The tit-for-tat recruitment by the Maoist army this week in response to the Nepal Army taking in 3,000 new soldiers has escalated tensions between the two armies, but it has also exposed a serious rift within the Maoist party.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahalís mediation skills, praised even by his adversaries, will be severely tested this week as he tries to bridge the gap between the two armies he commands, while simultaneously trying to appease his own restless guerrillas.

Last month, while addressing the PLA in Chitwan, Dahal told them they were no longer a Maoist army but would take orders from the Army Integration Special Committee. This didnít go down well with the fighters, and party hardliners quickly cashed in on the murmurings of discontent.

The announcement by PLA commander Nanda Kishore Pun that the Maoists would begin their own recruitment appears to be more of an effort to quell internal dissent rather than challenge the Nepal Army. Pun is regarded as a staunch Dahal loyalist.

ìThe PLA recruitment is a symbolic gesture,î admitted one Maoist insider, who said applications were being sought but the PLA did not necessarily want to follow through with actual recruitment.

The other reason the PLA recruitment may be a moot point is because up to 6,000 soldiers from various cantonments have voluntarily retired since UNMINís verification process, according to PLA sources.

Even so, Dahal is playing a two-track game. He hopes to also use the threat of PLA recruitment to improve his bargaining strategy vis-à-vis Army Chief Katawal who has stubbornly refused to bow down to Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapaís insistence that the armyís own recruitment process be aborted.

The high-level Political Coordination Committee, chaired by Narayan Kaji Shrestha, endorsed the Nepal Army recruitment on Saturday. The battle moved to the courts after a single bench gave opposing decisions on the case on Tuesday, forcing the issue to a full bench of the Supreme Court.

The Special Committee is meeting again on Friday to resolve the issue once and for all, but indications are it will not go away until the two armies learn to trust each other more. 

Dewan Rai
Doublethink

With only a year to go for writing a new constitution, teams of CA members have fanned out across the country this week to collect folk wisdom.

In many places, this is the first time that elected representatives have gone back to their constituencies for the questions. From voters are more about jobs, inflation, health and education than about demand for a new political party. They are furred by the questionnaires.

There was always a mismatch in this country between the observations of the Maoist leaders and the people’s overwhelming desire for development. That gap, instead of narrowing after the most inclusive election in our nation’s history last April, has actually widened. The rules for how to retain it, and haven’t made the correlation that the best way to stay in power is to deliver on promises made to improve people’s lives.

The Maoists beat everyone else by proposing a federal structure, and this week they scored again by drafting a constitution. Even if it is the same old Maoist song and dance, the draft will now set the agenda for future discussions. By putting the protopage constitution up on his website, Baburam Bhattarai could be presenting an even more radical new vision from warriors in the camps.

But even this ‘soft’ draft gives an ominous whiff of totalitarianism with its provision to ban all groups with ‘feudal’ and ‘imperialist’ tendencies. This is new for ensuring that only the group that reserves the right to declare others ‘feudal’ will prevail. The Maoist draft envisages an Orwellian world where ignorance is strength and thoughtcrimes are punished by Big Brother.

Is this a deliberate attempt by the Maoists to give an Orwellian world where ignorance is strength and thoughtcrimes are punished by Big Brother. The Maoist draft envisages an Orwellian world where ignorance is strength and thoughtcrimes are punished by Big Brother.

I n the late 1980s, while working at Kathmandu, I had gone to the then Royal Nepal Army’s Bhadrakali recruitment centre with an申请者. I was in the first batch of Tarai. This young man’s dream was to be the army. A major had endorsed an application for recruitment. I had heard that Madhesis were not taken, but I didn’t quite believe it. I walked into the office and placed the application before an amiably young officer in charge of handling recruitment. He looked at me, looked down at the application and said: “Where is your family?” I told him. He smiled and said that although he would give the documents to my wife to see, he knew nobody from the Tarai had ever been given a commission in the army. I still don’t know if I was written policy not to recruit people from the Tarai people the official enemy and if it was understood coded to disallow Madhesis. The army is struggling with the cultural and political homogeneity of a new Nepal.

Army Chief Rukmangat Kharel wants to keep the Nepal Army politics-free and professional during this crucial transition, and this deserves support. But why were they then heralded by the National Interest Preservation Committed to be a nursery for army mountainous expeditioning hiring only Nepali Sherpas. The Maoists know that they want to stop them. That figures.

In the United States, the Blacks were not considered battle worthy until they took part by necessity and demonstrated their courage while fighting for their liberation during the Civil War. It took two World Wars, Vietnam and the coup in Bangladesh, for the US military to recognize the dead and the bravery associated with it.

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Maiming the messenger

This Women’s Day, let’s salute Nepal’s brave women journalists

In a posthumously published editorial, Lasantha Wickrematunga, the slain editor of Sri Lanka’s Sunday Leader newspaper rued that of all professions in his country, soldiers and journalists were the only two who had to be prepared to die in the line of duty.

You could say the same about Nepal. Radio journalist Uma Singh’s brutal murder in Janakpur in January underlined the fact that more journalists have been killed since the ceasefire than during the war. Women journalists, especially in the Tarai, are under pressure to quit the profession. Rishi Dhamala’s conspiratorial imprisonment and the nationwide sense of fear and self-censorship today show that life and liberty of journalists are seriously threatened.

After the Maoist were elected to power, we all thought that the ex-rebels no longer needed to resort to violence and intimidation. Instead, in government, they have become even more belligerent bullies.

And to distract attention from the attacks on media and the country’s pressing development needs, Nepal’s two armies are engaging in dangerous political brinkmanship. In a clear bid to sabotage the compromise reached between coalition partners not to intervene in the recruitment of Nepal Army, guerrilla commanders have declared that they too are enlisting fighters. To do what? And who will foot the bill?

