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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

No end in sight

Sagar Rana (*above*) has waited all night inside his car on a petrol line at Bhadrakali.

It is now 9.30 AM on Thursday morning, the road is filling up with commuters driving to work. Sagar's car is where it was when he joined the queue last night, his eyes are red from the lack of sleep. The pump has opened, but it will take another six hours for him to get to the head of the line and, when he does, he will only get a rationed 10 litres of gasoline into his tank.

"This is pure incompetence," says Sagar wearily, "we are sick of a government that doesn't care."

Right down the line, there is a similar refrain. Drivers seething with anger at the government's inability to ensure adequate supply now for nearly two years. At the pump, goons force the attendant to fill up their tanks. Others in the line complain, and there is nearly a fist fight.

It's not that there isn't the money to pay for imported fuel. The government doesn't want to keep subsidising it, and is reluctant to raise the prices for political reasons. Not everything can be blamed on the international price of crude at \$120 per barrel. Corruption,

mismangement, adulteration and the NOC's monopoly in distribution are equally responsible.

In the short-term, fuel prices need to be raised, but consumers can be cushioned if the taxes are tied to the old price. The new government must also reduce taxes on electric cars and vans. In the medium-term, letting the private sector into fuel import and retail will control corruption and adulteration. And ultimately, there is no alternative but to reduce dependence on imported fuel by switching to renewables. At Bhadrakali, motorcyclist

Ritesh has lost all patience: "Let the government double the petrol price to Rs 200, I don't care. But stop torturing us like this." ●

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DOWN TO BRASS TACKS

Ever since May 2002, all prime ministers in this country have been provisional. But we may not have to wait long now for a legitimate, elected government.

Nepal must have set some kind of a world record by not forming a government even four months after an election. Mercifully, political parties have finally realised that there is no alternative to working together to institutionalise the republic and address the people's immediate needs. The new government will have to get down to brass tacks right away to make up for lost time.

Taking the peace process to its logical conclusion will have to be at the top of the agenda. Rehabilitation of Maoist combatants, reform of the Nepal Army and addressing the needs of the immediate victims of war are all linked to the peace process.

After the distraction of government formation is over, the Assembly should function smoothly so we can get on with the work of drafting a new constitution that will restructure the state. There is great public scepticism that a new constitution will be ready in two years.

But while we wait, the really urgent task is to restore governance. This must happen in parallel with state restructuring. To establish the credibility of the new government and to end the current state of anarchy and neglect of public services, the people want to see a government that is responsive to their needs.

More than a decade without elections undermined the state's legitimacy. It will be hard work to restore law and order. One quick way to generate faith in the capacity of the government and rekindle hope is to show immediate and tangible improvements in service delivery. The people don't need much: they just want law and order, they are sick of queuing for fuel and suffering power cuts, they want to be sure they can travel without being stuck on the highway, in deficit areas people need food urgently.

Several articles in this issue deal with the gory details of urban decay, lawlessness, the unacceptable rise in crime. At the root of all these problems is the prolonged lack of legitimate government and the unnecessarily lengthy post-election powerplay. This is a classic example of what happens when elected leaders lack accountability and are obsessed about retaining power at all cost.

Police posts removed during the insurgency need to be restored. VDC secretaries need to be in the villages. School teachers must be liberated from extortion. A stopgap political setup will have to be devised at village, district and municipality levels till the next local elections are held. Development can't happen in the present vacuum.

Nepalis are experts at coping. They have shown great forbearance and tolerance of their leaders as they try to reach a power-sharing deal. Let's not let it reach breaking point again.

Common maximum program

The relatively recent transition from coercive politics to multiparty processes has already been a costly and embarrassing experience for the Maoists.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal had his way with the other parties as long



GUEST COLUMN
Bihari K Shrestha

as the dealings were limited to chiseling away at the monarchy. But now its realpolitik, and the Maoists suffered an embarrassing setback with the presidency debacle.

The Maoists have now drafted a Common Minimum Program (CMP) as the possible basis for political consensus to form and lead the post-election government. Their CMP is an exercise in populist generalities, there is nothing concrete to spur growth and development. There is no attempt to understand past achievements, and learn from mistakes.

Now the four parties have formed an eight-member task force to put together their CMPs and come up with the mother of all CMPs. Since these negotiations will now go hand-in-hand with forming of a governing coalition led by the Maoists, one can expect the CMP

now to stand for Claiming Maximum Portfolios.

Just look at the main points of the Maoist CMP. It includes items like a national consensus on security, foreign policy and water resources, review and replacement of treaties, repatriation of Bhutan refugees, nationalisation of the ex-king's property, relief to conflict-hit, adjustment of the Maoist combatants, formation of commissions, revolutionary land reform and an ill-advised higher minimum wage for employees of multinationals.

The NC, UML, MJP say the CMP has to be linked to the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, many of the provisions of which remain unfulfilled by the Maoists.

Two items of the new CMP to ensure smooth supply of essential goods and reconstruction of infrastructure are closer to popular expectations, but the people need more than just words to experience the peace dividend. Nepalis want an explicit assurance that all outstanding issues will be settled without blackmailing the nation with a threat of returning to war. Since the same old parties and politicians enjoy predominance in the game of numbers, the rules of the political game this time

Remember what worked, and just do it

around should be new and corruption-free.

Maybe that would be asking too much, but the Maoists are expected to shoulder special responsibility. They are the fresh faces, as ones who worked for revolutionary change, who hold the people's hope for accountability. To prevent disillusionment among the people, and dash their hopes all over again, the Maoists should commit themselves to three priority items in the upcoming CMP:

1. They must not just promise to disband YCL but actually do it and tell the UML that their Youth Force is an unfortunate, undemocratic and unnecessary countermove.
2. The CMP must be strong and unequivocal on ministerial corruption. The rot starts at the top.
3. Our world-acknowledged success in community development has unequivocally shown that when people are empowered to shape their own destiny, things happen rapidly, effectively, sustainably and inclusively.

The donor-wrecked Local Self-Governance Act must be instantly revived and revamped in all sectors of development and service delivery. Should this happen, even if the ministers continue to rake in ill-gotten wealth in Kathmandu, our local development process would go ahead. ●

The growth of Kathmandu Valley from rustic temple towns to a malignant urban growth has consumed its life force. Rather than gently welcoming newcomers to the city, it overwhelms them with its cacophony of voices, streets that look like they have a perpetual riot, odours that assail the nostrils, and menacing touts. Kathmandu's dystopia, its descent into chaos and filth maybe depressing enough. But the situation in other towns of Nepal is worse.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

It used to be said in rural Nepal that you knew you were approaching a village when human droppings started dotting the trail. Our towns proclaim their presence in even more dramatic ways. Black plastic bags float in the air like balloons, open sewers overflow into pavements, endless queues of dilapidated vehicles honk their heads off, abandoned cows and stray dogs amble along thoroughfares, and aimless groups of people loiter the streets. Welcome to Nepal.

Despite their over-stressed infrastructure and underserved municipal facilities, these cities are growing in all directions. This can only mean more squalour and more nastiness in the future. Economic growth and urbanisation are so closely interlinked that one without the other appears unimaginable. But there have to be better methods of planning, building and managing towns than the free-for-all way in which we run our municipalities now.

Early this week, Nepal Engineers Association organised a workshop to discuss 'Public Private Partnership

Nepal's urban dystopia

City life is getting much worse than country life



KIRAN PANDAY

approach to municipal level infrastructure development and services'. Like most consultations, the event turned out to be largely ritualistic, but participants did succeed in pinpointing the reasons why urban growth in Nepal's towns is unplanned and getting worse.

Like with everything else, the main reason is the absence of effective government in Singha Darbar. The lack of political leadership means that governance everywhere has been at a standstill for over two years now.

