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Weekly Internet Poll # 277

Q. What do you think of the new council of ministers appointed by the king?

Total votes: 4,867

Approve 36.2%
 Disapprove 59.1%
 Don't know 4.7%

Weekly Internet Poll # 278. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Is it right for the main political parties to boycott municipal and general elections?

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NARESH NEWAR
in NAGARKOT

The festival was in full swing on Wednesday night at the Kali Debi temple on the eve of the full moon. Up to 300 people were offering prayers, others were dancing to blaring pop music.

It was ten at night and Soni Gurung was selling fruits in her small shop. Sujan Shrestha, receptionist of Club Himalaya resort, was there with his friends. Tsiring Lama was watching the people from a terrace.

Suddenly, members of the feared Pipalbot gang and Sgt Basudeb Thapa from Nagarkot got into a fight. They had a history of enmity and both were drunk.

The ruffians from Pipalbot village were notorious for bullying villagers. They started beating up Sgt Thapa, who took out a knife and slashed one of them before driving off.

When Soni Gurung saw Sgt Thapa return, he had a gun but she didn't think much of it. By this time, the Pipalbot gang had fled. But Sgt Thapa walked up to the temple's wall and started firing with his INSAS assault rifle.

Soni saw Sujan Shrestha get a bullet in his stomach. Others also fell, killed or wounded, and there was a blind stampede.

When the shooting stopped, Basudeb was dead. Some eyewitnesses said he shot himself, while some think he was shot by another soldier. Of the 12 dead, three were women, one of them hit in the head as she knelt to pray. At least 19 were injured, three of them women and five children.

Sita Nagarkoti, was sitting at home when she heard the gunfire. She ran to the temple where her husband Ram Lal Nagarkoti had gone to pour mustard oil on the lamps. When she found him he was already dead with three bullet wounds. The Nagarkotis have a 12-year-old daughter.

COLD BLOOD



Sita Nagarkoti, waits to claim her husband's body outside the morgue in Bhaktapur on Thursday. The Kali Debi temple in Nagarkot and a cap with a bullet hole.




KIRAN PANDAY

Twelve hours after the incident, when we reached the temple the flagstones were still caked with dried blood, bullet holes riddled the prayer flags, there was a red cap with a bullet hole lying on a sack soaked with blood.

Villagers who had been victims of the ruffians wanted them caught, and the army was hunting for them. At Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital where the 12 bodies were lined up, the mood was angry. Villagers shouted slogans calling the soldiers 'terrorists'. Some were carrying party flags and the slogans were getting politicised.

The army, for once, swiftly went into damage control mode. The Home Ministry to set up a civilian investigation led by a former chief justice, announcing a Rs150,000 compensation to next of kin. Members of the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the NHRC were also at the site Thursday to investigate.

Contrary to first reports, what happened at the Kali Temple on Thursday night was a gang fight gone tragically wrong. ●

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MONKEY WRENCH

If anyone needed a reminder of the hair-trigger situation the country is in two weeks before the Maoist ceasefire ends, the Nagarkot carnage is it. This is what happens when a country slides towards militarisation and the state's security apparatus ends up alienating the very people it was set up to protect.

Wednesday night's heinous slaughter of innocents may have been an isolated act by a soldier running amok. But it is yet another blot on the RNA's dismal human rights record. This time the army reacted swiftly with a statement providing full details and promising an investigation. It needs to make sure there is no coverup this time and that the families of the dead and wounded are properly and promptly compensated. Otherwise the public's worst fears, that something is seriously rotten in the army's discipline and morale, will be confirmed.

All we can hope for now is that nothing will derail the movement towards peace that began with the party-rebel pact. The Pink Palace has two choices: to build on the agreement or to wreck it.

To turn the Maoist MoU with the parties into a tripartite agreement and steer the country back to peace, stability and development would be the right path. But the royal regime appears to take the agreement as a direct threat. Going by his track record over the past three years, the king thinks he can ride this out and even seems to be working on a parallel deal with the Maoists.

For a brief moment last week we were almost tempted to be optimistic after seeing the new faces in the reshuffled cabinet. In Singha Darbar's vast corridors of mediocrity, Kesar Bahadur Bista, Kamal Thapa and Narayan Singh Pun stand out as doers. You may not agree with them but they are not the shrill sycophants we are used to seeing. And because Pun was the architect of the 2002 peace process with the Maoists, there was speculation the royal regime was finally responding, albeit indirectly, to the initiative taken by the parties and the Maoists towards peace.

But the pronouncements that the new ministers have made in their first week in office indicate their terms of reference are solely to conduct municipal elections. What a waste of talent to have these guys as just window-dressing for a showcase poll and put them in charge of a demoralised bureaucracy already micro-managed by royal cronies.

Rebuilding democracy

There is need for an international guarantee

A forest user group in Rolpa recently withdrew the few thousand rupees it had in a Libang bank and bought polythene pipes. It wasn't immediately necessary, so why did they buy pipes? Just a few days earlier a neighbouring forest group had lost all its Rs 40,000 savings to Maoist extortion. Converting cash to pipe was a hedge against plunder.

GUEST COLUMN
Bihari K Shrestha



Such episodes are far from uncommon. So much for the 'popular support' the Maoists are supposed to have even in their proclaimed heartland. Despite the recent Maoist-seven party deal, therefore, the rebels have yet to win the hearts and minds of the people.

One logic of the 1990 People's Movement was that once Ratna Park is filled with agitating Kathmanduites regime change follows. For the last three years,

this is the feat that disgruntled politicians have been trying to repeat without success.

To add to their woe, one or more of their constituents occasionally allowed themselves to be lured away by ministerial berths. It was indeed this obsession with money and power during the dozen years of their incumbency that devastated the country and birthed the Maoist rebellion. The silent majority felt relieved when King Gyannedra stepped in on 1 February.

Indeed, the compulsion for the politicians to make money was hardwired into the kind of 'democracy' we adopted. Given the widespread illiteracy and poverty votes were bought in winner-takes-all elections. This forced most politicians to resort to corruption, despite the sacrifices many of them

made in the build up to the popular uprising in 1990.

These politicians now confess having "made mistakes" but, addicted as they have been to minting money, they stop short of proving to the people how they wont be corrupt again. And with the same tainted faces around, people refuse to converge on Ratna Park and have withheld support despite the parties referring to themselves as "representative political parties" in the 12-point pact.

With no help coming from the Nepali people, the politicians went a-begging in India only to play right into the hands of the Maoists. But judging by their utterances lately, they seem to be having second thoughts and itseemed they just wanted to use Maoist bogey to scare the king



With time running out on the one-month ceasefire extension and after the Nagarkot incident, the palace needs to respond positively to the party-rebel agreement and tighten the bolts on a tripartite peace process. A monkey wrench can be used to put a spanner in the works but it is really meant to be a tool to fix things.

LETTERS

CRAZY
Although Ashutosh Tiwari's attempt in his Strictly Business column to apply game theory to the political gridlock between the King, the Maoists and the political parties ('Crazy as a strategy', #276) is an admirable step in beginning a more rigorous discussion of the political crisis in Nepal, his analysis is inadequate on two counts. First, he recommends that the parties play irrational strategies to make future threats credible but he fails to recognise that the political parties together do not form a single collective institution that is opaque in the way the Maoists and palace are. Their agenda is developed in a discursive manner (as the open publication of Tiwari's own article suggests). So their strategy to play some irrational strategies for the sake of making other threats credible would be common knowledge both to the Maoists and the monarch, whose responses would take that knowledge into account, resulting in suboptimal outcomes for the political parties. Therefore, without a more robust mechanism for making threats it

is unlikely that Tiwari's recommendations will be useful. (They may even be counter-productive.)

Second, Tiwari accuses the parties of 'never pose[ing] a credible threat to the palace and the Maoists' but it is not clear that they were ever in a position to do so. He suggests replacing 'old politicians with stridently republican ones', but does not offer a mechanism by which to do this. Since intra-party games determine which individuals emerge as the leaders, what is required first is a more in-depth analysis of leadership evolution within parties. Further, it is unlikely that 'call[ing] the palace's bluff' and 'tak[ing] part in internationally supervised elections', is even a feasible strategy. I am not convinced that foreign countries or organizations would be willing and able to supervise elections in Nepal (and recognise their outcomes) without the palace's consent.

Tiwari is right, however, that for the parties to actually succeed they need to be more creative. The application of a well-known result in bargaining theory—that the bargaining outcome depends on

the disagreement payoffs (ie: what each party gets if negotiations break down)—tells us that because the parties do not receive much in a stalemate or breakdown of talks, they do not have many bargaining chips to work with. Given these shortcomings, it is my conjecture that a more sound game theoretic analysis that seeks to maximise party payoffs would construe well-defined mechanisms for cooperation between the parties and the Maoists, or unity between the parties and the palace. I am inclined to believe that unity between the parties and the palace would yield better payoffs for the country *and* for the palace, as opposed to the development of the parties-Maoist alliance that we are witnessing now.

