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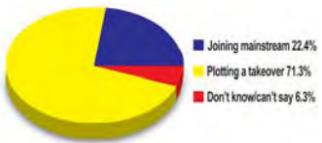
Backside: From terrorism to tourism



Weekly Internet Poll # 321

Q. Is the Maoist activity in Kathmandu a sign that they are joining the mainstream or planning a takeover?

Total votes: 4,459



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

Q. Will the interim constitution help check Maoist 'law enforcement'?

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

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.

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.
- An interim government will be set up following the interim parliament.
- 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.

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Not too late

"There is a spirit of solidarity and shared objectives."

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:

- A deal on what is euphemistically called 'arms management'. Questions include: where will they be stored, who keeps the keys, what kind of surveillance will there be, how about socket bombs?
- Citizenship issues, such as a cut-off date etc.
- Rehabilitation of the Maoist army and militia and reduction of the Nepal Army to pre-insurgency size.
- The monarchy, the fate of which the Maoists are demanding be decided first.
- Constituencies for constituent assembly elections, and the composition of the CA.

It looks daunting, but the good news is that both sides know they have to accommodate each other to survive. They are also under unrelenting arm-twisting from the international community to find the middle ground.

What is really delaying the peace process is an absence of trust. With so much bad blood from the past 11 years of violence, the government and the rebels are still wary of each other. That is why in public the Maoists are always downplaying arms management, while the government tries to make it 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: this needn't 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 Nepal Army has already been confined to barracks. The Maoist militia must be similarly cantoned. Reform and cutbacks of the Nepal 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 squeezed to suit the timetable of outsiders. People walk slower arm-in-arm than when they stride along 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.

I made a short visit home to Gulmi over Dasain. The message from Gulmi could very well be a message from any of the other 74 districts of Nepal.

Despite the conflict and suspension of many development activities, there has been steady progress in basic education. Enrolment in primary and secondary schools is increasing



GUEST COLUMN
Kul C Gautam

constantly. There is growing enrolment of girls in schools.

As more children complete primary education, parents are anxious to see them continue to secondary. Many communities have applied for upgrading of their schools to lower-secondary and secondary plus schools, and as they wait, they've mobilised local resources to hire additional teachers and build more classrooms.

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

At health centres 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 people of Gulmi welcomed the budget announcement that annual block grants for VDCs will be doubled to Rs 1 million. But no directives for the use of these funds have been issued yet. One hopes the Maoists will not seek to take advantage of these additional resources, and that they will be used for effective delivery of basic social services at the community level.

The absence of elected local bodies is a major constraint in the smooth functioning of development activities. But there is a spirit of solidarity and shared objectives. There is heightened awareness of their rights among women and dalits, and acceptance by local communities of their increased participation in

development activities.

In part this is thanks to Maoist awareness-raising.

Had the Maoists not resorted to extortion, violence, and high-handed behaviour, some of their progressive ideas and actions would have won them genuine, lasting popular support. It is not too late for them to change their ways, focus on their positive, progressive social agenda, and abandon violence,

intimidation, and extortion to regain genuine public support and retain it, even if that means a temporary loss of power and influence.

