Close to a deal
Barring last-minute hitches, a historic agreement is tantalisingly near

NARESH NEWAR

When the news finally came out of Baluwatar on Thursday afternoon, it wasn’t the breakthrough everyone expected. But it wasn’t a breakdown either.

The top-level talks between the Maoists and the seven-party government will continue over the weekend, and both sides appear close to a deal. The stumbling blocks are the same as six months ago: the Maoists don’t want to disarm completely before a political resolution and the seven parties want them to.

The Maoists are also holding out for a republic and dissolution of parliament, and there are signs of persistent squabbling within the governing alliance. Yet, Girija Prasad Koirala and Pushpa Kamal Dahal seem determined to see a deal. A historic agreement is tantalisingly close and a success would turn both into statesmen that can reap the peace dividend.

In contrast with previous posturing, both sides are surprisingly upbeat. They present a positive front in joint press meets and stress progress rather than obstacles. “We have significantly narrowed down differences after a series of consultations and hopefully we will come up with definite conclusion on Sunday,” said Maoist spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara.

Home Minister Krishna Sitaula also oozed optimism. “The leaders are showing willingness to work for lasting peace and so we need more time,” he said.

For internal reasons, the rebels may have to grandstand on erasing the king from the constitution altogether. Then there is the issue of arms management which is of vital importance in the lead up to proposed elections to a constituent assembly in mid-2007. This issue reportedly also came up in Dahal’s talk with special UN envoy Ian Martin on Thursday morning.

That election will be intensely polarised over the issue of monarchy, and a weapon-free environment is important to make it free and fair. Those polls will also decide on how to restructure the state and assure proportional representation to remove the roots of future conflict.

But for national and international players there are more specific issues at stake. The political futures of the alliance members hinge on the outcome of the constituent assembly. Even if the Maoist army is interned, its militia could sway voting in many districts. But the rebels could lose control of parts of their militia and could be hit by the repercussions of the militant ethnic groups they’ve unleashed.

For them, the only safe landing is through elections that will be accepted as legitimate. The international community, including the United Nations and particularly the United States are loath to support elections or an interim government where one party controls a parallel military. Senior members of the UN team are in town, waiting for agreement on the mechanics of the election process and arms management.

The challenge for the Maoists and the government now is to make the final push to breakthrough discussions. It’s no surprise there are delays. After ten years of conflict, many talk-watchers say, it would be worrying if agreement came too easily.

THE FUTURE IS PRESENT:
Maoist demonstrators outside the prime minister’s residence in Baluwatar where summit talks were underway on Thursday.
Nepal is on the mend. The Maoists leadership intention is to give up the bloody ePeoples Wari and join mainline politics, and they are being engaged by seasoned politicians of the seven-party alliance.

True, the polemics emanating from the Maoist camp have caused concern, and resolution on some matters has been delayed by irreconcilable references to an October Revolution and attempts to create fait accompli on issues that should be left to the people. Also true is that any spillage would weaken public democracy, and transparency, for one outcome of the Maoist-SPA negotiations should be that the public gets more, not fewer, rights.

While it is possible to be sceptical about the Maoist intentions, they are believable precisely because they have tried to grab state power by force. If they fail, then when they see a glimmer of hope, also in the context of a hostile geopolitical environment, they decided at their August 2005 plenum meeting to engage the political parties. That engagement led to the ePeoples Movement, but was endangered by the ham-handed handling of negotiations that let to the June eight-point agreement (which proposed an unrealistic interim constitution process and was dismissive of parliament).

Fortunately, the current discussions between the Maoists and the political parties are marked by sobriety. Both sides know the interim constitution process and was dismissive of parliament). They have a rough date, probably late May, for elections to the assembly.

The Maoists need a way to go from being a rebel group to a political party, and the SPA and the Maoists might delay the CA elections and a referendum, while the political parties are willing to discuss restructuring of the political parties and the parties are marked by sobriety. Both sides know the interim constitution process and was dismissive of parliament).

We truly think, as we explained earlier, that the country is on the mend. The Maoist leadership’s intention is to give up the bloody ePeoples Wari and join mainline politics, and they are being engaged by seasoned politicians of the seven-party alliance.

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I had the opportunity to read all the stories published in the Nepali Times about the tragic loss of Nepalí conservation gurus (saying friends and colleagues), (#317). But it was your editorial (ëStill among usí) that touched my heart.

Chandra and Mingma were my conservation gurus. I worked with them in the Annapurna and they inspired me in my PhD work on examining why community-based conservation is so successful in Nepal. The void they left will not be easily filled. They designed and implemented the project as directors and trained many grassroots conservation workers to raise awareness about conservation, making it a way of life for the people of the region.

Through their efforts they have made ACAP a practical learning university for conservation and their visionary conservation ideas have been adopted beyond the country’s borders. Today ACAP serves as a model project for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in developing countries, and together with the Kangchenjunga handover make Nepal a global leader in achieving sustainable conservation objectives. They showed the global conservation community the importance of local communities’ participation and their role in conservation is vital to safeguard the world’s most precious resource, biodiversity. Nepalí conservation community is still in shock, too stunned to think beyond the tragic loss of their seniors.

Two decades ago, they planted the seeds of community-based conservation in the Annapurna, they nurtured the project and made it flourish in the buffer zones of national parks and reserves and eventually dedicated themselves to Kangchenjunga.

Hum Bahadur Gurung, Australia

You have written a moving and heart-wrenching (ëStill among usí, #317), yet somehow positive piece about the tragic loss of Nepalí conservation gurus. I was impressed by the care evident in your coverage, and by your editorial. It takes restraint not to slide from grief into cheap exploitation of emotion, and not to write hagiographies, but genuine tributes. Well done.

Sarita Thapa-Hill, email

WING AND PRAYER

Soma Sen (ëWing and Prayer, #317) is absolutely right in saying it is too early to draw conclusions on the crash. The jury is still out, so to speak. Has the information from the cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder been analysed? It takes weeks, if not months, to conduct a proper air crash investigation. Despite all this, we’ve heard despairs passing judgement on the cause of the crash. Some said it was pilot error, others bad weather and difficult terrain, and a few have even gone as far as saying the pilots were flying under pressure from their VIP passengers.

To compute all this, we now have a judge heading the investigating committee. In what way can someone with his background help an air crash investigation other than providing legal advice? It is logical to have legal advisors on air crash investigation committees, but to have one as a chairperson is beyond my realm of understanding.

Subodh, email

FULL DISCLOSURE

We are not surprised by Comrade Baburam’s latest revelation, that India was a key actor in the ikking of the 12-point pact between them and the seven-party alliance in New Delhi. What an allegation has been substantiated today.

Now, our grey safari-clad republicans need to disclose other understandings and secrets of history, such as who funded them in their so-called ëPeopleís Warí, who supplied the arms, who provided their top-brass with a safe haven for most of the past 15 years, who planned their strategic attacks, who trained their combatants, who

The Maoists have replicated the Pol Pot style of extortion, torture, and murder of Nepalí civilians, and this they did without restraint.

