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#325

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Weekly Internet Poll # 325

Q. Do you expect the interim constitution to be an adequate and fair document?

Total votes: 3,546



Yes 37.7%
No 60.2%
Don't know/can't say 7.1%

Weekly Internet Poll # 326. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. What do you think of the recently passed Citizenship bill?

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FAREWELL TO ARMS: A PLA fighter of the Fifth Division looks pensive at a cantonment camp near Dahaban village, Rolpa on Sunday.



BRIAN SOKOL

Mend in Nepal

Next June's CA election is looking like a mirage

KIRAN NEPAL

Electing an assembly to draft a new constitution is what brought the political parties and the Maoists together. It is the one thing almost everyone agrees on. Yet, it is unlikely the polls can take place in June 2007 as planned.

Missing the first deadline to sign the Comprehensive Peace Accord was not by itself serious, but other cut-off dates have been missed. The weapons lockdown, finalising the interim constitution, and dissolution of parliament are all on standby.

The Election Commission stops short of saying that elections are impossible, as does

everyone else. But planning for the polls and the run-up to them can only happen when the interim constitution is adopted, laws are passed on the scope of the Commission's mandate and details of voter registration.

Until it is written into the interim constitution, the EC remains effectively illegal for the purposes of the CA, and not allowed to plan constituencies, lay down campaigning rules and administer a poll. The extent of the EC's 'refereeing' role is undecided, including whether or not it will have any punitive authority to check campaign or ballot irregularities.

Just how 'fair' we expect this election to be, and in what ways,

needs to be put in writing. Voter registration remains a contentious issue. The cut-off dates for newly-granted citizenship and for being put on voter lists are conflicting. Should a couple of million people be unable to vote, this too will affect the fairness of the election. Other lists must be updated to reflect migration patterns and internal displacement.

Strict rules which dictate that registered voters may only vote in their home district will need to be altered for maximum turnout, including through absentee ballots. Some changes need to be written into the new constitution, not just legislation.

An election to a constituent assembly election is not a general election, but mixed-process polling. Voter education will be an essential function of the EC and the parties if we are to have a valid election at all. It will be

obvious to Nepali and international monitors if voters are ill-informed, say if there is a larger than usual number of invalid ballots.

The election will essentially be a highly-polarised referendum on the monarchy, with high stakes all around, and security will be a major concern. With the army in barracks and the APF greatly distrusted by the Maoists, the job is left to the police. But will the police be able handle the task? Can 45,000 police guard 37,000 potential polling booths? There are shortfalls in all resources needed to run an election. But the biggest problem might not be logistical at all. Can the country survive a postponed election? Will the parties be able to sustain their united front if the polls are shifted to after the monsoon? ●

Editorial p2
The week after



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So far so good

Nepal's unique attempt to manage the conflict locally is an example to the rest of the world

THE WEEK AFTER

Hard to believe it's been just over a week since the signing of the peace accord. The euphoria persists, but there is also great expectation and great impatience.

The breathless live tv coverage from the parking lots of the Summit or the Shangri-La has oscillated from intense optimism to acute pessimism. The people have been taken on a rollercoaster ride, but are now mature enough to see through the media's short attention span and cynicism. Even when a daily overstretched itself to replicate the Pajero scandal by bannerizing a story on the SUVs of leaders, most readers refused to be swayed by its mocking tone.

It's fashionable these days to be disparaging of the seven party leaders and sneer at their perceived incompetence. You hear this superior tone from expat peace consultants, and our own civil society has always bad-mouthed government to prove that it is indispensable. But it was the political parties that steadfastly defended the middle path. They brought down a royal dictatorship through a non-violent pro-democracy movement, and made peace possible by nudging the Maoists into the mainstream.

Of course, the peace process hasn't been smooth. It was never supposed to be. There was the usual fecklessness and disunity, but that is what parties are by definition: they have short political time horizons and they bicker all the time. Those are givens. The fact that the alliance of seven parties achieved its goal shows that it had leaders with vision, who understood that the people most wanted peace, and then went about restoring it despite tremendous odds.

In the past year, while the ultra-right used the security apparatus to enforce its powergrab and the revolutionary left believed change was only possible through bloodshed, the political middle demonstrated the moral superiority of non-violent struggle. The parties are the only entities which do not need the force of arms to gain and retain power. Their reason for being is the electoral process and democracy.

Having said that, the parties can't afford to throw this away. A people's democracy is best safeguarded by improving their lives. The Nepali people have heard too many unkept promises and have been let down too often—this time it must be for real.

The government must not waste any more time in dogmatism and senseless rhetoric. It must get to work to make the peace dividend tangible. The best way to do this is to urgently launch high-profile activities that improve access, create jobs, and make an immediate difference in the lives of the most-neglected Nepalis.

If the seven plus one parties show the same steadfastness and vision towards this goal as they have shown in restoring peace, the political rewards will be great.

After two failed ceasefires, a genuine internal effort is underway to find a negotiated solution. No outside agency has directly mediated, and Nepalis can be proud of this homegrown process.

The changed political



GUEST COLUMN
Chitra B Gurung

scenario that led to the seven party and Maoist alliance brought the Jana Aandolan II through which the violent conflict turned into a peaceful political struggle. Steps have been taken to manage both the state and the Maoist army. The UN has kept itself engaged and is now ready to provide the technical expertise for weapons management through the one-lock mechanism.

Different approaches have been made to manage armies and their weapons in other arenas of conflict. In some places the strength of the national security force has been cut in the process of demilitarisation. In Nepal the strength of the state security force was increased during conflict and it needs to be reduced.



Rebel armies have also been reintegrated into society in conflict areas where the UN has been involved. Some national and rebel armies have been integrated, while others are decommissioned. When Sierra Leone held its election in 2002 there was neither an interim government nor arms management. The old system was kept, the rebels submitted their weapons, 73,000 combatants were disarmed, and a small proportion integrated into the national army. Under this disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process the rebels first came to camps to submit their weapons, and then headed for demobilisation. Those fit for the national army are inducted while the others are sent for skills training to go back to civilian life.

In the Congo, elections are being held after the rebels submitted their weapons. In Burundi an interim government was set up 16 months after the peace agreement in August 2000. Even though 18 of the small groups had signed the peace agreement the UN could only go there in June 2004 due to delays caused by two of the biggest groups. Half the number from both sides have been kept in the integrated security force there. The army was integrated before the interim legislature was formed. The rebel faction was included in the interim parliament, the constitution then formed passed through a referendum, and the army and weapons managed before the election. The global norm that no

party can go for elections with weapons was also used here.

In Nepal, we haven't used the term 'DDR' because neither side wanted it to look like a surrender. The model used here is: camping, UN monitoring, and reintegration (CMR) but can essentially have the same longterm goal.

Nepal's scenario is different from that of the other countries because here the sides at war have now become partners. That is why it was possible to reach an agreement on the one-lock mechanism in the runup to a constituent assembly election.

The UN is the credibility force here to convince the people that monitoring will hold the Maoists to their word. If the weapons come out it will have a huge international impact on the UN's credibility. To make this effective, a Community Arms Collection program is needed so weapons belonging to the militia are also included.

The Nepal Army has 92,000 soldiers under arms, the Nepal Police has 50,000 and the APF 20,000. The agreement to keep a similar number of state security weapons under arms is just a confidence-building exercise. Although we have yet to go into the implementation phase, the fact that such unique flexibility was shown by both sides is an encouraging sign for the future of this process. ●

Ret Lieutenant General CB Gurung is former Deputy Military Adviser and Military Adviser of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at UN headquarters.

Loving to hate Girijababu

GP deserves praise, but there's a reason why he's getting so much of it

Girija Prasad Koirala seems puzzled by the greatness being thrust upon him. By signing an agreement with Maoists, all he'd hoped for was being given the benefit of the doubt. As he himself said, to try to mainstream terrorists is a democrat's duty—and a political gamble. He expected censure from conservatives, but people want to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

There are two reasons why the most controversial figure in Nepali politics has been receiving such adulation. His opponents may be conspiring to dismiss him by burying him in false praise. But those who think they can con Koirala by merely calling him South Asia's tallest political personality don't know him. After all, he's survived being seen as inefficient, corrupt, and irrelevant.

Or maybe even his critics want to strengthen the position of a mainstream leader vis-à-vis the Maoists. Either way,

the image transformation of this much-maligned premier is an interesting case study in how powerful personalities are manipulated by vested interests.

Kathmandu's upper crust and middle classes have always harboured a distaste for the Koirala surname. This animosity dates back to Krishna Prasad Koirala, the bahun-turned-vaishya who dared point a finger at the all-powerful Chandra Shumsher. Powerful old-time bahun clans believe Granpa Koirala's expulsion from Nepal was not because of his political beliefs. They still think he was a lackadaisical trader forced into self-exile when he defaulted on tax collection as a revenue contractor in the tarai.

The loathing of the Valley's elite for the Koiralas grew as "that *madise* from Banaras" became the premier figure in the popular uprising of the 1950s. BP became a pet hate figure after the marginalisation of the 'living martyr' Tanka Prasad Acharya, the downfall of the last maharaja, Mohan Shumsher, and the downgrading of pioneering communist Pushpa Lal Pradhan.

But Ganesh Man himself, the one

person no one belittled, accepted playing second fiddle to BP, and so few dared criticise Koirala in public. Still, the negative undercurrents were obvious among NC supporters who'd gather around Krishna Prasad Bhattarai at the Jamal office while the party was banned.

BP's passing turned the Koiralas into everyone's favourite target. As party secretary, Girija Prasad was called an Indian agent, a pancha-in-waiting, and a spokesperson for Morang's Marwaris. His acceptability among the intelligentsia hit rock-bottom when the GM-KP duo lashed out at him for what his supporters saw as his unwillingness to be a puppet prime minister. When the once-loyal Sher Bahadur Deuba became his fiercest critic, many thought his political career was over.

US ambassadors Michael Malinowski and James Moriarty distrusted GP, and an immensely influential Indian ambassador barely concealed his dislike. After the royal takeover in 2002, a powerful Indian diplomat said smugly in a private conversation, "That man now has no political future."

Now, even Maoists are concerned about Girijababu's health. "Can the Old Man hold on till the constituent assembly elections?" district secretaries and chiefs of the Maoist 'people's government' units are asking. And his once-harsh critics are drowning Koirala in fulsome praise, to draw him away from the supposed influence of the insurgents.

GP's dilemma isn't unique. In the 1950s, BP was blamed for giving too much to the Ranas and Shahs. GM was always tainted by the allegation that he single-handedly created the UML from communist party splinter groups and turned it into an unassailable force. KP Bhattarai lives with the charge of protecting abusers identified by the Mallik Commission.

GP's success in bringing the Maoists into the mainstream is perhaps more important to him than a Nobel nomination. But if an awards committee wants to make an example of a moderator of radicals, chronic Koirala-baiters wouldn't complain too loudly—their distrust of communists is deeper and truer than their distaste for the NC strongman. ●

LETTERS

REALITY CHECK

I was amazed to see GP Koirala and PK Dahal congratulating each other for bringing peace to Nepal. I was even more amazed to hear that the idea of them receiving the Nobel Peace Prize is being touted. For what? Ending a conflict they started? Since when did the generators of Operation Romeos and Kilo Sierras, and the people who recruit children into insurgencies—all resulting in the deaths of 13,000 people—receive awards? What a devaluation of such a prize. They both owe the Nepali people a huge apology and some humility, especially all those children whose lives have been affected.

