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**Times** nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 360

**Q. In light of recent developments, what is your opinion of the Nepal Army?**

Total votes: 3,257

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Weekly Internet Poll # 361. To vote go to: [www.nepalintimes.com](http://www.nepalintimes.com)

**Q. Which is the biggest obstacle to holding elections in November?**

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# 100 days to go

## But are they serious about polls?

The Maoist leadership, under pressure from a hardline faction, has decided party unity is more important than the November elections and may opt for an intensified pro-republic movement in the next months.

Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been heavily censured at the fifth session of the Maoist extended central committee this week in Kathmandu for failing to stand up to the NC and not taking a firmer stand on republic. Dahal has compromised with dissidents by agreeing to insist on the declaration of republic as a precondition to elections.

The Maoists have concluded they will not perform very well in elections, and may have decided their best bet is to put impossible preconditions for polls just to keep the party together. Says political science professor Krishna

Khanal: "Party unity is important for them."

Unable to withstand the pressure of hardliners and with just 100 days to go for polls, the Maoist meeting is preoccupied with the possibility of an election defeat. A UML forecast, which many find credible, shows the Maoists may get just 10 percent of the seats in the first-past-the-post part of the election.

"There is growing frustration within the party with the democratic experiment," admits ex-guerrilla commander Janardan Sharma (Prabhakar) who is in the dissident faction, "time has come to develop a new policy."

Another central committee member, Netra Bikram Chand (Biplab) echoes the views

of Maoists living in harsh conditions in camps: "The peace process has achieved little, yet our leadership is wallowing in luxury and comfort."

Sharma, Chand and radicals lead by Mohan Baidya feel the peace process is flawed, it has weakened the Maoists and the gains of the revolution squandered. The party leadership is finding it hard to convince them to be patient at least till elections.

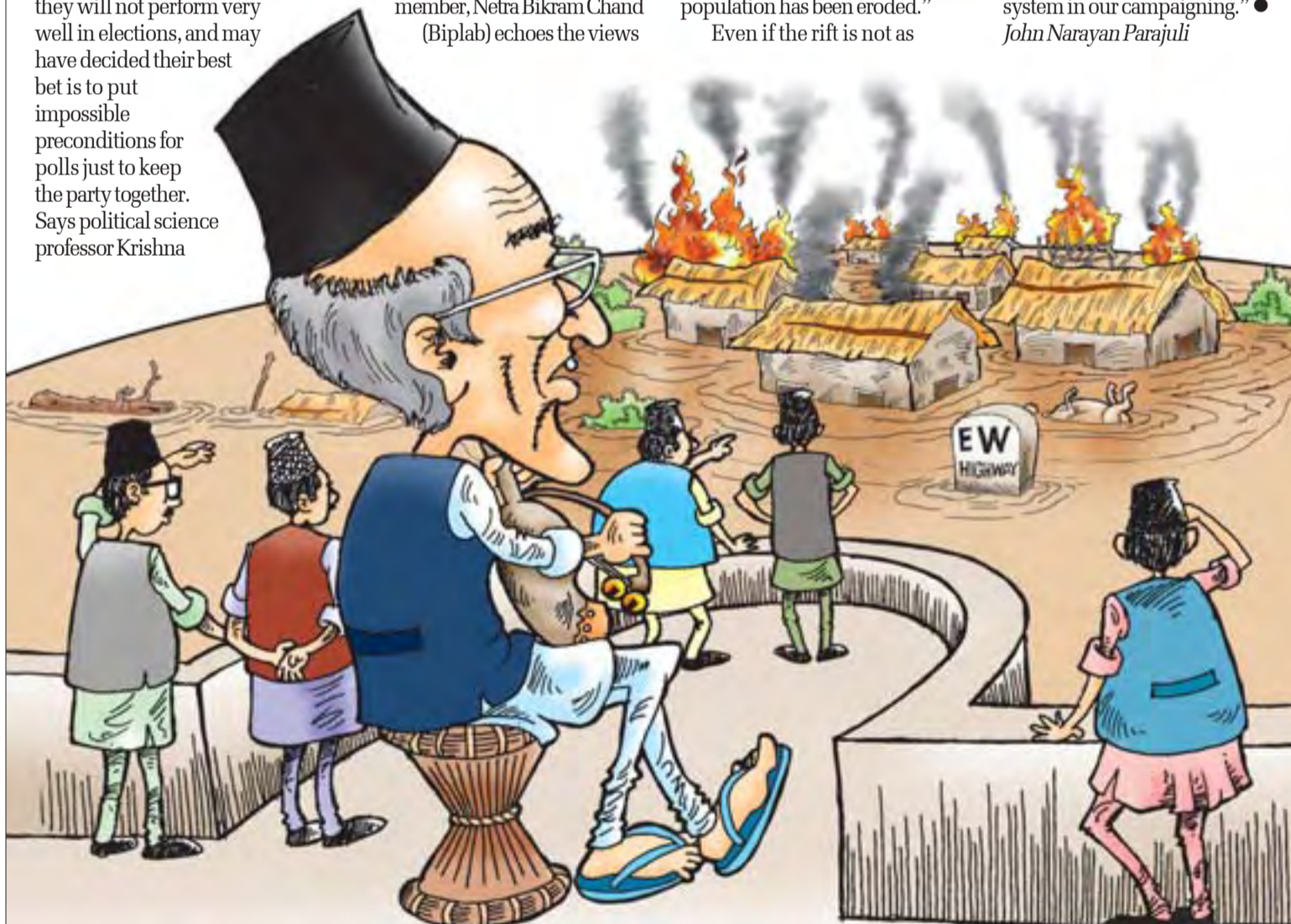
"A large section of the Maoists cadre believe that they have been betrayed by the other parties," explains analyst Shyam Shrestha, "and both factions of the Maoists know their support base in the population has been eroded."

Even if the rift is not as

serious as some make it out to be, the Maoists may come out of their meeting next week with a hardline approach. The irony is that an avowed republican party is converging with the monarchy which doesn't want polls either.

**TARAI EYE** Prashant Jha  
**Beyond Tokenism** p12

Barsha Man Pun (Ananta) who belongs to the pragmatic section of the Maoist leadership says his party is totally committed to the polls. "We want elections, that is what we fought for. But we are launching a movement for republic and proportional electoral system in our campaigning." •  
*John Narayan Parajuli*



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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Editor: Kunda Dixit  
Design: Kiran Maharjan  
Director Sales and Marketing: Sunaina Shah marketing@himalmedia.com  
Circulation Manager: Samir Maharjan sales@himalmedia.com  
Subscription: subscription@himalmedia.com, 5542525/535  
Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur  
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013  
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018

editors@nepalitimes.com  
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# Half revolution

The debate about inclusiveness has excluded class

## UNNATURAL DISASTERS

Every year it is the same story: monsoon rains gushing down the mountains create floods downstream in the plains. The government is blamed for not rushing relief fast enough. The Indians are blamed for building embankments across the border. The Biharis blame Nepal. And everyone blames god for unleashing a natural disaster.

Lost in this post-event flood of recrimination is the fact that there is nothing natural about the annual loss of life and damage to crops and property. Granted, the Himalayan arc is a region prone to water-induced disasters: this geologically young and fragile mountain range itself acts as a monsoon trap, setting off the highest precipitation rates in the world in the most-densely populated mountain region in the world.

Combined, the topography and climate make the Nepal Himalaya vulnerable to landslides and floods. But these are givens, and generations of our forebears have learnt to live with the dangers. Himalayan habitations are mostly situated along ridgelines or protected river banks, in the plains traditional homes are built on stilts and farmers depend on nutrients washed down in the silt to fertilise their fields.

What has changed, is that population pressure has forced people to live on slopes exposed to slides and encroach along flood plains. Lacking traditional community ties and a historical memory of coping with floods, they are helpless when the waters rise. Entire cities have sprung up in the plains blocking natural drainage. Badly designed road embankments and even flood protection levees act as dams, impounding runoff instead of protecting people from floods.

Rivers will find their natural path to the sea no matter what, and protecting one area from floods inevitably means submerging another. Usually it is the cities, rich farmlands, infrastructure that are protected and this means it is the poorest areas and the most marginalised groups that suffer floods. A tally of flood victims this year has direct correlation with social inequities. Reflected in the flood waters every year is the manmade disaster of governance failure.

The Constituent Assembly Members Elections Act strives to make Nepal, or at least the constituent assembly, 'inclusive' based on a six-sector divide. Through the 240 seats based on proportional representation the Nepali people will be represented as madhesi (31.2 percent), dalit (13 percent), janajati, (37.8 percent), from backward areas (4 percent), and others (30.2 percent).



**GUEST COLUMN**  
Bishnu Rimal

Nepalis, who have long lived with a loss of identity and been victimised, whether by patriarchal, caste-based, geopolitical, ethnicity-based or linguistic domination, now have a chance to put forward alternative agendas in debates about state restructuring.

But this arrangement fails to address another side of the multidimensional conflict in Nepali society: economic oppression.

To be poor is to be unable to fulfil basic needs and to be deprived of the right to education and health. To be poor is to be marginalised from socio-political processes and resources, to be socially and politically incapacitated. The latest statistics put about 31 percent of Nepal's population below the absolute poverty line, it could be as high as 40 percent.

According to the 2001 census, more than a million Nepalis are landless. In 19 districts, over 20 percent of households have no land. About 15 percent of households do not own a piece of land on which to construct a hut and members are solely dependent on land-based wages.

Without this large mass of people represented in the constituent assembly, it will not quite be an assembly of all of Nepal's historically oppressed and marginalised people. The worries that it will end up being just another coterie of the elites of various groups are genuine. Progressive lyricist Manjul has written fittingly of a 'Brahmin's son deceiving a Brahmin'.

