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Prime Minister-elect and UML Chairman Jhala Nath Khanal scored an improbable victory on Thursday

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

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UML Chairman Jhala Nath Khanal is now the Prime Minister-elect, thanks to support from the Maoists in Thursday's election. He faces the multiple challenges of taking the peace process forward while balancing the interests of the other parties, especially leaders within UML and the Maoists.

MAN OF THE MATCH



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SLAP-HAPPY

The media is better placed than most to predict what will happen next in politics, but in Nepal this does not always apply. When politicians cannot be held accountable for what they say or do in private or public, anyone who claims to know what is going on is on shaky ground indeed.

With every turn of events in the ongoing saga of the peace process, there has been cause for hope, cynicism or despair. The formal handover of PLA combatants to the Special Committee a fortnight ago was one such milestone. Did the event represent a major stride towards integration of the ex-combatants, and thereby the conclusion of the peace process? Or was it another ‘red’ herring let loose by Chairman Dahal to appease his detractors on the domestic and international fronts?

Once more, the potential significance of the event has been obfuscated by statements from the Maoist leadership claiming they still hold the chain of command over the PLA. More immediately, the possibility of building on the symbolic handover is fizzling out in the all-too-familiar tussle for power.

Which brings us to Jhala Nath Khanal, our likely prime minister-elect at the time of going to press. Did that resounding slap not bring him to his senses? Even if he could dismiss his attacker as a ‘gnat’, surely he is politically



RSS

perceptive enough to recognise the public anger against him and his ilk in the applause that slap generated? To go from red-faced to abir-faced will not be enough to erase the memory. He may be able to spin his ludicrous position into one of necessity, but all we can hear is this: “I withdrew support for a majority government led by my own party, and now I am ready to lead another majority government.”

The difference, of course, is that there will be many more hands reaching out to slap him once he settles down in Baluwatar. He will lead a government, thanks to the last-minute shenanigans of MJF (Democratic)’s Bijaya Kumar Gachchhadar. But this will be a government that the Maoists will assume they can control. His party and the nation may have been better off letting the Maoists lead from the front. With leaders like Khanal, who needs followers?

Khanal won't have a honeymoon; the knives will be out before very long. Let's hope the famous slap sharpened his senses. He will be hard-pushed to keep his eyes on the tough road ahead if he's busy watching his back. But we wish him luck. He will need all the diplomatic skills he can muster just to stay afloat, but if he is to make a mark before 28 May, he will need to rise above the treacherous waters of Nepali politics.

ON THE WEB
www.nepalitimes.com

PRIVATE ECONOMIES

The political economy of Nepal is not going to change unless the political parties stop using the government as a venue to give their cadres employment (‘The politics of the economy’, Prashant Jha, #538). Privatisation of public entities will take that power out of the politicians’ hands and make them weak. And for that reason, there is no political will to privatise public companies.

However, for Nepal to become a vibrant economy, the government should get out of consumer business and focus on implementing fair rules. A nation cannot be run by government entities, and that’s why the Maoist model will not work. While they decry the feudalists and the private sector, their social program is based on hand-feeding their cadres with plum sectors like media, banking, etc. There is no sustainable economic model there. No incentive for cadres to create jobs and sustain the economy. Why should they, when their mother party is showering them with gans, bans and kapas? It’s just the collection of funds from one group to give it to another group. Nothing is created, nothing is traded.

S Onta

● If the Government of Nepal is privatised it will be far better, the new constitution should say ‘may be privatised’. We will pay equity to everyone. There will be no strikes, no difference of opinion, etc.

Chatur

NATURALLY NC

Attributing actions or inactions to NC is like attributing actions or inactions to a puppet (‘What is the NC waiting for?,

Damakant Jayshi, #538). Puppets are not the doers, the string-pullers are.

KK Sharma

● Damakant’s analytical power at its best. The suggestions put forward by him deserve due attention. However, he is telling dogs to leave bones alone! Not done in New Nepal. NC as a party has been fractured, and discredited mainly due to its most corrupt leaders. Apart from the Maoists, there needs to be an alternative force (read: party). Only time will tell.

Ram B. Chhetri

WHOLESOME CUPPAS

Delighted to see that equal opportunities for women are being observed on this tea estate (‘Everyone’s cup of tea’, Jana

● It is highly commendable that Jun Chiyabari has taken the higher ground and is empowering women and allowing gender equality in the workplace, while expanding in the international market. This topic is much talked about in the global sphere, but not too many businesses are able to handle it this way. Apart from this, having tasted tea from this estate, I must say that as a staunch tea drinker, the quality is second to none. I wish Thailand had some available!

Dr Nalinee Taveesin, Thailand

LOOK WEST

Excellent piece! (‘A default state’, Bibhav Acharya, #538) I will add two personal observations:

First, it’s not like the ‘far’ western districts never had representation in Kathmandu. In fact, a lot of such politicians have even managed to hold ministerial positions in the cabinets since 1990. Deuba even went on to become prime minister. We now have Bhim Rawal in a prominent portfolio. Why did not a single one of them take a few steps to make life easier for these fellow Nepalis?

Second, the ‘Maoists’ used and abused the ‘far’ west during their guerilla war. One would think that having seen the difficult topography and struggled first hand through the harsh conditions, they would be more susceptible to the cries for help from the destitute population in these areas. Not a single policy was put forward to help them when the ‘Maoists’ came to power.



Asenbrennerova, #538). I’m sure that for companies like Jun Chiyabari the benefits of this kind of forward thinking will have had both immediate and long-term positive ramifications for the day-to-day running of the business, and contributes to the social credibility of their international image as well.

Karen Haines, NZ

What’s the lesson learnt? Our ‘leaders’ lack empathy, and sadly, it’s only empathy that can bring the best out of people.

FunkyBuddha

SLAP-HAPPY

Ek mukka diye pugdaina dui mukka diye badi hunchha, ke game? (‘The slap that shook Nepal’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #538) (One blow isn’t enough, two blows are too much, what to do?)

Gole

SERVE THE POOR

I totally agree with Dr Karki (‘Missionary zeal’, Michael Cox, #538) - it is not only academic/intellectual abilities that should be considered when medical students are selected - are they really keen on healing and helping fellow human beings? Are they able to empathise? Do they have the capacity to feel for those who are suffering?

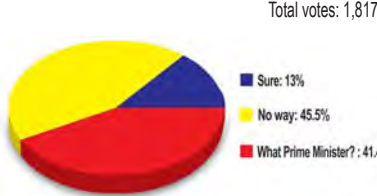
Or are they pressurised into it by their family or society? Best wishes to Dr Karki on his mission.

R Rai



nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 539

Q. Will we have a prime minister by February 5?



Weekly Internet Poll # 540. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should anyone be allowed to bury their dead in Pashupati area?





PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

NEW DELHI. Speaking at a welcome function organised by the Nepal Democracy Solidarity Committee on Monday evening, President Ram Baran Yadav hit all the right notes.

He emphasised the unique nature of India-Nepal ties, expressed his hope that Nepali political forces would be able to resolve all their problems, brought in a personal touch about his memories and political socialisation in Calcutta and Chandigarh, hailed India as a model for liberal democracy, and asked for Indian support for the ‘conclusion of the peace process, writing of a democratic constitution, and the holding of new elections under the new constitution.’ The Indian side reciprocated in kind, with leading politicians from across the spectrum hailing the change in Nepal, and expressing support for a ‘democratic, republican, stable, peaceful and prosperous Nepal’.

Presidential poise

Even though it was a public event, the president’s message set the tenor for the rest of his visit and was a fair indication of the kind of conversations he had. During high-level official visits, especially at the level of a head of state who does not wield executive authority, there is little of immediate operational significance that is discussed. Clichés are repeated; everyone pretends to be best friends; and politics is dealt with in generalities. It is through the small gestures, the nuanced line during a conversation, and the questions asked that intentions and thought processes are understood and messages conveyed.

