LIGHT AFTER DEATH: Tilganga Eye Bank manager Sankha Narayan Twyana prepares medical instruments before extracting the corneas from a seven-year-old girl at Pashupati Aryaghat. Full story inside.

Light from darkness

Light from darkness
It's hard to see what else the Indian prime minister's 12-point agreement between the seven parliamentary parties and the Maoists could mean he has a stronger sentimental attachment to his baby, and is therefore more committed to reviving the peace process.

It is now common knowledge that Indian intelligence sheltered and nurtured the Maoist leadership in Delhi during the war years. There are some in Nepal who say that India should clean up the mess it created. But that would be abdicating our own responsibility, and (more seriously) handing over our future political destiny to outsiders.

Indian operatives mollified the Maoists, as they did the Tamil Tigers in the 1980s, to try to co-opt and control them. But the Maoists have become a pet that has outgrown its master. With the benefit of hindsight, Delhi probably realises it bit off more than it could chew. It now sees the Maoists as a thug leadership not just in Nepal but India as well, and in no mood to accept an unformed Maoist party in a position of leadership in Kathmandu.

The slaughter of 11 more Indian police in a Maoist attack in Chitahaghar on Wednesday is just the latest in a rapidly escalating war there that reminds us of the 2000-2001 conflict period in Nepal. The Indian insurgency is following a familiar pattern, and there are calls to deploy the army there, too.

The red carpet treatment India gave to Burmese junta chief Tin Shwe last week proves that despite talk of sharing democracy in its neighbourhood, realpolitik is the name of the game. If the national interest, need for energy, or geopolitical considerations dictate hobnobbing with dictators, so be it. There's a whiff of a subcontinental version of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine here (we don't care if they are sons-of-bitches, as long as they are our sons-of-bitches).

What this all means for us is that instead of waiting for India, or anyone else, to rescue our politics and peremptorily look to Delhi for signals, we should pull our own house in order. There is no point celebrating the fact that Nepal was never colonised in history when we hobble around on the regional stage with our tail between our legs. It is time to stop playing victim, something we are extremely good at, and make our own chance.

By now Chairman Dahal must have realised that the only way he is going to get to be prime minister is by making a credible public undertaking that he is dismantling his fighters, dismantling his paramilitary and renouncing his goal of establishing a totalitarian people's republic through protracted war. His ultra-nationalism card and flirting with the ex-royals are just not working, they are backfiling on him.

There have been enough empty words and false promises, so this time the burden of proof will be on Dahal. He has, however, made his task even more difficult by refusing to reign in the violence of his cadres, and burning his bridges with Big Brother.

The future of the peace process, the new constitution and this country's long-term political stability needs the Maoists to be on board as a demobilised and disarmed democratic party. This they must do to prevent their own self-destruction, and to prevent a collapse of the peace process.

Q. Can a Maoist-Madhesi alliance be stable?

 weekly internet Poll #514
Total votes: 3,060

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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
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<td>93%</td>
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Source: nepaltimes.com
Hard choices

By Prashant Jha

On Monday, the Madhesi parliamentary party offices in Singha Darbar were abuzz with activity in the run-up to the third round of voting. Leaders slipped in and out, even as there was an avalanche of rumours outside – Upen Yadav will split from the front; Bijay Gachchadar has threatened his MPs not to cross the floor; or the extended meetings are a way to keep everyone guessing but the decision to remain neutral has already been taken.

A little further away, in the CA building in Baneswor, the Maoists saw a flicker of hope in the divisions within MJP and launched a subtle propaganda war about how they were sure to win.

The stalemate eventually persisted. But what was clear was that all political forces are in an extremely difficult spot, finding it hard to balance the pulls and pushes they are facing. Nepali politicians have a far tougher job than is often recognised.

Take the Madhesi front. There is a strong argument, made by Upendra Yadav and supported by a faction in the other parties, that this is the best time for the Madhes to strike a deal with the Maoists. Their bargaining position has never been better; the past three defeats have made it hard to balance the pulls and pushes they are facing. Nepali politicians have a far tougher job than is often recognised.

But an equally powerful counter-argument is that the Maoists cannot be trusted; they may just use the alliance with the Madhesi front to make a comeback in the Tarai; this would be suicidal since the mood in the plains is anti-Maoist; there is little guarantee that the Maoists are indeed interested in writing the constitution; Prashuta Kamal Dahal is a master at using and disposing of partners. Add to this the pressure from the Indian establishment, which has made it clear that it will not take it too kindly if Madhesi MPs shift their allegiance to the Maoists.

So there is a need to have a little bit of a counter-argument is that the Maoists cannot be trusted; they may just use the alliance with the Madhesi front to make a comeback in the Tarai; this would be suicidal since the mood in the plains is anti-Maoist; there is little guarantee that the Maoists are indeed interested in writing the constitution; Prashuta Kamal Dahal is a master at using and disposing of partners. Add to this the pressure from the Indian establishment, which has made it clear that it will not take it too kindly if Madhesi MPs shift their allegiance to the Maoists.

Or consider the Maoists themselves. Dahal is closer to his position has never been better; the past three defeats have made it hard to balance the pulls and pushes they are facing. Nepali politicians have a far tougher job than is often recognised.

