Business as usual

SHARAD KC

Tuesday gave us an inkling of what the Maoists’ ‘safe landing’ will mean on the streets.

Every time the party doesn’t like something, it will force a shutdown on a weary nation.

Which means, as the Maoists come out of the closet, they will behave just like opposition parliamentary parties have since 1990. This week, they enforced a wildcat strike on Kathmandu and put on showy armed parades near cantonment sites. Then they warned that there would be two more days of this to augur in the new year 2007. A farmer in Musuriya watching the Maoist armed parade told visiting journalists: “We thought we finally had peace. And now this.”

All this sabre rattling was less about ambassadorial appointments and more a sign of Maoist nervousness about anger in the rank and file boiling over because of the UN’s delays in arms storage, which is also having a knock-on effect on the setting up of an interim government.

The party brass must have heard the impatience during its central working committee meeting this week in Bhaktapur. The meeting strategised on how to restructure the organisation for party politics and, in that sense, was path-breaking.

The party leadership decided to push for a nationwide political campaign on a democratic republic platform for the constituent assembly election. They also decided that ‘revolutionary’ land reform and a lower land ceiling would be part of that platform. It does look like the Maoists have a headstart in the campaigning over others in the governing alliance.

On Thursday, for the first time the Maoists announced the real names of all their top leaders, some of whom were still underground and were only known by their nom de guerre. They announced sub-central committees based in five different development regions: with Ram Bahadur Thapa in the east, Barsaman Pun in the central region, Top Bahadur Rayamajhi in the west, Post Bahadur Bogati in the mid-west and Netra Bikram Chanda in the far-west.

“The end of the war and to enter open politics, we are structuring our party based on the government’s regional divisions,” party spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara explained.

Interestingly, the photogenic party supremo Dahal will be in charge of publicity, and ideologue Baburam Bhattarai will head the People’s Council. Mohan Baidya, recently released from jail in India, will head training and monitoring. Other committees will decide on the names for the interim government and parliament.

The Maoist threat of more bandas is the sound of an underground armed group entering mainstream politics. We’ll have to get used to it.
Myopia

As one movement winds down, another one, as insidious, is escalating

A shutdown that works by coercion and threats can never be justified. But last Tuesday, a day after the two leaders—unlike the reasons to keep vehicles off the roads during shutdown hours were made polity. Although the Maoists made a show of force, the guns in the tarai and some vehicles were torched, violence was relatively light. It seems as if the transformation of the Maoists into an electoral force has begun. In comparison, the SPA stalwarts lived up to their reputation of being incompetent, myopic, and self-centred. They squandered one more opportunity to redeem themselves. In the last Tuesday, for once, the Maoists passed muster. But the cadres will pass muster. But the leadership, if anything, continues to be myopic, and self-centred. They squandered one more opportunity to redeem themselves.

the hill and the plains will soon become a schism. But our major political parties, including the CPN-M, are so wary of criticism that they are afraid to be frank. Negotiating skills and a personality that inspires confidence are added assets. If these criteria are strictly applied, very few of Girja Prasad Koirala’s relatives or UML cadres will pass muster. But the qualifications were held to suit the preferences of the foreign minister’s political bosses, and the result is a mixed bag of the wrong sort: the commonplace, and the odd. There are some notable names. Hamid Ansari deserves to be an ambassador. A rare Marxist Muslim, he also has an enviable track-record of passionate advocacy for minority rights. But how a leftist diplomat will go to the Saudi Arabia while the democracy remains to be seen. Tanka Karki for China and Surya Gurung for Russia are both amenable enough. But it is difficult to imagine a more inappropriate candidate than Shailaja Chandra. Talk of her being an appropriate candidate than Shailaja Chandra. Talk of her being an untouchable, and often wrong in her politics. She lost in the last general elections, and is not considered. In the next April’s election, it is only in light of the other candidates—so mediocre you can’t even imagine a worse candidate—than Shailaja Chandra. Dalal did this recently, but the madhesi issues didn’t make it to the list. The Madhesi Parliament has considered such an interaction.

When we warned three years ago on this page about the war turning into a caste war we had hoped it wouldn’t be a self-fulfilling prophecy. But the euphoria over the ceasefire of the past nine months is now being replaced by a worrying sense of foreboding about ethnic, separatist, and religious tissues that are opening up beneath our feet. What we advised last week was that we writing up after the restoration of democracy. Partly it is also politics where the radical fringes of the Maoists and other parties have taken to extreme and militant rhetoric to leap frog into the political arena. Whatever the reason, there are ominous signs that unless the legitimate ethnic and political groups are addressed and heeded, past ten years of war are going to look like a picnic. At its most fundamental, tara resentment is directed at our traditional “hill-centric nationalism”. Kathmandu has identified Nepaliness for so long with the hill and hmal that we have come to accept it as a given, forgetting that half the country’s population lives in the tarai.

The Maoists tried to co-opt this with their ethnic autonomy formula, which was really just lip-service because they have already started falling back on Lenin’s concept of ‘democratic centralism’. But having raised false expectations it will be difficult to put the genie back in the bottle, as the militant fringe of chauvinistic groups have now brieﬂed a political weapon. Violence is. Even the Maoists may now be unable to control the tara, Limbuwan, Magarat, and dozens of other ethnic-based demands for independence. It seems every time negotiations start with one faction, a more hardline group breaks away. Jay Krishna Guli of the T.R.M. rebelled from the Maoists, and now Jwala Singh has broken away from him. At the root of the crisis is resentment that even the new loktantra alliance, despite its promises of inclusion and proportional representation, doesn’t allow the people of the tara far say in the interim parliament and beyond. Time is of the essence, because left-wing, right-wing and no-wing extremists want to manipulate genuine grievances for militant politics. In the long-term there must be a mechanism to deluge the ethno-factional dimension of the current agitation with meaningful regional federalism that translates into true devolution of power and resources away from Kathmandu to the rural areas.

instead of calling for impetuous and irrational Shutdown, the Maoists about major decisions. Threats can never be justified. But our major political parties, including the CPN-M, are so wary of criticism that they are afraid to be frank. Negotiating skills and a personality that inspires confidence are added assets. If these criteria are strictly applied, very few of Girja Prasad Koirala’s relatives or UML cadres will pass muster. But the qualifications were held to suit the preferences of the foreign minister’s political bosses, and the result is a mixed bag of the wrong sort: the commonplace, and the odd. There are some notable names. Hamid Ansari deserves to be an ambassador. A rare Marxist Muslim, he also has an enviable track-record of passionate advocacy for minority rights. But how a leftist diplomat will go to the Saudi Arabia while the democracy remains to be seen. Tanka Karki for China and Surya Gurung for Russia are both amenable enough. But it is difficult to imagine a more inappropriate candidate than Shailaja Chandra. Talk of her being an untouchable, and often wrong in her politics. She lost in the last general elections, and is not considered. In the next April’s election, it is only in light of the other candidates—so mediocre you can’t even imagine a worse candidate—than Shailaja Chandra. Dalal did this recently, but the madhesi issues didn’t make it to the list. The Madhesi Parliament has considered such an interaction.

EYES WIDE SHUT

Sheetal Kumar

Intellectuals in Kathmandu are loudly voicing their objections to the restrictive provisions of the interim constitution that limit their participation in the proposed constituent assembly. If only someone would listen to the voices of dissent. They are signs of a realignment of forces that could ﬂare into a conﬂict in later months. If genuine madhesi grievances, such as adequate representation in the constituent assembly, are not addressed, the divide between the hills and the plains will soon become a schism.

