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Q. After Butwal, will UML emerge:

Total votes: 2,842



Stronger: 29.4%
Weaker: 26.5%
The same: 44.1%

Weekly Internet Poll # 441. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. How do you grade the six months of the coalition on development issues?

Monkey business

DEWAN RAI

Following protests by animal rights activists, the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources this week directed the government to ban the export of Nepali monkeys for bio-medical research, but there are still loopholes that could allow the trade.

The Nepal Biodiversity Research Society, which has a breeding centre in Lele, asked for permission in November to export a first lot of 25 offspring of captive monkeys to a lab in San Antonio in Texas.

But animal rights activists filed a public interest litigation suit in the Supreme Court. The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) clarified it hadn't issued any permits for export. The parliamentary committee then summoned the department's Shyam Bajimaya and instructed him to stop any planned shipment of lab monkeys to the US.

But there are still provisions in the law to allow the export of offspring of captive monkeys for research if there is a permit. Bajimaya told *Nepali Times*: "We will have to wait for the court verdict to remove the ambiguities."

Rhesus monkeys are listed as almost endangered in the CITES Appendix II and Nepal is a signatory to the treaty. "The offspring being sent should be scientifically proven to be second generation seed monkeys through DNA analysis," says Ravi Aryal, wildlife expert and member of the parliamentary committee.

Manoj Gautam of Roots and Shoots, which sued the government, suspects the US foundation is importing the monkeys for bio-terrorism research. "There are now alternatives to the use of primates in labs," he says, "there is no need to kill monkeys." The Texas-based Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research has a Biosafety Level 4 lab, where bio-warfare agents such as Lassa fever, Anthrax, Ebola and smallpox are tested.

Primatologist Mukesh Chalise, who runs another breeding centre in Lele, denies there is anything sinister. "The monkeys are for tests which is impossible to conduct on human beings. If you are a humanist you have to help find cures for diseases," he argues.

NBRS got a government license in 2004 and received a \$2.8 million grant from the Maryland-based National Institute of Health to set up a rhesus monkey breeding centre in Nepal to supply lab monkeys for research. The Society then bought 200 seed monkeys from the government for Rs 5 million in 2005 and there are now 100 offspring of which it wanted to export 25.

Says animal rights activist Pramoda Shah: "This is a deeply moral issue. Rhesus are the closest animals to humans, someone has to speak out for them." ●



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JN'S RAISON D'ÊTRE

With its closely-fought election out of the way, the UML now has an even bigger challenge: to prove its reason for being.

Chairman Jhal Nath Khanal leads the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist which, despite its outdated name, is closer to being a moderate social democratic force. JN now has the challenge of preventing the UML from being subsumed by the gravitational pull of the larger Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist.

For this, the UML will have to stick to its unique selling point, the one thing that distinguishes it from the Maoists: its rejection of violence as a political weapon. By putting up the Youth Force and competing with the Maoists in the use of threats and extortion, the UML has been trying to emulate more radical comrades. That policy is a deadend.

JN's party started out in Jhapa in the 1960s by beheading landlords. It spread its influence among the urban bourgeoisie with the tacit support of the autocratic Panchayat regime that found a willing collaborator against the Kangres. It boycotted the 1981 referendum, allowing the Panchayat to win.

In 1990, Ganesh Man Singh used his moral force to create a coalition of disparate communist groups as a unified challenge to the Panchayat. The People's Movement I created what is now the UML, and got its 'People's Multi-party Democracy' ideological bearing from the short-lived stewardship of Madan Bhandari and Jibraj Ashrit. Together they transformed a rotting revolutionary group into a formidable electoral machine.

Both these leaders died in a tragic highway accident in 1993, and the baton was passed on to Madhab Nepal who ran the party without taking any risks of ideological innovation or organisational reform. His distaste for change drove UML cadre into the arms of the Maoists.

Chairman JN now has to prove he will not play second fiddle to the more powerful chairman of a much more radical communist party. He would have to draw the support of an increasingly rightwing NC and keep the faith of Madhes-based parties for a national coalition. He must not lose sight of the goal: writing an acceptable constitution by April next year.

JN may yet prove himself to be the leader the UML has always needed, but his test has barely begun. It must start with an unambiguous enunciation of the one thing that distinguishes his party from the Maoists: the belief in the politics of non-violence.†



MUKESH POKHREL

Rules of war

Ratifying treaties is necessary, but to respect their obligations is indispensable

As we are all sadly aware, armed conflicts create victims: women, children, the elderly, forcibly displaced, wounded, sick and detained. All of them have, and deserve, protection and assistance under the various instruments of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).



GUEST COLUMN
 Jacques Moreillon

But the fate of these victims is directly linked to the willingness, determination and capacity of states to stand by their obligations to 'respect and ensure respect' for IHL in all circumstances, and of all parties to any conflict to abide by their humanitarian obligations.

To have and ratify treaties is necessary, but to respect their obligations is indispensable.

The fundamental humanitarian treaties, the Geneva Conventions, are universally ratified and there has been constant development taking place since 1949. This movement has dramatically accelerated over recent years. More than ever, humanitarian concerns are high on the multilateral agenda, and the way conflicts are conducted has become the subject of the nightly news.

At the same time we continue to witness, throughout the world, violations of IHL. It is the essence of a state's obligation so

that civilians are not attacked, prohibited weapons not used, nor any weapon used indiscriminately, and to ensure that national laws deal with the prevention of such acts, and failing this, their punishment.

IHL, while limited to armed conflict, nevertheless covers much legal ground within that limitation. It includes not only protection for the wounded and sick in armed conflict, but also addresses matters such as the protection of—and assistance to—prisoners of war, civilian internees, child soldiers. It also deals with the environment, cultural property, weapons restrictions and prohibitions, and war crimes.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would encourage states in the region to review those treaties to which they are not yet a party and, hopefully, to consider accession to them. Most IHL treaties require legislative steps to be taken to ensure that these international obligations are reflected in domestic law. This is most important for dualist states, including those with a common law tradition, which normally require legislation prior to the direct applicability of the treaties.

South Asia is a part of the world whose general importance as well as IHL-relevance is growing. This region of Asia currently contributes over one-third of the world's military and police deployed in peacekeeping operations under United Nations auspices. Thus, it is essential that South Asian

countries also be leaders in the implementation of IHL, in order to ensure that it is respected whenever applicable.

South Asia itself continues to be affected by armed conflicts. Thankfully, Nepal has seen an end to its non-international armed conflict, and is developing the institutions and legal framework necessary to build a democratic state based on the rule of law, both national and international law.

It is most fitting that Nepal should be hosting this week the First South Asian Conference on IHL in view of the democratic transition currently under way following 10 years of armed conflict. Indeed, Nepal has had the sad privilege of knowing what an armed conflict is and it is appropriate that it should now take a key role in the dissemination of the laws of armed conflict.

South Asia has proud humanitarian traditions. Rules on protecting civilians and combatants date back thousands of years. While IHL treaty accession and implementation rates are somewhat low in this region when compared to other parts of the world, the ICRC hopes that this will increase as a result of events such as the IHL conference in Kathmandu. ●

Dr Jacques Moreillon is the vice-president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). This piece was adapted from his keynote address to the First South Asian IHL Conference in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

LETTERS

DIASPORA

CK Lal calls extreme the viewpoints of the Nepali diaspora without any basis or evidence (Rise of the diaspora, #439). Lal shows more resentment than logic or light in his piece. He thinks that diaspora has no right to speak about Nepal from a safe distance. His comparison of diaspora with Khalistanis in Vancouver, Tamils in Toronto and Hindus in the US is quite unfortunate at best and downright slanderous at worst. Lal's depiction of Nepalis abroad can only be described as resentful and tainted with bias.

Ajay Pradhan, email

Alternatively, one might as well put forth a point that if the ultra-left aggression finds sympathisers and facilitators in NGOs, INGOs and other major foreign socio-religious and political organisations serving their own interest in Nepal, perhaps diaspora voice and support political, monetary and intellectual is a much needed counterbalance to the prevailing forces and their lop-sided agenda. Additionally, I suggest CK Lal perform little more due

diligence while making outlandish claims such as finding parallels between fragmented political agenda of hyperactive amateur bloggers and regional separatist movements of Khalsa and Tamil Eelam.

