Highways across Nepal have been blocked by landslides and floods as late monsoon rains batter the country. Kathmandu’s road lifeline was blocked in Dhading creating a monstrous jam that lasted two days. The Kathmandu-Lhasa highway has been blocked by major slips along the Bhote Kosi, closing the route for nearly a week. The new Beni-Jomsom track has been washed away in several places. In Surkhet, highways are blocked by transporters after angry locals threw a bus driver into the Bheri River when his vehicle ran over a girl. The politics is also stuck, with no end in sight to the deadlock ahead of the eighth round of elections in parliament for a new prime minister.

Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood speaks to Nepali Times about being in the news for all the wrong reasons.
DELIKNING THE ECONOMY FROM POLITICS

That is easier said than done. But Nepal's politics is in deep crisis and our rulers are oblivious to the urgency of the situation. The stability of the state today, everyone knows what needs to be done. Politicians of every hue repeat the old refrain over and over again. "We need to work together."

But they just can't get themselves to do it. If we wait for the politicians to get their act together, this country is doomed. Technocrats in government could drink politics from the economy and development, as researcher Raul Schiappa-Pieta argues in his Guest Column (below). In the past two months we have re-opened highways and the bureaucracy is still functioning. But just for the first time in a long time we have competent civil servants in the Finance Ministry, the Rastra Bank and the National Planning Commission, guess how much money the government has spent on development? Zero. Dizil. Even though constitutional provisions allow the government to spend up to one-third of last year's allocations when the budget is not passed, political disarray at the caucuses that nothing has been sent to the VDCs and DDCs for local development.

The cynical would say this is just as well because it would probably be plundered anyway by the three-party dictatorship in the districts. It is actually a miracle things haven't completely ground to a halt. Somehow, landslides are still being cleared to re-open highways and the bureaucracy is still functioning. But just for the first time in a long time we have competent civil servants in the Finance Ministry, the Rastra Bank and the National Planning Commission.

Learning from Peru's transition

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

On 23 November, 2000, Francisco Boza Lascurain had been approached as Peru's president by phone from Japan, home of his ancestors. By that time, the noose around his neck had tightened so much he had no choice. But what really did him in was the lifting of the lid on the corrupt and shady dealings of his government. In September, a video was disclosed in which Vladimir Montesinos, Fujimori's right-hand man, political operative and Machiavellian head of the powerful National Intelligence Service, was seen helming a congressman. An avalanche of videos would follow, compromising political figures and businessmen who peddled favours with Montesinos. This triggered a scandal that led to the downfall of the Fujimori regime.

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NEW DELHI—During the middle to late 1980s, there was a sense of siege in India. The Khalistan movement resulted in the assassination of one of the country’s most powerful Prime Ministers ever, Indira Gandhi. Delhi had rigged the 1987 Jammu and Kashmir assembly elections, sowing the seeds of a separatist movement that, with Pakistani backing, has ravaged the state ever since.

The northeast was in turmoil and violence became an entrenched part of Assamese politics. The IPKF experiment in Sri Lanka had gone terribly wrong. Pakistan, with Chinese help, was developing nuclear capabilities. And despite some reforms the economy was in crisis, and foreign exchange reserves had almost run out. All of this was taking place in the backdrop of a Kashmir steadily dipped. Indo-Pakistan tensions persisted, but India’s unity held. In fact, separatist leadership has to further alienation, which the handling of the situation has led to. The administration’s siege is once again unmistakable. A new lot of younger, radical leaders, many inspired by Islamism, have come to terms with rising regional aspirations. Newer elites were accommodated. Communal riots occurred, but did not destroy the larger Hindu-Muslim equilibrium. The Khalistan movement persisted, and the Kashmir militancy grew, but India’s unity held. In fact, between 2002-08, violence in Kashmir steadily dipped. It is not that inequality was increasing, but economic reforms unleashed India’s entrepreneurial energies and created a huge middle class. The world was forced to recognise India, and its growing political and economic might, on largely Delhi’s terms. And from being hounded by Pakistan, India came to be spoken about in the same breath as China as future superpowers.

