Representatives of the 27 parties focus on the task at hand while debating whether to extend the term of the High Level Taskforce, Sunday.

Getting down to business

Whatever the motivations of those demanding a parliamentary session, and those in government opposing it, the fact remains that there is a lot of work pending. In this sense alone, the President’s action to call for a session from 19 December cannot really be faulted.

This does not mean the honourable members of the CA will actually achieve much, with decisions largely relegated to the head honchos of the three political parties. But a caretaker government that doesn’t even care for the niceties of parliamentary process is rather less than a government. Let the games begin.

Microfinance is one way to tackle poverty household by household.

In Nepal’s energy-starved economy, every little bit counts. Does wind power make the grade?

Nobel winner Elinor Ostrom in conversation with Kanak Mani Dixit
F or the optimistic, and without seeking to prop up the principle of innocent until proven guilty, this could be a landmark week for Nepali law and order. And by some happy coincidence, the accused — former Chief Justice Arjun Karki and former Minister Govinda Raj Joshi — have been arrested. Joshi will end up behind bars, and Karki will lose his very low bail instead of sending them into custody.

The Supreme Court has just ruled that the Special Court erred in absolving Joshi, who will now once more face charges of corruption. Joshi was lambasted for having used his discretion to limit jail sentences for two rhino poachers to five years. Now it’s Justice Rana Bahadur Bam’s turn to be accused of improper conduct for having released repeat offenders –– later involved in Bhaktamara Shrestha’s abduction –– on very low bail instead of sending them into custody.

If Chief Justice Ram Praad Shrestha has his way, Joshi will end up behind bars, and Bam will lose his place in the Supreme Court. Bold moves, indeed, and ones that will set groundbreaking precedents. But it is perhaps the third case, that of former crown prince Paras Shah, that constitutes the boldest move of all.

Paras Shah’s arrest for allegedly firing an illegal pistol following an altercation with Bangladeshi national and Bangladesh National Party leader Sheikh Hasina is a landmark development. It represents the first time the Nepali state has attempted to hold a Nepali royal to account for his actions. Granted, he will most likely pay a fine at most, and then promptly leave the country under a cloud. But it also demonstrates how far some former royals are removed from the Nepali public and norms of civilised behaviour, and how much slimmer their chances are of being resurrected, even as a ceremonial institution. This, despite the best efforts of former king Gyandeendra and Paras’ wife, Himani.

Ironically, Shah has received support from the Maoists, who are accusing the government of ‘‘politicising’’ the issue, and suggest that India might have orchestrated the whole affair. However murky the backgrounds of both protagonists in the incident are, both Shah and Chautari initially told the media that the former fired a pistol, though not at the latter, but in the air. This is indisputable. Even if Chautari had provoked Shah, which seems unlikely given the erstwhile prince’s long-standing reputation for violence, there is no justification whatsoever for the Maoists to insist that the government defend such an action is extremely poor judgment on the part of the Maoists.

The only other people to be protesting the arrest are of course diehard royals and RPP-N cadres, whose leader Kamal Thapa met with Maoist Chairman Prakash Dahal a few months ago to discuss how to form a ‘‘nationalist alliance’’. This is clearly what has prompted the Maoist response, but it only reinforces the fear of the other political parties that the royals and Maoists share little more than an opportunistic nationalism and a love of authoritarianism. The government, for its part, has already distinguished itself by taking Shah into custody, and should allow due process to be followed rather than give in to political pressure and street protests.

We all know the Maoists have plenty of reasons to criticise Nepali Congress and UML. This doesn’t mean they can’t agree with them on anything. At the end of the day, we’re all on the same side. When someone starts shooting, you’re better off worrying about holes in the fuselage, not who’s shooting their mouth off.

**Weekly Internet Poll  # 533**

Q. Were the police right to arrest Paras Shah?

Blaming others can only take you so far, but unless the political leaders can be held accountable by the people, things can only get worse. For example in many parts of the Madhes, the pahadias were blamed by the Madhesi politicians for many of the problems of the region and were driven out in droves. Really helped to improve the economic and social plight of the common citizen there? There is more lawlessness now and more corruption. Unless you happen to be a politician or one among the elite few who spends most of his time in Kathmandu, the common man in the Madhes probably does not feel his economic or social condition has changed much.

That some of the Madhesi politicians want to provide voting rights to people without proof of citizenship is another example of flouting the law that can only breed more lawlessness and anarchy in the region.

The intelligentsia, media, and people in general should stop exempting their leaders from accountability based on similar ideology, ethnicity or party affiliations. Doing so will encourage only more lawlessness and anarchy, and the ultimate losers will be the people.

Anil

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**Talking Business**

Good write up (‘‘Business Reporting’’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #531). These tips will be of substantial help to people who want to improve the level of journalism focusing on the business environment of Nepal.

As a serial entrepreneur, I would welcome more regularly business/ economic analyses and reporting in our media rather than political ramblings that go on and on and grab the headlines instead these days. Your points are good advice to any journalist, or business analyst who wants to focus on business reporting (and help focus on Nepal’s positives rather than its negatives).

Ujwal Thapa, http://www.nepalalp.com

**Solutions for the System**

A system is greater than the sum of its parts (‘‘Better, not good’’, Prashant Jha, #531). Despite the machinations of the multiple actors, the 2006 system has been adapted and lock in various group interest. The successes of Madhesi parties are an obvious example. What is necessary now is that missing component: justice.

There are potential methods to manage this contradiction of peace without justice in the 2006 transitional system. The Special Security Plan should be balanced by either a true and reconciliation commission or a commission on the disappeared. This policy would have been a combination of both coercion and justice mechanisms.

One of the main causes of instability in the 2006 system are the two armies. I can’t provide an answer on how to manage that instable problem. However, a just peace, and thus a lasting peace, cannot occur without a solution to the final status of the two-army problem.

Yes, the system has failed to provide tangible benefits in the form of unemployment. But all is not lost. Creative policies could be used to reconstruct the relationship between Nepal and the transnational Nepali proletariat. Embassies with a sizable labour attaché that assists the Nepali Workers Abroad (NWA) could be helpful. Giving the NWA a voice by extending voting rights could be an interesting idea. NWA keep our country afloat; they deserve a direct say in its affairs.

The absence of institutional coherence is another problem. Ideally, the parliament should have been the strongest body in the system – the voice of the system. The constituent assembly should have been the venue to discuss the future of the state and not newspaper columns, street demonstrations, or ridiculous speeches. Nepal’s most important institutions are reelected to the background in national discourse. They need to be yanked back to the front of the line. Using Prashant’s terminology, the organised force to fill the vacuum in the 2006 transitional system is the constituent assembly/parliament itself.

