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Weekly Internet Poll # 372

Q. Compared to last Dasain, what is your feeling about the country?

Total votes: 4,360

Much better 13.2%

Same same 19.2%

Much worse 63.8%

Can't tell 3.8%

Weekly Internet Poll # 373. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

Q. Who is the most to blame for the current political deadlock?

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# Delhi view

## India's last-ditch effort to salvage Nepal's peace process

PRASHANT JHA in NEW DELHI

India is frustrated with mainstream politicians, angry at the Maoists, bitter towards UNMIN, and concerned with the deadlock in a peace process that it helped set up in Nepal. Policy makers here place the blame largely on the Maoists, but also point out that Prime Minister Koirala has been stubbornly resisting a compromise.

New Delhi diplomats see the possibility of the peace process unravelling, and they want an immediate declaration of election dates to avoid further complications.

Shyam Saran's visit last month as envoy of the Indian prime minister was intended to add pressure. But negotiations went into slow motion over Dasain.

This week there is a new sense of urgency. On Wednesday, Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee summoned Pushpa Kamal Dahala and Baburam Bhattarai to the embassy and went to Baluwatar to meet Koirala. "Our impatience was amply conveyed," said one Indian source.

However, the election postponement last month reminded the foreign policy establishment in New Delhi about India's limitations. "No plan works there," conceded one senior official. "The Nepalis promise us one thing and then they do the exact opposite."

After pursuing several avenues to end the deadlock, New Delhi is now said to be comfortable with a 'commitment resolution' to a republic, subject to endorsement by the elected assembly. With the clock ticking, the NC's latest compromise in Kathmandu on Thursday afternoon was to have a 60:40 ratio for proportional representation and direct voting. This is said to have more takers.

Indian officials said they don't have a Plan B for Nepal, but one of them sent out a stern warning: "If any political force thinks it can get away with derailing the process or attempting a power grab, it is mistaken."

Meanwhile, there is deep distrust here about UNMIN, and officials don't mince words. Not only is UNMIN trying to extend and deepen its involvement in Nepal, they believe, but it is also harming the process. They see a pro-Maoist tilt in the UN's statements. "It was the Maoists who walked out of previous agreements. Why doesn't the UN realise how essential elections are to the success of the peace process?" asked a diplomat.

New Delhi registered a strong protest recently when it found out UN officials had crossed the border to meet madhesi militants. UNMIN's contacts with Nepal's political class down to the grassroots through its political and civil affairs office has also caused concern here. Said one senior official bluntly: "They want to treat Nepal as a UN protectorate, they're going to mess it up."

India is currently said to be re-evaluating its Nepal policy and what to do about UNMIN. India is not a permanent member of the Security Council and that limits its leverage in New York, but it is accepted as the regional power.

Delhi is said to be considering a six month extension to UNMIN, but with a stern message to downsize and limit its role. ●

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Tamrat Samuel p4



LAKE PLACID: A lone boatman crosses Lake Fewa in Pokhara on Sunday.

KIRAN PANDAY

Ford

RANGER

BUILT Ford TOUGH

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# Nepal's democracy is thwarted by the left and right

## Knife-edge

### A PEACE MISSING

Now that the painkiller of the festival season begins to wear off, we wait once more with a sense of foreboding. Goaded by hardline monarchists, the NC is in no mood to agree to any more Maoist goalpost shifting. Similarly, die-hard revolutionaries among the Maoists have held their leadership hostage. The level of distrust is now so high that even a slight mis-reading of signals could take us to the brink. Such hair-trigger stalemate is not good for either side.

The bottom line is that the Maoists don't want a constituent assembly election in which they will be trounced, even if it was something they fought for 11 years. They are too shy to say it out front, hence the two demands for a full proportional electoral system and declaration of republic by parliament before polls. Instead of taking us quicker towards a republic, the Maoist stance has only prolonged the lifespan of the monarchy.

The NC is enjoying seeing the Maoists squirm. The conservative pro-monarchist wing of the party doesn't want elections either because it is sure to lose its dominance of the un-elected interim legislature. They find it convenient to let the Maoists take all the blame for being spoilsports.

The only silver lining in this endless stalemate is that at least these things are being debated on the floor of parliament and not on the battlefield. But the longer the stalemate drags on, the greater the danger to the peace process. The Maoists and the monarchists have a common agenda in buying time and letting things drift, but no one benefits from this prolonged uncertainty.

If it was only over electoral procedures and the declaration of republic, it shouldn't have been this difficult to find a compromise. After all, it's either about sequencing (the interim parliament can easily agree on a consensus commitment on republic) or it's about semantics (the direct election part of the mixed system could also be carried out in a proportional manner).

The Maoists have left the door open by suggesting that even if one of the two demands is met, they are willing to allow elections. But such is the level of suspicion that the NC refuses to budge because it thinks the Maoists will come up with new demands if it agrees to the present two. This misgiving is partly justified because the Maoists are already floating trial balloons about a new census and an election government.

Till press time on Thursday afternoon, it looked like backroom negotiations on a consensus agreement may still avert a vote. The question is: why were the Maoists so determined to lose in a vote? To expose parliament as a sham? So they'll have an excuse to go back to the streets? To appease hardliners?

Whatever the reason, intense streets protests now is the last thing the Nepali people want or this country needs. Let's take this debate out of the hands of the hardliners on both sides who want a winner-takes-all system and let it be settled by more reasonable people in parliament who can finally give our politics some direction.

Those outside the parliamentary game clamour to be let in. And they are, on the promise that they will stick to the rules. Once in the ring, they go along with the rules as long as it suits them. When it doesn't suit them, they first change the rules of the game and then the game itself.



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Shastri Ramachandaran**

This is what happened in Sri Lanka, and this is what is happening in Nepal. The guns fall silent and the peace process gets frozen into a state of non-war. The Maoists have forced the seven parties to put off indefinitely the already-postponed elections.

The elections are now unlikely before May 2008 and this is a long period during which *je pani huna sakchha*. In this twilight zone there is no immediate return to warfare, everyone is on a knife-edge. The one who blinks first loses. The

rebels can hold out indefinitely, consolidate their gains, mobilise men, resources and firepower, and await that tipping point in the strategic balance when the endurance of the parliamentary parties would break.

Whatever the government does, confrontation or negotiations, the rebels have the upper hand. It may be premature to ask whether the Maoists will take up arms again like the Tamil Tigers, but that is the tried and tested route in insurgencies everywhere.

The peace agreement last year opened the doors for the Maoists to enter the mainstream political arena with a place in parliament and government subject to their renouncing the armed struggle and laying down weapons under UN supervision. At every stage the Maoists kept creating new conditions and raising new demands.

The Maoists knew that only Girija Koirala could deliver on the agreement and also that once on peace process he would have to go the extra mile to make it work. His legacy of peace, democracy and elections rested on it. Like the monarchy, the Maoists are fearful of democratic elections because the outcome is unpredictable. Their power in government and on the ground would be circumscribed if not vastly curtailed, compared to what they enjoyed during the war.

When the Maoists signed the peace agreement, they agreed that the constituent assembly would be elected on a mixed proportional system and decide the fate of the monarchy. Yet, their 22-point charter demanded that Nepal be declared a republic

by the present interim parliament and elections be held under a full proportional system.

Declaring Nepal a republic before the elections would be lacking in popular legitimacy, and by raising this issue to such a pitch, the Maoists have brought the monarch back to the political center-stage. By repeatedly asserting that he was striving for a bigger role, the Maoists have drummed up sympathy for King Gyanendra and reinforced popular cynicism against mainstream parties.

More than the demand for a republic, their insistence on a change of electoral procedures just weeks before the nomination deadline was calculated to wreck the election timetable. They knew that this demand could not be met because it was impossible to make the systemic switch in the time. It doesn't matter what parliament decides anymore, the Maoists have derailed elections and now can be held only at a time of their choosing.

The message is that the Maoists will call the shots, and that they are not bound by the agreements to which they are a party. This bodes ill for Nepal and is the most serious setback to multiparty democracy since the elections in 1991. The political parties are forever thwarted by non-elected forces, be it the monarchy or the Maoists.

Unless Nepal breaks out of this pattern, representative democracy will remain the mirage it has been since the first movement in 1950. ●

*Shastri Ramachandaran is an Indian journalist and writer and co-author of the book, State of Nepal.*



KIRAN PANDAY

# Agreeing to agree

## Posturing has become the default position of all politicians

Nepal's political mood swings keep oscillating between optimism and pessimism with brief interludes of euphoria.

It has been a roller-coaster ride ever since the 12-point agreement in November 2005. This year's Dasain, hope turned to despair as we watched the theatre of the absurd: Gyanendra in Taleju greets cheers of hired crowds, Girija in Biratnagar



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
**C K Lal**

promises harsher security measures, Baburam in Kakani threatens to quit the interim parliament, Ban Ki-Moon in New York issues dire predictions for the peace process and Gen Rukmangat Katuwal in Taplejung says there won't be any coup.

Everyone thinks that everyone else is wrong. The Maoists think they're always right, the NC is always in foolish denial, the UML enjoys fence-sitting. But no one is really confident about the efficacy of its

preferred method. While such prolonged uncertainty can breed despondency, there is no cause for alarm. When everybody is perplexed, they have no option but to end the current deadlock.

