Haiti calling

If the pictures of Haiti’s wrecked presidential palace remind us how futile human endeavours are in the face of nature’s brute force, it won’t be the first time. The earthquake of 1934 caused similar damage to the Kathmandu Valley, and the relatively low number of casualties (by today’s standards) shouldn’t deceive us into thinking our capital will get off with anywhere near the level of punishment. As we remember the victims of the Haitian quake in the run-up to Earthquake Safety Day on Jan 16, we’d do well to assess our own risk and consider how we can prepare for the inevitable.

Yes, you CAN

CAN Info-tech is here again and you’d do well to brave the chill if you want to indulge in some hi-tech hijinks this winter.
TRUE NATIONALISM

In the space of one week, some political pressure groups closed down the country in support of ethnic autonomy. Others did the same to protest federalism. Another political party shut down the nation to protest federalism. The Maoists fomented to border hotspots to shake angry fists at India, while in Kathmandu activists rallied at the statue of King Prithvi Narayan Shah.

One of the offshoots of the 2006 Andolan and Nepal’s transition from monarchy to republic is the ongoing debate about the symbols of our nationhood. In this grand, touching, accepted beliefs are being challenged, traditional values questioned. There is a genuine and understandable desire on the part of many groups that have historically been marginalised by Kathmandu from decision-making to have their grievances addressed.

The tragedy is that it is all coming at a time of political instability, which means even moderate political leaders have been forced into radical posturing to keep their rocks together. Some donor-funded NGOs have now gone for development organisations to political pressure groups with incendiary ethnic, racist and separatist agendas. Their views are now so extreme and rhetoric so radical that their political heathens lack moderate in comparison.

Things are made worse by a rigid, exclusionary state based on partisanship. Perhaps the most extreme groups, operating on hatreds of basic entitlements. Perhaps this could be why they have mobilised the的力量 of an India-dominated economy. The lack of jobs and opportunities, and over-centralised decision-making by unaccountable politicians.

Nepal’s neo-republicans love to vilify Prithvi Narayan Shah, but that king showed more foresight, vision and wisdom than any of the leaders of this supposedly ‘new’ Nepal. Prithvi Narayan didn’t conquer Nepal militarily, for the most part he co-opted principalities and allowed them self-government and autonomy. Even when the Valley fell after a military siege he was way ahead of his time in merging his kingdom into Kathmandu rather than the other way around. Prithvi Narayan was much more of a federal democrat than today’s slopeheen on the streets.

Prithvi Narayan’s guise of the political patronage in Kathmandu looks like a farce, but it reminds us what true nationalism is. True nationalism doesn’t consist in going to Susta, Kalapani and Khurulatal to deliver xenophobic and paranoid tirades but in being more self-reliant, having more self-respect, and cultivating a sense of unity and national pride. If we want to reduce our Indian influence, it is more important to restrict the trade gap through prudent use of our natural resources, and make India dependent on Nepal rather than the other way around. Nepal’s nationalism is about celebrating our diversity, not using it to divide us.

Susta: A rough road track with fields on one side and a river on the other; hispanic-speaking villagers, many of them Muslims: a single decrepit police post; the winter fog; and a border where a single border post. And demarcate the border small thing. Build a health post. And demarcate the border so we can cross to the Nepali mainland more easily. Give us citizenship, for more than 60 per cent of villagers are not legally Nepali. Construct a bridge so we can cross to the Nepali river, which took a rough road track with fields on one side and a river on the other; hispanic-speaking villagers, many of them Muslims; a single decrepit police post; the winter fog; and a border where a single border post. And demarcate the border so we can cross to the Nepali mainland more easily. Give us citizenship, for more than 60 per cent of villagers are not legally Nepali. Construct a bridge so we can cross to the Nepali mainland more easily. Give us full VDC status so we don’t have to travel to Trivoori for every small thing. Build a health post. And demarcate the border with India.

Notice a pattern? All these demands have more to do with the utter failure of the Nepali state rather than grand Indian hegemonic designs. The lack of penetration of the state in its own territory; its diplomatic laziness and ineffectualness; its administrative failure to provide basic infrastructure; and the tendency of politicians to opportunistically whip up struggles, there is much that India can only be blamed for its pettiness, and lack of diplomatic magnanimity. Instead of allowing such issues to fester, India would earn significant goodwill if it were willing to make certain concessions.

Residents in the deep south seem to understand this. It is an emotive issue, but the Madhesh is not a province of Nepal. It is a group of Maoist-ruled constituencies. Many of whom of whom regard India with suspicion. They were also reinforcing their message about a ‘controlled’ government in contrast to their own government, which took pro-

people measures, laws that seem to imperative laws, creating employment schemes, and increasing budgets for VDCs. Political corruption is all about repeating themes immutable times in different public settings to maintain influence.

Crucially though, it was one more step in strengthening the organisation, energising the party cadre, and reinforcing the message that the leadership remained committed and united.

Being embedded with the Maoists, I have witnessed the working culture and commitment of the whole-time organisation that sustains the party. A large group of Maoist-affiliated students from TU came to Susta, cheerfully chanting slogans. YCL from adjacent districts were present in full force. Regional state committees were activated. Party members and sympathisers provided shelter and food. Mass meetings were organised, where martyrs were honoured, local leaders got a platform, and the Maoist position on the national political situation was explained. Other contingents replicated the pattern in different parts of the country.

Whether the Maoist ‘national awareness’ campaign is appropriate or will succeed is debatable. But there is little doubt that it has strengthened the party machinery further on the ground, and helped the Maoists reach out directly to multiple constituencies.

IN MEMORIAM

Ramji, your article is a mistake for victims’ struggle for justice. It is very difficult in Nepal to end impunity and provide truth and justice to disappeared families and thousands of conflict victims, when activists like you are not and every party is trying to break the spirit of justice. The dollar organisations and so-called NGOs are not interested in victims, but peace projects for the sake of money and fame in the market. Maoists are not interested in this human rights in Nepal, because they are scared to face the courts and punishment. This is why they never come to the Nanajan Basnet and Major General Toran cases. I salute your bravery.

