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STANDSTILL: Manakamana Cable Car in Kurintar, hotels and numerous industries across the country have been closed because of threats from militant unions affiliated with the Maoists.

DIPENDRA BADUWAI

Disunion

DEWAN RAI

When the Maoists came into government, many had expected a better business environment and improved security. However, the private sector is reeling under threats and extortion from militant unions that many claim is directed by the Maoists.

All hotels in Nagarkot have been indefinitely closed since Wednesday. Biratnagar Jute Mill has been closed since 24 November. Hulas employees are on strike from this week. Asia Distillery shut down this week. Manakamana Cable Car has been shut for two weeks and is losing Rs 1 million a day. Even in remote Mugu, the Gamgadhi

hydroproject has been closed for the past two months. The list goes on.

On 20 November, Colgate Palmolive became the latest multinational to close shop in Nepal, citing labour problems as one of its reasons. The factory was sold to Nepali investors, but the workers didn't even let the new management take over.

According to FNCCI, 20 entrepreneurs were murdered, 53 businessmen kidnapped, 54 companies closed and there have been 62 shutdowns since the elections in April.

In September, the cabinet decided to raise the minimum wage of unskilled workers from Rs 3,300 to Rs 4,600 a month. The private sector says this will put many companies out of business.

Maoist Labour Minister Lekhraj Bhatta said negotiations were taking place and the minimum wage issue would be decided on Sunday. Asked if his party had political reasons to put pressure on the private sector, Bhatta admitted: "Of course, it is natural for a political party to try to extend its influence."

Rajendra Khetan, the ML assembly member whose brewery was also hit by strikes this week, says workers are being paid as per government rules. He says the current dispute is about politics and has nothing to do with labour. "If this goes on, forget about

international investors, there won't be any domestic investment either," he said.

Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee raised the issue of industrial security and threats against Indian multinationals operating in Nepal when he met Prime Minister Dahal on Tuesday.


EDITORIAL

Waste of time **p2**

The current spate of strikes is also caused by an intense rivalry between unions affiliated to the Maoists and the UML. Bishnu Rimal, vice president of the UML-affiliated trade union, GEFONT, denied this. But sources said the Maoist unions broke an agreement with GEFONT not to strike in the tourism sector for three years in response to a party directive. ●

Q. How do you characterise the rift in the Maoist party?

Total votes: 3,333



Response	Percentage
Not as serious as I think	34.2%
Pretty serious	18.2%
Party will split	47.5%

Weekly Internet Poll # 428. To vote go to: www.nepalintimes.com

Q. The Nepali Congress' current activities are:

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A romantic couple in formal attire dancing in a grand ballroom. The woman is wearing a green strapless dress and a necklace, while the man is in a tuxedo with a red bow tie. In the foreground, there is a bottle of Signature Vodka and a glass filled with ice and vodka. The background features ornate columns and a chandelier.



Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd. Editor: **Kel D**
 CEO: **Amir** Design: **Karshan**
 Marketing Manager: **Sabin**
 Asst Manager: **Shikhar**
 Subscriptions: 5542535/5542525
 Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur
 GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu 5250333/845
 Fax: 5251013
 Printed at Jagadamba Press 5250017-19



Still a yam

There may be benefits in cosyng up to China, but there will also be costs

The Maoist leadership is either busy in internal party management or foreign policy. This week, we have had the Indian, British and Danish ministers visiting. A Chinese delegation is here so often that it is difficult to keep count and a high level visit is scheduled for next week.

And all this when Nepal still does not have a concrete foreign policy (all we do is ask everyone for “support”). There is lack of

cross-border visits by ministers. From asking the Nepali left to unite to express concern over foreign encouragement of protests over Tibet. The Chinese are all over the place.

The accepted view that this is the Indian sphere of influence, and the Chinese have limited interest doesn’t seem to hold anymore. The Maoists have reciprocated happily to the Chinese interest. Their core concern is not the bilateral relationship, but strengthening party-to-party ties. The Maoists see a great opportunity to play China against India and win favours from both.

Our much vaunted ‘nationalists’, who wake up only when Indians intervene, are silent. But this approach raises fundamental questions which the Maoists must answer. Sino-Indian ties have really improved in the last two decades after Rajiv Gandhi’s handshake with Deng Xiaoping and burgeoning trade links. Indian foreign secretary Shiv Shanker Menon is an old China hand and knows them inside out. But the last few years have seen an undercurrent of tension.

The Chinese have made assertive claims over Arunachal Pradesh. They called the Indian ambassador in Beijing late at night when the Tibet protests were happening in India, even though New Delhi crawled backwards to curb it. The Indians called and rebuked the Chinese envoy when they felt that Beijing was blocking deliberations at the

Nuclear Suppliers Group in Vienna for the nuclear deal. A key US calculation in pushing nuclear cooperation and helping India ‘become a world power’ is to counter China. India and China are battling over energy in Africa. And Beijing has promised nuclear cooperation to Islamabad to keep the Indians in check.

In this larger context, do we want to become a small theatre in this new Great Game? While enhanced ties with a close neighbour is good, do we know what we want from Beijing and what Beijing wants from us? At a time when there is little internal coherence and domestic politics are so fragile, should we be re-orienting our foreign policy? Do the Maoists think their duplicity, of claiming equidistance on some platforms and emphasising the special relationship when Indians are present, goes unnoticed?

When the fundamentals of our economic dependence on India have not changed, what can we extract from the Chinese? Is the Nepali establishment aware that this would antagonise sections in India, who could react by destabilising politics here? What will happen if the BJP, paranoid about the Chinese hand and skeptical of the peace process, comes back to power in April 2009?

This is not an argument for status quo in foreign relations. Neither is it a plea for groveling in front of Delhi and accepting Indian tutelage. But it is a case for being aware of what Nepal may get embroiled in as the Maoists enhance their space to negotiate.

The country needs to be cautious, for there may be some benefits of cosyng up to China but there will also be costs. And Nepal is not in a position to play these games, which it does not even understand fully, when the peace process remains incomplete and democracy is still at a nascent stage. ●

WASTE OF TIME

The Maoists have spent the entire past week splitting hairs over whether to go for a ‘people’s republic’ or a ‘democratic republic’.

As if it makes any difference. In fact, the whole thing is beginning to look like an elaborate charade to distract attention from more pressing problems of governance, and to hoodwink an impatient cadre base. There are more fundamental issues at stake here, however. Who gave Minister of Culture and State Restructuring Gopal Kirati the authority to hand out a concept paper draft in Government of Nepal stationery about his vision of a restructured state? Is he speaking as government, as party member or as an individual?

Similarly, the three options that Pushpa Kamal Dahal submitted for consideration this week to his party’s Central Committee is *ultra vires* beyond the scope or authority of that body. Political parties, Maoists or otherwise, have no right to unilaterally go beyond the limits set by the constitution. The future nature of the Nepali state is the purview of the elected members of the CA.



Prime Minister Dahal’s proposal for a ‘democratic republic’ is therefore not a moderate viewpoint at all. It is as subversive as the proposal for permanent revolution that

Mohan Baidya has put forward. Both seem set to sabotage the peace process that brought the Maoists out of the jungles.

Hope, however, lies in the grassroots. Other than the now city-based YCL types there is little support for hardliners among the masses that voted Maoist in April.

The course-correction adopted by Chunbang plenum in 2005 wasn’t just a tactical move; it was a strategic decision to transform the party from a revolutionary machine into a political outfit. Turning the clock back to 2003 will invite the wrath of the voters. The Maoist leadership is under tremendous internal pressure, but this factionalism is more personality driven than ideological in nature.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal needs to realise that he became prime minister because his party got the most votes in the April elections, so he doesn’t have to threaten or extort anyone anymore. Why is he squandering his mandate by letting the YCL and the krantikaris continue with violence and threats? He is undermining the very democratic process that propelled him to power and is creating conditions for his own downfall.

The coalition Dahal heads is a transitional entity with three jobs: take the peace process forward, assist the CA in framing a new constitution and ensure a functioning government. Everything else is either a diversionary tactic or sheer waste of time.