While Indian growth remains robust, the sense of being under siege is once again unmistakable in power corridors in the Indian capital. For four months now, street protests have racked Kashmir. The administration’s confused and then repressive handling of the situation has led to further alienation, which the separatist leaders has capitalised on. Senior officials believe this is a passing phase, but outside observers say this is unprecedented. A new lot of young, radical leaders, many inspired by Islamism, have emerged. Even if the centre takes major steps like repealing draconian security legislations, a long-standing demand, it may not be enough to douse the anger. The Naxal insurgency in central India is growing slowly, but systematically. The state’s hard security approach has eliminated many top Maoist leaders. Politically, mainstream parties are trying to make inroads into the tribal belt and appropriate some Maoist issues. But security experts predict the violence will only increase, the Maoists will continue to have a fertile constituency as a result of inequitable state policies, and urban areas may be targeted. In the northeast, the recent 68 day Manipur blockade was a reminder that many complex identity and resource related battles in the region remain unresolved. There is need to address the root causes of the unrest, which will have troubling implications for India. A ‘tough’ home minister is on top of intelligence inputs and coordinating responses. Chinese assertiveness has become an increasing worry, with the prime minister for the first time hinting last week that India may need to respond. Nepal often neglects this broader context. India is insecure, but paradoxically in some ways, it is also strong and belligerent. If there is an attack in its territory because of a lapse, deliberate or not, from Nepal’s side, the security establishment will unleash its destructive potential. The first target will be closing the border, which will have enormous implications for our people and politics.

The Nepali state, for the sake of the Nepal people and the bilateral relationship, must be sensitive to Delhi’s security concerns. Modernising security systems at the Kathmandu airport, strengthening the immigration systems, allowing sky marshals, and even considering the extradition treaty do not really erode our sovereignty. The real loss of sovereignty is when our politicians beg diplomats to support them to become the PM, or get used in games India plays in Nepal’s internal politics. The Nepali state’s inefficacy and insensitivity is strengthening the Indian security hardline approach. If the Delhi hawks win, the Nepali people will lose.
Nepali Times: All the current media attention on you must be a bit stressful?

Rakesh Sood: Before taking over my present assignment in Kathmandu, I spent three years in Afghanistan which was also stressful, but in a different way... so I have become used to it. But on a serious note, the Nepali media’s focus on India and the Indian ambassador is a reflection of the intimate relationship between our two countries and our people. The breadth and depth of our relationship makes it both intense and complex. However, I must confess that misleading and baseless reports carried by certain sections of the media are hardly helpful.

Is there anything about being an Indian ambassador to Nepal that makes it different from being an Indian ambassador to anywhere else?

As I mentioned, the Nepal-India relationship is unique. Our shared history and cultural traditions, people-to-people relations going back into millennia, open border, extensive economic and commercial linkages, our role as Nepal’s key partner in its economic development: all these factors make India-Nepal relationship an extremely close and multi-dimensional. Naturally, any close relationship becomes a sensitive relationship and this makes the task of the Indian Ambassador to Nepal, both challenging and rewarding.

There has been criticism of the response from your Embassy on the negative reports of Indian products in Nepal, especially the stoppage of newsprint and advertising to media critical of India.

First, Dabur is an Indian brand but the product in question was produced by Dabur (Nepal), a joint venture in your country which has close ties with Nepal, India’s interest in political stability in Nepal arises from our open border, the large Nepali diaspora in India and close economic and commercial linkages between the two countries. However, it is not an Indian policy that can bring about political stability but the desire and commitment of Nepali political leadership. India believes that the peace process in Nepal, which is understandable.

As far as stoppage of newsprint is concerned, this is a method in which the Mahara Tape was released hurt the credibility of the content? I think, this question should be addressed to those who have released the tape. However, on the question of substance, Nepal’s Constituent Assembly is already seized of the matter and therefore I will refrain from making any comments on it. Let the Nepali authorities undertake their own investigation regarding the authenticity of the contents of the tape.

What is your view on another four month extension of UNMIN’s mandate in Nepal?

India has consistently supported the peace process in Nepal. We welcomed the establishment of UNMIN in 2007. In fact, we provided more than 80 vehicles and 30 wireless sets to UNMIN to help UNMIN activities get going and even today the containers in which the weapons are stored are provided by India. Extension of UNMIN’s mandate is a decision taken by concerned Nepali authorities. India believes that the peace process in Nepal, in order to have legitimacy, must be Nepali-led and Nepali-driven.

Is it true India is against the formation of a Maoist-led government in Nepal?

