Key ministers in the cabinet are in Copenhagen, the Maoist opposition is gearing up for a total national shutdown from next week, and efforts to find a way to bring the Maoists back into government have failed so far. The Maoists themselves are spending their time flying around the country declaring ethnic autonomous councils and have threatened a ‘parallel government’.

In all these fun and games, none of the national players have given any thought to a looming economic emergency. The economy is a soap bubble, it can go any moment,” said one senior government adviser who is worried that the ministers have no time to think about medium and long-term interventions to rescue the economy. Banks are heavily exposed with unproductive consumer lending and real estate with long-term gestation, exacerbating the cash crunch. Interest rates have recently climbed up to 16 per cent, dampening business.

Nepal’s trade deficit with India is now a whopping Rs 100 billion and growing every quarter. While the balance of payments was still healthy, Nepal paid for goods imported from India in remittance and tourism dollars. But money transfers from Nepalis working abroad have plateaued. Overall exports are down, and the fuel import bill is up by 90 per cent from last year. There has been a three-fold increase in vehicle imports this year, which will mean another spike in fuel imports in 2010. All this will put further pressure on rupee parity with India.

Meanwhile, the economy..
THE GOLDEN MIDDLE

For those who are having a tough time deciding which political party is the least of all evils, there is a simple test. Just figure out which one uses violence as a political tool and which one doesn’t.

For the Maoists, despite having won an election and entered the political mainstream, the standard operating procedure is still violence, intimidation and terror. In fact, it is their unique selling point.

What we fail to grasp is why governments that would not tolerate the use of violence and terror in their own countries are sympathetic to those who refuse to renounce violence here. The moral double standards are most glaring in the way the national army is being hauled over the coals for atrocities committed during the civil war and mayhem after the war by the Maoists don’t elicit commensurate opprobrium.

Journalists have been killed and beaten up, it’s open season on citizens, there is an epidemic of extortion and seizure of personal property nationwide, and there have been murders inside camps ostensibly under UNMIN supervision.

The army’s culpability in disappearances, summary execution and torture during the war years needs to be addressed in a court of law, just as Maoist atrocities. But the one-sided hounding of the state army is protecting a dangerous rightwing backlash that could push the country back to war.

Only the naive still believe that the land-grabbers across the country this week are poor landless peasants, or that this is any more about the liberation of the downtrodden. The revolution may have been genuine for the emancipation of the marginalised at one time, but the praise owing through the heartland convinces us it has now largely degenerated into a nationwide crime syndicate.

Land-grabbing, smuggling, trafficking, contraband, extortion, kidnaping, nepal boulder and sand mining, the decimation of community forests, district contract constructions: you name it and the comrades have their paws in the cookie jar. And any district journalist exposing this is immediately threatened.

To be sure, there are criminal mafias also involved, and the NC and UML are no saints, but the Maoists have taken politicisation and crime and the criminalisation of politics to new heights. The party is always right, and the party never has to say sorry in this Orwellian of politics to new heights. The party is always right, and the party never has to say sorry in this Orwellian.
It is getting a bit too much, the attempt by politically correct moral police these days to judge the inclusivity of functions by tallying token representation based on surname or gender. If they find one surname representing a Dalit, Janajati or marginalised group, they heave a sigh of relief. But I wonder if they are trying to be more inclusive, or more exclusive. Are our intellectuals, analysts, politicians and journalists so mentally constricted that they cannot think beyond their own caste?

To be sure, there are many groups in Nepal that have not been given a say in decision-making. This gross violation of human rights and dignity was perpetrated by Bahuns and Chhetris, and other groups have genuine grievances that have to be addressed. But let’s not go to the other extreme by insisting that participation in every function be reckoned by the proportions of caste, ethnicity, religion, language, gender and so on.

What is going on in the name of redressing past wrongs is aggravating divisions in Nepali society. This has the potential to seriously disturb communal harmony and trigger violence.

Futile donor-driven efforts to make Nepali society just and inclusive are fake, a mere facade. If we consciously involve all castes, creeds and religions in all aspects of life superficially it will look quite inclusive, but it will not solve the deep-rooted problems of marginalisation and poverty in this country. You can already see that reservation is creating a crime de la classe of neo-elite in beneficiary groups. The majority within these groups, however, is still deprived and discriminated against. The neo-elite skims off the benefits, and nothing percolates down to the lower levels.

Pretend inclusivity is seriously abusing the human rights of many in this country. Deprivation crosses caste and ethnic lines. Brahmins and Chhetris together constitute nearly 30 per cent of the population, many of them are not rich, don’t have civil service jobs and in parts of the country are actually at the bottom of the economic ladder. If you really want to look at numbers, there are more ‘high’ caste people living below the poverty line than ‘low’ caste people.

Now, with affirmative action, even if the children of very poor Brahmin or Chhetri families excel academically and come into the job market, they risk being excluded from government or INGO jobs. So in trying to correct one wrong, you make another mistake. These poor youngsters whose parents have spent their lives in absolute poverty should not be penalised for the misdeeds of those with whom they only share surnames.

Many Nepalis raise issues when there is a possibility of funding. These flavours of the month fashionable causes are having a detrimental effect on the progressive evolution of our society. Interestingly, it is the higher castes themselves who have been championing the cause of the downtrodden by promising to include them.