Nepal's inequity is alarming. In fact it is the most inequitable country in South Asia, which itself is one of the world's most inequitable regions. The people are getting poor and their purchasing power is plummeting by the day. To buy one tablet of paracetamol, a Nepali worker has to spend five minutes' worth of wages. A shroud to wrap a dead body costs 33 hours and 33 minutes of work.

Poverty cuts across all groups and communities in Nepal's caste structure. Half or more the total population of most caste and ethnic groups is poor. (Limbus have 71 percent

poverty, Kamis 68 percent, Damais 67 percent, Sarkis 65 percent, Tamangs 59 percent, Magars 58 percent, Rais 56 percent, and Chhetris 50 percent). A quarter of the members of the Newar community, supposedly the wealthiest in Nepal, live below the poverty line.

Sociologists hope that if all caste and linguistic groups can be maintained in a proportional balance, Nepal can be a beautiful 'mosaic'. But there is already a mosaic, in fact there are two—of the rich and the poor in each group. Without a mechanism to ensure proper representation of the large mass of the working class people, attempts at caste-, ethnicity- and region-based inclusiveness will not help end existing patterns of social inequality.

Of course, given the multifaceted nature of oppression in Nepal, and its many vectors of conflict, there is not much sense to the traditional notion that an end to class struggle results in an equitable state. This hits home when you see how states established after a socialist revolution failed to address social oppression.

The lesson from history is this: the struggle against class exploitation and social oppression should go hand in hand. Class is an ideological issue and has a national focus unlike caste, regionalism, and gender which are identity- and difference-based. If we are really committed to the freedom and emancipation of the oppressed, we have to look at injustice that cuts across ethnic and caste lines. ●

*Bishnu Rimal is the vice chair of General Federation of Nepali Trade Unions.*



NEPAL PHOTO AGENCY

# The revolt of the aristocrats

Why even privileged Yadavs are so very angry

Influential donors and lenders have long been involved in manufacturing knowledge in Nepal. Since 1996, sponsored scholarships have sought to identify the causes behind the insurgency. Later came possible remedies to counter leftwing radicalism.

Latent tensions between Bahun-Chhetri-Newar (BCN) elite and janajati aspirants has been minutely mapped. Donor support



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
C K Lal

has been channelled for dalit consciousness, gender rights activism, identity politics, social inclusion, and the kamaiya struggle.

Yet, the Madhes Uprising last winter took everyone by surprise. The international community was asking who these madhesi were and why they were so angry. Magnus Hatlebakk of CMI, Norway, was one of the 'experts' asked to find an answer.

Hatlebakk has been studying the economics of the eastern tarai for nearly a decade. In the past, when he approached donor agencies for research funds, all he'd get was a polite hearing. Now he was asked to do something double-quick. The sense is clear in his rushed report. Hatlebakk also isn't too sure what he has stumbled upon. His researcher lingo is qualified with conditional qualifiers: it depends, may be, possibly.

Hatlebakk uses information from the Nepal Living Standard Survey to show that the farmers of the eastern tarai have the resources to continue with the political agitation. They have the time and inclination to pursue political goals and are unlikely to settle for any compromise they might consider unfavourable, he concludes. A year ago no one would have believed his pessimistic prognosis that the tarai conflict could be long drawn-out and intractable if not handled carefully, but today it sounds like conventional wisdom.

The study misses one major dynamic.

Almost as an aside, Hatlebakk finds that the Yadav's landholding makes them one of the tarai's most influential population groups. Since the cost of agricultural labour is low and productivity is high in the eastern tarai, big farmers (pahadi bahuns and chhetris but also Yadavs) who own land worth, say, half-a-million rupees can afford to explore other avenues. That is why Yadavs dominate tarai politics.

Look at the names: Upendra Yadav heads the MJF and Sitanandan Raya is his political mentor. Rambaran Yadav is the second most prominent madhesi leader in the NC after Mahantha Thakur. Jai Krishna Goit leads the separatist JTMM. Matrika Yadav is the public face of Maoist madhesi. NC-D looks more inclusive for having Chitrlekha Yadav. The UML is making amends for its weak madhesi policies by promoting the interim cabinet's Minister for General Administration Ramchandra Yadav even though he is a very junior party member. There are Rayas, Yadavs, and Goits among both rightist

former panchas and the communists in the leftist alliance.

As is often the case with number-based findings, Hatlebakk can't comprehend the reasons why comfortably placed Yadavs are so enraged. The realisation and frustration that their social and political standing isn't commensurate with their economic status seems to have fuelled madhesi identity consciousness. Traditional clashes over scarce resources are now complicated with identity conflicts.

The sociology of identity conflict is much more complex than that of class contestation. When identity groups feel discriminated against and denied respect regardless of their economic status, violent conflict becomes inevitable. It could be easy for the state to deal with the Yadav aristocracy they have too much at stake to risk losing everything. But if the landless Chamars, Doms, Dusadhs, and Mushahars were mobilised for the madhesi 'cause', Hatlebakk's worst fears will begin to look optimistic. ●

**LETTERS**

**STAND TOGETHER**

You have hit hard on one of the major problems the parties have failed to address so far in 'United we stand' (Editorial, #359)—they gloat over the infighting, disunity, and power struggles within other parties.

In a parliamentary democracy, alliances are supposed to be developed over issues and policies between different parties and even between different groups within parties so programs and policies get implemented. But not in Nepal. Parties in Nepal change their colour according to what will get them the most (personal) advantage at a given time. Just look at the UML.

At this juncture, the seven parties, particularly the NC and the UML, must in every possible way support those willing to go along with the current frame of governance. The media should help discuss this openly so political parties can forge common ground and make less room for hardliners to rumble the peace process.

*Kamal Kishor, email*

● The election to the constituent assembly will probably take place, but it will not be an analytical, well-debated exercise. The situation is exactly the same as it was a year ago. The problem now is that none of the political parties are confident of achieving the result they desire in the elections and so we must watch out for them turning the current parliament into a constituent assembly. It does not have the mandate of the people and as for the Maoist MPs, they are appointed by their high command and do not necessarily represent the views of most Nepalis. Democracy is for all, even small parties such as Hariyali.

*PP Luintel, Green Nepal Party/ Hariyali*

**LEAVE IT TO US**

Prashant Jha addresses the root of the issue, that most madhesi intellectuals want their issues to be internationalised (Tarai Eye, #359). To some extent, that gives them bargaining power. The question is how long can madhesis hold on to that power without internationals taking over the whole game on behalf of madhesis.

Pahadis have always thought that the tarai was India's property and so instead of talking directly to madhesi leaders, the pahadi elite talks to SD Muni, Shyam Saran, Jaswant Singh, and Sitaram Yechuri. Jha rightly points out, the pahadi elite has a deeper relation with these diplomats, than madhesis do. Meanwhile, the US and the UK will want to use tarai power to counter the Maoists, and who knows what China wants?

The mindset of the pahadis will cause a deadlock. But this time, it won't just be the madhesis bleeding as always, it will also be the pahadis who are swinging off the very branch on which they sit.

*Ram Manohar, email*

**BRAIN GAIN**

I agree with much of what CK Lal's says in 'Brain deficit' (State of the State, #359). I am currently researching professional nursing training in Nepal and the migration of nurses to the UK. Although Nepal produces more nurses than the capacity of our health service to employ them, most nurses dream of migrating to western countries. I know none who wants to work in rural districts. It is a vital policy issue for the state to balance the safeguarding of services in Nepal and the dreams of these professionals. The issue is crucial especially at the levels of senior nursing. There is already a severe shortage of experienced and qualified academic nursing faculty in training institutions.

I have met and interviewed a number of highly experienced nurses (in critical areas like ICU/CCU) at Patan, Teaching Hospital, Norvic, and Model Hospitals, senior staff from nursing colleges, and people from other senior public health positions currently working in the UK. They face difficulties in the UK, and have to perform menial tasks way beneath their level of training. They are frequently exploited and face complex institutional discrimination in a country increasingly hostile to migrant workforces.

Yet, despite this, the huge investment required to establish themselves in the UK, and the large differential in pay scales means most are not going home yet. If the current trend of nursing migration does not change soon, our health services will face a crisis emanating from the senior management levels down, as senior staff retire.

Just training more nurses isn't the answer. Nor is Lal's assumption that training more non-elites will somehow make things different (nursing, at least, has long been more differentiated in its ethnic diversity than other professions in Nepal). Why should their aspirations differ? But starting bilateral discussions on the issues at stake would be both an acknowledgement of the problem, and a starting point for developing solutions.

*Radha Adhikari, email*

● 'It will matter a lot less that the Bahun-Chhetri-Newar elite is trooping out of the country. As it is, we could do with fewer of them in almost every discipline,' writes CK Lal. I am appalled to read a pseudo-intellectual stoking the flames of casteism at such a sensitive period in Nepal's history. Many of us from all sections of Nepali society have worked hard to reach where we are, and are proud to be ambassadors of our country overseas. We live in harmony with our fellow Nepalis and do not share Lal's communal views. Mr Lal, if you do come overseas on one of your many junkets, please come and see the facts for yourself. This will give you some food for thought and more importantly, readers of *Nepali Times* a break from your columns which have quite frankly become a bore.

*Vijay Baral, USA*

● CK Lal's analysis of the impact of brain drain is extremely one-sided. There is no doubt that the loss of skilled individuals has an adverse effect on poor, unstable countries. But the positive aspects of migration must not be overlooked. First, expatriates make a large contribution to their home country by investing, and sharing the knowledge they have gained. This is especially true in the IT and outsourcing industries. While highly unstable countries like Nepal and Bangladesh may be feeling the negative effects of the 'brain drain', developing countries like India and China are reaping the benefits of 'brain circulation'. The problem, thus, is not the exodus of talent. It is the political condition in the home country.

