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 barbwired 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 Nepalganj 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

Human sacrifices
Ceasefire or no ceasefire

NARESH NEWAR

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The king at the summit

If he is going to go he’s going to go

Absolutely traditional

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

Mark 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 is mt, he is the source of their power, and the fundamental character of divine kings looks like King Gyanendra will be attending the 13th SAARC Summit on 1-23 November in Dhaka. Because the parties and civil society in open dissent are yet to gather sufficient steam to challenge the takeover’s headwind to reverse the coup of

HUMAN SACRIFICES

Tens years into the war and nearly half that time without parliament, it is difficult to see a solution to one of the most power struggles 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. 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 monarchy, 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’s dissemblement of disenchantment against the party leaders and believes this means support for himself. The parties and civil society in open dissent are yet to gather sufficient steam to challenge the takeover’s headwind to reverse the coup of

The Maoists know what they are up

THREE OF THE STATE

The royal takeover of 4 October, 2002 gave the king a semblance of powers in several ways. It assumed the power to fire elected prime ministers and replace ministers in his cabinet. It sought to establish the precedence that the king could interpret, amend or expand provisions in the constitution. It took sovereignty to imply impurity from censure. And finally, it propounded the principle of wearing the mantle of tradition. Enough has been said about first

When King Gyanendra attends the summit of SouthAsian leaders, he represents only the palace, some sections of the military, and the graceless squad would make up his council of ministers.

King Gyanendra reveals in pomp and ceremony, whether it is at religious rituals in deities’ temples, military parades, among the palace’s prosperity, acting graciously in investiture events, or seated regally at international gatherings. If limited to 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 international credibility and, consolidate power at home on the renowned. And therefore, the royal palace is now a major player in African capitals at a time when the nation bleeds and desperately searches for an answer.

The king has yet to receive a formal invitation and dates from countries he would actually like to visit (United States, China, or any of the European countries). Even the flag-flight to royal palaces elsewhere will 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 (excepting 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 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 flood of recognition for the February First. Domestically, the king’s rage in the countryside, the political parties are not far behind. and public opinion poll would probably show a dramatic shift in perception of the people’s craving, and the mindset from

Since 1 February, King Gyanendra has gone to open-ordination international summits: the Non-Aligned Summit in Jakarta and the G-77 summit, both of which he would have been laugh out by a monarch who doesn’t fit the prototype of tinpot dictators in post-colonial authoritarianism. Kings have their own ways of appreciating is that monarchs don’t fit the

The dips are even more confused. A Western diplomat tells me: “When we saw a Hindu priest being helicoptered around to tour shrines all over the kingdom just before Gajan, some of them were a bit skeptical as to what something was all about. But we had submitted an assessment report on this basis, we would have been laughed out by the 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 anywhere in text book case-studies at institutes of international relations.
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 Kanjipur 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 unpopular 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 insight, 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.

Anchana Bharatari, 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:

- Make sure there is no 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 harkening for more power with Panchayat-like gimmicks but offering true devolution

D Mahal, email

I couldn't agree more with Dr Narayan B Thapa's balanced analysis of the country's present crisis ("Still silent majority", #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 not the victory of parliament over the palace. Successful elections are the best bet for those among us who are 'egging' on the Maoists: Why don't the parties start looking for a winning approach.

Pabitra Limbu, Sat Dobato

GAME POINT
I read Sujay Lama's tennis column Game Point on Nepal Times especially 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 been playing tennis for five 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 mould

Abhishek Basnyat, Washington DC

CK Lal is probably the only Nepali journalist who remembered the passing away of Rosa Parks ("The end of an era", #270). He quoted Martin Luther King's famous lines about Mrs Parks: "...eventually the cup of endurance overflows and the fruit of injustice 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 Pandey 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 editors and CK Lal are as good as ever, please spare us regular features like Shraddha Ghale and the Guest Column. What's a pandemic 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 and the Quinn family can argue about who is jaded and uses his Under My Hat columns only to spew bile. Take a breack, 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 Lukas?

Pabitra Limbu, Sat Dobato

LETTERS

Nepal 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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Abhishek Basnyat, Washington DC

I am impressed with Herjog'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 Herjog cartoon in your paper, I have wondered whether something is wrong with me because I never 'get' them. But recently I met several of my friends who don't understand it either. Herjog's so-called humour seems to be too obscure for even the sophisticated readers of Nepal 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.

