KIRAN NEPAL on the EAST-WEST HIGHWAY

It's four months into the peace process, but you wouldn't know that along Nepal's 1,100km-long lifeline, the East-West Highway.

We travelled along the highway for ten days starting 1 September, and every day, and along every stretch heard stories and saw Maoist intimidation, as well as extortion, kidnapping, smuggling, turf wars between the rebels, 'democrats', and dacoits.

Police and the local administration can do little to ensure security amid all the lawlessness, and in many places the Maoists have taken law enforcement into their own hands. On and around the highway, there appears to be a complete breakdown of the state.

VoIluntary donations—in reality anything but—are common in places like Siraha, and Lahan, where local businessmen shut down the market last month until Maoist district leaders assured them the intimidation would stop. The extortion takes different forms, such as forced 'voluntary' contributions of Rs 100,000 to support Maoist 'cultural events', protection rackets, checkpoints, toll booths, and 'taxation'. No businessman we spoke to would dream of refusing, because they're faced with guns. Maoist-condoned smuggling and illegal felling of timber have resulted in suddenly-sparse forests in Sambil, near Utharabari.

Toll booths and blockades are everywhere, some openly run by the Maoists, and others in the name of 'pujas'. The price of a 45km bus ride has almost doubled to Rs 145. Trucks ferrying goods between Birganj and Utharabari pay 300 percent more than a few months ago. In ten days we saw five chakka jam, and disturbances and shutdowns in Butwal, Hetauda, Itahari, Mechinagar, Kakarbhitta, and other stops along the way.

Unable to cross the Rapti river after last year's Badarmude killings, the Maoists have intensified activities in areas they have access to. Trade unions are polarised, and the Maoists have taken over and destroyed property and service areas belonging to IDGs and VDCs.

There are PLA camps along the highway, particularly between the Koshi and Kamala rivers, and the soldiers are out in full force, conducting march-pasts, armed and in full battle regalia. Students are taken for forced militia training, as we saw in Bharatpur and Manahari. Local residents are forced to attend rallies and local political party working committees are subject to intimidation.

Self-determination and the Maoists entering the mainstream are moot. In Rautahat, when the rebels were asked to join a village meeting, they said they had no 'central directive' to work with other parties and instead asked for half the development budget to carry out projects themselves.

People live under the shadow of guns here. Face-offs between the Maoists, party members, police, and dacoits play out in crowded marketplaces and private homes. Sometimes the police intervene and promises safety, but often they also claim to not know what is going on.

Meanwhile, the Maoists are also trying to run a hearts and minds campaign to win over middle-class sentiment. They are building 'people's hospitals' (often using illegally felled timber for beds), repairing stretches of road, and 'punishing' looters. But as long as guns are present, no one believes them mean it. Many people we spoke to said it was all just 'for show', pointing out that a rebel-run hospital in Mangalbare, Morang, is a stone's throw from a government health care centre.

People are fed up with the anarchy. The feeling along the 1,100 km we travelled was that whether or not dacoits were responsible for much of the mayhem, the Maoists will have a lot to answer for if and when they are disarmed.
Far left, far right
Both sides could abuse a ‘peaceful’ resolution

Koirala’s appointment of Katuwal may backfire

The weekly nepalnews.com-Nepali Times opinion poll, despite voting for the interim “status quo,” has a fairly accurate correlation with past nationwide polls. Results in the past month show that the Nepali public is fully behind pluralism and democracy, they reject Maoist violence, threats and extortion, and that they are impatient with the pace of the peace process. But this week, nearly six months after the April Uprising, they have for the first time turned pessimistic about the chances of a return to peace. More than 57 percent of the 4,455 who voted believe the ceasefire wouldn’t last beyond Tihar.

Part of the reason for this is the public perception that the seven-party government is lost in its own bickering. The other part is that they believe the Maoists have no intention of staying the peace course.

To a certain extent disagreements are usual, even necessary, in a democracy. But the parties lack credibility is their biggest drawback. It doesn’t help that the biggest whiners of them all, Madhav Nepal, keeps threatening to quit the seven-party alliance. Parliament passing radical laws is all very fine but that doesn’t make a big, immediate difference in the lives of desperate people. Never before have we seen the kind of lawlessness and abuses that we see today. On any given day there are strikes, road blockages, and sit-ins by up to a dozen different groups. Rebels or other shady outfits either block the main highways, or improve illegal toll collection. The state doesn’t exist, and it has become a free-for-all.

As for the Maoists, it is clear the comrades now have no regrets about this for public opinion. They are taking full advantage of the disarray of the government and forcing high school children to the jungle. A stage-managed ceasefire has already begun. It’s now or never. The Maoists are realizing that to topple a government in the name of peace isn’t easy. A strong government is needed to ensure the Maoists live up to their promise of a ‘peaceful’ resolution.

The Maoist leader has threatened to start a new round of violence if the SPA leadership doesn’t agree to their demands. The Maoists have already shown their strong determination to initiate violence. They don’t want to lose any opportunity to increase their influence at the cost of the Nepali public. The Maoists are moving in a critical direction.

The Maoists have had a score or two to settle with the SPA leadership. The Maoists believe that the SPA has not been sincere in the peace process. The Maoists have in the past even hinted at the possibility of an armed struggle. The Maoists have, however, realized that the SPA leadership is not sincere in the peace process. The Maoists believe that the SPA leadership is not sincere in the peace process.

