Hardliners in each of the three big parties are making it more difficult for the top leadership to find a compromise power-sharing formula, prolonging the stalemate and threatening the peace process. This could be why senior leaders all sounded conciliatory after their numerous one-on-one and joint meetings this week, but came out with uncompromising stands the very next day.

“The problem is not between the political parties, it is within the parties themselves,” one senior adviser told Nepali Times.

For example, the UML has an almost right-wing faction, while the NC has a leftist fringe that is acceptable to the Maoists.

The Maoists, weakened by serious internal rifts, need an acceptable face-saving way out of their ‘civilian supremacy’ stance. Conservatives in the NC and UML, however, smell blood and don’t want to give the Maoists an easy way out. Although the Kailali incident this week and the vicious Maoist attack on Rukum journalist Tika Bista have sharpened the rhetoric on both sides, the three were said to have edged closer to a formula for an all-party coalition.

Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai represents the pragmatic aspect of the Maoist hierarchy, although one wouldn’t guess that from what he has to tell us in an extensive interview this week. His clarification that ethnic autonomous regions are just ‘symbolic’ betrays his party’s need to extricate itself from an issue that is spinning out of the leadership’s control.

Peeling away the rhetoric, one senses his hurry to resolve the political deadlock to pay attention to the economy and to development. “Our society is afflicted with poverty, unemployment, discrimination, dependency. We have to do away with these as soon as possible. We have to hasten our pace,” Bhattarai says.

When asked about how his party’s labour militancy is hurting industry, he replies: “National investors and multinational companies are most welcome to invest in Nepal and contribute to the development of the country. We have no policy to discourage investment in the country.”

Excerpts on p3, full interview on www.nepalitimes.com
Nepal in Copenhagen
Ten steps to a new carbon-neutral Nepal

country by 2030: currently Nepal consumes a tiny amount of energy per capita and has a very small carbon footprint. If we can make concerted and determined effort now, it is quite conceivable that we can build a carbon-neutral future.

2. Develop a master plan for energy independence: at a time when we have prolonged daily blackouts and nearly half the population rely on expensive imported petroleum products for most of our modern amenities, energy independence may seem an unrealistic prospect. But Nepal has vast untapped water, solar and wind energy resources, and people power. We certainly have the potential to become energy independent if we develop ambitious, long-term master plan.

3. Switch to Nepal-based renewable energy sources for major infrastructural projects and industrial projects as we develop ambitious new national reconstruction and development plans. In fact, if the political parties be allowed by pragmatists in all three areas, we can easily do so.

4. Offer generous tax incentives for vehicles and machinery using non-polluting energy sources: although we are set to open new bus routes, we are not doing enough to encourage electrically operated or hybrid vehicles and industrial equipment and machinery. It is time for us to take the lead in this area.

5. Create a new culture of non-violence: we must end the culture of violence spreading across the country. Non-violence must be a key criterion in protecting our precious natural resources.

6. Invest in children: we must protect our environment to ensure that our children will be able to inherit a world that has not turned out less than what their parents had hoped for. Let us reach out to them, and educate our children about the beauty of Nepal, to uplift their spirit and future generations that we must build a carbon-neutral new Nepal. Like all progressive and prosperous countries, let us invest heavily in the survival, protection and development of our children, and inculcate in them an abiding love of nature and the environment.

Crisis of the Week

As this country lurches from one crisis to another, the government is too busy fire-fighting to plan or implement anything. One such crisis was the violence in the forests of Kailali, where we witnessed a combustible mixture of politics and populism. It is now becoming clear from field reports that the Maoists deliberately mobilised tens of thousands of people they had promised land to in the past.

Some were genuinely landless, some ex-Maoists, but many were people bussed in from afar. The timing was unseemly. What the Maoists perhaps had bargained for, and five people paid for with their lives, was that the government was determined to forcibly stop the land-grabbing that has rapidly spread across the country, especially in the western Tarai.

There is a moral to the story of the Maoists copying the NC and UML in resetting new vote banks along the highways by burning forests: don’t stir the hornet’s nest. Perhaps the most important lesson pertains to the resettlement of Maoist guerrillas, qualified and unqualified alike. If they are let out into society without a plan, incidents like this week’s explosion of violence may find better motivated and heavier armed instigators.

But Dhumbarahi has already started to fade from the media glare, being replaced by some other crisis of the week. It is clear that incidents like these will become increasingly commonplace unless the political parties do not come to a power-sharing agreement soon. Unfortunately, we see a dangerous political polarisation between the Maoists on the one hand and the NC/UML on the other. This chasm is difficult to bridge because both sides are being goaded on by hardliners on both sides who agree on only one thing: the peace process was a mistake and we should start killing each other all over again.