But our major political parties, including the CPN-M, are so wary of criticism that they are afraid to be frank. Negotiating skills and a personality that inspires confidence are added assets. If these criteria are strictly applied, very few of Girja Prasad Koirala’s relatives or UML cadres will pass muster. But the qualifications were held to suit the preferences of the foreign minister’s political bosses, and the result is a mixed bag of the wrong sort: the commonplace, and the odd. There are some notable names. Hamid Ansari deserves to be an ambassador. A rare Marxist Muslim, he also has an enviable track-record of passionate advocacy for minority rights. But how a leftist diplomat will go to the Saudi Arabia while the democracy remains to be seen. Tanka Karki for China and Surya Gurung for Russia are both amenable enough. But it is difficult to imagine a more inappropriate candidate than Shailaja Chandra. Talk of her being an untouchable, and often wrong in her politics. She lost in the last general elections, and is not considered. In the next April’s election, it is only in light of the other candidates—so mediocre you can’t even imagine a worse candidate—than Shailaja Chandra. Dalal did this recently, but the madhesi issues didn’t make it to the list. The Madhesi Parliament has considered such an interaction.

faced a dilemma: find new and better ways of conducting an election, or rest the dates and risk a restart. As one movement winds down, another one, as insidious, is escalating. It’s bad long-term politics for mainstream parties if groups like the T.M.R. vote for the T.M.R. Singh’s gain a foothold among moderate ethnically-oriented groups, most people in the tara deplore the extremist expression of these groups give genuine grievances of people from the region. But the longer these issues go unresolved, the greater the chances that their separatist appeal will cross into the political arena.

Koirala and Dalal may be many things, but they are looking less and less like visionaries. Koirala wants to go down in history as the successful middlewife and nurse of the peace process. His insistence on the June date for the elections, meanwhile, is not, is part of that. However, as another leader of Nepal said in another context, Koirala may die, but his nation will live on. Why should Koirala’s health concerns hold Nepal’s future hostage to a bald-faced imposition of an election time-schedule? Dalal is focused entirely on ensuring his party comes to power. A leader of a political party, until you realise that he shows no signs of doing anything about the ethnic nationalism and his party have unleashed. Whether madhesi perceptions are true or not, the mere fact that they are raised can raise ethical concerns. Dalal believes real power. Koirala, Dalal and the rest better sort this out before the constituent assembly elections. Or otherwise, like, as we know it won’t last. •
MYTHICAL FIGURES
Thanks to Sheetal Kumar for reminding us of history at a time when we’re all keen on just making it (“Debunking myths,” #327). I’m surprised that the Maoists, who come from a tradition which learns, as all good litter sorts do, heavily on historical determinism (Prachanda himself talks the usual bunk about historical inevitability), don’t know the backstory of their own claims. Or perhaps it’s just easier to reify it into myth, eh?

Shanti BJ, email

SHUT IT
It’s all very exciting, great news etc, that the seven parties and the Maoists have finally come to an agreement. Unfortunately, I think our political leaders are too power hungry to unite and work sincerely for the good of the people. Let’s wait and see. Until then, god bless Nepal and poor Nepalis.

Kiran Karki, Australia

Nice cartoon (“Scrubbed,” #326). Let’s hope everyone is using good quality soap so at least their hands stay clean for some time. We have seen positive changes since April—a commitment to peace and limits on the powers of the king. But there hasn’t been much from the Maoists except the Maobadi.

Bimal Raj Bastola, New York

Just as the country is moving towards a peaceful settlement to the insurgency and the people are, to a certain extent, forgiving the Maoists’ past deeds, they have reminded us again that their intolerance is tenacious. Their banda abruptly halted daily activities over a routine, long- overdue activity, not a policy decision requiring consultation. If they genuinely want to look less intimidating and cruel, they should change their mode of showing displeasure. And why do other parties in the coalition jump on the Maoist bandwagon? In any case, I don’t see any proposed appointment that needs serious rethinking.

People wonder whether the Maoists are serious about joining a multiparty democracy or are just using democracy to destroy democracy. In other words, are they using democracy as a means to fulfill their goal of a communist hegemony?

PB Rana, email

SAME OLD TUNE
Please convey my greetings to the SPA and the UN monitoring team with this little ditty.

Perhaps it could be an anthem entitled, “God Help Dur Motherland” (sung to the tune of “Oh Mr Porter what shall I do, I wanted to go to Birmingham but you took me off to Crewe.”)

Ode to the SPA
“Or seven parties what shall we do?
You bent over backwards to please the Maobadi.
Now every time you hiccup, they’ll hurry back to war.
Oh seven parties what silly men you are!”

That’s how it looks from a cold, northern climate.

KA Tamang, Middlesbrough

FOR SARITA
“Sarita’s family” (#327) accurately represents a typical Nepali village. That is how difficult life is in the countryside, where people look upon bleak futures and struggle with daily poverty. The government doesn’t really care, although they too are citizens of Nepal. Thank you, Rupa Joshi, for seeing this.

Ram S Kuwar, China

NOTE
A number of readers wrote in, asking what they could do to help Sarita and her children. Rupa Joshi responds: “We’ve opened a bank account to collect money for Sarita’s family. I promised her I would help collect enough funds so she can send all her kids to school (after she’s paid off a Rs 25,000 loan her husband took before he died); I’ve already raised almost the entire loan amount and hope to get more.”

“The cost of sponsoring a child for a year—including all opportunity costs—varies widely from government schools in different places to private ones. The best option for the girls would probably be to attend school in Galpalat so they would not be far away from the family—and not have to make too big a jump from the village.”

Details of Sarita’s Family Fund are available on request. Anyone who’d like to contribute or has suggestions can contact Nepali Times.

LETTERS
Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. White 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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**NARESH NEWAR in NEPALGANJ**

**Point well taken**

More bandas are not the way to go, but this one had a reason

**NARESH NEWAR**

Motorcycles, nicknames and Shank’s pony bone me about on that day and I noticed with surprise that I was more punctual than usual—no traffic for an excuse.

Through the quiet streets of Patan and Kathmandu, I crumpled along with my well-paid young Rickshawala. At major intersections, lines of smoking tyres smouldered and police stood by, batons and shields at the ready. A few bashed in the midday sun, mostly officers who had little or no intention of mixing it up with the maobili. Ambulances and a few brave taxis rolled by. A shrill yellow voice jabbered rhetoric from a red van flying Maoist student union flags. The words “Nepali janta” and “ucheet banda” echoed off the shuttered shops.

Suddenly something began to penetrate the fog of my annoyance. Why was I so upset with the comrades? Why did I feel that they’d done something evil or capricious proving they were nayits with no intention of playing politics peacefully?

Conditioning, that’s what it was. A failure to look beyond my own comfort or needs to the wider picture. As I jogged along across the Bagmati Bridge, the nicknames grazing under my well-fed foreigner’s bulk, I gave these thoughts free reign to see where they’d gallop, freed from knee-jerk initiation at those who dared inconvenience me.

First there was the ostensible reason for the strike. The government’s announcing ambuscades as approved by cabinet. On the surface, this was a good thing. Crucial diplomatic posts—New Delhi, Washington, London—were vacant at a time when the country’s fluid situation needed to be managed. The maobili welcomed the news.