Prime Minister Dahal needs to aim his rhetorical prowess towards his own cadres rather than the press. He is still blaming the messenger and this week let off another tirade against the influence of “big media outlets” and “large circulation” newspapers. He needs to be careful; airing his insecurities in public makes him appear weak. It may unleash storm troopers of his YCDL by beginning to attack ‘class enemies’ in the media again.

That said, big media does need to do its own introspection, especially about the exclusive nature of its workforce. Journalists need to examine their role in the current constitution debate and whether they are confusing citizens even more by focusing just on the quarrel-of-the-day.

The belief that journalism, like soldiery, is more suited to the warlike male temperament still finds currency. But Nepal’s women journalists have shown that when it comes to grit, determination and integrity they are as professional as their male colleagues.

In addition to common concerns of the profession—personal safety, work conditions and job security—women journalists have to struggle against at least three other factors: balancing family with a profession in which deadlines are sacrosanct and working hours unpredictable; in the newsroom they have to overcome gender bias and perform better to prove their worth; but the most dispiriting is feedback that degrades their contribution. No wonder only the determined women survive in journalism long enough to make a mark.

Who can forget Durga Karki of Sagarmatha FM facing rifle-wielding soldiers during the royal military rule? Nimla Acharya of RSS, who has made the rights of stringers her cause. Usha Tilakhu, the photojournalist who goes boldly forth wherever a man has gone before. Yashoda Timilsina has to overcome YCDL threats in her reporting while simultaneously bringing to the notice of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists. Our own Shaliee Barnat climbed Chomolungma and pushed the envelope in her journalism. And, in the same vein, Malika Aryal tried to make sense of interesting news with flair, sensitivity and fairness.

This Women’s Day, let’s salute Nepal’s women journalists who have struggled against great odds to do the profession proud.
As India gears up for polls, it’s our turn to wait and watch

NEW DELHI—India is officially in election mode. Speculation is rife about the possible results as alliances are re-engineered. As India’s Election Commission prepares for what is the most ambitious democratic exercise in the world, the best and worst of politics is on display.

No one quite knows what to expect from the polls. With the rise of regional parties and the absence of a single overarching issue, the final outcome will actually be an aggregation of results in 28 states. The recent delimitation of constituencies, with an increase in the number of seats, has added to the uncertainty.

But here is the big picture: the Lok Sabha will continue to be fragmented. As the BJP’s prime ministerial candidate, the venom in urban seats, has added to the uncertainty. The problem for the UPAs is that it is not looking good in the four states that matter the most. DMK is weak in Tamil Nadu (the state has 39 seats). The Congress-led alliance has not shaped up yet in UP (80 seats). And in Bihar (40 seats), even with a Congress-Lalu-Ram Vilas Paswan alliance, Nitish Kumar has the momentum for having delivered on development. And Congress already peaked in Andhra Pradesh (42 seats) last time.

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New papers merge

The publisher of two new newspaper groups Wednesday to merge even before they were to begin publication next month. Bikram Gyawali, the publisher of Nagarik and Hari Shrestha, the publisher of Darikvee decided to pool their resources and bring out only Nagarik, the Nepal daily. Gyawali had earlier split off from Kantipur, taking away many of its top journalists. But he split again and had decided to go it alone. Insiders said the reason was a contracting media market and the need to challenge the combined circulation lead of Kantipur and Annapurna Post. Nagarik’s English sister paper is Republica and Nagarik’s sister paper is Newsfront. It is not yet clear what will happen to the combined circulation lead of Nagarik, Republica, and Hari Shrestha’s English sister paper.

Hassle-free

Travellers taking international flights no longer have to queue at Tribhuvan International Airport to pay airport taxes before boarding. The Civil Aviation Authority has incorporated the tax in the ticket itself. Before the service was introduced on 1 March, travellers had to pay taxes at the airport through a coupon from Nabil Bank.

Health show

HIV/AIDS prevention and safe motherhood organisation Nepal Contractive Retail Sales has partnered with AV News Channel, which is launching a daily programme that aims to raise awareness about health, particularly highlighting problems in remote areas.

Race in India

Morang Auto Works, the only authorized dealer of Yamaha motorcycles in Nepal is giving YZF R15 owners the chance to take part in R15 Championship in Chenna, India on 8 March. Customers may apply through local dealers or contact Yamaha Club, Kathmandu. Participants will be selected through a draw and all expenses will be paid for by MAW.

Top of the game

The British Council is to work with the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training on a project that aims to promote skill development in Nepal. The Skills for Employability project seeks to link education with industry.

Bike hike

Syakar Company and Everest Bank have launched a joint finance scheme for Honda Motorcycles customers outside the Valley. Borrowers can get a 10 per cent interest loan and a one per cent rebate if they abide by the company’s repayment conditions. In order to qualify for the scheme, customers need to have a monthly income that’s at least double the monthly instalment sum.

Employing skill

The way this problem appears to our political elite is that, first, it’s an opportunity to continuously blame those who were in power yesterday, and, second, if it gets any worse, donors and others will somehow come to the rescue through some hastily arranged bailout. How else is one to explain the lacklustre campaign to promote the usage of energy-saving CFL bulbs?

Red and white

Three ways to change rigidly held perceptions

A few months ago, sitting down for a conversation with four well-named representatives of the Lalitpur District Maoist Trade Union ‘whole time’ it was clear they see the world in black or white, or maybe red or white. You were either with them or against them, it was either-or. The world was divided between their friends and enemies.

The friends (the poor, the downtrodden, the disadvantaged and the anti-feudal) could do no wrong, and any amount of violence could be justified in the name of aiding such friends. When those friends were somehow wrong, they could criticise themselves publicly, and learn from the mistakes. But the enemies were to be given no such recourse. They had to be defanged and destroyed. This was a very clear worldview, and the Maoists sitting across the table seemed entirely sincere in their belief that their view was not only true, but also superior.

In business, as in life, how the world appears to the other person or to the other group influences what is to happen next. And the managers who do not understand this are headed for a life of frustration, because they will always be throwing their hands up in the air to ask, “Why don’t others understand the gravity of this x or y problem?”

