I
t wasn’t supposed to be like this. When the Maoists came
to power through elections, most Nepalis expected
improvements in their lives. And by now we should have
been nearly halfway into the constitution-writing process.
But, especially in the past month, as the government
lurches from one crisis to the next, there is a deep sense of
gloom—most visible in the business community.
Having survived extortion and violence in the past decade,
business leaders say things have never been this bad. Crippled
by union militancy and power cuts, most are on the verge of
closing shop. Hotels in Pokhara lakeside have been shut by
Maoists from Wednesday. Biratnagar has been closed this week
by agitating jute industry workers.
Although Maoists lead the government, their unions are
demanding a 30 per cent rise in daily wages, have shut down
Jogbani border customs and all highways in Morang.
“We thought that after the elections, things would
stabilise, but they have got worse,” says industrialist Rajendra
Khetan, “we are planning to migrate to look for opportunities
abroad.” Some 100 Nepali industrialists have already moved
across the border, and Rudrapur in India’s Haryana state has
become a Nepali industrial estate.
“We want the government to introduce an exit policy so we
can shut down our factories and move to India,” says one
defeated investor.
Nepali Times asked Finance Minister
Baburam Bhattarai if he was aware of this
mood of doom. His answer: “The
situation isn’t hopeless, these things
happen in a transition. Once the
minimum wage issue is resolved the
cabinet will ban all strikes and
shutdowns.”
Multinationals also say the
investment climate has deteriorated since the Maoist
government came to power. “This has become a land of
lawlessness with the YCL, the militants and criminal
extortion,” says one multinational manager, “the Maoists can’t
control it. We are all close to giving up on Nepal.”
Hoteliers in Pokhara say they are willing to comply with
government regulations but are being forced by Maoist unions
for an across the board Rs 1,300 pay increase.
Says Gobinda Pahadi of the Regional Hotel Association
in Pokhara: “Most hoteliers are so fed up they just want
to quit.”

Mood of
doom
DEWAN RAI

YEAR OF THE OX: A view of the inner sanctum of Pashupati on Wednesday as Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal partially retracted his removal of priests.

Enjoy the moment a swing at a time
Crisis prone government

The Maoists in government are showing themselves to be crisis-prone. Why would they want to destabilise their own government by bringing these crises on themselves? It is misleading to think of the Maoists as being split between moderates and hardliners. They are split between hardliners and even more hardliners. Prime Minister Dahal has no time for anything else but to deal with the crisis of the week: the judiciary row, army recruitment, Pashupati, attacks on media, the wholesale shutting down of industry. What next week’s crisis is.

The Sanatari National Convention of his party decided to pursue ‘the people’s republic’ and Dahal got a handy message to threaten his coalition partners with: ‘look, you better support me because these guys are even more hardcore.

After every crisis when people with grievances go to Baluwatar to complain, they come out exclaiming, ‘what a swell guy our PM is, we had completely misjudged him, the problem is the party, not the chairman.’ It is now time to judge the prime minister by his actions, not by his words. Also, we need to force him to take responsibility for the actions of his cadres, whether they are sanctioned or not.

Dahal, it appears, has finally come to his senses with the Pashupati row. But he managed to sail through even that one. The Indian priest is headed home, the Maoists have managed to act sensibly in an emergency and the Maoist high ground by avoiding to abide by the decisions of Supreme Court. The responsibility of a head of government, however, goes much beyond plotting and implementing survival strategies. The prime minister needs to extricate himself out of the self-defeating game of fooling all the people all the time and concentrate instead on whether or not the Maoists have entered the volatile political scene with fire.

Geopolitically, there is a confluence of factors in the society and people’s bodies of a federal Nepal. Issues that should be discussed with cool heads by the sociologists and demographers will have entered the volatile political discourse. An issue as sensitive as this can’t be resolved with political rabbles rousing the ethos.

The People of a federal Nepal is for the transformation of the socio-economic system under real decentralisation of political and economic power so that the marginalised are recognised, represented and given control over their destiny. This should be achieved with minimum instability, and maximum sensitivity. No ideology political is this playing with fire.

A federal Nepal is not in the conceptual of the mainstream political parties to fix and the agenda is all, Marx always favoured real socio-economic transformation through decentralisation. The truth, perhaps, is that Nepal Maoists among all parties.

They are extremists and there is an unholy alliance between the extreme left and the extreme right.

— Puskar Gautam, a leftist thinker and former Maoist army commander for Okhaldhunga. He wrote regular opinion pieces for Nepal Times between 2001-2004.

Let’s rethink this

Federalism could be disastrous for Nepal

heinous act committed by the Maoist-learning organisation, I find this a very lazy strategy taken by the media houses to fight back—similar to closure of schools by doctors in the name of ‘protest’. Were there any empty headlines? What was the purpose it was made for—to bring the Maoists to their knees?

The interview of the prime minister sound good and what he is saying is quite praiseworthy (Unacceptable crime, 4/32). If we have faith in his determination will impact Nepali nation. Issues that should be discussed with cool heads by the sociologists and demographers.

1. The urban middle-class has only now begun to see the true colours of the Maoists. What 13,000 deaths and a decade of destruction was unable to impart, a few arctics by the YCL has made it crystal clear: the only objective of the Maoist party is to keep a hold on the state power. Everything else, development of the country and equal rule of law for its citizens, is secondary. During the war years the urban middle class viewed the Maoists as a mere nuisance. Those who are criticising the attack on press today have, in the past, sympathised with the violence of the Maoist-led war. But why is there a double standard? Those who were issued that should bediscussed with cool heads by sociologists and demographers.

2. The notion of self-determination within an ethnic federal framework has now taken root in the psyche of Nepali activists, and acentric territory so far has not met the aspirations of Nepal’s identity politics. The demands have also gone beyond the reality of the mainstream political parties to fix and the agenda is self-determination will impact Tibetan nationalism. There is also concern that self-determination is a western-supported and funded agenda. The Chinese have historically felt more comfortable with a powerful centre in countries on its periphery.

