If Nepal Standard Time is pushed forward one hour and 15 minutes, we can reduce our electricity shortfall this winter by upto 4 per cent, and loadshedding by upto 40 minutes a day. If enacted, daylight saving time will delay sunset and sunrise by 1 hour and 15 minutes, reducing light use during evening peak hours. However, it may disturb early risers, who will have to wake an hour earlier to keep up with their schedules, and confuse astrologers. Besides, it may prove difficult to implement, as Pakistan's recent experience with a similar plan shows.
Uncomplicating peace

Forgetting the past is not Nepal’s future

There is a revealing anecdote about Girija Prasad Koirala and his idea of justice. After the April 2006 movement, a group of human rights activists sought an appointment with GFP to discuss war-time atrocities. GFP did not think it was important enough. The activists conjured an easier route—forget the past.

Thiscolumnist was drawn to the argument, until the killings in the Tarai shot up. A pattern was visible. Analyst Tulsi Namjyush Sah has done remarkable research to show that the political violence in the Tarai can be traced back to past crimes that went unpunished and a desire for revenge. A key reason for both the Ganj massacre and the Kapilbastu riots was that the Maoists and other groups harboured grievances against each other. A bloody tit-for-tat, even delayed, was inevitable.

Forgetting the past may appear attractive if you are translated from the conflict. It obviously doesn’t work if your father, mother, brother, sister, wife, husband, son, or daughter is part of the past’s violence. To suggest that painful memories be obliterated is both a morally questionable position and a politically ineffective and naive strategy. The root of the Maoist insurgency was the perceived absence of justice. But the cardinal lesson of that period was not learnt. No justice means more violence. Those following the Maim Sumanwar case (she was tortured and killed by army officers in 2004) were not surprised when her father was found dead this week in mysterious circumstances. Activist Manilal Sharma points to the struggle that so many families have faced: how the process has been deeply frustrating; how the pain and depression has taken its toll; and how, in the process, victims’ families have made enemies of powerful people. She adds, “The feeling among victims is that if Maima’s family could not get justice after all this, what hope is there for others?”

What is left is a deep sense of hurt. That hurt may sometimes translate into quibbling, but often results in thought of vengeance. If you wonder about the rising violence, or the rage that characterises even mundane everyday street conversations, it is because we live in a society that has suffered, where many people feel cheated out of life’s simple joys, thereby fuelling a desire to destroy or be destroyed.

One could argue that it is in the Nepal Army’s interest to take action against officers involved in cases such as Maima’s —this would enhance their institutional prestige and silence critics. It is in the Maoists’ self-interest to act against the Bilals of their party — this would overhaul their image and demonstrate a commitment to democracy. And that could mark the beginning of a wave of reparations across the country.

But it is unlikely that this will happen, for neither side feels it has committed any wrong. Crimes have been justified through clever narratives. Collateral damage is seen as a part of the game. Anti killers on both sides have become part of the new political elites.

An apology for the pessimism, but given the shocking inability of our politicians to provide justice, Nepal seems destined to remain stuck in a cycle of violence and hatred.

PLAIN SPEAKING

Prashant Jha

GETTING ON WITH IT

Trust Bihaya Bhandari to transform the most mundane issues of the defence ministry into the most pressing concerns of the nation. From the day she took charge, she has constantly railed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). First she wanted the army to resume recruitment. Better sense prevailed in the Council of Ministers, which refused to approve her proposals. She wanted some discriminated army generals promoted, overriding the objections of human rights defenders. She got her way. She then refused to reconstitute the army and ammunition. She now wants the army chief Rockmangal Katalaw to shoulder important responsibilities in his retirement.

But even though she lost the CA elections, Nepal’s middle-class is behind her. That may be so, but she should remember that this is a transition period, where unilateral decisions on sensitive issues will only strengthen the Maoist argument about this government’s illegitimacy.

Bhandari’s claim that the peace agreement, which puts arms procurement and new recruitment on hold, is affecting the preparedness of the Nepal Army is without merit. However, the priority now is to protect the peace and write a new constitution.

Strengthening the defence forces is necessary, but it is not the priority.

To be sure, certain provisions of the CPA are absurd: you can’t equate an insurgent group with the national army. But in 2006 it was needed to initiate the peace process. UN monitoring has been a joke, but it was a fig leaf the Maoists needed to show that they didn’t care the war. However absurd they may look now, the peace structure stands on these fragile feet. Remove them now and the whole thing could come crashing down. The CPA is a faulty document, but for now that’s all the defence minister has. She’d do well to implement its provisions and move on. The sooner we can leave our past behind us and get on with it, the sooner Nepal can be a peaceful, prosperous and just society.

NON-RESIDENT NONSENSE

In his rather condescending column ‘The NRNA Manifesto’ (#471), one can perceive Prem Jug Thapa’s bitterness against the current NRN leadership.

What he has failed to mention in his write-up is that the current NRNA leadership and thousands of Nepalis abroad have developed an unbroken networking capacity across the west in the last 6 years of the existence of the NRNA (Non Resident Nepali Association). Since 2003, NRNA has organised 3 global conferences in Kathmandu and many regional conferences in the Middle East, Europe and the Far East.

A lot of hard work and imagination has gone into setting up an organisation for the Nepali and by the Nepali people. An organisation like NRNA will have a multi-pronged approach to work with Nepal at various levels, not just in terms of business investment. Comparing NRNA’s objectives with that of business houses of Nepal is myopic and absurd in the extreme.

I hope the leadership of NRNA have met my congratulations and blessings. Mr. Thapa’s argument that NRNA is another rent-seeking organisation based on Nepali ethnicity to be a diversion.

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NRNA conference in Kathmandu such a diversity should be treated as just that, a diversification.

