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Times

#376

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Weekly Internet Poll # 376

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

Total votes: 3,919

Optimistic: 16.4%

Pessimistic: 83.3%

Who cares? 0.3%

Weekly Internet Poll # 377. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. The Maoist pre-condition of republic declaration by parliament is:

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READY, AIM, FIRE: Maoists with M-36, INSAS, M-16 and AK-47 assault rifles prepare to fire off a six-gun salute on 24 November at the Chitwan cantonment in the presence of UN monitors.

KIRAN PANDAY

Farewell to arms?

Time for the Maoists to decide: house or jungle

KUNDAN ARYAL

On the week that the winter session of parliament was getting ready to meet again after a ten day recess, the Maoists celebrated PLA Day at the UN-supervised cantonment in Shaktikhor in Chitwan.

There was an armed marchpast and a seven-gun volley from automatic weapons—all in the presence of the UNMIN adviser on arms management, Brigadier General Jan Erik Wilhelmsen, who listened as Pushpa Kamal Dahal warned that his force could “go back to the jungle”.

Whether the cantonment sabre rattling on 25 November fell within the parameters of the

comprehensive peace agreement is moot because the UN was there. But it underlined the fact that the Maoists are still openly on the dual track of using the threat of violence while ostensibly in the parliamentary process.

By late Thursday, as this edition went to press, there were indications the seven parties were nearing an agreement. But one party leader cautioned the Maoists could still come up with new conditions.

UML leader KP Oli says it is clear why: “The Maoist strategy is to foil elections at all costs.” But other UML and NC figures believe the Maoists can be brought around. “We mustn’t give them the excuse to go back to war,” the

NC’s Mahesh Acharya told us.

Prime Minister Koirala met Baburam Bhattarai and Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Monday and Koirala came out of that meeting saying he was optimistic the Maoists were not against elections per se. But his problem remained convincing his party’s rightwing to opt for a republic.

The compromise hammered out on Thursday was to have 60-40 proportional representation in elections, but for a 600-member house in which 240 members would still be elected directly. There was also agreement on having a commitment for republic in the interim constitution to be ratified by the elected assembly.

The UML leader regarded as being closest to the Maoists, Bamdeba Gautam, told *Nepali Times*: “The two parliamentary directives must be set in motion, if the Maoists don’t go for elections even after that then they’ll be wiped out.”

The NC’s Narhari Acharya summed it up: “The Maoists are running out of options, they can either go back to the jungle or compromise.” ●

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SINK OR SWIM

Girija Prasad Koirala has perfected the fine art of putting Pushpa Kamal Dahal in his place. Taming the Maoists he considers his main achievement. He likes to think that the international community would never have accepted the participation of the Maoists in the interim government without his personal guarantee. Dahal, for his part, likes to point out to his senior partner in realpolitik that it was the Maoists that gave the mainstream parties an opportunity to wash away their past sins. Dahal is often impatient with Koirala's obduracy. He ridicules the prime minister's infirmity and supposed senility. He keeps threatening to look for an alternative to Koirala. That is unlikely to happen anytime soon.

Even with the support of all other leftwing parties in the interim parliament, the Maoists do not have the numbers to oust NC from government. Whether they like it or not, Koirala and Dahal are cursed to swim or sink together. What they need to do is to devise a strategy for mutual survival and save the country from further ruin.

Koirala must convince right-wingers in his party that the days of constitutional monarchy are coming to an end and the declaration of a republic isn't tantamount to a Maoist takeover. The Maoists are terrified of the outcome of elections. All the more reason not to give them any excuse to run away from the ballot.

The Fierce One has by now realised the futility of insisting upon a fully proportional election system but has to harp on it to keep ethnic pressure groups within his party in good humour. Jimmy Carter has offered a face-saving formula. Dahal needs to sell it to radicals in his party.

The hawks will resist the lure of electoral politics, and he has to show he is a leader and not a follower, and overrule them. The UML has an important role in keeping the seven parties together. Madhab Nepal tries to balance the boat by sitting sometimes on the left and sometimes on the right. He should actually keep himself tied to the oars. The seven parties need a common secretariat in Balkhu and not Baluwatar. Only the UML can keep the communication channels open between the NC and the Maoists.

Together, the three principal political parties must immediately stop making excuses to postpone elections. That alone will help ease the troubles in the tarai, lawlessness in Kathmandu and hopelessness in the hills. The parties need to do it not just for us, but for their own survival.



KIRAN PANDAY

Promises unkept

Continued pahadi chauvinism is churning madhes cauldron

At the BBC interaction program in Biratnagar three weeks ago, the Prime Minister showed a side of himself that tells us a lot about why Nepal's problems continue to increase. A man complains about the plight of the landless and Girjababu launches into an elaborate speech about how like 9/11 in US, Nepal also has problems and this is only natural.



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

A woman complains about frequent rapes in her village and the prime minister, in a sentence assures her law and order will be improved before elections. Girija Prasad Koirala's responses revealed his utter lack of empathy and sensitivity to people's concerns.

But it was his comments on the tarai which were most striking. Close to a year after a powerful assertion of madhesi identity, the PM simply refused to recognise or accept that the madhes exists. It is true that there is heterogeneity within Tarai and groups which reside there claim a distinct identity for themselves. And 'madhes' is now a distinctly political term preferred by madhesi activists for mobilization. Yet, it is an insult to the movement and a politically unwise move for the PM to say in an accusatory tone: "I am a resident of the tarai, too, although you have separated us by calling yourself madhesis."

This attitude not only refuses to recognize that 33 percent of the country's population constitutes a separate group but also the fact that they have genuine grievances

related to identity and representation.

Couple this with the PM's other statement that the problem can be solved in one minute if India and Nepal cooperate, and is it any wonder that the madhes is still burning?

Despite seeing the writing on the wall, Kathmandu hasn't changed one bit. Yes, there are major distortions in the movement, there is no leadership, and the issue is used as a neat political cover to settle personal scores or engage in crime. Yet, at its core, the anger in madhes still runs deep because people who run this country, like Koirala, retain the same old pahadi chauvinism. No promises implemented, no increase in madhesi representation, no symbolic concessions, no effort to reach out to an alienated population, no provision of security to a disturbed area, and now, the outright refusal to admit that there is anything that can be legitimately called madhes and madhesis.

The Kathmandu establishment is complacent about the tarai because Koirala's recipe is buying off and splitting an already divided madhesi leadership, and blaming the border for all the crime. By passing the buck to India, he was obviously trying to escape his own responsibility. The solution lies in addressing systemic issues at home, and being sensitive to the angst of madhesis.

But it is also true that India needs to come clean. South Block and Lainchaur are losing the plot nationally with the peace process in crisis, though not necessarily because of their actions. And they neither appear to have done

enough homework on the tarai nor realised that the conflict is becoming intractable.

The resentment against India is building up across the madhesi political spectrum, with leaders claiming that New Delhi has not done enough to exert pressure on the government to give concessions. At the other end, the fact that militant leaders live in Bihar has prompted suspicions in Kathmandu about whether New Delhi is playing a double game. India is definitely not happy with the unrest in the madhes. But it would do well to publicly tell us what it thinks about the situation in the tarai, and privately try to engineer a just compromise, given that it has enormous leverage with all actors.

Meanwhile, on the ground, things are churning. Rajendra Mahato's announcement of a semi-militant force and public admission of engagement with armed groups is significant. Everyone is talking to each other. Mahato with Goit and Jwala, Biswas with Maoists, Mahato and Biswas, Jwala with Upendra, Prahlaad Giri aka Pawan with Jwala. There is case-to-case collaboration between district level units. And all groups, mainstream or armed, are in an agitation mood. Popular frustration is easily channelised into street action. The demands range from immediate inclusion of madhesis in proportionate numbers in government services, a full PR electoral system, and a commitment to declaring madhes as a single separate federal unit. Combine the insensitivity at the top and anger at the bottom and all it requires is a spark for the situation in the tarai to spiral out of control. ●

Don't be mean to UNMIN

Without the Blue Jackets there would be no peace

The government has declared rather condescendingly that it will finalise the decision of the extension of UNMIN's term by the first week of December. Perhaps Ian Martin is expected to be grateful. Parties to the comprehensive peace agreement have refused to allow an enlargement of its role.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Quoting Ram Bahadur Thapa's planted interview in state-controlled The Rising Nepal, Xinhua reported with unconcealed glee: "The mastermind [sic] behind the decade-long guerrilla warfare and building of People's Liberation Army charged that UNMIN is going against its mandate by behaving like activists and journalists." Apparently, UNMIN has succeeded in annoying both neighbouring member states and parties to the agreement in just one year.

