India’s last-ditch effort to salvage Nepal’s peace process

PRAKHAN JHA in NEW DELHI

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Now that the painter of the festival season begins to yield off, we wall once more with a sense of foreboding. Given this for the monarchists, the NC is in no mood to agree to any more Maoist goalpost shifting. Similarly, die-hard revolutionaries among the Maoists have held their leadership hostage. The level of distrust is now so high that even a slight miss-reading of signals could take us to the brink. Such hair-trigger staleness is not good for either side. The bottom line is that the Maoists don’t want a constituent assembly election in which they may well be trounced, even if it was something they fought for 11 years. They are too shy to say it out front, hence the two demands for a full proportional electoral system and declaration of republic by parliament before polls. Instead of taking us quicker towards a republic, the Maoists have only prolonged the lifespan of the monarchist system. The conservative pro-monarchist wing of the party doesn’t want elections either because it is sure to lose its dominance of the elected interim legislature. They find it convenient to let the NC take all the blame for being spoilers.

It is only silver lining in the theatre of the absurd: Gyanendra in Taleju greets thousands of cheering crowds. Girija in Bratang

Agreeing to agree

Posturing has become the default position of all politicians

Nepal’s democracy is thwarted by the left and right

Knife-edge

Those outside the parliamentary paradigm can no longer be let off the hook. The Maoists have forced the seven parties to go it alone, in the absence of the already-postponed elections. The elections are now unlikely before May 2008 and this is a long period during which ji paru huna sakchha. In this twilight zone there is no immediate return to warfare, everyone is on a knife-edge. The one who blinks first loses. The rebels can hold out indefinitely, if need be, to take their gains, members of parliament, women, resources and firepower, and await that tipping point in the strategic balance when the Maoists will realize that the parliamentary parties would break. Whatever the government does, confrontation or negotiations, the rebels have the upper hand. It may be premature to ask whether the Maoists will take up arms again like the Tamil Tigers, but that is a tested and tried route in insurgencies everywhere. The peace agreement last year opened the doors for the Maoists to enter the mainstream political arena with a place in parliament and government subject to their removing the armed struggle and laying down weapons under UN supervision. At every stage the Maoists kept creating new conditions and missing new demands. Girija Koirala knoed that only Girija Koirala could deliver on the agreement and also that once on peace process he would have to go the extra mile to make it work. His legacy of peace, democracy and elections rested on it. Like the monarchy, the Maoists are fearful of democratic elections: the outcome is unpredictable. Their power in government and on the ground would be circumscribed if not vastly curtailed, compared to what they enjoyed during the war. When the Maoists signed the peace agreement, they agreed that the constituent assembly would be elected on a mixed proportional system and decide the fate of the monarchy. Yet, the Maoists have been demanding that Nepal be declared a republic by the present interim parliament and elections in a mixed proportional system under a full proportional system.

Declaring Nepal a republic before the elections would be lacking in credibility, and by raising this issue to such a pitch, the Maoists have brought the monarch back to the political centre-stage. By asserting that he was striving for a bigger role, the Maoists have drummed up support for King Gyanendhu and reinforced popular cynicism against mainstream parties.

Whether a republic, their insistence on a change of electoral procedures just weeks before the nomination deadline is an effort to wreck the election timetable. They knew that this demand could not be met and so they created the system to make the system unworkable in the time. It doesn’t matter what parliament decides anymore, the Maoists have the backing of the military and now can be held only at the time of their choosing.

The message is that the Maoists believe they are entitled, that they are not bound by the agreements to which they are a party. This is the game for Nepal and is the most serious setback to multiparty democracy since the elections in 1991. The political parties are forever thwarted by non-elected forces, be it the monarch or the Maoists.

Unless Nepal breaks out of this pattern, representative democracy will remain the mirage it has been since the first movement in 1956. 

Shastri Ramachandran is an Indian journalist and writer on the conflict in the state of the book, State of Nepal.

PM

promises harsher measures, Baburam in Katari threatens to quit the interim parliament in which he was an active member. The York issues dire predictions for the peace process and Gen Rumaantig Katwal of Taplejung says there won’t be any coup. Everyone thinks that everyone else is wrong. The Maoists think they’re always right. The NC is always in foolish denial, the UML enjoys finger-biting. But no one is really confident about the efficacy of its preferred method. While such prolonged uncertainty can breed despondency, there is no cause for alarm. When everybody is perplexed, they have no option but to end the current deadlock. In the jargon of unification, the NC is exhibiting new stubbornness. The usurpation of their political agenda by the mainstream parties has made Maoist leaders less flexible. Since there are no political dialogue points, the posturing has become the default position of all politicians. While a word of less harmful than a war of real bullets, top-level leaders must ensure their dire threats don’t become self-fulfilling prophecies. The NC and UML leaders should also reflect on whether their anti-YNCL speeches have contributed to weakening the moderate leadership within the Maoist party.

The Maoists have been at the receiving end of blistering criticism all this week at the special session of parliament. The mainstream parties have excelled themselves in ridiculing Pushpa Kamal Dahal, disparaging Baburam Bhattarai slamming Ram Bahadur Thapa, deriding Mohan Baidya. The Maoist stance has therefore hardened as well. It was foolish to let them walk out of the parliament, but the NC and UML provoked it by their bitte indifference to the plight of combatants in cantonments.

When the interim parliament reconvenes later this month, its members will have to recognise the precariousness of their position. If the Maoists make it clear that they want a war of words, the posturing could be the biggest losers. UML leaders in particular need to realise that there is no place for self-righteousness. On the contrary, the NC can undermine the entire peace process if it insists on turning the legislature into a rubber-stamp issue. Issues are complex, and of far-reaching consequences. It requires serious deliberation in an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding.

Despite the loss of face caused by the election postponement, the seven party alliance is the only thing we have. Alternatives discussed at Dasain—reunions—a non-partisan electoral government, a military-backed NC-UML coalition, internationally-approved royal guardianship, technocratic government under UN stewardship—all border on desperation. Perhaps, the Maoists have written themselves into a corner. Their position has been remarkably well so far with mainstream parties, the variance between the expectations of parliamentarians and former insurgents isn’t just attitudinal, it’s ideological. Some philosophical differences between the Maoists and mainstreamers—land reforms, market mechanism and social re-engineering for example—are too uncalculated to write off. The Maoists have been at the receiving end of blistering criticism all this week at the special session of parliament. The mainstream parties have excelled themselves in ridiculing Pushpa Kamal Dahal, disparaging Baburam Bhattarai slamming Ram Bahadur Thapa, deriding Mohan Baidya. The Maoist stance has therefore hardened as well. It was foolish to let them walk out of the parliament, but the NC and UML provoked it by their bitte indifference to the plight of combatants in cantonments.

