Vigilantes in the central tarai complicate the peace process

Last week in Kathmandu, the Maoists dispensed vigilante justice. In Kapilbastu, they’re on the receiving end.

The anti-Maoist vigilantism that began in February 2005 is becoming institutionalised here. The security forces continue to protect vigilante groups, citizens’ groups say, and provide them with much-needed resources in this proxy war against the Maoists.

People are used to speak openly, but a local political leader in Sihokar village told us: “Forget about the peace process, eliminating the Maoists through the use of armed vigilantes was always the plan, and the army continues to help them.” The Nepal Army is still camped out in the compound of vigilante leader Abdul Mohit Khan’s home.

Like the Maoist militia, the vigilantes are also potential spoilers in the peace process. But unlike the rebels, the only talks about managing them are happening at the local level.

Shortly before Dasain, Kapilbastu human rights activists, journalists, and civil society groups held meetings with vigilante and political leaders to try and negotiate a trilateral agreement. The vigilantes refused to talk to the Maoists.

“If we don’t deal with this now, we’re going to see the vigilantes being used by all kinds of political forces to do their dirty work, and again civilians will be victimised,” said Drona Raj Subedi, a local civil society leader who brokered the talks.

In the villages, the vigilantes are now openly building networks with gangs from across the border, and seeking political protection and support from the Tarai Janatantrik Mukti Morcha (‘Tarai tinderbox’). Some vigilante group members we spoke to said they feared Maoist retaliation, and see their best option as latching on to the TJMM. As in February last year, the vigilantes’ actions are directed against the Maoists as well as hill migrants in villages like Bishnunagar, a hotbed of vigilantism. Small arms are easily procured from across the open border with Uttar Pradesh.

Subedi says some vigilantes are seeing the advantages of moving into mainstream politics after NC leader Chitralal Yadav’s recent visit here. Yadav made a fiery speech about tarai rights to a rapt audience of 10,000 at the launch of the Lokantantrik Madhani Muki Morcha Nepal-Blount Mauritri Sangha in Bahadurganj last month. A number of Indian politicians attended the function.

The vigilantes are defiant. One said, “We’ll continue our war against the Maoists until they stop terrorising our villages.”
Constitutional ability
Inclusion, participation, discipline

K
enya still doesn’t have its new constitution 15 years after the process to write it began. The story has positive lessons and cautions for Nepal.
Kenya was a one-party dictatorship from 1963 to 1992, but in the late 1980s, Kenyans began a people’s movement demanding reform and a return to constitutional democracy through a constituent assembly.

The government gave in and agreed to review the constitution. The process was participatory, aimed at a constitution which respected human rights, multi-party democracy, and ethnic and gender equity. First, an independent commission was set up in late 2000 to educate people about constitutions and to collect their views. In the basics of this, the draft constitution the constituent assembly would consider. The 29-member commission was too large and the members were too often linked to political parties, but all were lawyers or persons in public life. The commission held meetings in every constituency, with interpreters for local languages and sign language. Thousands attended and the commission received 36,000 submissions, all were analysed. The results were freely available.

The conference had 629 members, including all MPs, three elected representatives from each district, and another chosen by civil society groups. The chair ensured underrepresented groups and minorities had a voice.
Right before the first formal sitting in 2002, the president called an election. The assembly suspended work for five months. When they returned, politicians were making calculations of personal advantage.
But most conference delegates were committed and serious, and after 11 months of work it adopted a draft constitution which overall responded to the demands of the people. The size of the conference made national discussion hard, so some delegates demanded higher allowances, others were bribed by politicians, and they made a mockery of the process.

For Nepal, these conclusions stand out:

- Get people involved.
- Give them the facts.
- Let public opinion lead.
- Protect the process through the interim constitution.
- Keep the CA small.
- Short-term self-interest is disruptive.
- A referendum is expensive, unpopular, and gives ethnic minorities a chance to cardinally neglectful.

Yash Gai was chair of the Kenya’s constituent assembly, and is a UNDP Adviser in Nepal on constitution making. Jill Cottrell is a consultant on constitutional matters.

Outside looking in
Far from home, Nepalis in Japan cling to their roots

TOKYO-Everything you’ve heard about this teeming city is true. It is meticulously planned, runs like clockwork and is the most automated city on earth. Over three million passengers pass through Shinjuku, the trainhead on the city’s western edge. The railway platforms are equipped with highcapacity layers deep underground. Millions of people walk through, seldom bumping into each other. Deeply revered are the blind, the jump-flying foreigner who accidentally brushes against fellow-commuters.

One western myth about Japan is that its rigid rules of etiquette and civility make it an alien place. For us Asians, though, this is how we’d like our homes to be: with clear, safe streets, a belief in community, respect for the elderly, consideration for others, and honouring guests. No wonder so many Nepalis choose to stay on in this city long after their student or visitor visas expire. At Naito’s indirgence desk every newcomer from Nepal is a potential illegal immigrant. But there is no great border mentality, just courteous carelessness. No one has an exact count of the size of Nepali community here, not even the ambassadors.

But even in Nippon the Nepalis are fragmented by political, ethnic or other cleavages. Thakalis, Tamangs, Gurungs, and Sherpas have their own platforms to socialise.
The News International Forum Japan celebrated Maha Puja and Nepal New Year 1972 at the Community Centre in Kasi in over the weekend. Flags of Japan and Nepal greeted visitors at the venue. Paras Ghimire, the officiating Nepali managed to deliver a scholarly speech. Thereafter, the aila and avarshi started flowing and even participating bahuns were inspired to dance to the tune of Rajmati.
But life in Japan isn’t as smooth as it seems. Whenever they may choose to work and live, Nepalis have similar affinities, fears and hopes. Gone are the days of lifelong job security in Japan. In a desperate bid to cut costs, reduce the deficit, and decrease public debt, the private sector has been forced to privatise, outsource and trim the fat. The private sector is trying hard to compete with new entrants to the global marketplace like China, Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan. The legendary Japanese labour force is being told that it doesn’t have to work any more because it’s such a good product. These days, it’s a struggle to keep private enterprise in Japan. The private sector is making huge cuts to the workforce, the private sector is downsizing. The private sector is trying hard to compete with new entrants to the global marketplace like China, Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan. The legendary Japanese labour force is being told that it doesn’t have to work any more because it’s such a good product. These days, it’s a struggle to keep private enterprise in Japan. The private sector is downsizing.

To survive in a world of inescapable interdependence and economic globalization, Nepalis must adapt, like others. Some children of Nepalis here have started kindergarten, and speak to their parents in Japanese. Newar children, from Patan, Kathmandu, and speak to their parents in Japanese. Newar children, from Patan, Kathmandu, had to learn Japanese from the ground up and adapt to a new culture.