There is no issue with some European donors being more aggressive in trying to uplift the really marginalised. But inclusivity must look beyond the token presence of people with certain surnames. An empty stomach is an empty stomach, whether it is a Brahmin or a Dalit one.

The state should strive for economic and social balance, remove inequities and give everyone equal opportunities. But if it really wants to do poor people a favour, it has to be on an economic basis, not on the basis of caste. This country will progress only if we adopt meritocracy in all walks of life. If not, we will be forever stuck in a politically correct morass. No NGO or activist is thinking about this potentially divisive issue because there are no donor funds earmarked for it.

Normally, following a successful revolution, people and society are eager to embrace new ideas and changes. But even if they feel such changes will have a negative impact on society, many will prefer to keep mum so as not to be labelled anti-national, counter-revolutionary or status-quoist.

This could be the reason otherwise sane, rational critical thinkers are keeping quiet about token inclusivity.

Prateek Pradhan is the editor of Karobar, a new Nepali language business weekly.
I
n the euphoric aftermath of the April Uprising in 2006, the formulation of an interim constitution was a hugely challenging task. The restoration of parliament was certainly historic. But while the old guard of the Nepali Congress and UML wanted to maintain the status quo, the Maoists were unlikely to be satisfied with anything less than the outright declaration of a People’s Republic.

Despite the reservations of the Maoists, the framers of the interim constitution chose to retain the parliamentary system of governance. The anomaly of that preference became apparent when the reconstituted parliament decided to keep the monarchy under suspension. Girija Prasad Koirala functioned as head of state as well as the government when ethnic eruptions threatened the constituent assembly elections. Had Koirala not been a ‘constitutional dictator’ in those trying times, his draft for the interim constitution mutilated almost beyond recognition.

Amendments in the interim constitution then created the posts of president and vice-president, to be chosen through elections. Majoritarianism became the basis of government formation. The consensual CA’s transformation into a parliamentary site of political contestations was now complete.

The drafting of the new constitution by this supreme elected body has since receded into the background of intensifying political bickering, to the extent that the CA is almost defunct. The Maoists continue to obstruct its sittings and anti-Maoist forces do nothing to clear the logjam. At this rate, not many tears will be shed if the CA ceases to exist without drafting a new constitution.

The possibility of a political vacuum after May 28, 2010 has energised extremists of the left and right alike. The Maoists have begun to plan for a ‘fusion’ of ethnic unrest and urban uprising to capture the state. Radicals of the right insist that the president can continue to function with the residual authority of the CA even after the body that created his post ceases to exist. No matter which side prevails in this contest of radical convictions, the middle ground will disintegrate.

It’s the responsibility of the government to initiate a reconciliation. But Premier Madhav Kumar Nepal is too busy preparing for his next overseas jaunt to pay attention to issues of governance. His deputies in the cabinet are political lightweights. So the ideologues of Shital Niwas have taken the opportunity to mount a frontal attack on the very essence of the parliamentary system.

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Justice Laxman Aryal, more of an organic intellectual than a constitutionalist, succeeded in finalising a ‘least unacceptable document’ in the absence of a political consensus over the system of governance. But he passed away in September 2009 a disillusioned man, his draft for the interim constitution mutilated almost beyond recognition.

The constituent assembly is still around, but its relevance is rapidly fading. Parliamentary decisions are excruciatingly slow, sometimes confusing, often frustrating and almost always contestable. But like democracy itself, it is the worst form of government except for all the others that have been tried. The CA has every right to extend its term if drafting of the constitution can’t be completed in time. If the president has any authority, it’s purely moral. He should not be advised to think that he can exercise residual powers without inviting political uncertainty, a collapse of governance and social calamity.

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In a parliamentary system, the head of state is purely ceremonial. It appears some would prefer to adopt the German model of the Weimar constitution, wherein the president was considered to be “the pivot of the constitutional scheme, as a ‘neutral, mediating, regulating, and conserving’ power set above all other branches to defend the constitution and maintain the state.” What this ultimately led to needs no elaboration.

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How did Nepal fare at Copenhagen? Our readers said:

Six hundred people flying out from Kathmandu, staying in hotels in Copenhagen, dining and drinking on food and beverages presumably transported over long distances, sight-seeing by taking cabs and buses around the city and some possibly also visiting friends in nearby places before heading home – somebody please measure the carbon footprint of our delegation!

The fact that so many Nepalis have managed to get onto this gravy train is a positive sign. I am assuming that not many other countries have done better than this. I think the government should hold a special seminar to teach people how to milk this to the fullest extent possible.

For failed states like Nepal, there are more urgent priorities than a carbon-neutral economy. But then I thought Nepal was already a carbon-neutral country. Its total emissions are probably comparable to a mid-sized city in the west. Then why invent a problem?

These people already spent a lot of money arranging trips to Kala Patthar and Copenhagen. If our politicians were so concerned about climate change, they could utilise this fund to save our environment. Our politicians did that meeting in Evered just for a show, and we’ve nothing to gain from this summit. Just a waste of our money.

(Comments have been edited for clarity.)

-Karla

The decade in pictures

From the royal massacre to the new republic, from the banking boom to the explosion of remix-music bands, we look back at the most dramatic decade of our history in photos.

