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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 419

Q. How would you characterise the prime minister's India's visit?

Total votes: 4,895

Very successful: 12.8%
Successful: 19.7%
Nothing Special: 51.8%
Failure: 15.8%

Weekly Internet Poll # 420. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Was the finance minister right to cut the budget for festivals?

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PRASHANT JHA

Awesome in America

KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA
in NEW YORK

Prime Minister Dahal hits the ground running

After arriving here on Tuesday, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal hadn't a moment free until his first full Nepali meal at the residence of Nepal's UN ambassador, Madhu Raman Acharya.

An NYPD patrol car was parked on the kerb, there were more black cars across the street and more security on the hallway outside Acharya's Upper East Side apartment at the Wednesday lunch. Nepal's ambassador to Washington, Suresh Chalise was also present.

The prime minister looked pleased and calm, if a little dazed, as he took a helping of cake for dessert. Speaking earlier at the Asia Society—a talk moderated by the former deputy chief of

UNMIN, Tamarat Samuel—Dahal emphasised the "economic revolution" that he said could consolidate peace in Nepal.

The predominantly non-Nepali audience seemed impressed with the former guerrilla's direct answers to questions. Responding to skeptics in the audience about his commitment to parliamentary democracy, Dahal said: "We are in a democratic phase and we are going to apply the democratic form of government, this is quite clear."

On Wednesday evening, Dahal attended a reception hosted by the Nepal mission at Sunnyside in Queens.

Representatives of overseas Nepali organisations from Arizona and Canada are in New York to attend Dahal's talk at the New School's India China Institute on Friday and another one in Astoria, Queens, on Saturday.

Before his talk at the New School, Dahal

will attend an invitation-only round table and a private dinner hosted by the India China Institute which will be attended by Under-Secretary General of the UN, Angela Kane, the former Norwegian Minister for International Development, Hilde Johnson, UNMIN's Ian Martin and former Assistant Secretary-General of the UN, Kul Chandra Gautam.

"This is an opportunity for the prime minister to meet scholars and experts including Nepali community leaders, and to get a sense of how deeply people care about Nepal," said Ashok Gurung, senior director of the India China Institute.

On Monday evening Dahal attended a reception hosted by US President George Bush where the two shook hands and spoke briefly. Later, he met US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavarov and

officials from Cuba, Mongolia and Qatar.

He hasn't met Ban Ki Moon yet, but his press office said a meeting may take place on Saturday. "Obviously Nepal is an important country for us and we have a major office set up there," a UN spokesperson said.

EDITORIAL

Powering growth p2

Nepal's Foreign Secretary Gyan Chandra Acharya told *Nepali Times*: "This is the first major international platform for Nepal since the changes and I think it's been successful in allowing us to explain our situation and garner their interest and support."

Dahal's address to the UN General Assembly is slated for Friday morning and he will raise the problems of Least Developed Countries, development and trade and Nepal's contribution to UN peacekeeping. ●

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POWERING GROWTH

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Sadly, Nepali officials still don't seem to get it. If India's interest is really 'augmented flow', what is our negotiation strategy? The prime minister goes to India and all he talks about is energy. The third Power Summit organised this week in Kathmandu by the Independent Power Producers Association of Nepal and the Power Trading Corporation of India focuses on electricity.

Calculating an annual compensation package to Nepal for submerged valleys and putting a cost on regulated flow is fraught with political and technical complications. The first test cases will be West Seti and Naumure, the two reservoir projects that are in the immediate pipeline. Kathmandu is so convinced it'll get a raw deal on regulated rivers, it just doesn't dare agree to anything.

However, we shouldn't wait around twiddling our thumbs just because we are convinced the Indians are going to arm-twist us. First, we must work out a formula to calculate annual reparations for submergence and a tariff on regulated flow. Second, we shouldn't let delays on water negotiations set back energy projects. Third, look for alternatives to high dams like Kosi with smaller inter-basin transfers like the Kamala Diversion.

The Maoist-led government wants to "think big" and increase present generating capacity from 600MW to 10,000MW in 10 years. This will cost Rs 1.4 trillion. There's no harm in dreaming, but even if we manage to generate that amount of electricity by 2018, our domestic demand will have risen to 3,000MW and India's generation capacity will be 300,000MW. Our exports will make up only two per cent of India's electricity needs in 10 years, so they can do quite well without our power. We need it much more here.

Nepal needs to generate more electricity to meet rising domestic demand and then sell the surplus to balance our Rs150 billion annual trade deficit with India. The most prudent course of action for us therefore is to fast-track hydroenergy projects by turning Nepal into an investment-friendly destination.

For this, the new government must get serious and streamline licensing, respect the sanctity of contracts and temper militant labour. If that isn't done, forget about 10,000MW in 10 years.

Secularism in a diverse state

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The protests over the weekend against the government slashing funds for 'cultural activities' irritated many. Some felt the government was foolish in provoking the local community and insensitive for not respecting public sentiments.



PLAIN SPEAKING
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Nepal became secular without adequate public discussion and debate on what it meant. Ethnic groups legitimately felt alienated by the Hindu character of the state. Liberal activists in Kathmandu championed the cause, and the Maoists made it a powerful political slogan. Kathmandu's NGOs wanted this

clause changed in the constitution.

The decision to declare Nepal secular was correct but it was done in a flawed manner. People did not know what to make of it and there were differing expectations. The parties never explained the issue when they went campaigning even though it was a key point in their manifestos. There was little public debate in the media.

In the Tarai many felt secularism meant cow slaughter. The leftist parties felt it would divorce the state from religion. Ethnic minorities thought it would mean their own interests would be promoted. And to have the head of state—first Girija Koirala and now Ram Baran Yadav—replace the king at Kathmandu's religious-cultural events led to questions about whether formal secularism would mean a change from past practices.

This week's riots have set a precedent and we will have no choice but to follow what is broadly the Indian model of secularism. If the French understand secularism as absolute separation of state and religion to the extreme extent that no religious symbols are allowed in educational institutions, the Indian model is more flexible.

The state is not anti-religion but is based on the premise that it will treat all religions equally. It recognises the public nature of religion and negotiates with religious communities. So the Indian government organises and subsidises pilgrimages for Hindus to Amarnath and Vaishno Devi. It arranges special facilities for Muslims to travel for the Haj. Minority Christian institutions get grants, and the social code and religious affairs for Sikhs are guided by institutions like the

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Nepali secularism will now also be about the competitive appeasement of all religions and communities. If the Newars have got their share of the pie today, it is inevitable that others will ask for theirs next. A Christian friend only half-jokingly said: "If they give them free meat, they should give me a Christmas present." A Madhesi said the state should buy his bhang for Holi.

Nepal's diverse ethnic groups have multiple customs and there are bound to be demands on the state for support for culture and religion. If the government fails to provide this, or favours one community over another, expect alienation and communal ill-feeling.

In the next two years, these issues must be discussed in the constituent assembly. Is it right for the president to attend Hindu events? What if we have a Muslim or a janjati president—will he do the same? Can the state keep a distance from religion? Or will secularism only mean that the state will not let religion influence its decisions, but engage with it at other levels? In a context where group identities are strong, will the secularism debate focus on communities or individual rights? Will practitioners have the right to propagate their religion and seek to convert? What are the expectations of religious communities from the state and what can the state accommodate?

Gandhi once said that those who think religion has nothing to do with politics understand neither religion nor politics. Our left-leaning government and liberal intelligentsia were reminded of that maxim this week. ●



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

What a riot

Pay for people to live, not for animals to die

It was the eve of the Indra Jatra festival when Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai, in his budget speech, cut the government's funding and subsidy for festivals like Dasain and other jatras. Protests began around Hanuman Dhoka the



INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

very next day, and the areas of Indrachok, Asan, New Road and Teku grew tense. Bhattarai's logic was that since Nepal is now a secular state, it would not be right for the government to support any particular religion.

Some compared the decision to Prithvi Narayan Shah's attack on Kathmandu's Newar community when he invaded the Valley during Indra Jatra in 1769. They say Bhattarai, a native of Gorkha, did the same thing by attacking Newar culture and

beliefs. The protesters claimed that to withhold money, no matter how small the sum, was an insult to their traditions and customs. Animal sacrifices are crucial in concluding the week-long jatra, but by funding these sacrifices, the government also saw itself endorsing activities that violate animal rights.