The reason they are angry is because the presence of the Blue Jackets reminds them of their own failures. Had there been

an acceptable alternative to multilateral monitoring, the term of UNMIN would probably have been allowed to lapse. So UN SUVs with proboscis antennae will continue their high visibility presence outside famous eateries along national highways for at least another six months.

Putting a limited mandate and an expiry date on UNMIN is a pity. Its expertise could have proved to be useful in at least two areas: security sector reform and mainstreaming marginalised groups.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal's latest pre-condition for constituent assembly elections is a prior amalgamation of Maoist combatants and the Nepal Army. Such an extreme position may be posturing, but the importance of rehabilitating armed guerrillas is a task that can't be postponed forever. The necessity of rightsizing the national army on the one hand and absorbing guerrilla fighters on the other is where the UN's expertise is potentially useful.

The second agenda of reforming security forces is even more complex. The establishment of unquestioned civilian supremacy over the military may require constitutional guarantees, a legal

framework, competent personnel in the defence ministry, and specially the setting up of a Security Committee at the cabinet secretariat or an inclusive, independent and high-powered Peace Commission. These intricacies can't be worked out without international assistance, and the UN will be the least controversial.

The national army has to appear inclusive to command the respect of the entire nation. The Bhadrakali brass is perhaps as aware of this necessity as anyone else. But reconciling the urgency of inclusive recruitment with the immediate need of downsizing the force is a dilemma the defence ministry can't resolve on its own. Extensive political consultations and technical preparation will be necessary to devise an acceptable formula. The UN can probably provide technical input and facilitation services for such an exercise.

When Nepal becomes a federal republic (no longer 'if') the police will probably have to work under provincial governments. The military and paramilitary are to meet external or internal security threats. It's necessary to prepare for this, and UNMIN could be helpful.

There is no reason to take offence if anyone offers his or her assistance in countering existing or incipient threats to peace. All that a UN officer did by meeting a madhesi insurgent in Bihar was to expose the duplicity of the Indian establishment which denies the presence of insurgency leaders in their land. Baluwatar should have allowed the UN to handle this situation by themselves. Nepal needs the goodwill, expertise and assistance of international organisations to resist unwarranted arm-twisting by powerful neighbours.

Those who feel the UN's role here is unproductive rather miss the point. The UN is high-profile and showy because that's how it is designed. Ostentation is built into the system. The UN puts procedures above principles, objectivity above impartiality and process above outcome. It is rigged for effect rather than impact.

Despite all its shortcomings, UNMIN is an indispensable component of the ongoing peace process in this country. Enlargement of its terms of reference deserves consideration if parties to the peace agreement are conspiring to postpone elections indefinitely. ●

LETTERS

POSTPONED PEACE

After reading Kunda Dixit's 'Peace postponed' (#375), I felt depressed and even more so when he predicts that Jimmy Carter will see the same lack of movement in his next visit to Nepal. The excitement of the polls have faded but what is clear is that it is all due to these unaccountable and irresponsible politicians. The Maoists, who should has been different, are not faithful to the people. It is a shame to hear politicians like CP Gajurel say that they won't let the elections happen if they are to lose.

Samyam Wagle, Australia

● The return of internally displaced people, security and a suitable proportional electoral system are prerequisites for elections. I think the dates to election by a neutral civil government are necessary as no one has the right to keep the people in a state of uncertainty for such a long time.

Name withheld, email

● You are confused. On one hand you say (Editorial, 'Conceptual continuity', #375) the ruling bloc should immediately announce elections but on the other hand declare that the Maoists don't want it and would do everything to spoil it. You exhibit the dilemma as the UML and other political parties: hoping against hope to blame the Maoists. Their strategy is: the other parties want elections, not us. When nobody wanted elections, it was our agenda but when everyone wants it, it is no longer our agenda. Now we want a republic to be declared and once you agree to that, we will promulgate the constitution. In their vocabulary, there is

no responsibility, commitment or ideology. Prachanda is the supreme leader of the world. Whatever he says, you have to accept. There is no alternative.

Kishor Kamal, email

SUPERFRUIT

Thank you very much for bringing the sea-buckthorn into the limelight ('Sagarmatha superfruit', #374). We really need to push and popularise such unexplored and underestimated treasures of Nepal. Back in 2004 when I first tasted sea-buckthorn in Sing Gompa. It has long been prepared and processed in Tibet as a medicinal drink. Kudos to the Khumbu Alpine Conservation Council for teaching villagers the technical know-how and encouraging its preparation in the Khumbu region. With more refinement and research for its nutritious value, this could be the next big health drink. Seeing it being packed and labeled in bottles is a good start.

Matiram Pun, Institute of Medicine, Maharajgunj

ELEPHANT POLO

Frank de Lange (Letters, #375) has concluded that by the act of translating a literary novel, one can become the 'embodiment of de-contextualised peace industry'. He also questions my motives in translating *Elephant Polo* and presumes the book is destined for a 'happy few'.

I doubt that he would have written his letter if he had taken the trouble of actually reading the book, rather than drawing far-flung conclusions from a short description of the book's launch ('Dutch elephant', #373).

I much prefer, but not necessarily agree with, the straightforward argument made by S Ranjit in the same page to the effect that 'the top-down approach for development never worked'. The book makes exactly the same point. I quote the main protagonist of *Elephant Polo*, Oscar, who states in a speech: "Ladies and gentleman, although traditional development assistance is characterised by a selfish, paternalistic and short-sighted approach, it remains one of many possible models for development. But, in my eyes, it is barely productive. Moreover, it costs tax payers handfuls of money without any accountability whatsoever for results—at least, if you do not wish to use sentimentality or self- gratification as a yardstick.' Incidentally, readers will find that Oscar's own model of development does not survive the confrontation with the rather grim realities of Nepal today. It goes under in a finale that is as spectacular as it is moving.

So what was my motive in translating the book? Simple: I discovered an entertaining and well-written novel that provides a sharp insight into Nepal and opens a window into the soul of a foreigner who loves Nepal and struggles to understand it. Often complex realities are much better explained through literary expression rather than in thick consultants' reports full of jargon. Problem was, this novel was written in inaccessible Dutch. I felt it deserved a wider audience, certainly not a happy few.

Adriaan Verheul, email

CORRECTIONS

● The fifth paragraph in the editorial 'Conceptual continuity' (#375) should have read: 'The upshot if that even if the winter session of parliament next week agrees on declaring Nepal a republic and on full proportional elections we will be no closer to election.' The word 'no' was inadvertently dropped.

● The aircraft depicted in 'Sky-high with Buddha' (#375) should have been Raytheon Beechcraft 1900C, and not 1900D as erroneously reported.

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Mission impossible?

UNMIN will now have to work with limited time and scope

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Now that its term is set to be extended by only another six months, UNMIN is putting on a brave face and saying this is not unusual. The UN's missions elsewhere have also been similarly extended. But the way Nepal's internal and external actors limited the term to six months and refused to widen its mandate signals that the mission will not have an easy time.

Earlier, the government was willing to go along with UNMIN's preference for a one-year extension. But indications from New York that India and China would not be happy with that forced it to be scaled back to six months and no widening of mandate.

"We are sending a request for a six month extension to New York this week," a close aide to prime minister Koirala told *Nepali Times*. He confirmed that the decision was shaped by Indian and Chinese sensitivity to the issue and their concern expressed at a Security Council meeting.

At debates in New York last month the Indian and Chinese positions were in sharp contrast to the Europeans who wanted both a longer extension as well as widening of the scope of UNMIN's presence in Nepal, diplomats said.

UNMIN chief Ian Martin had himself earlier hinted at his mission taking on additional responsibilities like peace process implementation, security sector reform and supporting security. But he is fully aware of the sensitivities of Nepal's neighbours.



"When I have discussions with representatives of member states, its not a discussion in which there are deep disagreements," he said recently.

The Maoists have always been critical of UNMIN's role in the verification process, and they have lately tried to ingratiate themselves with India and China by stepping up their anti-UNMIN rhetoric.

"China and India have become suspicious over UNMIN's long term plans," Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Thapa said. "They have brought in thousands of vehicles and even helicopters and aircraft while our army has only 57 vehicles, this has raised questions within the Nepali people and our neighbouring countries whether any foreign power is trying to make Nepal a failed state and establish its base here under UN cover."

This is clear reference to favourite Maoist bogey, the United States. A US embassy official in Kathmandu confirmed that Washington is for an extension of UNMIN's presence in Nepal. "We believe it is necessary to extend UNMIN's mandate for a short period in order to see how the political situation is going to play out here," said the official. But the official dismissed the theory that India is concerned over the possible extension and expansion of the UN's mandate because that could pave way for a greater US role.

