HAPPY DASAIN
Nepali Times takes next week off. There will be no issue on 26 October, and the next hardcopy edition will come out on 2 November. Tune in to www.nepalitimes.com or www.himalkhabar.com in Nepal for updates on the news.
From all of us here at Nepali Times, a Happy Dasain, Id and Chhat.

THE BIG THAW
The mountains are melting

S cientists are still trying to measure the rate of retreat of Himalayan glaciers, but climbers have known for years that the mountains are melting. Glacial retreat, receding snowlines and expanding lakes has become much more rapid since the 1980s. Climbing even easy peaks like Cho Oyu and Chomolungma has become harder because previously snow-covered ridges are now bare rock.

Glaciers like the Imja below Lhotse are shrinking by up to 70m per year. There is now a lake 3 km long where there used to a frozen glacier 50 years ago. Dozens of glacial lakes in Nepal and Bhutan are in danger of bursting their banks, and in an earthquake there could be multiple outburst floods on Himalayan rivers.

Besides the dangers to human settlement, thinning snow cover in the Himalaya threatens water supplies to rivers like the Yangtze, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Ganges and Indus on which more than a billion people depend.

There is a near consensus in the scientific community that global warming is caused mainly by carbon emissions from human activity and vegetation loss since the start of the industrial age. The world’s biggest emitters of carbon dioxide have not signed up to the Kyoto Protocol to cut back on emissions.

HOT AND COLD: The Imja Glacier in 1956 and again in 2006. As global warming melts the ice, many new glacial lakes have emerged in the Himalaya, posing an unprecedented threat of flashfloods downstream.

THE BIG THAW

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THE BIG THAW

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THE BIG THAW

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THE BIG THAW

Continued from p12

New Arrivals
ZARA

THE DESIGN STUDIO
CONTACT: 442145, ABOVE HIMALAYA JNA

Success keeps you on your TOES

SUCCESS IS GOOD FUN

SUCCESS IS GOOD FUN
Nepalis outside Nepal areashed about the state of Nepal
Uncertain no more

H ow does Nepal look from abroad for people of Nepal origin? For some time now, it has been looking like a country cursed with chronic uncertainty.

To be sure, instability is not unique to Nepal. Most countries go through periods of uncertainty. And among intellectuals, there is a great deal of uncertainty about uncertainty itself. Some think it gives society a certain tension that brings forth vitality and creativity, but it brings imagination and the possibility to begin things anew. Certitude doesn’t fit the times.

But a modern nation state can’t flourish in uncertainty for too long. A few months or a year of instability won’t do much harm, but if it persists and dominates society uncertainty will breed more uncertainties and becomes self-perpetuating. Nobody all countries are able to break this vicious cycle, development turns into destruction. This could turn counterproductive even for those who are responsible for keeping things uncertain.

Excess periods of uncertainty give forces that benefit from it the chance to rise up again. We can see that this is already starting to happen in Nepal, and those who thrive in uncertainty are sure to try to prolong it. If there is one big goal that the national leadership has in front of it, it is to end this period of uncertainty. After all, is the country united? Are there any citizens or are the inhabitants meant for the country? If there are no citizens there can be no country, and if there are no inhabitants without a country.

But there can be citizens without a country.

There are many ways to get out of this cloud of uncertainty and it seems that the efforts of Nepal’s intellectuals and leaders have not been enough. They haven’t been able to look beyond their vested interests. They aren’t looking beyond their own interests at the national interest as they should be.

Nepalis have always been champions of free thought. We’ve proven the future, but not prepare ourselves for it. We regard anyone who takes us as an enemy. Even so, the solutions to Nepal’s problems must come from Nepalis themselves. The answers won’t fall from the sky, it won’t be waited from here the south or north. It must be from us, it must suit Nepal. If not today, then surely tomorrow.

The English praised Nepal for being “brave Gurkhas” and Nepalis let that get into their heads. They are proud because they were never colonized, but they should be able to see how they are being snarled by those same powers.

They may try to ruin the image of the new avatars of colonialism.

Today, Nepalis outside Nepal see Nepal as a poor, backward country. Just as a son may disown a mother dressed in rags, Nepalis outside Nepal are trying to cut themselves off from Nepal’s history, language and culture.

But Nepalis can’t remove the palad mudsill euphe, the male-female disparity or ethnic discrimination, they must at least try. They should try to overcome their economic, social, educational failures. They must be able to stand on their own feet and not depend on outsiders. Only then can Nepalis be truly proud of being Nepalis.

Instead of looking abroad this is the country where the Buddha was born, Nepal should be able to live in peace. Instead of showing off an MT Everest they should be able to stand above-traditional, linguistics and regional differences.

Nepalis shouldn’t panic at such a long worst list. Obviously, these problems can’t be resolved overnight. It needs time, patience, but above all it takes imagination. If Nepalis can imagine a future, it is not impossible. We just need to draw a blueprint. Once there is a blueprint, the house can be built sooner or later. For a bright future, Nepalis don’t need dreams, they need imagination.

Tanka Subba is professor of Anthropology at North-eastern Hill University, Shillong. This is a translation of the letter that he has sent to the Madan Punsakar Award ceremony on 13 October in Kathmandu.

LETTERS

DASAIN WISH

IF things go on like this, Nepal will have only nuisance value for the international community.

The foreigner, however, much more with our politics is because our rulers are such serial delinquents. If they were more united, possessed with some vision for the future, and were committed to the national interest, it wouldn’t be ranting away, even European ministers wouldn’t be dispensing unsolicited advice and Shyam Saran wouldn’t be air-dashing to Kathmandu.

At the rate things are going, there is a danger of a catastrophic cascade of events that will unravel the peace process. If that happens we would probably wish the foreigners would interfere to rescue us from the brink of chaos. If we want less meddling, we better to put our own house in order quickly.

The thrity high priests that have taken it upon themselves to command our destiny (PKP, GFP and MKN) seems characteristically more interested in electoral advantage. Political parties everywhere are preoccupied with electoral arithmetic, but our rulers seem bent on delaying or abandoning elections unless they win big.

This week’s haggling behind closed doors between the three banubs at Baluwatar were deadlocked till deadline. We won’t go into any detail, but you can guess what the bargaining was not about protecting the national interest.

A lot of the blame must go to the Maoists, who keep on changing the rules of the game and going back on past agreements. Everyone understands this is because of their internal contradictions and the desire to harden their line.

They’ve got cold feet about the elections and the leadership fears it can’t hold the party together if the party suffers a major defeat in elections.

The UML and NC need to understand this Maoist sense of insecurity and not try to exploit it for partisan advantage. The Maoists are not going back to the jungles, but they are not coming so that much that hardline warlords take up ethno-regional banners and go back to armed struggle. This is not so far fetched that because that is exactly what happened in the tari with the JTM.

The NC is also guilty of vacillating on the elections because of the NC’s fears of losing out in a full-proportional system. The prime minister and his home minister have proven themselves to be incapable of ensuring security.

The end result of all this is that a majority of Nepalis are beginning to give up on the politicians in Kathmandu ever getting their act together. After more than 18 months of ceasefire, they are still waiting for an improvement in service delivery, in justice and human rights, in education, in health and to begin things anew. Certitude doesn’t fit the times.

Across Nepal, ordinary people equate long-term peace with elections. The current assembly polls would bring closure to this period of unstable transition. It would focus people’s minds on what politics really should be about: improving people’s lives.

And that is the Dasain wish of all Nepalis.

KIRAN RANJAI

NEPALI PAN

I very much appreciate Vijay Lama’s article (“Nepal ek haun,” Nepal Pan, #370). The political parties are destroying the king for everything. They are just chanting the slogan of constituent assembly and garib bani. Neither CA nor garib bani is a magic wand for solving all our problems. We need good government and strong political willpower.

L. Karki, New Zealand

I am really grateful to get your great thoughts. Keep on posting such write ups.

