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Weekly Internet Poll # 377

**Q. The Maoist pre-condition of republic declaration by parliament is:**

Total votes: 3,390

Weekly Internet Poll # 378. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

**Q. Should we have an independent caretaker government for elections?**

# What are they waiting for?

**JB PUN**

After months of dilly-dallying, the Maoists appear to be finally overcoming their fear of elections and trying to iron out a deal that will bring them back into the government.

The main reason for this dramatic change of heart is the conclusion reached by so-called hardliners in the Maoist leadership that postponement of the elections has not helped the party and instead benefited reactionaries.

With the radicals suddenly showing flexibility, the moderate leadership led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai has responded by launching a three-month public

relations offensive that they kicked off by meeting senior editors at the Shanker Hotel on Tuesday.

The chairman admitted his party had made mistakes, that high-handedness by some comrades had undermined its prospects in elections, and said the party was now serious about repairing its reputation ahead of elections.

"We need to address our past behaviour, we need to change ourselves, otherwise we are headed towards disaster," Dahal told

editors with uncharacteristic candour, adding: "We are now convinced we need elections and for that we need to reform ourselves and I am asking you for your understanding."

To be sure, election dates may take some time to be announced because a part of the deal will be the re-entry of the Maoists into government and there will be the usual haggling over portfolios.

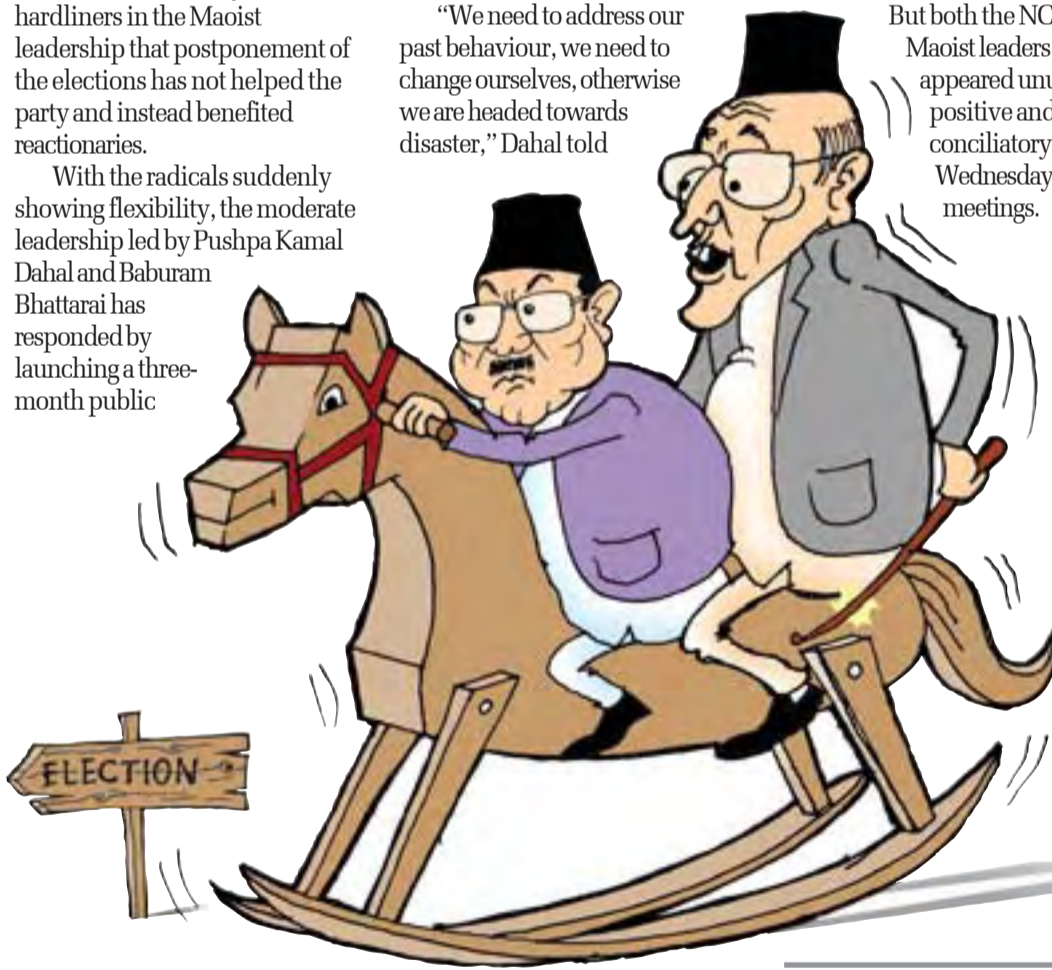
But both the NC and Maoist leaders appeared unusually positive and conciliatory after Wednesday's meetings.

The party leadership has also held meetings with its YCL cadre and warned them: "In a war you can kill people, but not in elections. From now on, no beating up people, no extortion."

It remains to be seen how much control Dahal has over his cadre units, which have often said they work independently of the central party. The radical trio of Mohan Baidya, Ram Bahadur Thapa and Netra Bickram Chand have been critical of Dahal and Bhattarai since the August plenum and even forced the chairman to apologise for his unilateralism.

They recently also accused Dahal of speaking impulsively and without consultation within the party about issues like the integration of the PLA.

But all three now appear ready for elections. Chand told Nepali Times this week: "If we don't go for elections now, it will be bad for us."



BILASH RAI

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# Five-point solution

## There are ways to end the present political deadlock

The present political crisis is not a result of deadlock in parliament. It is because the leaders of the three main parties are unwilling to strike a compromise.



**GUEST COLUMN**  
Nilamber Acharya

The Maoists are not a party that is governed by a belief in elections, and they still believe in the use of physical force. On the other hand, the NC and the

UML do not have the power of conviction in themselves as democratic parties to be able to persuade the Maoists to change their ways.

The main reason for the current stalemate is therefore not a disagreement about a republic or electoral procedures. That is only what appears on the surface. Deep down, the main reason is the gap in trust and the differing political cultures and values of the two sides. So, unless these deep-seated issues are tackled, elections will not happen. And even if they do, the constituent assembly will not be a workable body.

### There are five ways to end this deadlock:

First, the NC and the UML must embark on a long-term effort towards unity of democratic forces. What binds them together is a common belief that only a democratic system will strengthen the nation, and their shared belief in the democratic transformation of the Maoists.

It is the unity of the NC and the UML that makes seven-party unity possible. That is what made the April Uprising successful, and the 12-point agreement with the Maoists possible. Without their unity, we wouldn't have seen an end to the royal dictatorship, nor an end to the 10-year war.

Whenever the two parties have allowed themselves to forget the need for their unity and have fallen out, the democratic achievements have been weakened and the peace process has started to unravel. Neither party believes in the force of arms. They don't need

violence to come to power, and both believe in the parliamentary system and a sovereign people. These common values give their unity a solid strength.

Second, the longer this deadlock continues, the more it helps regressive elements. The strategy of both right and left extremists is to weaken the moderate middle path. But what the Maoists must also understand is that they suffer the most from postponed elections and a deadlock will create the conditions for democratic forces to move ahead without the Maoists.

Third, the NC and the UML must finally realise that neither will benefit from making each other weaker. The more vulnerable the democratic parties, the weaker democracy becomes.