Avidit Acharya, email

RED, GREEN, BLUE
Out of the country for a couple of weeks, I was surprised to be on your 'quote of the week' (From the Nepali Press, #276) and so were my friends who wanted to know where I had said that the Maoists were 150 years behind in their thinking. A very nice apology by your reporter cleared the matter: it was an interview in *Nepal*

magazine 15 months ago. With hindsight, after my irritation subsided, I realised that the content of the quote was indeed 'eternal', although the context in which it was stated needs elaboration. It is not just the Maoists but the entire Marxist fraternity that is an epitome of regression, since they base their agenda on an analysis of unbridled capitalism of the mid 19th Century. Since then, capitalism has transformed itself, as well as the world, so fundamentally that today's battles for social justice need newer social science insights. Marx's egalitarian critique was used by Lenin, Stalin and others in the pantheon right down to Pol Pot, to justify an extremely hierarchic order of politburo dictatorship. Indeed, South Asian Marxists following the Leninist path remind one of neo-Brahmins using the Hirsute One as a new *Manu Smriti* to foist another despotic order. In this globalised world, the vanguards on the fight for social equity are no longer the Reds but the Greens, and very often quite pleasantly, the Blues from 'sustainable development' businesses. Thank God, the

Bearded One famously said: "As far as I know, I am not a Marxist!" His egalitarian Marxian critique still has points of usefulness for the Greens and the Blues in converting the globalised world into a kinder, gentler place: no society, however, has come to much good with Red Marxist thinking.

Dipak Gyawali, Patan

SILENT MAJORITY
Narayan B Thapa's Guest Column 'Let the people decide' (#276) shows he is one of those who continue to pretend as if nothing has happened. With all his pseudo-reasoning about people's power to decide the fate



into submission.

But the Maoists are laughing out aloud because they got the parties to agree to just about everything they wanted: 'abolition of autocratic monarchy', 'forming an all-party government', and 'holding elections to a constituent assembly'. Bingo.

Given that it was mostly NC cadres who were slaughtered by the Maoists during the last ten years it is anybody's guess what price they will again have to pay should their leaders backtrack on the deal. It has been an act of sheer foolhardiness for the NC to have embarked on such mindless adventurism, especially when Girija Koirala has never been known to love communists and had even reneged on an agreement two years ago refusing to endorse fellow alliance leader Madhab Nepal to become prime minister.

In a recent seminar in Katmandu a participant lamented "we are so far from God and so close to India". While India continues to torment Nepal with problems such as Bhutani refugees, border dams, Maoist safe havens, etc it now seems poised to further tighten the noose particularly after King Gyanendra's recent successful bid to have its regional rival, China, inducted as observer in the SAARC.

Nepal has now arrived at the same position as Cambodia during the Vietnam War when King Narodom Sihanouk had demanded international guarantee for his country's sovereignty, neutrality and territorial integrity. The Americans refused. Nepal now must seek just such a guarantee at least from its immediate neighbours India and China so that we can reinvent a largely corruption-free democracy that can live in peace with itself. ●

Clichés in the corridor of power

There is a self-defined category of Nepalis which prides itself for being in the know

By completely ignoring the 12-point understanding between the Maoists and seven-party alliance the regime probably thought it would just go away. They don't like to listen to what they don't want to hear.

It fell upon that loose canon, Satchit Shumsher to shoot down the prospect of mainstreaming the Maoists. "We didn't start the war so why should we declare a

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



ceasefire," has been the official line. One thing you can say for the general, he doesn't flinch from using clichés.

Curiously, though, newly appointed royal ministers such as Narayan Singh Pun and Kamal Thapa are making conciliatory noises. The rumour mills have started churning out reports of back channel overtures to the rebels via a team led by Vice-chairman Kirti Nidhi Bista. When the exercise of power is as centralised and murky as it is in Nepal today, there is suspicion, mutual acrimony and self-doubt between the players. Fear and insecurity haunts even the most determined.

Every move in politics has to be made by assuming all possible countermoves by every other player in the game of power. There is a danger that when the power-wielder becomes so obsessed with manipulating others, he will lose sight of why he is doing the manipulation in the first place. Theoretically, it's almost impossible to devise a faultless scheme that takes care of all the shifting permutations of alliances and counter-alliances



DEEPENDRA BAURACHARYA

with enemies of the friends of enemies.

Manipulative rulers know how to play upon the hopes and fears of their opponents by pouncing on them with an element of surprise. Successful players do the next best thing to performing to the script, they play by impulse, pretend to have a plan and let their opponents keep guessing.

So far, King Gyanendra has played his hand exceptionally well. But like in all games of chance, past success is no guarantee of future triumphs. Aware of the risk, the palace is perhaps planning yet another move to confuse its supporters, confound its critics, and keep all others guessing.

In knowledgeable circles (this is a self-defined category of Nepalis whose members pride themselves for being in the know) there is a rumour going around

that the chief executive is contemplating appointment of a prime minister. And the buzz is that a negotiating committee, "probably" under Vice-chairman Bista has already been formed to talk to the insurgents.

The strategy seems to sideline the party-rebel agreement with a parallel deal for which the king will get kudos. The palace believes that if it has India's nod the plan will work. After that, parliamentary elections can be preponed, municipal polls postponed thereby placating the international community and exerting pressure on the political parties to reconsider their boycott.

The palace-military establishment has adroitly played its China Card to rattle paranoid sections of the Delhi Darbar and divide Indian policy on Nepal. (General Pyar's Pakistan visit was just to rub it in a little more.) The statement issued at the end of

Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran's visit this week seems to confirm that the palace has succeeded in checkmating the Indians at their own game. The official Indian statement consciously avoids using the 'D' word. Democracy is nowhere mentioned amidst the usual homilies to peace and good-neighbourly relations. The statement grandly declares 'the restoration of peace and stability and economic recovery in Nepal is not only in the interest of Nepal but also in India's interest'.

What about democracy, Mr Saran?

To his everlasting credit, Lord Snow recognised the value and utility of convenient clichés. In explaining why he had used his own familiar phrase as the title for his novel *Corridors of Power*, he is supposed to have said: "If a man hasn't the right to his own clichés, who has?" ●

of the nation, he reiterates the defunct rhetoric that 'monarchy is the symbol of national unity'.

His recourse to the 'silent majority' theory is full of contradiction, even if one assumes that he has the knack of hearing the silence. If the silent majority, whoever they are, by definition don't speak, how does he know that the so-called silent majority 'would like the king to have an important inspirational role in the future of the nation'? His shadowy vindication of this 'inspirational role' is based on the defunct rhetoric of national unity. How can the monarchy be the symbol of national unity when the king has become the symbol of unity of only the few royal cronies, ex-convicts, panchyati outcasts, vigilantes and Hindu fundamentalists? The fact is, people like Thapa chose to reiterate a myth that has lost its relevance and, for that matter, the power of its rhetoric.

Aniruddha Thapa, email

● Your editorial ('Reshuffling the pack', #276) and cover story 'All the king's men' in the same issue leads me to wonder when this farce will end. In a game of cards, all players attempt to win but the

latest cabinet reshuffle is a sure 'lose-lose' game (and will continue to be so until constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy are restored). Besides, every royal-appointed cabinet is an exercise in futility as they are not accountable to the people. What is common to the new inductees is that they all share the same enthusiasm for opportunism and possess little personal integrity themselves. They are not only the last group of people who will resolve Nepal's crisis but their very induction exacerbates the crisis. In this new pack, there are no aces. Rather, the entire team may be aptly referred to as a bunch of jokers.

S Shrestha, email

● The latest news about misappropriation of poor NEA vehicles goes to show how blatantly unaccountable the authorities now consider themselves. Do they think they are employees of the royal palace or what? The month long extension of the ceasefire is going to expire and the indication so far is government's response will not be positive. Peace is still a far cry.

I Pradhan, email

CLASSROOMS

As a mother and former teacher, I am acutely aware of the severe discipline problems in many American schools cited in Shradha Ghale's Nepali Pan column ('In their classroom', #275). We used to have firm discipline way back when I was in school where teachers were respected and cutting up was not tolerated. No more. That said, I see Nepal schools teaching conformity, drawing within the lines, no going outside of the status quo. Societies that want to thrive and change and prosper need imagination, vision, big dreams and people willing to be crazy enough to make those dreams reality.