Factors such as geography, ethnic diversity, settlement patterns, wealth inequality, resource scarcity, and geopolitics may mean that no one group can only breed more lawlessness and anarchy in the region.

The intelligentsia, media, and people in general should stop exempting their leaders from accountability based on similar ideology, ethnicity or party affiliations. Doing so will encourage only more lawlessness and anarchy, and the ultimate losers will be the people.

Anil

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**Weekly Internet Poll  # 532**

Q. How much should the minimum wage be increased by?

Total votes: 1,430

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**Word of the day**

**battisputali**

- The author is right that anarchy seems to be gaining ground in the country especially in the south.

- The ones who are mostly benefiting from this are the corrupt politicians including those who thrive solely on ethnicity based vote-bank politics, and criminals.

- The leaders, who keep on chanting how things have improved, see far removed from the reality and hardships that the common people are facing day to day due to the lack of any economic opportunities, the rampant corruption, and the lawlessness that pervades society.

- Without any economic opportunities at hand, thousands of people are forced to leave the country everyday to look for work abroad, and without their remittances and financial contribution it is difficult to imagine how the country would fare. In this context it is ironic that the world should still be talking about government largesse. The belief that the government’s job is to provide largesse is one of the main causes of corruption in the country and is the remnant of a feudal mentality that plagues our intelligentsia and political leaders. It is the government and the political parties that are dependent on the people’s largesse and not the other way around.

- The government should instead focus on providing law and order to the people, so that private citizens can operate their businesses in a safe and environment; and they can lead to ways towards economic development of the country. Similar examples can be seen in many countries including in India in the last decade. If Nepali citizens can successfully work abroad for the development of our country, there is no reason they cannot do it in their own country provided the right environment can be created.

- All the government has to do, besides ensuring law and order is make sure it keeps up with the necessary infrastructure and appropriate economic policies necessary for growth.
Hollow loktantra
One does not have to be a Maoist to see the hollowness of Nepal’s liberal democracy

Nepal’s national political outcomes are determined by a dozen or so individuals in Kathmandu. A candidate who lost from two constituencies because the PM. A cabinet with most ministers either rejected by the electorate or notorious for their open loot of the exchequer has been at the helm for 20 months. And multiple rounds of voting for a PM have not thrown up a result — primarily because many parties were not allowed to exercise their free will due to extraordinary pressure from forces outside parliament.

A caretaker government prodded the House and would rather not face parliament again. Policies are formulated to suit different interest groups in the most opaque manner possible. Last year, the government and the speaker ganged up to refuse a debate on the presidential action to remove the army chief in the House. The main opposition party spent months blocking parliament only to return to it, and mostly included in some manhandling of senior ministers, violating basic norms of human conduct and parliamentary ethics. Directives by House committees often go unheeded.

It is this parliamentary supremacy that is fed in democratic Nepal, the fate of the rule of law cannot be much better. Girija Prasad Koirala taught a valuable lesson to most of Nepal’s present-day politicians. Corruption enables you to build a vast patronage network, which is essential for political survival and power. And once you are in power, or even on its periphery, there is little chance of the law catching up.

From Madhav Nepal, who took charge of UML’s institutional finances to K.P. Oli, who began investing in private businesses, to PK Dahal, who can smell a business opportunity from a distance — all have internalized this lesson well. Each Nepali politician is way richer than he was in 2006. Some are generous like Koirala was; others are stingy. But none have to end up accounting for the sources of their wealth, or face any legal liability. This extends to big businesses that have defaulted on loans; the scores of bureaucrats who pay millions to get lucrative postings because they are sure of the dividends; and media owners who have multiple business interests but never reveal conflicts of interests.

In the districts, there are clever mechanisms to bypass any procedures that pose an obstacle to siphoning off public funds. Indeed, expect a surge in violence in the next few months as politicians rush to spend funds before the fiscal year ends and battle it out. The authorities will remain silent witnesses or be a part of the nexus. It is not merely in cases of corruption, but in enforcing order and implementing welfare schemes that the law is most conspicuous in its absence.

Democracy as it exists in Nepal suits the politicians and businessmen, ensnared with one another, perfectly. As scholar Deepak Gyawali pointed out recently, it is the trading compendium bourgeoisie class, which thrives on shortages, that calls the shots in Nepal’s new political economy. A weak, discredited state is an asset. The political economy. A weak, discredited state is an asset. The political economy. A weak, discredited state is an asset. The political economy. A weak, discredited state is an asset. The political economy. A weak, discredited state is an asset. The political economy. A weak, discredited state is an asset. The political economy. A weak, discredited state.

When the Maoists expose the infirmities of the so-called democratic system, they do have a case. But even if their diagnosis is partially correct, they do have quite a prescription — and the one offered by Kiran and company is infinitely worse than the problem itself. Indeed, the abrupt end of the parliamentary session brought home the value for many, especially the Maoists, of how formal institutions are a check against the government. Paras Shah may get away but the state’s action has sent a symbolic message about equality before law, a case about which Maoists have been ambivalent given their partnership with the ‘royalist nationalists’. The success of Nitish Kumar in neighbouring Bihar, on the other hand, is all about how building up a democratic and functioning state is essential to preserving law and order and to creating multiple opportunities for livelihood and growth.

So in its present avatar, do not blame the people if Loktantra breeds more contempt than hope.
Helping workers abroad

With formal remittances from the 3 million Nepali migrant workers across the globe reaching Rs 262 billion in 2010, it’s no exaggeration to say foreign employment is the backbone of the Nepali economy. HIMALMEDIA organised a roundtable discussion on migrant labour last week. Excerpts:

What is the current situation of Nepali migrant workers?

Purna Chandra Bhattachari (Joint Secretary, Ministry of Labour): Only about 2 per cent of those who go abroad to work are skilled manpower, 23 per cent are semi-skilled, and 75 per cent are unskilled labour. Though Nepalis are authorised to work in 108 countries, 65 per cent go to the Gulf and Malaysia, about 90 per cent of this through informal channels. About 400,000 youths enter the labour market every year. Formal and informal annual remittances, which make up about 30 per cent of the GDP, amount to more than the national budget.

Ganesh Gurung (member, National Planning Commission): We are in a post-conflict situation now, but until we address unemployment, we are not addressing one of the root causes of the conflict. Millions work abroad, but even the manpower recruitment sector employs about 350,000 people within Nepal.