Forget the political slogans about civilian supremacy: the secret talks these days are all about the conditions (read ‘Defrosted’, #479). In fact, if the political parties be allowed by pragmatists in all three areas, we can easily do so.
“If you consider all oppressed people Maoists, if you say all 28 million Nepalis are Maoists, we are quite comfortable with that”

Nepali Times spoke to vice-chairman of the UCPN (Maoist) Baburam Bhattarai on Tuesday on federalism, the landless problem, the current political deadlock and ways forward. Excerpts follow:

Baburam Bhattarai: From the very beginning, we have said the basis of the federal system should be nationality. In Marxist terms, nationality means a common language, geography, economy and psychological make-up. On this basis we have proposed federal autonomous units in Nepal. Let me be clear that translating the word ‘nationality’ into Hindi it becomes jatiyeta (ethnicity), in Nepali it becomes rastriyata (nationality). In English, ethnicity is also jatiyeta, caste is also jatiyeta and nationality is also jatiyeta. So there was some confusion. Since the very beginning we have been consistent that federalism should be along the lines of nationality.

Isn’t the declaration of autonomous federal states by the party unconstitutional? Who says? In the interim constitution and Comprehensive Peace Agreement we have already agreed to adopt a federal system. Those going back on this commitment are violating the spirit of the constitution.

What if all political parties start declaring their own federal states? They are most welcome. That will help the people and engage them in the debate.

The Kailai incident has cast doubt over the Maoists’ commitment to democracy and a new constitution. How can you win the people’s confidence? The people are with the Maoists. The reactionary elements who sided with the monarchy are feeling insecure because the monarchy is gone, but they need not be. The Nepali people who have suffered for so long want to introduce a democratic system, restructure the state, and bring about social and economic transformation, which will create peace, stability and prosperity in the country.

Did the Maoists encourage the landless to occupy government land illegitimately? Do you think the millions of landless people don’t have any rights over the land? These are natural resources given free by nature. It is perfectly legitimate for landless people to ask for their share of land and we support them.

Are you trying to find a way to mobilise your cadres by announcing autonomous states, as you did by encouraging the landless in Kailali? The landless peasants’ problem is a real issue in Nepal. If you don’t solve it, they will agitate for their rights. If you want to say all 28 million people of Nepal are Maoists we will be quite comfortable with that.

Political leaders are frequenting the president’s residence lately. What’s your take? The legal advisor to the president wrote an article in a national daily arguing if the constitution is not written on time, power will automatically go to the president. They are encouraging the president to assume all power and institute a formal dictatorship in the country. We hope he won’t be provoked.

What should be done to end the current political deadlock? We should have worked out the modality of taking decisions and forming government through consensus. But when the Maoists emerged as the largest party, some of the old parliamentary parties went against that principle and opted for a majority system, which invites the dirty game of pulling down and making new governments. Constitution writing has thus been overshadowed. We should only go for competitive politics once the constitution is written.

Are the Maoists not responsible for the deadlock at all? We are responsible in the sense that we are the largest party. The current clash is between two forces, those who want to bring about changes in society and those who resist it. The challenge is to find a correct balance of pace for both sides.

You have made a unilateral decision to release unqualified combatants. Do you have UNMIN’s support? We have already made our commission for disqualified PLA combatants to be discharged. It is our duty to comply with that agreement and I don’t think anybody should have any objection to that.

Some argue the Maoists want to use the PLA as a bargaining tool. In the CPA, we made a commitment to integrate and rehabilitate the PLA and democratise the NA. That’s the only way you can create a new national army and complete the peace process.

Is it true that your name was proposed for the post of prime minister in a new coalition government? Our concern is that civilian supremacy be established in the country, and that peace and the constitution are guaranteed. You need a national coalition government to facilitate this. First let this peace process be settled, then only will we talk about who will lead the government.

So you think the Maoists should lead the government? This is the mandate of the people. We are the largest party. Even the second and third party combined are smaller than us. Where on earth do you make a coalition government and not have it led by the largest party?

Do you regret leaving the government? No, we did the right thing. We set a very high standard of political morality and we are very proud of that.

International donors recently asked for reassurance that the Basic Operating Guidelines will be respected, citing incidents of extortion and threat. We fully abide by the guidelines. There will be no extortion of anybody, especially foreign donors and NGOs and INGOs. If there are any specific complaints, we are always ready to look into that and take appropriate action against the culprits.

Full interview on www.nepalitimes.com
Forget-me-not

**PLAIN SPEAKING**
P rashant Jha

cynical interpretation is that Yadav has locked himself into a position where he cannot join this government. Through the andolan, he wants to increase his bargaining power, and then push andolan, he wants to increase his position where he cannot join the Kathmandu Valley Enterprise Challenge.

Even as the focus remains on the government-Maoist impasse, the Madhes is slowly coming back to haunt the ruling classes.

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The Madhes movement is not over by any stretch of the imagination. The Madhesis continue to demonstrate against the state and their own representatives. It does not take into account the state's institutional structures surrounding them or because state structures have become inclusive and won the loyalty of a broader social alliance. The fundamental trust deficit between the state and Madhesi people persists, and it will translate into a confrontation. At that point, the fact that a Dr. Yadav heads the state, even if he were to run for it, will be irrelevant to the Madhesi masses.

