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The peace industry

Is there a conflict of interest in the peace efforts?

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The more elusive peace becomes, the more it seems to become an industry. Foreign conflict-resolution consultants and mediation experts are swarming all over the capital, sometimes rubbing shoulders in hotel lobbies with arms merchants.

At last count there were at least two dozen government and non-government outfits with the word 'peace' on them like the Peace Secretariat, High-Level Peace Committee, Civic Solidarity for Peace and Citizen's Peace Commission.

The Americans have hired South African conflict expert Hannes Siebert to advise government officials, political parties and civil society. Britain's DfID has hired a slew of consultants for what it calls 'mitigation of conflict effects' and has spent 4 million pounds to promote peace. DfID

officials told us the money was used for "capacity building" in conflict resolution for officials, parliamentarians and civil society, research and conflict analysis and support for media.

Visiting British Minister of State Douglas Alexander, said in Kathmandu Wednesday: "Nepal's problem should be resolved internally, and we will support such efforts."

The Europeans hired two experts to prepare a report on conflict prevention assessment two years ago and another expert is arriving next month. The EC is releasing another report on the conflict soon.

"Everyone within and outside the country seems to be pushing their own agenda," says a bewildered Peace Secretariat official. There is a distinct lack of urgency in the secretariat, and Information Minister Mohsin (*see box*) says it is setting up a 'documentation centre'.

Actually, the Peace Secretariat is supposed to be a

foundation for future peace process. Government officials are not comfortable about the formation of the Citizen's Peace Commission, an umbrella organisation of peace groups. "Why do you need a parallel organisation when a Peace Secretariat has already been formed?" asked one member of the High-Level Peace Committee.

Most people interviewed for this article agreed the government and the rebels are just paying lip service to negotiations. This week, the military launched a major airborne and ground assault from Dang on Maoist strongholds in Rolpa and Rukum from Dang amidst reports of an imminent Maoist offensive in the west.

Mediators are disappointed. Krishna Jung Rayamajhi of the Civil Society Peace Commission says: "Efforts to bring the two sides together have not been encouraging, the response is distressing." ●



Mohsinisms

Interview with Minister of Information, Mohammad Mohsin

Is the peace secretariat just an eyewash?

It will take time for the secretariat to become fully operational. We are collecting documents for a peace archive. But we won't wait, we will make peace overtures.

When do you expect results?

So far, we haven't got any authentic response from the rebels for dialogue. The Dasain ceasefire was a gimmick, we are interested in a long-term resolution. Our twin mandates are to restore peace and hold elections, and we are serious about both.

But are elections possible?

If the Maoists respect the sovereign right of the people, they will allow them to vote.

Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 161

Q. Should the pre-2002 parliament be reinstated?

Total votes: 1,002

Weekly Internet Poll # 162. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Do you agree with the proposal for a special quota for disadvantaged groups in education?

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The more discerning among you may have realised by now that we are a nation of animal lovers. With Pashupatinath as our patron deity, our zoological society has nothing to worry about.

We shower considerable respect and devotion to our fellow creatures and this is evidenced in the way we pamper the higher mammals by allowing them free access to our national highways and street intersections. Every year, this adulation for our four-legged and feathered chums reaches a crescendo at Tihar when we set aside one day for specialised

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



attention to each of them.

We start on Wednesday with National Crow Day to honour Yamaraj's roving ambassador and plenipotentiary. Devotees get up early in the morning and travel to the banks of the Bagmati where crows can be found partaking of their communal breakfast on the visceral remains of recently-deceased buffalos. We proceed to offer them a plethora of sweetmeats which they totally ignore because (despite its name) a sweetmeat is totally vegetarian and the crows would much rather dine on a plethora of rotting cadavers. But it's the thought that counts, and how appropriate that at least once a year we recognise the valuable assistance that crows provide to the



Kathmandu Metropolitan City as volunteer scavengers, and honour them in nationally-televised ceremonies to decorate them with one of the nation's highest civilian honours, the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu Third Class.

Thursday is when dogs are gods. This is the day we have set aside to worship man's best friend and to reward Fido, Fuchhe and Lucky for being around when we need them most to provide us with security in these troubled times by yowling non-stop all night at everyone in general and no one in particular. But disregarding our own

personal discomfort and sleep deprivation we get up at the crack of dawn on Dog Day to round up the neighbourhood dingo pack and feed them body parts of fellow animals, resisting the temptation to lace it with pulverised sleeping pills. Veneration of our nocturnal canine choir is a tradition that has been passed down to us from the ancient Egyptians who even built pyramids to immortalise dead pets. Giza has three of them: one for Fido, one for Fucche and one for Lucky.

Then comes Friday, which in our animal kingdom is reserved for none other than the holy cow. An indication of the reverence we have for our national animal is the right of way we accord to them along our major thoroughfares. No other animal, not even the prime minister's motorcade on its way to Gokarna for a much-needed vacation to read up on the constitution, has as much priority as the city's urban cattle population. In fact, the prime ministerial motorcade had to make a slight detour into the sidewalk this week when a bovine traffic island at Jorpati refused to budge despite blaring sirens and commandos wielding Uzis. On Friday, let us show our cows that we care by putting an immediate stop to all this bullshit.

In conclusion, on behalf of all the animals who feel left out this Tihar, let me assure them that they are not forgotten. Ours is an inclusive democracy in which all animals have the right to have their day of veneration. So from next year's Tihar, by royal ordinance, we shall also mark Musa Tihar, House Fly Day, the Day of the Vultures and the National Day for Monkeying Around. ●

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

SURRENDER: Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari gives up answering reporter's questions about the UML's inability to make progress on peace.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

SHATTERED: Windows on the newly-built facade of the Employee's Provident Fund Building at Sundhara were shattered by a powerful pressure cooker bomb that went off on its first floor on Tuesday afternoon. More than 30 passersby were injured.



KIRAN PANDAY

THIS IS THE BBC IN KATHMANDU: The BBC's business development manager, Michel Lobelle, with the executive director of Radio Nepal, Shailendra Kumar Sharma, at a ceremony to launch the 24-hour news channel, BBC 103 FM.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

TOGETHER FOR A CAUSE: International delegates at the Fourth Asian Spinal Cord Conference after its inaugural ceremony at the Hyatt Regency on Tuesday.



RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS: A participant at a conch shell blowing contest in Kathmandu on Sunday.

Ballots, not bullets

When (or if) elections are ever held in Nepal, the country can tap the experience of dozens of Nepalis who have organised smooth polls in the world's hotspots.

The latest is Afghanistan, where four out of eight provincial coordinators for the recently held elections were Nepalis working for the United Nations. Despite the killing of several voter registration officials, intimidation by militants and the threat of violence on election day, Afghans thronged to the polling stations. There was nearly 90 percent turnout, and the biggest surprise was that women came out to vote in droves.

Naresh Bhatta, who was provincial coordinator for the western province of Heart, was in the UN compound when it was attacked and set on fire on 10 September. Bhatta (pictured) lost all his belongings and records, but still managed to conduct the polls successfully.

"We had planned it very well," says Bhatta, who is in Kathmandu for the holidays. "We divided up the

constituencies into sensitive and non-sensitive and just tried to foresee every eventuality."

The other Nepali provincial coordinators are Subhadayak Shah, who looked after Kabul, Hari Prasad in Mazar-e-Sharif and Neel Kantha Upreti in Jalalabad. The only other serious incident took place after the elections were held and Hamid Karzai was declared winner when three UN staffers were kidnapped in broad daylight from a Kabul street. They have still not been released.

Bhatta says the western province of Heart is "more remote than Humla" and conducting elections there was the most challenging thing he has ever done in his life. That means something because Bhatta has previously helped organise elections in East Timor, Cambodia

and Kosovo. He will now be going to Iraq.

"Nepalis used to be known for their bravery in battle, they are now known in the UN system as people who can administer and manage countries in transitions to democracy," says Bhatta. The inevitable question: how about Nepal?

Bhatta says elections in Nepal can be held, it just needs to be planned right and there has to be integrity and political will. And he is willing to help if asked.

He adds: "We have to solve it with the ballot, not the bullet." ●



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Yasir Arafat's ghost

Arafat leaves a vacuum and the absence of a viable successor

History gave Yasir Arafat far more time than most leaders to achieve his mission. After all, as he fought for his life in a Paris hospital, he had been leader of the Palestinians for 35 years. Yet he left his people in a terrible situation, with no state, in the midst of a losing war, and with a bankrupt economy.

COMMENT
Barry Rubin



Looking back at his career, Arafat never really veered from the belief that his life's mission was to destroy Israel by any means necessary and replace it with a Palestinian Arab state. An independent Palestine that did not include all of Israel held no appeal to him. Now, in the post-Arafat era, Palestinians must choose one of several strategies.

The moderate strategy seeks an independent Palestine state as quickly as possible on the assumption that once there is no more Israeli presence or violence, the Palestinians can concentrate on constructive pursuits, including resettling refugees and improving living standards. But this is the view of only a small minority of leaders, notably former Prime Minister Abu Mazin and Muhammad Dahlan, who heads his own militia in the Gaza Strip.

The hard-line strategy is the

traditional ideological approach championed by many Fatah and PLO veterans who returned from exile to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including Arafat. Their current leaders include men like Palestine National Council head Salim al-Zanun and Fatah ideological chief Sakr Habash, who favour continuing to battle Israel until it is destroyed, at which point they will rule Palestine with a relatively secular nationalist regime. They look down at younger challengers and view the Islamists as a threat.

The younger generation of indigenous West Bank Palestinians, whose leaders began political activity in the uprising of the late 1970's, embrace a militant strategy that views hardliners as burned-out old fogies enervated by corruption. Unlike hard-line secularists, the militants, whose best-known leader is Marwan Barghuti, the head of the Tanzim grassroots grouping in Fatah, are willing to work with the Islamists.

The militants argue that long-term continuation of violence will force Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. Then, with Palestinians gaining the upper hand, they can conquer all of Israel.

Finally, there is the revolutionary Islamist vision

espoused by Hamas, which seeks to continue fighting and using terrorism, regardless of how much time it takes till it defeats both Israel and Palestinian secular nationalists. Palestine will then be an Islamist state in which moderates would be shot and the old nationalist leadership forcibly retired or jailed for corruption. In the meantime, however, Hamas is willing to form alliances with the nationalists, particularly the militant faction of Fatah.

The problem for Palestinian moderates is clear: any leader willing to agree to a peace treaty with Israel would be opposed, passionately and even violently, by roughly 80 percent of the movement. A key question is whether the Palestinian masses, fed up with their leadership's bickering, corruption, and incompetence, could make their wishes known to find an end to a conflict that has cost them so much. But none of the main leadership factions are proposing that the masses be consulted very much. Nor did Arafat leave in place any institutional mechanisms for doing so.

Moreover, the popular appeal of radical religion, ideology, and misinformation should not be underestimated. Few Palestinians are even aware that four years ago Arafat turned down an independent state equal in



size to the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip, in addition to more than \$20 billion in refugee compensation.

The main problem left by Arafat is the lack of any leadership at all. Rarely in history has a political movement been so deliberately set by its founder on a course toward chaos. Arafat not only leaves no successor but no order. Over the decades, the movement has developed a political culture of indiscipline. Arafat presided over a sort of anarchy, encouraging rivalries, undermining other potential leaders and ensuring that all authority (and money) ran

through his hands.

Only if the post-Arafat movement decides that it really wants a Palestinian state in exchange for ending the conflict with Israel in every respect will there be a real chance for peace. Arafat's departure may well mark the beginning of that process, but the transition to a new Palestinian leadership could take years and there is no assurance that it will be a moderate one. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Barry Rubin is director of the Global Research in International Affairs Centre and co-author of *Yasir Arafat: A Political Biography*



Abimael Guzman (right) founder and former leader of the Shining Path guerrilla movement, and Elena Iparraguirre, his cellmate and lover, raise their arms on 5 November during the first day of his retrial in Callao, Peru.

The 69-year-old founder of Peru's Maoist Shining Path terrorist movement, Abimael Guzman, faced a civilian court last week for the first time since he was arrested more than 12 years ago.

Guzman and his co-defendants brought the hearing to a halt when they stood and faced media cameras with raised fists. "Long live the Communist party!" they chanted. "Glory to the Peruvian people! Glory to Marxism, Leninism, Maoism!" Guzman's Sendero Luminoso

(Shining Path) movement envisioned a classless utopia and 70,000 people were killed in the 20-year insurgency he launched in 1980. The vast majority were innocent Peruvians caught between rebels and the military crackdown.

The proceedings were stopped and cameras cleared from the courtroom on 5 November. A philosophy professor at the University of Huamanga in Peru's altiplano town of Ayacucho, Guzman believed that only a

Trying to shine again

Comrade Gonzalo is being retried in Peru for a 20-year war that cost 70,000 lives

Maoist doctrine could rid Peru of its feudal elite.