Lal's prescriptions to stanch the loss of skilled individuals are also troubling. Delaying the outflow of trained professionals is only going to increase the financial burden on hardworking individuals. The same is true for an exit tax. Lal forgets that it is not just the elite (whom he openly despises) who are emigrating.

It is amusing that Lal thinks that affirmative action is going to alleviate this phenomenon. According to the 2007 migration report by OECD, emigration rates for highly-skilled women are higher than for men by a slight margin (<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/18/38875143.pdf>). The same would be true for janajatis, dalits, and madhesis. After all, they are no different from the elite. It is only in Lal's warped mind that training more janajatis, women, and madhesi doctors and scientists is going to solve this.

*Aayush Sakya, email*

**LIMBO**

Thank you for denouncing the desperate situation adoptive parents and children have been put in ('Kids in limbo, #359). Finally, somebody cares for the kids waiting for their parents. My son was three when I met him. He is now four. He is a real orphan and spends his day in the children's home instead of going to school and being loved by us. It is a scandal and we are hostages of the Ministry for Women, Children and Social Welfare. I am so tired of waiting for the final signature, I would like to just die. Your article was a great psychological support.

*Beth, email*



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# “Business shouldn’t be the government’s business.”



PICS: MONIKA DHAKWA

**Muhammad Yunus and the institution he founded in 1976, Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, won last year’s Nobel Peace Prize for ‘efforts to create economic and social development from below’. Owned largely by poor women borrowers, Grameen Bank has long upset conventional banking paradigms. It does not ask for collateral, legal instrument, group-**

**guarantee or joint liability of any kind when giving out small**

**loans or microcredit. It enjoys a recovery rate of about 97 percent. Since its inception, it has disbursed \$6.20 billion to over seven million women in 77,000 villages across Bangladesh. Grameen’s microcredit model has been replicated in over 100 countries. Columnist Ashutosh Tiwari met up with Yunus in Dhaka.**

**What do you mean when you say “access to credit is a human right”?**

We have the bill of human rights, which covers the rights to shelter, work, education, and so on. My question is: who’s going to bring these rights? There is this expectation that the government will somehow provide these rights. But we have seen that the government is unable to provide them on a silver platter. What it can do is create an enabling environment so that people can earn incomes for food and shelter. This makes earning an income a critical task. Textbooks say that the only way to create incomes is through jobs. But the governments of Nepal and Bangladesh cannot create jobs for all the people. If so, why not let poor people create their own jobs?

As it is, people sell food on the street, pull rickshaws and do other things to make a living. One way to support such self-employment is through financing. That’s because once you have some borrowed money, you can use it to earn an income, which makes it easier to buy food, be healthy, and have a shelter and get an education.

**You’ve developed a list of 10 qualitative indicators to assess whether a family is out of poverty. Are these Bangladesh-specific indicators or can they be applied widely?**

We have been using them to monitor whether our borrowers get out of poverty. If others find these indicators useful, that’s good. When you define a poor person as someone living under a dollar a day or surviving on less than 2200-calorie of daily food intake, who, except for the experts, is going to measure all that? This means that we need experts to tell us who is poor and who is not, and that gets us into academic debates that do not help the poor.

In our case, we regularly visit a borrower’s home, and see what kind of roof she’s got. If it’s leaky, she’s poor. If

not, that’s good. Does she sleep on bed with mosquito net? If yes, that’s good. If not, she’s poor. Does she have access to clean water and sanitary latrines? Do her children go to primary school? Does she have access to basic health service providers? Do her children go hungry at any time of the year? Only when our 10 easily verifiable criteria are fulfilled do we say that her family has graduated out of poverty. This check-list of simple monitoring indicators has worked well for us.

**You have said, “We can put poverty into museums”. Are you suggesting that microcredit alone can eradicate poverty?**

My point is that all human beings are packed with a bundle of capacities that they need for themselves and to contribute to others’ growth. But we live in societies that do not give opportunities to people to unpack the gifts that they have within themselves. If we find ways to unleash people’s potential, then, yes, we can put poverty into museums.

I am not saying that microcredit alone will do all that. But it is one tool that helps unlock poor people’s untapped potential to do good for themselves and others around them. A woman gets a loan. At first, she is scared because she has never handled borrowed money. Once she starts to use that credit to make money for herself through a small-scale entrepreneurial activity, she finds that new possibilities have opened up for her and her family. Those possibilities are likely to get her out of poverty.

If all our global formal banking systems collapsed today, that would have almost no effect on two-thirds of humanity. That’s because billions of poor people are not even participants in what goes on in the name of financial services. Microcredit is one way they can open bank accounts, borrow money, make use of their ideas to make more money for themselves, learn to make their own decisions and empower themselves.

**But not all poor women can be successful small-scale entrepreneurs. Does that mean that the success of microcredit is necessarily tied to there being a bundle of services to go along with credit?**

Let’s look at it this way. If you have a 15-course meal, that’s good. But if you are hungry, and have nothing else, then plain rice will do just fine. In times of famine, when you don’t even have that rice, then you might ask for the water that comes out when the rice is cooked at a wealthy neighbor’s kitchen.

When you say that microcredit needs a bundle of services, you are talking about the 15-course meal. I am starting with plain rice. Gradually, I might add salt, then a few chillies or vegetables to my rice. But that comes later. For now, I want to survive. If someone offers the 15-course meal, I will say that, that’s great, but I will not wait for it to come to all anytime soon.

My point is that the concept of microcredit is flexible enough to be customised to address various levels of hunger for credit. People everywhere need money, and there are more ways than one to get it to them. What is important is to start from somewhere, anywhere, and build up from there by seeing what works and what doesn’t according to local opportunities and constraints.

**In Nepal, government promoted microcredit programs through five regional grameen banks, all of which failed. Is microcredit an area in which a government can play an active role?**

I explained to your finance ministers that running microcredit programs through the government would never work. Things get politicised. Loans are given to friends and supporters, who do not pay back. Political supporters are hired as bank officers, and they do no work. I have seen this happen in every country where the government runs micro credit programs. So, the first principle is: no matter what sort of micro credit program you run, do it away from the government. Choosing partners such as NGOs or socially-oriented private businesses comes next. I define a socially-oriented private business as a business that can get its investments back from a socially useful venture but earns no dividend.

**You continue to equate microcredit with social business and Pierre Omidyar, the founder of eBay, thinks that it should be commercialised to reach millions more poor people.**

Omidyar sees microcredit as a profit-maximising business. I see it as a social business to help the poorest, and we keep on fighting (laughs). I define a social business as a non-loss, non-dividend business that is different from philanthropy in that a social business returns the invested money to its owners. Micro credit should be a social business. We do it to help the poor get their rice. When the poor become rich enough to have that 15-course dinner, then commercial bankers can come in, offer additional financial services and make money off them. Until then, the profit-maximising approach is similar to that of village money-lenders who come with gleaming eyes. Omidyar understands returns, and he is arguing on behalf of a business principle, which I understand.

But one recent event highlighted these different approaches. Compartamos, a bank in Mexico, issued an Initial Public Offering, and made about 400 million dollars. They sold the idea that the bank could make lots of money by giving loans to poor people at interest rates hovering over 100 per cent! What a wrong message to give!

**What relationship do you advise a government to have with the private sector?**

First, the only thing any government can do is have the humility to accept that it cannot change people’s lives, and that it can only help people who are changing their own lives. But most governments simply mess up people’s lives, something they are good at. My experience is that business should not be the business of government. Business should be in the hands of the private sector, which produces jobs and services. I define private sector broadly to include both businesses that make profits and do good for society at large such as by building schools, hospitals and the like.

**What is life like after the Nobel Prize?**

The interest of governments in many countries to implement Grameen-style micro credit programs has gone up. Because of the prize, I think journalists and the public are asking them, “When are you starting micro credit programs in our communities?” I am using my time to advise several countries, including China, to set up their own microcredit programs to help their poor. The prize has made it easier for me to advocate for changes in relevant policies and regulations. Earlier, I used to scream and shout, and not many listened to me. Now I am seen as a wise man, and even my mere whisper carries a lot more weight. (Laughter)

## Security first

Laxmi Bank has been given an 'A' rating after an audit by Arif Ahmed and Associates, a firm that works with India's Ministry of Information as Information Security Auditors. Laxmi Bank is the first Nepali bank to have its IT systems audited by an independent body.

## Safe syringes

Everest Med, Nepal's disposable syringe manufacturer has launched an awareness campaign on the use of safe syringes. The company says lack of a monitoring body for quality control and an unhealthy competition between traders are reasons for imports of illegal products. Everest Med's Lifeline product line has been certified by ISO - 9001:2000.



## Another ATM

Machhapuchhre Bank has opened a new ATM in Kalimati. This is the eighth ATM in the Valley and is accessible to people with disabilities. The bank plans to open five more ATMs around Kathmandu in the near future.

## Nabil Installment

Nabil Bank has launched Nabil Installment under the bank's credit card (Visa and Mastercard), which allows cardholders to buy consumer durables like home appliances, electronics, computers, and jewelry with cards. Payment is made at a low interest rate in monthly instalments and can be used at shops in Kathmandu.

## Scratch and win

Alankaran Electronics, the producer of KEC TVs and sister conglomerate of Kedia Organisation has launched a scratch card scheme 'Bhagyo Tapainko...KEC Ko Saath, Jadaina Khali Haat'. KEC provides a scratch card in every purchase and customers can win cash from Rs 500 to Rs 10,000.

## Merchant

United Finance, Kathmandu has started merchant banking services. Certified by Nepal Stock Exchange Board and Nepal Stock Exchange Market their new services will include initial public offering and right issue of shares.

