With only two weeks to go before the mass sacrifice of animals at Gadhimai in Bara, calls to stop the slaughter for once and for all are growing.

Adding his voice to the campaign is Ram Bahadur Bomjon, the ‘Boy Buddha of Bara’ who gained world renown after he meditated in the hollow of a tree, ostensibly without food and water for six months in 2006. He disappeared mysteriously then, and is now living in the jungle near Ratnapuri.

At an ecumenical function on Saturday in Bara, Bomjon (pictured, above) urged that the ritual sacrifice be stopped. “The animals are killed cruelly for the notion that wishes will be granted. I urge everyone to stop the slaughter,” he said.

The Gadhimai sacrifices have been opposed by animal rights groups in Nepal, but this year there has been unprecedented international attention on the gruesome ritual in which half a million buffalos and goats as well as chickens, pigeons, ducks and even rats are sacrificed. The event is held every five years and this year will take place over two days on 23-24 November.

Indian animal rights activist Maneka Gandhi has also spoken out strongly against the sacrifices, writing a letter to Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal urging him to ban the festival. But preparations are going ahead regardless.

Gadhimai is a transnational festival, and most of the pilgrims as well as the animals being sacrificed come from across the border in India.
Whatever the slogans on the streets about ‘civilian supremacy’ it is now clear that the current phase of Maoist street protests are aimed at seizing the party from itself.

The Brahils, the ruling family in front of municipal buildings and the ‘capture’ of Dhankuta are all showcase activities to say, “We’re here”. But much more sinister is the escalation of violent attacks on opposition figures, attacks that are a sign of the conflict years. The only difference is that guns are not being used.

But the time-tested Maoist method of enforcing obedience by terror tactics, A Maoist leader this week reminded everyone that the party still had guns stashed away and could use them anytime.

As for the explanation for this new type of protest, a post-Thar gettysburg compromise on a parliamentary resolution that offered everyone an honourable escape clause, the Maoists proved that this is all about getting back to power by hook or by crook. Indeed, to see it from their side, the Maoist leadership is afraid of greater alienation from the rank and file and perhaps even a split in the party if it doesn’t get into government soon.

The question is how. The UML-NC coalition is unlikely to agree to Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal stepping down, and the Maoists will not settle for anything less than prime ministership. The street protests were necessary because the Maoists realised they don’t have the numbers in the house to oust the government, and their strategy of splitting up parties to gain those numbers failed.

The desperation has led the Maoists to play an even more dangerous game by declaring autonomous ethnic federal councils this week. When nothing else works, the Maoists have always fallen back on stoking ethnic and caste tensions: not to liberate the country. If the Maoists really want to integrate the Tarai into the national framework, they may have to rethink this strategy of using violent tactics to integrate the Tarai into the national framework.

The Maoists are busy turning swords into ploughshares, but the question is how to do so. The Maoists may have to think of different ways to integrate the Tarai into the national framework.

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WHEELING AND DEALING

I read your well-written update (‘Deal or no deal’, www.nepalitimes.com) with great interest. Although I am not an avid supporter of the Maoists, in my view they are the only legitimate party to lead Nepal: they won the elections fair and square.

Now we have a government being led by the biggest losers in the elections. How will ‘New Nepal’ find direction if we do not even start on a legitimate footing? The Maoists may be playing games, but they are only following the lead of GPK who loves playing chess with the entire country.

Abhishek Bhandari

PEOPLE POWER

When you distrust the community (‘Demonstrating democracy’, #474), you are undermining the power of the individual. When you want government to give you a free ride, you are essentially killing that natural instinct of the individual. Perhaps one has forgotten how and what brings success in life: hard work and perseverance, which are best played out in the markets.

Anjan Panday

SOFT TARGET

I was upset by your editorial this issue (Presidential conduct, #475). Is it a sign that our media houses are now aiming at soft targets rather than trying hard to fight the scrouge that is sure to destroy them when it gets its first chance?

It also reminded me of a comment historian Schumpeter made about ‘liberal’ French elites just before the French Revolution of 1789 in his classic ‘History of economic analysis’:

“French society in particular was rapidly disintegrating, but as yet felt perfectly safe. Like all disintegrating societies that don’t want to face their danger, it delighted in protecting its enemies and thus provided a milieu of unique charm that will attract even those of us who sense a flavor of decay... A wave of religious, political and economic criticism that was pathetically uncritical of its own dogmatic standards swept over the intellectual centers....”

Biswo Poudel, from www.facebook.com/nepalitimes

REAR VIEW

The Ass is not a comedy page, it is an editorial, which appears to the untrained eye as a gossip column.

Shankhar Ranjit

The Ass’s request to hold a climate summit on Everest (Out of power, out of mind, #475) seems to have reached the concerned authority.

A Bomjon
Tamrat Samuel is the director of the Asia and the Pacific Division, Department of Political Affairs at the United Nations. He has been actively working on Nepal since 2003, and served as the deputy head of UNMIN in 2007-08. In the run-up to the UN Security Council meeting to discuss Nepal on Friday, Samuel spoke to Prashant Jha of Nepali Times in New York.

Prashant Jha: What is the UN’s assessment of the present political situation in Nepal?

