

# Gorkhaland goes BJP

Some believe that the GJMM is selling out to national political parties on the issue Gorkhali identity



DINESH WAGLE

The high pitched movement for the state of Gorkhaland within India by the Nepali-speaking people of the Darjeeling area has reached an awkward situation. The Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha (GJMM), the party that resurrected the Gorkhaland movement, and its firebrand leader Bimal Gurung have handed over the task of taking up the issue of statehood in Delhi to the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The GJMM has supported the candidacy of BJP's Jaswant Singh from the Darjeeling seat in the parliamentary elections to be held on April 30.

This has invited mixed reactions from the locals in Darjeeling. "The party should have nominated its own candidate," said one local reporter who didn't want to be identified. He believed that the party shouldn't have relied on other parties regarding their issue as "all parties in the past have cheated us Gorkhalis". Others felt differently. "Now our Bimal Gurung has brought someone from Delhi, an influential leader, who can take our case to the high corridors of Delhi," said an elderly man whom I met one early morning. Singh, a BJP veteran and leader of the opposition in the upper house Rajya Sabha, actually hails from the desert state of Rajasthan. He keeps reminding his prospective voters about the fact with a little bit of mythical twist. "Perhaps God brought me here to the mountains to work for you," Singh has been repeating in his campaign speeches.

enjoyable.

A colleague at *Kantipur* told me about the *banda* the next day as I reached the office in the evening after booking a nonrefundable ticket with Buddha Air. I was destined to get stranded in Biratnagar (from where I planned to reach Delhi via Darjeeling). I thought, okay, a day of *banda* has become a non-issue for many of us these days, so I'll take it. It's like only a couple of hours of power outage a day. But eastern Nepal has become a hotbed of protests of all kinds. So my sixth sense and my colleagues at the Biratnagar office were saying that there might be another sudden *banda* or disturbance on the East-West Highway the next day as well.

So it was decided that I take the office vehicle that carries newspapers early in the morning to Jhapa. So Madhav Ghimire, the Biratnagar bureau chief of *Kantipur* Publications, and I woke up at 2:30 a.m. to catch the distribution van that would leave the office at 3 a.m. (I had stayed at Ghimire's apartment.) As we were approaching the Bargachhi office, a loud noise came from far away. Within minutes, we could understand what was coming from the loudspeaker. "Respected brothers and sisters," said the speaker, "our office was attacked yesterday at 10 p.m., and our candidate from Morang-7 Dr. Subodh Kumar Pokharel was attacked. In protest against the assault, we have decided to observe a *banda* today (April 7)."

The instant publicity was being done on behalf of a fringe party called Chure Bhawar Ekata Samaj that came into existence after launching an agitation in the Chure area months before last year's CA elections. By-elections were scheduled to be held in six constituencies on April 10.

The vehicle carrying the loudspeaker went towards the bus park to convey its message to the targeted audience -- the bus-wallahs.

That was an impromptu decision. The alleged incident happened at 10:30 p.m. and guys were already publicizing the protest programmes



On the other hand, Bimal Gurung is busy these days justifying his decision to rely on the BJP. In a recent public meeting organized at Gymkhana Club, Darjeeling, Gurung said that supporting the BJP was the best decision that he and his party could take at the time. "The Congress will never support our cause because one of its influential leaders, Pranab Mukharjee, is a Bengali, and he doesn't want to go among his men as the one who divided the state of West Bengal [where Darjeeling is situated]," Gurung said. What about the Third Front? "It's all dominated by communists who have been ruling Bengal since ages," Gurung said. "The BJP was the only viable option. We made sure that it included our demand for Gorkhaland in its election manifesto. We decided to support it only after we saw that it had been included."

Some feel that the Gorkha community doesn't have the capacity to win the elections, and supporting a national party was a lame effort to keep the issue alive. Others believe this is an example of the GJMM and its leaders selling out to national political parties on the issue of ethnicity and Gorkhali identity like Subash Ghising did for years.

"If Singh is defeated," said the same reporter, "that would be interpreted as the defeat of the GJMM, and the whole cause of Gorkhaland."

### Nepal *banda* and power cut

In my five-month-long stay in Delhi, I almost missed two things in particular about Kathmandu. 1. Why no *bandas* here? 2. Why no power cuts?

I was back in Nepal for a week recently and experienced both in ways that were in no way

by 2 a.m. "They must have decided to organize the *banda* without visiting the place and the supposedly injured person," commented Madhav as the vehicle passed us.