The formation of the government in Nepal is a matter to be decided by the people of Nepal. As a neighbouring country which has close ties with Nepal, India’s interest is seeing the peace process being brought to its logical conclusion, so that a new constitution can be drafted, thus providing for political stability and creating an enabling environment for Nepal’s economic development.

As far as the issue of providing advertisements by private companies is concerned, these are decisions that corporate houses take on their own, depending on their marketing and media strategies. In doing so, they are bound to take into account that in terms of brand image, advertising of Indian products or joint ventures would be more consistent through channels which present a balanced image about India and India-Nepal relations, which is understandable. I must add that there are more than 300 Indian joint ventures in Nepal which provide direct employment to more than 30,000 Nepali citizens and indirect employment to more than twice that number, and has contributed nearly Rs 15 billion to the Nepali exchequer last year.

Wouldn’t you agree that the method in which the Mahara Tape was released hurt the credibility of the content? I think, this question should be addressed to those who have released the tape. However, on the question of substance, Nepal’s Constituent Assembly is already seized of the matter and therefore I will refrain from making any comments on it. Let the Nepali authorities undertake their own investigation regarding the authenticity of the contents of the tape.

A full interview of Rakesh Sood, Indian ambassador to Nepal, in the Nepali Times, can be read [here](http://nepalitimes.com/).
Of jobs and toilets

I am often asked about the differences between the private sector and the development sector. In the former, goals are narrow and sharper: beat the competition, meet the quarterly sales targets, show profits for growth, and the like.

For a firm, the metrics and the consequences move in the same direction: if you do not sell enough, you will not be able to pay your employees.

In the development sector, however, goals loiter with an overture of moral superiority. They are also diffused: reduce poverty, make poor people’s health better, raise employment levels, and so on. In development, the metrics and the consequences move in opposite directions: if poverty is not reduced more money is lobbed at the problem. There has been much criticism of the development sector for not having agreed-upon sharper, clearer and measurable goals to have agreed-upon sharper, smarter, persistent development goals.

Sanitation such as safe water and toilets. Of these, the first and the third are especially important in that they are about earnings and basic hygiene that serve as visible-to-all indicators for progress.

In the past, this column had argued for ways to promote entrepreneurialism as a way to create jobs. After all, a large, young and restless population with nothing to do is a time bomb for mass social unrest.

But it’s also increasingly clear that to get entrepreneurialism programs going on at scale, new thinking has to come up. With about 500 Nepalis leaving for overseas jobs every day, the government has little incentive to seriously look for ways to create in-country jobs.

Some businesses, elected to the CA and who enjoy doubling up as economic statesmen in the media, could have been credible advocates for job creation. Understandably, they see more value in being narrowly pro-industry – demurring when it comes to promoting pro-market and pro-competition views that ultimately benefit job seekers and consumers. And development agencies set up to help promote the private sector tend to bring highfalutin templates from other countries, and shoehorn Nepali companies to fit in without bothering to invest in strengthening the local ecosystem in which jobs creation can flourish. Unless there’s a high-level time-bound public-private type of a National Jobs Agency, specifically tasked to propagate and practice policies that create real jobs, addressing unemployment is likely to remain a problem.

Improvement of sanitation, yields a nine-dollar return through spillover health, education and livelihood benefits on every dollar spent, it remains a development scandal as only 74 out of 3,915 VDCs in Nepal have been declared open-defecation free, and 16 million Nepalis still have no proper sanitation.

New Nepal needs to create jobs and toilets to meet MDG goals

Nepal, by 2015. To that end, for the last 10 years, most development institutions in Nepal have recast their work as contributions to meeting the MDGs for Nepal.

Now that the third leg of the 15-year stretch has started, how close is Nepal to meeting its MDGs? It’s on track, according to a recent report published by the NCPAD UNDP, except in achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all, achieving universal access to reproductive health, and in halving proportion of population without access to improved sanitation such as safe water and toilets. Of these, the first and the third are especially important in that they are about earnings and basic hygiene that serve as visible-to-all indicators for progress.

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Taking job creation and sanitation as emblems of Nepal’s persistent development challenges, the sharper, smarter, private-sector-like goals for New Nepal are abundantly clear: jobs and toilets for all.

