What we think

Nepalis are carefully upbeat about the future: poll

Regardless of how much power the king has, do you think Nepal should or should not have a king?

- Have a king 48%
- Not have a king 49%

Who should ultimately control the army: the king or a democratically elected government?

- King 9%
- Democratically elected government 81%

Generally speaking, do you think things in Nepal are going in the right or the wrong direction?

- Right direction (somewhat) 18%
- Right direction (strongly) 71%
- Wrong direction (somewhat) 7%
- Wrong direction (strongly) 2%

Do you approve or disapprove of the constituent assembly elections?

- Approve 97%
- Disapprove 1%

Do you think the Maoists will fully disarm?

- Yes 32%
- No 68%

What we think

A nationwide public opinion poll has shown that Nepalis are cautiously optimistic about the way things are going, but are divided on whether to keep the monarchy or not.

It was an almost 50-50 tie between those who wanted the monarchy abolished and those who wanted to keep it, but the trend shows clear divides based on gender, education, and location. Younger people and men tend to be republicans, and there are fewer supporters of the monarchy in western Nepal and among the educated.

The poll was conducted between 6 August-6 September among 3,000 respondents above age 18 all over the country by the Kathmandu offices of the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the market research company AC Nielsen.

The poll shows Nepalis are very sure about some things. For instance, more than 80 percent think the army should be under the command of a democratic, elected government. There is also overwhelming support for the job the seven-party alliance has done so far (91 percent said they approved) and for UN involvement in monitoring the ceasefire. An overwhelming 97 percent of those who’d heard of constituent assembly elections wanted them, perhaps because they think this is the only way to restore peace in the country.

The popularity of various political entities in 'thermometer ratings' showed the seven-party alliance scoring highest with +45, followed by the UML with +12, and the NC with +10 respectively. The Maoists scored -2 and the NC-D -39. This was corroborated with popularity ratings for personalities in which Sher Bahadur Deuba scored -39 with only King Gyanendra more unpopular than him at -59. Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhab Nepal tied at -1 and Girija Koirala came out with +4.

More than one-third of those polled hadn’t heard of a constituent assembly or knew little about it, and slightly more than half thought the Maoists will not fully disarm. Even so, 56 percent said they would trust the Maoists to allow a multiparty system if they came to power. However, the formulation of the question leaves room to doubt whether this is what the people actually believe or what they hope will happen.

Whereas 89 percent of the people felt the country was going in the wrong direction in June 2004, only 7 percent think so now. And while in October 2004 74 percent thought elections couldn’t happen in the next year, only 10 percent think so today.

A striking revelation from the poll is that when asked to name two of their main concerns most respondents said lack of jobs, followed by education and cost of living. Maoist violence came seventh, after health care and above corruption.

Do you approve or disapprove of the constituent assembly elections?

(The pie charts do not include 'Don’t know/ Can’t say' responses. For details of the poll, please see ‘Optimism, certainty, and ambivalence’, p11.)

Which two of the following are you most concerned about in your everyday life?

- Lack of jobs
- Education
- Global living
- Health care
- Maoist violence
- Corruption
- Political instability
- Crime
- Democracy

- 9
- 10
- 20
- 30
- 40
- 50

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CANTONMENT COMMITMENT

The Nepali polity treats the international community with ambivalence. On one hand we ask that ambassadors keep off the national political turf, but at the same time we hope for a rescue from that quarter if and when the Nepalese people create a mess. It now looks as if the transitional process to bring the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) into open politics and move towards constituent assembly elections will be long and drawn-out. The confusion during this interregnum must not deprive the Nepali people of international support for recovery and development. The memory of the peace and progress sought by the April movement must not be forgotten.

It is clear that the international community at large needs to weigh in and not be accused of interfering if they do nothing of the importance of making a space for the Maoists on the open platform. Together with Nepali opinion-makers, they must ensure that the people’s desire for peace and clarity to pluralism, and democracy are not undermined during this transition period.

The Nepali intelligentsia and the international community must now hold the Maoists to their commitment to demobilize their armed forces and enable a safe passage with dignity. Why should only Mr. Moriarty hold court?

Private sector management consulting thrives on three elements: a need for specialized skills, creditable facilitation, and a ‘whipping boy’. From an economic perspective, consulting business models works well because consultants and their employers are guided by similar incentive structures: by lucrative fees and the prospect of add-on business, and executives by perceived success and associated increases in compensation in each contract.

Each undertaking task involves a careful analysis that weighs the probability of failure against the benefits of success. In conducting such pre-contract due diligence, consultants perform a serious of analyses that weigh the probability of success against the consulting firm’s exposure to failure, often referred to a reputational risk.

The long-term costs of failure to the service provider’s brand name (and associated losses in future fees) often outweigh the benefits of avoiding non-contingent, short-term revenues.

If the UN does not work together with Nepal’s peace process, it will not only fail, but it will lose face.

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If the UN does not work together with Nepal’s peace process, it will not only fail, but it will lose face.

But for obvious reasons, the UN will not want to position itself as an interfering party for a peace process that by any meaningful account, is yet to kick off.

Which way the situation steers is completely up to the seven parties and the Maoists. This time, there are no whipping boys.
MAIN

Two weeks ago you bravely published a translation of the Kathmandu article on How Maina was killed (from the Nepali Press, #313). Shocking though the detail was, I write to say that it did not prepare me for reading the full account in the army Court Of Inquiry report. One sentence in it made me hot in the process of questioning by torture. In not being able to withstand the torture, her death occurred. In other words, the torture and the torturer were Maina. It is surely a matter of extreme shame that the three officers who initially ordered the direct killing were not appropriately changed, and continue to serve in the army today, even in the same ranks.

All armies worthy of the name are ashamed of this, and else, and I know the Nepal Army well enough to say that no one in its ranks would dispute that assertion. The reason is both simple and profound. It is what makes up the profession of arms, an honourable one, to be followed with courage, and which separates it from barbarism. But, sadly, that is the only appropriate word I can find for the behaviour of the army that led directly to the death of Maina.

As Nepal moves into a new era, the new Chief of Army Staff, General Katuwal, has rightly and courageously signalled his commitment to ensuring that the army operates within the law of the land. That brings up the killing of civilians by soldiers to be dealt with by the civil courts. There could be no better signal that Nepal is indeed moving for the better in regard to the observance of human rights than for the COAS to reassure all, open investigation into the killing of Maina with a view to having the perpetrators appropriately charged under criminal law, and tried before the civilian courts. I appeal to him to do so.

In the same spirit, I appeal to the new government, without further delay, to honour its international obligations and declare torture to be a criminal offence under the law of Nepal. There can be no bringing back what has been lost, but I am sure our readers would agree that the actions proposed above would be a worthy memorial to her young life, so tragically and brutally ended while she was still at school.