On the blogs www.nepalitimes.com/blogs

East-West with Kunda Diviti: Sharing nostalgia and heartache in Nepalganj with singer Amber Gurung.

My City: A photo blog of interesting visual portraits of Nepal.

Sustainable development

Of words and actions

When the Prime Minister and his jumbo Copenhagen entourage ensured that the Kathmandu airport was blocked for two hours, one imagines wasn’t smilling how he was about to contribute to the nation’s carbon footprint. While we love slogans on sustainability, our actions show that we are yet to give up the practices of the monarchs, and perhaps onto them as well.

-ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Nepalis love junkets and consultations and every new word creates new opportunities. Hundreds made it to Rio in 1992, other hundreds made it to Banyu in 2002 and hundreds more have made it to Copenhagen. Crowding the bars in Copenhagen and discussing politics till the wee hours, however, is not going to get us solutions. We don’t even know how many Nepalis are actually presenting papers, how many people are writing for international audiences, and how many are willing to practice what they preach.

Buzzwords such as sustainable development, climate change and carbon footprint need to be understood in the context they are being used in. In the recently released Superfreakonomics, the authors cite examples of how, back in the day, New York’s horse carriages were considered an environmental nuisance because of the dung, disease and noise they produced. When fuel-fired automobiles were introduced, they were considered a solution. Today, this role has been usurped by electric and natural gas-fired vehicles.

So when we use these words in a Nepali context, we need to look at how we understand and internalise them. For instance, the green stickers we use to certify that our vehicles meet pollution standards are basically an over-the-counter purchase of a certification, like many government approvals. But as the idea was conceived and pushed by dams, we take it as something imported and have not internalised the rationale. How to make our drivers understand that they are responsible for ensuring that their vehicles pollute less is perhaps more important than filling seminar halls at five-star hotels.

Similarly, how do we ensure that the parents who look on idly as their kids litter the streets with empty noodle packets teach them that this is wrong? Look at the civic conduct of those who give lectures on environment and sustainability. How many of them toss cigarette butts everywhere after a few drinks, and how many of them are responsible for ensuring that their vehicles pollute less is perhaps more important than filling seminar halls at five-star hotels.

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East-West with Kunda Diviti: Sharing nostalgia and heartache in Nepalganj with singer Amber Gurung.

My City: A photo blog of interesting visual portraits of Nepal.
It was December 2008 and the SLC exams were right around the corner. The students at Koshi Higher Secondary School in Sunsari, however, had only covered 25 per cent of the syllabus. They were massively unlucky. After their coursebooks arrived three months late, floods swamped the school. As a result, only a handful of the 110 students were expected to pass. In short, they needed help.

The parent-teacher association at Rato Bangala got busy straight away, initiating a project called ‘Prayas’. A group of A-level students from the Kathmandu school were sent to Sunsari to prepare the students there for the upcoming SLC send-up exams. But with only 17 days at hand, the plan seemed absurd.

One month later came the news that that seventy per cent of the students had passed the examinations. For students who had hardly attended school that year or even flipped through a coursebook prior to the ‘Prayas’ project, it was a miracle.

Volunteers like Saugat Ghimire were so thrilled by the results, they immediately set their sights on other impoverished parts of the country. “I literally went up to the principal’s office one morning and said, ‘Miss, let’s go to Dailekh,’” says Saugat. Just like that, the ‘Youth to Youth to Child’ project was born, with the aim of training 1800-odd youth participants in Dailekh. Every morning we wrote up a lesson plan for the day before heading to the training centres at 10AM. It was arduous work, since we had to plan enough activities – math and vocab activities, or shared reading and book-based activities—to keep our trainees occupied until classes ended at 4PM. But it was engrossing work. Although many of us were away from home for the first time, calls home were rare and rushed.

It did take time to settle into our roles however, and we never really got used to being called ‘Miss’ or ‘Sir’. Indeed, we ran the sessions like a typical classroom, hoping to give the youth-in-training a model to replicate back home. For instance, we were constantly reminding them to raise their hands before they addressed us or the rest of the class.

After work, we would meet up for tea at the bajar and share our experiences, complaining about how difficult it was to stay on our toes all day. But for all our griping, we would eagerly begin making lesson plans for the next day. Our key message to our trainees was that they needn’t come to Kathmandu for the good life; they were talented enough to create such a life right where they were, in Dailekh. Volunteer Bibhusha Dangol put it best: “If we can go all the way to Dailekh to help, why can’t they stay right where they are and do good things?” In that sense, the experience taught us all something, trainees and teachers alike. You don’t need a PhD to change Nepal. All you need is initiative and a little bit of patience.
The holy lake Manasarovar and the mountain that looms over it, Kailash, have been revered by Hindus, Buddhists and Tibetan animists for millennia. Myth, spirituality, history and even geology come together in many of the world’s holy sites. But aside from the striking scenic beauty and spiritual energy of the place, Manasarovar is truly a lake on the roof of the world: some of Asia’s mightiest rivers originate within 100km of this lake on the tri-junction of the borders of Nepal, India and China.

In Hindu mythology, Kailash was regarded as Meru, the Earth’s spinal cord, the centre of the universe. It is where Shiva is believed to reside with his consort Parbati. It is Kang Rinpoche and Tse to the Buddhists and followers of Bon Po. Lake Manasarovar, on the other hand, has a deep spiritual influence on the minds of people of the region. The mountain and the lake are the ultimate pilgrimage for many across the region.