Raktabeej

ON THE WEB

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| I beg to differ with Mr Lal in that his insight is being highly influenced by continuations and the Indian media. I believe Nepali television channels are quite crude, but that’s because they’re un Prep. | Dear Mr. Jenkins, it is indeed wonderful to see you paying tribute to our grandparents, fathers, uncles, and brothers who lost their lives in WWII & World War I. (Sandman, 2008). One of my uncles who was only 18 years old died in WWII and our family doesn’t even know where he died. As our parents and grandparents were neither educated nor had the benefit of their education and computer world they could not locate his cemetery or place of death. So by your kind gesture you have at least done given my mother’s family some peace. Once again, thank you very much and a hearty Gunthali namaskar to you and the fellow WWII veterans of the UK. | This article is powerful and has good analysis (Justice, #484). International community and support- based INGOs must reach the victims families and family associations directly, as the NGOs are not interested in victims, but peace projects for the sake of money and fame in the market. Maoists are not interested in this human rights in Nepal, because they are scared to face the courts and punishment. This is why they never come to the Nanajan Basnet and Major General Toran cases. I salute your bravery.

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PLAIN SPEAKING

President Jha

The tribulations of Nepalis on the border have more to do with the Nepali state than with India.

...there is much that India can only be blamed for its pettiness, and lack of diplomatic magnanimity. Instead of allowing such issues to fester, India would earn significant goodwill if it were willing to make certain concessions...
The Maoists have once again shown they are masters of media manipulation. Just as it appeared that they were on the verge of going off the publicity radar, they have managed to hog the headlines and monopolise primetime.

Ever since their scuffle with UML in the mid-nineties for the control of a blank wall to paint party slogans near Ratna Park, the Maoists have dominated media coverage. The favourable press that the most violent political group in Nepal’s modern history continues to get is a mystery worthy of exploration by media studies scholars.

When they began their violent campaign in the mid-mountains, the Maoists had little access to the mainstream media. The commentariat in Kathmandu bristled with UML-types who would jump at any chance to attack the NC. The idea of Nepali nationalism was still based on kneejerk anti-Indian rhetoric. The Maoist media strategy took advantage of these absurdities of the popular press.

The Narayanhiti Massacre provided the Maoists with an opening to run their disinformation campaign. The press, including the most popular Nepali daily of the time, became their mouthpieces. With the escalation of armed conflict, the Maoists forced the media to do their bidding. Those that dared to hold independent views were threatened, attacked or killed, as the case of Dekendra Thapa of Dailekh illustrates.

When they had to take shelter in India, the Maoists had to come up with a strategy to deflect attention from their dependence on that country. So they directed their cadres to begin digging trenches on the Nepali side of no-man’s land. In a country where the middle class has turned a sanctioned mentality into a nationalistic virtue, this turned out to be a fail-safe strategy to promote the agenda of armed insurgency.

The response of the mainstream parties to the propaganda onslaughts of the Maoists was often incoherent, limp and self-defeating. Commentators close to NC claimed that Maoist guerrillas were merely UML cadres in mufti. UML footsoldiers in the media responded that the guerrillas were maiming and killing only class enemies. Former Panchas in rightwing parties were happy that communist guerrillas had declared them nationalists. In this confusion, all that Chairman Prachanda had to do was spread the rumour that Pushpa Kamal Dahal did not exist, and the media left him free to travel between New Delhi and Lucknow.

The only time the Maoists’ disinformation machinery faltered was when they joined the coalition government. It did not get any better when Dahal led the ruling alliance and tried to strengthen his hold over state institutions. When Dahal had to resign under duress, his propagandists realised the Maoists would now be targeted by the mainstream media. Resistance would have been pointless and even counterproductive. So they decided to play along and be as spectacular a target as possible. Journalists have since discovered that we can love them or hate them, but we cannot ignore the Maoists. It seems the moment Dahal is removed from the headlines, there is nothing to report on. The wily supremo uses his indispensability to make the media magnify the Maoists’ concocted posturing. To pander to the prejudices of hypernationalists in UML and the fronts of former Panchas, the Maoists reap the publicity benefit.

The best way to counter Maoist propaganda is to deny them the oxygen of publicity. Even when Dahal’s buffoonery is ridiculed in print, he still emerges a winner in front of his core constituency — the masses in the countryside that deeply resent the holier-than-thou attitude of the urban middle class. In the art of deception, the Maoists have proved that they have no equals in Nepal.

All publicity is good publicity for the Maoist propagandists

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More useful has been the reported rift between Dahal and his alter ego Baburam Bhattarai. No matter whose side the media takes, the Maoists reap the publicity benefit.

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In recent years, the government has instituted a series of education reforms that aim to make schools more responsive to the needs of individual students. However, there are signs that this policy shift, detailed in the School Sector Reform Plan of 2009, may be frustrated by the persistent problems of large class sizes and inadequate teacher training.

Two key policies the government has warmed to are the Liberal Promotion Policy (LPP) and the Continuous Assessment system (CAS), which relax promotion requirements while assessing students more regularly throughout the school year. The point is to reduce dropout rates, ensure that all students keep up with the syllabus, and lessen the immense psychological pressure that attends the conventional examination system.

“Many students who fail during the early years of schooling never return to school. These policies will help to check that trend,” says educationalist Tirtha Khaniya of the National Planning Commission.

Variants of these policies are practiced widely in the west and have shown impressive gains in southeast Asia with regards to access to and quality of education. In Nepal, LPP has been in operation for several years from Classes 1-3, and was recently extended up to Class 7. While it may be too early for a conclusive judgment, the early signs aren’t all positive.

“Access to education has improved but the impact on the quality of education in the lower classes has been mixed,” says educationalist Mana Prasad Wagley, Dean of the Kathmandu University School of Education.

At Shree Janakalyan Higher Secondary School in Hungi, Palpa, it’s clear why this may be so. The school has over 1000 students but only 11 classrooms, which means about 100 students must be packed into classrooms designed to seat only 30. Under these circumstances, the kind of individual student attention that LPP and CAS demand is next to impossible.