PANKEAJ Bhandari

inter-agency co-ordination between the foreign and other ministries. A turf war rages between the foreign secretary and the PMO foreign policy adviser Hira Bahadur Thapa. Career diplomats are disgruntled. Given easy access and influence, foreign diplomats in Kathmandu see themselves more as domestic political players.

But the most striking trend on the foreign policy front is the steady increase in Chinese interest in Nepal. They lost their traditional ally of the monarchy but have been quick on damage control mode by cosyng up to the Maoists.

From inviting PLA commanders in China to visiting cantonments. From pushing Chinese business interests (there are rumours of the Chinese investment in an integrated township) to hosting covert

LETTERS

THE UN

Kanak Mani Dixit writes that it was distressing that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was not heard to utter the words ‘impunity’ and ‘accountability’ during his recent visit to Nepal (‘The United Nations now’, #424). In fact, in his address to members of the Constituent Assembly the Secretary-General spoke of the need to end impunity in the following terms: ‘Sustaining peace will also require efforts to heal the wounds of the conflict. That means clarifying the fate of those who disappeared and compensating victims. It means enabling the return of displaced persons to their homes. And it means undertaking an honest and inevitably painful acknowledgement of the truth of past human rights violations, and to end impunity.’ (Full text: www.unmin.org.np)

The Secretary-General’s reports to the Security Council and the messages of Ian Martin as his Special Representative, both to political actors in Nepal and to the Security Council, have also repeatedly emphasised the need to clarify the fate of those who disappeared, to compensate victims, to enable the return of displaced persons to their homes, and to fulfil the commitments made in past agreements

so that Nepal can have lasting peace.

Macarena Aguilar, Spokesperson United Nations Mission in Nepal

WHO’S IN CHARGE?

CK Lal’s column (‘Who’s in charge’, # 426) is an absolute diagnosis of the current situation of law-and-order in Nepali society. From past experience we know some political identities prefer to be under gangsters. This is the reason thugs and criminals are running the country. Nice to read CK Lal after a long gap.

Puspa Pant, email

● Welcome back, CK Lalji, we missed your perceptive analysis and cogent prognosis about Nepal. ‘Who’s in charge’ (#426) was spot-on. The editorial in the same issue, ‘Rebels without a cause’, is the first time I have seen anyone in the Nepali media looking at the demographic root causes of youth militancy in Nepal and why the political parties are beholden to them.

C Stetson, email

GAGAN THAPA

Gagan Thapa’s comment (‘Learning from South Africa’, #425) was interesting. However, the ANC has been a prime example of a movement that came out to be hegemonic once institutionalised in the

state. There is no effective party competition and racial segregation is still rife. Nepal should be careful not to follow that example especially given the similarity with the Maoists.

Dikshya Thapa, email

OFF THE BEATEN TREK

From what appears on the map and the conditions they encountered, Boustead and his team must have passed through the Lukchi valley and also touched the mid-upper Barun while trekking through the Upper Arun (‘Off the beaten trek’, # 426). The Barun-Lukchi is one of the very few areas in the Himalaya that can be described as Amazonian in its wildness and near-pristine ecology. It is too valuable biologically to be included in any popular trekking route.

It would be more sensible to develop a trail straddling the Shingsawa villages in the upper Arun right through to Thudam in the east. This would ensure the area completely off the existing Makalu and Kangchenjunga routes a steady source of income and could be crucial in alleviating the area’s chronic poverty and the smuggling of timber into Tibet, apparently widespread from Thudam. At the same time it is crucial that strategically located areas are singled out for development as tourism centres.

Only then can the stranglehold of Kathmandu fat cats on the tourism pie be broken and an equitable share of it ensured to the locals.

Badri Rai, email

GREAT ARCHITECTURE

Amidst the well-deserved praise for the new and unique health facility, Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) in Banepa, (‘Backbone of healthcare’, #424) which itself is the remarkable outcome of Kanak Mani Dixit’s endeavours after his own spinal injury some years ago, we also appreciate the design of architect, Arun Pant. He has added another splendid landmark to the country’s contemporary hospital buildings, in league with the Dhulikhel Hospital or the new one for civil servants in Kathmandu, built with Chinese assistance. The stark and white cement modernity of the latter example is also part of Pant’s articulate design, though mellowed by some subtle allusions to traditional design features, combined with the warm colour of immaculate brick work: a beautiful and functional building of great empathy for its suffering clients, as well as for its dedicated professional staff.

Niels Gutschow and Goetz Hagmueller, Bhaktapur

Keep them guessing

The Dahal Doctrine is steeped in compromise and hypocrisy

In his first interview to the media after taking up arms, Pushpa Kamal Dahal told the *Revolutionary Worker* in 1999: “We condemn all revisionist cliques as vulgar evolutionism... I hate revisionism. I seriously hate revisionism.”

This pleased Maoist ideologue Mohan Baidya (Pokharel) aka Comrade Kiran so much that he used his influence in the party to help Dahal emerge as supreme leader. But the mentor lost his acolyte

STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

somewhere along the way. With the acceptance of Prachanda Path as an equal of Maoism, Dahal established himself as the sole interpreter of revolutionary ideology. He has consistently used his authority since then to sideline purists and further the cause of pragmatism.

In Marxist parlance, revisionism refers to the ideology that social transformation could be achieved gradually and peacefully through political institutions. A revisionist is one who believes that halfway measures adopted to achieve total revolution doesn't amount to a sell-out.

It's his revisionism that has metamorphosed shadowy Prachanda into the successful revolutionary and prime minister. Paradoxically, Dahal owes his success to the very revisionism he once hated so much. He now has everything he ever craved for: the limelight, the highlife and the power to keep everyone on their toes.

Dahal was at his manipulative best in engineering the outcome he wanted from the Maoist central committee and the national convention of cadres this week in

Bhaktapur. On the face of it, dogmatism has taken a beating and revisionism has triumphed. Baidya has discovered that his disciple has learned more than what he taught him, and used the knowledge and skill to marginalise all rivals within the party.

Dahal's critics, competitors and opponents outside now know that dealing with the Maoist party implies unquestioned acceptance of his leadership. He is to Maoists what Girija Prasad Koirala is to Kangressis—love them or hate them, but ignore them you can't.

Recently, scientists at University College London established what romantics have known for eons: the chemicals that trigger love and hate in the brain are identical. Litterateurs have long believed that both these extreme emotions

emanated from the heart and were beyond human understanding. Biologists now tell us that love and hate have similar effects because they share the same synapses, but hate is somehow more rational. So, there is a scientific explanation for the triumph of the Dahal Doctrine.

In politics, the line between pragmatism and opportunism is very thin. The UML brought about its own demise by embracing expediency and pushing ideology into the background. The NC lost its way when a group of arrivistes in the party succeeded in sidelining the venerable old guard of socialism. Will the Maoists suffer the same fate? It's too early to say, but Dahal must make it clear whether his hatred for the NC and UML was enough to wage a full-fledged armed insurgency against the state.

In a moment of candour, Baidya admitted to an interlocutor soon after his release in 2006: “Had the April Uprising not succeeded, we would have rotted in Indian jails till our death.” When he and CP Gajurel, the so-called hardliners, were behind bars in Siliguri and Madras, their better-placed colleagues were using the hospitality of Indian government to engage leaders of parliamentary parties in Lucknow and New Delhi. Despite his stubbornness, Baidya is more honest.

The underlying message of the compromise document of the Maoists this week is disconcerting. It says that nobody should pay any heed to what its chairman says and wait anxiously instead to see what he does. Hypocrisy is a strong term, but nothing else captures the essence of Dahal's leadership. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Sunny side up

Lotus Energy's solar technology shines a light on the future



PAAVAN MATHEMA

It is a sad irony that Nepal, with its sunny winters and the highest hydropower potential of any country in the world, suffers from endless power cuts.

The country is better placed than most to take advantage of renewable energy sources, but successive governments have done almost nothing to make this happen. Private entrepreneurs, however, have stepped in and one of the pioneers in this field has been Lotus Energy.

"You see the dark houses, the power cuts, you see the pollution on the road and you feel that you have to do something," says Adam Friedensohn who set up Lotus Energy when he moved to Nepal 15 years ago to promote solar and wind energy technologies.

