If we're hard pressed for success stories in Nepal it may be because we're not looking in the right places. Yet far from the dirty politicking of parliament it’s business as usual for some, and business is good. Our homegrown pashmina industry has weathered the storm of its uncontrolled early growth and is now maturing into a steady, innovative industry that employs thousands of Nepalis and earns billions for the economy. Pashmina is now a truly Nepali brand.

Keeping it together

South side story: Sanjaya Baru thinks diplomats should bat for trade. Pranav Budhathoki is convinced we’ve all got batter for brains.
esperate times call for desperate measures, and it may be opportune to think out of the box. The first priority should be to delink the prolonged political impasse from the country’s stagnant development and economy. Service delivery and the economy are more directly relevant to the people’s welfare and everyday needs than the shameless buying and selling of lawmakers in parliament.

One reason why we were beginning to take off was at the VDC and DDC levels in the mid-1990s before the Maoists came along and wrecked everything with their terror. And the reason it was beginning to show results was because we had hit upon the key to local development: grassroots democracy. So, here is a radical proposal. Why wait for the formation of a new government, the new constitution and then a general election a couple of years after that? What’s to stop us from having local elections right away?

Of course, those who have ignored their constituents and fear they won’t fare well will oppose this. Sher Bahadur Deuba is expected to call last local elections in 1999 before he felt the UML would sweep them, and did a big favour to the Maoists by creating a political void at the grassroots.

Anotherauscuous idea is for the Nepali Congress and the Maoists to team up to form a new government. It may be just the kind of forward-looking alignment that this country needs to leap out of the political quicksand we are in. This is by no means an original thought. Before he died, Girija Prasad Koirala was trying to engineer just such an arrangement. We pooh-poohed it then because GP was trying to strike a deal with the Maoists to correct his legacy, and make himself president. The political playing field has to be level for this to happen. Which means the first step is for the Maoists to give up their ideology of violence. There is some justification for the fear among the UML, NC and Madhesi parties that if Pushpa Kamal Dahal becomes PM now, he will never give it up. In fact, if the Maoists don’t give up violence and agree on a demobilisation timetable, there is no point having a new constitution even.

The internal NC elections have thrown up a new crop of diverse local leaders, which is a heartening trend. The Congress is finally turning into what the Congress should have always been. A NC-UCPN(M) coalition could allow the NC to temper Maoist extremism.

However, if Deuba becomes party chief in the NC Convention, such a coalition would not be possible, because he is a polarising figure. Either way, the eighth round on 26 September won’t be the last if we keep doing what we are doing now.

TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR

So, here is a radical proposal. Why wait for the formation of a new government, the new constitution and then a general election a couple of years after that? What’s to stop us from having local elections right away?

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New imbalance

A
fter weeks of speculation, the government sent a mystifyingly ambiguous ‘letter’ to the UN requesting an extension of UNMIN’s mandate. After a long prelude, it asked for a mandate that focused on monitoring of Maoist combatants and arms without specifically asking that the Nepal Army (NA) be taken off UNMIN monitoring.

Three and a half years after the interim legislature was constituted and two years after the special committee was formed, the government has discovered those developments mean there are no longer ‘two sides’ to the conflict, and that the government’s voice is the only legitimate voice. Why were they going through the charade of consulting the Maoists on UNMIN extension all this time? Or, why did the Maoist government have to consult the NC on the issue? And why did they not revise agreements to reflect this reality, and change the mandate request accordingly, earlier?

The letter also tells the UN that the situation has ‘evolved rapidly’ and many of UNMIN’s tasks are ‘redundant’. One wonders what progress flashflood and its allies have seen in the peace process since the last extension in May, for the rest of the country can only see stagnation.

But the letter’s details, and the logistical claims and counter claims on both sides, are not really the core of the issue. Neither is UNMIN’s functioning. It is the politics behind the extension.

The change in the balance of power since the agreements were signed originally, and the differing motivations of the actors who signed those pacts, explains why UNMIN manages to invite ire and criticism.

Koirala decided that the best way to bring the ‘Maoists’ into the mainstream was by creating a new framework and new institutions that could accommodate them. The interim constitution, interim legislature, and interim government were constituted. The republican agenda was accepted. And UNMIN was invited, to give a sense of security to the Maoists, who wanted international legitimacy, and to fulfill the tasks of arms monitoring that no other external force could.

Few people in the NC and UML really believed in the new framework. But they privately knew Maoist strength had played a key role in bringing them back to power through the People’s Movement. They also hoped this would ‘lock’ the Maoists in and co-opt them, and eventually through elections the hegemony of ‘democratic forces’ could be restored.

Think about all that has changed since then. The king has gone and there is no common enemy. After the elections, but particularly since the Katwal incident last year, NC and UML started seeing the NA as a partner in their battle against the Maoists. This is a historic and unprecedented shift in Nepali politics; the NC and NA are on the same side.

There is almost a consensus in the ‘democratic camps’ that the Maoists gave ‘too much’ to the Maoists, who are seen to have gone back on their promises. The logic of the anti-Maoist Mahila-Nepal coalition was that it is not by giving the Maoists space, but by isolating them entirely, that they will be ‘weakened’ and forced to ‘reform’. So keeping them out of power, and getting all domestic and international actors to pressure the Maoists, became a primary goal.

But there is a problem. Two institutions serve as a constant reminder to the spirit of those heady 2006 days – the CA and UNMIN. Until the CA is around, the Maoists cannot be sidelined. The prospect of them coming to power remains, and their agenda cannot be brushed aside. Until UNMIN is present, there is a symbolic acceptance of ‘two armies’ since that was the basis of the Agreement on Monitoring the Management of Arms and Ammunition. And there remains international recognition of the Maoists as a genuine 50 per cent stakeholder in the peace process.

If understood in the context of this anti-Maoist strategy, the attack on UNMIN makes perfect sense. But it is a reminder of how far we have moved from the days of the 2006 political framework, the new balance of power, and how implementing the peace accord has become infinitely more difficult now.

