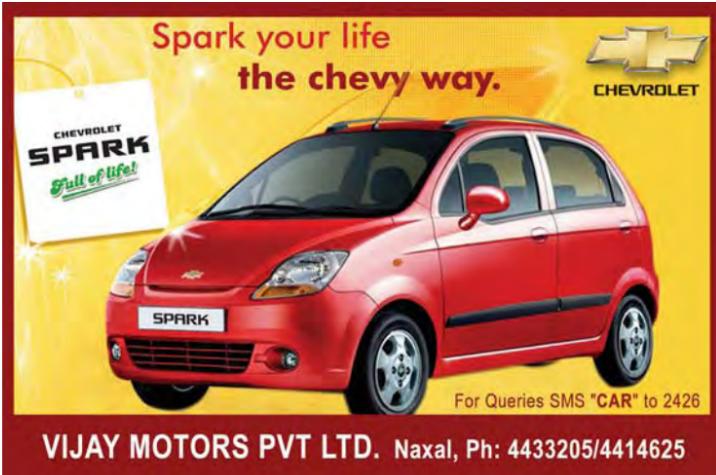


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TOUCHING DOWN: Yeti Air aims higher at Syangboche, 3720m



KUNDA DIXIT

Back to the future

There was a time when Nepal was dotted with dirt airstrips, connecting remote valleys with short take-off and landing aircraft. The advent of roads and the inability of the national airline to provide services meant most fell into disuse.

Now, several private

airlines are moving back to the future to revive old airstrips and open remote areas to a new model of tourism. As roads replace old trekking routes, operators say flying tourists to these isolated airfields will mean formerly far-flung areas are more accessible to hikers.

Yeti Airlines recently spun off all its STOL (short take off

and landing) aircraft into its subsidiary Tara Air, which will specialise in mountain tourist charter flights. This week, Tara revived flights to Syangboche, and is planning test landings in Langtang and Rara soon.

Fishtail Air has just added a Eurocopter Euriel AS350 B3 to its fleet so it can extend the

altitude of its operations to 6,000m for heli-skiers and high mountain rescue teams. The chopper-type aircraft made it to the record books in May 2005 by landing on the top of Chomolungma.

Buddha Air, on the other hand, is taking another route to expansion: it is soon going to launch a Pokhara-Lucknow

flight with ATR-72 turboprops to tap into the Indian tourism and pilgrim market. The airline wants to make Pokhara a hub for regional destinations. ●

Full story p8-9

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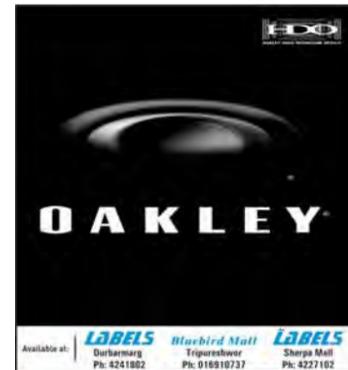


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Zero sum shenanigans

Maoist protests may break the stalemate, but what comes after?

PRESIDENTIAL CONDUCT

The first citizen of the country has every right to be worried about parliamentary deadlock, the status of his deputy and the delay in the drafting of a new constitution. Like all fellow citizens, his concerns over fissiparous tendencies in national politics are justified. It shows that he sees and hears what everyone else does. But when he insists on speaking about his concerns, his conduct acquires political overtones.

By all conventions of the parliamentary system, the Prime Minister is the main advisor of the President. Except under circumstances explicitly specified in the constitution, the head of state is bound to abide by the decisions of the Council of Ministers. The authority of the President under the present dispensation is mostly moral. He needs to remain above political controversies to be able to exercise it in national emergencies. Unfortunately, he has already used (or abused) his authority once on the advice of 18 anti-Maoist parties. Clearly the Maoists and their supporters consider him a partisan player rather than a referee. All the more reason for him to be mindful of the company he keeps and the advice he seeks.

Carefully leaked stories in the media hint that the President has been associating with legal eagles known for their stridently anti-Maoist views. On legal affairs of public interest, the Ministry of Law and the Attorney General are his main advisors. The President can confer with the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice, the Chairperson of the legislature or even the President of the Nepal Bar Association if he wants further clarity about his position. But his hush-hush consultations are sending all the wrong signals.

The President should not only be non-partisan but also seen to be fastidiously so. If the first citizen is seen to be sticking to the rules, then the rest of us may have some incentive to do so.

A well known Nepali lefty litterateur often remarks that Maoist behaviour is semi-Marxist and semi-Talibanish. The latter may not be a fair analogy given the vast gap in the scales of cruelty. But our comrades do have a ruthless instinct and consider instilling fear among opponents an acceptable strategic instrument.



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

That side was on display this week in Bhojpur and then Chitwan. Maoists were beating people up, throwing stones, and chasing MPs into houses. The consolation is they are not killing people any more. But if you do not view violence relatively, as one should not, it is clear there is a hangover of the war. This tendency becomes stronger when the Maoists are cornered in 'mainstream' politics by past masters of the game.

The rising political conflict may not be desirable, but it is inevitable.

The government, for its own survival, cannot give in to Maoist demands. It does not feel the need to do so, since it believes

anti-Maoist forces are united, there has been enough 'appeasement', Maoist strength has dipped, and India is with them. The coalition's only ideological glue is protecting the existing state structure from Maoist 'adventurism'.

The Maoists, to remain relevant and deliver on their promises, cannot abort the movement. They do not see any reason to be constructive in opposition when the government (in their assessment) is illegitimate and weak. The ideological basis that binds together all elements within the ultra-left party is the commitment to use state power to expand the party's hold, and effect radical changes.

To break this stalemate, and determine the balance of power, a new round of confrontation, hopefully limited and peaceful, will take place.

If the agitation paralyses the state, induces a sense of panic, divides the ruling alliance, and pressures India to bring the Maoists back, there may be a new deal. The Maoists can then claim victory.

If the movement has the opposite effect – of uniting the anti-Maoist coalition further and provoking a security offensive – the political stalemate will be prolonged, and violence will escalate. The Maoists will blame an almost dysfunctional government for wanting conflict, and play the victim card while keeping their organisation intact.

Either way, they do not lose.

The only losing scenario for the Maoists is if their own party faithful do not respond to calls to protest, they lose goodwill among their own constituents (not the media or urban middle class), and are forced to backtrack and accept the status quo. This is unlikely.

But seeing this as a zero sum game will leave the broader

challenges of establishing peace, writing the constitution, and institutionalising democracy on the backburner. The only way out is a broad agreement that addresses five issues simultaneously.

The first is a deal on the president's action that may not focus on the past but will have guarantees about the future, with a specific delineation of the role of the head of state and cabinet. The second is an agreement on the nature and timing of integration and rehabilitation of the PLA – which the Maoists want to use tactically to increase their political strength, even as the other parties are trapped in their past rhetoric of viewing integration as a Maoist takeover of the army. Third is a consensus among the three big parties, in consultation with regional and ethnic groups, on the nature and shape of federalism and other constitutional issues. The fourth is a certain commitment by the Maoists to 'reform' their overarching party structure and ideological line to make it more 'democratic'. And the fifth is an alternative power sharing arrangement, which probably means that this government has to go.

Given the resurgence of the anti-peace process lobby, Maoist dogmatism, the stakes many forces have developed in the status quo, and the internal divisions within each party, such a package deal looks very unlikely at present.

The only good thing that can come out of the Maoists' announcement of protests is in compelling all parties to recognise they sink or swim together, that there is no alternative to a multi-class compact, that each side has to give and take, and they need to postpone the competition until after the constitution is written. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

LETTERS

FAMILY VALUES

'Festivalonomics' (#473) touches a sensitive point. For generations the festivals and rituals in the Kathmandu Valley have been performed privately with great devotion and dignity. Restaurants are closed during these times so that cooks and waiters can perform their own worship. My impression is that the majority of Nepalis still hold cultural and spiritual values above monetary gain. Mr. Beed is suggesting that these values be sacrificed to boost the economy.

Betty Woodsend, Tahachal

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

The background of community management ('Demonstrating democracy', #473) goes back to the Rana regime: even in those days, democracy functioned in rural areas.

But local level initiatives and democratic decision-making processes were actually unleashed after 1950. Within a few months, both urban and rural areas saw local participation and decentralised decision-making processes reach new heights. This was throttled in 1960 but again came into play after 1990. The political energy released after the 1950 revolution was converted into local initiatives which helped in setting up schools, social, educational and religious clubs, health centres, public libraries, literacy and literary movements, etc not only in Kathmandu but even in remote parts of Nepal. If you talk to senior intellectuals and scientists in Nepal today they will tell you how important

this period was.

The political zeal to convert Nepal into a modern country galvanised the intellectuals (though their numbers were very small) into dedicated volunteer groups in an unprecedented way. The change it brought in the participation of people in local governance systems was so powerful that within a short period Nepal made great progress. I think we really need to look more deeply into that period.

Kamal Kishor, email



FOUND TREASURES

Great coverage on Mustang's restored paintings (Mustang's murals, #473).

Sanjay Budathoki, USA

WOMEN VS MEN

'Leading by example' (#469) shows the Women's Caucus as very engaged in its work for the various committees of the Constituent Assembly. Without being sexist, it IS interesting to compare the work of women vs men in the Assembly.

Sandra East, email

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms are accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.
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According to Karl Marx, history always repeats itself: the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce. So it has been for Leninists. But for liberals, the present is a continuum of the past. Nobel laureate William Faulkner put it most forcefully, "The past is not even past." No matter which camp Premier



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Madhav Kumar Nepal now belongs to, he has to live with the consequences of UML's ambivalence towards parliamentary democracy.