English teacher Drowna Raj Nyoupane complains, “I can’t interact with my students and supervise what they are doing, so I don’t even know if they are learning anything. With over 100 students in a class, what can I do?” Additionally, teachers haven’t been adequately trained about the proper implementation of these policies. As a result, many teachers have misinterpreted them as an outright prohibition on failing students.

“Too many teachers think the policy means you can’t fail anyone. But, that just isn’t the case,” says Wagley. This, along with large class size, has led to cascading problems. Some students are less motivated to study, and the classroom environment has deteriorated as the higher pass rate has raised the student retention rate and subsequently class sizes. Teaching has also grown more difficult as classes have filled up with students of varying skill-levels, since they are passed regardless of their exam scores.

The consequences have been felt outside of Hungi too. In 2004, a study on CAS by the Department of Education found that schools with CAS performed worse than those without, and concluded that the policy had failed.

“This is the most absurd result I’ve ever seen,” erupts Wagley, “these aren’t bad policies, they have just been poorly implemented.” Absurd or not, it isn’t a surprise. There have been problems with teacher training and supervision for a long time. In the 1980s, two donor-funded programs worked separately to revise the academic curriculum and improve teaching practices. But the teachers weren’t trained about the curricular changes, so the programs couldn’t be implemented properly.

“Reflects a broader point: although everyone knows what’s necessary for education reform, not many are clear about what’s sufficient, like teaching teachers how to deal with children,” concludes Khaniya.

Until these extra investments are made, the future of school children like those in Hungi hangs in the balance.

If you would like to make a contribution to Shree Janakalyan Higher Secondary School, contact Janak Raj Pandey at janapan@gmail.com

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**Specials**

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

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As we put out all the stops, The Himalayan Times now comes to you loaded with Specials everyday. Spawning the norm of life, your daily life is paired with something exclusive for everyone. Easy to expect nothing less when you’ve accepted the unstoppable.
Where has all the money gone?

Liquidity crisis and what more...

There is little research done on liquidity issues; so anyone says anything they want. Here is the Beed’s take: the money transacted between co-operative banks is probably half or one-third of the total inter-bank transactions. These co-operative banks are not regulated, so no one knows where their customers have invested. The co-operatives then lend cash to individuals who buy real estate, to continue to deal in cash (in order to avoid paying taxes). The co-operatives do not require clients to present their KYC (Know Your Customer), so anyone can be a client and do anything with their money. Some people wonder if this is how the dance bars in Kathmandu are funded!

The co-operatives have mushroomed since banks are too busy focusing on missionary lending against collaterals and personal guarantees. Banks do not like to take risks, so no project finance stuff, no non-recourse lending, no cash flow lending. Perhaps, as one banker friend confided in this Beed, the bankers themselves are going the chamber way: the money gone? Are people not remitting in expectation of a dollar appreciation, or are they remitting through informal channels? Has the opening of branches and the installation of a plethora of ATM machines led to more idle cash lying around at branches and machines? Does the NRB really know how much currency is required in a country of 30 million people? These are the questions that must be answered, and one hopes we don’t need another high-level mechanism to do so.

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Sat-reliability

The Thuraya XT satellite phone, with an unprecedented battery life, is set to entice customers, suffering under the hassles of load-shedding and the vagaries of local telecommunications. The Thuraya XT is considered the world’s most rugged satellite phone, is user-friendly, and comes with GPS to ensure you don’t get lost during an enjoyable phone conversation in a remote corner of the country.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

Golfers’ aid

Hanraj Hulsechand and Company, the sole authorised distributor of Bajaj two-wheelers in Nepal, donated three Pulsar 180cc motorcycles to the Kathmandu Metropolitan Traffic Police Office with six Pulsar motorcycles for use by its Quick Response Team.

 awarded with golf sets last week, Surya Nepal Khelparyatan and Surya Nepal have been organising the event with the objective of identifying and mentoring golfing talents in Nepal.

Traffic gifts

Kathmandu Metropolitan Traffic gifts

Police Office with six Pulsar motorcycles for use by its Quick Response Team.

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Capital risk

There are some 150,000 houses in Kathmandu Municipality, and 4000 are added every year. But the metropolitan municipality responsible for issuing certificates for land sales has not been able to estimate to what extent the Nepal National Building Code has been adhered to. In fact, Head of the Physical Development and Planning Department of Kathmandu Municipality, Bratn Rijal, reckons not even 40 out of these 4000 houses are monitored for earthquake safety during construction.

The situation is similar in the other municipalities of the Kathmandu Valley, though engineer Pravin Shrestha claims in Lalitpur, carpenters have been trained to build earthquake-resistant houses and the municipality does conduct regular checks.

It’s not just old residential houses that are at risk: administrative centres such as Singh Darbar are equally insecure. According to NSET estimates, an earthquake on the scale of 1934 could destroy 70 per cent of the Valley’s buildings. Eighty per cent of casualties would occur as a result of earthquakes. Experts note that major earthquakes occur here every 80 to 100 years.

Despite being at high risk from earthquakes, Nepal’s lack of preparedness makes a mockery of Earthquake Safety Day

Do or die

Last Tuesday’s 7.3 Richter earthquake devastated the island nation of Haiti, and alarm bells rang on the other side of the world as it emerged that thousands of people were dead or missing. There are approximately 1300 Nepali peakseakers stationed in the country.

They may have been declared safe, but Nepal has plenty of reason to worry on its own account as it prepares for Earthquake Safety Day on January 16. Nepal ranks 11th on the list of nations at risk from earthquakes. Experts note that major earthquakes occur here every 80 to 100 years. The last catastrophe to fit this bill occurred in 1934, when 60,000 houses were destroyed and 8,518 people died in an 8.3 Richter quake, half in the Kathmandu Valley. But preventative measures are proceeding at a snail’s pace.

Following the earthquake of 1988, during which 721 people lost their lives, the state did begin to look into such measures. The 2005 Nepal National Building Code was to be enacted in 58 municipalities and 121 peri-urban VDCs in two years. Between 1994 and 2005, 7300 engineer-level workers were trained in earthquake-resistant construction. Similarly, the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) has provided training to 200 members of the security forces and the Red Cross on earthquake impact minimisation.