With partner Jeevan Goff,



PAAVAN MATHEMA

NO PROBLEM: Adam Friedensohn, who started Lotus Energy, stands proudly with his electrically powered Reva.

Friedensohn has set up the company to provide Nepalis with affordable solar alternatives for lighting. Starting with just three staff in 1993, Lotus now employs 100 and has branches across Nepal.

Friedensohn started out with trying to light up rural areas of Nepal with solar power, but quickly got involved in trying to find a solution to the extremely polluting Vikram three wheelers. Lotus collaborated with other partners to start Electric Vehicle Company (EVCO). The project to

replace the diesel powered smoke belchers with battery-powered three wheelers became a runaway success, and 'Safe tempo' has today become a household word.

Lotus' work in homes, schools, medical clinics and community centres in rural areas has provided light to villages in more than 65 districts. The company has also provided sustainable power for water pumps, vaccination fridges and water purification systems. Lotus even markets solar and hydro-powered prayer wheels.

It's continuous effort to make life easier for the poorest and to make energy sustainable is why Lotus Energy was chosen as the *Nepali Times* Company of the Month for November.

"Solar systems work well in villages because the people don't need sophisticated training to learn how to use them," says Chaitanya Chaudhary, an engineer at Lotus Energy. Chaudhary admits that solar technology can be expensive, and that is why Lotus tries to subsidise its lighting systems with grants from charities.

Now, even people in the cities are interested in solar power because of the load-shedding and Lotus can hardly keep up with demand at its workshop in Bhatbhateni. Last year, the company's sales increased by more than 30 per cent.

Friedensohn and Goff are also the promoters in Nepal of the electric-powered Reva in Nepal. They ordered the first four vehicles in 2001 through a subsidiary, Eco-visions. But the government changed its mind about a tax rebate, so the cars rotted at Birganj customs for five years.

Undeterred, Eco-visions

bought them back in an auction for scrap, refurbished them and started selling them again last year. Today, there are nearly 25 Revas purring around Kathmandu.

They are ideal for Kathmandu's narrow roads, the drivers don't need to queue for petrol, and a four hour full charge takes you 80km. At less than Rs 1 per km, the Reva is cheaper than a motorcycle.

"The great thing about the Reva is that it's been designed according to South Asian needs," explains Friedensohn, who himself drives a cute metallic purple Reva.

"We want the Reva to be a people's car," says Friedensohn, adding that the government's exorbitant 125 per cent tax on electric vehicles makes it expensive to be green in Nepal.

Friedensohn hopes that the new government will recognise the environmental and economical importance of electric vehicles and announce a tax rebate soon.

"We in Nepal have to think about energy sustainability," he says. "We can't continue to pretend that oil is limitless." ●

www.lotusenergy.com



closeup

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FOR ARTISTIC FREEDOM

Charity walk

Four hundred in Kathmandu took part in a walkathon on 15 November to raise funds and support blind and visually impaired people. Organised by the Standard Chartered Bank the money collected from the walk was invested in one of the bank's charitable initiatives.

Granted

The Rotary Club of Patan has been awarded a grant to expand the Nepal Disability Awareness Program to seven districts in the country. The funds will be invested in an education project for the disabled in partnership with other organisations already working in the field. A call centre is also set to be established.

Branching out

Prime Bank has opened new branches in Lagankhe, New Baneshwor and Balaju. The banks are equipped with the latest facilities including SMS and e-banking. The bank has also recently opened new branches in Dharan, Bharatpur and Pokhara.

NEW PRODUCTS

GO BANANAS: Sujal Foods, which already has lemon and spearmint flavored gums, has launched a new banana flavoured gum. The gums, which are manufactured in Nepal, are available for Rs 1 per piece and Rs 5 per packet.



The politics of labour

Last November, shortly after joining Himalmedia, one of my tasks was to start the negotiation process with the staff union. It had been registered a few months earlier and had submitted a list of 17 demands to the management.



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

In the first meeting, union representatives made it clear that theirs was a non-partisan trade union. Their aim was to put pressure on the management to address staff concerns. Though most demands were sensible, I told them that some demands were difficult to fulfill without first improving the health of the company.

I asked them to help me put the company in a sturdier financial footing. Over the next seven months, several formal and informal negotiations—some lasting for six hours at a stretch, and dragging into midnight—took place as we discussed the pros and the cons of each difficult demand.

In June, while making plans for the fiscal year, it became clear that a tradeoff was necessary between achieving the profitability goal and signing a realistic agreement with the union. That tradeoff was to reduce staff in all departments.

Fortunately, once the management made its case to the staff by sharing all the relevant details through numerous back and forth conversations, 34 staff submitted

written resignations over a three-month period. The union's cooperation was valuable to make sure that not a single day was wasted. And contrary to what was reported in tabloids, the staff saw that the company not only provided appropriate severance packages but also assisted with job search.

This process of peaceful layoff was not to the liking of some union members. In September, they left the existing union to create another one by seeking help from the political party

left with reference letters, but 16 subscription sales staff refused.

Asked why, they said that they were in the process of registering their new union at the Labour Office. The management said that it had no objection to their registering a new union. But it reminded them that such a registration would be valid only with verifiably true support of at least one-fourth of the current staff—85 per cent of whom are with the existing union with which the management signed an agreement.

Can a government office break the law and get away with it?

that now leads the government. Around that time, the company announced that it would stop running its subscription sales unit from December, and look for a cost-effective alternative.

Some subscription sales staff believed that the company's announcement was aimed at thwarting their union-forming plans, when, in reality, it was a further move along the cost-cutting path. Over a series of meetings, the management patiently explained the company's situation, offered job-search assistance, severance packages that were higher than legal minimums, and additional three months' pay. 10 of the staff happily

This has put the sales staff in a quandary. Their union formation plans do not have adequate support from the current staff. By all accounts, the political party they have become close to wants to have its presence at Himalmedia. Meantime, the company has had to deal with physical attacks, death threats against staff and arson.

Since options for straightforward legal registration of the new union are closed, there is one possibility: In days ahead, those close to the centres of power may put political pressure on the Labour Office to offer a certificate of recognition to this new union anyway, even if that means circumventing the law. We will be watching what happens next. ●

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Talk too much

Shambhu Shrestha in *Drishti*, 25 November

We talk too much. It doesn't help. If it did, the *panchas* would have taken the country far ahead long ago. Only having a strong ideology isn't going to make a difference, we need farsighted politicians who can bring their ideas to action. If he just talks, Prachanda's dream of turning Nepal into Switzerland will remain just that: talk. The excitement and hope that Prachanda was initially welcomed with has slowly evaporated, and the people seem to have lost hope that he'll be any different from his predecessors. If this disillusionment continues, there is a grave danger that the country will fall into a state of anarchy. No

one expected that the faith the people showed towards the Maoists would be broken so soon.

United we stand

Editorial in *Janadesh*, 25 November

The discussions held at the meeting of the Maoists has unified and strengthened the whole party. The enemies of the people's war, the imperialists, the expansionists and critics were conspiring to destroy the Maoists revolution by spending millions. But this meeting burst their bubble. The proletariats have won, the doubts have been cleared. In the world map, the Nepali proletariats are united enough to defeat any counter-revolutionary forces. The Maoists are committed to continue the work required for

the progress of the revolution. As the people's revolution reaches its heights of success, the counter-revolutionaries also increase their threats. This meeting, however, brought them tumbling down. The party has achieved a new basis for a stronger unity. Let us move forward with the global communist revolution and the proletariat headquarter!

Same advisers

Durga Subedi in *Kantipur*, 24 November

Royal advisers paid too much attention to opinions when decisions needed to be made. That is why they couldn't save the monarchy. What is going to happen if these same men become the advisers of our new rulers? The Maoist leaders claim that power is with the people, but they too seem to want is to be worshipped for their own supremacy.

These are the people who've used their craftiness to turn kangresi and UML politicians into money-hungry monsters. Why have the Maoists appointed these same people as their advisors? In the past, politicians managed to travel, sometimes unnecessarily, across the world, courtesy of the state, the Maoists are doing the same showing what their real intentions may be. There's inconsistency between their revolutionary ideology and their behaviour. This has increased tension between comrades who slept, ate and fought together during the war. In the end, nothing changes. The people are beginning to think that the current government is just an extension of feudalism.

