest

Instead of yearning for 'the best' leaders, we should try make those we do have more accountable

In conversations with Nepali professionals working abroad, two questions come up frequently: Why do we get the same old netas as our politicians? Why is it that our best and the brightest are not in public leadership positions when a New Nepal is being born? Needless to say, "the best and the brightest" is used to mean "Nepalis like us, with fancy degrees and global exposure".



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

Answering those questions requires examining what it takes to grow a career in politics. Despite lofty talk about public participation through grassroots voices and youth empowerment, Nepali politics remains an activity for, by, and of old men from the telegram era.

A career path typically goes like this—if you don't have politician parents or cousins, you spend your teens and then 20s either as a village activist or in the

junior wing of a national party. For the lucky few who complete high school, college-level politics, replete with graffiti slogans, fistfights, and calls for shutdowns, becomes the bridge to the national league.

Indeed, many of today's netas are erstwhile radicals who burnished their credentials as anti-Panchayat jailbirds of the '70s and the '80s. Others are former village school teachers who were more committed to their students' mastery of Marx than of Mahendra Mala.

As in any other profession, career management is critical. You need to be clever to secure the blessings of mentors who can introduce you to other power wielders. But it's suicidal to be a maverick. As the currently-sidelined careers of Gagan Thapa (pictured) and Man Mohan Bhattarai signal, gracing the news item sections in Kantipur all too frequently spells doom. So, lie low. Do your grunt-work silently, even at the expense of putting your family through hardships for many

years while fawning over the old guard publicly.

The goal, after all, is to obtain an election ticket to represent a constituency in the general elections. It doesn't matter that you have never lived in that locality or that only 50 voters know you. What matters is that the selected-for-life members of your party's central working committee like you enough to throw their weight behind your campaign. Once you're an MP, your chances of becoming a cabinet minister are about how you assure others that you can rake in money to enrich the party. And so goes the arc of your political career.

Unless you are careful, you will be elbowed aside by party insiders. But you will rarely be displaced by lateral entrants—highly educated novices who come in wimpy advisors and not as your bare-knuckle rivals. These are the ones who spent their youth climbing up career ladders elsewhere.

Given this closed

set-up, is it any wonder that Nepali politics is designed to be filled with characters who adhere to this formulaic script?

Instead of accepting this reality and making the best of it, there's this persistent yearning to be led by the best and the brightest. David Halberstam, an American journalist who died early this week, wrote about how America's elite, drunk on the invincibility of their intellect, led their country to humiliation during the Vietnam War. The Panchayati system, conceived and managed by some of Nepal's finest brains, ended in disgrace.

For our democracy to lay deep roots, we need to focus not on a handful of our best and the brightest (whoever they are!), but on the consistency and the quality of the public vigil we exercise through activism, media, and the courts. Once our politicians see that they have no choice but to perform and deliver or face the consequences of their decisions, that awareness will be the best and the brightest thing to occur in our democracy. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

Media boom

Others are former chairman of the Thamel Tourism Board Anil Joshi, who is also involved in the import-export business, and Sanjaya Adhikari, a businessman and dealer in Raymond shirts. It is being said that the Maoists are also investors in Sagarmatha, but Bista dismisses these are unfounded allegations. "We are totally transparent, all our investors are Nepalis, and none are affiliated with the party," he said. The station aims to go on air by May 2008.

Naya Patrika, edited by Krishna Jwala Debkota, hit the newsstands on 14 April. The over Rs 50 million invested in the Maoist-leaning tabloid comes from the Maoists and British Gurkhas. Debkota denies these reports and said, "I have invested a little, and Nepalis in Europe have invested some, but that is all."

Meanwhile the daily *Rajdhani*, run by foreign employment agent Mahendra Sherchan, is also looking for more funding. It is understood that former royal minister Naryan Singh Pun was supposed to invest, but that the two sides could not reach a deal on shares. Recent news reports suggest that the Maoists are also looking to invest in *Rajdhani*, but editor Jibendra Simkhada denies flatly that the paper is looking for new investments at all. "Newspapers last as long as there is democracy. We suffered a lot under the royal regime, but with democracy we are doing much better," he said. He added that the quality has become better because they have reorganised the newsroom.

Himalmedia is also undertaking a

feasibility study for a daily and says that the research is aimed at assessing the mode of publication of the paper, and what kind of paper the planned daily will be. Just a few months ago *Newsfront* started under editor Yubaraj Ghimire. The former editor of *The Rising Nepal*, Lok Deep Thapa, has also started a weekly, called *Chronology*. Journalist Jib Ram Bhandari is also trying to garner support for a royalist paper.

In addition, political parties are also trying to invest in media and the Maoists are making some organisational changes in their Radio Ganatantra Nepal. Since becoming the Minister of Information and Communications, Krishna Prasad Mahara has publicly expressed interest in changing the structure of the radio station, and that is why training programs are being organised for Maoist cadre. Radio Nepal is also training more people so they can run programs like Ghatana ra Bichar and Paribesh.

There are no new big businesses which can support the Rs 2 billion media industry. The challenge for the new tv stations, radio outlets, and print publications is to look for advertisers. Existing media houses will have to hold on to their advertisers. Rajkumar Bhattarai, chairman of the Advertising Agencies Association of Nepal, says the market cannot meet the new demands being created in the media industry. He adds, "If the new media outlets are being set up with the intention of creating new markets, that would be fine. But it is very difficult to enter the present market as it is."

Abhiyan, 23-29 April


अभियान

After the 1990 movement, there was a surge in investment in media in Nepal. There has been similar rush for investment in Nepali media since last year's Jana Andolan. Over a dozen FM stations, and some tv channels and print outlets have been awarded licences to operate. New investment in media reportedly totals over Rs 2 billion. Sagarmatha Television and Avenues Television are ready to go on air, and six new FM stations have gone on air in Kathmandu since last May.

Bhaskar Rajkamikar, former chairman of Advertising Agencies Association of Nepal and coordinator of Ad Avenues, is

busy working on the Avenues Television project. Our sources tell us that he has already received a hefty loan from Machhapuchchhre Bank and that he is pushing to start broadcasting as soon as possible. Rajkamikar's three investors have so far put up Rs 350 million. Although he did not want to tell us who the investors are, one of them is understood to be Yunus Ansari, son of royal minister Salim Miya Ansari.

Similarly Rs 480 million has been invested on Sagarmatha Television and, according to Jiban Bista, its managing director, former chairman of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agents Nirmal Gurung is one investor.



