

# NEPALI Times

#498

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## An other year

Over a thousand years ago, the sage Gorakhnath took umbrage at the good people of the Kathmandu Valley when his request for alms was ignored. He gathered all the serpents of the Valley, keepers of rain, and sat on them. The ensuing drought caused much suffering, and King Narendra Dev was compelled to call upon Gorakhnath's guru, Machhindranath. When Machhindranath appeared, Gorakhnath rose to greet him, releasing the serpents, and ending the drought. Ever since, the god has been honoured in Patan every year.

As this year's Rato Machhindranath chariot is built plank by plank on the road to Jawalakhel, well might we wonder what is holding the heavens up. Who is stifling the peace process, and what will it take for the stakeholders to come to their senses and get to their feet? Last year, the chariot keeled over in Mangal Bajar, forcing devotees to painstakingly rebuild. For those dwindling voices still calling for the constitutional deadline to be met, this is a cautionary tale if there ever was one: do it properly, or be prepared to start all over again.

**THE RED ONE:** Patan's Machhindranath gets his annual makeover

KIRAN PANDAY

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

## PATIENCE AND HOPE IN 2067

Recent protests on the streets of Bishkek and Bangkok are warnings to us here in Nepal about the dangers of democratic decay, the threats of reversal and backsliding.

The rise of the red shirts in Thailand culminated in hand-to-hand combat on Saturday that left 22 dead. In Kyrgyzstan last week at least 100 people were gunned down in an uprising that sidelined a hated regime. In other resource-rich former Soviet Central Asian 'stans', totalitarian Soviet communism has been replaced not by democracy, but by rapacious oligarchs. Across the world, democracy is numerically in retreat: there have been more setbacks to freedom than progress.

Some would argue that it is the Thais who should learn from us, not the other way around. The street protests that marked the beginning of our transition from a monarchy to a republic were relatively non-violent. Things are behind schedule, we have a messy

political deadlock, but at least we are moving in the right direction.

Freedom is an absolute (one can't be partly free) and an inalienable right. But ever since the Philippines in 1986, we have seen that the restoration of democracy through people power is not the end of a process, it is the beginning. If we become complacent, the euphoria of democracy is soon replaced with disillusionment and despair as the new rulers begin to emulate the tyrants they replaced. Democracy doesn't come with a warranty card, it has to be protected through vigilance and accountability.

Elections are the process by which we choose the most honest, efficient managers to run a country for a given period. But, as we saw in Kyrgyzstan, elections cannot be the sole criteria for legitimacy. The Thai debacle, too, raises a question as old as Athenian democracy itself: how to protect the nation and people from those they have elected? History is replete with examples of leaders who, once elected to office, proceeded to dismantle the very institutions they used to get to power in order to indefinitely extend their mandates.

Fortunately for us in Nepal, there seems to be an emerging consensus at the top level of the triumvirate that

lords over us that there is no alternative to a national government during the constitution-drafting process. They are now putting the necessary legal provisions into place to postpone the statute deadline till 28 November, and hopefully within a month we will have a new all-inclusive government.

Inaugurating an international conference on democracy in Jakarta this week, Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who spent six years in solitary confinement, said there were two kinds of political leaders in Asia today: ones that grow old in their jobs and others that grow old in jails. He paid tribute to the world's most noted elected prisoner of conscience, Aung San Suu Kyi.

In his keynote address, Anwar said he realised two things while in detention: "Democracy needs patience, and democracy needs hope. Despair is the enemy of democracy."

Here's to hoping we don't run out of patience in 2067.

# Learning from Jajarkot



GUEST COLUMN  
Om Prasad Gautam

"I am alone now, my wife died last night and my daughter died this morning. How I am going to survive? Why doesn't this killer attack me?"

These words were uttered by a villager from Jajarkot, during the deadly outbreak of diarrhoea in August of last year. By that time, over 300 people had died in 20 districts in the mid and far-western regions of Nepal. This year, as summer sets in and we begin to receive reports of diarrhoea cases again, we should consider: how can we prevent another public health disaster?

Diarrhoea is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among children under five in Nepal, with 10,500 dying every year. Most of these deaths could be avoided through simple

measures like safe drinking water, sanitary latrines and proper hygienic practices, including hand-washing. But due to the lack of public awareness and low government priority, the hygiene and sanitation situation of the mid and far western development regions is in a critical state.

Jajarkot is one of the poorest and remotest districts of Nepal. Access to drinking water is

communities more vulnerable. It was no surprise that Jajarkot became the epicentre of last year's epidemic of diarrhoea and cholera, exacerbated by the monsoon that followed a prolonged drought.

Sanitation and hygiene promotion are the most cost-effective public health interventions. The simple act of hand-washing with soap can

measures.

Though outbreak response activities succeeded in controlling the diarrhoeal epidemic to some degree last year, many more deaths could have been averted if preventive activities had been intensified immediately after the outbreak. Key areas for future interventions include:

- an early warning system with proper mapping and a contingency plan to focus immediate attention on outbreaks
- availability of medical staff in duty stations with back-up resources
- coordination among government and non-government actors
- improving information management and communication channels, including through the use of security forces
- focus on logistics to transport oral rehydration

solutions and other drugs in time and in adequate quantities

- social mobilisation using local volunteers, health workers, political leaders and their cadres, and teachers for water purification and promotion of hygienic sanitation practices, including setting up health camps
- providing better access to health care services: most deaths last year happened at home or on the way to health institutions.

The epidemiology of diarrhoea indicates that there will be outbreaks this summer and monsoon too. If we are to prevent the loss of human life this year and in the future, it is imperative that we learn from our recent past.

Om Prasad Gautam is a public health professional with WaterAid Nepal  
omprasadgautam(at)wateraidnepal.org.np

## Last year's diarrhea epidemic doesn't have to be a recurring nightmare

estimated to be 49.4 per cent, though the quality of water available needs to be further investigated. Access to sanitation is less than 22 per cent, compared to the national average of 46 per cent. Open defecation is a common phenomenon and the lack of safe drinking water and hygienic practices make

reduce the risk of diarrhoeal disease by up to 45 per cent. Though the importance of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is recognised by the health sector in Nepal, the curative aspects of health promotion or technology-driven water and sanitation interventions often overshadow basic awareness and preventative

### ON THE WEB

www.nepalintimes.com

#### A FIT LEADER?

The parties messed up our country ('Prachanda's choice', #497). Do we really want a multiparty democracy where the leaders are loyal to their parties and not to the country?

Gautam Buddha

- Prachanda does not have the political or intellectual competence. He is good at manipulating truths and deceiving indoctrinated semi-educated party cadres and clueless international pundits. I am not that optimistic about Baburam Bhattarai either but he may be the best short-term bet. His desires for a better Nepal at least seem more genuine. But there are no leaders in Congress or UML who can step up to the task.

Concerned Citizen

#### WONDERSTRUCK

All I can say is wow: Nepal never ceases to amaze me ('Annapurna air safari', #497). Let's save it for ourselves and posterity.

kabulekancho

#### WE'RE THE PROBLEM

Having lived very close to Washington, DC for a long time I have seen so many ambassadors come and go ('Diplomatic disaster', #497). I agree that Nepal has to send representatives who have some credibility and who are competent – not just people who are politically connected. A sound foreign policy is indeed a reflection of the healthy internal democratic milieu of any country. We have to swallow the doctor's bitter pill that the "challenge is within us, and not beyond our borders". Chetna Kunwar

#### USED OR EMPOWERED?

Sadly, these young women are being used, and they do not seem to realise they are doing disservice to their communities by encouraging young girls to adopt superficial values and *nakkal* ('The Mangols are coming!', #497).

R Rai

#### A MATTER OF TRUST

Very perceptive analysis by Prashant Jha ('India's war', #497). But I think he is underestimating the impact of Indian foreign policy on Nepal's Maoists. The tragedy for us Nepalis (and conundrum for India) is that the alternatives to the Maoists are totally useless. I expect them to finally settle for a Maoist leader they can trust. But will the Maoist hardliners trust India's candidate?

Pradip Kumar

### The blogs

nepalintimes.com/blogs

Nepali Kukur chows his way across Patan

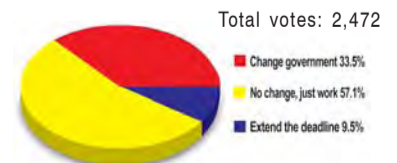


Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 498

Q. How can we best meet the constitutional deadline?



Weekly Internet Poll # 499. To vote go to: www.nepalintimes.com

Q. Will 2067 see a breakthrough in Nepali politics?

# MRP masala



**PLAIN SPEAKING**  
**Prashant Jha**

The government took the MRP decision without following rules. It defended it tooth and nail when faced with questions. Then internal pressure from UML, a parliamentary directive, a court order, and fear of Maoist protests forced it to retract.

