Clearing a path

A preview of the momentous moves to peace in coming weeks

KIRAN NEPAL

The peace talks are coming to a climax this week. As expected, after the loud posturing of the pre-Tihar talks, the most contentious issues are being resolved in small, private meetings.

Having gone public with their positions, the parties and the Maoists now appear more willing to compromise on the two issues that divide them: deciding the fate of the monarchy and ‘arms management’.

The Maoists’ agreement to a cantonment proposal was delayed because of dissent in the ranks. But a proposal to lock up both armies’ weapons under a single-key formula monitored by the UN has been acceptable.

The UML is displaying flexibility on its proposal to have a referendum on the monarchy. But no agreement has been reached on what kind of a majority will be needed for the referendum or for elections to the constituent assembly—two-thirds, or a simple majority.

Between 75-85 of the proposed 325 seats in the constituent assembly will be assigned to mainstream political parties, and bargaining has already begun to allocate 20-25 percent of the seats in parliament to the Maoists. UML general secretary Madhab Nepal says the interim parliament will be in place by the end of the month.

Coming soon:

- Consensus on peace, ceasefire, and human rights agreements, which will be signed.
- Maoist army camps will be dismantled and militia cantoned in seven new camps and two sub-camps within 10-15 days.
- The UN will monitor all this, verify and register Maoist guerrillas and weapons, and lock away weapons within two weeks.
- The current parliament will present an interim constitution and then dissolve itself to be replaced by an interim parliament that will include the Maoists, which will then pass an interim constitution—all in one day.
- Simultaneously, Maoist local government and ‘people’s courts’ will be dismantled.
- Public display of arms, marching with weapons, and forced ‘donations’ will be declared criminal activities.
- All-party peace councils will be formed in every district under the peace secretariat to avert vendetta attacks and lawlessness bred by the decade-long violence.
- The interim government will tackle internally displaced persons, reintegrating conflict victims and restructuring the state, and prepare for elections to the constituent assembly.

SOCKETS TO SICKLES: Maoists cleaned up Kathmandu and Lalitpur on Thursday, in a dramatic image-building exercise that is a sign of things to come.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Backside: From terrorism to tourism

Weekly Internet Poll  # 322. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

1. Is the Maoist activity in Kathmandu a sign that they are joining the mainstream or planning a takeover?
   - Good imager upset L/C: 54%
   - Laying imager upset T/LC: 24%
   - Negative imager upset L/LC: 22%

Weekly Internet Poll  # 321

1. Will the interim constitution help check Maoist ‘law enforcement’?
   - Not to the level needed L/C: 46%
   - Relaxation L/T: 42%
   - Not to the level needed L/LC: 12%
Arms in Arms

Nearly seven months after the success of the April Uprising, the seven-party alliance and Maoist leadership have finally narrowed down their positions. But some issues are delaying an agreement:

- The need for trust among all parties.
- The idea of a package agreement that includes a mutually acceptable method of arms management.
- The need for the Maoists to initially lay down arms and then renounce violence.
- The need for a sense of urgency in the negotiations.
- The need for the Nepali Army to remain on alert.

It looks daunting, but the good news is that both sides know how to accommodate each other to survive. They are also under pressure not to hamper the efforts of the international community to find the middle ground.

What is really delaying the peace process is an absence of trust between the parties. In the last 17 years of violence, the government and the rebels are still wary of each other. That is why public opinion tends to be always downplaying arms management, while the government tries to make a precondition for talks.

The Maoists need to initially lay down arms and then renounce violence. There is no other way and they know it. But they also know if they do that too quickly their commanders will rebel. The compromise needs to be a pre-condition for settlement. A package agreement can include a mutually acceptable method of management of arms. If there was trust, this wouldn't be difficult.

The Nepali Army already has been confined to barracks. The Maoists must be suitably cantoned. Reform and cutbacks of the Nepali Army and a formula for rehabilitation could be the confidence-building measures to enable Maoist leaders to sell the idea of demobilisation to their edgy comrades.

We need a sense of urgency, but undue hurry may be counterproductive. The international community wants to wrap things up before the New Year break. But sensitive political negotiations can’t be rushed or squelched to suit the timetable of outsiders. People walk slower arm-in-arm than when they stride separately.

It's up to the seven-party alliance and the Maoists to show that they have now built trust and they are walking together up the peace path in a surefooted manner.

The enigma of excellence

Tokyo—The verdant premises of the University of Tokyo have hosted Einstein, invited some of the world’s leading international researchers, and attracted the best and brightest of Japanese society. Unlike other universities here, it also has a village community of international students, which at one point included King Birendra when he was crown prince.

State of the state

Toalai, as it affectionately called, has for over a century produced Nobel laureate physicists, celebrated litterateurs, award-winning artists, renowned novelists (Kengo Tange, designer of the Luminari Master Plan, was on the faculty), and premiers and tycoons. The university has also produced most of the top ministers and career bureaucrats who run Japan.

There is an active group of Nepali scholars at Toalai. As is often the case with diaspora elite, they seem to know more about their country of origin than they do about their home. Apparently, distance doesn’t just make the heart grow fonder, but also makes for clear-eyed, detached observation.

But, to the considerable frustration of local officials and parents, over many years the government has not approved the upgrading, accreditation, and funding of a large number of private schools.

At health centers and sub-health posts, government-supplied essential medicines meet less than half a year’s requirements for most communities. This annual allocation needs to be doubled.

The message from Gulmi could be a hopeful lesson. It is to be hoped the Nepali Army will remain in the barracks during peace time. The Maoists could stop appointing outsiders and rely on local cadre, who have an understanding of their villages because of the lurking threat of arms. Minus that threat, people seemed confident that they can work things out among themselves in a democratic, participatory manner.

This is important and hopeful lessons. It is to be assumed that the Nepali Army will remain in the barracks during peace time. The Maoists could stop appointing outsiders and rely on local cadre, who have an understanding of their villages because of the lurking threat of arms. Minus that threat, people seemed confident that they can work things out among themselves in a democratic, participatory manner.

The enigma of excellence

We need smart, committed people. But how do we hang on to them?
SPEAK UP
Your editorial ‘Public intellectualism’ (#319) best describes Nepal’s current situation. It will take time to bring the Maoists, who have indulged in barbaric acts for the past 10 years, to civilised mainstream politics. But it’s difficult to understand why so-called civil society rarely apportions blame fairly on all sides. If we are afraid to talk now, when the Maoists don’t officially rule, god knows what we’ll do when they come to power. We need strong law and order—even when the lawbreakers are Maoists.

Bimal Bastola, New York

Your editorial on not speaking out was on target, but you could’ve made your point in less leaden prose. Your usual crisp style is much better for saying things that sound suspiciously self-righteous.

Kamal Humagain, email

The ‘Young saviour’ you profiled (#320) is amazing. What gumption! For a Nepali girl trying to make my mark abroad it was inspiring to see what a little girl can do in a village. I think such stories deserve a permanent slot, even if not on the front page. Even better, tell us how we can help: through donations of time or money, or using connections we might have. Inspiration is hard to come by these days, and it’s great to see rebelliousness being put to good use.

RP, Sydney

I agree with Biswo Poudel that the situation of teachers in rural Nepal is pathetic (‘Show some gratitude’, Nepal Pan, #320). But even many politicians, who used to be teachers, forget how bad it can get. An MP from my area became the education minister. He was once a teacher at the local campus and like other teachers, he would often not get paid on time. But do you think he remembered or did anything about it when he became minister?

