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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 323

Q. What is your level of trust towards the CPN (Maoist)?

Total votes: 6,892

- Trust a little 25.7%
- Do not trust at all 53.9%
- Trust very much 17%
- Don't know/can't say 3.6%

Weekly Internet Poll # 324. To vote go to: www.nepalimes.com

Q. Are the peace accord deadlines set for the coming weeks realistic?

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STRAINING FOR A GLIMPSE: Curious civilians crowding around Kathmandu's Khulla Manch to see what the future looks like, last Friday at the first Maoist public meeting since the peace deal.

DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

Barriers to success

The first speedbump on a long, winding road

NARESH NEWAR

The first deadline in the peace schedule has been missed. The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement is now set for next Tuesday, when the interim constitution, and cantonment and arms lockdown issues are also to be finalised.

Pushing back ambitious deadlines by a few days is not in itself alarming, but more than just

the schedule is straining at the seams.

The Maoist leadership is emphasising its good faith, but barely any 'PLA' fighters showed up at the proposed camp sites during the UN peace team tour earlier this week. There is continued recruitment, offering underage children money to sign up in what appears to an attempt to fill the camps with an acceptable number of 'fighters'.

Maoist leader Dinanath Sharma said they were, "forming a working group to re-estimate the actual number of PLA personnel," never mind that this mars the perception of trust.

The 7+21 camp formula has been described as 'overly complicated', with military sources suggesting a series of linked camps instead. The comprehensive agreement is also meant to clarify issues such as how the fighters are to be occupied and retrained during the cantonment period.

The government and the United Nations accepted a near-impossible timeline to keep up

the momentum and pressure of expectations. But the parties didn't help by pushing agreement on human rights issues, which are more appropriately addressed by the interim constitution in order to have the force of law.

The UN peace team's tour highlighted its status as a non-enforcement body, and a senior member of the government told us that there is growing wariness about the terms of the deal.

Meantime, the other monitoring body, the ceasefire monitoring committee is facing possible dissolution "due to an unclear mandate", committee member Taranath Dahal told us. The fate of the committee is to be decided on Sunday. ●

Signature
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The seduction of process

Is this really about sharing power?

ALL TOGETHER NOW

The first thing to remember is that the absence of war is not peace. What we have now is a stand-off. There is no frontal war killing 40 people a week, but the fear hasn't abated. The threats remain, people must still do things they don't want to.

Real peace will come when the rebel and state armies come together and genuinely grieve for the victims of both sides. It will come when they are truly sorry for what they did to each other and to citizens of this country who wanted no part in their war. It will come when they apologise.

What we saw last week in Baluwater was a relief. But no one said sorry. The agreement wasn't about the people, but about sharing power. The war was a power struggle and the peace agreement, a division of the spoils.

Still, by clinching the peace deal the leaders have redeemed themselves in the eyes of the people by giving them what they had most yearned for. Now they have to prove their commitment by sticking as best as they can to the slew of deadlines they've set.

There are many pitfalls. Will the Maoists implode when they start dividing up portfolios in the interim government? The tarai separatists are on the warpath and not a part of the deal, as are the Maoist militia. There are the doubters, mainly royal residues, who say the peace deal is a sham. In fact, they want it to be a sham so they will be proven right about not trusting the Maoists.

Then there are the seven parties and their fragile alliance, which is always on the verge of falling apart. But it has withstood the past two weeks relatively unscathed, proof perhaps that the alliance is more resilient than we give it credit for. But how will parties that can't even agree on ambassadorial appointments share power with the Maoists?

As in the past, the NC, the UML, and the CPN(M) have used each other to press home their advantage. But the stakes now are much higher. It is not about power and who emerges on top on 1 December. It is about rebuilding Nepal together following a new, more representative, blueprint. Only then will the last 11 years and the sacrifice of the 15,000 who died not be in vain.

This is not about power any more, it is about this country's future.



There is a deep reluctance among governments and interlocutors, including international mediators, to acknowledge persistent and pervasive patterns of deception that mark the engagement of terrorist and insurgent organisations in peace processes.



GUEST COLUMN
Ajai Sahni

Daily details and 'expert' interpretation of each new statement, agreement or act consume all attention, while the essential equation of power between the conflicting parties shifts subtly and steadily in favour of violent non-state actors.

This seduction of process explains why the new 'peace deal' is being celebrated despite reports of continuous and systematic violation of the preceding three agreements pouring in from across the country.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who seems to making an Arafat-esque move from terrorist to statesman, assures us that "once the peace accord is signed, we will honour every word of it." But as with other terrorist and insurgent groups in South Asia who have engaged in peace processes with governments (the LTTE in Sri Lanka and the Taliban 'elders' in Waziristan in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas), there isn't much reason to believe they will honour the letter and spirit of their deal. Rather, there is evidence that they will keep up their campaigns of extortion and intimidation while simultaneously furthering their project of social and political engineering to secure the desired

outcome, the seizure of power. Through the peace process they capture space and, importantly, legitimacy.

Current Maoist postures and the peace process should be assessed not just in terms of daily violations of prior agreements and the code of conduct, but also in terms of manifest intent and the prevailing equation of power.

The Maoists were not forced to the negotiating table. They forced the government, external powers, and international organisations. The Maoists retain in full their capacity for the violence that underlies their engagement with the state and external interlocutors.

Much in the present agreement, particularly the clauses relating to confinement of 'combatants' to camps and weapons under the single lock deal, reinforces the asymmetry between the insurgent and state forces.

It is naïve to believe the Maoists would surrender the bulk of their weaponry and declare the entire strength of their armed cadres. The distinction between the 'armed' and the 'political' cadres is inchoate at best. Though a token quantum of arms and cadres will be put under the restraints of the camps and lockdown, the bulk of their forces will be kept out of the camps, and much of their arsenal secreted in caches across the country. Meanwhile, the Nepal Army's forces and weaponry, far more easily verifiable, will effectively be locked away.

There is no sign the Maoist mass line is being abandoned or diluted. These ideologies are not easily relinquished, and they unleash dynamics

difficult to disrupt, and with a momentum of their own. Engagement in the peace process is not an act of accommodation or abnegation on the part of the Maoists; it is integral to their strategy for seizing power, which remains the objective of their manoeuvring.

There is slippage between what the Maoists say in public and what they are projecting within the organisation. Sources suggest to us that the top leadership has told members of the core group that their engagement in the process is tactical, and represents a change of strategy, not intent.

This is the backdrop against which Dahal, Baburam Bhattarai, and Ram Bahadur Thapa have said they will not join the interim government, and continue to seek to form their 'own government' to implement their 'progressive and revolutionary' agenda.

The UN monitors have no capacity to ensure compliance with the agreement. As with the Norwegians, the most they could do is maintain continuously inflating lists of violations, and deliver homilies on peace.

The Maoists have manoeuvred themselves to the centre of Nepal's democratic and political processes, paralysed the army, neutralised the king. They've done this without the slightest dilution in their own capacities for violence, and with a significant expansion in their abilities for mass mobilisation, as in Kathmandu earlier this month. ●

Ajai Sahni is executive director of the Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi.

Power for the powerhungry

Why not to hurry hydro-deals

The primal fear of the dark is a harsh reality for many Nepalis, in part because we literally live in the dark ages. The promise that hydropower will lead the country towards development and light appears tantalisingly close, yet too good to be true.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

The benefits of hydroelectricity are obvious. But our valleys are densely populated and our mountains are fragile, our needs are many, and resources limited. Our fast-flowing rivers that descend from the Himalaya to the tarai seem nature-built for generating power and not for the power hungry.

For politicians, this has always been a huge potential wealth-generating avenue. "If only we could exploit our water resources," has been the refrain of Nepal's politicians

and planners for half a century.

Hydropower is a victim of the rent-seeking mentality of many middle-class Nepalis who borrow to build a house which is then rented out, since a guaranteed monthly income supposedly affords a life of leisure. That's exactly what hydropower has come to mean, generating the myth of the hydro-dollar, which in reality fleeces consumers and enriches the rulers.

We're told to follow Bhutan on hydropower. But the Chukha model only works for countries like Bhutan. It is financed, built, operated, and managed on a colonial model by New Delhi. The Bhutani elite made peace with this unequal bargain in exchange for Indian support for the world's largest refugee crisis in terms of proportion of a country's population. Thimpu calls it "maintaining the proportion of Drukpas and Lhotsampas within manageable limits" and has India's firm support, and Bhutani refugees rot in Beldangi.