In the process, it ended up backing out of a state-to-state deal with our most important neighbour, coming across as an utterly unreliable international partner. It was also further discredited within Nepal, and faced accusations ranging from corruption and impropriety to 'selling the country's security'.

In any other country, after such a fiasco, the government would have resigned. But that would be too much to expect from a bunch of losers with little accountability, and no moral fibre.

But the real story here is about Indian diplomacy. It is an open secret that Lainchaur helped put this government together. The embassy strengthened the Nepal-Oli combine in UML, split the MJF when Upendra Yadav began flirting with the Maoists, encouraged the NC, and pressurised TMDP to join the government instead of backing it from outside.

Since then, even as the domestic base for this government has got steadily weaker, India's backing for it has become stronger.

There is internal dissent in NC and UML. TMDP knows the longer it stays in government, the more credibility it loses in the Tarai. And even the smaller parties have become dissatisfied. But no one is quite willing to pull the rug from under the government's feet, for they fear it would antagonise Delhi. And



## India shouldn't feign surprise over the politicisation of the passport deal

who would want to be in India's bad books?

India decided its interests were at stake. It had the influence to determine who would control the state apparatus, and exercised it to shape the process and outcome. This is perfectly justified in statecraft.

But despite such leverage, with a government of its choosing in Nepal, why is it that India cannot even retain a government contract that it feels is important for its security?

Regimes that do not have a strong domestic popular base are perpetually insecure. They are defensive, indecisive, and constantly on the look-out to ensure that no decision they take is construed as 'anti-national'. This is especially true when that regime has, or is seen to have, strong external backing.

Apply this to the present government and you will understand why it cannot serve any of India's tangible political, economic or security interests.

Madhav Nepal knows that he has become PM with Indian backing. He also knows if he takes a step which is remotely 'pro-

Indian', he will be seen to be paying back debts. So he tells the Indians 'political compulsions' deter him from delivering. India has not been too demanding either, since it does not want the government to be discredited. Pawns have limited value, and Madhav Nepal is serving that limited purpose – to keep the Maoists out. Little else is

expected from him.

But if Indian diplomacy's core objective is to fulfill Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's priority of ensuring that domestic economic growth is not constrained by a resource crunch, and the external climate is favourable, then this approach is futile.

By backing governments like

these and keeping the biggest political party of the country out of state power, India will not get anything in Nepal. Hydropower projects will be blocked and new contracts will not be signed, depriving India of an additional source of energy. The state will become weaker and the situation will turn more anarchic, causing greater security threats to India. The democratic system will be discredited and the peace process derailed, making India's stated goal of having a stable, prosperous and democratic Nepal even less likely.



The embassy's statement regretting the MRP issue got 'politicised' is a meaningless statement. Anything to do with India will assume political dimensions in a polarised atmosphere where India is perceived not as an external but an internal actor.

The real lesson from the MRP saga is for India: if you prop up governments with no popular base, they will not be able to serve your core interests.

As the end-game approaches here, it is time for Delhi to rethink its support for this government, and its broader Nepal policy.

*New Arrival*

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# The failure of the commentariat



FOURTH ESTATE  
C K Lal

The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu has confirmed the authenticity of the letter Ambassador Rakesh Sood wrote to Deputy Prime Minister Sujata Koirala regarding the Machine Readable Passport (MRP) deal. A perfunctory press release

leader Narayan Kaji Shrestha read out the offending portions of the letter in parliament. The story appeared in the press after the contract had been cancelled. In addition to the limitations of the media, this episode exposes the marginality of commentators and columnists in Nepal.

Verifiability is the sine qua non of news reports, the maxim being 'when in doubt, leave it out'. Despite the antiquity of speculative reporting and

repute with access to 'usually reliable sources', the Maoist Veep would have been spared the embarrassment of owning up to privileged access to confidential documents in parliament. The contents of the letter would have appeared under a byline in a newspaper and parliamentarians could have reacted accordingly. But it seems sources in Nepal have more trust in politicians than in journalists when it comes to leaks.

Columnists in Nepal have few contacts and even less influence mainly because most of us are interlopers. Quite often, editors and reporters write columns on subjects of their interest.

Specialists contribute technical pieces for a general audience. Freelancers from corporations or NGOs who write for visibility and voice. Academics, too, pontificate through the media. Predictably, politicians are most eager to be columnists as it confers the legitimacy of knowledge upon them. Owners of media houses love this cosy arrangement as it saves them from the hassle of dealing with eccentric columnists they can't afford to support.

Most newspapers add or remove columns as they go along. Such a lack of continuity is one of the reasons columnists fail to develop contacts in the corridors of power and those in authority do not feel the need to cultivate commentators. It's much more rewarding to keep reporters, editors and publishers in good humour. But clearly, whoever leaked the confidential MRP letter to the Maoists didn't have enough faith in the media fraternity as a whole to trust it with the explosive nature of the document.

There is no reason for television and radio channels to shy away from having in-house commentators that keep an eye on the big picture by distancing themselves from the daily grind of reporting. Publishers need to invest in a corps of columnists to have an edge in the marketplace of news interpretation. When almost everybody is reporting the same thing, it's the point of view of commentators that separates the wheat from the chaff. 🇳🇵



## Independent commentators are a rare and underutilised species in Nepali journalism

from the embassy regretted that a confidential communication had been publicised, but didn't claim that the letter had been misinterpreted.

The leaked letter reads as if the ambassador is issuing a fiat to his underlings. It connects a commercial contract with the national security concerns of India and bilateral relations, and then makes an offer that the government of Nepal could hardly refuse. No wonder Madhav Nepal trembled in the parliamentary committee hearing when the opaque deal was discussed.

Strangely, the hyperactive Nepali media got hint of the controversy only when Maoist

investigative journalism in politics, editors and reporters try to keep away from statements involving diplomatic circles that can't be attributed to an identifiable authority.

In journalism, there is a grey zone of unverifiable facts and believable fictions where the sources and imaginations of columnists and commentators get full play. But this is a minefield where very few Nepali columnists dare to tread. Only a few will stick their neck out to pass judgement on what can't easily be substantiated; most of us in the trade are essentially dissectors of past events.

If there were a columnist of

## THIS WEEK



KIRAN PANDAY

### SC divided

The Supreme Court remains divided on whether President Ram Baran Yadav's decision to reinstate then army chief Rookmangud Katawal last May was constitutional. A division bench of the SC consisting of Justices Damodar Prasad Sharma and Rajendra Prasad Koirala was scheduled to deliver a final verdict on Tuesday but instead referred the case to a full bench. Sharma said the case raised "serious legal questions" while Koirala said it had lost relevance, as Katawal has retired. They nonetheless agreed that the president does not have legal immunity, and further constitutional interpretation is necessary to clarify the role of the president vis-à-vis the cabinet.

### Tightening up

The new Governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), Yubraj Khatiwada, has moved quickly to tighten regulation of the financial sector. Banks have struggled of late with the liquidity crunch, which its poor lending practices helped bring about. New NRB regulations aim to preserve foreign exchange reserves, and tame the haphazard growth of financial institutions. Under new regulations, promoters of new banks and financial institutions must deposit in cash – as opposed to mere bank guarantees – 45 per cent of their committed investment at a class A financial institution within 30 days of their letter of intent being granted. Additionally, investors are forbidden from holding significant equity stake in more than one financial institution. NRB has also moved to cut the import of gold, which has cost foreign exchange reserves dearly over the past six months.

### India responds

The government revoked its unpopular decision to commission an Indian company to print Machine Readable Passports on Sunday, and instructed the foreign ministry to begin a fresh bidding process. Two days later, the Indian government issued a statement expressing regret over the politicisation of the issue, saying the deal betokened the "friendly relations between the two countries." A confidential letter from Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood to Foreign Minister Sujata Koirala came to light during a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearing on Tuesday. The letter said the deal would address "[shared] security concerns and be financially advantageous to Nepal." Deepak Upadhyay of PAC said the confidential correspondence violated "diplomatic norms". According to officials, Sood expressed his displeasure at the cancellation of the contract during a one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal on Tuesday.