DS, email

I must question why am I seen as an outcast? I’ve spoken the truth, I’ve pointed out the corruption and dishonesty of the rulers, I’ve worked very hard. I’ve voiced my opinion, I’ve been a part of the change, I’ve been there from day one. Yet, I’m still considered a threat. It’s frustrating.

Name withheld

MAOST MAYHEM
Sorry, there’s a problem with Prachanda and his gang. In interviews I’ve read, he never really answers the questions, just refers to Mao’s doctrines and philosophy. There’s no substance in his statements and he often rambles. If he wants the Maoists to have a say in the government of Nepal, why can’t he control his people? They behave like a responsible body with a real purpose in government? How can they be seen as a legitimate party when they kidnap people and create problems for the man on the street? To the rest of the world, they seem like a bunch of thugs, bullying their way through with no agenda. They are doing what they want, where they want, how they want, when they want.

Chai Wanarat, Thailand

It took just a handful of men burning tyres, waving red flags, and shouting childish Maoist slogans to paralyse the country for two hours last week. I’ve seen Maoist cadres extorting money in broad daylight, forcibly demanding Rs 5,000 from a shop in Boudha, and Rs 10,000 from a hotel in Lajimpat. Such people are outlaws. They and their leaders belong behind bars. If Prachanda is responsible for all these incidents, including the murder of innocent people and burning a bus full of passengers, he should be dragged to The Hague as a war criminal.

Bernd Mueller

CK LAL
CK says Tokyo is “meticulously planned” (‘Outside looking in’, State of the State, #320). Actually, it’s highly unplanned. It’s mature and rich, and therefore well-managed. Let me also caution Lal that the bow and deep apologies on Tokyo’s subways he’s so impressed are mere custom, similar to the flurry of Irrasyamase (welcome) when one enters a Japanese shop. The Japanese do deserve applause for their public services though and, as Lal points out, the immigration officials are refreshingly well-mannered. As for the Nepalis here, as elsewhere, they are fragmented, mainly along political and ethnic lines.

As far as privatisation in Japan is concerned, it can’t be compared to privatisation drives in other countries where the main reason is to combat deficits, low quality, or operational difficulties. The government here does not have many holdings, as in assets or businesses, to privatise, as Lal points out. Some public infrastructure, such as highways and the postal system, are large-scale privatisations already in process. Lifetime job security may be on the decline, but it does still exist.

Shobhakar Dhakal, Tsukuba, Japan

Your columnist is profoundly impressed by the Japanese. Obviously, he’s unfamiliar with the deep-seated historic xenophobia of Japanese society. These ‘Whites of Asia’ can be pretty nasty to other Asians, not to mention black people.

Allison Gurung, Osaka, Japan

CK Lal should stop reviewing books. His review of Barbara Adam’s book, (‘Barbara beats around the bush’, #320) comes to baseless conclusions. Is he still living in the glories of third world nationalism?

Phu, email
Monitoring the monitors

The ceasefire monitoring committee has gone from toothless to bungling

NARESH NEWAR

Five months since the National Monitoring Committee on the Code of Conduct for the Ceasefire was formed, it’s still unclear what its 25 members are up to. The Maoists in particular continue to violate the ceasefire, as the daily reports of human rights abuses, abductions, and extortion show. They are defying the rule of law, and taking the law into their own hands, dispensing justice through kangaroo courts and street action. The Maoist militia publicly displays weapons, and rights groups warn that the Maoists continue to recruit new members, including children, into the ‘People’s Liberation Army’.

Meanwhile, even members agree that the 25-strong committee is looking rather like a lame duck. “It’s a powerless committee, and was formed only to serve the interests of both the SPA and the Maoists,” says committee member and rights activist Subodh Pyakurel.

There is a growing divide in the committee between a handful of rights workers and journalists, and the majority of political representatives handpicked from the SPA and the Maoists. The rights workers argue that many of the political appointees, though professionals, have little relevant experience, barely any knowledge of human rights issues, poor negotiation skills, and no idea of how to carry out such monitoring.

On a recent visit to Dhanusa to begin preliminary investigation of a reported violation, members spoke to a roadside teashop owner a few hours’ walk away from the site of the alleged violation, because the village was “too far” for them to walk to. Even if all the members did have the ability to investigate, member Sushil Pyakurel says, “most of them have neither the power nor the courage to challenge the violating parties.” His colleague on the committee and former NHRC member Kapil Shrestha goes so far as to call them “geriatric and fossilised.” Shrestha believes the committee has “totally failed” in making the parties accountable to the code of conduct. The committee has received 1,300 reports of violations so far, but not carried out one complete investigation. Some monitors say they have no clear terms of reference, no presence in rural areas, and barely any resources.

As a result, members and observers fear the committee’s actions might prove more dangerous than their inaction. The committee’s mandate does not include ‘rescue’ of any sort, but earlier this week some committee members followed up a report of kidnapping by Maoists by showing up at the Brighter Toothpaste Factory in Thimi, where the abductees were being held. They had a chat with the rebels and got four released. One member told us the local cadres were polite. But the committee has issued no statement and did not raise the issue with Valley Maoist commanders.

While the committee oversteps its mandate on some occasions, it does not even have a checklist of violations and has not addressed crucial issues such as disappeared people and child rights abuses. A political member told us a common subject of discussion at meetings is the very toothlessness of the committee. “This is a joke. It was formed just to present an acceptable face to the world, showing that both sides were serious about the ceasefire,” he said. Members we spoke to said they were “enhammed” to be part of the committee and would not speak on record.

Human rights activists on the committee say that it still has a chance to be effective—as long as the political appointees are dismissed. “There’s no point sustaining the committee as it currently is—members are acting as advocates for their own parties, and not working objectively for the people and for justice,” Shrestha said.

A destination for complete pleasure in the heart of the jungle

RESORT

“A JEWEL RESORT IN DANDAK TALUKA, PAHARGANJ"

Meghau, Chitwan, Nepal
City Office: PO Box: 1912, Trisuli Bazaar, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 0264444 Fax: 977-1-264444 Email: rkhiresort@winik.com.np; www.geocities.com/rkhiresent

November Issue

“FOR FREE PACKAGES
5 days & 2 nights or
2 days & 1 night stay
please see Himalmedia subscription schedule.

Did your paper arrive on time this morning? If not, call our
Customer care @ 5547002

DIRECT LINE

Himalmedia Pvt. Ltd., Hatiban Lalitpur
Face action

Finally, there is hope that with the help of C, which will have to face the music: “In January 2001, we had 20 parties who had taken loans of Rs 2 billion. Today, 50 parties are involved, and loans stand at Rs 25 billion,” said Rajendra Khetan, director of the Khetan group. “This is ridiculous.”

Many defaulters have allegedly used their political connections to avoid repaying loans in the past. Last year, Nepal Bank Limited’s campaign to impound passports of defaulters was rejected by the then-royal government. The repercussions have long been felt in the financial reform sector and the development world. “Funds from the poor have been going to the rich, reversing the poverty alleviation factor. As a result the cost of doing business itself is higher now,” said Sabin Shrestha, a financial sector specialist at the World Bank. “Action needs to be taken against the defaulters, but all the banks can actually do is blacklist and auction properties,” he added. However, courses of action proposed by the Nepal Rastra Bank include seizure of defaulters’ passports, withdrawal of state facilities, and prohibition of property transactions.