Shengjie Li (Director, ILO Nepal): The Second National Labour Force Survey 2008 indicates about 21.1 per cent of households have at least one member living and working abroad. From 1993 to 2007, the volume of remittance increased by 30-fold, with a major impact on reducing poverty. In spite of contributions to family income and GDP, many migrant workers, especially women, face various problems, including abuse and trafficking. Another negative impact is the brain drain.

Another negative impact is the brain drain. The skills they learn abroad have not been utilised for productive work.

Som Luitel (lawyer, Safe Migration Network): The foreign employment sector is fraught with fraud. Over 700 cases of fraud have been filed at the foreign employment department but there is no national policy to address the issues of migrant workers. The government has set up a foreign employment board to compensate returnees duped by recruiting agencies but it lacks a clear strategy. Recruiting agencies are organised, but migrant workers are not, and struggle every step along the way, from finding an agency to securing decent jobs abroad.

Shaktida Singh (UNIFEM): The issues of Nepali women migrant workers – there are 200,000 abroad – don’t fall within the formal framework of migrant workers. There is no specific policy for them. They are at high risk as they mostly go through informal channels, rather than formal sectors such as industry and construction where insurance and other facilities are guaranteed. Most women work as domestic help, are undocumented, and aren’t affiliated with labour unions. They contribute up to 15 per cent of total remittances, but there is no legal protection available for them.

Keshav Badal (legal advisor, GFONT): Migrant records are confusing. We keep records of those who go abroad but there is no record of returnees. We calculate the remittance they bring in but don’t have any account of how much we have spent to go abroad. And we are also sending skilled people abroad, who rich countries have not invested in. It’s time to raise the issue of a human resource development fund that rich countries contribute to in exchange for supporting them with skilled manpower.

Hansaraj Wagle (first vice-chair, Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies): The manpower agencies themselves have to look for international openings to send migrant workers. We don’t have direct links with employers. Therefore, we have to go through middlemen, whose fee is taken from migrant workers. But we cannot show the details of such deals to the government, so migrant workers are being charged high fees by some agencies. Manpower agencies have to keep a Rs 5 million deposit on hand to compensate workers who have returned because they didn’t get the jobs they were promised. But despite contributing so much remittance, manpower agencies are not recognised for their work. Instead they have to face the charge of cheating aspiring migrant workers.

What needs to be done to protect the rights of Nepali migrant workers, and to manage remittances productively?

Keshav Badal: Migrant workers have to cross a number of hurdles and are duped before they fly out. They should be informed about the jobs they are applying for, the salary and benefits, as well as the risks. As far as insurance is concerned, the government has granted manpower agencies a license to cheat. Migrant workers should only have to pay a lump sum rather than instalments that amount to much more, and undocumented workers should also be included somehow.

Madan Mahat (former vice chair, Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies): Government should facilitate travel and have labour attachés in destination countries, which could reduce the risk, particularly for women. We should develop an online system of all stakeholders through which we can access information on workers and monitor their situation.

Shaktida Singh: We cannot bar the movement of people. If they see better opportunities abroad we cannot stop them, but if women could earn Rs 5,000-6,000 here they would not leave. The social costs to families are high. Foreign employment should be made an option, not a forced choice.

Purna Chandra Bhattachari: We have decided to send women abroad only after the recommendation of the Nepal’s embassy. We have also raised the issue of establishing an embassy in Saudi Arabia. We have been lobbying for insurance and the implementation of the ILO convention on migrant workers. The government has been drafting foreign employment regulations and is reviewing migration policy, and is working on a scheme to utilise remittances better. We are also planning to decentralise the foreign employment board, and develop a database of job opportunities.

Shengjie Li: There should be a tripartite mechanism of the government, recruiting agencies, and workers’ organisations to implement the ILO convention, which ensures safety of migrant workers. We have been helping in capacity building by training government officers, labour attachés, trade union representatives, and private recruiting agencies. The NAFA code of conduct should be put in practice, and NAFA should develop a grading system for recruiting agencies. The government should encourage workers to use legal channels to send remittances and develop an economic mechanism to utilise these funds.
“Nepal is a growing market”

Spencer Lo, senior marketing manager at Sony Singapore, was in town recently to launch Sony’s next generation of 3D entertainment solutions. Nepal Times talked to him about the growing market here for electronic goods:

Nepal Times: How is Sony’s market in Nepal, a country with a small economy?
Spencer Lo: Nepal is a rising market. The consumers here are keen to own new and innovative technologies and so the market is expanding. We will introduce new products according to the demands and interests of Nepali consumers.

At what rate is the Nepali market growing? Our sales volume in Nepal is growing year on year. Sony Singapore is very happy with the market growth here.

Where does Nepal’s market stand regionally? India is the largest market in the region, considering its area, population and its swift economic growth. After India, the markets in all South Asian countries are growing at a similar rate.

Sony’s products seem to be relatively expensive, compared to other electronic goods. Our prices are based on the quality of our goods. When a consumer purchases a Sony product, he can rest assured that he has a complete guarantee on its utility. Sony may appear expensive in comparison to low-quality electronic goods, but is not over-priced in terms of quality.

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International outreach
ParkwayHealth, a private healthcare provider based in Singapore, has opened a new patient assistance centre in Kathmandu. The centre will help patients access specialist medical care in Singapore. There are 39 ParkwayHealth Patient Assistance Centres across the world.

New bank
Civil Bank, the country’s 30th commercial bank, opened this week. The bank has paid-up capital of Rs 1.2 billion. It aims to open 15 branches within two years.

Dell’s own
Dell has opened an authorised showroom in Mallighat. The store will showcase Dell desktops, laptops and other products.

Candy delight
Jaya Confectionery has launched ‘Enjoy the Great taste of Green Mango’ for its product CandyMan Kaacho mango, priced at Rs 1.

Branded wear
Jeanswest, an Australian denim brand, has opened a showroom in Civil Mall, Sundhara. Jeanswest jeans, jackets, sweaters, t-shirts and accessories will be available at the store.

Double cool
Samsung has introduced RF67DEPN, a twin cooling French door refrigerator. Samsung’s patented Twin Cooling technology independently cools the refrigerator and the freezer, preventing the mixing of odours between the storage compartments. Samsung now has 24 refrigerators priced between Rs 16,990 to Rs 154,990.

Right answer
Sampuma Tuladhar won the Automobile Quiz organised by GO Automobiles. Tuladhar took home a HP Presario laptop. The quiz was part of a promotion of GO Ford’s cost of ownership campaign for Ford Figo.
In this climate of mistrust, you have to wonder if Nepal's high and mighty agree on anything at all. Surprisingly, there is one such issue: not bringing human rights violators to book.

