

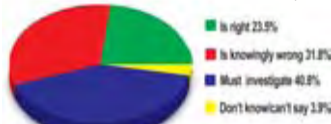


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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 320

Q. The government denies the OHCHR report that 49 people went missing from the Bhairabnath battalion. What do you think?

Total votes: 2,424



Weekly Internet Poll # 321. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Is the Maoist activity in Kathmandu a sign that they are joining the mainstream or planning a takeover?

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ILLCIT JOYS: Firecrackers were popular but expensive this Tihar, with Maoist cadres cornering the resale market.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

LIT FUSE

Vigilantes in the central tarai complicate the peace process

NARESH NEWAR
in KAPILBASTU

Last week in Kathmandu, the Maoists dispensed vigilante justice. In Kapilbastu, they're on the receiving end.

The anti-Maoist vigilantism that began in February 2005 is becoming institutionalised here. The security forces continue to protect vigilante groups, citizens' groups say, and provide them with much-needed resources in this proxy war against the Maoists.

People are scared to speak openly, but a local political leader in Sihokar village told us: "Forget about the peace process, eliminating the Maoists through

the use of armed vigilantes was always the plan, and the army continues to help them." The Nepal Army is still camped out in the compound of vigilante leader Abdul Mohit Khan's home.

Like the Maoist militia, the vigilantes are also potential spoilers in the peace process. But unlike the rebels, the only talks about managing them are happening at the local level. Shortly before Dasain, Kapilbastu human rights activists, journalists, and civil society groups held meetings with vigilante and political leaders to try and negotiate a tripartite agreement. The vigilantes refused to talk to the Maoists.

"If we don't deal with this now, we're going to see the

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vigilantism. Small arms are easily procured from across the open border with Uttar Pradesh.

Subedi says some vigilantes are seeing the advantages of moving into mainstream politics after NC leader Chitrallekha Yadab's recent visit here. Yadab made a fiery speech about tarai rights to a rapt audience of 10,000 at the launch of the Loktantrik Madhesi Mukti Morcha Nepal-Bharat Maitri Sangha in Bahadurganj last month. A number of Indian politicians attended the function.

The vigilantes are defiant. One said, "We'll continue our war against the Maoists until they stop extorting our villages." ●

Editorial p2
Hurry up

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Constitutional ability

Inclusion, participation, discipline

HURRY UP

Now that the holidays are over, it is time for the seven-party alliance and the Maoists to inject some momentum into the peace process. To recap: the army has sworn allegiance to civilian command, the king has said he will obey the will of the people, the Maoists have said they are committed to seeking a negotiated solution and the seven parties are all agreed on a more just and inclusive democracy.

So, what's holding things up? After all, Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Girija Prasad Koirala have managed to build some trust in the past months, and perhaps even some grudging admiration for each other as politicians. The seven parties and the Maoists may not see eye-to-eye on the nature of state restructuring, but they are unanimous on the mechanism: that it should be done through the setting up of an interim government under an interim constitution to organise constituent assembly elections. They have even agreed on the date of those polls. An agreement on an interim constitution should therefore just be a formality, right? Um, not quite.

There are a couple of roadblocks on the roadmap. Leaving aside ever-changing Maoist demands, which at one point during the talks even included the immediate abolition of monarchy (isn't that supposed to be decided by the constituent assembly?), it does look like the Maoists are shifting goalposts all the time. They are also flagrantly violating the code of conduct on the ceasefire with extortion which they don't even bother to hide anymore.

Even if the delay is deliberate posturing to pacify hotheads within their party, it has gone on for too long. The comrades wouldn't want the negotiation to seem too easy, and don't want to give the cadre the impression that they agreed to everything put on the table by the parties.

What we saw in the hemming-and-hawing at Baluwatar last month was the Maoists setting the stage for an agreement on an interim set-up which will now look like it was hard-won. Details of 'arms management', which is essentially a question of trust between the two sides, appear to have been ironed out.

We suggest that future negotiations not be held at Baluwatar with the ensuing circus that we witnessed during the last round. Sensitive talks such as these can't be held in the glare of the media spotlight and sloganeering on the streets outside.

At a certain point, posturing and time-buying are counterproductive. The Maoists may think they have time on their side, but they don't. Neither does the government. The people have been waiting and they don't like this suspense.

There is the added danger that delays in the peace process will tempt renegade royals, sectarian radicals, fundamentalists, and assorted criminal gangs to take advantage of the murky transition. Some of this is already happening. Maoist extortion during this extended interregnum has also undermined their future political base. The people have come to regard them as plain criminals and not the revolutionaries they are supposed to be. And for every week that drags by without a deal, the people also blame the seven parties for being selfish and disregarding the welfare of the people.

So, for everyone's sake (including their own) the 7+1 parties should look beyond immediate power gains to real progress towards peace in the coming weeks.

Kenya still doesn't have its new constitution 15 years after the process to write it began. The story has positive lessons and cautions for Nepal.

Kenya was a one-party dictatorship from 1982 to 1992, but in the late 1980s, Kenyans began a people's movement demanding reform and a return to constitutional democracy through a constituent assembly.

GUEST COLUMN
Yash Ghai and
Jill Cottrell

The government gave in and agreed to review the constitution. The process was participatory, and aimed at a constitution which respected human rights, multi-party democracy, and ethnic and gender equity.

First, an independent commission was set up in late 2000 to educate people about constitutions and to collect their views to form the basis of the draft constitution the constituent assembly would consider.

The 29-member commission was too large and the members were too often linked to political parties, but all were lawyers or people in public life.

The commission held meetings in every constituency, with interpreters for local languages and sign language. Thousands attended and the commission received 36,000

submissions, all were analysed. The results were freely available.

People spoke openly despite fear of retaliation. The urban poor and rural communities produced a more scathing critique of years of authoritarianism than any scholarly or NGO analysis, and this provided a secure basis for the reform agenda.

The draft constitution, while not perfect, was enthusiastically received. The constituent assembly (called the National Constitutional Conference) was to follow, though final approval depended on parliament on the insistence of the president, who controlled it.

The conference had 629 members, including all MPs, three elected members from each district, and another chosen by civil society groups. The chair ensured underrepresented groups and minorities had a voice.

Right before the first formal sitting in 2002, the president called an election. The assembly suspended work for five months. When they returned, politicians were making calculations of personal advantage.

But most conference delegates were committed and serious, and after 11 months of work it adopted a draft constitution which overall responded to the demands of the people. The size of the conference made rational discussion hard, some delegates

demanded higher allowances, others were bribed by politicians, and many stopped coming. Tribalism, which barely figured in popular submissions, became prominent. There was constant political interference, and delaying tactics. The process caused elation and frustration.

Decisions were made by consensus, failing which an article had to be accepted by a two-thirds majority. MPs persuaded the conference to reject some ideas that made them and their parties accountable. Some ideas accepted enthusiastically were not workable, notably the provisions for devolution of power to districts.

The draft constitution adopted proposed a parliamentary system to replace the existing all-powerful presidential system. But president Mwai Kibaki and his henchmen, loathe to lose power, 'persuaded' parliament to endorse a very different draft, which was put to a referendum. It was overwhelmingly rejected. People voted against it because they preferred the earlier draft, or out of dissatisfaction with the government, or for tribal reasons.

Kenya doesn't have its constitution yet, but for Nepal, these conclusions stand out:

- Get people involved.
- Give them the facts.
- Speed it up.
- Protect the process through the interim constitution.
- Keep the CA small.
- Short term self-interest is disruptive.
- A referendum is expensive, unpredictable, and in multi-ethnic societies can upset a carefully-negotiated draft. ●

Yash Ghai was chair of the Kenya's constituent assembly, and is a UNDP Adviser in Nepal on constitution making. Jill Cottrell is a consultant on constitutional matters.



Outside looking in

Far from home, Nepalis in Japan cling to their roots

TOKYO-Everything you've heard about this teeming city is true. It is meticulously planned, runs like clockwork and is the most automated city on earth. Over three million passengers pass through Shinjuku, the trainhead on the city's western edge. The railways are laid out over several layers deep underground. Millions of people walk through, seldom bumping into each other. Deep apologies are offered to a jumpy foreigner who accidentally brushes against fellow-commuters.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

One western myth about Japan is that its rigid rules of etiquette and civility make it an alien place. For us Asians, though, this is how we'd like our homes to be: with clean, safe streets, a belief in community, respect for the elderly, consideration for

others, and honouring guests.

No wonder so many Nepalis choose to stay on in this city long after their student or visitor visas expire. At Narita's immigration desk every newcomer from Nepal is a potential illegal immigrant. But there is no gruff interrogation, just courteous carefulness. No one has an exact count of the size of Nepali community here, not even the embassy.

But even in Nippon the Nepalis are fragmented by political, ethnic or other cleavages. Thakalis, Tamangs, Gurungs, and Sherpas have their own platforms to socialise.

The Newa International Forum Japan celebrated Mha Puja and Nepal New Year 1127 at the Community Centre in Kasai over the weekend. Flags of Japan and Nepal greeted visitors at the venue. Paras Ghimire, the officiating Nepali managed to deliver a scholarly speech. Thereafter, the *aila* and *awamori* started flowing and even

participating bahuns were inspired to dance to the tune of *Rajamati*.

But life in Japan isn't as smooth as it seems. Wherever they may choose to work and live, Nepalis have similar affinities, fears and hopes. Gone are the days of lifetime job security in Japan. In a desperate bid to cut costs, reduce the deficit, and decrease public debt, the government has begun to privatise, outsource and trim the flab. The private sector is trying hard to compete with new entrants to the global marketplace like China, Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan. The legendary Japanese labour force is being told that if it doesn't become even more innovative Samsung, Acer and Lenovo will take away jobs.