Pradip S, New York

CK Lal is right in saying that the diaspora is usually much more radical and chauvinistic than folks back home. We have seen this with most ethno-separatist and national liberation movements around the world. The danger now is not that the UML supporters abroad are dragging the party to the right or that democrats abroad were furious at Girija Koirala for appeasing the Maoists. The danger is of ethno-chauvinism fed and funded by diaspora Nepalis. Here in Europe, identity politics has already fragmented Nepalis according to their ethnic subgroups.



K KC, Belgium

CITIZEN DAHAL

Fascism is an ideology with a long history of violence and it converges with communism in its use of tyranny and terror. Currently there are sectors of the ruling left who are clearly intolerant of democracy. This throttles, through violence, any

dissenting voice. It is easy to consider them as left-wing fascists. To be kind, we could consider them intolerant and politically ignorant. They're completely unable to comprehend two important aspects of freedom: the right to dissent and the right to not to be suspected for exercising dissidence. These goons, like the chair of the unified Maoist student wing are the ones who may come out on the streets shouting, raising flags of solidarity with the people. But they are also the same people to poke us back with these flags in an attempt to silence us because we think differently. The most disappointing thing in all this is that the state's security

organs let them roam around freely even when they incite violence so explicitly.

Nirmal Ghimire, email

MUFTI

While I admire your courage for taking a potshot at the Nepal Army (in mufti, #439), I wish to remind you that there are those who would prefer the army over the sleazy politicians leading the country. Why is the COAS being chastised for being proactive in a country where there is an absence of a dignified person to lead them into grace.

Prasanna KC, Gyaneshwar

LETTERS

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

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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Another letter from home

One year after agreement, lessons still haven't been learnt in the Madhes

JANAKPUR—A committed reader last week complained he'd had enough of Mithila in this column. But here is the familiar dateline again. What makes us go back again and again to the same place?

In the amorphous field of cultural studies, there is an even more rarefied stream called the anthropology of emotions. The penchant for



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

neologism among cultural anthropologists is notorious—they borrow or

invent definitional terms with almost every research paper they write. To illuminate the importance of place, American scholar of history of geography John Kirtland Wright (1891-1969) coined the term 'geopiety' with which he attempted to explain attachments people have either for their homeland or for destinations of reverence such as Jerusalem, Lhasa, Lumbini, Mecca, Rome or Banaras.

Extending Wright's concept of spatial veneration, the Chinese-American geographer of human emotions Yi-Fu Tuan propounded that it is in fact 'topophilia' that lies behind one's affection for one's native land. In other words: it is just an intense yearning for home.

The romantic notion of home is a place where the heart is at peace with itself and the world. Such a territory exists only in the imagination. In real life, the concept of home is a strange mix of nostalgia and desires.

Mithila embodies both. It still celebrates the involved detachment of King Videha, reveres the practical philosophy of Sage Yagyavalkya and sings songs of 14th century poet extraordinaire Vidyapati. Meanwhile, forward-looking Maithils have spread around the world to earn a living or simply to satisfy wanderlust. But no matter where they live, a Mithila-born is a Maithil forever.

The Madhes is a political construct, once a pejorative identity that exerted respectability through organised agitation and a spontaneous movement culminating in a mass uprising that forced the state to accept the idea of federalism. But Mithila is a lived experience that exists in

language, literature, arts, painting, customs and cultural practices. Hence, it's also a significant force in national politics.

It's not just Madhes-based parties like Sadhhabana, MJF or TMDP that have to rely upon Mithila to recruit Madhesi cadres and groom their possible leaders. Barring exceptions like Hridayesh Tripathi or Sarbendra Nath Shukla, almost the entire line-up of ethnic Madhesis even in 'national' parties is exclusively Maithil. That may be the reason federalism inspires intense emotions and heated debates herein Janakpur.

OMOP, they call it now: One Madhes One Pradesh. Leaders of the MJF, Sadhhabana and TMDP admit in private that this concept lost its relevance with the acceptance of federalism and inclusion as guiding principles for the new constitution. MJF and a splinter group of Sadhhabana are coalition partners of the ruling alliance. TMDP has just upped the ante by calling for an agitation to mark the anniversary of the agreement between the government and the United Democratic Madhesi Front on 28 February 2008. But more than totalitarian-minded Maoists, it is the mainstream parties who seem to be having second thoughts about federalism.

The UML has reinforced its exclusivist nature by roundly defeating Ram Chandra Jha and Raghubir Mahaseth for secretaryship of the party in Butwal this week. The NC is also wavering, and Girija Prasad Koirala repeatedly warns on the dangers of federalism, knowing fully well that the demands for self-determination are now irreversible.

When constituent assembly members come here to collect suggestions for a new constitution, they will probably get conflicting opinions about OMOP and demand for a Videhabhumi encompassing Morang-Sunsari in the east, Rautahat in the west, Bhitrimadhes in the north and everything in between.

Such a territory seems to satisfy Koirala's strictures against ethnic federalism and his support for economically viable provinces. The former NC-stronghold is waiting for the stand that the party of Ram Baran Yadav takes to address their aspirations for self-rule. ●

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The centre can't hold

All the parties are competing to appease the militants

JANAKPUR-Briakesh Chandra Lal ran when he heard the cry for help right next to his house last week. He could see a man lying flat on his back and struggling to breathe.

Lal suddenly recognised he was Narendra Khati. They had worked together in the NC. Khati was the brother of a popular student leader Yubaraj Khati. Narendra had moved on from politics, turned to alcoholism and worked at the Janakpur Cigarette Factory. Lal, a former town mayor, is now a senior TMDP leader.

Khati had been shot in his lower abdomen and was bleeding profusely when the police arrived. He died on the way to the hospital. Jwala Singh's Dhanusha-in-charge, Surya Dev Singh, took responsibility. No reason was given.

The uneasy calm in Janakpur after the murder of Uma Singh on 11 January has been deceptive. Armed groups are still active, fear is deep and as a journalist put it: "The state just has no strength left."

We have known that sections of the administration are complicit with the Tarai's criminal gangs and share the loot, but it seems to go a lot deeper than that.

Government officials actively encourage loot and extortion. A cop may actually tell a particular group which trader is a possible target and fix a share. An official at the land office may inform an armed militant about recent transactions and who would have liquid cash. A mid-level banker may pass on the details of which family has received money from a relative in the Gulf.

The conventional explanation is that the Madhesi parties are silently backing the armed gangs to bolster their strength. But the tentacles of crime span across political parties. A bus was recently looted in the middle of the day in Mahottari. The transporters threatened to go on a strike, the administration reacted swiftly and within a few hours arrested the culprits from Hotel Rama, showing they can control crime if they want to. But the very next day, an NC leader got them released.

Or look at the talks drama. The key aim of the Maoists is to get as many armed groups in the party as possible. Instead of politically isolating the armed groups, all parties are engaged in a competitive appeasement of the militants.

The most visible manifestation of that will be seen in the student union elections to be held next month. Umesh Chaudhary, the present Maoist president of the RR campus union, predicts this may be one of the most violent elections in the history of the campus. All candidates boast of the support given by one group or the other.

Dipendra Jha is the present vice president of the campus union. He has been arrested in the past by the police for multiple crimes: stealing assets from government offices, trying to encash a fake cheque. Each time, he has got off because of political pressure.

After the talks, armed groups have been allowed to emerge in public. At a public meeting held by the Rajan Mukti group in Sarlahi, Jha was on the dais. So, it turns out that this office-bearer in one of Tarai's biggest colleges was the student front coordinator of a dreaded militant group.

This also gives a glimpse into the way the government talks with armed groups has worked. The state signed a staple five-point agreement with the bizarrely named Liberation of Tarai Tigers Eelam, which reportedly has only a dozen or so members. Five of them were in the lock-up and were released in the run-up to negotiations. And the same lot later formed the team to speak with Peace Minister Janardan Sharma as equals. Today, they can operate in public.

In this maze, no one here can quite figure out what the government is trying to do. Why are they legitimising goons even though the real militants are still out of the process? Why is it allowing this semi-anarchy to persist? Is the aim to foster a sense of disillusionment, discredit the Madhes movement, and then unleash a security operation? Is it to allow these groups to come out and make life difficult for the Madhesi parties, who are being squeezed from all sides?