DTH Launched

HomeTV, Nepal’s first Direct to Home (DTH), was launched this week. The technology provides TV channels directly in digital format via signals transmitted from a geostationary satellite. Home TV is a product franchise of Satellite Channel Pvt. Ltd., which is the DTH service provider for 80 channels on demand for national and international channels.

Go England

Coupon number 008707 has won the Carlsberg ‘Win a Trip to England’ campaign. The winner along with a friend will go to England and watch the match between England and France at Wembley Stadium.

Aiding bank

NIC Foundation, supported by NIC Bank, has donated Rs 120,000 to Biratneshwar Old Age Home in Biratnagar. The foundation has also been continuously providing food to the home.

Bike makeover

Morang Auto Works, sole distributor of Yamaha Motorcycles in Nepal, has now introduced the FZ-S. The 153cc 4-stroke bike claims to have been developed for better mileage than its older versions.

FESTIVE OFFERS

Paach Tola Sun Pakka: With a purchase of every Tata car or jeep, the buyer will get 58.32 grams of gold. In addition, the company will pay a year’s vehicle tax, and the registration and ownership transfer fee.

Dashain-Tihar ko Bela, Hyundai ko Upahar Mel: Hyundai Santro, i10 and 20 buyers can win a gift package worth Rs 120,000 which includes an HP laptop or a Samsung Galaxy Mobile, free insurance for a year, free ownership transfer during the offer period, and the cars as bumper prize.

Nokia Cruising Dashain: Neoteric Nepal and Paramount Electronics, authorised sellers of Nokia mobile phone, are giving away a coupon with every Nokia purchase. Twelve lucky winners will go on a Star Cruise Trip, six will win 100cc Bajaj Platina bikes, six will take 42 inch Panasonic Plasma TV, and 60 will get Panasonic LS 80 digital cameras.

New Nepal needs to create jobs and toilets to meet MDG goals

Toilets of jobs and toilets

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New Nepal needs to create jobs and toilets to meet MDG goals

Toilets of jobs and toilets
Amrit’s rocky road

The music is rock, but the rhythm of its musical heartbeat, the melody of its flute interludes and the earthy jhayure lyrics give Amrit Gurung’s new album a distinctive Nepali sound. This folk-rock fusion at its best, and if one were to give this hybrid genre a label it may be “Himalayan Blues Rock”. The songs are about the ups and downs of life in the mountains of Nepal, the hard knock life, of relationships and existence itself. These are the songs of our ancestors that echoed in the mountains and valleys of Langtang, in Mustang, Lamjung, Paavan Mathema aims to own 10 per cent of the market share.”

Late, but in a couple of years, Volkswagen Beetle owners can expect support from the dealership network. Ronnie Marais, Director of the Volkswagen Group’s standards and there is an excellent network to make all spare parts available.” Even classic Beetle owners can expect support from the service centre.

Volkswagen was a company run by engineers. Innovation and customer satisfaction have been our strengths,” says Keller. “Our entry in Nepal might be a bit late, but in a couple of years, Volkswagen Beetle owners can expect support from the service centre.

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There’s more to Volkswagen than the Beetle

Vishal Group replies, “The cars are designed to be tough and have higher suspensions to suit the roads here. We select the models only after a careful study.” Indeed, a look at Jetha, a family sedan, confirms that even high-end models have upgraded suspensions. The SUVs with their rugged off-road names — Tiguan and Touareg — have so far been the most popular here.

The showroom is complemented by a fully equipped service centre inside the Balaju Industrial District. Ronnie Marais, Director of the Regional Aftersales in Singapore, says, “The technicians in the service centre have been specially trained to meet the Volkswagen Group’s standards and there is an excellent network to make all spare parts available.” Even classic Beetle owners can expect support from the centre.

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An insider’s guide to Helambu

Centuries before weighty tomes such as the Lonely Planet and the Rough Guide became essential packing for Western visitors to Nepal, Lamas and other literate figures in greater Tibet were busy compiling their own religious and cultural guidebooks about the far reaches of their territory. The genre of scholarly production that can be called ‘Tibetan guidebook literature’ ranges in quality and interest, but all these travel texts invariably include lists of auspicious and powerful holy places to visit and meditate at while en route. In addition, the more absorbing handbooks include ethnological observations on local cultural traditions and the communities who practice them. One particularly noted example is the Guidebook to Lapch (extensively studied by anthropologist and Tibetologist Tony Huber), which, according to its colophon, was compiled by a Buddhist monk in 1901.