In reality, hydropower is technology-based, capital-intensive, and risk-prone. It involves difficult negotiations and hard bargains, the success of which hinges on mature technocrats, responsible political decision-makers, and a stable government.

There are lessons from the past. In the rush to finalise the Mahakali package, the political class of this country disgraced itself so badly, a section of the population saw salvation in nihilistic Maoist ideology.

Mega hydroprojects are a hallucination of the hungry. Hydropower isn't a panacea for the economic ills of our country. And the Himalaya is too young, the Mahabharat ranges are crumbling, and the tarai too precious to bear the burden of dams on the scale of China's Three Gorges. When we do build, our reservoirs would have to be designed, constructed, and maintained to withstand 8.5 magnitude earthquakes, so a dam burst doesn't submerge half of Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. Besides, Himalayan rivers are not water, but mud paste. The

Kosi carries the highest sediment load of any major river in the world. Yet we design reservoirs as if for tame rivulets in the Alps. The future holds climate change, glacial lake outbursts, and uncertainty.

The knowledge-base for mega projects in the Himalaya has to be created by starting small and building upon experiences. At present, the state's delivery capacity is depleted due to institutional collapse brought about by the royal regime's mal-governance. Bank defaulters have exhausted the stamina of the economy. The over-enthusiastic ministers of the transitional government will have enough such challenges as they negotiate peace with the Maoists. But no matter how strong the pressure from power brokers, they shouldn't finalise hydro-deals in a hurry. They can—and must—wait until we have a proper constitution and a properly constituted government. ●

LETTERS

PLUS AND MINUS

Finally, it seems as if you are getting it right. 'Moving the peace forward' and 'We have a deal' (#322) rightly point out how careful we must be to stay one step ahead of the stumbling blocks that will be in our way. No one wants to be cynical, least of all someone like me who has had a lucky life in Kathmandu. But haven't we been talking in abstracts too long? 'Peace' and 'reintegration' and all are fine and important, as long as we also understand that realpolitik can make people do unpleasant and even treacherous things. We can have peace at a price, but not at any cost—that kind won't last.

RB Shrestha, Sitapaila

- Why must you people always be so dark and pessimistic? You claim that 'we have a deal', but your analysis kills any euphoria. We're still in the honeymoon period—too early to start complaining about who does the dishes.

Kalpna Bhattarai, email

- Naresh Newar seems confused ('We have a deal', #322). Here's a clarification: he was writing about a historic agreement, not preparing a UN project proposal.

Rakuba, email



RAMESHWOR BOHARA

MY COUNTRY, MY VOTE

If I recall correctly, the last time I cast my vote was back in 1999. The country was on fire, swords were pulled, and battle lines drawn between the government and the rebels. My vote was a mandate to crush the rebels. Things have changed a lot since then. One fine morning in April, our nation was declared secular, our national anthem scrapped, the king stripped of his powers by the reinstated House. People started talking about a Nobel Peace Prize for Girija and Co. Hold on a minute. Isn't he the person who ignored Maoist demands and later deployed the army to crush them? Didn't he get democracy off to a bad start here?

Our country seems mummified. What about my vote and my mandate? I didn't vote to allow my elected body to make such large changes. People may no longer support those they voted for back in 1999. This is completely against the basic norms of democracy, as if they're saying: "You Nepali people are a bunch of idiots, let us decide your future."

No thanks, I don't trust any of you. This country belongs to the Nepali people, and each individual can voice their opinion though a secret ballot. I am

a citizen of this country—let me decide whether I want a king or not, and what works, Hinduism or secularism.

Nalin Gurung, email

CHASING YOUR TAIL

CK Lal's transition from political analyst to economic guru is understandable ('Minding business', State of the State, #319). Making sense of the political situation in the country is frustrating to say the least—like trying to solve a jigsaw puzzle with pieces from another set, eh Mr Lal? With all his analyses and predictions going haywire, what could he do but resort to quoting economic facts and figures that he can always blame on someone else, should they turn out to be incorrect.

Still, this is much better than having him dish out political lectures in a dal-bhat-tarkari/ tarkari-bhat-dal/ bhat-dal-tarkari fashion, endlessly extolling the virtues of democracy, how it should be practiced, what it is all about, and so on and so forth.

P Subodh, Lagankhel

- Readers are as ready to consume problem-centric news as the media is to provide it. Still, I was surprised that CK Lal's prescriptions for how to counter brain drain ('The enigma of excellence', State of the State, #321) were criticised in your letters column ('CK-speak', #322). People who can read and understand a good English-language newspaper should surely be able to envision a bright future of the country, or at least not get in the way of those who do. Should we keep on being no more than a source of cheap labour for developed countries, as SN Singh suggests? CK Lal is right to be concerned about brain drain, especially during such a tying transition.

A Poudel, email

CORRECTION

Due to an editing error, Michel Jolivet was referred to as former ambassador of France in 'Bodies in the Forest' (#322). He is still serving in Kathmandu.

- The caption for 'All the world's a stage' in Happenings (#322) misidentified the performance. The play was *Khusi ko mrityu*, directed by Birendra Hamal and based on three poems by Henrik Ibsen, which played to a packed house at Gurukul last Monday.

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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Keeping money clean

Why the run on Nepal Bangladesh Bank happened

The circumstances surrounding the recent run on Nepal Bangladesh Bank speak volumes about the legal and bureaucratic hurdles in regulating the financial sector. The basic mechanisms of checks-and-balances are weak and the scope for corruption, immense.

Five years ago, the Nepal National Act gave Nepal Rastra Bank the mandate to develop the financial sector and protect the interests of individual depositors in banks and financial institutions. Rastra Bank's governor was well within his rights to decide to take over management of Nepal Bangladesh Bank when it became evident that the NBB group's mismanagement was risking the savings of ordinary depositors.



COMMENT Bharat Upreti

The run on the bank happened not because of this assessment, but because the takeover plan was leaked in advance, and a flurry of meetings between NBB

officials and the Patan Appellate Court judge resulted in him ordering the central bank to stop any proposed action. Ordinary depositors heard about the court's decision and, now really fearing for their investments, started queuing up from 5AM the next day to withdraw their savings. In less than an hour, over a billion rupees was withdrawn.

The situation might be stable now, but there has to be an investigation into the interim court order by the Law Council if the safeguarding roles of the NRB and the National Insurance Committee are to be strengthened.

This latest incident raises questions about the social and moral responsibilities of banking entrepreneurs and legal institutions. How did the bank's managing director come up with over Rs 2 billion when it was supposed to be in a serious financial crisis? How much further does the authority of the central bank extend past asking for the resignation of key figures and taking over the management of a bank in trouble?



MIN BAJRACHARYA

For example, when the Rastra Bank sought to penalise the chairman of Kumari Bank for expenses of nearly Rs 30 million not backed by receipts, the Appellate and Supreme Courts ordered it to not take any action. The Supreme Court also ordered NRB to back off when it was preparing to act against Nepal Development Bank and its board of directors.

Many factors weaken the central bank's governing authority. The Law Council sleeps on the job, corruption and nepotism are rampant, and some of the more surprising stay orders against NRB are simply due to the fact that judges don't understand banking.

Rastra Bank needs better governance and the roles of its senior officials need to be better defined and monitored. Who can depositors turn to if top officials, responsible for their protection, fail to be duly vigilant against defaulting institutions?

What might politely be called conflict of interest remains a considerable problem. A number of institutions the Rastra Bank oversees are run by or staffed with family members of central bank officials. It's an open secret that a recently-retired Rastra Bank deputy governor was also on the payroll of NBB. On retirement from the state bank, most high-ranking officials join private banks and finance companies as chairmen, advisors, or members of the board of directors.

Making regulations bespeaks good intent, but you have to ask why implementation is so difficult. Despite NRB's ceiling on how much one family or business group could invest in banks and finance companies, how did the central bank itself permit NBB investors to own four banks and finance companies. This is not an isolated case.

Depositors come from all sections of society. There are a number of investment options open to wealthy clients. But for the rest of society, banks are seen as the safest—and the only—place for life savings. If people worry about the stability of financial institutions, they will again start hiding their money under mattresses. The loss to the economy and the setback in economic development will be considerable. ●

Bharat Upreti is an advocate, and senior partner at Pioneer Law Associates. bharat@pioneerlaw.com



JB PUN

Peep-eye

The Maoist army is playing coy

JB PUN MAGAR in PALPA

The Maoists say their 'People's Liberation Army' (PLA) is 35,000-strong. Why, then, did the UN team, led by General Jan Erik Wilhelmsen, see barely 200 soldiers at each of the proposed cantonment sites in Kailali, Surkhet, Rolpa, Palpa, Kabhre, Sindhuli, and Ilam?