Mira M. Thalland

I absolutely agree with Capt Vijay Lama. He is right in all aspects. We all should be proud to call ourselves Nepal. It is high time we ignored these arrogant, divide-and-rule type politicians. Anup Pandeyp, Kathmandu

Vijay Lama’s article mirrors the futility of current Nepali politics, its practices and dilemma of millions of Nepal youths, at home and abroad. I am very much impressed by his opinions. Bhawaneswor Sharma, email

I salute Vijay Lama for his article. It carries the real sense of what Nepal and Nepalis should be. It is true that our nation is on the brink of disintegration because of the present political scenario, but I do hope that the political leaders read your article and take something from it. Thank you once again for your deep sense of nationalism and patriotism toward our motherland.

Paras Nepali, email

I must please remember that Prashant Tamang is not a Nepali and we are not proud of him if you wish. Why is there an ethic then Nepal can never be united. Your writing itself sounds racist.

Name withheld, email

VOYAGE

Your assessment (‘Poll vault,’ Editorial, Nepal Times #370) is very sombre and realistic. Girija Shankar is very much appreciated. Vijay Lama’s article mirrors the current problem can’t be solved by a single party or a single person. It has to come from all Nepalis putting in the same direction.

Pashupati Neupane, Syangja

DISCRIMINATION

After reading ‘Head to the hills’ (#370) my wife, who is Nepali, called the Resort to enquire about the availability of rooms. She was told only one room was vacant (NRs 1,600 a night) and that too in front of the kitchen. Clearly, she was being discouraged to visit the resort as Nepali guests by a Nepali staff. She was told only one room was vacant (NRs 1,600 a night) and that too in front of the kitchen. She was told only one room was vacant. Why this discrimination against Nepalis? Charging 3000 for the same. Why this discrimination? Why? Why? Why?

Arora, Kathmandu

Nepali youths, at home and abroad. I am very much impressed by his opinions. Bhawaneswor Sharma, email

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id agencies have issued their second undertaking in four years to show fairness and transparency in the most unequal country in Asia. On the face of it, the code of ethics is to be welcomed. However, the proof of the pudding will be in its implementation.

The Basic Operating Guidelines (BOG) are just that: basic, selected for the least common denominator. ‘Operating guideline’ appears to be the operative noun coined to contain a set of instructions that can be used to help make a decision or form an opinion in difficult situations. The BOGs aren’t binding. Individual donors are free to come up with excuses not to follow some or all the guidelines. No objection can be raised for their non-observance. In that sense, the BOG is a propaganda tool. Donor activities in Nepal go largely unexamined by civil society and the press. It’s Foucault’s famous formulation at work: money, power and knowledge implicate each other. Those who make opinion here in Kathmandu do so freely, but the extent of their freedom is defined by the knowledge-power nexus at the service of international agencies.

Donors have reaffirmed their pledge to ‘operate in all areas of Nepal in transparent and inclusive manner’. The commitment to extend their activities in areas other than tourist destinations and trekking routes is laudable. But transparency? It takes some daring and patience to endure personal humiliation to pass through multiple security checks of the UN Fort at the BICC. Even INGOs today hire multinational security guards that consider every Nepali visitor to be a potential baddie. But it is the hollow promise of ‘inclusiveness’ that raises eyebrows. Criteria for inclusiveness are personnel and programs, in that order. In the absence of public accountability, programs of international agencies are excessively influenced by people involved at the decision-making level. They are overwhelmingly English-speaking young achievers from upper-middle class families, the kind that has back-slapping familiarity with the centres of legislative, executive, judicial and media power in Kathmandu. Most donors have succeeded in maintaining reasonable gender balance, but few recognise the importance of caste, creed, class or community in giving a sense of inclusion to their workforce. Large white SUVs, jet-setting ways and a wide lifestyle gap are a part of the neo-colonialism of aid. Waste and extravagance set the lords of poverty apart from the native substrata.

The pathologies of foreign assistance such as phantom or boomerang aid (the money that is paid to home-country consultants and suppliers in the name of the recipient state), edifice complex (building for show rather than utility), fix-up deals (providing sinecures to native elites), chasing rainbows (policy canvassing at international fora) and politics of patronage can be seen in Nepal, too. Adopting a BOG is not intended to change this part of the culture. However, the commitment at least shows that signatories are ready to be accountable. This is an opportunity that stakeholders in Nepal must seize. Parliamentary oversight is the best method of ensuring accountability in foreign aid management. Last week the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) meeting in Geneva called for more parliamentary supervision of state policies on foreign aid and their implementation. It denounced tied aid and members of the IPU Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade agreed that giving a free hand to donors was detrimental to the interests of recipient countries. But, beggars can’t be choosers. One who pays the piper calls the tune. Donors will continue to have their way as long as they don’t face scrutiny from their partners in Nepal’s civil society.

Parliament and civil society must monitor donor activities

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Female community health volunteers bring medical care to the weak and sick in remote areas

More than half of Nepal’s children younger than five can now be treated for diarrhoea and pneumonia close to home thanks to the volunteers, says a 2007 report by Save the Children (US). But health workers say there is still room for improvement.

“Death among children under five years is common and it’s a tragedy that even today we still can’t control the mortality,” says Kalpana Swar, a volunteer in Dadeldhura.

The number of young deaths rises during the monsoon, when water-borne diseases are widespread. For the volunteers, the job means sometimes having to fight their way through torrential rain and landslides, and being permanently on call, which can put pressure on their family relationships.

“It is a 24-hour job and we can’t say no to anyone or we will make enemies,” says Rita Sharma, a volunteer in Dadeldhura.

“Despite all the odds against saving lives, there has been progress and there is optimism of saving more if such community-based efforts are sustained,” he says.

More than 85 percent of Nepali children are covered by Vitamin A and immunisation programs, and this is largely due to the contribution of the nationwide network of female health workers.●
Branching out
Ace Development Bank’s first branch office opened at Birgunj’s Ghantagar Link Road. Ace Development Bank is the first financial institution to be upgraded from a ‘C’ class financial institution to a ‘B’ class national bank. Ace was also recently awarded BOSS Magazine’s ‘Best Financial Institution’ award.

Palm top
Signature Whiskey can now be had in a 90ml palm-sized bottle. Designed by London-based Classens, the smaller bottle is priced at Rs 90 and is available everywhere. Signature Rare Whiskey is marketed by United Spirits Nepal.

Awarded
Swarit Oil Industries has been awarded the NS Quality Award 2007. Swarit manufactures Swarit Soyabean Oil, Ghee, Dhara Health Sunflower Oil. Swarit Oil is a member of the KL Dugar Group of Industries.

Youth savings
Machhapuchhre Oil Industries’ new Youth Savings Account can be opened for a deposit of just Rs 100 at an interest rate of four percent. The account will entitle customers to an ATM card, any branch banking service and free mobile banking.

It’s a blog world

If you follow blogs maintained by experts who write well and are passionate about sharing what they know with others, you find that their postings are short, insightful and often useful to do one’s work better. If current improvements can be sustained, Nepal is set to meet most MDG targets. Poverty is likely to be halved by 2015, and hunger also reduced. Material mortality, serious as it is, is also on course to be brought down to 100 per 100,000 births in eight years’ time. Similarly child mortality is expected to reach 40 per 1,000 live births (from the present 70) by 2015. However, one MDG target that Nepal will likely fail to reach is universal primary education, says the UNICEF survey. Also, even though targets may be reached by national averages, the rates for vulnerable groups like girls in primary and secondary schools are still not acceptable.

For a country wracked by conflict, Nepal has shown surprising progress in child survival and literacy in the past decade. But there is still a long way to go. That is the message of UNICEF’s Situation of Children and Women in Nepal survey that looks at key indicators and projects them till 2015, the year by which key development targets worldwide are supposed to be met.

The numbers look daunting
● Half of Nepal’s population of 27 million are children below 18
● Nearly 550 mothers die every year since 2003 and much slower growth in health, education and sanitation (11 percent) in the same period.
● Most of the world’s developing countries, including Nepal have committed themselves to meeting the UN’s eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to halve poverty, reduce hunger and improve maternal and child health by 2015. Last month, Nepal with Cambodia and several African countries became the “first wave” nations to sign an agreement in this regard.