"Their (India's) judgment of UNMIN or its extension is not based primarily on the US, it's based on their own interest in terms of the wider region. They have traditionally been hesitant to involve the UN as you know in Kashmir," the official explained.

The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu refused to officially comment on the issue of extending the UNMIN mandate. All that an embassy spokesman in Kathmandu would say was: "Such speculation is normal in any democracy."

India has been disappointed by the postponement of elections, and has publicly urged an early election. But UNMIN wants to see conditions right before elections are held, and hence its offer to do more.

Martin said as much at a recent press meet: "Nepalis are very concerned about the peace process that they see faltering in a number of ways and they assume that it should be the role of the United Nations to help keep that process on track. Naturally many ordinary Nepalese who do not understand the limitations of the UNMIN mandate expect that we should in some way be able to support the process more broadly."

UNMIN may be calling it like it is and reflecting ground realities and challenges, but its signals haven't gone down well with Nepal's neighbours who want it to do what it can and leave. ●

Himalayan at Teku

Himalayan Bank has a new branch in Teku. This is the bank's sixteenth branch. All banking facilities are available at the branch including an ATM machine has also been installed.

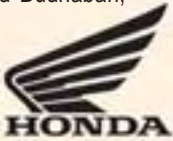


Bakery Café Pulchok

The Bakery Café's eighth outlet opened in Harihar Bhawan, Pulchok. The chain employs 48 special staff who are hearing-impaired and who constitute over 50 percent of the overall dining staff.

Two more for Honda

Honda has two new showrooms in Putalisadak and Budhabari, Teku. These Honda showrooms will provide sales, services and spare parts, and have ample room for more than 30 motorcycles. Syakar Company is the sole authorized dealer of Honda in Nepal.



Winter Peter

Peter England has launched its winter wear range, comprising of sweaters, jackets, caps and mufflers Peter England aims to provide quality clothing at affordable prices. It has more than 25 different styles and over 75 colour combinations.

NEW PRODUCTS

SLIM: Heroplus has introduced 3D Slimming, a gel-based drinking product. The gel comes in a raspberry flavour and is based on all natural plant extracts. 3D Slimming is marketed by Robeus International.



FASTRACK: Nepal International Business has launched the Fastrack range of sunglasses. Fastrack is manufactured by Titan, India's largest watch and accessory brand. The sunglasses provide glare control, distortion free vision and 100 percent UV protection. Fastrack is available in a price range of Rs 1,200-3,000.

Sandalwoodonomics

Nepal has developed some key competencies in smuggling

A trip to Tatopani can really open your eyes. It's a national highway where the laws of the land have been subcontracted to multiple players. The political parties are experimenting outsourcing of taxes, duties and fees. Now, they should also outsource revenue collection, at least the money would go to government coffers.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Across the border in China new buildings are springing up to house a population which has been expanding steadily for the past 20 years, alongside its growing congestion and garbage disposal problems. Rumour has it that a posting to the Chinese side of the border is a much sought-after experience, offering as its reward the potential for great personal economic uplift!

The entire stretch of highway from Dhulikhel to the Chinese border appears to exist for one reason only: to make money from the illicit transit of red sandalwood. The use of Nepali highways to smuggle this valuable timber from the forests of Karnataka to a buoyant market in Tibet has been going on for a while, ever since the Indian government allowed Tibetan refugees to settle in Bylakuppe in Karnataka's Mysore District in the early 1960s. Veerapan, the

notorious dacoit who became a significant global player in the illicit sandalwood trade, was rumoured to be a regular visitor to Kathmandu.

Now the main players in this trade, once an exclusive, secretive club, are upset because the whole extortion racket has come to the public's attention. It is said that a disgruntled member of this elite band blew the whistle when the deal got messy during the tenure of the Maoist minister. Today everyone is involved, from large gangs of young men to the little old lady with her five-year-old grandson, each one of them seeking a piece of the valuable pie.

Groups whose core competencies include extorting money with threats in Kathmandu have also moved in to capitalise on such rich pickings. Transporters claim the cumulative cost of these informal highway tolls can be as much as Rs 10 million per truck by the time it reaches Kodari. And such a thriving business has encouraged similar groups across the border to engage in this nefarious activity too.

The price paid for sandalwood in Tibet therefore depends on the amount extracted en route. Tons of the wood are used for building monasteries, but it is also said that affluent Tibetans use it to make their lavatories. Such is the wealth of these conspicuous spenders that the price, like the



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

cost of a mink coat, matters not one jot.

This business strikes a chord with our very own Nepali rent-seeking psyche: the chance to make serious money for no serious effort. The security forces will not intervene because they do not want to upset their political masters.

However, what would happen if the sandalwood trade were to stop? Then there would be problems. Already, attempts are being made to collect informal tolls from vehicles carrying all kinds of non-sandalwood items.

Once a community gets lucrative, it becomes hard to restrain that greed. More work needs to be done to assess the socio-economic impact of such behaviour. No doubt it is just the job for those parachute consultants, and, since it involves two nations, perhaps the UN could step in. After all, they have a lot of people to spare at the moment. ●

“Wish things moved quicker”



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Odd Hoftun, a hydropower engineer from Norway, came to Nepal in 1958 to build Tansen Hospital and later set up Butwal Technical School. Hoftun was back in Kathmandu recently and talked to *Nepali Times* about lessons learnt in hydropower development in Nepal.

***Nepali Times:* You were here in 1990 when the Jana Andolan I took place. Do you get a sense of déjà vu?**
Odd Hoftun: The things I have seen in Nepal have overwhelmed me. Kathmandu is overcrowded and growing beyond its limits. I was visiting Butwal, and it is also a changed place. Many of these changes are positive. I am an optimist. I don't see things going backwards in Nepal. One does wish, however, that certain things would move quicker.

What lessons has Nepal learnt, or not learnt, about hydropower in the last 17 years?
We have learnt that hydropower development takes time, but also requires a lot of investment. It takes realistic planning, and big projects are simply unrealistic. My philosophy has been to start small and grow over time. Changes in legislation have been very favourable. Some infrastructure has been developed. Opening up to the private sector was unthinkable 20 years ago, but this has now become what many people think of as a solution. The introduction of small hydropower schemes has proved that this it is one way in which hydropower can be developed in Nepal. If you add up all the micro-plants, there is quite a lot of capacity even with them.

There was a time when people used to think only foreign investors and foreign experts could develop hydropower in Nepal. We know that is no longer true because Nepal now has the capability and resources to handle these things. Companies like Himal Hydro, Nepal Hydro and Electric, and Butwal Power Company all started as small companies. Today they have grown and become internationally competitive.

What is still lacking is an understanding from the government on how to work with the private sector. There has to be an element of trust. It seems to me that there's scope for private investment also in power distribution. Whatever the private sector is doing in hydropower, or in power distribution, there's an urgent need for a realistic and predictable government framework. It shouldn't be that one minister says one thing, then another comes in and says something else.

Can politics be blamed?
They say people get the politicians they deserve, so I wouldn't blame them. I can't come here and offer a prescription for how things should be done. I would just like to say that one must be realistic, there must be trust,

and there must be consistency over the years. There was a time when I thought the Melamchi water project should become a public-private enterprise. The government was supportive of the idea, but when outside financing institutions got involved the idea was dropped. I was sorry about that because it could have been a multi-purpose regional development model so that not just the city people would benefit.

Is the Indian market a blessing or a curse?
It can be both. One must look 20 years ahead to make something like that work. The potential is tremendous. In Nepal, big hydropower projects are much talked about, but no one is even thinking about transmission lines across the border or within the country. It is difficult for private parties to run the grid. India is in desperate need of clean energy and Nepal can provide it. That said, just because there is demand in India, doesn't mean Nepal should rush into big projects. In some places the small hydro concept is ideal. Ultimately, however, these small power plants need to be connected to the grid, which is why they are good for rural development. The big projects take a long time to start, and the rush upsets the local economy. Big projects should and must be undertaken, but that is only possible through export to India. However, there has to be a fair agreement and a very high level of trust between the two nations for something like that to work.

How would you advise the Norwegian government about investing in Nepali hydropower?
We have hydropower in Norway that has been developed, while in Nepal it is just starting. This is the time for Norway to invest in Nepal. There are many qualified and experienced Nepali people in the legal, financial and technical fields who can take care of Nepali interests. So Nepal would be an ideal partner for cooperation from the Norwegian side.

"Who's India to decide?"

