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NARESH NEWAR

All is quiet on the western front, but for how much longer?

With only a month to go before the Maoists' unilateral ceasefire ends, a lone policeman this week guards the barbed wire and landmined perimeter of Khalanga, the capital of Rukum. He hasn't seen any Maoists lately, just people streaming in and out for the festivals.

This sandbagged sentry post is as far as the government's writ goes in this midwestern district where the Maoist rebellion started 10 years ago. The ceasefire has brought down the daily death count in the war, development activities have picked up and political parties in many places find the situation more relaxed. At the Nepalgunj border, despite the new rule to carry photo IDs, Nepalis are coming home for Tihar, Id and Chhat.

But the Maoist blockade remains in place in Khalanga, where traders have to pay exorbitant taxes to the rebels to bring in food and essentials. There are strong rumours of a Maoist offensive once the ceasefire ends and in district headquarters throughout the midwest the army is fortifying bunkers and reinforcing bases.

Editorial p2
Human sacrifices
Ceasefire or no ceasefire p4

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 271

Q. Should news be allowed on FM radios in Nepal?

Total votes: 5,141

Yes 74.9 %

No 24.2 %

Don't know 0.9 %

Weekly Internet Poll # 272. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Were the political parties right in calling for a Valley banda last week to protest the media ordinance?

Times

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HUMAN SACRIFICES

Tens years into the war and nearly half that time without parliament, it is difficult to see a solution to the three-way power struggle between the king, political parties and the underground rebels.

The day-to-day headlines of blame and counter-blame poison the air and confuse war-weary citizens who have lost their trust in all political forces in the arena. They reject the Maoists' use of violence, they don't see signs of the political parties behaving any differently, and they are turned off by a monarch who doesn't even bother to hide his autocratic tendencies anymore.

In conflicts where a resolution looks intractable, it helps to distil to its essence differences between adversaries. In Nepal, the dispute is about how much power the king should have. The political parties will settle for a constitutional role, the Maoists want to get rid of the monarchy and the king himself wants more power than the 1990 constitution grants him. Each of them is exploiting the weaknesses of the other two.

The king senses the public disenchantment against the party leadership and believes this means support for himself. The parties haven't properly atoned for squandering democracy and think they can win public sympathy simply by pointing at a bullying king. The Maoists have played the parties and the palace against each other but despite the unilateral ceasefire are losing whatever support they once had. The irony, of course, is that all three claim to be fighting on the peoples' behalf and boast that they have their full support.

All three are tumbling down a precipice together, but instead of working to arrest the fall they are punching each other as they go down.

How does one even begin to stop this descent into oblivion? In the short-term we must buy time for confidence-building by pushing for an extension of the unilateral ceasefire and reciprocity by the army. The past two months may not have freed the people from extortion, abductions and disappearances but it has accomplished one thing: reduced the rate at which Nepalis were being killed.

A section of the Maoists now seem genuinely interested in a soft-landing by agreeing to suspend the armed struggle and join the mainstream. With his extended foreign tour, nomination of an insider to the NEA and the media ordinance the king shows he hasn't changed tack, but even he may respond to a face-saving offer to back down. The parties are working to convince the Maoists to come to the mainstream as the least-cost path to peace through social justice.

All three need to be given a chance to work things out, but for this they need a longer truce. Otherwise, we are looking at renewed post-ceasefire bloodshed as the Maoists commemorate the 10th anniversary of their 'people's war' with more human sacrifices.



The king at the summit

If he is going to go he's going to go

It looks like King Gyanendra will be attending the 13th SAARC Summit 12-13 November in Dhaka. Because the parties and civil society in open dissent are yet to gather sufficient steam to challenge him head-to-head to reverse the coup of

GUEST COLUMN
Kanak Mani Dixit



1 February, for the moment the king is in the driver's seat even if few like the direction he is taking.

If he is going to go, he is going to go. But we have to be clear that when King Gyanendra attends the summit of Southasian leaders, he represents only the palace, some sections of the military, and the graceless squad that makes up his council of ministers.

King Gyanendra revels in pomp and ceremony, whether it is at religious rituals in debi temples, walking in military fatigues among the peasantry, acting gracious in investiture events, or seated regally at international gatherings. If limited to that, the country and

people would have no problems with it.

Unfortunately, the king also clearly enjoys the exercise of power. The reason to attend the SAARC summit is to try to gain some regional and international credibility, and consolidate power at home on the rebound. And thereafter, the royal palace plans a two-week tour of African capitals at a time when the nation bleeds and desperately seeks a political release.

The king has yet to receive a formal invite and dates from countries he would actually like to visit (India, United States, China, or any of the European countries). Even the black-flag demonstrations planned by boisterous Nepalis in New York would not have kept him away in September: it was only the failure to secure an invitation at a reception given by George W Bush where everyone else would have been present (except a handful of totalitarians and dictators) that forced the palace into humiliating retreat.

According to reliable information, the takeover was itself rushed so the king could attend the SAARC Summit originally slated for 6-7 February and later cancelled. The plan was to ambush the international community and gain automatic recognition for the new authoritarian dispensation.

In the ensuing months since February, things haven't been going well for the king. Internationally, there has been a solid wall of non-recognition of February First. Domestically, the Maoists rage in the countryside, the political parties are sullen but defiant, and a public opinion poll would

probably show a dramatic shift in perception about the place of royalty.

The king heads a regime given to midnight raids on radio stations, elevating Panchayat-era hooligans to powerful positions, promulgating unprincipled ordinances on the eve of weeklong holidays, and allowing the country to run without fiscal discipline or accountability. Overall, it is a blot on the country's image.

Since 1 February, King Gyanendra has gone to open-invitation international summits: the Non-Aligned Summit in Jakarta and the Boao Forum in April and the G-77 meeting in Doha in June. The same will hold true for SAARC in Dhaka. The right thing to do would be not to attend because each and every action, directive, ordinance and ruling by the royal palace is presently constitutionally unauthorised and so would a trip to Dhaka as a head-of-state and head-of-regime.

If he does attend, the king will be doing so under the sheer weight of power garnered through the military-backed takeover. That attendance will be without representational legitimacy. Nepal was already once a democracy and intends to go back to being one.

Attending the SAARC summit will be one more act by a monarch insensitive to the people's political maturity: a willingness to rule over a shrunken kingdom where the citizens suffer economic stagnation and social regression. One must understand the craving, and the mindset from which it emanates. ●

Absolutely traditional

The only way to make monarchies less absolute is to make them dispensable

The royal takeover of 4 October, 2002 sought to change the monarch's powers in several ways. It assumed the power to fire elected prime ministers and replace them with selected royal nominees. It sought to establish the precedence that the king could interpret, amend or annul provisions in the constitution. It took sovereignty to imply impunity from censure. And finally, it propounded the principle of primacy of tradition. Enough has been said about first

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



three principles, but even at the risk of belabouring the obvious, some points need to be made all over again:

- A king constitutionally bound to act according to the advice of the council of minister doesn't have the right to dismiss its chairman, no matter how compelling the reason.
- According to the doctrine of separation of power in parliamentary democracies, the legislature makes laws, the executive implements them, and should there be

confusion, the judiciary is the final authority to interpret it.

- The notion of state sovereignty doesn't supersede the provisions of universal declaration of human rights and other similar covenants duly ratified by people's elected representatives

Thus, by every criteria of constitutionalism, the October Fourth takeover was wrong. It was morally reproachable, legally untenable, and practically flawed. Almost every framer of the constitution has since taken the stand that the takeover is patently unconstitutional. However, that was precisely the point of the proclamation in the first place because the fourth cardinal rule of constructive monarchy is cast in stone: the customs and traditions of the Shah Dynasty supersede the laws of the land.

Hardcore monarchists like Bharat Keshar Simha, Sachit Shamsher Rana and Tulsi Giri have been forcefully pushing this argument. For Giri, the king is the personification of all his subjects. In somewhat similar vein, Simha asserts that a divine Hindu monarch can't be bound by

human constitutions. Sachit Shamsher is a little more circumspect, but his position is: the king is the state and vice versa.