## Networking

United Telecom has started UTL phone service in Butwal from this month. In addition the company will also provide a limited utility UTL Mobile at Rs 2,525 (including taxes) and Rs 8,595 worth wireless fixed CDMA at monthly instalments. UTL is providing services in Kathmandu, Hetauda and Birganj and plans to extend its networks to Pokhara and Bharahawa in the future.

### NEW PRODUCTS

**SAY CHEESE:** Marigold Food has launched Cheesy Cheese Rings in new flavours, new shapes at Rs 10 for 20gm pack and is introduced with a new slogan 'Life Ma Naya Zing.'



**ALUMINUM:** Hansraj Hulaschand, has introduced Alstrong and Metastrong, aluminium materials produced by India's Alu-Bond Enterprises in the Nepali market. Alstrong aluminium composite panels (ACP) are made of high quality aluminium and are appropriate for exteriors. Meanwhile, Metastrong, available in 30 colours are for interiors, and is touted as being better than laminates, veneers, granite, and marble.

# Taking stock

## What is happening to stock prices?

Your weekly Beed is being buttonholed at parties, being asked why the stock prices are increasing and whether one should invest or not and in which stocks they should. How should he know? It's hard to say when it comes to explaining stock market movements in



**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
Artha Beed

general and in Nepal in particular. Millions have written doctoral theses about stock markets and how to predict their movements. An MIT maths professor made billions after devising a formula that could recognise patterns and predict the market. But at the end of the day, playing the stock market is a bit like gambling in a casino.

The NEPSE has zoomed considerably in the past six months. If one had invested, say, Rs 1,000 on listed stocks in 2005, the value today would be Rs 2,500. Considering the roller coaster ride that the economy has been through, this is phenomenal. The stock market starts to gallop when there are speculative instincts at play rather than technical analysis.

Equity investments is more scientific, but in a country where we still believe that its better to queue at empty gas stations than to leave it to the market, we would still like to consider playing in the secondary markets an extension of the card game, marriage.

Nepal's stock market volume is not at all small when we consider the market capitalisation of shares: the number of shares multiplied by the closing prices. The current capitalisation of \$3 billion is nearly half of Nepal's GDP. So if one is to consider that at least ten percent of these shares are floating in the market, then there is about \$300 million of shares that can be traded.

Considering the volumes of less than \$10 million a day, the transactions are still small.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Further, the size of our companies is very small. In India, the definition of small cap companies are those whose market capitalisation is less than \$400 million. In Nepal, the largest companies would be less than this cap. So, there is a long way to go.

Stock market fluctuations can be volatile and a piece of paper can be worth a lot more or less in a matter of hours. A strong regulator is therefore necessary to ensure that the trading is close to efficient and also encourage more people to access the market for funds.

Unfortunately, in Nepal, the regulator sees itself as another government department and not really interested on how to take the markets ahead. A strong

regulator can always encourage professionalism as well as growth, as has been demonstrated by the banking industry. Time has come to really make the regulator attuned to global

practices, privatize the stock exchange and let the trading go electronic. For investors to really reap benefits from stock markets, individual investors have to be replaced

by institutional ones. This means mutual funds and other institutional investment possibilities must be opened up. Institutional investors can afford to employ people who can do better analyses and help in stabilising the secondary markets. They need to be treated at par from the tax perspective as well as given incentives to take the risk of managing funds.

These elements have to be of course looked at by the government, which has to formulate necessary legislation to ensure that the market grows and encourages companies to take the public company route. Surely, this needs to be linked to the constituent assembly! ●

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# Prachanda vs Kiran

Drishti, 31 July

The commander of the People's Liberation Army and supreme leader of the Maoists, Chairman Prachanda is in a minority in his own party. Even before the Maoists' fifth extended conference began, Mohan Baidya ('Kiran') and Ram Bahadur Thapa ('Badal') launched an attack on the Prachanda line. Kiran and Badal think the party should launch a republican rebellion even before



KIRAN PANDAY



MIN BAJRACHARYA

the constituent assembly election and in this they are supported by Biplab, Prabhakar, and Sudarshan. In addition, RIM and COMPOSA have also voiced their opposition against the politics of compromise.

Prachanda's formula is to contest the elections and make a strategy based on the result. Besides these two lines, there is also a small faction that wants to take the Maoists back

to armed struggle.

This is not the first time that there has been a serious rift over strategy within the Maoist party. Eight years ago, Prachanda and Baburam themselves had a difference of opinion over the centralisation of leadership and in 2005 Baburam came close to being expelled from the party. It was the Chunbang central committee meeting that patched up the differences.

The Maoists have in the past tried to put an ideological label on these rifts, but given the kind of abuse that is being hurled the rifts seem to be mostly due to personality clashes. One of the reasons for the present rift is that a party that fought a war, one with its own army has been considerably weakened after the peace process. More than a year after entering the mainstream, the country is still in the shadow of violence and threats. Says one maoist central

committee member: "There are always discussions and disagreements at these meetings, and it will happen this time too."

In the past it would be Kiran or Badal who would mediate during rifts, but this time both are aligned against the leadership. Source say the Maoists will be evaluating their activities since the last convention and may decide to announce a rebellion and take steps to reinvigorate the organisation.



SURESH RAJ NAUPANE

## Insult to flag

Editorial in *Samaya*, 26 July 2007

After the political changes in Nepal last year, many national symbols were altered. We are getting a new national anthem, the coat arms has been changed. But the fact that our sun and moon flag was left alone shows just how potent this symbol of our national identity is.

Yet, the way this flag is being dragged on the ground by the national airline that carries it is a disgrace. It shows that just by dropping 'Royal' from its name hasn't changed the way Nepal Airlines is managed and operated. It also shows the political apathy for the airline's growth as well as interference by successive governments. The plane has only two aircraft for its international flights and they are mostly grounded. Whenever one goes off for routine maintenance, the airline's schedules go haywire. This time, the airline is taking a Druk Air plane on lease. It just shows Bhutan, which despite its landlocked topography has managed to allow its airline to grow, and underlines the total mismanagement of our national

airline. Neither the current government nor the concerned minister seem to have any new ideas about rescuing the airline. If that's the case it is better to pull the plug on an airline that is in a coma. Because allow it to function would just spread a negative image about the country.

## Hand-in-hand

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 1 August

There are now only 100 days to go for elections. The Election Commission and Parties say they are looking at the security, budget and technical aspects of the polls. Even so, the conditions for elections are not being created. There are three reasons for this. First, efforts to defuse the madhes andolan have come not achieved results. Second, there is still uncertainty about the delays in addressing janajati demands. And the third is the behaviour of the Maoists. This week, the Maoists roughed up the Dolakha district administrator. Then there are the behind-the-scenes activities of the palace, army or religious groups that have trying to sow uncertainty about



Thumb to Thumb



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| Tujhe Dekha        | Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge | 1156  |
| Ek Dil Hai         | Ek Rishta                    | 1175  |
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elections. If these three problems are addressed, the other issues will resolve themselves. But time is running out.

The eight parties need to immediately go hand-in-hand in creating conditions for elections. They must have a high-level meeting right away on the madhes and the janajatis. The Maoists' job is to assure the country that it will curb its violent behaviour.

Only after this will things like low police morale be addressed. Recently in New York, UNMIN's Ian Martin said: 'There has to be cooperation between the parties right down

to the local level. Even if it is just to raise the morale of the police force, this cooperation is necessary so that voters can be protected from intimidation.'

### Junglis

Letter to the Editor in *Kantipur*, 1 August

The people had pinned a lot of hope on the Maoists, but they haven't lived up to that trust. Aside from a few token actions from the YCL, there isn't much. And instead of warning its affiliated organisation to desist from terrorising the people, the

Maoists are actually helping spread terror. What's the point of having a peace process if they want to terrorise the people just as they did during the war? Why stay in government? How does it make any sense for a party that is sitting in government to allow its own cadre to ransack the district administration office and beat up the CDO? Is this the model of new Nepal that you want the world to emulate, Comrade Prachanda? This isn't about showing off your political arm-twisting capability but how effective you are in the marketplace of ideas. The Maoists are the third-largest party in government, but they didn't attain that through elections. If they want to know their political status, they must allow free and fair elections. But if it keeps on its present path, the Maoists may have to wash their hands of politics.

### Pro-Hindu

*Mahima*, 2 August

In the last few days, Hindu extremists in bordering Indian states have launched a movement against Nepal's Maoists, while the Indian administration is tightening its noose on them. In Nepal, meanwhile, the palace continues to organise feasts. It may seem like there is no connection between these two events, but sources think there is. There is a tacit agreement between the palace and India. In December 2006, BJP parliamentarian and a preacher of the Gorakhnath temple in Gorakhpur, Adityanath had passed a resolution against Nepal becoming a secular country. Upendra Yadav and Lakshman Lal Karna had attended the meeting. Lately, Adityanath is advocating the expulsion of Nepali Maoists from India, giving provocative sermons and issuing



pamphlets (see pic). Meanwhile, India has expelled Bir Bahadur Shahi and his friend on the charges of being close to the Maoists. Even Nepali organisation in India with perceived links to the Maoists are coming under increasing scrutiny of the Indian authorities. Jaswant Singh, during his recent visit to Nepal, publicly objected to Nepal becoming a secular state. Upendra Yadav is spearheading a movement to disintegrate Nepal and has demanded the dissolution of the parliament to weaken the Maoists.

## "Why blame the driver?"

Interview with Sushil Koirala *Naya Patrika*, 1 August



MIN BAJRACHARYA

#### You are allegedly delaying the unification of the two Congresses?

There are so many allegations against me. Why do I have to respond to them? What have I gained? I have not become minister or deputy prime minister. I have always worked in the interest of the party. I am all for unification.

#### So who is holding it back, then?

The unification of the two congresses is need of the hour, and it is inevitable. Both parties are doing their homework, and it will be finalised soon.

