

Times NEPAL nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 423

Q. Should the CPN-M, drop the 'Maoist' tag from its name?

Total votes: 3,429

Response	Percentage
Yes	48.7%
No	13.8%
Makes no difference	34.7%

Weekly Internet Poll # 424. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What is the best option for army integration?



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RAJESH BHARDWAJ



FUNNY MONEY: Birganj SP Yogeswor Romkhani (*above*) shows fake notes seized at the border. He holds a wad of Indian 500 rupee notes (*left*) from a consignment of counterfeit currency .

Real or fake?

Nepal has become the main conduit for the smuggling of counterfeit Indian currency

Every month, one billion rupees worth of fake Indian currency is smuggled via Kathmandu airport to Birganj and across into India.

This counterfeit currency racket has vast tentacles with links to international terrorism and crime. The only reason Nepal is a transit point is because of the ease with which Kathmandu airport can be used to smuggle things in and out, and the open poorly-guarded

border between Nepal and India. The irony of it is that even real Indian 500 and 1,000 rupee notes are banned in Nepal.

Our investigation shows that every day, some Rs 30 million is being taken across from Birganj to Raxaul in bicycles, rickshas and tangas. Couriers are paid IRs 500 (in real money) for every bundle of fake Rs 100,000 that they take across. Dealers in India buy every fake IRs 1,000 note for IRs 700 and they pass them on to retailers across the country.

Fake cash is now appearing in ATMs as far afield as Bangalore

and Chennai. Indian sources say that at this rate, there will be IRs 100 billion fake currency in circulation in the next two years. Nepal is also affected because the Indian rupee is used widely in the Tarai. The political instability in Nepal and the criminalisation of politics in the Tarai have abetted the smuggling. The porous Indo-Nepal border, always a haven for smugglers, just has another contraband to push fake cash.

Till a few years ago, the notes looked fake: they had thicker paper, shoddy printing and didn't feel right. But lately, counterfeiters are using sophisticated presses in

Thailand and Bangladesh and have incorporated watermarks, security threads and even got the subtle tints in the ink right. Indian security officials say foreign governments are out to subvert the Indian economy and suspect terror groups with links to Dawood Ibrahim 'D Company' are involved.

Yogewsoor Romkhami displays some fake notes, and says: "Even I can't tell which is real or which is fake. There must be some countries or agencies involved, but I can't say anything sitting in this chair."

VK Shashikumar in Birganj

Full story **p4**





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DEMOB DEADLINE

Government formation, the prime minister's foreign trips, then there was Dasain-Tihar. Finally, there are no more excuses for the government to start governing.

But there is one more potential distraction: army integration. The January deadline for UNMIN's mandate is beginning to focus everyone's minds on dismantling cantonments and containers. Those bankrolling the UN are not in the mood for another extension.

Given the extreme posturing and grandstanding by doctrinaire Maoists led by Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa and the centre-right supporters of status quoists in the Nepal Army, integration won't be easy. Thapa's rash public pronouncements, and the kangresis whipping up a storm over rumours they heard that Nanda Kishore Pun was being proposed as army chief has needlessly polarised the debate.

Back in early 2007, the whole process of interning the guerrillas and their weapons was called 'arms management' just so that it wouldn't hurt Maoist feelings by making it look like they lost. Everyone knew the hardcore guerrillas and their commanders were not in the camps. The Maoists knew we knew. We agreed to call the camps 'cantonments' and gave them the other key to the containers that contained mostly .303s just to keep the ex-rebels happy.

We knew the real hardened fighters were actually the YCL and they were in the cities, but we went along with it. And when the YCL kept beating up and killing people and running kangaroo courts, we looked away for the sake of protecting the peace process. Semantics mattered then because the peace process was fragile. It's now time to call 'arms management' what it really is: disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation.

And it is time to downsize our bloated military, make it more transparent and institutionalise civilian command. The army's argument that it can't allow politically indoctrinated cadre to join a professionally-trained force is a bit disingenuous. After all, it could be argued that the ex-royal army also has a sizeable proportion of 'indoctrinated' officers and soldiers.

Some integration is necessary. You can't have peace when there are two standing armies. There are some 19,000 verified guerrillas in the camps, if they are all integrated into the national army its size will grow to 120,000 at a time when it probably needs to be brought down to its pre-war size of 45,000.

This is a challenge: how do you add and subtract at the same time? The only answer to that is the political will to find a compromise formula. That is what the multi-partisan committee is supposed to do, let it work independently.



Left, right

NC-Maoist confrontation needs to be postponed until we have a stable political system

On Monday, as a television show recording finished, Krishna Prasad Sitaula got a call on his mobile asking if he was free to talk. It was from the prime minister's office. In a few minutes, there was a direct call again: this time from PM Dahal himself.



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

After exchanging warm pleasantries and joking (Dahal asked about Sitaula's disappearing act and Sitaula said it was impossible to get through to the PM after he took office), Dahal got down to business. He wanted to know what the NC had in mind with its Biratnagar rally and asked for support.

Sitaula responded that NC would not hamper the constitution writing exercise and urged Dahal to meet Girija Koirala again.

The same evening, at the Sadbhawana Diwali get-together, all three leaders found themselves sharing a sofa. Dahal immediately pointed out Sitaula to Koirala and said he had reached out and wanted to fix a meeting. Girija said he had referred to his 'sentimental attachment' with Dahal only that morning, and would be happy to meet.

Is this the beginning of a kangres-maobadi thaw? Unfortunately not. Beneath the

surface, the trust deficit between the two parties is deep and small talk over tea will not be enough to bridge it. The NC feels cheated.

Koirala still sees the Maoists refusal to give him the presidency as a betrayal. The NC rank and file feels they have appeased the Maoists enough during the peace process and wants to take an aggressive stance.

NC moderates Sitaula, Shekhar Koirala and even Ram Chandra Poudel are relatively weak. They are peeved with the Maoist arrogance and claim it is ridiculous to expect them to work with a party which has categorised the NC as their 'dushman'. Yet, it is not this school which poses the problem to cooperation, it is the party's rightwing (Sher Bahadur Deuba and his technocrat cronies, Govinda Raj Joshi, K B Gurung and Sujata Koirala) who feel NC suffered because of its association with the Maoists and that it should distance itself.

The Maoist version is different. They feel the kangresis are sore losers and can't reconcile to being just a junior partner in an alliance. Maoist politicians claim they have made the effort and are being flexible on all fronts, including integration. It is the NC which is unclear and not reciprocating. Some Maoists admit privately that they botched up on the presidency but say the NC insistence on the defence ministry and decision not to join

the cabinet was wrong.

Like on most other things, there is division in the Maoist top brass on the question of engaging with the NC. Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai realise that their political survival is dependent on the success of this process, which cannot happen without NC. If this means keeping their ambitions of total political consolidation in check for now, they are willing.

Not everyone in the party sees it that way. They feel the NC is a spent force and can be brushed aside.

If we want a constitution in two or even three years, the country needs the NC and the Maoists to work together. This does not mean NC has to join the government as some are demanding, it is their prerogative to stay out.

Neither does it mean that the Maoists need to get hyper if the NC organises rallies and criticises the government, that is their job. But sections of the NC need to stop flirting with the idea of overthrowing the Maoists in six months. The party also needs to come up with specific demands and constructive proposals instead of only ranting at rallies.

The NC moderates Maoist impulses. The Maoists keep a check on the right wing in the NC and forces it towards the social justice agenda. Both have their class biases and constituencies at odds with each other. Neither can prevail totally over the other. It is fine if they discreetly consolidate and cater to these biases.

Competitive politics is natural but confrontation needs to be postponed for two years till we have a stable political system. Otherwise, the NC will become the rallying point of the right wing. The Maoists will veer towards an ultra-left agenda. And the people will be caught in the middle and continue to suffer. ●

Picking up the pieces in Pakistan

There's fear that things will get a lot worse before they get better

ISLAMABAD-A month after a suicide bomber struck the Marriott here on 20 September, killing 55 people, the hotel is getting ready to reopen in the new year.

Owner Sadruddin Hashwani has made it his goal not to be cowed down by terrorism, and is determined to bring the hotel back into operation. Bulldozers are busy clearing the debris, workers are up in



INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

the rooms facing Constitution Avenue, putting up new windows and repairing the charred façade.

Shock waves from the blast and the ensuing flames twisted the window frames. Every window of not just the Marriott but also a neighbouring government building, is smashed. There is nothing left of the bedrooms, they look dark, abandoned, haunted. The truck bomb left a crater 10m deep in front of the hotel and among the dead was the Czech ambassador.

In early October the UN approved Security Phase-III, which requires the children and spouse of the international staff to leave Pakistan and relocate for an interim period. Various places in the city are off limits, checkpoints are placed all

over the city and routine security alerts are circulated.

Even a month after the bombing, restaurants and parks are empty, shopping centres wear a deserted look and less people come out during the evenings with their families. There's fear that things will get a lot worse before it gets better and expats want to leave before it is too late.

Some have called the 20 September Marriott Hotel bombing Pakistan's 9/11. The attack in Islamabad was symbolic and the message that the attackers were trying to convey was clear—they are getting stronger and they don't care about democracy.

Pakistan's problem with terrorism has its roots in the Cold War years—their support for the Afghan Mujahideen, who were assisted by the US in their fight against the Soviet occupiers of Afghanistan, and later became the Taliban. In the post 9/11 world, Pakistan reluctantly let go of its ties with the Taliban and joined hands with the US to drive them out of Afghanistan. The Taliban fled to Pakistan's northwest tribal areas where the Al-Qaeda was already operating. It shared an intense hatred towards the US that brought the Taliban and Al-Qaeda together.