With statistics like that, we should have a government that is very worried, but it is so preoccupied with the politics of elections there is very little effort to improve healthcare. That is why experts are worried about reversals even in the modest gains we have seen in the past 10 years.
“I stand with the revolution”

Interview with Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Thapa in Nepal, 28 October

By raising demands on the eve of the constituent assembly elections, the Maoists are accused of being against polls. Why are you going against the very agenda you raised?

On a superficial level, it looks like the CPN-M was behind the delay in elections. But if you take a closer look, you’ll see that the NC and other parties are the main culprits. Take a look at our demands, and see if they are legitimate or not. The parties are responsible for the election postponement because they refused to budge.

Don’t you see that you are endangering the peace process and a return to war?

We have seen that danger. If the government tries to suppress our peaceful revolution with weapons then it will be clear that they have no desire to hold elections or change to a republic. I don’t think they’ll make such a stupid move. But history has shown that in extreme cases, people do resort to stupidity. So we haven’t dismissed that possibility.

In the span of one and a half years, what have you accomplished and what have you lost?

Our recently concluded fifth plenum answers this question. There were forces that tried to isolate us by labelling us terrorists. They have failed. The middle class no longer misunderstands us and we have established international relations. But there have also been losses. We have had trouble making the changes we wanted. We failed to make the people understand many of our agreements. Regressive forces have made use of that. Our weaknesses in madhesi, janjati and republican issues have been exposed.

Are you a hardliner?

No. There are right-wingers, middle-of-the-roaders, and leftist factions in our own party and they are in constant conflict.

So where do you stand among those factions?

We are revolutionaries and I fall into that category. Our party follows the revolutionary code. I am on the side of revolution and if the party line goes against my beliefs, then I will stand with the revolution.

It is said that you have tried to establish yourself against Chairman Prachanda. That is also part of a conspiracy. I do not surface in public much, and that is my weakness. This rumour has spread because certain factions wish it.

You have said that you do not want a republic like that in Iraq or Sikkim.

We want a Nepali republic, where Nepalis make the decisions. Foreign help will be required, but not foreign direction. If foreigners try to direct us instead of just helping us, it will be an attack on our national integrity.

You have maintained that there is an Indian hand in everything, but we do not see you opposing it.

Our line on India is clear. There are many treaties and agreements with Nepal that need to be changed. We don’t want to ruin our relationship with India, we want to make it better in the future. But our party will oppose India’s incorrect actions. Certain factions in India are hatching a conspiracy against the movement of the Nepali people. This is an attack on our independence. The madhesi incidents are also anti-national.

I stand with the revolution

Akhilayan, 5-21 October

 Doesn’t look like negotiations on elections are going anywhere. The Maoist proposal on a republican and full-proportional elections are not going to be voted by parliament. Pushpa Kamal Dahal is locked up by pressure from radicals within his party and is in no position to be flexible. NC president Girija Prasad Koirala is also under pressure from his party stalwarts and India’s green signal to stick to his demands even more strongly. The Indian prime minister’s special envoy, Shyam Saran, brought the message that parliament should go on record declaring a republic before the vote. Koirala would prefer parliament to announce an interim president to be ratified by the first session of the constituent assembly. But Koirala is nervous about doing that because of the probability of a military coup. Koirala’s formula is to declare a German-style proportional representation system and to announce a commitment by parliament on a republic. The fact that the Maoists poured scorn over Saran’s proposal after his departure shows just how unpopular it is among them.

Ram Bahadur Thapa says even if there is agreement on one of the two proposals parliament could vote. But even if the UML votes with the Maoists, they will need
the NC voters to get a two-thirds majority.

The UML has also rejected the Maoist demands. There is a sense of urgency because of the Maoist threat to launch a rebellion if it fails to secure the necessary support in parliament for its proposal. If they go back to the streets to declare a republic and a new government, the seven party unity will fall apart and so will the peace process.

The deadlock resulted in the UML calling for an extension of the parliament meeting by two days till Thursday. The radicals in the Maoist party led by Mohan Baidya and Ram Bahadur Thapa have given leader Dahal little room for manoeuvre. “At this rate, there will be no agreement even by Thursday,” according to an analyst.

Fear of China
Singha, 15 October

Shyam Sharan spent his 48-hour visit saying different things to different political parties and leaders. Shanna chose to say whatever was most favourable to whichever party he talked to, and that is one reason he had to return empty handed this time, say analysts. Sources do say, however, that Sharan managed to bring up the issue of China’s growing influence in Nepal with everyone from Prime Minister Girija Koirala to Maoist Chairman Prachanda.

He also expressed the Indian government’s unease at China’s posting of 200,000 soldiers along the northern Nepal-China border, says a Maoist source. China posted the soldiers during the time of the royal regime. There are 100,000 of them along the Khasa border, 50,000 along Taplejung’s Chyang tanglo border and 50,000 along the Muga border. Sharan also expressed dissatisfaction at the growing contact between the Maoists and China and also the prime minister’s comments about getting petrol from China.

Nepali politicians responded to this by pointing out India’s forces at Kalapani and the thousands of soldiers posted along the southern Nepal-China border for ‘border security’.

Inept
Artur Narsingh KC in Dristi, 16 October

The suspension of elections is an unfortunate event but instead of rectifying mistakes, the parties are too busy blaming each other. The reasons for failure to hold elections can be found by accusations but by realizing their own weaknesses.

The Nepali Congress unification was supposed to emotionally unite party workers but that failed miserably. We unified the party but that proved to be only artificial. NC’s internal difficulties are the reason why the nation’s politics has failed to find a way out.

We cannot always run our society, its foremost responsibility is to provide security to both lives and property. But there is absolute lovelessness. The government has totally shut its eyes towards the illegal activities carried out in the name of the YCL. Impunity andarchy are rampant.

The government has failed to protect journalists, industrialists and many others. It has even failed to do anything in the capital, and is doing much worse in the tarai.

Children get abducted every day. The terror of Maoist extortion continues, Teachers, civil servants, and journalists are being abducted and killed. The home minister is a national embarrassment, he has even stopped feeling ashamed.

Royal Maoists
Dhulukut, 14 October

At a time when India is trying to tighten bonds between the political parties and the Maoists and facilitate the peace process, China seems to be trying to distance the parties from the Maoists. Sources say that China, keeping in mind Nepal’s sovereignty and integrity, is trying to bring together the palace and the Maoists.

Maoist hardliners Mohan Baidya, CP Gajurel and Ram Bahadur Thapa have been used by China, say sources. Two weeks ago, the Maoist politicians and Chinese envoys met at a hotel. Since then, the Maoists have been interacting with royalists and the army.

Maoist spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Malla has even met former royalist minister Prakash Koirala.

TALK TALK
Naya Patrika, 14 October

Minister for peace and reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel has spent nearly 59 of his 187 days in his job holding talks with various groups with political demands. So far only four of 59 negotiations have been fruitful and tens of millions of rupees have been wasted:

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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of sessions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities</td>
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<td>Women Security Pressure Group</td>
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<td>Inter-party Women’s Alliance</td>
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<td>Nepal Federation of Disadvantaged Group</td>
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<td>Nepal Civil Servants Union, Nepal Civil Servant</td>
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<td>Madhese People’s Rights Forum</td>
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<td>Chure-Bhawar United Society</td>
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<td>Janantar Tarai Mukhi Morcha (Jalwa Singh)</td>
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<td>Dalit Workers and Peasants Party</td>
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<td>Madhese Agricultural Workers Family</td>
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<td>National Federation of Disabled-Nepal</td>
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<td>Maitihi Democratic Society</td>
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<td>Association of People’s Revolution Wounded and Warriors</td>
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<td>Nepal National Victims Association</td>
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<td>Association for Nepal Khas Society Upliftment</td>
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<td>Dalit Citizens Society</td>
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<td>Ex Army Association</td>
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<td>Tarai Cobra Group</td>
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<td>Women’s Power Centre</td>
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The decision of monarchy should be made through people’s mandate
People in war

JOHN S SHILSHI in BIRGANJ

W

hen I read in a Birganj newspaper that the ‘A People War’ photo exhibition tour was put up at the Birganj Chamber of Commerce and Industry, I wasn’t really that interested. I had seen exhibitions here before, and they all lacked the professional touch.