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PLAIN SPEAKING
The outpourings in most Nepali media demonstrate that épicurial hogwash is the opiate of the masses. From Comrade Awesome with his claims that he érulesí 80 percent of Nepal? Does he know that 95 percent is under permanent snow and 18 percent is barren rock? Towns and urban areas account for 30 percent and he can hardly claim to éruleí them. Simple arithmetic leaves him or anyone else 37 percent of the country, of which he claims 80 percent. But only ignorance would claim that it comes in a neat, ready-to-be-rulled package. Is his responsibiity for real, or will he get by as before, preaching to the uninformed? As an non-resident Nepali (NRN) whose family survived by working abroad, I want to know, in straightforward, un-doctored statistics, what achievements result from small groups of badly-informed but thoroughly indoctrinated cadres threatening rural households with guns, not to mention other atrocities ever-so-diligent shumans rightist folks have not picked up on. Have harvests increased over the last ten years? Are more children, particularly girls, in school, or out toting guns, their adolescent hormones raging against an adult world that has failed them? In the areas he érulesí, has income increased (without counting our remittances, or the money received from daughters trafficked into the flesh trade)? Weíd like to hear more policy and less political twaddle. And to Mahat: does he know the impact on the economy if NRNs stopped sending remittances? Does he plan to create jobs so people have the satisfaction of earning their own income instead of relying on éaidí? Can he guarantee that everyone who should pays taxes? I ask this because the other gentleman is swift to condemn ëtaxí. From Comrade Awesome with his claims that he érulesí 80 percent of Nepal, to Ram Sharan Mahatís claim that he érulesí 80 percent of Nepal, to Ram Sharan Mahatís claim that he is the only man who can deliver in a crisper and more intelligent manner. Please find more substantive business analysis delivered in a crispier and more intelligent manner. Or shut down columns that donít add value to your paper.

NATIONAL HEROES
We look for medical consultation and facilities as a matter of habit. Yet, the other day, a fellow Nepali who lives in London consulted a specialist for his eye ailment. After a thorough investigation the specialist commented, ëYouíre from Nepal, you have the renowned Dr Ruit and Tilganga for treatment.î Weíve always identified ourselves with Gurkhas and Everest. Now we have another reference point, Dr Ruit and Tilganga.

WANNABE ECONOMISTS
Your two medocio wannabe economic columns (Economic Sense and Strictly Business) havenít communicated anything of substance for months. Neither writer has the data to back their arguments nor do they use economic theories to explain their anecdotal analyses. The two pieces on oil politics and the NOC are prime examples of the mediocrity (ëOily ruckusí, Economic Sense, #313 and éFuelling discontentí, Strictly Businessí, #312). They list out the problems, which Nepalis are good at, without telling us how opening up the market will ease the problems of pricing, adulteration, corruption, cartels and above all, building trust. Please find more substantive business analysis delivered in a crispier and more intelligent manner.

NATS AND ASSES
I really miss Under My Hat. Youíve done a fantastic job of producing it week after week for so many years and I think this become habit to look for that column first thing on Fridays. Now Iím bewildered and that the column isnít shunted into another reference point, Dr Ruit and Tilganga.

Weíve always identified ourselves with Gurkhas and Everest. Now we have another reference point, Dr Ruit and Tilganga.

I am a Nepal okhata and frequent reader of Nepal Times who likes the last humoristic bit a lot. This week I particularly enjoyed the more serious column first thing on Fridays. Now Iím bewildered and that the column isnít shunted into another reference point, Dr Ruit and Tilganga.

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I am very sorry to hear that Kunda Dixit may be forced to stop his Under My Hat column. He has brought years of good humour and insight into Nepal and journalism that was and still is very much needed. I do hope that this is just a short break, but at some point, I hope youíll think of early retirement for that would be a crying shame. I guess I will just have to read over the vast collection of your columns instead.

Matt Hogg, via email

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Matt Hogg, via email

All past columns can be viewed by clicking ëUnder My Hat on our nepaltimes.com ë Ed

CORRECTION
Due to an editing error, the reference in Ashutosh Tiwariís Strictly Business column (ëLoan blowsí, #314) to Jagannath Adhikari was a mistake. The name should have been Jogendra Ghimire.

In ëSalt of the earthí (#314) the proportion of Nepalis still consuming non-iodised salt should have been 9 percent and not 17 percent as misteriously reported.

Reader, via email

Weíve always identified ourselves with Gurkhas and Everest. Now we have another reference point, Dr Ruit and Tilganga.
Kamlaris in Dang

Suman Pradhan in Dang

Deep inside Deukhuri Valley, in a small hut on the banks of a river, lives Sudhani Chaudhary with her husband, children, and their families. The extended family ekes out a living as sharecroppers.

Sudhani is only 30, but she already has four daughters. One, not quite 10 years old, lives in Ghorahi, working as a housemaid for a family. “I am told she is not quite 10 years old, lives in Ghorahi, working as a housemaid for a family. “I am told she is in the banks of a river, lives deep inside Deukhuri Valley,” says Sudhani. Five other young daughters of the family are in faraway cities like Surkhet, Pokhara and Kathmandu. All work in the cities like Surkhet, Pokhara, and Kathmandu. All work in faraway cities like Surkhet, Pokhara, and Kathmandu.

They have gone as kamlaris,” says Sudher Chaudhary, one of the brothers. “It is difficult to feed ourselves as it is. At least they have food and clothes. And they can go to school.”

Sending young daughters as kamlaris (girl-child indentured labourers) is widespread in the Tharu community of lower Dang Valley (also called Deukhuri Valley) and adjoining districts. The reason often cited is poverty, and this tradition began when hill people descended upon the fertile plains of the western tarai and slowly usurped the land once inhabited by the Tharus.

Loss of land brought about the kamlari system. “The kamlari system grew out of kamaiya and now vice president of kamlari,” says Sadhna DC, a motivator for Friends of Needy Children (FNC), which works to eradicate kamlari, “These are false promises. We claim that nearly 90 percent of parents receive annual payments because buyers promise them they will be brought back and rehabilitated. Most now attend local schools or vocational training classes in surrounding areas. But this success has also invited controversy, ill-will, and threats.

The owner and his family, who watched the conversation intently, were soon being sent off to cities and towns as favours for businessmen, almost all keep their rich buyers promise them they will be brought back and rehabilitated.

Children (FNC) who travels being brought home from their families. The order resulted from a writ petition filed two years ago. The Court also ordered the government to set up a kamlari rehabilitation fund for the welfare of the kamlari girls and their families. The order resulted from a writ petition filed two years ago.

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Many parents say one reason they send their daughters out is because they promise them education. But SWAN and FNC claim that nearly 90 percent of the girls are never sent to school. “These are false promises. We have only a few who are treated well and actually sent to school,” says Man Bahadur Chhettri of FNC, who travels to convince families and owners to let the girls go. “Traders, government officials, businessmen, almost all keep their rich buyers promise them they will be brought back and rehabilitated.”

