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Weekly Internet Poll # 324

Q. Are the peace accord deadlines set for the coming weeks realistic?

Total votes: 2,842



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Q. Do you expect the interim constitution to be an adequate and fair document?

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BILLI BIERLING

PEACE BELLS

Now to make peace deliver development to a ravaged land

KANAK MANI DIXIT

The credit for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement goes to the political parties of Nepal—detested by the extreme right royalists, the Maoist supporters of the far left, and Kathmandu Valley's upper crust. As responsible, elected people's representatives, they reached a magnanimous compromise with the CPN (Maoist), to keep the latter from reverting to brutality and saddling society with more

years of violence. The peace agreement, though couched in language that appears balanced equally against the state and rebels, makes demands on the Maoists to abandon violence in word and deed. It is, finally, though not in so many words, the declaration of abandonment of the 'People's War'. This is Girija Prasad Koirala's hour of recognition, having held out against international naysayers and standing steadfast against Maoist attempts to deliver a less-than-pluralistic finale to

Jana Andolan II. Going against the populism which had made the intelligentsia reluctant to challenge the Maoists, Koirala followed his own course, utilising the stature he had acquired even with the rebel leadership. And what of Pushpa Kamal Dahal? He showed nerve and steel in turning his insurgency a full 180 degrees, and bringing his commanders along with him. Whether he can now bring along his entire cadre as well is the next challenge, one which will truly

be a measure of the success of the agreement signed last Tuesday evening. While Dahal has thankfully turned out to be more politician than revolutionary, we now have to await the CPN (Maoist) as a whole to convert from a militarist force into a political party, one that does not extort, abduct, threaten, and act as if nobody would notice.

Editorial p2
Making it work

Full story p4

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MAKING IT WORK

The peace accord this week is the formal declaration of a cessation of armed conflict. Nepalis are rightly euphoric. A situation which seemed to get darker the longer you looked at it now seems contained, manageable.

But the road in the months ahead will not be smooth or straight. No matter how hopeful we are, there will be bargaining, waffling, and fighting out the details of a complicated process of normalisation.

In this space, we have always maintained that the Maoists need time to convince their hothead commanders about the peace process. This is called giving the Maoists the benefit of doubt. But right until the deal was signed, the comrades gave us less and less reason to trust them. Their recruiting spree to pad their cantonments and fool the UN into thinking they really have 35,000 warriors included forced enlistment of school children, hotel workers, and young villagers. Just as there are reasons to doubt the Maoists' sincerity, it is also possible that residual royalists are still plotting a comeback.

But all sides and their leaders, no matter how far they believe they have come, can't turn this into another political wrangle for power and posts.

We cannot afford to lose sight of what is really at stake here. We need to move forward, not slide right back into the old ways of thinking, complete with selfishness, parochialism, and lack of vision. Nepalis have sacrificed and suffered far too much to settle for that.

Second chances don't come around often. We've got one now, but it's also a last chance to get this right. Outside of party agendas, what should a future Nepal look like? How can we move past Kathmandu and think for the nation as a whole? How can Nepalis move out of the shadow of fear: of guns, discrimination, hunger, and hopelessness? Some of the answers are obviously political, but others concern social justice and reaching out to the forgotten, the hungry in Karnali, dalits who barely survive on the fringes of life in Saptari.

Yes, the peace process is important, but there is nothing stopping the interim government from also moving quickly to restore this country's momentum on education, healthcare, microcredit, and investment to create jobs. That's what this has been about all along. The parties all lost sight of it once. We can't make the same mistake again.



DEEPENDRA BAURACHARYA

The more things change

The Maoists now trust India, but let's not buy into the impression of reciprocity

Nepal's Maoist party no longer see India as the 'reactionary power' they railed against for some years, and whose malign influence they sought to remedy in their initial 40-point agreement.

Kathmandu's elite is happy with the change of heart. Most Nepalis do not believe a prime



GUEST COLUMN
Tapan Bose

minister can annoy India and still remain in power, and political 'realists' believe the change was inevitable. The integration of the CPN (Maoist) into the 'mainstream' is almost complete.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal has thanked the Indian government for allowing them and SPA representatives to meet on Indian soil. He's also said that without India's tacit consent the 12-point understanding of November 2005 would not have been possible. The Comrade says India

represented a threat to the Nepali people when the government in New Delhi was supporting the monarchy and what was then called the Royal Nepal Army against the 'People's War'. Now that India seems to have accepted his party's claim to political power it no longer represent a threat to the people of Nepal.

For decades, the Indian ruling elite supported the Nepali monarchy, which behaved in a feudal, autocratic manner. The monarchy perpetrated a system of government based on privileges and denial, and harsh suppression of dissent. Yet India, the largest democracy in the world, supported it. New Delhi continues to support the autocratic king of Bhutan and is friendly with Myanmar's military dictators. The Indian ruling elite supports 'official' killers and abusers of human rights, and frowns upon 'non-official' or 'non-state' armed struggle.

The CPN (M) no longer espouses Marx's dictum that 'force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one'. Instead, the Maoists appear to have accepted the theory of 'peaceful' transition to a 'new social order' through 'competitive democracy'. In making this switch, they have become acceptable to India.

The CPN (M) say it expects India will support a republican Nepal, should the constituent assembly decide on it. Let's put realpolitik aside, and look ahead. The class character of India's ruling elite cannot have changed overnight. New Delhi supported the monarchy and the 'twin pillar' theory during the 13 years

of multiparty democracy in the name of the 'Nepali people'. Now New Delhi supports the SPA-Maoist government in the name of supporting the Nepali people's rights.

New Delhi's mantra is strange when it shows so little regard for its own vast masses of poor, dalits, adivasis, and religious minorities. New Delhi boasts of being the world's largest democracy and an emerging economic power but, bowing to the dictates of the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF, it introduces agricultural policy reforms that drive thousands of farmers to suicide, strips labour of rights, and virtually gives away vast tracts of farmland and hundreds of villages for 'Special Economic Zones' where Indian citizens will have restricted entry.

If India does in fact accept the Maoist party's ideology, it could be faced with more than just a logical disconnect in having a socialist society next door.

The Comrade has also said that the real threat to socialism is the United States. He warns that the neo-conservative-ruled US might create a Nicaraguan Contra-type force in Nepal with the remnants of the royalists and renegade elements of the RNA to overthrow the new government and create political chaos.

It seems unlikely that India, as it follows the neo-imperialist path of the US and strives to become a strategic partner, would support its socialist regime in its backyard. And if the US did decide to support armed gangs in Nepal, what would New Delhi do? ●

Tapan Bose is Secretary General of the South Asia Forum for Human Rights.

The future of the past

21 November was fraught with meaning, now we need more than symbols

'Wonder' was the oft-repeated word at the signing ceremony of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on Tuesday evening. Everyone seemed surprised. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala claimed he had stunned the international community with a peace deal with former-terrorists. Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

boasted that his was the miraculous deed—achieving change with continuity in a stagnant society and sterile polity.

Koirala has reasons to be smug. His earlier premiership was sabotaged by the Maoists, now he's put them in their place. The octogenarian had also been at the receiving end of UML barbs, but Madhab Nepal had to accept a peripheral role in what promises to be a path-breaking deal. The NC boss has never been a favourite of the Nepal Army. At the signing ceremony, Chief of Army Staff Rukmangat Katuwal

humbly sat at the back as the decade-old civil war was declared over. The Nepali Congress had reasons to celebrate on Wednesday.

But ground realities have to change significantly if the rest of us are to feel free again.

Dahal thinks the deal he has made with Koirala is a 'miracle'. Communists never tire of repeating Lenin's cliché that Marxism is a scientific ideology with no room for miracles. Two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen never produce milk. So should we swallow the Chairman's concoction? It will do no harm, but let there be no illusions that it's milk and honey from here on.

The first test will be changing in the behaviour of guerrilla commanders in the countryside. Most never had direct access to their leadership and accepted directives issued from safe houses in Siliguri, Lucknow, and Noida because Prachanda and his sponsors promised more than individual commanders could achieve on their own. Now Maoist nominees in the interim legislature and government will

have to deliver, as their secretaries in the districts face the wrath of sympathisers, supporters, followers, part-timers, and full-time cadres. Comrade Chairman's organisational ability will need to kick into high gear.

The Rayamajhi Commission has diverted attention by pointing at the king as the primary agent of dictatorial experiments. But Maoists and mainstreamers alike will have to answer the vital question: didn't they encourage the king to take over by insisting that they would deal only with the master, rather than his slaves? Sher Bahadur Deuba and Madhab Nepal timidly accepted this by joining the royal government. King Gyanendra has given de facto approval to the peace deal, but his public approval is also a not-so-veiled warning to the dealmakers: beware, big brother in the palace is watching.

The third, most important test of the peace deal will be its implementation. The government will have to guarantee the safety of unarmed Maoist cadres returning

home to face those they had until recently coerced, abducted, fleeced, and oppressed. The anger of people whose near and dear have been tortured, maimed, or killed by the military or militants will require more than platitudes. The Nepali Congress is sending its leaders back to the villages, but whether they will actually follow the central directives is yet to be seen. The Maoist leadership will also need to travel, meeting the aggrieved, instead of congregating for free lunches at state-sponsored secure centres.

At best, the peace-deal is an opportunity to begin building the bridges of reconciliation. This is a process, a journey, and its impact will be measured by the distance travelled from the podium of the Birendra International Convention Centre in New Baneswor on 21 November, 2006. Whether it turns out to be a red-letter day or yet another false start will depend largely upon how Dahal and his cohorts conduct themselves in the coming days. For now, the Koirala-Dahal duo deserves the kudos they are receiving left, right, and centre. ●

LETTERS

SAFE LANDING INDEED

After over a year of king bashing, *Nepali Times* has begun to pay attention to the other threat to democracy ('The Seduction of Process', #323). Instead of write-ups by experts like Ajai Sahni, we'd been treated to week after week of CK Lal's 'bitterades' against the king and the army, and lured into believing in the mainstreaming-the-Maoists-through-safe-landing rhetoric.

