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Weekly Internet Poll # 375

Q. What should be the first priority of the winter session of parliament?

Total votes: 4,800

Weekly Internet Poll # 376. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

Q. How optimistic are you that elections will be held within 2064?

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KIRAN PANDAY

# Peace postponed

ANALYSIS by **KUNDA DIXIT**

When ex-US president Jimmy Carter arrived in Kathmandu on Wednesday he could be forgiven for thinking that Nepal is exactly where he left it during his last visit in June.

In fact, things have regressed. The euphoria of the peace accord signed a year ago this week has evaporated. Six months ago, the country was at least looking forward to elections and closure. Now, even polls look uncertain.

We'd all have voted on Thursday if things had gone right.

By next week, the first meeting of the constituent assembly would have decided to abolish the monarchy.

It's not hard to see who benefited the most from the postponement of the polls. By constantly coming up with new conditions for elections, the Maoists gave the monarchy breathing space.

This week, Pushpa Kamal Dahal categorically stated that elections were no longer in the Maoist agenda. Indeed, in hindsight it seems that was the plan all along. Resigning from the government in September,

announcing a two-month agitation just as the election commission was finalising the logistics of the polls and presenting two proposals in parliament that took 25 days to deliberate when time was running out, were all a lead-up to this.

To be sure, the NC has also been stubborn and is pulled by its own radical rightwing. But at least the NC and UML want polls, and on Wednesday committed themselves to holding it before April. But how are they going to get the Maoists to go along?

The Maoist conditions of parliament abolishing the monarchy before polls and as well as a fully-proportional election, and a brand new set of sub-demands are not the issue. The real sticking point is a gerrymandered power-sharing

agreement that would give the Maoists at least 30 percent representation in the constituent assembly.

The house vote, instead of paving the way for elections, has delayed it further, endangering seven-party unity. The winter session of parliament was postponed so the three leaders

**EDITORIAL**  
**Conceptual continuity p2**

could come up with a power-sharing formula. As things stand, it doesn't look likely that they can resolve the stalemate by next week.

If Jimmy Carter comes back in April 2008, it's likely Nepal will be exactly where he left it this week. ●

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# Hangover of war

## Let's help the Maoists join the mainstream

**J**ournalists, political workers, businessmen are still being targeted by the Maoists. They continue to be threatened, abducted, disappeared and killed. Tourists and ordinary citizens are being extorted.

Last month, 14 pilgrims aged six to 64 were severely beaten up and attacked by knives in



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Prakash Jwala**

Kalikot. Their crime? Deigning to worship at a temple.

We understand the Maoists are still trying to make the transformation from jungle to parliamentary politics. They have expressed this commitment in the peace agreement and many other accords since then. But this

commitment is not expressed in any of the internal party documents, and it is urgent for them to convince everyone about their beliefs in pluralism and non-violent politics. The party still hasn't got over the hangover of war.

To be sure, the party that in the past didn't even want to hear about peaceful struggle or parliamentary politics has seen a dramatic transformation. They used to repeat Lenin's famous dictum that parliament was a place for "bourgeoisie feudal class to chatter". The Maoists themselves once called parliament a "mutton shop selling dog meat".

But this month we saw them make use of parliament as a place to debate whether to vote out the monarchy. They finally saw a use for a legislature. But we still have to see whether this was the result of a genuine belief that parliament is an institution representing the people or whether they just want to use it for tactical political advantage.

There is no doubt the Maoists are republicans. But the declaration of a republic has been pushed back because of their actions. If the elections had been allowed to happen on 22 November as scheduled perhaps today we'd already be living in a democratic republic.

You don't usher in a republic just by singing revolutionary songs or wearing t-shirts. The talk is that the Maoists don't really want a republic, and their actions have benefited the royalists, no one else. What is the real story behind this, is it that the extreme left and the extreme right always find a common cause against democracy?

Our main destination now is the constituent assembly

election. The NC is not that keen on elections, but the real obstacle is the Maoist party. It's an irony that the party that made the constituent assembly election its main agenda is itself trying to sabotage it. The reason for this is not hard to find.

Maoist leader CP Gajurel told a meeting at JNU in New Delhi earlier this year: "We have a battle-hardened army and automatic weapons. We will win the elections. If we can't win, we won't go for elections. And if elections are announced without our agreement and participation we won't let the polls happen." What could be plainer than that?

The 2005 Chumbang plenum of the Maoists concluded that the party couldn't capture state power through force of arms alone, and decided to go for an agreement with the seven parties. This is what made the 12-point agreement of November 2005 possible. By the time of the Kamidanda Conference last year, the Maoists had deduced that they could win in an election. By at the Balaju extended central committee meeting this year the Maoists evaluated the ground situation and decided that they couldn't win in an election. The reality now is that the Maoists don't want elections under any circumstances.

In fact, the Maoists wouldn't mind turning the current parliament into a constituent assembly. But we must make sure we bring the Maoists out into the open and create conditions for them to take part in elections. We can't let them run away from mainstream politics. ●

*Prakash Jwala is the UML MP from Rolpa. This is a translation of his piece this week in Himal Khabarpatrika.*

## CONCEPTUAL CONTINUITY

The 'New Basis for New Unity Concept Paper' that Pushpa Kamal Dahal presented before a gathering at the Malla Hotel on Sunday this week is another vivid example of his party's muddle-headedness. It also exposes ongoing tension between hardliners and ultra-hardliners in his party.

The five-page single spaced document, unfortunately, doesn't help save seven-party unity but will invite continued disarray and more uncertainty about elections. Which is probably the intention. Dahal states categorically that the Maoist party no longer sees the election as a priority. We had known that all along, but this is the first time that he has given it in writing.

The reason elections are not a priority, let's be blunt here, is that the Maoists fear they are going to be routed. Not because the other six parties are brilliantly popular, but because the comrades have seriously undermined themselves by not giving up the tactics of violence and threats. The YCL kangaroo court that publicly pronounced five people guilty of murders and bombings and the abduction of hospital staff this week were just the latest examples.

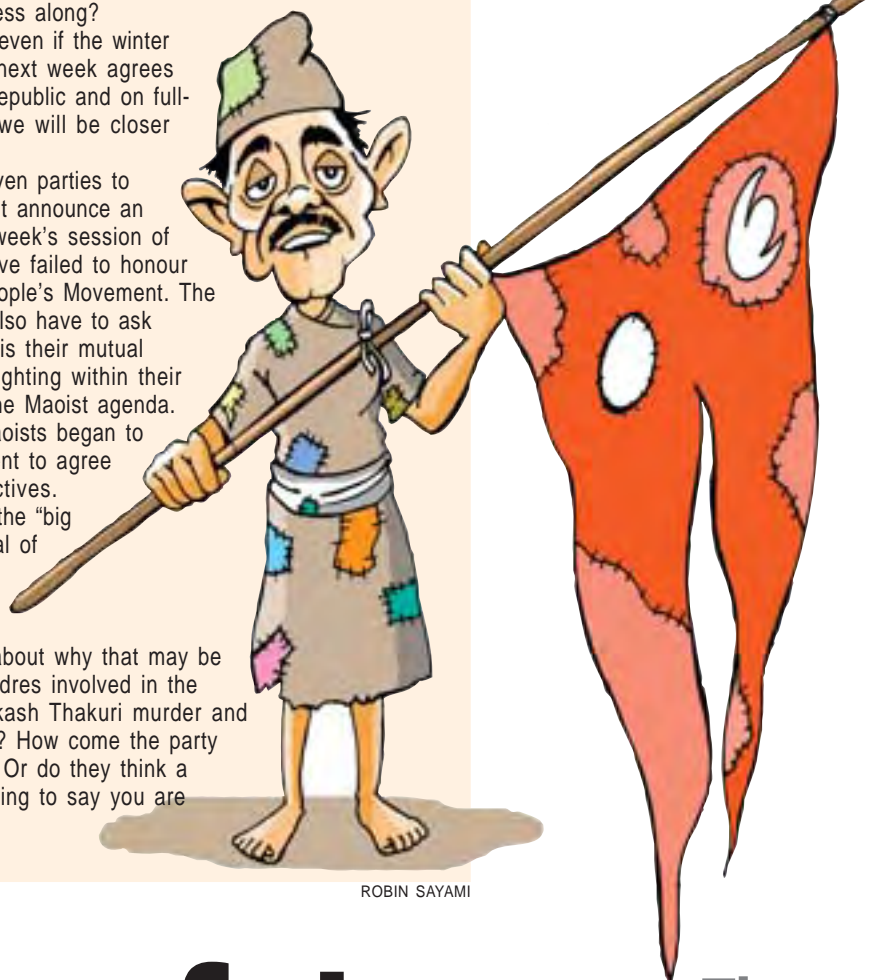
Dahal's paper also proves that the Maoists are adding new conditions and escalating their demands so as to make elections impossible. For example, they want to review all past agreements, including the 12-point memorandum of November 2005. Why open that can of worms now unless you want to torpedo the peace process? The paper also wants the Ministry of Peace scrapped and replaced with a Peace Commission. Ram Chandra Poudel has been a disaster, but how is adding another layer of bureaucracy going to help the process along?

The upshot is that even if the winter session of parliament next week agrees on declaring Nepal a republic and on full-proportional elections we will be closer to elections.