Even more amazing is the suggestion—made while babbling about Peace and Reconciliation Commissions—that the king and his ministers should be indicted for human rights abuses.

Get a life. By the same token GPK and PKD should jointly be indicted for the deaths of 13,000, not a couple of dozen. Is life so cheap that we can forget those dead, those decapitated and garrotted, those 'class enemies' who struggled for a living in the villages of our land? Shame on anyone who applauds such foolish witchhunting.

As for Kamal Thapa, Comrade Awesome should perhaps give him a medal. Think of Kathmandu traffic—without the curfews the former Home Minister clamped down, the Rhododendron Revolution would have been trampled over by road rage.

KA Tamang, Middlesborough

STUMBLING BLOCKS

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement is a great step forward towards long-lasting peace. But where is its commitment to eliminating political corruption? This was why ten years of multiparty democracy failed in Nepal, and it can happen again. Simply making the monarchy redundant and signing a political declaration will not help avert this kind of crisis.

Abhi, New Delhi

- The Maoists have landed safely and are entertaining the Nepali public, with the participation of our all-powerful neighbours and the UN. From what I gather, the Maoists are living up to their doctrines and road maps—just read about China's Maoist experiment. Personally, I feel no one is playing honestly. It all seems too good to be true.

Topgyal, email

CLEAN NAMES

The Bagmati, Bishnumati, Manahara, and Dhobikhola rivers are choked with untreated sewage and faecal waste from the Valley. Cleaning these rivers in the capital city of the new republic—?—should be top priority. And doing so could be a great platform for our leaders.

Here's what we need: with hard embankments and intercepting drains on either side of the rivers, the waterfront will provide opportunities for planners and developers in the Valley. We need adequate manholes so the main drains are not disturbed in the future, and treatment plants can be located downstream to avoid pollution, and producing fertiliser and cooking gas could provide a new business opportunity.

Finally, as a mark of respect to our peacemakers, the left bank of the Bagmati can be named Comrade Prachanda Bank and the right Sri Girijababu Bank. The banks of other rivers can be named after other deserving peacemakers.

N Grimal, email

SENSATIONAL

The world media has not reported with due importance our historic peace deal. When the bloody

conflict was on, there were sensational programs and news items all around. So why don't they let the whole world know now that a monumental socio-political revolution is taking place through peaceful negotiations in a much-experimented-upon country like Nepal? Can't the world's peace-lovers see that this country needs more attention than ever before?

Divas Sarma, Kathmandu

MONEY FOR NOTHING

You have donor support to start a hydro project. Then you negotiate an agreement that states you get paid even when you don't work. And then project contractors hire more project lawyers than engineers, simply to pry the money away from the government. No surprise there is no incentive to negotiate or complete the work. Finally, if the work is ever completed, you're guaranteed two to three times the going rate for electricity. No wonder there's huge private sector interest in hydro power in Nepal.

Scott Justice, email

PEACE CORPS COME BACK

There is much to be done to restore Nepal to a viable democratic nation. Much of this involves returning the villages to normalcy. Education and infrastructure have suffered greatly due to the insurgency. The Peace Corps had been working in Nepal since 1963 and it had made a huge difference in Nepal. Then two years ago, the United States government, fearing for their safety, ordered the Peace Corps to leave. Many changes have occurred since then, and now it is time to bring the Peace Corps back to Nepal.

Indeed, it is crucial that we do so. There is a pressing and urgent need for the very types of skills for which the Peace Corps is famous: working closely with the people, teaching them and giving them the skills enabling them to live productive lives.

We urge President George W Bush to immediately return the Peace Corps to Nepal. They have been sorely missed, and will be gratefully received.

Lawrence and Joyce Tapper, USA

UNTRUE

In Sophia Tamot's article ('Long Overdue,' #324), I have been falsely accused of having been a "former defaulter". Neither I nor the Jyoti Group has ever been declared a defaulter.

Roop Jyoti, email

CLARIFICATION

On 16 August, the Rastra Bank released a list of defaulters. The Jyoti Group was listed as owing Nepal Bank over Rs 7 million. On 25 August, the Group's loans were restructured, and no longer listed as a defaulter. Then on 28 August, Nepal Bank Limited issued a press release stating the group had never been a defaulter.

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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Torture truths

It's barely a crime in Nepal



ASKING TOO MUCH: Singer Ishwor Gurung (head bowed), was taken away by Maoist cadres in Pokhara for three days last month and says he was tortured and interrogated about his dance restaurant business before being produced in public and subject to this kangaroo 'people's court' in Halan Chok, Lakeside.

MALLIKA ARYAL

Lal Singh Adhikari was arrested by police in the spring of 1996 on suspicion of being a Maoist. He was hanged upside down and his fingernails pulled out with pliers. "First I thought my head would explode, then I lost consciousness. By the

time they threatened to make me dig a hole in which to bury me alive, I thought it was a good idea," says the 47-year-old from Rukum who spent three hellish years in prison. Today, Adhikari can't hear or see very well. He has trouble walking, is forgetful, and looks like the cowering shell of a man.

What happened to him—and to thousands others in the last decade—is barely treated as a crime in Nepal. The state signed the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT) in the mid-1990s, but that commitment languished until the insurgency began, and then the offensives against it. "After that there was pressure to

do something about the torture situation in Nepal, so the government created the Torture Compensation Act to please the international community," says advocate Bidhya Chapagain of Insec. Getting even just an acknowledgment that you have been done wrong is a bureaucratic nightmare. Victims of torture have to file cases against perpetrators within 35 days. Insec estimates that the average case runs about five years and even then, victims are unlikely to get compensation. If a case is decided in favour of the victim, the district office has to recommend the case to the Home Ministry, which then requests the Finance Ministry to send the compensation amount back to the victim's home district. The maximum of Rs 100,000 is barely enough for a person to rebuild their life or even seek medical help. Of the 186 cases filed under the Act so far, 85 have been decided, 27 cases in favour of the plaintiffs. Three victims have received compensation. Advocate Hemang Sharma says that following the provisions of the Act and the requirements of CAT would be a good start. Under CAT, Nepali authorities are required to keep records of the whereabouts of detainees, a provision conspicuously missing from our laws. Only 'departmental action' is taken against those state officials accused of torture. "The

most that can happen is that they get transferred and the case is closed," says Sharma. CVICT estimates that the thousands it counsels annually make up under five percent of the victims who've been tortured, or been traumatised by the war. Lack of witness and victim protection programs is a major reason for such massive under-reporting. "People know that no matter who tortured them, the state cannot protect them. Who wants to be victimised again?" asks Sharma. "The first step is criminalising torture," says Kabiraj Khanal, assistant chief district officer for Lalitpur, and a member of the CAT reporting team. "Security personnel need to know torture is unacceptable, and taught better interrogation techniques," he adds. Victims of torture need institutionalised rehabilitation and counselling programs, says CVICT psychologist Rajan KC "Our experience of working with torture victims shows that they usually seek medical help for physical injuries, but have no clue about their legal rights, and most don't know that their malaise is deep, long-term mental trauma," says KC. Ultimately, the challenge may be less about impunity and more about culture. Jamuna Poudel, an advocate with CVICT, says "Culturally we think it is okay to beat someone up for confession." For that to change, individuals need to stop thinking that a little roughing up helps anything. ●

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Still missing

NARESH NEWAR

As the nation celebrated the 'official' end of the decade-long armed conflict on 21 November, thousands of Nepalis were disappointed to hear nothing about the fate of their missing loved ones. In 2004, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) received 1,600 reports of disappearances at the hands of the security forces alone, making Nepal the country with the highest number of 'disappearances' in the world. After the breakdown of ceasefires in 2001 and 2003, the royal government and the Maoists unleashed a wave of violence against the civilians, arresting or abducting anyone on suspicion of working as 'spies' for the other side. The Society of the Families of the Citizens Disappeared by the State says that far more cases go unreported, and estimates over 5,000 disappearances from the state's side. The peace accord signed last week says that the whereabouts of all the disappeared will be made public in 60 days. According to the National Human Rights Commission, 350 of the 1,768 of the disappeared are still missing. Monitors from the commission visit families in the villages where disappearances were reported to check if their relatives have returned. "A major difficulty in monitoring disappearances and returns is that people often move away from home when they are released," says Shyam Babu Kafle, who works with disappearance and abduction at the NHRC. The other problem is more chilling. Kafle maintains that as long as the missing people are still alive, they are often found. A number of activists we spoke to agree, saying that the remaining 350 are likely not be found, and their names not mentioned in government records, because they are likely to have died in custody. Despite pressure from families, civil society, and the OHCHR, the 49 missing from the Bhairabnath Battalion in Maharajganj, Kathmandu are not discussed by the government, and the Maoists are quiet about 70 of the 750 people reported abducted by them. Rights activists and the OHCHR believe impunity on disappearances will be a major stumbling block in the reconstruction process. "The culture of impunity in Nepal is a key hurdle in promoting rule of law, human rights, and democracy," argues human rights lawyer Mandira Sharma. OHCHR believes people implicated after finding evidence of criminal responsibility should be brought before a civilian court. The peace accord provides for a truth commission, but its implementation remains a big question mark. Until then, people just want to see their family member's name on a list that acknowledges that they are disappeared. "If that does not happen, we will launch a street revolution, even against the Maoists," explains Sharmila Tripathi, president of the Society. ●

On top

Samsung Electronics has claimed the world's top spot in sales and revenue for its LCD tvs in the latest economic quarter. Samsung accounted for 13.2 percent of all LCD tvs sold worldwide in the July-September period, and the company global revenue share was 15.6 percent.

Keeping time

Seiko's brand new showroom and service centre at Rama Griha, New Road, which opened on 27 November in partnership with Time World, will showcase the best of its products for the Nepali market, including lines like Arctura, Sportura, Premier, Vivace, and Rivoli. The showroom also has an introductory offer of a gift with each purchase and free servicing of all Seiko watches until 26 December.

Womanly assets

Bank of Kathmandu is launching a new Griha Laxmi Bachat account, targeted at boosting savings among female customers. Women can make a minimum deposit of Rs 5,000 at any Valley branch, or Rs 2,500 with Bank of Kathmandu branches outside Kathmandu and open a Griha Laxmi Bachat account. A lucky draw every Friday will award one account holder with Rs 25,000 worth of Samsung household appliances, and a bumper prize draw every three months will give away household appliances worth Rs 100,000.

Low down payment

As part of Bajaj's 'Jadoo' campaign, motorcycle riders can now opt for the popular Bajaj Discover DTSI motorbike with a down payment of just Rs 11,111.

NEW PRODUCTS

HAPPY FEET: Bess Footwear has started marketing BF Dear Hill Shoes in Nepal. Although targeted more specifically at youth, the range is for all ages and includes formal, casual, and sports shoes, all of which come with a six-month warranty.