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Un-democratic

Gunaraj Luitel in *Kantipur*, 24 April

कान्तिपुर

The second Jana Andolan had two agendas: peace, and the establishment of democracy. It was understood that democracy would mean democratisation of the political parties too.

Andolan did result in some achievements, one of which is that regular Nepalis found a voice—for example, singer Rubin Gandharba is now more popular than the king. However the period of transition has just become longer and the political situation is still not stable. The law and order situation is getting worse, the supply situation is

the political parties are still very strong. The new order of things does not just mean new kings with old ideas, which is why there is an urgent need to end the nepotism inside the parties and make way for new leadership.

The people won last year, but they are already disappointed with the way things are going. The inconsistencies between the promises made and the reality today have given rise to hatred for the system. Who knows when it will erupt again? The political parties seem to have barely given a thought to the possibility that regressive forces could take advantage of this hatred. Democracy is becoming synonymous with instability, poverty, and insecurity. The peace process is not moving as quickly as people expected. No concrete plans have been made to ensure that the country's future is secure. All this will push the people to think the country is nothing without the king.

Do we need to be ruled by someone? Do the people of Nepal not understand anything about self-rule? Do we always need a master?

A year after the second People's Movement, the Nepali people are asking these burning questions. There is hope that all sectors will be democratised, but the leaders for such change have to be the political parties.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

We've achieved democracy in broad terms since 24 April, 2006, but the political parties remain undemocratic. The People's Movement was successful last year because the political parties promised to mend their ways. They'd suffered during the royal regime and people believed them when they said they would be different from then on. But the promises have not been put into practice.

Nepal in 2006 was different from the country today. The Jana

deteriorating, and there are many political uncertainties that need to be addressed urgently. We are on the right track towards democracy, the Maoists have given up arms, and the parties are thinking about long-term plans.

The reason for much of the uncertainty is that there is no democracy within the political parties. The parties have efficient youth leaders, but they have not been allowed to work. The Gyanendra in Naryanhiti may be weak, but the Gyanendras within

Touchy Giri

Rajdhani, 21 April

राजधानी

Tulsi Giri, vice chairman of the Council of Ministers during the royal regime, has accused the Rayamajhi Commission of having a political agenda, and said he would have nothing to do with the report.

The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) summoned Giri last week and interrogated him for nearly two hours. On his way back, Giri challenged the commission to make the report public, and told the reporters present: "The media has the right to ask the government for information."

The report tabled by the Rayamajhi Commission indicates that royal ministers misused funds and were responsible for suppressing the People's Movement. "Hasn't the prime minister been accused by the Supreme Court before, and didn't the CIAA want to take action against him? How can he take action against me?" fumed Giri. "Does it stop being suppression if the prime minister is involved?"

Giri argued that new laws could not be made to retroactively take action against him for what happened in the past. But he did say that he would trust the verdict of the CIAA over that of the Rayamajhi Commission, because it has a clear mandate



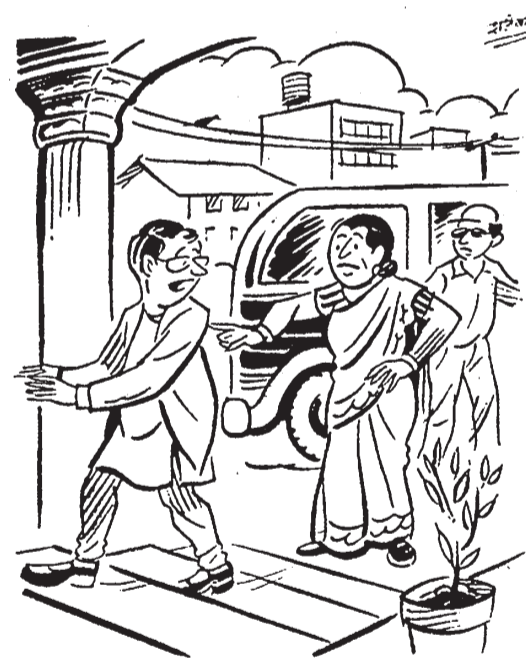
KIRAN PANDAY

and is not influenced by politics.

When asked what he would do if a case were filed against him, Giri answered angrily: "When a constitutional body summons me for an interrogation, I show up. I am a commoner who follows the law, I don't go looking for stones to pelt because I am asked to show up for questioning."

Giri responded angrily when asked about his role in attempting to put down the Jana Andolan last spring, and countered, "So many people died in the tarai, where is the commission to investigate those deaths?"

The CIAA also summoned royal Minister for Education and Sports Radha Krishna Mainali and regional administrators Rabindra Chakrabarti and Prajapati Koirala.



भगडै गर्नुपरे मैसँग गरे भै'गो नि,
किन जान्छौँ संसद् ?!

"If you want to fight, why go to parliament?
Just fight with me."

Suman Manandhar in

संवाचासप्त नेपाल Samacharpatra, 21 April



सहिदले देखा 'को बाटो खोज्दैछु,
बिसिँए भन्ने आरोप लाउन
थाले, के गर्नु!

"I am looking at the path shown by the martyrs
because I've been accused of forgetting the way."

राजधानी Basu Kshitij in Rajdhani, 23 April



KIRAN PANDAY

House divided

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 25 April

क्या

The restored parliament is having trouble finding its destination. The interim parliament should be making laws, and yet it is being disrupted repeatedly. At a time when it should be showing the way to the constituent assembly elections and conducting serious debate about the future of the country, it is throwing up uncertainties.

The people are watching to see how much of their concerns are being raised in the house by those who are supposed to represent them. They now think the interim parliament is not living up to the mandate and expectations of the April Uprising. The MPs should be giving the impression that it is not like the same old politicians, but it hasn't shown any new behaviour.

One can't reach a solution to problems by stopping debate, by disrupting the proceedings of the house. The government is supposed to be answerable to the legislature. Its main responsibility is to execute the decisions of the lawmakers. The government must listen to the demands of the Madhesi MPs. And the MPs must behave as if they are the people's representations and not disrupt proceedings. If we carry on as business as usual with the government and parliament pulling in different directions, the problems of the country will remain as they are.



"The Nepali people have been trying to hold elections to the constituent assembly since 1950 and have not been able to, because Nepali Congress has always created obstacles."

Maoist leader Mohan Baidya 'Kiran', quoted in *Rajdhani*, 26 April



ALL PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

Staging history

There's a vibrant theatre movement on in Nepal, and this month some of the best companies are performing in Kathmandu

PRANAYA SJB RANA

The theatre is booming in Nepal and many people associated with it seem rather bemused.

