The Nepal Army isn’t going anywhere, which is why it must be made accountable

BIRDS ON A WIRE

Every day that goes by during this heady hiatus, the Maoists are taking themselves further out of the jurisdictions from which they came. Ahead lie the challenges of statesmanship and the politics of compromise.

This is a powerful truth to confront those who are习惯于 the absolute certainties of revolution. They have been used to the ‘scientific’ analysis of the dialectics of class struggle. As doctrinaire communists of a bygone era, they think they have all the answers. Their revolution, cut off from history, had no space for doubters, revisionists, and reformers.

Well, welcome to the real world. When Maoist MPs enter the jam-packed interior of the interim parliament one day soon, they will find themselves, by wielding political power that came out of the barrel of the gun, as a price of the peace, the Nepali people were willing to temporarily over the Maoists nearly a third of the seats in the House of Representatives.

The path ahead will not be easy, but it will be more difficult than the resistance to the Maoists is continuing. To convince the army to prove its innocence and try to undermine a multiparty polity. They can’t have it both ways: they can’t be in an interm government without formally forsaking violence. Even if some of their arms are contained in cantonments even everyone knows they can do likewise.

And why is Pushpa Kamal Dahal pushing suddenly push for ex-Gurkhas to monitor arms management until the UN gets its act together? Of course the word ‘ready’ is the UN’s middle name. The reason this tricky monitoring mechanism has credibility is because the UN is involved, not let’s say, Nepalis with possible conflict of interest to manage arms.

Ironic, isn’t it, that the very success of the Maoist armed struggle was that it ultimately forced them to give up armed struggle. To convert his fighters’ dramatic gains into political power, Pushpa Kamal Dahal had no other option but to sign the peace accord, and try to lock up his arms. It was not an easy decision, given the fissures in his movement. Already, the Maoist leadership has a split between two groups, having cause in parts of the tara. Unlike the rest of Nepal, people in places like Siraha still endure bombs and assassinations and haven’t known peace.

It must be tempting for royal reactionaries and the satirists to invoke ethnic unrest in the tinder-dry Nepali Military. But if Dahal were to however indirectly, supports this he’ll have made his third and last mistake and will have to be reconciled. The throne is on one hand by a slender thread. The only way he can preserve it, if all by all, is by sitting perfectly still until the people decide on his fate.

A gain, the Nepal Army is in the headlines for all the wrong reasons. A promote to reward tainted officers has raised the hackles of some senior SPA ministers. Local government officials are sore about the favouritism rampant in ration contracts. Activists believe officers guilty of human rights abuses have been let off lightly. The Supreme Court has added to

The Nepali polity, it will take at least 20 years to pare down the NA’s strength from over 160,000 to 30,000. The Nepali people are willing to temporarily over the Maoists nearly a third of the seats in the House of Representatives.

The crisis of credibility facing the Nepal Army will only get worse if the officers ignore pleas for openness. That said, the claim that the Blue Helmets isn’t a mercenary, and peacekeeping duty isn’t like a stint with a private security agency is a historical fiction. A soldier on deputation to the UN is a mercenary, and peacekeeping duty isn’t like a stint with a private security agency.

We’re one of the top 10 troop contributors to UN peacekeeping forces, but lag behind countries like Ghana and Uruguay in terms of representation as a proportion of population. Unilateral peace enforcements have collapsed spectacularly in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, and Sri Lanka, while the UN has had relative successes in East Timor. There will be more Blue Helmets, not fewer.

If we want to use this opportunity for national gain, at least the welfare fund must be managed in a transparent manner. The Nepali Army has to learn the ropes of good governance and be responsive, and responsible. It will be hard to inculcate these traits in an organisation used to being a state with a state, but there is no other way. Brahadrak needs to use the chance it has been given to redeem itself.

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LETTERS

GIRIJA BABU
The title of CK Lal’s article (‘Loving to hate Girija Babu’, #325) paints a true picture of our ambivalence towards Girija Babu. Often termed as inefficient, corrupt, and irrelevant within his own Koirala and Kangresi clan, he has proven himself in the end. Today, he stands as the symbol of unity between the political parties and Maoist rebels. As the Grand Old Man of Nepal, he has redeemed himself and completed his duty towards the motherland by signing the Peace Accord after 10 years of war, political instability, international pressure, and other factors. To be sure, I never liked the man for his political short-sightedness and corruption that he engendered. Now it is the duty of the younger leaders in the NC to take over and lead this great nation. Great job, Girija Babu!

Pravesh Saria, email

Divas Sarma (Letters, #325) is right about how the peace deal in Nepal got so little attention in the international media. As sad as it is, it is true that a historic event like this does not mean much when it is a country like Nepal and besides, the so-called ‘international’ media need their airtime and web space for something sexier than peace breaking out in Nepal. Perhaps the political pundits from Nepal should not have scheduled the event at the same time when Tom Cruise was getting married and Brittany Spears was getting a divorce!

Sushil Bogati, Atlanta, USA

PM GP must be happy that those who used to chant “Talukhule Girija, Bharat tira Chirija” want to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize. But the Nobel Prizes, especially those for Peace and Literature, are no less controversial than our own Grand Pa of Nepal Politics.