NEW DUO: Maruti is launching the new Wagon R, which boasts 10 percent more fuel efficiency and a sleeker new SUV-inspired design, and the Wagon R Duo, which can run on petrol or LPG (which reduces running costs by about 33 percent). The new Wagon R is available in eight colours, and with full options costs Rs 1.45 million. The newly-launched Duo Wagon R is priced at Rs 1.56 million.

REGISTERED: The new SAM4S Electronic Cash Register from South Korea is now available in Nepal through SOI. Its built-in software has programmable tax rates and a backup battery, and it can also generate customised reports.

NEW RIO: Continental Trading is following the success of the KIA Rio in Nepal with new models of the small city car, in sedan or hatchback options. The all new Rio has upgraded engines and improved fuel economy.

Say no, voluntarily

Here's a real chance to fight graft and increase political transparency

As the euphoria of the peace accord dies down, the eight parties will be hunkering down to form the interim government. But surely in the back of their minds they



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

are already thinking about where and how to find the money to fight the elections to the constituent assembly elections and, hopefully, general elections 24 months after that.

The parties have been out of business since October 2002, and their coffers have dried up. Apart from the NC-(D) and the UML, who made some hay during the royal sunshine, the others are pretty much washed up. Where do they make the money?

There are no new planes for the national flag carrier, the state oil corporation is itself haemorrhaging, and no big new development projects are in sight.

For the Maoists too, the lockdown of their guns will mean a significant decrease in the 'voluntary' euphoria they successfully roused over the last decade. Only in Kathmandu Valley did the comrades realise that their version of 'voluntarism' was not going to work everywhere. Businesses have their own take on voluntarism, which is that money begets money, as cash-strapped parties are happy to dole out favours in exchange for liquidity.

The Beed feels strongly that

the situation now calls for renewed harping on the need to legitimise political giving. Part of the political change should be that the days of 'informal service charge' and 'favour levies' come to an end. It's a simple reality—parties need funding and historically this comes from individuals and businesses. Surely if the parties can decide on issues like the monarchy, they can reach a consensus on something this basic.

Donations to political parties should be made legitimate and capped at a certain percentage of business turnover, profits, or wealth. These expenses should be

animosity and strife between party members.

Contributions could initially be made to a fund that gets distributed to all political parties based on how many seats they have in the interim expanded parliament. If Nepal's formal and informal business turnover is about Rs 250 billion, then a percentage of the same, say Rs 2.5 billion between the parties, should provide enough money for their election campaigns and daily operations.

The CPN-(Maoist) has always said that its fundraising is transparent. Perhaps it is time for them to provide leadership on



tax-deductible for the individual or organisation. Political parties which receive money in this manner should provide receipts. Parties can be tax exempt to a certain extent, but they'd need to file returns.

Even as they understand the difficulties in tax assessment, the parties will be forced into transparency. This is a head-on challenge to the larger problem of levies for favours. And the fact is, the way things are now just a fraction of the money collected informally in the name of the parties actually goes into the parties' coffers, thereby creating

this issue. In the coming political battle, this could be their comparative advantage over the covertly funded operations of the other parties.

There are many chances in front of Nepal now that do not come often. This particular one could be catalytic in setting off many other changes too. Here, finally, is an opportunity to tackle the bulk of graft. There are many allegations against many leaders under investigation, and the New Nepal will perhaps not pardon their sins. ●

www.arthabeed.com

“Foreign investors need fair treatment”



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Nepali Times spoke with Ruslan Zaika, CEO of Spice Nepal, on the state of telecom in Nepal and the foreign investment scenario.

Nepali Times: Where is Spice Nepal business-wise?

Ruslan Zaika: Today, Spice Nepal and its Mero Mobile brand is the fastest growing and most innovative telecom operator in Nepal. In our first year of operations Mero Mobile built a state-of-the-art mobile GSM network which supports voice, data and video transmission. The Mero Mobile family has about 300,000 subscribers who can make

and receive telephone calls, organise conference calls, have internet access, send SMS, SMS to e-mail, MMS, download and set Personal Ring Back Tone (PRBT), pictures and melodies, call waiting, and missed call notification service.

Has your performance matched your expectations?

We're making very good progress despite problems, such as political instability, and the reluctance of other telecom operators to share facilities and infrastructure. For example, we still don't have enough capacity on interconnection links. Difficulties are part of the work but we'd really appreciate the government paying attention to our problems and providing Spice Nepal the same rights and facilities as other operators. We need an International Gateway license, and a decision about unequal royalties compared to other operators.

What are Spice Nepal's plans for the near future?

We're still the only operator in Nepal to provide high-speed mobile Internet access based on GPRS and EDGE technologies, this means our customers can be really mobile and wireless, and use services such as MMS. High speed data transmission services are also very useful for corporate clients and banks to access corporate networks or connecting Points Of Sales. In the near future we plan to introduce new services based on mobile internet.

We will soon expand to Janakpur, Siraha, Rajbiraj, Bhadrapur, Gaur, Kalaiya, Lumbini, and Nepalganj among others. It's just a matter of time that we cover remote

areas like Jomsom and Namche.

In the near future we're going to be very fast and aggressive, covering new cities and areas, providing new services and opportunities to our customers.

Why the delays in international roaming agreements?

We already offer roaming facilities in major cities in India, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Sri Lanka. But as I said before, the government has not provided us an international gateway license, and we have to send international and roaming traffic from and to our network over links to one of the two existing license holders. Despite many requests, one still refuses us to send and receive roaming traffic through its network, and the other operator accepts our traffic, but can't ensure quality. Normally, the government should be interested to resolve such situations and request the license holders to provide adequate quality to us as their customer, or allow Spice Nepal to organise its own international connections. The government needs to step up its role from that of just a regulator to a facilitator.

What's it like to do business in Nepal? What works well, and what would you change?

Nepal has huge potential for further development and growth and we're lucky to live and do business here. With peace and a stable political situation, changes in some foreign investment policies, and a fair attitude to foreign investors on the part of the government could attract a lot of potential foreign investors whose money and experience can help Nepal move up in the region.

"National power"

Jhalanath Khanal, Permanent Central Committee member, CPN-UML *Budhabar*, 29 November

Did the party decide on whether or not to join the interim government at Friday's central committee meeting?

The meeting analysed the recent political developments following the peace agreement. Nepal will have an interim constitution, an interim parliament, and an interim government, all a result of the sacrifices made by the people. The CPN-UML is a national power driving this hurricane. Surely then it is a historical need for us to be involved in all three institutions.

But the leadership seems confused about whether or not it will join in.

There is no question about joining or not joining, honour or dishonour. This is about the right of the CPN-UML to participate in parliament and in the government. The country must now head towards a democratic republic and the achievements of the people's struggle must be institutionalised. The CPN-UML will be involved in this with determination and will use these institutions for the betterment of the country.

Will you send the team that is in government presently to the interim government?

When talking about the interim parliament and government we must not forget that the last Jana Andolan took the form of a peaceful revolution. Parliament and the government are tools to make the most of that revolution. A different team will join the interim government.

बुधवार



Has the decision already been made?

We are heading in that direction. The central committee has already said we need a new team. It is yet to be decided who will be in the team and how big it will be. More important than the team itself are the reasons for joining the government.

Will your senior leaders join the interim government or will you send representatives according to the principles of inclusiveness?

Forty-eight seats will have to be filled. We will probably get six to ten of those seats. Whatever number we get, we will fill on the basis of what is necessary. Some will go on the basis of political leadership, and others on the basis of inclusiveness from various regions.

What will be your party's role in the government?

From our side there will be a few new rookie comrades entering the government. We do not have the right to criticise those who are going in for the first time, but we can question those that have time and again been in government, who have experience, but are still unable to perform their duty.

Won't the growing distance between the UML and the NC affect the new government?

Politics in this country is gravely polarised. The ideological and practical polarisation between those who are for a democratic republic and those for the monarchy is essential. I do not take this widening gap as unnatural. But if the NC decides to go for a democratic republic, this distance will lessen.

Looter Maoists

Rajdhani, 30 November

राजधानी

NEPALGANJ—The Maoists have been looting poor farmers in Banke and Bardia. This week alone they seized over 100 quintals of food grains in these two districts. Khadga Singh Tharu, Diwakar Sharma, and Risiram Sharma from Naubasta VDC of Banke watched helplessly as a group of Maoists led by 'Uday' loaded their food grains onto three tractors.

These farm owners were told they had no right to any grain they grew as long as their land remained under control of the Maoists. Maoist cadres also seized the grain harvested from 14 bighas of land belonging to the late Nepali Congress (NC) worker Shanker Shah in Mahadebpuri VDC, ignoring his widow's pleas.



KIRAN PANDAY

Shah was killed by Maoists and his family driven out from the village about eight years ago.

Mukesh Swar of Gola VDC, Bardia also lost 200 quintals of grain to the Maoists. They refuse to return eight bighas of his land, which they have occupied for the past eight years. "We had hoped the Maoists would not act like this after the peace agreement, but they have not improved," said Swar. Many civilians like Swar had hoped that the peace process would change their difficult situation. But sadly, poor farmers are still the ones suffering the most from Maoist intimidation.

Fakes arrested

Janadharana, 30 November

जनधारणा

Two fake astrologers of Indian origin who had been regularly advertising their alleged astrology skills in the back pages of *Kantipur* have been nabbed by the Nepal Police. The police arrested Barku Joshi alias 'Swami Rajuraj' from Hotel Vaishali and Nausuji More alias 'Dr Duttarajan' from Hotel Pisang.

The arrests were made after several victims, who were duped of large amounts of money, complained to the police. The police have received permission from the Kathmandu District Court to proceed with the investigation.

While printing advertisements, newspapers that people have come to trust must



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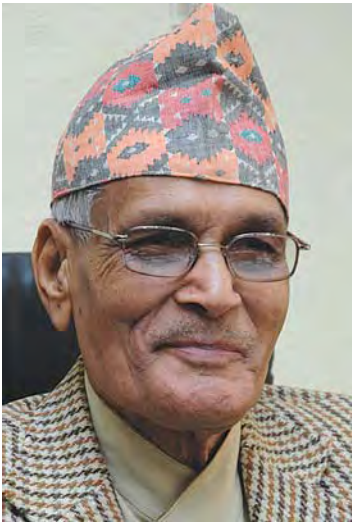
Tastes like eating a fruit



also be careful about disseminating accurate information. *Kantipur*, which was printing advertisements publicising the two fakes, only published the news of the arrests in a small column in its inner pages. Perhaps the Press Council should question this as a violation of the code of ethics.

Anti-Gyanendra
Chhalphal, 26 November

Former vice chairman of the council of ministers Tulsi Giri has openly been blaming King Gyanendra ever since the Rayamajhi Commission report recommended action against Giri. At a recent meeting at Kamal Thapa's residence, sources say Giri accused the king of being indecisive and making him unpopular, he also said the king



KIRAN PANDAY

never followed his advice. Giri regularly holds meetings with royalists and RPP leaders at his residence in Baluwatar. In the last few weeks he has also met the king's advisor Sharad Chandra Shah several times. Giri now maintains that it will be extremely difficult to save the king. Giri also said that the 1 February takeover occurred with India's approval. Before the coup, the king in a meeting with Giri had said the only way to save democracy in Nepal was for him to take over, and India had supported this decision. "It was only about four days later, when the international community started boycotting the king's takeover, that India changed its stance," said Giri.