The *banda* culture has reached such an extent in Nepal that even a small annoyance or incident instigates people to go for a shutdown. "A husband and wife fight could see a city closed," said Madhav. He wasn't joking. His tone was serious. And I believed him. On my way to Ilam that morning, I saw many people stranded on the highway. Those people who were waiting for buses to show up didn't know there was a *banda* on the other part of the highway.

When I reached Darjeeling via Ilam, a local Nepali singer told me that her daughter had to return from Kakkarbhatta, the border town, after finding out about the sudden *banda* in the eastern region the other day. The daughter worked at Jet Airways in Kathmandu.

And the power cuts. As I was stranded in Biratnagar, I wanted to use my computer, but no luck. The area was in the midst of an eight-hour-long load-shedding. In my home in Kathmandu, I didn't watch TV and mostly had candlelight dinners. I am sure enough has been written about our failure to provide adequate power. There is a huge shortage of electricity in India too. But load-shedding rarely happens in Delhi. I experienced power cuts a couple of times in the past five months, but only for about five minutes or so. Light is one of the key aspects of a city: be it inside homes or on the streets. They should be illuminated. When will Kathmandu come out of darkness?

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# The safety of civilians

The Sri Lankan government should proceed with a political solution that will enable it not only to destroy terrorism but to get rid too of the possible breeding grounds of terror

RAJIVA WIJESINHA

The decision of the Sri Lanka's government to declare a ceasefire over the New Year period has met with the type of reaction that suggests how difficult it is to achieve peace when so many influential and noisy international actors are full of destructive preconceptions.

The main purpose of the ceasefire is to allow people to leave, which is what the so called international community has been requesting. Ignoring the fact that several months ago we suggested to these people that they concentrate their energies on ensuring freedom for the Tamils trapped by the LTTE, it was only a few months ago that they suddenly, when the defeat of the LTTE seemed inevitable, registered the plight of the civilians. Even so they did not make any categorical demands, but played into LTTE hands by suggesting that there were reasons these people might not want to leave the arms of the Tigers.

That claim was belied by the thousands who did walk out, thirty five thousand in February. Then the efforts of the Tigers to stop them became more brutal, the shootings more public, a suicide bomb, land mines. The flood stopped, and once again the so called international community found ways of reasserting a balance, instead of categorically condemning the Tigers and demanding that they free our people.

Then in March the people again spoke for themselves, and another exodus commenced, this time of twenty five thousand, some appearing in our midst with the wounds inflicted on them by the Tigers as they tried to flee. These were the lucky ones. They spoke of their loved ones being forced back or killed. But very little of this was noted by the international community. Their silence enabled the LTTE to engage in even more brutal repression, including the building up of a wall to pen in those who sought to cross the lagoon. No talk though of concentration camps from agencies such as Human Rights Watch or newspapers such as the *London Times* when this happened.

Instead we had, from Britain in particular, egged on by amoral MPs, demands for a ceasefire. Though there was a pretence that this was to help the trapped civilians to escape, the aims

of the British were as usual shrouded in ambiguity, and those who wanted what they called a permanent ceasefire were able to make the running.

In the process the rationale for a pause in fighting was lost. The Sri Lankan forces in any case did not need to be told to pause with regard to shooting at escaping civilians, since at no time has it even been alleged that this has happened. Sixty five thousand civilians have got away to the safety of government controlled territory, many braving LTTE violence to flee, and at no time has there been any suggestion that, even by accident, firing by the Sri Lankan forces has harmed them.

Still, if only to make the situation clear, there have been requests by those who understand the situation better than those who echo the demands of terrorists that there should be a definite pause in the fighting. The Indian Foreign Secretary made such a request earlier, and this was echoed by Prof Walter Kalin, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons. The latter indeed, following his visit to Sri Lanka, said 'I believe that a series of humanitarian pauses must be initiated immediately to allow civilians to leave and humanitarian actors to provide life-saving relief to the remaining population.'

Prof Kalin's use of the phrase 'a series of humanitarian pauses' makes clear his understanding of the problem the Sri Lankan government faces, in trying to rescue its citizens who are now trapped by terrorists. The purpose of the pause is to free the civilians, but it is possible that the Tigers will use such a pause to entrench their control more deeply, to build up higher walls, to launch a witch hunt against those seeking to escape, to recruit more indiscriminately. It is therefore essential, if such pauses are to continue, to make sure that they achieve their purpose, not the opposite.