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But as a group of grim young men in Mao caps marshalled by, shouting their slogans, I began to get the point. What the government—or perhaps the prime minister—did was wrong. Not is the time to be sending political hacks to important allies’ capitals. A foreign affairs adviser should be advising on foreign affairs, not packing his bags for Washington. A central committee member should be planning political strategy, not preparing to fly to Delhi. A central committee member should be advising on foreign affairs, not packing his bags for Washington. A central committee member should be planning political strategy, not preparing to fly to Delhi.

The Maoists were our last hope. And we should have known better. And we should have known better. And we should have known better.

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**UNTCHED**

For far-west Nepal’s dalits, the peace process has been a bitter return to old realities

**NARESH NEWAR**

B alaram is too afraid to reveal his real name and wants to conceal his identity as a dalit Maoist activist. Last month, he watched quietly horrified as local Thakuri and other high caste landlords in Kalikot’s Daha VDC brutally beat up Babche BK, a district leader of the Maoist-affiliated Dalit Liberation Front (DLF). The old masters were getting back at BK for his role in promoting dalit consciousness in this caste-defined area.

Interestingly, the Maoists call Kalikot district an “untouchability-free” zone. The reality, it becomes increasingly evident, is quite the opposite. “High caste people are no longer afraid of Maoists and are now attacking dalit rights workers,” says Bale BK a dalit rights activist and school teacher from Roba VDC in Mugu.

The Maoists have stepped up their kangaroo courts and jungle justice. And for many dalit activists in the Karnali who joined the Maoists out of disillusion with special interest organisations such as DLF, life as a dalit has become harder and more dangerous than before.

Now the Maoists have won a political victory. Our issue has been overshadowed by hardcore political matters. They just watched as landlords beat up a local dalit leader last week,” says Hari Babchar BK, a dalit rights activist and school teacher in Roba VDC, Mugu.

There is a growing sense in the dalit groups here that they have been sold down the river by the Maoists. A Maoist party worker told us, on condition of anonymity, “Now, looking at the speed with which things returned to what they used to be and, more tellingly, how little the attitudes of high caste cadre towards us have actually changed, we feel that we were used. They wanted numbers, and they found it easy to recruit us.”

In Kalikot alone, nearly 106 dalits were killed during the “People’s War” and many of their families say they were barely trained as fighters and had been used as human shields. There are few dalits in decision making positions in the party, and most are in the “PLA”. Of the 36 central committee members, two are dalit, Khashaba Bahadur BK and Tilak Pathak, who is also a politiburo member.

“The Maoists have to account for what they’ve done here. They can’t just give a district a fancy label and leave things at that. And they must finally acknowledge the dalit contribution to the PLA Movement and all that to the people’s war,” says an angry Bale BK a dalit rights activist and school teacher from Roba VDC in Mugu.

Illiteracy, caste discrimination, female exploitation, poverty, poor child health, malnutrition, and unemployment are rampant in dalit communities in Karnali, where 17 percent of Nepal’s five million dalits live. The situation is much worse for dalit women—only 1.3 percent in the Karnali region are educated.

“The Maoists were our last chance, and many of us gave to the movement what we could. Our hopes are shattered,” says Ram Singh Sarki, an activist with Jumla’s Karnali Utpiti Samaj Kendra.

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**HERE AND THERE**

Daniel Lak

Like many of you, I reacted badly to news of Tuesday’s six-hour banda called by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist. I fumed and fulminated. Phrases like “who do they think they are” and “lip service.”

Suddenly something began to penetrate the fog of my annoyance. Why was I so upset with the comrades? Why did I feel that they’d done something evil or capricious proving they were nayits with no intention of playing politics peacefully?

Conditioning, that’s what it was. An inability to look beyond my own comfort or needs to the wider picture. As I jogged along across the Bagmati Bridge, the nicknames grazing under my well-fed foreigner’s bulk, I gave these thoughts free reign to see where they’d gallop, freed from knee-jerk initiation at those who dared inconvenience me.

First there was the ostensible reason for the strike. The government’s announcing ambuscades as approved by cabinet. On the surface, this was a good thing. Crucial diplomatic posts—New Delhi, Washington, London—were vacant at a time when the country’s fluid situation needed to be managed and help asked for. Rightly, royal placemen were recalled from foreign capitals when the king’s mad experiment to make the country’s fluid situation needed to be managed and help asked for. Rightly, royal placemen were recalled from foreign capitals when the king’s mad experiment to make the country’s fluid situation needed to be managed and help asked for. Rightly, royal placemen were recalled from foreign capitals when the king’s mad experiment to make the country’s fluid situation needed to be managed and help asked for. Rightly, royal placemen were recalled from foreign capitals when the king’s mad experiment to make the country’s fluid situation needed to be managed and help asked for.

But as a group of grim young men in Mao caps marched by, shouting their slogans, I began to get the point. What the government—or perhaps the prime minister—did was wrong. Not is the time to be sending political hacks to important allies’ capitals. A foreign affairs adviser should be advising on foreign affairs, not packing his bags for Washington. A central committee member should be planning political strategy, not preparing to fly to Delhi. A central committee member should be advising on foreign affairs, not packing his bags for Washington. A central committee member should be planning political strategy, not preparing to fly to Delhi. A central committee member should be advising on foreign affairs, not packing his bags for Washington. A central committee member should be planning political strategy, not preparing to fly to Delhi.

The Maoists had a point. Even if all they intended was to press their own demands a CPSM commune made ambassador to Beijing to hear what the Chinese think of a post-Mao Maoist party? the protesters had the right to take to the streets, if not shut down the Valley. Besides, what we expected last Tuesday isn’t too different from what the rest of the country goes through almost every day. A little rain on our parade might just jolt the country goes through almost every day. A little rain on our parade might just jolt the country goes through almost every day. A little rain on our parade might just jolt the country goes through almost every day. A little rain on our parade might just jolt the country goes through almost every day. A little rain on our parade might just jolt.
China and India dominate all conversation about the state of the world economy in the global press. Together, they carry 40 percent of the world’s population. They produce 25 percent of the global output. Measured in terms of what currencies actually buy, China has the world’s second largest economy; India, the fourth largest. China alone has emerged as the world’s local factory, producing just about everything in high volumes and at low prices. Meanwhile, urban India has become a sought-after global hub for IT and, increasingly, other sophisticated services. Little wonder, every forward-looking country today wants to be literally next to these two giants.

That is why, given Nepal’s location, you’d think that we’d be busy transforming our geographic luck into competitive advantage. But a look at the papers tells us otherwise. Beleaguered by the internal wars of aged politicians at least the chances they offer for progress representing yesterday’s dreams, we haven’t really got our act together. Indeed, when it comes to strategically linking our economy up with those of our neighbours to create trade and job opportunities for young Nepalis, all we can do is lapse into collective hand-wringing.

One reason is that the mindset of Nepal’s political class is anti-business. By temperament and background, the members of this class don’t understand the value that businessmen and entrepreneurs add. That’s not surprising, considering that many of our netas came of age at a time when the only viewpoint was that the state should provide everything for its citizens. As chest-thumping socialists, they still believe that a government’s role is to be a pervasively controlling influence in all Nepalis’ lives. Never mind that the netas send their own children for higher studies and jobs in countries which favour fewer government interventions. Moreover, few of our politicians have managed competitive small businesses. Fewer still have paid the bills with money they’ve earned through their own honest sweat. This gap in exposure shows up in the way they view the business community—not as creators of jobs and the middle class, but as a constituency to be milked for bribes in exchange for discretionary favours. The result is, our netas have developed neither the imagination required to make every adult Nepal a gainfully employed worker, nor the humility to understand how business policies which anchor our economy to those of our neighbours uplift us all.

