It was tragic to see the one party in Nepal that we thought stood for democracy and non-violence stoop so low by calling an unnecessary and self-destructive banda last week. Unlike the Maoists, this was one party that did not have the use of political violence as one of its guiding principles, and could point to a long tradition of not compromising on its core democratic values. 

Editorial: Worst system, except for the others

A banda terrorises the public with the threat of violence, and has become the time-tested way for anyone to blackmail the state, and it doesn’t even have to be a political party anymore. Anyone can do it. Nepal has deeper structural problems eating away at the roots of democracy.

BY THE WAY p3 by Anurag Acharya

Lumpen Gandhians

For Nepal, solar is the next best thing to hydro. We have plenty of water and plenty of sunshine. And if hydro is lagging behind, why not harness the sun?

Special Report

Bring back peace

The news of the return of the Peace Corps to Nepal has delighted many.
Every time things are in disarray, there is a hangover for strongman rule. This happens not just in Nepal. Next door, in the world’s most populous democracy, members of the upper crust often get tired of India’s functioning anarchy, the lack of accountability of elected leaders, and bluster that they could do with a Lee Kwan Yew or a Mahatir.

They forget that they tried authoritarian rule under Indira Gandhi’s emergency in 1975-1977, and it failed miserably. For India, an electoral pluralistic democracy with all its kinks is still the worst form of government for almost all the others. The same is true for Nepal.

However messy things get during this transition phase we just have to remember that we had a century of Rana rule, three decades of a partyless army, and five years of a royal-military dictatorship. The democratic decade after 1990 wasn’t much better, but it was better. Party-based local elections ensured accountability for the first time and had started to deliver development by the mid-1990s.

Communities were empowered even with limited political devolution. At the community level, politicians were shortsighted and exhibited elastic morals, but they would have been forced to give way to younger, dynamic leaders more responsive to the electorate.

But, as we all know, that was not to happen because the Maoists started their war. To battle the extremists left behind, the Nepali state swung to the extreme right.

Both the ultra-left and ultra-right were defined by anti-democratic and needed violence to get to power and stay there. Democracy, with all its faults, is still a system that can cleanse itself over time because its elected representatives are supposed to be answerable to the people who voted them to power. It was thus so surprising to see the one-party state in Nepal that we thought stood for democracy and non-violence strop so low by calling an unnecessary and self-destructive banda last week. Unlike the Maoists, this was one party that did not have the use of political violence as one of its guiding principles, and could point to a long tradition of not compromising on its core democratic values.

That one decision by the Central Committee cost the party very dearly: it squandered all the social capital it had amassed since 2006. A weak system that can cleanse itself is the one that is stable.

If the Maoists and security forces do not want to honesty deal with war crimes. Under such circumstances, it is likely that the TRC will be used to cover injustices by cash or some ad-hoc political means and both the security forces and Maoists will come out relatively unscathed. Therefore it is imperative for competent authorities like the judiciary, to be involved in the TRC process.

Fourth Force

Across online forums it has become a trend to post xenophobic comments against fellow Nepalis whenever there is a discussion on Madhesi leaders and Madhesi politics (‘The Fourth Force’, Anuraj Acharya, #583). Do we want to turn into a second Bhutan and expel Nepalis because they don’t dress a certain way or don’t speak the language and practice the traditions of the majority? Yes, the Madhesi Front is problematic, but are the NC, UML and Madhesis. It does not mean we label Madhesis ‘anti-national, pro-Indian’ and force them out of their own country. It isn’t enough that we went through 10 years of hell and are still trying to recover from it? Do we really need to resurrect the ethnic-racial strife to list of strife?

Kaji

Saddly, on the day this article was published, the tea-house before the press was shut down permanently, because it was built on an unauthorised government land in a wildlife habitat.

Kinjal

This is an article by Rubena Mahato (‘Justice is Peace’, #583). However, if the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is not successful, we should take Nepal war criminals to the International Criminal Court. Dahal and his cronies need to be prosecuted according to international standards just like politicians involved in the post-election violence in Kenya and Ivory Coast.

Nepal should do well if it learnt from the experiences of other countries which have undergone the process of post-war reconciliation. Post-conflict societies like Peru, East Timor and Guatemala have dealt with the aftermaths of war by creating independent Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and went through the harrowing process of revisiting past crimes. The commissions organised public hearings and allowed societies to know what happened, why and come to terms with the present. The documentary is a good watch and its producers have agreed to make the Nepal version freely available on the internet.

Search for ‘Confronting the Truth’ on its producers on youtube.

Bhaskar Rubena. The last thing we want is violence to be institutionalised in our society. If the perpetrators are granted impunity, they will feel vindicated for their atrocities. There is no other option to justice. The Nepali Army is also guilty of human rights violations during the war and must be investigated and punished accordingly. But it is unfair to castigate the Maoists and Nepali security forces in the same bracket. The Maoists started the cycle of violence and counter-violence. They attacked policeman as they slept in their posts and dragged teachers and shot them in front of school children. Remember Ganesh Chhival and Gyanendra Khadka?

Manohar Budhathoki

We were ahead of the UML, but one-third of the 4,000 respondents were undecided. That cohort is up for grabs for whichever party can show that it is clean, efficient and can deliver. That group will not vote for the party that can burn more tyres on the streets, or vandalise more shops.