Japan's gastarbeiters have to work doubly hard to be tolerated, but the country is also aging fast and new workers are needed. But their position in this close-knit society is

always precarious. Japan has a homogeneous culture with relatively little religious, linguistic or ethnic diversity.

Dinesh Manandhar, a researcher in satellite communications, grew marigolds in a local community park for Mha Puja. The Japanese don't cultivate it, but Nepali families need it for tihar. The flowers were watered by the municipality and looked after by his community. This year the Nepalis didn't have to ration the flowers.

To survive in a world of inescapable interdependence and conformity, Nepalis must adapt, like others. Some children of Nepalis here have started kindergarten, and speak to their parents in Japanese. Newars originally from Patan, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Dharan, and Baglung were striking a balance at Kasai this week: recording Mha Puja in their digital cameras as documentary evidence that they are clinging to their roots. ●

LETTERS

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CK Lal has hit the nail on the head in stating that the country's farmers can't wait for complete resolution of the conflict ('Food for thought', #318). Farmers need relief now, yet some donors have them waiting for over two years without any new agricultural programs in the pipeline. The upper-income, urban-based, politically savvy have jumped the development queue yet again with democracy and governance projects and programs that will serve only themselves.

Scott E Justice, Kathmandu

RECONCILIATION

Although it was really good to be able to come home for Dasain, even briefly, much of what is happening amazed me.

The political factions spout democracy slogans while making decisions crucial to Nepal's future without the mandate of the Nepali people. Was the so-called 'rhododendron revolution' the only mandate needed? It had some genuine participants, no doubt, but who would deny that many rent-or-force-a-crowd participants were 'encouraged' by the Maoists? Is the widespread extortion at gunpoint democracy or tuggery?

At any given time in a nation, political party members make up a minority, significant only in the votes each brings to the table. These people have brought no votes in almost a decade, yet they are passing laws, making policies, talking of turning the whole structure of the nation on its head, replacing a constitutional/ceremonial monarchy. Replace with what, I'd like to ask. A presidency that will rip the people off even more, rebuilding expensive institutions and, as history shows, lead to more dictatorships and corrupt practices?

Political cadres have robbed the majority of a voice, through guns and by paying off newspapers to bleat on about the same old stories. Expat organisations carry more clout through their money than the people of Nepal, and they love wielding it despite having little knowledge of what they're doing. That's true globalisation, when people who don't

even have a vote and have not been voted for make all the decisions for a silent majority, cowed by force and money.

Now, the job of the interim government is to prepare the country for general elections. If the Maoists want to be a political party, they can put down their guns and campaign. People will accept them if they do it democratically. There should be no short cuts, no daft talk of dismantling the Nepal Army. Haven't they seen what happens elsewhere when civilians try to disband armies?

Terrible blunders have been made and it's now time for reconciliation in the style established by Desmond Tutu, not through reprisals and witchhunts. The SPA-Maoist talks give no cause for celebration so far.

KA Tamang, Middlesborough



NUMBSKULLS

Upon returning for my summer holidays, I was amazed to see that nearly all pillion drivers were no longer wearing helmets.

After the helmet-wearing rule was enforced in 2003, casualty figures dropped in Bir Hospital's emergency ward. But now Kathmandu has gone back to the pre-January 2003 situation. It would be interesting to hear what last month's number of casualties were compared to the numbers in June. It is sad to hear people say the helmet is really unnecessary, they certainly don't think of the repercussions following a road accident.

A Rajahalm, email

FRANCHISE FOR ALL

It is sad to see the stalemate in the peace process and that the Maoists have to take the onus for sticking the sore thumb. The government has been more than accommodating, but there are certain things a state can't breach such as the security and stability of a nation.

To place the state army and the rebel army in the same footing would be catastrophic. An institution that has been around for almost two and half centuries can't be terminated just to appease the rebels, it is the people who should decide by the means of adult franchise.

All peace loving Nepalis would like to appeal to the Maoists to be more serious about a peaceful settlement. And if the Maoists create any city-centric unrest, such an attempt will be akin to treachery and should be taken as an act of war.

PB Rana, email

KING

I have serious reservation about the article 'King in Crisis' (From the Nepali Press, #319). It is true that the Nepali monarchy has been made almost useless by the ridiculous steps King Gyanendra took, but terming King Birendra as the only real king for the people is totally wrong. King Birendra had his own share of faults during his tenure as an absolute monarch and then as a so-called constitutional monarch. Had he stepped in timely and cautioned Girija and the others that he would not allow them to misuse their power, things would have been totally different.

I still remember how a minister during both the Panchayat and so-called democratic era used to fill many posts in government-owned corporations with people from his districts. Similarly, for top government appointments, one main criteria was that the person come from either Morang, Dang, Tanahu, Dadeldhura, Kalaiya or another district represented by the powerful ministers. This was responsible for creating even more divisions in our society. The main point is not pointing fingers at a particular institution or class for all wrongs and sufferings, but trying to find a longterm sustainable solution so that all the people can live in peace and harmony.

Even the government formed by such incredible people power is repeating old mistakes. So is it fair to make only the monarchy a scapegoat?

Abhi, New Delhi

ILLEGAL

On Monday, Nepal saw yet another banda called by the FNCCI. Visiting their homepage, you will see their vision, objectives and mission are well defined, but how well are they following them?

The FNCCI is supposed to lead Nepal towards economic growth. We have already suffered due to the conflict and political instability. Nationwide and regional bandas have crippled the economy. Despite all that, the FNCCI, the so-called guardian of all Nepali businesses and economic institutions, called for a closure. The president must be aware that one banda day incurs a huge loss in national economic growth. I wonder how he would react to a strike in his own Memento Apparels?

Sometimes the Maoists are on strike, at others it is the political parties or student wings or temporary teachers and doctors, the list goes on. Isn't this a serious abuse that human rights organisations should look into?

Pravesh Saria, email

CLARIFICATION

Due to an editing error, the context of last week's illustration on page 2 was missing. UNOCHA routinely monitors and reports on the ability of the humanitarian and development agencies to operate and implement their programs freely throughout the country. The September Operational Space map, published in #319, is part of this effort. Regular updates and reports are available at www.un.org.np.

Due to a layout error, the last line from 'Home for the holidays' was omitted. Kul Chandra Gautam's quote should have read: "That's the only way to keep your humility and remain realistic. Those are the things that have been useful in my life."

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RAMESHWOR BOHARA

Trafficking tactics

A new bus route and employment dreams are getting women in trouble

RAMESHWOR BOHARA

The new Kathmandu-Delhi bus route is making monitoring trafficking more challenging than usual. It's also the newest way for women, egged on by manpower agents who dupe them, to try and illegally make their way to Kuwait.

In mid-September 15 young women from Rasuwa, Solukhumbu, Okhaldhunga, and Khotang were stopped at the Jamunaha checkpoint near Nepalganj. They said they were going to Kuwait via New Delhi.

These women were stopped when police and Maiti Nepal workers were conducting a regular check of public transport. Most of them, between 16 and 22, were turned over to their relatives, since they had neither the papers nor the finances necessary for their alleged journey to Kuwait.

Such women are considered high-risk for being sold, and in the last two months more than 100 women from Sindupalchok, Nuwakot, Banke, Rasuwa, Salyan, Jhapa, and Gorkha have been sent back from the border.

When the direct Kathmandu-Delhi bus route opened three months ago, more and more groups of women began crossing the border, and police sources say they stepped up vigilance at checkpoints. Rita Bhattarai, coordinator of Maiti Nepal's Nepalganj office, says traffickers also make frequent use of the open border in Banke, Bardia, Kailali, and Kanchanpur.

Nepali women are not allowed to travel to Kuwait to work, except in the organised sector, yet manpower agents continue to offer them work as well-paid domestic help. Often this is a trap, and the women end up being trafficked in India.

Until now, women being trafficked crossed the border in rickshaws and horse carts, travelling alone or with a watcher, who often kept their distance. Groups of women on the buses now say they are out on a shopping expedition or, increasingly, that they are going to Kuwait.

Kuwait may not be as bad as Mumbai brothels, but it's far from ideal and women there legally have little recourse to help when in trouble. Maiti Nepal staff in Nepalganj say they've received eight complaints this year, one from a woman who was taken to Kuwait and sexually abused, and the rest from women who ended up in the brothels of Bombay instead of the jobs they were promised in Kuwait. "We managed to bring two women back from the brothels and are preparing to rescue more taken from Surkhet, Banke, and Dang," says Bhattarai.

The women stopped on 20 September were only carrying Rs 500 each, and none could say how they planned to fly without any money. "We didn't have to pay for the bus ticket or food," says Anjana Rai from Khotang, who was persuaded to come along by Akalmaya Sunuwar from Okhaldhunga. Sunuwar claimed to have a relative in Kuwait who had told her to "get in touch with someone in Delhi who would take us to Kuwait", but was vague on details and unable to name the contact person.

All 15 women, most who hadn't even made it to SLC, were either very confused about their destination or had been told not to disclose any details. "It was clear that they would have never reached Kuwait and would instead end up in brothels in India," says Bhattarai.

Even if the group had reached Kuwait, chances are that they'd end up working as domestic help and possibly be sexually abused. On 28 September, Daya Gadtaula from Jhapa spoke to the press of how she and 13 other women in Kuwait were suffering under appalling conditions. It seems that no matter where these women go, their dreams of a better life are met with exploitation and misery. ●

musically nepal

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NEW PRODUCTS



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CHEERS: Royal Challenge Premium Whisky, a blend of rare Scotch and Indian malt whiskies matured in imported white oak casks is now available from Mc Dowell Nepal. The 750ml, 350ml, and 180ml bottles are initially priced at Rs 600, 300, and 150 respectively.



