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KIRAN PANDAY/GANESH PANDEY

Meanwhile, the economy..

Key ministers in the cabinet are in Copenhagen, the Maoist opposition is gearing up for a total national shutdown from next week, and efforts to find a way to bring the Maoists back into government have failed so far. The Maoists themselves are spending their time flying around the country declaring ethnic autonomous councils and have threatened a 'parallel government'.

In all these fun and games, none of the national players have given any thought to a looming economic emergency. The banking sector is facing a liquidity crisis the likes of which this country hasn't seen, remittance growth is down, the trade deficit with India is growing, domestic production is down and consumer spending is up. Everything is pointing to an economic crisis stemming from prolonged political uncertainty and instability.

Nepal's trade deficit with India is now a whopping Rs100 billion and growing every quarter. While the balance of payments was still healthy, Nepal paid for goods imported from India in remittance and tourism dollars. But money transfers from Nepalis working abroad have plateaued. Overall exports are down, and the fuel import bill is up by 90 per cent from last year. There has been a three-fold increase in vehicle imports this year, which will mean another spike in fuel imports in 2010. All this will put further pressure on rupee parity with India.

"The economy is a soap bubble, it can go any moment," said one senior government adviser who is worried that the ministers have no time to think about medium and long-term interventions to rescue the

economy.

Banks are heavily exposed with unproductive consumer lending and real estate with long-term gestation, exacerbating the cash crunch. Interest rates have recently climbed up to 16 per cent, dampening business.

On 1 January, Nepal will have to open up its services sector including banking to foreign investors under WTO rules. This will mean that smaller banks and finance companies will find it even harder to survive. ●

EAT DRINK AND MAKE MERRY



Special Holiday Supplement

p8-9

MAN FOR ALL 'TREASONS': Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has shown us how versatile he is, but what has he really done for the common people?



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We're with you

Delhi appears to be throwing its weight behind the Nepal Army

THE GOLDEN MIDDLE

For those who are having a tough time deciding which political party is the least of all evils, there is a simple test. Just figure out which one uses violence as a political tool and which one doesn't.

For the Maoists, despite having won an election and entered the political mainstream, the standard operating procedure is still violence, intimidation and terror. In fact, it is their unique selling point.

What we fail to grasp is why governments that would not tolerate the use of violence and terror in their own countries are sympathetic to those who refuse to renounce violence here. The moral double standards are most glaring in the way the national army is being hauled over the coals for atrocities committed during the war while murder and mayhem after the war by the Maoists doesn't elicit commensurate opprobrium.

Journalists have been killed and beaten up, it's open season on citizens, there is an epidemic of extortion and seizure of personal property nationwide, and there have been murders inside camps ostensibly under UNMIN supervision.

The army's culpability in disappearances, summary execution and torture during the war years needs to be addressed in a court of law, just as Maoist atrocities. But the one-sided hounding of the state army is provoking a dangerous rightwing backlash that could push the country back to war.

Only the naïve still believe that the land-grabbers across the country this week are poor landless peasants, or that this is any more about the liberation of the downtrodden. The revolution may have been genuinely for the emancipation of the marginalised at one time, but a recent swing through the heartland convinces us it has now largely degenerated into a nationwide crime syndicate.

Land-grabbing, smuggling, trafficking, contraband, extortion, kidnappings, illegal boulder and sand mining, the decimation of community forests, district construction contracts: you name it and the comrades have their paws in the cookie jar. And any district journalist exposing this is immediately threatened.

To be sure, there are criminal mafias also involved, and the NC and UML are no saints, but the Maoists have taken politicisation and crime and the criminalisation of politics to new heights. The party is always right, and the party never has to say sorry in this Orwellian world. And those who call it like it is are conveniently labelled class enemies and status quoists out to protect privileges. Pushpa Kamal Dahal's chilling warning that one million Nepalis may have to "swim in blood" is a sign that the Chairman is trapped by his own populist rhetoric and the promises he made to his cadre which he now can't fulfill.

Nepal's tragedy is that the democratic parties that don't have a violent ideology and which should have been real alternatives to the Maoists are so weak, fractured and feckless. It is the media's job, and the job of Nepal's true friends abroad, to protect the peaceful middle ground of democracy.

New Delhi – At a reception hosted by General Chhatraman Singh Gurung in the lawns of the expansive Nepal embassy grounds here on Tuesday, the who's who of the Indian defence establishment made an appearance. Indian Army chief General Deepak Kapoor; General Gurung's batch mates from the



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

Indian Military Academy, now in the top echelons of the military; PM's special envoy Shyam Saran; defence attaches from foreign embassies; and retired and serving diplomats queued up to greet the Nepal Army chief.

The bonhomie was palpable. The old tradition of honouring the army chief of a neighbour had just been given continuity. General Kapoor's Nepal visit itself is in the pipeline. The conversation hovered around 'traditional and historic' army-to-army ties. The Indian army brass

was impressed with General Gurung's 'sober and apolitical' outlook. "He is focused and knows where the army's job ends and the government's job begins. And he is a very intelligent man," said a top Indian officer. And a member of the Nepali delegation observed, "They are really giving him the royal

treatment. Their support to the Nepali state and the Nepal Army has been conveyed in clear terms."

Both sides insisted that it was a conventional goodwill visit. But the underlying political message and concerns were hard to miss. There was a sense that the Nepal Army had just passed through a difficult political challenge, and may face testing times again, during which it will have India's full support.

In informal conversations, the Indian defence brass conveyed its desire to see a 'democratic, professional, and apolitical' army. The argument was that the Nepal Army is the only stable institution in the Nepali state, and the only force capable of standing up to the Maoists. Former Maoist combatants will be welcome to join as individual Nepali citizens after meeting the established criteria. But there should be no integration in a manner that would 'politicise' the army and harm its 'institutional integrity'. The Maoists were 'untrustworthy and had to compromise'. When the Maoist argument about how integration was necessary to change the army's 'feudal character' was pointed out, a top Indian general responded, "Is your present army chief a feudal? Don't fall for Maoist rhetoric."

Across the Indian establishment, there is a consensus that the Maoists intend to capture the Nepali state and establish a form of totalitarian rule. The non-Maoist Nepali political class has conveyed the same impression to Delhi. The sense is that too many concessions have been made to the Maoists in the past and this time, the 'Nepali state and the democratic political class' cannot blink in the face of Maoist aggression if they want to survive.

The bottom line is that until the Maoists reform themselves; accept multi-party democracy in principle and practice; entirely settle the PLA question and disband the YCL; return seized property; and agree to be a constructive opposition, instead of the 'irresponsible' one they have been, their participation in the government – far from leading it – is out of the question.

But there is also a recognition that this is not happening. The Maoists are seen to have upped the ante and become even more 'obstructionist'. Earlier, there was a feeling that this was meant to boost their bargaining strength. More recently, Maoist activities have given Delhi the impression that the situation may spiral out of control. The next few months are seen as crucial and if there is no broad agreement soon, Delhi believes the country may slide into a violent confrontation.

Noone here believes that the constitution will be written by May or knows with any precision what will happen after that. Any kind of presidential takeover is not a preferred outcome, for Delhi understands that it would not be a sustainable political arrangement. But if the Maoists 'push the country into conflict', then anything may happen.

India is now deeply worried about the unfolding events in Nepal. It recognises that the process it initiated may be in its death throes. But the consensus is that the onus rests entirely on the Maoists to reform, compromise, and cooperate. If that does not happen, Delhi feels Nepal will head into a 'conflict between multiparty system and one party rule, between democracy and communist dictatorship'. If that happens, India is prepared to back the Nepali state with all its might. ●



LETTERS

FORGET-ME-NOT

Prashant Jha is right ('Forget-me-not', #480). He has correctly pointed out the Kathmandu mindset and attitude towards the emerging generation in the Madhes. I think the coming year 2010 will be very tough for the country as a whole, the disputes within the CA and the Madhes in particular. Despite the weakening of MJF and TMDP, the Madhesi middle class and local-level opinion makers are still hostile towards Kathmandu, the big three parties, and the conservative bureaucracy and security sectors. While they are divided on the issue of federalism, they are

unanimous in the appeal for greater inclusiveness within the state mechanism and security sectors. Yet nobody seems willing to give them anything.