Flying high

Qatar Airways has been named Best Airline in the Middle East and Africa at this year’s TDG Asia travel awards in Thailand, compiled based on votes from travel agents across the Asia-Pacific. Over the last decade, Qatar Airways has gone from its initial fleet of just four aircraft to over 50 planes with an international network spanning 70 destinations, and plans to double its fleet by 2015.

NEW PRODUCTS

SOLAR: Sunshine Engineering and Sales Enterprise has introduced a new solar water heating system, which uses Australian vacuum tube technology and has an automatic electric backup for cloudy days, and can keep water hot for up to 72 hours. With capacities ranging from 180-350 litres, prices go from Rs 30,000 to Rs 70,000.

HAIR TONIC: Himalayan Hair Care Centre has launched Satya Sai Hair Tonic, a herbal formula to promote hair growth, and prevent hair loss, premature greying and dandruff. The tonic is priced at Rs 300 per bottle.

QUICK COLOUR: Japanese hair colour company Bien has launched Speedy Hair Colour Conditioner, which dyes hair in just five minutes.

Farming and rural poverty

Investing in agriculture will not reduce poverty, creating jobs will

KABINDRA PRADHAN IN BUTWAL

C K La’s State of the Column (‘Food for thought’, #138) pressing the government to invest more in agriculture reinforces the myth that agricultural development to increase crop production is the panacea that will lift Nepal’s out of poverty. For fifty years, governments have invested lavishly in this, basing planned development strategies on farm inputs. And they’ve failed. But this has been like an elephant giving birth to a mouse. Farmers show they’re doomed if they depend on the land and are looking for full employment. And because there are no jobs here, they must migrate abroad.

Developing agriculture and reducing rural poverty are separate things. There are connections, but there has to be clarity on the main goal: decreasing poverty or increasing farm output.

Reduction of poverty calls for full employment, not just higher wages. Developing agriculture won’t lead to full employment if the money is sent away in the form of better negotiated wages. Developing agriculture won’t bring in more money every year than all foreign aid to this country combined. And unlike aid, this money doesn’t flow into the village economy.

Comparable income and employment from agriculture will need vast investment and a paradigm shift in the way this country is run. Agriculture is, after all, a culture. Developing agriculture is developing a culture of adapting to the modern global economy. Are we up to it?

Foreign employment, in contrast, is regular and provides better income. Remittances from Nepali workers abroad bring in more money every year than all foreign aid to this country combined. And unlike aid, this money doesn’t flow into the village economy.

In its present setup, our state can’t deliver resources to develop farming. Asking the rural poor to wait for the development of agriculture to lift them out of poverty is a cruel joke. The only solution to poverty is generating real jobs, and because local investment is so low, employment abroad is the only short-term hope.

To really reduce poverty, the government should reduce the expense and hassle for those wishing to work abroad. It should negotiate to increase the salary levels of Nepali abroad. But given past bungling, perhaps the best thing the government can do is nothing, and allow foreign employment to grow on its own.

Kabindra Pradhan is a farmer in Butwal.

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beeed

Dhulabir through the porous border of Kakarbhitta. Now, over 70 Syliguri businesses make more than a dozen trips each to Guwahati every year, bringing in consignments directly to the markets in north and northeast India. These shipments are sent out from Shanghai straight to the Kolkata port.

The goods available there are of superior quality, similar to what Nepali farmers produce. Merchandising is one of the most critical parts of retail and import businesses. But the Nepali predilection for mediocrity has left us with cheap goods, rather than attractive and durable ones. The Beeed repeats of reasons that three decades ago Kathmandu boasted a supermarket that sold quality stuff from around the world. We’ve no longer a destination for the best global brands of watches, perfumes, or electronics. Such businesses were pillars of the parallel economy, so it is difficult to find statistics, but talk to the traders in the tax havens of Bandarban and you’ll get enough evidence of a slump.

If we want trade with India to matter again, we’ll have to be innovative. In Nepal, our approaches to trade and transit issues are superficial. Money is poured into study after study that yield nothing substantial. We consider the opening of the Nathu La in Sikkim for trade with Tibet a major blow for Nepal’s economy. Not true. Traders in Syliguri will still get their stuff from Kolkata, as transit through Nathu La is three times more expensive and more time consuming than the sea route, and the road is shut for seven months in a year. Our own plans for a transit corridor with special economic zones thrown together could not be determined by the opening of this route. If maintained well, our Taptapani route provides a better transit corridor for goods to move between China, Nepal, and India.

Nepal can benefit most from serving the north-eastern and northern states of India. The markets and buying behaviour of Shillong or Kohima have more similarities with Kathmandu’s markets than those in Bangalore or Chennai.

Our businesses must understand the fundamentals of supply and demand. Okay, so trade is our forte. Well, then let’s develop a comparative and competitive advantage in trade. Why can’t we have world class merchandising outfits that understand consumer behaviour and what works best in which markets? Our trade networks with China or Taiwan are the oldest. Let’s revive them to our best advantage. Markets demand superior quality goods, so why shouldn’t we procure them, and also work on educating consumers? We lose businesses like consumer-electronics because we do not believe in providing or honouring worldwide warranties.

Business is affected not by major changes but small boats that people hardly notice.

www.arthabeed.com

Trying trade

We need to find out what’s good at

You don’t need to go far afield from Nepal to see the kinds of business opportunities available. In the metropolis of Syliguri, the second largest city in West Bengal, many are switching to the business of direct import from China.

Chinese goods used to find their way there from Kathmandu and

remained poor as rural poverty are separate things. There are

basing poverty reduction strategies on farm

agriculture reinforces the myth that

In BUTWAL The project was just extended after an

KABINDRA PRADHAN

X

WORLD BANK

The World Bank-designed, financed, and supervised irrigation project, the Bhiraswa Project is a case in point. Increase in income from the project is limited to those in the feeding frenzy, project staff and government officials. Long-term benefits include the access roads built for moving giant American drilling rigs around the project sites, and the electricity grid put up to power the water pumps. As for irrigation, the main aim of the whole show, hardly anyone uses the water.

The project was just extended after an exhaustive evaluation. There was no hue and cry, no heads rolled, no political party spoke out.

Under the WTO, Nepal has opened its market to imported fruit, but try to export Nepali agricultural produce to India and it’s as if Nepal tea, ginger, or vegetables were potential bio-weapons.

Opening foreign markets is difficult and takes much skill and dedication, if not outright muscle power. After all, one job producing products for export is potentially one job lost in the importing country. We’re yet to see serious effort to open foreign markets, even the less sophisticated Indian market, for our agriculture produce.

In its present setup, our state can’t deliver resources to develop farming. Asking the rural poor to wait for the development of agriculture to lift them out of poverty is a cruel joke. The only solution to poverty is generating real jobs, and because local investment is so low, employment abroad is the only short-term hope.

To really reduce poverty, the government should reduce the expense and hassle for those wishing to work abroad. It should negotiate to increase the salary levels of Nepalis abroad. But given past bungling, perhaps the best thing the government can do is nothing, and allow foreign employment to grow on its own.

Kabindra Pradhan is a farmer in Butwal.
For monarchy

Interview with Rabindranath Sharma in Maha Khabarpatrika, 2-16 November

Why did you become the party president?
I look on the responsibility hoping that this party, which has millions of supporters, can be brought onto a democratic track and become an alternative democratic party in the future.

But you had refused the same post before, why accept it now?
True, I refused the post a few months ago. But in the political atmosphere then, a strong-willed democratic force was necessary. The power from which this party separated must be brought in place.

