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SHAIENDRA KHAREL

On the move

The country has entered a critical phase, as the people wait for the 12-point understanding between the Maoists and political parties to kick in and yield the twin fruits of peace and democracy. At the village level, the parties continue to mobilise support, as in this rally in Kalikot (above). The two most important issues ahead are: how King Gyanendra will react to this rebel-party combine as he returns to the country on Friday after his African air safari and whether the rebel leadership can take their cadre and fighters along on the road to peace. Besides the king, the parties and the rebels, the other players who will play a defining role in the weeks ahead include the Royal Nepali Army and the international community, including the United Nations, India, the western embassies, the judiciary and civil society. (Turn to Analysis on page 4.)

Editorial p2
Nepali Radio,
Nepali Awaj



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 275

Q. Do you agree with the party-Maoist accord on an election to a constituent assembly?

Total votes: 4,679

Yes 63.9%

No 34.9%

Don't know 2.1%

Weekly Internet Poll # 276. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you agree with the government's action against the relay of BBC Nepali Service through FM stations in Nepal?



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NEPALI RADIO, NEPALI AWAY

The Supreme Court has stayed the Ministry of Information's decision to close down Radio Sagarmatha till 7 December. Once again, timely intervention by the court has bought time for a pioneering community radio that symbolised people power not just in Nepal but also the region.

But what the episode also exposed was the deep insecurity of a regime that is afraid of its own shadow following the party-rebel pact. It was another brazen nocturnal raid on a radio station, a methodology that has become the trademark for the way these fellows go about their business.

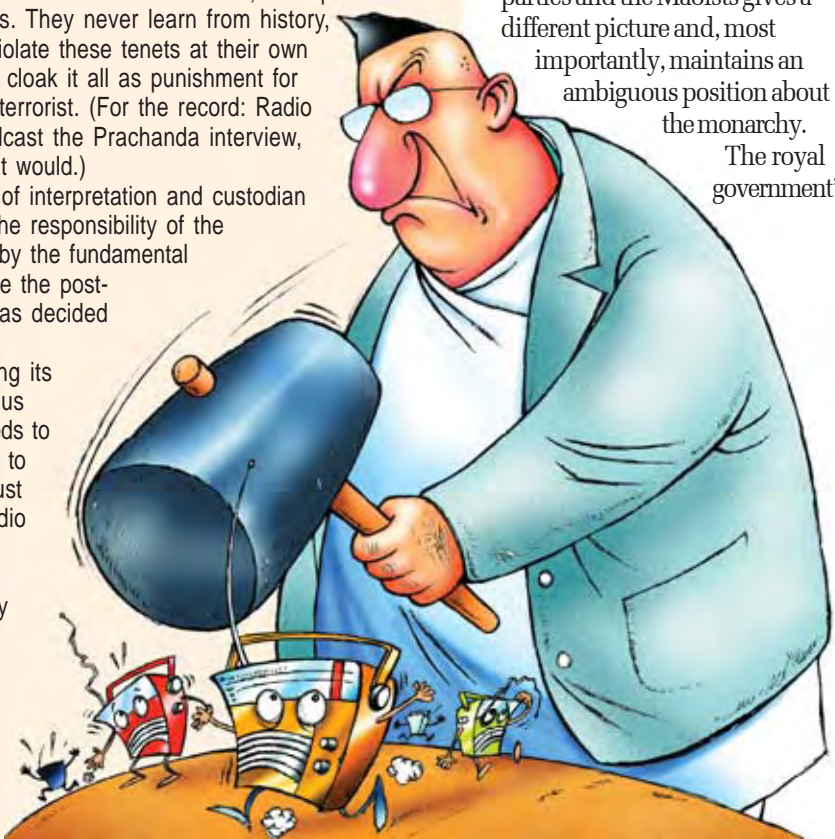
The flunkies assigned to carry out the order of the unnamed 'higher up authority' violated just about every principle of civilised behaviour. It was a violation of the citizens' right to Freedom of Expression and Right to Information, it went against Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 and it violated the 1990 constitution.

But much more than all that, it showed that the council chaired by the king does not respect even the laws that it swears by. It proved that doubts about the royal regime's legitimacy are well founded and gave more reason for critics to doubt its honesty and sincerity.

The Attorney General says a Hindu king's authority is almost limitless. It's a little difficult to argue with logic like that. In all modern societies, individuals have inalienable rights—they can't be given or taken away, bought sold or bartered. They can't be abrogated. Rights thus have intrinsic as well as instrumental value since rights help establish peace.

A government, even if it is for its own survival, must protect the basic rights of its citizens. They never learn from history, do they? Governments violate these tenets at their own peril however much they cloak it all as punishment for airing the interview of a terrorist. (For the record: Radio Sagarmatha never broadcast the Prachanda interview, the state just presumed it would.)

As the highest court of interpretation and custodian of the constitution, it is the responsibility of the Supreme Court to stand by the fundamental rights of the people, since the post-February First regime has decided not to. By restraining the government from imposing its will, the court has given us reason to hope but it needs to do a lot more in the days to come. After all, it's not just journalists who need Radio Sagarmatha and the dozens of other citizens' media across the country but the people who depend on them to be informed. And that, obviously, is what scares this regime the most.



SUBHAS RAI

Let the people decide

The silent majority wants neither to dismantle the royal apparatus nor a powerful monarchy

Are we, at last, observing some real political activity from our political parties? The goings on in New Delhi might have resembled a circus but there is a strange euphoria about them.

If there is no hidden agenda and no recurrence of bad behaviour, then this must be taken as the beginning of

GUEST COLUMN
Narayan B Thapa



something positive on the political horizon. According to some of the leaders involved in the Delhi health visit drama, the Maoists are willing to lay down their arms in return for elections to a constituent assembly. Unfortunately, the published 12-point understanding between the parties and the Maoists gives a different picture and, most importantly, maintains an ambiguous position about the monarchy.

The royal government's

plans have already been announced: municipal and parliamentary elections. After rejecting outright polls under this regime, the seven-party alliance has gone ahead to negotiate with the Maoists. If—and it is a big if—the Maoists are not playing games with the negotiators and there indeed is an offer to give up the armed insurgency then this is a great achievement.

What are the pitfalls? The same as they have always been: the monarchists don't want to give up their hold on power and the rest of the polity wants to dismantle the royal apparatus.

In the silent majority there is support for neither camp. They would like the king to have an important inspirational role in the future of the nation. After all, he is the descendant of a ruling system entrenched in the Nepali psyche and as such has a useful place as a symbol of unity in an ethnically diverse society. A chastened political leadership should give up the unrealistic and vindictive demand for the demise of the monarchy and formulate a plan to include it in a benign but positive role in a multiparty democracy.

There is no place in the 21st century for the type of royal actions we have been subjected to in recent times. The result for the monarchy has also been dismal: having been spurned by everyone who matters, the king has been reduced to visiting middling officials in grossly under-reported visits to African countries. What sense do these visits make anyway?

But who should decide? The people. They should be given a chance to decide how they wish to be ruled. After all, democracy

is 'for the people, of the people and by the people'. But how do we determine what the people want when there are no representative elections and no opinion polls with an ideal demographic reach? We still have that magical option called a referendum. There is a precedent, albeit not a happy one, of the 1980 referendum.

This is probably far removed from the visions of various political forces but such a referendum would have three questions:

- Do you want elections for a constituent assembly?
- Do you want parliamentary elections under the 1990 constitution?
- Do you want reinstatement of the dissolved parliament under the 1990 constitution?

These three questions include the most important wishes of the three protagonists in the conflict. They are very unlikely to be settled either by negotiations or by ignoring them. A referendum is the way out of the political deadlock that will follow the proposed elections if the bulk of the political players boycott them. Legitimacy for the referendum, on the other hand, will be provided by an agreement of the political forces and by the people's participation in it.

Since these are questions of momentous importance for the future of many generations of Nepalis, why should a few political leaders elected many years ago and the wielders of guns decide among themselves what that future should be? Let the people decide and let the leaders who have always pronounced in the name of the people have the courage to empower them do so. ●

Precursors to peace

What does it matter that the pact was done in Delhi and not Ngorongoro?

Our hardcore royalist chums are working up a frenzy over the fact that the 12-point pact between the Maoists and the seven-party alliance was reached in New Delhi rather than at the Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania. Perhaps they believe everyone must share King Gyanendra's penchant for exotic locales.

They forget that it was New Delhi where the primacy of the Shah dynasty was restored in 1950. Initial negotiations

between Tamil rebels and the

Sri Lankan government were held in Bhutan and Thailand. The Aceh agreement was struck in Helsinki. It's too early to call the parties and the Maoist leadership 'peace-makers' just yet. But it's not difficult to identify who the peace-wreckers could be. Whether with the consent of the palace or on their own, some

of them are active behind the scenes to sabotage the first tangible step taken towards getting the Maoists to abandon armed struggle and bring them into the political fold.

An unseen 'Foreign Hand' is ominously mentioned, the implied allegation being that the two sides were manipulated to enter an understanding inimical to the national interest. This is a classical fascist technique: throw wild allegations at opponents to put them on the defensive. One simple question: in the past three years what has actually been accomplished to end the senseless violence in this country?

It's too early to predict whether the ballot shall prevail or the bullet but the country may now be on the verge of entering a phase of peaceful politics. This is where the choices that the palace makes will affect the future of the 12-point agenda and by implication, the fate of

monarchy in the country.

In the absence of their chairman, royal nominees in the council of ministers looked somewhat confused. Garrulous ones like Ramesh Nath Pandey and Tanka Dhakal have proclaimed the pact an 'unholy' alliance. Kirti Nidhi Bista was playing the good cop: giving a cautious thumbs up on camera. But after that, he hasn't uttered a word. On return from his African exploration on Friday, the king will be greeted by mammoth processions in Kathmandu. He is obviously not happy about an alliance between political parties he doesn't like and an underground group that wants to overthrow him but he will need to respond.