Dr Sanam, Kathmandu

One should think carefully, instead of before adopting the interim constitution in a hurry. Are we, as Nepalis, destroying our common identity and heritage in the name of progressive thinking? Will we destroy our social fibre which will, in turn, sow the seeds of national disintegration? All the major parties have endorsed the federal structure for Nepal without comprehending its long-term implications, but just as a trump card to counter Maoist appeal. Responsible political parties with a democratic history and credentials should not decide on issues of such far-reaching importance so lightly for short-term political mileage. The Maoists have always played this divisive role but responsible political parties can’t compete with them on populism and divide the nation along ethnic, caste, regional and religious lines. The nine federal regions devised by the Maoists along indigenous lines are based on a faulty premise, because no region has a majority of the ethnic groups they are named after.

PB Rana, email

The persistent call for the abolition of the monarchy only stems from political parties with vested interests. This pathological, rabid hatred that the baddies espouse for His Majesty is not shared by and large by the Nepali people. And I’m not talking about the few hundred people who got asked in the capital. The end of the monarchy would open up and hand over tremendous wealth and assets to any government. Suddenly we’d need a lot of greedy and hungry politicians to manage trusts and funds supposedly for the benefit of the Nepali people. We all know who really stands to gain.

Rick, email

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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.

Email: letters@nepalitimes.com
Fax: 977-1-5521013
Mail: Letters, Nepali Times, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.

CORRECTION
Due to an editing error, in ‘Foreign investors need fair treatment’ (#325), the CEO of Spice Nepal was wrongly identified. The name should read Dmitry Zaika.

In ‘Uphill slog’ (#317), Keshav Bohara should have been identified as manager of the Kakani International Training Centre.

LETTERS

AMA DABLAN
I am writing to congratulate you and thank Padam Ghale for the excellent story on Ama Dablam (‘Accident on Ama Dablam’, #324). It is the best piece of mountaineering journalism I have seen in this country. We were all saddened by the tragedy, and it proved just how dangerous climbing in the Himalaya is because of the objective dangers.

Tim Rogers, Edinburgh, UK

NEW ARRIVALS

On the occasion of Christmas and New Year we offer these books as Christmas reading with a discount of 15% until 31st December.
Certification of guerrillas and their weapons is a cornerstone of the peace process. This is what the success and credibility of the cantonment and 'arms management' hinges on. But certification is exactly what the 12-page long peace agreement leaves vague. The best the seven parties and the Maoists could come up with after six days of discussion was an agreement to “solve the issue of certification at the suggestion of the UN.”

The deal does agree that ‘People’s Liberation Army’ soldiers under18, and those recruited after 26 May this year will not be in the camps. Which seems fair enough, until it becomes apparent that there is no mechanism to determine how minors and new recruits are to be identified.

Human rights watchdog Insec estimates that the Maoists’ 8-21 November recruitment drive right before the peace deal was signed added almost 5,000 people to their army. Insec cautions that this figure does not include new cadres recruited in remote areas. In Palpa, for example, five of 150 students taken away returned to the district headquarters and testified that they were undergoing military training and had been told to say that they’d already spent two years in the PLA.

In Ilam, a 13-year-old new recruit accidentally killed another teenager while learning to handle a .303 rifle. Padam Pun reports from Rukum that the Maoists opened a temporary recruitment office and promised young people who signed up positions in the national army commensurate with their educational qualifications. Right now in Rukum students from grade five to college levels are receiving military training from the PLA.

Establishing who is a minor is difficult in the first place because not everyone has citizenship, educational and birth registration certificates. When people do have them, the paperwork often sports arbitrary birthdates. The Maoists are also likely to argue that their fighters have been unable to get citizenship certificates because of the conflict.

In places where the Maoists claimed they had set up a ‘new system’ people were effectively prohibited from obtaining documents like citizenship papers from the ‘old regime’. Birth registration in rural areas is a hit-or-miss affair, which is also to the advantage of the Maoists. It is also difficult to identify who was recruited after 26 May, as many of these new fighters have had five months of training and indoctrination already. Those taken away by force, or tempted with offers of real employment in the national army, are unlikely to speak out against the Maoist party.

The Maoists, for their part, understand the importance of keeping sweet the thousands of children they’ve used as porters, informers, guides, technicians, and cultural groups, or worse, those who have been tortured or lost limbs for the cause. The party has a real numbers problem. At their meeting in September last year in Chitwan, Rukum, the Maoists claimed in a show of strength directed at the royal regime, to have seven divisions. In reality, the PLA had three divisions and needed about 23,000 new soldiers to add four more. They could barely recruit 1,000. The contribution from their strongholds in Rukum and Rolpa was a paltry 300 youth. They are thus now even willing to canton their militia, to make up the numbers.