Whatever the case, politicians are playing with fire and making life hell for the people of the eastern Tarai. ●



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

"If there is another movement, we will be back on the streets"

Kishori Mandal rides a rickshaw and is a UML member. Jadhu Paswan is the area committee chief of the Dalit Janajati Party. Ram Kapar was in NC but voted for TMDP this time.

Sitting around at a tea-stall in Pipra on the Janakpur-Jaleshwar road, the three banter about politics. "The netas went to Kathmandu after the elections and have not come back," one of them laughs dismissively, "it's always the same."

It has been exactly one year since Prime Minister Koirala said

is another movement, we will again be on the streets," said one.

That just about summarises the political mood on the Madhes street on the anniversary of the eight-point accord. The TMDP has called for a one-day shutdown on 28 February and is set to announce another round of protests next week. Asked about their specific complaints, TMDP's Bijay Singh says: "The province will be decided in the CA but the government and the major parties can at least initiate a dialogue. There has not been

petition drive to the district administration as a warm-up. The MJF has been trumpeting the inclusion ordinance as a result of their pressure. But the Forum's local leaders say being in power has put them in an uncomfortable spot. Breakaway Maoist Matrika Yadav is still in his planning stage, in touch with underground militants.

The Madhesi protests are timed to coincide with the federalism debate. At a two-day event organised by the Mithila Natya Kala Parishad in Janakpur, speakers backed the formation of a

Mithila state instead of a single Madhes province.

The new Maoist Madhesi face, Ram Rijhan Yadav told us: "We have decided to make the three sub-provinces: Mithila, Bhojpur and Awadh, into separate states. It is more scientific and will fulfill aspirations of different communities." The demand has drawn flak from Madhesi party leaders who say smaller provinces will allow Kathmandu to play one against the other.

The Madhes movement is still defined by a constant

radicalisation against Kathmandu. But this is now tempered by a sense of confusion where Madhesi, including party leaders, do not know where politics is headed.

Analyst Bhaskar Gautam sums it up: "The Madhes is lost. It is trapped between the MJF which is in government but increasingly unpopular on the ground, TMDP which is protesting but is internally weak and a state that can't protect its citizens." ●
Prashant Jha in Mahottari



in Hindi on the Baluwatar lawns: "Believe me. I will implement the eight-point agreement." Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhab Kumar Nepal nodded. Mahanta Thakur reciprocated, and spoke in Nepali. The agreement promised an autonomous Madhes province, inclusion and collective entry into the army.

Paswan, Mandal and Kapar sipped tea, and shook their heads when asked about whether the promises had been kept. "No, we still don't have rights and if there

inclusion proportionate to the population. And there is little change in the army's character."

The TMDP's idea is not to trigger off mass unrest but to keep up the pressure on the government, use the period to mobilise and build up an organisation and occupy the moral high ground by exposing the fecklessness of the other Madhesi parties in the coalition.

The strategy has pushed the other parties on the defensive. Sadhabana is planning a

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Milky way

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includes free transport, bungee jump and one night's accommodation. Buyers can also opt for a cash discount instead.

Three more

Bank of Kathmandu has opened three new branches in Tripureshwor,



Gyaneshwor and Baneshwor bringing its total to 26. The branches offer all standard banking services.

Banking sweeps

Aarti Rana and Ranjan Thapa of Global Bank won the Banker's Cup Golf tournament held at Gokarna Golf Club. Twenty-five players from various banks participated in the tournament.

Barricades to growth

The highway to Nepal's progress is blocked

On Shivaratri day, as the Beed was driving back to Kathmandu from Bandipur, the car was stopped more than 50 times by children collecting money for the Shivaratri bonfire (see picture). Smiling parents looked on as their children got better and better at intimidating and forcing people to pay.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

We have always relied on others paying for our fun, whether it's seeking money from state agencies to celebrate festivals or passing vehicles to pay for evening barbeques. When those children grow up they may use similar extortion tactics in the world of business, and it may be tolerated in the name of 'culture'.

In the same way as we allow stoppages to add hours to journey times, perhaps waiting years to achieve economic growth just because we are not willing to change simple fundamentals has become a way of life.

Bandipur provides glimpses of great opportunities for economic growth. A village that is close to the main road yet a world away from the disorganised mushrooming of houses in other small Nepali towns. With magnificent views it can be developed as a tourist destination for overseas visitors and a getaway for city



dwellers from Kathmandu, Pokhara and Narayanghat.

But such projects have to be run in proper businesslike fashion and not driven by donors. We have seen in Nepal that donor-driven projects never metamorphose into large-scale businesses because funding is given for the pilot phase only.

Donor supported projects rarely attract commercial investors because they are dependent for their continued survival on subsidies, which when withdrawn can kill the project with one swipe.

If projects like Bandipur are to expand commercially, they have to do so by increasing the accommodation at the same time as preserving the character,

heritage and beauty of the village and architecture. It could mean recreating villages with rows of houses with period architecture but modern amenities. The kind of tourists who are attracted to the village for its stunning, pristine views, will also be lured by a high standard of accommodation, food and service.

Nepal's economic growth will only happen if we capitalise on these opportunities for large scale projects and that in turn will lead to the creation of jobs and a new generation of entrepreneurs. Donors should not be the ones to stand in the way of big business ideas. There are enough people already who are there putting that bamboo pole across the street. ●

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A strategic hydropower plan



New York-based lawyer, Jenik Radon, teaches international business and investment at Columbia University. He is a regular visitor to Nepal and was in Kathmandu recently to consult with the constitution-drafting committees. He spoke to *Nepali Times* about managing Nepal's natural resources.

purchasers. In short, Nepal has to see itself as being in business, and has to treat the subject as such.†This means that it needs to create a national water resource development company that functions as any private company does, subject to regulations.

So the main reason Nepal has not succeeded in commercialising the usage of its water resources is that there is no strategic business plan and no national business office to implement it. Nepal needs to think and act commercially with respect to water resources and not view water resource development simply as a political issue.

One mental block in Nepal is the fear of being cheated in a future deal. How can we tackle this?

There should†be no mental block.†Commercial negotiation is a skill.†For example, Georgia, a country smaller than Nepal, engaged my services to negotiate a multi-billion dollar oil and gas pipeline transaction. The way to remove this block is to realise that professional assistance is globally available.†With such support, you build a team, and since water is a national asset, the team keeps its work transparent. Nepal needs to realise that it does not have to engage in such complex transactions alone, but can acquire the necessary professional assistance globally†

What are some of the issues that a nation must be careful about when negotiating international deals on the usage of natural resources?

Agreements for the development of natural resources are very complex.†This is evidenced by the fact that there will be many agreements and that they will be long.

One issue is price.†Is the price that is agreed upon now increased or adjusted over time? It should be flexible to provide for negotiated and predetermined price adjustments.†Nepal will need to develop a risk mentality†it captures increases in the downstream prices but may have to accept decreases if the market collapses.†So the first major issue is to realise that water resource is part of a supply chain and the value of the water resources needs to be considered accordingly. As water resources contracts and development are long-term, it can never be forgotten that a contract must be flexible to adjust to the invariable changes that will occur over the lifetime of a contract. People who live in the area of natural resource development must be treated fairly and must also be compensated. Further, if the developer of natural resources does not abide by its commitments there must be an effective legal way to enforce obligations.†

The penalty provisions of a contract must be strong.†For example if a company violates environmental regulations, certainly repeatedly, it should lose its license. Accordingly, the issues range from price to enforcement.†They are many and they must all be negotiated.

What lessons from Estonia and Georgia are relevant for Nepal today?

There are many lessons. Commercial undertakings must be pursued professionally with a team that combines many different skills, including†international lawyers and local expertise.†In addition, they must be based on strategic policy and plans.†Third, there must be a realisation that if international companies wish to enter into agreements, that is because you have an asset.†This means you need to be fully aware of the assets you have and their value.†And such knowledge should give the confidence to go forward.†In sum, you need a strategy, which is a vision and outlook based on facts, policy, tactical implementation and openness so that you have the support of your nation.†Estonia and Georgia did that.†Nepal has a valuable resource and it must mobilise local and international skills to commercialise it.

Nepali Times: Despite being blessed with water resources, Nepal has not been able to exploit this to raise living standards. As someone who's worked in Nepal and taught international investments and business, why do you think that is the case?