Needless army
Nepal, 3 December

The Nepal Army is now almost 250 years old. It was through the NA that Prithbi Narayan Shah successfully united Nepal. During those days, the army was useful in establishing a kingdom and protecting it. Then it was also natural for the kings to find it impossible to have a kingdom without an army serving under them. But today things are different, and we have a debate about whether the army is necessary or not. Some feel that Nepal would be highly insecure in the absence of an army, especially when the Indian and Chinese soldiers have been mobilised along the border. But the important thing to remember is, even if this country came under any military attack, Nepal would never have the military strength to face China or India. It

would be ridiculous to assume that a country would lose its sovereignty in the absence of an army. On the contrary, if we are to remove the army from our country, it will boost the dignity of both our soldiers and the citizens. It would especially help in making the arms management of the Maoists successful. Even now, the process of arms management is still filled with doubts and there is uncertainty about its effectiveness. However removing the army also means depriving the livelihoods of a large number of personnel. The state has to think of an effective employment programme for around 95,000 from the NA and 35,000 from the PLA. This will directly or indirectly affect the livelihood of around 500,000 people. The most important factors associated with the army is economy and politics. With an already weak national economy, the country can no longer afford such a modern army. It already costs around Rs 10 billion annually to finance the NA. In addition, it would cost another Rs 830 million if the country is to also look after the PLA soldiers. So instead of spending such colossal funds on our military, the amount if used to invest in their future employment would release them from our age-old imperialistic tradition. Removing the army would not only avoid any future military coup as in Thailand but would also avert the possibility of future dictators. It is high time that we change our traditional mindset, the belief that a state can only run if we have an army with weapons. There are already 14 countries around the world without armies. We can very well be the 15th.

New money

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 27 November
The business community is elated by the recent peace agreement, as peace has always been the first condition for business and investment to thrive. There are already small but encouraging signs in the share market. This particular accord like any other detailed peace accord in the world is not limited to politics. It promises economic and social transformations too. Poverty and economic backwardness was the main reason the Maoists' resorted to arms. Now it is thus all the more necessary to initiate programs to boost the income level of the ordinary Nepali. However, the political parties have not done their homework on what the new economic policy should look like. Contradictory party policies on capital formation are a huge obstacle in the making of an economic policy. Since the roadmap is still unclear, entrepreneurs are still hesitant about investing in Nepal. On the other hand, the business community does not trust the Maoists, though they are set to be part of the political system. Maoist leaders at different levels have different opinions on globalisation and nationalisation. Parties that earlier supported an open economy while in power now seem uncertain about it. This confusion makes the work of the National Planning Commission difficult. Donors are ready to provide assistance, but are awaiting a clear plan. The 10th plan, whose poverty alleviation strategic paper was used to seek donor assistance, comes to an end this fiscal year. However, discussions on economic policy are often redundant—there is no alternative to an open economy. Ten years ago, Nepal started moving in this direction, and so far it has been successful in poverty alleviation and economic modernisation. More work needs to be done on mainstreaming rural communities in development, narrowing the gap between the haves and have-nots, the best use of resources, decentralisation, and good governance. Now, all parties need to agree on an open economic policy that is also socially responsible. Just like we agreed on the political roadmap, we should also draft an economic agreement. Donors want a clear plan, and an economic policy could be another step in ensuring that we don't repeat our mistakes.

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हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 17 November - 1 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“ So, what is your name, hakim sahib? ”

Raute chief Rambahadur Shahi to Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal during a meeting Kathmandu between Maoist and Raute leaders, *Kantipur*, 30 November

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100% Woman (Canada, 2004)
Dir: Karen Duthie, Duration: 51 min
Trials and tribulations of a transgender athlete.
On at: 5:45 PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall A

37 Uses for a Dead Sheep (UK, 2006)
Dir: Ben Hopkins, Duration: 87 min
A Central Asian tribe chooses exile over communism.
On at: 5PM, 8 December at Gurukul
2PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall B

Alone Across Australia (Australia, 2003)
Dir: Ian Darling and Jon Muir, Duration: 52 min
A man and his dog go for a long walk.
On at: 10AM, 10 December at RCC, Hall A

Alta Rezia Freeride Tour (Switzerland, 2005)
Dir: Alec Wohlgroth, Duration: 30 min
Champion mountain bikers 'freeride'.
On at: 10.30 AM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Anupa Pafadnam/ Go Pafadnam (Spain)
Dir: Lluís Jene and Oriol Gispert, Duration: 57 min
Burkina Faso's top cyclist trains in Spain.
On at: 5.45 PM, 10 December at RCC, Hall B

Beton/ Cement (Israel, 2006)
Dir: Nechama Goldstein, Duration: 26 min
Crossing the line for survival.
On at: To Be Arranged, 9 December at RCC, Hall B

Beyond the Call (USA, 2006)
Dir: Adrian Belic, Duration: 82 min
US war veterans to the rescue.
On at: 2PM, 11 December at Gurukul
11.45 AM, 9 December at RCC, Hall B

Be Zi/ Quilts (China, 2003)
Dir: Ju An Qi, Duration: 92 min
Candid confessions about quilts.
On at: 10.30 AM, 11 December at RCC, Hall B

Call it Karma (Canada, 2004)
Dir: Geoff Browne, Duration: 47 min
A Rinpoche returns home.
On at: 5.45 PM, 9 December at RCC, Hall B
5PM, 11 December at Tourist Service Centre

China Blue (USA, 2005)
Dir: Micha Peled, Duration: 87 min

Inside a blue jeans factory.
On at: 11.30 AM, 11 December at RCC, Hall A
2PM, 9 December at Gurukul

Chulo, Cholo ra Banduk (Nepal)
Dir: Subina Shrestha, Duration: 22 min
A glimpse of women in Nepal's Maoist Party.
On at: 11.30 AM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A
6PM, 11 December at Gurukul

Ciao Martina (Poland, 2004)
Dir: Dariusz Zaluski, Duration: 21 min
A climber is far from home.
On at: 4.30 PM, 9 December at RCC, Hall B

Climate's First Orphans (India, 2006)
Dir: Nila Madhab Panda, Duration: 22 min
Climate change impacts coastal Orissa.
On at: TBA, 10 December at RCC, Hall B

Dancing Kathmandu (USA, 2006)
Dir - Sangita Shresthova, Duration: 43 min
Reconnecting with Nepal through dance.
On at: 3PM, 8 December at Gurukul
11AM, 10 December at RCC, Hall A

De un hil/ By a Thread (Spain, 2005)
Dir: Juan Carlos Romera, Duration: 9 min
A climber's faith is tested.
On at: 5.15 PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Den Sidste Aere/ The Last Honours (Denmark, 2006)
Dir: Birgitte Glavind Sperber, Duration: 29 min
A Pakistani Kalash person passes away.
On at: TBA, 9 December at Gurukul
TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Der Propellervogel/ The Propellorbird (Animation, Germany, 2005)
Dir: Jan Locher & Thomas Hinke, Duration: 5 min
About four birds.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Devta Activists (India, 2005)
Dir: Sanjay Barnela, Duration: 28 min
Negotiating tradition with contemporary discourses on conservation.
On at: TBA, 10 December at RCC, Hall B

Die Gorillas meines Grossvaters/ The

Gorillas of my Grandfather (Austria, 2004)
Dir: Adrian Warren, Duration: 53 min
Demystifying the mountain gorilla.
On at: 10.30 AM, 9 December at RCC, Hall B

Flying over Everest (Italy, 2004)
Dir: Fabio Toncelli, Duration: 60 min
A man, a hang-glider, and two birds.
On at: 1PM, 8 December at Tourist Service Centre
10.30 AM, 9 December at RCC, Hall A

Footprints (UK)
Dir: Ben Hopkins, Duration: 60 min
Mines turn homelands into hostile environments.
On at: 10.30 AM, 10 December at RCC, Hall B

Greina (Switzerland, 2006)
Dir: Villi Hermann, Duration: 28 min
A Swiss farmer encounters change.
On at: TBA, 11 December at Tourist Service Centre
TBA, 10 December at RCC, Hall B

Himalayan Dreams (Maldives, 2006)
Dir: Ahmed Shafeeu and Ali Rasheed, Duration: 28 min
Maldivian longing for Himalayan heights.
On at: 5PM, 9 December at Gurukul
4PM, 7 December at RCC, Hall A

I sona su la torns/ They are Playing Over the Towers (Italy, 2004)
Dir: Detomas Margherita, Duration: 9 min
The Dolomites are alive with music.
On at: 3.30 PM, 9 December at RCC, Hall A
3.45 PM, 10 December at Gurukul

Invisible Children: Rough Cut (USA, 2006)
Dir: Jason Russell, Duration: 55 min
Abduction and child soldiers in Uganda.
On at: 3:15 PM, 9 December at RCC, Hall B
6.45 PM, 8 December at Gurukul

Kekizili: Mountain Patrol (China/ USA)
Dir: Lu Chuan, Duration: 85 min
Risking life for the Tibetan antelope.
On at: 5.30 PM, 7 December at RCC, Hall A
4PM, 8 December at Tourist Service Centre

Kilimanjaro (UK, 2005/06)
Dir: Richard Heap and Ben Pritchard,

Duration: 52 min
Disabled climbers battle the odds.
On at: 10.30 AM, 8 December at RCC, Hall B
3PM, 11 December at Tourist Service Centre

Lebenslauf (Animation, Germany, 2005)
Dir: Thilo Ewers and Waldemar Fast, Duration: 3 min
Braving life.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Light of the Himalaya (USA, 2006)
Dir: Michael Brown, Duration: 69 min
Climbing and curing cataracts.
On at: 12 noon, 9 December at RCC, Hall A
4PM, 10 December at Tourist Service Centre

Malenkaya Katerina/ Tiny Katerina (Russia, 2004)
Dir: Ivan Golovnev, Duration: 24 min
A girl grows up in Siberia.
On at: 3.30 PM, 11 December at Gurukul
4.45 PM, 9 December at RCC, Hall A

Manaslu (Japan)
Duration: 112 min
The Japanese ascent of Manaslu.
On at: 2PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall A

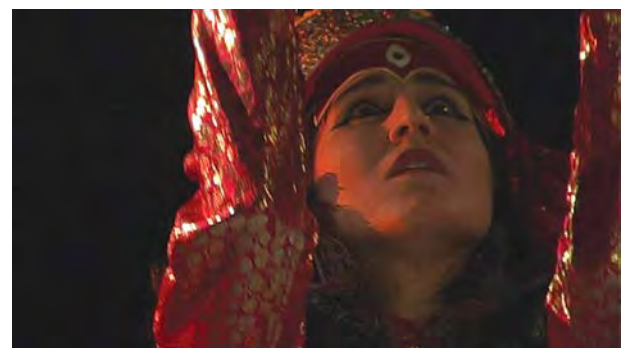
Meeting Me (Germany)
Dir: Angela Steffen, Duration: 5 min
A short story about the discovery of the world.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

New Samaritans (Israel, 2006)
Dir: Alexander Shabataev, Sergey Grankin, & Efim Kuchuk, Duration: 52 min
Foreign brides 'refresh' the nation's blood.
On at: 4.30 PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall A
5PM, 10 December at Gurukul

No Limits (Germany)
Dir: Heidi Wittlinger, Anja Perl, and Max Stolzenberg, Duration: 1 min
A driver shows no mercy.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Nomads: Wandering Women of the Whitewater Tribe (USA, 2006)
Dir: Polly Green, Duration: 21 min
About three compassionate kayakers.