The Maoists know what they are up against in a country mired in obscurantism. The mainstream parties also realise the grip Hindu orthodoxy still has upon Nepali rulers. But professionals judge the king by their own beliefs and declare that the idea of an absolute king obsolete. But that attitude is more wishful thinking than a reflection of ground reality.

The dips are even more confused. A western diplomat lamented ruefully: "When we saw a Hindu priests being helicoptered around to four shrines all over the kingdom just before Dasain, we guessed that something was afoot. But had we submitted an assessment report on this basis, we would have been laughed out by headquarters."

What our western well-wishers fail to appreciate is that monarchs don't fit the prototype of tinpot dictators in post-colonial countries. Kings have their own ways of authoritarianism not found anymore in text book case-studies at institutes of international relations.

Marx described traditional monarchs as "oriental despots". The phrase is loaded with racial overtones (hereditary monarchs elsewhere in the world were hardly any different) but it encapsulates the fundamental character of divine kings in unambiguous terms: "An oriental despot requires but little ability: as long as he lives, he succeeds, for he has absolutely his own way..." They rule by being, not by doing. Faith is the source of their power, not logic.

Since monarchies are inherently absolutist, there is only one proven method of making them constitutional: make them dispensable. The constitution of 1990, for all its merits, was thus fundamentally flawed. It failed to enshrine the crucial clause that the country could turn into a republic if and when its people so desired.

As we celebrate the 15th anniversary of a comatose constitution on 9 November it is time to end the farce of Article 127 and opt for a constituent assembly. Drafting a new compact to transform this kingdom into a modern state has now become an undeniable imperative. ●

LETTERS

DARK AGE

B K Shrestha seems to be actively involved in the publicity campaign supporting the present regime ('Rock and hard place', #269) and defaming the political parties and blaming civil society. Wonder who the elections are for: definitely not for the people because they are just pawns in this power tussle. It's not holding the elections that is the problem, it is whether they will be meaningful given the present situation. Mr Shrestha seems to think that the security forces are in a strong position to conduct free and fair elections which is doubtful. And now with the media ordinance, there will be a limitation on the presentation of facts. What happened to *Kantipur* is just a hint of things to come. Mr Shrestha also had a go at Indian leaders for supporting Nepal's democracy and not raising the issue of the lack of democracy in Bhutan. So, anybody who supports the cause of democracy is unpatriotic in the view of our guest columnist as well as the state. What both forget is that when the VHP leader came to Nepal and praised the king for his boldstep, that was ok. I don't remember anyone showing him a black flag. It showed how the state can be biased in diplomacy and set the wrong precedent. The present regime just wants the people to return to the same dark age when a few were worshipped as gods by the rest.

Pramod Bhagat, New Baneswor

- The new media ordinance and attack on Kantipur FM proved that the present government wants to suppress the press freedom guaranteed by the constitution ('Press under pressure', #270). The regime doesn't respect the minimum legal standards and the principle of natural justice so we can say that now in Nepal there is no rule of law and democracy. So it is the duty of every freedom fighter to support the FNJ agitation for press freedom and democracy.

Anchan Bhattacharai, Sindhuli

- Peace in Nepal is not possible without every political force embracing certain values whether they are kings, revolutionaries or politicians. At

the end of the day, everyone is a Nepali and we all need to share the same land with a hopeful future. This checklist may help:

Maoists:

- Must give up violence and join the mainstream
- Must prove to Nepalis they are interested in building and not destroying
- Must acknowledge that destroying other political forces with violence is not a winning approach.

Democratic Parties:

- Must display true democratic values—its about empowering the people not their leaders
- Must not yield to the interests of foreign nations

Monarchy:

- The king can get genuine respect only if the people trust him
- In this day and age that means not hankering for more power with Panchayat-like gimmicks but offering true devolution

D Mahat, email

- I couldn't agree more with Dr Narayan B Thapa's balanced analysis of the country's present crisis ('Still silent majroity', #270). The parties have not only not apologised to the Nepali people for letting them down, they have not shown that they have reformed in any way and when the king offers them a chance to renew their mandate they reject it. This kind of negativism will get us nowhere. Why don't the parties start looking for solutions instead of being an obstacle all the time?

J B Thapa, email

- Narayan B Thapa hit the nail on the head. Successful elections are the best bet to move Nepal out of the deadlock it's been caught in for years. Those who seek to mould the fate of the nation need to go to the people to find out what it is we seek. Only with our mandate will they earn the right to make drastic changes to our polity. It's time to stop sloganeering about 'people's sovereignty' and start practicing it instead by contesting the elections. As Dr Thapa says, it makes sense to demand certain conditions for free and fair

elections but to boycott them outright is sheer stupidity and utter irresponsibility. As for those among us who are 'egging' on the political parties in their recalcitrant line (namely the civil society movement and the media) they need to carefully consider what their support is meant to achieve. In the continuing political struggle, our aim should be the victory of parliament over the palace not that of political parties over the palace. Let us make this distinction carefully and move forward boldly in favour of what's best for the people of the country. As responsible citizens, we should encourage the parties to take a leading role in ensuring the success of the elections not boycotting them.

Abhishek Basnyat, Washington DC

- CK Lal is probably the only Nepali journalist who remembered the passing away of Rosa Parks ('The end of imagination', #270). He quotes Martin Luther King's famous lines about Mrs Parks: '...eventually the cup of endurance runs over and the human personality cries out, "I can take it no longer".' Was it a coincidence that in the same issue (#270) you have one of the architects of Nepal's democratic spring in 1990 saying: "How long can we go on?"

Sam Irving, Kathmandu

- Congratulations to Devendra Raj Panday for calling a spade a spade and to you for having the courage to print his interview ('How long can we go on?', #270) in these uncertain times for the media. It is clear that there is still time for the king to show statesmanship and voluntarily devolve his powers. Because if he doesn't, that power may be taken away from him sooner than he realises.

Jit Ghimirey, email

SYCOPHANCY

While your editorials and CK Lal are as good as ever, please spare us regular features like Shradha Ghale and the Guest Column. What's a paediatric surgeon doing writing about the state of the state, anyway? Narayan Thapa's guest column mirrors the grovelling sycophancy that has ensured the survival of a redundant monarchy till this day. Also, Kunda Dixit is (understandably) jaded and uses his Under My Hat columns only to spew bile. Take a break, Kunda, and come back rejuvenated and make us roll with laughter as you did in the good old days. Lastly, where are the MJ Akbars and the Daniel Laks?

Pabitra Limbu, Sat Dobato

GAME POINT

I read Sujay Lama's tennis column Game Point on *Nepali Times* especial and I am amazed and proud that a Nepali is a tennis coach in the US! I am an 11-year-old student in Boulder, Colorado. I have mostly been doing piano all my life since I was six. But now I am really into tennis since my dad put me in a week long tennis camp a year and a half ago. My dad is my coach and we learn from tennis books and videos since my dad had never played tennis

before. But he is talking to a coach at the moment to arrange some private lessons for me. My dad wanted to take me to the US Open this year but something came up and he could not make the time. Hopefully I will be able to go next year. Thank you for printing Game Point and I hope Sujay will keep on writing.

Laxmi Pooja Rai, Colorado, USA

HEROJIG

I have been following Herojig's meteoric rise in the cartoon world. He is truly impressive. Having lived in Nepal for some years and now back in the USA, I find it gives me a unique window on Nepal.

Maggie, email

- I am really impressed with Herojig's cartoons. He has rare insight into modern Nepali mores and sees things we Nepalis don't usually see.

Gopal, email

- Since you haven't discontinued the Herojig cartoon in your paper, I have wondered whether something is wrong with me because I never "got" them. But recently I met several of my friends who don't understand it either. Herojig's so-called humour seems to be too obscure for even the sophisticated readers of *Nepali Times*.

Seema Khatri, Bansbari

RIGHT RAJBHANDARI

I was shocked to see the photograph of the previous election commissioner shown in place of the present one. Agreed that both are Rajbhandaris but it was still too big an error.

Anupam Rajbhandari, email

The real election commissioner, Keshavraj Rajbhandari, is pictured (below).

**LETTERS**

Nepali Times welcomes all feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be 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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Taxing times

Not a single villager has been spared from 'voluntarily contributing' to the Maoist 'People's Liberation Army'. Farmers have to pay taxes equivalent to at least two percent of their produce, either in cash or harvest. Families of workers in the Gulf or Malaysia pay Rs 30,000 a year on top of the flat rate of Rs 5,000 for overseas workers. Those going to India have to pay Rs 1,500 before departing and are taxed Rs 100 a month.



