he impasse in Nepal’s peace process and the danger of it unravelling appear to be rattling policy advisers at the United Nations in New York and in capital cities around the world.

Baluwatar’s swift and sharp reaction to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s report to the Security Council took UN officials in New York by surprise. Although UNMIN clarified that the need for political consensus was something all political leaders in Nepal had themselves articulated, the speech became an opportunity for the ruling coalition to draw attention to UNMIN’s perceived pro-Maoist bias.

Said a Baluwatar insider: “Of course we say it all the time, but it is different when the UN Secretary-General comments on Nepal’s internal politics. Whose side is UNMIN on?” What hasn’t helped UNMIN are Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s speeches claiming that the UN’s report has vindicated his party’s protests.

The Secretary-General’s report to the Security Council, UNMIN chief Karin Langdren’s briefings in New York, and the Security Council meeting last Friday betray the UN’s anxiety about Nepal’s peace process, with UNMIN’s mandate due to expire in January.

Most observers agree that the UN needs a success story in its chequered history of international peacekeeping, and that UNMIN’s mandate will probably be extended. But what will be keenly watched is how it corrects its perceived tilt towards the former rebels. And the elephant in the room that no one mentions is India, its role in the peace process and the desire of advisers in New Delhi to get UNMIN to pack up and go.

The row has distracted attention from the need to allow UNMIN to disarm the Maoists and dismantle cantonments, finish writing the constitution and allow parliament and the government to function. You can debate whether the UN Secretary-General was within his rights to call on the parties to work together, but few in Nepal will deny that he was right.
**PASS THE BUCK**

As the political tug-o-war spills into the streets, an already tattering economy is looking even more precarious. In the last couple of months, we have been Knocked back by high inflation, labour unrest, transport disruptions, the liquidity crisis and a delayed monsoon. But there is no sign any of this is worrying our political party leaders. They don’t seem to care that the economy is in shambles, the budget hasn’t been passed, highway arteries are blocked, and remote area airfields are being shut down by militant locals.

If the parties don’t sort out their political quarrels, they will sink Nepal. Here’s the lowdown on the economy:

- In agriculture, contributes far less to GDP than the service sector and not much more than industry. Poor infrastructure and persistent transport disruptions have hurt productivity further, and the ensuing rural-urban migration has fed a growing law and order problem. Along with labour unrest and power shortages, this explains Nepal’s political instability in recent times. Politics don’t help by encouraging aggressive unionism, as the public offering of the Bratang Jule Mili recently attests to, and refusing to get tough on road blockaders.

- Services, on the other hand, will stay strong so long as remittances and tourism, which have weathered the worst of the global recession, revive revenue and the housing market doesn’t crash. Yet benefits haven’t reached the countryside.

- Financial services, for example, grew by double-digit figures last year but mainly oiled Kathmandu’s housing boom.

The government can’t mandate big rural loans because the facts are there, basically been to NGOs. Apart from a few exceptions, the fact remains that NGOs are not now many donors, especially in Eastern Europe and Nepal, as in Eastern Europe and other developing countries, has been more likely to reflect the priorities and agendas of foreign assistance programs.

**GADHIMAI SLAUGHTER**

We all recognise that investment in education is the key to our success in many dimensions: it deepens democracy, it creates human capital to spur long-term growth; but it also helps us evolve as human beings. Is it in the last context that the Gadhimai sacrifices are relevant? You might be surprised to learn that Manakamana, in which she argues that animal sacrifices in the name of temple goddesses are also partly driven by economic motivations (Stop the slaughter, #475). I wonder how many of our NUSU-educated luminaries would in the pond to tear apart a live goat in the name of some cultural practice. The majority of us probably would not. Thus, I would like to draw our Honourable Cultural Minister Dr. Ripjals attention to this issue. We’re very quick to declare the country a secular state, and yet why can we not take actions to stop such a barbaric tradition?

As Ms. Gandhi argues, bad practices like Satí, slavery, uncontrollability, Thagi and human sacrifices have been banned. Animal sacrifice should face the same fate. To that end, investment in education is utterly vital so that people can make informed decisions rather than be blind followers. At the same time, some level of government contemplation in the immediate future on this issue may not be that bad either.

Akash B. Behara, USA

**Donor dynamics**

With the failure of political party leaders to move the peace process forward, citizens and foreign donors have been pushing ‘civil society’ to the rescue. This is problematic for many reasons.

- During the heady days of the April 2006 democracy movement, the common goal of ensuring the king’s autocratic rule.

Donors pushing for citizens to rise up again miss the fact that people are tired and are struggling with basic survival issues. It is bizarre that while powerful civil society organisations in the US, for example, are not expected to lobby for healthcare reform or push to decrease troops in Afghanistan unless united disparate groups. Indeed, the opening of coexistence, including civil society members, was extraordinary.

**GUEST COLUMN**

Seila Tamang

**The problem of overruling civil society in Nepal’s peace process**

- civil society in Nepal is expected to cajole political parties of fundamentally different ideologies to move forward together.

While and it is acknowledged in the US that the politics behind these issues are far more complicated with various actors, agendas and interests, the same understanding is rarely extended to an analysis of Nepal’s political situation. Equally lacking is the acknowledgement that the current political parties and their maligning and politically contentious role of civil society is actually the norm in Nepal and elsewhere.

Of late, foreign donors appear to have discovered the well-known political party patronisation and allegiances of civil society. Current donor emphasis on the political affiliations of civil society overshadows the validity and importance of such ties in the current political situation, especially given the lack of democracy and accountability of political parties to citizens in general.

As noted by a senior political party and a CA member recently, once the term ‘political’ was inserted into the interim constitution, constitution making and the peace process were taken out of the hands of citizens, elected members, and given to top Political leaders.