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Knife-edge
MELTDOWN

Congratulations on your special coverage of the effect of climate change on the Himalaya (‘Himalayan meltdown’, #371). I climbed Imja Tse in 2002 and just compared the picture of the lake taken in 2000 in your newspaper to mine from 2002. The lake has grown dramatically in size in just four years. For these lakes to burst one doesn’t even need an earthquake. Five years ago, Sabai Tsho above Tangnap (Hinku Khola, under Mera Peak) burst its mornate just by an avalanche falling into it. The flood caused terrible damage and casualties downstream. People in Tangnap were lucky. They heard the sonic boom and had enough time to run uphill. Not so lucky for people further down.

Liba Cummings, Calgary, Canada

● See, Mr Lomborg, Al Gore may not be a scientist but what he is saying is not fiction (‘An inconvenient peace prize’, #371). You are right that world hunger is more urgent, but climate change will jeopardise food production even more. Besides, if we only diverted a small portion of what governments spend on the military, world hunger can be solved. Gore deserves this honour, it was the right choice.

Saujanya Acharya, Tokyo

BOGGED DOWN

I couldn’t help sensing a twinge of jealousy in Ok La’s ‘Bogged down’ (State of the State, #371) where he uses phrases like ‘English-speaking young achievers’, ‘large white SUV’, ‘jet-setting ways’ about aid agencies and NGOs. What is wrong if aid agencies are giving jobs to the English-speaking youth? Even a single dollar should be considered a gain to the nation’s economy. As long as the aid is in the form of outright grants, I see no reason in wasting time analysing and discussing, thereby antagonising donor countries that have their own priorities and their own national interest (or self-interest)?

Sugat R Kasakar, Kathmandu

UNCERTAINTY

I would like to know where Tanka Subba (Uncertain no more,’ Guest Column, #371) gathered his foreign-living Nepali focus group to draw his conclusions on how Nepalis abroad see Nepal. He says they see the country as poor and backward. He accuses them of trying to cut ties with Nepali history, language and culture. As a Nepali living abroad, I want to provide a synopsis of how things are here at my American home:

● My children call my wife and I, Mama and Baba
● My children are enrolled in Nepal dancing classes
● My children eagerly await Dal Bhat at dinner time
● My children and most of our friends’ children love to show off their daura surwal
● There are many Nepali professionals who are continuously gathering to find effective ways to invest in Nepal and ways to create socially responsible ventures
● Nepalis living abroad are generous in times of need such as this year’s floods. Still think that Nepal does not mean anything to people who live abroad?

Sushil Bogati, USA

NEPAL’S HEROINES

As an ex-Additional Secretary who innovated the female community health volunteers (FCHVs) I found that the article ‘Nepal’s real heroes’ (#371) read more like an indictment not only of our regular culprits: the politicians and the officials, but also the numerator: the FCHVs’ donors and the hundreds of their fat-salaried officials. Then, the FCHVs had to be members of and accountable to their respective mothers’ groups. The latter were seen as the stakeholders’ forum for primary health care in the communities who would together build pressure on the government health system to be increasingly responsive to their needs. But the Ministry of Health and Population apparently no longer cares about mothers’ groups. Nepali Times would be doing a great service if it were to do an investigative piece on the irresponsible health managers of Nepal and their donor accomplices.

Bhakti Krishna Shreshtha, Chakupat

TARAI CHURNING

‘Tari shuming’ (Tari Eye #371) helped clear a very blurred picture in my mind. The picture Prashant Jha presents describes a dangerous trend.

Criticalism of politics is accelerating at a pace beyond our control. All national parties, except the UML, have lost their presence in the tarai.

This is only helping secessionists, who are led by criminals.

K Kamat, USA

EK NEPALI

Vijay Lama’s Nepalipan (‘Nepal ek haun’, #371) is very much relevant in Nepal’s present context. Everywhere, there is division. This article should be read by our political pundits. They should pay attention to the Nepal agenda, not their party agenda. Thanks to Vijay Lama for his outstanding thoughts.

Ram Bahadur Kuar, China

POLS

Absolute power corrupts absolutely. The postponement of the elections now shows that we have swapped one dictator for eight. Why would the parties want an election when they can rule without being checked? Mr Prime Minister if you have any integrety, hold the elections and let the people vote.

Name withheld

● The Election Commission’s report showed that expenditure for the elections was a whopping Rs 510 million. Can an impoverished nation such as ours do away with such an amount for just political upmanship? We should go ahead with the election even if Maoists are not part of it! We can’t afford to spend another Rs 1.5 billion for someone else’s political whim. The Maoists’ idea is to create a political vacuum and exploit it to their advantage.

PB Rana, email

● It is no surprise that our new republican kings have postponed the elections. Why give anyone a choice when you can rule without being checked? Mr Prime Minister if you have any integrity, hold the elections and let us choose our leaders rather than forcing yourself on us.

B Bhandari, email

CORRECTION

A zero was missing in the box item ‘Recycling places’ (#371). The sentence should read: ‘Global average temperatures are rising at 0.56 degrees a year, and scientists say snowlines especially of mountain regions close to the equator are most affected.’ In the accompanying article ‘Himalayan meltdown’, the year Malory’s body was discovered on the north face of Chomolungma should have been 1999. Both were editing errors.

B Bhandari, email

Real Mausambi

Otherwise known as “sweet lime” or “Mausam” in Nepali, the Mausambi is a veritable powerhouse of citrus vitamins. This amazing fruit brings with natural goodness and regenerative powers. Mausambi is not only full of anti-oxidants it has anti-bacterial properties as well. It’s juice purifies the blood and cools the body. It’s good for your skin, good for your heart, good for your immune system and the good news is that there’s a great way your family can enjoy all the nutrition of this fruit even when it’s not in season.

thank goodness it’s here!
Nepali Times: The Secretary General’s report to the Security Council last week wasn’t very positive about the prospects for peace. Can things still be salvaged? Tamrat Samuel: The report tried to bring out the dangers facing the peace process without being unduly pessimistic, which could have serious consequences unless the parties come together and take the necessary corrective action. I believe there is ample opportunity not only to salvage the peace process but to turn the current crisis into an occasion to strengthen and deepen it. Communication and cooperation among the parties has not broken down. The parties are exerting a lot of effort to overcome the current crisis. The Maoists have repeatedly assured us that they have no intention of abandoning the peace process, whatever the difficulties, and that their troops will be peaceful. However, it is better to avoid reaching that stage. No one can have full control of events in the streets in a charged political atmosphere. The seven parties have a common interest in preserving the peace process and seeing it through to its intended outcome. The longer the deadlock and the division among the parties continue the greater the danger for the peace process.