Do you see a possibility of the king becoming active?
The king himself has been unable to be active, how can the royalists be so?

Do you see a possibility of the king becoming active?
It could happen if there is a situation where responsibility is not taken, deliveries are not made, kidnappings and abductions continue, property is confiscated, agreements are not implemented, and if the Maoists are to continue with their atrocities, we will not go to keep quiet.”

Inclusive?
Desbanjani, 29 October

For a long time the Nepal Army has been faithful to an individual or organisation, but recent news from the barracks sends a different signal—that the army is on its way to becoming less militaristic and more inclusive. The army is apparently also trying to change the feudal mentality prevalent amongst its officers.

Recently, the army has scrapped its orderly system and is now preparing to recall over 166 orderlies working in the homes of army officers. Until now, Nepal Army was the only army in the world supporting the orderly system. In Nepal these orderlies used to work in army officers’ houses, where they were made to do hard physical labour. Similarly, to smooth out differences between army personnel and officers, they will both eat in the same kitchen.

Education
Chhalphal, 29 October

Over the years Tribhuvan University has earned a good reputation nationally and internationally. Recently, however, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koilala’s narrow-mindedness and hunger for power has brought chaos in the university’s administration. Six months have passed since Jana Andolan II, yet the appointment of officials at Tribhuvan University has not been made because Koilala is unwilling to take any action.

Student unions and intellectuals have requested the government to take immediate action but it has been ignored. Since the budget for the current fiscal year has also not been passed, professors and staff at the university have not been paid and various long-term plans have also been shelved. This has affected the academic calendar, examinations and new student admissions.

Visionaries like the current Education Minister Mangal Siddhi Manandhar have big plans for Tribhuvan University, but sources say even Manandhar is growing disappointed with Koilala’s narrow-mindedness.

When NC’s reluctance became the obstacle in the appointment of Ministry of Education officials, even the UML said they were not satisfied with the state of things.
in the Nepali education sector. Some blame officials who have long held on to their positions for the deadlock. They predict that the chaos will escalate if officials are not appointed as soon as possible. The positions of vice chancellor, registrar and education service commission officials have been vacant for a long time. To expedite the appointment process, Manadhar formed a recommendation committee in June, but nothing came of it.

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 1-7 November

The positions of vice chancellor, registrar and education service commission officials have been vacant for a long time. It is understood that the Nepal Professors' Association has been pressuring Koirala from inside, which is why the PM has been so reluctant to do anything.

No India trip

Chauta Ra Bichar, 1-7 November

Maoist Chairman Prachanda has declined 'The Hindustan Times' invitation to attend the Hindustan Leadership Summit in New Delhi this month. In a letter to The Hindustan Times, Prachanda said that he is busy with the peace process in Nepal and "will not travel internationally unless peace is guaranteed in Nepal." He also said that he is concerned about his safety in India because the government is yet to release his party leaders, Mohna Baidya 'Kiran' and CP Gajurel 'Gaurab' from Indian prisons.

Prachanda was invited to talk about Maoist views under the topic 'India: the next world power'. Experts say that by refusing to attend the summit, Prachanda has lost his opportunity to interact with world leaders including Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi, former British Foreign Minister Jack Straw, President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai, former Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir Mohammar, Sitaram Yechuri, Shanki Tiwari, Arun Jaitley, and Sanu Gandhi.

Prachanda was sent a special invitation to talk about the decade-long "People's War" and Jana Andolan II. The fact that Prime Minister CP Koirala was not invited but Prachanda was has been a matter of contention in Kathmandu. This invitation to Prachanda was both a challenge and an opportunity because it would have been the first time that a Nepali Maoist leader was able to present party views to a group of world leaders.

This would also have been the perfect opportunity for the Maoists to garner support for their cause. Experts say that by declining to attend, the Maoists will have to bear diplomatic losses. On the other hand, some have applauded Prachanda's decision and say that by declining the "mysterious" invitation, he has "kept himself free from controversy."

Nathari Acharya, Nepal Congress Central Committee member

Is it true, as Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has been saying, that the Nepali Congress is in favour of a democratic republic? The party can't be seen as opposed to a democratic republic, but neither has Girija Prasad Koirala taken a clear stand. He's just attempted to present his views a few times.

What kind of 'attempts'? He feels he's doing something contrary to what Nepali communists are doing. I think that, since there are four communist parties, he feels threatened by their numbers.

Is that why he says "we" should be different from the communists? Yes. He understands that the international political stage has changed. But his statements have not made his views clear.

Do you think the people are in favour of loktantra for the country? Only yesterday I was travelling in Karnali, trekking from Dailekh to Jumla. I talked to friends of the Nepali Congress and other parties, as well as to Maoist officials. The view there was clear—they are not in favour of keeping the king.

Have people's understanding of politics changed, or their wishes? Things have changed, but you don't see these factors in the chief's statements. The 6 September statement of the Nepali Congress states that the 11th general convention of the party has already deleted the constitutional monarchy from the party's constitution, that the people will decide the fate of monarchy through the constituent assembly, that a democratic republic is the demand of the moment in terms of international as well as national politics. But Koirala is still trying to push his views forward. I do not feel he can succeed, because there is already a republican movement within the party.
hey come from all sorts of backgrounds. But once here, they share the same mission, to look their freshest best and be sold to the highest bidder. Some are organic, some are not, some are seasonal while others, are, well, a little past their prime. Kathmandu’s vegetable markets are a delight.

The fresh, sharp smell of vegetables and fruits, and the hustle and bustle between shoppers and sellers is unmistakable. Colourful veggies are stacked row after row, in all shapes and sizes, from all over Nepal and abroad. There are lemons from Lucknow, tomatoes from Chautara, ginger from Hetauda, juicy green spinach from Bhaktapur, pumpkins from Pharping and much, much more.

Vegetable markets across the Valley are booming, driven by Kathmandu’s growing population and greater awareness of the importance of fresh fruits and veggies in one’s diet. Kalimati, once the king of vegetable markets, has now given way to mandis all over the city. In the wee hours of the morning, vegetables arrive by the truckload from all over the countryside and are picked up by wholesale vendors. The vendors in turn take their goods to smaller markets across town like in Naxal’s Naryanchaur or Ason or Chabahil’s well-organised tarkari bajar. Some like Anita and Chandan Bahadur Lama who sell their veggies in the
Farm fresh

Old and emerging veggie markets are in stiff competition

wholesale evening market next to Birendra International Convention Centre in Naya Baneshwor go all the way to Banepa at four in the morning to bring in their day’s goods—sweet potatoes, ginger, garlic, green chilly. For Rs 65 a day the Lamas get a tiny space in the shed to sell their goods. Competition is tough, as there are plenty of choices, and the market is swarming with bargain-hunters. “It’s cheaper here than in other places,” says one shopper hunting for sweet potatoes for Ekadasi.

With the ceasefire in place, farmers from as far off as Charikot can send their produce to Kathmandu, where supply barely keeps up with demand. Festive seasons are always bonanza time, but a healthy diet of dal-bhat-tarkari-saag ensures that business is always decent.

Vendors who want to be competitive must begin their day at the crack of dawn. Sarita Maharjan, who sells in Khasibajar, must make it to Kalimati by 4AM. Her daily shopping list varies, as she keeps a sharp eye on what her clients say their families are in the mood for. Vendors like Maharjan earn anywhere between Rs 1,500-2,000 a day.