Young Tharu girls sold into indentured labour are slowly being brought home

On 9 September, the Supreme Court directed the government to ban the kamlari system, much as the kamaiya system was banned five years ago. The Court also ordered the government to set up a kamlari rehabilitation fund for the welfare of the government and police officers.

The kamlari girl is ‘sold’ in a sharecropping agreement so lopsided that they were in bondage as kamaiyas. And this tradition began when hill people descended upon the fertile plains of the western tarai and slowly usurped the land once inhabited by the Tharus.

On 3 September, an association of local hoteliers and restaurateurs in Lamahi banned kamlari, and SWAN members from their eateries because of “unfounded allegations that we exploit children.” The owners instead argued they were providing employment for the girls.

Young Tharu girls sold into indentured labour are slowly being brought home

Rs 4,000-6,000. The contract is for one year, but it continues as parents receive annual payments. And this tradition began when hill people descended upon the fertile plains of the western tarai and slowly usurped the land once inhabited by the Tharus.

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Tourism blues

Let’s build a solid industry on the famous Nepali smile

It’s the season for that favourite Nepali catchphrase, ‘guests are like god’. All well and good, but what about those who work to bring these guests here and make them feel at home? In the news this week are two telling items: the good and bad news that all airlines seat to Nepal are sold out, and that a delegation of tourism entrepreneurs felt obliged to go to prime minister’s office to ask for an end to pseudo-militant unions and the extortion racket.

Nepal’s tourism has over the past decade run into problems the second things start to look up: the IC 849 hijacking, riots sparked by a rumour about what some Indian soldier said, the bomb scare, 9/11, Gulf War II, SARS, Maoists, invaders, actor said, the royal massacre, 9/11, Gulf War II, and travel advisories. If last decade run into problems the second things start to look up, then tourism entrepreneurship needs to sort out its internal personality clashes without resorting to lawsuits. Tourism entrepreneurs can do the most, by first getting away from the politicising of their various associations. Constructing hotels was a way to get bank loans and upgrade an individual’s mandate to the blank horizon scenario was a default on debt. Time to stop that. Time also to take advantage of the branding exercise underway. ‘Visit Nepal again, and again,’ #309. It may not be perfect, but it’s the only one we’ve got. When Incredible India was launched, there was a lot of naysaying, but it’s turned out to be a positive, enduring brand.

The Beed has devoted enough column inches to our labour force. It’s time now to strengthen, not hamstring, at its foundations, so we can pick up where the golden run of the early 90s left off. That’s the season for that favourite Nepali catchphrase, ‘guests are like god’. All well and good, but what about those who work to bring these guests here and make them feel at home? In the news this week are two telling items: the good and bad news that all airlines seat to Nepal are sold out, and that a delegation of tourism entrepreneurs felt obliged to go to prime minister’s office to ask for an end to pseudo-militant unions and the extortion racket.

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Interview with Prachanda on Bahas, Kantipur Television, 9 September

You've come a long way from two rifles and a pistol. Would things be different if the parties had done right by the people?
No, there are other countries where political parties are corrupt too. Why isn't there a revolution in those countries?

Could we say the political parties and the palace gathered the tinder and straw, and you just lit the spark?
I wouldn't say that, it's unscientific. There was a basis for a revolution, our ideology.

Did you think you'd succeed as much in ten years?
We knew the revolution would pick up speed, and we'd either fail or succeed very quickly. But we couldn't predict reaching this state in ten years.

Your revolution has shaken the nation, even the world, but what about all the bloodshed and lives lost?
Every great nation has been formed through great sacrifice. No nation can go forward without it.

What action did you take against your party members found guilty of committing these barbaric murders?
I'm sorry, I can't give you details now, but we took very serious action. Otherwise the movement would have lost its base.

We hear the political parties suggested you use your weapons during the April Jana Andolan. When Gyanendra was trying to hold his local level elections the seven parties requested that we mobilise our PLA to attack and make the elections a failure.
Now we don't know what kind of pressure the parties are under, maybe from foreign powers. Because of the five-point agreement, we felt secure, but within two or three days Girija Babu went to Brahmagar and said repeatedly at press conferences that the Maoists can't be considered a political party until we give up our weapons. He shouldn't have. He also kept talking about a ceremonial monarchy, which he needn't have done, whatever his own beliefs. At the time we were holding talks and the interim constitution was being prepared. His comments only aroused unnecessary suspicion.

Third, the most important and sensitive issue for Nepal at this moment is the democratisation of the army, yet he rewarded the old regime by making Rukmangat Khatiwala chief and confirmed our suspicions. In Kamidanda we said that unless the government is pressured by the street, it is going to regress.

So Girja Prasad's words and actions made you decide that they must be attacked?
Attack is not the right word, but the conclusion was that unless the people were brought on the streets once again, the government would turn back. Girja Prasad Koirala is the prime minister of a country in a state of emergency. Whatever he says cannot be taken as a personal statement. Girja is not an individual at this moment.

"Let's not call it guilt"

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Adulteration

Kantipur, 10 September

Adulteration of diesel and petrol has increased after the Nepal Oil Corporation stopped monitoring the petrol at fuel stations. Mechanical engineers who inspected the fuels said diesel sold at pumps had 75 percent kerosene mixed in and petrol had 40 percent diesel. Fuel adulteration, why many motorcycles and trucks, even new ones, break down. “After the Kantipur story on adulteration came out, it went down for 15 days, but now it’s as bad as it was,” says chief mechanic of Syaker, Sitaram Neupane. NOC's monitoring was terminated after the government was forced to roll back price hikes last month. Sources said the Ministry of Industries and Supplies had instructed NOC not to do anything until the committee on fuel prices submits its report. Meanwhile, reports say up to 3,000 litres of petrol are smuggled into India every day from Nepalganj alone because of the price differential between India and Nepal.