In Palpa (pictured), there were supposed to be 7,000 Maoist fighters. When just a couple of hundred showed up, the explanation was that the rest were on home leave, all 6,000-plus of them. In Dahban in Rolpa, district commissar Hemant Prakash Wali said he had 8,000 soldiers under his command but again, the team met with only about 150.

Across the country, there are

reports of a massive new recruitment drive in a bid to show more numbers for the arms management process. Poor, unemployed civilians—many of them school students—are being asked to join the PLA and attend training in exchange for a month's salary of Rs 10,000 in Rupandehi and Rs 7,000 in Ilam.

Where are the remaining 33,000 fighters, and who will be in the camps is anyone's guess. The commanders, Baburam Bhattarai, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal say they won't join the government, and will focus instead on different aspects of the peace and arms management processes. ●

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towels to pat dry your hands with, bath towels to wrap around, turban towels to wrap around your head, a towel for Monday, Tuesday or any day of the week. Does it really matter what you do with it? As long as it doesn't remind you of those

remnant strands of hair after a wash?...well not if you've got the new Sunsilk Thick & Strong.



Now get a **FREE BATH TOWEL** with every 400ml Sunsilk Thick & Strong. No more hair fall, just a fresh towel.



Twenty years



At its 20th annual general meeting, Nepal Investment Bank's 2005-06 fiscal report showed that net profits grew by 51.1 percent to Rs 350 million, and that the bank now has 14 branches and 600 point of sale

terminals. Shareholders will receive cash dividends of 20 percent and 35.46 percent bonus shares. The bank is celebrating its anniversary with a new Social Deposit Account targeting NGOs and INGOs, a recurring savings deposit account called Parivar Bachat Khata, and the NIBL E-ZEE VISA Prepaid Card.

Mileage challenge

Daihatsu's Charade Mileage Challenge guarantees 15km/l mileage for city driving or a refund. Mileage is generally over 18km/l in city traffic, which the company says makes it the most fuel efficient car on Nepali roads.



The Charade has a spacious cabin, a minimum turning circle of 8.4m, and is competitively priced at Rs 1,540,000.

Mayos offer



Himalayan Snax's 'Mayos mutthima hatti' offers coupons with chances to win three tola (35gm) gold elephants or instant cash prizes for up to

Rs 100,000. Customers who collect and send in three *sunko hatti* coupons are eligible for each Saturday's lucky draw, broadcast live on Kantipur TV's *Call Kantipur* show.

Chicken crackers

Asian Thai Foods is now marketing Mama Chicken Cracker at Rs 10 for a 20gm packet, down from Rs 12.



NEW PRODUCTS

MIO: Morang Auto Works' new Yamaha Mio sports a 113.7cc four-stroke SOHC, two-valve CVT engine, and is available in five colours. The Mio is made in Thailand, and is priced at Rs 129,900.



XTREME: Syakar Company is launching the new Hero Honda CBZ Xtreme. New features include a unique split rear grip, an asymmetric instrument panel with a tachometer and trip meter, self-start and kick-start options, a

power pro engine, a three-year warranty, and a lower price tag than the original Hero Honda CBZ.

POWERED: Advance Power Devices, a pioneer in power-embedded systems in Nepal, has launched a range of inverters and home and online UPSs with digital signal processors and advanced intelligent battery management technology, which ensure silence, reliability, low running costs, and equipment safety.



New business for new Nepal

Business reforms are not necessarily complex

If we want to get ahead, we need economic reform that makes business easier. So says *Doing Business 2007*, the fourth report in the World Bank series, which places Nepal in 100th place out of the 175 economies surveyed, down ten places from last year. The report says the increased GDP of top reforming countries such as Georgia, Romania, Mexico, and China is the direct result of just making business easier.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

The survey factors 'ease' of doing business in terms of the time and money it takes to start a business, acquire licenses, employ workers, register property, get credit, protect investors, pay taxes, trade across borders, enforce contracts, and close a business. Sure, Nepal ranks ahead of other countries in South Asia on a number of counts, but it still stands at a dismal 150th in employing workers effectively, and is one of the ten worst countries in the world for regulating licenses, which takes an average of 424 days.

Some reforms might not seem earth-shattering, but they can both increase efficiency and bring more enterprises under the tax net. For instance, in Zimbabwe the average cost of firing workers is 446 weeks of salary, which means owners flee the country if their business goes bust. In Chad or India it takes about 10 years to close a business, compared with under three months in Ireland.

As often happens in Nepal, while we managed to draft legislation a year ago about liquidating business, we do not

yet have the institutions needed to undertake this.

The fastest and easiest way to promote growth is to cut down on paperwork and introduce administrative reforms that don't need legislative changes. A good example from Nepal is the move to allow institutions other than government departments to issue Certificates of Origin. Using the internet reduces interface with bureaucrats—and the frustrations of businesspeople. Simple things like being able to read the budget speech on the internet and downloading tax forms right at home without having to hike to an office and pay someone tea money add up to a considerably more pleasant business experience. In El Salvador, over the last two years little efforts like these have brought down the time to start a business from 115 days to 26.

What really resonated with the Beed is of course labour, and how we deal with it. If labour laws are tough, then just a handful will

dare formalise labour contracts, leading to messy situations bad for both employer and employee. Malawi has a population of 12 million and draconian labour laws—and a mere 50,000 registered workers. The harder you make it to fire workers, the more likely it is that owners and managers will find it tough to close business in time or expand and diversify. In a globalising world, if the labour environment is uncompetitive, people will move to a different country.

The Beed recommends that all involved in policymaking read this report and take it on board. Yes, that means you too, Dahal, Bhattarai and Co. Those charting the vision of a New Nepal will surely agree that it must believe in reforms to create successful businesses that will generate enough employment and taxes. ●

www.arthabeed.com



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Nepali Times spoke with Rabindra Malla, Managing Director and CEO of Smart Choice Technology, which issues debit cards and runs a network of ATMs, about the challenges and possibilities in the cash dispensing business.

Nepali Times: How is SCT doing?

We have over 150,000 cardholders and will soon be adding 15 more machines to our 57 ATMs. There are 17 banks and financial institutions in our network, and we've invested a total of Rs 100 million.

The fault rate is zero in the SCT network. After we issue the PIN, responsibility lies with the customers. We have a five-year projection for returns, and we have barely been around for two-and-a-half years.

'A card for every Nepali'

How is your card different from those issued by banks?

International cards like Visa and MasterCard are issued by four banks: Standard Chartered, Nabil, Himalayan, and Nepal Investment Bank. We issue local cards. Just under 25,000 credit cards have been issued in Nepal. Debit cards, such as Visa Electron, are much more popular, and the SCT card aims to take these on. Like Visa Electron, now our cards also work in ATMs in India.

Why the focus on debit cards?

They are more secure than credit cards, as you can only withdraw money already in your accounts. Banks still have to recover all the money they are owed on credit cards. Globally, distribution of debit and credit cards is at 60:40.

It's also expensive to issue Visa and MasterCards, so banks have started using ours because they require a lower investment. The banks do not need to invest in technical manpower or in technology. We do all the work, the banks just dispense the cards.

Why do banks join the SCT network?

For a bank to invest in an ATM network they need a minimum of Rs 20 million. Our service costs Rs 1.5 million. We integrate the banks' account management systems, make the cards, and generate the serial numbers. The bank merely has to distribute this package. We also provide 24-hour services, monitor the system, and keep track of

machines that need to be refilled. Basically, banks outsource their work to us.

Standard Chartered, Nabil, Himalyan, and Nepal Investment Bank have each invested Rs 80-90 million in similar services. How will they get returns from a small market like Nepal? They've invested a lot and are still providing free service, which will cost them at some point.

But that cost difference gets passed on to the customer.

We have to cover our costs and pay the banks for each transaction. We just get a small share for fixing the network. Compared to going all the way to the bank and queuing, the charge of just Rs 25 per transaction at an SCT ATM is very competitive.

You can also withdraw money using cards from banks not in our network for a charge of Rs 125-150. Other banks' networks don't offer this service.

We're ensuring that people who live outside the Ring Road don't have to enter Kathmandu. Of the four entry points to the city, only Balaju is still awaiting an ATM.