The Indian side laid out the red carpet for the president for the second time in a year. The rituals, pomp and ceremony may be the same for the visit of any head of state. But the message, both directly and through the paraphernalia, was to convey India’s full recognition and support for the institution of the presidency as a pillar of the Nepali state in these fragile times. It was as much a message to all those who, in

the Indian perception, either wish to reverse the 2006 republican transformation or go beyond it. The warm reception was also intended to reaffirm their respect for Dr Yadav personally, who India believes played a key role in ‘preserving the architecture of democracy in Nepal’ in May 2009.

When asked about the current political impasse on government formation, the president briefed his

combatants. While expressing optimism about recent developments in the peace process such as the handover of the PLA to the special committee, the president said he had faith in the judgment of Nepali political parties. He also emphasised that all the political forces, including the Maoists, were still in the process, and the process itself would lead to an outcome. Significantly, without mentioning the word

had a position that was at once clear, yet left room for interpretation. He emphasised that Nepali institutions were functional; there was no constitutional crisis; and the impasse was a result of political differences. Nepal’s interim constitution would remain in force as long as there was no new constitution, and in his capacity as the president, he would remain committed to protecting the constitution. But Dr Yadav was cautious, and reiterated the importance of the political process, political consultations, and how that would lead to a solution.

Concern about a major political crisis was lurking in the background in all the major conversations. But the Indian side was careful not to push, and not be seen as pushing, any message – it was more interested in hearing out the president’s assessment and how he saw his role. The president too was careful not to commit to any course of action; did not speak critically of the Maoists in official engagements or lobby with India; and placed the onus on the judgment of Nepali politicians. The visit helped both sides build on a warm equation, and size each other up better as the endgame approaches in Nepal. 🇳🇵

The president was careful not to ruffle any feathers, home and abroad, during his visit to India

Indian interlocutors about the change in election rules and his hope that there would be a result this time. Even though the Indian leadership is too mature and sophisticated to make its preferences known at that level, the president, for good measure, added he would work with anyone that the process threw up.

There was concern about the peace process, with even the Indian PM asking about the status of former Maoist

sequencing, the president added that conclusion of the peace process would enhance trust levels and pave the way for smoother constitution-writing.

There was no loose talk of presidential rule post 28 May. But the president was subtly asked what the implications would be if the constitution is not drafted on time, and whether there could be a vacuum.

Well prepared by his advisers, the president

THIS WEEK

PM in the House

UML Chairman Jhala Nath Khanal was elected prime minister late Thursday after UCPN (Maoist) decided to withdraw the candidacy of its chairman, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and throw its weight behind him.

The Maoist move to support Khanal came after Dahal’s chances were fatally undermined by the last-gasp announcement on Wednesday of the candidacy of MJF (D) President Bijaya Kumar Gachchhadar. This effectively split the Madhesi alliance Dahal was relying on, and prompted him to ask his party to support a UML-led government with Khanal as prime minister. Reports indicate there was serious disagreement within the Maoist party, with the Baburam Bhattarai faction registering a note of dissent but agreeing to vote in favour in Khanal.


President in India

President Ram Baran Yadav on Thursday began his 10-day visit to India, his second trip to Nepal’s southern neighbour in a year. Ministers for federal affairs, the constituent assembly and culture, his political advisor, and various secretaries accompanied him. He will be meeting his Indian counterpart Pratibha Patil and Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh as well as other top-ranking officials. In a statement, India’s external affairs ministry said the visit would be an opportunity to exchange views and hold discussions on issues of mutual interest and concern. He is scheduled to return home on 5 February.



Treasure it

The Supreme Court on Tuesday issued a stay order to the government asking it not open the main treasury of Pashupatinath Temple. The interim order will be effective until the court takes a new decision after hearing both sides on 10 February. The stay order issued by a single bench of Justice Girish Chandra Lal was in response to a PIL filed by Bharat Mani Jangam on Thursday demanding court intervention to nullify the caretaker government’s decision to open the main treasury of Pashupatinath. Last month, the government decided to open the main treasury to maintain a record of valuables and ensure their safety. It is believed that the treasury has been under lock and key for centuries.




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BIKRAM RAI

BBC Nepali Service survives budget cuts, expands listenership

RUBEENA MAHATO

Every evening at a quarter to nine, from Darchula to Ilam, Nepal resonates with a familiar jingle and a well-modulated voice from London: “Yo BBC Nepali Sewa ho”. Over the years, as the country lived through democracy movements, conflict, absolute monarchy

and censorship, the daily news on the BBC Nepali Service has been the station most Nepalis have turned to for credible news and analysis. Today, even though the conflict is over and there is constitutionally guaranteed press freedom, Nepalis still turn to the BBC to make sense of what is happening in their own country. The latest survey has shown that an estimated 5.2

Kalpana Dhakal and Jitendra Raut read out letters for the feedback segment at the BBC Nepali Service studio in Naxal with Technical Manager Shyam Nepali (left)

million people tune into the BBC for its half-hour broadcasts every evening, relayed through 103FM in the Kathmandu Valley and a network of 150 stations all over the country. A further million people listen to the BBC online. BBC Nepali will probably experience a slight drop in audience numbers as it will stop broadcasting in shortwave from next month, but hopes to make up for the loss by expanding its syndicate partners. Even so, it already rivals Radio Nepal for the highest audience numbers in Nepal. But BBC Nepali’s impact goes beyond just numbers. This may be what saved the Nepali Service from the latest budget cuts in London last week, which resulted in the axing of seven language services (see box). The cuts will cost the BBC 30 million listeners worldwide, and have been subjected to plenty of criticism.

“Despite being small compared to other world services, we have consistently managed to survive cuts because of the impact we have and the value that we add to the broadcast,” explains Rabinendra Mishra, the head of the Nepali Service, based in Kathmandu. BBC Nepali’s listeners come from a broad swathe of society, from political bigwigs to ordinary people. Despite clashing with primetime TV, the news and current affairs programs are so popular, politicians are known to carry FM earphones in their pockets to avoid missing the evening bulletin. Says avid BBC fan, Nepali writer Kumar Acharya: “It has become a habit, I listen to it every day to make sense of the politics. BBC gives me a synopsis, whereas other TV and radio bulletins leave me confused.”

Letters from listeners flood into BBC’s studio in Naxal, Kathmandu, from all over Nepal and the world. The online listenership ranks among the top ten in the BBC despite Nepal’s relatively smaller diaspora. Unlike radio, with online service, audience do not have to wait till evening for the news and can listen to programs again and again. Says Mishra, “What gives the Nepali Service such an impact is that it speaks to a large section of society. Everyone wants to hear what is happening, after all.” Mani Rana, who retired in 2003 after working for BBC Nepali for over 30 years since its inception in London, remembers the heady early days. “Our audience numbers rose dramatically during the 1990 democratic movement,” he recalls. “The state media had no coverage of the movement and the BBC Nepali Service became the only source of factual information.” This happened again during king Gyanendra’s rule, following his coup in February 2005 when there was complete censorship, and during the second movement for democracy in April 2006. Apart from its core staff in London and Kathmandu, BBC Nepali has correspondents and stringers across the country, and quite a few of them are women. Although the staple fare continues to be politics, the programming has shifted to make room for social issues, art, entertainment, and sports. BBC Nepali has also responded to audience complaints about world news being given priority to news from Nepal by kicking off its bulletins with domestic news. It is also looking into having short morning bulletins. Mishra sums it up: “Our audience wants more news about Nepal and more airtime, and we are looking into doing just that.”