Jit Ghimirey, email

I couldn't agree more with Dr Narayan B Thapa's balanced analysis of the country's present crisis ("Still silent majority", #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

The real election commissioner, Keshavraj Rajbhandari, is pictured below.
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 and we want for the Maoists to return our property and leave us alone,” says 66-year-old Balaram 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 Manikumar Bista, 66, (pictured) whose former husband Min Bahadur was shot dead after he refused to join the rebels four years ago. Today, Manikumar 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 Rukmilis killed by the Maoists have started their own union, DWANDA PIDIT SANGH but the CDO has not given them permission to use the bulldozer and they came,” boasted Limbu to villagers who had just been transferred to Barachhetra. There wasn’t much to do during the ceasefire. The rebels have been engaged in prover with messages to the CDO and local security officials warning of an imminent attack. The United Command, meanwhile, has been sending patrols deeper into the Maoist hinterland. Reports are swirling in the heavily-fortified district capital of Kathalanga that a Maoist brigade is in the vicinity. Barbed wires encircle the town’s perimeter which are hoary 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 Khakhangna resident Sakha Bahadur BK.

Densose 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 Khulanga, 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 use local government officials but in vain,” explains Dhan Bahadur. The administration told traders to take ‘whatever means necessary’ to get supplies into Kathalanga. They met Maoist district chief who made them sign documents saying they’d pay taxes and support rebel activities. “The traders also ‘donated’ Rs 1,50,000 to the ‘Village People’s’ Government committee.”

Several traders were later arrested after the army found the documents with the names of those who claimed ‘support’ for the Maoists. Dispair 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 Khulanga 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 Kathalanga itself.

The punishment for defying the blockade or not paying taxes can be severe. A farmer was recently beheaded badly when he imported potatoes without written permission from the rebels. The only way supplies can come into Rukum is by ferry 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 Khulanga. After nearly a year with the rebels, he fled to Khulanga where he now teaches at the district’s oldest school, Tribhuvan 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 to see their permission and have to inform them beforehand about any activities,” says Nepali Congress worker Nanda Bista. “In the media they talk about cooperation, but their behaviour is just the opposite here.”

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 mountainous areas 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 prover 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 hinterland.

Reports are swirling in the heavily-fortified district capital of Kathalanga that a Maoist brigade is in the vicinity. Barbed wires encircle the town’s perimeter which are hoary 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 Khakhangna resident Sakha Bahadur BK. 

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Ceasefire highway

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

Jos Limbu used to be the head of the Maoists’ Dharian unit but he had to be transferred to Barachhetra. There wasn’t much to do during the ceasefire, so Limbu commanded 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 in-charge, Hemanta, was sitting next to the Barachhetra in-charge, Hemanta, was sitting next to the

Maoist election in Nuwakot VDC, a six hour walk from Khulanga. After nearly a year with the rebels, he fled to Khulanga where he now teaches at the district’s oldest school, Tribhuvan Higher Secondary.

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Youth power rising

The challenge is how to harness it

Last Saturday, more than 30,000 young Nepalis roared 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 events? What if there is a bomb scare? Have we foreseen the mob frenzy of 5 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, and 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.

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 cross-border 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).

“Tibet, especially the Himalayan region, 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.”
Polls apart

Nilanjhar Acharya, leftist intellectual in filmundra, 28 October

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 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. But the stormy 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 ordinances.

Safety valve

Sundar Man Dixit, civil society activist in Kantipur, 25 October

This incident dates back to the time when pressure cooker 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 repair. 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 our country, is plugged through this ordinance, the pressure cooker will go off just as mine did.

Open border closed

Kantipur, 1 November

NEPALGUARD—The open border allowing free transit between Nepal and India will be regulated from Tuesday. Under the new system at the Nepalguar guards at border crossings will be permitted to close the border only with proper documentation. 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 DDC, VDC, metropolitan city, or sub-metropolitan city,

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 incident. 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 six storey and was completed despite this is another issue. There must be a serious investigation into the building construction and overall process. The hospital management should obtain 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 Radheeshyam 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 so did 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. Nonetheless, some talks 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 parties. 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 carefully analyse this factor, realizing the need for restraint, patience and tolerance.

The Maoists must extend 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.

The Maoists must carefully examine the third option, a constituent assembly. The third option, a constituent assembly, this option must not be discarded. It could be possible with a constituent assembly with the present constitution will not permit what could be possible with a constituent assembly. This option must not be discarded. 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 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 discarded.

The Maoists must carefully examine three facts in 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 pretenses 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.

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 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 pretenses 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.

Are Nepalis genetically susceptible to cardiovascular diseases and diabetes?

Read all about it in Himal Khabarpatrika’s Health Special.