Mahesh Shakya, 22, can't believe his luck. When he first auditioned at Gurukul for a small supporting role, he didn't expect that just two years later, he'd be starring in Aarohan's acclaimed production of Abhi Subedi's *Mayadebi ko Sapana*.

Then there's Gurukul itself. Twenty-five years ago, the theatre, established by a group of Kathmandu theatre artists, didn't expect it would ever attract audiences of over 100, or host a month-long theatre festival. The ongoing Aarohan National Theatre Festival is showcasing productions by 27 groups from all over the country, from Bhojpur to Parbat, Ilam to Surkhet, Panchtar to Morang to Dang.

Many plays draw upon the decade-long insurgency and last year's Jana Andolan, while others are rooted entirely in their specific local ethnic and cultural

milieu. The themes of the plays and motivations behind the productions are as diverse as the country itself—and more than alarmist proponents of the homogenisation bogeyman would have you believe.

Raute, by the Miteree Kala Kendra from Nepalganj, is about the life and times of a group of Raute people. Kishor Anurag's *Kathaa: Sanaika Dhunharuko*, is about a Damai family caught in

the Jana Andolan and the struggle for democracy. *Gangalako Chitaa*, performed by Morang's Letang Natya Samuha, is about the 'martyr' Gangalal and the aftermath of his death. Hetauda's Taranga is presenting *Anikaalko Yatra* about the survival of Chepang culture.

"Theatre in Nepal is more vibrant than in many other places," argues Pushpa Acharya, writer-director of *Samayantar*. "There's more life here, more energy, because we have all of our rich, varied culture to draw upon." Acharya, who leads the Chitwan-based Narayani Kala Mandir, believes that Nepal needs "cultural theatre", and his own *Samayantar* epitomes this belief. The play is about the life of a Magar family, punctuated by joy and sadness. There's pathos and moments of reckoning as well as vibrant colours, folk songs and dances, witty repartee, and laugh-out-loud moments.

Theatre seems to be booming outside Kathmandu. "We perform



regularly for big audiences of over 200 in our hometowns and villages," says Prakash Angdembe, director of *Cho:Lung*, a play based on a Limbu myth performed by Jhapa's Shriantu Pictures. In Chitwan, Acharya says, there are regularly audiences of four to five hundred.

Many actors and directors we spoke to who had travelled in from outside the Valley say this is because the theatre and acting have maintained their connection with traditional values in most places, and so seen as a way of preserving cultural mores and perspective on life. "Our large audiences may not be very well-informed or sophisticated, but they have an instinctive joy in our plays, and they attend to show their support for us," explains Anurag of Bhojpur's Matribhumi Theatre.

Sunil Pokhrel, artistic-director of Gurukul and one of the most energetic members of the theatre community says things

will only get better for actors and audiences. "Our core audience is mainly students," he explains. But events like this Festival attract attention, and our audience is diversifying to include people of all backgrounds and all age groups."

Plays communicate directly with the audience, and are the original interactive art form. "Theatre has all the elements that people respond to—music, dialogue, actions—and so has the power to touch everyone," says Angdembe. In melas and haats around Nepal plays have traditionally been the glittering centrepiece of the festivities, as much part of Nepali culture as lok dohori. Because the theatre has traditionally been accessible and non-elitist, drama often is social commentary, a mirror that shows society for what it actually is.

"Our plays usually deal with history and culture," says Ghanshyam Khatiwada, director





of *Gangalal ko Chitaa*. In Morang plays about history and patriotism are popular, says Angdembe, but his company performs its Limbu-influenced plays outside the hometowns of the actors to give other communities a taste of Limbu culture.

"Theatre is what it always was," argues Birendra Hamal, veteran actor and director of more than 30 plays. "Even 20 years ago, we had abstract drama, socio-political plays, and even solo performances, the difference now is the attention from the media." Hamal is directing Abhi Subedi's one-man play *Samaya Sisir Yatra*.

And, contrary to all the

starving artist jokes, in a few places in Nepal you can make a highly respectable and more-than-adequate living as an actor.

Angdembe says: "Back home in Jhapa, our families encourage acting and parents push their children to pursue the theatre. It's definitely possible to live comfortably as a theatre artist."

This isn't the national norm yet, unfortunately, but there are enough young actors and directors, like Khagendra Lamichhane, who has contributed *Peeda Geet* to the festival. "Where there's a will there's a way. There are struggles, but if you want to be an actor badly enough, you can do it. Acting as a profession is possible." ●

The Aarohan National Theatre Festival 2007 runs until 11 May at the Gurukul Theatre, Old Baneswor. There is a new production everyday, and two performances of each, at noon and 5.30 PM.

- 27 April : *Anikaalko Yatra*, Taranga, Hetauda
- 28 April : *Kamlari* by Kamlari Samuha, Deukhuri, Dang
- 29 April : *Ek Raat*, by Shristi Natya Samuha, Dharan
- 30 April : *Deshle Gumaekaharu* by Natyagriha Nepal, Udaypur
- 1 May : *Buddhimati Dhwonchwalecha* by Shreekala Natya Samuha, Lalitpur
- 2 May : *Parinaam* by Kshitiz Natya Samuha, Panchthar
- 3 May : *Sahid Number 206* by Renew Art Theatre, Sarlahi
- 4 May : *Kathaa: Sanaika Dhunharuko* by Matribhumi Theatre, Bhojpur
- 5 May : *Bisthapan* by Jyotipunj Sign Theatre, Kathmandu
- 6 May : *Andhako Hatti* by Anam, Dharan
- 7 May : *Ganthaigantha* by SEED Nepal, Parbat
- 8 May : *Sati Kalasa* by Bageena Samuha, Surkhet
- 9 May : *Arichali* by Marangburu Santali Kalakar Parisad, Morang
- 10 May : *Aahal* by Sanskritik Sansthan, Kathmandu
- 11 May : *Burki* by Ranga Sarathi, Kathmandu



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- P & P Enterprises- Tripureshwor, United World Trade Center, 1st Floor B.58
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The X factor

Politics is what separates human from beast

Two words that can be spat out as an insult in polite company are 'politics' and 'bureaucracy'. I dare say their Nepali versions work pretty well as pejoratives too.

Ask almost anyone what's wrong at the moment and you'll hear them blame politics and politicians. Many will include bureaucrats and the civil service too. Go to America and you'll find that surveys of popular angst and aversion rank politicians near the bottom, or the top, of the league table of annoying creatures; bureaucrats often finish a close second, especially now at tax time.