This year the Nepalis didn’t have to ration flowers. The Japanese don’t cultivate it, though, and this year flowers were watered by the municipality. Marigolds in a local community park for Mha Puja. The Japanese don’t cultivate it, though, and this year flowers were watered by the municipality. Marigolds in a local community park for Mha Puja. The Japanese don’t cultivate it, though, and this year flowers were watered by the municipality. Marigolds in a local community park for Mha Puja. The Japanese don’t cultivate it, though, and this year flowers were watered by the municipality. Marigolds in a local community park for Mha Puja. The Japanese don’t cultivate it, though, and this year flowers were watered by the municipality. Marigolds in a local community park for Mha Puja. The Japanese don’t cultivate it, though, and this year flowers were watered by the municipality. Marigolds in a local community park for Mha Puja. The Japanese don’t cultivate it, though, and this year flowers were watered by the municipality. Marigolds in a local community park for Mha Puja. The Japanese don’t cultivate it, though, and this year flowers were watered by the municipality. Marigolds in a local community park for Mha Puja. The Japanese don’t cultivate it, though, and this year flowers were watered by the municipality.

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To recap: the army has sworn allegiance to civilian command, the government has begun to privatise, outsource and trim the fat. The private sector is trying hard to compete with new entrants to the global marketplace like China, Korea, Malaysia, and Taiwan. The legendary Japanese labour force is being told that it doesn’t have to work any more because it’s such a good product. These days, it’s a struggle to keep private enterprise in Japan. The private sector is downsizing.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
CK Lal has hit the nail on the head in stating that the country’s farmers can’t wait for complete resolution of the conflict ‘Food for thought’, #318. Farmers need relief now, yet some donors have been waiting for over two years without any new agricultural programs in the pipeline. The upper-income, urban-based, politically savvy have jumped the development queue yet again with democracy and governance projects and programs that will serve only themselves.
Scott E Justice, Kathmandu

RECONCILIATION
Although it was really good to be able to come home for Dasain, even briefly, much of what is happening amazed me.

The political factions spout democracy slogans while making decisions crucial to Nepal’s future without the mandate of the Nepali people. Was the so-called ‘Rododendron revolution’ the only mandate needed? It had some genuine participants, no doubt, but who would deny that many rent or force-a-crowd participants were ‘encouraged’ by the Maoists? Is the widespread extortion at gunpoint democracy or thuggery?

At any given time in a nation, political party members make up a minority, significant only in the votes each brings to the table. These people have brought no votes in almost a decade, yet they are passing laws, making policies, talking of turning the whole structure of the nation on its head, replacing a constitutional/ceremonial monarchy. Replace with what?

I still remember how a minister during ‘Home for the holidays’ was amazed to see that nearly all pillow drivers were no longer wearing helmets. After the helmet-wearing rule was enforced in 2003, casually figures dropped in Bir Hospital’s emergency ward. But now Kathmandu has gone back to the pre-January 2003 situation. It would be interesting to hear what last month’s number of casualties were compared to the numbers in June. It is sad to hear people say the helmet is really unnecessary, they certainly don’t think of the repercussions following a road accident.

A Rajahalme, email

NUMBSKULLS
Upon returning for my summer holidays, I was amazed to see that nearly all pillow drivers were no longer wearing helmets. After the helmet-wearing rule was enforced in 2003, casualty figures dropped in Bir Hospital’s emergency ward. But now Kathmandu has gone back to the pre-January 2003 situation. It would be interesting to hear what last month’s number of casualties were compared to the numbers in June. It is sad to hear people say the helmet is really unnecessary, they certainly don’t think of the repercussions following a road accident.

A Rajahalme, email

FRANCHISE FOR ALL
It is sad to see the stalemate in the peace process and that the Maoists have to take the onus for sticking the sore thumb. The government has been more than accommodating, but there are certain things a state can’t breach such as the security and stability of a nation.

To place the state army and the rebel army in the same footing would be catastrophic. An institution that has been around for almost two and half centuries can’t be terminated just to appease the rebels. It is the people who should decide by the means of adult franchise.

All peace loving Nepalis would like to appeal to the Maoists to be more serious about a peaceful settlement. And if the Maoists create any city-centric unrest, such an attempt will be akin to treachery and should be taken as an act of war.

PB Rana, email

KING
I have serious reservation about the article ‘King in Crisis’ (From the Nepali Press, #319). It is true that the Nepali monarchy has been made almost useless by the ridiculous steps King Gyanendra took, but terming King Birendra as the only real king for the people is totally wrong. King Birendra had his own share of faults during his term as a so-called constitutional monarch. Had he stepped in timely and cautioned Girija Prasad Koirala, things would have been almost useless by the so-called guardian of all Nepali economy. Despite all that, the FNCCI, the so-called guardian of all Nepali businesses and economic institutions, called for a closure. The president must be aware that one banda day incurs a huge loss in national economic growth. I wonder how he would react to a strike in his ownMomento Apparel.

Sometimes the Maoists are on strike, at others it is the political parties or student wings or temporary teachers and doctors, the list goes on. Isn’t this a serious abuse that human rights organisations should look into?

Praveesh Sarai, email

CLARIFICATION
Due to an editing error, the contest of last week’s illustration on page 2 was missing. UNOCHA routinely monitors and reports on the ability of the humanitarian and development agencies to operate and implement their programs freely throughout the country. The September Operational Space map, published in #319, is part of this effort. Regular updates and reports are available at www.un.org.np.

Due to a layout error, the last line from ‘Home for the holidays’ was omitted. Kul Chandra Gautam’s quote should have read: ‘That’s the only way to keep your humility and remain realistic. Those are the things that have been useful in my life.’
The new Kathmandu-Delhi bus route is making monitoring trafficking more challenging than usual. It’s also the newest way for women, egged on by manpower agents who dupe them, to try and illegally make their way to Kuwait.

In mid-September 15 young women from Rasuwa, Solukhumbu, Okhaldhunga, and Khotang were stopped at the Jamunaha checkpoint near Nepalganj. They said they were going to Kuwait via New Delhi. These women were stopped when police and Maiti Nepal workers were conducting a regular check of public transport. Most of them, between 16 and 22, were turned over to their relatives, since they had neither the papers nor the finances necessary for their alleged journey to Kuwait.

Such women are considered high-risk for being sold, and in the last two months more than 100 women from Sindupalchok, Nuwakot, Banke, Rasuwa, Salyan, Jhapa, and Gorkha have been sent back from the border.