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Lessons learnt

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Board is the boss: The

Governingbodyofthecompanyis

Acharya won the Amateur

Win-Win

 precedence, and gain strategic advantage.

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Win-Win

Rabi Rai on his makeshift

Buy and sell

A special scheme

Inauguration

Jebhi Finance Limited was

Turning 20

Continental Trading

Getting connected

Lessons learnt

Goverance, persistence and culture matter most

Soaring high

Thai Airways is celebrating its

Mission, Itahari, Sewa Kendra

Helpless Children Welfare

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Community deforestation

Nepal’s community forestry success story may be unravelling if the trend in Dang is anything to go by. Forests that were conserved by communities are being cut down by the user groups themselves. Two thirds of the 447 community forests in Dang are said to be in the process of being denuded, affecting more than 3,200 hectares of woodland protected by villagers in the past decades. Many places that used to be thick forests are today unrecognizable because they have been turned into farmlands, or even plotted out to housing colonies. In many of the community forests, the user group committees have themselves decided to cut the forests and start cultivation because they were being encroached upon by squatters. The chairman of one user group, Duryodhan Pandey, said: “When the squatters wouldn’t move, we thought it was better to cut down the trees and use the land ourselves.”

The Dang DFO has warned user groups that it may get the police to evict the encroachers and if that doesn’t work, they may lose their lease on government forests if the deforestation continues. The main parties in Dang have also started consultations on how to stop the destruction of community forests. The UML and NC are fully on board with getting the encroachers out, but the Maoists are against the move.

Kailali’s lessons

Karna Bohan, Nagarik op-ed, 8 December

Last Friday, while scenes of the cabinet preparing to meet on Kala Patthar were being shown live on tv, preparations for a confrontation were ongoing in Kailali. More than 15,000 squatters had gathered along the highway with ‘orders from above’ to encroach on the forest, while 2,000 security force personnel too had orders not to let that happen. When the police started setting fire to the huts, the squatters brought out their khukuris and axes. Both sides had orders not to give in. By dusk, five people lay dead. Many were wounded. Both sides took their dead and wounded and retreated, weeping and looking down.

The squatter problem is not new to the farwestern Tarai. The clever and powerful have always encroached on the forests of Kailali and Kanchanpur. There is now pressure on land from the landless, the freed Kamaiyas, from migrants from the hills and flood and landslide victims. Political parties like the NC and UML have always used this shifting population as a vote bank for elections. The Maoists used the same groups for recruitment, but after getting into government the party couldn’t deliver on its promises of land to its supporters, who were increasingly disillusioned.

Three weeks ago, an all-party meeting in Kanchanpur decided to clear squatters from community forests with the use of force if necessary. So the district administration chased out 4,000 squatters who came out on the highway and started chanting anti-Maoist slogans. The Maoist leadership felt it was losing control of its erstwhile supporters, so it announced that anyone moving down to Dudejhari would get 10 kattha of land each.

In one week, more than 20,000 people were bussed in by the Maoists, some from as far away as Surkhet. The party then started provoking the squatters to confront the expected security clampdown. The ordinary folk who were enticed to Dudejhari with the promise of land did not know they were pawns in a political game, the ordinary peasants were being readied to kill or die. The Kailali administration decided to use live bullets as the tension escalated. If the government still doesn’t learn its lesson, and unless the main parties stop using peasants as cannon fodder in their power games, the problem of land is going to be much more explosive in the future.
In a discussion organised by Himal Khatabartha last week in Jumla, people revealed that they are concerned about the protracted political impasse and delayed constitution-writing process. They also unanimously supported an autonomous Karnali region with special provisions for its development. Translated excerpts:

How hopeful are you about the constitution-writing process?

Birka Bahadur Budha (Treasure, RPP- Nepal): The CA members were elected to write a new constitution incorporating the people’s aspirations. They seem to have submitted themselves to their party’s people’s aspirations. They seem to have written a new constitution incorporating the people’s aspirations. But the people are aware of what’s necessary, and if the parties fail to write the constitution, the people will do it themselves.

Would an amended interim constitution be acceptable?

Dunga Prasad Pandey (President, NGO Federation, Jumla): So much money has already been spent on the new constitution. Frankly, if the politicians can’t run this country, let’s give it up to India or China.

What has the CA achieved in the past year?

Ekraj Bhandari, Maoist CA member, Salyan: “The CA shouldn’t be parliament also”

Debaraj Joshi, NC CA member, Bajura

How have you spent the last two years in the CA?

We set the CA agenda and formed the committees. Then, the committees canvassed and discussed public suggestions for the constitution and started work on preliminary drafts. The Determination of the Form of Rule Committee, Judicial System Committee and the Distribution of Natural Resources, Financial Fights and Public Revenue Committees haven’t finished their drafts yet.

What difficult will it be to write the constitution on time?

Going by the current pace of work, it’s unlikely to be written on time. But we must write it, even if that means pushing back the deadline once again.

What are the chief reasons for the delay?

The main reason is the distrust among the parties. This distrust would disappear if there were a high-level political mechanism.

Would an amended interim constitution be acceptable?