 [www.bbc.co.uk/nepali/
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Off the waves

On 27 January, the BBC announced the closure of its Albanian, Macedonian, Portuguese for Africa, Serbian and English for Caribbean regional services. It also said it was stopping programs in Azeri, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish for Cuba, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Ukrainian. Medium and short wave transmissions will be phased out with content available online. Short wave transmissions in Hindi, Bahasa Indonesia, Kyrgyz, Nepali, Swahili and the Great Lakes service (for Rwanda and Burundi) will be terminated in March. There are now 26 language services left and the BBC hopes to save GBP 46 million a year with these cuts. www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice



RABI THAPA

Jaipuri lessons

If we are to host big events, we need to take our cue from the Jaipur Literature Festival



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

When you have close to 50,000 people at a free event hosted within a couple of acres, you have to be up to the challenge. For this Beed, visiting the Jaipur Literature Festival for the second time, it was an impressive show. Events are getting bigger in Nepal, too, so there are a few lessons for us here.

To make a success of an event, you need a real tough general leading the way. At Jaipur, there were four venues, where hour-long sessions ran over five days. Packed audiences moved seamlessly from one venue to another. Importantly, when a session was meant to last an hour, it lasted sixty minutes. This may seem obvious, but in Nepal an hour usually has a variable number of minutes. If we are to host good events, then we need to ensure that people understand that a minute has sixty seconds and an hour has sixty minutes. Just watch the way our people talk on television shows or run conferences and seminars. We could take our cue from Nepa-laya, which is doing a good job of starting programs on time and putting up good shows.

Before I left Nepal, I was asked who was going to inaugurate the Jaipur festival. Perhaps the Prime Minister? Hardly. It was the Chief Minister of Rajasthan who did the honours, after which he discreetly made his exit, with nary a speech. The thousands present were then left to the literature they had come to celebrate. In Nepal, we would do well to discard our infatuation with political figures, who in any case are usually wholly unsuited

to the events they are inaugurating.

For events to be successful, we need team performance, from the generals to the soldiers on the ground. For five days, this Beed watched a group of people whose only job was to pick up the trash. No matter what was going on, no matter who was on stage, they kept at their job. Shuttle vehicles took people to their hotels and back at regular intervals, making the whole experience much more restful for the attendees. It is people like these who make events a success. In Nepal, volunteers are more likely to be in the front row, listening to the concert, as no one wants to deal with filthy toilets. Those in charge of security are usually no better, and situations are much more likely to spiral out of control. Memories of a badly managed World Cup

football final in our city stadium are still fresh.

Event management was the key to the success of the Jaipur festival. Nepali event managers would do well to visit Jaipur to get their own events right. There are companies like DMI in Nepal, who are getting better at defining professionalism, but the hosts of so-called event management firms need to learn what it is to deliver beyond people's expectations. It is not about resources, having the best audio-visual equipment, or the best venues, it is the management of such resources that makes events stand out.

Kudos to Teamworks, the producers of the Jaipur Literature Festival. We hope to see them do something in Nepal too, in collaboration with Nepali firms. Perhaps a Southasian Cultural Festival?  www.arthabeed.com

High-end of town

Urban Oasis Projects launched four new stores in Pulchowk on 29 January. The brands to open the stores are Tresmode and Catwalk with their premium footwear range, Hidesign with its savvy and contemporary leather collection, and Samsonite, which caters to the needs of the global traveler.

Branching out

NIC Bank opened its 33rd branch in Sandhikharka of Argakhachi on 1 February. The branch will provide a full range of products and services including loans, deposits, transaction banking services, card payments, internet and mobile banking.



New tablet

The OlivePad, a 3.5G wi-fi enabled Tablet with Android 2.2, has been launched in Nepal by Olive Telecom along with other products under the brand Olive Convergence. The tablet provides computer functions, mobile and smartphone functions, and comes loaded with the Zenga TV application that allows users to surf their favourite channels.

Two is better

Call Mobility Pvt. Ltd., the sole authorised distributor of Motorola, has launched two Dual SIM mobile handsets in Nepal. Apart from being one of the most affordable in the category, the new launches EX 115 and EX 128 come with exciting features like 32 GB expandable memory, a 3 MP camera and applications like Facebook, YouTube and Opera.

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NC's loss

NC must move on from its mistakes and reach out to Khanal and the Maoists



MY TAKE
Damakant Jayshi

UML Chairman Jhala Nath Khanal will most likely be Prime Minister-elect by the time this goes to press. A decision by the Maoist Party to withdraw its candidate, Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and vote in favour of Khanal, has made this possible. Of course, the Baburam Bhattarai camp has opposed this decision, but has said it will cast its votes as per the party's decision.

This is not a loss for the Maoists. Dahal is actually having the last laugh. He will now have a pliant and obligated person as prime minister, who will have to make some serious concessions to the Maoist party, and particularly to Dahal. The exact details of the deal between Khanal and Dahal are yet to be made public but rest assured they will be soon.

The biggest loser here is NC. It serves them right. The party establishment led by president Sushil Koirala as well as the rival camp led by Sher Bahadur Deuba could not see beyond their personal considerations. The Koirala faction, in particular, was listening too much to private advice over the past two



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

weeks.

The NC's idea of extracting more from a 'cornered' Maoist party was very much out of sync with reality. The ambitions of its candidate, Ram Chandra Poudel, was also at play here. Poudel's candidacy in the last session of parliament was a deadwood candidacy but it had immense value. He could not win but ensured that the Maoists did not get the post of prime minister without first delivering.

NC's decision not to reciprocate with the Maoist decision to officially hand over their ex-combatants to the

government's Special Committee is baffling. There is still the risk that the Maoists will keep control of their army, despite the handover ceremony. But those risks will only increase since NC lost an opportunity to reciprocate by supporting a Maoist-led government and make Dahal deliver on his party's commitment to peace-related agreements. NC still has the best chance to cobble together anti-Maoist forces should the communist party really start moving towards its avowed goal of a 'proletarian state' (read one-party communist rule). But the image NC has of acting at India's behest will put off many non-Maoists. Did the party seriously reflect about the fallout of its decision?

Dahal won't be too happy with NC. The animosity between NC and

the Maoists will now be too strong to ignore, affecting constitution-writing. Don't be surprised if the proposed integration of Maoist combatants into government security forces, especially the army, comes across more obstacles. The Nepal Army has started issuing statements to this effect already. These are not good signs for the peace process.

NC may curse UML for not reciprocating its absolute support to its man as prime minister, Madhav Kumar Nepal. Additionally, Khanal will now be beholden to Dahal and will be compelled to make large concessions vis-a-vis the peace process and the constitution. (This is what the Maoist hardliners want; only Dahal's ambition was playing spoilsport here.) NC will not be able to do anything, apart from issuing statements. It will be on the sidelines, unable to force a change in the direction politics will move in after another acrimonious election. Has NC forgotten why we were holding this election in the first place?

An avoidable mistake has been made. A Dahal obliged to NC was a much better prospect for peace and the constitution than an obliged Khanal to the Maoist party. NC has lost a very good opportunity.

Can the party still salvage the situation? It all depends on how much it is willing to reach out to Dahal and his party as well how much it cooperates with the Khanal government. damakant@gmail.com



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MICHAEL COX

Experimenting with the essence of contemporary art sounds ominous. But when Ashmina Ranjit puts a new spin on the art world of Nepal, it's time to listen.


Ranjit says her new Jhamsikhel art hub, Lasanaa, is based on the contemporary idea of activism. She defines activism as art and activism combined to redefine political art. "Art is a tool for social change and the Lasanaa art space is trying to redefine the notion of art and artists," she says.

The initiative isn't some off-the-rack trend picked up from western contemporary art. Ranjit draws on the political and cultural changes of the last 20 years. With the help of a team of academics and artists, she has finally been able to realise her dream to create a space that will define activism in Nepal.

