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**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 328

**Q. Do you think the interim constitution will be finalised before year-end?**

Total votes: 2,916

- Yes 37.2%
- No 47.2%
- Maybe 12.2%
- Don't know/can't say 3.4%

Weekly Internet Poll # 329. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

**Q. Should the Maoists get an ambassadorship?**

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RAMESWOR BOHARA

**BACK TO WORK:** Nepal police returning to Udrapur in Banke on 11 December, after nearly five years of absence.

## Bandas are part of mainstream politics

# Business as usual

**SHARAD KC**

**T**uesday 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.

"With 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. ●

**Editorial p2**  
**Put out this fire**

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# Myopia

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

## PUT OUT THIS FIRE

When we warned three years ago on this page about Nepal's class 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 fissures that are opening up beneath our feet. Part of this is caused by reaction and resentment that was welling up after the restoration of democracy. Partly it is also identity politics where the radical fringes of the Maoist and other parties have taken to extreme and militant rhetoric to leapfrog into the political arena.

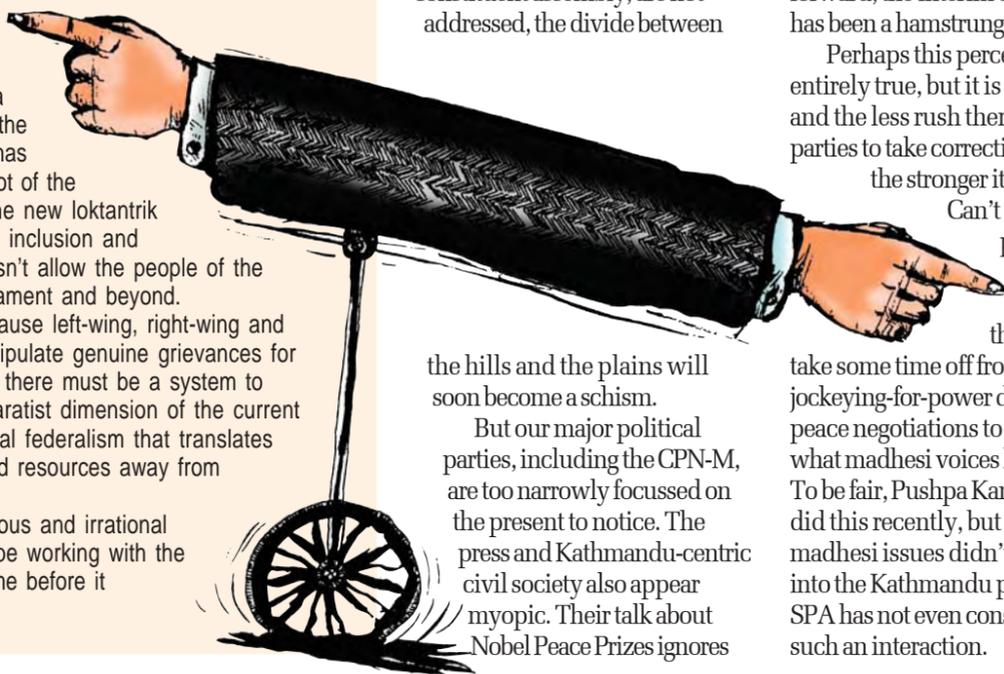
Whatever the reason, there are ominous signs that unless the legitimate grievances of these groups are addressed quickly the past ten years of war are going to look like a picnic. At its most fundamental, tarai resentment is directed at our traditional "hill-centred nationalism". Kathmandu has identified Nepalinness for so long with the hill and himal that we have come to accept it as a given, forgetting that half the country's population lives in the tarai. The demographics of the plains have been complicated by Mahendra-era transmigration from the hills and competition for land is now so acute, it is getting entangled with citizenship and representation.

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 seen how potent a political weapon violence is. Even the Maoists may now be unable to control the tarai, Limbuwan, Magarat, and dozens of other ethnic-based demands for independence.

It seems every time negotiations start with one faction, a more hardline splinter group breaks away. Jay Krishna Goit of the TJMM 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 loktantrik alliance, despite its promises of inclusion and proportional representation, doesn't allow the people of the tarai fair 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 system to defuse the explosive ethno-separatist dimension of the current agitation with meaningful regional federalism that translates into true devolution of power and resources away from Kathmandu to the periphery.

Instead of calling for impetuous and irrational shutdowns, the Maoists should be working with the seven parties to put out this flame before it becomes an inferno.



**M**aoist bandas are not the only ones around. There's one as we speak in parts of the eastern tarai, called by Jwala Singh's Jantantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha, an offshoot of the radical CPN-Maoist splinter led by Jay Krishna Goit. The Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandi) has called another banda on 25 December to protest the interim constitution. Madhesi

**EYES WIDE SHUT**  
Sheetal Kumar

intellectuals in Kathmandu are loudly voicing their objections to the restrictive provisions of the interim constitution, which limit their participation in the proposed constituent assembly.