Take the chronic national shortage of electricity. The way it appears to our political leaders is not that it is deeply shameful for a country that is supposed to be wealthy in water resources to be keeping its citizens in darkness on most evenings, and that something must be done urgently to solve the problem so that tomorrow’s voters will look upon them kindly.

The way this problem appears to our political elite is that, first, it’s an opportunity to continuously blame those who were in power yesterday, and, second, if it gets any worse, donors and others will somehow come to the rescue through some hastily arranged bailout. How else is one to explain the lacklustre campaign to promote the usage of energy-saving CFL bulbs?

In Nepali companies, too, it matters how the world is viewed by the employees. If the employees’ worldview is that the owners are wealthy and will somehow find the money to pay the bills even when costs continue to go up and revenues continue to dwindle, then, it affects how the employees offer to help their own companies to ride out the bad times.

There are three ways to change how the world is perceived by others. First, is the acceptance that the same problem can be viewed differently by different people, and these different views can determine the responses to solve or not solve the problem. Second, transparency with regard to sharing relatively neutral indicators such as financial statements can go a long way to help those who need to know what is what. And third, one can punctuate the certainty of others’ views by throwing logical doubts supported by veritable facts that contradict the worldview the other person holds.

In management communication, understanding how others perceive problems is the first step toward solving issues that require a wide range of support.
Every day a banda

1 February
- Bands across Attariya and Lamki-by Mukta Kamaiya (6 days)
- Protest in Darchula by locals (1 day)
- Jalesworo banda by the Joint Struggle Committee, Jaleshowr (1 day)

2 February
- Barsbas, Mahottari banda by businessmen and civil society (9 days)

4 February
- Birganj banda by local businesses (2 days)

5 February
- Demonstration from Nigad to Bara by local struggle committee (1 day)

7 February
- Dot, Dadeldhura banda by temporary teachers (1 day)
- Eastern Tarai banda by Tharu Kalyanakini Sabha (TKS) (2 days)

8 February
- Takopani customs office banda by Chinese goods entrepreneurs (6 days)

9 February
- Banda of Indrawati IV and Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), Melamchi locals (4 days)

10 February
- Banda in Butwal by students of Glorious College (2 days)

12 February
- Gaur banda by Dumania VDC locals (1 day)
- Mahottari banda by MJF (1 day)

13 February
- Indefinite banda of Sunsari Pashnal section of the East-West Highway by Janachetana Aama Samuha (Mother’s Group) (3 days)

16 February
- Banda in Fikki Road Section along Mechi highway local residents (2 days)
- Banda in Gorkha by transport entrepreneurs (1 day)

17 February
- Janapalpur Cigarette Factory banda by staff (1 day)
- Indefinite banda in Rasuwa by locals (5 days)
- Indefinite banda in Rautahat by transport entrepreneurs (3 days)

18 February
- Banda in Kosi Highway by Kosi Victim’s Struggle Committee (1 day)

19 February
- Madhes banda by Madheshi Student Union (3 days)
- Okhaldhunga banda by YCL (4 days)

20 February
- Banda in Bhanu Bhatkha Higher Secondary School, Damchaur, Siraha by Maoist Aligned All Nepal National Independent School Union Revolutionary (ANNISUR) Students (1 day)
- Banda by Kosi Flood Victim Struggle Committee (9 days)

21 February
- Sunsari banda by locals (3 days)

22 February
- Banda in Fikki by students (1 day)
- Mechi zone banda by transport entrepreneurs (1 day)

24 February
- Tanahun banda by Youth Force (1 day)

25 February
- Banda in Rupandehi - Lamjung Road Section by locals (1 day)

26 February
- Banda in Butwal by locals (1 day)

27 February
- Banda in Tari region by Tari Madhes Loktantrik Party (1 day)
- Indefinite banda in Eastern Region by transport entrepreneurs (2 days)

www.nepalbandh.com

Northern interest

When China recently sent its vice-foreign minister Hu Jiggui to Nepal as a special envoy, the visit prompted much speculation. Jiggui arrived with a proposal for a new peace and friendship treaty and even submitted a three-page draft to the foreign ministry. Why is China initiating a new relationship at this time? China was always going to change the present relationship with Nepal, regardless of who was in government. The Chinese say they have proposed a new treaty to ‘make the relationship between the two countries firmer and strong’. The Chinese embassy spokesperson has said that the agreement is directed only towards Nepal and not any other country.

All Chinese visits to Nepal in the last six months have focused on studying and understanding the situation here. High level Chinese officials were at the UML and IMF party conventions. The vice-commander of the Chinese army and his team and Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi’s brother and head of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, Pro Yang Jemin followed him here, heading a non-governmental team.

What all these visits have in common is the focus on controlling free Tibet activities on Nepal soil. In the words of a Chinese diplomat: “The issue of Tibet might not be that important to you in Nepal. But for us it has become a top priority matter of national security.” The Chinese believe that Nepal is the conduit towards Tibet and is easier through Nepal than India. In the present context, when China is challenging the US as a global power, Tibet has become China’s Achilles heel.

For Nepal’s Maoist government, Tibet has become an opportunity to win China’s trust and copy up to the northern neighbour. However, it is unlikely that the Maoist government will become an ally as strong as the monarchy was to Beijing in the past.

Shifting ground

Narendra Peter in Naya Patrika, 1 March
Nepali society is in the process of metamorphosing. The media would be fools if it tried to ignore this and get away without engaging in self-evaluation, assessment and reform. However, some Nepali media houses are not embracing the change. It’s perfectly acceptable for a paper to show partiality to a certain ideology or governance. A paper’s editorial may empathise with a certain party, but when it comes to issues of national responsibility, the media should unite. The press plays an important part in setting out national goals. Civil society may strengthen the national unity, but the media gives a sense of national consensus and nationalism. The media has a large role to play in strengthening the country so that outside forces don’t have the power to intervene.