A federal Nepal is not in the conceptual of the mainstream political parties to fix and the agenda is.

Some of the demands of the Maoists, an ethnic federal Nepal, are being supported by Western governments and NGOs. Even when some of these groups publicly expressed violence, their funding continued.

The question that must be asked is why the Maoists have allowed themselves to become tools of ‘Western imperialists’ by favouring federalism. After all, Maoists always favoured real socio-economic transformation through decentralisation. The truth, perhaps, is that Nepal Maoists among all parties.

They are extremists and there is an unholy alliance between the extreme left and the extreme right.

— Puskar Gautam, a leftist thinker and former Maoist army commander for Okhaldhunga. He wrote regular opinion pieces for Nepal Times between 2001-2004.
Disregarding Chief of Army Staff Katuwal’s appeal not to drag him into political controversy, the NC and UML havejealously jumped into the fray.

UNMIN’s Ian Martin has declared that any recruitment by parties to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) violates the letter and spirit of the Agreement on Monitoring and Management of Armis and Amis that his team is committed to ensure. This is as clear an espousal of the Maoist cause as is prudentially possible for the UN.

Whether the position of UNMIN constitutes a breach of protocol or merely violates accepted norms of diplomatic decency is for Foreign Minister Upendra Yadav to decide. But the statement clearly ignores the reality that the chief of the PLA currently heads the government and a former guerrilla commander is the defence minister.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is responsible for the commitments made by both signatories of the CPA. UNMIN’s stand in the changed circumstances has merely given Maoists a convenient stick to beat other political parties.

The moment the NC and UML sprang to support of the army chief, Defense Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa upped the ante by declaring that “appropriate action” will be taken against the erring general for transgressing his limits of authority.

The row over recruitment is a red herring. The core of controversy lies in differing perceptions about what Maoists call “army integration” and what other political parties and the army brass understand as accommodation of some PLA combatants into security agencies of the government. If it were not so, the government should have been happy that an important instrument of the state was taking timely steps to acquire its sanctioned strength and maintain battle readiness.

Unlike the organic character of Maoist combatants in camps, or its YCL guerrillas who can be mobilized with looted weapons at a moment’s notice, the state army functions like a machine. It has clear command and control structure, specific numerical strength and ancillary services supported by troops that seemingly do little else than march in parades in Tundikhel.

But try reducing the army’s troop strength without proper planning and you make it dysfunctional. The more sophisticated a machine, the higher the dependency on its smallest components.

The Maoists do have a point when they say the Nepal Army is too bloated and we can’t afford it. Madhesis are correct in claiming that the army is racial in composition, parochial in outlook and discriminatory. The intelligentsia has the right to disbelieve anything that an army general says in light of what he did in the guise of Ajai P Nath during royal rule. Citizens have every reason to question whether we need such a large army.

In the days ahead, the strength of the army will have to be reduced according to a national security plan. Its composition will have to be made more inclusive and diverse to foster national unity. The army leadership will have to learn that it doesn’t behoove the chief of armed forces to issue public statements, receive petitions from prosecuted groups and claim openly that the organisation he heads is somehow ‘above’ politics. It will have to learn that theory in any democratic dispensation is very much ‘below’ politics.

Until the Nepal Army becomes truly national, clearly responsible and wholly accountable to civilian control, we have to make do with whatever we have. The Maoists better not mess with the army because that is the institution of last resort.

It is Nepal’s army

The army is not ‘above’ politics, it is ‘below’ politics

Managing today’s expense and saving for tomorrow’s unexpectedness is a tough task. But it is not impossible, because you know your priorities and at Kumar Bank we can help you plan for your future. Together, we can prepare for the expected and unexpected.

Kiran Panday
Two steps forward one step back

The Maoists underestimated the media-induced political pressure from India

Nepali Times: Revenue collection this quarter is 35 per cent up from last year. Is this because you started from a low base, or did you really have to crack the whip?

Baburam Bhattarai: We gave ourselves an annual revenue target of Rs 141 billion and divided it into monthly targets, which we have met. We issued strict instructions to check leakage, were in the thick of it with tax evasion, and made it even bigger. I have instructed them not to listen to anyone, in fact they have instructions to be even stricter on those who use our party. They are not our people, they are opportunists. They seek political patronage.

But what about the big fish, the wilful defaulter?

I am reviewing the situation of small and medium entrepreneurs affected by the conflict. If they are genuinely affected and have difficulty repaying loans, we are considering ways to help them. But we won’t let wilful defaulter go.

Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai spoke to Nepal Times on Tuesday about the doom and gloom in the economy, the worsening investment climate and the lack of foreign investment, saying that he was a “revolutionary optimist”.

I will take a decision on banning strikes soon. We will strictly enforce the law against closing down highways and against striking in essential services such as industry, health and electricity companies.

But investors are really demoralised. If we allow this instability to escalate it will worsen the investment atmosphere here. To encourage and increase investment, we have proposed an Investment Board under the chairmanship of the prime minister on which the cabinet will decide. Soon, investors will be more comfortable knowing that there will be single-point investment for mega projects and the overall investment climate will improve.

And the power crisis? We have prepared a 35-point strategy which envisages ending or minimising load shedding within this fiscal year. For this there was no alternative but diesel to help meet the current 300MW shortfall. Therefore, we will be putting diesel and thermal plants, solar and bio-diesel plants. Then, we have waived taxes on medium-term hydro projects to be completed in 2-3 years.

Nepali Times: Does this all make your long-term goal of 10,000MW seem like an impossible dream?

We will start working on all projects simultaneously. Once the Investment Board is formed, we will launch the bigger projects immediately.

How can that happen with this instability? We must have a minimum common understanding with all the political parties on the situation. First, the geo-strategic location of our country means we are buffer

The Maoists underestimated the media-induced political pressure from India

The president of the Traditional Religion and Culture Protection Committee lives up a narrow alley opposite the western gate of Pashupatinath. Shiva Shankar Rajbhandari does not seem to be particularly hurt or angry man. The unpolished sandal and clearly enjoying being in the limelight, is enthused by the support of “Hindus across the world” and thrilled at pushing the Maoists on the defensive.