#### Is it the seniority dispute between you and Deuba that is delaying the process?

I have not made any claims about seniority. But one's contribution to the party, role in the people's movement and continuity should form the basis of determining the seniority chain.

#### The NC is leading the government, are you satisfied with its performance?

This is a coalition government. Our party is leading the government, so in a way we are more responsible. But what is happening here is that we have been asked to drive, while others in the government are creating roadblocks. They blame the driver and pass the buck.

#### What would you say to those creating obstacles?

Let us move forward. It would be better for them to get off the vehicle if they don't want it to go forward.

#### Are you saying the Maoists should quit the government?

I am only saying no one should create problems in the day-to-day running of the country. I want the eight parties to come closer and work together, but what doesn't make sense is those who are in government themselves behaving like the opposition.

#### Why did you reappoint an ineffective Home Minister?

I didn't appoint him. What the Prime Minister saw in him, what the issues are, I don't know. Ask the Prime Minister, but certainly there is a growing concern over the deteriorating security situation.

#### How will the madhesi movement affect the NC?

Not just NC, if the movement continues to escalate, it will affect all the parties. That's why I am saying we have to work together to resolve it.



Dumb-bells: Peace and Security  
Weightlifter: Government

Abin Shrestha in, *Samaya*, 2 August

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"I don't think the army can takeover. If anyone is planning a coup, they should forget it."

CPN-UML general secretary Madhab Nepal, in an interview with *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 1 August.

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## In loving memory of

### Taraneh and Jasmine Vaidya

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# Instead of one laptop per child, computer network per school



PICS: RAMESH KARKI

In recent months many leaders of education in Nepal and elsewhere have been attracted by the rhetoric about One Laptop Per Child (OLPC).

While computers in schools are a good idea, an over \$100 million project to give each Nepali child a laptop is not.

There are advantages to having computers in schools. FIT Nepal has recently installed telecentres in government schools; ENRD has done so in Kaski; Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya's Bhasha Sanchar project has installed four-computer networks that work in Nepali in two schools. These enable teachers to prepare teaching materials, and children to use educational programs and become familiar with computers.

With internet connections, these computers could be used for management, interacting with computers in local



**COMMENT**  
Pat Hall

District Education Offices and ultimately with the Ministry of

Education and Sports

(MoES). Two locally developed proprietary schools management systems were demonstrated at CAN Softech in May. An open source system is being localised to the Nepali language and education context.

An installation of four computers with a high-powered 'server' and cheap recycled 'thin clients' costs Rs 120,000 (\$1,700). With transport, installation, and training, the final cost is around Rs 200,000 (\$2,800). Equipping Nepal's 26,277 schools (MoES, 2004) with this very simple network would cost \$74 million, not including

# Dailekh bridges the

## Cost and language used to be barriers to computer



**EARLY START:** These children in schools in Lalitpur (top) and in Dailekh saw computers for the first time last month because of a new pilot project to provide cheaper networks with Nepali language commands.

**SHRISTEE GURUNG**

The two factors restricting the spread of computers in Nepal are cost and language. But a pilot scheme to test a Linux-based LAN system in schools in Dailekh and Lalitpur have shown that accessibility and affordability needn't be a problem anymore.

The digital divide doesn't just exist between rich and poor countries, but also within countries like Nepal. More than 80 percent of the computers and internet connections in Nepal are located inside Kathmandu's Ring Road.

The challenge is to encourage computer usage in Nepali language and also equipment that would be cost-effective for the school management. Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya's Linux Terminal Server Project (LTSP) is trying to test initiative and see if it works. The idea is not to distribute laptops to every school child, but set up a computer lab so students can learn basic skills.

LTSP is a Linux add-on package where one powerful

### Cheaper and better

|             | Unit | Price  |
|-------------|------|--------|
| Server      | 1    | 33,300 |
| Thin client | 3    | 15,400 |
| Normal cost | 4    | 26,400 |

### TOTAL

If a school were to install four computers under the prevailing cost. But if the hardware was networked through a server and three desktops, the cost would be Rs 26,000.



# er child, how about one ool, one laptop per teacher?

installation and training. Schools also need internet access and a reasonably reliable electricity supply. This infrastructure has not been costed in, since it is necessary for any computer use in education.

A great potential use of computers, the internet, and a schools network is to disseminate the best teaching practices in inclusive education in Nepal. This is where one laptop per teacher comes in. The OLPC is too small for adults. It aspires to be the \$100 laptop, but in reality costs \$150-\$200. Fortunately other companies have announced competing full-sized offerings—Taiwan's AsusTek has announced a \$200 full-sized laptop and Intel has a similarly priced community PC. With a laptop each, teachers can take distance education courses, share practices, and develop educational materials. To equip each teacher with a laptop and a computer lab in each school would cost around \$100 million.

OLPC groups sell their proposal partly on price (though it costs twice the claimed \$100), its robust technology, and its claimed educational advantage. Now OLPC was conceived by Nicholas Negroponte while he was director of MIT's Media Lab. In 1995 Negroponte wrote *Being Digital*, which describes a world that has become real for many rich northerners, in line with MIT Media Lab's mission. His enthusiasm for computer-based education, based upon the advocacy of Seymour Papert, is embodied in OLPC.

But Negroponte's expertise is questionable, particularly on big and expensive projects. In the 1990s he sold the Media Lab to the governments of India and Ireland. In exchange for substantial payments for using the 'Media

Lab' brand, and for advice and help in setting them up, Media Lab Asia was established in Mumbai and Media Lab Europe was established in Dublin. But just a few years later, the collaborations had failed and both governments lost a lot of money—the Irish figure is reported as \$40 million. This negative experience should make us cautious about acting purely on Negroponte's assurances.

Olpc.com, says the project's mission is "to develop a low-cost laptop—the '\$100 Laptop'—a technology that could revolutionise how we educate the world's children." The website does not elaborate how it will do so, but points us to the olpc.news.com site where a June 2007 article by an anonymous 'Roland' talks about Seymour Papert, "the mental father of the education part of OLPC". Papert believes children learn best as they did before going to school—by exploration, learning from errors, and responding to challenges. These ideas date back 50 years, but the technology just wasn't there then.

There is no evidence to back up OLPC's aims of embodying exploratory learning through interactive multimedia software and internet access. The top story in the 17 June issue of African e-zine *Balancing Act* was an interview about OLPC pilots in South Africa and Nigeria with a South African enthusiast Antoine Van Gelder who is still looking for funding, and whose best evidence of success from Nigeria is 100 percent school attendance and "a lot of smiling kids". BBC World reported the same week that an OLPC trial run in Peru involves 250,000 OLPC laptops, making this a large, costly experiment.

Research in the UK on children using laptops and other mobile devices at school and at home in the manner

envisaged by OLPC shows that learning only improves if teachers, learners, and parents are closely involved in the design of their content and use.

In the US there has been a much wider use of laptops in schools, but the *New York Times* reported this May that many schools are dropping laptops, troubled by breakdowns and the need to manage inappropriate use, and most damningly because there is "literally no evidence it had any impact on student achievement—none," and that "It's a distraction to the educational process."

It would cost over \$1 billion—Nepal's entire educational budget for the next four to five years—to give a laptop to each of Nepal's 6 million school-going children. For this price you could rebuild and modernise every school.

But while Nepal is better off without OLPC, some level of school-based computer provision is worthwhile, particularly to disseminate some of the excellent teaching practices in Nepal, and promote good teaching that embodies OLPC's principles.

Some able and enthusiastic young Nepali engineers are working on OLPC, localising software and creating new content in Nepali. The volunteers have deliberately made it possible to use this software and view this content without OLPC. We need to channel this talent into supporting schools in an economically and pedagogically appropriate way. ●

*Pat Hall directs the Bhasha Sanchar project at Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya and is a visiting professor at Kathmandu University. (p.a.v.hall@btinternet.com)*

## digital divide

### use in Nepali schools. No longer.

server is shared among dumb terminals (also known as 'thin clients'). The server is a high-end computer with a hard disk of 120 GB capacity, a powerful processor of 2.6 GHz and 512 MB RAM. Although the cost of the server is 20 percent higher than a standard computer, the cheaper thin clients cut down overall cost of the network. Because the dumb terminals don't need CD-ROMS and other accessories they are 40 percent cheaper than standard computers.

This is an excellent way, for example, to recycle used CPUs from companies and individuals in Kathmandu willing to donate them when they upgrade to more powerful equipment. It can be up to 25 percent cheaper to install four computers under LTSP compared to standard costs (see table).

At Dailekh's Kimugaon a pilot LTSP project was implemented at the Basanta Madyamik Bidayala which has 400 students, most of whom have never seen a computer before. So, the first computer they used had a Neplinux 2.0 operating system so everything on the screen was in Nepali.

Grade Four student Laxmi Kumari Thapa couldn't hide her excitement. "I hadn't even seen a television before this," she said, "I can't wait to tell my parents that I used a computer."

Installing the computers in the school was also an exhilarating experience for engineers Amit Aryal and Dayaram Budathoki who went to Dailekh to teach teachers and students basic concepts of mouse, keyboard, monitor, writing and saving files with Nepali text.

"It was my first encounter with the reality of Nepali schools in remote areas and I was really moved, it was very rewarding," says Dayaram.

Basanta Madhyamik was the first school in Dailekh to ever have computers, so there was excitement not just at the school but also among local government officials, political parties and parents.

Says Amit: "In Kathmandu we've become so blasé about computers, and to see the excitement in the faces of the students really made it worthwhile for me."

Teachers are planning to make computer class compulsory for students of grades two to eight. And since the desktop commands are all in Nepali there won't be any barrier to use.