We’ve come a long way from the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2006, but shifting sands have got us into trouble

Leaked tape
A private TV channel based in Delhi broadcast an audio tape conversation supposedly featuring Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara, asking for Rs 500 million from a Chinese man to buy votes for Maoist candidate Pushpa Kamal Dahal, two days ahead of the sixth round of prime ministerial voting. On the tape, a man alleged to be Mahara discusses possible meetings with an unidentified person.

Both Mahara and the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu have denied involvement, and the authenticity of the audio tape is yet to be verified. The NC, UML, and civil society members have demanded an independent probe.

EM elections
Two rounds of prime ministerial elections, on 5 and 7 September, failed to secure a win for either of the candidates from the Maoists and the NC. The UML and the Madhesi alliance remained neutral during both rounds of voting, despite threats from Lekhendra Yadav’s JSM faction to cross the floor to vote for the Maoists. An eighth round of voting is scheduled for 26 September.

Roll on, UNMIN
After much dillydallying, the government has bought a four-month extension for UNMIN. The letter filed at the UN Security Council (UNSC) through Nepal’s permanent representative to the UN, Gyan Chandra Acharya, has also asked UNMIN to monitor ‘Maoist combatants, their cantonments and arms’ while remaining silent on its role over the Nepal Army.

Briefing the UNSC on Tuesday, UNMIN chief Karin Landgren highlighted the risks to the peace process posed by the unresolved leadership battle. ‘The biggest risk of all may be that the peace process and parliamentary processes appear discredited, sending a discouraging signal to existing and emerging groups about taking the democratic route to push for change,’ she said.

KIRAN PANDY
Understanding inflation

Why are prices rising?

L ast week, more than a dozen people died in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, in a week-long riot caused by a 30 per cent price hike in food and other basic necessities. We may not know the official inflation rate in Nepal, but ask any householder who shops for groceries — prices change with each visit to the market. Rates in restaurants have increased and the cost of living, calculated on the backs of envelopes since we don’t have credible indices, shows that it is getting dearer to live in Nepal, especially in Kathmandu. For Nepal, the increase of a single rupee in the international market or production centres means a greater increase in price for consumers.

The beed always wonders why his favourite egg rolls at roadside stalls cost just Rs 13 (Rs 21) in Kolkata but Rs 50 in Kathmandu. No meal in Kathmandu, even in stalls at roadside stalls cost just Rs 10 in Kolkata but Rs 21 in Kathmandu. For Nepal, the increase in oil prices in India.

The prices are also high because our labour costs, compared to productivity, are the highest in the region. We require more people to man our restaurant kitchens and production lines. With many festivals, or other events that create shortages, or other events that cause major shifts in demand means prices spiral, as people love to hear and make extra money. It is questionable how petrol stocks evaporate from underground tankers as soon as gas stations hear of a landslide, or other events that create shortages. The consumers are partly to blame. Nepali consumers are not adamant about getting their money’s worth. How many times have you seen people refusing to pay for a badly cooked dish at a restaurant or faulty service from cell phone operators? Lax attitudes mean suppliers of service can get away with increasing charges for low-quality products.

The other major cause for price rises is our love of cartels. Transport entrepreneurs have gorged up to overprice transportation costs, making them among the highest in south Asia. Hairdressers have banded together to fix minimum rates and so have gold vendors. The fact that different gold associations fight tooth and nail over fixing prices and quotas makes us wonder if they are government agencies or the private sector. The Nepali private sector, too, loves protectionism and continues to find ways of making money by fixing prices and quantities.

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Compared to the value of assets, rents are still lower than in most low or middle-income countries. If this goes up too, it will have a multiplier effect on wages and product prices, making heady inflation a distinct possibility.

We need updated and reliable figures on inflation so that we can start being proactive in understanding price rises. A high rate of inflation increases income inequality, and for every high-end house that is occupied, we will see another ghetto. If we cannot understand and deal with price hikes, then the streets of Kathmandu may soon see riots like the one in Maputo.
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www.omanair.com
A decade since the boom ended, Nepal’s pashmina industry is carving out niche market

The pashmina industry seemed to have fallen prey to the classic trajectory of once-successful Nepali exports such as garments and carpets. In the late 1990s, there was a short boom for pashminas, during which time the number of pashmina factories shot up from 25 in 1993 to over 900. The heavy competition didn’t translate into sustained growth, as compromises in quality began to hurt the industry.

But those who survived the bust learnt their lessons quickly, and are rebuilding the pashmina industry to cater to a niche market for high-quality, innovative products. Last year Nepal exported Rs 2 billion worth of pashminas and earned an additional Rs 1.5 billion locally. Today, there are 150 pashmina manufacturers and more than 400 exporters in business.

“The growth of the pashmina industry at the moment is different from the rapid expansion we saw earlier,” says Chandra Kakshyapati of Sana Hastakala. “It’s a lot steadier.”

It’s also more diverse. Pashmina is no longer synonymous with shawls. Manufacturers are designing sweaters, wraps, gowns, gloves, blankets and even slippers made out of pashmina. Diversification is taking place not just in what is produced but also in the designs and methods used. Patterns are being woven and printed, and intricate beadwork and embroidery are adding value to the products. Manufacturers are using knitting along with weaving. Pashmina was traditionally mixed with cotton and silk; today we even have mixes with bamboo yarns.
Over 15,000 are people directly employed in the pashmina industry. Although the exact number of women employed in the industry is unknown, most manufacturers say that a majority of the workers in their factories are women. Twenty-four-year-old Saraswati Shrestha (pic, left) works at Nature Knit and is proud that she can support her household with her earnings from the factory. “I have been working here for four years and I get more respect at home,” says Saraswati. Phulkumari Magar, who works alongside Saraswati, adds, “With my earnings I have been able to send my kids to an English-medium school. I also have a say in decisions at home.” Factory owners say women are keener to learn, and they have a lower turnover because women are more loyal to the company.

“We need to treat it as a fashion industry and be innovative in our designs,” says Anin Rajbhandari of Tara Oriental, which has been tying up with international brands and designers to make new pashmina-based products that appeal to buyers. Europe is the top market for Nepali pashminas followed by the United States, Japan, Russia, Brazil and the Middle East.

The pashmina industry has also realised that while major buyers are abroad, Nepalis are also keen on pashminas. Many export manufacturers have opened local retail outlets to cater to Nepalis and foreigners who might drop by.