Jenik Radon: Water resources are not a fungible global asset. It is not like oil that can be sold throughout the world.†It is like gas which is more of a local product to be sold domestically in a nation and to neighboring nations through an integrated pipeline system.†For example, Quebec sells electricity to the state of New York.†But that sale was the result of a well thought-out water resource development program in Quebec.†

Nepal needs to develop an overall strategic plan for national water resource development. Then it needs a business team that will market and sell it to prospective

A long wait

Dhanbir Dahal in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 23 February

समाचारपत्र

The victims of Rukum, which was one of the centres of the conflict during the decade long People's War, are yet to receive the relief they were promised.

Although the actual number of those killed or disappeared in clashes between the state and the Maoists is unknown, Nepal Red Cross has provided food support for 634. The local peace committee says that since the government's announcement of the relief payouts, people have queued every day to fill out application forms. The vice district officer, Shiv Prasad Lamsal, says: 'We have been collecting the forms. But so many died or disappeared during the conflict, it is hard to identify who is genuine.'

On 20 May 2001, six farmers of Rugha-6 were shot dead by the police while they were working in their fields. Ram Prasad Dahal, who watched his father being shot, says, 'They shot him without even a word. Six people died right in front of my eyes. For a few days, Maoist leaders came to give condolence. But later no one cared about us. I've heard that we'll get relief, but nothing has happened yet.'

In July 1998 Sushila B Kalai of Garayala-3

witnessed her parents' murder in her own house by the police. Her four sisters and brother, who were also there, have been brought up with the support of their relatives. 'We've been told that the government will at least grant money for our education. But we don't know when it will come,' says Sushila.

Dhan Singh Khadka of Simla was abducted and killed by the Maoists in 2004. Rangsi VDC Secretary Dal Ram Khadka was killed by the Maoists for the same reason on 17 November 1998. Narbir Bikai of Khalanga-8 was arrested by the army on 24 February 2002 and has not returned yet. None of the families have been compensated. The Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction is supposed to coordinate relief, but even the VDC is unsure of when it will come.



Failure to pay

Editorial in *Abhiyan*, 23 February-1 March

अभियान

The Finance Ministry has issued a blacklist of 300 bank defaulters and has pledged to take action against them. When previous administrations tried to do this, the process was halted because of political pressure. In all past efforts, only those who defaulted on their debts were targeted. This government is making the same mistake. There has been no move to question those who dole out loans recklessly or because they are in cahoots with willful defaulters.

When a bank loan is arranged, the bank's management is also responsible for verifying the customer's ability to repay. It is the bank's responsibility to weigh out possible risks and calculate the assurance of the security of the loan being paid back. The list of defaulters also includes foreigners. Coincidentally, these foreign defaulters took loans from banks that have a representation of the national bank of their country of origin. It's unlikely that a government that is so easily coerced into letting off Nepali defaulters will pursue foreigners.

Opiate of masses

Kantipur, 24 February

कान्तिपुर

Farmers in Bara and Parsa, who were left unemployed after the

Briganj Sugar Mills closed down, have started farming opium. There have been no restrictions on farming ganja in the past years so poppy fields are blossoming. Due to lack of proper regulation by the government, 20 VDCs are farming opium on almost 340 hectares of land. Locals claim that opium and ganja farming is being sustained by the help of the police. Most cultivators seem to prefer areas close to the border.

In both districts, locals say that the police only destroy ganja plantations for show. Last year, the police destroyed just 124 hectares of ganja out of 1,354 hectares. SP Subodh Ghimire says he has no resources to pursue drug cultivators.

Ten promises

Naya Patrika, 24 February

नयाँ पत्रिका

Recently appointed IGP Ramesh Thakuri has made ten promises:

1. Accountability in the police service will improve.
2. Responsibility will be matched to experience and ability.
3. Corruption in the police force will end.
4. Activities of all personnel will be recorded.
5. There will be no political interference in police promotions.
6. Let the politicians deal with politics, we will deal with criminals.
7. I don't believe that empty streets mean the security system



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

- is good.
8. The investigation bureau will break the criminal networks.
 9. A system of rewards and punishment will be implemented.
 10. The metropolitan police will live up to its name with the work it does.



को, को मोबाइल चोर ? यो मेरो मोबाइल हो ... एकछिन चाने गर्ने पो तपाईंको घरत छिन्या त, छाड्नास् मेरो कठालो

It didn't come here to steal your mobile, I came here to charge mine.

Kishor Joshi, *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 24 February

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Although they make up 10 per cent of the population, Nepal's Muslims are under-represented at the decision-making level. *Himal Khabarpatrika* organised an interaction with Muslim intellectuals this week. Excerpts:

Mohammad Habuhullah (MJF)

We have witnessed different models of democracy in Nepal: run by one person during the Panchayat, run by a few people after 1990 and now run by many people. We are now an inclusive democracy, which we believe will correct the educational, social, political and economic inequalities of society. The Muslim community wants identity and representation in the new constitution.

Rahamatulla Miya (Nepal Muslim Journalists Association)

We want an identity. We had hoped the new government would not discriminate like the previous governments did. Reservation and Muslim Personal Law should be ensured in the constitution. We are treated as refugees. The state should recognise our contribution in the unification of this country to Jana Andolan II.

Muhmuddin Ali (Legal Research and Advice Centre)

Inclusion became a slogan because the marginalised indigenous communities, women and minorities were never recognised. We have the opportunity to include them in the new constitution, show them that they belong. Equality, development and fundamental rights should not just be confined to words but put into practice. Muslims do not make a majority anywhere in the country but their population is dominant in the Tarai. We are against giving federal units ethnic or

Muslims want identity, representation...

religious names. We are wary of secession in the name of federalism, especially in the southern and northern parts of Nepal.

Maulana Gulam Rashul Falahi (Al-hera Educational Society Nepal)

Leaders have found a new slogan of inclusion and equality but there has not been any change in their mentality. That Nepal is a common garden of all castes, creeds, communities and classes is just rhetoric. If Muslims raise issues of discrimination and injustice, leaders call it being communal and fundamentalist and get away with it. We still doubt the new constitution will guarantee our rights.

Hamid Ansari (Nepal's ambassador to Saudi Arabia)

Five major areas—political, economic, social, cultural and religious aspects—should be the basis for state restructuring. It is a technical issue as to how many provinces can be made so that all communities and classes get equal opportunities and deliver justice. It is crucial whether the provinces are vertical or horizontal. Muslims are categorised under 'Madhesi' or 'other' communities in the interim constitution, so what can we expect under a federal structure? The new constitution should have a provision of affirmative action for Muslims.

Tahir Ali Ansari (Supreme Court)

There is no mention of 'Muslim' in the



MIN RATNA BAJRACHAYA

constitution, so we have no identity. The state should adopt a reservation policy towards Muslims. Muslims want proportional representation in every state mechanism, not only in the central administrative system but also at district and village levels.

Mohammadi Siddiqi (CA member, NC)

It is only Muslims that are identified as a religious minority, and we must try to prevent discrimination. Muslim girls need reservation in education. The Madarsa Board and Muslim Commission should have Muslim women members.

Rahamatulla Miya

The new constitution should mention

us not as a religious minority but as the Muslim community. Nowhere is Muslim mentioned in the new ordinance on inclusion.

Najarul Hasan Falahi (Amir Islamic Association, Nepal)

Muslims should be included in all state mechanism proportionately. There is a high school for five houses of Pahadi people but just one primary school for an entire Muslim settlement. If Muslims don't like co-education then the government should make faith schools and colleges for them. The certificate of madrasa education is not recognised. Urdu should be included as an optional subject in school and college.

...gender rights and education

KONG YEN LIN
in NEPALGANJ

When Hasron Idrishi was unable to afford the dowry her in-laws demanded after her marriage last year, her husband doused her with kerosene and set her on fire.

Hasron was rushed to Bir Hospital in Kathmandu overnight for treatment and survived, but the burns disfigured her, and she is still emotionally scarred. Not one to suffer in silence, she took the case to court and won. Her husband was sentenced to six months imprisonment, but Hasron says the sentence was too light.

Domestic violence has been endemic in the western Tarai. Rising female literacy, instead of decreasing these crimes, seem to be making it worse. As more and more young brides become more educated, they challenge the dominance of the husband—leading to increased violence. Muslim and gender activists are now calling for constitutional safeguards against domestic and gender violence.