The leaders of the Nepali Congress just showed that the tail is wagging the dog in their party. The going are the calling the shots. The party will have to pay a price for this for a long time to come. But for the sake of democracy and development in this country, we hope the NC has learnt its lesson.

Democracy is a long and winding road, but it will get us there. Any kind of authoritarian system, whether it is headed by a Rajapaksa-style executive president or the military, will take us off the edge. Nepalis haven’t lost faith in democracy yet, and Nepal’s friends abroad shouldn’t either. If it is long-term stability they want, a democratic and inclusive constitution that throws up accountable leaders, is the only way to go.

HIMALMEDIA PUBLIC OPINION POLL NEPALI TIMES #553

WHEN WEB

This is a well argued editorial which merges Nepal’s geopolitical reality with the pressures from regional and global powers. (Women Wire, Editorial, #833).

Actually, Nepal has been balancing all the forces surprisingly well for a weak, unstable country bordering China. No doubt, it was the embarrassment of having a monk immediate himself live on CNN that was the main reason for the cancellation of the visit; the Chinese ambassador’s official statement was just a PR tactic.

Peter S

The mouse-cat-dog image conveys the message of the editorial perfectly. In an ideal world, regardless of size and shape each country would have its rightful place and status, and sovereignty would matter the most. However, in the real world, Nepal is indeed a small mouse, wedged between India and China. Both the dog and cat have large geopolitical interests in the mouse. They will be watching the mouse’s activities very closely and will not hesitate to play political games. The mouse would do well if it cooperated with dog and cat, and not use the two against each other. Also, if the mouse could improve its image, work towards being a more stable animal, its bargaining power with the bigger monopolies of democracy, it could be more in control over its domestic affairs.

Tashi Lama

We must discuss the Maoists and Madhesis. You are asking why the Maoists and Madhesis have not learnt its lesson.

Renu Shrestha

Maoist leader Jaya Prakash Gupta resigned from the Constituional Commission recently. But that is not enough, he must be put out of politics and face graft charges. That group will not vote for the party that can show that it is clean, efficient and can deliver. That group will vote for the party that can burn more tyres on the streets, or vandalise more shops.

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Over 200 people stranded at Biratnagar airport last Saturday due to poor visibility were in for more bad news. Criminalised politics had led to another violent death in a Bharatpur jail, and an enraged youth wing pressurised the parent party to call for a nationwide strike. Only this time it was supposedly the ‘most democratic’ party, the Nepali Congress.

An 85-year-old woman next to me wanted to call her son, who had returned to Dharan after dropping her at the airport. The elderly, the sick, Indian tourists, doctors, we were all stranded, frantically calling to find out what was happening. Some were even hoping the flights would be cancelled because they didn’t want to reach Kathmandu after dark with no transportation.

Luckily, the strike was called off just as the fog lifted. But that was only the warm-up. Two days later, the NC called for a ‘real’ strike and the country ground to a halt again. Congress leaders told the media it was their ‘democratic right’ to protest, and that they would do so in a ‘Gandhian’ way without resorting to violence. But a terrorised population wasn’t daring to venture out or open shops after taxis were torched, ambulances vandalised and even bicyclists harassed. Government offices in several districts were ransacked, examination centers were mobbed, pharmacies stoned and Bharatpur airport attacked.

It was a ‘successful’ banda because by Monday evening, the government took back all the cases against the NC activists in jail and promised to declare Shiva Paudel a ‘martyr’. Paudel and his supporters were serving time in a Bharatpur jail for the alleged murder of a UML youth leader Sanjay Lama. Whether Paudel was innocent or a criminal, we will never know and it does not matter anymore.

It has now become impossible to distinguish between a criminal and a politician. In July in Biratnagar, the UML’s Mahesh Basnet issued an open threat to a police officer and a newspaper editor for daring to accuse one of his supporters of trying to kill a reporter. Protected by the UML, Basnet challenged the entire state machinery to arrest the attacker from his house. Nobody dared.

This has now become a country where the home minister admits he hires goons to run his affairs, and says, “Oh, I am only doing what everyone else does.” Parties mobilise their militant youth brigades to extort money from businesses and hijack government tenders. Media houses are vandalised, journalists manhandled, sometimes killed for speaking up.

We ran into long-staying American, Barbara Adams, on Monday walking past burning tyres on Putali Sadak. With her long white tresses, she stood out in the crowd of pedestrians. She just shook her head, “Kasto thiyo kasto bhayo yo dech.” A banda terrorises the public with the threat of violence, and has become the time-tested way for anyone to blackmail the state, and it doesn’t even have to be a political party anymore. Anyone can do it. The protracted transition and stagnant economy means young people have no jobs, and a sizable population of youth is left outside the national mainstream. Disillusioned and hopeless, they vent their anger on the streets, and all political parties are trying to channel this energy to their advantages. It doesn’t matter anymore whose flags they carry.

Outside the CA building in New baneswor, a 10-year-old was burning tyres and stoning cars. “Somebody gave me this flag and told me not to allow anybody to pass, so that is what I am doing,” he told me proudly. An NC flag waver further down the street was telling a tv reporter: “This is the first time we have called a banda in three years, we will show other parties how bandas should be done.”

Nepal has deeper structural problems eating away at the roots of democracy, and those who have bestowed upon themselves the task of defending it are the ones responsible for the rot.