China is the toughest competitor for the Nepali pashmina industry with its cheap labour, low production cost and skilled manpower. “It is impossible to compete with them but our advantage is that we can provide customised low-volume orders and work flexibly with our clients,” says Bhanu Adhikari of Nature Knit (Boudha factory pictured, left). But cost-wise it is still an expensive business for pashmina makers.

Ironically, most Nepali pashminas is actually made of yarn imported from China. Commercial farming of Himalayan goats (chyangra) is yet to take place in Nepal and the existing supply can only meet 30 per cent of the total yarn demand. The lack of spinning and refining factories here means farmers sell their wool to China at just Rs 2,000 per kg. Nepali manufacturers then buy back the yarn at rates higher than Rs 10,000 per kg. “Even before we start producing our costs are already 20 per cent higher, simply because we have to import our raw materials here,” says Gurvesh Singh of Umrao Cashmere. But initiatives are underway to produce yarn locally. The Nepali Pashmina Industry Association is working with the Asian Development Bank to set up a yarn spinning and processing plant in Nepal. “A lot can be done to make Nepali pashmina competitive,” acknowledges Shiva Shrestha of Dhaulagiri Pashmina. “At least the manufacturers have understood now that the quality of pashmina is not to be tampered with.”

nepaltimes.com Restoring Nepal’s social fabric, #284

Passion for pash, #174

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Ladies behind the looms

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Cashmere, Yak Wool, Bamboo

Umarao Cashmere
Sirtin Building, Kupandole, Kathmandu. Ph: 5010734 - 6, umraocashmere@gmail.com
Interview with the President of Nepal Pashmina Industries Association, Pushpa Man Shrestha

Nepali Times: What is the difference between cashmere and pashmina, when the raw material used is the same?

Pushpa Man Shrestha: You’re right; the raw material for cashmere and pashmina is the same. But the standard we’ve set for pashmina is that the yarn used should be of less than 15 microns. Whereas cashmere is made with 19 micron yarn.

How can we brand the products as Nepali pashmina when all the yarn, dyes and other raw materials used are imported?

Pashmina is one of the strongest Nepali brands in the international market. We were the first to market our products using that name. We’re not self-sufficient in terms of raw materials but it is traditional Nepali craft which gives it its identity.

The sales of Nepali pashmina went down after fake pashmina entered the market. What is being done in response?

We’ve developed the trademark of ‘Chyangra Pashmina’, which is now registered in more than 40 countries. This will prevent duplication of Nepali pashminas and help maintain the standard of goods marketed under the trademark in the international market.

What about quality checks?

At present, we have no lab tests in Nepal that can grant internationally recognised certification. Manufacturers have to send out samples for quality certification to verify raw materials. But we’re in the process of establishing an internationally recognised testing lab here by working together with the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the quality department in Nepal.

How can a customer be assured of quality?

It’s hard for even an expert to evaluate the exact quality of a pashmina just by touch. But if anyone sells you a 70/30 mix of pashmina for less than Rs 1,600 and a 100% pashmina for less than Rs 2,500, you know you’re being duped.

Is the industry facing any particular problems as of now?

Nepal Rastra Bank provides loans at the rate of four per cent for exporters like us. But we haven’t been able to get such loans from commercial banks, to whom we have to pay a rate of 13 per cent interest.
**Dining**

Dhokalma Cafe has a new menu, try the Blackened Norwegian Salmon and Grilled Shrimp Ajiito, Patan Dhoka, 5522113

Viva Italia, enjoy Italian food at its best, Italian Chef Massimo Guillotta brings the best of Italian delicacies. Till Sunday 12 September, 11am-11pm. Café Toscana, Pulchowk. 5537775, 9721458413

Haddock, big compound with ample parking space, their Western and Thakali dishes are done to perfection, Thamel, 10am-10pm. 5546341

Arabian Nights In The Cafe, taste culinary delights from the Middle East. Every Friday from 6:30pm onwards, Hyatt Regency Boudha. 4491224/4489582

Saturday @ Hyatt, take a refreshing dip in the pool and sample delicious barbeque in open air. Every Saturday from 12:30pm to 4pm at the poolside, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234

Buddha Bar, offers a warm and cozy space for intimate conversations over a large selection of drinks. Thamel. 9850103235

Mike's Breakfast, huge breakfasts and a never-ending supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting characterise this café, popular among tourists and locals alike. Naal, 4424303

Bronco Billy, a new restaurant in town offering Tex-Mex and Indian dishes. Pulchowk opposite Manaslu Supermarket

Ghangri Cafe, a quiet place with candlelit tables and a lovely courtyard, perfect for those sunny afternoons. Pulchowk (near the Suzuki showroom), 11am-10pm except Tuesdays.

Irish Pub, not only does it feel like that, expected him to get up, sweep up the keys and dump them into the pockets of his jacket, so completely did he possess the piano. Suffice it to say was happy to walk out with a loud full of tinkling.

**Music**

Moksh Bar, live performances by Humble Bee. Every Tuesday, 7.30pm onwards, Moksh Bar, Jhamikhel, 5526212

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, KJC brings renowned German musician Rainer Pusch to town. Till 20 September, KJC, Jhamikhel. 5513554, info@kathmandujazz.com.np

Sunday Jazz Brunch, enjoy a relaxing Sunday in The Terrace at Hyatt Regency with barbeque and live jazz music by Inner Groove. Every Sunday from 12pm to 3.30pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234/488602

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**Events**

Docskool, screening of Paris, Texas, directed by Wim Wenders. Friday 10 September, 3.30pm, Kathmandu Academy, Mahendra Bhawan Premises, Naal, 4471104

A People War Exhibition, Nepal’s conflict history in pictures. Every day except Tuesdays, 11am-4pm. Patan Dhoka, for school visits, cell 5549448, www.apewarpleaser.com

Julie Malja, Mandala Theatre stages a Nepali adaptation of Miss Julie, written by August Strindberg. Every Friday, Saturday and Sunday @ 11am 6.30pm, UWTC, Trupke Rewal