Pushpa Kamal Dahal answers questions from the public in Pokhara Sajha Sawal, *BBC Nepali Service*, 28 November (Extracts)

Nanu Sri Tamang: The elections were postponed from June to November. But why couldn't you hold elections in November? Explain that to me.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal: The elections were to be held in June. But the cause of postponement in June wasn't properly diagnosed and treated. The same reason caused the deferment of polls again in November.

Sushil Sharma: You would only want your party to take part in the polls if you knew you could win?

Dahal: That's not right. We have never said that. All we are saying is that CA elections shouldn't be like parliamentary or panchayati elections. It comes once in a lifetime, therefore it should represent all groups and people. We aren't concerned about losing or winning.

Lekhnath Adhikari: I would like to ask the chairman, how are you going to ensure that elections are held?

Dahal: Elections are an integral part of the peace process. Without addressing the problems of cantonments, the problems of those affected by the conflict, the elections will be incomplete. Of late, GP Koirala's activities haven't helped the peace process.

Sushil Sharma: A year ago you said you were willing to accept even absolute monarchy if that came from the elections, but now you are trying to end it without elections.

Dahal: If the environment for elections can be created, we don't care who wins the elections. But without duly addressing the problems in the peace process, such an environment cannot be created. We realised that without ending the monarchy, elections can never be held.

Sushil Sharma: You claim that you have popular support, but why are you so scared of the monarchy that's on its death throes?

Dahal: That's not true. The palace has enough money to spoil the elections.

Sushil Sharma: You have always blamed the foreign powers. Are they just scapegoats for your inability to agree?

Dahal: No. We have tried to be flexible as much as we can. But now they are trying to tie our hands and feet, that's why we had to quit the government.

Binod Nepali: Why are you still kidnapping students?

Dahal: The instances of child kidnapping have gone up even in the capital. Our party is against it. We are in favour of punishing those who are guilty and creating an atmosphere for proper education.

Sushil Sharma: Every day we read in papers about YCL excesses.

Dahal: Show me an instance where YCL is involved. Actually, it is trying to help the police to nab the criminals.

Sarangka Ghimire: Your people take students forcibly to Maoists programs. Is this your way of protecting children rights?

Dahal: We don't do that. I will look into the matter, if anyone has been taken forcibly, it's wrong.

Presenter: Why can't you even control your own cadre?

Dahal: That is a fabrication. We have said there are few bad apples within our party. We have been taking action against them and handing them over police. Why are you still asking these questions? There is a conspiracy behind such questions.

Sushil Sharma: These incidents happen and then your statement comes out saying it is against party policy. Now people wonder if denying incidents after orchestrating them is part of your party policy.



Dahal: (Laughs) That's not true.

Deb Narayan Mukhiya: During the war your cadres as per party directives killed innocent people: son in front of father, wife in front of husband. Can they be prosecuted in an international court for crimes against humanity? Are you ready to stand trial?

Dahal: It's wrong to say that our party committed excesses during the conflict. We have taken action against individuals who had been involved in a few incidents. Crime against humanity and other excesses weren't part of our policy. But if there have been any excesses committed we are ready to stand trial in an international court; everyone should be ready for it.

Sushil Sharma: But while drafting the interim constitution, you forced the removal of a clause on prosecution for crimes against humanity.

Dahal: No. I don't know where you got that from. What we said was, there should be a proper investigation before the prosecution.

Shanti Kumari BC: You keep on denying everything. Because of forced donations, the tourists have stopped coming. How long will this continue?

Dahal: We have not been collecting forced donations now. We do accept voluntary donations. It is not true that the tourists have stopped coming. I have been asking hoteliers in Kathmandu and they tell me otherwise.

Karma Gurung: While you were fighting against the government yesterday, the people had to provide you with money. Now that you are in government we are still asked to give money to you.

Dahal: We haven't stopped voluntary donations, but we have disallowed the forced donations and taxation. If anything close to what you've said is happening I will look into the matter and urge my party people to stop it.

Sushil Sharma: What's the reason why you secretly went to the Indian embassy recently?

Dahal: I have been to the Indian embassy many times. But on that particular occasion I was ambushed by the press. It was a conspiracy. I was supposed to meet the Prime Minister at 5:30 pm in his office. At 4:30, the Indian ambassador called me and expressed his desire to meet. Well I thought, it would be lot easier to meet the ambassador at Lainchour and then go to Baluwatar. The ambassador had insisted on holding elections, and I had gone to tell him: who's India to decide?

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How free?

.....
Baburam Bhattarai in *Drishhti*,
23 November

Commenting on the media’s role these days is like stirring a hornet’s nest. For a political figure to do this is to risk his entire political career. That is because in the age of media empires, anyone who crosses the path of the press can’t be saved even by god.

Democracy and press freedom are synonymous. Wherever there is more press freedom, democracy is stronger. Even so, press freedom doesn’t mean a free for all. Threats to press freedom can also come from media monopolies. That is why whereas feudal dictatorships openly suppress the media, monopoly capitalism does so indirectly by controlling ownership. In a society like ours where socialism and lackey capitalism are all mixed up, there

are direct and indirect threats to press freedom. It is becoming clear that the Nepali media is increasingly controlled by lackeys of capitalism. The print and electronic media are in the hands of a handful of big families and capitalists and it is a cruel fact that this monopoly is

strangling the press. This spread of cronyism and control of the media by lackeys of capitalists is a serious challenge to our nascent democracy. Journalists who courageously fought against a feudal dictatorship now need recognize the threat to media freedom from a capitalist monopoly and be vigilant. That working journalists who write about exploitations of the masses should fail to recognize their own exploitation is a conundrum.

No one should doubt the Maoist commitment to press freedom. But press freedom can also be misused by anti-democratic forces. For example, journalists are often used as spies by intelligence agencies.

The FNJ team that investigated the abduction of Prakash Thakuri in Mahendranagar has shown that he was the commander of the militant royalist group, Nepal Janatantrik Morcha. Similarly, Lal Bahadur Chaudhari accused Birendra Sah of repeatedly trying to set fire to his house and raping his daughter, but this didn’t get much attention in the press and needlessly dragged the entire Maoist party into the controversy.

Plug leaks

.....
Editorial in *Kantipur*, 26 November

The annual report of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) estimates that 24.94 percent of the electricity generated in this country is lost to leakage. This means 154 megawatts are being

lost, this is more than the capacity of the Rs 26 billion Kali Gandaki project that generates 144 megawatts. A new hydropower plant to generate the electricity lost would cost Rs 52 billion, if you take the cost of the Middle Marsyangdi as a benchmark.

Loss can be caused by technical factorsm which the NEA argues is impossible to reduce. Better transmissions, transformers and maintenance could reduce this loss. If the NEA reduced system loss by one percent it would mean six megawatts of

electricity could be saved—as much as the capacity of the Puwa Khola which is costing Rs 2.5 billion to build.

In a few days, consumers will be facing frequent blackouts. The NEA says it can’t control pilferage of electricity because of the unrest in the tarai. This is disingenuous. The highest rate of pilferage is not in the tarai, it is in Bhaktapur district. Controlling leakage and pilferage is important because NEA’s fortunes are tied to the country’s economy.



SEVEN PARTIES

 Abin Shrestha in *Samaya*, 29 November

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS



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RURAL ENERGY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (REDP)

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Rural Energy Development Programme (NEP/07/011) is operational in 40 districts of Nepal. The programme supports at all levels- centre, district and community- for the improvement of rural livelihoods and preservation of the environment through the promotion of rural energy systems, primarily the micro hydro system as the entry point. The principal activities include the promotion of community managed micro hydro systems, community mobilization, human resources development, institutionalization, local resources mobilization and policy formulation for the achievement of sustainable development and poverty reduction. UNDP on behalf of the Executing Agency invites applications from energetic and highly motivated Nepali citizens to fill the following positions:

1. Post Title: Rural Energy Development Advisor (REDA) NPPP - 2

General Responsibilities: The REDA will work under the supervision and guidance of the National Programme Manager (NPM). The REDA will be responsible for supporting the Rural Energy System Development Team in achieving the outputs as appropriate and to facilitating the flow of technical advisory, innovative experiences, training and other inputs to the districts.

Duty Station: Kathmandu, with frequent visit to the districts.

Qualifications: The candidate must possess a Master's degree in sustainable energy or relevant subject with a bachelor's degree in engineering and with at least 5 years' experience. Preference will be given to candidate with practical experience in Rural Energy Systems and development works. The incumbent must possess research, report writing and computer skills. The candidate must have practical experience of implementing the participatory development programmes at the local level. Previous working experience with bi-lateral and/or multi-lateral development agencies will be an added advantage. Ability in English writing is required.