Nepal was one of his party's nominees in the statute drafting committee in 1990 that opted for the Westminster model. But no sooner were the general elections held than the People's Volunteers (the predecessors of the Youth Force) were uprooting footpath railings and burning telephone booths in the capital. Even during the UML's stint as a minority government in 1994-1995, its parliamentarians never stopped ridiculing 'bourgeois' democracy.

At the height of the Maoist insurgency in 2001, the UML boycotted the entire winter session of parliament. This contributed significantly to the untimely demise of the 1990 constitution.

Egged on by the military, Sher Bahadur Deuba dissolved parliament in May 2002. But the UML kept its head buried in the sand while democracy faltered and the Maoists rehearsed their sequential farces in places as far apart as New Delhi, Lucknow and Siliguri in India.

Nepal then endorsed Gyanendra's dictatorial ambitions by authorising UML's participation in Deuba's government of 'half-corrected regression' five years ago. Lest it be forgotten, the Marxist-Leninists were full-fledged partners of the first elected Maoist government in the world, and they are equally responsible for all the acts of the Dahal cabinet.

That was then, when Nepal and Dahal were comrades-in-arms. By his own admission, Premier Nepal helped Pushpa Kamal Dahal refine his directing skills. Now he claims that he is the best person to stop the Maoist narrative being enacted because he was involved in their conceptualisation: that he is the last liberal standing between a Maoist takeover and a rightist backlash. Even by UML standards, this is duplicity of a remarkable order.

Liberalism was once a political principle that favoured social progress by reform. Its tactics were based on the belief



CHONG ZI LIANG

Leninists, liberals and Maoists

Premier Nepal's upright character is not reflected in the politics of his party

that more enduring social transformations could be achieved by peaceful politics and institutional reform rather than by violent revolutions. It has now come to stand for a politics of fear.

Premier Nepal is not alone in seeing phantoms wherever he looks. Conservatives are afraid of secularism and the spectre of proselytising missionaries.

Moderates are alarmed by the rise in Chinese influence. Nationalists fear Indian domination. The mainstream is scared of radicals on the left and right. Industrialists don't want trade unions. Bureaucrats hate the prospect of working under a stable political leadership. The army is itching to flex its muscles. The police don't want to reform. Nobody wants to face

the great unknown – federalism.

Fear of communism has always been a potent weapon. At root it constitutes status anxiety, in this case the fear of losing what one has. In Nepal, anti-Maoism is a consequence of the neoliberal policies of privatisation and trade liberalisation pursued with vigour since the late 1980s. These policies, coupled with the

development industry, have created a comfortable class in the Kathmandu valley that is loath to give up any of its privileges. But the more the elite resists, the more the Maoists become popular among those rural millions neglected or even exploited by neoliberal policies.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal could have coolly waited for the 22-party coalition to crumble under the weight of its own contradictions. But neighbouring countries are breathing down his neck to accept a compromise. So the Maoists are accumulating political capital. It may come in handy at the next elections. Meanwhile, the status quo will linger on until the time the UML decides whether it wants to be Leninist or liberal. ●

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PICS: ANUP PRAKASH



“No possibility of government change until constitution written, elections held.”

Nepali Times/Himal Khabarpatrika caught up with Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal on Saturday. Translated excerpts follow:

Nepali Times/Himal Khabarpatrika: The Maoist ultimatum will expire on 1 November, are we not moving towards further polarisation?

PM Nepal: The Maoists are unpredictable. It is impossible to believe what they say, when they shower you with kind words or when they threaten a hurricane of agitation. Today they are the most unstable and afflicted because of their craving for state power. Whatever they say and do today is geared towards the illegitimate capture of state power. For this, they are willing to drag their cadre up the illogical and dishonourable path. But state power tends to escape the grasp of those who think only of capturing it.

This craving for state power makes people authoritarian, non-pluralist and totalitarian, and we must be wary of this tendency within the Maoists. Like anywhere else, the proper way is to form a government as and when one is able to garner a majority in the House. If one cannot thus form a government, the proper attitude is to serve the people and try to win a majority during the next elections. The Maoists seem unable to understand this simple matter of parliamentary practice.

But there must be a formula to cooperate and bring the Maoists into government.

We are ready to open the doors of government to them, we want them in. But they should accept some norms. Why do they insist on a government with their leadership? In an open democracy, state power cannot be achieved by

“I am in consultations to push investigation on some emblematic cases of human rights abuse.”

shouts and threats. Think of this – what if there is a counter revolt from a different direction in response to the Maoists' planned street agitation? Both would be anti-democratic. If a reactionary force prevails in capturing state power, the responsibility will lie entirely with the Maoist leaders.



There are suggestions that your government has not tried hard enough to reach an agreement.

I have tried very hard. One cannot surrender one's values in the search for a solution, but I will continue to reach out to the Maoists, including on an individual level.

“State power tends to escape the grasp of those who think only of capturing it.”

The Maoists may have been angered by the government's decisions on army recruitment, the promotion of generals, and so on.

We have not yet said that we will take the recruitment forward. We would like to reach a point of consensus within past agreements. As far as a promotion of officers in the army is concerned, it is natural for the most senior to be named acting in-charge.

But you can rest assured that this government wants to end the state of impunity that is prevalent today, and it believes that those who have violated human rights must be punished. I am in consultations to push investigation on some emblematic cases of human rights abuse.

UNMIN is concerned about the call for a review of the Comprehensive Peace Accord.

What I have heard is that even the Maoist members in the State Administration Committee praised the statements by the minister and prime minister in the chamber. This seems to have come out differently in the press, and I have not spoken to the minister about this. Perhaps the view (of the minister) was that the peace accord was signed in the belief that the issues would be resolved quickly, and that it has taken much longer. How does one proceed against such a backdrop, is probably what was meant. But there is no need to panic. We are committed to our agreements.

The management of ex-combatants has taken too long. Are we still on track?

The ex-combatants should have been managed before the elections, even before the Maoists came into the [interim]

parliament. Cantonment management must now be completed before we go into the final phase of constitution writing. The Maoists are generally positive but they must cooperate in discharging disqualified minors.

Are they presently under the Special Committee?

No, the mechanism is being prepared. Ex-combatants not wishing to join politics will be able to choose between rehabilitation and integration. We are working on the details. The Technical Committee has submitted a report, which will be discussed in the Special Committee.

The public is frustrated that development works have come to a halt despite the political change.

There is no doubt that development needs to be jump-started. I have asked for an explanation for the delay in road construction in the Gaur-Chandranigahapur sector, and the cabinet will move rapidly on the fast-track road out of the Kathmandu Valley. We have also started studying the prospects for an international airport in the Tarai. Everywhere, obstacles must be removed to projects that have been approved. This relates equally to Melamchi as to Pancheswar.

Are you getting the support of bureaucracy?

It is not moving at the speed I had expected. I am willing to listen to grievances, but all projects presently in the pipeline within Singha Darbar must be completed within three years. We can always provide funding. If domestic companies drag their feet we will turn to foreign companies. I have told the people in the construction industry, I am going all out to make public works move. But it is political friction that takes up most of my time.

So things will not move until there is political agreement with the Maoists.

I am proceeding methodically, tackling the problems as they crop up. This is how I have proceeded in my political journey of three decades.

Is the post of Nepal's prime minister a thankless one?

Not at all. All that is needed is vision and a willingness to stay the course.

There is constant talk about the durability of your government.

There is no need for worry. Under today's conditions, there is no possibility at all of a government being formed under Maoist leadership.

Why is that so?

Because everyone is traumatised by the Maoists today, there is a feeling that they will foist an authoritarian regime on the polity, that they will finish off democracy. The other simple matter is that the Maoists do not have a majority. And how can a Maoist-led government be formed if others are not willing to trust them? Why should the UML, Congress and Madhesi parties hurt themselves by submitting to a government led by unreformed Maoists?

This government is inclusive of everyone's aspirations, is supported by the international community, and besides, we have asked the Maoists to join. I see no possibility of a government change until the constitution is written and elections held.

Read full interview on www.nepalitimes.com

Win Win

The bumper prize winners of LG's scheme 'Ahai LG', Pradip K Paudyal and Pramila Shrestha, were presented with an LG refrigerator, television, washing machine, vacuum cleaner, microwave oven, DVD player, home theatre and a mobile set.



Going Rome

Carlsberg's 'Win a Trip to Probably the Best Bars in the World' ended on 26 October. Organised by Gorkha Brewery, the last winner with the coupon number 638271 won a free trip to bars in Copenhagen, Denmark, Rome and Dubai with a friend.

Branching out



Kist Bank opened its 37th branch in Kalimati on 15 October. The bank aims to open 50 more branches by the end of this year.

Trade treaty

Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry Anand Sharma and Nepali Minister of Commerce and Supplies Rajendra Mahato signed the 2009 India-Nepal Treaty of Trade and the Agreement of Cooperation to Control Unauthorized Trade on October 27, 2009. The 2009 Treaty builds on the previous Treaty to provide further access to Nepali products in India and to enhance and expand bilateral trade between the two countries.

The 2009 Agreement of Cooperation to Control Unauthorized Trade will enhance exports from Nepal to third countries, and enable Nepali exporters to take advantage of third country market access developed by Indian export houses.



The soft stuff

Running a business is often thought of as being all about doing the 'hard' stuff: poring over financial statements, running the numbers and quantifying results. These activities are important, to be sure.