Fourth, the seven parties must now set up a neutral caretaker government for the elections. This government's main job will be to ensure security and hold elections. The interim parliament must be dissolved and the caretaker government should be a small, efficient and streamlined team. The seven parties can't stay on indefinitely in government without holding elections.

Fifth, there should be a separation of powers between the head of state and head of government. The two must be different people. This is necessary because of the special circumstances in which we find ourselves and also to ensure judicial independence. ●

*Nilambar Acharya is a constitutional expert, political thinker and former Nepali ambassador to Sri Lanka.*

## FOOLING ALL THE PEOPLE ALL THE TIME

The seven parties deliberated on the extension of UNMIN's mandate until they were blue in the face. What they should have been more worried about was their own mandate.

These unelected, unrepresentative leaders, either catapulted themselves to power by killing lots of people or had power thrust upon them after the April Uprising. The Six Plus One like to say that they are where they are because of the sacrifices made during the pro-democracy movement that brought down the king. What they forget is that it was the people who made the sacrifices, and they have to go back to the people to seek a fresh mandate.

By delaying elections time and again on one pretext or another they have proven themselves to be unaccountable, irresponsible and devoid of a democratic culture. Of course they have elaborate pretexts: demands for full proportional representation, lack of security, declaring Nepal a republic first because the king will try to rig polls. Actually there is only one reason they don't want elections: because they think they will lose. The Maoists know that they will never have the one third of seats in parliament that they awarded themselves. The NC is sure to lose its commanding position over the government and legislature. Only the UML could be expected to gain from elections, but even they weren't campaigning seriously enough.

The problem with this behaviour is that our cynical politicians think they can get away with it, they think they can fool all the people all the time. But just as we didn't tolerate a royal-military dictatorship and rose up against it, the Nepali people will not tolerate an indefinite seven-party dictatorship. The seven-party alliance may have been able to redeem itself and gain a degree of legitimacy if, even if it couldn't hold elections, it showed improved governance and efficient service delivery. But even here it has failed miserably: the tarai is out of bounds, law and order has never been this bad even during the conflict years, the petroleum shortage is growing worse, garbage is piling up and corruption is a way of life. The people's verdict is that this coalition is unfit to govern.

The only thing they expect this government to do is to keep its promise to announce an election date and then step down.



BILASH RAI

# Throwing justice to the wind

## Our flawed judiciary lets the kangaroo courts flourish in a vacuum

The Nobel Medical College affair disappeared from the headlines as suddenly as it had appeared. Apparently everyone involved wanted to brush it under the carpet. But the audience missed the chance to see the juicy intricacies of crony capitalism.



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
C K Lal

The plot had all the ingredients of a thriller. A businessman, ditched from a potentially lucrative enterprise, calls in the heavy guns in the form of the YCL, which summons a physician and co-investor in the enterprise to its commercial dispute resolution centre in the capital. This man, apparently unperturbed, takes the next available flight to Kathmandu and on arrival is bundled off to the Maoist Guantanamo in Kamidanda.

With some painful encouragement from the YCL, our physician-investor agrees to

abide by all decisions of this kangaroo court. But other players enter the fray. The good doctor, released from captivity, is in turn persuaded by them to make public his tale of woe. He shouts about the injustice dealt him by this 'court' whose jurisdiction he had not dared to question earlier.

The story is not over. It has merely gone underground. But the enigma remains: why is it that notorious criminal groups, ambitious armed officers and cunning Maoist commanders are the favoured courts of appeal for a very influential section of Nepali society?

Although the media have tried to portray the Maoists as the main culprits in this saga, it is difficult to absolve from blame the other parties to the conflict. They were the ones to seek out and accept the jurisdiction of the Maoists' justice mechanism. They were probably also aware of the modus operandi and believed in its efficacy to help them get what they wanted. The whole affair brings

to mind the famous dictum of Lenin: "the capitalists will sell us the rope with which we will hang them".

This unfortunate affair also shows how the formal structures of dispute resolution have lost their legitimacy. The 1990 constitution introduced the notion of judicial supremacy. The courts used this to abrogate treaties made by the executive and restore dissolved parliaments. They began to recklessly overrule politicians and in the process lost their own legitimacy.

The mainstream media love to criticise the Maoists' courts, but for many people living on the margins of rural society, they were the only recourse available against the tyranny of a local strongman, moneylender or government employee.

Sadly, innovations outside the system are often prone to abuse. Within a few years, the kangaroo courts became abettors of crime, perpetrators of injustice and handmaidens of wily manipulators. When the Maoists realised these anarchic instruments had become a liability, they

decided to disband them under the political cover of the agreement made with the mainstream parties. There must be compelling reasons behind their eagerness to revive these discredited dispensers of instant justice.

The problem lies mainly with the way justice is delayed, deformed and denied in Nepal. Our judicial system is fundamentally flawed, with procedural complications that rebuff rather than facilitate the people's access to justice. Most judges fail to inspire confidence. People are then lured to the informal justice systems.

The Maoists are the most notorious, and therefore easy prey for public censure. Other shadowy players stay out of the headlines but their presence can be felt in all major commercial controversies. Only by strengthening the formal justice system, with effective policing and conscientious courts, can we counter muscle-men and Maoists. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs need to ignore arbitrary summons from such illegal authorities to protect their interests. ●

**LETTERS**

**TARAI**

'Promises unkept' (#376) is another example of how people of Prashant Jha's level try to justify the conflict in the tarai. Nepal's rulers perpetrated injustice not just in the tarai but all over the country. Of course there is discrimination against people of tarai origin, but there is also discrimination against all other marginalised groups. This doesn't mean you kill innocent people and launch a policy of ethnic cleansing.

*Abhi Karki, Pune, India*

● How will Prashant Jha reconcile his arguments with the reality expressed in the sad story of the Sunsari families who have been displaced by Madhesi Tiger violence 'Wasn't the war supposed to be over?' (#376).

*Jyoti Mandal, Kathmandu*

● The prime minister's replies to the public's questions in Biratnagar ('The prime minister meets the people', #374) do reflect a genuine attempt to pass the buck, like always. However, it is untrue when Prashant Jha argues that continued pahadi chauvinism is belittling the madhes struggle ('Promises unkept', #376). We people of the hills feel the same despair and angst as tarai residents at the state of the county.

*Amish Mulmi, email*

Kundan Aryal has analysed the situation correctly in 'Farewell to arms?' (#376). The Maoists have no options but election or war.

*Bishnu Rijal, email*

**UNMIN**

It is unfortunate that commentators like CK Lal have also started to support UNMIN's ill-intended and unsolicited encroachment into Nepal's process. It's time to caution UNMIN and ask it to come up with an exit plan as early as possible.

*B Raj, email*

● CK Lal does write sensible things occasionally (this time on UNMIN). As far as I remember he was one of the columnists who envied UNMIN's expensive SUVs and enlarged

role. At least he now concedes that UNMIN has a role to play in taming the increasingly criminalised tarai armed groups and mature tarai politicians (viz R Mahato) trying to fish in muddy waters at times of fluidity. And I appreciate his views on the duplicity of the Indian establishment in (not) helping with these problems.

*Sandeep Dhungana, email*

**VOLUNTEERS**

I have in the past helped many young people who were distressed by commercial 'volunteering' firms like the ones written about in 'Gap year ripoffs', #372. But I would draw readers' attention to Students Partnership Worldwide (SPW), which is part of an international organisation with high values and standards. Most Green Clubs are still running after being started by volunteers 10 or 15 years ago. Any young person wanting to help Nepal should join SPW.

