If all goes well, the seven-point deal is likely to see Maoist ex-fighters finally leaving the camps (like this one, right, in Chulachuli of Ilam) that they have lived in now for nearly five years. All Maoist commanders have cautiously welcomed the seven-point deal, and there isn’t expected to be any major opposition to it. However, in Surkhet, deputy commander Durga Chaudhari held a press conference on Thursday denouncing the deal. “How is it suitable for a party that got to power by waging an armed struggle to suddenly be a representative of the Buddha and preach peace?” he asked.

Across the political spectrum, there was a surprising new unity of purpose to see the deadlock ended. Some NC leaders raised doubts about implementation because of the ambiguity in Tuesday’s agreement about returning seized property by 23 November. Nevertheless, such is the overwhelming public pressure on the politicians to end their bickering and deliver on peace and the constitution that they have finally acted, even though it took them three years to do what should have taken six months.

Editorial p2
The mother of all agreements
THE MOTHER OF ALL AGREEMENTS

O
n the face of it, there is little new in the agreement that was signed by the main political blocks on Tuesday night at Baluwatar. It was the mother of all agreements that agreed to implement past agreements. The seven-point agreement is just a rehashing and reiteration of some of the four-point, five-point, 12-seven-point agreement is just a rehashing and agreed to implement past agreements. The leaders had nothing to show Nepal. The netas must have had the sense that the public perception of them was at a nadir. Now, they can safely extend the CA deadline again without major public backlash.

This agreement was actually negotiated and brokered during the tenure of Madhav Kumar Nepal, two prime ministers ago. So there was no reason it couldn’t have been signed last year. The only argument that could be made was that Pushpa Kamal Dahal hadn’t yet seen the light, and perhaps the terms of integration and compensation weren’t yet “sold” to the fighters in the camp. So what happened at the Radisson on Tuesday afternoon while the tea party at Baluwatar was going full swing, was just a continuation of the Gokarna lunch with a gap of about 12 months.

We don’t yet know what the fine print is on this week’s agreement. But there is rumoured to be a power-sharing rider about who gets to lead the next government and when. In fact, don’t rule out all the leaks about haggling over the numbers of Maoists to be integrated and the compensation package for those willing for reintegration, the real contentious issue seems to have been bargaining over future leadership.

Whatever the case, we can all breathe a sigh of relief that the leaders have for the first time in a long time risen above their selfishness and partisanship to show some accountability to the people who elected them. To call it “statesmanlike”, as some commentators have this week, would be hyperbole. They just did what they were supposed to do four years ago. Still, better late than never.

The next step in the mainstreaming of Maoists in Nepal must be for them to abjure violence once and for all. Baburam Bhattarai, the ideological architect of the wasteful 10-year war, made a 180 degree turnaround in New Delhi last month when he wooed the very Indian investors he said should be thrown out in his 40-point demand in 1996.

If he can do that, there is no reason his party leadership can’t now say: “Our armed struggle was in response to the structural violence of the state, we have now concluded that as a duly-elected political party we don’t see the need anymore to adhere to the ideology of violence.” Baburam Bhattarai, the ideological architect of the wasteful 10-year war, may find it difficult to publicly admit that a war that killed 16,000 Nepalis was unnecessary. But as a party that now believes in the ballot, it’s about time they pledged their allegiance to non-violent pluralistic democracy. All the same, it would be nice if they could say sorry.

THE NEW DEAL
BRIs is facing too little payment for the damage he has caused to this country. Anurag Acharya (The New Deal, #576) clearly does not understand the implications of that damage. The use of adjectives, honifics and academic jive like PhD is his attempt to prove that the man is bigger than his actions. My best guess is that Acharya is either an idiot or a beneficiary of those actions.

It’s OK, Jayi Malhota, Baburam Bhattarai had to use the gun and now he uses the pen for some purpose: looking, threatening, fear and embarrassment for his actions (“Guns to Pens”, #576). Ask him again why he shifted to pen and get back to us, please.

The New Deal is no Big Deal.
Kiran L.

MAN POWER
It’s a time to generate employment at home, as you say in your editorial. The power of Nepal’s man power, #576. Our entire national policy should be to reach that goal. There should be easy capital for those who want to invest in business, there should be a proactive policy towards retaining our manpower. But our middle class is going to the Middle East. To change that we have to change our education policy so that the day you graduate you can stand on your own feet, and not have to work for someone else.

Safe migration is the need of the hour. Your calculation of 200 deaths per year of migrant workers is only 10 per cent of the total. The primary cause is cardiac arrest at 55 per cent, next is RTA. Death due to heat stroke is rare and occupational hazard is within controllable limit. The rate of death has decreased from 114 to per 100,000, and this is the result of action by community organisations and the government. Let’s give credit where it is due.

You say in your editorial: “A ruinous war was fought to right the wrongs in society so Nepal’s wouldn’t have to work for work.” The architect of that war is now the prime minister. And yet you have such high expectations on a person who unleashed murder, loot, expropriation and destruction on Nepal. Triumph of hope over experienced Baburam will never see the light. Just hope that Nepal Times does.

The number of Nepali migrant workers who have died in the Gulf now exceeds 8,000. The Prime Minister himself is a handling Ministry of Labor and Transportation and as per law he is chairman of FEPSB (Foreign Employment Promotion Board) too. The government collects Rs 1 billion a year in its Welfare Fund with contribution of migrant workers themselves. The interest on this alone would be Rs 10 million annually. Yet, there is no program addressed at worker safety.

