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OPEN HOUSE: Following the Maoist announcement to end their obstruction of the legislature, politics returned to Parliament, pictured here on Thursday.



KIRAN PANDAY

End on a high

A rollercoaster week of recriminations and reconciliations began with a three-day Maoist bandh marked by violence and intimidation across the country. It peaked with a massive Maoist assembly in

New Baneswor. Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal then delivered a fiery anti-Indian tirade during which he labelled the rest of the political leadership 'remote-controlled robots' who he would bypass to

hold direct talks with Delhi. Amidst widespread condemnation, the Maoist supremo weakly argued the following day that his comments were meant to be a 'satire' on the shape of things in Nepali

politics. Soon after, the Maoists announced they were lifting the six-month obstruction of the House, raising (yet again) hopes that a political settlement would finally be reached that would pave the way towards the completion of the constitution-writing process. But with the hardliners within the Maoist party still resurgent, the prospect of an indefinite strike looms large. ●

2000-2009

It's the end of the Nepali noughties, and we've come further than most. Before you protest, we'd like to remind you it's not been downhill all the way. The war's over, we're no longer a kingdom, and we're waiting for a constitution. But there's much more to the decade we've lived through. Check out our back pages for a trip down memory lane, 2000-2009.

p7-9

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DEALING WITH DELHI

Kathmandu's talkerati is all abuzz with Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal's fiery anti-Indian tirade on Tuesday, followed by the sudden retraction of his statement with the explanation that he was just joking.

Everyone knows India is always the elephant in the room in Nepal's domestic politics, but Dahal's public utterance was inflammatory, provocative and irresponsible. The Chairman, as is his wont, has tried to distance himself from his original statements by first saying he was quoted out of context, by blaming the messenger and accusing the media of 'yellow journalism', and then saying he was just being 'sarcastic'.

A few hours after calling Prime Minister Madhav Nepal a 'puppet' and 'robot', however, Dahal met him secretly to strike some kind of a deal. Nepalis have reason to be confused by these contradictory words and deeds.

Some have taken all this as a sign of Maoist desperation, others as the hardcore of the Maoists raising the ante within the party. Whatever the reason, the outcome has been inexplicably positive because it paved the way for the resumption of the House. We lost six months in pointless boycotts and street protests, and there is a lot of catching up to do. But at least the supremacy of parliament has been reinstated.

Populist ultra-nationalism in Nepal has always been the recourse of scoundrels. We saw it during the 1990s when the NC and UML just couldn't resist the temptation of stoking anti-Indian nationalism to garner votes. When the UML won the elections in 1994 and Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari went to India on a state visit, he was grilled by the Delhi media about his party's anti-India platform. His reply in Hindi was: "Aap log samajhta hai na, election mein to aisa karna padta hai."

Dahal's speech on Tuesday was not as innocent as all that. His incendiary words risked igniting a re-enactment of the so-called 'Hrithik Roshan riots' of December 2000. That ugly episode should be a warning to the Maoists of how quickly ultra-nationalism can escalate into a pogrom. All the six people who were killed in two days of riots were Nepali.

The dominant theme of the fourth phase of Maoist protests that is supposed to culminate in an indefinite strike next month is to 'expose' India. The Maoist central committee decided on the anti-Indian course, and a significant moderate faction was outvoted. By first declaring parallel ethnic provinces and now stoking anti-Indian feelings, the Maoists are playing with fire on several fronts.

Also to blame is a resurgent right wing within the NC and UML that wants to roll back the peace process and are cornering the Maoists by giving them no face-saving exit. This is also dangerous because it is sure to drive the Maoist party into the hands of an extreme faction that isn't happy about the peace process either.

One can understand Dahal's frustration with sections of the Indian establishment. But he hasn't done much to allay fears that his party is bent on establishing a totalitarian people's republic. If only he had been more of a statesman and less of a party apparatchik and publicly renounced violence and disbanded the YCL, Dahal would have commanded much more respect at home and abroad.

Sound bites bite

Plain speaking won't win the Maoists friends in high places

As Prachanda walked up to the stage in Naya Baneswor on Tuesday, he surveyed the crowd – rough estimates suggest there were more than 20,000 people – and smiled broadly.

In their subsequent speeches, both Prachanda and Dr Bhattarai reveled in this show of strength. "We wondered if the masses here are just our activists or ordinary citizens. If it



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

includes the common people, our opponents should get the message. But if they are just our cadre, is there any other party that has such a large number of activists in the capital?" The crowd roared with approval.

The protest rally – organised within a day – was a measure of Maoist organisational strength, discipline, and ability to channel the energy of the crowds. Compare this to the NC and UML, who have not had a single mass meeting in Kathmandu to counter Maoist propaganda in the

last eight months.

This fact of Maoist strength and their need to maintain it is crucial in understanding why Prachanda said what he said, and its potential implications.

Prachanda's first priority is to maintain his primacy within the party. He knows it is this massive organisational apparatus and his control over it that gives him power. He will feel the pulse of the party cadre, and judge what he needs to do to keep the majority of the other leaders on his side. With three rounds of agitation not delivering results, there was restlessness. Kiran and company, who want to scuttle any deal that would 'betray the revolution', were eager to raise the stakes. Prachanda decided he had to play along.

So why did he zero in on India?

Firstly, there is an element of truth in what was said. The trust deficit between Delhi and the Maoists is the single most important reason for the present impasse. But Prachanda's list of five bilateral issues is hogwash – the India-Maoist relationship did not go sour because of Kalapani or Susta, nor will it blossom with the resolution of those issues. But his point about there being no solution without a deal with India is spot-on. The rest of the political class and the mainstream media are angry with him for blowing the cover on the fiction of independence the Kathmandu establishment has assiduously cultivated. Nepal has been and remains only a partly sovereign country. Going public only reveals that private India-Maoist talks are going nowhere, and that the Maoists feel India is out to squash them.

The second reason is that Maoists can sense that there is increasing resentment against India on the streets of Nepal.

They calculate that land issues will win over the

dispossessed rural peasantry and Dalits; the ethnic card will win over a broad-based segment from the marginalised elite to the semi-educated youth in district headquarters and smaller towns; but it is the anti-India card that will win them the support of the Kathmandu hill-origin youth, the lower middle class as well as the older royalist conservative constituency. By projecting the Madhesi parties as having sold out to Kathmandu because of pressure from Delhi, they even hope to generate support in the Tarai.

The third reason is that the only way Prachanda can create space for himself within the party to deliver on any promises to the NC-UML or internationals is by sounding radical in public.

Why else would he end the House obstruction a day after his fiery speech? The Maoists even agreed to discharge the disqualified from cantonments before the third phase of their agitationspeaked. One part of the Maoist strategy is to prepare for a confrontation, communicate with multiple constituencies, paint India-President-Army-PM as the pantheon of villains, and flag up the possibility of a right-wing takeover. But they will also cooperate and keep doors open for a compromise. Both strategies go together, and by publicising the first, the leadership defuses pressure from the hardliners and creates space to work on the second. What is certain is that Prachanda's public stance will not win him friends in Delhi. There is a sense in the Indian establishment that Prachanda has failed to be a mature leader once again, and succumbed to the hardliners – proving the Maoists cannot be trusted.

Prachanda's nuanced analysis may have been partially correct. But it is unhelpful in resolving the present impasse and could descend to mindless bigotry on the streets. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

LETTERS

CONSIDER THIS

1. The leader of the main opposition party is a joke, a man who has no sense of political or personal direction.
2. Our PM doesn't have the moral right to lead the country, but he does. He gets the limo treatment and the first family gets free rides on taxpayers' money. Noone complains.
3. Girija Prasad is disillusioned if he still believes he can solve the political stalemate. As I see it, he is the biggest hurdle in Nepali politics.
4. Civil society is anything but civil. It is a biased organisation bent on giving the ruling parties and the army a hard time knowing well that they cannot beat them up.

5. Notice the only vehicles plying the streets these days with a full tank of petrol have blue plates. Someone tell me why even the Maoists who blatantly torch ambulances allow them to function when the entire country is shut? Does anyone know what these missions even do anymore?
6. Lastly, notice the intelligent and smart people of the country, young and old alike, lined up for visas outside the embassies?

A new Nepal? Yes indeed.
Prasanna K.C., Kathmandu

INCLUDING THE EXCLUDED
Affirmative action is another debate, but the charge against donors couldn't be truer ('Including the excluded', #481). People forget there's nothing

humanistic about donor programs. They're mere tools to meet a country's foreign policy objectives. Granted, you can make a qualitative distinction between donor agencies if you like, but they're still just extensions of their respective foreign ministries.