Dunga Prasad Pandey (President, NGO Federation, Jumla): So much money has already been spent on the new constitution. Frankly, if the politicians can’t run this country, let’s give it up to India or China.

What type of federalism does Karnali need and on what basis?

German Nepali (Dalit activist): Federalism became a hot topic because the centre has too much power in the current unitary system. Decentralisation and the devolution of power will ultimately strengthen the federal structure. Karnali people want federalism based on geography and the availability of natural resources.

Kamlia Sejuwal (Principal, Karnali Secondary School): Karnali’s voice won’t be heard no matter how loudly we shout. The media doesn’t care about us, especially our gender issues. Women are discriminated against at every step yet don’t have a voice in the CA.

Has the CA stopped working altogether?

No. It’s tough because the CA functions as the legislature too. We should keep the functions separate. That way, the CA could focus exclusively on writing the constitution.

What needs to be done for the constitution to be written on time?

First, first every thematic committee must complete its drafts and submit them to the main assembly. Second, the assembly should promptly finish discussions and quickly make necessary revisions. Third, the Constitutional Council should collate all of these drafts. But none of this can happen without political consensus.
Refugees from Bhutan who had been living in camps in Nepal since 1991 are finding it difficult to adjust to life in Europe and separation from their extended families, but their children have fit right in. They are learning the local languages and making friends fast.

It is the older family members who bear the brunt of culture shock, and find their new environment difficult to get a handle on. But all agree that they are willing to go through it for the sake of their children.

“We came here for our son’s sake, so he would have a future,” says Kamala Rijal, who was resettled in Utrecht in the Netherlands last year with her husband Hem and son Manish. “He already speaks Dutch better than Nepali and all his friends are Dutch.”

In Denmark, Durga and Balkumari Adhikari’s two sons are already fluent in Danish and are so good with gadgets they are in high demand in their apartment to fix the neighbours’ malfunctioning computers.

Ramesh Gautam, 26, only arrived in Norway three months ago, but even he has picked up Norwegian so rapidly that his teacher, Ina Jacobsen, is impressed. “They are so fast with the language it is amazing,” Jacobsen told the Nepali Times, “but I must say we language instructors have learnt much more from our students about Bhutan than they have from us.”

Bhutan evicted nearly 100,000 of its citizens 20 years ago, and with India’s assistance dumped them in eastern Nepal. Their numbers in seven camps in Meena and Bajura have grown to 110,000 and those born in the camps are now teenagers. Two years ago, a consortium of western countries agreed to resettle the refugees and over 20,000 have now left, mostly to the United States. So far, Norway has taken 310, Denmark 305 and the Netherlands 122 refugees.

After living for nearly two decades in bamboo huts in the hot and dusty plains of eastern Nepal, the Bhutanis now enjoy the amenities of modern apartments with high-tech kitchens. But it’s not the novelty of life in Europe that the refugees are most happy about. They say it is the first time in a long time they are being treated with respect.

Naturally, there is the sorrow of separation from their extended families back in Bhutan and Nepal (see box). “We now have everything we want, the only worry is about the relatives we left behind,” says Kebalram Rijal, 55, who arrived in Utrecht from Goldhap recently.

Third country resettlement has not always been able to place family members together. Kebalram starts his day in a prayer room filled with pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses and he prays that he will soon be reunited with his parents, who were resettled in America, and his daughter, who is still in Jhapa.

In the west Norwegian town of Tysvaer Rohit Pokhrel, 68, and his wife are worried about their family as well, and say the only thing missing in their life is a Hindu priest to do saradhha and other ceremonies.

See also: ‘Can’t wait to leave’, #409
‘Refugees finally find respect’, #409
‘No place like home’, #306
‘Home away from home’, #340
‘Long way from home’, #353
In Beldangi there are tearful scenes of farewell every day as fleets of white IOM (International Organization for Migration) buses taking Bhutanis for third country resettlement leave for Bhadrapur airport. Among those seeing off relatives and friends are those who have travelled clandestinely from Bhutan for poignant farewells before time and distance separate them from their relatives.

Antari is 35 years old, and has come all the way from southern Bhutan, crossing two international borders, to say goodbye to her parents, and seven brothers and sisters and their children. She is the only member of her family still in Bhutan. “I don’t know when I will see them again, they are going so far away,” Antari sobbed, clutching a faded photograph of the family taken while they were still in Bhutan. Antari’s elderly parents Krishna Prasad and Dhanmaya can’t hide their tears.

Hugging her parents, Antari tells them there is now no sign of their little ancestral home in Bhutan and even the tulasi plant in front of their house is gone. But Antari has brought a handful of soil from their homeland to give to her parents in a little plastic pouch before they leave. Dhanmaya takes a pinch from the pouch and puts it on her daughter’s forehead like tika as a final farewell.

Like most Bhutanis here, Antari doesn’t want to be named or her picture taken for fear of retribution back home in Bhutan. She says the repression of Nepali speakers continues. More than 80,000 Lhotshampa Nepali speakers were not allowed to vote in last year’s elections. The signals of some Nepali FM stations reach southern Bhutan, but Antari says one has to be careful not to listen openly for fear of spies in the neighbourhood who have already labeled her ‘ngolop’ (anti-national) for having refugee relatives in Nepal.