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## Swap over



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## Everest profits

The Board of Directors of Everest Bank held a meeting April 2 to announce an increase in Operating Profit by 30.72 per cent and Advances by 30.04 per cent during the first eight months of the current financial year. The results are yet to be audited. The Bank has a total of 36 full operating branches and five extension counters.

## NEW Nokia N900



The Nokia N900, Nokia's latest mobile computer based on open source Maemo 5 software, is now available in Nepal in the two Nokia stores at City Center (1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Shop No F-28) and Tamrakar Complex (2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Shop No. 28) at a retail price of Rs 52,500.



## Real goal

With World Cup fever slowly gripping the masses, Real Juice's campaign 'Score the Real Goal' is underway. This campaign will run for three months and will feature a picture with 11 different footballs numbered from 1 to 11. To score a 'Real' goal, one has to identify

the Real Ball, type it in with 'Real' and SMS it to 5004. A KIA Picanto full option car is the bumper prize.

## Free TV



HH Bajaj, authorised distributor and marketer of Bajaj Motorcycles, has introduced a New Year scheme: 'Bajaj Dil Khus, Dimag Kharab'. Under this scheme, every Bajaj Motorcycle customer will receive a 21" Samsung colour television.

## England, a bottle away

Carlsberg has come up with a new promotion this summer, 'Win a Trip to England'. You and a friend could win an all-expenses-paid trip to watch a football match live in England. All you have to do is buy a bottle of Carlsberg and keep the coupon that comes with it. [www.carlsberg.com.np](http://www.carlsberg.com.np)

## Free glucose

With the onset of summer, your body surely is going to need some more glucose. Wipro has announced a new offer for consumers of Glucovita: purchase 500gm of Glucovita and get 100gm extra, absolutely free.

## Ninja!

After generating an overwhelming response in India, Bajaj Auto has announced the launch of the much awaited Kawasaki Ninja 250R in Nepal. It is widely acknowledged as the best 250cc motorcycle in the world and is exclusively available at HH Bajaj Probiking Corner, Kathmandu.

## Banepa's bank

Infrastructure Development Bank Ltd. held its general assembly recently, electing 6 shareholding members to its organising committee, including bank chairperson Khemnath Dallakoti. The assembly agreed to provide shareholders with 10 per cent bonus shares as well as a 5 per cent cash bonus.

# Learning leadership



STRICTLY BUSINESS  
Ashutosh Tiwari

Last year, I asked a Nepali industrialist to come talk to a group of first-time young entrepreneurs about how they might scale up their small businesses. The industrialist said that he wanted to talk about leadership.

I explained that these entrepreneurs had just started out and would be more interested in learning the nuts and the bolts of running a business. But the industrialist was not interested in sharing what he knew about how to run a business amidst uncertainty in Nepal.

He was more interested in having a stage to strut on, dispensing what I thought were platitudes on leadership. Watching him interact with his confused audience, I couldn't help but think that talking about leadership in grand yet vague terms must have made him feel like a corporate Nelson Mandela.

Since then, I've become more aware of a plethora of activities touting 'leadership development' in Nepal's corporate and non-profit sectors. Typically, these activities fall into two categories.

**Fun and games:** Some trainers seem to sell the idea to heads of organisations that taking staff out to some idyllic location for a few days to make them climb trees, play with ropes, talk about their childhood, and sing around campfires is likely to unlock the staff's latent leadership abilities.

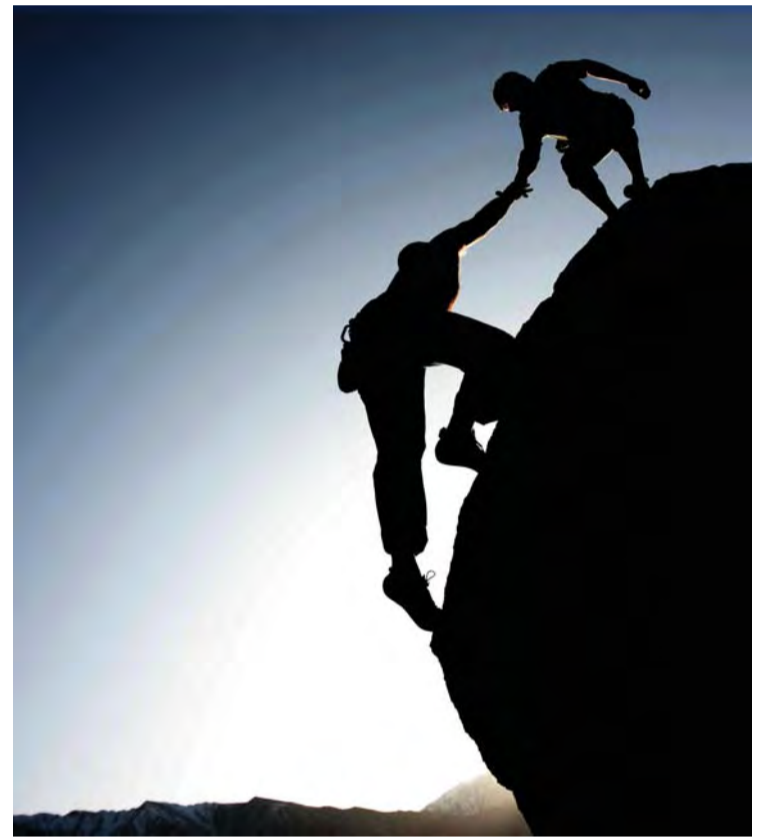
Staff members generally enjoy these outings – not to acquire any specific leadership skills, but to break the monotony of work for a few days. If the trainers marketed these events as 'fun and games', nobody would buy them. Slapping on the phrase 'leadership development' lends the requisite gravitas to what is essentially a three-day picnic.

**Behavioural preaching:** Successful leaders are supposed to have a catalogue of

behavioural traits, which they routinely employ to be, well, successful leaders. Such leaders are self-aware. They anticipate change before anyone else. They ask questions. They give credit to others, and so on. To drive their point home, trainers often share touching anecdotes from the lives of extreme outliers, ranging from religious gurus to Gandhi to Mandela to Steve Jobs. The premise of 'behavioral change' leadership trainers is that if only we somehow programmed ourselves to adopt a set of behavioural traits, we all could be leaders.

members, tolerate mistakes so long as there is collective learning from what went wrong, and let staff make certain decisions for the organisation provided they take the responsibility for the consequences.

Such an option frames leadership development as an iterative real-world event, which is fraught with uncertainties and judgment calls. Such a frame allows participants to adjust and modify their learning in real time to adapt to what the organisational context is. When they do such an adaptation, they



## Staff retreats and inspirational lectures will not a leader make

What the trainers often forget is that changing behaviour is hard for most of us. What's more, translating what one knows in one's mind about being a leader into what one does routinely to be such a leader is a lot harder.

**Leadership as a craft:** See-sawing between the above two, there is an option that most organisational heads appear not to exercise. That is, instead of sending staff off to leadership camps, they could give increasing on-the-job accountability to staff

will start changing their behaviour to get the results that their organisations want. Viewed this way, leadership becomes a series of real-world actions that one can practice, make mistakes with, get right, and do again to improve outcomes.

Minus the practice of the craft of leadership, it would be a mistake to continue to think of leadership as something that can be learnt through fun and games, and through lectures on behavioural change.

# Cal's International Baccalaureate

Thousands of Nepali students enroll in Indian educational institutions every year as they provide quality education at low cost. Kolkata's Oaktree International School, too, is eyeing markets across the border. "We expect students from Nepal as thousands of students come to India for studies every year," says executive director Aditya Kumar.

During a symposium on International Education in March, Kolkata-based Educo Ventures announced the launch of the school, the first of its kind in East Bengal.

The co-educational school will take only 650 students

for the Middle Years Programme (grades VI to X) with a maximum of 15 students per class. Kumar says the school has completed the paperwork for the Baccalaureate Diploma (Grades XI and XII).

The school opens its doors in August 2011, for which admissions start from August 2010. All-inclusive monthly fees range from IRs 30,000 to 60,000, depending on boarding facilities, which is much cheaper than IB schools abroad. The focus is on learner-centric, holistic education that develops skills and creativity, and which serves as a base to enter a good university abroad.



# License to kill?

PRAKRITI PATHAK

An average of three people are killed everyday in road accidents across the country

**5** 788 people lost their lives in road accidents in the last five years. Of the 40,278 injured in the same period, at least 14,175 suffered life-long disabilities. Nepal has one of the highest road fatality statistics in Asia in terms of total vehicle users.