Under-motivated, unwilling and mostly unsuitable executive officers head nearly

all municipalities. They are mayors, metropolitan councillors and its executive members all rolled into one. Even if such a person is Brahma incarnate, it is impossible for an individual to be the cook, the butler, the cleaner, the janitor and the father of the town all at the same time.

Municipalities have remained headless since the last elections over a decade ago. A fresh mandate from the electorate will only be possible after the new constitution is made, but till then there has to be a new way to demand accountability through an ad-hoc political setup. The fact that Baburam Bhattarai is an urban planning

expert and the Maoists may soon lead a new government could be potential good news.

Even though they are glorified as local government units, most municipalities have to survive on doles from the central government. Kathmandu has no money to patch up potholes, Janakpur lacks resources to dispose its garbage safely, and despite hosting the biggest revenue-generating customs office in the country, Birganj doesn't have the budget to upgrade infrastructure on its own.

After the leadership and funds, the third most important factor of urban degeneration is the lack of trained people to run municipalities.

Apprenticeship has its strengths, but it works properly only when it is combined with sound theoretical base and practical training. Tribhuban University does offer a masters in urban planning, but most short-term programs run by donor agencies benefit consultants running the course rather than their trainees.

We will have to learn to build better cities to produce responsible citizens that do not begin to burn tyres, pelt stones and shout slogans at the behest of political paymasters. We have to nurture citizens who are outraged by shoddy services, angry about living under corrupt, incompetent and insensitive governments and demand improvement. ●

LETTERS

PORN WAVE

Porn is not new in Nepal ('Porn wave', #411). In 1984, when I was living in Nepal, a house in my neighbourhood used to charge an entrance fee and show pornographic films. There will always be a market for sex. What society needs to ensure is that there is protection for the girls involved in this trade, who take part in it unwillingly and are forced to do so due to poverty. As long as there are men who want sex, porn and prostitution will exist. Legalising this industry and protecting the workers should be the primary concern, not banning it. Nepal has far worse problems in society than sex. The solution is to criminalise the buying of sex, which will never happen in Nepal. So the only alternative is to legalise it, make testing mandatory, clean up the working environment and punish those who abuse these regulations.

Margareta, France

- When you criminalise buying of sex you are indirectly discouraging selling of sex, are you not? If there are no buyers will there be no sellers. Pornography becomes dangerous when young people start believing what they watch and the perversion rife in it. Poverty is only one factor pushing women into prostitution. Please do not forget upbringing, culture, moral values and most importantly things like drug addiction, damaged psychology and circumstances like coercion, deception and blackmailing.

K Rai, UK

- Common sense should prevail. The need of the hour is perhaps to focus on advocating, spreading the awareness and sensitising the issue in illiterate and impoverished communities. Hitherto, only a handful of ill-resourced agencies

are working towards the prevention of sexual exploitation, trafficking and domestic abuse. The assistance may cease when foreign alms dry up. The ominous silence now of Nepali civics will only aggravate the situation. It is urgent to preserve the Nepali pride of being rich in conservatism, traditional and cultural values. Otherwise in years not so distant, Nepal will perhaps be a hot spot for international sex traders. Making sex a taboo is to victimise more young women and children.

Gavin, email

- A country that tolerates the trafficking of its young women to become prostitutes in India and has no right to hold the moral high ground on porn. We have to stop this shameful real-life exploitation of our women before getting all worked up about reel-life smut.

Jujubhai, Asan

MILLION MUTINIES

'A million mutinies' (Editorial, #411). Instead of sermonising, *Nepali Times* should introspect and ask the question whether it has also been responsible to some extent for this mess. By constantly maligning politicians and eroding their credibility they have contributed in bringing about

a situation where there is no one left to douse such fires when they start.

Ram Prasad, Chhauni

- An excellent editorial and I have no words to describe the front page cartoon by Robin Sayami. No, the flag and country should never be torn apart. Let's forget the divisions and unite for our beloved Nepal.

CK Shrestha, email

- Fantastic cartoon. It says it all.

Sarita, Janakpur



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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: Samsung's Tony Myoung-Sun An holds the NV 2HD model that his company is launching in the Nepali market with Shekhar Golchha of Him Electronics (right).

Picture perfect

Samsung, the Korean company better known for its monitors and cell phones, has launched an aggressive foray into the camera market that has been dominated by the Japanese giants, Sony and Canon.

"We don't regard Nepal as a small country, this is an important market for us," said Tony Myoung-Sun An, Sales Area Manager of Samsung's Asia Group, who was in Kathmandu this week.

Korea's Samsung had gone into a strategic partnership with Golchha Organisation's Him Electronics in 2002, and since then Samsung has literally become a household name in consumer electronics. "Samsung fits perfectly with our portfolio. It is an international brand that is recognised for its quality and innovative products," says Shekhar Golchha, Managing Director of Him Electronics.

Samsung currently holds 20 per cent market share in the consumer electronics sector, and Golchha says this is growing rapidly. It has built a strong brand image in the Nepali household appliances, with televisions, washing machines, home theaters, audio systems and microwaves.

Samsung invades the camera market in Nepal

"Cameras are no longer a family commodity, it is an individual product," explains Myoung-Sun An and says Samsung wants to leverage its global leadership in digital technology to take advantage of the market broadening in cameras.

The new models launched this week are in five series: from 7.2 to 14.6 mega pixels, with one of the clearest LCD screens among new model cameras. And they don't just click pictures: they have high-definition video capability in addition to the regular functions like digital image stabilisation and face recognition. Selected models also offer multimedia features: the camera can be used to listen to music, read novels and even watch movies. Consumers can choose the model according to their pocket size as the prices range from Rs 8,900 to Rs 120,000.

"Because Samsung is not essentially known for its cameras, we need to add value," says Myoung-Sun An, "and in that the consumers are being offered high technology cameras at a comparatively lower prices." What set Samsung cameras apart is their unique designs that focus on being consumer friendly. With the feather touch technology, navigation is so simplified that one doesn't need to be a professional to take great pictures.

Him Electronics' Samsung showroom in Darbar Marg is already flooded with enquiries and orders for the new line of cameras, and Myoung-Sun An is convinced Samsung can soon be the best-selling camera in Nepal.

Golchha says the current political instability is having a dampening effect on the economy, but he is optimistic about the future. He says: "Of course it worries us. But what we try to do is see the light at the end of the tunnel. Today's need is to focus on the economic agenda. When there is money in the pocket, everything else will fall into place." ●

Paavan Mathema

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LG -luck



Purusottam Neupane recently won a TVS RTR - 160cc Apache bike through a lucky draw on Call Kantipur, from LG's 'lawalaskar' offer that started in April.

Hang on



Hang Ten, a California-based life style brand, has opened a showroom at Tamrakar Complex, New Road, and a retail outlet at the Blue Bird Mall, Tripureswor. Hang Ten caters to young adults and kids' clothing and accessories and is brought to Nepal by South East Traders.

Scratch



Customers of Gorkha and Bishwakarma Cement get a chance to win Yasuda domestic products through a scratch card from the 'Sukhi Pariwar' offer for every 20 sacks of cement purchased.

Choppers

Fishtail Air has signed an agreement with Eurocopter, Singapore and is bringing two new AS350 B3 Ecureuil helicopters to Nepal. The choppers, which are suited for high altitudes and difficult climate, will be delivered by early 2010.

Fitness freak



The Jasmine Fitness Club and Spa was opened at the United World Trade Center, Tripureswor. The club offers facilities such as heated swimming pool, gym, sauna, and beauty parlour. The monthly membership fee is priced at Rs 16, 500 per month for singles.

NEW PRODUCTS

TABS: Drinking Water Purification Tablets Aquatabs, manufactured by Medentech, Ireland, was launched in Nepal by the Centre for Socio-Economic Development. One tablet of Aquatabs purifies five liters of water.