Meeting him with an Indian television news crew covering, for it shows the symbolic relationship between the jingoistic Delhi-based channels which have blown up the issue and the local protest.

Rajbhandari was chatting with the Indian reporters. He offered tea, took down numbers (“Can I call you if something happens afterwards?”), spoke in Hindi and then English for the network’s different channels, posed on the terrace, and guided them through the temple. “There will be burn, it will look good too,” he winked.

The reporters played along, focusing on responses that said the Maoist intervention was a “threat to Hinduism” and asking constantly if it was an anti-India move. Some distance away, the Gauahar road was blocked. Middle aged and young men in tight jeans and caps, the same ones you see during every road block, were negotiating with the police about what to burn. Starting with about 50 people, they began chanting logs asking for Prachandatoto “be hanged”, as soon as they saw tv cameras. The crowd swelled to about 400 as speeches began.

So what has this drama been all about? Here is what the bhandaris said: this is a political intervention in temple affairs, there was no need for the Maoists to break with tradition in the appointment of priests, all allegations of corruption are false, the status quo should be restored.

The Maoists and temple administrators countered: the Indian priests had resigned voluntarily, what was wrong in getting qualified Nepali priests when the core issue was having a transparent financial system. They said Rs 30-35,000 was now being deposited daily while no one had any clue where the money went earlier.

Privately, pro-Maoist temple authorities were in no mistake that the Palace and NC did it in the past and now it was their turn. They were also sending a message to other temples and guthis across the country: if we can take over the Pashupatinath, you better fall in line. And they were playing the nationalism card.

The report went wrong for them domestically because they were just becoming a latest series of actions that created a fear that the Maoists are out to capture and control all institutions. Local priests assumed apolitical colour that they may not have got sometime back.

The Maoists anticipated the Indian response in it, in fact it stimulated them because it gave them a chance to tell the cadre how they were the only ones resisting Indian hegemony. But what they perhaps did not expect was that the media-induced political pressure would get so intense from Delhi.

The BJP’s reaction is natural because this is their constituency. It comes at a time when they have encouraged the formation of the Nepal Janata Party, headed by former TMDP leader. Hindu right leaders in Kathmandu say that after years, they hit on an issue on which there was broad support and this could be turning point in reviving their politics.

Mulayam Singh Yadas visit was a coincidence. But Mulayam advising Prachandatoto respect “Hindu sentiments” is ironic because he has often faced accusations of not having done so in his own UP. Heled at Hindu karsevaks in Ayodhya in 1989-90, which fuelled the Ram jannahboomi movement. Yadav relies heavily on the Muslim vote and is often called Maulana Mulayam by BJP followers. A %= equal victory in panchayats in the northern states.

The unstated Maoist ambition was to use the Delhi visit to create a fear that the Maoists are out to capture and control all institutions. Local priests assumed apolitical colour that they may not have got sometime back.

The Maoists anticipated the Indian response to the reports that said the Maoists had taken over the temple. They were not the only ones resisting Indian hegemony. But what they perhaps did not expect was that the media-induced political pressure would get so intense from Delhi.

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SPinning out of control

The Maosists can’t go on covering one lie with another lie

You justify it in the name of nationalism, even though patriotism is the refuge of scoundrels. Guarded by goons, you force open the temple gates, so the new priests could offer prayer to Shiva.

Still, when you make light of the attack, saying that only light beating had taken place, and that no murder had been committed.

But as pressures mount, you release on bail, which one day later, you make light of, saying that only light beating had taken place, and that no murder had been committed.

Power crisis. The organisation includes Kantipur TV, Image Channel, Avenues, ABC, Sagamartha and has state-owned NTV as observer. “The power situation is having a huge impact on broadcasting,” says Bhaskar Rajkarnikar of Avenues TV.

“Outside, we see nothing but gloom. Here inside the government, we have a sense of ownership. There has to be a sense of ownership. We now want to assure the international community about that. It is our commitment, not a tactical ploy. We want people to vote for us because of our policies, not because of being associated with the business of drafting the constitution so that 28 million Nepalis can understand what the pragmatists’ guidelines of the game are for their success, prosperity and happiness in Nepal.”

and no one should be...
Promises not kept

Nepal, 4 January

Twelve-point agreement, 25 November 2005
The Maoists commit to create a conducive environment for the freedom of or other democratic party leaders, who were displaced during the conflict, to return home, live safely in their communities, to have their seized property returned and to be allowed to participate in political activities without fear.

Ceasefire code of conduct, 26 May 2006
To return seized property, public and private buildings and land and other property.

Agreement on 8 November 2006
To expedite the process of returning seized property. To make the environment safe for the war displaced to return home within one month by creating district committees with members from both parties.

Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 21 November 2006
Both sides agree to return confiscated property and to cooperate in the process of returning property to its rightful owners. The administration will take necessary actions against those who create obstacles in the process. The committee that is formed at this meeting will monitor the return of property and present its report within the next 15 days.

23-point agreement 23 December 2007
Confiscated private and public property to be returned to their owners within one month. A body to be set up in districts, under the leadership of the chief district officer, to oversee the implementation.

Agreement signed on 25 June 2008
CPN (Maoist) to end all semi-military activities of YCL and direct that all property (private, public, government buildings and land) be returned within 15 days. The YCL to remain within the law.

NC demand to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, 9 November 2008
Although the issue of return of property has been mentioned in the 12-point agreement and subsequent agreements, negotiations have not been implemented. Compensation and relief packages must be arranged from the time when the property was confiscated. The agreement signed on 25 June 2008 relating to the activities of YCL must be implemented immediately. The progress of all the agreements must be made public by the Home Ministry via the legislative assembly as soon as possible.

Two days after the above demand letter was presented, the prime minister spoke to the CA and said that the agreements will be implemented by mid-December. He added that if the confiscated property is not returned by then, government will provide compensation. At a meeting with NC leaders on 1 January, Dahal said he needed at least three months to fulfill these demands.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Nepali cricket team?
There is unity and understanding amongst the players. Our bowling and fielding is good but our batting requires more practice.