Where is the main stumbling block as you see it? In my opinion, the loss of critical momentum in the peace process over the past several months has led to tension and friction among the parties. Mutual suspicion about each other’s intentions seems to have eroded the level of trust within the seven-party alliance. By definition an alliance requires a level of mutual confidence and a common perspective on the fundamentals, although it does not presume a full convergence of views on everything. This is why we believe the current crisis presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the seven parties to take full stock of the peace process this on the anniversary of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The parties in particular need to look at how the political landscape has become more complicated in the past year, and ensure that the process is genuinely inclusive and guided by the spirit of the People’s Movement. I think difficulties and delays in implementing existing agreements have played a significant role in making all sides more confrontational.

Therefore, the first order of business at this critical time should be the preservation of the peace process and the unity of the seven parties. Secondly, there is a need to carry out an assessment of the peace process as described above with the aim of achieving a common vision about its future direction and about the defining attributes of the ‘New Nepal’ the parties hope to build, including in areas such as state restructuring and the security sector. Lastly, the parties should look at the architecture and management of the peace process and decide how best to organize the ongoing negotiations more efficiently and agree on effective implementation mechanisms and an independent national monitoring body. All of this must be premised on a collective commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law and on the assumption that agreements and popular decisions are there to be honoured.

Beyond the relations of the seven parties there are the international relations of the UN and the other member states of the Security Council. The Security Council has expressed its openness to respond positively. The sooner this request is made the better so that we can fine tune the operational details in advance of the end of the current mandate.

If that happens, what kind of extension of its mandate does UNMIN envisage? Our mandate is up for review in January but generally there appears to be a consensus that the mandate should be extended, the prime minister and the government have given an indication to this effect. For us, the sooner we complete this task and go back home the better. If the Nepalese government makes the decision and sends the request for mandate extension we expect the Security Council to respond positively. The sooner this request is made the better so that we can fine tune the operational details in advance of the end of the current mandate.

Are India and China happy with the extension? We are entirely in the hands of the Council and Member States. The Security Council has expressed its openness to any request from Nepal for an extension of UNMIN’s mandate. Clearly, there was a great deal of concern amongst Security Council members about the postponement of elections and the threat this might pose for the peace process in the long-term, so the general sense of the international community is that there should be an effort to address the immediate issues that are blocking the elections. So, there is a lot of interest to move about the Nepalese process which is seen as a largely positive development and in any case very bleak. International situation at least in the conflict arenas around the world that the UN has to deal with. People would be very disappointed if there was further drift and the situation became more complicated here.

Tamrat Samuel from Eritrea has been with the United Nations for the past 24 years, and as Senior Political Officer for South Asia since 2003 he was closely involved with the UN’s efforts to help resolve the conflict in Nepal. In June he was appointed Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Nepal and Deputy Head of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). He spoke to Nepali Times this week on the political deadlock that is threatening the peace process.
Bank of Asia

Bank of Asia is the first private bank to open in Nepal. Services have already started and the regional bank aims to become a top commercial bank by emphasizing its personalized service and an ambitious expansion plan.

Thirteen

Mauritius’ Republic Bank’s Pan-Indian branch opened in September 2006. The branch also has an ATM and offers 365-day banking and an evening counter. The bank has 13 branches and 11 ATMs to date. It plans to open branches in Imal, Dhanakuti, Syangja and Baglung in the near future.

Signature golf

For the first time, five Nepalis and a Chinese will represent Le Meridien Golf Resort in the semi-finals of the Sixth McDowell’s Signature Club Golf Championship. 2007. The event will be held in Kolkata and is supported by LG and Kingfisher Airlines. The event is managed by Delhi-based Tiger Sports Marketing while Outlook Business is the print media partner.

Super Six at Sealtée

Sealtée Crown Plaza holds its ninth Super Sixes cricket tournament from 30 October-3 November. Twenty teams participate in this year’s five-day six-a-side tournament which is being organized in association with Spice Nepal and is supported by Himalayan Distillery, Godrej, Serenity and the Himalayan Distillery.

Sel-In Sanitary

Sel-In’s sanitary systems are now available at the Empires Heights in Panipokhari. A range of exhibition lounge has recently opened at the Sel-In’s customer service and commercial office. A range of Sanitary systems are available.

Bluebird is 23

Bluebird Mall is celebrating its first anniversary and the 23rd anniversary of the Bluebird Department Store with events under the motto ‘Healthy, Happy, Sanitary’. A lot of Sanitary products including electrical fixtures, wall and floor tiles, sanitary wares, and furniture are available.

NEW PRODUCTS

SLIM: LG has launched the LG Ultra Slim, a 21 inch flat TV that is 150mm thinner than any other TV set with LCD and PDP. The Ultra Slim applies the XD engine that enhances picture quality colour. The TV is available for Rs 49,900 with 48-months’ warranty.

SAARC Golf

Nepal hosts the SAARC golf championship

WASHINGTONTDC— At the Global Leadership Forum here this week, this self-proclaimed Beed realised just how little he knew. When past participants mentioned from more than 45 developing countries converge to discuss issues, diversity has to find a new definition. Interestingly, many believe that DC cab drivers going on strike on Thursday were learning from Nepal. They were protesting the introduction of metering, believing it or not. Most DC drivers (90 percent of them immigrants) accuse large taxi companies of wanting to dissuade individual owners. At the Forum itself, discussions looked ahead to what’s in store for developing countries in the next 20 years. While there are many challenges that one can prioritise, lack of governance stood out as the main one. Zimbabwe was mentioned a lot. A country that 30 years ago had one of the strongest economies in the world, boasts nearly 100 percent literacy and was called the bread basket of Africa, is now a basket case with a statutory emergency of its director. It just goes to show that when countries start sliding it all happens very quickly, it’s usually due to leadership failure. Nepal witnessed phenomenal overall growth between 1990 and 1995. But all that evaporated when the political squabbling began. Today, with G P Koirala unnoticed in power, we are looking at the IMF and the World Bank making decisions for our people. The way certain vested groups moved to the street to protest against the hike in petroleum product prices shows that politicians cannot ever understand how the economy works. In the UK, the price of petrol is already above one pound, which is double what we pay in Nepal. With a looming confrontation between us and Iran, the price of oil will soon cross the $100 per barrel mark. Not recognizing these global trends would only lead to economic, and ultimately, political, anarchy.

In the US by contrast, the economy determines politics. The mortgage and sub-prime issues leading to a dip in the housing market resulted in lower consumer spending and threatened to send the entire economy into a spin. A low economic growth rate, coupled with high inflation and high unemployment, would make the US economy—which borrows so much—far more fragile. If the economy takes a hit, there is no way the Republicans can get their candidate elected the next president.

The more we in Nepal allow politicians to hold our economy hostage, the worse off we will be. If we can’t take decisions on power projects despite having two power summits, or if we can’t decide that petroleum products are something that the state has to buy and sell, or if we do not want to examine the impact of a deteriorating economy, there is little that anyone can do to help us. Your Beed has been optimistic over the last couple of years, but perhaps for the first time, one feels that the country is losing steam, leaving it all to politics, we have put the cart before the horses.