Another reason the China-India talk does not amount to much is that there is a shortage of Nepalis who can credibly push as a priority the agenda of business, trade, and jobs. Through their own actions, the present crop of old business leaders has become a liability. The younger ones are busy—pushing Maoists out of factories or running away to safety. Other competent Nepalis are either slaving away for investment or consulting firms in the west, or existing as well-compensated bureaucrats at international aid organisations, aware that every passing year weakens their ties to Nepal. And our civil society, filled as it is with NGO careerists and well-to-do retired professionals, has its calendar full of activities that are important, but too abstract to mean much to most Nepalis beyond Thankot who are in need of food, shelter, and jobs.

So, who’s to start a strategic China-India conversation in Nepal that goes beyond the “cementing the age-old ties” routine? Hard to say, except that the opportunity is ripe for us to act now. Unless we want to be left so far behind, that we later come to depend on the charity of these two neighbours.
Talk to the tarai
Ghatana Ra Bichar, 20 December

A new terror is being unleashed in the tarai by several armed groups. In the name of the Jantantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha, these groups are threatening, physically assaulting, abducting, and looting from hill migrants, who they call ‘pahadiya’. They prevent pahadiyas from working and constantly put pressure on them to return to their homes in the hill districts.

Recently, TJMM president Jwala Singh warned that no pahadiya was allowed to ride or operate public transport for two weeks. ‘If anyone defies our orders, the vehicle will be destroyed anywhere, at any time,’ said Singh. The TJMM declared that only tarai madhesis have the right to use the east-west Mahendra highway.

A large number of families who have been living for the last few decades in Saptari, Siraha, and Janakpur are now considering leaving. The TJMM is responsible for the murder of RPP parliamentarian Krishna Charan Shrestha, and the group says any hill migrant who poses an obstacle to their activities could face a similar fate.

The TJMM’s prime target used to be the Maoists, but now innocent civilians from the hills are falling victim to their political terror, and the tarai is becoming increasingly radicalised and militant. The government seems to be quiet even though civilians are being abducted, koted, and displaced from their homes. This issue has not even been discussed in parliament. In the name of madness rights, the tire of hatred against the hill migrants is spreading. The situation will go out of control if nothing is done right now. This is why the government should not delay in talking with the tarai leaders about resolving the issue, and not focus all their energy on mainstreaming the Maoists. The government shouldn’t underestimate the TJMM, which has the potential to grow very large. The Maoists were also a small party once.

Who are they?
Jana Aastha, 20 December

This is what went on at the prime minister’s residence on the night when the eight parties were gathered to agree on the interim constitution.

It was almost midnight and UML leader Madhab Kumar Nepal had decided that history was being made and that he had to have a record of this on his digital camera. He went from room to room, photographing all the chambers of the prime minister’s residence. This irritated former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who said, ‘There goes the man who wore daura suruwal when the king sacked me.’ Nepal snapped back, ‘Stop lying. Did I not ask you to reinstate the parliament?’ This was met with a roar of laughter from other leaders and shut Deuba up for the rest of the night.

Deputy Prime Minister Amik Sherchan gave a grand tour of the prime minister’s residence to Baburam Bhattarai’s wife Hisila Yami. The leftist leaders decided to pull an all-nighter, while GP Koirala and Deuba took long naps. Ram Sharan Mahat, Chakra Bastola and Minendra Risal came in late because they had prior commitments. Later that night, Deuba was reportedly overheard saying, ‘Now all issues are resolved. When I was prime minister, I got a message from India assuring me that the king would not go against the constitution. Why else would I gamble my reputation and trust the king?’ The strangest part of the whole evening was the number of people that no one recognised. They were seen running around the computer room, writing notes, talking on their mobiles. They all looked very important and very busy. They were seen talking and laughing with the leaders of all the parties, yet no one really knew who they were. They are in all the pictures taken that night, smiling to their heart’s content.
Purge

Sanghu, 18 December

The criminals who joined the Maoists during the people’s war are now proving to be a nuisance and embarrassment to their party. Many who gained notoriety as armed robbers and rapists had joined the rebellion to get away with their crimes and evade arrest. They have no political awareness and principles. All they know is how to use guns, and they are the ones responsible for defaming the party at the local level. This was discussed seriously during the party’s central committee meeting. Maoist leaders are concerned about the negative fallout due to the presence of such party workers, especially when they join open competitive politics before elections to the constituent assembly.

These are the same cadre who’ve been involved in extortion, intimidation and threats at the local level in defiance of orders from the central committee. One Maoist leader was heard expressing concern that the party was turning into a “trash can”. The central working committee plans to launch a new campaign to clean up the party’s image. The party is under pressure from members to act quickly to either kick out anti-social elements and criminals or rescind them to the Maoist ideology. These were the same people involved in atrocities and torture designed to force civilians to accept their ideology.

Editorial in Tarun, 18 December

In the last seven months, there have been seven agreements between the government and the Maoists, about which everyone has been happy. What is lost in the celebrations is that these agreements need to be monitored and implemented. Those involved in negotiating the terms of the contracts have forgotten the clauses they agreed upon. The government couldn’t care less about the monitoring aspect, and the Maoists have never followed the agreements in practice. Nepalis in cities and villages feel that there is no rule of law. We are so desperate for peace that no one questions either the government’s inaction or the Maoists’ actions. We want peace at any cost.

The government has already given over Rs 170 million to the Maoists, so the PLA is looked after well. But the Maoists continue to collect money from the people saying they need it to take care of their army. Maoist spokesperson and coordinator of the talks committee, Krishna Bahadur Prasad Mahara, has clearly stated that this ‘tax collection’ will continue until the interim constitution is agreed upon and the Maoists join the government. It is unclear whether this is because the government support they receive is not enough or because they suspect the state will not let them join the government. And what if they use the latter as a reason? It looks as if Nepalis will always have to live in fear and intimidated.

The parties and the Maoists talk about increasing trust between themselves. Is this trust just based on words? The government and the Maoists have failed to get people excited about the various developments taking place. The international community is not playing the role it could have played in conflict management and rehabilitation simply because it doesn’t trust the Maoists.

To build trust the government has to do something immediately about prevalent lawlessness, admit that mistakes were made in the past, and assure the people that it is committed to peace. And none of these things can be done without the help of the Maoists.

At any price

Laxmi Gautam

Selected material translated every week from the Nepali Press

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“We don’t have to wait to finish one thing to go on to another. The need of the hour is to take everything forward together. Only then will we be able to hold the constituent assembly elections as planned.”

Laxman Aryal, former chief justice and head of an earlier constitution drafting committee, in Deshanatr, 17 December

Magical Christmas and New Year Celebrations

Shangri-La Bakery

supported by

Christmas Eve Dinner

Lights, sound and action... a place that has always been used as Christmas tree at the Shangri-La... and why not... with the suave festive feel in the air... the wall of lights and an environment that would have Santa come over... to wonder if dinner at the Shangri-La is always reminiscent with such festive:

Rs. 1000,- including set Menu with Turkey:
Christmas Buffet - Rs. 999- net per person.
Includes sponsored Drinks. Buy coupons for Live Food Counters.

Christmas Day Lunch

The warm December morn, warm pleasing food... children laughing and playing with you and your loved ones enjoy the lovely subtly herb and the international buffet, the smells of which will fill through the garden:

Rs. 700- net per person.