"YCL follows Prachanda's orders"



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

youth communist who hope to make a New Nepal. We don't do the same job that the army and the police do. In fact, we carried out jobs that they weren't able to do. We are a political committee. We are fighting for political goals.

Interview with Ganeshman Pun, Nepal, 30 November

नेपाल

The YCL has become synonymous with violence. When will this stop?

Those who believe in justice and freedom are not terrified by us. Only unlawful criminals and feudalists are afraid of us.

The government is under the Maoists and the state has its own army and police. Why do we need the YCL?

We are not a paramilitary force. We are revolutionary

What would happen if other political parties formed militant groups like the YCL?

By following us many youth forces likes NC-affiliated force, Madhesi youth force have become active. If these forces have been formed to oppose us then conflict will arise and this will definitely not help make a New Nepal. If they were formed for positive reasons then we have no problem. We are ready to work with such groups.

The prime minister publicly announced that he would change the way YCL works, why hasn't that been done till now?

The YCL is moving ahead under the directive of Prime Minister Prachanda. Under that directive, we haven't had many revolutionary programs. We have kept silent even though we have been attacked many times.

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When will they start drafting?

Despite delays, a glimmer of hope for a timely draft still remains

PURNA BASNET

Although the constitution writing process has just begun formally, the rift between the Maoists and the NC is ever-widening. If Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal fails to implement the nine-point agreement with the NC this time, the conflict will persist and hamper the drafting process.

“The Maoists are concentrating on sorting out differences within the party while the NC is playing a tough opposition creating difficulties for the Maoists,” says Hari Roka, a Maoist nominee CA member. The Maoists should take the initiative in mending the relationship but the rift has further deepened in the last four months.

NC leader Chakra Bastola says: “If there is no political consensus, the constitution will not be written. But the government is not serious about it. We doubt whether the Maoists really want a new constitution.”

Seven months after the CA election, the Assembly passed Rules of Procedure in mid November to start the process. The CA chair Subhas Nembang says 14 subject committees will prepare the first draft which the assembly will discuss and eventually endorse.

Maoist Law Minister Deb Gurung, who also heads the commission to outline the federal structure, is preparing a draft proposal for his party while Maoists Post Bahadur Bogati and Khimlal Debkota have been handed the job with the latter claiming he already has a number of drafts ready.

“If it was a people’s republic we could have worked out a different draft but a few amendments in the interim constitution will be sufficient,” says Debkota.

The NC draft committee is headed by Chakra Bastola who says his party is taking a bottom-up approach, gathering public opinion from all 240 constituencies before producing the draft. “People are sovereign in a republic country. Therefore, we



decided to go to the public first.”

The UML has formed 13 subject committees to prepare the draft. According to Bharat Mohan Adhikari the committees will submit suggestions by 30 November having already gathered opinions from Janajati and Karnali people. The UML will also discuss its draft with other parties.

“The major political parties have already agreed on more than 85 per cent of the issues and only 15 per cent remain to be resolved,” says Adhikari. The major issues to be discussed are the demarcation of provincial territory, devolution of rights, executive power systems and socio-economic transformation.

But the issue of federal structure is the main point of contention. All political parties have agreed on federalism but the issue of provinces and devolution of power

remain unresolved. The Maoists propose basing federal structure on ethnicity and geographical region while UML and NC argue this would be divisive. Madhesi parties are still demanding ‘One Madhes One Pradesh’ while Limbuwan and Tharuhat state councils are threatening to take up arms if they are not given the region.

There is even division within the Maoists on the federal issue. A faction wants provinces divided north-south, an issue which is being hotly debated in its 13 state councils which were created on the basis of ethnicity and region. “In the name of liberating one ethnic group another should not suffer,” says one of the Khas members of Tamsaling state where the debate recently turned very sour.

The UML and NC are at least united in their belief that ethnic-based federalism will not work. NC’s Bastola says: “We can learn from the practices of countries where there is federalism.” A task force under former UML General Secretary Madhab Kumar Nepal, has been preparing a draft which is set to emphasise decentralisation and devolution to the grass-roots level.

Many INGOs as well as foreign observers are involved in the process directly or indirectly. Some are funding local organisations to go on foreign fact-finding trips, others have even proposed to draft the new constitution. Offers to write the CA rules of procedure and clauses of the constitution have been rejected out of hand.

Speaker Subhas Nembang takes a dim view of all this: “We told them that fortunately we have experts of our own to prepare our own constitution.” ●

“Indigenous demands should be welcomed”

The UN’s Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, S James Anaya, was in Kathmandu this week to talk to representatives of the government and indigenous communities and report back to the Human Rights Council. *Nepali Times* spoke to him about incorporating indigenous issues in the new constitution.

Nepali Times: Do you see progress in the political representative of indigenous communities in Nepal?

S James Anaya: It is with a sense of humility that I come on this mission. You are engaged in a very interesting process of writing a new constitution within the widely-accepted principles of democracy building. There is the representation of indigenous people, their rights and demands and the need to respond to those. You don’t see that in all parts of the globe. Often, these demands for indigenous rights are ignored. Here in Nepal, at least on the surface, you see a responsiveness and official affirmation on the part of the government as official policy.

Do you think that is just lip service, or is it a real commitment?

I will be looking at and encouraging the recognition of the demands of the indigenous communities. These demands are itself a form of affirmation of the collective identity, and coincides with the agenda of autonomy. But you have to find out what the people are demanding in real terms, not what they have been told is the conduit for their liberation or what they perceive as the only route that they think will be taken seriously. There has to truly be an open debate about these issues, and to focus on whether this is how their real interests will be served. The biggest mistake would be to think there is one formula to address the demands of

indigenous people across the globe.

Nepal is so ethnically interwoven that some say a federal structure based on ethnicity would not be practical.

Well, that should certainly be taken into account. And really, a majority of the situations around the world are like that. You don’t find many geographical compacts which are exclusive of other communities. In some cases such indigenous-based federal units have worked, and others where they haven’t. You have to distinguish between recognising indigenous self-governance structures and a federal system.

So, it is not so much about indigenous autonomy but how effective self-governance is within federal units?

There are examples of autonomies based on multi-ethnic areas that encompass indigenous people. Where you do have ethnically-based systems that work well, they are not indigenous autonomies, like Switzerland. Spain is one of the models in Europe for building democracy with their success stories for very strong system economic, social and cultural autonomies in Catalonia and the Basque region.

With the 103 ethnic groups how does Nepal compare with other countries in terms of complexity?

I would say not uncommon, but we have few examples to say that is the way it should be done. That is why what is happening in Nepal is so important. And one has to understand that the demands of indigenous people is not threatening to the integrity of the country, it is simply an effort to build a country that is inclusive along a philosophy of a multi-cultural state. It shouldn’t be feared, it should be welcomed.



MAKING WAVES: Gayatri Shah is the youngest member of the Constituent Assembly from the Nepali Janata Dal from Sarlahi district. She is the écover girl in this month’s issue of the youth magazine, WAVE, and brings a new face to the evolution in Nepali politics. Young, driven and very optimistic about the future, Gayatri hopes to be able to make a difference in the living standards of Nepalis through politics. She says: “Young people in general are more hopeful about the future, and so am I because I believe in the possibility of positive change the youth can bring.”

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The big

Iconic French leader Charles de Gaulle once questioned how anyone could govern a nation that produces 246 types of cheese.

Nepal shares many of France's great attributes: beautiful mountains, fantastic growing conditions, diverse countryside, an aptitude for animal husbandry. Now, it seems, it is developing a (some may say worrying) palate for cheese.

Traditionally Nepal is a nation of yak cheese eaters. The famous yak cheese, much of which is actually made from zopkyo milk, is produced in the high mountains. One version of it is the khurpi, which is not really a cheese at all. In Ilam, they make cheese from cow's milk, and everywhere in between it is from the high-fat water buffalo milk. Lately, goat's cheese from Chitlang and cow's milk cheese in Tokha is proving popular with Kathmandu expats.