As Ranjit envisages it, Lasanaa will feature art and dialogue as expressed through video, sound, performance and other forms of experimental art. The space will serve as much as an open gallery to disseminate art as for the ideas they embody, and will bring together contemporary art, creative thinking, and the essence of art into an interactive hub.

A key objective for Lasanaa is also to "break the line", and demonstrate to people that art is more than paintings that hang on walls and beautify homes. "People here misunderstand the word contemporary art," Ranjit says. For her, artists too have to reflect on history if they are to produce contemporary art. "If this kind of essence is missing it's not contemporary," she says.

Indeed the recent international workshop, Glocalization of Art, and the three-day workshop that followed, epitomised such on engagement with current issues. The results, which were exhibited in Lasanaa at the start of December (*see pictures*), included an installation that used defunct televisions, prayer flags defaced with noodle adverts, and other slogans to comment on the clash of modernity and tradition in contemporary Nepal.

Ranjit laments Nepal's current education system, which according to her spoonfeeds future artistic minds. But if she has her way Lasanaa will be a site "where art is happening all the time", not for its own sake, but to encourage political art that can push society in a positive direction. Perhaps then, she says, "Art can be for the people." 

ARTIVISM

New space in Jhamsikhel to encourage political art





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EVENTS



Call for entries for Film Southasia, a festival of South Asian documentaries. 29 September to 2 October, early submission deadline: 31 May 2011, final submission deadline (for films made after April 2010): 31 June 2011, Film Southasia Secretariat, Patan Dhoka, 5552141, www.filmsouthasia.org, fsa@filmsouthasia.org

Mystic muse, exhibition of paintings and mixed media works by artist Chirag Bangdel. Till 6 February, Chai Chai Gallery and Café, Jhamsikhel

CAN Info Tech, latest products, technologies and software solutions. Till 6 February, Exhibition hall, Bhrikuti Mandap



Tavern Tales Special, featuring Manjushree Thapa in conversation with Indian author Dilip Simeon about his recently published bestseller 'Revolution Highway'. 4 February, 6pm, Quixote's Cove Bookshop, Entry Fee: Rs. 50 (suggested), refreshments, including Aila and tidbits will be on offer, the book will be available at Rs 480

Grahan: an eclipse, exhibition of paintings by Sagar Manandhar. 23 January to 6 February, Gallery Hours: 10.30am to 5. 30pm, Saturdays closed, Park Gallery, RN Joshi Center for Fine Art, Pulchok

The New World Rhizome, exhibition of paintings by Indra Raj Subba 'Soshu'. Starts 6 February, 5.30pm, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamsikhel, 5521120, www.kathmanduarts.org

Royal Nepal 1930: Through the lens of Richard Gordon Matzene, book launch and exhibition of rare photographs. Till 18 February, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4218048/4438979

DINING

Krishnarpan, a specialty Nepali Restaurant at The Dwarika's Hotel, 6 to 22 courses, an authentic Nepali meal. The Dwarika's Hotel, Battisputali, 4479488

Pumpernickel Bakery, get an early breakfast or brunch with interesting choices of bread and sandwiches. Experiment with their goat cheese or yak cheese sandwiches, or have a sip of coffee in the classy indoor dining area. Thamel, 7.30am-7pm, 4259185

A photograph of a woman in a grey sweater and white shawl, smiling and holding a large metal bowl filled with a colorful salad. She is standing in front of a traditional brick building with many ears of corn hanging from the eaves.

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

The ancient Newari town of Kirtipur is hosting a festival to promote its unique cultural and historical heritage. The festival that will continue till 6 February also has an exhibit of 140 copper and stone statues by artist Ram Krishna Bhandari reflecting local culture. Rituals from birth to death in Newari society, as well as Kirtipur's rich culinary tradition, are also being showcased.

Black Pepper Café & Pub, cosmopolitan dining and drinking in a traditional style courtyard, try the apple sauce pork chops and enjoy the good service. Kopundole Height, Lalitpur, 5521897, 5536926, <http://blackpepper.com.np>

Saturday @ Hyatt, come and spend a day with your family this winter. Your children can enjoy on-site fun and games, as well as a kid-friendly menu. Hyatt Regency, Boudha, for reservations call 4491234

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11am to 6pm, **Vegetarian Buffet** at The Café every Tuesday from 6.30pm, and **Arabian Nights** at The Café every Friday from 6.30pm at Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234, 4489362

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

If not for a Kaiser, then a rajah

It was Friday night, but early as we were, we had Dwarika's Kaiser Café Restaurant & Bar almost wholly to ourselves. All the better to admire the simple, tastefully done two-storey building comprising outdoor and indoor seating.

We were quickly ushered inside, installed next to a gas heater, furnished with menus, and left to admire the framed, bookish demeanour of the previous owner of the complex: Kaiser Sumshere JBR. What would the Field Marshal, so admiring of European culture, have made of the continental fare available at the restaurant that bears his name today?

Armed with glasses of Chilean red, we tucked into the excellent Seafood Cappuccino, a rich tomato-based soup leavened with chunks of prawn



DWARIKA'S GROUP

and topped with a creamy foam. The Grilled Oyster Mushroom with Roast Cumin, too, was tasty, except for the fact that it was breaded and fried, and weighed heavy on our tummies. Would we be able to do justice to our mains?

The Steak a la King, accompanied with a mushroom basil sauce, mashed potatoes and vegetables, put that question to rest. A crunchy crust gave way to tender, perfectly poised medium rare meat, and I could barely bring myself to covet my companion's

charcoal baked fish, though the sight of rapidly emptied plate was proof of the pudding. The tastiest meal in a long time, she declared. It was only for form's sake that we shared a dessert, so stuffed were we. The light Lime Yoghurt Cake fit the bill, and we staggered out into the night.

Good portions, excellent service, and given all that, prices that don't set your teeth on edge. Bravo!

PS It was with some annoyance that we forked out Rs 80 to be allowed to

pass through the Garden of Dreams on our way to the restaurant. I agree that an excellent job has been done on the restoration of this historic garden, and that maintenance could use some form of public support. But can't Dwarika's come to an agreement with the government regarding separate access to the restaurant, so those only looking for food and drink aren't compelled to subsidise the lip-lockers that have thronged the garden of late?

Nepalikukur



Vesper Café, has quaint outdoor patio good for leisurely weekend brunch. Serves good salads, and steak-wraps. *Jhamsikhel*

Hankook Sarang, serves up the incredible tastes of Korea, including superlative steamed rice to anchor meals fit for kings. *Thamel, near Roadhouse Café.*



Attic, newly transformed lounge/bar ideal for Friday night drinking before hitting the dance spots. *Uttar Dhoka, Lazimpat, 984161476*

MUSIC

Ke-sang on acoustic guitar and vocals. *Every Saturday, 7pm onwards, New Orleans Coffee Shop Garden, Jhamsikhel, 5522708 for reservations*

Musical programme by Western classical guitarist Daniel Linden. *5 February, 5pm onwards, Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, Rs 500, 5553767/ 5522113*

Absolute Live Music, by Rashmi & Kitcha Band every Friday and performances by Shabnam & Cannabiz Band every Wednesday. *7.30pm onwards, Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, Pulchok, Lalitpur, 5521408, 5549504, abar@wlink.com.np*

Sunday Jazz Brunch, enjoy a relaxing Sunday in The Terrace at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu with barbeque and live jazz music by Inner Groove. *12pm to 3.30pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234/4489362*

Jindabaad: Plastic Heart EP, *House of Music, 4 February, 8pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, Rs 200*



GETAWAYS



Overnight Package at The Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, for local residents, package includes accommodation in Himalayan room, dinner and breakfast. *Dhulikhel, Rs 4,000 (Single), Rs 5,700 (Double). The package rates are subject to a 10% service charge. For more information/reservations call 4479488 Dwarika's Hotel, Sales & Marketing Department.*

Park Village Resort, Saturdays and Sundays combo package with swimming, lunch and a bottle of beer. *Budhanilkantha, Rs 990 for adults and Rs 800 for children, call 4375280 for reservations*

Weekends Treks Out Package, for expats and locals, 3-day Kathmandu Valley Cultural Treks (Kathmandu/Lankuri/Balthali/Namobuddha/Kathmandu), includes 2 overnight stays in Lankuri and Balthali with meals, guide and drop & pick-up services. *Himal Nepal Tours and Treks, Lazimpat, info@himanepaladventures.com, 9841766561, 012081099*

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Looking too healthy?