"Not only should there be stricter enforcement of laws punishing perpetrators of spousal abuse, there should also be family law courts to cater to



KONG YEN LIN

SCARRED: Hasron Idrishi's mother holds a picture of her daughter when she was admitted to hospital after her husband set her on fire. In the background are Hasron's son and daughter, age 15 months and three years old respectively.

customary rights of Muslims, especially in the case of divorce," says Mohammad Shahid Reza, a counselor at the Nepalganj-based Fatima Foundation. The group recently held orientation lectures in 75 venues in 23 Banke VDCs to educate the women on their constitutional rights.

"Awareness of their situation is the first step towards reform and equal participation," says Fatima Foundation's Maimoona Siddiqui, "if their rights were to be codified in the new constitution, it would greatly empower them and help them progress."

Educators are also hoping for syllabus changes where madrasa and mainstream education are combined. "In that case Muslim students can learn about modern knowledge and languages like English and Nepali while staying connected to their cultural roots," say Abdul Daffar Khan, a teacher

at Ideal Public High School.

Nepal's Muslims, who make up one-tenth of the population and half of who live below the poverty line, see the new constitution as a landmark opportunity to improve their socio-political marginalisation. Only 17 of the 600 CA members are Muslim. Representation is equally dire in the army and police.

"Muslims are actually more vulnerable than Dalits in terms of problems like low life expectancy and poor access to education and employment opportunities," says Muslim CA member Mohammad Ishtiyak Rai, "the first thing on the agenda is to make sure that Muslims are represented at the decision-making level."

Says Mustaq Durai, of Rural Society Upliftment of Nepal: "If the government lends its support through the districts, we could better tackle Muslim problems at the grassroots." ●



Before and after

The effect of climate change in the Himalaya appear most dramatic when pictures taken a few decades apart are juxtaposed.

The photograph above was taken by Austrian cartographer Erwin Schneider in early 1950s from Nang Kartshung Monastery. The peaks at centre are Taboche (6367m) and Jobo Lapsan (6440m) with Pheriche in the valley below. Tsholo Tso is a moraine dammed lake at the foot of Jobo Lapsan. The moraine, seen as a white, glacial-like feature, is blocking the lake.

By 2007 (below) the clean, debris-free glaciers and ice nestled below the Taboche summit have been reduced considerably by recent warming trends. The ice in the small glaciers below the ridgelines to the north has suffered the most, perhaps because of its lower altitude, below 6000 metres. A comparison of satellite images of Khumbu Himal taken in the 1970s, and in recent years shows that hundreds of these small glaciers have disappeared. ●

See also: 'The melting Himalaya' *Nepali Times* #427
'Himalayan meltdown' *Nepali Times* #371

(Pictures courtesy: Erwin Schneider/Association for Comparative Alpine Research, Munich and Alton Byers/The Mountain Institute)





ALL PICS: KISHOR RIMAL

The gods are angry

Rolwaling villagers say climate change is a result of divine wrath

KISHOR RIMAL
in DOLAKHA

There is 24-hour load shedding here in the Rolwaling Valley, the farmers don't know who Nepal's prime minister is, there are no chukka jams because there are no roads.

But what they do see in the towering mountains around them are signs of climate change. They don't know why, but the snowline is receding every year, the glaciers are melting and this winter has been the driest anyone can remember.

Gauri Shankhar VDC is named after the 7,181m mountain known locally as Chomo Tseringma. The distinctive twin peaks are visible from Kathmandu, but from up close the lower spurs block the view of its majestic summit. This year, there is no snow on the slopes and Gauri Shankhar is just a massive rocky outcrop.

Locals are superstitious, and say climate change is a result of the gods being angry. They have no idea that it is all a result of fossil-fuel burning by the rest of the world.

The Rolwaling Valley was first linked to global climate change when the Tso Rolpa lake here threatened to burst in the mid-1990s because of accelerated glacial melt. An expensive effort to siphon the water and lower the pressure on the moraine dam was undertaken. Villages downstream were prepared for evacuation and early-warning sirens were installed.

The project was able to reduce the water level by 3m of the targeted 20m, but the cost of lowering the water level further is too prohibitive. "The risk of Tso Rolpa bursting has been temporarily reduced, but there is still a danger," says Om Ratna Bajracharya hydrologist at the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology in Kathmandu which has listed 200 glacial lakes in Nepal that could burst.

Tso Rolpa is frozen solid this winter. Global warming seems very far away up here at nearly 5,000m amid the frigid Himalayan winter. But climate variability is something everyone here has noticed. Villagers say that the winter snow has been decreasing through the past



FIRE AND ICE: Global warming melted the ice that made Tso Rolpa so big (top, left), but last week it was frozen solid. Gauri Shankhar towers over the Rolwaling Valley (top) its slopes bereft of snow because of this year's dry winter. The sluice gate of a dam that was built to let out the lake's water to reduce the danger of a catastrophic burst (above).

decade and the mountains all around are rocky and snowless. Farmers down the valley are afraid there will be snow in spring.

"Like in previous years, we may get six feet of snow in spring and that will destroy our potatoes," says Ang Wasang Sherpa of Beding.

This year the mean temperature has been higher than

normal across the country. In central Nepal's valleys the minimum temperature in the 2008-9 winter was four degrees above normal. The irony of it all is that farmers here like Ang Wasang don't burn any fossil fuels, and are the least responsible for the climate change that is affecting their lives. ●

See also: 'Meltdown', #100



Asylum in Hong Kong

Nepalis will pay to go to Hong Kong even to be declared refugees

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA in HONG KONG

The number of Nepalis seeking political asylum in Hong Kong is on the rise, even as the government has stopped issuing and renewing student and work visas.

For those who do manage to make it here the outlook is often gloomy. Ram Bahadur Neupane of Tehrathum and Hari Limbu of Taplejung paid job agents Rs 350,000 each for a passage to Hong Kong via Singapore and Shenzhen, but neither have jobs. Both have applied for political asylum. Raju Shrestha of Thankot came to Hong Kong while the war was going on six years ago, and has told the authorities the Maoists will kill him for being an informant if he goes back.

In 2005 alone, about 1,500 Nepalis applied for asylum with the UNHCR in Hong Kong, saying their lives were under threat at home. Although the war has ended, some 100 Nepalis have applied for refugee status in the first six months of 2008 citing fear of persecution in the Madhes.

Legal consultant Dashuram Parajuli, blames the lack of diplomatic pressure from Nepal as well as administrative discrimination by the Hong Kong government for treating Nepalis shabbily.



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

The numbers of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians living illegally is far greater than Nepalis but they are granted work and student visas, he told *Nepali Times*, why are Nepalis singled out?

When Hong Kong passed a law granting citizenship to those born here before 1983, there was a steep rise in the number of Nepalis emigrating here. But more recently many Nepalis who are duped by job recruiters get stranded and then apply for asylum in order to stay on.

The president of the Nepal Chamber of Commerce here, Tej Rai, explains: if the government tightens the law back home and books rogue recruiters, the problem of fake refugees would be resolved and the Hong Kong ban on visas would be lifted.

Hong Kong does not acknowledge Nepalis as refugees but UNHCR gives applicants a temporary recognition as a refugee, and grants them a one-month stay during which time they investigate whether or not they are genuine refugees. During that period, they are given a stipend of Rs 10,000 for rent and Rs 3,500 for food per month.

After the UNHCR verifies a Nepali as a genuine refugee, they are repatriated to third countries and are not allowed to stay on in Hong Kong. Many who were considered genuine refugees have been resettled in Norway.

Hong Kong's pull towards Nepalis is strong. There is a sizeable Nepali community here already and most want their relatives to join them. Those who are working here in construction, or as security guards or domestics earn considerably more (Rs 50,000-Rs 200,000 a month) than in Malaysia or the Gulf, and that is an added attraction.

Maya Rai of Kathmandu is the president of the Domestic Helpers' Union and says domestics can have their work visas renewed if their employers allow them to stay on, but many others have to return or stay on illegally if their visas expire. The number of Nepali domestics in Hong Kong has dropped by half to 1,000 since the ban on work visas five years ago. ●



Organic growth

German publisher goes green in Nepal

When Hans Hofer first came to Nepal over land from Germany in 1969, he went up to Nagarkot to see the sunrise and had what he calls a "this is it" moment.