Maggie Namjou, email

CORRECTIONS

The article 'Tusker trophy' (#276) erroneously stated that all the elephants used in the tournament came from the Royal Chitwan National Park. In fact, eight of the 16 were from Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge.

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Electrocuting the NEA

The government is readying a controversial electricity ordinance

RAJENDRA DAHAL

The government is working on a new Electricity Ordinance that will splinter the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) into at least three outfits to manage generation, transmission and distribution.

But even NEA insiders are puzzled about why this has become the government's priority at a time when attention should have gone to tackling a looming power shortage, addressing

unprecedented losses and launching new projects.

Work on the new ordinance was expedited after the controversial appointment of Harish Chandra Shah as the new director of NEA two months ago. Critics said Shah has no background in the power sector and questioned the timing of his appointment.

It is now looking more and more probable that Shah's appointment and discussions on the new ordinance are linked and

aimed at making it easier for favourites to invest in Nepal's power sector through the backdoor.

Senior NEA executives have been kept in the dark about the new ordinance and speculation has grown that the royal regime is eyeing NEA's Rs 60 billion in assets and handing over generation, transmission and distribution to selected partners.

The private sector was asked for suggestions on the electricity ordinance but one source told us

its recommendations weren't included in a draft that was finalised at a retreat in Godavari Resort last month. Some private sector producers are said to be in favour of splitting NEA into three components saying it will make the body more efficient.

But at a time when the government is finding it difficult to get international tenders for Kathmandu Valley's water supply management it is doubtful if there will be any takers for private sector involvement in a fragmented electricity utility. NEA insiders point out that private sector competition in the energy sector has rarely worked in countries like Nepal where big capital outlays, huge infrastructure and long construction periods are required. NEA was set up in 1986 under pressure from the World Bank and other donors.

The uncertainty over the future of the NEA comes at a time when the it is preoccupied with a 40 MW shortfall this winter. There is already an unofficial load-shedding in tarai industries. Last year peak demand reached 557 MW in December and this year it will exceed 594 MW. The big question is where the extra power is going to come from when not a single MW has been added.

Except for the 70 MW Middle Marsyangdi which is to come onstream in 2007, there isn't a single big power project that has been launched since King Gyanendra took over three years ago. There hasn't yet been any concern about what project to undertake after Middle Marsyangdi even though load-shedding reminiscent of the last days of the Panchayat are imminent.

In fact, it is looking increasingly like the post-1990 democracy period literally handed power to the people. Successive elected governments in that period liberalised power generation, allowed joint-venture and private sector investment and increased



the price of electricity by almost 400 percent to make NEA profitable. Between 1998-2002 NEA was making a profit of up to Rs 1.23 billion a year. But in the years since 2002 NEA has amassed losses of up to Rs 5.39 billion.

Even after 2002, successive water resource ministers appointed by the king have tried to manage prices with differential tariffs and other demand-side interventions but these have been turned down because of feared backlash from the urban middle class.

There is now a real danger that NEA will end up in the same rut as the Nepal Oil Corporation which is facing colossal losses and an inability to pay Indian suppliers because of the lack of political will to raise prices.

Power sector analysts say there is no reason why the country should face a dark winter. There are dozens of power projects where feasibility studies, design and infrastructure are already complete. There is no shortage of domestic and foreign investors. An IPO for the Chilime Project this year expected to raise Rs 240 million ended up raising Rs 1.1 billion just from NEA employees.

If only the government could show more interest, donors, international development banks and overseas Nepalis could step in with extra capital. But instead of trying to build on this promise, analysts say the government is trying to fix what ain't broke with the electricity ordinance. ●



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Vision beyond the box

Inflation warning

Inflation has tripled in the first quarter of 2005-6 and could rise further in the near future, Nepal Rastra Bank Governor Bijay Nath Bhattarai told journalists this week. The rate now stands at 7.8 percent up from 2.5 percent during the same period last year. The officials urged the government to pay special attention to maintaining fiscal balance by narrowing the mismatch between available resources and expenditures. NRB Senior Economic Adviser Keshab Acharya said inflation has risen due to the hike in petroleum prices and the increase of the VAT to 13 percent from 10 percent.

Banking on education

Nabil Bank will support education of all children in classes 8, 9 and 10 of the Lubhu-based Mary Ward School. The school provides education to less-privileged children and has close ties with St Mary's School. With the agreement, Nabil now has partnerships in three areas: education, health and sport. It also collaborates with Tilganga Eye Hospital and Nabil Three Star football club.

Eco-guiding

The program Guide Training for Ecotourism will be held in Kathmandu from 16-22 December. Organised with the Asian Development Bank, the South Asia level training aims to establish a resource pool of skilled guides and guide trainers. Participants will come from Nepal, Bhutan, India and Bangladesh while training will be conducted by Nepali and international experts. The program opens on 16 December at Hotel Park Village.

NEW PRODUCTS

AUTO JAVA: Aqua Java has unveiled its Instasip vending machine that offers not only hot coffee but cardamom tea, tomato soup, hot chocolate, café lattes, iced tea and cold coffee. A pioneer in the coffee bar business in India, Instasip is brought to Nepal by Binny Sharma of Sakchi Holdings and Saket Agrawal, CEO of Instastep's parent company Aqua Java.



PETROL SIPPER: The new LML motorcycle has been launched by Nepal dealer Shreeansh Trading Concern. The four-stroke CRD100 was designed and styled in Italy and reaches maximum fuel efficiency of 101 km per litre thanks to its advanced microprocessor-controlled digital ignition.



Whose Trade Organisation?

The WTO lesson for Nepal is: open up and take advantage

The voices in Hong Kong against the WTO will be rising now but they are like the minority parties that take to the streets when two-thirds of the parliament has approved legislation.

This week's meeting is another round of deliberations and the rules of negotiations suggest that might will always be right. This is also true at the WTO. The

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



BIRC countries (Brazil, India, Russia and China) will provide some resistance but getting their way on issues like farm subsidies is a futile fight.

For Nepal two issues are clearly emerging. First, as an LDC (ie, a poor country that does not have the leverage by itself to alter the status quo) it must see what it can get from the world travel regime. Second, we must realise that protectionism is a dying 'ism' and the sooner we embrace the rules of the new game, the better off we will be. Although our entrepreneurs and leaders would like to see protectionism continue, the world's economic heavyweights won't let it happen. Protectionism is a right reserved only for them.

Nepal needs to think outside the box. Farm subsidies will never make our products competitive given the high transportation costs here and the current state of our agriculture. We need to take advantage of the food surplus in our southern neighbour. If Indian rice is cheaper, then why do we grow rice? With India's economy growing just an open border away, we will never run short of food grain. We just need to ensure that the distribution system is efficient.

This can happen if the government gets out of the distribution business. The property owned by the Nepal Food Corporation is worth more as real estate than as storage for grain or at times to incarcerate political activists. Let private business determine distribution and prices. People living in a few isolated pockets in far-flung hills will need to be taken care of by a social security program and not via a government food grain distribution system. Eventually they will migrate to areas where food grain prices are better and opportunities are plenty—it has happened in the past and it will happen again in the future. We can then use available land to embark on some large-scale high value activities such as growing



citrus fruits for multinational companies or developing floriculture to meet the region's growing demand.

Reducing import duties does not kill local industries if they are efficient and professionally managed. Look at Thailand and India—lowering duties there has made local manufacturing more competitive. Arbitrage as business is about being competitive and not about how much one can make from duties. Our focus should be on the export of labour and integrating into larger labour markets. The integration of east European countries into the EU has provided them with labour markets like never before. Here we surely have a competitive advantage.

The future of our farmers p12

Our protected businesses and plethora of morality-policing NGOs will always want the WTO out but since we are now a member, the best way forward is to take the most we can from it. Might as well ride the tiger otherwise it'll eat you up. ●

“No alternative to democracy, like it or not”



As one of Germany's key development agencies, the German Development Service (DED) contributes over \$ 5 million every two years to Nepal but has decided to slash its aid due to the conflict. DED Director Jurgen Wilhelm spoke to us on the importance of democracy and local governance with special emphasis on municipal elections scheduled for February 2006.

Nepali Times: DED has been giving special importance to municipal elections due next year. Why?

Jurgen Wilhelm: At the local level, there's a precondition that we must have elected counterparts to be accountable. With elected people in the government, there will be confidence among the people that the policy will be in good hands because they can trust their elected personnel. Then DED can come in and try to improve the qualification of the administrative staff and infrastructure. But there is so far no elected personnel and only bureaucrats posted in villages by the government. This is why I am keen on the announcement of local elections.

Is DED withdrawing its support in the local governance sector?