A western friend once told me that when a Nepali says you look ‘very healthy’, he euphemistically means you are morbidly obese. Obesity is an increasing problem in Nepal, and besides giving us a prosperous look, the extra weight adds to chronic medical problems.

The ‘X’ syndrome is known by a more mundane name - the metabolic syndrome - and obesity is one of its key characteristics. Experts say that the presence of abdominal obesity is more highly correlated with metabolic risk factors than one’s body-mass index (BMI). A measurement of a patient’s girth size indicates potential risk factors for diabetes or cardiovascular problems like strokes and heart attacks.

The numbers to remember are: more than 102cm (>40 inches) for a male adult waist, and more than 88cm (>35 inches) for a female adult waist. Male patients can develop multiple metabolic risk factors with only a slight increase in their abdominal girth, and those with a waist measurement of 94-102cm may have a strong genetic contribution to insulin resistance. This means they have diabetic problems. Guess what, diabetes is a common condition in south Asia.



The other ‘non-blood test’ parameter to be tested for the ‘X’ syndrome is blood pressure. And blood pressure levels >130/> 85mm of Hg are deemed risky. Blood tests can look at three things: levels of fasting glucose, HDL, and triglycerides. Levels of fasting glucose >110mg/dl are suspect, and you’re at lower risk for diabetes with low levels of HDL (‘good cholesterol’) and high levels of triglycerides.

These five parameters - waist size, blood pressure, blood glucose, HDL, and triglyceride levels - make up the clinical identification of the metabolic syndrome. However, any deranged single parameter is a risk factor. At least three abnormal values will identify a patient suffering from the full-fledged metabolic syndrome, and this will increase a patient’s risk for cardiovascular illnesses many times over.

The good news is that a healthy lifestyle including exercise, not smoking, and moderate to no alcohol intake will definitely have a positive impact on waist size, blood pressure and blood glucose. Lifestyle changes, then, are one way of not appearing ‘too healthy’ in Nepal. 🇳🇵

GREEN SCENE

Green bricks

The Kathmandu Valley’s smog owes much to the highly polluting brick kilns that dot its southern expanses. What’s worse, the smoke billowing out of these towers obscures the terrible conditions in which its workers - including many children and donkeys - slave for minimal reward. These are the victims of the capital’s housing boom.

It’s time we moved away from ‘blood bricks’. This may be possible now, as Animal Nepal’s award to Indra Tuladhar of Bungamati Itha Udyog last week indicated.



Tuladhar was honoured for producing ‘clean and green’ bricks using Chinese technology, and the animal welfare organisation hopes other brick producers will follow suit to reduce pollution and stop the exploitation of kids and animals. “The industry has the technology and the resources to stop the production of ‘blood bricks’; all it needs is the right motivation,” says Krishna Singh, program manager at Animal Nepal. “We can address

the issues by introducing new technologies such as Vertical Shaft Brick Kilns and automated machinery.”

The brick factory, located in Bungamati, introduced Chinese automated brick-making machinery in 2009. The factory now produces bricks year round, and does not employ migrant workers, children or donkeys. Workers are contracted and earn fixed salaries. The improved technology means that significantly less emissions are produced, making for less hazardous work conditions. The bricks themselves are transported by electric carts, negating the need for donkeys. Bungamati Itha Udyog is one of three factories in Nepal using this technology.

Tuladhar was well aware of the labour problems, animal abuse, and pollution the brick industry was responsible for. So when he learnt about the new technology, he took the opportunity to clean up his own factory. To encourage both suppliers and buyers to tap into ‘green bricks’, a network of NGOs active in environmental protection, children’s rights and animal welfare, including Animal Nepal, have come together to promote a responsible brick-making industry. A certification system will be introduced that will provide brick factories with a red, orange or green label.

Animal Nepal’s award to Tuladhar was supported by Dutch Party for the Animals member Martin Schoenmakers. Together with Animal Nepal Volunteer Director Lucia de Vries, Schoenmakers presented Tuladhar with a certificate and gifts. The clean bricks producer now plans to build better housing for his workers and introduce a firing system that will result in almost zero emissions. 🇳🇵



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

GOING TO A PARTY: Newari ladies head to the five-day Kirtipur Mahotsav that began Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

RESPECT OUR DEAD: Kirantis protest the government’s decision to prohibit burials in Sleshmantak Forest, Pashupati, Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

FLYING HIGH: Rock band Albatross launch their new album ‘Atti Bhayo’ (Too Much) at Patan Darbar Square.

WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The prominent feature of this week’s weather is a significant temperature rise along the Himalaya and northern India. The Kathmandu Valley recorded a 2-degree rise in a week, signalling the approaching spring. A fresh pressure chart of the continent indicates Nepal will experience warmer days over the weekend due to low pressure. Satellite images show an expanding layer of low-lying fog over the Tarai and advancing westerly fronts with moisture-bearing clouds over Kashmir. However, there is little chance the clouds will reach Nepal. Expect extended morning fogs, sunny intervals and warmer days ahead.



FRI	SAT	SUN
21-4	22-4	22-5

Jaipur: jostle or josh?



KALAM

Rabi Thapa

Is there really such a thing as becoming 'a victim of your own success' if you're just getting bigger and bigger (and don't die in the process)? For purists, the phrase can refer to 'over-commercialisation' that pushes an event or product along lines perhaps not originally intended by those responsible, or at least not appreciated by those who were there at the start.

Metallica, middle-aged rockers of Napster notoriety and purveyors of increasingly lumbering hard rock, fit the bill in this sense. Before they hit the big time with their 1991 *Metallica* ('The Black Album'), they were revered as the uncompromising masters of thrash metal. Arguably they are doing even better than ever now, with five consecutive studio albums debuting at No.1 on the Billboard 200 since 1991. But tell a fan from the 1980s that you like Metallica, and he's likely to sneer, "So you started with the black album, right?"

The Jaipur Literature Festival has had a similarly rocking trajectory since it debuted in 2006. The inaugural festival featured 18 writers



RABI THAPA

Where festivals are concerned, the good old days are passé

and about 100 attendees, who in the words of co-director (and writer) William Dalrymple "appeared to be tourists who had simply got lost." This year, the festival had 226 speakers (including Nobel laureates JM Coetzee and Orhan Pamuk), and an estimated 50,000 attendees. Unmitigated success, then? It would seem so, but talk to regular attendees, and you get a sense that Jaipur is too much of a muchness.

Even by last year's standards,

when a publisher explained to me that she was staying away from the festival because "the idea of an industry party is dull enough, and that of a full-fledged fete horrid", Jaipur 2011 was a blockbuster. The crowds normally only seen for marquee authors spilled over into obscure sessions featuring anyone with international recognition. And, in the case of 'Fractious borders: the ups & downs of Himalayan relationships', sessions featuring anyone famous in the audience.

While Sujeev Shakya and Narayan Wagle discussed Nepal-India relations with Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, swarms of schoolgirls buzzed around the edges, their eyes firmly on the two stars in attendance, Indian lyricists Gulzar and Javed Akhtar.