The emphasis on the political bias of civil society furthermore obscures the very political role of donors themselves. Their work to rise up against civil society in Nepal, as in Eastern Europe and other developing countries, has basically been to NGOs. Apart from a few exceptions, the fact that NGOs are now many donors, especially in Eastern Europe and other developing countries, has been more likely to reflect the priorities and agendas of foreign assistance programs.

Issues of ‘civil society’ in Nepal are inevitably tied to the manner in which foreign aid functions in the country. Indeed, it is unclear how state restructuring can be discussed without including debates on the restructuring of foreign aid.

Gadhimai sacrifices are a relevant issue. You might be surprised to learn that Manakamana, in which she argues that animal sacrifices in the name of temple goddesses are also partly driven by economic motivations (Stop the slaughter, #475). I wonder how many of our NUSU-educated luminaries would in the pond to tear apart a live goat in the name of some cultural practice. The majority of us probably would not.

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- If the goddess of the malignant Gadhimai motif is ghoulish enough to be appeased by blood, then the feverish participants can offer the ultimate sacrifice of their own blood and let the Red Cross properly and humanely collect it for medical needs. What could please her more?

Sono Lucais Lyons, Kathmandu

- The animal rights activists have to earn their daily bread, hence one can’t blame them for jumping at an opportunity to bring them headlines in the papers. However, disingenuously, we see the #Eludhuda Bojhi so involved in denouncing age-old traditions and rituals in rural areas other than his own. Now that the Gadhimai sacrifices are going ahead anywhere, how about stopping the Christians from slaughtering turkeys for Thanksgiving?

Prasanna K.C., Patan

**OUTSTRATEGUS**

This is outrageous abuse of power (Ox, Ministret, http://www.nepalitimes.com/nepalitimes/2008/11/12/318). The案例 and trust among other civil groups is lacking. These groups are not more likely to develop networks of accountability to citizens or to the state, crucial from the perspective of governance, and are more likely to reflect the priorities and agendas of foreign assistance programs.

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**GEOGRAPHIC FEDERALISM**

The article seems to touch on the socio-economic and geographic dimensions of the issue; but whether all the federal models proposed so far ensure populations easy access to service centres (or geographic view of federalism, #474). Besides, just wait for the gerrymandering that will occur come election time. People in the Tarai already got a taste it during the CA elections.

Tepal Ashikari, www.facebook.com/nepalitimes

**LETTERS**

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Tej Prasad Adhikari, chairperson of Martin Chautari, a research and policy institute in Kathmandu

Donor dynamics

Chief Editor, Lingle, www.facebook.com/nepalitimes
When Raghuji Pant went ballistic over UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s report to the Security Council, which mentioned in passing that a government of national unity ‘remained desirable’ in Nepal, the former journalist deserved and received the benefit of the doubt. English is not Pant’s forte, and the difference between banchhniya (desirable) and abashyak (necessary) is not very distinct in Nepali.

But now that the whole phalanx of politicos that make up the anti-Maoist coalition has joined the chorus, it appears there was more to the statement of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal’s political advisor than what was lost in translation. This was clearly a case of wilful distortion on the part of Pant.

UNMIN is not very popular with the biggies of the 22-party alliance. Ram Chandra Paudel holds former UNMIN chief Ian Martin responsible for his lacklustre stint at the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction. Rakam Chemjong probably has a similar grudge against Karin Landgren and wants to seek a clarification from her to hide his own ineffectiveness.

The Madhes-based parties appear to be under the impression that the Chinese and the Indians would be happy to see Landgren and her team leave Nepal. When Indian Ambassador to Nepal Rakesh Sood said his government wanted the anti-Maoist league to take the peace process to its logical conclusion, almost a dozen ministers present at the dais didn’t feel the statement was a breach of diplomatic protocol.

Perhaps even jealousy explains the resentment of junior ministers in PM Nepal’s unwieldy 47-strong cabinet: UNMIN personnel breeze past in fancy SUVs while they have to break the windshields of malfunctioning cars to expend their frustration. But there is more to the current regime’s distaste for UN agencies than mere pajeros and politics. The continuing involvement of the UN in Nepal’s peace process has begun to hit the front organisations of the UML where it hurts the most—their bank accounts.

With its large bureaucracy and generous compensation packages, the UN system drinks up donor funds like an elephant. Other than a select group of mid-level professionals and suppliers, few locals benefit from the activities of UN agencies. There is a small clique of expatriates that keeps circulating between Cambodia, East Timor and Nepal, depending upon where the world body has more commitment from donors.

The INGOs are not happy at all. Prior to the arrival of UNMIN, INGOs and their local affiliates (NGOs) handled conflict-resolution and the peace-building industry on behalf of bilateral donors. There was a time when the Brits, the Swiss and the Scandinavians vied with each other to send Nepali experts across the world on observation trips. With a large slice of donor funding now being diverted to expensive enterprises like the UNDP-run Centre for Constitutional Dialogue, the INGOs have been left high and dry.

NGOs fronting for the UML now have little income to contribute to the coffers of their mother party. Since they can’t demand a ride on the UNMIN gravy train, they never lose an opportunity to deride it in the hope that donors may thus be tempted to throw some more grants their way.

From the perspective of NGO-entrepreneurs, it seems cruel that the installments on their Marutis go unpaid while foreign volunteers that worked for them until yesterday speed past them in duty-free White Elephants. If PM Nepal had his way, he would have thrown UNMIN out the day he took over from Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The problem is the Nepal Army needs the goodwill of UNMIN to keep its lucrative peacekeeping accounts. That’s the reason the Kathmandu media did an about turn and lined up behind the Secretary-General’s report to the Security Council. UML bigwigs are past masters at eating their words, but this time even they may suffer light indigestion. The Blackskali brass knows that there is no fooling Karin Landgren, who may be soft-spoken but certainly doesn’t mince her words.

