The Maoists are bent on making things more and more difficult for the UML-led coalition unless they are allowed back into government. All last week, they played the ultra-nationalist card by beating up Indian priests at Pashupati and bringing the capital to a halt (left).

But the leaders of the NC and the UML need to accept that there is no place for their old antagonism in the present scheme of things. Girija Prasad Koirala and Madhav Kumar Nepal may have been movers and shakers once, but the main players in the political arena now are the Maoists and the Madhesis. Koirala and Nepal need to make peace with Pushpa Kamal Dahal for their own good and for the future of peace and democracy in the country.

**JHAMAK**
She was born with cerebral palsy, and can’t speak, walk, or move her limbs freely. But Jhamak Ghimire’s disability hasn’t prevented her from expressing her acerbic, poetic humour freely – through her left foot.

**Film South Asia 2009**
The region’s best documentaries showcased in Kathmandu film festival 17-20 September. Indian actress Shabana Azmi will deliver the opening speech. Highlights: Afghan Girls Can Kick (Afghanistan’s first women’s football team), In Search of the Riyal (Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf), People’s Leader (Benazir Bhutto’s life).
Ram Chandra who?

The media's obliqueness to Ram Chandra Mishra's passing shows how little we care

After five bedridden years during which he was gradually losing his memory, Ram Chandra Mishra passed away on Monday at the age of 72.

Ram Chandra who? It was symptomatic of how we treat the generation of real revolutionaries who struggled for our freedom that his passing got no mention in the media. Mishra was among the few true Gandhians of Nepali politics and a pioneer of the Madhes movement.

Plain speaking

Prashant Jha

Born into a landowning family in Mahottari's Pipra village, Mishra had a political and spiritual bent right from his schooldays. He was close to the two political stalwarts of the region, Bhadrakali and Ram Narayan Mishra, and became an active member of the NC. He had met Vinobha Bhave in India and was inspired by Gandhian ideals. During the NC's Putna convention following the royal takeover of 1960, Mishra firmly opposed Subhas Chandra Bose's argument for an armed movement from Indian soil, and advocated a non-violent struggle within Nepal.

He was arrested in June 1973 and spent 10 years participating in one of the first protests against the Panchayat system. From then on, his being imprisoned and tortured became a matter of course for Mishra and his family. In 1970, he wrote a scathing pamphlet against Bhadra Chhatram, then in its tenth year. But he also believed in using the existing electoral system in order to correct the system. He won in 1971, but was not allowed to take his oath and was arrested again. Fifteen days before the 1979 referendum, he was brutally tortured by police and Panchayat goons. He was taken to Patan but returned because his treatment was complete to vote for the multiparty system. Mishra was the district president of the NC in Mahottari in 1983. That year, along with Ganjam Narayan Singh and others, he set up the Nepal Social Unity Party, the precursor to the Sadbhavna Party. Girija Prasad Koirala was the national general secretary of the NC, and he delivered an ultimatum to Mishra, forcing him to choose again between Congress and the Panchayat. Even through the latter was only a socio-cultural occasion, Deeply hurt, Mishra left the NC. But his commitment to democratic struggle remained, and his stand in favour of Madhesi rights. In the 1990 movement, he was arrested again and sent to Sindhuli jail for a full 16 months.

Mishra was among the founders of the Sadbhavna Party after the restoration of multiparty democracy, and stood for elections in 1991 and 1994. But unwilling to cut any deals, Mishra lost both times. He also developed differences with Ganjam Narayan Singh's brand of Kathmandu-centric, India-first politics and moved away from spiritualism, setting up an Aarbinho Ashram in his village.

Mishra's political philosophy and foresight were remarkable. He vetoed the Maoists long before the Maoists. Twenty-five years before the Madhes movement, and before people like Mahat Traikur left the NC, Mishra had sacrificed a national party for a regional outfit. He showed how democracy, nationalism, and commitment to the Madhes could co-exist.

Mishra's values remain relevant for future political parties even today. He felt that Sadbhavna should have used the 1990s to remain outside power politics and build a larger Madhes movement. This is a lesson newer Madhesi parties would do well to heed. He remained unswayed in his opposition to non-violence, despite being repeatedly at the receiving end of state violence. And he felt that the first duty of any party was towards the masses, not to the embassies.

But his biggest lesson was his uncompromising honesty and integrity. Though born into a well-to-do family, Mishra lived a life of economic hardship, with barely enough to educate his children. He was never rent in the middle of his contributions. Yet Mishra did not die a bitter man, for these were political choices he had made. To him, and to us, political success, mission, or a cost-benefit calculation.

Those who knew him have the invisible image of a slightly built man walking along the streets of Janakpur in a khadi kurta, dhoti and chappals, bag hanging from shoulder. That image, fading with the generation of early revolutionaries, is a rare one: that of an honest man, committed to a just society.
Nepal and Koirala

Nepal is behaving as if he is the leader rather than the figurehead of a wobbly coalition

When Prime Minister Nepal called on Girija Prasad Koirala early this week, the octogenarian leader may have been genuinely sick. When an elderly person is stressed, after all, symptoms of chronic diseases tend to worsen. And Koirala must be extremely worried. Contrary to his expectations, Premier Nepal is behaving as if he is the leader rather than the figurehead of a wobbly coalition.