When the direct Kathmandu-Delhi bus route opened three months ago, more and more groups of women began crossing the border, and police sources say they stepped up vigilance at checkpoints. Rita Bhattarai, coordinator of Maiti Nepal’s Nepalganj office, says traffickers also make frequent use of the open border in Banke, Bardia, Kailali, and Kanchanpur.

Nepali women are not allowed to travel to Kuwait to work, except in the organised sector, yet manpower agents continue to offer them work as well-paid domestic help. Often this is a trap, and the women end up being trafficked in India.

Until now, women being trafficked crossed the border in rickshaws and horse carts, travelling alone or with a watcher, who often kept their distance. Groups of women on the buses now say they are out on a shopping expedition or, increasingly, that they are going to Kuwait.

Kuwait may not be as bad as Mumbai brothels, but it’s far from ideal and women there legally have little recourse to help when in trouble. Maiti Nepal staff in Nepalganj say they’ve received eight complaints this year, one from a woman who was taken to Kuwait and sexually abused, and the rest from women who ended up in the brothels of Bombay instead of the jobs they were promised in Kuwait.

“We managed to bring two women back from the brothels and are preparing to rescue more taken from Surkhet, Banke, and Dang,” says Bhattarai.

The women stopped on 20 September were only carrying Rs 500 each, and none could say how they planned to fly without any money. “We didn’t have to pay for the bus ticket or food,” says Anjana Rai from Khotang, who was persuaded to come along by Akalmaya Sunuwar from Okhaldhunga. Sunuwar claimed to have a relative in Kuwait who had told her to “get in touch with someone in Delhi who would take us to Kuwait”, but was vague on details and unable to name the contact person.

All 15 women, most who hadn’t even made it to SLC, were either very confused about their destination or had been told not to disclose any details. “It was clear that they would have never reached Kuwait and would instead end up in brothels in India,” says Bhattarai.

Even if the group had reached Kuwait, chances are that they’d end up working as domestic help and possibly be sexually abused. On 28 September, Daya Gauchan from Gorkha spoke to the press of how she and 13 other women in Kuwait were suffering under appalling conditions. It seems that no matter where these women go, their dreams of a better life are met with exploitation and misery.
At any cost

Winning is not the only thing

“Wining is the only thing,” so proclaims a business magazine in Kathmandu. But in today’s super-heated times, when your taking an additional slice of the pie leaves me a small cutback, there is an unnecessary side to winning. The tendency to win at any cost often comes by taking short cuts to glory. Last week, they hauled up around 60 Nepalis for “various criminal activities.” It’s one thing to genuinely want to win the people’s hearts through good work. But this glaring instance of the pot calling the kettle black was hardly reassuring. It stank of a process of eliminating competition in the pulse of assisting ordinary Nepalis.

Besides, in a free society like ours, from where did the Maoists derive the authority to arrest innocent-until-proven-guilty Nepalis? And if we love the Maoists to win at carrying out such activities, who and what is to stop them tomorrow from arresting anyone they dislike?

Winning at any cost takes other forms too. Businessmen borrow millions from state-run banks, and do not bother to settle their loans. Politicians won their privilege in April to lead the nation out of its deadlock. But since then, they have been busy as acting as though their privilege to govern were their inalienable right to stay in power. Likewise, rich and influential Kathmandu parents desperately want to win in the game of having their kids obtain admissions to selective US and UK colleges, even if that means requesting teachers to fudge records, thus destroying the chances of other, more deserving, students.

One reason winning at any cost has become an obsession is that there’s this growing perception that competition for everything is fierce, that the pie has become smaller, and that winning alone brings disproportionately large rewards to a few. It is the visible results that seem to matter, not the quiet honest means to achieve them. Still, such an attitude is hardly surprising in contemporary urban Nepal. This is a society filled with losers—as in those made unable to win by completing primary education, passing SLC exams, getting decent employment, and ranking high in most comparative international indices. Here, winning at any cost by those in positions of power and privilege distorts everyone else’s behaviour and ruins the game for all.

Winning is not the only thing, if the means to achieve are those of losers.

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Winning is not the only thing, if the means to achieve are those of losers.
Jana Aastha, 18 October

If the government-Maoist peace talks succeed and the country heads towards a constituent assembly, there will be elections for 409 seats. An interim arrangement with 315 seats will also be formed. Although issues like weapons management and the fate of the monarchy are still unsolved, both sides have agreed to the number of seats in the constituent assembly and the interim management. According to sources, the number of seats for the constituent assembly increased, as the terms of National Assembly members had not expired and the seven parties demanded that their members of the lower House of Representatives also be included. The total number of members in both houses stands at 209 at the moment. The number in the HoR is less than 200, as some MPs have died, some were murdered, and others were expelled by their parties for supporting the royal regime. There are less than a dozen members left in the 60-seat National Assembly, as elections to it have not been held in the last five years, and the king did not nominate any members. The Maoists had proposed forming a 51-member interim arrangement comprising representatives of civil society and party leaders, but they also agreed to the parties’ proposal to include members from both houses. The interim arrangement will have 203 MPs from both houses. The remaining 108 members will come from the Maoist side and from civil society. Some MPs in the Lower House supported the regression and accepted ministerial and administrative posts dispensed by the royal regime. Their seats are to be given to the Left Front.

The Nepali media has a lot to expect from the ongoing peace talks between the government and the Maoists. The enthusiasm comes not just from the ceasefire but also from Chairman Prachanda’s public commitment to respect freedom of the press in policy and in practice. Nepali media has many flaws but despite that, it has continued to work for the last 15 years. It has been the first to protest when democracy and citizen’s rights and freedoms are curtailed. It also gave the Maoists a platform to voice their opinions, even if that meant suffering at the hands of the government.

The regional Maoist leadership may have apologised, but action against mediapersons and political opponents continues unabated. Activities like attacking members of the trade union GEFONT, and torturing a communter and accusing him of having murdered his wife while she was actually alive will affect the ongoing peace talks and the peace and security situation afterwards. This is a result of the failure of the ceasefire code of conduct monitoring committee formed jointly by the government and the Maoists.

Lawlessness

Yubraj Umme Ramshya, 2 November

The Nepali media has a lot to expect from the ongoing peace talks between the government and the Maoists. The enthusiasm comes not just from the ceasefire but also from Chairman Prachanda’s public commitment to respect freedom of the press in policy and in practice. Nepali media has many flaws but despite that, it has continued to work for the last 15 years. It has been the first to protest when democracy and citizen’s rights and freedoms are curtailed. It also gave the Maoists a platform to voice their opinions, even if that meant suffering at the hands of the government.

The Maoist leadership needs to clarify with what authority their cadres controlled the streets outside the prime minister’s residence. What right did they have to check media people and civilians gathered there? Home Minister Krishna Sitaula is unaware of parliamentary culture and of his responsibilities, and does not have an answer. However Sitaula’s political patron Girija Prasad Koirala will certainly have to provide one.