It’s easy to lambast politicians, but the current crop are under extreme pressure right now

But he has shown remarkable energy and dynamism in trying to stitch together alliances, lure MPs, and engage with established power centres, unlike Ram Chandra Poudel, who appears to be merely going through the motions. The Maoist success in breaking the ‘democratic alliance’ and engineering rifts within each Madhesi party are major achievements for the party.

But Dahal’s personal reputation has suffered in the process. Three defeats have made him a cartoonist’s delight. His dalliance with royalists is public knowledge. And there is increasing pressure on him to withdraw and allow a fresh process, for an outcome through the present round of voting will not necessarily lead to a constitution – which remains the official Maoist goal.

India has its own dilemmas. It invested considerable political capital in holding the Madhes back in the last round. But there appears to have been some confusion on Wednesday in Delhi about whether it made more sense to make the best of a bad situation and allow a Maoist-Madhesi government, or stick to the policy line of keeping the Maoists in general, and Dahal in particular, out of power till they undergo a ‘course correction’. For now, the old line has prevailed and the Maoist alliance will be encouraged to stay together and remain neutral.

India has raised the stakes considerably by sending Shyam Saran as special envoy. Delhi will now get the flak for whatever happens – if there is a result and Dahal wins, non-Maoist parties will blame them for having engineered it; if the stalemate continues, Dahal will ratchet up the rhetoric on ‘foreign intervention’. But the criticism will be meaningless, and it would be a stellar contribution if Saran can use the authority of the Indian Prime Minister to encourage actors to think beyond the numbers game and get the broader process on track.

Madhesi leaders have told us the front will probably remain neutral once again in the fourth round. But there could be some increase in cross-voting. In addition, if the Maoists can get a section of the UML, CP Mainali’s ML faction, and parts of RPP, Dahal has a chance.

At prese-time, this remains an unlikely prospect for the potential costs of defecting to the Maoists remain high for all politicians, especially those from the Tarai. Nepal’s parliament will probably make history by failing to elect a PM for the fourth time. If that happens, there must be an effort to begin the process afresh.
You can bring light to people even after you pass into darkness

Sabitri immediately after the operation on her left eye, into which a cornea has been transplanted (top), and resting in the recovery room at the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology (bottom). A day later, she returns for a check-up (right). Her eye is examined and she is able to see shapes and movement.

Bhattachariya and her husband were disappointed with the progress of the operation. They were worried about her vision. "I thought the operation would be successful," says Bhattachariya.

"I was in grief. My child was dead," she adds. "I didn't want to give my eyes "I was in grief. My child was dead," she adds. "I didn't want to give them to anyone. I just told them to leave," KC says.

The Eye Bank team had already left when KC sent someone to call the team back. KC still can’t explain why he changed his mind. "I thought if she could help two people to come out of the darkness, at least they would bless her soul," he says.

And the child is blessed indeed. "I pray for the girl every day," says Laxmi Bhattarai, wife of Bishnu Bhattarai. She cannot stop thanking the family who agreed to the donation: "My husband got his life back. Is there anything more one can do for strangers?"

Laxmi has herself pledged her eyes for donation after her death. 

The names of the donors and recipients have been changed to protect their identities.

The gift of sight

B
ishnu Bhattarai, 41, is a teacher from Surkhet. He thought he knew what it meant to pass on the light of knowledge to his students. "I had it meant to pass on the light of knowledge to his students. "I had

The Tilganga Institute of Opthalmology has been teaching for many years and

knowledge to his students. "I had it meant to pass on the light of knowledge to his students. "I had

Tilganga offers free transplantation services and the patients only need to pay for medicines and a small entry fee. "We thought that if there was no money involved, we could discourage the black market in organ transplants," explains Bhola KC of the Eye Bank team. Most grieving relatives think the eyeball itself is excised and the deceased will be disfigured, but many consent once they realise what they are doing will transform the lives of two people.

A pair of donated corneas is always given to one eye in two people.

When Manoj KC prepared to cremate his seven-year-old daughter at Pashupati, the last thing he wanted was to be approached by someone asking him to donate his child’s eyes "I was in grief. My child was gone. I didn’t want to give anything to anyone. I just told them to leave,” KC says.

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of the deceased can help the blind see again. It is not an easy job, and most refuse. But

Tilganga’s cornea excision centre at Pashupati has seen an increase in the number of donors. The Eye Bank team at Pashupati harvested 214 pairs of corneas in 2008, compared to just two in 1996.

One in every ten Nepalis is visually impaired and corneal defects are the second biggest cause of blindness after cataracts.

The transplantation of a new cornea is the only way to cure such blindness.

Sabitri Lamichhane (see pics) from Chitwan is among the many who have benefited from the eye donation program. A timely cornea transplant saved her from permanently losing sight in one eye to a severe infection that began a week before she had her operation. “It’s a miracle, I never thought she’d see again,” says Om Lamichhane, her husband.

But the taboo against organ transplantation is still very strong, meaning few people pledge donations: “Most of our corneas are the result of grief counselling of relatives in Aryaghat,” says Shankhini Narmaye Twyana, manager of the Eye Bank. “We have very few voluntary donors and most of them are the relatives of the people who have received such transplants.”