If only someone would listen to these 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 too narrowly focussed on the present to notice. The press and Kathmandu-centric civil society also appear myopic. Their talk about Nobel Peace Prizes ignores

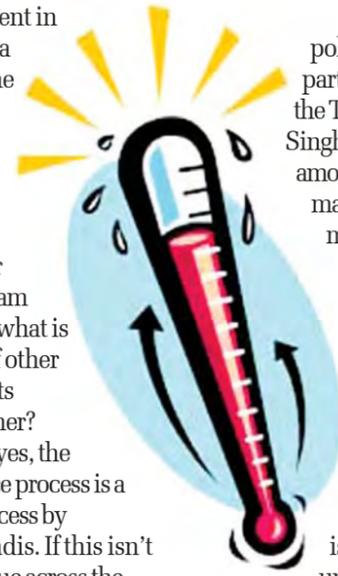
the political foment in the south that is a direct result of the proposed recipients' politicking.

Girija Prasad Koirala may deserve kudos for helping mainstream the Maoists, but what is the net benefit, if other potential conflicts continue to simmer?

In madhesi eyes, the SPA-Maoist peace process is a pahadi peace process by pahadis for pahadis. If this isn't the case, they argue across the board, why have the parties not addressed discrimination against madhesi and their sense of alienation? Surely this can be done side by side with the perceived 'key' issues—not coincidentally both pahadi concerns—the status of the monarchy and democratisation of the army. Madhesi perception is that if the recently-enacted Citizenship Act was a step forward, the interim constitution has been a hamstrung step back.

Perhaps this perception is not entirely true, but it is powerful, and the less rush there is by the parties to take corrective action, the stronger it becomes.

Can't the politicians—all, including the Maoists—take some time off from the jockeying-for-power disguised as peace negotiations to listen to what madhesi voices have to say? To be fair, Pushpa Kamal Dahal did this recently, but the madhesi issues didn't make it into the Kathmandu press. The SPA has not even considered such an interaction.



It's bad long-term politics for mainstream parties if groups like the TJMM and Jwala Singh's gain a foothold among moderate madhesi. For now, most people in the tarai deplore the extremist expression these groups give to genuine grievances of people from the region. But the longer these issues go

unaddressed, the greater the chances that their separatist appeal will cross over into the mainstream.

Koirala and Dahal may be many things, but they are looking less and less like visionaries. Koirala wants to go down in history as the successful midwife and nurse of the peace process. His insistence on the June date for the elections, reasonable or 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 half-baked constituent assembly election time-schedule?

Dahal is focussed entirely on ensuring his party comes to power. A nice thing for a radical party, until you realise that he shows no signs of doing anything about the ethnic nationalism he and his party have unleashed.

Whether madhesi perceptions are true or not, the mere fact of their being held gives such beliefs real power. Koirala, Dahal, and the rest better sort this out before the constituent assembly elections. Or this country as we know it won't last. ●

# The division of spoils

All sides need to have a say in decision-making

**A** shutdown that works by coercion and threats can never be justified. But last Tuesday, for once, the Maoists had a reason to be miffed. The manner in which the dominant parties of the ruling alliance divvied up ambassadorial assignments among their favourites deserved to be condemned.

Although it was called with little warning, there was an effort to make it manageable to the public by fixing the time



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
C K Lal

from 10 to four. Burning tyres cause cancer, so they were discouraged. Exhortations to keep vehicles off the roads during shutdown hours were made politely. Although the Maoists made a show of force with their 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.

More than the appointees themselves, it was the manner in which they were selected that caused the bitterness. After the agreement over the draft interim constitution, it is incumbent upon the present occupants of ministerial chairs to also consult the Maoists about major decisions.

Diplomats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to be media-savvy, flexible, friendly, and multilingual. They must get along with people, provide a sense of history to contemporary events, and have the capacity to assess risks in murky situations. Negotiating skills and a personality that inspires confidence are added assets. If these criteria are strictly applied, very few of Girija Prasad Koirala's relatives or UML cadres will pass muster. But the qualifications were tweaked to suit the preferences of the foreign minister's political bosses, and the result is a mixed bag of the worthy, 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 leftie diplomat will do in the Saudi theocracy remains to be seen. Tanka Karki for China or Surya Gurung for Russia are both amiable enough.

But it is difficult to imagine a more inappropriate candidate than Shailaja Acharya for India. She is obstinate, self-righteous, and often wrong in her politics. She lost in the last general elections, and disgraced herself by opposing the April Uprising. It is only in light of the other candidates—so mediocre you can't even say anything against them—that her worth comes through as a person worth censuring.

Such a fuss over the suitability of individuals would be unnecessary were it business as usual: cultivating friends, courting donors, and attending receptions. But our representative abroad will have to 'sell' the Maoists to the world until the constituent assembly elections. You can't expect that from Acharya, who was against any understanding with the Maoists to start with.