Meanwhile, after switching their slogans from democracy to peace, the parties are getting an overwhelming response across Nepal. From Butwal to Pokhara, the UML has been drawing huge crowds to its protest rallies. NC leaders

have been reaching out to their rural constituencies for the first time in six years. Unlike rented crowds that were bussed in to cheer the king at district headquarters, these people have turned up despite roadblocks at great personal risk. The people seem to want to forgive the parties' past mistakes if they can deliver peace. Should the palace appear as a barrier on this road to peace and democracy, the silent majority will take note of it and will respond at an appropriate time. Despite Pushpa Kamal Dahal's protestations to the contrary, it is a fact that the party-rebel agreement leaves enough elbowroom on the question of constitutional monarchy. Should the king make a serious attempt to transform this bipartisan arrangement into a tripartite settlement, there is a still a chance that monarchy will have a role in the future of Nepal. Otherwise, as Tulsī Giri himself says, "Time and tide waits for no man". ●

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal



LETTERS

MAOIST MOU

The deal between the parties and the rebels is all very fine as you say in your editorial ('Ten years is enough', #274). But can we trust these political parties after what they have done to democracy since 1990? It was during their watch that we saw the beginning of the civil war. They couldn't establish a proper democracy during those years and hypocritically they now demand full democracy. And how can we now trust the Maoists, who killed thousands of people? Is it possible that the alliance was a result of Indian and American instigation? They might establish a puppet government of their choice to further their own geopolitical interest. We and you shouldn't jump to conclusions without thinking through this alliance of corrupt leaders, mass murderers and outside powers. We definitely need democracy but educated wise people should run the country and not a bunch of thugs.

Pravesh Saria, email

DISINFORMATION

The king's presence in Tunis at the World Summit on the Information Society was a mockery ('World summit of disinformation officials', #273) because he earned a name for shutting down Nepal's telecommunications system and bringing the information channels to a standstill on 1 February. Why were leaders like him allowed to attend the summit and speak in the interest of nations that are pushing for better access to information in order to spread real democracy? If there is ever a summit on crackdowns on the internet that would be the place for him.

D. Mahat, Baltimore, USA

REPAIR BRIDGE

I often visit Bardia on the east-west highway and have watched the bridge over the Surai Khola (about 10 km east of Bhalubang) grow more and more frighteningly dangerous. It appears to have been damaged by a bomb at some time and is supported now by only one crumbling concrete beam, which appears to be deteriorating more each time I cross it. If this bridge fails, there could be not only terrible loss of life but, as it covers a deep ravine, it could result in a blockage of all traffic to the far west. When I went over the bridge recently, only half of the surface could still be driven on and less than half of the remaining support beam was left, so time is running out. On behalf

of all the people who travel on this busy route, I would like to request the Roads Department to take some action fast.

Marco Peter, Asha Clinic, Pokhara

DIASPORA

I completely agree with Subindra Bogati ('Same old Nepal', #273) that the best Nepali minds are leaving Nepal when they are desperately needed there. He is also right that we have had many meetings here in London that political figures from Nepal have addressed. But I have noticed that successful Nepalis rarely attend these meetings.

It really ticks me off when I see trivial stuff from the diaspora making headline news in mainstream media back home. Nepalis who seem active in political activities here are the same type of people who are active in Nepal. In fact, they seem to be in activism not because they want to help bring change but because it is a platform for their own self-interest. It is time that we start looking at diaspora Nepalis critically as well.

Sandesh Thapa, London



● As a journalist in Nepal I had many opportunities to talk to political activists. Even our young leaders who sound so promising from outside are hollow up close. Subindra Bogati has portrayed them as they are. Gagan Thapa and other student leaders always said that we could make a better Nepal. They repeated the same mantra for many years and became good orators. The speeches I heard here by Gagan Thapa and Krishna Pahadi were not that different from what I used to hear in Nepal two years ago. The only difference is that they are now active anti-monarchists. The reason we have failed to get good leaders is that we have not demanded enough of them. We encourage them with applause whenever

they say anything radical and populist. Frustratingly, that is also what happened at the London meetings. The media is also to blame for giving rabble rousers more prominence than they deserve. Even after the royal coup, Nepali leaders who came to speak in London sounded as confused and visionless as they were before.

Dinesh Gautam, Wembley, UK

JAZZMANDU

Here is my response to 'Mandu Jazz' (Letters, #274):

1. Jazzmandu goes on for nine days and there are a variety of shows at a variety of prices—there are even free shows. If you wanted to see jazz for real cheap, you could have watched Solid (a renowned jazz band from Norway) perform for FREE in Patan Durbar Square on 8 November.
2. Sorry you missed the free show and found Gokarna so outrageously priced for an evening featuring live music by more than five bands. Gokarna is one venue where we feature our own Nepali classical and traditional musicians and dancers, since one of the festival's aims is to respect and recognise our own traditional music. This is a well-known fact that was adequately covered by *Nepali Times* and other media sources throughout the four years the festival has been going on. I have to ask: is it so painful for our own people to give a little respect to our own music?
3. What is jazz for you? Do we all perceive it in the same way? Is it somebody playing a saxophone? If that is jazz for you, then surely you will enjoy the wedding season: you'll hear a lot of that on the streets and it will be free.
4. You should try to appreciate the sincere and intense effort put in by fellow Nepalis and other music lovers who are trying to bring some quality music to this country, whether it is rock, pop, fusion or jazz.

Last but not least, stop whining about everything.

A Jazzmandu Volunteer, email

HEADLINES

The recent news headlines speak for themselves about the state of the country: 'Government Hospitals Closing Down Essential Services Due To Financial Crunch' and 'Rs 300 million Being Spent on King's Africa Visit'.

S Hamal, Lalitpur

HARDY FURER

Thanks to Barbara Adams for her poignant remembrance of Hardy Furer ('Last flypast

for Hardy', #274) which made me sad as a Nepali citizen. The government's apathetic mindset towards people like Hardy who have done so much for this country is shocking. If Barbara hadn't dared to write, nobody might have known about Hardy and his contribution to Nepal's remotest regions like Bajhang, Humla and Jumla.

Meanwhile, our despotic leaders never go there. Instead of granting him a visa they granted him frustration. It is not the first time that Hardy was disappointed in Nepal and there are many other Hardys who have been abandoned by the government of the country they loved. Hardy is mourned and we must remember what he did selflessly for the country. In the end it was the government's apathy that killed Hardy. Hardy, you are no longer here but people living in remote areas will always keep you in their hearts. May you rest in peace.

Deepak S Ayer, Baitadi

BEING WATCHED

Congratulations for Jemima Sherpa's excellent Guest Column ('Biggish brother', #274). Being a Sydney resident for four years, I feel very much the same way. You always know that other people are watching us and our Nepalese brothers and sisters. I would like to plead with our king, the Maoists and the army all to realise this and to act in a way that does not give our Nepal a bad image. They must realise that even though people in Nepal are silent, they are still being watched from outside of the country.

Niraj Thapa, Sydney, Australia.

● Jemima, Go and put that 'offending' poster back! It has a more serious purpose than seeking to embarrass you personally. By removing that poster, you are not removing the problems.

Susila, by email

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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Country at the crossroads

The peace train has started its journey in Nepal with the 12-point pact between the political parties and the rebels announced on 17 November.

The understanding resulted in part from the decision taken by the CPN (Maoist) plenum a couple of weeks earlier in the Rolpa highlands. There is

ANALYSIS
Kanak Mani Dixit



danger, however, that the train will be derailed by the cumulative reaction of the royal right-wing, an angry army unwilling to concede political resolution and western ambassadors remote from the hurly-burly of the Nepali political process and disrespectful of it.

This transition to peace is credible because, this time, the Maoists have been forced to seek a *surakshit abataran* (safe landing) due to the people's will, national circumstance and regional geopolitics. Seeing the impossibility of taking over the state by force of arms and to cash in what political credibility they have left, the rebel leadership has agreed to join competitive, open



CHINTAMANI POUDEL

multiparty democracy. This decision registers a 180-degree turnaround at the policy level. Conveyed to the political party leadership in face-to-face meetings in New Delhi, it is a dramatic reversal, to be welcomed with all the required caution but without scepticism.

There will be a large number of citizens who have been mauled by the Maoists rebels over the last decade

whose justified anger must be countered with the argument that the death and destruction of the past cannot justify a further descent into the pit. This wrath, which is countrywide and runs deep, may be misused by the right wing to try and scuttle the peace initiative. As talk-show host Vijay Kumar Pandey asked on air last week while challenging one retired royalist general, "We have

Peace will not arrive like night after day but the process has begun and will likely snowball

already seen 12,000 dead. Are you asking us to go for 24,000 dead, 36,000 dead?"

Opaque release
The decision by the Rolpa plenum renders the gun in the hand of the rebel fighter suddenly irrelevant, an anachronism. At the policy level there is no more a 'people's war' being fought and the political parties and civil society must now assist the insurgent leadership to bring the followers along. The commisars are asked to conduct 'political re-education' of the very fighters they propagandised over the years—young men and women who they introduced to the gun—and persuade them to set aside the three-knot-three and socket bomb.

The diplomats and pro-palace folks who point to the fuzzy areas in the 12-point document fail to realise that they have been left there to allow the Maoists leaders the space needed to convince their cadre. Any attempt to take advantage of these areas of deliberate opaqueness in order to destroy the rebel-parties understanding will affect the fragile moment. The fighting that would follow as a result would most likely finish off the rebels but will leave a charred landscape full of suffering—and a royal dictatorship in Kathmandu.

The peace that the people crave will not arrive like night after day but the process has begun and will likely snowball. It is time to start planning national rehabilitation, to restore the torn psyche, support the tens of thousands of victims and the displaced and replace the destroyed health posts, repeater towers, bridges and police stations. The Maoist fighters themselves need to be rehabilitated even while we guard against spontaneous vigilante action against the rebels and their sympathisers.

The plenipotentiaries
The all-important foreign policy establishment in the Indian capital is still in favour of the Nepali people's democratic aspirations and will countenance the political parties as the lead players in the peace dialogue. It is important that the royalists in India, the Indian intelligence agencies, as well as the men in Indian khaki, not be allowed to seek a resolution that leaves the initiative with King Gyanendra.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has been soberly respectful of the people's aspirations, as have Senator Patrick Leahy and a host of other Democrat and Republican lawmakers of the US Congress. The State Department, too, is on board and the British government has welcomed the 12-point pact. But there are western ambassadors in Kathmandu—the German plenipotentiary a case in point—who do not necessarily reflect the views of the home office but who like to exhibit full-frontal disrespect to Nepal's politicians. This attitude finds play in the dreadfully contemptible suggestions of some diplomats that the proposed municipal elections are welcome. A dozen years of democracy has taught the Nepali people to distinguish between a free and fair election and a farce.

Further, let not the embassies panic

that the country will collapse with a weakened kingship or no kingship. It will not. As Madhav Kumar Nepal says, "Nepal is not a country without institutions. The parties will not allow a political vacuum."