Sam Cowan, via email

CK LAL

CK Lal (Big gambler, #315) seems to have no knowledge of how the Nepali Army functions. His gibberish that the choice of Katuwal was controversial makes no sense. According to Lal’s logic, nobody should have been promoted, since the entire army was following somebody else. Mr Lal, please keep in mind that the main criterion for promotion in the army is seniority. May I ask who else he had in mind?

Amrit KC, Bishanaghar

The article KU’s quality education (#315), appears to glorify Kathmandu University management without proper background research. The author didn’t consult the academic faculty at KU about the reasons for the current unrest. The academic faculty has been demanding for over two and a half years and has now found voice through the formation of the University Professors Association. The author talks about the current VC of KU, Professor Sharma and his contributions to education in Nepal, but blocks out the issues of nepotism and administrative and financial irregularities hounding KU and preventing it from going even further.

The golden rule of journalism is unbiased reporting. What we read in this article is biased and inaccurate interpretation of facts, which could have been avoided by consulting the academic staff of KU.

The article quotes Sharma on how hurt he is to see nepotism trying to destroy what he has built so carefully. But the article does not summarise what our demands are, or which of them are being implemented as it inaccurately says. What the audience reads in this article is exactly what the KU administration wants them to.

We sincerely hope that in future Nepali Times sticks to what it stands for: best reporting facts that reflect both sides of the coin.

Kathmandu University

Professorial Association, via email

KAMARI

Your report on #314 in Dangki (#315) tells the true story of Tharu girl children being used as housemaids. Kamalirs are even considered a mark of family status here. Even high-rung professionals have no hesitation in having them, though they don’t concede in public that they have unveiled kamalirs at home.

The NGOs working for Kamalirs have done good work and are providing the girls with alternative sources of income.

But I suggest they find an amicable solution to the problem, instead of filling cases against hoteliers.

Bhaskar Aryal, Dang

POWER PLIGHT

Your article Electric switch (#314) is a must for the busy nation. Electric cars backed by statistics, cost analysis, and presentation of future that can be manufactured in Nepal. Sounds very impressive, but I see two main problems. First, is it possible to have a smart government in Nepal? Our past experience has been quite disappointing.

The biggest inevitable hurdle is electric #314. The NDC is broke and the NEA is sliding towards bankruptcy. There is daily load shedding, even in the monsoon. It will take at least ten years all go well with all proposed projects, and with a smart government be self-sufficient in electricity and meet industrial and domestic demand. And that electricity will be expensive. Where will we get affordable electricity when we fail to exploit our rich hydropower potential?

I think, Kunda Dixit, the only way to realise your suggestion is to first get a government that will effectively deal with corruption. Nepal is the only country in the world where state-owned corporations like the NDC and the NEA are in financial trouble despite being monopolies.

S Tuldahar, Geneva, Switzerland

SALT FIGURES

The salt prices in #314 of the earth (#314) are incorrect. Free-flow 30 gm iodised salt ex-factory, Gandhinagar in Gujarat, India, is Rs 1.60/kg. Packing charges are Rs 0.70/kg, and rail freight Raizal is Rs 1.60/kg. The total price ex-Raizal is therefore Rs 3.90 to 4.80. STC charges are.

DS, email

BACKSIDE

Considering that two paragraphs of the first Buzz (#314 on the buzz, what’s happening, Backside, #312) were about me. I thought that it was wise to clarify the story. If I referred to it, the incident did not take place in Kathmandu. It was suddenly attacked by outsiders near Chhetrapati on my daily walk home, during the declared strike, in a small hotel, but not by the mother as reported. As far as the story is concerned, even the parents have gone on record to say it is untrue.

The point of economic diplomacy was also raised. True, I could not do much in seven months except start projects like the Sindhuli Road, Kail Gandaki-A, Kulekhani-II Radar Installation in TIA, Bagmati Bridge, perhaps the biggest projects post-1990. Really, I would have loved to bring in more than these projects.

Dr Bishnu Hari Nepal

Former Ambassador to Japan

NEPALI HERO

For once I wholeheartedly agree with your editorial, on Dr Ruit (#315). Ten years ago Dr Ruit cured a chronic eye problem our baby daughter had in a week without medication or surgery (he taught us a massage technique instead), and for a one-time fee of Rs 5.

I am pleased he is finally receiving much-deserved international attention for his wonderful work. The fact that his outreach eye camps went into the remotest regions of Nepal even during the deadliest times of the conflict is awe-inspiring. He is a man of the people who insists that even ministers and other self-appointed VIPs get line to see him, just like the rest of us. Dr Ruit and his dedicated team of EyeGPs, such as Dr Gunjan Thapa, are nothing short of miracle workers and Dr Ruit should be declared a national treasure.

Any prospective international donor searching for a worthy cause in Nepal need look no further than Dr Ruit. Nobody will put your money to better use. And if any domestic éfatíé catsi want to rejuvenate their souls a tad, I cannot suggest a more resolute-oriented man of vision than Dr Ruit. Heck, buy the good doctor a heli-ambulance and see how many more thousands he reaches and gives back the gift of sight.

God bless Dr Sanduk Ruit and all those like him. #315

Sanjeeb Mstreghi, Kopanpule

LETTERS

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Child abuse

The war has not stopped for children

NARESH NEWAR

In NEPALGANJ

Over 600 children killed. More than 8,000 orphaned. Around 40,000 displaced. Close to 28,000 abducted.

A generation of Nepali children has been crippled physically and psychologically by the decade-long conflict, as these figures from Child Workers in Nepal suggest. Yet, children have failed to figure as anywhere in the peace process and so far, none of the series of talks between the Maoists and seven-party alliance have managed to include children in their agenda.

On Monday, the Maoists “asked” schools around the Valley to send their students in school uniforms to attend their ANFUSHI’s national assembly conventions in Tundikhel. There was a huge outburst from child rights and human rights groups and the event made the headlines of newspapers, radio, and television.

But this is virtually an everyday occurrence out in the districts, especially in west Nepal, where children are abducted and forced into “voluntary” participation in Maoist activities.

“They intimidate us and make threats if we refuse to join,” says 16-year-old Shrenika Shaha from Bardia, who is a member of Bal Asha of Bheta Samuha, a children’s group formed by Insec: to help raise awareness about child rights in remote villages. Shaha explains that the rebels start out convincing children to join their political activities and become “important” in society.

“They try to tell us that they’ll turn Bardia into Switzerland if we all work as Maoists,” says 16-year-old Harish’s Deh Bahadur Buda.

This constant intimidation has frightened some school children into submission, left others mentally disturbed, and seduced some with visions of power.

Local Maoist leaders in Bardia and Banke say they never force their political activities and become “important” in society. “We try to tell us that they’ll return Bardia into Switzerland if we all work as Maoists,” says 16-year-old Harish’s Deh Bahadur Buda.

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Child abuse

This week provided a rare opportunity to watch the “awesome Prachanda” in action. It was a high-wire camera interview for ultimate victory. Balancing these goals can be frighteningly difficult. How does one balance the ultimate victory against the war against feudalism? This was no ordinary speech. It was aimed at his own cadres during a time of great uncertainties in the peace process. It was authoritative and final, and the words relatively measured. In fact, we are fighting for capitalistic mode of production. We are not classical dogmatic communists. We are willing to adapt.