But it shouldn't be this way. Politics and bureaucracy are strengths, not weaknesses, of democracy. Without these forces and their practitioners, we are lost, at war, repressed or worse. We are in a state of nature. You could say democratic politics and a functioning civil service are the highest institutional achievement of humankind, if you don't mind the snorts of derision and the laughter that you'll encounter.

Without politicians and their party games, we'd be stuck with fumble-handed royals and sycophantic courtiers to run the country. That has been tried and found to be a comprehensive failure. Army generals might be tempted to step in and impose a little discipline on this rowdy place. They too would leave a bigger mess than they found.

After those right-wing experiments, perhaps the extreme left would have a go, as the Khmer Rouge did in Cambodia. It took more than a million dead Cambodians to prove the utter fallacy and evil of that experiment in efficiency and discipline. Tens of millions died in the various exercises of power in Mao's China. And how about Hitler's Germany for efficiency and apolitical government?

Wait. I hear people from the general direction of the World Bank or the IMF saying that all we need are apolitical technocrats to run the country, get it back on its feet. No politics, a bureaucracy that does what it's told. Or else. Let's see, it's worked in... umm... Bangladesh. Yes, it's working a treat down there with those two dreadful women and their gangs of thugs sidelined and politics on hold while the structural adjustment goes on. Or so some say.



In fact, Bangladeshi technocracy will fail just as surely as its Pakistani or Thai versions will. Not perhaps in spectacular meltdown, but in the continuing inability of the polity and nation to develop resilience, maturity, and capacity. Technocrats should stick to 'techno' and leave the 'crat' to the demos.

Right now things are confusing and frustrating in Nepal—there's political bickering and infighting, and a civil service that's not sure what to do next, except perhaps take another bribe. But a free media reports freely and people know what's going on. The country lurches along, slowly restoring its capacity to survive convulsions and catastrophe from Maoist and royalist depredations. A radical centre is being resuscitated.

Human beings politicise and bureaucratise by nature. They see a problem, they meet and manoeuvre and try to impose systems to resolve disputes and problems. That, or they assemble armies and fight. History tells us which options work best. One of the advantages humans enjoy over other animals is our ability to address problems through politics and resolve them through bureaucracy.

By all means watch the politicians and civil servants like hawks. Pounce on their crimes and demand redress and accountability. Don't trust them. But know that they're the best we can hope for.

In the words of that wily old politician and former bureaucrat, Winston Churchill, "It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government ... except (for) all the others."



HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

Hard knocks

Children need a lot more help staying in school than getting there

NARESH NEWAR in
BARIYAPUR, BARA

"It's a love story," says 10-year old Sita Majhi (pictured). "Every night I read Muna Madan to my parents, they love it," the young girl says with pride. Majhi is the first of her Musahara family to ever enter a classroom.

In the remote village of Bariyapur, 20km south of Kalaiya in Bara, the lowest of the dalit castes—families of Musaharas, Chamars, Doms, Dusahas, and Dhobis—are the most illiterate of the poor and disadvantaged communities.

"There's literally a zero literacy rate among many adult dalits groups here," says schoolteacher Shyam Prasad Yadab. But Yadab is changing things for the future, having successfully motivated the parents of almost one hundred dalit children to send their sons and daughters to the Shri Dalit Primary School.

In the year since the school was moved closer to the village from Kalaiya, with financial assistance from the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), many dalit children have



NARESH NEWAR

joined, and they now account for 90 of the 200 students.

Even upper caste children study here. "There is no mistreatment. We shake hands everyday and all play together," says fifth-grader Lila Nepali.

But, as the 400 dalit families here know, having a welcoming school is just part of the battle. Bariyapur's dalits are asking the government for help to get books, clothes, and stationery. "How long can we depend on NGOs and foreigners?" asks Babulal Majhi,

chair of the school's management committee. The District Education Office says it simply does not have the money.

Most parents here are landless and make little money as wage labourers, migrant workers, and sharecroppers. Many feed their families one scanty meal a day.

"Educating our children is the only hope we have for improving our lot," says Yadab, who is one of the three underpaid teachers the school can afford. "We've inspired dalit families to send their kids to school despite unimaginable hardship," says Majhi. But, he says, the financial strain could become too much, and parents could ask their children to drop out before they have finished primary school.

Most school dropouts in Nepal—which has one of the highest dropout rates in the world—come from impoverished, disadvantaged groups.

"I really, really want to stay in school," says nine-year-old Hari Majhi. "My mother was so happy when I wrote her name for her and she saw for the first time what it looked like." Hari wants to be a teacher when he grows up. ●

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Let's stay together

Because breaking up by ethnicity is hard to do

Early this month I had the privilege of trekking through the western foothills of Gauri Shankar from Barhabise to Dolakha—so close to Kathmandu and yet devoid of crowds of trekkers. We climbed high above the Sun Kosi into remote mountain pastures, basked in rhododendron groves, goggled at langur monkeys, and were warmly welcomed by



NEPALI PAN
Charles Haviland

the nuns of the Bigu gomba, some of whom had rolled up their sleeves to help build a new block there. We marvelled at neat terraces of barley and wheat, swam in chilly rivers, and watched the lightning.

Aside from all those wonders, we were struck by the constant atmosphere of warm camaraderie and the diversity of the 11 staff on our camping trek. The sirdar was a Sherpa and his deputy a Rai. The marvellous cook a Bahun, his assistants a Sherpa and a Rai. Our porters were two Chhetris, two Tamangs, and two Newars.

And these people had not been gathered from all over Nepal. The porters were from a single village above Barhabise, and for six days we walked through a patchwork land, passing settlements of Gurungs, Tamangs, Sherpas, Chhetris, Thangmis, and more.

Look at the ethnic conflict prevalent in



CHARLES HAVILAND

THINK CONSTRUCTIVELY: These hardworking nuns were a hit with everyone on our trek—Sherpa, Chhetri, Newar, Rai, Bahun.

much of the world, and you realise that this diversity is one of Nepal's greatest assets. Of course the country is wracked by hierarchy and discrimination, but society here still has a tolerant and open dimension that outsiders should envy. In the past, politics hasn't taken on the ethnic, caste, or sectarian dimensions seen, for example, in India.