Issues such as the government’s commitment to a Federal Democratic Republic, a logical conclusion to the peace process and the drafting of the constitution must receive most media attention at present. Not the personal lives of a few political personalities. Some papers try to divert attention away from these central issues with trivia. Nepali media can’t limit itself to mere preaching without thought. It must not only decide which issues take centre stage in media coverage, but assess and question its own code of conduct and ethics. Discourse in the press cannot be without boundaries or accountability.

(Peter is a consultant to the Ministry of Information and Communications)

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On the cover of January 2007 Vogue Angelina Jolie was featured in a red gown designed by Nepali designer Prabal Gurung. Under the fashion house Bill Blas (which has since closed), Prabal has designed clothes for celebrity women like Jolie, Oprah Winfrey and Laura Bush. And it looks like Prabal’s fashion career is just beginning. With the

High fashion

ongoing crisis, many designers have started losing their jobs. Opportunities are scarce in the fashion world but Prabal’s new label is already taking off in New York. Prabal’s designs attracted a lot of attention at the recent New York Fashion week with praise in Vanity Fair, The New York Times and High Society. The New York Times wrote: “Nepali Designer Prabal captures a youthful attitude. His style and finishing is promising.”

Prabal completed his SLC at St Xaviers School in 1980, and went on to study design at Delhi’s National Institute of Fashion Technology and worked with designer Namish Aznor. Later, he joined the Parsons School of Design in New York and has since worked with designers such as Cynthia Rowley and Bill Blas.

Prabal wants Nepali style to be part of the fashion world. He uses colours that dominate Nepali and Dhimal clothes in his designs. Prabal has now become an inspiration for other Nepali designers.
Ethnic identity is encapsulated within its language. Language is the link to its history, culture and customs. According to the 2001 census, there are 12 languages spoken in Nepal, but this diversity is being eroded, threatening the cultural identity of the people who speak them.

**COMMENT**

Mukta Singh Tamang

The Khas language, which until the Rana regime was known as Gorkha, is used in government, administration and education. It is drowning out other languages. Language activists say Gorkha language speakers were biased and exclusive towards other languages branding them as uncivilised. They imposed their language on other groups thereby weakening them by not acknowledging them. Some languages of indigenous groups are now on the verge of extinction.

Languages require no interference and support from the state for their development and continuity. The state needs to have a single official language for administrative purposes, for national unity and to create a single political society. But the state made a mistake when it imposed a single language in the name of unifying the country because it infringed on multilingual rights. Experiences of other countries show that a multilingual policy also consolidates national unity. In multilingual countries, school education is given in the mother tongue while other languages are taught alongside.

India has a long experience of multilingual education. Studies have shown that India’s policy of schooling in three languages within a state has been very effective. Each Indian state teach a second and third languages alongside the state language. For instance, education is given in Bengali in West Bengal with Hindi taught as a second language and English as a third. India defined its federal structure primarily on the basis of language which has helped institutionalise democracy and bring about national unity.

South Africa mentioned nine indigenous languages along with English and Afrikaans as the official working language in its 1994 constitution. Similarly, New Zealand acknowledged the indigenous language Maorii as the official working language in 1978. Under this provision, one can use this language in court, which has to provide an interpreter. Countries like Russia and China have also invested in the development of local languages and cultures. In Nepal, National Language Recommendation Commission 1994 studied the status of national languages and recommended national languages. But not much has been done except the preparation of textbooks for primary level in a few indigenous languages. Experiences of other countries show that a multilingual policy also consolidates national unity. In multilingual countries, school education is given in the mother tongue while other languages are taught alongside.

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Although its recommendation for a three language policy was made 15 years ago, it is still relevant today and the federal structure should adopt it. But which languages should be used in schools, the media and administration is the issue to be debated. TU professors are undertaking a language survey which should be taken into account when drafting the new language policy. But we can theoretically determine four practical aspects already. Firstly, primary education should be in the mother tongue and secondly, autonomous provinces should choose their official working language and language policy independently. Thirdly, there should be translation services available in state health and legal sectors and finally the state-and local provinces in a federal structure—must preserve and develop threatened languages. In a pluralistic society, the use of many languages makes democracy all the more meaningful. In the past, Nepali speakers were considered more Nepali than non Nepali speakers, who felt a sense of alienation in their home country. It is a positive sign that many feel that language can be one of the cornerstones on which the federal structure is constructed.

Now that the monarchy as a symbol of national unity is gone, we need to find another foundation. The new constitution with its inclusive structure and multicultural policy will make a new foundation for national unity.

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**CONSTITUTION 2010**

**Mother tongue**

Nepal’s linguistic diversity should be seen as a strength.

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**Six equal provinces**

Future federal units should be economically viable and include all ethnic groups within them.

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**COMMENT**

Gobindraj Joshi

The real challenge in transforming Nepal into a republic is to restructure the state into a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural society while maintaining social harmony and national unity.

It is not easy to create federal states in a country with a topographic and geopolitical make up such as Nepal. Which rights of the people living there. A much more practical approach would be to set up the following six provinces:

**Eastern Province** (ilam, Taptah, Physmat, Bheep, Surkhum, Khukhi, Barhali, Sankhuwasabha, Dhading, Bungamati, Sikkim, Saptari, Bhojpur, Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Tara, Dhanusha, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Nuwakot, Rawsa, Vatupalpok, Khruwako, and Cashtham), Capital: Bhatpatan. This does not affect the existing settlement patterns of the various communities and geographic, administrative, educational, cultural and physical facilities can remain intact. There are two universities, a regional police office, appellate court, regional administrative office, medical colleges and other institutions in the region. Transportation, electricity and telephone services are already in place.

**Middle Province** (Sagar, Sinikha, Bhanu, Bhandari, Sauraha, Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Rasahat, Bara, Paspa and Makwanpur), Capital: Janakpur. There are universities, medical colleges, courts, police and army headquarters and other institutions. Development infrastructure is relatively developed.