For 20 minutes Prachanda spoke to a rapt audience. His tone was authoritative and final, and the words relatively measured. Twenty minutes later, Prachanda, a man in a private room, facing a TV camera, wiped his sweaty forehead, he looked eager to begin the interview. It was quite a transformation. From a fiery revolutionary rallying his troops just 20 minutes before, Prachanda was now coming across as a statesman. He knew he was addressing a global and American audience.

He spoke in measured tones, smiled often at the camera, and cracked a few jokes. He talked about his family, what he eats and drinks, what his life was like in the jungle. He even spoke of the Hollywood movie he enjoys watching (Spartacus). But time and again, he returned to one message: Don’t be afraid of us. We are a party of the people. We don’t believe our leadership will realise the need to end the violent conflict, but many Maoist cadres, driven by years of hard-left indoctrination, are holding out for ultimate victory. These goals can be frighteningly difficult to balance. How does one balance the ultimate victory against the war against feudalism? This was no ordinary speech. It was aimed at his own cadres during a time of great uncertainties in the peace process. It was authoritative and final, and the words relatively measured. Twenty minutes later, Prachanda, a man in a private room, facing a TV camera, wiped his sweaty forehead, he looked eager to begin the interview. It was quite a transformation. From a fiery revolutionary rallying his troops just 20 minutes before, Prachanda was now coming across as a statesman. He knew he was addressing a global and American audience.

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NEW PRODUCTS

ACCOUNT SCHEME: Lumbini Bank has launched the 8US Dollar Premium Deposit Account, giving depositors 4 percent interest on a daily balance. The account holders will be allowed unlimited withdrawals, free SMS banking, a waiver on good for payment charges and a 50 percent waiver on traveller’s cheques, amongst other services.

CHEVY: With Chevrolet’s new SRV and Tavera both hitting the Kathmandu streets, there’s plenty to choose from. The stylishly sporty SRV is a sport-back vehicle boasting a 1.6 litre petrol engine, handy storage and in passenger comfort features, wrap-around lights and an MP3 player. The multi-utility Tavera (pictured) offers a third row for several seating options, along with stylish interiors and the assurance of low maintenance and running costs.

CALCIUM CHOW CHOW: Wai Wai noodles will now come packaged with extra calcium, with its manufacturers claiming it will offer four times more calcium than other Nepali noodles. With the additional calcium, each 75gm of Wai Wai meets 20 percent of children’s recommended dietary allowances.

LIQUID GOLD: Marico Industries has launched Safola Gold oil, made of a mixture of ricebran and kardi oils. It’s high in vitamin E, lowers cholesterol and doesn’t saturate foods cooked in it.

CASH MACHINE: Nepal Investment Bank Limited (NIBL) has opened a new ATM at Mangal Bajar. The bank already has machines in Pulchowk, Darbar Marg, Thamel, Patan, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. The bank is currently offering various promotional offers on its ATM service.

FRIENDLY: World Bank brings out indicators every year in a report called Doing Business, which determines how business friendly a country is. In 2006, Singapore came first, followed by New Zealand and USA, Nepal ranks 108th out of 175, whereas India’s position is 137th and China’s 93rd. In South Asia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives rank at 88, 74, 138, 89 and 53 respectively. Last year, Nepal ranked 90th.

NEW CHOCOFUN: Sujal Foods’ flagship brand Chocofun, a chocolate covered wafer, priced at Rs 5, has been launched in a new pack through their ‘New Pinch, New Pinchi’ campaign.

TIC TOC TIC: Peter England has introduced an exciting Dasain offer. A chic wristwatch is offered absolutely free, on purchase of TIC TOC TIC: Peter England has an exciting Dasain offer. A chic wristwatch is offered absolutely free, on purchase of $950. ‘ ‘

NATION

22 - 28 SEPTEMBER 2006

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari

The civil society—the Nepali business community.

Thus, we get abstract lectures, but no effort to start a national conversation about how our hard-earned rights can be effectively practiced within a framework that adds to employment, income, and worker empowerment levels, while reducing job-related vulnerabilities. Yes, a gold-plated constitution is a good start. But as we saw through the 1990s, without continuous collaborative work to translate people’s dreams of a better future into reality, a well-crafted legal document alone offers no certainty that Nepal’s lives will significantly improve.

Once the business community is shunned is that it is perceived to be ‘damaged goods’. During the battle of Nepal’s direct rule, influential business leaders became ministers and advisors. That made them notorious for 15 minutes, but publicly untrustworthy for life. The issue of what to do with loan defaulters has also dragged on for far too long. Business leaders have symmetrically shut down production and service lines. Meanwhile, despite an admirable start two years ago, Business Initiative for Peace has fallen by the wayside. The business community has lost an opportunity to exercise leadership and use the interim times to explain how better business policies and practices give more Nepalis jobs and pay.

The Maoists are riding the wave of anti-business mood, which they helped create and sustain. They’ve escalated acts of extortion and intimidation. They harass bankers and financiers, force firms to hire and train their unskilled cadres, and get away scot-free after heisting up businesses.

In such an environment, how is anyone to do business in Nepal? How is someone to get into business when there is little sympathy for those who want to play by the rules?

Can anyone articulate the role the business community should play?

Business is getting far too long. Business leaders have woven a shroud over their petty concerns and started articulating answers. When the notion of private sector business is continuously under attack, it must be a priority for the business community to explain how better business policies and practices give more Nepalis jobs and pay.

Business leaders have won rights can be effectively exercised within a framework that adds to employment, income, and worker empowerment levels, while reducing job-related vulnerabilities. Yes, a gold-plated constitution is a good start. But as we saw through the 1990s, without continuous collaborative work to translate people’s dreams of a better future into reality, a well-crafted legal document alone offers no certainty that Nepal’s lives will significantly improve.

Nepal’s financial system is open and competitive. There is little competition, no workable solutions, they dither or offer lame defensive explanations. In the public mind, businessmen are crooks—in bed with other crooks, aka politicians.

The cost of the failure to deal with those few bad apples is mounting. The integrity of Nepal’s financial system is open to question, and the risks associated with doing business in Nepal make the capital requirement for it high. Given this, how can Nepal attract even small-scale investments and raise local money?

The recent actions of and against the business community don’t help either. Contractors are shunned is that it is perceived to be ‘damaged goods’. During the battle of Nepal’s direct rule, influential business leaders became ministers and advisors. That made them notorious for 15 minutes, but publicly untrustworthy for life. The issue of what to do with loan defaulters has also dragged on for far too long. Business leaders have symmetrically shut down production and service lines. Meanwhile, despite an admirable start two years ago, Business Initiative for Peace has fallen by the wayside. The business community has lost an opportunity to exercise leadership and use the interim times to explain how better business policies and practices give more Nepalis jobs and pay.