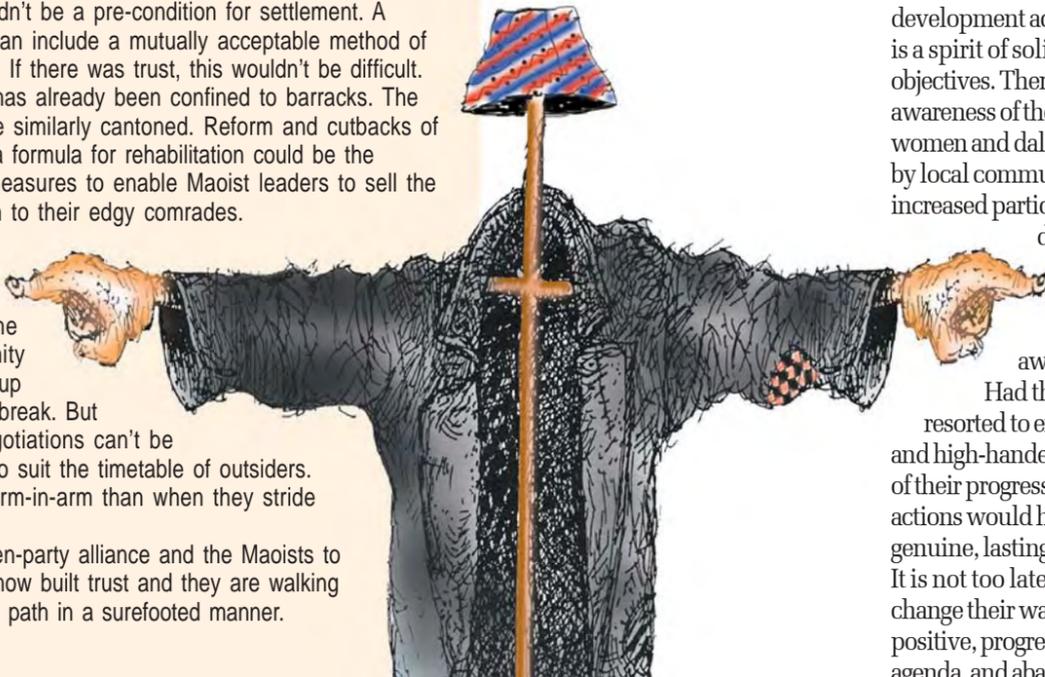
I had not visited my ancestral village for the past six years, and was afraid that Gulmi would be politically polarised. But I was pleasantly surprised to find people continuing to behave cordially as good neighbours. The Maoists and army, who came from outside the village, brought fear and distrust to the community.

People are still afraid of the Maoists. They deeply resent, but tolerate, their extortion. A small number of unarmed Maoists can intimidate large numbers of villagers 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 has important and hopeful lessons. It is to be assumed that the Nepal Army will remain in the barracks during peace time. The Maoists could stop appointing outsiders and rely on local cadre, who have to live in peace and harmony with their neighbours.

Beyond peace and democracy—as a result of them—people expect rapid improvements in their lives. Nepal must urgently begin to prepare an ambitious post-conflict reconstruction and development plan that can galvanise broad national consensus and international support. ●

Kul C Gautam is Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF. This piece is excerpted from a speech he delivered in Kathmandu last month on UN Day.



The enigma of excellence

We need smart, committed people. But how do we hang on to them?

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



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

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

There is an active group of Nepali scholars at *Todai*. As is often the case with

diaspora elite, they seem to know more about their country of origin than folks back home. Apparently, distance doesn't just make the heart grow fonder, but also makes for clear-eyed, detached observation. Such longing and belonging creates a peculiar kind of love-hate relationship with the home country. That partly explains the ambivalence of Nepalis here to the monarchy.

Nepalis here would like to go back home, but career options discussed are in Australia, Canada, or the US. If things improve in Nepal, they might consider a return some time in the future.

There's a lesson for Nepal: we need centres of excellence to produce the administrative and technocratic elite necessary to modernise the country.

Consider what we could learn from India. The bureaucracy that runs that huge country is almost exclusively homegrown. Agriculture, business, and service are operated by graduates of Indian universities. The strides Bangalore and

Hyderabad have taken in IT and bio-tech began in educational institutions set up by Jawaharlal Nehru. Without the IITs, IIMs, RECs, and central universities, the double-digit growth Manmohan Singh is contemplating would be unthinkable. Had they met at next week's The Hindustan Times Leadership Summit in New Delhi it would have been an ideal time for him to impress this upon Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

In Nepal, it's hard to think of an institution of excellence whose students are committed to working at home. The first choice of bright students, usually from private schools, is to migrate. We can't expect much from their long-distance patriotism. The 'system' has to be changed from within, and for that we need infrastructure conducive to creating commitment towards society. People can't be barred from leaving, but they can be encouraged to think of the rewards of transforming their society by staying on.

It's difficult to tie talented

individuals down to a stagnant society, but there is no other way to break the dormancy. We could begin with public-funded centres of excellence in education, engineering, and economics. Perhaps some *Todai* alumni might want to give something back to the society which made them what they are.