Lara G, email

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It is time for the citizens of the Valley and elsewhere in the country to defend their right to live, even if it means taking up arms. The Maoists must be brought to justice for all the atrocities they continue to commit.

Suyocha, email

MAINSTREAMING MAOISTS

The inclusion of Maoists leaders in the interim government cannot but be welcomed, provided, as the prime minister has been insinuating, the Maoist arms are managed. When they are in government, the would-be Maoist ministers will be overseeing the Nepal Army and there can’t be two adversarial armies in the country.

There need be no hurdle to that because the basics have already been agreed to, and the UN representatives are there. To look after arms management, there should be a military advisory body consisting of retired army officers who have served in UN peacekeeping missions, together with serving army officers and Maoist representatives. This

body should also be charged with the task of planning the future of the Nepal Army with possible induction of the Maoist militia.

Ishwari Pradhan, email

BASIC VALUES

You make a genuine observation about the responsibility of the foreign missions in Nepal (ëCambodien commitment, #316). At this critical juncture, ambassadors who do not understand the roots of the problem and diplomatic norms should keep their mouth shut. Their ad hoc comments will only weaken the ongoing peace effort between the government and the Maoists. Right now we need mediation that will bring about a solution, not confrontation. People do not wish to let slip the democracy now within our reach.

No matter what sacrifices the seven-party alliance and the Maoists have to make, we need a positive result from the peace talks. Foreigners could derail the process by taking sides or imposing conditions. Unfortunately, we have a weak and old prime minister whose past record is questionable and corruption. We also know little about Prachanda, so far seen as a leader of a group which has terrorised the people with intimidation.

In the land where the Buddha was born, the path of forgiveness and reconciliation is the best approach to achieving peace and prosperity in Nepal.

Tuladhar, email

PERMANENT SEAT

Under my hat, Backside, All Sidesí can’t a person wish for some semblance of permanence in these unpredictable world of politics? If you got tired with your weekly hat change then you could have just made do with caps. And whatís the ass and backside and all? Oh, well.

V Kharel, email

Your last issue was excellent, particularly the memorial section on the 23 September helicopter crash. However, I think that your new back page is very hard to understand, and have spent many hours wondering what you are trying to accomplish by printing such nonsense. Under My Hat was silly, but now this is just confusing for us ordinary Nepali readers. Please consider using such an important space for serious issues of interest to the people.

Sahel Bista, Kulekhwar

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. Email letters to letters@nepalitimes.com, or write to the editor.

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No-fly season

Don’t challenge the Himalayan monsoon

A

ir accidents don’t have a season. They can, and do, occur just about anywhere and anytime. In Nepal though, most air crashes over the last 15 years have occurred in the rainy season.

Recall the disasters of 1992 when a Thai jet and a PIA jet crashed into the mountains surrounding Kathmandu during the monsoon, killing all onboard. Or the RNAC crash in July 2000 near Dhagaudhath that killed 25 people. Or the Shangrila Air Twin Otter crash of August 2002 which took 18 lives. Or the May 2004 Yeti Air accident in Lukla in which three crew members died. The list goes on and on.

Now add to that last month’s helicopter crash in Taplejung, which snuffed out 24 lives. All the new-fangled technology such as GPS, GWPS, EGWPS, with which the copter was reportedly equipped could not save it from slamming into the mountainside.

The immediate lesson of the Taplejung crash is that no technology can rule out disasters in poor weather conditions, especially in the Himalayas. It can minimise the frequency of crashes, but not stop them. In some cases, technology actually contributes to accidents by giving rise to a false sense of security.

After covering aviation and air disasters in Nepal for over a decade, I have a simple rule: don’t fly in the monsoon, especially in the mountains. It’s not worth the risk. Go by bus or pony, hike, trek, or postpone your program. The litany of air crashes in the monsoon is now too long to be a fluke.

It’s true that improved technology and navigational aids have made all-weather flying routine in Nepal, bringing once remote and cut-off mountain villages into the modern world. But the number of flights have also led to an increase in the accident rate.

The official investigation committee looking into the Taplejung crash probably led the search for the disaster, but we may never know what led the pilot to fly in such bad weather. What led him to take risks on a day when most other pilots would have called the flight off? Would he have flown in the weather if a senior pilot had told him to take risks on a day when most other pilots would have called the flight off? We may never know the answer to these questions.

Was the Shangrila Air crew under corporate pressure to return to Kathmandu? Did the pilot come under inadvertent pressure to fly this flight? What was his mindset? How long had he been flying in such weather? The questions are many, the answers are few.

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Don’t challenge the Himalayan monsoon.

No-fly season

Halving poverty by 2015

Kim Hak-Su is the Bangkok-based executive secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP). Nepali Times interviewed Kim in Kathmandu this week, where he attended the South Asia Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Forum. The goals include halving poverty by 2015. The South Asia MDG Forum met here to develop a roadmap to eradicate extreme poverty in the region.

Nepali Times: What does the MDG Forum hope to achieve?

Kim Hak-Su: This Forum provides an opportunity for stakeholders from eight South Asian countries to evaluate their progress towards meeting the MDGs, the challenges they face, and the actions needed in the short-to-medium-term future to meet the 2015 deadlines.

The participants—who represent governments, civil society, media, and academia in their home countries—will develop an action plan listing the immediate steps necessary for South Asian countries to move forward with MDGs.

But this time, I am disappointed to see that only 16 of the 43 stakeholders who were invited to attend the forum actually came. This is a harbinger of the problems that may be faced in the future, especially when trying to meet the 2015 deadlines.

And how do you plan to do that?

UN agencies must certainly step up their awareness campaigns and the lessons learned here should be kept in mind during the other upcoming sub-regional forums, like the Southeast Asian Forum coming up in December in Hanoi.

Does achieving MDG targets mean a country is relatively problem-free?

If a country met the targets it would mean it had taken the basic steps to reduce poverty and address crucial development challenges. The UN believes the MDGs are the minimum requirements for a country to move towards productive development. The MDGs are not the answer to all development problems, but a good blueprint for moving forward.

How does Nepal’s progress on MDGs compare with other South Asian countries?

No developing country in the world is on track for all of the 2015 targets. Nepal is on track for some, but off track for others.

Nepal has made progress since 2000. For example, between 1996 and 2004 Nepal reduced the percentage of people living below $1 a day from 34.4 to 24.3 percent. However, progress needs to be stepped up to meet the 2015 deadlines. Like other countries in the region, Nepal needs to strengthen its institutional capacity to deliver accessible services to the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized groups.

Kim Hak-Su: ‘The immediate lesson of the Taplejung crash is that no technology can rule out disasters in poor weather conditions, especially in the Himalayas. It can minimise the frequency of crashes, but not stop them. In some cases, technology actually contributes to accidents by giving rise to a false sense of security.’