If Rakam Chemjong insists on seeking a clarification, PM Nepal may be forced to reconstitute his cabinet for the ninth time in six months.
if we’re stuck, it’s no surprise
the UN is stuck

about current tensions, the lack of progress in the peace process, and the impending end of UNMIN’s mandate. The key players in Nepal need to do a lot more to address these concerns.

The trust deficit between the parties, especially between Maoists and non-Maoists, has increased after the impasse in May/June, the roots lie deeper. The end of the power-sharing arrangement after the CA elections; the inability or unwillingness of the Maoists to make a break with their violent past and reassure other parties about their democratic commitments; the absence of any movement on security sector reform; the resurgence of accusations of UNMIN’s mandate limits its influence in shaping wider outcomes. It can only encourage dialogue between national actors, and push for convergence and consensus.

The underlying political analysis that marks many of these suggestions sees the growing political acrimony between earlier drivers of the peace process, or their steady marginalisation from the centre of politics, as the key factor.

If the peace process is stuck, the UN is stuck. Talking about the peace process, and urging actors to focus on it, necessarily means leaving space for the national actors to come to an agreement as to how their society is to evolve. To see the UN as a pro-Maoist institution, as the 22 parties have hinted, is to misread why UNMIN is here in the first place. It is here to assist the peace process. The Maoists are a 50 per cent stakeholder in the peace process, and the key partner in the task of determining the future of former Maoist combatants. If the peace process is stuck, the UN is stuck. Taking about the peace process, and urging actors to focus on it, necessarily means leaving space for the Maoists. UNMIN’s mandate limits its influence in shaping wider outcomes. It can only encourage dialogue between national actors, and push for convergence and consensus.

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Yeti Airlines announced the arrival of its seventh 129-seat Jetstream 41 at Tribhuvan International Airport. This addition to Yeti’s fleet is likely to be used for regional flights and mountain flights.

Helping hands
As part of its corporate social responsibility program focusing on supporting education among underprivileged students, Everest Bank donated 24 computers to 17 educational institutions.

Flying high
Yeti Airlines announced the arrival of its seventh 129-seat Jetstream 41 at Tribhuvan International Airport. This addition to Yeti’s fleet is likely to be used for regional flights and mountain flights.

Sky scraping
The board of directors of Everest Bank announced their un-audited results for the first quarter of the current fiscal year: their operating profits have increased by 24.20 per cent.

Money matters
Himalayan Bank has decided to provide 31.55% per cent of bonus shares and 12 per cent of cash dividends to its shareholders from the profits of the fiscal year 2008/2009.

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Endless expansion
After Mero Mobile’s Gift a Gift campaign, mobile operator Spice Nepal is extending its coverage to new parts of the country. It currently has more than 1.8 million subscribers.

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**Undiplomatic**

Lokman Rai in Kantipur, 7 November

Successive prime ministers in Nepal and diplomats have violated their own rules by not keeping the Foreign Ministry informed about meetings. State Minister for Home Affairs Mohammad Ansari went on a week-long visit to China last month, but the Foreign Ministry was not informed. Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao met Defence Minister Bihaya Bhandari and Foreign Ministry officials, once again, had no idea they were meeting.

For the Indian and Chinese embassies in Kathmandu, it has become routine to bypass the Foreign Ministry and go directly to Baluwatar. Recently, the Chinese ambassador met Madhav Nepal. Neither his embassy nor the prime minister’s office informed the Foreign Ministry.

Such lapses of protocol indicate who actually directs foreign policy in this country. “We are fed up, there is no role for us when even low-level diplomats have direct access to the prime minister,” complains a Foreign Ministry official.

Prime Minister Nepal is just carrying on the tradition of his predecessors Girija Prasad Koirala and Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Koirala used to have secret talks with visiting Indian officials which he didn’t even allow his personal secretary to attend. Dahal once got visiting Indian foreign secretary Shiv Shankar Menon to come directly to Baluwatar from the airport, while Foreign Ministry officials were waiting at Singha Darbar for a scheduled meeting.

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Such lapses of protocol indicate who actually directs foreign policy in this country. “We are fed up, there is no role for us when even low-level diplomats have direct access to the prime minister,” complains a Foreign Ministry official.

Minister Karima Begum violated official decorum and broke the law when she abused Parsa Chief District Officer Durga Prasad Bhandari. It was a criminal act unbecoming of a state minister.

She barged into his office with 40 to 50 goons and slapped him several times, alleging that he did not send the vehicle she had demanded.

The minister has embarrassed the Machhi Jansadhar Forum and the coalition government. Although government officials and the home ministry have condemned the act, the cabinet is still split in its response.

The Chinese embassy has also faced the ire of government officials, who have demanded that the Chinese ambassador should come to the Foreign Ministry for meetings.

For generations, the dalits of Bandhu have endured early mornings, bumper and back-breaking labour ploughing for the town’s landlords. Now, they want an end to the tradition.

Poor and indebted farmers have often had no choice but to till for landlords. Forty-one-year-old Raghu Bibak has been ploughing for landowner Rajbahadur Khatri for the past 23 years, and Karna Lohar, unable to repay a debt, has been doing the same for landowners. Forty-one-year-old Raghu Bibak has been ploughing for landowner Rajbahadur Khatri for the past 23 years, and Karna Lohar, unable to repay a debt, has been doing the same for landowners. Forty-one-year-old Raghu Bibak has been ploughing for landowner Rajbahadur Khatri for the past 23 years, and Karna Lohar, unable to repay a debt, has been doing the same for landowners. Forty-one-year-old Raghu Bibak has been ploughing for landowner Rajbahadur Khatri for the past 23 years, and Karna Lohar, unable to repay a debt, has been doing the same for landowners. Forty-one-year-old Raghu Bibak has been ploughing for landowner Rajbahadur Khatri for the past 23 years, and Karna Lohar, unable to repay a debt, has been doing the same for landowners.