Rebel spies

Dristi, 12 September

After the Maoist central committee meeting decided that they would embark on an urban uprising if the talks do not resume, the rebels have started deploying spies to better understand the daily activities of the SPA, government, and security forces. Their intelligence section, INT, is under the direct command of high-level Maoist leaders. Our sources say the Maoist spies in the INT are to keep tabs on ministers, party leaders, high-level army and police officers, and diplomats who are against their policies. Before this, the INT was accustomed to keep tabs on some of the Maoists’ own leaders, and to monitor the field situation before a big attack. INT cadres went out to rural areas equipped with satellite phones and attacks were carried out based on the news they sent back. Maoist sources say that to control the situation during the urban uprising they will use the intelligence against those conspiring to suppress the movement. Most Maoist leaders are in the capital right now, and INT cadres will also be helpful to monitor their movement, to see if they are forming alliances with those who tarnish the party’s name. The Maoists say the spies will be especially useful because the district-level offices have sent people who are able to control the party’s command there, and none of them recognise each other. This will help the INT to use their advantages, as no one will know who is spying on whom.

Rumours

Editorial in Nepal Samacharpatra, 14 September

The news that weapons were being imported despite peace talks between the government and the Maoists is being widely reported across the country. The Maoists were on high alert from Tuesday evening, claiming that the government was importing large quantities of weapons via the eastern border. Over three dozen vehicles carrying tents, clothing, vehicle spare parts, and helicopters for the Nepal Army were brought to Gajuri, Dhading, on the way to Kathmandu, with strict orders to remove every obstacle along the Mugling-Naryanghat and Mugling-Gajuri stretches. Neither the government nor the Nepal Army issued a statement before these supplies were moved, causing suspicion and mistrust amongst both the people and the Maoists. The Ceasefire Monitoring Committee has gone to Gajuri and said that the trucks did not contain any weapons, and the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu also claims the trucks were empty. Hopefully the confusion will clear up now.

If there was any need to import goods for the Nepal Army, the government should have discussed it with the ruling parties and the Maoists. However, no official of the government or Nepal Army thought that was necessary. Perhaps in the past there was no need to do so, but these are different times. At a time when the Maoists are preparing to enter mainstream politics and all the political parties and the people are focusing on a constituent assembly, any activity that might rouse suspicion is not acceptable. The people of Kathmandu and its surrounding areas that had to bear the brunt of things when the Maoists suddenly declared a strike on Wednesday to protest the alleged import of weapons. Although the strike was cancelled later that day, it took time for things to settle down. The Maoists also need to think about the effect such decisions will have on the country and the people. Decisions made in haste may be regretted, or be detrimental to the party itself.
After much anticipation, the Garden of Dreams is finally opening its gates to the public on 8 October. For six years, extensive restoration work went on hidden behind the huge wall along Tridevi Marg in Thamel. Soon, the entrance gate opposite the SAARC Secretariat should be lined with visitors queuing to enter the historical garden.

A special zebra crossing now provides easy access to visitors crossing the street to enter the main gate. Götz Hagmüller, chief architect of the project and the man behind the Patan Museum restoration is excited that the big day is just around the corner. “We are sure the garden will be a huge success. In fact, we are worried that it might be so popular that it might turn into a fair ground,” says Hagmüller. A lot of thought has gone into setting the admission fees. “The cost of maintaining the garden will be very high, so we can’t afford to have people mess it up,” shrugs Hagmüller.

He is also very strict about the kind of activities that will be allowed inside the park. “No rock concerts. No weddings. No fashion shows,” he says. Instead, the garden will accept bookings for cultural events and private functions at the three restored pavilions. The basic idea is to have the garden generate its own income through admission fees, rent collected from the Basanta Café and Kaiser Bar and from events.

Restored after 80 years, the $1 million project funded by Austrian Development Aid and implemented by Eco Himal covers 4070 meter; is a testament to the extraordinary vision and talent of one man—Field Marshall Kaiser Shumshere Jung Bahadur Rana. If he were alive today, he would have been pleased with all the restoration work and the extensive innovations added to the garden.

Stone slabs have been replaced with fountains. A moat has been constructed around the stage and a multipurpose amphitheatre, seating 300 people, built around it. Decaying wooden pillars of a pergola have been swapped with historical looking iron cast ones. A rotunda has been built, remodelled after one of the lost buildings in the garden. Numerous water bodies have been constructed, and the main pond has four copper lotuses that emit gas flames during the night. Night illumination has been carefully planned. Another innovative idea is the use of aluminium foil in the high ceilings of the pavilions to get a polished silver look. And not to worry, Hagmüller says, it’s durable because no dust collects there.

During restoration work, Hagmüller...
and his team discovered a narrow space between two walls in the south that had been lying unused and covered by overgrown flora. He devised a way to make use of it by having a water cascade flows from one narrow end of the wall towards a slightly bigger area–creating the optical illusion of a long waterfall. An oriental feature, Hagmüller says this is also a ‘hidden garden,’ which is a characteristic of many European historical gardens. One big advantage of the water cascade is that it masks the noise from the streets of Thamel. In the summer months, this area is also the coolest in the entire garden. So if you’re headed for shade and a quiet corner, this is the spot you want.

One problem the garden did have was with the water supply. With so many water bodies and foliage to take care of, they needed something they could depend on. So the project team dug two ground wells, to provide the garden with water. Although most of the garden is complete, further restoration work and training of staff will continue up to September 2007.

These days, the team of over 100 staff, are extremely busy with preparations for the opening.

The project estimates that it will take about Rs 300,000 to maintain the garden and pay staff each month. More than half of that amount will hopefully come from the rent while the rest should be covered through admission fees.