"When we started selling cheese, most of our buyers were foreigners, but locals have developed a taste," says Nirmal KC of Hermann Helmers Bakery in Sanepa.

The cheese industry in Nepal officially started in 1953, when the government-run Dairy Development Corporation (DDC) ventured into producing yak cheese with the support of the Swiss. Sumendra Shakya of DDC says: "Nepal is one of the few places in the world where yak milk is used for making cheese. It has almost become a souvenir product."

"Nepal is perfect for cheese production. You couldn't ask for more."

While the cheese produced by DDC is the dominant seller in the market, there are a number of small-scale cheese makers with the holey Swiss Emmenthal and French Cantal being produced in Langtang and Ilam.

Swiss cheese connoisseur Jean Paul Corboz says: "Nepal has perfect conditions for it to develop as a cheese producer. It has the right climatic conditions, the grasslands and people who are traditionally into animal husbandry. You couldn't ask for more."

He reckons the cheese selection here is quite good. While most of the varieties have a mild taste even strong flavoured ones like Ekisho are available.

Surprisingly, Nepal doesn't export cheese. Iswori Prasad Adhikari of DDC explains, "Right now, the demand exceeds the supply, especially in the case of yak cheese."

According to Corboz, the export could pick up if the consistency in the taste and the quality of the local cheese could be maintained although producers will also have to satisfy strict hygiene and veterinary regulations.

However, Nepali cheese is 'unofficially' exported by expats. "Nepal's yak cheese or other varieties are so popular that there are many foreign customers who take more than 7kg abroad at a time," says KC.

If Prime Minister Dahal really plans to turn Nepal into another Switzerland, then the cheese industry is one place he could start. ●
Paavan Mathema and Shradha Basnyat



French connection

In the hills above Tokha and in the shade of Shivapuri lies the hamlet of Chandeshwori. From there it is a 15 minute hike through woods and over streams to the simple stylish home built by 30-year-old Frenchman Francois Driard (pictured right) two years ago.

When he had to decide how to make a living in Nepal he hit upon cheese-making because it was the single thing he missed most about his native France.

The French are pretty superior about their cheese and Driard, who consumes 2kg of the stuff a week, is no exception. For him cheese must have a rind and it must call for a glass of red wine. While higher quality wine was becoming increasingly available in Nepal, non processed cheese was still lacking.

Having recognised his ambition he went to the Savoie Valley in the French Alps for traditional training.

Last December he made his first batch of Tomme (though he still owned no cows and was buying in the milk) and after leaving it to mature in his cave for the required one month at 12-14 degrees Celsius and 95-98 per



cent humidity he tried it.

He vowed that if it wasn't good he would stop immediately, he says, he taste every batch of cheese he sell and if it's not to my taste I ditch it.

One year on from that first cheese he has a small herd of Jersey hybrids and Holsteins. But the popularity of the luxury cheese means demand has quickly outgrown supply.

It has been a steep learning curve. His herd is producing 60 litres of milk a day which makes

six kg of cheese but he needs to up that which may necessitate moving elsewhere to get pasture for the animals.

His ambition is to start making other cheeses so he can offer a whole platter, perhaps beginning with the quintessential soft French cheese Camembert on which he gorges himself whenever he goes home.

Driard is also now making salami with the aim of expanding into other forms of charcuterie. • Katy Elliott

cheese



escape

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A F F O R D A B L E & R E L I A B L E



Climactic change

TOKYO Japan's greenhouse gas emissions reached a record high last year pushing the country further away from meeting its Kyoto targets. The world's fifth largest greenhouse gas emitter, it has been long criticised for not paying attention to its climate-protection obligations.

Tokyo's leadership on climate change is eroding as it slips in meeting targets to limit emissions. The global recession may now make it harder for industrialised nations like Japan to invest in cleaner technology.

Japan is already experiencing some adverse affects of climate change. There has been about a 1°C rise in temperature over the course of the 20th century and a 2-3°C rise in large cities.



INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

There have been dramatic changes in the length of growing seasons. Studies have also found that various birds and mammals exhibit trends toward larger body size, probably due to increasing food availability. Rice yields are projected to decrease by up to 40 per cent in irrigated lowlands.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) first major follow-up summit took place in Bangkok earlier this year. Japan proposed that the developed countries be given a target date of 2020 to reform their global warming reduction goals as compared to the 2012 agreed in Bali earlier. If Japan's proposal were to be accepted, even the developing countries will have to set up the same greenhouse gas reduction targets as Japan. Under Kyoto, which expires in 2012, only industrialised countries have to reduce emissions by five per cent from the 1990s level.

Although Nepal's contribution to climate change is negligible, the Himalaya will be the hardest hit region in the world after the north polar region. And it will be the poorest people in the mountains who will suffer most. A report by the Institute for Global Environment projected that there will be an increased risk of hunger in South Asia due to a 30 per cent decline in cereal yields. Accelerating melt of glaciers in the Himalayas, glacial lake outbursts and flooding, migration of malaria and dengue to higher altitudes and the loss of mangroves because of sea-level rise will threaten South Asia. So far, no action has been taken by Nepal or developing countries other than the preparation of a National Adaptation Program of Action by least developed countries.

Nepal can do much more to promote renewable energy

At major international climate change meetings Nepal's environment experts have drawn attention to the fact that ice retreat in the Himalaya is not just Nepal's problem. The Himalaya is the water tower on which nearly 1.5 billion people in Asia depend.

Nepal's own ongoing alternative energy programs like community forestry, biogas, micro-hydropower development are all climate-friendly activities. But the international community is slow to give us credit for our small efforts, and compensate us adequately. UN data shows that Nepal is leading with its initiatives to curb climate change and is ahead of countries like Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Maldives and even China. But such initiatives are easily dwarfed by the scale of the problem especially considering the size of Nepal's neighbours China and India.

Global warming will affect all regions of the world. But there are some countries that will be more seriously hurt, like the Maldives and Nepal. Countries like ours are also the least responsible for the problem because of low populations and low per capita emissions of carbon dioxide both now and in the past. We are also doing relatively much more to reduce our carbon footprint.

Of course, a lot more needs to be done. Nepal's consumption of fossil fuels is increasing, and past governments have been negligent in reducing our dependence on imported fuel not just to combat climate change, but even as a purely economic imperative.

The new government of a New Nepal could pro-actively promote hydropower generation and a switch to electric mass transit, electric buses and vehicles. At the same time, we need to protect our carbon sinks. Despite the spread of community forestry, encroachment on woodlands is shrinking hardwood canopy cover in the Tarai. ●

The melting

When it was put up at 5,300m at Chomolungma Base Camp in April, this was the highest-ever photo exhibition in the world. 'Changing Landscapes' examines, through dramatic before-and-after photographs, the impact of climate change on the Himalaya.

Organised by the Kathmandu-based International Centre for

Before and after pictures show dramatic glacial retreat in Nepal

Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) the exhibition has also toured Stockholm and Barcelona. The loss of ice cover and glacial retreat in the span of 50 years is so stark

that it converts those still sceptical about the effects of global warming.

"Visitors to the exhibition were obviously shocked to see how rapidly these glaciers are

Rebuilding Palpa



It was new year's eve 2005. Fierce gunfire started on the Srinagar ridge at about 9PM. The sound of explosions reverberated from the surrounding mountains.

Then the district administration building came under attack. There was fierce fighting in the main market outside. Huge explosions shook the whole town, and people cowered under beds all night. At least 22 soldiers, policemen and attacking Maoists were killed that night. The historic Palpa Durbar where the government offices were housed was on fire.

The next morning the shocked residents of Tansen stepped over bodies, cartridges and unexploded bombs to see their town's landmark a smouldering ruin. The four-storey palace was built in 1903 by Gen Pratap Sumshere and had four storeys, 70 rooms and two courtyards. As news spread about its destruction, many in the Palpali diaspora scattered across the world wept.

For the past two years there has been intense

debate about how to rebuild the historic site. Some wanted the land to be sold and a mall built in its place. Others voted for a modern government building. Luckily, the view of local residents that the palace be rebuilt and restored to its original look prevailed. The Rs 50 million reconstruction has started, and the new design is earthquake resistant and set aside space for a museum.