**Bagmati Province** (Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Nuwakot, Rasuna, Dhusing, Dolkha, Sindulpalchowk and Kabhrepur), Capital: Kathmandu. There are universities, medical colleges, courts, police and army headquarters and other institutions. Development infrastructure is relatively developed.

**Gandaki Province** (Chitwan, Gorkha, Lamjung, Tanahu, Shyangtra, Kaski, Maram, Mustang, Myangdi, Parbat, Baglung, Palpa and Nawalparasi), Capital: Pokhara. There would be linguistically very diverse, but it is well-endowed with tourism and water resources with the Kali Gandaki, Maryangdi, Seti, Madh and Chep江 rivers.

**Karnali Province** (Darchula, Jumla, Kalikot, Myagdi, Annapurna, Dhaulagiri, Dolakha, Achham, Dang, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Delfu and Bajhang), Capital: Jighai. There is a regional police office and administrative office. There are appellate courts and army units. This region does not have university but there are hospitals and most of the districts have roads. Kaph合资公司 and Rama lake are the tourism treasures of the region. Because of its underdevelopment this province will require more attention than others.
Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be Tarzan, swinging high up in the trees? Or how monkeys feel when they hover high above you on your visit to Swayambhu? Well, if you are interested in getting some fun high up in the forest canopy, just hop on a bus and go to The Last Resort, where Nepal’s first high rope course has opened.

With eight challenging crossings reaching up to nine metres into the trees, this high rope course offers a new kind of adventure sports and team-building exercise in Nepal.

“High Ropes is the brand name for a high wire forest adventure that challenges your personal boundaries, encourages teamwork and builds confidence,” says Sam Voolstra, marketing director of The Last Resort.

For the launch of this new adventure, 12 people from Nepal and abroad met up and put their bodies and minds into the capable hands of The Last Resort high wire staff, which is entirely Nepali.

“I felt completely and utterly safe all times as we were always on a rope. The stations were pretty challenging, but it was good to do as I felt so much better afterwards,” said Nonna Lamponen, a participant from Finland.

The high rope course, which has enjoyed huge popularity in Europe over the past few years, was designed and built by Austrian Alex Schuchter together with The Last Resort crew.

Modern rope courses were first designed by French naval officer George Hebert 100 years ago as a method of physical education with the aim of...
developing the physical, morale, and 'virile' qualities in an outdoor environment. However, the main purpose of such a high rope course is not necessarily the physical challenge or the adventure, but the team building exercise.

“Learning through experience has never been more essential to organisations and individuals as the challenges we face are increasingly demanding, complex and often unpredictable. With the global economic crisis employees need to be motivated,” says Voolstra.

“I would actually want to see politicians do it, especially from two different parties,” says Mickey Mohan from Kathmandu half-jokingly.

A maximum of 12 people, who are divided into pairs, can join one session, which takes between 2 and 3 hours, and even though the team is always nearby, the participants have to rely on each other during the exercise.

“It really made me realise how important it is to trust another person,” said Maske, who took part in the first session.

For some, however, it was more of a physical test as the first ladder (named ‘Hillary Steps’) seemed to be quite demanding for some participants. “I think the first station could be a challenge for someone who is not very physical,” Maskey continued. “But with the help of the team everybody will get up.”

However, no one can ever get stuck high up in the trees as participants can be lowered down from any station such as ‘Helicopter Rescue’, ‘Mountain Flight’, ‘Bagmati River Crossing’ and ‘Nepali Taxis’.

**Specifications**

- **Maximum number per session:** 12
- **Maximum number per day:** 36
- **Minimum height:** 5'2"
- **Minimum age:** 12

Special introductory rate, applicable till the end of May 2009:
- Rs 2,000 for Nepalis, Rs 3,000 for foreigners (lunch included, not transport)
Ban bandas

Anyone, anywhere can shut down Nepal for any reason

On Sunday, the Kathmandu to Madhmeshwar stretch was blocked. Traffic had been particularly bad because of the motorcades of high-security dignitaries, but this was different: Several small cars and motorcycles were parked across the middle of the road. It became clear this jam was no traffic jam, it was an impromptu chukka jam.

No one seemed to know why or who blocked the road. “It must be the students, or the teachers,” said one cab driver. “It is the Madness,” said a student. “No, the Tharus,” said another. Bhaktapur has seen only three working days in the past three weeks. There are overlapping bandas: Mahendranagar is on Day Five of a shutdown and curfew, the entire Tarai is on Day Four of an indefinite strike. The repair of the Kosi embankment is seriously delayed because of a shutdown by flood victims. Bandas initially began following the first people’s movement of 1990 when political parties in opposition called general strikes to pressure the Panchayat rulers to restore democracy. In the 1990s, the culture of enforcing a shutdown became the protest of choice by the political opposition of the day. The website www.nepalbandh.com records over 550 shutdowns in 2008 alone.

For one month entrepreneurs in Bhaktapur called a banda to ban all bandas. In Butwal, journalists blocked the East-West Highway for two days when a local reporter was killed in a motorcycle accident. The mode of protest is a fear. Fear of a car being stoned, a motorcycle being cremated, a store being vandalised. Gone is the spontaneity of the protest and an expression of fear against genuine grievances. While the impromptu strikes make life difficult for those who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, what is the cost to the people and the nation?

A recent report by UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) focusses on food security and the livelihood impacts of bandas in Nepal. It says the country’s poorest are the worst hit by these shutdowns. A quarter of Nepal’s population spends more than 75 per cent of their income on food. If that population is prevented from earning a daily wage, this means they skip the day’s meal. One day of banda causes losses of up to Rs 1 billion, according to the WFP’s calculation.

When the highway is shut buses get stuck, often in a place where there is no market. Those who can afford may have to pay eight times more for a packet of noodles and spend a fortune for several days of accommodation. Chukka jams became the only way to get attention from a disinterested government. You blocked the highway and the authorities took notice.