GAURY S ADHIKARY, USA

IMPUDENT

Issue 471’s front page graphic is a disrespect to the Lord. To use the auspicious and blessed Shivalingam in that context is an abuse. It is an innocent mistake by Nepali Times. Please remove the graphics from all your online media.

Prabir Raj Gautam, USA

CORRECTIONS

● Due to an editorial error, the article “Shivan and Brannocks” (#471) wrongly identified Surya Bahadur Thapa as chief of the Rastra Prajatantra Party and Rajendra Mahato as belonging to MUF. 0. They lead the Rastra Jana Shakti Party and Badal Bhaktan Party respectively.

● Help Nepal Network has 52 chapters worldwide, not 21 of which 5 are officially registered charities, not 4 (“Inspiration, etc.”, #471).
T

here is something about Sujata Koirala that makes everyone uncomfortable. It’s not her lineage. Other Koirala women hardly evoke the same hope, fear and frustration. It’s not beauty either, though she looks quite striking for a grandmother.

If birth and beauty were decisive criteria for success in politics, Manisha Koirala should have been reigning in Kathmandu rather than slowly fading from filmdom in Bombay. Despite her much publicised forays into Rautahat, the glamorous granddaughter of BP Koirala has failed to make her mark in politics.

For all her intelligence and gravitas, Nona Koirala’s hold over NC politics was felt, but seldom seen. Shalija Acharya was a visible presence with a history of struggle and sacrifice. But she wasn’t, ultimately, able to influence her party’s politics. Sidelined from the mainstream, both these ‘women of substance’ died dejected.

Sujata Koirala insists on being seen and heard. She wants political power and she will get it. It’s her grit and determination that NC bigwigs find disagreeable, but what they hate most is how she never misses an opportunity to remind them that they are where they are today simply because of the Koirala clan.

Who said hardcore politics was a popularity contest?

Republican royalty is an oxymoron, but it thrives in some form or the other in most democratic societies. With uncertainty the only certainty, politics is the battlefield of the determined and the desperate. Scions of political dynasties may have a launching pad at their disposal, but they are at heart no different. Unfortunately, shows of resolve and ferocity do not often endear one to people. That’s why successful politicians have more followers than friends, though also more critics than outright enemies.

When as foreign minister she refused to accompany PM Madhav Nepal on his visit to New Delhi, the entire political class in Kathmandu accused Daughter Koirala of sabotaging the anti-Maoist coalition from within. She dealt with them with a clever mix of innocence (she claimed to have fallen sick) and defiance.

Now that she has got what she wanted, Sujata would do well to reflect on whether the prize has been worth the price. She has called the bluff of Team Hypocrite at the helm of her party. But for once, Baluwatar has clearly outsmarted her father. PM Nepal has managed to make his foreign minister one of his two deputies without stepping on the toes of his unwieldy coalition. He also insisted, initially, that a formal decision of the NCCC was necessary to promote Sujata. Lured by their newfound influence upon the government, NCCC members then defied their Chair and insisted on holding the Grand Committee meeting from November 3-5 in Kathmandu instead of concentrating on preparations for the General Assembly scheduled for March 10-14, 2010. This probably means that the latter will not be held anytime soon and the UML will continue to maintain its primacy in anti-Maoist politics well into the next elections. Once this was established, PM Nepal simply went ahead and promoted Sujata.

Tactically, it was a masterstroke of realpolitik on the part of PM Nepal. The only problem is that he and his co-conspirators in the NC have no strategic aims other than keeping the Maoists out of power for as long as possible. Koirala is aiming higher - he wants to take the peace process to its logical conclusion. In this war of wills, may the better-intentioned win.

KIRAN PANDAY

The daughter also rises

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For those who pretend to be popular in their own right, this must be painful.

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The chattering classes of Kathmandu love to hate Sujata for different reasons. For them, she is an upstart from the periphery. She didn’t even attend St. Mary’s, after all. But she dresses better, has more men half her age following her, and she gets what she wants, almost all the time.

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anjay Golchha, founder and CEO of technology marketing firm Neoteric, is a slight man with a big attitude and speaks the bold, cosmopolitan language of Naya Nepal. “If Japan can be a technology powerhouse, then so can we,” he says, gesturing to emphasise “we”. Golchha is a stand-out figure among Nepal’s new breed of philanthropist-businessmen, out as much to score a profit as to help their compatriots.

His own contribution in that direction has come largely in the IT sector, and follows a long fascination with gadgetry and computers. He learned the programming language BASIC in high school and studied IT business applications in the United Kingdom. Soon after he returned to Nepal in 1989, he set up software company IT Nepal and went on to develop the first Nepali Enterprise Resource Management tool.

Following these successes, Golchha founded Neoteric to locally distribute internationally branded hardware, like Samsung LCD screens. He also catered to a large market for assembled computers, which were not only customisable but also significantly cheaper. More recently, Neoteric has also become a leading distributor of Nokia phones and appliances in Nepal.

Neoteric is at war with a ‘grey market’ - the nebulous and legally dubious traffic of refurbished Indian and Chinese goods, many of which boast recognised brand names with a stray letter or two inserted, a ‘Nokla’ instead of ‘Nokia’, for instance. Golchha claims that while Neoteric’s products are pricier, they are better quality and come with international standard service and warranties. “Before we entered the market, as much as 40% of the IT goods circulating here were either fake or were smuggled into the country,” he says.

Underpinning these business ventures is a commitment to help the common man and empower the individual. Before Neoteric came along, only large corporations, and very few households or small businesses, had the high-grade HP and Samsung gear that Golchha markets. And that state of affairs was disastrous, he says, because in the Internet age, connectivity is as elementary as water or food. Golchha reveals an almost missionary zeal for Nepal and the Internet: “Imagine what Nepal would be like if everyone had a laptop with an Internet connection.”