LOVELY MEN: Unilever Nepal has introduced Fair & Lovely Menz Active, a fairness treatment specially formulated to deal with male skin. It includes extra sunscreen, silicone conditioners and Vitamin B3 for rougher skin types, and comes in 25gm and 50gm packs, priced at Rs 48 and Rs 85 respectively.

TIPPLER'S PARADISE: Scot & Scott Nepal have launched seven different brands of liquor for the Kathmandu market. Tippler whisky and Joop gin both boast 34.2 percent alcohol, with Champ whisky, Jazz gin, Sipp rum, and Gambay dudiya are all in the 28.6 percent category. Bichu liquor is aimed at the lower end of the market.





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Winning is not the only thing

"Winning is the only thing," so proclaims a business magazine in Kathmandu. But in today's super-heated times, when your taking an additional slice of the pie leaves me a smaller share, there is an unsavoury side to winning. The tendency to win at any cost often comes by taking short cuts to glory.



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

Consider the case of Rajendra Bhandari (pictured), a talented runner from Tanahu, who trained with the Nepal Army. When Bhandari won two gold medals in the recent 10th South Asian Games (SAG), Nepali sports fans were delirious with joy.

But he ended up testing positive—not once but twice—for apparently having used banned performance-enhancing drugs.

True, there's a tiny chance that Bhandari's test results might have been wrong. But that's beside the point. Bhandari wanted to win at any cost, and succeeded in the short run, only to have his SAG records declared null and void. His trainers and sports officials can keep blaming one another. But the conclusion is unmistakable: no international tournament will allow Bhandari to run competitively for some time. And that is his loss and ours.

Consider too the case of the Maoists, who expanded their terms of reference unilaterally to launch Operation Crime Control.

Last week, they hauled up around 60 Nepalis for "various criminal activities." It's one thing to genuinely want to win the people's hearts through good work. But this glaring instance of the pot calling the kettle black was hardly reassuring. It smacked of a process of eliminating competition in the guise of assisting ordinary Nepalis.

Besides, in a free society like ours, from where did the Maoists derive their authority to arrest innocent-until-proven-guilty Nepalis? And if we allow the Maoists to win at carrying out such activities, who and what is to stop them tomorrow from arresting anyone they dislike?

Winning at any cost takes other forms too. Businessmen borrow millions from state-run banks, and do not bother to settle their loans. Politicians won their privilege in April to lead the nation out of its deadlock. But since then, they have been busy acting as though their privilege to govern were their inalienable right to stay in power. Likewise, rich and influential Kathmandu parents desperately want to win in the game of having their kids obtain admissions to selective US and UK colleges, even if that means requesting teachers to fudge records, thus destroying the chances of other, more deserving students.

One reason winning at any cost has become an obsession is that there's this growing perception that competition for everything is fierce, that the pie has become smaller, and that



ANUP PRAKASH

winning alone brings disproportionately large rewards to a few. It's the visible results that seem to matter, not the quiet, honest means to achieve them.

Still, such an attitude is hardly surprising in contemporary urban Nepal. This is a society filled with losers—as in those made unable to win by completing primary education, passing SLC exams, getting decent employment, and ranking high in most comparative international indices. Here, winning at any cost by those in positions of power and privilege distorts everyone else's behaviours and ruins the game for all.

Winning is not the only thing, if the means to achieve are those of losers. ●

"It all comes down to service"



MIN BAJRACHARYA

In the seven short years since it started as a regional bank in Pokhara, Machhapuchchhre Bank has become one of Nepal's fastest-growing banks, with branches from Kathmandu to Jomson. Nepali Times spoke with Bhai Kajee Shrestha, CEO, about what the future holds.

Nepali Times: You worked for Rastra Bank earlier. What's the transition been like?

Bhai Kajee Shrestha: My previous role in the central bank, as a regulator at the policy formulation level, helped me understand the workings of a commercial bank and made it easier for me to adapt here. For example, the central bank has many regulations with which we have to comply, and prior knowledge of those makes it easier.

How do you rate the Rastra Bank's supervision of private banks?

It's satisfactory, but they have to develop their capacity through staff training and improving their technical know-how.

How about your own employees?

We have orientation and on-the-job training for staff when they join us. We also regularly provide training courses for our staff within Nepal and abroad.

Seven years into operations, how are you doing?

Our customers must evaluate us. But if you ask me, we've been doing pretty well. We've only been in Kathmandu for two years, and we've grown by almost 150 percent. We started off as a regional bank in Pokhara and as of last week, we had a deposit of nine billion and loan advances of Rs 65 billion. Our non-performing assets are low in comparison with other banks, less than one percent.

What special features does Machhapuchchhre offer its customers?

Service. There are other attractions too, for example, our interest rates for deposits are slightly higher than those offered by first or second generation banks, but we mainly

attract customers due to our attention to service. We now have 20,000 loyal customers.

Why do you think the banking sector is doing well, but not other industries?

The past 12 years of conflict have definitely played a big role in weakening our economy but it's not as if industrial expansion hasn't taken place at all. Industry may have contributed less than expected to the national economy, but there has been development—why else would the demand for loans grow 20 percent annually.

So there's liquidity?

Yes, and remittances boost liquidity considerably. At our bank alone, we get an average of \$200,000 a day through institutional and individual remittances. There are 17 other banks, some getting more remittances than us.

Still, people are not yet fully convinced by the ceasefire and the peace process. We are also waiting and watching, which is why banks are not in a hurry to invest in new projects.

How do you see the next few years playing out?

Once there is peace—and we are hopeful—we think the hydro sector can flourish. Hydropower is our priority and we are working on nine projects, of which five are already in operation.

There are now 18 commercial banks including Agricultural Development Bank and a few more are coming up. There are also donor banks, finance companies, INGOs, NGOs, postal saving banks. There is tough competition everywhere. We'll continue to focus on service and are shortly opening six more branches, in Kalimati, Gongabu, Gwarko, Damak, Itahari, and Baglung.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Interim

Jana Aastha, 18 October

अगरथ

If the government-Maoist peace talks succeed and the country heads towards a constituent assembly, there will be elections for 409 seats. An interim arrangement with 315 seats will also be formed. Although issues like weapons management and the fate of the monarchy are still unsolved, both sides have agreed to the number of seats in the constituent assembly and the interim management.

According to sources, the number of seats for the constituent assembly increased, as the terms of National Assembly members had not expired and the seven parties demanded that their members of the lower House of Representatives

also be included. The total number of members in both the houses stands at 209 at the moment.

The number in the HoR is less than 200, as some MPs have died, some were murdered, and others were expelled by their parties for supporting the royal regime. There are less than a dozen members left in the 60-seat National Assembly, as elections to it have not been held in the last five years, and the king did not nominate any members.

The Maoists had proposed forming a 51-member interim arrangement [sic] comprising representatives of civil society and party leaders, but they also agreed to the parties' proposal to include members from both Houses. The interim arrangement will have 203 MPs from both Houses. The remaining 106 members will come from the Maoist side and from civil society. Some MPs in the Lower House supported the regression and accepted ministerial and administrative posts dispensed by the royal regime. Their seats are to be given to the Left Front.

Lawlessness

Yubaraj Ghimire *Samaya*, 2 November

सगर

The Nepali media has a lot to expect from the ongoing peace talks between the government and the Maoists. The enthusiasm comes not just from the ceasefire but also from Chairman Prachanda's public commitment to respect freedom of the press in policy and in practice. Nepali media has many flaws but despite that, it has continued to work for the last 15 years. It has been the first to protest when democracy and citizen's rights and freedoms are curtailed. It also gave the Maoists a platform to voice their opinions, even if that meant suffering at the hands of the government.

Now the Maoist leadership needs to clarify with what authority their cadres controlled the streets outside the prime minister's residence. What right did they have to check media people and civilians gathered there? Home Minister Krishna Sitaula is unaware of parliamentary culture and of his responsibilities, and does not have an answer. However Sitaula's political patron Girija Prasad Koirala will certainly have to provide one.

The regional Maoist leadership may have apologised, but action against mediapersons and political opponents continues unabated. Activities like attacking

members of the trade union GEFONT, and torturing a commoner and accusing him of having murdered his wife while she was actually alive will affect the ongoing peace talks and the peace and security situation afterwards. This is a result of the failure of the ceasefire code of conduct monitoring committee formed jointly by the government and the Maoists.

Will those who have risen by taking the law into their hands be able to live within the law if they come to power through agreements motivated by the political situation? Statements like "We won't let you go even if Prachanda himself is here," have been repeatedly said not just outside Baluwater but also from leaders of various Maoist fronts and sister organisations.

Active king

Janadharana, 19 October

अरुण

The UML leadership's decision to hold a referendum on the fate of the monarchy is causing under confusion. This was not expected from UML, which has always said that a democratic republic was their main political agenda. On the one hand, they want to establish a republic by throwing away the monarchy. On the other, they are also keen to pull a politically inactive king into mainstream politics by pushing the option of a referendum on the monarchy.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

Everyone is surprised at dubious policy of the UML. The UML's idea of holding a referendum will create more political complexities and push the monarch towards politics whether he wants to be involved or not. There is also every possibility of a new party emerging, headed by the king.

Political gurus conclude that the king and his loyal royalists will do anything to ensure that the referendum is in favour of the monarchy. It is time the UML opened its eyes and withdrew its proposal referendum unless they want the king back in action.