Parliamentary hearings for the proposed

appointees are still to take place. The Maoists might have been a little premature in opposing the tentative names. But their banda, and deadline for the formation of interim arrangement, serves as notice to the bickering, blundering, bumbling SPA ministers.

The April Uprising wasn't only against the dictatorial king and violent Maoists. It was also against mindless mainstream parties. They have no mandate to go against its basic spirit. Politics henceforth must be based on principles of equity, equality, fraternity, and solidarity, not the old practice of distribution of spoils to the party or personal favourites.

That said, the Maoists must withdraw their year-end bandas. Having made their point, they need to engage, not threaten, the government.

Bandas are counterproductive. Madhab Nepal's popularity has suffered as a result of the UML having enforced more shutdowns than all other parties put together since 1990. Pushpa Kamal Dahal must find better ways of conducting oppositional politics. ●

**LETTERS**

**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 leans, as all good leftie 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 BJT, 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 formal ceasefire. They are still extorting, looting, holding back rival parties, and the like. And they keep changing the goalposts. I hope this trend will not go on until the constituent assembly, and so on and so forth. Will the Maoists' actions be punishable by law? Until we know that, people will

continue to doubt the capability and willingness of the government to contain the various elements within the Maoists.

*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 fulfil 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 Our 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*

"Oh 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, Middlesborough*

**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 B Kuwar, China*



RUPA JOSHI

**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 Gaighat 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. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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# Untouched

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

NARESH NEWAR  
in NEPALGANJ

Balaram is too afraid to reveal his real name and wants to conceal his identity as a dalit Maoist worker. Last month, he watched quietly horrified as local Thakuri and other high caste landlords in Kalikot's Daha VDC brutally beat up Bachhe 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-driven area.

Ironically, 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 Parsuram Nepali from Mugu's Neglected Community Awareness Nepal.

Nepali is one of many activists, dalit and otherwise, who narrated to us incident after incident—all of which took place

in the last two months—in which dalits were beaten up, and again denied access to public taps and temples.

While they were around, Maoist cadre took 'action' against landlords accused of caste-based discrimination. Scores of landlords were displaced and their land seized, or they were forced to pay high taxes. Still others were sentenced by 'People's Courts' in districts like Jumla, Mugu, and Kalikot to physical punishment or were abducted and tortured.

Now the Maoists have stopped their kangaroo courts and jungle justice. And for many dalit activists in the Karnali who joined the Maoists or affiliated special interest organisations such as DLF, life as a dalit has become harder and more dangerous than before.

"Now the party has 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 Bahadur BK, a dalit rights



UNITED: Dalit rights activists from Karnali gather to plan a stronger movement for dalit empowerment.

NARESH NEWAR

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, Khadga Bahadur BK and Tilak Pariyar, who is also a politburo 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 first People Movement and after 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 Utpirit Samaj Kendra. ●

# Point well taken

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

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 "showing their true colours" leapt to lips pursed in disapproval.



HERE AND THERE  
Daniel Lak

Motorcycles, rickshaws and Shank's pony bore 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 rumbled along with my well-paid young rickshawwalla. At major intersections, lines of smoking tyres smouldered and police stood by, batons and shields at the ready. A few basked in the midday sun, mostly officers who had little or no intention of mixing it up with the maobadi. Ambulances and a few brave taxis rolled by. A shrill young voice jabbered rhetoric from a red van flying Maoist student union flags. The words "Nepali janta" and "ucheeta 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 nasties with no intention of playing politics peacefully?

Conditioning, that's what it was. A



RAMESH KARKI

failure to look beyond my own comfort or needs to the wider picture. As I jolted along across the Bagmati Bridge, the rickshaw groaning under my well-fed foreigner's bulk, I gave these thoughts free rein to see where they'd gallop, freed from knee-jerk irritation at those who dared inconvenience me.

First there was the ostensible reason for the strike. The government's announcing ambassadors 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 explained and help asked for. Rightly, royal placemen were recalled from foreign capitals when the king's mad experiment

in one-man misrule ended last April. Who needed a former army chief who didn't speak French as ambassador in Paris, for example.

Nor did it seem initially that the assigning of cushy diplomatic jobs was likely to rile up the janata as much as Comrade Prachanda might want. The janata have rather more down to earth concerns—peace, order, governance, health care, schools and investment, jobs, security, and a chicken in every pot.

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. Now is not 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 plotting political strategy, not preparing to fly to Delhi. These central postings need senior diplomats or national figures above the fray of politics, people who will be respected and listened to in the corridors of Indian and American power.

The Maoists had a point. Even if all they intended was to press their own demands (a CPN-M comrade 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 experienced 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 civil society, politicians, and foreign types to take the national view of things.

A few agreements in Kathmandu do not a peaceful settlement make, even with a ceasefire and arms management beginning. Not that more bandas are the way to go, but I hope the Maoists' point is taken and the government starts living up to its commitments. Consultation with all parties on all things. Proper funding of the Maoist cantonments. Progress on development, and induction of the interim government and legislature. Gearing up for CA elections, restoration of order in the countryside.