Tamrat Samuel: The current situation is one of stalemate. We recognise efforts are being made to resolve the stalemate. Unfortunately, as the Secretary General stated in his report, we can’t say that the commitments made in the 7 July letter by PM Nepal to him have been implemented. This is regrettable, including from UN’s point of view. UNMIN’s mandate was framed in the context of the period before the Constituent Assembly elections. It has been over a year-and-half since the CA elections took place, and the mission is carrying out the residual aspects of the original mandate under significantly different political circumstances. What we would like to see is that agreements are carried out, integration is completed, and the constitution is drafted in a timely manner so we can finish the job we were given.

So do you think a new mandate, that reflects the changed political context, would help the UN perform its role better?

It is up to Nepal, the parties to the peace process, and the Security Council to determine that. As the UN, we respond to the needs of the country. There should be no sense that the UN has any different agenda or that UNMIN wants to stay on in Nepal. We are not looking for any additional business. But anything that spurs progress is welcome. To maintain the cantonments indefinitely, under UNMIN’s light monitoring arrangement, while political tensions and the possibility of confrontation increase, is definitely not ideal. While UNMIN’s monitoring has been an important factor and no serious breakdown has occurred, this arrangement was designed for a different period when parties shared greater mutual trust and confidence. The sooner there is progress on integration and related aspects and cantonments can be closed the better.

The Secretary General’s recent report says that a national unity government is desirable. There has been criticism that this marks disrespect for Nepal’s domestic political processes.

“We are not looking for any additional business”

The criticism is not justified in any way. The report actually says “remains desirable”. All the major Nepali actors have emphasised that a national unity government is important. In fact, PM Nepal told me in June that he was trying to get all the key parties into government. All the report does is reflect the general desire of the parties, and it is consistent with what the Secretary General has repeatedly said in the past about governance by consensus, maintaining the unity of the parties, etc. The report does not make any suggestion about the specifics of such a government. That is obviously for the parties to decide. To interpret this positive encouragement in the direction of a commonly held ideal as being a partisan view is not acceptable at all.

January is two months away, and there may be another request for UNMIN’s extension. Will there be a roll-over of the mandate?

I’m sure the Security Council will be grappling with the issue of the future of the mission this Friday. It is up to the parties to decide the nature of UN assistance they request. The PM had given strong and encouraging indications that after the Dasain and Tihar holidays, there would be maximum effort to make progress on integration. There is time, and while it may be physically difficult to complete the process by January, with trust and confidence, progress is still possible.

What would you say to the Maoists, who have just started an agitation?

Our consistent message to all parties has been to adhere to solemn agreements, implement commitments, utilise the constitutional and political mechanisms available to them to resolve problems and to refrain from taking extra-constitutional steps that would impede rather than facilitate progress. This is the responsibility of all parties, and this is what we continue to say to the Maoists.

Have you been talking to India about the stalemate?

Do you think neighbours can play a more constructive role to turn the situation around?

Nepal’s neighbours are of course key partners, and India is a major player. Our consultation with them is quite important. They know our concerns about the present drift in the peace process. They have a closer engagement with stakeholders in Nepal. Our position is that the international community, including India, should send a message to Nepali actors that the peace process enjoys the support of the international community, and that the fate of the peace process is in their hands, and whatever the international community does is to support the peace process and not to undermine it. There is complete respect for the national ownership of the process.
Good ad sense

Michael Maedel is president of J. Walter Thompson (JWT) Company, the global business communications company. Nepali Times caught up with him when he was in Kathmandu earlier this week.

Nepali Times: As a global company operating in almost 100 countries with about 200 offices, how do you maintain relations with all your clients? Maedel: Our company has been around for 150 years. Yet there has never been a time in which we are as competitive as today. This means our professional standards have to be very high. Our standards have to be the global standards.

Though we have been pioneers in using new technologies and getting into new markets, we find that our clients are ahead of us. They keep us on our toes. Though we are a global company with offices around the world, we have come to see ourselves as a network of talents that is there to serve our clients. Our clients do not want generic business communication solutions. They want customised solutions and our job is to deliver.

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Artha Beed

Nepalis: This Beed estimates that the number of Nepalis living in the United States has crossed the half-million mark, with a high concentration in the east coast. More and more Nepalis are seen on trains, in restaurants and bars. They are also very successful in the competitive Asia Pacific market has demonstrated, though recognition is nice, as our work for Nokia and Kit Kat help their clients.

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New branch

Bank of Kathmandu opened its 32nd branch in Ubbare on 28 October. With 32 branches and six counters, the bank now provides services in 38 locations in Nepal.

Sky scraping

The 23rd AGM of Standard Chartered Bank convened on 4 November. The Bank’s Operating Profit and Net Profit for fiscal year 2008/2009 was Rs 1.51 billion and Rs 1.03 billion respectively.

Hassle free

Everest Bank started its SMS bill payment service for NTC mobile users. Customers can make monthly bill payments or recharge their mobiles by texting 5677.

Money transfers

United Remit and Everest Bank have led up to provide money transfer services to Money Gram.

Missions University of India.