Tula Narayan Shah

BEING MUGALI

She is working hard for her family, instead of retiring from work altogether ('Being Mugali', #480). Nepal's elderly really do have it bad. Don't they deserve the same rights as elderly people around the world? Why isn't the

Saroj Gurung

FRIENDS LIKE THESE

For better or for worse, the Nepali Army (NA) has been the only institution in the country that has remained intact and functional throughout Nepali history. In my view, it has been able to achieve such a feat because it has allied with and co-opted the prevailing powers – first the Shah kings, then the Rana oligarchs, and then the Shah kings again. Indeed, the NA is the weathervane of Nepali politics. The fact that the NA refused to co-opt the Maoists and instead turned to foreign powers shows the sheer influence those powers have. So much then for Mr. CK Lal's wish that Nepali democracy must be home-grown ('Friends like these', #480).

Gaule hero

MAN IN A HURRY

Dr. Bhattarai has it right ('Man in a hurry', #480). It's embarrassing that Nepal's

ruled by the same leaders we threw out of power not so long ago. My blood boils to think that I flew here all the way from the US to vote in the CA elections.

Yanpras



LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms are accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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Including the excluded

It is getting a bit too much, the attempt by politically correct moral police these days to judge the inclusivity of functions by tallying token representation based on surname or gender.

If they find one surname representing a Dalit, Janajati or marginalised group, they heave a sigh of relief. But I wonder if they are trying to be more inclusive, or more exclusive. Are our intellectuals, analysts, politicians and journalists so mentally constricted that they cannot think beyond their own caste?



GUEST COLUMN
Prateek Pradhan

To be sure, there are many groups in Nepal that have not been given a say in decision-making. This gross violation of human rights and dignity was perpetrated by Bahuns and Chhetris, and other groups have genuine grievances that have to be addressed. But let's not go to the other extreme by insisting that participation in every function be reckoned by the proportions of caste, ethnicity, religion, language, gender and so on.

What is going on in the name of redressing past wrongs is aggravating divisions in Nepali society. This has the potential to seriously disturb communal harmony and trigger violence.

Futile donor-driven efforts to make Nepali society just and inclusive are fake, a mere facade. If we consciously involve all castes, creeds and religions in all aspects of life

As a firm affirmative action real, or just a facade?

superficially it will look quite inclusive, but it will not solve the deep-rooted problems of marginalisation and poverty in this country. You can already see that reservation is creating a crème de la crème of neo-elites in beneficiary groups. The majority within these groups, however, is still deprived and discriminated against. The neo-elite skims off the benefits, and nothing percolates down to the lower levels.



KIRAN PANDAY

don't have civil service jobs and in parts of the country are actually at the bottom of the economic ladder. If you really want to look at numbers, there are more 'high' caste people living below the poverty line than 'low' caste people.

Now, with affirmative action, even if the children of very poor Brahmin or Chhetri families excel academically and come into the job market, they risk being excluded from government or INGO jobs. So in trying to correct one wrong, you make another mistake. These poor youngsters whose parents have spent their lives in absolute poverty should not be penalised for the misdeeds of those with whom they only share surnames.

Many Nepalis raise issues when there is a possibility of funding. These flavour of the month fashionable causes are having a detrimental effect on the progressive evolution of our society. Interestingly, it is the higher castes themselves who have been championing the cause of the downtrodden by promising to include them.

There is no issue with some European donors being more aggressive in trying to uplift the really marginalised. But inclusivity must look beyond the token presence of people with certain surnames. An empty stomach is an empty stomach, whether it is a Brahmin or a Dalit one.

The state should strive for economic and social balance, remove inequities and give everyone equal opportunities. But if it really wants to do poor people a favour, it has to be on an economic basis, not on the basis of caste. This country will progress only if we adopt meritocracy in all walks of life. If not, we will be forever stuck in a politically correct morass. No NGO or activist is thinking about this potentially divisive issue because there are no donor funds earmarked for it.

Normally, following a successful revolution, people and society are eager to embrace new ideas and changes. But even if they feel such changes will have a negative impact on society, many will prefer to keep mum so as not to be labelled anti-national, counter-revolutionary or status-quoist.

This could be the reason otherwise sane, rational critical thinkers are keeping quiet about token inclusivity. ●

Prateek Pradhan is the editor of Karobar, a new Nepali language business weekly.

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In the euphoric aftermath of the April Uprising in 2006, the formulation of an interim constitution was a hugely challenging task. The restoration of parliament was certainly historic. But while the old guard of the Nepali Congress and UML wanted to maintain the status quo, the Maoists were unlikely to be satisfied with anything less than the outright declaration of a People's Republic.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Justice Laxman Aryal, more of an organic intellectual than a constitutionalist, succeeded in finalising a 'least unacceptable document' in the absence of a political consensus over the system of governance. But he passed away in September 2009 a disillusioned man, his draft for the interim constitution mutilated almost beyond recognition.

Despite the reservations of the Maoists, the framers of the interim constitution chose to retain the parliamentary system of governance. The anomaly of that preference became apparent when the reconstituted parliament decided to keep the monarchy under suspension. Girija Prasad Koirala functioned as head of state as well as the government when ethnic eruptions threatened the constituent assembly elections. Had Koirala not been a 'constitutional dictator' in those trying times,

it's unlikely the CA elections would have taken place at all.

The successful completion of the CA elections validated the concept of the politics of consultations, the fundamental premise of the interim constitution. But the Maoists challenged this principle of harmony by insisting upon the declaration of a republic at the very first meeting of the constituent assembly. The CA lived to see another day, but the seeds of discord had been sown.

Amendments in the interim constitution then created the posts of president and vice-president, to be chosen through elections. Majoritarianism became the basis of government formation. The consensual CA's transformation into a parliamentary site of political contestations was now complete.

The drafting of the new constitution by this supreme elected body has since receded into the background of intensifying political bickering, to the extent that the CA is almost defunct. The Maoists continue to obstruct its sittings and anti-Maoist forces do nothing to clear the logjam. At this rate, not many tears will be shed if the CA ceases to exist without drafting a new constitution.

The possibility of a political vacuum after May 28, 2010 has energised extremists of the left and right alike. The Maoists have begun to plan for a 'fusion' of ethnic unrest and urban uprising to capture the state. Radicals of the right insist that the president can continue to function with the residual authority of the CA even after the body that created his post ceases to exist. No matter



KIRAN PANDAY

The constituent assembly is still around, but its relevance is rapidly fading

which side prevails in this contest of radical convictions, the middle ground will disintegrate.

It's the responsibility of the government to initiate a reconciliation. But Premier Madhav Kumar Nepal is too busy preparing for his next overseas jaunt to pay attention to issues of governance. His deputies in the cabinet are political lightweights. So the ideologues of Shital Niwas have taken the opportunity to mount a frontal attack on the very essence of the parliamentary system.

In a parliamentary system, the head of

state is purely ceremonial. It appears some would prefer to adopt the German model of the Weimar constitution, wherein the president was considered to be "the pivot of the constitutional scheme, as a 'neutral, mediating, regulating, and conserving' power set above all other branches to defend the constitution and maintain the state." What this ultimately led to needs no elaboration.

Parliamentary decisions are excruciatingly slow, sometimes confusing, often frustrating and almost always contestable. But like democracy itself, it is the worst form of government except for all the others that have been tried. The CA has every right to extend its term if drafting of the constitution can't be completed in time. If the president has any authority, it's purely moral. He should not be advised to think that he can exercise residual powers without inviting political uncertainty, a collapse of governance and social calamity. ●

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Specials

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- Monday - Hi Tech Plus - technology and gadgets
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- Wednesday - Campus Plus - collegiate life ; Appointments - careers and jobs
- Thursday - School Times - everything kids should know
- Friday - Green - environment matters
- Saturday - Property Plus - weekend two pager focusing on real estate

On the web | www.nepalitimes.com

How did Nepal fare at Copenhagen? Our readers said:

Six hundred people flying out from Kathmandu, staying in hotels in Copenhagen, wining and dining on food and beverages presumably transported over long distances, sight-seeing by taking cabs and buses around the city and some possibly also visit friends in nearby places before heading home – somebody please measure the carbon footprint of our delegation!