But since most businesses have accounting or finance departments, arranging and re-arranging numbers alone will not separate a company that's poised for long-term success from one that's succeeding simply because it



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

happens to enjoy the wind at its back. Think about Nepali garment and carpet companies. They had the numbers on their side. In fact, fifteen years ago, when the industry cost structure was favourable, every third house in Kathmandu seemed to be full of either sewing machine operators or wool spinners. These days, only a few high-end companies are still in those businesses.

Besides, smart investors know that all accounting numbers tell is a story about a company's past, while projection numbers are just that: an optimistic reading of the future despite all the unknowns. As such, when given projection figures, one can pretty much believe what one wants to believe, much like when one listens to an astrologer.

Over the years, I've come to understand that more than the 'hard' stuff, assuming all other variables are constant, it is the 'soft' stuff—of governance, culture and iterative persistence in meeting goals—that really pushes a company forward.

Governance: CEOs who give lectures on corporate leadership rarely talk about the context that makes acts of leadership possible. Good governance sets up the context. And good governance in any company boils down to agreed-upon clarity on who makes what decisions to safeguard the shareholders' interests.

Most Nepali companies, with the increasing exception of banks regulated by the Central Bank, see little need to

practice good governance. That's because there's little demand for it. Understandably, they do not want to subject themselves to outside scrutiny, even if that helps attract new investors and capital for growth. But the only solution is increased competition, which will sooner or later either make the companies practice good governance or bump them off the market altogether.

Culture: How easy a company makes it for employees to share information for growth is an important indication of a healthy corporate culture.

The easier it is, the more the culture acts as a glue to keep motivated employees productive. Such a culture is reinforced by an environment that encourages openness and candour in internal communication. True, some

people fear that too much openness will lead to a competitive disadvantage. But my experience is that sharing information is often a credible way of signaling to staff that the company sees 'sunshine as the best disinfectant'. In practice, this signal leads to openness up and down the ranks, thereby loosening up the rigidities of hierarchies to move the company forward.

Accountability: Accountability does not happen in a vacuum, and it's not helpful to constantly appeal to people's innate sense of responsibility.

Governance and culture, when applied to all employees equally, set the stage for individual accountability. Most employees want to be valued. If not, it's hard for them to be accountable for work they aren't proud of or that others do not see as meaningful or valuable to the company.

One reason why most employees do not do their work is because they've come to accept the company's culture as something that devalues their work or makes it anonymous, and they don't see the point of toiling away.

The hard stuff of arranging numbers is easy. It's getting the soft stuff right that's hard. ●



5 questions for Radhesh Pant



Lose the 'saujee' mentality, says Pant

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Nepali Times spoke to Radhesh Pant, CEO of Kumari Bank and Past President of Nepal Bankers' Association, about his plans for the bank and thoughts on corporate governance in Nepal. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: You've been the bank's CEO for a little while. What challenges are you looking to tackle?

Radhesh Pant: The banking sector has become extremely competitive as banks have proliferated even as the investment and security climate has deteriorated. It will not be business as usual. Banks will

now have to find their niche, think out of the box and focus on efficiency and new markets.

I've been CEO of Kumari Bank for about 2½ months now, and we've begun looking at a number of things that could help us optimise our performance. We have restructured the organisation, centralised certain functions and processes, diversified and reassessed both the lending and deposit portfolios and priced them by risk. We are also looking into ways of increasing our off-balance sheet income, and enhancing our bank's

image and staff morale.

We are also looking into partnerships. We've signed an agreement with the Education Consultancy Association of Nepal (ECAN) and are now their official banker. This arrangement will be a win-win for students, agencies and the bank.

What makes Kumari Bank different from other banks?

We are more tech savvy than most other banks. We were the first to institute e-banking in the country. The bank is wholly Nepali-owned. We believe in touching lives and making finance accessible to more Nepalis in the days to come. We are going to use our technological savvy to increase delivery channels to fulfill this.

Recently, there has been tension between CEOs and board directors and among board members in many Nepali banks. Your thoughts?

Nepali investors in the banking sector need to lose their 'saujee' mentality—the tendency to think that because you have a lot of equity, you are the final authority. We must realise that the contribution to profit from deposits always outweighs that from equity. As you know, a banking sector collapse can bring economies down especially in countries like Nepal where major non-governmental funding is through banks and financial institutions.

So governance standards in banks need to be much higher than in any other industry.

What could be done to strengthen the corporate governance system of our banks?

First, the central bank (Nepal Rastra Bank) has good regulations but many evade them, so implementation must be improved. Second, the central bank needs to employ a stick-and-carrot approach so bad governance is penalised and good rewarded. Third, bank boards need to have a solid code of conduct that is implemented and a clear line needs to be drawn between the management and owners.

Banks are under statutory obligation to serve the rural population. What is Kumari Bank's strategy to do this?

We have consistently fulfilled our statutory obligations. However, we want to do more. We opened a branch in the remote town of Urlabari last week, and plan to open 11 more in rural areas this fiscal year. We want to utilise our technological edge to create more delivery channels that can be accessed by rural people. We will focus on microfinance, SMEs, small-scale projects like small hydropower and cooperative run projects. I see a lot of opportunities for banks in the rural sector. Moreover, this will have a direct impact on the country's economy and Kumari wants to be part and parcel of this.

“India shouldn't be suspicious”

Janaastha spoke with Prakash Dahal, the son of Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, about the party leadership's recent visit to China. Translated excerpts:

आस्था

Why are the Maoists so happy about Prachanda's visit to China?

We met important officials from the politburo and Chinese Communist Party's central committee, all of whom were impressed by and respected our achievements in Nepal.

But, while China's happy, India isn't!

These are rumours spread by the media. There is no reason why India should be unhappy or suspicious. In fact, we discovered during our visit that China is eager to smoothen relations with India. Every official we met told us, “China, Nepal and India should join together to work on issues of mutual interest.”

What did Chinese Premier Hu Jintao say?

We met him in Xinjiang, which borders Sangdong, on October 13. There was a big sports event that day, and my father and Comrade Kiran were seated alongside Hu Jintao at the very front. Mahara sir and I were a couple of rows behind them. The official business began once the event concluded, and Hu Jintao said, “China will continue supporting peace and the constitution-writing process in Nepal”.

Fortunately, I could hear everything that was said in the front row, and learned that Jintao knew exactly which Chinese leaders we had spoken to before him and what we had said. When we spoke with him, he said he said he was happy we had met these people.



KIRAN PANDAY

Was anything said about Mao himself?

Chinese officials said they were happy and proud that we drew inspiration from Mao. I've noticed that in the three years since my first official visit to China in 2006 that the Chinese themselves have become more interested in Mao.

What else did you talk about?

After spending two nights in Beijing we went to Tiangjing on the fastest train in the world. There, we were welcomed by high-ranking party official Chang Gaoli, who visited Nepal just two months ago. It was he who sent us the invitation to come to China.

We then visited the biggest dock in the region, and discussed with our Chinese counterparts how Nepal could achieve China's pace of economic growth. We also visited a museum on the site of Mao's birthplace in Hunan where we saw Mao and his brothers' beds and other artifacts they had once used. My father became emotional seeing all this. Forty to fifty thousand people visit the museum every year.

Martial arts



Choodamani Bhattarai in Nepal, 1 October

नेपाल

The Nepal Army handed Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal a draft proposal on the integration and rehabilitation of Maoist fighters when he visited army headquarters on 11 October. Excerpts:

1. When integrating PLA combatants, priority should be given to the non-security sector. To facilitate this, minors should be handed over to their parents and the government should train those who want to work abroad, and

support those who want to pursue higher education.

2. The government should have authority over deciding how many Maoists to admit into the security sector, and make integration contingent on the Maoist party's commitment to democracy. Priority should be given to organisations other than the APF, Nepal Police or Army, such as the industrial security forces, municipality security forces, tourist police services, fire brigade, private security, forest security forces and security organisations. The Nepal Police,

APF and NA should be the second, third and fourth alternatives, respectively.

Maoists may become district level field agents for the National Investigation Department, but should not be made district head.

Selection should occur according to the standards of the concerned security organisations.

3. The government and the NA should adopt the following policies in integrating the former guerrillas:

NA should not be politicised in the name of democratisation and should be downsized only after Maoist weapons are managed properly.

All integrated PLA fighters must leave the Maoist party.

Integrated PLA combatants should be split up into different ranks and battalions.

The integration will take place in different stages. Each batch of vacancies will be split evenly between Maoists and non-Maoists.

Maoist victims should be allowed integration as well.

If there must be a separate PLA unit, its sole function should be to support NA's development activities. A second alternative is to integrate PLA fighters in existing battalions that don't play a key role in state security.

PLA members should only receive high ranking NA posts if they meet NA criteria for the post and have undergone special training. NA recruitment criteria must apply to all ranks, from officer to general.

Stoned minister happy

Nagarik, 23 October

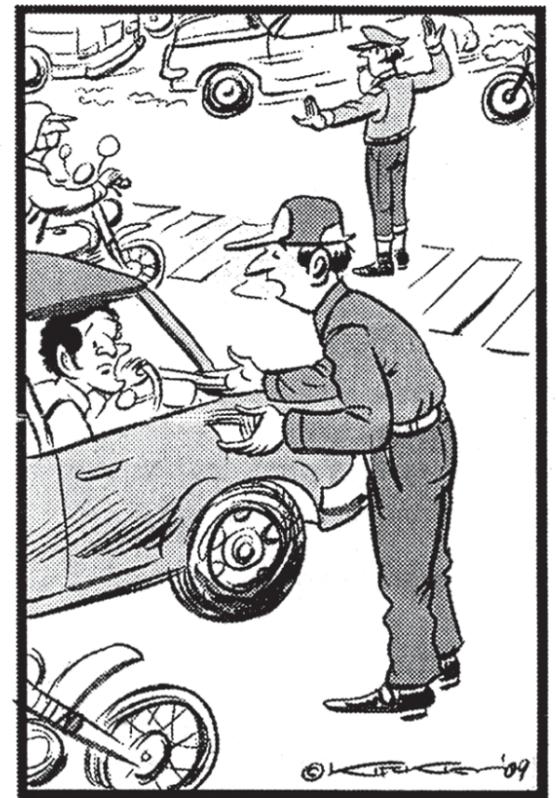
नागरिक

Palpa – Maoist cadres waved black flags at State Minister for Energy Chandra Singh Bhattarai in Tansen on Thursday. They broke through tight security and waved the flags in his face.