Gyanu

WE'RE WITH YOU
What does it say about Nepal's status among nations when, half a century after the defeat of white colonialism in South Asia, the head of the Nepal Army goes to India and offers to open his country for recruitment of Nepalis into the Indian Army, to fight their battles against their enemies? "India is now deeply worried about the unfolding events in

Nepal," writes Prashant Jha ('We're with you', #481). Actually, a lot of us are more worried about events unfolding in New Delhi.

Gangalal

XMAS? CHEERS!
Finally, an article that doesn't disparage Christianity ('Xmas? Cheers!', #481). Being a Nepali and a second-generation Christian myself, I'm disheartened by the fact that so few journalists in Nepal say anything positive about Christianity. To them, I ask: have you met Christians or listened to them? Have gone to a church in Kathmandu, and seen how helpful people are to each other?

THE REGAL RUBBER STAMP
CK Lal is spot on ('The regal

rubber stamp', #481). Extreme left and right wing ideologues have created a vacuum in the country. Unless this vacuum is filled soon, Nepal will see more bloodshed and chaos, not to mention a deepening economic crisis.

Yanpras

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Junkets aren't as bad as you think, as they are an economic activity in themselves and generate employment ('Sustainable development', #481). Think of the marketing skills that went into taking 600 Nepalis to Copenhagen. It's a tribute to our entrepreneurial skills and it's big business.

Jange

Beyond control

Back in 1986 at a meeting of the CPN-ML, I proposed that representatives of ethnic groups be members of the central committee. My colleagues rejected this, saying it was 'communal'. At the time the only criteria for being in the central

Limbuwan and Magarat shows an insecure minority mindset.

Limbus will not liberate their people by asking for Limbuwan. Magars will not be autonomous in a Magarat. The kind of emancipation we want is one which can bring together all 30 million Nepalis. We don't want a territorial liberation because that would mean expulsion of those not belonging to a particular group. The Maoists are lighting an ethnic bush fire that they will not be able to control.

Many say a federal state structure is the first priority for ethnic liberation. For me it is only number two. If federalism is for decentralised development, it may still have some uses, but it is not enough reason to carve up the country along political lines. The most we can do is have

representation in the national legislature or federal councils that is proportionate to the ethnic composition of the country.

In a sense, most of us in Nepal came from somewhere else to live here. We shouldn't waste time trying to figure out who settled down where first.

The important thing is for one group not to behave like the others do not exist. By not dividing up opportunities equally, there is a danger that the struggle for liberation will turn violent. We should address societal inequities before they turn violent. There is still time to address the problem of discrimination and inequality in a non-violent manner, we haven't exhausted peaceful options.

The proportional representation in the legislature/constituent assembly last year wasn't a mechanism to allow former prime ministers who lost elections to have a berth in the house. It was to allow the marginalised and unrepresented groups a presence in the legislature. The question of ethnic representation has to be addressed at the political level within the chambers of the house. Lately, however, we see the struggle spilling out into the streets, and it is spinning out of control of the political forces.

I have never lived through an ethno-separatist civil war and I hope to never have to see it dismember my own motherland. ●

Gorebahadur Khapangi Magar is the acting chairman of the Rastriya Janamukti Party. The original version of this article appeared in Himal Khabarpatika, 16-30 December.

GUEST COLUMN
Gorebahadur
Khapangi Magar

committee was having spent time in jail. If they had listened to me then, the country would not have drifted into the extreme ethnic chauvinism you see now.

I have always felt ethnic extremism should never lead to the fragmentation of the Nepali nation. Which is why we have always tried to ensure progress towards a proportional representation of ethnicities through elections. The marginalisation of these groups can be redressed peacefully through elections. But the Maoists hijacked this agenda during the war and made the ethnic groups carry guns. Ethnic groups that were moving ahead in a peaceful manner were sidetracked into violence.

The Maoists are being dishonest towards the Janajati movement with their ethnic autonomous councils. It is opening up a can of worms. Already, Bahuns, Dalits and Muslims are saying: where are our autonomous councils?

It looks like the councils will have hereditary chief ministers from only the ethnic group represented. Limbus and Magars are majorities in their areas, but following the Maoists to declare

"I hope never to have to witness an ethnic war in this country"



BILASH RAI



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Nepal 2.0

Subisu has led Nepal into the Internet Age



Sudhir Parajuli, CEO of Subisu Cablenet, was born into a family of bureaucrats. So when he aborted a nascent but promising career in the civil service to become a businessman, he ran into immediate resistance from his relatives.

Today, Subisu is one of Nepal's leading information and communications technology firms. Parajuli has no doubts about his career trajectory. "It gives me immense pleasure to have grown from a person who used to work for others to a person who is leading an organisation," he says.

Subisu provides state of the art cable TV and internet and data connectivity services across 33

districts, and employs 300 people in the Kathmandu Valley alone. The company is an out-and-out industry leader, having pioneered the use of several key technologies in Nepal, and even counts a few competitors among its clients.

The path to its current perch at the top, however, hasn't been smooth. On the eve of the new millennium, Nepalis were still using dial-up modems to connect to the internet. Parajuli and his peers reckoned that cable connections, which had already proven their worth in the west, would serve internet users better. Together, they started Subisu Cablenet in 2000 with the intention of introducing and marketing this technology in Nepal.

National regulatory bodies thought differently and didn't allow Subisu to operate cable internet in the country. Unfazed, and convinced of the technology's

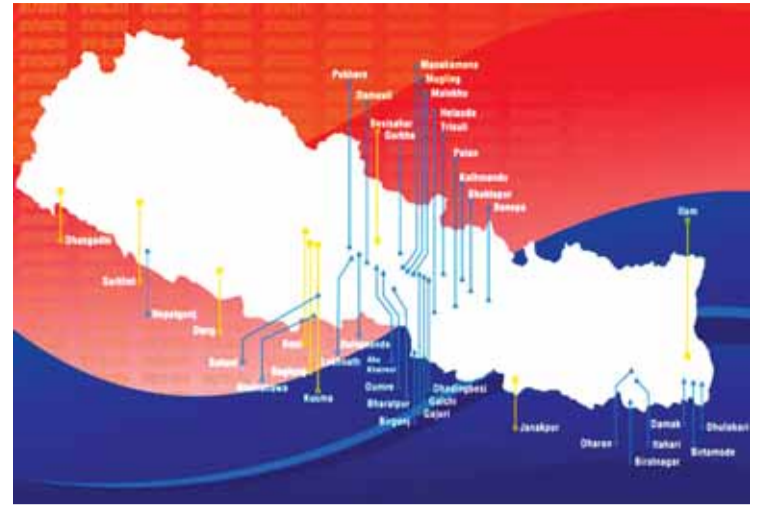
virtues, Parajuli and his team decided to set up a cable TV service instead, hoping to build the infrastructure for a cable internet service some time in the future.

The plan worked. In 2004, Subisu received a license to operate cable internet and in 2006, data connectivity services as well.

Subisu has done so well partly because it has been very quick to identify and resolve service problems. It has a record-setting Mean Time to Restore (MTR), a measure of the time taken to respond to service disruptions, within the industry.

"We study service problems our customers face very closely to ensure they don't happen again. Fast service delivery and response to problems really sets us apart," Parajuli says.

Underwriting Subisu's



commercial success is a commitment to help ordinary people take advantage of the latest in information and communications technologies. Parajuli laments the backwardness of the Nepali countryside, where many don't have access to electricity, but believes that technology firms are well-positioned to help.

"Sixty per cent of Nepal doesn't have electricity, forget about internet. However, being in the field of ICT services, we have tried our level best to change this."

Subisu has worked with NGOs to connect remote villages to cable TV and internet, and distributed laptops to needy educational institutions free of cost. It has also helped doctors

and teachers deliver diagnoses and lectures remotely, through internet and telephones.

These inroads into the countryside aren't just humanitarian gestures, but part and parcel of Subisu's commercial strategy. Subisu plans to reach at least all district headquarters in the future, and is fully prepared to invest in the necessary technological innovations to negotiate Nepal's rugged and varied landscape. Subisu will also introduce digital television services in the near future.

A fully connected Nepal, of course, remains a distant prospect. But with bright stars like Subisu and Parajuli leading the way, we're getting there. ●

Suvayu Dev Pant

Post-Maoist futures

JANAKPUR – There are Shiva temples here, but this is essentially a town of Vaishnavs where the main Hindu castes have their own *kutis* or cults that celebrate different aspects of the life of Sita and Ram.

Many of these cults are in decline as their landholdings have shrunk and pilgrims increasingly limit their visits to the more celebrated temples. But the



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

diversity of faiths even within the Vaishnav sect has bred a culture of dissent and tolerance that has defined the way of life here for years.