**Tickets**

- **Single admission:** Nepalis Rs 80, foreigners Rs 160, children, disabled persons and senior citizens Rs 40
- **10 admissions:** Locals Rs 400, foreigners Rs 800
- **Annual membership:** Rs 2000, including 10% discount on all restaurant bills and free parking
- **Corporate membership:** Rs 1000 for a minimum of 10 members, 10% discount on all restaurant bills

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October 8, Sunday
6.30 PM hours | Ticket: Rs 500

CLASSICAL NEPALI CONCERT

Coordinated by Sangeeta Mishra of Kirateshor
Mahadev Sangit Ashram

October 11, Wednesday
6.30 PM | Ticket: Rs1000

THE JAZZ AFFAIR

By the Saskia Laroo Band (Netherlands) and Stupa (Nepal)

October 14, Saturday
10.30 AM – 10PM hours | Ticket: Rs 500

JAPANESE DAY

Display of Ikebana, bonsai, Japanese dolls, Kendo, Kimonos

Chrysantheme Festival, Tea Ceremony & Musical Concert

October 15, Sunday
6.30 hours

CHILDRENS DAY

Music concert by children

October 17, Tuesday
7PM hours | Ticket: Rs 300

FIRE IN THE MONASTERY

A play in Nepali, Directed by Sunil Pokharel

Presented by Gurukul

October 18, Wednesday
6.30 hours | Ticket: Rs 500

FUSION NIGHT

By Tristaal, Salt on the Digifondoo and An-Fairnerkathmandu

expatiate Irish Band

October 20, Friday
7PM hours | Ticket: Rs 500

RAMAULO SANJH WITH HAWAS IN CONCERT

Presented by Nepa-laya

October 19, Sunday
6.30 hours

Kaiser Mahal Garden of Dreams, Kathmandu | Tel.: 4423540

Email: kmahal@mos.com.np

FOR MORE DETAILS

Kaiser Mahal Garden of Dreams, Kathmandu | Tel.: 4423540

Email: kmahal@mos.com.np

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since it was formed by an act of parliament after the pro-democracy movement in 1991, Kathmandu University (KU) has been selective about students and faculty, and has aimed for excellence. But, as with most institutions started with one man’s vision, KU faces the same challenges as the nation itself: how to adjust to the new demands of a new generation.

When Suresh Raj Sharma got together with like-minded friends retired from academia, all they had was an idea. Today that idea stands in the form of a university that has more than 5,000 students in its departments and affiliated colleges.

We all complain that the government doesn’t do enough for us, but KU is the perfect example of what we can give back to the country, says the silver haired professor, who worked his way up from an impoverished Sindhuli village to get a PhD and devote his life to education, the country made me what I am, I have no right to complain.

Sharma has always been a doer, overcoming obstacles to ensure that Nepal can provide an international standard university education so students don’t have to go abroad to study. Today KU offers intermediate, undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate level programs in science, engineering, medicine, management, education, pharmacy, environment, music, human and natural resources, information technology, and biotechnology through six schools.

Sharma’s biggest challenge is ensuring quality and he admits that he is worried about making sure that new departments like biotechnology and media meet the highest standards. KU has an enviable record of student retention (85 percent), three-fourths of all students have jobs within three months of graduating, and up to 20 percent go on to further studies.

Just providing education is never enough, says Sharma, we have to make sure that there are jobs out there for our graduates. Since 1998, the pharmacy department alone has produced 350 graduates who are the backbone of Nepal’s budding pharmaceutical industry. KU-affiliated medical schools in Nepal save the country at least Rs 40 million a year in fees that would have otherwise have gone abroad, in addition to attracting medical students from abroad.

KU also has the only hydropower energy program in this part of the world, set up with Norwegian help. It is the perfect example of capacity building: setting up a hydropower training institute in Nepal instead of sending students to Norway. Other than Nepalis, 15 students from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Zambia, and Bangladesh are also presently enrolled in the program.

Students come to KU because they want to study. With rigorous curricula and the pressure to do well, students have little time for politics, unlike in other universities. My parents are paying so much money for me to study in KU, I came here because I want regular classes and I want to study, says Anuroop Manandhar, a fourth year biotechnology student.

Unlike other colleges, at KU it’s not the students but the teachers who are on the warpath. Following the April pro-democracy uprising, faculty members at KU have been pressuring the administration to address long-standing grievances on promotion and job security. When the administration refused to allow staff to form a union in May, the university shut down for two weeks/five first time in its history.

Sharma concedes there may be legitimate demands, and says he is willing to consider them. But even for a chronic optimist like Sharma this episode has been a bitter reality check. I gave it all I had, we made this institution brick-by-brick, he says, it is very painful to see people trying to destroy what you have built so carefully.

Oddly enough, it was KU students who mediated between administration and agitating staff. When the classes stopped we knew our semester calendar was going to be affected, so we pressured both sides to sit for talks and not fool around with our future, says Deepak Sharma, a student. The university accepted some of the demands, which are in the process of being implemented.

Perhaps now KU can go back to doing what it does best: using the next 15 years to build on the last 15 to produce a workforce of homegrown talent that is truly world class.●
It is easy to overlook parliament’s dramatic transformation of Nepal’s state structure since the April Uprising. But that is because parliament made it look so easy.

Using the mandate of the people power movement, the house of representatives has dismantled the powers of a feudal monarchy and pushed through progressive legislation at a breathtaking pace: vested the powers of royal succession in parliament’s state affairs committee, stripped the king of his role as supreme commander of the army, declared Nepal a secular state, ratified the Rome Statute, and amended the citizenship act.

Critics say parliament has overstepped its mandate and is trying to substitute real progress with pseudo-radical legislation. Conspiracy-minded republicans even say dismantling the powers of the monarchy is a way to save it. The Maoists, who have no representation in parliament, have definitely felt the rug pulled from under them as the House makes decisions on issues that have always been their agenda.

The man driving this activist parliament is Speaker Subash Chandra Nembang, and he has no qualms about going too far. The soft-spoken and suave speaker has gathered a formidable reputation for integrity since he burst upon the political stage as chairman of the public accounts committee five years ago.

The committee came down hard on allegations of corruption in the lease of aircraft by then-Royal Nepal Airlines in a deal initiated by Girija Prasad Koirala when he was prime minister in 2000. Nembang did not even hesitate to investigate a minister from his own UML in another lease scandal, even though it upset his party colleagues.

Says Nembang: “What matters most to me is justice. I have taken an oath to work for the people.” Nembang is a bit worried that the slew of reform legislations passed by parliament will face delays in implementation. For example, the ratification of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention 169 should give indigenous people more rights by law, but will it in practice?

Nembang himself comes from a line of Limbu nobility from eastern Nepal and learnt early on what discrimination does to people. His father, a lawyer, had been pro-Congress, but Nembang was attracted to communist ideology. He became a student activist during the Panchayat years, and turned towards politics as an elected MP from Ilam. He is also an attorney with 20 years of experience.