Yes because as long as there is no real counterpart, we will withdraw up to 10 persons in different areas. But if there is a positive outcome of hopefully fair and internationally acknowledged local elections next year, we will be ready and willing to improve our engagement in a very short period of time. DED's funding is likely to be slashed from \$ 5 million every two years to \$ 1 million.

How has the new code of conduct for NGOs affected your local partners?

It has so far not affected our cooperation but we will look into this very carefully once the government really brings this through and implements it, in a serious way. German taxpayers are expecting that they are sending their personnel to make a positive impact in this country. But if there is no chance for DED staff to work for development in this country, we will withdraw our people. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam

and many other countries are really waiting for our personnel. We have had a big impact in Nepal for the last 35 years and we would love to continue. But when the conditions change tremendously, we have to think about our consequences.

Are you concerned that the role of local government bodies is diminishing?

Democracy has its basis in the grassroots. When in a democracy, the municipalities and local bodies are not working both efficiently and effectively, this is lack of not only democracy but also a lack of acceptance of the entire system by the population. People will lose efficiency in economy, agriculture and so forth. Who can govern the country from only the capital? You must have people at the local level who are elected and not nominated. And it's not because westerners want it but because it has been our experience after 50 years of international cooperation that whenever there is no basic democratic structure existing, the country will fail. This is why the communist and socialist countries failed. Privatisation, democratisation, open economy, participation, a fair open press and opposition are a necessities for the fruitful future development of every country in the world. There is no alternative to democracy whether you like it or not.

Your advice to the policy makers?

The international community is concerned about the situation in Nepal and we strongly ask the government, the king and all the parties involved to try to find a way out of the current unsatisfactory situation in the country.

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Torture in the time of ceasefire



Nepal, 18 December

नेपाल

Their bodies are covered with bruises. Dhana Bahadur, 52, his son Jhak Bahadur, 15 (*pictured*) and nephew Netra, 12, all look like they need immediate medical attention. “Look at what they did to my family,” says Sukmaya Kumal of Maidikhola in Tanahu with tears in her eyes. Men who identified themselves as soldiers abducted the children while Dhana Bahadur was captured and tortured after he went looking for them. The story starts on 16 November when Sukmaya sent her son and nephew to sell some bananas in Bhimad market. On their way, people on motorbikes cornered the boys and said, “We are with the army, you two have to go and bring back some Maoists for us.” They were told to bring Maoist leaders like Ram Bahadur and Gore to the market. The boys were scared and did not know what to do. “We told them we could not go and asked them to leave us be but they threatened to kill us,” said Netra. Then the captors started beating the boys. The next day they took them to Manpur, where they were asked to sign a letter addressed to their parents. “They did not let me read the letter,” said Jhak Bahadur. After their abductors left, the boys finally met the Maoists. But when they told the rebels that the army was looking for them, the rebels in turn tied the boys up and started beating them. “They made us walk for four days, now our feet are swollen. They kept on calling us spies and did not stop beating us,” said Netra.

Jhak Bahadur was in a terrible state after the beatings and the forced march. He screamed, cried and passed out. His mother Sukmaya panicked when the boys did not return. Two days later, she received the letter they had signed. When the parents went looking for the boys, they were also abducted and beaten by the Maoists, who repeatedly asked them why the boys were spying on them. They were locked up in a small dark room for four days. “They kept telling us how our sons were already dead and now it was our turn to die,” Sukmaya said. When she would not stop crying, they let her meet the children. “Afterwards, they threatened that they were going to kill us if we ever told anyone about being abducted,” she said. Sukmaya said she could not tell us the whole story because she was scared the rebels would come and torture the family again.

The army told us they knew nothing about the reports. “If this incident really took place, someone who wanted to tarnish the army’s reputation must have done it,” said an army official. The human rights group INSEC has promised to conduct a detailed investigation and says its not sure if those who abducted the boys were army personnel. But this much is sure: it was the Maoists who tortured the kids and their parents.

Palace games

Disanirdesh, 12 December

The palace has been using all kinds of tricks to jeopardise the understanding between the Maoists and the seven parties. This is evident by the appearance of former negotiators like Narayan Singh Pun in the council of ministers. As a former go-between for the government and Maoists, Pun has kept in touch with Maoist leaders. It is obvious that he will be used to renew those contacts in order to provoke the Maoists to axe their pact with the parties. Ever since the rebels and parties united to attack the palace, the king has been looking for a way to break this political alliance. He found a solution by appointing Pun, along with Kamal Thapa and Badri Prasad Mandal, as ministers. With this team, the palace is preparing to set up a high-level government delegation to talk with the rebels. Powerful figures in the palace are saying that the Maoists have already given up their demand for a republican system and that the only way to sustain the king’s powers is by breaking the rebel-party agreement. They believe that will be quite simple if the government can reach a level of understanding with the Maoists. But the question is, what does the king have to offer to the Maoists, when key palace figures like Satchit Shamsheer, Tulsi Giri and Kirtinidhi Bista have already condemned the constituent assembly demand.

More violence

Disanirdesh, 12 December

With the controversy provoked by the stoning of Crown Prince Paras’ motorcade in the melee after the 3 December Baneswor rally, few people noted the brutal attack on Ayan Bahadur Magar, a student union member from Amrit Science Campus. Magar nearly died after a bunch of ear-ringed hooligans attacked him with swords and khukuris and left him

for dead in the middle of the city. His own student union and the campus declined to publicise the incident as did the UML, with which he is affiliated. Magar currently lies seriously wounded in hospital. He was assaulted at about 6PM by a group of armed men on six motorcycles who stopped when they saw Magar was alone. They attacked him with the knives, nearly slicing off his arm. Passers-by took him to hospital. “I was scared for the first time in my life. These were hoodlums working under government protection,” says Magar, adding it was the same group that tried to attack the UML office after the Crown Prince stoning incident. He cautions that more student union members (many of whom are hardly known to the public) are at risk of such attacks in the near future.

Fratricidal

Jana Aastha, 14 December

आस्था

It may seem strange that an army officer is in mourning when a Maoist dies. But that is exactly what has happened to Gen Ananta Bahadur Thebe of the East Division Command. In a battle in the east earlier this year, troops under his command killed his nephew who had joined the Maoists. The incident proves that brothers killing brothers is common in a fratricidal war like this. After the unsuccessful attack on the army post Bandipur earlier this year, the army triumphantly announced that it had killed 37 Maoist rebels. The attack coincided with three other raids on army bases in Sarlahi. Among those killed was the 20-year-old son of Gen Thebe’s older brother, Samrat Thebe. Samrat had joined the Maoists while he was in Grade Nine in Taplejung in 2003, and by the time he was killed, had risen to the rank of section commander. Ten other Maoists from Thebe’s home district of Taplejung were killed in battles earlier this year. Also in the Bandipur battle, Maoist sub-platoon commander Dibya Rai was killed while her elder sister, Sita was injured and captured. A picture of Dibya carrying an AK-47 was recently published in Nepali magazines.

King’s roadmap

Samaya, 9 December

समय

So, predictions that the king’s costly trip abroad was a prelude to political changes were true after all. Immediately after meeting with security officials, the king named new ministers to the cabinet, thus proving that he is not yet ready to give up power. With the reshuffle, new entrees like Kamal Thapa and Keshar Bahadur Bista have been given key ministeries. The president of the new Democratic Nepal Party, Bista has been given the fourth most important position in the cabinet, even above that of Ramesh Nath Pandey. The role of vice president of the Council of Ministers, Tulsi Giri, has been limited to the hydropower ministry while the other vice president, Kirti Nidhi Bista, has not been allocated any department. Despite its stance



KIRAN PANDAY

against dialoguing with the rebels, the government chose to bring in Narayan Singh Pun in response to international pressure to reciprocate the ceasefire. Pun has been always in favour of talks with the Maoists. Madhukar Shumser Rana was relieved of his duties as finance minister and other ministers like Dan Bahadur Shahi, Ram Narayan Singh and Khadga Bahadur GC were also removed due to their involvement in the fertiliser scam. The notorious Jagat Gauchan was included in the cabinet on the day that the UN’s Lakhdar Brahimi met the king and requested him to restore democracy. Another important minister, Tanka Dhakal, has been transferred from the information ministry to local development. So far, the parties have remained indifferent to the king’s move but some of the royal appointees are saying that the king wants to appoint a prime minister so that the municipal elections will be held without fail in February. The only question is how the king will manage to elude both an economic crisis and criticism from the international community. He is not ready yet to increase the price of petroleum products because it will be unpopular. And there are already signs the government is becoming openly hostile to India by importing arms from China. Although Delhi has not yet mentioned imposing an economic blockade as it did 18 years ago, there is growing pressure from south of the border that the king reinstate democracy. It is also apparent that the king feels that the street protests led by the political parties have not been strong enough to force him to relinquish his executive powers. Even his isolation from the international community will not budge him.