We have had four governments (including the two headed by the late GP Koirala) since the success of People's Movement II in 2006. But no sincere attempt was made to form an effective Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Commission on the Disappeared. All we have seen are cosmetic attempts by each of the governments towards setting up the commissions.

Both sides involved in the decade-long Maoist insurgency have found something in the draft bill or its terms of reference (ToR) to object to, thus thwarting the exercise to deliver justice to victims. The most recent activity regarding these two bodies (that is, bills on them) was in April this year, when parliament was discussing the drafts.

It suits both the Maoists and the national army to scuttle any move towards the formation of any such body, or to limit it to an ineffectual commission that will not be able to deal with gross abuses of human rights and crimes against humanity, finding the whereabouts of those forcibly disappeared by the state and the Maoists, and recommending action against the perpetrators.

The stance of the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML is not surprising either. Their fear of the Maoists' not-so-hidden-goal of imposing one-party rule in Nepal has rendered them unable to take concrete steps to punish those who committed human rights abuses by the state. They are under pressure from the army top brass to either ignore or go slow when it comes to addressing human rights violations. So all we have is lip service.

There are hundreds of families who want to know what happened to their loved ones who never returned home, people who want to know whether any punishment will ever be meted out to those who killed their kith and kin by terming them either Maoists or spies of the government.

It's a given that anyone who says that we, as a nation, cannot afford to dig up past abuses, let alone prosecute the accused, have not had their loved ones killed, tortured, disappeared or maimed for life. When the heat is on and parties find themselves unable to defend their morally repugnant position on the delay in ensuring justice to victims of the conflict, they point out that any (serious) attempt to book those involved would harm the ongoing peace process. This is a silly notion.

The Comprehensive Peace Accord that spells out the formal end to the insurgency does have provisions on addressing gross abuses of human rights. It also specifically mentions setting up a high-level Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and making public, within 60 days of the agreement, the whereabouts of people who were made to disappear or were killed, conveying the details to family members. The agreement was signed on Nov 21, 2006. To argue that setting up the TRC and the Commission on the Disappeared would rupture the peace process is dishonesty, and only aids impunity.

The government, the army, and the Maoists have got away with it because there has not been enough pressure on them from Nepal's now fractured, biased and partisan civil society, human rights organisations who are afraid to bring attention to atrocities by Maoists, and the international community.

All we have are occasional programs to mark days such as Human Rights Day and International Day of the Disappeared, and then it is business as usual. Impunity remains unaddressed. It warrants repetition, over and over: think about those people and families still waiting to hear the last word on their loved ones.

damakant@gmail.com
Kathmandu sees many cycle rallies and there was yet another last month. This one was special – it marked the launch of the first-ever Nepali bicycle company, Chain.

Behind the giant glass window of the store in Khantakusa, rows of cycles are lined up dutifully, awaiting new owners. On closer inspection, one sees many have little green ‘Sold’ stickers on them. Over 125 of the BMX and mountain bikes available have been sold in the last couple of weeks.

Rupesh Man Shrestha of Epic bikes, a partner in Chain, says, “There was an obvious gap in the market between high-priced models and the cheap but low-quality bikes. We’re aiming to fill that gap.” Imported cycles can set you back a minimum of Rs 38,000, while it’s likely the pedals will drop off the Rs 6,000-10,000 Chinese models in a few months.

Shrestha has 13 partners, including outdoor sports instructors, long-time bike enthusiasts, a dental surgeon, an exporter of traditional handicrafts, a socially responsible travel agent, an architect, and a rock star – 1974 AD’s Nirakar Yakthumba. The common thread is entrepreneurship, and wanting to make a difference.

The architect, Prabal Thapa, explains how the idea was born. “We often go out cycling and after a number of rides together, we thought we’d try to see if we could make a difference.” Like so many good ideas, “it’s a way of combining business and pleasure.”

The BMX is aimed at kids but it’s standard competition size and good for adult kids too. Neson Bajracharya, 16, is considering being Nepal’s first BMX bike champion, and approves of Chain’s cycles: “They look cool.” He’s from Gyanodaya School, where Chain’s not-for-profit, pro-cyclist sister organisation Chain Inc. has built a pump track. A girl next to Neson says she can do “endos and jumps”. When asked if she has ever gone to ground while attempting stunts, she scowls, “No, I don’t fall off!”

Chain’s ‘Jomsom’ mountain bike does all it’s meant to do; I take it out for a short ride and try my best to break it, and fail. The gears (and other critical components) are all trustworthy Shimano from Japan and a gear change is just a single click of the trigger. The V-brakes feel solid, something especially necessary in Kathmandu. The bike weighs a total of 14.5kg, just half a kilo more than my much pricier bike – I am resentful. The front suspension is perhaps a bit soft, but if you have never ridden a bike with proper front suspension, you won’t complain – it smooths out the potholes and leaves your eyeballs level in your head. At Rs 22,000, Jomsom is very good value.

Markus Illömaki from Finland rides frequently with one of the many groups of guys who head out to the trails in the valley early every morning. “The frame looks strong. The wheels are ok and if the spokes are kept tight, then you can expect it to last. It’s a perfect city bike.”

If Chain has its way, you’ll be powering your way in and around the city on a bicycle before too long.

Richard Bull

If Chain has its way, you’ll be powering your way in and around the city on a bicycle before too long.
Photo Exhibition by Gemunu Amarsinghe, till 11 January, 11am to 2pm. Tuesdays closed, Peace Museum, Madan Puraskar Pustakalya, Patan Dhoka

Let’s talk about ART baby! a collaborative solo from the series of Artivities by artist Sujan Chitrakar. Starts 17 December, 3.30pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4218048

Winter Art Collection, works by Japanese and Nepali artists. 19 December to 24 January, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamikhel, 5521120

Screening of ‘The Other Guys’, a comedy starring Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg. 17 December, 5.30pm, Lazimpat Gallery Cafe, Lazimpat

Under One Sun Festival, live music, photo exhibitions and art installations. Till 17 December, 9am to 8pm, Basantapur Darbar Square, www.photocircle.com.np

Nature Hike in Shivapuri National Park, organised by Chandra Gurung Conservation Foundation, guided bird watching and plant exploration program also included. 18 December starts 7am, Shivapuri National Park gate, Tickets: Rs 700, Rs 350 for students, 9851041325

Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Cafe, enjoy wood-fired pizza with a superb view of Boudha stupa and free wifi, candlelight dinner options are also available for the romantics every full moon night. Boudha, 2130681

Cosmopolitan Café, located in the heart of Basantapur, this cozy café offers arguably the best chicken sizzlers in town. Basantapur (along Kathmandu Darbar Square), 4225246