When defenders of democracy are responsible for the rot, we are doomed

BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

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Lumpen Gandhians

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ANURAG ACHARYA

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When defenders of democracy are responsible for the rot, we are doomed
Stability for growth

The new Japanese ambassador to Nepal, Kunio Takahashi, spoke to Nepali Times this week on the importance of political stability for sustainable economic growth and job-creation. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: You have been posted to Nepal at a critical time in the country’s history with the conclusion of the peace and constitution process. What is your government’s assessment of the progress? Kunio Takahashi: Shortly after I arrived in Kathmandu, the historic seven-point agreement was signed on 1 November by the leaders of the main political parties. Since then, positive and constructive development has been observed with regard to the implementation of the agreement, such as the establishment of the State Reconstructing Commission, earned initiatives to form a national consensus government, and, above all, the substantive move towards settling the future of Maoists combatants, which has been one of the major stumbling blocks towards peace and democracy. Japan welcomes this progress while expecting that the remaining outstanding issues will also be addressed through the spirit of continued understanding and cooperation among the political leaders. Japan is ever ready to support Nepal’s efforts to this end.

Japan’s policies towards Nepal appear to be guided less by geopolitics, but would it be right to say that Japan supports the protection of fundamental values like democracy, pluralism and free press in Nepal?

Japan’s economic cooperation is based purely on our wish to improve Nepal’s citizens’ living standards and welfare. As you pointed out, Japan espouses democratization through, for example, running several projects to support Nepal accomplish the peace process through its own efforts. These projects include dispatching experts and JICA volunteers, conducting seminars and training, as well as providing technical assistance to empower and strengthen the capabilities of monitoring and evaluation at central and local government levels. Japan also focuses on strengthening the mediation capacity at community level, as well as strengthening the media and the legal sector’s support to promote peace building and democratisation.

What would your advice be to Nepali officials about economics and development?

The development of the private sector is essential for sustainable economic growth. Nepal has been receiving very large amounts of remittance, but this is being used to buy cars, bikes, electrical goods etc, and is not being saved. Therefore, the huge amounts of remittance isn’t utilised fully as investment in the industrial sector. This is the fundamental problem of the Nepali economic sector. Building a mechanism to lead remittance to the industrial sector is necessary for promoting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). However, the current situation in Nepal has several problems with regards to introducing FDI: a) lack of infrastructure b) complicated procedures c) labor disputes and d) lack of awareness among investors. Many Japanese businesses don’t recognise Nepal as a potential place for business but simply as a nice place to visit for sightseeing so far. From the point of view of foreign companies including, Japanese companies, India and Bangladesh are also candidates for investment in South Asia. Therefore, the Nepalese government should recognise that Nepal must be competitive among these countries in order to get FDI. I welcome the great efforts of the Nepalese government to introduce Investment Year 2012-13 and expect the establishment of a investment friendly environment next year. In addition, when we discuss in Japan a new development project in Nepal, the political stability of this country is the main issue. I hope that the Nepal government will resolve its political issues in the near future, as this will definitely help promote more Japanese ODA and private investment in the future.

Japan’s cooperation with Nepal has traditionally been on physical infrastructure, is there an effort to reorient this to more direct poverty-alleviation efforts?

The Government of Japan has supported Nepal for the last four decades, prioritising poverty reduction, sustainable growth and peace-building. It is true that we think, physical infrastructure is very important. Without roads, people cannot access schools, hospitals and markets. Without water supply, people cannot live their everyday lives safely. Without electricity, children find it hard to study at night, small businesses find it hard to operate, and people lack access to unbiased information. We believe that basic infrastructure contributes a lot to poverty alleviation. Besides, large infrastructure projects create huge local employment. For example, about 1,500 local people are employed in the Sindhuli Road Project at present. Additionally, Japan is very active in the area of technical cooperation. We think human capacity development is also important for poverty reduction. As if the 2010, Japan has dispatched 1,891 experts and 1,171 volunteers to Nepal. They have worked with Nepal counterparts and local people. And we have received 4,848 Nepali trainees in Japan. As a close friend, Japan will continue this kind of support as a sustainable way of poverty reduction.

Is the tragic earthquake tsunami disaster in Japan going to lead to cutbacks on Japanese overseas development assistance (ODA) to Nepal?

It is true there was some delay in the ODA procedure just after the disaster. At present, however, the disaster is not having any influence on ODA. Even in the rough period, we didn’t reduce the ODA in Nepal. At this time received a lot of heartfelt support from many countries all over the world, including Nepal. Through this tragic disaster, the Japanese people came to realise how valuable help is when we are in trouble. We would therefore, like to continue our support to Nepal.

nepalitimes.com

For a longer version of this interview:
Social media as political player
Nepali politicians ignore Facebook at their own peril

The Nepali Congress does not understand the power of social media. This was obvious from the way its US-trained economist-politicians criticised the US Ambassador’s Facebook status updates against Monday’s Nepal banda.

Far from being political, the ambassador’s much-commented-upon post talked about externalities: the economic and social costs forced upon on millions of people when a few politicians encourage their militant youth cadres to go all out to enforce a shutdown. For a political party professing faith in democracy, did it suit NC’s image to push its narrow party-political agenda down everyone’s throat?

The politicians’ criticism also touched upon the envoy’s use of Facebook to share his thoughts directly with thousands of his ‘friends’. How dare, one could hear the NC politicians asking themselves, the envoy use Facebook to reach out to the people directly and thereby cast us in a negative light? But this is where the historic and pre-historic NC leaders need to wake up, rub their eyes and learn how the media world has changed.