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In India vs Kantipur in June, the truth was never adequately explained to readers

**FOURTH ESTATE**  C K Lal

In The Clash of Civilizations, Samuel P Huntington characterises India as the ‘core-state’ of Hindu civilisation. The Indian government, however, behaves more like a besieged nation. The Indian embassy’s role in the Madhunath Samal Passport deal exposed the risks to trade. In a similar controversy in the 1980s, King Birendra had to acquiesce to New Delhi’s pressure to rescind a road-building contract awarded to a Chinese company and give the Kohalpur-Mukhakali Highway to an Indian company. This didn’t buy Birendra any goodwill. India imposed an undeclared economic blockade.

In the late 1980s, as the UNMIN (United Nations Mission in Nepal) was ramping up its operations, an ignoble dimension of the Kantipur saga was the relative neglect of the whole affair by the rest of the Nepali media.

Agreement and the Agreement on the Monitoring of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. UNMIN has expressed deep concern over the fresh recruitments announced by the Maoist army constitute a breach of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Agreement on the Monitoring of the Management of Armst and Arms.” said a statement issued on Tuesday evening.

**THIS WEEK**

Army boosts

Nepal Army (NA) has announced vacancies for 3,434 soldiers, including 250 officers, and received applications from eligible and interested Nepali citizens on Monday. NA began the recruitment process following the Supreme Court dismissal of the cases against recruitment last week, which deemed the decision taken by the Indo-Nepal Joint Monitoring Committee. NA has requested the government to create a dozen new positions for special class officers, including two lieutenant generals.

In response to the NA recruitment drive, the People’s Liberation Army, the military wing of the UCPN (Maoist), announced fresh recruitment starting from Tuesday. PLA deputy commander Chandra Prakash Kanai Baldev told reporters in the capital that despite fresh recruitment, PLA strength will not exceed 31,315, the PLA’s original strength before the UNMIN verification team brought it down to 19,604. “Committed Nepali youths above 18 with strong patriotic feelings can submit the forms at any of the seven cantonments across the nation,” he said.

The Ministry of Defense objected strongly to the Maoist recruitment drive, and in a statement on Wednesday, said it would only create additional complications and challenges in security management. This was, however, the fifth time NA had announced vacancies for various positions since the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

UNMIN has expressed deep concern over the fresh recruitments announced by NA and the PLA. “UNMIN’s position remains that any recruitment by either the Nepal Army or the Maoist army constitutes a breach of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Agreement on the Monitoring of the Management of Armst and Arms,” said a statement issued on Tuesday evening.

Third time unlucky

Parliament failed to elect a new prime minister for the third consecutive time on Monday. UCPN (Maoist) candidate Pushpa Kamal Dahal obtained 259 votes while NC vice president Ram Chandra Poudel received 124 votes. Dahal had obtained 241 votes in the second round of voting. The CPN (M-L), Nepal Peasant and Workers Party, a few small parties and significantly, 11 MPs from the Madhese People’s Rights Forum (Yadav) voted for Dahal but he fell short of the required 300 votes for a simple majority to form a government. The Business Advisory Committee of parliament has slated a fourth round for August 6.

Shyam Saran arrives

Former ambassador to Nepal Shyam Saran arrived in Kathmandu on Wednesday to try to fix Nepal’s politics. He is here as a special emissary of Indian Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh.

“I am here to discuss his concerns with Nepali political leaders,” he told reporters upon his arrival at the airport. “My role will be to facilitate a few political consultations among major parties for national consensus.” His visit is just in advance of the fourth round of voting for the post of prime minister, scheduled for Friday, following three consecutive failed elections.

On Wednesday, the UCPN (Maoist) spoke out against the interference of foreign power centres in the ongoing deliberations to form a new government. But Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal met Saran along with other top Maoist leaders, subsequent to which Dahal’s deputy Narayan Kaji Shrestha told reporters the talks were not about the formation of the new government. Saran then met leaders of the NC and UML.
Systemic failure
We need to find a way to change the system, not the players

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

O
serving the continuing political drama, which is as exciting as watching paint dry, there are those who say that we deserve the politicians we get. Perhaps. But what if we say that we only get the politicians who can thrive in the system we’ve let mutate to our liking? That gives us the politicians we have tolerated for far too long in our fate, it’s the system that we have allowed to become a means to political ends. Thus, even when they do nothing because they listened to their party bosses who wanted to strengthen their numbers, not because they listened to voters. As such, even when they do nothing for the districts that they represent, there is little they need fear so long as their party has the money and is powerful, it will give them the permission to stand for election again, and win. Voters thus become a means to political ends.

Over the years, what this practice has amounted to is this: Yes, we have democracy and yes, we have elections, but the system is designed to be unresponsive to people’s concerns.

Not my children’s future:
People work hard to improve, if not their own future, then their children’s future. Human nature being what it is, it’s hard for most people to get excited about the future of other people’s children. But politicians searching for appealing personalities often make references to improving their children’s future as a way to engage themselves, finding ways to possible future gains. In Nepal, politicians know that, given half a chance, most young people would rather leave the country. It’s likely that most politicians’ children are not in the country themselves.

Shorn of an honest metaphor, that refers to our shared collective future, Nepali politicians habitually leap into speeches that are filled with abstractions about Democracy and revolutions. When one can’t imagine, much less communicate, what the future holds in more vivid, concrete terms, then the question becomes: is one really working for long-term goals or for quick, short-term gains – the answer to which is plain to all who follow politics.