Extortion

Desantar, 22 October

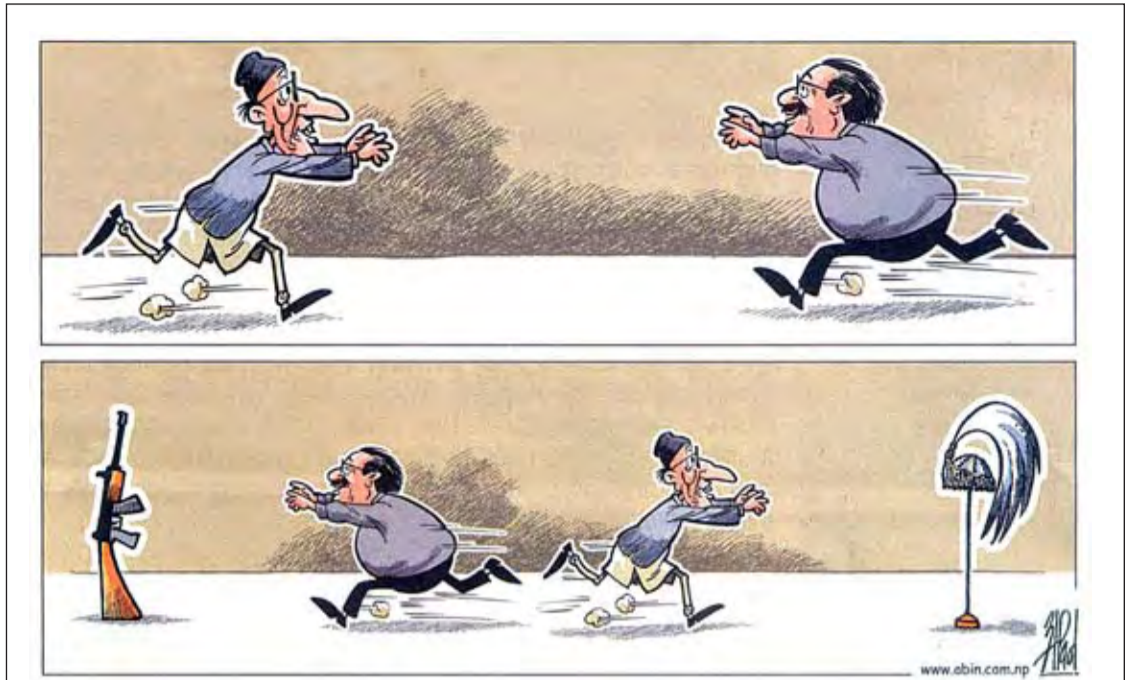
उत्कर्षण-सडक-डोला

DOLALGHAT— The Maoists in their combat dress intimidate everyone along the highway, and

collect donations from each passing vehicle, public or private. Drivers have to pay each time they enter the highway. A group of Maoists belonging to the 'Tamang Autonomous Republic Region' of Ramechhap and Kabhre have been mobilised under the leadership of sub-commander 'LB' at Dolalghat bajar.

Every day, they collect over Rs 10,000 from buses, minibuses, lorries, vans, and tourist coaches in Sindupalchok, Kabhre, Dolakha, and Ramechhap districts. Besides privately-owned vehicles, even drivers of government cars have been terrorised by this extortion drive. The Maoists tax government vehicles more than others. They are also demanding a minimum 'entry tax' of Rs 500 from each tourist who comes on to the Arniko highway from Tibet. Around 3,000 tourists enter Nepal from Tibet [every month].

Similarly, hundreds of Nepali tourists visit Tatopani. In addition to taxes, the Maoists are now demanding tv sets, Chinese blankets, cameraa, mobile phones, and other expensive equipment from local traders. The demands are getting more extravagant, and the of Maoist workers making such expensive demands is also on the rise along this main highway.



समय Abin Shrestha in Samaya, 2 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ We cannot be a part of politics that aims to polarise the country on the basis of class and in the name of a republican front. ”

Nepali Congress central committee member Chakra Prasad Bastola in Kantipur, 26 October

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

Death row

Himal Khabarpatrika, 18 October-1 November

हिमाल

Maoist workers Hiralal Shrestha (pictured) and Gyaljen Sherpa face an uncertain future in the Chinese prison in Lhasa, where they have been incarcerated for the last three years. They were arrested by Chinese police in Khasa bajar for possession of arms and communications equipment. Although Hiralal explained that they were Maoist workers, the police filed a criminal case of arms smuggling against them. Both are now on death row.

The death sentence handed down to the two Maoists has been the subject of international attention. In addition to appeals from international human rights organisations, Nepal has also requested China to reconsider the verdict. Even when the relationship between the Maoists and government was at its worst, former premier Sher Bahadur Deuba had asked the Chinese government to repeal the death sentences. Sources say that this is already under consideration. Meanwhile, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Kong Quan says the final decision is yet to be made.

Before the peace talks summit began, the Maoist leaders had requested Prime Minister Girija Koirala to again appeal for the release of the duo. There is no confirmation on whether the current Nepal government has already made any efforts towards that end.

While they await a final verdict, Shrestha and Sherpa are optimistic. They keep busy, labouring for two hours a day on the prison farm. They receive free medical treatment, clothing in addition to the prison uniform, access to a telephone, and are permitted to meet visitors. "He looked happy and has no grudge against the Chinese government," said Hiralal's brother Yandralal.

Former UML worker Shrestha was a teacher in his Sindupalchok village and quit his full-time job to join Maoist politics seven years ago. He was a senior member of the Sindu-Dolkha district committee. His comrade Gyaljen owned a small shop. Since they lived close to the China border, they travelled frequently to Tibet.

Nepali porters helped the Chinese police to arrest Shrestha and Sherpa.



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WASHED AWAY: Norbu Sherpa points to the spot where his house once stood before it was destroyed by the Dig Tsho flood in 1985.



AARATI GURUNG/WWF NEPAL

The consequences of climate change are evident in Khumbu

The heat is on

NORBU SHERPA in GHAT, KHUMBU

Just over 20 years ago I saw a glacial lake outburst flood destroy my home. This summer I saw a forest fire. In between we've seen numerous other changes, incremental rather than dramatic—less winter rain, fewer mushrooms in the forest, the snow line moving up—that we now know are the result of climate change.

When Langmoche glacier, also known as the Dig Tsho glacial lake, broke its banks at 3PM on 4 August, 1985, in just two hours our little village was shattered. We lost houses, cattle, and arable land. The damage amounted to Rs 1.2 million back then. Also destroyed were the almost-completed microhydropower plant in Thamo, which cost \$1.5 million and

hundreds of hours of lobbying, planning, and work. Bridges were damaged and communications cut off.

After two decades of hard work, we've bounced back. One of my jobs is working as a tourist guide in season. When I was a child, we'd get two to three feet of snow in the village, and it would stay for days. Now I count myself lucky that I can see something like that when I go trekking and climbing in the high mountains.

Winter rain, so important for agriculture and our water supply, has become also become unpredictable. The dry winter we had last year is what caused the forest fire, something we've never seen. The forest behind our village is drying up. The spring the village uses for drinking water and irrigation is also drying up, and the water mill between

Ghat and Phakding is no longer functional.

Talk to elders who know about these things and they'll tell you how sensitive mushrooms, which we love, are to changes in climate, and how the forests behind Ghat were once filled with bamboo shoots and mushrooms.

It's incredible what a ripple effect something like climate change can have. You wouldn't think builders would be terribly affected, but of course they are. Tenzing, a construction expert in Ghat says traditional knowledge about how to build houses is dying out. "Now homes have thinner walls and the roofs need a lot less support. It just isn't as cold as it used to be, nor does it snow as much, so we're forgoing traditional insulation and construction techniques and materials."

Every time I go trekking I'm awed by the beauty of where I come from. But I also see the snow line moving up, and glacial lakes forming and expanding. Many of the factors behind climate change may be far away, in North America and Europe, but we feel the impact here. Every time I see a glacial lake—and there are many—I get a bit of a jolt, and wonder what if.

While the prospect of another GLOF is terrifying, I, and many like me, worry about the small signs even more. A fern disappears, a forest dries up and burns, pastures move further up and homes down to the cities. And we lose a part of what makes us who we are. ●

Norbu Sherpa, a high altitude trekking and climbing guide, is also former chairman of the Dudh Kunda community forestry user group in Sagarmatha National Park's buffer zone.

CLIMATE CHANGE WILL CAUSE A RECESSION



JAMES RANDERSON

Climate change could tilt the world economy into the worst recession in recent history, warns a UK Treasury report. Nicholas Stern, a former World Bank chief economist, will warn that governments need to tackle the problem head-on by cutting emissions or face economic ruin. The findings will turn the

Dealing with it will boost the economy

economic argument about global warming on its head by insisting that fighting global warming will save industrial nations money. The US refused to join the Kyoto protocol on greenhouse gas emissions because George Bush said it would harm the economy.

"All of Stern's detailed modelling out to the year 2100 is going to indicate first of all that if we don't take global action we are going to see a massive downturn in global economies," said David King, the UK government's chief scientific adviser. "If no action is taken we will be faced with the kind of downturn that has not been seen since the great depression and the two world wars." He also called the review the most detailed economic analysis yet.

"This is not just an environmental problem," said British foreign secretary Margaret Beckett. "It is a defence problem. It is a problem for those who deal with economics and development, conflict prevention, agriculture, finance, housing, transport, innovation, trade and health."