Political capillaries
After some time in the political wilderness, the 12-point understanding has once again returned the politicians to the driver's seat of national affairs. The self-aggrandising mediators of the past, the heavily-funded Nepali and expatriate conflict resolution consultants and the competing international think tanks that presumed to guide Nepalis out of the morass—all have been superseded by the political parties in the peoples' hour of desperation. The names of those who met Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Delhi on 17 November says it all and they deserve respect—Girija Prasad Koirala, Madhav Kumar Nepal, KP Sharma Oli, Krishna Sitaula, Amik Sherchan, Narayan Kaji Shrestha and Hridayesh Tripathi.

In the past, the political parties could not generate crowds against the king in the name of democracy because the people first wanted peace. Today, they know King Gyanendra is not inclined to grant either, while the political parties are poised to provide both peace and democracy. That is why the rallies in Kalikot, Bharatpur, Butwal, Pokhara and Janakpur have brought in the crowds and why we are in the middle of an accelerating movement.

Two concerns
Even as we look ahead to the return of peace and democracy, the royal regime has created conditions that will create endless hurdles on that path. The politicisation of the Royal Nepali Army and the rapid rise of a kickback merchant class are matters of particular concern, for the taste of power and the volume of money involved are enough to destabilise the democracy far into the future.

February One diverted the RNA from its proud professional vocation and made it a partner in a coup d'etat. For nearly a year now, the army officer corps all over the country has been exercising absolute power and getting used to it. Many in the topmost echelon are also getting to like the taste of large commissions. Meanwhile, the operating national superstructure is being run to the ground, with the civil service and the police force dispirited and robbed of initiative.

The other pollution underway is the attempt by the royal regime, which includes the mercantilist royal son-in-law, to make a fast buck through moneymaking public institutions. The salivating powerbrokers that have crept out of the Narayanhiti woodwork are today in the process of finishing off the National Telecommunication Authority and have their eyes on the airline industry, the substantial holdings of the Employees' Provident Fund, the National Oil Corporation and above all, the hydropower sector—soon after 1 February, approaches were made to the National Hydro Power Corporation of India to sell off rights to significant national rivers.

King Gyanendra has repeatedly shown his disregard for the public's sensibility, the last being the surreal trip across the African continent. He has also been shown up on his inability to lead, to administer or to manage the economy and development. But while the king has been isolated in every way possible nationally and internationally, he has not been challenged politically on home ground. While he has been away on his air safari however, the ground has shifted back home with the 12-point understanding.

We can expect an acceleration of the political movement against the 1 February coup and the king may finally have to confront a genuine political challenge fuelled by the populace across the land that wants peace with democracy. How he will responds, we will know soon enough. After he deplanes. ●

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Peace pays

The Federation of the Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry has urged the Maoists to extend the ceasefire, which expires on 3 December, and asked the warring parties to use the opportunity to make it last. The Nepali economy, especially the tourism sector, has recovered slightly during the last three months of the unilateral ceasefire. Tourism entrepreneurs and the service sector industry related to tourism are faring better and if the ceasefire were to continue there is hope for long-term peace, said a press release issued by FNCCI on Wednesday.

More financing

At an extraordinary general meeting on 29 November, Ace Finance Company (AFC) decided to raise its authorised capital to Rs 500 million and its issued capital to Rs 320 million. It also agreed to merge Ace Investment Company with AFC. Ace has served Nepal's financial market for 11 years. By mid-October, its operating profit was Rs 7 million.

Door-to-door

Direct marketing and distribution company Bitarak.com celebrated its 5th anniversary on 27 November. From a small operation in November 2000, the firm has grown to a size where it now services customers such as Nepal Telecom, which has outsourced distribution and home delivery of its Namaste Prepaid mobile SIM cards to Bitarak.

NEW PRODUCTS

MOBILE MEMORY: Base International is now distributing the Phonebook Backup, a device that allows you to save the phonebook data from your mobile's SIM card with the push of one button. You can also copy from the Backup to a SIM card. Designed as a key ring, the product is available for Rs 700.

HEALTHY DOGS: Effem India is launching the Pedigree range of pet foods in Nepal. Initially the company will offer one variety for adult dogs and one for puppies, both developed to meet the nutritional needs of dogs in the Indian subcontinent. The



products will be distributed through the Mount Everest Kennel Club. Pedigree was launched in India three years ago after research found that more than 80 percent of dogs in the region suffer from skin and coat problems.

Fear of flying

Nepal's airports are hurting, not helping, tourism and economic growth

It is good to see that tourist arrivals have increased and the Nepali tourism industry is just waiting for elusive peace to return. However, are we prepared to handle the increasing number of tourists at our airports?

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



Globally, efficient airports are becoming pre-requisites for tourism as well as for healthy economies. China is the fore-runner, building more airports than any other country in the world. Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong are proud to have the most efficient airports in the region. In Heathrow, one can exit the airport less than 15 minutes after leaving the aircraft. Globally,

airports are competing with each other to provide the best services to airlines and passengers. But the inefficient, crowded and delay-prone airports of Delhi and Mumbai demonstrate too clearly how airports can hinder tourism and economic growth.

Nepal's airports have always been unique. We take pride in our mediocrity. While we collect one of the highest airport taxes in the region, we have not invested that money into making the airports efficient. (We should exclude from discussions the airports outside Kathmandu—some of them should be kept in their present unbelievable states so that they might enter a record book some day.)

Our only international airport has always been a subject of ridicule, be it in travel memoirs

or on today's internet travel blogs. In the name of security we have made the airport customer-unfriendly. While hordes of security personnel inside make the lives of travellers miserable, this Beed observed quite a few people begging in the parking lots! It may or may not be a security hazard but it is likely not the first and best thing for a visitor to see.

While globally, travellers are pampered with pre-check-in facilities, city check-in and many more fast-track services, the people working at our airports look upon travellers as more privileged than themselves, therefore fair game for harassment. TIA is one of the few airports in the world that does not believe in different classes of travel so priority baggage comes out last and partitioned cubicles serve as lounges. Elsewhere, travellers have the freedom to pay extra and demand extra, be it fast-track services at check-in or a real swanky limousine to whisk them away from the airport. The Beed cannot stop repeating the need to replace TIA's rickety, pre-

referendum taxis that give the place such an ugly look and the arriving flyer who is unfortunate enough to hire one a harrowing experience.

Passengers who travel through the domestic airport want to hang their heads in shame at its condition, which perhaps also reflects the current state of our nation. The conveyor belt at baggage x-ray has to be manually pushed by the passenger, who still receives what can only be termed disgusting treatment from the personnel. How can we even talk about flying more people to Lukla, Bharatpur or Jomsom as any tourist who makes the trip would never want to repeat it?

There is no other option but to point the finger at the government and institutions like the Nepal Tourism Board and then call for private management of the airports. However, looking at the performance of Nepal's private airlines gives little hope as they are as problem-laden as the government. The only option is to call in an experienced international player to operate our airports. ●

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Radio raid



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 29 November

कान्तिपुर

Radio Sagarmatha is the latest victim of state terror, after Kantipur FM. By attacking the only community radio in South Asia and arresting five employees from the station, the government has challenged Nepal's journalism and democratic communities. In the same way that Radio Sagarmatha was attacked, the state raided Kantipur FM on 21 October and seized its equipment, which is yet been returned. After those attacks, civil society and journalists joined hands to protest against state terror and the government moved further away from the people. We understood these raids as not just attacks on the stations but on the entire journalism community, listeners and all Nepalis. The attack on Radio Sagarmatha has proven this analysis. The lawsuits against the state's attack on the FM stations and the illegal Media Ordinance are still awaiting consideration at the Supreme Court. We are all aware of the Nepal Bar Association's decision to boycott the jury in protest of the Supreme Court refusing to issue an interim order on the writ against the Ordinance. However, the agreement between the Bar and the Supreme Court, wherein the former agreed to cease its protest and the latter promised to abide by the

law, has also rendered the Court's unwillingness to grant an interim order more controversial. The government attacked Radio Sagarmatha with the excuse that the Supreme Court is yet to issue an interim order. These attacks help us understand the mindsets of the people who run the state today. Although Maoist leader Prachanda's interview had not been broadcast by Radio Sagarmatha, the government used that as an excuse to attack it. This proves that those at the policy making level are blabbering without intelligence and knowledge. The unique way in which those in the media and the rest of Nepal have come together to protest these attacks on media houses is commendable. The way in which Nepalis gathered in the middle of the night to protest the attacks proves that the media enjoys strong support. And the positive response of Nepali civil society and the international community proves the Nepali media is not alone and is heading in the right direction. The government understands this and is often threatened by our strength. It does not want a free press, it wants a propaganda machine. Therefore, to protest this thinking and future acts of terror by the government is the responsibility not just of the journalism community but also of civil society, the democratic community and every individual.

‘Mature Maoists’

UML general secretary Madhab Kumar Nepal in *Deshantar*, 27 November

देशान्तर

The Maoists have reached two conclusions. First, they believe they can go on fighting for a long time and that they can't be finished off by military might. The second is that they can't capture state power through the barrel of the gun. So the conclusion they have reached is that state power won through the barrel of gun can't be sustainable. They know the international situation is not in their favour. Neighbouring countries are not supportive of their cause. Past international experiences have shown that in the absence of a favourable international setting, such a regime can't last. The Maoists have considered all these ground realities and developed a new maturity. The seven-party alliance thinks people power can overcome guns. That is why we will never resort to violence. If the well-equipped Shah of Iran was uprooted by unarmed people, there is no reason why it can't happen in Nepal. If the Maoists resort to arms again, those in power will have to take the blame.

Everyone will point fingers at the monarchy for forcing the peace-seeking Maoists to take up guns once again and for sending them back to the jungle. If the government tries to provoke the Maoists at a time when we have been trying to bring them into peaceful politics, it will be clear that it is the people in power today who are the real obstacle for peace. Until yesterday, people used to criticise the Maoists for taking up guns. If they are forced back to violence, they will win the people's sympathy this time. The Maoists, however, know that they have no choice but to go for a people's republic while acknowledging the existence of other political parties.