Road to now here

POKHARA— One always is tempted to take the scenic drive to Pokhara, now that the notorious Krishna Bhir landslide has been tamed through ingenious Nepali bio-engineering.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Today, it isn't the landslides that block the road, but obstructions by locals along the way. A national highway artery can be blocked for hours or days by anyone for any reason.

Or it can be just two vehicles that decide to change tyres right in the middle of the road, creating a monstrous traffic jam that make cars in the queue burn away precious fuel. A similar psyche works at the national level: a few people block Nepal's progress. Out of ignorance or selfishness, they stop the flow of prosperity. A few people keep millions back.

Pokhara itself is bursting at the seams like Kathmandu Valley. There is construction everywhere, and everywhere the new houses flout zoning and seismic standards. The contemporary architectural style of 'uncovered steel rods on the top floor and black plastic water tanks' dot the landscape. Water scarcity is becoming an issue just as it is in Kathmandu, although it is much

easier to solve here. Garbage has yet to become a big problem, but the littered Lakeside is an indication of a crisis to come. Pokhara has replicated Kathmandu Valley's self-destructive urbanisation model, but hopefully Pokhara still has a chance to learn from the capital's mistakes.

Pokhara is endowed with scenery that makes it one of the world's natural wonders. The combination of mountain and lake is stupendous. However, our tourism marketing and 'shutteronomics' has turned this town into an ugly concrete jungle

'eco-friendly' water sports.

A Federal Nepal should not be a conglomeration of small Kathmandu Valleys that resemble the capital's soulless urban slum. Kathmandu made mistakes that cannot be rectified as the cost of the restoration would be more than building a couple of new cities. However, other cities should be able to use the powers entrusted to them to stop the rot before it gets irreversible.

Pokhara could easily be more organised, have proper roads, water, sanitation and waste disposal facilities. Zoning of areas as agricultural, commercial and

When was the last time we had real governance?

devoid of any sense of aesthetics.

One argument you hear here is that since the quality of tourists has deteriorated over the past two decades, houses and hotels haven't been able to pay attention to repairs. The time is ripe for a serious re-think of our tourism strategy and products to ensure that there are more tourists both foreign and domestic coming and spending more time in the city. There have to be more things to do, and opportunities of optimum utilisation of the lake and water can be exploited to create amusement centers and

residential would probably bring a sense of organisation. Pokhara can be a green city with areas set aside as urban lungs, like the hill of the Peace Stupa.

But when all our activists and politicians are only thinking about where to block the highway next, there is no one to plan. A few people will continue to set the next impediment on our path to progress. The first challenge for the new government would be to ensure clear passage through the highways. If they can't do that, there would be little else they can do. ●

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Skin deep

Letter to the editor, *Kantipur*, 5 August कान्तिपुर

As the Miss Nepal contest draws near, opposition to it has been raised once more. This isn't new. In 1994, Ruby Rana became the first Nepali to be crowned amidst unnecessary controversy, partly orchestrated by the media. But the Kathmandu Jaycees continues to organise the contest every year.

Every competition has its limitations and Miss Nepal is no exception. Some people just can't qualify. But for any college student, five feet and above there is no problem. Look at it this way: at least someone gets to show off her talent.

The argument that beauty contests must be banned because they take women into the world of

glamour is an attack on individual freedom itself. That is an individual choice and it's none of our business. Why are the protestors mainly women? Could there be an element of the stereotyped 'jealous woman' at work here? A winner is honoured, not oppressed. A Miss Nepal has a choice to appear or not appear on television.

Then there is the objection to the bikini round while representing Nepal in the internationals, but to win a title it is necessary to play by the rules. It may not be acceptable in our culture but it is in theirs, and women from a multitude of cultures will be there.

We talk about modernisation, and hope to catch up with developed countries. Is it oppression when you participate in a contest out of your own free will, or when you rally against a changing society? Does it make any sense to burn tyres or take part in a contest that brings out your talents?

Ashish Luitel, Kathmandu University

Prachanda meets Pushpa Kamal

Suresh Kiran in *Nepal*, 10 August

Everyone knows Comrade नेपाल Prachanda, but not many know Pushpa Kamal Dahal because it is only recently that he has emerged from underground. They met after a long time last week by chance.

Pushpa Kamal said to Prachanda, "After you won the elections you forgot all about me. Why don't you look me up anymore?"

Prachanda replied, "It's not like that...um...I'm very busy these days."

This enraged Pushpa Kamal, "You have time to meet Baburam

everyday. You have all the time to visit the Indian Embassy, or dine with dips but you don't have time for me?"

Prachanda tried to calm him down, "It's not like that. You know how it is with politics, I'm busy with that."



"What politics?" by now an angry Puspha Kamal was shouting, "before the elections you said you'd be president."

Prachanda scratched his head: "Yeah, that didn't quite work out. But I'm now thinking of making you the Prime Minister."

"I don't want to be the Prime Minister. I know you are going to betray me," said Pushpa Kamal.

Prachanda patted Pushpa Kamal on the back, and said: "That's not going to happen. First I'll propose my name, if that's rejected then I'll put forward yours. One of the two is sure to be accepted."

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Party financing

Pramila Devkota in *Sancharika Feature Service*, 5 August

True democracy is not possible without transparency in the government sector: its expenditure, the activities of the political parties and public corporations. The 25 political parties in the constituent assembly have the responsibility of running the country and writing the constitution. But Nepalis also want the parties to be transparent in their policies, their agenda and their expenditure.

But not one political party submits its records to audit. In fact, this lack of transparency has meant that we are still unaware of the number of members in a party, their fund-raising sources, how they manage their finances and their expenditures.

Legally, all parties have to submit annual financial records to the Election Commission but no one does it. "Parties have repeatedly ignored our request for audited statements," says EC spokesperson Laxman Bhattarai. During the CA elections, EC had given permission to each political party to raise up to Rs 460,000 without disclosing the source of income. But the commission has no idea whether the parties adhered to this requirement.

Civil society activist Devendra Raj Pandey says that Nepali political parties must practice transparency. "The parties shouldn't trick the citizens of this country," he adds.

Insiders say the Maoist need more than Rs 2 billion every year. The party says it raises the money from membership fees. Maoist office secretary Keshab Nepal says: "Since we gained a majority by winning peoples trust, we are trying to be more transparent." He says that although the Maoists are the largest party, has the smallest budget.

The UML also claims that its main source of income is membership fees. But it is difficult to believe that parties like UML and the Maoist with 100,000 members each can function purely on fees. UML member Astha Laxmi Shakya says her party is very transparent and its party congress reviews a statement of accounts. The NC doesn't have a membership fee and runs solely on donations and doesn't keep open accounts.

The big parties have given CA seats to the people from the business community instead of their own members, raising questions about the nexus between politics and business.



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Organic growth



SHRADHA BASNYAT

Dawn is just breaking. Overnight rain has made the monsoon clouds hang low over the surrounding mountains, but Baburam Kunwar is already heading off to his fields in Godavari.

He works meticulously and efficiently, checking each and every lettuce leaf, the tomato plants, the root crops for signs of damage from insects and worms.

Kunwar works in an organic farm, but because he is not using chemicals to kill off insects and other pests he has to be extra vigilant about his

precious vegetables being destroyed. But the reward for the hard work is not just a higher price for his veggies in Kathmandu's market, but also a sense of pride that he is not poisoning his environment.

Kunwar's crispy-fresh greens may not have the artificial plumpness and shine of commercially grown veggies, but they are more vitamin and mineral rich, and a whole lot healthier.