Deb Mukharji, Indian diplomat and former ambassador to Nepal, is a Manasarovar expert, having visited the site three times since 1981 accompanying Indian pilgrims. Researching, photographing and exploring the Kailash region has been Mukharji’s life work. His picture book, Visions of the Infinite, is being launched by nepa-laya on Saturday, and weaving together the mythology, history and the profound spiritual meaning of the place, Mukharji has been walking and taking photos in the Himalaya for five decades. His first book, The Magic of Nepal, featured photographs and accounts of his walks in the Nepal Himalaya. In Visions of the Infinite, Mukharji’s photography brings out in exquisite frames the deep meaning that Manasarovar has on the minds of millions. Many of the 200 pictures were taken before cameras went digital and this is where Mukharji’s versatility in the medium shines through. The text complements the pictures, giving us not just facts and figures, but what the pilgrimage means to those who have been there. Mukharji’s last lines in the book sum it all up: “Kailash is where conviction remains suspended, myths endure, and sparks of understanding illuminate reason.”

Kunda Dixit

Kailash and Manasarovar
Visions of the Infinite
by Deb Mukharji
nepa-laya, 2009
pages: 246
Price: Rs 2500
See also: “Two Himalayan travelogues,” #245

A new book on Kailash gives us a glimpse of the infinite

Kailash from the north, south and west.
For the festive season, Chez Caroline offers a la carte menu of Christmas and new year specialties, except only for December 24 and 31 evening where fixed menu has to be ordered, along with your menu of old favorites. The festive full set menu comprises of mussels en bouches or snacks, two sets of starters to choose from, a main dish from amongst many, a choice of desserts and home made chocolates. As usual most ingredients including poultry, fish, meat and cheese have been imported from the world over. Vegetarians are requested to ask for the special festive vegetarian menu.

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HOLIDAY SPECIAL
schweineroulade (pork rolled with bacon) and other dishes easier to taste than to pronounce.

And why not a seafood buffet for Christmas Eve? Head to Lobsters, whose New Year’s Eve itinerary includes a buffet, a DJ session, and special handmade candle souvenirs.

Thamel, as always, is not to be outdone. New Orleans Café’s cozy Thamel courtyard is hosting a turkey dinner with drinks and Christmas gifts. Aqua Java Zing has Christmas punch on offer, a pizza shaped like a jingle bell, surprise gifts, and live music.

Not far away, the Bourbon Room will feature Neva Band, followed by a DJ from 7 PM onwards on Christmas Eve. J Bar, Cube, Club Platinum, Insomnia, Absolute Bar and various other clubs around town are also ringing in the New Year with their own special events and countdowns.

But if you really want to mark the end of the year in style, sawasdee kha, escape the winter chill with Marco Polo Travels’ 3-night Thailand package deal for Rs 29000 pp on a twin sharing basis. Lalit Mandap Tours is also organising holidays to Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. With the commencement of flights to Dubai via Flydubai, passengers can make their way to the Gulf for just Rs 14000!

Of course, there are plenty of getaways closer to home. Dhulikhel Mountain Resort offers one night’s accommodation, a Christmas gala dinner, cultural shows, Christmas lunch and drinks, while Dwarika’s Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort is offering a New Year’s package deal that includes overnight accommodation, BBQ dinner with live music, and champagne to toast the New Year. The Godavari Village Resort, meanwhile, is offering a New Year’s package including accommodation, a lavish gala dinner, door prizes and a live performance by The Heart Breakers.

Happy holidays!

Check our About Town listings (p14) for details and prices.
Trip to freedom

You’ve big footed if you approached Taking Woodstock...
Christmas Day is itself a public holiday now, and we might wonder why. In the erstwhile Hindu kingdom of Nepal, we now celebrate – or are given license to celebrate – everything from the more conventionally Hindu and Buddhist specials to Id, a clutch of Lhosars and more secular attractions such as Republic Day, Labor Day and Martyrs’ Day. And Christmas. In the Kathmandu Valley, it may seem that the spirit of inclusion that has gripped Naya Nepal may even have the expat community in its drunken embrace, for what else but the latter’s patronage and the economic imperative could give momentum to this particular season of making merry?

Delve a little further, however, and you will understand that in Nepal, Christmas isn’t just about the glitzy ballrooms of the Hyatt and the Soaltee. Even recent tragedies point to the changing demographics of this country. In May, a bomb killed two in a church in Dhobighat. In September, at least 23 people gathered for a Christian conference of 1500 were killed when a makeshift church dormitory collapsed in Dharan. Walk past Patan Darbar Square these days and you are as likely to catch a riveting performance of the Kartik Nach, the re-enactment of Narasimha’s disembowelment of the demon Hiranyakashyap, as a re-enactment of the Passion of the Christ. Walk into Ekta Books looking for some godly inspiration, and you’re more likely to come across rack upon rack upon rack of Christian Lit than anything else. This, in a nation where Christian proselytisation is still frowned upon despite the 1990 Constitution’s provisions for religious freedom, and where the 1971 census determined a Christian population of just 2541.