Singma Food Court, for the best Singaporean and Malaysian cuisine in town. Pulchok, 5009092 and Bhatbhateni, 4411078, foodcourt@wlink.com.np, www.singma.foodcourt.com

Christmas Eve dinner, with lavish food and live music, 24 December, Sunrise Café, Rs 1,600 plus taxes, Exclusive 5-course candle-lit dinner, 24 December, Chimney Restaurant, Rs 2500 plus taxes, Christmas brunch, December 25, Sunrise Café, Rs 1,200 plus taxes, Christmas hi-tea, a fun-filled event for the children from Bal Mandir with magic show and gift hampers, 26 December, Poolside Garden, 4248999

Christmas Eve Celebration at Gokarna Forest Resort, one night accommodation with a lavish Christmas Eve Dinner, a glass of sparkling wine, and breakfast the next day. 24 December, Gokarna, Room rate Rs 11,000 Nett, Dinner only Rs 3,500 per person, 4451212, sales1@gokarna.net

Music, Art and Healing Concert: In Memory of Vidhea Shrestha. 18 December, 3pm to 6pm, Moket, Jhamikhel

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Christmas Eve dinner, with lavish food and live music, 24 December, Sunrise Café, Rs 1,600 plus taxes, Exclusive 5-course candle-lit dinner, 24 December, Chimney Restaurant, Rs 2500 plus taxes, Christmas brunch, December 25, Sunrise Café, Rs 1,200 plus taxes, Christmas hi-tea, a fun-filled event for the children from Bal Mandir with magic show and gift hampers, 26 December, Poolside Garden, 4248999

Christmas Eve Celebration at Gokarna Forest Resort, one night accommodation with a lavish Christmas Eve Dinner, a glass of sparkling wine, and breakfast the next day. 24 December, Gokarna, Room rate Rs 11,000 Nett, Dinner only Rs 3,500 per person, 4451212, sales1@gokarna.net

Music, Art and Healing Concert: In Memory of Vidhea Shrestha. 18 December, 3pm to 6pm, Moket, Jhamikhel
Lazy Gringo, fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine.
Jawalakhel, 2118517

Momotarou, nestled inconspicuously amongst the street shops of Thamel, this restaurant serves Japanese food that is top value for money. Extravagant taste yet humble in presentation. Thamel, Bhagawatisthan 4417670

Vesper Café, has quaint outdoor patio good for leisurely weekend brunch. Jhamel

Himalayan Java, this Thamel establishment, more known for its coffee, serves excellent sandwiches too. Tridevi Marg, 4423019

ANNOUNCEMENTS


AmarJyoti Foundation, provides support through scholarships in art and sports, elderly daycare and grief recovery. 9851023958

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Game change in Tuberculosis?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there will be 10 million new cases of tuberculosis (TB) this year in the developing world. But the good news is that effective therapy will prevent the deaths of many of these patients. However, by the time the sick patients are diagnosed and treated, they will have infected many others in their community. Indeed, this ‘failure of interruption’ continues to keep the global epidemic of TB alive and well. Prompt diagnosis is thus key to treating and preventing the spread of TB.

Unfortunately, the techniques of TB diagnosis are antiquated. The most widely used method to test sputum (‘khakar’ in Nepal) for the TB bug is called the Ziehl-Neelsen stain, which is a 125-year-old technique. If TB was still prevalent in the Western world, there would surely have been major new breakthroughs in diagnostic techniques, but basically TB is a poor man’s disease. So it was welcome news when a few days ago, WHO endorsed the GeneXpert device, a rapid test for TB, as “a major milestone for global tuberculosis diagnosis”.

Unlike the Ziehl-Neelsen technique, GeneXpert does not need an expert to prepare sputum slide and look for a bug under the microscope. This new molecular approach is more straightforward. After the patient spits into a cup, the sample is placed in an ‘espresso’ machine that examines the sample’s DNA to see if it contains the genetic signature of TB. A simple, reliable ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer is available in two hours. Importantly, GeneXpert can also determine within two hours if the bacteria is resistant to rifampicin, the most effective of the four-drug cocktail prescribed for TB. This allows treatment to account from the outset for resistant bacteria, and to tailor therapy accordingly.

However, the initial costs of about US$30,000 for the machine and at least US$20 for tests are daunting for the developing world. Unskilled workers can carry this test out with minimal training, but electricity is required. Freen hospitals in Bihar to the well-appointed Hinduja Hospital in Mumbai, great satisfaction has been expressed about the usefulness and accuracy of the device. But the cost continues to be an important issue, regardless of the scientific enormity of the breakthrough.

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The initial disparagement that met Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s announcement last week that he would turn universities into barracks “if the regressive elements do not stop plotting” against the Maoist Party seems to have swiftly been replaced by the chatter over the shooting incident implicating ex-prince Paras in Chitwan. Not one to miss a chance to grab the headlines, his party pounced once again on the “regressive elements” by claiming that the shooting incident was engineered by India, and the person who was allegedly shot at should be investigated because “it involves the issue of nationality.”

It would seem that resorting to Tea Party extremism, and hoping for things to become true if you repeat them a hundred times, is unbefitting for the largest party in the country. Is this an indication of the immaturity of our politics?

2011 will mark five years since the Maoists left the “jungle”. In 2006, Dahal was seen in Kathmandu for the first time, and his arrival was greeted with a mix of trepidation and excitement. He had led a war that had cost 13,000 lives, but his party had also fought for the people ignored by the state and the ruling elite in Kathmandu. “Will he be a hero or a villain,” a commentator asked at the time. “It will depend on what he can deliver in Nepal’s future setup,” was the answer.

Five years is a substantial time if you are among those who like to get things done. That is how long it took to build the atom bomb, the Achilles’ heel of modern international relations. It took the same time to build the first space shuttle. Historians say it took even less time to build a pyramid, although admittedly the Pharaohs used thousands of slaves.

The point is it is possible to lead change that can have lasting effects into the future in five years. Dahal led his party through a comfortable election victory, and led a government with some clear indications of success like a surge in national revenue collection. But he lacked agility in situations that required teamwork. Yet he did something unheard of in Nepali politics, and resigned from the government after losing a tug-of-war over the dismissal of the army chief.

Almost everyone agrees the Maoists won the election because they promised change from the same old politics. But with a lack of vision and an outdated ideology, they seem to have lost their edge through complacency, unable to compete in the realm of realpolitik, and continually resorting to threats of violence.