He sold his Volkswagen bus to a member of Nepal's royal family and decided then and there he wanted to work and retire in Asia. He hitchhiked to Singapore, and in 1970 produced his first guidebook on Bali.

Within 15 years, Hofer's Insight Guides had become a global publishing empire with 400 titles spanning 125 destinations. The Nepal edition of Insight Guides came out in 1985 and became an instant bestseller at a time when tourism to Nepal was booming. It was translated into Spanish, German, Italian and French and is now in its 25th edition. A guidebook just for Kathmandu Valley was produced in 1989. Then in 1999 Hofer sold the entire business to the German company, Langenscheidt.

"The creative part of the work was tapering off, and I saw printing on paper as a sunset industry," explains Hofer, "besides, since the very beginning I had always looked

beyond publishing to this concept of combining organic farming with eco-tourism."

Hofer returned to Nepal to look for the magic spell that the Nagarkot sunrise has cast over him. After much searching, he found Phulbari of Kabhre and there in 1996 he and his wife, Cynthia, set out to build their dream organic farm and resort. It coincided with the start of the conflict, and it wasn't easy when staff were harassed by both the Maoists and the army.

But Hofer and Cynthia persevered and the couple now spends a few weeks every three months here supervising their Organic Himalaya farm that produces chemical-free vegetables, fruits, jam and teas for sale in selected outlets in Kathmandu and even air-freights them to Singapore.

"I see it as a way to give back to Nepal and the community," says Hofer who hopes his farm will be a catalyst for surrounding villages to raise income and serve as a marketing outlet. With their contacts in Singapore, Hans and Cynthia already fly out one shipment every two weeks of Kabhre vegetables to Singapore where

they are sold to health-conscious foodies.

"We could do much more if freight charges were cheaper and there were daily direct flights from Kathmandu to Hong Kong, Singapore or Dubai," says Cynthia, a former Singaporean journalist. Salad greens and cauliflowers picked in Phulbari at five in the morning are rushed to the airport to catch the Silk Air flight and are in kitchens in Singapore the next morning.

"The feedback has been amazing, our customers know they are eating chemical-free vegetables, but they have been really impressed with the taste," says Cynthia, "it's something about the soil, climate and care in Nepal that brings out the taste."

The farm also rents out its residential space for two families at a time for weekends and long-term creative retreats preferred by writers, painters and poets. Apa Phulbari Villa is only an hour's drive east of Dhulikhel on the Sindhuli Highway and from its 1,800m elevation over the Panchkhal Valley, offers a sweeping view of the northern horizon from Ganesh Himal to Numbur. ●

www.apavilla.com



REFLECTED GLORY: The central Himalaya reflected on the rainwater harvesting pond that feeds the vegetable patches of Organic Himalaya in Kabhre.



KONG YEN LIN

PAAVAN MATHEMA

Going natural

Nepal's Himalaya is a rich storehouse of herbs, many of them rare and with medicinal properties. The irony of it is that Nepal exports much of these herbs in raw form only to be bought back again as ready-made medicines or cosmetic products.

But lately, a herb-based industry for personal care products is slowly gaining momentum. In addition to production of herbal massage oils, perfumes and hair oils, an increasing number of small or medium-scale industries are now involved in manufacturing herbal soaps.

"The people here have an age-old knowledge of how these herbs can be used as remedies," says Carroll Dunham of Wild Earth that produces a diverse range of herbal products and services, "it is this knowledge that we tap into to create herbal solutions."

Non-herbal soaps are powder-based while herbal soaps are oil based, making them a better option for skin care. With Nepal's middle class becoming more health-conscious domestic demand is also growing.

"Our domestic customers used to be mainly foreign, but now local clients are increasing their interest as well," says Sambhu Kumar Lama of Farmhouse Herbal Industry which produces the appropriately named My Favourite Soap.

Yak Milk soap, whose key ingredient is yak milk, is one of the most popular herbal soaps. "But transporting the milk from the mountains to here safely is a difficult task," says Sanjiv Pandey of Bounty Himalaya, "the problem is not just with milk but other medicinal and aromatic plants as well."

The industry does not have a stable source of quality herbs. In addition, the prices fluctuate without warning. "What we need is to create a sustainable source of our raw materials," says Dunham, who is developing permanent links with herb cultivators.

The herbal soaps face tough competition in the market from commercial brands. "It is next to

impossible to compete with them because of the high cost of our ingredients," adds Darshana Shrestha of Nature Nepal. The competition is not just from non-herbal soaps but also 'fake' herbal soaps that use low-quality materials.

Herbal companies thus opt for niche marketing, using goodwill and personal links. But the main focus is not on retail selling of

the soaps but on sales by order, which mostly come from abroad.

Last year, Nepal exported an estimated \$ 500,000 worth of herbal soaps to the US, Europe, Japan, Korea, India, Taiwan and elsewhere. This figure could be much higher if the government had a recognised certification system that is demanded by some importing countries. ● www.wildearthnepal.com

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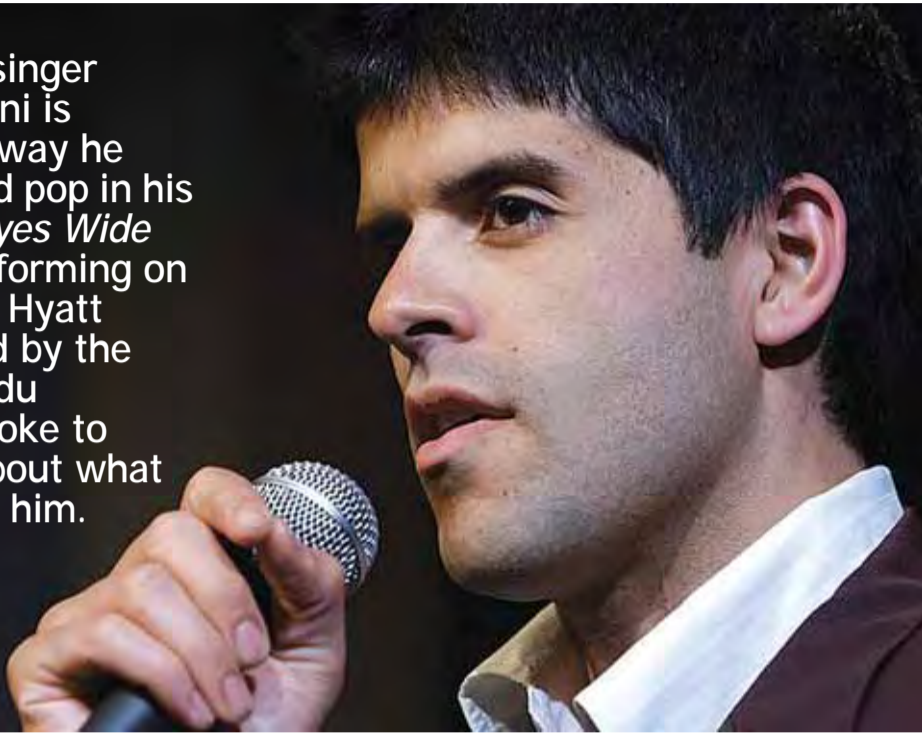
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“A visceral, core joy”

New York jazz singer Sachal Vasandani is praised for the way he bridged jazz and pop in his debut album, *Eyes Wide Open*. He is performing on Saturday at the Hyatt Regency backed by the band, Kathmandu Empress. He spoke to *Nepali Times* about what music means to him.



Nepali Times: What inspires you when making music?

Sachal Vasandani: All of life, whatever inspiration strikes—my love for great music, my struggles, history, contemporary events, friends and family, love, fear. When I write songs I am trying to share little stories, personal stories, sometimes funny, sometimes opaque...the emotional material varies, but hopefully there are songs that I write or am inspired to perform that connect the whole spectrum of emotions.

And how does the writing process work for you?

The ideas can come at anytime, anywhere, and I try to have the flexibility to be able to jot down musical or lyrical ideas when they come. The editing process is more predictable, but that's where I think the initial idea gets a real body.

What leads you to want to perform or record covers of certain songs instead of others?

I like great melodies, and you can find those in all types of music. Once I reconcile myself to the lyrics, I might adapt a song to my natural style of singing. Beyond that, I just sing and whatever comes out, comes out.

