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Weekly Internet Poll # 319

Q. Did the peace summit address all the major issues?

Total votes: 3,927



Yes 24.7%

No 68.7%

Don't know/can't say 6.6%

Weekly Internet Poll # 320. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. The government denies the OHCHR report that 49 people went missing from the Bhairabnath battalion. What do you think?

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KIRAN PANDAY

Red road

The Maoists are making their presence felt in the capital with street patrols

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

It is Saturday night on one a Thamel side-street. Five young men walking along are suddenly confronted by 50 Maoists in five vehicles.

“We are Maoists,” they say, “we are patrolling the streets for your protection.”

Earlier that evening, Kumar Lama of Swoyambhu was taken into Maoist custody for drinking and starting a fight. His captors took him to the Maoist trade union office in Balaju where, according to the union’s district chief Hom Bahadur Acharya, Lama was made to “understand and repent his action”.

Lama returned home after three days badly bruised and unable to walk. “I had a little too much to drink and got into an argument with a taxi driver, that’s why they took me,” he recalled,

“There were others there too, some of them were blindfolded.”

Even as the peace talks were going on in Baluwatar, Maoists had begun patrolling the capital’s increasingly crime-ridden streets. It may be against the 25-point ceasefire code of conduct, but that doesn’t deter the Maoists from what they say is an effort to curb the crime surge.

The Maoist leaders want to keep their cadre busy, or it may be part of the party’s hearts-and-minds campaign. But the end result is that the Maoists are meting out summary justice to anyone behaving behaving in a rowdy manner on the streets.

The Maoists are also said to have taken some leaders of the Valley’s crimina; gangs into custody, although the rebels did not confirm it.

“We have been conducting patrols for the last three weeks

and have taken some people into custody for action,” said Pawan Man Shrestha of the Maoist-aligned Newar front, “those found guilty will be handed over to the police after investigations.”

At the Maoist trade union office in Balaju we were told that the office was only a shelter for union members and that they were not holding any detainees.

But this is little consolation for Renuka Shrestha, whose contractor husband Rajesh and four friends were taken in by Maoists on the Ring Road on Wednesday morning. She asked around and was told to go to the Balaju office, where we met her.

“His father and mother are worried sick,” said Renuka in tears after recognising her husband’s motorcycle in the union’s premises, “if he has done anything wrong take action, but at least let me meet him and see

WHO’S PROTECTING WHOM?: Maoist militia also provided security and crowd control outside the prime minister’s residence in Baluwatar on Sunday.

if he is all right.” Union leader Acharya flatly denied knowledge of Rajesh’s whereabouts.

Ceasefire monitoring committee member Taranath Dahal told us: “We have heard rumours that the Maoists are arresting people and holding their people’s courts in the Valley. We are investigating, but if true it is a violation of the code of conduct and a breach of Prachanda’s public commitment to not hold people’s courts in cities.” ●

Editorial p2
Public intellectualism



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Minding business

We need business, and women in business

We worship wealth in Nepal, but when it comes to generating it, we are laggards.

The business class here lives off rent from fixed assets and connections with the ruling clique. Cartels and exploitation of labour are the norm. Get-rich-quick methods are the way to go



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

and long-term investments an anomaly. Almost all big businesses are family-owned, clan-run, and conservative to the core. The defaulters' list of public sector banks reads like a who's who of Nepali business.

The top layer of business have flirted and celebrated the rise of Chairman Gyanendra, and is now trying to subvert a possible SPA-Maoist rapprochement. What other explanation is there for their pre-Tihar behaviour? The business community has no right to resort to forced closure, wildcat strikes and tactics of intimidation.

Nepali entrepreneurs' profiteering tendencies didn't develop in a vacuum. Government policies regard profit as the primary motive of business, and job creation as an outcome, not driver, of growth. This must change if business is to contribute

to national integration and economic development.

The economic agenda of the mainstream parties is hopelessly donor-driven, based upon long-discredited jobless growth models from the IMF and World Bank. The Maoists seem to not know how they want the economy to grow. Soft-spoken commissar Deb Gurung's business babble about the primacy of domestic trade and industry doesn't make much sense in a country self-sufficient only in the production of franchised soda-water, licensed alcoholic drinks, monopolised tobacco, and localised junk food. We need instead to democratise business through the promotion of micro and small enterprises.

The Grameen experiment and microfinance in Nepal both began in the early eighties. Comparing the two can offer useful lessons to economists entrusted with charting a new economic course for the country. The former flourished in a country not entirely controlled by elitist businesses, the latter floundered under the weight of fixers promoting shady foreign banks.

Grameen Bank and its founder Mohammad Yunus have been awarded the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for the grassroots work they did to help lift millions out of poverty. The similar Small Farmer Development Project (SFDP) here operated under the Agricultural

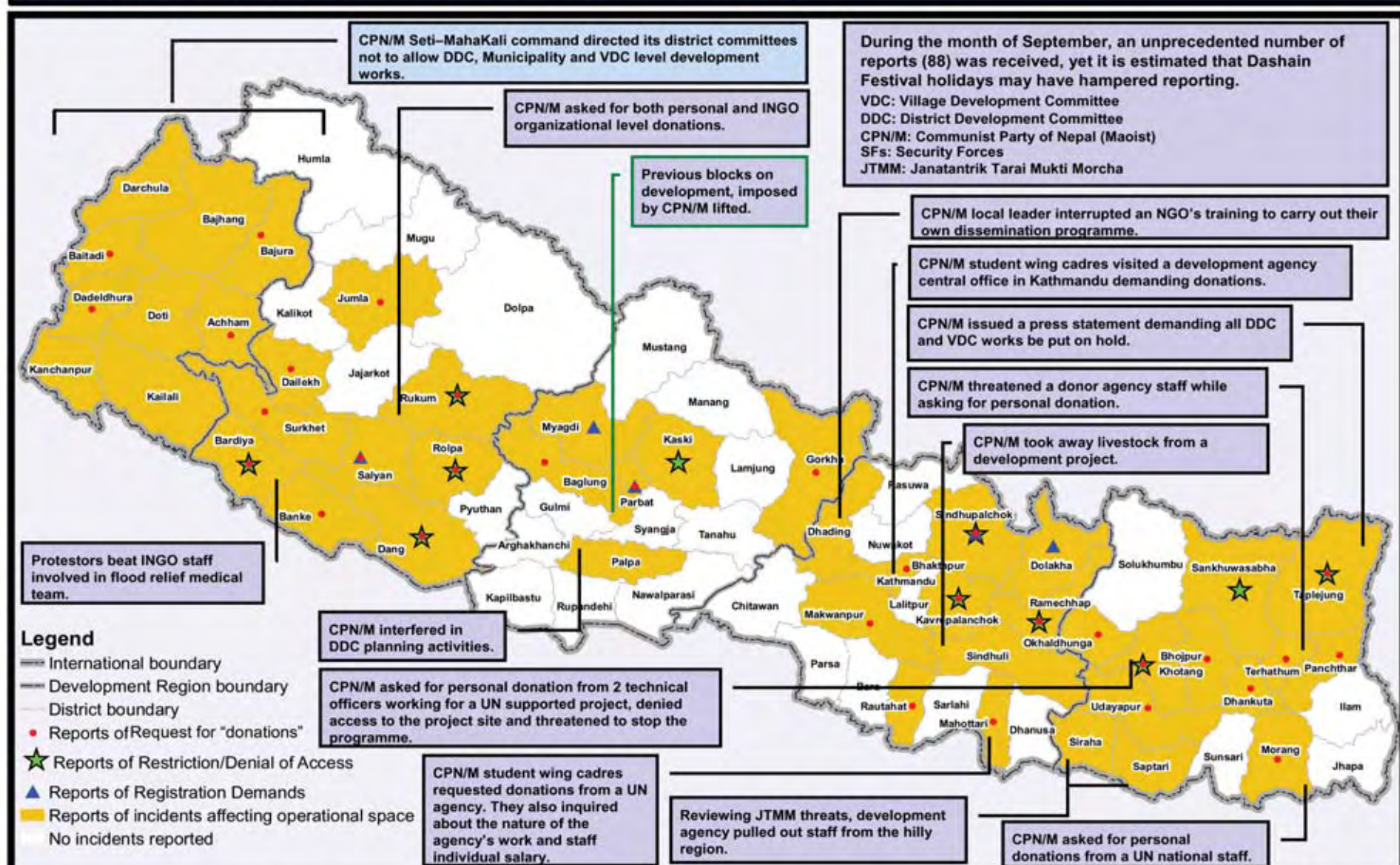
Development Bank continues to falter.

In the court of history, the Maoists will also be held responsible for the havoc their misguided ideology has wrought on fledging microfinance and small businesses. This impoverished the poor and helped the parasitic rich prosper. Had microcredit schemes benefited from the lucrative money transfer business of the remittance boom, we would have maybe fewer ATMs in cities, but more banking facilities in small towns and rural areas.

The fundamental premise of the Grameen model is also important—belief in the ability of the individual to lift herself out of poverty. Professor Yunus concluded that the future of small businesses in developing countries will have to be led by women, if the poor are to be empowered and get out of the poverty trap. Almost four-fifth of Grameen stakeholders are women.