Mountain films



The fourth edition of the non-competitive biennial Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (Kimff) begins 7 December. Over five days, more than 70 documentaries, features, animation, and shorts from 26 countries will be screened back-to-back simultaneously at the **Russian Cultural Centre (RCC) in Kamal Pokhari, Gurukul in Old Baneswor, and the Tourist Service Centre on Exhibition Road**. Kimff will open with filmmaker Sangita Shresthova's Dancing Kathmandu (premiere) a US/ Nepal venture that explores classical dance in Kathmandu. Nazir Sabir, the first Pakistani to scale Mount Everest is the chief guest at this year's Kimff. Sabir earned Pakistan's

prestigious President's Award for Pride of Performance in 1982 and The Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Star of Distinction) in 2001 for his outstanding achievements in mountaineering. A committed environmentalist, Sabir is involved in conservation activities in Pakistan's northern areas. Sabir has been a jury member at the Banff International Film Festival, Canada and the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival. This year's Kimff is a tribute to Dr Harka Gurung, eminent author and geographer, and staunch supporter of the festival since its inception in 2000. Two books, *Atlas of Nepal* and a collection of his Nepali writings, will be released at a special tribute session. Kimff '06 will also

present a retrospective of films by the late Narain Singh Thapa, an Indian filmmaker of Nepali origin who specialised in films on Himalayan Valleys and mountains. Kimff '06 will also showcase "Best of Banff", a selection of films from Canada's premier mountain film festival, and a 'Know Your Himal' quiz about the Nepal Himalaya. In collaboration with WWF Nepal, the festival will feature a photo competition and exhibition on Nepal's highlands. The only award given out at the festival will be the Audience Award.

More information at Kimff Secretariat, Himal Association at 5542544, Patan Dhoka, www.himalassociation.org/kimff



On at: 3PM, 10 December at Tourist Service Centre
2PM, 9 December at RCC, Hall B

Pass Me Over the Binoculars... (Switzerland)
Dir: Pierre-Antoine Hiroz and Benoit Aymon,
Duration: 27 min
How far should rescue work go?
On at: 4.30 PM, 10 December at RCC, Hall A

Planet Earth—Mountains (UK, 2006)
Dir: Vanessa Berlowitz, Duration: 49 min
Spectacularly visual intrigues of creatures around the world.
On at: 10.30 AM, 11 December at RCC, Hall A
5.30 PM, 10 December at Tourism Service Centre

Praszczur/ Grandpa (Poland, 2005)
Dir: Mirosław Dembinski, Duration: 26 min
79-year-old Janusz is passionate about paragliding.
On at: 2PM, 10 December at RCC, Hall B
4PM, 11 December at Tourist Service Centre

Riding Solo to the Top of the World (India, 2005)
Dir: Gaurav Jani, Duration: 94 min
Soul-searching during an adventure.
On at: 5.30 PM, 10 December at RCC, Hall A

Schneeweisse Schwarznasen/ Snow-white Blacknoses (Switzerland, 2006)
Dir: Sylviane Neuenschwander, Duration: 86 min
A comic and not so comic look at sheep-breeding.
On at: 12 noon, 10 December at RCC Hall A

School Among Glaciers (Bhutan, 2005)
Dir: Dorji Wangchuck, Duration: 60 min
A teacher's tryst in remote Bhutan.
On at: 11.45 AM, 10 December at RCC, Hall B

Solo un Cargador/ Porter (Peru, 2003)
Dir: Juan Alejandro Ramirez, Duration: 20 min
A Peruvian porter thinks aloud.
On at: TBA, 9 December at Gurukul
TBA, 7 December at RCC, Hall A

The Last Race (Nepal, 2005)
Dir: Alex Gabbay and Subina Shrestha,
Duration: 23 min
A touching tale of friendship.

On at: TBA, 11 December at Gurukul
TBA, 9 December at RCC, Hall A

The Lord of Darjeeling (France)
Dir: Xavier de Lauzanne, Duration: 53 min
A tale of a tea planter.
On at: 3PM, 9 December at Tourist Service Centre
3PM, 7 December at RCC, Hall A

The Other Final (Netherlands, 2002)
Dir: Johan Kramer, Duration: 53 min
Football, friendship and 'feeling hot hot hot' in Bhutan.
On at: 5PM, 9 December at Tourist Service Centre

The Value of Women (Denmark)
Dir: Birgitte Glavind Sperber, Duration: 40 min
Pakistan's Kalash minority discuss love, marriage and bride wealth.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

The Women's Kingdom (USA, 2005)
Dir: Xiaoli Zhou, Duration: 21 min
Women rule in Moscuo, China.
On at: 3.45 PM, 9 December at Gurukul
4PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Trailblazing (Canada, 2005)
Dir: Lisa Hoffe, Duration: 24 min
Three Nepali sisters show the way.
On at: TBA, 9 December at RCC, Hall A
TBA, 10 December at Tourist Service Centre

Treacling Down (Sri Lanka, 2005)
Dir: Upali Gamlath, Duration: 14 min
Profits trickle down in Sri Lanka.
On at: 3. 15 PM, 10 December at RCC, Hall B

View From a Grain of Sand (USA, 2006)
Dir: Meena Nanji, Duration: 82 min
Afghan women speak on conflict.
On at: 4PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall B
2PM, 10 December at Gurukul

Women of K2 (USA, 2003)
Dir: Jeff Rhoads, Duration: 47 min
Death on the 'savage mountain'.
On at: 12.15 PM, 11 December at RCC, Hall B

Waiting (India)
Dir: Atul Gupta and Shabnam Ara,
Duration: 39 min
Missing men and 'half widows' in Kashmir.
On at: TBA, 10 December at Gurukul
TBA, 9 December at RCC, Hall A

We Corner People (Nepal)
Dir: Kesang Tseten, Duration: 50 min
An impoverished Nepali village gets a bridge.
On at: 4PM, 9 December, Tourist Service Centre
6PM, 9 December, RCC, Hall A

Words of My Perfect Teacher (Canada, 2005)
Dir: Lesley Ann Patten, Duration: 103 min
Dzongsar Khyentse Norbu is not your typical teacher.
On at: 6:15 PM, 10 December at Gurukul
11.30 AM, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

BEST OF BANFF
Balancing Point (USA)
Dir: Dany Brown, Duration: 6 min
'Reverse destruction' of balanced rock sculpture.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Cavewoman (Scotland)
Dir: David Brown and Paul Diffley, Duration: 14 min
A humourous tale of a woman in a man's world.
On at: 2.50 PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Charles, Edouard ou le temps suspendu/ Suspended Time (France)
Dir : Bernard Boyer, Duration: 26 min
Two elderly bachelors on a mountain farm.
On at: 2PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Creatures of Habit (USA)
Dir: Trey Chace, Duration 12 min
Kayaking the extreme.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Everyday Extreme (Sweden)
Dir: David Kvart, Duration: 4 min
Julien makes his every day extreme.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Hockey Night... in Ladakh (Canada)
Dir: Baiba Auders Morrow and Pat Morrow,
Duration: 9 min

A Himalayan-sized passion for Canada's national sport.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Off Road to Athens (Custom World Tour Edit) (USA)
Dir: Jason Berry, Duration: 51 min
Eight US cyclists hope to make the Olympic team.
On at: 6PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Return2Sender: Bug Out (USA)
Dir: Peter Mortimer, Duration: 10 min
A ten-year-old's commentary on climbing.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Sur le fil des 4,000 (France)
Dir: Gilles Chappaz, Duration: 50 min
Adventure in the Alps.
On at: 3.30 PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

The Khumbu Mighty-Mites (USA)
Dir: Karl Swingle, Duration: 3 min
Khumbu's children enjoy home-made skis.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

The Lost People of Mountain Village (USA)
Dir: Carol Black and Neal Marlens, Duration: 15 min
We may never know what really happened.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

The Magic Mountain (Canada)
Dir: Pat Morrow, Duration: 50 min
Offbeat story of a Canadian educator.
On at: 2PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

Unconquerable Summit (Kazakhstan)
Dir: Vladimir Tulkin, Duration: 40 min
Life and times of alpinist Anatoli Boukreev.
On at: 4.45 PM, 8 December at RCC, Hall A

UFO (USA)
Dir: Stephen Burgess, Duration: 6 min
Unusual flying objects galore.
On at: TBA, 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Whiteshine (Canada)
Dir: Charles Boileau, Duration: 10 min
A new style montage in the freeskiiing world.
On at: TBA, , 8 December at RCC, Hall B

Declaration delayed

The UN General Assembly's Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) has chosen to not pass, not reject, but amend the draft resolution on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The delay came after Namibia and other African nations proposed the amendments saying that "some provisions ran counter to the[n] national constitutions", and that deferring its adoption would allow for more consultations. The Declaration aims to raise international standards for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples.

The decision comes amidst a gathering of representatives of indigenous peoples organisations held at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu, to present their findings on an assessment of the first UN Decade of Indigenous Peoples.

Alok Tumbahangphey

At peace, at home

Land transactions in the Valley have declined sharply since the start of the current fiscal year, says the Malpot (Land Revenue) Office in Dillibajar. "Buying and selling of land has gone down by over 50 percent in the past four months," says Ramesh Subedi, a non-gazetted officer at the Malpot Office. Daily transactions have gone down from over 120 to around 50 per day.

The drop in the number of transactions has been largely attributed to the success of Jana Andolan II and the peace process. "People are safe in their villages now, so they aren't migrating to Kathmandu," explained real estate agent Jit Kumal. During the conflict thousands fled to Kathmandu from the districts due to Maoist intimidation, extortion, and abductions.

Despite the fall in trade, land revenue hasn't really been affected, because collection depends not just on the number, but also on the location and cost of a transaction, as well as on periodic payments from large landholders. Last year, the Dillibajar Malpot Office collected Rs 603.67 million in land revenue, while in the past four months it collected Rs 220.23 million.

Sophia Tamot

Visit Nepal, if you can

Despite the political optimism, the international arrivals figure (by air only) last month was 4.4 percent lower than that for October last year. The Immigration Office at Tribhuvan International Airport says just over 36,851 visitors entered Nepal this month, and that there has been a significant increase in the number of visitors from Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, France, Norway, Spain, and the US.



AJAYA JOSHI

Arrivals from SAARC countries, especially India, have dropped the most. Aditya Baral from Nepal Tourism Board for the most part attributes this to the significantly fewer flights between Kathmandu and Indian cities. Cosmic, [R]NAC, and Indian Airlines flights to Delhi, Calcutta, and Benaras have been cut in the last few months.

In recent years, tourism entrepreneurs have complained that there are simply not enough flights coming into Nepal. This tourist season was no exception, and flights into and out of Nepal through to the end of the year have been fully booked for months.