Bedazl3 Fashion Walk, organised by Mrs. Samata Krishna. Till 10 September, 7.30pm -11.30pm, Moods Studio Lounge, Trupke Rewal

TGIIF Fashion Week 2010, IEC organizes the biggest fashion event of the year. From 13 - 16 September, Soapstone Crown Plaza, Tashchahal

Galijatra, solo painting exhibition by acclaimed artist Regin Upadhyay Grela. Till 20 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4218048

Repeating Bodies Structural Space, exhibition of paintings by Sanjeev Maharjan and Sunil Maharjan. Till 20 September. 11am to 5pm, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamakhel, Lalitpur, 5521120

Cycle 4: Selfie, photo exhibition by 17 young amateur photographers. Till 29 October, Galleria CUC, Mama Magic, Pulchowk

Kitty’s Annual Wine Festival, offers the widest range of choice in wines. mid-September. Kitty’s, Thamel, Jyatha Street, 4250840

**Business**

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**Times**

A little night delight

Niranjan Shrestha

It’s not every day in Kathmandu you can catch a virtuoso in flight Last Tuesday I felt more spoilt for choice than I usually do mid-week, which is not at all. Despite our annual jazz and blues festivals, not to mention the film festivals, there’s still a tendency to see the capital of Nepal as something of a backwater. Case in point: five years ago, the front pages were splashed with news of the impending arrival of international pop star and DJ...Dr Alban? Who penned one awful hit in the 1990s and promptly vanished, never to surface again, except in places awfully short on celebrity.

Indeed, things have changed. But how did the American Embassy manage to convince Roman Rudnytsky, the internationally renowned concert pianist, to drop into Nepal for a recital? I cared not; here was a rare opportunity to witness genius at work.

It didn’t matter that the grand piano laid out for Rudnytsky looked and sounded a little worn, that the seats in the Russian Cultural Center were crummy, or even that the photographers from the dailies didn’t seem to realise how loud their clacking cameras were. For two hours, the American pianist had us in a trance. Some members of the audience, of course, must have been bored stiff; for the rest, it was a guided tour through the best of the west, an amalgam of the familiar, the exotic, and the downright thrilling.

Rudnytsky introduced each piece with a few words on its provenance and place in the canon of classical music, choosing, intriguingly, to begin with the folk-influenced Tres Danzas from Guatemalan composer Manuel Herrarte. Following on with two stalwarts of the Romantic era, Beethoven’s Sonata in F, op. 10 no.2 and Chopin (Nocturne in C sharp minor), Rudnytsky quickly moved into the sublime. He then changed gears effortlessly with the jaunty and occasionally thunderous ‘El Salon Mexico’ by American Aaron Copland (left hand flat-batting the bass keys to great effect).

Following the intermission, Rudnytsky launched into Schumann’s varied masterpiece Carnaval, op.9. He then essayed into the gentle tones of ‘Venus’ from Holst’s The Planets. And how better to round a recital than with two pieces from that demon of the piano, Hungarian Franz Liszt? Anyone unconvinced by the intricate dynamic and harmonic fluctuations of Schumann would have had to submit to the showmanship of Liszt, the Paganini of the piano.

When Rudnytsky obliged with a rousing encore from American Louis Moreau Gottschalk, The Banjo (yes, the piano sounded just like that), I expected him to get up, sweep up the keys and dump them into the pockets of his jacket, so completely did he possess the piano. Suffice it to say was happy to walk out with a loud full of tinkling.

Nepali Kakur
H
uman rabies is a fatal illness. Unfortunately, about 80 per cent of the world’s human rabies cases (about 30,000 annually) occur in South Asia. Rabies is transmitted most often through animal bites, although other contact with the saliva or brain tissue of an infected animal can cause the disease as well. In Nepal, the most commonly infected animal that transmits rabies to humans is dogs. Cats come a distant second, simply because they aren’t popular as pets. Whoever said our capital should be renamed Dogmandu instead of Kathmandu had the right idea, at least in terms of rabies.

Children are especially vulnerable to rabies simply because they may be bitten or nicked by a rabid dog and not mention this to anyone. This may be fatal because after a usual incubation period of about a week to two months, the child may come down with rabies, by which time it is too late. It is clear that rabies is under-diagnosed in the developing world. And not all cases of rabies manifest with hydrophobia (fear of water) and the terror-stricken behaviour we are used to hearing about in popular culture!

So what can be done? Prevention, of course. Taking care of your dog would be a great start, but this undertaking seems to lack political backing. The second best thing to do is being properly vaccinated with human rabies vaccines which are available (at a price) mainly around the Toka Hospital area in Kathmandu. In the case of a bite, regardless of prior (pre-exposure) vaccination, the wound needs to be cleaned properly, daily, with liquid iodine or soap and water, as the virus hangs around the bitten area for a long time. A “top off” shot or two to boost immunity will be required even if prior vaccinations have been taken. If prior vaccinations have not been taken, and especially if the bite is severe, then immune globulin (a kind of “prompt responder” medicine) needs to be administered. Immune globulin may be available in the Toka Hospital area again, but supply tends to be erratic. Hence “pre-exposure” vaccination is best. Luckily, after a bite a potentially rabid animal, the Nepali government does usually administer rabies vaccinations for free at Toka Hospital.

Rabid dogs are also a threat to cattle. Since 2006, 30,000 annually) occur in South Asia. Rabies is transmitted most often through animal bites, although other contact with the saliva or brain tissue of an infected animal can cause the disease as well. In Nepal, the most commonly infected animal that transmits rabies to humans is dogs. Cats come a distant second, simply because they aren’t popular as pets. Whoever said our capital should be renamed Dogmandu instead of Kathmandu had the right idea, at least in terms of rabies.

Children are especially vulnerable to rabies simply because they may be bitten or nicked by a rabid dog and not mention this to anyone. This may be fatal because after a usual incubation period of about a week to two months, the child may come down with rabies, by which time it is too late. It is clear that rabies is under-diagnosed in the developing world. And not all cases of rabies manifest with hydrophobia (fear of water) and the terror-stricken behaviour we are used to hearing about in popular culture!