The Nepali Cricket team does well in the under 18s, but not so well when they are competing at senior level. Why?
Our players become nervous and lose their confidence. There isn’t an environment for making a career out of cricket, so once you get to a senior position you don’t get the support and don’t play as well.

The players need training. Training should start at least 4-5 months before an international game.

What sort of training support does the Nepali female cricket team get?
You might as well say none. The tradition of just being happy when we win and starting training just a couple of months before the tournament still hasn’t gone away. We may have won a big tournament but we won’t have had 15 days of training. What’s more, the other teams were weak in this tournament but they won’t always be weak.

Nepali champions

31 December-31 January, Himal Khatarpatrika

Interview with Nira Thapa, captain of the Under-18 Asian Cricket Championship (ACC) that won a women’s international tournament in Chiang Mai last month.

Himal: How do you feel after winning the tournament? Nira Thapa: This was a big success for the Nepali women’s cricket team. For the first time we were able to make our country proud.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Nepali cricket team?

There is unity and understanding amongst the players. Our bowling and fielding is good but our batting requires more practice.

The Nepali Cricket team does well in the under 18s, but not so well when they are competing at senior level. Why?

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Call for Proposal Writers

An international agency working in Nepal is looking for experienced and high quality proposal writers to work as part-time/ full-time consultants. Currently, the proposal writers are needed in the field of Natural Resource Management, Sustainable Livelihoods, Climate Change, Bio-fuel, Non-Timber Forest Products, Bio-diversity, Non-formal Education and Awareness, Sustainable tourism, Hydropower and Agriculture.

Minimum qualification required is Masters in the relevant field of study with ten years of professional experience including substantive experience in proposal development. The applicant should be capable of conceptualizing a new project idea, framing the project logic and developing a full proposal. Fluency in English, and ability to deliver product in a given time frame and format is necessary.

If short-listed, the agency may provide work on as-needs basis. Remuneration will be highly competitive from local market standards, and in commensurate with experience and expertise of the applicant.

Interested individuals should send in their CVs including samples of their recent work to the email address below by January 31, 2009.

proposalwriters@gmail.com
A problem with the political parties and academics start suggesting models of federalism, Alok Bohara has put a forward his own cooperative federal structure (The boundaries of federalism, #431). He argues that the Maoists’ ethnic-based federalism and the One Madhes demand would invite unnecessary complications.

He proposes Kosi, Bagmati, Gandaki and Karnali provinces with ethnic enclaves within them so that they establish a level playing field, economic growth, ethnic tolerance and resource distribution. But his proposal is not taken too seriously politically because it seems to ignore what federalism in this country is designed to do: address the longstanding grievances and repression of individual groups by a central feudal state apparatus.

Once the Maoists launched their armed struggle in the name of ethnic autonomy, the right to self-determination, ethnic and cultural rights and the proposals were taken directly or indirectly. As the peace process begins, Madhesi parties proposed to the Maoists and began their own struggle. Similarly, Limbuwan and Khambuwan in the east, Tharu in western Terai, Tamang in the west, and Tsering Lepcha and Nepal Mandals in the north, are continuing the struggle for autonomy.

It doesn’t make any sense to consider state restructuring without considering these ethnic and regional aspirations. The basic principle of federalism is to divide the state structure into two levels: the provincial and the local. How autonomous the states are in the local factor and the constitution should lay out provisions for self-governance at the grassroots.

Federalism is itself a cooperative because the local and provincial governments within and outside their areas of authority work both in partnership and separately with the centre playing a unitary monitoring role. It is the concept of shared and self-governance. The Maoists have proposed 11 provinces and three autonomous sub-provinces, while MJFJ put forward the United Madhes demand before the election. The NEC and UML stepped up the issue altogether, which led to their dismal performance in the elections.

The main challenge before the Constituent Assembly is to find a solution acceptable to two-third majorities of its 601 members and to do so within two years without passions spilling out into the streets. With Nepal’s immense ethnic diversity, the demands and dissatisfaction will need to be politically managed while the process of constitution-drafting is actually taking place. The authors write: “The study of the diversity and of ethnic relations elsewhere suggests that the CA is no ‘jagad magic bullet’ that will resolve all the ethnic and other tensions.”

The book also includes chapters by Prayag Raj Sharma (on nation-building in a multi-ethnic state) and Harka Gurung (on state and society). The authors suggest the constitution builders bear in mind that ethnic boundaries were often consciously created, have been deliberately maintained, developed, contested and have changed over time.

**CONSTITUTION 2010**

**Comment**

Balkrishna Abhushan

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**No magic bullet**

New edition of ethnicity book can help in constitution-writing

**Review by Dhurba Simkhada**

The timing couldn’t have been better for the release of the updated new edition of the 1990s academic classic Nationalism and Ethnicity in Nepal. The Constituent Assembly has started deliberating on the structure of the new Nepali state and the role of ethnicity and federalism in it. Unfortunately, the agenda is being set by political sloganeering and not a sound analysis of the ground reality of this incredibly diverse country.

The re-release of the book by Geliner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton is therefore a welcome development. One only wishes it also had a Nepali translation.

The original volume was written at a time when ethnic voices were muted and identity politics hadn’t yet made a mark. But post-1990 and especially after 2006, the demand for space and voice by the traditionally marginalised has reached a crescendo. The 2008 election to the Constituent Assembly was contested along a mixed electoral system that included proportional representation roles. The result has been the most diverse elected legislature in Nepali history.

The original volume was titled Ethnicity and Nationalism in the World’s Only Hindu State, but was changed because Nepal turned secular in 2006. The new edition has a new chapter: New Ethnicities: Changes Since the 1990s. The authors rightly point out that despite the new voices and new activism the leadership of the political parties remain exclusive, this in turn means that their affiliated ethnic-based organisations are more radical than them. Ethnic and regional movements for autonomy therefore cross party lines and appear to be out of the control of their mother parties.