Mandarins

Nepal Samacharpatra, 9 December

संज्ञाचार्य

At a time when the government is accused of playing the China card, the private sector in Kathmandu has been playing the Chinese language card. The Chinese government has assigned 20 volunteers to teach Mandarin here. About 16 schools are reported to have started teaching Chinese, and Beijing is financing the teachers but the schools are asked to pay for other costs. Students up to class eight are given the language training in popular schools that include Galaxy, Paragon, EPS, LRI, Saraswati Kunj and Kathmandu International. According to government officials, there are preparations underway to include the Chinese language in the



Colour of the Palace
Pink: What you see
Yellow: What you hear

हिमाल

Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 16-30 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Enforcement of the ordinance will have a chilling effect on the media and lead to greater self-censorship as journalists try to predict when authorities will try to silence a newspaper or broadcast or close down whole media operations.”

- Nicholas Howen of the International Commission of Jurists in a report on the Nepali media released on Monday.

curriculum up to the SLC level. Discussions are already being held at the curriculum development centre and in order to get permission from the Education Ministry. The China Study Centre is already operating language training in several parts of the country, including Dharan, Pokhara, Kathmandu and Banepa.

Teacher shortage

Annapurna Post, 9 December

The good news is that enrolment at the Sagarmatha Primary School in Nepalganj more than doubled this year after a government campaign. The bad news is that the number of teachers declined and now only two remain to instruct 750 students. The District Education Office removed the teachers despite the enrolment of a large number of children from Rajhena's displaced peoples' camp and requests from school administrators. The DEO is now depending on NGOs to provide teachers.



Maoist remix

Ghatana ra Bichar, 14 December

The Maoists, who were preparing to increase the size of their armed force before the 12-point agreement with the parties, have decided to dissolve their regional peoples' governments. This will be announced in a week. The central committee meeting held two months ago in Rolpa dissolved the United Revolutionary Peoples Council under Baburam Bhattari and formed a General Convention Organising Committee. Politburo members who were made working coordinators during Baburam's estrangement have been appointed secretaries, while the regional and communal government chiefs were appointed members of the committee. The same organising committee is said to be disbanding the Peoples Liberation Army, five communal governments of the Magarant, Tamang, Madhesh, Tamuwan and Kirant as well as the peoples governments of Bheri-Karnali, and Seti-Mahakali. Changes have already been made in the central leadership of the Maoist affiliated student union and preparations are also being made to reorganise teachers, trade unions and women's organisations. According to sources former commanders of the dissolved eastern, western and mid-division commands Netrabikram Chand (Anant), Nanda Kishore Pun (Pasang) and Janardan Sharma (Prabhakar) have been given equal status posts in an army academy.

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MUNA SHARMA



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

KILLING PEOPLE IS WRONG. Muktinath Adhikari's body was tortured and killed by Maoists. An army honour guard salutes his body in February 2002 after the battle. Students from Krishna Secondary School were killed in 2004 by Maoists after three days of fighting. A woman and Kumle Praja of Jogimara, who were killed in the trench. Maoist leaders Prakash Dahal, Yami, Ram Bahadur Thapa and Duwadi of Thanti in Lamjung while her brother-in-law held. The son of a civilian killed by Kailash Gupta who sells corn. mother died in a Maoist land. Debi Sunuwar, the mother of daughter was dead eight months. Sindhupalchok by the army in

Picturing

Can anyone look at these pictures and come to a conclusion?

LUCIA DE VRIES

War is hard to capture. The heart of war is a schizophrenic place where extremes of love and hate, heaven and hell, touch and ignite each other.

Few photographers can capture this. But when they do the image is never forgotten and sometimes even change the course of history. A little Vietnamese girl, naked, fleeing a napalm attack, the soldier in the Spanish civil war caught at the moment of his death, Saddam's teetering statue or prisoners being tortured at Abu Gharib, these images lie buried in our minds and hearts and have become part of humanity's common consciousness.

When Nepal's conflict began in 1996, it was one without images. There were daily reports of increasing body counts but no photos. We did not know what a *baltin* bomb looked like. Today, with digital photography, Nepali photojournalists have amassed a lot of visuals. My own collection is bulging with photos cut out of newspapers.

A picture of Baburam Bhattarai, Hisila Yami, Ram Bahadur Thapa and Pushpa Kamal Dahal beaming as they watch something 'in an undisclosed location'. I look carefully at their faces: they look so content and united. So well fed. I draw my conclusions but it doesn't tell me much about what war feels like out there.

A destroyed health post in Banke. 'The locals are now deprived of basic medical treatment,' reads the caption. I imagine

children dying of diarrhoeal dehydration, anemic women without iron tablets, untreated broken bones, infecting wounds, women dying at childbirth.

More images of destroyed buildings. Government offices in Charikot, schools in Gurkha, police posts and airports all over the country. I imagine a country bombed back into history, decades of development undone.

Lots of pictures of dead bodies. A pile of policemen bodies in Bhakunde Besi. The first layer of corpses is vertical. The faces seem identical: a wave of thick black hair, well-defined eyebrows, long noses. The second layer consists of policemen with feet pointing at the camera, almost touching the face of a fellow-policeman below. A policeman wearing blood stained gloves pulls the legs of a body towards him. Around the pile are remains of what look like a basket, spades and rocks. Two policemen sit on a low wall, one of them has crossed his legs in a comfortable position.

Pictures of 'Maoist' dead in Khara, scattered across the terrain. Lovely faces, perfectly shaped feet, strong legs—these boys could have been lovers, surgeons, sportsmen, mountaineers.

Then there is one particular picture I can't look at for long. The one of Lamjung teacher Muktinath, Adhikari, crucified against a tree. I know exactly what the Maoists did to this man but don't want to remember. It's enough to watch, for a minute, the image of a dead man on his knees, handcuffed from the back, shirt spilling out of his trousers. It's enough to watch his face, the eyes closed in intense sorrow, mouth slightly open as if still



SURESH SAIJU

SAGAR

S: (Clockwise from top, left)
ies crumpled near his village in Lamjung after he
aoists in 2002.
es fallen comrades at Pashupati's cremation site in
e for Mangalsen.
ndary School in Lalitpur on being released in July
days of forced-marches and indoctrination. Syani
a in Dhading who became widows at age 15 when
y the army in Kalikot in 2002. Bodies of policemen
es of Satbaria after a Maoist raid in April 2002.
nal (Prachanda's son) Baburam Bhattarai, Hisila
nd Prachanda at an undisclosed location. Parbati
lies in a pool of blood after being killed in a crossfire
s her infant son.
y Maoists in Bhaktapur comforts his sisters.
rn on the roadside in Nepalganj is only six, his
mine blast in which his sister Tara was injured.
15-year-old Maina Sunuwar after learning that her
onths after being disappeared from her village in
n February 2004.



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

war

continue the killing?

Wanting to speak: "Don't do things you might later regret." Four years later, I can almost hear Muktinath say: "Don't hurt, don't destroy, don't take life."
Tucked away at the bottom of my folder are pictures of mourning relatives. I can almost touch the war here. An army personel is killed in Rolpa. In Kathmandu relatives cry after hearing the news. The wife is lying on the floor, a man (her brother-in-law?) holds her face with both hands. The man himself is visibly distressed, crying and speaking at the same time. A woman (his sister?) presses the palm of her hand against his face, in comfort. Another man wipes tears from his cheeks and holds the first man by his shoulder. There are many hands reaching out in grief and chaos: a *tableau vivant* depicting the human ability to create and destroy.
A picture that really brings the war home to me is one that hits me like a nail, splits open my head and fills me with revulsion, sadness, compassion. It is Suresh Sainju's picture of three children after the death of their father, a policeman.
The eldest son sits in the middle, sisters on his left and right cling to him. The sister on the left rests her head back a little, her mouth is open. The sister on the right embraces the brother with her left hand and cries into his shoulder. But it is the mother's face that touches me the most. His eyes upon his sisters trying to take it all in his face frozen with thoughts that can't be spoken. The responsibility on those young shoulders, the only male in the family. Rituals, cremations, documents, his sisters' education, money.
Can anyone look at this photo and continue the destruction? ●

Sona

Just before noon on 9 May 2004 a crowded Kathmandu-bound bus from Jiri stopped at Mainapokhari. Suddenly, a fierce firefight broke out between soldiers and the Maoists in the slopes above. The bus was caught in the crossfire and was riddled with bullets. It was all over in 15 minutes, combatants on both sides suffered casualties. Six passengers in the bus were also killed.
In Kathmandu, the media flashed this famous picture of Krishna Maya holding her 20-day-old grand-daughter, Sona, in her lap outside Chhauni Hospital where the little girl's mother, Nani Maya, was being treated after being critically wounded. She survived, but her father, Shobendra Kafle, died on the bus.