The content of national politics can be dispiriting. Instead of asking politicians to behave themselves, finding ways to change the context of politics is how changes are likely to come faster.
Stuff Nepali People Like - I

Forcing you to eat
It doesn’t matter if you’ve just had lunch. Your aunt will still force two rasbari, a bowl of yogurt and a cup of tea on you. If you try to resist, she’ll pull out some reference in the scriptures to the sin that will visit her if you leave empty-stomached. In the meantime, if you’re not otherwise engaged, everyone present will…

Exhort you to get married
Apparently there is a season in life for everyone, vegetable-styles, to be picked off the shelves. Woe befall those who do not heed the call of Father Time. For anyone who knows one of The Unwedding, however distantly, it is a duty most solemn to impress, ad nauseam, how important it is that you yoke yourself to another, bullock-stylee, to plough the merry fields of life.

Hating India, loving India
Up in the hills, we love to blame India for everything that’s wrong with the politics and the economy. But most of us subsist on the petri dishes of Indian culture, from the Mumbaahat to Bollywood.

Calling white people racist
It’s probably in the same vein that we like to blame white people for all the rest that’s wrong in the world. They’re arrogant, self-centred and racist, confirm the more hemmed-in Nepali diaspora, even as they aspire to be just like their hosts. What could be more racist?

Stuff Nepali People Like will be an ongoing series. Comment is free! www.nepalitimes.com/blogs/nepalikakur/

Mumos
What is it about momos that transfixes Nepalis home and abroad? There are hundreds of types of dim sum, but it’s the steamed buff dumpling, with few variations, that gets our tongues into a twist.

Hawking and spitting
“Khaanak-thok!” How many times do you hear this a day? Perhaps the most disgusting of our physical tics, hawking and spitting may have been tolerable in the open spaces of our hills and valleys and plains but in the city streets, it should go the same way as blowing nose-into-fingers-and-wiping-on-kamp-post seems to be going – out of fashion. Sometimes it seems we hawk and spit as a sort of segue between activities, in much the same way Americans say ‘like’ to link sentences. The argument that it’s more racist, confirm the more hemmed-in Nepali diaspora, even as they aspire to be just like their hosts. What could be more racist?

Telling folks they've gained/lost weight
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The lake that was once Kathmandu

Kathmandu Valley is where mythology and geology intertwine. The former holds that the Tibetan saint, Manjushree, flew down to Kathmandu. Upon seeing the huge lake, he cut the Chobhar ridge in half with his mighty sword and drained the waters to allow civilisation to flourish in the fertile sacred valley.

There is ample geological evidence to prove that the Kathmandu Valley was once a lake. But geologists piecing together the genesis and demise of the primordial lake now think it may not have been drained all at once, but in phases.

The lake was formed over one million years ago with the tectonic uplift of the southern edge of the Valley and the damming up of the proto-Bagmati River, probably where Katuwal Daha is today. As the southern rim of the Valley rose at a geologically rapid 3cm a year, the lake shifted northwards. The level of the lake ebbed and rose between 1,400-1,440m, depending on the prevailing climate, making it about 200m deep in places.

Geologists have found the fossil remains of the extinct ancestors of mammoths, hippos and crocodiles in the Kathmandu Valley. They have pollen-dated the sediment, indicating that the shoreline of the Kathmandu Lake was heavily forested with pine and hemlock and teeming with wildlife.

30,000 YEARS AGO: This panorama by Dinesh Shrestha, taken from Lakuri Bhanjyang in 2008, was manipulated to visualise what the Kathmandu Valley must have looked like when it was a huge lake.

The last Ice Age cooled and dried the Himalaya and the lake started to shrink starting 30,000 years ago. The main water body carved its way through the soft limestone at Chobhar, leaving behind a shrinking lake and three smaller ones at Gokarna, Pashupati and Kitni. These lakes later carved ‘mini-Chobhars’ and emptied into the main lake.

As the lake receded, flats emerged above the water that were later separated by the tributaries of the Bagmati, which sliced channels through the soft clay. The airport is one such flat from the Gokarna Period 30,000 years ago, and geologists think Thimi and Patan surfaced 25,000 and 18,000 years ago respectively.

The Kathmandu Valley civilisation with Licchavi and then Newar settlements grew and prospered because of the fertility of the soil, and later because of the Valley’s location along the ancient trade route between India and Tibet. In their wisdom the early settlers set up towns along ridgelines, leaving the fertile slopes for farms. This unique urban-rural symbiosis and the agricultural surplus it resulted in enriched the kingdoms of the Valley, and they ploughed back the wealth into the unique cultural and architectural heritage of their towns.

Kunda Dixit

Geology shaped the Valley’s destiny, and will continue to do so

The Bagmati River Festival celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. Organiser Megh Ale of the Nepal River Conservation Trust spoke to Nepali Times about what he is trying to achieve:

Megh Ale: I was already working for river conservation when we talked about doing something for the Bagmati River in 2001. There was a time when clean water flowed in the Bagmati. So we came up with the idea of rafting down the river and called it the Bagmati River Festival. See, the Bagmati we see everyday is actually clean at its source. Only if you take the journey and follow the river can you understand the situation. The idea was to involve people with the river and raise awareness. The festival also provides a platform for all organisations working for the environment to come together.