Stern argues that tackling the problem may not prove as economically painful as some experts predict. The International Energy Agency predicts that \$15 trillion of investment in new energy sources will be required over the next 15 years. "The massive investment program that's ahead of us is an opportunity to move towards a zero carbon energy system. The investment process is going to act quite possibly in the opposite direction to an economic downturn," King said.

He drew parallels between scientific advice on global warming and advice from seismologists ahead of the 2004 tsunami. A month before the disaster a delegation warned governments around the Indian Ocean about the extreme danger posed by tectonic activity under the sea. No government chose to act on the advice. "\$30 million as the cost to install some kind of early warning system presumably looked like a lot of money." But such a system could have saved 150,000 lives. ● (*The Guardian*)

Nature's fury

To manage conflict, we need ecological solutions, not just military ones

Our political systems and global politics are largely unequipped for the real challenges of today's world. Global economic growth and rising populations are putting unprecedented stresses on the physical environment, which in turn creates extraordinary social challenges. But politicians are largely ignorant of these trends and governments aren't organised to meet them. Crises that are fundamentally ecological in nature are managed by outdated strategies of war and diplomacy.



COMMENT
Jeffrey D. Sachs

Consider Darfur, Sudan. This horrible conflict is being addressed through threats of military force, sanctions, and the language of war and peacekeeping. Yet the origin of the conflict is the region's extreme poverty, made disastrously worse in the 1980s by a drought that has essentially lasted until today. It appears that long-term climate change is leading to lower rainfall not only in Sudan, but also in much of Africa south of the Sahara, where life depends on the rains, and drought means death.

Nobody approaches Darfur's drought-induced death-trap from the perspective of

long term development. Darfur needs a water strategy more than a military strategy. Yet all the talk at the United Nations is about sanctions and armies, with no path to peace in sight.

Water stress is a major obstacle to economic development in many countries. China and India will face growing water crises in the coming years, with potentially horrendous consequences. The economic takeoff of these two giants started 40 years ago with higher agricultural output and an end to famines. Yet part of that increased agricultural output resulted from millions of wells sunk to tap underground water supplies for irrigation. Now the water table is falling dangerously fast, as underground water is being pumped much faster than the rains can recharge it.

Aside from rainfall patterns, climate change is upsetting the flow of rivers, as glaciers, which provide a huge amount of water for irrigation and household use, rapidly recede due to global warming. Snow pack in the mountains is melting earlier in the season, so river water is less available during summer growing seasons.

Given the heat waves, droughts, and other climate stresses across the US, Europe, Australia, and elsewhere this year, wheat prices are shooting to their highest levels in decades. With rising populations, economic growth, and climate change, we



will face intensifying droughts, hurricanes and typhoons, El Niños, water stress, heat waves, species extinction, and more.

Environment and climate issues will be the hard, strategic concerns of the 21st century. Yet people who speak about hunger and environmental crises are viewed as muddle-headed moralists, as opposed to hard-headed realists who deal with war and peace. This is nonsense. The so-called realists don't understand the sources of tensions and stresses that are causing crises around the world.

Governments should establish Ministries of Sustainable Development, to manage the links between environmental change and human well-being. Agriculture ministers by themselves can't cope with water shortages that farmers will face. Health ministers won't be able to cope with an increase in infectious diseases

due to global warming or environment ministers with the pressures on oceans and forests. A new powerful ministry should be charged with coordinating the responses to climate change, water stress, and other ecosystem crises.

The treaties governments have signed in recent years on climate, environment, and biodiversity are as important to global security as the war zones and crisis hotspots that grab the headlines, budgets, and attention.

By focusing on the underlying challenges of sustainable development, our governments could more easily end current crises, as in Darfur, and head off many more in the future. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey Sachs is professor of economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

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Money and happiness

In 50 years, we might all be bourgeois



The recently-released Penn World Table compares living standards across countries for 2004. Not all countries are included because of data lags, but these numbers are valuable as they account for relative price differences, sometimes leading to surprising results.

There is good news for the 82 countries included in the survey: real per capita GDP has risen by an average of 18.9 percent



ANALYSIS
Robert J Shiller

between 2000 and 2004, or 4.4 percent per year. At this rate, real per capita GDP will double every 16 years.

Many people who could not afford a car in 2000 now have one, and people who could afford only one car in 2000 now have two. More people can afford to send their children to a good school or college, and consume a range of goods and services.

Despite the 'Chinese economic miracle', China's ranking rose by just one place from 2000, to 60. This is despite per capita real GDP having the highest growth rate of the major countries, 9.6 percent a year.

The reason is that other countries have also been growing, and the gaps between countries are enormous—the average real per capita GDP of the top 25 percent of countries is 15 times that of the bottom 25. Other big winners include Lithuania (up 48 percent), Chile (up 33 percent), Korea (up 23 percent), and Nigeria (up 22 percent).

If such growth rates continue, in 50 years we will see relatively poor countries like India, Indonesia, the Philippines, or Nicaragua reach the current average levels in advanced countries. But they won't have caught up with them, as those countries will have moved ahead too.

If just about every country's GDP doubled or quadrupled, what would they do with all that money?

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith in his 1958 bestseller *The Affluent Society*, wrote: '[With the enormous changes in living standards] many of the desires of the individual are no longer even evident to him. They become so only as they are synthesised, elaborated and nurtured by advertising and salesmanship, and these, in turn, have become among our most important and talented professions.'

But real per capita GDP in the US is now three times higher than it was in 1958. What have people been spending all that extra money on?

Data suggests that Americans spent 27 percent of the huge increase in income between 1958 and 2005 on medical care, 23 percent on their homes, 12 percent on transportation, ten percent on recreation, and nine percent on personal business.

The products advertisers and salesmen typically promote were relatively unimportant. Food got only eight percent of the extra money, and clothing three percent. Unfortunately, idealistic activities also fared badly: three percent for welfare and religious activities, and a similar share for education. Thus, most of the extra money was spent on staying healthy, having a nice home, travelling and relaxing, and doing a little business.

Maybe that is the way it will be around the world. As long as we can keep worldwide growth going at its current rate, billions of people can look forward to the same kind of improvement. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Robert J Shiller is professor of economics at Yale and author of *Irrational Exuberance* and *The New Financial Order: Risk in the 21st Century*.

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Whaling away

Iceland decided this week to resume commercial whaling, defying an international ban and making it the pariah of the green world. Japan and Norway, the only other significant whaling countries, are watching carefully. All three countries have continued commercial whaling exceeding their 'quotas', saying it is for "scientific" purposes. Polls show that 70-80 percent of Icelanders support commercial whaling, though curiously in 2004, just a quarter of the meat taken by the Icelandic whaling fleet was sold, and the country's industrial freezers are full of unsold whale from previous seasons. Only 1 percent of Icelanders eat whale meat once a week or more, while 82.4 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds never eat whale meat. Meanwhile, the international market is saturated. The Norwegians failed to meet their quota of whales last year, and still had to turn some of the catch into pet food. In Japan, whale meat is being handed out to schoolchildren. Why still whale? These countries say it's part of their tradition, of who they are. (The Guardian)

Say yes to DDT

The WHO has called for an increase in the use of controversial pesticide DDT in developing countries, particularly in Africa, in redoubled attempts to fight malaria. DDT is notorious for the environmental damage it causes, and is banned in the US. However, the WHO hopes to promote indoor spraying to kill mosquitoes that bite people while they sleep. The organisation argues that with proper use DDT is the most safe, effective and economic solution. Anti-malaria experts insist that this will be a key part in the fit against the disease, which infects half a billion people each year and kills more than a million, mostly children.



No fast moves

In a move to curb domestic dissent and fend off a western 'cultural invasion', Iran's Islamic government has banned high-speed internet links. Restricting internet speeds to 128kbps is intended to discourage downloads of foreign movies, music and tv programs, and hinder the political opposition's efforts to use the internet as a tool. With an estimated five million internet users, Iran is second only to China when it comes to censoring blogs and websites. The ban on high-speed internet comes in the wake of a crackdown on illegal satellite dishes, used to secretly watch western television, and increasing media restrictions. The ban has drawn flak from MPs, internet providers, and the public, and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was sent a 1,000-signature petition against the ban.



PICS: DAMBAR K SHRESTHA



OUTSIDERS: Jhabadi Debi Sada can barely feed or clothe her children (left); Sita Mallik is out of the landlord-dalit trap and works as a sweeper in a Dhankuta hospital. But when it comes to the village pond and teashop, she's still an outcaste.

Sideswiped

Madhesi dalits are on no one's agenda

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
in HARIPUR, SAPTARI

Jhabadi Debi Sada from Haripur in Saptari district works every day from 7AM to 6PM in her landlord's fields, as does her husband. For their efforts, they get nine kilos of paddy a month. Jhabadi Debi's husband sells some of the paddy to buy rice, salt, and oil. When we meet her, she's returned from another day of backbreaking work to care for her five children.

"I've never seen more than Rs 50 in my life, and we almost never have enough to eat," says Jhabadi Debi, who knows she was married at 12, but has lost count of the years since.

You hear the same story in every one of the 35 Musahar households you go to in Chakdaha, Haripur.

In the hotbed of tarai ethnic politics, mainstream madhesi rights activists, anti-hillspeople vigilantes, Maoist splinter groups and Tharu groups are demanding everything from

greater autonomy to secession. But Madhesi dalits are nowhere in the equation.

In east Nepal there are hundreds of communities like this one in Chakdaha. In Siraha and Saptari alone over 225,000 dalits live in dire poverty. The local Saraswati Community Development Forum, which works in five districts in Saptari, says that 85 percent of the dalit community in the area do not have enough to eat all year long. They also do not have citizenship certificates.