It is time for all seven parties to realise that if they don't announce an election date by next week's session of parliament they will have failed to honour the mandate of the People's Movement. The NC and the UML will also have to ask themselves whether it is their mutual mistrust and policy infighting within their parties that is aiding the Maoist agenda.

On Sunday, the Maoists began to pressure the government to agree with parliament's directives. Leaders lashed out at the "big media" for being critical of their party.

It's time for the comrades to engage in some self-analysis about why that may be so. How come their cadres involved in the Birendra Sah and Prakash Thakuri murder and abduction are still free? How come the party hasn't yet apologised? Or do they think a revolution is never having to say you are sorry?



ROBIN SAYAMI

# Asian futures

## The world's largest Muslim nation grapples with economic growth

**JAKARTA**--There is a familiarity to the chaos outside the Seokarno-Hatta airport. Touts, taxis and tour operators swarm around visitors just like they do at Tribhuban. Tourism is booming in Indonesia and there are rich pickings.



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

The drive to the city of Jakarta offers a dramatic view of stunning contrast of office towers soaring over a sea of shantytowns. In Kathmandu, we now only have brick shantytowns.

Indonesia is the fifth most populous country in the world, and 3,000 of the archipelago's 14,000 islands are thickly inhabited. It takes four hours to fly from Irian Jaya bordering Papua New Guinea in the east to Aceh in the west where some of the islands are only 30 km from India's Andamans. This huge country is blessed with enormous natural resources,

but has been cursed with a history of dictatorship and the plunder of a nation by outside powers through their native agents.

Indonesia gained formal independence in 1949 and showed the potential of emerging as a quasi-socialist nation under Soekarno. But his anti-communism didn't satisfy Washington during the Cold War. He was sidelined by a more pliant highly ambitious Suharto through a bloody coup in 1965-1966. Suharto ruled the country for three decades with an iron hand. Present president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is Suharto's protégé.

With the help of what were known as the 'Berkley Mafia' of US-educated advisers Suharto rescued the economy from the brink of collapse, but over three decades built an elaborate system of crony capitalism. The pathologies of Indonesian politics can all be traced to a naïve belief in the doctrine that mixing political passivity and technocratic

excellence will foster economic growth. It may have done so for a brief period and it may work in a test-tube experiment like Singapore, but in Indonesia the resulting prosperity failed to lift all boats.

Rulers tried to divert the attention of the people by raising racist fears of Chinese dominance that resulted in some of the worst pogroms in the world. The culture of violence has transcended traditional Javanese tolerance and is now metamorphosing into Islamic militancy in a country with the world's largest Muslim population. The frustration of a seething youth population feeds into this.

A stroll along the streets of Jakarta with its signs in Romanised Sanskrit is a constant reminder of things that can go wrong with Nepal. We too had our version of the Berkley Mafia when graduates of western universities were brought back to Nepal by King Mahendra and King Birendra in the sixties through the seventies: Bhekh Bahadur Thapa,

Pashupati Shamsher, Prakash Chandra Lohani, Mohammed Mohsin, Mohan Man Sainju, Harka Gurung. Former Finance Minister Yadav Prasad Pant who died this week was also one of them.

A decade after the East Asian economic meltdown, Indonesia has begun to recover from the shock and shaking of the tumbling rupiah. Its vice-president felt confident enough to make 'Oil for forest' and 'Oil for education' proposals at the OPEC summit early this month. From a UN seminar on democracy and governance to a global summit on climate change in Bali next month, the world has begun to assemble in Indonesia.

The ASEAN Summit this week in Singapore had as its slogan 'One ASEAN at the Heart of Dynamic Asia'. And at the heart of ASEAN is its most populous nation, Indonesia. What happens here will affect us all, yes even here in Nepal, in some way or other in the coming decades. ●



## LETTERS

## ELEPHANT POLO

The author of *Elephant Polo*, Cas de Stoppelaar, should be congratulated ('Dutch elephant', #373). In the same issue you have a guest column by Tobias Denskus ('Donor amnesia') which sheds a paradoxical and ironic light over the peace-consultant turned translator of *Elephant Polo*. Is the translator a gifted consultant, able to engage fully in understanding the complexity of Nepal and capable of translating *Elephant Polo* in an effortless stint at the same time?

Alternatively, is the gifted translator the embodiment of de-contextualised peace industry, which invaded Nepal after April 2006? Denskus' article seems to suggest the latter. Was the UN-consultant/translator a person aiming to engage with the Nepal-grounded, conflict-affected, fly-over people or was he more a mere spectator fly-by on a short-term, commercially attractive mission?

It seems that the real work of the UN consultant is translating Nepal's complex realities into digestible practice based policies turned fiction. This begs a question: is translating fiction for the 'happy few' more important than a thorough engagement to further what the 'many unhappy' in Nepal desperately desire: peace? Denskus would probably suggest that the 'inhabitants of aidland' at the end of the day (unconsciously) decide to please the happy few.

The translator of *Elephant Polo* could not be a better example of Denskus' observations and arguments about the 'peace industry' in 'aidland.' The book launch of *Elephant Polo* highlights the paradoxical irony that not only the author, representatives of the UN-led peace industry, their well-wishers that Denskus writes about. The 'inhabitants of aidland' cannot only produce fiction. They can present and celebrate it amongst themselves as well, perfectly proving Denskus' points. This side-story of *Elephant Polo* makes De Stoppelaar's novel more ironic and tragic than the reality of Nepal already is.

Frank de Lange, UK

I totally agree with Tobias Denskus and his keen sense of how 'aid' for the downtrodden is actually being spent in Nepal in the name of the 'development and peace process'. It is about time there was a genuine assessment of how the spending of this hard earned tax payer's money is justified. It is appalling to see how 'aid' is being spent on extravagant purposes both by donors and their domestic partners. This top-down approach for development never worked.

S Ranjit, Kathmandu

## GAP YEAR RIPOFF

After reading about the problems faced by volunteers in Nepal ('Gap year rip offs', #372) I had to write to you. Having travelled in both Asia and Africa, I was immediately struck by a sense of safety and comfort upon my arrival in Nepal almost one year ago. Though I was supposed to stay only five months, something about the friendly, smiling faces made me stay longer. I taught English, made a library, travelled around the country. Then, I began to work with INFO Nepal that organizes placements for foreign volunteers as Volunteer Coordinator. I had responsibility, freedom, and variety in my work.

Then, things went very, very wrong. I arrived at work one morning to an e-mail from two of our volunteers placed in Prabhatipur, Chitwan. There had been a horrific sexual harassment incident in the home where they were staying with INFO's host family. What followed was a long saga of misunderstanding between my employers and I over the question of refunding the volunteers who pay 125 euros a week to be in Nepal. The incident opened my eyes and I saw the organization for what it was: a business, a money-making enterprise, disguised as an NGO. Volunteers weren't valued, appreciated or respected. Prior to arrival, the volunteers were promised the moon but once they got here and

paid their fees, the attitude changed dramatically.

This is only a brief summary of one organization dealing with volunteers. This has resulted in foreigners, myself included, beginning to lose trust in Nepalis. Certainly not all Nepalis are this way, but I have become skeptical. This is a problem for the entire country, and thus should be taken seriously by all Nepalis.

Brittany Sears, email

## CK LAL

CK Lal's 'Pitfalls of praying alone' (State of the State, #373) is an absolute reflection of myself. I thought and wondered how you knew so much about me before writing it. Lal successfully depicts the true feelings of the Nepali diaspora and its families back home.

I have been in Australia for nine years and have never been able to celebrate any of the festivals with my family. Though our hearts and minds belong at home, somehow we find excuses not to go back. There are four of us. My elder brother is in the US, myself here in Australia. Our two sisters, along with their spouses, are trying to fill the big gap we left behind. Thanks, Lal, for your perfect insight into our angst.

RJ, Melbourne

CK Lal seems to think Girija Koirala has leadership skills ('Who is cornering whom', #374). That is news to us Nepalis. Why can't the press understand how much harm GP has done to Nepali politics since 1990? Actually it is us Nepalis who are cornered by leaders like these. We are also cornered by the media which seems to have a blind spot when it concerns politicians. So what do they do? They blame King G. Just because we won't accept the monarchy doesn't mean we will accept these failed leaders. Lal is too kind to them.

Pashupati Neupane, Syangja

## MONEY

I totally agree with Aruna Uprety's perceptive article ('Money is not the answer', #374). Money is

nothing, but everything comes under money. So how come no one has analysed where all the money that was spent in Nepal on malaria TB and HIV/AIDS prevention went?

Dwarika Maharjan, email

## TOURISM

All right. Nepal can easily reach that longtime goal of 500,000 tourist arrivals by air by 2010. How? (Artha Beed's 'Tourism déjà vu', #374). Drastically reduce those extremely high landing fees at TIA, get rid of any visa fee for tourists staying up to 90 days (right, you'll get heaps of backpackers flying in. Well, they drink. They eat. They need accommodation.) Get rid of all motorized traffic at Durbar Square, Thamel and other places where feet are the only means of transportation. Mainly that taxi lobby's wings have to be cut. Triple the budget for international advertisement campaigns in close cooperation with Indian Airlines, China Southern Airlines, Thai Airways, Qatar Airways, Gulf Air, Ethiad and others. Forget about Nepal Airlines completely. Declare "Visit Nepal Year(s) 2008 / 2009 / 2010".