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It’s time our business leaders rose above their petty concerns and started articulating answers. When the notion of private sector business is continuously under attack, it must be a priority for the business community to explain how better business policies and practices give more Nepalis jobs and pay.
FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

Editorial in Rajdhani, 18 September

In the name of supporting the peace process, US ambassador James F Moriarty recently took a ride in a Nepal Army helicopter and visited the midwest and far west regions. Following his visits to the army barracks, he criticised the Maoists heavily in front of the media. Now both the Maoists and the seven parties have countered by attacking him for acting against diplomatic norms. His face-saving defensive stance is that he has not done so. No matter how powerful one’s country is, undermining one’s own diplomatic decorum looks like an attempt to intimidate another country. Moriarty’s remarks will not go un-criticised, especially when the political powers are working hard to resolve the country’s internal problems.

This is not the first time that Nepal has experienced active foreign interest in domestic issues. Besides the USA, other countries have also interfered actively, especially against parties that were very popular among the Nepali people.

The US has generally maintained its position against communist parties. Former ambassador Julia Chang acted exactly like Moriarty. The UML protested heavily against Chang.

Around April 2002, Girija Prasad Koirala flew to Delhi and initiated peace talks with Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai. Former US Ambassador Michael Malinowski was simultaneously visiting the barracks and provoking war.

He often said, “The Maoists are no different from al-Qaeda and must be dealt with.” To do so, the US provided the Nepal Army with unprecedented military aid, sabotaging Koirala’s peace efforts. Pro-American Sher Bahadur Deuba dissolved the House of Representatives, giving the king the opportunity to stage his 1 February coup.

America’s extremist policy has not changed, and Moriarty was Malinowski’s new avatar. Despite idealistic talk, his every move seemed anti-democratic and against the peace process. He caused political chaos by saying the king should be given 100 days following his coup. He then ran to Delhi to prevent the 12-point understanding, just as Girija and the Maoists were trying to launch a decisive anti-monarchy movement. During the April Uprising, Moriarty kept trying to split the Maoists and the parties. Following the restoration of parliament he continued his campaign, saying the Maoists could not join the government until they disarm.

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During the peoples movement, Koirala repeated a key issue. He has told the Americans not to make Nepal part of their global strategy. Let Nepal be open, independent, and flourish on its own. Then, the US was warning that Nepal’s state mechanism could be destroyed. Now Moriarty is warning of the danger of the end of democracy in Nepal. Is the US global strategy, which Girija Babu clearly understood, resurfacing? In our region, the US is focused on China. ‘Dirty games’ in international politics are easier and more successful in failed states than in peaceful ones. Is Nepal’s peace process becoming an obstacle in the American game?

MIN BAJRACHARYA
Justice
Suman Adhikari in Himal Khabarpatrika, 17 September-1 October. The author’s father, teacher Mukti Adhikari, was tied to a tree and killed in cold blood by Maoists in early 2002.

Over 12,000 people have died in the name of the Maoist conflict. Nepalis have been killed because they have refused to pay, feed, or house Maoists, or the rebels have taken innocent lives for personal vendettas. The state also killed many innocents because they were ‘rebel spies’, or just unlucky enough to be caught in the crossfire. Nepalís have been killed because they have refused to pay, feed, or house Maoists, or the rebels have taken innocent lives for personal vendettas.

The ceasefire is our chance to make something positive. Now is not the time to be bitter, but to join hands and to work together. But sadly, even in such a positive environment the Maoists are determined to hide their excesses and blame the last ten years on the government. Their victims are suffering from psychological, financial and social problems, yet no one on the talks team is discussing how to deal with the psychological trauma of the war.

We can’t get out of this war if we don’t address humanitarian issues. Only the victims have the right to forgive those who committed those atrocities. A political solution is not the only way out of this conflict. Justice is the only hope victims of the conflict have in the face of their psychological and financial wounds. Reconciliation and reparation require finances and physical structure, but the face of their psychological and financial wounds. Reconciliation and reparation require finances and physical structure, but the face of their psychological and financial wounds.

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Kids in crisis
Editorial in Annapurna Post, 20 September.

The CPN-Maoist ignore the global consensus that using children for politics and war is a crime against society. After claiming their child, the Maoist leader Deb Gurung has proposed Giri Parasad Koirala for president. Inaugurating the 17th convention of the ANFSPU, Gurung made the proposal public for the first time. It is not known if Gurung’s statement was a personal or party decision, but it did bring to light confusion within the party.

Even during the heat of the Jana Andolan, or when he was made prime minister through its force, Koirala has always been one of the palace’s most loyal guards. Gurung’s statement makes it clear that the Maoists naively believe it might be possible to step into a republic with the help of a monarch’s crutches. Gurung has put his political stand in question by seeming to support Koirala more than even Ram Sharan Mahat and Krishna Prasad Koirala.

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Great escapes
A Dasain getaway planner for those who can’t leave fast enough

Where: Tiger Mountain destinations are in Chitwan, Bardia, national parks and Pokhara, and have special offers for

tours this season.

When: Until 28 October

Package: Choose between a three-day-two-night package or four-day-three-night deal, at either Tiger Mountain Tharu

Lodge or Tiger Tops Karnali Lodge or a combination of the two.

Cost: Prices range from Rs 10,000-25,000 per person

including meals, activities such as elephant safaris, boat

rides, jungle drives, bird watching, jungle walks, plus the

services of experienced naturalists and jungle guides,
taxes, and national park fees.

Special offer: Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge offers a per

night rate of Rs 6,000 per head, inclusive of
accommodation, meals, and in-house activities such as

jungle walks, bird watching and village tours.

Contact: Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, 4391500,
reservations@tigermountain.com

Where: Rhino Resort in Chitwan is reached by road, a flight

into Bharatpur, or by a combination of a raft and wheels from

Mugling.

When: Dasain

Package: Three-day-two night package

Cost: Rs 3,000 on twin sharing basis

Contact: Rhino Resort, 4265454

Where: Gaida Wildlife Camp in the central area of Chitwan National Park, Drive to Sauraha, and the Camp folks will take care of you from there.

When: Dasain

Package: Three-day-two night package

Cost: Couples pay Rs 5,999, and single Rs 2,999, inclusive of

jungle activities

Contact: Gaida Wildlife Camp, 4215431, 4215407

Where: Temple Tiger Jungle Lodge in Chitwan offers

countoured rates this season, as well as picnics lunches,

barbecue dinners, and jungle activities.

When: Until 31 October

Package: Flexible Dasain and Thar offers

Cost: Rs 5,400 per person per night

Contact: Temple Tiger Jungle Lodge, 4244651

Where: Le Meridian, Gokarna is a lush getaway in the

heart of the forest, surrounded by green hills and a panoramic

view of the mountains.

Package: Four-day-three night Dasain offer, two-night Golf

Getaway, two-night weekend package, two-night Romantic

Getaway.