The Maoists will also have to deal with the internationally-accepted ‘one man, one weapon’ model for guerrilla certification. Best estimates are that the PLA has around 7,000 weapons looted from the army and police, 5,000 taken from villages, and 300 bought from India. Again, to make up numbers, the Maoists thus demand that khukuris, socket and pressure cooker bombs also be considered as weapons.
More tourists, please

The Nepal Association of Tour Operators (NATO) sent a letter to all foreign embassies, urging them to review and lift their travel advisories against Nepal the day after the signing of the peace agreement on 21 November. Embassies including Israel, France, and Malaysia have responded, extending their support and cooperation to NATO and Nepal’s tourism industry.

Laxmi in Teku

With the addition of a new branch in Teku, Laxmi Bank now has a total of eight branches in Nepal, three of which are inside Kathmandu Valley. The new branch, located on the premises of National Trading Limited, will host Laxmi’s workforce remittance centre in addition to normal banking services. Laxmi Bank expects that the new branch—their third in the last four months—will attract commercial clientele in the Teku Kailmati area, as well as residential customers from surrounding neighbourhoods including Kailmati, Tahchal, and Kuleshwor.

Awarded

Everest Bank has been awarded Bank of the Year-2006, Nepal by The Banker, a publication of the British Financial Times. The award is given out on the basis of commendable performance, recording consistent business growth, improved asset quality, good governance, and returns to shareholders. Over the last financial year, the bank’s disposable net profit increased 39 percent to Rs 237.3 million. Laxmi also saw a 36 percent increase in deposits, a 38 percent increase in advances, and a 21 percent rise in operating profits to Rs 453.1 million from Rs 375.1 million in the previous year. The bank also reports among the lowest non-performing assets to shareholders. Over the last financial year, the bank’s disposable net profit increased 39 percent to Rs 237.3 million.

CLICK: Fujifilm has launched a range of new photographic products via Rainbow Group Nepal, including two models of Fujifilm Minilab—the Frontier Digital 500 and the Frontier Digital 550.

NEW PRODUCTS

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More sport

Nimbus Sports, a Traders authorities to distribute the Neo Sports and Neo Sports Plus channels within Nepal. Neo Sports is a 24-hour cricket channel, and Neo Sports Plus covers major international sporting events.

Volunteering growth

We need short-term foreign experts for more diverse and efficient industry

Last week, I spoke about career management at a Kathmandu business school. My audience, final-semester MBA students in their 20s, said that in addition to teaching them the art of resume-writing and interview-giving,

their school regularly invites professionals to talk about the types of jobs and career paths available in Nepal’s private and non-profit sectors.

The students spoke to me relatively fortunately—they represent the declining thin upper-end slice of this country’s five million citizens between the ages of 16 and 24. They will find few jobs but hundreds of thousands of their peers will end up going to India, Malaysia, and the Gulf countries for jobs, while still more will look for employment in urban Nepal.

Given this reality affecting one-fifth of our population, how are we to create thousands of jobs in the near future? We need not revisit one of those teleological 20-year development plans that become meaningless by being all things to all people. But how about giving space to conceive and implement multiple, diverse and experimentally-oriented small plans that address the pieces of our employment problem from different angles? One plan could be to allow small firms to bring in the appropriate business knowledge and technological know-how to help such firms develop further.

Second, our firms learn to do business by copying the practices of other Nepali firms, which are badly run to start with. They do not even know what they lack to develop well-functioning personnel management, accounting, marketing, product development systems and the like. They’re reluctant to purchase business services, but volunteers can help spread business methods that cut costs, boost revenues, and improve the quality of the workforce.

Third, seeing how visitors remain Nepal’s informal ambassadors abroad long after their toes are over, it’s conceivable that many business volunteers too will remain in touch long after their assignments are finished. They’ll deepen relationships, informally market Nepal as a destination for small-size investments, source products and services, help link our businesses (to global customers), and send more visitors our way.

Some agencies, such as GTZ, do assign foreign experts as short-term volunteers in Nepali firms. In 2002, for example, a German carpenter spent some months at a woodworking facility in Patan, teaching new methods to craftsmen while learning from them. That exchange led to higher product quality for the Nepali firm.

For our businesses to grow to create jobs, we will need many such interactions, in an institutionalised form, between expert volunteers and firms willing to provide basic amenities in exchange for services that add value.

Yes, some bad apples may find their way in. But if the easing of visa restrictions comes with appropriate safeguards, the positive consequences of hosting business-focused foreign volunteers for a couple of years far outweigh the risks.
Memories of torture