As a stopgap measure, before Dasain the government announced that it would allow more flights into the country. Airlines like Korean Air, GMG Bangladesh, Air Arabia, Etihad, Orient Thai, and Sri Lankan Airlines (again) have recently been permitted to operate in Nepal and are expected to meet the rising demand. Air Arabia's first flight in was on 7 November, Korean Air's the week after, and Thai Orient is expected to start in coming weeks.

Mallika Aryal

High level homophobia

Nima Lama, a 24-year-old transsexual from Nuwakot, died last Sunday after drinking tainted alcohol sold to her by two unidentified children. Though there is no evidence yet that this was a hate crime, the Blue Diamond Society, with which Lama was associated, says it was a "planned attack" on sexual minorities in Nepal, and follows recent physical attacks on other members of the society in Lajimpat.

Lama, who was celebrating her birthday with eight friends in Baudha, had bought what police and doctors say was most likely spirit used to light burners at banquets. Sunil Babu Pant, president of the Society, says Lama did not receive adequate treatment and was moved unnecessarily between hospitals.

Pant and other members of the BDS called on Prime Minister Koirala, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and other leaders of the seven-party alliance to include protection of the rights of sexual minorities in the new constitution.

Two days later, on 29 November, at the third national consultation meeting organised by the Women Rehabilitation Centre, Foreign Minister KP Oli said that he and his party had "nothing to do with homosexuals", and later refused to speak to a small group of transgendered people who approached him. At the same meeting, Amrita Thapa, general secretary of the CPN(M) Mahila Sanghathan said "homosexuality is unnatural and pollutes society".

Alok Tumbahangphey

"Maybe (janajatis) should have their own political party."



MARTY LOGAN

The United Nations created the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2002 to advise the world body on issues concerning the world's 370 million indigenous people. Its chairperson, Victoria Tauli-Corpus from the Philippines, was here this week to attend a meeting on indigenous people in Asia. We talked to her about Nepal's janajati movement just days before the UN General Assembly was to vote on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Nepali Times: Are people outside Nepal aware of the indigenous people's movement here?

Victoria Tauli-Corpus: People are aware of Nepal's struggle for democracy but, sadly, indigenous people's participation in bringing about change in countries like Nepal is not really visible.

Now that we're in a post-conflict situation, what experiences do you think Nepal's indigenous people can learn from?

I think the Bolivia experience can be very instructive for Nepal. I heard the advisor to Bolivia's foreign minister speak recently. He said "we went through everything, through armed struggle, through complaints, and we were always used by the left or the right, but when they got into power they forgot us. We got sick and tired of that, so we decided why the hell can't we run and get into government..." That should be food for thought for indigenous peoples in situations like Nepal's—maybe they should play a more active role in government, maybe have their own political party and run for power on their own indigenous agenda.

The UN General Assembly is supposed to vote on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples this week. It passed the Human Rights Council in June but is being actively opposed by a few western nations. What if it doesn't pass?

Ideally it would be adapted by consensus, but even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adapted by a vote... even if it doesn't get adopted by the General Assembly it has already been adopted by the Human Rights Council, an organ of the UN, so it would still have the weight of customary international law. At least, that's my view.

The Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People started in 2005. What influence did the first decade have in Asia?

You can't really generalise. In some countries there was an impact—in the Philippines we came up with the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act—but in some countries there were no clear policies or programs related to the decade... what really determined what happened in these countries was how active indigenous peoples themselves were.

Afterlife of a rhino

On 27 November, the villages surrounding Chitwan National Park had a feast. The star attraction— forbidden rhino meat.

That very morning, a male rhino had been found dead along the Mardi Ghole riverbank in Chitwan. The cause of death was a rifle bullet through the head. We were told by Tika Ram Paudel, a ranger from Lau Khani post of Chitwan National Park, that a single gunshot was heard three nights before the dead rhino was discovered, but that he and his colleagues found nothing while patrolling the next morning.

This rhino had been stripped even more than usual. Poachers routinely take the horn, or *khag*, which is what they kill for, but this time around, even the toenails, *khoor*, of the animal were missing. Park authorities usually keep these as part of their investigation records.

After investigation into the cause of a rhino's death is completed, its body is theoretically buried. In practice, though, when this is done, large teams of villagers come to dig up the dead rhino for the flesh.



SAMIR JUNG THAPA

FINDERS KEEPERS: Locals finish cutting and distributing the dead rhino in a matter of few hours, depriving natural scavengers like vultures of their food.

"Since we can't do anything to stop the villagers from taking the meat of dead rhinos anyway, we usually let them have the body after we're done with our investigation," says Ram Chandra Khatiwada, a ranger from the Kasara check post.

When we were there last week, more than thirty villagers, men, women, and children, were milling around, urging the 'investigation' to a quick end. The formalities over, they efficiently skinned the animal,

severed its head (*pictured*), carved it up, and loaded their sacks with the meat. The Tharu community in particular is said to enjoy rhino meat. It's not served in hotels, but if you want a taste you just have to ask.

Already this year, 10 rhinos have been killed in Chitwan National Park, in large part, says Major Bishal Shah, "because the number of army posts inside the Park has come down from 38 to 14." ●

Samir Jung Thapa



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Modern parliament

There may not be a much-needed new parliament for a new Nepal, but our current premises at Singha Darbar are proving as flexible as ever. The building went from being a Rana naachghar to parliament for the kingdom. Parliament won't be moving anywhere any time soon, but the hall is moving into the 21st century.

The building will now have to seat 330 members compared to the previous 205, and new seats have been added between the pillars that used to form a passage outside the original hall. Even this expansion will not be enough though, as the constituent assembly will require seating for 425. There is room to grow, though, as the ground floor and viewing balcony together can seat 900 people. The trick is to make sure they can all see each other.

The speaker's podium has a 17" LCD display with a four-screen display so the speaker can see all members, especially those obstructed by the pillars that now stand in the middle of the newly-expanded hall. There are six CCTV cameras and two 2.4m screens mounted on the walls for parliamentarians to keep an eye on each other. ●

Dhruba Simkhada

AKA

The inalienable right to an alias

Adopting a snappy new *nom de guerre* is the latest craze sweeping the nation, led by the supremo trendsetter, Mr Awesome. Despite having successfully initiated a number of wildly popular fads recently, including extortion, purging, and bullying (which don't appear to be flash-in-the-pans and promise to be with us for decades to come), he is not one to rest on his laurels. As if to



stretch the limits of credibility and prove there is no holding him back, Comrade Prachanda's recent signing of the Comprehensive Peace Treaty in his assumed name exhibits typical cutting edge panache, and is certainly worth emulating next time we apply for a bank loan.

Such racy pseudonyms not only make life more fun and exciting, they also allow us to re-live the happier days of childhood when fantasy had free reign, we were all heroes, and nobody needed a job. Keen to jump on the bandwagon and fit in with the times, I wracked my mind for a suitable moniker; how to express my inner charlatan while still inspiring fear and loathing like the greats? Many of the best stage names (i.e. Badal/ Cloud) were already taken, leaving us with also-ran spin-offs like Quiro (Fog) and Baph (Steam). While ruminating, it dawned on me such aliases can serve a very useful purpose, best illustrated by Pushpa Kamal Dahal/ Prachanda's disguise, which conveniently obscures the fact a high-caste Brahmin is once again leading the dalits and poor to perdition. For small fry like me, an alias could come in handy to sidestep persecution and murder for cracking a few jokes at Maoist expense. We all know how touchy they can be. 'Neporeko Quire' and 'Johnny RisUthdo' were soon struck off my list of possible identities as being

too unwieldy, despite the charming inclusion of the National Language and insight they offer to my essential character. 'Running Dog' has that wonderful kitschy Cold War flavour, so reminiscent of the last time Communists stalked the earth, but might identify me too closely with capitalist ethics (or lack thereof). 'Pox', on the other hand, is apolitical and has a nice catchy ring to it, but would likely see me blamed when plague next hits.

I finally settled on 'Foreign Hand', as the one force constantly alluded to whenever Nepali politicians are especially desperate to cover up their own inadequacies. Ever since the country opened in the 1950s and your average citizen became aware that foreigners actually possessed hands, the ruling class has found it expedient to mutter darkly of conspiracies hatching in distant capitals.

Rarely willing to concede the obvious, including the fact that foreign powers stopped caring about this country decades ago, leaders of the seven 'patti' alliance pulled my name out of the worn and soiled hat throughout the recent peace negotiations. This sentiment was echoed doggedly by the Maoists, like some sort of demented mantra, and I stood accused of interference and grand designs at every turn. This surely makes me the single most vilified player, bar none, both then and now.

I get the sole credit for every failing of the elite, mainstream or Maoist; the indignant rage running rampant across the political spectrum is all mine. Nepotism, corruption, abduction, indoctrination, coercion, intimidation, extortion, terrorism; are nothing compared to my all pervasive yet curiously invisible presence. Read my name and quake with nationalistic ire, for I am the greatest meddler in history. I am 'Foreign Hand', reviled equally by one and all, the eternal all purpose scapegoat at your service.

Hard to beat that, I figure. Stay tuned. ●

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Complete overhaul

The UN must now implement its goals, not create new ones



On 1 January, 2007, Ban Ki-Moon, South Korea's former foreign minister, will become United Nations Secretary-General, following Kofi Annan's ten-year tenure.



COMMENT
Jeffrey Sachs

Along with the long-term challenges of poverty, the environment, nuclear

proliferation, and UN reform, the new Secretary-General will inherit a long list of hotspots: Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon, Somalia, Myanmar, Sudan, North Korea, and others. Recent attempts to influence developments in these countries through threats and sanctions, and sometimes war, have failed. Most are less stable today than they were five years ago. Clearly, a new approach is needed.

The leading Asian countries, including Ban's South Korea, have long favored a balance of diplomatic approaches and

economic incentives to solve complex challenges. This balanced approach is important because most of the world's hotspots are in trouble not only because of politics, but also because of the underlying challenges of hunger, disease, and environmental crisis.

Climate change, deforestation, growing populations, and other ecological strains will challenge the very survival of hundreds of millions of people around the world in the coming decades. UN leadership will be instrumental to

proposing and forging solutions to such daunting long-term global challenges.

In fact, from 1992 to 2002, the UN's member governments signed a number of treaties and agreements that can and should provide the foundation for long-term global solutions. Three treaties emerged in 1992 out of the so-called Rio Conference on the Environment – on climate change, biodiversity conservation, and desertification. In 2000, the member governments agreed on the Millennium Development Goals. And in 2002, they agreed on the Monterrey Consensus, pledging concrete efforts to triple aid flows to the poorest in order to reach the international goal for foreign assistance of 0.7 percent of rich-world GNP.

The key for today's UN, therefore, is not to create more goals, but to implement those that have been set. This, too, fits strongly with the spirit in which Ban has approached his new position. He has made clear his intention that the UN should implement the commitments that the world community has made.

During his mandate, the Secretary-General will face the pressing challenge of forging a global agreement on climate change for the years beyond 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol ends. The Millennium Development Goals remain far off track in the poorest countries. Despite a global pledge to reduce significantly the loss of biological diversity by 2010, huge areas of rainforest and oceans continue to be destroyed.