When the Maoists have got everything they asked for, or the path to it cleared, surely we deserve peace. The hard truth is that this Peace Accord has not only legitimised the Maoists' violence, but glorified it. Their local cadres still go around committing atrocities while their leaders attend international summits decrying 'bourgeois democracy' and peddling their own brand of 'socialist democracy'.

With a 'new Nepal' on everyone's lips, one wonders who is 'mainstreaming' whom, and who needs a 'safe landing' from whom.
Satyajeet Nepali, email

LIGHT OF PEACE

Your recent political analyses have been fairly wishy-washy. Admittedly, this could be as much because there is actually not much to say, though it is more likely *Nepali Times* had not done its homework. At least you had the good sense to treat us to some stunning photographs by Deependra Bajracharya. The image titled 'Light of Peace' (#322) was by itself worth the price of admission.

BR Chettri, email

RENT-SEEKING

Rent-seeking has nothing to do with house rent or physical capital, as CK Lal suggests ('Power for the powerhungry,' State of the State, #323). Economist Ann Krueger used the term in the 1970s to explain the behaviour of economic actors in India when the Indian economy was plagued by the 'License Raj'. It is used in political economics literature while discussing corruption, lobbying, and other unfair practices, and refers to the seeking of financial benefits by securing unfair market advantages using political or bureaucratic influences.

The rent-seeking behaviour of major actors in hydropower—in the form of securing license for easy commissions or winning favourable contractual terms through unfair lobbying—is the key barrier to developing the sector. Unlike Mr Lal, I think it makes a lot of economic sense for potential hydropower investors to learn from real estate-investing middle-class Nepalis who expect fair financial returns and don't spend their money bribing decision makers.

In its extended meaning, 'rent-seeking' is also used to describe intellectuals who claim to be more than they are worth through misinformation. One wonders if Lal's motive in using a term he does not fully understand is an act of intellectual rent-seeking, attempting to give the impression that he is familiar with economics.

Surya Raj Acharya, Tokyo

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Agreement and interregnum



SAGAR SHRESTHA

from p1

The magnanimity of Nepal's politicians was obvious in their willingness to provide the Maoists a presence in the interim government and interim legislature equal to that of the two large parliamentary parties. The sacrifice made by the CPN (UML) in this regard is noteworthy, for it has allowed the perception to develop that a gun-wielding rebel group has equal status as a party which has stayed steadfastly within non-violent practice.

The rebels now have to traverse a vast ideological distance when serving in government and the hybrid interim legislature, where they will have to jettison practiced rigid polemic and replace it with principled positioning. Can they adjust to the practicalities of governance, so far removed from gun-in-hand sloganeering? Ideologue Baburam Bhattarai does maintain that this is the time to concentrate on delivering the constituent assembly, which will tackle the larger issues of state transformation; but we have to see

how things play out around the cabinet roundtable and in the interim House.

Dahal and Bhattarai now also need all their dialectical skills—so clearly visible in Delhi last week, where they shed all pretence of the anti-Indianism that has been the leitmotif of their rebellion—to manage the myriad contradictions of an ideology-driven insurgency that has not publicly conceded defeat. They understand better than many Kathmandu-based analysts that the people in the districts are sullen with the years they have suffered under the commissars and militia. But unlike Gyanendra the king, the Maoist leadership will hopefully not miscalculate the democratic values held dear by a rational, sophisticated populace.

The Nepali proclivity to conduct negotiations in the full glare of floodlights week after week might have exasperated some foreign observers, but one could say that these were the most 'transparent' negotiations to be conducted anywhere—an example, indeed, for the world.

More importantly, the public sharing of the daily ups and downs provided a crucial cushion to prepare the Maoist fighters for the changing times. While not mentioned in any of the celebratory prose after Tuesday, the Indian government's positioning on the guns-and-government issue obviously played a part in moderating rebel demands, while the UN role in overseeing 'arms management' and the election process has provided some confidence in the outcome all around.

In fact, the politicians and peasantry alike are relying too much on the United Nations mechanisms—Jan Martin's office and the OHCHR in particular—for the monitoring of the peace agreement and attendant ceasefire and human-rights matters. They will not have enough reach if Nepal's government administration does not activate itself, and if civil society gets drowned in the upcoming 'donor tsunami' and neglects to be a proper watchdog of the people. With the National Human Rights

Commission as a broken entity, we must have a monitoring committee of half-a-dozen eminent persons to hold the state and rebels to account. But it must be one that does not resemble the ungainly truce monitoring committee set up in June with more than two-and-a-half dozen members.

Even as the PLA fighters arrive by the thousands at designated camp sites that are yet without infrastructure, the term 'militia' does not find mention in the lengthy agreement document. And it is the rebel paramilitary—especially the opportunistic 'Maoists' among them who do not have the ideological commitment of the mainline cadre—which would most likely contribute to destabilising the polity in the days ahead. There is scepticism about how a government with Maoist participation will deal with wayward militia, and this is where Dahal will have to show an improved record compared to the months past.

Krishna Prasad Sitaula deserves congratulations as the impresario of the peace agreement, having nurtured it since the semi-secret confabulations in New Delhi in the autumn of 2005. However, it is time now for the Home Minister to get a handle on national law and order. Without the presence of a highly motivated and committed Nepal Police force in the villages, and motivated district administrations all over, the state will remain absent from the rural hinterland. And without it, there will be precious little governance or peace dividend, as far as the people are concerned.

If and when the populace becomes disenchanted with the lack of governance or with service delivery, the reactionaries in the palace, army, and the erstwhile power elite will perceive an opportunity to make a move. There is no doubt that the Nepal Army can still swing back to the

palace like a released spring, should the interim government be seen to falter. This potential reactionary threat must be understood by the politicians of the SPA, but even more so by the Maoist leadership, so they can hold back on their public radicalism in the House and Cabinet.

A possible rightist reaction is one more reason why an enormous effort must be made to conduct the constituent assembly elections by early June. Shifting the polls to post-monsoon, possibly post-Dasain/Tihar 2007, will surely destabilise the state. Besides the unending *sankramankaal*—interregnum—with its attendant weak government, poor service delivery to the citizenry, and the Maoist fighters in the cantonments, would represent a pressure-cooker of discontent that could explode with great violence. Nepal would become a tinderbox, which even the monsoon rains would not be able to douse.

With the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in place, and as the government administration seeks to re-establish itself all over the country, it is finally incumbent upon the political parties to enter the villages and not remain diffidently sequestered in district headquarters. The promise of the April Uprising was the sidelining of the gun and the revival of politics. This required crushing the royal design and bringing the Maoists into open politics, before heading for the constituent assembly. That process is taking longer than expected, which is why all energy must now be concentrated on pushing through the constituent assembly by early June.

If this unexpectedly lengthy *sankramankaal* is not to make the people disconsolate, the political parties and all layers of civil society must work together to give the people hope. And by 'political parties', we hope to also mean the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). ●

New faces

We're to see an influx of parliamentary novices

SHARAD KC

The Maoist office in Old Baneswor is bustling. Outside there's barely enough parking space. The motorcycles and cars belong to the crowds of cadre and leaders, who can barely squeeze past each other in the narrow corridors inside. The scene here looks like the office of a political party gearing up for an election.

You could call them the new faces of the new Nepal, and we should start getting used to them. One-third of the interim government's House of Representatives will consist of Maoist nominees and names put forth by the eight parties.

Maoist spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara says that about 50 of their representatives will be chosen for their political qualities, and come from dalit, women, janajati, madhesi, and other oppressed groups, as well as the physically challenged, and the injured. Few were in active politics prior to 1996 and, in addition to the



experience of armed rebellion, the new representatives will also bring with them new backgrounds, fresh perspectives, styles, and characters.

Mahara himself is most likely to get one of the five ministerial posts, and the rest will go to a mixed group that represents all the interest groups mentioned above. The party will likely propose Deb Gurung for the post of Speaker of the interim parliament. If this does not happen, Gurung and Matrika Yadab will join Mahara as ministers. Either Hisila Yami or Pampha Bhusal, and 'People's Liberation Army' Deputy Commander Nanda Kishore Pun ('Pasang') are also likely to join the government.

Four high-level leaders—Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Baburam Bhattarai, Ram Bahadur Thapa, and Post Bahadur Bogati—along with most other central committee members will not join the interim government or parliament. Mahara said this was because, "The leadership level will be working on spreading the organisation in view of the constituent assembly elections."

Senior Maoist leaders Thapa, Bogati, Barsha Man Pun ('Ananta'), and Deb Gurung are working on changing the 'wartime' structure of the organisation, and preparing a proposed list of representatives. Deputy Commanders Pasang, Chandra Khanal ('Baldev'), Janardan Sharma ('Prabhakar'), and central committee member Kul Bahadur KC will manage the Maoist army and work simultaneously on who will join the planned integrated national army and at what position.

In addition to the commissars, the Maoists are expected to bring in upper-level leaders from sister organisations, civil society, and independent communities. Sources tell us that anyone who agrees with the Maoists' republican agenda could be given a post—even if they are independents or currently members of the Congress, the UML, or any other party. "We don't have to join the government to send people from outside," said Mahara, "Can't we give constructive criticism anyway?"

According to the SPA-Maoist agreement, two-thirds of the 330 members of the interim parliament will be pre-1999 representatives. In the interim period there will only be one House, with the the 209 former representatives coming together from the previous Upper and Lower Houses. Many will have been elected during the last election, in which the Maoists did not, of course, participate. Of the other 121 seats, the Maoists will get 73, while the remaining 48 members will be nominated by the eight parties from representative professional organisations, oppressed peoples and regions, and other political figures. ●

New leader



Jaspal Singh Jass (centre) has been appointed the new executive director of Everest Bank. Jass, who has 30 years of experience, including as Punjab National Bank's zonal manager of Jammu and Kashmir, says he is committed

to Everest Bank's growth as well as its dedication to corporate social responsibility. As part of their program, the bank recently donated 20 computers to two government schools in Dhapasi and Kapan. Everest Bank opened in 1994 and in the last fiscal year recorded a 39 percent increase in net profits to Rs 237.30 million.