After the fall of the Maoist-led government, the NC, as the second largest party in the legislative parliament, was entitled to take the reins of government. But Koirala probably didn’t wish to sow seeds of disagreement in a party still struggling with its unification process with a former breakaway group. When the NC didn’t stake its claim to leading the government, UML leader Jhalanath Khanal should have been the rightful choice. Khanal was perceived to be too close to the Maoists for India’s comfort. Koirala thus consented to give Madhav Kumar Nepal a chance on the assumption that he would be consulted. The appointment of daughter Sujata Koirala as deputy premier was an implicit condition. Once ensconced in Baluwatar, Nepal didn’t need Koirala anymore. He deduced accurately that as long as his anti-Maoist ‘international community’ constituency was intact, the NC wouldn’t dare unseat him. Apparently, the Congress patriarch has failed once again to correctly assess the UML’s visceral antagonism against his party in general and the Koirala family in particular.

Since the mid-nineties, the UML has succeeded in attracting a large number of self-employed professionals, small entrepreneurs and something it calls ‘nationalist’ capitalists to its fold. But the petty bourgeoisie continues to be the mainstay of the Balaju establishment. Avowedly conventional in its beliefs and outlook, the lower middle-class hate proles. But it detests the elites even more. Since the time of BP Koirala, Ganesh Man Singh, Subarna Shamsher and Ram Narayan Mishra, the NC has relentlessly been portrayed as an elitist party. UML stalwarts are actually more comfortable in the company of the RJP of RPP, the political platforms of former Panchas with whom they worked during the time of absolute monarchy to resist the penetration of the NC into urban areas. Nepal knows his cadres aren’t comfortable working with the NC as a coalition partner and doesn’t want to antagonise them.

Premier Nepal has been in Nepali politics long enough to be aware of the risk of inviting Koirala’s ire. But his core constituency in New Delhi isn’t willing to cede an inch of political space to the Koiralas. A senior sleuth, who worked behind the scenes for the formation of Premier Nepal’s anti-Maoist coalition, was recently heard remarking, “I have four years to go before I retire. By that time, I will make sure the Koiralas are history.” He may have been merely massaging Nepal’s bruised ego, but the discredited leader of the UML has apparently begun to believe that he is indispensable for now.

Despite a concerted disinformation campaign against the Maoists, it’s Madhav Kumar Nepal’s hubris that lies at the centre of the parliamentary deadlock in the Constituent Assembly. Under Nepal’s leadership, the UML boycotted the entire winter session of Parliament in 2001, so he must know the difficulty of extracting an opposition party from a self-destructive, confrontational course. Even though the Maoists know the prolonged impasse in Parliament will ultimately harm them more than any one else, they just can’t let it go without extracting at least a face-saving compromise.

Koirala and Nepal need to accept that there is no place for their old antagonism in the present scheme of things. They may have been movers and shakers once, but the main players in the political arena now are the Maoists and the Madhesi, as well as whoever hates or loves them strongly enough to meddle in the internal affairs of another country.

Koirala and Nepal need to make peace with Pushpa Kamal Dahal for their own good and for the future of peace and democracy in the country.
In the way to the airport, when you drive by the International Conference Centre at Baneshwor, you can see a well-manicured garden right in front of the building. Orbit International Education maintains it. Asked about the incentive for an educational consultancy to get involved in urban beautification work, Uddhab KC, CEO of Orbit International Education, says: “Now that we are doing well as a business, we’d like to give a little something back to society.”

The former handicrafts salesman who studied fine arts at Kathmandu’s Lalitkala Campus young Nepalis made plans to study abroad. In 2004, KC, ever the maverick, decided to branch out to offer educational services to others too. His tie-ups with the British Embassy and the American Embassy to teach conversational English to security guards became successful templates for his subsequent work on teaching English to female MPs, the police and even housewives in Kathmandu.

“We are in the process of teaching English to taxi drivers who frequent the airport road,” KC says. “If taxi drivers put their guests at ease, it will have many indirect effects on boosting tourism.” His training program for photojournalists on the basics of first aid was appreciated by participants who cover riots and bandas.

KC is happy to note the progress the educational consultancy business has made in the last five years. “Many of my former employees have gone on to start similar businesses, and it makes me proud to see them doing well,” he told Nepali Times after being chosen as the paper’s September Company of the Month. But he readily admits that giving back to society there are quite a few fly-by-nights in his profession. “Buyers beware,” he cautions. “Students and parents must do their homework to make sure that they get their money’s worth when they buy the services of an educational consultancy.”

In the last few years, KC has been busy expanding his business overseas, and in medical education. Together with Nepali professionals living abroad, he has started offices in Japan, the Philippines, China and Australia. "As more and more Nepali students head to those countries, it would be good to have a presence to assist them, and to look into new educational services that we can offer to our customers," he explains.

Early this year, KC ventured into offering medical school test prep courses. The courses are already oversubscribed. “The best medical applicants want to study in Nepal, where the quality of medical education is high,” KC says. In any year, there are about 8,000 to 10,000 medical applicants for far fewer seats, and they all have to take the entrance tests. To accommodate applicants who come from villages to Kathmandu, KC class built a dorm which offers subsidised room and board. He says, “My observation is that those who come from villages tend to take their education much more seriously than those who grew up in cities.”

“I have been able to help thousands of Nepali students achieve their educational dreams,” KC admits, even though he got into the educational advising business by accident. These days, he spends his time more on social service activities. He’s founded an organization that aims to stop cruelty to animals, and works on other plants trees, the growth of which is tracked with Google Earth software.