Some vegetables and fruits are dropped off straight to the bajas by farmers’ groups. At this time of year, when the sun is up and warm at 7 AM, most of the good veggies are already taken. The markets operate for two or three hours each in the mornings and evenings. During the day they are virtually deserted. Canny shoppers make sure they go towards the end of the selling day, to get better prices.

As the markets grow, though, so do the problems associated with them. Waste management is the biggest problem—the rubbish generated from markets like Khasibajar is thrown into the Tukucha river that flows next to it. In other places, it’s just left by the side of the street until a municipality truck rolls around, by which time the stench of decomposing vegetables is usually impossible.
S

udhams Tharu, 14, and her parents never really stopped being enslaved. “Almost every day, most of us children go to school on an empty stomach,” says Sushma, who had to quit school to get married as her parents simply couldn’t afford to feed or clothe her any more.

Sushma is one of the over 100,000 kamaiyas Tharu “liberated” six years ago when the government banned bonded labour. In the early 60s, thousands of Tharus were bonded to high-caste landlords in southwest districts like Dang, Banke, Kailali, Bardiya, and Kanchnapur to work for free until they paid off all their family debts—usually all their lives.

Now, though free, they live in fear of new exploitative employers, hunger, and illness in the camps. Patu Tharu, 50, says that though he’s happy to be free of his old master, he and his wife must survive on what grows on their tiny plot of government-issued land, and his wife must still work for employers, who work her for 16 hours a day and pay her Rs 300 a month.

“What freedom is this?” he asks bitterly. “There was no alternative for us but to fall into a similar trap as before.”

The hardship and exploitation continue for us,” he adds.

There are a large number of kamaiya families like Patu’s, resettled in makeshift huts in Banke and Bardiya districts. Their living conditions are squalid and they were relocated with little thought of what they would do later. Thousands of kamaiyas’ children can’t go to school, as they must work to supplement their parents’ livelihood. Most work long hours for little pay as construction workers, factory labour, domestic servants, cleaners, and porters.

“Kamaiya children in particular are almost worse-off now than they were before, and no one cares about their welfare,” said Chuma Bahadur Chauluwar, director of Backward Society Education (BASE) which, with Nightgroup Nepal, pioneered the free kamaiya movement. Nearly 2,000 children of ex-kamaiyas work in exploitative conditions in Nepalgunj alone. Malaria, diarrhoea, and malaria are rampant, and there is no health post in the resettlement camps. When they finally get to a government health facility, many told us, they’re simply doled out headache pills and told to go away.

Some organisations like ActionAid Nepal have been helping thousands of ex-kamaiyas and training them in income-generating activities, but Chauluwar says that under a thousand families actually benefit from these efforts.

The hundreds of Tharu families marched to the capital in August and staged demonstrations to pressure the government to finally give them the land and livelihood support they are promised sporadically. But all they received, they say, were the same old empty promises.

“How long can we wait for the government to help us?” asks Ram Prasad Tharu who has been coming to the capital every year to meet ministers and government officials. He says he is always told to “be patient”.

“We used to live in fear of our landlords in the past, now we worry that we’ll have to sleep hungry another night,” says 20-year-old Kali Tharu.

S

ething our society has been overblown. The media, so vocal and indifferent to the atrocities of the Maoists. The real victims of Maoists continue to protest against the Maoists (their leaders routinely get shot) but must do so against the government, which for many today exists as an abstraction. The media, so vocal and self-righteous about the monarchy, has lost its voice against the Maoists.

But there are some hopeful signs: some politicians finally seem to be taking what diplomats are saying at face value and recommending the recent Thai coup, while we cannot provide basic security for ourselves. We fantasise about creating ‘new’ peace paradigms. We believe easy explanations of ‘interference’ from foreign powers. We can weigh in with ‘new’ peace paradigms. We believe easy explanations of ‘interference’ from foreign powers. We can weigh in with ‘new’ peace paradigms. We believe easy explanations of ‘interference’ from foreign powers. We can weigh in with ‘new’ peace paradigms. We believe easy explanations of ‘interference’ from foreign powers. We can weigh in with ‘new’ peace paradigms. We believe easy explanations of ‘interference’ from foreign powers. We can weigh in with ‘new’ peace paradigms. We believe easy explanations of ‘interference’ from foreign powers. We can weigh in with ‘new’ peace paradigms.
Guiding a revival

Prices have nearly doubled for budget trekkers, as tour operators aim for quality over quantity

BILASH SUBBA

Trekking in Nepal just got more expensive.

In recent years, travellers have had to buy Maoist ‘trekking permits’ on many popular routes, in addition to paying the usual national park entry fees. But trekking here, long seen as one of the best budget adventure holidays available, will now cost at least $10 more per day per person. The Trekking Registration Certificate (TRC), which the Trekking Agencies’ Association of Nepal (TAAN) launched on 27 October, has been approved in theory by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, but has not received final approval from the cabinet, ministry sources told us.

The new regulation requires that every trekker employ the services of a porter or guide, which can easily double the daily cost of a trek for a tourist. TAAN says the TRC will help cut down on illegal operators and make trekking safer. For example, trekking agencies will have to submit an itinerary and personal details for every trekker to TAAN, and there are TRC checkpoints at several points along major trekking routes.

“The TRC will also help generate employment for many people,” said Deepak Mahat, former president of TAAN and the coordinator of TRC. “But reception has been far from enthusiastic. The new permit, which costs an initial Rs 240, was introduced in the middle of the peak trekking season with little or no notice. “If TAAN had given us six months’ notice, we could have informed our clients. We now have to change quotations that we sent out well in advance of the season,” said Lekha Nath Bhandari of Ample Trekking.

Tour operators say while the idea is good in principle, tourists are unlikely to be impressed by the extra costs and bureaucracy, and the positive proposed benefits, such as rescue missions for trekkers in trouble, will take some time to kick in. They also argue that there are no training programs for guides and porters and no established standards of service, making for wildly different experiences.

For visiting tour leaders, overcrowding is also a concern. Becky Harmon, an American guide who has run tours in Nepal for over ten years and recently returned from Khumbu, said, “People there are wondering if they should put all these guides and porters. They are used to individual trekkers without staff and there’s no system in place to accommodate all these extra people who aren’t paying anything.”

But TAAN, which has been looking for a solution to manage trekking in Nepal since the old permit was abolished by the government in 1999, says it is keen to regain control of the sector even if it loses tourists in the process.

“When the old permit was abolished, a lot of bogus agencies came into existence and started operating illegally. The TRC requires every trekking agency to be registered,” Mahat said.

“We might lose some individual trekkers but we are looking for quality and not quantity. Nepal is still cheaper than other destinations in the world. I don’t think it will damage tourism.”

None is convinced either way, and industry insiders point to a number of short-lived regulations TAAN and other tourism bodies have attempted to introduce over the years. “We’ll have to wait and watch,” said Tashi Jangbu Sherpa of Everest Trekking. “There’s no systematised, integrated approach to managing tourism in Nepal. Regulations come and go.”

'Socialist' economy coming

The interim government will change the labour law in favour of workers if State Minister for Labour Ramesh Lekhak has his way. “The government will convince employers to protect workers’ rights and increase their wages and also convince workers to let things run smoothly,” he told us.

The minister acknowledged that the approach runs counter to the trend both internationally and in Nepal, where for example, Prime Minister Girija Koirala in September promised entrepreneurs he would form a taskforce to probe trade union activism and extort and other pressures from Maoists. “International practice and trends do not favour workers due to a capitalist trend... we want to follow a socialist pattern of economy,” said Lekhak.