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like the Asian Games and the Olympics, the SAF Games has not yet included golf as an event. But the SAARC Golf Championship has been held since 1989 providing a platform for South Asian golfers to show off their skills. The SAARC countries have made tremendous progress in the game.

Unlike past years, the Surya Nepal 9th SAARC Golf Championship is going to witness the full strength of all golf players playing in SAARC country for this annual championship. Top players are from India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal will have full five-member teams (3 men and 2 ladies). The Maldives does not participate in the tournament. Soaltee Crowne Plaza holds its ninth Super Sixes cricket tournament from 30 October-3 November. Twenty teams participate in this year’s five-day six-a-side tournament which is being organized in association with Spice Nepal and is supported by Himalayan Distillery, Godrej, Serenity and the Himalayan Distillery.

Glimpses designed Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. Unlike past years, the Surya Nepal 9th SAARC Golf Championship is going to witness the full strength of all golf players playing in SAARC country for this annual championship. Top players are from India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal will have full five-member teams (3 men and 2 ladies). The Maldives does not participate in the tournament. Soaltee Crowne Plaza holds its ninth Super Sixes cricket tournament from 30 October-3 November. Twenty teams participate in this year’s five-day six-a-side tournament which is being organized in association with Spice Nepal and is supported by Himalayan Distillery, Godrej, Serenity and the Himalayan Distillery.

TEE BREAK

Deepak Acharya

Deepak Acharya, a golf instructor and golf director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu, commented: “A while back I was turning in great low scores, while Keerti Lama was not having a good day. But now I have improved tremendously and I’m playing well,” said team member Rupak Acharya. Keerti Lama commented: “A while back I was turning in great low scores, while Keerti Lama was not having a good day. But now I have improved tremendously and I’m playing well,” said team member Rupak Acharya.

New Delhi, October 10:

The second leg of the Sixth McDowell’s Signature Club Golf Championship has begun. Today, with G P Koirala unnoticed in power, we are looking at the IMF and the World Bank making decisions for our people. The way certain vested groups moved to the street to protest against the hike in petroleum product prices shows that politicians cannot ever understand how the economy works. In the UK, the price of petrol is already above one pound, which is double what we pay in Nepal. With a looming confrontation between us and Iran, the price of oil will soon cross the $100 per barrel mark. Not recognizing these global trends would only lead to economic, and ultimately, political, anarchy.

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INDE

Shivram D.singh

Meanwhile, in the US, Washington is itself in the grip of a recession. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high. The country’s growth rate is falling, and the unemployment rate is rising. The US is in danger of becoming the first developed country to slide into recession. The US economy is growing at a slow pace, and the unemployment rate is high.
Fuel politics
Bijay Chhimire in Kantipur, 31 October

When taxi drivers heard that fuel prices were going to be raised, they were ecstatic. Finally, it was going to be easier to get petrol. Taxi drivers have been buying petrol from China on the black market at Rs 100 a litre, so they welcomed the price hike. But those who opposed the hike were only trying to transform the issue into a political one. There was no alternative to solving the fuel crisis except raising prices. To say that the fuel hike hits the poor hardest is an outright lie. Almost 80 percent of the people use wood as their primary fuel source. In the villages, barely a litre of kerosene is used in a month. Almost 75 percent of kerosene is used by the rich, for heating water in five-star hotels and for industry. Thus it is the rich who are hit hardest by the fuel hike, not the poor. Why should those who don’t use the product have to pay for the subsidy of those who do?

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Happy king
Dhikunchhau, 28 October

With the parliamentary parties busy arguing about declaring a republic and the election procedure, the king quietly made his way to Hanuman Dhoka during Indra Jatra despite being stripped of his state ceremonial rights. The differences between the parties are to the king’s advantage. It is undeniable that the monarchy would benefit more the longer the country’s transitional phase lasts. The king would never have such an opportunity if the elections had already been held. The king’s morale is now rising due to the ongoing crisis in the country, where there is poor security, a violent war in the Terai, and a lie. If the proper preparations aren’t made, a constituent assembly can be a tool for reactionaries and this could start the revolution. That is why we want to end the monarchy before elections. Without taking into account Nepal’s multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic diversity a constituent assembly can’t be inclusive. That is why we want a full-proportional system. Without these two things we can’t fulfil the aims of our people’s war.

So, who is to blame?

Instead of blaming anyone, it may be better to analyse the stance of the parties towards elections. We agreed in the past about elections in June. But as time went by we realized we couldn’t look at elections as something separate from the peace process. Their biggest mistake was to look at the constituent assembly election as a parliamentary election.

By delaying elections isn’t there a danger to the peace process?

As long as a military loyal to the monarchy is around there will be a danger of regression. To prolong the transition period while the king is still around can be disastrous. That is why we need to throw out the monarchy and shorten the transition.

Won’t it be dangerous if the alliance breaks up?

It can be very dangerous for the country if the parties keep confronting each other. That is why we called for a special session of parliament to keep the unity of the six parties and the Maoists. Our unity must be based on the minimum demand of a republic and full-proportional elections. That is why we need to throw out the monarchy and regression. What are the ways to do this?

Interim parliament agreeing to our two demands. That is the last chance to bring political stability through a political agreement in parliament. We have been talking to civil society and the ethnic groups about this and they all agree that the best way to resolve the issue would be through a roundtable conference. That way madhesh, janajati, dalits can also be a part of the struggle and we can take the country forward through unity and inclusion.

This roundtable conference couldn’t materialize in the past. What are the chances of it happening? If we aim a real political resolution and progress there is no alternative to all the stakeholders sitting in one place to reach an agreement. It shouldn’t be about anyone losing or winning. Is there a chance for you to compromise on your demands?

At first there was pressure on us to agree on June elections. That is why we agreed to the mixed-election proposal. But later, it was clear that was a mistake—we needed full-proportional. This is not just a demand, it is a realistic need. So, how do we get to a solution?

By agreeing to a roundtable conference, let’s agree and decide on a solution. This would be the most democratic thing to do.
Removing discrimination against mental illness is a bigger challenge than treatment

Stigma therapy

MALIKA ARYAL

Shanti was not the only one. A woman suffering acute depression, chose to end her life by hanging herself on the street, left by her family, and in the mental illness becomes a burden, challenge than actually treating discrimination against mentally ill people. Shanti is not the only one. Mentally ill people are dumped on the streets, abandoned in the attics, or simply abandoned by relatives who can't deal with the stigma and burden of taking care of mentally ill patients. In fact, fighting discrimination against mentally ill people is often a bigger challenge than actually treating the patients.

"After a person with mental illness becomes a burden, starts getting discriminated against by the family, and in the worst cases gets dumped either on the street or on the hospital," says Sumeer Bamska, a social worker at the hospital.