Says KC: “Others have helped me become what I am today. Now is the time for me to help others.”
**Turning 50**

Marking the 50th anniversary of Asia-Pacific education, officials from the East-West Center (an international education, research and exchange institution) will be visiting Kathmandu 12-15 September. Says Karen Knudsen of EWC, “We hope to reinforce ties with the EWC community in South Asia, reach out to Nepal EWC alumni and meet prospective EWC students.” Headquartered in Honolulu, Hawaii, the East-West Center was founded by the U.S. Congress in 1960. Today the Center, supported mainly by the US government, provides educational scholarships and conducts cooperative research and discussions on common issues concerning the Asia-Pacific and the United States.

**On the move**

Prolink launched a brand new netbook, the Prolink Glee TA-009. Weighing only 1.1 kg, the netbook is available at Rs 36,000. Prolink also introduced a combo pack ‘Wireless-N Portable Router and Adapters’ designed especially for those on-the-move lifestyles.

**Absolutely free!**

‘Yastai bhanchan Dasain ako’, a grand Dasain-Tihar offer by CG, offers a chance to win a trip to Bangkok for five couples or a free CG product on the purchase of any CG product.

**Convertible**

SHTC International launched Fujitsu’s LifeBook tablet-convertible PCs: the LifeBook T5010 and LifeBook T1010. The wider-screen PCs are said to be more convenient.

**Irish Pub**

The Irish Pub is offering a 25 per cent discount on shots of whiskey, gin, vodka, rum, brandy and various other spirits this Dasain season. New delicacies on the menu are chicken nuggets, fish burgers, and mushrooms with Guinness cream sauce and apple pie.
ONCE CONSIDERED AN EXCEPTIONAL INSTITUTION, TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY (TU) IS NOW IN A PITLESS STATE. ENGULFED IN THE COUNTRY’S POLITICAL TURMOIL, THE IRRESPONSIBLE, DIRECTIONLESS COURSE TU HAS TAKEN IS JEPPESTING THE FUTURES OF MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND STUDENTS.

THE BLAME GOES TO ACADEMICS AND STUDENT LEADERS WHO SPEND THEIR TIME RUNNING AFTER CORRUPT POLITICIANS. TU IS NOW A HUB FOR DIRTY POLITICS. IT IS NOT JUST CRIMINAL POLITICIANS AND Ego-centered scholars who should be blamed. WE STUDENTS HAVE PLAYED AN EQUAL PART IN DEGRADING TU. OUR UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR – INSULTING TEACHERS, MAKING CLASSROOMS ROMANTIC HIDEOUTS AND THE UNIVERSITY GROUNDS A BATTLEFIELD – HAS DONE NOTHING BUT RUIN OUR FUTURES.

TU NEVER RELEASES RESULTS ON TIME AND EXAMS DON’T TAKE PLACE ACCORDING TO TIMETABLES. STUDENTS, ON THE OTHER HAND, SIT FOR EXAMS ONLY IF THEY FEEL LIKE IT AND IF THEY TAKE PLACE ACCORDING TO TIMETABLES. STUDENTS, ON THE OTHER HAND, SIT FOR EXAMS ONLY IF THEY FEEL LIKE IT AND IF THEY TAKE PLACE ACCORDING TO TIMETABLES.

TU ITSELF ISN’T HONEST IN THIS REGARD. HOW CAN OUR FUTURES BE SAFE, TRAVELLING IN SUCH A RICKETY COURSE?

TU IS NOW A HUB FOR DIRTY POLITICS. IT IS NOT JUST CRIMINAL POLITICIANS AND Ego-centered scholars who spend their time running after corrupt politicians. TU IS NOW A HUB FOR DIRTY POLITICS. IT IS NOT JUST CRIMINAL POLITICIANS AND EGO-CENTRED SCHOLARS WHO SHOULD BE BLAMED. WE STUDENTS HAVE PLAYED AN EQUAL PART IN DEGRADING TU. OUR UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR – INSULTING TEACHERS, MAKING CLASSROOMS ROMANTIC HIDEOUTS AND THE UNIVERSITY GROUNDS A BATTLEFIELD – HAS DONE NOTHING BUT RUIN OUR FUTURES.

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THEIR FUTURES.
“In Limbuwan, non-Limbus need not have fear!”

Himal Khabarpatra: asked people in Phidim Bajar, Panchthar, about their views on ethnic federalism and the self-proclaimed Limbuwan province they currently inhabit. Translated excerpts:

Himal Khabarpatra: Why are ethnic fronts necessary when we have political parties?
Kamalraj Nembang (Joint Secretary, Federal Limbuwan State Council): The unitary structure doesn’t represent the country’s diversity, so Rais and Limbus have formed fronts to demand federalism based on history and ethnicity rather than geography and administration. The fact that even economically well-off Limbuwan residents support Limbuwan proves that the problems this country faces are rooted in ethnicity, not class.

Dilendra Subba (President, Limbu Language Development Organisation): Nepal’s problems are rooted in both ethnic and class differences. Those who consider class issues to be primary are seeking to retain the status quo, so Limbuwan and Khumjunwan residents have had to push for ethnic federalism through various fronts. Non-Limbu speakers have not been able to understand what I’ve had to experience as a Limbu speaker.

Lahbang Chemjong (Federal National Democratic Front): The big parties don’t understand the reality of Nepal. Not until we deal with the ethnic problem can we fix the class problem.

How will an ethnic federalist Nepal safeguard the rights of minorities? Bir Bahadur Dhamala (Dali Upliftment District Coordination Committee): Ethnic federalism won’t help Dalits. Even since this movement began two or three years ago, nobody’s seriously addressed Dalit rights. Only if the movement to establish a Dalit province in the west is supported by those espousing ethnic federalism will Dalit concerns be adequately addressed.