Like the deities of two other forms of power celebrated this festive season—Kali of coercion, and Saraswati of wisdom—the goddess of wealth is a woman. It's impossible to break the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance, and timidity without empowering women. May she bless those who worship all her earthly forms. ●

NEPAL Operational Space: September 01 to 30, 2006



Map Produced by OCHA, Nepal. This map can be downloaded from <http://www.un.org.np>
Data Source: International and domestic media and field reports from UN Agencies, Donors and I/NGO's

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October 11, 2006

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The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

LETTERS

ETHNIC AUTONOMY

JB Pun has rightly pointed out ('Race for identity' #318) that ethnic autonomy, if taken seriously, would only sow 'the seeds of future conflict by creating new exclusions'. Due to centuries of east-bound migration, most individual settlements in the country are ethnically mixed, with members of a large plurality of caste and ethnic groups eking out an existence based on mutual cooperation. Given such a situation, any plea for so-called ethnic autonomy, whose operational structure apparently continues to elude the 'ethnic' leaders themselves, must also take into account the identity of the majority of the caste Nepalis who also comprise a vast proportion of the poor and deprived. The new constitution (including the proposed interim one) should, instead, provide for a highly decentralised system of governance under which individual Nepalis, irrespective of their caste, ethnic, or gender status, would be inalienably and substantively empowered to participate in making decisions for their own socio-economic advancement. The success of community forestry in Nepal provides a good indication as to what all is attainable through devolution.

Bihari Krishna Shrestha, Chakupat

NAIVE

The editorial 'The EPA' (#318) is either overly optimistic or plain naive. The opening statement, 'Nepal is on the mend', borders on the delusional. The Maoist leaders' statements and behaviour show that they consider themselves victors, not that they have 'achieved failure'. They also deny that they were looking for a 'soft landing'. Having conquered the countryside, they are in the cities, without having fired a single shot. Their cadre indulge in extortion, kidnapping, illegal taxation, murder, and beatings daily, yet the editors address them as a legitimate party, failing to realise that violence is the mainstay of their ideology and that it is by allowing extortion that the Maoist leadership keeps its cadre loyal.

Moreover the statement about the Maoists 'showing flexibility on arms management' has been proven to be

wishful thinking. The king, blinded by his arrogance, made a mess of the country and has paid dearly for it. Now the 'seasoned politicians', darlings of *Nepali Times* editors, and the self-righteous Kathmandu intelligentsia are eagerly following his example.

SK Aryal, email

THE HUMAN FACTOR

Suman Pradhan is right to be careful about monsoon flights ('No-fly season', #318). But in remote areas there is no other option and people, usually in need of urgent medical attention, have to fly despite the risk and expense.

As a former aircraft crew member, I know you can have your pick of who to blame for crashes: bad weather, old aircraft, the marketing or engineering department, crew, passengers.

Passengers refuse to believe the weather at their destination is bad if it is okay in Kathmandu, and start fisticuffs when they hear about cancellations. So-called educated passengers do this as much as anyone else.

Aircraft are often poorly maintained because delays caused by proper procedure—even when there is a technical problem—are unacceptable to passengers who pressure marketing personnel.

Pilots fly in bad weather because of ego problems. If they hear of a junior captain who flew safely in bad conditions, they want to top that.

Once airborne, passengers refuse to fasten their seatbelts, saying expansively that they 'fly regularly'. In bad weather, their heads hit the roof and they even fall to the floor, but they continue to believe that seatbelts are restraints, not safety measures.

Shhradhaa Malla, email

● Suman Pradhan dismisses 'new-fangled technology' and 'latest gizmos', but aviation technology has in fact evolved and become reliable.

Had GPS been commercially available in 1992, the Thai and PIA jets probably wouldn't have crashed. The mid-air collision involving a Russian airliner and a DHL cargo jet over southern Germany four years ago happened when the Russian plane's pilot disregarded the Traffic Alert

and Collision Avoidance System's warning to climb, and instead descended following the air traffic controller's instructions.

Pradhan also misses the human factor. Seventy percent of all air disasters occur due to flight crew error and five percent due to other human error (air traffic control, improper loading, poor maintenance), 13 percent because of mechanical failures, and just seven percent due to weather. The rest is either undetermined or due to causes such as bombs, hijacking, or shootdowns.

The human error factor in Nepal is likely higher than the world average. Aircraft operate without airworthiness certification, pilots with dubious qualifications from fly-by-night schools get licenses, and operators compromise on maintenance to meet all the competition and cost cutting.

Subodh S Pal, Lagankhel

OLD PROBLEMS, NEW PEOPLE

Sudha Khakurel's poem ('A dalit is born', From the Nepali press', #318) is being talked about because the author is from the dominant group that controls media and other sectors in Nepal.

The poem lists handicaps that have been associated with being a dalit or a janajati in Nepal for the last 238 years. Yet they were never the concern of the Nepali state or of the socially dominant groups. Suddenly they become the talk of the town because one person from the dominant group writes about them as his or her problems. Twenty percent of the population is dalit and owns less than one percent of land in Nepal. Thirty percent of the population totally dominates society.

The Maoists, despite their inherent deficiencies and antiquated ideology, brought this to the forefront. Yes, a truly discrimination-free society should be the consensual goal of the country as a whole. Or the Maoists will be proved right that their violent path is the only means to bring about a just Nepali society.

Rajendra Khadga, Lazimpat

FROM THE GROUND UP

Those making mock of 'shaping the nation's history' hold conferences and issue statements reiterating that the People's Movement is gaining momentum.

But ordinary citizens are kept in the dark. They should take a lesson from Nobel laureate Mohammed Yunus in creating economic and social change from below.

Ram Chandra Thapa, email

GOOD SHOPPING

'Ready for retail' (#317) had a glaring omission: the Bhatbhateni supermarket. It is larger than some of the supermarkets profiled in the article, and is constantly expanding. I have been shopping there since it was the one-room Bhatbhateni Cold Store and remain impressed by the wide selection, low prices, and friendly atmosphere created by the owners and staff. Also, since it hires so many staff, it is a valuable source of employment in Kathmandu.

Rachel Amtzis, email

TASTELESS BUT FUNNY

At first, I was disturbed by the appearance of words like 'backside' and 'ass' in *Nepali Times*, as we have always considered it a family newspaper. But, having read the last two or three instalments I can forgive the breach of taste. It is almost funnier than the old Under my Hat, and after all, we laughed like teenagers through that too, despite its propensity for making jokes about wives, animal mating season, scratching, and the poetic efforts of young Nepalis. There must be some outlet for these feelings, or they could fester and cause serious lapses of taste and behaviour. Just don't go too far.

Grace Chamling, email

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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COURTESY: WINROCK INTERNATIONAL NEPAL

Rural electrification works best when managed by local communities

Making light work

MALLIKA ARYAL in MUGLING

Until four months ago, Phulmaya Praja's family lived 200 metres off the Prithibi Highway (*pictured*) in complete darkness. They saw the lights of the trucks and buses on the road, but inside the home there was only the feeble light of kerosene lamps.

"We had to cook and eat before sunset, feel our way around the house at night in the dark, sleep early and our children had to study under a *tuki*," says Phulmaya.

Today, the Praja family is among the 90,000 households that the government and Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) plan to electrify by July next year under a community rural electrification development program. Since 2003, community electrification has extended to 37 districts. NEA sells electricity in bulk to user groups at a substantially discounted rate of Rs 3.60 per unit, and they in turn sell it at a retail rate of up to Rs 4.50 per unit.

That is a lot less than what normal users pay and NEA doesn't have to be involved in distribution and fee collection—areas where its record is not so good.

"By distributing electricity via communities, NEA is saving on what they would have had to spend as operating costs," says Dilli Ghimire, chairman of the

National Association of Community Electricity Users. At present there are over 107 user groups distributing electricity which are registered either as a cooperative, under the company act as a private limited company, under the social welfare act, or as non-profits.

"It reduced non-technical loss," explains energy economist Ratna Sansar Shrestha, "it's not NEA but the communities that monitor leakage, theft, so the management cost decreases, thereby also reducing distribution costs."

The program also facilitates a cost-effective rural electricity scheme by attracting private investments. A fund is set up in which the government contributes 80 percent and the community chips in the remaining 20 percent in cash or kind. "Word is spreading about the 80:20 program, people feel that they can also bring electricity to their communities," says Ghimire.

As with community radio or local management of forests, or irrigation, the program proves that *de facto* decentralisation is the best management option for Nepal. "Electricity generation can be private or public, its transmission has to be nationally managed like a highway, but distribution works well—and loss, especially theft, decreases dramatically—only when organised village groups and municipalities manage it," says

former Water Resource Minister Dipak Gyawali who initiated this program in 2003 to 'communitise' electricity in Nepal.

Electricity lines may have reached rural areas, but there are still those families who live in total darkness because they cannot afford to pay the initial cost. To help such households organisations like Winrock International Nepal and local communities have set up a revolving fund in two pilot projects in south Lalitpur and Mugling, thereby helping to electrify over one hundred households in less than a year.

"The family takes a loan of Rs 1,500-2,000 to electrify its house, or use the money to start income generating activities, and eventually pays the loan in instalments over a period of time," says Bharat Raj Poudel of Winrock, which works on productive use of energy.

Communities that are adopting the electrification model are increasing but there are challenges ahead, mainly to do with tariffs. "It may be appropriate to sell electricity to some communities at Rs 3.50, but the same rate cannot be applied across the board," says Poudel.

Even with the 80:20 model, the 80 percent is actually not a grant to the community but goes to NEA, which doesn't start the project until the community also puts in its 20 percent share. The NEA treats the government's share as a loan or equity and thus ends up

owning the system.