Though Tulsi Giri hardly ever visits his hometown, locals still claim the hardcore royalist as one of their own. Ramraja Prasad Singh may have been born and bred in Rajbiraj, but when the avowed republican decided to fight an election in the 1990s, he came here to test the strength of his ideas. Whether it's TMDP strategist Hridayesh Tripathi or MJF ideologue Jayprakash Prasad Gupta, the titans of Madhesi politics feel that they are received more warmly in Janakpur than in their home constituencies. Despite the filth, crime and corruption, the one good thing about this town is that it has managed to maintain its



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

composure. The soul of the settlement is alive even though the body of the town urgently needs some physical treatment.

Perhaps due to the diversity of its religious roots, Janakpur has prided itself on positing itself as the 'other' of the national 'self'. When post-colonial nation building was the main agenda, Ramnarayan

Mishra challenged his own superiors in the Nepali Congress by stressing the need for a federal structure and inclusive polity. During the early years of the reign of King Mahendra, Kathmandu was monarchical and all that Biratnagar ever wished was to add the constitutional adjective to it. But it was Durgananda Jha who actually lobbed a bomb at the king in Janakpur, the only time in modern history a commoner attempted regicide. Saroj Koirala, too, thought that the monarchy had outlived its utility. Destiny may have had a hand in choosing his acolyte as the first head of state of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

Janakpur's political legacy doesn't end

there. Almost a decade before the Maoist insurgency made forced disappearances routine, Dr Laxmi Narayan Jha was picked up from his clinic by law enforcement agencies, in June 1985. His remains are yet to be found. Surprisingly, even though Mahottary-Dhanusha has always been a NC stronghold, almost all prominent communist leaders have spent some time in this part of the country. Madhav Nepal stayed in Mahottary. Pushpa Kamal Dahal learned to handle guns in Dhanusha. Ishwar Pokharel honed his debating skills at the local college. And Gore Bahadur Khapangi practiced his pre-royalist demagoguery in the surrounding villages.

The Maoist leadership may congratulate itself on being the first to grant Madhesi their long-cherished self-rule, but once again Janakpur is a step ahead of the rest of the country. At teashops and newspaper stalls, people have begun to debate post-Maoist futures. A neo-con wave seems to be sweeping through the hinterland, where religion has once again become the main mobilising force. Temples are being built, mosques are coming up and churches have found place in the most innocuous of spaces – makeshift huts meant to shelter cattle.

For the first time, Janakpur has a direct stake in the political contestations of the capital city, but nobody seems too concerned about the fate of the first president of the country. There is a deep suspicion above the intentions of all the political leaders. The Maoist assessment that rightwing assertions will end up strengthening their political hold may be theoretically correct. But whenever pitted against religion, political ideologies invariably crumble. ●

Janakpur has a formidable political legacy, but the Maoists could be knocked out by the opiate of the masses

Green customs

Customs and police officials from India and Nepal met this week in Sravasti of India near the Nepal border in the first dialogue of its kind to address the challenges of illegal trade in environmentally sensitive commodities across the open border. The illegal international trade in wildlife contraband and ozone depleting substances, harmful chemicals and hazardous wastes is a substantial and increasingly lucrative business across the India-Nepal border. India and Nepal will now cooperate in a Green Customs Initiative facilitated by UNEP, a new partnership of international organisations and governments. UNEP says that based on the history of ozone-depleting chemicals in South Asia, there is an urgent need to strengthen collaboration to monitor the trade and curb illegal movement of such commodities.

Dabur day

Dabur Nepal is organising one-day events such as the 'Dabur Fun Day Out' at various housing complexes within the Valley. The event aims to entertain, promote healthy living and introduce the public to Dabur products. Aptitude, the official agency of Dabur, is also coordinating the event.

Moneymaker

Himalayan Bank announced its achievements in the last fiscal year: total deposits of Rs 34.681 billion, total loans and advances of Rs 25.519 billion, operating profits of Rs 1.159 billion and reduction of NPA to 2.16 per cent.

Concrete plans

British Council Climate Champions, Kanchan Shrestha and Amita Thapa Magar from Kathmandu, reached Copenhagen to make their

voice heard as world leaders gathered for the United Nations Climate Change Conference. Two hundred Climate Champions from more than forty countries attended the COP15 in Denmark from 7-18 December.

Fly high

Flydubai, whose local promotion partner is Universal Tours & Travels, inaugurated its flights from TIA on 15 December. The airline is operating four days a week.

Hurry up!

Morang Auto Works, the sole distributor of Yamaha motorcycles in Nepal, has launched a scheme for Gladiator SS motorcycle customers, offering a 0% finance scheme on purchases and a Rs 10,000 discount for customers making cash purchases. Offer valid till 15 January only.

The new Activa

Syakar Company has released a modified version of Honda Activa. It now comes with CBS (Combined Braking System), a system that automatically applies front braking force when the rear brake is applied. This prevents slipping and skidding. The new Activa also gives 15 per cent more mileage.

Perfect six

The Cricket Association of Nepal proudly announced Pepsi (Varun Beverages) as its sponsor and Standard Chartered Bank as the co-sponsor of the senior national cricket team for one day and 20/20 national tournaments. The Nepali cricket team is expected to benefit greatly from this association.

On the web | www.nepalitimes.com

Is affirmative action the way to correct caste-based discrimination? Our readers said:

The power structures are quite clear and transparent. Any person or groups who want to be in power or part of the political process can form political parties, persuade people to vote for them, get elected and into positions of power. No one is excluded, either by law or by convention. What more is needed? Favours one group, by any criteria, means discriminating against the rest.

- jange

It's not fair to blame all Bahuns and Chhetris for past discrimination. That was perpetrated by elites that contained many people from other castes who were within the royal circle. To be precise, people in Kathmandu of all castes were the ones who committed the grossest violations of human rights and dignity

- Bibek Paudel

We all know that the caste system is immoral, but why continue using the phrases 'high-caste' and 'low-caste' to denote only certain groups? To me, non-Brahmins or Chhetris could just as easily, and justifiably, call themselves high caste. What stops them?

- Sanjay Thapa

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HIMAL KHABARPATRIKA 16-30 December



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Look east

KUNDA DIXIT

KUNDA DIXIT in ILAM

While the rest of the country is a political cesspool, Ilam shows visitors that the Nepali word 'eelum' must stem from the inherent talent of its inhabitants. Bhupi Sherchan noted this long ago when he visited the district, hence the famous verse: *Nepal bhari ali ali Ilam chharna man lagyo...* I want to sprinkle a little Ilam across Nepal.

Indeed, if Kathmandu had the same commitment to waste disposal and water treatment as Ilam's municipalities, the Bagmati would not be the sewer it is. If the national power utility was as efficient as Ilam's community micro-hydro network, there would be no load-shedding. If the rest

of the country showed the same management skills as Ilam's farmers, who have made Nepal the world's biggest exporter of cardamom, there would be no national food deficit.

Ilam is blessed with fertile soil, copious rainfall, and a temperate climate but that is not why it is the most developed district in Nepal. Proximity to Darjeeling and a traditional emphasis on education have given Ilam one of the highest literacy rates in Nepal, and there is a work ethic that takes the visitor by surprise.

"If you think about it, I would say quality education has been the single most important factor in Ilam's development," explains Homnath Adhikari, director of the Namsaling Community Development Centre (NCDC). Adhikari says inspiration to do something

The rest of the country has a lot to learn from Ilam

for rural upliftment came when he was a primary school teacher in Namsaling 30 years ago. "There was a Peace Corps volunteer who got us together and told us to plan for where we wanted Ilam to be in a hundred years time," Adhikari recalls, "and that got us thinking about what kind of Nepal we wanted for our great-grandchildren."

That Peace Corps volunteer was Barry Bialek, who is now a physician in Boulder, Colorado. He heads Engineers Without

100 YEAR PLAN: Homnath Adhikari of Namsaling in Ilam at a pilot waste-water treatment plant that he helped set up. Ilam's development model could be replicated all over Nepal.

Borders, which collaborates with NCDC in Ilam on a waste treatment plant, safe drinking water, telemedicine, latrine building, and projects to improve farm productivity.

NCDC is also involved in biodiversity conservation and the revival of community forestry along the border with India, where there has been serious denudation because of poaching from across the border. It has even installed a giant fog collector in Danda Bajar to augment drinking water supply.

Says Adhikari: "You could say Ilam is a model for other districts in Nepal, and although we are an NGO we work very closely with the district development committee. Our job is to complement the government's own efforts, fill the gaps, and build the government's capacity." Indeed, district development committee officials and NGOs from Dolakha and Myagdi are trying to replicate Ilam's experience.

Another Ilam NGO is the Mahila Jagaran Sangh, which works with 9,000 women in a microcredit scheme that generates income for families. The group's 'Khutrake' program now has Rs 30 million in savings and lends to women for small enterprises and dairy and tourism projects while also investing in community micro-hydro.