Cost: Offers range from Rs 10,15,000 for singles and Rs 12,00,000-18,000 for couples, and Rs 17,000 for the

romantic getaway.

Contact: Le Meriden Kathmandu GokarntForest Golf

Resort Spa, 4451212

Where: Park Village, Budhanilkhantha, in the foothills of

Sivapul is spread over six acres of dense woodland, and

is excellent for kite-flying.

When: Dasain

Package: Two day-one night package with full American

breakfast and dinner, elaborate Dasain lunch, free use of
pool, gym, and snooeker, and 25 percent off steam, sauna,

massage, and beverages.

Cost: Rs 2,100 per person on twin sharing basis, children

under five free, children over 10 pay Rs 1,100

Contact: Park Village, 4372580

Where: Club Himalaya, Nagarkot is making up for the

cancellation of Changa Chait by organising a pre-Dasain

party, where kites can be flown.

When: Year-round

Cost: Single Rs 2,800, double Rs 3,400, not including taxes

Contact: Club Himalaya, 6600801, 83

Where: Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu

Package: Dasain Bonanza for Nepalis and residents,

including massage, gym, spa, buffet dinner and

breakfast.

Cost: Rs 4,500 per person per night on twin sharing basis

with two children.

Contact: Hotel Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4491234,
reservations.kathmandu@hyattintl.com

Where: Godavari Village Resort is spread over 14 lush

green acres and offers mountain views and traditionally-

styled cottages and buildings overlooking rice fields.

When: Dasain

Package: Dasain overnight stay package

Cost: Rs 1,800 for one and Rs 2,500 for two

Contact: Godavari Village Resort, 5506765

There are literally scores of companies that organise treks
to the popular Everest and Annapurna regions. Or, you
could get a map and make your own way, stopping at
teahouses and mingling with locals and other tourists.

International

In the decade since Kathmandu travel agents started
offering international tours, they've specialised in
leisure, pilgrimage, adventure, and honeymoon

 Packages. You can go anywhere, from Asian
destinations like Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar,
China, and Dubai. Farther afield are Australia, New
Zealand, France, Switzerland, the US, Egypt, and Kenya.
Special Dasain packages are selling out, and all depart in a
few weeks.

Lalit Mandal specialises in Asia and offers four packages this season:

Where: Thailand

Package: Eight days-seven nights in Bangkok and Pattaya

featuring Coral Island, Nong Nooch Gardens, Tiger Zoo,

Safari World, and Dream World

When: Tours depart on 29 September and 4 October

Cost: Rs 47,000 per person on twin sharing basis

Where: China

Package: Twelve days in Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing, Wuxi,

Suzhou, Hangzhou

When: Tour departs 7 October

Cost: Rs 68,000 per person

Where: China

Package: Best of China, nine days in Shanghai, Beijing,

Wuxi

When: Tour departs 30 September

Cost: Rs 60,000

Where: East Asia

Package: Oriental bonanza, nine days to Malaysia,

Singapore, Thailand

When: Tour departs 29 September

Cost: Rs 92,000 per person on a twin/triple basis

Lalit Mandal also offers domestic tour packages, priced
according to the number of people. Packages include two
days-one night to Nagarkot and Dhulikhel, day-long rafting
on the Trisuli, one-day-one night camping, and rafting trips
to Churauji, Kunirat, Manakamana, available year-round.

Contact: Lalit Mandal Travel and Tours, 5546526

President Travels and Tours says its more popular trips
include those to Macau, Mauritius, Turkey, Korea, and
Cappus. This holiday season, President Travels offers
promotional packages.

Where: Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur

When: Dasain

Package: Seven days-six nights Dasain dhamaka

Cost: Rs 55,000
Where: Egypt
Package: Eight days-seven nights in Cairo, Luxor, the West Bank, and Aswan including the pyramids, museums, a Nile cruise among other activities.
Cost: Rs 41,000 (not including airfare)

For both contact: President Travels and Tours, 4220245

Malaysia Dream Holidays offer numerous packages through Zenith Experiences Travel Services (4444076) and Marco Polo Travels (4247215).

Where: Kuala Lumpur, Genting and Penang
Package: Three nights in Kuala Lumpur, one in Genting, two in Penang
When: Year-round
Cost: $325 per person on twin sharing basis, $200 per person and child with bed, $165 per person and a child with no bed, $113 for single supplement

Where: Kuala Lumpur and Genting
Package: Three nights in Kuala Lumpur, two in Genting
When: Year-round
Cost: $260 per person on twin sharing basis, $170 per person and child with bed, $125 per person and a child with no bed, $94 for single supplement

Where: Famosa
Package: Two nights in Famosa
When: Year-round
Cost: $125 per person base on twin sharing basis, $113 per person and a child with bed, $100 per person and a child with no bed, $188 for singles

Where: Famosa
Package: One night in Famosa
When: Year-round
Cost: $93 per person base on twin sharing basis, $84 per person base and a child with bed, $64 per person and a child with no bed, $150 for singles

Where: Kuala Lumpur and Melaka
Package: Dasain special
When: Until end-November
Cost: Rs 13,999 per person on twin/ double/ triple sharing basis

Many fly-by-night firms offer trips to Tibet or just Lhasa. It’s important you choose a reliable operator, and there are many choices to suit your budget. Among the choices are:

Where:†Three days sightseeing and overland return to Kathmandu via Gyantse, Xigaitse, Tingri, Nyalam, and Zhangmu.
When: September and October
Package: The Lhasa Express, eight days
Cost: $855 per person for group of four, airfare not included.
Contact: Shangri La Tours / Himalayan Journeys, 4226138

If none of these floats your boat, Star Cruises might. Cruise packages are ex-Singapore and include accommodation on twin sharing basis, meals, and entertainment on board.

Where: Two nights Melacca/ Kuala Lumpur cruise
Cost: $340 per person on twin sharing basis, 50 percent discount available for second passenger.

Where: Three nights Penang/ Phuket cruise
Cost: $355 per person on twin sharing basis, 50 percent off for a second passenger.

Where: Five nights, straits of Melacca
Cost: $830 per person on twin sharing basis, 50 percent off for a second passenger.

When: Cruises sail 1 September-15 November.
Optimists, pessimists

The future looks increasingly uncertain

M ost Nepalis will welcome plans for new peace talks before Dasain, announced after the prime minister met the top two Maoists on Sunday.

That is because Nepal still hovers between war and peace. Large-scale violence has ended, but local outrages continue, mainly perpetrated by the Maoists. And despite the claims that suspicions have been lifted, mistrust between the Maoists and the government has been rising.

This enables the Maoists to disrupt life on relatively small scales, as illustrated by last week’s incident surrounding the armoured vehicles at Gajuri military camp. After the ceasefire monitoring committee found the trucks empty, the strike was called off, but Prachanda still said there was a conspiracy.

Given this recent pattern, how will things play out in the weeks to come? Let’s focus on the intentions of the Maoists and the government.