To be sure, the NC leaders are comfortable in the world of traditional media. According to Douglas Arellanes, a media maven in Prague, that media is centralized: it has headquarters, physical offices, editors, administrators and so on. That media is also scheduled, in the sense that it adheres to fixed timetables to bring out its dailies, weeklies, fortnightlies and so forth. Sustaining that media requires a lot of money: the payroll is big, and there are rent, utilities and suppliers to pay.

But thanks to the Internet, that media is dying slowly. As a result, its place is increasingly taken up by social media. According to socialbakers.com, as of December 2011, there are about 1.3 million Facebook users from Nepal. Given Nepal’s youth population, it’s worth thinking that most of these users are young, educated, internet-savvy Nepalis who aspire for a better, more democratic Nepal. Social media allows them to take part in conversations, discussions and debates about issues that potentially shape the future that they want for themselves in Nepal. It will be the misfortune of Nepali political parties if they disregard social media.
Popular Nepali folk rock band, Nepathya, is hitting the road for its fourth concert tour of the country this time with a message of education.

During the war, Nepathya toured the country singing for peace and reconciliation, but the ‘Shantiko Lagi Sikchya’ (Education for Peace) tour is designed to raise awareness about education as a foundation for long-term peace in the country.

The band will begin on 3 January from Hetauda, travel through 10 districts and conclude in Gorkha on 21 January (see box).

Nepathya’s first tour 10 years ago was at the height of Maoist insurgency. The band wanted to send a strong message to the security forces and the rebels to save schools from violence at a time when classrooms were used as barracks, playgrounds as helipads and football fields for military drills. Nepathya continued touring the country to raise awareness through music about the need to keep politics out of schools, and to promote schools as Zones of Peace.

Nepathya’s last tour in 2006 followed the signing of the peace accord. In the subsequent years, Nepal has been relatively peaceful, but bandas and protests remain a daily part of Nepali life and political interference in educational institutions is on the rise. “It has been five years since we last toured the country and we look forward to sharing the message of happiness and sorrow with our audience once again,” says lead singer, Amrit Gurung. “The boys are very excited to be back on the road.” Gurung is going to sing his wildly popular ‘Resham’, ‘Bheda ko Oon Jasto’ as well as songs from his latest albums Mero Desh and Aina Jhyal.

Like earlier years, Nepathya is collaborating with nepa~laya and local organisations to put up its show. Tickets range from Rs 1000, Rs 500 and Rs 300 and all proceeds will be donated to local schools in each respective area and used to build recreational and educational facilities.

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Amrit Gurung

Amrit Gurung is the only remaining original member of the Nepathya band, and is its lead vocalist and lyricist. He is known for blending folk melodies into new pop and rock tunes. Amrit Gurung’s songs carry on the tradition of Nepali folk music to sing about the problems of everyday life in order to lessen the burden.

Nepathya’s songs have been about the war, of betrothal, of separation, of longing and love. With his John Lennon spectacles, Gurung is a modern minstrel who travels around Nepal singing about reality. Gurung is an avid photographer and has traversed 70 of Nepal’s 75 districts, most of them on foot. It is in these lonely travels through remote trails that he composes his songs. Says Gurung: “Being in Nepathya is like being part of a journey. We still have a long way to go.”
Animated Competition

Nepal’s first 3D animation film competition, One Film 3D Animation Challenge is set to launch the careers of Nepali animators. Organised by Maya Animation the competition will run from December 22 onwards providing Nepali animators with a platform to showcase their work to a larger audience. The event also aims to help aspiring talents broaden their skills while bringing together animation film enthusiasts across the country.

The completion will feature 26 films, out of which eight will be selected for the final round of competition. The winning movie will receive cash award of Rs 5,00,000 and all short films will be showcased at various international film festivals.

The quantity and quality of Nepali animation products has improved tremendously over the years, while there has been a marked increase in the number of animation studios and institutions.

Snippets of the eight films:

**Knowledge:** Directed by Ankit KC, the eight minute long film showcases the importance of education and depicts the life of a boy who is compelled to leave school and start working at a young age.

**Shiny:** The film is directed by Deepak Limbu and shows the friendship between a dog and a boy.

**Sweet Sixteen:** The story documents Nepal’s notorious power shortage crisis and the problems Nepalis face during load shedding season, directed by Ujwalnanda Bajracharya.

**The Tail Tale:** Directed by Bijayaprakash Pradhan, the film brings to life the adage ‘tall in the story of a rabbit and a tortoise.

**Bad day:** A film of a modern day love triangle, directed by Subayagiratna Tuladhar.

**No light:** Directed by Sandesh Pradhan, the film depicts the problem of frequent change in load shedding schedules and its effect on the daily lives of Nepalis.

**Asha:** Directed by Pravekash Chhetri, it tells the story of the courage of the main character Asha.

**Apocalypse:** The film depicts the last few moments of a warrior after being hit by an arrow, directed by Pujesh Joshi.

The Factory, a trendy restobar perfect for a refreshing stopover in the chaos that is Thamel. Great food and drinks, with zesty music. Don’t miss out on their cheesecake; it’s a must.