Cards will be the way to go in the future—it's not safe to carry cash, and it's a hassle to always go wait in line.

What are your plans for the future?

We are establishing a network in India, and we want every Nepali to have a card. We're also trying to facilitate bill payment using the card over the internet.

Metro police

Himal Khabarpatrika, 17 November-1 December

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Deepak Sing Thangden is the recently-appointed Kathmandu Metropolitan Police Commissioner. He spoke about his new role saying, "The police will reach the site within ten minutes of being informed."

Is the Metropolitan police a replacement for the Nepal Police?

We should not take it as a replacement. The metropolitan police force is a system used in large cities and capitals in many countries around the world.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

How will it operate?

It will effectively utilise a unit system to maintain peace and security and control antisocial activities using pseudo-judicial powers. Crime investigation and control, which was limited to Hanuman Dhoka will now be extended to five other places within the metropolis.

What do you mean by a unit system?

In the past different departments issued orders, registered businesses, and implemented laws, so it was difficult for us to work. Now the metropolitan police will do everything.

Will a new system mean crime will be under control?

This system will make it easier for the people to have access to the police, and our services will be more effective. Control room vehicles will be available in 50 places within the metropolis, and ten each in Lalitpur and Bhaktapur.

Can you tell us a bit about the structure of the organisation?

The office of the commissioner in Ranipokhari will be headed by the DIG. Nine Senior Superintendents of Police (SSPs) will be handling various departments. At the district level, Superintendents of Police (SPs) will head the Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSPs). The present posts, ward offices, and regional police offices will be converted to provinces.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Mahara to lead

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 15-21 November

महारा बिचार

Sources have confirmed that Maoist spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara will be leading the party's parliamentary team. The party will be represented by leaders from all castes and regional fronts, and from both the district and central level.

According to Maoist leader Ananta, women from various classes, indigenous communities, and regions will make up 30-40 percent of the representatives. Some of the confirmed names are Dinanath Sharma, Deb Gurung, Devendra Poudel, Ram Karki, Netra Bikram Chand, Hisila Yami, Pampha Bhusal, Heetman Shakya, Lekhraj Bhatta, Matrika Prasad Yadav, Agni Sapkota, Suresh Ale Magar, Top Bahadur Rayamajhi, Gopal Khumbu, Narayan Sharma, Ishwari Dahal, Haribol Gajurel,

Khadga Bahadur BK, Iswor Chandra Gyawali, Kumar Dahal, Rishiraj Baral, Pawan Man Shrestha, Jaipuri Gharti, Shanti Man Karki, Sita Poudel, Usha Pun, Lekhnath Neupane, and Komal Baral among others.

However senior leaders like Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Baburam Bhattarai, Ram Bahadur Thapa, and Western Command in charge Diwakar, special Central Command head Ananta, eastern deputy commander Baldeb, western deputy commander Prabhakar, and third division commissar Swanam will not be joining either the cabinet or the parliament.

Seat squabble

Jana Aastha, 15 November

आस्था

So who will be the lucky ones to get the remaining 48 seats in the interim parliament? The parties have each presented six names, representatives from their parties, to fill the seats but the decision is yet to be made.

On the night of 7 November, heated discussions took place between the United Left Front (ULF) and the UML. Arguing that the 48 seats were the direct result of Jana Andolan II, ULF's Chandradeb Joshi said the parties have to sit together and decide on distributing them equally amongst themselves. He accused the big parties of trying to keep the ULF away from the interim parliament. "You have already

taken 205 seats, now you want the 48 seats as well?" Joshi asked. To this the UML responded, "United Left Front is a small party so it is not fair for them to ask for equal share." Joshi shot back: "Have you ever stopped to think about our contribution during Jana Andolan II? A day before the king's coup, our party was the first to announce the possibility of regression." When the discussion started heating up, Joshi grew furious. He said, "And please don't even start with martyrs, has anybody counted how many people our party lost?" He added that their party was sincere in contributing during Jana Andolan II. "Had you asked us to bring one person, we would have brought hundreds. Do you remember how you promised to bring over a thousand people out on the streets but you brought just over a hundred?" Joshi asked. The ULF demands that they be given 25 percent seats in the interim parliament. When it looked like the catfight was not going to stop, Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula gave up.

"All other clauses have been agreed upon, if the parties still cannot agree on the number of seats, I have nothing more to say," said Sitaula.

Eventually as the discussion was going nowhere, Joshi complained to Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Immediately, Dahal said that the 48 seats were to be distributed equally amongst the parties and

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everyone promptly agreed. Joshi and CP Mainali are now demanding that the promise be given to them in writing.

Another UML

Khagendra Sangrula in Kantipur, 15 November

कान्तिपुर

Leaving the old parliament and creating a new one is like walking from the misty base of history towards a sunnier resting point further uphill. But there are signs that our history may never walk that path. The parties will not let us climb up the hill. Except for the handful of loyal royals from the tattered parliament, the rest will join the new parliament.

A large portion of this group includes those who would like to remain in the status quo, who can be called royalists. Before the 12-point agreement, many among them used to tease those fighting on the streets by saying, "We also have those who talk about a republic in our party." The same old faces with the same old characters will now take their seats with honour in the interim parliament, but with new names. This begs the question will they be considered eligible to stand in the constituent assembly

elections? Will they raise their hands to remove the king? Perhaps one can only hope, like Comrade Prachanda, who seems to believe that it is possible to end the monarchy with the help of this same crowd.

Speaking of his party, a huge responsibility now rests on the Maoists' shoulders. They may have walked a bloodstained road to reach this stage but they have made countless promises and the Nepali people have high hopes from them. However, after looking at the six-point agreement there is a nagging suspicion that the Maoists have unconsciously slipped away from what they promised. Otherwise why would they join hands with those who represent the old system?

Lately, there seems to be a fundamental shift in the Maoist policy. They have agreed to give up their weapons and practise ideological politics in place of their former politics of violence. This is good. However now it feels as if the Maoists are turning into another UML. If the Maoists are to use the same 'flexibility to the ultimate' policy, they will be just another UML.

One UML is enough for us, why do we need to burden ourselves with another?

Indigenous opposition



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Prakash, 13 November

प्रकाश

Various indigenous peoples' rights groups have expressed discontent at the 8 November agreement signed by the government and the Maoists. The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) has said that although the agreement was important for establishing peace in Nepal, it has failed to give justice to the indigenous communities.

NEFIN has said that the agreement neglects the role played by indigenous nationalities who make up at least 40 percent of the population. Likewise the Kirat Rai Yayokha Central Committee has issued a press statement expressing disagreement with certain points in the agreement.

The group has said that the agreement has neglected indigenous communities by not mentioning them, pressing only for party inclusion in the interim parliament and government, supporting a mixed electoral system instead of a caste inclusive one, ignoring the role of indigenous communities in the Jana Andolan II and the call for a federal democratic republic, and ignoring the right to self determination and self rule.



LEFT: We managed to come to an agreement

PAPER: Note of dissent

RIGHT: We managed to come to a disagreement

समय Abin Shrestha in Samaya, 16 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The state begins the violence, it is an organisation of violence. So I cannot speak like an ideological Gandhian and say that violence will end forever.”

Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Chairman of the CPN-Maoist, in Sanghu, 13 November

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Nepal's exotic, c A SW

MALLIKA ARYAL

Honey isn't just sweet. The thin, pale gold, mass-market brands are vitamin-rich, antibacterial, anti-fungal, and other good stuff. But there's also a whole world of exquisite tastes, and some varieties of Nepali honey can be the stuff of connoisseurs.

The dark, musky, slightly bitter buckwheat-based honey and paler, more complexly perfumed mustard-based honey are excellent additions to any breakfast or baking. Varieties like these, as well as lychee, chiuri, and rapeseed are unique to this part of the world, and they're seldom seen in European or North American stores.

Nepal's honey production is four times the 250 metric tonnes annual domestic demand, says the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control.

Honey producers here know that they can potentially create lucrative niche markets overseas, such as organic honey, 'Himalayan honey' and 'honey from the highlands', says

Mahalaxmi Shrestha, secretary of Apiculturist Network.

"Nepal is rich in biodiversity, our bees feed on the nectar of flowers and fruits that are not available in many parts of the world," agrees Surendra Raj Joshi of GTZ's Private Sector Promotion/Rural Finance Nepal. "The taste, quality, and standard of Nepali honey are among the best in the world."