Thousands of villagers from Rukum go to Himachal Pradesh, Mumbai, Calcutta, Punjab and Goa. In Chunwati VDC alone, nearly 150 villagers have gone to the Gulf. Road contractors must pay two percent of their total budget as commission. The road

users committee has to pay taxes as well. Even the guilty party at the People's Court, especially in cases of bigamy and second marriages, have to pay a tax, which can reach Rs 70,000.

Ten year war

The hardships faced by the Rukmilis pales in comparison to the misery of the internally displaced in these midwestern districts.

After 10 years of war, many of the 100 displaced families have not seen their home villages for years because they were driven out by the Maoists. "All we want is for the Maoists to return our property and leave us alone," says 66-year-old Baram Buda, whose son was forced to work as a porter and guide for the security forces and was killed during an encounter in Mahato village three years ago. His grandson was only a month old when his son Bhim Prakash was killed.



"I want to go home. I can't bear this hardship anymore," says Mankumari Bista, 66, (pictured) whose farmer husband Min Bahadur was shot dead after he refused to join the rebels four years ago. Today, Mankumari survives by grinding stones at a quarry. She looks feeble and is constantly sick.

With no support from the government or NGOs, the fathers of young Rukumelis killed by the Maoists have started their own union, Dwanda Pudit Sangh but the CDO has not given them permission to fundraise. The Maoists have offered to return property they seized on condition that owners refund them the compensation they received from the government. "How can we do that?" asks Mankumari, "from where can we bring the money back?"

Narco-revolution

Not everyone in Rukum is negative about the Maoists. The happiest are villagers who have been permitted to cultivate cannabis in the terraces of the midwestern hills where the plant grows wild. Villagers say they sell the drug to the rebels for Rs 3,200 per kg who then take it down to Dang or Nepalganj and resell it for several times that price. Many families in the district's remote VDCs where there is no police or army presence have been actively farming this cash crop. It is harvest time now and each household produces up to 3 kgs of the cannabis resin.

Ceasefire highway

BARACHHETRA—Two months into the ceasefire, the Maoists in this pilgrimage town of Sunsari are trying to win the hearts and minds of the local people.

Jos Limbu used to be the head of the Maoists' Dharan unit but he had just been transferred to Barachhetra. There wasn't much to do during the ceasefire, so Limbu commandeered a bulldozer from the Roads Department and started building a road north up the banks of the Sun Kosi to Bishnu Paduka.



When we visited, the Maoist Barachhetra in-charge, Hemanta, was sitting next to the driver in the bulldozer giving instructions. "I told the guys from the Roads Department who were

repairing the Chatara highway to come with me otherwise I'd set fire to the bulldozer and they came," boasted Limbu to villagers who had come to watch.

The villagers say the Maoists have suddenly started asking them to apply for electricity, roads and drinking water, if they need these services. Earlier, the rebels had marched off everyone to dig a part of the highway that is the main artery during the Barachhetra Festival this month.

But elsewhere in the east, the Maoists don't seem to care about whether they win the hearts and minds of the locals or not. They have declared all schools closed from 11-16 December.

We asked Limbu how the ceasefire was going. He handed over his party paper, *Janabidroha*, and replied: "The lower ranks are impatient for the ceasefire to end so they can get back into action." (Gopal Dahal in Sunsari)



ALL PICS: NARESH NEWAR

Ceasefire or no ceasefire

It doesn't seem to make much of a difference in the Maoist heartland

NARESH NEWAR
in RUKUM

Even though there is still a month to go for the unilateral Maoist ceasefire to end, tensions are already running high in these remote mountains where the Maoist war started nearly ten years ago.

There is nervousness on both sides and even a small incident could spark a premature end to the ceasefire. The rebels have been engaged in psywar with messages to the CDO and local security officials warning of an imminent attack. The Unified Command, meanwhile, has been sending patrols deeper into the Maoist-held hinterland.

Rumours are swirling in the heavily-fortified district capital of Khalanga that a Maoist brigade is in the vicinity. Barbed wires encircle the town's perimeter which are booby trapped with landmines. Every new visitor has to register with the security forces. Hotels and lodges are inspected every day. Lights out is 8PM and it is strictly enforced by patrols. "It's like a prison and feels like a prison," says Khalanga resident Sakta Bahadur BK.

Despite the ceasefire, the Maoist blockade of Rukum was never lifted. Local traders manage to bring in food supplies and other household items but only by paying exorbitant taxes to the rebels. "The Maoists administer this district, not the government," says local trader Dhan Bahadur BK. No business can be done anywhere, including in Khalanga, without registering with the Maoists.

Food started to run out in May, when the Maoists enforced the blockade to prevent supplies from reaching government and security personnel. "We tried to

get help from local government officials but in vain," explains Dhan Bahadur. The administration told traders to take 'whatever means necessary' to get supplies into Khalanga. They met Maoist district chief who made them sign documents saying they'd pay taxes and support rebel activities. The traders also 'donated' Rs 150,000 to the 'Village People's Government' committee.

Several traders were later arrested after the army found the documents with the names of those who had signed 'support' for the Maoists. Despair is rife among the Rukmilis despite the ceasefire. Their lives have deteriorated in the past two months since there are more restrictions by both sides on villagers wishing to travel over the festive season.

Only government teachers based in remote villages are allowed to visit Khalanga once a

month to collect their salaries and that is only because they pay up to 20 percent of their salaries as tax to the Maoists. So, in an indirect way, the government itself is subsidising the Maoists. Nearly 1,000 teachers have been paying such taxes, whether they live in remote areas or in Khalanga itself.

The punishment for defying the blockade or not paying taxes can be severe. A farmer was recently beaten badly when he imported potatoes without written permission from the rebels. The only way supplies can come into Rukum is by lorry from Kapurkot in Dang via Salyan. The rebels control the highway and have checkpoints where they inspect rebel registration cards and purchase bills so they can tax the products.

"The situation looks quite grim if you ask me," says Dipendra Roka, a former Maoist who headed a village 'people's government' in the district, "people trust neither the security forces nor the rebels." Roka was a teacher and forced to stand for a Maoist election in Nuwakot VDC, a six hour walk from Khalanga. After nearly a year with the rebels, he fled to Khalanga where he now teaches at the district's oldest school, Tribhuban Higher Secondary.

There appears to be many reasons for people to doubt the sincerity of the rebels' ceasefire. Even local politicians from the seven parties, unlike their leaders in Kathmandu, still feel pressure from the Maoists. "We still need their permission and have to inform them beforehand about our activities," says Nepali Congress worker Nanda Bista. "In the media they talk about cooperation, but their behaviour is just the opposite here." ●



Youth power rising


The challenge is how to harness it

Last Saturday, more than 30,000 young Nepalis swayed to rock music in the National Stadium. In the evening, thousands more moved to the beats of DJs in an open-air festival in the streets of Thamel. Tens of thousands across Nepal attended the Sundar Shanta Nepal Travelling Peace Concert that had its grande finale in Bhaktapur on Sunday. Marketers are wondering what to peddle to this growing segment of young consumers but all of us should be considering how we can positively channel this youthful energy.

Such gatherings of youths can turn both ways. What happens if the crowd turns into a mob? Do we have adequate security for such open-air dos? What if there is a bomb scare? Have we forgotten the mob frenzy of 1 September so quickly?

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed



Using the opportunity offered by the unilateral ceasefire, thousands of young people travelled to watch the just finished cross-country peace concerts. It was a cry for peace that seems to have fallen on deaf ears. While the establishment and politicians might be satisfied that this generation seems unmoved by the dirty game of politics, we should ask if their involvement might make a positive difference to the future of this country. The issue needs to be addressed.

It is also interesting to see institutions such as the British Council sponsor events like the Thamel music festival, to see more music videos and albums being released daily and more parties happening weekly. But it is also important to offer young people other types of activities, such as discussion forums on how to extend the ceasefire or integrating Nepal into the global economy.