Forlorn foreigners

Nispakshya, 29 November

निष्पक्ष

The foreign powers that had been supporting the seven parties' movement are now in a state of shock having learned that Maoist leaders who had held talks with the parties' chiefs in New Delhi were none other than Mohan Baidya, alias Kiran, and CP Gajurel, alias Gaurab, who have been in Indian jails for a while. How could Kiran, who had been jailed in Siligugdi and Gaurab, who was kept in a jail in Chennai, meet the parties' leaders in New Delhi? This is something that has left even some Indian leaders flabbergasted. The international community is disappointed that the seven parties are now following the Maoists' agenda. The pact has made the foreign powers feel that the parties are not interested in sustainable peace and democracy but for state power. What has made them more suspicious about the parties is the way the issue of the reinstatement of the House of Representatives has been treated in the understanding with the Maoists. House reinstatement was

one issue that had drawn the international community's sympathy toward the parties' movement but the agreement only lists it as a matter for further discussion.

Strong start

Conflict expert Bishnu Uprety in *Drishti*, 29 November

दृष्टि

Most of the world's rebel forces do not talk about giving up arms in the beginning of a reconciliation process but Nepal's Maoists have done just that. This decision must be taken positively. However, the 12-point understanding between the parties and the Maoists is not a complete document in itself but a basis for additional understanding through dialogue. There remains a danger that the state might not take the understanding positively. If the government decides to treat the parties like the Maoists, as terrorists, the conflict will intensify. The situation will worsen if the state takes the 12-point pact as a threat to its own existence. But if the state considers the people's desire and prioritises peace, things might move in a positive direction. As things stand now, the state is divided on the understanding. The parties and Maoists must have considered both the would-be positive and negative responses of the government when they signed the 12-point understanding.

Any rebel force does not give up arms just like that, it requires a long process. The dialogue between the Maoists and the parties that began in Silgudi was the genesis for a deal and must be taken positively. If there is an election for a constituent assembly, it should not be held under any kind of pressure from the Maoists or government forces. Such an election can take place only if there is an understanding with the state power. If the state refuses, it won't happen. For now, the Maoists need to extend the ceasefire if they wish to implement the understanding with the parties.

People's choice

Communist Party of India (Marxist) politburo member Sitaram Yechuri in *Bimarsha*, 1 December

बिमारशा

India wants to see peace and prosperity in Nepal. We also believe that Nepal must have democracy and human rights. If Nepal has peace, India too will benefit. Nepal is a sovereign nation therefore what is good and bad is something for Nepalis to decide. India fully supports those forces that work together for the reinstatement of democracy in Nepal. It is for the people and the political forces of Nepal to decide what they want. All India can do is support such a decision. When I recently visited Nepal, I met leaders of political parties and civil society. This is what I said in an interaction program: when people associated with the Shiva Sena and World Hindu Federation visit Nepal and speak in support of the king, the government (of Nepal) does not call it foreign interference. But whenever we



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कान्तिपुर

Kantipur, 26 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ If the monarchy accepts constituent assembly we can think about a new situation (stance on the monarchy). But we feel that this is not the case in our country. ”

Maoist supreme Prachanda on *BBC Nepali*, 28 November

visit Nepal and express our solidarity for democracy, they call it interference. I wish Nepal’s government would do away with its mentality of seeing any foreign dissenting voice as external interference. All we wish is to see democracy continuing in Nepal. The country has no alternative but to embrace democracy. All powers in Nepal should initiate dialogue toward that end. The Nepali people long to see peace. To fulfil their desire, the king should begin talks with the parties. India still supports a multiparty democracy in Nepal that includes constitutional monarchy. The king should stop direct rule and remain as a constitutional monarch but it is for the people to decide if they need the monarchy or not.

Maoist expansion

Samay, 1 December

The Maoists may have reached an understanding with the parties for what they call total democracy but they have not slowed their project of consolidating their military strength. At a meeting in Rukum and Rolpa between Dasain and Tihaar, the central working committee decided to expand the Maoists’ three-division army into



SAGAR SHRESTHA

seven divisions. Before the expansion plan, the three divisions were known as western, central and eastern commands. The western command was led by Prabhakar (Janardan Sharma), the central by Pasang (Nanda Kishore Pun) and the eastern command by Ananta (Barshman Pun). The expansion responds to the fact that the Maoists have been unable to mobilise their armed force at different places at the same time. Until recently, the eastern division had been operating east of Kathmandu, the central division west of Kathmandu and east of Rapti zone and the western division had been covering areas west of Rapti. Although the western and central divisions jointly launched an attack west of the capital some time ago, the western command failed to help its eastern counterpart when a similar attack was made east of the capital. A member of the central advisory committee said the goal is to bring uniformity to all the commands. Each of the original three divisions had 5,000 guerillas. Now the seven divisions will contain 4,000 rebels each. That means an overall increase of 13,000 fighters, a hike the Maoists plan to cover by accelerating their recruiting of youths. The Maoists’ expansion

comes at a time when the Royal Nepali Army has been recruiting more soldiers in order to increase the number of its divisions to seven.

No school

Nepal Samacharpatra, 27 November

RASUWA— After walking for hours to reach school, Durga Tamang turns around immediately to go home because the teachers are always absent. This is the fate of over 11,000 students in this district where education is so marginal that schools close even when it rains or snows because the buildings leak. Several don’t even have roofs. Of the 99 community schools in 18 VDCs, the majority remain closed most of the time. To make matters worse, only a handful of teachers have been appointed by the government in most of these community schools. Opening of the Lingling Primary School on the Nepal-Tibet border was approved 18 years ago but the school building has still not been constructed. Around 36 students of this school are forced to attend classes in an open field. Despite all these problems, the District Education Office has shown little concern. “The condition of most schools are similar all over the district, where the rate of school dropout has remained high,” says principal Nirmal Jung Sherpa. The problem is most evident in Haku, Gatlang, Charsa, Chilime, Bridhim, Timer and Ramche VDCs, which are barely an hour from district headquarters Dhunche. But the education office still believes it is doing its best. “We have reform programs to solve the problem,” says District Development Committee President Khem Bahadur Magar. The literacy rate in the district is only 34 percent.

Schools suffer

Nepal, 20 November

LIBANG—Money earmarked to build 27 classrooms under the ‘Education for All Programme’ initiated in Rolpa with the assistance of five donor agencies has reportedly been spent illegally. Eighty classrooms were to be built in the district this year but only 27 were constructed, in part due to obstacles created by Maoists. Of those, 21 classrooms have been built in and around the district headquarters and only six classrooms in the villages. There are reports that instead of starting work on the buildings, the School Management Committee gave an illegal contract to a contractor. While sanctioning this contract, technicians of the District Education Office demanded 10 percent of the deal’s total amount. Six classrooms were to be constructed in Masina, 60 km from the district headquarter, but even before they were completed, the Education Department cleared the payment, suggesting that funds were embezzled.

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COUNTRY DIRECTOR

Practical Action (formerly ITDG) is an International NGO, with its UK office in Rugby, England. Practical Action works for poverty alleviation through the development and use of appropriate technologies in South Asia, Southern and East Africa and Latin America. In its current strategy for the period 2003-07, it aims to become the leading international authority on the use of technology to reduce poverty in developing countries- by demonstrating results, sharing knowledge and influencing others. Practical Action seeks to achieve this by implementing work under four International Aims. The aims are- Reducing Vulnerability, Making Markets Work for the Poor, Improving Access to Infrastructure Services, and Responding to New Technologies.

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The position is based in Kathmandu and will involve extensive travel both in Nepal and overseas. The job contract will be initially for five years. Salary and terms and conditions are as per the organisation's policy, more details are available in the application pack.

For further information on this job please send an e-mail to: recruitment@practicalaction.org.uk

The closing date for applications is: Friday 16 December 2005, interviews in early January 2006.

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Nowhere to turn

Amid continuing reports of Nepali workers being duped in Malaysia, desperate people continue to sign up for jobs

NARESH NEWAR in KUALA LUMPUR



ALL PICS: NARESH NEWAR

They have fled poverty and joblessness at home in Nepal. Most have been cheated by Nepali recruiters and some have been exploited by their Malaysian employers.

Government ministers describe them as modern Nepali 'heroes': migrant workers whose remittances sent home prop up Nepal's tottering economy. But they are not treated as heroes by some rapacious agents and immigration and customs officials at the airport.

At the royal Nepali Embassy in Kuala Lumpur on the 16th floor of an office building on Jalan Ampang in the city centre, it's just another day for Debilal Kandel, officer at the embassy, tries to calm dozens of agitated Nepali workers not paid as per contract or who have been mistreated by employers.

"I feel their pain and it really depresses me to think how they were tricked into coming here," says Kandel as he tried to assist workers in the embassy's reception area last week. Some

were raising their voices and they told two visiting journalists from Nepal that the embassy was no help at all. "I'm so fed up, I just want to go home," one of them told us.

The workers have good reason to be angry. Most of them were deceived by their recruiters in Kathmandu, who had promised hundreds of dollars a month in salary, benefits and easy work. After they arrived in Malaysia they earned less than half the amount stated in their contracts. Most are working in Chinese plastic, food and chemical factories for just Rs 5,000-7,000 a month—after paying hundreds of thousands of rupees to agents back home.

"When we asked the companies to pay as per our contracts, they just threatened to hit and kill us," says Dipendra Timilsina, who arrived here two months ago. Timilsina and 18 other fellow Nepali workers organised a strike at Perak Duck Food Industry on 14 November. The strike spread to two other

companies, Kelan Behun Bersatu in Kedah and Hip Hong Plastic Company at Muar Johar. According to the workers, employers paid Vietnamese and Bangladeshi migrant workers to control the Nepali strikers. "We were caned and beaten up severely so we ran away—we can't go back," says 23-year-old Sundar Kumar Yadab of Dhanusa. Yadab and 23 other Nepalis escaped into the jungle to hide from their attackers. Then they travelled six hours to Kuala Lumpur to seek help from the embassy. But it looks like they came in vain. There isn't much the embassy can do.

Most of the workers have no choice but to rejoin their work. To date, some 13 have returned but 11 others have disappeared. Yadab says he is worried about them and about himself because he thinks his employer regards him as the ringleader of the group. Some workers at the embassy tried desperately to contact their recruiters in Kathmandu but in vain. They had all provided fake names and

telephone numbers.

The plight of Nepali workers abroad is not new and many recruiters and employers in Malaysia continue to get away with exploitation because the workers have nowhere to turn. Malaysia is drafting a new law that will protect migrant workers from cruel employers and guarantee a minimum wage. The secretary-general of Malaysia's Ministry of Human Resources is visiting Kathmandu this week and it's believed he will be discussing the new law as well as recent incidents concerning Nepali workers in his country.