NCDC's partners include Norway's Development Fund, ICIMOD, WWF, UNDP and SNV. NCDC with the Alternative Energy Promotion Program has installed nearly more than 220 kilowatts of subsidised small hydro-projects. This has earned Ilam the moniker of 'Peltric district'. The power supplied to 203 households saves Ilam Rs 700,000 worth of diesel and kerosene per year and has brought down the cost of milling rice, reduced indoor pollution and increased income, by allowing villagers to work at night. And, unlike Kathmandu where next week's six hours of daily power cuts are only a taste of what is to come, Ilam's villages have power all the time. ●

Foster father We need more honorary consuls like Benard

Didier Benard took a RNAC flight from Paris for his first visit to Nepal in 1985. "As soon as I got on board, there were beautiful Nepali ladies serving Nepali food, the interior was decorated with exotic photos of Nepal," he recalls. "I just felt I was already in Nepal."

Benard has been a regular visitor to Nepal ever since, visiting the country every two years since he was appointed honorary consul of Nepal for France in 1999. But it's not because of his honorary designation that he keeps coming back – it's because he truly loves this country.

His two children, after all, are from Nepal. During his first visit to Nepal, he adopted his first child – a three-month-old boy. Five years later, it was a baby girl. His son Aurelien Ram Prasad Benard (with father Didier,



KIRAN PANDAY

pic) is now an engineer, and daughter Agathe Diksha Chhetri Benard is studying to become a dental surgeon. Benard adopted them through the ODA Marseille, a philanthropic organisation that helps prospective parents with

international adoptions.

As a consul in France, he has gone beyond the call of duty to promote Nepali tourism and business. He is particularly drawn to the idea of village tourism: "People think you have to be fit

to travel in Nepal. Actually, you can trek at a low altitude, meet villagers and hang around in tea gardens."

In 2007, Benard hosted a video conference from Phidim, Ilam of such tea. Over 90 per cent of orthodox tea finds a market abroad, he says, and Nepali tea is far superior to Indian tea because the tea plants are much younger. His work has inspired a group of French agro-engineering students to study orthodox tea, and 13 students are visiting the tea plantations for a field visit this January.

Benard issues 150,000 tourist visas per year, and he's developed a website (<http://www.consulat-nepal.org>) for inquiries and information about Nepal. It is listed by the French travel guide Routard as one of the 'most complete' sites on the country.

While he is relentless in promoting Nepali culture and traditions, Benard is also

surprisingly open about the changes in Nepal's urban centres. "Kathmandu has changed," he acknowledges. "The concrete buildings are sticking out like matchsticks. Along the streets are telephone billboards blocking the temples, malls where people are shopping and suddenly when I was walking along Darbar Marg KFC and Pizza Hut appeared."

But he is optimistic. "This is a sign of a rising new middle class. Nepal is changing. The situation is getting better for everyone. You don't need to regret the past, but culture and tradition should get special attention for the country to prosper," he says.

Benard was in Nepal last week to scout out the "next travel destination". He visited the national parks in Chitwan and Bardiya, and plans to promote them in France. ●



AJAYA JOSHI

2000-2009

Politics

Royal massacre: On the night of Friday, 1 June 2001, King Birendra and members of his family were killed in a shootout in Narayanhiti Royal Palace. The entire country grieved the death of 10 royals at the hands of Crown Prince Dipendra, who was believed to have turned on his family due to frustration at not being allowed to marry the woman he loved. According to the findings of the government inquiry, Dipendra carried out the massacre single-handedly, then turned a gun on himself. Still, he was made king and died whilst in a coma three days later.

Raging war: The massacre gave impetus to the Maoist revolution. The Maoists attacked the Royal Nepal Army base in Ghorahi in November 2001, dragging the army into a war that till then had been fought by the police. More people were killed in 2001-2002 than in all previous five years of the conflict. Human rights violations were rampant on both sides.

Royal takeover: On 1 February 2005, King Gyanendra dissolved parliament and took complete control of the government, blacked out the media and even switched off mobile phones. Fundamental rights were suspended and newspapers were censored.

Mainstream Maoism: On 22 November 2005, rebel leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal and the Seven Party Alliance signed a 12-point agreement brokered by India to counter the king's rule. "It has become the need of today to establish peace by resolving the 10-year-old armed conflict

The first decade of the new millennium was a dramatic one for Nepal in many ways. The country witnessed the spread of the Maoist revolution, a massacre of royals unparalleled in world history, a king's attempt to reinstate absolute monarchy, and a pro-democracy uprising that took the country from kingdom to republic.

On 1 January 2000 Krishna Prasad

Bhattarai was the prime minister and that seems like a long time ago because we've seen 12 governments since.

That's just the politics. The last ten years were particularly good for banks and mobile companies. Remittances skyrocketed. Urbanisation doubled Kathmandu Valley's population.

This is a look back at the most dramatic decade in Nepal's history.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

through a forward-looking political outlet," the agreement stated. The Maoists thus entered into an alliance with the main political parties.

Jana Andolan, Madhes Andolan: The seven parties and the Maoists launched peaceful pro-democracy street protests on 6 April 2006. In 19 days, Gyanendra was forced to reinstate parliament and step down. Ten years and over 16,000 lives later, the Maoist insurgency finally drew to a close

with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord on 21 November 2006.

"Beginning today, the politics of killing, violence and terror will be replaced by the politics of reconciliation," Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala said.

"This is the victory of the Nepali people and the defeat of regressive elements," Maoist chairman Dahal said, adding, "The people will perform another miracle by working on a war-

footing to develop their nation after the elections of the Constituent Assembly."

On 17 January 2007, the Madhesi people launched violent protests demanding an amendment in the constitution. The Tarai region saw a surge in violence that continued for about six months as the government addressed their demands on an installment basis.

Elections: The CA elections of 10 April 2008 were 'largely

peaceful' although there were reports of intimidation and booth capturing. The Maoists emerged as the biggest party, winning 240 out of 601 seats.

The world's youngest republic: The newly formed Constituent Assembly passed a resolution with near total unanimity to declare Nepal a democratic republic on 28 May 2008. "Nepal shall remain a sovereign, independent and integrated, secular and inclusive country," announced the then Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula. This announcement also scrapped all the legal and traditional privileges of the royal family, who became commoners from that point on. The resolution was passed by 560 of the 564 members present.

Political impasse: After months of haggling over the post of president and prime minister, the Maoists formed a government on 16 August 2008 under the leadership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Earlier, NC candidate Ram Baran Yadav had been elected the first president of Nepal on 21 July 2008. The Maoist-led government resigned on 4 May 2009 when their attempt to sack the army chief was foiled by the direct intervention of the president. A coalition government of 22 parties led by UML was formed on 25 May. A six-month Maoist obstruction of the House, mirrored by increasingly intense nation-wide protests for civilian supremacy capped by the declaration of Maoist ethnic autonomous councils across the country, ended just short of Christmas 2009. The constitution remains to be written ahead of the May 2010 deadline.



BHIM GHIMIRE

Society

While political wrangling continued, the Nepali people showed unbelievable resilience to get on with their lives in the face of major hardships.

Kosi floods: Floods in eastern Nepal in 2002 killed 445 people and left some 128,000 families homeless. Nearly half the country's 75 districts were ravaged. Then in 2008, the Kosi broke its banks and carved a channel of destruction through Nepal and India. Over 70,000 people were displaced by the country's worst flooding in 50 years, and five million were rendered homeless in north India.

Far from home: On 31 August 2004, Islamic militants killed 12 Nepali migrant workers in Iraq. Politicians back home used the massacre to stage protests that soon escalated into an anti-Muslim campaign. Organised attacks vandalised migrant recruitment offices and media houses. It emerged later that most of the victims had contracts falsely promising them jobs in a five-star hotel in Jordan, but were diverted to Iraq by an American contractor, Kellogg, Brown and Root.

Karnali highway: After 15 years, the Karnali Highway linking Surkhet with Jumla was inaugurated in July 2006. Within 11 months, 20 people had lost their lives in 40 road accidents. The army opened the pilot track, but lack of maintenance means most of the highway has since become impassable due to landslides.

Jajarkot epidemic: More than 400 people died from a cholera outbreak in Jajarkot in mid-2009. The government said it sent teams of doctors and drugs to Jajarkot but locals claimed they'd seen neither three months later.

Human rights bodies tried to shift the blame on food donors, but the long drought and delayed monsoons that contaminated water supplies were more likely culprits.

Business and technology

Banking boom: Fuelled by remittance money, the banking sector grew exponentially and Nepal now has more than 40 commercial banks, 60 development banks, nearly 90 finance companies and several hundred cooperatives. There are 160 licensed deposit-taking institutions, and at least 24 financial institutions including five A-class commercial banks are in the pipeline. On 1 January 2010, Nepal will have to allow foreign banks as part of its commitment to the WTO. Local banks may struggle to compete, but consumers will enjoy more choices.