Truckloads of prizes

Asian Thai Foods' new 'Rumpum Truck Ma Luck' campaign features coupons with prizes such as a truckload of home appliances (including a Videocon 21" tv, a Videocon refrigerator, and an LG washing machine) and cash prizes.



Winners



Dhana Bahadur Waiba from Lalitpur, Chandra Kala Dahal from Bhojpur, and Kusum Gurung from Kathmandu won the Western Union Dasain Tihar Hungama lucky draw on 15 November, and went home with a motorbike each.

Carlsberg Classic Golf winner

Dawa Sherpa won the Carlsberg Classic Golf Tournament 2006 held at the Royal Nepal Golf Club (RNGC) Saturday. Sherpa won the two-day tournament organised by Carlsberg in coordination with RNGC. Gopal Chitrakar was declared runner-up.

Sherpa won an all-expenses paid trip to Malaysia to represent Nepal in the Malaysian Open ProAm 2007 along with a trophy and other gift hampers that he received today. Chitrakar got a two-way ticket to Pokhara, two-night stay at Hotel Shangri-La Resort, Pokhara, and one day's play at Himalayan Golf Course in Pokhara to go with a trophy and Carlsberg gift hampers.

NEW PRODUCTS

ULTIMA: Asian Paints Nepal's new exterior emulsion, Apex Ultima, comes with a seven-year performance warranty for even the harshest weather conditions. It's Advanced Anti-Formula protects homes from algae and fungus, is dust-resistant, and available in a range of bright and dark shades.



BEAUTY: A new line of beauty care products, Lotus Herbal Professionals, has been launched in Kathmandu and includes a range of skin and hair care products.

Long overdue

The fight against defaulters has only just begun

SOPHIA TAMOT

- Blacklisting and seizure of passports of wilful defaulters, as well as of all members on the board of directors and shareholders holding 15 percent or more shares in defaulting companies
- Prohibition of transfer of property
- Ban on standing for public office
- Withdrawal of all state facilities

Those are just some of the actions against wilful defaulters proposed by the 2004 report, prepared by a six-member team led by then-Chairman of the National Planning Commission Shankar Sharma. Other members included the Rastra Bank governor and secretaries from various ministries. The report seemed to have been put on ice, and defaulters even held positions in the royal government.

Although the non performing loans has significantly decreased in the past year from 19 percent in 2005 to 13.8 percent in July this year, that's still more than double the acceptable level of five percent. Earlier this month, Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat promised that 75 of the 90 biggest wilful defaulters will soon face action,

including having their passports impounded and transactions of property stalled.

That comes as good news for banks like Rastriya Banijya Bank and Nepal Bank, which have been crippled by bad loans, and hobbled in their attempts to catch the 'big fish' for the past three years. "This is a welcome move, and the only thing that can affect the big defaulters, but even then, our total non-performing assets will not be realised," says Jogendra Ghimire, corporate lawyer for Nepal Bank Limited.

Minister Mahat's announcement has been greeted with scepticism by many in the business community, who ask what purpose the sanctions will serve, if they don't provide for recovery of the loans. "Many of these acts are blackmailing, not blacklisting," says Roop Jyoti, former finance minister, vice chairman of the Jyoti Group, and a former defaulter. Jyoti argues that the report's recommendations are inconsistent. For example, 'wilful' is defined vaguely, and non-Nepali directors on the boards of defaulting companies are let off the hook.

"The proposed measures are not practical, and impounding passports of all board members is a severe measure," says

To catch a thief

We need to disengage the CIAA from politics

The Commission for Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has blown two high-profile cases. The CIAA punishes small-time embezzlers more than four out of five times. But its record is dismal



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

when it comes to catching the big fish—Govinda Raj Joshi, Khum Bahadur Khadka, and others. The reasons why lie in three I's: incentives, incorrect emphasis, and inconsistent laws.

Incentives: The CIAA doesn't have its own lawyers and investigative officers, though it can hire private lawyers to argue its cases. Almost all its personnel are on deputation from government departments and ministries.

Under-secretaries and joint-secretaries spend a few years at the CIAA knowing they will go back to their ministries upon completing their rotation. These bureaucrats do run after obscure underlings accused of, say, presenting falsified educational credentials for civil service jobs. But they are understandably nervous about nailing top politicians and top ex-bureaucrats who might—remember, this is Nepal!—run their future ministries. Until the CIAA recruits its own independent officers, it will remain beholden to politicians.

Incorrect emphasis:

Dr Narayan Manandhar, a CIAA watcher, says we've focused too much on the consequences of corruption, and not enough on the causes and early signs.

In the name of punishment, for instance, we tolerate violations of civil rights by applauding even when the CIAA yanks allegedly corrupt people out of their beds at midnight to be thrown into jail. But as long as we maintain tediously numerous bureaucratic procedures designed only to increase the interactions per transaction between a politician or bureaucrat and businesspeople, corruption will continue to grow and stay undetected. "What sick people are to a doctor, corrupt people are to the CIAA," says Manandhar. As such, until we start to change the emphasis from cure to prevention, there's no point in crying over the courts' decisions.

Inconsistent laws: "Even if the CIAA drags us to the Supreme Court, I am confident that we will win because of the soundness of our arguments," says Lalit Bahadur Basnet, a member of the four-person legal defence team of Joshi and Khadka. Basnet's team benefited from the Special Court's favourable interpretation of an old law which says that there is a time limit of only one year within which a corruption-related lawsuit against a person holding public office can be filed.

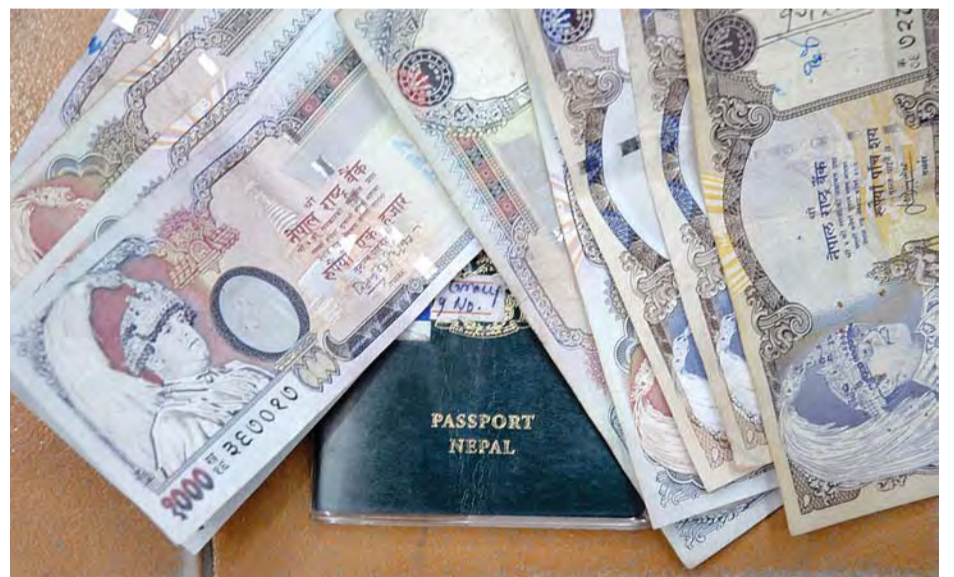
In Joshi's case, the court did not apply a more recent version of that law, which allows for an open time-frame during which lawsuits can be filed. Why the



court chose one law over the other remains unclear. Still, it is likely that the Supreme Court might just take the opposing view, and let at least the facts of Joshi's case be admitted for a retrial.

In Khadka's case, the CIAA simply did a poor job of collecting evidence. Not surprising as, historically, the CIAA has been better at arresting people, filing charges against them and basking in the glow of 15-minutes of fame than at doing a thorough investigation to find out provable information on how the embezzlers might have hidden the money. Again, this comes from the lack of career incentives the short-term CIAA personnel face when going after the big fishes.

The loss of two high-profile cases is an opportunity for the CIAA to examine how its incentive system and institutional emphasis, and a poor reading of the Special Court's orientation converged to damage its own credibility. Now its challenge is to ensure that lawsuits against other politicians, two ex-IGPs and three ex-Secretaries don't fail. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Jyoti, adding, "Such penalties will make people reluctant to invest in businesses, which will have an impact on Nepal's economy."

The real problems, many in the financial sector say, go even deeper. "This is a wakeup call for the financial sector," says Siddhant Raj Pandey, executive director of Ace Finance Company. "But just blacklisting defaulters is not enough. There is so much corruption, from insider trading for loan procurements and violation of client confidentiality, to bribing judges to manipulate hearings. The crux of the problem involves the lending banks, the regulators, and the judiciary," he adds.

In the last four years, Lumbini Bank and, recently, Nepal Bangladesh Bank have

been taken over by Rastra Bank because of bad loans. "The banking sector needs professional bankers, the court system needs a tuning, and along with reform of the judiciary, the regulators need to be regulated," says Bharat Raj Upreti, senior advocate at Pioneer Law Associates.

Upreti says that while stringent actions proposed against big defaulters are welcome, ultimately far-reaching consequences are best planned through insolvency law. "For a businessman to be declared personally bankrupt is political death. He can't vote, he can't stand for a public post, he will be segregated from society. No businessman in the right frame of mind will want that, so the pressure to pay up is more," he says. ●

Tomorrow's army

Interview with Nanda Kishore Pun, deputy commander of the 'People's Liberation Army' in Nepal, 19-26 November

नेपाल

Are you preparing to go to the barracks?
We have asked the government for Rs 20 million for each of the 28 barracks; that's the minimum. As soon as the government provides for expenses, we will enter the camps.

Is the budget also for salaries?
We have to start paying salaries, which need to be given from the day the agreement is signed.