"Every time we passed the ruins we used to be reminded of that terrible night and the war that destroyed this country. But now that the construction has begun we are hopeful about the future," says Tansen trader, Pradip Shrestha.

Ironically, the minister for peace and reconstruction is Maoist





Himalaya

melting,” says ICIMOD’s Nonna Lamponen. During the week-long outdoor exhibition at the Hanuman Dhoka temple complex at Kathmandu Durbar Square, mountain panoramas that were taken by a team of scientists in the 1950s will be displayed and compared to photographs taken in 2007.

Mountain geographer Alton Byers, who was part of that team,

revisited many of the sites of the original photographs and took replicates that illustrate the changes in the landscape.

“Only 50 years have passed between the old and new photographs and the changes are dramatic,” Byers told *Nepali Times*. Many small glaciers at low altitudes have disappeared entirely and many larger ones have lost around half of their

volume. Some have formed huge glacial lakes at the foot of the glacier, threatening downstream communities.

The exhibition is part of ICIMOD’s 25th anniversary celebrations, and will run from 2-8 December 2008. It is free of charge and will be open daily from 10AM to 5PM. ●

See also: *‘Himalayan meltdown’, #371*

Palace



ex-guerrilla Janardan Sharma whose party was responsible for the destruction of not just Tansen, but palace-turned-administration buildings in Mangalsen, Dailekh and elsewhere.

Reconstruction of Mangalsen Darbar is starting this year with the allocation of Rs 25 million. The Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction set up a task force last year that estimated that Rs 4.5 billion worth of damage was done to government buildings during the war. Nearly double that amount will now be needed for rehabilitating the infrastructure, but only Rs 1 billion has been set aside in the budget for this fiscal year.

Here in Tansen, though, local tourism entrepreneurs look approvingly as the old palace goes higher every day. Hotelier Manmohan Shrestha says: “This was Palpa’s jewel, and rebuilding it will send a positive message to the rest of the country.” ●

Govinda Luitel in Palpa

December Sky

Meteor watchers watch out

In December we have the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year (21 December) when the sun reaches its most southerly point in the sky. During the month, deep sky observers will be able to see some prominent constellations like Gemini, Orion, Taurus, Aries and Cetus from east to west.

In the northern skies you may see the constellations Auriga, Perseus, Cassiopeia, Andromeda and Cygnus. You could always download star charts from the internet to help identify stars (www.heavens-above.com).

Mercury will be visible towards the end of December as it sets about an hour after the Sun. On 31 December, Mercury will be close to the lower left of **Jupiter**. Venus is now becoming noticeable as the evening star in the south western sky after sunset. Even if the sky is still bright, Venus is such a brilliant object that it shows up clearly. Don’t miss using your binoculars to view the meeting of Venus, **Jupiter** and the crescent moon on the evening of 1 December.



STARGAZING
Kedar S Badu



LOOKING UP: School children in Dhunche gather around a telescope last week to watch Jupiter and Venus come together on the western horizon.

Mars is on the far side of the Sun. It’s in conjunction on 5 December. We won’t be able to see the red planet at all this month. **Saturn** is rising in the middle of the night and it’s well up in the southern sky by dawn.

Meteor watchers should get prepared for the Gemini shower, one of the most reliable meteor showers of the year. Geminids may be seen any time between 7 and 16 December. These meteors all seem to spread out from a single radiant point close to the bright star Castor in Gemini with the highest numbers usually spotted after midnight. The peak this year is expected on the evening of 13 December when you might catch one every couple of minutes.

Nothing gives me more satisfaction than giving a child the first opportunity to observe the moon and planets through a telescope. (see picture). Last month, I went to Dhunche which is the district headquarters of Rasuwa and some 170km north west of Kathmandu.

After a six hour drive including 50km of bumpy tracks from Trisuli I finally arrived and soon found out that with high altitude and clear skies it’s a perfect location for observing the night sky.

Rasuwa is mainly inhabited by the Tamang community. I met the local school teachers there who helped me organise a stargazing session for local children the next evening. Some 30 pupils turned up to marvel at the craters on the moon and the Galilean moons of Jupiter through the telescope. ●

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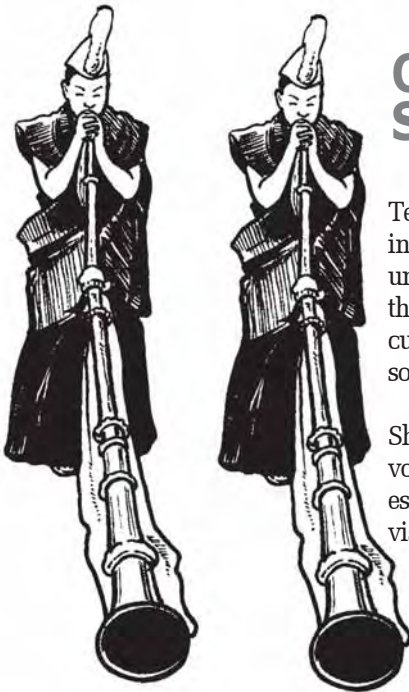
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The Sherpa



One of the best resources on Sherpa culture produced so far

Tengboche suggests in the introduction, this is 'an unassuming work that is one of the best resources on Sherpa culture that has been produced so far'.

Beyond English-reading Sherpa youth, the 210-page volume is bound to emerge also as essential reading for tourists visiting not only the Khumbu region, but other high-Himalayan *beyuls* (sacred sanctuaries). Translated into Nepali, this work could help the midhill and plains population better understand the highlanders.

The author's goal is to try and preserve an understanding of the traditional lifestyle and beliefs amidst the fast-paced changes that modernisation and tourism have introduced to the Khumbu.

The Sherpa practise the original Nyingma school of Mahayana Buddhism, a 'practical sect' (writes the author) which shares much with the earlier Bon faith including the worship of

spirits of land, water, trees and mountains. Sherpa is pronounced 'Sharwa' locally, referring to the people of the east, a reference most likely to origins in the Kham region of eastern Tibet.

Back in 1965, all the roofing in the main Khumbu market of Nauche (Namche) consisted of traditional materials, including slate, wooden slats and bamboo mats. By 1995, every house had corrugated metal roofing, which changes the look of the village 'but saves a lot of trees'.

Traditionally, people carried their own *gokpur* wooden eating bowls during travels, within the folds of their tunics. No longer. The Sherpa are used to composting human waste, but with the changing economy (decline of farming and arrival of tourists) things have become unmanageable.

The Chinese thermos, the Korean blender and Indian pots and pans are sidelining local utensils. There is an interesting chart showing how the earlier

Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa is a forester and environmentalist who is transforming into a dedicated cultural activist. *Through a Sherpa Window* is an illustrated volume that is encyclopaedic yet accessible, a guide to Sherpa culture presented as part of a larger drive to sensitise the 'educated, younger generation Sherpa'.

As the High Lama of

Pratap Subba



KELLY STACY

By bringing Pratap Subba to sing at Paleti on Friday night, nepa-laya is honouring this great Bhutani singer who was driven out from his motherland with 100,000 of his compatriots who have lived as refugees in Nepal for the past 18 years.

Subba was a household name in Bhutan in the 1980s, and his songs were on every Bhutani lip: whether Lhotsampa or Drukpa. His lyrics and melody shed a mellow light on Bhutanis darkness.†

*Bandhan ko chhino hara lai dina sakdina
Tara timilai pote lagaideula*

The words evoke the heartbeat and heartbreak of a lost motherland, they take us back to the

innocence of an era, before Bhutanis name was blackened by one of the most systematic cases of ethnic cleansing in recent history in terms of proportion of population driven out of a country.

In the late 1980s, Subba's songs were played, relayed and sung on stages, in buses, forests, farmyards and pilgrimages throughout Bhutan, Darjeeling and Sikkim. His songs were a hit on Bhutanis national radio. But then came 1990, and the state-sponsored eviction of tens of thousands Lhotsampas from Bhutan. Subba's family was driven out because of its ethnicity and background-not even his singing could save Subba.