Rolf Schmelzer, Cologne

## CORRECTION:

The author of the piece 'Slave labour' (#374) translated from *Nepal* is Madhav Dhungel.

## 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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Starting this issue, *Nepali Times* selects a Company of the Month on the basis of criteria such as making progress towards management excellence, social accountability, vision and environmental consciousness.

# Sky-high with Buddha

## Nepal's best-run airline marks ten years



**PLANE SPEAKING:** Buddha Air's managing director, Birendra Basnet, stepping out of one his airline's fleet of Raytheon Beechcraft 1900Ds at Kathmandu airport on Wednesday.

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**B**uddha Air's Birendra Basnet still remembers the day well. It was November 1997 and his first aircraft was arriving on a ferry flight from Bombay. As he drove his car down the airport road on the straight stretch from New Baneswor, he saw a plane about to touch down. The tail stabiliser lights illuminated the blue-and-beige Buddha Air logo.

"It was the proudest moment in my life," Basnet recalls. "I felt a great sense of accomplishment."

Today, ten years later, that sense of accomplishment is even greater for this Budanilkantha School graduate who forayed from being a middle class farmer in Morang to becoming the owner of Nepal's most trusted airline. Since 1997, Buddha Air's fleet has expanded to seven aircraft, its route map now spans the country from east to west.

Asked to rank the main factors that made Buddha excel, Basnet counts them off on his fingers: "Lots of luck, lots of hard work, being realistic, having a good business plan and taking care of our staff."

The airline selected the twin-engined turboprop Raytheon Beechcraft 1900D, but realised only later just how lucky it was with the choice. The 19-seater was the right aircraft at the right time with its performance, capacity,

and Nepal's passenger volumes.

At \$5 million apiece, the capital investment was steep, but the airline saved on maintenance costs and reaped the benefit of being the first private domestic airline in Nepal to invest in new equipment.

The first few years were difficult. New private airlines had sprung up, Necon had just brought in used ATR42s and Cosmic was flying SAAB340s. The war intensified and tourism went into free fall. "Those were the hardest years," Basnet recalls, "and that is when we realised our biggest asset was our staff. It was their dedication and hard work to help management

overcome the crisis that saved us."

The airline's main mantra, says Basnet, is never to compromise on two things: staff morale and maintenance. Indeed, Buddha has the lowest crew turnover of any airline in Nepal at a time when companies are hemorrhaging pilots and staff to foreign airlines.

As other airlines folded due to poor management or low yield, by 2002 Buddha was soaring again. It inducted two more Beechcrafts and was paying creditors regularly giving the airline a lot of credibility. Today, it fully owns three of its 1900Ds.

"You need proper and

transparent book-keeping. You have to strive for reliability and integrity," says Basnet. "In the airline business, if you take shortcuts, you are gone. You have to be in it for the long-haul."

Basnet reads a lot, and he listens to the experts: engineers, accounts people, admin staff, IT specialists. Basnet's office has glass panels on all walls so the staff sees him and he sees the staff. His table is paperless. On a computer, he constantly monitors fleet deployment, performance, occupancy, yield.

But things don't always go according to plan. Buddha Air dabbled with trying to help a new airline startup in India's

northeast with equipment and operations, but had to back out when the venture took too long to take off.

"We've now prepared a five-year strategy and we are much more focussed about what we want to do," says Basnet. Buddha will concentrate on the domestic market which isn't yet saturated, it is looking at bigger turboprops, an expanded fleet and after that to start connecting Nepali cities to northern India and South Asia.

"We aren't going to expand, or add jets just for the sake of it, we will build on our strengths," says Basnet. "But we have to keep growing, if we don't we'll stagnate." ●

## 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





## Yadav Prasad Pant, 82



Nepal's first PhD in economics in 1952 and former finance minister Yadav Prasad Pant died last week in Bangkok at the age of 82.

In a long and illustrious career, Pant also served as a senior economist with the UN ESCAP in Bangkok, was Nepali ambassador to Japan and minister of commerce, supplies, finance and water resourcess. Pant authored more than two dozen books including *Problems in Fiscal and Monetary Policy*, *Trade and Co-operation in South Asia* and *Some Aspects of Economical Planning*.

## Open till late

Shangri-la Development Bank Pokhara has started an evening counter and will soon introduce ATM cards to its customers. The bank will also open its first branch in Dulegauda, Tanahu. The bank has been working with various international remittance services for easy money transfer, and is active in 10 districts throughout Nepal.

### NEW PRODUCTS

**RUBBER:** Praxis Trade Link has introduced Inspiral and Skinless Skin Love Condoms in Nepal. Inspiral condoms come with spiral design and Skinless Skin Love Condom is designed for long time pleasure. The dotted, ribbed, contoured, and scented condoms come in kiwi, lavender and jasmine flavours and are available in drug stores.



**VERSATILE DRINK:** United Spirits Nepal formerly known as McDowell Nepal has introduced White Mischief Vodka. The drink is triple-distilled from silent sprit and carbon filtered for clarity and purity. White Mischief is being touted as a “young, light, trendy, versatile and enjoyable drink that helps you loosen up.”

**WIN WIN:** Rumpum noodles, manufactured by Asian Thai Foods has introduced a new scheme ‘Rumpum Rich & Famous’. In this coupon based scheme, consumers can win cash prizes up to Rs 100,000. Lucky winners who win Rs 10,000 and above will get a chance to be included in a lucky draw to have their picture on the noodle packet.



# Compensation dilemma

Victims' families get financial relief, but what should the criteria be?

One of my professors used to give this example: Say that three adults go to a restaurant. The first person only orders the food. He will neither have to eat it nor pay for it. The second person eats the ordered food. The third is around



**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
Ashutosh Tiwari

just to pay for it. How will these three people behave? And how is their situation different from the one in which each person chooses his own food, eats it and pays for it out of his own pocket?

I remembered this lesson on learning that the government has just set aside Rs 1 million for the family of the slain journalist Birendra Sah. On the face of it, providing relief money at a time of distress is noble. After all, who but a heartless bean-counter is going to be against it?

Though giving away money does not solve the bigger mystery of disappearing journalists, it does provide immediate relief to the family, while the government appears to have done something respectable. Still, if you put emotions aside and start thinking about the implications of such a decision, complications come up quickly.

The Maoist leaders icily accepted that their cadres were involved in Sah's murder. Their acceptance alone makes it unsettling that the government did not ask for a formal explanation - let alone claim

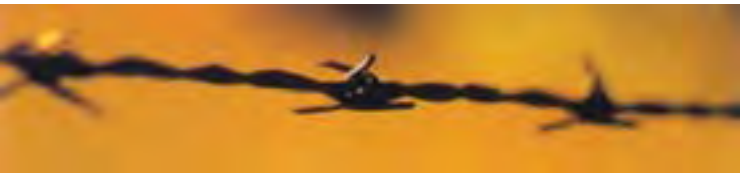
damages - from the Maoists, whose cadres draw salaries from the government.

Moreover, the government did not clarify the basis which formed the rationale for its decision. Given this sort of murky decision-making process, what if a physician is beaten up and killed tomorrow, with some group not admitting anything beyond the point that its cadres fired the bullet? How will her after-death compensation be determined? By the loudness of protests on the streets?

By dispensing the usual rhetoric about how great the need for harmony in Nepal is, the government may try to evade such questions. This evasion allows it

pressing, you have to take away that much from other public-benefit activities such as building a school or a health clinic.

But when you talk to most Nepali politicians, the disconcerting thing is that they do not seem to be worried about running out of money. Nor are they particularly concerned about ways to raise it by effectively mobilizing domestic resources. Somehow they seem assured that the donors will be there, in the name of strengthening democracy, to pay for various governance-related reforms. So, if giving away a million here and a million there in the name of making peace will make everyone happier, why quibble?



to continue to go for easy compromises, especially when it can get away with paying for other people's crimes by using public funds. But as the custodian of public money, and even in its interim avatar, it owes us all an explanation on what its basis for spending public funds is, regardless of what the funds are used for.

Such an explanation also clarifies one more thing: where the money to be distributed is coming from. Public funds, after all, are limited. And if you want to give away Rs 1 million to some cause, no matter how noble and

Besides, with every 11<sup>th</sup> adult Nepali male working abroad to take care of his family's private needs in Nepal, our politicians face little incentive to be prudent about how they spend public funds for public goods such as hospitals, schools and community centers.

Thus, with scrutiny on spending lessened, and with other people's money available to give away, our politicians can go on paying for the cost of one group's actions with another group's money, and continue to buy us further make-believe harmony. ●

# “Conflict children are doubly disadvantaged”

**Tove R Wang is the head of Save the Children Norway and the chair of the Rewrite the Future campaign that is working with the 40 million children who are out of school in conflict-affected countries around the world. She was in Nepal last week and spoke to *Nepali Times* about why children in conflict areas need special attention.**

***Nepali Times:* What is the reason for your special focus on children in conflict areas?**

**Tove R Wang:** Major donors are reluctant to invest in countries that are in conflict and in a fragile state. They expect good strategies and firm plans and a system that works, and obviously conflict affected areas are usually poorly governed. Children in these countries have an even greater need for education and the support that education brings to restore social stability. So they are doubly disadvantaged in a way: they don't get education and they are affected by conflict.