Despite being a communist, Nembang has no reservations when it comes to his own family’s beliefs. His liberalism is apparent when he discloses that his wife is a fashion designer who runs Hama, a popular boutique in Durbar Marg.

While being interviewed, a group of constituents from Ilam arrive unannounced. He doesn’t turn them away, and welcomes them politely. They garland him and sit down for a chat about conditions on the ground in his home district.

In a country where politicians are known for feathering their own nests, it is refreshing to come across one who has vision and is driven by a strong commitment to democracy and development.

“My job is to weaken the forces of regression and strengthen people power,” says Nembang, “my job is also to ensure that the constituent assembly elections take place soon and that they are a success.” The speaker is so busy, he has declined more than a dozen speaking invitations and junkets abroad to take care of things here. The peace process is still fragile, but with politicians like Nembang steering the House of Representatives there is hope. But how positive is he?

“Oh I am positive,” he replies with conviction, “because the people are on our side.”

**SOPHIA TAMOT**

**Man of the House**

Speaker Subhash Nembang puts parliament to work

**KIRAN PANDAY**
“50 percent of the noise is posturing”

Günter Bächler is a Special Adviser for Peace Building in Nepal of the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs. He has experiences in peace building in the Balkans, Horn of Africa, Ivory Coast and Rwanda. He spoke to Nepali Times about the road ahead in the peace process.

Nepali Times: Things seem stuck in the peace process. Günter Bächler: The process is on track. Put it in perspective: the unilateral ceasefire of the CPN (Maoist), the seven-party alliance, the 12-point understanding, the April Jana Andolan, the 26-point code of conduct, the letters to the UN, the fact that there is a Special Representative of Kofi Annan here at the invitation of both sides. All this is progress, now it needs implementation. The interim constitution, although it couldn’t be finalised, proved that political issues must be settled in the political arena. If both sides refrain from expanding their positions, and instead concentrate on their common interest to elect a constituent assembly/them the open questions can be settled soon.

But there seems to be a wide trust gap. There are suspicions, but 50 percent of the noise is posturing, bargaining, and campaigning, common for political parties. Only 50 percent is disagreement on real issues. Without continuous dialogue or a clear roadmap, growing mistrust will lead to a divergence of views and perceptions, and hardening of positions. After 27 August 2003, armed violence resumed despite political agreement on a six-point agenda. To avoid a repeat, building confidence and strengthening both talks teams is essential.

What influence does the international community have?
The peace process has been and is Nepali-owned, which is good. The international community expresses its views, but has limited influence on the process as a whole, which is also good. There are two concerns in the international community’s statements. The continuation of violence, which drives statements about disarming the rebels before they join the political mainstream. Second, concern about the peace process as a whole, which promotes statements about a clear roadmap based on a more systematic approach to the talks that minimises suspicion and mistrust.

Yours is the second position, but isn’t it different for those with geopolitical interest in Nepal and those without?
I don’t think there are too many geopolitical interests at stake. The most important actor is India, and the complex, historically-grown relationship can be an asset for both sides. Of course there are different international views about how a democratic and peaceful Nepal would look. Some fear a left-wing alliance government more than others. Nepal is a sovereign country and we should help create a situation where voters can decide in a free and fair manner, without external political interference.

What is the Swiss interest?
For 50 years we’ve been engaged at the local level with the people of Nepal, with the excluded and marginalised. So we often see the peace process from the perspective of our partners in rural areas. If any political elite puts the process at risk, that jeopardises the positive transformation of the country. We all need to be committed to the peace process, spend time to make it sustainable, not just complain about failure of any side, or engage in business, politics, and development work as usual.

But is there still the political will for peace?
Yes, but there is also pressure to engage in parallel strategies that nourish suspicion and self-fulfilling prophecies of failure. Instead, we should ask: what is the source of the lack of confidence and erosion of trust, and how can it be re-built?

What does your job entail?
I contribute ideas and help create an enabling environment for dialogue, support negotiations, and peace initiatives. I should not interfere in the process owned by Nepal, I am confident, as I have established good relationships with all sides. My expertise in conflict resolution and negotiation, peace and constitution-making processes, and federalist state structures, is on offer. For example, I am now coaching a group of 20 Nepali women to strengthen their negotiation skills.

Do you think Nepal is unique?
Nepal has a remarkable conflict-carrying capacity compared to other countries, where armed violence has triggered complete state failure. There was never a full-fledged war and no extreme violence. Some ethical barriers, the focus on political options, and a strong, organised civil society helped prevent the worst. The military and human rights defenders also contributed. Finally, the society at large has enormous self-help capacity. The ability to handle the most difficult challenges provides a sound basis for building a peaceful democracy in Nepal.
Jazz aficionados have a double treat at tonight’s Surya Classic Encounters. Nepal’s very own jazz legends Cadenza will be performing at the Radisson Hotel’s Olive Bar while Stupa—an up-and-coming jazz outfit to watch out for—will be playing at the Rodi Bar in Soaltee Hotel.

Last week’s edition of Surya Classic Encounters featured guitar maestro Anil Shahi and his troupe fusing the elite crowd with their mix of western and eastern instrumental music at Absolute Bar in Pulchowk (pictured) while Stupa wowed Jatra with their jazz. The Absolute encounter was subtler and suited a quiet dinner type affair, while at Jatra jazz lovers just couldn’t get enough and were asking for more even after the last number.

This week is packed as well, with two events on Friday, one on Saturday and the last of the Surya Classic Encounters on Wednesday at the Liquid Lounge. Besides Friday’s event at Olive Bar, jazz masters Cadenza—with vocalist and drummer Navin Chettri, Samir Chettri on congos, Rajat Rai on guitars, Roshan Gurung on bass, and Marino on saxophone—will be playing on Saturday at the Fusion bar in Dwarika’s as well. Although Cadenza needs no introduction for most, those new to jazz need to understand that this is the band that not only introduced the genre in Nepal but also took Nepali musicians to regional and international fame with their world class style and innovation. They’ve played in gigs at home and abroad, and have been major contributors to Jazzmandu, the annual jazz extravaganza, ever since it began in 2002.