So what can be done? Prevention, of course. Taking care of your dog would be a great start, but this undertaking seems to lack political backing. The second best thing to do is being properly vaccinated with human rabies vaccines which are available (at a price) mainly around the Toka Hospital area in Kathmandu. In the case of a bite, regardless of prior (pre-exposure) vaccination, the wound needs to be cleaned properly, daily, with liquid iodine or soap and water, as the virus hangs around the bitten area for a long time. A “top off” shot or two to boost immunity will be required even if prior vaccinations have been taken. If prior vaccinations have not been taken, and especially if the bite is severe, then immune globulin (a kind of “prompt responder” medicine) needs to be administered. Immune globulin may be available in the Toka Hospital area again, but supply tends to be erratic. Hence “pre-exposure” vaccination is best. Luckily, after a bite a potentially rabid animal, the Nepali government does usually administer rabies vaccinations for free at Toka Hospital.

DANGEROUS FALL: A gigantic stone toppled down the hills on the Goleswor-Beni highway, damaging a drinking water pipe and obstructing traffic. A team from the Nepal Army blasted the stone to remove it from the road.

AWARDING EXCELLENCE: Caretaker PM Madhav Kumar Nepal awarded 13 schools for quality education to mark National Education Day and International Literacy Day on Wednesday at Nepal Academy Hall, Kathmandu.

WEEKEND WEATHER

Friday

Bhaktapur: 29-19

Kathmandu: 30-21

Sauraha: 29-19

QUEEN'S PARK

PANCHAVATI

HIMALAIA

NEPAL MILITARY HOSPITAL

Himalaika Pat. Unit, Harisiddhi Lalita

Kirat Panday

KIRAN PANDAY

Kirat Panday

Kiran Panday

Kiran Panday

Kirat Panday

Kirat Panday
The kindest cut

This Dasain, we may want to consider the benefits of castration for goats, dogs and politicians

There are three dogs in my house. The oldest, smartest, and the smallest, a mongrel bitch, is called Jantari. Then there’s two male bhote kukurs (Tibetan Mastiff): Rame, 3, and Pushe, 1.

Now, observant readers will note such a combination is a recipe for disaster. One female, two males of the bhote variety, no matter such a combination is a nightmare. Then there’s two male bhote kukurs, a mongrel bitch, is called Jantari.

3, and Pushe, 1.

What’s worse, the bhotes refused to make up. Another confrontation seemed imminent. What to do? The doggy drama put me in a quandary. The owners, instead of feeling secure gaining the upper hand. Their dominance, focused solely on their own political games. Pushe and Rame were battling it out for power, guarding the household, worried about their own security as they shuffled and got on with more important matters like procuring food. House dogs on the other hand, due to the idiosyncrasies of their breeding and owners, may take things rather more personally. So they persist in savaging each other, causing everyone around grief. Food still comes in a bowl day in day out, after all, so they can remain focused on egoistic struggles.

Back home, after some consultations, the momentous decision was taken to castrate both Pushe and Rame, that is, khelo harane. We’d been told of the snarling and growling from a distance. Wild dogs, who live in highly organised packs attuned to collective survival, quickly find a way to adapt to hierarchical shuffles and get on with more important matters like procuring food. House dogs on the other hand, due to the idiosyncrasies of their breeding and owners, may take things rather more personally. So they persist in savaging each other, causing everyone around grief. Food still comes in a bowl day in day out, after all, so they can remain focused on egoistic struggles.

It was not to be.

Last week, after a series of minor squabbles, Pushe and Rame got into the worst brawl of their doggy lives. When they were finally separated, there was blood everywhere. Rame had a torn mouth and was limping. Pushe had swollen, bloodshot eyes and cuts on his flanks. Those trying to break up the fight got bites for their trouble, too. What’s worse, the bhotes refused to take things rather more personally. So they persist in savaging each other, causing everyone around grief. Food still comes in a bowl day in day out, after all, so they can remain focused on egoistic struggles.

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NEW DELHI – It is probably the first of its kind. A press release issued by an Indian embassy abroad in support of an Indian company and a very Indian brand.

Last week, the Indian embassy in Nepal was constrained to issue a press release alleging that sections of the Nepali media were seeking to malign an Indian company and suggesting that such a malicious campaign against an Indian brand could hurt bilateral relations.

The company in question is Dabur Nepal, a subsidiary of India’s famous Dabur India Limited. The provocation for the embassy press release was a muted campaign against Dabur India’s famous Dabur India’s ‘Real’ fruit juices, suggesting that the company was selling inedible goods. What provoked the embassy to intervene was a desperate plea from the company.

Dabur Nepal had received a blackmail threat from a leading media group in Nepal stating that a major campaign would be unleashed against its products if the company did not resume advertising with the group’s print and television media. The company also suspected the active involvement of anti-Indian politicians, especially the Maoists, in the campaign. This was not the first time Indian companies had felt threatened by such smear attacks and so Dabur Nepal felt compelled to approach the embassy for support.

Convinced of its case and taking the view that it is the duty of Indian diplomats to protect the interests of Indian brands and companies, the Indian embassy in Kathmandu issued a press release that sought to alert the general public to the threat of anti-Indianism masquerading as consumer protection. Nepal’s media and its political class are engaged in an animated discussion on the rights and wrongs of such diplomatic intervention in a purely commercial matter.

Should diplomats only walk the high road of high diplomacy (strategic policy, bilateral relations and regional cooperation) or should they also walk the low road of low diplomacy (commercial and business diplomacy), promoting the cause of business and commerce? This is an old debate and has played itself out in other countries too. There are equally compelling arguments on both sides of the divide.

Should diplomats restrict themselves to policy issues and only help create a framework for improved economic and commercial relations between countries, or should they dirty their hands, wet their feet, sweat it out, and earn their spurs selling brands and promoting businesses? This is by no means a settled debate, but on balance most governments, and certainly companies, would increasingly expect diplomats to do precisely what the Indian embassy in Nepal did.

Trade has long followed the flag, but in recent years the flag has followed trade. The company did. Every now and then this incestuous relationship between diplomats and businesses does irritate someone or the other. When US diplomats bat in India for American companies, many in India get shirty and upset. Just as the Nepali media is criticising the Indian embassy for getting involved in the Dabur controversy, Indian media and politicians often criticise American diplomats and officials for openly espousing the cause of their companies.