Indeed, that vision of a Nepal of laptop-toting villagers and grandpas is why Neoteric is, as Golchha calls it, ‘leapfrogging’ conventional desktops into the laptop business. He points out that laptops are sturdy and high quality, and almost as cheap as desktops, which means they have enormous social and commercial potential. They promise to correct what Golchha calls Nepal’s ‘chicken-and-egg’ problem: not many are bothered to buy Internet connections in part because the content isn’t great, or doesn’t suit specific Nepali needs, and there’s poor content because few Nepalis are connected. Golchha thinks by making laptops easily available, he can shorten the loop and encourage more people to buy into the Internet age.

The Golchha Organisation, a fraternity of firms including Neoteric that is held by the Golchha family, sponsors a number of social service activities. They run an eye hospital in Biratnagar that offers treatment for free or at negligible prices and serves about 80,000 people annually. They also sponsor academic scholarships, and have made headway on a slew of environmental initiatives. Golchha says they’re dabbling in non-conventional energy sources like husk and in characteristically far-sighted manner, have begun recycling electronics to prevent hazardous build-ups of electronic waste.

“It’s a big problem in rich countries,” he warns. “And if we’re not careful, it could be a big problem here too.”

Taking on software, hardware and social service is no mean feat, and involves a degree of risk in the volatile business and political environment of Nepal. Golchha admits he’s made business mistakes in the past, but accepts that risks are part and parcel of entrepreneurship. “What Nepal needs more than ever is a risk-friendly investment climate that ensures businesses ownership of the rewards,” he says.

“If we do these things, nothing can stop us.”

Bold is the word.
Xchange

Global Xchange, a British Council and VSO partnership program, is giving 18 hearing impaired volunteers from Nepal and the UK the chance to live with host families and work for local organisations. The volunteers, aged 18-25, will live in the two countries for three months and promote cultural exchange as well as build active networks.

Gift of sight

Marking World Sight Day 2009, World Sight Day, the Nepal government and VSO partnership program, is giving 18 hearing impaired volunteers from Nepal and the UK the chance to live with host families and work for local organisations. The volunteers, aged 18-25, will live in the two countries for three months and promote cultural exchange as well as build active networks.

Smokin’

Gorkha Lahari launched its new cigarette ‘Action’ earlier this month. This addition to the cigarette market uses international quality tobacco and is available for Rs 52 a pack.

Risk-taking for dummies

Sujata Koirala was defeated by Madhav Kumar Nepal appointed her to the position of deputy prime minister. When asked why he did what he did, Nepal gave a distinctly non-prime ministerial answer: “I appointed her as asked by Girija Prasad Koirala.” In other words, “Girija made me do it.”

But on Monday, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal appointed her to the position of deputy prime minister. When asked why he did what he did, Nepal gave a distinctly non-prime ministerial answer: “I appointed her as asked by Girija Prasad Koirala.” In other words, “Girija made me do it.”

It doesn’t matter how displeased or angry Nepali Congress members are with Sujata’s new post. They can do their predictable song-and-dance routine: that is, pull long faces, hold meetings in windowless offices, condemn the PM’s actions, pass resolutions, blame Sujata’s father at press conferences and do everything that ends up as a spectacle on television.

If history is any guide, in just a few days, they will have shown signs of that great sense of Nepali resilience. It’s the stuff that gets praised ad nauseum by amateur sociologists and drenched-in-stuff that gets praised ad nauseum by positive-thinking pundits. It consists of reluctantly accepting what has happened and moving on to other matters without putting up a principled fight.

Principled fights, let us remember, often have uncertain outcomes and can be costly for careers. Given these odds, which non-Koirala Nepali Congress leader has the self-confidence or the public following to say: “Look, enough is enough. Either we seriously reform how our party is governed or completely erode public confidence in what we do for democracy…”? Nothing.

In fairness, though, there are some NC leaders who have workable ideas about how to reform the party. But unless they start taking intelligent risks to translate ideas into actions, their continuous claim to be working for democracy is laughable. If they can’t even work toward turning their party into a New Nepali Congress, who believes them when they shout loudly about creating a New Nepal?

It’s not enough to blame the father for what he has done. He’s shown that he has calculated the odds, cast aside his scruples, and decided he can get away with doing what he thinks is right for his daughter’s political future. The problem, broadly, is how Nepali institutions are governed in ways that are antithetical to democratic values and business success. Here’s two rules of the game.

The Great Man approach

It’s not enough to blame the father for what he has done. He’s shown that he has calculated the odds, cast aside his scruples, and decided he can get away with doing what he thinks is right for his daughter’s political future. The problem, broadly, is how Nepali institutions are governed in ways that are antithetical to democratic values and business success. Here’s two rules of the game.

1. The Nepali Congress leaders have only themselves to blame. That the Sujata episode has come to a head is symptomatic of their practicing both the Great Man approach and ignoring small problem approach: This happens when an organisation’s leadership thinks it’s beneath its dignity or that it does not have time to deal with small problems. Its approach is to brush away small problems, which then go on to fester and mutate into bigger problems in due course.

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The Great Man approach

Usually, a public organisation is first led by an initiative-taking individual who shows more courage than anyone else. Once he’s in a position of leadership, his enthusiasm, energy and activities are hailed by all, and he starts winning national and international acclaim. After some time, he gets comfortably settled in his role. He hires family members, gets defensive about criticism, and punishes those who disagree with him. He is insecure about sharing the limelight with others. So he surrounds himself with dwarves who sing the great man’s praises, and when he promotes one dwarf, others may grumble but don’t complain much because they don’t want to bite the hand that feeds them.