Why do you call this a festival of the 21st century?

A festival is a time when all of us get together for a purpose. We in Nepal celebrate many religious festivals as a tradition, regardless of their relevance today. However, the Bagmati River Festival is for a cause that is relevant today and tomorrow. The festival incorporates clean-up programs, rafting, mountain biking, concerts, painting exhibitions and other events.

What are the specific problems you are trying to address?

The main problem with Bagmati clean-up has been sewage management. Sewage has to be treated before it is disposed of in the river. Dumping of solid waste has to be checked as well. Another issue is the water level, which at present rises only during the monsoon. The natural flow of the river is dammed at Sundarijal to fulfill the water demand of the valley. This issue can only be resolved by finding alternate water sources. And of course, law and order has to curb slum encroachment on the river banks, land intrusion and sand mining.

Nepali Times: This is the 10th year of the Bagmati River Festival. What was the rationale for starting it?

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Kunda Dixit

Nepali Times: This is the 10th year of the Bagmati River Festival. What was the rationale for starting it?

Megh Ale: I was already working for river conservation when we talked about doing something for the Bagmati River in 2001. There was a time when clean water flowed in the Bagmati. So we came up with the idea of rafting down the river and called it the Bagmati River Festival. See, the Bagmati we see everyday is actually clean at its source. Only if you take the journey and follow the river can you understand the situation. The idea was to involve people with the river and raise awareness. The festival also provides a platform for all organisations working for the environment to come together.

Why do you call this a festival of the 21st century?

A festival is a time when all of us get together for a purpose. We in Nepal celebrate many religious festivals as a tradition, regardless of their relevance today. However, the Bagmati River Festival is for a cause that is relevant today and tomorrow. The festival incorporates clean-up programs, rafting, mountain biking, concerts, painting exhibitions and other events.

What are the specific problems you are trying to address?

The main problem with Bagmati clean-up has been sewage management. Sewage has to be treated before it is disposed of in the river. Dumping of solid waste has to be checked as well. Another issue is the water level, which at present rises only during the monsoon. The natural flow of the river is dammed at Sundarijal to fulfill the water demand of the valley. This issue can only be resolved by finding alternate water sources. And of course, law and order has to curb slum encroachment on the river banks, land intrusion and sand mining.
The rise and fall

Approximate extension of the proto-Kathmandu Lake overlaid on a current Google Earth image of the valley. The approximate shoreline of the lake is loosely based on a composite of geological studies by Japanese and Nepali experts, and may not correspond to contemporary contours because of tectonic uplift in the last 100,000 years.

120,000 years ago
Upliftment of the southern edge of what is now Lalitpur district and blockage of the proto-Bagmati river at present-day Katuwal Daha, leading to the impounding of water in the Kathmandu basin.

30,000 years ago
Continued tilting of the Kathmandu basin moves the lake towards the north and the lake level, blocked by the Chobhar ridge, is at its maximum height of 1,440m. Bhaktapur, Patan, Manohara Valley and Gokarna are all under water.

15,000 years ago
Climate change and seepage through rocks at Chobhar lower the level of the water, exposing the Gokarna, Thimi and Gauchar (present-day airport) flats, and leaving three smaller lakes behind bedrock ridges at Gokarna, Pashupati and Kirti.

Do you feel your effort has been worthwhile? It is difficult to say, but the campaign has certainly raised awareness. It is hard to stay committed to a cause when you don’t see changes or get the kind of response you expect. But we have received encouragement from the local communities and organisations like Bagmati Sewa Samiti, Nepal Tourism Board and PABSON. Mega Bank has recently committed to support the festival.

But is awareness enough? Isn’t it time for action? Well, if you tour the vicinity of the Bagmati in Chobar, Sandhmanil, Tilganga, Thapathali and Teku, you will notice changes. Many areas that used to be filled with garbage are now clean. The locals have also become active. Efforts have been made in the Pashupati area as well. We have also had tree plantation programs at the source of the Bagmati, and the saplings are being maintained as well. Policy wise, there is much to do, but recently a Bagmati Action Plan was formulated that aims to revive the Bagmati and restore it.

Can the Bagmati be what it once was? It is unlikely that the Bagmati will look like it originally did, especially in terms of size. But efforts can be made to clean it. The river is not contaminated by chemicals but biodegradable and treatable waste. It is the lack of initiative and political will that is letting this sacred river be polluted.

August schedule for the Bagmati River Festival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Event Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 August</td>
<td>7am-4pm</td>
<td>Sundarjai Uttar Bahini</td>
<td>School Challenge/Media Dunga Daud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 August</td>
<td>7am-4pm</td>
<td>Sundarjai Uttar Bahini</td>
<td>Corporate Challenge/Dunga Diplomacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 August</td>
<td>7am-4pm</td>
<td>Chobar-Gokarna via Balaju and Shivapuri Bagmati</td>
<td>Eco-Challenge for Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 August</td>
<td>7am-6pm</td>
<td>Tilganga-Shankhamul</td>
<td>Bagmati@bshumati-JaUntra/Grand Finale/Bagmati Live Aid</td>
</tr>
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</table>
GREEN SCENE

As good as new

J amarko in Nepal means effort and Jamarko Handmade Paper Products is a commendable effort to manage waste by recycling and reusing paper.