ENCOUNTERS IN NEPAL
Cai Yun has amusing observations about haggling in Kathmandu (“Strange Encounters”, #576). But when I was in China I had to pay more than twice for my flight from Beijing to Chengdu than the Chinese. This was in the late 1990s. But I agree that the distortion pricing is really discriminatory in Nepal now. I really loved China’s investment in infrastructure.


“Buzz”

During my visit to Shanghai, I paid RMB 390 for boxer shorts from a street vendor thinking that Shanghai is most expensive city in China. Now, I realize I paid a “foreigner tax.”

I do not feel it’s anything wrong for Nepal to have two rates for Nepalis and foreigners. Thailand does the same thing. Anyway, it is as always like this in a developing country, it’s the real world. Foreigner = money. You go to Tannersmen Square, it’s the same thing.

I stayed in China for four years and the conversation Cai Yun writes about in his book was exactly the conversation I had. Thousands of times.

Gyare!

I stayed in China for four years and the conversation Cai Yun writes about in his book was exactly the conversation I had. Thousands of times. It’s just that no one said I was lucky, they wouldn’t joke and smile, and frowned at me. Anyway, Cai Yun is luckier than a “western” tourist who have had to pay twice what she paid.

MEDITATION TOURISM

Thanks a lot to Dorji Tsering Sherpa for sharing the news of Dharma Poshara Vipassana Center at Pokhara (“Now, meditation tourism”, #576). Many tourists who come to Nepal exploring its natural beauty also have an interest in searching for their inner selves. There are two meditation centres in the Lumbini Masterplan. Extending the visitor stay in Lumbini for spiritual practice is a real support to Nepal’s tourism industry. The uniqueness of the Buddha’s birthplace in Nepal is Nepal’s unique selling point. Wish Nepal success in promoting spiritual tourism.

Sayalay Bhaddamani

ARNINO SKATEBOARDS

Thanked Arih (Arnih’s skateboards,” #576). Innovation and contribution are most appreciated in Nepal, hope you will help Nepal products to be better known in Europe.

Umesh
The right to know

A right to information (RTI) petition filed by an advocacy organisation and an order from the Rastriya Suchana Aayog later let the cat out of the bag this week.

The Finance Ministry which had earlier refused to disclose the list of VAT defaulters to parliament’s Public Accounts Committee citing defaulters’ right to confidentiality was forced to make the complete list public.

The list just provides names of firms, some of which are being investigated while others have since been given a clean chit. There is no information about the amount embezzled. The ministry hasn’t even released the original investigation report where there is more detail. Nonetheless, the decision marks a watershed in the history of RTI in Nepal which, although touted as being the most progressive in the region, has never really been tested.

The general perception about RTI being solely the domain of journalism has also been broken by this incident. In fact, it has shown how citizens should take charge of their own rights because media is not always the safest bet. Fearing reprisal by advertisers, a large section of media previously hushed up the issue. When they should have proactively investigated it after an online portal first brought out the scam, the mainstream media played it down.

When there should have been pressure on the ministry to release more details, there was deafening silence in the big newspapers. It was filled by social media networks and blogs, which do not face advertiser pressure. However, internet sites are also not bound by defamation and libel restrictions, which means irresponsible anonymous postings can destroy reputations of the innocents as well.

People have criticised the disclosure of the list saying it harms business. No doubt, all firms on the list should not have been lumped together, and care should have been taken to ensure that the investigation process was not influenced. But if anyone is to be blamed for the lackadaisical and incomplete release of information, it is the ministry itself. There is no point condemning the RTI petition. In fact we should be demanding clearer and more detailed information. It was the suspicion that then Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari was protecting fraudsters in high place, for example, that forced Finance Secretary Rameswor Khanal to resign earlier this year.

On a recent lecture to Kathmandu journalists, The Hindu’s investigative journalist P Sainath talked about how corporate media has “a structural compulsion to lie”. This may be why we need citizen journalists who operate outside the incestuous network of business, politics, bureaucracy and the media. The mainstream press has time and again failed the test when it chooses to prioritise the concerns and interests of big business rather the public’s interest. It is no wonder then that the big media which did not speak for the taxpayers’ right to know is now bending over its back for the defaulters’ right to confidentiality. Their standard format of covering such stories is making them as vague as possible and withholding information.

The mainstream media should now be using the right to information petitions to uncover wrong-doing in high places. We should be holding politicians accountable by demanding information on their sources of funding, or asking NGOs to produce their balance sheets, demanding the list of human rights cases the government has decided to dismiss.

Barring few sensitive areas tied to defense and national security, in a democracy the public has the right to know information that directly affects it. In fact, governments should proactively provide all information relating to public offices in easily accessible and understandable format.

This is not just a theoretical exercise. Transparency is the biggest safeguard of democracy, information improves governance, and better governance lifts living standards.
Rice crisis

HARIDEVI ROKAYA IN JUMLA

A fungal infection threatens to blow away 80 per cent of this year’s paddy harvest in the Tila Valley of Jumla, the world’s highest rice production area.

The Karnali is a chronic food-deficit area but the irrigated valleys of the Tila and Sinja rivers have consistently good harvests of the Marsi variety of high altitude rice. But their hopes were dashed as the harvest time neared. “We burnt our paddy fields as the yield was very low,” says Devu Nepali, who blames the heavy monsoon rains during the transplantation period for the spread of the rice blast fungus. However Bed Chaulagain of the District Agriculture Office here says the indiscriminate use of pesticides could be the main reason for the spread of the fungus. “Excessive use of nitrogen fertilizer and pesticides that also kill good bugs would otherwise have controlled the fungus could have made the conditions right for the spread of the blast lesion in the rice plants,” Chaulagain says.