The latest scandal exposes the management values that underpin many of Nepal’s institutions

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Intensifying food crisis

Om Astha Rai in Nagarkot, October 10

Bratnagar Jute Mills, the country’s oldest jute mill, will close down this week following conflict between the government and employees. The mill will be handed over to the private sector once the government pays the workers. Even if it continues operating, its image as the centre of the democratic movement will suffer. The surrounding place is also known as the Mills area and three generations of employees spent their lives here. These will become mere fables once the mill is handed to the private sector.

The management weakened after the political changes in 1990, when party-backed unions overran the mills. Directors were appointed by political parties, and cadre from the same parties were involved in theft and irregularities. Of 1,039 employees who lost their jobs after the closure of the mill, about 800 have joined private jute mills in Sunsari and Morang, their jobs after the closure of the mill, while the rest remain out of work. Of those 200 who have been able to find a job, 90 do not have a regular post.

The mill is closing because of its age, regular losses and the lack of new jute to process. The management weakened after the political changes in 1990, when party-backed unions overran the mills. Directors were appointed by political parties, and cadre from the same parties were involved in theft and irregularities. Of 1,039 employees who lost their jobs after the closure of the mill, about 800 have joined private jute mills in Sunsari and Morang, their jobs after the closure of the mill, while the rest remain out of work. Of those 200 who have been able to find a job, 90 do not have a regular post.

Death wish

Editorial in Rajdhani, 14 October

Since time unknown, Nepal Congress chief Girija Praasad Koirala has been making death wishes, most of which have been fulfilled. His most recent one, to have his daughter appointed deputy prime minister, has just been fulfilled by the prime minister. Madhav Nepal’s motive seems to have been primarily to save his own post. Pleasing Koirala enables Nepal to take advantage of the unconstitutional status that he holds. Both GP Koirala and Nepal are driven by selfish motives, sending the government further down the downward slope it is already on.

Because the decision was taken without the consent of the Nepal Congress and was something of a pact between Nepal and GP Koirala, the Nepal Congress now faces a test. Much depends on whether they decide to contest the decision or accept the post assigned to Sujata Koirala. Whether they decide to contest the decision or accept the post assigned to Sujata Koirala.

Nepal’s population is 32 million, more than half of whom live in rural areas. The nation’s food production is also small compared to its population.

The world food crisis has made it evident that the nation’s food production is not enough to accommodate the needs of the population of this region,” Jijajot, Neryalapur, Dang, Dhonubhi, Tulsipur and Pyuthan are the major affected areas.

Farmers were not only unable to plant paddy on time but were also unable to apply fertilizer at the right time. This year in Banke district, for instance, 31,718 acres of land were farmed, 4,783 hectares less than the year before. Similarly, while paddy production was 131,400 metric tons last year, the drought prompted estimates of only 80-90,000 metric tons. This is now expected to decrease by another 40 per cent. Sajja Bhumihakata, Bhuban of the Agriculture Development Office, “A loss of about Rs 280 million is anticipated.”

Nepalganj bureau in Kantipur, 9 October

The endless downpours and flooding following the harsh drought has left several mills and far western districts facing a severe food crisis. The crops that made it through the delayed monsoon were inundated by the heavy rain of the last few weeks and began to rot, and rice grain laid out to dry was washed away.

Sachidananda Upadhyay of the midwestern agricultural directorate says, “Even without adverse weather conditions, the arable land here is not enough to accommodate the needs of the population of this region,” Jijajot, Neryalapur, Dang, Dhonubhi, Tulsipur and Pyuthan are the major affected areas.

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28 years in Bratnagar Jute Mills and now works in a private mill says, “We only get a 20 minute break and hardly any leave.” Khadga Rai recalls those days when he protected his corrupt colleagues. “I did so because I was in politics,” he says. He says if he had not done so someone else would “There was competition to protect those corrupt people.”

Rai, who worked in the mills for 24 years, is now unemployed at the age of 46. His children still need his support and he cannot just stay home idly. It is difficult to find a job for a person who is already known as a union leader. “We never realised I would make life more difficult for my family,” he says.
Discord, and more discord

Too little, too late to meet the constitution deadline

The deadline for writing the new constitution is now only seven months away but five thematic committees haven’t submitted their draft reports and concept papers to the CA. To make matters worse, the six thematic committees that have submitted their drafts haven’t patched up differences on key points. Only the Committee for Rights of Minority and Marginalised Communities passed its draft unanimously.

But instead of forgiving and forgetting those differences the political parties want to extend the drafting period, which was initially two years, by a further six months.

Constitutional Committee Chairman Niranjan Acharya feels the problem is a lack of commitment, not necessarily the disagreements themselves. He says, “The parties should understand that the constitution is a document of consensus.”

The ongoing conflict between status-quoist and progressive forces has held back the constitution writing process at its most crucial time.

The constitution writing process was slow from the outset. It took 3 months after the historic CA elections to form the Maoist-led government, and CA committees were established to facilitate agreement on constitutional issues. CA regulations eased the challenge by forbidding party whips from becoming too meddlesome so, if all had gone well, there wouldn’t have been opposition in the CA.

Committee members collected public suggestions for the constitution, which have been investigated in a report that has been submitted to the Study and Suggestion Committee. But things haven’t gone well, and the draft reports don’t reconcile basic ideological differences. The UML and NC are happy with the status quo and the parliamentary system, the Maoists, Madhesi parties, and the left are happy with the federal system. It hasn’t been able to start work because the political parties haven’t even submitted their concept papers.

The CA calendar has already been reduced six times and the public doesn’t expect the November deadline to be met. Once definitions finish, the public will be invited to comment on the drafts.

Acharya is still hopeful: “If the parties consider the national interest, the constitution will be written on time.”