For Nepalis, migrating has been a way of life. They have been doing it for over two centuries, mainly because they see no hope in Nepal. Politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen alike often prefer their children to stay out of the country they themselves have helped shape. However, interest in Nepal, especially among second generation Nepali in the US, in building. The Asia Center at Boston University has hosted speakers who have eked out a living in conflict-torn Nepal, and a group of students from Harvard Business School is coming to Nepal on a trekking cum exposure visit. Everyone, it seems, is interested to know more about a country uniquely situated between two galloping economies. For the bipali community here, the issues haven’t changed. Many play out the Nepali penchant for politicking in associations, but others are less interested in becoming an association president than getting work done. For instance, the Chalpah Group in Boston continues to help the Nepali community there interact with visitors and scholars from Nepal, and is successful largely because it is informal and unstructured. The same goes for the Washington Nepali Forum, which continues to host interesting programs. Perhaps more such efforts are needed. Debates on migration hosted globally, have stopped contemplating its merits. They realise that in a globalising world political boundaries are losing relevance. The success of the European Union and now talk of an Asian Economic Union show that as communication becomes easier, cultural differences will dilute, and a homogeneous culture that relies heavily on technology will grow. Nepal will slowly become where Nepalis are and it will be immaterial where a person resides. So welcome to the building of Nepal in the United States.  
www.arthareed.com

by such groups are always interesting. Some, ‘punchate consultant’ types who think they know everything about Nepal, need constant reminding that migration is by no stretch new for Nepal. Many Nepalis migrated to Assam and Darjeeling as far back as the mid-nineteenth century. India and China, which receive the highest number of migrants and remittances

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**Decision under pressure**

**Daman Nath Dhungana in Nepal, 8 November**

Willingly or not, our political leaders are polarising the country. Maoist leaders launched the current street protest because they were under pressure to do so from the majority of party members who supported the idea. The political leadership isn’t focused on safeguarding the historic changes we’ve achieved in the past couple of years. A consensus government is necessary to end the political confrontation which, in turn, requires that all past agreements, including the 12 point agreement, be reviewed without scrapping old agreements.

A new, reviewed agreement should mandate a national unity government and forbid any opposition. A common mechanism should be developed to resolve the political disputes and misunderstandings to help run the government smoothly. The same mechanism can decide the forms of the government.

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**“Two-facedness has caused uncertainty”**

Gokulpatra’s Ram Prasad Acharya spoke to former United Nations Deputy Secretary General Kul Chand Gautam on 31 October about the country’s political situation:

Violence and armed struggle will never bring about peace and prosperity. No political party can succeed through armed revolution, which in any case has best short lived. Political parties should understand that people are fed up with violence and will shun anyone who tries to sow communal discord. This isn’t the time for conflict. The parties ought to cooperate to write a constitution that addresses ordinary people’s aspirations. The constitution should eliminate past inequalities, discrimination and misunderstanding in order to empower the people.

As the biggest party in the CA, the Maoists should be more responsible and create an environment conducive to consensus. Instead, they have disrupted the House, protested on the streets, all in order to impose their ideology on others. They talk of a People’s Republic with their cadres but express a commitment to democracy with the international community. This two-facetedness has caused greater uncertainty. The other so-called democratic parties haven’t behaved democratically either. It’s time they sorted out their own problems instead of blaming each other.

We need honest politicians. The Maoists claim they want peace but have a finger on the trigger. This is nonsense. We should renounce violence for peace. To make a country democratic, peaceful and progressive, the political culture should be democratic and progressive first.

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**In the mood to resign**

**Tarun, 26 October**

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and Defense Minister Bidya Bhandari aren’t talking to one another because of differences over a proposal mooted by Bhandari to revise the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The PM has refused to lend the proposal official government sanction. The agreement, made when the monarchy was still extant, places many limitations on the army. Bhandari and every political party except the Maoists want these limitations removed. However, the PM has not given her the permission to put this proposal to the cabinet. The PM ended cabinet meetings prematurely on each of the three occasions Bhandari attempted to do so.

Flustered, Bhandari is now considering resigning. But under KP Oli’s advice, she has held off doing so for a couple of days because there are fears that the PM may go softer on the Maoists after her resignation. A few days ago, when PM Nepal toured army headquarters with Bipin Koirala and Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar, the Defence Minister wasn’t even informed. According to UML sources, Bhandari will resign whenever the talks between KP Oli and party president Pushpa Kamal Dahal conclude.

Khadim (who left for Delhi on Tuesday) and Oli have had several secret meetings. There are rumours that they are looking for someone to replace PM Nepal from outside of the Maoist party.
**Himal Khabarpatrika’s constitution caravan reached the southern city of Rajbiraj recently.**

Himal Khabarpatrika: What are the challenges to overcome before the constitution can be written?

Ashok Chaudhary (advocate): All the parties have not accepted the political changes wrought by the Jana Andolan and the Madhesis movement. Because we don’t yet have an environment for languages and cultures other than Nepali, the basis for a balanced constitution is not in place.

Amarkanth Jha (professor): When the South African constitution was written, political parties and constitution experts were in agreement on how to go about it. We too need to have a common political mechanism.

Raja Pawan (rights worker): There can be no constitution without political agreement. We have to address the demands for ethnicity based provinces. The government needs to hold talks with the Madhesi parties and constitution experts.

Suman Raj Pyakurel (UML): The constitution can’t be written while the Maoists still have an army. This needs to be addressed before we move ahead.

What do you think of the demand for One Madhes One Pradesh? On what basis should provinces be designated?

Himmat Singh (senior advocate): It should be All Madhes One Pradesh. The constitution can have provisions to maintain Nepal’s territorial integrity.