In an increasingly competitive, inter-dependent, integrated global economy, governments are expected to be more proactive in promoting the business interests of their respective companies. The Indian embassy in Nepal should, therefore, be complimented for its proactive stance.

Many politicians, officials and diplomats are actually quite comfortable with this hypocrisy of not being seen to be close, friendly and helpful to businesses in public but willing to more than bat in private. But a new generation of proactive diplomats, in embassies around the world, are willing to be more supportive of Indian business, without having to compromise on professional ethics and personal integrity. This ought to be welcomed.

Sanjaya Baru is the editor of the Business Standard newspaper in India, and served as a media advisor to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.
Juicy gossip

The Dabur scandal betrays contaminated minds rather than packets of juice

The government, as one would expect, never got off its sorry ass to find out if Dabur’s recklessness was actually to blame. If they had, the ones responsible could have been brought to book and charged with criminal negligence, sending across the image of a responsive bureaucracy. And if Dabur was found to be clean, the government, which pays itself a salary with the money from tax paid by companies like Dabur, should have protected the company with all its might from the sustained slurs.

Then there is Lainchaur’s abundance of folly and total lack of finesse. They say a diplomat is someone who can tell you to hell in such a way that you actually look forward to the trip. Someone there could clearly do a copy of Diplomacy for Dummies if there is one, if their own ‘how to screw up’ guide to diplomacy has not yet gone to the press, that is.

Sifting through newsprint consignments, switching between being an ambassador and a spokesperson for a private company, and attempting to preach to the Nepali media was all a little bit of diplomatic comedy gone stale. But it went beyond funny when a politician was threatened with his life and a girl’s education was used as leverage.

India builds us hospitals and helps us save lives. India also builds us roads so that our farmers can sell their fresh vegetables in the market. India builds us schools in out-of-the-way villages so that our girls can up in classrooms instead of Kathmandu’s swish hotels.

But the loathing India evokes in the minds of many Nepalis is once more at peak levels. Our politicians simply do not have the intellectual capacity to strategise relations with a country we should have been best of friends with. So it comes down to the louts at Lainchaur. Someone there is clearly not doing the job right. Is it time for Mr. Sood to go back for good?

Two weeks ago when most-slicing machines at Maple Leaf Foods contaminated the production line and set off a listeria outbreak. This summer, salmonella traced to contaminated eggs made 2,000 people sick in the US. And Britain’s Health and Safety Executive routinely hauls out rats and cockroaches from London’s Chinese and Indian restaurants on live TV, not to mention the rat-in-a-bread-loaf commercials that classy and imaginative. But apparently it is wiser to put across the message that a popping of a can of diet Pepsi by putting a syringe into it. The media picked up the story, dozens of copycats replicated the hoax across the country, and Pepsi faced a catastrophe.

But apparently it is wiser to suppose than to find out exactly what happened. All those wedged in this whirl are now poster boys for a textbook on idiocy.

First, the media went into a frenzy with cherry-picked facts. I wonder if any journalist bothered spending some time in Dabur’s factory in Rampur to learn if the juice scare could be traced back to the production line. Some declared war on the company, some sensitised the public, and some just chose to hug the honey pot. The lack of rigorous investigation was appalling.

Then there was the company management. If you get into a fight, you don’t go running to your daddy. That’s cool only when you’re in elementary school.

Take the ‘Pepsi panic’ in the US back in 1993. A pensioner tampered with a can of diet Pepsi by putting a syringe into it. The media picked up the story, dozens of copycats replicated the hoax across the country, and Pepsi faced a catastrophe. But they simply involved the Food and Drug Administration, traced the tampering, and came out with a full page advert in newspapers over a summer weekend that said, “Pepsi is pleased to announce… nothing”. The public were handed out drink coupons with slogan, “Thanks, America.”

No one expects Dabur to be that classy and imaginative. But involving the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control to look into its production facility and asking for a clean chit from the government; asking the Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industries to help with damage control; taking the media on a fact-finding trip; and putting across the message that a company of that scale would never mess about with the health of the people who help it to make a profit would surely have saved the company from the mess it is in today.

Keeping your commitment

FedEx helps you keep your business commitments. FedEx integrated global network of more than 141,000 employees, 665 aircraft and 44,500 vehicles delivers approximately 3.5 million packages daily to over 220 countries. When you need speed and reliability for your next international express shipment call FedEx on 977-1-4298248 or visit our service centers at Kathmandu, Kathmandu or Pokhara.
“At 3am I heard my neighbour scream. I ran to his house and saw his whole family standing in a foot of water. We realised we were being flooded. The water level rose quickly. We didn’t have time to collect anything, we just ran for our lives,” recalls Shakil Ahmad Khan of the floods that engulfed his village in 2063 BS. Back then the lack of an early warning system in Kamdi VDC of Banke district almost cost Shakil’s family and their neighbours their lives.

Things have changed in Shakil’s community since. With Practical Action’s Community Based Flood Early Warning System (CBFEWS) in place, communities in Banke, Bardia, Chitwan and Nawalparasi districts, threatened every monsoon by the Kosi, Narayani and Karnali river systems, receive warnings at least three to four hours prior to potential floods. The mechanism of CBFEWS is fairly simple. Disaster Management Committees (DMCs) are set up with volunteers in both upstream and downstream communities. These committees are trained in flood awareness and preparedness before and after floods (pic, left). But it is the communication between these DMCs that is crucial to saving lives and loss of moveable properties.

“Upstream DMC members read the gauges installed in the river (pic, right) and if the reading
Plan falters

On 14 May, police found 3 pistols, a homemade gun, 10 shotguns, 14 rounds of magazine bullets, and one SLR magazine in Tirath temple of Trilok VDC, Saptari district. It has not been determined who these arms belong to. Udaypur District Police Chief Police Manoj Kumar Yadav complains, “Terrorist activities can never be controlled without the help of the police. But those affected hesitate to inform us, as they fear being targeted.”