NEA's annual loss of Rs 2.5 billion can be cut by half if distribution of electricity is managed better. One way to fix this is to unbundle generation, transmission and distribution which NEA has been doing by itself since the 1980s. Says economist Shrestha: "We can follow the same model in the cities, let neighbourhood councils feel the ownership, the losses are cut, the process of unbundling begins, and everyone wins." Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimates it will cost them \$300 to take electricity to every home in Nepal. The NEA and Butwal Power Company's community model shows that it will only cost \$100 per home. It is clear Nepal needs a cheaper indigenous model for distribution.

Back in Mugling a community is ready to start a lift irrigation project. "Every member of the community has brought in a tool from home and we are all working hard to install a water tank," says Rana Bahadur Magar. His village is right above the Trisuli river but due to lack of irrigation Magar used to get only one crop a year. Now, using electricity to lift water from the river, the villagers hope to grow cauliflower, cabbage and other vegetables to sell in Mugling.

"A few years ago we were living in darkness," Magar tells visitors, "who would have thought that today we would be using electricity not only to light our homes but also to irrigate our fields?" ●

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Visionary

As part of Standard Chartered's global Seeing Is Believing program to help 10 million people with visual impairments by 2010, Standard Chartered Nepal signed an agreement with Tilganga Eye Centre (TEC) on 12 October, World Sight Day. TEC will conduct screening camps between October 2006 and July 2007 in Kathmandu and neighbouring districts, and the bank will sponsor cataract surgeries for 500 patients with funds raised from walkathons.

Money home

Everest Bank's new online Everest Remit service provides a safe, efficient way for Nepalis in the Middle East to send savings home at a nominal cost and attractive exchange rate. Everest Bank is working through Thomas Cook Al Rostamani Exchange and Asia Exchange Centre in Dubai and Trust Exchange, Doha, and has also entered into an arrangement with Agricultural Development Bank to broaden its coverage.

New for old

If your home appliances are looking a little worse for wear, take advantage of Sagtani Exim's special festival offer—any domestic device, regardless of condition, swapped in part for IFB Home Appliances' washing machines, dishwashers, microwaves or dryers.

Winner

Binaya Bahadur Shrestha has the kind of luck most dream of. Over the last year, NabilBachat account holders have been narrowed to a pool of 111 hopefuls for the grand prize, a brand-new Toyota Echo. In the draw on 16 October, Shrestha won the new set of wheels. Nabil Bank's premier savings account also offers monthly lucky draws, a tiered rate of interest which increases up to four percent per annum, and the services of their Privilege Banking Unit.

Floury praise

Vikas Flour Mill's contribution to Nepal's food grains industry has been recognised with 'Best Agriculture Industry Award' from the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. The KL Dugar Group enterprise received the award on the occasion of the 26th World Food Day.

Safe for life

Laxmi Bank has got permission from the Insurance Regulatory Board of Nepal to offer life insurance services in addition to regular banking facilities. They're calling the service 'Bancassurance', and they can now cross-sell and promote insurance products through their seven branches, as well as channels like the internet, SMS, and ATMs.

Go Grameen
Nepal can learn from Bangladesh

For Bangladeshi Mohammad Yunus and his brainchild, Grameen Bank, the Nobel Peace Prize was perhaps always on the cards. While traditional money lenders fleece the poor through exorbitant interest rates and collaterals, the modern banking



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

system finds it too risky to deal with small unsecured loans. Grameen Bank offered poor Bangladeshis access to funds without any financial security. By empowering women and self-help groups to lend and collect money, they have had 98 percent recovery, a fact that commercial banks should envy. They are saddled with virtually no non-performing assets. Their network has now been used successfully in bringing about a communication revolution through telephone and mobile phone distribution. Grameen's success has now become a model for global replication. A few successful strategies in the world have benefited the poor

and made the world of microfinance as distinguished as the world of finance. This has also prompted others, like India's ICICI, to integrate some of Grameen's successes into their own lending strategy. These have been well-documented as a case study in *Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*. Indeed, Bangladesh owes a lot to the Grameen revolution for improving its macroeconomic indicators over the past two decades. In Nepal however, our model replication practices have yielded limited results. While in name we have borrowed 'Grameen', in practice there is little that has happened in the world of Nepali microfinance. Perhaps it is because of our own half-hearted Nepali way of doing things or the plethora of aid agencies that try to tweak the strategies, which is why we have yet to see any comparable revolutions. We do have a bunch of Grameen banks that love to draw parallels with the Bangladeshi institution, but have never been able to reach and penetrate the most rural parts of Nepal where the moneylender sahu still takes

a goodly pound of flesh. When cooperative financial institutions opened up in our country, they could have taken the initiative to be a good tool for providing the poor with access to finance. However, they have basically become unregulated financial service institutions that compete with commercial banks without the banking industry's stringent regulations. Promoters of these cooperatives have gotten rich without having to deal with regulations or providing real access to finance to the marginalised. For Nepal, there are multiple lessons in Yunus's endeavours. First is that the transformation of any sector that has national impact depends on homegrown agents of change who can provide the leadership to challenge conventional practices. Efforts for change have to be relentless; there is no shortcut to success. This Beed has remarked that we Nepalis tend to be happy with quick, if temporary, popularity, rather than reinforcing longterm successes. Secondly, the Grameen movement was homegrown. Yunus received a lot of impetus from bi-laterals and multi-



laterals, but he drove the core strategy with his team. Outsiders can successfully supplement strategies, but those drawn by them tend to have fewer chances of success. For Nepal, the tendency of donors to sit in the driver's seat, instead of just supporting good ideas, has led to no major nationwide initiatives like Grameen. Finally, the search for our own agents of change should begin with support from both Nepalis and donors. Perhaps, one day, we can be proud of our own Nobel Prize winner and institution. ●

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AJAYA JOSHI

Interview with Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 18 October-1 November

Have the talks stalled?

There are so many issues to resolve, it is only normal that the talks are taking this long. The interim constitution drafting committee left a lot of things open, like the king's role in the interim constitution, constituent assembly (CA) elections, setting up the interim parliament and council of ministers, the correct way to set up an interim constitution, arms management and how to canton the Maoist army, etc.

The Maoists say the latest talks ended inconclusively due to disagreement on arms management.

Both sides agree to the policy issues related to it. The five-point agreement says it is imperative to discuss the procedure of army and arms management with the UN, and that is what we are doing.

The Maoists say that the seven parties didn't agree to any of the three alternative solutions they put forward.

The government has one alternative—build a consensus, form an interim government with the Maoists and conduct the CA polls. Both sides agree that the priority is to manage the army and weapons and form an interim government simultaneously. Things must be finalised by November for next June's elections.

How will arms management happen?

The procedure for weapons management has already been agreed upon. Maoists will remain in cantonment with arms and the Nepal Army will move to the barracks.

Did Prime Minister Koirala backtrack during Sunday's talks?

He remains committed to peace talks and is in fact moving ahead paying attention to the changing situation. The prime minister's main concern is how to conduct the CA polls soon.

Only interrupted, not over



KIRAN PANDAY

Interview with Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 18 October-1 November

Are the talks interrupted or stalled?

Just interrupted. The prime minister has been under pressure after the king's principal secretary Pashupati Bhakta Maharjan talked with Chief of Army Staff Rukmangat Katuwal. Apparently he and the NC were pressured by royalists within the party, the palace, and international powers. The parliamentary powers also do not have a strong stance on monarchy and military transformation. We had agreed on the UN monitoring both armies, and were near a bigger agreement, but then Koirala came under pressure from an invisible source to disagree with us on monarchy and arms management.

What do you mean by arms management?

Moving our army to camps and the Nepal Army to barracks before constituent assembly elections, and monitor them under

UN supervision. Those generals who oppose loktantra need to be sacked. The new, integrated national army should be 30-40,000 strong.

You have some new proposals?

If the NC is ready to go for a republic, we agreed to lock away our weapons. If not, we call for a referendum to end the monarchy, nationalise the king's property, and lock up both the army's weapons. If a deal is still difficult, we agree to participate peacefully in CA elections, but won't join the government.

So you want to join the interim government with weapons?

The royal army's weapons have been used repeatedly against loktantra. That's why we proposed transforming the royal army and managing its arms first, after that we'll agree to the same. We don't want two armies in Nepal either, that is why we want a loktantrik military. If talks fail, we will go for an urban uprising.

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हिमालमिडियाको कुनै एउटा प्रकाशनको ग्राहक बन्नुहोस्, तत्काल, हरेक महिना र ६-६ महिनामा उपहार प्राप्त गर्नुहोस् । यो योजना* १ भाद्र २०६३ देखि नेपाल अधिराज्यभर लागू हुनेछ ।

हिमाल संग सितैमा

तीन वर्ष (नाडी घडी वा होटल प्याकेज)***

दुई वर्ष (भित्ति घडी)

एक वर्ष (नेपाली म्युजिक दुईवटा सिडी)

	Actual Rate	Discount Rate
3 Years	2520	2100
2 Years	1680	1450
1 Year	840	750

Times संग सितैमा

तीन वर्ष (होटल प्याकेज)***

दुई वर्ष (नाडी घडी वा होटल प्याकेज)*

एक वर्ष (भित्ति घडी)

* हरेक महिना हुनेछ । ** हरेक जन्मदिवस दुई रात तीन दिन अघि र दुई जन्मदिवस हरेक रात दुई दिन अघि बस्ने सुविधा । *** हरेक जन्मदिवस हरेक रात दुई दिन अघि बस्ने सुविधा ।

	Actual Rate	Discount Rate
3 Years	4590	3500
2 Years	3060	2500
1 Years	1530	1350

WAVE संग सितैमा

तीन वर्ष (भित्ति घडी)

दुई वर्ष (नेपाली म्युजिक दुईवटा सिडी)

एक वर्ष (नेपाली म्युजिक एउटा सिडी)

	Actual Rate	Discount rate
3 Years	1260	1100
2 Years	840	750
1 Years	420	380

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King in crisis
.....
Nepal, 22 October

King Gyanendra has little to do these days, and spends most of his time at Nagarjun palace. But the king and the monarchy still seem prominent in the national political centre, the latter being the top agenda in the ongoing peace process.