Had there been no bandas, popular movements like the April Uprising and Madness Movement would not have gained momentum. But those shutdowns were voluntary and had popular mass support. It was the people who were protesting against the system and were refused to work until something was done about it.

Bandas should be the last resort, not the only option. The way they are conducted, bandas are not non-violent forms of protest. They are compulsory closures enforced with the fear of violence. The modus operandi of a banda is fear. Fear of a car being stoned, a motorcycle being cremated, a store being vandalised. Gone is the spontaneity of the protest and an expression of fear against genuine grievances.

Changing Nepal

A unique initiative to help families keep children in school

S

chool teacher Ram Chandra Poudel grew increasingly distressed 15 years ago by the number of children who were dropping out of school because their families couldn’t afford their education.

As someone who had grown up in poverty and worked as a porter and domestic, Poudel tried ways to help poor children but the ineffective government school system frustrated him. So, in 1996, he left his teaching job and with a group of friends set up a program to help drop-outs get back to school.

Today, Poudel’s Children Nepal helps support 360 children’s education by empowering their families with skills training. Theory and condition are: the families must provide their children with food and time to go to school instead of work.

“This is so far it is a trial ownership of other children’s well-being,” explains Poudel, “I can’t spoon feed them.”

Families get loans to start income generation so their children don’t have to be sent to work. Next, CN finds an appropriate government school for the child to attend and the school too must give incentives like free admission or subsidised books.

That way, the organisation is just one of the three pillars supporting the children. Sita Nepal (above) works briskly on a sewing machine, making doll clothes. Tushnu Bhujel (below) raises nine-year-old daughter Sita and when she is old enough, he will go to school too with CN’s help.

“I’m happy for the support,” he says. “I couldn’t afford to send her to school without CN.”

The organisation also provides tuition for children who are struggling with their homework or exams. Ishrat Prabin was only nine years old when she learnt the English alphabet and other nursery rhymes in the teaching centre run by CN. Eleven years later, she leads the children in ABC at the very same centre where she grew up in.

“In this room, I made my decision to become a teacher so naturally I’m a social worker here now,” says 20-year-old Ishrat.

During the war, Children Nepal was an impromptu chukka jam.

Together, the three set up the Madhav Chirrime Foundation.
families afford education

one girl at a time

named after Kiran’s father and Nepal’s poet laureate, "Kiran is the most accomplished woman I know, with a medical degree, master’s degrees in public health and anthropology, and a doctorate," Regmi says.

Regmi’s experience working with poor families in rural Nepal matched what Kottler had seen while doing research in remote areas. Six years ago in Lamjung, he met the headmaster of a school who told him that an academically gifted girl was dropping out because her family couldn’t afford the fees. When he found out it was only Rs 7,000, he took out his wallet and paid for a year’s support.

From that first girl in 2003, the Madhav Ghimire Foundation now supports 73 students. It plans to add 25 more this year, some of them gifted Sherpa girls whose fathers have died in climbing accidents.

Outside support has also helped provide CN with computers and teaching aids government schools can only dream about. Says Paudel, “We realised how important computer skills were becoming and decided we had to provide them with the resources their schools could not.”

Outside support has also helped provide CN with computers and teaching aids government schools can only dream about. Says Paudel, “We realised how important computer skills were becoming and decided we had to provide them with the resources their schools could not.”

COMMITTED TRIO: Businessman Digumber Piya, doctor Kiran Regmi and professor Jeffrey Kottler set up the Madhav Ghimire Foundation to give girls in Lamjung a head start in school. The foundation is named after Nepal’s poet laureate. Scholarship students at the Sri Chandra School in Bahundanda last week (left).
Thirty years after the end of the brutal Maoist regime that took the lives of as much as a quarter of Cambodia’s population, the court sessions of senior Khmer Rouge cadre will open in Phnom Penh this month.

The first defendant is Kaing Guek Eav, 66, better known as Duch, the commandant of the Tuol Sleng prison and torture house, which sent at least 14,000 people to their deaths in a killing field.

Duch confessed to journalists before his arrest nine years ago that he had committed atrocities but said he had been acting under orders and would himself have been killed if he had disobeyed. Known for his brutality, he is charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes, and with murder and torture in his prison, known as S-21.

On Monday, attorneys asked the UN-backed genocide tribunal for permission to interview Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and former King Norodom Sihanouk.

Four senior Khmer Rouge officials are in custody, but court officials say their trials may not start until next year. They are Nuon Chea, 82, the movement’s chief ideologue, Khieu Samphan, 76, who was head of state, Leing Sary, 82, the former foreign minister, and his wife, Leang Thirith, 75, a fellow member of the Khmer Rouge Central Committee.

The Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot, died in 1998. Many Cambodians say they fear that some of the defendants may also die before they are brought to trial, and the tribunal has been providing them the best medical care Cambodia has to offer.

The trials are being held by a hybrid tribunal supported by the United Nations that includes Cambodian and foreign judges and prosecutors in an awkward legal compromise that has drawn criticism from human-rights advocates and legal scholars.

“We wish to see this tribunal for at least these five, and this is the minimum of the minimum,” said Kek Galabru, a leading Cambodian human-rights campaigner. “A lot of people ask: Why only five? Why only five?”

“T"
Girls’ night out

Women in Concert is back with a bang this year.

Although there was a break last year, Women in Concert VI is back with a promise to be bigger. This year, Women in Concert VI will be held on Saturday, 21 March, 7PM-9PM. The event is a music concert featuring a variety of performers.

Sapna Thapa, a prominent Nepali musician, states, “The audience’s expectations are sometimes difficult to live up to but we make an earnest effort from our side.” Along with Sapna, Rachana Gurung Sharma, Prithi Kaur and Pooja Gurung have been a part of previous Women in Concert events. This year, the audience will also feature budding artist Astha Tamang Makay.

“The genre of music that will be performed will run the gamut from pop to rock to R&B and soul,” says Vidhea. “We believe literature will also get a chance to watch performances from members of Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC) which includes Shresti Shrestha Pradhan and a young trio of sisters. The all-women chorale group is an offspring of seven members from KJC are sure to be a draw.