We spent much time standing, tut-tutting at people chattering away to each other or their phones during the sessions, and waiting in the serpentine queues for meals and book signings. Inching our way forward through the surging masses from the Vodafone Front Lawns to the Times of India/Coca-Cola stage, turning away from the sight of Candace Bushnell (creator of 'Sex & the City') in her matching tiger print shoes and handbag, it was easy to wonder whether Jaipur hadn't sold out, and if the spirit of the beast wasn't irredeemably tainted. Perhaps it was time to head to the more tranquil literary pastures of Galle, Dehradun, or Paro?

Hold on a minute, I'd tell those turned off by crowded, branded Jaipur, and ask yourself, has the pink city lost its literary soul? Has the branding affected the content in the same way that sponsorship has ruined cricket? Are the tens of thousands present interested more in celebrity than literature?

I'd say no. If the aim is to bring quality literature to the masses at a

free event, then the Jaipur festival has surely succeeded. If the elites for whom reading and writing has been an almost exclusive hobby for the bulk of history truly believe in the emancipatory power of literature, then they must also believe that having half a lakh people attend a five-day literature festival is a wonderful thing.

And if it takes branding and a smattering of celebrity authors to make this possible, then so be it. As long as the corporates don't determine content, and as long there is the option of listening to JM Coetzee on 'Imperial English' while 'Sex & the City' is running in a parallel session, it's all good (barring some complaints on crowd management). A literature festival must comprise a judicious mix of the highbrow and the lowbrow, the quick and the dead. And if compromise really is intolerable to the snobs, well then, there's always the aforementioned fests in Galle et al, and who knows, perhaps Kathmandu, soon.

So if the crowds throng Sujan Chitrakar's 'Let's talk about Art, baby!', Bryan Adam's February concert at the National Stadium, or Patan Darbar Square's annual Kartik Nach, this indicates both the success (of the organisers) and the passion (of the audience). Manage the content and the logistics, and the rest will be history.



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“The extreme right and left are feeding each other”



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Nepali Times spoke to Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai this week to gauge his reaction to the political deadlock and the tensions within his own party. The interview was conducted in English at his Sanepa residence. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: Looks like we are reaching a critical point in the peace process?

Baburam Bhattarai: The next four months are crucial for us. We have to come up with the new constitution, which will formalise the political agreements, and then we have to finalise the integration and rehabilitation of the PLA. No one side can now afford to accuse the others of going against the spirit of the agreement. Now that the monarchy is abolished the other parties are going back on their word, and they think that with international support they can marginalise us. The whole problem lies here.

Where is the international support coming from?

Because our party is called the Maoist party, the international community thinks we are not democratic. People have a cold war mindset, you see, they think these are Maoists so they can't be democratic.

The Europeans seem very happy with you?

Yes they are, but when the Maoists emerged as the dominant power in this country the others thought they would lose their political hold. That is why they joined hands to encircle us and silence us. And when we formed the government, they all ganged up against us and forced us to resign and for the last two years the whole process has been stuck.

But your party is polarised as well.

The extreme right and left are feeding each other, you see. When the basic demands are not fulfilled and the path of peaceful democratic development is blocked, then naturally the other side, the traditional Marxist leftist opposition, will feel that this strategy is not going to work and we may have to go back to armed struggle. So this is a reaction to the right regressive forces who don't want to bring changes to society. The danger of this extreme polarisation has been growing in recent times. If the traditional conservative side blocks change then there will be a backlash from the left and the whole thing may break down. That is the internal dynamics.

And there is the added external dynamics, our relations with India. The Indian establishment is very wary of the Maoists coming to power because if we come to power we will want to restructure our relationship.

Did you manage to reassure the Indians during your two recent visits to India?

I have been putting forth these views openly. We have to restructure our relations, but through peaceful and diplomatic and political means. We have no interest in going to war with India.

What needs to happen?

The best thing would be to have a national unity government, and work out a timeframe for the completion of the peace process including the integration of the armies. If there is an agreement among the major parties a national unity government is still possible. Ultimately what is delaying it is a power struggle among the three parties and between leaders within the three parties.

Does this include your party?

It happens in every party (laughs). There is always debate within a communist party, we have agreed that these issues will be debated within the party. The personality issue is not the only factor, but it is one of the factors. The three parties want to lead, and within the three parties individuals want to lead, but you have only one chair which can't be occupied by more than one person at the same time. So a formula has to be worked out: a rotational system, a presidium, or a neutral candidate from outside the three parties to head the government are possibilities.

Do you think the military will move in?

If we can't finalise the constitution by 28 May, then there is no constitutional provision for another election to form a government. There will be a vacuum and somebody will fill it and there is the danger again of a violent clash. We should avoid it at any cost and agree on setting up a unity government, and go for the completion of the peace agreement and writing the new constitution. And being the largest party, naturally, we should be heading the government. We are not just the largest, we have double the number of seats of the second largest party. We have more seats than the second and the third largest parties combined. *A full version of the interview is on*

www.nepalitimes.com



Shaktikhor waits

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA IN CHITWAN

Durga Dhakal and his wife Kamala Dahal, from Dang, put their lives at stake during the ten years of conflict. Now attending the combatant handover program at Shaktikhor with their two-year-old daughter, their only wish is that the country does not go back to war, and that they do not have to wait any longer. Durga and Kamala

were married five years ago, and fought in over 15 battles.

Shabnam Parajuli of Kavre and Usha Lamichhane of Gorkha, both ex-fighters, watch their husbands parade during the ceremonies. Their children watch with them. “Since having a child, the idea of going to battle scares me,” Usha says. Dipendra Buda Magar and Bipana live near the camp in Shaktikhor

Maoist ex-combatants want an end to the uncertainty over their futures





PICS: DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

with their son. Bipana hopes that in the future, her family will be able to earn more than the Rs 4,000 a month that her husband has been receiving from the cantonment. There are 200 women with children like Bipana in Shaktikhor.

The signing of the agreement letter on combatant handover to the Special Committee by Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal may have seemed historic. But many ex-combatants expressed skepticism, even if those with families appeared keen to believe it would lead to something.

Yangji Sherpa, 23, who joined the Maoists with her uncle when she was just 13, is not so sure that anything will come out of the agreement. “The handover took place but I doubt integration will be as easy,” she says. Yangji spent all her youth fighting, participating in over 15 battles, and lost her uncle to the war. She adds, “It is hard to say with the way politics is moving, but I hope things turn out well. Hope is all we have.”

Sabina Ghimire of Sindhupalchok, 23 and Nirmala Thapa of Makwanpur, 30, say that the coming together of party leaders has sparked hope, but they are not entirely convinced. Camp commander Ganesh Mahar (Gurans) says that they have sacrificed a lot for the sake of peace, and that it is now the government’s and parties’ responsibility to look after the combatants. Brigade Commander Bishnu

Kumar Limbu says however that the handover is more of a political gesture than an actual step towards integration and rehabilitation. “They should formally ask us to join the national army or go back home. Then we would either carry guns or tend fields. We would at least be free from the uncertainty inside the camp.”

Most combatants just want freedom from the captive life inside the camp, and express frustration over having to spend four years in a place where they were only supposed to stay for six months. Some who have run away have been found to be involved in criminal activities. Captain Durga of Anish Kalyan Memorial Brigade says that the government should mobilise such youths in the interest of the country.