Guide to the Hidden Land of the Yolmo Snow Enclosure and its History, a 28-page religious travel companion by Khempo Nyima Dondrup, translated into Nepali by Punya Prasad Parajuli and Padam Singh Gale, and into English by Matthew Akister, is an edited and annotated compilation of a number of Tibetan-language guides to Yolmo (also known as Helambu in Nepal). Although somewhat marred by a shortage of contextual information about the documents that it surveys, the booklet includes a black and white pilgrimage map to the region and 32 colour plates illustrating notable sites.

Although certainly portable and reasonably priced at Nrs 300, it is not immediately clear for whom this pocketbook was written, other than the well-networked community of English speaking Western Buddhists. Of course, not all books need to be written for a specific readership, but the present Guide seems to fall between categories. However, kudos goes to Vajra Publications for continuing to translate, publish and disseminate such material to a wider public.

Mark Turin

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Mark Turin
Enigma, solo art exhibition by Yash Vardhan More. Till Friday 17 September, Insago-De Café Gallery, Nagpothani, 4442464

Gajitra, solo painting exhibition by acclaimed artist Ragini Upashta Gorta. Till 30 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4216048

Repeating Bodies Structural Space, exhibition of paintings by Sanjeev Maharjan and Sunita Maharjan. 18 to 29 September, 11am to 6pm, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamshikhel, Lalitpur, 5521120

House of Music, screening of Fairy tale of Kathmandu. Saturday 18 September, 4pm to 7pm, Kathmandu Academy, House of Music, Thamel

USEF-Nepal, screening of My Big Fat Greek Wedding. Friday 17 September, 7pm, USEF Nepal, Gyaneshwor, 4414598, advance booking required

Bandipur Festival 2010, holiday packages to Bandipur, food stalls and dance and cultural shows. 23 to 25 September, Tundikhel, Kathmandu, 10am to 7pm

Rivers of Pilgrimage, The Indian Cultural Centre and Siddartha Art Gallery presents an exhibition of photographs from India and Nepal. 17 to 30 September, 4.30pm; also a talk program with photographers Prashant Panjiar, Ravi Agarwal, Kishor Kayastha and others on 19 September, 4pm, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal

Vulture Conservation Festival 2010, vulture nest watching, jungle hiking, camping and other activities, organized by Roots and Shoots Nepal. From 24 to 26 September, Basabasati, Nawalparasi, call 4107599 for registration

Botany Art, learn how to draw and paint flowers with Neera Joshi Pradhan. From 17 to 19 September, Studio Petals, Centre for Fine Art, Pulchok, studiopetals@wlink.com

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Moksh, performances by Albatross and bands part of KJC Chevrolet Concert Series for promoting Chevrolet’s “Give life Blood” initiative. Saturday 18 September, starts 4pm, Moksh, Jhamshikhel, 5526212

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, KJC brings renowned German musician Rainer Pusch to town. Till 20 September, KJC, Jhamshikhel, 5013554, info@katjazz.com.np

The Factory, a trendy restobar for a refreshing stopover in the chaos that is Thamel. Great food and drinks, with zesty music. Mandala Street, Thamel

Arabian Nights in The Cafe, taste the culinary delights from the Middle-East. Every Friday from 6.30 pm onwards, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234/4489362

Chopstix, savoury Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion

Mike’s Breakfast, huge breakfasts and a never-ending supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting. Naxal, 4424303

Yin Yang Restaurant, east meets west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Get a little spice in your life with their pad thai or green curry. If you can’t handle the heat, fall into the safety net of their western dishes. Thamel, 10am-10pm, 4701510

Saturday @ Hyatt, take a refreshing dip in the pool and sample the delicious barbeque in open air. Every Saturday from 12.30pm to 4pm at the poolside, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234