"He has no regrets for what occurred," said Carlos Tapia, a former member of Commission for Truth and Reconciliation who has interviewed Guzman more than a dozen times in the past two years. "He feels the acts committed were justified because it was a war."

Eulogio Cruz witnessed the bloody rebel takeover of his highland village in the Ancash region more than 12 years ago. Weeks later, a group of soldiers descended on the town and shot Cruz in the eye when he tried to stop them from taking away his son, Epifanio, as a suspected guerrilla. While Cruz survived, his son was taken and he has not seen him since.

"I want justice," said Cruz, now 54. "The trial is the first step towards that."

In the early 1990s, then-president Alberto Fujimori succeeded in passing laws to strengthen the trial process against suspected terrorists. Cases were referred to a military court presided

over by hooded judges and closed to the public. Hundreds of suspects were found guilty and imprisoned, including Guzman, who was convicted of treason in 1993 and has been incarcerated since at this naval base just outside Lima.

Peru's Constitutional Tribunal ruled his trial unconstitutional last year and overturned the conviction. Under Peruvian law, Guzman can be held for three years as long as a new trial is held within that amount of time. To avoid having to release him in 2006, the government must secure a conviction in a public trial, and Guzman is being tried along with 17 other Shining Path leaders whose convictions were also overturned.

While there is little chance Guzman will be freed, Peruvian authorities are concerned he is trying to reorganise Shining Path to resume the armed conflict. Colonel Benedicto Jimenez, a former leader of the national police anti-terrorism unit and the man who led the team that captured Guzman, said the prisoner has been sending orders in coded

messages to his followers. Jimenez said he thinks Guzman plans to use the trial to reorganise his movement politically while several hundred at-large compatriots continue the military struggle, mainly from jungle bases.

Last year, a monitoring group, the Council for Peace, estimated there were approximately 730 Shining Path adherents still at work in remote areas. There have been numerous clashes with authorities in the past 18 months, particularly in Ayacucho.

Peru Interior Minister Javier Reategui has said there is also concern Shining Path is trying to infiltrate the education system, a tactic Guzman used in the 1970s to gain adherents and financing for his revolution. Steve Stern, a US-based expert on the group, said the danger exists it will return, but he doubts it could repeat the devastation of the late 1980s and early 1990s. "As an organised political machine, it is finished," he said. "But there is still the danger it can create a great deal of chaos." ●

and women's rights activists. Wearing a leather jacket, red scarf and a gun on her waist, Bhusal is campaigning against Mohan Singh Bikram, leader of United Centre-Masal. Not many know about Bhusal's position in the party. Recently she was involved in a scandal about her relationship with senior politburo member Badal, which is why she was unable to occupy a higher position in the Maoist party. "Finally I am able to meet you all," Bhusal says to

the women activists of local NGOs. "It's wartime and we need to move." A few hours later, she walks off with Battalion 20 escorted by a female bodyguard. "It takes two hours to walk up that hill. Why don't you come up with us?" Bhusal asks me but I refuse and she quietly treks up the hill munching a packet of noodles. This is her fourth public appearance after going underground for over seven years.

Duty free

Kantipur, 8 November

कान्तिपुर

The Namche Bajar is stocked with Tibetan goods that haven't had their customs duty paid. Everyday Rs 300,000 of duty free goods are sold here. The number of Tibetan traders here is rising and this has discouraged local businessmen. The Tibetans sell their goods cheap and consumers prefer them. Dorji Sherpa, a local businessman

says, "Products are being brought in without duty being paid and this has killed our business." The Tibetans bring clothes, radio, watches and other goods over the Nangpa La pass till Thame from where it is loaded on yaks. The main trading areas are Thame, Phorche, Dingboche and Tengboche. There are about 40 stalls in Namche and they are open April-October. The tourists' preference for their products has affected local businessmen.

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Revive parliament

Nilambar Acharya in Kantipur, 4 November

कान्तिपुर

The pro-palace component in the government talks about elections. This is just a smokescreen to continue to obstruct the implementation of the constitution. The propagandist side of the Maoists advocates a constituent assembly. This too, is nothing more than a word game.

Both sides know that there will be no election or constituent assembly without peace talks. In fact, the royalists do not want elections and the followers of Prachandapath are not for constituent assembly. Both want the state power system. If any of them win or strike a deal for power sharing, the possibility of the country holding a democratic election either for the parliament or the constituent assembly is nil. How can we expect peace, democracy and the restoration of the people's power from both forces under such circumstances?

Both know that without proper implementation of the constitution, talks will not take place. Followers of Prachandapath say, "We do not support the idea of reinstating parliament, we will not allow elections to take place and will not speak to any nominated government." Royalists say, "We will not allow the reinstatement of parliament and we will not revive the constitution."

Like the Prachandapath followers, they have been harping about being flexible for talks. One party says it is ready to talk on anything but multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy. The other claims to be revolutionarily representing the people but is not ready to reactivate the constitution. What kind of flexibility is this? How can talks be held and between whom? And, more importantly, how will they bring peace?

The prime minister has repeatedly said on state-run television that the House

of Representatives can't be reinstated because of the verdict of the Supreme Court. A group that is pro-military, royalist and propagandist and another that belongs to the Maoist camp have both been taking undue support of the apex court's verdict. The Supreme Court has found it difficult to guard its own integrity in the absence of parliament since the Robinson episode. It has remained silent even when official agencies have wrongly pointed out that after the Supreme Court's verdict it has become difficult to bring the constitution back on track. Should it not have countered that there was never a decision saying the House of Representatives can't be reinstated? Even if it deems that such defence of its integrity is unnecessary, it should have resorted to judicial activism.

If the Supreme Court can't take a stand at a time when the derailed constitutional process needs to be normalised for peace, when will it? For the rest of the political spectrum, the question is not whether parliament can be reinstated. It is whether the hurdles to implementing constitutional provisions will lessen or increase after the reinstatement of the House.

Will the House be able to actually meet if reactivated? If it can, should it be made to decide the solution to the present conflict? Should democratic normalisation be allowed? The parliament is a meeting point among political parties, government and the people, between people's representatives and the king. Such contacts are the need of the hour, whether for peace, amendment of the old constitution, or for drafting a new one.

We hear about the need for unity among constitutional forces, more so between the king, government and parties. Only when all provisions of the constitution begin to function normally can one believe that the derailed constitution can be brought back on track. How can there be constitutional unity without an active constitution?

Such a dialogue can be held in parliament and the result ratified by the parliament. Only then can we go for elections, whether it is the election of the House of Representatives or the constituent assembly and on whatever basis. But for these to happen, the House of Representatives must be activated. Without the House, talks about peace, elections, constituent assembly and democracy will remain talks.

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Taxed to death

Surkhet's businessmen are forced to register with the Maoists and pay taxes to both governments



The Maoist checkpoint at Baddichaur of Surkhet

SHARAD KC

SHARAD KC in SURKHET

One morning earlier this month, businessmen in Surkhet were all heading out of town towards Baddichaur. They were trying to beat the Maoist deadline to register with them and fill out tax forms.

In Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka's hometown

traders now pay two taxes: one to the government and the other to the Maoists. Thirty km outside town in Baddichaur (which the rebels have renamed 'Himal Municipality') is the Maoist contact office for surkhet businessmen to pay their revolutionary tax, for people who need Maoist 'visas' to travel to Jumla, Kalikot, Achham and

Dailekh. Those travelling without visas have to face interrogations and are sent to labour camps to dig tunnels.

When the rebels began registering businesses in the district on 17 September, businessmen gathered at Baddichaur. The rebels had issued a notice saying no one was allowed to run a business without registering with the 'new regime'. As a result, 1,100 businessmen in Surkhet have registered, whereas only 300 businesses have been registered with the Surkhet Association of Industry and Commerce.

Tax collection is more efficient than the government's revenue department. It is amazing what the fear of the gun can do.

Businessmen are supposed to pay their Maoist tax by the fifth of every Nepali month. There is a flat rate of Rs 100 a month for

every business with a monthly turnover of Rs 100,000. The local deputy chief of the rebels says Surkhet businessmen are paying anywhere between Rs 25-Rs 5,000 a month.

For Maoist land registration, people are supposed to go further up the road to Babiachour. The Maoists also have their own vehicle registration done in Ramghat and Mehalkuna in Surkhet.

CDO Tilakram Sharma admits he knows about the Maoist taxes, but his administration can do little to stop it. Chairman of the Surkhet Association of Industry and Commerce Tek Bahadur Bhandari says no one dares to defy the Maoist order to register. "Everyone has been to Baddichaur, and there is nothing the administration can do to stop it," he says.

The Maoists don't allow people from Surkhet, Dailekh and Accham to take provisions and goods up to their areas unless it has been bought in a registered shop, and this is an added reason why everyone has registered.

"The villagers know the Maoist rule and they make sure that they buy things only from

shops and business houses that have registered with them," says Tulsiram Upadhyay of Maya Plastic and Suppliers in Birendranagar. "It makes it necessary for us to register with the Maoists."

Bus operators face the same problem. The chairman of the Association of Bus Operators in the district is Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka's brother, and even he would not be able to ply his buses without paying off the Maoists. However, when asked he did not wish to comment.

Local businessmen seem happy with the Maoist efficiency. They have also been fed up of extortion from people pretending to be Maoists, and this way they are safe. "Now we just pay once a month, we don't get harassed by pretend Maoists," says Bhandari.

All this used to happen in Maoist base areas. With the registration in Surkhet, the Maoists seem to be testing their reach in government areas as well. After King Gyanendra's recent visit, all government offices are being shifted from Nepalganj to Surkhet, and this is the Maoists' way of thumbing their noses at the state. ●

Mourning in Dasain

While Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka celebrated tika at his home in Surkhet, dozens of displaced villagers from Mugu and Jumla were living in tents nearby. They had no food and were begging from house to house. "What Dasain are you talking about when we don't have shelter or food to eat?" a frail looking Chandra Buda asked. "We aren't celebrating anything." About 200 villagers from the two districts are now living in the open here and more are coming since the Maoists intensified their 'join us or leave your homes' campaign. Most victims were subsistence farmers. The Surkhet district administration says it doesn't have money to take care of them.

Minister Khadka drove to them in a line of escort cars and assured them the government would fly them back to their homes in a helicopter and sped away leaving the bewildered refugees in tears.

Ambushed child

Nanda Buda, one-year-old, toddled on the bloody floor to wake her mother Bidra. She was hungry. But her mother was dead, killed by a Maoist booby trap in their village in Humla. Bidra was killed instantly while her daughter survived. Her husband Jay Chandra recounts finding his wife and how he collapsed on seeing her dead. The Maoists tried to take Nanda but Jay Chandra woke up and stopped them. "We are not going with you. I have lost my wife and don't want to lose my daughter too," Jay Chandra recalls telling them. The rebels forced him to leave the village. Today, he and his three young daughters are living in Surkhet with hundreds of other refugees from Humla. "So many reporters have come and I have told them my story, but no one has helped," says Jay Chandra.



Jay Chandra with his daughter, Nanda.

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STREET FESTIVAL ~ 2061

ATTRACTIONS:

LIVE CONCERT, DANCE
&
FOOD STALLS

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FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

What are left of our traditions are becoming hollow rituals of an ersatz civilisation. The original function of harvest festivals, the celebration of plenty and family bonding have given way to trivial give-and-take of the marketplace. Dasain and Tihar in the city have become little more than government-sanctioned bandas. There is a curfew for bhailo and deusi, and defying a firecracker ban the Maoists blew up the first floor of the Sanchaya Kosh Building on Tuesday. Aside from the bubble of the capital valley and a few cities, the festivals have lost their lustre. The people are in no mood to celebrate.

Still, Tihar is also a celebration of sibling reunion. A chance for sisters and brothers scattered by conflict to get together at least in their hearts. And an opportunity this weekend to look beyond the family to all Nepalis as our own sisters and brothers.

It is in these times of murky gloom that we inevitably take comfort in symbolism: the terracotta cup in which we pour mustard oil, dip the wick and light a lamp. It will burn all week of the Yamapanchak. The number five is a recurrent theme over Tihar/Chhat/Diwali. The *diyo* incorporates the *panchatatwa*, the five elements of life: earth, water, air, fire and sky. The flame is a miniature sun, the star to which we owe the existence of life

on this planet and every molecule in our being.

The potter shapes this cup from a mixture of water and earth, lets it dry in the sun, then bakes it in fire. The diyo in



the puja room is a symbol of life, death and rebirth, of eternity and immortality. It leads us from darkness to light. And the darker the night, the brighter the light.



DEUTSCHLAND

Singing of love and longing

Displacement and diaspora have set off a burst of creativity in Nepali music

A new genre of music is sweeping Nepal. From Hits, Image and Kantipur FM to Radio Nepal's AM bands, Lok Dohari folk duets rule the airwaves. The music video market is dominated by Nepali pop. In the markets of tarai, Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Awadhi

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



songs with double entendre set to techno music have begun to replace Hindi hits at local bajars. These are happening times for Nepali music.