Mandala Street, Thamel

Mukti and Revival, enjoy live music from Muki and Revival and tasty snack from the street side food court. 23 December, 7pm onwards, Times Square Mall, Durbar Marg, 9802560634

Different Strokes, modern beats and authentic melody come together as Dj Vive and Sarasvi maestro Shyam Nepali perform. 24 December, 7pm onwards, The Pataka, Pankajipal, 9841148662

Delices de France Festive Offer, Celebrate this holiday season with festive delights like roasted potatoes, chocolate truffles and smoked salmon. Rs 2400 for a three course meal excluding taxes. 15 December to 1 January. Thamel, 4260308, info@restaurantnepal.com
Dining on a terrace in Thamel is as clichéd as the district’s nightly cover bands, and views are usually limited to water tanks and electric cables. The Heritage Kitchen and Bar, despite a less than extraordinary view of Narsingh Chowk and surrounding trekking offices, offers an inviting interior and an escape from the hodgepodge of the tourist hub.

On a rooftop built around a dya chen or a family temple, The Heritage alludes to Newari culture with its black and red tablecloths and emphasis on the building’s traditional architecture. But a flip through its menu recalls someone else’s heritage certainly not Newari, let alone Nepali. Vegetarian or non-vegetarian thali and momos at the bottom right corner defer to top-page offerings like beef goulash and chicken roulade—Hungarian and French respectively. Here’s what enticed our hungry bellies: the mushroom stuffed artichoke; paella, the quintessential Spanish rice dish and the panna cotta. The ‘Heritage crispy chicken and chips’, which sounds like a house specialty, isn’t worth a rant or rave.

For starters quartered artichoke hearts crowned with minced mushroom, chili, garlic and green onion made for a savory delicacy. For the main sish we ordered paella, which is like a biryani, but saffron-infused with full pieces of meat and/or seafood (bones, shells and all) and is served in a wide shallow pan inviting forks and fingers from every angle. Heritage prepares chicken, seafood or vegetable paella, while the more typical mixed version is absent from the menu. As listed, the seafood paella features Arborio rice (a short Italian grain used best for risotto, also available on the menu), mussel, calamari, shrimp, bhedki fish and octopus (we couldn’t find a slither or tentacle of octopus, unless The Heritage doesn’t distinguish between mollusks). All in all, the rice was slightly al dente, as it should be, and the seafood cooked evenly. A spoonful of paprika and a pitcher of sangria would be the perfect companions for the dish.

For dessert the panna cotta, a conspicuous blob of cream and gelatin drizzled with a raspberry sauce, provided a deceivingly smooth and sapid end. Prices and service at The Heritage are standard for high-end dining in Thamel, and the overall experience was equally fair.

Bench Burger, be it fish or steakburgers, Bench Burger offer many types and tastes to satisfy your palate. Krishnapati, Patan

Bronco Billy, a new restaurant in town offering Tex-Mex and Indian dishes. They make their own cam tortillas, which gets a big thumbs-up. But really, we can’t wait to try their Margaritas. Pushchowk, opposite Namaste Supermarket

BBQ Station, a place for those of you who simply can’t do without meat. BBQ Station offers a chance to make your own Barbeque on coal. Jawaharhn

Chopstix, savory Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Begin your feast with the Dragon Chicken; it is one-of-a-kind. Karmapa, 5251118

Fire and Ice, home to some of the most delicious pizza in town. Thamel, 4290210

Milk Coffee and Cocktail Café, coffee house during the day and a cozy lounge serving cocktails at night, try their yarchagumba and molecular cocktails along with the famous Starbucks. Woodland Complex, DattarMarg

Bronco Billy, a new restaurant in town offering Tex-Mex and Indian dishes. They make their own cam tortillas, which gets a big thumbs-up. But really, we can’t wait to try their Margaritas. Pushchowk, opposite Namaste Supermarket

Jazz Upstairs, the perfect place to relax with friends, listen to good music and have a plate of the best momos in town. LaGuma

Aalishan, serves authentic Indian delicacies. Try the special chicken biryani and chicken reshami kabab. Jawalakhet, 5550039

The Last Resort, be a part of the Bungy or Swing Jump Event over the Bhotekoshi river 160 metres below or mountain bike to the Tibetan border. Rs 2700 per person for one day or Rs 4500 per person for an overnight stay, valid until December, the Last Resort Sales Office, Mandala Street, Thamel, 4700525

The Heritage

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Marco Polo

Stand in Narsingh Chowk in Thamel, face southward and look up to the left

Service

Bread ‘n water

Space

Deal-icious

Repeat?‰°‰°°°
New hope for typhoid

Because typhoid can affect anyone in Nepal (from highly-placed officials to high-altitude climbers to school children), we all continue to suffer from the lack of prompt, proper diagnosis and treatment for this ubiquitous disease despite a huge gain in theoretical knowledge. What happened?

After scientists sequenced the typhoid bacteria they moved on to other unchartered areas of sequencing. And because diseases like typhoid have no spokesperson or lobby groups and are considered “biblical” diseases confined to the developing world, there is clearly no incentive to take advantage of the sequencing to make cost-effective, accurate diagnostic tools to help with patient care.

Compare typhoid with HIV, which continues to make important gains in prevention and treatment. This bias towards diseases like HIV is obvious in the funding pattern of the US National Institute of Health (NIH) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

So it was indeed good news when a new organisation called the Coalition against Typhoid (CaT) pledged to help deal with this neglected disease. At the core of CaT’s mission is a responsibility to provide a voice for the communities impacted by typhoid fever, to better define and increase awareness of the burden of typhoid at the global, regional and national levels, and to foster use of existing vaccines. CaT does not have a substantial operating budget but relies upon the collective, cooperative activities of its members to support its work plan.