100% Healthy Life
Now with every 200ml Clinic Plus shampoo (worth Rs. 90/-) get 150gm Lifebuoy gold soap (worth Rs. 27/-) absolutely Free!
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 friend in an email 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 rose almost 650m above a dusty riverbed. Steep walls eroded by relentless wind and weather protect the 30-60 basic stone houses shielded 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 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 inhabitants of Nar and Phu are no different. As a country that relies heavily on tourism, the key for Nepal is to be able to keep the balance of tourism and the increasing dependence on tourism has made the Nar Phu valleys an attractive option. Two months later, I laid eyes on the village of Phu. Like a medieval castle it rose almost 650m above a dusty riverbed. Steep walls eroded by relentless wind and weather protect the 30-60 basic stone houses shielded 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.

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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 pummelled 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 mountain 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 yards from Nar, two French climbers 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 busy preparing for winter, families working together in the fields and on their flat rooftops as they prepared for winter, 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 busy preparing for winter, families working together in the fields and on their flat rooftops as they

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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.

The film by Zana Briski and Ross Kaufman gives a new global face to the Sonagachhi 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 infantilicide. She returns in 1997 to begin her project in the red light district of Sonagachhi. Living in the brothels for months at a time she is struck by the cheers and tears of children born in the brothels for months at a time, she quickly develops a relationship with many of the kids she photographed. The children in 1998 when she first began to 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 her, to her. They found safety and companionship in her. She gave these children new families, the broccoli, the school Zana had chosen for the 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. Kochi, the shiest of all 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 be sent to a boarding school. Suchitra, who won’t be sent to a boarding school. Suchitra, who given to her, drops out of school to join the line for her aunt’s sake. Kochi, the shiest of all 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 be sent to a boarding school. Suchitra, who given to her, drops out of school to join the line for her aunt’s sake.

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 her. They found safety and companionship in her. She gave these children new families, the broccoli, 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 be sent to a boarding school. Suchitra, who given to her, drops out of school to join the line for her aunt’s sake.

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 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 her. They found safety and companionship in her. She gave these children new families, the broccoli, 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 be sent to a boarding school. Suchitra, who given to her, drops out of school to join the line for her aunt’s sake.

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.

www.kids-with-cameras.org

—Amidst an

stingy alley as soul-rich music

plays in the background. It is an

antipolar to the children’s is of

surroundings. The fact that Zana

immediate and distant

bond that connects the children,

photography classes develop a

truth”. Ten-year-old Kochi

does wonder what it would be

if she was studying. Her

photography carries verticals and

horrizontals within whose frames

she tries to place her objects: a girl

standing right below the moon,

whiteness of the girl’s outfit?

creamy moonlight, or is it the

where the two almost

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—Amidst an
The inside story

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 underwears 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 Bartaula 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 checked 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 it will be and showing straps of influence by the west, with the emphasis on style not substance. The rule seems to be that the flimsier the garment the more it will be and showing straps of influence by the west, with the emphasis on style not substance. The rule seems to be that the flimsier the garment the more it will be and showing straps of influence by the west, with the emphasis on style not substance. The rule seems to be that the flimsier the garment the more it will be and showing straps of...
The politics of frustration

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

Does extreme poverty breed violence and ultimately revolution? Many people believe that it does and seek to explain phenomena ranging from guerrilla insurgencies to Islamist terrorism accordingly.

However Karl Marx and Alexis de Tocqueville, the two great social analysts of the nineteenth century, knew better what makes people tick and what makes societies change. Extreme poverty breeds apathy, not rebellion. The very poor can at most be used for occasional demonstrations of anger but they are not the stuff from which either terrorists or revolutionaries are made.

A far more critical group in any society are those who have begun to move forward to new conditions but then find their path blocked. Their desires and ambitions are not unrealistic in the circumstances but they are frustrated. Things do not move as fast as they want them to, or not at all, owing to conditions that they do not control. Opportunities exist but they cannot be seized or realised.

This group, not the desperately poor and helpless, forms the great mobilising force of violent protest and ultimately, of revolution. The politics of frustration accordingly.

Yet, in fact, things initially got worse. The route to prosperity and freedom was not straightforward. While the politics of frustration was finally controlled in the postcommunist states with help from the EU, it broke out with a vengeance in the Islamic world. 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 world of traditional ties and customs dry up and 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 here and now, the existing progress and turn to more dramatic action. The politics of frustration, of ambitions raised and then thwarted, is clearly one cause of ‘terrorism’.

Ralf Dahrendorf is a member of the British House of Lords and a former Rector of the London School of Economics.
Junoir 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. The latter is what will provide the thrill to tourists. Rafting entrepreneur Megh Ale says, “It is possible to raft in the upper portions of the Seti, but this 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 3-4+ ‘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 Tantr, Arun, Sun Kosi in eastern Nepal, Bhote Kosi, Indrawati, Bagnati, 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, whereas 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-water 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 fences have 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.”