The cadres then covered the state minister's car in black cloth and pelted stones at it, but the minister wasn't hurt. “I don't care that they waved flags at me. Actually, I'm happy, since it's a step down from killing people,” he said. “Yesterday they shot people, today they only stone them. It's only a matter of time before they stop that too.”

Bhattarai, who stopped by Tansen on his way to the Kali Gandaki Hydroelectricity Project, said it isn't possible to immediately end loadshedding. He added that the political deadlock has persisted because the speaker hasn't had the courage to force an agreement.



एकै ठाममा रोकेको बीस मिनेट भयो ..., पार्किङ चार्ज ... पार्किङ चार्ज ।

Twenty minutes since you've been in the same spot...parking charge...parking charge.

संवाचापत्र Nepal Samacharpatra, 24 October

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हरेक दिन बिहान र बेलुका साढे ६ बजेदेखि ७ बजेसम्म

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रेडियो तरङ्ग १०७.६ पोखरा

फरक परिवेश फरक संस्कार फरक भूगोल

उज्यालो ९० नेटवर्क सानेपा

रेडियो चितवन ९४.६ रत्ननगर

अब सधैँका साथी



KIRAN PANDAY

“There is still hope”

Himal Khabarpatrika: *What do you think are the major challenges for the constitution writing process?*

Nilambar Acharya: The biggest challenge is the growing animosity between the political parties, since a political consensus is crucial to complete the new constitution. Secondly, the peace process is not moving smoothly. Thirdly, there is the tendency to ignore the interim constitution and earlier agreements.

There's no agreement even on basic constitutional issues. For example, they haven't agreed on whether to have a presidential or prime ministerial system. The first session of the CA on 28 May, 2008 declared Nepal a democratic federal republic, but now some dispute even this. A democratic federal republic is our commitment and the constitution should be written on this basis as we agreed earlier.

Is it possible to complete writing the constitution within seven months?

Not unless relations between parties improve and there is a culture of compromise, consensus and rule of law, which shouldn't be hard to bring about. But we also need to realise that the constitution-writing process is by its very nature difficult and will take time.

Can't we promulgate some clauses by the 28 May deadline and resolve controversial issues afterwards?

No, there is a process to follow. We need to set the priority of tasks and implement them accordingly, be it PLA integration or the demarcation of provinces.

The political leaders have never come to the table to discuss the issues regarding the constitution-writing process. Even if they resolved their differences three weeks from now, we could still complete the constitution on time.

Can we resolve contentious issues one at a time after first promulgating existing agreements on constitutional issues?

This is a dangerous game. If we don't feel the urgency of completing the task on time, maybe we won't even get a start within the remaining time. It will become even more difficult once work starts piling up.

If we work seriously, we still can write the constitution in seven months. All concentration should be on writing the constitution. However, if the political haggling continues until December, we should be worried.

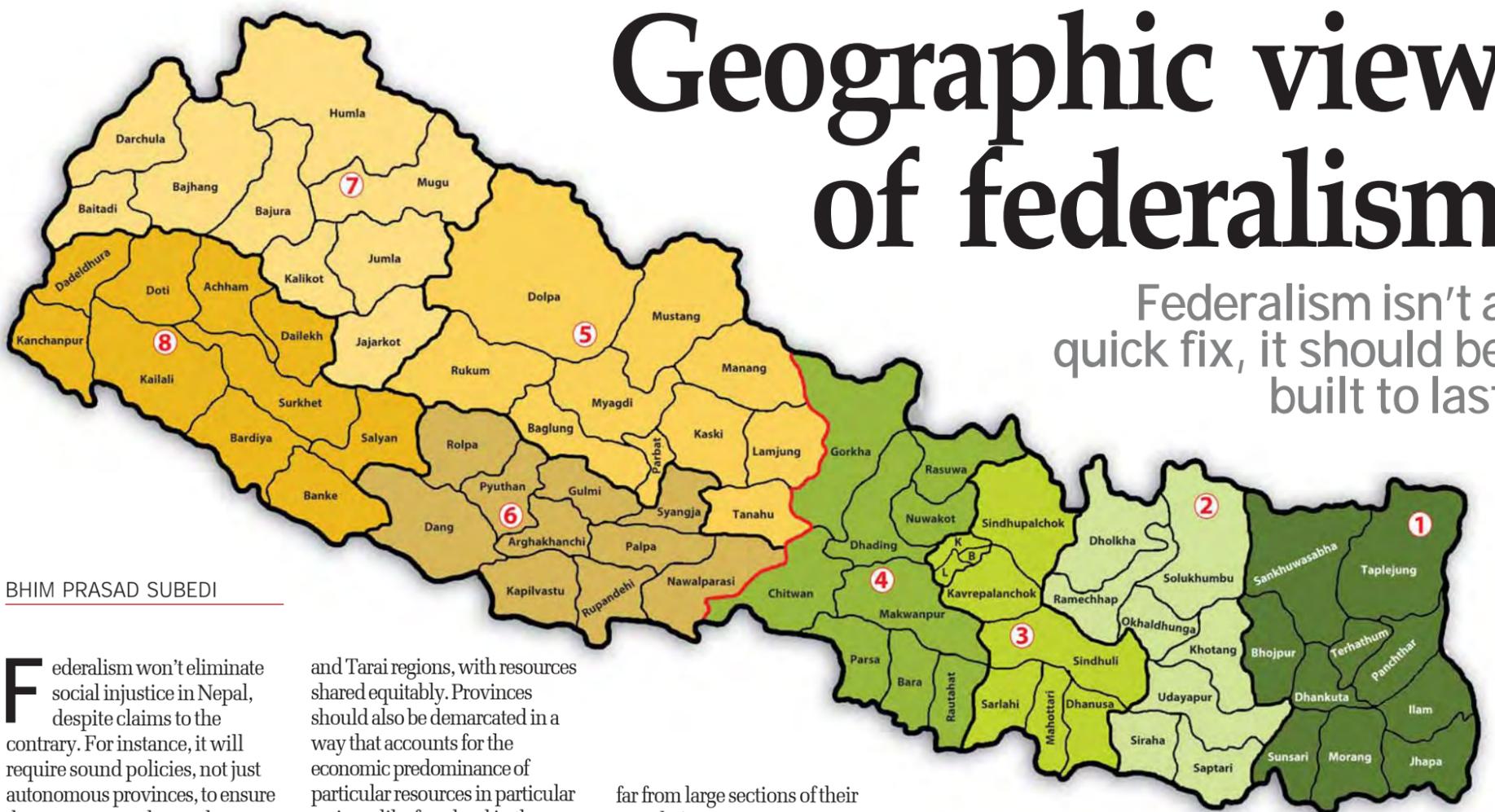
Among which power centres should we maintain power equilibrium?

The king, Nepali Congress and the communists were in equilibrium in writing the constitution in 1990. Now, there should be a balance between the Maoists, the parliamentary parties and ethnic groups. We cannot write a new constitution by balancing the Maoists and the parliamentary parties. We should not overlook the ethnic groups. The new constitution should incorporate the aspirations of these three forces. A constitution is not a holy book that can never be amended. It is a live document that will change in the future. Obsolete provisions in the constitution should be replaced with new ones.

Nilambar Acharya is the newly elected chair of the Constitutional Committee. *Himal Khabarpatrika* spoke to Acharya about the constitution-writing process and challenges. Excerpts:

Geographic view of federalism

Federalism isn't a quick fix, it should be built to last



BHIM PRASAD SUBEDI

Federalism won't eliminate social injustice in Nepal, despite claims to the contrary. For instance, it will require sound policies, not just autonomous provinces, to ensure that women are adequately represented in the legislature. Plus, federalism is tricky in a country as geographically and socially diverse as Nepal, so will require an intelligent assessment of the interactions between economic, bio-physical and social variables. Nonetheless, if the important issues are given due attention and viewed through a geographic perspective, federalism could work wonders.

Provincial boundaries ought to represent the realities of bio-physical, social, economic and historical geography. Provinces will more likely prosper if they span, and enable interaction between the Himalayan, Mid-hill

and Tarai regions, with resources shared equitably. Provinces should also be demarcated in a way that accounts for the economic predominance of particular resources in particular regions, like farmland in the Tarai.

The shape and size of these provinces are important but rarely discussed. Provinces need their capitals to assume responsibility for the provision of province-level services. Like it or not, capitals are power centres, and exclusion, poor access and deprivation increase in proportion to distance from these centres. Elongated provinces run the risk of estranging their populations. It would be too embarrassing to have to traverse the capital of another province to get to your own capital. Provinces should be shaped and sized in a way that their capitals are not too

far from large sections of their populations.

Rights and responsibilities should be sensibly distributed between the centre, provinces, districts and villages. One possibility is to let the centre handle defense, the minting of currency, international relations, development and natural resources; give the districts and villages greater authority over development; and split political and administrative authority between provinces and the central state.