After Jana Andolan II, only Koirala is openly talking about a role for the monarchy. Even staunch royalists, former panchas, the RPP and Jana Shakti Party haven't been able to raise the issue.

After nearly 238 years of the Shah regime, the fate of the monarchy now rests with the people. There are people who favour the king, but there is no sign of any group lobbying hard to save him.

There are fears that the army, despite changing from the 'RNA', remains loyal to the king. But senior army officials deny having anything to do with the royal move of 1 February. They allege that the king simply uses the army as his weapon. "The army will no longer be used just because the king wants it to be," says a senior general. There will no coup with the army's help, he said. The question is how did the royal institution come to such an end after over two centuries?

The Nepali royal institution has so far left no positive stamp besides the country's unification by King Prithbi Narayan Shah. But many argue that the Shah king did this merely to establish his own regime. Only King Birendra was considered relatively liberal following his understanding with the political forces during the 1990 people's movement. After his death, the



MIN BAJRACHARYA

tradition of worshipping the king as god has also withered away. When King Gyanendra took over, he promised peace but ended up militarising Nepal. In addition, he jeopardised his own goodwill by ignoring foreign leaders' appeals to work in harmony with the parties.

Arms and votes
.....
Jana Aastha, October 18

The Maoists want the new interim government formed by 11 November. If this fails to happen, then it is likely that the constituent assembly elections will not be held. This will lead the country towards another year of uncertainty.

It seems unlikely that any decision will be made till the Tihar festivities are over. The Maoists have already given the PM their deadline for the CA elections. But the question is, why did the peace talks suddenly stall? Sources say that consensus on arms management had already been reached but that all changed after the last round of talks.

Initially, the government had agreed not to completely canton the Maoist weapons, but then they told the Maoists to lock up all their weapons. This infuriated the communist leaders and they accused the PM of backtracking from his decision to lock up the state's weapons.

Compared to the arms management issue, there is near-consensus about the fate of monarchy. King Birendra's properties will be turned into a trust, King Gyanendra's private property will be taxed and he will be stripped off state stipends. So the issue of arms is the main obstacle so far.

First meeting
.....
Ghatana Ra Bichar, 18 October

Bhaktapur Guest House, which has become a favourite among the Maoist leaders, was packed on Monday. It was the first time that Ian Martin, the UN Secretary General's personal representative, and members of the government and Maoist talks teams met together along with other leaders.

Sources say the Maoists looked more enthusiastic than the government people when UN officials talked about conflict resolution experiences in other countries. The UN officials made three suggestions. First, solve the political issues fast. Second, every country has its own model for weapons management. In some countries both armies are treated equally, in others not. A model used in one country may not work for another and you should decide on the method together. We will not make suggestions. Third, start working on confidence-building measures.

Baburam Bhattarai suggested that the weapons of the state and the Maoists could be locked up in a barracks and the UN could monitor the situation. The government team had no suggestions.

Open letter

Yubaraj Ghimire, Samaya, 19 October

Prachandaji,

Since you've openly entered politics, some diplomats and others who have met you see the possibility of your being a 'statesman'. But I believe you must first prove yourself as a politician with a difference. While doing so, it is your judgment, not the arms you carry that will affect the people. King Gyanendra didn't have a shortage of people who called him a 'statesman' either, and perhaps he even believed them.

The challenge now is to sincerely prepare for progress and long-term peace, and to do so democratically. People's participation, inclusion, and transparency are the pillars of a democratic state. Your holding on to arms has alienated the people from you, begging the question whether you are a people's leader. You have be a leader of the people before you can become a statesman. Maybe you are as sensitive as you claim, perhaps you haven't murdered a single person with your own two hands, but that does not absolve you from being accountable for the crimes of violence. And unless you admit responsibility, you cannot be included in a democracy.

The violent Maoist movement may have brought about a transformation and change of direction in Nepal's politics, but the road ahead is still murky.

Along with the solution to the problem, there is a new complication. The ongoing peace talks can be an encouraging milestone if you enter competitive politics peacefully instead of 'bargaining' with gun power.

The current activities carried out by your armed cadres go against your previous declaration that your 'weapons will not obstruct the peace process'. In the end, that will either finish the people's faith in you or it will push you towards armed politics.

Nepalis in the past killed Nepalis for Nepalis. Now your key responsibility is to ensure that there is the least possibility of that happening. Indeed, you may not have full control over all, as the murder of Krishna Charan Shrestha by the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha proves. But any kind of war that continues in a country is a form of a civil war.



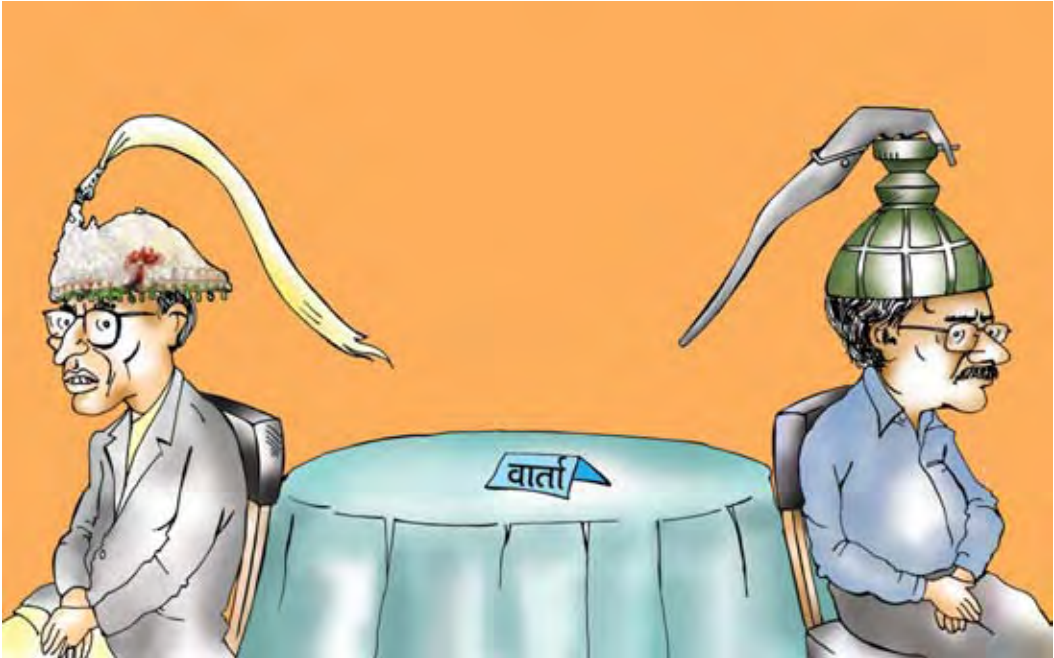
KHIL BAHADUR BHANDARI

You often stress that politics must be scientific and that's right. But politics directed by guns does not believe in scientific conditions. In the five months since you've come aboveground, you held discussions with entrepreneurs, industrialists, journalists, politicians, and diplomats. But children have failed to appear in your priority list. Nor have schools. This begs the question—are you aware of the country's future? Or are the interim constitution and the journey up to the constituent assembly your only goals?

If you really want the peace process to succeed, then hand over clear instructions to the UN team that is here. If you are not prepared for arms management now, the credit will go to Ian Martin in the end. Do you really want that? If you don't want bombs to go off, why do you remain armed?

If your sentimentality transforms your image into something akin to that of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, or Nelson Mandela, as opposed to the image you've created over the past 12 years—of egoism, bitterness, and revoltion—will that do injustice to your revolutionary politics? On the other hand, with your continued affiliation with guns, you will remain merely Prachanda.

Your well-wisher,
Yubaraj Ghimire, Journalist



Talks

हिमाल Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 18 October - 1 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ The Maoists don't have to work, they can just demand that things be done. But the government actually does work. There's a big difference between talking the talk and walking the walk. ”

Deputy Prime Minister Krishna P Oli in an interview with Dristi, 17 October.



Through Nepali eyes

Openness means more and better documentaries

MALLIKA ARYAL

Nepal is at the threshold of a documentary film revolution. In 2003 *Bheda Ko Oon Jasto* ran to a full house for four days at Jai Nepal Cinema. Earlier this month, *Sa Karnali Through Dolpo* opened at Kumari Cinema. Documentaries screen regularly on local tv channels, and Nepali documentaries open to enthusiastic crowds all over the world, from Amsterdam to Ithaca.

When the Himalayan Film Festival opened in 1994, few would have thought that 12 years later, like Nepal's FM radio success, there would be a boom in documentary filmmaking here too. New technology, political changes, freer media, and exposure to international films have made amateur and professional documentary filmmakers out of many Nepalis. In the past documentaries were considered 'funded' projects, designed to fulfil NGOs' development propaganda, but now local documentaries are made on subjects ranging from the conflict, cultural phenomena, individual portraits, and entertainment.

"Documentaries did become a tool for development propaganda, but the interest of development organisations in films also brought in new technology," says Mohan Mainali, director of *The Living of Jogimara*. "Liberal media and digital technology gave the necessary impetus to an already brewing documentary revolution."