There are no reliable statistics on how many mentally ill people there are in Nepal, but worldwide the average is three percent of the population. This would put the number in Nepal at nearly one million. Bishwa B Sharma, a psychiatrist at Kathmandu's Mexican National Hospital, says mental health has been neglected for years and patients are vulnerable to arrest and torture. Women may be sexually exploited or rejected by families.

Mental health care facilitators for mentally ill people have to be made better, more health professionals need to be trained and we need to set up training programs to look after patients with mental illness," Sharma says. "But all that should go hand-in-hand with awareness programs, training and legal provisions for the mentally ill."

Just a few years ago there were just a handful of psychiatrists in Nepal. Psychiatry is still not a popular subject among medical students with only four new students with only four new psychiatrists graduating from Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Maharajganj and the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan each year.

The Mental Hospital in Maharajganj has 40 beds, and other hospitals have a few more. But these are all in urban areas and patients from rural Nepal suffer most from the lack of services. In 1997 a national mental health policy was drawn up, and more recently a Mental Health Bill was drafted. Experts say it is imperative that the bill be discussed and passed by the government soon as it has provisions relating to the care and support of mentally ill people, land and property issues. But most importantly the act makes family, state and community responsible for mentally ill people.

In Nepal, mental health is not given as much priority as community and rural health issues. "People don't die from mental problems, so the government doesn't see mental health as a priority," says RP Sapkota, a psychologist and counsellor at the Centre for Victims of Torture.

Experts say it is vital to have at least one psychiatrist in each rural hospital, and there should be training for community health workers to raise awareness, identify mental illnesses, treat mild mental disorders and refer acute cases to psychiatrists. They suggest Nepal should look to the model of Scandinavian countries, where social workers have legal powers to intervene and fight for the rights of the mentally ill.

Back at the Mental Hospital, someone has finally come to collect Shanti. It is not her husband but her 11-year-old daughter with an adult cousin. "We are saved by Lambu, a student from Dhapakhel, who volunteers to spend the first night at Dana's bedside. As soon as Dana sees Lambu, her attitude changes. Keeping an eye on her, he agrees to come the next day. Dana could be saved. She was diagnosed as schizophrenic by the visiting psychiatrist who not once looked or talked to her directly. He prescribed four pills a day and turned a deaf ear to our protests: how could he trust Dana with so many pills?

By now Dana seemed a different person. The nutritious food and 24-hour care had helped her. She started talking about her life and family. She had been married once, but didn't like it. One day she left her husband and started living in a nearby parking lot. Her mother had died and she loved her father. Dana did not want to stay indoors. The potty smelled even worse than before. Street dogs liked staying with her, especially the cats with three-legged paws. She continued to change the dressing and to give antibiotics. Just when we thought the leg would never heal, Dana started waking normally. Our lives did not entirely return to normal. Lambu seriously considered giving up business studies and become a social worker. He said he loved Dana more than his own sister and would never forget the days he spent in the hospital. He married a nurse. Some of the other volunteers continued to work as carers for sick children. They are quiet heroes who spend many restless nights in overcrowded hospitals.

Now she is no longer with us. I heard she was taken to Pashupatinath by relatives and neighbours. I hope that at the last moment she allowed a carer to be at her side, watching him or her until she was ready to let go.

There are no care or rehabilitation services exclusively for homeless mentally ill people in Nepal. Chhaflai Nepal was founded in 2005 to address their needs in close cooperation and collaboration with existing rehabilitation and medical services. The organization found that a large number of homeless mentally ill people of all ages in the valley is surprisingly much higher than expected. Although community members usually provide food virtually none receive medical or social care. Chhaflai Nepal: chhaflainepal(at)twink.com.np

Dana's gift

LUCIA DE VRIES

Yesterday I heard the news: Dana had died. She probably did the way we know she would: go into a cold winter day, on the street, unshaved, staring at occasional passers-by with her unwavering dark eyes until they became uncomfortable and left her to die.

A train of memories. Her first appearance in my Patan neighbourhood. One day a well built, barely dressed person collecting in front of my toy store house, face down on the mud. When the person is still there some hours later, in the same position, I start to worry. "Dai, please wake up!" I call and shake the small body.

Nothing moves. Some children in school uniforms join me and so does the chowkidar opposite a nearby house. "It's not a man, it's a woman and she is paga," he says. I don't believe him. And a young Nepali woman doesn't roam alone unattended on the streets, even when she is mentally ill.

Her name is Dana. She uses the barren land opposite the house to relieve herself. Sometimes she simply collapses in the weeds and stays there for the night or longer. One night I hear an eerie sound. I run to the balcony, expecting to see someone being raped or killed. Instead I see Dana, screaming while wringing her hands obsessively. It goes on for hours. That night, listening to Dana, I come to understand what it's like to suffer from mental illness.

An abandoned woman who brought humanity to everyone

I start giving Dana some food. Often she sleeps, somewhere next to the road in a cot; shelter, where she likes to stay, but the food is gone by the time I return. Sometimes I hear her moaning and wailing to find that she needs help crossing the road. After some weeks Dana starts to speak: "Dai, titura," I guess our friendship gets baptised by sharing this sticky piece of titura.

Some time later Dana developed a leg infection. The smell became repulsive. Some volunteers from a nearby children’s home came to see Dana occasionally. They suggested we make an appointment for her see a doctor. Dana's family, who live nearby but have more or less given up on her, agreed. She had to be taken to a hospital for deep tissue surgery, otherwise her leg might have to be amputated.

There was a frantic phone call from the hospital: "Dana is about to kill the doctor!" When I arrive on the ward Dana is about to attack a very angry young doctor with a massive fire extinguisher: "They want to lock me up. I'm going home," she screams and over again. The unfortunate doctor is in a long row of carers who have no clue how to deal with a mentally ill homeless patient.

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Chhaflai Nepal: chhaflainepal(at)twink.com.np
How do Bhutani refugees see their world? Some were born in the camps and have never seen their motherland, all have spent the past 17 years as refugees.

Three organizations teamed up to train selected refugee journalists in a four-day photography training. These are some of the pictures the trainees took, the young refugees look inward to find their personal voices to tell their stories of camp life. As insiders, their pictures show us the true story of the daily life in the camps for the 100,000 Bhutanis who are now waiting for third-country repatriation. The photojournalism training was supported by Third World Media Network, Bhutan Press Union, Association of Press Freedom Activists-Bhutan and Drik India. Photos will be on display at the photo.circle Saturday 3 November 10AM-12PM at Sundhara Bakery Cafe.

Images

Aita Maya Subba
Approximately 290 patients come to the UMP Hospital to get medicinal treatment everyday. The hospital runs from 8:45 AM and till 4PM. Simple cases are given treatment here, but complicated cases are handled by AMDA hospital.