Most Madhesi dalits are perpetually indebted. Debki Debi Sada looks a lot older than the 32 years her citizenship certificate says she is. Married at 18 to Mithulal Sada, she spends her days looking after their five children. This family has five kilos of paddy a month, and as with the others, there is only work in the fields for five months of the year. The rest of the time they scrounge for manual labour, and take loans from their landlords. "We repay them by working again. That's why we never have money," says Debki Debi.

They sell the paddy they get from the landowner at Rs 7-12, but must buy rice for as much as Rs 24 a kilo. Vegetables are unaffordable and to stretch the rice they make it into a thin gruel with a little salt and green

chilli. On lucky days they have boiled pumpkin, but they have less and less land from the landlords to grow vegetables.

They are not kamaiyas, but the cycle of poverty and patronage they are caught in makes the situation of Madhesi dalits little better than that of bonded labour. Landowners still give away workers to each other in dowry or when they formalise friendship. Parau Saud's family was brought to Haripur two generations ago when a landlord here tied a bond of friendship with a landowner from another village. "Our landlord didn't have enough labourers, so his friend sent 12 families to work here. That's how this settlement was established in Chakdaha," explains Saud.

Haripur's Musaharas are subject to all the usual strictures against dalits, but here even the school teachers taunt their children. If they actually get to school—dalit children are entitled to an annual Rs 250 government scholarship, but for many families the paperwork to claim this money is daunting. And the money is nowhere near enough for clothes, books, and school supplies. Jhabadi Debi gestures to her children, who are running around naked and says, "Sure, we admitted them to school, but where's the money to buy them pencils?"

The Musahar community is preparing for its biggest annual festival, Dinabadri, by going around neighbouring villages, banging their drums and begging for food. For a community that lives, barely, on the edges of a society in upheaval, that's the only option. ●

Closer to home

SANGITA MARAHATTA in LONDON

It's now feasible to launch a 24-hour Nepali news and entertainment satellite channel. Clearly, the Nepali diaspora has attained critical mass.

Bijay Thapa, a London-based Nepali entrepreneur, launched Nepali TV in November 2005. The programs are beamed from London and can be watched in 55 countries in Europe, the Arab world and parts of North Africa.

Already, UK-based Nepalis are getting the channel on cable to watch their favourite Nepali soaps and follow the news from back home.

"I knew we could do it when I saw lots of Nepalis in Britain watching the Hindi channels," Thapa told us, "it was the closest thing to Nepali they had, so why not give them the real thing?"

But it took a while trying to convince the British government to grant them a broadcasting license. "They were sceptical about whether we had enough viewers, but were convinced by the expanding ex-Gurkha community in the UK."

In the past six months, Nepali TV started test transmissions with music videos and tv serials. The response was overwhelming and following audience demand, the television channel started a half-hour news show broadcast live from London.

The news show is popular and reports

A new satellite tv channel offers the growing Nepali diaspora a link to home



COURTESY SANGITA MARAHATTA

Ananta Nepal reads the news live in the London studio of Nepali TV.

are filed by Nepali TV's Kathmandu office. The channel also has a 'Music on demand' show in which Nepalis from across the world can call and request songs.

Running a 24-hour television channel is expensive business and it has been a

struggle. "Our target is the overseas Nepali business community because we want to make Nepali TV sustainable mainly through commercials and the subscription fees," says Thapa, who is also director of the company. Initially a free-to-air channel,

Nepali TV has now become a pay channel. The subscriber base is also going up.

Nepali TV's programs are produced both in Kathmandu and London. 'Sandesh' is a popular slot that serves as a messenger for people back home to relatives and friends abroad and vice versa. Other highly-rated shows are old teleserials that have already been broadcast back home, like *Hijo ajaka kura*, *Tito satya*, *Pabankali*, and *Jire khursani*.

A Nepali feature film is telecast every weekend. Rebroadcast rights for talk shows such as 'Bahas' and 'Fireside' are bought so that overseas Nepalis are now much more clued-in about what is happening in Nepal.

Nepali TV plans to expand transmission to Canada, the United States and Hong Kong, and recruit news correspondents in the Arab world and Europe.

In the UK, Nepali TV has reassured parents who are afraid that their children may forget how to speak Nepali and lose touch with the home culture.

A mother in London says she is delighted to hear her daughter sing along with Ani Choying Dolma's *Phool ko ankhama*, which she'd never have got interested in but for the video on Nepali TV. ●

Barbara beats around the bush

The cover of Barbara Adam's *Nepal: Crisis Unlimited* depicts a visibly frail Ganesh Man Singh sitting uncomfortably behind an imperious-looking white woman in a sari.

The woman is Barbara Adams, who has been such a fixture in Kathmandu that the publisher didn't even deem it necessary to put the author's name on the cover. Barbara arrived in Kathmandu in the swinging sixties: democracy had just been crushed, King Mahendra was well on his way to setting up the partyless Panchayat system. The business and political elite was one and the same and everyone knew everyone else. Hash was legal, Kathmandu had one manually controlled traffic light and taxis were painted in tiger stripes.

Barbara met Prince Basundhara, Mahendra's brother, whose reputation in the sixties matched those of Dharendra in the eighties and Paras in the nineties. Barbara became his consort, went on hunting trips, developed a taste for expensive trinkets and ran a travel agency.

Barbara tries her best to sound sincere. She lashes out at all critics and those who deny her wishes with the ferocity of a

cornered cat. Girija Prasad Koirala, who deported her in 2000, is singled out for special treatment. She is a fan of Ganesh Man, though, and has nothing but praise for Comrade Madhab.

Unlike the queen or kazini of Sikkim, Barbara never acquired the status she believes was rightfully hers. The bitterness shows in her trying to be fashionably leftie and demonstratively democratic, but the socialite socialism she espouses fails to stick. This is a collection of previously published columns, but it is hard to see the merit its publishers saw in regurgitating them.

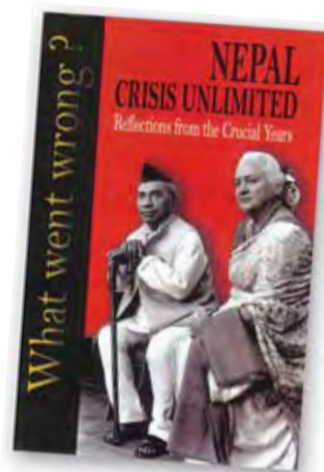
The upper crust of Kathmandu society that Barbara's barbs are aimed at will probably buy this book as a form of self-flagellation. Expats will have something to talk about at their soirees. For the bored and idle English-reading classes, there may be some interesting tidbits buried in the pages. But to those interested in truly understanding Nepal, the book is neither reliable nor readable.

In comparing the unfortunate death of Madan Bhandari in a highway accident with the assassination of JFK, Barbara notes that "the young Camelot had captured the imagination of a

generation of American youths, who had been turned off politics by the sleaze and perfidy of the Nixon Administration". Wait a minute, didn't Kennedy precede Nixon? The book is riddled with inaccuracies, contradictions and bizarrely inconsistent spelling of Nepali names. Barbara may be unable to spell, but what about the editors at Adroit?

Readers are repeatedly told by considerate reviewers not to judge a book by the cover. But the picture on the cover of this volume captures the very essence of what's inside. ●

CK Lal



Nepal: Crisis Unlimited
by Barbara Adams
Adroit, New Delhi, 2006
pp: 341
Rs 800



NARESH NEWAR

Show some gratitude

It doesn't matter where good teachers are from

When I went back to Tandī, Chitwan this summer, as always, my friends and I went to meet our 'Sarwendra sir'. He was hunched over a desk in a small dim room. He hadn't changed a bit, just gotten a little older.

Most of his old students visit Sarwendra sir often and not just because he was a fantastic teacher. We visit him because he needs to know his students are ready to take care of him in these turbulent times, that though he isn't in his own country, he has nothing to fear.

Sarwendra sir's story is not unusual, but it is instructive. He came to Nepal from India about 25 years ago to teach science. He first went to teach in a remote, inaccessible village in Dhading where most of my Chitwane friends still don't want to go. He later moved to Tandī, and has since been a much-loved fixture of the local high school. He's seen some



NEPALI PAN
Biswo Poudel

students, like me, grow up and leave the village, and he's seen others pick up guns and kill.

After we finished school, we often wondered what would become of Sarwendra sir. He is entitled to no pension, and the thought that he might spend his old days in an unknown slum in Uttar Pradesh was appalling. Even a minor illness could prove disastrous for him—he has no money to speak of. The last thing we want is for him to regret coming to Nepal to teach people like us.

Teachers like Sarwendra sir are our responsibility, and it's a shame that the Indian embassy has to raise this issue while our leaders are bogged down by parochial concerns. The issue of Indian teachers here is a humanitarian one. When Nepalis themselves refused to go to some parts of the country to teach their compatriots, Indian teachers like Sarwendra sir travelled to schools in the remote middle hills. These teachers are getting old, and it is time we recognise their contribution.

Talk to political leaders informally, and they all agree that long-serving Indian teachers need to be taken care of. Yet not one of them has actually done anything to help, even as the government is ready to kowtow to non-tenured Nepali teachers asking for automatic tenure.

In Kathmandu and elsewhere in the country, India is perceived as an imperial bully due to historical reasons. But it would be a real pity if we hated a power more than we loved our teachers. If we cannot show gratitude where it is due, perhaps that's a backhanded victory for those people to the south who do have an imperial mindset. Sarwendra sir will be taken care of, as some of us Tandī high school alumni have decided to do so. But what about the thousands of others like him? ●

Back at Sundarijal

BP Koirala's English diary from his second incarceration in the 1970s has just been published in Nepali.