Employers and employees will be consulted before amendments are made, added the minister, but they are on hold until the Maoists join the government. “They might disagree with the changes,” he said.

Marty Logan

Lumanti in Japan

In the last ten years Patan’s slums have undergone a sea change. Stone pavements have replaced dirt tracks, all houses have toilets and each ward has a learning centre and children’s library. This is in large part due to the Lumanti: Support Group for Shelter, which has been working since 1993 with squatters and slums dweller on housing issues. Lumanti, founded by Lajana Manadhar (pictured) in memory of her urban planner husband Ramesh, addresses urban poverty by improving squatter communities’ living conditions (‘Lajana’s helping hand’, #160).

Now, Lumanti’s efforts are gaining wider recognition. Manandhar received the million-yen ($8,426) IYSH Memorial Matsushita Prize at a ceremony in Tokyo in October for Lumanti’s “contribution in improvement of livelihood and its work with squatter communities.” The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless Memorial Fund was founded by Japan Housing Association, and awards long-term activities that help solve housing and human settlements problems.

Lumanti has projects planned at Butwal, Birgunj, and Dharan, and also works indirectly with community partners and squatter federations in rural areas. Manandhar says Lumanti will use the award money to establish a fund for those who have been forcefully evicted, to pay for legal counsel and other services.

Malka Aryal

This winter

Godavari Village Resort rejoices with a typical Barbeque-Ban Bhoj at ‘The Beer Garden’

Vegetarian: Rs. 499/- + tax per person
Non-Veg: Rs. 599/- + tax per person
Child: 25% discount below 10 yrs.
Time: 12:30-15:30 hrs.

* Includes a glass of wine or beer/Soft drink

Price reservation recommended

Also available: Spirituous overnight day package & Conference Packages

P.O.Box: 12448 Amrabad Toolshe, Godavari
Tel: 5566873 Fax: 5566777
Email: gotours@gmail.com
Website: www.godavarihotel.com

This week at ‘The Beer Garden’

Every Saturday & Sunday

Pakistani Cuisine

Punjabi Tandoor Cuisine

Vegetarian: Rs. 499/- + tax per person
Non-Veg: Rs. 599/- + tax per person
Child: 25% discount below 10 yrs.
Time: 12:30-22:00 hrs.

* Includes a glass of wine or beer/Soft drink

Price reservation recommended

Also available: Spirituous overnight day package & Conference Packages

P.O.Box: 12448 Amrabad Toolshe, Godavari
Tel: 5566873 Fax: 5566777
Email: gotours@gmail.com
Website: www.godavarihotel.com
Dances of gods

Late last week, crowned and garlanded dancers in full-length robes whirled gracefully before a rapt crowd in the floodlit courtyard at Patan Darbar Square. The dancers were performing Kaili Bhul, one of Kathmandu’s most intricate dance traditions, which began during the reign of Siddhi Narasih Malla, as thanksgiving to Kailikeya for protecting the Newar community. The dancers enact scenes from the life of Kailikeya and other deities. The Narshingh Avatar dance, one of the most popular, depicts the moment when Narshingh, an incarnation of Vishnu, kills the demon king Hiranyakashipu with his bare hands. The recitals, which by the time of Siddhi’s grandson Yog Narendra Malla, had become heady month-long celebrations, now only run for the time of Siddhi’s grandson Yog Narendra Malla, had become heady month-long celebrations, now only run for

Rishi Amatya

Blog talk

What they are saying these days

MALLIKA ARLAY

“Does one let the people speak when they are never given a chance through elections? And, how can we be sure people are free to voice their legitimate opinions when active Maoist coercion and intimidation prohibit such freedom? Do, really, let them call whoever ‘royalist’ or what not. It has no meaning now. Until we control Maoist arms, the people will never get to hold a referendum on anything.” - Blogdai on nepalnow.blogspot.com

“It is all a big joke because more than 50 percent don’t even know what CA is.” - Right on savenepalnow.org

“The Maoists’ moral standard is skewed—a love affair between grown ups is morally wrong but the abduction, torture, and rape of a 12-year-old girl, and the killing of innocents fall within their moral code. …They [are] a rogue, cruel state within this state.” - Raj on International Nepal Solidarity Network insn.org

Like everyone else these days Nepali bloggers talking most about the Maoists and the seven parties, the monarchy, the summit talks, the ceasefire, and the UN. But our blogosphere is missing the passion and obsessive writing fuelled by official censorship after the royal takeover. Jana Andolan II saw intensive blogging, but most blogs are looking sluggish these days, even with new political developments. Sites like Keep Nepal Free, Ganatantra Nepal, and Friends of Nepal, Parwa News and Krishna Online have stopped updating altogether. Still, some new blogs, and some old ones are going strong. Blogger Umesh’s Mero Sansar, which offers photoblogs, podcasts, and videoblogs saw 67,000 visitors on a single day on 25 April, making it Nepal’s most popular blogsite. For using the power of the internet in those difficult days, Umesh was recently awarded Rs 51,000 by the America-Nepal Society. This week on mysansar.com, bloggers are debating republicanism, the monarchy and Nepal’s FM radio revolution. Posters are wary of the summit talks, saying the attention given to the monarchy comes at the expense of discussion of Maoist atrocities, and are sceptical of the

UN’s role. The site also has travelogues, political writings, videoblogs on Umesh’s trip to Beni, and features on Tihar. The well-written, controversial, right-of-centre Blogdai is fed up with government inaction in the face of Maoist atrocities. He is watching for a real ‘People’s Movement’, and has an audio and video archive. Nepalnews has also started a comments section for selected news updates. Some posters say we need to be patient with the current peace process, others have lost all faith.

“Every one knows the peace process is going nowhere, but we like to keep quiet. Just like we have all these years. [Nepal’s] political and economic conditions were never democratic. Feudalism existed no matter whose government it was. [The] seven parties and Maoists are hypocrites, monarchy is a failure and the public is dumb.” -Arijandy at nepalnews.com

Newbies like Nepal Info update regularly but their forums are not really interactive. Nepali Perspective, Hamro Radio and himalakhabar.com have fresh content but are low on analytical writing. News portals started by Nepalis abroad include nepalatatar.com, nepaljan.com, nynepaltimes.com [no relation whatsoever to this newspaper, or the New York Times for that matter], and hikeynapal.com.

Blogs and news portals:


Bang a drum

Sanu Raj Maharjan’s hands were just a blur as they danced deftly between the 33 madals that make up his kit during a performance last Sunday evening at Thamel’s Tridevi Mandir. The Kathmandu native displayed finesse, musical knowledge and incredible prowess. Maharjan has performed in countless festivals and concerts in Nepal and abroad, including the 2001 International Hand Drum Folklore Festival in Taiwan, where he won the best drummer award. He also works as a music teacher, passing his craft on to hundreds of students. Maharjan’s performance was part of a show organised by Global Village, which works to promote classical Nepali music.

“Hand Drum Folklore Festival in Taiwan, where he won the best drummer award. He also works as a music teacher, passing his craft on to hundreds of students. Maharjan’s performance was part of a show organised by Global Village, which works to promote classical Nepali music.