After you finished college you found yourself choosing between a job on Wall Street and working full-time as a musician.

Wall Street offered a great job, but creating music is a true joy and obsession. There are a lot of little things in life that crop up and get in the way, but when I sing, they all peel away and I'm left with some kind of visceral, core joy.

Did you listen to Hindustani classical and other forms of South Asian music growing up?

I did listen to a fair amount of Hindustani classical music growing up and continue to find it an awe-inspiring tradition. Getting to know a little bit about that music, I became aware of the extraordinary discipline needed to really master the craft. That awareness has probably been its greatest influence on me and my work.

What have you had to work hardest at as a musician?

I tend to enter into musical situations with a certain level of talent, and I find it's easy to tread water at that level. When I wish to push to the next level, whether in regard to songwriting, vocal technique, rhythm, memory, etc. I always find challenges. So to the extent that I keep pushing myself, I will always find this line as hard work. But the next level is so rewarding, and the journey to it even more so.

What brings you to Kathmandu again?

I did some shows and a master class with Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory and everyone was fantastic. I remember how cool everyone was in Kathmandu and that the whole energy of the place was laid-back and supportive, which is exactly my kind of vibe.

Sachal is performing live on 28 February, 6.30 PM onwards at the Hyatt Regency.

Voting lines now open 24 hours



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Himals in Holland

The Sixth Himalayan Film Festival at the Free University (VU) of Amsterdam on 14-15 February screened 50 films about the Himalaya to 2,200 visitors. The films went on non-stop from 9.30 AM to nearly midnight through the weekend with discussions and even a Himalayan arts and crafts fair.

Glenn Krishna Mitrasing, medical doctor by day and festival organiser by night, says audience numbers continue to rise every year with better advertising and publicity. "The festival has now become an established yearly cultural event known across the Netherlands," he says.

Nepal and Nepali films were particularly well represented this year. From feature presentations such as *Kagbeni* (Dahal) to contemporary politics addressed by *Sari Soldiers* (Bridgham), *Returned* (Koenig) and *Living Goddess* (Whitaker); documentaries and social commentaries such as *Malaamee* (Thapa), *Chhau* (Khadka), *Children of God* (Yi Seung-jun) and *Yuddha Chitra* (BK and Tseten); through to travelogues, mountains and music such as *Return to Nepal* (Lang), *Daughters of Everest* (Sakya and Limbu) and *Musicians Call* (Bajracharya), the range of genres and locations were impressively diverse.

Neasa Ni Chianain's *Fairytale of Kathmandu* is a nuanced and penetrating film about honesty and the abuse of power, raising uncomfortable questions which provoked much discussion. The five-episode series for BBC Four entitled *A Year in Tibet* was

another festival highlight, since writer and producer Peter Firstbrook was present to introduce his films and answer questions. Lectures by Pema Wangchuk Dorjee, editor of Sikkim's leading English-language daily *Now!*, and John Sanday, conservation architect, on their recent research and ongoing work were also well attended and lively.

It's no small achievement that in the few years since 2003, when Mitrasing launched the first Himalayan film festival, the event has done so well. Hundreds of Dutch film goers pay €10 a session to watch films about the Himalaya, and the festival has already been to Tokyo and may travel to other European countries in the future. Taking the festival on tour would be an excellent next move, as it would ensure further exposure for the film makers and their creations. The large communities of Himalayan heritage residents in the UK and Germany make these countries in particular natural settings

for future screenings.

The appetite for Nepal-related events seems to be insatiable in the Netherlands: Nepal Samaj Nederland (NSN), an association established by Nepalis in Holland, organised a one day Nepali film show and public discussion about immigration in Amsterdam a few days after the festival on 21 February. ●

Mark Turin in Amsterdam

www.himalayafilmfestival.nl/eng/
www.nepalsamaj.nl/



Waltzing on a wire

The Academy Awards always has a certain self-congratulatory ring, members and audiences applauding their own supposed good taste: on one hand generally rejecting films that are actually the industry's biggest grossers, while on the other, avoiding the critics' favourite and obscure picks. Much more is said about the appearance of big budget stars than highlighting talent.

Timezones and loadshedding conspired to keep this critic away from catching the event on television, but in the Youtube world we inhabit today, even the speeches are only some minutes wait with a decent internet connection.



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo DiSilva

Yet the real value of the event, apart from memorable speeches, the heartfelt appreciation and the glamour, is the second lease of life for the otherwise unnoticed and under-appreciated films that get nominated, usually in the foreign film and documentary category.

Waltz with Bashir, is an unconventional documentary from Israel by Ari Folman, nominated for Best Foreign Film. The narrative is a kind of investigative journey of autobiographical dimensions, a kind of inquiry into the self that intercepts with a particular historical event. Folman, not much older than a kid at the time, served in the Israeli Army during the Lebanon War of 1982. When a friend approached Folman recounting his recurring nightmare from the time he spent in Lebanon, the filmmaker is confronted with his own glaring gaps in his memory.

The traumatic centre of the mystery is the Sabra massacre—a gruesome, organized retaliation against Palestinian refugees by Christian Phalangists, allies of the Israelis, who were enraged at the assassination of their leader Bashir Gemayel. Folman only recalls fragments of the event, even though he places himself only streets away from the camps. He embarks on a quest to uncover his own past and complicity by interviewing his scattered comrades-in-arms. Its live-action footage is painstakingly rendered into animation, save for the gruesome archival footage at the end, a fitting burst of realism in a film about memory and repression.

Adjoining the interviews, which are often with wry and blunt characters, are graphic re-enactments of war-life. Like Richard Linklater's *Waking Life*, which it automatically draws comparison with, *Waltz* shares a dream-life quality, a certain nagging vagueness. But with its darker subject, it more frequently dips into the bizarre. The format is almost judicious circumspection, building the contexts and explanation about the soldiers' lives and the kind of war they were fighting, that at one point you wonder if Folman will ever reveal the actual event. But at its end and without any excuses, he unpacks the ugly truth and the enigmatic tableaux of his own memory.

Man on Wire, this year's Best Doc winner by James Marsh, retells the stunt pulled off by the French tight-rope walker Philippe Petit and his team between New York City's still-incomplete Twin Towers in 1974. Petit, some decades later, still preserves his boyish looks and all of his charms. His retelling is full of theatrical flair and dramatic demonstrations. Fashioned like an old-fashioned heist story with archival footage and interviews with the many confederates who were charmed and cajoled into abetting Petit, Marsh assembles an entertaining and delightful narrative, culminating with the main event itself, an awe-inspiring and time-stopping work of performance art.††† The events of September 11th, deliberately unmentioned, haunts the retelling of fake IDs, illegal trucks sneaked past barriers and foreign nationals are generally the kinds of details that generate anxiety.

But it's hard not to read this documentary with its irrepressible optimism and sense of adventure as an attempt to rehabilitate the feeling and emotions around those iconic buildings. There is something undoubtedly insane about the venture. It is not quite a pure act of art with its dimensions of ego, but it is inarguably a courageous and inspiring human act that deserves the documentary treatment it receives. ●

Waltz with Bashir
Director: Ari Folman
Documentary 2008. 90 mins.

†
Man on Wire
Director: James Marsh
Documentary 2008. 94 mins.