Gopal Chitrakar's photograph shocked the nation. No reader who saw this image in *Kathmandu Post* and *Kantipur* last year could have remained dry eyed. Among them was singer and composer Amrit Gurung of the band, *Nepathya*. "For me, that tiny girl symbolised the Nepali nation itself, orphaned, terrorised but with a future ahead of her," Amrit says, recalling how he travelled to Mainapokhari a week after the incident.

The asphalt still had blood stains, the air was still heavy with death and loss. Amrit talked to villagers and eye witnesses. On the drive back, he composed a haunting song in the folk Nepali gaine-inspired rock ballad. The number is the lead song in the *Nepathya* album *Ghatana* which was launched without fanfare on Thursday. The band will soon be going to Mainapokhari to perform at the spot where the incident occurred.

Nepathya will perform *Ghatana* at the Maiti Ghar Shanti Mandala at 5PM on Friday 15 December. Everyone wishing to attend is requested to bring a candle.



Krishna Maya holds her 20-day-old grandchild at the Army Hospital in Chhauni, Kathmandu. The infant luckily survived when 14 people including her father died in a Maoist attack on a bus in Mainapokhari, Dolakha on Sunday.
POST PHOTO/GOPAL CHITRAKAR



MOHAN MAINALI



SUPUT



SHRESTHA



RNA

Let's start seeing children

An event of huge significance happened for some of South Asia's most disadvantaged children in August. They came home. In Lahore they were met by their parents, some of whom were in tears. They had been tricked to become camel jockeys in the Gulf.

COMMENT
Cecilia Lotse



In May the UAE changed its law so that only those aged 18 or over could act as jockeys. This, we hope, will mean an end to the practice of agents preying on children from families who are desperate for them to have a better life but who are not informed of the terrible dangers they face. In a process that is still continuing the Punjab government and UNICEF are working to reunite families and make life better for the returnees, some of whom are still very young.

This intervention demonstrates what can be done when we all—states, families, humanitarian workers and the media—come together to turn around unacceptable practices and conditions. This week UNICEF is publishing a report that is concentrating on children who are 'excluded' and 'invisible'. Too many children are simply not being counted. Too many are not

getting health care or the food they need to develop. Children who are 'invisible' are neglected and made much more vulnerable to abuse.

This is not normal and it should not be ignored. It would be difficult to imagine much of a future for nations that deny the value and potential of up to half the population. South Asia regrettably has some 24 million children who are not registered at birth, which makes it the region with the highest number of unregistered births in the world. This marginalisation plays into South Asia's immense child labour and trafficking problem, which often keeps children locked in poverty through debt bondage and exclusion from education. It is estimated that 43 million children are not enrolled at schools in South Asia and up to 60 percent of those are girls. What happens to girls in South Asia who are denied opportunities? Too often they are robbed of their childhood, with dramatic consequences.

A household survey conducted by UNICEF in 49 developing countries this year suggested that 48 percent of females in South Asia aged 15-24 had married before they were 18. Pregnancy related deaths are the leading cause of mortality for 15-

Don't let South Asia's children be excluded and invisible, says UNICEF

19 year old adolescents worldwide. Those under 15 are five times more likely to die than women in their 20's and their children are less likely to survive.

Keeping large numbers of children excluded and invisible has a high cost. It costs them their rights, and it costs states as they lose out on the benefit of having engaged citizens who are economically thriving.

It need not be like this. South Asia's governments devoted three major points in the SAARC declaration in November to the immediate needs of women and children, and applauded the resolve demonstrated by the ratification of Conventions relating to Trafficking and the promotion of child welfare.

Children need to be included in statistics. Let us 'see' them in government analysis and planning. But in addition let us really see the impoverished, the street child and the tiny domestic worker. And when we see them, let us look them in the eye and let them know that they are not invisible to us. ●

Cecilia Lotse is the regional director for South Asia of the UN Children's Fund.



Every child counts

Nepali children start suffering before they are born because of the exclusion and neglect of their mothers. They are born underweight because their mothers are anemic. Most children don't have birth registration. Many mothers can't take proper care of their babies because of overwork. Then, if they are girls, they suffer through their childhoods working harder and eating less than their brothers. Then they are married, often in childhood and ill-treated by husbands' families.

And still we wonder why the male-female ratio in Nepal is so skewed. Why Nepal is still one of the few places in the world where men on average live longer than women, where the number of women who can read or write is half that of men, and our maternal mortality rate is the highest in Asia.

At the rate we are going, Nepal is unlikely to meet most of the Millennium Development Goals to eradicate extreme hunger, achieve universal primary education, have equal enrolment of girls and halve child mortality by 2015. Nepal has made progress—especially in the 15 years since the restoration of democracy. In 1990 out of 1,000 babies born alive, 145 never lived till their fifth birthday. Today, that number has been halved.

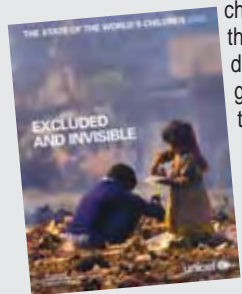
But there are still many children who are left out. They are excluded because they are poor, because they are not from the dominant ethnic groups, because they live in remote areas, because the state either doesn't care or is too inefficient. In Nepal the conflict has worsened child neglect.

Many Nepali children are also invisible because their births are never registered. They don't appear on national statistics and if they are street children, refugee children, internally displaced children, trafficked children or child workers they are exposed to further exploitation and discrimination.

UNICEF's *Excluded and Invisible* report has special relevance to Nepal because so many of our children are left out and not seen. Boys and girls in hazardous jobs who don't go to school or are exploited as domestics, children who are sold or trafficked. Children displaced by war, children who run away from home to live on city streets. They don't go to school, they don't have health care many are separated from parents and are exploited in conditions of near-slavery. For the state, they just don't exist.

UNICEF reminds governments of their responsibility to protect children. The report has a list of action points: mandatory birth registration, increasing allocation for social welfare, implementation of legislation on child rights, prosecution of those committing crimes against children, educating children themselves on their rights.

The report is international but on exclusion UNICEF's antidotes for Nepal are long-term and tied up with the solution of other crises as well. Including children will also mean an inclusive democracy when they grow up, it will ensure sustainable peace, decentralisation of political and economic power to the grassroots to make service delivery more effective for tomorrow's children as well. ● Kunda Dixit



The State of the World's Children 2006
Excluded and Invisible
UNICEF, New York 2005
ISBN: 10: 92-806-3916-1
www.unicef.org

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Last minute shopping

Fun presents of questionable utilitarian value for the holiday season

As the dew gathers in the morning and the chill seeps into your bones reminding you that another year is about to end, you quicken your pace to keep warm and hit the shops earlier. But no matter how early you try to begin, the fact remains that you always have frantic last minute Christmas shopping—be it due to innate procrastination or because that friend who you thought wouldn't be in town for the holiday has suddenly arrived.

Whatever the reasons, gifts have to be bought. And for those of you who don't celebrate Christmas, let's not forget your sister's sister-in-law's aunt's nephew's niece who is getting married in this auspicious month said to guarantee matrimonial harmony. This week *Nepali Times* has complied a collection of fun last-minute gifts of questionable utility to make life easier for you and the recipient. ●

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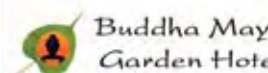
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Perspectives

Farmers' fate



LINE WOLF NIELSEN
 in HONG KONG

Akilo of low quality rice today sells for Rs 20 in Nepal. Given that most Nepali households eat rice at least once a day, one would think that a drop in the price of rice should make people happy. Wrong.

If there is a sudden influx of rice priced at Rs 15 a kilo into the Nepali market, the effect will be devastating, both in social and economic terms. Securing the right to protect Nepal's domestic rice market and farmers who depend on its production is the main goal of Nepal's delegation at the sixth WTO Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong.

"Since 77 percent of Nepalis are farmers, a fall in the price of crops will also mean a huge drop in earnings for many families," says Posh Raj Pandey, who heads the Trade Related Capacity Building project supported by UNDP. "A lower price will only benefit the people not living off the rice fields and those people tend to be better off and living in Kathmandu. We need to be able to aggressively expand our exports and still protect our farmers."

Such policy flexibility, or 'special safeguard measures' as it

Nepal's WTO delegation in Hong Kong is focussing on agriculture, access

is called in WTO-speak, was already written into the draft text of the agreement prior to this meeting. It's been agreed that if imports exceed a certain threshold level, a nation belonging to the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) such as Nepal, will be allowed to raise tariffs or even ban imports or define quotas. What has not yet been agreed is the actual level of the threshold.