Virtue can't be taught, but we know land-grant universities helped transform the American landscape. The *École Polytechnique* of Paris, whose motto is 'For the Nation, Sciences and Glory', was instrumental in creating a forward-looking society in France, and Japan's five imperial universities played no small role in establishing a system where trains run on time, faucets do not leak, and bureaucrats can keep political bosses and business tycoons on their toes.

Every country needs a committed, competent corps of academics and administrators to keep society moving. This corps has always been cultivated by the public sector. Even today, *Todai* remains a government-run university. ●

LETTERS

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

GUMPTION

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

THANKLESS JOB

I agree with Biswo Poudel that the situation of teachers in rural Nepal is pathetic ('Show some gratitude', Nepali 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

The so-called bias against Indian teachers here is a complicated mix of wounded and defiant nationalistic pride, wanting to get as much as you can from the 'enemy' and, equally, a sense of camaraderie of the 'you're not like other Indians' variety.

Name withheld

MAOIST 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 so 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



Vacancy Announcement Consultant for Disaster Preparedness and Response

UNICEF, with funding support from the European Commission - Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), is in the process of developing a framework for earthquake disaster risk reduction in Lalitpur municipality in partnership with the Lalitpur municipal authority, NWSC, MPPW, MLD and MoHA and plans to identify and develop emergency drinking water supply facilities using existing deep wells. The Project includes preparation of a disaster preparedness and response framework, vulnerability assessment of existing deep tube wells, water quality testing and design of water treatment units, preparation of GIS location maps, improvement and renovation of pumping station and possible installation of one or more new deep wells, installation of back-up diesel power supply and training of technical staff of municipality and NWSC authorities on operation and maintenance. The prospective candidate will have the responsibility to guide and assist the NGO engaged to implement this Project, liaison with government partners and ensure the planned results are achieved within the given timeframe.

The Project commenced March 2006 and must be completed by the end of June 2007. UNICEF intends to recruit a suitable international candidate under the Short Term Service Agreement (SSA) for the maximum period of 6-7 months, starting as earliest as possible, but not later than January 2007.

The interested candidates should have the following qualifications:

Qualification:

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- At least 10 years work experience in development field in developing countries with particular exposure in urban water supply networks;
- Work experience in planning, implementation and monitoring of development projects in partnership with central, local government and line ministries and departments. Work experience in disaster preparedness and response will be given added advantage.
- Capable of effectively interacting with ECHO representatives and ECHO partners in Nepal;
- Technical skills and field experience on installation of deep tube wells and pumping stations and knowledge on key water quality issues of ground water.
- Capable of establishing working partnerships with a number of government, NGOs and civil society organizations and organizing and effectively mobilizing these organizations to achieve the set goals and targets in a given short timeframe;
- Candidate should have excellent written and spoken English and should be able to prepare excellent reports in English. Preference will be given to the candidate who have better understanding about Nepal's development situation and who can speak Nepali language as well.
- Applicant age should be between 30-50 years;