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Love in the Air**, art by Ragini Upadhayay-Grela at 5.30 PM till 8 March, Siddhartha Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Faces of Europe**, portraits and landscapes by Fritz Risken, till 1 March 11AM-6PM, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Second Documentary Open School Workshop**, till 28 February at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 9851108338
- ❖ **Short films** with a message and discussion at Mind and Body Library, 10AM, 1 March, Tripureswor. 9841896000
- ❖ **Reprise**, a movie, on 28 February, Lazimpat Gallery CafÉ
- ❖ **Art of loving**, a two day course 1-4.30 PM, 28 February and 1 March, Mind and Body Library, Tripureswor. 9841896000
- ❖ **A workshop by Sachal Vasandani**, 28 February, 11AM onwards, Rs 100 entry, limited seats, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory.
- ❖ **Call for entries** for Film South Asia, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. For deadlines, visit filmsouthasia.org. 5552141
- ❖ **Monthly Lecture** by Lisa Choegyol and Gautam SJB Rana, Cultural Studies Group Nepal, 10AM, 27 February, Shankar Hotel, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Bhote Kosi rafting**, Nepal River Conservation Trust, rafting date from 1 March, Rs 1,500 registration fee. 4361995
- ❖ **Francophonie week**, 16-20 March, film festival, special meals, writing, lottery and pÉtanque tournament, Alliance FranÁaise, Tripureswor. 4242832

MUSIC

- ❖ **Mahashivaratri World Music Festival** on 28 February, Rs 100 for ticket, Pradarsani Marg, Naya Bajar, Pokhara
- ❖ **Sukarma band live**, 27 February, tickets available at Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 5.30 PM onwards, Rastriya Nach Ghar, Jamal
- ❖ **Sachal Vasandani**, live, 6.30 PM onwards, 28 February, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 5013554
- ❖ **Sunday Jazz brunch** barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz evening** at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM. 4260326
- ❖ **Strings Band** live every Tuesday at Gis Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.
- ❖ **Wednesday Melody** at Jazzabell CafÉ, Happy hour 6-8PM and TGIF party with live band Epic every Friday at 8PM. 2114075
- ❖ **Some like it hot** every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarikaís Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra CafÉ & Bar.
- ❖ **Live Sensation**, performance by Yankey every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234.
- ❖ **Fusion and Looza** Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- ❖ **Fusion and Classical Music** by Anil Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, sufi & raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5521408



DINING

- ❖ **Gourmet trout** at Olive Garden, 6PM onwards at Rs 850+, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat. 4411818
- ❖ **Chez Caroline** for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited. 4263070
- ❖ **Fresh Himalayan rainbow trout** at Rox Restaurant all February 7PM onwards, Hyatt Regency. 4489362
- ❖ **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The CafÉ, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Strawberry Etagere** at The Lounge from 4.30 PM- 6.30 PM. Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Nhuchhe goes Thai** at Nhuchheís Thai Kitchen, Baluwatar. 4429903
- ❖ **Fusion** of Marcela Raganís new menu and Mannieís new bar at Dhokaima CafÉ. 5522113
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Pasta pesto passion** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Home made pasta** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser CafÉ, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarikaís Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **High tea** with scones and sandwiches everyday at the Lounge from 4.30-6.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Organic salad bar and steak** at Jalan Jalan restaurant every Friday from 6PM, Rs 650

Quest Entertainment



Roshan (Abhishek Bachchan) accompanies his ailing grandmother to Delhi, from the United States. Little does he know that this quick trip will become an important journey, leading him to self-discovery. Along the way he falls in love with Bittu (Sonam Kapoor), who is searching for her own identity and who wants to break free from the traditional Indian social structure. The story unfolds in the backdrop of the walled city of Delhi with the chaos, beliefs and warmth of the people and the sights and sounds of the ancient city. Locals call their city Delhi-6 referring to the pin-code of Delhi.

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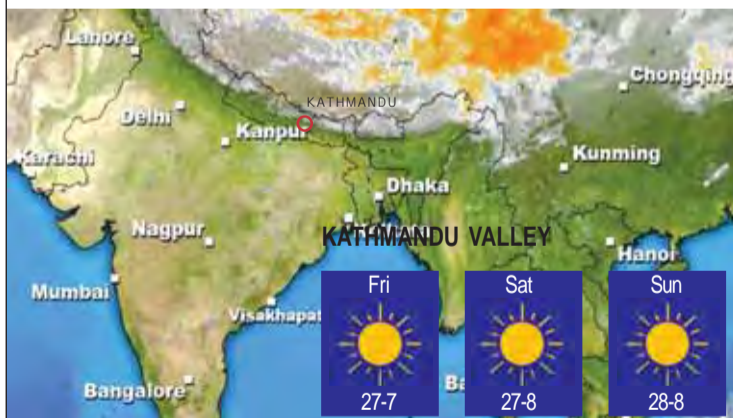
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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Central and eastern parts of Nepal have been affected the most by this year's drought which is entering sixth month from next week. There will be no reduction in power cuts because there is no snow to melt to raise river levels, and Kulekhani has only one week of water left. Temperature has soared to 27 degrees, which is normal for April. This drought stretches all the way from Jordan, through Iran and Pakistan and India to Nepal and beyond to southern China. So it's not just us. This satellite picture of Thursday afternoon indicates no westerly disturbance in the offing. Nights are still cold (7-8 degrees) but afternoons are hot and breezy. Watch out for brush fires driven by up-valley wind in the midhills.



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'MANDU MANDALA by PRERANA PAKHRIN

common sights during shivaratri...





MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

PALACE MUSUEM: Security guards with metal detectors at the gates of Naryanhiti before the former palace was inaugurated as a museum on Thursday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

YOUNG AND COMMUNIST: YCL activists at a function in Tundikhel on Tuesday to mark its unity with the youth wing of the Unity Centre, with which the Maoists merged this month.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

POP THE BALLOON: Defence Attaches and their spouses at the traditional pop-the-balloon contest during the Army Day celebration at Tundikhel on Shivaratri.



KIRAN PANDAY

BURNING ENERGY: Street lights at the airport's parking lot were blazing away on Tuesday afternoon despite a nationwide power crisis.



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Where is Lenin?

Had we not got so used to seeing it being worn by officials, our daura suruwal national dress would look pretty ridiculous. It is a cross between thermal underwear and skirt, and to cover up this embarrassing combination it has a silly western-style jacket and a topi. Our national dress is only slightly less bizarre than the national dress of the Kingdom of Tonga which consists of a reed skirt with a bow tie on a shirtless chest (for men) and a reed skirt with neck scarf on bare chest (for women). Just like a new national anthem, it's about time we had a new national dress.

The prime minister has taken the lead in modeling a revolutionary national dress which consists of a dark suit, white shirt and red tie with a bhadgaunle topi. It does make him look like one of those **rotational monarchs** from Malaysia, but the dress is catching on so fast that there is now a severe shortage of topis. Even in the ex-royal army functions this week where the dress code was "Uniform, Lounge Suit or National" Baddie ministers turned up in suits and black topis. At the Shivaratri extravaganza the other day, though, it was the Hindi-speaking, dhoti-wearing Veep who appeared in labeda and jodhpurs.



Maobuddy ministers are all looking like the clones of Tremendous. Especially **Comrade Photocopy** who has become his boss' understudy at do's around Mandu since he got promoted to be the deputy leader of the UCPN-M parliamentary party. This has left Comrade Rambabu mighty peeved, especially since the United Revolutionary People's Council that he headed was also disbanded. They gave Laldhoj the chairmanship of the new Governance Coordination Committee but this was an obvious humiliation, and fed rumours that PKD is trying to sideline BRB again like he has done thrice in the past.



Meanwhile, the renegade Revolutionary Left Wing and Matrika's Mutineers at their war council in Rautahat have decided to set up the Red Guard to safeguard the revolution from Awesome, whom they labelled "modern revisionist and a toady of running dog capitalists and Indian hegemonists." Just to recap, these are the guys who split from the original Maoist party before it united with the Unity Centre and changed its name to Unified Communist Party of Nepal. Efforts are underway to bring disgruntled senior Maoists like Biplop and Kirati also to defect. Kirati just might because he got a dressing down from **Terrifico** the other day for getting the govt into hot water with just about every decision he has made as the Cultural Revolution Minister.



This country would have been much more stable if **Awful** had kept his promise to Girja and made him president. But Chief Secretary Bhoj Raj seems to think it's still not too late to turn back the clock. He told PKD he could convince GPK to take the bait and all the prime minister's headaches would go away. With a nod from his boss, Mr Bhoj goes over to Maharajganj and tells GPK that Awesome wants to make him president. But instead of perking up at the prospect, the Old Fox yells "Nonsense!"



The UML has found it politically difficult to remove the portraits of all communist netas at once, so it started doing it in installments in Butwal. But holier-than-thou comrades noticed Vladimir Illyich was missing from the stage and created a big hoo-hah. It didn't look like Vladimir Putin's press secretary was bothered, though, because he was on a **heli-hunt** in Dhorpatan bagging a couple of blue sheep.



The talk of the Army Day bash at HQ the other day was of sniffer labradors from the **Bomb Squad** with names like Laldhoj, Giriya, Jhallu and Prachanda. Apparently there is now an order right from the Chief to change the names of all dogs named after Maoist comrades. But no such instructions about renaming dogs with names of the leaders of other parties. Comrade Fido will be glad.



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