Sanu Raj Maharjan’s hands were just a blur as they danced deftly between the 33 madals that make up his kit during a performance last Sunday evening at Thamel’s Tridevi Mandir. The Kathmandu native displayed finesse, musical knowledge and incredible prowess. Maharjan has performed in countless festivals and concerts in Nepal and abroad, including the 2001 International Hand Drum Folklore Festival in Taiwan, where he won the best drummer award. He also works as a music teacher, passing his craft on to hundreds of students. Maharjan’s performance was part of a show organised by Global Village, which works to promote classical Nepali music.

Sanu Raj Maharjan’s hands were just a blur as they danced deftly between the 33 madals that make up his kit during a performance last Sunday evening at Thamel’s Tridevi Mandir. The Kathmandu native displayed finesse, musical knowledge and incredible prowess. Maharjan has performed in countless festivals and concerts in Nepal and abroad, including the 2001 International Hand Drum Folklore Festival in Taiwan, where he won the best drummer award. He also works as a music teacher, passing his craft on to hundreds of students. Maharjan’s performance was part of a show organised by Global Village, which works to promote classical Nepali music.

Sanu Raj Maharjan’s hands were just a blur as they danced deftly between the 33 madals that make up his kit during a performance last Sunday evening at Thamel’s Tridevi Mandir. The Kathmandu native displayed finesse, musical knowledge and incredible prowess. Maharjan has performed in countless festivals and concerts in Nepal and abroad, including the 2001 International Hand Drum Folklore Festival in Taiwan, where he won the best drummer award. He also works as a music teacher, passing his craft on to hundreds of students. Maharjan’s performance was part of a show organised by Global Village, which works to promote classical Nepali music.

Sanu Raj Maharjan’s hands were just a blur as they danced deftly between the 33 madals that make up his kit during a performance last Sunday evening at Thamel’s Tridevi Mandir. The Kathmandu native displayed finesse, musical knowledge and incredible prowess. Maharjan has performed in countless festivals and concerts in Nepal and abroad, including the 2001 International Hand Drum Folklore Festival in Taiwan, where he won the best drummer award. He also works as a music teacher, passing his craft on to hundreds of students. Maharjan’s performance was part of a show organised by Global Village, which works to promote classical Nepali music.
Jayanta Acharya, 31, is a young guru of astronomy in Kathmandu’s Balmiki College. He’s also committed to taking the science to ordinary citizens.

The college is Nepal’s only centre for the ancient sciences. Two shastras (ancient knowledge) are taught there: Falit Jyotish (pure astrology) and Siddhanta Jyotish (astronomy).

Jayanta remembers being thrilled as a child, looking at the night sky with his father, Professor Shamba Raj Acharya, head of the Jyotish Faculty at Balmiki.

The young guru wants to do the same for others, and organises public observations of celestial events at the college. If you want to see a Solar Eclipse or the Transit of Venus, Balmiki College is the only place that allows you access to a modern telescope.

In August this year, Jayanta was the only Nepali participant at the 26th International Astronomical Union (IAU) meeting in Prague, where Pluto was deemed not to be a planet. Jayanta paid his own way, but got to check out the Prague astronomy clock tower (pictured), and meet fellow astronomers.

As a result of Jayanta’s visit, though, we know that there are astronomers in China, Japan, and NASA who’d jump at the chance to establish observatories in Nepal, if the government hoops here made the effort worth it.

But we don’t have to wait for foreign-funded facilities to enjoy our night skies. Jayanta plans to build a sundial at the college to teach students how ancient scientists kept time. He’ll also be organising a series of public observation programs next year for the 50th anniversary of the International Heliophysical Year (IHY), an international organisation that takes astronomy to the general public.

It’s a shame that instead of supporting initiatives like Jayanta’s, the government pampers the bureaucrats at the Ministry of Science & Technology (MoST) and NAST.

November highlights:

- The Sun is in Libra for most of November but crosses to Scorpius on the 23rd before moving to Ophiuchus on 30th.
- Mercury’s Transit will take place on the night of 8-9 November, when the planet crosses the disk of the Sun. The ‘greatest transit’ happens at 21:41:04 UT. Folks in the Americas and the Pacific will be positioned correctly to see it.
- Venus is very close to the Sun all month, but towards the end you might see the Evening Star after the sunset.
- Mars, a morning object, is in Libra, and difficult to see it in the predawn glow. By the end of the month, though, you might see Mars rise almost an hour before the Sun.
- Jupiter is at conjunction (behind the Sun) on 21 November to become a morning object and will thus be visible this month.
- Saturn, in Leo, is the only planet well-placed for viewing this month. It rises in the east late in the evening, and by dawn is high in the south. Saturn will meet the Moon on the night of 12-13 November.
- Meteors: The Taurids meteor shower peaks on 3 November but you’ll see less than ten an hour. The Leonids should be more interesting. It starts on 15 November, peaks on the 17th, with one meteor every five minutes, and tailing off by the 19th. The Leonids tend to be fast-moving, and the brighter ones often leave persistent trains. Train your binoculars to the radiant point, Leo’s sickle.

Enchanting Khammam was published on 4th November 2006.
**EVENTS**

- Shastraartha at Martin Chautari by MAPS. 3-5PM, 4 November to discuss dependency theory. 4238050
- Second-hand Book Sale of French books, 4 and 5 November, 10AM-5PM at the Alliance Française. 4241163
- Floating River lymph drainage workshops on 4-5 and 11-12 November, lead by Joanna Claire. 4430040
- Himalayan White Water Challenge 2006 on the Bhote koshi, 3-5 November. 620, including transport, meals and party. 4421197
- My Migrant Soul documentary screening at Yala Maya Kendra, 10 November at 5PM. 5942544
- Documentaries every Wednesday at 6.30 PM till 30 November at NhuChhe’s Kitchen—The Organic Bistro, Baluwatar.
- Just Divine Night at Sportbar, 3 November, 9PM onwards. 4419011
- Tai-chi and Qi-gong demonstrations at Café U, Sanepa. 5524202
- Salsa Classes at the Radisson Hotel, 8PM. 4411818
- ‘Transcendental Meditation at a 25 percent discount all November at the Self Awakening Centre, Baber Mahal. Revisited. 4256618

**MUSIC**

- Euodia Ensembles classical music with Japanese musicians, Summit Hotel, 10AM-6PM till 4 November. 4267063
- Raamalo Sanchh Fusion music with Adi Shashi and Maya Mantra, 7-10PM on 8 November. Rs 1,000 at Dwarika’s. Reservations required. 4479198
- Open Mic Night at VaVa Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- The Patan Tris classic music every Friday at Nuchhe’s Kitchen—The Organic Bistro, Baluwatar.