Farmers fed up

Arjun Shah in Nepal, 14 November

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“My family never gets to eat enough,” laments Lohar, adding that a sack of rice is too little for his family of seven. But the farmers don’t complain for fear of being dismissed with mounting debts left to repay. Thirty-two families in Bandhu, and as many as 1800 farmers in eastern Jhapa, face the same problem.

The government signed an agreement with farmers in 2008 to end the practice and rehabilitate those affected, but the agreement has yet to be implemented. Meanwhile, the farmers of Bandhu remain hopeful. Farmer Nandlal Wad says, “We will be liberated one day.”
Nicole Töpperwien has been working on federalism for more than 10 years, and has been closely involved with the debate on federalism in Nepal for more than two years now. She works as an expert on constitution-making and federalism with the special advisor for peace-building of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Nepal Times: What is your assessment of the peace process and federalism in Nepal?

Nicole Töpperwien: The peace process and constitution-making are closely linked, and federalism is one of the big topics in constitution-making. When I first came to Nepal, I found people were mostly interested in what federalism was and whether it was possible here. The debate has changed. The country has already decided to become a federal republic, so the focus is now on how this can be realised and what it will mean for Nepal. I can see there is a certain degree of urgency to come to an agreement because of the approaching deadline for the constitution. The CA committees have had many meetings. In the coming weeks important decisions will have to be taken to move constitution-making forward.

There has not been an agreement on the basis of federalism. What do you think would be most appropriate for Nepal?

This question only Nepal can answer. When we look at experiences across the world, we see some countries base federalism more on geography, others use ethnicity as a basis and still others have a mixed system. In the end what is more important is that people throughout Nepal, whether they are in a minority or a majority, can be assured that they can live with the federal system that is chosen.

No ethnic group really dominates any region in Nepal. How can we demarcate boundaries?

The interim constitution envisions Nepal as a federal country. Federalism has been chosen as a means to eliminate marginalisation and foster development. Demarcating boundaries can be used to address such issues but it alone will not automatically improve the lives of marginalised people. That depends on a whole host of other issues as well, such as inter-ethnic relations, how federal units are organised or how problems are solved in different regions. We have to look at the range of possibilities, for instance whether certain ethnicities and marginalised groups have to be granted special rights to ensure equal opportunities.

What about the expenses of federalism for a poor country like Nepal?

We can argue that federalism incurs certain costs because you need administration at different levels. But Switzerland was a poor country when it introduced federalism. Switzerland owes its overall prosperity to many different factors, federalism amongst others. The central government still supports poorer cantons financially. It is very difficult to answer the question on the costs of federalism. In certain cases, it is less expensive to deliver services and to have decision making done locally rather than have everything controlled by the centre. It might also prevent certain conflicts. It’s only when we take all of these factors into consideration that we can determine whether a federal system is more expensive than a centrally run system.

There is no agreement among the parties on federal structure, forms of government and a number of other issues. Was it right for Nepal to opt for federalism?

It is never easy to write a constitution and to agree on a new system of government. Difficult times during constitution making are fast overcome if the outcome is experienced as positive. The decisions can only be taken by Nepal because Nepal will have to live with the consequences of its decisions. On the positive side, federalism could help devolve more rights to regions and acknowledge different groups. There will also be new opportunities for new economic centres to emerge. In federal countries there are normally mechanisms at the centre that will incorporate the viewpoints of different regions in the national parliament. Such a mechanism can make government inclusive and help keep the country together.

What will be the consequences if the provinces fail?

First of all when federalism is introduced, the provinces normally aren’t given full powers right away. Powers are gradually devolved and capacities are built in parallel. People are really eager to learn and build up capacity when they know they have to apply it, and I think this will be the case in Nepal. The process of implementation is important and has to be carefully prepared. Federal units will not receive all powers. Some powers will remain with the centre and there is always cooperation with the centre. For this there have to be certain mechanisms for cooperation. The idea of federalism is that on certain issues federal units can really make their own decisions. On other issues, the centre decides or can give certain guidelines. If provinces are not capable of assuming certain responsibilities, then the centre can limit the risks and provide support to the provinces in these areas. Cooperation between federal units and the centre will be an essential part of establishing partnerships between those levels of state.

What is an autonomous region with the right to self-determination?

Some understand it as the right to leave the country, while others interpret it as meaning that the population of a territory can decide on certain issues, elect its own representatives or make its own policies. It really depends on how self-determination is defined. International law in most cases defines it as right to internal self-determination without right to secession.

Is there any risk of secession?

The hope of federalism is that you make it attractive for people to remain in the country they live in. On certain issues they can decide for themselves and on certain issues they cooperate with the centre. They are not completely ruled by the centre. There are no absolute guarantees against disintegration, but if the system chosen gives people room to roam, happiness and security and they feel they have a good life, why should they want to leave the country?

What is the situation of the cantons of Switzerland?

We don’t use the term self-determination but we have a very strong notion that cantons should be able to determine their policies on their own. They can have a bit of their own identity. In this sense they have the right to self-determination. But the constitution does not say anything about the right to secede. A long time back, before federalism was introduced certain cantons wanted to leave the confederation. The centre intervened and mobilised the military. More recently we had one case in which part of a canton wanted to form a canton on its own. There were extensive debates and finally they agreed on a mechanism whereby every district and village could decide whether to be part of the new canton. We managed to find a democratic solution that took up the wishes of the people. For us, federalism combined with democracy worked as a conflict management tool.
Uppards from the Rupse Chahara in Kabhre village in Myagdi district, the Kali Gandaki river narrows as it tumbles and rumbles its way through a steep, deep gorge. The power of the muddy river as it pounds on the rocks can almost be felt a hundred metres or so above on the equally narrow track that winds its way treacherously towards Mustang. Yes, a track. One can’t quite call it a road, not yet!

Travelling through this deep gorge between two 8000-metre peaks, there is a great sense of awe and humility. Maybe it’s the timelessness of the river that down the millennia, has been relentlessly cutting through the tough rocks in its search for the southern plains. It makes one seem so miniscule, insignificant and transient. The rock face now sports graffiti in many places.