There is a need for strengthened regional cooperation so countries like Nepal can learn from the good MDG practices of other South Asian countries. I’m proud of the work we in UNESCAP, and the tri-partite initiative with UNDP and ADB, have been doing to assist countries in meeting the MDGs.”
Looking Phelps-wards
Valuable lessons from the economics Nobel laureate

Phelps completed much of his ground-breaking work in the 60s. His core insight—that “imperfect information and imperfect knowledge, with their consequent complications,” affect macroeconomic results—is to economics what, well, gravity is to physics. In the 90s, Phelps turned his attention to issues that could be of immediate interest to countries like Nepal. He looked at the transitional economies of Europe, and teased out factors that help raise a country’s economic performance. In doing so, he has shown how some key market-friendly relationships affect one another.

Phelps is not a market fundamentalist. He grew up during the Great Depression. He has written against George W Bush’s tax cuts that favour the rich, showed how state subsidies help firms to hire additional workers, and critiqued his own profession for neglecting issues concerning social justice.

Phelps defines high economic performance as a state in which there is high productivity and high employment. For such performance, he outlines two conditions: that there be jobs that “enlist the minds of employees, engage them in problem solving—leading them to discover some of their talents and expanding their abilities”, and that employees see such jobs “embedded in a stimulating workplace, with new problems to solve, harder tasks to be mastered, and added abilities to strive for.” This combination of challenging jobs and motivated employees, with its attendant influence on employment and productivity, is what Phelps says makes up a country’s “economic dynamism”.

What raises a country’s economic dynamism? Phelps cites the role of institutions. What matters for dynamism, he says, is how an economy’s rules of the game are defined and played out. It’s not enough, he says, as some socialist-leaning European countries display, to have a general rule of law that safeguards, say, private property or places conditions on who gets hired and fired at a firm. A country’s economic dynamism is slowed by the absence of specific, yet flexible, institutions—“company law and corporate governance, the population’s preparation for business life, the development of the stock market”, and lower barriers to entry to do business.

What does that tell us about raising Nepal’s economic dynamism, especially in light of the FNCCI’s protest program? Four things: First, a high economic performance matters urgently for Nepal. This is so basic an idea that it gets routinely ignored. It’s as if those who lead us happily view the rise of a remittance economy as an excuse not to engage in any serious thinking about Nepal’s economic performance.

Second, our politicians need to view high employment and productivity rates as issues that will keep them in power, no matter who gets to govern from Singha Durbar.

Third, Nepali defenders of free enterprise need to further argue publicly that making it easier for all sorts of private sector businesses to function in Nepal provides the best antidote to unemployment and poverty.

And finally, the terms of our national economic debates need to be recast not to look at ways to restrict, but to understand how institutions or rules help Nepali business owners, employees and customers to thrive together.

Applying the findings of Phelps’s recent real-world research is a way for us to look forward to an economically dynamic Nepal in times ahead.
From the Nepali Press

Code breach
Kantipur, 11 October

Maoists have taken control of a school in Sunsari district and are using it as barracks for their army, in violation of the ceasefire code of conduct. News received from Khanar VDC says that Maoists took over the Sharada Higher Secondary School without any authorisation on Monday. The Maoists have said they will remain in the compound until the holiday is over, after the Chath festival. According to a Maoist worker, Hemant, 25 cadres are currently based there, and additional militia are expected soon.

The Maoists agree that, as principal Subarna Thapa says, they took over the building without permission. Maoists have also taken over the Holyland International Boarding School in Chitwan district’s Chainpur VDC. The school has been closed for almost three years. The Basu Smriti Brigade Third Division has established a temporary camp in the school compound.

In Dharan, 22-year-old Akash Agrawal was abducted by Maoists. According to family sources, the Maoists bundled him into a taxi and disappeared down the railway line in Dharan.

In Baitadi, policeman Narbahadur Chand has been in ‘custody’ since Dasain. Chand, who is posted at Baitadi prison, was taken away the day after Tika.

In Salyan district’s Tribeni VDC, Laxman Shrestha was taken into ‘custody’ after being accused of eloping with a married woman.

In Taplejung district’s Khebang VDC, villagers managed to free 27 locals detained by the Maoists, but former VDC chairman Khadag Prasad Tamling and his brothers Sancha Bahadur and Himal Dhwaj Tamling are still in Maoist custody.

Royal right
Jaranibharan, 12 October

At a time when the SPA-led government and the Maoists are discussing the future of the monarchy, 47 independent politicians have released a statement in favour of the monarchy demanding that the peace talks be led by the king. The statement begins: ‘This scared north of Nepal cannot bear the weakening of the monarch who has borne the historic responsibility and given it warm guidance.’

Independent political leaders like Radheshyam Thapa, Dinbahadur Aryal, Haribahadur Basnet, Kamansingh Basnet, Golche Sarki, and Dhanmundi Bahadur Basnet signed the statement.

They state that the king’s 24 April proclamation was a fulfilment of a historic responsibility to safeguard the sovereignty of the state, the unity of the Nepali people, and the betterment of the country, and that it did not stem from personal aspirations. ‘Any step that aims to disrupt the cordial relations between the king and the people, the united force of the people, and the historic establishment of the monarchy will not be beneficial to the country and the people,’ the statement adds.

A dalit is born
Sudha Khakurel in Kantipur, 29 September

I, Brahmin by accident of birth† What crime did I commit?
Although I am not called dalit Poverty has ground me down I have no access to education And health care is denied me.
My father spoke himself hoarse Consecrating for a godan of one rupee Even then he did not complain When called mean names like Irapali! He simply laughed it off.
But today my self-esteem Has taken me far from my father I cannot act any longer as my father did What will my son’s future be?
Even though I get no special favours I am considered privileged † My peer, a minister’s son Sarki Is today classed as dalit Another, a Newar sahu’s daughter Has now become janajati.
I do have the right to live as an equal Don’t take away my rights There are no dalits here Only legions who suffer.
Light the beacon of education Give access to health for all Make a society with no differences Don’t let another dalit be born.

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Sudha Khakurel in Kantipur, 29 September
MPs peeved
Nepal Samacharpatra, 12 October
Members of Parliament have accused the government of dishonouring the House of Representatives. They said that though it was the government’s duty to inform parliament about issues of national importance while the House is in session, the government is not acting as if there were no parliament. MPs are asking why the prime minister is not in attendance at the House, and if there were no resolution on the fate of the monarchy, they would see it as a conspiracy to keep the monarchy.

MP Raghu Punta of the CPN-UML cited the example of Italy, where the issue of having a monarchy was resolved through a referendum after there were complications during the process of writing the interim constitution. He also said the decision to hold elections to a constituent assembly by next year was not new, reminding the House that the current government had already allocated a budget to hold the election by next year.

Summit satire
Jana Aastha, 11 October
Everyone may have wished the summit talks between the SPA-led government and the Maoists that began on Sunday would succeed, but few actually believed they would. Fewer still could have thought that there would be a break on Monday. The proposal came from Pushpa Dahal himself, but was meant satirically, as he suggested that the SPA needed a break to consult with foreign powers and the palace.