Other farmers like Nepali say they have lost half their harvest, and are now worried about how they will provide for their families through Jumla’s harsh winter months. Kalbhadur Rawal is now thinking of migrating to find work to buy food for his family this year.

Chaulagain says that some farmers who planted the Chuanvari variety of rice, which has been found healthy harvests and didn’t suffer losses, but it was the Marsi who suffered the worst losses. There are 3,000 hectares of paddy planted in Jumla every year, and the town itself needs about 25,000 tons of rice. But this year the district capital may have to depend on outside rice to see itself through the winter.

Why Monsanto?

In a USAID press release last month announcing a partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and Monsanto on a pilot maize production project in Nepal, we heard the same tired arguments of more nutritious food, increased yields and food security, and the requirement of less chemicals.

As elsewhere, these arguments were used to justify the introduction of hybrid seeds and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO). Throughout the world there is evidence to the contrary. Two years after the introduction of Monsanto seeds in Canada and the United States, for example, yields started to go down between 10-15 per cent. There has been a substantial increase in the use of these seeds and chemicals, the creation of “super seeds” requiring more highly “toxic” “super” chemicals, some containing agent orange.

Canadian activists say Monsanto uses test plots to introduce GMOs into a country because the dominant gene in the new seeds spread through pollination, contaminating conventional and organic farms. Only four years after the introduction of Monsanto’s seeds in Canada, no pure canola seeds and no pure soybean seeds remain.

It is frightening, then, that under the pretext of ‘improving food security’ USAID will be implementing the pilot program in the key and already well established maize producing districts of Chitwan, Nawalparasi and Kavre. To gain control of the seed supply, Monsanto is known to intentionally break down the social fabric of rural communities. In a country where people, including USAID, are working to build cohesion, this is a crucial point to consider. Monsanto takes away a farmer’s right and ability to use his/her own seed and forever after farmers must buy their seeds and chemicals from Monsanto.

Hybrid maize seeds were actually introduced in Nepal a decade ago. In the foothills where I am living and researching environmental change, farmers are currently using hybrid corn seeds produced by the Indian company Shriram Biotech Genetics, among others.

Instead of improving harvests, a USAID program to push hybrid maize will make Nepali farmers more destitute

Hybrid seeds need chemical fertiliser. Nowadays, if people do not increase their chemical fertilizer use each year, their crops will not grow. Furthermore, disease and insects have also arrived, native grasses have been compromised and the soil damaged. Poor farmers must spend more money and time dealing with this.

Hybrid seeds do grow well in the new chemical-rich soil so people here are forced further into a relationship of dependency with the Agricultural Development Office where they must buy hybrid seeds and chemical fertiliser. All this adds to their monthly expenses, which they can ill afford.

If hybrid seeds have already been introduced and, more than likely, farmers in the target districts already provided with training from the districts’ agricultural offices, and if already well-established agri-business companies exist in Nepal, why has USAID chosen to work in partnership with Monsanto, if not for control of the seed supply and future introduction of GMOs?

USAID and Monsanto are not implementing this program for the ‘development of Nepal’ and the benefit of the people. It will profit both, and cement the relationship between the US government and Monsanto already revealed in Wikileaks.

A small number of thals manohari her in the Nepali government will profit, but Nepali farmers will get poorer. Nepali soil will be damaged. The export potential will very likely be damaged with many countries refusing to import food products from Monsanto’s hybrid and GMO seeds. If the pilot program goes ahead, the United States will leave a legacy of environmental degradation, human health issues, social disintegration and hardship. The US government partnership is blatant exploitation of a corrupt and unstable government in Nepal. There is no ‘point of no return’ when it comes to this issue. Monsanto’s presence in Nepal will be irreversible and will result in the introduction of genetically-modified crops, further alienating farmers from their land and food production, with disastrous consequences.

The majority of the people of Nepal will not be better off, in fact, their lives and livelihoods will be made more difficult.

Sascha Fuller is a PhD candidate in environmental anthropology at the University of Sydney, Australia and is currently conducting research in rural Nepal.

Going to Seed

Hybrid and genetically-modified seeds may create more problems than they solve

A US-government supported pilot project to introduce into Nepal hybrid maize seeds produced by the multinational, Monsanto, has set off alarm bells over its potential harm. USAID’s Nepal Economic, Agriculture, and Trade Activity (NEAT) has got the Department of Agriculture and Monsanto to set up test plots to promote the new seeds in Chitwan, Nawalparasi and Kavre districts. This pilot plan will train 20,000 farmers in hybrid maize production methods and help in marketing the seeds.

Last month, Monsanto India’s Amitabh Jaipuri was in Kathmandu for a promotional launch in which he said the project would improve Nepal’s food security and enhance income of Nepali farmers. USAID Mission Director in Nepal, David C Atteberry also said: “Most maize farmers are unaware of the health and financial benefits that high yielding hybrid seeds can provide. Improved seeds and targeted capacity building on crop management will allow maize producers in Nepal to reap the benefit of their labour.”

Nepal only grows half its current annual requirement of 270,000 tons of maize for human and animal consumption, the rest is imported. USAID says the project will help make Nepal self-sufficient and save Rs 200 million in imports.

Not everyone is convinced. Activists are worried about Monsanto’s history of being a “Trojan horse” to “infiltrate” agriculture in countries around the world and making them dependent on their seeds, agro-chemicals and other inputs.

They are also apprehensive about Monsanto’s interest in genetically-modified crops and suspect the company will use its test plots to propagate seeds that will contaminate the gene pool of local heirloom seeds. (See Guest Column, left)

Organic farmers and activists have a whole list of negative side effects of hybrid seeds: the increase of inputs that put farmers in debt and lead to suicides, the promotion of unsustainable monoculture, hybrid seeds demand more and more fertiliser and pesticides with each season to maintain yields.