But the agreement only talks of lodging and food.
All the details will not be mentioned in the agreement.

How were the camp locations chosen?
We proposed [the sites] and the three sides discussed them. The sites have been inspected and we are now building camps. Some locations don't have roads, electricity, or water.

Isn't your recent recruitment drive against the code of conduct?
Yes, we did send our people (PLA) out to organisations—women's, labour, student unions. We have now called them back.

If all your cadres are 'PLA', and all PLA fighters cadres, who goes to the camps?
We have a military and political structure. We select the cream of the force and during war take people from all directions. Normally, they go back to political and organisational work afterwards. All leaders at the central or regional level are soldiers and political workers.

So how do we know who is from the PLA?
Through identity cards. If you're doubtful, you can investigate with the UN people.



JB PUN MAGAR

So what do we call the Maoist militia?
The militia is also the army.

Will their weapons also be locked away?
The talks were about the regular forces. What to do with the militia's weapons—khukuris, muzzle guns, homemade pistols, grenades—is undecided. For the CA elections, we can't just depend on state security. Our militia and their militia must integrate.

How big is your armed force?
Around 35,000.

What about weapons?
One for every 15-20 soldiers. We'll show whatever weapons are collected next week.

How can we believe that all the weapons will be locked away?
The government team is made of all parties. There's the army, the UN, and we have our own teams. Our army will bring the weapons to be counted at the same time as the head count.

Will the PLA be tomorrow's national army?
Yes, definitely.

Ethics

Editorial in *Kantipur*,
21 November

कान्तिपुर

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) recently declared its strong political support for the transformation of Nepal into a democratic republic. This political declaration, made during the FNJ's eighth central committee meeting in Dhulikhel last week, made the federation sound more like a political party.

This raises serious question about the professionalism, ethics, and independence of journalism. It also proves that journalists are being manipulated politically. The federation is meant to help journalists in lobbying and advocacy for their rights and freedom, and when necessary to launch a movement.

It's true that the FNJ fought strongly for freedom of press during the king's direct rule, and also actively took part during the street protests even in prohibited areas. During the April Uprising it was inevitable that the federation reach some sort of minimum understanding with the political parties to struggle for press freedom. But that was about as far as journalists could go without harming their profession.

FNJ's decision violates the basic code of ethics. An organisation of journalists that makes demands similar to those

of a political party, or acts as a sister group to one, is being irresponsible and crossing a basic line. Fighting for one's minimum benefits, dignity, rights, and independence is one thing, but the federation's avowal of political goal taints journalism as a profession. Parties, not journalists, set political goals.

The federation should be satisfied when there are no obstacles to press freedom. It should work towards freeing journalists from influences. It should also work towards liberating journalists from biases towards any party, organisation, community, ideology, person or group with vested interests. The federation's ultimate goal should not be political, but to make journalists more capable and independent. Failure to do this will not only make journalism weaker but will also harm democracy.

Mahara money

Jana Aastha, 22 November

आस्था

The latest round of meetings of the council of ministers has decided to give Mahara a cheque for Rs 70 million. However the CPN (Maoist) has to provide the government with receipts and vouchers to keep record. Of the Rs 100 million allocated for the peace process, the government will keep Rs 30 million for internal management. The

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Maoists are to use this Rs 70 million to provide rations for their cadres. Although the government has agreed on rations, the cadres will not receive an allowance. The council of ministers met on Tuesday morning before the peace agreement was signed to agree on allocation of funds and to form various committees.

Child recruits

Sanghu, 20 November

Various human rights groups in Banke have said they will start investigating allegations of Maoists violating the ceasefire code of conduct. This comes following media reports of the Maoists recruiting underage children in their army. Fourteen human rights groups including INSEC, HIMRIGHTS, and CVICT have said they will begin investigating.

The Maoists have been recruiting children as young as



NARESH NEWAR

grade four students and youth from villages in Banke. Eighteen children studying between grades four and eight in Nepal Rastriya Nimna Madhyamik Vidyalaya in Kohalpur VDC's Khadwar village were recently taken by the Maoists. Parents and guardians claim that the Maoists lured their children away by offering various perks. The Maoists, however, deny the allegations.

Not in vain

Annappurna Post, 23 November

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

The decade-long armed conflict killed Hira Gurung's husband, Kaluman but she wants to move on with a new Nepal. "Let the tears for our lost loved ones not be wasted," says Gurung, who moved out of Khotang where Kaluman was killed six years ago. "Whatever happened is in the past, but now let no innocent person become a victim again," is what she wants to say to those who have also lost loved ones.

Humnath Tiwari from Gorkha witnessed his father being killed, but finds consolation in a peace deal and the rebuilding of Nepal. "We now have to focus on new things rather than concentrating on our past," says Tiwari. Widowed young, Kalpana Bhandari also hopes that the death of her husband, a policeman who was killed by the Maoists while on duty in Ramechhap, will not be in vain.

"We have to learn to forget our past if someone's death can make the lives of future generations secure," says Bhandari.

Grief-stricken 63-year-old Shiblal Tharu from Saptari, who had to bury his young son almost seven years ago, finds it hard, but believes, "Now we all have to join the campaign to rebuild our nation."

Andolan justice

Kantipur, 22 November

कान्तिपुर

The government had committed to make the Rayamajhi Commission's report public once it was complete. Its reluctance to do that now is against the people's wishes. Making the findings public and taking action as per the report's recommendations should be a priority.

The Rayamajhi Commission has, after six months of investigation, advised legal action against the accused.

This makes it easy for the government to expedite prosecution of the guilty. However, the report could have missed out on all people responsible for the excesses committed during Jana Andolan II. Similarly, defining penalties might also have been omitted. The report may not necessarily be complete. It is up to the government to see to it that all those who ordered Jana Andolan II be oppressed are subject to court martial.

This report is just a set of recommendations. It leaves the path open for the government to conduct investigations into the role of people not included in the report. This must be a reference, and the government should take further legal measures against the guilty. The prime minister must show enthusiasm to take this forward, and the government must begin to do its homework on the issue of appropriate action against the king.

Marsyangdi darkness

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 22-28 November

घटना बजार

When the 70MW Middle Marsyangdi project started five years ago, it was touted as one of the most important and least expensive hydroelectricity projects in Nepal. But work on Middle Marsyangdi has stopped and the project is on the verge of collapse.

Over 75 percent of the work on Middle Marsyangdi is finished, and only the power station remains to be completed. Work on the project has stopped because of pressure from the German contractors, locals, and Maoists. As a result of their selfishness, the government is losing over Rs 100 million every week.



Although the project started with German assistance, due to numerous irregularities, it is now estimated that it will cost double the original estimate of over Rs 13 billion. Foreign assistance may sound attractive, but it comes with conditions.

The contractor, DDC JV, has already collected millions of rupees and numerous cases related to the project are still pending against the government. By the time just a quarter of the work was complete, over Rs 21 billion had already been spent.

As the cost of the project has skyrocketed, locals saw it as a source of free money and began milking it. The government had said that it would benefit the local community, and had set aside Rs 250 million for schools, drinking water, a road, rural electricity, and health posts. That money has been grossly misused by the locals—Rs 30 million was spent on the construction of one school building, and now, another is being put up.

When a parliamentary committee visited the region recently, it said there is no alternative but to finish the work swiftly. They also recommended that in future the government do its homework before signing agreements on assistance for such big hydro projects.

The Minister for Water Resources Gyanendra Bahadur Karki, and managing director of Nepal Electricity Authority, Arjun Karki insist that work on Middle-Marsyangdi can be completed on time. A highly-placed source says negotiations are going on between the government and the Maoists, and that both sides are worried about the ongoing strikes. It's anybody's guess when the work will resume.

Board: New Nepal
Wait! Wait! I don't agree! Only half my name [Madhab Nepal] is on the sign. We should write the whole thing.

समय Abin Shrestha in Samaya, 23 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“ Now we will do miracles for development.”

CPN (Maoist) chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Rajdhani, 22 November

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In search of the spirit

Some people raise the dead, others go along for the ride



BILLI BIERLING
in SUSPA, DOLAKHA

The shaman showed up drunk. Full of spirits, you might say. By the time the tiny, inconspicuous man of 70-something and his band of buddies came staggering along the trail, we'd been waiting for over three hours in front of his house, squished between rice fields and looming snowy mountains.

When I saw a notice in Thamel for a shaman festival, I wasn't quite sure what it would entail. I knew that traditionally, twice a year, hundreds of *jhankris* make the pilgrimage to

Kalingchok in Dolakha, where the spirit of Kali rests. The older ones do it to renew their allegiance to her spirit, while for young apprentices it is a crucial rite of passage.

But the festival had been put off for the last five years because the shamans couldn't afford it, said organiser Dinesh Deokota of Adventure First, a regular visitor to the shamans of Kalingchok. Paying tourists would mean the festival could resume.

So it happened that 20 of us took the bus to Charikot, and then walked five hours to Suspa, a Thami village just before Kalingchok and watched Jun Kiri,

Suspa's head shaman, struggle to get his front door unlocked.

As the effects of the shaman's little *bhatti-stop* started wearing off, Jun Kiri told us about the woman coming to see him, who has apparently been possessed for years. "We've had two sessions, I haven't driven it out of her yet," he said, putting on his white robe, a chain of bells, and an dangerous-looking crown of porcupine quills.

The patient arrived and Jun started drumming himself and her into a trance. The thunderous sound went on for about three hours. The longer the *jhankri* and the possessed woman shivered,

shook, and drummed, the stiffer our limbs got from sitting quietly. The energy was palpable, but the spirit was unimpressed, and the woman went home, still possessed.

At nightfall the next day, we made our way to Suspa's cemetery to raise a spirit to accompany the *jhankris* and apprentices up Kalingchok—a ritual apprentices need to be able to perform to be full-blooded *jhankris*.

After about five hours of drumming, dancing, and chasing through the forest with a bunch of tourists in tow, the apprentices had failed to raise the spirit.