Hasim Ansari (National Muslim Front): We Muslims don’t consider ourselves Madhesis, even if we live in the Madhes. The Muslim community of the 10 districts where there is a Muslim majority says: under no condition will the demand for One Madhes One Pradesh be granted.

Yukti Lal Marik (Dom Upliftment Society): There will be no place for Dalits in One Madhes One Pradesh. We need proportional representation and participation in all parts of the country.

Suman Raj Pyakurel: There are no majorities in any part of the country, so ethnic federalism doesn’t make sense. Provinces should be designated on the basis of whether they can survive in the long term.

Shiva Hari Bhattarai (journalist): Madhesi parties are playing politics with the idea of One Madhes One Pradesh and there is a lack of trust between the state and the Madhesis.

Kishore Kumar Yadav (student leader): Madhesi students want a Madhes state with the right to self-determination. If the Constituent Assembly doesn’t fulfill our demands then there will be another revolution.

Hindu state or secular state?

Sabita Koirala (women’s rights worker): A secular state is the need of the moment.

Hasim Ansari: The Muslim community does not favour either a secular or a Hindu state. We only want religious freedom. If we had a Muslim majority we would dream of an Islamic state. So if the Hindu majority in Nepal desires a Hindu state then we would not oppose it.

Himmat Singh: Since Nepal was declared a secular state by the interim constitution, people should be able to vote definitively on the matter.

How should we decide on language rights?

Yukti Lal Marik: The national language should be Nepali. Which ever language is predominant in particular regions should be the language of government there.

Bhogendra Chaudhary (MJF-Democratic): The main thing is that we should understand one another. Research should be conducted to determine which language is the most spoken and understood so it can be declared the national language. Mother tongues and regional languages should be included in primary education.

Surya Nath Yadav (UCPN-Maoist): Language is related to development. Whichever language unites the country, is the most developed and easier to access education in will become the national language. If English is spoken the most tomorrow then it could become the national language.

What has the CA done to help your cause?

The Committee to Protect Minority Rights recognises gay marriage and allows positive discrimination in favor of gay people.

How interested are you in the issues of the ‘People’s Assembly’?

The Committee to Protect Minority Rights recognises gay marriage and allows positive discrimination in favor of gay people.

Who do you think is responsible for obstructing the constitution writing process?

Don’t you think the Maoists have delayed the process by focusing on issues such as changing the flag?

Some think the flag should better reflect Nepal’s diversity, but others don’t want it changed. I think it should be changed.

Perhaps the Maoist obstruction of parliament is to blame?

When the legislature is obstructed, the CA certainly be affected. That’s why the legislature needs to be run properly.
P Kasthamandap’s computer servicing station in Kumaripati, a Dr. Frankenstein den of busted motherboards and meticulous repairwork, is at the heart of a new trend sweeping through Kathmandu: the emergence of the super-personal, customisable laptop.

Take 20-year-old engineering student and football fan Sameer, who has spiky hair, a bookbag slung over his shoulder and a blue HP laptop bearing the Manchester United insignia tucked under his arm. When Sameer ordered his laptop, he asked for specs—techie lingo for computer specifications—that would enable quality video gaming, including special video and graphics cards and a large monitor.

“I’m crazy about computer games and football, and I’d like everything I own, including this computer, to reflect that,” he says. “Sure, custom laptops are a little pricey, but they’re definitely worth it.”

People like Sameer are willing to spend that little extra to cultivate a digital persona, which they exhibit in social networking accounts, blogs, gaming avatars and elsewhere. Indeed, local distributors of laptops have banked on people like Sameer for the last six or seven years, in which period laptops have boomed in popularity: “We sell about 500 laptops a month. The price of notebooks has gone down significantly,” says Rajan Man Tuladhar of CAS Trading House.

“Part of the reason why laptops have done so well is that it is trendy to have the latest models,” says Sunjay Golcha of Neoteric, which distributes Apple, HP and Wipro laptops locally. “A Macbook will be carried around with a lot more pride than some Chinese model,” adds Ribhu Agarwal of IT Trade Revolution.

New models hit the Nepali market every 3-6 months, which is about the global average. “There are already 12 models of Japanese Fujitsu laptops in Nepal,” says Anil Agrawal of...
SHTC International, sole distributor of the brand in Nepal. Laptops have also profited from Nepal’s taxing load-shedding schedule. “Laptops pretty much became popular among young professionals when loadshedding started as they can usually last through electricity cuts,” explains Sujit Malla of HP Kasthamandap, which distributes HP merchandise. Workers in private companies often prefer laptops with smaller monitors and modest but robust hard drives. In comparison there are few laptops in government offices, but demand there is picking up as well. But branded laptops face a stiff challenge from assembled computers and the grey market. Assembled computers were the first computers to appear in Nepal and remain popular because they are cheap and easily customisable. Fake laptops are also cheap but have few other virtues, yet dominate as much as 50 per cent of the local market. You can recognise them from their names — a “compak” instead of a “compaq,” for instance. “I have had so many customers coming back to us and buying the genuine product after they have tried fake products,” says Niraj Thapa of Harati Computer Services.

A warranty and the extra service cost a significant Rs 2,000-5,000, but sales figures suggest many believe it’s worth the money. “We repair any hardware problems of Acer computers within four hours,” declares Kabindra Jhonse of Mercantile. Optimism about laptop sales, however, should be tempered by the reality that laptops aren’t quite as popular here as they are elsewhere. “Although laptop sales are rising, desktops sales will also increase, especially in banks where data security is extremely important,” says Sujan Mool of World Distribution Nepal.