If the US works more closely within the UN framework, it will find willing partners in the rising Asian powers, which are intent on using their influence and resources to solve today's challenges. After all, Asian countries are interested in global stability to underpin their own long-term development.

The new Secretary-General comes to office with the world yearning to solve festering problems. Importantly, there is already broad agreement on a set of shared goals. Those goals are achievable. The challenge is implementation. ●
(Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

A productive tension between moral philosophies and economic prescriptions

Friedman completed Keynes

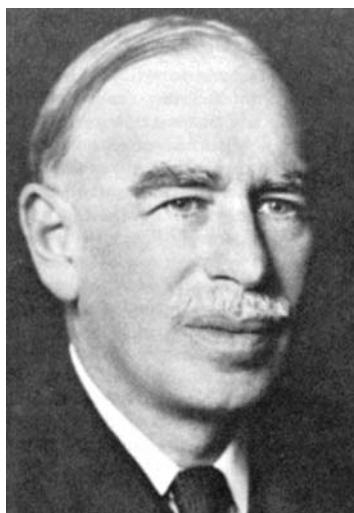
The most famous and influential American economist of the past century died last month. Milton Friedman was not the most famous and influential economist in the world, though—he came second to John Maynard Keynes.



ANALYSIS
J Bradford DeLong

Milton Friedman was the star pupil of, successor to, and completer of Keynes's work. Keynes, in his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, set out the framework that nearly all macroeconomists use today. That framework is based on spending and demand, the determinants of the components of spending, the liquidity-preference theory of short-run interest rates, and the requirement that government make strategic but powerful economic interventions to avoid extremes of depression and manic excess. As Friedman said, "We are all Keynesians now."

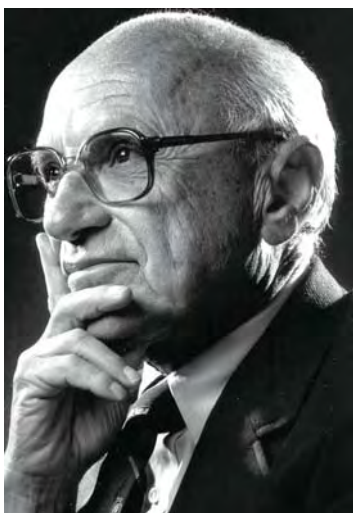
To Keynes's theory—of employment, interest, and money—Friedman added a theory of prices and inflation. This



assumed a natural rate of unemployment, and limits on government policy in stabilising the economy, beyond which intervention triggers uncontrollable and destructive inflation.

The Great Depression also led Keynes and orthodox successors to underestimate the influence of monetary policy. Friedman, in a 30-year campaign starting with his and Anna J Schwartz's *A Monetary History of the United States*, restored the balance. As Friedman also said, "and none of us are Keynesian."

From one perspective, Friedman was the arch-opponent



and enemy of Keynes and his successors. Both agreed that successful macroeconomic management was necessary, that the private economy on its own might be subject to unbearable instability and that strategic, powerful, but limited intervention by the government was necessary to maintain economic stability. But the key for Keynes was to keep government spending and private investment stable, and while for Friedman it was to keep stable the money supply—the purchasing power of businesses and households in readily spend-able form.

A technical difference in means, you might say, a difference of opinion based on different judgments about how the world works. You'd be half right. But this difference in means, tactics, and empirical judgments rests on top of a deep gulf between the moral philosophies of Keynes and Friedman.

Keynes saw himself as an advocate of public management. Government officials of goodwill could design economic institutions superior to the market, or at least tweak the market with taxes, subsidies, and regulations to produce superior outcomes. It was simply not the case, Keynes argued, that private incentives in the marketplace were aligned with public good. Technocracy was Keynes's faith: good-hearted skilled experts designing and fine-tuning institutions to promote general prosperity. This is what he did at Bretton Woods where the World Bank and IMF were created.

Friedman disagreed vociferously. He believed private market interests were usually aligned with the public good. Important and significant market

failures were the exception, not the rule, and laissez-faire a good first approximation. Even when private interests were *not* aligned with public interests, that government could not be relied on to fix the problem. Government failures, Friedman argued, were greater, more terrible than market failures. Governments were corrupt and inept, and staffed by people who liked ordering others around.

Friedman believed that even when the market equilibrium was not the utilitarian social-welfare optimum, and even when government could help improve matters from a utilitarian point of view, there was still additional value in expanding human freedom. There was, Friedman said, something intrinsically bad about government ordering people about, even if it *did* know what it was doing.

The tension between their two views has been a valuable driving force for human progress over the past hundred years. ●

(Project Syndicate)

J Bradford DeLong, professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley, was Assistant US Treasury Secretary in the Clinton administration.



Mithila in the city

The original inspiration behind Mithila folk art may be religious—the paintings were originally tributes to deities—but increasingly, Mithila artists are painting scenes from daily life, images of animals, birds and fish, and abstract design patterns.

To encourage such explorations, the Janakpur Women's Development Centre (JWDC), which has been promoting Mithila art in Nepal and abroad since 1989, brought together contemporary Nepali artists, including Mithila artists from Janakpur, and painters from Bangladesh, for a 15-day workshop. The outcome, 'Collaboration with Mithila Art', is on show at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal.

"There is an obvious stylistic and conceptual difference between Mithila art and the contemporary art that I exercise, but I was seeking to express the various features of Mithila art through modern methods of painting, to bridge the social and cultural gap," says Jupiter Pradhan. His primary concern, he says, was to not disrupt the authenticity of Mithila art or destroy the flavour of the ancient city of Janakpur.

Tayeba Begam Lipi from Dhaka says her inspiration came from the vibrancy of colours, the bright saris and exotic jewellery central to life in Janakpur. "I wanted to express my womanhood by paying attention to the bodies of the women around the village," she explains. Lipi's paintings illustrate

women in their daily lives, but she pays special attention to the decorative custom of tattooing hands and necks (see pic).

Artist Sunil Sigdel gave Mithila artists canvases to draw and painted on their drawings. As an extension of this series of works, he also drew on a few canvases and asked them to paint on his drawings. "My paintings are about the relation people in Janakpur have with domestic animals, they're of children sitting on a buffalo and roaming around the grass fields all day." He says that though at first glance Mithila art may look childlike, the concepts it embodies are complex. ●

Collaboration with Mithila Art at Siddhartha Art Gallery till 3 December, 10AM-5.30 PM. 4438979

Jumbo joy



It's been 25 years since Tiger Tops' Jim Edwards, aided by alcohol and a polo enthusiast, decided to replace fleet-footed ponies with lumbering elephants and start Nepal's Elephant Polo World Championships. The annual event in Chitwan's Meghauli airfield has become a tradition, and first-timers are amazed by the speed and skill required. The game has developed its own set of rules, such as, it is a foul for an elephant to pick up the ball with its trunk during play. So is intentionally hitting another player, an elephant, or the referee. The somewhat slow game is played on a 120m by 70m pitch, and four elephants with a mahout and a player makes a team. There's a 15 minute interval between each 10-minute chukka, when the teams swap elephants.

This year eight four-person teams from Nepal, the UK (including the Chivas team from Scotland), and Hong Kong participated in the event from 26 November to 1 December. www.elephantpolo.com



Winter skies

Go on morning walks for the best December stargazing

Observing the pre-dawn sky is the best option for stargazers, as there is less light pollution than in the evening. A number of us go jogging early in the morning, and an added incentive to continue that in winter is to also take the chance to observe the changing night skies.

Early this December, in the morning, the planet Saturn will be just overhead in the constellation of Leo. Of the constellations, you will see the Gemini Twins to the West and The Big Dipper (Saptarshi) to the North. Use star charts to identify Polaris (Dhruva Tara) with the help of the 'Pointers' of the Big Dipper.

During the first week of the month, take your binoculars to enjoy the spectacular show of three planets in the eastern predawn sky. A wonderfully tight Mercury-Mars-Jupiter conjunction stands low in the predawn twilight on 9-10 December. These planets will



STAR GAZING
Kedar S Badu

engage in a most intriguing pre-Christmas gathering, as if to celebrate the coming New Year. The best time to look for the trio will be around 6.30 AM local time.

For evening sky watchers, in December you will find the brilliant constellation Orion, The Hunter in the Eastern Sky. Look for the Orion Nebula (M42) just below the 'belt' of the Hunter. This is the brightest nebula where young stars are being born.

Early evening, the square of Pegasus will be right overhead. To the south of Pegasus, you can identify the faint constellations of Pisces and Aquarius. However, at midnight, The Winter Hexagon, which consists of the brightest stars in our sky, will dominate the sky overhead. Use star charts to identify Sirius (in Canis Major), Procyon (in Canis Minor), Castor (in Gemini), Capella (in Auriga), Aldebaran (in Taurus) and Rigel (in Orion).



Other December highlights:

The Sun is in the constellation of Ophiuchus at the start of December, moving into Sagittarius on 18 December. Winter solstice falls on 22 December, the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere.

Mercury remains visible during the first half of the month in the dawn sky. Thereafter Mercury starts to disappear behind the Sun.

Venus is currently the Evening Star, visible in the south-west immediately after sunset. But it sets only a very short time after the Sun.

Mars is visible in the morning sky, rising more than an hour before the Sun. The planets Mercury and Jupiter will both be near Mars during December and both of them appear brighter.

Jupiter is the third planet low in the south-east at dawn this month. It's moving slowly south-east from Libra, across Scorpius into Ophiuchus.

Saturn in Leo, is the only planet easily visible in the evening sky this month. It rises in the middle of the evening and shines all through the rest of the night. On 10 December the waxing Moon passes close to Saturn.