One banda, I got it. I'm not so sure I'd feel so sanguine about the next one. ●

# Love the neighbours

## Or at least the chances they offer for progress

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



**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
Ashutosh Tiwari

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

who seem to be around forever 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.

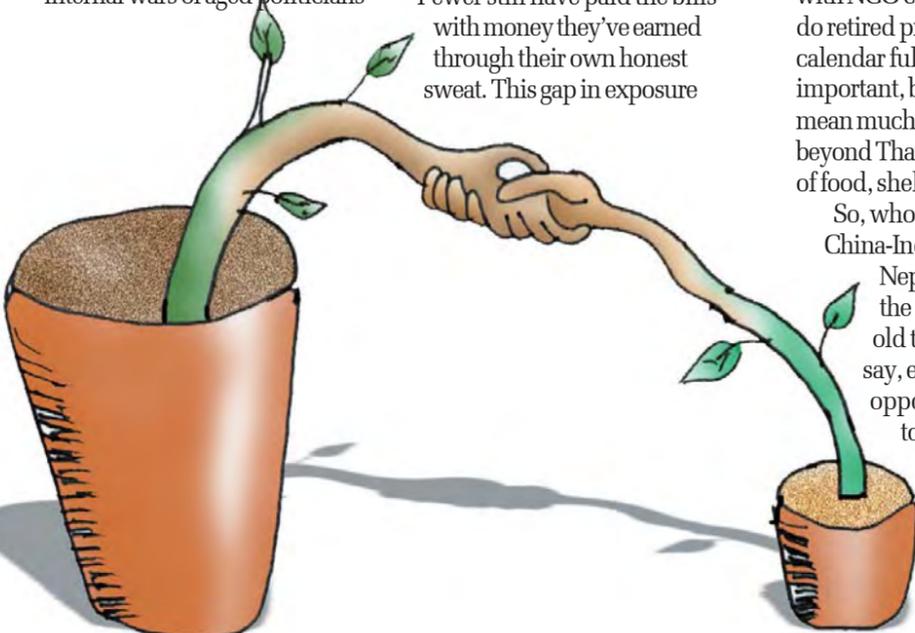
One reason is that the mindset of Nepal's political class is anti-business. By temperament and background, the members of this class don't understand the value that businessmen and entrepreneurs add. That's not surprising, considering that many of our *netas* came of age at a time when the only viewpoint 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 Nepali 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 *bikas* 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. ●



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# Talk to the tarai

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 20 December

घटना बिकार

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 madhesi 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 was 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,



looted, and displaced from their homes. This issue has not even been discussed in parliament. In the name of madhesi rights, the fire 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 only 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

आस्था

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



KIRAN PANDAY

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.

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<b>3 Years</b>	<b>2520</b>	<b>2100</b>	<b>3 Years</b>	<b>4590</b>	<b>3500</b>	<b>3 Years</b>	<b>1260</b>	<b>1100</b>
<b>2 Years</b>	<b>1680</b>	<b>1450</b>	<b>2 Years</b>	<b>3060</b>	<b>2500</b>	<b>2 Years</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>750</b>
<b>1 Year</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>1 Years</b>	<b>1530</b>	<b>1350</b>	<b>1 Years</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>380</b>

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**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

सोच्च

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 reorient them to the Maoist ideology. These were the same people involved in atrocities and torture designed to force civilians to accept their ideology.

**At any price**

Editorial in Tarun, 18 December

तरुण

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 do 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.



अठार रे ?! हवाँ अंकलले तिम्रो उमेर सोध्नु भा'हैन क्या ! कति वर्षको भो पो भन्नु भा' त !

18? Uncle is not asking your age. He is asking how long it has been.

समय Samaya, 21 December



कम्ब्रेड, खवै चकलेट ऐलेसम्म 'लि किन आइनुपुग्या भन्या ? यस्तो तालले कसरी छापामार'रुको संख्या बढ्ला ?

Comrade why haven't the "chocolates" arrived yet? How are we going to increase our guerrilla numbers like this?

समय Samaya, 1 December

**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 Deshantar, 17 December

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# Eat, drink, be

## And remember, if you over-indulge, stop

With the shortest day of the year mercifully behind us, Christmas and New Year provide the perfect excuse for a party, a getaway, or a good meal, all ideal for chasing away the winter blues. Here's *Nepali Times'* guide to where and how to get the most out of the festive season:

**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. 6680080

**Courtyard**, Putalisadak has a Christmas barbeque, and special gifts for groups of eight or more. 4253056

**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. 4479488

**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 5,999 (double) or Rs 8,500 (triple). 5560675

**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. 5523900

**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. 4491234

**Jalan Jalan Restaurant** goes local for Christmas, with an Asian buffet and classical and Nepali folk music, starting 4.30 PM on 25 December. 5544872

**Jbar** is embracing a red theme for the festive season, from their famous flaming cocktails to the décor. 4418209

**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. 4451212

**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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Rs 999, which include roast turkey, suckling pig, Beijing duck, and plum pudding. 24 and 31 December.