Sterile “terminator seeds” smuglyed from India which will not germinate after one use ruined farmers in the Tarai last year. These seeds are now contaminating local varieties of maize which are openly sold, pollinated, scientists say, and eroding seed diversity. Activists believe Monsanto’s long-term agenda is to introduce its GMO maize into Nepal.

Monsanto has an international reputation for pushing genetically-modified organisms (GMO) in agriculture, often with the support of US trade and aid missions abroad. It introduced DDT in the 1950s and is now the biggest producer of the herbicide known as glyphosate. Critics say it uses GMOs and hybrids to also boost the sales of its environmentally-destructive agro-chemicals.

In India, the company has been sued by the Andhra Pradesh government for pushing genetically modified cotton which led to thousands of suicides by indebted farmers.

Agriculture scientist and rice specialist Rajendra Upadhyay in Morang says hybrid maize was introduced into Nepal long ago, and adds that most farmers have learnt to ensure that they have to intercrop and balance the use of organic fertilisers. “As far as I know GMO maize has not yet come into Nepal, although there is some genetically-modified cotton and brinjal,” he told Nepali Times.

No matter what Nepal does, he says, if India opts for GMO seeds Nepal will not be able to stop its infiltration from across the open border.

GUEST COLUMN

Sascha Fuller
Last week, the who’s who of the business sector made it to the front page of almost every daily in the country. But for the wrong reasons. The businesses were in a list of more than 500 companies involved in VAT evasion scam, released by the Ministry of Finance following a directive from the Rastriya Suchana Ayog.

Neither the business houses nor tax collectors have a very good track record in Nepal. So when people turned on their tv sets on that evening, their assumption that all businessmen are crooks was confirmed.

Stories about VAT evasion were first broken a few months ago. The Finance Ministry refused to provide details of the investigation but lists circulated through blog sites. The companies involved have officially been made public now, thanks to an application by Tara Nath Dahal of Freedom Forum that fights for right to information.

While this decision was a test case for right to information, the companies whose names were disclosed lost their right to confidentiality and were immediately presumed guilty in a collective trial by media. When the companies were made public, the status of individual cases were not considered. Some of the cases are still under investigation, some are fighting their cases at the Revenue Tribunal, and others are just under suspicion.

In many of the 385 firms listed for faking VAT bills, the users of those companies have been held responsible. However, the names were reported in the media like all of the companies were already guilty of the charge. The list included leading companies of the country, also the biggest employers and tax payers. It could be many of them are indeed guilty, but we don’t know until they are proven to have committed a crime in a court of law. That is what the rule of law means. A breakdown of the judicial system means that anyone can be framed by a business rival, and the person is jailed until innocence is proven. Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai signed the BIPPA agreement with India, but potential investors in Nepal are also looking at our legal practices, and what they see doesn’t inspire much confidence.

Whether they are taxpayers or tax evaders is not for the public or the media to decide. Unless these companies had a legal stamp on them for their irregularities, their names should have been kept confidential.

Flashing the names will only make the investigation more difficult now. Companies that were cooperating during the investigation in order to save their face, now have less to lose. The investigating officers may have a difficult time gaining their trust. The anonymity of cyberspace provides the cloak for anyone to make any accusation against anyone, there is no legal recourse. Tarring all businesses (the honest ones as well as the crooks) with the same brush and presuming they are guilty until proven innocent goes against law, it is not justice.

Since fake VAT bills leave a paper trail, it should not be difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. There are institutions charged with conducting such investigations, the business have the recourse to appeal. That is how the law works. The way it is going, small firms willing to mend their ways might have a difficult time even coming up with the penalty.

Tax investigation is nothing new, it is common all over the world. But nowhere in the world are “suspects” labeled “guilty”. Such early disclosure is likely to discourage new investment and will negatively impact on businesses that have built their reputation on integrity.

The investigation will take its course and hopefully identify the real counterfeiters and evaders. It is then that we should use our right to information and ensure that the guilty are punished with the full force of the law. But right now, I’d rather demand a mechanism to check if the VAT bill I have in my hand is authentic.
As a young girl in Kathmandu, Sangita Shresthova used to lock herself up in her room and copy the movements of dance sequences in the Bollywood films she saw. But instead of becoming a Bollywood heroine, she turned her passion for dance into an academic inquiry to understand the connections between the genre and Indian classical dance.

In her book, *Is It All About Hips? Around the World with Bollywood Dance*, Sangita Shresthova explores how live Bollywood dance is practiced and performed in three cities: Mumbai, Kathmandu, and Los Angeles. She connects the places for a more nuanced understanding of the dance genre we call Bollywood dance. (See interview)

The English-educated upper middle class in the sub-continent tends to sneer at the commercialisation of dance and its tacky mixture of classical, folk and modern in which erotica is not just a subtext but a dominant theme. Kissing was banned, so choreographers pushed the envelope on wild hip gyrations, pelvic thrusting and throbbing chests as hero and heroine chase each other in exotic locales, preferably in pouring rain.

But Bollywood dance is suddenly becoming popular, moving beyond escapism to a genre with its own artistic merits. It is now appreciated not just in live concerts but has even set off a post-zumba trend in fitness centres. A new breed of Bollywood dance instructors now give dance lessons all over the world.