I was also blase because similar exhibitions of photographs of conflict in Kashmir and the Indian northeast I had found disappointingly selective.

Human rights groups highlighted atrocities committed by the state, and those put up by state functionaries displayed images of militant atrocities. Photo exhibitions, therefore, seemed to serve a propaganda purpose rather than to tell the stories of human tragedy.

But my reluctant visit to ‘A People War’ sprang a few surprises. First of all, the exhibition, displayed by Nepal Army, the photo journalists who had been working in a war zone, had much more human interest.

Nepal had done a good job in selecting the photographs from the book, ‘A People War’. Each told the story of how ten years of violent conflict in Nepal had brutalised society. The exhibition was carefully balanced, and left no scope for excoriation or revenge.

The emphasis was on how conflict affects civilians the most, and it depicted images of sorrow but also resilience and the inner strength of people caught up in war.

Everyone was reading every caption and lingering over the pictures. As we inched along, I was instantly struck by a photograph that showed three dead goats and an elderly farmer, their bodies torn apart by a bomb dropped from a helicopter. The picture forced us to ponder and compare the value of human life and the lives of animals.

Further on, there was a photograph of a woman caressing the body of her policeman husband who lay among many dead scattered on a blood-soaked field. My inner self asked a silent but difficult question: was she unlucky to be there, or lucky to be able to say a final farewell? I took refuge in a presumptuous thought and silently comforted myself by supposing that they did not have children.

More corpses, this time of policemen in the back of a pickup atPokhara airport. The bodies were dumped like municipality workers disposing of carcasses. The photo revealed the level of engagement during the conflict, how even usually ceremony-bound security forces didn’t find time to arrange basic coffins for their departed colleagues.

A photo exhibition tour that strengthened the Nepali voice for peace

The pictures of grief of those who lost relatives were unbearable to look at, and there were few dry eyes among the visitors. From Tuli Basnet and her little son mourning her husband’s death, to the body of her policeman husband who lay among many dead scattered on a blood-soaked field. My inner self asked a silent but difficult question: was she unlucky to be there, or lucky to be able to say a final farewell? I took refuge in a presumptuous thought and silently comforted myself by supposing that they did not have children. More corpses, this time of policemen in the back of a pickup atPokhara airport. The bodies were dumped like municipality workers disposing of carcasses. The photo revealed the level of engagement during the conflict, how even usually ceremony-bound security forces didn’t find time to arrange basic coffins for their departed colleagues.

Connecting the dots to make sense of madhesi politics is becoming much harder

Multiblock leaders share a strange relationship—they fight among themselves and fragment, yet co-operate on issues. Mainstream or armed, national or local, they are all in touch with each other. Local factors are more important than pan-Madhesis issues in many cases. No alliance is static. The line between politics and crime is blurred, and caste remains the central determinant in political choices.

Not a single madhesis moderate force is now committed to the electoral process. Upendra Yadav found an excuse after the postponement of polls to walk out from his deal. The NSF-Mulato has announced an agitation after the EC and SC refused to recognise it as the legitimate NSF. Both these groups are vulnerable to Indian pressure and a NC-MJF-NSP alliance is still possible. But their present move has complicated politics and reflects something deeper: any arrangement with Kathmandu opens up the space to question the legitimacy of the entire political system.

Rajendra Mulato and his aides suspect that the prime minister instructed the CEC not to award his faction the original party status, with the motive of weakening the madhis forces. They are thinking of beginning a movement demanding a commitment to a regional parliament and regional prime minister in the tanai before the CA polls.

The madhesis armed groups are thrilled. Apart from the king and army, if the poll postponement benefits anyone, it is them. And with above-ground parties revising their strategy, the rebels have the upper hand. Both Goit and Jwala Singh have assured the parties of behind-the-scenes support in case they decide to go ahead with any agitation. Their problem is that all of them have a severe resource crunch.

Underground politics is evolving rapidly. The most recent split in the Goit faction was led by Pawan aka Prabhat Singh, a Pasta leader who was with the UML and then turned royalist. Some local Raxaul leaders encouraged this split because they were disenchanted with Goit’s uncompromising stance on succession as well as building a united front with other madhesi forces. They would like to see an alliance between Pawan, Jwala, and the MJF dissident faction. Jwala Singh has been steadily increasing his numbers and has managed to attract splits by giving his district units a high degree of autonomy as long as it shares the loot with the central leader. But while both Goit and Jwala hate each other, their district level units have been cooperating in planning joint political action and even extortion. There is constant communication between their district leaders along with those of both factions of MJF.

Caste remains central to underground and mainstream politics. The MJF split had more to do with the Yadav non-Yadav divide than policy differences. A dissident leader says, “Those who stayed with Upendra are Yadavs and the rest came with us. That is natural.” The divide has become stark on the ground. A Bihari faction activist in Birganj pulled this writer away from a local journalist, saying he was a Yadav and would provide misleading information.

This does not mean all Yadavs get along. Upendra and Jwala share an acrimonious relationship because both are Yadavs from adjacent districts and know only one can make it big. Instead, Upendra and Jwala shared a closer relationship, at least until the MJF leader signed the deal.

Jwala is a dalit, and wants to engineer a dalit-brahman alliance in the Mayawati style. His district commanders are mostly upper caste but his understanding and commitment to such an alliance and whether it is feasible in the Tanai’s context is questionable. Madhesis, bramhans are happy with the movement but are not keen on greater democratisation within their limited population share. Most dalits know that madhesi high castes remain their primary oppressors. At the same time though, they do identify themselves as madhesi dalits rather than seeking a new independent identity.

In this almost incomprehensible madhes maze, the only certainty is there will be more confusion and disorder. Polarisation will continue and alliances will emerge and collapse.
Global climate change is affecting the Himalaya much faster than previously thought, and mountaineers have been the first to notice the changes: more frequent avalanches, more crevasses and exposed rock faces where there used to be snowfields.

Cho Oyu and Chomolungma used to be considered the easiest of the eight-thousanders to climb, but have become more difficult in the past 25 years.

"There are certainly more crevasses than there used to be on Cho Oyu and climbers have to take a new steeper route than before," says Phil Crampton, who has been leading expeditions to Cho Oyo and Chomolungma for the past seven years.

Mike Roberts, a mountain guide from New Zealand, has also seen changes on the mountain: "I think the upper section of Cho Oyo is getting steeper and more difficult, and expeditions will have to start putting ropes there."

At 8,201m, Cho Oyu is the sixth highest mountain in the world, and this year hasn’t been kind to mountaineers. Normally the success rate on the mountain is relatively higher than other mountains, but this year most expeditions had to turn back due to bad weather.

Mountaineers have also noticed a change in weather patterns, with more frequent late monsoon storms. Russell Brice, a guide from New Zealand, says: "Even though the last two monsoon seasons were very heavy, there was hardly any deposit of snow on Cho Oyu."

Sections that were snow and ice when George Mallory and Andrew Irvine climbed the north face of Mt Everest in 1923 are now mostly bare rock. In fact, this was probably one reason Mallory body was found two years ago because the ice melted, exposing the body. (See also: 'Is climate change changing climbing?', Nepali Times #268)

New Zealander Russell Brice first went to the Tibetan side of Chomolungma 20 years ago, and he thinks that the mountain has become drier. "In 1988 I was climbing on green ice to gain access to the northeast ridge, today it is shingle scree," he says. The route to the North Col at 7,000 m has also become more difficult as two or three crevasses now block the way.

On the area leading up to the bottom of the col there are now small lakes and ice slush rivers forming during the spring season, says Brice. The ice walls of the ‘Magic Highway’ leading to Advanced Base Camp are now half the size of what they used to be 20 years ago. On the Nepal side, Chomolungma has also changed dramatically since Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay first climbed it in 1953.

"When my colleague Guy Cotter first guided an expedition to Everest the Hillary Step was completely covered in snow and ice...in 2004 it was just rock," says Mike Roberts, who has led expeditions to Everest since 2002. "The entire stretch from the south summit to the true summit is now pure rock."