For those who weren't ready to accept it, the Marriott bombings made one thing clear—the Al-Qaeda and Taliban are not

just enemies of the US and Afghanistan but also Pakistan.

As a Nepali visiting Pakistan during the country's difficult times, one wants to understand their struggle and draw parallels between the war we just came out of and the one that's going on in Pakistan. Although a past American ambassador tried to represent Nepal's anti-Maoist war as a part of the global war on terror, it was clear that there weren't any links.

Our war was internal, it was a domestic response to domestic grievances that had piled up over the centuries. Nepal is not geo-strategic the way Afghanistan always was ever since the Great Game, and we don't have oil—so we have less to fight over. Nepal's giant neighbours both want political stability in Nepal, so there isn't the need for a turf war.

After almost a decade-long military-led regime of Pervez Musharraf, like Nepal, Pakistan has a new government in place. This government has made it clear that it wants to revise the past policies and is willing to do things differently. Taking this approach is not possible unless there's peace in the country, and the new government is able to resolve the economic issues. Pakistan is nearly bankrupt because of falling investment and exports.

Nepal has its own set of problems, but we are not fighting a bloody war anymore, our military is not engaged in operations around the country, innocent civilians are not dying or fleeing their homes every day and there are no terrorist attacks on the scale you see here. Our differences are being sorted out through dialogue. While there's a sense of helplessness and hopelessness in Pakistan, overall in Nepal there's hope for a better future, for a New Nepal.

However, unless the Madhes issue is resolved quickly, and the various political groups and crossborder quasi-criminal gangs are neutralised, it could flare up. If it does, the mix of ethnic volatility with social grievances can be a potentially deadly mixture. Pakistan and Sri Lanka are examples of what will happen if we ignore the Madhes.

Pakistan, pressured by the US, is still taking a heavy-handed military approach along the Afghan border. Many are dead and thousands left homeless are now living in refugee camps in Peshawar. US-led airstrikes kill people every other day. The one important lesson Pakistan can learn from Nepal is that a military-only option doesn't work and it is absolutely doomed to fail if the political government doesn't respect the aspirations of its people. ●

LETTERS

WAR AND PEACE

Thank you for a thought-provoking editorial ('War and peace', #422) which provided us with a new definition of peace. The lawlessness that we see in our streets every day is a direct result of the war and shows us that violence once it is unleashed, is difficult to control. That is why there was all that vandalism outside Annapurna Hotel and Norvic Hospital. Unless we address this, we can't say we are a society at peace.

Dr Umesh, Kathmandu

War at whatever level engulfs your soul and mind which takes years to pacify. In all the wars—Vietnam, Korean, Indo-Pak and WWII—it took many years to heal the wounds in mind and heart: physical ones disappeared much sooner. I supported the Maoist's call for change but not their method. Now they are realising that slogan mongering is easy, but transforming that into real change is an uphill task—especially when most of the influential members of political parties and CA, including those belonging to the Maoists, are the old guard and of the upper caste. The problem in hand now is of army integration. Whatever the outcome, outside expertise will be needed if not for integration then for rehabilitation of the ex-guerillas. Otherwise we will be creating another war.

Sarala Dixit, email

REAPING RICE

One reason why the 'miracle' rice growing technique ('Growing much more rice', # 422), the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), has not gained popularity could be that the decision-makers were not consulted or involved during its introduction. This novel system could solve Nepal's shortage in rice production. Launching the new rice strain into a national movement needs patience as well as professionalism. However, word-of-mouth publicity of success stories could induce other farmers to follow suit. The village development councils should take the lead in promoting the new rice growing technique that would benefit the farmers as well as a large population that depends on rice as a staple diet. Will the Prime Minister show some interest in promoting the SRI that would eliminate the need to import rice?

D B N Murthy, Sanepa, Lalitpur

CORRECTION

The picture credit in 'Indian Idolatry' (#422) should have gone to Shubha Giri instead of Tom Owen-Smith.



Date of First Publication: 28 October 2008

The United Nation Country Team in Nepal and the UN Millennium Campaign
are looking for a dynamic, results-driven Nepalese citizen for the position of

National MDG Campaign and Advocacy Specialist

Contract Type : Service Contract, SB-5
Contract Duration : One year with the Possibility of Extension

Responsibilities

Under the over-all guidance and supervision of the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) in Nepal, the National Campaign and Advocacy Specialist will work under the day-to-day guidance of the Head of the RC Office and the Asia Deputy Director of the UN Millennium Campaign.

The Specialist will work in close cooperation with the UN Country Team, the UN Communications Group the UN Information Centre.

The principal role of the successful candidate will be to plan, design and implement strategies for advocacy, communications and media outreach in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other development issues, to implement advocacy initiatives of the UNCT and the Millennium Campaign, and to strengthen inter-agency collaboration in relation to MDG advocacy and communications. The successful candidate will be expected to quickly become familiar and knowledgeable on the status of the MDGs, the roles and mandates of different UN agencies, engage with key civil society partners and constituencies, and understand the political dynamic and environment of the United Nations in Nepal.

For detailed Job Description of the position, please visit the following UNDP website: <http://www.undp.org.np/vacancy.htm>

Qualifications Requirement

- Advanced degree in communications, journalism, public relations, social sciences or other related field
- At least 5-7 years relevant experience in journalism, public relations-related field and/or communications with a reputable organization with a wide network of media contacts in Nepal.
- Ability to apply in-depth sound technical knowledge and skills in media, current affairs, public relations, and communications to plan and implement MDG campaign and advocacy.
- Proven track record to engage and mobilize key constituencies at the national and local level (e.g. civil society and community-based organizations, youth, legislators, media, private sector and local authorities)
- Excellent analytical, writing and communication skills with the ability to conceptualize, articulate and debate issue related to MDGs.
- Ability to build partnership and manage high-level communications with media, NGOs, government officials, the UN System in Nepal and others.
- Ability to interact with senior UN staff and senior representatives of other organizations.
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Applications should be submitted no later than 20 November 2008
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(Only applicants who are short-listed will be contacted for further recruitment processes)

Applicants must submit the updated standard UN Personal History Form (P.11) available at
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Work experience and/or academic knowledge in relation to gender and social exclusion will be an added advantage. Women, Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis, people with disabilities, and other minorities are especially encouraged to apply.

UNDP has a policy to have a gender balance in its staff at all levels by 2010.

UNDP is currently aware of fictitious vacancy announcements that are being circulated through the internet, the purpose of which is to get people to register for a training and send in a fee. If you believe that you have received such a notice, please forward it, and any other related information you have received, to scamalert@undp.org. Since logos, emblems, names and addresses can be easily copied or reproduced, you are advised to take particular care in applying for vacancies, including undertaking all appropriate measures to protect against the unauthorized use of any personal information you may have provided as a result of the scam.



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“Politicians and police are involved. Otherwise how can so much fake currency be smuggled?”



HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE
1. The Gandhi watermark on the white part of the fake note looks like a caricature and is not accurate, especially the expression on Gandhi's face.
2. Running your finger over the ink of the real note gives a raised 3-D effect which is not as pronounced in the fake note.



CHANGING HANDS: A driver openly bribes a Nepali border policeman to allow him to get through last week in Birganj customs.

ALL PIC: RAJESH BHARDWAJ

V K SASHIKUMAR in BIRGANJ

As the sun rose above the misty Tarai last week, policemen at Nepal's border with India at Birganj stirred awake to guard a checkpoint through which 80 per cent of Nepal's trade with the outside world passes. By the end of the day, Rs 30 million in fake Indian currency will have traveled from Nepal to India concealed in sacks on bicycles, rickshas, tangas and even on the knapsacks of pedestrians.

This is one of the most porous international borders in the world, at most places it is not even marked. Livestock go across to graze and people move about freely to work or shop. On both sides, people are desperately poor, and the lawlessness in the Tarai makes the Indo-Nepal border a haven for smugglers.

Criminal gangs here have been ferrying narcotics, fuel, timber, electronic goods and even people back and forth for decades. But these days, there is a new contraband: counterfeit Indian currency. Printed in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and lately in Thailand, the Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes are flown into Kathmandu airport by couriers, transported overland to Birganj and then taken across the border by smugglers to distributors on the other side.

"We have confiscated more than Rs 400,000. People from both sides are involved," says Birganj SP Yogeswor Romkhami, "this is an open border, we can't control the fake currency unless both sides cooperate." Political uncertainty in Nepal and the Madhes crisis have helped the trade, which thrives on an international criminal network

that has found the weakest link to get the fake cash into India through Nepal.

Officials in New Delhi say Nepal is the main transit point for most of the counterfeit currency entering India. They estimate that Rs 1 billion worth of fake Indian notes are injected into the Indian money circulation every month via Nepal. At the pace it is growing, there will be Rs 100 billion worth of fake currency in circulation in India in the next two years.

"It is a matter of concern for the financial and security establishments and we are aware that the note come in through Nepal, Bangkok and various other centres," India's National Security Adviser, MK Narayanan said in an interview in Delhi.

Indian officials have long maintained that the racket is organised by Pakistani

intelligence and has links to the Dubai-based underworld don, Dawood Ibrahim and his associates in Nepal. They say the intention is to fund terror and to subvert the Indian economy, and use Kathmandu airport and the Indo-Nepal border because it is so easy to smuggle contraband through them.