On Sunday, after saying his piece, the prime minister went to bed, complaining of tiredness. NC(D) chairman Sher Bahadur Deuba kept going out and coming in and talking on his cell phone. When asked for his opinion, Deuba just said, “Whatever Girjababu says we feel the same.” It looked as if the two Congresses were on the same side, and opposed to the other parties. The Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party, and the left fronts complained that the Congress and the CPN-UML were paying too much attention to royals and others who had no role in the people’s movements and sidetracking those who had contributed to it.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK
Pushpa Kamal Dahal: You’ve been making us wait! Haven’t you swung enough?

MPs peeved
Nepal Samacharpatra, 12 October
Members of Parliament have accused the government of dishonouring the House of Representatives. They said that though it was the government’s duty to inform parliament about issues of national importance while the House is in session, the government is not acting as if there were no parliament. MPs are asking why the prime minister is not in attendance at the House, and if there were no resolution on the fate of the monarchy, they would see it as a conspiracy to keep the monarchy.

MP Raghu Punta of the CPN-UML cited the example of Italy, where the issue of having a monarchy was resolved through a referendum after there were complications during the process of writing the interim constitution. He also said the decision to hold elections to a constituent assembly by next year was not new, reminding the House that the current government had already allocated a budget to hold the election by next year.

Summit satire
Jana Aastha, 11 October
Everyone may have wished the summit talks between the SPA-led government and the Maoists that began on Sunday would succeed, but few actually believed they would. Fewer still could have thought that there would be a break on Monday. The proposal came from Pushpa Dahal himself, but was meant satirically, as he suggested that the SPA needed a break to consult with foreign powers and the palace.

On Sunday, after saying his piece, the prime minister went to bed, complaining of tiredness. NC(D) chairman Sher Bahadur Deuba kept going out and coming in and talking on his cell phone. When asked for his opinion, Deuba just said, “Whatever Girjababu says we feel the same.” It looked as if the two Congresses were on the same side, and opposed to the other parties. The Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party, and the left fronts complained that the Congress and the CPN-UML were paying too much attention to royals and others who had no role in the people’s movements and sidetracking those who had contributed to it.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK
Pushpa Kamal Dahal: You’ve been making us wait! Haven’t you swung enough?
A woman in a shirt patterned with smileys signals to a man wearing oversized pyjamas. Their mischievous eyes meet, and as their red noses squish against each other, they fill their cheeks with air. This draws great guffaws from the small crowd gathered on the street around them. You’ve probably seen this group of funny dressed people with red noses and a mish-mash of accents entertaining children and the elderly on the streets of Kathmandu this past week. They call themselves “smiling ambassadors,” but many say they should instead be described as ‘clown doctors’. They are currently in Nepal on one of the ‘healing through humour’ missions that take them around the world.

Vania Calzavara, 30, was studying to become a diplomat but she gave that up to do something decidedly undiplomatic—be a clown and promote clowning around. Calzavara decided to work with her boyfriend, Fabio Sorgato, 40, who runs voluntary clownery workshops in Thiene, Italy.

“For me, being with the person you love is far more important than a great career,” she says. Seeing the joy Fabio spread among people, she also became a clown. “Four times a week, we visit hospitals, orphanages, nursing homes and prisons and make people laugh,” adds Calzavara.

But life for the couple is not always funny. Calzavara works ten hours a day managing a local bakery in Thiene. She earns just about enough for the both of them. “I saved 3500 euros so Fabio and I could come to Nepal. We are also celebrating his birthday here,” smiles Calzavara.

Accompanying her are 11 clowns from Italy, Cambodia, and Japan who are here for two weeks and will be visiting orphanages.

“We are all not professional clowns. We just want to bring joy and love where suffering is dominant,” says an animated Ginevra Sanguigno. Sanguigno is founder of the group Clown One Italia. A theatre artist and teacher back home, she was encouraged to start the non-profit group after her meeting with Patch Adams in 1994. Adams is an American clown and doctor who founded a holistic medical centre and became famous after the eponymous 1998 movie based on his life starring Robin Williams. “Patch taught us that you don’t need special skills to make people happy, just the intention to spread love. And that is exactly what we are doing here—spreading the message of love and peace,” says Sanguigno.

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Does the almost-diplomat plan on being a clown all her life? “Yes,” she shoots right back. “Money is not everything. Once you know how not to waste money, a little is enough.”
therapy through humour

shelters, hospices, schools, and hospitals in Kathmandu and Pokhara run by organisations as diverse as CWIN, Saham, Shanti Sewa Griha, Bid Mantra, Saathi, Dalit Welfare Organisation, Prayas Cooperative, and Maiti Nepal.

The group’s focus is mainly on young girls and women who have been victims of violence, and who have been rescued and rehabilitated. While visiting the girls in various shelters, they hope to even train a few and sponsor them on the next Clown One Italia mission.

The group is also laying the groundwork to sponsor ten dalit girls to attend school for ten years. “This is our pilot project and we will start with the villages near and around Boudha because the school is located there,” says Italo Bertolasi, organiser of the trip, who first came to Nepal 35 years ago and has since studied the work of jhakris. “I have studied the traditional way of healing, we now will mix it with the untraditional way (clowning),” he says.

“We may look stupid, but in this costume, you can be very powerful,” Bertolasi adds. The group says that they use the power of ridicule to poke fun at figures of fear, such as men with guns. “In Afghanistan, a female clown tried to paint a red nose on a mujahideen who was carrying a gun. And what did he do? He ran away while the women and children all laughed,” chuckles Bertolasi.

The members of Clown One Italia are clowns here, but back home they practise all kinds of professions— they are counsellors, artists, actors, and physiotherapists. They share a common goal, to hear sick children laugh, and see lonely old people smile. They are all volunteers, and some have used up their entire savings to come make Nepalis smile.

“We try to get funds for all our trips, but sometimes we don’t have enough for everyone in the group,” explains Sanguigno. Even when they do, there’s just enough to cover airfares. In Nepal, their accommodation and logistics is sponsored by Apeiron, an Italian organisation that works to uplift poor and disadvantaged women and children.

“Nepalis are cheerful people despite their suffering. But the war has left many people displaced and bitter. We are here to remind them that they should not forget to smile because only that can give them the courage to go on,” says Sanguigno.
Abused on both sides
Tibetan refugees are also mistreated by Nepali border guards

MARTY LOGAN

S o many Tibetan refugees have been fleeing to India via Nepal for so long that their crossing is accepted as something normal until a day like 30 September, when a group of 70 would-be refugees was fired at by Chinese border guards while trying to cross into Nepal over the Nangpa La in the Cho Oyu region (pictured, file photo).

They started shooting and we ran. It was around 8AM. There were 15 small children aged 8-10, only one escaped and the rest were arrested," a monk from Tibetís Gyamda county told website phayul.com.