But implementation is virtually absent. Though Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Thimi and Kirtipur have only adopted some measures. Amrit Man Tuladhar, National Program Manager for the Earthquake Risk Reduction and Recovery Preparedness Programme for Nepal, says, “There are laws, we’ve been trained, but if it isn’t implemented what can we do?”

The problem stems in part from the lack of a separate government authority and national strategy for disaster management, such as exist in many Asian nations. Implementation has also suffered due to weak support from local administration, which in any case is hamstrung by the absence of elected representatives in the last decade.

More recently, the cabinet passed the Disaster Risk Management Bill under the Nepal National Building Code. According to the regulations, buildings would have to be checked by a national expert committee. The Department of Survey and Land Enquiry, which has the power to declare a building safe, would also have to conduct a re-inspection. It is not clear whether the bill will be enacted.

In fact, Dixit quips, “Easy if you do it, hard if you don’t want to.” If the government wants to, the Disaster Risk Reduction Management National Regulations could be passed in parliament and put into action immediately. Shag bah Koirala, Joint Secretary of the Central Natural Disaster Relief Committee at the Home Ministry, claims a relevant draft law is almost ready to be submitted to parliament. The enactment of this law, under the aegis of a National Emergency Work Coordination Committee, will be a major achievement. But according to Dixit, it will take 20 years for Nepal to reach the level of Japan’s preparedness even if the strategy is implemented tomorrow. Time is of the essence.

Dangerous game

Maoist leaders visited key points of the Nepal-India border on Monday as part of their campaign for ‘national independence’ and angrily denounced Indian encroachment upon Nepali territory. Baburam Bhattarai said internal and foreign reactionaries had teamed up to undermine Nepal’s sovereignty. But at the same time, the Maoists were at pains not to estrange Indian authorities, whom, recent reports suggest, have met with secretly over the past several months. Mohan Baidya and Pushpa Kamal Dahal said they weren’t trying to sour Nepal-India relations, but simply pointing out obvious injustices. All eyes are now on a high-level Indian delegation including External Affairs Minister SM Krishna that begins with a three-day visit Friday.

Smoking guns

Two local leaders were killed in Parsa in the past week. On Monday, gunmen allied with the Joint Tarai Mukti Morcha shot at Assistant Chief District Officer Bal Bahadur Malla as he was getting into his car, killing his bodyguard, Ananta Raj Khadka. On Tuesday, unidentified gunmen killed Rajesh Mandal, second-in-charge of the Maoist party in Parsa. The violence comes after several Tarai-based armed groups pulled out of talks with the government, which they say is indifferent to their demands. In response, the Maoists called a bandh in Bhujpur on Thursday and are demanding greater government security for party cadres and government employees. Meanwhile, locals have lured down, fearing another wave of violence is imminent.

A grudging welcome

Just days after the High Level Political Mechanism was formed to end the current political impasse, it has already run into difficulties. UML leader KP Oli said it lacked legitimacy since it was formed on the basis of interactions between three party leaders, not the parties themselves, and warned the Maoists were gearing up to capture state power. Baburam Bhattarai also said the group was divided.

The week also saw a drawn-out public spat over whether to invite Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal into the group. Dahal thinks Nepal, whom he labels the “main cause of the impasse”, should be left out. Girija Prasad Koirala and Jhalanath Khanal decided to make Nepal a ‘permanent invitee-member’ on Thursday. Needless to say, Dahal isn’t happy.

Slowly but surely

There is progress on the constitutional front. The Constitutional Committee submitted its draft report and concept paper to the CA on Sunday. The Committee on State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power announced it was putting the final touches to its concept on Monday. The Committee still has to work out names and boundaries of provinces, but is ready to go to grant to ethnic communities the right to preserve languages and culture, to participate in political commerce, and manage land within their provincial boundaries. It also envisions special rights to protect Dalits and women.

The Committee on Form of Government submitted a compilation of three different概念 papers, after the NC, UML and Maoists failed to resolve their differences.
In the age of connectivity and community, making do without all your technological flotsam and jetsam may seem like sheer insanity. Hold on to that thought.

Technology continues to dazzle, in the process rendering obsolete whatever gadget was the talk of the town only yesterday. But the song remains the same – more and more functions are being integrated into unified devices. The mobile phone is a prime example, with most models today featuring internet connectivity and entertainment on the go among other things.

With applications such as Skype to make your calls, hardware such as the TV adaptor bringing breaking news to your desktop, and all the rest covered by your personal computer, the concept of an integrated work and entertainment system is gaining popularity by the day.

Not just in the west, either. This year’s Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) Infotech began its six-day run on Wednesday. Sudesh Kumar Karna, president of CAN, expects a turnout of around 300,000. Nepali Times reviews some of the best digital devices and solutions that money can buy at the country’s biggest IT show so you can put together your very own home integrated system.
**Desктops**

**Acer Aspire Z5610**
(Rs 105,000),
Mercantile Office Systems

Keeping it simple, the Acer Aspire Z5610 is an all-in-one desktop. While it might not be on par with the iMac, its price belies its performance. The screen is as big as it can get at 23 inches, ensuring enough space for work and decent movie viewing. However, what makes the Acer Aspire Z5610 stand out is its seamless fingertip experience. That’s right, you can use touch screen technology to perform various tasks and commands. Just be sure to wash your hands before getting down to work...

**Sound systems**

**Creative Gigaworks G500**
(Rs 34,500), Multronics

With certification from THX, Creative’s Gigaworks G500 is a made-for-movie masterpiece. With a 5.1 speaker configuration, the sound is of superlatively crisp quality, ensuring that your movie experience is as good as being in a theatre. Music enthusiasts aren’t forgotten by the G500, which accepts MP3 players such as the iPod. Don’t forget to check if you’re home alone before blasting the neighbourhood.

**Logitech Z-5500 Digital**
(Rs 38,000), Neoteric

Comparable to the Creative Gigaworks G500, Logitech takes the audio experience one step further by indulging our lazy genes. Aside from THX-approved sound quality, the Logitech Z-5500 Digital is blessed with a wireless remote to do all the work for you. Couple it with other wireless components and proximity will be a redundant word.