Today, these numbers have mushroomed to upwards of half a million, by some accounts. According to the Nepal Research and Resource Network, there were 2799 churches in Nepal in 2007, 309 in the Kathmandu Valley alone. We may not quite be making the Great Leap Forward, but Christianity has made great strides in Nepal, and we have one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world.

What of it? I have always had a problem having religion foisted on me, be it through the medium of all-night megaphoned bhajans or clean-scrubbed Jehovah’s witnesses a-knocking on my doorstep. But as long as I don’t have to hear it or don’t see the ill consequences of it, I don’t care what religion rocks your boat, it’s all Greek to me. What is striking, however, is the remarkable growth of the Gospel in a society traditionally bound by Hindu or Buddhist conventions. This speaks volumes about that society’s failure to address the spiritual needs of its members. The cynics or diehards among us may allege that Christian missionaries offer financial inducements to lure marginalised Dalits and janjatis away from their ‘real’ religious roots, regardless of how recent conversions to Vedic Hinduism itself might be. But the fact remains – state and society have failed these people in some way, and Christianity is offering them something tradition has been unable to.

So rather than perceive the growth of Christianity as a threat (read: editorials in 2011 that express surprise, no, shock, at the new census figures), perhaps it should be seen as a wake-up call. Not to imagine that we can turn the clock back, that this would be even desirable, but to consider how, beyond economics, we can accommodate the hundreds of thousands of Christian Nepalis and others who are so disenchanted with Nepali spirituality. That, rather than a turkey dinner, might be food for thought this Christmas. For those who have the means, after all, ‘tis the season to be merry, like any other.
Leaders speak

Kulchandra Neupane in Kantipur, 5 December

“The declaration of federal states is a serious conspiracy”, KP Oli, 28 November

“To protest against the declaration of federal states is a ploy to prevent the country from going for federalism”, Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, 30 November

“The declaration of federal states is a serious conspiracy”, NC leader Sushil Koirala, 2 December

“We’ll decide declaration of federal states is a big conspiracy”, PM Madhav Kumar Nepal, 3 December

“Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal is trying to become a king without a crown”, NC leader Ram Chandra Poudel, 3 December

If their speeches are anything to go by, the country is heading to a confrontation rather than a completion of the peace process and a new constitution. If leaders sometimes appear to be reaching a consensus, they inevitably pull away.

Why? Youth leaders of the big three parties think power-grabbing prevails in politics. They say that the constituent assembly should be the primary issue and power secondary but it is other way round.

Besides, leaders contradict their own speeches. NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba stressed the need for a high-level political mechanism in Biratnagar on November 30. On the same day in Kathmandu, just 20km away, he said, “The high-level mechanism will be a place for gossip, there is no need for it.”

Such contradictory statements have brought internal party rifts to the fore:

“The coalition does not become rightist just because there are no Maoists”, PM Nepal, politburo meeting, 2 December

“We have to leave the government if need be”, UML chairman Jhala Nath Khanal, politburo meeting, 2 December

“The NC itself is going against the peace process by opposing the idea of a high-level political mechanism”, Deputy PM Sujata Khanal, 29 November

The leaders themselves are not oblivious to their contradictions:

“Leaders have become irresponsible. They don’t have control over their own speech”, NC leader Purna Bahadur Khadka

“The leaders’ expressions show the forces that want confrontation have become stronger within the party”, Maoist leader Top Bahadur Rayamajhi

It is obvious that journalists, rights activists, intellectuals and those who raise their voice are facing trouble in the districts. But the physical assault on Rukum journalist Tika Bista has only inspired us to pursue professional excellence in journalism.

The Maoists’ nurturing of a culture of impunity has helped create an environment conducive for opportunists to take advantage. The journalists in the district are in the forefront to discourage this trend. If their morale is low, the whole of society will have to bear the brunt of it. At this moment, we remember Uma Singh and wish Tika Bista a speedy recovery.

Leaders on the frontline

Related in Himal Khabarpatrika, 16-30 December

It is obvious that journalists, rights activists, intellectuals and those who raise their voice are facing trouble in the districts. But the physical assault on Rukum journalist Tika Bista has only inspired us to pursue professional excellence in journalism.

The courage and commitment of journalists working in the districts has challenged the reign of fear in a society already facing intimidation, threats, assaults and “physical action”. Even after the Maoists’ move from insurgency to peaceful politics, they do not seem to have developed an inclination for political norms and ideology. They are consolidating the party by recruiting people with brutal criminal backgrounds who have tarnished the party’s image. The leadership occasionally makes apologies for atrocities committed by their party cadres but they tend to overlook the increasing number of such incidents.

The Maoists’ nurturing of a culture of impunity has helped create an environment conducive for opportunists to take advantage. The journalists in the district are in the forefront to discourage this trend. If their morale is low, the whole of society will have to bear the brunt of it. At this moment, we remember Uma Singh and wish Tika Bista a speedy recovery.

PM’s day out

Bidhesh Pokhrel in Nayaapatrika, 13 December

“This facewash suits your skin,” said a store proprietor wearing a sticker on her left cheek, as Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal entered the exhibition hall in Biratnagar. There was no way the prime minister could refuse her supplications. “Really?” said Nepal, “Did you make this yourself?” Yes, she responded, “we made it ourselves and it’s completely natural.”