That is why it makes sense to have a brief pause, to see whether the purpose is achieved. Thus far it has not been, which suggests the Tigers will be intransigent. In such a context, which is essentially a hostage situation, the Americans have shown what should be done, by their dramatic rescue of the ship's captain taken hostage by Somali pirates. But the so called

international community will continue to seek excuses for the Tigers, without standing by its original rationale as to the need for a pause, namely that it should be to ensure the release of the civilians.

Interestingly the BBC, perhaps not deliberately, indicated some sort of bias in its coverage of the situation, which is of a piece with the British government's ambiguity as to whether it wanted a ceasefire or a humanitarian pause. Without much reference to the Sri Lankan government or supporters of the government, except for a brief interview with the Foreign Minister in Colombo, it sought the views of Tamils demonstrating against the government and also Robert Evans, the rascal who seems to have been instrumental in preventing European MPs from visiting the Eastern Province last year.

It did interview Sir John Holmes, but what he said was not repeated satisfactorily, with Evans replacing him. And then, when his remarks were reported, they were twisted in that, whereas he had clearly put the blame on the LTTE for not letting people out, the BBC said that the people might not be willing to leave. In short, the original purpose of the pause will now be ignored, and the so called international community will renew its call for an actual ceasefire, a ceasefire that the Tigers seek desperately in order to renew their strength.

Such indulgence would be dangerous. The Tamil people have suffered enough and, while every effort should be made, in accordance with the latest request by a senior UN official, to seek safe egress for the civilians, the Sri Lankan government cannot allow the possibility of terrorism being resurrected. At the same time, firm action against terrorists should be accompanied by political reform that encompasses all Tamil groups that reject terrorism. In this context it is to be hoped that democratic elements in the TNA will finally throw off the yoke that they allowed themselves to be placed under during the ceasefire period. But, whether they come in or not, the government should proceed with a political solution that will enable it not only to destroy terrorism but to get rid too of the possible breeding grounds of terror.

The Island (Sri Lanka)/ Asia News Network

# The good, the bad and the ugly

The Chinese get angry at how their artists portray them abroad

ALEXIS HOOI

Prostitutes, stock punters, mistresses of big businessmen and migrant workers - "images of modern China" decked out in panda-themed outfits for the world to see. The fashion show by Chinese designer and artist Zhao Bandi in Paris last month was just asking for it.

Once the media picked up the news, the Chinese online community proceeded to flame Zhao for this latest sacrilegious act of abusing China's beloved bear. He had first used the catwalk to present 33 social classes and issues of the country last November in a similar fashion.

"This is no way to treat a symbol of cultural exchange between China and other countries," ran one online diatribe.

Thousands on the Internet have left furious postings, saying Zhao's Paris stunt was also the most recent example of how the ugly side of China was being blown way out of proportion by the creative industry to pander to Western audiences. After all, acclaimed director Zhang Yimou drew similar fire from the Chinese public for playing up the country's backwardness in his earlier films of the 1990s.

His 1992 movie, *The Story of Qiu Ju*, about a Chinese peasant who battled bureaucracy over an injustice, won international accolades but suffered criticism at home for its negative portrayal of society then. But panda-designer Zhao's case highlights a major, underlying concern today - how a Net-savvy generation handles the increasing interest in its country as it rises in importance on the global stage.

The views the world has of this expansive country will inevitably be as diverse as its provinces, regions and municipalities.



Which means that good or bad, how others see their country is a fact citizens of a developing China will have to take in their stride.

Because along with portrayals that are grossly exaggerated or way off the mark, depic-

tions of the country will also include gems of truth that serve to boost understanding across national and cultural boundaries. That is also why the role of a media that reports accurately and avoids fanning the flames of sensationalism is more urgent than ever. Western media reports on the Olympic torch relay and the riots in Tibet last year already led to strong reactions from Chinese audiences for what they said were "negative and biased" reports.

From London to Los Angeles, thousands of overseas Chinese took to the streets in peaceful demonstrations last April to protest what they felt were distorted and slanted coverage of the events by major news agencies.

Conversely, examples of responsible reporting on the May 12 Sichuan earthquake last year moved the world by showing the resilience of the Chinese people and the countries that came to their aid to overcome disaster.