When you buy the genuine article you have peace of mind because you have a high-quality product with a warranty,” says Ninj Thapa of Harati Computer Services. A warranty and the extra service cost a significant Rs 2,000-5,000, but sales figures suggest many believe it’s worth the money. “We repair any hardware problems of Acer computers within four hours,” declares Kabindra Jhonse of Mercantile. Optimism about laptop sales, however, should be tempered by the reality that laptops aren’t quite as popular here as they are elsewhere. “Although laptop sales are rising, desktops sales will also increase, especially in banks where data security is extremely important,” says Sujan Mool of World Distribution Nepal.

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Fading light

More people than there are tigers in Nepal’s dwindling wilds massed at the Soaltee last week for a round-robin of meetings, workshops, press briefings and declarations. Their mission: defining actions to save wild tigers from extinction, with the immediate goal of doubling the population of wild tigers in the next decade. Their motto: saving tigers is our test, if we pass, we get to keep the planet. The global tiger workshop was the first of its kind, and laid the groundwork for the Year of the Tiger, 2010. It’s about time. It hasn’t quite been the Century of the Tiger. In the last 100 years, their numbers have plummeted from about 100,000 to 4,000 today, thanks to human encroachment into tiger habitats, misguided enactments of masculinity, and the ignoble pretence range states like China maintain in allowing illegal tiger farms to flourish. It’s culture, it’s medicine, insist advocates of tiger farms, and we could reduce the demand for wild tigers by farming them. Bullshit. It’s not culture, it’s not medicine, it’s their economy, stupid. What was the Cultural Revolution for if not to root out practices that threaten the wellbeing of society? It was for the little red book, perhaps, not the ever-expanding IUCN red list. So is the tiger then a useful member of our earthly society, beyond fueling the Chinese obsession with dismembering endangered species? We’re told it’s a keystone species, an apex species, meaning it has a disproportionate effect on the health of the ecosystems within which it lives. Currently, 121 breeding tigers prowl the confines of Chitwan National Park. But if the tigers were to go, if Chitwan were to go, what would it mean for you and for me?

No tigers in my garden, thank you

One can debate the pros and cons of tigers to local communities living around national parks such as Chitwan, but it’s clear the disappearance of this species would be damaging to sub-tropical tourism in Nepal. Economics aside, it’s perhaps this tourism that explains what it is the tiger means to us.

Let’s face it, the tiger is a celebrity, plain and simple. The smallest of chances to view the planet’s most powerful terrestrial predator draws crowds to enclaves such as Chitwan. Alas, his domain is much diminished. Local communities have had to bear the consequences. Six children were killed by tigers in the run-up to the festival, ‘Separating myth from reality – status of women’, provided a reasonably accurate teaser.

The show was raw, spontaneous and captivating. It was everything one would expect from a Tracey Rose performance. Her slightly disturbing, sonically wild video installation, currently being displayed as part of the international art festival, ‘Separating myth from reality – status of women’, provided a reasonably accurate teaser.

Tracey Rose reaches for the sky

The South African did not disappoint, but nonetheless betrayed a superficial understanding of local culture, a trend that seems to be too easily forgivable in contemporary (dare I say ‘post-modern’) art. Tracey Rose’s performance at Moksh on Sunday embodied the satire and irony of being an artist, her role as a guest artist, and the touristic nature of her presence in Nepal. These very real, very personal experiences that are a part of her being in Nepal came out as genuine and captivating. However, in terms of an understanding of Nepali culture and traditions, she reiterated the standard schema of western pseudo-intellectualism that backpackers and development workers alike tend to adopt. This could have been intentional, but given the sincerity of the performance, it is highly unlikely. However, in failing to understand what it means to be a goddess, she does capture the essence of the modern day hyper-real televised goddess.

During her time in Nepal, Tracey Rose will be playing out the role of the goddess – not the mythical eastern goddesses, but the mythical goddesses of the silver screen – Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie. The simple life came to the third world and unsurprisingly didn’t understand it at all. Tracey Rose tried to be a goddess and for 15 minutes on the sunken stage in Moksh she became one, but not the kind she was looking for. But it is perhaps the irony of her failed quest that made the performance worthwhile. Undoubtedly a gifted performer, her dedication to her role as an artist is her strongest asset. A performance like hers is a rarity in Nepal and those who missed it missed a display of the true potency of art.
SURESH RAJ NEUPANE
in BARDIYA

Chitwan’s loss is Bardiya’s gain. Going by the tourists thronging to Bardiya these days, that is the way it looks.

Chitwan is a world-renowned national park and has become synonymous with wildlife safaris like Kenya’s Masai Mara. A key role has been played by resorts like Tiger Tops, which have promoted Chitwan internationally since the 1970s.

However, Tiger Tops and seven other resorts inside Chitwan have been closed since early this year because of a government move to re-evaluate the impact they are having on park ecology. The dispute has been complicated by rivalry between resorts inside and outside the park.

But 450km away, Bardiya National Park has become a beneficiary of Chitwan’s closures. Bardiya has only 22 rhinos and 19 tigers and a dozen or so wild elephants, but wildlife viewing is said to be easier here because of the sparse undergrowth.