*Christine Stone, Kathmandu*

**FORESTS**

Thanks to Kunda Dixit for the positive and negative sides of community forests ('Seeing neither forests nor trees', #375). The government should hand all forests to community users.

*Rabi Gharabja, email*

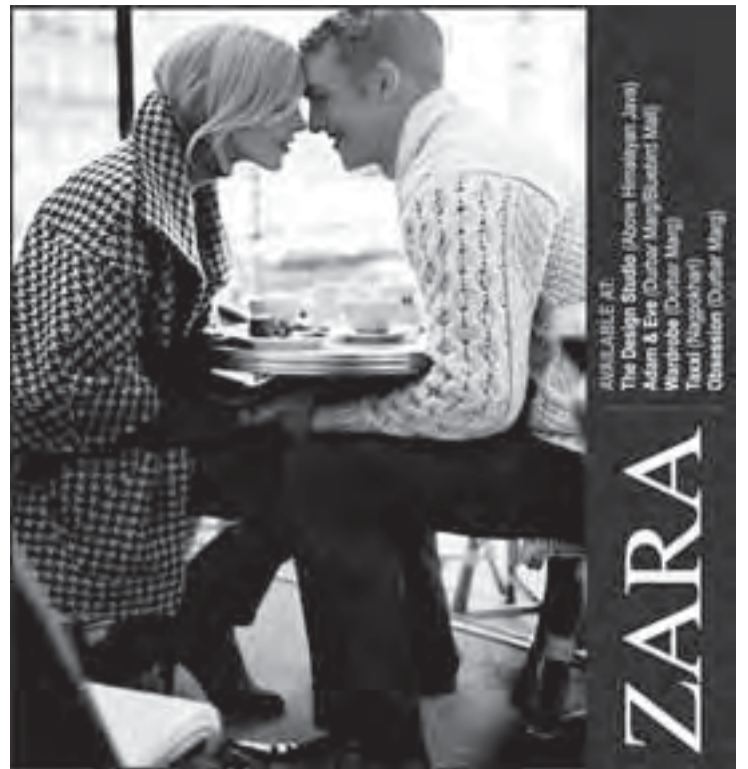
**WORST AIRPORT**

I cannot agree more with the descriptions of Tribhuvan International Airport ('world's worst airports', #376) but you could have added the following hard-to-miss features: pan-stained floors courtesy of the security personnel on duty, a huge toilet mug instead of disposable cups at the water filter, and rude salespeople at the duty-free shops who fawn upon foreigners while ignoring Nepalis.

*Ram Chaudhary, email*

**CORRECTION**

The name of the rawat of elephants in 'Hefty responsibility' (#376) should have been Ram Singh Kumal. Shamshere Gaj is not the largest domesticated Asian elephant in South, his father, Shamshere Bahadur, probably was entitled to that status.



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ANUP PRAKASH

# NRs, IRs and the \$ slide

**Ashutosh Tiwari, CEO Himalmedia:** Some say the slide of the dollar is a good thing because other economic powerhouses now rival the US. The jury is still out, the economists haven't yet given their final verdicts. Himalmedia has invited you here to zoom in on Nepal and see how the slide of the dollar affects our exporters, importers, remittances and the economy. The discussions will be moderated by Sujeev Shakya of Tara Management.

**Siddhant Pandey, Ace Development Bank:** NRB data show that the rupee has appreciated against the dollar by 15.26 percent in the past year. We have 63 percent of our international trade with India and because of our peg to the Indian rupee we have been insulated from recessionary or inflationary shocks. But others who are dependent on the dollar have been hit. To cover our trade deficit with India, last year we sold \$930 million to buy IC. We are selling more dollars to buy less Indian rupees, therefore our reserves are going to be affected. The central bank which is still highly weighted towards the dollar is a loser because it doesn't have a hedging mechanism. The average Nepali who sends remittances home is definitely going to get less rupees for the dollar, but I believe that if this continues remittances will opt for another currency. Having been a currency trader till a few years ago, I do not believe that the dollar will not depreciate further because \$5 trillion are held in international reserves out of which \$1.5 trillion is with China. For them to opt out of the dollar at this depreciated rate will mean being hit hard.

**Sujeev Shakya:** What does it really mean for the Nepali exporter/importer?

**Sujit Mundul, Standard Chartered Bank:** What we have to understand is that the Nepali rupee is not linked directly to the dollar, it has an intervening currency, the IC with a fixed peg. This has worked very well till now, but the point is how is it affecting traders? Seventy-two percent of the country's trade is with India and there is a huge deficit, this has been perennial and it can't be rectified in the short-term. In India the rupee was at about 45 at the beginning of this year, today it is 39.30. The RBI is intervening because it doesn't want it to go below the psychological level of 39. The government of India has asked the banks to go in for subsidisation in the form of export credit, so they are getting export working capital at concessional rates. Unfortunately in the case of Nepal the government doesn't have these mechanisms. It could look at export subsidies to keep this country competitive. I don't think the dollar is going to come back very strong in the foreseeable future.

**Kavindra Nath Thakur, Nepal Carpet Exporters Association:** The government has to take some measures as in India to save our exports which have taken a hit due to the sliding dollar. Nepali carpet exports have gone down by 63 percent in the past ten years. But the government hasn't taken any interest despite the fact that 250,000 people are employed in this industry.

**Radhesh Pant, Bank of Kathmandu:** We need to do more to help exporters because I do not believe the dollar will come back in near future. One reason is that the Indian economy is really booming, secondly oil prices are

not going to come down drastically and because of the sub-prime disaster people are not going to invest in American debt. The Nepali economy is insulated by the peg. But the economy is being impacted, the remittances are less than before when converted to rupees and exporters need help.

**Jaspal Singh Jass, Everest Bank:** In India, the slide of the dollar to record lows means imports will be cheaper and exports will be more costly. In Nepal 65 percent of the imports are from India, and because of the peg the fluctuations are not passed on to the consumer. It will only be the importers in dollars from third countries who will benefit. Seventy percent of the exports are to India, but the ones to be adversely affected by the weaker dollar will be exporters to third countries. The dollar may weaken further, but market forces will also play their part. Nepal should think of providing incentives in form of tax concessions and subsidies for those industries which are having dollar transactions.

**Suman Joshi, Laxmi Bank:** I'm not being critical of the export industry, but if you take an overall view the contribution of exports to the GDP is so small that perhaps that will need to take a back seat. Also, are our exports suffering only because of the dollar? Exports were dipping even before the dollar slide. So, do we also need to look at the comparative advantage, or the lack of it?

**Ujjwal Thapa, DigitalMax:** The economic and political stability of the country and comparative advantage of the country is more important than the value of the dollar. As long as we are competitive, we shouldn't be that badly affected.

**Laxman Risal, NIC Bank:** Some sectors like tourism and handicrafts which procure locally and export are affected badly. But if you see the manufacturing industry like carpets, they are actually import-based. They import wool in dollar terms, and they are being hit only in the value addition part. So it's not as bad as it is being portrayed. It's ok to ask for government subsidies for exports, but we have to ask if our exports have problems other than currency.