But producers are finding it remarkably difficult to meet international standards. The problem is documentation. Recently Nepali honey was banned from the European market because the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control failed to submit the Pesticide Residue Control Plan that EU regulations require. Producers also slipped up, failing to have their honey tested by international standards laboratories before export.

Entrepreneurs and department officials say that amid the instability of recent years, honey export was laughed off the priority list. "But even if we couldn't get together a Pesticide

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Delicious honey could go places Meet future



SURENDRA RAJ JOSHI

Residue Control Plan, we should still have provided some documentation proving our honey is safe. Our main market, Norway, was wiped out," says Ganesh Dawadi of Department of Food Technology and Quality Control.

Until the mid-1990s, beekeepers in Nepal produced honey mostly for their own consumption. *Apis cerana*, native to Nepal, was bred in small hives in backyards across Nepal. But honey never really took off as a business because the yield from one hive of local bees was just about 10kg a year. This changed in 1995, when the Bee Development Section introduced the hardy European *Apis mellifera*, one hive of which yields 40-50kg of honey a year.

The exponential increase in production combined with a low initial investment, meant that beekeeping has become a vibrant commercial activity in

the hills and tarai. "A recent survey of 350 beekeepers across Nepal shows that a household can increase its net annual income by over Rs 11,000 through beekeeping and honey production," says Bhimendra Katwal of Winrock Nepal's Farmer-to-Farmer Program. Dabur Nepal alone collects and produces 108 metric tonnes of honey every year. The Bee Development Section in Godavari estimates that, in the last three years alone, honey production in Nepal has nearly doubled. About 50,000 households now contribute to the 1,000 tonnes of honey being produced in Nepal each year.

The health benefits of honey are getting wider play too, from the word-of-mouth marketing of small producers, to Dabur's massive marketing campaign with Amitabh Bachchan chatting up a bottle of Dabur's best. "We just distribute through

supermarkets and we're doing fine," says Prem Singh of Stone Bee Concern, whose labels list benefits ranging from aiding bronchitis to burns.

The Beekeeping Shop in Lagankhel, which sells three to

four tonnes of honey every year through their shop and trade fairs, also caters to apiary enthusiasts—you can buy bees, hives, protective gear, the works.

Beekeepers need to upgrade their skills, says Ed Levi, a

Winrock volunteer, to raise healthy bees and breed quality queens. Production needs to be streamlined and systematised to bring down costs, and quality control must be a higher priority, entrepreneurs say. ●

Queen bee



ED LEVI

When private beekeepers imported the European *A. mellifera* to Nepal some 15 years ago, and the agriculture ministry followed suit a couple of years later, there was concern about the impact these tough exotics would have on native species such as ghar mauri (*A. cerana*) (pictured), bhir mauri (*A. laboriosa*), khago mauri (*A. dorsata*), kathyauri mauri (*A. florea*).

"We decided to promote the new bees in the tarai, since we weren't sure they'd survive at higher altitudes," said Jaya Kumar KC, chief of the Bee Development Section. Also, the exotics need to migrate, which is easier in the tarai, and require lots of forage space and large pasturelands to feed on. Although *A. mellifera* is more productive, it is also vulnerable to diseases.

Cross-breeding is a concern, because each variety of bee thrives in different conditions, says Sanjaya Bista, a scientist at the Entomology Division of the National Agriculture Research Council. The native *A. cerana* needs help during chiuri flowering season, though, so the imports are transported up for the feeding season. "But farmers understand that the two breeds cannot be mixed together, therefore when the feeding is over, they take the *mellifera* back," adds KC.

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Home is where the vote is

For the elections to be fair, people must be free to return home



NARESH NEWAR

NARESH NEWAR
in NEPALGANJ

Baisali Buda and her four children lived on the edge of poverty in Mugu's Birat VDC. They had just a little land, but their remote, rugged village was home. Then Maoist cadres started coming around, making increasingly unaffordable demands. Eventually, four years ago, Buda and her family fled to

the relative safety of the city.

But life in the tiny shack in the camp for internally displaced people in Rajhena is even harder. "I wish we'd settled in India and never returned, though it is not easy there either" says Buda.

There are nearly a quarter of a million internally displaced people in Nepal, says the international Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). Buda and many like her

were innocent bystanders who just gave up, or refused to support the armed rebels. But an equal number of internally displaced people are former political workers of the NC, the UML, and the RPP. Their safe return will be a factor in whether all parties can campaign fairly for elections to the constituent assembly.

"The local Maoists locked our houses and took away our farms, and they will kill me if I go back," 72-year-old Kesar Bahadur Shaha from Jajarkot told us. A Nepali Congress worker, Shaha was constantly harassed, and his 45-year-old wife Ganga was abducted and severely beaten up. His young daughter couldn't handle living with the constant Maoist threats and intimidation, and succumbed to heart disease.

Over 200 people living higgledy-piggledy in the camp are waiting for the local Maoist leaders from Mugu, Dailekh, Jajarkot, and other surrounding districts to come to them and give them written assurance that they will not be harmed in any way. The Maoist leadership publicly says that internally displaced people should be

reintegrated unconditionally in their home villages. But camp residents are far from convinced that the local Mugu-based cadres, used to extortion and living on other people's property, will welcome them warmly.

"We hear all the time of displaced families being further victimised by both the local Maoists and sympathisers in the villages," said Durga Debi Shahi, whose home is in Tholaregar, a two-day walk from Jajarkot's district headquarters Khalanga.

The SPA government never gave directives to the CDOs or DDC offices on how to deal with internally displaced people. The run up to last week's preliminary peace deal addressed the return of IDPs, as they are called, but there were few concrete proposals put forward.

Some people in the camps have negotiated their return home, only to be turned back at the last minute. Last month, some 45 UML cadres decided to return home to Dhading en masse when the peace talks had stalled. In Rautahat, over 40 political workers who tried to follow their example were denied re-entry by the Maoists.

Some returnees have been taken to indoctrination camps, made to pay 'donations', and tried in kangaroo 'people's courts'.

Most movable property taken from internally displaced people has been either sold or destroyed. While district-level Maoist leaders say that, barring papers destroyed in government raids, they do keep records, few internal refugees believe they will be compensated. People in camps like this one now want the government to make restorations.

Organisations that work with internally displaced people say the only way to ensure a smooth, safe return is to decentralise the process and have the government work closely with Maoist cadres on the ground.

"Rule of law and order needs to be restored at the local level," says Hanne Melfald, an IDP advisor with the United Nations. The government has to work fast to make the VDCs functional, and police offices have to return to the villages from which they have been absent for over six years. Fundamentally, say experts like Melfald, the return of internally displaced people must be handled as a matter of human rights. ●

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Back to basics

Nepal's peace-time governments should get back to basics to kickstart development, says a new report by Oxfam International.

That means investing more money in essential services like safe drinking water and education in order to build physical and intellectual infrastructures solid enough to support future growth. But it doesn't imply simply putting money into politicians' hands, adds the new report, *Serve the Essentials*, which examines the South Asian region.

At least 20 percent of government—and donor—money should go to essential services, but with measures to stem corruption, such as right to information laws. And the cash should be spent wisely. For example, at least 15-20 percent—not the current under five percent—of states' recurrent spending should be on non-salary items, like school chalkboards.

The document repeatedly cites the success of the Sri Lankan model: invest heavily in initial programs and infrastructure and reap the benefits for decades after. In the 1950s and 60s, Colombo devoted five percent of GDP to education, and though today that's down to three percent, the state still provides free education for all up to university.

Wealth is not the determining factor for success, argues the report. "Government actions matter more than national income. High human development achievers either rely on public-led systems, or inject substantial public finances into essential service delivery [to uphold their citizens' basic human rights]."

The report says that in addition to free health and education, and a greater role for women in community decision-making, services should be delivered universally, rather than spending precious resources determining who should get them. ●

Marty Logan



ALOK TUMBAHANGHEY

Karnali's daughters

Unless child marriage goes, education for the girl child will remain taboo

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY in MUGU

"Ke garne," says Bali Raj Biswokarma (BK) as he talks of his marriage, arranged by his parents when he was 16. "Tradition got me married really young but the same will not happen to my daughter." He pauses for a second before defiantly adding, "She will go to school."

At 18, Bali Raj is already a father and works as a porter to fend for his wife, four-month-old daughter, and his parents. He usually sits by the Talcha airport with a rope in hand and bargains with the travellers and trekkers to carry their goods to their destination. Depending on the length of each trip, he earns anywhere from Rs 500 to Rs 3,000.

The story is the same with many of Karnali's young people—most are married off early, some even before they enter their teens.