Raxaul is regarded as the most corrupt customs post on the Indian border. On the Nepal side, police at the border openly extort incoming Nepalis. A consignment of Rs 2 million fake Indian currency has just arrived in a village 20km from Birganj. A courier is getting a red bundle ready to take it across in his bicycle. He will ferry anything across if the price is right and doesn't ask questions. We watch as he casually pushes his bicycle across, past the Shankaracharya Gate, over the bridge into India. We catch up with him on the other side, where he will hand it over to Indian fake currency dealers and collect his payment. He says hundreds of couriers bring bundles of currency like this into India every day. The fake currency used to be printed in Pakistan's Multan or Quetta, officials say, but they were shoddy and could be easily detected. Now, the counterfeiters print much better copies in Thailand and Bangladesh. It is flown into Kathmandu airport in special suitcases with foil linings so they can't be detected. The Kathmandu end of the operation gets IRs 500 for every IRs 1,000 that passes through. Bicycle courier here in Birganj get IRs 500 per bundle of IRs 100,000 they ferry across to Raxaul. Dealers in India buy the fake cash for Rs 700 for every counterfeit IRs 1,000 note. Nepali police sources arrange for us to meet a fake currency dealer in Birganj who they say is a double agent helping them penetrate the racket. He brings with him wads of fake Indian 500 and 1,000 notes from a fresh consignment. The cash looks real, too real. There is a water mark, and has the right tint to the ink, feels and even smells

the same.

For most people in Birganj, what is surprising is not that there is a counterfeit currency racket going on but that the authorities in India and Nepal are either unable or unwilling to control it. It is clear the smuggling operation has high-level support in Nepal with the son of a former royal minister reportedly one of the ring-leaders with links to Dawood Ibrahim's D Company. The network runs so deep that Indian-origin businessmen here in Birganj don't even bother to deny they are involved. "There has to be a much more serious effort to control the smuggling. Birganj has become a hub for fake Indian currency," admits Ashok Temani of the Birganj Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The fake cash also affects the Nepali economy because Indian currency is widely used across the Tarai. Jitendra Sonal, elected member to the CA from Bara, has no doubt that the Nepal government knows who is behind the racket. "Of course they know," he told us, "five lakhs worth of fake currency was caught in Simra airport recently, within 22 hours the fake cash had become real. How do you explain that?"

In Raxaul, assistant customs commissioner Shaukat Ali, says his officers keep a round-the-clock vigil for counterfeit currency. "There is smuggling, it's a tough job, but we are controlling it," he tell us. In Birganj, Shivnath Yadav, of Nepal Police says the sheer length open the border is the biggest challenge, and adds: "We work with our Indian colleagues, but there is no doubt the criminals stake advantage of the open border." Bhaban Singh is an elected CA member who was accused in a series of bombs in Kathmandu last year that killed three students. He now lives most of the time in Raxaul and slips in and out of Nepal to attend assembly sessions in Kathmandu.

He puts it very simply: "Politicians and policemen are involved in the fake currency racket. Otherwise how can so much cash come in through Kathmandu?" ●

On the stands now!



Cover Feature: The Weapon of 'People's Republic'
J B Pun Magar reports on how Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal uses the 'Janaganatantra' slogan to beat his opponents and stay at the head of the line. He will drop it the day it loses utility. Opinion by Mohan Bikram Singh.

Ko Kamyunist? Who's the Real Communist?
Opinions by Pradip Gyawali, Surendra KC, plus report by Subash Devkota.

Sambidhan Yatra - Constitutional Journey
The writing of the constitution has not begun six months after the elections. Himel begins its dedicated journey, reporting and analysing the workings of the Constituent Assembly, featuring Krishna Khanal, Radheshyam Adhikari, and others.

Gurkha Remittance - The London High Court visa ruling on Nepali pensioners could mean the annual loss of NRs 6 billion in remittances. Report by Dambar Krishna Shrestha.

Tarai Militancy - No one believes that the government is ready or that the militants are serious about talks. The blood-letting is set to continue.

... And so much more

HIMAL KHABARPATRIKA - There Is No Alternative

Sleep safe

A Swiss company known for its technologically advanced innovations for the prevention of diseases, Vestergaard Frendsen, has introduced two of its products in Nepal with the help of Kalika Enterprises. The new products are long-lasting insecticide treated mosquito bed nets and curtains, which last for over 20 washes and remain effective for up to four years, and water purifiers in individual and family designs. The nets help shield users from a number of diseases including encephalitis, kala azar and other mosquito related diseases, and are safe to use for infants and pregnant women as well. The family design purifies water according to US EPA standards and doesn't run on electricity.

Golf it

Tashi Ghale won the McDowell Signature Club Golf Championship held on 25 October in Kathmandu. He and runner up Wanchen Dhondup will compete in the Eastern Zone regional finals in India on 17 November. Other winners were Pushpa Rai in the ladies category and Joseph Nathan in the handicap category.



Big heart

Nabil bank donated a sum of Rs 135, 000 to the Prime Minister's Disaster Relief fund for the victims of the Kosi floods on 22 October.

Looking east

Laxmi Bank has opened a branch in Itahari in a bid to meet growing demand in Eastern Nepal. The bank already has branches in Biratnagar and Damak and 12 others across the country. The branch at Itahari will offer the full range of services including a credit card and a savings account offering 6.5 per cent interest. The bank expects to attract remittances coming from the Middle East, and will offer small loans through its micro-credit facility.

Conservation support

Arzu Rana Deuba was elected regional councilor at the fourth congress of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Spain, attracting strong support from NGOs and 118 countries. She was elected with two others to represent the region of South and South-East Asia, and is the first Nepali to win a place in the IUCN's highest decision-making body.

Media mania

Excellence in journalism can be competitively paid for only if papers are financially viable

In the next months, two new media houses will soon bring out four broadsheets in Kathmandu. Never mind that there are already 84 daily newspapers (broadsheets and tabloids) all across Nepal, with 23 of them based in the Kathmandu Valley alone. Given that, according to Advertising



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

Association of Nepal, the print media advertising revenue stands at about Rs 710 million per year. The question on everyone's mind is: Will the new media houses be financially viable?

The answer is: maybe. IT depends on the owners' understanding that they are in a for-profit industry, and not in a for-charity one. What this means is that the way Nepali media companies are viewed, managed and run need to be rethought. Beware of superstars: It's tempting for a new company to get a head start by recruiting journalists working at other publications. Though this can be monetarily exciting for journalists, it's hardly in the long-term interests of the owners. Ultimately, the expenses of keeping a team of superstars, and making sure that their egos are not easily bruised, exceed the revenues, especially when the revenue pie is not growing fast. Indeed, borrowing a page from the Nepali music industry, the executive may glumly concede that the superstars are known only for being, well, superstars, and not

necessarily for scoops and ground-breaking stories that make the readers and the advertisers regularly sit up and take notice. As such, it's well worth thinking whether it's better to hire fresh recruits who have the stamina, the focus, and the raw talent to succeed. After all, in journalism, as in music, you are only as good as the quality of what you last delivered.

Cash is king: One irony is that most journalists want stronger management in the companies they write about, but not necessarily in the ones in which they work. Then again, managing a mainstream media company is not easy. The executive has to balance the budget without forgetting the media's civic mission, and without interfering too much with the kind of creativity and editorial freedom that the business demands. But too much of a focus on either freedom or the civic mission may result in poor cash flow which leads to employees not being paid on time. One way to address this is to make all employees take the management seriously by creating an environment of open and frank conversation. Once it's clear to all that it's the availability of cash that runs the business, the conversation can then be about ways to raise and save cash so that excellence in journalism can be competitively paid for.

Media service company: Thanks to Internet connections that are becoming affordable, more and more readers are used to getting their news almost for free. This is not good news for newspapers that generate revenue



by selling dead-tree products. True, excellent journalism will always be in demand. But if distribution platforms are such that most consumers end up paying next to nothing for the content, then, where will the additional revenue come from?

One way to envision the future is to see the media company not as a traditional media company that puts out newspapers, but to recast it as a media service company. This means that the company may reformat its content to offer training programs, engage in advisory and consulting services, and undertake other media-related activities.

In this age of rising expenses and competition, adhering to the discipline of raising revenues and cutting costs is the only way for a Nepali media company to have a long-term future. ●

Phone care centre

Does your mobile need a health checkup?



KIRAN PANDAY

Ever got home drenched in your bike to find your mobile dripping wet, but still working? Has your cell phone fallen down the staircase and yet still rings? These two real miraculous mobile survival stories show that phones are so sturdily built these days that they are virtually indestructible. Still, Nokia has decided to set up a cell phone care centre

in Kathmandu. "It's not just a repair store, it's a care centre," explained Prem Chand, managing director of Nokia Emerging Asia while opening the centre in Kathmandu last week. This is the first authorised showroom in Nepal for repairing mobile phones a sort of hospital for phones.

Chand says the care centre is a way for

Nokia to extend its brand to customer care and maintenance. With a broad range of mobile phones catering to both the high and the low end, Nokia wants to show that it doesn't forget its customers after selling a device to them.

Although the hardware may be sturdy, with phones getting more and more complicated there are more software glitches. This is why Nokia is opening similar care centers around the region, including Pakistan, Maldives and all over India. The one in Kathmandu will be followed by similar care centres in Pokahara, Narayanghat, Jankapur, Biratnagar and Birtamode.

What's the big deal right, there is a repair centre in every corner street, New road is cluttered with more repair shops for phones than anything else? But as Prem Chand says, "With so many grey areas, its hard to figure out which is genuine and which has been imported by unofficial means.

Also, in a use-and-throw society, you'd think that it's easier to buy a new phone than get involved in the hassle of fixing and repairing. Those who can

afford it usually take this option but others usually take it to small repair centres which charge a lot and usually put in faulty spares.