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Monitoring the monitors

The ceasefire monitoring committee has gone from toothless to bungling

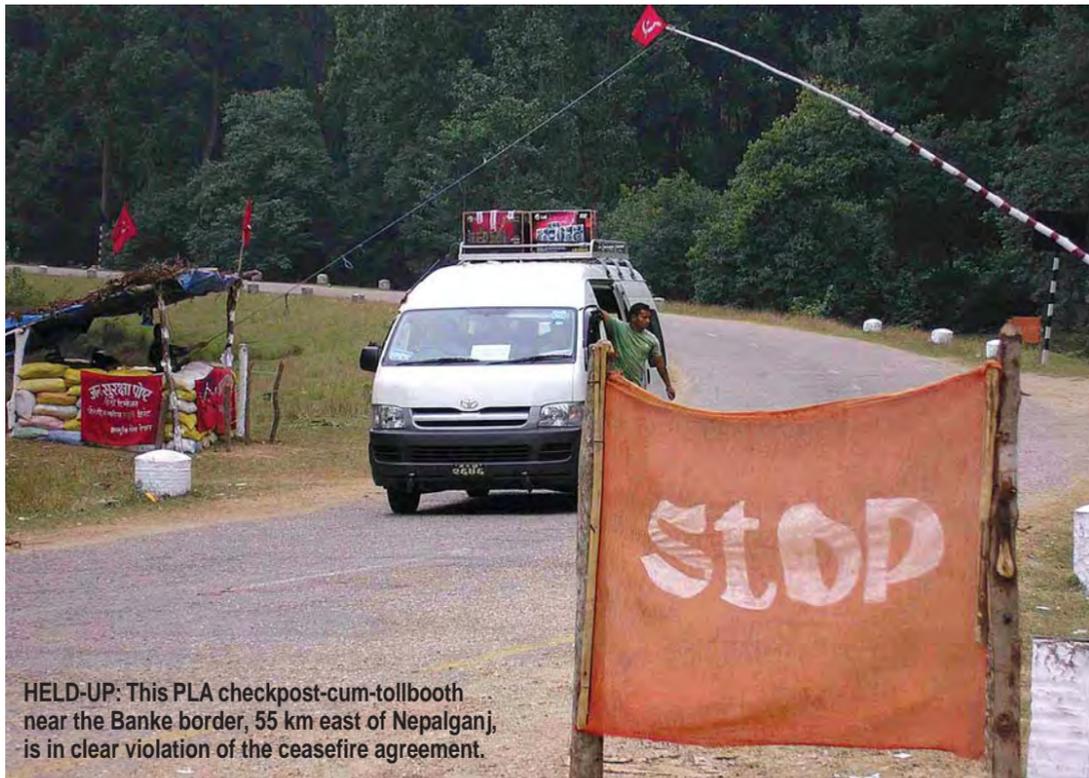
NARESH NEWAR

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



HELD-UP: This PLA checkpost-cum-tollbooth near the Banke border, 55 km east of Nepalganj, is in clear violation of the ceasefire agreement.

RAMESWOR BOHARA

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 "embarrassed" 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. ●

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Face action

Finally, there is hope that wilful defaulters on large bank loans 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 29 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 off 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 TTTG 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 Austrian vacuum tube technology, 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 graying and dandruff. The tonic is priced at Rs 300 per bottle.

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



Trying trade

We need to at least be good at what we're good at

You don't need to go far afield from Nepal to see the kinds of business opportunities available. In the metropolis of Siliguri, 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



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Dhulabari through the porous border of Kakarbhitta. Now, over 70 Siliguri businesses make more than a dozen trips each to Guangdong 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's in western stores. 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 Beed repeats ad nauseum that three decades ago Kathmandu boasted a supermarket that sold quality stuff from around the world. We're 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 haven of Indrachok 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 Siliguri 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 in should not be deterred by the opening of this route. If maintained well, our Tatopani route provides a better transit corridor for goods to move between China, Nepal, and India.

Nepal can benefit most from serving the northeastern 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 businesspeople must understand the fundamentals of supply and demand. Okay, so trade is our forte. Well, then let's develop comparative and competitive advantages in trade.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Why can't we have world class merchandising outfits that understand consumer behaviour and what works best in which market? 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.

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Farming and rural poverty

Investing in agriculture will not reduce poverty, creating jobs will

KABINDRA PRADHAN in BUTWAL

CK Lal's State of the State column ('Food for thought', #318) pressing the government to invest more in agriculture reinforces the myth that agricultural development to increase crop productivity is the panacea that will lift Nepalis out of poverty. For fifty years, governments have invested lavishly in this, basing poverty reduction strategies on farm inputs. And they've failed.

But this has been like an elephant giving birth to a mouse. Farmers know 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 for the poor with decent wages. Developing agriculture won't lead to full employment for any significant part of the rural poor. Even in California, farms depend on poor Mexicans. Generations of these migrant workers have remained poor as they depended on the seasonal employment on gringo farms. In Nepal, fragmented landholdings make poverty reduction through farm employment even more difficult.



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, a lot of this money goes directly 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?

It is also an economic activity with fierce competition. So far, the government's

investment in agriculture rarely reaches the farmers. Most agriculture projects are designed by non-farmers for the benefit of non-farmers. The World Bank-designed, financed, and supervised irrigation project, the Bhairahawa Lumbini Groundwater 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.

Longterm 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 foodstuffs. But try to export Nepali agricultural produce to India and it's as if Nepali 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 less 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 Rabinranath Sharma in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2-16 November

हिमाल

Why did you become the party president?

I took 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. Others cannot do this, I can. If we can make this into another democratic force we can be an alternative to the Nepali Congress.