Khadga Raj BK was married off at 13 to a girl of the same age, but unlike many of his friends, he is privileged to still be



CHILD BRIDES: 15-year-olds Shova and Laxmi Karki, both wear the *tilahari* that signify they are married.

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

attending school. He proudly shares his school's name "Mahakali Uccha Madyamik Vidyalaya in Srinagar—I'm in grade seven," he nods approvingly. But his bride stays at home as the traditional dutiful wife, as is

expected of her.

Some girls occasionally have the freedom to visit relatives and friends. Shova and Laxmi Karki (pictured), both 15, had come to attend the Rara festival

recently held in the area. Though they did not admit to being married, the *tilahari* each wore suggested otherwise. Both had never been to school and said, "we look after the cows, but our brothers go to school."

Mugu has 124 schools but despite this impressive number for such a remote region—accessible only by foot or expensive flights—there is a low turnout of girls attending school. "Child marriage has always been a tradition here but that is slowly changing. I think because of that, the number of girls attending school is also improving gradually," says Badrinath Dhungana, teacher at the Janjyoti Madhyamik Vidyala, Na Tharpu.

That may be positive sign but obviously, more can be done to speed up the progress. For Nepal's government and most of the locals here, roads remain the top priority. No doubt once the roads are built, they will open up Karnali to everything from farm to forest produce in the markets down south. But along with the roads, there is something equally important that needs to be addressed for Karnali's future generations—access to education for the female child.

As a distinguished visitor at the festival observed, "That bit of carefully planned infrastructure could be instrumental in changing the lives of Karnali's people but unless there is equal access to education for the girl child, social flaws like child marriage will continue to be practised." ●

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Looking at the bright side

High politics

The Times, 8 November

THE TIMES

Nepal, like Sri Lanka, has been a troubled part of the Indian sub-continent. While events in Colombo seem, alas, to be turning for the worse yet again, developments in Kathmandu are far more encouraging. Political negotiations between the Prime Minister of Nepal and his seven-party alliance and Maoist rebels have reached agreement ... a bargain that would bring to an end a civil war that has lasted for a decade and cost 13,000 lives is now in sight.

None of this seemed plausible when King Gyanendra dismissed Parliament and attempted to impose personal rule on his people 21 months ago. It was an inept and deeply unpopular initiative by a monarch who only took the throne after a surreal tragedy in 2001. Yet any sympathy that the Royal Family might have secured then has been sacrificed by the King's arrogance and incompetence. He was forced to back down and become a ceremonial figure this April under the threat of an enforced abdication.

With the King sidelined, politicians and military leaders have wisely opted for dialogue. They have been pressed to do so by Nepal's huge neighbours, China and India, each of which decided that neither a Khmer Rouge-style regime nor absolute monarchy would serve their broader interests. A compromise that would bring the Maoists into mainstream democratic politics has, therefore, been championed.

How well it works largely depends on the approach taken by the Maoists. Their leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal (known as Prachanda), is, to put it charitably, a recent convert to multiparty politics. It is not clear whether he will stay the course if, as seems plausible, a majority in Nepal opts to maintain a symbolic monarchy (if not King Gyanendra himself) as part of a constitutional settlement. Nor is it obvious whether the Maoists would be content as minority partners in a new administration that was focused on such distinctly unrevolutionary activities as an attempt to boost the tourist industry.

This is why China, especially, has to engage with a group that it has not supported but over which it could exercise influence. There is the suspicion that the Maoists have agreed to hand in their arms because they are confident that they can replace them at short notice if they are so inclined. Beijing has to disabuse them of that notion and encourage them to look to the current Chinese economic model, not that of Mao, for inspiration. India, meanwhile, must be prepared to play host to the King if he opts for exile.

If that could be done, then Nepal, an extraordinarily beautiful country, should have a bright future. It is also a place with which Britain has many historic links, not least through the Gurkhas. A political accord rooted in a sincere shared acceptance of democratic institutions would be welcome. It may also provide a precedent for others in South and East Asia to follow.

An historic peace deal

The Economist, 9 November

THE ECONOMIST

While the agreement is very encouraging, there are many unresolved issues that could yet derail the process of constitutional reform. If Maoist leaders do issue orders for [informal militia] to disband, it is not certain that they will do so willingly—many will have become used to collecting "taxes" from the rural population, and will lack alternative employment to fall back on.

[Will] the Maoists be willing to work in a democratic system if they do not fare well in elections for the CA next year (or if the CA either votes to retain the monarchy or fails to draft a constitution along the lines they had envisioned). Maoist cadres running "people's governments" in the regions developed a reputation for compelling the local population to co-operate, by force if necessary.

Residents of Kathmandu have been exposed to the kind of Maoist intimidation that was until this year confined to the regions. The city residents took to the streets in protest at the intimidation, leading Maoist commanders to issue denials that they had used such tactics (saying "requests" for help had been misinterpreted as demands).

Another matter not covered is whether the 35,000 regulars will be merged with the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), as the Maoists have demanded. The RNA ... could yet be moved to take action if it is compelled to co-operate with the rebel forces it has been fighting for the past ten years. It would retain the support of pro-monarchist parties, who have been excluded from the interim government, if it did so.

[In] the run-up to the CA election next year interest groups that have remained relatively subdued could emerge to try to influence the process. Opposition could come from Hindu fundamentalists opposed to secularism, from royalists attempting to carve space for themselves, and from sections of the army that may have reservations regarding the way in which the political parties and the Maoists want to restructure government.

It will remain vital that the seven-party alliance remains united until next June, but the parties have a history of bickering among themselves ... two dissenting notes were issued by the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), over the desirability of a referendum to decide the future of the monarchy and the fact that not all the CA will be elected by proportional representation. Another situation that could spark a dispute among the parties is one in which there is a need to replace Mr Koirala as head of government.

For now, however, there is unity amid the optimism that with the insurgency almost at an end, the real business of building a modern Nepal can begin.

New start for Nepal

Sydney Morning Herald, 9 November
Connie Levett in Bangkok and agencies

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

The warring parties in Nepal have struck a historic deal that raises real hopes for a lasting peace after 10 years of bloody civil conflict but also signals the beginning of the end for the monarchy.

To move the peace talks forward, both sides have agreed to delay a decision on the future of the monarchy.

The Maoists' methods remain under close scrutiny. They announced a ceasefire in April after Gyanendra handed back power to the seven-party alliance; however, reports of violations by the rebels continue and are increasing, the National Monitoring Committee on the Code of Conduct for Ceasefire says.

The monarchy had been a big sticking point and the breakthrough came after the two sides agreed that a special assembly, to be elected next year, will make the decision on what happens to the king.

War nears end

Bikash Sangraula in The Christian Science Monitor,
9 November

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

It took five months of peace initiatives, several piecemeal agreements, and 17 hours of marathon talks for Nepal's government to finally hammer out a comprehensive agreement with Maoist.

... The Maoists' sense of security and confidence in the final weeks leading up to the agreement, analysts say, leaves little doubt of their commitment to promoting multiparty democracy.

"The well-drafted document has addressed all quarters and put a final seal on peace," says Narayan Wagle, editor of *Kantipur*, Nepal's largest daily. "With the agreements, Nepal is on a definite course to lasting peace. There is absolutely no doubt about that. The people will feel this the day the weapons of the rebels are locked up."

The two sides have also agreed to sign a

comprehensive peace accord by 16 November, which will include provisions to compensate the families of those killed or maimed during the conflict, rehabilitate displaced civilians, and form a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to deal with cases of serious human rights violations.

Ordinary Nepalis appeared upbeat the morning news of the agreement screamed from the front pages of Nepal's daily newspapers.

Despite the long-overdue success, Nepal's civil society leaders remained sceptical of the agreement. While acknowledging that the accord is likely to steer the country toward peace, human rights officials and observers were disappointed at the lack of specific legal protections for ordinary Nepalis.

"The document is excellent as a power-sharing arrangement between the parties and the Maoists. However, there is no human rights component in it," said Subodh Pyakurel, chief of Insec, a leading human rights NGO in Kathmandu. "There is nothing for the people in whose name the insurgency was fought," he added.

"Our revolution won"

Interview with Prachanda in L'Espresso

L'ESPRESSO

If we win the elections, we will naturally claim the presidency of the Republic. ... I want to change the country's entire socioeconomic system, but not with myself in government or as the president.

So, the CIA may conspire against our movement, we are serious and we are prepared for anything.