“Paper can be easily recycled and reused, it should not be a part of garbage,” says Aruna Lacoul of Jamarko Handmade Paper. Lacoil and her sister Muna Shrestha started the company 10 years ago.

In Kathmandu, the pollution caused by piles of waste is clear to see, and this is what prompted the sisters to turn waste into a resource for a commercial venture. They attended a paper recycling training course conducted by the Department of Cottage and Small Industries, and without further ado, started a company. It has already managed to create an environment-friendly brand for itself.

Jamarko Handmade Paper Products collects waste paper from a range of organisations, recycles it, and turns it into usable items. Anyone is welcome to contribute to their paper collection and a few NGOs and GOs have become regular suppliers. Now, Jamarko recycles an average of 20 tonnes of paper every year.

The collected waste paper is sorted, soaked overnight and mashed into a goopy pulp. The pulp is strained and spread over thin sheets according to the thickness of the paper required. It is then dried in the sun and ironed to produce sheets of paper. On a good day, Jamarko can manufacture up to 600-800 sheets.

“The paper produced is of a fairly good quality and can even be used for simple printing,” says Lacoul. With the paper, Jamarko produces folders, envelopes, letter pads, notebooks, invitation cards, visiting cards, handcraft items as well as A4/A3 size papers. On the side, the company also produces Nepali Lokta paper and its products. The quality of recycled newspaper is not up to the standards required, so they are reused instead by making paper bags out of them.

Lacoul says that over the years, interest in recycled paper has risen, especially among young people. Jamarko has a few regular clients and also exports its produce. The price difference is minimal between recycled and non-recycled paper products.

Sales at Jamarko soared on World Environment Day this June, but concern for the environment will have to be sustained beyond a day a year if such industries are to gain momentum.

Paavan Mathema
Contact 2000162, 4351050, jamarko@hotmail.com

Snakebite!

I n the corners of the Kathmandu Valley we worry about leech bites in the summer, but imagine how much more frightening and deadly a snakebite could be.

Many of us appreciate the fact that venomous snakebites are an occupational hazard for farmers in the Tarai, especially in the summer. South and Southeast Asia have been identified as having the highest number of snakebites per year. Conservative estimates suggest that there are 20,000 cases in Nepal a year, almost all in the Tarai, that cause 1,000 fatalities.

Unfortunately, because snakebites happen most often in impoverished rural settings, prevention and medical management have been neglected. Furthermore, there is a dearth of information. Nepali doctors will consult western textbooks to treat snakebites, but the treatment of bites from Nepali snakes is significantly different from that which is prescribed in the West.

Russell’s vipers, kraits and cobras are the three well-recognised types of venomous snakes in Nepal. While kraits and cobras cause neurological and breathing problems, viper bites cause acute kidney or blood problems.

Dr Sanjib Sharma of the BP Koirala Institute in Dhanush has shown that prompt motorcycle transport to a proper health facility by community volunteers can save lives in a Tarai village setting. At various institutes, Sharma has trained personnel ready to administer anti-snake venom and provide artificial ventilation if needed.

Rewards for killing venomous snakes have been used to minimise bites, but the ecological impact may be detrimental as snakes keep the rodent population in check, thus helping farmers.

An awareness of the behaviour pattern of snakes is more useful.

Knits in the Tarai seem to mostly bite at night when people are sleeping on the floor. Using a mosquito net will help deter snakes. Snakebites, furthermore, are usually on the feet and legs, so villagers would do well to consistently wear proper foot gear in paddy fields. Simple measures like these will make a huge difference. A pound of prevention is better than an ounce of venom.

FATAL RAIN: Nepal Army airlifts victims of a landslide in Dolakha to safety. The landslide, triggered by incessant rainfall on Monday night, killed nine and injured several others, including the workers of Springkhola Hydropower project.

LOUD MOUTHS: Nihita Biswas, wife of convicted killer Charles Sobhraj, and her mother, lawyer Shakuntala Thapa, surrendered before the apex court for contempt of court on Thursday. They have been sent to judicial custody.

GO SAFFRON: Shiva devotees make their annual ‘Bol Bom’ pilgrimage from Sundarijal to Pashupati to offer holy water to the Shiva linga.

RE-VERIFICATION: Ncell set up a camp in Pokhara this week as part of their nationwide campaign to re-verify Ncell numbers and match them with their subscribers. The Home Ministry has sent directives to all mobile operators to curb the misuse of strain numbers.

WEEKEND WEATHER

It has been a strange monsoon with the south-westerlies entering Nepal from the southwest. This has left most of the Tarai without monsoonal precipitation. Rain, when it has come, has been scattered and in small amounts, as well as, usually a 25 per cent shortfall in monsoon averages. The trend in the last decade has been that the monsoon starts late and ends late and this year looks like it will be no exception. A large low-pressure circulation is building up in the Bay that could intensify if it makes landfall this week, and lots of spotty, isolated rain is possible this weekend. A slightly drier than wetland rainfall mainly of light rain over the weekend is into next week, with slightly above average maximum and minimum temperatures.
For more than 1,350 families across Nepal, the war never ended. Every day is a painful wait for the one piece of news they have waited years for: the whereabouts of missing relatives, even if it is a confirmation that they are dead.