The protests, henceforth called buffalo riots, weren't very unique. Cars and buses were vandalised, traffic blockaded, shops forced to close and tyres burnt. Bowing to the pressure, the Finance Ministry signed a 10-point agreement on Sunday night and the protests were called off when it was decided that the government would continue to bear the expenses for religious ceremonies.

There are those who argue that, with the king gone, all traditions related to the old regime need to be slowly discarded. But Indra Jatra in particular has been celebrated in the Valley from the time of the Malla kings, before the Shahs took over.

Such a decision by the government was sure to have repercussions, especially during a delicate time like this. It was bound to upset the feelings of people who, proud of their own culture, have been celebrating this ritual for centuries. A mature government would not make an irresponsible decision such as this—to cut funding from an important cultural ceremony—without first consulting the community.

Since the buffalo riots, responsible people of new Nepal have been asking themselves some serious questions. When a large number of people around the Kosi area and the far west Nepal have been made homeless, to protest over a small sum of money so that animal sacrifices can continue seems rather petty. In some parts of Nepal there'll be no Dasain, Tihar or Chaat because people will be surviving in temporary shelters and dreading the long cold Tarai winter which is just around the corner.

This could be the year when we say no to animal sacrifices and give that money away to a better cause. Already many Nepalis no longer sacrifice animals during Dasain and other festivals for moral and practical reasons. Why not donate that money to the flood relief fund this year? Perhaps start a kitty so that the money can be replenished every year, to be used for relief and rehabilitation during natural disasters.

Some of us had hoped that in the new Nepal, Kathmandu would have less influence on how the government made its decisions, but the buffalo riots have dashed our hopes. No other population in Nepal can protest for a few days and get their way. Only the people of Kathmandu can bully the government to agree to their demands, no matter how trivial, if they burn tyres, coerce businesses to close down and intimidate people. Very few things have changed in this new Nepal. ●

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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Lost in transactions

Making money transfers smoother would increase remittances

PAAVAN MATHEMA

An estimated 32 per cent of Nepali households now receive foreign remittances, up from 23 per cent a decade ago. This income now accounts for 16 per cent of GDP, making it nearly as important as agriculture.

With so much money moving home, the mechanisms to get it here have become significant. More than 30 banks and money transfer companies compete to deliver remittances even to remote areas, but an estimated 60 per cent of remittances still make their way into the country through informal means like *hundi* because of regulatory constraints.

Unskilled, illiterate and often illegal workers abroad do not have access to banks, and their high charges deter them from using formal channels from countries like Japan and the UK. Informal routes are the only option for many, leading experts to believe that the real annual remittance figure is probably double the official Rs 1.5 billion.

Narabahadur KC of C G Finco says some simple, practical steps could make a difference: "The government could create

access points in other countries where our workers can learn about sending their money home," he told a Roundtable on Money Transfer and the Remittance Economy organised by Himalmedia recently.

Women working as maids in countries like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia often find it hard to get their money home, says Diwakar Thapa of Hulas Remittance. "Their employers delay the transfer or sometimes don't send it at all," he says.

Here in Nepal, less educated people in rural areas often do not understand how money transfers work. "Many don't remember the code number or the name of the agency or don't know about exchange rates," says Krishna Tandukar of Bank of Kathmandu.

It is largely due to remittances that the proportion of Nepalis living below the poverty line has fallen 11 percentage points to 31 per cent over the past ten years. Experts say the total remittances are increasing only because the number of Nepalis going abroad is increasing, not because they are earning more.

And the falling dollar and the drying up of British Gurkha remittances will make

the increase less dramatic.

In the 2006-07 tax year alone, an estimated 240,000 Nepalis migrated to work in the Gulf and Malaysia, where the total number of Nepalis has now surpassed one million. There are another two million in

India (see box).

It's not only about getting the money home, but also what families back home are spending the money on, says Arun Bajracharya of Union Money Transfer. "For over a year, much of a worker's earnings are spent on repaying the loan he takes to go abroad, usually at a very high interest rate," he says. Because the majority of migrants are poor, the money is used initially to provide basics like food, clothes and education for the family.

But researchers have been struck by the amount spent on consumer electronic goods, jewellery and vehicles. Once they have spare cash, few migrants are looking to invest the money for the long term. "There is a need to create a partnership between the worker, his family, the government and financial institutions to create an accumulated fund that can be used for investment," says Pradyumna Pokharel of Nabil Bank, pointing out that only one-third of Nepalis currently have access to banking.

Remittances are expected to continue going up, but would no doubt increase faster if bureaucratic barriers and transfer costs could be reduced and workers better trained before they go abroad, enabling them to take higher-paying jobs.

The view in the banking sector is that the government should see foreign employment as a development opportunity. Says Surendra Malla of Union Money Transfer: "We must have an integrated approach so the money injected into the economy promotes sustainable economic growth." ●

Let's not forget India

No one knows for sure, but at any given time there are estimated to be at least two million Nepalis working in India. Most are seasonal migrants who go to supplement their income because they can't grow enough food to feed the family. Others stay for longer periods but come home for the holidays. And there are another estimated 70,000 Nepali citizens serving in the Indian Army.

A back of the envelope calculation of an average Nepali sending home a very conservative Rs 7,000 a year would put the remittances from India alone at Rs 1.4 billion, which means Nepal's annual remittance from India is double the official amount from 'third countries'.

However, nearly all this money comes into Nepal through the *hundi* system or is carried in as cash, and there is no record of the amount. "Money from the Gulf can be transferred to Nepal in three seconds, but from India it is a cumbersome process and there is no record of how much money is coming in," explains Vivek Niraula of Everest Bank.

In January, Nepal Rastra Bank and the Reserve Bank of India set up a committee that recommended a formal remittance system between India and Nepal. It identified Nepal SBI Bank and the State Bank of India as the two banks to provide money transfers between the two countries.

"People need to see they have

Beth S Paige grew up in Nepal in the 1970s and is now back as USAID Nepal Mission Director. She spoke to *Nepali Times* this week about the focus of her agency's development assistance to Nepal.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Nepali Times: The US has been providing development assistance to Nepal for over 50 years now. What are some of the lessons learnt?

The US was the first country to sign a technical cooperative agreement with Nepal in 1951 and since then we have achieved remarkable development outcomes with our partners. But certainly there's a lot more to be done.

In terms of lessons learnt, the first thing that comes to my mind is that we need local participation. In the past, "experts" would design programs without a lot of consultation with communities and other stakeholders. But we have recognised over time that community participation, buy-in, and support are absolutely essential for success.

The same is true regarding government commitment, without which the desired impact will not be possible. Donors can do the groundwork and initiate activities, but at the end of the day, government commitment is an absolute prerequisite for widespread, sustainable, positive changes.

We are trying to influence and accelerate development and economic growth, and there is often no specific tested method or blueprint for doing this in a particular country. Therefore, I believe there is a need for evidence-based approaches to development: researching the best practices in the region or in countries with similar issues, bringing them to Nepal as pilot projects, gathering relevant data to evaluate their impact and then rolling out and scaling up those programs. We also need to be thinking of sustainability and an exit strategy right from the very beginning in

Book online

ZenNepal, in collaboration with an international partner, is introducing online hotel bookings. The company already has contracts with 60 hotels in Nepal and expects this to rise to 100 by next year. It also has a 24-hour customer service centre in Thamel.



Next Kumari



Kumari Bank has opened a new branch in Birtamod. This is the bank's 15th branch since it opened for business eight years ago. The bank says it will now focus on expanding its network in other parts of the country.

Spicy deal

Spice Mobile is offering a Namaste SIM card free with a purchase of either the S-570 folding phone with FM or the S-650 with Mp3. Each phone comes with a one-year warranty. Battery and charger come with six-month warranties.

Ladies only



Laxmi Bank has launched a new savings account for women with a 6.5 per cent interest rate. The minimum opening balance is Rs 500 and there are introductory cash prizes.