Duration: Initially for one year. Service contract issued annually, if extended based on performance appraisal.

2. Post Title: Rural Energy Advisor (REA): (Mechanical/ Electrical Engineering) NPPP - 2

General Responsibilities: The REA will work under the supervision and guidance of the NPM. The REA will be assigned to a development region. However, s/he will have to complement a group of engineers with their specialization based on her/his technical expertise (Mechanical/ Electrical Engineering). REA is responsible for ensuring achievement of all the outputs related to the installation and operation of rural energy systems, particularly the community managed micro hydro systems in the districts under the assigned development region.

Duty Station: Katmandu, with frequent visit to the districts.

Qualifications: The candidate must have a Master's degree in Mechanical/ Electrical Engineering or Agricultural Engineering. The incumbent with Master's degree shall have at least 5 years' practical experience of working in the energy sector in Nepal. Likewise, the incumbent with Bachelor's degree shall have at least 8 years' practical experience of working in the energy sector in Nepal. A REA must have knowledge of all the major sectoral issues and possess analytical skills in planning and management of energy development. The REA must be computer literate, trainer and facilitator. Proven abilities in English writing is required. Preference will be given to candidates who have working experience with bi-lateral and/or multi-lateral development agencies with the VDCs, DDCs and/or line agencies and practical experiences in designing, manufacturing of electro mechanical component of micro & mini hydro.

Duration: Initially for one year. Service contract issued annually, if extended based on performance appraisal.

3. Post Title: Monitoring and Communication Officer (MCO) NPPP - 1

General Responsibilities: The MCO will work under the direct supervision and guidance of the NPM. The incumbent will be mainly responsible for supporting the NPM in designing and implementing systematic documentation and dissemination of information in achieving the programme outputs as appropriate and for facilitating the timely monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the progress, achievements and outcomes from the implementation of the programme activities at all levels.

Duty Station: Kathmandu, with frequent visit to the districts.

Qualifications: The candidate must possess a Bachelor's degree with 5 years of working experience or preferably Master's degree in economics, sociology or related subject with communication or journalism. The candidate must have minimum of 3 years of working experience in Monitoring and communication on the rural development. The MCO must have practical experience on the participatory development programmes at the local level. Priority will be given to candidates with working experiences with bi-lateral and/or multi-lateral development agencies. Ability to write both Nepali and English will be required.

Duration: Initially for one year. Service contract issued annually, if extended based on performance appraisal.

4. Post Title: Livelihoods Promotion Advisor (LPA) NPPP - 2

General Responsibilities: The LPA will work under the direct supervision and guidance of the NPM. The incumbent will be mainly responsible for supporting the NPM in formulating strategies for the effective promotion of livelihoods and environment development activities in achieving the programme outputs as appropriate and for facilitating the flow of technical advisory, innovative experiences, training and other inputs to the districts.

Duty Station: Kathmandu, with regular travel to districts.

Qualifications: The candidate must possess a Master's degree in business administration, Sociology or other related equivalent subjects. The candidate should have at least 5 years of working experience in livelihoods promotion in rural areas. The LPA must possess research, report writing and computer skills. The candidate must have practical experience of implementing the participatory development programmes at the local level. Priority will be given to candidates with working experiences related to rural energy sector development and/or environment management. Previous working experience with bi-lateral and/or multi-lateral development agencies will be an added advantage. Ability in English writing is required.

Duration: Initially for six months. Extension will be done, if needed.

5. Post Title: Gender and Social Inclusion Advisor (GSIA) NPPP - 1

General Responsibilities: The GSIA will work under the supervision of LPA and overall guidance of the NPM. The incumbent will be responsible for supporting the LPA in formulating strategies for the effective participation of intended beneficiaries especially the poor, women, and socially excluded group in project activities for achieving the outputs as appropriate and to facilitating the flow of technical advisory, innovative experiences, training and other inputs to the districts.

Duty Station: Kathmandu, with regular travel to districts.

Qualifications: The candidate must possess a Bachelors degree on social science or related subject with 5 years of working experience or preferably Master's degree with 3 years' of working experience in the rural development sector. Preference will be given to candidate with working experience in rural energy and/or environment and gender/social inclusion related development works. The incumbent must possess research, report writing and computer skills. The candidate must have practical experience of implementing the participatory development programmes at the local level. Previous working experience with bi-lateral and/or multi-lateral development agencies will be an added advantage. Ability in English writing is required.

Duration: Initially for six months. Extension will be done, if needed.

6. Post Title: Project Assistant (PA) SU - 5

General Responsibilities: The PA will support NPM and all thematic teams in performing their duties. Specifically, s/he will maintain records of activities or works to be done by all teams and NPM, analyze and advise various teams on common issues, facilitate the teams to understand each others synergistic contribution to achieve the common goal of the REDP, assist the Communication officer in collecting lessons and managing knowledge, undertake field visits together with MEO and other team members and facilitate their functions, carry out additional support as requested by the NPM and as required to make this programme a success.

Duty Station: Kathmandu, with regular travel to districts.

Qualifications: The PA shall have a Bachelor's degree in development fields with work experience of at least 3 years. Proven abilities in analyzing issues, English writing and computer skills are required. Previous experience in the UNDP and /or the World Bank funded programmes in similar capacity will be an added advantage.

Duration: Initially for one year. Service contract issued annually, if extended based on performance appraisal.

Applications should be submitted no later than 17 December 2007 by email, to:
hrmu2.np@undp.org by stating the position applied for in the "Subject" line or in a sealed envelope to
UNDP Operations Division, (Ref: REDP/RC), P.O. Box 107, Kathmandu, Nepal
(Only Applicants who are short-listed will be contacted)

Applicants must submit the updated standard UN Personal History Form available from
the UN House Reception or UNDP Programme Office Nepalgunj (PON) and Biratnagar
or the UNDP webpage <http://www.undp.org.np/vacancy.htm>

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LINE WOLF NIELSEN
in CHITWAN

Elephants understand up to 40 different commands. But one thing you can't order them to do is to respect you. To win their trust, you must prove yourself worthy. And that means getting up at 4AM to clean the stables and feed them a breakfast of freshly cut grass.

"The elephant does not care for high rank or seniority," Ram Singh Kumar explains with a smile. "It needs to see that you are willing to assist and nurse it-and bring out the dung for at least three weeks."

Kumar has 14 years of experience working with elephants. As senior trainer or mahout at Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge in Chitwan he is responsible for the elephants' health and well-being.

"It's easy to see if the elephant has a sore stomach because it swells. It's my job to prevent it from swelling in the first place,

SWIMMING TRUNK: Elephants were taken out by their mahouts for a leisurely morning bath on the Rapti River in Chitwan last week before their polo game.



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LINE WOLF NIELSEN

Ram Singh Kumar knows what it takes to keep an elephant happy and healthy

and we learn from the elephant itself how to treat illnesses,” he says. “The elephant knows what to eat in order to get better, so if an elephant looks unwell we let it wander and send a mahout after it to see what of nature’s medicine it eats.” A certain type of black berry is the cure for stomach aches.

The previous week, Kumar was busy caring for the 17 elephants taking part in the annual Nepal Elephant Polo Tournament. Half of them belong to the Nepal National Parks and half belong to Tiger Tops Jungle

Lodge. They have been trained and cared for by skilled mahouts who often will stay with an elephant for many years. Kumar himself lives just opposite the elephant stables and can be with his elephants within a few moments if necessary.

His wife and three sons live in a village about an hour away and he gets to see them six days a month. Elephant polo has strict rules to protect the animals from harsh treatment by their drivers. The games end in the early afternoon so the elephants won’t get too tired and hot. No elephant

is allowed to play two consecutive games. They have sugarcane snacks and water at half-time and then have an hour to rest.

Kumar says the elephants enjoy the break in routine and social opportunities that the polo offers them. For an elephant, much more important than food is the time off they can spend with friends. Elephants make friends much like humans-by spending time together, eating together, playing and trumpeting together. If two elephants don’t get along, the mahouts take great

care to ensure they have time together to work things out. Fighting in an elephant stable is best avoided, so there is usually just one male elephant in residence.

At Tiger Tops, the current incumbent is 27-year-old Shumsher Gaj, who sports long tusks and is reckoned to be the largest domesticated elephant in South Asia. In the polo tournament he had the important job of carrying the umpire.