Pokhara’s new waves

Sustained peace could turn the trickle of rafters this season into a flood
"Lata ko dekh ma gaun do tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goat can be a hero.) - as translated by UNACODTS, the United Nations Association of Cortinovists.

EXHIBITIONS
- 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, Lakeshore 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 Chadakak from Kopan Monastery, 5 November, 10AM – 4PM, BHMC. 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 Lakeshore 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, 6 November, 3.30 PM.
- Jazz at Patan 9 November, Patan Museum Café.
- Jazz or School Students 10 November, Budhanikantha School.
- Super Club - The Best of Jazzmundu 11 November, Hotel Shangri-La, 7.30 PM onwards.
- Traditional Nepa Music Concert by Tanani Bajjan Khalsa, 28 October, 6.30, 10, 20 & 27 November at Hotel Vajra. 4215145
- Ramaloo Saanjh at Dwarika’s, 15 November and 1 December, 4479488
- Latina Friday nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- Unplugged sessions with Strings. Latina Saturday nights. 4256623
- Live Music at Jureli Bar, Hotel de l’Annapurna. 4221711
- Wonderful Wednesdays great music at the bar, Dwarika’s. 4479488
- Latina Ladies Night 21 November, one free cocktail to the ladies.
- Musician Night every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 PM. 5526212
- Live Jazz by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4235272

FOOD
- Kebab and Biryani Festival cuisine from the house of Mughals at Hyatt Regency 5-20 November, 6.30 PM onwards. 4497234
- Sushi and Saki Promotion at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- The Sidewalk BBQ with live jazz, Fridays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- Cinex and Par-e-jat every Friday at Dwarika’s. 4479488
- BBQ Dinner at Summit Hotel, Fridays, 6:30-9:30 PM. 5521810
- Chimney Restaurant Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4498999
- BBQ Ban Bhoj at Godavari Village Resort, Saturdays. 5569675
- Jazz Gourmet fine dining redefined at Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999
- Autumn Chill out Moments at 1905 Kantipath, delightful entrances and lounge grooves by DJI. 4225272

GETAWAYS
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge has special offers for Tihar holidays, 4381500
- Overnight Stay Package at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage info@escapetrip.com.np
- Junglewalks, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bandu junglbasecamp@yahoo.com
- Esclling Holiday Packages with Le Meridian, Kathmandu. 4415121
- Special Dipawali Holidays package tour in Malaysia. 2013245
- Gokarting Rs 200 for 4 laps, 4361500

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

With one festival over and another about to begin, pollution levels are reaching dangerous levels. Patalsadak 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.mopa.gov.np

| Hazardous | 425 | 120 |
| Harmful | 351 to 425 |
| Unhealthy | 121 to 350 |
| Good | 61 to 120 |
| Excellent | 0 to 60 |

NEPALI WEATHER

This satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning shows a nice 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 Ganges 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.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Daily 2045-2115 BBC Nepal

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Nooni, while searching for a solution to Bouddh’s frequent electrical outages, unexpectedly discovers the Lightness of Being.
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 if 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 Tumbahangpeh
We were always opposed to foreign interference in this country’s internal affairs and that is why the nation heaved a collective sigh of relief when Baba-san went back to Japan.

We in Kathmandu can breathe easy again and revert to our usual behaviour on the streets. The police chief can once more run the red light at Baneshwor intersection without fear or favour and Jaywalkers can again jaywalk wherever they feel like jaywalking.

As an independent nation, we were enjoying the freedom to break every traffic rule in the book—we didn’t need some samurai to come and trample all over the sovereignty and territorial integrity just because they built the traffic junctions.

How agitated we are on our streets, which side of the road we drive on is our own business, and the Japanese should think twice about poking their nose into how we Gorkhalis conduct ourselves. Remember Burma!

Ever since we drove Baba out and restored self-determination on our streets, a sense of national pride has returned to the capital and there is a feeling that we finally have our destiny in our own hands when we make a dangerous high speed illegal U-turn on Darbar Marg.

Driving each other nuts

Q: Which side of the road do I generally drive on in Nepal?
A: Generally we drive on the left side of the road, but generals in motorcades with sirens blaring can drive on either side or in the middle.

Q: On the Jawalakhel Traffic Circle what are the rules on the right of way?
A: Four legs good, two wheels bad. Give way to cattle approaching from the right, but if it is a Maruti accelerate immediately and beat him to the turn. If it is a VIP on a motorcycle, pull over and play dead.

Q: Have the authorities made up their minds on mobile phones?
A: Yes. The ban on the use of mobile phones while driving has been lifted because the $#%&* thing never works anyway. It is also henceforth legal to stop the car, place your defunct phone on the road and run over it repeatedly until it breathes no more.