The combination of local and natural is what makes the produce of farmers like Kunwar stand apart. Kathmandu Valley is historically renowned for its rich vegetable crop which has found its way into traditional Newari

cuisine. But today, with urban sprawl crowding out the fertile furrows of cauliflowers and potatoes, vegetable production has shifted to the Valley's outskirts and surrounding districts of Dhading, Kavre and Nuwakot.

The first thing one notices in an organic farm is that it's full of insects—ladybirds, bees, earthworms, snails and beetles. Many of these are good organisms that help eat harmful insects, or like earthworms naturally fertilise the soil. A commercial farm on the other hand, is essentially a monocrop, where pesticides kill all the good insects and worms along with the few bad ones.



Increased health awareness among the upper middle class in Kathmandu now means that customers are willing to even pay the 20 per cent extra for organic produce. But with inflation, people are getting more price conscious and some families are buying whatever is cheapest.

Prajwol Khadka, a struggling owner of an organic farm in Panauti, says: "The difficulty is that people don't understand that organic food isn't just a western fad." So Khadka tries to tell his retailers that this is how the farmers of Kathmandu

Valley used to grow vegetables in the past—centuries ago, everything was fresh and organic.

Documentary-maker Kedar Sharma, who is working on a film on organic food, says: "If organic food wasn't marketed just for rich westerners as it is, it would be affordable. After all, most vegetables in Kathmandu are still organic." Sharma says if the 'organic hype' is removed, more people, not just the elite, can afford healthy foods.

Samir Newa is the founder of Organic Village, which has three organic vegetable shops and many farms in places such as Sankhu, Sanga, Dhulikhel and Pokhara. "Slowly, people are becoming more aware, choosier and conscious of their health," says Newa, who plans to set up a wholesale market specialising in organic food.

Restaurants and hotels in Kathmandu are switching to organic, and have started to include organic food in their menus such as the Organic Café in Thamel or U Café in Sanepa. There is an organic food bazaar every Wednesday and Sunday at the Summit Hotel, where more than 30 items are sold.

Reeka Oemisch is opening an organic snack shop—Organic World and Fair Future in Basantapur and says consumer awareness will grow. She adds, "Sensible cultivation is the only way to preserve the environment." ●



Where to buy organic food: Organic Village in Baluwatar, Bakundole and Kupondole Summit Hotel Organic Food Market on Wednesday and Sunday



DOUBLE ARCH ON DURBAR MARG? International fast food chains have so far shunned Nepal, but that may be changing.

PHOTO MONTAGE: MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA/KIRAN MAHARJAN

Slow inte

PAAVAN MATHEMA

Nepal's unique status as one of the last countries in the world without international fast food chains may be coming to an end, ironically at a time when the Maoists are about to lead the government.

Many have wondered why there isn't a McDonalds in Durbar Marg, a Pizza Hut in Pokhara or a Starbucks in Namche, while others count it as a blessing that Nepal is one last unspoiled corner of Asia where the golden double arch hasn't yet made its appearance.

We asked Nepali businessmen why multinational

fast food wallahs have kept away from Nepal. "It has a lot to do with low purchasing power here," suggests Binod Tuladhar, managing director of Bluebird Mall which has a popular food court. "Although the demand for fast food is rising, the taste preference of Nepali consumers is inclined towards Chinese and Indian rather than western food."

However, the success of the Bakery Café chain that serves sandwiches, fries and burgers shows that fast food may not just be a fad. Bakery was started by Shyam Kakshapati with his first outlet in Tindhara in 1991. Since then he has opened nine Bakery Cafés all over Kathmandu, and even one in his native Tansen

Health concerns are making more and more people go green



PICS: MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Interest in fast food

But Pizza Hut and KFC are sniffing around

in 1998 and in Butwal in 2001.

Kakshapati told *Nepali Times* he feels there is great potential for international chains to set up business franchises in Nepal. "They are simply waiting for the right time to enter the market. The consumers here are already exposed to their brand name. Once they set up, the market will follow," he explains.

Asked if he is nervous about competition, Kakshapati adds: "No, it will keep local restaurateurs on their toes, force us to improve our standards too."

The lifestyles of the young in the cities are changing and so are their eating habits. Nuclear families in which both spouses are working are becoming the norm. Eating out has become convenient, and not just on special occasions.

"Nepalis have become more experimental in their taste, they are eager to try new items in the menu," explains Chandan Kayasta, owner of Roadhouse Café, "we see real potential for the food industry to grow."

Given this, what seems to be

keeping The Colonel and Big Macs out is the high franchise cost. For example, the annual fee for a McDonalds franchise is said to be in the \$ 1 million range in this part of the world. Even if the novelty effect may bring in customers initially, businessmen doubt if there will be a good return on investments, especially because of the high franchise cost.

"Independent businessmen do not have the resource or infrastructure to sustain such a risk," says Gagan Pradhan, owner of Himalayan Java, the trendy coffee joint in Thamel.

Most locally owned restaurants themselves are working under tight margins. There is an acute shortage of even the basic

supplies like fuel, gas, electricity and water. Raw materials are of inconsistent quality, prices fluctuate wildly and there is always the threat of labour problems. All this has kept businessmen as well as potential international investors away from Nepal.

But one factor that could change all that would be a tourism boom and a trickle down of income to young Nepalis exposed to western brands. Several international chains are now reportedly exploring the Nepali market and trying to cash in on the first player advantage.

Varun Beverages, bottlers of Pepsi in Nepal is hoping to open a Pizza Hut outlet this year and

KFC is expected to follow soon after. R J Corp, the parent company, appears to be interested in setting up a franchise network starting next year. Although political stability is still an issue, there is optimism that things will settle down once the new government is formed.

Publicity is not expected to be a problem since most young urban Nepalis are already exposed to the brand. The franchises would be a new 'cool' place for urban youngsters to hang out, provide office-goers a new option to grab a quick bite and also for trekkers sick of eating dal-bhat nonstop for three weeks in the mountains. ●

Slow-burn in the Tarai

If you do not deal with the youth bulge there will be conflict

LAHAN—The Tarai is on a slow-burn mode, and in our current state of lawlessness there is no one to douse the fire.

A volatile mix of anarchy, corruption, institutionalised criminality, economic stagnation, popular discontent and deepening communal divide are making the towns in the plains more dangerous and fragile.

In Siraha, the Madhes Tarai Mukti Morcha kidnapped a Pahadi VDC secretary. Most VDC secretaries have moved to district towns signaling a retreat of the state. Another unknown armed group killed a Madhesi school teacher. Government employees have locked up their offices and refused to work unless given more security.

The Tharus called a shutdown against Hindi oath-taking. And MJF leaders smugly said they would teach the Tharus a lesson in the future. The mysterious

killing of a Madhesi college student in Dharan has turned into an ethnic issue. Madhesi students demand an investigation into the death, asking the college to set up a branch in a 'Madhesi area' where they will be more secure. Instead of calming the situation, Madhesi parties are capitalising on the polarisation.

Youth militancy is picking up in Dhanusha. The Rajan Mukti faction is the most notorious these days for its blatant extortion. A Madhesi businessman was shot in Janakpur a fortnight ago for refusing to pay up. There were 13 blasts in the town in July. Youth wings of mainstream parties (Maoists, UML, MJF and Sadbhabana) are engaged in competitive populism and acting as law-enforcers.

Economic stagnation is a key factor for this mess. There are no jobs for people who do not migrate out of the country. The collapse of the public sector in the Tarai (the Birganj sugar factory and the cigarette unit in Janakpur are visible examples) means the state is not giving jobs. The insecurity of the past year has led to shutting down of more than 25 industries in Bara-Parsa belt. Vegetable oil units are winding up. There are no fresh investments and no expansion of production. Many factories still operating prefer Indian workers because they do not want Nepali labour trouble.