But both Roberts and Brice think that the Khumbu Icefall has actually become safer in the past few years. This could be because of 'Icefall Doctors' (Sherpas who fix ropes and the ladders) or due to global warming.

"The ice fall is probably moving faster now than it did about 20 years ago, and now it is not as steep, so I think that there is less serac fall," says Brice. "The entire stretch is now pure rock."

Pumori and Ama Dablam, on the other hand, have become more treacherous. A few years ago Pumori was considered one of the easiest 7,000-metre peaks but that has changed.

Giampietro Verza, an Italian mountain guide who knows Ama Dablam well, says the mountain is no longer what it used to be since a huge block of ice broke away just above Camp 3 and swept six climbers to their deaths last November.

"This spring there was hardly any snow on Ama Dablam, and climbers had to manoeuvre over rock in places that are normally an easy walk on snow," says Verza, "the mountain has become much more technical in the past few years."

Ama Dablam at 6,812m is one of the most challenging and popular mountains in the Himalaya, but this spring none of the 14 teams climbing it via the normal route in one season. The Ama Dablam glacier itself has retreated more than 500 metres in the past 50 years.

Mountaineers worry about glacier retreat in the Himalaya
These days you hear a lot of well-intentioned talk about how to stop global warming. You'll hear about how certain mechanisms, cap-and-trade systems for greenhouse gas emissions, carbon taxes, and research and development plans for new energy technologies, can fit into some sort of global emissions reduction agreement to stop climate change. Many of these ideas will be innovative and necessary, some of them will be poorly thought out. But one thing binds them together: they all come much too late.

For understandable reasons, environmental advocates don't like to concede this point. Eager to force deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, many of them hype the consequences of climate change—in some cases, well beyond what is supported by the facts—to build political support.

Climate change is already happening, with greenhouse gas emissions as a significant driver of this change. New emissions limits in the United States and other major emitters such as Europe's key economies and Japan may slow the processes driving these events. But the mounting scientific evidence, coupled along with economic and political realities, increasingly suggests that humanity's opportunity to prevent, stop, or reverse the long-term impacts of climate change has slipped away.

Given the scale and complexity of modern economies and the time required for new technologies to displace older ones, only a stunning technological breakthrough will allow for reductions in emissions that are sufficiently deep to stop climate change. Stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at 550 parts per million, twice pre-industrial levels—a level at which most believe there is already a higher probability of major climate disruptions—would require stopping the global growth in emissions by 2020 and reducing emissions by 2.5 percent per year after that. The longer it takes to stop the growth in emissions, the deeper the eventual cuts need to be.

Without a technological or economic miracle, it would take a political miracle to reach an international agreement that would mandate the necessary emissions cuts to reverse the momentum behind our evolving global climate system. But once again, realities get in the way. The US Congress is too divided to pass legislation sufficiently tough to make a major difference.

The international political environment also makes truly significant emissions cuts very unlikely. In 2010, developing countries will emit nearly 20 percent more CO₂ emissions than developed countries. Indeed, only in China (and perhaps India) would emissions limits or cuts make more of a difference than in the United States.

By one estimate, China has already surpassed America in emissions to become the world’s leader and, with sustained high growth rates, will open the gap even further. In fact, if China grows at 8 percent for the next nine years, its economy will double in size, and its greenhouse gas emissions can be expected roughly to double as well.

Moreover, as China’s economy expands, it is turning increasingly to carbon-laden coal for electricity. And although China’s energy intensity (energy consumed per unit of economic output) has decreased by nearly five percent per year for the last two decades as a result of greater efficiency, it is still nearly seven times that of the United States. At this rate, China’s growth trajectory could add the equivalent pollution of another present-day United States to the climate system in a little more than a decade.

Dollar for dollar, the most efficient way to cut global greenhouse gas emissions would be, in theory, to invest hundreds of billions of dollars to improve China’s energy efficiency. But Congress would never support such an approach. More broadly, how long will voters in Europe and Japan, which have done the most to limit emissions, be prepared to make sacrifices for the global climate if they believe they are alone in doing so?

Policy makers in the United States and elsewhere must start hedging their bets and prepare us to live in a warmer world. This emphatically does not mean giving up on efforts to slow climate change. Nor should it suggest that the task of adaptation will be easy or cheap.

The scientific community will need to do a much better job of predicting climate impacts at a regional and local scale. Governments will need to support this process, to collect and assess the information that results, and develop their own plans. Riding out the consequences of a warming world will be difficult, and we need to prepare now.

Paul J Saunders is executive director of the Nixon Center and associate publisher of The National Interest. Vaughan Turekian is chief international officer at the American Association for the Advancement of Science and has a PhD in atmospheric geochemistry.
An inconvenient peace prize

The future of polar bears is not as important as feeding the world’s hungry

This year’s Nobel Peace Prize justly rewards the thousands of scientists of the United Nations Climate Change Panel (the IPCC). These scientists are engaged in excellent, painstaking work that establishes exactly what the world should expect from climate change. The other award winner, former US Vice President Al Gore, has spent much more time telling us what to fear. While the IPCC’s estimates and conclusions are grounded in careful study, Gore doesn’t seem to be similarly restrained.

Gore told the world in his Academy Award-winning movie (recently labeled “one-sided” and containing “scientific errors” by a British judge) to expect 20-foot sea-level rises over this century. He ignores the findings of his Nobel co-winner, the IPCC, who conclude that sea levels will rise between only a half-foot and two feet over this century, with their best expectation being about one foot.

Likewise, Gore agonizes over the accelerated melting of ice in Greenland and what it means for the planet, but overlooks the IPCC’s conclusion that, if sustained, the current rate of melting would add just three inches to the sea-level rise by the end of the century. Gore also takes no notice of research showing that Greenland’s temperatures were higher in 1941 than they are today. Gore also frets about the future of polar bears. He claims they are drowning as their icy habitat disappears. However, the only scientific study showing any such thing indicates that four polar bears drowned because of a storm.

The IPCC has magnanimously declared that it would have been happy if Gore had received the Nobel Peace prize alone. I am glad that he did not, and that the IPCC’s work has rightfully been acknowledged. Gore has helped the world to worry. Unfortunately, our attention is diverted from where it matters. Climate change is not the only problem facing the globe. Gore concentrates above all else on his call for world leaders to cut CO₂ emissions, yet there are other policies that would do much more for the planet. Over the coming century, developing nations will be increasingly dependent on food imports from developed countries. This is not primarily a result of global warming, but a consequence of more people and less arable land in the developing world.

The number of hungry people depends much less on climate than on demographics and incomes. Extremely expensive cuts in carbon emissions could mean more malnourished people. If our goal is to fight malnutrition, policies like getting nutrients to those who need them are 5,000 times more effective at saving lives than spending billions of dollars cutting carbon emissions. Likewise, global warming will probably slightly increase malaria, but CO₂ reductions will be far less effective at fighting this disease than mosquito nets and medication, which currently save 800,000 lives every year. By contrast, the expensive Kyoto Protocol will prevent just 1,400 deaths from malaria each year.

While we worry about the far-off effects of climate change, we do nothing to deal with issues facing the planet today. This year, malaria alone will kill almost four million people. Three million lives will be lost to HIV/AIDS. Two and a half million people will die because of indoor and outdoor air pollution. A lack of micronutrients and clean drinking water will claim two million lives.

With attention and money in scarce supply, what matters is that we first tackle the problems with the best expectation of the most good throughout the century. If we focus on solving today’s problems, we will leave better societies to deal much better with future problems – including global warming.

Committing to massive cuts in carbon emissions will leave future generations poorer and less able to adapt to challenges.

Bjørn Lomborg

Bjørn Lomborg is the organizer of Copenhagen Consensus, adjunct professor at the Copenhagen Business School, and author of Cool It and The Skeptical Environmentalist.

Receding glaciers

The Imja Glacier below Lhotse is the fastest receding glacier in Nepal, and is melting at 70 m a year as seen in these pictures taken in 1956, 2006 and 2007 (above, left).

The melting has created huge lakes on Imja Glacier which are expanding alarmingly, and scientists are concerned there will be catastrophic glacial lake outburst floods in the future that could kill thousands of people downstream.