In the jubilation of unification, the NC is exhibiting new stubbornness. The usurpation of their political agenda by the mainstream parties has made Maoist leaders less flexible. Since there are no ground rules for political dialogue, posturing has become the default position of all politicians. While a war of words is less harmful than a war of real bullets, top-level leaders must ensure their dire threats don't become self-fulfilling prophecies. The NC and UML leaders should also reflect on whether their anti-YCL speeches have contributed to weakening the moderate leadership within the Maoist party.

The Maoists have been at the receiving end of blistering criticism all this week at the special session of parliament. The mainstream parties have excelled themselves in ridiculing Pushpa Kamal Dahal, disparaging Baburam Bhattarai slamming Ram Bahadur Thapa, deriding

Mohan Baidya. The Maoist stance has therefore hardened as well. It was foolish of them to walk out of government, but the NC and UML provoked it by their blithe indifference to the plight of combatants in cantonments.

When the interim parliament reconvenes later this month, its members will have to recognise the precariousness of their position. If the Maoists make it irrelevant by walking out they will be the biggest losers. UML leaders in particular need to realise that there is no place for theatrics now. On the other hand, the NC can undermine the entire peace process if it insists on turning the legislature into a rubber-stamp. Issues to be resolved are complex, and of far-reaching consequences. It requires serious deliberation in an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding.

Despite the loss of face caused by the election postponement, the seven party alliance is the only thing we have. Alternatives discussed at Dasain reunions—a non-partisan electoral government, a military-backed NC-UML

coalition, internationally-approved royal guardianship, technocratic government under UN stewardship—all border on desperation.

Although the Maoists have worked remarkably well so far with mainstream parties, the variance between perceptions of parliamentary forces and former insurgents isn't just attitudinal, it's ideological. Some philosophical differences between the Maoists and mainstreamers—land reforms, market mechanism and social re-engineering for example—are irreconcilable. Bullets proved powerless to settle those issues, they can now only be resolved through the ballot. The terms of engagement, however, need to be clearly set.

Consultations and consensus-building prior to the announcement of new dates for the constituent assembly election will have to be carried out in an environment of tolerance and restraint to build trust. Since there is unanimity over avoiding further outside interference in the peace process, mudslinging in public isn't just pointless, it's proving to be counter-productive.

There is some difference over the manner of monarchy's disposal, but no doubts about the supremacy of sovereign Nepalis. Then why delay constituent assembly elections? Mainstream parties are no more sincere about holding polls, but the question this time stares straight into the face of Maoists: deferral of CA elections isn't a disaster, but any lack of commitment to its earliest rescheduling will prepare the ground for catastrophic consequences. ●



## LETTERS

## MELTDOWN

Congratulations on your special coverage of the effect of climate change on the Himalaya ('Himalayan meltdown', #371). I climbed Imja Tse in 2002 and just compared the picture of the lake taken in 2006 in your newspaper to mine from 2002. The lake has grown dramatically in size in just four years. For these lakes to burst one doesn't even need an earthquake. Five years ago, Sabai Tsho above Tangnag (Hinku Khola, under Mera Peak) burst its moraine just by an avalanche falling into it. The flood caused terrible damage and casualties downstream. People in Tangnag were lucky. They heard the sonic boom and had enough time to run uphill. Not so lucky for people further down.

**Liba Cummings, Calgary, Canada**

● See, Mr Lomborg, Al Gore may not be a scientist but what he is saying is not fiction ('An inconvenient peace prize', #371). You are right that world hunger is more urgent, but climate change will jeopardise food production even more. Besides, if we only diverted a small portion of what governments spend on the military, world hunger can be solved. Gore deserves this honour, it was the right choice.

**Saujanya Acharya, Tokyo**

## BOGGED DOWN

I couldn't help sensing a twinge of jealousy in CK Lal's 'Bogged down' (State of the State, #371) where he uses phrases like 'English-speaking young achievers', 'large white SUVs', 'jet-setting ways' about aid agencies and INGOs. What is wrong if aid agencies are giving jobs to the English-speaking youth? Even a single dollar should be considered a gain to the nation's economy. As long as the aid is in the form of outright grants, I see no reason in wasting time analysing and discussing, thereby antagonising donor countries that have their own priorities and their own national interest (or self-interest?).

**Sugat R Kansakar, Kamaladi**

## UNCERTAINTY

I would like to know where Tanka Subba ('Uncertain no more,' Guest

Column, #371) gathered his foreign-living Nepali focus group to draw his conclusions on how Nepalis abroad see Nepal. He says they see the country as poor and backward. He accuses them of trying to cut ties with Nepali history, language and culture. As a Nepali living abroad, I want to provide a synopsis of how things are here at my American home:

- My children call my wife and I, Mama and Baba
- My children are enrolled in Nepali dancing classes
- My children eagerly await Dal Bhat at dinner time
- My children and most of our friends' children love to show off their daura suruwal
- There are many Nepali professionals who are continuously gathering to find effective ways to invest in Nepal and ways to create socially responsible investment ventures
- Nepalis living abroad are generous in times of need such as this year's floods. Still think that Nepal does not mean anything to people who live abroad?

**Sushil Bogati, USA**

## SCAPEGOAT

Thank you for publishing Dr Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha's excellent opinion piece ('Scapegoat', Nepali Pan, #371). He has rightly questioned our cruelty to animals in the name of religious sacrifice and it shows animal sacrifice is not something we should be proud of. Could it in fact indicate our backwardness and primitiveness? The article should open the eyes of every Nepali, specifically the Maoists who are responsible for a war that killed 14,000 Nepalis.

**Bhuaneshor Sharma, Adelaide, Australia**

## NEPAL'S HEROINES

As an ex-Additional Secretary who innovated the female community health volunteers (FCHV) I found that the article 'Nepal's real heroines' (#371) read more like an indictment not only of our regular culprits: the politicians and the officials, but also the numerous health-related donors and the hundreds of their fat salaried officials. Then, the FCHVs had to be members of and accountable to their respective mothers' groups. The latter

were seen as the stakeholders' forum for primary health care in the communities who would together build pressure on the government health system to be increasingly responsive to their needs. But the Ministry of Health and Population apparently no longer cares about mothers' groups. *Nepali Times* would be doing a great service if it were to do an investigative piece on the irresponsible health managers of Nepal and their donor accomplices.

**Bihari Krishna Shrestha, Chakupat**

## TARAI CHURNING

'Tarai churning' (Tarai Eye #371) helped clear a very blurred picture in my mind. The picture Prashant Jha presents describes a dangerous trend. Criminalisation of politics is accelerating at a pace beyond our control. All national parties, except the UML, have lost their presence in the tarai. This is only helping secessionists, who're led by criminals.

**K Kamal, USA**

## EK NEPALI

Vijay Lama's Nepalpan ('Nepali ek haun,' #371) is very much relevant in Nepal's present context. Everywhere, there is division. This article should be read by our political pundits. They should pay attention to the Nepali agenda, not their party agenda. Thanks to Vijay Lama for his outstanding thoughts.

**Ram Bahadur Kuwar, China**

## POLLS

Absolute power corrupts absolutely. The postponement of the elections now shows that we have swapped one dictator for eight. Why would the parties want an election when they can rule unchecked? I am saddened to see that Jana Andolan II was a waste of time and effort. The country was better off with the king and the Maoists in the jungle. At least then their actions were considered illegal. Now, they roam free. How long will we accept these corrupt, unethical and lawless leaders?

**Name withheld**

- The Election Commission's report showed that expenditure for the elections

was a whopping Rs 510 million. Can an impoverished nation such as ours do away with such an amount for just political upmanship? We should go ahead with the election even if Maoists are not part of it! We can't afford to spend another Rs 1.5 billion for someone else's political whim. The Maoists' idea is to create a political vacuum and exploit it to their advantage.

**PB Rana, email**

● It is no surprise that our new republican kings have postponed the elections. Why give anyone a choice when you can rule without being checked? Mr Prime Minister if you have any integrity, hold the elections and let us choose our leaders rather than forcing yourself on us.

**B Bhandari, email**



## CORRECTION

A zero was missing in the box item 'Receding glaciers' (#371). The sentence should read: 'Global average temperatures are rising at 0.06 degrees a year, and scientists say snowlines especially of mountain regions close to the equator are most affected.'

In the accompanying article 'Himalayan meltdown', the year Mallory's body was discovered on the north face of Chomolungma should have been 1999. Both were editing errors.

## Real Mausambi

Otherwise known as "sweet lime" or "Mausam" in Nepali, the Mausambi is a veritable powerhouse of citrus vitamins. This amazing fruit brims with natural goodness and regenerative powers. Mausambi is not only full of anti-oxidants it has anti-bacterial properties as well. It's juice purifies the blood and cools the body. It's good for your skin, good for your heart, good for your immune system and the good news is that there's a great way your family can enjoy all the nutrition of this fruit even when it's not in season.

thank goodness it's here !



The Original Goodness





# “Longer the deadlock, greater the danger for the peace process”



IRENE PERONI

**Nepali Times:** The Secretary General's report to the Security Council last week wasn't very positive about the prospects for peace. Can things still be salvaged?