Convinced, Nepal reached for his wallet, but the proprietor stopped him. “Don’t worry, this is a gift.”

Madhav Kumar was visiting the 10th Cottage Industry Festival and National Industrial Expo at Biratnagar, which began on Thursday. The PM spent 30 minutes there on Saturday shopping, observing stalls and receiving gifts. He received the facewash, worth Rs 120, and other items as gifts from the proprietor, and bought other things he wanted. He later caught sight of an organic coffee stall. “How much is the coffee?” he asked. Upon receiving an answer, he asked again, “Is this made in Nepal?”

He reached for his pocket but, perhaps finding no money there, instead asked an assistant to buy a packet. “We have to leave the government if need be”, UML chairman Jhala Nath Khanal, politburo meeting, 2 December

“If the declarations of federal states are a conspiracy”, Deputy PM Sujata Khanal, 29 November

“The NC itself is going against the peace process by opposing the idea of a high-level political mechanism”, Deputy PM Sujata Khanal, 29 November

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The courage and commitment of journalists working in the districts has challenged the reign of fear in a society already facing intimidation, threats, assaults and “physical action”. Even after the Maoists’ move from insurgency to peaceful politics, they do not seem to have developed an inclination for political norms and ideology. They are consolidating the party by recruiting people with brutal criminal backgrounds who have tarnished the party’s image. The leadership occasionally makes apologies for atrocities committed by their party cadres but they tend to overlook the increasing number of such incidents.

The Maoists’ nurturing of a culture of impunity has helped create an environment conducive for opportunists to take advantage. The journalists in the district are in the forefront to discourage this trend. If their morale is low, the whole of society will have to bear the brunt of it. At this moment, we remember Uma Singh and wish Tika Bista a speedy recovery.

Leaders on the frontline

Related in Himal Khabarpatrika, 16-30 December

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PM’s day out

Bidhesh Pokhrel in Nayaapatrika, 13 December

“This facewash suits your skin,” said a store proprietor wearing a sticker on her left cheek, as Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal entered the exhibition hall in Biratnagar. There was no way the prime minister could refuse her supplications. “Really?” said Nepal, “Did you make this yourself?” Yes, she responded, “we made it ourselves and it’s completely natural.”

Convinced, Nepal reached for his wallet, but the proprietor stopped him. “Don’t worry, this is a gift.”

Madhav Kumar was visiting the 10th Cottage Industry Festival and National Industrial Expo at Biratnagar, which began on Thursday. The PM spent 30 minutes there on Saturday shopping, observing stalls and receiving gifts. He received the facewash, worth Rs 120, and other items as gifts from the proprietor, and bought other things he wanted. He later caught sight of an organic coffee stall. “How much is the coffee?” he asked. Upon receiving an answer, he asked again, “Is this made in Nepal?”

He reached for his pocket but, perhaps finding no money there, instead asked an assistant to buy a packet. “We have to leave the government if need be”, UML chairman Jhala Nath Khanal, politburo meeting, 2 December

“If the declarations of federal states are a conspiracy”, Deputy PM Sujata Khanal, 29 November

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Ethnic liberty first

Laxman Tharu, president, Federal Democratic National Forum

Janajatis are deprived of their right to utilise their water, land and forests as guaranteed by ILO Convention 169. The government is selling medicinal herbs, wood, rocks and soil without taking permission from the rightful owners because Janajatis don’t have access to politics. Once the provinces are created based on ethnicity and the rights over water, forests and land are ensured, they don’t have to look to the centre for development activities and locals will be employed.

Creating federal units without the right to self-determination is impossible. It should be understood as the right to secession. It is a provision to take decisions on our own but within the purview of the country’s interests.

The ethnic issue should be resolved before class conflict. If we want to resolve the class issue, all should be employed, which is impossible. But the people are rendered unemployed, impoverished and disrespected just because they are Magar, Tharu, Dalit or Muslim. How can this be a class issue?

Ethnicity is class

Sanjibang Palungaya, president, Limbuwan State Council

We are not seeking the autonomy of Limbus in Limbuwan. Our movement is for the liberation of Limbuwan and its autonomy. Limbuwan itself is a territory, not an ethnicity. Ethnic autonomy is not possible. Once autonomy is in place, Limbus and all those living here will be liberated.

Autonomy without the right to self-determination is meaningless. Locals should have rights over their resources, as defined by ILO Convention 169.

We follow all democratic norms. Multi-ethnicity, multi-language, multi-culture is our reality. If we ignore this, there won’t be lasting peace and security.

All castes will have equal rights in Limbuwan. There will be autonomous units within the provinces to include everyone. Limbuwan is imagined as a colourful Tehatathume Dhaka Topi with different hues and patterns.

The province will have a two-tier parliament: a Lower Limbuwan People’s Council and an Upper Limbuwan Indigenous People’s Council. The representatives in the people’s council will be elected through a proportional representation system and the indigenous council will have representatives of indigenous nationalities from Limbuwan.

People can vote for non-Limbu representatives for the centre. However, the province reserves the right to call back representatives if they are found to be acting against the interests of Limbuwan.

Federalism alone cannot resolve ethnic issues, however.