For Kumar, the most astonishing thing about elephants is their ability to protect the mahout from danger. If he falls off, the elephant will try to catch him with its trunk. And it will stand over him to protect him from dangers such as an attacking tiger. He has also noticed how the elephant can sense its surroundings and walk in a way that protects its driver from low-hanging branches, even in the dark. ●



PRAKASH MATHEMA/AFP

World Elephant Polo 2007

A total of 12 teams competed in this year’s World Elephant Polo Association Tournament in Nepal. The Chopard Team from Hong Kong won the final match against Chivas Regal Scotland. Three Nepali-based teams took part: National Parks, the British Gurkas and the Tiger Tops Tuskers. The World Elephant Polo Association (WEPA) was founded in 1982 and the tournament has been played annually in Nepal for the past 26 years.

www.elephantpolo.com



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PICS GOPAL DAHAL

MAKING DO: (l-r) Asha Shrestha tries to pick up the pieces of her shattered life near her tent at Jabdi. Bhuban Singh Magar was beaten unconscious and his clothes set on fire. Seventh-grader Anita Rai has stopped going to school for a year because of harassment. Now she has fled with her family.

“Wasn’t the war supposed to be over?”

If Kathmandu doesn’t act, the madhes refugee crisis can spread

GOPAL DAHAL IN SUNSARI

This is where the Kosi bursts out of the mountains into the plains, and its blue waters reflect the scenic mountains to the north. But the scenery is lost on the 150 people who have been living in makeshift tents by the banks of the river for the past week. They

aren’t victims of a natural disaster, but have fled for their lives after threats from one of the militant groups active in the Eastern tarai. The displaced are all from the village of Haripur, 30km to the south bordering the Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, who collected all their belongings and fled their village on 24 November. Besides

the 30 families here in Sunsari’s Jabdi, Haripur refugees have also fled to Morang and Jhapa. “They were masked and carried guns, they hit me on the chest with the back of a pistol,” recalls 20-year-old Asha Shrestha, who was dragged out of her house. Her husband, Som Bahadur was also roughed up and their mobiles taken.

Sixty-four year old Bhuban Singh Magar was attacked the previous day by five armed men in masks. They kicked him and set fire to his clothes and said if he didn’t give them Rs 10,000 within three days they’d kill him. They took away all his chicken, a radio and watch. The Shrestha and Magar families are among hundreds who fled. They were not poor, many had two to four hectares of fertile land. Magar had his entire ripening paddy crop destroyed, and he has heard the attackers have sowed dal on his land.

But the threats are not new. Ever since the Armed Police Force killed a Madhesi tiger militant in July and the group retaliated by killing Haripur village elder Tek Bahadur Kunwar, the villagers have been terrorised by the militants. It is clear that the extremists are using the madhesi cause to rob and loot, and that in essence this is all about land. “I had three hectares of rice—they destroyed it all, I’m now a beggar,” says Om Bahadur Shrestha who owned three hectares. When *Nepali Times* interviewed them on Wednesday, the families were sitting on the sun drying their damp clothes and looking completely lost. “We

tried to stay for as long we could since it was our home. But we just couldn’t take the torture anymore, we fled for our lives,” says Harka Bahadur Rai. Most refugees say the gunmen are few and can be easily identified. What puzzles them is why they were allowed to terrorise them for so long using the madhes issue as an excuse. So far, the Red Cross and the local branch of the FNCCI has helped with tents and rice, but most families go to bed hungry every night. The cold is taking its toll on the 30 children who are here, many have lung infections and cough a lot.

The children had stopped going to school last year, while still in Haripur because they were harassed by the Tigers. “They used to abuse us and hit us when we went to school, so we just stopped going to class,” says seventh grader Anita Rai. Her father Harka Rai says the children just refused to go to school. “By now they have forgotten what they learnt.” In Jabdi, the children help with foraging for food and firewood. Sunsari CDO Chrianjibi Adhikari has promised shelter, and so has the local Maoist commander Tika Rai. But so far, the refugees are still in tents. Chitra Bahadur Karki is a father of three, and says simply: “Wasn’t the war supposed to be over?”

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Change in Rolpa

The Maoist heartland should be a model district for the Maoists



RAMESWOR BOHARA

RAMESWOR BOHARA
in ROLPA

Nepal's Maoist war started 11 years ago when the Maoists attacked Rolpa's Holeri police station on 13 February 1996. It has been two years since the war ended and the Maoists have entered mainstream politics and even the governing alliance. But all over the country, Maoist cadres openly carry weapons, collect donations by force, beat and threaten people. Although the rest of the country is complaining about the unreformed behaviour of the Maoists, here in their heartland the former armed rebels are on a public relations drive. Political relations with other parties have improved. Local altercations have started to be resolved peacefully. Maoists have begun to abide by the laws of the state and to seek out the police when problems occur. If cadres do something illegal, swift action is taken by the leadership. Rolpa's residents, observing these

changes, have started to feel more hopeful and secure, and it is because of this that the Maoists are more popular here than anywhere else. In fact, Rolpa should be a model district for the Maoists. "Rolpa has changed," says NC chairman Krishna Bahadur Dharti. "Political ties are strengthening and development work have started jointly, all the way from the district headquarters to the villages." Previously, Nepalis working overseas were a steady source of income for the Maoists. When these people came home, they had to pay revolutionary tax. They were also required to make a deposit in the self-styled People Power Bank. Those who refused were often abducted. Last May, irate locals in Bhawang seized a Maoist known as Comrade Sagarmatha, accused him of extortion and demanded that all his expenditures be made transparent and their deposits returned. The situation escalated and they beat up

Sagarmatha. To contain the situation, the local Maoists, police and others held a meeting. Maoist in-charge Dipendra Pun (Comrade Sijal) admitted his cadre had made a mistake, publicly apologised and offered compensation of Rs 30,000 to the victims. For the first time, not just in Rolpa but in all of Nepal, the Maoists had admitted they had made a mistake and actually paid compensation. "Besides the usual small fracas, nothing major has happened since then," says Rolpa police chief Basanta Lama. "If the cadres make any mistake, the Maoist leadership immediately takes action. That has made it very easy for us." A year ago, Rolpa was still a war zone despite the ceasefire. Even though the Maoists no longer carried guns, residents were no less frightened. But now former Maoist ministers attend functions hosted by other parties, proclaiming "it is time to work together".

Hari Prasad Dharti of the UML confirms the Maoists have improved, and even Maoist district secretary Resham Pun agrees. "Yesterday, we were at loggerheads with the other parties. Now, there is that much more friendship," says Pun. The Maoists have even helped to rebuild the police station they themselves destroyed during the war. In the past, they had said all police matters would be handled by the YCL, but recently when a cadre was beaten up in Khungri the Maoists asked the police to help. "The same Maoists who would use any small mistake by the police to create a major fight are now working alongside us," says Lama. The word has spread to the internally displaced from Rolpa. On 5 November, 105 displaced families of 24 Rolpa villages returned home. Secretary Pun was heard directing his cadre on the phone: "Let there be no use of force from us. Even if the displaced express anger and violence, do not retaliate. If they don't have food or shelter in their homes, then help them. If violence could solve everything, then we would have had our government a long time ago." When the war ended, Rolpa was entirely in Maoist hands. They blockaded the security forces to starve them out. But while supplies were airlifted in for the security forces, locals suffered. Rolpa's district capital of Libang was surrounded by three layers of barbed wire. A daily curfew started at five o'clock. Today, Libang is bustling till late at night and citizens who have lived in the shadow of fear now walk around with smiles on their faces. Rolpa's Maoists have shown they are different from the Maoists of Bara, who killed a journalist, or the YCL in Kathmandu who beat up doctors. Says Maoist secretary Pun: "National politics have their own place. It is up to us to take positive steps in our own district." Now, if only the rest of his comrades followed suit. ●

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The world's worst airports

Hate flying? You're not alone. But often, it's not the crowded, overly air-conditioned airplanes themselves that are the problem. Just getting on and off the plane is the real nightmare. Foreign Policy magazine looks at five airports around the world that make travelling hell. To which we add our own Tribhuban International.

Léopold Sédar Senghor International Airport, Dakar

First-hand account: 'There is only squalor, an unnerving sense of confinement, and to some extent danger.' Patrick Smith, Salon.com



Why it's so bad: Because it's standing room only. As a regional hub, an ordeal at Senghor is often unavoidable for travelers to West Africa. Once you're in the terminal, don't plan on relaxing: There are no seats, and guards will advise you to stop loitering if you hang around in one spot too long. Immigration lines can take up to three hours. And in any event, it's best to keep moving since you can expect to be surrounded by vendors selling counterfeit goods and unofficial 'porters' who will pressure you into hiring their services if you happen to come to a standstill. But the good news is that help may be on the way. The Senegalese government has begun construction on a new airport set to open in 2010. No word yet on whether the new terminal will actually have chairs.

Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi

First-hand account: "Of all the regional capital airports this one takes the cake. Bring the bug spray." - Anonymous commenter, The Budget Traveller's Guide to Sleeping in Airports

Why it's so bad: Because it's sheer chaos. The IT boomtowns of Hyderabad and Bangalore have built shiny new airports in recent years, but old standbys like New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport have failed to benefit from India's economic expansion. Visitors report



aggressive panhandlers, filthy bathrooms where attendants charge for toilet paper, and used syringes on the terminal floor. Things have hopefully gotten a little safer since a young girl died on a malfunctioning escalator and an Australian tourist was murdered by a taxi driver leaving IGIA in 2004. But there's still a danger of things going slightly awry: in 2005, an act of sabotage in an ongoing feud between cable television providers led to a pornographic film appearing on the airport's television monitors. Let's just hope it provided a much-needed respite from CNN International.

Mineralnye Vody Airport, Russia

First-hand account: "Mineralnye Vody airport is a lower circle of hell." The Economist



Why it's so bad: Because nobody told Mineralnye Vody that the Soviet Union is no more. In a war-torn region of the Caucasus not far from the Chechen border, the airport remains a stubborn throwback, right down to the large map of the Soviet Union that hangs in the departure hall. The airport seems to have earned a special place in the hearts of Russia's foreign journalists, including the BBC's Steve Rosenberg, who wrote in 2005, 'Rather worryingly there's a man selling Caucasian swords and daggers in the departure lounge and opposite him, over on the wall, is a list of local criminals wanted for murder.'

Baghdad International Airport

First-hand account: "Before jumping out of your seat to complain to the pilot,

consider the good news: You've just avoided being shot down by a missile."

Alan T. Duffin, Air & Space magazine

Why it's so bad: Because it's in a war zone. The Baghdad International experience begins before you even touch the runway. That's when you're treated to the stomach-churning effects of a landing technique known as the corkscrew, used to avoid projectiles like the shoulder-fired missile that took down a DHL Airbus cargo plane in November 2003. The corkscrew involves an abrupt roll during final approach that twists into a spiraling, straight-down descent until the plane flattens out and lands at what feels like the last possible



moment before crash landing. The terminal is itself not that bad, having been refurbished after the war by USAID. But after leaving the airport, visitors have to brave the infamous "highway of death" between the airport and downtown Baghdad.

Charles de Gaulle International Airport

First-hand account: 'Charles de Gaulle is a disgrace. It's like a third-world airport.' Michel-Yves Labbé, president of French travel company Directours



Why it's so bad: Because a city this great with an airport this bad is just plain embarrassing. Charles de Gaulle's most recent attempt at modernisation, the construction of futuristic terminal 2E led to tragedy when its roof collapsed in 2004, killing four people. In June, President Nicolas Sarkozy opened a new facility capable of handling up to six Airbus superjumbos at one time, or about 8.5 million passengers per year. Normally, such a move would be welcome, but CDG already boasts eight terminals and handled 57 million passengers in 2006. Making the airport bigger only makes the problem worse.

Tribhuban International Airport, Kathmandu

First-hand account: 'Long queues to pay your departure tax, long queues to check in, enormous security queues. One of my group was asked for baksheesh at the security check to let her take toiletries on board. Uncomfortable seats and very smelly toilets. Fuzzy announcements so everyone was asking everyone else. Nepal is lovely but Kathmandu airport is hard work.' Melanie Ling in www.airlinequality.com

Why it's so bad: Where do we start? Corruption in Nepal may be bad, but Kathmandu airport is where it is rampant. It's a den of thieves. At security check, there is a sign in Japanese warning tourists to beware of guards asking for bribes. Handbags are searched after being scanned, and this is where security personnel extract money from passengers. Immigration is a minefield for Nepali passengers, mainly women, who are harassed until they pay up. The airport was designed for traffic 20 years ago and is hopelessly overcrowded. There is a parking problem and planes have to circle for hours waiting for a slot. X-ray machines and baggage carousels are often out of order and if you land at night it's dark and dingy because half the lights in the terminal don't work. And don't get us going about the dilapidated airport taxis and the touts outside. NTB should forget about promoting Nepal abroad and clean up the airport first.



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Mountain movies

Hot on the heels of Film South Asia comes the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (Kimff). Now in its fifth year, the festival will be showing 52 films from 20 countries, with 26 of them in competition for the Kimff trophy.

The festival will focus on the devastating effects of global warming on the environment, with features on conflict, culture, climbing, wildlife, globalisation, gender and lifestyle. An international jury chaired by Danish director Per Fly will select the top three films, and one film will receive

For Those About to Rock, 8 December, 3.15 PM, Rastriya Sabha Griha
Nepali amateur rock bands vie for a spot in a competitive rock competition. This film follows the energetic teenagers and their love and passion for the music they play. A reflection on young urban Nepalis, the film also pictures the ethics of the music scene and its place in Nepali society.

Afghan Muscles, 8 December, 5.15 PM, Rastriya Sabha Griha
Afghan men have discovered the art of bodybuilding. This documentary follows bodybuilder

Rain in a Dry Land, 10 December, 5.45 PM, Nepal Tourism Board
Rain in a Dry Land follows two families in their transition from Somali refugees to underclass Americans. The documentary sheds light on a little-known stratum of American society as well as on the plight of the African emigrant.

Siachen: A War for Ice, 10 December, 4.30 PM, Nepal Tourism Board
A documentary about the soldiers involved in the world's highest and most absurd war—a 20-year conflict for control over a few hundred square kilometres



an award based on audience voting.

During the festival, Fly will conduct a film making workshop and Kunda Dixit will test audiences in a 'Know Your Himal' quiz. There will also be a photo competition on peace-building and reconciliation in Nepal, and lectures and slideshows about the effects of global warming on the Himalayas and Nepal's wildlife.

Kimff is organised by the Himal Association and will take place on 7-11 December at the Rastriya Sabha Griha and the Nepal Tourism Board.

Hamid's heroic struggle to gather food and proteins in an effort to win the championship and create a better life for himself.

Blowing Up Paradise, 8 December, 5.15 PM, Nepal Tourism Board
For 30 years, the idyllic Moruroa atoll in French Polynesia was used as a site for France's nuclear tests. *Blowing Up Paradise* uses archival footage to chronicle France's explosion of various nuclear devices, in violation of the international test ban treaty, from the first test in 1966 to the last in 1996.

of glacier and frozen rock at the extreme northern end of the Indian-Pakistani border.

Angnima Sherpa: The Icefall Doctor, 11 December, 11AM, Nepal Tourism Board
This documentary explores the life of Angnima Sherpa, who has been working below the Khumbu Icefall since 1975, providing medical services to mountaineers seeking to climb Everest from the Nepali side. As always, Angnima and his team are the first to reach base camp each season and the last to leave.

Not just mountains this year Kimff 2007

There seems to be some confusion about the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival. Why is the so-called 'mountain' film festival not ostensibly simply about mountains? And there is the additional accusation that the desire to celebrate mountains is merely a twisted indication of our North-centric national consciousness, something that cannot be taken lightly in this period of Southern dissent.

If you saw the films for this year's edition of KIMFF, though, you would realise that mountains are just a pretext to explore human diversity—a diversity that is characterised by the multiple ways in which humans confront adversity and relate to their world.

In Sasha Snow's *Conflict Tiger*, shrinking habitats for tigers in eastern Russia and the desperate post-Soviet human economy have forced these two predators into a deadly competition. In this snow-covered Siberian landscape, unwelcome contacts between the beasts and the locals have increasingly resulted in gory, ill-fated circumstances. The film revolves around the case of one notorious man-eater. Snow uses vivid re-enactments, cautionary words of the locals and raw footage taken by tiger expert Juri Trush to great effect. With the instincts of a horror film, this documentary is perfectly suited to these ecologically catastrophic times. The oft-simplified debates of conservation and animal rights get a more nuanced treatment here.

Terror of another nature haunts *Blowing up Paradise*, a BBC-produced film by Ben Lewis about the French nuclear testing in the Polynesian territories, particularly Moruroa. In the 1960s, an irrepressible desire for nuclear fame possessed France and compelled its authorities into an over-stretched flirtation with radioactivity. Starting from there, the director smartly probes the long history of France's relationship to a colonial possession that it converted into a militarised zone, the peculiar transformation of the archipelago into a nuclear economy, and subsequently the stunted but vital anti-nuclear independence movement of the region. The documentary is a must-see for its absurdly beautiful footage of the nuclear tests taken from maniacal proximity, as well as those scenes of cringe-inducing bursts of activism that played no small role in France's belated decision to end testing.