Walking along these precipitous slopes is nothing compared to the adrenalin rush as one bumps and sways inside cramped buses along the one-monsoon old gravel track. Once the gorge opens up to the wide Kali Gandaki Valley, where the river flows relatively sluggishly, meandering from one bank to the next, it is a different story. Pedals hit the metal as the buses hurdle forward on the straight stretches, blowing their pressure horns impatiently to scare off trekkers stragglng along the road. The horns echo back and forth along the contorted and pristine trans-Himalayan hillfides.

“One has to blow the horn continuously,” explained one microbus driver as he dashed over the river bed past Kagbeni. “Otherwise these trekkers won’t hear us through their head-phoned ears!”

The road has been a bane for the woman near Rupse whose eatery now lies below the new road. It has proved a boon to the lad in Kabhre who had to give up quite a bit of his land for the road, and now is building a ‘hotel’ by the roadside. His neighbour, too, thinks it’s heaven sent for transporting the sick and ailing to health facilities. Some farmers in the Kali Gandaki valley are happy that their produce of fruit and vegetables is fetching them a better price in markets elsewhere in the country, such as Pokhara. Ironically, vegetables are getting scarcer and more expensive for many locals in Jomsom!

Scores of jeeps now ferry pilgrims to Muktinath, and for those who are tired, unhealthy or simply naïve enough to be fleeced, there are about a dozen motorbikes with daredevil drivers to zip you up the zigzag path to the temple doors.

These vehicles are also a boon to those tired feet that have trekked down from Thorung-La or Lo-Manthang, which now have the option of reaching their destination a little quicker. And if you’re really in a hurry to see the sights, then you can bypass the road altogether. Take a plane to Jomsom or better still, chopper it all the way to the foothills of Muktinath!
The road up the left side of the Annapurna circuit is functional, but by no means safe. Buses trundle along narrow tracks past Rupse Chahara (bottom left and right), near Tukchey village (left) and Jomsom Bajaran (bottom), where petrol is now an essential commodity (bottom middle).
Deluge of words

When the Maoists joined mainstream politics, the language of threat they employed in public speeches surprised Kathmandu’s media and urban liberals across the country. When they became the largest party in the CA and led the government, it got worse. They began to call themselves ‘victors’ and labeled the rest ‘losers’.

The Maoists may not be in government anymore but nothing has changed. Just this week Baburam Bhattarai declared that his party would ‘smash the state into pieces’. Pushpa Kamal Dahal has announced that if the government decides to use force against Maoist agitations it will suffer “the same fate as the former king Gyennendra did”.

The other political parties haven’t kept quiet either. Deputy PM Bijay Kumar Gachhadar has spoken of the possibility of ‘bypassing’ the Maoists to end the deadlock. A UML leader recently accused the Nepali Congress of plotting to do away with the CA and establish presidential rule. And small political parties never get tired of blaming the big political parties for the impasse.

These are strong words. Never mind that the UML leader in question recanted. Who are they meant for? Are they meant to put pressure on those at the decision-making level? Are they directed towards leaders of other political parties? Or are they meant for public consumption, as proof that the politicians are actively engaged? It seems everyone is talking but no one is listening.

The only people listening, perhaps, are the Nepali people. But they too are desensitized by sensational slogans. They know that when the Maoists say they are going to “crush the government into pieces”, it is just another threat by a party that is sitting in a corner and licking its wounds. Similarly, when the political parties talk about presidential rule, people scoff at the idea, because they know how strong people power is. For the people, these are all hollow threats.

In reality, they only listen because they have no choice but to do so, given media coverage. But Nepali politicians just do not understand that it is not kosher to talk about politics when they have been invited to non-political events. There is a right time, right audience, and a right place for everything. Just because the cameras are rolling and the event has journalists in attendance doesn’t mean that politics is all people want to hear about. It is callous and downright offensive to hear keynote speakers talking about crushing the government at the opening of a primary school.

What our leaders have also not understood is that the people do not want to hear any more speeches. If you have heard one, you have heard them all. What they want is action, not name-calling, finger pointing or threats: that’s the easiest thing to do in politics.

The priorities for this government are very straightforward – end the impasse and write the constitution on time. The country’s budget, prepared months ago, hasn’t been passed. There are 60-odd bills waiting their turn. The CA election last year was not just about writing a new constitution. It has been a more important time in our history for our leaders to be delivering on the promises they made to the Nepali people.

The CA election last year was not just about writing a new constitution. When we went to the polls, we voted to end years of uncertainty and insecurity, in the hope that the country would move in a new direction. Our leaders are so consumed with their power struggles that they have forgotten the most important player in all this – the people. Stop badmouthing each other, leaders are so consumed with their power struggles that they have forgotten the insecurity, in the hope that the country would move in a new direction. Our leaders are so consumed with their power struggles that they have forgotten the
deluge of words

It seems everyone is talking but no one is listening
Becoming Humli

Sure to thrill botanists. Simikot is hemmed in by high, snow-capped mountains, but the weather is generally pleasant. In May, for example, when it was a blazing 42 degrees in Nepalganj, it was a cool 20 degrees here.

However, Simikot is so remote it calls to mind Soviet-era Siberia. Unless you want to walk 7 days from Accham’s Sanphe Bagar, you will have to hop on to two-50 minute flights, from Kathmandu to Nepalganj, and again from Nepalganj to Simikot, to get here. To make matters worse, this is the most expensive air route, and yet still half as expensive as the next best thing: choppering in from Surkhet. Even if you have the money, you’re likely to get stuck in Nepalganj for anywhere up to a fortnight. Too many Humlis have missed exams or job interviews in Nepalganj because of flight delays.