“Last year this time we had 40 per cent occupancy, this year we are fully booked,” says Gauri Mallakar of Tiger Tops Karnali, a branch of Tiger Tops Chitwan. She adds: “Tourists love this place, it has a unique ecology.”

Indeed, these days flights to Nepalganj are full of tourists on wildlife safaris to Bardiya, most of them British and American.

Nancy Reid from the United States, getting off an elephant after a safari, was breathless with excitement: “It was incredible, we saw rhinos up close, I’m going to come back.”

Conservationist Ramesh Thapa of Bardiya National Park says the park sees a lot of repeat tourists because of its unique habitat. “Also, Bardiya is not as crowded as Chitwan, and the park is really wild,” he explains.

More than 500 tourists came to Bardiya in August-October, compared to only 250 at the same time last year. But hoteliers like Mohan Aryal of Forest Hideaway Hotel and Cottage says Bardiya could do much better if the government invested in infrastructure.

“The electricity, telephones, direct flights, and bus routes from Pokhara and Kathmandu would double the number of tourists coming here,” he says.

Bardiya National Park is home to about 30 species of mammals including the Bengal tiger, the one-horned rhino, wild elephants, swamp deer and black buck.

Gift to the earth

At the inaugural session of the Global Tiger Workshop held last week, Minister for Forests and Soil Conservation Deepak Bohara announced the government’s plans to add 898 square kilometres to Bardiya National Park, effectively doubling its size. Under the proposed plans, Bardiya would extend east towards Dang, taking in hilly terrain (left), with the Mahendra highway as its southern border. At 1866 square kilometres, it would become the largest national park in Nepal.

The expansion of the national park could be a significant boost to tiger conservation efforts in Nepal. An additional 549 square kilometres of forest would be included, while the remainder would be part of a buffer zone. Thirteen VDCs of Dang district will be included. Some 50 additional staff, including army personnel, will be needed to manage the enlarged park.

Back in 2000, the then prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala pledged to double the park’s size as a ‘gift to the earth’, but the deteriorating security situation put the plan on the backburner.

Minister Bohara is confident that this time around there will be no such obstacles as the groundwork has been done and funding is available.

Bardiya National Park is home to about 30 species of mammals including the Bengal tiger, the one-horned rhino, wild elephants, swamp deer and black buck.

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Over the last few weeks, I’ve been bombarded with questions about my thoughts on President Barack Obama winning the Nobel Peace Prize—so much that I’m starting to feel like I’m defending a relative.

My first reaction is to say I’m very proud. He’s certainly deserving of the Nobel Committee’s claim that “only very rarely has a person to the same extent captured the world’s attention and given its people hope for a better future.” But is capturing the world’s attention enough to justify receiving this prestigious honour?

There is a sense that the reservoir of global goodwill candidate Obama built up on his run to the White House is starting to ebb. After all, leading America is no cakewalk. Obama is now the tough talking face of a country fighting two of the most brutal armed contests on earth. Yet he has won a prize for peace?

Was the Nobel Committee bold enough to imagine the honour would weigh on his conscience when contemplating America’s next steps in Afghanistan or Iraq? If that was the case, they were way off track. National security and foreign policy decisions are about national interests and any prize is unlikely to have an influence on the decisions of a global superpower, even if US foreign policy has adopted a much-needed multilateral approach.

No, in my opinion President Obama won the Peace Prize for something else, something that I think will intrinsically transform the landscape of modern America, and if the United States is a beacon for others, then the world.

To grow up black in America has never been easy. The legacy of colour is chequered with pain, and struggle. Often treated as second-class citizens, black Americans still live segregated lives in some sense. Award-winning African American producer Lee Louis Daniels says that before Obama was elected blacks in America had two separate dialogues running in their heads. There was one for the black world, and another for the rest of the world, the white world. The latter was designed for success, it was superficial, and didn’t ring true.

The Declaration of Independence, written in 1776 by Thomas Jefferson, boldly declares: “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.” Yet throughout the country’s short history race has divided America and resulted in its greatest social challenges. The Civil War (1861-1865), fought between the anti-slavery North and the pro-slavery South, remains the nation’s bloodiest conflict.

We stand at a similar crossroads today in Nepal. The country’s leaders, civil society and citizens are struggling to decide on a roadmap for the future. The decisions of today are likely to affect the future of generations to come. So those who are impatient for results should remember that from the time Thomas Jefferson penned those immortal words, it took Barack Obama 233 years to get to this milestone on America’s long walk to freedom.

So what does it really mean to have a black man elected as President of the United States? My hope is that this is the beginning of the end in the long journey towards a colour-blind nation. For this, Barack Obama stands in the company of the other giants who have won this award, and for this alone I believe he deserves the prize.

Richard Ragan is Country Director for the World Food Programme (WFP) in Nepal.
Living between nervous giants

KUNDA DIXIT in NEW DELHI

Nepal’s founding king called the country a yam between two rocks, and just as it was during the Great Game, recent strains in India-China relations are affecting the state of play in Kathmandu politics.

Complicating things further is the barely concealed schism within the New Delhi political establishment between conservative advisers close to Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh’s custodians of the bureaucracy on everything from climate change and dealing with a newly assertive China.

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Silently but speedily China is dumping arms arms to Nepal, the Times of India reported on Thursday.

Although Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai appeared relaxed at a meeting of Kailamali-based editors on Wednesday, he was hard pressed to explain comments he made in a revolutionary website last week in which he threatened a “final assault against the enemy to complete the revolution.”