Ironically, it seems the Malaysian government is more concerned about the welfare of Nepali workers than the Nepali government.

Malaysia's *The Star* newspaper is working on an investigative report on Nepalis being underpaid, exploited and their passports held up by their employers after the celebrated case of Mangal Bahadur Gurung. The former porter was caned and



LABOUR OF LOVE: clockwise, Administrative officer Debilal Kandel at the Royal Nepali Embassy in Kuala Lumpur helps 100 or so Nepali workers who arrive at his office every day with various problems (top). Dayaram Chaudhary at the airport before leaving to Malaysia for the first time (above right). Most Nepalis living or visiting Kuala Lumpur flock to Jalan Silan in the Kotaraya area to shop and meet compatriots (far right). Subash Shrestha runs a successful business (bottom right). Sundar Kumar Yadab (above).



Clueless in KL

Daya Ram Chaudhary has just entered the departure area at Kathmandu airport when his small backpack breaks open. He ties it up with a piece of rope so the biscuits, toothbrush, a T-shirt and trousers won't fall out. This is all he is taking with him to Malaysia, where he will work for the next three years.

"I'm nervous," admits 26-year-old Daya Ram. "I've never been abroad." He has just Rs 500 in his pocket and a one-way ticket on Air Nepal. He doesn't know who will come to fetch him at Kuala Lumpur airport and doesn't even know the name of the company where he'll work or the kind of job he is going to do.

All that his recruiter told him was that he was going to Malaysia. He paid his agent Rs 100,000 after borrowing money from a village moneylender in Kanchanpur at an interest rate of three percent. "They didn't tell me anything," he says but brightens up as he adds, "I hope to return with lot of money."

Daya Ram has heard of Nepalis like him being duped by their agents, not being paid as much as promised and having to do back-breaking work. "I'll just have to take that risk," he says as his flight is announced.

spent 51 days in a Malaysian jail when he was mistakenly arrested as an illegal worker. He was released and his conviction set aside in May.

Members of Nepal's National Human Rights Commission have visited Malaysia twice but workers here say they didn't even bother to visit their colleagues detained in jails here. "They came, partied, shopped and left without any interviews," says labour activist and journalist Ramesh Poudel who runs the Nepal Labour Organisation here and publishes a Nepali-language weekly called *Shram Saptahik*, which has a circulation of 7,000.

Nepali workers here are now worried that publicity about the strikes and exploitation could jeopardise the future job situation. An estimated 200,000 Nepalis now work in Malaysia,

the highest number after India and the Gulf.

"We're thankful that the Malaysian government has opened doors for us but the weakness of our own government and exploitation by Nepali manpower agents are ruining this opportunity," says Niraj Sapkota, who runs Nepal House, a restaurant and lodge where hundreds of Nepalis congregate every day to share problems.

Nepal still has no labour agreement with Malaysia through which Nepalis can have more rights as overseas workers. The Nepali embassy here has tried hard to convince the Foreign Ministry in Kathmandu to send more staff for the embassy and for the Labour Ministry to take action against blacklisted recruiters in Nepal. But not much has been done.



Despite the workers' hardships, Nepalis are still desperate to work here. Every morning hundreds of people throng the gates of the Malaysian Embassy in Harihar Bhawan for their visas and the airport is crammed with workers waiting for flights. Dozens of workers landed in Kuala Lumpur on a midnight flight last week but there was no one there to fetch them. With no money and completely lost, they wandered aimlessly in the arrival area, hungry, thirsty and culture shocked.

Not all Nepalis suffer, many especially those working in consumer electronic, plastic, furniture or computer factories, are interviewed and recruited by their employers in Kathmandu itself. But the horror stories are hard to ignore. "I don't know why they keep on coming. I strongly urge Nepalis not to apply for work here unless they go through good manpower agents," says Nabin KC, who has been working here for the last five years. The last two years he has been illegal and has even been jailed but he is taking the risk to prolong his stay as he now has a good job that pays Rs 20,000 a month.

Ashok Kumar Shah is going back to his home village in Morang in January. The New

Global manpower agency in Kalanki sent him here promising a good salary but after three years he has only saved about Rs 10,000 because he was paid less than his contract guaranteed. "I don't know how I'm going to

explain this to my father who works so hard in the farm but at least I'll be with my wife and children again," he told us. When we tried to contact New Global Manpower in Kalanki it no longer existed. ●

Striking it rich

Subash Shrestha from Jhapa is a typical Newari trader. Three years ago, when he came to Malaysia to work as a security guard, he saw that most Nepalis were working in small restaurants and hotels. He made a plan with his brother to start a mini-market stocking the kind of things Nepalis here need: Nepali magazines and newspapers, books, Nepali folk music in CDs, novels, pens, clothes. His Fishtail Shop was a hit. On Sundays, Shrestha serves up to 10,000 Nepali customers. He is now making Rs 200,000 a month but has not left his night security guard job as it pays well.



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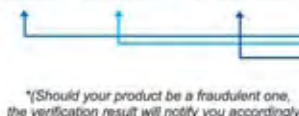
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The mountains of Asia, including the Himalaya, are facing accelerating threats from a rapid rise in roads, settlements, overgrazing and deforestation that could worsen the impact of climate change and threaten water supply in China, southeast Asia and northern India.

The region's water supplies, fed by glaciers and the monsoons and vital for around half the world's population, may be harmed along with the area's abundant and rich wildlife. A

new report points to a critical gap in water security to billions of people in Asia and the crucial role of sound environmental management for sustained development.

The report, *The Fall of Water*, was published by the IUCN and UNEP with support from the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The study is based on a new way of assessing the direct and cumulative impacts of

A Himalayan meltdown

Climate change and development in the Himalaya threaten water supply for nearly half the world's population

infrastructure development called Global Methodology for Mapping Human Impacts on the Biosphere (GLOBIO). It has been developed by UNEP's GRID Arendal centre in Norway, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre in the UK and the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.

Comparing satellite images from the 1960s to today reveal that deforestation and unsustainable land use practices make the region's rivers carry the largest sediment loads in the world causing increased flood-related disasters in China and India.

Researchers say Himalayan countries like China and Nepal are now acting to develop parks and protected areas aimed at conserving the Asian region's water supplies and wildlife but they warn that far more effort is needed to extend protection right across the region in both lowland and mountain areas.

The water from the Himalaya and the Tibetan Plateau flows down to half of the world's population, but less than three percent of the watersheds are protected. Many have become deforested and overgrazed. Impoverished people often have to

settle in the most exposed flood-risk areas, and when the forest is gone further upstream, the floods will hit them severely. Rivers that originate in the Himalayan region like the Huang De, Indus, Amu Darya, Ganga and Salween, have on average of just 2.5 per cent of their basins protected.

The report argues that climate change is likely to aggravate problems with water supplies. Studies by ICIMOD and UNEP have shown that some 50 lakes have formed in Nepal, Bhutan and China as a result of melting glaciers. There is concern that these lakes held back by soil and stones, could burst their banks sending flash floods down densely populated valleys.

New calculations by the Chinese Academy of Sciences show seven percent of the country's glaciers are vanishing annually and that, by 2050, as many as 64 percent of China's glaciers will have disappeared. Close to half of the Asia's mountain region is affected by infrastructure development and that, by 2030, this could rise to over 70 percent.

The hotspots are along the

Karakoram highway in Pakistan, the southern slopes of the Himalaya and in south-eastern Tibet, Yunnan and Sichuan provinces of south-western China. All countries in the region are likely to see a decline in the abundance of wildlife over the next three decades on current trends of infrastructure development.

There is particular concern over remaining fragile populations of species like the snow leopard, the Black necked crane, Przewalski's gazelle and the Whooper Swan.

"Most serious is the situation in parts of Pakistan, northern India, Bangladesh where human population pressures together with unchecked piecemeal development have great impacts on biodiversity and the ability of watersheds to handle monsoon floods," says Surendra Shrestha, director of UNEP's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok.

The Fall of Water: Emerging threats to the water resources and biodiversity at the roof of the world to Asia's lowland from changes associated with large-scale settlement and piecemeal development.
<http://globio.info/press/2005-09-05.cfm>
www.unep.org

Changing climate change

Plenty of carbon dioxide was emitted as the world's climate negotiators flew to and from the Montreal meeting this week


The 10 warmest years on record have all occurred since 1990, and 2005 is likely to be the warmest ever. This year, we've gotten a taste of the many kinds of dangers that lie ahead: more extreme hurricanes, massive droughts, forest fires, spreading infectious diseases, and floods. The climate is changing, and more is yet to come.

The world's governments met in Montreal this week to plot the next steps, including specific measures that the world could adopt if the Bush administration abandoned its wilful neglect of this critical issue.

Climate change is equated with global warming, but much more than warming is involved. The rising concentration of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are leading to more extreme storms, higher-intensity hurricanes, rising ocean levels,

GREEN ECONOMICS

Jeffrey Sachs



melting glaciers and ice sheets, droughts,

floods and other climate changes. Even the chemistry of the land and ocean is changing, with the ocean becoming more acidic – thus threatening coral reefs – as a result of higher carbon dioxide.

The specific patterns of change are not known precisely, but the risks of continuing on our current global course are



widely appreciated. Yet the United States has refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol, which does little to change the long-term course of events on the planet, since it calls for only small steps up to the year 2012.

The actions that are needed are difficult to introduce, because they go to the heart of the world's use of energy, particularly its use of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas), which, when burned, release carbon dioxide – the key source of rising greenhouse gases – into the atmosphere. Yet the world economy depends on fossil

fuels, and developing countries will need to use more, not less, of them as their economies grow. Even if the world runs out of oil and gas in the coming years, coal will prove to be plentiful, and solid coal can be converted at relatively low cost to liquid fuels for automobiles and other uses.

Unfortunately fossil fuels are plentiful, but harmful, renewable sources like wind are good for the climate but not plentiful. Solar power is plentiful but not cheap. Nuclear power is plentiful but not safe.

Improved technologies can offer a way

out of this bind, but only if we think and act ahead. There are two main kinds of technologies that look most promising. The first is energy conservation through more fuel-efficient vehicles. The other is called 'carbon capture and storage'. The idea is to capture the carbon dioxide that is emitted in power plants and other big factories when fossil fuels are burned, thereby preventing it from entering the atmosphere. The captured carbon is then pumped into underground storage sites such as empty oil fields and other suitable locations.