Housing boom: The remittance economy has also fed a housing boom that has resulted in growth in the market for construction material. With more than \$1.5 billion entering the country in remittances every year and nowhere to invest but in real estate and housing, the second half of the last decade saw prices skyrocketing. Banks raced to offer loans and now have over Rs114 billion invested in housing and real estate, considered risky assets by Nepal Rastra Bank. It prompted a 25 per cent loan cap on commercial bank exposure. The days of 'unreal estate' may finally be over.

Mobile all over: Nepal Telecommunications Authority auctioned off a private mobile telephone license in 2000, bringing cheaper, and somewhat efficient, phone services to consumers. Nearly six million people in Nepal



KIRAN PANDAY

now own a mobile phone. Mobile phone coverage is available in all 75 districts of the country, as well as the top of Mount Everest. Mobile phones were also crucial in organising dissent during the royal takeover, forcing the king to clamp down on mobile services for four months in 2005.

Digital bridge: In 2007 Mahabir Pun, a teacher and a social entrepreneur, was awarded the Magsaysay Award in recognition of his outstanding work in setting up the Nepal Wireless Networking Project in his impoverished and wholly disconnected village of Nangi. Pun leapfrogged poverty with computers, solar power and wireless connectivity. Nepal's internet user base has grown from 200,000 in 2007 to 499,000 this year, a feat made possible by the decreasing costs of computer and internet services.

Dark decade: Despite our much-touted hydro-potential, our energy crisis has gone from bad to worse to absurd, culminating in 16-hour-a-day power cuts in winter 2008. Nepal's second largest hydropower project, Mid-Marsyangdi, finally became operational in 2008. The wrangling over the gigantic West Seti continued through the decade. The future of our CFL bulbs may rest on community micro-hydro projects. An example: Palpa district alone has 22 community hydropower projects that produce electricity at a tenth of the rates of the national electricity supplier.



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- Sunday - Shopping Plus - info, bargains, discounts, destinations
- Monday - Hi Tech Plus - technology and gadgets
- Tuesday - Health Times ; Medical Board - Nepal's best doctors respond to queries ; Wheels - everything automobile
- 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

Culture

Tales of conflict: Narayan Wagle made history with his novel *Palpasa Café* in 2005, selling over 16,000 copies that year. The novel won the Madan Puraskar and is said to have changed the reading habits of Nepali people. Kunda Dixit's trilogy *A People War* was combined with a travelling exhibition seen by 350,000 people across the country. In fact, it has been a pretty good decade for writers, especially those writing in English. Manjushree Thapa's *Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy to Democracy* put her on Penguin India's hit list, and Samrat Upadhyay came out with three books. Young writers like Sushma Joshi have followed suit and the literary scene promises much.

Old and new music: Folk music is the most popular music in Nepal and cheap recording technology and mushrooming tv stations have granted artists new-found status. Twenty-seven-year-old Anju Pant's folksy ballad "*Na birse timilai..na paye timilai..*" was downloaded by a million people. Nepa-laya organised peace concerts across the country during the insurgency, and continues to nurture uniquely Nepali talent through its regular sit-down jam sessions. Jazz and blues festivals became a fixture on the Kathmandu circuit, and proved Nepal is not quite a backwater.



DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA



KANAK MANI DIXIT

Documentary capital: Kathmandu seems to have an insatiable appetite for documentaries that is only whetted by festivals like Film South Asia and the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival. Filmmakers like Kesang Tsetan, Prem BK and Mohan Mainali made impressive documentaries chronicling tales of the conflict and the Nepali underclass. Tsetan and BK's *Frames of War* was the biggest documentary blockbuster: it was seen by more than 150,000 across the country. Our commercial film industry, unfortunately, is too busy emulating Hollywood scripts (badly) and lifestyles (with tragic results).

Life's a stage: We might not have *Mamma Mia* or *Billy Elliot*, but we do get plenty of *A Doll's House*. Arun Baral's Pratiwimba and Sunil Pokharel's Aarohan theatre groups are the two pillars propping up theatre life in Nepal. In the last ten years, they have introduced classic foreign theatre to Nepali audiences with junkets like the Ibsen Festival.

Sports: Nepali sports fans haven't had much to cheer about. For the most part, our teams have fared poorly in international competitions. The national football team won a bronze medal in the 1993 South Asian Football Federation Cup, but has made early exits in most competitions since. Our martial artists haven't done much better, winning several medals in regional tournaments, but none in the Olympics. Our national sports authorities haven't helped. The top division of the domestic football

league, for instance, was inactive for years because of rifts between the Nepal Sports Council (NSC) and the All Nepal Football Association.

Cricket, however, is a different ball game altogether. The Nepali national youth cricket teams first hit the headlines when they reached the finals of the ACC trophy in 2000, and went on to win the ACC Premier League in 2004 and 2006, and the Plate Championship in the 2006 Youth World Cup. Such success was in large part the result of a concerted state effort to develop the sport, and perhaps NSC's Vision 2020 will change our fortunes.

Media

Journalists in the cross-fire: Whether working as district correspondents in Maoist strongholds, or at headquarters in Kathmandu, journalists faced threats and censorship, and 29 lost their lives on the job at the hands of both the state and the rebels. Journalists were arrested right after the royal massacre, Maoists killed journalists like Gyanendra Khadka in retaliations, and the army edited copy in newsrooms during the royal takeover. Press freedom continues to suffer.

Mushrooming media: Despite the challenges, Nepali media has flourished. There are now nine privately owned broadsheet dailies and two broadsheets under state ownership. There are 10 television stations and 22 others have been granted operating licenses. The growth of FM stations has been phenomenal throughout the south Asian region: Nepal now boasts 200 FM stations, mostly community-operated, and 150 more are set to go on air soon.



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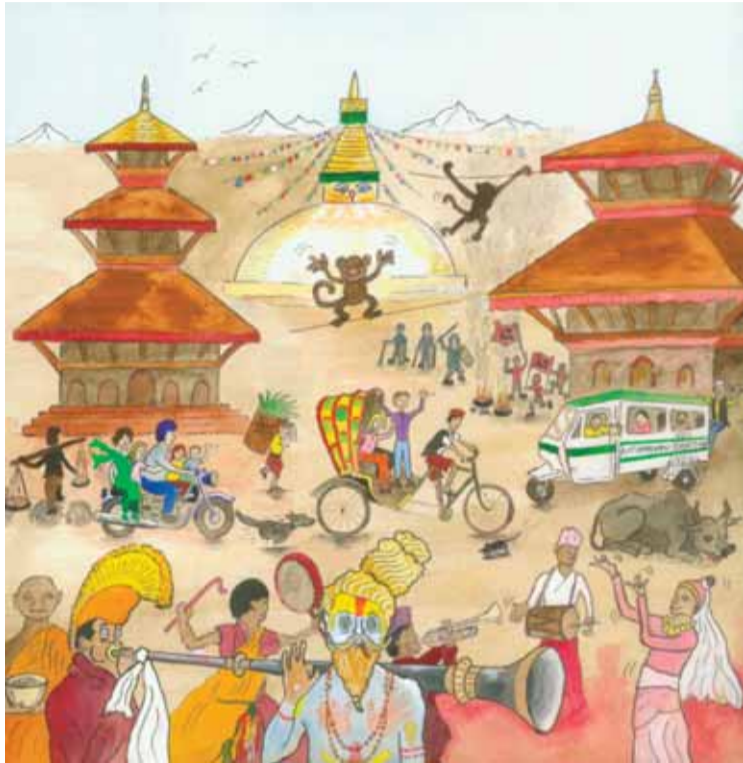
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Magical mystery tour

Simon Arthy's *Yak and Yeti* will delight kids and adults alike



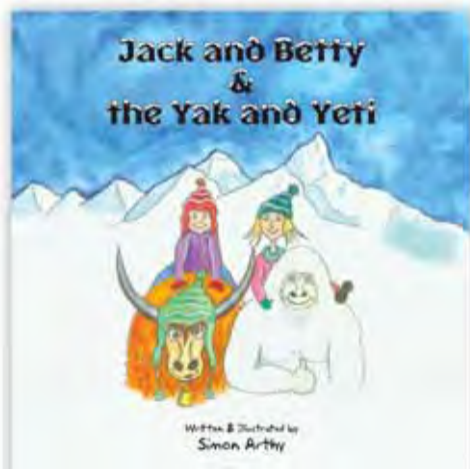
KATY WILLIAMS

Conflict advisor Simon Arthy has been living and working in countries in conflict or emerging from war for over 20 years. But when he's not at his day job he can be found performing magic tricks, singing with his Kathmandu band 'Load Shed'... or writing and illustrating children's books. His debut book *Jack and Betty & the Yak and Yeti* is one for the holiday season.