-MD

The fact that so many Nepalis have managed to get onto this gravy train is a positive sign. I am assuming that not many other countries have done better than this. I think the government should hold a special seminar to teach people how to milk this to the fullest extent possible.

-Jange

For failed states like Nepal, there are more urgent priorities than a carbon-neutral economy. But then I thought Nepal was already a carbon-neutral country. Its total emissions are probably comparable to a mid-sized city in the west. Then why invent a problem?

-Gaule Hero

These people already spent a lot of money arranging trips to Kala Patthar and Copenhagen. If our politicians were so concerned about climate change, they could utilise this fund to save our environment. Our politicians did that meeting in Everest just for a show, and we've nothing to gain from this summit. Just a waste of our money.

-Karla

(Comments have been edited for clarity.)



The decade in pictures

From the royal massacre to the new republic, from the banking boom to the explosion of remix-music bands, we look back at the most dramatic decade of our history in photos.

On the blogs | www.nepalitimes.com/blogs

East-West with Kunda Dixit: Sharing nostalgia and heartache in Nepalganj with singer Amber Gurung.

My City: A photo blog of interesting visual portraits of Nepal.

Sustainable development

Of words and actions

When the Prime Minister and his jumbo Copenhagen entourage ensured that the Kathmandu airport was blocked for two hours, one imagines wasn't mulling how he was about to contribute to the nation's carbon footprint. While we love slogans on sustainability, our actions show that we are yet to give up the practices of the monarchs, and perhaps outdo them as well.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Nepalis love junkets and consultations and every new word creates new opportunities. Hundreds made it to Rio in 1992, other hundreds made it to Jo'burg in 2002 and hundreds more have made it to Copenhagen. Crowding the bars in Copenhagen and discussing politics till the wee hours, however, is not going to get us solutions. We don't even know how many Nepalis are actually presenting papers, how many people are writing for international audiences, and how many are willing to practice what they preach.

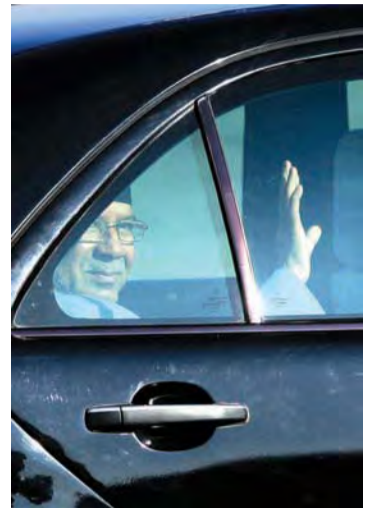
Buzzwords such as sustainable development, climate change and carbon footprint need to be understood in the context they are being used in. In the recently released *Superfreakonomics*, the authors cite examples of how, back in the day, New York's horse carriages were considered an environmental menace because of

the dung, disease and noise they produced. When fuel-fired automobiles were introduced, they were considered saviours. Today, this role has been usurped by electric and natural gas-fired vehicles.

So when we use these words in a Nepali context, we need to look at how we understand and internalise them. For instance, the green stickers we use to certify that our vehicles meet pollution standards are basically an over-the-counter purchase of a certification, like many government approvals. But as the idea was conceived and pushed by donors, we take it as something imported and have not internalised the rationale. How to make our drivers understand that they are responsible for ensuring that their vehicles pollute less is perhaps more important than filling seminar halls at five-star hotels.

Similarly, how do we ensure that the parents who look on idly as their kids litter the streets with empty noodle packets teach them that this is wrong? Look at the civic conduct of those who give lectures on environment and sustainability. How many of them know what is happening to the trash that is being generated at home, how many of them toss cigarette butts everywhere after a few drinks, and how many of them are aware of the carbon footprint of all their junkets?

Nepal's economic growth trajectory has been punctured by those who adopt words but don't



KIRAN PANDAY

internalise their meaning. Like the slogans that we used to chant for the kings not knowing why, we keep on adopting newer slogans to chant. The fact that we have not been able to internalise the words 'conflict resolution' means we have a society traumatised by violence. The fact that we have not been able to internalise the words 'labour rights' means both employees and employers are busy destroying enterprises. The fact that we have not been able to internalise 'inclusion' means we are limited to ticking boxes whenever we want participants from supposedly excluded classes. Hopefully, we will learn from our past mistakes and explore ways to actually internalise sustainable development and climate change issues, or we will simply abandon these concepts once new slogans and new junkets make themselves available. ● www.arthabeed.com

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Teaching teaching

SABHYATA TIMSINA

All you need is a little initiative to change Nepal

It was December 2008 and the SLC exams were right around the corner. The students at Koshi Higher Secondary School in Sunsari, however, had only covered 25 per cent of the syllabus.

They were massively unlucky. After their coursebooks arrived three months late, floods swamped the school. As a result, only a handful of the 110 students were expected to pass.

In short, they needed help.

The parent-teacher association at Rato Bangala got busy straight away, initiating a project called 'Prayas'. A group of A-level students from the Kathmandu school were sent to Sunsari to prepare the students there for the upcoming SLC send-up exams. But with only 17 days at hand, the plan seemed absurd.

One month later came the news that that seventy per cent of the students had passed the examinations. For students who had hardly attended school that year or even flipped through a coursebook prior to the 'Prayas' project, it was a miracle.

Volunteers like Saugat Ghimire were so thrilled by the



SABHYATA TIMSINA

results, they immediately set their sights on other impoverished parts of the country. "I literally went up to the principal's office one morning and said, 'Miss, let's go to Dailekh,'" says Saugat.

Just like that, the 'Youth to Youth to Child' project was

born, with the aim of training young people in Dailekh to teach children in schools across the district. When I first heard about it, I knew I wanted in. For three weeks, we studied education philosophy and child-centred learning in Kathmandu. We then set off to

train 1800-odd youth participants in Dailekh.

Every morning we wrote up a lesson plan for the day before heading to the training centres at 10AM. It was arduous work, since we had to plan enough activities – math and vocab activities, or shared reading and

book-based activities – to keep our trainees occupied until classes ended at 4PM. But it was engrossing work. Although many of us were away from home for the first time, calls home were rare and rushed.

It did take time to settle into our roles however, and we never really got used to being called 'Miss' or 'Sir'. Indeed, we ran the sessions like a typical classroom, hoping to give the youth-in-training a model to replicate back home. For instance, we were constantly reminding them to raise their hands before they addressed us or the rest of the class.

After work, we would meet up for tea at the bazar and share our experiences, complaining about how difficult it was to stay on our toes all day. But for all our griping, we would eagerly begin making lesson plans for the next day.

Our key message to our trainees was that they needn't come to Kathmandu for the good life; they were talented enough to create such a life right where they were, in Dailekh. Volunteer Bibhusha Dangol put it best: "If we can go all the way to Dailekh to help, why can't they stay right where they are and do good things?"

In that sense, the experience taught us all something, trainees and teachers alike. You don't need a PhD to change Nepal. All you need is initiative and a little bit of patience. ●

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Looking south across Manasarovar with Gurla Mandata towering over the mountains of Humla in Nepal in 1993.



MANAS

universe. It is where Shiva is believed to reside with his consort Parvati. It is Kang Rinpoche and Tise to the Buddhists and followers of Bon Po. Lake Manasarovar, on the other hand, has a deep spiritual influence on the minds of people of the region. The mountain and the lake are the ultimate pilgrimage for many across the region.

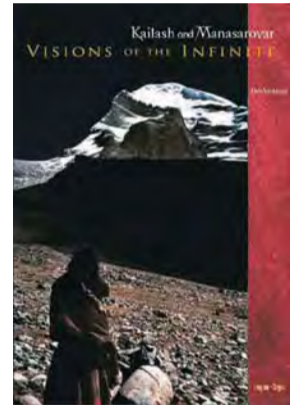
Deb Mukharji, Indian diplomat and former ambassador to Nepal, is a Manasarovar expert, having visited the site three times since 1981 accompanying Indian pilgrims. Researching, photographing and exploring the Kailash region has been Mukharji's life work. His picture book, *Visions of the Infinite*, is being launched by nepa-laya on Saturday, and weaves together the mythology, history and the profound spiritual meaning of the place.