Promising international standard service, Chand says the care center will provide proper diagnosis of whatever problem there is, using genuine imported spare parts to fix faults. Another service the centre will provide is to swap a faulty mobile under warranty with a new one.

Nokia's future plans in Nepal include users being able to send Nepali SMS soon. Moutushi Kabir, communication specialist at Nokia says his company will work with regulators, government and service providers to improve accessibility and mobility. "Tax rates and heavy duty on phones need to be reduced," he says, "mobile penetration can help growth in GDP."

But with the global economic recession looming, it's a wonder that people aren't getting more cautious about investing in technological products. But Prem Chand says: "People are so dependent on phones we don't see a drop in sales." ●
Shradha Basnyat

Talk to whom?

Santosh Baraili in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 1-15 November

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

The government has begun an unusual method to look for mediators with Tarai parties. Peace minister, and coordinator of the government's talks committee, Janardan Sharma says the government will offer a cash reward of Rs 50,000 to anyone who can successfully bring the Tarai groups to the negotiation table. And Prime Minister Dahal says he is ready to provide the post of assistant or state minister for a mediator who proves himself able to fix talks with a significant party in the Tarai.

Chairman of the Dalit Janajati Party and member of the constituent assembly Bishwendra Paswan disclosed the 'offer' after a meeting with the prime minister, "I don't know about other parties, but Jwala Singh will be present in the talks." Paswan is an uncle of Jwala Singh of the JTMM faction. "He's not just going to sit at the talks just for the sake of it, the talks will be

successful," Paswan said. The government doesn't know how many militant groups there are in the Tarai, what their demands are and where they are based. There is difficulty in reaching them, sending letters, and even figuring out their location. Moreover, the parties who have been sent letters have begun to raise the bar and are increasing their preconditions and demands. All of this is heavily weighing on any possibility for the talks, and thinning chances that they will be held at all.

Parties such as the Rajan Liberation Party who have received the letter are demanding that the government's talks committee itself should be dismantled. But the talks committee is persistent that demands and pre-conditions should only be discussed on the talks table, and not beforehand.

The government has agreed not to arrest members and politicians of any of the armed Tarai groups, and has even agreed to ensure security during the talks to create an environment conducive for the talks.

The three-member talks team which was formed under the

coordination of Minister Sharma, decided that armed forces should not be arrested prior to talks, and that members who attend the talks be guaranteed of their full safety. They will try to reach and inform other parties about the

talks and fix a location and date for the talks to be held.

However, the government isn't clear about which parties it considers as criminal and which as political. While Sharma says that the talks will only be started after this is sorted out, other members of the talks group have been saying that they are ready to talk with everyone from Ramchandra Rai to Renu Yadav. This shows that the government

isn't prepared for the talks and also clearly reveals that there is confusion even on the rules and principles level. Political analyst Nilambar Acharya says that the government should hold separate talks with the criminal and political groups. Says Acharya: "Holding talks without being aware of a criminal group's character, could result in criminality gaining legitimacy."



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Talks with PM only

Ajit Tiwari in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 1-15 November

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

A joint front of 15 armed groups in the Tarai put a condition for talks with the government that the PM should head the talks team, the front's coordinator Manejar Mahato told the press in Bihar last week. He said the government devalued the Terai armed groups by forming a talks team comprising of low level ministers.

"This government did not realise that the real power of Tarai is with us," he said. He demanded that the talks team should be headed by the PM and its members should include MJF president Upendra Yadav, TMLP president Mahanta Thakur, Sadbhavana president Rajendra Mahato. The front has already formed a five member talks team led by Bibas Bidroha. The front comprises of four small outfits of People's Liberation Front, Madhesi Tigers, Terai-Madhes Liberation Tigers, Madhes-Tarai Liberation Front, Tarai Cobra, Tarai Liberation Force and Madhesi Virus Killers.

People's Tarai Liberation Front, Rajan Liberation group shot at a UML cadre Utimalal Mahato the very next day the government formally wrote to Tarai armed groups. Police arrested Chandra Kumar Yadav in connection to the murder and he died the following day in custody. There is no decline in incidents of violence in the Tarai and the government mechanism does not seem to be acting responsibly.

The internal conflict within the armed outfits seems to be another hurdle in peace talks. When the most influential leader Jwala Singh was showing his willingness to sit for talks, his party spokesperson Surya Deb Singh said that there is no meaning to sit for talks with the government they do not trust. Each group has its own demands, which is another obstacle. Responding to the government call for talks, Rajan Liberation group has demanded the government talks team should be dissolved while Jwala Singh group has put a condition of ceasefire before talks. The Goit group has completely ignored the government call and demanded UN mediation.

Nine armed groups in a meeting held in Katihar, India had declared a ceasefire unilaterally and showed interest for talks with the government before Dasain. But the Front could not take a decision as Goit walked out of the meeting when he found that he would not get the leadership.

Although some of the groups are positive about talks, the chance is low that they will come to the table because they have a lucrative extortion racket going. They are far from the reach of state security. However, they have been demanding that security should be limited to district headquarter. Supply Minister Rajendra Mahato said in Janakpur this wasn't possible.



KIRAN PANDAY

Adulterated fuel

Kantipur, 26 October

क्रान्तिपुर

Krishna Dulal of Maitidebi got ready to leave for Chitwan on Saturday on his motorbike. His new Pulsar motorbike had just come back from the shop after servicing, but it just wouldn't start. He took it to the Pulsar showroom where he was told that the engine has ceased to work. Shiva Ram Shrestha started experiencing the same problem with his bike which is less than three weeks old. When he took his bike to the showroom he was told that there are 80 bikes in line before him with similar problems. The company told both Dulal and Shrestha that their engine died because they have been using petrol adulterated with turpentine. Over 150 motobikes break down in the Valley every week

with this problem. When the fuel in the tanks of the bikes were tested they were all found to be adulterated. Workshop owners say that in the last 15 days the number of bikes with bad valves, start-up problems, engine ceasing to work have increased. When there was scarcity of fuel in Kathmandu, the workshops used to see many motorbikes with similar problems. Authorised dealers of Hero Honda, Suzuki, Yamaha and Bajaj say that 95 percent of the motorbikes sold during Dasain have come back to them with the problem. The colourless turpentine is easy to mix with petrol and is only Rs 30 per litre, much cheaper than the Rs 95 per litre petrol. The owners of the motorbikes have sent letters to

various ministries. They have demanded that the supply of adulterated oil be stopped immediately. Although the government has tightened the supply of turpentine motorcycle dealers say that many tankers are still coming in. Hero Honda dealer Laxman Ratna Tuladhar says if the engine is damaged due to adulterated oil, it is not covered by the company under warranty repairs so it costs the customer over Rs 12,000 to fix. Supplies Minister Rajendra Mahato has requested all consumers to ask for a receipt from the petrol station when they put gasoline, "If there's a receipt, it is easier to track the petrol station down and penalise them," says Mahato. Similarly, motorcycle dealers are requesting their customers to only refill in gas stations they trust

Forgotten promises

Letter to the Editor in Rajdhani, 26 October

राजधानी

Although Nepal became a republic not long ago, some people are out to turn the clock back. The Maoists were seen as a force of change, but since coming to power, their thoughts and actions seem to have dramatically changed. Has the lure of power intoxicated them as well? It is important that the result of any revolution or election is fruitful. The people's mandate has to be respected. Nepal's politics has been limited to forming excellent roadmaps, not implementing any of them. Development is extended to only a selected group of people. Are the Maoists following this trend as well? What has the Maoist government done for the relief of the poor, the voiceless? Instead, road-side vendors have been harassed. Only the salaries of civil servants has been raised. There must be a reason why we still have protests, even though the peace process is underway, monarchy has been abolished and we have become a republic. It is most unfortunate when the rights won after a revolution or the people's mandate and freedom achieved after an election are not reflected in actual actions. The Maoists are biased and only make decisions benefiting a few. The main task to drafting the constitution hasn't even begun. Are the politicians again playing games to ensure that their chairs are not shaken? Such a situation can only result in what we can terms as a 'political cancer'. The political parties have to respect the people's mandate and work sincerely for the country's benefit. Past agreements should not be disregarded. Basudeb Debkota, Nepal Manbiki Campus, Kathmandu



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Female FM

Samaya, 6 November

समय

The radio industry in Rupendehi is buzzing with activity. At present, seven FM stations are being aired from Rupendehi alone, and there are seven more from outside the district that the radios catch. The latest addition to the FM dial in Rupendehi is Mukti FM. The station has been initiated by a group of women as a community project and made its debut only last week. Mukti is all-female: the investors, the management and the staff are all women. With a capacity of 100W, the station can be tuned into not just by people in

Butwal but also from Kapilbastu and Nawalparasi. The group that operates this FM station is associated with an organization called Media Campaign for Gender Equality. These motivated women are actively involved in fields of politics, social, media, law, education, health and human rights. A radio station by the women and for the women, Mukti FM focuses on issues related to the fairer sex. However, programs covering subject like health, education, employment, Dalit and ethnic groups are also aired. Mukti FM follows the example of an all-female FM in Biratnagar started last year.

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Feathere

This autumn, take time off to wat



PAAVAN MATHEMA

October marks the start of the best bird-watching season in Nepal. And what a place to watch: nine per cent of the entire world's bird species are found in this country.

There are 863 species of birds found in Nepal, which is more than can be found on the entire continent of North America. It is Nepal's topographic diversity, ranging from the wetlands of Kosi Tappu barely 90 metres above sea level to Himalayan peaks above 8,000 metres, that provides the diverse habitat to make the rich birdlife possible. The hills around Kathmandu Valley alone is home to more than 500 species of birds.