"The main reasons are improper licensing and poor maintenance of roads and vehicles," says Binod Singh of the Metropolitan Traffic Police Division. A written exam and a basic handling test are all that is needed to obtain a license. And even this rudimentary test can be bypassed with a bribe.

"Amendments to the laws are urgent, the ability of a candidate to drive confidently on an actual road should be a key factor," says Singh. "The laws we have now are 25 years old, and we will have to wait for the new constitution."

Under-secretary at the Office of Transport Management Tej Raj Pande concurs: "A proper driving test would save lives but there is no space to carry them out."

Syakar Company's recently opened safety riding training centre in Lalitpur for two-wheelers could



FOO CHEE CHANG

Vehicle	No. in Bagmati Zone	Accident rate
Microbus	2583	1 in 11
Bus/minibus	10872	1 in 26
Truck and mini-truck	12448	1 in 57
Car, jeep, van	85524	1 in 106
Tempos	5300	1 in 118
Motorcycle	374447	1 in 370
Tractor	1729	1 in 173

help with awareness and training.

"People with licenses are enrolled in beginners as well as defensive classes, and our aim is to give riders the confidence to use their vehicles safely," says Mandip Regmi, Chief Riding Instructor at Syakar.

The government, too, is getting in on the act. The Metropolitan

Traffic Police Division is giving drivers a course in road rules, traffic signs, and passenger and pedestrian behaviour. But despite requests to all members of the Transportation Association, only ill-starred Swayambhu Yatayat, whose buses have been involved in a number of fatal accidents, has signed up.

The traffic police also plan to extend traffic safety education programmes to college students, who comprise a significant portion of two-wheeler drivers. A dedicated FM radio with traffic information is planned.

But it doesn't help that there is no effective system in place to punish traffic offenders. Traffic police are only allowed to fine offenders Rs 25-200. The Vehicle Management Office can fine offenders between Rs 1000 and Rs 5000, but a carefully placed bribe usually precludes cases getting to that stage. More serious offences are more likely to be left to mob rule and an informal, often illogical system of compensation whereby 'big pays small', whatever the circumstances of the accident.

And then there are highway accidents, where other factors like dangerous, steep mountain roads, poor condition of vehicles and overloading cause a major loss of life.

The majority of those who lose their lives in road accidents are aged 15-40. The loss of such a productive demographic should add urgency to road safety efforts. 🇳🇵

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- **Thursday** - School Times - everything kids should know
- **Friday** - Green - environment matters
- **Saturday** - Property Plus - weekend two pager focusing on real estate

FOO CHEE CHANG

Young children and youths on mountain bikes of all shapes and sizes speed round a newly constructed 'pump track' at Gyanodaya Residential School, navigating bumps and ramps, having a good time in general while proud parents watch from the side.

This project, in collaboration with the school and sponsored by Kumari Bank, Mountain Dew and retailer Evo Store, is spearheaded by Chain Inc. This is a new collective of mountain bikers that seeks not only to promote cycling, amongst youths especially, but also hopes to bring mountain bikes back from the trails to the commute around the city.

"The country is so polluted and congested. If we can instill an appreciation for nature and create a culture of cycling here, there might still be hope for a reversal," says Chandra Ale, one of the founding members of Chain Inc.

But the task to make cycling an integral and safe part of commuting is an uphill climb here in Kathmandu. An exponential proliferation of motor vehicles on the road over the last 15 years shows no signs of letting up. Nepalis are increasingly dependent on private vehicles to get around, even on short-haul trips. The convenience is apparent, but it comes with the heavy and growing costs of traffic congestion and air pollution.

While poor air quality and the accompanying risks of respiratory illness are of concern to cyclists, wearing a facemask negates it to a certain extent. The chief adversary of cyclists is the general recklessness of road users here, emboldened by the fact that there are few traffic mechanisms to check them. Even when traffic offenders are caught, lax penalties, such as a maximum Rs 200 fine, do little in the way of punishment and deterrence.




FOO CHEE CHANG

For the past 25 years, Sonam Gurung, a pioneering Nepali mountain biker and proprietor of Dawn Till Dusk Mountain Biking, has been trying to lobby for bicycle lanes on the roads. Today, he is well aware that with Kathmandu's narrow roads, compounded by urban sprawl, it is unlikely that bicycle lanes will be created unless there is serious pressure from commuters and road users on the Department of Roads. The cracked helmets from the road accidents that Gurung experienced now hang outside his shop as makeshift flowerpots that speak a grave warning to cyclists who visit.

The Department of Roads, for its part, says that at present there are no plans to install bicycle lanes. Dilli Niraula, superintending engineer at the department, explains, "The roads we have now are too narrow. We are planning to create alternative routes around the valley by bridging the central zone to Ring Road. Once that goes through, we will consider bicycle lanes on Ring Road, which is much wider and more suitable."

Detractors might question the viability of cycling as a form of commuting given the difficulties presented. Further, the cost of a branded mountain bike is comparable to that of a scooter. Consider the advantages however. One can move through traffic faster during rush hour and navigate narrow lanes that motor vehicles have a harder time with. Cycles mean zero emissions for the environmentally conscious and fitness gains for the health-conscious. And from a financial standpoint, one saves on fuel and the availability of affordable Chinese-made bikes with multi-gear systems means you don't have to break the bank.

So the next time you find yourself stuck in a traffic jam, or worse, in a fuel queue, spare a thought for the happy cyclist whizzing past you. If cycles won't solve the Valley's traffic problems, they're certainly a turn in the right direction. 

# Spin city

The humble bicycle could well turn Kathmandu's traffic and air pollution woes around




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## Here comes the sun: Sundance Festival 2010

Are you already booked up this weekend? If not, why don't you come and celebrate the fifth annual Sundance Festival in the beautiful, lush surroundings of The Last Resort near the Tibetan border? Established five years ago by Sam Voolstra of The Last Resort and Nirakar Yakhumba of Moksh, the Sundance Festival is still the only overnight open-air live music event in Nepal.

"When you think about Nepal, you think about mountains and not a lot of people know that there is actually a great music scene here. By organising the Sundance Music Festival we want to show tourists as well as Nepalis that this country has amazing talents," says Voolstra.

This year, the festival will once again feature bands from Nepal playing with international guest musicians. The band 'Soul Train and Blue Eyed Girls', for example,

fuses musicians from Nepal, Scotland, France and India, and will certainly get the crowds onto the dance floor with their 70's-style music.

DJ Raju will play his loops with live musicians, joining other bands like Electro Foundation, Triveni Classical, Alt+F4 and Velvet Valor.

"As a new addition to the festival, we would like to make the link between music and visual art performance," says Voolstra, referring to 'The Blue Room' – an act combining painting with music and the sounds of Tibetan chanting.

Tickets are 2,500 Rs per person and include food, camping accommodation, use of the sauna and plunge pool and transport to and from the festival. They are available at the Last Resort Office in Mandala Street, Thamel and at Moksh in Pulchowk.

*Billi Bierling*



### DINING

**Italian Fiesta at Rox**, Italian chef Alessandro will be cooking an Italian feast every evening featuring authentic cuisine from Italy's different regions for a limited time only. *Until 1 May, dinner only, Rox restaurant, Hyatt, 4491234*

**OR2K**, One of the few vegetarian restaurants in the Valley, their Middle Eastern platter is delicious and their cocktails robust. *Mandala Street, Thamel, 4422097*

**Organic Café and Salad Bar**, hearty breakfasts and healthy salads while you catch up with your reading or emails in the heart of Thamel. *Chakshibari Road, Thamel 4215726*

**Café de Newa**, won't be surprised if there is a Newari mama in the kitchen churning out choila, sukuti, kachila and bara at this restaurant amidst the bright lights of Thamel. Try Newari delicacies like deep-fried buffalo tongue, brain and intestines. You will be blown away. *Next to Kathmandu Guest House, open everyday*

**Ghangri Café**, a quiet place with comfortable sofas and a lovely courtyard, perfect for those sunny afternoons. Although famous for their open sui mai, they offer a few other great dishes as well. *Pulchowk (near the Suzuki showroom), 11am-10pm except Tuesdays.*

**Casa de Cass**, out-of-Kathmandu dining in cosy surrounds with attentive service, what more could you ask for? A martini, of course. *Hariharbhawan, 5010100*

**Roadhouse Café**, serves pizzas cooked to perfection in wood-fired ovens. Health-conscious diners have an alternative in the caesar salad, garnished with the freshest of ingredients. Bring a magazine to pass the time as you ait. *Jhamel, 5521755*