Committees that have completed drafts:

- Committee for Rights of Minority and Marginalised Communities
- Committee for Determining the Bases of Cultural and Social Unity
- Committee for Determining Legislative Bodies
- Committee for Determining the National Interests Preservation
- Committee for Determining the Form of Governance System

Committees yet to complete drafts:

- State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power Committee
- Committee for Determining the Form of Governance System
- Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles Committee
- Economic Rights and Sharing of Natural Resources and Public Revenue Committee
- Constitutional Committee

The National Interests Preservation Committee was the first committee to submit a draft concept to the CA but papered over differences on state structure, national defence policy, border issues and on whether to call the civil war a ‘people’s war’ or an ‘armed insurgency.’ The NC and UML have also strongly opposed the provision of conscription for all adults.

The draft of the Judiciary System Committee has been the most controversial, as the Maoists want to invest parliament with the power to hire and sack judges, and to allow non-Supreme Court justices to become chief justice. The other parties have criticised this as an undue violation of the separation of powers.

The Committee for Determining the Bases of Cultural and Social Unity proposed Nepali as the official language but Madhesi parties want Hindi instead, while the Maoists say any language spoken by at least one per cent of the population should be given the status.

The Committee for Determining Legislative Bodies has already prepared a draft paper without Maoist backing which proposes a bicameral Parliament: a 151-member House of Representatives and a 51-member National Assembly, with separate houses in each province. The Maoists have proposed an all-powerful 245-member unicameral Parliament. The IMF wants the chair of the proposed national assembly to be made vice president.

There are differences over what to name constitutional commission in the draft prepared by the Committee for Determining Legislative Bodies. ‘National Commission’ is preferred to ‘Federal Commission.’

We need a high-level political mechanism to resolve differences over committee drafts

Committee has finalised its draft but there are disagreements about whether to compensate landowners for land taken from them during land reform. The Maoists object to any compensation.

The Committee for Determining the Form of Governance System has been debating the merits of the presidential and prime ministerial systems, which is important since it has implications for the entire political system.

The State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power Committee has perhaps the most difficult task of all in deciding on a federal system. It hasn’t been able to start work because the political parties haven’t even submitted their concept papers.

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Way out
The Great Himalaya

The mother of all trekking trails promises adventure for tourists and hope for the denizens of the Himalaya

If there is a trekking ‘holy grail’, it is a route through the remotest peaks of the Great Himalaya Range that joins all the major trekking regions in Nepal. Following five years of research treks, the Nepali section of the Great Himalaya Trail (GHT) is now a reality. Starting in September 2006 in Kanchenjunga and ending in July this year in the Api Himal, Pema Sherpa and I became the first people to traverse the entire length of the Nepal Himalaya. In doing so we traversed some of the most amazing mountain scenery on the planet and discovered an incredible wealth of ethnic and natural diversity. The result (see box) is an extreme trekking trail over 162 days with more than 150,000 metres of climbing and descending, a proposition sure to tempt adventurous trekkers. Over the next couple of years, I will be trekking through the Eastern and Western Himalaya to complete a trans-Himalayan trail over 4,000km that will take between 16-18 months to trek.

Nepal’s three main trekking regions, Everest, Annapurna and Langtang, attract tens of thousands every year. The trails here are well maintained and safe, and offer novice and experienced

ROBIN BOUSTEAD

ROBEROBERT ROSENBAUM
In his fascinating book 'The Great Himalaya Trail – A Pictorial Guide', Robin Boustead uses stunning photographs, compelling storytelling and section route descriptions to describe the highest feasible route across Nepal. The large format pictures offer an intriguing insight into the first expedition to trek and map the Great Himalaya Trail. It crosses every one of Nepal’s mighty mountain ranges, from Kanchenjunga in the east to Saipal in the west. Folklore combines with descriptions of the communities encountered to give the reader an intimate glimpse into the lives of mountain people. The series of interlinking trekking maps and graphical trail profiles provide enough detail for anyone to begin planning their own Great Himalaya Trail adventure.

I hope that the GHT will inspire other trekkers to embark upon their own GHT trails, helping to develop micro-tourism projects in communities too remote for major infrastructure development. Creating value in regions that previously had little to offer could also precede the establishment of a transboundary corridor for animal migration, helping to save many endangered species. The snow-covered crown of Asia may then become one of its greatest assets.

for more pictures, visit www.nepaltimes.com

The real Naya Nepal

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ISBN: 9789993347408
Pages: 167

Robin will be signing copies of his book at Mandala Bookpoint on Saturday, 3.30PM
Family matters

After two months of lobbying and sulking, Girija Prasad Koirala has finally succeeded in making his daughter Sujata the deputy prime minister. Given her unpopularity with the public as well as within the NC, it’s no surprise the backlash has been so intense.

Koirala has squandered the merit he earned in 2006 in leading the country back to democracy by pushing his daughter as his political successor. He has demonstrated his lack of commitment to democracy, and nowhere is this more palpable than within his own party.

NC leaders are enraged and the UML is rivaled. There is finger pointing between the political parties. Critics blame the weak government for not being able to stand up to Girija. The public, on the other hand, is so apathetic that the reaction has been a dismissive: “So what else is new?”

As always everything will be figured out, forgiven and forgotten. The public understands that there will be protests now, but they will soon die down, and those protesting will be seen hobnobbing with Sujata about town.

Sujata Koirala has no political charisma, skill, guile or experience. She has little support within her party and the only person rooting for her is her father. When her party summoned her for questioning, she came with slogan-singing hired goons. But is Girija the only one responsible for the mess in the NC? How about the other so-called leaders?

Koirala’s dynastic tendency undermines democracy in his party

The NC leadership is quick to say that the party is changing with the times and that the leadership is going through a transition. They have protested in the past against Girija’s efforts to anoint her as his successor. But this particular move by the party president goes to show just how weak the NC leadership is and how beheld they are to the old man.