**Olive Bar & Bistro's** four-course set menus for Rs 799 per person on 24 and 31 December.

**Splash Bar and Grill's** New Year's Eve barbeque buffet dinner for Rs 999 per person.

**Hotel Shangri-La Kathmandu** celebrates Christmas Eve with a Rs 1,000 set menu dinner, as well as a Rs 700 Christmas Brunch with roast turkey on 25 December at the Shambala Garden. They also have an assortment of Christmas goodies and hampers. 4412999

**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 Malhar 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. 4273999

**Sportsbar** is offering a special 25 percent Christmas discount on their continental cuisine menu and a free glass of wine with each main course. 4438017

**Tiger Mountain** is offering the expat community a \$75 per person package until 15 January which includes an elephant safari, lunch at the Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, special Christmas and New Year's Day menus, and accommodation at Tiger Mountain Tharu Lodge. There's also a 50 percent discount for children from three to 12, with kids under three free of cost. Transfers not included. 4361500

**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. 4248999

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

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## Christmastide with Lady Bountiful



**24th December / New Year Eve**

An elaborate Christmas Eve buffet including Yuletide delicacies like Roast Turkey, Suckling Pig, Beijing Duck & Plum Pudding with a welcome drink. 6:30 pm onwards @ The Fun Café  
Rs. 999/- nett. per person.



**24th December / New Year Eve**

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Delicious Christmas pastries, cakes, goodies and excellent Xmas Hampers available from 20th - 31st December.



**New Year Eve**

New Year Barbeque Buffet Dinner with a welcome drink. Venue: Splash Bar & Grill 7:00 pm onwards  
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**New Year Eve**  
Nepa Dhuku Hall

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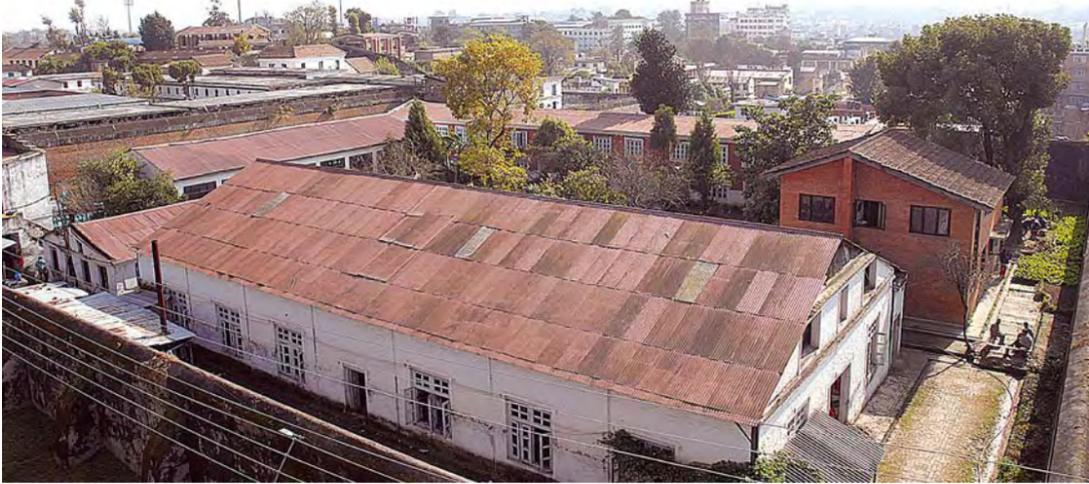


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# Unsafe in prison

## 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 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

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, and that there should be no more blood drives among prisoners. The Nepal Red Cross Society issued a notice ordering the Blood Bank not to collect blood from prisoners, but

never made a public report.

While Pokharel's request for a list of infected prisoners could obviously not be honoured for ethical reasons, the Red Cross has not informed the infected 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 we spoke to at the prison or prisoner welfare groups would speculate on why or how so many prisoners are 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. ●

## Speedbumps

Underlying threats to the newfound peace lie in the very process that created it: "a lack of solid dialogue mechanisms, poor facilitation, little attention to confidence-building and an opaque, elite-driven approach," says the latest report by the International Crisis Group (ICG).

To diminish the risks, ICG advises the SPA and Maoists to: make the next stages of talks more inclusive; thrash out remaining differences and implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement immediately; devise ways to return local governance and rule of law; and start building confidence on military matters so that the mammoth task of restructuring both the armies goes smoothly.

Ironically, considering this week's government appointments and subsequent Maoist protests, the report quotes an insider who says "the communication gap (between the two sides) isn't an issue any more."