**Logitech Dinovo Mini**
(Rs 16,500), Neoteric

The Logitech Dinovo Mini is a multi-talented little wonder that takes bulk and boredom right out of the equation. While fulfilling the basic role of a keyboard, it also has a ClickPad that allows you to use it as a mouse. Flip a switch, and it becomes the perfect remote. The ClickPad turns into a directional pad for you to scroll on DVD menus. Be it to stop, play, fast forward or rewind, the Dinovo Mini seems to do it all. Don’t take your eyes off this beauty if you want to keep it for yourself.

**Creative-HS-1200**
(Rs 12,500), Multronics

While not as visually appealing as those seen in sci-fi movies, the HS-1200 makes up with practicality and performance. Its wireless capability ensures maximum freedom, while the noise-cancelling microphone delivers clear quality sound. Call friends and family while playing the guitar or sipping a cup of tea. The HS-1200 makes conversations easier and personal once again.

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**WEEKEND WEATHER**

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

It has been cold and cloudy all week, with the temperature in Kathmandu plummeting to 0.2 degrees, the lowest it has been all season. Satellite images show that low pressure in the South Himalaya Zone is drawing in clouds from high pressure regions north of Nepal. The cloud cover lacks moisture so will only cause light drizzles, but will lower temperatures as it blocks out sunlight. Expect partly cloudy skies and fluctuating temperatures over the weekend. Overall, it’s a decent time to travel.

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**Desktops**

**Apple iMac**
(21.5”, Rs 122,000; 27”, Rs 160,000),
Neoteric

The new iMac, unsurprisingly, is as sleek and beautiful as its predecessors. Sporting an expansive 27-inch screen, it gives you more than enough space to run multiple work windows. Watch a video, check your mail and browse the latest news simultaneously: the iMac takes the concept of multi-tasking to a whole new level. If its practicalities still don’t impress you, it’s likely the design will draw you in eventually. And if you can’t afford a 27-inch smile, then try the smaller version.

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**HIMAL Khabarpatrika**

16 January-1 February

**COVER:**
Extremism Threatens Peace
Left and right extremism has polarised the country

**Army integration**
Neither army wants integration

**Interview:**
BABURAM BHATTARAI

Economic Chain Reaction
A drop in the remittances that prop up the Nepali economy

**Earthquake!**
Lessons of Haiti for Nepal

**CONSTITUTION SUPPLEMENT**

Ramesh Dhungel on the relevance of Prithvi Narayan Shah
Report on state transformation
Bhairahawa Interaction

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**CAN Info-Tech 2010**
will run until Jan 18, 10am-5pm, Exhibition Hall, Bhrikuti Mandap, Kathmandu
EVENTS
- ‘In the Eye of the Storm’, exhibition of drawings by Manuj Babu Mishra, 21 January. Siddharth Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, Sunday-Friday 11.00am-5.00pm, Saturday 12.00am-4.00pm, 4218048
- ‘Politics Without Guarantees’, lecture series XXXVI by Vinay Gidwani, 18 January, 4pm, Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap
- People After War, permanent photo exhibition, every day 11am-4pm, Matan Puraskar, Patan Dhoaka, for bulk school bookings call 5521393

MUSIC
- Live music from Inner Groove on Fridays at the Rox Bar and Sunday Jazz brunch at The Terrace from 12-3.30pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha.
- Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288
- Some like it hot, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwaraka’s Hotel, 4479488
- Happy cocktail hour, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7pm
- Nepali Ghajals at O’Lounge Beijing Duck Duck, every Thursday 6.30pm, 4486589
- Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7pm at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212
- Jazz evening at Delices de France restaurant every Wednesday, 11am-2pm, 4260326

DINING
- Famous stews of the world, at the Rox Restaurant, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 6.00pm, 4491234, 4489362
- Wine and cheese, every Friday & Saturday, 5-8pm, Strawberry High Tea, 4.30-6.30pm, The Lounge, Hyatt Regency, 4491234, 4489362
- Arabian Nights for Middle Eastern specialties every Friday from 6.30pm, Oriental Nights, flavours and specialties of Asia every Wednesday at The Café, 6.30pm, Hyatt Regency, 4491234, 4489362
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4260700
- Live continental BBQ Festa, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30pm everyday
- The Corner Bar, 5-7pm, 3-11pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 441818
- Lavaza Coffee and Bassin n’ Robbins, at Blue Note Coffee Shop, Lazimpat, 4491234
- Al fresco, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, Kakori, for biryanis, curries and kebabs, 7-10.45pm, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 4273999
- Teppanyaki meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara, 4436318
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwaraka’s Group of Hotels, 9am-10pm, 4425341
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shankar-La with live performance by Ciny Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden every Friday 7pm, Pint Du Jour at Hotel Shankar-La, Lazimpat, 600, 4412569
- Himalyan Rainbow Trout at Hotel Yak and Yet, Darbar Marg, 4248999
- Tiger for Breakfast, breakfast everyday at 9A.M, Kantipath, 4215068
- Gokarna Forest Resort for a variety of sizzlers at Tripti bar, 44512126

GETAWAYS
- Relax Package at the Hyatt for Rs 6200 plus taxes for one night accommodation for two, including breakfast at The Café. Package valid till Feb 20, 2010, only for local residents and Nepalese citizens for a maximum of 3 nights stay. Please call 4491234 or 4496800.
HOMECOMING: Ex-King Gyanendra at Tribhuvan International Airport on Wednesday after returning from five weeks in India.

WHIZ KID: Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal presides over the inaugural ceremony of CAN Info-tech 2010 at Bhrikuti Mandap on Wednesday.

FULL-TIME: Part-time teachers demand permanent teaching positions outside Singh Darbar on Wednesday.