The problem is timing. The changeover of the world's vehicles to hybrid and other efficient technologies will take decades, not years. So will the changeover of power plants to carbon capture and storage. If we procrastinate, the dangers posed by climate change will confront us as we talk, debate, and plan. The world needs to start acting soon – very soon – if it is to head off major threats.

Plenty of carbon dioxide will be emitted into the atmosphere as the world's climate negotiators fly to and from the Montreal meeting. Let's press our governments to make real progress when they meet, otherwise they will merely be adding to the problem. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.



Turf war wrecks expedition

Nepal ultimate loser in Barun biodiversity fiasco

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

A turf war between government departments has cost Nepal a landmark international scientific survey of one of the world’s richest biodiversity areas.

Bureaucratic bungling, professional rivalry and an international conservation group that underestimated Nepal’s red tape and displayed some highhandedness have cost science a major study of the Barun Valley in eastern Nepal.

The Makalu Barun National Park lies in a vertical world from 1,000m on the gorge of the Arun River right up to summit of Makalu at 8,484m. Because of its location, it gets the full blast of the monsoons, giving the cloud forests and the high mountain meadows of the region the richest biodiversity in the world.

That is why international environmental group, Conservation International (CI) chose to conduct its scientific study and specimen collection here this year. The group took an expedition consisting of 14 Nepali and foreign scientists and three television networks from 27 October to 11 November to Saisima, a side valley of the Barun.

World-renowned biologists found three new species of ants, a number of new plants and possibly a new species of frog. Disney and Discovery crews, including Jeff Corwin, filmed the entire expedition for a special segment of the popular ‘Corwin’s Quest’ segment about Nepal’s biodiversity on Animal Planet.

CI’s Rapid Assessment Team had reason to be ecstatic. But one day before the helicopters were supposed to fly in the expedition out of the Barun (12 November) the satellite phone rang. It was a message from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) in Kathmandu: CI’s request for specimen collection had been denied.

The scientists were shocked, and when the full implication of that news hit them, some even began to sob with frustration.

Without being able to take the specimens out for further analysis there was no point.

A *Nepali Times* investigation has found that a turf war between the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation and the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation appears to have been at the root of the permit cancellation. But CI also did not have all the permission in writing and yet it arrogantly went ahead with its studies in the field.

The Mountain Institute (TMI) in Kathmandu coordinated the visit and had written to the Department seeking permission for specimen collection in August. The Ministry sought a four-point clarification from TMI, including a query on the authorship and intellectual property rights on the final report and filming.

“Owing to the Dasain holidays, processing of the letter took time whereas the RAP team was arriving on 27 October,” explains TMI’s Himal Program Director, Brian J Peniston. The visit was an activity of CI’s Rapid Assessment Program (RAP), an innovative biological inventory program designed to use scientific information to catalyse conservation action. RAP methods are designed to rapidly assess the biodiversity of highly diverse areas and to train local scientists in survey techniques.

The Ministry later issued an eight-point letter stating that the team could not take samples, that they needed to get clearance from the Home and Defence Ministries and that the Forest Ministry should get to designate the team of Nepali scientists. It was this last point, insiders say, which annoyed the officials at the Ministry because CI and TMI had already selected their own team of Nepali scientists.

DNPWC officials accuse the Ministry officials of highhandedness and say rules allow the Department to decide on expeditions of this nature. “It was interference from the Ministry that created the whole problem,” said one senior DNPWC official.

Peniston told us that the

secretary of the Ministry of Forest, Ananta Raj Pandey, gave verbal approval to the team to leave for the national park. But it looks like CI had nothing in writing about samples. “After that phone call, we returned all the samples to the habitat,” says one of the six Nepali scientists in the team.

CI and TMI had corresponded with Nepali scientists since July seeking their participation. But even while awaiting written approval, planning for the expedition went ahead. Unused to strict red tape, the scientists may have mistakenly thought permission was just a formality because they had brought along snap traps, mist nets and other equipment to snare bats, rodents and reptiles. Their preparations also showed that they had taken things for granted.

The CIRAP team has conducted 41 expeditions to biodiversity hotspots around the world, including Peru, Bolivia, Guyana and Papua New Guinea and this is the first time it’s had a problem like this.

While the CI team continued its work in the park, TMI was frantically waiting for the Forest Ministry’s response on a request that sample collections be allowed. Peniston learnt it was a ‘no’ only one day before the team left the park. “Needless to say, they were dejected and depressed. They carried back no samples with them at all,” he says.

CI and TMI say they did everything in good faith and went through proper channels to get permission. Says LeeAnne Alonso of CI: “When the team received word in the field via satellite telephone that the collecting permits had not been granted, they were disappointed but this did not affect their visit since they had already been doing observations only.”

In the end, it was Nepal that was the ultimate loser: we lost the publicity that would have gone with the discoveries and our scientists would have gained from future collaboration. Said one senior official at the DNPWC: “It could have been a win-win situation, it turned out to be a lose-lose one.” ●

In their classroom

Freedom, security and comfort produce demanding US students

Schools program us to think and act in certain acceptable ways. They prepare us to fit in society like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. But the process in which they do so differs from place to place. This difference becomes particularly striking if you are looking at a school in another culture. And if the other culture happens to be a wealthy preschool in the US, the contrast strikes you harder.

The classroom is spacious, colourful, fully equipped. There is a head teacher and two assistant teachers for 15 kids bursting with

NEPALI PAN
Shradha Ghale



energy. As one of the assistant teachers when four-year-old Jason pulls your hair to play horse, you can’t just get up and yell at him. You must request him in a singsong voice, “Jason, please stop pulling my hair. Nice boys don’t act like that.” To your Nepali ears, this sounds hyper civilised and artificial. Because back home, little boys don’t dare come near their teacher, let alone pull her braid. If they do, they get a nice beating.

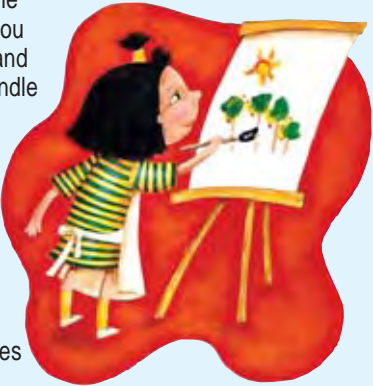
When Amanda’s paper frog looks like a boat and you offer to help her, the head teacher calls you to a corner and says, “I would suggest letting Amanda make her own frog. As a teacher, you are supposed to watch them do their thing.” Your urge to instruct is too strong to accept a boat as a frog but you quietly suppress it. You cannot go against their philosophy. Teachers back home didn’t go against a philosophy because they didn’t have one.

Two boys suddenly turn wild and start destroying each other’s Lego ships. In your newly acquired singsong, you request them to stop but they are unstoppable. As the scene grows violent, you loudly threaten to cancel their outing. The head teacher comes and warns you against using ‘negative speech’ and demonstrates the right way to handle the situation. She summons both parties, hears them out and ponders long before she recommends a solution. A mini trial, her effort looks extravagant to you. You never received such treatment as kids although you belonged to the privileged lot.

As Eric squeezes out full tubes of paint to make his ‘art’, you suggest he could do better with less. “No,” he says haughtily. “I like it this way!” The head teacher standing nearby smiles and asks you to let him be. “It’s never a waste as long as they’re exploring their imagination.” The sheer abundance of the classroom’s resources dazzles you. But the freedom with which the children can exploit them dazzles you even more. Then you remember how throughout your childhood, your parents stacked all your toys on a high shelf because you might damage them.

Finally, when it’s time to go home, you marvel at the ease with which the kids ask you to find their things, tie their laces, button their coats. Some just want you to sit with them and listen as they talk. They are bright, cheery and adorable, as children are. But here they know what they are entitled to. They question, demand and complain like no kid in your hometown does. At three and five, their idea of self-importance has already taken a firm shape. Freedom, security and comfort are already a natural condition for them. And they know how to react to the slightest disruption.

In another classroom, where you are a student again, your professors constantly complain about your silence. They want you to be like your American classmates, who express even the most rambling thought with great confidence. They want you to be vocal, analytical and assertive. You need to have an opinion on everything. You need to speak up, interact and participate more. Now, you can make sense of their demand. You can also make sense of your resistance to it. Your differences are deeper than you thought. ●



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SERENITY: Ram under his tree (above). It's not possible to approach closer than 6m. Prem Lama, 16, Ram's cousin and the only other person allowed inside the inner sanctuary (bottom). Pilgrims at the bazaar that has sprouted at the site (left).

ALL PICS: THOMAS BELL

Thousands continue to flock to seek the truth in 15-year-old Ram Bomjon

On his path

THOMAS BELL
in BARA DISTRICT

The cult of Ram Bomjon, whom some are calling the 'new Buddha' of Bara district, has spread far beyond the villages of the terai. An internet search on the 15-year-old produces thousands of results from every continent.

In the jungle where the young man has been silently meditating beneath a pipal tree for the last

six months, reportedly without food or water, pilgrims still flock to see him.

The CDO's office has tried to discourage visitors with announcements on local radio and in newspapers but for the time being the phenomenon continues. Official disapproval and demands that the young mystic submit to scientific tests to verify the claims being made, mean that it may not continue for much longer.

The best time to visit Ram is at around 10AM. That's when his devotees say strange lights glow in his body. "If you just sit and watch, the light will come," says Prem Lama, the 16-year-old monk who guards the fence around Ram's tree. "Do you see a white light coming from his hands?"

A crowd of pilgrims murmured, squinted and pointed, trying to discern the supernatural glow. "Do you see it? Do you see the blue light from the back of his head?" said one.

Other miracles are attributed to the boy. He is said to have

survived two snakebites without medical treatment. The giant roots of his chosen tree are said to be growing faster than usual, slowly enveloping him as he meditates between them.

No one knows how many people have been to see him but the number is certainly great. On the full moon before the Dasain festival, the local committee managing the site counted 296 vehicles in their improvised parking area, ranging from over-crowded buses and tractor-trailers to ox carts.

Last week Amit Bartola, a bus driver from Hetauda, said he had 80 people on his 36-seater bus. "We stop from village to village and people are really keen to come," he said. Suman Bhujel, a driver from Sarlahi district, added, "there's about 10 busloads a day from where I come from."

The bazaar that has grown up to service pilgrims sells everything from bicycle inner tubes to sacred threads. Deft salesmen from over the border in Bihar demonstrate haircare products to attentive

groups of women. Now the craze seems in danger of becoming a victim of its own success and of the wilder claims made about Ram's special powers.