While some combatants declined to speak to the media, others were more vocal. A battalion commander went as far as to label the program a ‘fine drama’. He vented his ire on his leaders, saying that they did not do anything for the combatants when the party was in power, deliberately delayed constitution-writing, and only plotted to get the post of prime minister. Another battalion commander lamented that all the talk of fighting for change felt like sheer nonsense and foolishness during the four years in the camp. “The party better stop hoping for anything from those in the camps if they are planning another revolution,” he said. 🇳🇵

Power sharing, post-handover

MADHAV KUMAR NEPAL

Despite the delay, the handover of the Maoist ex-combatants to the Special Committee has opened up the road towards their integration and rehabilitation. Now we can take the peace process ahead based on this understanding. It has been unanimously agreed that the UCPN (Maoist) should separate itself from its army and weapons. The Maoists themselves have been repeating their commitment towards finalising the peace process and have raised the need to prepare norms and standards for integration. Chairman Dahal did say the Maoists were ready for integration during the talks in Hattiban and Gokarna, but said nothing about the numbers, norms or modalities to be employed. Now we are working to give this a final shape. I have proposed a regrouping of those interested in integration and rehabilitation, and Maoist, NC and UML leaders sound positive. For this we should settle on standards based on consensus.

If we are still hoping for a majority system to elect a prime minister, it will take us nowhere. In the last meeting of the main parties, both NC and UML made it clear to the Maoists that they will not accept a Maoist-led government until they renounce their army and weapons. If the Maoists are willing to address this issue, we can have results in a couple of days.

There are two streams in the political scene right now. One believes the Maoists should not be supported till they completely give up their arms. The other is willing to support the Maoists as long as they provide enough evidence that they will work towards this goal. There is scope for consensus if we can settle on a basis of power sharing between these two sides.

It is not enough to present the modality of peace process on paper. There should be concrete steps taken to build an environment of trust. Dahal implemented the points of the October agreement four months later, in Shaktikhor. I believe there were two reasons for this delay: one, it was a ploy

to engage parties by making agreements without implementing them and two, because of internal fissures within the Maoists. I think the Maoists have finally implemented the agreements because they felt that keeping an army was hurting their credibility. But the problem is the Maoists are trying to earn trust in instalments, which in fact is not helping reduce the trust deficit among parties at all. The Maoists should understand this: if they are going to walk the path of peace and trust, why talk of revolt? It is only proving to be counterproductive for them. Either the Maoists have not understood this or don’t want to. The uncertainty and extreme leftism in the party has also contributed to the delay.

We need to at least start regrouping the combatants this week and then proceed to determining numbers, standards and processes for integration. Several modalities are under discussion about how and where to integrate the Maoists, but now the real work should begin.

We don’t need foreign help to do this. We don’t need to think about the interests of other countries to plan our actions. The only interest we should be looking out for is that of Nepal and its people. There are those who say that India will not accept a Maoist government in Nepal. But I think it should not make a difference.

There is widespread fear and speculation among people about what will happen after 28 May, the extended deadline for drafting the constitution. If the parties reach a consensus, there will be a constitution. But if the current atmosphere of mistrust and uncertainty persists, it is hard to say. We won’t have to wait long to see if the statute will be written by this date; this will be clear by the end of March. And if the constitution is not written, the first one to be held responsible will be the Maoists, as the chief stakeholder and actor of the peace process. 🇳🇵

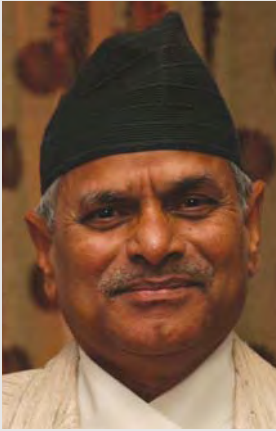
For longer version of this piece in original Nepali see www.himalkhabar.com

Concrete steps are needed to create trust, not agreements on paper that are never implemented



President’s visit to India

Editorial in Janadisha, 28 January



With a 27-member team in tow, President Ram Baran Yadav left for Kolkata on 27 January to attend the annual function of a medical college he studied in. He will be meeting the Indian president, the prime minister, and other top officials in Delhi.

Some have remarked that a head of state should not have gone to India for a college function. At a time when the political deadlock has persisted for seven months due to the interference of the Indian establishment, it is natural to think that there is not much point in attending such a function. The president went to India for an official visit some time ago, so it is questionable whether his decision to go to India again was correct.

We can discuss this topic in the days to come but the president and his entourage should ensure that the visit does not tarnish Nepal’s sovereignty, independence and self-esteem. Whatever the purpose of his visit, it is not just a private visit, so the president should focus on making it fruitful.

The president should focus on strengthening the existing relationship between the peoples of both countries. He also should not hesitate to raise concerns about Indian interference in Nepal’s internal affairs with his counterpart and the prime minister. He should request the revision of the existing unequal treaties between the two countries so they don’t undermine the Nepali people’s aspirations, and ask that India act as a good neighbour. If the president succeeds in this, then his visit will be in the interest of the country. We hope his visit will succeed as a goodwill visit.

जेनिदिशा

Banned pesticides

Yadav Thapaliya in Arthik Abhiyan, 2 February

अभियान

The Nepali market is flooded with banned, fake and obsolete drugs. Dealers have been found to tamper with expiry dates and sell them in the market, while banned drugs are being sold under the trademark of renowned Indian pharmaceutical companies.

According to Ashok Shrestha of Shubh International, the banned methane parathion is being marketed as a product of Wire Crop Science and Hindustan Pulverising Mills. Similarly, the banned monocrotophus is being sold as a product of the Indian company Dhanuka and Agro Chemicals. According to Sabitri Baral at the Pesticides Registration and Management Division, fungicides were found labelled as products of Indian Synjenta India Ltd in Chitwan last year.

Chloride, DDT, dieldrin, andrin, aldrin, heptachlore, mirex, texaphene, BHC, linden, organomercury



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

fungicides, methyl parathion, and monocrotophus, among others, are banned but almost all these products are available in the Nepali market, according to the Pesticides Registration Division.

According to Chhotelal of Birgunj Seed Storage, methyl parathion is marketed as a product of Dhanuka Agritech Ltd and the indophil, babistin (fungicides) and thymine available in Nepali market are fake products. “All fake pesticides come from India,”

he said.

As for registered pesticides, dealers affix a new date of expiry on outdated drugs and sell them. “An original indophil M 45 costs Rs 220 but the same product is made available for Rs 160 in the Nepali market,” said Shrestha. This has become a headache for genuine drug retailers.

According to the Pesticide Registration and Management Division, there are 55 registered companies and firms that import pesticides. They imported 581,190 kilograms of pesticides worth Rs 207 million for this fiscal year, below last year imports. The dealers claim this is due to the illegal import of fake and banned drugs from across the border.

Baral blames it on weak regulations on pesticides. The Pesticide Act 1991 and its first amendment in 2008 have a provision of a maximum fine upto Rs 5,000 and seizure of products for trading illegal pesticides. Baral says this is not comparable to the damage such illegal drugs can do.



HIMAL KHABARPATRIKA
30 Jan-12 Feb 2011

COVER

Power Balance after Shaktikhor
Integration and agreement

OPINION

JB Pun Magar:
Why be afraid of Prachanda
Bharat Dahal:
Internal strife within the Maoists |
Purshottam Dahal:
New phase in peace process
Gauri Nath Rimal: Faiz in Nepal
Chandra Kishore:
Another side of the Tarai

EDITORIAL

Caution advisable

REPORTS

Three Nepali UN
bosses in Burma
Decentralisation of corruption
Maoist ex-fighters
look for stable future



Board on wall: Election Officer
Board on floor: Speaker

नागरिक Rajesh KC in Nagarik, 3 February

Let them all in!

Editorial in Karobar, 30 January

कारोबार

Nepal has announced free visas for Chinese tourists in NTY 2011. According to Tourism Minister Sarad Singh Bhandari, preparations are underway. But free visas for Chinese visitors were offered eight years ago, too. In fiscal year 2003/04, Prakash Chandra Lohani, then finance minister, announced free visas for visitors from SAARC countries and China in the budget, but the government failed to implement the changes. There’s some doubt it will get around to it this time.