**Anupama Khunjeli, Nabil Bank:** We can hedge foreign receivables. US interest rates coming down and the US current account deficit of \$2 billion a day have to be factored in. Interest rates in Japan and Eurozone are also going to go higher. Yen and yuan will have to appreciate. Down the lane, the US dollar will depreciate even more. Such being the case, our exports are going to be hit and they will need help.

**Sushiel Joshi, Himalayan Bank:** If this country subsidises which is consumed by the rich, or gas which is consumed by the urban middle class, why can't we subsidise the carpet industry on which 250,000 poor people depend on for jobs and which is adversely affected by the dollar slide?

**Sujit Mundul:** We can learn from how the Philippines has negotiated with the countries where its workers are based to change remittances from dollars to euros or other currencies. We must look at cross-currency routes.

**Anupama Khunjeli:** Nepal's balance of payments has gone negative. When we were importing oil in dollars our reserves were better six to seven years ago. Now we are buying oil in INR, so the central bank may have to talk to the Indian side and try to import oil in dollars and use the remittances for that.

**Siddhant Pandey:** What hasn't been factored in is that when we start selling dollars to buy Indian rupees, 1.6 becomes moot because we are taking a big hit one way or another. There has to be some kind of a basket of currencies to be pegged to the rupee.

**Sujit Mundul:** Let's assume we unpeg it. Officially inflation is 8 percent, our calculation shows between 10-11 percent and the rupee goes into a realistic equilibrium at 1:2.5, that translates into 25 percent inflation. Can we manage that? India is slowly going into capital account convertibility, they will reach there in three-and-half years. Nepal has to be mindful of this, maybe not in tandem with India's speed but we need to go in for that. If we adopt that, it will correct the peg by itself.

**Sushiel Joshi:** We are in a country when the government can't raise the price of petrol when NOC is bleeding, can we afford 20 percent inflation in this country? Politically can the government take this decision?

**Radhesh Pant:** From the political standpoint, I'd say it's impossible to change this peg right now or even in the next five years because of our increasing dependence on the Indian economy. But we should try to have a goal like 10-15 years to repeg, change it to 1.7 or 1.8.

**Laxman Risal:** We could also increase the number of commodities imported from India so it could provide natural hedging, paying out remittance dollars to pay for our imports.

**Bhanu Kandel, Global Bank/IME:** We are hiding our weakness as a nation by pegging our rupee to the INR. Why shouldn't we be more practical and make necessary corrections in time, otherwise our situation may be like the ruble in future. I think the peg should be revised and revisited and repegged.

**Prahlad Neupane, Annapurna Travels/Western Union**

There is some impact of falling dollar value on remittance, but we do not need to feel discouraged at the moment. Whether the dollar value goes up or slides down, they need to send money to their families anyway. They are not concerned with dollar value but are worried about how fast and reliably they can send money home. The important point is how the country is using the remittances, is it being used in productive areas?

**Bandana Thapa, Nepal Investment Bank**  
Changing the peg between Indian and Nepali currency is such a sensitive issue that the moment you change it there is going to be chaos. We won't benefit by changing it. Remittances are in decline, if this continues the dollar inflow will go down.

## Hydropower

Hydro solutions was formally inaugurated on 2 November by Andre Boulanger, president of Hydro-Quebec Distribution Canada. Hydro-Québec is the world's largest producer of



hydroelectric power with a total installed capacity of about 40,000 MW. Hydro Solutions is a one-stop-shop for all hydropower business, providing comprehensive advisory, planning and execution solutions form a single platform, the first of its kind in Nepal.

## NIC award

NIC Bank has been awarded the Bank of the Year 2007 Nepal by The Banker magazine, Financial Times Group, London. NIC Bank will be profiled in The Banker's magazine issue. NIC was the first bank in Nepal avail a line of credit under IFC's Global Trade Finance Program and the first to be ISO 9001:2000 certified for the Quality Management System.

## Food court



The Bluebird Food Court celebrated its first anniversary on 30 November with a festival that had food decorations, a 15 percent discount on the menu and various activities for children.

## Laser beauty

The first lasertolysis and skin rejuvenation clinic, TouchBeauty, has opened at Old Baneshwor. This beauty clinic is equipped with the latest laser beauty equipment and has been launched by Agio Countertrade, in association with TouchBeauty USA.



### NEW PRODUCTS

**BURN:** A new DVD/CD burner from LaCie is being marketed by CAS Trading House. This burner is fully mobile and burns disks with the help of Toast 8 Titanium, a special burning software for MAC users. The burner will help you design and etch your own labels onto specially coated discs with the Light Scribe labeling technology.



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*A modern reshaping of the British Council's library services in Nepal, including a new ICT-based Learning Centre, will enable us to enhance facilities and help meet the country's needs in English and education more effectively.*

The British Council's services in Nepal will enter a new era next April when it launches its new Learning Centre, providing specialised training and self-development opportunities for educational professionals from schools, colleges and universities.

The new Learning Centre, which will open at the British Council's premises in Lainchaur, will be at the centre of its work with partners in Nepal in providing training and building capacity that will affect over 10,000 primary school teachers, as well as helping shape the future of vocational education in the country.

### An IT-based future for education training

The ICT-based Learning Centre will provide access to a wealth of resources both on-line and on CD-ROMs, with study space for 60 members at any one time. Users will have access to more than one million learning resources, with specialist guidance provided by trained staff to help meet their needs.

The Learning Centre will take over the space of our existing library, which will close in mid-January. Our library services will be taken over by the Kathmandu Valley Public Library, which will inherit the majority of our books and other library stock.

### Working with partners in library services

The British Council will work in partnership with the Kathmandu Valley Public Library, helping them start up their library lending service, providing some funding for new materials, and cooperating on educational and cultural events, such as future visits of writers from the United Kingdom.

"In re-focusing our work to where it can have the greatest impact, we want to ensure it does not happen at the expense of our current library users and customers," said John Fry, the British Council's Country Manager for Nepal.

"By working together with the Kathmandu Valley Public Library, we want to ensure that there continues to be access to top-quality books and learning materials in the English language for the people of Kathmandu".

"What we want to do is to invest our resources where they can provide most impact for Nepal. Increasingly, this will be providing access to specific resources for teachers and educationalists. We can dovetail learning resources from the UK to the exciting capacity-building projects which we will be undertaking in education and English in the next few years.

Mr Fry concluded: "This is a 'win-win' solution which safeguards current library resources by transferring them to a Nepalese partner, while enabling us to provide real value where our expertise can most make a difference. Taken together, there will be more, not fewer, services for the citizens of Kathmandu. The British Council will be doing bigger projects and working with more people than ever before".

### Services to continue for our students and IELTS candidates

The Learning Centre will also serve students attending our language classes and IELTS candidates who have registered through us. Resources for these two groups will be temporarily transferred to the nearby Ambassador Hotel, while the current library space is closed for refurbishment from mid January to April.

### A message to library members

Further information on the changes and how they will affect the way you access library services in the future are available at the British Council and by visiting the following address:

### Contact Information

Raju Shakya  
 Information Services Manager  
 British Council, Lainchaur, PO Box 640  
 Kathmandu, Nepal  
 T 01-4410798  
 F 01-4410545  
 E library@britishcouncil.org.np

# Conditions for elections



KIRAN PANDAY

Interview with Baburam Bhattarai in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2-15 December

**Himal Khabarpatrika: You are ready for a new agreement. As of 29 November 6PM, what progress has there been?**

**Baburam Bhattarai:** We're moving ahead. We're trying to find out what we lacked in the 12-point agreement, trying to figure out its kinks and how to iron them out. It is commonly understood that we need to keep the peace process strong while keeping eight-party unity intact.