I think the soldiers fired for about 15 minutes," he added. "They were shouting, probably warning us, but I did not hear them as I was terrified. I just heard gunshots passing my ears.

The nun was with us and she was shot and a boy from Kandze was shot in the leg.

The monk and 40 others who fled arrived in Kathmandu late Monday accompanied by an official from the UNHí High Commissioner for Refugees.

The nun, a 17-year-old according to phayul.com, died in the incident. Climbers at Cho Oyu advance base camp reported seeing as many as eight people killed, but these reports are unconfirmed.

Although such shootings are relatively rare, abuse of Tibetan refugees is common, much of it at the hands of Nepali border guards, says a new report.

Two years ago, researchers interviewed 50 refugees staying at the refugee reception centre in Kathmandu about their trips from Tibet to the capital. On average they travelled 34 days, both by foot and by bus. Most carried little food for fear of arousìng suspicion and had to go hungry for days or resort to begging when their supplies ran out, says the report, Dangerous Journey: Documenting the Experience of Tibetan Refugees, published in the November issue of the American Journal of Public Health.

Although two refugees caught by Chinese border guards experienced the most severe treatment, one of the findings of most concern in our study was the treatment of refugees by the Nepali border guards. We documented beatings, torture, and sexual assaults at gunpoint," says the report.

Three women were separated from their groups and, despite attempts to escape, were captured. The women were taken to an outside area where a group of six guards disrobed them and sexually assaulted them at gunpoint," adds the document.

All of the refugees who met Nepali border guards were threatened with refoulement (being forcibly returned to China). Others ran into Maoists. They experienced extortion or detention. When they were able to pay the required amounts to the rebels, they received Maoist passes and were allowed to proceed," says the report, whose authors include Edward J. Mills, of McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada.

"The longterm impacts of such dangerous circumstances are having a large impact on the physical and mental suffering of refugees," he told us via email.

The report recommends that the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala start providing care programs for all refugees, not only political asylum seekers, including special programs for children.

Faulty feeding
Ignorance fuels malnutrition in the western tarai

SUMAN PRADHAN in BANKE and KANCHANPUR

T his picture (right) was not taken in Africa, but at a nutritional centre in Nepalgunj. It shows four-month-old Sarumala Chandhary, who was brought here for treatment of severe malnutrition. There were 16 other such children at the centre when we visited recently.

In the western tarai districts, there is a silent malnutrition and wasting epidemic brewing. Health workers say the cause is not lack of food but faulty feeding habits and lack of awareness.

"Mothers here donít know how to feed their children. They only give them rice and milk, which deprives the kids of protein and other essential nutrients," says Punam Singh Adhikari, who

Race for

JB PUN

T he restoration of democracy in April has prompted Nepalís plethora of ethnic, regional and linguistic groups to press for self-determination and autonomy. But political scientists warn that identity-based federalism may lead to fragmentation and perhaps even ethnoseparatist conflict in future.

The Maoists, who felt sidelined by the restoration of parliament and the pace at which it passed dramatic legislations since April, have tried to remain relevant by strongly pushing for autonomous ethnic regions. Even non-Maoist indigenous organisations, ethnic minorities and marginalised groups have found common cause with the rebels.

Together, they tried unsuccessfully to push elements of ethnic regionalism into the draft interim constitution, and various groups struggling for indigenous autonomy have been holding public meetings calling for radical state restructuring along ethnic lines.

But neither the Maoists nor the various ethno-based groups seem to be clear about how ethnic regionalism will work in practice in a country with such racial and caste heterogeneity within districts and regions.

For instance, when the Chepang Union held its conference in Chitwan in July it said it wanted ìself-determination with ethnic autonomyî in the 29 VDCs where an estimated 52,000 Chepangs live in Chitwan, Gorkha, and...
Ethnic-based federal autonomy may open up another can of worms

Dhading and Makawanpur. But some of these are districts are also claimed by the Tamang Autonomous Region.

Similarly, there are misgivings among the Tharu and other tribal communities about the Maoist autonomy that would encompass the entire tani communities. Madhya desh is the area between Ganga and Jamuna rivers and over time, the people from this region started being referred to as Madhesis, which does not indicate any ‘national’ or ‘ethnic’ identity, says Kewa Nanyani Chaulkary, president of the Tharu Kalyankarini Sabha. In fact, a Maoist-breakaway faction called the Janamat Mikhi Mokhi Morcha is already fighting both the Maoists and the state, and announced RTPFP Nepal’s Thomson World Shrestha just before Dasin.

The ethnic regions carved out by the Maoists for the Gurungs, Magars, and Kirats also overlap, and autonomy could lay the seed of unprecedented inter-ethnic conflict in future, experts say. The communal riots that followed the massacre of 12 Nepali workers in Iran in September 2004 proved that communal violence can easily be stoked.

In fact, in many of the regions set aside for particular ethnicities, these groups are themselves minorities. Magars, Tharus, Tamangs, Newars and Gurungs each have majorities in only one district each within their regions, for instance.

In an interview before he was killed last month, ethnic expert Harka Gurung told us: “It’s not enough to say ‘Limbowar’ or ‘Tamuwari’. You have to decide where to demarcate the borders of these regions. So you can have endless debates for political reasons about whether these divisions are ethnic or geographic, but the key question is whether these regions can be truly autonomous.”

There is no denying that successive governments in Nepal ever since unification have refused to devolve power. There was extreme marginalisation of certain ethnic and caste groups, and centurises of neglect of remote regions and exploitation of tail resources by feudal rulers in Kathmandu.

Some like political scientist Krishna Bhattachar, believe that ethnic autonomy should not be seen as synonymous with separatism. “If you offer genuine autonomy it won’t bring separatism, in fact it will prevent it” he says.

You lack the overdue impetus in demands for ethnic autonomy after the collapse of the royal regime is partly political posturing by various identity-based groups. Political parties have also been tempted by ethnic populism and are trying to take advantage while the Maoists are using the ethnic card as a bargaining chip. All this could be dangerous, analysts say, because it threatens to turn Nepal’s class war into a caste war.

There is near unanimity among academics and politicians that some form of federalism is needed to correct historic Kathmandu-centric governance. But the question is whether a future federal structure should be demarcated along ethnic lines or by regions. At the moment, the voices of those calling for non-ethnic autonomous regions are muted. Yet, true regional autonomy would kill two birds with one stone: guaranteeing political devolution while giving proportional representation to marginalized groups.

Bahun-Chhetris have dominated the political process, but still account for more than 50 percent of the population in 18 districts and more than 20 percent in 62 districts. Regional federalism would be fair to everyone, some experts feel, without swinging to the other extreme and sowing the seeds of future conflict by creating new exclusions.

A more-inclusive politics works at the centre.