If we had clean drinking water and improved sanitation typhoid would disappear, but that needs political will. In the meantime we need to increase awareness and have more effective diagnosis and treatment even to inhibit transmission of typhoid.

DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

“NON VIOLENT” BANDA: Despite Nepali Congress leaders’ pledge to make the nationwide shutdown on Monday “exemplary, non-violent and democratic”, eight ambulances were attacked in Jhapa while carrying patients to hospitals for emergency treatment.

WHENDAY WEATHER

FRI  SAT  SUN

19-04  19-03 18-01

The cold wave is expected to continue, with thick fog blanketing the Himalayan Valleys as well as the Tarai for the third straight week. The fog cover is caused by an inversion layer to which water vapour from winter irrigation and soot particles from cars and industries in India are a contributing factor. Kathmandu Valley pollution levels with dust and diesel particles is getting worse, too, but luckily the smog is blown away by mid-afternoon. More of the same for the weekend and into early next week, with frost on the outskirts.

THE WEEKEND WEATHER

TOWNSHIP OFFICER

KATHMANDU

THOMAS L KELLY

“TOXIC CITY: Despite pledging not to burn tyres because the smoke is a health hazard, Nepali Congress activists set off tyre pyres all over the country.

ARRIVAL COFFEE: Himalayan Java’s fancy new coffee shop at the airport arrival lounge in Kathmandu is getting its finishing touches.
When Carroll Dunham visited Humla 25 years ago as an anthropologist, she was fascinated by the healing techniques that local women practiced. She was inspired to establish Wild Earth Nepal in 1999 with the aim of helping communities in the Himalayan region generate sustainable income.

Today Wild Earth Nepal produces a wide range of handcrafted herbal goods such as soaps, massage oils, pillows, smudge sticks, and aromatic amulets. The products are sold to customers in over 30 countries including Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, Trump Hotels and The Body Shop.

Nepal is known for traditional Ayurvedic medicines, after all, this was where Hanuman came to look for a potion that would cure the wounded in Ram’s army when he invaded Lanka. But Nepal also has good brand value in the west for its Himalayan products.

Wild Earth organisation also makes use of traditional therapies and offers unique spa treatments to its customers.

“We don’t need to borrow foreign massage techniques as Nepal is very rich in ancient touch therapies,” says Dunham.

Until recently most of Wild Earth’s clients were foreigners, however urban Nepalis are slowly warming up to the products.

Wild Earth stays true to its mission by working with remote and economically fragile mountain communities while purchasing herbs directly from the source, by passing middlemen, so farmers receive maximum income for their raw materials. In addition to helping villagers earn sustainable incomes, Wild Earth teaches them better and safer processing techniques. The company also has a strict policy against using rare, endangered or improperly harvested plant products.

Wild Earth considers preserving local knowledge as its secondary mission, as many healing practices and medicines have been passed down for generations through folksongs and folklores.

“We have interactions with amchis (traditional healers) where we discuss methods to standardise traditional practices and share skills based knowledge. We also want to create recipe books for herbal medicines so that the knowledge is not lost,” says Dunham.

In its effort to be socially responsible, Wild Earth regularly provides massages at the Bal Mandal and the old age home in Pashupati and has been donating to charitable causes.

Dunham is content with the work her organisation has accomplished so far and attributes its success to the commitment of the people involved.

She is hopeful that the future will bring new opportunities and says, “Wild Earth Nepal has only been a mediator in introducing Nepal’s rich indigenous healing techniques and herbs to rest of the world. But the country’s abundant natural resources are yet to be fully explored.”

Wild Earth uses ancient Himalayan knowledge to create international standard herbal products made in Nepal. The company also has a strict policy against using rare, endangered or improperly harvested plant products. Wild Earth considers preserving local knowledge as its secondary mission, as many healing practices and medicines have been passed down for generations through folksongs and folklores.
The 61-year-old surgeon from Colorado, has visited Nepal more than 30 times. He is fluent in Nepali, familiar with Nepal's social, cultural and political affairs, wears the traditional Nepali ‘dhaka topi’ regularly and prefers to be called Bir Bahadur Subba.

After completing his BA 40 years ago, he had two alternatives: work in the mountain states of the US or volunteer in a developing country half way across the world. After serious deliberation he chose the latter, joining the Peace Corps where he was assigned to teach science at a school here in Namsaling of Ilam district.

Bialek recalls the initial difficulties he had while learning Nepali, his frustration at not being able to speak the language for the first six months and the inaccuracies he found in translated texts used in science modules such as ‘the Sun revolves around the Earth’.

When Bialek realised his students had no textbooks, he taught science classes using examples from daily life and put together a science laboratory in the school.

Fellow teacher Homnath Adhikari recalls Bialek was well-liked by Namsaling residents. Adhikari himself was inspired when Bialek once asked his class to write an essay on where they wanted Ilam and Nepal to be in 100 years.

“That essay completely opened my mind,” says Adhikari, who went to set up the Namsaling Community Development Center (NCDC).