Saraswati Sharma is 83, but has travelled for three days to get to Beldangi to say goodbye to her second daughter, Shilamaya, who will soon be leaving to join her elder sister in the United States. For others, like 45-year-old Bhim, there was a different kind of farewell. Hearing his father was ill, he rushed to Nepal, arriving at the Sanischare refugee camp only to hear that his father, whom he hadn’t seen for ten years, had just died. Bhim went straight to the banks of the river to light his father’s funeral pyre.

(Some names have been changed.)
The Joint Secretary of India’s external affairs ministry Satish Mehta has decided that an army airstrip at Surkhet and the resumption of non-lethal military supplies are the two most important needs of Nepal. Chief of Army Staff Chhatra Man Singh Gurung is leaving today for India for a week-long visit. For the Indian security establishment, the imperilled peace process of Nepal has suddenly become a low-priority issue. Security cooperation rather than political interactions is going to be the focus of Indo-Nepal relations in the coming days.

These days, few Nepali politicians can access top-rung Indian leaders. They have to go through featherweight politicos like D.P. Tripathi, who was here some time ago to bolster the resolve of the anti-Maoist coalition in Singh Darbar. Officers of the Nepal Army, however, can boast of high-profile batch mates from Sandhurst, West Point or the Indian Military Academy at Dehradun. General Gurung is an alumnus of the latter and will be attending a graduation ceremony there during his visit, but he will also have a crucial meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s national security advisor M.K. Narayanan.

Meanwhile, the Chinese sent a team under Gen Shu Yu Tai, its deputy force commander in Tibet, to assess ways of enhancing military assistance. Another Chinese team is likely to arrive soon to discuss the modalities of improving security along the 1400km Nepal-Tibet border, much of which remains impassable throughout the year anyway. The agenda for Premier Madhav Kumar Nepal’s scheduled visit to Beijing from December 26 is thus more or less set: there may be some development assistance thrown in to sweeten the deal, but he will be asked to accept security assistance first and foremost.

With friendly neighbours like these competing with each other to militarise the Nepali state, democrats and peaceniks in Nepal need no enemies. But that doesn’t mean they don’t have to contend with more friendly advice from further afield; everyone seems to have designs for the vulnerable, geopolitically strategic state of Nepal.

The Eurozone is still a marginal player in global affairs, often playing second fiddle to Uncle Sam. But individual European countries wield considerable clout in the capital cities of the Third World, where the academic elite and the INGO/NGO sector are important actors in national politics. This sector may be naturally more comfortable with the stave social elite than with the rustic political class. The problem arises when opinion leaders begin to play favourites with the transfer and promotion of officers in the Nepal Police or the Nepal Army at the instigation of their sponsors at various aid agencies. Playing politics with the defence establishment is a bigger cause for concern than even militarisation.

Till the early 1960s, the India Desk at the State Department in Washington looked after its interests – meagre as they were back then – in Nepal. With Af-Pak emerging as a global hotspot, the concept of the India Desk may yet see a revival. But if the experiences of the past are anything to go by, there is nothing to cheer in the decision of the Embassy of the United States in Nepal to develop American Centers in four different towns in the country. Intelligence gathering rather than strengthening of democracy will probably be their priority.

It seems Nepalis will have to learn the ropes of democracy on their own. All foreign aid is invariably aimed at strengthening the establishment, of which the military is the most prominent part. Hillary Clinton affirmed this viewpoint by vowing to restore American leadership through a ‘smart power’ mix of diplomacy and defence at her Senate confirmation as the US Secretary of State earlier this year.

Meanwhile, the queues at the KFC and Pizza Hut outlets, to say nothing of the booming sales of Coke and Pepsi, will ensure that Americans taxpayers needn’t worry about the source of funds that go in the name of aid to Nepal.

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Stagnant times

For a country known for great political changes, we don’t have much to show for the last seven months

In Nepal, we have long maintained that political events happen too fast. What was true the night before is no longer so the morning after. This was especially true after the end of the war and during the peace process. The way we have leapt forward from signing the peace treaty, holding the Constituent Assembly elections and ending the monarchy, it has been a rollercoaster ride.

But since the Maoists quit the government in May our rush towards change has come to a complete halt. The largest party hasn’t stopped sulking about civilian supremacy. Mistrust between political parties has so deepened that no high-level task force or fence-mending meet has come up with a solution. This has been going on for over seven months and there’s no end in sight to this deadlock.

Very few things have actually changed in Nepal in the last year. The country is still reeling from a crippling fuel crisis, and Nepalis are quietly getting ready for long, dark, cold winter nights. Nepal bandas have continued, new businesses are too scared to invest and the continuing extortion of entrepreneurs has led some to consider closing shop. While those who killed journalists Birendra Sah and Uma Singh have gone scot-free more journalists are being threatened and beat up all over Nepal. The rehabilitation of ex-combatants is in limbo. Three years on from the CPA, the families of the victims of war have no word on missing family members, nor official acknowledgement of wrongdoing by either side or reparations.