Lokendra Ale Magar (President, Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, District Coordination Council): Once a Limbuwan province is established, non-Limbu residents will have nothing to fear. But if the rights of indigenous communities are not enshrined in the new constitution these communities do not have to recognise it.

What are the relations between those supporting Limbuwan and those opposed to it in Panchthar?
Chhabi Bansakota (President, NGO Federation of Nepal): It may not be fair to blame the parties advocating Limbuwan but persons linked to them are indulging in extortion. There have been slogans against Bahuns. Some in the pallo-Kirat have even denied people the right to buy or sell land. However, such activities are on the decline lately, and the situation isn’t as bad as people elsewhere think it is. The leaders at least are of the opinion that we must work together.

Laya Bansakota (CPN-ULM): The extreme slogans of Limbuwan supporters have not yet subsided, but the actual situation is not that bad.

Lekhnath Khatiwada (President, Federation of Nepalese Journalists): In the last year, there have been a dozen violations of press freedom on the part of Limbuwan supporters. We have had to self-censor ourselves. There is also a parallel justice system.

Kamalraj Nembang: Limbuwan residents know they cannot obtain their rights by disrupting communal harmony. If anybody does so in the name of Limbu rights then the press must expose this.

Dilendra Subba: I’ve heard the slogan “Those Opposed to Limbuwan Beware”, but that’s about it. If it’s the case it must be the work of those who don’t want Limbus.

What do you think about the Madhesi demand to make Hindi the state language?
Some want Hindi; others English as the official state language. In my view, we don’t need to be so rigid about language, so there’s no need to campaign for one so forcefully. If parliamentarians in India are allowed to speak Nepali in their house, then what’s the problem with allowing people to speak Hindi in ours?

Will the constitution be written on time?
Problems don’t last forever, so I’m still hopeful. The constitution is the chief law that binds together various communities, ethnic and linguistic groups and religions. If the leaders put aside their differences, then the constitution will be written on time.

Unicameral or bicameral system?
A bicameral system will be best, since a unicameral system is a communal ideological brand. I don’t want communal rule to be instituted in the name of the people. So the committees determining the form of legislative system should institute a bicameral system with a lower and upper house.

How can Limbuwan supporters and the state come to an agreement?
Jaya Rijal (Vice-Chairperson, Nepali Congress): Limbuwan residents have been respecting the ideal of communal harmony. But the leaders of ethnic fronts have perhaps not been able to educate their cadres sufficiently.

Raj Kumar Bhandari (Secretary, CPN-ULM): This is the right time to demand Limbuwan. And even if the state is not ready to grant these demands, and those in the movement have been unable to present their case responsibly.

Sant Kumar Rai (Secretary, Nepal Bar Association): Those in the movement should focus less on whether all their demands have been met and more on whether a constitution is drafted that doesn’t discriminate against any ethnicity.

Rupnarayan Jabeju (President, Teachers’ Union): The main political parties should invite those agitating for their rights for discussions. Experts could help decide what kind of federalism is acceptable.

Lokendra Ale Magar: The demands of the movement should be addressed without disturbing religious or ethnic harmony. If the state looks at our demands in the right light, then they will seem entirely reasonable.

What do you think about the CA’s work so far?
Although the constitution-writing process is going on slowly, the development and security situation hasn’t improved at all, largely because of our stubborn party chiefs.

Will the constitution be written on time?
If the big three parties cooperate then there’s no need to panic.

Why hasn’t your committee, the Committee on the Distribution of Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Public Revenue submitted its preliminary draft yet?
Committee members just haven’t been able to patch up their differences. Many pretend to be independent thinkers but blindly follow party orders and ideology.

You’re a businessman, how did you end up in the CA?
I wasn’t elected. Upendra Yadav nominated me since he wanted somebody who could speak about economic issues. I wasn’t involved with any party before.

What do you think about “One Madhesi One Pradesh”?
More important than the identity of the province is that it really is autonomous.

Do you think Hindi should be made an official state language?
Since everyone speaks Nepal, it should surely be made an official state language. But we should consider giving Hindi that status too, since Mathili, Bhojpuri and Tharu speakers can easily understand it.

What needs to be done so the constitution is written on time?
The big parties need to cooperate and put the people’s aspirations ahead of their own and form a national unity government.

‘Need to be flexible about Hindi’
Mahendra Dhij GC, NC CA member, Nawalparasi-2

How have you spent your time in the CA? It’s been a very frustrating 13 months because we haven’t met people’s expectations. We’ve dashed whatever hopes they had following the restoration of democracy.

Will the constitution be written on time? Problems don’t last forever, so I’m still hopeful. The constitution is the chief law that binds together various communities, ethnic and linguistic groups and religions. If the leaders put aside their differences, then the constitution will be written on time.

Mandhuwan Agrawal, MUF CA member, Kathmandu

‘Need national government’
What do you think of the CA’s work so far?
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Although the constitution-writing process is going on slowly, the development and security situation hasn’t improved at all, largely because of our stubborn party chiefs.
A ren child

For Jhamak Ghimire writing is everything, and everything is literature.

We meet our contact off the bus from Hile, and instead of heading down to the spread of Dhankuta Bajar hike up into the cool, damp groves of Salleri beyond which Jhamak Ghimire lives with her family. The air tingles with the scent of pine but the sky is overcast, and it begins to drizzle.