New Year Eve Dinner

A Gala night where tapes & the soul Stimis, DJ to keep you up all night and mesmerize you with their songs. A New Hall and a new year’s all to a place where you can get enough of anything. Be it the music or the Ambience and Live Food Counters.

for reservations: 4412669, Laxmitar, Kathmandu
Hotel Himalaya, Kopundole has a Christmas Eve package that includes carols, a buffet dinner, wine, and live music for Rs 999 per person. Their New Year’s Eve offer for Rs 4,000 per couple or Rs 3,000 per person includes a buffet dinner, unlimited drinks, door prizes, and live music from Ram Shrestha and the Rockers.

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu offers special Christmas Eve packages for Nepalis and local residents. Rs 7,999 for a single or Rs 10,999 for a couple gets you an overnight stay and get 45-minute relaxation massage, as well as access to the hotel’s pool, spa and gym, and Christmas dinner at The Café on 24 December. Alternatively, for an extra Rs 565 (single) or Rs 1,360 (couple) you can have Christmas dinner at The Rox, breakfast for two at The Café, and enjoy Christmas carols on Christmas Eve.

Jalan Jalan Restaurant goes local for Christmas, with an Asian buffet and classical and Nepali folk music, starting 4.30 PM on 25 December. Alternatively, for an extra Rs 1,000 (single) or Rs 3,000 (couple) you can have Christmas dinner at The Rox, breakfast for two at The Café, and enjoy Christmas carols on Christmas Eve.

Le Meridien Kathmandu’s Rocking 60s event rings in the New Year from 7 PM with a return to the era of rock and roll. For Rs 1,500 per person, there’s live music from Crossfire, a DJ, and re-creations of a typical 60s dining experience.

Radisson Hotel is offering a number of Christmas and New Year dining options, including:

**Club Himalaya Resort’s Restaurant Kantipur in Nagarkot has a Christmas Eve dinner for Rs 750 per person, and a New Year’s Eve dinner for Rs 999, including a bottle of Gorkha beer.**

**Courtyard, Putalisadak has a Christmas barbecue, and special gifts for groups of eight or more.**

**Dwarika’s Christmas Eve offer starts with warm glühwein, followed by a four-course dinner at Toran restaurant for Rs 1,600 per person. They also have Christmas lunch on 25 December for Rs 1,200 per head. On New Year’s Eve, a Rs 3,000 entry charge includes dinner, a welcome drink, and live music by Anil Shahi, followed by Side B.**

**Godavari Village Resort’s New Year includes accommodation on 31 December, dinner and a drink, a live concert by The Heart Breakers, door prizes, and breakfast on New Year’s Day for Rs 4,500 (single room), Rs 6,500 (double) or Rs 8,500 (triple).**

**Jbar is embracing a red theme for the festive season, from their famous flaming cocktails to the décor.**

**Le Meridien Kathmandu’s Rocking 60s event rings in the New Year from 7PM with a return to the era of rock and roll. For Rs 1,500 per person, there’s live music from Crossfire, a DJ, and re-creations of a typical 60s dining experience.**

**Radisson Hotel is offering a number of Christmas and New Year dining options, including:**

The Fun Café’s Christmas and New Year buffet dinners for

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Christmas Celebration at Soaltee Crowne Plaza is all about adding delight to your festive party. Get into the festive mood with our all-inclusive Christmas Celebrations Package.

Join Priority Club today for free nights, miles and more! Visit us at www.platonfly.com

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**Christmas CONCE**

Enjoy your Christmas with

Asian Buffet,

Classical & Nepalese folk music

Achut Ram Bhendari and friends

Date: 2015 Dec 25, 2016 Jan 1
Time: 6 PM - 10 PM
Price: NRS 500

**Merry Christmas!**

Bluebird Mall, Tribhuvan Narayani Complex, Pulchowk

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**Merry Christmas!**

Bluebird Mall, Tribhuvan Narayani Complex, Pulchowk
Sedate dinner and drinks are all very well, but if you’re looking to ring in the New Year with some dance floor action, here is the pick of the parties:

The party: New Year’s Fiesta with PartyNepal
The perks: Sets by DJ Yanik and DJ Vibe, a complimentary drink
The price: Rs 800
The place: 8PM onwards at Liquid Lounge, Lazimpat

The party: New Year’s Fiesta with PartyNepal
The perks: Sets by DJ Sickfreak and DJ NVN, a complimentary drink
The price: Rs 500
The place: 9PM onwards at Jeans Café, New Road

The party: Sinners in Heaven
The perks: DJs from India, unlimited drinks and dinner
The price: Rs 1,599
The place: 8PM onwards at Atrium, Hotel Yak & Yeti

Soaltee Crowne Plaza has Christmas festivities galore at Al Fresco, Bukhara, and China Garden, all offering a four-course traditional dinner on Christmas Eve. There’s also a buffet dinner with live music and a DJ at Megha on 25 December and, on Christmas Day, The Front Lawn has a buffet lunch and live music. For New Year’s Eve, there are international belly dancers at Megha Mahal for Rs 4,999 per person, in addition to music from DJ Ryan and a live band. There’s also a buffet dinner at Garden Terrace for Rs 2,999, or a la carte dining at Bukhara, Al Fresco, and China Garden for a minimum of Rs 1,200, 8PM onwards. 4239999

Hotel Yak & Yeti’s Christmas and New Year offers include:
Sunrise Café’s Christmas Eve dinner (6.30-10PM) and Christmas Day lunch (12 noon till 2.30 PM), both at Rs 1,199 per person, including a glass of house wine. Sunrise Café is also hosting Yak & Yeti’s New Year’s Eve musical extravaganza, which starts 7PM on 31 December.

The Chimney Restaurant’s Christmas Eve dinner, Rs 3,499 per person or Rs 5,999 for a couple (6.30-9.30 PM). On New Year’s Eve they offer a seven-course candlelit dinner for Rs 4,499 for a single entry or Rs 7,999 for a couple, with a live performance by classical guitarist Kishor Gurung and complimentary entry to the Sinners in Heaven party.

Yak & Yeti’s Regal Ballroom is hosting ‘A Night at Lal Durbar’, featuring dancers from Russia and India on 31 December. For Rs 2,499 you get dinner, half a bottle of sparkling wine, and entry to the Sinners in Heaven party. 4246999
Unsafe in prison

Everyone is keeping quiet about HIV in Kathmandu’s jails

HIMAL KHABARPATRIKA
REPORT

Unreleased findings from Kathmandu’s Central Jail suggest there might be an HIV crisis building in the prison. In February this year the Community Centre for Justice and Development (CCJD) conducted a blood drive among prisoners in the Central Jail and Bhadra Jail as part of a social service initiative. Of the 77 prisoners from the Central Jail and 27 from Bhadra Jail who donated blood, the samples of 27 came back HIV positive after mandatory testing by the Blood Bank. Twenty one of the 121 prisoners who gave blood from the Central Jail and 8 from Bhadra Jail also tested positive for HIV.

Nepal is estimated to have an HIV positive population of over 70,000, although there are only 8,000 reported cases. These figures should be cause for alarm. Instead, they were brushed under the carpet. The logistics of all blood donation drives in Nepal, from collection to testing, are organised by the Nepal Red Cross Society. This is why the CCJD’s Shyam Pokharel was told after the camp that some donors were HIV positive, but prisoners from the Central Jail and Bhadra Jail also tested positive for HIV.

Everyone is keeping quiet about HIV in Kathmandu’s jails.