**Tamrat Samuel:** The report tried to bring out the dangers facing the peace process without being unduly pessimistic, which could have serious consequences unless the parties come together and take the necessary corrective action. I believe there is ample opportunity not only to salvage the peace process but to turn the current crisis into an occasion to strengthen and deepen it. Communication and cooperation among the parties has not broken down. The parties are exerting a lot of effort to overcome the current crisis. The Maoists have repeatedly assured us that they have no intention of abandoning the peace process, whatever the difficulties, and that their protests will be peaceful. However, it is better to avoid reaching that stage. No one can have full control of events in the streets in a charged political atmosphere. The seven parties have a common interest in preserving the peace process and seeing it through to its intended outcome. The longer the deadlock and the division among the parties continue the greater the danger for the peace process.

**Where is the main stumbling block as you see it?**

In my opinion, the loss of critical momentum in the peace process over the past several months has led to tension and friction among the parties. Mutual suspicion about each other's intentions seems to have eroded the level of trust within the seven-party alliance. By definition an alliance requires a level of mutual confidence and a common perspective on the fundamentals, although it does not presume a full convergence of views on everything. This is why we believe the current crisis presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the seven parties to take full stock of the peace process on this anniversary of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord.

The parties in particular need to look at how the political landscape has become more complicated in the past year, and ensure that the process is genuinely inclusive and guided by the spirit of the People's Movement. I think difficulties and delays in implementing existing agreements have played a significant role in making all sides more confrontational.

Therefore, the first order of business at this critical time should be the preservation of the peace process and the unity of the seven parties. Secondly, there is a need to carry out an assessment of the peace process as described above with the aim of achieving a common vision about its future direction and about the defining attributes of the 'New Nepal' the parties hope to build, including in areas

such as state restructuring and the security sector.

Lastly, the parties should look at the architecture and management of the peace process and decide how best to organize the ongoing negotiations more efficiently and agree on effective implementation mechanisms and an independent national monitoring body. All of this must be premised on a collective commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law and on the assumption that agreements and popular decisions are there to be honoured.

Beyond the relations of the seven parties there are the wider challenges facing the country, notably the situation in the tarai and the demands of traditionally marginalized groups for greater inclusion and representation in the peace process and beyond.

**But how much can you do with your mandate to remove these obstacles?**

UNMIN is a special political mission established by the Security Council to support Nepal in its political transition towards an elected constituent assembly. The specific elements of the mandate are monitoring of arms and armed personnel, electoral assistance and support to the monitoring (by a national mechanism) of the cease-fire/peace agreements. Much of the work in these areas, particularly in electoral assistance, has either been accomplished or cannot be completed until there is a political agreement on moving forward with the election. But other areas have become more pressing. We feel, for example, that a more lasting arrangement needs to be devised for the security sector. Keeping Maoist combatants cantoned and the Nepal Army restricted to barracks is obviously only an interim solution. The discussion on the future of the security sector should start without delay since finding acceptable solutions to these issues is likely to take time.

The UN is ready to be of more assistance, within its existing mandate, in some of the areas where the process needs adjustment, including the organizational management of the peace process and implementation mechanisms. It has the capacity to do so without in any way infringing on the national ownership of the peace process. But it is up to the parties to make the best use of UNMIN and its value.

**The parties are now looking at elections in February-March, what are the issues that need to be addressed before that?**

The seven parties need to extricate themselves from the present crisis. But ending the current stalemate by itself may not resolve all issues. The emergence of new problems

Tamrat Samuel from Eritrea has been with the United Nations for the past 24 years, and as Senior Political Officer for South Asia since 2003 he was closely involved with the UN's efforts to help resolve the conflict in Nepal. In June he was appointed Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Nepal and Deputy Head of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). He spoke to *Nepali Times* this week on the political deadlock that is threatening the peace process.

that could again hinder the election should be avoided. We believe, therefore, that the parties need to delve deeper into the underlying causes of the friction and mistrust. As mentioned earlier, there is a need to rebuild confidence among the seven parties and beyond, by taking immediate action on existing commitments and through other gestures of goodwill. There is also a need to agree on a common long-term vision and for strengthening the mechanisms of the peace process. Improvement of the law and order situation is an important prerequisite for a credible election. While security is primarily a function of political stability and consensus, the law enforcement agencies deserve support if they are to carry out their tasks with the required level of professionalism and responsibility. Dialogue and consensus-building with the madhesi and janajati communities as well as other traditionally marginalized groups should be accelerated so that the legitimate aspirations of these groups in relation to the election are addressed and criminal elements are isolated.

**If that happens, what kind of extension of its mandate does UNMIN envisage?**

Our mandate is up for review in January but generally there appears to be a consensus that the mandate should be extended. The prime minister and the government have given an indication to this effect. For us, the sooner we complete this task and go back home the better. If the Nepal government makes the decision and sends the request for mandate extension we expect the Security Council to respond positively. The sooner this request is made the better so that we can fine tune the operational details in advance of the end of the current mandate.

**Are India and China happy with the extension?**

We are entirely in the hands of the Council and Member States. The Security Council has expressed its openness to any request from Nepal for an extension of UNMIN's mandate. Clearly, there was a great deal of concern amongst Security Council members about the postponement of elections and the threat this might pose for the peace process in the long-term, so the general sense of the international community is that there should be an effort to address the immediate issues that are blocking the elections. So, there is a lot of interest to move ahead the Nepal process which is seen as a largely positive development in an otherwise very bleak international situation at least in the conflict arenas around the world that the UN has to deal with. People would be very disappointed if there was further drift and the situation became more complicated here.



Bank of Asia

Bank of Asia is the 22nd commercial bank to open in Nepal. Services have already started and the regional bank aims to become a top commercial bank by emphasizing its personalized service and an ambitious expansion plan.

Thirteen

Machhapuchchhre Bank's 13<sup>th</sup> branch opened in Sunsari's Itahari. The branch also has an ATM and offers 365-day banking and an evening counter. The bank has 13 branches and 11 ATMs to date. It plans to open branches in Ilam, Dhankuta, Syangja and Baglung in the near future.

Signature golf

For the first time, five Nepalis and a Chinese will represent Le Meridien Golf Resort in the semifinals of the Sixth McDowells' Signature Club Golf Championship 2007. The event will be held in Kolkata and is supported by LG and Kingfisher Airlines. The event is managed by Delhi-based Tiger Sports Marketing while Outlook Business is the print media partner.

Super Six at Soaltee

Soaltee Crowne Plaza holds its ninth Super Sixes cricket tournament from 30 October-3 November. Twenty teams participate this year in the five-day six-a-side tournament which is being organized in association with Spice Nepal and is supported by Himalayan Distillery, Gorkha Brewery, Dragon Air, Yeti Airlines, ournepal.com, Vogue, Seiko, Bottles Nepal and Avenues Television.

Sel-in's sanitary

Sel-In's customer service and commercial exhibition lounge has recently opened at the Empire Heights in Panipokhari. A range of products including electrical fixtures, wall and floor tiles, sanitary wares, and furniture are available.

Bluebird is 23

Bluebird Mall is celebrating its first anniversary and the 23rd anniversary of the Bluebird Department Store with events under the month-long Season of Festivals, 10 October-10 November.

NEW PRODUCTS

SLIM: LG has launched the LG Ultra Slim, a 21 inch flat TV that is 150mm thinner than any other TV set with LCD and PDP. The Ultra Slim applies the XD engine that enhances picture quality colour. The TV is available for Rs 21,900 with 48-months' warranty at zero percent finance.

Unlike the Asian Games and the Olympics, the SAF Games has not yet included golf as an event. But the SAARC Golf Championship has been held since 1999 providing a platform for South Asian golf governing bodies and golfers to



TEE BREAK

Deepak Acharya

get together, strengthen mutual relationships and compete at the highest regional levels. This year is the ninth edition of this prestigious event, which is being held from 31 October-3 November in Nepal for the first time. It is being played at the

SAARC Golf

Nepal hosts the SAARC golf championship

Gleneagles designed Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. Unlike past years, the Surya Nepal 9<sup>th</sup> SAARC Golf Championship is going to witness the full strength of players from each golf-playing SAARC country for this annual championship. Top amateurs from India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal will have full five member teams (3 men and 2 ladies). The Maldives does not have any golf courses nor a golf team, so their abstention from the event is understandable. The event used to be a 'Men Only' affair, but that changed in Lahore in 1994. This year the Nepali men's team will comprise of veteran Tashi Ghale and two youngsters, Rupak Acharya and Rabi Khadka. Kesang Lama and Shastika Shrestha will spearhead the

Cart before the horse

Our economy has always been held hostage by our politicians

WASHINGTONDC—At the Global Leadership Forum here this week, this self-proclaimed Beed realised just how little he knew. When participants from more than 85 developing countries converge to discuss issues, diversity has to find a new definition. Interestingly, many believe that DC cab drivers going



ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

on strike on Thursday were learning from Nepal. They were protesting the introduction of metering, believe it or not. Most DC drivers (98 percent of them immigrants) accuse large taxi companies of wanting to dislodge individual owners. At the Forum itself discussions looked ahead to what's in store for developing countries in the next 20 years. While there are many challenges that one can prioritise, lack of governance stood out as the main one. Zimbabwe was mentioned a lot. A country that 30 years ago had one of the strongest currencies in the world, boasted near 100 percent literacy and was called the bread basket of Africa, is now a basket case with a stereotypical tinpot dictator. It just goes to show that when countries start sliding it all happens very quickly, and it's usually due to leadership failure. Nepal witnessed phenomenal overall growth between 1990 and 1995. But all that evaporated when the political squabbling began. Today, with GP Koirala trying to fill the shoes of the

abominable kingman and perpetuating his own power once again, the memories of politics killing the economy are coming alive again. The fear of defeat in the Maoist camp coupled with the fear of the sun setting on the Koirala dynasty keep elections to the constituent assembly a mirage. The way certain vested groups moved to the street to protest against the hike in petroleum product prices shows that politicians never understand how the economy works. In the UK, the price of petrol is already above one pound, which is double what we pay in Nepal. With a looming confrontation between the US and Iran, the price of oil will soon cross the \$100 per barrel mark. Not recognizing these global trends would only lead to economic, and ultimately political, hara-kiri. In the US by contrast, the economy determines politics. The mortgage and sub-prime issues leading to a dip in the housing market resulted in lower consumer spending and

threatened to send the entire economy into a spin. A low economic growth rate, coupled with high inflation and high unemployment, would make the US economy – which borrows so much – far more fragile. If the economy takes a hit, there is no way the Republicans can get their candidate elected the next president. The more we in Nepal allow politicians to hold our economy hostage, the worse off we will be. If we can't take decisions on power projects despite having two power summits, or if we can't decide that petroleum products are something that the state has to buy and sell, or if we do not want to examine the impact of a deteriorating economy, there is little that anyone can do to help us. Your Beed has been optimistic over the last couple of years, but perhaps for the first time, one feels that the country is loosing steam. By leaving it all to politics, we have put the cart before the horse. ● [www.arthabeed.com](http://www.arthabeed.com)

performance at the SAARC Golf championships have fallen short of the mark. This year however, they are determined to take advantage of the home venue and bring the golden medal home. "I am very confident about my game, have the feel for putting and I'm playing well" said team member Rupak Acharya. Kesang Lama commented: "A while back I was not confident enough with my short game, but now I have improved tremendously and I'm much happier with my game." ● *Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and golf director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. [prodeepak\(at\)hotmail.com](mailto:prodeepak(at)hotmail.com)*

<b>INDIA</b> Bhanwar Singh Manav Das Simarjeet Singh Jasjeet Singh Swaeta Galande Nnlini Singh
<b>BANGLADESH</b> Ahsan Habib Mohammad Zamal Hossain Mollah Mohammad Shahid Khan Mohammad Sakhwat Hossain Shohel Mrs Fatima Matur Mrs Luna Sarker
<b>SRI LANKA</b> N U G De Silva T Prabakaran Mithun Perera T Chandradasa Niloo Jayathilake Danushi Senadhira
<b>BHUTAN</b> Tshenchok Thinlay Karma Rangdol Chang Tshering Jigme Wangmo Ms. Lhadon
<b>NEPAL</b> Rabindra Man Shrestha Rupak Acharya Tashi Ghale Rabi Khadka Kesang Lama Shastika Shrestha
<b>PAKISTAN</b> Mohammad Tariq Tariq Mehmood Danyaal Jehangir Muhammad Safdar Khan Tahira Nazir Miss Mahreen Raheel



# संविधानसभाको सवालमा राष्ट्रिय रेडियो बहस

तपाईंको बिचार, प्रश्न र भोगाई प्रत्यक्ष टेलिफोनमा

पैसा नलाग्ने

फोन: १६६० ०१ ३८५६७

## नेपाल चौतारी

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बझाङ: माइपान एक.एम. १००.६ MHz.

कोशी: घोडाघोडी एक.एम. १००.४ MHz.

### मध्य पश्चिमप्रान्त

बाँके: सेरी एक.एम. १०५.४ MHz.

रेडियो सेरी आवाज १५.६ MHz.

रेडियो खम्वुवाडी एक.एम. ११५.६ MHz.

सुर्खेत: रेडियो सेरी एक.एम. १०८.६ MHz.

बाँझु: रेडियो सुर्खेत १००.२ MHz.

गर्वाङ: रेडियो १०२.८ MHz.

### पश्चिमप्रान्त

काठमाडौं: तिम्रुली एक.एम. १०२.८ MHz.

माछापुच्छ्रे एक.एम. ११५ MHz.

गण्डकी: विजय एक.एम. १०१.६ MHz.

रामेछंडा: सुमिरी एक.एम. १०६.८ MHz.

लुम्बिनी: एक.एम. १०८.८ MHz.

रामेछंडा: एक.एम. १०२ MHz.

पल्लो: रेडियो गण्डकी १०८.९ MHz.

रेडियो सुमिरी १०८.९ MHz.

रेडियो पश्चिमप्रान्त एक.एम. १०१.४ MHz.

वीरगञ्ज: एक.एम. १०३.२ MHz.

बाँझु: उदयपुरी एक.एम. १०८.६ MHz.

### मध्यमप्रान्त

धनुषा: रेडियो जनकपुर १०७ MHz.

पर्सो: नारायणी एक.एम. १०३.८ MHz.

मकवानपुर: सेटीडा एक.एम. १०६.६ MHz.

रेडियो धनुषा १०७.२ MHz.

पुर्वचम्पू: एक.एम. १०७ MHz.

चितवन: गिरनी एक.एम. १०१.६ MHz.

मकवानपुर: उदयपुरी एक.एम. १०८ MHz.

काठमाडौं: सेरी एक.एम. १०८.६ MHz.

### पुर्वप्रान्त

सप्तरी: जनकपुरी एक.एम. १०८.६ MHz.

सुनसरी: सप्तरी एक.एम. १०८ MHz.

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# Removing discrimination against mental illness is a bigger challenge than treatment

# Stigma therapy



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

MALLIKA ARYAL

Shanti Dulal, a 35-year-old woman suffering acute schizophrenia, was abandoned by her husband at the Mental Hospital in Lagankhel 45 days ago and doctors are still waiting for him to collect her. He promised to care for her during her hospital stay but disappeared after a few days, perhaps back to Gokarna where he is a teacher.

Shanti is not the only one. Mentally ill people are dumped on the streets, chained in their attics, or simply abandoned by relatives who can't deal with the stigma and burden of taking care of patients. In fact, fighting discrimination against mentally ill people is often a bigger challenge than actually treating the patients.

"After a while the person with mental illness becomes a burden, starts getting discriminated against by the family, and in the worst cases gets dumped either at the hospital or on the streets," says Sameer Banskota, a social

worker at the hospital.

There are no reliable statistics on how many mentally ill people there are in Nepal, but worldwide the average is three percent of the population. This would put the number in Nepal at nearly one million. Bishwa B Sharma, a psychiatrist at Kathmandu's Medicare National Hospital, says mental health has been neglected for years and patients are vulnerable to arrest and torture. Women may be sexually exploited or rejected by families.

"Health care facilities for mentally ill people have to be made better, more health professionals need to be trained and we need certified trained nurses to look after patients with mental illness," Sharma says. "But all that should go hand-in-hand with awareness programs, training and legal provisions for the mentally ill."

Just a few years ago there were just a handful of psychiatrists in Nepal. Psychiatry is still not a popular subject among medical students with only four new

**ALL IN THE MIND: (l-r) Director of Patan Mental Hospital Kapil Dev Upadhyaya, psychiatrist Bishwa B Sharma and psychologist RP Sapkota say mental health patients are often forgotten by health care professionals and government alike.**

psychiatrists graduating from Tribhuban University Teaching Hospital in Maharajganj and the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan each year.

The Mental Hospital in Lagankhel has 40 beds, and other hospitals have a few more. But these are all in urban areas and patients from rural Nepal suffer most from the lack of services.

In 1997 a national mental health policy was drawn up, and more recently a Mental Health Bill was drafted. Experts say it is imperative that the draft be discussed and passed by the government soon as it has provisions relating to the care and support of mentally ill people, and land and property issues. But most importantly the act makes family, state and community responsible for mentally ill people.

In Nepal, mental health is not given as much priority as communicable or other diseases. "People don't die from mental problems, so the government does not see mental health as a priority," says RP Sapkota, a psychologist and counsellor at the Centre for Victims of Torture.

Experts say it is vital to have at least one psychiatrist in each zonal hospital, and there should be training for community health workers to raise awareness, identify mental illnesses, treat mild mental disorders and refer acute cases to psychiatrists. They suggest Nepal should look to the model of some Scandinavian countries, where social workers have legal powers to intervene and fight for the rights of the mentally ill.

Back at the Mental Hospital, someone has finally come to collect Shanti. It is not her husband but her 11-year-old daughter with an adult cousin. The cousin tells the doctors that the husband could not be reached. It appears he has abandoned Shanti. From now on it will be up to her daughter to look after her. ●

# Dana's gift

LUCIA DE VRIES

Yesterday I heard the news: Dana had died. She probably died the way we knew she would go, on a cold winter day, on the street, unwashed, staring at occasional passers-by with her unwavering dark eyes until they became uncomfortable and left her to die.

A train of memories. Her first appearance in my Patan neighbourhood. One day a well built, barely dressed person collapses in front of my two-storey house, face down in the mud. When the person is still there some hours later, in the same position, I start to worry. "Dai, please wake up!" I call and shake the foul smelling body.

Nothing moves. Some children in school uniforms join me and so does the *chowkidar* from a nearby house. "It's not a man, it's a woman and she is *paga*", he says. I don't believe him. And a young Nepali woman doesn't roam alone undressed on the streets, even when she is mentally ill.