And, as a reflection of the times, a new Nepali Soul is emerging. Soul was the musical outpouring of American blacks forced to cities of the North and represented the distress of displacement. It sings of suffering, separation, loss of hope, bereavement, and melancholy with occasional self-mockery. People uprooted from their homes for reasons beyond their control find comfort in songs of love and longing.

Unprecedented numbers of Nepalis have been displaced from their places of birth in the last decade, it is the biggest

involuntary migration in Nepali history. And they have taken to Nepali Soul to find their moorings.

The overseas Nepali audience croons with the sound of rhythm and blues and goes ecstatic with 1974 AD's *Je gar je bhana jatasukai laijau malai, Yo man ta mero Nepali ho*. The logic of the success of this song is simple: play it on your car sound-system with a Nepali flag sticker while you drive on endless expressways of an alien land to assert your belongingness to a faraway home.

The Nepali Diaspora is lapping up music from home like never before. It's not just established names like Nepathya and 1974AD performing in front of homesick comptariots, even greenhorn musicians talk about the overseas market as a separate category altogether. Nepali singers regularly go on diaspora tours. Babin Pradhan, Yam Baral, Nhyu Bajracharya and Raju Tuladhar entertained a Nepali crowd of around 500 in Woolwich Public Hall in East London recently after a successful US tour. Imagine a Nepali guard in Iraq listening to Ram Krishna Dhakal sing



NAWARAJ WAGLE

Bihana utthne bittikai himal dekhna paiyos. Last week, Deepak Bajracharya became the first Nepali singer to be net-cast directly from his studio in Kathmandu.

More are sure to follow in his footsteps. Meanwhile, the local audience in Nepal is swooning to an emotive mixture of rock, jazz, disco, and folk—the fusion of it all that makes the Nepali Soul.

Lok Dohari singers like Bima Kumari Dura and Sindhu Malla are our new superstars, and some newspapers even have separate chartbusters of Lok Dohari and Nepali pop. The

music and lyrics are simple: madal, flute, guitar and the raw energy of the singers' voices.

Nepali modern songs have become anthems for the newly literate displaced from their ancestral homes. It's difficult not to be moved with *Ekadashi Bajaraime* or *Wari Jamuna, pari Jamuna* of Khem Raj Gurung. You may have never seen Ilam Bajar, but *Badalu ko ghumto ma* will make you long for the place. These songs celebrate the Proustian remembrance of things past.

Till a few years ago, very few listeners bought Maithili

cassettes. Now Rupa Jha and Rama Mandal have become such familiar names in Janakapur and Rajbiraj, and few remember Udit Narayan Jha's early Maithili renditions for Radio Nepal. Rupa Jha's *Chaita baisakha ke purain dah* sings of gender bias rampant in Mithila and doesn't fail to bring tears even to grownup eyes.

This year, play-time for deusi and bhailo have been severely curtailed by the administration, but keep your ears tuned for the fresh rendering *Rato mato, chiplo bato* sung to the tune of Buffalo Soldiers. ●

LETTERS

ROYAL TIKA

I was taken aback to read 'Royal tika' that you translated from *Jana Astha* (#220). It is utterly ridiculous blacklisting police officers for not attending the Dasain royal tika. One can't be forced to attend, people should attend out of their own free will. Why should absent officers be asked to furnish an explanation for not attending? If it is compulsion then this signifies that there is oppression. Even more astounding was the revelation that officers who didn't go to the palace may be penalised by not getting promotions and being transferred. Do promotions depend upon the duty, valour, discipline of the officer or on sycophancy?

Milan Gurung, email

BUSHWHACKED

Daniel Lak's Here and There column 'It's over' (#220) is much appreciated. Unlike most Kerry supporters in Nepal his reaction is tempered with wisdom. Depressed Kerry wallahs in Nepal are arguing that 55 million people did not vote for Bush, and he has no mandate. America is doomed, the world is doomed. Even your editorial ('Bushwhacked', #219) that wanted the rest of the world to be allowed to vote in US elections, is sour grapes. Eighty percent of Nepalis who have returned from the US are Kerry supporters and they point out that the American people are stupid and at least Kerry followers console themselves with the prospect of Hillary Clinton becoming the next president. Women did not vote for Kerry because a) he was not young and handsome b) his divorce and marrying 'up' the Ketchup heiress did not make them too comfortable.

Mahendra Sakya, Ekanta Kuna

- Come on Dem's, quit crying.

We lost and in some ways we should be damn glad that we did. We now have the luxury of clear opposition, an opposition unclouded by a Democratic president whose freedom of movement is heavily constrained by a Republican Senate and House. Iraq is a mess. The economy is a mess. Our position in the world is a mess. With Bush's policy acumen, nothing is likely to improve over the next few years. The Republicans made their bed, now they get to lie in it. Our defeat today could plant the seeds for a far more sustainable victory in the mid-term and next presidential elections. Seriously, how would you feel if President Kerry, unable to bring in other countries to bail us out of the Iraq mess, felt compelled to reinstate the draft? Both support and opposition would highlight the contradictions inherent in having a president who has to pick up the pieces but can't publicly disavow a war we should never have started. The same goes for our structural deficit. With a solidly Republican House and Senate, Kerry wouldn't have been able to take the bold steps essential to resolve our massive problems. His only role would have been to bear the blame...and pass that blame on to all Democrats as clear evidence of 'liberal' incompetence. Yes the loss is real. We're going to lose irreplaceable parts of our environmental heritage. We've lost global legitimacy and may have to suffer many years before we're able to regain a respected position in the global community. We may also face an economic collapse as the dollar declines. All this may be extremely painful. But we're also handed the wonderful gift of clarity. Our moral position on many issues doesn't have to be compromised. We don't face the dilemma of

supporting a weak president who can't make fundamental changes. Bush built his victory on a coalition of fear and religious bigotry. When the economy sours, the moral contradictions of his position emerge, and his wars appear increasingly 'un-winnable' that coalition will fragment. Over 50 million of us have the luxury of a clear, uncompromised moral position. Be patient, work hard. His recent win hands us a clear opportunity for real sustainable victory.

Marcus Moench, USA

- Reading your editorial 'Bushwhacked' gave me some amusement. As a serious editorial piece it was sorely lacking in any meaningful insight. Liberalism in newspapers is fairly common across the globe, unfortunately Nepal is no exception. If Nepal had one leader as unwavering as President Bush maybe the political situation in Nepal would have some direction and stability. Being a leader does not mean giving up convictions for the sake of popularity. Reading about the political situation in Nepal, it is laughable that you think Americans are 'bamboozling their way with petty minded insensitivity'. Unfortunately your paper gives a one-sided view through the likes of poor old depressed Daniel Lak who condemns America at every turn, but has chosen to reside there. You want to vote in America? How about voting in Nepal first, that's if you can actually get elections rolling.

M Danesth, email

FEDEX

This is to clarify the incident described in 'Spinal conference in Nepal' (#220). An emergency medical kit sent through Federal Express USA four years ago did not arrive on time in Kathmandu due to the problems of using a courier service to transfer a

medical item. Federal Express did not have any authorised service provider in Nepal during that time. However, Mr RM Singh of Everest De Cargo received a call about this urgent shipment, immediately consulted a friend in FedEx Dubai and arranged for it to be handed over to RNAC Dubai, which ultimately reached Kathmandu. Everest De Cargo is now a global service provider and exclusive licensee of Federal Express for Nepal. FedEx in Nepal is able to export as well as import any shipment (emergency medical kits included) to or from more than 215 countries.

Neelisha Pradhan, FedEx Everest De Cargo

POLLS

Now that you are bombarding us with public opinion polls it gives us the opportunity to compare results, which is an interesting exercise. The surprising thing is that the Krishna Hachhethu's 'State of Democracy in South Asia' poll featured 80 percent of Nepalis wanting democracy' (#220) and the Kathmandu Valley Himalmedia poll 'Yes and no' (#218) both seem to have similar results. Most people are dissatisfied with democracy, most think the king should remain a constitutional monarch, most think he is in charge and most want him to solve the national crisis by talking to the Maoists. But what is most clear from both polls is how low the political capital of the parties have sunk. Wonder if the king, parties and the Maoists are reading these polls and learning their lessons from it.

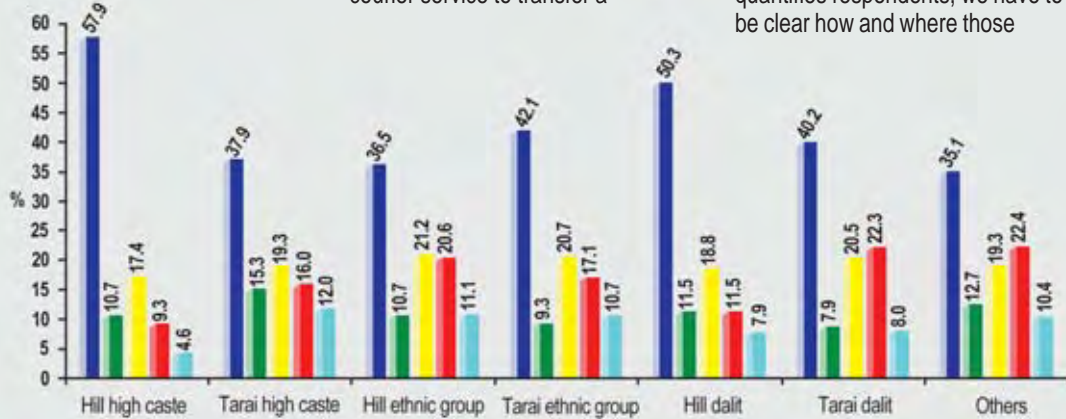
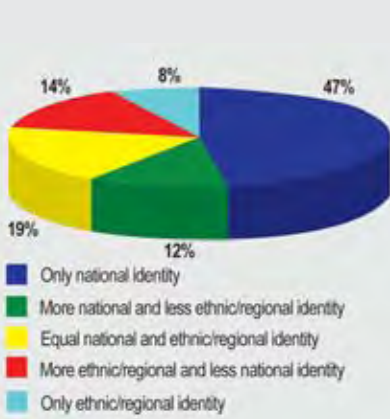
JK Panday, Kathmandu

- Public opinion polls are important, especially at a time when there is no parliament and elections are uncertain. It is even more important to do them scientifically. It is not enough to be satisfied with a methodology which quantifies respondents, we have to be clear how and where those

respondents were chosen, how they were interviewed and by whom. Each enumerator in the Himalmedia Poll ('Yes and no', #218) seems to have spent 10 hours a day interviewing respondents, which is too long for accurate data collection. Only 40 percent of the respondents are women, which is below the census proportion of 48 percent females. The poll lists 'don't know' and 'can't say' in one category even though they mean completely different things. Another weakness of the poll questions is that the possible answers to questions can have multiple interpretations. You can't have socio-economic answers like 'corruption', 'poverty', 'joblessness' grouped with political answers like 'Maoists', 'king' or 'NC'. It is like comparing apples and oranges and doesn't aid clarity in the responses. And in the question 'What is a meaningful solution to the Maoist crisis?' the choice of answers include 'talks', 'constituent assembly', 'all-party government', 'referendum', 'constitutional amendment', 'UN mediation', 'military suppression', 'reviving parliament', 'Indian role' and 'civil society's role'. But these answers don't include 'king's role'. Why not? Elsewhere in the poll, there are questions like 'Can the king do anything to resolve the crisis?' or 'How can the king resolve the crisis' which are leading questions that elicit criticism of the king's role. There are other biased questions like, 'Who is actually ruling the country?' in which 49 percent said the king is. The question after that is 'Are you satisfied with the current government?' to which 83 percent have answered 'no'. These are pre-emptive questions which nudge respondents to furnish preconceived answers. Analysis of such results lead to fallacious interpretation because it could lead us to conclude that 83 percent of the people are not happy with the king's role. There should have been a complementary question: 'Are you happy or unhappy and why?' You conclude that the respondents in Kathmandu Valley are confused, whereas in actual fact it shows your poll design is itself confused.

Sudhindra Sharma and Pawan Kumar Sen, Kathmandu

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'We shall return'

NARESH NEWAR

Peace Corps volunteers leave Nepal with heavy hearts

This is their last week here. The US Peace Corps is packing up to leave Nepal after nearly 42 years of service.

Only a handful of senior managers are busy emptying their offices. The library, artistically designed by the volunteers, is now a cold empty room. On the top floor, a large number of Nepali personnel are attending the employment-counselling program for job prospects in other organisations. Several have worked here for nearly three decades certain that the most dedicated American social organisation in Nepal would never close down.