As with other parties, the Maoists’ mode of operation now seems to be to create enough noise to keep the people on top busy without doing anything for those at the bottom. Dahal’s contribution in the past five years, especially in the last couple of years, has been to feed the noise in that echo chamber. Of late it is the laughable endorsement of the argument that India staged the shooting incident in Chitwan.

When a party’s leader leadership fails to make a government work and starts losing the support of his peers, it is time for him to resign and make way for a new leader. This is an opportunity for Dahal to take the high road, and resign once again. This solution is simpler than the war we have been promised.
The success of microfinance in Nepal serves to remind us that poverty needs to be battled household by household.

**Mission drift**

Microfinance institutions in India’s Andhra Pradesh suffered a huge blow after legislation was passed that prevented them from deploying any agents for the recovery of loans. It was meant to address allegedly coercive actions the institutions had undertaken to recover loans from borrowers. The legislation followed reports in October this year of over 80 suicides in the state, triggered by high interest rates and aggressive debt collection techniques by microfinance institutions. While it was taken to stop exploitation of poor borrowers, the legislation has in turn meant borrowers have stopped paying loans, crippling the microfinance industry.

Muhammad Yunus, the Bangladesh economist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his Grameen Bank’s pioneering work in microfinance, admitted the reputation of microcredit had been tarnished due to Indian commercial companies that charge high interest rates and allegedly use heavy-handed tactics to collect repayments. "It is a complete detour and nothing but a quashing of the mission of microfinance," Yunus said, responding to the crisis. "The original microcredit concept cannot be blamed for their faults."

**High finance**

While microfinance has been very successful in the Tarai, the challenge now is to move to the hills and the mountains. "Institutions are reluctant to go to these areas because of the high cost of operation," says Shankar Man Pradhan of the Rural Microfinance Development Centre (RMDC), a wholesale lender to microfinance institution. Settlements tend to be more scattered in the hills and the options for income-generating activities to be taken up with the help of loans are fewer than in the Tarai. Nonetheless, microfinance institutions are beginning to acknowledge this service gap and some are now looking the initiative to extend their services into more difficult terrain. RMDC has been trying to incentivize organisations to begin work in the hills by providing loans with interest at only 2 per cent. Co-operatives like Himchuli Kishri, Hataimo and Katihuri have already taken up the gauntlet and are now working in the villages of Kalikot, Achham and Jajarkot.

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In Nepal, wind power has been promoted as a potential source of renewable energy. The government has expressed interest in tapping into this resource, with the prospect of wind power being a viable option for places where micro-hydropower plants are not feasible. GHRC's Hathru Danda is an example of a wind power project. The project is not without its problems, as it is only able to provide enough power for lighting purposes.

At the Kathmandu Engineering College, Thapa heads a private company that has set up a 2KW wind turbine, using a 1.5KW generator at a resort in Lakhuri, Bhanjyang. The wind power system is much more powerful than most wind turbines set up by the government, most of which produce 200-600W for lighting purposes only.

Wind power has immense possibility for wind power but investors will not move forward unless there are places where wind readings are high. This is not a problem, "In places where wind power can be more cost-effective, as much as 10MW of electricity can be produced in eight months if all conditions are met, which is of course much quicker than hydropower," he says. "The national government should at least create an investment-friendly environment for companies willing to invest. "The national government was prepared months ago, has not been finalised," says Thapa. Mandikhatar, echoes this concern. "Projects such as these, albeit small in scale, will at least ease their immediate power needs," says Surbir Shrestha of Practical Action. "But because we have installed a hybrid system, one system can provide continuous supply when there are problems."

Many experts rightly point to areas as a potential market. "We need to get the power to the people," says the other. "Practical Action has built a model energy village. There are plans to build a wind farm of 500KW and provide assistance to small-scale wind turbine manufacturers though a 20MW wind project is in the pipeline, government officials say the focus for the time being will be on smaller rural projects of a few hundred watts rather than utility-scale projects."

Given the power shortages in the country, which uses this power for community projects such as these, albeit small in scale, for lighting purposes only. With the declaration of 2009 Energy Policy, investors are expected to show interest in tapping into this resource.

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We have #532 4

We cannot bar the

across the globe

reaching Rs 262

say foreign

employment is the

backbone of the Nepali economy.

Himalmedia organised a roundtable migrant labour last week. Excerpts:

Shaktida Singh:

movement of people. If they see better opportunities abroad we cannot stop 6,000 here they would not leave. The not a forced choice.

decided to send women abroad only after embassy. We have also raised the issue of the recommendation of the Nepali the implementation of the ILO

We have been lobbying for insurance and convention on migrant workers. The government has been drafting foreign

are also planning to decentralise the scheme to utilise remittances better. We

foreign employment board, and develop a database of job opportunities.

Shengjie Li:

mechanism of the government, recruiting implement the ILO convention, which agencies, and workers’ organisations to ensures safety of migrant workers. We

training government officers, labour attachés, trade union representatives, and private recruiting agencies. The NAFEA practice, and NAFEA should develop a

The government should encourage workers to use legal channels to send remittances and develop an economic

Migrant workers have

workers. We don’t have direct links international openings to send migrant

are being charged high fees by some agencies. Manpower agencies have to compensate workers who have returned because they didn’t get the jobs they were promised. But despite

manpower agencies are not recognised for their work. Instead they have to face workers.

What needs to be done to protect the rights of Nepali migrant

Keshav Badal:

to cross a number of hurdles and are well as the risks. As far as insurance is

duped before they fly out. They should Migrant workers should only have to pay a lump sum rather than more, and undocumented workers should also be included somehow.

Madan Mahat (former vice chair, Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies):

The foreign employment sector

Migrant records are confusing. The manpower fraud have been filed at the foreign employment department but there is no migrant workers. The government has set agencies but it lacks a clear strategy. Recruiting agencies are organised, but step along the way, from finding an agency migrant workers are not, and struggle every to securing decent jobs abroad.

of Nepali women migrant workers –– there formal framework of migrant workers. We

countries, which could reduce the risk, insurance and other facilities are available for them.

remittances, but there is no legal protection available for them.

We keep records of those who go abroad but there is no record of returnees. We calculate the remittance they bring in but don’t have any account of how much we have spent to people abroad, who rich countries have not

human resource development fund that invested in. It’s time to raise the issue of a rich countries contribute to in exchange for supplying them with skilled manpower.

Planning Commission):

The issues

Purna Chandra Bhattarai (Joint Secretary, Ministry of Labour):

about 2 per cent of those who go abroad to work are skilled manpower, 23 per cent are labour. Though Nepalis are authorised to

Gulf and Malaysia, about 90 per cent of 400,000 youths enter the labour market remittances, which make up about 30 per cent of the GDP, amount to more than

the national budget.