The chapter lists organisations like the Kirat Yakhung Chumlung, Nepal Thami Society, Magar Association of Nepal and the Nepal Tamang Ghedung with their missions and aims. A useful table classifies 59 official Janajatis as defined by NEPFL and NFJDN. We should be very careful in the process of creating new provinces/states. The problem is already fueling conflict in the Terai where Madhesi parties demand the creation of a single Madhes province from Kavrepati to Kanchanpur, but this is rejected by many Tharus. The authors argue caution over the proposal for ethnic states and indicate that it could face considerable difficulties.

They also suggest that ethnic autonomy might perhaps be better served by devolution to small blocks of villages or, as suggested by political scientist Mahendra Lawoti, by a system of ‘non-territorial’ or ‘cultural’ autonomy. But the titular group of Adibasi-Janajatis would enjoy a ‘right of primacy’ (agradhikar). Activists have raised the voice of ‘self-determination’, but this can never extend to a right to secession. While the Maoist want ‘self-determination’, NEFIN wants internal autonomy because granting full right of self-determination would lead to disintegration. Even though the creation of a Limbuwan province may deprive Kochila of resources and therefore proposes one state so that the resources can be shared.

His fears that Limbuwan may sell its electricity to India instead of giving it to Kochila are unfounded because both provinces would be answerable to the central government. The issues of economy and resource sharing are at the heart of any discussion of federalism in Nepal.

Economic factors, however, have been decisive in very few countries drawing up a federal structure. The centre can always balance the equations, even if they feel shortchanged with special packages or redistribution of resources to reduce ethnic disparity.

Instead of discussing which province has the most or least resources, it is important to use them collectively for human welfare. Provincial or inter-provincial mechanisms must be developed to distribute resources according to need. Bohara calls for Nepal to rise above ethnic interests to resolve the common problems. But ethnicity is the reality of our society, it will have to be addressed. The politics of ethnicity based on ethnicity, religion or class but a system of democratically elected governments. However, we can’t overlook the politics of identity of the Madhes. The social justice needs to be studied, affirmative action is required to take the vidhyaladi of good governance the grass-roots education and do not remain just a slogan. Ethnic slogans will fade away once the state develops a proper mechanism to do so.

Balkrishna Abhushan is a professor at the Central Department of Population at Tribhuvan University.
Don’t curse the darkness, sh"
how a light

Light is all you need

There are emergency lights and there are emergency lights. We have even seen emergency light systems that have sirens, flashing amber lights and even one with a CD player. Forget the gimmicks. The most cost-effective we have seen is the Ricona. Small, handy and cheap. Ricona 220V-240V, 4-5 hours, Rs 800.

Solar inverter

Eco-vision, Bhatbhateni
Tel No: 4418203
These solar inverters are available at Eco-vision, Lotus Energy complex and range from 150VA-900VA and cost between Rs 17,900 and -Rs 77,000.

Solar Power

Energy International, Jwagel
Tel No: 2613169
Ranges from 21-130 Watts and cost between Rs 24,000 and Rs 59,000. 25-year life guarantee for solar panels and 1 year guarantee for the whole system.

Cell torches

If you use the mobile phone screens for light, but some ingenious dudes designed a mobile phone that actually has a torch instead of a camera. You can get it at Nokia stores in Tamakar Mobile Complex.

HM 555, Rs 4,000
580, Rs 580
Women show the way

Simi’s women break traditional barriers and become trekking guides

family incomes are rising, children are going to school and people can afford solar lights. Simi hit the headlines last year when three young women from the village, Pujan Acharya, Nimadona Sherpa and Pemba Diki Sherpa, all climbed Chomolungma. They were neighbours who worked as trekking guides and became interested in mountaineering. This seems to have inspired Simi women to look beyond Dolakha. Treksing herself has taken tourists to Khumbu and the Annapurnas. “We’ve been trekking since we were kids,” she says, “so it’s not such hard work.” And Tsering says they also enjoy the freedom and adventure that comes with being guides. Some Simi women have set up trekking shops in Kathmandu. Simi and the Rolwaling Valley saw a crisis. And those that can still afford to come to Nepal will be deterred if the country returns to political instability. But putting aside such macro issues, which make starting out in the trade a pretty daunting prospect, Shona concludes: “Business is about luck as much as it’s about business. And it’s about interest and passion too.”

On the right track

Business is about luck and passion for Shona’s trekking supply in Thamel

Katy Elliott

I n the teeming alleyways of Thamel’s bustling streets, Shona’s trekking supply shop is an unprepossessing, distinctly whole in the wall that hardly lures you in. But ask any experienced trekker or mountain guide where to rent or buy kit in the capital and they will say Shona’s. What singles out the 15-year-old business is not only that it is run by a woman, the charismatic Shona Lama, but that she is from the mountains — Tapijung, and is an experienced and passionate trekker herself. “I love trekking and I know what you need and what you don’t need. I have seen how often people make mistakes and how they suffer.” Shona told us after we stopped by her shop in Thamel’s bustling streets, in the teeming alleyways of the Nepali capital.

In fact it was while trekking in 1981 that Shona gave birth to her second daughter in Jomsom. Shona started her shop in 1999, and since then it has been a hit. Today, Shona’s shop is an unprepossessing, yet undeniably thriving business that is full of clients who hail from all over the world. Meeting famous photographers is nice. Every day is different. When people go and come back and give you two bottles of beer because they were happy with their equipment, it feels good,” says Shona. When it comes to trekking she likes to be alone, carrying her own equipment rather than taking porters, which may explain why she urges hikers not to purchase too much and keep their packs as light as possible. Renting out mountain equipment such as plastic boots, crampons and sleeping bags to the scaling all the trekking peaks of Nepal accounts for most of the business. Shona works seven days a week and sells, or rents out, 120 sleeping bags and 90 trekking jackets each month of the year.