“The idea of Women in Concert is two-fold,” explains Vidhea, “firstly it serves to be a platform for aspiring young Nepali women musicians to perform and have their talent recognized. Secondly, the concert contributes a percentage of the proceeds towards alleviating social ills.”

In the past, the proceeds from the concert have gone to support Nepal Child Welfare Foundation and Sewa Kendra. This year, the women will sing to support Orchid Garden Nepal, a child-friendly based group that runs a day care centre for children under five whose parents are daily wage labourers and come from underprivileged families.

“We have always tried to raise funds for a genuine cause wherever we are sure to be a big draw,” says Sapna. “We hope that our collective experiences in these troubled times will in some way be a catalyst for a better future,” Vidhea adds.

And what a way to express that hope: through the voices of women, united in song and celebration.

Women in Concert
Saturday, 21 March, 7PM-9PM
Gokarna Forest Resort
Tickets: Rs 999

Vidhea Shrestha

STAR GAZING

Kedar S Badu

If you can’t afford a telescope, binoculars will do for star-gazing.

Many of the readers of the Stargazing column have sent me emails seeking advice on where they could get telescopes in Nepal. Unfortunately, telescopes are not available here and even if you get one, it might be either expensive or not suitable for your observing requirements. In many ways, binoculars prove superior to a telescope for amateur astronomers. If you have never experienced binocular astronomy, you’ll be thrilled at how easy objects are to locate and the speed and comfort at which you can observe. A new whole experience is waiting for you.

Binoculars have a wide field of view and provide right-side-up images, making objects easy to find. They require no effort or expertise to set up — just sling them around your neck, step outside, and you’re ready to go. They can reveal craters on the Moon, moons orbiting Jupiter, Milky Way star fields, and even other galaxies.

But, before you purchase binoculars, you’ll need to understand a few basics. Aperture is the most important binocular specification that describes the diameter of the front lenses. The larger the diameter, the brighter the resulting images. You can find the aperture simply by looking at the two numbers displayed on each binocular: in 10x50, for example, “10” refers to the diameter of the front lenses, and “50” refers to the diameter (in mm) of each of the front lenses (aperture). I suggest you buy binoculars of either 7x35 (for children) or 10x50 (for adults). And one last tip: go for binoculars with a ‘p’ in the specification that describes the diameter of the front lenses. The ‘p’ is for porro prism.

In March, there are two planets for you to enjoy during evening hours: Saturn (in Leo) is in the eastern sky and Venus (in Pisces) is low in the west. On 10 March, don’t forget to observe the pairing of the ringed planet Saturn with the gibbous Moon. Regarding constellations, you could enjoy the stars of the “Winter Hexagon” which will be located just overhead during the evening. Direct your binoculars towards the belt of Orion the Hunter and you will be thrilled to see the brilliant emission nebula M-42 (also known as the Orion Nebula) and the great Saptarshi (Ursha Major) in the north-eastern sky. Try to find the Dhruba Tara (Polar Star) with the help of the pointers of the Saptarshi. While looking at stars, pay attention to their colour, as it gives us a clue about their age. For example, in the Orion Constellation, identify an orange-red star just to the north of the Hunter’s belt. This is Betelgeuse, a red-giant that has already used up its hydrogen fuel and may explode anytime into a supernova! Hopefully we’ll be lucky enough to see this event in our lifetimes.

And finally, we have the Spring Equinox that falls on 20 March when the Sun crosses the celestial equator (at 5:23 PM) from south to north, signalling the arrival of spring.

Mercury is rising only minutes before the Sun, but it’s at a superior conjunction (almost directly behind the Sun) on 31 March. We’re very unlikely to see this elusive little planet this month. Venus is well up in the western sky at sunset, but will be at inferior conjunction (almost directly in front of the Sun) on 2 March. At the very end of the month it is just starting to appear in the morning sky.

Mars is still rising only a few minutes before sunrise. We won’t be getting good views of the red planet until after the summer. Jupiter, like Mars, rises less than an hour before the Sun. Towards the end of March, we could see it up very low in the south-east just before sunrise.

Saturn is very well placed for viewing this month. It’s at opposition to the Sun on 8 March, so it is rising as the Sun sets. It’s due south at midnight and doesn’t set until sunrise.

In early March, don’t miss seeing the surprise Comet Lulin (pictured) with binoculars during the evening hours. Look towards the constellation of Leo, close to the Star Regulus. Wish you all a happy stargazing.

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STARGAZING
ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS
❖ Love in the Air, an art by Ragini Upadhayay-Ghara at 5:30 PM till 8 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4218048
❖ Feather friends, an exhibition of paintings by Sanju Shah, 6 March, 4PM, Kathmandu Gallery, Lazimpat

EVENTS
❖ Doubt, a film starring Philip Seymour Hoffman, 6PM, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 7 March. 4288549
❖ Lecture Series XXXX by Rai Bhandari, 5PM, 8 March, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhokai. 4371410
❖ Destination Thailand, 8 March, Darbar Hall, Yak and Yeti Hotel, 9AM-5PM. 4371410
❖ South Asian women networking event, 7-9 March, evening event at Garden of Dreams. 4252572
❖ Call for entries for Film South Asia, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. For deadlines, visit filmsouthasia.org. 5525141

MUSIC
❖ Women in Concert at Gokarna Golf Resort, 8:30 PM, 21 March
❖ OZMA concert at the Army Club Auditorium, 6PM, 27 March
❖ Final concert of Miles Music Festival at Dhokaiama, Palan Chok, 28 March, 7PM.
❖ Sunday Jazz brunch barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491234
❖ Jazz evening at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-3PM. 4260328
❖ Strings Band live every Tuesday at G’s Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.
❖ Wednesday Melody at Jazzabell Café, Happy hour 6-8PM and TGIF party with live band Epic every Friday at 8PM. 2114075
❖ Some like it hot every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dowartia’s Hotel. 4479488
❖ Happy cocktail hour, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar.
❖ Live Sensation, performance by Yankay every Saturday, 8PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
❖ Fusion and Looba Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
❖ Fusion and Classical Music by Anil Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, sull & raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5521408