The Nepali people are not a priority for the leadership because the latter are so bogged down by political bickering. Then there are the big meetings to attend, from Kala Patthar to Copenhagen. These years on from the CPA, the families of the victims of war have no word on missing family members, nor official acknowledgement of wrongdoing by either side or reparations.

Nepalis knew the transition would not be easy and it would be difficult to bring different ideologies together. But we also knew that no matter what our beliefs we all wanted the same thing – peace and development. Political parties will always disagree, but this time around they agreed to come together and write the constitution. If the constitution is not written on time, and it is looking more and more likely that it won’t be, there will be anarchy in Nepal. We will be an embarrassment in the world community and the leaders will have once again failed the people.

A recent survey indicates the majority of Nepalis either don’t know what federalism is, or don’t want it. Perhaps if the leaders had left Kathmandu to talk to their constituencies we would not now be stumbling towards a system that most Nepalis do not even want. The priority should be fixing Nepal first. In order to do that Nepal’s leadership must let go of rigid ideological stances that the common people do not care about. Being flexible does not equate to being weak. People want promises delivered. They want results. They are tired of the limbo. They want great change. They want the leadership to put them first.

For a country known for great political changes, we don’t have much to show for the last seven months.
Frank Senn, Hari Thapa and Otto C. Honegger
Sherpas - The true heroes of Mount Everest

What was your inspiration?
In 2003, we did an expedition on the north side of Mount Everest and decided to film what no one had filmed before – how hard the Sherpas worked.

You trained some Sherpas in camerawork as well.
We had two Sherpas and they shot the portions above the base camp. But we had six cameramen and at the end of the film, it was hard to know who did what.

What was the audience’s reaction in Switzerland?
There was a huge discussion. The climbers were both happy and unhappy. Some Swiss climbers had come home saying, “I climbed Everest.” Now people were asking them: “Who was your Sherpa?”

Did you have safety concerns during filming?
There is always a chance something will happen but we knew we had a strong, professional team.

What would improve a Sherpa mountaineer’s life?
They should get internationally recognised degrees as mountain guides. They are good climbers, and with a degree, they would have better positions in the expeditions.

Kesang Tsetan
In search of the Riyal

Why did you make a film about migrant workers?
Everyone from a low-income background thinks about migrating, has migrated or knows someone who has migrated. Very little is known about the experience of these migrants except for those who make the headlines for the wrong reasons.

How hard was it for you to film in the Gulf countries?
It’s difficult to get a visa let alone get permission to film in the Gulf. I had friends who sponsored my first visit to the UAE but refused to do it when we went to film. I couldn’t get a visa to Dubai the second time, so the filming centres on Qatar.

What role should the government play on behalf of the migrant workers?
Given that workers’ remittances add up to almost USD 3 billion, the government should make migration safer by regulating manpower agencies, posting labour attachés in the migrant destinations, and negotiating with foreign governments for better wages.
Rabi Thapa

Raijan, Muga is a very ordinary Nepali hill village, and the traveller may be forgiven for passing it by. This may be how it should be. The seasonal road, in the words of 75-year-old Lila Maya Rai, has made precious little difference to her life. ‘I’d have to walk whether there was a road or not,’ she says. ‘We used to walk to Dukkan, to Dharan, and even to Jogbani on the Indian side, which took three days. But since I hardly go anywhere these days, even to market, what do I care where the road goes or not?’

It is not entirely true that civilisation has passed Lila Maya by, even if she suggests the new, easy age of education and medicines and roads is not for her, this old woman of hard times. Just as her mother before her, Lila Maya had to bear the burden of a husband’s early death, which left her with four daughters and a son. ‘Babu, those were the hard days,’ she remarks matter-of-factly. ‘I was seeing double, I’d chase one cow and lights it. “This is my friend.”’

Perhaps she would have made use of education, too, if she’d had the chance. ‘The days of happiness are here,’ she repeats with distaste. ‘Look at them, wearing pants, short hair. You can’t tell men from women.’ A brash, gravel-voiced boy of about 10 waves a slipper on a stick at the hornet that threatens her apiary-in-a-log. She a laugh. She gets up, wry and spry, and to go live in Kathmandu, she’s game. ‘And now he wants to go abroad again.’ She points at a photo of a youth in blinding sunlight against a backdrop of glittering towers. ‘He said he couldn’t stand the heat, he was sweating from the soles of his feet. “Dubai, what for?” A television, a computer, a camera and a few thousand rupees. That’s all he brought back from Dubai, what for?”

‘I just got the things I always wanted,’ Mani Raj admits when he and his wife join us after a day planting millet. ‘I want to go back because there’s nothing to do here.’ Never mind that only last month a cousin came back in a coffin.