Kathmandu’s jails

Kathmandu's Central Jail

In February this year the

CCJD's Shyam Pokharel was told

that there were “problems” with

prisoners of their status either.

Dr Manita Karnikar, director of

the Blood Bank, acknowledged

that there were “problems” with

many of the prisoners but

requested that the numbers not

be mentioned and the matter not

be written about, as it might

cause problems. Karnikar argues that the Blood Bank is just following WHO guidelines on not collecting blood from infected groups. However, sources at the Blood Bank tell us that the organisation is not, in fact, following all WHO safety guidelines and fears greater scrutiny will reveal loopholes in its own procedures.

The Blood Bank apparently “did not think it necessary” to inform the prison wardens or officials such as Dr Rajendra Pant, chief of the National AIDS and STD Prevention Centre. Pant says he’s heard only rumours of prisoners being infected.

Central Jail chief Rishikesh Niraula says there are a few HIV positive prisoners, but claims to have not been told anything more. “The Blood Bank should have informed us as soon as they ran the tests. We could’ve started preventing the spread of infection, but now the problem remains hidden because they refuse to share information with us,” he says. The Central Jail, which has its own government hospital to treat ill prisoners, has not followed up with tests of its own.

Pokharel argues that those who donated blood did so willingly and that most were likely unaware of the state of their health. “Look at the numbers,” he says, “and these were only the willing prisoners. It’s hardly a stretch to guess that there might be a lot more infections than this.”

No one spoke to at the prison or prisoner welfare groups would speculate on why or how so many prisoners were infected. Niraula mentions offhand that when an NGO tried to distribute condoms, most prisoners had refused the suggestion that they were involved in gay sex.

We’ve been kept in the dark about HIV in Kathmandu’s jails.
E ffusive declarations that peace would turn Nepal into the Switzerland of Asia had the Hand (Foreign) ecstatic (briefly). Apparently the only thing stopping us from joining the exclusive club of the world’s most wealthy nations was mayhem, murder, and the chaos of war. Ain’t politics grand!

Despite being ludicrously puerile, the idea does have a certain pedigree. King Birendra’s once touted Zone of Peace initiative envisioned a strictly neutral Nepal with Switzerland as the role model. Possibly the only creative proposal to emerge from the palace in over two centuries, it was soon squelched by India, who never took any of this seriously nor considered granting official neutrality to a country so firmly in its orbit.

Nonetheless, the similarities between the two nations gave the concept an irresistible allure; landlocked, mountainous, multilingual, and beautiful beyond description, the idea had visionary elan than lent it fleeting credibility. After all, if Switzerland could thrive in the middle of Europe, why couldn’t Nepal prosper in the heart of Asia? Prachanda’s recent gushing that the country he spent the last decade wrecking would soon be on par with Switzerland (ever notice how these big shots all end up sounding the same?) was impressive for its naiveté. Having already put paid to the Zone of Peace by instigating a bitter civil war for reasons that are still unclear, he now postulates Nepal will become a liberal, democratic, highly-developed international banking capital. Conceivably the first Maoist ideologue to propose such revisionism without getting shot, he expeditiously neglects to mention the main reason Switzerland is so rich: it never had a communist government.

I suspect being hemmed in by insurmountable mountains has contributed to the scanty knowledge of geography among many Nepalis. That got me thinking that Comrade Pundit, in his enthusiasm at finally being taken seriously, may have actually meant ‘the next Poland’ of Asia. Alas, I fear even Poland is beyond reach; if the comrades have their way the best Nepal could hope for is to become the next North Korea of South Asia.

Talk is cheap, and hyperbole cheaper still; it is time to forget the crackpot delusions of kings and would-be kings and take bold action. Instead of trying to be ‘like’ Switzerland, why not pass a law that arbitrarily declares Nepal to be the 26th Canton and an integral part of the Swiss Confederation. If we immediately adopt their national anthem (since we need a new one anyway), allow duty free entry to all the cheese and chocolate they can ship, and recognise yodelling as a time-honoured custom of mountain people the world over, they might not object too much.

Free movement of population would see the burgeoning criminal/political class of East Switzerland drift west in search of richer pastures, where the ‘mainland’ Swiss would simply arrest and jail them the minute they stepped out of line. Mainlanders coming here would soon build top-quality roads to their chalets dotting the hillsides, initiating a building boom that would boost the economy for years. If we hired a few of their famously efficient bureaucrats to run the Customs Department (watch government revenue increase dramatically) and police (watch crime decrease immediately) and banks (watch will-full defaulters fall over each other to pay back their loans) Nepal stands to benefit greatly. Hell, if we could rope in a few to run the political parties it would be a real bonus!

Naysayers will point to Pakistan, East and West, a union surely doomed to failure, but at least they managed to hang in there forty odd years before plunging into devastating civil war. Well, we’ve already had the horrible war, and it is highly unlikely East Switzerland would rebel against union with the world’s richest country. West Switzerland, on the other hand, could get so fed up with us they secede unilaterally, but even if we only squeeze a few decades out of the deal, think of the progress we could make (and weep).
Sitting and waiting
Asian monarchs are in interesting limbo

Malaysia's unique system of rotating the crown every five years among hereditary state sultans ensures that the institution remains almost entirely symbolic. Most Malaysians have trouble remembering who is king. Such political influence as the sultans once enjoyed was largely stripped away when some atrocious personal behaviour by certain royals provided then-Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad with the occasion to downgrade their role, which nominally still includes being head of Islam as well as head of state.

Looking a little nervously at Malaysia, however, is the Sultan of Brunei, the last absolute monarch in Asia east of the Gulf. Once a vast sultanate encompassing large parts of what are now Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia, Brunei may have to reinvent itself if it is to survive the exhaustion of its oil wealth.

If the Malaysian monarchies are harmless if costly luxuries if they can act as a reminder of the number of actual kings that exist and may still attract support among nine hereditary state rulers, Malaysia probably has even less to offer. Once a vast sultanate, the kingdom of Malacca—where Mahatma Gandhi was born—was a net gain for Cambodia, but he has at least succeeded in passing the crown— if not any power—to his son King Shahrom. Might the Lao decide to revive their monarch as a way of reinforcing their identity vis-à-vis much bigger neighbours? As the revolutionary generation that killed off the monarchy in 1975 dies away, may a royal personage will return to reign from the royal capital (and UN heritage site) Vientiane? Howard French

Revealing the 5 signs of fair, flawless skin

But if Thailand has a succession problem, it may well be the crisis of the Kingdom of Bhumibol Adulyadej, a restoration of their monarchy, in favour of his son King Bhumibol. The palace has wasted no time in its attempt to absolve itself of this. Nonetheless, throne claimants exist and may still attract support from Thais looking for symbols to bridge the divide between a fiercely republican and democratic south and the Communist dynasty in the north. And if the Japanese can hang on to their monarchy, will not Koreans want one too?

Small countries at least may benefit from the sense of identity provided by monarchs. It is debatable whether the volatile kingdom of Timor-Leste was a net gain for Cambodia, but he has at least succeeded in passing the crown—if not any power—to his son King Shahrom. Might the Lao decide to revive their monarch as a way of reinforcing their identity vis-à-vis much bigger neighbours? As the revolutionary generation that killed off the monarchy in 1975 dies away, may a royal personage will return to reign from the royal capital (and UN heritage site) Vientiane? Howard French

AND AWAY THEY WENT: An illuminated manuscript depicting the forced departure of Burma's King Thibaw in 1885.