What about organising live debates for youth, along with quiz contests and knowledge forums? We may want to leave the sponsoring of DJs and music concerts to beer companies and focus more on finding new avenues for youthful energy. We need to address the concerns expressed by friends of this Beed about Kathmandu having more institutions that train DJs and RJs than it does career counselling centres.



Youths can transform politics and the economy. While the non-retiring student leaders in the Indian state of West Bengal made the education system and economy into a fiasco, the non-political enterprising youths of Karnataka helped Bangalore become the second Silicon Valley. While young people in China, Thailand and Vietnam are driving economic growth, young people in Kathmandu want to escape the ‘serious’ issues by partying and rural youth just want any opportunity to leave the country and work abroad.

Our political parties squandered the opportunity offered by the multiparty system to give youth a chance and the current regime is displaying the same reluctance, at the same time wasting the chance to make economic reforms that is open to a government without opposition.

Youth power is more visible now than ever before, simply because half our population is below 20. Now is the time to find the right ways to harness this energy for positive uses. Yes, young people will drive the future economy because of their sheer numbers but we must ensure that their contributions in all facets of our society will be positive. ●

Himalayan tsunamis

LHASA—An international conference in Lhasa last week warned that flash-floods are a growing threat to mountain dwellers in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region and called for better preparedness and crossborder cooperation to deal with these disasters.

Experts from eight countries in the Himalaya as well as international organisations took part in the week-long meeting in Lhasa organised by the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), the China Meteorological Administration (CMA) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

“There is a real threat of Himalayan tsunamis in the region,” said ICIMOD Director General J Gabriel Campbell. “Often flash floods can have impacts hundreds of kilometres downstream and warning time is counted in minutes.”

The Lhasa Declaration called for greater transboundary cooperation in early warning and data-sharing since many rivers flow across national borders. “There is an urgent need to improve the cooperation between, and within, the forecasting and warning agencies,” the document urged.

Chand, Jr abducted

Maoists have abducted industrialist Arun Chand from Chuha village in Kailali district, where he had gone to reopen his Bahulinga Sugar Mills. Son of former Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand,

Arun Chand was reportedly kidnapped on 27 October but his family delayed contacting authorities hoping he would be released after talks with Maoists. Mill management had apparently not received previous Maoist threats but were warned to pay all dues owed to sugarcane farmers.

Branching out

Nabil Bank inaugurated its 17th branch on 27 October at Maharaiganj. Located behind Namaste Supermarket, the full-service branch includes safe deposit lockers, ATM and Privilege Banking Centre. It will also be the drop-off point for applications for visas to the US, issue dates for visa interviews and accept payment of visa fees.

NEW PRODUCTS

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Sarbinda KC
MBA, KUSOM
Winner - 2004

Our street kids

Bal Sarokar, August-October 2005

बाल सडकाउ

"I was walking around Putali Sadak one morning when suddenly a man came and accused me of stealing his utensils. He hit me hard and dragged me to Singha Darbar police station. I was locked up for 12 days without proper food and beaten regularly by the police. See, I still have the scars," Krishna Shrestha told us.

Twelve-year-old Kalu Pariyar says he gets beaten by watchmen at night, when he is sleeping by the roadside. And Ram Bahadur, 13, says people are always calling him names like thief and pickpocket. There are nearly 5,000 street children in Nepal's cities, nearly 800 of them are in Kathmandu, according to CWIN's latest survey. Rapid urbanisation, financial difficulties, lack of love, domestic violence and unemployment are only some of the reasons why children leave home.



NARESH NEWAR

The armed conflict has boosted the numbers of kids leaving home, entering city areas and living on the streets. These children are vulnerable and are targeted by paedophiles, are prone to drug abuse and criminal activities. The longer they stay on the

streets, the more likely it is that they will get involved in such activities. Our society is to be blamed for this situation and if we do not accept our responsibility now, we will have to bear grave consequences in the future.

I was in Gaushala recently trying to bring five street kids to CWIN. When we tried to put them in a bus the conductor refused. "They are filthy, so when we let them ride on the bus our usual passengers get off," he said. In other cases the children are called names, chased away, sprayed with water and hit. Such violence occurs even within their own groups. There is often a leader who comes at the end of the day and loots the money the kids have made. If they do not get the money they want, these older kids often torture little ones, cutting them with knives, making them lift heavy loads and eat Dendrite.

The children say the police also torture them. They form the children into groups so they can go pick pockets or force them to look for sex workers. Yet if someone is robbed, the police blame the street kids, intimidate them into confessing and throw them in jail. The problems facing these street children are complex and challenging. However, it will not be impossible to start rehabilitation programs if we work with a clear conscience and firm willpower. The first step would be for society to stop mistreating the children on our streets.

Polls apart

.....
Nilambar Acharya, leftist intellectual in *Bimarsha*, 28 October

विमर्श

The king's command to conduct elections by 2007 is meaningless because the main political parties are going to boycott it. It is absurd to announce elections in this situation. The election announcement will therefore only widen the rift between the king and the parties. The media ordinance cast further doubts on the king's real intentions and it is clear that the intention is to continue the autocratic trends. An election conducted by an autocratic regime has no meaning. If the government holds an election inspite of this it will never be legally acceptable. This is non-constitutional, just like the a government without a prime minister is unconstitutional.

Government ministers are saying the polls will be valid even if with there are only 5-10 percent of votes cast. It is obvious the government is going ahead ignoring public interest and is driven by only its own ambitions. It seems almost as if the government has declared war on the people. What kind of elections and what kind of democracy is it if the parties do not trust the government enough to take part in polls? This makes a mockery of the government's stated commitment to multiparty democracy. A proper election should resolve the country's crisis, but the kind of polls being conducted will only deepen it.

Government after government in the past four years have said elections are not possible. And the ground situation today is even worse. Successive governments have

been installed and sacked on the whim of the king using elections as the excuse. If the king thinks he can restore his international reputation by dangling the elections, he is wrong. The international community can't be fooled and in fact the poll announcement has further isolated the royal regime.

Political parties, civil society and the people should struggle to restore democracy and peace. Since peace is necessary, the political parties should take forward their negotiations with the Maoists first. Restoring parliament may be a better option than elections especially because in the absence of the house, laws are being passed by ordinance.

Safety valve

.....
Sundar Mani Dixit, civil society activist in *Kantipur*, 25 October

कान्तिपुर

This incident dates back to the time when presser cookers were confined to our kitchens, unlike their multipurpose role in Nepal's conflict-ridden present. The old pressure cooker in my kitchen had broken and was sent to be repaired. The mechanic thought the safety valve was causing the pressure leakage and so he plugged it. Shortly after, the repaired cooker was placed on the stove and it burst, sending the whistle-weight into the ceiling wood. Luckily, no one was hurt.

Our country is in a similar situation today. It can also be a symbolic warning to our rulers. People have grievances everywhere and they naturally want to air them. And it is impossible for the government to know what each and every one of these grievances are unless the people are allowed to freely express them. Had there been an elected parliament, the people

would have a forum to air their views. Without parliament, the only avenue is the media. In its absence, the people will be forced to resort to agitation which are not always peaceful. That is why, under no circumstances should any ruler try to muzzle the media. That is how a civilised society operates. But the present government appears to be intent on making the media its puppet.

The recent incident at Kantipur FM is yet another example of bullying. The government could well have followed a legal course if it intended to take action against the station. Instead, it chose to rob its equipment and vandalise the premises. Why is the government acting shamelessly? The entire media world, other professional groups and intellectuals are now gearing up for a movement. If the media, which is the safety valve of country, is plugged through this ordinance, the pressure cooker will go off just as mine did.

Open border closed

.....
Kantipur, 1 November

कान्तिपुर

NEPALGANJ—The open border allowing free transit between Nepal and India will be regulated from Tuesday. Under the new system at the Nepalganj-Rupaidiya checkpoint, travellers will be permitted to cross the border only with proper documents. For Nepalis that means either a passport, citizenship certificate, proof of property or ownership, voter identity card, identity card issued by a ministry, department or government-controlled office, identity card with a photo issued by a DDC, VDC, metropolitan city or sub-metropolitan city, identity card with a photo issued by a district or regional administrative office or student identity card.



"...the talks were cordial. They welcomed the king's move."

हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabar* trika, 2-15 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ The power struggle between the king and the political parties is now in its last stages. It could explode any time. If it does, both the sides will be finished off. ”

Ex-prime minister Surya Bahadur Thapa talking to Vijay Kumar Pandey on Kantipur TV's program *Frontline*.

Manipal collapse

Editorial in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 22 October 2005

समाचारपत्र

The Manipal Teaching Hospital accident where 10 people were killed and nine seriously injured when the roof of the six story building collapsed has raised some serious questions. From the analysis till date it looks as though carelessness during the construction is the only reason for the collapse. There is not much reason to criticise the way the hospital and rescue workers managed the emergency after the accident. However this can't be the end of the story. The important question is how such carelessness was allowed to happen. Only three storey buildings are allowed in Pokhara. The fact that the building was being used even during construction is another issue. There must be a serious investigation into the building construction and overall process. The hospital management can declare an independent committee of technicians to investigate into the matter. However the government also has its responsibilities to form its own team to investigate the issue so this tragedy is not repeated.



The Maoists must extend the ceasefire

Former MP Radheshyam Adhikari in
Himal Khabarpatrika 2-15 November

The one-sided ceasefire period declared by the Maoists is now more than half over. During this time the entire nation breathed a sigh of relief. Before the ceasefire was declared, an average of five people lost their lives every day. This fell to one a day after the ceasefire was declared. The capital witnessed a long absent silence during Dasain because those who had not been able to return to their villages for many years happily did so this year. The ceasefire has also resulted in a revival of political activity and has rendered the government's propaganda about 'defeating terrorism' ineffective. It has also shown that the Maoist central leadership is still in command of its cadre. True, all is not rosy. Extortion and mass abductions of teachers and students for political indoctrination continue. However, during this period the government has violated people's rights more than the rebels have. It is also provoking the Maoists. Until now the Maoists have not lost their cool but it must be tough for them to refrain from reacting to the government's provocation. The Maoists have claimed that they declared the ceasefire in order to create an atmosphere in which they could hold talks with the seven political parties and then convert those discussions into a trustworthy partnership. This has been welcomed by the parties as well as civil society. Although formal talks may not happen, some discussions are underway at different levels. It is rumoured that the Maoists are miffed at the political parties for not creating a formal committee for talks.

Perhaps what is more important is what can be done to decrease the distance between the two sides. First, they need to agree on what should be included and what should be left out of the talks. The parties and civil society will not compromise on multiparty democracy, a healthy and competitive election system, rule of law and a guarantee of human rights. The Maoists must understand that until they officially accept these minimum clauses, talks will not make any sense. Then comes the question of the Maoists' armed force. Because Nepal's army is non-political, trying to add to it the rebel force's



BETTER THIS WAY: Maoists symbolically lay down their arms at Tale Gaun in Jajarkot on 15 September, just after the ceasefire was announced.

ideological soldiers would cause it great harm. Therefore, the talks must include effective provisions for managing the rebels' weapons. The three-month one-sided ceasefire is not long enough to act on all these factors. It can only be taken as time to prepare for talks. The Maoists should realise that the ceasefire has harmed only the government, which has been using Maoist 'terrorism' as an excuse to enlarge its own military force, centralise power and deny the rights of the people. But laying down arms has made the government's line on 'the fight against Maoist terrorism' difficult to sell. The Maoists must carefully analyse this factor, look for options and continue the ceasefire. The rebels have three options:
a) Continue the strategy of armed rebellion started ten years ago, defeat the government forces and capture power
b) Join political parties under the current

constitution to emerge as a political force working on the people's behalf
c) Enter mainstream politics only after declaring a constituent assembly and forming a political front.
To follow the first option the Maoists can ignore the political parties and civil society. Although the second option might not sound feasible, they should not stubbornly refuse it because the main achievement of the 1990 Peoples Movement, of which the Maoists were also a part, is "peoples rule". Until and unless it can be concluded that the present constitution will not permit what could be possible with a constituent assembly, this option must not be discarded. The third option, a constituent assembly, will not be possible without complete political reconciliation.
The Maoists must carefully examine three facts when deciding their future course, including the fate of the ceasefire: the present regime is denying the people

their rights and preparing to revoke even more of them under the pretexts of "curbing terrorism" and establishing peace, evaluate what they have gained and lost after a decade of war and whether the time has come to use the ground gained through armed uprising to enter mainstream politics
They must also evaluate what sort of role and influence international players will have in Nepal's geopolitical future. It remains for the political parties to trust or not to trust the Maoists. Hundreds of their workers have been killed by the rebels and thousands more displaced. But if the two sides want to create a bond of trust they must keep trying. Three months of ceasefire is not long enough to bridge this gap. If the Maoists want to win the confidence of the parties and civil society, they must extend the ceasefire despite government provocation. It remains to be seen if the rebel leadership has realised the need for restraint, patience and tolerance. ●

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NAR PHU

Off the beaten trek in Manang's hidden valleys



WANDA VIVEQUIN

'When you come around the corner, you will see a sight that will move your soul.' So wrote my Sirdar in an email to me after his reconnaissance trip into the Nar Phu valleys in August 2005.

Two months later, I laid eyes on the village of Phu. Like a medieval castle it rises almost 40m above a dusty riverbed. Steep walls eroded by relentless wind and weather protect the 30-40 basic stone houses sheltered behind, built atop one another like a vertical jigsaw puzzle. It had taken us over a week to walk to Phu, following the Annapurna Circuit as far as Koto and then heading north through a narrow gorge, alongside a thundering river and into the high, arid valleys that Bhotia people have inhabited for many centuries.

No sooner had we set up camp across the river from Phu than we were visited by a gaggle of cheeky, dusty children already a little trekker-savvy and bold enough to peer into our tents. In the early 1980s, sociologist Christoph von Furer Haimendorf and a team of researchers visited the Nar Phu valleys when they were still off-limits to trekkers. In an academic paper in the journal *Kailash*, he wrote: 'The decision of the Government of Nepal to not expose such regions to the increasing flood of tourists had had the great advantage of shielding at least a small percentage of mountain dwellers from the



SANDY PAGE

Avalanche!

The Nar Phu valleys made headlines on 20 October for all the wrong reasons. Eighteen people, seven French climbers and 11 Nepali guides and porters, were buried in an avalanche on Mt Kanguru, propelling this isolated region into the news. (See: 'Do not take the mountains lightly', #270). A French rescue team with sniffer dogs is on the mountains trying to dig through the ice and debris deposited at the bottom of the gully where the avalanche swept the camp.

Just one day after we crossed the 5,300m Kang La Pass that connects Nar with Manang Valley, the region was pummeled by unseasonal blizzards that relentlessly dumped over 1.5m of snow in 72 hours (*pic, above*). A British climber spent eight days trapped in Phu, followed by a treacherous trek that involved fixing ropes to move along the precipitous trails, wading through chest-deep snow and listening to avalanches peeling off the mountains all around.

Members of a French expedition on nearby Himlung were lucky to be in their base camp when the storm hit, eventually spending 17 hours trekking to Phu, a walk that normally takes four hours. They were finally helicoptered out of the valley.

Three hundred yaks from Nar were killed in the storm, dealing a devastating blow to a people who rely on these animals for subsistence. Just a week earlier, we had watched the people of Nar Phu busily preparing for winter, families working together in the fields and on their flat rooftops as they have done for centuries. The people of Phu now seem resigned to the fact that this will be a harsh winter. The harvesting was far from complete and autumn grazing has been all but wiped out.

commercialism of a tourist trade which has already transformed the social and cultural pattern of such communities as the Sherpas of Khumbu.'

But in 2003, Nar Phu was opened for trekking. Climbing expeditions have been visiting the region since the 1950s to attempt the nearly 7,000-m Mt Kanguru, whose imposing western flanks dominate the approaches to the two valleys. In 2004, 244 permits were issued to visit Nar Phu. In October 2005, when my group visited, it appeared this number might easily be surpassed. Operators of adventure travel companies have promoted the area as an exciting new destination and, like myself, are thrilled that it offers an affordable alternative to the expensive Mustang region and the increasingly congested Annapurna Circuit.

The relatively cheap permit fee, accessibility and its pristine locale have made the Nar Phu valleys an attractive option.