AJIT TIWARI

Agriculture can't accommodate everyone because of its seasonal nature, the lack of modernisation, falling productivity and inequitable land distribution. There is no big infrastructure project or employment guarantee program which could give people money and dignity. It is simple: if you do not deal with the youth bulge, there will be conflict.

Combine this unemployment with the collapse of the administrative and security apparatus of the state. There is no local government, the bureaucrats are not accountable to anyone and they have no political direction. The state lost out at a critical moment when it did not capitalise on its post election legitimacy and the total illegitimacy of the armed groups. That was the best time to weaken extremists and we lost the chance.

Where the state does exist, it is corrupt. As long as the cops get a share of the loot, they prefer not to confront criminals. The parties use the armed groups as a card to promote the politics of divisiveness. Businesses and even NGOs are now reported to be using armed groups against rivals. A conflict economy is slowly taking root in Madhes, and some sections are quite happy with the lawlessness.

Across the eastern Tarai there is unhappiness. A trader can't transport products because of blocked highways. A Dalit labourer in a northern Siraha village is unhappy because he barely gets 3 kg of rice as daily wage. A Muslim is unhappy because his community has lost out in the inclusion race. Both upper and intermediate-caste Madhesis are unhappy because they feel the government has not fulfilled any promise. Pahadis and Tharus are unhappy because they feel victimised by the Madhes hegemony. There are no institutions to deal with the discontent, which means all the unhappiness and anger will be manifested on the streets.

After Kathmandu parties do us a favour and form the government, they should turn their gaze southwards and start building the state. ●

DEWAN RAI

Seeing the way Nepali migrant workers are cheated by middlemen, harassed at the airport on departure, ill-treated by staff in Nepal's own national airline and extorted when they return, it is hard to believe that they are the pillars of the country's economy.

Economists say that aside from facilitating paperwork for overseas workers and protecting them from exploitation, there should be an urgent campaign to upgrade their income by giving skills training before they go.

Simple vocational training could easily double or triple the annual Rs 102 billion Nepalis sent home last year from overseas. Because of the growing number of workers, this figure is expected to reach Rs 135 billion next year.

Most Nepali migrant workers are unskilled, and they do the most menial work in restaurants, department stores and plantations for \$ 125 a month. A semi-skilled labourer is paid twice as much as unskilled labour and a skilled worker can earn up to 10 times higher salary.

"If we started a coordinated policy to upgrade skills, there will be a rise of 25 per cent in remittances from the same number of workers," says Krishna Dawadi, director at the Department of Labour and Foreign Employment Promotion.

Skilled workers also get better treatment at work, they enjoy more safety, security facilities and health insurance. But above all, they can live with dignity in an alien land.

"Neither recruiter nor employer can ever cheat a skilled worker who has been trained and knows his rights," says Dawadi. Most untrained Nepalis are either cheated by their recruiters who promise salaries that aren't honoured, or often abandoned on arrival at the airport in the Gulf or Malaysia.

The government has announced strict punishment for rogue recruiters, but that doesn't seem to deter them. Dawadi says incidents of cheating could go down dramatically if the government makes vocational training or technical education



ECONOMIC

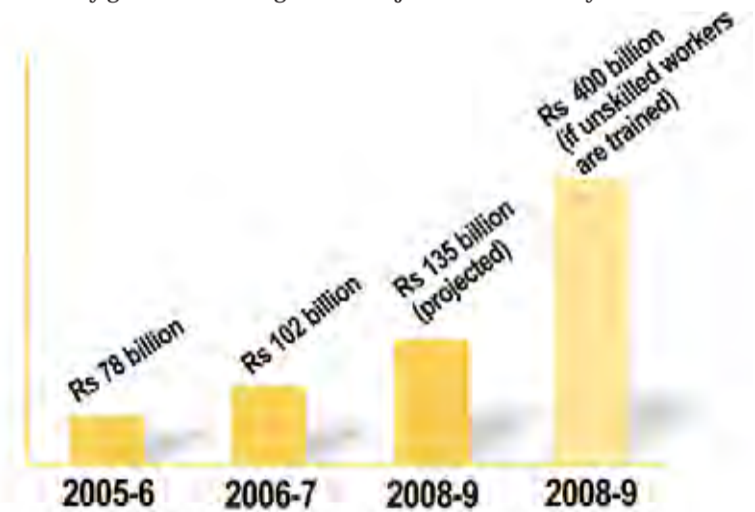
How to maximise the benefits from

mandatory.

A proposed National Skill Testing Board will certify vocational and technical education because existing training documents can be easily forged. The Professional and Vocational Skill Development Directorate runs the training programs in 48 districts, the Department of Cottage and Small Industry gives the training in

27 districts, the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training has 18 schools of its own and there are 500 private training institutions which target high school dropouts and the illiterate.

The trouble is that put together these institutes can train only 40,000 people a year whereas 10 times that number enter the job market annually. "The



"Vocational

Geoff Pines, Principal of Greenwich Community College in the UK, was in Kathmandu to speak about public-private partnership in vocational education organised by the British Council. He talked to *Nepali Times* about the importance of vocational education in Nepal.

***Nepali Times*: Why vocational training?**

Geoff Pine: I've been involved in education all my life. But unlike traditional schools, at a vocational school an individual's talent surfaces easily. The issue here in Nepal, like in the UK, is that vocational education is seen as a poor relative of academic studies, which is a wrong concept. Every country needs business and in order to have well-rounded employees, vocational education is an area of importance and should be focused on very seriously.

Over 200,000 Nepalis go abroad to work every year.

How important is job-oriented education in a country like this?

Vocational skills are beneficial for any individual. They play an important role in the long-term as they help the industries, which in turn help in the economic development of the country. Vocational education is also important because it has a positive effect on business and attracts foreign investment. If vocational education is emphasised, it will yield high quality employees who will be recognised not just in the country but beyond the borders.

Is there a role for the private sector to be involved?

The private sector plays a very significant role as it provides and acts like the knowledge unit. This concept is just coming up in the UK too and is quite interesting because the private sector helps regulate the kind of students we put out there. Vocational education is demand-led and students are trained as



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

CLASS

our remittance economy

investment in vocational training is just not sufficient," says Ramhari Lamichhane, project manager at the \$ 20 million ADB-funded Skill for Employment Project which started training dropouts this year and aims to train 80,000 in the next three years.

On average, out of 100 students enrolled in Class One, only eight students pass SLC, 15 make it to Grade 10, and 85 drop out of school. Says Dawadi: "Education should get 25 percent of the national budget and of that one-third of the money must go to technical and

vocational education."

Vocational training would not just benefit workers going abroad, but also give Nepalis jobs in Nepal. Nara Bahadur Thapa, director at Nepal Rastra Bank, says Nepal shouldn't depend too much on remittances since overseas jobs could easily dry up if there is instability in the Gulf. "It is not a long-term solution," he says, "We don't have control over external situation, so vocational education should primarily be targeted at the domestic job market with a coordinated employment generation campaign in agriculture, finance, infrastructure and manufacturing." ●

CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF OVERSEAS WORKERS

2001	250,000
2007	500,000
2008	800,000 (projected)
2011	1,200,000 (projected)

Sweat and tears

GANESH GURUNG

Nepalis have been migrating to work for the past 200 years, so it is not a new phenomenon. But a burgeoning population and lack of jobs has dramatically increased the number of people leaving the country to find work. The decade-long conflict accelerated this process.

Some analysts had predicted that with the peace dividend, the number of Nepali workers overseas would drop, but that hasn't happened. Some 560 people are leaving Nepal every day for jobs overseas, this is the official figure from the Department of Labour and does not include those leaving unofficially and those going to India.

The push factor is lack of jobs in Nepal and the salary differential. The money they send home has sustained Nepal's conflict-ravaged economy and reduced the poverty rate by 11 per cent. If there hadn't been a conflict, poverty reduction would probably be higher.