Training officer Sherry Russell looks sadly at Maharajganj from the Rana mansion behind the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where the US Peace Corps moved two years ago. "I'm going to miss all this," she says with a sigh.

The organisation does not want to lose the building and is now planning to lease it out to other organisations so that the newly decorated office with its well designed furniture and beautifully painted walls will not go to waste.

"This is not the end of our era but just a suspension, we'll definitely come back once there's peace in the country," Peace Corp's country director David O'Connor says, more to reassure himself. "The suspension of the program was very difficult to experience but now all of us understand why this was necessary". The organisation was concerned not just about the Americans but



PEACE CORPS

also the safety of their Nepali staff, who might get into trouble if they continued working with an American program. Most of them have to work with communities in remote villages where the Maoists have declared war on 'American imperialism'.

Some NGO partners of the Peace Corps received threats from Maoists and American volunteers were beginning to

feel the pressure although they knew the rebels had not hurt foreign nationals. Until a month ago, about 84 American volunteers ranging from teenagers to 80-year-olds were working in Nepal. After the blast at the American Centre in Kathmandu on 10 September, the US Embassy in Kathmandu told family members of the diplomatic staff they could leave if they wanted to and said

the Peace Corps was being suspended for six months. Although the advisory on family members was lifted last week, the Peace Corps pullout stands.

After the suspension of the program, the volunteers went to Bangkok for a conference to relocate in other developing nations around the world. Unable to cope with the thought of leaving Nepal for good, each of them wrote their wishes on a

large Nepali lokta paper and dispatched it back to Nepal. Their office took the hundreds of wishes to Kathmandu's most significant monasteries and temples. The paper of wishes remained unopened.

During the Bangkok conference all they wished for was peace in Nepal and the return of the US Peace Corps to the kingdom. Senior lamas at Swayambhu and Bouda blessed

Leaving in droves

After the Bush victory, liberal Americans want to emigrate

MIAMI— Amid the triumphant scenes on the right of American politics, liberal gloom and angst is as thick as London fog. These people thought that George W Bush might actually pay for what they saw as his incompetence, smugness and apparent inability to do more than one thing at a time. They were wrong, and now they're depressed.

So depressed actually, that many are thinking of moving. That's right. American liberals, some of whom give champagne socialism a whole new

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



cachet, want out. In Canada, my native land, immigration websites are swamped with queries from Boston, Berkeley, Greenwich Village and Seattle. Some wag redraws the map of North America, rethinking the 'Red State-Blue State' divide and encompassing Canada.

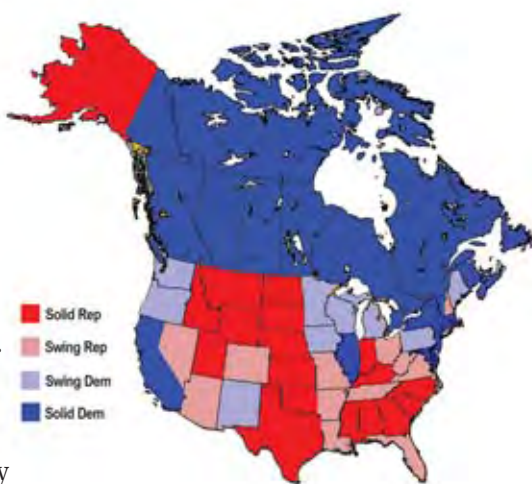
Alas for my American friends, and I have many, it's not so easy. Canada doesn't need liberal-media-literary-academic-leftist types. The place is already awash with the native born variety. Those immigration websites advise that doctors, engineers, welders, plumbers and carpenters are most

welcome to become beaver-loving denizens of the Dominion of Canada. Journalists can only visit.

So in a spirit of trans-continental charity, I offer some suggestions to the depressives left in the US, those too offended by the Bush victory to stay behind and fight for Hillary Clinton in 2008. There are other places you may be useful, other islands of sanity that will welcome you and your wine cellar.

Well, for a start, what about Nepal? I mean, come on. This country needs rich foreign investors, right? People with ready cash to build homes, employ people, start factories and generally push ideas of commonwealth, development and peace. Mind you, perhaps not. For one thing, I'm sure that our existing expat population, some of them anyway, wouldn't be too welcoming. It's a limited patch and as I found to my surprise when I lived in this fair land, outsiders are welcome in Nepali homes, not so among the hierarchical long-term expatriates.

You who are exceptions, you know I know who you are, if you know



what I mean.

Other places for our distraught US liberals then... How about Nauru? I can hear the *Nepali Times* drop to the floor from here as readers rush for an atlas. Just to help pinpoint it, Nauru is in the southwestern Pacific, but it's too small to appear on most maps. But it's there, and it needs help.

Nauru is a country, a circular island about 16 km in circumference, and it used to be made from bird poo. That's right. Guano, phosphate rich seagull

dung, many metres thick, coated the coral reefs of Nauru until the place was a gold mine for Australian mining companies. Apparently it's good for the garden. Anyway, Nauru is out of bird poo and it's going nowhere fast. American liberals would be welcome to join the local pastime of driving around in circles, drinking Foster's Lager and bemoaning the fact that seagulls don't shit here anymore.

Various Central American countries are used to playing host to US citizens fleeing something back home—in the past, taxes, spouses, drug charges or life its own self. Add to that list, Republican ascendancy and you've got a place to run to. Then there's Mauritius, Dominica, Sao Tome and Principe, Uruguay and New Caledonia. All need the right kind of new citizen. My travel agency for disgruntled liberals is about to take off big time. But then again, maybe people should just hang on for four years and keep fighting the good fight. I suspect most will. Nauru and Nepal may be worse off, but America needs you more. ●



PRAYERS IN THE WIND: Tiny scrolls of Nepali paper bearing messages from the Peace Corps Volunteers flutter in the wind at Boudha (Left) and Peace Corps Nepal director is blessed by a Hindu priest at a ceremony closing his office recently.

the letters. Hindu rituals were organised at Pasupatinath and at the Peace Corps office where priests blessed the letters before casting them into the holy Bagmati.

“The Volunteers had a very strong bond with Nepal. Many of them had close affinity with Nepali culture and traditions. They were all living with Nepali families,” recalls Russell. Leaving their host families was the most difficult part. Some of the volunteers had been in Nepal barely two months and more than 15 of

them returned to Nepal to meet the families again and bid them a final farewell. Some volunteers are so attached to Nepal they decided not to leave the country and are looking for jobs here.

The US Peace Corps closes its chapter in Nepal on 19 November. After this, there will be no trace left of the institution that served Nepal for nearly half a century. Unlike most foreign organisations, the Peace Corps were representative of volunteers living a simple life without posh office rooms or

lavish residences. Most of them were based in remote villages and poor urban areas to help communities improve their status in health, education, sanitation, forest conservation and more.

O'Connor, himself a Peace Corps volunteer in Ilam from 1967-69, looks lost. “I don't know where I'll be sent, but one thing I know for sure is that I am going to miss Nepal very much.” ●

(See also: Nepali Pan, *End of an era*, #216 and *Peace Corps Pull out*, #214)

Maoists need breathing exercises

The Maoists may want a ceasefire for breathing space, but an Indian guru says they need breathing exercises to control their anger.

Ravi Shankar, the 46-year-old founder of the Art of Living Foundation in India, who was in Nepal last week says he can make the Maoists give up violence with his meditation and breathing techniques.

The hirsute guru preaches conquering anger and other negative emotions through philanthropy and breathing practices, and was in Nepal on a three-day visit to spread the “message of love and harmony”.

“People who join militant movements usually harbour great stress and fear, which impede thinking and forgiving,” Ravi Shankar told followers in Birganj. “Revenge becomes the dominant theme in their lives”.

The Indo-Asian News Service quotes Ravi Shankar as saying: “But inside every culprit there is a victim crying for help. So when the victim is helped, the culprit disappears.”

The Indian sage said his breathing techniques help calm passions and make people think positive thoughts, and it has worked with suspected al Qaeda detainees in Mumbai. The Nepal chapter of the Art of Living Foundation conducts courses for prisoners in Nakkhu.

National agenda

More than 1,000 participants from all over the country attended a two-day conference in Kathmandu on ‘People's Initiative for Future’. The focus was to pressure the warring sides in the conflict towards a negotiated settlement.

Twenty-parallel workshops and two plenaries were held on constitution making, restructuring of the state, internal democracy in political parties, monarchy, natural resources, dalits, women, madesh, regional disparity and political economy of conflict. Participants decided to form citizen's pressure group for negotiation in all districts by 10 December, Human Rights Day. Peace rallies will be organised throughout the country during Martyr's Week in January 2005. A massive rally will be held in Kathmandu on Democracy Day, 18 February.

Why people fall

The Fourth Asian Spinal Cord Network Conference this week looked at why people fall in Nepal. Because of the country's terrain and subsistence livelihood, Nepalis suffer excessively from spinal injury related to falls from heights. Eighty international experts and Nepali neurosurgeons, public health experts, nursing specialists, physiotherapists took part. Dr Upendra Devkota delivered a lecture on innovations in spinal injury treatment carried out in Bir Hospital. “This conference is an opportunity for us to learn about latest developments in spinal injury treatment and rehabilitation so we can enhance services,” said Esha Thapa, director of the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre, organiser of the event.



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

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"We don't want charity"

The serenity and beauty of Humla belies the hard life of Nepal's most-remote district which has been made even more harsh by the insurgency.

A mule train arrives from the Chinese border carrying food items, two traders stop by to chat. The 62 km Simikot-Hilsa road would make things easier, but construction has stopped because of Maoist threats. Pilgrims travel along the trail to holy Mt Kailash and Mansarobar in Tibet, paying a Maoist tax of \$100 for each foreigner and Rs 300 for Indians. Nepalis have to pay Rs 200, and even porters are taxed. Even then more than 800 pilgrims have taken the route this year, from only 107 last year.

Many Humlis have been either forced out of their villages, or have fled after the rebels started a drive to recruit one person from every household. "It's been six months since I left my family in the village, who knows, it might be another six years since I see them again," says a villager who has been married just one year. He is waiting in Simikot to take a helicopter out. This is the only way to get in and out of Humla now, since the Maoists don't permit travellers to walk the trails to the south.

But the Humlis have fierce pride, a can-do attitude that comes from the daily struggle to survive in this harsh land. Despite the hardships, they are quick to smile and villagers still easily overcome fear of strangers to show visitors around.

"It is not charity we Humlis want," says former DDC chairman, Jivan Bahadur Shahi. "We want education and jobs so we can take care of ourselves. And most of all we want peace." ● (Sujala Panta in Humla)



KAPIL TAMOT

Lawful error

The Maoists have given themselves the legal right to sanction death penalty

RAMESWOR BOHARA
in SURKHET

Nepal's Maoists consider themselves outlaws and do not adhere to the laws of the land. But a document has just come to light in which the rebel group gives itself the legal right to take human life. As advocates of 'pro-people' power, they can now legally issue death sentences with *safaya* (cleansing) and *janakarbahi* (people's action).

After abducting and killing Radio Nepal journalist Dekendra Raj Thapa in Dailekh in August, the head of the Maoist army's Western Command, Comrade Diwakar, issued a statement saying: 'Dekendra certainly committed a serious crime. But in line with the party's policy he should not have been killed because he was a journalist.'

In other words, it would have been ok to kill him if he wasn't a journalist. Had he not been one, the punishment would have been 'just'. If this is any indication of the way Maoist justice is going to work, the nation needs to be on high alert. It has set the precedence for the rebels to pick anyone who has made a mistake, knowingly or unknowingly, and order their execution.

The rebels have not yet made their law of capital punishment public. But the central member of the Maoists and the Seti-Mahakali regional bureau in-charge Lekh Raj Bhatta (Comrade Rakesh) told us recently that the underground party has a legal manual allowing capital punishment. "Anyone who commits a serious crime will be sentenced to death," he says without specifying what constitutes a 'serious' crime. That Maoist revolutionary

law sanctions capital punishment is probably not surprising. Nepali law itself does not allow death penalty, even though a recent Nepal Police draft *badapatra* tried to supersede the constitution by provisioning death penalty in its charter. After the clause was leaked to the press, and following an outcry, the final version of the document did not contain the provision.

The worrying thing is that Maoist rulings for capital punishment do not need approval of the central party leadership, the death penalty has been 'decentralised' to the rebel's district and village courts. These revolutionary justice systems run by the rebels are allowed to and can decide who should live and who should die, and the accused can't defend themselves with lawyers. For instance, if the rebels file a case in their local court stating that someone be executed for alleged crimes, the court is not likely to reverse the decision. Local 'people's governments' have already been issuing death warrants and killing those found guilty.

Comrade Rakesh, who is also a Maoist central member, defends the move, saying the local courts are independent. "We don't interfere with the court's decisions on death sentences," he told us, adding that regional people's government were fully autonomous and were authorised to decide everything except defence and foreign affairs.