Dinesh put it down to severe performance anxiety, and most of us started to crawl into our sleeping bags. As photographer Josh Lustig put it, "at about 2AM, I did start to wonder what on earth we were doing, digging up dead babies' bones."

We should've stayed awake. About an hour later Josh and a few others were jolted awake. He looked up and, like a few of the other visitors, saw something that hadn't been there earlier—either the spirit itself, or a shaman dressed in a black cloak who no one had seen before. Amrit Thami, a *jhankri* from a neighbouring village, said it would stay with them until it was put back in another ceremony two nights later.

The shamans, who had not slept for two days and two nights, began to dance up the hill to the



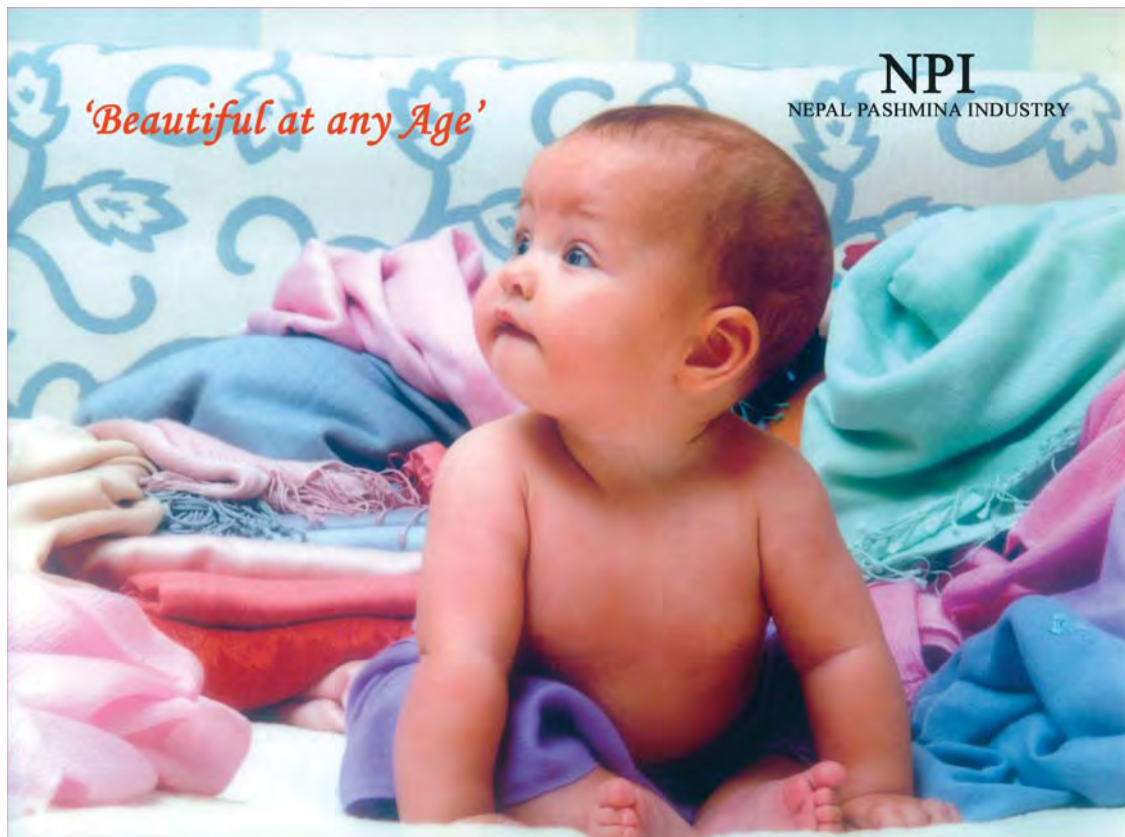
summit at 3,500m, even the elderly as fleet-footed and energetic as teenagers. We collapsed, worn out from the intensity of the experience, while the spirit-workers drank and chatted till the wee hours.

Before dawn the next morning the steep trail up to Kalingchok was already teeming with pilgrims. On the sacred summit we were rewarded with a magical simultaneous moonset and sunrise, as the mountaintop heaved with activity.

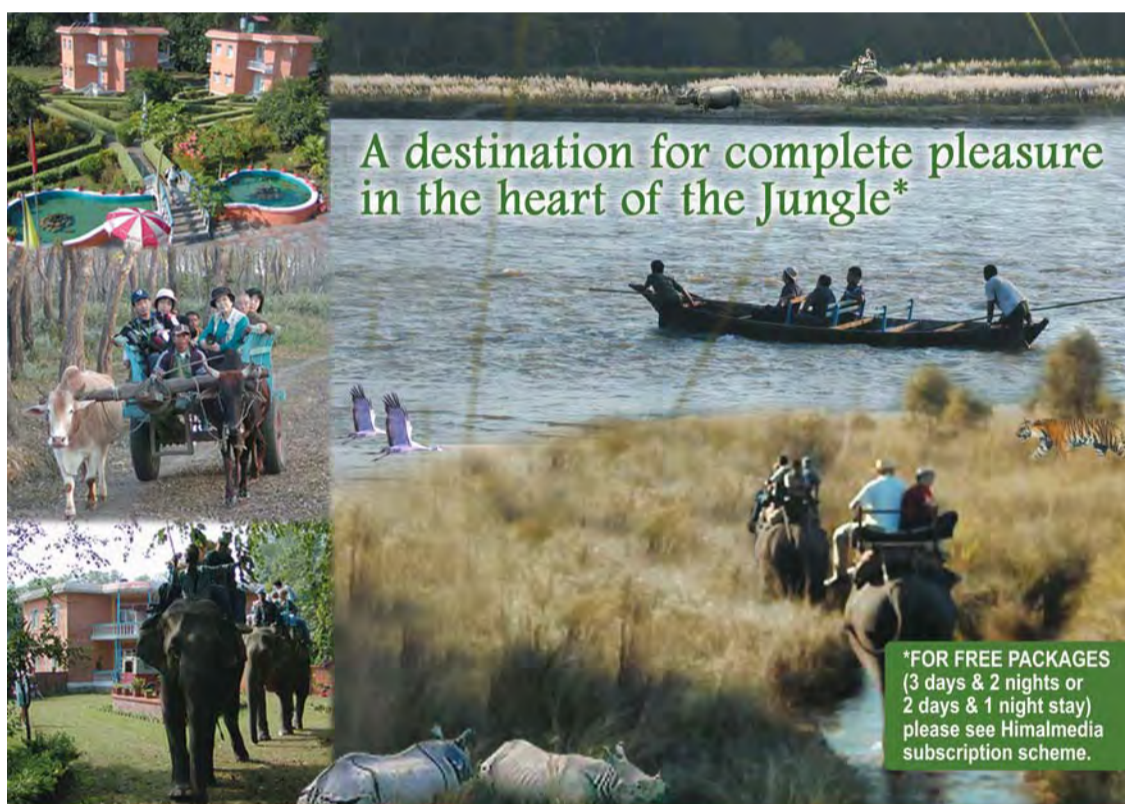
At around ten o'clock heavy clouds started moving in and the pilgrims, finished with sacrificing chickens and goats to the goddess, made their way down to the next village. Turning back, I got a final glimpse of the treeless peak before the cloud curtain closed and Kalingchok fell silent again until another festival in August next year. ●

(For more information on shaman trips, contact Adventure First Nepal at info@adventurefirtnepal.com)





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Beneath the surface

Efforts to remove a 56kg 'cylinder' bomb from the Ghardebi section of the Gaur-Chandranighapur road in Rautahat have been surrounded by drama and controversy. The bomb was planted by Maoists over six months ago, and has since been sealed over, with vehicles driving over it every day. The road is still currently in use.

Following the peace talks, the Maoists contacted the CDO last week requesting a bulldozer be sent so they could remove the device. A bulldozer was provided, but the driver refused to proceed. Local Maoist district committee member Samir says they are willing to coordinate with the UN, INSEC, and the Nepal Army to do what is necessary. "We've removed devices from other locations, but because the road is sealed, we need a bulldozer. If we have one, we can remove it in ten minutes," he said.



KIRAN NEPAL

However, mine and bomb risk expert Hugues Laurence, who is currently working with UNICEF, as well as local INSEC representatives are strongly advising against this plan of action. "Because it's an improvised explosive device (IED), we don't know the lethal radius of this bomb, but we know it is huge. A bulldozer is not appropriate in this case; it needs proper risk assessment, and to be excavated with multiple precautions, which is very sensitive work. The device either needs to be removed and defused, or specific explosives need to be used to destroy or neutralise it on-site. All this is dangerous, and must be done by bomb disposal professionals," explains Laurence. There are concerns that, as with all explosives, passing time—combined with climate, ground conditions, and the vibrations from vehicles will have made the device increasingly unstable.

In a similar case from monsoon 2006 in Dhukuri, Nuwakot, fragments of shrapnel were found in trees 2km away after a 50kg bomb being used by the armed police exploded; fortunately, the explosion happened at night, so there were no casualties. A standard socket bomb contains less than 100gm of explosive. (Jemima Sherpa)

Kathmandu falls

Kathmandu now has the distinction of being the most unpleasant of all 94 World Heritage Sites. A recent survey by National Geographic Traveller of sites as varied as the Jurassic Coast of Dorset, the Pyramids of Giza and the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador, gave Kathmandu Valley the lowest score, with just 39 points out of 100.

Some 420 experts from a variety of fields such as ecology, sustainable tourism, geography, travel writing, and indigenous cultures studied the World Heritage destinations. Convened by National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations, this international panel rated each place on the basis of stewardship and overall outlook and criteria including environment, historic preservation, cultural impact, aesthetics, tourism management, and plans for the future. Norway's West Fjords topped the list with 87 points, and Mexico's Guanajuato, Salzburg, Austria, Siena, Italy, and Kyoto, Japan were ranked as 'destinations doing well'. South Africa's Cape Floral Region, historic Prague, Czech Republic, and Australia's famed Great Barrier Reef were named the 'so-so destinations'. Stonehenge, England, China's Great Wall, Machu Picchu, Peru, Greece's Acropolis, and Egypt's pyramids are all having serious problems.