The number of Chinese tourists to Nepal is increasing every year. Last year about 38,000 visited Nepal. If we give them free visas, that number will go up, China could even become Nepal’s biggest source of tourists. Currently most tourists to Nepal come from India, about 110,000 in 2010. But Nepal would really benefit if it provided free visas to tourists from all countries, not just SAARC countries and China.

About 590,000 tourists visited Nepal in 2010. If we waive visas for the two thirds of tourists who don’t originate from SAARC countries, then we could meet the target of one million tourists for this year. According to the Tourism Ministry, the per capita expenditure of tourists during their stay in Nepal is about US\$65, and the average stay is 11 days. Waiving the US\$30 tourist visa fee could thus bring in US\$715 per tourist encouraged to visit Nepal because of the ease of access.

उज्यालो 90 नेटवर्कमा

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Loathing leaders

Editorial in *Ghatana Ra Bichar*, 26 January

घटना-बिचार

I reached Nepalgunj on a banda day last December. People were not bothered about who had called the strike. "A leader might have died," said a passenger at the airport. Everyone there was slamming the politicians

driver, as he got more passengers. "But we're not like our leaders who look out for their own benefit only," he said. "We should see how many people suffer because of a banda."

A week ago in Janakpur, a motorcade transporting politician Mahanta Thakur glided past a village in the style of a Hindi movie. A

People reason that Nepal's leaders are not doing what they were elected for. Voices are being raised and people want the new constitution to guarantee the right to withdraw votes if leaders do not fulfil their mandate.

Recently, a participant in a publicly recorded TV program said that he was filled with remorse for having voted for the current leaders.

He wanted to take back his vote. Advocate and social activist Mohini Maharjan has launched a campaign called 'recall your vote'.

Physical attacks are

definitely not civilised, but leaders should learn from the slapping incident. Khanal was the victim, but people did not sympathise with him. Regmi, the offender, had support from across the country because Nepal is frustrated with its leaders. It may only be Khanal who got slapped, but all leaders face similar anger.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

and calling them ridiculous. One could guess that some politician somewhere must have committed a crime, and it became clear later that Tharuhat had called the strike.

Our rickshaw driver grumbled that the country would be different if our leaders were better. A strike was good for the rickshaw

bystander murmured, "Kuch sharm hota to aisa nahi karta." If he had any shame, he would not have travelled this way, he meant.

We find that people loath leaders everywhere, in Kathmandu, in the districts, in villages. It is their repeated failures to forge a consensus for a new government that has resulted in this hatred.

Lets say 'ours'

Letter to the editor in *Nagarik*, 31 January

नागरिक

We've replaced our wall calendars 61 times since democracy was introduced to Nepal in 1950. The faces in Baluwatar have changed, the king has been banished to Nagarjun, and armed rebels have come to power. Months, seasons and years have gone by, but the plight of the Nepali people remains the same.

The winter chill is taking a toll on the lives of the Tarai people. People in Karnali are starving to death. Hundreds of people are dying because they can't even get Cetamol or Jivanjal. The leaders that promised to address the people's aspirations are never bothered by their sufferings. Singhadarbar and Baluwatar shed no tears when a poor house collapses.

Politics is supposed to run the country, but Nepal's politics is as polluted as the Bagmati River.

A good leader thinks about his country. In fact, a good leader does not have any individual or party interest. He thinks about the state and about humanity. There is a dearth of leaders in our country. Politics for leaders has become a business and the poverty of the people is a begging bowl.

It might sound disrespectful but the bitter truth is a gang of goons are in power and if the power goes to a good person, they hatch conspiracies to pull him down. Those who fool others and fish in troubled waters can never give momentum to society.

Once people are educated and informed, politicians will not be able to buy voters. Informed people are not intimidated by threats, nor can they be bought. This is what the hypocrites are afraid of, so they never take good leaders on board.

To whom should we complain? It seems that we harvested grains of mustard, but never got oil from them, put stones together, but could not make a fire. We learnt to say 'mine' and 'yours', but never 'ours'.

Bijaymani Poudel, Katari, Udaypur

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One of the world's coolest nationalities

The only consensus is that there is no possibility of a consensus now. The way the cookie has crumbled, maybe we should have just let Prime Minister Macoon continue as caretaker till May. The Donk's back of the envelope calculation shows that Rs 12 karod of taxpayer's money would have been saved by not replacing the government at the present time. Imagine the cost of dislodging all current ministers from their lodgings. You can be sure at least ten of them will refuse to hand back their official cars, and there will be equipment and bathroom fixtures missing from Harihar Bhavan. The new ministers will need added moving allowances. Just to replace one UML guy with another UML guy for four months? We should've just let MKN carry on cutting ribbons and wearing funny hats.



Till Thursday press time, looked like we had a breakthrough in the **four-ass race**. The rules for prime ministerial election having been altered, however, no one knows for sure if the



honourable members voted dishonourably. They can't remain neutral, but they can still have a mass diarrhoea attack, scoot off to the loo at voting time, or tear up the ballot slip and stuff it in the box. In a democracy, you can take MPs to the polling booth but you can't make them vote.



The fact that Shyam Saran hadn't arrived in KTM till Thursday afternoon meant the Maoists were never near getting the magic 301 to hit the jackpot with the help of the Forums. The reason

Awesome's candidature wasn't going nowhere was because Kingbreaker Bijaybabu of the **Locktantrik** declared himself a candidate minutes before the deadline expired at 4pm Wednesday. This move essentially check-mated Awesome's last-ditch attempt to propel himself to power. PKD

was desperate to be PM, and his top secret plan (to which only the Ass is privy) was to delay constitution-making till 28 May so he could rule forever. Ditto: **Ram Chunder Poodle** and **Jhol Nath Khanal**, the other candidates with naked ambition. And guess what, Com Yummy was still canvassing for Hubby even though he wasn't even a candidate.



The most tragic figure in all this is still Come Red JN who has decided to happily play second fiddle to the Baddies.

When KPO proposed JNK as the UML's candidate on Tuesday he meant it as a satire. He thought Jhallu didn't stand the chance of a snowflake in hell. MKN, slow on the uptake even at the best of times, looked visibly shocked when Oli Dai proposed his arch-enemy as UML candidate, but must have thought Com Oli knew something he didn't because he seconded the motion.



So, to recap: MKN'd have rather backed PKD as PM than JNK. BRB'd have preferred Padam Rotten than PKD. And SBD would have even agreed to PKD, but not RCP. This must be why Nepalis are ranked #10 by CNN as the world's coolest nationality: www.cnn.go.com/explorations/life/12-coolest-nationalities-earth-050844



Bouquets to Rastra Bank guy Crown Prince Khatiwada for declaring an end-of-year deadline for phasing out bank notes with Kingji's mug. Smart move to say you are erasing the last vestiges of monarchy to inject cash into the ailing banking sector.

Petrol and diesel also literally face a **liquidity crisis** because we haven't paid the Indians. Good news is that it's not just us, apparently Kingfisher and Jet Airways together owe IOC Rs 1,775 karod, too.



Baddies fighting over the division of the spoils is getting worse. The split in the **Kranti Curry** trade union erupted into gang fights this week. Although the Baidya-loyalist faction led by Com Budgegain has accused the PKD-loyalist Com Jamcattle faction of a lack of transparency in accounts, the real issue seems to be that Mr Salik is keeping all the casino loot to himself. The problem for ordinary people is that we are now going to be extorted by not just one but two competing Baddie factions.



Some Mau Mau are sick of their party's descent into the criminal underworld. Take Com Yukta, who tore up his membership card and has taken off for a **Vipassana** retreat.



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