The Khashmend-based mountain research institute, ICIMOD, estimates that the Khumbu Glacier is also retreating at an average of 20m per year. The length of the glacier has shrunk from 12,040m in the 1960s to 11,200m in 2001 and Everest Base Camp has actually dropped from 5,320m to 5,200m since Hillary and Tenzing first set up camp there. All these glaciers are seen in this NASA photograph of Chomolungma taken in 2000 from the Space Shuttle (left).

Global average temperatures are rising at 0.6 degree a year, and scientists say snowlines especially of mountain regions close to the equator are most affected. But scientists at ICIMOD which monitors the Hindu Kush-Himalaya region says there isn’t enough proof that receding snowlines are directly the result of climate change.

“It is still too early to say,” says ICIMOD glaciologist Pradeep Mool, “but if present trends continue most valley glaciers will have disappeared by 2050.”
Global warning
How melting ice and snow will affect the Himalaya

The Himalaya is the water tower for over one billion people. Three of the region’s greatest rivers, the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra start close to Mansarovar. From their sources in eastern Tibet, the Yangtze flows to the East China Sea, the Mekong goes down to Vietnam, the Irrawaddy and Salween flow down through Burma to the Bay of Bengal. What happens to the snow and ice in the Himalaya will determine the future of agriculture in countries downstream, influence the growth of cities and the future of hydropower dams. Disappearance of glaciers will have major consequences on water resources, especially in regions such as the Himalaya-Hindu Kush, the Andes, the Rockies and the European Alps where many dry-season river flows depend on glacier meltwater, warns the UN Environment Program in a recently released book, Global Outlook for Ice & Snow.

Ancedotal evidence from the Himalaya about glaciers receding dramatically even within one generation is backed up by evidence that global glacial retreat in the past 100 years, and especially since the 1980s, is related to global warming. Global Outlook for Ice & Snow examines the dynamic interlinkages between ice, ice on land, permafrost and glaciers and how they are being affected by global climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which shared this week’s Nobel Peace Prize with Al Gore, in its Fourth Assessment Report concluded that most of the global warming over the past 50 years is due to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.

That should have clinched the issue, but there are still skeptics. The trouble is, by the time we know for sure whether climate change is a result of human carbon emissions or not it will be too late to do anything about it.

The UNEP book is full of fascinating facts, trends and predictions. For example, the North American Arctic is warming twice as fast as any other region on the planet. Antarctica is not warming as fast, but may pick up by the end of the century. Mean snow cover in North America is declining at 1.3 percent a year, this means less sunlight is reflected and there is positive feedback to global warming.

In its section on the Himalaya, the book notes that there has been a doubling of glacial retreat in the Himalaya since the 1970s.

Even if global temperatures rise by only one degree by 2100, which is the optimistic low scenario, scientists estimate that Himalayan glaciers will decline by 43 percent. If global temperatures rise by six percent (pessimistic high scenario) then Himalayan glaciers would shrink by 83 percent.

Reduction of snow cover is already having a dramatic effect on water resources. Mountain snow contributes to water supplies for one-sixth of the world’s population. As rivers run dry in the dry season, there will be widespread human misery and perhaps water wars.

The book has a dire warning for the Himalaya: “The result of glacier loss is not only a direct threat to lives, but also carries great risks of poverty, reduced trade and economic decline. This poses major political, environmental and social challenge in the coming decades.”

So, what is to be done? The book cites the IPCC’s conclusion: “Greenhouse gases must stop increasing and start decreasing no later than 15-25 years from now.” Economists have said this can be done without a decline in living standards. But do the world’s main carbon emitters (the US, China, India) have the political will to do so?

Nina Pradhan

Jamming in thin air
If you are at Kala Pattar next week, drop in on the world’s highest charity rock concert

More than 40 trekkers, including musicians, cancer survivors and hardcore mountainiers have descended on the Khumbu to begin what could be the highest gig on earth to raise money for cancer research.

On 21 October six musicians from the United States, Britain and Australia will be jamming at the top of Kala Pattar (5,545m) as long as their lungs can take it. The group behind this breathtaking event, the Love Hope Strength Foundation, was set up by two-time cancer survivor Mike Peters of British band The Alarm and fellow cancer survivor, John Chippendale. Since the 1980s, is related to global warming.

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So, if you happen to be in the Everest region over Dasain do drop in for free as Mike Peters of The Alarm, Slim Jim Phantom of The Stray Cats, Cy Curnin and Jamie West-Oram of The Fixx (pictured above) will not charge for their breath-taking performance. On 29 October the groups will stage a grand finale at Durbar Square in Kathmandu.

Billi Birling
Prashant Tamang’s fame eclipsed a talented and modest Amit Paul

The other guy

ELIZABETH J GIBSON
in SHILLONG

Amit Paul’s modest home in Shillong is festooned with posters, banners and cards. One of them on the gate in an orange magic marker says simply: ‘Amit’s House’.

One month after this sprightly 24-year-old Bengali from Meghalaya came second in the Indian Idol the euphoria over the event that gripped the Indian northeast has subsided a bit, but Amit is still mobbed everywhere he goes in his hometown.

Last week, Amit was here to give a big thank you concert for the benefit of all those who texted to try to make him win.

Amit is a better singer than a speech giver, and he read nervously from a piece of paper. Coming from a region with diverse autonomy-minded ethnic groups speeches have to be carefully worded.

But it was when he started singing that the mainly young and mainly female crowd went wild all over again. Amit’s father is from Meghalaya, his mother from Assam, and the family considers itself to be Bengali Hindu.

“Amit has been singing from age three and is self-made, he never got any voice training,” says Amit’s father Deepak Paul. After Indian Idol catapulted him to fame, the Meghalaya government bestowed on him the title of ‘Brand Ambassador of the State of Meghalaya for Peace, Communal Harmony and Excellence’.

Amit took time to speak to us after his concert and came across as a modest and mature young man who is comfortable with the fame that has come with the singing contest and hasn’t let the hype get into his head.

“When I came home I was amazed,” he said, “I was mind-blowing actually to see people supporting me so much.” Even as we spoke to him, there were crowds thronging the Paul house and stretching for about two blocks in either direction.

“I’ve seen hard times, very hard times,” he said, “but I dream a lot. Some people say dreaming is bad, but I dreamt that someday I would do something big. Dreaming is good.”

Despite his dreams, this is a realistic young man. “I don’t know how much I’ll be able to bring peace,” he said. “I just want people to understand each other’s feelings. They should stop fighting and help each other.”

Now as an Ambassador of Peace, Communal Harmony and Excellence, Amit faces the dual challenge of responding to dreams for autonomy of India’s northeast to a broader audience.

Amit Paul holds a contract with Sony and intends to enter a career in Mumbai as a playback singer in Bollywood. He will be visiting Nepal later this month.

\[\text{VOTE FOR AMIT: Banners urging people to SMS Amit Paul to victory are still standing in Shillong. Amit’s parents and grandmother, pose for a picture. (above).} \]

\[\text{PHOTO: ELIZABETH J GIBSON} \]
The proof that Dasain is around the corner is the sight of four or five goats riding the top luggage carrier of a microbus. The carnivore carnival is here and livestock don’t stand a chance. Goats, buffaloes, chicken, sheep, and ducks. None will be spared this season as Nepalis binge for ten days on meat.

The khasi, like the buffaloes, arrive from the tarai by truckloads. Mountain goats (chyangra) from our other friendly neighbour in the north. The Kalanki Khasi Market is at full capacity. Due to the instability in the tarai there is a severe shortage of goats which has pushed prices up.

The shortage of goats is being compensated for by a chicken glut. The birds are transported to market in pickups or even five fowls dangling from either side of a motorcycle. A single truck can carry more than a hundred, in rows of twenty each, one on top of the other, trapped in wire-mesh cages. The ones on the bottom row are the lowest in the pecking order and they are covered in droppings. Pretty soon, it will be off with their heads at temples, sidewalks, backyards and picnic spots throughout the country. The debate about animal sacrifice and open slaughter will probably never be resolved. There are those who argue for humane slaughter by knocking the animal unconscious before killing it. But it is difficult to say who is civilised and who is not based on the method of slaughter.