Icy expansion



Baskin Robbins recently added 500ml and 1000ml ice-cream packs to its takeaway services.

After opening its latest ice-cream parlour in Uttar Dhoka Road, it plans to open six more outlets this year, including one in Darbar Marg. It also plans to introduce home delivery services soon.

Macau golfing

Fakhre Shah Sayed won the Carlsberg Golf Classic 2008 tournament held at the Royal Nepal Golf Club on Saturday. He won a trip to the Macau Open 2008 Pro-Am tournament.



NEW PRODUCTS



SPORTS WEAR: UFO has introduced new lines of high-end sports shoes from major international brands Puma and Fila. The brands are now available at UFO outlets in Kathmandu Mall, Kumaripati, Baneswor and Pokhara.

NEW WHEELS: Hyundai has launched the new i10 cars, powered by a 1.2-litre petrol engine. They come with power steering and a choice of 10 colours. The top-end models of the i10 also have a sun-roof and remote locking. The cars come with a three-year guarantee. AVCO International is the sole distributor of the cars.



The nocturnal economy

An unelected home minister makes a unilateral, authoritarian decision

Two weeks ago, Home Minister Bam Dev Gautam issued a statement saying that the police would go around shutting down restaurants, discos and bars after 11 PM in Kathmandu, 10 PM in Lalitpur, and 9 PM in Bhaktapur.



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

According to one estimate, 80,000 employees in about 2,000 nightclubs and bars have been adversely affected by the minister's decision. Most of the employees are women who work as dancers, escorts, waitresses, masseuses and the like.

At first glance, the Home Minister seems to have a point. Due to the non-implementation of urban zoning laws, these restaurants are located alongside private residences, and are seen to be fronts for prostitution. In addition, NGO activists say that women working in the nightlife industry are exploited, underpaid and coerced into doing things they do not want to do.

But the unelected minister's unilateral decision to punish the entire industry is in conflict with the ideals of a free and democratic society.

Legal businesses: Supporters of the minister's decision say that most of these restaurants are not legal, and that the minister was right to crack down on them. This is not true. Any business that puts up a public signboard, no matter how titillating, signals that it is subject to municipal fees and, in some cases, police approval.

Since businesses want to attract the attention of customers but not that of authorities, they have little incentive to pay

voluntarily. The result is that the authorities themselves go around checking the papers to collect fees from every new signboard they come across. As such, regardless of our views of what goes on inside these establishments, we cannot call them illegal while the government, police and municipal authorities keep on collecting fees from them on a regular basis.

Nanny government: The minister's decision smacks of the 'father knows best' form of governance. This is the sort of governance that tries to manage adult citizens' lives by telling them what to do, what to say, how to behave, where to go, what

businesses such as newspapers, books and even speech that it may deem to be 'against the public interest'?

Protesting women: Strange as it may sound, this is the time for NGO activists to cast aside their moral priggishness and support the rallies of nightlife employees against the government. Such rallies help the women who've been kept indoors to come out in the open, improve solidarity, build up activism-related logistical skills, press-related awareness and their law-related knowledge, while being publicly acknowledged for the critical role they play in the industry.



SAM KANG LI

to think and how long their evening entertainment should last. What the minister failed to understand is that Nepalis rejected such form of governance both in 1990 and in 2006, and the last thing they expect from those in power now is babysitting on a national scale.

Besides, such an attitude on the government's part signals that it treats its citizens as children and not as voters to be served. If we allow the government to babysit us for our evening entertainment, what is to stop it tomorrow from extending that role to the banning other

With enough practice, such skills and recognition can only help them strengthen networks and confidence, which can be harnessed by skillful NGOs to eventually help them form unions that offer protection against exploitative tasks.

Had Minister Gautam been strategic, he would have undertaken sting operations to expose and weed out those businesses that were proven to be engaged in illegal practices. But by taking on an entire industry in this brazen manner, he has overstepped his limit and taken us closer to authoritarianism. ●

the power to change their lives"

order to ensure that development results are fully sustainable and effective.

We've also discovered that money is not the answer to everything. What is most important for development is commitment at the community, district and national level. We have seen great impacts with only small investments—like the community forest users group. Those minimal investments when combined with people's dreams and aspirations go a long way. When people see that they have the power to change their lives positively, the development possibilities are boundless.

But the criticism is that despite the millions of dollars spent, there hasn't been much poverty reduction.

Well, I'm not sure if I agree with the basic premise of this question. Since 1951, the US has provided over a billion dollar worth assistance to the people of Nepal. Results speak for themselves. Look at the socio-economic indicators.

During the early 1950s, the population stood at 8.5 million. Today it is 29 million. Life expectancy was 28 years compared to 63 years today. The literacy rate was 5.3 per cent back then. It is now at 79 per cent for

men and 55 per cent for women. The same is true with college enrollment: 300 college students versus 132,777 enrollments today. There were 376KM roads during the 1950s compared with 17,280KM today.

There are actually a lot of indicators we can use to show development progress. Poverty rates have also improved, but maybe not as significantly as other development trends in Nepal.

The only possible reason I can think of why this impression exists is because development is a slow, gradual process. Development doesn't happen overnight. I personally believe Nepal has made some very good progress in the last 50 years. So one might ask why hasn't there been more rapid progress. Granted, we have a lot more to do to support marginalised, disadvantaged, conflict-affected populations, but in general there have been great results.

I lived in Nepal for almost eight years during the 1970s. I went to school here and my experience shaped my interest in development. I came back as the Director of USAID in 2007 after 30 years away, and have personally witnessed dramatic

improvements in forestry, poverty, public health and infrastructure.

What is USAID's prime focus now?

US foreign assistance programs promote peace and stability by fostering economic growth, protecting the health of Nepali families, providing emergency humanitarian assistance and nurturing democracy.

These will remain our focus areas. But in all of these, we have a special focus on supporting Nepal's youth. USAID has immense faith in the youth of Nepal and it is one of our highest priorities to engage with this group. We have been a firm supporter of various youth initiatives and programs that promote peace and reconciliation, provide skills training and create new job opportunities.

Does the emergence of a Maoist-led government change your operational methods in Nepal in any way?

USAID's programs are aimed at helping the Nepali people and we look forward to working with the government to help achieve development goals. Our relationship is with the government, not any particular political party.

Army integration



KIRAN PANDAY

Interview with Nanda Kishor Pun (Pasang), head of the Maoist PLA in *Samaya*, 18-25 September

समय

To be a part of the National Army, your combatants need to fulfil certain criteria. What would you term as the criteria?

As far as we understand it, the candidate should be physically fit, healthy and capable of working under harsh conditions. He should be brave and emotionally strong enough to tolerate pain and suffering. The Maoist combatants are battle-hardened. It would be incorrect to say they do not fit the bill. The People's War ended with neither the Maoist army nor the state army winning, but politically we have won. The monarchy has been overthrown and Nepal is now a republic.

After the integration of the armies, do you expect to be the head of both armies? How are you qualified?

My position will be decided by the party and the

government. It is a national issue and the state will take responsibility. The cabinet and the CA will decide, and no decision has been made yet. We assert that even after integration, the commanders of the PLA should not lose their positions.

What should be the size of the army?
There are 19,604 PLA soldiers at the moment. Other than those who are injured, handicapped and pregnant, all should be integrated. We also need to think about the 4,008 PLA soldiers who the UNMIN as identified as under-aged and cannot be integrated into the army.

Will integration be completed in six months?

It should be completed because the peace agreement is at stake here. Those who are against integration are against the peace process as well. A process has to be started within three to six months.

But there are voices within the Maoists who say that it is not yet time for army integration.

There isn't a big disagreement within the party. Making the future of the PLA soldiers secure has always been an issue. The talk now is of an economic revolution, and in many areas our revolutionary objectives are yet to be realised. The modality of a federal republic and army integration is yet to be achieved, we have to write the constitution. It is only natural that there are a few disagreements in the party. The whole party is in favour of integration. But we have to understand who is being integrated into whom. Both the armies have to be respectfully integrated.