The regional Maoist leadership may have apologised, but action against mediapersons and political opponents continues unabated. Activities like attacking members of the trade union GEFONT, and torturing a communter and accusing him of having murdered his wife while she was actually alive will affect the ongoing peace talks and the peace and security situation afterwards. This is a result of the failure of the ceasefire code of conduct monitoring committee formed jointly by the government and the Maoists.

Will those who have risen by taking the law into their hands be able to live with the law if they come to power through agreements motivated by the political situation? Statements like “We won’t let you go even if Prachanda himself is here,” have been repeatedly said not just outside Baluwatar but also leaders of various Maoist fronts and sister organisations.

Active king

Janadhana, 19 October

The UML leadership’s decision to hold a referendum on the fate of the monarchy is causing under confusion. This was not expected from UML, which has always said that a democratic republic was their main political agenda. On the one hand, they want to establish a republic by throwing away the monarchy. On the other, they are also keen to pull a politically inactive king into mainstream politics by pushing the option of a referendum on the monarchy.

Interim
Everyone is surprised at the dubious policy of the UML. The UML’s idea of holding a referendum will create more political complexities and push the monarch towards politics whether he wants to be involved or not. There is also every possibility of a new party emerging, headed by the king. Political gurus conclude that the king and his loyal royalists will do anything to ensure that the referendum is in favour of the monarchy. It is time the UML opened its eyes and withdrew its proposal referendum unless they want the king back in action.

**Extortion**

Desantar, 22 October

DOLALGHAT—The Maoists in their combat dress intimidate everyone along the highway, and collect donations from each passing vehicle, public or private. Drivers have to pay each time they enter the highway. A group of Maoists belonging to the ‘Tamang Autonomous Republic Region’ of Ramechhap and Kabhre have been mobilised under the leadership of sub-commander ‘LB’ at Dolalghat bajar. Every day, they collect over Rs 10,000 from buses, minibuses, lorries, vans, and tourist coaches in Sindhupalchok, Kabhre, Dolakha, and Ramechhap districts. Besides privately-owned vehicles, even drivers of government cars have been terrorised by this extortion drive. The Maoists tax government vehicles more than others. They are also demanding a minimum ‘entry tax’ of Rs 500 from each tourist who comes on to the Arniko highway from Tibet. Around 3,000 tourists enter Nepal from Tibet every month.

Similarly, hundreds of Nepali tourists visit Tatopani. In addition to taxes, the Maoists are now demanding tv sets, Chinese blankets, cameras, mobile phones, and other expensive equipment from local traders. The demands are getting more extravagant, and the Maoists workers making such expensive demands are on the rise along this main highway.

**Death row**

Himal Khabarpatika, 18 October-1 November

Maoist workers Hirat Shrestha (pictured) and Gyaljen Sherpa face an uncertain future in the Chinese prison in Lhasa, where they have been incarcerated for the last three years. They were arrested by Chinese police in Khasa bajar for possession of arms and communications equipment. Although Hirat explained that they were Maoist workers, the police filed a criminal case of arms smuggling against them. Both are now on death row.

The death sentence handed down to the two Maoists has been the subject of international attention. In addition to appeals from international human rights organisations, Nepal has also requested China to reconsider the verdict. Even when the relationship between the Maoists and government was at its worst, former premier Sher Bahadur Deuba had asked the Chinese government to repeal the death sentences. Sources say that this is already under consideration. Meanwhile, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Kong Quan says the final decision is yet to be made. Before the peace talks summit began, the Maoist leaders had requested Prime Minister Girija Koirala to again appeal for the release of the duo. There is no confirmation on whether the current Nepal government has already made any efforts towards that end.

While they await a final verdict, Shrestha and Sherpa are optimistic. They keep busy, labouring for two hours a day on the prison farm. They receive free medical treatment, clothing in addition to the prison uniform, access to a telephone, and are permitted to meet visitors. “He looked happy and has no grudge against the Chinese government,” said Hirat’s brother Yandralal.

Former UML worker Shrestha was a teacher in his Sindupalchok village and quit his full-time job to join Maoist politics seven years ago. He was a senior member of the Sindhuli district committee. His comrade Gyaljen owned a small shop. Since they lived close to the China border, they travelled frequently to Tibet.
The consequences of climate change are evident in Khumbu

**The heat is on**

Dealing with it will boost the economy

**Climate change will cause a recession**

JAMES RANDERSON

Climate change could tilt the world economy into the worst recession in recent history, warns a UK Treasury report. Nicholas Stern, a former World Bank chief economist, warns that governments need to tackle the problem head on by cutting emissions or face economic ruin. The findings will turn the economic argument about global warming on its head by insisting that fighting global warming will save industrial nations money. The US refused to join the Kyoto protocol on greenhouse gas emissions because George Bush said it would harm the economy. "All of Stern’s detailed modelling out to the year 2100 is going to indicate first of all that if we don’t take global action we are going to see a massive downturn in global economies," said David King, the UK government’s chief scientific adviser. "If no action is taken we will be faced with the kind of downturn that has not been seen since the great depression and the two world wars." He also called the review the most detailed economic analysis yet. "This is not just an environmental problem," said British foreign secretary Margaret Beckett. "It is a defence problem. It is a problem of security, and health.”

Stern argues that tackling the problem may not prove as economically painful as some experts predict. The International Energy Agency predicts that $15 trillion of investment in new energy sources will be required over the next 15 years. "The investment program that’s ahead of us is an opportunity to move towards a zero carbon energy system. The investment process is going to act quite possibly in the opposite direction to an economic downturn," King said. He drew parallels between scientific advice on global warming and advice from seismologists ahead of the 2004 tsunami. A month before the disaster a delegation warned governments around the Indian Ocean about the extreme danger posed by tectonic activity under the sea. No government chose to act on the advice. "$30 million is the cost to install some kind of early warning system presumably looked like a lot of money. But such a system could have saved 150,000 lives," (The Guardian)
Nature's fury
To manage conflict, we need ecological solutions, not just military ones

Our political systems and global politics are largely unequipped for the real challenges of today's world. Global economic growth and rising populations are putting unprecedented stresses on the physical environment, which in turn creates extraordinary social challenges. But politicians are largely ignorant of these trends and governments aren’t organized to meet them. Crises that are fundamentally ecological in nature are managed by outdated strategies of war and diplomacy.

Consider Darfur, Sudan. This horrible conflict is being addressed through threats of military force, sanctions, and the language of war and peacekeeping. Yet the origin of the conflict is the region’s extreme poverty, made disastrously worse in the 1980s by a drought that has essentially lasted until today. It appears that long-term climate change is leading to lower rainfall not only in Sudan, but also in much of Africa south of the Sahara, where life depends on the rains, and drought means death.