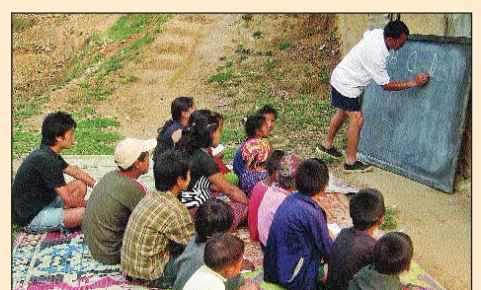
Still, local reporters and editors today face the danger of simply teasing readers and viewers of new media with fleeting, superficial and unverified content. It is a daily challenge they will have to remind themselves - and their audiences - to surmount. Only then will stories that matter make a difference and expose those that are irrelevant and untrue.

While I am not amused by Zhao's latest antics on the overseas fashion runways, I am still willing to let it pass as a necessary evil for a society becoming more sophisticated and tolerant in coming to terms with differing points of view.

China Daily/ Asia News Network

## Nice photo

Many thanks to Surendra Subedi for your nice photo captioned "Charity begins at home" (April 17, Page 4). I would like to congratulate police officer Prem Bahadur Rai for doing such com-



CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME: Police officer Prem Bahadur Rai teaches children the ropes of English alphabets at his home in Sankhuwasabha on Thursday. Rai is spending his own money to educate 32 poor kids.

mendable work in his home village. As we know, where there is a will, there is a way; there is always room for doing something good for society. I am particularly impressed to see that he is not only funding but also directly involved in teaching the poor kids in his village. We should all try to learn something from him.

Dakkal Pandit  
Tinthana, Kathmandu

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The photo captioned "Charity begins at home" filled me with respect for Prem Bahadur Rai. In a nation where majority of children are deprived of basic education, police officer Prem Bahadur Rai is doing a great job of teaching kids in his village with his personal funds. I request the government to learn from this gentleman. I am very inspired by Rai and hope I can put the learning to practice.

Navin Kumar Devkot  
Binayak, Achham

## Welcome steps

The cabinet meeting on Thursday formed a high-level commission to provide suggestions on state restructuring as per the wishes of diverse groups of people ("State Restructuring Commission formed", April 17, Page 1). This is a welcome step. I look forward to the end of the centralised and unitary form of the state. Likewise, the legal service reform commission is also now in full shape with the appointment of three advocates from different communities - Lila Udashi

Khanal, Dev Narayan Yadav and Shanti Kumari Rai. This is another inclusive step made by the cabinet. The most important decision of the cabinet is to set up 240 integrated service centre (ESC) in all electoral constituencies to ease the issuance of citizenship certificates and passports. I'd like to congratulate the cabinet for all this and request the government and concerned authorities to implement the decisions as soon as possible.

Roshan Kumar Jha  
Rautahat, Gaur (now Kathmandu School of Law)

## Exemplary school

I was excited to read the news story "Vedic ritual to ward off politicking" (April 17, Page 1). The effort of Manthali Higher Secondary School in Ramechhap to ward off political interference in its educational activities by yearly setting aside a day for chanting Vedic mantras deserves appreciation. Many schools and colleges have now become political playgrounds. Schools are closed and students are being used to fulfil the political agenda of political parties and their sister organ-

isations. In this context, Manthali School's attempt to keep itself away from political shadow is exemplary. Why don't other educational institutions follow this example?

Rai Biren Bangdel  
Maharajgunj, Kathmandu

## 5th national games

The 5th national games ended only last week. But I am not happy. The question I'd like to ask the chairperson of the event is: Why were the champions of games like taekwondo, football, etc. not included in the 5th national games? However, I am very grateful to The Kathmandu Post team for covering the Champion League Quarter Finals. But I hope you will provide more details of such events in the future.

Gaurav Paudel  
Bicharichautara, Syangja

## People's army

This is in reference to the article "Party is state" by C Raja Mohan (April 16, Page 7). The argu-



ment holds well not only for China but also for Nepal at this juncture when army integration has become a major issue in Nepali politics. Army integration is the chief aim of Maoists as they want to hold power not only in government but also in security so as to meet the target of their people's war. We prefer a party-led army if it is for the people and by the people. So far the army -- both PLA and NA -- has only been used against the Nepali people. The high posts in the NA, for example, have often been occupied by those connected to the palace. Meanwhile, poor soldiers go on taking orders from "above" with little hope of reward. So the time has come to make Nepal's army a people's army.

Tsirag Nepali  
Sunsari