The first few months of the SSP looked encouraging. It set up 10 security base camps of the Nepal Police in the eastern Tarai and 13 camps of the Armed Police Force in hilly districts (see box). The SSP has been praised for its effective use of limited resources. Currently, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) maintains a network of 17 hydrological stations and 28 meteorological stations for flood forecasting and warning. CBFEWS represents an opportunity to extend a network of flood safety mechanisms across the country. Vulnerable communities have a right to such warnings, and who better to look after their security than community members themselves?

Shreedha Giri works for Practical Action

CBFEWS is also a cost-effective mechanism that involves communities right from the beginning. “Being a part of this committee has given me great satisfaction because people in our community now believe that even if nobody comes to help us we are ready to save ourselves and our belongings,” says Shakil, now Secretary of Dudiwa Lundri Disaster Management Committee. This emphasises the point that communities are not passive victims waiting for disasters to strike; they have the capacity to build resilience to disasters.

A holistic approach is key. “Prayer and tragedy can hardly minimise the loss of lives but it has its limitations. Effective communication mechanisms like CBFEWS are vital to saving lives, valuable documents and livestock,” explains Deb Niranjan Bajaj of Practical Action. “CBFEWS has proven to be very effective. We’ve also supported the communities with hand sirens, boats, life jackets, telephones and life-saving training. We run awareness campaigns using street theatre, drawing and singing competitions, and door-to-door visits to explain the dangers of floods and the importance of early warning.”

Given the recurrent troubles of those who live on or around the floodplains of Nepal, investment in early warning systems involving communities would be a cost-effective use of limited resources. Currently, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) maintains a network of 17 hydrological stations and 28 meteorological stations for flood forecasting and warning. CBFEWS represents an opportunity to extend a network of flood safety mechanisms across the country. Vulnerable communities have a right to such warnings, and who better to look after their security than community members themselves?

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On 19 July, for instance, Bhdrin Bahadur of Kusum VDC, Banka, reported river levels of 5.8m. During a 2006 community meeting, an upstream reading of 5.4m had been signalled as dangerous for downstream communities in Binauna. A level of 5.5m at 9.30 am in Kusum, it was estimated, would cause a possible flood in Binauna around 11.30 am. The reading was reported to the CEO of Banka, who alerted all the parties concerned. DMGs in Fattepur and Holiya, too, alerted their communities with hand sirens. Though Binauna escaped flooding that time around, quick communication from upstream to downstream helped alert those most at risk and allowed them to prepare safe evacuation. What’s more, the incident prompted the communities to raise the danger level to 6m (upstream) for the future.

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Tape trouble

SuHit Sharma in Kathmandu, 5 September

The Chinese ambassador to Nepal often invites editors from the Nepali media for interaction in a house in Baluwatar. A similar interaction was taking place Friday evening when a senior diplomat from a neighbouring country called. He wanted to know if news about a telephone tape could be published.

When asked what the tape was about, Kathmandu Post Editor Akkalesh Upadhyay was told that he would know once he listened to the tape. All three editors of Kantipur, Kathmandu Post and Kantipur Television were present at the time.

News started coming in from other sources as well. The tape was allegedly of Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara asking for a sum of Rs 500 million from a person claimed to be Chinese. It was not clear who the “Chinese” person was, what the numbers used for the conversation were, or how it was recorded in the first place. The diplomat’s only concern was whether it could be published that day or not.

How can we readily believe unverified news about a neighbouring country coming from another neighbour? We decided to publish the news only after listening to the tape and ascertaining its authenticity. But the informer did not want to wait for all of that; he wanted to publicise it immediately and so started looking for alternatives.

The phones of other invitees at the dinner started ringing as well. After some time, the news was broadcast on television and on Saturday, two publishing houses gave front page coverage to it.

The news given out by an embassy in Kathmandu could have been true, or not. Now that we have the media have publicised it without investigation, and elicited responses from all quarters, it will be very difficult to find out the truth.

News about monetary dealings during the prime ministerial election is not new. The Chief Secretary of ML, CP Mainali, recently revealed that the Maoists offered the party Rs 50 million to support them. The Maoists haven’t satisfactorily clarified this allegation so far, so it is not unnatural for the media to believe this tape involves the Maoists.

But how sensible is it for the media to implicate China just because a foreign embassy leaked the tape claiming the conversation was carried out with a “Chinese” person? If tomorrow some other country gives us a tape involving an Indian national, should we drag the entire Indian nation into it?

What would become of our duty to seek truth if we started publishing sensitive but unverified information without proper investigation? If we become an easy platform for one country to provoke another, where will the complex geopolitics of India and Nepal take this ‘boulder between two yams’? The tape scandal offers lessons to those concerned with these questions.

Real respect

Interview with Udyan Ganguly, Chief Executive Officer of Dabur Nepal in Karobar, 5 September

What is the condition of Dabur Nepal at present?

Pretty good. We have managed to stay put and earn the trust of our consumers even at a bleak time for the country.

How much respect has the company gained?

The communities we are working in have always appreciated and encouraged us. But the fourth estate of the nation, the media, should evaluate us fairly. Dabur has invested Rs 2.5 billion in Nepal and has helped promote Nepal for the last 20 years by exporting products made here. Dabur Nepal’s juice plant is among the seven best for tetra packs in the world. These packs are used not just for packaging juice but also for packaging milk and cream, which get spilled even sooner.

Then why is the quality of your products being questioned?

The raw materials go through at least 73 quality controls before they go outside as products. So the accusations made against us are baseless. The Food and Quality Control Department has been conducting quality tests of our products at least once a month for years now.

What do you think led to this problem?

The problem is of governance. Can a single entity have the right to launch a case, hand down verdicts and take action in a democratic society? If Nepal is the only country where this is happening, this is something everyone should think about.

This case also shows how incomplete news can create big problems. The Food and Quality Control Department has already presented its report, saying there is nothing wrong with the quality of Real juice.

How much has this scandal discouraged you?

We are disheartened to an extent. Everyone who is interested in the industrial development of Nepal should have been at least impartial if not sympathetic toward us. Our corporate discipline does not let us ignore the sentiments have been hurt.

Could you have ignored the matter?