The Nepalgunj nutritional centre, funded by the Nepal Youth Opportunity Foundation (NYOF) and jointly managed by the Banka District Hospital and Srijan, a women’s group, is the only one of its kind in western Nepal. It treats hundreds of malnourished children from Banke and surrounding districts.

But most importantly, the centre also teaches mothers that if a lack of use of common food is the only thing they grow here, even though they feed them rice and ghee, “says nurse Sunamati Acharya. “It takes a while for them to understand that rice and ghee, though they feed them rice and potatoes. That’s the only thing they grow here, even though the land is vast and fertile.”

Lack of a balanced diet, proper sanitation and care make Kanchanpur an appalling district for children’s health. A recent assessment study by UNICEF in Kanchanpur found that 21 percent of children are afflicted with wasting, an indicator of acute general malnutrition. The study further found that the prevalence rate is almost twice the national average found in the Demographic Health Survey conducted in 2001.

“It’s not because families can’t feed their children,” says Nursing Inspector at the Mahendranagar hospital Indudhir Paudyal. “There is enough food that most parents can afford, but lack of a balanced diet is causing this problem.”

There is hope on the horizon. Just as in Banke, the NYOF is funding a nutritional centre in Kanchanpur too.

A PICTURE OF HEALTH:
A well-fed baby in Manang

just rice and milk but also greens and potatoes.

The dietary habits of locals in far-western Kanchanpur district are of particular concern. “In my 15 years here, I have been appalled at the eating habits of the locals,” says Dr Sibshesh Kayastha, superintendent of the Mahendranagar Zonal Hospital in Kanchanpur district. “They only eat rice and potatoes. That’s the only thing they grow here, even though the land is vast and fertile.”

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A new building will open in Mahendranagar Zonal Hospital in Kanchanpur district. “They only eat rice and potatoes. That’s the only thing they grow here, even though the land is vast and fertile.”

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Economic sanctions would harm North Koreans, and help Kim Jong-il

This is how the Korean Central News Agency reported the blast, and some of Mondays other top stories.

DPRK Successfully Conducted Underground Nuclear Test

The field of scientific research in the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) successfully conducted an underground nuclear test under secure conditions on October 9, 2006, as a strong sign that all the people of the country are making a great leap forward in the building of a great prosperous powerful socialistic nation.

It has been confirmed that there was no such danger of radioactive emission in the course of the nuclear test as it was carried out under a scientific investigation and calculation.

The nuclear test was conducted with indigenous wisdom and technology 100 percent. It marks a historic event as it greatly encouraged and pleased the DPRK and people that have hoped to have powerful self-reliant defense capability.

It will contribute to defending the peace and stability on the Korean Peninsulas and in the area around it.

Commemorative Stamps Issued

Commemorative stamps have been brought out in the DPRK on the occasion of the 61st anniversary of the Workers' Party of Korea. In order to open up a new way for revolution from the East part of the DPRK and imperialist colonial rule over Korea, President Kim Il-Sung formed a revolutionary vanguard organisation to conduct the anti-Japanese national liberation struggle in reliance upon popular masses with a correct fighting program and organised the OJU on October 17, 1926.

Nepalese Library Delegation Arrives

A delegation of Kim Il-sung Kim Jong-il Library of Nepal headed by its Director Narayan Prasad Sapkota arrived here Sunday.

Floral Basket to Kim Jong-il

General Secretary Kim Jong-il received a floral basket from the family of Zhang Jingyi, an anti-Japanese revolutionary martyrs, on the occasion of the 61st anniversary of the Worker's Party of Korea. (The Guardian)

Risky rescues

Attacking aid agency workers deprives the neediest

For those who work to save the worlds sick and wounded, this summer was among the worst of times. Too many days began with desperate calls from field colleagues, telling us still more aid workers killed, kidnapped or those who work to save the world's most desperate, destitute families in Darfur, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

By extension, these assaults potentially sever the lifeline of hope that unarmed aid workers provide to millions of desperate, destitute families in Darfur, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

In August, 17 humanitarian aid workers in Sri Lanka from Action Against Hunger were shot in execution-style killings. Two more aid workers were killed in Sri Lanka; 19 deaths in one month alone. Violent incidents in Darfur increased more than 100 percent in the first seven months of 2006 as compared to the same period last year, further expanding the worlds largest relief operation.

In Afghanistan, 27 aid workers have died this year to date, while 31 were killed the year before. Add to this the dozens of other aid workers killed, kidnapped or attacked in Somalia, Iraq, Chechnya, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and elsewhere over the last three years, and the tragedy of these crimes becomes still more stark. Those who seek to alleviate man's inhumanity to man have become its victims.

Attacks against humanitarians have occurred against the backdrop of deteriorating security, impunity for perpetrators and an increasingly politicised environment for aid work. In each case, aid workers, armed only with their principles, paid with their lives to uphold the ethos of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality that defines the humanitarian movement.

Under the Geneva Conventions, both civilians caught in armed conflict and aid workers seeking to assist them are to be protected from harm.

UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court both affirm that intentionally attacking a humanitarian aid worker could constitute a war crime.

Despite these protections, humanitarian aid workers are still targeted, with the local staff of NGOs by far the most frequent victims. When humanitarian staff or operations are targeted, aid agencies often have no choice but to suspend or downscale their operations. The result: an aid lifeline to millions is potentially severed.

Attacking an aid worker undermines the fundamental right of all civilians on the front lines of violence or disaster to receive assistance. Safe, unimpeded access is essential, as it is impossible to be a safe, remote, longdistance humanitarian.

Proximity entails risk! And so this is the price we must pay to access those in greatest need. Today, in numerous conflicts around the world, aid worker ability to help millions of civilians who urgently need it is curtailed by the threat of armed attacks or bureaucratic obstacles imposed by warring parties.

That suffering civilians have the right to impartial assistance is an unassailable principle. We need a neutral and impartial humanitarian presence, free of name, deed and perception. Local communities need to know humanitarian workers are there for one purpose: to alleviate it through outreach of lifesaving assistance based on need alone.

Aid workers enjoy no ironclad guarantees of safety. Security does not come from armed security officers, or by withdrawing from the front lines of suffering. We must continue to build trust with local communities by demonstrating through word and deed that humanitarianism is entirely separate from political or military agendas. We need a humanitarianism that is by and for all humanity.
The stage is set

T he musicians at the Surya Classic Jazzmandu 2006 are a hard lot to spot and chat with. Several will arrive mere hours before they go on stage, others sport heavy accents ranging from French to Cuban. But when the festival began on Wednesday, with the Upstairs Jazz Bar packed to the rafters, it was the music doing the talking and telling Kathmandu that thereís a lot to look forward to this week.

Despite Wednesdayís session being an intimate, unassuming affair, it showcased a whole range of talents, with local jazz trailblazers Cadenza getting things moving along with Remi Abram and Claudio Celada of the Remi Abram Quartet, and David Burgos. Besides the home-grown Cadenza, Kutumba, Stupa, and Sukarma, only Afro Dizzi Actís Nick Aggs has done the Kathmandu jazz route before, which means nine fresh new acts to look out for. There are 11 events in total, running until 18 October.