DINESH SHRESTHA

16 years, 16 days

Women's rights activists will be observing 16 days of stepped up activism against gender violence beginning 25 November (the International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women) to 10 December (International Human Rights Day) to pressurise the government to effectively implement the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security.

The 16-day campaign began in 1991 with activists the world over calling on the UN to place women's issues on the agenda for the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993 in Vienna. The campaign, which succeeded in collecting half a million signatures in 23 languages from 124 countries, helped secure a formal declaration of women's rights as human rights and of violence against women as a human rights violation in the Vienna Declaration.



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ALL SMILES: Rabina and Rabin (*foreground*) surrounded by friends at Bright Horizon Children's Home School in Kalanki.

NARESH NEWAR

New life

NARESH NEWAR

Smiling shyly, Rabina and Rabin come over to their visitors. "I'm Rabina, and this is my brother," says the ten-year-old girl. We barely recognise her.

In 2002, when Rabina was six and Rabin four, they were severely burnt after Maoists bombed the bus they were on, near the Lakhanti bridge in Simara, Bara. Their young mother Anju died trying to save her two children.

Their horrifying story barely received any attention in Kathmandu. For several months their father Bhakta Bahadur, a forest guard with District Forest Office in Bara, was living from day-to-day, desperately seeking help and relying on the local hospital to treat his children at a low cost.

After we reported on the

siblings, ('Why the children?' #121,) they were flown to Kathmandu and offered free treatment at the Sushma Memorial Hospital in Sankhu. Nepalis at home and abroad contributed Rs 200,000 to a fund set up by *Nepali Times* and human rights group, Insec.

The Swiss-supported Bright Horizon Children's Home School in Kalanki, which assists children affected by the conflict, offered them free schooling and board. In large part, their remarkable psychological recovery from the trauma is because of their friends here.

"When we first saw Rabina and Rabin, we fell in love with them, but they were so scared," says Rabina's friend, 14-year-old Nani Tamang. One night, soon after they came to Bright Horizon, the sister and brother tried to run away, unable to cope with their nightmares. But, they say, the

unconditional warmth and attention they received from their peers and teachers slowly helped them feel safe. "The other children helped them the most," says hostel warden and teacher Binita Shrestha.

Today, Rabina is known not as the girl nearly burnt alive, but as one of the school's brightest students. "I love math and science, I want to be a doctor when I grow up," she says. "Me too," says Rabin, now eight. His classmates laugh, and say he's so active, he should take up sports instead.

"Their cheerfulness and determination to be the best is amazing," exclaims staff member Bikash Lama, who's watched the two grow from being reclusive and cowering into the school's most popular students.

"Rabina really takes care of her friends," another close friend Pema Doma explains, as 20 other girls literally drag Rabina away from us for a game of basketball.

Everyone is smiling fit to burst when it's time to say goodbye. They still have scars on their faces, but they don't care. "This will also go away soon," Rabina says, as she pats her face and runs away. ●

Pollution check

Almost 60 percent of the Valley's air pollution is caused by vehicular emission, despite authorities carrying out mandatory emission tests and on-the-spot checks on all four wheeled vehicles.

Private vehicles are required to go for tests annually while those for hire have to do it every six months. But with rising import of vehicles and an ill-enforced ban on vehicles over 20 years old, there is little they can do. Three wheelers on two-stroke engines have been banned from the Valley, but two wheelers with the same engines have not.

Constable Hari Sharan Poudel sits in the garage of the Valley Traffic Police office in Baggikhana every day and conducts vehicle emission checks for petrol-based four wheelers imported before 1998. He uses a Bosch monitor to see if the vehicles are emitting more than 1000PPM (particulate matter smaller than 10 micrometer) of hydrocarbons and three percent carbon monoxide. Some of the vehicles are older than 30 years but miraculously pass the test. "They fix their carburetors so that it gets more oil and less oxygen, which gives a low emission result on the monitor," he explains. In the Transport Office in Kusunti, it's the same story, except that the check is on vehicles imported after 1998. The traffic office in Satdobato checks vehicles that run on diesel engines. If a vehicle passes the test it gets a green sticker. But once on the streets, the vehicle owner goes back to the mechanic and readjusts the carburetor to economise on oil, thus increasing emissions to above the legal standard. In an attempt to control this manipulation, the Ministry of Environment Science and Technology (MEST) regularly conducts spot checks with the help of the Valley Traffic Police.

Air quality monitoring results in six places within the Valley by MEST show pollution levels in Putali Sadak, Patan Hospital, and Thamel area as the highest. Anything above 120 micrograms per cubic metre is unhealthy, and these areas usually show above 120. "We only have a system to check emissions and monitor air quality. Decreasing pollution will require effective implementation of the law," says Khum Raj Panjali, joint secretary of the Environment Department of MEST. The department has recently completed a study on how to improve the Valley's air quality and control air pollution, which they will soon be recommending to the government, says Panjali. ●

(Alok Tumbahangphey)



MUDITA BAJRACHARYA

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Teacher teacher

NAYANTARA GURUNG KAKSHAPATI in BAGLUNG

There are a few bleary eyes in the community hall here at 7AM on a recent Tuesday. But Christine Stone is bustling around happily, unpacking boxes of finger puppets, flashcards, and drawing materials for one of her rather unique teacher training sessions.

An hour in, Stone has the 25 teachers, some beginners and others 20-year veterans, blowing and chasing after soap bubbles. The training is fun, but the lessons Stone imparts are serious. Some are general—why primary education is the foundation of all that comes later, including SLC, and others are specific classroom techniques, like inexpensive and interactive ways of imparting knowledge using flashcards, cassette tapes, finger puppets and, yes, soap bubbles.

The slogan is Education For All By 2015, and most action plans we see are about building infrastructure and supplying textbooks, to maintaining enrolment in schools and developing more relevant curriculum.

But talk to teachers who deal with low attendance rates, frequent failure, high repeat and drop out rates, and disengaged parents, and you wonder how teachers, who get little by way of training and support, remain motivated.

"Teaching needs to be seen as a challenging, exciting, thrilling career. Nepali teachers need a

career structure and opportunities to progress," believes Stone, who criss-crosses the country every week with Save the Children Norway and private school associations training mostly primary school teachers.

In her 25 years of working in Nepal, Stone has done it all, from teaching English and math in Gorkha and Namjung to writing textbooks with the Secondary Education Project in Sano Thimi. Stone also works with the Kathmandu International Study Center (KISC) and Room to Read.

The transformation in participants is remarkable. Maya Regmi (pictured top) teaches three to six year-olds in a single class at Mahendra Secondary School in Narathati. She has four children of her own and began teaching 10 months ago just because she needed the money. But now, says Regmi, "I want to teach well now, try new things."

Regmi and her colleagues receive flashcards and listening tapes, and will take home the materials they've made. There could be nothing better for Shailendra Paudyal (pictured second left), who's taught at Ganesh Higher Secondary in Balewa for 20 years. Today, when Stone put the teachers through listening and action-oriented exercises, Paudyal finally got that English words and phrases like 'point to the window', which he made his students repeat, actually meant something, they formed a language. ●



Last week, a distinctive part of the mountain broke off, killing six climbers

Accident on Ama Dablam

PADAM GHALE
in SOLUKHUMBU

On 13 November, at about half-past-five in the morning, three Sherpas, one Briton, and two Swedes would have been preparing for the final assault of Ama Dablam's summit. They were placed at Camp Three (dot on *Before photo*), at 6,300m, on a narrow ledge on top of a near-vertical ice slope of nearly 1,000m. The ledge is located just below the huge and distinctive overhang that juts out like a chin of Ama Dablam (circle on both photos). This 'chin' is perhaps why the mountain is called 'mother's necklace'. Besides the amazing leftward tilt of the entire massif as seen in postcards, it is this overhang that, according to many, makes Ama Dablam

the most beautiful peak of the Nepal Himalaya.

On that tragic morning, a part of that overhang gave way (circle on *After photo*). A block of ice removed itself from the rest of the mountain, and crashed through Camp Three, careening on down the main western face of the mountain (dotted line on *Before photo*). The climbers obviously had no possibility of survival. The villagers of Pangboche, in the sprawling valley of the Imja Khola in Upper Khumbu, would have heard the avalanche early that morning. At least one of the Sherpas in the accident was from Pangboche.

The crest and logo of the Himalayan Rescue Association sports an image of Ama Dablam, and it was as the Association's coordinator for mountain rescue that I flew with a team over the crash site in a helicopter to make an investigation.

Of the British expedition, the two who were lost were Mingma Nuru Sherpa of Pangboche, and Duncan Williams. Two other climbers, still down at Base Camp, abandoned the expedition and returned to Kathmandu. Tashi Dorje Sherpa and Da Nurbu Sherpa perished with Swedes Mikael Forsberg and Daniel Carlsson. They were climbing without a regular trekking or mountaineering agency, who would have provided support and information.

Inspecting Ama Dablam from the base camp as well as upon flying around the west and south face, we ascertained that this was an accident from which there was no escape, possibly even if the climbers had been at Camp Two (dot on *After photo*). There were pieces of what looked like tent fabric visible on the western flank, about 500m below the Camp Three site, where the slope converts itself

into a high altitude glacier (oval on *Before photo*).