She claims that business remains steady though the shop can weather the slower periods because she and her husband live a pretty humble life. “We have lunch for Rs 30 and dinner for Rs 50,” she says. Her children are grown up and have independent means, so she doesn’t have to worry too much about the ongoing business. Nevertheless, these are worrying times for the dozens in the trekking equipment industry. Tourism is bound to be severely dented by the global economic crisis. And those that can still afford to come to Nepal will be deterred if the country returns to political instability. But putting aside such macro issues, which make starting out in the trade a pretty daunting prospect, Shona concludes: “Business is about luck as much as it’s about business. And it’s about interest and passion too.”

Kiran Panday

The main occupation of the people in Simi is trekking and it has increased family income,” says Tseringdipi Sherpa. “In other places, the men go out to work and the women stay home, but here women work as guides and the men farm.”

The majesticrocks of the Annapurnas. “We’ve been trekking since we were kids,” she says, “so it’s not such hard work.” And Tsering says they also enjoy the freedom and adventure that comes with being guides. Some Simi women have set up trekking shops in Kathmandu. Simi and the Rolwaling Valley saw a significant increase in trekkers last autumn. Tourists are coming not just to Khumbu, but to traverse the Tashi Lhabsa pass to Khumbu. Maili Tamang earned Rs 60,000 last year and is hoping to earn even more this spring. “More work means more money,” says Maili, smiling. “I walk four or seven hours a day carrying up to 50kg of bags, tents and food.” That is nearly Maili’s own weight, but she doesn’t find it difficult as she has her husband to help her. Tourism in Dolakha is being promoted under the Rolwaling Eco-Tourism Project supported by the Austrian group, Eco Himal. The project has built lodges, trained locals in running restaurants and hotels and promoted an environmentally-friendly tourism in the area.

Money generated is invested in local schools, drinking water and health.

Eco Himal has built over 30 community lodges in Biga, Chilangara, Ladak, Orang Lamagae, Karthali and Ghorthali and has handed them over to the locals. More than 5,000 families have benefited. Chief of Eco Himal, Rameshwar Kadhia, says: “There’s great potential in Dolakha, and this model can be replicated elsewhere in Nepal.”

Sealive: “Dolakha’s hidden charm,” #120
Banking on women

RAMESH POUDEL
in POKHARA

Not so long ago, it would have been rare to find a woman bank employee at any level, let alone management. But the Pokhara branch of Shangri-La Bank is bucking the trend because it is run entirely by women—from the clerks to the manager. Only the security guards are men.

The Bhadrakali Chowk branch of the privately-run Shangri-La Bank is the first all-women’s bank in Pokhara, Kathmandu, as well as the first all-female bank too, a branch of the Development Credit Bank. This branch of Shangri-La Bank has only been open for a month and a half, but employees have already collected Rs.40 million in savings. One of the reasons the bank is doing well seems to be because the employees are women. When the marketing staff go to nearby communities to bring in possible clients, people are delighted to see a smartly dressed woman. Some locals even promise to come by, even if it’s just to look.

Having a bank with female staff makes women heads of households more comfortable coming to a bank for deposits, withdrawals and other investment queries. “We realised that there’s a difference when the employee is female,” says Hamal. “More female customers come to us.”

Hamal has asked the head office to arrange for a special scheme for female customers and the board has agreed to introduce low interest loans. The branch also seeks to help neighbouring communities in Pokhara by assisting local women to create accounts and start saving and investing their money.

Sujata, like several others here, comes from a remote village in Myagdi, where she studied at a local school. Now, she juggles her job and her studies at Prithvi Narayan Campus, where she will soon graduate. She adds, “Women are capable. It’s just about giving them responsibility and representation.”

And despite being armed with a first-world education, my impression of Nepal then never extended beyond the textbook knowledge of the Himalaya and the Maoists. As a photojournalist, nothing excites me more than bloodthirsty jungle-romping guerrillas. This excitement was heightened by the fact that Singapore has a political scene as quiet as Bagmati after midnight.

But the Maoists were neither bloodthirsty nor jungle-romping. They didn’t even look like guerrillas. The first PLA fighter I met did an unthINKable thing: he fed me a half-boiled egg. Granted I was part of a self-administered media entourage following a Baburam rally around Gorkha and we had stopped for a mid-morning tea break. But how can you not love someone who peels an egg for you?

In months to come, I would become fast friends with many Maoists who had in more ways than one impressed me with extreme generosity. Thank you Raju-da for offering me a seat on an incredibly crowded Rupali-bound bus. And thank you Mohan-ji for serving me the largest portion of buffalo in the small hotel at Tila. Thank you, Jitendra for offering to give me a PLA haircut.

And I thought to myself, “With enemies like these, who needs friends?” When my Mao-buddies captured the most votes on 10 April, I was hopeful for Nepal because they seemed to display a strong conviction towards positive change for fellow-Nepalis.

But six months later, instead of a strong conviction, my Mao-buddies are behaving like strong convicts. They gave a few of my former newsroom colleagues a thrashing right where I used to work. But how can you not love someone who peels an egg for you?

Don’t let me down

A Singaporean’s optimism for this new republic may soon wither

I was midday when my flight landed at Tribhuvan International Airport exactly one year ago. After a 45 minute wait for my luggage, I skipped through the customs into the bright sunshine but felt no warmth. It was winter in Nepal. My first winter.

I had come to be a photojournalist intern. Like all lucky Singaporeans who take our utilities for granted, I discovered a whole new lifestyle of ice-cold showers and total darkness. Naptimes immediately fell in love with the country.

Despite being armed with a first-world education, my impression of Nepal then never extended beyond the textbook knowledge of the Himalaya and the Maoists.
I have been a frequent air traveller since I was a few months shy of my sixth birthday, when my parents packed me off to boarding school two plane rides away from home. Those days of being willingly handed from air hostess to air hostess as an unaccompanied minor made me blasé about the rigours of air travel. Going abroad to study as a teenager, and joining the United Nations at 22, confirmed my ease with the world of the frequent flyer. I saw the average airport terminal as a familiar haven, like a friend’s sitting room.