Meteors The Geminids are one of the most reliable showers of the year, which is expected to peak on 14 December. You can expect to see one meteor every minute or so. Geminids move relatively slowly, and are often bright. The Ursids start just as the Geminids end (on 17 December). At their peak on 23 December you might expect to see about five meteors an hour. ●

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Nepal from the Sky** Exhibition of aerial photographs of Nepal by Captain Bed Upreti. Yala Maya Kendra, 3-9 December
- ❖ **Collaboration with Mithila Yatra** paintings until 3 December at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 11AM-5.30 PM. 4438979
- ❖ **Inspired Expression** tribute to RN Joshi on until 6 December at Park Gallery, Pulchok. 5522307

EVENTS

- ❖ **Vagina Monologues** opening on 1 December 2006 at The National Academy, Kamaladi at 5.30 PM. 4421800
- ❖ **Surya Lights Rythmn Nites** with Akriti and DJ Charlotte, 1 December 8PM onwards at The Atrium, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Rs 999 including a drink and dinner
- ❖ **AWON Christmas Bazaar** 2 December, 10AM-5PM at the Hyatt Regency. Entry Rs 100 for adults, Rs 50 for children
- ❖ **Shastrartha** at Martin Chautari by MAPS. 3-5PM, 2 December to discuss culture and personality. 4238050
- ❖ **Stories in Motion** with international storyteller Cassandra Wye from 2-10 December with the British Council
- ❖ **Luncheon on the Grass** Garden open with French games, food, and film at the Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwor. 10AM-5PM, 3 December. 4241163
- ❖ **Mahan Shilpi** Nepali adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, presented by Aarohan Gurukul at Rimal Natakghar, Old Baneshwor daily at 4.30 PM. 4466956
- ❖ **Jamaican Peace Party** at 1905 with reggae from Jerry Julian & the Power of Joy. 8 December, 6PM onwards, Rs 599
- ❖ **Seven habits of highly effective people** 6-8 and 10-12 December, 9.30 AM-5.30 PM at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 9851036719
- ❖ **For Good** winter concert by The Kathmandu Chorale, 3.30 PM and 6PM on 9 December at The British School. Admission free.
- ❖ **British Film Festival 2007** 15-19 January in Kathmandu, 26-28 January in Pokhara. Free tickets distributed from 9 January.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Music** at the Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. NIVA from 8PM onwards on 1 December, Priety Kaur on vocals and Sanjay Suman on piano from 8PM onwards on 2 December.
- ❖ **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, Kathmandu. Wednesdays, 7PM onwards, Rs 600 with barbeque
- ❖ **Live music** at Absolute! Bar with Anil Shahi and group. 1 December, 7PM onwards. 5521408
- ❖ **Folk and Funk Yatra** Rythms of Nepal featuring Stupa and 25 Nepali percussionists, 3PM, 2 December at Yala Maya Kendra, Rs 399. 5526212
- ❖ **Classical fusion music** at Jatra, every Saturday, 7PM onwards



DINING

- ❖ **Walk and lunch** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 16 & 23 December
- ❖ **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. Sunday and Monday Nepali thali with cultural show, Rs 700. Friday Bhaktapur Nights with cultural show and Newari cuisine, Rs 900
- ❖ **Foodcourt** at Bluebird Mall, open 11AM-9PM every day. 4228833
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizza** at Java's new extension, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Happy Hour** buy one get one free at Lost Horizon Bar, Shangri-La Hotel from 5-7PM every evening
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768 and Pulchok. 5521755

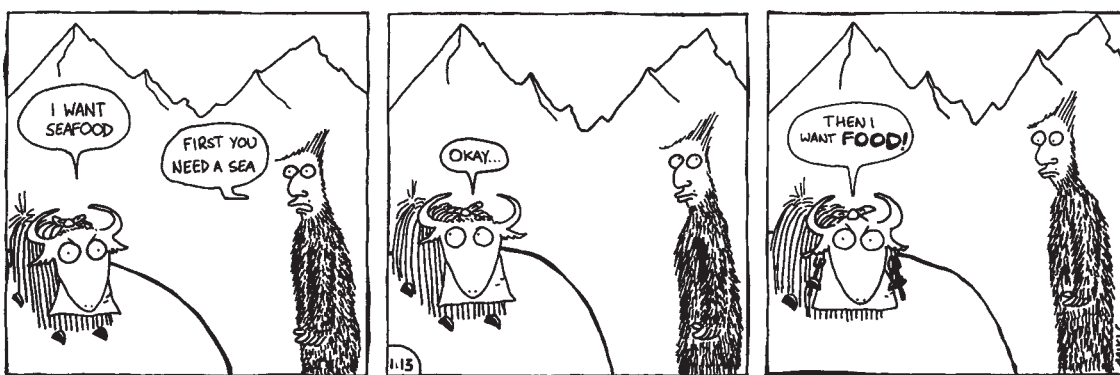
GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** pure relaxation. 4361500
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Yoga Camp** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 1-3 December. 9841371927

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

YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



Quest Entertainment

It's back to the beginning for James Bond (Daniel Craig), as *Casino Royale* shows how he became the legend that he is. His first mission as '007' leads him to Le Chiffre (Mads Mikkelsen), banker to the world's terrorists. He finds himself embroiled in a high-stakes poker game with Le Chiffre at Casino Royale, with beautiful British Treasury official, Vesper Lynd (Eva Green) at his side. The 21st Bond movie promises all the suave sophistication, thrills, and romance that we've come to expect from the famous British spy.

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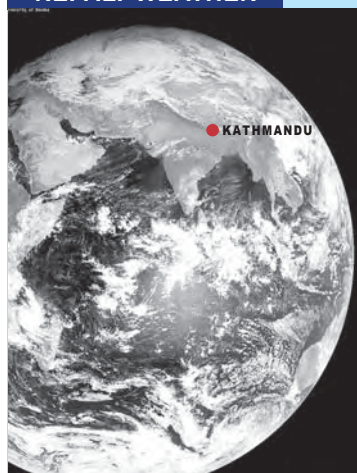
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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



Even the sunny days couldn't make up for the sharp five degree-drop in early morning temperatures this week. The blanket of thin cloud formed by a relatively low pressure system along the southern Himalayan belt was worn out due to the upfront effect of warm air, a common phenomenon of the Tibetan plateau. The space was then quickly filled by a cold westerly front. The good news is that the layer is again being formed, so night temperatures will hold. Thursday noon's satellite pictures show clear skies over the Himalaya with a shallow layer of the usual winter fog along the tarai. November passed as expected in the Valley, with a little over 1 mm of rain, and there is now winter rain in sight yet. This weekend will be humdrum, weather-wise, with warm days and cold mornings.

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SAGAR SHRESTHA

FAREWELL TO ARMS: (L-R) Maoist spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara and Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula hand over the signed arms management accord to the UN peace team's military advisor Jan Eric Wilhemson at Hotel Shangri-La on Tuesday.



RAM PRASAD HUMAGAI/NEPALNEWS

TALKING HEADS: Visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister KP Sharma Oli chat at the Foreign Ministry on Thursday.



SURESH RAJ NEUPANE

NEVER TOO OLD: Kumar Mohan Bahadur Shahi approaches Minister for Education and Culture Mangal Siddhi Manandhar to accept second prize in the veterans' doubles at the third Krishna Mohan Memorial Badminton tournament at the Armed Police Headquarters on Saturday.



KIRAN PANDAY

PEACE MUSIC: Young monks at Tengboche Monastery in Khumbu blow the conch on Wednesday as a symbolic gesture to usher in peace.

Siraha's good soldier

Three years ago, all Rikma BK knew was, things in her village of Bastipur in Siraha were far from perfect. Little did she know that her fight against traffickers and usurper landlords would one day land her in hospital, and her daughter in the hands of kidnappers.

The 35-year-old describes herself as an unschooled housewife who in 2003 participated in a 90-day course on women's and children's rights advocacy. The more Rikma learnt at the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), the angrier she became.

She was soon going door-to-door in her village, telling

people about the false promises middlemen were making to them—their children would be employed as domestic help in Punjab, India and they'd receive handsome sums of money in the future. Rikma knew the children would disappear to a shady fate, and the parents wouldn't get a paisa.

By January this year, Rikma had collected enough evidence to press for the arrest of Sitey Bista, who has traded over 300 children

in the last five years.

Bista, who has close political and gangster connections, was arrested, released by the police, re-arrested at the insistence of families of missing children—and released again.

The price of that—Bista's men beat up Rikma so badly in public last month that she had to be rushed to Kathmandu for emergency medical treatment. We met Rikma in the capital last week where she is receiving follow-up care. She's still in pain, but says, "My fight against this will not stop."

Last month Rikma's 15-year-old daughter Diwas was abducted and forcefully married to the kidnapper because Rikma has been waging a campaign against Bastipur's landlords, who have also seized plots leased out to tenant farmers without warning or compensation. Rikma's supporters in neighbouring villages rallied to find the girl, but they were later convinced by her daughter not to pursue. Sitey went into hiding, but no one has been punished yet.

"There's a price to pay for the good fight," Rikma says, "but you should never give up. And eventually you will win." ●

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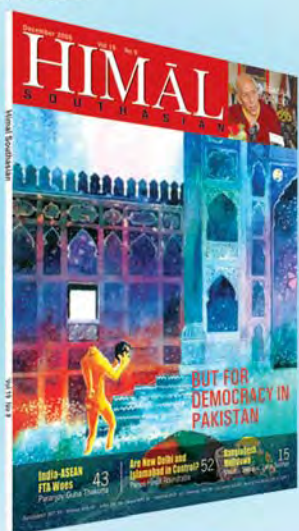
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The Land of the Shivs

The most commonly seen postage stamp in this secular kingdom of ours is the one commemorating the Silver Jubilee of the World Hindu Federation. How appropriate, then, that the **Vagina Monologues** is being staged in the **Land of the Lingam**. And this week we have not one but two Shiv Shankers in town besides, of course, our own Lord Pashupatinath himself.



So what if Nepal has been **declared secular**, our Unified Marxist-Leninist Supremo was spotted this week draped in saffron and garlanded in marigold while leading the puja at the Dandhayanchal Mahayagya of the Gajendramoksha Dibyadham at the sacred confluence of the Kali Gandaki with the Narayani at Tribeni. With the Maoists snapping at his heels, one can understand why Comrade Nepal is now hopelessly addicted to the **opiate of the masses**.

Nepal was really reluctant to go to the peace accord signing ceremony, and the Ass has learnt that it was Girija the Great who had to bundle the UML leader into his car and drag him kicking and screaming to the BICC.

Which explains why he had on a **casual jacket** while everyone else was dressed up to their nines. And this news just in: the last minute hitch during the signing ceremony was caused by Home Minister Sitaula accidentally dropping the documents while making a **quick stopover at the loo** on the way to the Great Hall of the People.



Anyone who has found Baburam Bhattarai's Nokia 3210 please return it to its rightful owner or else face **bhautik karbai**. The handset had some important phone numbers and BB suspects his phone was stolen (an inside job perhaps?). Comrade Laldhoj reportedly called his number as soon as he found his set missing but it was **switched off**. Something tells the Ass BB can easily get a new one.

If there is a kleptomaniac loose in the movement then Pushpa Kamal Dahal better keep an eye on the awesome golden **Mont Blanc fountain pen** with which he signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement last week. In contrast, Girija Prasad Koirala used a **Rs 2 plastic ballpoint** of an unspecified brand to sign the historic document.

And was that a **Breitlin Chronomat** we spotted on The Fierce One's wrist at the Y&Y the other day in that glittering confab of communal communists and anti-social socialites? History really comes a full circle, doesn't it, and some people are **more equal than others**. It's getting hard to tell the difference between the proletariats and the bourgeoisie. Are our comrades going to emulate Dear Leader Kim Jong Il and his penchant for some of the finer things in life?



Like fleas leaping off a **just-deceased dog**, all the king's men seem to be abandoning him. At first, they denied ever advising King Gyanendra on matters of state. Then, when the Rayamajhi Commission summoned them in one by one, they passed the buck. Now they are all bad-mouthing their former royal master.

Kirtinidhi Bista is too nice a nice guy to say anything nasty, but his fellow vice-chairman Tulsi Giri is seething. Lately Giri has taken to **holding court** with ex-Mandales and their ilk at his Baluwatar residence and a large part of the time is taken up in **Gyan-bashing**. Giri meets up with Sharad Chandra Shah, Kamal Thapa and others to commiserate about how the king plucked him and Sharad out of a comfortable exile and foisted a government on them. And he seems to be in the mood to spill the beans: he says the king staged his February 1 coup d'etat only after getting a green light from New Delhi. The good doc now thinks the king is a **goner**.



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