The LTSP project is already running successfully in Phulchoki Primary School in Godavari south of Kathmandu, and Dailekh was the second pilot. Two more schools in Dang and Bhaktapur are getting LTSP networks with a grant from the Helap Nepal Network from the Nepali diaspora. Students from class one to five can now use computers to play educational games, learn to type text files, and send emails in Nepali.

More Nepali schools can benefit from this scheme because the computer applications are accessible and also within the budget of most schools in the country. ●

## Web pioneer

Mahabir Pun put Nepal on the information technology map not by complaining about how the poor didn't have access to computers, but actually doing something about it.

He gave up a potentially lucrative dot com career in the US to return not just to Nepal, but take the information age to his remote ancestral village in Myagdi. This week, Pun received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for 2007 in recognition of his efforts to connect his village to the global village.

After returning from the US in 1997 to his village of Nangi, Pun started out with four computers and set them up at a school. He set up a wireless antenna on top of a tree to connect him to a server in Pokhara and connect his school to the internet.

"Given Nepal's topography and cost, the future is in wireless," Pun said this week. In 2001, with help from foreign volunteers, Pun rigged a wireless connection between Nangi and the neighboring village of Ramche using TV dish antennas. Today his Nepal Wireless Project in mid-western Nepal is a model of simple, effective, and successful rural internet access.

In five years, 22 villages in Myagdi and Parbat have been wired for just Rs 2 million. The network is used for education and to exchange information about locally produced goods and commodity prices, village activities, and weekly markets. The wireless network also provides telemedicine facilities to eight villages with doctors from a Pokhara hospital.

Pun's model is proof that villages don't have to wait for landlines for communication, and the internet is not just a luxury. ● *Mallika Aryal*



| Cost LTSP     | Normal cost    |
|---------------|----------------|
| 33,300        |                |
| 46,200        | 106,000        |
| <b>79,500</b> | <b>106,000</b> |

ts, the bill for four computers would come to Rs 106,000.  
mb terminals, it would be less than Rs 80,000, saving more than

# Wikipedia embodies a democratic virtual medievalism

## It's a wiki world



Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia, is the most impressive collective intellectual project ever attempted and perhaps achieved. It demands the attention and contribution of anyone concerned with the future of knowledge.

Because of the speed with which it has become a fixture in cyberspace, Wikipedia's true significance has gone largely unremarked. Since its sixth anniversary in 2007, it has consistently ranked in the top ten most frequently viewed websites worldwide. Everyday it is consulted or changed by 7 percent of all 1.2 billion



OPINION  
Steve Fuller

internet users. Its rate of usage is growing faster than that of internet use as a whole.

Some 4.7 million 'Wikipedians' have contributed to 5.3 million entries, one-third of which are in English, with the rest in more than 250 other languages. There is a relatively large group of hardcore contributors: roughly 75,000 Wikipedians have made at least five contributions in any given 30-day period.

The quality of articles is uneven, but not uniformly bad. True, topics favoured by sex-starved male geeks are elaborated in disturbingly exquisite detail, while less alluring matters often lie fallow. Nevertheless, University of Chicago law professor Cass Sunstein says Wikipedia is cited four times more often than the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in US judicial decisions. *Nature's* 2005 evaluation of the two encyclopaedias in terms of comparably developed scientific articles found that Wikipedia averaged four errors to the *Britannica's* three. That difference has probably since been narrowed.

Wikipedia's boosters herald it as Web version 2.0. While Web 1.0 facilitated the storage and transmission of vast amounts of different kinds of information in cyberspace, the second version supposedly renders the whole process interactive, removing the frontier separating transmitters and receivers of information. But we've had this for most of human history.

In Wikipedia, any change to an entry generates a historical trace, so entries can be read as what medieval scholars call a palimpsest, a successively overwritten text, and 'talk pages' provide ample opportunity to discuss actual and possible changes. Everyone has a virtual copy of Wikipedia.

Wikipedia's content policy remains deeply medieval in spirit. The rules are: 1) no original research; 2) a neutral point of view; and 3) verifiability. These rules are designed for people who have reference material but no authority to evaluate it. Such was also the epistemic position of the Middle Ages, which presumed all humans to be mutually equal but subordinate to god. The most one could expect was a perfectly balanced dialectic. In the Middle Ages, this attitude spawned scholastic disputation. In cyberspace, the same practice, often dismissed as 'trolling,' is the backbone of Wikipedia's quality control.

Wikipedia's democratic medievalism that does not respect claims to personal expertise in the absence of verifiable sources. To fully realise this ideal, participation in Wikipedia might be made compulsory for advanced undergraduates and master's degree candidates worldwide. The norms of conduct for these students correspond to Wikipedia's content policy: one is expected to know where the research material is and how to argue about it.

This would improve Wikipedia's collective knowledge base and help curb the elitist pretensions of researchers in the global knowledge system. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Steve Fuller is professor of sociology at the University of Warwick and author of *The Knowledge Book: Key Concepts in Philosophy, Science and Culture*.

# Exlied to Cyberia

## Do child pornography laws apply in Second Life?

PETER SINGER

In a popular Internet role-playing game called Second Life, people can create a virtual identity for themselves, choosing such things as their age, sex, and appearance.

These virtual characters then do things that people in the real world do, such as having sex. Depending on your preferences, you can have sex with someone who is older or younger than you, perhaps much older or younger. In fact, if your virtual character is an adult, you can have sex with a virtual character who is a child.

If you did that in the real world, most of us would agree that you did something seriously wrong. But is it seriously wrong to have virtual sex with a virtual child?

Some Second Life players say that it is, and have vowed to expose those who do it. Meanwhile, the manufacturers, Linden

Labs, have said they will modify the game to prevent virtual children from having sex. German prosecutors have also become involved, although their concern appears to be the use of the game to spread child pornography, rather than whether people have virtual sex with virtual children.

The law is on solid ground

when it protects children from being exploited for sexual purposes. It becomes much more dubious when it interferes with sexual acts between consenting adults. What adults choose to do in the bedroom, many thoughtful people believe, is their own business, and the state ought not to pry into it.

When someone proposes

making something a criminal offense, we should always ask: who is harmed? If it can be shown that the opportunity to act out a fantasy by having virtual sex with a virtual child makes people more likely to engage in real pedophilia, then real children will be harmed, and the case for prohibiting virtual pedophilia becomes stronger.

But looking at the question in this way raises another, and perhaps more significant, issue about virtual activities: video game violence.

Those who play violent video games are often at an impressionable age. *Doom*, a popular violent videogame, was a favourite of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the teenage Columbine High School murderers. In ten years in the video game industry there hasn't been any serious debate within the industry on the ethics

of producing violent games. The manufacturers fall back on the simplistic assertion that there is no scientific proof that violent video games lead to violent acts. But sometimes we cannot wait for proof.

The burst of publicity about virtual pedophilia in Second Life may have focussed on the wrong target. Video games are properly subject to legal controls, not when they enable people to do things that, if real, would be crimes, but when there is evidence on the basis of which we can reasonably conclude that they are likely to increase serious crime in the real world. At present, the evidence for that is stronger for games involving violence than it is for virtual realities that permit pedophilia. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Peter Singer is Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and author of *How Are We to Live? and Writings on an Ethical Life*.



# Could be worse

## Looking from Afghanistan at Nepal's failure to get its act together

**N**ot to minimise Nepal's challenges, but after a month or two in Afghanistan and Pakistan, it does seem as if there are countries with problems, and other places that just can't seem to get their act together. I'm afraid Nepal falls into the latter camp.

Just think of it. The Afghan people have faced 30 years of near-constant conflict mixed only with uncertainty. Their country has faced Communist coups, meddling from Moscow, an invasion by the late, unlamented Red Army, civil war, perpetual interference from neighbouring states, economic and infrastructural collapse, hundreds of



**HERE AND THERE**  
Daniel Lak

thousands of deaths, the exodus of 5 million citizens fleeing war, famine, floods, earthquakes, international isolation, the brutal rule of the Taliban, bombardment by the US despite what Donald

Rumsfeld called "a lack of targets", a growing narco-economy run by warlords with familiar faces and friends in Washington and lately, international involvement far short of what is required.

Yet Afghans remain resilient, proud and capable people. They have never lost hope, despite constant disappointments. They are good humoured, hospitable, and cultured. Poets and musicians thrive and are honoured. Guests are treated better than royalty. Food is lovingly cultivated and prepared and life celebrated, despite the frequently fatal crossfire between US-led forces and the resurgent Taliban.



As I wandered and filmed in Afghanistan recently I found islands of hope in what should have been a sea of despair. The United Nations led relief effort in the country is well-staffed and funded, but it lacks political leadership from the security-obsessed American and British authorities. Many Afghan provinces have little or no relief work going on because of fighting with cynical Islamo-nationalist forces more intent on kidnapping and violence than rebuilding their country. It's a grim picture but people still laugh, welcome you into their homes, and express hope that their children will enjoy life more than they have.

Then there's Pakistan. The wretched Lal Masjid affair produced no winners, only bloodstains and vengeful minds. President Musharaff has made some mistakes in his time but sending his crack commandos into a girl's school affiliated with a religious institution leads the pack. Suicide bombers have come out of the woodwork to attack Pakistani soldiers and police, men from poor backgrounds blown to bits on both sides of the explosion.

Musharaff's government tries and fails to maintain a moderate religious stance in a land that grows more committed to faith by the day. Secular forces are still powerful but in troubled times, people seek solace in culture, nationalism, and familiar patters of devotion. Pakistan's 87,000 mosques are full to bursting and even a cynical, westoxicated national elite is hedging its bets on the religion front. More and more children flock to religious schools that are supposed to teach proper Islamic principles of justice and peace, not the jihadist hate that blooms across a Muslim world under pressure.

Yet again Pakistan defies easy categorisation. The press is free, lively and critical. Deep analysis and investigative journalism are thriving and if the picture that emerges is gloomy, the sense of excitement in its emergence is contagious. Pakistanis are also dignified, friendly people who long for better days but don't lose their sense of humour.