Perhaps the only civilized people are vegetarians.

PRANAYA SJB RANA

The back of the truck opens, its dazed occupants slowly emerge in single file down a straight wooden plank. Their eyes are glazed and legs jittery. Some seem glad to just stretch their legs. The journey from Birganj has been eight hours of misery for the passengers. It’s standing room only, wedged with 50 others in the back of a Tata truck. Through the constant roaring of the truck, bouncing through potholes drivers are too lazy to avoid, and the incessant lurching from the stop-start traffic. There is no toilet break, no food stop.

At one depot at Khumaltar alone, 25 of these trucks arrive every month. There are dozens of similar drop off points in the Valley. The buffaloes are downloaded at river banks or abandoned factory premises, allowed to graze and fatten a bit and then slaughtered. When the Valley’s population was still low, demand was met by local buffaloes. But more and more of the buffaloes now are imported from India, where they are not eaten.

“If they’re big buffaloes, we can fit in around 30,” says Shikh Atikur, a truck driver. “For the smaller ones, up to 70 can be squeezed in.” Atikur brings in about 10 truckloads each month, but exonerates...
himself from any responsibility for the way they are treated. "It is the people high up who load them up like that," he says. "We drive have nothing to do with it. I've only had a maximum of three die on a single trip."

Gafara Ansari, a dealer who has been transporting buffaloes to Kathmandu from Birganj for the past 25 years, appears less to Kathmandu from Birganj for the way they are treated. "It is the people high up want to see them," he says. In the past, he has used deserted factories or sites beside the city's rivers. Now he is offloading them in Khumaltar.

There is no limit to age or size, with even young calves and females eligible for slaughter. The young ones are the simplest to kill. The smaller they are, the easier it is for the butcher to decapitate them cleanly. The bigger ones are bludgeoned to death. The butcher repeatedly smashes their foreheads with a heavy hammer until they die. The calves are put on a spit and roasted, skin and all, over a fire. The older ones are backed into more manageable pieces before the cuts are sold. Buff is the most popular meat for momos, and apparently the cooks aren't very particular about what they buy.

As long as the meat is minced, no one cares what it includes," says Dipen Khadka, my local butcher. "I've ground almost every part of the buffalo, excluding the hooves, horns and the bigger bones. Every other part has gone into one of those momos."

A large, well-dressed buffalo ambled up, it had a red spotch on its forehead, a mark of ownership and a death sentence. In a few hours this animal would be meat.

Scapegoats

We celebrate Dasain by appeasing the goddess Kali so that she will chase away the demons and bring us health, wealth and victory. After all, this is a festival of the triumph of good over evil. This is also the festival of blood-letting as thousands upon thousands of goats, sheep, buffaloes, chickens and ducks are cruelly slaughtered on our streets and temples. Our idols are made of stone, but they drip with the blood of our fellow beings. It is now time to think about what this means in a festival that celebrates the victory of good. Why are we exhibiting such cruelty, and how does this reflect on our society? If we are indeed human beings, why can’t we learn to be a little more humane during a national festival? A society that treats animals so brutally will also be brutal towards fellow humans.

It could be that our martial ancestors, while unifying the country and fighting invaders, had to harden their hearts. It may be a part of our tradition that the khukuri wielded in the battlefields first had to beroasted, skin and all, over a fire. Even Hindus from other countries are shocked to see the cuts are sold. Buff is the most popular meat for momos, and apparently the cooks aren't very particular about what they buy.

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Our enemies today are not demons. It is superstition, fascism, poverty and social inequity that plagues our society. We will defeat and overcome these foes by being more humane and caring for the way they are treated. By showing civilized behaviour. Decapitating a beating buffalo or goat should not be the symbol of the Nepali civilization.

Rage is a human trait. Rage leads to cruelty. But it is not a human trait. Rage is a human trait. Rage leads to cruelty. But it is not a human trait. It is the people high up who load them up like that," he says. "We drive have nothing to do with it. I've only had a maximum of three die on a single trip."

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**Futile neutrality**

Excessive timidity is eroding UNMIN’s credibility

**ANALYSIS by SIDDHI SUBEDI**

Whenever UNMIN comes up in conversations these days, it is accompanied by derisive comments and gestures. The mission’s high visibility (the takeover of one of Kathmandu’s grandest buildings for its office, its host of cars, jeeps, helicopters and planes that have become a constant feature of the Nepali landscape regardless of bandas or fuel shortages) contributes to the illusion that it was a force far more powerful than any indigenous political party or institution. With such disjunction between UNMIN’s apparent virility and actual incapacity, it was inevitable that disillusionment would set in. Much of this, of course, is hardly UNMIN’s fault; it is inherent in the very structure of UN missions and has been seen earlier in East Timor, Cambodia and elsewhere. With its abundance of resources but a mandate limited to the monitoring of arms and armies and the provision of ‘support’ to the constituent assembly election and peace process, the heightened expectations and disappointment could have been foreseen. UNMIN adopts a very narrow interpretation of its mandate. It is true that its support for elections and Nepal’s peace process is chiefly of a technical nature. As it can only make political interventions in the capacity of mediator, it has to maintain strict neutrality. But neutrality does not mean there is a complete moral equivalence between all parties at all times.

There are occasions when one party is clearly more responsible than others for creating obstacles in the peace process, and it is UNMIN’s responsibility as clearly and flatly to put pressure on those who are particularly intransigent. Unfortunately, UNMIN is so cautious not to offend anyone that it has adopted a spurious definition of neutrality: one that apportions equal responsibility to all parties at all times, no matter what the circumstances.

When the Maoists decided not to participate in elections held according to a mixed electoral system and began pressing for the immediate declaration of a republic, it was UNMIN’s responsibility to clearly state that this was a severe breach of prior commitments and should have brought pressure to bear. Instead, it remained silent on these crucial issues, stating merely that these were for the Nepali people to decide.

Throughout the past months, UNMIN has instead focused chiefly on the much less controversial issue of the government’s refusal to implement the agreements it had signed with the Maoists in the past: regarding the future of Maoist combatants, living conditions in the cantonments and discussion on Security Sector Reform. The lack of progress on these issues, UNMIN’s argument goes, led the Maoists to mistrust their coalition partners and then to quit government and refuse to participate in the scheduled elections. It is therefore the major parties in government, the NC in particular, that are responsible for the electoral delay.

Now that elections have been indefinitely postponed, UNMIN (and western nations and institutions that collectively call themselves the ‘international community’) hold that it is currently more important to deepen and strengthen the peace process and to ‘create conditions for a credible election’—as if there is all the time in the world to create these conditions. As if it isn’t of the utmost necessity to hold elections as soon as possible in order to ensure that elections do happen at all and forces against polls aren’t allowed to disrupt the process.

Its excessive timidity in the face of a crisis is bound to further erode UNMIN’s credibility in the eyes of the Nepali people and contribute to the impression that the Maoists can use it to further their own political ends. If it continues to interpret its already restricted mandate so narrowly, UNMIN will become increasingly irrelevant even if it stays beyond January.
Almost everyone has seen the Lion King, but not everyone knows there was a Nepali involved in its animation. Among the many who worked on bringing Simba to life was Kathmandu native, Kiran Joshi. But the talented artist is now looking to the animation field in Nepal for more opportunities. "I'm counting on my contacts in the US, which will handle the work, and I'm betting all I've got on Nepal," Joshi confides. "With the peace agreement, the government had no way of holding them to it, and the UN didn't have a clue as to who they were dealing with. The Politburo simply shifted the war's venue to the valley, changed the acronym PLA to YCL and sent up Prachanda's cousin, KP Silalau, as Home Minister and chief apologist. The comrades' recent withdrawal from government and scuttling of the same election they initially insisted upon has stunned the nation. The lack of good faith in dealing with the other parties and population at large proves Maoist engagement with parliamentary democracy is a hopeless charade to buy time at best, a nefarious ploy to seize totalitarian power at worst, or both. As preparations for the CA elections were well underway, millions believed an historic opportunity was finally theirs and keenly looked forward to casting their vote. The Maoist about-face, due solely to the fact they were sure to be massively rejected at the polls, killed this chance along with the hopes of an entire kingdom cum republic.