The names of provinces have drawn far more attention, which may not be undeserved, since they have enormous consequences for inter-caste relations. The

names will inevitable rankle minority populations within provinces and, since these names will remain even as people migrate in and out, potentially future majorities too.

We should also remember that we want these provinces to last many generations, so we should demarcate them with an eye on future trends: newer generations will have different preferences, migration and inter-caste marriage will become more popular, and there's a looming youth bulge.

Whatever form federalism finally takes, it won't last long without grassroots support. We

should start at the local level, informing individuals of federalism's pros and cons, begin with viable development units based on human geography and economic linkages, and bring these together into viable regions or provinces.

If all these issues are properly understood, then federalism can go a long way in overcoming social injustice. ●

Bhim Prasad Subedi is a Professor of geography at Tribhuvan University. This article is a summary of a presentation at the Centre for Constitutional Dialogue.



SUDARSHAN RANJIT

International Po

Buddha Air eyes Indian tourism and pilgrim market

Reaching saturation on trunk routes and facing increasing competition, Nepal's domestic airlines are starting to think outside the box to drum up business.

While Yeti's new subsidiary, Tara Air, is promoting new destinations by reviving disused airfields in remote areas (*see box*), Buddha Air is starting flights to India using Pokhara as a hub.

When India and Nepal signed a new Air Services Agreement in September in New Delhi, the clause opening up new destinations in the two countries

went largely unnoticed by both Indian and Nepali operators. But it is this agreement that has made it possible to link Pokhara with points in India to tap the vast tourist and pilgrim market south of the border.

The India-Nepal agreement allows airlines from the two countries to offer 30,000 seats per week to and from Nepal to five cities and 21 other destinations in India including Dehradun, Bagdogra, Lucknow and Gorakhpur. This is a substantial increase in the number of seats available today.

"We think Pokhara has huge potential that is waiting to be tapped," says Buddha Air's Birendra Basnet. He points out that pushing through airport expansion in Pokhara and adding hotel capacity there would also relieve pressure on Kathmandu.

Buddha Air faces two hurdles. First, Nepali aviation laws don't cover local operators flying international routes using turboprops like the ATR-72. The cabinet is expected to approve new terms of reference for Nepali turboprop carriers this week.

Second, the landing and ground handling charges at Indian airports are high.

"The main challenge is that Indian airports have a flat rate for airport charges for international airlines operating big jets, and it is just not economical to fly to India at those rates," says Basnet. Reducing landing and ground handling charges would make it feasible for Nepali non-jet airlines to immediately start flights to destinations in north India.

Indian and Nepali airlines would also benefit from the



KUNDA DIXIT



(Top) Talcha airport, Mugu district

(Left) A Buddha Air ATR 42 at Pokhara airport getting ready for a flight to Kathmandu on Tuesday morning. The airline wants to make Pokhara a regional hub for flights to Indian cities.

(Bottom) Syanboche airport with Namche Bajar to the left

(Bottom left) Simkot airport, Humla district

Pokhara



KUNDA DIXIT

proposed air route from Kathmandu to Delhi over Pokhara and Mahendranagar (instead of via Bhairawa and Lucknow presently). The shorter flight would shave 15 minutes off the 90-minute flight and could also reduce the exorbitantly high fares on the route.

These moves would open the floodgates of Indian tourism to Nepal. At present, Indian airlines are allowed 6,000 seats per week, which they underuse. The quota of 3,000 seats per week for the state-owned Nepal Airlines is largely wasted.

The 74-seater ATR-72 that Buddha Air wants to fly to Lucknow will only go so far, even with daily flights. Nepal's national airline will have to step in with more flights on wide-body jets to Indian metros if we are to make full use of Nepal's quota under the new agreement.

Pokhara is an attractive destination because it already has

an infrastructure for tourism and is the gateway for the Annapurnas and the Muktinath pilgrimage. It also has lower airport fees and is less congested than Kathmandu. Buddha Air thinks it can offer a Rs 9,000 one-way flight between Lucknow to Pokhara with a through connection to Kathmandu. If Lucknow works well and landing fees at Indian airports are reduced, Buddha Air will consider starting Pokhara-Delhi flights.

Meanwhile, Kathmandu airport is getting an \$80 million upgrade with the help of an ADB loan. There are also plans to launch Bhairawa as a regional airport as part of a circuit that takes in the birthplace of the Buddha. If Pokhara steps up to the plate, Nepal can begin looking beyond its target of 1 million tourists for Visit Nepal Year 2011. ●

Kunda Dixit in Syanboche

Yeti's Himalayan air treks

Nepal's biggest domestic airline, Yeti Airlines, has just set up a subsidiary for mountain tourism to remote area airfields. Tara Air has taken over four Twin Otters, two Dornier 226s and two Pilatus Porters from Yeti to specialise in destinations with short-takeoff-and-landing runways.

Nepal's trekking industry is being dramatically transformed because of roads snaking up the mountains over what used to be hiking trails. The round-Annapurna trek, for instance, is now roadless only for a small stretch along the Marsyangdi. In the Everest region, a road has cut the Jiri-Lukla trail from five to two days.

Not everyone is happy about this, but there is overwhelming demand from locals for roads. Trekking agencies are responding by offering flights to high mountain valleys from where tourists can explore hitherto isolated areas that used to take too long to get to.

This week, Tara began services to Syanboche, the sloping dirt airstrip that was carved out of the mountains above Namche Bajar in the 1970s by the Japanese-owned Everest View Hotel. Tara is offering a scenic early morning 'Everest for Breakfast' flight to Syanboche that returns to Kathmandu by 10AM.

"It will add a new thrill to mountain flights, since we will be in the mountains, will touch down and give tourists a real feel for the place," says Daman Pradhan of Yeti Holidays, which is promoting the concept at the World Travel Mart next month in London.

Pradhan is also working on a week-long 'Trans Himalayan Flying Trek' that will fly tourists across Nepal, touching down at remote airfields from Simkot, Rara, Dolpa, Dhorpatan, Manang, Langtang, Syangboche right up to Taplejung in the east. Tourists will spend the night in tented camps at the airfields, making for tours similar to those catering to whitewater rafters. Yeti Airlines hopes to attract high-value tourists by using the full potential of the Himalaya as a brand.

Operators are now pressing the civil aviation authorities to recommission airfields in Langtang, Dhorpatan, Jiri, Rara and an abandoned grass runway in the Budi Gandaki valley. All these airfields were once serviced by Pilatus Porters operated by Royal Nepal Airlines and the United Nations in the 1970s.

Capt Praful Vaidya, who flies Tara Air's new Pilatus Porters, is enthusiastic about the Swiss-built aircraft. "This plane is ideal for flying in the mountains and especially for the rough airstrips," he says. ●

YAK AND YETI: A Yeti Airlines Pilatus Porter on the ground at Syanboche on Sunday morning after its STOL subsidiary Tara Air started charter operations to the airport. The airline hopes to boost mountain tourism by bringing disused airstrips built in the 1960s back into operation.



KUNDA DIXIT

Public domain

Early in the morning, a young woman on crutches enters a gated park in Jwagal and slowly walks around for half an hour. She has been doing this twice a day, every day, since she slipped and fell a few weeks ago. Her physiotherapist recommended that she get some exercise. Grateful to be living close to the so-called UN Park by the Bagmati river, she says even when she was not injured she used to come here for morning walks.

She's not the first. As the sun comes up, morning walkers trudge up and down the paths alone or in groups of six or seven. On the side some are quietly practicing their yoga positions or doing tai chi while the runners run their umpteenth laps around the park. Some use the little sheds installed for meditation and breathing exercises. Others just get together with neighbours to

talk about politics, work and family. The park paths are teeming with people until about 9AM when high-school children start trickling in.

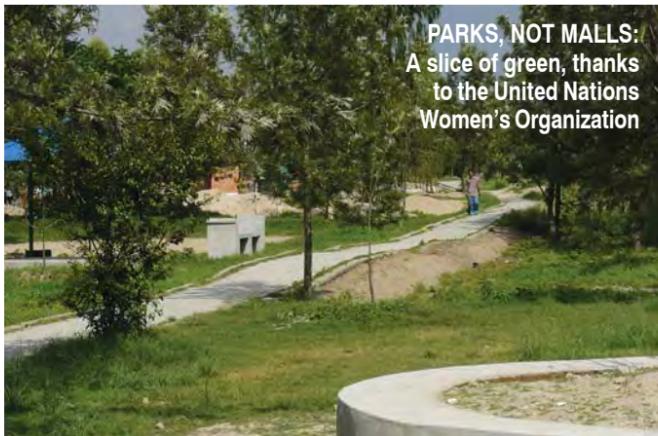


INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

Little benches that have been put up recently are well utilised by lovers snuggling up to each other. During the day the park is mostly quiet except for students hanging out and eating cheese balls or late risers running laps. In the evenings the park gets busy again, with little children rolling on the unkempt grass, dog walkers taking a long evening stroll and others who've escaped to the park to alleviate the boredom of loadshedding.

Very few people outside of the surrounding areas know of this little green space tucked away from the city. This land was converted into a park by the government before the squatter invasion. The park may not have manicured grass, exotic flowers or well-trimmed trees, but it is clean and well used.