Radhika Homagain
Ganga Maya Gurung and Sukh Maya Monger weave Dhaka topis, which they sell to earn a living. Support provided by UNHCR is not sufficient to meet the basic requirements of their family. According to the women, it is not an easy task because of their old age. They were evicted from their homes in Danahari by the government of Bhutan in 1990.
Cheta Nath Khanal

Bhakta Bahadur Rai, 26, is a 10+2 graduate and originally from Chirang district in Bhutan. Now he expresses the sorrows of separation from his homeland in the paintings and sculptures that he makes. He has opened a library and an art gallery in his hut to promote art and to manage daily expenses for his family of 10 members.

Bhakta Bahadur Rai

Yam Thulung

Khina Maya Kalikotae is frustrated that she has not been able to use the tailoring, bamboo basket making, knitting, embroidery and other skills that have been provided to her by various NGOs within the camps. She has not been able to start up a business due to lack of funds. Khina Maya is originally from Labshibhotae village in Tshirang District, Bhutan. She lost her hearing and speech due to severe unidentified illness when she was a child. Now she struggles to live the life of a widow, with no income of her own. Around 100,000 Bhutani citizens are leading a miserable life of asylum in exile in eastern Nepal.

Khina Maya Kalikotae

No way home

Child refugees seek dignity and the right to return to Bhutan

Basudev Osti has no memory of leaving his country as he was barely a year old when his parents were forced out of Bhutan in 1990. But he knows what it means to be a refugee and every day he hopes to be liberated from this status.

“I want to start a new life as a dignified citizen,” says 17-year-old Osti who grew up in a refugee camp at Khudanabari. Rebika Bhandari is worried that thousands of children will spend their entire lives as refugees. “We have been forgotten by everyone,” she says. Osti and Bhandari are among the children whose art works, photographs, CDs and handicrafts are on display for three days at the Art Council this week. Visitors snapped up most of the items on display, including a portrait of King Jigme. Proceeds from the sale will go to the welfare of refugee children back at the camps in Jhapa and Morang.

US Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration Ellen Sauerbrey is in Kathmandu this week to review the process by which her country is taking more than 60,000 Bhutani refugees for resettlement. The move has divided the refugee community, with some who say all refugees should be allowed to return to Bhutan threatening those opting for third-country resettlement. Sauerbrey is also visiting Bhutan and India.

There are now an estimated 40,000 children in the camps, many of them born there. But the Bhutanese Refugee Children’s Forum, representing child refugees, says more support is required. The refugees still have to buy uniforms and stationery, and nearly 10 percent of children have dropped out of school to help their parents in labouring jobs, to make ends meet.

The children complain of lack of food, of being unable to afford medical treatment, and of social rejection by Nepalis. Bhandari tells how she took a 13-year-old girl to a government hospital in Biratnagar a few months ago, only to be ignored by the doctor. She says the young girl had to sleep on a trolley for three nights before the nurses found her a bed and medicines.

“If you want to know our problems, then you will have an endless list,” said 18-year-old Churamani Mainali, who told how his parents were beaten by Bhutani police just before they were evicted from their homes. “Although I was only two years old when I was forced out of my country with my parents, I can imagine the pain that they went through.”

Bhandari’s grandparents migrated with the first generation of Nepalis to the southern lowlands of Bhutan during the 19th century at the invitation of the Bhutanese government, which wanted them to clear the malarial jungle for agriculture.

“We have every right to go back home and the world has to pay attention to us and not forget us so easily,” she said. Mainali adds: “We have every proof to our right to live as citizens in Bhutan and the government cannot deny that in the face of the world.”
or some young westerners, Nepal appears the perfect place to combine a few weeks of well-intentioned volunteer work with some of the world’s most accessible and dramatic outdoor adventures. Type ‘volunteer+Nepal’ into an Internet search engine and there are any number of contacts. Projects in developing countries to occupy young volunteers in their gap years between school and university have become big business and can be expensive. Month-long programs organized through reputable outfits like Volunteer Abroad, i-to-i, or Projects Abroad, can cost more than $2,000.

That is why many students and professionals on a career break are resorting to a much more affordable alternative: surfing the net for small-scale, low-key Nepali NGOs. A few clicks of the mouse bring a plethora of placement offers in all the popular fields: conservation, health care, teaching and orphanages, with prices from as little as $250 a month.

But as these volunteering opportunities have sprung up, so too have scams and sloppily organised operations which are only too happy to take people’s money, but haven’t given much thought to what they should provide in return.

“I hate it when people come here with the best intentions and get ripped off by some money-mind ed outfit, be it Nepali or international,” says a volunteer social worker who has been living in Kathmandu for several years and prefers to remain anonymous. Many leave feeling cheated and vow never to come back, giving Nepal a bad name.

IRENE PERONI

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Chemonics International seeks qualified candidates for part-time Media Advisor on a USAID/DTOI funded program which seeks to support Nepal’s political transition. This fast, flexible program is designed to positively affect the current political transition in Nepal. The objectives are: 1) to increase access to information and diversify public debate on issues critical to the political transition; and 2) to increase effectiveness of key political transition institutions. Duties will include, but are not limited to, the following:

• Secure and maintain firm grasp and understanding of USAID/DTOI strategy in Nepal, goals and objectives with respect to small grant and technical assistance activities, ongoing events and trends (political and security) in Nepal.
• Assist the Chief of Party (COP) in maximizing the impact of the current program portfolio through media and in developing new activities targeted at supporting the transition on both a national and regional level.
• Develop, maintain and advance relationships with new and existing strategic partners.
• Advise the COP on whether grant/technical assistance activities under consideration are consistent with USAID/DTOI media strategy.
• Advise and assist the COP, over the course of implementation of small grant/technical assistance activities, on suitable USAID/DTOI media activities.
• Train program staff on the media strategy, identification of appropriate media activity development, etc.
• Solicit proposals according to guidelines agreed with USAID/DTOI.
• Define needs and intended impact of the media activities.
• Design audio, visual, and other matters for telecast, broadcast, and print media as required and assist in the development of a range of publications.
• Develop a feedback mechanism to be utilized by stakeholders to communicate their views, opinions, and recommendations on the program and information messaging.

Qualifications:

• Extensive experience in strategic communications, media management and large-scale media activities, events, and productions;
• Practical experience of at least 3-10 years in a similar position, including handling large media projects;
• In-depth understanding of the broader media environment in Nepal;
• Written and oral fluency in Nepali and English languages; other Nepali languages a plus;
• Excellent interpersonal and communication skills;
• High level of initiative and creativity and ability to work with minimal supervision;
• Experience in working with the Government of Nepal and international organizations;
• Capacity to understand and analyze national, regional, and local Nepalese politics, and the creativity and analytical capacity to design media activities that relate to current political events;
• Experience in working with US funded media activities highly desirable.
• The position may require extensive travel throughout the country.

Length of Assignment: Approximately 6 months, part-time, to be reevaluated every 3 months.

Please submit CV to operations@chemonics-nepal.com and write Media Advisor in the subject line no later than November 9, 2007. Only short listed applicants will be contacted.