Mukharji has been walking and taking photos in the Himalaya for five decades. His first book, *The Magic of Nepal*, featured photographs and accounts of his walks in the Nepal Himalaya. In *Visions of the Infinite*, Mukharji's photography, brings out in exquisite frames the deep meaning that Manasarovar has on the minds of millions. Many of the 200 pictures were taken before cameras went digital and this is where Mukharji's versatility in the

medium shines through.

The text complements the pictures, giving us not just facts and figures, but what the pilgrimage means to those who have been there. Mukharji's last lines in the book sum it all up: "Kailash is where conviction remains suspended, myths endure, and sparks of understanding illuminate reason." ●

Kunda Dixit



Kailash and Manasarovar
Visions of the Infinite
by Deb Mukharji
nepa-laya, 2009
pages: 246
ISBN: 978-9937-8021-9-2
Price: Rs 2500 1

See also: 'Two Himalayan travelogues', #245

A new book on Kailash gives us a glimpse of the infinite

The holy lake Manasarovar and the mountain that looms over it, Kailash, have been revered by Hindus, Buddhists and Tibetan animists for millennia.

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In Hindu mythology, Kailash was regarded as Meru, the Earth's spinal cord, the centre of the



ALL PICS: DEB MUKHARJI

Kailash from the north, south and west.



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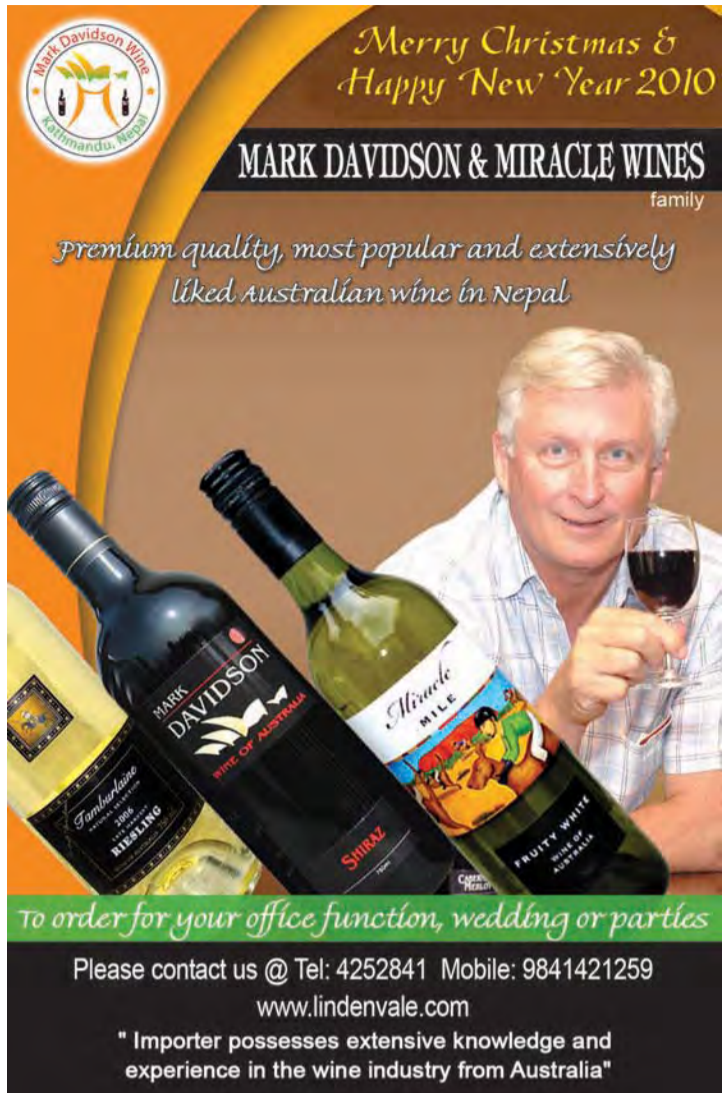
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Merry Christmas & Happy New Year 2010

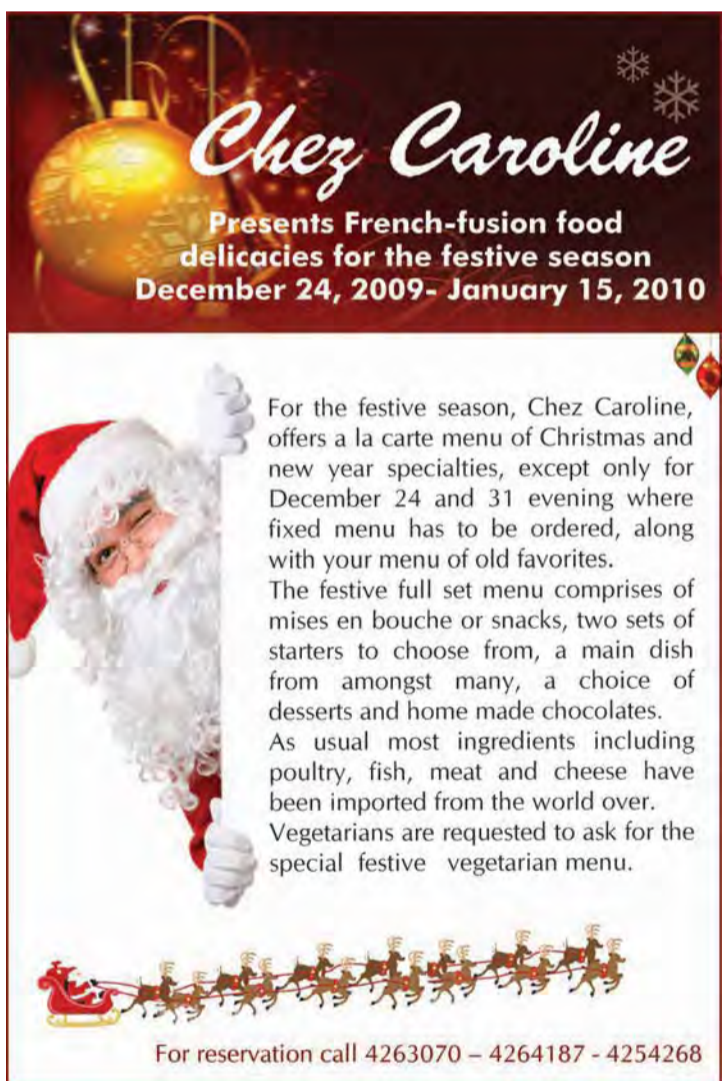
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Once again, it's that time of year, no points for guessing what. From delectable buffets to inexpensive trips to Dubai, here's a list to help you spread the holiday cheer in style.

For those foodies out there (and who isn't this time of the year?), The Café at the Hyatt is offering a traditional Christmas Eve dinner with Christmas carols and mulled wine. Rox Restaurant, Hyatt has a five-course New Year's Eve dinner with champagne lined up. And if you're there already, why not ring in the New Year at Rox Bar?

Hotel Himalaya, too, has a Christmas Eve five-course menu, including drinks, with an instrumental performance by Creation Band. If you feel like going all the way, stick around

for their Christmas brunch the morning after.

The Radisson Hotel is hosting a retro flower power gala dinner on the 31st with a performance by Jyoti Ghimire & The Band along with Dj B Man. But if you fancy turkey, pies and pudding, head over to Hotel Shangri-La for their Christmas Eve dinner. For New Year's, they've invited Sabin Rai, Cobweb Band, 8848 Band, a DJ, and celebrity dancers.

For the more adventurous, Hotel Soaltee will have a hip-notising performance by three belly dancers from Ukraine. Indian Idol finalist Charu Semwal is all set to croon to the crowds on New Year's Eve in the Megha Malhar Hall. An Arabian theme, an exotic buffet, and door prizes including tickets to international destinations, you'll

fancy you're not in Kathmandu at all!

Head to Toran, Dwarika's Hotel for a delicious four-course Xmas dinner with a glass of eggnog or gluhwein. On New Year's Eve they will have a live band performance with champagne. Or soak in the tranquilising ambience at the Kaiser Café for Christmas Eve with a four-course dinner menu.