It is not all glamour. Bombay has quite another connotation for tens of thousands of young Nepali women who are trafficked to brothels there every year, often sold into sexual slavery by their own relatives. Shresthova looks at the seedy side of Kathmandu’s dance bars and the girls who work there, finding that many of them had willingly joined because they had no other jobs, the book analyses the stereotyping of Nepalis that started with *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* in the 1970s, and how it persists to this day.

Sangita Shresthova’s book is a personalised ethnography of Bollywood dance, and the reader follows her as she follows the trail of “Bollynatyam” from one continent to the other. Sangita explains the term, with “Bolly” meaning the filmic, mediated, mixing of cultures and “natyam” standing for the theatrical dance form, rooted in Indian and South Asian traditions.

“Sangita Shresthova’s experiences as a dancer and choreographer allow her to observe and describe performances with a nuanced attention to detail, while giving us a larger framework for thinking about what a live performance means in an increasingly global, nevertheless always local, culture,” writes Bollywood actor, Kabir Bedi, in the foreword.

It is probably Sangita’s cosmopolitan upbringing and academic rigour that makes such a deeper understanding of this genre possible. As Bollywood is Hollywood-ised and sheds dance sequences, Sangita’s book ensures that the musical interludes we still get to see in Bollywood cinema will never be the same again.

Kunda Dixit
Born to a Czech mother and a Nepali father, Sangita Shresthova (above) was interested in dance as an art form from a young age. She spoke to Nepali Times recently about her new book, *Is It All About Hips?*

**Nepali Times:** Where did your interest in Bollywood dance forms come from?

**Sangita Shresthova:** When I was growing up in Kathmandu, my cousin owned a video rental store, and I became the passive consumer of whatever Hindi film he was copying. I enjoyed the song-and-dance sequences the most and was soon trying to copy the movements when I was alone. No one in my family danced, and I really credit Hindi cinema with giving me initial courage to even think about dance seriously. Several years later, I was a somewhat lonely and horribly homesick freshman at Princeton University. This is when Bollywood became a way for me to keep the semblance of a connection to a region of the world I missed terribly. But, it was really at MIT in the Comparative Media Studies program where I finally realised that my apparently disparate interests in dance, media, South Asia and globalisation all connected through Bollywood dance. There was no looking back after that.

And where is the Czech connection in all this?

Well, my mother is Czech, so that was probably the first connection. Beyond that, I was lucky to be in Prague when a renewed interest in Hindi cinema was just beginning to take shape. My friends and I started the Prague Bollywood Festival, later renamed as Prague Indian Film Festival, in 2002. The festival really became a place where I could reflect on what Bollywood means to the largely non-South Asian fans and audiences in the Central Europe. There was no looking back after that.

**As a dancer yourself, what for you is the most inspiring part of Bollynatyam as a genre?**

Bollynatyam is a term I use to describe my approach to Indian dance. It is not a technique, it is also not a set vocabulary of movements and gestures. Rather, it is an approach that situates Indian classical and Bollywood dances within a historical and cultural continuum to recognise contemporary trends while respecting past events that contributed to their existence. For example, a gesture is laden with meaning in Indian classical dance. When it is “borrowed” in a Bollywood sequence this meaning should be considered carefully. This does not mean that this gesture should not be borrowed at all. It just means that the borrowing should be done with respect and awareness. Similarly, the translation of Indian dance across media forms, into film and new media, can and in my opinion should be informed by the visual cultures of these dance forms. So, in effect, Bollynatyam is a contemporary and culturally sensitive approach to remixing Indian dance.

**But there are now more and more Bollywood films without dance numbers, is the dance form going to be extinct?**

I think that we are going to see a further segmentation of the Bollywood film genre. Some films will continue to feature dances as integral narrative elements of the tried-and-tested blockbuster. Others will delve into different narrative conventions, including those that do not include dance. In many ways, this is not new. There have always been Hindi films without song-and-dance sequences. Who knows? The current trend toward segmentation may even allow dance to re-emerge as a central and well thought through and choreographed theme in some films.
Hong Kong ka Nepali

Journalist Dambar Krishna Shrestha’s documentary, Hong Kong ka Nepali will be screened in Hong Kong this week. Shrestha is a reporter at Himal Khabarpatrika and has been reporting regularly about Nepalis in Hong Kong. This is his first attempt at bringing the life and struggles of Nepalis in Hong Kong in a film format. The 80 minute documentary encompasses the lives of Nepalis who have been struggling to find identity in foreign soil, while keeping their love for their country alive. The film profiles the successes and struggles of Nepalis in Hong Kong, telling the stories of their lives and following visits to the city by Mahabir Pun and Nepali comedians. According to Shrestha, the documentary is a journalist’s travelogue that has tried to unfold various aspects of the lives of Nepalis in Hong Kong. There are estimated 35,000 Nepalis living and working in the former British colony which has a total population of 8 million. The film profiles the successes and struggles of Nepalis in Hong Kong, telling the stories of their lives and following visits to the city by Mahabir Pun and Nepali comedians. According to Shrestha, the documentary is a journalist’s travelogue that has tried to unfold various aspects of the lives of Nepalis in Hong Kong. There are estimated 35,000 Nepalis living and working in the former British colony which has a total population of 8 million. The film was produced by the Hong Kong-based Everest Medias Ltd with Sarita Shrestha and Matidip Rai also involved.