We hurry past a group of girls, all dressed up and somewhere to go. It’s Tij. One of them is Jhamak’s sister, and we pass another of her siblings on the way. They all wave us on in the direction of their house, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. By the time we get to the modest single-storeyed house below the highway, it’s pouring. Jhamak’s parents greet us warmly and usher us into her room. The four of us, dripping, crowd into the small space lined with hundreds of books, framed certificates, and more books. We awkwardly arrange ourselves facing the flannelled, huddled figure in bed, feeling like intruders.

But Jhamak, with a ready smile, soon puts us at ease. She reaches for a copybook and painstakingly begins to scribble responses to my questions, laughing delightedly every now and again at the jokes we exchange, completely accepting of the curiosity that has drawn us to this settlement above Dhankuta. She corrects me when I address her as Jhamak Kumari: “It’s Jhamak. Kumari is just something they hung onto my name when I got my citizenship card.” I apologise for my ignorance of her body of work, and try to explain that I write too, but in English. She assures me it doesn’t matter what language I write in, as long as I write.

We’re not the only visitors, not by a long shot. Her mother, Asha Devi Ghimire, brings in some tea and asks us to sign a bulky visitor’s book filled with admiring comments. It’s no surprise Jhamak inspires such wonder in those who flock to see her. Being deprived of an education didn’t stop her from learning how to read and write all by herself, and she has progressed so far along this path that she is today an award-winning author of 10 published books comprising both prose and poetry, mediums she traverses with equal, heartfelt facility. Dr. Govinda Raj Bhattarai’s English translation of Jhamak’s autobiography, ‘Jiwan Kadha Ki Phul’ (Life, Thorn or Flower), is due by Tihar at the latest. Jhamak’s going places, too. Father Krishna Bahadur Ghimire proudly announces she is soon moving to Kathmandu courtesy of a grant from the Ministry of...
Of Jhamak Ghimire’s poetry, translator
Manjushree Thapa writes:

Poverty is an issue that is difficult to take on in poetry without giving way to flat, cliché-ridden didacticism. Jhamak overcomes this challenge through the sincerity of her voice, and the sophistication of her language. In the poem below, she takes to task the irresponsible father (the metaphoric father of the state) who has abandoned his progeny to the indifferent streets:

A STREET CHILD’S QUESTION TO HIS FATHER

Baba! I’ll ask you a question if you won’t shout it down for though you can boast a hundred thousand offspring I have only one father

Baba! Have you forgotten me amidst the hordes of your offspring I am your fugitive child Have you forgotten your sleepless communion with my mother? How could you embrace me a new ray rising from a wrong time? I am the avenging apparition of a wrong time an unneeded offspring added to the hordes of your offspring a mere child who broke through his mother’s stained womb a renegade child

Baba! I’ll ask another question though you can boast a hundred thousand children the union of your blood is in the union of my blood Questions of silent union arise from the cacophony Half formed by you fully formed by my mother am I, the child of the street? Why did you damage me on a corner of the street? Why did you fill my mind with gunpowder? Its transformation will leave your society and you poisoned

Baba, my last question: why are you siring renegade children like me who have lit your funeral pyre before you have died who have mourned you before your death shattering pebbles

Baba! Why are you siring renegade children like me?

Women, Children and Social Welfare. Jhamak will be learning English for a year in the capital. “You’re sure to have plenty of visitors there,” I remark. “Will you still have the time to write?” “I need money like anyone else,” she says. “So I will continue to write.” But it’s hard to make a living as a writer in Nepal, isn’t it? She busies herself awhile and flips the copy over to me, grinning. “That’s true. But I only need a little, not so much.”

I look around the tiny space in which this remarkable woman has spent most of her life, and can’t help commenting on the books piled up in shelves and on the window sills. “You have books on everything here, are you interested in anything especially?” Jhamak responds: “Everything in every field can be seen as literature. Law, economics, science. I don’t want to limit myself.” “Do you spend all your time reading and writing, or do you watch TV too?”, I wonder. “I watch TV sometimes…I’m human after all,” she quips.

And perhaps this is the key to Jhamak Ghimire. An insistence on being seen as ordinary, coupled with an extraordinary drive to transcend her physical limitations and accept the diverse people and realities around her. Her body, as closed as a fist, has not been able to stop her mind from embracing the world around her.

Many thanks to Srijana Hingmang for taking us to meet Jhamak Ghimire.
Road to riches

KATY ELLIOT

Last year apples from Jumla were fetching Rs 70 a kilo in the Tarai. They were low-grade fruit, battered and bruised after being harvested by growers vigorously shaking the trees, then flung unprotected into crates to be hauled to Surkhet and roughly transported via potholed roads to Nepalgunj and beyond. In fact, of the 3000 metric tonnes of apples that were grown only 5% was exported out of the region and the rest was dumped as mush on the land.

This year Jumla’s A grade, gleaming organic apples are selling for as much as Rs 350 a kilo to the health-conscious Kathmandu elite willing to pay a premium for organic. Jumla’s organic certified apple farmers are already reaping a significant premium for their apples. The Jumla apples are the country’s first fruit to be certified (by independent company Organic Certification Nepal) under the government’s new guidelines. For now the road is still impassable during the monsoon and the apples are being flown to Surkhet well packaged and protected, then transported by road for the final 400 potholed kilometres to the capital to ensure they are in the shops in the run-up to Dasain.