What 50 years of Five Year Plans could not do with their grand strategies for poverty reduction has been accomplished by the 'manpower export' industry. It is interesting that our planners never saw that the way to poverty reduction was through employment generation. When the government couldn't offer them jobs in the country, Nepalis did what they have traditionally done: migrate for work. It has happened by default, with virtually no contribution or planning from the government. In fact, when the government has tried to regulate, monitor or promote the manpower industry, it has usually made things worse.

Lack of regulation and monitoring has led to widespread exploitation of poor Nepalis by fellow Nepalis. Individual instances of cheating and abandonment of recruits at foreign airports fill the media every day.

But there are other aspects of foreign employment that don't get as much attention: the increasing number of deaths of workers abroad. In 2007 alone, 754 Nepalis died in the Gulf and Malaysia. Besides accidents, there is a mysterious increase in the number of workers whose deaths are registered 'heart failure' in the Gulf.

There has been an alarming increase in cases of domestic violence, even murder, due to suspicions of infidelity. The spread of HIV, divorces, children falling into bad habits due to lack of supervision are other social side-effects.

No major impact study has been done on how the money that the workers send back is spent. With food prices increasing, a larger chunk of it probably goes to the upkeep of the family back home. In other words, what is the social cost Nepali families pay for overseas migration? Is it

Is the social cost of migrating for work worth it?

worth it? How do we maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of foreign employment until we find jobs for them at home?

Labour migration is a business and like any business it is driven by the laws of supply and demand. Nepal has to compete with other countries for the price

of labour and to compete, our workers need to be more skilled, productive and disciplined.

But government policy on recruitment erodes our competitive advantage. By offering only unskilled labour, we undermine the earning potential of our nationals.

An independent bureau must replace the Labour Department so it can work in marketing and welfare services independently and efficiently and reduce exploitation and fraud. It could also facilitate access to information, an effective insurance system, counselling, equal opportunities to women, tap niche markets and provide loans to people from remote areas and unprivileged groups.

At present, Nepali migrant workers are squeezed by both the government policy and recruiting agencies. That is no way to treat the heroes who sustain our economy with their sweat and tears. ●

Ganesh Gurung is a sociologist with the Nepal Institute of Development Studies and chairperson of the National Network on Safe Migration.



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

training is the way to go"



ANUP PRAKASH

per the needs of the employer and businesses. At Greenwich Community College there is no vocational education course that's doesn't guarantee a job on completion. There is no point teaching a course which is of no use to businesses, that would be just a waste of time and money. The relationship between private sector and vocational education is a mutually beneficial one. In Nepal, the FNCCI has a huge role to play. At the symposium here, the British Council started a dialogue which is going to help the industries as well as the economy in the future.

Can you give us an example of a model partnership? There was a time when the leisure industry was doing very well but it was depressing because none of our students were getting jobs. The employers said our students had no skill that they wanted. So, we joined hands with the London Leisure College and GL Limited and designed the course as per the need

of the industry. It was mutually beneficial because they were getting better workers and our students were getting better jobs. Similarly, in Thailand's Chang Mai region, the local Thai tour operators and hotel staff were not getting jobs beyond a certain level. So GCC collaborated with local tour operators and hotels to design a course that would help qualified Thai in high managerial post as well. As a result GCC has an objective that the teachers have to have had some relevant experience in the industry in the last 12 years.

Which are the most feasible professions for Nepal? Construction, which doesn't necessarily mean learn from other countries but more importantly learn from how it functions here. Then it would have to be hospitality and health sector. Its culture and rich heritage makes it easy for Nepal to sustain tourism for a long time.



Two sides in the life of Alexander Solzhenitsyn

MOSCOW—Prophets, it is said, are supposed to be without honour in their homeland. Yet Moscow has just witnessed the extraordinary sight of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, dissident and once-exiled author of the *Gulag Archipelago* and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, receiving what amounts to a state funeral. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin

was chief mourner.

So, even in death, Alexander Solzhenitsyn will, it seems, remain a force to be reckoned with. But will he be a force in keeping with the liberating vistas of his greatest works?

Sadly, art in Russia is always used to reinforce the narcissism of power. Solzhenitsyn was used in this way twice. The paradox is

that, in the Soviet era, his art was used, briefly, as a force for liberation, because Nikita Khrushchev allowed the publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in order to buttress his anti-Stalin thaw.

In today's supposedly free and democratic Russia, however, Solzhenitsyn is idealised for his nationalism and Orthodox messianism, his contempt for the West's supposed decadence, all messages that Putin's regime proclaims loudly and daily.

The old Soviet iconography has broken down completely. Despite heroic efforts, not even Putin could restore Lenin, Stalin, and the old Soviet pantheon. Yet the Kremlin understands that something is needed to replace them as Russia adapts to its new oil-fueled autocracy. Solzhenitsyn, one of the most famous and heroic dissidents of the Soviet era, now seems certain to become a towering figure in the iconography of Putinism.

For Solzhenitsyn, a survivor of the gulag system enforced by the KGB, the desire to see Russia as a great nation, its eternal spirit superior to the West's vulgar materialism, found him in old age supporting an ex-KGB

The Gulag chronicler

strongman. Putin once said that there is no such thing as an ex-KGB man and sees the Soviet Union's collapse as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of modern times. Despite this, Solzhenitsyn accepted Putin as a 'good dictator'.



TRIBUTE
Nina Khrushcheva

It is a sad testament to Russia's current mindset that it is Solzhenitsyn the anti-modernist crank who is being remembered, not Solzhenitsyn the towering foe of Soviet barbarism and mendacity. Today, his writing is seen as buttressing the state, not individual freedom. Works such as *The Red Wheel* series of novels, a tedious account of the end of Imperial Russia and the creation of the USSR or his last book *A Hundred Years Together* on the history of Russian-Jewish coexistence, seem backward, preachy, conservative, unenlightened, at times even anti-Semitic. They smack off Solzhenitsyn's own grim authoritarianism.

Both Putin and Khrushchev sought to use Solzhenitsyn for their own purposes. Putin vowed to revive the moral fibre of the Russians, their glory and international respect. Under him, Khrushchev Solzhenitsyn's work was used to liberate the country from the grip of Stalinism. Khrushchev knew that he was undermining the entire Soviet era up to that point. But, with Khrushchev's overthrow in 1964, Leonid Brezhnev lost no time in restoring orthodoxy and purging books that threatened the Party's reputation. Solzhenitsyn was banned, driven first underground and then into exile.

One lesson of the 1989 revolution in Eastern Europe is the value of having truly democratic-minded figures lead the escape from communism. Poland had Lech Węseła; Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel. Both kept their countries calm during wrenching transitions. Russia, sadly, had no one with

the moral authority to soothe people's passions. Only Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov came near to Węseła and Havel in terms of moral authority. But Sakharov was dead by the time communism collapsed, and Solzhenitsyn's ideas were too conservative, too tied to Russian nationalism, for him to become a symbol of democracy in a multi-national Soviet Union.

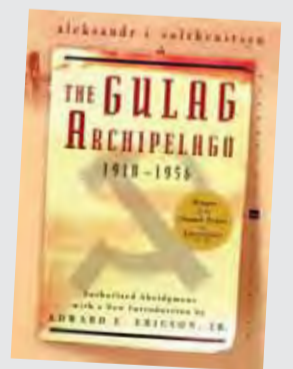
The tragedy of Solzhenitsyn is that although he played a mighty role in liberating Russia from totalitarianism, he had nothing to say to ordinary Russians after their liberation, except to chastise them. Yet perhaps one day we Russians will escape our false dreams, and when that day comes, the heroic Solzhenitsyn, the Solzhenitsyn who could never surrender or be corrupted, will be restored to us. But it is now that we need that Solzhenitsyn most. ●

Project Syndicate

Nina Khrushcheva teaches international affairs at The New School in New York.