Although the 'people's council' has provisioned death penalty, the ruling regulation prepared by the council's chief Baburam Bhattarai does not clearly specify it. The document's security chapter

says that 'feudalistic and imperialistic forces will be destroyed'. It has also specified that any one or any agency that violates the fundamental rights of the people will be punished severely.

A separate provision in the council's regulatory says that any work against the country, people and the people's war will be regarded as 'enemy action'. The clause goes on to hint that such offenders will be sentenced to death, but the language is not clear.

Nowhere have the Maoists spelt out the kind of offense that will be subjected to capital punishment. Comrade Rakesh, however, says he has understood it to mean that murderers and informers will be sentenced to death. "We will certainly give them the chance to refrain from such activities, but if they do not improve, they will be executed," he adds. This includes party members and cadre who turn traitors. "If they have committed a crime, they will have to die," says Comrade Rakesh. "There are no exceptions in the law." ●



Comrade Rakesh



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At her home, up a steep wooden staircase in Sandhikharka, Pratiba Acharya is bored. In her tiny bedroom, walls plastered with popstar posters, textbooks are piled high. Her school, Argakhanchi Higher Secondary, has been closed for nearly three months on Maoist orders.

"We'd heard the Maoists think only rich people study in English schools like mine, so they want to close them," says the shy 15-year-old in English. But, she adds, many poor people scrimp and save to send their children to the district's 17 private schools. Pratiba's family can't afford to send her away, so like many of her classmates she is idle and deeply worried about her plans to study science.

Pratiba's school is idyllically situated near pine forests at the edge of town. Principal Sri Krishna Bhushal showed us the redundant facilities. His students have now gone to local schools where there were 200 students in one class before the closure of private schools. "Now you can imagine the numbers," says Bhushal, "It's hazardous for their health."

Bitter politicised local disputes have produced tragedy here. A widely respected local Congress leader who had stood up to the Maoists, Ram Mani Gyawali, ('The murderous middle ground', *Nepali Times* # 86) was hacked to death here three years ago. "He never thought ill of anyone," recalls former VDC chairman Bhoj Bahadur Basnet. "But his gruesome death made all the political leaders run away." Five Congress members and others have met similar deaths.

Bhoj Bahadur now lives in Kathmandu and on one of his rare day-trips to his village, I could sense his family's unease as strangers arrived. A hunted look on his face, he told me he

Surviving in Argakhanchi

Individual tragedies of a people trapped by conflict

CHARLES HAVILAND in ARGAKHANCHI DISTRICT



CHARLES HAVILAND



Principal Sri Krishna Bhushal (left) of the Argakhanchi Higher Secondary School on the outskirts of Sandhikharka (above)

Lekhnath, died in a road accident while working as a driver. Her eldest son, Dharma Raj, blamed local Congress politicians for having blocked Lekhnath's appointment as a teacher and joined the Maoists. After that, Tilottama says the army started victimising her daughter, Kanchi.

"One day they came and took her away," she told us. They kept her for 49 days and beat her with sticks. On returning home, she had jaundice but was ordered to report to the army in Sandhikharka every three days. Kanchi couldn't take it any more

and joined the Maoists. Recently, Kanchi who her mother insists never wielded a gun, died at the hands of the army. As for Dharma Raj, the family barely hears from him.

Travelling deep into the breathtaking Argakhanchi countryside, a visitor might be oblivious to the conflict. Every so often Dhaulagiri appears from behind the jagged green foreground with its immaculately tended fields and terraces. In Ghorakhori, the Maoists passed through the day before we arrived. Dhan Bahadur Khatri Chhetri, a venerable

family patriarch, chuckles as he pours a tot of rum for breakfast. "They demonstrated their arms and ammunition to us," he says. "They stayed a night then went down into the valley. They say they're fighting for us and we must help and then they go on." So far, a plan to conscript one person from each house has been threatened but not implemented.

Deep down in the valley below, a huge network of mustard fields nestles by the fast-flowing Jhimruk Khola, hidden from the world outside. The footbridge here is one of the very few links to the Maoist Midwestern heartland of Pyuthan. Most houses lie empty, only 20 families live permanently in this fertile but remote spot. Purna Ram Belbase keeps a small shop. "If I don't sell the Maoists something, I'll put myself in danger," he says. "But if I do and the army finds out, then I'm in danger too."

The army says it has been mounting a major operation against the Maoists in Argakhanchi and three neighbouring districts. It is difficult to test this claim. Villagers like Purna Ram have seen nothing but the Maoists did cancel a planned meeting partly on grounds of ultra-caution because of the army offensive.

Extortion and related violence remain common. Since a major Maoist assault on Sandhikharka two years ago (see: 'Enough', *Nepali Times* #111) the army has increased its strength here to 700 troops and has also moved its barracks to a more secure spot up the hill from town.

"The army hasn't made us feel secure," said a man from the town. "They roam around during the day, but after sundown there's no one here." ●



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Mid-Marsyandi on hold again

Construction work on the Middle Marsyangdi hydropower project was halted once again after Maoists allegedly blew up a bus belonging to the project on 5 November. The Maoists had issued a public notice two months ago saying that they would not allow construction as long as security forces guarding the site also engaged in search operations in the surrounding areas. The government says the soldiers are guarding dynamite used in construction. An agreement was reportedly reached with the Maoist leadership and construction had resumed this month.

The contractor of the German-funded project, DDC JV, says it can't continue when there is a threat. The Nepal Electricity Authority, which loses Rs 2 million for every day that work is stopped says there is adequate security. DDC JV's original bid for civil works was 77 million euros but extra claims due to delays have already topped 60 million euros. (See: 'Delayed reaction', *Nepali Times* # 216) The 70 megawatt project was initially going to cost Rs 14 billion of which 85 percent would be borne by a German grant. But given the escalation in the compensation claims by the contractor, the cost of the project to Nepali taxpayers has soared.

Business for awards

Standard Chartered Bank has announced that it will be sponsoring the Award for Best Banking Submission at the 2005 Business Journalist of the Year Awards. Standard Chartered first sponsored the banking award in 2004, when Richard Morais of Forbes Global won.

Another Bakery

The Nanglo chain of restaurants has opened 'The Bakery Café Dharahara' offering customers international quality services. The new venture was launched on 8 November and is doing roaring business.

Kia goes golfing

Continental Trading Enterprises, the exclusive distributor of Kia Motors organised Kia Open Golf Tournament at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort. The basic theme was 'Get the hole in one and win Kia Picanto'.

VOW now

Voice Of Women is organising a Top 10 College Women Competition for women students across the nation. Eligibility requires women currently pursuing education with leadership experience, involvement on campus and in the community, excellence in field of study and inspiring goals.

NEW PRODUCTS

GEL FRESHNESS Following the launch of the Dabur Red Toothpaste in July 2003, Dabur Nepal has introduced Dabur Red Gel in 40gm and 80gm packs, priced at Rs 20 and Rs 40 respectively. Dabur says it is enriched with three core ingredients: clove, mint and lemon.



ZOOMING IN After Zoom wafers were launched at Rs 2 per wafer, Chaudhary Group has now launched Zoom chocolate wafers at Rs 5. More flavours on the way.



MUNCHING MAGIC The Golchha Organisation's Hulas Biscuits & Confectionaries has launched a sweet and salty biscuit called 'Magic' available in the market for Rs 10.



NATURAL SOAP Wipro Consumer Care and Lighting, a division of Wipro Limited, India has launched its flagship brand Santoor in Nepal in 100 gm pack with sandal and turmeric soap. It recently acquired Glucovita and has marketed it in two flavours: almond and orange.



Losing the labour lottery

Raghuji Pant made three mistakes

Where did Raghuji Pant, the Minister for Labour, go wrong? Only last summer he seemed convincing to many people when he announced that "no matter what" he would impose a lottery system for private-sector agencies that select and send

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



Nepali labourers for work abroad. Pant, a UML politician and a former journalist, said that what he was planning to do was driven by his concerns for the poor.

Since the supply of Nepali labourers vastly exceeds the demand for them to work as plumbers, cooks, factory-floor workers and the like in South Korea, the Gulf countries and Malaysia, the recruitment agencies exploited the opportunity to sell the available spaces at exorbitant prices to those who could pay, thereby pushing out the poor from even gaining a foothold in the international labour market. Pant said that a lottery, conducted under the government's watch, would level the playing field in that all who qualify and participate would have an equal chance of being sent to jobs abroad without paying anything extra.

Though this columnist had his doubts about the promise of such a lottery (see 'The Luck of the Draw', *Strictly Business Nepali Times* #207), Pant's argument apparently sounded right to many people as letters of support poured onto the pages of national dailies. When Lumbini Overseas, the first target of Pant's plan, filed a case in the Supreme Court challenging the minister's decision, the judges sided with the government.

Meantime, the public's hatred for manpower

agencies became starkly clear on 1 September, as hordes of young people went around Kathmandu destroying, along with Muslim-owned businesses, the offices of over 300 manpower agencies to mourn the murder of 12 Nepali labourers in Iraq. In October, the minister himself made a trip to South Korea to explain why he was doing what he was doing to the employers who, in turn, told him that they would trust their agents' judgment more than that of Pant's government.

And the result of all this is that as Lumbini Overseas prepares to send workers to South Korea in the usual way, the Minister's lottery proposal, despite the hype, has fallen by the wayside, putting him on the defensive, disappointing his

supporters and denting his credibility. Looking back, he committed three mistakes.

Pant failed to understand that the best way to help the poor was not to tamper arbitrarily in the existing market but to expand employment opportunities for all. Instead of battling the politically well-placed manpower agencies in a show of ego, he could have used his time and energy to take them into confidence to spot and negotiate new opportunities in new markets for more Nepali workers.

Pant appeared to have neither done his homework nor secured any cabinet support before taking on the agencies. Using anecdotes, he only talked about high charges borne by the poor, but could supply no hard proof to the public or to a court of law to punish the offending agencies. In the end, admirable though Pant's concerns for the poor were, his inability to think through how he would push his policy (and his blaming others when it failed) raised questions about his own political judgment.

And finally, Pant could not understand that as an industry gets connected to international markets, the power to decide what Nepal should supply and how shifts from Nepalis to buyers outside who don't hesitate to drop Nepal if they don't get their way—regardless of whether they are getting garments or labourers. This is why, regardless of how extortionist the manpower agencies are and regardless of Pant's and the Supreme Court's decisions, it was the Korean buyers who made the final decision on what Lumbini should do. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Gambling on business

Gambling is considered a social evil. Don't casinos encourage it?

People gamble everywhere. They place bets on cricket matches and toss coins. You can't really stop them. The government is in no position to stop them either. A casino gives them a place to gamble with fixed rules and regulations. Ninety-nine percent are responsible gamblers. They don't gamble if they can't afford it.

What about the black-money-washed-white in casinos phenomenon, especially with Indian gamblers?

That is a myth. They can't claim to the taxman to have won money at the casino without producing a certificate as proof. On the basis of this, they'd be liable to taxes in both Nepal and India. It would be a loss for both parties.

Do casinos rig the games so they never lose?

No, there is no such thing. We make rules that ensure odds in favour of the casino. More than 95 percent of our players will always lose. Only five percent win. The casino has a little edge in some games such as blackjack, but if the players know the rules, they can easily win. Also, each table wins at least once so

it is really all the player's luck.

A lot has been made about the contribution that casinos make to the national economy. Is it really that important, and don't the negative effects outweigh the revenue to the state?

We do contribute in various different ways. We take from the rich and give to the poor, really. We employ up to 700 people in each casino, on an average. And we pay Rs 10.45 million as royalty to the government per casino. We also encourage local singers and dancers in a big way and provide entertainment and outlets for people who want a night out.

Where do you draw the line between gambling and compulsive gambling?

Don't gamble. Don't gamble in casinos. If you must gamble, gamble with money you can afford to lose. Take the free meals and drinks. Don't get drunk and lose unnecessarily. It can become a compulsive habit. But that is true of most things: anything in excess and you will suffer. You must be prepared to face the consequences of over-indulgence and pushing yourself beyond your limits.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Besides being a regular columnist, Rakesh Wadhwa is the executive director of Nepal Recreation Centres and managing director of Casino Everest and Casino Royale in Kathmandu. He talked to us about gambling and the game of business.



It's a gamble

Tihar is here, take a bet on the market value of professional gambling



ABHA ELI PHOBOO

Nepal used to be the only place between Monaco and Macau where you could gamble legally. With a huge nation of gamblers next door, Nepal's casinos cashed in on the bonanza for decades, propping up the kingdom's tourism industry through good times and bad.

It all started with Casino Nepal at Hotel Soaltee (previously Hotel Oberoi). It was all nicely tied in for the Indian

package gambler: air fare, three days four nights and free coupons thrown in to get 'em hooked. And, boy, did they get hooked.