The audience for these films is unique in Nepal—the same crowd that enjoys mainstream, commercial films also watches documentary and independent films. The films have local content that is relevant or amusingly offbeat, and generally manage to transcend language barriers. Young viewers in particular are enthusiastic attendees at Kathmandu film festivals. With increased exposure to documentaries, viewers are better able to understand the grammar of the genre, and now watch more critically and demand better films.

The rise of the Nepali documentary is interesting to track. When *Ankhihyal*, a fortnightly television magazine made by Nepal Forum of Environment Journalists started airing on Nepal Television in the 1990s, it was the only mainstream outlet for issue-based and in-depth stories.

When the Maoists started their 'People's War,' few Nepalis in the urban areas or abroad knew what was going on because news coverage was limited to printed media and sporadic images on tv. Dhurba Basnet's 2001 *The Killing Terraces* brought the graphic images of war closer to home. Then came a number of war films like *Schools in the Crossfire*, *The Living of Jogimara*, and *Six Stories* (all also available in Nepali).

Parallel to these, numerous cultural documentaries, travelogues, climbing films, and films with social messages were released to sold out shows at festivals and in theatres, and sparked off discussions about the issues they addressed in them and about filmmaking in general. The best known of these are Kesang Tseten's *On the Road with the Red God*; *Machhendranath* and *We Homes Chaps*, Pranay Limbu's *History for Winners*, Ramyata Limbu and Sapana Sakya's *Daughters of Everest*, Alex Gabbay and Subina Shrestha's *Kathmandu: Untold Stories*, Dinesh Deokota's *A Rough Cut on the Life and Times of Lachuman Magar*



INTERFACE

(pictured filming below), Kiran Krishna Shrestha's *Bheda Ko Oon Jasto*, and more recently Dil Bhusan Pathak's (pictured above) *Newsroom Bahira* (*Outside Newsroom*).

"Festivals here, and mountain or Himalayan film festivals abroad are getting a lot more films about Nepal and Nepali subjects, made by Nepalis. This just goes to show that more people here are aware of the scope of films," says Ramyata Limbu, who is also director of Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF). "In 2000, at the first KIMFF, there were hardly one or two entries from Nepal, but this year we've received over a dozen Nepali entries."

The increase in numbers is exciting, but documentary filmmaking here is still young and full of challenges. "We have a long way to go in terms of quality," adds Limbu.

Subina Shrestha, writer of *Kathmandu: Untold Stories*, says we lag behind in terms of conceptual creativity, adding, "A good film also has to be flawless, but we are yet to master that." The cost of making a documentary has dropped dramatically with digital technology, but it still costs to make quality films. Funding is hard to come by, and often filmmakers don't even know how to tap into existing sources.



Kathmandu Film Society's Rajesh Gongaju argues that it's about more than just getting funding. "We lack the support base. It's not just about funding, it is about marketing and selling your films," he says.

On the creative side, most filmmakers agree that exposure to the process of documentary filmmaking is essential. "This is a form of storytelling. Just having a script is not enough—you need time, knowledge of the craft, and expertise to make it good," says Limbu.

Nepali documentaries so far generally fall into two extreme categories, war films and cultural films. But with the new openness, access to areas previously restricted to filmmakers, and a recharged economy, we can expect the space between films like *History for Winners* and *The Killing Terraces* to slowly be filled with stories and images we didn't even know existed, told in innovative ways. ●



ALL PICS: HARI THAPA

Survival video

Modern technology might just be what helps the Rautes keep their old ways

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

They are among the last of Asia's hunter-gatherer nomads. The Rautes of west Nepal's inner tarai have long fought a hard battle to save their traditional way of life against the advances of time and technology.

The last census says there are about 2,000 Rautes, but unofficial estimates say they are far fewer. The community traditionally lives in the forests and avoids contact with outsiders. They've refused offers of permanent settlement, even from the king. As awareness of indigenous rights grows, the Rautes too are increasingly vocal about their choice to stay true to their values.

Now modern technology—digital video—might be what helps them argue their case that they just want to be left alone.

When journalist-turned-filmmaker Hari Thapa, whose previous credits include the 2001 *Guanthali*, travelled to the inner valleys of Surkhet and Dailekh last summer, to document the Raute way of life, he had a hard time winning their trust. He managed to convince community leaders that he had no intention of settling them, and was then allowed to film for five intense days.

The result is a 27 minute-long video that gives us the first-ever glimpse into everyday Raute life and highlights the community's perilous negotiation with the world that is slowly encroaching on the forests where they often camp. Rautes live in temporary shelters made from the branches of trees that are of lesser value to villagers. They make wooden pots

from the wood of the same trees and exchange this for rice and grain in villages. Rautes only eat this grain, roots and fruit they gather in the forest, and monkeys. They burn their settlements when they leave. "Their way of life is such a brilliant indigenous survival strategy, that it sometimes seems almost too naïve," says Thapa.

But Raute lives are intertwined with those of people in nearby villages. As one side changes, so does the other. Traditional wood pots and leaf plates are giving way to plastic and metal utensils. There is less forested area than the community is used to, and there are more roads. It takes time to get used to traffic—and footwear, a

lesson learnt the hard way when long treks along paved roads caused blisters and bleeding feet.

The video contains rare footage, but is low on technique and image quality, in part because it was the result of a reconnaissance trip rather than a full-fledged documentary shoot set-up. Thapa will present it as a proposal, for 'conservation of endangered human species', to the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program to fund a two-year-long project. They aim to develop traditional Raute occupations and support Raute rights advocacy.

Thapa says he is struck by how little is known about Rautes

and how little sympathy there is for the community's choices.

"They don't want much, not to be settled, be farmers, or be educated. They want to be allowed to live in the forests and use the few resources they use," says the soft-spoken Thapa, who hopes to start the project early next year.

Dor Bahadur Bista, one of the first non-Rautes to get close to the community, wrote in his book *People of Nepal* that they would not survive for long due to the rapid growth of population and settlements, deforestation, changing landscape, and rise in human traffic.

But the community has survived and this short film shows

a vibrant culture with passionate adherents.

There will be much discussion about whether the Rautes are right to keep their children away from the benefits of modernity, such as improved health care, but they at least need to be heard.

A former Raute clan head, septuagenarian Min Bahadur Shahi, speaks for his community when he declares with pride and humility, "You are the world, we are the Raute. You are kings of your palaces, we of the jungle."

And if it takes video to hold firm to their ground, well, the Raute community seems ready to adopt some modern things in the name of tradition. ●



BE TOGETHER,
BE PREPARED



Issued in public interest by:



(DIPECHO-CPDRR)
Community Preparedness for Disaster Risk Reduction in
Central and Eastern Nepal
(DCA in Cooperation with LWF Nepal)





Mother and malnourished child attending a food distribution in Dharma, Humla district.



ACF staff weigh a baby in Dharma, Humla District



Draught, near Natarphu, Mugu district

The Karnali's children

UNICEF last month celebrated Nepal's progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal of reducing child mortality by two-thirds by 2015. However, the goal of cutting malnutrition from around 50 percent to 25 percent remains a daunting one. These photos from Humla and Mugu are a reminder that all is not well.

Taken by an independent photographer documenting the work of French NGO Action Against Hunger (ACF) in August, they show that last winter's drought is having a major impact in some areas.

ACF started a therapeutic feeding program for children in 10 VDCs of the two districts in June and then had to include 30 percent more severely malnourished children than planned, "indicating a real deterioration in the situation" since its first assessment in February, says ACF's Mireille Seneclauze.

The UN World Food Programme is now delivering emergency rice to Mugu but it won't reach all affected VDCs, and plans to fly in rations to Humla, Jumla, and Dolpa will have to be put on hold this week if donors do not make up a \$3.7 million shortfall.

In July and August, WFP and local NGOs distributed food to neighbouring Bajura. A district-wide survey conducted afterward by various agencies found an alarming rate of malnutrition. Seventy percent of children were underweight and 12 percent wasted—the indicator for acute malnutrition. More than 40 percent of kids under two years of age had diarrhoea, fever, or a cough.

Supplying food relief and essential medicines is the immediate need in addressing the crisis in the Karnali, one nutritionist told us, but it's important to remember that 50 percent of children throughout Nepal are malnourished. "Unless underlying causes—including good feeding and hygiene practices, psycho-social support and care for mothers—are addressed, the situation will not improve," he said.

Giving communities the tools to assess the well-being of their children and collectively take action to reduce malnutrition is essential, he added. ●

Marty Logan



A malnourished boy in Nehar, Mugu district



People receiving *pitho* from ACF staff at a food distribution in Dharma, Humla district.

ALL PICS: ACF/FREDERIC LECLOUX/VU

Home for the holidays

Kul Chandra Gautam returns to his village for a long-overdue visit

NARESH NEWAR in BUTWAL

Kul Chandra Gautam went home to Amarpur to a hero's welcome. The UN Assistant Secretary-General had not been back to his Gulmi village for almost six years. His village is proud of him, and he of it. Gautam says that despite the turmoil of recent years, many changes he sees are positive.

We accompanied Gautam home, and talked with him later at a relative's house in Butwal. He was emotional as he told us that everyone he met had the same courteous, kind, loveable and neighbourly qualities he grew accustomed to as a child, over 55 years ago. "It's amazing how people continue to be warm, caring and cordial after all these years of hard life and living in conflict," said Gautam, perched atop a modest wooden chair, his legs comfortably crossed.

He's sanguine about the passing of time, but will admit to some nostalgia and a sense of loss. "So many people I knew have died or left the villages," he says. But Gautam also sees real progress. There is now a water supply near the village, a telephone line, a motorable road, schools, a post office, a health post, and other basic development, which was undreamt of when he was

younger. There's still no electricity, though, and Gautam laughs, "My god, I never realised how pitch dark it gets, like in the ancient times."