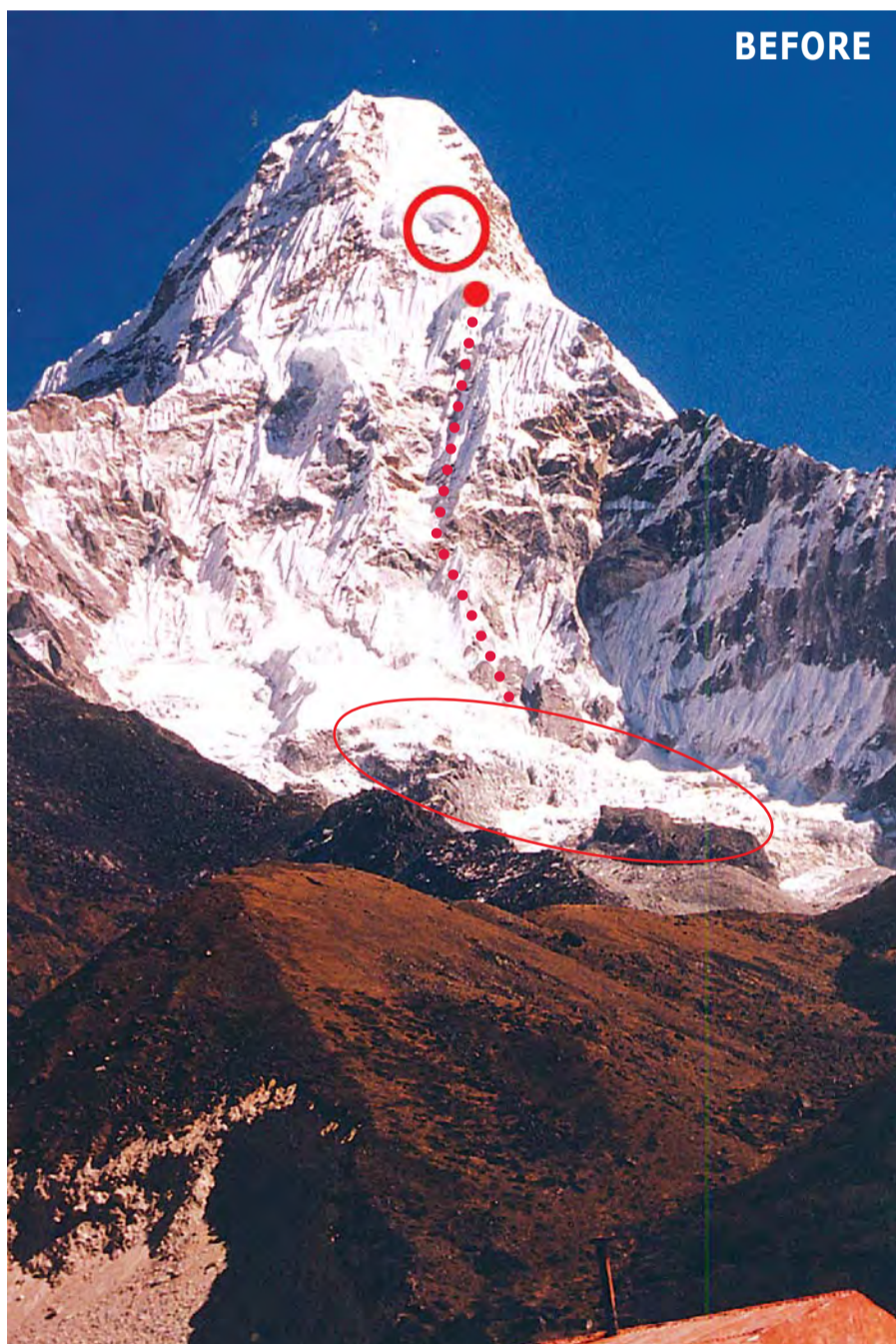
The most well-known accident on Ama Dablam before this was when Peter Hillary found himself dangling from a rope on an exposed slope while attempting the unconventional West Face, back in 1979. Reinhold Messner, who was on the south of the mountain (not the usual south-west ridge route), made a detour to rescue Hillary. The last fatal accident on Ama Dablam, one of the most climbed expedition peaks, was in 2003, when a German climber lost his life.

This time around, there was no possibility of rescue, and with the danger of falling debris and the extreme cold of an early winter, it is difficult to conceive of a salvage operation.

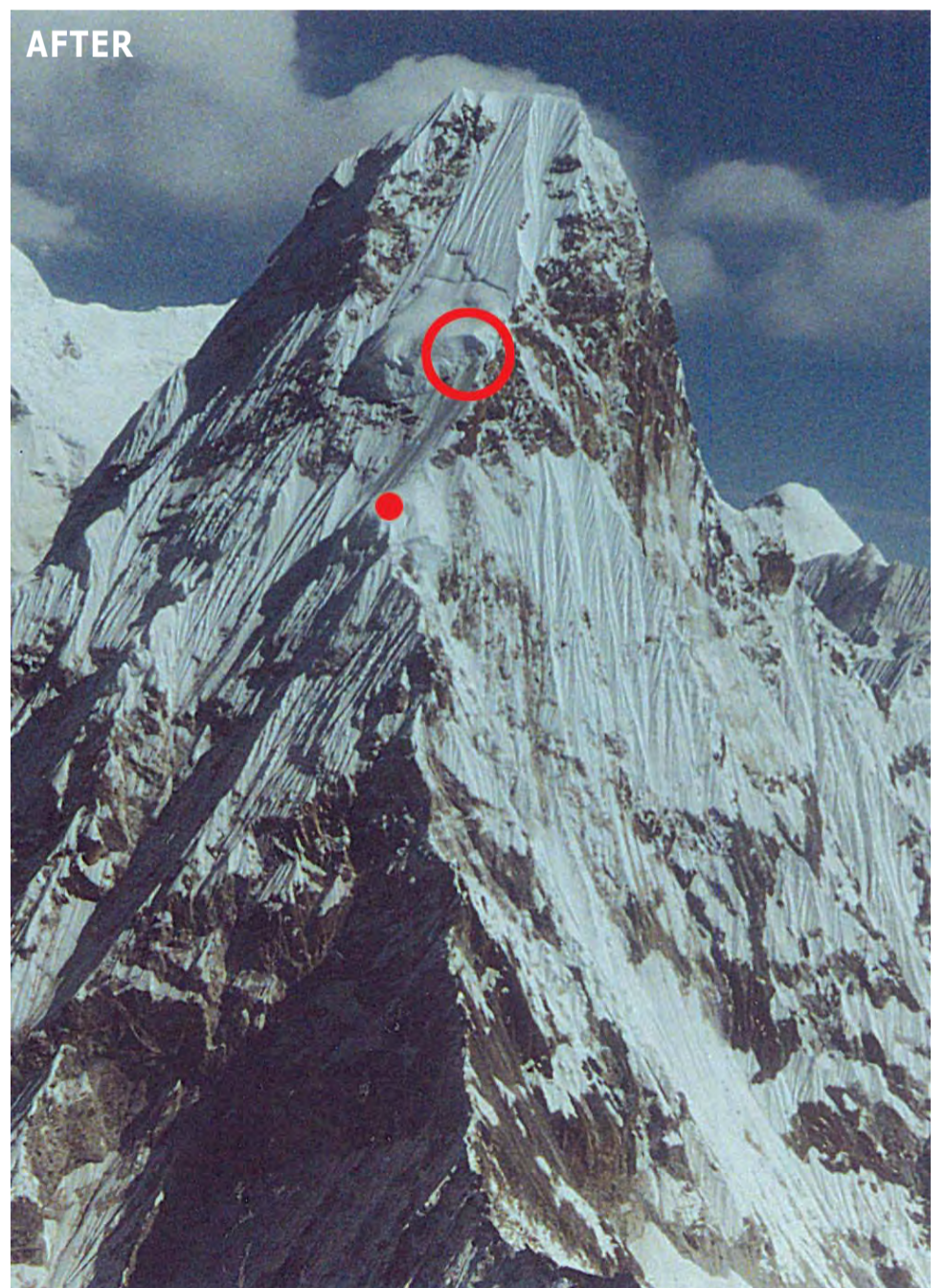
The 13 November tragedy occurred in one of the most widely-photographed ice faces of

the Nepal Himalaya, visible as a sentinel to all who trek the upper Khumbu fork of the Imja Khola on the way past Pangboche, Pheriche, and Lobuche to the Everest Base Camp. The climbers knew the risks involved in the endeavour, and would have been careful about avalanche danger. But they would not have expected an entire block of ice to peel off the Ama Dablam—the 'chin' which has been there for as long as photographic memory can remember.

At the time of this writing, an American team is still up on the mountain, expecting to make an attempt on the summit. Perhaps they will glean more information on the two ill-fated teams. But winter is closing in, and the area of the accident site is dangerous, so it is more than likely that we will have to wait till spring before any effort can be made to go up to find the remains. ●



PICS: PADAM GHALE



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Sense Awareness** paintings by Shobha Adhikari-Wagley at Imago Dei Café, Nag Pokhari
- ❖ **Woman in Nature** paintings by Erina Tamrakar at the SAARC Arts and Crafts Village, Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Faith** symbolic representational art by Laya Mainali until 26 November at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Inspired Expression** tribute to RN Joshi on until 6 December at Park Gallery, Pulchok. 5522307
- ❖ **The New 'Du: A Playful Image of Kathmandu** (and beyond). Paintings by Symon at Indigo Gallery, Naxal.
- ❖ **Collaboration with Mithila Yatra** paintings until 3 December at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 11AM-6PM. 4438979

EVENTS

- ❖ **Mahan Shilpi** Nepali adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, presented by Aarohan Gurukul at Rimal Natakghar, Old Baneshwor at 4.30 PM, 24 November. 4466956
- ❖ **The Role of Silence** dialogue at Mind Body Library, Tripureswor at 12 noon, 24 November. 4279712
- ❖ **Live Music** with Siren from 8PM onwards on 24 November, and Yanki Lepcha on vocals and Sanjay Suman on piano on 25 November at Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Shastrartha** at Martin Chautari by MAPS. 3-5PM, 25 November to discuss Marxist anthropology. 4238050
- ❖ **November Film Festival** documentaries from Nepal, 25-26 November at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. Tickets Rs 50, 5542544
- ❖ **Personality Through Quality Circles** Second national convention of Students Quality Circle at DAV School, 25-27 November.
- ❖ **Vagina Monologues** opening on 1 December 2006 at The National Academy, Kamaladi at 5.30 PM. 4421800
- ❖ **Documentaries** every Wednesday at 6.30 PM till 30 November at Nhuchhe's Kitchen—The Organic Bistro, Baluwatar
- ❖ **Surya Lights Rythmn Nites** with Akriti and DJ Charlotte, 1 December 8PM onwards at The Atrium, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Rs 999 including a drink and dinner.
- ❖ **AWON Christmas Bazaar** 2 December, 10AM-5PM at the Hyatt Regency. Entry Rs 100 for adults, Rs 50 for children
- ❖ **For Good** winter concert by The Kathmandu Chorale, 3.30 PM and 6PM on 9 December at The British School. Admission free.
- ❖ **Seven habits of highly effective people** 6-8 and 10-12 December, 9.30 AM-5.30 PM at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 9851036719