**Comfort Zone**, expansive restobar that needs to be full to come into its own. A decent range of cocktails and barbequed meats should keep you glued to the massive screen at one end. *Comfort Zone (rooftop of Bank of Kathmandu), Thamel*

**Momotarou**, nestled inconspicuously amongst the street shops of Thamel, this restaurant serves Japanese food that is top value for money. Extravagant taste yet humble in presentation. *Thamel, Bhagawatiathan (near Bhagawati Temple), 4417670*

**Hankook Sarang**, serves up the incredible tastes of Korea, including superlative steamed rice to anchor meals fit for kings. *Thamel, near Roadhouse Café*

### GETAWAYS



**Yoga and Wellness Camp**, For Zen and peace of mind, and an hour and a half long ayurvedic massage, head for the edge of Shivapuri National Park. Whether you are a novice or long-time practitioner, it is an opportunity to meet like-minded people and practice Yoga, while feeling benign pity for the Valley residents choking on the dust. *Friday 23 April-Sunday 25 April, Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 9841371927 for prices and reservation*

**Fishing Expeditions and Day Trips**, Tiger Mountain offers a chance to catch the Golden Mahseer, one of Asia's most famous game fish, in Bardiya National Park, while exploring the beauty of the Himalayan foothills. Perfect for this time of the year. *Contact 4361500 for prices and reservation*

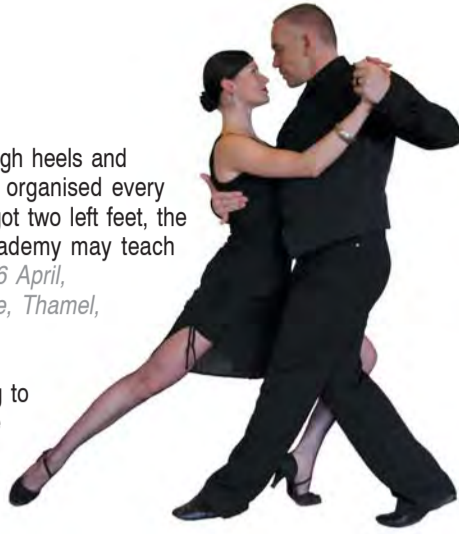
Email us with listings at [editors@nepalitimes.com](mailto:editors@nepalitimes.com). Listings are free but inclusion is not guaranteed as space is limited.





**MUSIC**

**Spicy Salsa**, put on your high heels and ruffles for a night of Salsa, organised every month at Tamas. If you've got two left feet, the folks from Salsa Dance Academy may teach you a few moves. *Friday 16 April, 6.30pm, Tamas Spa Lounge, Thamel, 4257658*



**E.equals** The boys are going to London to participate in the global battle of bands, and the big names in the Nepali metal and rock music scene – 1974 AD Cobweb, Albatross, Alt F4, along with E.equals – are putting up a fundraising concert to help them get there. Expect chaos all night long. *Wednesday 21 April, House of Music, Thamel*

**Chandra Surya Musical Program**, Ani Choying Dolma, Kunti Moktan, and others will be performing at a fundraiser for a Ramechhap school by Better World Family Nepal. It will be more than a concert, with food stalls and games and even a documentary screening. *Saturday 17 April, City Hall, Pradarsani Marg, call 4810163 for tickets*

**Monkey Temple**, this beginning-of-the-century band entered the underground music scene around the same time as Xmarica and Albatross. And they are also reuniting for a performance. *Friday 16 April, House of Music, Thamel*

**Open mic nights with Ciney Gurung**, she is one of the few female artists performing live in Kathmandu every week. Ladies get a free cocktail and the rest get a free platter of cheese if they order a bottle of wine. Drink up, and enjoy. *Wednesdays at Bourbon Room, Darbar Marg, 4441703*

**EVENTS**

**Bahini: The life of my sisters**

A photo essay about the education of under-privileged girls in Nepal by two Singaporean photographers, Debby Ng and Edwin Koo. You might have seen Koo's photographs in *Nepali Times* and *Himal Southasia* before. *Opens Saturday 17 April, National Art Council, Babar Mahal*



**Roles of the Indian Film Heroine**, film festival that looks at the changing ethos of Indian film heroines from Satyajit Ray's *Devi* to Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Michelle in *Black*. Also features talks from cinema-watchers, including actress-turned-director-turned-activist Nandita Das. *Runs until 18 April at Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road, call 4412715 for tickets*



**Saturday's Farmer's Market**, weekly market starting in Kantipath this weekend, promises to be different from all other farmers' markets in

town with lasagne, pies and Mediterranean treats along with organic fruits and vegetables. *Every Saturday, 9am to noon, 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath*

**Chaitya & Silent Flow**, works of Kailash Shrestha and Sushma Shakya created during their one-year residency sponsored by the Australian Himalayan Foundation. *Runs until 21 April, Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4218048*

**Khariko Ghero (The Caucasian Chalk Circle)**, a Bertolt Brecht play adapted into Nepali about a peasant girl and her adopted son. Directed by Max Webster and Mia Theil Have at *Rimal Theatre, Gurukul runs, until 1 May, 5.30pm, except Mondays, 4466956*

**Movie screening: Antaheen (The endless wait)**, collage of life of upper middle-class Bengalis in Kolkata, shown through a series of intertwined vignettes, starring Rahul Bose and Arpana Sen. *Saturday 17 April, GAA Hall, Thamel*



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KIRAN PANDAY

**TEST OF FAITH:** Hundreds look on as Bhairab's chariot is pulled to mark the beginning of Bisket Jatra on Saturday in Bhaktapur.



KIRAN PANDAY

**RED-FACED:** Colour-smeared devotees on the occasion of Sindhur Jatra in Thimi on Thursday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**THE FIERCE ONE:** A priest and children watch over a mask of Durga during Navadurga in Bhaktapur last week.



KIRAN PANDAY

**NANAK'S FAITHFUL:** Sikh women celebrate Baisakhi Parva on Wednesday at Guru Nanak Satsang, Kupondole.



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**WEEKEND WEATHER**  
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

A long westerly jet stream has blown high clouds towards us from the west, a sign that spring is firmly upon us. Satellite pictures show it pumping moisture in pulses. The thundery showers on Monday evening alone brought down temperatures by four degrees and the snowline to 3500 m. For the weekend, expect sunny intervals and brief afternoon showers in the hills. A perfect time to travel around hilly towns.



FRI	SAT	SUN
		
32-14	30-13	34-15

# Bollywooding in Nepal



NEPALI PAN  
Ranjan Adiga

**K**umari or Jai Nepal was the question. We finally settled for Jai Nepal because it was closer to Thamel and we could go grab a few beers after the movie. Since I'd arrived home for my summer vacation my cousins had been raving about the movie theatres – "bahira ko bhanda kehi kam chaina," (no less than any place outside). They had tickets for the premiere of a Hindi film, a Bollywood flick.

When they came to pick me up, my cousins were dressed in their best, which made me reconsider my rather shabby jeans. It was just as well. The crowd outside the hall looked

almost as glamorous as a gaggle of movie stars. My cousins bumped into colleagues and friends and traded talk about stocks and finance. Cell phones buzzed and along with namastes and handshakes, people greeted each other with cheek-kisses and elongated "hiiiiiii"s. Had I arrived in New Nepal against the backdrop of an opulent Bollywood film?

Once we took our seats and the trailers began in Dolby sound, my cousins worked hard to make me comfortable. "Want more popcorn?" they asked. "How about a burger?" I thanked them and said I was fine. The movie was shot in America, Europe, and India with characters who slipped effortlessly between East and West. At every opportunity my cousins leaned toward me to whisper that crores had been lavished on a single song. To be

New Nepal isn't here yet, but Bollywood does a good job of fooling us

honest, I knew all of that. I am, like them, a Hindi film buff, but I pretended ignorance and kept my reserve. The movie was a blockbuster hit and no one left the hall until the last credit rolled.

We drove to the newly opened KFC, and on the way, my cousins argued over who was better:



ANUP PRAKASH

Katrina or Priyanka. "Bollywood rocks" someone said and over fried chicken and Pepsi, chitchat over Hindi film stars and their affairs continued. "Let's hit Thamel," a cousin suggested.