Solzhenitsyn's published works:

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962; novel)
An Incident at Krestovtsovka Station (1963; novella)
Matryona's Place (1963; novella)
For the Good of the Cause (1964; novella)
The First Circle (1968; novel)
Cancer Ward (1968; novel)
The Love-Girl and the Innocent (1969; play)
August 1914 (1971).
The Gulag Archipelago (three volumes) (1973–1978).



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An ode to Hollywood blockbusters and a call for action charms and inspires

Be kind, rewind, rewatch, repeat

familiarity with the source material, but the scenes of productions with their improvised sets and costumes are surprisingly fun, and sometimes frustratingly short. The *Rush Hour 2* sequence recreated on a playground jungle gym set as the high-rise building of the movie's action movie is ridiculously grin-inducing. With a premise like that, Gondry allows himself to pull back the curtain to peek at his cinematic alchemy to a degree unprecedented, capturing the playful and experimental essence of his approach.

Be Kind, Rewind probes the strange antipathy between an industry that is preoccupied



A lucky Sherpa

As one of the few Sherpa members of the Constituent Assembly, Lucky will now be involved in drafting a new constitution on behalf of her people—a branch of Sherpas that lives in the Arun Valley of Sankhuwasabha.

Lucky's father was the first Sherpa professor and when he came to teach at Tribhuvan University, her family moved to Kathmandu where she was educated. Lucky graduated with a masters in economics.

It's a long way from Madi Mulkharka, where the rest of the clan still lives to being the UML representative in the assembly.

"Most of my extended family didn't get the opportunities I had and I am determined to work for their upliftment so that no Nepali is left behind," Lucky told *Nepali Times* on a trek through her home district recently.

Neglect by rulers in faraway Kathmandu, and the apathy of the district administration in Khandbari to the concerns of the mountain people means that the people of northern regions of Sankhuwasabha are even more remote than Humla or Mugu.

"I guess you can call me lucky," says Lucky Sherpa, making a familiar joke about her name.

There are layers upon layers of neglect: people are marginalised because they live in far-flung areas, their voice is feeble because they come from indigenous communities, they are not educated and don't have the reach, they are poor so no one listens to them, or they come last because they are women.

Says Lucky: "At the national level, the indigenous movement is getting a voice, but here you won't find many people like me who can speak out." That is why Lucky set up the Himalayan Indigenous Women Network (HIWN) to promote and protect the rights of indigenous mountain communities, focussing on women.

She explains how information is power and because indigenous women don't speak Nepali they are left out of decision-making in government offices. There are things that can start within the communities: girls must be given the same opportunities as boys and women need to be educated about their rights.

"Already," adds Lucky, "participation and the sense of politics among women are emerging. We are becoming aware that we should be involved in politics at local and central levels, otherwise our issues will not be heard."

The road to becoming a woman indigenous leader is a bumpy one. Nepal's political arena and the indigenous movement are dominated by men. But Lucky chooses to focus on the common denominator: indigenous groups feel the same social, political and economic exclusion, which can be amended by the revised constitution.

Lucky is determined that it won't just be luck that will give women from indigenous communities the same opportunity she had for education. ●

Sraddha Basnyat

Himalayan Indigenous Women Network www.hiwn.org.np



With movies like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) and *The Science of Sleep* (2006), director Michel Gondry had managed to return to movies a certain sense of wonder, even bewilderment at the magic of film. Eschewing the digital special effects of late that have reached dizzying heights of



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

technical achievement (and despairing depths of mediocrity), he is a practitioner of a more material form of wizardry—one that is all the more enchanting for us, knowing that it is a trick: playing with perspective, tinkering with the mechanics of the camera, even something as simply running the film backwards. The 'how-did-he-do-that?' wonder that he evokes is a kind of invitation for the viewer to try it himself. With his newest film, *Be Kind, Rewind* the invitation has never been more

clearer or as inviting.

Passiac, New Jersey, a place that seems to stretch up one urban block under a highway is the economically depressed neighborhood that is home to 'Be Kind, Rewind', an anachronistic video store that rents actual VHS movies. The film's central relationship is between Mike (Mos Def), the affable guy who works for his father figure Mr. Fletcher at the VHS store, and Mike's best friend Jerry (Jack Black), the oddball mechanic from across the street. When Jerry electro-magnetises himself and accidentally erases every cassette in the store, the pair replaces the movies with their own home-made amateurish versions with kitschy remakes of blockbusters of yesteryear.

Mike and Jerry's goofy productions ignite the imagination of their community, who line around the block to get copies, and eventually to feature in the little knock-offs themselves. Granted, there is an assumption on the part of the filmmaker of the audience's

about copyright and safe formulaic movies, and an audience that feels an attachment, fondness and ownership to the movies that rely on the studio system. The filmlovers here aren't rarefied connoisseurs but prosaic, everyday people who watch blockbusters. It is only tepidly subversive—after the studio suits descend onto Passiac and deem the remakes piracy (featuring a scene-stealing Sigourney Weaver who complains sarcastically, "we're the villains, right?" after she orders a steamroller to run over the inventory of cassettes one more time), the defeated filmmakers acquiesce. However, the abiding anthem of the film, that of a charge for a visual culture that is participatory, community-based and assessable, not to mention envisioned as so darn fun, is jauntily electrifying. ●

Be Kind, Rewind
Director: Michel Gondry
Cast: Mos Def, Jack Black, Melinda Diaz, Danny Glover
2008. PG-13. 102 mins.



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Duet of Fantasies** by Promina Shrestha and Ranendra B. Mali, 8 August -7 September, 10AM-6PM, Gallery 32, Dent Inn at Heritage Plaza II, Kamaladi. 4241942
- ❖ **Amalgam-2008** an exhibition of paintings by national and international artists till 8 September at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Sunday - Friday 11AM- 6PM and Saturday 12- 4PM. 4438979.
- ❖ **Teej Festival 2008** till 10 August, United World Trade Center, Tripureswor. 4425898
- ❖ **Health and Fitness Expo 2008** from 21-24 August, United World Trade Center, Tripureswor. 4117104

EVENTS

- ❖ **The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2008** by David Ludden, 3.45 PM, 12 August Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari
- ❖ **Dancing/yoga-latey with Shabira Rao** 1-14 September, Rs 300 per session, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan. 9803673551
- ❖ **Monsoon madness package** at Shangri-la Village Resort, Pokhara, Rs 5999. 4435741

MUSIC

- ❖ **Retro Nite** presented by Party Nepal, 9 August, 9PM, Rs 500, Cube Bar, Kamaladi
- ❖ **28th Yala Maya Classic**, a classical music series, 18 August, 5PM, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, Rs. 100. 5553767
- ❖ **TGIF** at Jazzabelle Café every Wednesday and Friday from 6.30 PM onwards. 2114075
- ❖ **Ladies night** at Jatra Cafe & Bar on Wednesday with live unplugged music by D Shewan
- ❖ **HyJazz Club** every Friday from 8.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4489800
- ❖ **Fusion and Looza Band** every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- ❖ **Rudra night** fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Sufi music** by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.