**Do you think we are on track to meet the MDGs?**

The Millenium Development Goal wants all children to have access to education by 2015. There is no way we can reach that goal unless we invest in and concentrate on children in conflict-affected areas. The trend of the past years is that the number of children not having access to education is going down, but the portion of the children not having access to education in conflict-affected areas is at the

same level. So what will happen is that the number of children who don't go to school will keep going down but we will reach a barrier when we count the children in conflict areas. So we are challenging international donors through a campaign to invest more on children in conflict and fragile states. We are working in 20 countries and Nepal is one of the five countries in Asia.

**How does the status of children here compare to, say, Aceh?**

One of the things that strikes us about Nepal is that through the conflict years we had some access to the war zones and we could conduct programs. Still, the needs for education are not being met, the ministry (of education) thinks the percentage of children not going to school is 13 percent, we think the figure is much higher than that—maybe about 30 percent.

Nepal has got a lot of attention in the past year because the country is coming out of conflict and there is a peace process. But what is not so well-known is that there are new conflicts arising for instance in the tarai. So it's not that there is peace and everything is now going to be all right. We believe that if the government and NGOs and local communities work together it is possible to significantly increase the number of children going to school.

**But are there classrooms to accommodate all the new children?**

The only way to solve that is by paying attention to training teachers. A key factor for quality education is a good teacher. It's nice to have a nice building as well, but if I had to choose, I'd rather have a good teacher. And it is more costly to upgrade a school than to upgrade teacher training. The



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

ministry of education estimates 62,000 additional teachers are required. But the higher the quantity, the more challenging maintaining the quality will be.

**What are you focusing on in Nepal?**

We work in 14 districts with government schools with a comprehensive program that includes teacher training, mobilizing the community and encouraging children's participation in education. After all, children are smart; we should learn to listen to them more. I have heard that some children have actually helped mediate between teachers and the Maoists to reopen their schools.

If you involve the community from the beginning of the process then they will participate and we get immense support. Essentially, its not poverty that people are fighting but lack of knowledge. We are also involved in ensuring that children are a zone of peace.

**The government's response?**

It's not very helpful only to criticize but to see what is working and move from there. Giving education to children is not rocket science, it is about political will. And for us it is being able to demonstrate that we can do it in difficult parts of the world.



# "We tamed the Maoists"

Interview with UML leader Madhab Kumar Nepal in Himal Khabarpatrika, 17 November

**Your own colleagues said they were against the cooperation with the Maoists in the special session.**

They didn't say that when they spoke to me. They must obey the party's decisions. They shouldn't speak in support of the Congress, instead they should be happy the UML proposal was adopted.

**Hasn't the parliament's proposal made elections even more difficult?**

The peace process won't progress unless we take the Maoists along. The UML bears the responsibility of not letting the Maoists return to the jungle. If the Maoists are against elections, we can never be with them. Our proposals have helped the election process, not harmed it. We averted the possibility of the Maoists quitting parliament, and the Maoists are now convinced that the peace process is the only way forward.

**But how can the proposal be implemented without the NC's consent?**

That consent has to happen. You can't talk about the parliamentary process and not follow its directives. The NC has the responsibility because it is leading the government.

**So how come the proposal to declare a republic at the first session of the constituent assembly, to which the UML had earlier agreed, not moved forward?**

I just don't know. No one discussed it with me.

**The Maoists have said they will exert pressure for the proposals to be adopted. What will be the UML's role in it?**

If it is peaceful, there can't be any objection. But if anyone tries to disturb the elections, we will oppose it. We will take it up in parliament, in government and in discussions among the seven parties. We're not taking to the streets.

विमल



KIRAN PANDAY

**All this has created uncertainty about elections ever being held. The prime minister is responsible for the postponement of the April date.**

The Maoist leader Prachanda is responsible for the postponement of the November date. And Sher Bahadur Deuba even said elections should be postponed. We don't know who will be responsible if elections are postponed again. But maybe we'll find out soon enough.

**So there is a real confidence gap among the seven parties?**

The NC and the Maoists need to have a working relationship. Both have to figure out why they don't trust each other. We aren't happy with the way the NC is running the government either. They interfere even in our ministries, security is deteriorating, crime is on the rise, development is at a standstill. We think there should be improvements.

**Is that why there is talk of a leadership change?**

I don't want to get into that now. That time hasn't come. But parliament has sent a message, and the government should take it into account.

**How?**

The message is that the NC doesn't have a majority. This means the prime minister also doesn't have a majority. There has to be complete change in governance. If not, you can guess what will happen.

**So there is a crisis in the alliance?**

We don't want to weaken the alliance. But unity means taking the country forward. Unity is for progress not to take the country downhill.

**What is more important for the UML, unity with the Maoists or the seven party alliance?**

The seven party alliance is most important, left unity comes within that. We are close to the NC in basic democratic values, we are close to the Maoists in seeking fundamental change in society.

## Trek tax

Samaya, 21 November

Pokhara and its environs are once more terrorised by a Maoist extortion drive. The Maoists had been forcing trekkers to cough up money ever since the start of the autumn tourist season. But lately the extortion has spread to professionals and ordinary citizens.

Even though the Maoists say they have given up violence, most people are still too afraid to lodge a complaint. Even if they did, the police wouldn't do anything. The police know what is going on but haven't done anything.

The main target is the Annapurna Conservation Area where there are 500 trekkers every day. The Maoists have openly set up 'donation' collection centres in Birethanti at the gateway to the Annapurna region, in Ghorepani and at Chame in Lamjung. Although it's all supposed to be voluntary, most trekkers are forced to pay.

When local journalists reached the collection counter, the Maoists said they were collecting "donations for building a new Nepal." Some trekkers paid up readily, but others were reluctant. Each trekker ends up paying about Rs 2,000 at various collection centres in the Annapurna circuit. The Maoists are collecting an estimated Rs 1 million a day along the trekking routes here.

Although trekkers are only



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supposed to pay once, Norwegian trekker Ina said in Pokhara: “They make you pay in every place.” Ina said she paid out a total of Rs 1,400 in various places to the Maoists.

**Sahana Pradhan**  
Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan interviewed by Navin Singh Khadka on *BBC Nepali Service*, 15 November

**We hardly see you and the prime minister meeting. But we see him meeting foreign diplomats all the time.**  
I know of no other country where foreign ambassadors can meet the prime minister so easily. I don't know if this is because we are a small country. This is very surprising. The prime minister should first try to solve our country's internal problems through our own efforts and then he should sound that decision off foreign ambassadors. He should be conveying our decisions to them instead of taking their advice.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**Are you implying that the prime minister's decisions are influenced by some foreign diplomats?**  
That's true to some extent because nowhere else do foreign ambassadors have such easy access to the prime minister. I ask for an appointment with the prime minister from time to time, that is how it works. But it's difficult to get an appointment, whereas ambassadors are meeting him all the time.

**So how do you coordinate foreign policy issues with the prime minister?**  
I have repeatedly said to the PM that all foreign affairs related issues will be dealt by the foreign ministry and not by his foreign and foreign affairs advisers. Those advisers are not the foreign ministry.

**What was his response?**  
He always says he will think about it. But old habits die hard you know.

**Talk, talk**  
*Abhiyan*, 19 November

Talk, talk, talk. The biggest accomplishment of the seven party alliance leaders for the past three months is to talk. But all that talk is now meaningless. The growing gap between the NC and the Maoists indicates a big crisis ahead for the country. Instead of

leading to agreements, the talks are centred around one party using parliament as a strategic venue to threaten to go to the streets unless everyone agrees to their point of view.  
The Maoists want parliament declaring a republic and a fully-proportional election system. The NC doesn't agree and the two have been trying to sort it out with some help from the UML and Jana Morcha this week. The idea is to have a political agreement so that the winter session of parliament can announce an election date. But the likelihood of that happening looks remote.

Instead of compromise, the NC and the Maoists are busy trying to isolate one another by bringing other members of the alliance to their side. The Maoist leader Prachanda has said elections are no longer his party's priority. The Maoists have also announced that they will disrupt parliamentary proceedings if the house doesn't agree with their demands. Baburam Bhattarai has bluntly said parliamentary politics has harmed his party.

Even while there are outstanding disagreements over the two Maoist conditions, the party has raised new conditions: removing the prime minister and declaring a republic from the streets. Analysts say the Maoists have been emboldened by their alliance with the UML in the special session and now want to improve their bargaining position. Maoist policy is being set by the hardliner factions led by Ram Bahadur Thapa. Analysis say the Maoists want an upper hand now because they think the party will otherwise suffer irreversible loss.

Meanwhile in the tarai the JTMM and Sadhabana (Mahato) are moving ahead with a blatant separatist agenda. If this agitation escalates it will be a threat to the country's sovereignty and will further support the separatists.



Alright, heads means elections, tails means no elections.

नेपाली Rabindra Manandhar in *Nepal*, 25 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Criminals involved in looting in Nepal under the guise of the Madhes Movement get sanctuary in India. This is enough proof that India is out to weaken Nepal's national unity.”

Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal in *www.himalkhabar.com*, 12 November

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Spiritual retreats are still one of Nepal's m

# Meditating in 'N

**IRENE PERONI**

“Kathmandu, I’ll soon be seeing you,” sang Cat Stevens with his warm, persuasive voice back in 1970. The British songwriter’s captivating tune led a whole generation to dream of this mystical city, a sacred place packed with temples and shrouded in a thick cloud of incense.

The myth has never been completely dispelled. Over 10,000 people a year, more than half foreigners, still flock to the many Buddhist meditation centres in the valley to satisfy their craving for a spiritual experience. During

the war years, when tourism collapsed, it was in fact meditation tourism that kept the industry alive.

Marjolijne Blankevoort, a 25-year-old from Holland, attended a 12-day retreat at the Vipassana Meditation Centre in Budanilkantha last spring. Now, seven months on, she remains enthusiastic about the experience.

The rules at the centre are draconian: wake-up call at 4AM, 11 hours of meditation a day, no physical or eye contact, no sexual activity, no reading, writing or taking notes, no intoxicants, music, make-up, jewellery or charms. What’s more, observing ‘Noble Silence’ means you are

expected to remain totally silent for the duration of the retreat. Vipassana literally means ‘to see’.

The regime is tough, but for Marjolijne the benefits made it worthwhile.

“Even though I don’t think Vipassana can rid you of suffering, it certainly gives you a way of dealing with it,” she told *Nepali Times*. “You can do so by seeing the suffering, going through the suffering, accepting your own suffering and letting go of it.”

She recalls a funny episode: during the course, she was plagued by head lice. Her teacher told her the cause of the itching

could be sensations from her past—until one day she breached the number one rule, ‘don’t kill’, to show him that the ‘sensation’ was pretty real.

“When I showed him the dead bug, we both started laughing,” says Marjolijne, an airport security coordinator in Amsterdam. But the ‘miraculous’ thing, as she describes it, was that while meditating she sometimes stopped feeling the discomfort on her scalp.

“The same thing goes for suffering in general,” she adds. “Through meditation you are able to rid yourself of the pain you feel. By noticing it and

accepting it, it eventually disappears.”

Another very popular option, though a rather more relaxed one, is provided by Kopan Monastery, an oasis of peace on a hill not far from Bodhnath, where the 10-day courses are attended mostly by westerners. Here you are allowed to talk in the afternoon. You can even chat with the monks at the sunny tables outside the cafeteria.

Louise Nielsen, a 29-year-old from Denmark, is very happy with her time at the monastery. “I made quite a lot of friends here,” she told us just before leaving Kopan.

## Pilgrimage tourism

Now that the tourism industry is finally picking up again, the Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Center (HBMC) has decided to highlight the potential of meditation courses and of pilgrimage trips by calling a conference on ‘Value of meditation and pilgrimage in Nepal’.

“We are currently holding meetings with the Nepal Tourism Board to find ways of collaborating,” Antonio Pascual at the Thamel-based centre told *Nepali Times*. “Developing this sector would benefit both the Nepali people and the government.”

Pascual says that even at difficult times for Nepal, westerners never stopped coming to attend Buddhist retreats. He is currently working on some statistics, but says that the flow has been pretty much constant even through the years of political unrest.

The event is scheduled to take place at Hyatt Regency Hotel on 16 December from 4-6PM, and is expected to attract people from the tourism industry as well as expats, diplomats, NGOs and students of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the co-founder of Kopan Monastery.

Presentations will be given by the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), the HBMC and NTB. Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche will hold a speech. Refreshments and a Tara dance performed by the nuns from the Khachoe Ghakyil nunnery will close the conference. ●

*Irene Peroni*



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA



# ain tourist draws

RAJESH KC

# Mandu

“People are very nice and open to you, because this experience makes you all go through different moods—sadness, melancholy, happiness—and that makes you feel a lot closer. We will definitely keep in touch and support each other if we have questions about what we have learned here.”

Ani Karin, a soft-spoken woman wearing the dark red robes of a Buddhist nun, explains the huge popularity of Buddhism in western countries.

“In Buddhism, it is through debating and questioning that one comes to wisdom,” says the Swede, who has been teaching at Kopan for many years. “Most

western people like this approach. They like to understand before they believe in something.”

These retreats, although short, are sufficient to teach people compassion and make them aware of their responsibility for the happiness and well-being of others, she says.

“When I look at the faces of people who leave at the end of a course, they look very calm and peaceful, and there is a glimpse of real compassion in their eyes, which is wonderful, I think. It means they really take something personal from here, for their whole life.” ●

## JOINING A MEDITATION COURSE

### Kopan Monastery

Seven- or ten-day introductory retreats run once a month from March-October. Price is respectively \$80/110, food and lodging included. A more advanced, one-month course runs in November each year. Most participants tend to have some previous experience in meditation. Other courses available. [www.kopan-monastery.com](http://www.kopan-monastery.com), 977-1-4821268, [kopan@mail.com.np](mailto:kopan@mail.com.np)

### Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Center

This is Kopan's drop-in centre in Thamel. They offer free yoga classes (7-7.45 AM, Mon, Wed, Fri), free daily meditation classes (8.30-9.30 AM and 5.30-6.30 PM Mon-Fri) and an introduction to Buddhism (10AM-12PM Sat, Rs 400, lunch included). Tailor-made meditation courses for small groups available upon request. <http://fpmt-hbmc.org>, 977-1-4700895, [hbmc.programs@gmail.com](mailto:hbmc.programs@gmail.com)

### Nepal Vipassana Center – Dharmashringa

Two monthly ten-day retreats are held all year at the centre in Budanilkantha. Longer courses as well as short courses for former students are also available. A free donation is usually made at the end of the course. <http://www.np.dhamma.org>; city office: Jyoti Bhawan Kantipath, 977-1-4250581, [info@shringa.dhamma.org](mailto:info@shringa.dhamma.org)



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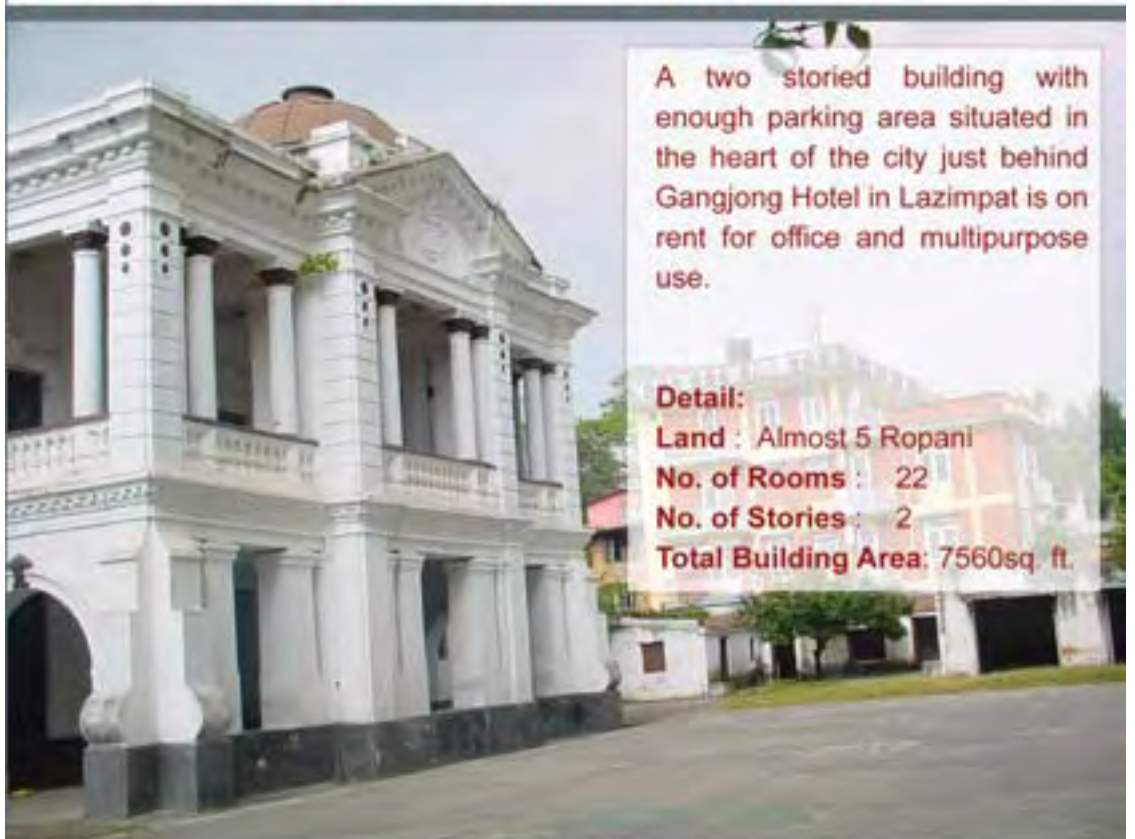
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# We are what we eat

## The middle class is getting wider midriffs

**A**fter binging during the Dasain festival, many urban Nepalis are examining their girth and are trying to figure out a way to work it off.

Nearly 40 percent of Nepali children may be underweight, but being overweight is also becoming a serious health hazard in Nepal. In a way it reflects society's inequities, but it goes beyond that: lack of awareness about a balanced diet, the advent of junk food, society's increasingly sedentary lifestyle. The middle class is getting a wider middle.