Outside KFC, a woman, with her head draped in a sari, approached us carrying a naked child. My cousin grabbed my arm

and led me to the car. "Dhat! Bloody Indians – always begging. They've ruined our city," she said. Everyone agreed. In typical Katrina Kaif style, my cousin then put on her dark glasses and off we went, speeding towards Thamel, cranking up the latest Coldplay and Bollywood songs. 🇳🇵

काम सानो ठूलो भन्ने हुँदैन । पसिनाको कुनै रङ र जात पनि हुँदैन । काम गरेर खान लजाउनु पनि हुँदैन । चोरेर, ढाँटेर, छलेर, लुटेर खान पो लजाउनुपर्छ । जो जहाँ रहेर जुन काम गर्छ ऊ त्यसैमा रमाउनुपर्छ गौरब गर्नुपर्छ र समर्पित भएर गर्नुपर्छ । काम नै शक्ति हो, भक्ति हो र मुक्ति हो । कामको इज्जत गरौं, पसिनाको सम्मान गरौं ।

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#### Expertise and skills

The post holder will be expected to have the following skills

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- Preferably 3 years of working experience of Driving.

#### Competencies required

- Good oral and written communication skills both in Nepali and English.
- Proficient in computer application.

#### Core competencies that DFID will assess as part of the selection process:

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/nepal-country-plan-brochure11.pdf>

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# Do your homework

Prabal Gurung's superlative year comes as no surprise to the man himself



RABI THAPA

By now, most of us will have heard of Prabal Gurung. He stands out as a Nepali who's done real good, and done so from his base at the epicentre of the world of fashion, New York. What's as remarkable as the fact of his success is the timing. While the global recession has seen uber-trendy fashion houses like Christian Lacroix falter and fall, the house of Prabal Gurung is making waves. Certainly Michelle Obama and American Vogue editor Anna Wintour think so.

When Entrepreneurs for Nepal met at Dwarika's Hotel a fortnight ago, a roomful of youth sat rapt as Prabal sketched out the journey that had ushered him into international celebrity. Then the questions rained down, all the way from 'When can I hope to buy a Prabal Gurung handbag in Kathmandu' to 'How do you manage the global positioning of your brand?' In such sore times as these, it was a celebration not only of Prabal, but of what a Nepali success can mean, backed by a desire to find out how to get there.

I've my own set of questions when I meet the 36-year-old designer in Vesper Café a few days later, but I quickly realise how clear Prabal is about who he is, and how easily he articulates the substance of what he believes in.

He's keen to point out, first off, that he's no overnight sensation. 'I've paid my dues,' he says, simply. 'Of course it's been a pleasant surprise how quickly all the

good things have happened in the last year. But I made sure I invested the time to learn every aspect of my craft, from the designing to the business end. I've spent a decade working in every part of this industry, planning to get where I am. And I'm not done yet,' he adds, with emphasis. "This is just the beginning."

But how, I wonder, did you dare to launch your collection in the middle of a recession?

"It felt right, it was instinctive," Prabal replies, and the conviction with which he says it makes it seem absolutely normal that the First Lady of America should fancy a Prabal Gurung dress. "I was ready. Of course," he says, almost as an aside, "If it hadn't gone well I would have blamed it on the recession!"

Our iced teas arrive, and after a considered sip, Prabal chides the photographer for not having one ("You're missing out, dude"). I ask him how it is to be back this time around.

"Great. I try to come back once a year, to be with family, to recharge. Sitting and waiting for you guys, with the birds chirping, even the noise of the cars, everything moves at a certain pace here," he smiles. "It *has* been different this time. What I've noticed is how people are genuinely happy for me. Not many people celebrate other people's success in Kathmandu, maybe it makes them feel smaller. But the younger generation is different... it's very encouraging."

Perhaps they see what's possible for them? He agrees, and I ask him what he'd say to all those Nepalis, home and abroad, who may consider investing in Nepal.

"Do your homework, believe in yourself, and just go for it."

Certain such phrases take on the form of mantras. It seems almost too easy, I think. But they do sum up what Prabal is about, and the passion with which he explains himself ("I'm *extremely* lucky to be working in a field I love") soon dissipates cynicism.

It's not as if he doesn't know how difficult doing business is in Nepal. His own attempts to enlist garment factories in Nepal for his collection initially ran into difficulties with on-time delivery. "But every city has its challenges."

Doesn't Nepal have more challenges than most?

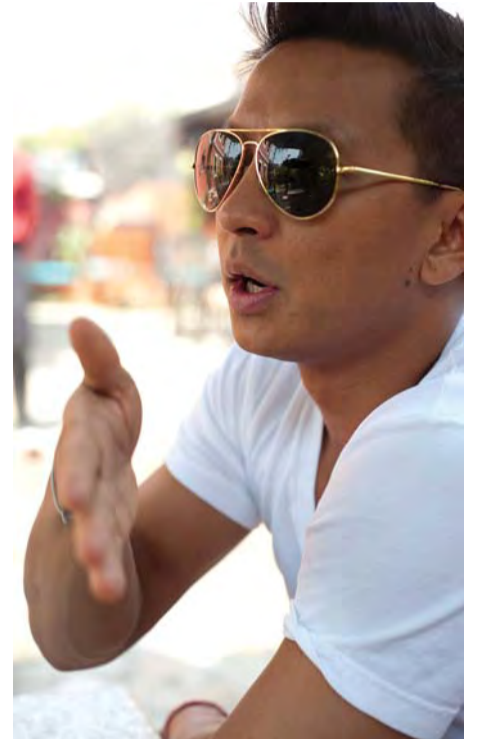
Looking ever so slightly shamefaced, Prabal confesses he relies on family to keep up with the merry-go-round of Nepali politics. But he is ambiguous about the relevance of democracy in a largely illiterate country. "Democracy isn't

freedom at any cost," he says. On the subject of ethnicity, he is very clear. "I see myself as a human being first. The house I grew up in – a Gurung father and Rana mother – was a melting pot. I know it's not the same for many people here, but I do hope that those minorities seeking a voice don't repeat the patterns of what they are fighting against, and don't limit themselves to expressing themselves through ethnicity."

These seem sound sentiments. But I'm keen to see how Prabal balances the reality of Nepal with the unreality of models earning \$10,000 an hour in New York. Isn't fashion frivolous, and irrelevant to Nepal?

"Of course it's frivolous!" he bursts out. "In a sense it's all about surfaces. But fashion and the arts are not irrelevant to Nepal. The arts make you more sensitive, more tolerant to differences. And face it, the fashion industry is a multi-billion dollar industry. If Nepal can't compete with mass market garment producers like China and India, it can produce 100 pieces rather than 1000 pieces and charge 10 times more."

It won't happen overnight, and neither did Prabal. "I'm extremely patient, and I'm



AHMAD ISKANDAR

very demanding. As long as people don't strive for excellence, as long as they are happy with mediocrity, it won't happen. People need to put in the work, be original, and look beyond borders, and I think Nepali youth are beginning to do that."

It's only when he tries to convey to me how it's possible that he isn't totally carried away by his success that he struggles, for the first time, to find the right words. "I'm just not," he insists, "I have so much more to do." It may seem hard to believe, but through all the hype, Prabal sees himself as "an ordinary guy in an extraordinary situation". *Heroine haru le layera ta ho ni!* he says self-deprecatingly, and falls back on his family, and his mother. "If you met her, you'd know exactly what I mean. She's always been like, what's next?"

It's hard to say what's next for Prabal beyond the next collection. He knows better than anyone else how fickle the world of fashion can be. But he is living proof that even in the extraordinary world of fashion, the ordinary virtues of hard work, supplemented by no little talent, can prevail. He's set to be a big fish in a very big pond. And for anyone who has seen Prabal Gurung dance Nepali *jhyaure* to booming house music, his stars hitched to his own

chariot, his success will come as no surprise, and is impossible to resent.



THAT DRESS: Michelle Obama makes Prabal Gurung's day



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# The service revolution

EJAZ GHANI

WASHINGTON, DC – China and India are both racing ahead economically. But the manner in which they are growing is dramatically different. Whereas China is a formidable exporter of manufactured goods, India has acquired a global reputation for exporting modern services. Indeed, India has leapfrogged over the manufacturing sector, going straight from agriculture into services.

The differences in the two countries' growth patterns are striking, and raise significant questions for development economists. Can service be as dynamic as manufacturing? Can latecomers to development take advantage of the increasing globalisation of the service sector? Can services be a driver of sustained growth, job creation, and poverty reduction?

Some facts are worth examining. The relative size of the service sector in India, given the country's state of development, is much bigger than it is in China. Despite being a low-income region, India and other South Asian countries have adopted the growth patterns of middle- to high-income countries. Their growth patterns more closely resemble those of Ireland and Israel than those of China and Malaysia.