The biggest test will be meeting the June timetable for constituent assembly polls, the ICG's Roderick Chalmers told us. "If they do happen it's almost certain they won't be free and fair (but) the real danger is if they don't go ahead—it's momentum that's keeping the process going." *Marty Logan*

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TONI HAGEN

## Why not just declare Nepal a new Swiss canton and be done with it?

**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 élan that 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 expediently 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 26<sup>th</sup> 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 Switzerlandis 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). ●

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### PROJECT DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

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- Pro-active conceptualization and development of small grant activities that support the ongoing transition to peace and democracy. The PDO must be able to critically assess and identify potential activities and grantees that are appropriate to support the current political transition in Nepal.
- Guide grant activities through approval process, assist in developing activity budgets, submit information on grant activity development and reporting into the OTI/Nepal activity database, and develop a monitoring and evaluation process for each grant activity.
- Work closely with project grants specialist, procurement specialist, and grantee to ensure effective implementation of approved grant activities.
- Monitor the programmatic and implementation progress of each grant activity and report on results.
- Participate in strategy development and advise on the evolution of the local political, legal, and economic situation and on how to continuously adapt the program to ensure that it remains relevant and effective.

The position may require extensive travel throughout the country.

### QUALIFICATIONS:

- University degree in relevant subject.
- Minimum of 1-2 years experience with project design, development and management with development-type projects - this experience may be volunteer work.
- Must be proactive and be able to work effectively independently and as a member of a team.
- Capacity to understand and analyze national, regional and local Nepalese politics, and the creativity and analytical capacity to design grant activities that relate to current political events.
- Flexibility, creativity, and the ability to maintain a rapid and demanding pace of work are also required.
- Strong written and spoken English language ability is required.

Please submit CV to [operations@chemonics-nepal.com](mailto:operations@chemonics-nepal.com) and write PDO in the subject line no later than December 29. Only Short listed applicants will be contacted.

## VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

### INFORMATION OFFICER

Chemonics International seeks qualified candidates for **Information Officer** on a two year, USAID/OTI funded program which seeks to support Nepal's political transition. This fast, flexible program is designed to bolster the current peace process; strengthen governance mechanisms; and support positive, non-violent community engagement in the country's political, social and economic future. Duties will include the following:

- Assist program staff with writing and editing of reports, grants related documents, and activity justifications while ensuring accuracy, consistency, and completeness.
- Ensure all written documentation clearly outlines linkages between activities and/or and program objectives.
- Document program activities through success stories, press releases, photographs, and other methods of communication.
- Assist with quality control of entries and updates to the database.

The position may require extensive travel throughout the country.

### QUALIFICATIONS:

- Native English speaker or TOEFL iBT of 100 or equivalent (documentation required).
- Minimum of 1-2 years experience with editing and writing documents for proposals and/or reports.
- Must be proactive and be able to work effectively independently and as a member of a team.
- Experience developing press releases, success stories, and grants highly desired.
- Flexibility, creativity, and the ability to maintain a rapid and demanding pace of work to meet strict deadlines are also required.
- Must have strong computer skills, including MS Office and MS Access.

Please submit CV and salary history to [operations@chemonics-nepal.com](mailto:operations@chemonics-nepal.com) and write IO in the subject line no later than December 29. Only Short listed applicants will be contacted.

# Sitting and waiting

## Asia's monarchs are in interesting limbo

HONG KONG: The monarch of Malaysia probably has even less political power than the bike-riding sovereigns of Scandinavia. But the installation this week of a new Yang di-Pertuan Agong (king) in Kuala Lumpur—the Sultan of Terengganu—is a reminder of the number of actual and would-be monarchies in East Asia, and their varying roles.



**OPINION**  
Philip Bowring

Malaysia's unique system of rotating the crown every five years among nine 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 opposed by almost nobody, that of Nepal must surely be closest to the brink. The attempt of the inept King Gyanendra to rule



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

directly, confronting democrats and Maoists alike, ended in failure. It now seems likely that the monarchy will be voted out of existence. Few would have thought that possible just a few years ago when the popular King Birendra, assassinated in 2001, was on the throne and endeavouring to be democratic.

The Nepal experience could be relevant to Thailand. After 60 years on the throne, King

Bhumibol Adulyadej's prestige has never been higher, nor his political influence greater (the palace overtly supported the recent coup makers). Yet the Thai monarchy has come close to extinction before, whether at the hands of democrats or generals, so Bhumibol's successor, whoever that may be, will need to understand that a monarch's political power in a modern state is more earned than inherited.

But if Thailand has a succession problem, it may well be the envy of the Burmese. Might a restoration of their monarchy, in abeyance since the British sent King Thibaw into exile in 1885, be one way of bridging the divide between the generals and Aung San Suu Kyi's democrats?

Descendants of Thibaw are still around, as are descendants of the last emperor of South Korea. The Korean monarchy was tainted by Japan's attempt at absorbing it. Nonetheless, throne claimants exist and may still attract support from Koreans 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 King Sihanouk was a net plus for Cambodia, but he has at least succeeded in passing the crown—if not any power—to his son King Sihamoni. Might the Lao decide to revive their monarchy 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, maybe a royal personage will return to reign from the royal capital (and UN heritage site) Luang Prabang.