Negotiations are a question of give and take and in Hong Kong they are about the right to be defensive and protective, and aggressive and expansionistic at the same time. Basically, boosting exports while still protecting domestic markets is also what the other 149 WTO member states want but it is the size of domestic agricultural support that is the real hot potato here.

Currently it is accepted that LDCs can support domestic agriculture by spending as much as the equivalent of 10 percent of their GDP on subsidies. However, Nepal's current level of subsidies amounts to only 1-2 percent.

"On paper it could look as if Nepal should aim at getting everyone else down to our level but if we look at the future potential of the country, we might want to give more and therefore it will be important for Nepal to maintain some flexibility here and not agree on a low level of support," says Navin Dahal of the Kathmandu-based South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics & Environment (SAWTEE).

Nepal is participating in the WTO talks as a full member for the first time, following its accession in 2003. However, it is not negotiating on its own but as one of the LDC group, which is seeking a drastic reduction in agriculture and export subsidies provided by the EU and US.

Nepal's main exports are textiles, leather goods, carpets, handicrafts and tea but volume will have to grow to push economic growth. "Expanding market access for the products that we already make is important," says Gyan Chandra Acharya, Nepal's ambassador to the WTO. Nepal and other LDCs need better market access for exports, including more countries agreeing to give products special tariff treatment or 'differential treatment', Acharya adds.

The two previous WTO meetings in Seattle and Cancun collapsed and although this one is billed as critical for completing a new multilateral trade accord, Nepal's delegation is acutely aware of the competing interests.

Says Dahal: "In Doha it was decided that the LDCs should have better market access and long-term periods of transition... However, almost all these nice commitments are not mandatory and I find it hard to believe that the WTO members can agree on more binding measures." ●

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Back on home court

Our columnist returns to celebrate and energise tennis in Nepal

There is no better feeling than returning home to be with family and friends. My five-year-old daughter Priya (pictured) is making her first trip to Nepal. She had the biggest grin as she watched the Himalaya draw closer from the window of the plane as we approached Kathmandu. “Aren’t you excited to be back?” she asked.

There are more cars, more buildings, more smog and more dust but my homeland remains beautiful and enchanting. I am thrilled to be back to show my roots to Priya but also to help celebrate tennis in Nepal. This country needs positive energy and tennis is no exception. My goal is to energise tennis lovers in Nepal and give them hope for a better tomorrow.

It hasn’t taken me long to learn that very little has changed regarding the state of tennis in Nepal. Yes, there are some superficial developments such as an increased number of courts and some new tournaments. But the general feeling is of apathy about developing the game. Tennis aficionados have lost trust in the All Nepal Tennis

GAME POINT
Sujoy Lama



Association. Lack of communication by ANLTA about its vision and plans seems to be at the core of the problem. A long-time patron of tennis summed it up to me: “We have got to stop relying on ANLTA and hold ourselves accountable for change”.

Two shining examples that we can emulate are initiatives taken by my friends Manoj and Jyoti Rana as well as my father Hem Lama. The annual Jayakar Open in memory of the Ranases’ late son was a way for them to remember Jayakar as well as to give Nepali youth an opportunity to compete in a tournament.

The undersized tennis court that my father built at his house now serves over 40 kids, including seven children from Bal Mandir orphanage. These heart-warming developments are models for success and serve as inspiration.

My tennis clinic on Saturday sponsored by this paper (see www.nepalitimes.com) and another one by Little Angels School on Monday will give me an opportunity to reach out to the youth. There is no better way than to get young people excited and enthused about tennis. I will be giving tips about the technical, tactical and mental aspects of tennis. I will also be talking about training and tournament preparation.



Me and Priya at Satdobato sports complex on Thursday.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

The two most important areas are teamwork and love for the game of tennis. We must instil in our children the values of hard work, fair play and importance of making the people around us better.

I have also invited all our past champions and coaches to participate in this celebration of tennis in Nepal. They will be recognised for their contributions to the development of the game. The role they play is critical and it is important for the younger generation to appreciate as well as embrace their knowledge and expertise.

I hope to have as many dialogues as possible with the tennis community and the ANLTA in the next couple of days with the aim of developing the sport in Nepal. It is time we come together and get it done for the right reasons. We have an obligation to step up and make changes.

As I walk the streets of Kathmandu, I feel Nepal’s vibrancy. Memories of childhood have flooded back. Yes, Priya, I love Nepal and am excited to be back. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Kayaking continues to rope in white-water thrill seekers



ROLLER COASTER: Kayak rodeo on the Bhoté Kosi brought kayakers from all over the world and kayaking trainer, Nim Magar (above).

Nepal’s wet rodeo

KIRAN PANDAY
in SUKUTE BEACH

You could be sure that the Himalayan White Water Challenge was going to be one wet, rollicking ride. And it was, also a chance to highlight Nepal’s wild waters and the still relatively unknown sport of kayaking.

“Nepal and the UK have the best rivers for kayaking though the Nile in Uganda is not far behind,” says Peak UK’s Peter Astle.

Kayaks were originally developed by the Inuit and used to cross ice floes in the Canadian Arctic. ‘Kayak’ itself is an Inuit word that means ‘man’s boat’. The ‘eskimo roll’ is the move where kayakers purposely tip the kayak over till they’re under water and then keep rolling until they are upright again in the cockpit. But there is much more to kayaking than the ‘eskimo role’ as participants at a kayak rodeo on the Bhoté Kosi found out this recently.

“We would like to promote this sport more here but until the conflict is resolved, it will be impossible to do it properly,” Astle told us. But in spite of the country’s problems, kayaking seems to have caught on, with 600 river guides registered in Nepal.

Nim Magar is one of them and has taken first place in the

last three competitions including this year. Magar started in 1992 and now trains kayakers in Japan earning up to \$ 5,000 a month. Asked about the sport’s future in Nepal, he says, “Our rivers are the best kayaking rivers in the world, we should encourage Nepalis to practice so they can win international competitions.” ●

Kayak kids

Children show off their kayaking moves at the closing ceremony of the Himalayan Whitewater Challenge last month. The underprivileged kids were trained in kayaking and circus skills by the Himalayan Whitewater Circus Project, an initiative that began in 2004 that wants to set up a club for children. Drawing, dancing, English speaking and other confidence-building activities were also part of the group’s three-week program.



“These children can later become professionals,” said project member Sanjeev Ranabhat. The Circus Project is organised by Far and Away Adventures from Sweden with the cooperation of KAVU, Equator Expeditions and several volunteers.



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THE ADVENTURES OF HEROJIG



What kind of Bear is that?

Why has the price of gas gone thru the roof?!!?

WHAT NEPALI BHAALU'S DISCUSS OVER TEA...



I'm going to bite the Nepal Gas Maanchhe the next time I see him.

Little Known Wildlife Facts:
Fact #263: Most adult bears are killed by people.

Quote of the Week!
"The proverb warns; "Don't bite the hand that feeds you." But maybe you should, if it prevents you from feeding yourself."
- Thomas Szasz, Professor Emeritus in Psychiatry

NEXT WEEK: Herojig interviews a Bhaalu from Western Nepal, to get to the truth of the "situation."

#95 2062 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

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

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **6th Annual Dolpo and Contemporary Art Exhibition** at Lotus Gallery. 10-11 and 17-18 December. 4253646
- ❖ **Reflection of Bhaktapur City** paintings by Ashu Ram Khaiju at Park Gallery, Lajimpat, till 26 December. 4419353

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

- ❖ **Globalisation and the Securitisation of Migration:** the Context of Nepali Foreign Labour Migrants and Sustainable Livelihood with Jagannath Adhikari, Social Science Baha lecture, 16 December at Yala Maya Kendra, 4PM. 5548142
- ❖ **Youth Discussion** Palpasa Café with Narayan Wagle at Martin Chautari, 16 December, 3PM. 4256239
- ❖ **Centennial Celebration** mega party at 1905 Kantipath, 17 December, 6PM onwards. 4225272
- ❖ **St. Xavier's Annual Mela** at St. Xaviers 17 December 10AM-5PM, live bands, food stalls, games and more. 5521150.
- ❖ **Teachings with Geshe Daddhak** on Lama Tsongkhapa's Lam-rim, 17 and 18 December at HBMC. 4414843
- ❖ **Talk on HIV-AIDS** with Dr Simkhada, research fellow at the Department of Public Health, Aberdeen Universtiy, United Kingdom, 18 December, 9.30 AM at the British Council. 4410798
- ❖ **REIKI 1** with Elif Koksai every Wednesday and Friday at HBMC.
- ❖ **International Migrants Day** 18 December.
- ❖ **Christmas and New Years** party at GAA Hall door prizes, music and more, 23 December, 5PM.