**NC is trying to speed up the entire process by putting proportional representation, the election date and the declaration of a republic into one package.**

First, whatever the interim government was instructed to do should be done: a republic and proportional representation. Secondly, care of the PLA, compensation for martyrs' families, a search for those who have disappeared, treatment for those injured—all of which are present in the peace agreement—should be implemented immediately. Third, the merger of the PLA

and the Nepal Army has not been started, as mentioned in the interim constitution. And finally, if we are pushing ahead with a specific date for the elections then we should also change the interim government.

**Have you talked to Koirala about these points?**

All these four points are on our agenda. We have discussed it with Koirala and he has agreed to talk it over and return to us with an answer. As long as the monarchy remains, it will find new obstacles and will not let the elections take place. That is why we need to get rid of the monarchy now. But what the Congress thinks is that if we get rid of the monarchy now, it will lead to problems later. But we have discussed it and we have nearly reached an agreement that the monarchy cannot stay. If a republic is declared, the current deadlock will be dissolved.

**Have you become a bit more flexible concerning the proportional representation system?**

Right now, the system is only half-representative. What we want and what the interim agenda dictates is a fully proportional system. Not just the political parties, but even the madhesis, janajatis, dalits, women and all citizens should make a collective decision. If we are able to reach a conclusion on the republic issue and are able to solve issues of the comprehensive peace agreement properly, then we must also find a way to solve this problem.

**A common view is that even if all these conditions are met, the Maoists will still not be ready for elections.**

We fought a 10-year war with the idea of a constituent assembly election. It was because of the Maoists that the elections were included in the national agenda. Now people think that the Maoists don't want to be a part of the same constituent assembly? The Maoists want this election because it will usher in a new political establishment. How can the Maoists not want to be a part of this?

**Suppose everything goes according to how you want it, would the Maoists then be ready to have elections within five months?**

Of course. If the conditions and the environment for the elections are all satisfactory then we will willingly have elections. Then we will show everyone the power that we have, the same power that we got sacrificing ourselves in the 10-year war. The Maoists will triumph magnificently in the elections. There is no doubt about that.

**You have also started to demand reform of the government.**

Whatever the interim executive directs, it is the government's duty to follow through. If that happens then the government will be reformed under Koirala's direction. But if the executive's direction is not followed, then the leadership of the government will not rest with the NC. There will be a search within the seven parties for new leadership and the government will be reformed.



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### Corrupt Kodari

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 2 December

Smugglers now control the entire Kodari highway to China. Since the smuggling of red sandalwood became public knowledge, it has become clear that this highway's police, tax department, customs and forestry departments are all easily influenced by smugglers. After Tatopani customs officials, hand in glove with smugglers, closed down the customs office for seven days, it got to the point where a customs department investigation team was threatened.

Police are being transferred according to the whim of the smugglers, and at eight or ten places along the road there are ruffians who are there only for 'route clearance'. Those who have spoken out against the current situation are running for their lives. Who's running the Home Ministry, Sitaula sir?

### Dips-in-waiting

*Jana Aastha*, 5 December

The Maoists are the driving force behind demands for a republic. But ironically, the ambassadors that the Maoists nominated will

present their credentials to kings and queens, not presidents or prime ministers.

Ambassador designate to Malaysia, Rishi Adhikari, will be presenting his credentials to the Malaysian king, one of the nine that is rotated in that country. Vijay Kanta Lal Karna, ambassador to Denmark, will be presenting his credentials to Queen Margrethe II.

Yogendra Dhakal, senior Maoist translation editor, is nominated ambassador to Australia, of which Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain is also queen. The only nation in the Maoist quota which is not a monarchy is France.



Prachanda's bucket: Reform  
Crow: "Comrade, you can't wash an ass and turn it into a cow."

द्विपत्रक Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2-15 December

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# Wide



**W**hen Kishor Kayastha was nine years old and growing up in Bhaktapur, he took his father's precious box camera out of the wall cabinet while his parents were out and snapped his first picture.

He was grounded and not allowed to touch the camera for some time. But the young boy's passion for the image meant he started helping out at his father's Nilkamal Studio in Bhaktapur.

And it was clear from very early on that Kishor was an artist, a photographer who saw beyond the two dimensions of celluloid. Living in the ancient city and his interest in the architecture and life of his people shaped his mind's eye. And when digital photography came along Kishor took to the new technology and used its flexibility to full artistic advantage.

Kishor Kayastha's famous panoramas are on display at the Indigo Art Galley for a month beginning this week and some of them are being sold as limited edition 2008 calendars. This is the second time Indigo is displaying his photographs after a successful exhibition in 2005 ('The bromide canvas', #225, [www.nepalitimes.com/issue/225/Review/1520](http://www.nepalitimes.com/issue/225/Review/1520))

"I wanted to make them exclusive and also to give the photograph a time element," says Kishor, explaining why he chose the digitally-printed calendar format.

Kishor's panoramas are multiple exposures of urban vistas that are digitally pasted together and he has no problems with the technique. "If it is possible to do digitally, why should any purist have any problems with it?" he asks.

Indeed, seeing the end result of the 360 degrees of bahal or the Himalayan horizon as seen from Nagarkot, even the skeptic will be impressed. The Himalayan sky is already a wide expanse so the panorama of horizon

doesn't look as striking as the wide angle of Bhaktapur's alleyways.

"I was always struck by how you could take the narrow world of the streets and the bahals and widen them into cinemascope," explains Kishor. "The collective and the communal can then be spliced into individual elements and everyone in the photograph then looks like they exist in a separate universe while being a part of a larger whole."

One picture of golden heaps of harvested rice being dried in the sun in a chok in Bhaktapur can be broken down into many separate elements and is sure to be the most popular photograph in the exhibition.

Besides his wide-format strip panoramas, Kishor explores other motifs. His most dramatic recent works concern monsoon Kathmandu as seen through the wet windscreens of vehicles in the streets. The everyday image of shimmering wet lights are turned into moving colour stills that evoke a drippy and watery world.

Kishor has also been taking close-ups of the walls of homes and temples in Bhaktapur, and by going close enough to bring out the textures and colours, the effect is impressionistic. One can't wait to see where Kishor's eyes will take him next, and wherever they go the results are bound to be mesmerising. ●

'The bromide canvas' (#225)  
<http://www.nepalitimes.com/issue/225/Review/1520>

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# Hydropowered education

Colleges in eastern Nepal are paying staff by selling power to the government

SHAILEE BASNET in SANKHUWASABHA

Nepal has lots of potential for small hydropower schemes. But there isn't enough money to run proper schools and colleges in rural areas.

So what can be done? Why not sell electricity to fund higher education?

It's a simple power-for-education formula that is being successfully implemented in Nepal's eastern district of Sankhuwasabha by the private company Samudayik Sikhsa Bikash Jalbiddut, which means 'community education through electricity'.

"It's such a simple idea, we often wonder why we didn't think of it before," says Hari Bairagi, the former UML member of parliament from the district. "Everyone knows you need education for development, but we have turned that around. We are using development to finance education."