In a formula that is awfully familiar in the South Asian context, Manel Mayol's *Switch Off* documents the displacement and the fiery indignation of the Mapuche people whose land is flooded by the Spanish corporation Endesa in its bid to build a dam in Chile. This indigenous community has been forced to move higher up into the

Andes with insufficient recompense and unfulfilled promises of free electricity. The struggle against Chilean laws and bureaucracy blends provocatively with the resistance to faceless global capitalism, not to mention global warming (as Endesa is a major contributor of greenhouse gases).

Afghan Muscles, by Danish filmmaker Andreas M Dalsgaard, does not deal will anything as desperate, although the characters in the documentary would probably disagree. Living in an economically strangled nation, Hamid and Noor dream of fame and money through the sport of competitive bodybuilding. They struggle to have their nutritional requirements met and scrape together the cost of participating in the international Mr Asia contest. In the context of a prolonged conflict, these ambitions may seem trivial. But to these Afghan men, such bodybuilding exploits come to symbolise national strength.

The full schedule of 52 films at KIMFF starting next Friday will, like the films above, present diverse stories of human experience and engagement with space. KIMFF's compendium of themes and film genres is generally unmatched in Nepal. ●

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Kam reds

Two quotes of the week. The first one from **Comrade God** (alias Deb Gurung) who, when asked when YCL extortion will stop, replied: "We're only doing what the other parties have always been doing." Second quote from **Comrade Awesome** (aka Pushpa Kamal Dahal) in Pokhara: "We have disallowed forced donations. If it is happening I will look into the matter and urge my party people to stop it."



Here are some more nuggets from The Fierce One over the years: "We are willing to accept the monarchy if the people vote for it." (2006) "We want to get rid of the monarchy before elections." (2007) "We are even ready to accept restoration of the dissolved House of Representatives if the seven parties say so." (Feb 2006) "We don't believe in a parliamentary system." (Last week) "We revolutionaries believe in collective leadership, we don't like the trappings of power." (2006) "I will be president in two years' time." (2006)



Ever wondered how our seven-party leaders spent the last ten days during which they were supposed to come up with a consensus before the winter session of the interim parliament reconvenes? They were too busy dealing with the YCL who beat up the Nobel doctors in which Girjau's daughter and cousin were on opposite sides of the dispute. The Maoists got dragged into it, and **Comrade Ananta** packed the docs off to Kami Danda for a good thrashing. When the fhit hit the san, **Comrade Laldhoj** got **Comrade Sagar** to be the fall guy so Ananta could get off the hook and then got the Nobel promoter to go live on Kantipur TV to deny he ever went to the YCL to ask for help. These were the grave matters of state that were being discussed at the top secret meetings in Baluwatar, and you thought they were trying to iron out their differences on electoral procedures and republic. Ha. It's not the seven party disunity that intrigues the Ass so much as the back-stabbing between First Daughter and First Cousin. The old man seems happy to use the two flesh-and-bloods for his two-track strategy to deal with everyone from the Indians to the Maoists. **Comrade Shekhar** got an earful in Delhi about GP's obduracy and brought this message home to Uncle. But the old fox is sitting tight.



Now that Awesome has shown what an ageist he is by telling Girjau he is too old, Makunay just can't wait to be PM and is hopping up and down in anticipation. If Awesome hands him Baluwatar on a platter Makunay won't refuse. That will be the end of the UML. Poor Oliji has been trying to warn his party not to fall into the Maoist trap but to no avail. Finally it becomes clear why the Maoists resigned from government: with **Comrade Sitaula** and **Comrade Bamdeb** they have both bases covered.



The six parties just don't get it. The Maoists' main complaint is that the parties have stolen their slogans. We fought for a constituent assembly election, now everyone wants one, they say. We wanted a republic, now everyone wants to abolish the monarchy. The Maoists need to show they are different, so the UML's slogans can't sound more radical than theirs. If they want to end the deadlock, the six parties should respect the Maoists' intellectual property right on the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.



It isn't just **Comrade Ass**, it seems, who found Jan Erik Wilhelmson's salute from the podium and the six-gun salute at Shaktikhor a bit incongruous. It raised not a few diplo eyebrows, too. Hey, aren't those guns supposed to be inside the containers? So **Comrade Jan Erik** inspects the guard of honour and a six gun salute in the same week that the new Maoist demand of integration of the PLA with the NA comes up and just as UNMIN says it wants to be involved in SSR post-elections.



Two more **Comrade Fearsome** quotes from last week. "We may go back to the jungle." (Thursday in Chitwan). "We will not abandon seven party unity." (Friday in Pokhara).

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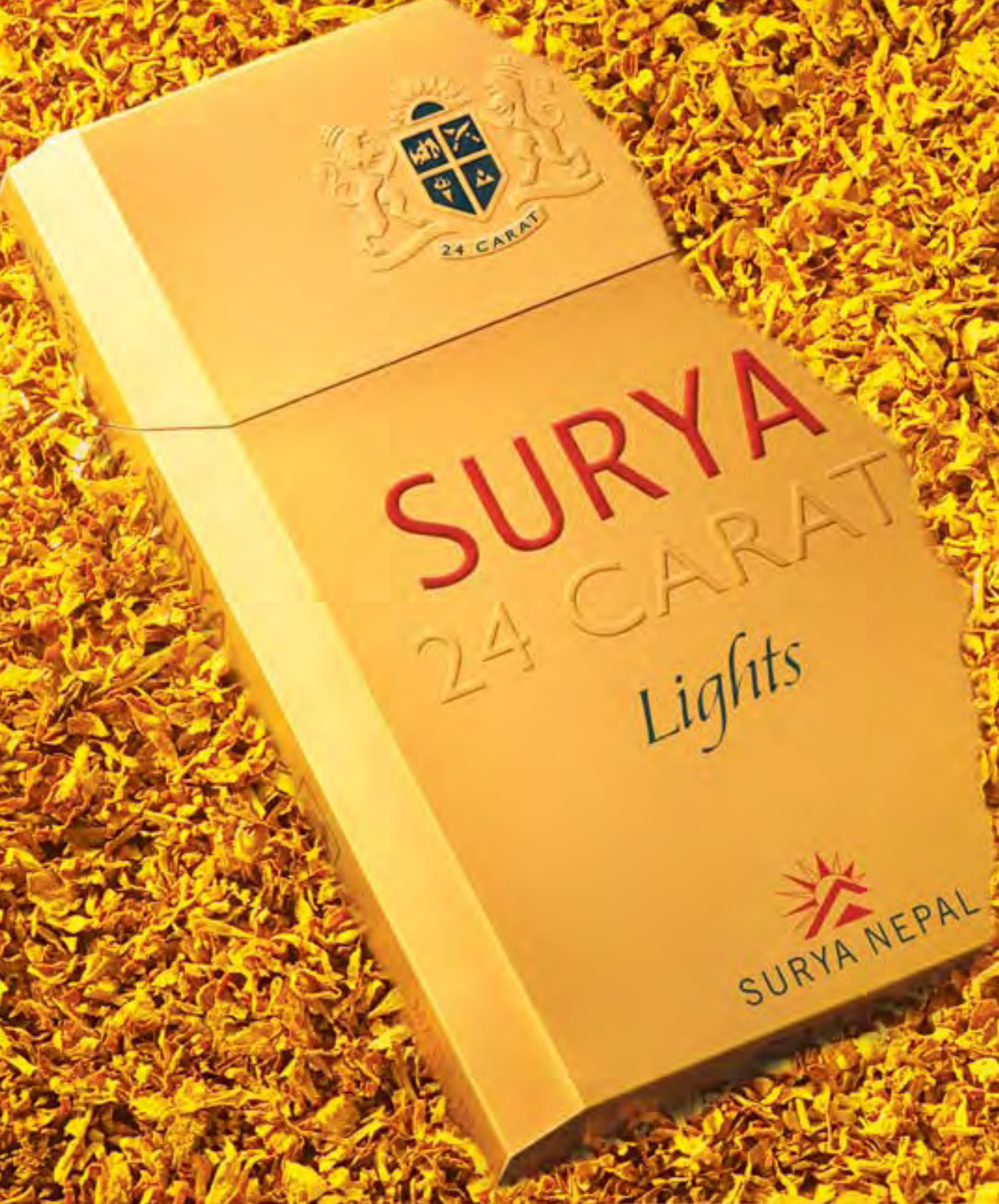
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