Ghanesh Dhakal in Kantipur, 2 December

Ramesh Prasad Guragain, Krishna Raj KC, Nischal Nakarmi, and I were arrested from my room in Ghattekulo Heights on the evening of 3 December 2003 by a Royal Nepal Army team led by Colonel Raju Basnet. I knew the former two as teachers but had only just met Nischal Nakarmi. At the time, I was studying at Tri-Chandra Campus and teaching at Maitidevi Higher Secondary School. As we were being blindfolded and put into a van, Colonel Basnet threatened Nakarmi, “Capturing you is a great success for us. Whatever we do, we won’t kill you.” The other two teachers and I are still alive but we do not know what happened to Nakarmi. An OHCHR report from 23 May this year listed his name among the 47 disappeared from Bhairabnath Battalion. During the 266 days I spent in Bhairabnath I did not believe I would make it out alive. We were blindfolded and hooded all day long, our hands were tied behind our backs and we did not get two proper meals a day. We were tortured while going to the toilet, forbidden from bathing or brushing our teeth for months, made to exercise even when we had no physical strength, tortured again, beaten by drunk soldiers every night, electrocuted, beaten with thin plastic pipes, kicked with jackbooted feet, doused with ice-cold water, dunked in vats of urine, abused endlessly. We were usually kept indoors, in the squash courts, but several times we were loaded onto a truck and taken to a bunker. From the talk of the soldiers on guard we realised that a team from the International Committee of the Red Cross had come to inspect the barracks, and were shown the empty hall. During our last days in the squash hall, we were forced at gunpoint to write and sign a statement that read, “I am a Maoist and am in the very comfortable custody of the security forces. Since arresting me a few days ago, they have treated me humanely. I have not been tortured and have no problems here. If I am released, the Maoists will kill me and so, for reasons of my own security, I have chosen not to contact my family. I will be released in a few days.” The statements were undated and those who could not write were made to put their thumbprints.

On 16 March, 2004, as the Battalion celebrated its anniversary with a big party, we were kept hungry all day. That night Major Bibek Bista led a team that beat us with their boots and pipes. The day I was released, my prisoner number, 96, was suddenly called out. I was dragged to a nearby tent and my blindfold was taken off. Major Bista was sitting there. He didn’t appear to be the devil I’d imagined him to be. He seemed understanding and asked me whether I knew him. I said I’d heard his voice. “Has anyone done anything wrong to mastersaab?” he asked. I lied that I was all right. “I told them to take special care of you,” he said. “That’s what detention is like,” I replied. “Mastersaab, no one has ‘Maoist’ written on their forehead. We have to interrogate and you were a victim. Please don’t mind.” I said I didn’t mind, but that if I was innocent, he should release me. “I am trying to get you released. What will you do for us if you are released? You must give us information about the Maoists,” I told him I was not in a position to do that. His second proposal was: “After being freed do not meet journalists or human rights activists. If you do, you will be responsible for your own safety. If you say anything about anyone (Nischal Nakarmi), you will be brought in again and I cannot guarantee your life then. Nepal is small. We can pick you up in an hour.” I was blindfolded again. After a while another officer came in, shoved my head around, and threatened me. “Mastersaab, no one has ‘Maoist’ written on their forehead. We have to interrogate and you were a victim. Please don’t mind.” I said I didn’t mind, but that if I was innocent, he should release me. His second proposal was: “After being freed do not meet journalists or human rights activists. If you do, you will be responsible for your own safety. If you say anything about anyone (Nischal Nakarmi), you will be brought in again and I cannot guarantee your life then. Nepal is small. We can pick you up in an hour.” I was blindfolded again. After a while another officer came in, shoved my head around, and threatened me. “Mastersaab, no one has ‘Maoist’ written on their forehead. We have to interrogate and you were a victim. Please don’t mind.” I said I didn’t mind, but that if I was innocent, he should release me. His second proposal was: “After being freed do not meet journalists or human rights activists. If you do, you will be responsible for your own safety. If you say anything about anyone (Nischal Nakarmi), you will be brought in again and I cannot guarantee your life then. Nepal is small. We can pick you up in an hour.” I was blindfolded again. After a while another officer came in, shoved my head around, and threatened me. “Mastersaab, no one has ‘Maoist’ written on their forehead. We have to interrogate and you were a victim. Please don’t mind.” I said I didn’t mind, but that if I was innocent, he should release me. His second proposal was: “After being freed do not meet journalists or human rights activists. If you do, you will be responsible for your own safety. If you say anything about anyone (Nischal Nakarmi), you will be brought in again and I cannot guarantee your life then. Nepal is small. We can pick you up in an hour.” I was blindfolded again. After a while another officer came in, shoved my head around, and threatened me. “Mastersaab, no one has ‘Maoist’ written on their forehead. We have to interrogate and you were a victim. Please don’t mind.” I said I didn’t mind, but that if I was innocent, he should release me. His second proposal was: “After being freed do not meet journalists or human rights activists. If you do, you will be responsible for your own safety. If you say anything about anyone (Nischal Nakarmi), you will be brought in again and I cannot guarantee your life then. Nepal is small. We can pick you up in an hour.”
Historic night
Biswa Dweep Pandey in Samaya,
7 December

It was the night of 28 November, and the entire nation’s attention was on the prime minister’s residence in Baluwatar. Senior party leaders, civil society members, and observers were at the hall. The observers and leaders of other communist parties looked confused, almost harrowed. The talks were delayed, and some were almost falling asleep from exhaustion, waiting for the PM to wake up from his nap so the talks could resume.

There was confusion over who was organizing the talks that night. Frustrated, a UML leader shouted at the Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula, “Sitaula ji, it looks like the talks are not going to start anytime soon. I’m not sure who is talking to whom! And where is my tea?” To which Sitaula answered gently, “This is the best Congress can do.”