The 250-megawatt Nigure micro-hydropower scheme was built 20 years ago during the Panchayat regime as part of the government's mission to light up the district headquarters. In 2002



PICS: SHAILEE BASNET

the station was blown up by the Maoists and for more than a year it lay in ruins. In April 2003 three local colleges — Barun Multiple Campus, Madi Multiple Campus and Chainpur Multiple Campus — linked up to revive the power station with a loan of Rs 10.8 million and assistance from German aid agency GTZ and energy group Winrock. Experts say the power plant can easily

double its capacity and increase income.

Tulsi Prasad Neupane, the company's president, says: "It's really working well. We sell electricity to the NEA grid and with the money run the colleges."

In 17 months, the company has already generated Rs 3.9 million in cash from the NEA. There are still loans to be paid off, but the colleges already have

a revenue stream for scholarships for needy students and to pay teachers' salaries.

"Most of the families here are poor. They can't afford school fees, so the scholarship fund means a lot to the community and for our college," says Parsuram Dahal, principal of Madi Multiple Campus. All three colleges plan to invest more on increasing student capacity as they earn more profit.

Economist and former water resources minister Dipak Gyawali says the Sankhuwasabha example has turned development in its head. "In previous development models, revenue flowed from the village to the centre. This is an excellent example of how villages earn from the centre."

Sankhuwasabha's success has inspired others to replicate the model elsewhere in the country, not just to use hydropower for education but also to run hospitals and microcredit cooperatives. Even in Sankhuwasabha, there are several other small hydropower sites which have signed power purchase agreements with the NEA.

"There cannot be a better source of long term income for institutes like colleges, hospitals and others," says Hari Bairagi Dahal. "Water is the raw material, no transport is required, and the national grid is right there to buy the product. All you need is initiative." Dahal thinks the model works best locally, but could also be the way to go nationally, with income from hydro power generation funding a nationwide upgrading of education and health facilities.

The Sankhuwasabha model is an example of how a ruined hydropower scheme can rise from the ashes of war to improve people's lives in peacetime, but it is not yet crisis-free.

Having once bombed the power plant during the conflict, local YCL cadres are now using extortion to demand a 'revolutionary tax' of 25 per cent of the profit that should be funding the colleges.

Last year the Maoists locked the power house for a week, but it was reopened after teachers and students from the three colleges retaliated by locking the Maoist office in Khandbari. Negotiations are still continuing. ●

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# Starstruck in Karnali

A clear night sky in the mountains makes a stargazer's dreams come true

Last month, I had the chance to visit the Karnali region for the first time. I was thrilled to be leaving Kathmandu's light pollution for the clear skies of Jumla. But although I had a confirmed air ticket, I had to wait at Nepalganj airport for seven hours, which killed some of my initial enthusiasm. At last, just after sunset, we landed at Jumla and I found myself in the land of my dreams. I looked towards the cloudless sky to find a magnificent crescent moon hanging above the horizon.

Next day I was in Lamra village, some 10km south of Jumla Bajar.



**STARGAZING**  
Kedar S Badu

We stayed at a hotel belonging to Balram Sah, a science teacher from Saptari who had settled in Lamra after marrying a local woman.

In the evening I asked him how he teaches astronomy to his rural students. He teaches pupils in Grades 7 to 10, but cannot identify the stars and planets in the sky. I pointed out a star-like object on the western horizon and told him it was the giant planet Jupiter. His eyes widened in astonishment.

Early the following morning, I woke at 4AM and looked up at the sky. The great celestial dome was above me with the stars and constellations clearly visible. Venus was dazzling in the eastern sky. Mars, the red planet, was overhead and the great Saptarshi (Big Dipper) was to the north.

Sah told me the weather generally remains clear in Jumla all year round, come rain or snow. I imagine the Karnali region has great potential for stargazing. Later, in Mugu, we were guests of a local army unit at Rara Lake, where the major told us that observing the full moon rising above the lake offered the experience of a lifetime.



Back to business. In December, we have the **winter solstice** on 22 December, which is the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere. During the evening, you can see the constellations Gemini, Taurus, Aries, Pisces and Aquarius along the Zodiac from east to west. Just south of Gemini is the great winter constellation **Orion**, popularly known as Teen-Tare here in Nepal. To the north of Taurus and Aries is the constellation of Perseus, where **Comet Holmes** has been putting on a spectacular show since October. With binoculars, enjoy the brilliant **Pleiades** (Seven Sisters), a cluster of tiny but brilliant stars in the Taurus constellation.

Of the planets, Mercury is behind the Sun on 17 December, so we won't be able to see it at all this month. **Venus**, in Virgo, rises in the east at about 4AM and appears as an intensely bright morning 'star'. **Mars**, in Gemini, will be at *opposition* (to the Sun) on 24 December and hence is very well placed for observation. It will be the closest it has been to us for the past two years. Jupiter is behind the Sun on 23 December and will not be visible for the whole month. **Saturn**, in Leo, is rising in the east in the late evening and is high in the southern sky by dawn.

The **Geminids** meteor shower, the best of the year, peaks on the night of 13-14 December, when we might expect to see one meteor every couple of minutes. On new year's eve, you might also catch the **Quadrantids** shower, which peaks in early January.

kedarbadu(at)gmail.com

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# \$liding dollar

Is the world economy at risk? Economists just don't know.

The falling dollar has emerged as a source of profound global macroeconomic distress. The question now is how bad that distress will become.

There are two possibilities. If global savers and investors expect the dollar's depreciation to continue, they will flee the currency unless they are compensated appropriately for keeping their money in the US and its assets, implying that the gap



**ECONOMETRY**  
J Bradford DeLong

between US and foreign interest rates will widen. As a result, the cost of capital in the US will soar, discouraging investment and reducing consumption spending as high interest rates depress the value of households' principal assets: their houses.

The resulting recession might fuel further pessimism and cutbacks in spending, deepening the downturn. A US in recession would no longer serve as the world's importer of last resort, which might send the rest of the world into recession as well. A world in which everybody expects a falling dollar is a world in economic crisis.

By contrast, a world in which the dollar has *already* fallen is one that may see economic turmoil, but not an economic crisis. If the dollar has already fallen—if nobody expects it to fall much more—then there is no reason to compensate global savers and investors for holding US assets.



On the contrary, in this scenario there are opportunities: the dollar, after all, might rise, US interest rates will be at normal levels, asset values will not be unduly depressed, and investment spending will not be affected by financial turmoil.

Of course, there may well be turbulence: when US wage levels appear low because of a weak dollar, it is hard to export to America, and other countries must rely on other sources of demand to maintain full employment. The government may have to shore up the financial system if the changes in asset prices that undermined the dollar sink



risk-loving or imprudent lenders.

But these are, or ought to be, problems that we can solve. By contrast, sky-high US interest rates produced by a general expectation of a massive ongoing dollar decline is a macroeconomic problem without a solution.

Yet so far there are no signs that global savers and investors expect a dollar

decline. The large gap between US and foreign long-term interest rates that should emerge from and signal expectations of a falling dollar does not exist. And the \$65 billion needed every month to fund the US current-account deficit continues to flow in. Thus, the world economy may dodge yet another potential catastrophe.

That may still prove to be wishful thinking. After all, America's still-large current-account deficit guarantees that the dollar will continue to fall. Even so, the macroeconomic logic that large current-account deficits signal that currencies are overvalued continues to escape the world's international financial investors and speculators.