It is perhaps too much to expect Lila Maya to understand what her son wants away from home. For her, despite everything, ‘Muga is like heaven,’ it’s home. ‘It was hard work and they didn’t look so good, but they lasted,’ she says, then eyes a crop-haired niece in shorts with distaste. ‘Look at them, wearing pants, short hair. You can’t tell men from women.’

‘But my days are gone,’ she says. ‘We were dull children, not like these kids, had, nor until recently, modern medicine. ‘We were dull children, not like these kids,’ she grimaces, gesturing at her seven-year-old grandson, Manish, ‘they have to study, so they can’t do anything else. They’re smart, they know everything. But they don’t even pick up what they drop, they don’t cut one handful of grass.’

Lila Maya doesn’t much fancy the chipko lungs, either, the smooth clothes from India and China. She recalls with evident fondness the days of weaving, cutting and dyeing her own cloth. ‘It was hard work and they didn’t replace, then again for glasses. ‘My teeth were all bad and cutting into my gums. Then I was seeing double. I’d chase one cow thinking it was two. So I went…’

‘The old man up the hill, he says, “We were born too early, sister!” We had to spend our lives away from home. For her, despite everything, ‘Muga is like heaven,’ it’s home. ‘Seventeen is when the brain goes bad, a blind age,’ she mutters. ‘He didn’t complete his School Leaving Examination, and what good was school then? Study, study, to plough the land. He was a fool, he got married.’

‘I just got the things I always wanted,’ Mani Raj admits when he and his wife join us after a day planting millet. ‘I want to go back because there’s nothing to do here.’ Never mind that only last month a cousin came back in a coffin.

This article is excerpted from Hamra Hajumali: Our Grandmothers, a photo.circle project. A book launch and exhibition will take place at the Nepal Arts Council, Babar Mahal, on 18th December. Please check www.photocircle.com.np for details.

Manish, “they have to study, so they can’t do anything else. They’re smart, they know everything. But they don’t even pick up what they drop, they don’t cut one handful of grass.”

Being Mugali

“Rabi Thapa”
EVENTS

- Indiscreet Basterds, movie screening at Lazimpal Gallery Cafe, 17 December, 6PM, 4428649
- Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival, 11-15 December, City Hall/Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road, www.kimff.org
- GAA Forum, organised by The Godavi Alumni Association, topic ‘What Ails Nepali Media’, 13 December, GAA, Thamel, 4PM, 4414785
- Kathmandu Chorale, a winter concert at The British School, Jhamsikhel, 12 December, 3.30PM and 6PM

MUSIC

- Mukti Shyakha and his band playing blues and original tracks, 11, a winter concert at The British School, Jhamsikhel, 12 December, 3.30PM and 6PM
- French Gypsy Jazz, 11th December, 7PM, Delices de France, Thamel
- Timmy’s Way, a benefit concert for Street Dog Care, at Hyatt Regency Ballroom, with Art Choying Dolma, 19 December, 7PM, 4428549
- HyJazz every Friday evening by Inner Groove at the Rox Bar, 4498369
- Baja gaa every Tuesday at Mokh, Pulchok, 7.30PM onwards, 5526211
- Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoka
- Some like it hot, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai, every Friday at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 600, 4412999
- Every Friday & Saturday at The Lounge, 5-7PM onwards, City Hall/Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road, call 4412999 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com

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WEEKEND WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Expect cloudy days, with more cloud cover in the west than east, and average much of central and eastern Nepal dry. Satellite pictures show a low pressure system over eastern Nepal, which will affect the weather in the west and will bring much cloud. Chances are that it will only yield light precipitation in western Nepal, leaving eastern Nepal dry. Stay tuned for updates.

Wednesday: Cloudy

Thursday: Partly cloudy

Friday: Partly cloudy

Saturday: Sunny

SUNDAY: High pressure system will cover western and central Nepal, with cloudy to sunny weather expected in eastern Nepal.

WEATHER

Dining

Dumplings

(Serves 4)

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup grated blue cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- Juice of half a lemon
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley
- 1 cup thick cream or yoghurt

Dipping sauce

- 1 teaspoon sugar
- Salt and pepper to taste

Dipping sauce

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 170°C for 1-2 minutes until golden brown. For the dipping sauce, lightly beat the cream and mix in the rest of the ingredients. Serve with the hot dumplings.

Harpreet Singh Bedi (Ranbir Kapoor) has just graduated, but his marks are a little embarrassing. Nevertheless, his scores do not stop him from dreaming of an exciting and adventurous career and so, he dives into the world of sales (rumoured to be an ultra cool career for all smart people blocked from entering medical, engineering or business schools). It’s everything he expected it to be, with sharp dressing, smooth talking and women who can sell ice to an Eskimo, dreams to an insomniac, and a lifetime mobile connection to a dying man. But soon, his idea of success begins clashing with the strange ways of these professionals and ‘success’ he looked up to.

The scriptwriter of Dostana, Rajat Kapoor, has filmed the story of the protagonist who has to work his way up to achieve the super glamorous and super successful lifestyle of the salesman. Harpreet Singh Bedi, played by Ranbir Kapoor, is the star of the film, and he is initially depicted as a Harvard MBA, living the life of a rich and successful businessman. However, as the story progresses, it becomes clear that Harpreet’s life is not as glamorous as it seems. He is actually struggling to make ends meet and is living a life of hardship. The film is about the challenges he faces in his life and how he overcomes them.