The bickering did not disturb Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who was intently reading the newspapers. Deputy Prime Minister Ananta Durlendra Singh Chaudhary, Hasta Bahadur Malla: Rs 150,000

Himal Khabarpatrika, 2-15 December

During the royal regime, only those with connections received financial compensation if their houses had been attacked out in the districts. Those who have received such monies include ministers, parliamentarians, and various political parties, and those with social connections. Home Ministry files show that after 2001 more than Rs 150 million was given out as compensation. Over 600 people received amounts larger than Rs 100,000.

Some prominent personalities received considerable sums: Kamal Thapa: Rs 450,000

Biswa Dweep Pandey is assistant to Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai.

Paid off

Himal Khabarpatrika, 2-15 December

Disappointed with the talks, party leaders were harrowed by the ending of the talks, as they were eagerly waiting for any news outside the residence. Though the talks had not begun, journalists and others came back, and soon the leaders of all eight parties were present. Sitaula read out the agreement, there was some discussion, and it was finally signed at 12.30 AM on 29 November.

Biswa Dweep Pandey in Samaya, Historic night summit talks. They were only leaders serious about Baburam Bhattarai were the begin soon. That the formal talks would not tell them what was really eagerly waiting for any news outside the residence were even begun, journalists leaders. Ordered Frooti to cheer up the Barsha Man Pun ‘Ananta’ minister’s residence. Comrade the rooms at the prime Bahadur Mahara inspected all Maoist spokesperson Krishna arrive. In the meantime, coffee, which took an hour to Ram Bahadur Thapa ordered began, and left Baluwatar. Inform him when the talks assistant Ishwor Pokhrel to stations on his mobile phone.

It’s best for the country if city folk stay in the city, and jungle people in the jungle, hakim aab.

Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 2-15 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The Maoists are matchless at sucking up to Indian expansionism. How can they, who indulge in such unstable politics, do the nation and the people any good?

Chitrabahadur KC, Chairman, Janamorcha Nepal in Dristi, 5 December

It has been in politics for 20 years now, and I am beginning to suspect there is no interest in making us self-sufficient because the mafia involved in flying food grains to Kamali have a vested interest in keeping us hungry.

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At 11.30 PM, Prime Minister Koirala came down to the hall and the mood changed instantly. Leaders woke up from naps, and others came back, and soon the leaders of all eight parties were present. Sitaula read out the agreement, there was some discussion, and it was finally signed at 12.30 AM on 29 November.

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During the royal regime, only those with connections received financial compensation if their houses had been attacked out in the districts. Those who have received such monies include ministers, parliamentarians, and various political parties, and those with social connections. Home Ministry files show that after 2001 more than Rs 150 million was given out as compensation. Over 600 people received amounts larger than Rs 100,000.

Some prominent personalities received considerable sums: Kamal Thapa: Rs 450,000

Biswa Dweep Pandey in Samaya, Historic night summit talks. They were only leaders serious about Baburam Bhattarai were the begin soon. That the formal talks would not tell them what was really eagerly waiting for any news outside the residence were even begun, journalists leaders. Ordered Frooti to cheer up the Barsha Man Pun ‘Ananta’ minister’s residence. Comrade the rooms at the prime Bahadur Mahara inspected all Maoist spokesperson Krishna arrive. In the meantime, coffee, which took an hour to Ram Bahadur Thapa ordered began, and left Baluwatar. Inform him when the talks assistant Ishwor Pokhrel to stations on his mobile phone.

It’s best for the country if city folk stay in the city, and jungle people in the jungle, hakim aab.

Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 2-15 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The Maoists are matchless at sucking up to Indian expansionism. How can they, who indulge in such unstable politics, do the nation and the people any good?

Chitrabahadur KC, Chairman, Janamorcha Nepal in Dristi, 5 December

It has been in politics for 20 years now, and I am beginning to suspect there is no interest in making us self-sufficient because the mafia involved in flying food grains to Kamali have a vested interest in keeping us hungry.

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Mountain lives
These images from In Harmony—People and Nature in Nepal’s Highlands, a photography contest organised by Himal Association and WWF Nepal, are just some of the splendid work on display at this year’s Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (Kimff). Each of the 180 entries fell into one of the three categories, ‘Sustainable livelihood’, ‘The high price of tourism’, and ‘Sacred natural spaces’. The 43 picks that made the finals will be on exhibition at Russian Cultural Centre until 11 December. Three winning photographs will be selected on the basis of originality, technique, content and effectiveness in conveying the theme and the winners will receive cash prizes at the Kimff closing ceremony at Gurukul on 11 December.

Facing page:
THE LONG TRAIL TO MT KAILASH: Pilgrims and porters travel to Humla in far west Nepal. (Mani Lama)
ANIMAL PORTERS: Crossing the Seti in Bajhang. (Susheel Kumar Shrestha)
This page:
TRADITIONAL FARMING: A woman winnows grain in Ghyaru, Manang. (Dinesh Shrestha)
BROTHERS IN ARMS: Making a living by the Bardibas road in Banepa. (Projjwal B Khaadka)
Promises have been made to the Maoist cadres and militia, which simply cannot be kept—there aren’t enough belongings to steal from those who ‘have’ in order to pass out to those who ‘have not’.