What will your role be in the constituent assembly?

The base on which we stand will not let us be republicans. We are in favour of a constitutional monarchy whether it is decorative, ceremonial or symbolic. It is not possible to have the same form of constitutional monarchy as before. What Girijababu means when he says ceremonial makes the same sense as decorative or symbolic.

It is said that you have been brought in to save the king.

Rabinranath Sharma cannot save the king in this hour of crisis. 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, the government loses its worth, if there is lawlessness, or if one class rises above the law.

Why are you in favour of a referendum?

Look at world history. Monarchies are either removed by revolution or through a people's referendum. No one can challenge the people's decision. We will take part even if there is a constituent assembly. We do not have the strength or the ability to oppose that. We have accepted this harsh truth.

Inclusive?

Deshantar, 29 October

देशान्तर

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 *loktantrik* and 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 carry out hard physical labour.

Similarly, to smooth out differences between army personnel and officers, they will

both eat in the same kitchen. It is understood that these new rules came about after the appointment of COAS Rukmangat Katuwal. In addition, the Army Officers' Wives Association will be renamed Army Wives Association via an amendment of the Army Act. The army is regularly lectured on the values of *loktantra*. Meanwhile, the Nepal Army is worried about the Maoists' abduction of its personnel who went home for Dasain and Tihar.

An army source said that Maoist atrocities are increasing, "The army is committed to the peace process and is careful that no obstacles be created due to them during the peace process, but the Maoists understand our tolerance and generosity as our weakness. We have not been able to provide security to our soldiers and if the Maoists are to continue with their atrocities, we are also not going to keep quiet."



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Education mess

Chhalphal, 29 October

छलफल

Over the years Tribhuban University has earned a good reputation nationally and internationally. Recently, however, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala'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 Tribhuban University has not been made because Koirala is unwilling to take any action.

Student unions and intellectuals have requested the government take immediate action but have 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 longterm plans have also been shelved. This has affected the academic calendar, examinations and new student admissions.

Visionaries like the current Education Minister Mangal Siddhi Manadhar have big plans for Tribhuban University, but sources say even Manadhar is growing disappointed with Koirala'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

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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 because of all the bureaucracy. 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

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 1-7 November

मन्मथ विद्यार्थी

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, Mohan 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 Mohammad, Sitaram Yechuri, Shashi Tharoor, Arun Jaitley, and Saurav Ganguli.

Prachanda was sent a special invitation to talk about the decade long 'People's War' and Jana Andolan II. The fact that Prime Minister GP Koirala was not invited but Prachanda was has been a matter of speculation 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.

Things have changed

Narhari Acharya Nepali Congress Central Committee member Sanghu, 30 October

साँघु

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.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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 agreement to a 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.

Mahara 'sir'

Interview with Krishna Bahadur Mahara in *Jana Aastha*, 1 November

आस्था

Did you get a UK visa easily due to a change in their attitude towards the Maoists?

England is not on our list of enemies. All countries except the US government have no difficulty understanding us. Of course there are some complexities but they view us in a positive way. Even in the US government, there are internal differences among the officials themselves.

So, the US government might change its attitude towards your party?

The American citizens also agree that Maoists are not terrorists. We feel that the US government will gradually accept that. We have been making efforts to communicate with the officials through various organisations and other sources. But we have not had the opportunity to talk to the US ambassador. We are ready to meet him anytime he wants and we will convince him that we are fighting for the freedom of the Nepali people and that we are not terrorists.

So, who do you consider the major obstacle in the peace process? The US government or Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala?

Both, as they seem to agree with each other. The US government does not like to see any changes in Nepal. It wishes to see that those power centres remain in a government that is in favour of the Americans.

Despite all this, you seem to be optimistic about the peace process?

The state has given more priority to the agenda of the seven parties and this is why the talks have been prolonged. But we also know that it is very difficult to come to an understanding easily after ten years of armed conflict. This can be concluded only after thorough and serious discussions. The talks would have

concluded by now if the peace process had taken place earlier. There are also elements which are trying to disrupt the talks. But both sides are in the spirit of making the talks possible.

Do you think that the talks were stalled after the king's chief secretary and army chief met PM Koirala?