About 600 of the birds found in Nepal are indigenous and some 150 are migratory species that stop over in Nepal on their east-west or north-south migration from Siberia to Indonesia, Sri Lanka and even Africa. New species are still being spotted, with 13 new species recorded in the past five years.

But not all is rosy in the bird world. "About 80 per cent of the birds in Nepal are threatened because their habitats are being destroyed," says Hem Sagar Baral of Bird Conservation Nepal. Nationally, 134 species of birds have been identified as threatened, including 33 that are globally considered under threat.

The main threats are from human encroachment of forests, filling in of wetlands, river and lake pollution and the use of pesticides in fields. Vultures throughout South

Asia, for example, are on the verge of extinction because of the use of steroids to treat livestock. This poisons the birds that feed on carrion.

Although nearly 20 per cent of Nepal's land area is protected, a high proportion for a developing country, critically important areas like Phulchoki, the Dharan forests, Mai Valley and Tamur Valley and their watersheds remain unprotected. Some birds with special habitats—such as the Golden-breasted Fulvetta, which live only in bamboo forests—are now struggling to survive as the bamboo groves are cleared.

As the monsoon clouds clear and the northern winter approaches, keen birders should get out their binoculars and be strategically located to look out for birds heading south. ●

Where to bird-watch



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

This island in the Kosi's delta fan as is Nepal's (and Asia's) richest bird sanctuary. Situated in the plains, along a river valley that is the superhighway for trans-Himalayan bird migration, it is a major winter sanctuary for migratory water fowl. More than 485 species have been recorded here, including 20 or so that are globally threatened species.

The Swamp Francolin, Black-bellied Tern, Lesser Adjutant and Yellow-breasted Bunting, which have been listed as vulnerable species globally, are fairly common in the area.

When the Kosi embankment was breached in September, many feared for the rich wildlife that the reserve shelters. So far, the birds are still there, but bird experts say construction work to bring the Kosi back to its original channel could disturb birds this winter.

Chitwan National Park

The Chitwan National Park has a combination of Siwalik hills and pristine tropical forests. Its location on the flood plains of the Gandaki and Rapti rivers makes it an ideal place for bird-watching. There is a combination of indigenous and migratory species, and some 480 species of birds have been identified in Chitwan.

Bardia National Park

With similar terrain to Chitwan, the Bardia National Park is rich in western lowland species. It is also on the migratory routes up and down the Karnali and has many species from western Tibet. There are several resorts that will bring you within binocular distance of Hawk-eagles and Bengal Floricans. Further west is Sukla Phanta, which has hundreds of migratory species wintering in the Mahakali floodplain.

Other national parks

Most birds have migrate down from the high mountain national parks like Langtang, Annapurna, Sagarmatha and Makalu-Barun in winter. So it isn't the best season for bird watching as most birds have already headed down the mountain or flown south. But Alpine Choughs can still be observed soaring up the valley winds and Nepal's national bird, the Danfe, stays behind to forage among the dwarf juniper slopes. There are also plenty of Cakor Partridges, Himalayan Snowcocks, Cheer and Kokla pheasants to be seen.

Kathmandu Valley

One doesn't need to go too far afield for birdwatching. Shivapuri, Pulchoki and Nagarjun are so rich in birdlife that ornithologists come all the way from Europe and the United States to visit the forests on the valley rim.

With its 1,500m vertical altitude range, Phulchoki is a birders' paradise with more than 250 species on just one mountain. Pulchoki's restricted-range species include the Hoary-throated Barwing, and threatened species like the White-rumped Vulture and Slender-billed Vulture.

Across the valley, Shivapuri has seen a remarkable resurgence after being declared a national park and has more than 180 species waiting to be ticked off, including the Spiny Babbler.

Taudaha may just be a pond on the Pharping road, but is a stopover for many migratory birds on their way from the Tiebtan plateau to the Tarai. Local youth have cleaned it up and there are good vantage points from which to watch the waterfowls.



ed friends

ch Nepal's amazingly rich bird life



ALL OTHER PICS: FRIENDS OF BIRDS

Nepalicola

An important addition to Nepal's huge bird family is a sub-species of the Rufous-vented Prinia, *Prinia burnesii nepalicola*, which brings the number of species and sub-species recorded in Nepal to 863. This olive-grey bird, 14.6cm long is a new discovery not just for Nepal but for the world. It was first recorded at Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve by a team from Bird Conservation Nepal in 2005.

Other subspecies of *Prinia burnesii* are already known. *Prinia burnesii burnesii* is found in parts of Pakistan and adjacent areas of Punjab in India. *Prinia burnesii cinerascens* is found in Assam. Perhaps it was only a matter of time before one sub-species would also appear in Nepal.

The birds were spotted on patches of grassland on small islands in the Kosi river. Similar grasslands are also present in Chitwan, Bardia and Sukla Phanta, and experts believe that this prinia may be present in those areas as well. Based on the Kosi study and the availability of suitable habitat, it is estimated that the current population of the Rufous-vented

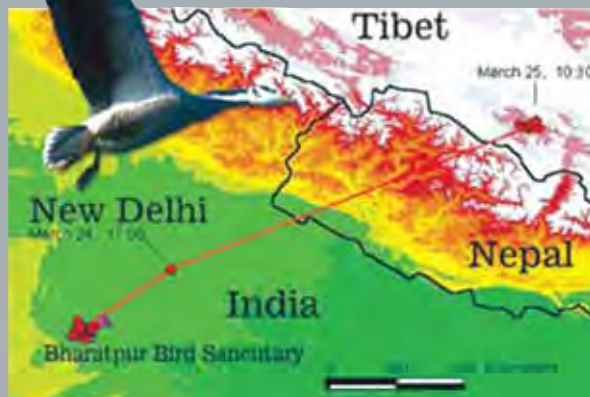
Prinia in Nepal could be as large as 500.

In January 2008, another new species— Sykes's Nightjar *Caprimulgus mahrattensis*— was spotted in the sandy banks of Kosi. This Nightjar breeds in Pakistan and North West India and flies to the south of centre China in winter. However, this is the first time that the bird has been seen in Nepal. Experts believe that this species is simply a visitor bird and that its population is probably low. This new discovery has increased the number of species of Nightjars recorded in Nepal to five.



BIRD CONSERVATION NEPAL

Flying high



WILDLIFE INSTITUTE OF INDIA/ US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Bird migration routes are older than the Himalayas. As the mountains rose, birds adapted to flying higher and higher.

Migratory birds crossing the Tibetan plateau from India to Siberia have set amazing altitude records. Acclimatised Himalayan choughs soar at nearly 8,000m

above the South Col of Chomolungma. Tibet-bound terns and ducks refueling at Gokyo Lake at 4,400m in early April before flying back over the "hump" to Tibet. Mountaineers catch plenty of regular sightings of geese honking their way past Dhaulagiri at 7,300m.

Satellites have tracked a wired bar-headed goose's flight path as it took off from the Bharatpur bird sanctuary in north India, across western Nepal up to the Tibetan plateau, crossing three countries. The bird rode the jetstream, flying over 500km at an altitude of 5,000m in 16 hours and 30 minutes to lakes north of Mustang in Tibet.





ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

International domestics

The gender and ethnic composition of Nepal's overseas labour migration is a subject that hasn't been analysed properly.

Of the total number of women officially migrating for work every year to third world countries other than India, women make up 11 percent. Newspaper reports of women flying to Kuwait and other Gulf destinations via India may mean that the numbers may be much higher.

Nevertheless, remittances by female workers probably make up 15 percent of the total \$1.5 billion that are sent home by Nepal's overseas workers. Adding the figures for India as well as the evidence that women tend to save more than male co-workers suggests that the money Nepali women send home is even higher.



COMMENT
Ganesh Gurung

Most women going for foreign employment are from rural areas, they have less than 10 years of schooling, they are in the 20-40 age bracket and they are mostly from

marginalised ethnic groups. Most work as domestics, but there is also an increasing number of women who are going as care-givers to destinations like Israel.

In September, the government imposed a ban on Nepali women intending to migrate to work in Malaysia and the Gulf. The bans were in response to the requests from Nepali ambassadors in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia who said the women have been vulnerable to exploitation in the hands of employers in the past. Tens of thousands of potential women workers have had to cancel their plans, or are trying to find ways to get around the law.

The ban is problematic for several reasons. The first is that it violates the fundamental right of Nepali women to move freely regardless of gender. The second question is: is the ban a solution at all?

The renewed ban on Nepali women to work in the Gulf is ill-conceived and unworkable

Past experience shows that despite bans, Nepali migrant workers have been flying to Iraq and Afghanistan via India and Bangladesh. Many are in trouble or have either been deported, rescued and flown back home by our embassies. Kuwait has been a major destination for Nepali women who are mostly flown out via New Delhi airport where many are detained every week for having improper passports or forged visas.

A ban would only raise the fees for illegal entry for women to those countries and increase their vulnerability to exploitation by middlemen. The ban was first imposed in 1998 after the death of Kani Sherpa in Saudi Arabia. The ban was lifted in 2007, but has been reimposed now for Malaysia and the Gulf countries.

The paradox is that it was when the ban was in place between 1998-2007 that the highest number of Nepali women went to work as domestics in the Gulf countries. Saudi Arabia alone has 40,000 Nepali women, and nearly all of them flew out via Dhaka or New Delhi. Their departure through Kathmandu airport wouldn't have been possible without an under-the-counter 'facilitation fee'.

Instead of trying to curb this, the government has taken the easy way out and announced a ban—knowing fully well that it will not work. The only people who suffer from the ban will be the women themselves who will now have to pay bigger bribes through their recruiting agents. And when they suffer, they can't even report it to the authorities because they are breaking the law.