In his documentary, Shadows of Hope, director Mohan Mainali gives voice to the forgotten relatives of those disappeared during the conflict. Both sides in the war are now in ruling circles and are preoccupied with politics, society wants to move on, and friends and neighbours can’t offer more than sympathy. In fact the suffering of the families of the disappeared has been deliberately ignored so that the peace process won’t suffer. The state expects the families to accept relief aid of Rs 100,000 and stop searching for answers that would be embarrassing for those responsible on both sides.

The relatives interviewed in Shadows of Hope want peace of mind, much more than justice or retribution. They want answers about the fate of their loved ones so they can move on. A little state support to rebuild their lives, if possible, would be appreciated. Mainali could have easily manipulated the six profiled families to present angry and emotional testimonials, or slant it politically as many other film-makers have done. But he keeps himself in the background, allows the families to speak and lets the message come out in poignant words of bereavement, longing and loss. This is a subtle, but powerful, documentary that brings back the horrors of our brutal war and reminds us that the legacy of the war will be with us for a long time to come.

Says Mainali: “We have often heard about the victims of war, but in the film we have tried to find out what it is that their relatives now need the most. It is their voice, the voice of the families of the victims.”

At the end of the 21-minute film produced by ICRC, Mainali zooms in on a father as he takes out from his wallet a faded photograph of his missing son. Ten years after his 14-year-old went missing, he is still trying to come to terms with his loss. His words dissolve in a flood of tears: “How can I ever forget?”

Rubeena Mahato

Shadows of Hope, directed by Mohan Mainali, is being launched officially by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on 6 August.
Women, determined

Women like Shakuntala, Sushma and Sita have independently begun their liberation from housewives to active members of their communities.

Respondents said they have become more independent, gained more control over household finances and are becoming better at making decisions. They are increasingly involved in local cooperatives where they have their own savings. Most signed up to participate in community libraries because they believe in the importance of literacy. During a 12-day community librarian training in Banepa in early July, women made up 18 of 26 participants. “I want to serve women and children, only women can understand the comfort of working with other women,” said Dhamumaya Paladi Poudel, a 26-year-old librarian at Dipshikha Community Library in Kaski. Such changes in rural Nepal also present challenges for women, whose cultural roles and identities are evolving slowly. They now juggle household duties with community activities. With a 10am appointment with the community group to attend, for example, women have to start their days earlier to cover their household commitments. But women like Shakuntala, Sita and Sushma have independently begun their movement towards liberation from housewives to active members of their communities. Their courage and determination changed my perception of women in South Asia.

Jeerawat Na Thalang is a correspondent with The Nation newspaper in Bangkok and spent two months with READ Nepal.
When it comes to getting services the residents of Thapathali, Sanepa and Lazimpat are as dependent on the government as those of Taplejung, Simikot and Lamidada.

Last week, the publisher of this newspaper wrote: “15 per cent of Nepal’s population is working abroad at any given time, and they send home $2 billion a year. This is improving family cash income, but it doesn’t always correlate with access to services like years of schooling, safe drinking water, electricity, or chronic hunger in children. Many of these basic services are the prerogative of the state…”

Perhaps if we were talking about new age concepts like happiness and satisfaction, the role of money would have required deeper investigation. If it is tangible services like school education, some iodine pills for your water or food for your children, why does a family with an improved income need to wait for the state to access these services, especially when the government has proven to be anything but effective?

Statements like these may be the perfect kicker to an article, but are worrying because they gloss over the details. A few weeks ago, the host of Sagarmatha Television’s primetime news program ended a segment about child labour by grandly announcing that “the government needs to look after these children.” There was no discussion of how he thought the government should go about doing that. Did he mean we should have more Bal Mandalas, the state-run orphanages long accused of corruption and even child trafficking?

There is merit in welfare services provided by the state to the poorest of its people and the most helpless, but none whatsoever in everyone waiting for the government to spoon feed us. The government is unable to manage expectations and even less able to get things done. More than 30 years after identifying Melamchi as a source of water for the residents of the capital, the project has yet to begin in earnest. Major hydropower projects like Arun III have been stalled in the planning phase for years and are yet to deliver more value than just as talking points.

One could argue that the reason we are stuck in a cycle of violence, or in the continual threat of one, is because the government is deemed so important. Foreign aid is distributed through the government. It has the largest share in the economy. It runs health services to the majority of the population in Nepal, as well as education, while it is clear that it is the private sector that is better at providing more choices and better services in both these areas.

Instead of asking for the end of state intervention in every aspect of our lives, we seem to be crossing our fingers and hoping that with one perfect government we can have a Swedish socio-heaven in this country. It might not happen in our lifetime, so we are better off looking elsewhere if we want our roads to be fixed.
Unholy alliance
Rameshwor Bohara and Saroj Dahal in Himal Khabarpatra, 1-16 August

With the Maoists assuring the royalists they will revive the monarchy if they help them form a government, their regressive journey has been confirmed. Pushpa Kamal Dahal recently met with Kamal Thapa of RPP-Nepal, the only party openly advocating a monarchy.

The royalists have been encouraged by Dahal’s statement about an alliance of two nationalist forces. “India betrayed both the parties. So we have come to the conclusion that an alliance of two nationalist forces is possible,” a central committee member of RPP-Nepal said.