MUSIC AND PERFORMANCES

- ❖ **Tara Baji Lai Lai**, an improvisational play directed by Morten Crough, 2 -17 December, 4PM, Gurukul. 4466956
- ❖ **Sanjhbatti** lights and music for peace at Shanti Mandal, Maitighar, live performance by Nepathya, 16 December, 5PM.
- ❖ **Friday Night Jam** session. live music, 16 December 7.30 PM onwards, Moksh Live, Rs 150.
- ❖ **Project Experience** music adventure at Patan Museum, 17 December, 7PM, Rs 550, tickets available at Moksh 5526212 and East Meets West 4256411 .
- ❖ **My Neighbour Toroto**, an animation movie by Hayao Miyasaki at Nepal Tourism Board, 18 December at 5PM.
- ❖ **Christmas Eve Carol Service** 24 December, 6.30 PM at The British School. 5525176
- ❖ **Christmas Day Service** 25 December, 9.30 AM, The British School. 5525176
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Barbeque** at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- ❖ **Kilroy's Christmas Madness** dinner with a free glass of Mulled wine 23 December- 3 January at Kilroys. 4250440
- ❖ **Plat du Jour** at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** at Fusion, Dwarika's, happy hour 5-9PM. 4479448
- ❖ **The Sidewalk BBQ** with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Jazz Gourmet** fine dining redefined at Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999

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- ❖ **Come Meet Santa at Shangri-La Village, Pokhara**, Rs 4,999 per person on twin Share. (061) 521995
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, holiday offers. 4361500
- ❖ **Shivapuri Walk** with Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 18 December. Meet at Hare Krishna Temple near Budhanilkantha at 11AM. 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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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



The two-month winter drought shows no sign of abating. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows a sustained high pressure system sitting over northern India that is not just keeping things dry but also deflecting any moisture-carrying westerlies. This is the reason for the high variation in daytime temperatures in the Valley ranging from 2-22 degrees. We also notice a prominent cyclone over the southern Bay which is gathering strength, this could send a tentacle or two of cloud our way unless the jet stream blows it off. Wheat farmers need a shower or two quickly and we have our fingers crossed for them. Also for the first snow of the season for Christmas at higher altitudes.

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AJAYA JOSHI

ALTOGETHER NOW: Leaders during an all party alliance pro-democracy mass meeting condemning the massacre in Nagarkot and blamed the army for it.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

WISHES FULFILLED: Pilgrims throng to board the Manakamana Cable Car at Kurintar to visit the temple and have their wishes fulfilled. The number of passengers using the ropeway has doubled after the ceasefire.



BIPUL GAUTAM

BIG DIFFERENCE: A charity show organised by students of Rato Bangala School last week raised Rs 150,740 which was handed over to Pakistani charge Ehsan Ullah Baath on Thursday. The money will be donated to the Edhi Foundation in Karachi for earthquake relief in Kashmir.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

WINTER SHOWER: Riot police hosed down a rally by the Citizen's Movement for Peace on Saturday at Bhotahity.



GOPAL DAHAL

ORANGE REVOLUTION: The extension of the Maoist ceasefire and a bumper harvest of oranges in eastern Nepal has brought down prices in this wholesale market in Dharan from where the fruit is trucked all over the country.



KIRAN PANDAY

Chepangi schools

During his days as a student in Allahabad University, Kishore Chandra Dhungana was impressed by Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on helping the most disenfranchised people in society. Dhungana was so inspired he decided to sell a part of his property and launch a school for the indigenous Chepang people of his native Chitwan.

Sri Antyodaya Janajati Awasiya Vidyalaya in Chitwan provides free education, accommodation, food, school supplies, clothing and medication for Chepang children. The Chepang are semi-nomadic farmers and the most underprivileged even among Nepal's indigenous groups. There are no more than 50,000 of these

slash-and-burn farmers in Nepal but very few have passed even SLC.

Dhungana's Chitwan school started with just 20 children five years ago and today, 211 Chepang children study and live there. "Every year, 60 parents come to us and ask us to admit their children," says Bachu Shakya, a member of the school's board and Dhungana's niece.

Because of the huge demand, the school is running out of space on the Dhungana family property in Chitwan. Money is also scarce despite help from Friends of Needy Children, Room to Read, SOS and the Chitwan DDC. After her uncle died, Shakya says it has been difficult keeping the school going and is appealing to

Nepalis for individual donations. It costs Rs 14,400 a year to sponsor a child at the school.

By starting a vocational training wing the school is trying to make sure Chepang children don't have to go back to their nomadic life in the jungles once they finish school. And as a fund-raising venture the school is starting a dairy farm.

Explains Shakya: "When my uncle started the school he did what he thought was best for Chitwan's neediest community. But today we also have to think of long-term sustainability." ●

Mallika Aryal
info@educatechepang.org

Just down the road in Shaktikhor, Chitwan, Jang Bahadur Chepang has also been running a similar school at his own expense. Chepang's school, Mahakali National Primary, has 66 children studying in it at present and is also looking for volunteers and support.

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T H E P O W E R T O L E A D .

Kiss and make up

Many of you have stopped me in the street this week to ask questions like: "Which way is the country headed?" or "Is the ceasefire going to be extended?" or "Have you seen King Kong yet?"

Being a veteran correspondent who believes that with press freedom comes responsibility, I am used to these questions and always make it a point to answer good naturedly: "How the bloody

hell should I know?"

In fact,

we hacks are as clueless about what is going on in this country as most of you, our valued clients. The only difference is that we keep it a closely guarded secret.

Even so, after decades of experience deciphering press statements that don't say anything, we have become experts at reading between the lines. For instance, if two heads of state are said to have had a

"free and frank exchange of views" one can be sure they came to blows and one of them suffered a dislocated eyeball.

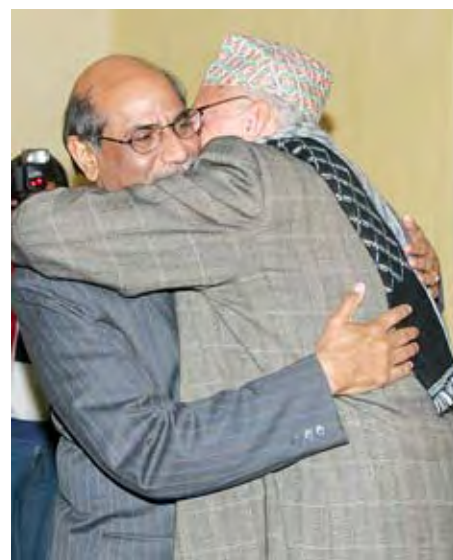
If, on the other hand, the official spokesman describes a one-on-one meeting as being held in "a cordial and friendly atmosphere" then it would be a safe bet that the two leaders probably sat face-to-face in stony silence for one hour and forty-five minutes until one of them fell asleep in his chair out of sheer boredom.

We reporters have also become specialists in the art of reading body language and gestures when VIPs meet. How firm was the handshake? Was there any eye contact? Did one of them, unbeknownst to the press corps, have the other by the gonads? That is why it is instructive to study closely this photograph of Vice Chairman Bista greeting visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Saran this week. I know what some of you with dirty minds are thinking. You are thinking: "Yuk, are they kissing or what?"

I don't mind admitting that was exactly what crossed my mind at first, making me quite worried about the implication on our already-strained bilateral relations of such public display of political osculation in broad daylight. After all, smooching is still strictly banned in Indian cinema and, because we copy everything, it is frowned upon on the Nepali silver screen as well. (Fine Print: Kissing ass, however, is quite acceptable in both cultures.)

What a relief that this picture did not put an irreparable dent on bilateral diplomatic relations similar to the furore that followed the peck on the cheek that Nelson Mandela once placed on Shabana Azmi. What made the Nobel laureate pay lip service to Shabana we won't know until we view a slow motion replay of that incident, but it is clear that some foreigners think they can take liberties with subcontinental womanhood.

And then there was the time Khuswant Singh (twice voted Most Lecherous South



RAVI MANANDHAR/NEPAL SAMACHARPATRA

Asian Alfa Male by *Femina* magazine) slobbered all over the daughter of the Pakistani Ambassador in New Delhi during the launch of his (Kushie's) latest semi-autobiographical potboiler and nearly triggered off an Indo-Pak nuclear exchange.

Thank heavens times are changing and Bollywood has now started allowing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in its movies. It won't be long before our political leaders, too, no longer have to be shy about kissing and making up in public. ●

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