HISTORY: Men dressed in traditional military attire hold up the national flag beneath a statue of Prithvi Narayan Shah in front of Singh Darbar on his birth anniversary, Monday.
NATION

Taking Nepal out of the Nepal Valley

There are many things we can do to make Kathmandu livable, but moving the capital is the one sure shot

KALAM
Rabi Thapa

I’ve lived most of my life at the northern end of the Kathmandu Valley, in the shadow of the Shivapuri mastif. My views of the Himalayas were thus limited to seasonal glimpses from Patan or further afield. As a youth, hill views were my one capacity to elevate remains undiminished in my eyes, even if their relative distance through the prism of pollution makes photos a couple of decades old look like bad photoshop experiments. Despite everything, the Kathmandu Valley is one of the most beautiful parts of the world. It’s just too bad we’ve done so little to keep it that way.

No wonder then that some in the Newar community feel that enough is enough, and that as indigenious inhabitants they must reclaim the valley that through their endeavours alone is a world heritage site. As a representative of the Newa Rastriya Party put it the other day, “What have we got from 240 years of external rule?” While he insisted this did not imply non-Newars had no place in the capital, he lamented that the valley was overburdened in every respect does suggest some Newars feel this way, if we are to view the nose-chopping incident of last Sunday’s banishment in a certain light. But while the world owes a debt to Newari culture, the Newars don’t have more right over the Kathmandu Valley than any other community in Nepal, given the pattern of settlement here (reflected in the rest of the country) and the layers of interdependence that allowed the capital to prosper in the first place. Imagining we can re-establish demographic equilibrium under the guise of an ethnic Nepali state is pure tomfoolery. Then how to save the valley from itself? If maillenarian fantasies involving the wholesale inundation of the valley seem lost, then the Great Earthquake that will devastate Kathmandu is only a matter of time. But that is hardly a premise on which to plan a new Kathmandu.

Shall we then wait for federalism to relieve the valley of its status as the hub of all Nepali endeavours? It’s hard to imagine designating provincial capitals will achieve much beyond creating more levels of administration, and buildings in which to house them across the nation. Kathmandu will still remain the federal capital. Is this the problem, then? From 1950 to 1990, 13 countries in Latin America, Africa and the former Soviet Union moved their capitals. Even the Indian capital moved from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911. Why not Nepal? The rationale for such expensive and risky strategies, as assistant professor of political science at Southern Illinois University Edward Schatzt explained, usually stem from nation-building efforts (particularly in post-colonial situations), economic and administrative justifications, or the whims of dictators. Taking Nepal out of the Nepal Valley doesn’t quite fit that bill, but that in itself doesn’t preclude taking the leap. Has anyone seriously considered moving the capital of the federal republic of New Nepal? Rome wasn’t built in a day. A new capital for Nepal won’t materialise overnight, either. But if we don’t think about it, we may be missing out on a double whammy: the chance to throw the Kathmandu Valley a lifeline, and the chance to give another city a shot at the future. Any takers?

WORLD HERITAGE
SITE: Brasilia’s planned capital, Brasilia

Minding our manners

The twain may never meet, but the belching has got to stop

NEPALI PAN
Subodh Rana

There is an anecdotal story of a Western salesman coming to Nepal and showing his wares to a prospective buyer. Every time he asked whether they liked something, the Nepalis would shake their heads from side to side. The salesman soon left very disappointed, never knowing that the Nepalis were completely happy with what they were seeing and their appreciative headshakes meant, “Yes, we like it!” Culture Shock Nepal is littered with such miscues whereby our mannerisms and manners don’t quite fit that bill, but that in itself doesn’t preclude taking the leap. Has anyone seriously considered moving the capital of the federal republic of New Nepal? Rome wasn’t built in a day. A new capital for Nepal won’t materialise overnight, either. But if we don’t think about it, we may be missing out on a double whammy: the chance to throw the Kathmandu Valley a lifeline, and the chance to give another city a shot at the future. Any takers?!
Traffic travails

Under the Local Self Governance Act 1999, local bodies planned and implemented policies independently, according to the needs of their localities. The arrangement served the political parties well, since it enabled them to get votes more easily, but an integrated plan was politically unfeasible. The costs of this arrangement are rapidly climbing as traffic gets worse. It’s clear what needs to done.

The number of cars has increased 10-fold over the last 15 years—largely because banks have had few other viable investment opportunities amid deteriorating security conditions—and only 73km of new roads have been constructed.

According to the Department of Transport Management, there are 444,700 registered vehicles in Bagmati zone, most in the Kathmandu Valley. And things will only get worse. “If it takes half an hour to cross the Bagmati bridge now, you won’t be able cross the bridge in three years time,” says David Irwin, team leader of the Kathmandu Sustainable Urban Transport Project, funded by the Asian Development Bank.

The project will assist the government in defining a sustainable urban transport vision to be progressively implemented over the years to come. It focuses on the dramatic increase in private vehicles since 1990 and the need to revise traffic acts and regulations in order to increase penalties for traffic offenders, which is impossible unless roads are widened first, which the Traffic Police don’t have the power to do.

It’s also unclear how to regulate traffic under a federal framework. Take the Outer Ring Road project, which was first tabled in 2000. While the planned road would be 50m wide, the government must also acquire 250m of land on either side through land pooling.

The project has prepared a detailed report for 72km out of 150km and land pooling began across a 6.5km stretch between Chobar and Sattal. But the Newa Rajya Committee, a federalist group, opposes the idea, calling it a ‘ploy to replace locals with outside people.’

They asked us to postpone the project until the issue of federalism is finalised,” says Dilip Bhandari, Senior Divisional Engineer of the project, “We will soon hold a meeting with representatives of political parties, locals and stakeholders.”

Until the powers that be discover a unified theory of traffic management, it seems Point A to Point B will be a long way from just that. #48512

A lack of coordination among plans and government agencies has contributed to the valley’s traffic chaos
The real fast track

RATNA SANSAR SHRESTHA

It takes about six to seven hours to reach Patihaliya in the Tarai from Kathmandu, a distance of under 70 kilometers as the crow flies. Although Patihaliya lies due south of the capital, we detour over 100 kilometers to the west to Mugling before heading back east through Nanyangpul to reach Patihaliya. No wonder, then, that the idea of a fast track road has been mooted for some time.