A visibly overweight patient with diabetes and hypertension was being checked up recently at a Kathmandu hospital by an obese cardiologist. The patient was overheard telling relatives later, "Looks like he doesn't follow his own advice."



**NEPALIPAN**  
Aruna Uprety

While walking in remote Mustang last year, I used to ask for millet chapatti and beaten rice for my meals. My

19-year-old guide and porter was embarrassed—it hurt his reputation that his employer ate local food and not packaged instant noodles.

Across Nepal, from Mustang to Mahendranagar, the changing food habits of Nepalis are leading to many health problems. Obesity and related cardio-vascular diseases are among them. In the villages, it is still rare to see overweight people and that is simply because they have to walk and work in the fields.

But even there, the spread of roads and bus transportation means people are getting less exercise. Combine this with an increased carbohydrate intake and you have a recipe for fat buildup. In Kathmandu and other urban areas, obesity has now become an epidemic. Till a generation ago, being overweight was regarded as a sign of prosperity. Today it points to potentially serious health problems.

Cardiologists I know obviously don't practice what they preach. They are themselves overweight, suffer from high blood pressure, and have borderline diabetes. Another colleague who regularly advises his patients to practice yoga fails to do so himself, although he seems to need it more than his patients.

In countries like India and China, obesity was virtually unknown until the introduction of a high-fat, western-style diet. With a per capita income of \$7,700, China is facing an unprecedented health crisis due to obesity among youngsters. Public health specialists in India are worried that changing food habits may have exacerbated the genetic proclivity of many Indians to cardio-vascular diseases.

In order to make food tasty, we use a lot of oil and then consume too much of it. In addition to that, we drink lots of sodas, and eat snacks, packaged food and other highly processed, sweet, high-fat foods. We end up feeling nauseated because of over eating, and then go to health workers to ask for digestive medicines. This habit is passed on to our children who may later develop heart problems, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

"We are what we eat" is one of those truisms that couldn't be truer. What you ingest directly affects your health. What comes in the way is our most primal instinct: to have our taste buds stimulated. The trouble is, the tastiest foods are also the most harmful: deep fried items, fatty foods, refined carbohydrates, salty snacks, etc.

It is only when patients get their first stroke or heart attack that they decide to change their food habits. Unfortunately, for some even such a warning is not enough and they go back to their unhealthy eating habits. ●



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

# Seeing neither



## Cooking Nepali food in a far-away Dasain

# A taste of home

**A**nything could have brought it on. I had been up since 6AM that day and hadn't eaten. It could have been all the walking in the hills around Heidelberg all day. Or it could have been that Dasain was two days away, and for the first time in my life, I was by myself.

Whatever the reason, I was headed back to Strasbourg and I was aching, literally, for dal bhat and tarkari. Before

coming to France, I daydreamed about the cheeses, the pastries, the coffees, and everything in between. But today, for the first time, I had this deep yearning for Nepali food. It was my stomach's way of telling me that I was homesick.

Something had to be done, this craving was not going to be shaken. I could easily get all the produce to make Nepali food, it was the spices that worried me. Where would I get cumin, cilantro, ginger, turmeric and chilies? There were no Nepalis I knew in this city of 700,000, the seat of the European Parliament.

With 48 hours to Dasain, I started out on a

personal quest to find the raw materials for a Nepali meal to celebrate the festival. I searched the net to get any sort of lead: looking for South Asian stores, restaurants and businesses. Two Indian restaurants were listed.

Then I remembered—on my first night here I ate at a pizzeria run by Punjabis in the Chez Michel area. The next day I headed to the pizzeria, the staff told me to go to an Indian store two streets away.

The store had a giant green sign: 'Indian Store'. The familiar, pungent smells of incense and South Asian spices filled my nose. They had everything: yellow dal, cumin, cilantro, turmeric, fenugreek seeds and vegetables.

The next night, I spent two hours cooking the trinity of Nepali cuisine: dal, rice and vegetables. I only had two pots so it took longer, but it was entirely worth it. It took me less than 10 minutes to gobble up what I had cooked.

I wasn't with my family.

There was no red tika on my forehead. I was flat broke. It wasn't a masterpiece of cooking. But I was eating the food I've known since childhood, and in that moment it felt like home. ●

*Rachana Dixit in Strasbourg*



**DULL BAT:** May not look scintillating, but it tasted great.



# forests nor trees

## Political uncertainty is wiping out Tarai and Chure forests



KUNDA DIXIT

KUNDA DIXIT in UDAYPUR

You start seeing them just after forking off at Patlaiya into the East-West Highway. Tractors, lorries, even bicycles, parked on the dirt roads leading out of the jungle on either side. They are heavy with sal logs.

This used to be the famous char kose jhari, the thick hardwood jungle that separated the mountains from the plains. Migration from the hills and from across the border in the past 40 years has decimated the trees.

The worst destruction has always happened during periods of political transition—the 1980 referendum, the post-1990 restoration of democracy and this past year.

Ironically, the forests were much better protected during the ten conflict years. There has been a full-scale plunder taking place since the ceasefire and the start of the peace process.

“They have SLRs, we don’t even have .303s. They have pickups we have to patrol on foot,” says Bhakta Bahadur Regmi, a forest guard at the district forest office in Simara.

The highway robbers and

**GOING GOING GONE:** Tarai woods are being plundered in broad daylight by timber smugglers, but even the community forests of the Chure like this one near Gaighat are thinning.

smugglers in the Rautahat corridor are now fully engaged in trucking the timber out of the tarai to India.

Birendra Sah, the journalist who was abducted and killed last month in Bara, had been investigating these gangs. “The lawlessness in the tarai has encouraged the timber mafia, and everyone is afraid of speaking out,” says a former DDC member in Rautahat’s Chandranigapur. In Dumriya, local officials say up to 700 bicycles carrying small logs cross the border into India every day.

“Even if some tractors are caught, you can openly see the driver paying off the guards,” says a farmer in Rautahat’s Dhamura. In his village, there is even a saw mill and a depot selling illegally felled trees only 500m off the highway.

Rautahat’s DFOMahendra Chaudhari shrugs it all off: “What do you expect when the prime minister, the ministers and parties are all busy looting the country? The rot starts at the top.”

Although community forestry has been a notable success in the mountains, only 2.5 percent of the forests in the tarai is managed and protected by local communities.

“After 20 years of protection, most community forests now have large, mature trees and the gangs are buying off greedy members of user groups,” admits one district official in Udaypur’s Gaighat. Earlier, a user group would decide on a policy—what kind of timber to sell and what to use the

money for.

During the conflict years, the Maoists took Rs 15 per cubic ft of timber sold as ‘tax’. Despite the peace process, the Maoists are still taxing timber. “Timber smugglers are also bribing some user group members,” says one user group chairman here, “but it is getting difficult to tell who is a smuggler and who is a Maoist.”

The community forests most at risk are in the Chure range adjoining the plains, which are extremely vulnerable to erosion and therefore are the ones that most need tree cover .

Says the official: “The sal forests of the eastern Chure are in a critical state. If we don’t do something about it, Udaypur will be a desert in 10 years.” ●

### Healthy hills

In complete contrast to the Chure and the tarai, the community forests in the midhills are thriving. In Chitlang Valley, Makwanpur, mountains that till 20 years ago were denuded and landslide-prone are thick with broad-leaf trees and pine (*pictured*). The local community manages the forests and allows villagers to collect deadwood once a month. The VDC earns up to Rs 500,000 a month by culling the forest and selling timber, and the money is ploughed into education, health and road maintenance.

On the Dharan-Dhankuta highway, the Charikot-Jiri road and on the way from Syangja to Pokhara logs harvested from community forests are piled neatly by the roadside to be taken to the market. Across Nepal’s midhills, the forests are healthy and thick. Community user groups have been using the money from timber sales for local development work.

Today, a quarter of Nepal’s forests are managed by local communities. The dense jungles on the slopes above Chitlang are even better protected than national parks, and the only complaint of villagers here is that wild boars and leopards have become a menace. Last year, in a misguided step, the government stopped handing over forests for community management. But such is the demand for community forests that some 5,000 local groups across the country are managing forests even without proper papers (*see interview*).

Kunda Dixit in Makwanpur, with additional reporting by Pranaya SJB Rana



# “Let’s go from 26% to 100%”

The Federation of Community Forests Users Nepal (FECOFUN) comprises the 14,000 or so community forest user groups around the country. (*l-r*) Bhola Bhattarai is general secretary of the federation, Navaraj Dahal and Thakur Bhandari are members. They told *Nepali Times* that the proportion of community managed forests should be taken to 100 percent.

**Nepali Times:** The war is over, community forests should be thriving, but we see them being decimated.

**Bhola Bhattarai:** The government has stopped handing over forests to communities after the war, no one knows why. But there are about 5,000 local communities who have started managing forests on their own even if they have no documents. So, it’s not true that woods are dwindling, in fact they are expanding every day. This has made Nepal green again. Still, only 26 percent of all forests in the country are community managed and we have a lot more to do.

**What are the post-conflict problems you face?**

**Bhola Bhattarai:** There is always the problem of smugglers and poachers. But that is mostly in nationally-owned forests. If you have an entire village watching over the forest with sticks and knives, poachers are less likely to target those forests. There



is a huge problem with the government, and forests are not a priority anymore.