On 26 October the CDO's office in Kalaya finally received a police report of the large crowds and the wheels of bureaucracy began to grind. CDO Santa Raj Subedi doubted that Ram could survive without eating and sent local doctors to investigate.

Dr Rajdev Prasad Kushvaha says it is medically impossible to live without food for more than 20 days but because his team was only permitted to observe Ram from a distance they could not come to any firm conclusion.

"He is human, and he is alive, that much we can say," says Dr Kushvaha. He says that physical tests are needed to discover more.

The CDO's office was forced to turn to Kathmandu for scientific assistance and to the Lumbini Development Trust for religious advice. They demand that witnesses be allowed to watch Ram through the night, when the attraction is closed to visitors and, they suspect, Ram might break his fast.

Ram's brother, Ganga Jeet Bomjon, 26, rejects any idea his brother is cheating by eating at night. "The investigators say 'you guys are doing something, feeding him batteries' (to give

him energy) or something," he jokes. "But try sitting with your legs crossed for three hours, never mind six months."

The committee that runs the site, composed mostly of young people from Ram's village, say they would be happy if experts examined Ram but without touching him and they have not yet granted access at night.

The CDO's office, which now has a bulging file on the case, seems unlikely to give up.

"We've told them, either you need to let people see everything that's going on or if this is a fraud you need to close it down," say Hari Har Dahal, an administrative officer.

Officials have also demanded the organising committee submit an account of the money they have raised. According to a fax received by the CDO, it totals over eight lakh in donations and offerings (there is no entrance charge) and about half has been spent on managing the site.

The feeling now is that the group of enthusiastic youngsters who have run this sensation are getting out of their depth. The stakes are high.

"He HAS to eat. He HAS to drink," says the guard outside the District Administration Office in Kalaya. "If we find out he's lying, he and the rest of them are going to jail." ●



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मूल्य रु.१०

अभियान

अन्तराष्ट्रिय बजारमा काव्या रेल को मूल्य उभय पृष्ठ ३

जीवाङ्गल को प्राविधिक परीक्षण पृष्ठ ५

अजदरले समितिले केवर उद्योग चलार पृष्ठ ६

अट उत्पादन १५ प्रतिशत घटले अनुमान पृष्ठ १०

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व्यू बिजिनेस एज (प्रा) लि.को प्रस्तुति फोन नं: ४४२९८९६, ४४२९८९३, २०३००८२, फ्याक्स: ९७७-९-४४२९८९३ ईमेल: abhiyan@newbusinessage.com
आजको अभियानका स्थानीय वितरकहरू: काठमाडौं उपत्यका: आरवी न्यूज, न्यू रोड, ४२४४६७७, ४२३२७८४, पोखरा: न्यू रोड, ०६९-४३८९९३, भरतपुर: नारायणगढ चौक, ०६५-४३०६६८, बिराटनगर: महेन्द्र चौक, ०२९-४३२३८७

Hit for all you're worth

Tips for playing competitive tennis, no matter your level

The best part of tennis for me is the competition. Although I no longer play tournaments, I still find time to play a set or two every week with my friends and students. This keeps my competitive juices flowing and allows me to coach better. I am in touch with the emotions of the game and can relate to the frustrations of my players. Trust me: tennis can be very challenging mentally. How can you become a better competitor?

Focus on preparation

Repetition = consistency = confidence = execution. There is no substitution for this model. You have to put in the time on the court, in the gym and on the track. Easier said than done, right? It takes dedication and sacrifice to hit an extra basket of serves, run that second mile or do one more set of squats. 'Failing to prepare is preparing to fail'.

GAME POINT
Sujay Lama



Sweat the small stuff

Take care of the little things because they all add up. Getting enough sleep, eating healthy, being well hydrated and having your playing gear ready before a match or tournament are some examples. Attention to detail is what separates the great players from the good ones.

Be mentally tough

At all levels of play, what separates the winners from the losers is mental toughness. When you compete, expect to feel pressure. Yes, there could be extrinsic pressure such as the expectations of your parents or coaches, but really, 90 percent of the pressure is internally generated. If you enjoy competing, you want to win and that creates tension. Being mentally tough means embracing this pressure and using it to your advantage.

Deal with pressure

When you are nervous, a couple of things occur. You stop breathing and that means you are short of oxygen. When that happens, you are



incoherent and cannot make good decisions. You also stop moving your feet. Take deep breaths between points and games and exhale when you strike the ball. The grunts you hear from Sharapova when she plays is her way of exhaling and keeping

relaxed. Move your feet when you are feeling tight because this helps with blood circulation. Plus, you will be alert to react quickly on the court.

Talk positively to yourself

It is natural to get down on yourself when things are not going your way. Be aware of your emotions and make sure you convert them into positive energy. The way you do this is by having a positive 'self-talk' internally, or for some of us vocally. It is ok to be frustrated and release your emotions once in a while. Use positive words and self-affirmation, such as 'come on, 'let's go, and 'move my feet'.

Use good rituals

We all like routines. They give us a sense of stability and comfort. While competing, you want to fall back on your rituals. These can be such things as examining your racquet's strings after a point or bouncing the ball three times before you serve. One of my favourite rituals is to walk and touch the fence whenever I lose a point. It slows me down and I am able to focus better for the next point.

Fake it till you make it

No matter how bad you are playing or how well your opponent is playing, act like you are in command. You do not want your opponent to know you are frustrated or flustered. Adversity is part of the game and life. Take the challenge and enjoy the battle.



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December sky

Coming soon: winter solstice and Orion the hunter

The December sky is dominated by **Orion** (*Mrigashira*). It is one of the largest constellations in the sky and also one of the easiest to find because of the distinctive three stars (*Tin-tare*) that make up the Hunter's 'belt'. Embedded in the 'dagger' is the Orion Nebula (M42), birthplace of young stars.

STAR GAZING
Kedar S Badu



Like any successful hunter, Orion is accompanied in the sky by faithful 'dogs': Canis Major and Canis Minor. Canis Major is the home of **Sirius**, the brightest star in the sky. Other celestial highlights in December:

The Sun

The sun is 'travelling' eastwards through the constellation of Ophiuchus and crosses the border into Sagittarius on the 18th.

The Earth

The earliest sunset of the year is on the 12th and the latest sunrise is on the 31st. Between them lies the Winter Solstice, which this year occurs on 22 December at 0020, making it the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere.

The Moon

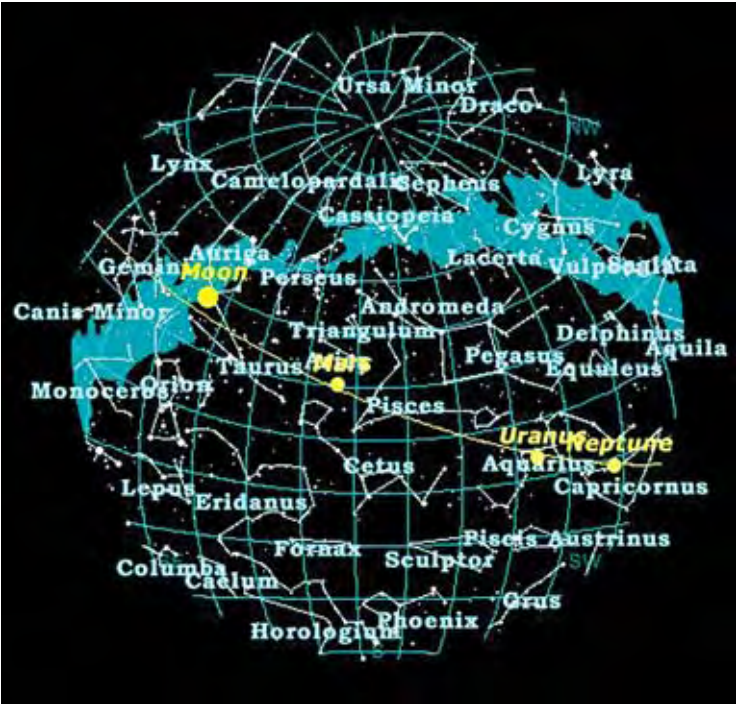
There are two new moons this month, on 1 and 31 December. On 5 December, the moon is at perigee, the closest point to earth in its monthly orbit, at a distance of 367,365 km. On the day of the winter solstice, the moon reaches apogee, at its greatest distance from the earth (405,014 km).

Mercury

Mercury appears before dawn during the first half of the month. This quick moving planet reaches its greatest elongation west of the sun on the 12th, at an angular distance of 21°. At this time, it rises a full two hours before the sun. Jupiter will be ahead of Mercury at a distance of 20°.

Venus

Venus will grab our attention after sunset as the 'Evening Star' just above the western horizon. It



will pair dramatically with the moon on 4 December and reach greatest brilliancy on 9 December when it will outshine everything in the sky. This is a good time to observe the crescent phase of the planet, which can be seen even through binoculars.

Mars

Mars is out nearly all night and is magnificent as it hangs slightly below the major stars of Aries. As the month progresses, the planet begins to fade in brightness as Earth leaves it behind in its orbit. On 12 December, the gibbous waxing moon approaches Mars.

Jupiter

Jupiter is a bright 'Morning Star' pulling away rapidly from the sun so that by the end of December, it rises almost five hours before the sun. Just ahead of Mercury all month, it enters Libra, its home, for the next year. It rises at 0412 on 1 December and will be near the Crescent Moon on 26 December. Don't forget to look out for the planet's four major moons, visible even through binoculars.

Saturn

It rises at around 2135 in the beginning of the month and brightens beyond the zero-magnitude threshold in advance of its opposition next month. Saturn will be near the Moon on 19 December. You won't be able

to see its rings but can see the glorious beehive star cluster above and to the right of the planet.

Uranus and Neptune

Uranus is amongst the faintest stars in Aquarius and will be 2° north of the Moon on 7 December. Neptune will be among the faint stars of Capricornus in the western quadrant of the sky by nightfall.

Pluto

Time to revise your idea of Pluto. New images from the Hubble Space Telescope have revealed that this distant planet could have two additional moons. Pluto and Earth are aligned on opposite sides of the Sun this month.

Meteor Showers

The heaviest Geminid meteor showers take place overnight from 12 to 15 December. You should be able to see these bright fast moving shooting stars overnight. Unfortunately, the 97 percent illuminated Moon will obscure all but the very brightest of the Geminids. The **Ursids** peak on 22 December and have a peak hourly rate of about 10. The 55 percent illuminated Moon doesn't rise until after 11 pm so you could be lucky to catch some shooting stars.