Nepal Recreation Centre now manages the six casinos that have mushroomed in various five-star hotels in Kathmandu. Though it was targeted at tourists, Nepalis were allowed to gamble in casinos before government policy discouraged them with Rs 50 charge on entrance. In 1977, the Gambling Act of the land granted licence and Nepalis were banned altogether from going into casinos. The dens now bank on tourists but most establishments give those entering the benefit of doubt.

This Dasain wasn't buzzing for Kathmandu's casinos. They do not have much to look forward to in Tihar either as the number of tourists dwindle. International media coverage of the blockade and the 1 September riots have reduced the number of tourists this season, especially from India.

"A majority of our clients are from India," says BK Shakya, general manager of Nepal Recreation Centres. "This Diwali, it looks like they are staying home." But there are the die-hards who come to Kathmandu regularly. "I come to Nepal on business every few months," says Ayush Agrawal, a trader. "I like the casinos here not just for gambling but for all the other facilities they offer."

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) is hoping that recent promos and road shows in India will bring in first-time Indian tourists to the casinos, especially from southern India. Casinos contribute two percent of their earnings (it amounted to Rs 1.7 million last

year) to the Tourist Service Fees which NTB ploughs into promotional efforts.

Casino clients are now diversifying and come not just from India but also from China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Says NTB's Tek Bahadur Dangi: "Casinos provide attractive packages for tourists and can encourage visitors to increase their length of stay in Nepal."

The history of the word 'casino' comes from the Italian word for a cottage: small summer homes where people gathered to listen to music, and eventually gamble. The first time it was recorded in the English language was in 1851, which is probably when English tourists in Tuscany discovered the salacious pleasures of games of chance.

Although Nepalis are not allowed in Kathmandu's casinos. "I like coming here," a Nepali who didn't want his name mentioned, told us. "It's not just the gambling, there is music, food and drink. I get to sing on stage sometimes if I ask. It's not like you can win gambling, it's more relaxing to just sit and watch."

The gaming industry has always had an uphill struggle to be accepted in society, although gambling is traditional in Nepal, especially during Tihar. "We are a taboo," admits Kishor Silwal, managing director of Casino Rad. "But we are a big draw for tourism and prop up the economy."

The pull factor is that casinos offer round-the-clock free food and drinks for players with special facilities thrown in. The push factor is that when gambling becomes a compulsive habit, it ruins lives. ●





Casino Nepal

Set up at the Soaltee, Casino Nepal is the country's oldest casino and was launched in 1968. In 1976, American Richard Doyle Tuttle entered the scene and began managing the casino. He now chairs the Nepal Recreation Centres which runs other gaming establishments in town. With its well-polished ambience, Casino Nepal has repeat patrons and frequent-gamblers. Children can be parked at a nearby video arcade.



Casino Anna

In 1992, Casino Anna opened and was as BK Shakya puts it "a product of the restoration of democracy". Located at Hotel de la Annapurna in the centre of town, it drew huge crowds.

The casino is built on three floors and the ground floor, in an attempt to catch them young, is targeted at children with slot machines. First floor is for serious gamblers.

Casino Everest

When the government granted licence for three more casinos in 1992, Everest Hotel opened (what else: Casino Everest). The establishment is known for its wide range of entertainment events with live music 24 hours. Free meals and drinks attract even more people and weekly tournaments have brought a bonanza of repeat customers.

Casino Royale

1992 also saw the opening of Casino Royale at Hotel Yak & Yeti in the renovated wing of the Lal Darbar. The casinos even keeps two astrologers on standby in case any of the customers want to consult the stars about their chances for that particular night. There is also an exclusive beauty salon for VIP guests.



Casino Rad

Casino Rad opened in Hotel Radisson last July and hasn't looked back since. Besides a loyal clientele of Indian gamblers, it has begun to pull in quite a few Malaysians who are tired of the Genting Highlands, as well as Thais. Like the other casinos, it offers casino packages to guests.



Casino Tara

The youngest casino, it opened last December and is located at the Hyatt Regency. It has an exclusive VIP subdivision where the minimum bet starts at pretty high stakes. It features Caribbean stud poker, halfroulette and more.

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The king holds the key



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Interview with Dr Keshar Jung Rayamajhi, former chairman of Raj Parishad Standing Committee

Samaya, November 11

समय

How was the 1991 constitution finalised?

The interim government had two prime responsibilities: to frame a new constitution and to hold general elections. The former had to be done first. Hence, a constitutional advisory commission was formed under the chairmanship of Biswanath Upadhyaya. Kishunji, Nilambar Acharya, Yog Prasad Upadhaya and I were appointed to give the constitution its final touch. Our meeting was held confidentially at the office of the forest department in Godavari, eight days before the constitution was made public. We used a taxi

instead of a government vehicle just to avoid detection. We discussed each section in detail and came across a section that said 'in case of two-third majority in the parliament there can be a referendum for a republic'. This was unacceptable to us. The country could not afford another crisis. When democracy had just been established it would be unhealthy to start a referendum for a republic or monarchy system. We came to the conclusion that the section should be changed.

How did you settle that?

I shared my concern with Ganeshmanji. He shared similar concerns with Kishunji and the next day, I worked with the commission team and we concluded that democracy, constitutional monarchy, human rights and rule of law would remain unchanged. We also agreed that besides these four, other sections would be amended if a consensus was reached with two-third majority in the parliament. In this way, the constitutional monarchy was included in which the king would protect and adhere to the newly framed constitution.

And everyone agreed?

There was a debate about the management of the Royal Nepali Army. As per the constitution, the National Security Council had been formed and there was much discussion about membership. One group proposed that the prime minister be made chairperson with the army chief and defence minister as members. Another group disagreed and suggested that the council add the field marshal also as member. There were disagreements over majority of military representatives in the council. Ultimately, it was agreed that the field marshal would not be included. The constitution team decided that the king would be supreme commander of the army and the army would be mobilised on his recommendation. It was said that army generals put pressure on the prime minister because of differences in opinion about council membership. They expressed dissatisfaction about protocol of the chief of army. They proposed that Nepal should be made a Hindu nation.

What are the shortcomings of the constitution in the present context?

The prime minister has the right to dissolve parliament but the constitution also says that he should hold elections within six months. There is no mention of any provision in the constitution about what happens when elections are not held within the stipulated time, which is why Article 127 was used and has caused complications.

So how do we resolve this?

This step was taken to find a way out of the present constitutional crisis. The king has shown his respect towards the constitution and has approved all decisions made according to legal provisions by the ministerial cabinet. He has been constantly supporting restoration of peace in the country and wants to see elections held. Since 4 October, we have had three prime ministers but none of them was able to hold elections.

So what is the solution?

Definitely not by constantly changing prime ministers. The king has to take steps to preserve the nation. He will take important steps after his visit to India if the political parties fail to do something by then. I don't see any possibility of Prime Minister Deuba restoring peace and holding elections. The king can solve the national problem himself either by forming an advisory assembly or by chairing the cabinet.

Do you think the Maoist problem can be solved within the existing constitution?

There is no need for a new constitution. The constitution is not an obstacle to bringing the Maoists into mainstream politics.

Rolpa offensive

Nepal Samacharpatra, 8 November

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Just when there is talk again of a Tihar ceasefire, the army has begun an offensive in the Maoist heartland of Rolpa and Rukum. The army has launched air and land attacks against rebels in the bordering villages of both districts from the south. The security offensive was launched after the military received information that armed rebels were gathering in huge numbers for possible attacks against security force camps in the area. Maoists have, in the past, gathered in Thawang, Rolpa before launching major attacks in the western districts. This time, the army decided to deploy troops right into the rebel base. The Maoists have claimed that a third military brigade has been formed and even central leaders have arrived in Thawang to plan a big attack. An army official said the idea is to strike the rebels right in their den and decimate their strength.

The army has established temporary camps in Ghartigaun, Bhawang and Kureli after being dropped from helicopters. There is a lot of chopper activity and more troops are being moved in. The army's Nepalganj-based western regional headquarters said the Dang brigade was leading the offensive in Rolpa and Rukum. Locals say the army

operation is bigger than a previous campaign before Dasain. Spokesperson of the army's western headquarters in Nepalganj, Yagya Bahadur Rajaure, characterised the military activity in Rolpa and Rukum as a strategy for "area domination". He had no other details of casualties on either side.

Conflict studies

Annappurna Post, 8 November

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

Due to the conflict, fewer students are going to schools in southern Doti. The Maoists have been forcing students to join their indoctrination programs, they have been killed in the crossfire between the Maoists and the army.

Many students are now dropping out of school and moving down to the district headquarters, or to India to work. People who can afford to keep their children in the district headquarters or other relatively safe places are the only ones who are able to provide their children with some sort of education.

In the southern parts of Doti secondary, higher secondary and middle schools have seen up to 60 percent drop in enrolment. "Students are unable to study consistently in schools," says one teacher. "The Maoists keep taking them for five-day, weeklong or 12-day campaigns

and other programs. We never get to finish our courses."

According to a parent from Barchen, students fear the army as much as the Maoists. Min Prakash Malla of Joroyal has been forced to work in a small shop in Dipayal and study there because the conflict in his village was hampering his studies. Students who work in lodges and shops in the district headquarters say that if there was a ceasefire they would be able to go back to their villages and resume studies. The Maoists maintain their party has never forced students to join their indoctrination camps, or join their militia. The army also says schools should be conflict-free. But both sides violate their commitments, students and teachers say.

Pampha Bhusal

Ujir Magar in Nepal, 21 November

नेपाल

BAGLUNG-"It's much safer in Nepal," said senior Maoist leader Pampha Bhusal who managed to cross the border and reach Nepal safely after Indian police chased her in Patna a few months ago. Her comrades were arrested. Her sudden appearance in Baglung recently surprised everyone. She was moving around freely in Baglung's remote villages, delivering public speeches and meeting local political leaders



कान्तिपुर Kantipur, 7 November

QUOTES OF THE WEEK



Constitution is not the end but the means.

King Gyanendra in his message for the 15th Constitution Day on 8 November

Spiralling into occupied Iraq

DAHR JAMAIL in BAGHDAD

The flight from Jordan feels all too normal...until we arrive over Baghdad International Airport. The nose of the plane dips, the left wing drops, and the downward spiral begins, dropping us 4,000 feet per minute into the inferno that is occupied Iraq.

Rather than an in-flight magazine, a lonely card is available to read in the seat pocket. It begins with: *'For those of you who have not travelled with us before, you need to be aware that, for your security and safety, and not for your comfort, we do a spiral descent into Baghdad. This is carried out to avoid any risk from anti-aircraft missiles or small arms fire...'*

The airport is filled with nearly as many foreign security guards from 'Global' as passengers. A large influx of third country nationals, looking as though they are either Sri Lankan or Indian, is rounded up onto the Kellogg, Brown and Root bus to go work jobs that could be done by Iraqis.

I nervously wait until another small bus appears and takes me to the front checkpoint...passing signs for soldiers that remind them to have their weapons ready and flak jackets on as they enter the 'unsecured area', which is most of Iraq outside of the US camps.

It is tense as we unload. A huge car bomb detonated here just a few days ago, killing nine people. One of the security guards approaches me and says, "You don't want to be here long. There are bad things going on here. Very bad things." I look up to see a line of cars being searched as they attempt to enter the pick-up area and take a deep breath when I see Abu Talat. He

approaches with a big smile, waving at me as he walks up to be searched. The man is undeterred. This entire trip is worth it just to see my dear friend.

We quickly load my luggage into his car and drive out, passing some men in a BMW (the favoured vehicle of criminal gangs), who ask us if I just flew in. Abu Talat tells them he came to pick up a friend, asks me for a pen and paper, and quickly writes down their license plate while telling me, "That could be kidnappers...there is no flight after yours. I will watch to see if they follow us. Everyone is being kidnapped now. It is a booming business here since there are no jobs."

Humvees and Bradley fighting vehicles are perched along the road, with their weapons aimed directly at us and other cars as we pass. This is occupied Iraq. I breathe and quickly remember the daily life here, driving to avoid craters in the road left by lethal improvised explosive devices, heavy weapons aimed at cars, scorched palm trees along the road, crime running rampant, and the constant threat of being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time by gunfire or an attack on a US patrol. I allow myself to surrender completely to the mindset of *Insh'allah*. It is the only solace here.

On the suggestion of Abu Talat, we go visit some friends of ours, a family whose father/husband was beaten into a coma while in US military custody. It is safer this way because as my trusted interpreter/fixer tells me, "No one knows you are here yet, so this is the best and maybe only time to go places. *Y'allah*, we go now."

We talk with the wife and daughters while the electricity

fluctuates – they tell me how they just finished a stint of 72 hours straight with no electricity. One of the daughters tells of how, while in school the other day, she listened to rockets flying over her building. "This is a war here, we are living like animals," she says wearily.