**Navaraj Dahal:** While handing over the forests, they talk to one or two officials. They are the only ones who know about the forest, the community is not a part of the process. This is the wrong way to do it.

**Thakur Bhandari:** The problem has never been money. Forest user groups have money in the banks, but communities haven’t figured out a way of using the money, and greedy officials have sometimes used it for personal benefit.

**How are you tackling these problems?**

**Thakur Bhandari:** Our community user



groups have always been inclusive. There has always been 50-50 female participation, and there are groups with only women in them. They are very active.

**There are reports that Maoists have forced user groups to give them a cut from forest yield. Any truth to that?**

**Bhola Bhattarai:** Surprisingly, no. Back during the war, the Maoists were very open about extortion, and they did take a lot. But now, it has gone down although there are places where it still continues. As they say, old habits die hard.

**Navaraj Dahal:** On the Maoist topic, there is one little problem though. The Maoist cantonments have been built right in the



PICS: MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

middle of community forests, and the houses that they live in are made from fine young trees needlessly chopped down. In Shaktikhor in Chitwan, 300,000 cubic feet of forests were cleared for cantonments. This was a huge mistake.

**So what is your strategy for the future?**

**Bhola Bhattarai:** The lesson we have learnt from the past 30 years of community forestry is that the best way to save the forests is to hand over their management to local communities. Just a week back, a timber poacher was stealing wood from a community forest. The chairman of the user group happened to hear of it and rushed to the spot. The poacher beheaded the chairman with his khukuri before rushing off to hide in the local police station.irate locals surrounded the police station and stoned the poacher to death. The chairman’s last words were “Kill me if you will, I won’t let you cut this tree.” He was a true martyr.

**Thakur Bhandari:** We now need to go from 26 percent to a full 100. Nepal’s forests need to be managed by local communities everywhere, not by the government in Kathmandu.

**Bhola Bhattarai:** Nepal’s community forest is a success story replicated all over the world. This is one sector where Nepal is showing the way. We should build on it.



# 2008 curtainraiser

It will be a year of living dangerously, especially for the world's poor



**W**hen the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change convenes in Bali in two weeks, governments will be told that the five hottest years of this century will be the five coldest of the next century.

Climate change is already shifting crop patterns, pests, and diseases. Agribusiness claims this



**GLOBAL WARNING**  
**Pat Mooney**

is rendering less commercial crops grown on marginal lands nonviable. Global warming will force an estimated 1.4 billion rural people off the land and into urban ghettos. Global warming is creating space for agribusiness to paint genetic engineering and heaps of new fertilisers as the technological silver bullet that

will keep the major crops (rice, wheat, maize, and potatoes) viable in Punjab, the Pampas, plains and prairies.

Second-generation agrofuels, industry claims, will provide maize, sugarcane, and palm oil producers with higher prices and South governments with new trade opportunities and energy sources. The food/fuel crunch is coming just in time for industry to trot out its latest technology: synthetic biology (extreme genetic engineering) in order to make sure there is food and fuel enough for all.

Industry is prophesying the Carbohydrate Economy—the theory that biomass can be reduced to carbohydrates that can make everything from food and fuel to books and car bonnets. If we're running out of petrol and the planet is running out of clean air, synthetic biology can

either rebuild plant DNA and/or rejig industrial-strength microbes to do the job.

It's just a matter of boiling down corn stalks and rain forests into carbohydrate raw materials. British Petroleum and Royal Dutch Shell have joined with the US Department of Energy and venture capitalists to inject more than \$1 billion into synthetic biology research during 2007 alone.

The global market for agrofuels is expected to rocket from \$22 billion in 2006 to \$150 billion by 2015 and the share of cropland sown to feed cars will grow from two percent to 12 percent, meaning that the rate of food crop yield improvement must grow by 50 percent now just to keep from increasing the ranks of the hungry beyond today's 850 million. The very industries that engineered

climate change in the first place are asking the world to trust them to get us out of their mess.

The international agricultural infrastructure is also facing a crisis in 2008. The World Bank's internal review has lambasted it for neglecting agriculture and has called for new resources and new relationships. The just-released World Development Report focusses on agriculture for the first time since 1981 and has joined the call for new resources and institutional cooperation.

The FAO's harsh (and justified) external review is also calling for major institutional and partnership restructuring. The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) is conducting its first systemwide review in ten years. Desperately trying to look 'with it', they are all now talking about second generation agrofuels

and 'climate-ready' crops for market-focused farmers.

The Gates/Rockefeller AGRA initiative is planning to take on not just Africa seeds and soils but its policy and trade infrastructure. The G-8 are pushing for new Centers of Excellence in such fields as genomics, informatics, nanotechnology, and synthetic biology around the global South. The likes of Clinton, Google and the Millennium Village are pressing for new public/private partnerships introducing a new era of philanthro-capitalism that will allow them to take the lead from governments and intergovernmental agricultural institutions.

Bilateral and multilateral support for agriculture are being re-organised and these adjustments over the next year will come to a crescendo at the OECD's Conference on Aid Effectiveness which will be held in Ghana in September 2008.

However, bucking the trend is a World Bank/FAO-sponsored innovative review of international agricultural technologies (still in draft and under intense corporate attack) that emphasizes socio-economic solutions and criticizes past technological hubris. Much to its own surprise, FAO has recently come out in favour of organic agriculture, stating that agro-ecological strategies can meet local and global food security challenges. The genetic engineering and fertilizer companies are deeply unhappy.

In the midst of the debates over new technologies and climate change, the UN Biodiversity Convention will conduct its first review of agricultural biodiversity in more than a decade in two high-profile meetings in 2008.

Industry and foundations are properly fearful that the ongoing sequence of food scandals, the hubbub over agrofuels, and the alarm over climate change could stir up a popular campaign to take back control of the food system. ●

*Pat Mooney received the Right Livelihood Award in 1985 and is the 1998 recipient of the Pearson Medal of Peace for his work in agriculture and the preservation of biodiversity.*

*Pat Mooney will be speaking at the 24<sup>th</sup> Pani Satsang on 'Impact of New Technologies and the Commodification of Manufacturing' at Yala Maya Kendra Patan Dhoka at 4PM on Friday, 23 November. The talk is organised jointly by Water Nepal and Nepali Times.*



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# Democracy activist becomes customs officer

## Durga's journey



When five participants of the Edinburgh to Everest Cycle Challenge Program got stuck for two days at Chinese customs at Kodari last week because of insufficient documents, an assuming Nepali official came across the border to help rescue them.

Durga Thapa may not be tall, she doesn't speak Mandarin, but it didn't take long for her to convince the Chinese officials to let the cyclists go. The five adventurers were on a grueling 10,000km tour from Scotland to Chomolungma to raise money for



PICS: MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

the Nepal Trust that is working to upgrade health posts in the Humla district.

The Chinese must have thought Durga was just like any other Nepali customs officials they have been used to seeing in the past. They weren't prepared for a determined, fire-breathing pro-democracy warrior.

Readers will be familiar with Durga Thapa because of the iconic picture of her taken by Min Ratna Bajracharya during the 1990 People's Movement. She is the student who leapt into the air with a double victory sign at a democracy rally at Asan. Sixteen

**PASSAGE OF TIME:** Durga Thapa (then KC) at a pro-democracy rally in 1990, again in 2006, and last week at Tatopani Customs on the Chinese border.

years later, the same photographer snapped a photo of her during the April Uprising as she chanted pro-democracy slogans on the streets.

At 39 and the mother of a young son, Durga has been a customs officer at the Tatopani Checkpoint on the Chinese border for the past year. Having been a social worker with charities like Sahara Group, activism comes easy to Durga. That is why she took it upon herself to intervene on behalf of the cyclists.

"My parents always told me: be diligent in your work, always be ready to do more than is expected of you, respect your elders and have affection for those weaker and smaller than you," recalls Durga, and it looks like she is following the advice well.

But it is difficult for a person of integrity to be posted in a place that has become a hotbed for smuggling and crime. "I feel really sad seeing how people are exploited to become carriers and only the small fish ever get caught," she adds.

One year after the April Uprising, what does she feel about the democracy she helped win back? "I am not happy with the way our leaders are squandering our gains. For the country to be democratic our leaders have to practice democracy first," she adds. ●

# Into oblivion

## Fighting Alzheimer's to preserve a long-lasting love

"When I look away I forget what yellow means, but I can look again. Sometimes there's something delicious about oblivion." Fiona, who somehow gracefully approaches the ordeal of Alzheimer's dementia, philosophises.

She makes one-half of the couple in Sarah Polley's directorial debut *Away from Her*, an achingly beautiful portrait of a marriage that is remarkably successful yet injuriously flawed. It's a film that is thick yet thoughtful and deep with emotional truths.

There might be something delicious about oblivion, but there's something else altogether despairing in the experience. We begin with a depiction of a couple who have lived decades together, with the comfort and solace of long matrimony. They have afforded themselves an idyllic and quiet retirement, enjoying each other's company, and living in a cottage away from the world. That quietness and peace is disrupted when Fiona begins to show signs of Alzheimer's. In one early scene, she places a frying pan into the refrigerator, an instance that is both softly funny and terrifyingly foreboding, before her husband, Grant, returns it to its rightful place after she departs.