Bialek went home after two years to become a teacher in America. He frequently met classmates from George Washington University to discuss ways to implement long-term development projects. Eventually, Bialek decided to dedicate his life to sustainable development in Nepal and returned in 1983 to help launch NCDC with Adhikari. Bialek is now involved with the organisation, Engineers Without Borders which helps projects in developing countries.

NCDC works with VDCs throughout Ilam and across Nepal in environment, agriculture, hydroelectricity, and biodiversity projects. Bialek has set up the Nepal Community Development Foundation in North America to raise money for his work in Nepal. During this recent visit to Nepal Bialek was advising Ilam Municipality on how to turn itself into a ‘green town’.

In September 1962, Nepal welcomed the inaugural batch of Peace Corps volunteers (pictured, right), becoming one of the first countries in the world to host a program pioneered by president John F Kennedy.

The next 40 years saw at least 4,000 American graduates and professionals serve in Nepal. It was a different, roadless, tangle of telephoneless and internetless Nepal in those days, yet the volunteers taught in schools and colleges, trained teachers, assisted at health posts and helped out with agricultural programs.

In return they gained valuable experiences living and working in a developing county and forged lifelong friendships.

Many volunteers continued working in Nepal as diplomats or in the development and education sector.

The Peace Corps was closed down in September 2004 after the Maoists set off a minor explosion at the American Information Centre in Gyaneswor. Initially the withdrawal was meant to last six months, but as the security condition worsened, the Peace Corps suspended its Nepal program indefinitely.

The move to return the Peace Corps was initiated by Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari during his visit to Washington last year. He made a written request to the US government, and

Barry Bialek still considers himself a Nepali at heart

Barry aka Bir Bahadur

BATCH OF 70: Peace Corps volunteers from mid 1970s gather for a group photo. Barry Bialek is seated in second row, first from the right

an exploratory American mission visited Kathmandu earlier this year. Sandra Wagner, who once headed the Peace Corps Asian department, has been appointed director of Peace Corps Nepal. The budget for the revived Peace Corps comes from the USAID’s health outlay, sources say. Wagner is expected in Kathmandu in January to prepare the logistics for opening the new office.

The news of resumption of the Peace Corps program has delighted alumnus and friends of Nepal around the world.

Barry Bialek, a volunteer stationed in Ilam in the early 1970s says: “My Peace Corps experience in Nepal opened my heart and mind in ways I had never imagined. I’m very glad the Peace Corps are coming back to Nepal, both for the new volunteers and for Nepal.” (See profile, above.)
As a young liaison officer at the Peace Corps directorate in Kathmandu, I was assigned to the second group of 39 volunteers in 1963.

The last reunion was in 2008 when we met for the 45th anniversary in Washington state which ended with the volunteers singing Nepali folk songs from 50 years ago. It was this experience that led me to the idea that the 50th anniversary should be marked by a musical get together.

I travelled to the United States in September for the 50th Peace Corps ‘Nepali le maya maryo’ Reunion, accompanied by guitarists Anil Shahi and Gaurav Basnyat. Since the last reunion, 10 volunteers had passed away. Yet, it was a nostalgic get together in which the most surprising was that volunteers remembered the lyrics and melodies of golden oldies like ‘Ke Bho Ke Bo Hijo Aja’, ‘Balaju ko Baise Dhara’, ‘Jhik Le Bhagai Lagyo Kanchhi Lai’.

At a reception hosted by Nepal’s ambassador to the US, Shankar Sharma, 100 former volunteers gathered at the embassy in the presence of Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun who joined the group to sing Dharma Raj Thapa’s 1960s hit: ‘Nepali Lai Maya Maryo Bari Lai’. One volunteer even sang a solo of ‘Tada Bata Bola Ko Timilai Nai Ho Maile’. As a Nepali diplomat who pushed ‘cultural diplomacy’ during my assignments in the US and UK I felt I was just continuing on with my work, making musical connections with a Nepal of 50 years ago. What was surprising to me was how the volunteers still remembered the songs, and how the music and lyrics seemed to link them to rural Nepal so many years later.

The American Peace Corps Nepal Reunion Newsletter wrote, “The group sing along of Nepali folk songs was accompanied by a motley crew of volunteers. They actually remembered the words. No comment about their singing.”

Taking his cue from Terence Bech whose collection of Nepali folk songs was donated to Madan Purnakar Pustakalaya in Kathmandu (see Nepali Times, #582), a former volunteer Stu Ullman has sent back his collection of the lyrics to 40 songs he used to listen to on Radio Nepal in 1963.

The happiest news for many of us at the reunion was that the Peace Corps is returning to Nepal in 2012. The Peace Corps helped with education and development in rural Nepal 50 years ago, but it is also worth remembering that it continues to serve as a cultural bridge between Nepal and the United States.

Singha Bahadur Basnyat was Nepal’s ambassador to UK in 1997-2003 and served five years in Washington.

SINGHA BAHADUR BASNYAT

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Public discontent with Nepal’s worsening political condition is spilling over into social networking sites as ordinary Nepalis take part in online diplomacy via Facebook with US ambassador Scott H. DeLisi. However, politicians in Kathmandu are upset with the ambassador and the amount of media attention these interactions are generating.

Throughout his time in office, DeLisi has been openly critical of political parties who have called nationwide strikes. In May 2010 he condemned the indefinite strike called by the Maoists and appealed to them to solve the political deadlock through dialogue. This past week he criticised the NC banda as being undemocratic, angering the party which describes itself as the ‘most democratic’. NC leaders have labelled DeLisi’s facebook campaign as ‘irrelevant and uninformed’. Minendra Rijal was especially critical saying political parties in Nepal do not organise protest programs according to a foreign diplomat’s whims, and dismissing DeLisi’s remarks as ‘unbalanced’ and entirely personal.