The NC leadership gossips behind Koirala’s back about him with the leaders of other parties. They say the old man is losing it or has become ‘senile’ and yet they have been unable to come up with alternative leadership. They have failed miserably in asserting their disapproval and discontent, in convincing Girija that his decision was a bad call, and in preventing him from making such a big decision unanimously. One has to wonder how one of the most unpopular leaders in Nepal has so much clout within his own party.

Seeing Koirala’s face on the evening news has proved to the Nepali people that although we may have come a long way in the last few years few things in Nepal have really changed. Quipped one disenchanted NC member: “The prime minister and deputy prime minister were both unelected. They make a good team.”

For the NC leaders, however, this is a good time to consider whether the party is actually going through the transition they claim is underway. They must understand that unless change can come from the top party leadership there will always be bad decisions. Unless young leaders are groomed, older leaders will always push their children as successors.

To come out in the media and badmouth is easy. This is a collective bad judgment call and putting the blame on someone else just makes the leadership look naive and immature. This is the time to be assertive about issues that really matter. The party’s reputation and position is at stake if it wants to present itself to the people as a real alternative to the Maoists.

General elections may be far away but if the party wants to rebuild its image the leaders need to undo this mistake and remake the party.
Twenty-three-year-old Susmita Rai’s interest in kayaking safety work was sparked by her own husband’s work in the tourist industry. But when she sought to transform a hobby into a career she came up against an impossible choice.

Sanu Baba Sunuwar, concerned about their household and the perceived risks a Nepali woman might face in male-dominated tourist guide industry, issued her with an ultimatum: “It’s either me or kayaking.” Determined to make her own way, Susmita left her four-year-old son Niraj in the care of her in-laws and divorced her husband.

Her decision marked the beginning of a difficult period during which she had to support herself through restaurant work, dishwashing jobs and hard labour. The tide began to turn when she encountered Inka Trollhals, a Swedish kayaker. Inka, who has been coming to Nepal for the last decade, runs Himalayan River Girls. This kayak club based in Pokhara trains Nepali women as river and rafting guides.

With Inka, Susmita had real cause to believe kayaking and rafting could give her a future different from that she was destined for once she was taken out of school and married off at the age of thirteen. She began to train with Inka and in 2008, along with compatriots Sita Thapa and Anu Shrestha, competed against athletes from 11 nations in the Peak UK Himalayan Challenge kayaking championship in Nepal. Susmita came first. Her triumph prompted a change of heart on the part of Sanu Baba, and led to a reconciliation. Since then, Susmita has represented Nepal at two kayaking championships in Spain and Switzerland. She continues to train, but has also set her sights on reaching the heights of her husband, quite literally: he is a paragliding pilot.

Susmita has blazed her own trail. But she laments the lack of support for women in sport, either from government or from sporting associations. She is clear about the need for women to be given opportunities. “If I had given up kayaking for my family,” she says, “then how would I have had the chance to fly the flag of Nepal in front of the world?” She smiles and adds, “Who would know who Susmita Rai is?”

Susmita’s choice
Susmita chose kayaks over her husband, but all’s well that ends well.

Himalayan River Girls is doing more than just hosting the competitive spirit of Nepali women, however. Cessation of its paddle work is the firm belief that training women like Susmita not only boosts their confidence but also makes them employable. So far, fifteen women have been employed by Nepali rafting companies through Himalayan River Girls which is run wholly on donation. Susmita herself works for Paddle Nepal. She had a rough ride. But calmer waters lie ahead.

[DINANATH BARAL IN POKHARA]

Vacancy Announcement

The South Asia Social, Environment and Water Resources Integrated Division (SASDE) of the World Bank invites applications for the position of an Extended Term Consultant (ETC) which will be based in Kathmandu, Nepal. The position will initially be a local one-year ETC appointment, with a possibility for a 12-month renewal depending on performance and business needs.

SASDE supports initiatives to promote demand-side engagement for better governance, improved transparency, accountability and risk mitigation in the Nepal Country Program, including the PROD, a US$3 million program financed by the State- and Peace-building Fund. The project will steward financial support to civil society organizations (CSOs) for: knowledge and skills development in social accountability (SA); piloting of SA initiatives; networking among SA practitioners; and the monitoring and evaluation of SA approaches. The PROD will use a wholesaler approach led by a Coordination Unit, housed in the World Bank Office, Nepal. The Deputy PROD Coordinator will provide administrative, managerial and technical assistance for the effective implementation of the PROD. S/he will invest at least 30-40% of his or her time to mainstreaming of SA in Bank-financed projects. The Deputy Coordinator will report directly to the PROD Task Team Leader (TTL), and will work under the technical guidance of the PROD Coordinator on a day-to-day basis.

The successful candidate will have the following qualifications:

- A Masters degree in a relevant discipline
- At least 8 years of professional experience in the field of development, with substantive knowledge and practical experience of undertaking SA and governance activities preferred
- A good knowledge of CSOs in Nepal and their institutional context is a requirement
- S/he must have previous project management experience with a proven track record of dealing with senior government officials, donors, civil society organizations and other non-state actors
- Experience managing and/or developing training and capacity building programs and/or major civil society-focused development programs (especially with respect to capacity building and networking) would be a strong advantage
- Knowledge and experience of World Bank operational practices and procedures (including fiduciary ones) is preferred
- Proven skills in report writing, conducting stakeholder consultations, overseeing M&E, and planning/sequencing program activities is required
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills in English and Nepali will be required
- Knowledge of social inclusion approaches in Nepal is preferred

This is a country office position in Nepal subject to local recruitment under the Nepal compensation plan. The World Bank offers a locally competitive package and is committed to attract and maintain a diverse, highly qualified and dedicated workforce. Equally qualified women and members of disadvantaged groups are encouraged to apply.