This Christmas and New Year's Eve, Chez Caroline at Baber Mahal Revisited is treating French cuisine aficionados to a smorgasbord of dishes, from *foie gras maison* to *tartare* and an array of vegetarian dishes. Those who prefer heartier fare should head over to the Irish Pub to experience the German Food Festival from the 18th of December to the 1st of January. The menu includes





PICS: KIRAN PANDAY



schweineroulade (pork rolled with bacon) and other dishes easier to taste than to pronounce.

And why not a seafood buffet for Christmas Eve? Head to Lobsters, whose New Year's Eve itinerary includes a buffet, a Dj session, and special handmade candle souvenirs.

Thamel, as always, is not to be outdone. New Orleans Café's cosy Thamel courtyard is hosting a turkey dinner with drinks and Christmas gifts. Aqua Java Zing has Christmas punch on offer, a pizza shaped like a jingle bell, surprise gifts, and live music.

Not far away, the Bourbon Room will feature Neva Band, followed by a Dj from 7 PM onwards on Christmas Eve. J Bar, Cube, Club Platinum, Insomnia, Absolute Bar and various other clubs around town are also ringing in the New Year with their own special events and countdowns.

But if you really want to mark the end of the year in style, *sawasdee khap*, escape the winter chill with Marco Polo Travels' 3-night Thailand package deal for

Rs 29000 pp on a twin sharing basis. Lalit Mandap Tours is also organising holidays to Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. With the commencement of flights to Dubai via Flydubai, passengers can make their way to the Gulf for just Rs 14000!

Of course, there are plenty of getaways closer to home. Dhulikhel Mountain Resort offers one night's accommodation, a Christmas gala dinner, cultural shows, Christmas lunch and drinks, while Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort is offering a New Year's package deal that includes overnight accommodation, BBQ dinner with live music, and champagne to toast the New Year. The Godavari Village Resort, meanwhile, is offering a New Year's Eve package including accommodation, a lavish gala dinner, door prizes and a live performance by The Heart Breakers. ●

Happy holidays!
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Trip to freedom

You'd be forgiven if you approached *Taking Woodstock* with some trepidation. Ang Lee, perhaps unfairly, has had in recent times a chequered record with critics and audiences. It's just a few seconds into the credits and you are already put in mind of his previous films – that score



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

reminiscent of *Brokeback Mountain*, and those panels within the screen that scream *Hulk*. But you are treated to his lush images, his affecting composition and his knack for seemingly effortless cinematic characterisation, and there's a stirring of recognition of his genius. Could this be an overlooked masterpiece?

What to make of *Woodstock*, the now-legendary hippie event that drew half a million to partake of peace, love, music and... what exactly? The counter-cultural movement of the 1960s was extraordinarily influential, and resonates still in the critiques of KFC openings in places such as Kathmandu as well as the growing popularity of the slow food movement in the press. When we feel trussed by the global economy and its consumerist lifestyle, we continue to look to what the hippies represented. But it appears America and to an extent the rest of us remain ambivalent to the counter-cultural movement, even if capitalism has not quite delivered. Think of the hippies, and some of us feel

embarrassment, if not outright hostility. Lee's approach to this subject takes on a certain quality of naïveté, with the admiring, even longing, gaze of an outsider.

Taking Woodstock is based on a memoir, and has for its protagonist Elliot, a young man who returns from New York City to help his folks run their rundown motel in a rural community. When he invites the *Woodstock* organisers down to his place after they are driven out of the festival's proposed location in a neighbouring town, Elliot becomes suddenly and accidentally instrumental in bringing in *Woodstock* and hundreds of thousands of

Schreiber as the crossdressing ex-marine who provides security at the motel, and Imelda Staunton as Elliot's mother, for instance. Granted there are problems, especially the inexplicably wooden performances in some parts of the film with characters that go nowhere. But even lulled by the cosy warmth and endearing helplessness of its lead, one would have to be pretty set on disliking the film to miss the thoughtfulness that Ang Lee and his screenwriting partner James Schamus have infused into this product. It has themes that are ostensibly counterintuitive against the backdrop of *Woodstock*, and that is precisely

Another Ang Lee tussle with freedom and repression hits the spot

hippies. The burgeoning madness of the festival elicits meek and harried panic followed by mild fascination. We, like Lee's protagonist, are along for the ride. Like docile tourists, we sample a little of the wild side – even Elliot's acid trip is a placid, if interesting, exercise in filmic montage (though it concludes with a gorgeous orgiastic climax of undulating masses on a hill to the soundtrack of a sitar). Sure, it may not be the 'genuine' *Woodstock*, but it's a pleasant trip all the same.

Lee populates *Taking Woodstock* with a brace of actors whose talents elevate their thinly written parts – Live

both its crime and its genius – taking this bacchanalian explosion, the iconic event of the counter-culture movement, and making it a mere backdrop to a young man's story of being torn between his desire to break free and the responsibility he feels towards his family. Of course, that tussle between repression and freedom is par for the course in an Ang Lee movie, but this entry might well belong in the upper echelons of his fascinating oeuvre. ●

Taking Woodstock
Directed by: Ang Lee
Cast: Demetri Martin, Dan Fogler, Henry Goodman, Jonathan Groff
121 min. R

Remembering our grandmothers

PRANAB MAN SINGH

Much of Nepal's documented history lies within the scope of a few. In the feudal caste-based system that underlies Nepali society, this is no surprise. The educated were those in power, those in power wrote about themselves and what was written then is what history is today.

Alternative accounts of this history are slowly emerging but much has already been lost and is fading even as we seek to explore further. This is because the powerless, the poor and the illiterate – the forgotten generations of Nepali men and women, have only the spoken word. The most remarkable and highly commendable aspect of a new photobook, *Hamra Hajurama: Our Grandmothers*, is that it captures not only this oral tradition, but also the history of an oft-neglected generation.

'Photobook', however, is a misnomer. *Hamra Hajurama: Our Grandmothers* features 12 eloquently crafted stories to go with the pictures of its subjects. The spoken word is thus preserved. While the pictures give us a view into their world in the present, the text tells you who they are. More pictures would have been an excellent addition, but what is presented does justice to a generation of Nepali mothers and grandmothers that has suffered through a tradition of gender-based discrimination, and survived the radical changes of modernity.

Some of the stories are absolutely fabulous. They ground the reader within the fundamental core of Nepali society – the family. It is the family that lends Nepali society some of its greatest strengths but also some of its gravest weaknesses. One of the best is Nusrat Banu's tale and its accompanying set of photographs. The story of a Muslim grandmother is enthralling, the prose unobtrusive, but it evokes it all – the comfort and love of family and friends, the oppressions a woman has to endure, the reality of living as part of a minority, and the balancing act of tradition and modernity. The pictures complement the text vividly, and reveal to us not just the present but also the past. The understanding here between writer and photographer on their medium-specific interpretations of one *hajurama* is sublime.

While only a few of the other stories reach these heights of synergy, the book remains a visionary production. Not all the pictures complement the text and not all the texts seem to have captured the soul of the woman being interviewed. This is forgivable, given the challenge of synergising two mediums while simultaneously presenting the life of someone two generations in the past. One of the writers best expresses this intrinsic challenge of the book itself: "She knows that to allow me to tell her story is to let me decide what her life is about, to let me fix her and wield control over her. To let me know her is to allow me to exploit her, do whatever I want with her. To her, I am not an author, I am the authority – oppressing her with my narrative structures and greed for knowledge. What she has perceived is the unfairness of my intrusion, the inequality that separates me from her, storyteller from the subject." ●

Hamra Hajurama: Our Grandmothers is a photo.circle project. A book launch and exhibition will take place at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, at 11AM on 18th December. The exhibition will run until 25th December.



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Xmas? Cheers!

Food for thought this Christmas

It's that time of the year again. If Kathmandu doesn't see Christmas shopping on the scale of London's Oxford Street, where 200,000 people crammed the thoroughfare last Saturday morning despite the economic downturn, there'll be parties galore. Like elsewhere in the West, this will then segue into the New Year celebrations. All this, though there is little to celebrate in Nepal these days, or perhaps because of it. Read: don't worry, make merry.