Ex-king Gyanendra, however, is not so convinced. He has given the responsibility of forging a business deal with the Maoists to his son-in-law Raj Baburam Singh. businesswoman Ajay Sumari and some ex-army generals.

The Maoist-royalist connection goes back a long way. The Maoists had relations with the palace even at the height of the insurgency, and it has already been revealed that there were agreements to share power. Baburam Bhattarai had to face action from his own party when he opposed this process.

E-farming
Deeptashree Gimi in Maharajgunj, 31 July

“If there was enough food to eat, I would have gone to school,” Ramesh Karki sighs in despair as he rests his load against a wall. His forehead is bruised by the rope holding up the sack of rice he is carrying on his back. Depression, pain and suffering show through his grim expression.

Karki, from Purna VDC of Jajarkot district, is 17. He should be going to college but has never seen the inside of a school. Transporting loads from Chaurjhari airport in Rukum district to different villages is what his daily journey has been confirmed. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Narayan Kaji Shrestha and Krishna Bahadur Mahara last week at Thapa’s residence

According to sources, Singh and Sumari, among others, have been gathering funds to help Dahal get 305 votes in parliament. It is not mere coincidence that the Times of India published news on 30 August about Singh’s attempts to get 10 to 15 more MPs on Dahal’s side.

Sources also claim that ex-crown prince Paras called Moti Duggal, MP of Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Anandidevi) to the Soaltee Hotel to get him to vote in favour of Dahal.

Fearing deciruous, Dahal has only allowed his brother Narayan and nephew Samrhee to handle the money involved. Reportedly, 500 to 550 million rupees have been set aside to buy MPs, to be spent only on the night of 1 August.

Alleging that Dahal has engaged in horse-trading both with India and the royalists to become the prime minister, a politician member said, “Whoever he settles the deal with, it will be against the country and the spirit of the people’s movement.” Another Maoist leader said, “If he is where they wanted to take the country, why did they have to kill 14 thousand people?”

UCPN(Maoist)-RPP(N) front possible
Chandra Bahadur Gurung, parliamentary party leader RPP(N)

What has brought together such strongly opposed parties? We are in an interim period. This means the constitutional republic, secularism and federalism are also interim. The Maoists know this well. We want a referendum on the issues of monarchy, secularism and federalism. Prachanda has assured us that he will consider this once there is a Maoist government.

What is Dahal’s stance on monarchy? Prachanda has said that there could be a cultural or religious king. The issue of national unity and independence are our common agendas.

Why do you think he saw any possibility of a cultural king? We are motivated by the fact that the king is inevitable for national unity, independence, and the protection of national sovereignty.

Do you think Maoist support is enough to restore the monarchy? It is an issue of national importance and therefore needs the support of all parties.
UCPN (Maoist) believes in a multiparty system, not in pluralism. Pluralism is a philosophy representative of orthodox thoughts and ideals that negates progress and transformation. It believes in putting together all the oppressed and oppressors, masters and serfs, tigers and lambs into a basket. It opposes the history of dialectical materialism. That’s why the Maoists are against this ideal.

The Maoists are against pluralism as well as absolutism. Although it has been made clear time and again, they are portrayed as authoritarian, as wanting to capture power. The Maoists have modified their programs, ideology and policies to suit multiparty competition and then joined the peace process.

As far as the question of authoritarianism is concerned, this is class-specific. The state represents a class. Capitalists are influential in capitalism while proletariats remain at the helm in communism. And the Maoists speak for the proletariat.

If the Maoists were against multiparty competition, they would not take part in the CA elections. People support the party that has concrete plans and programs for a better future. They won the hearts and minds of the people who wanted change despite their opponents’ attempts to denigrate them by calling them terrorists. People want change.

Maoists not for pluralism or absolutism

Editorial in Janadest, 3 August

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Four down, 20 to go

Sunday, 8 August

The gloves came off in the war of words between PKD and BRB long ago, and both are now donning finger studs. The party is beginning to split right down the middle between Chhalalal and Lalduj loyalists. The party’s newspapers are starting at one or the other leader, reminding us of the historical propensity for communist leaders to squash internal dissent. Usually it is the survival of the most ruthless. BRB commands respect within the party for his integrity and vision, while PKD has the gift of gab. Baddie reps in parliament going around trying to woo the smaller parties to vote for Awesome on Friday secretly admit they are just dishing out the party line, and that they’d much prefer BRB as their candidate. But they look over their shoulders as they say this.

The biggest setback to the Chairman within his party seems to be that after crushing the monarchy he now has a crush on it. Ferocious is now trying to justify his overtures to the royalists by saying that he is engaged in a “cultural revolution to bring back a cultural king”. This has already worked wonders on the Bhadgaunleys who went lock, stock and barrel with the Baddies in the third round. The king card has also worked with certain Madhesis, although the deal seems to have been lubricated with 3 karod smackeroos each and brokered by a son-in-law who was above-the-law during the royal days. Comrade Jwai-saheb has joined the pro-Mau Janata Dull to position himself for Information Ministership in new PKD govt.

And this week’s winner of the ‘Only in Nepal’ contest is the agitation by the Baddie-affiliated Nepal Oil Corruption employees for a bonus in an organisation that is running a loss of 2 arabs a year. China has donated garbage trucks, we will donate the rubbish, but who is going to donate the diesel to run them? ass(at)nepalitimes.com