“No need to panic”

Nepali Times: What is the population and area of the Kochila Autonomous Province, which includes Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari, there were many allegations that the Maoists were forming a parallel government and leading the country towards fragmentation, or even war. The Maoists were forming a parallel government and leading the country towards fragmentation, or even war. The Maoists were forming a parallel government and leading the country towards fragmentation, or even war. The Maoists were forming a parallel government and leading the country towards fragmentation, or even war.

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Maoist Kochila Province is headed by CA member Purna Singh Rajbanshi. Gopal Gauriwal from the Nepali Times asked him about his party’s intentions.

“Do you mean to say that this is just a proposal? If so, who’s going to ratify it?”

We will take it to the CA and leave it to the central leadership.

Is there any possibility of working with the other parties, then?

I don’t think so. But if they have some better ideas for a scientific proposal for federalism we will think about it. But we know we are the biggest party, and therefore our proposal is naturally the strongest.

And if the other parties also start declaring their own provinces one by one like you have? They should understand that we have called this a strong progressive move. There is no need to panic. If the other parties are responsible they should also come up with ideas.

There are already groups that question your boundaries, won’t this invite conflict between ethnic groups?

Only those who are against federalism or want to dilute it say that. Such thinking is completely wrong. If the demands of marginalised ethnic groups that are on the verge of extinction are addressed that is all for the common good, it is not against anyone.

Following the 11 December declaration of the Kochila Autonomous Province, which includes Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari, there were many allegations that the Maoists were forming a parallel government and leading the country towards fragmentation, or even war. The Maoists were forming a parallel government and leading the country towards fragmentation, or even war. The Maoists were forming a parallel government and leading the country towards fragmentation, or even war.
PERSISTENT low pressure continues to govern the weather pattern of the region in the last one and a half weeks. The chilly wind generated from the Indian Ocean has repressed high pressure that has repressed cold air that came in from the Indian Ocean, thus Nepal’s skies remained calm early this week. Satellite pictures of Thursday afternoon indicate more of the same over the weekend. This means we should expect foggy mornings, sunny intervals in the afternoons and clear night skies. This will lower morning temperatures by 2 degrees over the weekend.

**EXHIBITIONS**
- Habsa Hajmuara: Our Grandmothers, book launch & exhibition opening, 18 December, 11AM Friday, Nepal Art Council, Babor Mahal
- Marta to Manhattan, exhibition of photographs by Kashish Das Shrestha at S Disham Art Gallery, Bazar Mahal Revisted, 21 31 December 11AM-5PM, 4483979
- A people war, permanent photo exhibition, Sunday-Friday at Madan Purakar, Patan Dohka

**EVENTS**
- Christmas Workshop at Assumption Catholic Church, 24-25 December, Dharahara, 4926732

**MUSIC**
- Benefit concert for Street Dog Care, at Hyatt Regency Ballroom, with Ani Choying Dolma, 19 December, 5-7PM
- HyJazz every Friday evening by Inner Groove at the Rox Bar, 4489862
- Live music every Friday and night at Koi, 4486092
- Some kinda hip hop, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwaraka’s Hotel, 7PM onwards, 4479498
- Happy cocktail hour, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jafa Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7PM
- Nepali Ghajals and songs at D’Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30PM onwards, 4486989
- Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam nepali every Friday at 7PM at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212

**DINING**
- Christmas Eve dinner, with christmas carols and mulled wine, The Café, Hyatt, Rs 1500 pp
- Christmas Eve dinner, and performances by Sabin Rai, Colombo Band, 8948 Band, 9500, Hotel Shangri-La
- Christmas Eve buffet, enjoy seafood at Lobsters restaurant
- Arabian Night, with bellydancers from Ukraine on New Year’s Eve, Megha Mahal Hall, Hotel Soaltee
- Head to Toran, four-course dinner with a glass of eggnog or glühwein, Rs 2200, Dwaraka’s Hotel
- Christmas French cuisine, veg and non-veg, Rs 2950 and Rs 3950, Chez Caroline, Bazar Mahal Revisted, 4825070
- Jingle bell shaped pizzas, with Christmas punch, as well as BBQ and gourmet fare, Aqua Java Zing, Thamel, 4254849
- Christmas Turkey Dinner, 24 December to 1 January, K-toool Beer & Grill, 4704023
- German Food Festival, 18 December-January, Irish Pub, Lazimpat
- Christmas Cake shop, every Christmas pudding, chocolate Santa Claus, hampers and more at The Lounge, till 31 December, 4491234
- New Year’s Eve dinner, with champagne, Rs 4500+ pp, Rox Restaurant, Hyatt
- Lavaza Coffee and Baskin r Robbins, Blue Note Coffee Shop, Lazimpat
- Strawberry Étagère, strawberry flavours at The Lounge, 4.30PM-6.30PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4491234
- Oriental Nights, all flavours and specialties of Asia every Wednesday at The Café, 6.30PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4491234
- Live continental BBQ Fiesta, exclusive BBQ dinner at Slash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30PM everyday
- Chocolate, Coffee and Caramel, every evening at The Lounge, 4.30-6.30PM, 4911234
- Wine and cheese, every Friday & Saturday at The Lounge, 5-8PM, 4911234
- A café’s café, Dhoskama Café, Patan Dohka, 5522113
- Jazzabell Café, relaunched at Jhamikhel, TGF, 10% discount all day
- The Corner Bar, 5-7PM, 3-11PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4411818
- Al Fresco, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 4279899
- Kakori, for biryani, curries and kebabs, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 7AM-4PM
- Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle East at The Café, Hyatt acquitted, 4491234
- Tapanyaki meat, and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gardenirtha, 4433918
- Pot Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 60, 4412999
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Garden, Gardens of Dreams, operated by Dwaraka’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4425341
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciny Guring, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards, 4411299
- Himalayan Rainforest Hotel at Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4266999
- Tiger by Breakfast, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kirtipur, 4215068
- Stupa View Restaurant, for vegetarian creations & clay oven pizza at Gokarna Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwaraka’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4425341
- Gokarna Forest Resort for a variety of zesties at Trip 11, 4451226