Oded Volovitz, 32, said. His backers the target of lawsuits and screening bans, but his anti-semitic character is going down very well in one place: Israel. That's Sacha Baron Cohen's antics as the Kazakh Borat have made him and his movies a huge hit. Borat's humour would reinforce expressions and Israeli slang, inside and outside of cartoons. He is an observant Jew whose mother was born in Baghdad. The story of the most absolute monarchy in Asia became even odder this week. Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who last year gave a rousing Assembly the authority to elect Cabinet and draft a new constitution, abdicated a year- and a half earlier than the announced 2008 date. Jigme Singye handed over power to his 36- year-old son prince Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck. Before he abdicated, the former king, who assumed the throne in 1972 when he was 17, had circulated a draft constitution that would end almost 100 years of monarchical rule in Bhutan after national elections in 2008. Under the draft, the king would become head of state, but parliament would have the power to impeach him by a two-thirds vote. Democratic students in exile in New Delhi, and representatives of the Bhutanese refugees in Japan have consistently refuted the claim that Bhutan is moving towards a more democratic state, arguing that the changes being proposed in reality give little power to citizens wherever they might live. In 2004, Bhutan unveiled a 34-point constitution which was sent to 530,000 citizens for their views. The constitution is expected to be ratified after a referendum.

Concrete proof

Concrete was poured to build the Great Pyramids about 5,000 years ago, according to controversial research, which suggests the ancient Egyptians practiced the Roman concrete as the inventors of concrete. Michel Béziau, professor of materials engineering at Drexel University in Philadelphia, and colleagues report in the Journal of the American Ceramic Society that the pyramids are built of sand and limestone blocks and blocks of lime-based concrete. The study consists of a detailed examination of limestone blocks and stones taken from the pyramids and their vicinity to determine whether the two materials are natural or synthetic. General belief is the pyramids were built with blocks of limestone carved from nearby quarries. The blocks were cut to shape using copper tools, transported to the pyramid site, hauled up huge ramps, and set in place using wedges and levers. Using scanning and transmission electron microscopy, Béziau found that samples featured mineral ratios that did not exist in any known limestone source—and that they were, therefore, synthetic in part.

Nudge, nudge

Sacha Baron Cohen's antics as the Kazakh Borat have made him and his backers the target of lawsuits and screening bans, but his anti-semitic character is going down very well in one place: Israel. That's why Israeli film fans understand what he is saying when he's supposedly speaking Yiddish. The British comedian is an observant Jew whose mother was born in Iran. The irony of a Hebrew-speaking anti-semitic is not lost on the admiring Israeli audience. The film is peppered with Hebrew expressions and Israeli slang, inside jokes only Israelis could truly appreciate. Some US Jews feared that Borat's humour would reinforce anti-semitism. But in Israel, Borat's lines are in on the fun. “It was sort of like a one-up on Israeli礼貌,” Oded Volovitz, 32, said.
Kathmandu to Kanyakumari

Former British ambassador to Nepal, Keith Bloomfield, has always regretted not following the overland hippie trail from Europe to Kathmandu during the 1970s.

After he finished his tenure in Nepal in October, he determined to do it in the other direction and drive his Land Rover Discovery back to England. But a combination of Taliban, Al Qaeda and bureaucracy defeated the plan.

So Keith and his French wife, Genevieve, fell back on Plan B: drive around India. They set off on 19 October from Kathmandu, across Birganj into Bangladesh on the Grand Trunk Road to Varanasi and Agra, and skirting Delhi into Rajasthan.

“By then I had had enough of palaces and forts and photographs of royalty posing with dead tigers,” says Genevieve. So they turned southwards Baroda and Pune.

“Everywhere we went people were really curious about the blue Nepali diplomatic number plates,” recalls Keith. “They had never seen Devanagari license plates.” Although they had a Hindi-speaking driver, this turned out to be of not much help as they made their way across Pune and Mangalore right down to Kanyakumari at the southern tip of India.

Keith and Genevieve were fascinated with the diversity, seeing Portuguese India in Panjim, French India in Pondicherry and even Danish India in Tranquebar. And British India? “Of course, that is everywhere,” Keith replies. “Especially in Lucknow with the Residency and the buildings dating back to what is referred to in politically correct circles in India as the First War of Independence.”

“In every town that they drove into for a night stop, Keith would head into the nearest internet café to check up on events back in Nepal. Even the swarms of mosquitoes inside the internet cafes couldn’t keep me away from news from Nepal,” he recalls.

Keith arrived in Kanyakumari in late 2002, as King Gyanendra was sacksing Prime Minister Deuba for the first time and was here through the turbulent post-February First period and the pro-democracy uprising.

“It is like being back home, we really missed Nepal,” says Genevieve, who taught at Kathmandu University’s School of Art in Bhaktapur. The Bloomfields travel back over the hippie trail—by air.

This winter, let’s spread a little warmth and tolerance

Some time ago I attended a political meeting of my Tamang community. The speakers drew attention to the genuine grievances of the Tamang people and how they have been neglected, excluded, and exploited by successive rulers in Kathmandu. Indeed, in terms of education and access to health and basic services, Tamang villages in the districts surrounding Kathmandu Valley are far behind the national average.

As an airline pilot, I am reminded of this every time I make the approach to Kathmandu airport and look down at the Bhaybar mountains from my 757 cockpit. Tamang villages cling to the steep slopes, their terraces of yellowing mustard fields stunningly beautiful below the deep blue sky. Although these homesteads are less than five minutes from my touchdown at Kathmandu, in terms of development they are as remote as Humla or Mugu.

At the meeting, there was a lot of self-righteous anger and fiery rhetoric against other communities. It was my turn to speak. I said I am proud to be born to a Tamang woman, that I hold my head high when I say I am Tamang. But I also said that when I travel around the world, I hold my head high and say I am Nepali. People know me as a Nepali, not as a Tamang, Newar, Bahun, Rai, Gurung, or Magar.

I am a Nepali first, and then I am a Tamang. I will not allow my identity to be shrunk down from my Nepaliness to just my ethnicity. We don’t have to play down our greater identity to play up our Tamangness. Instead of talking against other groups, we Tamangs must work and study harder to be as good as or better than them. That is how we empower ourselves, not by chauvinism and bigotry.

I meet a lot of people when I fly to remote areas, and I reminded how Nepal has always been a garden with many flowers, each with its own identity. They can teach Nepalis who think divisively—those who look at what sets them apart and not what binds them—about tolerance and living together in harmony. It’s in Kathmandu, that people are cynical and talk about differences. Stand near the Khula Manch and listen to the speeches, they’re all about what divides us. About I am this, and you are that.

We can get over our differences by doing whatever we do well. By being caring and considerate Nepalis who look after other Nepalis. I am trying to put this into practice with an initiative called ‘Nyanopan’, through which a group of us pilots takes warm clothes to remote areas. We work with local youth clubs and community organisations and take woollens donated by people in other parts of Nepal to Simkot, Jumla, Bahajang, Bajura, Rukum, as well as eastern airfields like Bhagpur, Taplejung, Lamidanda and Rumjatar. Nyanopan is a private initiative, it is not an NGO, we don’t deal with money. There are children in Mugu who live indoors for four months of the winter because of the cold, and by summer will have worn the same clothes night and day for that entire period. In addition, indoor pollution from the fireplace gives them acute respiratory infections. The child mortality rate in Nepal’s remote mountain regions is three times the national average.