Her name is Dana. She uses the barren land opposite the house to relieve herself. Sometimes she simply collapses in the weeds and stays there for the night or longer. One night I hear an eerie sound. I run to the balcony, expecting to see someone being raped or killed. Instead I see Dana, screaming while wringing her hands obsessively. It goes on for hours. That night, listening to Dana, I come close to understanding what it's like to suffer from mental illness.

## An abandoned woman who brought compassion and humanity to everyone

I start giving Dana some food. Often she sleeps, somewhere next to the road or in a *pati*, shelter, where she likes to stay, but the food is gone by the time I return. Sometimes I hear her screaming and walk over, just to find that she needs help in crossing the road. After some weeks Dana starts to speak: "Didi, titaura". I guess our friendship gets baptised by sharing this sticky piece of titaura.

Some time later Dana developed a leg infection. The smell became repulsive. Some volunteers from a nearby children's home came to see Dana occasionally. They suggested we make her see a doctor. Dana's family, who live nearby but have more or less given up on her, agreed. She had to be taken to a hospital for deep tissue surgery, otherwise her leg might have to be amputated.

There was a frantic phone call from the hospital: "Dana is about to kill the doctor!" When I arrive on the ward Dana is about to attack a very angry young doctor with a massive fire extinguisher. "They want to lock me up. I'm going home," she shouts, over and over again. The unfortunate doctor is the first in a long row of carers who have no clue how to deal with a mentally ill homeless patient.

We are saved by Lambu, a student from Dhapakhel, who volunteers to spend the first night at Dana's bedside. As soon as Dana sees Lambu her attitude changes. Keeping an eye on her carers she agrees to come to the ward. Dana's leg could be saved. She was diagnosed as schizophrenic by the visiting psychiatrist who not once looked or talked to her directly. He prescribed four pills a day and turned a deaf ear to our protests: how could he trust Dana with so many pills?

By now Dana seemed a different person. The nutritious food and 24-hour care had been good for her. She started talking about her life and family. She had been married once, but didn't like it. One day she left her husband and started living in a nearby *pati*. Her mother had died and she loved her father.

Dana did not want to stay indoors. The *pati* smelled even worse than before. Street dogs liked staying with her, especially emaciated bitches with flea-infested puppies. We continued to change the dressing and to give antibiotics. Just when we thought the leg would never heal, Dana started walking normally.

Our lives did not entirely return to normal. Lambu seriously considered giving up business studies and become a social worker. He said he loved Dana more than his own sister and would never forget the days he spent in the hospital. He married a staff nurse. Some of the other volunteers continued to work as carers for sick children. They are quiet heroes who spend many restless nights in overcrowded hospitals.

Now she is no longer with us. I heard she was taken to Pashupatinath by relatives and neighbours. I hope that at the last moment she allowed a caring person to be at her side, watching him or her until she was ready to let go.

There are no care or rehabilitation services exclusively for homeless mentally ill people in Nepal. Chhahari Nepal was founded in 2005 to address their needs in close cooperation and collaboration with existing rehabilitation and medical services. The organization found in a study that the number of homeless mentally ill people of all ages in the valley is surprisingly much higher than expected. Although community members usually provide food virtually none receive medical or social care. ●

Chhahari Nepal: [chhaharinepal\(at\)wlink.com.np](mailto:chhaharinepal(at)wlink.com.np)

## Treating mental war wounds

Depression, anxiety, headache, flashbacks and nightmares, insomnia, bedwetting and suicide: these are just some of the psychological effects that violence and war have on people.

Mental health experts say it is safe to assume that Nepal's decade-long civil war has left many people suffering from psychological trauma.

"We don't have official figures, because no one has done a formal study, but from the examples of conflict in other countries it is understood that approximately 10-40 percent of the affected population suffer from psychological trauma," says RP Sapkota, psychologist and counsellor at the Centre for Victims of Torture, Nepal.

Since early 2007, CVICT has been working on a formal study of the psychological affects of war on the general population. Experts argue that although many of the mental illnesses resulting from war are easily treatable, there may be long-term consequences if action is not taken promptly.

"The doctors have to be able to recognise the symptoms first and they need to be trained in psychological 'first aid', which means they should listen, mobilise support, and make sure their needs are met and the victims protected from further harm," says Kapil Dev Upadhyaya of the Patan Mental Hospital.

Sapkota says the best way to ensure those suffering from psychological trauma are well taken care of is for the government to work with other organizations who are working in the same field.

"It is imperative that we treat those who have undergone war trauma, and we have to start at the grassroots level," he says. "If we train community health workers to raise awareness on war and mental health, to identify, treat and refer serious cases to a psychiatrist, we would be a step closer to healing their pain."



How do Bhutani refugees see their world? Some were born in the camps and have never seen their motherland, all have spent the past 17 years as refugees.

Three organizations teamed up to train selected refugee journalists in a four-day photography training. These are some of the pictures the trainees took, the young refugees look inward to find their personal voices to tell their stories of camp life. As insiders, their pictures show us the true story of the daily life in the camps for the 100,000 Bhutanis who are now waiting for third-country repatriation. The photojournalism training was supported by Third World Media Network, Bhutan Press Union, Association of Press Freedom Activists-Bhutan and Drik India. Photos will be on display at the photo.circle Saturday 3 November 10AM-12PM at Sundhara Bakery Cafe.



# Images



## Aita Maya Subba

Approximately 290 patients come to the UMP Hospital to get medicinal treatment everyday. The hospital runs from 8:45 AM and till 4PM. Simple cases are given treatment here, but complicated cases are handled by AMDA hospital.



## Radhika Homagain

Ganga Maya Gurung and Sukh Maya Monger weave Dhaka topis, which they sell to earn a living. Support provided by UNHCR is not sufficient to meet the basic requirements of their family. According to the women, it is not an easy task because of their old age. They were evicted from their homes in Danabari by the government of Bhutan in 1990.







# of exile



## Yam Thulung

Khina Maya Kalikotae is frustrated that she has not been able to use the tailoring, bamboo basket making, knitting, embroidery and other skills that have been provided to her by various NGOs within the camps. She has not been able to start up a business due to lack of funds. Khina Maya is originally from Labshibhotae village in Tshirang District, Bhutan. She lost her hearing and speech due to severe unidentified illness when she was a child. Now she struggles to live the life of a widow, with no income of her own. Around 100,000 Bhutani citizens are leading a miserable life of asylum in exile in eastern Nepal.



## Cheta Nath Khanal

Bhakta Bahadur Rai, 26, is a 10 +2 graduate and originally from Chirang district in Bhutan. Now he expresses the sorrows of separation from his homeland in the paintings and sculptures that he makes. He has opened a library and an art gallery in his hut to promote art and to manage daily expenses for his family of 10 members.

# No way home

## Child refugees seek dignity and the right to return to Bhutan

NARESH NEWAR

**B**asudev Osti has no memory of leaving his country as he was barely a year old when his parents were forced out of Bhutan in 1990. But he knows what it means to be a refugee and every day he hopes to be liberated from this status.

“I want to start a new life as a dignified citizen,” says 17-year-old Osti who grew up in a refugee camp at Khudanabari.

Rebika Bhandari is worried that thousands of children will spend their entire lives as refugees. “We have been forgotten by everyone,” she says. Osti and Bhandari are among the children whose art works, photographs, CDs and handicrafts are on display for three days at the Art Council this week. Visitors snapped up most of the items on display, including a portrait of King Jigme. Proceeds from the sale will go to the welfare of refugee children back at the camps in Jhapa and Morang.

US Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration Ellen Sauerbrey is in Kathmandu this week to review the process by which her country is taking more than 60,000 Bhutani refugees for resettlement. The move has divided the refugee community, with some who say all refugees should be allowed to return to Bhutan threatening those opting for third-country resettlement. Sauerbrey is also visiting Bhutan and India.

There are now an estimated 40,000 children in the camps, many of them born there. But the Bhutanese Refugee Children’s Forum, representing child refugees, says more support is required. The refugees still have to buy uniforms and stationery, and nearly 10 percent of children have dropped out of school to help their parents in labouring jobs, to make ends meet.

The children complain of lack of food, of being unable to afford medical treatment, and of social rejection by Nepalis. Bhandari tells how she took a 13-year-old girl to a government hospital in Biratnagar a few months ago, only to be ignored by the doctor. She says the young girl had to sleep on a trolley for three nights before the nurses found her a bed and medicines.

“If you want to know our problems, then you will have an endless list,” said 18-year-old Churamani Mainali, who told how his parents were beaten by Bhutani police just before they were evicted from their homes. “Although I was only two years old when I was forced out my country with my parents, I can imagine the pain that they went through.”

Bhandari’s grandparents migrated with the first generation of Nepalis to the southern lowlands of Bhutan during the 19th century at the invitation of the Bhutanese government, which wanted them to clear the malarial jungle for agriculture.

“We have every right to go back home and the world has to pay attention to us and not forget us so easily,” she said. Mainali adds: “We have every proof to our right to live as citizens in Bhutan and the government cannot deny that in the face of the world.” ●



NARESH NEWAR

**YOUNG GENERATION:** Basudev Osti (*second from right*) was in the capital this week with his fellow refugees to tell the world that Bhutani refugee children in Nepal suffer as much as refugee children anywhere else in the world.





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## IRENE PERONI

For some young westerners, Nepal appears the perfect place to combine a few weeks of well-intentioned volunteer work with some of the world's most accessible and dramatic outdoor adventures.