The diary, which he wrote during his imprisonment upon his return to Nepal from India in December 1976, was transcribed from microfilms preserved at the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya and the Jawaharlal Nehru Museum in New Delhi. The contents were serialised in *Nepali Times* from 2001-2003 as a fortnightly column, 'Back at Sundarijal'. (#74, www.nepalitimes.com)

BP Koirala, who returned from India with a call for 'national reconciliation' between the monarchy and democratic forces, was arrested at the airport and locked up along with Ganesh Man Singh at Sundarijal by Mahendra's son, Birendra. At the time India was under Indira Gandhi's emergency rule, and spearheading the movement against it was BP's friend and well-wisher Jayaprakash Narayan.

An earlier publication, *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections*, is not a diary and does not cover the last six years of

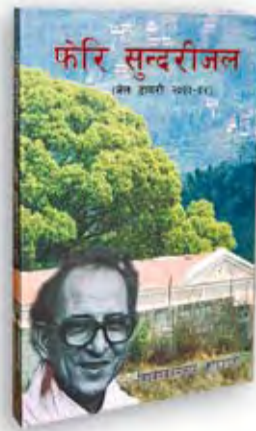
Koirala's eventful life. BP's Nepali diary (*Jail Journal*), written during his first incarceration after King Mahendra's 1960 coup has also been published. These diaries fill that void.

BP comes to life in this translation by Sushil Sharma, which documents all the concerns of everyday life in jail. BP describes his health concerns in excruciating detail, but there are also discussions with Ganesh Man about Mahendra's true intentions, and readings of *Gorkhapatra* that

look between the lines to figure out what Indira Gandhi may be up to. "I am not spending time in jail," BP writes on one of his more despondent days, "time is spending me."

The book has a foreword by Ganeshraj Sharma, but could have done with more explanatory footnotes and more consistent editing. ●

Ramesh Parajuli



Pheri Sundarijal (Jail Diary 2033-34)
Bisheshor Prasad Koirala
Jagadamba Press, Lalitpur, 2006
pp: 175
Rs 200

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Comrade Parvati's verbal violence

A multi-storey building of the Nepal Engineers' Association (NEA) at Pulchok is now almost complete, towering over modest structures in the vicinity. During the years it was being built, Hisila Yami was busy mobilising women across Nepal.

The NEA tower was partly designed by a young and energetic architect who used to bicycle around town collecting membership dues as the NEA's treasurer. After democracy in 1990, the NEA honoured Hisila's commitment. When Krishna Prasad Bhattarai hesitated—how could a bachelor premier garland a married woman in public—Hisila had craned her neck to receive the garland and the sindoor with a polite but firm: "Communists don't believe in customs with gender bias."

She showed similar zeal in protesting beauty pageants that came to town with the new market economy. She went off for higher studies in England and returned to go underground soon after. Hisila Yami, the engaged intellectual of the Institute of Engineering, had now become Comrade Parvati.

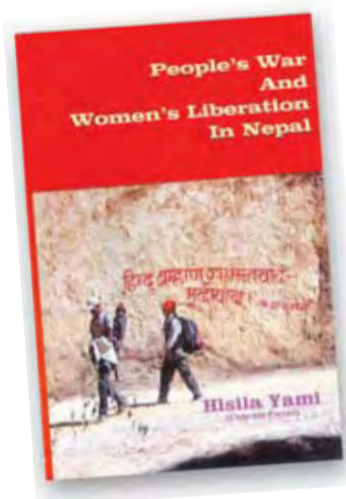
Her book, *People's War and Women's Liberation in Nepal* records the confusion of her mind in excruciating detail. She tries to say things she knows to be only partially true, and it shows. The book begins with a prosaic publisher's note probably penned by an aging apparatchik somewhere in Jharkhand. It reads like leaflets of the ex-Soviet Union. The foreword by Chairman Prachanda is shorter but no less platitudinous, and he openly admits the sole purpose of this

book in English is propaganda.

Don't bother if you have no stomach for rhetoric straight out of Mao's China of the 1960s. Reading this feels like a spell in a time machine, proof that history repeats itself—as farce.

"I had been a liberal feminist before I became a communist," says Hisila in her foreword. Many activists from Hisila's generation have opened NGOs and mellowed, the fire in their bellies has gone out, but Hisila soldiered on. There is no denying her commitment to the cause, but if you want to find out what makes her tick you won't find any answers in this book.

If she had remained an activist, would things be better or worse for Nepali women? Hard to say. Despite the contribution of women soldiers in the 'People's Liberation Army', their presence in the decision-making body of Maoists is minimal. Pampha Bhushal and Hisila Yami are leaders of the movement, but it is difficult to find a third woman recognised by common Maoist cadre throughout the country.



The photographic section of the book seems to have been inserted at the last moment as an afterthought. They bear no relevance to the text of the book. Interspersed with Maoisms ("People's War is a total war" and "To be advanced means to do the work of backward") and inane quotes from Marx, the book is dreadfully difficult to read. Even as propaganda it fails because it underestimates the readers' intelligence.

The struggle of man against power, Milan Kundera once said, is the struggle of memory against forgetting. What then is struggle of woman against power? Of forgetfulness against memory? The dialectic shows in the introduction of the author at the beginning of the book.

Ten years after she went into the wilderness, Hisila is back in the city of her forefathers to claim her place at the high table of intellectual debates. During talk-shows on tv, she is surprisingly restrained, but this book is doctrinaire Prachandpath. Hisila is capable of, and should, come out with more logically-argued books if she wants to convince us of the righteousness of her cause. This book does little justice to her learning, understanding and compassion. The right to publicise Prachandpath is all hers, but not with such shoddy prose, at least not when the peace process is on. ●

CK Lal

People's War and Women's Liberation in Nepal
by Hisila Yami (Comrade Parvati)
Purvaia Prakashan, Raipur,
India 2006
pp: xxviii+187
RS. 200 (paperback)



A fresh start for Nepali golf Hope swings

Our biggest golfing event, the Surya Nepal Masters has been postponed. Since the tournament is part of the Indian golf circuit, it attracts over 60 professional golfers each year from India alone. This sounds like bad news for golf tourism. So why am I hopeful?

The Masters has just been put off to January, not cancelled, and the reasons for the postponement had nothing to do with us. There's upheaval in the Indian golf scene, with scraps and tension between the golf governing body, players, and the marketing company which dealt with sponsorship and money.

In Nepali golf, too, we've had some changes, but of the positive kind. The National Sports Council reconstituted its ad hoc committee to work with the Nepal Golf Association. The committee is headed by businessman Pradeep Kumar Shrestha and I'm an



TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya

executive member. We're all energetic and enthusiastic about developing golf all over Nepal, not just in Kathmandu and Pokhara. Any golf committee which fails to tap

into the considerable resources available to build basic infrastructure is likely populated by members there for the social cache, not necessarily to work. The new committee will have to avoid that trap.

We'll have to take on a number of challenges: holding regular golf tournaments and training, and improving the standard of the game as it is played here, ensuring representation in most international golf tournaments, and soliciting government support to enhance facilities for golfing. We need to focus on young players, children, and establish golf academies to catch them young and ensure that in the future we have as good players as courses.

Money will be an issue, as it always is. We're already considering various fundraising options and most of us have made personal contributions to the development fund. We'll also soon start a vigorous campaign to raise funds to strengthen the Nepal Golf Association.

We should be looking ahead, and indeed the NGA wants to be affiliated with all the major international governing bodies of golf. We've talked about golf tourism till we were blue in the face. This is a chance to actually put Nepal on the map, as it deserves to be.

Can we have a Nepali PGA champion? I'd bet on it. ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Trees and Voyeurism** paintings by Sarita Dongol at The Art Shop, 10AM-6PM till 4 November. 4267063
- ❖ **Figures in Paint** by Chirag Bangdel at Imago Dei Café Gallery, 9AM-9PM. 4442464
- ❖ **Exhibition** of paintings, sculptures at Tantra Restaurant, Thamel featuring Juju Kaji Maharjan, Anil Maharjan, Uday Karmacharya and more. 4218565

EVENTS

- ❖ **Boosting the Mysterious Immune System** lecture by Joanna Claire, 9.30 AM on 27 October at Shankar Hotel, Lajimpat. Rs 50 for CSGN members, Rs 100 for non-members.
- ❖ **Festive Fiesta** post-Tihar celebrations at Liquid Lounge, 27 October, 7PM. 9851046604
- ❖ **Art of Loving** class and dialogue on love, 1PM on 28 October at The Quest, Tripureswor. 4279712
- ❖ **Documentaries** every Wednesday at 6.30 PM till 30 November at Nhuchhe's Kitchen—The Organic Bistro, Baluwatar.
- ❖ **Formula 1** on the big screen every Sunday at Sportsbar, Kamaladi. 4221324
- ❖ **Salsa Classes** at the Radisson Hotel, 6PM. 4411818
- ❖ **Tai-Chi, Qi-Qong and Hatha Yoga** at the Self Awakening Centre, Baber Mahal Revisited, call to sign up. 4256618

MUSIC

- ❖ **Live music** with Desmond O'Flattery, Bob Nunes and Nashville A O'Connor, 7.30 PM onwards at Lazimpat Gallery Café, 27 October
- ❖ **Aavas** performs at Garden of Dreams, rescheduled for 6.30 PM on 29 October at Kaiser Mahal. Tickets Rs 500, 5552839
- ❖ **Prakash Gurung** performs at Paleti, 5.30 PM at nepa-laya 'R'shala, Man Bhawan, 27-28 October. 5542646
- ❖ **Euodia Ensembles** classical music with Japanese musicians, Birendra International Convention Centre, Baneshwar on 4 November at 4PM, Rs 100. 9841481549
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM

DINING

- ❖ **Cine dinner** free projection on the big screen of a French film followed by dinner, 27 October, 7PM, Alliance Francaise. 4241163
- ❖ **Mediterranean Seafood** at Dwarikas on 27 October. Rs 1099 per person, including a BBQ dinner and a drink. 4479488
- ❖ **Deepawali** at Dolma Café Cocktail, Kabab. 3 November, Thamel. 4215069
- ❖ **Full Moon BBQ Dinner** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 4 November. 9841371927
- ❖ **Barbeque dinner** with new menu, 6.30-9PM every Friday at Summit Hotel, Kupondole Height. 5521810
- ❖ **Saturday Barbeque Special** at Le Meridien Golf Resort and Spa, Rs 1200 for adults, Rs 600 for children
- ❖ **BBQ Special** on Friday nights at Courtyard Restaurant, Kamaladi. 4253056
- ❖ **Shaken Not Stirred** Martinis 007 style every Wednesday with live music at Fusion, the bar at Dwarikas. Rs 555 including a tapas platter and a martini
- ❖ **Drinks and Dancing** theme Saturday nights at Jbar. 4418209
- ❖ **Seven Sensations** at Hotel Yak & Yeti, cocktails and snacks. 4248999
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel 4262768 and Pulchok 5521755
- ❖ **A Sweet Taste of Life** at La Dolce Vita, authentic Italian cuisine. 4700612
- ❖ **Season of Freshness** at Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La Hotel, happy hours 12-7PM. 4412999
- ❖ **Creations from the Clay Oven** at Stupa View Restaurant, Boudha Stupa, 4480262
- ❖ **Monsoon Madness Wine Festival** enjoy wines from four continents at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440
- ❖ **Weekend Brunch** at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** pure relaxation. 4361500
- ❖ **Walk and Lunch** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, Saturdays between 29 October and 25 November. 9841371927
- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- ❖ **Escape to Godavari Village Resort**, an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5560675

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NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



Last week's thunderstorm and driving rain may have come as a chilly surprise, but October's weather has been par for the course. Average rainfall for the month, the second driest of the year, is 56mm, and we've only received 44mm so far. The pesky westerlies which brought hail and low temperatures could strike again, though this time in the form of minor localised storms in high valleys, such as Manang. Thursday morning's satellite picture shows the front gradually advancing over Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the monsoon retreating from coastal east India. Valley residents can look forward to sunny days, breezy afternoons, and cold nights, as temperatures drop down to the single digits.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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नेपाल कृषिप्रधान मुलुक हो। यहाँका ८० प्रतिशतभन्दा बढी जनता कृषि पेसामा आधारित छन्। कूल राष्ट्रिय आयको फन्डै ४० प्रतिशत हिस्सा अहिले पनि कृषि क्षेत्रले नै ओगटेको छ। सिङ्गो मुलुकको आर्थिक, सामाजिक मेरुदण्डको रूपमा रहेको कृषिक्षेत्र उपेक्षित हुनु हुँदैन। कृषकहरू देशका वास्तविक नायक हुन्। उनीहरूलाई सम्मान र कदर गर्नुपर्छ। कृषकहरूले पनि आफ्नो पसिनामाथि विश्वास गर्नुपर्छ। नयाँ नयाँ कृषि प्रणाली अवलम्बन गर्नुपर्छ। पढ्दैमा खेती गर्नु नहुने होइन। कृषिक्षेत्रलाई आधुनिकीकरण गर्न शिक्षित र सचेत कृषकको खााचो छ। त्यसैले कृषि पेसालाई आदर गरौं, कृषकलाई सम्मान गरौं।

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

PEACEFUL NEW YEAR: Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala releases a dove as (r-l) Naresh Bir Kansakar, Pradeep Gyawali and Padma Ratna Tuladhar share the podium with him during the launch of the Nepal New Year Bhintuna rally in Basantapur on Monday.



NEPALNEWS.COM

GRAY MEETS GREY: US ambassador to Nepal James Moriarty and Maoist leader Deb Gurung stand together at a program marking the 61st United Nations Day on Friday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

LEISURELY WORSHIP: Some boat, others line up to pray on Tuesday at the Rani Pokhari temple, which opens once a year on Bhai Tika for people who don't have brothers or sisters.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

FEEDING THE FIRE IN THE BELLY: Maoists recoup their strength at lunch during a *deusi* program at Tri Chandra Campus on Saturday.



HERBERT GRAMMATIKOPOULOS

SCARFING UP A VICTORY: A horseman thunders past and swoops up the ultimate prize, a khada, at the annual Yarthung horseracing festival in Manang last week.

Young saviour

Eight-year-old Resmi Gupta is rebellious and defiant. And to the children of Baskhora village, Kapilbastu, she's a hero.

Resmi has single-handedly rallied the other children in this remote, dusty village to fight against child marriage. That would be impressive anywhere, but this is the poorest, least literate village in the district with the most child marriages in Nepal.

Here, Resmi is extraordinary. "It is not easy to go door-to-door convincing parents to stop this evil practice," she told us. But undeterred, every week, Resmi and 36 friends from their child club take their anti-child marriage campaign around the neighbouring villages.

Resmi helped save Laxmi, her 15-year-old sister, from being married off a few months ago. She told their very conservative parents to "stop this marriage", fully expecting to be slapped down. Instead, they actually listened to Resmi as she told them how getting married—and bearing a child—so young could literally kill their daughter.

Nepal has one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates—nearly 6,000 girls and women die every year due to pregnancy-related complications, in large part because almost two-thirds of Nepali girls marry before they turn 18.



NARESH NEWAR

The advocacy is paying off in neighbouring villages too. Urmila Karki, 14, was married when she was six. As per *gauna* tradition, she has stayed at her parents' home but is now due to return to her husband's house. "I'd rather join Resmi to fight for our cause," she says quietly but firmly. Urmila is seeking help and protection from her friends in the children's club, as well as organisations like UNICEF and local NGO Rural Illiteracy Society Education that support it.

Although she spends much of her free time teaching others to make better choices, Resmi herself is too poor to afford formal education. She's now attending a 20-month out-of-school program run by RISE and UNICEF.

"We need education and awareness to convince both parents and children to stand up to child marriages, ancient tradition or not," says the feisty Resmi. With future leaders like this, we've got something to look forward to. ●

Naresh Newar in Kapilbastu

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Close Up gives you strong, white, shiny teeth and fresher breath. So go ahead, get the confidence to laugh out loud.

Stop sending us all that booze

Most members of the Kathmandu media knocked themselves unconscious this season drinking all the free booze they were gifted by Kathmandu-based embassies. Going by the number of bottles in festive wrappings that the Ass noticed arriving every day at the boss' secretary's desk, there seems to be an impression among Nepal-based diplomatic missions that in this country all editors are alcoholics and if they're not they should be immediately turned into one. Enough. Hic! No more whiskey. Can we have a moratorium on bottles? At least until new year's?

The Chinese have the right idea, instead of sending alcohol to the journalists they sent journalists to the alcohol. Two troops of hacks departed just before Tihar to Beijing and Shanghai with delegations accompanying the Education Minister and the Information Minister and they all got right down to brasstacks as soon as they took off. So, it's not just the hacks who are going to return with massive mao tai hangovers, the ministers should be pretty much incapacitated themselves.



Us journalists have this reputation among the public of being predators, and the image is reinforced when there are news channels called "Fox". Or tv presenters with names like 'Wolf' Blitzer.

So far, no Nepali journalists has named himself after a member of the jackal family as far as we know, although they often behave like them on camera when they chew out studio guests and don't let them get a word in edgewise. Some of our prima donna talk show hosts have now interviewed just about everyone there is to interview in this country. The only thing left for them to do is to start interviewing each other.

But there is one person they haven't got yet, and the Ass has learnt from palace sources that rival newscasters have put in applications in writing for an interview with King Gyanendra. But the way his erstwhile majesty snubbed the Rayamajhi Commission by refusing to even answer the one question sent to him, they shouldn't set their hopes too high.



There are many things that happen in Nepal that should get us into the Guinness Book and don't. One of them was last week's nationwide shutdown called by FNCCI. In other countries it is the workers who go on strike, here it is the businessmen who do it instead. Kantipur, which had the audacity to poke fun at the strike call in an editorial, was punished by having its van vandalised on New Road by FNCCI's hired goons. The businessmen's credo seems to be: if you can't fight 'em, join 'em. Ever since we spied FNCCI honchos sharing the podium with the baddies last month we knew something was afoot. The strike had more to do with warning the government to lay off prominent willful defaulters than anything else. There, we said it.



So Nepal ranks #8 on the Indian Ministry of External Affairs priority list. Many in Nepal were dismayed when they read this: they had always been under the impression that Nepal was so important that officials in New Delhi had sleepless nights about us. It now looks like we are way behind the United States, China, Europe and the rest of southeast Asia in India's scheme of things.

The Ass's take on this is: thank god we don't have oil. Thank god we're not geo-strategically important. Just as well we are so ungovernable that the Chinese, British India and the Tibetans took one look at us in the 19th century and gave up trying to conquer us because they realised we were ungovernable.

It is better for Nepal if we aren't so high on Delhi's priority list. In fact, we would be more comfortable if our ranking dropped down to #15 or something and we were left alone.



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