**DINING**

- Mediterranean Food Fiesta 6.30-8.30 PM, 3-5 November at Al Fresco’ Poolside, Saaltee Crown Plaza. Rs 650 for adults, Rs 450 for children.
- Deepswali at Dolma Cocktail, Kabab, 3 November, Thamel. 4251369
- Full Moon BBQ Dinner at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 4 November. 9441371927
- Persian BBQ Night on 24 November for Rs 900 at Fusion, the bar at Dwarika’s.
- Barbeque dinner with new menu, 6.30-9PM every Friday at Summit Hotel, Kupondole Height. 5521810
- Saturday Barbeque Special at Le Meridien Golf Resort and Spa, Rs 1200 for adults, Rs 600 for children
- BBQ Special on Friday nights at Courtyard Restaurant, Kamaladi. 4250056
- Barbeque Ban-Bhoj at Godavari Village Resort, every Saturday and Sunday. 5560675
- Cyclic Buffet different cuisine each day at the Sunrise Café, hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- Thakkali Lunch at Moksh, Pulchok. 5526212
- Theme Dinners at Shangri-la Hotel. Saturday-Thursday Nepali thali with cultural show, Rs 555 per person including transport. 9841371927
- Shaken Not Stirred Martinis 07 style. Wednesdays at Fusion, the bar at Dwarika’s. Rs 555 for a tapas platter and a martini
- Pure and Sexy highnight party at Jbar with DJ Rupesh and DJ Rav4. 4 November. 9PM. 4418209
- Woodfired Pizzas at Roadhouse Café, Thamel and Pulchok
- A Sweet Taste of Life at La Dolce Vila, Italian cuisine. 4700812
- Creations from the Clay Oven at Stupa View Restaurant, Boudha Stupa, 440262

**GETAWAYS**

- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge pure relaxation. 4361500
- Walk and Lunch at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, Saturdays until 25 November. 9841371927
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- Escape to Godavari Village Resort, an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming or special conference packages available. 5560675

---

**NEWS**

- Nepal Weather

  KATHMANDU VALLEY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fri</th>
<th>Sat</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24-10</td>
<td>21-15</td>
<td>22-15</td>
<td>23-15</td>
<td>24-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

April may be the cruellest month, but November is traditionally the driest, with only 7mm of average rainfall. Trekkers and mountaineers have already been surprised by bad weather this season, but it looks like they can now expect perfect crisp, cold conditions. Thursday afternoon’s satellite picture shows a shallow cloud layer emerging over the eastern and central Himalaya, and there is a low pressure centre over north-east India, gathering dry clouds. But this will mean little more than overcast days, and the clouds will drift away by the end of the weekend. Mornings will be cloudy but warmer than usual, and sunny days will be back early next week.

---

**YAK YETI YAK**

Seeking revenge for her father’s role in putting him behind bars, Dilawar Khan kidnaps eighty-year-old Amian and sells her to the assult Khunam Sahib (Shabana Azmi). As she grows up in the brothels of Lucknow, Amian is renamed Umrao Jaan (Aishwarya Rai), and becomes one of the city’s most sought-after courtesans. However, her position prevents her from being with the love of her life, Nawab Sultan (Adityosh Bachchan), but leads her on a journey to discover her true identity.

To arrive early next week. WWW.JAINEPAL.COM

---

**THE VIENNA FOOD FAIR**

9-26 November, 10AM-9PM at the Austrian Cultural Forum, 11 Tansen Marg. 4255884

---

**BICC, Baneswor on 4 November at 4PM, Rs 100. 9841481549
**

---

**Ramailo Saanjh**

Nights with cultural show and Newari cuisine, Rs 900.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
LOOK OUT FOR THE KNIVES: Chef’s hats look dangerous on Monday as the third convention of the All-Nepal Hotel and Restaurant Workers’ Union in Basantapur on Monday demands better pay and 10 percent service tax.

PRESS MEET: Lekhnath Neupane, president of the ANNSU-R, and comrades at their new Baghbajar office, calling for dissolution of the ‘feudal education policy’, and a ban on dance restaurants and massage parlours on Wednesday.

PRAY FOR BETTER TIMES: Former Speaker Chitralekha Yadab (in blue) makes a Chhath offering at Rani Pokhari on Saturday, when the temple was opened for the tarai festival for the first time ever.

LET’S PLAY BALL: Acting Nepal Sports Council secretary Ajay Manandhar shakes hands with referee Gyani Raja Shrestha as coach Ganesh Thapa looks on at the Shaheed Smarak A Division League football tournament at Dasarath Stadium on Tuesday.

WALK FOR WORSHIP: Women from the Marwari Samaj walk along Ratna Park to mark Akash Bhairav (Shyam Baba) day on Tuesday.
From terrorism to tourism

Now that an agreement is near on arms management, what we want to know is who is negotiating on pressure cooker management. When are we going to turn socket bombs into water taps in this country?

While the negotiations reach a climax this week, comrades throughout the kingdom are giving us a preview of what they think a peace deal will mean: occupying Nepal TV’s Kohalpur station, taking over the Hetauda Spinning Mill, trying to extort Rs 1 million from an orphanage in Thankot and lobbying to get relatives of top comrades to head corporations. We’re not making any of that up, we crosschecked all the facts.

Meanwhile, the Eastern Command has put up a tol collection kiosk at Phakding right next to the entrance to Sagarmatha National Park and has started collecting parallel taxes. Trekkers were more bemused than angry, with some of them eagerly lining up to take pictures of themselves being extorted. The Maoists are also organising a cultural program in Luko offering half-price airfare for those flying from KTM. But guess what, the tickets to the show cost Rs 25,000. This is standard Maoist operating procedure. In Dharan last month the Maoists were forcing businessmen to voluntarily buy tickets at Rs 100,000 each for their cultural programs.

Some tourists from the former-Soviet bloc who thought they had finally seen the sun set on the communist empire back in 1990 are not very amused by Asiatic commies who adorn their receipts with portraits of Stalin.

Last week, a Polish trekker on the Annapurna circuit told a Maoist extortionist to stuff it. He was so severely beaten up by local comrades that he needed hospitalisation. A Czech mountaineer who has a severe allergy to anything that is Marxist-Leninist let loose a string of choice unprintable expletives in his native language which the baddies thought were Maoist slogans so they nodded, smiled and raised the red salute. That is why when we hear that the Maoist militia is conducting patrols along Kathmandu’s streets to reduce the crime rate we really get the feeling it is like a fox guarding the chicken coop.

While all this is happening at home, the international Maoist roadshow goes on. Dinanathji and Ale Magarji were in Paris this week and apparently joined a guided tour of the site of the storming of the Bastille at the Rue Saint-Antoine. Which reminds the Ass that the Comrades have suddenly gone really quiet on their ‘October Revolution’ rhetoric. Is it because we’re already in November?

Comrade Terrific declined an invitation to talk at the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit not, we are told, because he was hankering after the glamour of, say, Paris. The Ass hears that he’s actually occupied playing agony auntie to the PM’s political pals who have been complaining to him of Girija’s ‘high-handedness’.

However, in deciding against travel, he may be putting his newly minted title of ‘Extraordinary World Citizen’ in jeopardy. Lately it’s been all about global accolades for our Dear Leaders. The VHP seems to have missed the memo on King G’s local lack of popularity, and decided he’s ready for world domination, declaring him ‘World Hindu King’. Girija babu, as astute as ever, has realised his best bet for posterity is in the virgin pastures of Buddhism. He’s promised to erect the world’s largest statue of the Buddha on fruitful completion of the peace process. Wonder how religious tourism will fare in the Communist Republic of Nepal.

Yesterday’s terrorist is today’s tourist in more ways than one. The Awesome One was spotted taking the Manakamana Cable Car up to the temple over the holidays, the same ropeway that his local cadre in Gorkha have extorted millions from and even bombed one of the pylons of. This must mean bayonets are really bayonets. The Ass’s source tell him the Fearsome Fellow didn’t decapitate any goats, though, but he may have made a few secret wishes, which we will tell you all about some other time.

Exxchange Offer!

Has your solar water heater broken down?

Bring any old solar panel and take home brand new

More sets available.

We will install brand new solar panel on your existing water tank.

Also available 100V to 120V in readable sets.

Builder's Warehouse and Supplies Pvt. Ltd.

30-34 Annapurna Building, Dharahara Danda, Kathmandu. Tel: 5114105, Fax: 5114165, E-mail: builderwarehouse@ipnl.net.np