Type 'volunteer+Nepal' into an Internet search engine and there are any number of contacts. Projects in developing countries to occupy young volunteers in their gap years between school and university have become big business and can be expensive. Month-long programs organized through reputable outfits like Volunteer Abroad, i-to-i, or Projects Abroad, can cost more than \$2,000.

That is why many students and professionals on a career break are resorting to a much more affordable alternative: surfing the net for small-scale, low-key Nepali NGOs. A few clicks of the mouse bring a plethora of placement offers in all the

## Gap year



NAYANTARA GURUNG KAKSHAPATI

## VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

## Part Time Media Advisor

Chemonics International seeks qualified candidates for part-time Media Advisor on a USAID/OTI funded program which seeks to support Nepal's political transition. This fast, flexible program is designed to positively affect the current political transition in Nepal. The objectives are: 1) to increase access to information and diversify public debate on issues critical to the political transition; and 2) to increase effectiveness of key political transition institutions. Duties will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Secure and maintain firm grasp and understanding of USAID/OTI strategy in Nepal, goals and objectives with respect to small grant and technical assistance activities, on-going events and trends (political and security) in Nepal.
- Assist the Chief of Party (COP) in maximizing the impact of the current program portfolio through media and in developing new activities targeted at supporting the transition on both a national and regional level.
- Develop, maintain and advance relationships with new and existing strategic partners.
- Advise the COP on whether grant/technical assistance activities under consideration are consistent with USAID/OTI media strategy.
- Advise and assist the COP, over the course of implementation of small grant/technical assistance activities, on suitable USAID/OTI media activities.
- Train program staff on the media strategy, identification of appropriate media activity development, etc.
- Solicit proposals according to guidelines agreed with USAID/OTI.
- Define needs and intended impact of the media activities.
- Design audio, visual, and other matters for telecast, broadcast, and print media as required and assist in the development of a range of publications.
- Develop a feedback mechanism to be utilized by stakeholders to communicate their views, opinions, and recommendations on the program and information messaging.

## Qualifications:

- Extensive experience in strategic communications, media management and large-scale media activities, events, and productions;
- Practical experience of at least 5-10 years in a similar position, including handling large media projects;
- In-depth understanding of the broader media environment in Nepal;
- Written and oral fluency in Nepali and English languages, other Nepali languages a plus;
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills;
- High level of initiative and creativity and ability to work with minimal supervision;
- Experience in working with the Government of Nepal and international organizations;
- Capacity to understand and analyze national, regional, and local Nepalese politics, and the creativity and analytical capacity to design media activities that relate to current political events;
- Experience in working with US funded media activities highly desirable.
- The position may require extensive travel throughout the country.

**Length of Assignment:** Approximately 6 months, part-time, to be reevaluated every 3 months.

Please submit CV to [operations@chemonics-nepal.com](mailto:operations@chemonics-nepal.com) and write Media Advisor in the subject line no later than November 9, 2007. Only short listed applicants will be contacted.

popular fields: conservation, health care, teaching and orphanages, with prices from as little as \$250 a month.

But as these volunteering opportunities have sprung up, so too have scams and sloppily organised operations which are only too happy to take people's money, but haven't given much thought to what they should provide in return.

"I hate it when people come here with the best intentions and get ripped off by some money-

**MODEL NGO:** Past volunteers at German-sponsored Shanti Sewa Griha, a centre for leprosy patients near Pashupatinath have described their experience as "incredibly inspiring".

minded outfit, be it Nepali or international," says a volunteer social worker who has been living in Kathmandu for several years and prefers to remain anonymous. Many leave feeling cheated and vow never to come back, giving Nepal a bad name.



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# ripoffs

## If you are planning to volunteer in Nepal, beware of potential scams

“I’ve had people literally cry on my shoulder saying: ‘I wanted to do something good but I’ve been let down and I’ve lost so much money’,” says the social worker.

A typical is a girl from London who had saved up and borrowed money to volunteer. She contacted INFO Nepal, a local NGO, and paid \$1,200 per week to teach in an orphanage. When she got here, she complained that the place was filthy, the children were malnourished and mistreated, some were sick, and she had to share a room with a male stranger.

Some volunteering programs are being cleverly advertised abroad. Internship Nepal, a Kathmandu-based NGO which promotes itself through the US National Press Photographers’ Association as well as some US photojournalism magazines, promises foreign journalism students work placements with some of the best-regarded Nepali media, all duly listed on its website.

There is a \$50 non-refundable deposit and the first month costs \$500 full board. It isn’t clear that the chairman of the organization is

also the head of the host family, and so keeps all the money himself. Some students have joined the program only to find that nothing has been arranged for them ahead of their arrival.

Daniel Sato and René Edde, two American photojournalism students who detailed their Internship Nepal mishaps on their respective blogs, arrived in the summer of 2006. They quickly smelt a rat when they found that the publications they had been assigned to were completely unaware of the program. They subsequently quit after paying \$250 for a few days’ stay in the NGO chairman’s home.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Ask the NGO for names and email addresses of their former volunteers.
- Google the NGO you have chosen and check the results carefully.
- Avoid paying your whole fee right upon arrival if you have any concerns.
- If you can, come to Nepal first and “shop around” to see what is available.
- Post some feedback on the Internet: it will be useful to future volunteers.

To be sure, there are charity groups that offer genuine volunteer programs from which both Nepalis and foreigners benefit.

Haley Hunt-Brondwin, 19, from Canada, has been here for one month and is quite enthusiastic about her placement at a children’s home which she got through VSN (Volunteer Services Nepal). Her program started with a proper training week including language classes, a lot of cultural information and instructions on her daily routine. “Things have been great for me, but I also met volunteers with other NGOs who had a real culture shock—they felt overwhelmed because they had no idea what living and working here would be like.”

Emma Rahmin, VSN’s Filipino-born founder and executive director, recommends doing an Internet search on the NGO you have picked to make sure there have not been any major complaints about it in the past. “And of course if you can, it is better to join a program once you are already in Nepal,” she adds. ●

# The accidental tourist

Jane Diamond, a 37-year-old subtitler from the UK, is having dinner on a balcony overlooking a bustling Thamel street. She came to Nepal full of good intentions, but is now leaving dissatisfied and irritated. She had planned to work at an organic farm for five weeks but instead ended up spending \$1,200 on an unintended holiday. The bad vibes had started before she even got on the plane.

“Ahead of my trip, I kept sending emails to the person in charge of WWOOF Nepal (an NGO promoting organic farming),” Jane says. “I wanted to know where my farm was and what exactly my tasks would be, but each time I got the same reply: ‘Don’t worry, I will guide you.’”

When she landed in Kathmandu, she still did not know her destination. She was finally put in touch with a farmer near Pokhara, who in turn passed her on to another farm in the Kaleshi Valley, two hours east of the lakeside town.

“When I got there, there was no farm as such,” she says. “The would-be farmer took me around meeting local communities, thinking I was an expert in organic farming. I tried to explain that I didn’t have those skills. We both ended up feeling quite embarrassed.”

Jane quit after a few days. She does not consider herself the victim of a rip-off, but does feel misled and let down.

We contacted WWOOF by email about the allegations and the reply from Faninda Regmi was: ‘We are trying to reorganise WWOOF, if you come next year we won’t charge you membership fees...I am sorry friend...could you excuse us...’

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# Money Talks

Goats aren’t the only ones traumatized at Dasain. Those paying for the beasts get stressed by escalating prices and all the additional expenses considered essential for the festivities. Gifts, bonuses, and feeding more relatives than you knew existed all require money. Finally, countless envelopes must be filled with bheti cash offerings essential for tika. Crisp, unsullied bills are preferred, ritually speaking, and every year plenty of new currency is issued to coincide with the inevitable run on the banks.

This season’s new 500 rupee note created an unprecedented splash. For the first time since the advent of paper currency the monarch has been usurped by a rock, albeit a very large one.

Rumors to this effect, in circulation long before the notes were, are confirmed at first glance but The Hand trusts the reader has learned by now there is always more than meets the eye in the New Nepal.

MOVING TARGET

Foreign Hand

Typically, the answer to everyone’s first question, ‘is the king’s face still there?’ is both yes and no. No longer on the banknote, closer inspection reveals his image inside the paper, ghost-like in the watermark. He may be expelled from his position of honour and obscured by an improbable bunch of rhododendrons, but there he is still wearing that crown.

Having moved beyond standard literacy, many valley residents now specialize in reading between the lines. The novel sight of their monarch, once considered the omnipotent incarnation of Lord Vishnu, lurking behind a bush and invisible unless held up to the light at a certain angle, has led to many interpretations.

Replacing Rajah with the highest mountain on earth could be construed as a back-handed compliment. Everest is tops, after all, and at least they didn’t make the same mistake as Nepal Tourism Board in a recent promotion featuring Macchu Picchu instead of Machapuchre. On the other hand, this sullen lump of stone, notable only because foreign mountain-ologists decreed it was slightly higher than far holier summits, could be considered insulting. Surely, if dashing King Birendra was ousted instead of frowning Gyanendra, the majestic Annapurnas or elegant Machapuchre would have been chosen as stand-in.



## But what exactly is the new Rs 500 note trying to say?

If current political correctness required the king’s face be covered with a plant then rhododendrons are far better than, say, nettles. At least they are red, which should keep the commies happy, the whole point of this charade.

The Rastra Bank governor, a man currently under investigation on corruption charges, apparently refused to add his signature to the bills unless the king maintained a presence.