While the inhabitants of Nar and Phu have maintained regular trading relations with Manang and Chame for centuries, they have undoubtedly already been affected in a different way by trekkers visiting the region. Some spoke positively to us about the benefits of more visitors to Phu. Several women have kitchen, lodge and guide training through ACAP. Solar panels have sprouted on many roofs in Phu,

delivering power and creating a twinkling light show for campers below. We met people in both villages with relatives in Kathmandu, who choose to escape the harsh winters by migrating to the city instead of to the winter settlements of Meta and Kyang lower in the valley. In Nar, a New Zealand supported micro-hydro station delivers power and rooftops are criss-crossed with power lines.

For trekkers, the valleys are special places, offering glimpses into the past and a chance to reflect on how harsh life can be. In debating the effects of our presence, we all agreed that careful management will be key to retaining what is special and unique about the valleys.

Most people in the world want progress. The people of Nar Phu are no different. As a country that relies heavily on tourism, the key for Nepal will be finding a balance that will protect what is special about Nar Phu yet still allow its inhabitants a chance to make their lives a little easier. ●

Wanda Vivequin is a Canada-based trekking guide who visited the Nar Phu valleys in October 2005

MARVELOUS MANANG: The village of Nar with Mt Kanguru as a backdrop (*below*). Mani stones at the monastery looking down towards fortress-like Phu (*top left*). Children of Phu and looking northward along the gorge leading to Phu (*top*).



PIGS: WANDA VIVEQUIN



Oscar winning documentary portrays the lives of the children of Calcutta's brothels

The still-life of red-light kids

WASHINGTON—Amidst an epidemic of charity photography and documentary-making, it is instructive to see *Born into Brothels*, the film that bagged the Academy Award in the documentary feature category in February 2005.

DOCUMENTARY

Asthi Sakhwa

The film by Zana Briski and Ross Kaufman gives a new global face to the Sonagachi red district in Calcutta with a very personal search for a glimpse of the lives of children who live in that hidden world.

New York-based photojournalist Zana makes her first trip to India in 1995 to produce a story on female infanticide. She returns in 1997 to begin her project in the red light district of Sonagachi. Living in the brothels for months at a time she is struck by the cheers and tears of children born in the brothels who later become the final destination for her photography and filming as she tries to get the kids into a school.

She gives these children new pairs of eyes and teaches them

how to capture their visions in still pictures. Her own visions preserved in the film are the corollary of those of the children. The children get a chance to be reborn, so does the filmmaker. It is this unmistakable unity that appears time and again between the two sets of visions, which collectively weave the central theme of the film: it is about life, about being born—symbolically if not physically. The location, Calcutta or Manhattan, is irrelevant.

Eleven-year-old Avijit likes depicting suffering in his photographs “because it is the truth”. Ten-year-old Kochi dislikes one particular photograph “because it’s a head sticking out”. Zana likes the same photograph “because it’s a head sticking out”. All these statements from the photography classes develop a bond that connects the children, the filmmaker and their immediate and distant surroundings. The fact that Zana comes from a world that is antipolar to the children’s is of little relevance throughout their common journey.

We are led through a narrow, stingy alley as soul-rich music plays in the background. It is an

island in the ocean, a patch of territory where women have learned to separate their sexual offerings from their family spirit, their profession from their personal worlds, their bodies from their souls.

Even without really seeing her chemistry with the brothel women, at least not in the film, one senses a feminine touch in Zana’s relationship with their children. How the eight children relate to their immediate worlds is diverse and equally diverse is Zana’s relationship with each of them. In the epilogue, Avijit listens to his grandmother but not to his father, decides in the end to return to his own school from one that Zana had enrolled him to which requires him repeating one grade. Puja, who is not visibly poor and who giggles that she won’t be sent to a boarding schools because she is her parents only daughter, indeed drops out of the boarding school. Suchitra, who quietly takes everything that’s given to her, drops out of school to join the line for her aunt’s sake.

Kochi, the shiest of all who takes pictures to escape her surroundings, is the only one who remains in Sabera Foundation, the school Zana had chosen for the

kids. About halfway through the film, we hear Zana’s efforts for the children’s education become more urgent as she thinks of Kochi who will not say no to being a prostitute because “she has never said no to anything”.

But in her monologues, Kochi does wonder what it would be like if she was studying. Her photography carries verticals and horizontals within whose frames she tries to place her objects: a girl standing right below the moon,

where the two almost metamorphose into one in the creamy moonlight, or is it the whiteness of the girl’s outfit? Trying to hide her face with a shy smile as her bold friend tries to take her shot, Kochi certainly presents a paradoxical existence where she is firmly rooted in her own self but evades her surroundings.

Born into Brothels has evoked a vibrant debate on the internet.

Born Into Brothels - Calcutta's Red Light Kids
Directed by Zana Briski and Ross Kaufmann
2004
85 Minutes

Kids with cameras

Ten-year-old Manik's picture of Puja (top) is among photographs taken by the children of prostitutes working in Calcutta's red light district. More than 7,000 women and girls work as prostitutes here and only one group has a lower standing: their children. Zana Briski (right) became involved in the lives of these children in 1998 when she first began photographing prostitutes. Living in the brothels for months at a time, she quickly developed a relationship with many of the kids who, often terrorised and abused, were drawn to the rare human companionship she offered.

Fascinated by her camera, Zana thought it would be great to see the world through their eyes and held weekly photography workshops between 2000 and 2003. Equipped with inexpensive point-and-shoot 35mm cameras, the children produced incredible work. Their images are explosions of colour: self-portraits, family pictures, street scenes, stunning tableaux of Bengali life.

www.kids-with-cameras.org



मूल्य रु.१०

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सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग

The inside story

An overview of the underwear situation shows comfy cotton no longer satisfies Nepali youth

AARTI BASNYAT

The twin festivals are over and most Nepali youth are bedecked in new clothes. Does that include buying new undergarments? Going by the brisk business that new lingerie stores in the Valley did over the festive season it looks like the answer is a resounding yes.

The peak season for purchasing underwear is the pre-winter months and luckily that coincides with the festivals.

"We tend to buy undergarments according to necessity and for basics this will do," says Shanti Bartuala buying items off a pavement vendor, "but if you want fancier stuff you buy it at department stores."

Although the tried and true will still do for Shanti and many women, among the younger generation showing more of increasingly skimpier items is definitely the trend. And the trend in the world's fashion capitals to turn undies into outerwear appears to be making its appearance here too.

Exactly when Nepali women started wearing bras has never been documented properly. Over the generations, they were pretty much unencumbered while they did their chores, though in our national dress we had as much support as was required. If one looks carefully at the design of the *chaubandi cholo*, the resemblance to a crossover bodice, which provides ample support, is not only clear but also surprisingly inventive.

But since we chucked the cholo for the bra, the designs and fashions in local markets have become more and more influenced by the west, with the emphasis on style not substance. The rule seems to be that the flimsier the garment the more popular it will be and showing straps of any part of the underwear—be it the black bra underneath a white shirt or a red thong peeking out from hip-hugging jeans—is the rage.

But let's start our overview of the underwear situation with this roundup:

The footpath

Nirmala Giri has had her footpath pasal near one of the larger lingerie shops on the Khichapokhari road for about 12 years.



"During Dasain we make a profit, otherwise it's mostly just making up our costs," she says. The cost of her products ranges from Rs 25 to Rs 100. "We mostly price our products looking at our customers. If they look like they will bargain a lot, we hike up our prices".

The corner shop

The hole-in-the-wall shop on the way to Dharara from Khichapokhari belongs to Prem Bahadur Shrestha. The tiny space is packed with underwear of all shapes, sizes and colours—except for two-foot spaces behind and in front of the counter for seller and buyer. In the four years he has owned the shop, Shrestha has made a daily profit of up to Rs150. He acknowledges that trends are changing but maintains that comfort is the prime factor. "Business is slowly going down and it gets tougher by the day," he adds. "Not only are there day-to-day hassles but boutiques are mushrooming everywhere".

The boutique

To cater to the growing demand for flimsier more fashionable garments, Femilines opened four years ago, becoming at the time the capital's only exclusive lingerie shop. It stocks everything, from hard-to-find extra-large bras to ones that seem to just cling with no support whatsoever. Says proprietor Ajay Bajracharya, "We have only ladies staff so there is a comfortable environment for women."