MUSIC

- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** with Anil Shahi and Maya Mantra, 1 December, 6.30 PM onwards at Dolma Café, Thamel. 4215069
- ❖ **Paleti** featuring Prem Lama, 24 November, 5.30 PM onwards at nepa-laya R sala, Manbhawan. Rs 500, seats limited. 5552839
- ❖ **Live Music** with Rashmi Singh and band, 24 November, 7PM onwards at Aboslute! Bar, Pulchok. 5521408
- ❖ **Fourth Anniversary** of Moksh Live, with various artists from 8PM onwards, 24 November. 5526212
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Nekyham Band** live at Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La Hotel, Kathmandu. Wednesdays, 7PM onwards, Rs 600 with barbeque



DINING

- ❖ **Thanksgiving Traditional Dinner** with turkey and pecan pie, 23-25 November at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440
- ❖ **Persian BBQ Night** 24 November for Rs 900 at Fusion, the bar at Dwarika's
- ❖ **Walk and lunch** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 25 November and 16 & 23 December.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Barbeque Ban-Bhoj** at Godavari Village Resort, every Saturday and Sunday. 5560675
- ❖ **Pork chops** and lamb steaks at Sports Bar, Kamaladi. 4438017
- ❖ **Theme Dinners** at Shangri-la Hotel. Sunday and Monday Nepali thali with cultural show, Rs 700. Friday Bhaktapur Nights with cultural show and Newari cuisine, Rs 900.
- ❖ **Foodcourt** at Bluebird Mall, open 11AM-9PM every day. 4228833
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizza** at Java's new extension, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Happy Hour** buy one get one free at Lost Horizon Bar, Shangri-La Hotel from 5-7PM every evening.
- ❖ **Shaken Not Stirred** Martinis 007 style. Wednesdays at Fusion, the bar at Dwarika's. Rs 555 including tapas platter
- ❖ **Charcoalz and Flamin' Cocktails** with live music for Rs 799, Fridays and Saturdays, 7PM at Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768 and Pulchok. 5521755

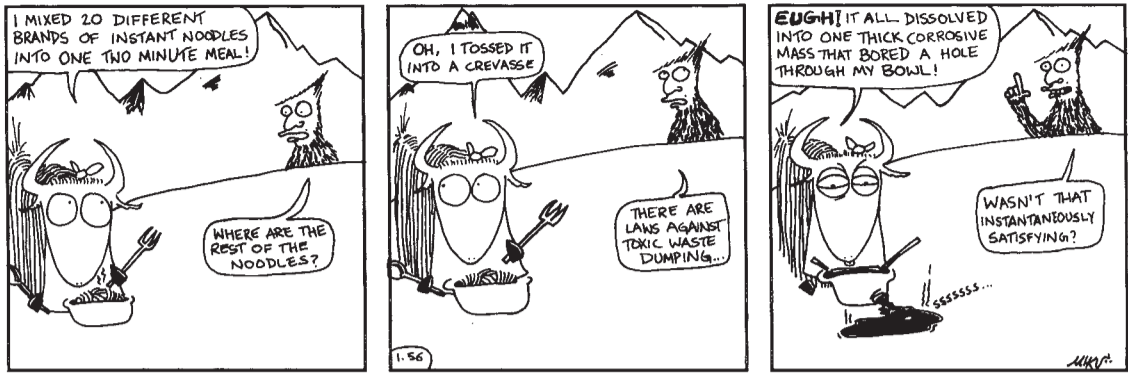
GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** pure relaxation. 4361500
- ❖ **Winter Package** three days and two nights at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara. Rs 7499, 4412999.
- ❖ **Harmony** of the mind, body and soul at Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Yoga Camp** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 1-3 December. 9841371927

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YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



Quest Entertainment

It's high-speed chases, revving engines, hi-tech heists, and non-stop action and laughs with Dhoom 2. Ali (Uday Chopra) is now ACP Jai Dixit's (Abhishek Bachchan) right hand man. But when cunning international thief Aryan (Hrithik Roshan)—known to the police only as the elusive Mr A—teams up with Sunehri (Aishwarya Rai), they need ACP Shonali Bose's (Bipasha Basu) help to track the slick crooks. It's a journey that speeds through the desert of Namibia to the backwaters of Goa, the mean streets of Mumbai and the ancient forts of Rajasthan, finally coming to a dramatic conclusion in the exotic city of Rio.

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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



Starting next week, we can all finally get down to our favourite winter pastime—finding creative excuses to go sit in the warm sun when we should be doing other things like, say, working. A low pressure system is gathering dry clouds from the polar regions, and the dreaded winter fog is becoming common at the lower reaches of the Himalaya. But after this weekend, the grey days will give way to pleasant bright days. The nights will slowly get colder, and it looks like the dry spell of the last three weeks will continue, confirming November as the driest month of the year.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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SAGAR SHRESTHA

LAST OF THE GUNBOATS: Maoist soldiers from the sixth division of the 'People's Liberation Army' travel on Wednesday from Ramghat to Dasharathpur, Surkhet, where one of the cantonment sites is located.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

ROAD RAGE: Satdobato comes to a standstill all Thursday morning, as irate truck drivers force a blockade to protest a traffic policeman's 'manhandling' of a driver.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

MOCK-KING: Comedian Manoj Gajurel does an impression of King Gyanendra at a cultural meeting at Khula Manch on Sunday.



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

FILLUM: Following a month of filming in Mustang, (l-r) actor Nima Rumba, producer Bhaskar Dhungana, director Bhushan Dahal, cameraman Bidhur Pande, and actor Saughat Malla speak at a press conference on Tuesday at Shangri-la Hotel about *Kagbeni*, Nepal's first feature film to use digital technology.



KIRAN PANDAY

ANYTHING FOR BUSINESS: A vessel vendor is far from home along the Khumbu trail on Wednesday.



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Registration and testing is open on, Sunday 26 November at any time between 8am to 4pm, Monday 27 November between 1pm to 5pm, Tuesday 28 and Wednesday 29 November between 7am to 5pm.

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Nectar of revolution

The ass is just a **horse with big ears**. This is what gives him an acute sense of hearing and wisdom, over and beyond his rugged good looks.

That just by introduction to this, the tenth Backside column in this space. The Ass thanks all faithful readers for their time and support as well as for the rotten tomatoes thrown his way. More, throw me more, yum-yum. I would not be where I am today without them. Please, please, please, can all you **rumourmongers** out there send chitchat to my email below? I'm scraping the bottom of the barrel here.



Nepal's **designer revolution** is now really going places. The Pushpakamal-Baburam show is back from Delhi (from 'The Forbidden Fruit or the Nectar of Progress'—who is the copy editor at HT, that's what I want to know). The Ass couldn't help reflecting that the very people who were forcing schoolchildren in Nepal to build bunkers in preparation of an **imminent Indian invasion** two years ago are now being feted by ex-Indian PMs for conducting a successful revolution. Also, wasn't it just last year that Indian spooks successfully patched up a serious public rift between Chairman Prachanda and Ideologue-in-chief Laldhoj?

Do these **ga-ga Indians**, who want revolutions only in other people's countries and not their own, ever read the news? The campaign to force schoolchildren to cantonments is so calculated, deliberate, and nationwide that it could only have come from a command at the highest levels of the Maoist hierarchy, despite what they have been telling lan. ("It is not part of our policy and we will take strong action against anyone going against it." Where have we heard that before?) It's pretty clear the Maoists are **blackmailing the people with peace**, and the strategy goes something like this: We know you all want peace, and we are the only ones who can give it to you, so you better allow us to take away your children into our PLA otherwise we will go back to war, and if we won't get our way in the interim parliament and the interim government we'll go back to war, and if we are not allowed to extort money we will go back to war...

To be fair, it is rather embarrassing for the comrades who till recently had been boasting of a 35,000-strong PLA to show up with only 4,400 rank-and-file guerrillas. Not surprised they want to **pad their numbers**.



Dahalji in his **dapper blazer** and Bhattarajji in a jacket sporting a Nike swoosh knew what the babujis wanted to hear so they made gratuitous references to the ISI ("the Pakistanis wanted to give us money and arms and we refused"). Oh yeah, and **I'm a horse**. Then the ding-dong duo sucked up to the ex-Naxalite closet pinkos in the India International Centre saying they found them much more sympathetic to Nepal than Kathmandu's buddhi jeebees. Hee-haw.

The **donkey's moles** in Delhi tell him this has been the strategy of the intelligence wallas all along: to make Prachanda president so they have a say over Nepal's hydropower and trade and whatever. The idea is to defang the Nepali Maoists by arm-twisting them into the mainstream and this way sideline an arrogant king, weaken those pesky political parties and cut the Nepal Army down to size. The bonus is that this will delink Nepali Maoist from their Indian comrades.

Prachanda's utterances in Delhi show this is going brilliantly according to plan. Then, I suppose they will do an Indira Gandhi on the Naxalites with scorched earth in Andhra, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Bihar. Well, good luck to the **big brothers**.



Business as usual for the royal pundits, though, who are still roving the kali temples doing pujas to enlist divine intervention to **save the king**. He'll need that with the final verdict of the Rayamajhi (Better Late Than Never) Commission this week.



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