Dull nights

Home minister Bam Deb Gautam speaks to *Samaya*, 17 September

समय

People have taken to the streets to protest against your decision to close down all businesses in the capital by 11PM. What is your response?

Dance restaurants, discos and other businesses in Kathmandu have become breeding grounds for depravity. The activities that they have been engaging in shouldn't even be allowed before 11PM. The decision was made with consideration to the capital's security and no compromise will be made.

Will the government control these businesses now or manage them better?

We won't allow them to operate in the capital where there are residential areas, schools, colleges and universities, all of which would be harmed. What we've decided instead is to specify a certain area outside the valley, for example Nagarkot, as a red-light district where they can openly do business.

If the government is going to monitor their activities anyway, can't it just stop them conducting illegal activities but keep the night-life?

We've done a lot of research to come to this decision. These businesses are only benefiting a minority of people. And most illegal activities in the capital are happening there. It has destroyed people's lives, has caused loss of money and property and has pushed young people from the villages into involvement in illicit activities. It's the government's responsibility to decide in favour of the majority.



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Australia has become a popular choice for overseas students and the number of Nepalese students has risen sharply over the few years. According to the statistics published by Australian Education International, the number of enrolment of Nepalese students has gone up to 500% at times. In the year 2007, Nepal became the 13th largest source country in terms of number of student enrolments. In this year also number of students going to Australia has gone up compare to last year. The maximum number has commenced their studies in Vocational Education and Training Sector.

With the aim of attracting non-European migrants by the Australian Government, Nepalese started to migrate to Australia from 1975. There is no official data before 1975 and only 4 Nepalese permanently migrated to Australia in the year 1975-76. It is interesting to stipulate the Nepalese migrated to Australia from the year 2000. Nepalese migrants were 228 in 2000-01, 166 in 2001-02, 2002-03 in 178, 2003-04 in 235, 302 in 2004, 304 in 2005-06, 460 in 2006-07 (Source: Australia Bureau of Statistics). The number of Nepalese migrated to Australia is increasing every year and Nepalese community has been well recognized by Immigration Department.

People who want to live permanently in Australia must apply to migrate or, if already in Australia, apply to change their status to permanent residents. There are four parts to Australia's migration program and they are:

1. Skill Stream
2. Family Stream
3. Special Eligibility Stream
4. Refugee/Humanitarian Program.

For more information on Australian Education and Migration please email us at info@eminent-oesd.com or visit our website www.eminent-oesd.com.

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Bharat Dahal in Nepal, 28 September

नेपाल

Fractious factions

There are five factions within the Maoists right now. The Kiran-Bikalpa faction claims that the struggle of the People's War still continues. With an inclination towards nationalist revolution, this faction stresses the need for a new work plan because the one devised under the 12-point agreement has already reached its objectives. In line with the changing situation, this faction thinks changes are needed within the party itself, and seems to want to discard the parliamentary system.

Those in favour of Baburam feel that the political aim of the revolution has been achieved with the abolition of the monarchy and attention should now turn to an economic revolution. There has to be a peaceful transition from the present democratic republic to a people's republic. However, their



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

view that India is supportive of Nepal's progressive political restructuring is worrying to others.

The third faction feels that since the party has moved on from the politics of

class to an agenda of regional ethnicity, there is no longer the need to be under the leadership of Kiran, Prachanda or Baburam. Although they are still a part of the Maoists, the party workers of the Seti,

Mahakali and Karnali, and the Madhesis, Adhivasis and Janjatis back this belief. Lekhraj Bhatta in the west, Prabhu Shah in the Madhes and Gopal Khambu in the east represent this thought.

The fourth faction feels that the People's War should continue, and there is a fifth faction that has lost its trust in the party and seeks to renounce it.

Among these, the first faction is not yet organised. The second seems to be clear in its ideas and has already implemented them since the formation of the government. The third faction, which supports regional ethnicity, is present more as a concept. Lastly, the fourth and the fifth factions exist only as sentiments and are not organised under anyone's leadership.



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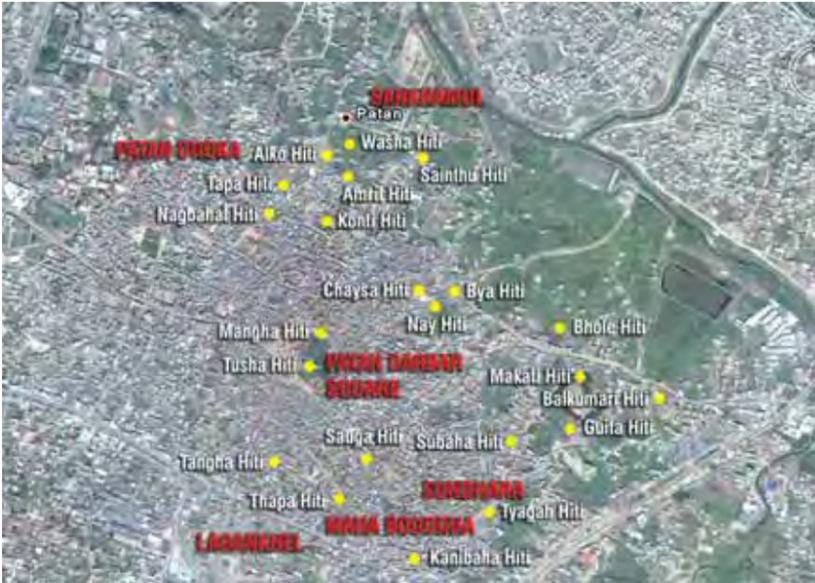
The Malla kings of the 13th to 15th centuries filled their royal baths in Patan with water channelled through an intricate canal network known as Raj Kulo, from 13km away in Lele.

As the population grew, an elaborate underground water distribution system was developed to bring water to the various spouts around the city. This pipe network remained an integral part of the water supply even into the 1970s, providing a constant water flow to the many hiti in Patan.

But as new houses sprang up and the road network expanded, developers paid scant attention to the canals beneath, and some water spouts were buried beneath construction projects deemed more modern and important to the developing city. Within a few years many hiti ran dry.

“People got used to getting water from the mains, and the spouts were buried and forgotten,” says Keshari Bajracharya, a Nag Bahal resident. Through a community initiative, and support from the US Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Heritage Preservation to the Patan Tourism Development Organisation and Nag Bahal Hiti Rehabilitation Project of Lalitpur, Nag Bahal Hiti in old Patan has now been renovated and locals have started using the water once again.

For the engineers responsible for its restoration, the biggest challenge was to find the original channels, some of which are now buried beneath private residences. “The process was long,” says project director Jharna Joshi. “We had to identify where the water was flowing from, and repair the channels in such a way that it would also be easy to carry out future maintenance work.”



The project staff say it would not have been possible without the support of the local community. Dilip Joshi, secretary of the Historical Water Spout and Aquifer Preservation Society, says the people of Patan understand the importance of preserving the hiti. “Even those who did not directly benefit helped us, especially when we had to identify where the water was flowing from and if it went under their homes,” he says.

Of the 61 known water spouts in the Patan area, five have been completely destroyed, but Jharna Joshi is confident that with further financial support, all the other 56 could be revived to their former glory.

Dilip Joshi says the water from Nag Bahal Hiti can be stored and distributed to homes—a system that has already proved successful in Patan’s Kumbeswor and Alko Bahal, where water coming from the spouts is collected and stored to be distributed to over 200 homes by the community.