As he explained his reasons in an interview with the World People’s Resistance Movement (www.wprmbritain.org) in which he predicted “another round of armed clashes” on Thursday, Bhattarai admitted “contradictory statements from our leaders is one of our weaknesses”.

At the meeting with chief editors Bhattarai didn’t just appear moderate, but back-pedalled furiously on his party line. “Some of our leaders have a dogmatic ideology, but that is a peripheral group,” he said. “We will soon be announcing our party line. We want to assure you that it will be a peaceful movement.”

Bhattarai was asked about the declaration of 13 ethnically-demarcated ‘federal republics’, and admitted that it was not going according to our plan,” he admitted, “It is going the wrong way.”

Bhattarai also came across as accommodating on a compromise with the other parties. “Some kind of common resolution from parliament or a gesture from the president would remove the need for protests,” he said. “We want to bring closure to one of the president’s move in a manner that would be acceptable to all.”

All this was in stark contrast to Bhattarai’s recent public speeches and his 26 October WPRM interview, excerpts from which follow:

Nepal is getting entangled in New Delhi’s Sinophobia

India and China reaffirmed their agreement on spheres of influence at a historic approachment between Deng Xiaoping and Rajiv Gandhi in Beijing in December 1988. That deal appears to have unravelled in the past year due to tension between the two countries.

Suspensions of Chinese intent, and the defeat of the Communist Party of India, have resulted in an attempt by hardliners in the New Delhi establishment to re-evaluate its accommodation to put the border dispute on the sidelines of an ASEAN summit in Thailand did clear the air a bit, and there are indications that Premier Hu re-emphasised the need for political unity in Nepal during his brief handshake with Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Sandung in October.

“India and China are just pretending to shadow box over Nepal,” said one senior foreign policy specialist here. “Their rivalry is elsewhere and essentially both would prefer not to have the headache of a failed state between them.”

Indeed, some Indian academics say China-India ties can mirror China-Japan relations where trade and diplomatic ties continue to grow despite territorial disputes and geopolitical rivalry. China is now one of India’s top three trading partners and they do cooperate on issues like global trade and climate change.

What has prompted India and China to seek leverage in Nepal, say some-Nepal-watchers here, may perhaps have less to do with their geopolitical rivalry than the deadlock in Nepal’s peace process and the fluid political situation in Kathmandu. A weak state will tempt both neighbours to crush their national agenda: China to seek a government less reluctant to deliver on its need for water and energy.

But ultimately, “both China and India realise that this will only happen when there is a strong and stable government in Kathmandu,” explained the foreign policy specialist. And the answers to that conundrum lie neither in India, nor in China.

WPRM: Why did the Maoist party enter the peace process and attempt to change society through Constituent Assembly forces? Baburam Bhattarai: Our understanding was that after abolishing the monarchy and establishing a bourgeois democratic republic, the proletarian party would take the initiative and launch the struggle towards the New Democratic Revolution. We knew the bourgeois forces, after the abolition of the monarchy, would try to resist, and our main contradiction then would be with the bourgeois democratic parties. A new field of struggle would start.

Now we are preparing for the final stage of the completion of the New Democratic Revolution. In a few months, there will be some intervention from the imperialist and expansionist forces. We may again be forced to have another round of armed clashes. We have decided to again focus on the basic masses of the people both in urban and rural areas. In the decisive stage of confrontation with the reactionary forces we could again combine our bases in the rural areas and our support in the urban areas for a final assault against the enemy to complete the revolution.

Can you explain how the UCPN(M) understands the nature of the state in its transitional period? Can the New Democratic Revolution be completed through the horizons of an election?

A sort of flux has been created, it has not been stabilised. Within this nature of the state, we think it will be easier for the revolutionary forces to intervene and further destabilise the state, putting pressure on it from outside the state which can be smashed to make a New Democratic state.

What we are talking about is not organising elections within the bourgeois state, we are talking about after the revolution in a New Democratic or socialististic framework, where there will be certain constitutional provisions whereby the reactionaries, imperialists and criminal forces will not be allowed to participate. This concept of competition is only a general concept, the actual mode of that competition we have still to work out.
ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- Art Show by Jennifer Fuller at the Indigo Gallery, 6 November, 841692692

EVENTS

- AWON Christmas Bazaar at Hyatt Hotel, 10AM-4PM on 5 December
- See Inside, documentary screening at Documentary Open Skool, Boudhadwar, 6 November, 5PM
- The Silence, movie screening at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe on 11 November, 6PM onwards, 4428549
- Nepali Art: In Present Scenario, documentary screening on 28 November, 2-30-3:30PM and 5-6PM, Yala Maya Kendra, Katmandu.
- Patan Press Club, meets every Thursday at Dhoskai Café, 6PM, 5522113
- Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Tai Chi 10-11.30AM Saturday, Yoga 8.30-9.20AM and Meditation 5-6PM weekdays, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402

MUSIC

- The Best Live Music in Town by MusicoLOGY at House of Music, Thamel, 6-7 November, 9851050166
- Gypsy Jazz with the Hari Maharjan Project at Delces de France, 12 November, 7.30PM, Jazz evening every Wednesday, 4469036.
- Desmond O'Flatterly and Anthony Correll at Lazimpat Gallery Café, 4 Nov, 4428549
- Baja gaja every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchok, 7.30PM onwards, 5526212
- Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4422788
- Sunday Jazz brunch, enjoy a relaxing Sunday in The Terrace at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu with barbeque and live jazz by Inner Groove from 12.30-3.30PM, 4412034
- 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, 7-10.45PM
- Nepali Ghajals and songs at D’Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30PM onwards, 4469869
- Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7PM at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4415122