India's growth pattern is remarkable because it contradicts a seemingly iron law of development that has held true for almost 200 years, since the start of the Industrial Revolution. According to this 'law' – which is now conventional wisdom – industrialisation is the *only* route to rapid economic development for developing countries.

As a result of globalisation, the pace of development can be explosive. But the potential for explosive growth has usually been seen only in the manufacturing sector. This is no longer the case. There is evidence that countries with high growth in services also tend to have high

overall economic growth; conversely, countries with high overall economic growth have high services growth.

To be sure, the causal connection remains uncertain: after all, there is also a positive relationship – widely accepted in development economics – between manufacturing growth and overall growth. But what has been overlooked is that the effect of services growth on aggregate economic growth appears to be as strong, if not stronger, than the effect of manufacturing growth on overall growth.

Moreover, the trend over time to a higher service-sector share in the economy suggests that higher real growth in services has not been offset by price declines. There is no outbreak of the

of services, which account for more than 70 per cent of global output, is still in its infancy. Moreover, the long-held view that services are non-transportable, non-tradable, and non-scalable no longer holds for a host of modern impersonal services, which can now be produced and exported at low cost. Developing countries can thus sustain service-led growth, given the huge room they have for catch-up and convergence.

India's experience offers hope to other development latecomers. The process of globalisation in the late twentieth century led to a sharp divergence of incomes between those who industrialised and broke into global markets and the 'bottom billion' in some 60 countries where incomes stagnated for twenty years. It seemed as if

## India's service revolution suggests a new way ahead for development latecomers

so-called 'Dutch disease' – that is, the price of services do not fall with an increase in the supply.


India has a higher share of services, and more rapid service-sector growth, than China, although the latter is richer and has grown faster over time. This indicates that services are not simply responding to domestic demand (which would be higher in China), but also to export opportunities.

India's growth experience suggests that a global service revolution – rapid growth and poverty reduction led by services – is now possible. In India, the service sector has not only led overall economic growth, but is also characterised by higher labour productivity than in the industrial sector. Indeed, productivity growth in India's service sector matches productivity growth in China's manufacturing sector, thereby reducing poverty by enabling wages to rise.

Service-led growth is sustainable, because globalisation

the 'bottom billion' would have to wait their turn for development, until giant industrialisers like China became rich and uncompetitive in labour-intensive manufacturing.

The globalisation of services, however, provides alternative opportunities for developing countries to find niches, beyond manufacturing, where they can specialise, scale up, and achieve explosive growth, just like the industrialisers. As the services produced and traded across the world expand with globalisation, the possibilities for all countries to develop based on their comparative advantage expand. That comparative advantage can just as easily be in services as in manufacturing or agriculture.

The promise of the service revolution is that countries do not have to wait to get on the path to rapid development. There is a new way ahead. 

*Ejaz Ghani is an Economic Adviser on South Asia at the World Bank.*



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How the shift to overseas migrant labour is tearing Nepali families apart

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Panic over May 28

The Maoist gameplan

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Swedish lawmaker Birgitta Dahl on the hope she saw in rural Nepal

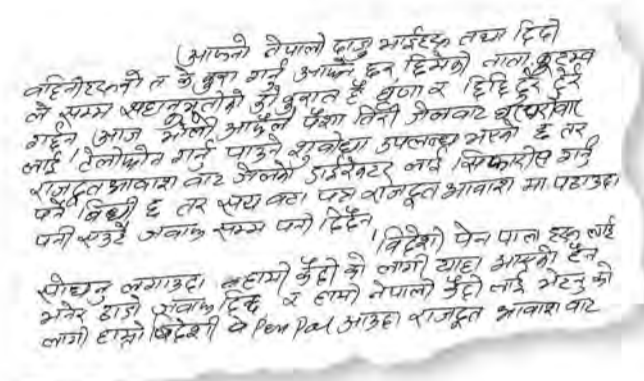
# Letter from jail

Letter written by Chandra Kumar Rai from Bangkok's Bangkwang Jail, where he has spent the past 17 years.

Himal Khabarpatrika, 14-28 April

हिमाल

Dear Kunda Sir  
Warm greetings from the cold floor of a Bangkok jail. What can I say? Ten years ago when you came to visit us in this jail and report on the situation of innocent Nepalis at Bangkwang you brought our plight to the notice of everyone. Today, I am writing to you to once more take our story to my Nepali brothers and sisters.



You know what each and every one of us has been through. I am not a smuggler, I never was. I carried the dreams of my father, mother, sisters and brothers to seek my fortune and was passing through Bangkok. But I was arrested at the airport by police when I couldn't offer them US dollars underhand. I was sentenced to life imprisonment and have now spent 17 years here. In that time my grandparents from both sides, my aunts and uncles, have all died. My father died five months ago and

my mother sits in the corner of our house and waits for me to come home. I want to see her one last time before she dies, but it is just a dream. My heart is wracked by storms, my mind is in turmoil. There is no one to pour out my soul to, that is why I am writing to you.

I am victimised here, and I am stigmatised back home among my neighbours and relatives. The Nepal Embassy in Bangkok finally lobbied with the prison administration to allow us to call home. But there is no trace of the application we made 12 years ago for a 'royal pardon', the embassy hasn't replied to us. My father even sent a ticket for me to go back to Nepal if I got a pardon, that ticket disappeared long ago. When asked, the embassy replies: "We're not here to help prisoners."

While in prison, I have made a lot of foreign friends. I only studied till Grade 10 in Nepal, but here I have been studying the bible through a correspondence course and have earned advanced diplomas from the US and Australia. I want to pursue the study of the theology. I have also started painting and my drawing of Machapuchhre was exhibited inside the prison. Before I die, I want to see the real mountains one last time.

I want to urge our Nepali brothers and sisters to help their fellow-Nepalis when they are in pain or in trouble. And I would like to request the Nepal Government to bring us innocent Nepalis home from the jails here in Thailand.

I am sorry if I have inconvenienced you.

Chandra Kumar Rai  
Chandra.kumar.raihotmail.com  
Bangkwang, Thailand



# Federations of factions

Hari Bahadur Thapa/Gopal Khanal/Ganga BC in Kantipur, 10 April

कान्तिपुर

There are as many opinions as there are leaders. Leaders within parties have different strategies instead of an institutional policy. The indecision of parties, which increasingly seem like federations of factions, has held the country hostage.

"The political parties never got institutionalised, this has resulted in the current disorder within the parties," says Krishna Khanal, political science professor at TU. He thinks the leaders have not realised yet that a political party is an institution, and that the culture of elevating the individual rather than the party is predominant.

UML policy is to be open to any alternative for a national consensus. Party chairman Jhala Nath Khanal interprets it as 'ready to explore an alternative to the current government if there is a need for a national consensus'.

Vice Chair Bamdev Gautam says, "Madhav Kumar Nepal should resign and form a national unity government under Maoist leadership."

KP Oli has a different perspective, "Open for consensus means the Maoists are welcome to join this government."

PM Nepal has similar view to that of Oli, "If the Maoists join this government, it becomes a national unity government."

There is no uniformity in the interpretation of the Maoist stance either: peace process and constitution writing or a people's revolt. Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and deputy chairs Mohan Baidhya and Baburam Bhattarai have differences on major issues.

The Maoists started collecting signatures to table a no-confidence motion against the government, but this was postponed for no obvious reason. The party central committee had already named Dahal to lead the government but the standing committee meeting suggested leaving the post open for alternatives.

According to Bhattarai, concluding the peace process and constitution-writing is the official party line. There is a need for a national unity government to complete the task. "People will resist conspiracy against this process, you can call it a people's uprising or a revolt," he says.

If this is what the official party line is, then why do they issue different statements? "Speaking against the party line shows they lack moral integrity," says political analyst Shyam Shrestha.

While the Maoists and UML quarrel over the constitution and government, the NC is bickering over party leadership.

Sher Bahadur Deuba, Sushil Koirala and Ram Chandra Poudel may have different personalities, but they have a single political aim. They are fighting for primacy within the Nepali Congress.

During party unification in 2007, Deuba was ranked above Sushil Koirala (and below Krishna P Bhattarai and the late Girija Prasad Koirala). But as acting NC president, Sushil Koirala was ranked above Deuba on Thursday (in the order in which the names appeared in the minutes). Deuba was enraged and stormed out of the meeting. But in a meeting the day after, Deuba was ranked above Koirala, to the chagrin of the latter. "The ranking was done during the party's unification, and this will be effective until the next convention," explains party general secretary Bimalendra Nidhi.