What I do is not going to change Nepal, but it helps keep part of it alive. There are more urgent things to do than creating new divisions in society. All Nepalis are the same. It is only a handful of people who see the differences for their own political vested interest. This season, let’s spread the warmth of tolerance.

Captain Vijay Lama flies with Nepal Airlines. For inquiries about donating clothes to his Nyanopan program, write to nyanopan@hotmail.com

I am a Nepali first

What are you made of?

Keith Bloomfield

Vijay Lama

NEPALI PAN

I’m a Nepali first

This winter, let’s spread a little warmth and tolerance

S
ome time ago I attended a political meeting of my Tamang community. The speakers drew attention to the genuine grievances of the Tamang people and how they have been neglected, excluded, and exploited by successive rulers in Kathmandu. Indeed, in terms of education and access to health and basic services, Tamang villages in the districts surrounding Kathmandu Valley are far behind the national average.

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EXHIBITIONS

- 35th Independence Day of Bangladesh Art exhibition at Park Gallery, Pulchowk until 22 December. 5223207
- Heartbeat Paintings for world HIV/AIDS day at Bayo Fiesta, Naald. Opens 5PM, 22 December. 4434945
- Art from Tibet – A World of Snow Paintings and photographs at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 11AM-5PM until 25 December. 4218048
- Tattva Paintings by Chirag Bangdel at The Art Shop, Darbar Marg Sunday to Friday, 10.30 AM-5PM until 29 December. 4267063
- Heartbeat 2 Photographs at Tantra Pub, Thamel until 12 January.
- Festive Mood Paintings at Park Gallery, Lazimpur until 31 December. 4419333

EVENTS

- Youth Discussion on the current situation of Nepali sports at Martin Chautari, 3PM, 22 December.
- Season of Bells at Bluebird Mall. Food festival, fashion shows, free mehendi, astrology, auctions, lucky draw, wine tasting, cards and more, until 31 December. 4229833
- Hata Yoga classes, 7.30-8.30 AM and 5-6PM, Sunday to Friday, 40 percent discount at The Self Awakening Centre, Baber Mahal. Revisited. 4256618

MUSIC

- Mega Jam Session with various artists at Moksh, 8.30 PM onwards on 22 December, Rs 150 at Moksh, Pulchowk. 5526212
- Christmas Live Music by Cinema Gurung and group, 7PM onwards, 24 December at Absolute Bar, Pulchowk. 5521408
- Open Mic Night at VaVa Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- Classical fusion music at Jatra, every Saturday, 7PM onwards
- Gaine (Gandarbhas) perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680080

DINING

- Walk and Lunch every Saturday at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 23 December to 27 January. 9841379127
- Traditional Turkish Dinner 24 December to 1 January at Kilroy’s, Thamel. 4250440
- Special Menus for Christmas and New Year at La Soon Restaurant, Pulchowk. 5537166
- Christmas Eve at Nihuche’s Kitchen-The Organic Bistro, five-course menu for Rs 1,199, with premium cocktails and music by Kumbra from 6PM onwards. 9851014566
- International Brunch weekends, 11AM-3PM for Rs 499 per person (Rs 299 for children) at Hotel Himalaya, 5523900
- Farmhouse Café at Park Village Resort. Dine alfresco with the birds and the butterflies. 4375380
- Te savour Tibetan delicacies at the new Tibetan restaurant and Nepal’s first noodle bar, Bluebird Mall Food Court
- Calcutta’s famous rolls, briyani, kebabs, and Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- Authentic Japanese cuisine daily from 12 noon to 3PM, Rs 500 at the Coffee Shop, Hotel Shangri-la. 4413999
- Pizza straight from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4229519
- Cocktails and Mocktails happy hour every day 4-7PM at Kathmandu Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road
- Some Like It Hot Hawaiin style winter cocktails with live music from Side B every Wednesday at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika’s.
- Woodfired Pizzas at Roadhouse Café, Thamel, 4262768 and Pulchowk. 5521785
- AKA Pizza at Moksh, delivery available, 5526212
- Momo and Sushi Revolution every Saturday at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048

GETAWAYS

- Winter Package Three days and two nights at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara. Rs 7,499. 4491234
- Xmas by the Jungle With elephant safaris, dolphins, rafting and more at Base Camp Lodge, Bardiya. 061-500398
- Harmony of the mind, body, and soul at Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- Aesthetic Living in pure nature at Park Village. 4375279

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
STILL A PRISONER: Human rights and political activists march from the Mallikhar mandala to the UN office in Pulchok to demanding the release of Myanmar’s democratically-elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been imprisoned since 1989.

Everyone knows that Tuesday’s sudden bund had nothing to do with ambassadorships, it was about letting off steam by allowing ex-guerrillas with time on their hands to light some tyres and keep warm. The Maobaddies knew about the lineup of inept candidates the NC and UML had put together as potential plenipotentiaries, so they just wanted their own inept candidates included as well. So the whole country had to be bunned. If Manisha’s aunt can be ambassador to India, they reasoned, there is no reason why BB’s wife can’t be sent off to DC. The Mao-ites have a point.

When His Fierceness confronted Girja Bir Bikram about designating some underground armed rebels as ambassadors as well, Girijababu is reported to have said: ‘Prachandaji, that’s why I left France for you.’

Masterstroke. France is a good start, after all that is where a revolution first started to devour its own children. But we should have also set aside The People’s Democratic Junta of Myanmar for the comrades so that the Loyal Nepali Ambassador to SLORC could go back to the jungles in Pyinmana.

Confronted with more party aspirants for ambassadorships than we had countries with embassies in them, last week the cabinet decided to add three more points: Australia, Denmark and ROK. Not that anyone did, but if they had asked the Ass, he’d have highly recommended also opening new embassies in Pyongyang, Havana, Harare, and Almaty—four dictatorships where our comrades would feel perfectly at home. That way His Excellency Comrade Rohit would have finally made it to DPRK.

The all night session at Baluwatar last week before the interim constitution was signed essentially boiled down to a tug-o-war between the King and the Cow. One side was pitching His Majesty as national animal while the other wanted the cow as head of state. No, seriously, the eight party candidates were falling asleep all over the place some even on the tables of the ‘Blue Room’, so named because of its garishly painted walls not because an ex-PM watched racy movies in them. One of the few people still awake in the wee hours, as it were, was Baburam who diligently sat next to the computer guy inputting stuff while the rest were beyond caring. No wonder the interim constitution is sprinkled with jargon like ‘feudal land mafia’ and ‘democratic centralism’.

The Seven Dwarves were in a desperate hurry to finish the job last week because they didn’t want the new constitution to be signed on Poush 1, the infamous anniversary of Mahendra’s famous putsch in 1960. When it looked like in was going to be Poush 1 after all, some extra-sensitive leaders even wanted to backdate the signatures.

The donkey’s mole tells him no one wants berths in the interim cabinet. The seven parties have set aside the slot for Minister for Supplies for the Maoists. The reason: one of the first things the interim government will have to do is raise petroleum prices again.

The delay in the UN arriving for arms monitoring, the Ass has reliably learnt, is caused by the Christmas and New Year holidays in New York. Even if a Third World war were to break out tomorrow, the Security Council would not be able to meet before 3 January. With Kathmandu-based peacekeepers either in Goa, Koh Samui or home for the holidays, and the 110 extra monitors only due on 15 January the question is: what will happen to arms management in the meantime?

One thing we can cheer in this jolly season is that despite the delay in management of arms, at last we now have a coat of arms.