The expenses don’t end there. Most things in Humla are three to five times more expensive than elsewhere in the country since they have to be flown in. Consider this: an egg costs Rs. 30 (Rs. 8 in Kathmandu), a kilo of sugar costs Rs. 180 (Rs. 55, Ktm), a litre of soybean oil costs Rs. 360 (Rs. 110, Ktm), a bar of washing soap costs Rs. 60 (Rs. 12, Ktm), and a packet of instant noodles costs Rs. 35 (Rs. 15, Ktm).

The government does subsidise rice and salt, and last year spent 60 million rupees transporting rice and salt from Nepalganj and Surkhet to Simikot. This is a well-meaning gesture. But like many Humlis, I wonder when the government will realise that it may make more sense to invest that money in job creation or sustainable food production. Maybe then, more people like me will flood into this remote paradise.

Yogi Kayastha is working in Simikot as Programme Manager of the Humla Development Initiative.

For more pictures, go to www.nepalitimes.com.np

Soon after I arrived in Humla on an assignment, a member of the field staff asked me, “Sir, asuro sange lakkad khana huncha?” (Would you like to eat lakkad with asuro?) Perplexed, I asked what asuro was. He looked at me quizzically and answered “It’s a pickle made from choti.”

“Chuti?”

It went on like this for a while, but I finally understood that he was asking if I wanted something akin to radish pickle with my buckwheat bread, which Humlis know as lakkad.

Humlis also use much simpler verb conjugations, like aya (to come), gaya (to go), khaya (to eat), diya (to give), and laya (to bring), with all pronouns.

It has been established that Humlis speak a variant of Nepali popular during Prithivi Narayan Shah’s day.
Malaysian states like Sabah and Sarawak are beginning to draw tourists away from popular hotspots like Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Langkawi and Malacca. Sabah and Sarawak’s islands, jungles, marine life and natural beauty are even beginning to rival more obvious attractions such as Kuala Lumpur’s Petronas Towers and Penang’s beaches. While just 335,000 international and 15,000 local tourists visited Sabah two decades ago, that figure reached 750,000 international and 1,300,000 local tourists in 2008. Sabah and Sarawak are neighbouring states in the north of Borneo, an island off the southern coast of Malaysia. Sabah’s capital Kota Kinabalu, which adjoins the South China Sea, is a 2½ hour flight away from Kuala Lumpur. Many towns and ports in Sabah are famed for the natural beauty that surrounds them, and there are 50-odd islands to explore. The marine treasures of Sabah are a real treat for people from landlocked countries like Nepal. If the idea of lounging about on Sabah’s gorgeous beaches worries those who don’t want to get their feet wet, they can visit the interior for glimpses of rare animals such as the Orang-utan.

The Malaysian government has lent ample support to schemes to accommodate tourists in traditional houses, or ‘home-stays’. There are 228 home-stays within 100 kilometres of Kota Kinabalu. Such arrangements have boosted the development of tourism as well as the local economies. Thanks to tourist dollars, there isn’t a road in Kundasang, a mountain town much like Nagarkot, that isn’t surfaced or a house without a car. Local businessman Bajau, who has hosted some Russian tourists, says, “the Malaysian government has really boosted tourism here and that’s also helped us.”

India Shrestha
“Their throats are gonna burst,” shuddered my companion as the National Finals of the Global Battle of the Bands got underway. Accustomed as I was to the howls and screeches of our indigenous metal scene, I was rather more blasé. But I was still surprised that two of the five bands playing for a place in the London finals next year represented that niche genre so disproportionately represented in Nepal—death metal.

The event at the National Music Center in Fingalothan last Saturday was as well-attended as the premises allowed, with scores of youths crammed onto the rooftop looking down onto the courtyard stage. Five bands vying to represent Nepal for the chance to win $100,000 and a world tour—who’d blame them for screaming? The odd men out were the charming Sutra, who opened with a two-song set of flute, tabla, madal and guitar. Shouty, leaden rockers Alt-F4 followed, then came Jindabad, a melodic, intense rock combo whose compositions bore the mark of future stardom. But it was not to be this time around.

When E.Quals strode out with black Ts, jeans and swirling hair below, it was clear who the audience was rooting for. It was a set only a metal fan could really appreciate, but give the devil its due: their crunching, tight, menacing songs of angst were impressive enough to sway not just the head-banging SMS voters, but also the judges. The contrast with forgettable fellow-metallers Kaal Bhairav couldn’t be starker.

It’s clear E.Quals are good at what they do, but one fears it’ll come to nothing if the judges in London next year, like most music-lovers across the world, simply don’t think death metal is any good. Perhaps ours should have taken that into consideration.

Rabi Thapa

After two decades in the Nepali film industry, veteran actor Rajesh Hamal is as busy as ever. He has starred in 235 movies, but laments the fact that despite the progress made by the industry, it has not really been able to change. In this interview with Himal Khabarpatrika, Hamal candidly shares his opinion on violence in movies, the state of the country, and stresses that unity, not mutiny, is the answer.

How would you assess the Nepali film industry?

In the past 5 to 6 years, international cinema has grown significantly. However, Nepali cinema has not been able to match this kind of growth.

Why do you think Nepali films copy Bollywood movies?

Politics and the culture of neighbours influence a country, and the same goes for cinema. Today, after mimicking numerous Hollywood films, Bollywood is in a position to compete with them. On the other hand, what do we consider ‘originally Nepali’? Is it the old traditional Nepal, or the modern Nepal?

Today’s Nepalis are very different and depicting them with dhaka topi doesn’t make them authentically Nepali. We can have Nepali actors flying in rockets to the moon and still consider them authentic Nepalis.

How long do you intend to act?

I think this decision is one for the audience! An artist aspires to remain an artist throughout his life, just like Amitabh Bachchan.

When will we get an opportunity to watch a movie directed by Rajesh Hamal?

I have an interest in creating and directing movies. Very soon you will get to watch a movie directed by me, also starring myself.

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You also happen to be involved in anti-violence campaigns.