Som Luitel (lawyer, Safe Migration

Global Labour Rights):

We made a difference in

What is the current situation of

ECLAC’s new report, ‘A new

in the global economy. Global

employment is the driving force of

The foreign employment sector

Shengjie Li (Director, ILO Nepal):

The Second National Labour Force Survey 2007, the volume of remittance increased by 30-fold, with a major impact on

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reintegrating migrants into society when abroad have not been utilised for productive work.
Comrade Fierce One is down with "a little bit of typhoid" according to his secretary-cum-bodyguard-cum-computer-operator-cum-heir apparent son Prakash. The Dear One seems to have ticked off Makunay by not passing on the PM’s phone to Dad. MKN called PKD from Brussels a little before midnight, forgetting the time diff. Here is the transcript.

MKN: Hello.
Prakash: Who’s this?
MKN: I am Nepal.
Prakash: The country or the person?
MKN: The prime minister.
Prakash: Oh yeah? And I am Vladimir Illyich. Don’t you know what time it is in Nepal? You think you can run the country? Go away, Dad’s sleeping. (Hangs up noisily).

Long and short of it is that MKN is not on speaking terms with PKD for the moment. And Makunay has stopped making phone calls himself, and lets his PA call. The quote of the week must be the prime minister admitting on his return from Belgium: “The reason I have been travelling so much is because it doesn’t matter what time it is in Nepal or not.” What has he been drinking, the truth serum?

So Himal Sharma has been elected the president of the All Nepal Federation of Student Unions (Revolutionary) during a general convention in which the Chief Guest was the son and successor of the Sendero Luminoso leader, Prof Abimael Guzman, aka Comrade Gonzalo. (“Long live the solidarity of the people of Nepal and Peru.”) He may be the boss of krantickurry students, but Himal is 40 years old, with four grown-up children, one of them in medical school in China. In his campaign speech he proposed all Maoist leaders take their children out of private schools, which didn’t make a lot of people happy. And then his boss Comrade Gonzalo turned up and threatened to turn all schools in Nepal into ‘nurseries’ and all school children into ‘gottillas’.

Comrade Fierce Buddha didn’t go around killing 16,000 people, but that’s a minor point.
Representatives of the 27 parties focus on the task at hand while debating whether to extend the term of the High Level Taskforce, Sunday.

Getting down to business

Whatever the motivations of those demanding a parliamentary session, and those in government opposing it, the fact remains that there is a lot of work pending. In this sense alone, the President’s action to call for a session from 19 December cannot really be faulted.

This does not mean the honourable members of the CA will actually achieve much, with decisions largely relegated to the head honchos of the three political parties. But a caretaker government that doesn’t even care for the niceties of parliamentary process is rather less than a government. Let the games begin.

Microfinance is one way to tackle poverty household by household. In Nepal’s energy-starved economy, every little bit counts. Does wind power make the grade?

Nobel winner Elinor Ostrom in conversation with Kanak Mani Dixit
Student unions of several political parties have demanded that Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) reverse the recent fuel price hike. In a joint statement, they warned that they would launch a protest program if NOC did not comply.

The statement points out that instead of making internal improvements to eradicate irregularities, corruption and criminal activities, NOC has increased prices at the expense of consumers. It argues that it is not justifiable for NOC to announce a bonus for its employees and on the other hand, increase prices citing losses for the corporation. NOC has announced its decision to grant bonuses worth almost Rs 200 million to its employees, following profits of Rs 3.39 billion.

Although NOC has taken no initiative to make internal improvements, it blames fuel traders for its loss. The corporation has not invested in its technical capability or in quality control mechanisms. When losses occur NOC seeks to transfer costs to the consumers — but it makes no effort to give profits back to consumers when it is in the black.

In response to the protests, NOC has released a statement to clarify its decision. It has claimed that because of increase in the international prices of crude oil, the domestic prices had to be increased.

The corporation’s losses reached a high of Rs 43 million after the international price rose to US$90 per barrel. However, the statement does not mention the cost price that NOC pays in India. In addition, when the international price had dropped to $40 per barrel earlier, NOC still maintained the price it had announced when the rate was $75 per barrel. The corporation has not invested in improving its technical capability or in quality control mechanisms. When losses occur NOC seeks to transfer costs to the consumers — but it makes no effort to give profits back to consumers when it is in the black.
**“Rebuild the t-r-u-s-t”**

Last week, 2009’s winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize for Economic Sciences, Elinor Ostrom, visited Nepal for a whirlwind four-day tour of the capital. She spoke to Kanak Mani Dixit about Nepal’s historically successful community management of its resources.

Kanak Dixit: Though Nepal’s heritage is ancient, in terms of managing common property resources such as forests and watercourses, we seem always bent on abandoning our community management that has been killed off. Community forestry is under fire. One gets the feeling that some of our decision-takers and opinion-makers are blind to our heritage.

Elinor Ostrom: Well, that’s not unusual. Scholars all over the world greeted Garrett Hardin’s 1968 article on ‘the tragedy of the commons’ with enthusiasm because it is very easy to perceive that everybody, farmers, fisherfolk, and those managing the forests are trapped and cannot break away from overexploiting resources. It’s sad, because in Nepal there is an incredible history of communities doing fabulous work.

Kanak Dixit: How do you think the villages have been managed in the past and how do you think they can be managed in the future? Is there anything in the past that we can learn from?

Elinor Ostrom: Yes, but of course it was not perfect because one doesn’t find people governing themselves in ways that are always fair and efficient. Community management systems can succeed or fail. If it is for yourself, your children and grandchildren and your friends’ grandchildren, you have an incentive to do something better. But there are problems. Heterogeneity can be a challenge in a forest governing unit, in terms of the existing divisions by caste, wealth or ethnicity, even though this does not automatically guarantee failure. It is true that the caste structure did not make success uniform in the community-managed system.

Kanak Dixit: As a researcher focused on rural Nepal, you have such rich heritage! I started doing research here sometime in the late 1970s and early 1980s and I was really impressed with what I saw out in the villages. Compared to government-run irrigation systems, the farmer-managed ones were more efficient and equitable. They were generating higher harvests, there was more water getting to the tail-end users. Remember, they do not use fancy systems – these are logs and mud canals that can control and divert the water, employed with great ingenuity. In the Rapli Valley, there were 85 irrigation systems giving farmers three crops a year. Engineers came in, disregarded these so-called primitive works, and recommended a huge irrigation system to be funded by the Asian Development Bank. It would have ruined the local communities, but fortunately there were some alert scholars who were able to stop the project. In another place in Rapti, a development agency came in and built over the existing farmer-managed irrigation system. Production went down.