The debate got off to a rather ludicrous start, with some proposing connecting Hetauda to Kathmandu through a set of tunnels. Besides, tunneling being exorbitantly costly and dangerous given Nepal’s fragile geology, it would have been a veritable death trap with the quality of vehicles that ply our nation’s roads. This ‘tunnel vision’ was then supplanted by the proposal to build a fast track road following a feasibility study by the Asian Development Bank.

The hype and assumptions surrounding the North-South Fast Track Project, however, have obscured a much more appealing and sensible option – an electric train service linking Kathmandu to the Tarai.

The first assumption here is that a fast track road will be fast. But with design speeds of 60km/h (50 km/h in mountainous terrain), it doesn’t even come close to matching the potential for landslides. But a track for an electric train would only be 11 metres wide. Encroachment on this scale in hilly terrain is inadvisable in view of the high potential for landslides. Besides, capacity enhancement means totally new track would have four lanes with a width of 21 metres. Encroachment on this scale in hilly terrain is inadvisable in view of the high potential for landslides. But a track for an electric train would only be 11 metres wide. Encroachment on this scale in hilly terrain is inadvisable in view of the high potential for landslides.

The knock-on effects of cutting fossil fuel consumption, quite apart from the obvious benefits to health and productivity, would be that Nepal would curtail its emissions of greenhouse gases by 321,000 tons a year. Electric trains may seem like a fantasy for a country as impoverished as Nepal. But while the North-South Fast Track Project is estimated to cost Rs 69.11 billion, a study conducted by Shankar Nuth Rimal and Birendra Keshari Pokhrel reveals an electric train service connecting Kathmandu to the Tarai would cost just Rs 16.46 billion. While the investment of Rs 60 billion would be just for the road, the costs of the electric train service are inclusive of the track and the rolling stock to run on it. The savings of Rs 50 billion could be invested in setting up electric train services in other areas.

Land use is another point on which electric trains trump roads. The fast track road would have four lanes with a width of 21 metres. Encroachment on this scale in hilly terrain is inadvisable in view of the high potential for landslides. But a track for an electric train would only be 11 metres wide. Besides, capacity enhancement means totally different things for roads and rail tracks. While roads can only be widened, with increased costs and risks, electric train capacity enhancement can be achieved by simply increasing the frequency of train services or the number of trains. What of the customers who are to benefit from the fast track road? Both options save on commuter and cargo time, though electric trains would be significantly faster. Also, it’s assumed road commuters will continue to pay the same fares as now, although service providers will save substantially. It is estimated electric train fares will cost just a third of bus fares. With in-train restaurants and restrooms, travel need no longer be disruptive, and even wireless internet could be installed. And as we know too well, inaugurations of new roads are inevitably followed by a rise in accidents.

Nepal’s future is electric, given the comparative advantage we have in hydroelectric potential. Unfortunately for us, every time a reference is made to transportation, our policymakers and bureaucrats start digging up roads. We are building a new Nepal and an oxymoron such as the North-South Fast Track Project doesn’t deserve the attention it has received, let alone the funding. ✓

Ratna Sansar Shrestha is a senior water resource analyst.

www.ratnasansar.blogspot.com
I would rather die than surrender to injustice," is Baburam Bhattarai’s motto. Party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s allegation that Bhattarai is subservient to India has challenged the latter to defend that belief.

Dahal was accompanied by Bhattarai to his first public appearance in Baluwatar, just before the signing of the CPA, and they have appeared side by side many times since. They even lived together for some time in Nayabajar after they came overground. Their camaraderie was likened to that between a real and flesh. Over time, a split appeared between the nail and flesh into which Dahal has now sprinkled salt with his assertions that Bhattarai is India’s candidate for prime minister. Now it is said they barely talk to each other, and that the clash has more to do with principle than personality.
Himal Khabarpatrika’s final constitutional roundtable outside of the Kathmandu Valley was held in Bhairahawa recently. On the whole, participants expressed disappointment at the CA’s performance while criticising the flawed logic behind the setting up of ethnicity-based states.

Are you satisfied with the constitution-writing process?

Dal Bahadur Thapa (Nepal Magar Association): The CA members should not have been given dual responsibility for parliament and the CA; that would have prevented them from indulging in power games. They don’t act on their words. If they are not earnest, the new constitution won’t be written and even if it is, it might not be of much use to the people.

Narsingh Chaudhary (Tharu Welfare Council): Political leaders seem confused themselves. They don’t have confidence. Their misunderstandings, arrogance and power politics have disrupted the constitution-writing process. Indigenous people, Jaintic people, Madhesis, Dalits and marginalised communities are worried.

Badre Prasad Alam (National People’s Front): Political parties ignored the politics of consensus. The constitution can still be written only if consensus is reached. The decision of federalism was taken in haste. I don’t think the new constitution will be in favour of oppressed and marginalised people. However, it is better to have a constitution than not to have one.

Rasanta Shrestha (UCPN-Maoist): The party leadership failed to internalise the Jana Andolan and the people’s mandate. It’s not clear who wants to write the constitution and who doesn’t, who is only interested in completing the formalities. It’s not that we didn’t have a constitution already, the question was what kind of constitution and for whom. A new consensus should be reached to complete the historic task. The public should keep prodding them from time to time.

What kind of federal state suits a place like Rupandehi, where there is a settlement of mixed communities?

Bharat Pokhare (UML): The federal state should not be based on ethnicities, as this might lead to ethnic conflict. The interim constitution talks about a democratic federal republic, not ethnic states. National sovereignty should come first in deciding federal units.

Hemraj Aryal (NC): We’ve never supported ethnic or creed-based federalism. Federalism should be based on equality.

Badre Prasad Alam (Federalism will ultimately break up this country no matter how the provinces are carved out.

How have you taken the One Madhes Prades demand?

Surya Saru Magar (Siddhartha Bus Entrepreneur Association): My humble request to political leaders is to save this country first. I am not in favour of an ethnic based federal state. There are 1.6 million Magars living from east to west but the Maoists have restricted them to five districts by announcing the Magarat state. This is wrong, and this is the same for all ethnic groups. It’s not rational.