But 9/11 changed all that. The assorted divestments, the enthusiastic frisking, the suspicious prying open of your bag, that bleeping wand pushed into awkward spots, have all combined to make flying less fun than ever. Passengers at airports now look so chronically morose that a passing vulture flying overhead would sense a business opportunity.

The episode of the shoe bomber Richard Reid has suddenly meant more feet being bared at airports than at the average Hindu temple. My solution has been to replace my customary lace-up Oxfords with a pair of slip-on loafers when I fly. Generals are always fighting the last war, and security screeners are the same. I’m just grateful it was a shoe bomber they were reacting to. What on earth would they do if the next Richard Reid tried to ignite his underwear?

Then, came the terrorists who planned to explode liquid chemicals on board. Since the plot didn’t work the first time and no one has tried it since, the only benefit of all this is the recycling, who receive a truck-load of discarded water and shampoo bottles from airports every day, and the concessionaires on the other side of security, who charge exorbitant prices to quench the thirst of parched passengers suddenly deprived of their drinks.

Indians such as myself whose features might pass for Middle Eastern have learnt to put up with the mad adventures of flying. “There was a time during the 1970s oil boom,” a fellow Indian told me, “that I rather enjoyed being mistaken for an Arab. People assumed I was richer than I was and treated me with respect. Now, after 911, I’m anxious to demonstrate that I’m Indian. If I were a woman, I’d wear a saree all the time, just to show I’m not that kind of brown.”

In all fairness, you don’t have to be brown to be selected for extra-special attention, though it helps. In their desire to prove the randomness of their biases, I’ve also seen security people pick passengers in inverse relation to the likelihood of their being a terrorist—elderly women making their way through security using a walker, say, or a certain white-haired senator from Massachusetts. (It is normally not difficult to tell the difference between Ted Kennedy and a terrorist fanatic bent on mass murder but I guess they wanted to prove their even-handedness, or their bloody-mindedness.)

A mother carrying breast milk in a bottle for her baby was ordered to drink it to prove it wasn’t a lethal toxin. A friend tells me about his handicapped young son who flies with an oxygen tank. How do we know it’s not a deadly poison gas, they wanted to know.

But every time you think you’ve got the formula down some new complication crops up. It’s bad enough that you have to take out your laptop, empty your pockets, slip off your shoes, loosen your belt and shed your jacket to facilitate the inspections: they’ll still ask you to spread your arms and legs. Worse, you have to smile through the whole ordeal. Because if you dare to complain, they really come down on you.

A witticism in an airport security line is like a Swiss tap: turn it on, and you instantly find yourself in hot water. ‘Jokes or inappropriate remarks regarding security could lead to your arrest,’ signs humourlessly warn you at strategic points. And until they actually close Guantánamo, I’m taking no chances . . . I have watched in mounting incredulity as one of my own books, which I was carrying as a gift, was taken away to be inserted into a special device after it had already passed security to make sure, no doubt, that my words wouldn’t explode mid-flight.

I feel sorry for the next six-year-old who needs to fly alone. The innocence with which I first embraced air travel is simply inconceivable today.
From 1996’s acerbic Trainspotting to the soulful horror of 2002’s 28 Days Later, Danny Boyle’s best films are bold, stylised works filled with rare wit and energy. After 2007’s Sunshine, a somewhat frustrating experiment with science fiction, few would have predicted that Boyle would expand his repertoire even further. Slumdog Millionaire is his most ambitious project yet, with the most challenging of subjects: India. Set in Bombay, the film’s very premise demands a knowledge and sensitivity that recent cinematic forays into India have lacked, and which Boyle delivers.

Based on a novel by former Indian diplomat Vikas Swarup, the film is composed as a series of non-linear flashbacks filmed documentary-style. When accused of cheating while competing to win 20 million rupees on India’s Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, Jamal Malik, an eighteen-year-old orphan “slumdog” from Bombay, reflects on his tumultuous childhood. Extensive editing and repetition of imagery colours Boyle’s Bombay with an eerie familiarity and a singular aesthetic. Buoyed by the avant-Bollywood musical stylings of AR Rahman, the film moves at an exhilarating pace, following Jamal from his fecal encounter with Amitabh Bachchan to the death of his mother during Hindu-Muslim riots to his work as a ‘chai wala’ in a telemarketing centre.

For a film so colossal in scope, Slumdog’s charms lie not in the straightforward and seemingly sentimental plotline (as the cheesy trailers would have you believe) but in its understated direction and attention to detail. This is exemplified by the way Boyle directs newcomer Freida Pinto as Latika, Jamal’s childhood friend and lost love. In spite of the enormous importance of Latika’s character in the story, the role entails little actual screen time and relies more on the actor’s natural presence and the nuanced editing of images interspersed throughout the film. The acting rarely falls short of the excellent cinematography: the child actors who play Jamal and his brother Salim are impeccably directed, largely overshadowing their older counterparts, while veterans Anil Kapoor and Irrfan Khan are sharp, comical contrasts to the innocent exuberance of the rest of the cast.

Just as importantly, the film seldom falls into the pitfall of catering solely to a foreign audience. There are awkward moments in which Patel’s British inflection can be heard and his character’s English sometimes comes off as implausibly refined; however, for the most part, the screenplay is consistently well researched and authentic. While movies produced in Bombay delve increasingly into the fantasy worlds of the Indian elite, Slumdog Millionaire portrays the genuine, grotesque Bombay: both a realistic portrait of contemporary India and an all-encompassing one. In spite of its fairytale plot, the film touches on contemporary Indian phenomena such as media mass hysteria, ‘India Shining’, beggar syndicates, police corruption and communal religious violence. Few feature films of recent times have dared or even tried to depict any of these realities. The film ends, fittingly, with a rousing, tasteful, Bollywood-inspired dance sequence set on a platform of VT station, where last month’s terrorist attacks took place.