Arthy's inspiration for this charmingly titled book is as practical as it is touching. The strain of working in the conflict sector has led him to focus on the positive aspects of each country he has lived in – its culture, myths, identity and history. With three children, now aged eight, six and four, this was all the more desirable. He explains: "When you have children so much of life suddenly takes on a magical quality; the little things they do, the way they respond to the world, the way they love you and how you love them so unconditionally. Sure, there are hard times too. But the magic is there, it's new and it's infectious."

He found himself striving to make his children's life experiences magical, by portraying every outing and holiday as a wild adventure, learning magic and doing shows for them dressed in outlandish costumes, and making up new stories every night at bed-time.

"And with all the stories flowing, I inevitably thought, 'why not actually write a story, dedicated to the kids, so that they can have it on their shelves for the rest of their lives?'"



In spite of working full-time Arthy found the time to pen his debut, aided in no small measure Kathmandu's traffic jams. He even took on the task of illustration, though he'd initially planned to use an artist. "Three weeks in Kathmandu while my wife and

family were in the UK gave me the time I needed," he recalls. "Painting for five hours every evening after work and 18 hours a day on the weekends. Eating cold baked beans and rice with lots of mayonnaise."

Jack and Betty & the Yak and Yeti is a fantastical tale, yet it's imbued with a real sense of place. When siblings Jack and Betty tell their magic map they want to go 'to the top of the world', they find themselves in the bustling streets of Kathmandu. From there it's off on the top of a bus and into the mountains to encounter the mighty yak, whose help they enlist to tackle Mt. Everest. As the title suggests they also meet up with the not-so-mythical yeti.

The level of detail and humour in the illustrations will delight children - and their parents - while early readers and older kids will enjoy the rich descriptions and revel in the sense of adventure and fun. The initial print run of 1000 copies by Kathmandu publishers Digiscan is extremely professional. It will be interesting to see whether Arthy's debut book is picked up by an international children's publisher and, if that is the case, how they will treat this 'product' and potential spin-offs like toys and cartoons.

In the first two weeks over 400 copies have been sold and the Arthy family is now giving 100 copies free to Nepali schools. "In the coming month we will explore how we can give the publishing rights in Nepali to one of the excellent foundations that exist in Kathmandu," says the author.

The new year will mean new projects for Arthy as he embarks on a follow-up book set in the Congo, and then perhaps one set in Yemen, again using the map of the world as a magic carpet of sorts for his child protagonists. ●

Simon Arthy's Jack and Betty & the Yak and Yeti is available at Pilgrim's and Sherpa Adventure Gear.

Life is smiling

At 73, Ambar Gurung is frail. He needs help to walk. But there is a twinkle in his eyes, and his heart still beats with the same deep love for the Nepali nation that stirred us all once with his song 'Naulakha tara' and more recently, the country's new national anthem.

Here in Nepalganj last week, Ambar Dai ends his Paleti concert with 'Naulakha tara'. His voice frays when he gets to the part '...niyali hera hamilai bhijeko chhaina parela', but you can still detect the soothing textures of the famous voice that is unmistakably Ambar Gurung's. The haunting words take us all back to an era of innocent national pride, of diasporic longing for the motherland, and a time when life was simpler and violence hadn't torn the country apart.

Two emotions bring tears to Ambar Gurung's eyes. One is the memory of youth and of friends who have passed on, triggered when young musicians break into Aruna Lama's 'Samalera rakha' and 'Pheri kali phulera', whose lyrics he wrote 50 years ago. The other is the sorrow of war, and the fear of the fragmentation of nation – the nation he has devoted his life to uniting through music.



For Ambar Gurung, unity rules

When he visited our *People After War* photo exhibition in Nepalganj earlier that day, Ambar Dai lingered over a photograph of a father being embraced by his daughter and son, who fought on opposite sides during the war. The cover picture of *People After War*, taken by Charles Haviland, shows Maoist guerrilla Juna Rai and army soldier Bhuvan Rai reunited with their father at their home in Khotang after the war.

"Yo Nepali daju baini bich ko ladain rahechha," says Ambar dai. It was a war between Nepali brothers and sisters. He says he has been inspired to compose a piece dedicated to reconciliation between Nepalis. The man who put to music 'Sayaun thunga phul ka hami', the lyricist who evokes such a strong sense of Nepaliness through his songs, is aghast that politicians are only talking about dividing rather than uniting.

That evening, Ambar Gurung begins the concert with his 'Ma Ambar hun', and then the soothing words and melody of 'Ukali lagda pasina puchhne...'. His voice breaks, and he has to stop. His student, Avas, steps right in to sing the missing stanzas.

Nepa-laya organised his concert tour to coincide with Narayan Gopal's 70th birth anniversary, and Ambar Gurung pays tribute to the late great singer with a rendition of his 'Gham ko jhulka', sung by the female vocalist accompanying him, Angela Singh. She adds a delicate new dimension to Narayan Gopal's trademark voice, and sings Aruna Lama oldies with great sensitivity.

Ambar Dai lets Avas sing 'Jasai kesh timile phukayau' and smiles at the words written long ago about the simple sight of a woman's hair flying in the breeze that makes him marvel at the joy of life: 'Jindagi hera muskurayo...'. Look, life is smiling. ● Kunda Dixit

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रेडियो तरङ्ग १०७.६ पोखरा

उज्यालो ९० नेटवर्क सानेपा

रेडियो चितवन ९४.६ रत्ननगर

अब सधैका साथी

फरक परिवेश फरक संस्कार फरक भूगोल

Witch-hunts

In November Jug Chaudhary, a 30-year-old mother of four children, was beaten up by her family members and paraded naked around a village in Kailali. They dragged her out from her home, beat her mercilessly and then forced her to eat human excreta. Her mother-in-law's brother had just passed away. She had been accused of putting a spell on him that caused his death.



INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

When Chaudhary's husband, a labourer in India, returned the couple went to the police station but could not file a complaint. "They said it was a personal matter, it should be solved in the community." Jug Chaudhary did not receive justice. She is living in the same village, in the same Dalit community as those who accused and assaulted her.

Chaudhary made the journey to Kathmandu to talk at a public forum last week. It is extremely difficult for her to talk about what she went through publicly. She has to stop many times and her voice cracks when she describes how helpless she felt when she realised there was no one she could turn to.

She has now decided to leave her four children in the village and move to India to look for jobs. But she has this to say: "I came all the way to Kathmandu to talk about this because I do not want other



KIRAN PANDAY

Medieval barbarity continues to blight the landscape of New Nepal

Nepali sisters to go through what I did."

Five other women from Dalit and other minority communities in Lalitpur, Saptari, Siraha, Kailali, Sunsari and Makwanpur also speak at the forum. Each was branded a witch and humiliated in front of their communities. In each case the perpetrators have been let off the hook. No one has come to apologise to the women for treating them like animals. They are awaiting justice, but living in fear of being targeted again. "I can't sleep because I am afraid they are going to come back for me," says Chaudhary.

These are not the only cases. But we only hear of those cases where brave

women actually talk to journalists and file cases with the police. There are thousands of Nepali women who quietly bear the ordeal of being labelled a witch. The victims mostly belong to largely illiterate, extremely poor Dalit communities, considered untouchables in Nepal.

Nepal's legal system does not have provisions to punish those involved in witch-hunts. If a complaint is filed and the guilty apprehended they are imprisoned for a short duration and slapped with a fine. The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare and Nepal's Women's Commission are only

just recognising the legal vacuum and have drafted laws against the practice. But we are still a long way from actually having a law that fully addresses this problem.

However, Nepal has been a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women since 1991. This international convention has clear provisions against gender violence. The state is obligated to amend domestic laws to conform to the spirit of the convention, follow the convention to the letter, or provide legal redress in cases where rights have been violated. Nepal has also signed nearly two dozen conventions on human rights, all of which touch upon gender violence. So to say we don't have laws in place is a cop-out, pure and simple.

Witch-hunting is an extreme form of gender violence and the reason it is not taken seriously is because the victims are usually from marginalised communities. Nepal's gender movement has made amazing strides, but it has done little for this community of victims.

Activists in Kathmandu can push for laws against witch-hunting while those in the field can work to spread awareness against the medieval superstitions that target these women. The Nepal Police, too, needs to include a chapter on how to address crimes related to superstition in their training manuals.