Our corporate discipline does not let us ignore the questions raised against our products. We had to speak in order to clear facts and convey the truth to our consumers. Otherwise, we would have never had to offer clarifications regarding our high-tech machines and production process.

How will Nepal’s industrial environment be affected by the Dabur case?

All the industries in India are closely observing our situation in Nepal. We are also influential members of India’s PCCI and CNI. Also, everyone who intends to invest in Nepal does not do so without consulting Dabur Nepal. Unilever, Surya Nepal, and Asian Paints. When multinational companies get into trouble, won’t the industrial environment of the country suffer?

Long-distance call

Gumam Luizel in Nagarkot, 6 September

The alleged telephone conversation between Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara and an unnamed “Chinese” is not being analysed to the extent that it deserves to be. Instead of trying to investigate the authenticity and content of the tape, all sides seem to be trying to exploit the incident for their own benefit. One can’t say the Maoists have already condemned it, so we don’t need to do anything. The government’s disinterest in investigating this is objectionable. If phones were being tapped, who was doing it? If it was some outside agency, what does it mean?

Mahara himself admitted to his party paper Janashakti on Saturday that it could be his voice. But he added, “with modern technology my words could be amplified and taken out of context”. The Maoists are obviously trying to invoke “technology” to absolve themselves of blame. After all, the same technology that “faked” the conversation can also be used to prove that it is indeed fake.

The Maoists themselves created the conditions for people to believe the accusations are credible. Their leaders shun between Kathmandu and Hong Kong and Singapore all the time, or they meet Indian intelligence officials, or have secret meetings with the Chinese. They take loud recourse in ‘nationalism’ but are themselves active in inviting foreign interference.

China has always been mixed up in controversies about interference in Nepali politics. This time, it is China’s turn. The reason is that the government and the political parties have not shown any inclination to control it. At this rate, foreigners will be taking part in future elections, and they will form future governments.
I am a believer in a socialist economy, where everyone has equal social, economic and political rights under democracy.

This is a critical time. We have achieved democracy. People have the power. Feudalism and monarchy have been eliminated. It is time to give the country stability by quitting the politics of guns. The country needs a constitution.

We need to establish democratic values by writing a good, democratic constitution. But there is no magic wand that will do it for us. We have to develop it by ourselves.

There can be no comparison with America which has had a democratic history of 400 years. We can look at our neighbour to the south. In 63 years of democratic practice, only 15 parliamentary elections have been held. Ethnicity and religions are no longer issues for them. Socio-economic transformation has been the issue in recent elections. India is prospering due to democracy.

So much can be done if we can institutionalise democracy and make use of our resources. Although it has been 20 years since democracy has been in practice, the Maoist insurGENCY lasted for 10 years and the king ruled for 3 years. So democracy has only been practised for five years.

To institutionalise the democratic republic is our priority. We should move ahead by managing weapons and writing a constitution. Political parties have their own ideologies but they should know nothing is above the country.

We can make our country beautiful. But we are wasting most of our time criticizing foreigners. We cannot set an example by resolving our differences among us. We worked in unison during the CA elections. But we could not work together after the elections. We all are to blame for this.

Our next door neighbours, one democratic and the other communist, are progressing at high speed. Can we not learn anything from them? Can we not benefit from them?

I am worried as to what will happen if we are not able to institutionalise our achievements. We are at a serious juncture. The economy is going down, ethnic and regional issues are being raised. This has made me worried.

The CA is the place to resolve these issues through discussion. History has shown that there is no end to fighting. The Nepali people cannot afford another conflict.
Rumble in the jungle

Ramdev can say nasty things about Coke and get away with it, it’s so fashionable to take potshots at multinationals after all. Why shouldn’t the Ass stick his snout in? Here are news items he’s looking forward to:

‘Soda Found in Pepsi’

KFC Admits It Mixes Chicken in Extra Crispy Boneless Bucket

The way they are being courted by left and right, the Madhes baddies are going from being king-makers to kingpins. JP broke off from Upadro and Bijay Babu locked up his MPs in the parliamentary party office during Round Seven. Comrade Twitchy was twitching more than usual on Tuesday because he was so nervous about whether the guys he thought he bought would show up to vote. But some Tarai MPs are miffed at not being sufficiently rewarded for their role in keeping the Baddies out of power and for their supreme sacrifice in turning down tempting portfolios. Those wearing T-shirts that say ‘We Stayed Neutral And All We Got Was This Lousy T-shirt’ are Awesome’s last hope.

In the end, what did the trick on Tuesday afternoon was the tape of the wiretap that Uncooked leaked to the press. That this is authentically Mahara Kamred’s voice there is no doubt, which means we all need to be careful henceforth on our mobiles. But was that really Mr Cheng playing Chinese whispers at the other end of the line? And why did the Baddies need the Northern Centre to supply the dough? Jamkatel comred with his casino connections could have delivered it by the sackloads to Perish Hill within 12 hours. Mahara is in a fix: CA members who had offered themselves for sale now say they don’t want Rs 1 kaned in cash, but in gold biscuits.

The Rastrafarian Bank was forced to ban the import of gold when it found out that gold worth Rs 40 billion was brought into the country in the last fiscal year. Which means we spent all the hard currency we earned from our exports on importing gold, most of which we smuggled into India because of the INR 35 price diff on every 10 grams. This makes us one of the world’s top gold exporting countries, and the beauty of it is that none of the revenue comes back to Nepal. Uncle Ban decides to punish the wrong dude and writes a letter which no self-respecting govt would even agree to receive because it questions the legitimacy of a member state, equates it with some genocidal central African republic, and some P5 members threaten us with Chapter 7. Look, if you love Stalin and Mao Zedong so much, take them home with you and wage a revolution in your own backyard. Someone tell the Mao Man they’re actually hurting the UN’s credibility in Nepal by being the only party still so openly supportive of UNMIN.

And now for the part you’ve all been patiently waiting for, the announcement of the Donkey’s Actual Headlines of the Week Award, which are in order of merit:

1. Overworked Equine in Donkey Heaven (personal favourite)
2. PAC Smells Rat (hmm, quite a lot of rat-smelling going on lately)
3. Butt Backs Down (Pakistan cricket scandal)
4. Ban on UNMIN (not making any of this up)

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