Yet some now want an ethnic carve-up of Nepal. In front of me is the Maoists' map of the country. My trekking route is in "Tamang-saling", the Kathmandu Valley in "Newa", Everest in "Kirant", the eastern tarai in "Madhesh", the western tarai in "Tharuwan". The Federation of Indigenous

Nationalities and other ethnic organisations are now demanding similar ethnically-based structures for the country. And given the tarai tensions, we now officially have federalism, though we don't know what kind.

Federalism, of course, can be highly successful, especially in large countries where decentralisation makes sense. Germany, the US, and Canada are successfully federal but not, largely, on an ethnic basis. But history suggests that ethnically-based federalism is a dubious idea. The former Yugoslavia was an ethnic federation and it collapsed. Apartheid

South Africa drew up internal ethnic borders to keep the black population divided; with democracy, it redrew those borders on a non-ethnic basis. Belgium is federally divided between French-speakers and Dutch-speakers and barely functions as a single country (intriguingly, its monarchy is the one unifying factor).

Closer to home, the LTTE's attempt to carve-up Sri Lanka along ethnic lines has brought 24 years of war. India's federation is mainly on linguistic lines and is reasonably successful, but it has brought some problems: violence in the north-east, and sectarian politics, for instance, in Mumbai, where the extremist Shiv Sena wants Marathi supremacy in the state.

In any case, Nepal differs from all of these in that its ethnic and caste groups are so much more mixed up. Think of the patchworks of villages around the country; or the diversity within villages and towns.

Nepal's status quo is not, of course, fine. The Bahun-Chhetri domination of state affairs has alienated most Nepalis. The exclusion of dalits, janajatis and madhesis—and, of course, women—is shameful and has been to the extreme detriment of the country. Nepal must wage a social revolution to counteract that history: maybe measures like quotas are needed, maybe non-ethnic federalism will help. But playing with ethnicity is dangerous and can turn neighbour against neighbour. ●

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G-8 has been making aid pledges it never meant to meet

Broken promises

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are the world's agreed goals to cut poverty, hunger, and disease. Established in 2000, their targets were to be met by 2015. At the halfway point, despite endless talk about increasing aid to poor countries, the rich G-8 countries are renegeing on their part of the bargain.



COMMENT
Jeffrey Sachs

At the G-8 Gleneagles Summit in 2005, member countries pledged to double aid to Africa by 2010. Soon after, I was invited to a small, high-level follow-up meeting. I asked for a spreadsheet showing the year-by-year planned increases, and the allocation of those planned increases across donor and recipient countries.

The response was chilling: "There will be no spreadsheets. The US has insisted on no spreadsheets." There was no plan on how to fulfil the promise. Indeed, there were clear instructions that there would be no such plan.

For the first year after the Gleneagles meeting, aid numbers were padded by misleading accounting on debt cancellation operations. With those operations largely completed, the data now reveal the stark truth: development aid to Africa and to poor countries more generally is stagnant, contrary to all the promises.

Between 2005 and 2006, overall aid to Africa, excluding debt cancellation



operations, increased by a meagre 2 percent. Total official development assistance to all recipient countries, net of debt cancellation, actually declined by 2 percent. Even the World Bank, which usually takes the donors' line, recently acknowledged that, except for debt cancellation, "promises of scaled up aid have not been delivered".

One senior G-8 official told me the aid promises are all lies anyway. I don't agree with that, but such cynicism is alarming, as it shows the nature of discussions at the highest levels of the G-8.

These are not unachievable financial

goals. The G-8, representing nearly a billion people, has promised to increase aid to Africa from \$25 billion in 2004 to \$50 billion in 2010—a difference that represents less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the income of the rich donor world!

The Christmas bonuses—just the bonuses—Wall Street paid totalled \$24 billion. Spending on the Iraq war, which achieves only violence, is over \$100 billion per year. The G-8's commitment could be honoured, if rich countries cared to.

To salvage its credibility, the G-8 needs to make crystal clear—again—that it

will honour its commitment to increase aid to Africa by \$25 billion per year by 2010. That way, cynics within the G-8 governments can understand their assignments. The G-8 also needs to present a plan of action. The lack of specific commitments by specific countries is a shocking display of poor governance.

Finally, recipient countries need to be informed about the year-to-year increases in aid, so they can plan. The increased aid should be directed at building roads, power grids, schools, and clinics, and at training teachers, doctors, and community health workers. Such investment requires plans and years of implementation, and clear commitments so recipients can use aid in a sensible and accountable manner.

Part of G-8's problem is competence. The US government doesn't know what it is doing in Africa, because over the years America's aid agency has lost its leading thinkers and strategists. Moreover, the Bush administration politicised the delivery of aid by channelling it through private religious groups that are part of the administration's political coalition. That's why much US funding on AIDS follows religious strictures rather than science.

What needs to be done is not complicated. African countries have already identified their high-priority investments in health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure (including roads, power, and internet connectivity). These investments could be increased systematically until 2015, to help these countries achieve the MDGs. The plans are there, waiting for G-8 funding.

Rich countries need to stop lecturing the poor, and follow through on their words. And G-8 citizens must hold their governments accountable. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey Sachs is professor of economics and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Loose change

Will World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz's troubles finally catalyse real change at the World Bank? Will there be an end to the archaic practice by which the United States president unilaterally appoints the head of the world's most important development agency?



OPINION
Kenneth Rogoff

Facing an extraordinary rebuke from the Bank's ministerial oversight committee and open revolt from his professional staff, Wolfowitz has faint hope of limping through the last three years of his term. The immediate uproar is over the exceedingly generous pay and promotion package that Wolfowitz awarded in 2005 to his girlfriend as compensation for leaving the Bank to pave the way for his arrival. At a time when the Bank has been emphasising high standards of governance as the key to development, the recent revelation of the details of that arrangement have dealt a serious blow to the its credibility.

But even if Wolfowitz is forced to resign, nothing will be gained if US President George W Bush is



allowed to choose his replacement, as US Presidents have done ever since the Bank was founded after World War II. Instead, the Bank's head should be chosen in an open and transparent process that selects the best-qualified candidate, whether from the US, Europe, or the developing world.

A big part of Wolfowitz's weakness is the way he came to his job, as an in-your-face appointment from a US

administration weak at international cooperation. The World Bank is a development finance institution. Wolfowitz's background at the US State and Defence Departments gave him no real expertise or experience in either area. His claim to fame was his role as architect of America's failed war in Iraq. By all accounts, Wolfowitz is brilliant, but an open, transparent, and multilateral selection process would not have chosen him to head the World

The heads of the World Bank and IMF need to be picked democratically

Bank.