KALAM
Rabi Thapa

Christmas Day is itself a public holiday now, and well we might wonder why. In the erstwhile Hindu kingdom of Nepal, we now celebrate—or are given license to celebrate—everything from the more conventionally Hindu and Buddhist specials to Id, a clutch of Lhosars and more secular attractions such as Republic Day, Labor Day and Martyrs' Day. And Christmas. In the Kathmandu Valley, it may seem that the spirit of inclusion that has gripped Naya Nepal may even have the expat community in its drunken embrace, for what else but the latter's patronage and the economic imperative could give momentum to this particular season of making merry?

Delve a little further, however, and you will understand that in Nepal, Christmas isn't just about the glitzy ballrooms of the Hyatt and the Soaltee. Even recent tragedies point to the changing demographics of this country. In May, a bomb killed two in a church in Dhobighat. In September, at least 23 people gathered for a Christian conference of 1500 were killed when a makeshift church dormitory collapsed in Dharan. Walk past Patan Darbar Square these days and you are as likely to catch a riveting performance of the Kartik Nach, the re-enactment of Narasimha's disembowelment of the demon Hiranyakashyap, as a re-enactment of the Passion of the Christ. Walk into Ekta Books looking for some godly inspiration, and



KIRAN PANDAY

you're more likely to come across rack upon rack of Christian Lit than anything else. This, in a nation where Christian proselytisation is still frowned upon despite the 1990 Constitution's provisions for religious freedom, and where the 1971 census determined a Christian population of just 2541.

Today, these numbers have mushroomed to upwards of half a million, by some accounts. According to the Nepal Research and Resource Network, there were 2799 churches in Nepal in 2007, 309 in the Kathmandu Valley alone. We may not quite be making the Great Leap Forward, but Christianity has made great strides in Nepal, and we have one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world.

What of it? I have always had a problem

having religion foisted on me, be it through the medium of all-night megaphoned bhajans or clean-scrubbed Jehovah's witnesses a-knocking on my doorstep. But as long as I don't have to hear it or don't see the ill consequences of it, I don't care what religion rocks your boat, it's all Greek to me. What is striking, however, is the remarkable growth of the Gospel in a society traditionally bound by Hindu or Buddhist conventions. This speaks volumes about that society's failure to address the spiritual needs of its members. The cynics or diehards among us may allege that Christian missionaries offer financial inducements to lure marginalised Dalits and janjatis away from their 'real' religious roots, regardless of how recent conversions to Vedic Hinduism itself might be. But the fact

remains—state and society have failed these people in some way, and Christianity is offering them something tradition has been unable to.

So rather than perceive the growth of Christianity as a threat (read: editorials in 2011 that express surprise, no, shock, at the new census figures), perhaps it should be seen as a wake-up call. Not to imagine that we can turn the clock back, that this would be even desirable, but to consider how, beyond economics, we can accommodate the hundreds of thousands of Christian Nepalis and others who are so disenchanted with Nepali spirituality. That, rather than a turkey dinner, might be food for thought this Christmas. For those who have the means, after all, 'tis the season to be merry, like any other. ●

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Leaders speak

Kulchandra Neupane in *Kantipur*, 5 December

कान्तिपुर

"The declaration of federal states is a serious conspiracy", KP Oli, 28 November

"To protest against the declaration of federal states is a ploy to prevent the country from going for federalism", Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, 30 November

new constitution. If leaders sometimes appear to be reaching a consensus, they inevitably pull away.

Why? Youth leaders of the big three parties think power-grabbing prevails in politics. They say that the constituent assembly should be the primary issue and power secondary but it is other way round.

Besides, leaders contradict their own speeches. NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba stressed the need for a high-level political mechanism in Biratnagar on November 30. On the same day in Itahari, just 20km away, he said, "The high-level mechanism will be a place for gossip, there is no need for it."

Such contradictory statements have brought internal party rifts to the fore:

"The coalition does not become rightist just because there are no Maoists", PM Nepal, politburo meeting, 2 December

"We have to leave the government if need be", UML chairman Jhal Nath Khanal, politburo meeting, 2 December

"The NC itself is going against the peace process by opposing the idea of a high-level political mechanism", Deputy PM Sujata Koirala, 29 November

The leaders themselves are not oblivious to their contradictions:

"Leaders have become irresponsible. They don't have control over their own speech", NC leader Purna Bahadur Khadka

"The leaders' expressions show the forces that want confrontation have become stronger within the party", Maoist leader Top Bahadur Rayamajhi



KIRAN PANDAY

"There will be civil war if we integrate the PLA into the Nepal Army", NC leader Sushil Koirala, 2 December

"Wilful declaration of federal states is a big conspiracy", PM Madhav Kumar Nepal, 3 December

"Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal is trying to become a king without a crown", NC leader Ram Chandra Poudel, 3 December

If their speeches are anything to go by, the country is heading to a confrontation rather than a completion of the peace process and a

PM's day out

Bishnu Pokhrel in *Nayapatrika*, 13 December

राजी पत्रिका

"This facewash suits your skin," said a store proprietor wearing a sticker on her left cheek, as Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal entered the exhibition hall in Bhrikuti Mandap. There was no way the prime minister could refuse her supplications. "Really," said Nepal, "Did you make this yourself?" "Yes," she responded, "we made it ourselves and it's completely natural." Convinced, Nepal reached for his wallet, but the proprietor stopped him. "Don't worry, this is a gift."

Madhav Kumar was visiting the 10th Cottage Industry Festival and National Industrial Expo at Bhrikuti Mandap, which began on Thursday. The PM spent 30 minutes there on Saturday shopping, observing stalls and receiving gifts. He received the facewash, worth Rs 120, and other items as gifts from the proprietor, and bought other things he wanted.

He later caught site of an organic coffee stall. "How much is the coffee?" he asked. Upon receiving an answer, he asked again, "Is this made in Nepal?" He reached for his pocket but, perhaps finding no money there, instead asked an assistant to buy a packet.

Nepal may not have visited each of the 145 stalls at the exhibition, but he did visit many. He bought several things besides the coffee, like Rs 150 worth of ginger juice. All in all, he spent Rs 695.

As he left, he told media persons that he was very happy to see so many Nepali products, and assured government help to brand them and market them internationally.

"It's not only goods that can be exported, but also the technology that backs them," he said.



Journalists on the frontline

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 16-30 December

हिमाल

It is obvious that journalists, rights activists, intellectuals and those who raise their voice are facing trouble in the districts. But the physical assault on Rukum journalist Tika Bista has only inspired us to pursue professional excellence in journalism.

The courage and commitment of journalists working in the districts has challenged the reign of fear in a society already facing intimidation, threats, assaults and 'physical action'. Even after the Maoists' move from insurgency to peaceful politics, they do not seem to have developed an inclination for political norms and ideology. They are consolidating the party by recruiting people with brutal criminal backgrounds who have tarnished the party's image. The leadership occasionally makes apologies for atrocities committed by their party cadres but they tend to overlook the increasing number of such incidents.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

The Maoists' nurturing of a culture of impunity has helped create an environment conducive for opportunists to take advantage. The journalists in the district are in the frontline to discourage this trend. If their morale is low, the whole of society will have to bear the brunt of it. At this moment, we remember Uma Singh and wish Tika Bista a speedy recovery.



Bag: Press

कान्तिपुर Batsayan in *Kantipur* on 13 December

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अब सधैँका साथी



TIRTHASIGDEL

“No need to panic”

Nepali Times: What is the population and area of the Kochila Province?
Purna Singh Rajbanshi: I'm not sure.

Now that Kochila province has been declared, what will be your job?

Look, we've already declared this province. The other parties should see this as our commitment and also as a challenge to them. We will now debate this in front of the parties and the people. This is our work now.

Do you mean to say that this is just a proposal? If so, who's going to ratify it?

We will take it to the CA and leave it to the central leadership.

Is there any possibility of working with the other parties, then?

I don't think so. But if they have some better ideas for a

scientific proposal for federalism we will think about it. But we know we are the biggest party, and therefore our proposal is naturally the strongest.

And if the other parties also start declaring their own provinces one by one like you have?

They should understand that we have called this a strong progressive move. There is no need to panic. If the other parties are responsible they should also come up with ideas.

There are already groups that question your boundaries, won't this invite conflict between ethnic groups?