The final episode of Surya Classic Encounters series will be held at Liquid Lounge on Wednesday 20 September with Nepali rockers 1974AD playing unplugged. The band that began more than ten years ago has produced more hit numbers than any other modern Nepali rock outfit. Their recent album On Air is completed and will soon be released by Santana Records.

Cadenza @ Olive Bar, Radisson Hotel, 8PM Friday 15 September
Stupa @ Rodi Bar, Soaltee Hotel, 8PM Friday 15 September
Cadenza @ Fusion Bar, Dwarikas Hotel, 7PM Saturday
1974AD unplugged @ Liquid Lounge, Lajimpat, 8PM Wednesday 20 September
EXHIBITIONS

- Green Apple exhibition of Saroj Kushwahais works, 17 September at Bandana. 4418984
- Reflections paintings by Chanda Shah at The Art Shop till 18 September. 4287063
- 3000 Trail Bridges photo exhibition of trail bridges at Patan Museum Café till 19 September
- Sparsh exhibition of Bhim Prasad Sharma’s works at Gallery Nine till 20 September. 4428694
- A Retrospective exhibition of RN Joshi’s work at Park Gallery, Pulchowk, till 25 September. 5522307
- Impressions of Manang till 28 September, Nepal Tourism Board

EVENTS

- Surya Kala Super Model Contest 2006 at Hotel Yak & Yeti, 15 September, 6PM
- Tuborg Malta Gaajatra at Pragya Pratishan, Kamaladi, 15 September, 5:30 PM
- Jacques Derrida and Deconstructionism with Arun Gupto, 16 September, 4PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- Garment Industry in Nepal Under WTO Framework with Chiranjy Tiwari, 16 September, 3PM at Martin Chautari
- Water colour painting, visual presentation, discussion, workshop organised by Nepal Water Colour Society, 16 September at Park Gallery. 5522307
- Bandana a new space for arts and creativity below Gallery Nine, Lajpatipat opening on 17 September
- Jeewan Dekhi Jeevan Samma written by Abhi Subedi and directed by Sunil Pokhrel at Sama Natakghar, Gunukul till 20 September
- Lux Supermodel Hunt at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 22 September
- Films Out of Mind at Lajpatipat Gallery Café, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind 19 September, Touching the Void 21 September, Harvey 26 September, Psycho 28 September, 7PM
- Ghalatashapana 23 September
- Naya Nepal Conference organised by Action Aid Nepal and the Social Science Baha, 26-27 September. 984119943

MUSIC

- Fusion with Kutumba and Stupa at Moksh Live, 15 September, 8.30 PM. 5528212
- Drop Everything start your weekend with live music night at Lajpatipat Gallery Café, 15 September, 7.30 PM
- Winter Concert Rehearsals by The Kathmandu Chorale, till 28 September, Nepal Tourism Board
- Winter Concert Rehearsals with Anil Shahi’s Maya Mantra at Dwarika’s, 26 September, 7PM
- Take 5 Jazz Night with Cadenza, Dwarika’s Hotel, 7PM on 16 September, Rs 1200, 7PM
- Nango Volkswagon Beetle Rally for cleft palate surgery, 16 September, 9:30 at Nango Darbar Marg
- Yata Maya Classics with live performances by Jeeven Ale on flute, Manoj Gautam on tabla and Mandira Ale on Tanpura, 18 September, 6PM at Yata Maya Kendra, Patan Chhoks. 5553767
- Women in Concert Part IV at Hotel Dell Annapurna, 24 September, Rs 500, 7PM
- Ramalo Saanjh with Anil Shahis Maya Mantra at Dwarika’s, 26 September, Rs 1000
- Oktober Fest a fusion of food and music at Dwarika’s, 29 September, Rs 850
- Surya Classic Jazzmundu 2006 12-20 October
- Open Mic Night at Valvi Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM

DIINING

- Mezza and Margarita at Dwarika Fusion, every Wednesday at 5.30 PM, Rs 555, 4470448
- Saffron new Indian restaurant at Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999
- Seven Sensations at Hotel Yak & Yeti, cocktails and snacks. 434899
- Thallak Lunch special price, everyday at Moksh. 5528212
- Sizzler Promotion at Hotel Himalaya. 5323900
- Authentic Thai Food at Kiu Thai, Thamel. 4701291
- Monsoon Madness Wine Festival enjoy wines from four continents at Kiroisi of Kathmandu. 4250440
- Wet & Wild Summer Splash/swimming and lunch, or overnight stay with breakfast and swimming. Godavari Village Resort. 5550675
- Weekend Brunch at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4419234

GETAWAYS

- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge open for new season from 1 September. 4361500
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4376280
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- Escape to Godavari Village Resort, two overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5560675

This week’s three-day run of stormy rain is like the Nepali proverb, da lam, shines brightest before it dies. Chitwan valley was hit hardest by this front, that brought it over 400mm of rain in three days, 250mm from a single storm. This was the last of its kind this monsoon, though the satellite picture from Thursday afternoon shows more rain in store for the coming week. Breakaway clouds will bring light showerers towards evening, and the sunny days will be punctuated by gentle autumn breezes. Valley residents can plan activities this weekend to match the fair weather.
WELCOME TO TOWN: Regional Resident Representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for South Asia, Shahidul Haque, UN Resident Representative to Nepal, Matthew Kahane and Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madhuban Paudel (left to right) at the opening ceremony of the IOM office in Nepal, Tuesday.

SHAKE-UP: Nepal’s newly appointed Chief of Army Staff Rukmangat Katuwal shakes hands with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala after receiving the official insignia on Sunday.

REMEMBERING BP: Acting General Secretary of the Nepali Congress Ram Baran Yadab speaks on the 93rd anniversary of BP Koirala’s birth during a function at Ratna Park on Saturday.

SNEAK PREVIEW: Kunda Dixit unveils the cover of A People War - Images of the Nepal Conflict 1996-2000, during the soft launch of the new book of photos on Tuesday at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka.