Nobody approaches Darfur’s drought-induced death-trap from the perspective of long-term development. Darfur needs a water strategy more than a military strategy. Yet part of that increased agricultural output resulted from millions of wells sunk to tap underground water supplies for irrigation. Now the water table is falling dangerously fast, as underground water is being pumped much faster than the rains can recharge it. Aside from rainfall patterns, climate change is upsetting the flow of rivers, as glaciers, which provide a huge amount of water for irrigation and household use, rapidly recede due to global warming. Snowpack in the mountains is melting earlier in the season, so river water is less available during summer growing seasons.

Given the heat waves, droughts, and other climate stresses across the US, Europe, Australia, and elsewhere this year, wheat prices are shooting to their highest levels in decades. With rising populations, economic growth, and climate change, we will face intensifying droughts, hurricanes and typhoons, El Niños, water stress, heat waves, species extinction, and more.

Environment and climate issues will be the hard, strategic concerns of the 21st century. Yet people who speak about hunger and environmental crises are viewed as muddle-headed moralists, as opposed to hard-headed realists who deal with war and peace. This is nonsense. The so-called realists don’t understand the sources of tensions and stresses that are causing crises around the world. Governments should establish Ministries of Sustainable Development, to manage the links between environmental change and human well-being. Agriculture ministers by themselves can’t cope with water shortages that farmers will face. Health ministers won’t be able to cope with an increase in infectious diseases due to global warming or environment ministers with the pressures on oceans and forests. A new powerful ministry should be charged with coordinating the responses to climate change, water stress, and other ecosystem crises.

By focusing on the underlying challenges of sustainable development, our governments could more easily end current crises, as in Darfur, and head off many more in the future.

Jeffrey Sachs is professor of economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

COMMENT
Jeffrey D Sachs

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Money and happiness
In 50 years, we might all be bourgeois

The recently-released Penn World Table compares living standards across countries for 2004. Not all countries are included because of data lags, but these numbers are valuable as they account for relative price differences, sometimes leading to surprising comparisons. There is good news for the 82 countries included in the survey: real per capita GDP has risen by an average of 18.9 percent between 2000 and 2004, or 4.4 percent per year. At this rate, real per capita GDP will double every 16 years. Many people who could not afford a car in 2000 now have one, and people who could afford only one car in 2000 now have two. More people can afford to send their children to a good school or college, and consume a range of goods and services.

Despite the “Chinese economic miracle”, China’s ranking rose by just one place from 2000 to 68. This is despite per capita real GDP having the highest growth rate of the major countries, 26 percent a year. The reason is that other countries have also been growing, and the gap between countries is enormous—the average real per capita GDP of the top 25 percent of countries is 15 times that of the bottom 25. Other big winners include Lithuania (up 48 percent), Chile (up 33 percent), Korea (up 23 percent), and Nigeria (up 22 percent). If such growth rates continue, in 50 years we will see relatively poor countries like India, Indonesia, the Philippines, or Nicaragua reach the current average levels in advanced countries. But they won’t have caught up with them, as those countries will have moved ahead too.

If just about every country’s GDP doubled or quadrupled, what would they do with all that money? Economist John Kenneth Galbraith in his 1958 bestseller The Affluent Society, wrote: “With the enormous changes in living standards many of the desires of the individual are no longer even evident to him. They become so only as they are synthesised, elaborated and nurtured by advertising and salesmanship; and these, in turn, have become among our most important and talented professions.” But real per capita GDP in the US is now three times higher than it was in 1958. What have people been spending all that extra money on?

Data suggests that Americans spent 27 percent of the huge increase in income between 1958 and 2005 on medical care, 23 percent on their homes, 12 percent on transportation, ten percent on recreation, and nine percent on personal business.

The products advertisers and salesmen typically promote were relatively unimportant. Food got only eight percent of the extra money, and clothing three percent. Unfortunately, idealistic activities also fared badly: three percent for welfare and religious activities, and a similar share for education.

Thus, most of the extra money was spent on staying healthy, having a nice home, travelling and relaxing, and doing a little business. Maybe that is the way it will be around the world. As long as we can keep worldwide growth going at its current rate, billions of people can look forward to the same kind of improvement.

Whaling away

Japan and Norway, the only other significant whaling countries, are watching carefully. All three countries have continued commercial whaling exceeding their ‘quotas’, saying it is for “scientific” purposes. Polls show that 70-80 percent of Icelanders support commercial whaling, though curiously in 2004, just a quarter of the meat taken by the Icelandic whaling fleet was sold, and the country’s industrial freezers are full of unsold whale from previous seasons. Only 1 percent of Icelanders eat whale meat once a week or more, while 82.4 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds never eat whale meat. Meanwhile, the international market is saturated. The Norwegians failed to meet their quota of whales last year, and still had to turn some of the catch into pet food. In Japan, whale meat is being handed out to schoolchildren. Why still whale? These countries say it’s part of their tradition, of who they are. (The Guardian)

Say yes to DDT

The WHO has called for an increase in the use of controversial pesticide DDT in developing countries, particularly in Africa, in redoubled attempts to fight malaria. DDT is notorious for the environmental damage it causes, and is banned in the US. However, the WHO hopes to promote indoor spraying to kill mosquitoes that bite people while they sleep. The organisation argues that with proper use DDT is the most safe, effective and economic solution. Anti-malaria experts insist that this will be a key part in the fight against the disease, which infects half a billion people each year and kills more than a million, mostly children.

No fast moves

In a move to curb domestic dissent and fend off a western “cultural invasion”, Iran’s Islamic government has banned high-speed internet links. Restricting internet speeds to 128kbps is intended to discourage downloads of foreign movies, music and tv programs, and hinder the political opposition’s efforts to use the internet as a tool. With an estimated five million internet users, Iran is second only to China when it comes to censoring blogs and websites. The ban on high-speed internet comes in the wake of a crackdown on illegal satellite dishes, used to secretly watch western television, and increasing media restrictions. The ban on high-speed internet links is a tool to control the country’s industrial freezers are full of unsold whale from previous seasons. Only 1 percent of Icelanders eat whale meat once a week or more, while 82.4 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds never eat whale meat. Meanwhile, the international market is saturated. The Norwegians failed to meet their quota of whales last year, and still had to turn some of the catch into pet food. In Japan, whale meat is being handed out to schoolchildren. Why still whale? These countries say it’s part of their tradition, of who they are. (The Guardian)

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**Sideswiped**

**Madhesi dalits are on no one’s agenda**

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA in HARIPUR, SAPTARI

“Jhabadi Debi Sada from Haripur in Saptari district works every day from 7 AM to 6 PM in her landlord’s fields, as does her husband. For their efforts, they get nine kilos of paddy a month. Jhabadi Debi’s husband sells some of the paddy to buy rice, salt, and oil. When we meet her, she’s returned from another day of backbreaking work to care for her five children.”