**CRITICAL CINEMA**  
**A Angelo D'Silva**



These small and mounting occasions lead to an episode that propels Fiona to place herself in an assisted-living facility. Just as her Alzheimer's steals away her mind, the memory of Grant's past indiscretions surfaces and colours the narrative. Some things that we wish to banish from memory can have a stubborn persistence. The thought crosses one's mind-and plagues Grant's-that all this is a plot cooked up by Fiona to punish him, especially as she

takes to her fellow resident, a mute but insistent gentleman she cares for. What follows is Grant's effort to preserve his relationship with his wife, to keep the memory of what they have together alive and ultimately to keep her happy and comfortable.

Julie Christie, who plays Fiona, is the picture of grace and poise. A veritable veteran of cinema, she returns with exquisite skill and execution. When her character asks Grant how she looks, he replies "Direct and vague, sweet and ironic," perhaps teasingly, but exacting in its description of Christie's impressive performance. Gordon Pinsent, playing Grant, has a rich baritone that matches his retired professor role. He masters that seeking glance, gleaning meaning from Fiona's every pause and utterance. The pair make an intelligent and warm couple, all the more tragic for the alienation that threatens to part them. Director Sarah Polley sprightly avoids clichés for the most part and accomplishes something that approaches perfection—a particularly impressive feat, considering she is still in her twenties while her subjects are times over older.

*Away from Her* is adapted by Polley from a short story by Alice Munro, and much like that other movie adapted from a piece of short fiction, *Brokeback Mountain*, we are given a pair of astoundingly fully-realised characters with a depth that surprises. This one, too, is also about the stubbornness and hurt of love. Love, of course, is hardly an uncommon subject for cinema. But generally our attention is drawn to lovers in their youth, when the act of loving can come so easy as opposed to the seasoned affection of a pair together for over forty years. Not often are we presented with a depiction of a couple in the later half of life, with history and habit maturing into a rich and fulfilling relationship. Sarah Polley shows us there are many lessons to be garnered from our attention to our insistence on loving and living through decades, even if she looks at it with a serious and unromantic eye.

*Away from Her*  
Director: Sarah Polley.  
Cast: Julie Christie, Gordon Pinset, Olympia Dukakis, Grace Lynn Kung.  
2006. 109 min.

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **The Work of the Wind** by Italian artist Giovanni Battista Ambrosini at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, till 27 November. 4218048
- ❖ **Foliage** an exhibition of paintings by Bidhata KC at the Shambhala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel, 25 November-1 December.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Amazing Grace** a film about anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce, by Michael Apted, 23 November, 6.30 PM at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Bamako** a film by Abderrahmane Sissako, presented by Candid Society at Alliance Francaise, 7PM on 23 November, admission free.
- ❖ **Twenty-fourth Pani Satsang** on the impact of new technologies and the commodification of manufacturing by Pat Mooney at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 4PM on 23 November.
- ❖ **On the Waterfront** a film by Elia Kazan, presented by Cine-Sankipa, on 26 November. 4466956
- ❖ **School Bullying** a talk program by Niti Rana, 27 November at The New Era, Battisputali. 9851023958
- ❖ **Education for the new Nepal** a presentation by Sister Cyril, winner of the Padma Shree Award, 29 November, 11AM at the Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **AWON Christmas bazaar** at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 1 December, 10AM-4.30 PM, Rs 100.
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **Fusion jazz** with Inner Groove at the Moksh Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok, 23 November at 8.30 PM. 5523212
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **Weeklong festivities** with Bella Italia on Monday, enchanting Asia on Wednesday and Mongolian BBQ on Friday at the Hotel Himalaya, 7PM onwards, Rs 499. 5523900
- ❖ **Steak** at the Olive Bar and Bistro, available for lunch and dinner at a-la-carte rates with live band in the evenings, Radisson Hotel. 4411818
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** with coffee, food, drinks, and dessert at the New Orleans Café, Jawalakhel, 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **BBQ, chilled beer, cocktails** and live music at the Kausi Restaurant and Bar, Darbar Marg, 6218490
- ❖ **Crepes and smoothies** taste our tempting crepes and fresh smoothies at The Lounge, Hyatt Regency from 4:30 pm till 6:30 pm. Please call 4491234
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Starry Night Barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666.00 nett. per person, at the Shambhala Garden, every Friday 6.30 PM onwards. 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
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- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The historical cyclone over the Bay of Bengal has finally worn out. Satellite pictures taken on Thursday morning show that while the southern side of the Himalaya looks sunny, the Tibetan plateau on the north is covered with high and dry clouds, brought in by the northwesterly cold fronts. There's a massive cyclone over South China Sea, which has drawn in hazy clouds from north India. Current features, however, are likely to change next week when the low-lying river plains of the southern Himalaya start gathering foggy layers. Enjoy the mountain views and bundle up for cold mornings over the weekend.

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सम्पर्क: ९८५१०८६५४८, ९८४१४१६५२६, ०११-४४००९५५, ईमेल: [info@radiojagarmatha.org](mailto:info@radiojagarmatha.org)

हरेक विहान ८:०० देखि राती ११:०० बजे सम्म सुनका सिला र उल्लेख गर्नुपर्नेहरूको लागि सञ्चारको लागि रेडियो सगरमाथा १०२ थोप्लो ४ मेगाहर्ज





KIRAN PANDAY

**ROUGH RIDE:** A professional Nepali kayaker saves his kayak from capsizing at the Seventh Himalayan White Water Challenge organized by the Nepal Association of Rafting Agents at Bhote Koshi on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**LIGHT OF PEACE:** Members of civil society light candles at a peace rally organized by Universal Peace Federation Nepal at BICC on Tuesday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**DIVINE PLUNGE:** The Chhat organising committee ferries the statue of the Chhat goddess across Rani Pokhari before taking it apart to mark the end of the festival on Saturday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**CORPORATE LEGALITY:** Chief Justice Kedar Prasad Giri launches law expert Bharat Upreti's book *Company Law* at Hotel de l'Annapurna on Friday.

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# Like there is no tomorrow

When Girjau said last week “I’ll resign after elections” some of his detractors rejoiced. But it soon dawned on them that what **Sanobabu** was actually saying was: “I decide when elections are held.”

So why is Delhi so miffed at Girjau? Ever since the prime minister’s public outburst against Amareshbhai there have been plenty of indications that Koirala is not listening to Lainchour.

Mao buddies have moved quickly to capitalize on the icy relations. The Maoist statement on UNMIN mandate extension was a xerox copy of the Indian statement. Which is probably why Shyam Saran is not speaking to Ram Sharan these days, but to Comrade Lotus. Eavesdroppers told the Ass there was considerable bonhomie in the telephone conversation on Monday between the two.

Is this also why South Block is sitting on accepting the First Niece’s candidacy as Nepal’s emissary to the Delhi Darbar? It doesn’t look like **Shailaja** (or the four other Maoist nominees) will be flying out anytime soon, even if they can get confirmed air tickets.

The question is, when it is time to go, will Shailaja also fly cattle class like Suresh Chalise had to on the trans-Atlantic leg of his flight to DC this week? Baluwater managed to get him an upgrade up to London, but after that our new envoy to Foggy Bottom was consigned to steerage.

And **Pampha Bhusal** must be glad she isn’t yet in Paris, otherwise the seven-day banda that has brought France to a standstill may have been blamed on infiltration of the French trade unions by Himalayan Maoists.



Don’t know who His Awesomeness was trying to impress by declaring that he was boycotting Tihar because it was a symbol of Nepal’s “patriarchal and feudal value system”. But his party comrades didn’t seem to have any qualms about ‘celebrating’ other aspects of Tihar like extorting money across the country in the form of revolutionary deusi chants.

The comrades may have thought it was mighty smart to leave their cadre in charge of state-controlled media like Maobaddy TV, Radio Mao, *Maopatra*, *The Rising Anew Nepal* and the Revolutionary News Agency even after their resignation from government. Not satisfied, they’ve been setting up a network of Radio Republics all over the country. The trouble is, however much **Mahara Babu** tells them not to use the channels for propaganda, old habits die hard. The attitude is: “Listen to us, or else.” Needless to say, NTV’s ratings are plummeting and Kantipur and Image have benefited the most.



The way the Young Communist Lawbreakers are going around beating up doctors, journalists, hoteliers and extorting trekkers, the YCL is becoming a huge embarrassment for the party brass who now spend all their time dealing with the fallout.

It led one victim of the YCL’s jaw-breaking squad to quip from his hospital bed: “They are like tigers who came out of the jungle to be in a circus. But the trouble is, the tigers have escaped and are roaming the bazar.”



This prolonged political transition is a time for everyone to rake it in as if there is no tomorrow. Nepali pilots flying for fat salaries with Indian domestic airlines need to have their licenses renewed by CAAN. But our **uncivil aviation authority** knows it has the pilots by their gonads. CAAN is sitting on it and is asking for one month’s salary from each of the 12 pilots as baksheesh. Sheesh.



This from the **Harrowing News Department**: a Nepali returning to Europe who had a moustache on his passport that he had since shaved off was stopped at TIA immigration. No way you can board your flight, he was told. Later, the official in question (whose name the Ass has been provided in case the CIAA wants to probe) asked for 30K to let him board. The man refused and now has to wait till his moustache grows back.

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