Narsingh Chaudhary: Creating federal units is not like cutting a birthday cake. Giving certain communities special rights will curtail the rights of other communities. One Madhes Prades is unacceptable. Tarai Madhes should be autonomous but with multiple states. Rupandehi has seen communal unrest in the past. What should be done to avoid it in the future?

Sanjay Kumar Gupta (Society for Justice of Conflict Victims): We should expel all discriminatory feelings from our minds. The distinction between Bahalais and Madhesians should be dissolved and there won’t be any communal conflict.

Sun Maya Gurung (Pashupati Multiple Campus): It’s the state’s responsibility to cultivate tolerance in society. But political parties have turned a deaf ear to communal violence. The open border makes things worse.

What’s the CA up to?

Meetings are going on but they are behind schedule, largely because of political disagreement. Street protests by the Maoists for ‘civilian supremacy’ have violated the CPA. This has diluted the CA’s necessity and purpose.

The Maoists unilaterally declared autonomous provinces. What’s the purpose of the Committee on State Restructuring now?

If the Maoists are going to make such declarations, then forget the committee, what’s the purpose of the entire CA? The Maoists should just say that they’re walking a different line, that the CA is unnecessary. They don’t say that, but their actions do. Their ambiguous conduct puts the CA and constitution-writing process at risk.

What is necessary for the constitution to be written on time?

The main thing is political agreement. The Maoists violated the CPA by unilaterally declaring autonomous provinces. Not only that, they have begun to illegitimately capture land again. They are trampling on the peace process.

So the constitution won’t be written on time?

If the Maoists continue behaving this way, it will be difficult. If they don’t follow their own rules, then how will we move the process forward? If the Maoists really support multiparty democracy, then they must follow its rules.

Will the CA’s constitutionality remain after 28 May?

We must ensure this question does not become problematic. Everyone and every party must abandon their selfsufficiency and work together for the country. You can’t leave the CA and legislature and protest on the streets.

Will you still be a CA member after 28 May if the constitution is not completed by then?

First, I will go to the people to explain who was responsible for the constitution not being written on time. I could do so as a citizen or as a CA member.

“Federalism decision hasty”

Prem Bahadur Singh, Law Minister, National Democratic Socialist Party

You are directly associated with constitution writing. What have you been doing?

Political disagreements have affected the CA. But it isn’t that the CA has done no work. Eight thematic committees have already prepared concept papers, and these have been discussed in the CA. Three other committees are in the final stages.

The Committee on State Restructuring and Redistribution of Resources is preparing name provinces after ethnicities, languages and so forth, but remember, no single group has a majority so it’s not possible to give primacy to anyone. That’s why proportional representation on the basis of population is the best.

Will the constitution be written on time?

If there were a consensus on federalism, then the necessary technical work would have been easier. It would have been easy to end this disagreement. The same holds for the legislative system. Right now, we’re seeking new problems. But despite all this, there isn’t much more of the constitution left to write.

Do you think you should still be a CA member after 28 May?

First, we must see how much of the constitution can be written by the deadline. Then, we must calculate how much delay political disagreements have caused. After all, for the first six months, we weren’t even allowed to write the agenda.

“Creating federal units is not like cutting a birthday cake”

Times
Going to the dogs

But you’ve heard many horror stories about Tribhuvan (why haven’t they got around to changing the name of this one?) Interaction Airport like the monkeys on the runway and pickpocket security friskers. TIA also recently approved a coffee shop in the euphemistically named ‘sterile area’. Whether passengers will actually want to partake of coffee at Rs 150 a cup in a room that is a cross between a gas chamber and septic tank is anybody’s guess. But one thing is for sure: the café will have to be a front for smuggling brown sugar and assorted contraband if the concessionaire is to recoup the kickback he doled out.

But I digress. Even battle-hardened TIA regulars like Tanya Pascual were not prepared to witness a trigger-happy police sentry shoot a dog with his double barrel gun the other day at the departure concourse. The fact that he missed was good news for the dog, but could have been very bad news indeed for a couple of tourists who nearly became collateral damage. When they said recently that security at TIA had been ‘beefed up’, we all thought it was a joke. Now we know they’re deadly serious.

To all those who have given up hope that even this HLPM is not going to resolve the political deadlock, the Aus can only say don’t lose hope. As long as they’re meeting secretly in the Sukedhara home of a certain eh-maley sahu and getting drunk together there is hope for this country.

Indeed, the capacity of our comrades to imbibe madeira is now approaching that of the pigs who raided Farmer Jones’ cellar. The Maoists have been seen tossing back mao tais like there’s no tomorrow: probably in the belief that it will be better than today. After giving his famous Baneswor “I will talk to the Indians directly” speech Awesome, it seems, had a secret rendezvous with Makunay and was in such a stage of inebriation that he spent the entire time talking down BRB. Although Makunay is now a teetotaler and Girja only drinks milk, could it be that the reason Awesome was so keen on the high level mechanism was that it was an excuse to be ‘high’?

The very next day, Awesome staggered into parliament after calling off the boycott and gave a two-hour speech. Speaker Subhas Nembang watched keenly as MKN and PKD whispered in the aisles, smiling. Then he noticed Makunay slipping something to Fearsome, who put the object surreptitiously in his coat pocket with a sheepish grin on his face.

Turns out PKD had left his reading glasses on Makunay’s sofa the previous night.

So the six-member committee headed by Nepal’s ambassador to the UK Suresh Chandra Chalise, entrusted with drawing up Girjau’s curriculum vitae for his Nobel Peace Prize nomination, has completed its task with a nine-page resume that details his extensive contribution to the cause of peace in Nepal. Although the Norwegians had asked for a three-page cv, it seems the committee just couldn’t whittle it down.

There was a time during the reign of Gyan Raja when Manoj Gajurel was so good at his impersonation of the king that police in Pokhara would click their heels and salute him, thinking he was His Majesty himself. Since then, the tables have turned with Gajurel’s impersonation of the Fearsome One. In Dhamgadi the other day, the rumour spread that Manoj Gajurel had flown in from Kathmandu to declare war on India.