“I’ve never seen more than Rs 50 in my life, and we almost never have enough to eat,” says Jhabadi Debi, who knows she was married at 12, but has lost count of the years since.

You hear the same story in every one of the 35 Musahar households you go to in Chakdaha, Haripur. In the hotbed of Warri ethnic politics, mainstream madhesi rights activists, anti-Hindu vigilantes, Maoist splinter groups and Tharu groups are demanding everything from greater autonomy to secession. But Madhesi dalits are nowhere in the equation.

In east Nepal there are hundreds of communities like this one in Chakdaha. In Sindh and Saptari alone over 225,000 dalits live in dire poverty. The local Samskriti Community Development Forum, which works in five districts in Saptari, says that 85 percent of the dalit community in the area do not have enough to eat all year long. They also do not have citizenship certificates.

Most Madhesi dalits are perpetually indebted. Debi Debi Sada looks a lot older than the 32 years her citizenship certificate says she is. Married at 18 to Mithulal Sada, she spends her days looking after their five children. This family has five kilos of paddy a month, and as with the others, there is only work in the fields for five months of the year. The rest of the time they scrounge for manual labour, and take loans from their landlords. “We repay them by working again. That’s why we never have money,” says Debi Debi.

They sell the paddy they get from the landlord at Rs 7-12, but must buy rice for as much as Rs 24 a kilo. Vegetables are unaffordable and to stretch the rice they make it into a thin gruel with a little salt and green chilli. On lucky days they have boiled pumpkin, but they have less and less land from the landlords to grow vegetables. They are not kamaiyas, but the cycle of poverty and patronage they are caught in makes the situation of Madhesi dalits little better than that of bonded labour. Landowners still give away workers to one another in droves or when they formalise friendship. Puru Saud’s family was brought to Haripur two generations ago when a landlord here tied a bond of friendship with a landowner from another village. “Our landlord didn’t have enough labourers, so his friend sent 12 families to work here. That’s how this settlement was formed in Chakdaha,” explains Saud.

Haripur’s Musaharas are subject to all the usual strictures against dalits, but here even the school teachers taunt their children. If they actually get to school—dalit children are entitled to an annual Rs 250 government scholarship, but for many families the paperwork to claim this money is daunting. And the money is nowhere near enough for clothes, books, and school supplies. Jhabadi Debi’s daughter Chhaya, 18, has been in school more than a few months, and must buy her books with money she earns working as a sweeper in a Dhankuta teashop, she’s out of school. She wants to go to college, but her parents are afraid that their children may forget how to work. “Sure, we admitted them to school, but how can we expect the money to buy them pencils?”

The Musahar community is preparing for its biggest annual festival, Dinabad, by going around neighbouring villages, banging their drums and begging for food. For a community that dies, barely—on the periphery of a society in upheaval, that’s the only option.

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**SANGITA MARAHATTA in LONDON**

It’s now feasible to launch a 24-hour Nepali news and entertainment satellite channel. Clearly, the Nepali diaspora has attained critical mass. Bijay Thapa, a London-based Nepali entrepreneur, launched Nepali TV in November 2005. The programs are beamed in 55 countries in Europe, the Arab world and parts of North Africa. Already, UK-based Nepalis are getting the channel on cable to watch their favourite Nepali soaps and follow the news from back home.

“I knew we could do it when I saw lots of Nepalis in Britain watching the Hindi channels,” Thapa told us, “it was the closest thing to Nepali they had, so why not give them the real thing?”

In the past six months, Nepali TV started test transmissions with music videos and tv serials. The response was overwhelming and following audience demand, the television channel started a half-hour news show broadcast live from London.

The news show is popular and reports are filed by Nepali TV’s Kathmandu office. The channel also has a ‘Music on demand’ show in which Nepalis from across the world can call and request songs.

Running a 24-hour television channel is expensive business and it has been a struggle. “Our target is the overseas Nepali business community because we want to make Nepali TV’s sustainable mainly through commercials and the subscription fees,” says Thapa, who is also director of the company. Initially a free-to-air channel, Nepali TV has now become a pay channel. The subscribers base is also going up.

Nepali TV’s programs are produced both in Kathmandu and London. ‘Sandesh’ is a popular slot that serves as a messenger for people back home to relatives and friends abroad and vice versa. Other highly-rated shows are old teleserials that have already been broadcast back home, like Hijo ajaka kama, Tito satya, Pabankali, and Jire kura, Tito satya, Pabankali, and Jire kha.

A Nepali feature film is telecast every weekend. Rebroadcasts for talk shows such as ‘Bahas’ and ‘Fireside’ are bought so that overseas Nepalis are now much more glued to hit serials, broadsheets.

Nepali TV plans to expand transmission to Canada, the United States and Hong Kong, and recruit new correspondents in the Arab world and Europe.

In the UK, Nepali TV has reassured parents who are afraid that their children may forget how to work. “But Madhesi dalits are nowhere in the equation,” explains Saud. A mother in London says she is delighted to hear her daughter sing along with Ani Choying Dolma’s Phool ko juna, which she’d never have heard on the home culture.

The Musahar community is preparing for its biggest annual festival, Dinabad, by going around neighbouring villages, banging their drums and begging for food. For a community that dies, barely—on the periphery of a society in upheaval, that’s the only option.

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**OUTSIDERS: Jhabadi Debi Sada can barely feed or clothe her children (left), Sita Mallik is out of school—dalit children are entitled to an annual Rs 250 government scholarship, but for many families the paperwork to claim this money is daunting.**

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**COURTESY SANGITA MARAHATTA**
W

When I went back to Tandi, Chitwan this summer, as always, my friends and I went to meet our ‘Sarbendra sir’. He was hunched over a desk in a small dim room. He hadn’t changed a bit; just gotten a little older. Most of his old students visit Sarbendra sir often and not just because he was a fantastic teacher. We visit him because he needs to know his students are ready to take care of him in these turbulent times, that though he isn’t in his own country, he has something to fear. Sarbendra sir’s story is not unusual, but it is instructive. He came to Nepal from India about 25 years ago to teach science. He first went to teach in a remote, inaccessible village in Dhaning where most of my Chilaware friends still don’t want to go. He later moved to Tandi, and has since been a much-loved fixture of the local high school. He’s seen some students, like me, grow up and leave the village, and he’s seen others pick up guns and kill. After we finished school, we often wondered what would become of Sarbendra sir. He is entitled to no pension, and the thought that he might spend his old days in an unknown slum in Uttar Pradesh was appalling. Even a minor illness could prove disastrous for him— he has no money to speak of. The last thing we want is for him to regret coming to Nepal to teach people like ourselves.