Only those who are against federalism or want to dilute it say that. Such thinking is completely wrong. If the demands of marginalised ethnic groups that are on the verge of extinction are addressed that is all for the common good, it is not against anyone.

Following the 11 December declaration of the Kochila Autonomous Province, which includes Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari, there were many allegations that the Maoists were forming a parallel government and leading the country towards fragmentation, or even war. The Maoist Kochila Province is headed by CA member Purna Singh Rajbanshi. Gopal Gartoula from the *Nepali Times* asked him about his party's intentions.

Ethnic liberty first

Laxman Tharu, president, Federal Democratic National Forum

Janajatis are deprived of their right to utilise their water, land and forests as guaranteed by ILO Convention 169. The government is selling medicinal herbs, wood, rocks and soil without taking permission from the rightful owners because Janajatis don't have access to politics.

Once the provinces are created based on ethnicity and the rights over water, forests and land are ensured, they don't have to look to the centre for development activities and locals will be employed.

Creating federal units without the right to self-determination is impossible. It should be understood as the right to secession. It is a provision to take decisions on our own but within the purview of the country's interests.

The ethnic issue should be resolved before class conflict. If we want to resolve the class issue, all should be employed, which is impossible. But the people are rendered unemployed, impoverished and disrespected just because they are Magar, Tharu, Dalit or Muslim. How can this be a class issue?



Liberty of Limbuwan

Sanjuhang Palungwa, president, Limbuwan State Council

We are not seeking the autonomy of Limbus in Limbuwan. Our movement is for the liberation of Limbuwan and its autonomy. Limbuwan itself is a territory, not an ethnicity. Ethnic autonomy is not possible. Once autonomy is in place, Limbus and all those living here will be liberated.

Autonomy without the right to self-determination is meaningless. Locals should have rights over their resources, as defined by ILO Convention 169.

We follow all democratic norms. Multi-ethnicity, multi-language, multi-culture is our reality. If we ignore this, there won't be lasting peace and security.

All castes will have equal rights in Limbuwan. There will be autonomous units within the province to include everyone. Limbuwan is imagined as a colourful Tehrathume Dhaka Topi with different hues and patterns.

The province will have a two-tier parliament: a Lower Limbuwan People's Council and an Upper Limbuwan Indigenous Council. The representatives in the people's council will be elected through a proportional representation system and the indigenous council will have representatives of indigenous



nationalities from Limbuwan.

People can vote for non-Limbu representatives for the centre. However, the province reserves the right to call back representatives if they are found to be acting against the interests of Limbuwan.



Ethnicity is class

Santosh Budha Magar, president, Magarat National Freedom Front

Language, culture, economy, psychological make-up and territory combined make up nationality. Magarat is the nationality of Magar but other castes live there too.

The Maoists have come up with nationalities as the basis of federal units because the ethnic basis is impossible to implement. It won't be practicable to make a separate province for an ethnicity that claims a couple of hundred members. We can make 13 broad provinces based on nationality. There will be sub-provinces

within the provinces. Ethnic minorities will be given autonomy at regional and village levels as required, with provisions of reservation for marginalised communities. Those without territory such as women and Dalits should be represented proportionately and inclusively.

The freedom of Magarat is the freedom of the people living there at large. However, Magars should get special political rights to utilise resources in the Magarat region. The preservation of language and culture too should be a priority.

The right to self-determination is the right to take decisions on our own. It should be acceptable to all to ensure the rulers cannot betray us. It means in principle that if the rulers try to curtail the rights of the people, they can secede.

Ethnicity in itself is a class. Magars in general are poor. Ethnic issues can be resolved much earlier than class issues. In Europe, there is no discrimination based on language and culture but even now there are issues of class: rich and poor.

Federalism alone cannot resolve ethnic issues, however.

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Hamra Hajurama: Our Grandmothers**, book launch & exhibition opening, 18 December, 11AM Friday, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal
- ❖ **Marfa to Manhattan**, exhibition of photographs by Kashish Das Shrestha at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, till 31 December 11AM-5 PM, 4438979
- ❖ **A people war**, permanent photo exhibition, Sunday-Friday at Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoka

EVENTS

- ❖ **Christmas Workshop** at Assumption Catholic Church, 24-25 December, Dhobighat, 5526732

MUSIC

- ❖ **Benefit concert for Street Dog Care**, at Hyatt Regency Ballroom, with Ani Choying Dolma, 19 December, 5-7PM
- ❖ **HyJazz** every Friday evening by Inner Groove at the Rox Bar, 4489362
- ❖ **Live band** every Friday and rooftop BBQ everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288
- ❖ **Some like it hot**, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, 7PM onwards, 4479488
- ❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7PM
- ❖ **Nepali Ghajals** and songs at D'Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30 PM onwards, 4468589
- ❖ **Rudra Night** live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7PM at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212

DINING

- ❖ **Christmas Eve dinner**, with christmas carols and mulled wine, The Café, Hyatt, Rs 1800 pp
- ❖ **Christmas Eve dinner**, and performances by Sabin Rai, Cobweb Band, 8848 Band, Rs 1500, Hotel Shangri-La
- ❖ **Christmas Eve buffet**, enjoy seafood at Lobsters restaurant
- ❖ **Arabian Night**, with bellydancers from Ukraine on New Year's Eve, Megha Malhar Hall, Hotel Soaltee
- ❖ **Head to Toran**, four-course dinner with a glass of eggnog or gluhwein, Rs 2200, Dwarika's Hotel
- ❖ **Christmas French cuisine**, veg and non-veg, Rs 2950+ and Rs 3900+, Chez Caroline, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4263070
- ❖ **Jingle bell shaped pizzas**, with Christmas punch, as well as BBQ and gourmet fare, Aqua Java Zing, Thamel, 4254809
- ❖ **Christmas Turkey Dinner**, 24 December to 1 January, K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel, 4700043
- ❖ **German Food Festival**, 18 December-1 January, Irish Pub, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Christmas Cake shop**, Christmas pudding, chocolate Santa Claus, hampers and more at The Lounge, till 31 December, 4491234
- ❖ **New Year's Eve dinner**, with champagne, Rs 4500+ pp, Rox Restaurant, Hyatt
- ❖ **Lavazza Coffee and Baskin n' Robbins**, Blue Note Coffee Shop, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Strawberry Étagère**, strawberry flavours at The Lounge, 4.30PM-6.30PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4491234
- ❖ **Oriental Nights**, all flavours and specialities of Asia every Wednesday at The Café, 6.30PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4491234
- ❖ **Live continental BBQ Fiesta**, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30PM everyday
- ❖ **Chocolate, Coffee and Caramel**, every evening at The Lounge, 4.30-6.30PM, 4491234
- ❖ **Wine and cheese**, every Friday & Saturday at The Lounge, 5-8PM, 4491234
- ❖ **A cafe's café**, Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 5522113
- ❖ **Jazzabell Café**, relaunched at Jhamsikhel, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8PM, 2114075
- ❖ **The Corner Bar**, 5-7PM, 3-11PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4411818
- ❖ **Al Fresco**, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 4273999
- ❖ **Kakori**, for biryanis, curries and kebabs, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 7-10.45PM
- ❖ **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle East at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234
- ❖ **Teppanyaki** meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara, 4436318
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 600, 4412999
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4425341
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards, 4412999
- ❖ **Himalayan Rainbow Trout** at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4248999
- ❖ **Tiger for Breakfast**, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4215068
- ❖ **Stupa View Restaurant**, for vegetarian creations & clay oven pizza at Boudha Stupa, 4480262
- ❖ **Gokarna Forest Resort** for a variety of sizzlers at Tripti bar, 44512126

GETAWAY

- ❖ **Fly Away**, Marco Polo Travels offers a 3-night package deal to Thailand for Rs 29000 pp on a twin sharing basis, inclusive of air fare, a 4-star accommodation.
- ❖ **Escapade**, one-night stay with Christmas gala dinner, cultural shows, Christmas lunch and drinks at Dhulikhel Mountain Resort, Rs 3000 pp
- ❖ **New Year's**, The Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort offers an overnight stay with BBQ dinner, live band, champagne and brunch, 4412999/61-462222
- ❖ **Godavari Village Resort**, offers a New Year's Eve package for Rs 8888 per couple, inclusive of accommodation, dinner, door prizes and a live performance by The Heart Breakers, 5560675

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalintimes.com

Quest Entertainment



Quest Entertainment brings you one of the most awaited movies of the year: James Cameron's Avatar. The acclaimed director of Titanic, Terminator 2 and Aliens has now released one of the most extravagant films ever, acclaimed as a revolution in motion picture history. Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) is a former Marine who was wounded in combat and is paralysed from the waist down. He is selected to participate in the Avatar program, which will enable him to walk again. He travels to Pandora, a lush jungle-covered extraterrestrial moon filled with incredible life forms, some beautiful, many terrifying. It is also home to the Navi, a sentient humanoid race. Jake begins to integrate into Navi society, and soon finds himself caught between the military-industrial forces of Earth and the Navi, forcing him to choose sides in an epic battle that will decide the fate of an entire world.