We had almost reached an agreement and the situation was becoming positive. But now the situation is quite sensitive and we hold these two persons accountable for that.

Is it true that many of your comrades call you Mahara sir?

Well, I used to be a teacher for a long time in Rolpa. I entered politics while I was teaching. Many of my students also joined as leaders of our party. This is why many address me as 'sir'.



MIN BAJRACHARYA



Summit Talks, Republic, People Power

हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2-16 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Prachanda's views are no different from those of Madan Bhandari. It would be better for the Maoists to join with the UML.”

Mani Thapa (Anukul), dissident Maoist leader in *Budhabar*, 1 November



ALL PICS: SAMIR JUNG THAPA



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

They 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 bustle and banter 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 bazar.

Some like Anita and Chandra Bahadur Lama who sell their veggies in the

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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. "Its 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 bajars by farmers' groups. At this time of year, when the sun is up and warm at 7AM, 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, its 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. ●

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NARESH NEWAR

NARESH NEWAR
in KOHALPUR

Sushma Tharu, 14, and her parents never really stopped being enslaved. "Almost every day, most of us children go to sleep 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 former kamaiya Tharus '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 Kanchanpur to work for free until they paid off all their family debts—usually all their lives.

Still slaves

Freedom is bitter for ex-kamaiyas, especially children

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 18 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 ex-kamaiya 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.

"Ex-kamaiya children in particular are almost worse off now than they were before, and no one cares about their welfare," said Churna Bahadur Chaudhary, director of Backward Society Education (BASE) which, with rights group Insec, spearheaded the free kamaiya movement. Nearly 2,000 children of ex-kamaiyas work in exploitative conditions in Nepalganj alone.

Malnutrition, 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 Action Aid Nepal have been helping build low-cost houses for ex-kamaiyas and training them in income generating activities, but Chaudhary says that under a thousand families actually benefit from these efforts.

Hundreds of Tharu families marched to the capital in August and staged demonstrations to pressure the government to finally given 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's 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. ●

Victims of liberation

When I was growing up in Nepal, it was de rigeur to blame the Ranas for our woes. History books, written during the Panchayat system, told us how King Tribhuban had liberated us from 104 years of repressive Rana rule.

But we've continued to hear that we aren't really liberated. There was a period of democracy, crushed by King Mahendra and replaced with his vision, the Panchayat

system. Multiparty democracy in 1990 was another

attempt at 'real' liberation, though after that we continued to observe independence day to mark liberation from the Ranas. (Liberation from the Panchayat system was obliquely relegated to 'constitution day' under some face-saving arrangement.) The Maoists, the most vocal and nihilistic of the lot, started looking for 'true' liberation in a complete overhaul of Nepali society, politics, and culture.

Aided by an institution that exposed its lack of modernism, we witnessed the eruption of Jana Andolan II this April. The Maoists rode this wave with the SPA, but for a few crusty political reactionaries and intense international pressure, might have already handed us their version of liberation.

Politicians and civil society 'activists'

Wake me up when we're there



RAMESWOR BOHARA

tell us we're on the verge of a 'historic' moment that will bring Nepalis the elusive permanent peace, and also create a model for the rest of the world.

Apparently we're are on the brink of updating Gandhi and the UN's peace playbook and showing those interfering westerners, particularly the US, the folly of their misguided scepticism.

What a great idea.

Except there's the issue of 13,000 lives

lost, thousands more displaced, still more children abducted. The Maoists may casually say this is the price of revolution, but the calculus of morality and warfare suggests that armies of liberation should leave significantly more people free in their wake.

And despite the best efforts of Maoist apologists, it's clear that the Maoists extort and exploit the very individuals they set out to free, suppress legitimate

entrepreneurship, press freedom, individualism, and rationality.

In the face of warnings from principled analysts who have studied Marxist theory and armed political insurgencies, civil society activists and the media continue to put forth alternative theories and apologies.

While the monarchy refused to accept modernity, our activists and many in the media represent a curious blend of hyperactive postmodern thinking, and intellectual elitism. An indulgent obsession with the monarchy as the root of all evils facing our society has been overblown.