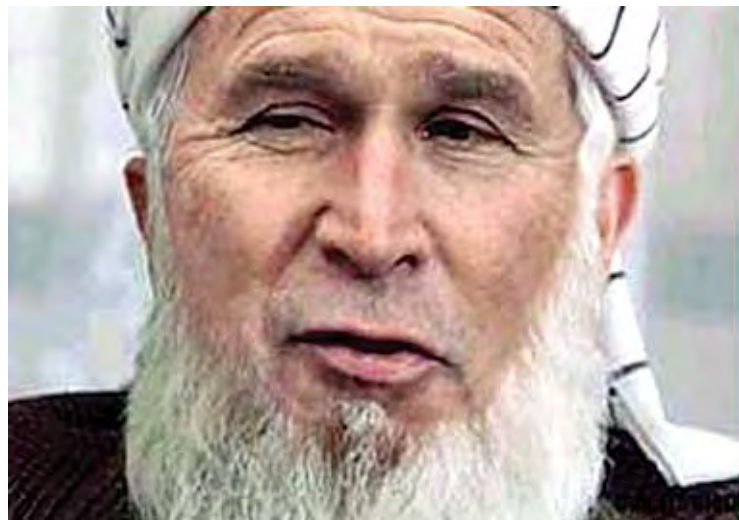
We mustn't stay long and are off to run errands before I go find a hotel. Every moment finds us watching to see if we are being followed; the kidnapping has gone out of control. He explains that even people who give information about Westerners to crime gangs can earn \$500. In a place with 70 percent unemployment, this is the only lottery.

The deep red sun peers through the pollution as the breaking of the fast approaches (it is Ramadan). We go to a few stores to pick up supplies for me, and Abu Talat tells me not to ever speak English in public. We are both on the lookout, ever careful for our safety.

As I type this, a gun battle of automatic weapons rattles on down the street, Fallujah has been sealed prior to imminent attack and the mood in Baghdad is tense with gloomy expectation. The feeling is that of a war zone, people are downtrodden, tense and angry, chaos reigns and nobody is safe, anywhere.

All this against the backdrop of the recent news of another four years with Mr Bush and his junta. Now the people of Iraq prepare to slide further into the hell that is occupied Iraq as the siege of Fallujah looms over Baghdad, and a heavy, damp night settles over this once magnificent capital. ●

Originally from Anchorage, Alaska, Dahr Jamail has spent five months in Iraq. DahrJamailIraq.com



Bush's second jihad

America has become dangerously fundamentalist, just like its enemy

This election confirms the brilliance of Karl Rove as a political strategist. He calculated that the religious conservatives, if they could be turned out, would be the deciding factor. The success of the plan was registered not only in the presidential results but also in all 11 of the state votes to ban same-sex marriages. Rove understands what surveys have shown, that many more Americans believe in the Virgin Birth than in Darwin's theory of evolution. He felt that the appeal to this large bloc was worth getting President Bush to endorse a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage (though he had opposed it earlier).

The results bring to mind a visit the Dalai Lama made to Chicago not long ago. I was one of the people deputised to ask him questions on stage at the Field Museum. He met with the interrogators beforehand and asked us to

STAR & STRIPES
Garry Wills

give him challenging questions, since he is too often greeted with deference or flattery.

The only one I could think of was: "If you could return to your country, what would you do to change it?" He said that he would de-establish his religion, since "America is the proper model". I later asked him if a pluralist society were possible without the Enlightenment. "Ah," he said. "That's the problem." He seemed to envy America its Enlightenment heritage.

Which raises the question: Can people that believes more fervently in the Virgin Birth than in evolution still be called an Enlightened nation?

America, the first real democracy in history, was a product of Enlightenment values: critical intelligence, tolerance, respect for evidence, a regard for the secular sciences. Though the founders differed on many things, they shared these values of what was then modernity. They addressed 'a candid world', as they wrote in the Declaration of Independence, out of 'a decent respect for the opinions of mankind'. Respect for evidence seems not to pertain any more, when a poll taken just before the elections showed that 75 percent of Bush's supporters believe Iraq either worked closely with al Qaeda or was directly involved in the 9/11 attacks.

The secular states of modern Europe do not understand the fundamentalism of the American electorate. It is not what they had experienced from this country in the past. In fact, we now resemble those nations less than we do our putative enemies. Where else do we find fundamentalist zeal, a rage at secularity, religious intolerance, fear of and hatred for modernity? Not in France, Britain, Germany, Italy or Spain. We find it in the Muslim world, in al Qaeda, in Saddam Hussain's Sunni loyalists. Americans wonder why the rest of the world thinks us so dangerous, so single-minded, so impervious to international appeals?. They fear jihad, no matter whose zeal is being expressed.

It is often observed that enemies come to resemble each other. We torture the torturers, we call our God better than theirs — as one American general put it, in words that the president has not repudiated.

President Bush promised in 2000 that he would lead a humble country, be a uniter not a divider, that he would make conservatism compassionate. He did not need to make such false promises this time. He was re-elected precisely by being a divider, pitting the reddest aspects of the red states against the blue of nearly half the nation. In this, he is very far from Ronald Reagan, who was amiably and ecumenically pious. He could address more secular audiences, here and abroad, with real respect.

In his victory speech last week, President Bush indicated that he would "reach out to the whole nation", including those who voted for John Kerry. But even if he wanted to be more conciliatory now, the constituency to which he owes his victory is not a yielding one. He must give them what they want on things like judicial appointments. His helpers are also his keepers.

Moral zealots will, I predict, give some cause for dismay even to non-fundamentalist Republicans. Jihads are scary things. It is not too early to start yearning back towards Enlightenment. ●

Garry Wills, an adjunct professor of history at Northwestern University, is the author of *St Augustine's Conversion*.



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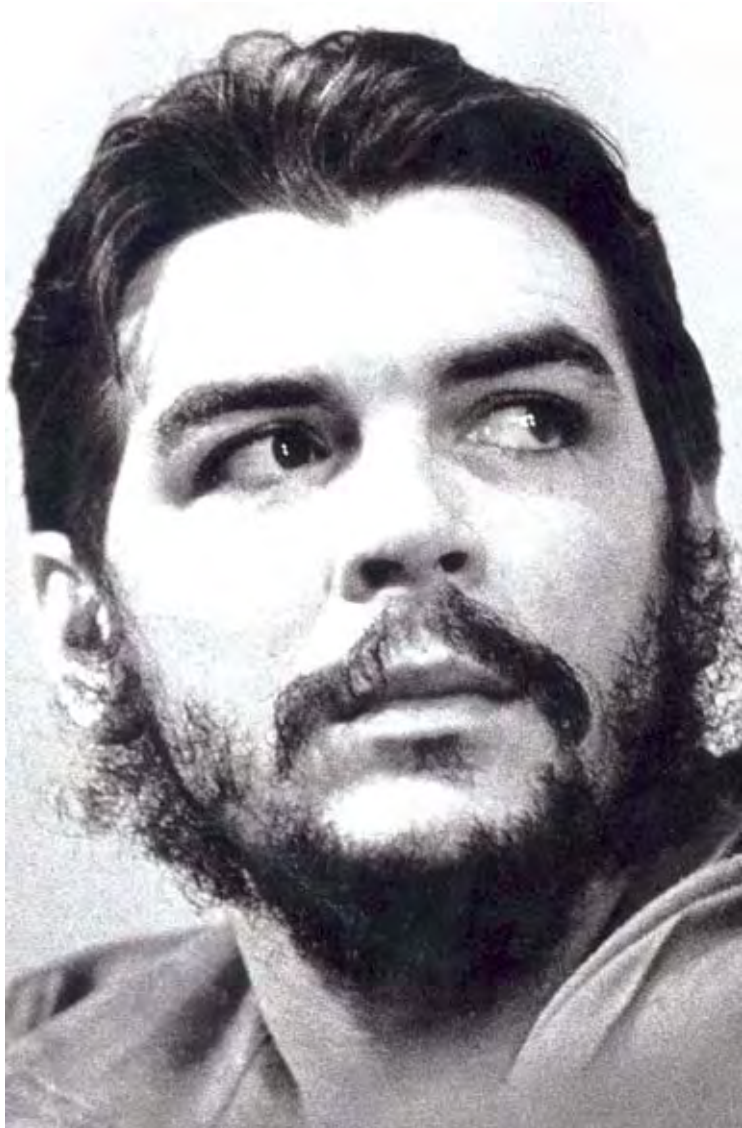
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Che chic

As Guevara fever sweeps the world with the release of *Motorcycle Diaries*, a Cuban writer wonders about the wonder called Che

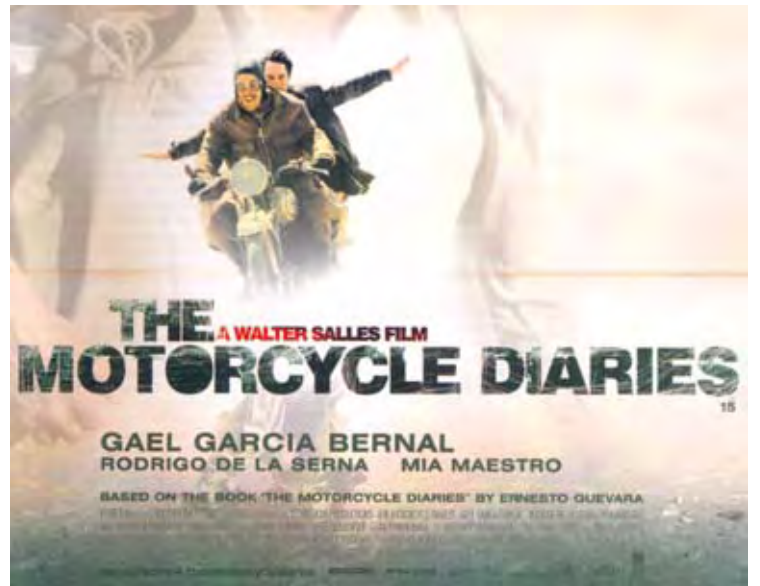
that came from his letters and diaries.

In his speeches, I discovered the brilliant Che, mercilessly railing against inefficiency, false politics, and double standards. "If we lack organisation the ideas after the impetus of the first moment lose their effectiveness and fall into basic routines and conformity to become a memory," he once said. I looked around our island and wondered: was anyone listening?

I discovered the Che who scribbled love poems and coveted his solitude. I wanted to sit with him, for beer and cigarettes, to talk about his love for chess or his favourite books.

With the crisis of the 1990's brought on by the collapse of our Soviet patron, many Cubans returned to what Che said about economics and admitted the value of what is achieved with effort. We felt once again the integrity of what it's like to share the burden of a common predicament. The value of our homemade solutions increased to some who had always favoured ideas imported from the east.

Then Che's face flooded our lives, staring at us from T-shirts, banners, walls, and key rings, with a look as vigilant as those on the faces in murals of the Committees for the



Defence of the Revolution. The solemn face that Alberto Korda caught in his photographs became tough and unsympathetic. He stopped being San Ernesto de la Izquierda, the saint or talisman who delivered us from injustice. Instead he rose like the flag of the trivial in a global mass culture — a sign associated with consumer tastes in fashion, music, and drugs.

To rediscover the Che who could inspire, I returned to the young Ernesto of Che's diary. I thought again about how on his trip through Latin America, he acquired his revolutionary ideals, clarified certain questions and added more. I loved how he was brave enough to postpone his life for a while to find his

own answers.

Today, a photo of Che's image displayed on the façade of Cuba's Interior Ministry is a must-have for tourists. Visitors leave and continue their imaginary leftist lives with full refrigerators. We Cubans remain, in-charge of keeping the flame alive.

I wonder, Ernesto, what you would have turned into had you lived? An archetype feeding the legend? A general talking down to us with reprimands? A favourite leader? A twenty-first century Quixote tilting at the windmills of canned politics? A postcard? A repressor of feelings? Or just another dinosaur? ●

(Project Syndicate)

Eduardo Sanchez is a pseudonym for a Cuban writer.

For millions of young people around the world, their introduction to Ernesto Che Guevara will be Gael Garcia Bernal as Che and Rodrigo De la Serna as his friend Alberto, kicking back the stand of an

man with a funny accent and starred beret, began with less romance. "Pioneros por el comunismo, seremos como el Che! (Pioneers for Communism, like Che we shall be!)," we repeated day after day before starting class.

The chant became so tedious that inevitably the class clown would ask if the incantation would end up turning us all into asthmatics, as Che was. Che's life and deeds all became part of a modern bible for young Cubans. Even if we wanted to reject what was force-fed in chants or poems like 'Che Comandante', it was hard to resist the charm and passion

FILM

Eduardo Sanchez

overloaded motorcycle, hopping aboard and lumbering north on an 8,000-mile journey through South America in the film version of Che's *Motorcycle Diaries*.