The Maoists, sporting their new grey uniform, have come largely overground, and are running a slick Kathmandu office. But as for what they’ll do next, predictions are divided between the pessimists and the optimists.

Some of Prachandais recent remarks have been hardline. For instance, his assertion that the people are asking the Maoists to keep their weapons, that the camps the Maoists are building can be seen either as a contribution to peace or as a preemption to meet any eventual hostility, and that when multi-party democracy comes back to Nepal, it will only be by their own force.

Baburam Bhattarai reportedly says constituent assembly elections will not be possible without restructuring the Nepal Army â€” which means that many press reports cite the word “civil war” in their headlines.

Some pessimists see the Maoists moving by stealth into a position of power, eulogised by most of the civil society lobby. A contributor to www.blog.com.np says Maoists have been entering FM stations and threatening violence unless they are given the airwaves they demand. I can only hope that isn’t true.

Charles Haviland

Pushing aside autocratic royal rule in a largely peaceful manner comes uncontrolled street politics. Because they have weapons.

Into the vacuum of democratic influence, and the Maoists behave as if they own the country just threatening a return to war unless big concessions were made. For instance, his assertion that the people are asking the Maoists to keep their weapons.

There are tens of thousands of these, some of whom have been living underground for years. What will they do next?

Some of Prachandais recent remarks have been hardline. For instance, his assertion that the people are asking the Maoists to keep their weapons.

The Maoists have a point when they accuse the government of reneging on agreements, and they themselves have started backtracking on last month’s letter to the UN, which requested help to stop violence.

The government did, after signing the June agreement, admit that the conflict, the power of Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros had risen to 412 from less than a hundred in the 1960s, just one indicator of success.

But Nepal today has just 409 rhinos. “From the rhino data alone, wildlife conservation work has stepped back nearly two decades,” says Chandita Gurung, WWF Nepal’s country representative.

Chitwan National Park alone had 544 rhinos in 2000. However, as the Maoists stepped up their activities, poachers were abandoned, giving poachers and smugglers the freedom to move around national parks, encroach on protected areas, and illegally furbish.

“Damage is most where security posts have been set up. The army was deployed in protected areas and they have been the main targets of rebels,” says a wildlife conservation activist.

In Chitwan, there were 44 armoured posts which were evacuated during the insurgency. “There is no data on poaching in the area, especially after 1990,” says Bhuju. Since 2000, the rhino count in Chitwan National Park has gone down to 372 from 544 — a 31 percent decline in five years.

In July, park officials found a carcass of a pregnant female rhino. In Nepal, the value of its fifteen or so old fetuses in Chitwan. Its horn was missing and the rhino was covered in gunshot wounds. Altogether, in nine months, seven rhinos have been found dead since July end.

Despite anti-poaching campaigns and efforts by forest conservationists, huge profits from the sale of rhino horns and tiger bones mean local smugglers will not be deterred. A rhino horn can fetch as much as Rs 800,000/kg in Nepal, while tiger bones cost up to Rs 5,400/kg. International prices are three to four times higher.

Conservationists have no idea about the state of other species, as the conflict has made it impossible for them to go into specific areas and monitor animal activity. “The south of Annapurna has become a no-go zone for partial staff,” says Gurung.

The conflict has also set back the implementation of programs planned to keep conservation efforts on track. In Chitwan’s Maidi valley, 60,000 residents live without electricity due to the conflict, and over 15 game scouts have been killed by Maoist landmines in Parsa and Sukhaphanta. “Ten of our staff were injured and abducted.”

The Maoists have also harmed social mobilisation, which makes it very difficult for us to work,” says Jhunajarkarki, assistant ecologist at the Department of National Parks and Forests.

Wildlife monitoring has also suffered a setback, which is why poaching is on the rise because the remote inaccessible ones has intensified. But poaching for food was curbed to an extent because Karki says, “the Maoists confiscated all weapons from the villagers.” Revenue generated from the exploitation of natural resources normally goes to the government and is put in part to local community development projects. That has in recent years been channelled into Maoist activities. “Even Maoists from Dhading 30 up to Dolpo to collect taxes on Yamaguchisa. The Rs 10,000/kg royalty that should be going to the government will go to the Maoists,” says Yeshe Lama, senior program officer of WWF Nepal.

But it’s not all bad news. “Despite the conflict, landscape conservation has materialised, a third breeding rhino population has been established, and the concept of community owned and managed conservation areas was successfully pioneered in the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area.”

The conflict project will be handed over to the local council this Friday. This is the only way to go, say experts, because true ownership of wildlife and the forests lies with the community, and it is difficult to run successful programs without their participation. “Ten years from now, we want to see the indigenous communities as experts, but political journalists with good contacts in peace with nature,” says Mangal Man Shyaka of the Wildlife Watch Group.

The group has just launched two publications to show the impact of the conflict on conservation in Nepal. (See box).
It may be a bit premature to discuss an election to a constituent assembly when 35 percent of the electorate hasn’t heard about it or knows very little about it. Even so, there are telling political and psephological patterns suggested by the NDI-AC Nielsen poll results released this week. There is cautious optimism about some things, dead certainty about others and ambivalence on the remaining. But that just reflects the contradictions already present among the parties, the Maoists, and the royalists.

The seven-party alliance may have a 91 percent approval rating, but that puts more pressure on them to perform. In the 2004 NDI survey, that figure was just 34 percent, which suggests that if the alliance doesn’t manage the expectations of the people well, they could lose a lot of ground gained through the April Uprising.

Nepalis may be optimistic about the parties, but they aren’t unrealistic. They see disunity (58 percent) and self-interest (33 percent) as the biggest stumbling blocks to the parties. Social inequity will play a role in how parties are judged, as 28 percent rated “not doing enough for women and lower castes” as one of their two top concerns about the government.

The king has an abysmally low rating (-59 on a “thermometer scale,” which measures the spread between approval points going up to 100 and disapproval going down to -100). But the thermometer rating is -2 after positive ratings for the seven-party alliance, the UML, and the NC. The Maoists have got better ratings in helping the poor, fighting corruption, and stopping caste discrimination, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s personal rating has gone to 35 percent. This support has the potential to grow during an election.†

Thus, the undecided wait-and-watch respondents (18%), all potential voters in the constituent assembly election, could play a decisive role in shaping the post-election scenario. Earlier polls by NDI and Himalmedia have shown that the Nepali people believe an election is a product of peace, not ambiguity and uncertainty. This is possibly why even today 76 percent of respondents favour integrating Maoist troops into the Nepal Army.