Thus we pass ridiculous (and impotent) legislation condemning 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 easy sound bites on George Bush but are indifferent to the atrocities of the Maoists. The real victims of Maoists cannot 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 some civil society activists and others in the media are beginning to sound strident tones against Maoist atrocities. The FNCCI, which previously garlanded Maoist leaders, is beginning to make its voice heard but not without being admonished for protesting.

Time will soon tell if we will be liberated once more. ●

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mazda



PADAM GHALE

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 a 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 250, 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 Harrison, an American guide who has run tours in Nepal for over ten years and recently returned from Khumbu, said, "People there are wondering where 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."

No one 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," says 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 extortion 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. Manadhar 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 for 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 Butwal, Birganj, and Dharan, and also works indirectly with community partners and squatter federations in rural areas. Manadhar 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.

Mallika Aryal



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MIN BAJRACHARYA

Bang a drum

Sanu Raj Maharjan's hands were just a blur as they danced deftly between the 33 maddals 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.

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 Kartik Nach, one of Kathmandu's most intricate dance traditions, which began during the reign of Siddhi Narsingh Malla, as thanksgiving to Kartikeya for protecting the Newar community. The dancers enact scenes from the life of Kartikeya 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 about a week due to financial constraints.

Rishi Amatya



RISHI AMATYA

Blog talk

What they are saying these days

MALLIKA ARYAL

"How 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? So, 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

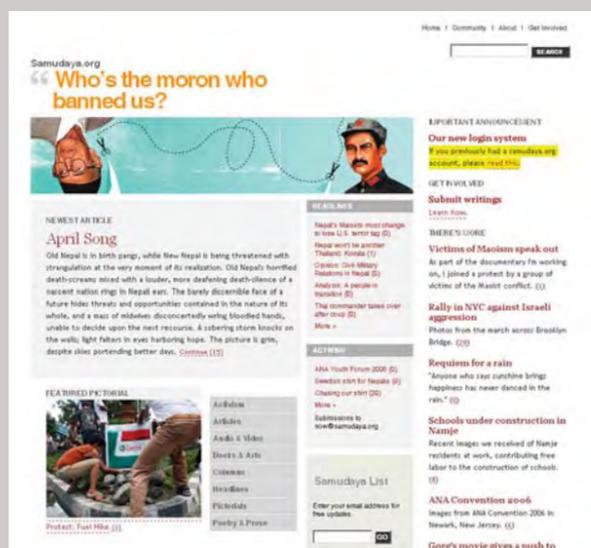
"The Maoists' moral standard is skewed—a love affair between grown ups is morally wrong but the abduction, torture, and rape of a 12-year-old girl, and the killing of innocents fall within their moral code. ...They [are] a rogue, cruel state within this state."

- 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 Nepa, Parewa News and Krishnasen 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', saying that in places like Jhapa, "Retaliations for Maoist acts are increasing and people are tired of living in fear." Also visit Blogdai for his four quick steps to detect media bias and six steps on preparing for a coup d'etat.

Posters at International Nepal Solidarity Network (INSN), United We Blog!, and Bloggers Nepal also criticise the Maoists and the king. Democracy for Nepal has writings on Madhesi issues, is organised chronologically by year, 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."

-Arjapandey in nepalnews.com

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

Blogs and news portals:

Bloggers Nepal <http://www.bloggersnepal.com>

Blogdai <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com>

Democracy for Nepal <http://demrepubnepal.blogspot.com/>

E Kantipur <http://www.ekantipur.com>

Hamro Blog <http://www.hamroblog.com/>

Himal Khabar <http://www.himalkhabar.com>

International Nepal Solidarity Network <http://insn.org/>

Mero Sansar <http://mysansar.com>

Nepal Info <http://nepalinfo.civiblog.org/>

Nepal Khabar <http://www.khojtalashonline.com>

Nepal News <http://www.nepalnews.com>

Nepali Perspectives <http://nepaliperspectives.blogspot.com/>

New York Nepali Times <http://www.nynepalitimes.com>

Sajha <http://www.sajha.com>

Samudaya <http://www.samudaya.org>

Save Nepal Now <http://www.savenepalnow.org>

United We Blog! <http://www.blog.com.np/>

Astro guru

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



STAR GAZING
Kedar S Badu

Siddhanta Jyotish (astronomy). Jayanta teaches astronomy, touching on the achievements of modern and ancient astronomers like Copernicus, Galileo, Ptolemy, Bhaskaracharya, Brahmagupta, and Aaryabhata.