The District Agriculture Development Office in Jumla is collaborating with the Jumla Chamber of Commerce and Dutch NGO SNV, and has received funding from agencies such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development and World Vision to train more than 10,000 households in the district on how to grow organic apples. The investment in Jumla’s organic apples is bringing an old dream to fruition.

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The region’s seven apple varieties represent part of a wider strategy to brand Jumla an ‘organic district’. In 2007, the local district council banned the import and use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers. All produce from the region is now receiving organic certification because the farmers have no access to and can rarely afford to use chemicals. The Jumla apples are the country’s first fruit to be certified (by independent company Organic Certification Nepal) under the government’s new guidelines. For now the road is still impassable during the monsoon and the apples are being flown to Surkhet well packaged and protected, then transported by road for the final 400 potholed kilometres to the capital to ensure they are in the shops in the run-up to Dashain.

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toddler rattles a cage and giggles as the bewildered budgies inside squawk, panicked. Nearby, 24-year-old Mohammad Minshad, who sells the birds to pilgrims at the shrine of Swayambhu, looks on misty-eyed. “This is all worth it,” he says. “I’m happy because they’re happy.”

For the last 12 years, Minshad has been selling munias and budgerigars to Buddhists from all over the world, who release them from their cages to gain religious merit. He wakes up everyday at 9am and walks from bird wholesalers in Chabahil and Bag Bajar to shrines around the Valley, making regular treks up the 365 steps leading to Swayambhu. He carries up to 70 birds at a time, held in sets of five or six in about a dozen cages.

The business isn’t very brisk. On most afternoons Minshad manages to sell only seven or eight pairs of birds. But he does better on full moon nights, celebrated by Hindus and Buddhists alike, who flock to temples and eagerly take up the chance to perform good deeds like feeding and clothing the poor and, happily for Minshad, freeing caged birds.

“Full moon days are my favourite. It’s like another Dasain every month.”

Minshad is a crafty businessman. The price for a pair of munias is Rs 400 for Nepalis but about Rs 1000 for Tibetan pilgrims. Although bigger birds would fetch a higher price, he doesn’t have a license to sell them. “If I sold big birds and the cops found out I’d be the one behind bars, not the birds.” But Minshad is going to have to close shop because he can’t afford life in Kathmandu anymore, especially with a wife and two children to feed. He says he will return to his hometown Malangawa, in Sarlahi district, to try his hand at farming.

Will he miss his birds? “Yes,” says Minshad, as he watches the toddler trail away and become transfixed by a pigeon fluttering on a nearby ledge.
Film South Asia’s seventh edition hosts the region’s best documentaries

F
dom 17-20 September in Kathmandu, Film South Asia (FSA) is showcasing 35 south Asian documentaries competing for the Ram Bahadur Trophy. The trophy, named after late Ram Bahadur Tamang (pictured with camera in the FSA logo), is sculpted in bronze by Purna Shambu Shakya. Actress Shabana Azmi will deliver the opening speech.

Tickets are priced at Rs 30 at the Kumari Cinema in Kamalpokhari, but FSA is putting out contribution boxes at the venue for the Ram Bahadur Trust. Donations will go to Sri Bhal Chandra Secondary School in the village of Rayale in Kavre district.

Afghan Girls Can Kick

Afghanistan’s first-ever women’s football team prepares for competitive international matches, and witnesses Afghanistan change as the harsh, brutally patriarchal Taliban regime gives way to a modern government.

Out of Thin Air

Cinema magnates in the Ladakhi film industry happen to make a living as restaurant workers and cops. Out of Thin Air takes a look at their distinctly unglamorous lives.

Out of Thin Air

A plan to connect an ancient Himalayan trade route in remote Rasuwa district, once the site of a Nepal-Tibet war, arouses mixed feelings among indigenous Tamang communities.

In Search of the Rival

The story of young Nepalis from disadvantaged communities who rush to the Gulf for work but return disillusioned. The film explores a world still obscure mainly because Gulf countries won’t open their labour practices to global scrutiny.

Chilika Bank$

In a canvas spread over four decades, a banyan tree on the banks of Lake Chilika whispers tales of the lake and her fisherfolk. Once there was no export bajar, and one day there may no longer be a lake.

Threadbare

The story of the victims of Canada’s ‘War on Terror’: 24 men are falsely accused, imprisoned and deported just for having the word ‘Mohammad’ in their names.

Machis ko Sinka (Matchstick)

A project that began as a search for the Nepali-Indian identity, Machis Ko Sinka evolved into an attempt to understand the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling and to interpret it for mainland Indians. The film studies the movement’s use of violence.

Children of God

Many children live off the rituals of death in the cremation grounds at Pashupatinath in Kathmandu. Children of God documents their macabre struggle to stay alive.

Supermen of Malegaon

Inhabitants of the depressed central Indian town of Malegaon take refuge in the fantastical world of cinema, spurring a young group of cinema enthusiasts to make their own quirky films, notably Superman of Malegaon. A small town mirrors India.

People’s Leader

A film about two different periods of Benazir Bhutto’s life: her struggle for democracy, and her two stints as prime minister of Pakistan.