Few Vietnamese harbour sentimental attachments to their last emperor, Bao Dai, who had the misfortune to be squeezed between the Communists, the French, and the ambitions of US-backed Ngo Dinh Diem, who deposed him in 1955. But the time will surely come one day for a revision of Vietnamese history and the presentation of Bao Dai as no less a patriot than Ho Chi Minh. A monarchy would even be useful in reminding their giant neighbour, China, that its last emperors were Manchu-speaking barbarians. ● (International Herald Tribune)

### Exit the dragon

The story of the most absolute monarchy in Asia became even odder this week. Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, who last year gave a reluctant 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 son, 26-year-old crown prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel 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 dissidents in exile in New Delhi, and representatives of the Bhutani refugees in Jhapa 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 predated the Romans by thousands of years as the inventors of concrete. Michel Barsoum, professor of materials engineering at Drexel University in Philadelphia, and colleagues report in the *Journal of the American Ceramic Society* that the pyramids are a combination of carved stones and blocks of limestone-based concrete. The study consists of a detailed examination of samples taken from the pyramids and their vicinity to determine whether the 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, Barsoum found that samples featured mineral ratios that did not exist in any known limestone sources—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 because Israeli film fans understand what he is saying when he's supposedly spouting Kazakh—Hebrew. The British comedian is an observant Jew whose mother was born in Israel. 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 bigotry. But in Israel, Borat's fans are in on the fun. "It was sort of like a wink to the Hebrew speaker," Oded Volovitz, 32, said.

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# Kathmandu to Kanyakumari



KIRAN PANDAY

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 Devnagari 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 Kathmandu in late 2002, as King Gyanendra was sacking 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 Discovery will now be freighted to Kolkata, from where it will take the sea route to England while the Bloomfields travel back over the hippie trail—by air. ●

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 was 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 Bihar, taking six hours to do 30km on the stretch from Raxaul to Muzaffarnagar, negotiating potholes as big as lorries. Then on to Bodhgaya, on the Grand



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

## I'm a Nepali first

### 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 Bhyabar 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 am 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, Bajhang, Bajura, Rukum, as well as eastern airfields like Bhojpur, 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

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **35<sup>th</sup> Independence Day of Bangladesh** Art exhibition at Park Gallery, Pulchowk until 22 December. 5522307
- ❖ **Heart beat** Paintings for world HIV/AIDS day at Baryo Fiesta, Naxal. 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, Lazimpat until 31 December. 4419353

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, carols and more, until 31 December. 4228833
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **British Film Festival 2007** 15-19 January in Kathmandu, 26-28 January in Pokhara.

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 Ciney Gurung and group, 7PM onwards, 24 December at Absolute Bar, Pulchowk. 5521408
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Classical fusion music** at Jatra, every Saturday, 7PM onwards
- ❖ **Gaine (Gandarbas)** 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. 9841371927
- ❖ **Traditional Turkey 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 Nhuchhe's Kitchen-The Organic Bistro, five-course menu for Rs 1,199, with premium cocktails and music by Kutumba from 6PM onwards. 9851014666
- ❖ **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. 4375280
- ❖ **Te savour** Tibetan delicacies at the new Tibetan restaurant and Nepal's first noodle bar, Bluebird Mall Food Court
- ❖ **Calcutta's famous** rolls, biryani, 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. 4412999
- ❖ **Pizza** straight from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Cocktails and Mocktails** happy hour every day 4-7PM at Kathmandu Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road
- ❖ **Some Like It Hot** Cozy winter cocktails with live music from Side B every Wednesday at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's.
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768 and Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **AKA Pizza** at Moksh, delivery available. 5526212
- ❖ **Momo and Sekuwa Revolution** every Saturday at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048



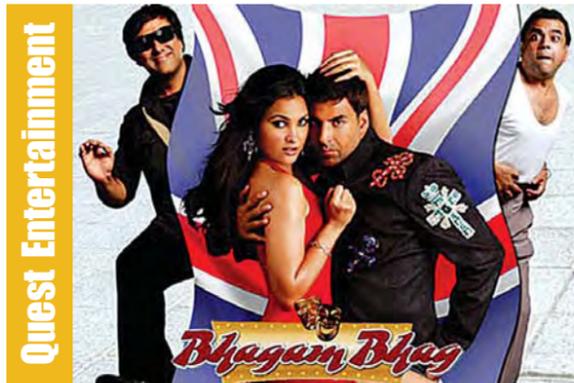
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by MIKU



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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



A weak westerly disturbance was over Kashmir on Thursday and may bring snow flurries and cloud cover over northwestern Nepal into the weekend. The front doesn't have much by way of moisture so the high clouds should pass swiftly and dryly past Kathmandu. This means the minimum temperature will see a slight rise into Monday because ground heat, which would otherwise be dissipated, will be trapped by the cloud cover. Day temperatures will see a two degree dip. For Kathmandu Valley, the usual misty mornings with smog will be blown off by afternoon.