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 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 invisible 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, peaking 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.

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EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Trees and Voyeurism** paintings by Sarita Dongol at The Art Shop, 10AM-6PM till 4 November. 4267063
- ❖ **Exhibition of paintings and sculptures** at Tantra Restaurant, Thamel. 4218565
- ❖ **Kumamoto Artpolis** Architecture through Communication. Exhibition at Embassy Hall, Panipokhari, 9.30 AM-4.30 PM from 4 to 16 November. 4426680

EVENTS

- ❖ **Shastrartha** 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 Francaise. 4241163
- ❖ **Flowing River** lymph drainage workshops on 4-5 and 11-12 November, lead by Joanna Claire. 4436040
- ❖ **Himalayan White Water Challenge 2006** on the Bhote koshi, 3-5 November. \$50, including transport, meals and party. 4421197
- ❖ **My Migrant Soul** documentary screening at Yala Maya Kendra, 10 November at 5PM. 5542544
- ❖ **Documentaries** every Wednesday at 6.30 PM till 30 November at Nhuchhe's Kitchen—The Organic Bistro, Baluwatar.
- ❖ **Just Divine Night** at Sportsbar, 3 November, 9PM onwards. 4438017
- ❖ **Tai-chi and Qi-gong** demonstrations at Cafe U, Sanepa. 5524202
- ❖ **Salsa Classes** at the Radisson Hotel, 6PM. 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, BICC, Baneshwor on 4 November at 4PM, Rs 100. 9841481549
- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** Fusion music with Anil Shahi and Maya Mantra, 7-10PM on 8 November. Rs 1,000 at Dwarika's. Reservations required, 4479488
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **The Patan Trios** classical 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, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. Rs 650 for adults, Rs 450 for children.
- ❖ **Deepawali** at Dolma Café Cocktail, Kabab. 3 November, Thamel. 4215069
- ❖ **Full Moon BBQ Dinner** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 4 November. 9841371927
- ❖ **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. 4253056
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Thakali Lunch** at Moksh, Pulchok. 5526212
- ❖ **Theme Dinners** at Shangri-la Hotel. Saturday-Thursday Nepali thali with cultural show, Rs 700. Friday BBQ, Sunday Bhaktapur Nights with cultural show and Newari cuisine, Rs 900.
- ❖ **Shaken Not Stirred** Martinis 007 style, Wednesdays at Fusion, the bar at Dwarika's. Rs 555 for a tapas platter and a martini
- ❖ **Pure and Sexy** hiphop night at Jbar with DJ Rupesh and DJ Rav4. 4 November, 9PM. 4418209
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel and Pulchok
- ❖ **A Sweet Taste of Life** at La Dolce Vita, Italian cuisine. 4700612
- ❖ **Creations from the Clay Oven** at Stupa View Restaurant, Boudha Stupa, 4480262



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- ❖ **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

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by MIKU



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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



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.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

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.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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.



KIRAN PANDAY

PRAY FOR BETTER TIMES: Former Speaker Chitrlekha 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.



KUMAR SHRESTHA

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.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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

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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 toll 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 Lukla 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 go 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 bygones are really bygones. 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.



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		(08:00-18:00 hrs)	(18:00-22:00 hrs) & (06:00-08:00 hrs)	(22:00-06:00 hrs)	
		Pulse Duration (Secs) / Rate per Minute (Rs)			
Group A (Districts with in a Zone)	All Days	60/1.00	60/1.00	60/1.00	1.00
Group B (Districts 0 to 50 km)	Sunday to Friday	30/2.00	40/1.50	60/1.00	1.00
	Saturday	60/1.00	60/1.00	60/1.00	1.00
Group C (Districts > 50 km)	Sunday to Friday	15/4.00	20/3.00	30/2.00	1.00
	Saturday	30/2.00	30/2.00	30/2.00	1.00

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Ajay Gupta Key resource person of Brand Insight Kathmandu 2004, is CEO of Corporate Leadership Institute (CLI), a consultancy based in New Delhi dedicated to bringing cutting-edge business practices to MNCs of India. *more on www.cliindia.com*

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