The Remi Abram Quartet

Fronted by charismatic saxophonist Remi Abram, the French quartet have an impressive track record and two CDs, Pianist Claudio Celada, drummer Ulrich Edorh, bassist Philippe Guiraud, and Abram all have noteworthy solo careers, and have been playing together since 2000. Their music is rooted in bebop, hard-bop, and Caribbean jazz, and they perform mainly in Europe and the Caribbean.

Andy Grosskopf

A saxophonist, flautist, and composer, the German Andy Grosskopf isnít afraid to experiment. Besides his jazz-rock group Scoorge, heís also a part of trancektion, which mixes dance, jazz, funk and oriental rhythms. His latest project, Nyle, works with singer Miles Griffith to create dance-funk-jazz. Exactly what mixture of his vast range of influences and talents Grosskopf is going to display here remains to be seen.

TR Dhandapani Ensemble

Master percussionist TR Dhandapani has over 40 years of musical experienceand only one performance in Kathmandu, the 16 October Jazz at Patan show, where he will build on South Indian rhythms to create fusion jazz with his ensemble of seven musicians and Cadenza.

David Burgos

Billed as ¿The Sound of Argentina¿ on the Surya Classic Jazzmandu 2006 schedule, 26-year-old David Burgosí passion for music started in his native Venezuela, as percussion lessons were quickly followed by trumpet lessons at age 13. Growing up in Venezuela and Florida, he excelled at music, winning several awards. He plays at European jazz festivals and works in South Florida on numerous musical projects.

FranÁois Carrier Trio

Canadian alto sax player FranÁois Carrier is a tireless improviser, and his spontaneity and energy have moved his trio into the realm of jazz legends. Carrier told Nepalí Times that at Surya Classic Jazzmandu 2006, heíll play the FranÁois Carrier kind of jazz. I donít really like labelling anything but I can tell you that all the music will be improvised.

Two On the Horizon: Judy Lewis & Orr Didi

After an illustrious 18-year career as a classical pianist, Judy Lewis has in the last eight years earned international acclaim as Israelis leading jazz artist. With four albums to her name, she now teams up with 18-year-old Israeli guitar virtuoso Orr Didi, who is blind, creating a unique mix of rock energy and acoustic jazz.

The Latin Jazz All Stars

The Latin Jazz All Stars includes Puerto Rican Jorge Castro on tenor sax, Yonir Cabrera from Cuba on bass, Colombian pianist Eddie Martinez, and Steve Berrios on drums. Each of the artists has an impressive solo record, and together they are a considerable force in the Latin jazz scene.

Nick Aggs ñ Afro Dizzi Act

Nick Aggs played in the first Jazzmandu in 2001 as part of the Australian funk-jazz group Afro Dizzi Act. Six years later, the groupís saxophonist and percussionist is back on his own, following Afro Dizzi Actís new album Welcome Speech.

Andreas Hessen Schei and Hilde Marie Kjersem

Norwegian jazz vocalist Hilde Marie Kjersem teams up with countryman Andreas Hessen Schei for Surya Classic Jazzmandu 2006. Kjersemís musical career began at 14, and now, at age 25, she is already working on her third album. Schei worked with her on 2004ís Red Shoes Diary, and has played around the world with bands like Jaga Jazzist, Tub Quartet, Berline Zeltitz, and Shining.

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EXHIBITIONS
- Green Apple exhibition by Saroj Kushwaha till 19 October at Bandana Art Gallery, Lajimpat (below Gallery Nine).
- Women in Nature by Erina Tamakar till 20 October at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4219048
- Aloha Namaste Sacred Places, Sacred Animal paintings by Wicki Van De Veer till 20 October at Siddhartha Art Gallery.
- Figures in Paint by Chirag Bangdel at Imago Die Café Gallery, 9AM-9PM, 4442464
- Exhibition of paintings, sculptures at Tantra Restaurant, Thamel featuring Jalju Kaj Mahajan, Anit Mahajan, Uday Kamchariya and more. 4218655

EVENTS
- Rotary Festival fun, food and festivities including displays, magic and cultural shows at the Malla Hotel Garden, Lainchaur, 13-15 October, Rs 50
- Japanese Day display of Ikebana, Bonsai, Japanese dolls and more. 14 October, 10.30 AM-11PM, Rs 500 at the Garden of Dreams, Kaiser Mahal
- Fulfillment in your Relationship- oriented topics and group discussions with life-therapists Nina Lange and Ludwig Zaccaro. 15 October, at German Info and Culture Centre, Thamel. 4705885
- Children's Day music by children, bagpipers, face painting, magicians and more. 15 October, 12PM to sunset at the Garden of Dreams, Kaiser Mahal
- Transcendental Meditation Program at Self Awakening Centre from 16-19 October. 4256818
- Fire in the Monastery a play by Abhi Subedi, directed by Sunil Pokhrel and presented by Gunukul, 17 October, 7PM, Rs 300 at the Garden of Dreams, Kaiser Mahal
- Launi Puja 21 October
- Bhai Tikaa 24 October
- Festive Fiesta post-Tihar celebrations at Liquid Lounge, 27 October, 7PM. 9810469004
- Salaam Classes at the Radisson Hotel. 4418118
- Tai-Chi, Qi-Qong and Hatha Yoga by children, bagpipers, face painting, magicians and more. 15 October, 12PM to sunset at the Garden of Dreams, Kaiser Mahal
- Salsa Classes of Paintings, sculptures at Tantra Restaurant, Thamel featuring Jalju Kaj Mahajan, Anit Mahajan, Uday Kamchariya and more. 4218655

MUSIC
- Mohak Live presents musician night with Slupa at Mohak. 13 October, Rs 150. 5526212
- Jazzmundu at 1905 Kantipath featuring Francois Carrier Trio (Canada), Hitide Marie Kissper and Andreas Hessen Schel (Norway), 15 October, 6PM, Rs 300. 4215088
- Sarad an evening of music, performance by Irish Band, Saill on the Didgeridoo and finale Trikaal, 6PM, Rs 500 at Moksh, 21 October, 6PM, Rs 500
- Aavaas performs at Garden of Dreams, Kaiser Mahal on 20 October at 6.30 PM, Rs 500. 5528289
- Surya Classic Jazzmundu 2006 till 18 October
- Musical Evening a special concert by an Indian percussion ensemble led by T.R. Dhandapani - Laya Gaana Madhur Lahari, 19 October
- Open Mic Night at Va Va Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM

DINING
- Harvest Moon Chinese food festival at Hotel de l'Amnapurna till 14 October
- Mezza and Margaritas at Oswarkis Fusion, every Wednesday at 5.30 PM. Rs 555. 4479448
- Seven Sensations at Hotel Yat & Yeti, cocktails and snacks. 4248999
- Scrumptious woodfired pizzas at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel 4382786 and Pulchok 5521752
- A Sweet Taste of Life at La Dolce Vita, authentic Italian cuisine. 4700612
- Season of Freshness at Shambala Garden Cafe, Shangri-La Hotel. happy hours 12-7 PM. 4412999
- Creations from the Clay Oven at Slupa View Restaurant, Boudha Slupa. 4480292
- Wet & Wild Summer Splash swimming and lunch, or overnight stay with breakfast and swimming, Godavari Village Resort. 5590675
- Weekend Brunch at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234

GETAWAYS
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge open for reservations. 4381500
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivaput Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- Escape to Godavari Village Resort an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5590675

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October may be the second driest month of the year, but nothing this year has been quite what it should be. The sudden heavy downpours in the last week were a local phenomenon, set off by a low pressure centre in Tibet. There are still some prominent patches of cloud that signal rainy spells through the weekend. Thursday mornings satellite picture does show a storm moving in from the Bay of Bengal, but it is unlikely to reach Nepal and the ever-present skies have little to do with it. Tihar will likely be as bone-dry as we need it to be for fireworks. The nights are getting positively fresh, and the days will be wonderfully sunny, but not hot.

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DINING
- Harvest Moon Chinese food festival at Hotel de l'Amnapurna till 14 October
- Mezza and Margaritas at Oswarkis Fusion, every Wednesday at 5.30 PM. Rs 555. 4479448
- Seven Sensations at Hotel Yat & Yeti, cocktails and snacks. 4248999
- Scrumptious woodfired pizzas at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel 4382786 and Pulchok 5521752
- A Sweet Taste of Life at La Dolce Vita, authentic Italian cuisine. 4700612
- Season of Freshness at Shambala Garden Cafe, Shangri-La Hotel. happy hours 12-7 PM. 4412999
- Creations from the Clay Oven at Slupa View Restaurant, Boudha Slupa. 4480292
- Wet & Wild Summer Splash swimming and lunch, or overnight stay with breakfast and swimming, Godavari Village Resort. 5590675
- Weekend Brunch at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234

GETAWAYS
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge open for reservations. 4381500
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivaput Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- Escape to Godavari Village Resort an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5590675

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KATHMANDU VALLEY

Friday 27-16 Saturday 29-15 Sunday 28-15 Monday 28-15 Tuesday 27-15

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

October may be the second driest month of the year, but nothing this year has been quite what it should be. The sudden heavy downpours in the last week were a local phenomenon, set off by a low pressure centre in Tibet. There are still some prominent patches of cloud that signal rainy spells through the weekend. Thursday mornings satellite picture does show a storm moving in from the Bay of Bengal, but it is unlikely to reach Nepal and the ever-present skies have little to do with it. Tihar will likely be as bone-dry as we need it to be for fireworks. The nights are getting positively fresh, and the days will be wonderfully sunny, but not hot.
WITH THIS GUN, I THEE WED: Nine Maoist couples tied the knot with the blessings of the party in Chitwan last Saturday, solemnising the union with a ritual exchange of weapons. In attendance at the ceremony were comrades from the Basu Smriti Brigade Third Division. The guests currently live in a school in Chainpur VDC.

JUSTICE: Paragon School teachers and staff of Nepal Rastra Bank stage a demonstration demanding immediate action against the killers of eight-year-old Bibek Sharma Luitel, who was found dead on the banks of Dhobikhola, Chabahil on 30 September. The demonstration blocked traffic in Maitighar for over an hour on Wednesday.

JAZZ DREAMS: Dutch trumpet player Saskia Laroo (centre) performs during the Jazz Affair, part of the opening of the Garden of Dreams. She is accompanied by (l-r) Warren Byrd, Ronald Wright, and Virgil Stelk.

I SMELL SOMETHING FISHY: A young boy proudly displays the catch of the day by the Rapti river in Sauraha last Saturday.
On those slow lazy days after Dasain when you don’t feel like working, you may want to browse Google Earth and check out all the new embassies coming up in our fair capital. Our mole tells us that what we see of the Stalinsque façade of the new American embassy is just the tip of the iceberg; it apparently goes down five stories. Wonder why they need all those basements.

And it won’t be all work and no play for American dips who have the misfortune to be assigned to this hardship post: Phora is being refurbished. Yay! And the fringe benefit for Nepalis is that the magnanimous yanks have yielded US territory to widen the road and sidewalk outside the palace.

And that is what we hope the Norwegians will do as they start demolishing their current embassy building in Kopundole to build a bigger one in its place. Please, can you widen the road from Pulchok up to the embassy while you are at it? We know Pata Sub-metropolis or whatever it’s called will never get around to it in the next 100 years.

Up the road a bit, the Swiss are in negotiation with a certain former finance minister to buy the Ekanta Kuna premises that they have rented ever since that neighbourhood was still ekanta. The price tag is so high, apparently even the Swiss can’t afford it.

The Indians and Chinese are not sitting idly by. The Indians are tearing down their Dak Bungalow in Lajimpat and the Chinese are back in Nasal at their swanky new premises. In the early 1970s, they used to say that Indian Naxalites got their name from the location of Mao’s embassy in Kathmandu. Must have great feng shui.

While the cessation of hostilities between Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie have dominated international peace talks over the last week, Nepali leaders have shunned the spotlight of a spectacular resolution, instead taking their time to really chew things over. It seems the summit talks took a bizarrely literal and literary turn, taking the proverbial worries about putting food in our mouths and our money where our months are very seriously indeed. Apparently caterers had put out a spread fit for a king—or president, as the case may be. But there was, shall we say, unequal distribution of these gustatory assets. The Sunday talks ended without any concrete developments possibly because the desserts were lousy.

Still, the Baluwatar Bhojanalaya Bonanza did cause a miniature economic revival around the PM’s residence, as an ocean of photographers, reporters, demonstrators and the simply curious created a classic supply-demand case study by cleaning out local shops and eateries of food, cigarettes, and soft drinks.

Still, Sunday being the first workday after Dasain, it’s unlikely that anyone keeled over as a result of abject hunger. There were more than a few newly-refilled spare tyres around in the midriff of prominent Nepalis, although The Awesome One himself had the toned look of a man with a few morning walks under his belt. Some of our own colleagues had the foresight to use Dasain to stock up for the long haul taking their cue from our very own CP, who wisely avoided the dangers of flying by being a tad too portly for a Dhading-Pokhara chopper trip with his parents.

As the Ass dutifully reported in a previous instalment on this space, there is no letup in the mass marriages of Maoists among themselves. They’re all getting wedded as if there is no tomorrow. Is there something they know that we don’t? By the way, just wondering, how do these avowedly atheist revolutionaries tie the knot? Okay, so they swap weapons. But do they also swear by the red book? Do they carry their SLRs like some of us carried khukuris in our patukas while riding a horse in the old days? Apparently, jantis are de rigueur, and the wedding of nine young Maoists in Chitwan last week was part of the new ‘make love not war’ campaign.