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KIRAN PANDY

**OBSERVED:** A motorcycle burned by Maoists in New Baneswor during Tuesday's banda smoulders as a UN vehicle drives by.



KIRAN PANDY

**STILL A PRISONER:** Human rights and political activists march from the Maitighar 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.



RAM HUMAGAIN

**REMEMBERING MAINA:** Lena Sundh, representative of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, at her office on Thursday releasing the report on the torture and execution of Maina Sunwar.

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<p><b>NARAYANGADH</b> Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec, Saturday Time: 3:00 pm Venue: Ganesh Cinema Hall Local partner/Ticket Contact: Narayani Kala Mandir Campa Chaur Ph: 520174</p>	<p><b>DAMAK - JHAPA</b> Date: 26<sup>th</sup> Dec, Tuesday Time: 2:00 pm Venue: Damak Chalchitra Mandir Local partner/Ticket Contact: Himalaya Hi. Sec. School Simal Danda, Damak-2 Ph: 580286</p>	<p><b>DHANKUTA</b> Date: 28<sup>th</sup> Dec, Thursday Time: 2:00 pm Venue: Triveni Hi. School Local partner/Ticket Contact: Triveni Hi. School Triveni Sanskritic Samuha Chuliban, Dhankuta-7 Ph: 520682</p>
<p><b>LAHAN</b> Date: 30<sup>th</sup> Dec, Saturday Time: 3:00 pm Venue: Pashupati Cinema Local partner/Ticket Contact: Ma Durga Bhawani Club Tarkari Bazar, Lahan-1</p>	<p><b>HETAUDA</b> Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan, Wednesday Time: 4:30 pm Venue: Om Chalchitra Mandir Local partner/Ticket Contact: Hetauda Campus Hetauda-4 Ph: 520974</p>	
<p><b>BUTWAL</b> Date: 6<sup>th</sup> Jan, Saturday Time: 2:00 pm Venue: Kalika Chalchitra Mandir Local partner/Ticket Contact: Kalika Hi. School Kalika Nagar, Butwal-12 Ph: 540392</p>		
<p><b>SURKHET</b> Date: 11<sup>th</sup> Jan, Thursday Time: 2:00 pm Venue: Nepal Rastriya Prastabit Hi. School (Danda School) Birendranagar-6 Local partner/Ticket Contact: Surkhet Jilla Rastriya tatha Antarastriya Kheladi Sangh Birendranagar-9, Ph. 522218</p>	<p><b>SANDHIKARKA</b> Date: 13<sup>th</sup> Jan, Saturday Time: 2:00 pm Venue: Bhagwati Hi. School Local partner/Ticket Contact: Bhagwati Hi. School Kur Sankhetari, Sandhikharka-9</p>	<p><b>TAMGHAS</b> Date: 17<sup>th</sup> Jan, Wednesday Time: 4:30 pm Venue: Shiva Shakti Chalchitra Mandir Local partner/Ticket Contact: Resunga Multiple Campus Ph: 520145</p>
<p><b>BESISAHAR</b> Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan, Monday Time: 1:00 pm Venue: Jana Bikash Hi. Sec. School Local partner/Ticket Contact: Janabikash Hi. Sec. school Ph: 520189</p>	<p><b>TRISULI BAZAAR - NUWAKOT</b> Date: 25<sup>th</sup> Jan, Thursday Time: 1:00 pm Venue: Trisuli Ganga Mai Chalchitra Local partner/Ticket Contact: B.P. Smriti Primary School Majhitar, Bidur-5 Ph: 560880</p>	<p><b>JIRI</b> Date: 27<sup>th</sup> Jan, Saturday Time: 1:00 pm Venue: Dhungeswari Lower Sec. School Local partner/Ticket Contact: Jiri Hi. Sec. School Jiri - 9, Dolakha Nepal Patrakar Mahasangh, Dolakha</p>
		<p><b>POKHARA</b> Date: 20<sup>th</sup> Jan, Saturday Time: 2:00 pm Venue: Dipendra Sabhagriha Local partner/Ticket Contact: Siddhartha Club Siddhartha Chowk Ph: 530200</p>
		<p><b>KATHMANDU</b> Date: 31<sup>st</sup> Jan, Wednesday Time: 5:00 pm Venue: BICC Ticket booking Contact: nepa-laya Ph: 5542646, 5552839, 9841484285</p>

• Please be seated 30 minutes prior to the mentioned time. The show will start on time. • Unauthorised recording of any kind( audio and video) is prohibited. • Sharp objects and bags are prohibited inside show venue. • Gate ticket sales on show day will be subject to 50% additional charge. • For advance booking please contact the local organisers.

# A season to be jolly

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 Girija Bir Bickram 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 Pynmana.

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**.



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