The ban on Nepali women migrating to work is ill-conceived, unworkable and will put the women in much more danger. Why doesn't the government just ban poverty, too, so that the women don't have to migrate at all? ●

Ganesh Gurung is a sociologist and chairperson of National Network for Safe Migration

At what cost the remittance economy?



LINING UP: Women stand on a long queue as they wait for their turn to submit applications for employment in Korea.

DEWAN RAI

Kalpana Giri was a government school teacher in Bajura and her husband was a policeman. During the conflict, he was forced by the Maoists to leave the police and they had to leave their village because of threats. After failing to find a job, Kalpana decided to go abroad. She spent Rs 30,000 to learn Hebrew and paid Rs 450,000

to a recruiter to find her a caregiver job in Israel. In 2006, she left her five-year-old daughter and three-year-old son with her parents, and went to Israel.

She was contracted to work for five years, but she could not work more than five months. Although she earned \$550 a month, her work to take care of a 82-year-old blind man was too demanding. He abused her verbally and tried to abuse her physically. "He

would go mad when I said no and he even started torturing me physically," she recalls. He would beat her up and would not give her food.

She complained to his son, but he said the family had paid for her so she had to do everything he asked her to do. "I just couldn't continue, I feel nauseated even telling you all this," Kalpana said, relating how she became sick after she was

Baglung women work



KISHOR RIMAL

KISHOR RIMAL in BAGLUNG

Baglung is called the 'District of Lahures'. It has more migrant workers in proportion to the population than any other district in Nepal.

In villages after villages between Baglung and Beni, houses are shuttered up, and there are only women, the elderly and children to be seen.

The Baglung district administration estimates that 65

TAKES COURAGE: Sita Pathak, her daughter and Devi Pathak with fellow activist Sitaram Thapa. Sita and Devi are both HIV positive, and have overcome social stigma to spread awareness among Baglung's women about AIDS prevention.

Female migrant workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse



KIRAN PANDEY

attacked. His daughter admitted her to a hospital and with the help of a social worker, she contacted her agency. But the recruiter refused to send her home and instead locked her up in a room. One day, she climbed the wall and ran away. She went to a police station and explained her situation.

The police summoned the agency and had it pay damages and her trip home. Kalpana says

the situation hasn't changed, and hundreds of Nepali women are going through the same problems she had. There is a Nepali embassy in Israel now, but Nepali caregivers who have problems at work still have no redress, she says, quoting friends in Israel. Kopila Rai worked as cleaner and domestic help in Kuwait for two years.

Born in Bhojpur, she had come to Kathmandu to go to college. She met a Kuwait returnee who told her about a vacancy for salesgirl there. She could not resist the temptation to visiting a new place, earning money and living an independent life.

When she got to Kuwait, she found her job was to be a janitor in a bank. It paid her Rs10,000 per month, but after six months she also started working as a part-time domestic to augment her income. Unlike many other horror stories of Nepali women in Kuwait, Kopila was never abused. "Not everyone is as fortunate as me," she says, "female migrant workers are often vulnerable to abuses and violations."

After two years, Kopila is back in Kathmandu and has completed her Masters in Sociology. She completed her thesis on the issues of migrant workers and has now become an activist working for the welfare of migrant workers. Female migrant workers often work as domestics or caregivers which makes them even more vulnerable to abuse. They suffer multiple vulnerabilities: they are first exploited by Nepali recruiters and in the destination country often suffer physical and mental abuse. Back home, society attaches a stigma to female migrant workers. They can neither get any compensation nor have access to other facilities like insurance. At home, the society tends to suspect the character of



MIN BAJRACHARYA

BACK HOME: Kalpana Giri is glad to have returned after working in Isreal for five months as a caregiver.

female migrant workers.

Despite all the publicity about abuse and exploitation, women are still lining to go abroad, paying for Kuwaiti visas they know as fake, or passports that are not theirs. And when they get in trouble, they have nowhere to go.

Kalpana Giri hopes no one has to suffer what she did, but is sad that so many are so unprepared for what happens. "Unless there is standard employment contract and bilateral agreements with the country of destination, they are always vulnerable to violence," says Kalpana, who like Kabita, helps migrant workers back in Kathmandu.

Kalpana and Kopila say the government needs to set up embassies in countries with large concentrations of Nepali women, have rescue services and counselling, work for legal remedies in countries of origin and employment, effective monitoring of fake documents and pre-departure orientation.

Says Kopila: "We only talk about how the government benefits from the money migrant workers send home. But at what cost?" ●

on AIDS prevention

Besides remittances, migrant workers are also bringing back HIV

percent of the young men in the district live and work in Qatar or Malaysia. They send home an estimated Rs140 million a year in remittances. If the money from Baglung migrant workers in India and soldiers in the Indian Army are added, the total is much more.

But there is more than just cash coming back to Nepal, workers are also bringing home HIV and infecting their wives. Although the Midwestern hill districts of Achham and Doti are worse off because of the higher proportion of unskilled workers in India, the epidemic is spreading in Baglung as well.

Sita Pathak of Balewa in Baglung was happy when her husband moved to India. He came home for holidays and brought back his earnings, but she only realised later that he had also infected her with HIV.

By the time she got her test, it was too late.

Her husband died three years ago, and despite the stigma Sita has now turned into an activist to help spread awareness to other women like her whose husbands work abroad. "I only have my daughter and other sisters like me, I will live for them," Sita says.

Devi Pathak is also from Balewa and was also infected by her husband who works in India. When she found out, she contemplated suicide. But like Sita she has dedicated herself to helping others like her.

Sita and Devi work with a local AIDS awareness group that has 70 members, of whom 50 were infected by husbands working in India. At least five of the women were infected by husbands who worked in the Gulf.

"Stigma and ostracisation means that it takes a lot of courage to come out openly to admit they have HIV," says Sitaram Thapa, who works with the AIDS awareness group which works with prospective migrant workers, with their families back home in Nepal and with the general population.

On the main street of Burtibang village there are only old men and women and children on the streets. "If there were jobs here, they wouldn't have left," says 70-year-old Santosh Pun, whose only son when to India to work as a porter and never returned. He was diagnosed as HIV positive and died last year.

Pun's eyes glisten as he tells us: "I have lost my son, but whose duty is it to protect the other sons and daughters of Nepal?" ●

Narrowing the gap



SAM KANG LI

It is now acknowledged that poverty and inequality have a great impact on health, and the world's leading experts recently called for this gap to be closed within a generation.

Nepal is trying to do just that by introducing policies to make access to essential health care services more equitable. The goal is for essential services to be as available to the poor and marginalised as services are to advantaged castes and ethnic groups. At present, free health care is targeted to the poor and other disadvantaged groups at district hospitals and primary health care centres.

Treatment is free at health and sub-health posts, and the government will introduce free maternal care at all health institutions and expand universal free care to all district facilities in the near future.

The number of clients using government health facilities has



COMMENT
Robert Timmons

increased since fees for services were abolished, especially in the Tarai. But Nepal faces challenges to ensure equitable access to essential health care services for all citizens.

Inequalities between castes and ethnic groups persist in the use of government health services and in the health of Nepal's people, just as inequities linger between the poor and those who are better off. But the results of surveys conducted in 1996, 2001, and 2006 show that significant progress has been made in reducing these differences.

Over the 10-year period, more poor families and people from marginalised castes or ethnic groups have benefited from family planning services, diarrhoeal disease control, treatment for acute respiratory infection, and childhood immunizations. At the same time, differences in the size of babies at birth, and infant and under-five mortality have decreased markedly. The equity gap has narrowed.

Use of modern contraception is much more evenly distributed now among castes and ethnic groups. The incidence of diarrhoea has decreased sharply among Dalits, from 30 per cent in 1996 to only 9 per cent in 2006. In 1996 'high caste' children were more likely to benefit from treatment of acute respiratory infection than Dalits. Ten years later, more Dalits than the 'high castes' were benefiting from the treatment. Treatment of acute respiratory infection among Muslims has also risen.

Inequalities in rates of childhood immunisations have decreased between castes and ethnic groups over the last decade, as they have between the richest and the poorest, but children from wealthier families are still more likely to benefit from immunisations.

Regrettably, disparities in antenatal care between castes and ethnicities have increased. Antenatal visits by the wealthiest women from more advantaged castes or ethnic groups have increased much more rapidly than visits by the poorest. We need to close this gap to help ensure safe pregnancies and healthy newborns.

The number of babies born smaller than average is decreasing faster among the poorest than the richest, and the new policy of free delivery care at government health care institutions aims to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality, especially among the poor and women and children of marginalised castes and ethnic groups. Disparities in rates of neonatal mortality, however, have increased slightly over the decade.

Under-five and infant mortality rates are still higher than the national average among marginalised castes and ethnic groups, but they have declined sharply since 1996. The gap in child survival is closing.

Remarkable gains have been made in reducing inequalities in access to and differences in utilisation of health care services between castes and ethnic groups, as well as between poor and wealthier citizens in Nepal since 1996. Health outcomes have also improved for the poor and marginalised.

However, inequalities in access and use persist and are increasing for some services. The government is addressing these inequalities in the delivery of health care and actively working to lower the number of deaths of the newborns, infants, and young children of poor and marginalised families. ●

Robert Timmons is team leader of the Health Sector Reform Support Program, Ministry of Health and Population



ALL PICS: ALLIANCE FRANCAISE

ROMA ARYAL AND
SHRADHA BASNYAT

While traveling around Kathmandu, Karl and Pierre found their answer in Darbar Square. As they watched the "social sculpture" of Hanuman Dhoka they realised what made it a sacred space was not so much the architecture but the people.