It is also the responsibility of an actor to serve the nation. I feel the participation of a public figure can make a contribution towards such a campaign.

Most Nepali films glorify violence.

Art imitates life, and vice versa. Commercial movies may depict violence to entertain their audiences to an extent but they condemn violence and never justify the use of it.

Why hasn’t the Nepali film industry dealt with political issues?

It’s not as if Nepali films have avoided politics altogether. Dusgaja dealt with border issues between Nepal and India, for instance. But it may be that in a situation of political flux, producers don’t want to risk dealing with controversial issues.

Hasn’t violence ruled over Nepali society as well?

In the last 12 years there’s been a misconception that societal change and rights can be obtained through violence. Just because freedoms were obtained does not mean that violence was right. To sustain what has been achieved and further reform Nepal we now have to move towards agreement, cooperation and debate.
**ABOUT TOWN**

**EXHIBITIONS**
- Exhibition 2009 of Nepalese Buddhism and Hinduism Art Painting by Sudarshan Subai at Summit Hotel, Kupondole, till 30 November.

**EVENTS**
- Gadhimai Dharna, symbolic demonstration against the world’s largest animal sacrifice, with Hari Banjhat (M/L) & Mahadeva Khadka, Patan Durbar Square, 13 November, 4-PM.
- Japanese Film Festival, at Khopa Engineering College, Shikrapur, 14 November, 10AM onwards, 4446680.
- Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring, movie screening at Lazimpat Gallery Café, 19 November, 6PM onwards, 442854.
- Nepali Art: In Present Scenario, documentary screening on 28 November, 2.35-3.30PM and 5-6PM, Maya Yala Kendra, Patan Dhika, 5557987.
- Patan Press Club meets every Thursday at Dhoikama Café, 6PM, 5522113.
- Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Tai Chi 10-11.30 AM Saturday, Yoga 8.30-9.30 AM and Meditation 5-6PM weekdays, Keshar Mahal Mang, Thamel, 4140042.
- AWON Christmas Bazaar with locally produced arts and crafts. 5 December, 10AM-3.30 PM. Hyatt Hotel, twoncom@gmail.com.

**MUSIC**
- Bard Yala Maya Classic, a classical music series, at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhika, 17 November, 5PM, 5557987.
- Music with Desmond O’Flattery and Anthony Correll, at Lazimpat Gallery Café, 18 November, 6PM onwards, 442854.
- HyJazz every Friday evening by Inner Grove at the Rox Bar, 4489602.
- Baja jaga every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchowk, 7.30 PM onwards, 5626212.
- Live band every Friday and rooftop BBQ everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4272388.
- Sunday Jazz brunch, at The Terrace, Hyatt Regency with barbeque and live jazz by Inner Grove from 12-3.30 PM, 412824.
- Live Band Sensation every Saturday till late with Aprilrush at Rox Bar, 4489602.
- Jazz evening at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM, 4260302.
- Some like it hot, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Darwaks Hotel, 7PM onwards, 4479688.
- Happy cocktail hour, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7PM.
- Nepali Ghajals and songs at DiLounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30 PM onwards, 4468849.
- Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7PM at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4431212.

**DINING**
- Norwegian Salmo every day 6PM onwards at Rox Restaurant, till 20 November, 442924.
- Live continental BBQ Fiesta, exclusive BBQ, Dineritl Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30 PM everyday.
- Chocolate, Coffee and Caramel, every evening at The Lounge, 4-6.30 PM, 4412124.
- Wine and cheese, every Friday & Saturday at The Lounge, 5-8PM, 4412124.
- A cafés café, Dhoikama Café, Patan Dhika, 5522113.
- Jazzabell Café, relaunched at J Ambassador, TGIIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-PM, 2114075.
- The Corner Bar, 5-PM, 3-11PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4411818.
- Al Fresco, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, Scoitie Crown Plaza, 4279399.
- Kakori, for bryianis, curries and kebabs, Scoitie Crowne Plaza, 7-11.45 PM.
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisted, 4263070.
- Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle East at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234.
- Tepanyaki meal and garlic rise at Le Restaurant, Garibaldi, 441717.
- Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 600, 4412999.
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4252341.
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Cine Gunur. Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards, 4431999.
- Himalayan Rainbow Trout at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4289999.
- Tiger for Breakfast, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4212012.
- Stupa View Restaurant, for vegetarian creations & clay oven pizza at Boudha Bupa, 4480262.
- Gokarna Forest Resort for a variety of sizzlers at Triplo bar, 4411212.

**WEATHER WEEKEND**

The latest satellite pictures show a airplane in the Arabian Sea that is steadily moving eastwards and has generated cloud cover in West India and Nepal. It is unusual for cyclones this time of year to affect conditions so far inland. Although the skies will only clear by Sunday, most of the clouds are unaltered so conditions across the country, except for parts of western and northern Nepal, will remain dry. Rainfall is rare during November, which is traditionally the driest month of the year. Morning temperatures will be stable over the weekend, but daytime temperatures will drop by 3-4 degrees.