There are people who see DeLisi’s facebook campaign as part of his larger support for the peace process. However, ex-foreign minister Ramesh Nath Pandey feels such statements and actions go against the Vienna Convention and warned the diplomatic community that unnecessary interference in domestic affairs will make them unpopular among the people.
FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

15

23 - 29 DECEMBER 2011 #584

#584

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"NC’s nationwide strike is not a protest, it’s a satyagraha."

NC leader Arjun Narsingh KC

Ethnic Platoon

Editorial in Kantipur, 22 December

The government’s decision to induct 3,000 Madhesis into the Nepal Army and create a separate battalion is against existing laws and will set the wrong precedence and tarnish the image of the military. The Madhesis are under-represented in the NA and their number has to go up, but there are reservation policies to address this problem to make the national force more inclusive. Creating an ethnic platoon will not ensure inclusion, it will promote exclusive identity and create a rift in the military.

In the past, the military was dominated by a particular group and large sections of the ethnic population were marginalised in the national force. To rectify this historical marginalisation, a time-bound reservation policy can be effective. Presently, the government has 45 per cent seats in the national army for the under-represented communities, and 28 per cent for the Madhesis alone. If the leaders feel this is too little, they have to resolve it at the political level. But mass recruitment into an ethnic platoon will set the wrong precedence for other communities to demand their own force. Besides, this will significantly increase the size of the army and put an added load on an already overburdened economy. The decision to create a new battalion is a desperate move by the Maoists to appease the Madhesi coalition partners and remain in power. It is not a secret that Madhesi leaders have been threatening to pull out of the government if PM Baburam Bhattarai doesn’t implement the 4-point deal.

Sajha Sawal

Nepal, 18 December

The BBC World Service Trust has been airing Sajha Saawal, a political debate program, for the past four years. Identified as the BBC’s international charity, the trust was registered with the government’s Social Welfare Council as an INGO. The trust had declared a budget of US $1 million to run projects on maternal health, but is spending more than US $3 million annually and running a program whose content is highly political. The documents state that the funds are raised from the BBC’s internal sources and donors but officials at the trust refused to give any names. An official at the Press Council admitted that the trust’s activities may have gone beyond the mandate in the contract and said further investigation is necessary. At a time when foreign investment in media is still a contentious issue in Nepal, journalists like Shiva Gaule and Dhruba Hari Adhikari say, an INGO should not be allowed to run political debates on national television.

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The windshields of 10 ambulances were broken throughout the country on Monday’s band. Nepali Congress leaders Jhusil Korala, Shere Bahadur and Gham Chandra pronounced the strike “a grand success and a victory for peaceful, non-violent democratic protest.” A taxi was set on fire non-violently in Banban for daring to defy the threat to stay off the streets. Two patients who couldn’t make it to Bir Hospital for medical emergencies died peacefully on the way. And in Baglung, the District Education Office was democratically vandalised because staff did not heed the call to take a day off. Why couldn’t the cabinet spare the population the suffering and just declare both Shiva Poudel and Kim Jong I “martyrs”?

We all know that Nepal’s political parties split like amoebas in heat. The NC split, united and is on the verge of a split again. Communistic parties are especially prone to multiplying by binary fission, and at one time there were 22 of them in this country. Communist parties also come together again, as their names show. “Unified” Maniat Leninist (UNL), or the “Unity” Centre, or the “United” Communist Party of Nepal, Maoist. After hemming and hawing and not being able to decide to split or not to split, the hard-on faction is planning a super-duper convention in Kathmandu soon which will decide whether to split. But what are we going to name them? The CPN-M label has already been taken up by Comrade Matrika so the donkey’s humble suggestion is to call the establishment faction Ex-United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (EU-CPNM) and the breakaway faction, the Un-United Communist Party of Nepal (UU-CPNM).

The other entity that seems to be on the verge of a split is the Blue Diamond Society. I know, it’s not a political party, but it has a member who is a Constituent Assembly member and hence has all the rights and privileges of a party. And in the grand tradition of political parties in Nepal, the un-governmental organisation is likely to be split into two with one faction calling The Blue Diamond Society (Lesbian) and the other the Blue Diamond Society (Revolutionary).

After years of deadlock, it is amazing to see how quickly the nearly 300 points of contention in the draft of the new constitution are being resolved. The number of disputed clauses has now been brought down to just 11. Suddenly, the compromises are coming through thick and fast. The Maoists even agreed on Wednesday to abandon the term ‘people’s war’ planning a super-duper convention in Kathmandu soon which will decide whether to split. But what are we going to name them? The CPN-M label has already been taken up by Comrade Matrika so the donkey’s humble suggestion is to call the establishment faction Ex-United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (EU-CPNM) and the breakaway faction, the Un-United Communist Party of Nepal (UU-CPNM).

Only in Nepal: The country is so bankrupt it doesn’t have moolah to import diesel from India. Yet, the government has decided to install two 100 megawatt diesel power plants. And NEA is planning to increase power cuts to 16 hours a day by mid-January, but simultaneously jack up electricity tariffs by 30%. Consumers are going to be delighted.