- Dr Thomas A Marks on Nepali Perspectives
http://nepaliperspectives.blogspot.com/

Those who rejoiced at how King Gyanendra had become the most humiliated man in Asia perhaps didn’t expect the palace to issue a statement hailing the accord. It [takes] uncommon effort to extol the success of your adversaries.

- Maila Baje on Nepali Netbook
http://nepalinetbook.blogspot.com/

Just when royalists are abandoning the king, Maila Baje’s rightist writings in Nepali Netbook talk of the republican camp’s frustration over the still-strong royal presence. His reading is that republicans are surprised at the staying power of the monarchy and frustrated because it seems as if Nepalis might still be attached to the institution. Maila Baje believes anti-monarchy camps across the southern border are vexed that the king hasn’t fled the country.

Similar sentiments are expressed in Umesh Shrestha’s Mero Sansar, where posters speculate that the king, Girija Koirala, and the seven parties came to an agreement on the modalities of how to keep the monarchy in the country when the king relinquished power in April.

No king can be expected to keep quiet while his house is being destroyed
- Prayas on Mero Sansar
http://www.mysansar.com

Regarding the ongoing process, bloggers still do not trust that weapons will manage honestly from either side. Blogdai criticises the weapons management program:

What good is ‘locked’ when Ian Martin has given the Maoists the keys to the locker? Why ‘hide’ when Girija has just authorised 100 million rupees to be given to the Maoists as support?

- Blogdai
http://nepalnow.blogspot.com

Save Nepal Now asks the Nepali people to be vigilant about the ongoing changes, especially arms management.

Storing their guns behind locked doors for a few months or forming an interim government consisting of Maoist leaders is not an answer to the problem, but a problem in itself. Now that they have signed an exclusive peace treaty, people like us should make sure we leave no stone unturned to disarm the rebels completely.

- Save Nepal Now
www.savenepalnow.org/

Posters at United We Blog! say the seven parties are using republicanism as a shield for their own incompetence and past mistakes. People need food, shelter, and education, they write, without which republicanism is irrelevant. No party has a strategy for making the lives of Nepali people better, so it’s no surprise Nepalis are wary of any political change. Despite the rumours about Maila Baje of Nepali Netbook being a Narayanhiti insider, the palace does not yet have a blog. However, www.nepalmonarchy.gov.np offers enquiring minds who wonder what the royals are up to these days a glimpse into a royal day, official appointments and an official history of the Shah dynasty, and all the royal proclamations and messages. Also on are Gyanendra’s poems and numerous official portraits of royalty. Looking at the latter can be a little like coming across a once-common species now considered endangered. Further amusement comes from the homepage, where one image is a picture of Everest all right—from the Chinese side.

Hunger in peace

The MORE THINGS CHANGE: For Humils like Man Bahadur Budha, Jalitarkha Budha, and Mangile Sunar, peace without food is little consolation.

MARTY LOGAN

THE TIMES 8 - 14 DECEMBER 2006 #326
Women after war

NARESH NEWAR

T
he Maoist movement may have helped improve the position of women in Nepal, but the peace agreement is a throwback to less egalitarian times.

Women account for nearly 40 percent of the ‘People’s Liberation Army’, but nothing in the deal addresses the specific needs of women ex-combatants.

Demobilisation and rehabilitation experts point out that women joining armed insurgencies usually cross tougher social and psychological borders than men to do so. Often theropes home to stigma in peace-time, or at best to the old roles they’d once fought against.

In most societies, men are welcomed as heroes following peace agreements. Women are not given the same respect and often get lost in the reintegration process, “an international expert on female combatants recently told us in Kathmandu.”

In Nepal so far, there have been unanswered basic questions than solutions. Will women ex-combatants—often with less training and education—receive the same opportunities as their male counterparts, such as the option to join the national army? Or will their options include stereotypically female small-scale businesses, for example, or agricultural training? Many Maoist women are mothers; what happens to their children? Will health facilities in the camps include reproductive care? How many female combatants do the Maoists really have?

“For real, there’s a reasonable reintegration, women ex-combatants need employment opportunities,” says Sabahur Pradhan from Franchised Skills, an employment-oriented training project of Helvetas that helps provide vocational and psycho-social training to former female combatants. Last year alone, F-Skill helped find loans and jobs in the field for nearly 85 former rebels.

F-Skill does not offer specific programs targeted at women ex-fighters.

The United Nations Operational Guide to the Integrated DDR Standards, not yet publicly available, also points to the weapon-combatant misperception, which is one reason why women cadres who might not have carried conventional weapons are not in DDR programs. The worst-case scenario is the fallout of peace in countries such as Sierra Leone, El Salvador, and Liberia, where female fighters, ignored in the DDR process, joined armed criminal gangs and prostitution rings.