Kathmandu's citizens need more breathing space



RABI THAPA

Kathmandu has never been a green city. Our public spaces were the bahals and chowks. Our modern architecture and the unplanned mushrooming of houses everywhere have left very little room for public spaces in the Valley and even the courtyards in the neighbourhoods have disappeared. Through personal initiatives, little green spaces have sprung up in Thapathali, Gyaneswar and Maharajganj, to be used by dog walkers and joggers. In recent years Tundikhel has been revived by Guru Ramdev's followers for yoga but Bhugol Park is no more, Ratna Park has been encroached upon by the microbus stand, and Godavari and Thankot parks are just too far away.

Tundikhel was always known as Kathmandu's lungs but it has been progressively encroached upon by the army and it is now a shadow of its former self. Yet, Kathmandulays make full use of what is left. After the 1934 earthquake, this was where the city's citizens fled to wait out the aftershocks. If an earthquake like that happened today there would be nowhere to go.

As land to build houses becomes scarce there is less space for public parks. Even the schools do not have enough space for children to play in. With chaotic traffic and missing sidewalks even walking is a dangerous pastime. Lack of exercise means obesity and health problems.

Public spaces are not just used by communities or individuals to hang out in. Kathmandu has always used them for festivals and could be even more creative, with concerts during the warm winter afternoons, theatre performances during the late summer evenings, carnivals and open air film screenings. And who says fashion shows have to be organised in the cramped environs of BICC every year? Temporary tents could be installed with ramps under them for models to sashay on in the latest spring collections.

It is obvious that Kathmandu's residents need open spaces: Ratna Park, Tundikhel, Maitighar Mandala, and the green belts around Pashupati are in heavy use, despite everything. We need more of the same to escape our sedentary lifestyles. And perhaps a little breathing space will open our minds too? ●

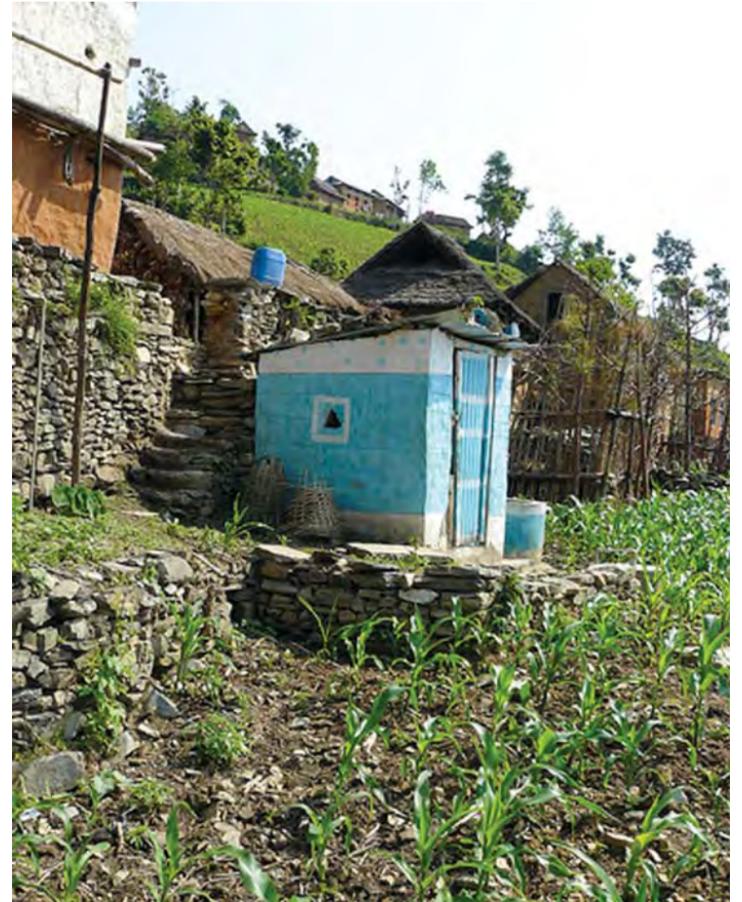
Sanitation short circuit

RABI THAPA
and DEWAN RAI

Last week's report from the World Health Organization was sure to embarrass the sloganeers of India Shining. Of a total 1.2 billion people who practice open defaecation, a staggering 665 million live in India. But before you start to snigger, take a look at your own backyard. Nepal features prominently, with 14 million of its citizens in the report going for nature's calls in, well, nature.

Fourteen million makes for half the population without access to proper toilets. But the significance of this statistic is much less the shame of it than what it means for the health of the population, particularly in the countryside. Over 15,000 children under five die of diarrhoea every year in Nepal, and the recent epidemic in western Nepal claimed hundreds of lives. What does this say about the much-vaunted efforts of the government and donors to meet the Millennium Development Goal for sanitation?

Suman Prasad Sharma, joint secretary at the Water and Sanitation Division of the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works, says the government has been providing subsidies of upto Rs 2,000 to build toilets. But he admits that subsidies are of little use without effecting a change in attitudes towards health and hygiene. To this end, the government has introduced school led total sanitation (SLTS) and community led total sanitation (CLTS) programs across the country. These programs seek to spread awareness of hygienic practices through communities and schoolchildren in particular,



RABI THAPA

Nepal makes the news for all the wrong reasons once more

seen as potent agents of social change.

Are these programs workings? The government claims about 48 per cent of the population enjoys sanitation facilities and 78 per cent has access to safe drinking water. But districts like Rukum and Jajarkot are way behind the national average: only 23 per cent have access to toilets and 46 per cent have a supply of clean drinking water.

Says Bishwa Raj Khanal, senior epidemiologist with the Department of Health Services, "Places in the mid west like

Jajarkot and Rukum do have sanitation programs in place, but very limited health services and workers. The communities have little access to clean drinking water and are generally unaware of the importance of good sanitation practices, even basic things like washing hands before eating and after going to the toilet."

In the areas hit by the epidemic, according to Khanal, the difficult terrain and the lack of coordination on the part of the district disaster relief committee compounded the situation. The rest is a sad history. ●

"Water and sanitation are like stones and soil"

There's a plethora of initiatives to provide sanitation facilities in rural and urban areas in Nepal. For the large part these are coupled with water supply projects. As Shankha Buddha Lama of the Shanti Jan Adarsha Youth Club puts it, "Water supply and sanitation are like stones and soil – you can't have one without the other."

In Kavrepalanchok, Shankha Buddha's organisation is the chief support organisation for the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Fund Development Board, an semi-autonomous institution funded by the World Bank and DfID. Over the last decade, Shankha Buddha has become something of a celebrity in Kavre. He has made it his mission to bring water and sanitation to his district by reconnoitering potential project sites and selecting them on the basis of demand and willingness to adopt a community participation model that includes women.

Kavre has enjoyed success, with several villages declaring themselves 'ODF' – open

defaecation free. Toilet use has been joined to mini-biogas plants in some sites, whereby human and animal waste is converted into gas, the residue is used as fertiliser, and firewood use is reduced. Though villagers initially demand water, they are soon convinced, sometimes by visiting other sites, of the advantages to their health and environment of using toilets.

At the closing event of National Sanitation Week in July in district headquarters Dhulikhel, schoolchildren enlivened the speeches with a carefully rehearsed 'sanitation song'. Shankha Buddha himself took the podium to suggest that parents desist from marrying daughters into houses without toilets. A government official was a little more circumspect, noting that Nepal was some way away from meeting its targets. "But Kavre could be a model," he said. "Why not make the entire district ODF by 2012-13? *Ghar ghar ma sauchalaya, Kavre jilla ko parichaya.*" A toilet in every house, the introduction to Kavre.

Saving our mothers

ADDIS ABABA — Ending the needless death and suffering of women during pregnancy is one of the greatest moral and development challenges of our time and requires concrete action, agreed more than 150 delegates that met here yesterday.

The High-Level Meeting on Maternal Health – Millennium Development Goal 5 (MDG5) was held to push maternal health higher on the political agenda and

- Strengthen health systems with sexual and reproductive health as a priority.

Describing maternal death as “the greatest crisis of our time,” Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Minister of Health of Ethiopia, highlighted, at the meeting’s opening, the need to focus on three priorities: keeping a strong momentum on MDG5; linking maternal health and the strengthening of

Among other recommended actions, participants called on policy makers to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health, with the involvement of young people, and to break the silence and mobilize efforts to promote gender equality. They also called on development partners and donors to fulfill the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance, and to place maternal health and MDG5 at the centre of global health initiatives. ●
UNFPA



UNFPA meet highlights plight of women worldwide

increase political and financial commitment for improving maternal health at the country level. The one-day event was organized by Bert Koenders, Minister for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands and UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, and was hosted by the Government of Ethiopia.

Policy makers, youth groups, members of civil society and the private sector worldwide discussed policy challenges and means to achieve MDG5, which is already behind schedule.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of the Addis Call to Urgent Action for Maternal Health that recommended specific steps to reach the goal by 2015, particularly the following key measures:

- Prioritize family planning
- Make adolescents a priority by investing in their health, education and livelihoods and

national health systems; and partnership between developing and developed countries.

The Dutch Minister, Mr. Koenders, said: “Today is important for women all over the world, and their children and partners. In fact, it is important for everyone, because MDG5 affects us all...MDG5 is the mother of all MDGs – an investment in it promotes the attainment of all other MDGs.”

“We are here for one reason and one reason only: to accelerate action to improve maternal health and end the needless death and suffering of women,” said UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid in her keynote speech. “To improve maternal health, we need to scale up and deliver a comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health information, supplies and services.”

Bright spot

Amidst worries that most countries won't meet the United Nation's Millennium Development Goal 5 to reduce maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015, Nepal has done surprisingly well.

In a statement delivered at the UN on 23 September Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal promised to scale up free maternal care and to improve women's access to healthcare. UNFPA executive director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid congratulated Nepal's efforts at the High-Level Meeting on Maternal Health, and noted that this would “enable a million and a half women to have a safer delivery over the next five years.”