On one level, this is very frustrating: we economists believe that people are smart enough to understand their situation and capable enough to pursue their own interests. Yet the typical investor in dollar-denominated assets—whether a rich private individual, a pension fund, or a central bank—has not taken the steps to protect themselves against the very likely dollar decline in our future.

In this case, what is bad for economists is good for the world economy: we may be facing a mere episode of financial distress in the US rather than sky-high long-term interest rates and a depression. The fact that economists can't explain it is no reason not to be thankful. ●

*J. Bradford DeLong, Professor of Economics at the University of California at Berkeley.*



# Closeup

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# 2-track revolution

KUNDA DIXIT in MANILA

As the world's longest-running Maoist insurgency enters its 40th year, the low-intensity conflict in the Philippines offers several lessons for Nepal about why a peace process can't be left half-finished.

Nearly 50,000 people have been killed since 1968 in a war that pits the Maoist New People's Army (NPA) against the Philippine Army. It has been 21 years since the first peace talks, but war and peace have gone on in parallel since.

The Communist Party of the Philippines is following a two-track policy of having a political front represented in Congress while keeping a 7,000-strong armed wing to fight the war. The NPA is active in 69 of the country's 81 provinces and says it is now 'in the middle of the strategic defensive phase'.

The army makes little distinction between the political and armed wings of the communists and has arrested senior NPA leaders, including central committee member Elizabeth Principe in Manila this week.

The last round of peace talks collapsed four years ago, and the government has refused to abide by immunity guarantees for its negotiators and has killed nearly 1,000 NPA 'supporters' since 2001. The government campaign aims to destroy the insurgents by 2010, but a secret army document recently revealed that target was unlikely to be met.

"There is war fatigue, and Filipinos are increasingly turning against violence," says analyst

Miriam Ferrer. However, the army appears to think it can break the back of the NPA with recent intelligence breakthroughs.

NPA guerrillas, who in the past were politically well indoctrinated in the Maoist mass line, have been accused of indulging in criminal activities. Just as in Nepal, there are frequent reports of extortion by the NPA.

Satur Ocampo, veteran communist leader and member of the Philippine Congress from the Bayan Muna party, says: "The NPA not only wants to achieve

extra-judicial killings and disappearances.

"It's got to a point where just being labelled communist is enough for a person to be branded and killed," says Ferrer. With a strong anti-communist, conservative government and a rebel force determined to wage both a military and political struggle, the Philippine insurgency looks set to drag on even though neither side sees an outright victory.

Nepal's difference from the Philippines is that our Maoists

## The Philippines is stuck in no-war, no-peace



military objectives but even more importantly pursue political goals."

His words have a familiar ring when he says: "Revolutionary taxation is not extortion, it is implemented to finance socio-economic programs for the good of the people."

The army's response of not distinguishing between political and military cadre has exposed it to international criticism of

have fielded the YCL to strongarm opponents, while the PLA is in UN-monitored cantonments and there is an effective ceasefire.

While no two situations are alike, the Philippine case study shows that if the ceasefire does break down, Nepal's Maoists could theoretically fall back on a war-with-peace strategy.

The longer the political deadlock and transition drags on, the greater is this possibility. ●

# 21st century Maoism

Maoism is the most effective method of asymmetrical warfare yet devised, says US military adviser-turned-academic Thomas A Marks in a book that compares the post-Vietnam cases of Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Peru.

After his Masters thesis on the Malayan insurgency and a PhD on the Thai conflict, Marks spent time here studying the Nepal war. He now teaches irregular warfare at the Washington-based National Defence University.

While Mao broke down the "people's war" into its components (mass line, united front, violent action, political warfare and international solidarity) Marks says one needn't be a Maoist to follow these techniques.

As in Iraq, Afghanistan or Sri Lanka, an insurgency is armed politics and a protracted political and military struggle meant to weaken government control so as to seize power. For Mao, legitimacy for such a struggle could only come from popular support to sustain the movement.

Marks says looking at the present peace process in Nepal, one can't be sure that this will lead to a permanent settlement. Usually, negotiated peace in insurgencies happens when the loser is willing to talk or both sides are so badly mauled that they come to the negotiation table. Neither has happened in Nepal.

'Advocating talks as a solution sidesteps the crucial issue of insincerity,' Marks concludes about Nepal's peace process.

The impetus for the Maoist entry into

negotiations had two factors: the international climate (mainly India) as well as the realisation on the part of the leadership that despite their own rhetoric the insurgency had failed in Mao's main condition: it had lost popular support.

The book analyses how in the post-Cold War era Maoism has taken on terrorist tactics as an insurgent weapon of choice. He takes Sri Lanka as an example of this, not just the JVP uprising in the south but also the Tiger separatist war as being essentially waged by Mao's rules.

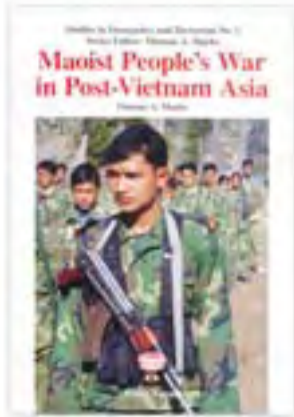
The other factor that has made Maoism more wildly successful in the 21st century than anything Mao predicted is the impact of state failure. 'Peru and Nepal displayed a lack of state capacity beyond anything Mao could have imagined,' writes Marks.

Revolution was made much easier for modern Maoists in Nepal and Peru because the class enemy was so corrupt, disunited and feckless. Despite

dense writing and fuzzy maps, the latest edition of Marks' book is a worthwhile comparative study of the challenges of modern Maoism. By far the longest and most detailed chapter is on Nepal and while there may be points on which Marks can be taken to task, it does give us a perspective on the contradictions we see in our Maoists during the peace process. ●

Kunda Dixit

**The Maoist People's War in Post-Vietnam Asia**  
 Thomas A Marks  
 White Lotus, Bangkok 2007  
 pp 434 \$40



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FRIDAY 7December	3.00PM 4.15PM	Conflict Tiger A Life with Slate	3.15PM 4.15PM	Climber Coast to Coast 458nm; Conversing with Aotearoa; Gimme Green Are There Still Any Shepherds?
	5.45PM	Switch Off	5.45PM	
	11.00PM	Thin Ice	11.00PM	Save Our Planet! Kilowatt Ours Little Terrorist; Made in Italy Alpine Saga
SATURDAY 8December	12.15PM	A Degree of Concern; A Green Agony	12.15PM	
	2.00PM	"Melting of Himalayan Glaciers" A Lecture by Pradeep Kumar Mool	3.15PM	
	3.15PM	For Those about to Rock We Salute You	5.15PM	Blowing Up Paradise
	5.15PM 6.30PM	Afghan Muscles Forgive! Forget Not!	6.30PM	The Dragon Women
	11.00PM	Dalai Lama Renaissance	11.00PM	Edith Collier: A Light Among Shadows The Wake of Calum MacLeod Rita; 37°C Adam's Apples Zum Tode: A Morte
SUNDAY 9December	1.30PM	"Know Your Himal" Quiz With Kunda Dixit	12.15PM	
	2.45PM 4.00PM	Om Bikram Becoming a Woman in Zanskar	2.45PM 4.30PM	
	5.45PM	The Bench	5.45PM	iSalud!
	11.00PM 1.30PM	Buhran A Lecture by Dr. Lakhpa Norbu Sherpa	11.00PM 2.45PM	We Shall Overcome After Srebrenica Voices of the Abandoned Siachen: A War for Ice Rain in a Dry Land
	2.45PM 4.30PM 6.15PM	Sari Soldiers Kripa Dreaming Lhasa	4.30PM 5.45PM	
TUESDAY 11December	11.00PM	Tingvong: A Lepcha Village in Sikkim	11.00PM	Angnima Sherpa: The Icefall Doctor East Sky Burial The Secret of Genyen Loop
	12.00PM	Volcanic Sprint	12.15PM	
	2.00PM	Book Release: "Nepal: Hindu A dhirajyako Itihaas, Dosro Khanda," by Sylvain Levi	3.00PM	
	3.15PM	Miss Tibet; The Big Top Shuffle		
	4.45PM	Dying for Everest		

# Into thin ice

Of all the films in this year's Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF), none quite matches the charm of Håkan Berthas' documentary *Thin Ice*.