Meanwhile, the Bahunocracy controlling such things originally came up with the bright idea of featuring Lord Buddha on the new currency, indicating a desperate impulse to cash in on anything they could think of, including Lumbini. This would be like Israel putting Jesus Christ on its money to lure tourists to war-torn Nazareth. Fortunately, leveler heads among local Buddhists prevailed, saving the nation from profound international embarrassment. Nonetheless, substituting Everest still smacks of the same instinct for exploiting any tourist attraction available.

The notes were produced abroad, but all schools of conspiracy and conjecture agree the rhododendron hiding king-ji is printed locally. Some say it will wear off with time, revealing his majesty just before he reasserts control. Others whisper Rastra Bank has stacks of these notes on hand sans national flower. Wisely keeping their options open, the authorities will either issue them with the ghost king in full view or slap on the camouflage flowers, depending on who’s on top at the time.

Some say king-ji, humbled and pushed into the background by nefarious politicians, still lives on in the people’s hearts like the banknote’s watermark, a guarantee against counterfeits. A surprising number declare that anything is better than incompetent parties and duplicitous Maoists destroying the country and hope, less secretly than before, for royal redemption.

As the country careens towards an uncertain future many are fumbling for reverse gear, and it’s a sad comment on national affairs that going backwards in time looks so damn attractive. Sick of the New Nepal (already a byword for anything-goes opportunism and irresponsibility) nostalgia for simpler times grows. Somehow, the new currency expresses the same confused, muddled compromises that seem to be the only way of surviving these unsettled times. ●





PICS: MARK HARTELL

# 3 days, 2 hours, 36 minutes

## Brits break Everest-Kathmandu running record

Two British ultra-runners have broken the world record for running from the base of the highest mountain in the world to Kathmandu.

Lizzy Hawker and Stephen Pyke jogged most of the 302km (188 miles) from Chomolungma Base Camp (5,545m) to Kathmandu in three days, two hours and 36 minutes. Their amazing feat beat the record set by Nepal's Kumar Limbu in 2000 by four hours and 34 minutes.

Even fast trekkers take about six days to walk from Everest Base Camp to Jiri, from where they take a bus to Kathmandu, which takes another seven hours depending on the traffic.

"We wanted to do it in three days but we got lost when we reached in Jiri and that cost us

about three hours," said Hawker, an oceanographer who has won several mountain marathons in the Alps.

The team started off as a threesome and their other objective was climbing Ama Dablam (6,812m). "Climbing Ama Dablam was my main goal," said Mark Hartell, the main organiser of the project who decided to stop in Jiri after running without sleep for 36 hours.

The team set off to Nepal at the end of September and joined a climbing team for Ama Dablam. Due to a cold, Pyke, who is not really a climber, did not make it to the summit as he was saving his energies for the run.

"Summit day was the best day for me but I was surprised how tired I was afterwards. Lizzy did

not seem to be fazed by the toughness of the mountain though," said 43-year old Hartell.

The team started running in -10 degrees temperature at 7.16 AM on 25 October from Everest Base Camp on a cold, clear morning. At that altitude, the density of oxygen is half that at sea level.

Due to its steep ascents, boulder strewn descents and thousands of trekkers, the trail was difficult to run at times. "At times we were completely stuck behind the trekkers and of course the yaks that took up most of the trail. But we had to be patient, this is Nepal after all," said Hawker, who came across extremely modest and unfazed by her amazing achievement.

"I think most of the trekkers

thought we were mad and we got some funny reactions. We got a few comments like "eat more" or "get the plane", the 31-year old oceanographer continued.

All together the team ascended more than 10,000 metres and descended around 15,000 metres during their epic run, which also took them through the night.

"Running during the night was beautiful. We had full moon and there were no people on the trail," said Pyke.

Once they had reached the roadside Hawker and Pyke knew that they still had 188km to reach the capital. However, the support from local villagers kept them going.

"I was elated when we finished, especially the last 60



**RUNNING HIGH:** Lizzy Hawker on the summit ridge of Ama Dablam before joining Stephen Pyke on the ultra run to Kathmandu (left).

miles. I was so knackered and the road was pretty unrelenting, which was mentally tough. Physically the last four hours were the most difficult part for me," said Pyke.

Even though Hawker and Pyke were greeted by a team of journalists and applauding admirers in Kathmandu running at high altitudes seemed to be an easier task than arriving at the stadium, where they were coerced into doing another lap.

"The worst part was running into Kathmandu because of all the traffic, the noise and the smell. It was horrible," said Hawker.

The team ran an average of 3 miles an hour and used a GPS to record longitude and latitude in order to prove their achievement.

The next plan for the runners, who are also raising money for a community charity in Nepal, is to run and climb in South America in 2009. ●

Billi Bierling

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## FSA 07 proved that Nepali documentary film-makers have come of age

# Documenting Nepal

A ANGELO D'SILVA  
& DIWAS KC

In the larger world, documentary films are generally considered to be an esoteric and unpopular format. But here in Kathmandu, the audience flocking to see the films of Film South Asia 07 held two weeks ago flouted that judgment and attested to the vibrancy and vitality of documentary filmmaking. FSA's line-up of documentary films from (or about) the subcontinent were invariably of the highest quality; and the Nepali entries were, happily, no exceptions.

The impressive achievement of Kesang Tseten in *We Corner People* is already well-known among film circles here, not least because of his ability to excel within the sometimes suffocating restraints of the NGO-dominated culture of documentary filmmaking. Tseten may have been commissioned to simply document the impact of a bridge construction in a remote village of Rasuwa, but instead he delivers the multifarious voices of the inhabitants whose collective aspiration reconfigures the significance of the project.

Pranay Limbu's entry *Forgive, Forget Not!* may have garnered the greatest amount of excitement, gauging from the almost palpable



sense of electricity in the audience of the packed movie hall. Experimental yet effective, artistic yet punchy, *Forgive* reenacts the experience of Bhai Kaji, a Nepali journalist detained without charge at the Bhairabnath military barracks for fifteen months in unimaginable conditions, during which he was subjected to frequent torture.

Depicted in the first person, the camera is often hooded, rendering those scenes almost completely obscure save for the edges of his vision and the light that penetrates the black material. Combined with the narration delivered by Bhai Kaji himself and the important soundscape, the scant images we are allowed to see convey on a deep and visceral level the senseless injustice of Bhai Kaji's harrowing experience. Establishing a form and syntax

that is original and so successfully exercised, it marks a landmark in documentary film in Nepal.

The potential of documentary films to reveal the human condition in both its beauty and rawness is rarely as effective as it is in Dipesh Kharel's *A Life with Slate*. This sublime, charming, and winning documentary about the Thami slate-miners of Dolakha follows the work-cycle of the miners as they harvest slate from the rocky quarry and then journey arduously to their clients to deliver their yield.

Trained as a social anthropologist, Kharel's film is about comprehending his marginal subjects, the 'others'. But Kharel somehow delivers something that is far from pedantic. What we get is not just a view into the particular practices of one distinct community, but rather an evocative meditation on human labour, its meaning, and its centrality to the rhythm of life. Scenes like a married couple bickering, two friends lazing, or miners breaking off to discuss political affairs brilliantly capture the texture of their working lives.

The talents evinced by these films and their brimming receptions herald the maturation of a movement that has already expanded beyond the limits imposed by the showcases that we presently have for them. One hopes these documentaries and others to follow will find the wider releases that they deserve. ●

## November sky

### On the menu for Tihar: Leonid meteors and the Demon

**Breaking News:** This just as we were going to press. Comet 17P/Holmes stunned comet watchers across planet Earth during the past week. On 24 October it increased in brightness over half a million times in a matter of hours. The outburst transformed it from an obscure and faint comet quietly orbiting the Sun every seven years to one rivalling the brighter stars in the constellation Perseus. The comet will be easier to spot late at night if it remains bright, when Perseus is more nearly overhead.

Many planets are hard to find this month, but the moonless nights of Tihar offer good opportunities to see the stars and constellations. The Zodiac consists of a series of constellations positioned along the imaginary path of the Sun in the sky.

In November you can see, from east to west, the constellations of Gemini, Taurus, Aries, Pisces, Aquarius and Capricornus. On the north-south meridian, you will find Cassiopeia, Andromeda, Pisces and Cetus, the Whale.



**STARGAZING**  
Kedar S Badu

Due east of Cassiopeia is the constellation of another mythical hero, Perseus. It contains the star called Algol (see star chart), one of the most remarkable and most famous individual stars in the sky. Its Arabic name is *Al Ghul*, meaning 'demon'. Why a demon? Because it winks! Its brightness fades every three days before returning to normal after about 10 hours.

The reason is it has an unseen, smaller companion star which orbits it every three days. When that passes in front of Algol, some light is blocked from us and the star appears dimmer.

Another attraction in this constellation is the famous Double Cluster, which is visible with binoculars between Perseus and Cassiopeia. To the south of Perseus, you can enjoy two small constellations—Triangulum and Aries, the Ram. Pre-dawn sky-watchers can observe the brilliant sight of the Big Dipper (Saptarshi) and Polaris, the North Star.

Among the planets, **Mercury** is at maximum western elongation from the Sun on 8 November, so we have a chance to see the planet before sunrise between 4-10 November. **Venus**, looking intensely bright, comes up in the east around 3 am, and by dawn it is well up in the south-eastern sky. Use binoculars to look for Mercury, to the left and far below Venus.