Still, comparisons with his childhood aside, Gautam knows that though the changes seem big, there remains much to be done in his village, as in most of rural Nepal. He noted that the VDC office was still not functional and that rural development activities were still in slowdown mode, people are still extorted and live in fear of the local Maoist cadres.

Good and bad, it's all a far cry from his childhood. Gautam remembers the slow, bucolic life that was gently interrupted when he was seven and, obeying his grandfather's wishes, left home for a village across the river to study Hindu scriptures and Sanskrit to become a priest. The young Gautam's life would have taken a different direction if his uncle had not persuaded him that a modern education in Kathmandu, and not a theological one in Banaras, was the way ahead. Poor health made that difficult, so he studied instead at Janata Vidyalaya High School in Tansen.

The young scholar used his time in Tansen well, getting through the canon of Nepali literature by 16, being appointed Palpa's poet laureate, and only then going to Kathmandu to



RUPA JOSHI

pursue a passport—his Peace Corps friends had encouraged Gautam to go study in the US. The passport was some time coming, and in the meantime he turned down a scholarship to Dartmouth to study at Tri-Chandra College from where, not surprisingly, he topped the national IA diploma.

Two years later, he got his passport and the rest is relatively well-known—a master's in public affairs from Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School, and a career that started in war-torn Cambodia, followed by a memorable stint in Laos as the youngest UNICEF country representative, a tour of

duty in ravaged Haiti, and envisaging the 1990 UNICEF Declaration and Plan of Action, one of the most effective instruments for international advocacy and action for children's well being.

Kul Chandra Gautam is something of a role model for Nepalis, but he just says modestly, "Sometimes, I pinch myself, because I can't believe what people say about me." He honestly believes that anyone can reach to the top. "I see the silver lining behind every dark cloud," smiles Gautam.

Back home too, he sees the

upside, but is realistic about the future of the country. While in his village, naturally Gautam's opinions on the conflict and on politics was canvassed constantly. As a senior UN official Gautam may not speak much about the conflict here, and he was at pains to emphasise that anything he said was his own personal view, and not that of his organisation.

As a citizen, he said he felt strongly that the Maoists should stop talk of arms management by the parties and the international community being part of a conspiracy against them. "I can tell you after being in the villages that arms management is a real issue from the point of view of ordinary Nepalis," he says passionately.

Gautam retires from UN next year, after 33 years and is enthusiastic to return to Nepal and help in the reconstruction process. Will he join a party or accept a post in government? Emphatically not, says Gautam—he wants to work in his personal capacity and in voluntary endeavours.

He tells us almost shyly that he is also excited about coming back and returning to his lifelong passion, Nepali literature. As a student at JP High School and Amrit Campus in Kathmandu, Gautam couldn't afford to buy books or the daily paper. So, rain or shine, he'd walk everyday to Bhugol Park in New Road to read the newspapers pasted on the wall.

He'd do it again if he had to. "Never forget where you come from and don't let success go to your head," says the man who still calls himself a village boy from Gulmi. "That's the only way to keep your humility and remain realistic. Those are the things that

Count women too, not just guns

Women are often excluded from post-conflict plans in ways big and small

MARTY LOGAN

Nepali women's needs are apt to be forgotten when peace returns if this country follows trends set in post-conflict societies in Africa, warned women activists here for an international meeting last weekend.

"The whole preoccupation with reconstruction takes centre stage and doesn't take into account the needs of female ex-combatants or even the needs of ordinary women," Betty Kaari Murungi, director of the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAF) Africa told us.

One humorous but telling example is a disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) pack given to ex-combatants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It included \$100, toiletries and underwear—men's only. "That tells you that there was no thought given to the demobilisation of women," declared Murungi during a break in UAF-Africa's board meeting in Kathmandu earlier this week.

UAF-Africa was spun off from the original Urgent Action Fund in 2001, an organisation set up to support women's activism with small grants that could be awarded quickly (*see box*).

Nepal activist Rita Thapa is vice-chair of the UAF board of directors and helped bring both organisations here for the meetings.

When war ended in Zimbabwe "the



KIRAN PANDAY

men who went back to their villages called the women prostitutes because they said they didn't know what they had been doing while they were away. They abandoned their children. A lot of women had nervous breakdowns," said UAF-

Africa's chair Hope Chigudu.

Because women don't have a place in the structures set up to deal with many nations' transitions from war to peace, such problems are rarely officially noticed, she added.

"Lasting peace will never be achieved unless positive action is taken to guarantee women an equal position in the development of peace agreements and in all post-agreement political and civic institutions," said researcher Margaret Ward, one author of *Re-Imagining Women's Security: a Comparative Study of South Africa, Northern Ireland and Lebanon*, released last week at the United Nations in New York.

The study on the role of women in peace processes in South Africa, Northern Ireland and Lebanon reported that women in the latter two countries said that "gender-based violence had increased" after peace deals were signed.

Also, prisoners released from Northern Ireland jails returned to find women more empowered. While some of the men accepted this, "others came back very resentful," added Ward.

Such a scenario is possible here. A report released last year by Samanata found that Nepali women had become empowered in the absence of their husbands as they were forced to take on more family tasks. (see 'Man's inhumanity to woman', #281)

There is a need "to decommission mindsets, not just hardware," Ward's co-

researcher Monica McWilliams told a UN media conference.

Murungi said that Rwanda is trying to do that in its Ingado Solidarity Camps, which are compulsory for ex-combatants. "They're taught values of reconciliation and how to exorcise the genocide ideology. Whether they'll work in the long run is still to be seen." ●

Fast action for women

Members of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq now know how to defend themselves against physical attacks, check if their vehicles have been tampered with and plan safer travel routes, thanks to an Urgent Action Fund 'rapid response grant' that enabled them to get security training.

UAF was started in 1997 by US activists who glimpsed a need for small grants that would be available much faster than traditional donor agencies could provide. The result was an international organisation that provides about 100 grants of up to \$5,000 annually—most within a month of applying—for three types of activities: 1. intervening in situations of armed conflicts, 2. protecting women human rights defenders, 3. precedent-setting legal or legislative action.

In 2005, 40 percent of UAF's grants were for security and protection compared to just 23 percent in 2004. Growing religious fundamentalisms, a push towards conservatism, and the misuse of anti-terrorism policies were some of the reasons why, it says.

Nepali grantees included the Blue Diamond Society (treatment for an activist who was assaulted) Nagarik Aawaz (networking of groups working for peace) and Shantimalika (publicity for a call to include women in the peace process).

Commune concerns

Alternative Maoist communities live on hope—and the party

Most of us plan carefully for our futures. How to earn for our families, what to do for our kids, how to make a more comfortable life for ourselves.

But consider this alternative: a life with nothing personal, no private property, no individual desires, no personal decisions, not even your own dreams. You work for your community, share and share alike, and live under its gaze. You and your fellow commune-members are fully accountable to each other.

It's been done before, from California to China, and now our very own CPN-Maoist is promoting communes in its heartland of Rolpa. On a recent visit we were taken around the model Ajambari Jana



NEPALI PAN
Peabin Gautam

Commune in Thabang.

"We do everything collectively," explains Comrade Pratap, who is responsible for the commune. "We are 140 people from 32 households and we all live together, work together, cook and eat together, and make decisions together."

Collective living requires considerable micro-management, Pratap tells us. The members are divided into work groups. For example, one group of five people looks after the commune's eight buffaloes and its milk requirements. Another group takes care of the 12 mules and deals with local traders and businessmen, hiring out the pack animals to raise much-needed cash. Some run cooperative shops and hotels in Rolpa, and many work on agriculture projects including paddy fields, vegetable plantations, and apple orchards.

The commune has the blessings of the party and remains its baby. It costs about Rs 70,000 a month to run, but Pratap says that their income cover just about 60-70 percent of the budget. The party pays for the rest.

A person or family wishing to join the commune must first join the Maoist party. The next step is giving it all up—turning over all your cash and property to the commune and party. You can't keep an inch of land, not a rupee of cash.



If you've got nothing, you've got nothing to lose, but perhaps something to gain. "If we take on the property of individuals, naturally we have to accept the loans too," Pratap says proudly of this brave new world, where new members' outstanding loans are often repaid. The commune or the local party committee investigates the reasons why the loan was taken, and its terms and conditions, and then, usually, repays it. Perhaps this will soon become a good option for all our bankrupt or defaulting businesspeople.

The model commune strives to be a good choice for Nepali women too. The 72 women in the 140-strong commune have more decision-making powers than the men, says the comrade-in-charge. "Our party has always been in favour of women's empowerment and in fact, they run the commune, though I am the in-charge," Pratap told us. Strong words, and perhaps true, but then why not make one of these women the official head?

Individual communes may be small, but the Ajambari Jana Commune means to enclose the entire world in an amoeba-like embrace. The ultimate aim is a global commune. "Ajambari means immortal, we aim to keep growing. We started three years ago with just 20-25 people from five or six households. Now, in addition to the 140 members we have, 60 more people from ten households are being processed. There's also another commune in Jelbang, and one in Rolpa," says Pratap.

Seeing us unswayed by hard figures, Comrade Pratap tries rousing rhetoric: "We are moving step by step. To start with, we'll turn Rolpa into a commune, then Nepal, and finally, the world. We're convinced we'll make it."

There's plenty of idealism here—everyone we spoke with at the commune is convinced that the peace process will cause a surge of interest in such communities, because living in a commune is so clearly the superior choice.