"One of the most beautiful things created by human hands," says Karl, speaking of the shopkeepers, beggars and sweepers. These people are mostly ignored by visitors taking photographs of the

Where does God exist? This is a question humankind has struggled with through the ages.

City of divine lights

temples. Karl and Pierre noticed how invisible the lives of the people were, but even so saw divinity in their mundane realities. This is where the concept of the 'divinity of the common life' originated.

Organised by the Alliance Francaise, the show at Khula Manch on 7 November will involve 19 artists in five different stages on the Tundikhel. Karl Knapp and Tenzin Norbu Gurung, a noted thanka painter, will paint large portraits both before the performance and on stage of random people around Darbar Square, depicting them in godly positions. Actors from Gurukul will portray those characters, glorifying them to the music of Kutumba, while Pierre-Alain Hubert's spectacular firecrackers and Salil Subedi's narration will

Magician of light

Pierre-Alain Hubert, French pyrotechnic, creates paintings in the sky through the medium of fireworks. More than words, Pierre finds it easier to communicate with his art. In one of his performances, he has firecrackers sputtering out of his hat, and in another a thousand-cycle-heels alight and revolving. They are all grand, dangerous and mysterious performances, executed with the flair of a magician and a skillful performer.

All his performances are an instant hit with the audience. "I don't know what they understand," says Pierre, "but everyone seems to pick up what they want from it."

With an entry in the Guinness World Records for his 1.6 KM long fireworks and 35 years of performing, Pierre is one of the most recognised pyrotechnic experts in the world. He was first trained as an architect, and the expertise enabled him to do the detailed sketching for the execution of his fireworks. Pierre is influenced by both mathematics and philosophy and finds the concept of the ephemeral appealing. For this reason and because he is fascinated by light, he chose the uncommon medium of fireworks.

In Kathmandu, Pierre is not only bothered by the fact that the sort of fireworks he wants aren't available here and that he will have to do with 'wedding' firecrackers imported from India, he's also particularly critical about the patakas and winces each time a Tihar firecracker makes a loud cracking sound. "Firecrackers aren't about shooting shells in the sky," he argues, "It's about manipulating light. It's emotional."



KIRAN PANDAY

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Festival of fusion

An artist who advocates the concept of 'fusion' in art, Karl experiments and fuses the traditional with the contemporary, attempting to breathe new life into the art scene. Initially influenced by the ideals of graffiti art of New York, he wanted his work to go to the streets and not be left hanging in museums. He is an installation artist using materials like videos, multimedia, performances and actions to make each of his work come to life and grab the audience. Karl's work is definitely not main-stream, but is an eccentric outcry of expression.



KIRAN PANDYA

Karl has been an artist for as long as he remembers. Even his grandmother was an artist, and young Karl followed in her footsteps but took a new direction. Graduating from an art school in Pasadena, California, he worked in Hollywood for a while and was involved in bringing creativity to music videos for 2Pac and Neal Young. However, Hollywood wasn't Karl's thing and he moved on, feeling that it wasn't "a place for creative people." At the age of 35, he moved to France, and seven years ago he met Pierre in Marseille. From then on, the two have worked to weave their contrasting styles of art in their several performances.

"Art is not just for the elite," says Karl. He wants his art to be accessible to the larger public, which is why he involves direct interaction with people and attempts to take laypeople's idea of

contemporary art to a higher level. If he can't change their ideas, Karl fills his performances with motion, moving the audience, and urging them to participate in the creative process: "If I can't move them mentally, I'll move them physically," he says. In many of his shows, he has moved people from one setting to a completely different place in order to make his point.

direct the audience's attention. At one point, two large wheel-like structures will be lit to represent the Kala Chakara.

With so many artists bringing in their own interpretations of the theme: Pierre and Karl describe the performance as a patchwork quilt created by the amalgamation of a variety of different art mediums and approaches of expression, a fusion of ideas. The idea is to arouse a feeling of interaction in the audience. That's why they

chose Khula Manch as it is accessible to a variety of audiences from all walks of life. They hope that the common experience will serve even partly to break down barriers.

Following the show will be an exhibition of the performance in the Art Council on 14 November. The photos that will be exhibited will cover the entire process of the performance and the art created during the show. ●

Khula Manch, 6PM, 7 November. Free entry.

November Sky

Meeting of two brilliant planets for 30 November

This month Mars is hard to find, but Jupiter and Venus provide a brilliant display in the evening sky and we also have a couple of meteor showers. But before we get to them, let me tell you about the great stars of November. On any clear evening, if you look directly overhead, you will find four bright stars that form an almost perfect square.



STARGAZING
Kedar S Badu

This is the Great Square of Pegasus. To the north of

Pegasus, you will find the 'W' shaped constellation of Cassiopeia. Just below Cassiopeia and to the east of Pegasus you can see the Andromeda constellation, near the centre of which lies the Andromeda Galaxy, M31—just visible to the naked eye but clearly seen through binoculars.

Next door to Cassiopeia is the constellation of another mythical hero, Perseus, which contains the winking star—Algol, 'the demon'—whose brightness changes every three days. Sometimes considered to be the evil eye of Medusa, this is well worth viewing through binoculars. Between Perseus and Cassiopeia is a beautiful sight for binoculars—the famous Double Cluster. These two closely situated open star clusters are well worth a look. The Summer Triangle, made up of the three bright stars Vega, Deneb and Altair, is also fairly obvious in the western sky.

Low on the southwest horizon immediately after sunset is another large and beautiful constellation—Scorpius. Behind and just to the east, is Sagittarius, another constellation that is easy to see. It is supposed to be an archer but it

looks more like a teapot. On a clear, moonless night, look carefully at the spout of the teapot and you will see what looks like steam rising from it. This is in fact the Milky Way band, which extends all the way up through the Summer Triangle. Planet watchers, get ready for the brilliant display of Jupiter and Venus in the evening sky.

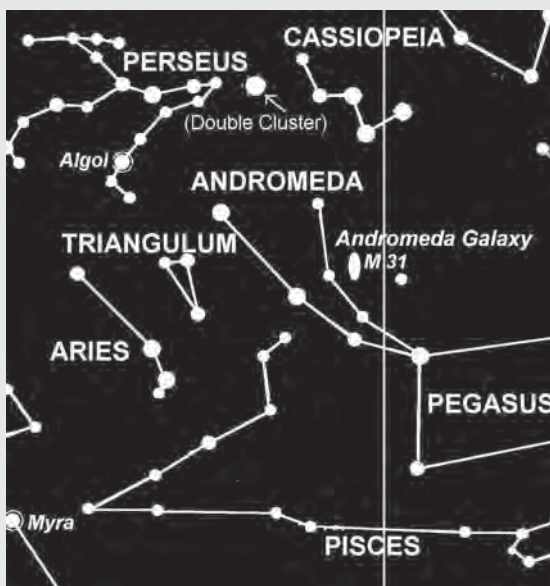
Every clear evening in November, step outside after sunset to watch the show as Jupiter sinks into the twilight while Venus rises. The grand finale comes on 30 November when these two planets meet the crescent Moon to make a brilliant display on the western horizon. Mercury is at 'superior conjunction' (behind the Sun) on 25 November and is unlikely to be seen at all this month. Mars is almost directly behind the Sun (conjunction is on 5 December) so that too will not be visible.

Saturn is rising in the early hours of the morning and is well up in the south-eastern sky by dawn. It is moving very slowly south-eastwards in Leo.

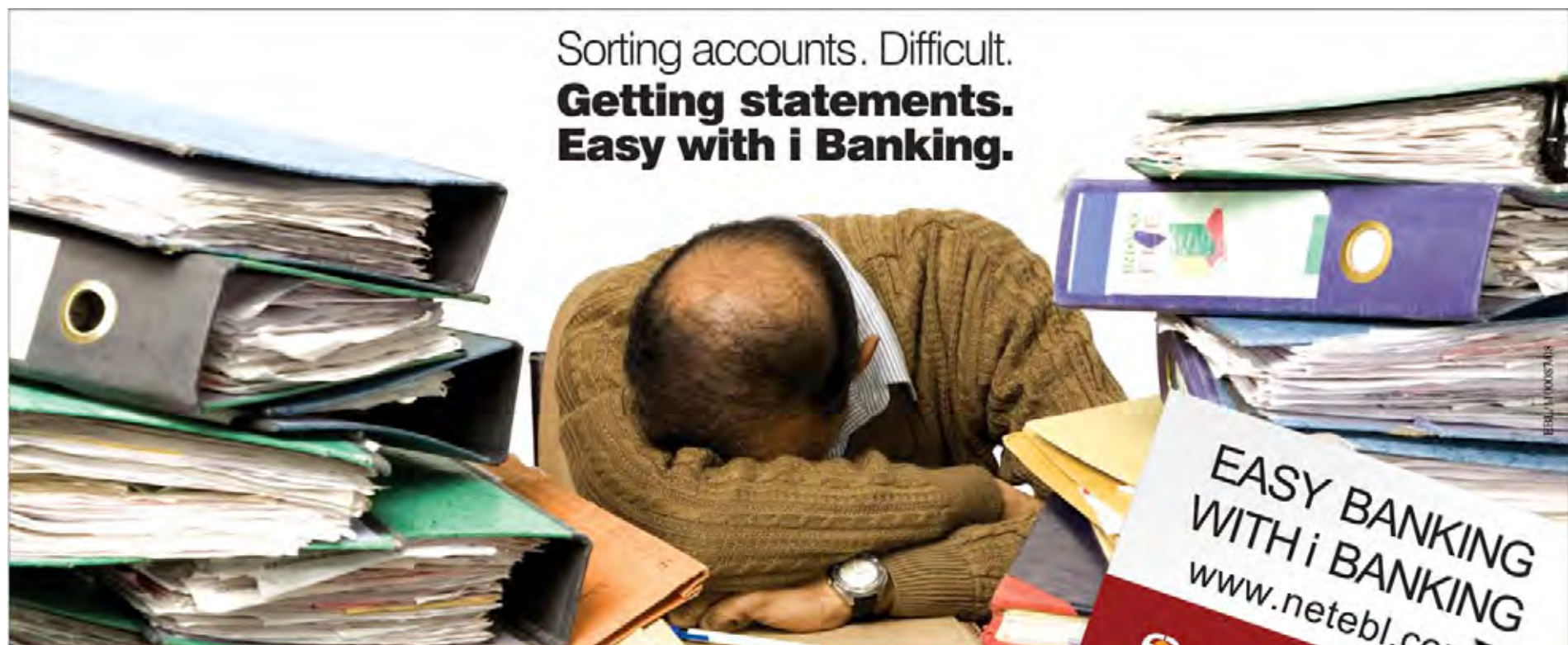
Meteor watchers get ready for the Leonid meteor shower, generally active between 15-20 November, and peaking around midnight on 17 November. The shower seems to spread from a radiant point within the 'sickle' of Leo, about midway between the planet Saturn and the waning gibbous Moon on the 17 November. Unfortunately, the light from the Moon will drown out all but the brightest meteors.