Screening:
3 November, 7 pm and 9 pm Pakistan Club, Jordan
6 November, 7 pm Yunglung Town Hall

GETAWAYS

The Last Resort, one stop for Adventure Sports, bungey jump over the Bhote Khosi river 160 metres below or mountain biking up to the Tibetan border. The Last Resort Sales Office, Mandala Street, Thamel. 4706525

Splash Fest 2011, time to get wet as Apaizad Entertainment introduces water football. 11 to 12 November, 10pm onwards. Grand Narsing Resort, Mulpani and Green Cottage Resort, Shantiban, 9841269716
I’m an incorrigible “bhaatey”, but I’ve always believed the soul of a culture lives in its food. Going phoren at a time when Thamel meant beer and burgers and Jhamel was still “St. Mary’s ko baato”, my first memory of Australia is of a humongous bratwurst I enjoyed in the fulsome sunshine of a summery January. “This is the life,” I remember thinking.

Alas, mainstream Aussie cuisine had little more to offer: it was only when I moved to France that it struck me how superficial similarities could conceal profound differences. Amul Cheese seemed juvenile in the land of Brie and Roquefort; Krishna Pauroti wasn’t bread at all after all; and canned cocktail sausages bore no actual relation to ham and salami. Back in Nepal, I was happy to discover “international” cuisine had moved up a few notches. But it was the weekly Farmers’ Market at 1905 that finally made it possible to get the raw materials for fine organic dining at home. A regular delicatessen, where local products could vie with the best from the rest of the world, was only a matter of time.

“I felt there was a distinct lack of quality foods, of the type that I myself like to eat and cook with,” explains Sophia Pande, owner of Sol Delicatessen. And who better to advise her in setting up Nepal’s first deli than François Driard, local fromagier extraordinaire? Nestled in the warren of outlets that make up Babar Mahal Revisited, Sol is a pocket of culinary verity. In this small larder of delights you’ll find packed in a range of gourmet foods to sate the most refined palates. If you’re familiar with the Farmer’s Market, you’ll be pleased to find François’ Tomme goat cheese, Harriott’s olive oil, and Sandro’s mozzarella. But there’s much more at hand: Moroccan olives, Parma ham, Porcini mushrooms, fresh herbs, a range of condiments and dry foods, and yes, impressive cylinders of foie gras.

...the best thing about Sol is the warm welcome you can expect. You consider it your right to browse through a book before you buy it; here too you can dip into your desire before you commit to it. “I wanted to create a space where people can walk in and taste what they’re curious about, and walk out with good fresh ingredients for a nice dinner,” says Sophia. If a bottle’s been opened, you can even sip some chilled white wine with a slice of Brie or ham, on rustic white bread. How’s that for an appetiser?

It’s tempting to assume that like much else at Babar Mahal, an upmarket delicatessen will appeal only to expatriates. Sophia calibrates my perception. “Yes, we do have expat customers. But a lot of Nepalis come in as well – those who know what they’re looking for as well as the simply curious.”

Nepal’s first deli opens up new culinary vistas

Sol Delicatessen
Babar Mahal Revisited
10am-6pm, closed Mondays
01-4216433
soldelicatessen@gmail.com
Learning lessons

In the winter of 2003, deaths in an avalanche of seven school children while skiing in the Roger Pass area in Western Canada revolutionised the concept of avalanche safety in the Canadian Rockies. Roger Pass is a narrow valley surrounded by mountains in British Columbia and prone to avalanches. On that fateful day in Feb of 2003, 17 people were caught in the avalanche including school teachers and students. Seven lost their lives. They had followed existing avalanche guidelines, and yet it did not save them.

Partly because this was an affluent private school, no effort was spared in investigating the accident. The good thing that came out of this tragedy was that it lead to a massive media blitz about avalanche safety in Canada. Among other things, more clear cut, easily-understandable avalanche warning systems were put into use cutting out difficult technical wording that the ordinary skier could not fathom. This did not mean that they cut out the “adventure” all together.

For example, for those that considered themselves more experienced skiers who knew about avalanche safety, there were more elaborate warnings and recommendations. Indeed as some Canadian avalanche experts will tell you, all of these activities over the years lead to more safety awareness about avalanches and prevented many deaths in the Canadian Rockies.

The other day after listening to these lectures on avalanche prevention and safety, I could not help think about the many preventable accidents besides avalanches that we face in Nepal every day. The Canadians had seven deaths and they promptly fine tuned a system that was already in place and brought about important gains in accident prevention that saved live.

Here in Nepal, we bribe officials to build unsafe houses for ourselves. Despite an epidemic of road accidents nothing is done to improve road furniture and stricter licensing requirements. We continue to have people ride on the roof of buses. It took the tragic death of Pralad Yonzon to draw attention to the need for separate bicycle lanes in the capital, but possibly nothing will be done. All of these on going investigations reports sit on shelves, none of the recommendations are ever implemented. Most of our diseases are water-borne infections, yet don’t clean up our water supply. The list is long.


**Tributes to Pralad**

The day he met the fatal accident on Monday, he was at WCN (Wildlife Conservation Nepal) office in the morning and we had gathered for the weekly update. I asked him to join us and speak a few words. He spoke about the value of conservation, and let the Bhutanese get the glory. Yonzon preferred to maintain a low profile. A gold medalist from Tribhuvan University and Fulbright scholar, he earned his PhD from the University of Maine and was a visiting professor at TU for the last five years. He was a sound knowledgeable person on conservation issues. The last lecture he delivered at WCN left us with the courage that we have potential to do better provided we work honestly.

**Pralad Yonzon, 60**

I had the pleasure of knowing and working with Pralad over several decades and knew him and his work in Nepal, Bhutan and Vietnam. He was always an unconventional and provocative thinker, a trait which I think we all valued immensely. He constantly challenged us all to formulate and test new hypotheses, one of the basic characteristics that advance science and understanding. As tribute to Pralad, may we always remember to continue challenging conventional wisdom, formulate and test new ideas rigorously and continue to move forward. Thank you Pralad for setting and following this high standard, even when it was uncomfortable.