Years later, Pratap Subba was living, unrecognised and forgotten in the refugee camp at Pathri in eastern Nepal. A popular singer whose songs celebrated Bhutani life was queuing up to collect food aid from the UN in a refugee camp in Nepal. A national icon was spending nights under a plastic roof, afraid to cough for fear of disturbing neighbours in the crowded camp. Such was the dedication of this low-key artiste, fellow refugees selected him camp secretary several times.††

The cycles of seasons and months have continued for 17 years. But for Subba, there is only one month to remember:†

*Mangsira ko mainale, kasailai, doli chadai
Naumati baja sangai ghara leuchu bhancha*

His lyrics were straight from everyday life in Bhutan, they echoed the cadence and voices of the rural folk. He returned their words in song, and in doing so lives eternally in their hearts. He sang of the mountains and forests of Bhutan, the murmuring brooks and festivals. But mostly he sang of love and longing.

Govinda Rizal in Kyoto



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Phone: 5534318, 5522614, 5542045

beyul

barter trade between Khumbu and Tibet is now exclusively a one-way affair, with imports of ‘electronics, carpets, meat, tsampa, butter, noodles, cement, iron products and silver cups’ in exchange for simply, ‘cash’.

Polyandry and polygamy are both in swift decline, we learn, with the additional information that the former is good family economics, while the latter is favoured by aristocrats. ‘Unlike polyandry, polygamy generally leads to conflicts and unhappiness.’

While the transformations are obviously a key concern of the author, the bulk of the text is devoted to explaining the aspects of Sherpa folk and high culture, lifestyle, household and terrain.

What the Khumbu children fear the most is the *gobkyokbuk*, the dark passageway leading into the main family room of Sherpa houses, where ghosts are said to lurk. Ama Dablang, arguably the prettiest mountain in Nepal, is so named because it looks like a mother wearing a charm box (*dablang*).

The author’s scientific temperament is obvious when he

deals with the natural world. He explains the difference between *yak* (male), *nak* (female), *zopkyok* (cross with lowland cow), and the more than a dozen resulting permutatons in progeny. Potato is the staple of the Khumbu today, stewed, mashed, fried, curried and roasted. And yet it is an interloper from the Andes, arriving less than 200 years ago.

Buckwheat (*thrau*) was probably the earlier staple, but its cultivation has declined because of browsing animals. Why so? The author describes how tourism led to the end of transhumance and the arrival of crossbreeds, resulting in the collapse of community control over livestock movement.

The book presents the definitive explanation for the name Jomolangma (Sagarmatha/ Mt. Everest): it is a shortened version of Jomo Miyo Langsangma, one of the five female sister deities of the Himalaya. She provides the boon of food and nourishment.

With fine illustrations by Krishna Gopal Shrestha, with lists and tables that help in the explanation, the book also comes



with an index and select reference for further reading. This is such a successful volume that the reader will want to know more. ●
Kanak Mani Dixit



*Through a Sherpa Window
Illustrated Guide to Traditional
Sherpa Culture*
By Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa
Vajra Publications,
Kathmandu 2008
210 pages

Curtains close on theatre festival

More than two weeks of intensive theatre came to a close on Thursday at the Kathmandu International Theatre Festival with the staging of the much-acclaimed Nepali drama, *Karnali Dakhin Bagdo Chha*.

Organised by Gurukul, the theatre group that has pioneered international class drama in Kathmandu, the festival showcased performances by groups from Denmark, Norway, England, America, Thailand, Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

The festival started on 12 November with the play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* written by Abhi Subedi and directed by Gurukul’s Sunil Pokharel. Among the more popular plays were those performed by Indian artistes,

mainly because there was no language barrier for the mostly-Nepali audience.

The hall was packed for the performance by the Kshitiz New Delhi Theatre of *Bimaar* and *Bade Bhaiya*. Directed by Bharati Sharma, *Bade Bhaiya* revolves around two brothers in which the elder brother always empowers the younger one. It shows the power relations between male siblings. *Bimaar* is a sitcom in which a character receives useless suggestion from his countless relatives to help cure his common cold.

“The response of the audience was amazing, we could sense that they were really engaged, it showed there is no cultural barrier between India and Nepal,” said Sumit Vats of the viewers at Gurukul.

Director Bharati Sharma agreed: “We are really thankful to Gurukul for giving us this opportunity to perform to such a responsive audience in Kathmandu.”

Other members of the audience were so impressed they decided to come back for the performance of *And Dead Trees Give No Shelter*, a one-act play by director Pranab Mukherjee—no relation to his namesake, the Indian foreign minister who is also in Kathmandu this week.

But the language barrier didn’t seem to hurt plays like *Hungry Tiger* from Denmark and *Wesandon, The Lost Track of Nirvana* from Thailand performed this week. “The plays were really different and beautiful, I especially liked the body language and mimicking,” said Saguna Sigdel, college student from Thankot.

Abhi Subedi who was also in the audience said the theatre festival had been a good opportunity to expose Nepali artistes to international theatre. “Drama is always a very good platform for the exchange of ideas,” he said.

Sunil Pokhrel of Gurukul is satisfied that the theatre festival fulfilled its promise, adding: “It was very interactive and proved to be an effective way to ensure inter-cultural exchange.” ●
*Shikha Sharma and
Prakriti Pathak*



UDHR turns 60

A season of often heart-rending documentary films define the myriad challenges ahead

A coalition of international NGOs have chosen to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with a slate of films that highlight the fronts where those rights are being threatened.

The screenings taking place during the first week of December at the Russian Cultural Center are dominated by ñNGO films,í an oft-disparaged genre that attracts a long list of criticisms: tepid

CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo DiSilva



political comment, a reliance on talking heads, creative decisions by committee and a crippling didactic bent.

In that aspect some of the films occasionally live up to expectation. In *Nepal: A Life in Limbo*, a documentary on the Bhutanese refugee situation, gorgeous and affecting footage is undercut with an odd narration that feels as if it’s been extracted from a brochure or a text book. Yet, when its subjects speakóthe very refugees themselvesóit acquires that necessary quality to connect with its audience.

Herein lies the strength of the documentary form, the ability to cut through the limitation of the screen, and it is best exemplified in *Between the Lines*. Consisting solely of interviews with internally displaced refugees in the decades-long Ugandan conflict between the government in Kampala and the Lord’s Resistance Army in the north, the film sketches the history of the conflict and conditions at the camps. The interviewees relate personal stories of torture and rape, which provoke a quiet explosion in your heart. The delivery is heartñbreakingly matter-of-fact and dignified.

Another section of the program is dedicated to women’s issues, where films focussing on Nepal fare quite well. *Women Vote for a New Nepal* captures the mood of the country during the recent elections and highlights the optimism felt at the same time as underscoring the particular concerns and serious inequalities women face. *Mirchi ko Patheghar Khasecha, Aba Ke Garne?*, perhaps with unintentional melodrama and camp, engagingly explores the all ñtoo-common prolapsed uterus condition afflicting over-worked and young mothers. Also included elsewhere is Pranay Limbu’s *Forgive, Forget Not!*, a first-person dramatisation of a journalist’s detention in the Bhairabnath Barracks for 15 months during the Maoist insurgency. Bold, effective and wise it was deservedly much feted in previous film festivals and not to be missed.

What’s striking, listening to people whose rights have been trampled register their dignified protest, is that one hears the inherent concept of a universal set of human rights. The courage that these people display in their lives and in telling their stories demands that we listen at the very least. That 60 years on, human rights abuses continue, excused or denied by governments across the planet, cannot be taken as a sign of the failure of the idea, but rather as an impetus for its continual renewal and expansion.

The UDHR60 in Kathmandu Human Rights Film Festival runs Dec. 1st ñ 5th at the Russian Cultural Center. Schedule is available at <http://www.alliancefrancaise.org.np>



Already Christmas

With Christmas being recognised as a public holiday for the first time in Nepal this year its commercial, and culinary, importance is set to grow. The Hyatt Regency is already laying out its Christmas goodies with an assortment of cakes, puddings, biscuits, pies and chocolate Santas.

“We started preparing in October,” says Anil Man Gabhaju, Hyatt’s chef de cuisine. The dry fruits used were soaked in a luxuriant blend of lemon and orange juices, rum and spices to give them a richness and aroma. “This annual event gets better every year as we learn more about the taste and add in new recipes.”