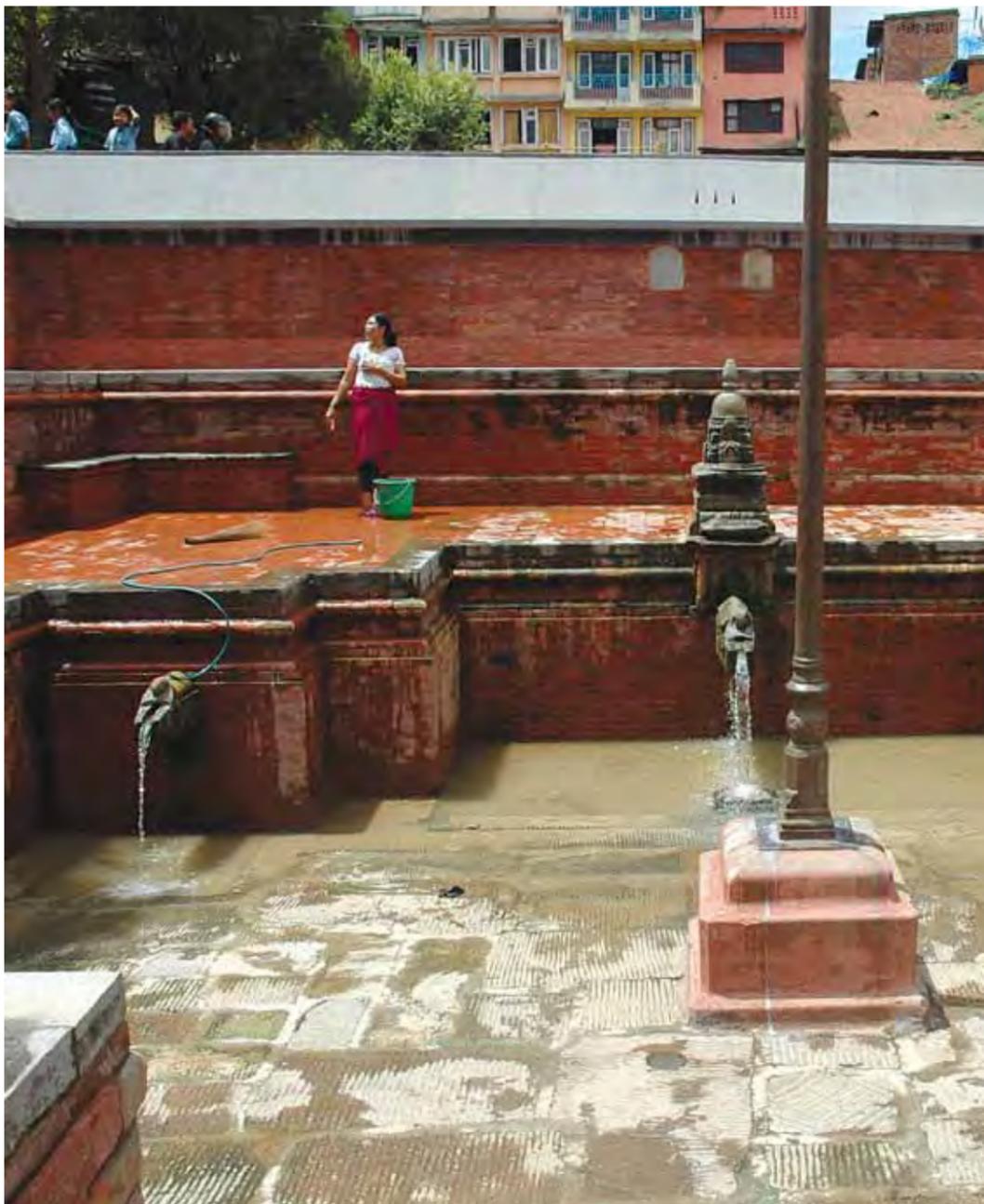
However, the long-term goal must be the preservation and restoration of the old canal systems that worked so well for so many centuries. Says Joshi: “We can renovate as many water spouts as we like, but unless the aquifers and the canals that actually bring water to them are saved, there may not be water flowing out of them.” ●

Mallika Aryal



A canal runs t

Centuries-old water spout is rest





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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Reality check

Nepal may soon become a federal state. Up to now, the major debate has focused around the question of where to draw the lines. Some favour a federal state that follows ethnic boundaries, while others fear that this will open up a Pandora's Box and undermine the unity of Nepal. Both sides need a reality check.

First of all, countries don't break up that easily. Look at Africa: a continent riddled with weak economic systems, disputed borders, heavy interference by external powers, ethnic conflicts and confrontational politics. With the notable exceptions of Eritrea and Ethiopia, none have departed from their colonial boundaries. The nationwide solidarity shown with the displaced people in the Kosi floodplain is a clear sign that Nepal's national unity is a reality and will probably prevail in the future.



GUEST COLUMN
Pieter De Schepper

On the other hand, 'ethnic federalism' shouldn't be seen as a shortcut to success. Let's look at Belgium and India, for instance. Both countries are seen as exemplary cases of federalism and both divided themselves up according to ethnicity. Nevertheless, both are facing increasing problems over the power balance between the centre and the different states.

In India, the states are asking for a bigger cut of the tax revenue to meet growing expenditure. In Belgium, the struggle of the northern state for more executive powers threw the government into a year-long deadlock, and this has still not been resolved.

If the experiences with federalism in these countries contain any lesson for Nepal, it would be that the fundamental question is not how federal units are demarcated but how power is shared between the centre and the units.

Nepal's unique diversity will need a unique model of federalism. Ethnicities are not dominant in any one region, economic connections transcend ethnic borders, and domination by one ethnic group in a certain area is mostly relative in comparison to the overall population in that area. All these issues need to be taken into account when devising the map of a federal Nepal. How to divide fiscal authority and accommodate both the interests of 'smaller minorities' vis-à-vis 'bigger minorities' are other tough questions ahead.

Asking the right questions is as important as finding the right answers

The opportunity we have in Nepal is that there is no power struggle yet between the centre and the states. This allows us to come up with a meaningful, well-balanced and sustainable federal system. An even bigger advantage is the presence of what has rightly been called the most inclusive body Nepal has ever had: the Constituent Assembly. This body bears not only the responsibility but also the legitimate mandate to design a federal structure in Nepal's new constitution.

For these advantages to have meaning, however, there are still some challenges to be met. The political parties should not only transcend the division between government and opposition, but also show a genuine commitment to the inclusive nature of the CA. Members of smaller parties or minorities groups should be included in the discussion.

This should limit the possibility of short-term political trade-offs for long-term constitutional matters, but more importantly can change the longstanding culture of backroom decision-making. Establishing an open and participative procedure for the drafting of the constitution will be a first step in creating a legitimate federal structure and much needed stability in New Nepal.

Up to now, the media spotlight has mainly been on the functioning of the new government, and rightly so. However, the assembly members shouldn't take this as a reason to take it easy. A lot of distance needs to be covered and it's time to get started. ●

Pieter De Schepper is a lecturer at National College, Kathmandu University.

Point of no

DEWAN RAI

Dirgha Raj Poudel was forced to flee his home in Okhaldhunga eight years ago. He has been living in Jadibuti in Kathmandu since then. He says he still can't return to his village because of threats, but life in Kathmandu is becoming unaffordable.

There are still at least 70,000 Nepalis who are internally displaced by the conflict who still live in limbo. Most of those who fled the war and managed to build a new life for themselves are reluctant to go back to their villages, but those like Poudel who are keen to return need protection and support.

"Property is only of secondary importance, security the main concern," says Poudel, complaining that the allowance from the government for returnees is not enough.

The government's package for returnees includes travel expenses to homes, a food allowance of Rs60 per person per day for four months, Rs 20,000 for the construction of a new house or Rs7,000 to repair their old house, and Rs 2,400 to cover school fees for children under the age of 16.

Bhojraj Timilsina, president of the Maoists' Victims Association,

FAR FROM HOME: Sabitri Remi (fourth from left) fled her home in a village in Dailekh after her husband was tortured and killed by the Maoists in December 2003. She and her children now share a one-bedroom apartment and wait for the day they can return home safely.



There is no real peace until those who fled the conflict can go home

says that the government should—if it really wants to settle this issue—bring the offenders to justice first. "It will be very difficult to live together with those who drove us away with violence, where the innocent

will continue to be afraid," he says.

It is now two years since the government announced its resettlement package to help people displaced by the war to return home, but many are still

Assembly profile

Jayapuri Gharti's journey from war to peace



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Jayapuri Gharti, one of the 23 elected Maoist women in the constituent assembly, also heads the women's wing of the party. Born in Rangsi, in Rolpa district, she began to get involved in politics 18 years ago while still at school, inspired by the social discrimination she encountered and hardship of village life.