The monarchy will be completely abolished ... If he agrees to the will of the masses, Gyanendra could live in Nepal as a normal citizen. If he does not, if he tries to do anything to sabotage the republic, he will be crushed. Maybe the state will give him some land, property, but he must stay away from politics.

We really believe in socialism, and even in a proletarian dictatorship, there should be multi-party competition ... we want democracy to be really to benefit the masses.

[Lula of Brazil, Chavez of Venezuela or Mandela of South Africa] are objectively closer to us than others who are blatantly capitalistic. But ... they represent only the middle classes.

We are not really that close to Fidel. ... Our understandings standpoint is different from any communist party in the world.

We are completely different from the Khmer Rouge, and also about the Peruvian Maoists. We are not dogmatists ... we are dynamic, understanding modernity.

We are fighting for the masses of the entire world.

We changed our name several times in the past, before the People's War. We can change name according to the situation, there is no dogmatism about it.

In 20 years we could be very similar to Switzerland.

We will apply mixed economics ... and [use] capital from abroad for the well being of Nepal.

You know, I'm not so interested in talking about myself.

One of my favourite teachers, a member of the Communist party, gave me a booklet with quotations of Mao Zedong, and a big photo.

In the Peoples Army there are Hindus, Buddhists and others, and we respect all the religious beliefs of the masses, even if our party teaches its officials and cadres a more scientific and secular point of view.

I read Indian and American literature, and political newspapers from all over the world. When I was a teacher I used to dance and to play some musical instruments.

My favourite movie is Spartacus.



KIRAN PANDAY

Blogspeak

Bloggers are hopeful, but wary

MALLIKA ARYAL

[The] Maoists are now ready to lock up their arms ... They are mentally preparing themselves to come into mainstream politics. A peace process takes time. What more do you want?

-Sukra on United We Blog!
http://www.blog.com.np

United We Blog! is optimistic that the process is genuine. Most Nepali bloggers are hoping for peace to last, but are still cautious because things have gone horribly wrong in the past. They say people are slowly beginning to trust the Maoists, and ask that they mend their ways before it is too late. A few see no hope, saying the government has given away too much:

Peace at any cost is not peace at all!

-Sarki ko choro on United We Blog!
http://www.blog.com.np

Comments on International Nepal Solidarity Network express similar sentiments. They say the people still do not trust the parties, which is why they need to be careful and listen to the public. Posters also caution the leaders about royalists waiting to capitalise on any weaknesses.

The ever-popular Blogdai thinks Nepal has no clue how to run a democracy. He says there is a fundamental disconnect in the free pass Nepalis have given the parties and Maoists. People are scared to say anything negative about Maoist atrocities because they are scared of harming the peace process.

Yes, let's get on the peace train with this new agreement with the Maoists, shall we? We in Nepal are so blind that we will trust these thugs again and again because we are too stupid to differentiate between what sounds hopeful and what the momentum of our own recent history has tried to teach us. Give the bums all the chances they want. They've never once gotten it right, but maybe this time....

-Blogdai on http://nepalnow.blogspot.com

Comments on Blogdai's site say there is no accountability in Nepal and we are handing power to 'murderers' who have no credibility.

A discussion on Mero Sasar says the king should definitely be held responsible for the atrocities during Jana Andolan II, and the Maoists for the last decade's killings.

The king is like an injured tiger right now. What has the commission done other than call the royalists for statements and let them go? I don't think the commission has the guts to put its hands in an injured tiger's mouth.

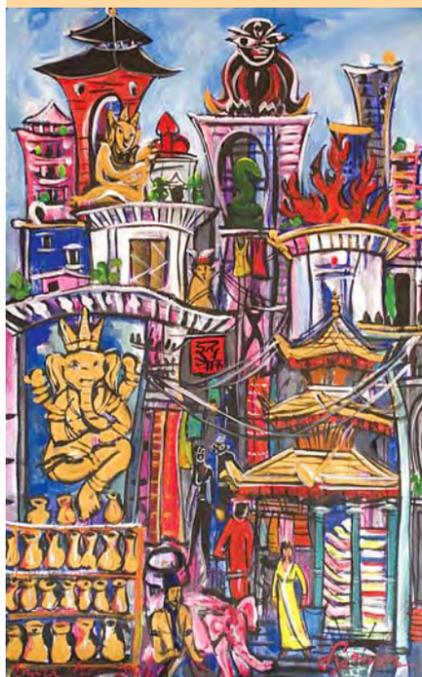
-Samrat on Mero Sansar
http://www.mysansar.com

Are there people out there who can prosecute the Maoist leadership for 1,400 [sic] deaths? Soon the Maoists will be joining mainstream politics and the charges (if any registered) will all be acquitted like it was done for Khum Bahadur Khadka (what a shame!!)

-Jay on Mero Sansar http://www.mysansar.com

Symon says

Have fun



Miles Davis' jazz classic 'My favourite Valentine' was playing on the radio when Symon decided to name his painting just that. As whimsical as his names of paintings are, his art is even more so—spontaneous, quirky, colourful, wild, and totally entertaining.

Painting is essentially about entertainment for this American-born artist from Bali. "The king made the palace to entertain himself, the priests built the temple to entertain the followers, and Symon makes art to entertain his audience," says the cheerful artist, his hands still covered in fresh paint. Back home in Bali, Symon, who goes by just his given name, is a leading artist with his own atelier and bright melange of pop art, landscapes, and cityscapes.

Symon lived in Kathmandu for almost a decade until 1976 and helped revive the Tibetan woodblock tradition right here in Jhochhen. He's back 30 years later, presenting his take on today's modern, chaotic city.

Symon uses broad brushstrokes and paints straight from the imagination. His 'Lost in Indra Chowk' (pictured) is filled with brass pots, piles of clothes for sale, a Ganesh, a pagoda, a random fire-spewing pillar—and a tired-looking pink elephant who has lost his way. Pink elephants feature in a number of the paintings on display simply, Symon says, because they're fun, and stimulate the curiosity of children.

The paintings, on show at the Indigo Gallery, are "funny", in a style the artist likes to call "immediasm". The approach seems tailor-made for Kathmandu's crooked architecture, and the chaos of daily life is evident in the bright colours and refreshingly vibrant lively, layered images. ● Sophia Tamot

The New 'Du: A Playful Image of Kathmandu (and beyond) by Symon opens 18 October at Indigo Gallery, Naxal.

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Actual Rate	Discount rate
3 Years 1260	1100
2 Years 840	750
1 Years 420	380

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Shakti** paintings by Women Artist Group of Nepal at The Art Shop, Darbar Marg. 10AM-5PM until 24 November, 4267063
- ❖ **Sense Awareness** paintings by Shobha Adhikari-Wagley at Imago Dei Café, Nag Pokhari
- ❖ **Woman in Nature** paintings by Erina Tamrakar at the SAARC Arts and Crafts Village, Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Faith** symbolic representational art by Laya Mainali at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Inspired Expression** tribute to RN Joshi on until 6 December at Park Gallery, Pulchok. 5522307
- ❖ **The New 'Du:** A Playful Image of Kathmandu (and beyond). Paintings by Symon at Indigo Gallery, 18 November onwards.
- ❖ **Collaboration with Mithila Yatra** paintings at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 19 November-3 December, 11AM-6PM. 4438979

EVENTS

- ❖ **Nepal Mountain Bike Race 2006** on 18 November. 4701701
- ❖ **Bollywood Remix Night** 9PM onwards at Jbar, 18 November. Rs 500 including a drink
- ❖ **3rd Nepal Exterior Interior Expo 2006** at Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall, 11AM-6.30 PM until 19 November. 4260232
- ❖ **Shastrartha** at Martin Chautari by MAPS. 3-5PM, 18 November to discuss sociobiology. 4238050
- ❖ **November Film Festival** documentaries from Nepal, 25-26 November at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 5542544
- ❖ **Documentaries** every Wednesday at 6.30 PM till 30 November at Nhuchhe's Kitchen—The Organic Bistro, Baluwatar
- ❖ **Seven habits of highly effective people** 6-8 and 10-12 December, 9.30 AM-5.30 PM at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 9851036719

MUSIC

- ❖ **Rashmi Singh** live at Absolute! Bar, Pulchok. 17 November, 7 PM onwards. 5521408
- ❖ **Yala Maya Classic** the seventh classical music series at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 18 November at 5PM, 5553767
- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** with Anil Shahi and Maya Mantra, 1 December, 6.30 PM onwards at Dolma Café, Thamel. 4215069
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Nekyham Band** live at Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel, Kathmandu. Wednesdays, 7 PM onwards, Rs 600 with barbeque
- ❖ **Ciney and Par-e-jat** sounds of the 70s live at Dwarika's, 7PM onwards. 4479488