**RECIPE**

by GRAHAM SYDNEY

**Couscous & Herb Stuffed Squid (Serves 4)**

12 medium squid bodies
1 large onion, finely chopped seasoned
1 large clove, finely chopped garlic
1 tbs capers
1 tbs chopped parsley
2 tbs lemon juice
2 tbs sherry
2 tbs olive oil
2 tbs finely sliced spring onion
1 small bunch parsley, chopped
6 fresh basil leaves
3 large cloves garlic
6 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon chopped capers
2 tablespoons chopped coriander
2 tablespoons finely sliced spring onion
1/2 cup couscous
5 large squid tubes

Heat, fry the squid tubes for 45 seconds on each side remove when soft. In the rest of the olive oil, on high heat, fry the onion and garlic in half the olive oil and enough space, as the squid will shrink when cooked. Chop the tentacles into small pieces and pan-fry for 30 minutes, separating the grains with a fork every few minutes. Mix in the chopped squid, coriander, parsley, spring onion, capers, lemon juice and chilli flakes and season with salt and pepper. Fill the squid bodies with the couscous mixture, making sure you leave space to add the leftover. Chop the herbs finely and sprinkle over the squid, tasty sauce. Clean the squid by removing the head and skin. Cut the tentacles off the head and discard together with the skin. Chop the tentacles into small pieces and put 30 seconds and set aside. Bake the previously cooked squid for 30 minutes, separating the grains with a fork every few minutes. Mix in the chopped squid, coriander, parsley, spring onion, capers, lemon juice and chilli flakes and season with salt and pepper. Fill the squid bodies with the couscous mixture, making sure you leave enough space, as the squid will shrink when cooked. Tightly tie the onion and garlic in half the olive oil and remove when soft. In the rest of the oil, on high heat, fry the squid bodies for 45 seconds on each side before returning the onion mixture and coriander. Reduce the heat and allow to simmer for 2-3 minutes until the sauce reduces by half. Serve immediately.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com

13 - 19 NOVEMBER 2009 #476

Summiters’ Summit

World-renowned mountaineers will come together in Copard on the occasion of International Mountain Day on 11 December to raise awareness on climate change in the Himalaya. The Summiters’ Summit, led by the Government of Nepal, is supported by ICIMOD, ITMCI, NBR, NMA, the World Bank and WWF. Mountaineers Apa Sherpa and Danu Steven Sherpa of the WWF’s Climate For Life Campaign will be representing Nepal. www.climatedlife.org

Preen (Rishi Kapoor) has a simple motto: be happy, make others happy and keep the town happy. But these supposedly simple motifs almost always result in disastrous consequences. A case of mistaken identity leads Preet to kidnap Jenny (Katrina Kaif). Short and simple, Jenny, brought up by steadfast and uncaring foster parents, longs to love and be loved in return. Fond love for Jenny makes Preet turn over a new leaf, be a second hard working and sort perennial happiness above everything else. But Jenny remains blind to the reality staring her in the face. Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com
UP IN SMOKE: The charred interiors of Lal Darbar after an electrical short-circuit caused on a fire on Tuesday that seriously damaged the building.

KEEPING ACCOUNTS: A German tourist shows receipts given to members of his trekking group while in Manaslu by Maoists who extorted them for Rs 1000-1500 a head.

PIT STOP: Members of a campaign to end domestic abuse against women stopped by Kathmandu Darbar Square on Monday during a tour across the country.

ROYAL REWARDS: Ambica Shrestha, president of The Dwarika’s Group, was honoured as Cruz de Officiel of the Order de Isabel la Catolica by King Juan Carlos I of Spain in New Delhi recently for her contributions to Nepal-Spain relations.
And we have lift-off

We have a problem. No, it’s not that the peace process is about to unravel. Nor is it that the development process is completely stuck. No, the real national crisis is the crippling lack of cars and official residences for the soon-to-be-60-member cabinet. If MJF (Upadro) joins the government, which now appears likely, they will demand a bigger share than the rival MJF (Bijay) faction, but there are no more luxury vehicles for the new inductees.

Already, ministers are (literally) taking matters into their own hands. Last month, the Youth Minister smashed the windshield of her Corolla after it refused to pull her weight up the Kupondole hill. This week, the state minister of agriculture slapped the CDO of Parsa four times (twice on each cheek) because he didn’t have a Big Car for her when she arrived for a meeting. The CDO offered the other cheek, and is feeling rather like a punching bag lately: he was manhandled last week by the Birganj chapter of the YCL, which wanted a share of the customs loot.

Someone better do something about this shortage of ministerial vehicles otherwise cabinet members are going to resort to armed struggle.

But all this still doesn’t solve the problem of how to transport the expanded 60-member council of ministers for the proposed cabinet meeting at Everest Base Camp next week. Since it was his idea in the first place (#474), the Ass has several bright ideas to make it happen. The first is to drive in a convoy of SUVs into Tibet through Korkori to the Rongbuk Glacier. It doesn’t matter which Base Camp, right? Besides, going to the Chinese Base Camp will emphasise the transboundary nature of the climate change problem. Bright Idea #2 is to take the entire cabinet on the army’s Avro that seats 60, open the hatch above the Khumbu Glacier and let the ministers freefall and paraglide to Base Camp. By doing it this way, we will be killing two birds with one stone: we’re drawing attention to adventure sports for the 2011 Visit Nepal Year while raising global awareness about climate change.

India and Nepal have signed a new air services agreement to allow airlines to fly a nearly indefinite number of flights between the two countries. But nothing is going to happen unless the state-owned airlines of the two countries get their act together. The less said about our own NAC the better, since the motto of our national flag carrier seems to be: ‘Why You Complain? Look at the State of the Country’. But it is a matter of great consolation that Air India isn’t much better, especially since it merged with Indian Airlines. The flight to Banaras the other day was four hours late. When it finally attempted to take off, the pilots slammed on the brakes halfway down the runway and the cabin filled with smoke.

The plane taxied back to the apron, but the passengers were kept on board for an hour while mechanics pulled the engine apart in front of their eyes. When an asthma patient nearly croaked, they were finally allowed to deplane. No announcement, no info and AI staff hid their security badges so that the passengers would not recognise them. The flight was finally ‘postponed’ at 6PM and took off the next day. Air India doesn’t need air marshals hovering six inches above Nepali territory in its cubicle on wheels in KTM, it needs better planes and more polite ground staff.

The story of our ministers thrashing CDOs and vandalising their official vehicles reminds the Ass of a particularly cantankerous American ambassador who once lifted a UN human rights consultant into the air by his shirt collar and yelled obscenities at him in full view of guests at a reception. Now, why don’t they send ambassadors like that to Nepal anymore?

ass(at)nepalitimes.com