IRENE PERONI

MODEL NGO: Past volunteers at German-sponsored Shanti Sewa Griha, a centre for leprosy patients near Pashupatinath have described their experience as “incredibly inspiring.”

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IRENE PERONI

Gap year

NATION 2 - 8 NOVEMBER 2007 #372
If you are planning to volunteer in Nepal, beware of potential scams

"I've had people literally cry on my shoulder saying: 'I wanted to do something good but I've been let down and I've lost so much money,'" says the social worker.

A typical is a girl from London who had saved up and borrowed money to volunteer. She contacted INFO Nepal, a local NGO, and paid $1,200 per week to teach in an orphanage. When she got there, she complained that the place was filthy, the children were malnourished and mistreated, and she had to share a room with a male stranger.

Some volunteering programs are being cleverly advertised abroad. Internship Nepal, a Kathmandu-based NGO which promotes itself through the US National Press Photographers' Association as well as some US photojournalism magazines, promises foreign journalism students work placements with some of the best-regarded Nepali media, all duly listed on its website.

The Bahunocracy controlling such things originally came up with the bright idea of exploiting Lord Vishnu, lurking behind a bush and invisible unless held up to the watermark. He may be expelled from his position of honour and so keeps all the money to volunteer. She contacted INFO Nepal, a local NGO, and paid $1,200 per week to teach in an orphanage. When she got there, she complained that the place was filthy, the children were malnourished and mistreated, and she had to share a room with a male stranger.

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The accidental tourist

Jane Diamond, a 37-year-old subtitler from the UK, is having dinner on a balcony overlooking Lake Geneva in Switzerland. Jane says, "I wanted to know where my farm was and what exactly my college's location was, but I didn't make it to the place for the first time since the advent of paper currency the nation has been facing by a rock, albeit a very large one. Rumors to this effect, in circulation long before the notes were, are confirmed at first glance but The Hand trusts the reader has learned by now there is always more than meets the eye in the New Nepal.

Typically, the answer to everyone's first question, ‘is the king’s face still there?’ is both yes and no. No longer on the banknote, closer inspection reveals his image inside the paper, ghost-like in the watermark. He may be expected from his position of honour and obscured by an improbable bunch of rhododendrons, but there he is still wearing that crown.

Have moved beyond standard literacy, many valley residents now specialize in reading between the lines. The novel sight of their monarch, once considered the omnipotent incarnation of Lord Vishnu, lurking behind a bush and invisible unless held up to the watermark. He may be expelled from his position of honour and so keeps all the money to volunteer. She contacted INFO Nepal, a local NGO, and paid $1,200 per week to teach in an orphanage. When she got there, she complained that the place was filthy, the children were malnourished and mistreated, and she had to share a room with a male stranger.

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The accidental tourist

Jane Diamond, a 37-year-old subtitler from the UK, is having dinner on a balcony overlooking a bustling Thamel street. She came to Nepal full of good intentions, but is now leaving dissatisfied and irritated. She had planned to work at an organic farm far from the city but instead spent $1,000 on an unintended holiday. The bad vibes had started before she even got on the plane.

Ahead of my trip, I kept sending emails to the person in charge of WWOOF Nepal (an NGO promoting organic farming)," Jane says. "I wanted to know where my farm was and what exactly my college’s location was, but I didn't make it to the place for the first time since the advent of paper currency the nation has been facing by a rock, albeit a very large one. Rumors to this effect, in circulation long before the notes were, are confirmed at first glance but The Hand trusts the reader has learned by now there is always more than meets the eye in the New Nepal.

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The accidental tourist

Jane Diamond, a 37-year-old subtitler from the UK, is having dinner on a balcony overlooking a bustling Thamel street. She came to Nepal full of good intentions, but is now leaving dissatisfied and irritated. She had planned to work at an organic farm far from the city but instead spent $1,000 on an unintended holiday. The bad vibes had started before she even got on the plane.

Ahead of my trip, I kept sending emails to the person in charge of WWOOF Nepal (an NGO promoting organic farming)," Jane says. "I wanted to know where my farm was and what exactly my college’s location was, but I didn't make it to the place for the first time since the advent of paper currency the nation has been facing by a rock, albeit a very large one. Rumors to this effect, in circulation long before the notes were, are confirmed at first glance but The Hand trusts the reader has learned by now there is always more than meets the eye in the New Nepal.

Typically, the answer to everyone's first question, ‘is the king’s face still there?’ is both yes and no. No longer on the banknote, closer inspection reveals his image inside the paper, ghost-like in the watermark. He may be expected from his position of honour and obscured by an improbable bunch of rhododendrons, but there he is still wearing that crown.

Have moved beyond standard literacy, many valley residents now specialize in reading between the lines. The novel sight of their monarch, once considered the omnipotent incarnation of Lord Vishnu, lurking behind a bush and invisible unless held up to the watermark. He may be expelled from his position of honour and obscured by an improbable bunch of rhododendrons, but there he is still wearing that crown.

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wo British ultra-runners have broken the world record for running from the base of the highest mountain in the world to Kathmandu.

Lizzy Hawker and Stephen Pyke jogged most of the 302km (188 miles) from Chomolungma Base Camp (5,545m) to Kathmandu in three days, two hours and 36 minutes. Their amazing feat beat the record set by Nepal’s Kumar Limbu in 2000 by four hours and 34 minutes.

Even fast trekkers take about six days to walk from Everest Base Camp to Jiri, from where they take a bus to Kathmandu, which takes another seven hours depending on the traffic.

“We wanted to do it in three days but we got lost when we reached in Jiri and that cost us about three hours,” said Hawker, an oceanographer who has won several mountain marathons in the Alps. The team started off as a threesome and their other objective was climbing Ama Dablam (6,812m). “Climbing Ama Dablam was my main goal,” said Mark Hartell, the main organiser of the project who decided to stop in Jiri after running without sleep for 36 hours.

The team set off to Nepal at the end of September and joined a climbing team for Ama Dablam. Due to a cold, Pyke, who is not really a climber, did not make it to the summit as he was saving his energies for the run. “Summit day was the best day for me but I was surprised how tired I was afterwards. Lizzy did not seem to be fazed by the toughness of the mountain though,” said 43-year old Hartell.

Due to its steep ascents, boulder strewn descents and thousands of trekkers, the trail was difficult to run at times. “At times we were completely stuck behind the trekkers and of course the yaks that took up most of the trail. But we had to be patient, this is Nepal after all,” said Hawker, who came across extremely modest and unfazed by her amazing achievement.

The team started running in -10 degrees temperature at 7:16 AM on 25 October from Everest Base Camp on a cold, clear morning. At that altitude, the density of oxygen is half that at sea level.

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“Running during the night was beautiful. We had full moon and there were no people on the trail,” said Pyke. Once they had reached the roadside Hawker and Pyke knew that they still had 188km to reach the capital. However, the support from local villagers kept them going.