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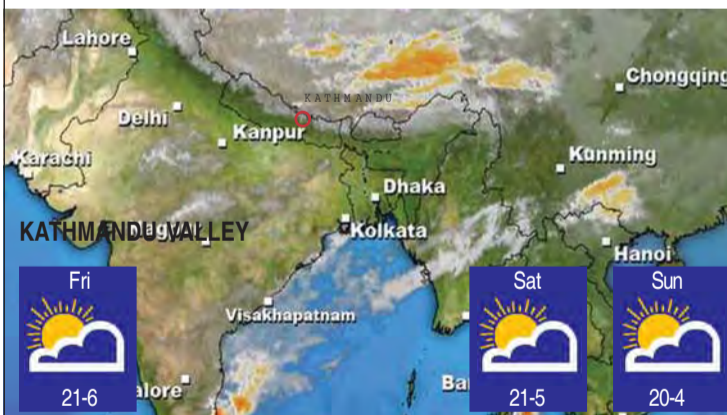
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Persistent low pressure continues to govern the weather pattern of our region in the last one and a half weeks. The chilly wind generated by the Siberian high pressure zone has repelled that coming in from the Indian Ocean, thus Nepal's skies remained calm early this week. Satellite pictures of Thursday afternoon indicate more of the same over the weekend. This means we should expect foggy mornings, sunny intervals in the afternoons and clear night skies. This will lower morning temperatures by 2 degrees over the weekend.

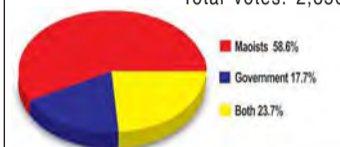


Times nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 481

Q. Who is using provocations to stall the peace process?

Total votes: 2,856



Weekly Internet Poll # 482. To vote go to: www.nepalintimes.com

Q. Who do you think is/was the best prime minister?

ARROW



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European Expedition

Legendary mountaineer Apa Sherpa and fellow Everest summiter Dawa Steven Sherpa are embarking on an expedition through 10 European cities – Prague, Brno, Bratislava, London, Rome, Geneva, Chamonix, Vienna, Brussels and finally to Copenhagen to raise awareness about the impact of climate change in the Himalaya.

Their European journey will reach out to high-profile politicians and celebrities and people in the streets of these European cities whose energy needs will determine the future of hundreds of millions of people who depend on Himalayan waters. The European Expedition is part of the Climate for Life Campaign started by WWF Nepal and the Nepal government, its development partners and many non-profit and private organizations.

www.climate4life.org

RECIPES

by GRAHAM SYDNEY

Ham and Pea Soup

This wintery soup is a classic and large quantities can be made which one can freeze and use whenever needed.
(Serves 8-12)

1 kg	dried peas
2	smoked pork shank
3 cups	diced onion
1 cup	finely chopped celery
2 tablespoons	finely chopped garlic
2 cups	diced carrot
3	bay leaves
10	black peppercorns
2 tablespoons	sugar
¼ cup	olive oil

salt and pepper to taste
water

Soak the peas in cold water overnight. Place the pork shank, bay leaves and peppercorns in a large pot, cover with water and allow to simmer for 3-4 hours or until the meat begins to fall away from the bone. Remove the shanks from the stock and strain the remaining liquid. Set both aside to cool. In the same pot on medium heat, lightly fry the onion, garlic, carrot and celery until soft. Add the peas and the stock from the pork shanks. Allow to simmer for at least 3-4 hours adding water if necessary, until the peas begin to dissolve. Remove the skin from the pork shanks and shred the meat from the bones. Add the meat to the soup and season with the sugar, salt and pepper. Serve with some fresh bread.

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KIRAN PANDAY

THAT'S SORTED THEN: Pushpa Kamal Dahal with UNSG Rep for Children and Armed Conflict Radhika Coomaraswamy after signing the action plan for the discharge of disqualified combatants.



KIRAN PANDAY

SEEING IS BELIEVING: Writer Kanak Mani Dixit at the launch of his book *Dekheko Muluk* at Patan's Yala Maya Kendra on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

WITCH HUNT: Women accused of witchcraft take part in a debate as part of a function organised by *Sancharika Samuha* for the 16 Days Campaign Against Gender Violence, on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

DOWN THE HATCH: Locals dispose of illegal homemade alcohol with the help of Lagankhel police on Saturday.



Photos copyright: Sue Carpenter

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फोन: ०१-५५२९३८३

Banned again

Have to give the Ostrich Trophy to this government for burying its head in the sand on national priorities. Makunay, who is still remembered as the minister in the short-lived UML govt of 1994 who proposed exporting electricity to China via satellite, got noted Nepali architects together in Baluwatar last week to call for designs to build a 70m statue of Pegasus at Rotten Park. What a bai-pankhi ghoda is supposed to symbolise we don't know, but if we must have a 70m statue near Rani Pokhari then a **winged Donkey** (ahem) may be more appropriate at the present time.



And another prize to our rulers for being at the wrong place at the wrong time. When the Kailali forest occupation crisis was going on the cabinet was meeting at Kala Putter. When the Maoists were declaring the **Kachila Autonomous State Council** in Basantapur on Wednesday, nine ministers were holding a cabinet meeting in Copenhagen. And it looks like the PM will leave Nepal on autopilot and jet off again on a China visit during the indefinite Maoist banned over Xmas and New Year.

And then Chhatra man Chief Sab goes off to India to buy 50 'non-lethal' T-72 tanks for the Nepal Army. Who are we going to fight with second-hand tanks when we have to queue for two hours to get diesel?



Awesome showed his fearsome side the other day at the inauguration of war pictures when he got so carried away by an alleged conspiracy to bump him off that he threatened to 'vomit out' (exact quote) the details at an appropriate time. Warming up to the theme, he went on to warn that a **million people would have to die** and he would swim in their blood to achieve the goal of his revolution. Used to the Chairman's hyperbole, the Nepali media ignored the remark. And it also ignored the fact that after the speech His Fierceness choked with emotion and shed a tear or two while looking at a portrait of himself, Comrades Laldhoj and Parbati during the Chumbang Convention. Interestingly, the conjugal comrades are all smiles in the pic: could it be they had no idea about the purge that was to befall them two days later?



The Ass was there among the well-wishers at Osho Ashram to greet Kishunji happy budday. The PM appeared, and so did the prez, although Her Highness the DPM and Daddy were conspicuous in their absence. The bad blood must really run deep between GPK and KPB. One can understand Kishunji turning to religion at his age, but what is surprising is that PKD now tries not to skip any function dealing with the Opium of the Masses. He was at the yagya by Dinabandhu Pokhrel, the world's only **Maoist Hindu preacher** (another one for the Guinness book). So, Awesome shows up at the Osho Ashram, runs smack into President Ram Baron on the stairs, and is so flustered he namastays the man he is trying to unseat for unseating him.

But much more remarkable was the fact that Comrade Vicious has great spin doctors: he arrived at the ceremony already wearing a dozen marigold garlands, giving the impression that he was the Chief Guest and not KP Bhattarai.



The Big Three are supposed to be deadlocked over the wording of the sankalpa prastab, but actually it is stuck because the UML and Baddies can't agree on who should lead a national govt. The Maoists say that being the largest party they have the right to PMship, while the UML is in no mood to let go. And that, ladies and gentlemen is why we are suffering a **3-day banned** next week.

ass(at)nepalitimes.com



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