And what do I find in Nepal? A political elite with the means and resources to move forward but a fractious mindset that places point-scoring above the national interest. The old courtiers and royals rightly on the ropes but plotting their absurd comeback. Maoists who are either deceiving themselves on the grandest of scales or lying shamelessly to their dedicated, if overestimated, cadre. I find a country that faces very real problems but wants the United Nations to solve them, if only to have someone to blame when things go awry.

Perhaps it's time to cast an eye around the region, and to give thanks that things are not much, much worse. ●



## VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT



The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Nepal was established in May 2005, following the signature of an agreement of cooperation with the Government of Nepal. The Office has a mandate to monitor the observance of human rights and international humanitarian law, bearing in mind the climate of violence and the internal conflict in the country with a view to advising the authorities of Nepal on the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and measures for the promotion and protection of human rights in Nepal. The office is seeking to fill the following positions:

### UNV/International Interpreter/Translator, 2 positions: Dhangadhi and Janakpur

Based in Dhangadhi and Janakpur under the direct supervision of the Head of Office, the incumbents will perform the following main functions: Interpret at various meetings as and when the need arises - this includes interpreting for the Head of Office and International Field Human Rights Officers and other OHCHR-Nepal staff, during meetings with government officials, NGO's, interviews with victims and family members, and/or the general population; Act as interpreter during the field mission to assist the Field Human Rights Officers in gathering information related to the conflict and to human rights/humanitarian law violations committed during the recent conflict and to human rights violations in the current context; Interpret at various interviews during visits to detention centres, including with security forces and persons deprived of their liberty; Assist in taking notes during meetings, when required; Assist in translating confidential or other documents from Nepali to English, ensuring that all deadlines are met and the quality of translation is adequate; Keep track of all his/her translations of documents and maintain copies of the translated materials; Advise the request or on the approximate completion time of requests for translations of documents; Coordinates and/or supports his/her interpretation/translation work with the National Interpreter/Translators; Performs other related functions, or as required.

**Qualifications and other desirable skills for the positions:** Advanced University degree, preferably in Foreign languages or equivalent, law, international relations, literature, anthropology or other disciplines related to social sciences. A combination of relevant academic qualifications and experience may be accepted in lieu of the advanced university degree.

3 years of experience in interpretation/translation work. Ability to work in an international and multi-ethnic environment and good interpersonal skills. High awareness of the political sensitivity of the work to be undertaken; the incumbent will be relied upon to use utmost discretion and maintain confidentiality of all materials relating to the work. Knowledge of the historical, political and cultural situation of Nepal. Skills in word processing (MS Word for Windows, Excel), use of the INTERNET and electronic messaging. Very good physical condition.

### UNV/International Interpreter/Translator, 1 position: Kathmandu

Based in Kathmandu under the supervision of the relevant OHCHR-Nepal official, the incumbent will be responsible for the following main duties and functions: Translate confidential or other documents from Nepali to English and English to Nepali, ensuring that all deadlines are met and the quality of translation is adequate; Proofread and edit translations (Nepali to English, English to Nepali); Interpret at various meetings as and when the need arises - this includes interpreting for the supervisors Human Rights Officers and others OHCHR - Nepal staff, during meetings with government officials, NGO's, interviews with victims and family members, and/or the general populations;

Act as interpreter during field missions to assist the Human Rights Officers in gathering information related to human rights/humanitarian law violations committed during the recent conflict and to human rights violations in the current context; Interpret at various interviews during visits to detention centres, including with security forces and persons deprived of their liberty; Assist in taking notes during meetings, when required; Coordinates and/or supports his/her interpretation/translation work with other Interpreter/Translators; Perform other related functions, as required.

**Qualifications and other desirable skills for the positions:** Advanced University degree, preferably in Foreign languages or equivalent, law, international relations, literature, anthropology or other disciplines related to social sciences. A combination of relevant academic qualifications and experience may be accepted in lieu of the advanced university degree.

3 years of experience in interpretation/translation work. Incumbent will have excellent knowledge of the Nepali language, including near-native fluency in spoken Nepali (formal and colloquial) and excellent command of written Nepali. Some capacity to translate into Nepali. Knowledge of Hindi or other local languages is an asset. Advanced university training in Nepali or related languages is desirable. Must be able to type in Nepali.

Ability to work in an international and multi-ethnic environment and good interpersonal skills. High awareness of the political sensitivity of the work to be undertaken; the incumbent will be relied upon to use utmost discretion and maintain confidentiality of all materials relating to the work. Knowledge of the historical, political and cultural situation of Nepal. Skills in word processing (MS Word for Windows, Excel), use of the INTERNET and electronic messaging. Work experience in human rights or related fields is an asset, as is familiarity with current human rights issues in Nepal.

Candidates are requested to complete a UN Personal History form available either at UN offices throughout the country or the OHCHR's webpage <http://nepal.ohchr.org/vacancy.htm>. **The deadline for applications is 21 August 2007.** All applicants are strongly encouraged to submit their applications by email mentioning the vacancy title, at [personnel.np@ohchr.org](mailto:personnel.np@ohchr.org) or mail it to Personnel Officer - OHCHR - Nepal P.O. Box 24555, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Only short listed candidates will be contacted.

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Is it too much to expect Kathmandu's rulers to take madhesi grievances seriously?

# Beyond tokenism

**K**athmandu needs to stop playing games with the madhesi. Unless the state and civil society here understand and acknowledge the true nature of the madhesi movement, the problem will fester and flare up in more dangerous forms. The government makes the right noises but seems to think short-term Machiavellian tactics will solve the tarai issue. Unfortunately for Koirala & Co., the time for that has passed and such a strategy can only lead to further radicalisation.



**TARAI EYE**  
Prashant Jha

The madhesi struggle is not for a few additional constituencies or token speeches on inclusion. It is certainly not an attempt to split off tarai from Nepal. Instead, this is a movement to redefine what being a Nepali means. It is a cry for respect and equality, abstract concepts which have struck a chord on the ground, and a desire to be a part of the mainstream.

People in the capital wonder why there is still trouble in the tarai when the prime minister ostensibly gave in to the demands in his second address. The problem persists because what is as important as substantive issues (which incidentally have not been addressed either) is sending out a message that madhesi are respected as Nepali citizens and



ROBIN SAYAMI

the power elite is sincere about including them in all spheres. Let alone a change in mindset, the state appears to have done its best to add to the trust deficit with madhesi.

Look at the government's stand, it has done nothing to honour the movement, and not even declaring those killed as martyrs. It took them four months to set up a commission to investigate police atrocities and guess who is a member—the police chief of the eastern region in charge during the killings; it

did not consult any madhesi groups before amending the electoral law; and it has made a decision in principle to use security forces to quell the unrest.

The major parties ensured that the constituencies were gerrymandered to suit pahadi candidates. Instead of showing some political imagination and reshuffling Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula, Koirala stuck to him as the face of the state, and Sitaula is one face madhesi don't like. Madhesi are still not being appointed in fair

numbers, look at the cabinet, list of ambassadors, statutory bodies, and recent recruitments in the police force. The silence of the capital's much-feted liberal civil society is also noticeable. Where are the Devendra Raj Pandeys when it comes to using their influence and pushing for madhesi concerns?

Take all this together, add it to long-standing grievances, and it shows why the eastern tarai remains fertile ground for agitation. It also explains why the most critical players, madhesi

moderates, are in the weakest spot. If the government is unwilling to give in on issues, which have no political cost, they wonder whether the state is prepared for a true transformation. Most moderates say that the ground is becoming too radical for them to urge for restraint.

In May-end, some NC madhesi leaders in Birganj and Janakpur were critical of armed groups. Three weeks later, the same politicians sounded sympathetic and admitted there was increased acceptance of use of violence. At a Kathmandu discussion last week, a Sadhabana Party youth leader said that picking arms seemed to be the only way out. These maybe voices of mainstream politicians keen on using armed groups as a bargaining chip to extract more but it also reflects the increasing radicalisation of the mood. It may not amount to much immediately in the absence of a strong force but ingredients for sustained confrontation are coming together.

The state is banking on a divided and, to some extent, discredited madhesi leadership which lacks a coherent political agenda or strong support base. Despite the public show, the government has done little to initiate back-channel communication with madhesi groups. Neither has it created an environment by fulfilling some minimum preconditions like assuring full security to leaders, agreeing to withdraw cases in principle, and guaranteeing minimum face-savers.

Instead, the Baluwatar recipe for managing the problem is engineering splits within madhesi groups, luring some away with money and posts, using coercive tactics, and asking India to put pressure on them. This may, at best, work in the short-term but will sow seeds for an even deeper and prolonged conflict. ●

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# INGMAR BERGMAN

## 1918-2007

Swedish maestro Ingmar Bergman died this week at the age of 89, leaving behind an oeuvre of unique significance. Best known for his quaintly bleak and brooding style, Bergman's perennial exploration of the human psyche and human desires



**CRITICAL CINEMA**  
Diwas Kc

is one of the most impressive in film history. Scout around in Thamel, and you will spot some of his landmark films like *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), *Wild Strawberries* (1957), *The Seventh Seal* (1957), and *Cries and Whispers* (1973), must-see for any serious film buff.

Bergman started his career in the post-WWII era, flourishing remarkably in the 50s and the 60s. At a time when the world of cinema was captivated by the need to make 'realistic' films - which usually meant dealing with social issues, depicting a connection with a public environment, and shooting in real location - the metaphysical and subjective ethos of Bergman films stuck out like a thorn. Moreover, the staginess of his films lent a contrived quality that counterpoised the established idiom of cinematic experience.