Kanak Dixit: How do we rebuild that trust?

Elinor Ostrom: It’s terrible, and the tragedy is that poverty just gets worse when you have a situation in the villages where you fear to go out to do anything. The big finding from our work in this country and around the world, is my favourite five-letter word – ‘t-r-u-s-t’. If you’ve gone through a civil war, that destroys trust, and rebuilding it is very hard.

Kanak Dixit: As a researcher focused on rural Nepal, do you feel like you’ve gone through a civil war?

Elinor Ostrom: Yes, indeed! The villagers of Nepal do! The long-standing political confusion has led to sharp demarcations? Where the transfer of responsibility also brings about these sharp demarcations? It’s kind of step-by-step, and a lot can happen in the villages through initiatives such as farmer-to-farmer training. Some farmers from Sindhupalchok whose irrigation systems were not working very well were taken to Palpa, where many of the systems are effective. The sharing that the farmers of Palpa did with those from other parts helped build on the social capital and knowledge that was already there.

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Kanak Dixit: There are two themes I take away from this conversation – one, that we can use the social capital that exists in rural Nepal to rebuild trust that has evaporated.

Elinor Ostrom: It won’t happen fast, but it’s essential.

Kanak Dixit: And the other, that people working together will reduce poverty.

Elinor Ostrom: As long as they work together on something manageable, then they can be successful. And as long as we recognise that there are multiple ways of doing things. **EO:** How do you feel about what villagers had to go through during the conflict?

Elinor Ostrom: It’s terrible, and the tragedy is that poverty just gets worse when you have a situation in the villages where you fear to go out to do anything. The big finding from our work in this country and around the world, is my favourite five-letter word – ‘t-r-u-s-t’. If you’ve gone through a civil war, that destroys trust, and rebuilding it is very hard.

Kanak Dixit: How do we rebuild that trust?

Elinor Ostrom: It’s kind of step-by-step, and a lot can happen in the villages through initiatives such as farmer-to-farmer training. Some farmers from Sindhupalchok whose irrigation systems were not working very well were taken to Palpa, where many of the systems are effective. The sharing that the farmers of Palpa did with those from other parts helped build on the social capital and knowledge that was already there.

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N o, the Evening Standard did not get an exclusive on the Chitwan Pistol Incident, the headline refers to British Army ‘Pan-commandos’ implicated in killing non-combatants in Helmand. But the London tabloid does evoke the past and the future. NC and UML of course poured out righteous anger at the royal ex-highness carrying out Hawaii Fire at Tiger Tops in order to mask their own inability to end the political deadlock. But conspicuous by their muted reax were the Baddies. That figures, since the Mau Mau are also the type that shoot first and talk later. Several of their rank and file, including a CA member, who didn’t just brandish weapons but actually murdered half a dozen people, are walking around the streets in broad daylight. Apprehending Paras Sircar would mean the comrades would have to be booked as well. Although Rubel Bhai passed himself off as a victim in all this, the skeletons have started rattling in his closet as well. He may have been better off not going to the press at all with the story that the Clow Prince told him to stick it up when he refused to go on a night safari. It now appears that it is the Vice Chairman and Acting President of the extremely dubious World Peace and Economic Development Organisation (WPEDO), registered in Dhaika, which has an HQ shaped incredibly like an oceans-going liner in Dhamandari called Christia Palace. And guess who WPEDO’s Executive Vice President is: none other than our very own Suzie Wong and her dodgy Melanie Koirala. All three have been listed as “Dr” on the website (www.wpedo.com), which has since been deactivated.

One after-effect of the trigger-happy prince brandishing a pistol at the son-in-law of the foreign minister is that it seems to have patched up the brewing row in the NC over party leadership. By coming out swinging Sanil Da may have bought time on his own appointment fiasco. Jaijai Kolams immediately used the opp to go ing around parleying with party leaders to create a unity front and by Friday we may actually have a full-fledged House session on this. Not bad to see them agreeing on at least something for a change. At least we know now how to get the kungkession to start working together. Let Jaijai Paras to piss off Suzie Q. The Prince-and-the Princess are our insurance policy, let’s keep them around just in case things get totally out of hand. May Pahupati and Allah have mercy on these spoilt royaltys.

Comrade Fierce One is down with “a little bit of typhoid” according to his secretary-cum-body guard-cum-computer operator-cum-heir apparent son Prakash. The Dear One seems to have ticked off Makumay by not passing on the PM’s phone to Dad. MKN called PKD from Brussels a little before midnight, forgetting the time diff. Here is the transcript:

MKN: Hello.
Prakash: The country or the person?
MKN: The prime minister.
Prakash: Oh yeah? And I am Vladimir Illyich. Don’t you know what time it is in Nepal? You think you can run the country? Go away, Dad’s sleeping. (Hangs up noisily)

Long and short of it is that MKN is not on speaking terms with PKD for the moment. And Makumay has stopped making phone calls himself, and lets his PA call. The quote of the week must be the prime minister admitting on his return from Belgium “The reason I have been travelling so much is because it doesn’t matter what time it is in Nepal or not.” What has he been drinking, the truth serum?

So Himal Sharma has been elected the president of the All Nepal Federation of Student Unions (Revolutionary) during a general convention in which the Chief Guest was the son and successor of the Sendero Luminoso leader, Prof Abimael Guzman, aka Comrade Gonzalo (“Long live the solidarity of the people of Nepal and Peru”). He may be the boss of krantikary students, but Himal is 40 years old, with four grown-up children, one of them in medical school in China. In his campaign speech he proposed all Maoist leaders take their children out of private schools, which didn’t make a lot of people happy. And then his boss Comrade Fierce One turned up and threatened to turn all schools in Nepal into ‘nurseries’ and all school children into ‘gottillas’.

Compared to these blunders, Dr Bahuman’s remarks at a book launch this week organised by the Nepal-China Society in the capital actually sound quite logical. BRB said (exact quote): “Buddhism is actually quite close to Marxist ideology. Lord Buddha held very progressive views.” Alas, Comrade Buddha didn’t go around killing 16,000 people, but that’s a minor point.

Venue: The front lawn, Soaltee Crowne Plaza
Time: 10 am 8-4 pm
Date: Saturday, 18th December, 2010
Ticket Price: Rs. 800/- for Adults. Rs. 600/- for Kids
(Tickets are inclusive of Entry fee, 5 Game Coupon, Welcome Drink and 1 Snack)
Attractive gift hampers to the best dressed boy and girl.
Tickets available at Festivity Desk. 01 4273999

A bunch of sorry asses