OR FOR four years, Poonam Rai produced and designed clothing lines for major French high street chains like La Redoute, Quelle, and Blanc Port. The clothes were manufactured in Nepal and then shipped off to France under Rai’s supervision.

But the conflict and an uncertain political situation caused delays in shipments, and that hit orders. After four years in the export business, Poonam suddenly lost all her clients, and worse, her workers found themselves without a job.

Poonam acted swiftly. She took in 24 workers, mostly Dalits, and with them opened SemiReMe, a small boutique in Maharajganj. Today, her clients range from locals who want custom-made jeans to expats and tourists who want wedding gowns shipped to America.

Poonam is doing well for herself, but she is concerned about the Nepali handicraft industry. “Many of our hemp and organic cotton, natural fibre, and woven textiles are not part of fair trade and because of this, the people who work the hardest get the least share of the profits. It’s just not right.”

She is also disturbed by Nepali designers not being all that bothered. “Sadly, I’ve only met foreigners who think it’s important,” says Poonam. While lobbying for fair trade, she makes sure her clients pay 5 to 10 percent of their sales back to the people who have manufactured the product. She hopes this amount will be used to strengthen workers’ skills, and production infrastructure.

Back in her workshop, her staff – tailors, weavers and dyers – listen intently as Poonam points out a missing button on a white organic cotton shirt. They know they cannot afford to mess up this order. The client, Leila Hafzi, is a well-known Scandinavian designer. A good word from her in the international scene would mean more business for the company and more money for them.

Poonam and her staff are looking ahead to better times. “Two years ago, we lost a bid to supply cushion covers to Harrods. But with our increasing professionalism, that’s unlikely to happen again,” Poonam says with a confident smile.

FAIR TRADE DESIGNER

ARMS AND THE MESS: These Armoured Personnel Carriers and the trucks in the background sparked off rumours of arms imports, which led to riots. The APCs are part of the supplies accompanying the 850 Nepal Army troops soon to be deployed on peacekeeping duty in Lebanon. They are now in Sangram Shardul Battalion in Gajuri.

SAGAR SHRESTHA

FAIR TRADE DESIGNER

SHAKE-UP: Nepal’s newly appointed Chief of Army Staff Rukmangat Katuwal shakes hands with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala after receiving the official insignia on Sunday.

SAGAR SHRESTHA

WELCOME TO TOWN: Regional Resident Representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for South Asia, Shahidul Haque, UN Resident Representative to Nepal, Matthew Kahane and Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Madhuban Paudel (left to right) at the opening ceremony of the IOM office in Nepal, Tuesday.

SAGAR SHRESTHA
We have been at battle stations keeping a watch on the tournament for vacant ambassadorships. There is nothing new to report since our last update on the issue three weeks ago, other than to say that the candidates have now entered the semi-final round. Competition is fierce, hand-to-hand combat has been reported. Parliament for its part has decided that it will henceforth demand three nominations for each ambassadorial position, and then will take an exam with objective and subjective questions essay questions and also oral exams before deciding which lucky chaps get to be Nepal’s emissaries and plenipotentiaries. This has meant all prospective dips are cramming geography, history and arithmetic so they can pass the Iron Gates.

The UML, NCP and NC all had rival ambassadorial candidates for the juiciest spots viz: Tokyo, London, Washington and New Delhi. This deadlocked the nominations for three months. The disagreement was one of the reasons the NC and NCP have a hard time agreeing on unification because some NC hopefuls would probably lose their chance of ambassadorial nominations if the party united.

Nevertheless, at least the NC and the UML have called a truce and decided to divide up the world much in the same way that the Spanish and Portuguese demarcated their spheres of influence in the 17th century. The NC wants New Delhi and Washington, arguing that sending a commie to Washington may not be a brilliant idea and that it can handle Big Brother better than the UML’s resident India-bashers. By which token it would mean that the UML could easily get a communist country like China, but don’t bet on it. Beijing doesn’t want commies either. So Balkhu now wants Tokyo, Berlin, Brussels and (surprise!) Rangoon. UML frontrunners appear to be mostly human rights wallahs.

The town is abuzz with speculation about what transpired at the Girija-Gyanendra summit the other week. We happened to have a fly on the wall during the hour-long meeting and can report that King G sought Premier G’s advice on matters of state. “What should I do?” the king asked. According to the fly, who requested anonymity, the prime minister replied: “Sit tight, Your Majesty, don’t do a thing,” adding, “tempus omnia curat.” Or words to that effect. Time heals everything, and no one should know that better than our prime minister.

There are several options being considered to untie the current political deadlock. And at risk of sounding like our predecessor, Under My Hat, they are (in no particular order):
1. Make King G president
2. Make Prachanda president
3. Make PM president
4. Make Chandi Dhakal president
5. Make Prachanda king
6. Make Baburam Minister of Urban Planning and Tyre Supplies
7. Make Paras ambassador to North Korea

We also hear Prachanda wants to change his name. It’s difficult living up to one’s awesome reputation and several suggestions come to mind. In the national interest, here are some suggestions: Comrade Awful, Comrade Grey Shirt, Comrade-in-Chief, The Dear One, the Great Leader, Mr Bad Hair Day, Chairman Meet-Me-At-The-Gym. Please tick only one.

It’s obvious that the prolonged ceasefire means the underground Maoist comrades have nothing to do, and the leadership needs to keep the elite commando units occupied with organizing tyre fires. Their special taskforce is busy patrolling New Road selling ‘tickets’ for Maoist cultural events at Rs 100,000. Wonder if we get a free Coke with that. Others are hitting shops along Lajimpat for up to Rs 1 million. In Jomsom, tourists have to pay Rs 1,500 as soon as they land to the commissar, and hotel owners there are thinking of closing shop because of extortion. So what is the Federation of Nepali Chamber of Commerce doing about all this? The President was sitting on the podium with Maoist leaders at a revolutionary trade union convention at Khula Manch. A day previously, the FNCCI head honcho also used the 10-minute time allotted to him during the Indo-Nepal Hydropower Summit to deliver a 20-minute tirade against the media suggesting, among other things, that just as China muzzled the media Nepal should do the same. With businessmen like these, who needs willful defaulters?