Comrade Pratap says that despite common property and all that, there will be room for individual tastes and needs. Apparently, anyone wanting something out of the ordinary just has to ask and argue their case. I'm sure everyone is looking forward to justifying their desire for new socks. ●

Beyond blame

Ellen Sauerbrey, US Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration spoke with Navin Singh Khadka of the BBC Nepali Service about the American resettlement offer.

How will you choose 60,000 from the 100,000 Bhutani refugees in the camps?

Probably not all refugees are going to want to be resettled. We'd start on a camp-by-camp basis. As I have assured the government of Nepal, we would not want to take the cream of the crop. We would take whoever comes forward and is interested in resettlement in the United States.

What if all come forward?

We would anticipate that a lot would be interested. We would look to the government of Nepal to give us direction ... and this is all predicated on the Nepal government deciding they want to use resettlement. There are three durable solutions for a protracted refugee situation: repatriation, integration into the host country, or resettlement. It has been nearly 20 years and neither repatriation nor reintegration is seeming to happen.

You don't yet have the Nepal government's support for third-country resettlement.



ASHOK R SHAKYA

The government of Nepal has not given a concrete answer, but we are pleased it has allowed the UNHCR to conduct a census (in the refugee camps), to begin in the next few weeks.

Some refugee leaders say resettlement will give a clean chit to Thimpu, letting it get away what has been alleged as the eviction of one-fifth of its population?

Frankly, the issue to us is not who is to blame, it's not

absolving people of the past. It is addressing a reality, and the reality of the situation is that these people have no lives, no hope, no future. They are stuck. We have been trying to negotiate for the two countries to reach an agreement between themselves, meanwhile these people are stagnating, their lives are on hold.

Did you tell the press in Geneva that Canada and Australia are also prepared to resettle 20 percent of the Bhutani refugees?

No, no, I did not. What I did say was that there are other countries interested in being a part of the solution. I mentioned that in terms of the overall resettlement programs worldwide, the United States would take about 60 percent of the whole world refugees. Canada and Australia have taken about another 20 percent. So between our three countries we resettle about 80 percent of the world refugees.

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Timeless trader

A Lhasa Newar family memoir documents the rise of two remarkable individuals

Writing an honest autobiography is hard, but nothing compared to the difficulty of compiling an accurate biography of one's parents and grandparents. Autobiographies are rarely hagiographies, after all, at least not good autobiographies, while biographies are harder to pull off, particularly if one is keen to portray one's own family in a positive light.



BOOK REVIEW
Mark Turin

Syamukapu: The Lhasa Newars of Kalimpong and Kathmandu is written by Deb Shova Kansakar Hilker, daughter of Gyan Jyoti and granddaughter of Bhajuratna Kansakar, a renowned Lhasa *sahu*. Gyan Jyoti and Bhajuratna are also the two protagonists in this book, with the narrative framed around their life stories. "Some people stand out more than the others," Deb Shova writes, "and both happened to be just such men" (page 8). As her story shows, both were remarkable men, the father more complicated than the son, and both were driven by two guiding principles: honest business and religious devotion.

Hilker must be applauded for her detailed approach to documenting her impressive family's past. She has turned what were most likely travel tales told by her grandfather and father to younger generations into an integrated and very readable narrative available to the general public. This is no easy task, and Hilker remains close to the facts and dates and studiously avoids narrative embellishments.

However, while many details are meticulously documented (the precise time of Gyan Jyoti's birth, for example), something is also missing from this narrative, perhaps because the author is too

close to the data. While the story starts in 1882 and ends in 2004, a period of enormous social, political and military upheaval in India and Nepal, the wider socio-political context is almost entirely absent. What of World Wars I and II, of Indian independence and Partition, the fall of the Rana regime in Nepal and the Panchayat years? Is the absence of politics from the book a reflection of a single-minded business acumen on the part of Bhajuratna and Gyan Jyoti, who carried on trading through thick and thin, or is it the author's desire to idealise her subjects and somehow delink them from the flow of history?

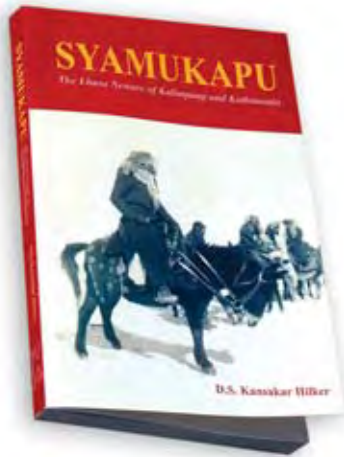
Strangely, we don't even learn how Bhajuratna came by the name *Syamukapu* (from Tibetan *zhwa mo* 'hat' and *dkar po* 'white'). Was he in mourning when he was named? Did he have the habit of always wearing a cap? At very few points in the narrative does the author actually delve into the motivations, feelings, and doubts of her grandfather and father, so the narrative remains on a fairly superficial level. She alludes a few times to a family feud between Gyan Jyoti and his brothers Maniharsha Jyoti and Dev Jyoti, which one would expect to be addressed in more detail, but no explanation of their estrangement is provided. As religion becomes more important to both men in the latter part of their lives, the narrative gives way to a somewhat dry list of lamas met and rituals performed, and in the case of Gyan Jyoti, a catalogue of his travels to Europe. Such quotidian accounts are an important component of any family's history, but they are rarely compelling enough for others to be drawn in.

At times, *Syamukapu* has an unclear voice. It alternates between narrative from the first person perspective of Bhajuratna and Gyan Jyoti to Hilker's own

interpretations and contextualisations. So when we read that the "*thebas* were a hardy, tough race of Tibetans, honest and very reliable" (page 41), or that "Tibetans smelled different" (page 130), we are unsure who is speaking, the author or the protagonist, and therefore unsure of how to interpret and make sense of these comments.

The book is enlivened by some lovely hand-drawn maps and a wonderful collection of carefully captioned family photos. The latter will certainly serve as a useful archive for those interested in the Newar business concerns in Lhasa. In all, this book makes an important start at exploring the involvement of a remarkable family in trans-Himalayan trade. It should also serve as a reminder that not all aspects of a family archive warrant public dissemination, and that a little distance from the subject matter is not a bad thing. ●

Mark Turin, PhD, is a linguistic anthropologist and director of the Digital Himalaya Project (www.digitalhimalaya.com). He has conducted preliminary research on the contemporary Nepali community in Lhasa.



Syamukapu: The Lhasa Newars of Kalimpong and Kathmandu by Deb Shova Kansakar Hilker Vajra Publications, 2005, ISBN 99946-644-6-8, 252 pp, Rs 700

Jazz echoes

As the final strains fade away, glimpses of Surya Classic Jazzmandu 2006



ANUP PRAKASH



KIRAN PANDAY



ANUP PRAKASH

FROM AROUND THE WORLD: 18-year-old Israeli guitarist Orr Didi performs at Gokarna Jazz Bazaar on 13 October; Canadian artist François Carrier learns about wind instruments, Nepali-style, during the Jazzmandu Peace Parade on Lazimpat on 14 October; local folk sensation Kutumba take the stage during Gokarna Jazz Bazaar.

UPSTAIRS IDEAS PRESENTS



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Trees and Voyeurism** paintings by Sarita Dongol at The Art Shop, 10AM-6PM till 4 November. 4267063
- ❖ **Figures in Paint** by Chirag Bangdel at Imago Dei Café Gallery, 9AM-9PM. 4442464
- ❖ **Exhibition** at Tantra Restaurant, Thamel featuring Juju Kaji Maharjan, Anil Maharjan, Uday Karmacharya and more. 4218565

EVENTS

- ❖ **German with Germans** at KC's Restaurant, Thamel. 5.15 PM on 20 October, 4700835
- ❖ **Art of Loving** class and dialogue on love, 1PM on 21 October at The Quest, Tripureswor. 4279712
- ❖ **Laxmi Puja** 21 October
- ❖ **Bhai Tika** 24 October
- ❖ **Mind Body Library** opens at 1PM, 25 October in Tripureswor 4279712
- ❖ **Boosting the Mysterious Immune System** CSGN lecture by Joanna Claire, 9.30 AM on 27 October at Shankar Hotel
- ❖ **Festive Fiesta** post-Tihar celebrations at Liquid Lounge, 27 October, 7PM. 9851046604
- ❖ **Suka Bahadur Adhikari, Class 4** at Nhuchhe's Kitchen—The Organic Bistro, Baluwatar, 25 October, 6.30 PM
- ❖ **Salsa Classes** at the Radisson Hotel, 6PM. 4411818
- ❖ **Tai-Chi, Qi-Qong and Hatha Yoga** at the Self Awakening Centre, Baber Mahal Revisited, call to sign up. 4256618

MUSIC

- ❖ **Gladiator Strings Concert** popular Pakistani band The Strings perform at Engineering College, Pulchok. 2.30 PM on 20 October, tickets Rs 300 for one, Rs 500 for two.
- ❖ **Aavaas** performs at Garden of Dreams, Kaiser Mahal on 20 October at 6.30 PM, Rs 500. 5552839
- ❖ **Mega Jam Session** with various artists at Moksh, Pulchok on 20 October, 8.30 PM till late. 5526212
- ❖ **Rashmi Singh** performs at Absolute! Bar on 20 October, 7PM onwards. 5521408
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM



DINING

- ❖ **Deepawali** at Dolma Café Cocktail. 3 November, Thamel. 4215069
- ❖ **Full Moon BBQ** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 4 November. 9841371927
- ❖ **Mediterranean Seafood** at Dwarika's on 27 October. Rs 1099 per person, including a BBQ dinner and a drink. 4479488
- ❖ **Shaken Not Stirred** Martinis 007 style, tapas platters and live music for Rs 555. Wednesdays at Fusion, the bar at Dwarikas.
- ❖ **Saturday Barbeque Special** at Le Meridien Golf Resort and Spa, Rs 1200 for adults, Rs 600 for children
- ❖ **Seven Sensations** at Hotel Yak & Yeti, cocktails and snacks. 4248999
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel 4262768 and Pulchok 5521755
- ❖ **A Sweet Taste of Life** Italian cuisine at La Dolce Vita. 4700612
- ❖ **Season of Freshness** at Shambala Garden Cafe, Shangri-La Hotel, happy hours 12-7PM. 4412999
- ❖ **Creations from the Clay Oven** at Stupa View Restaurant, Boudha Stupa, 4480262
- ❖ **Monsoon Madness Wine Festival** enjoy wines from four continents at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** swimming and lunch, or overnight stay with breakfast, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Weekend Brunch** at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234

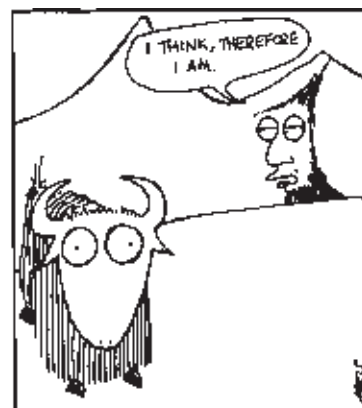
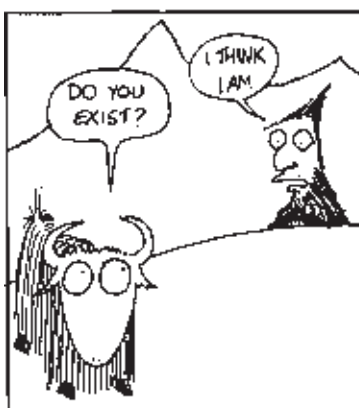
GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Yoga Camp** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 20-22 October. 9841371927
- ❖ **Tihar Package** three nights and four days at Le Meridien Golf Resort and Spa, inclusive of meals and spa facilities. Rs 15,000 for single, Rs 18,000 for couple.
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** special offers for Tihar. 4361500
- ❖ **Walk and Lunch** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage, Saturdays between 29 October and 25 November. 9841371927
- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resort & Spa. 4375280
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Escape to Godavari Village Resort**, an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5560675

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YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



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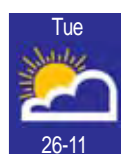
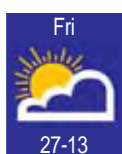
NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



We're sailing into calm, clear, chilly weather in the coming week. Thursday morning's satellite pictures show no major cloud formations that might ruin Tihar. The westerlies are moving into the skies over Nepal, and there's a high pressure ridge building up in the west of the country. This means colder mornings, though the days continue to be balmy. It's autumn, but it feels a mite closer to winter than usual.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

SCOFFLAW STOPPAGE: FNCCI members and entrepreneurs block the Machhindra bahal during a rally on Tuesday, when they also called a nationwide banda to protest the insecure business environment. The banda was ruled illegal and the body faces a contempt of court case.



NARESH NEWAR

I DO: Girls, some as young as eight, raise their hands when asked 'who among you is married' in Baskhora, Kapilvastu on Tuesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

STINKY BUSINESS: A week's worth of garbage is collected from steaming heaps around town on Wednesday. Locals around the Okharpauwa-Sisdole landfill site have given the government 15 days to build a drainage reservoir for liquid that leaks from the site.



SAGAR SHRESTHA

NEVER TOO OLD TO PLAYACT: Fifty-first anniversary celebrations at the Nepal Police Headquarters in Naxal on Tuesday included floats, displays, and a ceremony to honour policemen for outstanding service.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

SHEEPISH: Sheep had free passage during Tuesday's 'illegal' strike.

Never give in

NEPALGANJ – At an NC political leadership workshop two conspicuous old men sit squeezed into a corner. They look terribly frail. One intuitively feels there's more to them than meets the eye. Slowly, their story unfolds. Prem Bahadur Hamal, 65, and Laxmi Prasad Acharya, 64, are both from Sinja village in Jumla. Once seasoned, influential Nepali Congress leaders, they were abducted, beaten and had their property confiscated seven years ago when they refused to join the Maoists. Since then, they have lived in Nepalganj's camps for the displaced. Prem Bahadur (below, left) joined the NC in the late 1950s, and remembers being jailed for reading *Tarun*. He rose to be the NC district president, and has

been jailed several times for his democracy activism, including during the recent Jana Andolan. Of his 1998 brush with the Maoists, he says, "2,000 Maoists surrounded my house and nearly beat me to death." He was shot twice, and his life savings of Rs 97,000 was taken. Today, he's in a camp in Jumle Tole with his family of 11. Laxmi Prasad joined the NC about a year after Prem Bahadur, inspired by BP Koirala. "People have minted money misusing BP's name but hardly any stand by his ideology," he says. He left home after the Maoists threatened to kill him if he didn't join them. With 13 family members, he ekes out just enough to live. Both men remain devoted to the party that symbolises their fight for a democratic Nepal. "I was invited to a program to learn about democracy and leadership

from youngsters who weren't even born when I joined," says Laxmi Prasad wryly. Neither man is looking outward for support. Laxmi Prasad believes human rights organisations only favour leftist party workers, and Prem Bahadur asks what the government can do "when there are thousands like me wounded or dying in Kathmandu hospitals." Still, they seem surprisingly optimistic and determined. They won't endorse the Maoists, though it would mean a safe return home. Their wishes for the future are simple. Prem Bahadur says his only goal is to pay off his debts before he dies, and Laxmi Prasad wants to go home to the village he spent sixty years in and pray at the local temple. The men refuse an offer of help with the bus fare back to the camps. Laxmi Prasad says, "All we Nepalis have is our dignity." ● Shrishti RL Rana



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Dynamite between two boulders

So Nepal's bid for a seat in the UN Security Council was a fiasco. Surprise, surprise.

But look at it this way: we got 28 votes! So what if they were from countries like **Tonga, Tuvalu, Sao Principe and Tome, Laos, North Korea, and Burkina Faso**? OK, maybe some of them ticked the wrong box in the ballot by mistake, but nevertheless it shows these countries are not just Nepal's fair-weather friends. We can rely on them through thick and thin.

Just in case, however, we should follow the example set by The Dear Leader Kim who has forced the world to take his country more seriously by setting off a couple of nukes underneath his own territory. Our own Comrade Awesome had the right idea when he described Nepal as dynamite between two boulders. Now, we need to work on packing the dynamite with **nuclear tips** so we don't get kicked around anymore by upstart foreign ambassadors.



Someone who must be **kicking himself** is Comrade CP Gajurel in his jail cell in Kolkata after hearing Comrades Ale Magar, Sharma & Co have packed off on European tours. Gajurel tried to fly to Frankfurt two years ago on a forged Indian passport and was arrested in Madras. Sureshji and Dinanathji left on **Royal Orchid Class** on Sunday with legit Nepali passports that had genuine Schengen visas. Guess who was on the front of the plane with them: Lokendra Bahadur Chand. Let's see, if it's Tuesday, they must be in Belgium.

Even while the last round of talks were going on, leader of the Maobaddy negotiating team Krishna Bahadur Mahara was himself applying for a **new passport** because the last one he had issued in Rolpa expired long ago.

Meanwhile Comrade CP Mainali is just back from Havana after attending the Summit of Bushbashers with Hugo Chavez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

With all this junketeering going on, wonder who's going to be around to conduct peace negotiations. But one thing is for sure: if there are no talks, **they can't fail**.



Talking of talks, given the number of cigarette breaks Sher Bahadur Deuba was taking at Baluwatar last week, the whole thing must have been pretty stressful for our four-time prime minister. But we hear the Sher wasn't just taking **nicotine fixes** on the balcony, he was also making quick phone calls on his cell to you-know-who.

The Ass has learnt from reliable sources that Girija Babu had a hard time keeping awake during the proceedings, giving new meaning to Martin Luther King's famous line: **"I have a dream."** But even as the talks got underway Girija Babu seems to have lived up to his reputation for being the Sly Old Fox that he is by pulling a couple of fast ones. After getting everyone to agree to let him speak first, he apparently said: "You've all agreed to let me speak first, but I want Pushpa Kamalji to go first." **Clever.**

And then, after agreeing with Comrade Tremendous in a private pre-summit chat to accept the **infamous** double-key formula on arms management, Girija Babu unilaterally backtracked during the negotiations. Now, who was he talking to on the phone during the breaks?



In the midst of all this, the baddies gave themselves a **dasain present** by buying a six-storey building in Kopundole for Rs 2.5 million that used to be occupied (at different times) by Comrade Bam Dev (his name means: **"left-wing god"**) and by the RPP. The Maoists didn't pull any strings for the transfer of deeds, and now have their people's court and liaison office in the buildings. The Maos have also taken up cleaning up Kathmandu's underworld and are said to have abducted a couple of notorious Valley goondas.

Hmm. Going for hearts and minds, buying houses, going on European junkets. These guys are definitely don't have any intention of going **back to the jungle**.



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Tulku Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche
Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery
Nepal

Guest Speakers
Dr. Tom Tillemans
University of Lausanne
Switzerland

Dr. John Makransky
Boston College
USA

Dr. Koji Tanaka
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Dr. Naresh Man Bajracharya
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