To conduct this survey, NDI commissioned polling research firm AC Nielsen and polling consultant US-based Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research Inc, Washington DC, which predicts election results in countries like the US and the UK. Greenberg designed the polling survey, including the questionnaire, and analysed the data gathered. The Greenberg operation was directed by John Moreira, and AC Nielsen conducted the fieldwork. This entailed 10 focus group discussions, followed by random sampling based on the population break-up of 66 districts of Nepal. The survey’s margin of error is 1.6 percent.
Thailand after Thaksin

Mismanaged, even a well-intentioned, ‘bloodless’ coup could turn ugly

JOHANNA SON

Many Thais are heaving a sigh of relief that Tuesday’s military coup has been non-violent, and at the prospect of an end to months of political tension around ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

But not far behind is the nagging question: now what? Many are asking if they restore freedom of speech and the press, if elections are promised within six months, if an interim constitution is brought in immediately, then we might be moving forward. But if the present military rulers say that in order to eradicate the Thaksin system, they need to have power for many more months, or ban Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai party from standing in a future election, they will return power to the minister and cabinet would be named in October 2007.

Many Thais spent Wednesday surfing the internet or glued to the army channel. Public pronouncements of the coup leaders, led by army chief General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, said an interim prime minister and cabinet would be named in two weeks and that elections are expected by October 2007.

“The military only took power for a short while. They will return power to the people,” remarked 60-year-old Chao, a worker at a small Bangkok hotel.

But Noi, an accountant, added: “I don’t feel happy or sad for Thaksin. But I feel the way the military carried out the coup while Thaksin was not in the country, that’s not democracy. Right now, Thailand is no different from Myanmar.”

So far, the ruling Administrative Reform Council issued pronouncements including the suspension of parliament, the abrogation of the constitution and plans to draft a new one before polls can be held, control over media and a ban on gatherings of more than five people. Between 1932 and 1997, Thailand has had 15 constitutions. The general’s appointment as commander-in-chief of the army last October—as the first Muslim to take the post—came as a surprise to many. However, he was heavily backed by retired armed forces Supreme Commander General Surayud Chulanont and Privy Council President General Prem Tinsulanonda, both advisers to Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Adulyadej was never one of then-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s favourites. He is known to be soft-spoken and is respected for his professionalism, he turned back the clock on Thailand’s democracy lovers, Thaksin’s downfall. . . .

The general’s appointment as commander-in-chief of the army last October was never one of then-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s favourites.

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As a result of frequent differences with Thaksin, including over the handling of the insurgency in the Muslim majority in the south, Sonthi was reportedly on his way out and on to an inactive post.

Jon Unpahkornt, an activist and until earlier this year, a member of the elite Special Warfare Command.

Though the leader of the Thai military coup, General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, is known to be soft-spoken and is respected for his professionalism, the ouster of then-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s favourites. The general’s appointment as commander-in-chief of the army last October was never one of then-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s favourites.

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Sonthi, 59, graduated from Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy in 1969 and was commissioned into the Royal Army Infantry Corps. He went on to lead several top units, including the elite Special Warfare Command.

Earlier this year, Sonthi said, “as a soldier of His Majesty, I would like to help him relieve his worries and the army will adhere strictly to whatever advice he gives us.” As the political situation worsened, Sonthi repeatedly denied coup rumours that were stealing headlines and fuelling concerns of civil unrest. (The Nation)
Source to sea

Two Nepalis kayak from the Himalaya
to the Bay of Bengal

ALOK TUMBHAANGPHEY

R

am Silwal and Endra Rai’s journey might have taken less than three weeks, but it was the essence of classic, epic adventure travel. The two professional river guides kayaked 1,300km from the foothills of the Nepal Himalaya down to the Bay of Bengal. Along the way, they say they experienced the best and worst of unconventional travel in South Asia, from kayaking on the Ganga with fresh water dolphins for company, to spending 36 hours in Indian police custody. Silwal and Rai made the trip to encourage Nepali youth to take up adventure sports, create awareness about Nepal in neighbouring countries, and encourage environmental and river protection.

On 22 August, the duo mountain biked for two days from Pushupati to the Tala Munig creek in Helambu. There, they got in their kayaks and floated down to the Melamchi, which later joins the Indrawati. From there, they floated down to the Melamchi, they got in their kayaks and paddled down the middle of the river. We didn’t realise we were in trouble until a motorboat carrying Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldiers in plain clothes came right up to us,” they recall. “At first it seemed like people were cheering us on as we paddled down the middle of the river. We didn’t realise we were in trouble until a motorboat carrying Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldiers in plain clothes came right up to us,” they recall.

However, as they neared the sensitive India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal’s Lalgola area, neither expected the welcome they got. “At first it seemed like people were cheering us on as we paddled down the middle of the river. We didn’t realise we were in trouble until a motorboat carrying Indian Border Security Force (BSF) soldiers in plain clothes came right up to us,” they recall.

Although they had a legal visa for Bangladesh and didn’t need one for India, they were handcuffed and locked up for almost 36 hours until the BSF finally decided the two were harmless and let them go. However, a portion of the film they had shot on the Indian leg of the journey was erased by the security forces. There was nothing they could do but make up for the lost time and so they did.

On 5 September they crossed into Bangladesh where the Ganga changed to the Padma.

On the morning of 11 September they sensed the sea air. Paddling hard for almost 12 hours, they reached the Bay of Bengal by evening. From the moment they got into the water in Tala Munag, they had paddled a total of 153 hours, 29 minutes and 35 seconds, and were the first ever to make the epic journey.

Along the way there were plenty of lessons. “The simplest most important thing we learnt was that if there is anything dangerous to man, it is perhaps dangerous to man. In India and Bangladesh people depend on the river for their livelihood and if we here at the source do not keep the rivers clean, people there will suffer,” says Rai, who is also the goodwill ambassador of the Nepal River Conservation Trust.

The trip was a dream come true for the duo. Silwal had been planning the expedition from the ‘source to the sea’ for two years and realised Rai was the perfect partner when they met six months ago. “We were inspired by Edmund Hillary. Even after being the first to summit Mt Everest, he didn’t rest and went on other equally exciting and adventurous journeys,” says Rai, who is also the first from the Rai community.

The two spent almost $1,500 of their own money on the trip. Logistical support came from Nepal Mountain Bikes, camping and kitchen equipment from Himalayan Exotica, kayaks from The Royal Beach, and clothing from Keva. Silwal and Rai now plan awareness campaigns to educate and inspire the younger generation to take more interest in adventure sports. “There is so much potential for adventure sports that young people need not go abroad for jobs,” says Silwal.