Slumdog is both an aesthetic triumph and a crowd-pleasing success. Boyle has proven that even the simplest of storylines, if told intelligently with heart and style, can be uplifting.
**EXHIBITIONS**

- SPARSH: Touching Waste with Love, an architectural art exhibition by Raju Khadka at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited till 13 January. 4218048

**EVENTS**

- Zeitgeist Part II, a movie show at 2PM, 11 January, Mind Body Library, Stadium Gate, Tripureswor. 9841896060
- The Obama Ball, unofficial Kathmandu inaugural celebration, 20 January, Shankar Hotel Ball room, Rs 800
- Walk, eat and do good, a scholarship fundraiser walk from Banepa, Rs 1500, 7 February. 9441189291

**MUSIC**

- Tuesday Melody at JazzaBelle Café, Happy hour 6-8PM. 3114075
- 74 Twister playing live every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchok. 5328212
- Robin and the New Revolution playing live every Tuesday, 7PM 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 99 at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479488
- Happy cocktail hour, 5-7PM. Ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jastra Café & Bar
- Live Sensation, live performance by Yarkey, every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Dance and Cocktails at Cube Bar, Kamaladevi. 4438017
- Fusion and Lococo Band every Friday night, Bhuvi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- Hy jaz at the Hustle Club every Friday from 8.30 PM onwards. Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Audra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepal 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 Ankait Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, Sufi & Raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday. 8PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5521408

**DINING**

- Nhuchhe goes Thai at Nhuchhe’s Thai Kitchen.Bakawater. 4429903
- Organic Salad Bar and Steak at Jalan Jalan restaurant every Friday from 8PM. Rs 650
- Fusion of Marcela Regan’s new menu and Manne’s new bar at Chokaina Cafe. 5322113
- Piat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-La, Kathmandu. Rs 600. 4412899
- Pizza & Pasta every Monday and Tuesday at PloX Restaurant. Hyatt Regency. 448936
- Pasta pesto passion at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- Steak special with free Irish coffee at K tool Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4700043
- Continental and cafe item with Live band every Friday at Vintage Cafe and Pub, Woodland Complex, Darbar Marg.
- Unlimited wine offer for Rs 990 at La Maison wine and cigar lounge. 941330828
- Home made pasta at Afroso, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels. 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- Strawberry Etage at The Lounge from 4.30-6.30 PM. Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Steak escape with Kathmandu’s premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs at the Ashish Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- Retro Brunch Barbeque with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at Le Meridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4401212
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday. 4412899
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- Illy Expression Coffee at Hotel Shangri, Lazimpat and Mandop Hotel, Thamel.
- Socially Responsible coffee at Himalayan Java, Thamel

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@jainepaltimes.com

**WEEKEND WEATHER**

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The power cuts have affected even the Mausam Beed’s ability to make forecasts because satellite images can’t be downloaded. The absence of westerlies means the dry spell will continue, which means the rivers will remain dry and cripple power generation. At this rate, brace yourselves for daily 16 hour power cuts. This satellite radar image taken on Thursday morning shows a high pressure system from the northwest. This has brought Kathmandu Valley temperatures over the southwestern Tibetan Plateau that is blowing in cold, dry air. Absence of westerlies means the dry spell will continue, which means the rivers will remain dry and cripple power generation. At this rate, brace yourselves for daily 16 hour power cuts. This satellite radar image taken on Thursday morning shows a high pressure system from the northwest. This has brought Kathmandu Valley temperatures over the southwestern Tibetan Plateau that is blowing in cold, dry air. 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HAPPENINGS

CELEBRITY FOR A CAUSE: Bollywood actress and SAARC goodwill ambassador for HIV/AIDS Shabana Azmi, speaks at a press conference organised to launch the SAARC regional strategy on HIV/AIDS at Hotel Yak & Yeti on Monday.

LOOK WHO’S IN TOWN: Mulayam Singh Yadav, President of the Bharatiya Samajbadi Party, visite Patan Durbar Square after his entourage was diverted by the protests at Pashupati on Sunday.

OUT OF CHAINS: Members of the Tharu community from Dang and Deukhuri protest at Bhadrakali on Tuesday against the Kamrari tradition of sending girls away as bonded labourers.

KIRAN PANDAY

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

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After placing their political appointees in the national airline, handing supporters ambassadorships, vice-chancellorships, padding the bureaucracy, and trying to get the army chief sacked, the Maoists seem to have bitten off more than they can chew by taking on God.

Being atheists, the comrades probably didn’t realise they were meddling with the Lord of Animals. The Baddies have now collectively earned so much bad karma that they risk being reborn as tapeworms in their next life. By sacking Indian priests we also exposed ourselves for tit-for-tat expulsions of Sister Nirmala and Nepali high priests of Rameswaran and Kasi Vishvanath. Operation Mul Bhatta seems to have been purposely timed to embarrass the prime minister during a week when everyone knew Mulayam would be in town at the invitation of the president to pay homage to Pashupati. And Gовinda and Shabana would also be around. Otherwise, why sack the priest now?

Five months after Comrade Pukada stated that the YCL had changed and would henceforth be engaged in helping the people with development works, the ex-gorillas this week hacked off both legs of a UML supporter. Looks like the leopard has changed its spots into stripes, and has now become a tiger.

And we thought Terrifying said last week he was not going to any more inaugurations, ribbon cuttings and lamp lightings. But there he was on Thursday jumping off a cliff on a paraglider. All domestic flights were diverted because a VIP was freefalling somewhere over Kot Danda. But we should give the man a break, as it were, because he has been through one too many political cliff hangers lately.

At the rate PKG and GPK hit it off every time they meet, the Ass’ theory is that the real danger of the Maoist-led Govt being toppled comes not from the opposition kanganis or the UML comrades pulling the plug on them but from their own restless commanders. At a gathering in Naya Bajar this week to plan for the PLA Day parade in KTM on 13 Feb, division commanders are said to have used undiplomatic language to shake Awesome down.

The warlike warlords weren’t really so worried about the party’s ideological purity, but about their own salaries and perks. Also, we now have a clue as to why Kali Bahadur Kham was never arrested for terminating Ramhari Shrestha because the commander of the PLA 3rd Div was the only one who spoke up in support of the Supreme Commander at that meeting.