Commanders of armed groups often keep female combatants out of demobilisation processes, or continue to hide away abducted women and girls for fear of legal consequences. “Young girls are often unwilling to marry, and those who are, are less likely to date, less likely to have children,” according to the guide.

But that doesn’t mean parents stopped worrying about the institution being used as a recruiting ground. The rebels also stopped “taxing” teachers seven percent of their salaries.

“Previously they pressured us not to teach Sanskrit and moral education, saying the stories about the gods were untrue. They also said they would introduce a new curriculum, but they didn’t do it,” says head teacher Hari Gorkhali, sitting on a bench outside the school’s hostel as the sun sank in HUMLA.

In one recent afternoon.

“Women account for nearly 42 percent of the ‘People’s Liberation Army’, but nothing in the deal addressed the specific needs of women ex-combatants.”

He says the gods were untrue. They also said they would introduce a new curriculum, but they didn’t do it.”

The request is echoed by a dozen villagers speaking in HUMLA.

Nepali Congress student leader Lokendra Shrestha notes “the most important thing is food production, which needs irrigation,” he added.

The request is echoed by other villagers who stand one by one to recount their hardships. It is purely coincidental – or is it? – the result is Nepal’s youth have again been denied the chance for a normal childhood.

In this respect, the Maoists have failed as miserably as the Ranas did. They have managed to continue the legacy of keeping the citizens of Nepal ‘simple’ and uneducated.

With the Maharajah of yore, exceptions are always made for the elite, in this case Maoists. Children of high-ranking cadre study in exclusive institutions abroad while their parents wage war on the schooling system at home.

Just in case we forget that iron is alive and well in the teetering kingdom, it is worth noting that the single most damning legacy of Rana misrule has proved a boon to the Maoist cause. Nepal’s pitiful literacy rate—far below that of most Asian nations—has provided an audience unused to critical thinking, less likely to question authority, and easy to brainwash. The politburo must count themselves lucky that major global trends—such as the collapse of communism—have not reached this audience unused to critical thinking, less likely to question authority, and easy to brainwash.

Throughout the conflict, private schools have been singled out for exposure a fear of independent thought the Ranas would applaud.

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Life on Mars

Scientists have discovered tantalising evidence of water gushing down gullies on Mars, dramatically boosting the chances that regions of the planet might still be capable of harbouring life. Pictures taken from Nasa’s Mars Global Surveyor, which has been orbiting the planet for 10 years, reveal distinctive streaks of what is believed to be water, bursting out of crater walls and flowing around boulders and other rocky debris strewn across the surface. Researchers have previously found evidence that lakes once dotted the Martian landscape, and vast quantities of water ice are locked up in sheets of permafrost at the planet’s frigid poles. But this is the first evidence that liquid water, crucial to nurture life, might still be found on the planet today.

(The Guardian)

Virtual yaks

Virtual worlds are yielding real cash, as non-profits target online Sim City-style communities, including the hugely popular Second Life. Save the Children is rattling the virtual tin in the 3D world, and the approximately two million Second Life participants can now travel to Save the Children’s ‘Yak Shack’ and pay 1,000 Linden dollars (the game currency) for their own pixellated yak. The money is transferred to a Save the Children account at $3.50 to 1,000 Linden dollars, and is used to provide livestock for Tibetan families. A Second Life event for a US-based cancer charity recently raised $40,000, and the anti-poverty World Development Movement has also established a presence in the community.

(The Guardian)

Science in motion

Queen’s University psychology professor Niko Troje is using a sophisticated motion-capture system to glean information encrypted in ‘biological motion’. People wear special suits that outline their bodies with white reflective markers as high-speed video cameras record their movements from the marker dot patterns. Findings from over the last three years are relevant clinically and psychologically. For example, body motion can indicate telltale signs of impending mental depression, check progress of stroke victims, or, depending on their body language, even place politicians on a liberal to conservative continuum.

The scientists have also found evidence that animal brains (including our own) are probably hard-wired to detect the presence of other animals from simple foot motion, rather than from body shapes. This ‘Life Detector’ was discovered using student observers and processed recordings, and provides possible explanation for why wild animals are more startled by humans on foot than on bicycles or canoes, or why certain stalking behaviours of predators are so effective. A popular website demonstration at http://www.biomotionlab.ca/ regularly gets 50,000 hits a day.

(The Toronto Star)
Documentary filmmaking in Nepal has grown tremendously in recent years. The subjects and themes explored have, unfortunately, not. A welcome change is Imagine Rainbow in Kathmandu, by didgeridoo performer Salil Kanika and visual designer Thomas Bertschi. This 98 minute-long film, refreshingly new in technique as well as subject, envisions hope and future in a society devastated by war.

Shot in Kathmandu Valley between November 2005 and April 2006, Rainbow begins with portraits of urban wastelands and shots of street children whose future seems even murkier than their dirty hands and faces and greasy hair. Bertschi, artist, visual designer, traveller, and long-time friend of Nepal, found common ground with kids in their dedication to giving children a voice through art.