BOAT BROTHERS: Curious locals watch the two kayaks somewhere along the Ganga

Source to sea

Two Nepalis kayak from the Himalaya
to the Bay of Bengal

ALOK TUMBHAANGPHEY
**EXHIBITIONS**
- A Retrospective exhibition of RN Joshi's work at Park Gallery, Pulchowk, till 25 September, 5322297
- Impressions of Manang till 28 September, Nepal Tourism Board

**EVENTS**
- Lux Supermodel Hunt at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 22 September
- Jack Daniels Quench organised by Party Nepal with DJ DJ from New Delhi at Liquid Lounge, 22 September, Rs 599
- Baba Bowling Jamboree at Bowling Boulevard, Kanti path, 22-24 September, for school and college students only, 9841498251
- Poolside Dance Party a fundraising event at the International Club, Sanepa, 22 September, Rs 650, 5550061
- Answers to the Nation’s Woes with Mahabir Gurung, People’s Freedom Party (Progressive Green), 24 September, 3PM at Martin Chautari, 4-238650
- One Giant Leap a film brought to you by Kathmandu Film Society, 24 September, 5.30 PM at Brikuti Mandap.
- Films Out of Mind at Lazimpal Gallery Café, Harvey 26 September, Psycho 28 September, 7PM
- Book Launch of Babadil Khadya Shrinkhala, with commentator Bishnu Raj Upreti, 26 September, 4PM Martin Chautari
- Naya Nepal Conference organised by Acton Aid Nepal and the Social Science Baha, 26-27 September, 9841419943
- Premier Show of The Greater Nepal- in Quest of Boundary, directed by Manoj Pandit, 27 September, 3PM at Martin Chautari
- Fulpati 29 September
- Tika 2 October
- Salsa Classes at the Radisson Hotel, 6PM, pre-register at the hotel reception. 4411818
- Tai-Chi, Qi-Qong and Hatha Yoga at the Self Awakening Centre, Baber Mahal, call to sign up. 4256618

**MUSIC**
- Devillis Night featuring DJs Shrawan, Samba, Axe and Ray with reggae band Jerry and Friends, jam sessions, 22 September at Marion Lounge, 7PM, 9803219621
- Gajal Night at Jatra Café, 23 September, 7PM, 4256622
- Dolma Café/Eis Ramalo Saanjh with Anil Shahis Maya Mantra, 23 September, 4219069
- Women in Concert Part IV at Hotel Deli Annapurna, 24 September, Rs 999, 7PM
- Ramalo Saanjh with Anil Shahis Maya Mantra at Dwarikas, 26 September, Rs 1000
- Dwarikas Oktoberfest a fusion of food and music at Dwarikas, 29 September, Rs 850
- Jazz Affair at the opening of the Garden of Dreams, Saskia Hotel to perform, 11 October, Rs 2,000, 4495000
- Surya Classic Jazzmanada 2006 12-20 October
- Open Mic Night at VaVa Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM

**DINING**
- Oktoberfest at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, food, music, games and fun, 22-24 September, 4273999
- Mezza and Margaritas at Dwarikas Fusion, every Wednesday at 5.30 PM, Rs 555, 4479448
- Seven Sensations at Hotel Yak & Yeti, cocktails and snacks, 4240999
- Thakali Lunch special price, everyday at Moksh, 5528212
- Scrumptious wood fried pizzas at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4230768 and Pulchowk, 5521755
- A Sweet Taste of Life at La Dolce Vita, authentic Italian cuisine. 4700612
- Season of Freshness at Shambara Garden Cafe, Shangi-La Hotel, happy hours 12-7 PM, 4412999
- Monsoon Madness Wine Festival enjoy wines from four continents at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, 4250440
- Wet & Wild Summer Splash swimming and lunch, or overnight stay with breakfast and swimming, Godavari Village Resort, 5560675
- Weekend Brunch at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu, 4491234

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
Bamboo master

For a 63-year-old on dialysis, Punya Poudyal is bursting with energy. Both his kidneys have failed him, but he continues to work on his lifelong passion, bamboo, and share his knowledge with the world.

Poudyal, who has spent almost 40 years researching bamboo and rattan, is now working with a few other enthusiasts to establish a world-class Bamboo Botanical Garden on a sprawling four-hectare plot in Budanilkantha. The unique garden will also provide some much-needed green public space.

Poudyal has traveled the world presenting papers on the subject, and has come a long way from his small village in Tehrathum. After topping his batch of teacher trainees in the Sano Thimi National Vocational Training Centre in 1967, Poudyal won a government scholarship to study bamboo and rattan in the Philippines. He has over fifty professional journal publications, and established projects as far afield as Samoa and Papua New Guinea that are still active and profitable after two decades. His latest book, *Bamboos of Sikkim (India), Bhutan and Nepal*, is a comprehensive guide on the plant in the region and will be published next week. Next in line are books on bamboos of the world and even one on global bamboo experts.

Visiting Poudyal at his home is like an adventure into an exotic tropical land. He has a vast collection bamboo and rattan products, and a garden filled with 30 different species, each of which he can lovingly identify and praise. Here's hoping Shero master, as his former students in Bhadrapur Secondary School in Jhapa nicknamed him, proves as resilient as the plant that he loves.

Alok Tumbahangphey
It used to be that the UNís lords of poverty zoomed around the world at velocities approaching the speed of sound. These days they are moving their offices around instead.

At one point during the post-democracy period of the 1990s, Kathmandu had become the place where most regional organisations were based because this was where SAARC, in its infinite wisdom, decided to locate its secretariat. So, Unicefís Regional Office for South Asia came here, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) set up its regional base in Kathmandu, and several international NGOs headquartered themselves here looking after not just South Asia but also their Central Asian operations.

Now, whimsical UN bosses in New York seem to be afflicted with Acute Relocation Syndrome (ARS). They plunked the UNís regional poverty initiative, called SURF, in Kathmandu and two years later moved all human and non-human assets to Sri Lanka at enormous expense saying that the security situation in Nepal had become untenable. True, at that time Sri Lanka had a ceasefire and we were in the middle of conflict. But today, tís the other way around. And even at the height of Nepalís conflict we never had car bombs going off in the centre of the business district killing hundreds at a time. (The closest weíve come to a terrorist threat was a hoax fax at the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare last week, purportedly from Al-Qaeda) And now that Sri Lanka is on the brink at war again, are they going to move back?

UNAIDS set up its regional AIDS office in New Delhi five years ago recognising the threat of the disease in South Asia, and particularly India. Two years ago, it decided to move its entire office lock stock and barrel to Bangkok for no particularly intelligent reason other than that Big Boss liked the sights and sounds of Thailand.

Thereís no word yet on reactions to the rearrangements in Thailandís scenery. Perhaps the tanks complement Bangkokí‘s balmy breezes quite nicely.

Now comes word that a recent executive board meeting of UNFPA in New York decided to move the UNFPAís South Asia office from Kathmandu to Bangkok, too. Another regional boss whoíd rather be in Phuket, not Surkhet. As part of its $30 million ëregionalisation processí UNFPA has decided to keep its Pacific Regional Office in Fiji (another salubrious tropical isle) but close down its South Asia Regional Office in the worldís most populous region. What kind of message is the UNFPA sending to South Asiaís 1.5 billion people and SAARC?

Even more worrying than these ad hoc decisions is the vast silence from South Asiaís otherwise voluble dips at the UN. Our delegates attended the UNFPA executive board meeting in New York this month and didnít raise a squeak. Nepalís rep wasnít the least bit bothered. With this kind of attitude it wouldnít surprise this Ass one bit if SAARC itself decided to relocate its secretariat from Kathmandu to Bangkok. After all, despite two decades of talk-talk-talk about regional cooperation in air links the easiest way to fly to the Maldives from Nepal is still via Singapore.