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# Hong Kong speaks out



More than 85 per cent of Nepalis living in Hong Kong are from indigenous Nepali communities. During a Himal Debate organised there by Everest weekly and hongkongnepali.com, sponsored by the Magar Association, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the proposed 14 province model for federalism. Not only did they consider the ethnicity-based model, based on ethnicity, incomplete, they were also concerned it would invite conflict in the long run. Excerpts:

## What do you think about the proposed 14 provinces?



**Bhupendra Chemjong (president, Federation of Indigenous People):** The proposed 14 provinces are the solution. It was drafted after much homework on the part of the political parties and deliberated in the committee. It can address the concerns of all the communities. Demarcation

was done on the basis of the availability of resources. There is no need for further discussion.



**Kamal Poudel (intellectual):** We are sandwiched between two powerful countries. Therefore, it is not a good idea to have so many provinces in view of nationality and sovereignty. There are plenty of examples of how a small mistake during political transition can spark communal conflict and

ultimately country's break up. The political parties are trying to woo their voters and did not show seriousness while dealing with the ethnic issue. This might be counterproductive.

**Nanda Changshu (secretary, Kirant Yakthung Chumlung):** As long as provinces ensure the rights of marginalised and backward communities, it should be fine. Administrative expense is not an issue. Leaders are hoarding money and abusing their power but when it comes to creating provinces why should expenses become the issue?



**Indra Laksham (secretary, Kirant National Religion Literature Upliftment Association):** The ethnic movement, as well as the creation of federal states, will not wreck existing social harmony. Instead, one caste, language and religion has been reigning over multiple

ethnicities, which are now striving for their own identities. Interactions should consider the complexities of state restructuring and address them.



**Bhakta Dura (advisor, Dura Society):** Ethnic provinces were demanded to address the problems of ethnic communities. The other communities need not fear it. All 59 scheduled ethnic communities should get autonomous provinces. The most important thing is how to

bring the backward communities to the policy-making level and empower them. How can giving rights cause conflict? The oppressed have not got anything. Who brought up the issue of disintegration? The oppressed want change, not the oppressors. Those who have access to the state do not want change. The demand for ethnic provinces has been raised not to deprive anyone of their rights but to give equal rights to all.



**Bhim Thapa Magar (former general secretary, Magar Association):** It is said political prerogatives will be in place for a certain time. Is the liberation of ethnic communities possible within the given time frame? This might

please certain ethnic communities but it might invite conflict within ethnic communities. There is a conflict between ethnic and non-ethnic communities now and one day there will be conflict between ethnic sub-castes. What if ethnic sub-castes demand separate provinces? Do we suppress them? Federalism is ideally for devolution of power, meaning for development. But here it does not seem to be for development but for the self-serving purposes of certain castes. A majority of ethnic communities of the proposed provinces live outside the provinces. Nobody has ever said anything as to how they benefit from their provinces.



**Rita Gurung (deputy secretary, Tamu Tyohyul):** I am supposed to line up for Tamuwan province. However, other community members should also be treated equally. Without this kind of humanitarianism, I don't

want my own Tamuwan province.

**Abichandra Ingnam (general secretary, Limbuwan National Liberation Front):** If a community with majority population runs the province with representatives of all communities, there won't be conflict. Limbus favour co-existence. The country will prosper under a federal system.

## How can we improve the draft?

**Bhupendra Chemjong:** Those who do not get provinces of their own should be given sub-provinces within the region to uplift them. We have no grudges against the oppression of the past. We have to dispel the illusion that ethnic provinces disintegrate the country, they will integrate it instead.

**Bhakta Dura:** All ethnic and non-ethnic communities should be equally represented from the proposed provinces. This will pre-empt possible conflict. No one should be afraid of such provinces.

**Bhim Thapa Magar:** Tansen has been proposed as the capital of Magarat. People from Rukum will have to travel all the way there for administrative work. This is more impractical than in the past. How does it benefit people? Magars are ranked as the third largest population but they are being cornered within a underdeveloped region with scarce resources. Provinces with industries, resources, transportation facilities, educational institutions and the infrastructure of tourism will be inhabited by clever people. Magars are being taken for a ride in the name of ethnic provinces. What is the point of a Magarat province that does not benefit Magars?



**Durga Gurung (vice president, Association of Non-resident Nepalis):** I am from Pokhara, which is in Tamuwan province. Something like the price of potatoes could create conflict. Why will Gurungs supply potatoes to provinces they are not on good terms with? Tamus should

understand this. The leaders who drew up the draft have not considered these facts.



**Rajendra Thapa (entrepreneur):** The five development regions drawn from north to south during the Panchayat regime were not drawn haphazardly. Vertical demarcation can resolve the current debate on provinces. For instance, if we take Magarat and Tamuwan, rice can be cultivated

in the plains of Lumbini while tourism can be developed in the mountains and universities and industries can be developed in the mid-hills.

**Hem Limbu (chair, Federation of Nepalis):** The proposed 14 provinces are based on ethnicity, region and languages. It would be better if we could reach a consensus. The major political parties are responsible for forging a consensus on creating provinces.



**JN Gyawali (chair, Nepal Chamber of Commerce):** Creating provinces is not enough. The most important thing is if the provinces will get enough revenue to run these provinces. We have made a mistake by not considering this.

# All fall down

If any of you missed the new year revelry this week, don't worry, the 2067 calendar has 10 more new years and losars. And in the spirit of New Nepal we are going to celebrate them all with national holidays. There will be three months off this year, not counting Saturdays and Sundays, which makes Nepal the country with the highest per capita public holidays in the world.



Among the many other things that makes Nepal unique in the world are our hand-written passports: one of only six countries left. The donkey's **assport** is running out of pages again, and it's a comforting thought that, like the national flag, we will continue to preserve our national identity and unique selling point as the world's most backside country.



On a similar note, it is good to see that Kathmandu Aerodrome has been spruced up and streamlined ahead of Visit Nepal Year. The security line in front of the x-rays no longer snakes past the immigration desks, it only stretches up to the aroma-filled urinal and arsenal. This is a vast

improvement and cuts the waiting time from two hours to just 1 hr 45min.

The reason for the shorter queue is that we no longer have to remove our shoes and belts. Informed sources told the mule's mole that the shoe rule was waived because the smell of socks in advanced stages of decay was so overpowering that some policemen fainted, creating a security risk. And the reason we can keep our belts on is because several male passengers a day dropped their trousers as they walked past the metal detectors, giving new meaning to the phrase 'strip-search'.

Other long overdue measures have been taken to beef up tourism in this ex-Hindu kingdom: the Civil Aviation Authoritarians have blackened all the windows between the arrival and departure corridors. Apparently this has been done ahead of Visit Nepal Year so that arriving tourists can't see dear departing tourists looking like they can't wait to get the hell out of here.



What do MKN, MRP, MJF and Maobaddies have in common? It seems Makunay worked a deal to withdraw the MRP deal in return for the Baddies calling off the Bund. But the MJF got cold feet and Bijay the G suddenly saw

himself as a prospective premier. Don't underestimate Mad Nepal's ability to wheel and deal, though, because it was he who leaked the Indian embassy letter to make Suzie the fall gal. The FM is now sulking and not taking calls from anyone. The Soodsayer says India will still bag the MRP deal anyway for the simple reason that the new **ToR** for the rebid will stipulate the new passports have to be delivered by June, a criteria no other supplier can match.



How come no one talks about the late lamented HLPM anymore? Remember, this was the **Stratospheric Mechanism** designed to end infighting, but it died with GPK because they cudn't find a successor and the body hasn't even been able to meet because the three parties keep disagreeing on the agreement to find an agreement.



Two mechanics from the HLPM, JNK and PKD, have been trying to do their own sweet bilateral deal and obviate the need for a threesome. Comrade Fierce had

nearly convinced Jhallu Babu that he could lead the government and the Baddies would join. At a dinner at **Pistachio Palace** the other night, even Comrade Sita warmed up to the idea after initially having misgivings that hubby boy wouldn't be supremo. But JNK now seems to have changed his mind after the Chairman refused to give it to him in writing, just asking him to "take my word for it". After being roughed up in Rukum by the **Red Guard** for saying there was no alternative to the present govt, JNK has decided not to be a rebel rouser anymore. That now leaves only Bum Dev, the Baddie deep-penetration agent within the UML.



The Ass' quote of the week is from none other than Kamred Prabhakar, the voice of the people. **Janata Janardan** said: "Yes, we signed an agreement not to declare bunds. But this bund was necessary to protect the peace process, so it is good for tourism." *ass(at)nepalitimes.com*



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