DINING

- ❖ **Indian Food Promotion** at The Café, Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards until 17 Aug. 4489362
- ❖ **Sixth Annual Wine Festival** until September at Kilroy's, Jyatha. 4250440
- ❖ **New menu** at Dohkaima Cafe, Patan Dhoka. 5522113
- ❖ **Masala**, an Indian restaurant on Jawalakhel, St.Mary's school road. 4421634
- ❖ **Asparagus Promotion** at Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards till August 21. 4489361
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Lavazza coffee** Italy's favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, Roadhouse Café Pulchok and Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Mexican Food Special** at Jalan Jalan restaurant, Kupondole height. 5544872
- ❖ **Steak special** with free Irish coffee at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse.Thamel. 4700043
- ❖ **Lajawab** tandoori and kabab festival, 7-10 PM every Friday at the Hotel Himalaya. Rs 550.
- ❖ **Home made pasta** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Hot summer spicy food** at the Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Kupondole Heights. 5544872
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Steak escape** with Kathmandu's premier steaks for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- ❖ **Bourbon Room Restro-bar** open for lunch and dinner with over 100 cocktail, Lal Darbar.
- ❖ **Cocktails and grooves** with jazz by Inner Groove at Fusion-the bar at Dwarika's, every Wednesday at Dwarika's Hotel.
- ❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- ❖ **Illy espresso coffee** at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails.
- ❖ **International buffet** at the Sunrise Café, and Russian specialties at Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Scrumptious wood fired pizzas**, cocktails and more at Roadhouse, Bhatbateni 4426587, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel. 4260187
- ❖ **Retro Brunch Barbeque** with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeritien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Dhamaka** a Nepali style barbeque with a pan-Indian fusion at the Splash Bar and Grill, Hotel Radisson,7PM every Friday. 4411818
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519



Quest Entertainment



In *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon*, the third sequel to the Mummy franchise, Brendan Fraser returns as explorer Rick O'Connell to fight the resurrected Han Emperor (Jet Li). The Emperor who was doomed by a double-crossing sorceress (Michelle Yeoh) to spend an eternity in suspended animation is awoken after Alex (Luke Ford), Rick and Evelyn's (Maria Bello) son, is tricked. The reckless young archaeologist now must seek the help of his parents and together they must stop the mummy who awakens from a 2,000-year-old curse and threatens to force the world into his merciless, unending service.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal
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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The monsoon this week showed maturity, a more self-confident monsoon that dumped major rain right across central and western Nepal. The system that brought this moisture is an enormous front stretching right across northern India, as we see in this satellite radar image taken on Thursday morning. A distinct characteristic of this year's monsoon so far had been the higher number of isolated rainfall events of shorter duration compared to the light sustained rainfall of previous years. After this monsoon pulse wears itself out as it heads west early next week, the rain will come down in afternoon storms tapering into night rain. In the meantime, expect a wet and cloudy weekend.



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अपराह्न: २:४५, ४:४५
राति: ६:४५ र राती: ८:४५

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प्रसार हुने समय : हरेक शुक्रबार बेथुका (६:१५-६:३५)
हरेक आइतबार विडियो (१:४०-२:००)
"रेडियो सगरमाथा विचित्र सुनी, अंग्रेजी सुधारी"
(रेडियो सगरमाथा र अमेरिकी राजदूतावास, अमेरिकी केन्द्रको सहकार्य)

सम्पर्क: ५५५५५५, ५५५५५५ | पते: बस-५, ५, ५, ५ | ईमेल: info@radioosagarmatha.org

हरेक विहान ६:०० देखि राती ११:०० बजे सम्म सुचना शिक्षा र स्वस्थ सभोरन्जकता लागि सरचर्चा सार्थी रेडियो सगरमाथा १०२ थोप्लो ४ मेगाहर्ज

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com



KIRAN PANDAY

GUARDING THE PEACE: Japanese ambassador to Nepal Tatsuo Mizuno at a rally organised by the Alliance for Peace to commemorate the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima on Wednesday at Swoyambhu.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

FUELLING ANGER: Tired of waiting in queue for eight hours at the Bansbari petrol pump, a motorcyclist heckles an attendant to fill up his tank. Usually motorcyclists are only given 5 litres.



BISHNU S

PHOTO OP: New and outgoing members of the National Forum of Photo Journalists pose for a photo after its election on Saturday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

AUTHOR BEED: Prabhakar Rana speaks at the launch of the book *Beed Bytes* by *Nepali Times* columnist Sujeev Shakya (left) on Wednesday. The book is a collection of the Economic Sense column (see p5) from the past eight years.

LET'S HAVE CHINESE TODAY!
WHEREVER WE GO I NEED WI-FI HA!
NAH. LETS HAVE SOMETHING LIGHT SANDWICHES OR ROLLS.
I PREFER ITALIAN PIZZA WILL BE COOL!
MAYBE SOME JUICY TIBETAN MOMOS?
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Sowing wild oaths

Notice how the hoo-ha about the **Vices President** swearing in Hindi died out as soon as it started? Even when VP Jha ignored the Supreme Court order to come up with a written explanation, there was not a twitter. No prizes for guessing who had a hand in turning the anti-Hindi switch on, and who turned it off again.



You get rid of one set of royals and another set of **neo-royals** take over. Giriraja hadn't finished his chores in New Delhi, so the Nepal Airlines flight had to wait at the tarmac the whole day to bring him back. Remember how Gyanu took the 757 on safari to Botswana? At Tin Kune, the intersection was closed for traffic for 45 minutes for the prime ministerial cavalcade could pass, reminding us of the bandobast for royal comings and goings. Government gray coats, army brass, diplomats and the panchaya kanyas all had to troop to the airport just as they did during the bad old days of monarchy.



If a prime minister who has already resigned can lead our delegation to the SAARCASTIC Summit, then it wasn't such a big deal for Education Minister Pradeep Nepal, who resigned from the government with other UML

ministers in April, to lead the Nepali delegation to the Olympics. The contingent has eight athletes and 30 officials, among them the good minister's wife, **Ms Nepal**. In fact none of the UML ministers has yet given up their official residences or office vehicles.



But someone who couldn't go to the Olympics even though he hasn't resigned was none other than President Yadav. Notwithstanding the Ass' exclusive report last week, it looks like the prez had to call it all off even after he had packed all his bags. The reason was an unexpected visit by the ambassador of a neighbouring country to the south the name of which begins with "I" which shall remain nameless, who apparently told His Excellency: "Naya Nepal mein to naya trend chahiye." Or words to that effect. If Nepal's head of state has to first go to India before he goes to China, then **Yadav Sir** should have just taken the morning Jet flight to Delhi on Tuesday, said a quick hi to President Pratibha Patil, and got back on the afternoon Jet flight to take the night Dragon Air flight to Hong Kong.



Pukada is looking a bit under the weather lately, which is why he

sought spiritual solace from Yogi Kamalnayanacharya of Muktinath whom he addressed as "Swamiji" and touched his feet. Wait a minute, aren't these guys supposed to be godless atheists? Or is Pukada getting pangs of conscience about all the deaths he caused and now wants to make acts of contrition? The encounter seems to have cheered up the Supremo, who emerged wearing a **garland of cloves**, jubilant after being blessed by the Yogi.



But is PKD concerned about feelers he is getting that it may be better to let BRB become prime minister for now. But

strong lobbying from abroad has been met with an equal and opposite reaction from within the party where **Mohan Dada** and his left-hand man are said to be dead against the idea. Baburam got quite worked up at the Baddie central committee meeting the other day and went out of his way to prove that he wasn't a raw spy. Later, he issued a statement to media listing all the anti-Indian things he has done in his life. But doth Lal Dhoj protest too much?



The Ass' mailbox is overflowing this week with New Names for a New Nepal sent in by Ram Chaudhary, Mona, Jujubhai and Grimaji:

- Gorkhapatra changed to **Goru-kha-patra**
- Jhalanath Khanal changed to **Jhohnath Khanal**
- Rajbiraj changed to **Rambiraj**
- Maharajganj changed to **Maharaganj**
- Satdobato changed to **Satdalkobato** (Seven parties are going everywhere, but getting nowhere)
- Mahanagarpalika changed to **Mahanarakpalika** (due to existing hellish state of affairs)

Entries to the New Name Contest should be sent to [ass\(at\)nepalitimes.com](mailto:ass(at)nepalitimes.com)



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