Copenhagen climate countdown

KUNDA DIXIT in COPENHAGEN

With less than two months to go for a big climate change summit here in the Danish capital, the planet’s future hangs in the balance as countries continue to bicker about who should cut carbon emissions and by how much.

A preparatory meeting in Bangkok last week widened differences between rich and poor countries instead of bridging them, as emerging economies like China and India accused the West of forcing them to agree to similar targets.

China has overtaken the US with 24 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions. The US is responsible for 22 per cent, the EU 12 per cent and India 8 per cent of global carbon emissions. Scientists say the world must halve its emissions by 2050 to cap global warming at two degrees Celsius.

China, which did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, is now willing to go up to 15 per cent but wants countries like China and India to agree to similar targets.

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EU 12 per cent and India 8 per cent of global carbon emissions. Scientists say the world must halve its emissions by 2050 to cap global warming at only 2 degrees Celsius.

The annual per capita emission of carbon by Indians is only 1.6 tons, whereas an average European emits 18 tons and an American 25 tons. But 90 per cent of the increase in emissions is coming from countries like China, India, Brazil and Indonesia. Cuts only by rich countries, therefore, will not be enough to keep global temperature increase to within 2 degrees by 2050.

Indian state minister for the environment, Jairam Ramesh, accuses the West of trying to scrap the Kyoto Protocol, which requires rich countries to meet mandatory fuel efficiency standards, an increase in solar and wind energy to meet five per cent of its energy needs and the conversion of half of all coal-fired plants to ‘clean coal’ technology. But it will not accept internationally imposed cuts. For its part, China is unilaterally planning to move away from coal and source 15 per cent of its energy supply from renewables like wind and solar by 2020. However, China imports half its daily oil needs and this demand is growing.

Chinese negotiators have also rejected internationally agreed targets, preferring national mitigation action. But unlike India, China is poised to cash in on green technology and hopes to become the world’s biggest producer of photovoltaic cells, electric transport and batteries. Economist Joseph Stiglitz says it is clear that China and India can’t try to imitate US consumption patterns. “If they do,” he said this week in Copenhagen, “the planet is doomed.”

Rich countries must commit to deep cuts to compensate for their historical carbon emissions.

Emerging economies must announce unilateral cuts, with international financing for the conversion to clean energy.

Most vulnerable countries need help to adapt to the effects of sea-level rise and melting ice.

We need to set up a system for measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) to make sure nations stick to their commitments.

Denmark’s environment minister, Connie Hedegaard, says she is encouraged by a growing political consensus and the voluntary carbon cuts announced by countries. “We are waiting for the US to take the lead, and I think it is now doable politically,” she said.
Let them hear jazz

We don’t know about you, but when we go to a jazz concert, especially where bands inspired by Brazilian music are playing, we expect it to be, well…jazzy.

So the tables and chairs at Hyatt for Jazzmandu’s headliner event may have worked for the mellow tunes of Trio Urbano. But when Sheyla Costa said the crowd made her “want to cry” and that she wanted to “go home” when no one stood up to dance to her Samba-inspired Parisian jazz, she was on to something.

Not to take anything away from the impressive roster of artists Jazzmandu brought to Kathmandu this year. The line-up ranged from the traditional classical music of Gurudev Kamath to the energetic improvisations of Thai/French Vatchapuj to the bossa nova beats of Sheyla Costa-La Brasileira. Jazzmandu may indeed be the biggest jazz festival in the Himalayas.

The festival had something for everyone: the headliner event at the Hyatt treated the audience to a small, intimate evening of Brazilian jazz, while the ‘music marathon’ at Gokarna Golf Resort on Saturday entertained hundreds of guests with the entire spectrum of international musicians. No wonder people were still talking about it on Monday morning.

Despite the bands’ different styles, they palpably demonstrated the power of music to unite rather than divide. Homnath Upadhaya gave us an impromptu tabla tutorial; Vincent Martial of Vatchapuj and Jamie Baum of Trio Urbano challenged each other to flute solos; and saxophonist Yuri Honing of Amsterdam persevered through a minor power-outage for his first ‘solo in the dark’ at Patan’s Museum Cafe.

When Navin Chhetri started the festival back in 2002, his idea was to bring live jazz to the Nepali people. But with the kind of line-up they presented, they should have just set up shop outside Patan Durbar rather than inside, and set the evening on fire. The Seventh Annual Kathmandu Jazz Festival did not disappoint. But next year, let’s take Sheyla’s advice – no chairs.

Meg Patterson and Indu Nepal
**ABOUT TOWN**

**EXHIBITIONS**
- ‘Nepal Rendezvous - Nagarkot Workshop’, paintings by Bangladeshi and Nepali artists at Hotel de l’Annapurna, Darbar Marg, till 31 Oct, 4218048
- 'Lungta Paintings', exhibition by Maureen Drake, 19 Oct 10, 5.30PM, Indigo Gallery

**EVENTS**
- Global Handwashing Day 2009, at Nepal Administrative Staff College, 15 Oct, 11AM onwards, 5522784
- Patan Press Club, meets every Thursday at Dhoskama Café, 4PM, 5522113
- Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Tai Chi 10-11.30AM Saturday, Yoga 8.30-9.30AM and Meditation 5-6PM weekdays, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402

**MUSIC**
- Baja gaja Himalayan Rainbow Trout
- Live band Tiger for Breakfast

**DINING**
- Some like it hot Happy cocktail hour
- Meditation 5-7PM, 3-11PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu
- Relax Package, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7PM
- Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7PM at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212

**WEEKEND WEATHER**
Autumn is here and you can tell from the dark blue skies, cooler nights and the light breezes that sweep through the sunny days. October has received more than its normal share of rain throughout western and central Nepal. The satellite pictures show clear skies and scattered clouds that are too dry to cause rain. Valley residents can look forward to clear weather during Tihar and on the eve of Diwali. November is known for its light showers that are short and sharp. Expect this month to be on the whole rather dry.