**Mars** is the only planet well placed for viewing in the evening sky, since it is now closer to us than it has been for nearly two years. It rises in the north-east at 7.30 pm and is visible for the rest of the night. **Jupiter** may still be seen hanging low in the western horizon after sunset, but the planet is growing dimmer as it gets closer to the Sun. **Saturn** is rising in the east around midnight this month, and it is well up in the south-eastern sky by dawn. Don't miss the sight of four planets in the pre-dawn sky: Mars overhead, Mercury on the eastern horizon, and Venus and Saturn in between, all in a straight line!

Meteor watchers should prepare for the **Leonid shower** that peaks in the early hours of 18 November. The meteors will seem to spread out from a single radiant point, close to the sickle shape in Leo. Leonid meteors tend to be fast-moving, and the brighter ones often leave persistent trails. At their peak, we might hope to see one meteor every five minutes or so.

Fellow star-gazers, if you wish to share your experiences with us, you can always write to me. I wish you all clear skies and great star-gazing during Tihar, Diwali, Chhath or Ramadan.

kedarbadu(at)yahoo.com

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## ABOUT TOWN

### EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **photo.circle.xi** on 3 November, 9.45 AM-12PM at The Sundhara Bakery Café.

### EVENTS

- ❖ **Bollywood Night** with DJ Rocky at J Bar, Thamel, 3 November, 8PM onwards. 4418209
- ❖ **The Himalayan Times International Food Festival** at the BICC, 3 November, 10AM-5PM. 4770504
- ❖ **Dasain Swing Festival** at the Garden of Dreams, Kaiser Mahal, 10AM-6PM, with evening lighting from 6-7PM and Festival of Lights on 9 November. 4425340
- ❖ **Deepawali** with music, dance and bonfire at the poolside and garden at the Grand Norling Resort, Gokarna, 7.30 PM onwards on 2 November, Rs 400. 4482993
- ❖ **Bingo Nights** at the Welcome Food Plaza, Darbar Marg, starts 6PM every Monday. 2337201
- ❖ **Play and Learn German** at the German Info and Culture Centre, Thamel. 4700832
- ❖ **Toastmasters** a communication and leadership program, organised by Kathmandu Toastmasters Club every Wednesday 6PM at Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI) building, Tripureswor. 4288847

### MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazz at Jatra** every Saturday 7PM onwards, at Jatra Café and Bar, Thamel.
- ❖ **Ciney Gurung** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 7PM. 5521408

### DINING

- ❖ **Nauratha** special vegetarian dinner at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Vegetarian alternative** at Stupa View restaurant and café, Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- ❖ **Sunday Jazz Brunch** Hyatt's BBQ brunch with live jazz music at the Rox Garden, Hyatt Regency. 4491234.
- ❖ **Italian barbeque lunch** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Saturdays, 12.30-3.30PM, Rs 300 plus taxes. 4273999
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** with coffee, food, drinks, and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel, 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **BBQ, chilled beer, cocktails** and live music at the Kausi Restaurant and Bar, Darbar Marg, 6218490
- ❖ **BBQ Unlimited at Splash Bar & Grill** Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, every Friday 6.30 PM, Rs 899 nett.
- ❖ **Cocktails and jazz** with the JCS Quartet and a choice of cocktails at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarika's. 4479448
- ❖ **Lajawaab** curry, kebab and biryani festival, every Friday, 7PM onwards at Café Horizon, Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- ❖ **Shangri-La's pasta, pizza, pie, and pool** a special swimming package with a complimentary beer, Rs 650 nett per person, every Saturday and Sunday at Shangri-La Hotel. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel, six to 22 course ceremonial lunch and dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Rediscover fine Italian cuisine** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, all new exciting menu. 4700612
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

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- ❖ **Chiso Chiso Hawa Ma** at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot, Rs 3,400 for double, includes one night accommodation, dinner, breakfast and shuttle service. 6680080
- ❖ **Tiger Tops Karnali** \$299 per person for two nights and three days, includes accommodation, all meals, wildlife activities and transportation to and from Nepalganj.

❖For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com

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## WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

November marks the start of winter and is the driest month, with a normal monthly quota of less than 10 mm of rain. In the last two weeks, the temperature has been dropping by three to four degrees Celsius to bring a daytime range of 23 to 26 degrees. This satellite image on Thursday morning shows the Tibetan plateau being washed by the jet stream and this is deflected by the Himalaya. With no weather system or front advancing from the west, Nepal's sky is likely to remain as now, with sunny afternoons and foggy or hazy mornings. Kathmandu valley residents can expect a breezy afternoons, and the mercury is likely to drop a further degree at the weekend.

### KATHMANDU VALLEY

<div style="background-color: blue; color: white; padding: 10px; margin: 5px;"> <p>Fri 24-11</p> </div>	<div style="background-color: blue; color: white; padding: 10px; margin: 5px;"> <p>Sat 24-12</p> </div>	<div style="background-color: blue; color: white; padding: 10px; margin: 5px;"> <p>Sun 24-11</p> </div>
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हरेक आइतबार बिहान (९.४०-९.५५)  
रेडियो सगरमाथा विभिन्न सुनी, अमेरिकी सुनारी-  
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हरेक बिहान ८.०० देखि राती ११.०० बजे सम्म सुचना, शिक्षा र स्वास्थ्य बहिर्गमकबाट सार्ने बरपर्छ। साथी रेडियो सगरमाथा १०२ थोप्लो ८ मेगाहर्ज





KIRAN PANDAY

**MISSING MAN:** The family of kidnapped journalist Birendra Sah protest his disappearance at a demonstration organised by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists at Maitighar Mandala on Monday.



**HOT GOSSIP:** Prime Minister GP Koirala, Speaker Subhas Nembang and Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan talk to the press at the UML tea party on Saturday with general secretary Madhab Kumar Nepal.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**KAMPAI:** New Japanese ambassador Tatsuo Mizuno and Pashupati-san, chairman of the RPP, raise a toast at a cocktail party organised by the Nepal-Japan Citizen Society on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**ART OF NOISE:** British band The Alarm play to a packed crowd at Basantpur on Monday to raise funds for Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital. Last week they performed the highest ever rock concert at Kala Pattar.

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# Mad tea party

It must be because I'm an Ass that I just don't get it. The government raises fuel prices because it is going bankrupt. Immediately, Comrade Makunay declared that the government is "incompetent"—a government in which **eight** ministers are from his party.

Then the student unions which are affiliated to the parties in the governing alliance declared they will launch a nationwide agitation to force the government to roll back the price rise.

Not to be outdone, the Maoists, who think they can make petrol materialize out of thin air through parthenogenesis, protest the fuel price hike by declaring a **one**-hour chukker jam with **two** hour notice along main thoroughfares. The way it is enforced is through four or five goonish looking YCLs in tracksuits stopping motorcycles, among them one carrying a driver, his wife and a kid straddling the fuel tank. The driver has waited cumulatively for **125 hours** in the past **two** months to buy **five** litres of petrol each time, and now the young criminals tell him he can't take his family to his relatives for tika. The angry motorcyclist couldn't take it anymore, revved up his machine and just zoomed through the barricade.



As expected, Dasain was free season for YCL extortion. While Chairman Awesomeness, bedridden with backache, was clandestinely meeting select jarsaps over goat sekuwa in Kathmandu, his comrades set up kiosks at Ghorepani charging mandatory donations from trekkers whether they liked it or not. Marx's dictum of "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" was modified to determine the revolutionary tax from each trekker. Israeli backpackers bargained it down to **Rs 250** each, and Americans were charged **Rs 2,500** unless they claimed to be Canadian in which case it went down to **Rs 1,500**.



But that wasn't very nice of Comrade Awwful and his Ideologue-in-Chief to boycott both the NC and the UML tea parties. The Ass can understand not wanting to go to the chaotic kangresi tea party and the mad

hatters that populated it, but the comrades may actually have shown leftie solidarity and some magnanimity by going to Balkhu on Saturday.

Compared to the NC circus, there was plenty of tea and samosas at the UML do and it was also more disciplined because the UML had deployed its version of the YCL, the People's Volunteers. Guests were escorted by MPs and had to walk a gauntlet of cadre. The Ass did spot Maharababu and Matrika Yadav hiding behind the smokescreen provided by the cloud of dust that Girjau's motorcade had kicked up so they wouldn't have to shake the prime minister's hand.



There was a time in the **1980s** after the North Koreans set up their embassy that Jhamsikhel didn't have a street dog problem anymore. But later, even pet canines in the area started getting dognapped in broad daylight. Particular favourites were labs, Tibetan mastiffs and dalmatians. Now that Pyongyang Restaurant & Bar has opened up near the Hack & Yeti, and the Ass wonders if a similar fate will befall man's best friends in the Durbar Murg area.

We should learn from the Koreans about this novel way of funding the upkeep of our embassies abroad. Given the run-down condition of our missions, opening momo joints in each country where we have an embassy would be a good way for our dips to make ends meet. Maybe the **20** new ambassadors should take this up with the priority it deserves. But, alas, not in Canberra, Copenhagen, Paris and Kuala Lumpur—the **four** capitals to which the government had appointed Maoist ambassadors and which haven't yet sent agreements.



And before we go, this just in from Baluwatar: the seven parties made a breakthrough late Thursday by agreeing to hold elections after Tihar. They also decided unanimously to postpone Tihar till April.



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