DINING
❖ Gourmet trout at Olive Garden, 6PM onwards at Rs 850+, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat. 4411818
❖ Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisted. 4263370
❖ Fresh Himalayan rainbow trout at Rox Restaurant all February 7PM onwards, Hyatt Regency. 4493862
❖ Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4411234
❖ Strawberry Elagere at The Lounge from 4PM-6:30 PM, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
❖ Nhuchhe goes Thai at Nhuchhe’s Thai Kitchen, Baltiwater. 4425903
❖ Fusion of Marcela Ragan’s new menu and Mannie’s new bar at Dhokaiama Café. 5225113
❖ Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
❖ Pasta pesto passion at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
❖ Home made pasta at Al fresco, Sohales Crowne Plaza. 4273999
❖ Reality Bites, an Indian, moves into a new apartment on the 13th floor with his family. From the first day in their new home, the women are hooked on a new show. Sab Khaireyat. The show is about a family eerily similar to theirs who have also just moved into a new house. As the show unfolds, all the incidents that happen in the show start happening to Manohar and his family. Things take a turn for the worse when shocking incidents start happening in the show. Will the same happen to Manohar and his family? Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com

WEATHER

WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

"Expect no change in current weather pattern till early next week" is the summary of the message from the Met Office, and your forecaster, unfortunately, is forced to conclude. Moisture deficiency in the ambient air is now at the lowest level this season; relative humidity on Wednesday afternoon in Kathmandu dropped to 23 per cent. This satellite-radar image taken on Thursday morning shows the high-pressure system in place, while the westerly fronts zoom across the Tibetan Plateau. One of them grazed western Nepal last week, dumping snow in Humla, but other than that we were left high and dry. With the westerlies now weakening, the only hope is for convection systems building up over the mountains as the temperature rises. But even that needs moisture, and with this dryness it is unlikely there will be rain-

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com
HAPPENINGS

SUMMIT: Heads of state of Sri Lanka and Nepal shake hands after their ministers signed an air services agreement linking Colombo to Kathmandu on Tuesday. Sri Lankan Foreign Minister and Nepal’s Tourism Minister Hisila Yami.

SEEKING FREEDOM: Asia Journalist Association president Lee Sang-ki (centre) and vice-president Ivan Lim Sin Chin met Prime Minister Dahal on Monday in Singha Darbar. They raised concerns about press freedom.

WELL DESERVED: Himal Khabapatrika reporter and Nepal Times contributor Rameswor Bohara receives the Yadu Gautam Award for human rights reporting on Wednesday from UML chairman Jhal Nath Khanal.

YOU ARE HERE: A picture taken this week in Punta Del Este, Uruguay, showing the distance to Kathmandu.
What bad timing to schedule Traffic Week to coincide with the state visit of the Lankan president. It had got off to a fairly good start with volunteers acting like human road dividers, traffic cops threatening to decapitate motorcyclists if they ran the red light, and Baba-san distributing white gloves for police.

Traffic was actually getting smoother before disaster struck. Monday and Tuesday saw some of the worst traffic jams in living memory in the capital. Good thing the Sri Lankans cut short their visit, otherwise Wednesday would have been bumper-to-bumper as well. If this is what happens when there is just one visiting head of state, imagine the chaos the next time the SAARC Summit is held here. Security for the presidential banquet at the Soaltee was so tight some invited guests couldn't even make it.

Bureaucratic and business circles in Kathmandu are currently bristling with talk of the two cousins interfering in appointments, license procedures and bank loans by dropping the names of Comrade Uncle. PKD has enough problems in his hands without rotten eggs in his family raising another stink.

Just when we had started getting used to the western suit with topi or dhoti kamij, the rulers of the New Nepal are deliberately trying to confuse us with more variations on the national dress. At the guard of honour for the Sri Lankan president at the airport on Monday out comes the Foreign Minister in disheveled pajamas and chappals. If we are really already a dictatorship of the proletariat then night suit and slippers would be a perfectly acceptable national dress, but the last we heard, we are still a Federal Democratic Inclusive People’s Republic of Nepal. All this was fine, but after the anthems Touristic Minister Yummy was overheard telling the Firinghi Minister: “Tapai ta aja pukka Madhesi jastai dekhinu bhi.” Our mod didn’t hang around to figure out if Upendra took that as a compliment.

After having been holed up in Nepal for nearly three years, Kingji is letting his hair down in India extending his trip to last a whole month. After the clan wedding in Bhopal, the naturalist ex-monarch went to check out the tigers at Ranthambore and a pilgrimage to Somnath in Gujarat. None of this should worry comrades in the pipal republik back home, but Red Flag and Tremendous are getting rattled that royal cousin Arjun Singh is arranging meetings with Sonia and Lalmanoh. Conspiratorial as the comrades are, they are imagining that the baby king proposal is being revived.

The cabinet, in its wisdom, approved the proposal to delete the month of Chait from year 2006, but a committee of astrologers have so far refused to implement it. It’s now getting late to start printing next year’s calendars and most publishers are bringing out two variations of 2066 calendars: ones with Chait and ones without. The rumour is that the govt wants to prove that the Bickrum Sambat is unscientific and use this opportunity to introduce the Gregorian calendar. They may as well use this opp to declare Sunday a holiday and Nepal Time 45 minutes forward so we scrap this absurd 15 minute time diff with India.

Kathmandu-based embassies have decided to cock the snook at the Foreign Ministry’s letter asking them to reveal who they rent premises from and how much they pay because it contravenes the Vienna Convention. Comrade Ramhunu wants to leave no stone unturned to nab tax evaders, but he should have checked with the lawyers first.

For more information, log on to www.dabar.com