I myself have long advocated shifting the Bank's centre of gravity from lending to outright grants, a policy that the Bush administration strongly endorses. But choosing someone with no obvious background or experience in economic development was not the way to make progress on this front.

Why does the world let the US dictate the Bank's top position? It is a sorry tale of poor global governance. Europe does not get in America's way because it wants to maintain Europe's equally outdated privilege of appointing the head of the International Monetary Fund, the Bank's sister institution.

Asia has little choice but to defer to the US and Europe because it is grossly under-represented in both organisations. Africa's leaders are loath to do or say anything that might interrupt the flow of World Bank largesse.

Many people, including myself, have long complained about the leadership selection process at the Bank and the IMF. How can they lecture developing economies on good governance and transparency but not allow change in their own houses? To be fair, the IMF's leadership is making a determined effort to give dynamic emerging economies,

particularly in Asia, a bigger say in Fund governance. If carried far enough, this process would ultimately catalyse the necessary changes.

Unfortunately, the IMF's rebalancing efforts are proceeding at a glacial pace. At the World Bank, nothing seems to be happening at all.

Perhaps when Gordon Brown becomes the UK's next prime minister, he could convince the G7 group of rich countries to demand change. As head of the Fund's ministerial oversight committee, Brown understands the issues well.

Or perhaps the Wolfowitz debacle will be the catalyst. Maybe, at last, the next World Bank or IMF president will come from outside their usual domains. There are plenty of great potential non-American candidates. South African Finance Minister Trevor Manuel has ably served as head of the World Bank's oversight committee and would make a brilliant president. Or it could be a qualified American, like Bill Clinton. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Kenneth Rogoff is professor of economics and public policy at Harvard University and was formerly chief economist at the IMF.

Same-same

A new study says South Asia's political parties are a) similar and b) could learn from each other

The worst victims of every experiment in controlled democracy have been political parties. They have failed to emerge as principal actors of political process.

With the exception of India, which was closer to the Soviet Union than to the USA, malfunctioning parties are common features of most countries going through the democratisation process.

Some of the clearest illustrations of this come from the experiments in limited democracy carried out during the Cold War and the 1960s in particular. In Indonesia, this hybrid regime was herded by a military strongman-turned-civilian ruler and called "guided democracy". In Pakistan, General Ayub Khan called his dictatorship "basic democracy" and parties are today little more than platforms for ambitious individuals. In Bangladesh, political enterprises are inherited like family firms. Political parties in Nepal, where King Mahendra spoke of "indigenous democracy" suited to the "air, water, and soil" of Nepal, can be seen as a microcosm of the South Asian scene.

International IDEA's new publication, *Political Parties in South Asia: The Challenge of Change* is a study report of political parties of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Its seven chapters discuss the context, content, circumstances, conditions, and course of the region's major political parties.

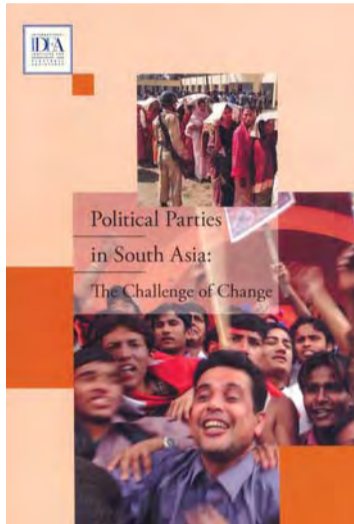
Although most donors realise by now that poverty alleviation requires democratic governance—which in turn cannot occur without vibrant, dynamic political parties—party building continues to be uncharted territory. There is no formula, no replicable method for creating effective political platforms.

The problems with South Asia's parties are legion—those with hoary pasts (like the Nepali Congress) are decadent. Those with ideological insecurities, such as the UML, turn to populist demagoguery. Extremist forces like the Maoists are marked by desperation. And in most parties of significance, dynastic succession and despotic tendencies are the norm rather than exception in their internal functioning.

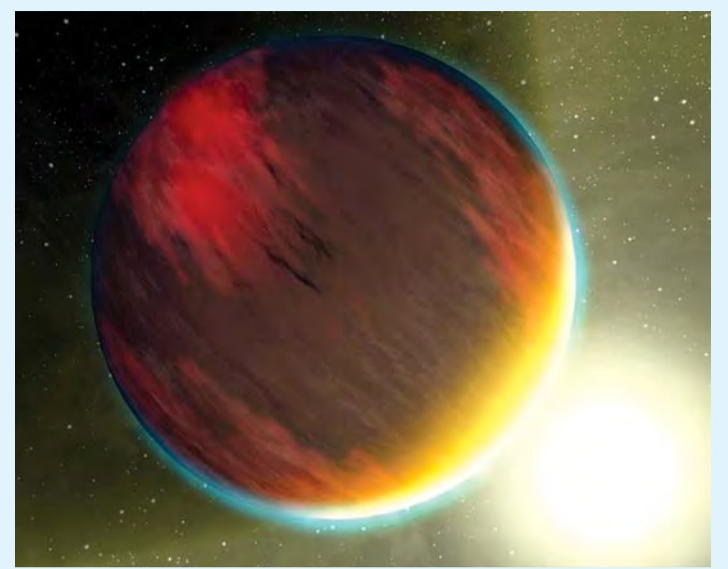
This is where comparative study becomes of paramount importance, especially to see and build upon the commonalities of experience. In doing this, *Political Parties in South Asia* comes to a striking conclusion—all of us in South Asia are more or less same-same, like that only. Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan can learn the importance of talking to sworn enemies for the sake of democracy from Nepal's octogenarian Girija Prasad Koirala. Pushpa Kamal Dahal can offer lessons in pragmatism to Prabhakaran. Madhab Nepal can benefit from the experience of Jyoti Basu. Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina should meet Jayalalitha, the superstar of political comebacks.

Like most donor-funded studies, this work is data-heavy, figure-dominant, fact-deficient, and truth-starved. It has many tables and no pictures, lots of history but no memories. There is long analyses and little synthesis, a lot of explanation but less insight.