The menu has it all- plum cakes, mince pies, stollen, gingerbread houses, cookies and Christmas puddings.

ABOUT TOW

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Divinity of Common Life**, an exhibition of paintings by Karl Knapp and Nayanantara Kakshapati. Nepal Art council, till 30 November. 4218048
- ❖ **A l'preuve du monde**, a photo exhibition, Russian Cultural Centre until 5 December.
- ❖ **Himalaya iChanging Landscapes**, an outdoor photo exhibition organized by ICIMOD Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, 2-8 December. 4256909
- ❖ **Autumn Collection**, group exhibition by six women, Park Gallery, 12 December, 11AM-5PM. 4419353
- ❖ **Once upon a time**, an exhibition by Donato Rosella, 14 December, Lazimpat Gallery cafe. 4428549

EVENTS

- ❖ **Paleti** with Pratap Subba, 28 November, 5.30 PM, nepa-laya ěri la, Rs 565. 4412469
- ❖ **Cultural Studies Group of Nepal** presents Nepal's State of Affairs, by Kanak Dixit, 28 November at 9.30 AM, Shanker Hotel. Rs 100.
- ❖ **Friendly football match**, 29 November, 3-5PM, Dasarath Stadium, Rs 20.
- ❖ **Kyikyí Sossó** a film by Vera Frossard, 30 November, 7PM, Indigo Gallery.
- ❖ **Burn after reading**, a film by Coen Brothers, 4 December, Lazimpat Gallery, 6.30 PM. 4428549
- ❖ **Alliance Francaise** presents 60th Anniversary of Human Rights Declaration, 1-6 December.
- ❖ **AN Christmas Bazaar**, 6 December at the Hyatt Regency, 10AM-4.30 PM
- ❖ **For the Elimination of Violence Against Women**, film screenings till 9 December, 12PM, U.S. Embassy. 4007200



MUSIC

- ❖ **Tribute Concert to Stevie Nicks**, Moksh, 29 November, 7.30 PM. 5526212
- ❖ **Nasville Country Blues**, 30 November, Lazimpat Gallery cafe.
- ❖ **Kathmandu Chorale** presents Tis the Season, a Winter Concert, 13 December 2008 at 3.30- 6PM, The British School
- ❖ **Robin and the New Revolution** playing live every Tuesday, 7.10 PM onwards at Bamboo Club restaurant, Thamel. 4470157
- ❖ **Live Sensation**, live performance by Yankey, every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency. 4491234.
- ❖ **Rudra night** fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212

DINING

- ❖ **Thanksgiving dinner**, till 29 November, Kilroy's Restaurant. 4250440
- ❖ **Coffee & Chocolate** at the Lounge in Hyatt Regency. 4.30-6.30 PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Take away** at Te Restaurant from Bluebird Food Court and Welcome Food Plaza at Bakhundole, Sanepa. 5549331
- ❖ **Salmon Delicacies** at the Rox Restaurant from 7PM onwards. Hyatt Regency. 4489361
- ❖ **Organic Salad Bar and Steak** at Jalan Jalan restaurant every Friday from 6PM, Rs 650
- ❖ **Fusion** of Marcela Regan's new menu and Mannie's new bar at Dhokaima Cafe. 5522113
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Pasta pesto passion** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Steak special** with free Irish coffee at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4700043
- ❖ **Starry Night Barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la, Rs. 999, every Friday at the Shambala Garden, 6.30 PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Steak escape** with Kathmandu's premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- ❖ **Retro Brunch Barbeque** with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Ily Expression Coffee** at Hotel Shangrila, Lazimpat and Mandap Hotel, Thamel

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WEEKEND WEATHER by NIRMINDRA DAHAL

November is over, and still no rain in sight. This dry spell has now lasted two months, humidity in the afternoons in Kathmandu is down to 40 per cent. This satellite image from Thursday morning shows no change in current prominent weather features over the Himalaya. The circulation over southern India is too far away to make any difference to us, so expect clear skies leading to cold nights, smoggy mornings and breezy afternoons. PS: The clear sky should offer a spectacular view of Jupiter, Venus, Moon conjunction on the western sky before sunset on Monday 1 December.



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MANDU MANDALA

by PRERANA PAKHRIN





KIRAN PANDAY

HOLD IT: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal shakes hands with Indian Minister for External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee at the Prime Minister's residence, Baluwatar on Tuesday. On the right is Indian foreign secretary, Shiv Shankar Menon and on the left Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai.



KIRAN PANDAY

FESTIVE SPLENDOUR: Devotees celebrate Bada Chaturdasi at Pashupatinath on Tuesday night.



KIRAN PANDAY

HOLY TRAIL: Nepali Muslims attend a function in Kathmandu to bid farewell to 476 pilgrims who left for the holy city of Mecca for Hajj, which starts next month.

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The freest country in the world

Must give it to the Thais for improving on the South Asian concept of the hartal. Whereas our idea of bringing the country to a halt is to deploy a couple of teenagers wielding bricks at Kalanki, the Thais have now perfected the unique concept of the **airport gherao**.

Wonder why our andolankaris didn't think of that yet. It is time Nepali protesters learnt not to exempt planes from forced shutdowns by lying down on the airport access road, burning tyres on the apron and enforcing a chukka jams on the runway by breaking the windshields of airliners that defy their ban.



The ass is only half-joking when it says half-jokingly that Nepal is the freest country in the world. But we have to be much more creative if we want to maintain our lead in the face of this new competition from Thailand. It's not enough anymore to be satisfied with halting traffic on the highway for three days because textbooks haven't arrived. No longer does it suffice to shut down a cable car company by provoking its security guards to go on warpath. We can't be smug and complacent just because gas station owners go on strike demanding their right to continue **committing adultery** on diesel and petrol. How can we be satisfied with just tearing up the LLB exam papers because we didn't like the questions?

OK, sometimes we see flashes of brilliance, like the Dhanusa CA member who beat up some cops and then declared an indefinite bund on his home district in protest because the police dared complain. It is not enough to say we are the freest country in the world, we must vigilantly protect our freedom to do anything we like by doing anything we like all the time in all spheres of public life.



Now that the Maoist national convention is finito, its leaders can get back to doing nothing in real earnest. That is if these darned foreign visitors stopped visiting us. There was the PRC PLA delegation, followed by Pranab Bhai and the British development minister. Then there is the Danish foreign minister, and now the Chinese foreign minister. How are we ever going to get anything done around here?

Here the Ass must butt in to ask Upendra Yadav to please stop holding hands with foreign dignitaries. OK, Pranab Bhai didn't mind cos he's a Bong and **same-sex hand-holding** is accepted. But last month from the time Ban ki-Moon stepped off the ramp until he got to the VVIP room, Upud wouldn't let go off Ki-Moon Kaka's hand. Someone better warn the Chinese minister not be rattled by at all the diplomatic handholding when he arrives in KTM next month.



Meanwhile Farang Minister Yadav (who has been nursing a gripe against **refusenik ambassadors** for failing to show up at the airport everytime he goes anywhere with Awesome) has got his revenge by sending a directive to dips that they should think twice before meeting government and opposition leaders or the bureaucracy without first getting his official permission. This is a welcome development, and puts us in the same league as the North Koreans and Myanmarese, if anyone still had any doubts on that score.



The infighting within the Maobaddies is now in danger of degenerating into a battle between the PLA commanders and the YCL. The reason is money. While the PLA depends on the government's cantonment budget, the YCL has fattened itself on **large-scale extortion** and a protection racket. The result is that the YCL is now a law on to itself and doesn't have to listen to anyone anymore.



And the Kirati Minister of Culture and State Restructuring seems to be so ticked off he still doesn't have an office for his new ministry that he wants to make his presence felt in other ways. Last week he summoned hacks to his residence and handed them a **White Paper** on what he thought the new state should look like. It expanded the number of districts in Nepal from 75 to 800. That's a 500 percent improvement.



If the Baddies can bring back Surya Bahadur Sen Oli and other royal advisers, what's to prevent them from **resurrecting the monarchy**? Is that why there have been no moves to turn Naryanhiti into a museum?

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