DINING

- ❖ **Thanksgiving Traditional Dinner** with turkey and pecan pie, 23-25 November at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440
- ❖ **Persian BBQ Night** 24 November for Rs 900 at Fusion, the bar at Dwarika's
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Pork chops** and lamb steaks at Sports Bar, Kamaladi, 4438017
- ❖ **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 cusine, Rs 900.
- ❖ **Foodcourt** at Bluebird Mall, open 11AM-9PM every day. 4228833
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizza** at Java's new extension, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Shaken Not Stirred** Martinis 007 style. Wednesdays at Fusion, the bar at Dwarika's. Rs 555 including tapas platter
- ❖ **Charcoalz and Flamin' Cocktails** with live music for Rs 799, Fridays and Saturdays, 7PM at Hotel Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Anatrim** a safe, natural option for combating obesity. www.fonklom.com
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768 and Pulchok. 5521755



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** pure relaxation. 4361500
- ❖ **Walk and Lunch** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, Saturdays until 25 November. 9841371927
- ❖ **Escape to Godavari Village Resort**, overnight stay package or conference packages. 5560675
- ❖ **Winter Package** three days and two nights at Shangri-la Village Resort, Pokhara. Rs 7499, 4412999.
- ❖ **Harmony** of the mind, body and soul at Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Overnight package** luxury at Dwarika's. 4479488

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalimes.com

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by MIKU



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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



The north-south jet stream that brought snowfall and drizzles over eastern and central Nepal has dissipated, which is good news for the moment. But break out your scarves and gloves, because winter will definitely be upon us this week. Another strong westerly wave is moving from Pakistan and over Indian skies, and will very likely hit western Nepal this week. This front, which originated in Siberia, will result in chilly, foggy mornings and dry afternoons.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

UNITED WE STAND: At a meeting with the EU Troika at Dwarika's Hotel on Wednesday, (l-r) French Ambassador Michel Jolivet, Personal Representative of the UN Secretary-General Ian Martin, EC Charge d'Affaires Eduardo Lechuga Jimenez, new OHCHR head Lena Sundh, UNHCR's Abraham Abraham, and OHCHR's senior officer Christopher Andersen pose for a photo.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

TOO LITTLE TOO LATE: Families demonstrate in Maitighar on Sunday demanding better compensation for victims of last year's Nagarkot shooting, where a Nepal Army soldier killed 12 and injured 19.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

WAVE THE RED FLAG: Maoists celebrating the peace deal with a rally in New Baneswor on Friday.



KUMAR SHRESTHA

HOLDING UP HALF THE SKY: A porter crosses Putalisadak with her load on Tuesday. The interim constitution is supposed to augment the rights of women and the labour force.



DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

THINKING ALOUD: Writer Khagendra Sangraula, politician Narahari Acharya, and human rights activist Krishna Pahadi at a Martin Chautari discussion on Sunday.

A growing partnership

When farmers in Begnas find their crops are not yielding well, they turn to local plant breeder Surya Nath Adhikari and his wife Saraswati for help.

Nearly a decade ago when imported breeds were gaining popularity, Surya Nath approached officials from a crop conservation project in Begnas, Pokhara to learn about the possibility of cross breeding local domestic rice with wild rice. The officials provided Adhikari with the know-how, but he says when he started working "with the plants, "my hand was too shaky and my eyes were too weak; I feared that I would fail."

The farmer asked his wife to pick up the tools instead, and after overcoming her initial fears, Saraswati became adept at splicing open and combining the sex organs of rice varieties. To date, the couple have successfully completed 16 crosses of various types of local rice and three crosses of local and wild rice (the latter for the first time in Nepal).

They have also started experimenting with coffee, one of the farm's (and the village's) main cash crops, whose main market is Japan. "I hesitated at first fearing that I might not succeed...but staff



MARTY LOGAN

from LI-BIRD [Pokhara-based NGO Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development] encouraged me and my confidence increased," Saraswati told us. Coffee, not the usual Nepali chiya, was on the Adhikaris' stove, and neighbours arrived at regular intervals to weigh and drop off their coffee beans.

One outcome of the project was the creation of Participatory Plant Breeding groups at the village level, which meets regularly to discuss the possible cross of *ekle chamal* (a

successful, but not the tastiest local variety) with *jetho budho* (famous in Pokhara for its taste and aroma). The answer may lie in the Adhikaris' experimental plots, where the cross of the two breeds is growing.

Asked if she thinks other women should take up crop breeding, Saraswati is humble. "I'm still learning. Until I'm sure it is entirely successful, how can I encourage other women to do it? But," she adds after a moment, "if someone is interested, I'm ready to teach them." ●

Marty Logan

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Spartacus and Rang de Basanti

The Fearsome One has always been aware of his looks and is careful what he wears. A sketch of him with a **Stalin moustache** and a blue turtleneck was the only image of the man available for many years while he was underground. Now, it looks like he is making up for lost time. We can't get away from his awesome visage; posters of Mr Grey Shirt are **splattered on victory gates** from Jomsom to Jochhen, and then there are the interviews on *Pawankali* and *l'Espresso*.

To the Italian, Mr Dahal gave a long-winded interview in which he made his oft-repeated pledge to turn Nepal "into Switzerland" in the next 20 years. Which of course immediately brought to mind **Comrade Krishna Prasad Bhattarai** saying he'd turn Nepal "into Singapore" within a decade.

And we now know he shares Kim Jong Il's passion for movies. While the Dear Leader is known to watch pirated DVDs spirited over from Dalian, our own Awe-inspired Leader told the obsequious Italian interviewer that his favourite movie is *Spartacus*. To a **flirtatious** Pawankali, he admitted watching the fillum *Rang de Basanti*.



Pretty media savvy, if you ask the Ass. Ex-extremists injecting a human face by subjecting themselves to extended and unpredictable interviews. And it looks like the comrades don't have to wear grey shirts after all. "You can wear what you want, I am not going to say you have to wear this or that," the guerrilla commander told Pawankali as she **batted her eye lashes** at him. For those of you who didn't watch what happened next, it may be wise to skip to the next paragraph. Pawankali gushed about how handsome Badal is. Comrade Supremo **twitched**, but didn't say anything. So when is Badal appearing on Pawankali?



Despite the peace deal, Dr Bhattarai apparently feels he still needs protection, even from Buddhist monks and grieving conservationists. Arriving to do his **chief guestly duties** at a memorial service for Harka Gurung at a monastery in Boudha on Friday, BB was flanked by two cadre, each carrying a rucksack with the barrel of a gun sticking out the top. Reports are that neither bag was equipped with a **UN-approved sensor**. It seems he also brought more along than just the weapon-toting two. As he got up to leave, there was a sudden flurry as over half the hall made a noisy exit. Something tells us they weren't just your run-of-the-mill memorial attendees.



In the latest issue of the aptly-named army publication *Sainik*, one sainik was quoted as saying that the food at the barracks has suddenly got much better that he doesn't want to go **peacekeeping in Congo** anymore. Amazing how fast things have changed in the army in just a few months. The food is better, of course, because the officers now have to eat in the mess like everyone else. And not to be left too far behind, the Army Officers' Wives Association has just been renamed the Army Wives' Association. Guess the Rana-haired ladies will have to **hobnob** with proles from now on.



If you didn't already know, the People's Liberation Army is now on both sides of the Nangpa La. After the shooting dead of a nun on the Cho Oyu flank last month, the PLA blew out China's plan to take the Olympic torch to the top of Chomolungma. Meanwhile, the PLA on our side has been active collecting revolutionary tax from trekkers headed up to Namche. A 16-year-old with a **walkie talkie** is ready to call in armed reinforcement if anyone refuses to pay Rs 100 a day at Phakding.



The extortion is now becoming an extraction as far as tourists to Nepal are concerned. In addition to the \$35 visa fee, they have to pay to see Bhaktapur, Patan, and Swayambhu; then there's the \$15 to enter Sagarmatha National Park, a two percent NTB tax on every meal and hotel bill, Rs 1,700 in airport tax, plus the Maoist tax on trekkers at Monjo and Jagat. On top of all this, TAAN now has its own **trekker tariff**. But lodge-owners in Namche have it even worse. After paying all the Maoists this Tihar, they also had to pay civil servants **fat sums** in deusi money.



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