Chilika Bank$
### Film South Asia 2009 Schedule

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THU</strong></td>
<td>17-Sep</td>
<td>4PM</td>
<td>The Lightning Testimonies (113)</td>
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<td>India, 2007, dir - Armar Karwao</td>
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<td>Exploring South Asia’s conflicts through sexual violence.</td>
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<td><strong>FRI</strong></td>
<td>18-Sep</td>
<td>10AM</td>
<td>Mayorni (65)</td>
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<td>Sri Lanka, 2008, dir - Carol Saller</td>
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<td>Reunited, a woman struggles to hold her family together.</td>
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<td>Come to My Country: Journeys with Kabir and Friends (96')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Shahnam Virmani</td>
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<td>Unlikely bonds in the quest for Kabir’s “country”.</td>
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<td>Punjabs in Pontyfalls (74)</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Parvek Rishi Kumar</td>
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<td>Women boxers work through their insecurities.</td>
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<td>Bhagvan Das: In Pursuit of Ambedkar (61')</td>
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<td>India, 2009, dir - S Anand</td>
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<td>The Constituent Assembly friend and Ambedkar.</td>
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<td>Afghan Girls can Kick (93')</td>
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<td>Afghanistan, 2007, dir - Behnam Hosseini</td>
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<td>Spunky girls go kick well.</td>
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<td><strong>SAT</strong></td>
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<td>Delhi: Work in Progress (38')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Krishnendu Boae</td>
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<td>The Commonwealth Games and reinvention.</td>
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<td>People’s Leader - Last 72 Days (25')</td>
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<td>Pakistan, 2008, dir - Naqish Hazim</td>
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<td>The climax of Benazir Bhutto’s eventful life.</td>
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<td>The Last Rites (17')</td>
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<td>Bangladesh, 2008, dir - Yasmin Kabir</td>
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<td>When the ships go to die.</td>
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<td>The Forgotten Refugees (47')</td>
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<td>Nepal/Bhutan, 2009, dir - Amanda Burrell</td>
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<td>The Lhotshampa go overseas.</td>
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<td>Afghani Girls can Kick (50')</td>
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<td>Afghanistan, 2007, dir - Bahareh Hosseini</td>
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<td>Spunky girls do kick well.</td>
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<td><strong>SUN</strong></td>
<td>20-Sep</td>
<td>10AM</td>
<td>All the World’s a Stage (65')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Nihal Chander</td>
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<td>Soft performers, the Sri Lanka’s forgotten history.</td>
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<td>Encountered on Saffron Agenda? (90')</td>
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<td>India, 2007, dir - Shobhaa Basu</td>
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<td>Gajendar adopts encounter killings; minorities victimised.</td>
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<td>Children of God (99')</td>
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<td>Nepal, 2008, dir - Yi Seung-jun</td>
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<td>The Promised Land (90')</td>
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<td>Bangladesh, 2008, dir - Tanvir Mokammel</td>
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<td>Stigma still haunts Bangladesh’s ‘Biharis’.</td>
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<td>Flying on One Engine (61')</td>
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<td>India/USA, 2008, dir - Joshua Weinstein</td>
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<td>Ailing, eccentric Brooklyn doctor helps India’s cloth-lipped.</td>
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<td>Stories For Away (45')</td>
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<td>India, 2007, dir - Sayyosaaji Jain</td>
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<td>Migrants attempt to smuggle themselves into Europe.</td>
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<td><strong>THU</strong></td>
<td>17-Sep</td>
<td>3.30PM</td>
<td>Chilka Bank(49')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Akanksha Joshi</td>
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<td>The Banyan and Chilika Lake’s forgotten history.</td>
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<td>Saamam (The Music) (42')</td>
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<td>India, 2009, dir - Ramachandran K</td>
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<td>Homage to Carnatic music legend M D Ramanaath.</td>
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<td><strong>FRI</strong></td>
<td>18-Sep</td>
<td>9.30AM</td>
<td>Leaving Home - The Life and Music of Indian Ocean (114')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Jaisoo Nama</td>
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<td>Understanding the musicians behind IO.</td>
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<td>The Battle for Pakistan (49')</td>
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<td>Pakistan, 2009, dir - Mahesh Zia</td>
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<td>Where do xenophobia and madrasas converge in Pakistan?</td>
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<td>19-Sep</td>
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<td>Our Family (56')</td>
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<td>India, 2007, dir - Anjali Montesini/ K P Jayasankar</td>
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<td>Three generations women speak to you.</td>
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<td>The Legend of Shiva and Parvati (61')</td>
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<td>India/Germany, 2008, dir - Krishna Saraswati</td>
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<td>The hippie girl and the yogi of India.</td>
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<td>Supermen of Malegaon (97')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Fazal Ahmed Khan</td>
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<td>Small-town chums out hitlous Hollywood spoof.</td>
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<td>The Salt Stories (94')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Lail Vachani</td>
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<td>Following Gandhi’s call march in our time.</td>
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<td>Morality TV and the Loving Jehad: A Thrilling Tale (31')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Paroantha Vohra</td>
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<td>Inside India’s breaking news’ industry.</td>
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<td>Muchko Ko Sinka (Matchstick) (11')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Rohantri Prasat</td>
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<td>The pro- and anti- violence arguments of Bonhild.</td>
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<td><strong>SUN</strong></td>
<td>20-Sep</td>
<td>11AM</td>
<td>The Way of the Road (60')</td>
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<td>Nepal, 2009, dir - Ben Campbell &amp; Cosmo Campbell</td>
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<td>Will the Rasuwa Nepal-Tibet road help villagers?</td>
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<td>In the Market Stands Kabir: Journeys with Sacred &amp; Secular Kabir (94')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Shahnam Virmani</td>
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<td>The spiritual Kabir recorded with the secular.</td>
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<td>Temples in the Clouds (56')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Jes Mudison &amp; Onchis Patuclu</td>
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<td>Parading pilgrimage to Himachal’s Chamunda temple.</td>
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<td>Super 30 (85')</td>
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<td>India, 2008, dir - Christopher Mitchell</td>
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<td>Poor kids with math shot for lift.</td>
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**HALL A**

**HALL B**
The story revolves around Chintu Ji (Rishi Kapoor), an erstwhile superstar, who is now trying his luck in politics. The residents of a small village, Hadbahedi, discover Chintu Ji was born in their village. To draw attention to the backward state of their community, the villagers invite Chintu Ji to visit his birthplace once more. Considering it an opportunity to launch his political career, Rishi Kapoor accepts the invitation and visits the village in his chartered plane, along with his young and dynamic PR agent, Aksha Matahe (Kulraj Randhawa). Can Chintu Ji survive village life without falling prey to tempting monetary and political offers?