Now lack of subjectivity may have been the very purpose of the book, to present the study in a scientific format so it gains the respectability of an academic work. This publication is highly recommended to those who want to be considered serious students of South Asian politics. ●
CKLal



Political Parties in South Asia: The Challenge of Change, KC Suri et al, International IDEA, 2007, Stockholm, 144pp, price not mentioned



Life outside Earth

An intriguing new planet is discovered and the asteroid Vesta puts in a must-see appearance

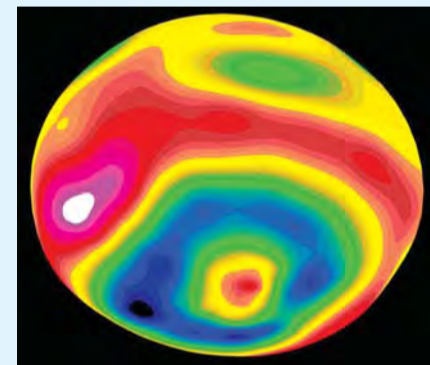
In a landmark finding in history, astronomers have reported discovering the most Earth-like planet outside our Solar System to date, a world that may have liquid oceans and thus life (above).

European scientists found the body, estimated to be 50 percent wider than our Earth, orbiting a so-called red dwarf star relatively close to Earth. The object is estimated to weigh as much as five Earths and would have more than twice Earth's surface area.

Other curious features of the newfound planet are that gravity at its surface would be around twice as strong as on Earth; and its year is just 13 Earth days long, as it completes one orbit about its star in that time. It's 14 times closer to its star than we are to our Sun, but since its host star is smaller and cooler than the Sun, the planet nevertheless would lie in its habitable zone

with suitable temperatures for liquid water. The host star, Gliese 581, is among the 100 closest stars to us, lying 20.5 light-years away in the constellation Libra, the 'Scales'.

In the 200th year since its discovery, asteroid Vesta (below), the brightest of all asteroids, makes one of its best showings ever. Vesta, is at opposition on 31 May and will be at 170 million km from the Earth, almost as low as it can get. This is a very favourable opposition with the asteroid nearly as bright as it can get. Vesta will be visible to the unaided eye from a dark site with no Moon in the sky. Star charts available on the internet can help find Vesta, which is in the constellation of Ophiuchus.



Other celestial attractions for this month are the meeting of Mercury and Saturn with the Moon. If you can catch sight of the very new crescent Moon on the evening of 17 May, then try looking for Mercury at the same height above the horizon, but three degrees to the left; the two objects will easily

fit together into the field of view of a typical pair of binoculars.

In the early morning hours of 23 May, our own waxing crescent Moon will pass directly in front of Saturn. The planet will disappear behind the dark limb of the Moon and will reappear from behind the bright limb just after one hour. For the rest of the evening on 22 May, the Moon will appear very close to the left of Saturn.

May highlights:

The Sun is in the constellation of Aries at the start of May, moving into Taurus on the 14th.

Mercury is behind the Sun on 3 May but it makes its best evening appearance at the end of May, low in the west after sunset.

Venus rises higher and becomes more dazzling in the western sky as it crosses from Taurus into Gemini. On the evening of Saturday, 19 May, the crescent Moon itself will be just three degrees to the lower right of Venus.

Mars is still lurking low in the east before sunrise; it rises just over an hour before the Sun. It won't be possible to make any useful observations of it this month.

The giant planet **Jupiter** is in the non-Zodiacal constellation of Ophiuchus. At the start of May it's rising in the south-east at about midnight. By dawn Jupiter is in the south-western, just above the horizon.

Saturn, in Leo, is sinking a bit lower, is still nicely visible in the southwest during the early evening hours. On the night of 22-23 May, our own Moon, waxing crescent, will pass directly in front of Saturn.

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Landmarks of New York** photography exhibition at Tribhuban University Central Library until 3 May.
- ❖ **A People War** travelling photo exhibition at NAFA, Bal Mandir, until 5 May, 10AM-6PM.
- ❖ **Focus** paintings by Rajesh Manahdar, Bipin Raj Shrestha at Baryo Fiesta, Naxal until 5 May.
- ❖ **Colours of the sepals and petals** an exhibition of paintings based on botanical art by Neera Joshi Pradhan, 10.30 AM-6PM, except Saturdays at Park Gallery, Pulchok, until 15 May. 5522307
- ❖ **Sacred Realms** mixed media works by Seema Sharma Shah at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, until 26 May, 11AM-6PM daily. 4218048

EVENTS

- ❖ **Monsoon Wedding** a film by Mira Nair, 27 April, 6.45 PM at the Lazimpat Gallery Café.
- ❖ **Ciné-dîner** movie screening of *No Mans Land* followed by dinner, 27 April 7PM at Alliance Française, Rs 300. 4241163
- ❖ **The Honest Thief** an adaptation of a play by Habib Tanvir, performed by Studio 7, opening weekend 4-6 May, further performances on 11-19 May and 18-20 May, 7.15 PM at the Naga Theater, Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **The Spirit(s) of Cricket** at Hotel Yak & Yeti live cricket in a widescreen projection and a World Cup special cocktail selection at The Pub, until 28 April. 4248999
- ❖ **Koninginnedag** flea market, buy and sell whatever you can, 28 April, 12-4PM at the Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Sun Dance Festival** at The Last Resort featuring Nepali and international musicians 28-29 April. 4700525
- ❖ **Aarohan National Theatre Festival 2007** featuring theatre groups from all over Nepal, two shows a day at noon and 5.30 PM, at Gurukul, until 11 May. 4466956
- ❖ **Pottery course** by Santosh Kumar from the Delhi Blue Pottery Trust, at Newa Art Ceramics in Mhyapur, Thimi, 25 May-24 June. 9841257968



MUSIC

- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at Via Via Café, every Friday, 8PM onwards.
- ❖ **Live Music** at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 8PM with Yanki and Zigme Lepcha. 4416071
- ❖ **DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers** live at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234
- ❖ **Fusion and classical Nepali music** by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien, Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800. 4451212

DINING

- ❖ **Indian BBQ** summer cocktails and spicy BBQs with live music by SIDE B, 27 April, Rs 799 net per person. 4479488
- ❖ **Weekend special** with sekuwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 4411706
- ❖ **Mongolian BBQ** Wednesdays and Fridays, 6.30 PM on, unlimited barbeque with Carlsberg beer, shandy, or cocktail, Rs 1,000 Splash Bar and Grill, Radisson Hotel. 4422828
- ❖ **Flavours** of the Middle East every Friday and the taste of Thailand every Wednesday, lavish buffet dinners at The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234
- ❖ **Saturday Brunch** at the Waterfall Garden, Radisson Hotel. 11.30 AM-3PM. Rs 799 plus vat inclusive of free flow of Carlsberg and soft drinks. 4411818
- ❖ **Light nouvelle snacks** and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La'Soon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- ❖ **Continental cuisine** and wine by the fire place at Kilroy's, Thamel. 4250440.
- ❖ **Smorgasbord** lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- ❖ **Trendy martinis** and appetizers at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Gyakok** lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum of four guests at Rs 450 per person, two hours order in advance.
- ❖ **Retro brunch barbecue** with the Crossfire Band at The Poolside, Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12-4PM, Rs 1,000 inclusive of swimming and complimentary drink. 4451212
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Senoritas & Margaritas** Inner Groove live at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's, Rs 599 includes a Mezza platter and a Margarita pitcher. 4479488
- ❖ **Jazzbell Café** enjoy great food, exotic cocktails and music, Chakapat, Patan. 2114075