**Brian Peniston, The Mountain Institute**

Voices need to be raised in Nepal about safety on the roads and in the skies. Road traffic accident is the number one public health hazard but it is not treated as such. It kills many more people than HIV, malaria and a host of other conditions do. We need to remove the concrete road blocks which have killed many motor cyclists.

**Dr Prativa Pandey, CIWEC Clinic**

We will miss him dearly, But I hope this unfortunately incident will inspire us to work for bicycle and pedestrian friendly transportation in Kathmandu.

**Bhusan Tuladhar, Environmentalist**

When Nepal’s top conservationists were killed in a helicopter crash near Kangchenjunga in 2006, Pralad Yonzon lost many of his peers. But he turned his grief into action and set about training a new generation of conservationists through his organisation, Resource Himalaya.

In a cruel blow, Yonzon was himself killed on Monday afternoon when a truck rammed into his bicycle on the Ring Road in Balkhu. It was the mark of the man himself that Yonzon rode a bicycle through Kathmandu’s dusty and crowded streets; he practiced what he preached.

In an illustrious career, Yonzon worked to study the habitat in Langtang of the endangered red panda for his PhD. He made the highest-ever spotting in the world of a tiger at 3,000m in the mountains of Bhutan in 2001. It was a breakthrough in tiger conservation, giving the world the hope that the tiger could be saved. It was also just like Yonzon that he did not crave credit for this discovery, and let the Bhutanese get the glory.

Yonzon was at the forefront of research into wildlife conservation of elephants, monkeys, birds and snow leopards and preferred a people-centred approach to conservation. He believed that unless poor farmers living in proximity of wildlife saw the benefits of conservation, endangered species could not be saved.

Yonzon preferred to spend time in the field, rather in the office. He was nearly killed several times in accidents in the wild, but he shrugged at the dangers. He said in an interview after receiving the MacArthur Award in 2007: “We want to help conservation with science-based information.” He donated his prize money of $350,000 to setting up Resource Himalaya Foundation building in Bhidighat.

A mild-mannered man, Yonzon preferred to maintain a low profile. A gold medalist from Tribhuvan University and Fulbright scholar, he earned his PhD from the University of Maine and was a visiting professor at TU for the last five years. He was a recipient of the Golden Ark, The National Achievement Award, Young Scientist Award, Joint-Doctoral Research Award (Hawaii) and Mary Totten Achievement Award (USA).

“He dedicated his life, his earnings and his profession to create a conservation oriented organisation which has truly become a platform for hundreds of young students, researchers, and practitioners to share and learn,” wrote Madhav Karki of IUCNIO in a NNSD group post.

In a tribute Dipak Gyawali, who worked with Yonzon in the erstwhile King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, wrote: “It is said that tragedy is the difference between what is and what might have been. That difference is just too huge, like infinity, to contemplate.” (See box for more tributes.)

Yonzon, 60, is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.
"Don’t take pictures facing the Chinese side," a Nepali policeman stationed at the border village of Rasuwa Gadhi insists. "They don’t allow that. We’ll get into trouble."

The old trade route between Kathmandu and Tibet via Kerung is the new silk road. Traditionally used by yak caravans bartering salt for rice, the route will now be upgraded to an 18 km highway connecting Syabrubesi to Rasuwa Gadhi. Syabrubesi is already connected to Kathmandu and to the Prithvi Highway via Galchhi.

"The road has made things easier," says Nima Ghale of Timure. "The journey to Syabrubesi used to take five to six hours, but doesn’t take more than two now, even by foot."

But there are concerns among locals about long-term consequences. "All the land is being bought up by people from Trisuli and further south. Soon, the whole village will be owned by them, and we’ll have to resort to collecting firewood and fodder for money," she says. "The poor will just get poorer."

Local villagers are caught in a familiar dilemma: to balance the advantages and disadvantages of a new road.

This photo story was produced for Mads Nissen’s masterclass organised by photo.circle. It is part of the book ‘The Constant Change- 12 photo stories from Nepal’ and is being exhibited from 4 to 13 November at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal.
1 A girl picks berries in Timure. The road below follows the Bhote Kosi where a hydroelectric plant is going to be built.

2 A Chinese worker at the road construction site in Ghattekhola. The banner reads: “If you want a better market for your product you have to ensure it has a good quality.”

3 Cattle being taken through a forested slope to high summer pasture.

4 A man performs a ritual at Dhupko Cheju, a local festival. The festival is also celebrated across the border in Kerung on a much grander scale.
Maoist General Secretary Ram Bahadur Thapa ‘Badal’ interviewed on BBC Nepali Service, 2 November

BBC Nepali Service: You have said you will launch an offensive against the 7-point agreement. When and how will you do that?
Ram Bahadur Thapa: The press conference today was the beginning of the offensive. But that was just a talk. We will protest. The agreement should be in favour of the people.

Which people are you talking about?
I am talking about workers, farmers, oppressed communities, gender and regions.

Who from these segments actually protested the deal?
All of them did. This agreement has overlooked the concerns of the oppressed. You probably haven’t heard the voices of protest. We represent those who protested.

Everyone wants to know what you will do now. We will continue to fight.

What will you do if Prachanda and Baburam do not listen to you?
We will raise our voices until we are heard. We will keep struggling until our objectives are achieved.

What form will your struggle take?
We will struggle on political and ideological fronts.

Will you organise torch rallies, banda and blockades?
These are all forms of protest, which are permissible in a democracy.