For those of us in Cuba old enough to take a similar trip, our journey with Che, the young

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Your caddy's world

Vijay Singh started his golfing career as a caddie

It struck me recently how privileged we are in most parts of Asia. We can enjoy a round of golf with a caddy at an affordable price.

Trust me, in European and North American cities, using a caddy during normal play is very uncommon. Mostly only wealthy people can afford them. Golfers there (and actually even in the more expensive Asian cities like Japan and Singapore) use a pull trolley or drive a golf cart. Some even use light bags and carry their sets themselves.

Most societies view being a caddy as a profession that indicates no real social standing. (In case you didn't know, caddies are employed by golfers to carry their golf bag containing the equipment and accessories needed to play and enjoy the sport.)

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



Caddies can and should play a very important role in a player's performance, right from top professionals down to club amateurs. Besides tending to

equipment, caddies assist in a variety of ways, such as judging distances, reminding one of hazard placements and reading breaks on the green.

Good caddies also help players in course management, such as taking into account wind speed and direction, advising on options that can be taken during the round, knowledge on the rules, and most importantly, keeping the player's morale and spirits up. It takes quite a lot to be a good caddy including being efficient, intelligent, hard working, and of course knowing a lot about golf.

For the caddies, just being the caddy is not the limit. Hard working talented caddies have developed into good golfers. There are numerous examples, such as world's #1 golfer Vijay Singh who recently revealed that he started his golfing career as a caddie. Being the caddy of a top golfer can earn lots of money as well. Tiger Woods' caddy, Steve Williams, is known to be the highest earning sportsperson in New Zealand!

Many professional golfers who reach the top have come from being ball boys and caddies. This usually meant they started by swinging wooden sticks at old rotten balls, just as some famous soccer players started as kids kicking plastic packs in the back alley.

In neighbouring India we have witnessed many such examples of having gone from being a 'bag boy' at the local Golf Club to becoming a top professional in the region.

Some who are enjoying success today and living a new lifestyle beyond anything they ever imagined include Vijay Kumar, Mukesh Kumar and Ali Sher. Recently, Ashok Kumar won the order of merit on the Indian PGA tour, placing him as the #1 in Indian Golf. He started his career at the Delhi Golf Club, first as a ball boy and then a caddy.

It is high time we encouraged our caddies and recognised their potential. It is not impossible for some of our caddies to be amongst the best players in the region, and their start will come from the opportunity to swing a golf club.

Next time you are discarding your old golf set, or even just a club or two, for a new one, don't throw it in the back of the storage room where it will rot. Talk to your local professional about how it could be used to open up a whole new world for caddies who faithfully help you through your round of golf. ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com

Italians shake off shackles

Serie A clubs have eschewed traditional counter-attacking tactics in their search for European success

GABRIELE MARCOTTI in ROME

Most years, around this time, the pundits gather around the Champions League tables and begin to draw conclusions, looking for wider trends and patterns. Never mind that only 48 matches have been played so far, a total which most statisticians would find insignificant.

As arduous as it may seem, halfway through the group stage, it does look as though Italy's representatives have been dominating the competition. Of the four sides with maximum points, three — Juventus, Inter Milan and AC Milan — hail from Serie A. The Italian contingent has notched 27 points, compared to the Premiership's 23 and La Liga's 17. The top-scoring team in the Champions League, Inter, are Italian. So are the competition's stingiest defence, Juventus. Leave out AS Roma—torn to shreds by continuous managerial changes (Luigi Del Neri is their fourth in three months), injuries and the as yet unpunished moron whose missile hit Anders Frisk, the referee, on the forehead — and Serie A sides have looked decidedly impressive.

Some will be tempted by this to draw definitive conclusions about the restored supremacy of Italian football. This would not only be premature, it would also be futile to some degree. The days when we could divide European sides based on their domestic provenance are drawing to a close. The far-reaching effects of the Bosman ruling have much to do with this: Juventus have six Italians in their best XI, Milan five and Inter only four.

But it is not only the players and managers who have been globalised. Footballing philosophies have as well. Inter, Milan and Juventus all play very different systems based on different philosophies. In many ways, they reflect the variety in Serie A, where there is a veritable hodgepodge of formations.

In Serie A there are sides that attack relentlessly at pace for 90 minutes, like Zdenek Zeman's Lecce, and teams that man the barricades for 90 minutes, crossing the halfway line only to counter-attack, like Carletto Mazzone's Bologna.

"I think this variety has been a massive boon," said Arrigo Sacchi, the former Milan and Italy coach. Indeed, the variety is reflected in Italy's Champions League participants. Milan serves up an entertaining attacking brand of football based around a short-passing game.

He has taken Andrea Pirlo, who had always played in the hole and sticking him in front of the back four. Or, as he did last

season, taking Cafu, the Brazil wing back, and playing him as a right back. By Italian standards, it amounted to apostasy. Serie A sides had always believed that the man in front of the back four should be a snarling, hard-running ball-winner with the lungs of a marathon runner. Not even Brazil trusted Cafu's defensive skills enough to play him as a full back.

With so many players comfortable on the ball, Milan became the kind of side that could hold on to possession for long stretches, thanks to the skills of Pirlo, Clarence Seedorf and Kaka. And with the prolific Andrei Shevchenko up front, the rossoneri have the cutting edge to turn all the creative work in midfield into goals.

management are a testament to his coaching skills and tactical nous.

Capello is an astute tactician who has employed a range of styles and formations in the past, but it was obvious that, at Juventus, he would only play one way. Capello's Juventus wear down opponents with watertight defending, a physical midfield and strikers who need only a few chances to score.

And then there is Inter, perhaps the most interesting of the Italian sides. After years of dull, defensive football served up by the likes of Héctor Cúper, Roberto Mancini, the new coach, has taken a decidedly different course. For the first time in recent memory, Inter



Of course, none of this would have been possible if the club — or, rather, Silvio Berlusconi, the owner — had not embraced the new attack-minded philosophy, even when it meant leaking goals, something which is inevitable with such a top-heavy side. Berlusconi, who made his billions in television and knows a thing or two about popular entertainment, mandated that the club should always prioritise entertainment over results, a strategy in keeping with his love of image and branding.

By contrast, the men who run Juventus made no such proclamations. To them, football is about results and to bounce back from last season's disappointment, they hired Fabio Capello — the closest to a sure thing that the modern game has to offer — away from rivals Roma. His six titles with three teams in 13 seasons of top-flight

did not break the bank over the summer, actually registering a transfer surplus.

All this has yielded performances like the one seen two weeks ago at Valencia. When the nerazzurri went 2-1 up they didn't just sit back and protect the lead, they went for the jugular. They rolled forward in waves and eventually handed the Spanish champions a 5-1 humiliation in front of their own fans.

Whether Italian clubs can dominate the Champions League remains to be seen. The history of the game is littered with sides who dazzled in autumn only to disappoint in spring. Yet the sudden upturn in Italian fortunes is not based merely on luck. It's a function of the lessons learnt in the dark years and the new found tactical and philosophical variety in Serie A. ●

SURYA NEPAL
GOLF

"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.)

The Adventures of HEROJIG
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by jiggy gaton Wuz up?

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~ Ancient Nepali Proverb

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Herojig's Adventures can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com #44 2061 by jiggy gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Uneven Fragments** Art forms by various artists at Gallery Nine. Until 12 November. 4428694
- ❖ **November Medley** Collection of paintings and sculptures by various artists at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Until 1 December. 4218048
- ❖ **Babermahal Deepawali Street Festival** with live concert, dance and food stalls at Babermahal junction on 13 November from 1PM. Entrance Rs 50.

EVENTS

- ❖ **The Art of Happiness** Introduction to Buddhism at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, 13-14 November from 10AM to 4PM. 4414843
- ❖ **Nepal Kaleidoscope Photo Competition** on any subject that portrays Nepal or the Nepali way of life, submission deadline 16 November. www.pjclub.com.np
- ❖ **The Sound of Music** at The Royal Nepal Academy on 19 and 20 November, a fund-raiser organised by Triyog High School. 4470608, 4476425
- ❖ **Ganesh's Trunk Holiday Bazaar** at Baber Mahal Revisited 11AM to 6PM on 20 November. 4436040
- ❖ **Aasman Mela** at Hyatt Regency, Boudha on 20 November.
- ❖ **How to Tame the Crazy Mind**, Talk by Robina Courtin on 20 November, 10AM to 4PM at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre. 4414843
- ❖ **3rd Annual Ride and Rage** with the Himalayan Enfielders to the Last Resort on 20-21 November. Rs 1,500 per person. 4440462
- ❖ **Kathmandu Dance Festival** with German dance master Andreas at Latin Quarter's Salsa Bar, Baber Mahal Revisited. From 16-27 November.
- ❖ **WCN Amateur Nature and Wildlife Photography Competition** for amateur photographers. Deadline 30 November. 5524202, www.wcn.org.np
- ❖ **Bluebird Festive Blast** Shopping specials for Tihar at both Tripureswor and Lajimpat outlets.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazz At Patan** featuring Cadenza and friends at Patan Museum Courtyard on 26 November.
- ❖ **Hey DJ** at the Yak & Yeti on November 26.
- ❖ **Fusion Night** at the Rox Bar. Every Wednesday from 6PM onwards.
- ❖ **Deo** at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** Live music by The Strings. 4256622
- ❖ **Happening live jazz in town** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat. Every Wednesday and Saturday, 7.45 PM onwards.

DRINKS

- ❖ **Island Bar** with DJ Raju and The Cloud Walkers. The Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Free drink deals** at Red Onion Bar, Lajimpat

FOOD

- ❖ **Charcoalz** a barbecue of western, Indian and Mongolian delights at Hotel Yak & Yeti, 6PM to 10PM. Till 30 November.
- ❖ **La Soon** Restaurant and Vinotheque, moved in the lane next to the Egyptian Embassy, Pulchok for spacious indoor and outdoor seating. 5537166
- ❖ **Tickling Taste Buds** live barbecue, 7PM onwards every Friday evening at the Shambala Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri-la. 4412999
- ❖ **Genuine Thai** cuisine at Royal Lotus, Bakhundole. 5521231
- ❖ **Delicious barbecue dinner** Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Unlimited nature with delicious meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Barbecue-Ban Bhoj** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vajrayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali Lunch** at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. Junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Dream Holiday** package tour to Malaysia during Tihar. Marco Polo Travels and Qatar Airways, 2012345, malaaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Canyon Swing** 140 m down stream at The Last Resort. 4439525
- ❖ **Getaway package** night's stay at Godavari Village Resort, includes dinner and breakfast. 5560675
- ❖ **Shivapuri** Tranquil village, superb views and birdwatching. Shivapuri Heights Cottage, on the edge of Shivapuri National Park. Steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Pure relaxation with special offers for Tihar. 4361500
- ❖ **Bardia National Park** with Jungle Base Camp Lodge. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Golf** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212
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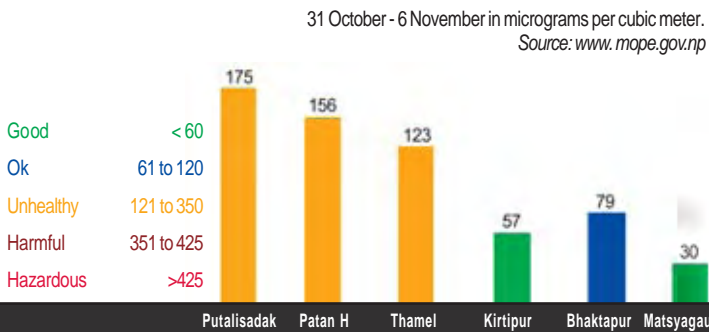
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There has been a significant rise in the concentration of PM10 at all six monitoring stations in the Valley. Winter means dry dusty weather. All zones need to be on high alert because the air quality is getting even unhealthier. Don't take your masks off yet!



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



November is the driest month with monthly average rainfall 7.6 mm for the Valley. Halfway through the month, we've had zero rain. This satellite picture taken on Wednesday afternoon shows no sign of rain at least for the coming week, which is just as well because it is Tihar. The high pressure zone over central Asia continues to bring in dry, cold wind from the north and keeps away the moisture. A virile cyclone that was spinning off the Arabian Sea has dissipated, sending some wisps of cloud our way. A westerly system over the Karakoram will not threaten us. Enjoy the sunny weather and great views of the mountains from the Valley rim.

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दक्षिण एशियाकै पहिलो स्वतन्त्र प्रसारण सेवा रेडियो सगरमाथालाई दिगो बनाउन यसको साथी बनाउँ रेडियो सगरमाथाको साथी बनेर रेडियो सञ्चालनमा यहाँले ठूलो योगदान पुऱ्याउन सक्नुहुनेछ।

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(थप जानकारीका लागि कार्यालय समयभित्र रेडियो सगरमाथामा सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस्, फोन: ५५२८०८९, ५५४२२४५)