Three years ago in June, the interim parliament declared Nepal an 'untouchability-free nation'. Such empty proclamations mean little to women like Jug Chaudhary. This year, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal acknowledged the state's failure to deliver on its promises, saying, "it is unfortunate that we haven't been able to implement this declaration in practice." ●



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Dahal invokes India

Special Editorial, *Nagarik*, 23 December

नागरिक

Seven months after having to quit the government, a desperate Maoist party has openly asked for foreign interference in Nepal's internal affairs. This has wounded Nepali self-respect and made the fluid political transition even more unstable. Dahal's speech was unprecedented in Nepal's history, no other political party had ever dared make such an irresponsible statement. It proves just how insecure a leader who was elected from two constituencies has now become. He publicly stated that India is Nepal's 'malik' and made all Nepalis hang their heads in shame. It also exposed the hollowness of the Maoist movement as being one just to get back to power. Dahal's extremist rhetoric was not just undiplomatic and provocative it also exposed the absurdity of a political party of a country talking directly with a foreign country. And if India doesn't invite Dahal for talks, are the Maoists going to punish the Nepali people with an indefinite shutdown? Does he want to hold the Nepali people hostage? The Maoists need to urgently retract such sweeping statements of surrender and anti-nationalism. They need to stop calling for foreign intervention and get back to the work at hand: to write a new constitution through the elected assembly.

Rajdhani, 24 December

राजधानी

Foreign interference in Nepal's internal affairs is growing, and this is creating a backlash. All political parties should take this issue seriously. Foreign

Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal's announcement that he will talk directly with India, and not with its 'robots' in Nepal triggered a flurry of comments in the Nepali language newspapers:



KIRAN PANDAY

diplomatic missions in Nepal must also be bound by the Geneva Convention. There are numerous examples of countries that have expressed their opposition and even taken sterner action against those flouting diplomatic norms. Sudan recently expelled senior UN officials, accusing them of interference. In Nepal, attention needs to be paid to regulate funds brought into the country in the name of development and clear guidelines put forth about how such monies can be used. The government also needs to urgently respond to diplomatic bullying. Prachanda's public announcement that he'd talk directly to Indian 'masters' to resolve Nepal's domestic political dispute is not just absurdly funny, but also objectionable.

Editorial, *Kantipur*, 23 December

कान्तिपुर

By publicly calling on negotiations with India to end the political deadlock in Nepal, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has linked domestic politics with external relations. Dragging India into the debate has invited controversy. By announcing an anti-Indian protest starting this week, he has descended to the level of dealing directly with India. But today's priority is to find agreement between domestic players in which an external force can only help. Dahal's threat risks giving an entry point and too much importance to India in Nepal's internal affairs. The fact that India wants an open and formal

say in Nepal's internal affairs is not hidden from anyone. Dahal's proposal to deal directly with India now makes it easier for India to do so. To be sure, India wants the Maoists to make a 'course correction' by permanently renouncing violence, disbanding the YCL and stop talking about 'state capture'. But instead of allaying Delhi's fears, the Maoists became even more hardline and started to cosy up to the northern neighbour China, which led to Delhi's hardened position vis-à-vis the Maoists. All this is the result of political disunity weakening the state and therefore increasing the influence of outside players. If every political leader in this country starts looking beyond its borders for decisions, there is a danger Nepal's sovereignty will be seriously eroded.

Nepal Samacharpatra, 24 December

समाचारपत्र

Pushpa Kamal Dahal accused India of interference and said since the NC-UML and other parties were working under Delhi's instructions he'd now talk directly to the Indians. Instead of being confined within tripartite negotiations, this statement has internationalised Nepal's internal problems. Such remarks from a senior leader aren't just irresponsible they also put bilateral relations with a neighbour in jeopardy. Nepal's political parties should start seeking solutions to their lack of mutual trust and not turn to foreigners. A neighbour will obviously seek to further its own national interest if we allow it to mediate a domestic quarrel.

Interview with Pushpa Kamal Dahal, BBC Nepali Service, 23 December

बिबिसि
नेपाली

Rabindra Mishra: In what capacity will you hold talks with India?

Dahal: Having gone through the media reports today, I realised they did not understand my speech yesterday. It was a sarcastic political comment on the political parties for not having their own stand and waiting for directives from Delhi. It was purely a political satire. Second, Delhi also has its own problems and therefore I pointed out the need for talks with Delhi.

You say controversial things then blame the media for misinterpreting you. You have announced the beginning of talks with Delhi from the podium.

The speech is not against the spirit of dialogue with political parties but it is against Indian interference.

The government holds talks but if the leader of the opposition party says he wants to talk about the 1950 treaty, will India take it seriously?

It does not matter if they listen to me or not. I put forward these issues when I was PM and I raise the same issues as an opposition leader. The real problem is the political parties cannot seem to decide on their own.

We know you took refuge in India during the insurgency, visited the Indian embassy in Kathmandu, and we all say you hugg the Indian PM Manmohan Singh.

The way you mix things up is wrong. I talked to India about unequal treaties, water resources and hydropower development and directly rejected suggestions offered to me which were against the country's interest. But I did not feel that I was the free leader of an independent country.

***Nagarik daily* says you openly called on a neighbour to resolve our internal conflicts and that this was unbecoming of an elected leader.**

There cannot be an uglier misinterpretation of my speech. I only said I wanted talks but it was distorted. This is yellow journalism.



Pushpa Kamal Dahal: "Will you restore civil supremacy or not?"

नागरिक Robin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 21 December

Uncertainty rules

People are increasingly alarmed by the dilly-dallying of political parties in writing the constitution. "If the political parties continue to act like this, they won't write the constitution and will endanger the country's future," said participants in an interaction program organised by *Himal Khabarpatrika* in Itahari. Translated excerpts:

On constitution-writing
Tanka Prasad Neupane

(professor): The political parties forgot the commitments they made in the CPA. NC and UML leaders are talking of a deadline extension already. The leadership itself is not clear on key issues such as state restructuring, language and ethnicity. Unless the Maoists that waged the 'people's war' and ran a parallel government in the past are mainstreamed, the constitution cannot be written.

Ashok Tamrakar (Industries and Commerce Association):

Industrialists and entrepreneurs fought for democracy and voted in the CA elections expecting the new constitution to be written and an economic revolution to take place. If the constitution is not written within the stipulated time, the people who overthrew the 240-year-old monarchy can easily overthrow the current political leadership.

Ashok Khudang (Federal Limbuwan Council):

The Maoists, NC and UML are contesting for a constitution to suit their own interests. When we



REEMA SHRESTHA

point out the obstacles in writing the constitution, we are labelled regressive, secessionist and communal. If they don't write the constitution on time, we are ready to give an alternative.

Laxmi Gautam (All Nepal Women's Association):

Our understanding of the CA was to write a new constitution first and then to run the interim government but our political leaders seem to have understood just the opposite.

On federalism

Dipendra KC (NC): Nationality should be at the centre in a federal system though the issues of special rights and privileges within the federal units can be considered. Topography, natural

resources and social aspects should be taken into account. Creating federal units is a purely technical issue in which politics should not play a part.

Aiyebu Ansari (Nepal Muslim Autonomous State Council):

No political parties have addressed the issue of the 1.2 million Muslims living in 73 districts of the country, though ethnic issues have been raised.

Padam Adhikari (Federal Limbuwan State Council):

We should find a balance between ethnic and historical backgrounds and prevailing social structures in creating federal states. States should be given the right to self-determination, not a particular ethnic group. This will enable all

castes to enjoy the provisions of autonomy, self-governance and special rights. On the basis of ILO Convention 169 and historical background, we have been saying the districts east of the Arun and Kosi rivers should be part of Limbuwan.

Keshab Dahal (rights activist):

We envisaged federalism as a means to eliminate discrimination and the domination of a particular caste in a unitary system. This was not aimed at curbing the rights of privileged castes and giving oppressed castes special rights in the name of liberation. Nepal is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country but we are talking about giving special rights to particular castes and languages in a new

federal set-up. If this happens, it will not be any different from in the past.

DN Mehata (MJF-D): The Madhes has been the victim of domestic colonisation. The major question is how to liberate it.

Madhesi people should be proportionately represented in all state mechanisms. There should be an integrated Madhes Pradesh and Madhesis should be given the right to decide on the number of states within it.

Miliram Chaudhary (Tharu Welfare Council):

Ethnic ratios should be the basis of federal units. All castes should have proportionate representation and access at central, federal and local levels.

"May not meet deadline"

Laxman Prasad Ghimire, Chief Whip, NCRamechep

The CA is still working, right?

Eight subject committees have finished discussing their preliminary drafts and concept papers. All the committees were supposed to have finished discussing drafts by November-December. But the Constitutional Council and the State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power committees haven't finished, which may force us to revise the schedule once more.

Will we ever complete the constitution if the schedule is repeatedly revised?

We are determined to finish it. But we have already cut down the time period for public scrutiny of the constitution from three months to one month, and it still doesn't look like we'll write the constitution on time.



Is one reason behind the delay the fact that the CA hasn't got a quorum?