The film also highlights the importance of hard work and determination in achieving success. Harpreet Singh Bedi’s character is an excellent example of this, as he is able to make a comeback after facing several failures. The film also highlights the importance of perseverance and resilience in achieving success.

The film is a perfect blend of action, romance, and drama, with a lot of twists and turns. The storyline is well-crafted and the performances of the actors are outstanding. The film is a must-watch for everyone who is looking for an entertaining and engaging movie experience.

The film is produced by Yash Raj Films and directed by Rohit Shetty. The film also stars Varun Dhawan and Anushka Sharma.

RECIPE

“Fried Spinach and Bread Dumplings”

Cut the bread into 1cm cubes and mix with the spinach and egg. Season well and roll into balls of the size of golf balls. Deep fry at 170°C for 1-2 minutes until golden brown. For the dipping sauce, lightly beat the cream and mix in the rest of the ingredients. Serve with the hot dumplings.
TRUTH BE TOLD: Rukum-based journalist Tika Bista was flown to Kathmandu for treatment after suffering severe injuries from an attack by suspected Maoists.

REMEMBER US: President Ram Baran Yadav looks on as traditional dancers perform at the Human Rights National Magna Meet-2009 at the Academy Hall on Tuesday.

THANK YOU: Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal meets Chief Justice Min Bahadur Rayamajhi on the latter’s last day in office on Wednesday in Singh Darbar.
Everyone has his share

So, to recap this week’s main news: Monday MKN met PKD, Tuesday MKN, GPK met, then PKD, MKN and GPK met together before they brought in JNK, NKS and RCP, and CPG met MKN on the sidelines of all this. On Wednesday PKD met RBY and soon after MKN also met RBY and then they all met individually with RS. On Thursday MKN, PKD, JNK, RCP, NKS all met once more and at the time of going to press, the meeting had expanded to include ABC, IJK, MNO, QRS, and XYZ.

It looks like all we in the media do these days is report on who met who, who flew off and who came back from junkets abroad. Speaking of which Makunay is leading a jumbo 56-member donor-financed delegation to Copenhagen that includes nine ministers. More than 600 Nepalis are already at the Climate Summit according to latest estimates, making the Nepali delegation the highest per capita carbon emitter at the conference. They should all ride bicycles for one year to make up.

The holy trinity of MKN, PKD and GPK are now reportedly so sick and tired of their meeting agenda getting prematurely ejaculated into the national media that Makunay suggested at their confab Tuesday that the three should meet at Kala Patthar just to get away from the prying press. They underestimate the Nepali media’s hound-dog tenacity and herd mentality, though.

Thereupon, Awesome is supposed to have said: “Now you understand why I had to go to Singapore?” Actually we gather the real substantial meeting was not in S’pore at all but at the transit lounge at Suwarnapoom. Which leads us to think that the reason both Makunay and Ferocious always want to meet somewhere else is because Bhuravuir, Paris Omala, Petalchio Palace and Balbuk have never been swept for bugs. Another reason we shouldn’t allow the Chinese to build our consulate in Lhasa, who know what they’ll sneak into those walls.

You’ve all been waiting with bated breath to hear the Ass’ take on the Airbus deal. Sorry to disappoint you, comrades, but the Donkey gives it a thumbs up. Look at it this way, it is a USD 200 million deal for the 330 and 320, right? Even if it is only a ten percent kickback that means 20 million smackers will theoretically be in the hands (palms?) of Nepalis.

This would raise Nepal’s per capita GDP by a couple of percentage points, and we’ve got to keep the planes too. Everyone has his share, the airline can fly its desperately needed, Airbus sells two more planes and saves jobs in Europe, Nepal gets richer and everyone can live happily ever after. Which is why it is so completely daft that some born losers are trying to put a spanner in the works. Apparently most party stalwarts, ministerial honchos, CAAN authoritarians, the airline board, even the anti-corruption watchdogs have been suitably lubricated. But they forget the PACmen, which is why the deal is stuck. But only temporarily, because all that needs to be done is share the wealth around a bit more.

The Ass is quite impressed with NAC CEO SRK, who seems to have a knack for these things, and boasted to the media that he ‘trapped’ the govt into agreeing with the deal by paying Airbus an advance. Good thinking, it’s this sort of go-getter attitude that will allow Nepal to leapfrog in the Long March into a prosperous future. The way to look at it is: there would be kickbacks anyway whichever plane NAC acquired, so our policy should be to allow constructive corruption. That way, everybody gets a share.

The Baddies declared Sunday’s unscheduled moti-band ‘peaceful’ and a ‘grand success’ because vans were vandalised, an ambulance was assassinated, drug stores were ransacked, there was a bonfire of buses in Lamki, Pokhara lakeside restaurants were forced to close on pain of death, Thamel shops got door-to-door threats. Syabas!