Inevitably, Bergman was a subject of tireless criticism. Over the years, he had drawn a reputation of being cultish and

artsy (read pretentious and irrelevant). His critics - a lot of whom assumed a non-cinema orientation - condemned his individualist and existentialist approach as being a result of petitbourgeois apathy, and of the typical predilection of the prosperous Swedish society for things static, apolitical, and ahistorical.

One cannot deny that Bergman films rarely did well in the box-office, appealing mainly to art-houses and academia. His characters were hapless artists and writers, failing, flailing due to madness, paranoia, ennui, loneliness or senility. Removed from social context, his films take on massive ethical dimensions and demand a doggedly universalist outlook on human emotions.

Yet it is hard to judge how mistaken Bergman's style was. Social scientists may be rankled by his persistent separation of the moral from the cultural, and of the personal from the political. But who is to say that the aesthetic pleasure one derives from this is worthless? If anything, it's just the opposite. The psychological intensity and the dramatic finesse Bergman achieved by relinquishing specificity is purely delightful to watch. Through close-ups and corporeal imageries, he created a technique that idiosyncratically suited his intentions.

**DIRECTOR'S PERSONA:** Ingmar Bergman (left) and Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann his film, *Persona* (1966)

Concrete objects of art and nature are present in his films, but exist only as abstract symbolism, as ideas receding behind the individualities of his characters. Ideas and emotions, on the other hand, seem to take solid forms, as if sitting ponderously in the front. What we get in Bergman films is a reality of a wholly different quality: intuitive, introspective, intellectual, and imaginative.

All great artists have pushed the boundaries of their medium, and Bergman has done the same. In spite of all the fallacies, Bergman films have contributed more to cinematic language with regards to the expression of subjective reality than many geniuses put together. Very few filmmakers narrate emotions and passions - the sap of human existence - as luminously as Bergman did. If melodramatists had learnt their craft from him, perhaps they wouldn't have such a bad name today. ●

*The following Bergman films are available on DVD at Suwal Music and Video, Lazimpat: Persona, Crisis, To Joy, Summer Interlude, The Devil's Eye, Wild Strawberries, Shame, The Passion of Anna, The Serpent's Eye, A Lesson in Love, Port of Call, Summer with Monika. 4421522*

# August sky

This month, Saturn, Venus, and Mercury are performing some fancy celestial dances close to the Sun, and will not be visible to us. However, mighty Jupiter will dominate the night sky. During evening hours, look for a bright Jupiter high overhead in the constellation of Ophiuchus. Predawn sky watchers should look out for the red planet Mars in the constellation of Taurus the Bull.

Weather permitting, get ready to enjoy celestial fireworks this month. August brings the well-known Perseid meteor-shower, the best of the year. Perseids can be seen from late July to late August, but the peak is expected in the early hours of 13 August. Tiny particles of dust and rock left by the Swift-Tuttle comet will smash into Earth's atmosphere at a speed of 215,000km per hour, producing a brilliant display of shooting stars.

Perseids are a rich and consistent meteor shower and you can expect to see one Perseid a minute. They all seem to radiate from a point in the constellation of Perseus, which is high in the east by dawn. Since the Moon is New, the sky will be very dark, making this an incredible display.

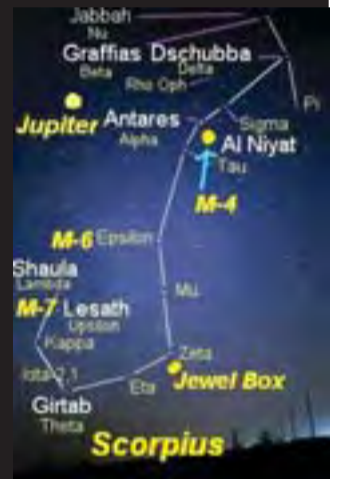
Also during August enjoy the red-giant variable star Antares, a brilliant jewel at the heart of one of the great constellations, the Zodiac's Scorpius. (The brightness of variable stars changes periodically). Antares is easy to find a little south of Jupiter. Antares means 'Mars's rival' and many a stargazer has mistaken this ruddy red star for the planet Mars. With a size of 15 to 18 solar masses, Antares probably does not have much time left, since super massive stars quickly exhaust their hydrogen fuel and explode as brilliant supernovas.


Don't miss the meeting of the waning Moon with Mars in the early morning hours of 7 August, when the Moon will be seen crossing Pleiades. There is a total eclipse of the Moon on 28 August that will be partially visible from Nepal between 6.30 and 7PM.

**August highlights:**

- The Sun is in the constellation of Cancer at the start of August, moving into Leo on the 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Mercury starts the month rising about an hour before the Sun and might be seen before sunrise. On 15 August, it goes through a superior conjunction (behind the Sun) and becomes an evening object.
- Venus is at inferior conjunction (in front of the Sun) on 18 August. But towards the end of August, it will start to appear as a brilliant Morning Star, low in the east before dawn.
- Mars rises after 2AM and spends most of August moving through Taurus. We have good views of Mars now and it will put on a good show right into winter.
- Jupiter, in Ophiuchus, is dominant throughout the month and is just northeast of Antares, the red giant star in Scorpius. Jupiter meets the Moon on 21 August.
- Saturn is getting closer to the Sun. On 21 August the ringed-planet goes through a superior conjunction almost directly behind the Sun to become a morning object.

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KIRAN PANDAY

**BANZAI:** Prime Minister Koirala, who has been absent from cabinet meetings this week because of health reasons, emerged from his residence on Thursday morning to shake hands with visiting Japanese Senior Vice-Minister for Defense, Takahide Kimura. Six Japanese Ground Self-Defence Force personnel are deployed with UNMIN.



RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

**BREAST IS BEST:** Mothers breast feed babies at a mass-feeding ceremony to kick off the Breast-feeding Week 2007 organised by Chhimeki Nepal and Terres de Hommes in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



**BOWLED OVER:** Buddha Air wins first place in last week's corporate bowling tournament 'Super Bowl 2007' organised by Applaud Event & Promotions at Bowling Boulevard, Kantipath.

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\*Consumption of coffee, tea, wine etc can cause staining of teeth.

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**AUGUST ISSUE**

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13th ANNIVERSARY

# SPAM is GON

What's with our leaders that they sneak off to India at the slightest excuse? And when they do, they do a 180 degree turn on what they were saying before they went.

**Chairman Shock and Awe** is having an increasingly tough time controlling cadre who thrash CDOs and then declare indefinite district bunds demanding the CDOs apologise. Awesome also can't seem to tone down anti-Indian rhetoric from a radical fringe of the party lead by **Comrade Cloud & Co.** So, the chairman was summoned by powers-that-be across the border and he air-dashed to Bhadrapur and and slinked across the Mechi Bridge in the darkness to Siliguri to return early next morning.

Why the hush-hush and giving the slip to his own security detail to vanish across the border? The Ass mole in Kakarbita has supplied intelligence that Comrade 'Wherever-Mary-Went-the-Lamb-Was-Sure-To-Go' Baburam and Comrade Pratik were in the entourage. What the mole wasn't able to find out was who the camaraderie met in Siliguri. (Ass' Mental Note: Sack Mole). Comrade Lal Dhoj, who till last week had been insisting that his party would soon be pushing the eject button from the govt, decided after his Siliguri sleepover to stay put.

Whoever they met, **RIM** or **RAW**, it must have been someone really powerful to make Ideologue-in-Chief Babuji eat his words.



One wonders why the Baddies have to go to India at all since Mohamad has been coming to the mountain. There have been a slew of visits by Indian bigwigs to Nepal in the past few weeks. Shyam Saran came through in transit from Oslo to Delhi last month, close on his heels was over-rated Nepalwatcher Prof Muni, then the architect of the peace process Sitaram Yechuri himself stopped by and even the BJP's Yashwant Sinha. (By the way, our vibrant free press doesn't seem to be able to tell the difference between **Yashwant** and the semi-royal ex-minister **Jaswant**.) The other thing puzzling the Ass is why Yechuri Sa'b keeps coming here when he already has his party's permanent representative serving as a parallel Indian ambassador.



Those who accuse SPAM (Seven Parties And Maoists) of inaction

over the past four months of its existence are just being cynical about GON (Government of Nepal). The non-government of Nepal actually deserves medals for saving money by:

- Dropping 'Royal' from Nepal Airlines and cancelling all international flights, saving the airline tons of money in fuel bills
- Fighting over **kickbacks** on a new jets and stalling purchase, so NAC saves even more money
- Not appointing 11 ambassadors to various countries and saving Sital Nibas lots of hard currency that it can squander on Comrade Sahana's sight-seeing of the Pyramids
- Allowing the tarai to burn so constituent assembly can't be held and thus saving the country at least Rs 4 billion
- Keeping the East-West Highway blocked means no gas-guzzling trucks and buses burning expensive diesel
- Stalling decision on licenses for Melamchi and all other hydropower projects, so if we don't build we don't spend
- Not paying IOC for imported petroleum and saving Indian currency



**Comrade Hitman** is at it again, hitting us with more requests for donations. The latest is a letter in the Mao Buddy letter head that goes: 'Gentlemen: Our glorious and proud party the CPN-Maoist is holding the Fifth Extended Convention of its Central Committee in Kathmandu soon. For this, we expect voluntary economic assistance from you of the amount ..... (in words) ..... (and no more). Yours sincerely, Hitman Sakya, in-charge Capital Regional Bureau.'



Kingji's astrological birthday was held recently at Nirmal Nibas with businessmen, bankers, singers, comedians and even media (alas, not Ass) attending. The ex-majesty excuded confidence and actually told people he was looking forward to the constituent assembly elections so the country could come out of its indecisive phase. Observed shaking hands with the king was our very own **Yubaraj**. No, not the clown prince, the editor.



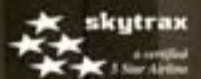
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