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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



Shopping in Nepal

"Looking for a Fresh Piece"

"Quote of the Week"
"Whoever said money can't buy happiness simply didn't know where to go shopping."
-- Bo Derek, Hollywood Star and Author of Everything that Matters in Life I Learned from Horses

#93 2062 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

The Adventures of HeroJig can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Don't Turn Your Back On All Our daughters: Keep The Promise.** Oil Paintings of trafficked survivors from Maiti Nepal's Women Rehabilitation Home by Jan Salter, 3-7 December, Rashtriya Sabha Griha Lobby, 9-13 December at Yala Maya Kendra.
- ❖ **Nature's Fantasy** based on Oriental art technique by Hare Ram Joju at Park Gallery, until 2 December. 4419353
- ❖ **Images of a Lifetime** featuring the works of the late Tej Bahadur Chitrakar at NAFA Balmandir till 5 December.
- ❖ **The Desmond Doig Exhibition** featuring watercolors and drawings, until 6 December at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4438979
- ❖ **Photographs** by Susan Griffiths Jones, until 7 December, Lajimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Rhythm of Forms and Colours** solo exhibition by Surendra Pradhan, at Buddha Gallery till 9 December. 4441689

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

- ❖ **AWON Christmas Bajar**, 3 December at Hotel Hyatt Regency. Rs 100.
- ❖ **Variety Show** to raise funds for the earthquake victims of Kashmir. 3 and 4 December at Rato Bangala School. Tickets available at Dhokaima Cafe and Rato Bangala School. 5522614
- ❖ **Bungee and Rafting** 10 December, Rs 450 per person (travel, breakfast and lunch). Additional Rs 800 for rafting and Rs 1500 for bungee jumping.
- ❖ **Batch of '95** invites all Friends and Families of St. Xavier's and St. Mary's to celebrate Christmas and New Year at GAA Hall, 23 December, Rs 299, live music, free snacks, dance and more.

MUSIC AND PERFORMANCES

- ❖ **Tata Baji Lai Lai**, an improvisational play directed by Morten Crough, 2 -17 December, 4PM, Gurukul. 4466956, 2101332
- ❖ **Extreme Jam** with various artists at Moksh, 2 December. 7.30 PM, Rs 150. 5526212
- ❖ **The Kathmandu Chorale** presents winter concert at the British School, 10 December, 3.30 PM and 6PM.
- ❖ **Live Music** every Friday 7PM at Rum Doodle 40,0001/2 ft. bar.
- ❖ **JCS Quintet** at Moksh every Tuesday. 5526212
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Live Jazz** by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272

FOOD

- ❖ **Ciney and Par-e-jat** every Friday from 7PM onwards at Dwarika's. 4479448
- ❖ **Plat du Jour** at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-La. . 4412999
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** at Fusion, Dwarika's, happy hour 5-9PM.
- ❖ **The Sidewalk BBQ** with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Ciney and Par-e-jat** every Friday 7PM at Dwarika's.
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Jazz Gourmet** fine dining redefined at Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Come Meet Santa at Shangri-La Village, Pokhara**, Rs 4999 per person on twin Share. (061) 521995
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, Christmas and New Year offers. 4361500
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Junglewalks**, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Conferences** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

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Sunny Malhotra is writer who has carved a name for himself writing for the Times of Hindustan. A bit of a cynic, he believes he is a self-made man. However, Michael Burnett, 51, is a simple man and an optimist. Burnett has recently landed a job as a pizza delivery boy at Mummy's Pizza. On the eve of Diwali, Sunny has loads of stuff to do and very little time. He has to meet his deadline and has a date with Maya, a South Indian superstar who he has been in love with since as long as he can remember. In this confusion, Sunny forgets that there nothing to eat and orders a pizza that Michael delivers. But what Michael delivers to Sunny is so much more than just a pizza.

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NEPALI WEATHER



KATHMANDU

by MAUSAM BEED

Good riddance to November, when the Valley saw nothing but cold days and not a drop of rain. The latest satellite pictures show a chain of two emerging cyclones over the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea with a shallow westerly front hanging over Kashmir. Early this week the cyclones sucked out everything from our sky, including the recently formed layer of haze over the plains, thus paving the way for bright sunny days and clear night skies. As a result, we saw a sudden drop in morning temperatures and lots of fluctuations in humidity levels. With no clear signs of westerlies arriving, there is a strong possibility that sunny days will continue throughout this weekend. Bundle up in the morning as the temperature is expected to go well below five degrees.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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र छाडा हुनु उस्तै हो ।
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समयानुकूल परिमार्जन गर्दै
राम्रा पक्षहरूलाई सगर्व
अनुसरण गर्नुपर्छ ।
आधुनिकताका नाममा
सभ्यताहीन र छाडा
प्रवृत्तिलाई प्रश्रय दिनु हुँदैन ।
बरु समय, स्थान र परि
स्थितिअनुरूप आधुनिक
प्रविधि सीप र शैलीलाई
संयमतापूर्वक ग्रहण गर्दै
जानुपर्छ । यसैमा सबैको
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श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग



ROYAL WELCOME: King Gyanendra being greeted at Cairo International Airport on Monday.



ANIMAL LIKE: Dr Jane Goodall imitates a chimpanzee's call for the attentive audience during her 'Reason for Hope' talk at Patan Museum on Wednesday.



USER FRIENDLY: Sabitra Khadka, 17, trying to type with her toes at the launch of the Nepali interface pack for Windows XP in BICC on Monday.



REALLY ROCKIN': BB Karki, director of the Trade Promotion Centre (wearing a topi) eyes the glittering specimens on display at Nepal's first rocks and minerals exhibition held at GAA Hall this week.



VICTORY HOTEL: Elated members of the Soaltee Crowne Plaza team pose for pictures after winning the 2005 Super Sixes at the TU ground on Sunday.



Music for Nepal

It would probably sound rather ambitious for a rising American rock band to claim that it's out to save the world. But for three-year-old Hooch from Minnesota state, it's the little differences their small contributions make that gives them a special zing. Although none of them had ever stepped foot on Nepali soil before this year, the members of this roots-rock reggae ensemble decided they would make their contribution to humanity by helping underprivileged children in Nepal, donating the money they made at their concerts to schools in Nepal. "What is so little for us in the States can go so far here and the idea was always to tie the music with a cause. It's not just about partying," said Marcus Glodell, 28, Hooch's

bassist and vocalist. Their contribution may seem small to some people but the little that the band has given was enough to see 25 primary school kids through two years of schooling in a village in Jhapa and to buy musical instruments for Sankhu Palubari Community School in Sankhu. After making friends with Nepalis living in the US, Hooch became hooked on this country. They not only donate for schools and charities like Hoste Haisain but have also tied up with Training For Development and the Kathmandu Trading Company (KTC) to have their merchandise, such as T-shirts, cards and bags, produced in Nepal. Jesse Schultz, managing partner of KTC

and the band's manager, is ecstatic. "Demand for Hooch merchandise manufactured in Nepal is growing. 2005 was amazing and 2006 is going to be even bigger." The five-member band has released two albums. Their first, *Kick the Dog*, was a home production recorded in a record six days and released in March 2004. Their music is a mix of classic rock, reggae and psychedelic combined with a bit of funky jazz and a touch of new age alternative vibe. The rock influence is unmistakable. The second album, titled after the band itself, has already been released locally in the US. Hooch will play in Nepal next spring. ● Alok Tumbahangphey

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NO MORE YELLOW



Interview with Comrade Awesome

The interview last week by Comrade Awesome on the British Bombastic Corporation (BBC) was a cowardly and craven attempt to garner cheap publicity and the nation can heave a sigh of relief that his unspeakable utterances did not defile our ears, thanks to some quick thinking by the vigilant folks at the Ministry of Lip Service and Tongue Lashing.

UNDER MY HAT

Kunda Dixit



However, it is only now becoming clear what a close shave we all had. The dramatic behind-the-scenes sequence of events that led to us being within a hare's breath of having to listen to The Fierce One's propaganda can now finally be revealed because our intrepid investigative reporters went underground to dig up a blow-by-blow account of how the nefarious plan was foiled.

It was prompt and courageous intervention by alert security personnel that thwarted the interview

from being aired just in the nick of time. All you members of the Special Forces Rapid Reaction Team who took part in the daring raid on Radio Sagarmatha on Sunday night in an audacious counter-terrorism commando operation please stand up. A round of applause, ladies and gentlemen, to these brave men who marched straight into the jaws of certain death with scant regard for life and/or limb in a perfectly coordinated attack against a heavily fortified radio station in Bakhundol defended by deadly and battle-hardened RJs.

At precisely 2100hrs the commandos synchronised their watches to GMT and stealthily scaled the outer perimeter of the target area and neutralised two guards from the Kalinchok Security Agency who were clad in pyjamas and heavily armed with a nightstick and a torch. By 2103hrs they had stormed the building in a three-pronged pincer movement. There was hand-to-hand combat in the downstairs corridor where the commandos successfully

wrested lethal hardware like tape recorders and ballpoint pens from enemy radio announcers.

At that very moment, another crack unit equipped with night-vision goggles was able to breach the defences of the studio room where it successfully deactivated booby-traps shaped like microphones and some explosive radio active material in the satellite relay room. Four hard-core journalists were captured, Radio Sagarmatha was liberated and the nation rescued from certain doom.

Now that we have it all behind us, we can finally reveal the full text of that interview with Comrade Shock and Awe making it clear why it couldn't be allowed to go on air:

BBC: So, Mr Awesome, you are one cool dude. How does it feel to give your first radio interview?

Comrade Awesome: So very kind of you to give us the air time so that it will be the government that will be seen as an enemy of free press and not us. It's great to have them do the dirty work for us.

BBC: And how is the revolution going these days?

CA: We are taking big leaps forward in the long march to total victory through this phase of our strategic counteroffensive tunnel and bunker campaign against running-dog imperialists, their regional hegemonistic expansionist puppets and domestic feudal fascist mongrels by bravely closing community-managed schools, valiantly extorting teachers, courageously abducting school children and taking them to undisclosed locations and heroically blowing up buses. So I'd say things are pretty much going according to plan.

BBC: Awesome.

CA: As long as I have you on the line, Rabindraji, can I ask you a question?

BBC: Shoot.

CA: Since the national anthem has the word 'Prachanda' in it, don't you think the government should ban it as well?



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