As the film progresses, professional artists work with groups of children from different social and economic backgrounds, slowly teaching them the basics of street art painting. Eventually you see hope, excitement, and self-discovery in the children's eyes. The five groups of children worked on much more than just music and painting—they painted faces, banners inspired by traditional ceremonial Barsee Umbil flags and school buildings, and played instruments they made themselves. At the end of the film, each group—the sarangi orchestra, the rock chorus, the drummers, the didgeridoo players, and chanters of Buddhist verses—give a grand performance.

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The rainbow—inspired by the Australian aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Snake, creator of growth and fertility—is an appropriate image. The performance evokes—even in cynics—the possibility that we can create a more beautiful world. Proceeds from Imagine Rainbow in Kathmandu will go towards providing further musical and cultural education for children.
YAK YETI YAK

In a family drama that spans generations with love and tragedy, Balraj Kapoor (Amrit Bachan) is a doling husband to Shobhna (Hema Malini) and father to their son Ansh (Sandeep Verma). After Ansh meets with a fatal accident, Balraj sets out to find happiness for his daughter-in-law Millie (Rani Mukherjee) and grandson Ansh with painter Rajat (John Abraham).

Cut 4442220 for show timings at Jal Nepal
www.jalepali.com

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GET THIS SHOW ON THE ROAD: Executive Director of Himal Association Basanta Thapa welcomes Nazir Sabir, the first Pakistani to scale Everest, as chief guest at the fourth Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival at Russian Cultural Centre on Thursday.

ROOTS, RHYMES, CONDOMS: The World Aids Day concert at Britamod High School on Saturday featured a performance by reggae group Jerry Julian and Power of Joy as well as HIV counselling and testing stations.

A tribute to Dr. Harka Gurung

STONED: A woman turns to hurl a stone while pursued by riot police on Monday at Mahendra Ratna Campus in Tahachal. Students and unions were protesting against provisions in the Education Bill to make temporary teachers permanent staff members.
The National Anathema

It is when soldiers padlock the gates of the Supreme Court and threaten to expand their agitation until all their demands are met that we know we are heading Ass-first into the new loktantra.

Last week alone, the streets of the capital were simultaneously closed off by agitating teachers, agitated students, ex-servicemen from the Nepal Army, ex-Gurkhas of the British Army, the Condom Parade on World AIDS Day, a protest march by Maoist victims, and a counter march by Maoist victimisers. Tyres are in such great demand that there is now a dealership in Kalanki.

The sole intention of all these demonstrations of street power was to create awareness by bringing vehicular traffic to a standstill at the centre of political authority in the country which is a 500m radius around Singha Darbar. So, the Ass’s free advice to all of you is to call 103 before heading out anywhere in the unforeseeable future. Or just take a walk.

The reason people spill out into the streets to be heard is because we have such a pathetic parliament building. The former nautch ghar of the Sri Tin Maharaj that looks like a cross between a Mormon church and a Tsar-era railway station is not befitting of the New Nepal. Imagine, there will be 450 MPs crammed like gundruk inside. And smelling like it too. Imagine the aroma of pheromones when one-third of the House raises the Red Salute, thus exposing their honourable sweaty armpits to all and sundry. We know that CCTVs have been installed so the Speaker can spy on interim MPs who are eclipsed by the fourth pillars of democracy inside the August House, but is that a way to run a National Legislature? We suggest moving parliament to BICC, or why not have it outdoors in the sun in the National Stadium?

Ever since Comrade Dahal was thinking aloud last week about how Deb Gurung would make an excellent Speaker, the man has been rehearsing for the post by cracking the Whip. Deb sir should also take a crash course in monitoring security cameras because that is what he’ll have to be doing most of the time to figure out which backbencher is hitting whom over the head with a microphone behind the pillar.

The national hue and cry over the proposed national anthem has got more column inches than any other subject in recent weeks, even more than Ian Martin’s commutes to New York. Byaccoid Maila is probably ruining the day he submitted his lyrics because he’s had to bear more public scrutiny than a candidate for the US presidency. Someone has dug up a preface he wrote for a book in which he sings undeserved praises for G Shah’s poetic abilities, thus raising serious doubts about his loktantrik credentials. Looks like the Mailas get along like a house on fire, and that includes the enigmatic Maila Baje (www.nepalinetbook.blogspot.com/).

Otherwise the only thing we can really say about the poem is that it is pretty bland and glorifies the blood spilt in past wars. And some of the words are so awkward, one wonders how they will ever be set to music, even by Ambar Gurung. Speaking of whom why not just turn ‘Naaulakhata dara utaye’ (Maybe replace nau lakh with tin karod) into the anthem of not just a New Nepal, but a Greater Nepal?

The Ass hears James Moriarty was a hit when he spoke in Nepali with a twang in Pokhara last week. The ambassador seems to have put in a lot of work on his spoken Nepali, and even mastered such Sanskrit mantras as “shanti punarsthapana” and “balik matadhikar”. Alas, the Ass’s Pokhara informant couldn’t figure out whether the ambassador was reading from Nepali or Romanised text. Either way, a well-deserved A-minus to the ambassador in his orals. Now for the written exam.

FG