Set in Ladakh, its subject is the plucky young student Dolkar, an aspiring athlete, who says her life would be "halved" if she didn't play ice hockey. In her effort to start a women's ice hockey team to compete for the national championship, her biggest hurdle is the patronising chauvinism of the men who find women's sports less worthy of investment than men's.



CRITICAL CINEMA  
 A Angelo D'Silva

In Dolkar's story of determination and ingenuity against the odds, Berthas crafts a small gem that warms the heart.

A charge frequently levelled against documentaries is that they are now so often preachy and unbalanced. So director Fulvio Mariani's *Siachen: A War for Ice* is a useful reminder of how terribly dull the traditional documentaries of the past have sometimes been. Told with little imagination, vision or insight, this film covers the 20-year, stop-start conflict between India and Pakistan over the Siachen glacier.

There are breathtaking shots of the frigid and desolate region and Mariani has impressive access to both sides of the border. But one major problem is the way the film notes, but then scurries away from, questions that are truly compelling, in favour of headshots of military personnel blustering patriotically.

Moreover, *Siachen* foolishly seems to think that India and Pakistan are fighting merely over a piece of ice rather than what in the 21st century will be the world's most precious commodity, drinking water, a resource that both countries seem to have irrevocably damaged with the pollution from their military activity. The filmmakers only mention this in the closing minutes.

Appreciation for this increasingly scarce but vital resource is smartly and satirically explored in Isaac Brown and Eric Flagg's *Gimme Green*, a short film about America's obsession with lawns and the severe ecological consequences this causes.

The filmmakers have assembled a diverse and engaging spectrum of perspectives, from the farmers who actually grow the grass on acres and acres of land, to an estate agent who prowls her neighbourhood to award 'lawn of month' because of her perception that well-manicured lawns keep property prices high. In a manner that has become popular in lofty American documentaries, the film allows its subjects to indict themselves by exploiting their willingness to express their opinions and values and contrasting these with troubling facts and statistics.

*We Shall Overcome* by director Neils Arden Oplev also involves American culture, but from the perspective of a Danish farm boy in 1969 who draws inspiration from the American civil rights movement to gain the courage to confront injustice in his own school. The film effectively illustrates the machinations of power that sustain a reactionary culture in his school—in this case the accepted use of corporal punishment—and allow those responsible to escape retribution—both things, I suspect, Nepali viewers will find remarkably familiar. ●





MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**TROIKA IN THE BLUE ROOM:** Pedro Moitinho de Almeida, head of the EU troika delegation (*third from left*) meets Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai on Wednesday at their office in Buddhanagar. Charge d'affaires of the Slovenian Embassy in New Delhi, Miklavz Borstnik, examines a portrait of Stalin on the wall.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**CRAFTY GIFT:** John Fry, country manager of the British Council in Nepal, presents a book on British arts and crafts to Narayan Khadka for the Kathmandu Valley Public Library on Wednesday. The British Council is transferring its book lending section to Bhrikuti Mandap.



KIRAN PANDAY

**FULL STEAM AHEAD:** Children of parents infected with HIV enjoy themselves at Hotel Shangrila during the launch of a new partnership between government and donors.



GOPAL DAHAL

**TAKING A PUNT:** Enterprising adventurers brave the hazards of the Kosi River in Bhojpur on Monday to float a raft of newly cut bamboo to markets downstream.



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# The bottom line

It's when the great revolutionary Lekhnath Neupane appears on the TV show hosted by the openly bisexual Ujju Darling that you know that the Maoists are finally ready for Constituent Assembly elections.

Yes, it took them time. Yes, they **hee'd** and **haw'd**. But the comrades finally realised they were making asses of themselves by finding excuses not to face the polls. Which is why the Fierce One has been reading the riot act to the YCLs lately.

In a meeting last week in Balaju, he told Comrade Sagar's Alsatian puppies that if they didn't behave themselves and didn't stop harassing people he'd personally **spank** them on their **buttocks**. That bottom line really scared the hell out of the ex-gorillas. And then Fearsomeji flew to Biratnagar and told the YCL Local Chapter there he was sick and tired of apologising all the time for their excesses. "Look at me," he told them. "During the war I was a healthy man. Now that we have made a successful soft belly-landing you are giving me all this stress."

✍

Given the kind of pressure that Comrade Chairman had to face in the August plenum from these very same young commies it took a lot of **guts** for him to say what he did. But the turning point seems to have come with the ultra-hardliners having finally agreed (with a bit of prodding this week by a fraternal delegation from Mao's own country) that by trying to put off elections the comrades had only strengthened their enemies. As part of the deal, a new government will be announced and the Maoists are already licking their **chops** since the defence, home and finance ministries will reportedly be divided up between the Big Three.

✍

The Chairman's charm offensive went into overdrive this week as the comrades launched what could be the first salvo of their election campaign in front of selected editors by admitting past mistakes,

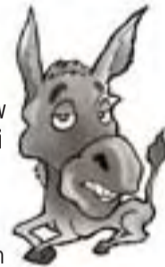
promising to reign in the YCLs, making cooing noises that royals aren't so bad after all, and even admitting that **Uncle Joe** had committed grievous errors by killing 20 million Soviets. So, when are they going to stop brandishing Comrade Stalin's portrait at their mass gatherings? The top comrades have realised they have run out of excuses not to have elections and, besides, the tactic has benefited just about everyone except themselves. So, for the first time the comrades are worried about public opinion and have launched a three-month campaign to win hearts and minds. If they'd only come to that conclusion last year, by now the Maoists would be a formidable political party. But, better late than never.

✍

So Shailaja Di finally got the nod from the Indians for her ambassadorship, but it looks like even Uncle GP has decided she is losing her **marbles** and has asked Shital Nibas to hold her appointment. The Ass takes no pleasure in being proved right and braying itself hoarse that sending First Niece to Delhi was a bad idea all along. But Sanobuwa himself is not doing too well, and it may be best for him to get out of Kathmandu's winter smog and **retire** while he still has a legacy.

✍

Meanwhile, Kingji's own relatives in India have invited him over for a royal family wedding in January and Girjau has been convinced to be magnanimous and let Gyan go and **stretch his legs** a bit. May do him some good to exchange notes with Jwaisa'b the Maharajah of Kashmir and Yasho Rajya Lakshmi about how to make a smooth transition from Sri Paunch to just Sri.



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