The seventh of eight children, she was a disappointment to her parents, who would have preferred a boy. But she was able to go to school—a rare opportunity for a girl in her village in those days.

At school she dreamt of

becoming an agricultural trainer. "I always wanted to become a JTA because that would be more helpful for me and my family," she recalls.

Nanda Kishore Pun 'Pasang' was one of several leftist teachers at her school, and she soon began to take part in political rallies and sing revolutionary songs. Slowly she learnt more about social injustice and discrimination based on caste and gender.

In the constituent assembly elections, she beat seven candidates, all of them men. "I don't hate men, but I never liked

the way social custom in feudal society ranked males higher than females," she says. "My fight is for gender equality and social justice."

She joined the Maoists to try to dismantle the existing feudal structure and help create a more equal society. "We waged war for social well-being, risking our lives," she argues, and adds that she had to fight both within the party and against the state to end discrimination.

But the difficulties and hardship of guerrilla war never weakened her. Although she could not continue her studies after SLC, she gained the confidence to

return



SAM KANG LI

too scared to go back as the Maoists continue to occupy their land.

Apart from providing travel expenses for their return, the government has no scheme to help returnees regain control of stolen land or re-establish their old livelihood. Government records show 27,000 IDPs (internally displaced people) have been offered the chance to return home—which some have

lead. She obtained party membership in 1990, became a central committee member in 1998 and since 2003 has headed the women's wing of the party. "This is definitely an achievement, but I have not forgotten where I come from," she says.

She married comrade Bibek, Kabiram KC, during the war, but he was killed in action in Rolpa the following year. "We were prepared to give or take lives," she says. She has a daughter, Nabina, who is studying in a government school in Palpa. "She was taken care by the janata ever since she was born and is happy with them," she says. "I cannot afford to bring her in Kathmandu to put her in some boarding school. She will study where the children of the people study."

Asked if she thinks the war was worth it, she nods. People are politically aware, one third of assembly members are women, and this wouldn't have been possible without the Maoist struggle, she says. But she is still not happy about the level of women's representation in the cabinet. "There has been a significant change already, but it is yet to be completed," says Gharti, whose name was making the rounds as a state minister, but seems to have been dropped.

Asked about her experience as a CA member, she says: "I would be doing physical work in the village, but this is a different kind of work. The struggle isn't over yet." ●

Dewan Rai

accepted—but little has happened beyond that.

"There is no streamlined system to deal with IDPs in terms of their return, integration and resettlement," says Philippe Clerc, country director of the Norwegian Refugee Council, "only the return has been addressed in a partial manner, which is not going to resolve the issue soon."

Bimala Regmi, field officer at the Council says the government must introduce programs of social reconciliation as early as possible to help in the integration of the IDPs. "The returnees are finding it difficult to adjust to society for various reasons," she says. "The government must introduce social reconciliation programs immediately to heal the emotional wounds first."

Regmi says some returnees have left their villages a second time, usually for political or financial reasons. Some in Maoist strongholds were forced out a second time by continual threats. With no protection, they felt they had no alternative to leave once more.

The government is focused on merely returning people to their places of origin, and many returnees have been unable to acquire documents from their VDCs for verification,

compensation and other rights. "There is a lack of a mechanism to monitor, evaluate and document cases of forced displacement," says Clerc.

The government has verified 41,000 IDPs so far, but NGOs and international agencies estimate the real number at between 50,000 and 70,000. In the absence of any systematic IDP registration system, verification has been difficult, and it is equally hard to determine how many have actually returned home, as most were scattered in the major towns and cities or migrated to India.

Furthermore, as only people displaced for political reasons are counted as IDPs, the figures do not take into account those forced out by lack of food and jobs.

The main donors to the Nepal Peace Trust Fund have approved a government proposal to distribute a \$5.6 million relief and rehabilitation package for 50,000 IDPs who were ready to return to their homes. But only half the amount has been spent so far.

While returning home may be the preferred solution for many, it is not the solution for all. "Return, reintegration and resettlement to an appropriate location should be carried out together," says Clerc. "And the IDPs directive should be passed and implemented as early as possible. The more we delay, the more complicated it will get."

The Norwegian Refugee Council is organising a concert at Khula Manch to create awareness about Nepal's IDPs. ●



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All in the mind

One in five Nepalis suffers from some form of mental disorder

When I was 11, I started suffering symptoms of mental disorder: chronic headache, insomnia and feelings of hopelessness, isolation and lack of interest in studies.

But such is the social and family stigma towards mental disorder that I kept it hidden from my family. I felt guilty about my deteriorating health and had suicidal thoughts. There was no one with whom I could share my sense of hopelessness.

Because of my belief in spiritualism I couldn't kill myself, but opted to poison myself slowly with alcohol and smoking. I went to doctors, but their dismissive and humiliating behaviour made me feel worse. Where to go? Whom to talk to? What to do?



COMMENT

Jagannath Lamichhane

At 15 I started taking neuro-psychiatric medicines along with the alcohol and smoking. But after 12

years, I stopped these and turned to yoga and alternative therapies. Slowly, I emerged from the darkness. As I got healthier, my faith in these methods grew and I started sharing my concerns with my family members who supported my recovery.

Since then, I have decided to devote myself to showing others that mental disorder is not a dead-end street, we can will ourselves to come out of it. There is a lot to struggle against, but the biggest barrier is society's ignorance about mental health and the stigma attached to it. The extent of the problem in Nepal is staggering:

- 20 per cent of the population is affected by some form of mental disorder, and this dwarfs any other disease
- Yet, only 0.15 per cent of the health care budget is spent on mental health
- There are only 40 licensed psychiatrists and five clinical psychologists for a population of 28 million people
- Traditional healers are primary care givers
- There is extreme stigmatisation and ostracisation
- Mental health is a human rights issue because many patients are sent to jail because of their illness
- Mental health is not a priority for the donor community
- Out of six people with disabilities, four have mental disorders.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was signed in May this year to promote the human rights of people living with mental or physical disabilities.

Usha is now 46 years old. She went into deep depression after the birth of her second child twenty years ago. Her family thought she was possessed and sent her to a jhankri. Fearing loss of prestige, Usha's husband settled her in another house and married again.



Later, she was diagnosed with common post-natal depression which has a 100 per cent chance of recovery. The only barriers to her treatment were ignorance and prejudice.

Our social attitudes, education and health care clearly deny the importance of mental health for individual and collective growth. This insensitivity creates a deep silence and great injustice by its avoidance of mental health issues.

There is no human rights review board with the authority to inspect mental health facilities. Instead, mentally ill people are locked up in jail or they are treated in semi-prisonlike isolated care systems.

There is a close relationship between mental illness and gender bias, social exclusion, alcoholism, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, suicide, unemployment, illiteracy, natural disaster, poor health and family violence. In Nepal, conflict trauma, poverty and political turmoil are also reasons. Yet, the voices of these people and their families are never heard in discourse about social, political, and human rights.

In the past year, I have found friends and supporters within Nepal for the cause of mental health. Let us hope that in a 'new' Nepal, the state and society will promote justice and equality and extend priority to the mental health of Nepalis.

This Dasain, let's commit ourselves to this goal on World Mental Health Day on 10 October. ●

Jagannath Lamichhane is the founder of the Nepal Mental Health Foundation
jagannathlc(at)gmail.com

Euromovies



To celebrate the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, several European embassies and cultural centres in Kathmandu have organised the European Film Festival 2008, screening 10 films



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

from five countries between 26 September and 1 October.

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue is really a European affair—a directive to encourage a shared European identity. That identity may be

decidedly wobbly—as is apparent from the nervous attention given to the Irish vote on the Lisbon Treaty and the recent agonising over relations with Russia—but thanks to the active European cultural institutes in Kathmandu, it has provided as good an excuse as any for a film festival whose stated intent is to encourage other nations to “explore the benefits of their own multicultural and multilingual heritage.”

Although some films on show are now a few years old, they are new to Nepali audiences, and have garnered critical praise and reasonable box-office takings in their respective countries. Besides the must-sees that film

connoisseurs may have already set their sights on—namely Ken Loach's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* and Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye Lenin*—the festival features other noteworthy entries.