The fact many Nepalis fatalistically accept such betrayal of their aspirations is equally disheartening. Expectations for the future are at all-time lows and concern for personal survival, the law of the jungle, now dominates life. No-one seems to think the situation is going to get better anytime soon; after being let down so often the best most can imagine is more of the same. As the incidence of kidnapping, extortion, and 'physical action' (i.e., arbitrary beatings by mis-guided youths) escalates so goes anxiety and fear. Many valley residents consider the situation more insecure and going to get better anytime soon; after being let down so often the best most can imagine is more of the same. As the incidence of kidnapping, extortion, and 'physical action' (i.e., arbitrary beatings by mis-guided youths) escalates so goes anxiety and fear. Many valley residents consider the situation more insecure and dangerous now than during the war. With stress levels at record highs, 'depression' is a word that has entered the Nepali language. Unknown until recently, it's now an epidemic. If you're not depressed these days you aren't patriotic.

As things fall apart in ways we never thought possible one wonders when to give up wishing for anything at all. If the simple desire for stability and rule-of-law is denied us maybe now's the time to join a cult, retreat from the world of greedy politicos, and time to join a cult, retreat from the world of greedy politicos, and time to join a cult, retreat from the world of greedy politicos, and... time to join a cult, retreat from the world of greedy politicos, and... time to join a cult, retreat from the world of greedy politicos, and...
EXHIBITIONS
- Buddhahoods: an exhibition of photography by Daniel Collins, 13 October onwards, 2-6PM at The Saturday Café, Boudhanath Stupa, 2072157
- Soshana: an exhibition of drawings and paintings by Soshana, on occasion of the 20th anniversary of Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, until 20 October, 11AM-6PM, 4216048

EVENTS
- Rugby World Cup: final live at K-tool Beer and Steakhouse, Thamel at midnight, 20 October, 470043
- Dasain Swing Festival: at the Garden of Dreams, Kaiser Mahal, 10AM-6PM, for all of Dasain, 4422340
- Grand Badhe Festival: part of Destination Manang, 25-29 October, at Manang Village, 4422343
- Bingo nights at the Welcome Food Plaza, Darbar Marg, starts 6PM every Monday, 2337201
- Toastmasters: a communication and leadership program, organised by Kathmandu Toastmasters Club every Wednesday 6PM at Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI) building, Tripureswor, 4288647

MUSIC
- Jazz at Jatra: every Saturday 7PM onwards, at Jatra Café and Bar, Thamel.
- Ciney Gurung: every Tuesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 7PM, 5521408

DINING
- Naurath: special vegetarian dinner at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234
- Vegetarian alternative: for all of Dasain, Stupa View restaurant and café, Boudha Stupa, 4480262
- Sunday Jazz Brunch: Hyatt’s brunch club with live jazz music at the Rox Garden, Hyatt Regency, 4491234.
- Italian barbeque lunch: at Al Fresco, Scoatlie Crown Plaza, Saturdays, 12.30-3.30PM, Rs 300 plus taxes, 4270399
- Jazz in Patan: with coffee, food, drinks, and dessert at the New Orleans Café, Jawalakhel, 11.30 AM-10PM, 5522708
- BBQ, chilled beer, cocktails and live music at the Kausi Restaurant and Bar, Darbar Marg, 6218490
- BBQ Unlimited: at Splash Bar & Grill, every Friday, 7PM onwards at Café Horizon, Hotel Himalaya, 5552690
- Shangri-La: pasta, pizza, pie, and pool: with the JCS Quartet and a choice of cocktails at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarika’s, 4479448
- Lajwaab: kebab, kebabs and biryani festival, every Friday, 6.30 PM, Rs 999 nett.
- Cocktails and jazz: with the JCS Quartet and a choice of cocktails at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarika’s, 4479448

WEEKEND WEATHER
KATHMANDU VALLEY
Don’t know where that one came from. The system that we see in this satellite radar image composite taken on Tuesday morning shows a mighty system covering central Nepal. We don’t mind admitting we don’t know where it came from. It wasn’t supposed to be there. But the late monsoon is a period when the dying monsoon plays a tug-o-war with resurgent westerly, and this one is probably due to the convergence of cold northwesterly wind colliding with moist warm Bay winds. But it should clear up by Friday to give us a sunny (and breezy) Dasain, ideal for kite-flying.

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HAPPENINGS

LOOK HERE, NOW: Shyam Saran, Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh’s special envoy to Nepal, at a two-hour meeting with Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and ideologue Baburam Bhattarai at the Dahal residence in Nayabajar on 10 October.

BABY BOOMERS: Protesters march to parliament on 12 October to put pressure on legislators to decide on electoral procedures.

EID MUBARAK: Nepali Muslims pray at the Jama Masjid in Jamal on Sunday.

HUMAN TANDOORIS: Nepali bodybuilders display their pecs at the 11th Dharmashri Body-building Competition at the Nepal Academy last week.
It is when Comrade Pasang starts wearing a tie that you know it is only a question of time before the Maoists complete their transformation into a mainstream bourgeois party.

Perhaps that was the intention behind Gen Wilhelmsen taking Nanda Kishor and Gen Shiva Ram on a junket to Stavanger so they could let their hair down, as it were, and sort out some of the cantonment issues. One problem Jan Erik may have to take up immediately with his Russian UNMIN pilots is to get them to stop flying their Mi-8s too low over the camps because the chopper wash is blowing off the flimsy Maoist tarp tents.

On a more serious note, where is the Security Sector Reform going, huh? Despite some hush-hush meetings between the generals and the comrades in past months, it looks like the Nepal Army has flatly refused to integrate guerrillas into the national army. Pity. Where would you get such a splendid bunch of battle-hardened soldiers?

Now that kingji has sent out hand-delivered Dasain greetings, can his Dasain address to the nation be far behind? It may be asking too much and it would be totally out of character, but saying sorry would help.

We’re getting rid of one king, but we’ve replaced him with Three Emperors. The way this triumvirate of bajes are carrying on, even this loktantricked Ass is nostalgic for the good old days when we just had one royalty to deal with. The way His Majesty Girjau was granting audience to NRNs at his Crown Princess’ bash at the Annapurna with perfunctory namastes from his bejeweled hand, it was difficult to tell which one was Napoleon and which Farmer Jones.

Girjau in his old age is not just getting short of breath, he is also getting short-tempered. Earlier he gave Peace Minister Poudel a tongue-lashing in the cabinet. Then he publicly blew a gasket in front of his centralized committee and tv cameras by telling his trusted adviser, Amarneshbabu, to bugger off. “You’re nobody,” he thundered as the cameras rolled, “you’re not to speak to anyone.” The reason was Amarnesh telling Bhutan on Fireside the previous day that he had such good connections he could fix anything. Who needs to bug Koirala’s bedroom if you have Mr Fixit here?

Was the prime minister sending a message to India during the Shyam Saran visit through his public outburst at Amarnesh? Is that why he also went to First Daughter house to meet the Chinese ambassador while Saran was still at the airport and get Sujata to leak that to the press? What’s cooking at Mandikatar anyway? And how come a supposedly-republican daddy is so cosy with his supposedly-monarchist daughter? The Ass wonders if NOC and NACare being parcelled out.

Whatever Shyam told the Three Emperors, it has certainly worked like magic, given the way the triumvirate conducted marathon meetings all week to end their deadlock on electoral procedures. The two-hour meeting at Awesome’s pistachio-coloured Nayabajar Durbar got so heated that passersby outside could hear the raised voices. The Fierce One tried to strike a relaxed pose by sitting crosslegged on his sofa, but Comrade Red Banner looked like he had been spanked.

Ask not what you can do for your country, ask what your country can do for you. That seems to be the mission statement of the unimaginatively acronymed NRN. They wanted free long-term visas for their retirement, now they want dual citizenship. People of Nepali origin should decide once and for all where they want to stay. Not that it counts, but the Ass’ advice to the Government of Nepal is to pay more attention to resident Nepalis than to non-residents.