“I was elated when we finished, especially the last 60 miles. I was so knackered and the road was pretty unrelenting, which was mentally tough. Physically the last four hours were the most difficult part for me,” said Pyke.

Even though Hawker and Pyke were greeted by a team of journalists and applauding admirers in Kathmandu running at high altitudes seemed to be an easier task than arriving at the stadium, where they were coerced into doing another lap.

“The worst part was running into Kathmandu because of all the traffic, the noise and the smell. It was horribile,” said Hawker. The team ran an average of 3 miles an hour and used a GPS to record longitude and latitude in order to prove their achievement.

The next plan for the runners, who are also raising money for a community charity in Nepal, is to run and climb in South America in 2009.

Billi Bierling
www.justgiving.com/run-everestbc-kathmandu
FSA 07 proved that Nepali documentary film-makers have come of age

Documenting Nepal

A ANGELO DPSILVA & DIWAS KC

In the larger world, documentary films are generally considered to be an esoteric and unpopular format. But here in Kathmandu, the audience flocking to see the films of Film South Asia 07 held two weeks ago flushed that judgment and attested to the vibrancy and vitality of documentary filmmaking. FSA’s line-up of documentary films from (or about) the subcontinent were invariably of the highest quality; and the Nepali entries were, happily, no exceptions.

The impressive achievement of Kesang Tseten in We Corner People is already well-known among cinephiles here, not least because of his ability to excel within the sometimes suffocating constraints of the NGO-dominated culture of documentary filmmaking. Tseten may have been commissioned to simply document the impact of a bridge construction in a remote village of Rasuwa, but instead he delivers the multi-faceted voices of the inhabitants whose collective aspiration reconfigures the condition in both its beauty and rawness is merely an effective as it is in Bipesh Kharel’s A Life with Slate. This sublime, charming, and winning documentary about the Thami slate-miners of Dolakha follows the work cycle of the miners as they harvest slate from the rocky quarry and then journey arduously to their clients to deliver their yield.

Trained as a social anthropologist, Kharel’s film is about comprehending his marginal subjects, the ‘others’. But Kharel somehow delivers something that is far from pedestrian. What we get is not just a view into the particular practices of one distinct community, but rather an evocative meditation on human labour, its meaning, and its centrality to the rhythm of life. Scenes like a married couple mending a broken piece of slate, or the miners’ family life, are completely unrepeatable as is the camera’s eye. It’s a great film.

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ADITYA (SHAHID KAPOOR), meets GEET (KAREENA KAPOOR) on a train at night after getting depressed at the marriage ceremony of a girl he loves. Geet irritates Aditya at first and discloses big plans of eloping with her boyfriend Anshuman (Tarun Arotia). Finally, the two find themselves stranded on a desolate station with no luggage or money. Despite the two falling in love Aditya helps Geet elope with Anshuman. In the end, will they reconcile or not?

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal

www.jainepal.com
MISSING MAN: The family of kidnapped journalist Birendra Sah protest his disappearance at a demonstration organised by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists at Maitighar Mandala on Monday.

HOT GOSSIP: Prime Minister GP Koirala, Speaker Subhas Nembang and Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan talk to the press at the UML tea party on Saturday with general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal.

KAMPAI: New Japanese ambassador Tatsuo Mizuno and Pashupati-san, chairman of the RPP, raise a toast at a cocktail party organised by the Nepal-Japan Citizen Society on Tuesday.

ART OF NOISE: British band The Alarm play to a packed crowd at Basantpur on Monday to raise funds for Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital. Last week they performed the highest ever rock concert at Kala Pattar.
Mad tea party

I must be because I’m an Ass that I just don’t get it. The government raises fuel prices because it is going bankrupt. Immediately, Comrade Makunay declared that the government is “incompetent”—a government in which eight ministers are from his party.

Then the student unions which are affiliated to the parties in the governing alliance declared they will launch a nationwide agitation to force the government to roll back the price rise.

Not to be outdone, the Maoists, who think they can make petrol materialize out of thin air through parthenogenesis, protest the fuel price hike by declaring a one-hour chukker jam with two hour notice along main thoroughfares. The way it is enforced is through four or five goonish looking YCLs in track suits stopping motorcycles, among them one carrying a driver, his wife and a kid straddling the fuel tank. The driver has waited cumulatively for 125 hours in the past two months to buy five litres of petrol each time, and now the young criminals tell him he can’t take his family to his relatives for tika. The angry motorcycle couldn’t take it anymore, revved up his machine and just zoomed through the barricade.

As expected, Dasain was free season for YCL extortion. While Chairman Awesomeness, bedridden with backache, was clandestinely meeting select jarsaps over goat sekuwa in Kathmandu, his comrades set up kiosks at Ghorepani charging mandatory donations from trekkers whether they liked it or not. Marx’s dictum of “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” was modified to determine the revolutionary tax from each trekker. Israeli backpackers bargained it down to Rs 250 each, and Americans were charged Rs 2,500 unless they claimed to be Canadian in which case it went down to Rs 1,500.

But that wasn’t very nice of Comrade Awful and his Ideologue-in-Chief to boycott both the NC and the UML tea parties. The Ass can understand not wanting to go to the chaotic kangresi tea party and the mad hatters that populated it, but the comrades may actually have shown Leftie solidarity and some magnanimity by going to Bakhu on Saturday.

Compared to the NC circus, there was plenty of tea and samosas at the UML do and it was also more disciplined because the UML had deployed its version of the YCL, the People’s Volunteers. Guests were escorted by MP’s and had to walk a gauntlet of cadre. The Ass did spot Maharababu and Matrika Yadav hiding behind the smoke screen provided by the cloud of dust that Girjau’s motorcade had kicked up so they wouldn’t have to shake the prime minister’s hand.

There was a time in the 1980s after the North Koreans set up their embassy that Jhamsikhel didn’t have a street dog problem anymore. But later, even pet canines in the area started getting dognapped in broad daylight. Particular favourites were labs, Tibetan mastiffs and dalmatians. Now that Pyongyang Restaurant & Bar has opened up near the Hack & Yeti, and the Ass wonders if a similar fate will befall man’s best friends in the Durbar Murg area.

We should learn from the Koreans about this novel way of funding the upkeep of our embassies abroad. Given the run-down condition of our missions, opening momo joints in each country where we have an embassy would be a good way for our dips to make ends meet. Maybe the 20 new ambassadors should take this up with the priority it deserves. But, alas, not in Canberra, Copenhagen, Paris and Kuala Lumpur—the four capitals to which the government had appointed Maoist ambassadors and which haven’t yet sent agreements.

And before we go, this just in from Baluwatar: the seven parties made a breakthrough late Thursday by agreeing to hold elections after Tihar. They also decided unanimously to postpone Tihar till April.