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com

Q: Will the PLA Army be settled within six months as promised?

Total votes: 1,692

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Weekly Internet Poll #469. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
HAPPENINGS

GERI MALPUWA: Geri Halliwell greets Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal on Wednesday at Everest Hotel as part of a campaign to raise awareness of women’s rights.

I’LL BE GOOD: President Ram Baran Yadav administers the oath of office to Army Chief Chhatraman Gurung at a swearing-in ceremony amid army generals, bureaucrats and security chiefs at his residence in Maharaj Gunj on Wednesday.

LHASA IN COLOUR: Chinese ambassador Quo Guohang observes a picture of a Tibetan woman on Wednesday at a photo exhibition entitled, ‘Women in Tibet, China’ organised by Sun City Art Gallery, Lhasa.

DIVINE PROTECTION: Indian nationals Girish and Raghavendra Bhatta undertake initiation rituals on Saturday before beginning priestly duties at Pashupati Temple. The two were earlier beaten up by Maoists protesting the tradition of appointing Indian priests at the shrine.

SAMARITANS: Members of a ‘Neighborhood Improvement Committee’ help clean up the Pashupati area on Wednesday as part of a campaign to raise awareness about cleanliness in the city.

Thank You!

Bonfidees & Recipients of Yei Annual Relief Fund
Helping Children Before Mission | Deewa Kendra Leprosy Relief | Sitalpuri Injury Rehabilitation Centre | Women for Human Rights | Tewa | DOGED | Mahi Nepal | Nepal Leprosy Relief | Nepal Stroke Eye Clinic (Tibet)

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4465888, Ext. 205
The prime minister’s advisors were probably trying to ensure the longevity of the Nepal government by making a big deal out of the fact that Barack Obama has given an appointment to Prime Minister Mcooney. Balcoo was not keen to cast this in stone so the government won’t be toppled before October. But if history is any guide, pre-announcing a visit doesn’t ensure the longevity of an incumbent: remember how Kishunji’s state visit to France didn’t save him from being ousted by GPK in the early 1990s?

If a prime minister uses every public speech to declare that his government is not going to fall, then it must mean it is pre-planning to cast this in stone so the government won’t be toppled before October. But if history is any guide, pre-announcing a visit doesn’t ensure the longevity of an incumbent: remember how Kishunji’s state visit to France didn’t save him from being ousted by GPK in the early 1990s?

The week was awash with other Maoist doublespeak. Comrade Awo-inspired first told cheering supporters that the ten-year war was a picnic and threatened a war in which 10 lakhs would be killed. More cheers. Then in Biratnagar, he let slip what he really meant by civilian supremacy: “civilian supremacy means every civilian will have a gun”. After that, Pushpatti blew up in Fearnace’s face and got Mahana Babu to issue a double-tongued statement: “We didn’t do it. The people did it, and we support the people.”

The tyre-burning at Pashupati went on the next day, but the Baddies chose the wrong time to attack Pashupati. They wanted to change its name to Pashupati吹 up in Fearnace’s face and got Mahana Babu to issue a double-tongued statement: “We didn’t do it. The people did it, and we support the people.”

The Baddies invited civil society members for a tête-à-tête and boasted of their own one-party agitation. One Indian tv editor put her arms around MKN and the Prime Minister of Nepal got up abruptly to go to the loo (yes, even premiers have to go) leaving Geri quite confused. In her speech, Geri called him a “21st century man”. During the group photo session at the end, Geri fondly put her arms around MKN and the Prime Minister of Nepal reciprocated, but ended up grasping her love handles, according to our eye witness. Let’s not forget Ginger was famous for pinching Prince Charles’ Royal ass when she was still a Spice Girl.

With the holiday season approaching, it’s a good time to remind ourselves of the good times we have at the country with the most holidays of any on earth. And we’re not even counting the bandas. Which reminds me, the Ass is taking the next two weeks off. Even donkeys celebrate Dasain, yaar.

The rumours were triggered by the story on ex-CP Paras being involved in fake currency trafficking. One Indian tv editor even called his correspondent in KTM to make up a Chinese role in backing the Maoist attack on Pushpatti. Mix 24-hour tabloid tv with hyper-nationalism and you get dynamite.

A one-party system is supposed to visit next week, even while a half-dozen young turk netas fly in the opposite direction on a junket: Minendra, Shoshar, Pradeep G, Khimalal, Azano and Anil J. For once, we know they are not all going for health checkups.

Even the intrigue-minded Maobaddies don’t know what to make of all this wheeling and dealing. But they have to make a big bang before everyone goes to sleep over Dasain, so they have announced a Samyukta Rastriya Jana Andolan Samiti. How does one party become Samyukta?

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