The German comedy *Kebab Connection* (2004) is one: an aspiring Turkish filmmaker has ambitions to make Germany's first kung fu film but for the moment must make do shooting commercials for his uncle's kebab shop. Another to note is the Danish film, *Kongekabale (King's Game)*, directed by Nikolaj Arcel—a political thriller about the damaging collusion between the media and politicians (nothing new there, then).

Kebab Connection puts a Turkish-German spin on the very familiar American format of big comedies. Its protagonist, Ibrahim 'Ibo' Secmez, travels the route of the reluctant, ill-prepared father-to-be before eventually stepping up to the plate. It is a well-worn idea, but nicely executed and given a new twist. Not only is he a pot-head, but he is of Turkish descent and his family thoroughly disapproves of his German girlfriend. The film

doesn't shy away from the complicated ways different communities relate to each other. Heavily populated with a host of hilarious characters and juggling a bundle of plot-lines, it manages to be well paced and scores plenty of laughs by affectionately poking fun at its immigrant subject.

Kongekabale explores some serious-minded ethical issues, not the least of them being the compromised nature of the press in democracies. A rookie reporter, Ulrik Torp, is placed on the parliament beat after the leading candidate in an imminent election meets with a serious car accident. Information fed to Torp from a source inside the party earns him a front page scoop, but digging deeper has serious consequences for him. *King's Game* has a certain aura of authenticity. It is based on a novel by a former spin-doctor for a Danish conservative party who witnessed at first hand the dirty power struggles that occur in politics, so conceivably it has a basis in reality. Sadly, what it gains in believability it loses in dramatic tension. It is nevertheless thought-provoking stuff that has you asking what's behind the headlines you read each day. ●

Films for all tastes

Whether it's the animated French film, *U*, in which a princess is befriended by a unicorn, or the Danish *Kongekabale*, where an obsessed political journalist struggles to unravel a conspiracy, the European film festival at the Nepal Tourism Board Auditorium at Bhrikuti Mandap, has something for everyone. The 10 films on show will be screened twice from 27 September-1 October.

LiEsquive

(Games of Love and Chance) (30 September 12 PM, 1 October 12 PM)
The grim housing estates of the Paris suburbs provide an unusual setting for this atypical romantic comedy about young North African immigrants rehearsing for a school play set in the 18th century.

U (27 September 6 PM, 28 September 10AM)
Little princess Mona, lives in despair and is mistreated by a pair of detestable rats. However, after she is befriended by the unicorn, *U*, Mona's misery is replaced by happiness.

Grow Your Own (27 September 10 AM, 29 September 6PM)
This British comedy directed by Richard Laxton finds a group of Liverpool gardeners up in arms when refugees are given some gardening plots in the same allotment.

The Wind that Shakes the Barley (29 September 12 PM, 1 October 4PM)
A dramatic Irish tale of two brothers who join the Irish Republican Army to fight for independence from Britain who find each other on opposite sides when a treaty is signed.

Good Bye Lenin (28 September 6PM, 30 September 10AM)
The story is set before the fall of the Berlin Wall and revolves around Alex, and his strongly socialist mother who lay in a coma as the wall came.

Kebab Connection (29 September 4 PM, 30 September 4PM)
A romantic comedy about an aspiring Turkish filmmaker in Germany who gets his German girlfriend pregnant and what happens when his conservative family finds out.

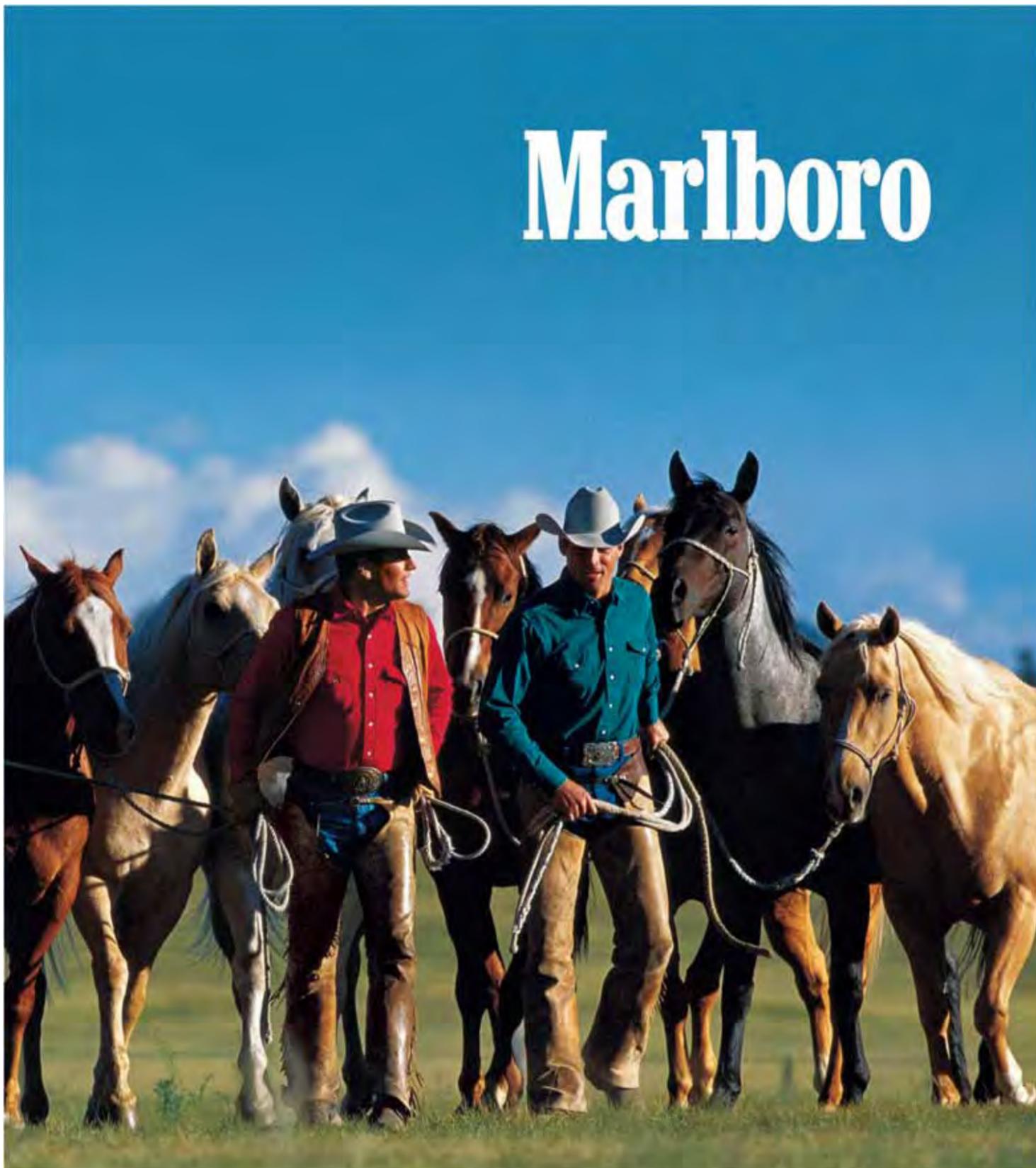
Mies Vailla Menneisyttö (The Man Without a Past) (27 September 4 PM, 30 September 6PM)
A man is so badly beaten up in Helsinki that he can remember nothing at all about his past. Unable to get a job or a place to live, he has to slowly rebuild his life from nothing.

Suden Arvoitus (Mystery of the Wolf) (28 September 12 PM, 1 October 10 AM)
This is an entertaining family adventure film from Finland, in which a young girl called Salla rescues two wolf cubs from poachers. From then on she spends her time battling to save them.

De Fortabte SjÉles ý (Island of Lost Souls) (27 September 12 PM, 28 September 4PM)
In this adventure film, 14-year-old Lulu's brother is possessed by the 19th century spirit of Herman Hartmann and he sets off on journey to stop dark forces determined to take over the world.

Kongekabale (King's Game) (29 September 10 AM, 1 October 6 PM)
Political power struggles and conspiracies come up against the obsession of young political journalist Ulrik Torp in this Danish thriller as he tries to report the truth.