The Taurid meteor shower reaches its peak on 3 November but like the Leonids, you'll see fewer than 10 meteors an hour. ●

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Wild-** an exhibition of paintings by Wayne Edwards from 2-18 November at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Sunday-Friday 11AM-6PM and Saturday 12AM-4PM. 4218048

EVENTS

- ❖ **The Big Lebowski**, a film by Coen brothers, 1 November, 6.30 PM, Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Cultural Studies Group of Nepal** presents from Sherpa culture to social work lecture, 31 October, 9.30 PM, Shanker Hotel.
- ❖ **Nepal Music Center's International Folk Festival 2008:** An ode to life and culture, 4-8 November. 4256909
- ❖ **Divinity of the common life**, an artistic performance by Pierre-Alain Hubert and Karl Knapp, 7 November, 6PM, Open Theatre, Kula Manch, free event. 4241163
- ❖ **New session of French classes**, admissions till 9 November, next session starts on the 10 November-22 January at the Alliance Francaise. 4241163

MUSIC

- ❖ **TGIF at Jazzabella Café**, everyday happy 6-8. 2114075
- ❖ **Poesie and Fags**, a jazz vocal trio from Holland, Saturday at Patan .5522708, Sunday at Thamel.4700736. New Orleans Café, 7PM 74 Twister playing live every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchowk. 5526212
- ❖ **Robin and the New Revolution** playing live every Tuesday, 7.10 Pm onwards at Bamboo Club restaurant, Thamel. 470157
- ❖ **Some like it hot** every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Tuesday Melody** at the Jazzabell Café, everyday happy hour 6-8PM
- ❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, 5-7PM, Ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar
- ❖ **HyJazz Club** every Friday from 8.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4489800
- ❖ **Dance and Cocktails** at Cube Bar, Kamaladi. 4438017
- ❖ **Fusion and Looza Band** every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- ❖ **Rudra night fusion** and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Sufi music** by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.
- ❖ **Fusion and Classical Music** by Anil Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, Sufi & Raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8 PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **Wok & Curry** every Wednesday at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Sunday Jazz Brunch** at Hyatt Regency with performances by Mariano and his band from 12- 3.30PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Organic Salad Bar and Steak** at Jalan Jalan restaurant every Friday from 6PM, Rs 650
- ❖ **Fusion** of Marcela Regan's new menu and Mannie's new bar at Dhokaima Cafe. 5522113
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Pizza & Pasta** every Monday and Tuesday at Rox Restaurant. Hyatt Regency. 448936
- ❖ **Pasta pesto passion** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Steak special** with free Irish coffee at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4700043
- ❖ **Continental and cafe item** with Live band every Friday at Vintage Cafe and Pub, Woodland Complex, Durbar Marg.
- ❖ **Unlimited wine offer** for Rs 990 at La Maison wine and cigar lounge. 9841333628
- ❖ **Home made pasta** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Reality Bites** at The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Steak escape** with Kathmandu's premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- ❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- ❖ **Retro Brunch Barbeque** with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Ily Expression Coffee** at Hotel Shangrila, Lazimpat and Mandap Hotel, Thamel.
- ❖ **Socially Responsible coffee** at Himalayan Java, Thamel.

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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

There is good news for all those in travel or planning to do so this weekend and ahead. Satellite pictures of Wednesday morning clearly show that the skies over the Himalaya and Indian plains are dominated by a high pressure system over the Tibetan plateau and a westerly that has blown off the remnants of last week's cyclone. Light evening breeze and an open night sky will mean a further drop in minimum temperature, although the days will remain warm and sunny. November is the driest month of the year, it and looks like it will stay that way.



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हरेक आइतबार बिर्सेको (१:४०-२:००)
"रेडियो सगरमाथा विभिन्न मुनी, अंग्रेजी सुधारी"
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KIRAN PANDAY

BHINTUNA: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal welcomes Nepal Sambat 1129 by offering garlands to the statue of Sankhadhar Sakhwah, who started Nepal Sambat, at Basantapur on Tuesday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

LAY THE ODDS: Kathmandu's casino employees protest at the Maitighar Mandala on Saturday against the attempted raid by Nepal Police in Casino Anna the night before.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

DEUSI RE: The cultural wing of Maoist-affiliated Newa Mukti Morcha hold a Bhailo program near New Road on Tuesday to mark the festival of Tihar.



KIRAN PANDAY

NIGHTS OF LIGHTS:† Swoyambunath stupa glows golden as the Valley shimmers in the background on the night of Laxmi Puja.

LET'S HAVE CHINESE TODAY!

WHEREVER WE GO I NEED WI-FI HA!!

NAH. LET'S HAVE SOMETHING LIGHT SANDWICHES OR ROLLS.

I PREFER ITALIAN PIZZA WILL BE COOL!

MAYBE SOME JUICY TIBETAN MOMOS?

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Ass for sale

What's happened suddenly to the Nepali media industry? The economy is stagnant, advertising is sluggish, even the middle class is living hand-to-mouth but the media is **booming**. Three new tv channels and at least four new daily newspapers are going to hit the stands in the next few months.

In this bubble, media salaries have **hit the roof**. New media houses are scrambling to poach journalists from each other:

columnists, reporters, marketing staff, cartoonists, designers, even peons. Salary offers have quadrupled, and reporters can shop for the highest bidders. At the Press Club, they're being hired on the spot. Editors can't trust their bureau chiefs anymore. As long as this means better journalism, no complaints. The only question (hint, wink) is why hasn't anyone tried to poach the Ass?



So UNMIN is all aflutter over Secretary General-in-chief's 22-hour visit. Wondered about that one: people come for 24-hour or 48-hour visits, but Uncle Ban comes for exactly 22 hours. Anyway, despite the briefness of the visit, the Ass hears all work at BICC has ground to a halt and this has nothing to do with this country of gamblers grinding to a halt over Tihar. PKD reportedly assured BKM in NYC last month that he'd get a move-on on integration by the

time he arrived. It's been a month, and of course this being Nepal, nothing has happened except a lot of hot air in the Reporter's Club. What this means is that Ban can't announce a clear exit strategy come Jan. Despite all the assurances and promises the pro- and anti-integrationists are sticking to their guns. Ban will probably hear a lot of promises, but will come face-to-face with the reality that Nepali leaders always say one thing and mean another, or that they'll tell you what you want to hear.

So the Sec-Gen may as well use his time here to twist some tails, otherwise there is no saying what will happen when UNMIN's mandate expires this time round because most UN brass have already sent out their resumes for jobs in other world hotspots.



Just when you think nothing is going to shock you anymore, the man caught on one of the Maoist real-life battle DVDs presiding over a point-blank execution of royal army prisoners is now the Minister of Peace. A Maoist commander is Defence Minister, and is pally with monarchists. And when Comrade Cloudy, flush with a Rs 100 million cash grant from the Chinese goes down to Shaktikhor, guess who comes to visit? Comrade Bibid himself in flesh and blood. Exactly a year ago YCLs abducted businessman Ramhari Shrestha who used to wine and dine the party bosses at his home (and had pictures to prove it). Obviously Shrestha knew too much and was taken away to be tortured to death at a UNMIN-

supervised cantonment in Chitwan. One of the torturers, Comrade Bibid, helped dump Ram Hari into the Narayani from a suspension bridge. The body was later washed up.



Anyway, the Maoists own up and name Bibid as the perpetrator and announce a "massive manhunt" and promise to hand the man to the police when they find him. Looks like the guy never went anywhere and has been in Shaktikhor all along. Last week, Comrade Cloudy's APF security recognised Bibid meeting the minister, but no one wanted to risk being arrested arresting a man on whom there was a warrant.



How come Girjau is suddenly so **hale and hearty**: last week, over a day he managed to deliver a speech to a mass rally in Biratnagar, visit Kosi camps, attend two press conferences, attend endless tea parties. Where was all that energy when he had to run the country?



It looks like just as the Maoists are getting ready to unite with the Unity Centre and the UML, the mother party itself may split into hardline and moderate factions. Now that even the Maoist mouth organ, Janadesh, is calling Prachanda 'Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal' isn't it time for our civil society buddhujibis to do the same?

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