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Weekend package** at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4451212

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Tara Rum Pum is about Rajveer (Saif Ali Khan) who has always been passionate about race cars. While working on the track as part of a pit crew, he meets Harry (Javed Jafferi) and Radhika (Rani Mukherjee). Harry manages Rajveer, now RV, as a driver in a failed racing team while RV and Radhika fall in love, and get married. The movie is about their life and how they face the hurdles that come their way.

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NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

KATHMANDU

The heavy rain on the day Patan residents started pulling the chariot of Machhendranath was expected. In one hour we received more than half (32mm) of this month's standard rainfall quota (60mm). Thursday afternoon's satellite picture shows the sky over Nepal full of passing clouds and emerging fronts from the west. That means continued collisions between warm winds from the south and cold winds from the north to produce thunderstorms and short showers. The spring weather patterns of the last few days will continue—sunny days with occasional passing clouds, breezy afternoons, and fresh mornings.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

 Fri 29-14	 Sat 30-14	 Sun 29-15	 Mon 27-14	 Tue 29-15
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KIRAN PANDAY

INFORMATION: Ambassadors, politicians, and other bigwigs at the official Democracy Day celebrations in Tundikhel on Tuesday.



SURESH MAHARJAN

NOW YOU SEE ME: King Gyanendra visited the Dakshinkali temple to ritually slaughter five animals on Tuesday, also Democracy Day. The road to Pharping was cleared in advance of his motorcade and top army brass were in attendance.



GOVINDA LUITEL

POST PERFECT: The residents of Juthapouwa in Palpa worked hard to restore their local police post and make the situation conducive for policemen to return last week to run it.



KIRAN PANDAY

WE'LL GIVE YOU THE BOOT: Democracy Day celebrations in Basantapur on Tuesday came with a warning to politicians to shape up or watch out.



KIRAN PANDAY

ACTORS AND BUILDERS: Kathmandu's new theatre group Shilpi performed Yubaraj Ghimire's *A New Nation* directed by Rajan Khatiwada at Patan Darbar Square on Wednesday.

ARRIVES IN KATHMANDU

Jiri ✓
30th - 31st March

Chautara ✓
2nd - 3rd April

Lahan ✓
5th - 6th April

Ilam ✓
8th - 9th April

Narayangadh ✓
11th - 12th April

Nepalgunj ✓
14th - 15th April

Images of the Nepal conflict 1996-2006

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Gheraoed a rostrum today?

The maoists and madhesis may be at each other's throats in the tarai, but in parliament they are shoulder to shoulder raising fists and shouting slogans. Strange bedfellows.

The comrades are supposed to have taken donor-funded **tuition classes** on parliamentary behaviour from veteran MPs last week. They were coached on how to raise objections from the floor without using four-letter words, the etiquette of table thumping without brandishing a handgun, and the elaborate rituals of speaking at Zero Hour about Year Zero.

But they must have flunked the course because the honourable **Grey Coats** have taken the practice of gheraoing the rostrum to an unprecedented level of theatrics. After watching the MPs grinning at tv cameras this week, the Ass is willing to bet that if the media is kept out of the chambers no one would bother to gherao the Speaker.

Speaking of the speaker, you should have seen the Honourable Mr Nembang stifling a yawn and walking out in disgust as the MPs went through their daily ritual of mistaking the rostrum for Ratna Park. Just as well the Speaker is off on an IPO jaunt, poor man needs a break.



So Comrade Sitaula has been hospitalised with hearing problems in his right ear. Come to think of it, the Ass had noticed symptoms ever since he became Home Minister last year. And when the madhesis clamoured for his resignation, he just didn't listen did he? In fact he was retained as minister of interior in the interim government at the insistence of Comrade Awesome. We all thought Sitaula was being stubborn, now we know the man **couldn't hear a thing**. We wish the minister speedy recovery. I SAID WE WISH YOU SPEEDY RECOVERY.



Last week, the Ass raised the issue of our Maoist ministers keeping two body guards. Now, several alert readers have drawn his attention to the fact that COAS Gen Katuwal has taken a great leap forward by having a **female bodyguard**. Award the jarsap another star for inclusiveness and demolishing

stereotypes. Still another reader notes seeing Minister Deb Gurung taking both his body guards into a Buddha Air flight recently. The comrade sat on seat 2 A while 3A and 3 B were taken up by his two bodyguards (both male). The Maoist guard in fact was carrying a firearm in full view of fellow-passengers. Hey, what are the containers for?



Of all the full-time professionals in our civilian society movement, Padma Ratan Kaka has been a fixture even before the 1990 uprising. Whether it is workers carrying out a talabandi on a hotel, revolutionaries doing talabandis on schools, or activists marching for a Newar Autonomous Republic you can be sure Padma Ratan Dai will be there. And sure enough there he was last week outside the US Embassy handing out Puntay Rios to DV pidits after convincing them to call off their fast on to death.

It had been a decade or more since we had seen Kamred Tuladhar **cry in public**. But there he was wishing Vladimir Ilyich happy 130th birthday last week at the BICC when he broke down and wept while delivering his homily to the Father of the October Revolution. The audience was so moved the man got a standing ovation. Yus!



Kingji just doesn't give up, does he? While the rest of the country is getting ready to usher in a Loktantrik Republic he is determined to keep his country a **Tantrik Kingdom** by appeasing the gods with the sacrifice of five animals at Dakshinkali. The astrologers told him to conduct the sacrifices on Tuesday, which also happened to be Loktantra Day in order to put a voodoo curse on the anniversary celebrations at the Army Pavilion on Tundikhel. His Ex-Majesty got the royal praetorian guards to clear the route to Pharping and even got the army band to strike up God Save the King on the occasion. Wait a minute, isn't the army now supposed to be under a civilian chain of command?

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NEVER STOP EXPLORING

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