No. We were supposed to discuss the preliminary draft by the Committee on the Distribution of Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Public Revenue, but couldn't because of the Nepal bandh called by the Maoists. However, the parties have agreed that in the future the CA will continue running during bandhs.

How will you reconcile the differences of opinion in the CA and parliament?

We have set up an informal special taskforce to resolve these differences, which will comprise the big three parties, the chief whips, and nine CA members including Radheshyam Adhikari, Agni Kharel and Ekraj Bhandari. The taskforce will also work with the other parties. Currently, the State Restructuring Committee is the biggest mess.

'Not optimistic'

Upendra Yadav, President MJF, Sunsari 5

What's happening in the CA?

Just a couple of days ago, the Committee on the Distribution of Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Public Revenue finished discussions on its preliminary draft and concept paper. The Constitutional Council is considering revising the schedule once more, and the State Restructuring Committee and the Committee on the Forms of Government are working on their drafts.

After repeated revisions of the schedule, there isn't enough time for public scrutiny of the constitution, right?

With the deadline so close, it will take a lot of hard work to write the constitution on time. As a result, there's isn't enough time for the public to review the constitution, and we may break our promise to the people to finish the constitution within two years.

Why isn't the party leadership more serious about the constitution with so little time left?

The NC, UML and the Maoists are to blame. There are discussions going on between them, but they aren't concerned about anyone else.

Aren't you participating in the discussions?

They haven't consulted us. That's why currently we're pressuring them to finish the constitution on time. We are also pressuring them to fulfill past agreements with the MJF.

Will the constitution be written on time?

Well, so far it seems unlikely. If they don't meet past commitments, the constitution won't be completed.



ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Marfa to Manhattan**, exhibition of photographs by Kashish Das Shrestha at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, till 31 December 11AM-5 PM, 4438979
- ❖ **People After War**, permanent photo exhibition, every day 11AM-4PM, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoka, for bulk school bookings call 5521393

EVENTS

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

MUSIC

- ❖ **HyJazz** every Friday evening by Inner Groove at the Rox Bar, 4489362
- ❖ **Baja gaja** every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchok, 7.30 PM onwards, 5526212
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **Arabian Night**, with bellydancers from Ukraine on New Year's Eve, Megha Malhar Hall, Hotel Soaltee
- ❖ **Christmas French cuisine**, veg and non-veg, Rs 2950+ and Rs 3900+ respectively, Chez Caroline, Baber Mahal Revisited, 4263070
- ❖ **Jingle bell shaped pizzas**, with Christmas punch, BBQ and gourmet fare, Aqua Java zing, Thamel, 4254809
- ❖ **Christmas Turkey Dinner**, till 1 January, K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel, 4700043
- ❖ **German Food Festival**, till 1 January, Irish Pub, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Christmas Cake shop**, christmas pudding, chocolate Santa Claus, hampers and more at The Lounge, till 31 December, 4491234
- ❖ **Lavazza Coffee and Baskin n' Robbins**, at 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
- ❖ **Jazzbell Café**, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8PM, Jhamsikhel, 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 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.

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

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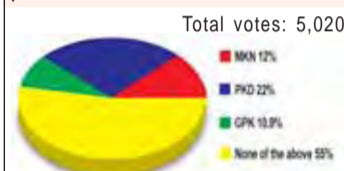
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Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 482

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



Weekly Internet Poll # 483. To vote go to: www.nepalTIMES.com

Q. What do you make of PKD's desire to talk to Delhi?

WWF European Expedition

WWF-led Climate for Life campaign ambassadors Apa Sherpa and Dawa Steven Sherpa travelled all across Europe in November and December, as part of a European Expedition, in an effort to raise the profile of the Himalaya in the global climate debate. They travelled through Prague, Bratislava, London, Rome, Geneva, Chamonix, Vienna, Brussels, Paris and Copenhagen meeting politicians, celebrities and people on the streets, talking about the impacts of climate change in the Himalaya.

Some of the prominent events of the European Expedition were meeting and handing over an Everest Rock and the Nepali Prime Minister's letters to the Presidents of Austria and France, speaking at the European Parliament, and at a climate change demonstration at Brussels. Both Apa and Dawa also participated and spoke at the Government of Nepal-organised Summiters' Summit in Copenhagen on 11 December.

WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Unlike Europe, which has seen excessive snowfall in recent years, precipitation in the Himalayan region and South Asia has been dropping. For example, the Valley hasn't seen its December quota of rain for three straight years. Satellite images of Thursday afternoon suggest that conditions will remain dry through the end of the month. This weekend, expect partly cloudy skies and warmer mornings, as a thin layer of clouds will act as a blanket.



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HOMECOMING: Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal at Tribhuvan International Airport, back from the Copenhagen Climate Conference on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

CHAOS: A fire rages as police stand guard in New Baneswor following riots during the Maoist-called Nepal Bandh on Sunday.



SRIGAN GHIMIRE

NOT SO FAST: Policemen recover around Rs 300,000 and IC 5000 worth of counterfeit money as the perpetrator, Jagir Sikh Adit, looks on in Lalitpur on Thursday.



SOHAN SHRESTHA

THIRSTY: Culture Minister Minendra Rijal sipping *Tongba*, or millet beer, during the inauguration of the Nepal International Indigenous Film Festival on Tuesday in Dharan.



KIRAN PANDAY

OUR GRANDMOTHERS: Five women, subjects of the Hamra Hajurama Photo Exhibition, at the opening at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, last week. The exhibition concludes on Friday at 6 PM.

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Never, never on a Banday

We've always been a nation of whiners. The Baddies just handed us a three-day forced holiday on a platter and all we did was grumble about it. Taxi drivers complained they couldn't cheat passengers at the airport, customs officials in Tatopani complained they couldn't collect their usual kickbacks, and Lazimpat's night walkers were out of business.

Why not look on the bright side of **Bandays**? The Ass' back-of-the-envelope calculation reveals that we saved Rs 600 million worth of fuel in three days, thus reducing our trade deficit with India, slashed Nepal's carbon footprint by 1.4 million tons of CO₂, and put ourselves on track to fulfill the Prime Minister's commitment in Copenhagen to make the country carbon neutral by 2020.



An average of 15 Nepalis die and 30 are injured every day in highway accidents across the country, which means the three-day banned saved the lives of 45 Nepalis, and an additional 90 who would otherwise be maimed were not. This is why we welcome the **indefinite banned** from January 25 onwards. If it lasts a month, we will have saved the lives of nearly 500 Nepalis and also temporarily arrested glacial retreat in the Himalaya.



The Baddies had promised that the banned would be 'peaceful', and sure enough it was three days of peace and tranquility. Non-violent goons nearly lynched DSP Chaudhari, peaceful YCLs prowled the streets of Pokhara Lakeside threatening to burn down any restaurant that dared open. In Surkhet, the office of an aid organisation was ransacked in a completely non-violent manner, and comrades in masks threatened to **gently break the legs** of anyone who dared go to work. Govt offices were either set on fire or vandalised in an extremely peaceful manner. Journalists were thrashed non-violently and ambulances were smashed so the patients inside could rest in peace.



Chairman Awesome's much-maligned speech in which he went on the warpath against the Injuns, and then immediately said the speech was supposed to be sarcastic, revealed at least one thing: he has a sense of humour. Boy, are we glad he was just joking. I don't think this country can afford another remote-controlled robot.

There were other signs of sophisticated humour at the rally. A couple of YCLs wearing their trademark black **North Face** down jackets held up a banner that said: 'Indians and Dogs Not Allowed in Nepal'. Ha-ha-ha. Others trampled on the Indian tri-colour. Hoo-hoo-hoo. PKD must have regretted that one, 'cos he was later overheard apologising profusely in Hindi to someone on his mobile.

The Cabinet also showed it has a sense of humour by nominating GPK for the Nobel Peace Prize. The Ass can't figure out what would be more embarrassing: nominating the man, or Girja actually winning the prize.



The prime minister is off again, this time to China, which means you should expect monstrous traffic jams both on the ground and in the air on Saturday and next Thursday. Last time he flew off to the climate summit, the airport was closed for two hours. International flights were diverted, domestic flights were cancelled and then the airport ran out of parking space when flights bunched up in the evening. We may have gone from **kingdom to republic**, but why does the entire diplomatic corps have to troop off to the airport to say 'bye' or 'hi'? And CAAN insists on issuing a NOTAM closing down the airport for VVIP movements. Makunay has outlived his usefulness and should gracefully retire after this China trip, but before that he should take one last decision to scrap these practices.



Stiff bargaining going on till presstime between the PMO and the Chinese embassy about the size of the prime ministerial entourage. The prime minister wants to take along his wife and dotter, and a retinue of 19. The embassy has capped it at 8, but is willing to allow one offspring. China still has a **'One child policy'**.



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