Teachers like Sarbendra sir are our responsibility, and it’s a shame that the Indian embassy has to raise this issue while our political leaders are bogged down by parochial concerns. The issue of teachers has become of urgent concern in excruciating detail, but there are also some interesting tidbits buried in the pages. But to those interested in truly understanding Nepal, the book is neither reliable nor readable.

In comparing the unfortunate demise of Madan Bhandari in a highway accident with the assassination of JFK, Barbara notes that “the young Ghandi had captured the imagination of a generation of American youth, who had been turned off politics by the sleaze and perfidy of the Nixon Administration”. Wait a minute, didn’t Kennedy precede Nixon? The book is riddled with inaccuracies, contradictions and bizarrely inconsistent spelling of Nepali names. Barbara may be unable to spell, but what about the editors at Adroit?

The book has a foreword by Ganeshraj Sharma, who had been turned off politics by the sleaze and perfidy of the Nixon Administration. The book is riddled with inaccuracies, contradictions and bizarrely inconsistent spelling of Nepali names. Barbara may be unable to spell, but what about the editors at Adroit?

The book has a foreword by Ganeshraj Sharma, who had been turned off politics by the sleaze and perfidy of the Nixon Administration...
Comrade Parvati’s verbal violence

A multi-storey building of the Nepal Engineers’ Association (NEA) at Pulchowk was almost complete, towering over modest structures in the vicinity. During the years it was being built, Hisila Yami was busy publishing women across Nepal.

The NEA tower was partly designed by a young and energetic architect who used to bicycle around town collecting membership dues as the NEA’s treasurer. After democracy in 1990, the NEA honoured Hisila’s commitment. When Krishna Prasad Bhattarai hesitated—how could a bachelor premier garland a married woman in public—Hisila had craned her neck to receive the garland and the sindoor with a polite but firm: “Communists don’t believe in sindoor with a polite but firm!”

Hisila had craned her neck to receive the garland and the sindoor with a polite but firm: “Communists don’t believe in sindoor with a polite but firm!”

Hisila is back in the wilderness, Hisila is back in the city of her forefathers to claim her place at the high table of intellectual debates. During talk-shows on tv, she is surprisingly well-read and well-spoken, but Hisila soldiﬁed on. There is no denying her commitment to the cause, but if you want to ﬁnd out what makes her tick you won’t ﬁnd any answers in this book.

If she had remained an activist, would things be better or worse for Nepali women? Hard to say. Despite the contribution of women soldiers in the ‘People’s Liberation Army’, their presence in the decision-making body of Maoists is minimal. Pampha Bhusal and Hisila Yami are leaders of the movement, but it is difﬁcult to ﬁnd a third woman recognised by common Maoist cadre throughout the country.

The struggle of man against power, Milan Kundera once said, is the struggle of memory against forgetting. What happens is struggle of woman against power? Of forgetfulness against memory? The dialectic shows in the introduction of the author at the beginning of the book.

Ten years after she went into the wilderness, Hisila is back in the city of her forefathers to claim her place at the high table of intellectual debates. During talk-shows on tv, she is surprisingly well-read and well-spoken, but this book is doctrinaire Prachandpath. Hisila is capable of, and should, come out with more logically-argued books if she wants to convince us.

The photographic section of the book seems to have been inserted at the last moment as an afterthought. They bear no relevance to the text of the book. Interspersed with Maoisms (“People’s War is a total war” and “To be advanced means to do the work of backsmash!”) and invasive quotes from Marx, the book is dreadfully difﬁcult to read. Even as propaganda it fails because it underestimates the readers’ intelligence.

This book does little justice to her learning, understanding and compassion. The right to publicise Prachandpath is all hers, but not with such shoddily prose, at least not when the peace process is on.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com

A fresh start for Nepali golf

Our biggest golfing event, the Surya Nepal Masters has been postponed. Since the tournament is part of the Indian golf circuit, it attracts over 60 professional golfers each year from India alone. This sounds like bad news for golf tourism. So why am I hopeful?

The Masters has just been put off to January, not cancelled, and the reasons for the postponement had nothing to do with us. There’s upheaval in the Indian golf scene, with scraps and tension between the golf governing body, players, and the marketing company which dealt with sponsorship and money.

In Nepal golf, too, we’ve had some changes, but of the positive kind. The National Sports Council reconstituted its ad hoc committee to work with the Nepal Golf Association. The committee is headed by businessman Pradeep Kumar Shrestha and I’m an executive member. We’re all energetic and enthusiastic about developing golf all over Nepal, not just in Kathmandu and Pokhara. Any golf committee which has to tap into the considerable resources available to build basic infrastructure is likely populated by members there for the social cache, not necessarily to work. The new committee will have to avoid that trap.

We’ve to take on a number of challenges: holding regular golf tournaments and training, and improving the standard of the game as it is played here, ensuring representation in most international golf tournaments, and soliciting government support to enhance facilities for golfing. We need to focus on young players, children, and establish golf academies to catch them young and improve the standard of the game as it is played here, ensuring representation in most international golf tournaments, and soliciting government support to enhance facilities for golfing. We need to focus on young players, children, and establish golf academies to catch them young and ensure that in the future we have as good players as courses.

Money will be an issue, as it always is. We’re already considering various fundraising options and most of us have made personal contributions to the development fund. We’ll also soon start a vigorous campaign to raise funds to strengthen the Nepal Golf Association.