Nepal has already halved its maternal death rate since the MDGs were introduced in 1990 and is one of a few countries that may meet MDG 5. But the problem remains serious in Nepal, with one woman dying in childbirth every four hours.

Former Spice Girl Geri Halliwell visited Nepal from 6-9 September to draw attention to women suffering uterine prolapse, a debilitating condition in which a woman's uterus drops to her pelvis, and which afflicts 1 in 10 women here.

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YES LOGO: Michel Lacoste (centre left) cheers Chitwan's cross.

Crocodile cheers

Chitwan's gharials have a shot at being more than just a logo

Michel Lacoste grew up with a crocodile. His father René Lacoste, the French tennis champion and founder of the clothing company, was given the nickname because of his pugnacity on the court, and perhaps also because of the crocodile bag he once bet a tennis game on.

So, as the CEO of the company most strongly associated with an animal, it was perhaps not so surprising when René's son Michel decided to join the Save Your Logo campaign. The program helps private companies protect the biodiversity of the planet by committing to the preservation of the animal that appears on their logo.

Lacoste was in Nepal this week to see

the gharials in Chitwan, the first beneficiaries of his company's \$500,000 contribution to Save Your Logo.

Gharials, distinguished by their long, narrow snouts, aren't technically the species depicted on Lacoste's preppy shirts. But they are the most endangered species of the reptile family; there are only a few hundred individuals left in the world.

"They belong to the same family," said Lacoste. "We have some gharials, some alligators, and some caimans. What puts them all together is more important than what separates them."

Lacoste was the first company to join the Save Your Logo campaign. Chitwan was

chosen as its first site because the national park has already made a strong push for preservation through its gharial breeding centre. Along with contributions from the World Bank, the Global Environmental Facility, the International Union for Nature Conservation and the Endowment Fund for Biodiversity, the campaign for crocodiles will be extended to China and the southern USA.

In Nepal, Lacoste's contribution will go towards preserving and increasing the gharial population in Chitwan and Bardiya. About 80 gharials live in the rivers of Chitwan today, a surprisingly small number considering 800 have been released from the breeding centre over the

last 10 years.

The main threats to the gharial population are the decline in the fish population and dams, where gharials often get stuck while swimming downstream. Pollution in rivers is also increasingly a problem. "It is ironic that a French company is investing to save gharials here while Nepali factories continue to pollute the rivers where they live," said Prashant Singh of the World Wildlife Fund in Nepal.

Until the industries change their ways, the long-nosed beasts can be assured of Lacoste's affection. As he put it: "After all, the crocodile is my father. When I look at a crocodile, I cannot help thinking about him." ● *Indu Nepal*

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Specials

- **Sunday** - Shopping Plus - info, bargains, discounts, destinations
- **Monday** - Hi Tech Plus - technology and gadgets
- **Tuesday** - Health Times ; Medical Board - Nepal's best doctors respond to queries ; Wheels - everything automobile
- **Wednesday** - Campus Plus - collegiate life ; Appointments - careers and jobs
- **Thursday** - School Times - everything kids should know
- **Friday** - Green - environment matters
- **Saturday** - Property Plus - weekend two pager focusing on real estate



The Real Deal

Every once in a rare while, you are captured by an action on screen that freezes you in your tracks. It isn't because what you see is spectacular; instead, it is its wholly mundane quality that grabs you. Not some actor striking a pose, but a simple act that rings so authentic in its



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

commonplaceness you recognise it to be from the real world. In this genuine human moment, one recalls the quality of artifice that marks most of cinema. It is this sensibility, sometimes labeled 'realist', which marks the films of Ramin Bahrani.

The Realist tradition, with its roots in the Neo-realist films of post-war Italian cinema such as Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thief*, is defined by its attention to the working poor. *The Bicycle Thief*, for instance, captures the complicated relationship we have with labour, tied as it is to our survival and our notions of personal dignity and worth. Ramin proves he is heir to this tradition with a body of work in a contemporary American setting that matches the pathos of any Italian Neo-realist entry.

In the hard-scrabble life of its extremely young working protagonist, Bahrani's *Chop Shop* (2007) is a humanist portrait of living and working on the margins of the economy. Ale is a character whose plight reaches Dickensian proportions. Neither parents nor school play a role in his life, and he has a taskmaster (albeit a sympathetic one) who puts him to work for a meagre wage. He has a dingy room to bed down in at the back of the mechanic shop where he toils. Yet there is no romanticism or melodrama in Ale's condition. He is self-reliant and applies himself with a gritty determination that could be described as *American*, with that tantalising *dream* stubbornly out of his reach as he struggles for a modicum of security for himself and his sister. The film's naturalism and resonant humanity belies the assiduous execution of Bahrani's craft.

In Bahrani's most recent work, *Goodbye Solo* (2009), it is

difficult not to be reminded of Abbas Kiarostami, Bahrani's predecessor and Iranian counterpart in the Realist tradition. It opens in the inside of a taxi cab with a gregarious driver trying to make conversation with his reticent, hostile passenger. In doing so, it evokes Kiarostami's *Ten*, with its candid divorcée interrogating her passengers, or perhaps more directly, *Taste of Cherry*. Like *Taste of Cherry*, one character seeks his own death – in *Goodbye Solo* it is William, a white, Southern, elderly grouse who commissions Senegalese Solo to

vernacularisms are completely charming. You root for him as he thaws William's hostility, your own identification with the characters increasing exponentially.

Goodbye Solo also marks an evolution for this supremely talented filmmaker. Bahrani branches out from the documentary-inflected realism of his previous work towards narrative and story. Alongside the story of affirming life in the face of hardship and the developing dynamic between the protagonists, complex themes of fatherhood emerge. Solo must confront his

Ramin Bahrani's chronicles of the working poor carve out a specifically American chapter in the Realist tradition

drive him to Blowing Rock. Solo realises that this is a trip of no return, with his passenger likely to jump to his death at his destination. And so in the few days they spend together, Solo contrives to draw his passenger into the social fabric of his world, hoping to restore William's connection with humanity.

Goodbye Solo rises above its bleak premise partly due to a performance infused with warmth and humour by its lead, Souléymane Sy Savané, whose Franco-African lilt and American

own vacillation towards his family and his unrealised dreams of a better life. In Bahrani's chronicles of those living at the margins of American existence, art and life could not be better served. ●

CHOP SHOP
Director: Ramin Bahrani
Cast: Alejandro Polanco, Isamar Gonzales, Rob Sowulski
2007. 85 min.

GOODBYE SOLO
Cast: Souléymane Sy Savané, Red West
2009. 91 min.

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November Sky

Meteor showers, mighty Jupiter and the Hunter's Moon

This month, we have two meteor showers, the Hunter's Moon and Jupiter dominating the evening skies. But let's talk of the stars first.

Along the Zodiac, from east to west, you can now observe the constellations Taurus, Aries, Pisces, Capricornus and Sagittarius. Just below Aries the Ram, enjoy the brilliant constellation Cetus the Whale, with its reddish, super giant binary star Mira, which will vary in brightness over successive nights. Note that the tail of Pisces the Fish points directly to Mira. Though summer has already given way to autumn, the well-known



STARGAZING
Kedar S Badu

asterism of the Great Summer Triangle is still visible in the western skies. The Great Square (Pegasus) is just overhead.

In the northern skies, you can easily identify the constellations Auriga the Charioteer, Perseus, Cassiopeia, Cepheus, Draco and Hercules from East to West. If you are away from dazzling city lights, enjoy the Milky Way, which stretches from the northeast to the southwest. Pre-dawn stargazers have the opportunity to enjoy the Big Dipper in the northeast and the Winter Hexagon (a group of bright stars around the constellation Orion) located just overhead. While watching the Big Dipper, don't miss the Great Galaxy (M81) that is located 15 degrees to the northwest from the star Dubhe. Note that the two stars of the Big Dipper, Merak and Dubhe, point straight to the Celestial North Pole (Polar Star).



Planet observing

Jupiter in Capricornus outshines everything else in the southern sky, save the moon. You can see its four largest moons and a couple of belts with a small telescope.

Saturn will rise in the east in the early hours of the morning, and is well up in the southeastern sky by dawn. It will move very slowly southeastwards towards Virgo.

Mars, getting brighter by the day, will rise in the northeast at around 11:30PM and will be high in the southern sky just before dawn. Catch it on the night of 2 November as it crosses the beehive cluster (M44).

Mercury will be invisible beginning 5 November as it passes behind the sun and **Venus** will rise before sunrise. Catch it low in the southeastern sky at dawn but be warned, it's getting gradually dimmer.

The Hunter's Moon – the particularly resplendent full moon that enables harvesting (not to mention hunting) past sunset – began on 3 September and will be 98 per cent full on 4 November. Catch it as it passes close to the Pleiades star cluster (M45).

Meteors

Two meteor showers occur about a week apart in November. The first is the **Taurid** shower, so called because meteors appear to shoot out of the constellation Taurus the Bull. This meteor shower begins around 4 November and peaks overnight on 11 November. Taurus will rise early in the evening so you won't have to stay up late. Don't expect too much since Taurid peaks at a mere eight meteors an hour.