**GETAWAY**
- Fly away, Marco Polo Travel offers a 3-night package deal to Thailand for Rs 2900 pp on a twin sharing basis, inclusive of air fare, a 4-star accommodation, flight, 4 and 5-star accommodation, food and beverages
- Escapade, one-night stay with Christmas gala dinner, cultural shows, Christmas theme cocktails and drinks at Dhulikhel Mountain Resort, 9300 pp
- New Year’s, The Dwaraka’s Himalyan Shangri La Village Resort offers an overnight stay with BBQ dinner, live band, champagne and brunch, 4559899
- Godawari Village Resort, offers a New Year’s Eve package for Rs 899 per couple, inclusive of accommodation, dinner, door prizes and a live performance by The Heat Breakers, 5900757

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com
THAT’S SORTED THEN: Pushpa Kamal Dahal with UNSG Rep for Children and Armed Conflict Radhika Coomaraswamy after signing the action plan for the discharge of disqualified combatants.

SEEING IS BELIEVING: Writer Kanak Mani Dixit at the launch of his book Dekheko Muluk at Patan’s Yala Maya Kendra on Sunday.

WITCH HUNT: Women accused of witchcraft take part in a debate as part of a function organised by Sancharika Samuha for the 16 Days Campaign Against Gender Violence, on Tuesday.

DOWN THE HATCH: Locals dispose of illegal homemade alcohol with the help of Lagankhel police on Saturday.

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have to give the Ostrich Trophy to this government for burying its head in the sand on national priorities. Makunay, who is still remembered as the minister in the short-lived UML govt of 1994 who proposed exporting electricity to China via satellite, got noted Nepali architects together in Baluwatar last week to call for designs to build a 70m statue of Pegasus at Rotten Park. What a hai-pankhii ghoda is supposed to symbolise we don’t know, but if we must have a 70m statue near Rani Pokhari then a winged Donkey (ahem) may be more appropriate at the present time.

And another prize to our rulers for being at the wrong place at the wrong time. When the Kailali forest occupation crisis was going on the cabinet was meeting at Kala Putter. When the Maoists were declaring the Kachila Autonomous State Council in Basantapur on Wednesday, nine ministers were holding a cabinet meeting in Copenhagen. And it looks like the PM will leave Nepal on autopilot and jet off again on a China visit during the indefinite Maoist banned over Xmas and New Year.

And then Chhatra man Chief Sah goes off to India to buy 50 ‘non-lethal’ T-72 tanks for the Nepal Army. Who are we going to fight with second-hand tanks when we have to queue for two hours to get diesel?

Awesome showed his fearsome side the other day at the inauguration of war pictures when he got so carried away by an alleged conspiracy to bump him off that he threatened to ‘vomit out’ (exact quote) the details at an appropriate time. Warning up to the theme, he went on to warn that a million people would have to die and he would swim in their blood to achieve the goal of his revolution. Used to the Chairman’s hyperbole, the Nepali media ignored the remark. And it also ignored the fact that after the speech His Fierceness choked with emotion and shed a tear or two while looking at a portrait of himself, Comrades Lalbhit and Purba during the Chunbang Convention. Interestingly, the conjugal comrades are all smiles in the pic; could it be they had no idea about the purge that was to befall them two days later?

The Ass was there among the well-wishers at Osho Ashram to greet Kishunji happy budday. The PM appeared, and so did the prez, although Her Highness the DPM and Daddy were conspicuous in their absence. The bad blood must really run deep between GPK and KPB. One can understand Kishunji turning to religion at his age, but what is surprising is that PKD now tries not to skip any function dealing with the Opium of the Masses. He was at the yagya by Dinabandhu Pokhrel, the world’s only Maoist Hindu preacher (another one for the Guinness book). So, Awesome shows up at the Osho Ashram, runs smack into President Ram Baron on the stairs, and is so flustered he namastays the man he is trying to unseat for unseating him.

But much more remarkable was the fact that Comrade Vicious has great spin doctors; he arrived at the ceremony already wearing a dozen marigold garlands, giving the impression that he was the Chief Guest and not KP Bhattarai.

The Big Three are supposed to be deadlocked over the wording of the sankalpa prastab, but actually it is stuck because the UML and Baddies can’t agree on who should lead a national govt. The Maoists say that being the largest party they have the right to PMship, while the UML is in no mood to let go. And that, ladies and gentlemen is why we are suffering a 3-day banned next week.

That’s it. There’s nothing more I have to tell you. Back to the day job.

Banned again