Femilines busy time is not Dasain or winter but the wedding season. "More and



MIN BAJRACHARYA

more newlywed couples are coming in to look for sheer gowns and sexier undergarments... people are really becoming conscious, not only with brands but also fabric," adds Bajracharya. Prices here start at Rs 200.

Juliet is the top-selling brand in the market today, says distributor Sanjay Agrawal. "We found that people in Nepal were becoming more and more brand conscious so we decided to bring Juliet here. We are stocked in all major department stores in Kathmandu and Pokhara and have been doing very well."

Brand consciousness and the growing sense of style in the underwear scene is reflected in new boutiques, like His and Hers in Babar Mahal. These stores not only cater to quality but also fashion—all at a price of course. On their shelves you'll find basic cotton panties and bras next to items that seem designed to prove the adage 'less is more'. The trend seems clear: while young people are looking for fancier, flimsier fashions, with age (and winter) you can't beat the warm and cosy long johns and thermals to keep you toasty. ●

Vacancy

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Marketing Officers - 10

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Sales Assistant - 20

Candidates need to have passed SLC. Preference will be given to street smart salespeople having exposure to sales concepts.

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It is not extreme poverty that breeds revolutions but the thwarted aspirations of the young

This group, not the desperately poor and helpless, forms the great mobilising force of violent protest and ultimately, of major change. The politics of frustration have been particularly apparent in the postcommunist world during the last 15 years. The vision of a new life like that in the open societies of the west seemed real.



But they soon discovered that realising this prospect would require a longer and more arduous journey than they had anticipated. In fact, it would take at least a generation, during which much of the effort of modern life would have to be

made, while the fruits of this effort would remain elusive. Those who do not manage to get to other countries or who fail in the countries to which they have migrated, are in a quandary. For them, the old world of traditional ties and customs is gone but the new world of modernity remains out of reach. They are lost in a limbo of uncertainty and disappointment. It has been argued that this was one of the problems of 'belated nations', like Germany 100 years ago. Seductive leaders (Hitler among them) exploited the resulting sense

of frustration. Whatever the value of such theories, it is evident that the frustration of young people's ambitions in modernising countries makes them the object of preachers of hate and tempts them to leave the course of plodding progress and turn to more dramatic action. The politics of frustration, of ambitions raised and then thwarted, is clearly one cause of "terrorism". ● *(Project Syndicate)*

Ralf Dahrendorf is a member of the British House of Lords and a former Rector of the London School of Economics.

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KOLKATA—The unveiling of yet another road sign is no spectacular event in this busy capital of West Bengal state and eastern India's main metropolis. Yet it drew a crowd of curious passers by. This road sign was different because it contained Chinese characters besides the usual English, Hindi and Bengali scripts to indicate 'Tangra', Kolkata's two-century-old 'China Town'. The move, initiated by the Indian Chinese Association (ICA), indicates the local Chinese community's desire to come out of its cocooned existence from behind the walls of Tangra, where people now venture mostly to savour authentic Chinese cuisine. Kolkata has the highest concentration of Chinese people in India. Though a part of the city's population for more than two centuries, its people have traditionally shied away from merging with the mainstream.

BEIJING—China's leaders want their national economy to grow not only fast but green so have asked state planners to develop a new indicator to measure the country's growth, a 'green GDP' that would tally up environmental degradation and resource consumption. The emphasis on green reflects China's slowly shifting priorities from sustaining growth at all costs to realising a more sustainable growth. By making local leaders accountable for squandering resources and pollution levels, Beijing hopes to put the brakes on rapidly unfolding environmental destruction.

KARACHI—Weeks after the devastating 8 October temblor hit the Kashmir region, survivors huddle under plastic sheeting, cardboard or rocky overhangs, sheltering as best they can against a mercilessly cold and wet Himalayan winter. The luckier ones have managed to get hold of tents, the quality of canvas making all the difference between survival and death in the valleys and hill slopes that make up much of Pakistan administered Kashmir and the adjoining North West Frontier Province (NWP) where as many as 100,000 people may already have perished in the wake of the 7.8 Richter quake. But many people are pointing out that tents are costly and have many disadvantages compared to readily available local materials, starting with ordinary corrugated tin which is capable of withstanding high winds and is flame proof—important because fires need to be lit inside for cooking and warmth. (IPS)

Juniour rackets

It's time to re-plan tennis in Nepal, for our kids' sake

Although I have lived most of my adult life abroad, I have followed the growth and development of tennis in Nepal very closely. Whenever I visit Nepal I am saddened by the lack of progress we have made.

Yes, there are a few more courts and a small increase in the number of people playing. However, I do not see a coordinated effort to popularise and spread the sport. What was even more discouraging is the lack of opportunities for young children to train and play in tournaments. Why have we gone backwards? Who is responsible for promoting tennis and energising the grassroots? What can be done?

As I write this column today, I have two choices. I can choose to be negative and pessimistic or I can be positive and optimistic about the future of tennis in Nepal. I am not qualified to criticise and there is no point throwing blame from so far away.

GAME POINT
 Sujay Lama



There are people who are genuinely giving their time and energy to teach children and adults the joy of playing tennis. To jumpstart tennis in Nepal we need to address the following areas as soon as possible:

Leadership

For any organisation, company or team to be successful, you've got to have a leader who has passion and love for what he does. A leader must have a vision and be able to sell that to the masses. Great leaders must lead by example and energise the people around them. Do we have capable leaders running the All Nepal Tennis Association (ANTA)? What have they done to develop the game of tennis? How are they held accountable? What are their limitations? Do they have well-defined goals and strategies to accomplish set goals? How much should ANTA shoulder the responsibilities for the growth of the game in Nepal?



The grassroots

The focus has to be on children when it comes to popularising tennis anywhere. Nepal is no different. How can we give more young people the opportunity to learn and play tennis? The answer seems pretty simple, yet it's complicated. Tennis is an expensive sport and getting more access to courts, rackets and balls would be a good start. Access to coaching would help children to develop faster. The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has helped many developing countries develop their programs and if we were to use their help the right way, we could start making tennis more accessible to children. A first step would be for ANTA to start a constructive dialogue with ITF leaders.

Work together

Nepal's tennis community is very small—we have no choice but to work together. We have to start by communicating with one another and combining all our resources and expertise. It is important to address the issues that are slowing the progress of tennis and share our frustrations as well as possible solutions for improving the status quo.

In mid-December, I will conduct a tennis forum and clinic in Kathmandu especially geared towards children. Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb once said: "The greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is to always try, just one more time."
 lama@uiuc.edu



KIRAN PANDAY

Pokhara's new waves

Sustained peace could turn the trickle of rafters this season into a flood

RAMESH PAUDEL
 in POKHARA

The opening of the Upper Seti River to rafting this season has given adventure tour operators in Pokhara something to cheer about.

Although almost 80 rafting companies are registered here, only about 20 are active, thanks to declining tourism and the growing number of dams, according to industry people.

"The Upper Seti will provide an excellent opportunity for those who want to enjoy rafting but have limited time and budget," says Ramesh Neupane of Holiday Adventure. The Seti tumbles down the flanks of Machapuchre and slices through the heart of Pokhara to flow across the midhills of Nepal to join the Trisuli north of Chitwan.

Its stretches downstream of Pokhara up to Damauli have always been a favourite with rafters and kayakers because of the accessibility and the year-round water. But the rougher top section are what will provide

thrills to tourists.

Rafting entrepreneur Megh Ale says, "It is possible to raft in the upper portions of the Seti, but that is for the more experienced rafters."

Besides providing dramatic scenery of the mountains and lakes, the 10-km stretch of the Seti before it meets the Madi provide an excellent close-up of the valleys north of Pokhara. The current here is more for experienced rafters and kayakers but once the river reaches Damauli, it becomes calmer.

The Seti has one of the narrowest gorges in Nepal and was opened at the request of rafting and kayaking entrepreneurs. The river offers Grade 3+ 'pick and drop' rapids and is also suitable for people who have limited time and in places perfect for families with children who want to enjoy a water ride.