The **Leonids** peak before dawn on 17-18 November and appear to come from the constellation Leo, which does not rise fully until after midnight. For early observers, note that Mars is leading Leo the Lion and Saturn is behind it. The radiant point is within the 'Sickle' of Leo, a hand's breadth to the left of Mars. There will be no interference from moonlight, giving you a good opportunity to enjoy the shooting stars. Meanwhile, sporadic (non-shower) meteors can be seen on any night, in any direction. ●

[kedarbadu\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:kedarbadu(at)gmail.com)

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **'Nepal Rendezvous - Nagarkot Workshop'**, paintings by Bangladeshi and Nepali artists at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg, till 31 Oct, 4218048
- ❖ **'Separating Myth from Reality - Status of Women'**, art festival from 30 October to 10 November at Nepal Association of Fine Arts, Imago Dei Café Gallery, Patan Museum, Kathmandu Contemporary Art Center, Nepal Art Council, Siddhartha Art Gallery (www.siddharthaartgallery.com, 421048 for details)
- ❖ **'Separating Myth from Reality - Status of Women'**, lecture series from 31 October to 2 November, Kathmandu Contemporary Art Center (www.qcbookshop.com, 5536974 for details)

EVENTS

- ❖ **Halloween Party** at Dhokaima Café, 31 October, 6PM onwards
- ❖ **Patan Press Club**, meets every Thursday at Dhokaima Café, 6PM, 5522113
- ❖ **Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre**, Tai Chi 10-11.30AM Saturday, Yoga 8.30-9.30AM and Meditation 5-6PM weekdays, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402

MUSIC

- ❖ **Baja gaja** every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchok, 7.30PM onwards, 5526212
- ❖ **Live band** every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288
- ❖ **Sunday Jazz brunch**, enjoy a relaxing Sunday in The Terrace at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu with barbeque and live jazz by Inner Groove from 12:00 to 3:30 pm, 4491234/4489362
- ❖ **Jazz evening** at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM, 4260326
- ❖ **Some like it hot**, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, 7PM onwards, 4479488
- ❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7PM
- ❖ **Nepali Ghajals** and songs at D'Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30PM onwards, 4468589
- ❖ **Rudra Night** live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7PM at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212

DINING

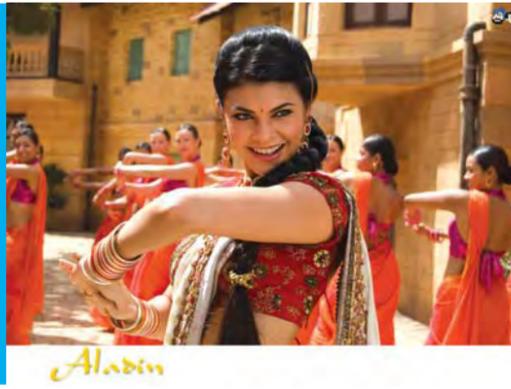
- ❖ **Live continental BBQ Fiesta**, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30PM everyday
- ❖ **Arabic Food Festival**, experience the finest cuisine from the Arabic world till 7 Nov at The Café, 6.30PM onwards, 4491234/4489362
- ❖ **Famous stews of the world**, at The Rox Restaurant, on Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays, all through October, 6PM onwards, 4491234/4489362
- ❖ **Chocolate, Coffee and Caramel**, every evening at The Lounge, 4.30-6.30PM, 4491234/4489362
- ❖ **Wine and cheese**, every Friday & Saturday at The Lounge, 5-8PM, 4491234/4489362
- ❖ **A cafe's café**, Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 5522113
- ❖ **Jazzabell Café**, relaunched at Jhamsikhel, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8PM, 2114075
- ❖ **The Corner Bar**, 5-7PM, 3-11PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4411818
- ❖ **Al Fresco**, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999
- ❖ **Kakori**, for biryanis, curries and kebabs, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 7-10.45PM
- ❖ **Chez Caroline** for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4263070
- ❖ **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle East at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234
- ❖ **Teppanyaki** meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara, 4436318
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 600, 4412999
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4425341
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards, 4412999
- ❖ **Himalayan Rainbow Trout** at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4248999
- ❖ **Tiger for Breakfast**, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4215068
- ❖ **Stupa View Restaurant**, for vegetarian creations & clay oven pizza at Boudha Stupa, 4480262
- ❖ **Gokarna Forest Resort** for a variety of sizzlers at Tripti bar, 4451212

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Relax Package** at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu for Rs 5555 plus taxes, for a night of double occupancy with breakfast, complimentary use of spa. Offer valid for Nepalis and local residents only, 4489800

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

Quest Entertainment



Aladin (Ritesh Deshmukh) is an orphan living in the city of Khwaish. His life takes an interesting turn when he meets Jasmine (Jacqueline Fernandez) who gives him a magic lamp with a genie 'Genius' (Amitabh Bachchan) who must grant him three wishes but manages, in the process, only to make Aladin's life more difficult. All this comes while he battles the villainous Ringmaster (Sanjay Dutt). Aladin's future seems bleak indeed.

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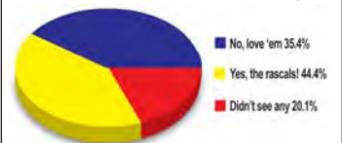
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Q. Were you harassed by deusi-bhailo bands this Tihar?

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Q. What do you think the Nepal-India revised trade treaty means?

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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Satellite pictures indicate there are no clouds heading our way, so we will continue to enjoy clear skies with Himalayan views this week. There is a cyclone off the peninsular coast of India but this won't affect us and is normal this time of year. Enjoy clear autumn skies but take care during the afternoons, which will be significantly drier than the mornings.



RECIPES

by GRAHAM SYDNEY

Avocado Gazpacho

(Serves 4-6)

This summery soup is a good way to use your excess avocado as it freezes well.

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 3 cups | ripe avocado |
| 3 | spring onions, chopped |
| 1 | green pepper, chopped |
| 2 tablespoons | lemon juice |
| ½ cup | olive oil |
| ¼ teaspoon | ground cumin |
| 1 tablespoon | honey |
| 3 cloves | garlic, chopped |
| ½ | medium cucumber, peeled and chopped |
| 2 tablespoons | coriander, chopped |
| 1 - 1½ cup | cold vegetable stock |
| 1 tablespoon | chopped green chilli, seeds removed |
| salt & pepper to taste | |



Place all the ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth. Strain and garnish with some diced, seeded tomato, diced cucumber and fresh coriander. Serve cold with some fresh bread, pita bread or bruschetta.

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KIRAN PANDAY

ENCORE: Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa arrives in Tribhuvan International Airport on Thursday to complete an earlier visit cut short when Sri Lankan cricket players were targeted by terrorist attacks in Pakistan.



KIRAN PANDAY

FIVE MAKES COMPANY: Panchakanya, a traditional five-girl troupe, welcomes guests to the SAARC Trade Information Portal launch at the Hyatt Regency on Thursday.



KIRAN PANDAY

FOR PEACE: A devotee lights incense during Chhat, a religious festival practiced mainly by people in the Madhesh, in Birganj on Saturday.



KIRAN PANDAY

CALM WATERS: A fisherman ferries his boat across the Kulekhani reservoir on Saturday.



KIRAN PANDAY

SMILE FOR THE CAMERA: Pawankali, host of a popular TV show, interviews CA members outside Singh Darbar on Tuesday.



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Out of power, out of mind

As we brace ourselves for another winter of discontent with at least 12 hours of daily power cuts, what is not so surprising is that none of the political parties have used this against each other. The reason is simple: they have all been in power at one time or other but have done nothing to increase the power we need in the past year.



However, there is a silver lining. The prime minister can now tell the Climate Summit in Copenhagen that Nepal has voluntarily reduced its energy consumption, thus putting moral pressure on the OECD to do the same. In the run-up to Copenhagen, the Maldivian president held his cabinet meeting underwater. We must also come up with gimmicks to grab headlines, and the Donkey's humble suggestion is to have a cabinet meeting at the top of Mt Everest and call it a 'Climate Summit'.



Out of power, out of sight, out of mind. That seems to be the way of Nepali politics, which is why everyone wants to cling on power. As King G, Sher Budder, Upadro Yadav all fade from memory, they've all found that mysterious air-dashes to Delhi are the only way to keep themselves in the mass consciousness. Which must be why King-ji is supposed to be planning another India visit next month, Surya Bua just got back and promptly passed on instructions to everyone from the prez down, and there is a new spring in Brave Lion's step. But even that didn't work for Upadro. Poor guy can't make up his mind whether to go in for full throttle agitation along with his bros in the Maobaddies and risk antagonising India, or to



keep a low profile and wait for the government to fall on its own.



The Ass has always maintained that TV channels give too much importance to the activities of our top leaders: who meets whom, who goes where, who

sneezes. Why is the media obsessed with the talking heads of the thaluz? How many times do we want to listen to Awesome say an agreement is near and the very next day threaten another andolan? We can understand NTV covering every inauguration the netas grace their presence with, but why the other stations? The

public is fed up and media owners should realise that such content will now actually bring down ratings. Instead of covering such samarohas, let's uncover them.



As the Ass predicted, now that she's got what she wanted Suzy Q has shifted from flirting with the Baddies to now blasting them for inviting instability. Bijay the Gachhedar has said 'hami ke kum' and warned that if the Maoists do come into government the Madhesi parties will obstruct parliament for the unforeseeable future.



Give the devil its due. The comrades have at least been honest this week. First they agreed to the discharge of minors if the disqualified were given

pocket money, revealing that all this rehab drama is a scam to keep UNDP employed. Then they said they don't agree with the technical committee's recco to keep the PLA under government control. And now they say their real aim is to lead the government. If not: we will shut down not just parliament but the whole country.



The quote of the week is from the Mao secretariat: "On 10 November we will block all entry and exit points to the capital, including the airport. But the protests will be peaceful and we don't want to inconvenience the public."

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