**RECIPE**
**Baba Ghanoush (aubergine dip)**

\[
\text{Baba Ghanoush}
\]

Ingredients:
- 4-5 medium sized aubergines, cut into 2cm chunks
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons raw sugar
- 2 tablespoons roughly chopped parsley
- 6 cloves garlic
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Roughly chopped coriander

Method:
- Roast at 200C for 15-20 minutes until the aubergine starts to change colour and becomes soft.
- Place the aubergine and garlic on a baking tray.
- Place in a blender.
- Add lemon juice, olive oil and parsley.
- Add garlic, salt and pepper.
- Blend until smooth.

**About This Page**
- Wake up Sid is a coming of age story about a young and wealthy Mumbai slacker, Siddharth Mehra (Ranbir Kapoor). He cares about his friends, camera and car, but little else. Then he meets young and ambitious Kolkata girl Aisha Banerjee (Konkona Sen Sharma), and the two become fast friends. But a chain of events compels Sid to take a hard look at himself and change his ways.

**Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com**

**Q. Do you agree with the ban on Belarusian oil?**

Total votes: 1,314

**Weekly Internet Poll # 472**

**Q. Will the Nepali Congress split over Sujata Koirala’s promotion?**

**Weekly Internet Poll # 473**

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

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**WEATHER WEEKEND**

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**GETAWAYS**
- Relax Package at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu for Rs 5505 plus taxes, for a night of double occupancy with breakfast, complimentary use of spa. Offer valid for Nepalis and local residents only, 4488809
- The Fulbari Resort, offers a ‘Dine & Dwell Fulbari Fiesta Package’ that includes a two-night stay with BB, buffet dinner and more. 4461918, info@fulbari.com.np
- Tiger Mountain, offers a safari at Tiger Tops, Chitwan National Park or Langtang Lodge & Camp, 4361500

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

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**NEWS FOCUS**

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**Do not hallucinate.**
COME BACK! School children perform traditional dances during the inaugural ceremony of the 4th Non Resident Nepali Global Conference 2009 at the Army Club on Tuesday.

YES, OFFICER? Police stop a LPG three-wheeler as it tries to evade them after protesting a government decision to gradually replace the vehicles with microbuses in the Valley.


MASTERCLASS: French artist Trebeka performs at Jazzmandu 2009’s closing concert on Tuesday at the Shangri-La Hotel.

IF ONLY... A man observes a model of an upcoming apartment at the Nepal Property Expo at the Exhibition Hall on Sunday.
Donkey Tihar

Kastho kichi kichi gareko, hairanai paryo buda le! East Mokranay soundbite last week before Girija finally bamboozled him into making Surya DPM. “I couldn’t take the pressure anymore,” MKN told Ram Chandra and Sushil, “I had to do it to save the government, at least it’s not PM, only DPM.”

To cut a long story short, GPK blackmailed MKN saying: “I’ll join the Baddies and topple you unless you take my daughter as your deputy.” MKN resisted, but he had to do it in the end. The donkey’s prediction: GPK will hibernate, lie low and stop hobnobbing with the Baddies till Christmas at least.

The other reason GPK is hibernating is because he was certain he’d get the Nobel Peace Prize, and was upstaged by President O’Bama. Can’t blame him for having his hopes up ever since Man Mohan-ji threw him a red carpet at IGIA in 2006 and called him “Asia’s great statesman” and then Jimmy (Jimbo) Carter called him “My Hero.”

What is all this sudden India-China shadow boxing over Nepal? OK, we understand it better now, the larger geopolitics, want to play India off against China. But what is surprising is that our netas, who have little clue of the larger geopolitics, want to play India off against China. So PKD troops into Beijing with dogmatist-in-chief Com Kiran and operator-in-chief Com Mahara to build ‘party-to-party’ links. Surya Bahadur Thapa creeps back from Delhi after meeting who-whos, convincing them the Maoists cannot be trusted, as if they needed more convincing. Then Lionheart flies into Delhi to convince them how he is their best bet at the next NC convention, and how he is the logical next compromise PM candidate. Ass’t advice: let’s stop beating around the bush and just have a direct India-China Summit on Nepal’s future. Let’s hammer it out once and for all. Once Beijing and Delhi come to an understanding, the domestic jobs will stop all this diplomatic tourism.

The discharge of disqualified Baddie minors began this week with a grand function at the Sindhuli cantonment. But has it really begun? Noone, including the UNMEAN folks meant to be overseeing the process, quite know. Are the Maoists just using this as a ploy to show progress before the next Security Council meeting, without really going all out to throw out those who had no business being there? Or are they sincere? The day after the event, deputy commander Com Baldev was heard cribbing about the rehabilitation package. Till we see this disqualified lot in civilian schools we will not believe it. But guess where many of them are headed after leaving the cantonments: a transit centre. This is meant to be a stop-gap arrangement, but are we not creating another structure that will be equally hard to disband?

The international community is getting wise to the ways of our netas. After paying endlessly for various parts of the peace process, the Norwegians have finally issued an ultimatum: they are willing to help with the rehab of the discharges, but only if this process concludes by January 22. If that date is crossed, the promised 5 million smackeroos will be channeled elsewhere.

And where is Com Pasang while all this is happening? The commander of the PLA has been particularly low key. He has not been giving interviews, he was not present at the discharge function; unlike last time, he has not reacted to the defense minister’s assertion that the CPA should be revised to bolster the Nepal Army’s capabilities. Noone quite knows why he has allowed Baldev to hog the limelight, or whether he has been asked to lie low. Maybe both?

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