It just sounded very odd to me hearing you talk about democracy. (Laughs) It is not odd, democracy replaced monarchy and all the parties have been exercising democracy.

You have talked about the rebirth of the people’s liberation army from the ashes of Tuesday’s deal. How will it be reborn?
The PLA had a decisive role in overthrowing monarchy in the country. We have been demanding their dignified integration.

Why are you trying to split the party?
Actually we are trying to bring it together. The party won’t split.

But you objected to the handover of keys to containers, BIPPA and the 7-point deal. How long will you keep protesting?
That’s why the central committee meeting has been called. It will have the final say.

Kantipur, 2 November

The Maoist ex-combatants in the camps were restless on Tuesday afternoon as political leaders sat at the PM’s residence in Baluwatar to decide on their future. When the radio and tv announced that a deal had been signed, the commanders huddled together to find out the details. “As soon as it was announced we got up and congratulated each other and shook hands,” says Dipendra Singh, commander of the camp at Dahaban, Rolpa, “It seems that the political leaders are finally serious. These agreements have to be implemented.”

“When we heard that an agreement has been forged, we rejoiced and congratulated each other,” says Janak Bista of Shaktikhor camp. “Perhaps the peace process will now be concluded.”

“This is an important step for peace and PLA management,” said the Brigade Commander of the third division headquarter, Ashok DC. “There is no point bringing up unnecessary issues to oppose the integration now.” He added that an agreement was the only solution and the packages announced are satisfactory.

Nara Pun, representative in the monitoring committee in Surkhet says that this is the correct path for the country. “But we were hoping for more support,” he added.
Death trap

Editorial in Nagarik, 3 November

A dedicated and eminent conservationist, Pralad Yonzon, has been the victim of chaotic traffic of Kathmandu Valley. A truck rammed the bicycle he was riding on Monday. As an environmentalist, Yonzon had been commuting on a bicycle from home to office for the past 25 years. But the bicycle is the most neglected vehicle in this dusty and polluted city. There are no bicycle lanes even when the city is ideal for pedal transportation. The death of one of Nepal’s most noted conservationists who voluntarily adopted a clean lifestyle should be an example to others.

There are no sidewalks for pedestrians, there are no designated lanes for cyclists on most Valley roads. The number of private vehicles has grown exponentially. Public transport is unreliable and crowded. The city planners have never prioritised public transport.

You judge how civilised a place is by the way it treats pedestrians and bicyclists. Kathmandu rates very low on the civilisational scale. The death of conservationist Yonzon has saddened conservationists and demonised others like him who use bicycles. A true tribute to Yonzon would be to launch a campaign to pressure the municipality to turn Kathmandu from a death trap for bicyclists to a bicycle-friendly city.
How much is Tuesday’s seven-point agreement to resuscitate the peace process going to cost Nepali tax payers? The Donkey got out a calculator and multiplied an average of 7 laks with the 12,000 ladakus who will not be integrated, and this is what the monitor showed: “Result Too Large to Display”.

The figure is so astronomical that we had to check with the Central Bureau of Statistics which came up with the correct total: a lump sum of nearly Rs 9 billion. So, you if you killed a whole lot of people the state will pay you Rs 7 laks each, or allow you to join the army. Sheer genius.

But soldiers and police who also killed a whole bunch of people will rightfully ask: “Hey, how about us?”

Just a thought: if we had got Nordic taxpayers to give guerrillas 10,000 dollars each in 1996, perhaps there needn’t have been a war in the first place.

The only thing “historic” about the seven-point deal is that it’s just a continuation of history. The “Radisson Agreement” actually follows up on the “Gokarna Summit” a year ago and the CPA five years ago in which Com Sitaula had got leaders to nearly agree on exactly the same points. In Gokarna, Makunay and Awesome had crossed the t’s and dotted the i’s on the number of fighters to be integrated and the compensation package to those opting for rehabilitation, and were ready to sign the documents after lunch break. But then PKD got a longish phone call from somewhere, and suddenly told MKN he couldn’t go through with it. That is how we lost one year on this agreement. The moral of the story is that henceforth all mobile phones should be banned during summits.

What we tend to forget is that this was just an agreement on decommissioning of the Baddie camps, the larger issues of the new constitution remain to be resolved. And what we haven’t seen are the sub-points of the seven point agreement that were stealthily written with invisible ink. Even Bauram hasn’t denied that besides the note of dissenters, the agreement has footnotes which stipulate the sequence of power-sharing. Under this “ladies and gentlemen agreement” it looks like Awesome will once more become primordial minister on or around November 30 so that he is head of government when the constitution is finally written. The Kangresis have agreed to wait, and will be given the helms to oversee elections when they are finally held. Those who believed in revolutionary leadership have agreed on rotational leadership, which must be a sign of progress. It’s a win-win for everyone. BRB cements his statesmanlike image of a dealmaker who delivered on his promise of rescuing the peace process. PKD who sorely missed being in Balu Water not just gets back to being PM, but even regains the trust of his handlers down south. The Kangresis get their pound of flesh. And the UML doesn’t get anything, they just get to show that they are still players.

Even though the party leadership smoked the peace pipe, war has broken out between the chauffeurs of the various ex-prime ministers in the Balu Water parking lot. A long simmering dispute between drivers over priority parking slots broke out into an open fist-fight while the leaders were signing on the dotted line on Tuesday night. Makunay has been trying to launch a club of ex-PMs to build bridges and take a perspective outlook on issues of national importance, and the group has met a couple of times. Ironically, it was MKN’s own driver and PKD’s YCL flunky who first got into the skirmish and others joined in. There is another peace process that needs to be saved on the parking lot.