Free passes will be available at Nepal Tourism Board one hour before the show.



SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH



DROP ZONE: Jumping off a helicopter near Thameksu from 5,000m during a recce dive in May, and cruising over Namche.



PICS: HIGH & WILD

New warning near Everest:

Beware of falling people

This season the region around the world's highest peak could be faced with a new danger: sky diving.

A team of 32 people are poised to jump out of a plane flying higher than Chomolungma at 8,990m and land on the world's highest dropzone at Syangboche at 3,833m.

"It began with an idea, which then became a dream and now it is reality," said Nigel Gifford of High & Wild, the organiser of the event. The British mountaineer and skydiver never thought

that this could ever be possible. He got the idea in 1975 when he saw a Pilatus Porter plane land on the airstrip at Syangboche.

"Organising this event has taken me more than two years and it would not have been possible without the help and support of the people of Nepal," Gifford told *Nepali Times*. In May, a team of skydivers did four reconnaissance jumps from 5,000m, testing the special gear that is needed at this altitude.

"Jumping from that height requires

specially designed clothes to cope with temperatures as low as minus 40C, extra large parachutes to account for the increased speed of the freefall and a relatively light oxygen system," said Ryan Jackson, the team's doctor and professional skydiver.

Jackson's other worry is altitude sickness, and he says the skydivers will acclimatise by first walking to Pheriche at 4,250m. But jumping off a plane over Everest doesn't come cheap. Depending on the type of jump, it can cost anything between £12,675 and £16,870.

"The thing I'm looking forward to most is just seeing Everest, it will be amazing," says Holly Budge, a 29-year-old professional filmmaker and skydiver from the UK. The solo jumpers are required to have made at least 200 skydives.

Most of the support team, which include astronaut Andy Elson and world skydiving champion Omar Alhegelan, are setting up base at Syangboche. The Pilatus Turboporter will be in Syangboche by the weekend. ● *Billi Bierling*
www.highandwild.com
[adventures\(at\)highandwild.co.uk](mailto:adventures(at)highandwild.co.uk)



KIRAN PANDAY

Cozy corner

If you are stuck in Lazimpat because of a traffic jam caused by riots up the road, just turn off into the Radisson and cool off at their newly opened watering hole. The Corner Bar offers its well-heeled customers an excellent mix of Nepali, Indian and European food ranging from Harra Kabab to Kingfish steak served in a cozy setting.

There is live music every evening from Wednesday to Monday, and the bar, open daily from 4.30 PM to 11.30 PM, offers comfortable seating, a great selection of snacks—both vegetarian and meat-based—chosen by executive chef Sylvester Gomes and cocktails ranging from the classics to more unusual variations.

By evening, you'll find one thing leads to another. And even if the road has cleared, you may want to hang out and get into the Dasain festival mood a little early. ●

Former British Gurkha Fergus Anderson sets off this week from Glasgow to Kathmandu on his Triumph motorcycle to raise funds for vulnerable Nepali children. He hopes to reach Kathmandu's Durbar Square in early November on the bike he has nicknamed 'AshaBlue'.

His route will pass through France, Switzerland, Italy and Greece, and then through Turkey to Iran, Pakistan and India before reaching Nepal. The money raised will be given to CWS, an international charity which supports disadvantaged children in Nepal.

The trip will allow Anderson to combine his three passions: Scotland, motorcycles and Nepal. Originally from Glasgow, he has lived and worked in Nepal intermittently for the past 16 years, first in the Brigade of Gurkhas and more recently as a trekking leader and motorcycle guide.

He has already trekked up to Everest Base Camp nine times—twice to run the Everest Marathon. In 1997 he led a mountain bike trip along the length of the Tarai, and in 2001 he rode his original 'Asha' motorbike from Delhi to Kerala. ●

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KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

BETWEEN CAKE AND LUNCH: Nepal's UN Ambassador Madhu Raman Acharya talks to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal during a meeting at Acharya's New York residence, on Wednesday.



EDWIN KOO

BUFFALO SOLDIERS: Central Kathmandu saw rioting once again over the weekend as people battled with police to protest the government's decision, later rescinded, to cut funding for festivals like Dasain and Indra Jatra.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

OBSTACLE COURSE: Even after the government signed the 10-point agreement on Sunday night, demonstrations continued in some areas as pockets of protesters remained dissatisfied.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

FESTIVE COLOURS: A rainbow hangs over the nine-storeyed temple at Basantapur Darbar Square on the last night of Indra Jatra on Sunday.



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WARRANTY 1 YEAR

The mice play when the cat is away

The Rt Hon'ble Prime Minister Pukada is in the Big Apple with the First Lady, First Son, First Dotter, First Son-in-law and First Adviser Hari Thapa. Foreigner Minister Uppud is in Denmark. Financial Minister BRB is off to the US next week. Tourist Minister Yummy is in the UK. Ram Bahadur is in China and Krishna Bahadur is in DPRK. Youthful Minister Gopalcha is in Azerbaijan of all places, while Reconstructive Minister Kirati is in Hong Kong. Lawful Minister Deb and Agro Minister JP are both in India. The prez is in Janakpur.



With no one around to crack

the whip, little wonder that the justices have joined strippers and buffalo-eaters to go on the war path on Kathmandu's streets this week. Before stirring the hornets' nest by accusing the Supreme Court of corruption, Barman Mainlai should've first checked the Transparency International report out Monday which showed Nepal has moved up from 131st most corrupt country in the world to 121st most corrupt, overtaking countries like Turkmenistan and Tonga. Even the two ministers left behind in Kathmandu were at each other's throats last Saturday. Kathmandales have been speculating about the shouting match between BRB and BDG at the airport

after seeing the Boss off the other day. Rumours have it that Jit Bahadur thinks Leftist God deliberately stoked the protests in Hanuman Dhoka and accused him of not being tough enough in quelling the riots. It's true, just when the demos were dying down, Bum Dev's cops dismantled the lingo, fuelling more anger. BRB should have just listened to his Asan-born wife and not cut the water buffalo decapitation allowance at Indra Jatra.

The finance minister sprung to the defence of bureaucrats who helped him with the budget at the press conference, but privately to advisers he has expressed misgivings about entire chunks of the budget speech

that went missing from the final text before he was due to read it to parliament.



Delayed intelligence has just been transmitted to this donkey's earpiece that Mr & Ms Awesome were gifted a double bed by the Chinese during his Olympics visit. Initially, yours truly wondered why a bed, only to realise that before becoming PM, Comrade Terrible used to meet foreign spooks in his bedroom in Naya Bajar. The dips must have seen the pyjama-clad prime minister-designate's primitive sleeping quarters and decided that it was in Nepal's national interest that the head of government get a

good night's sleep. A word of caution, though, PMji: better sweep the bed for bugs. When they inspected the soon-to-be Naryanhiti Museum last week, Chabilal and Sita noticed the king-sized double bed and exchanged glances when they realised Gyanu and Komal's bed was much bigger than theirs.



While in Delhi, it seems Comrade Terrifying sought out two of India's most-noted godmen, Comrade Ram Dev and Sri Tin Ravi Shankar. The abdominal diaphragm exercises they taught him will have stood him in good stead when he met Dubya in New York on Tuesday, and a transcript of their conversation has just been made available to the Ass. Excerpts:

Bush: How's things in Tibet?

Pukada: I'm from Nepal, it's Dalai who is from Tibet.

Bush: No kiddin'.

Pukada: Comrade President, I've brought with me here four spiral-bound volumes of the complete English translation of our government's Policies and Programs announced last week.

Bush: Wow. That's great!
Pukada: And here is a bronze statue of the Buddha for you as a token of my deep appreciation of your success in spreading the sweet dream of American imperialism all over the world.

Bush: Thanks, Dalai.

Pukada: In exchange, could you try to keep us on your terrorism blacklist? It gives us notoriety and everyone treats us with respect.

Bush: Sure thing, no problem. And say hi to the brave people of Tibet for me, will ya?



This week's New Name Contest winner is Mr Singh for turning Mahendra Highway into Mahindra & Mahindra Highway.



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