DINING

- Arabic Food Festival, experience the finest cuisine from the Arabic world till 7 Nov at The Cafe, 6.30PM onwards, 4491234
- Live continental BBQ Fiesta, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30PM everyday
- Norwegian Salmon every day 6PM onwards at Ritz Restaurant, till 20 Nov, 4491234
- Chocolate, Coffee and Caramel, every evening at The Lounge, 4.30-6.30PM, 4491234
- Wine and cheese, every Friday & Saturday at The Lounge, 5-8PM, 4491234
- A café’s café, Chokhama Café, Patan Dhoka, 5522113
- Jazzybel Café, relaunched at Jhamshikel, 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 Crown Plaza, 4273999
- Kakeori, for biryani, curries and kebabs, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 7-10-65PM
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4260370
- Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle East at The Cafe, Hyatt Regency, 4491234
- Topdy guitarist items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Garinish, 4436318
- Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 600, 4412999
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Cafe, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4425341
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Crazy Gurung, Rs 999, at The Shambhala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards, 4412999
- Himalayan Rainbow Trout at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4215068
- Tiger for Breakfast, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4273999
- Shapa Dawa, Restaurant, for vegetarian creations & dry oven pizza at Bodhata Shupa, 4480262
- Gokarna Forest Resort for a variety of sizzlers at Tripti bar, 4451212

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

Famous musician Arjun (Ayjay Dergan) invites his childhood friend Mannu (Sahran Khan) to join his tour in Europe. Mannu, who started out by performing at weddings, suddenly rises to stardom and Arjun begins to envy him. To add to the mess, Mannu ideates the girl of Arjun’s dreams (Ansh Thadhikar) from right under his nose. The rest of the movie revolves around Arjun’s scheme to destroy Mannu, but later he realizes his mistake and goes on to salvage his friendship.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal
www.jainepal.com
RECONNECTING: Nepali Congress leaders at the party’s General Convention at the National Academy Hall in Kamaladi on Monday.

SPOTLIGHT: Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal at an interaction program called ‘Sajha Sawal’ organised by BBC World Service Trust Nepal on Friday.


MAKING MERRY: School children dancing during a Maoist sit-in protest program at Kathmandu District Administration office on Wednesday.

HIGH ALERT: Police positioned around Bhadrakali on Friday. Security forces have been put on high alert following the announcement of Maoist street protests.
The talk of the town this past week has been the flying visit to Lumbini by the Sri Lankan president Raja Paksa. It is interesting that even though his name means “pro-king”, Raja Paksa also gave the Bi-Paksa anti-king leader of the opposition a blow-by-blow account of how he destroyed the Tamil Tigers back home in Serendib.

Needless to say, the Awesome wasn’t amused. But El Commandante got the message because he’s been getting cold feet about his andolan. In the past few days he has called off the asinine airport bund, dashed off for a Girja tea party and then carried on to a dinner party with the other parties at KP’s (Oli, not Bhattarai). Strange that while his cadre are staging war dances in front of municipality buildings nationwide their chiefain is whining and dining with the enemy.

Anyway, to get back to Raja Paksa, our fly on the wall tells us that the Sri Lankans warmed our officials not to trust the Scandies and the UN, reminding them how he threw the Norwegians out of his peace process because they turned into Tiger conservationists. There were knowing nods all around the room from senior advisers who now suspect Moon and Kathmandu-based Europinkos of being Baddie-sympathisers.

Let’s clarify this once and for all so UNMIN doesn’t get all hepped up about its importance here. The ambassadors who looked into the containers last month all saw rusty old 303s and SLRs, and everyone knows that we know that they know the high-powered assault rifles are all stashed away somewhere else. In fact, Baddie leaders openly admitted as much this week. Even after the minors were disqualified, the cantonments don’t contain guerrillas, the real fighters are now called YCL and they are providing security for the andolan. Strange that while his cadre are staging war dances in front of municipality buildings nationwide their chiefain is whining and dining with the enemy.

As far as the Ass is concerned, the first sign that this country has “civilian supremacy” will be when the Maiti Ghar Mandala to Tundikhel shortcut is re-opened as the public thoroughfare that it once was. The army occupied the road during the Gyanendra reign, citing security reasons much in the same way that it has militarised most of Tundikhel. If the Baddies had any brains, they’d not have polluted the streets outside Bir Hospital with asphalt soot from their rankay julus on Sunday and given half the capital an asthma attack: they’d have taken the torch rally straight from the Mandala to Bhadrakali and reclaimed the shortcut for the people.

Looks like all prime minister aspirants are rolling up their sleeves. By now, they’ve heard that Makunay became prime minister because he donated a she-buffalo to a Brahmin on a full moon day. And then there is Narum (“Me Xero”?) Kaji Kamred who thinks the epic clash between BRB and PKD will cancel out both, and he has a good shot at being in Baluwatar once the current andolan plays itself out. The wild card in all this is Comrade Cloudy, who seems to be lying in wait to ambush the post for himself.