The Seti's opening brings to 15 the number of Nepali rivers where rafting is now permitted. They include the Tamur, Arun, Sun Kosi in eastern Nepal, Bhote

Kosi, Indrawati, Bagmati, Trisuli, Tama Kosi, Marsyangdi, Kali Gandaki and Budi Gandaki in central Nepal and in western Nepal the Bheri and Karnali.

The three most popular rafting rivers in Nepal are Bhote Kosi, Sun Kosi and Karnali where steep and technically difficult continuous rapids rated 3-4+ are encountered. Karnali is ranked fifth among the world's rivers for rafting and kayaking while Sun Kosi comes 10th.

Nepal's rafting industry is racing against time to sell rivers before they are blocked by hydropower projects. Operators used to offer five-day packages on the Kali Gandaki, one of the fiercest and most challenging white waters but once the 'Kali Gandaki A' hydropower project was introduced, it was cut to a three-day trip. This has made rafters turn to other rivers.

"The ceasefire has increased the number of rafters in the rivers around Pokhara," Neupane says, "but for the trickle to turn into a flood there has to be sustained peace." ●





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"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.) - as translated by UNACOOTs, the United Nation's Association of Cartoonists

The Adventures of HEROJIG
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by jissy gaton Wuz up?

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~ Ancient Nepali Proverb

Next change: DOR establishes "SLOW PHONE ZONES" allowing motorists to impress each other by using mobile phones while driving.

HeroJig's Adventures can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

#44 2061 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

(Reprinted from the vast archives 'cause we wanted a holiday too.)

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Dolpo in Time** personal photographs and paintings by Tenzin Norbu Lama, 29 October – 11 November at Banana Cat Café, closed on Wednesdays. 5522708
- ❖ **Photographs** by Susan Griffiths Jones, 20 November- 7 December, Lajimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Art Walk** Traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4248999

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

- ❖ **Why Should I Care?** presented by Lama Dhaddak from Kopan Monastery, 5 November, 10AM – 4PM, HBMC. 4414843
- ❖ **International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict** 6 November.
- ❖ **Constitution Day** 9 November.
- ❖ **International Day of Tolerance** 16 November.
- ❖ **Universal Children's Day** 20 November.
- ❖ **Africa Industrialisation Day** 20 November
- ❖ **World Television Day** 21 November
- ❖ **Mean Streets with De Niro and Scorsese** film festival at Lajimpat Gallery Café, 9 – 30 November. 4428549

MUSIC

- ❖ **Valley Jams** at La Soon, 4 November, 7.30 PM.
- ❖ **Jazz Bazaar** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort, 5 November, 4PM onwards.
- ❖ **Red Hot Latin Jazz** at Hotel Yak & Yeti, 7 November, 7.30PM onwards.
- ❖ **Free Jazz** at Patan Square, 8 November, 3.30 PM.
- ❖ **Jazz at Patan** 9 November, Patan Museum Cafe.
- ❖ **Jazz or School Students** 10 November, Budhanilkantha School.
- ❖ **Super Club- The Best of Jazzmandu** 11 November, Hotel Shangri-La, 7.30 PM onwards.
- ❖ **Traditional Newa Music Concert** by Tanani Bajan Khala, 28 October, 6, 13, 20 & 27 November at Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** at Dwarika's with Maya Mantra, 15 November and 1 December. 4479488
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** great music at the bar, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Jatra Ladies Night** Wednesdays, one free cocktail to the ladies.
- ❖ **Musician Night** every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 PM. 5526212
- ❖ **Live Jazz** by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272

FOOD

- ❖ **Kebab and Biryani Festival** cuisine from the house of Mughals at Hyatt Regency 5-20 November, 6.30 PM onwards. 4491234
- ❖ **Sushi and Saki Promotion** at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **The Sidewalk BBQ** with live jazz, Fridays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Ciney and Par-e-jat** every Friday at Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **BBQ Dinner** at Summit Hotel, Fridays, 6:30-9:30 PM. 5521810
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **BBQ Ban Bhoj** at Godavari Village Resort, Saturdays. 5560675
- ❖ **Jazz Gourmet** fine dining redefined at Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Autumn Chill out Moments** at 1905 Kantipath, delightful entrées and lounge grooves by DJPj. 4225272

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** has special offers for Tihar holidays. 4361500
- ❖ **Overnight Stay Package** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage steve@escape2nepal.com
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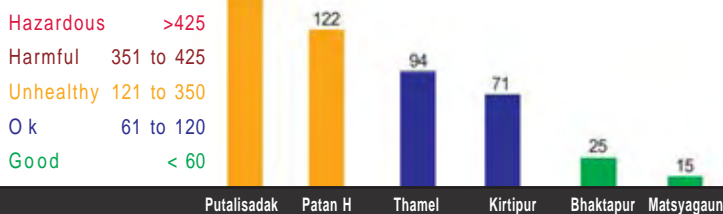


KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

With one festival over and another about to begin, pollution levels are reaching dangerous levels. Putalisadak is back to its unhealthy level of PM 10 particles (harmful matter less than 10 microns in diameter that lodge in the human body). Thamel and Kirtipur are fast catching up. With Tihar just around the corner and firecrackers in the air, it looks like a bad week for Kathmandu's air quality. Friendly advice: keep your masks on.

23-29 October 2005 in micrograms per cubic metre.

Source: www.mope.gov.np



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



This satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning shows a nice big high pressure area dominating northern India. The cyclone over Andhra Pradesh has dissipated without any untoward effects over the Himalaya and the menacing typhoon that has just crossed into Vietnam will be blown off by the jetstream and won't get near us. So expect more sunny days with some Gangetic haze filtering the sun and reducing its intensity in the Valley. Kathmandu's morning fog will get thicker and linger longer, reducing minimum temperatures to eight degrees.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

NEW YEAR COLOURS: Artist Surendra Chitrakar creates a mandala using eight ingredients at Ward 27 in Patan for the 1126 Nepali era celebrations on Tuesday.



MARTY LOGAN

CEASEFIRE SCRAWL: Nepalis who gathered for a rally against the new media ordinance at Basantapur on Friday also lined up to sign their names on a petition calling for an extension of the Maoist ceasefire.



RAJESH KC

DECORATED: Rajendra Khetan being awarded the “Grande Official Da Ordem Do Infante D Herique”, the National Order of Portugal, on behalf of the President of Portugal. The award was presented to Khetan for making a significant contribution to Portugal-Nepal relations.



PEACE JAMMIN': Thousands gathered at Bhaktapur Darbar Square for the grande finale of the Travelling Peace Concert last Sunday.



GO, GO, GOAL: Participants of the TBS PTA Trophy posing after the one-day football tournament. Rs 150,000 was raised in the event for Sathsath a welfare group for street children.

The light of learning

For someone who is from one of the most oppressed and economically deprived communities in the country, Bal Maya Biswakarma, 29, has come a long way. It wasn't just fate, but a conscious effort to rise above the bonds of society in her community in Chitwan's Fulbari VDC.

Bal Maya's world changed when she got a scholarship from Save the Children US 10 years ago to continue her studies in Grade Eight at Laxmi Secondary School. She hasn't looked back since. Bal Maya passed her SLC exams with good grades and joined the Sapta Gandaki Multiple Campus in Bharatpur to graduate with a Bachelors in Education. Then, she came to Kathmandu and did her masters in mathematics with support from a Japanese patron.

Bal Maya recently got married and now wants to do a PhD in social development. "Education helps you fight for your right and that is why it needs to be given the first priority," says Bal Maya, whose own life is a shining example of this.

The story of this remarkable woman's life would perhaps not be noteworthy were it not for the odds that Nepali society stacks against her dalit community and her gender. Bal Maya underplays her struggle, the resolve and self-assurance she needed to get this far and now wants to give other underprivileged Nepalis like her the same opportunities she got. She is the education coordinator at the National Depressed Social Welfare Organisation for the Underprivileged and is education coordinator for the same fund that started her on her journey to enlightenment. The National Children's Education Program today has 3,686 beneficiaries in 15 districts.

When Bal Maya went to Dang recently to meet her husband's family she was overwhelmed by the reception. She told us: "I have won the confidence of my community and society. Perhaps they will look at us differently now."

● Alok Tumbahangphey

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