We should be looking ahead, and indeed the NGA wants to be affiliated with all the major international governing bodies of golf. We’ve talked about golf tourism till we were blue in the face. This is a chance to actually put Nepal on the map, as it deserves to be. Can we have a Nepal PGA champion? I’d bet on it.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com

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**EVENTS**

- Boosting the Mysterious Immune System lecture by Joanna Claire, 9:30 AM on 27 October at Shankar Hotel, Lajpat. Rs 50 for CSSN members, Rs 100 for non-members.
- Festive Fiesta post-tilt celebrations at Liquid Lounge, 27 October, 7PM. 9851046004
- Art of Loving class and dialogue on love, 1PM on 28 October at The Quest, Tilottama. 4272912
- Documentaries every Wednesday at 6:30 PM till 30 November at Nutho’s Kitchen—The Organic Bistro, Baluwatar.
- Formula 1 on the big screen every Sunday at Sportbar, Kamaladi. 4212324
- Salsa Classes at the Radisson Hotel, 6PM, 4411818
- Tai-Chi, Qi-Qong and Hatha Yoga at the Self Awakening Centre, Babar Mahal Revisited, call to sign up. 4256618

**MUSIC**

- Live music with Desmond O’Flattery, Bob Nunes and Nashville band on the big screen of a French film followed by dinner, 27 October, 7PM, Alliance Francaise. 4241163
- Mediterranean Seafood at Dwarika on 27 October. Rs 1099 per person, including a BBQ dinner and a drink. 4479488
- Deepawali at Domca Café
- Cocktail, Kalab, 3 November, Thamel, 4215065
- Full Moon BBQ Dinner at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 4 November. 8441371927
- Barbeque dinner with new menu, 6.30-9PM every Friday at Summit Hotel, Kupondole Height. 5521810
- Saturday Barbeque Special at Le Meriden Golf Resort and Spa, Rs 1200 for adults, Rs 600 for children
- BBQ Special on Friday nights at Courtyard Restaurant, Kamaladi. 4243036
- Shaken Not Stirred Martinis 007 style every Wednesday with live music at Fusion, the bar at Raaj. Rs 555 including a tapas platter and a martini
- Drinks and Dancing theme Saturday nights at Jbar. 4418209
- Seven Sensations at Hotel Yak & Yeti, cocktails and snacks. 4248999
- Woodfired Pizzas at Roadhouse Café, Thamel 4282768 and Pulchok 5521755
- A Sweet Taste of Life at La Dolce Vita, authentic Italian cuisine. 4700162
- Season of Freshness at Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La Hotel, happy hour from 5PM to 9PM every Tuesday
- Creations from the Clay Oven at Suta View Restaurant, Budhata Stupa. 4486262
- Monsoon Madness Wine Festival enjoy wines from four continents at Kilroy’s of Kathmandu. 4250440
- Weekend Brunch at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234

**DINING**

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**GETAWAYS**

- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge pure relaxation. 4381500
- Walk and Lunch at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. Saturdays between 29 October and 25 November. 9841371927
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- Escape to Godavari Village Resort, an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5560675

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
PEACEFUL NEW YEAR: Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala releases a dove as (l-r) Naresh Bir Kansakar, Pradeep Gyawali and Padma Ratna Tuladhar share the podium with him during the launch of the Nepal New Year Bhintuna rally in Basantapur on Monday.

GRAY MEETS GREY: US ambassador to Nepal James Moriarty and Maoist leader Deb Gurung stand together at a program marking the 61st United Nations Day on Friday.

LEISURELY WORSHIP: Some boat, others line up to pray on Tuesday at the Rani Pokhari temple, which opens once a year on Bhai Tika for people who don’t have brothers or sisters.

FEEDING THE FIRE IN THE BELLY: Maoists recoup their strength at lunch during a deusi program at Tri Chandra Campus on Saturday.

SCARFING UP A VICTORY: A horseman thunders past and swoops up the ultimate prize, a khada, at the annual Yarthung horseracing festival in Manang last week.

The advocacy is paying off in neighbouring villages too. Urmila Karki, 14, was married when she was six. As per gauna tradition, she has stayed at her parents’ home but is now due to return to her husband’s house. “I'd rather join Resmi to fight for our cause,” she says quietly but firmly. Urmila is seeking help and protection from her friends in the children’s club, as well as organisations like UNICEF and local NGO Rural Illiteracy Society Education that support it.

Although she spends much of her free time teaching others to make better choices, Resmi herself is too poor to afford formal education. She’s now attending a 20-month out-of-school program run by RIISE and UNICEF.

“We need education and awareness to convince both parents and children to stand up to child marriages, ancient tradition or not,” says the feisty Resmi. With future leaders like this, we’ve got something to look forward to.

Naresh Newar in Kapilbastu
Most members of the Kathmandu media knocked themselves unconscious this season drinking all the free booze they were gifted by Kathmandu-based embassies. Going by the number of bottles in festive wrappings that the Ass noticed arriving every day at the boss’s secretary’s desk, there seems to be an impression among Nepal-based diplomatic missions that in this country all editors are alcoholics and if they’re not they should be immediately turned into one. Enough. Hic! No more whiskey. Can we have a moratorium on bottles? At least until new year’s?

The Chinese have the right idea, instead of sending alcohol to the journalists they sent journalists to the alcohol. Two troops of hacks departed just before Tihar to Beijing and Shanghai with delegations accompanying the Education Minister and the Information Minister and they all got right down to brassattacks as soon as they took off. So, it’s not just the hacks who are going to return with massive mao tai hangovers, the ministers should be pretty much incapacitated themselves.

Us journalists have this reputation among the public of being predators, and the image is reinforced when there are news channels called “Fox”. Or tv presenters with names like ‘Wolf’ Blitzer. So far, no Nepali journalists has named himself after a member of the jackal family as far as we know, although they often behave like them on camera when they chew out studio guests and don’t let them get a word in edgewise. Some of our prima donna talk show hosts have now interviewed just about everyone there is to interview in this country. The only thing left for them to do is to start interviewing each other.

But there is one person they haven’t got yet, and the Ass has learnt from palace sources that rival newscasters have put in applications in writing for an interview with King Gyanendra. But the way his erstwhile majesty snubbed the Rayamajhi Commission by refusing to even answer the one question sent to him, the kingsman’s not set their hopes too high.

There are many things that happen in Nepal that should get us into the Guinness Book and don’t. One of them was last week’s nationwide shutdown called by FNCCI. In other countries it is the workers who go on strike, here it is the businessmen who do it instead. Kathpur, which had the audacity to poke fun at the strike call in an editorial, was punished by having its van vandalised on New Road by FNCCI’s tired goons. The businessman’s credo seems to be: if you can’t fight ‘em, join ‘em. Ever since we spied FNCCI honchos sharing the podium with the baddies last month we knew something was astir. The strike had more to do with warning the government to lay off prominent willful defaulters than anything else. There, we said it.

So Nepal ranks #8 on the Indian Ministry of External Affairs priority list. Many in Nepal were dismayed when they read this: they had always been under the impression that Nepal was so important that officials in New Delhi had sleepless nights about us. It now looks like we are way behind the United States, China, Europe and the rest of southeast Asia in India’s scheme of things.

The Ass’s take on this is: thank god we don’t have oil. Thank god we’re not geo-strategically important. Just as well we are so ungovernable that the Chinese, British India and the Tibetans took one look at us in the 19th century and gave up trying to conquer us because they realised we were ungovernable.

It is better for Nepal if we aren’t so high on Delhi’s priority list. In fact, we would be more comfortable if our ranking dropped down to #15 or something and we were left alone.

stop sending us all that booze

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