Kathmandu Times
10 - 16 SEPTEMBER 2010 #519
Dhanyalal Buddha Baenyat, MD

Do you know that you can be perceived as a security risk if you have severe diarrhoea and are trying to enter the USA? Returning from Kathmandu, many tourists go home with a ‘valley’ belly, a gentle (and sometimes not so gentle) reminder of the hygienic state of Kathmandu. When they encounter friends and family, the standard questions are: ‘Did you have a good time?’ and ‘Did you get sick?’ The answers to both are usually ‘yes’. And sick generally means diarrhoea. But how would you feel if you are suspected of being a terrorist by the US government simply because you have severe diarrhoea? Two days had passed since the attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 at Detroit airport, USA, at the end of 2009. The airline authorities were understandably tense. Unfortunately for the Nigerian man who flew into the airport suffering bouts of diarrhoea, this did not bode well. As he had spent so much time in the toilet during the flight, the plane was not allowed to land until it taxied down Detroit airport, triggering panic amongst his fellow-travellers. After detailed questioning and examination, however, it was determined that the gentleman from Nigeria was suffering from a genuine case of severe gastroenteritis.

What can you do to avoid rushing to the bathroom frequently while travelling? In local vehicles, for instance a Nepali bus, the matter may be more serious as there are no bathrooms and the driver may not cooperate with you. To avoid such dire situations, following the standard rules of proper hygiene (drinking boiled water, washing your hands with soap and water) is of important. But it might be useful to get hold of some loperamide (Imodium), which works quickly by slowing the transit time in the gut. Two tablets of loperamide for adults, to start with, will be very effective, and may preclude security alerts (or total humiliation). Just remember this is only for temporary relief: it is advisable to see a doctor as soon as possible.

DHANVANTARI

**GREEN SCENE**

**Potty photo prize**

Most Nepalis and travellers to Nepal will have built a toilet paper ‘nest’ around the seats of a public bathroom, to avoid direct contact with the commode. Others still prefer the no-contact squatting toilet because they are presumed to be relatively safer. Even have to duck behind a bush, whereas women have had to innovate and make their own urinals, as has the American invention, ‘Go Girl’, - a funnel-like device that can be adjusted so that women can stand and urinate and avoid the hassle of hoovering over filthy toilet seats.

Perhaps a little exercise that would make our disregard for public hygiene glare at us in the face would do us good. Such must have been the thought behind the potty photo prize announced by Clean Energy Nepal (CEN), in collaboration with Environment and Public Health Organization (ENPHO) and the Resource Centre Network Nepal (RCNN), all of whom work to achieve one of the Millennium Development Goals of achieving sanitation utopia. There are nine categories of toilets that you have to capture: household, institutional, and community toilets, all of which will demonstrate the difference in standards, and perhaps also the difference in attitudes, hygiene, and socio-economic status. The competition is open to ages 15-35, and the pictures will be exhibited on World Toilet Day, 19 November and the winners will be awarded too.

Valley belly

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Valley belly
Amrit Gurung and his music are barometers for the mood of the country

Unlike the cynics among us who see Nepal as a nest of self-obsessed politics, Amrit sees it for what it is, and his subtile activism arises from the great love he has for this country and its people. So much so that when two of his band members disappeared in Japan after a concert, he was so embarrassed that his friends ditched their country that he almost quit music.

With love comes pain and disappointment, and this is visible in his eyes as he talks about his journeys over the last few decades. Before the war, he was welcomed everywhere he went, offered shelter, and fed. During and after the war, villagers became more suspicious and he found himself an unwelcome guest because “Nepalis had stopped trusting each other,” he says. “Yesto din pani dekhnu paryo. Never thought I would see a day like that.”

In an effort to stem the tide of chaos, he played charity concerts during the war called Shanti Ko Lagi! Shikshya (Education for Peace) to help raise funds for school children, and through Sundar Shanta Nepal- Shanti Sangeet Yatra in 2003 he toured the country singing songs of peace and love.

On Tuesday, Amrit released a new album with his band Nepathya called “Aina Jhyal”. Nepathya’s last two albums digressed from the usual to speak of the malaise in the country, the new album revisits the folk glory of its past hinting towards normalisation.

Art, they say, reflects reality. With so many miles and conversations behind him, perhaps Amrit is the barometer of the mood of the country. As Nepathya’s music steps away from melancholy to something more hopeful, there may yet be some hope for our future, but not unless we take a leaf out of his book and join him on his journey.

See also: Amrit’s rocky road, p 8
**Plants and slants**

By allowing itself to be manipulated, the media sacrifices its credibility

Objectivity in news is difficult to determine even in normal times. When shady players are looking for opportunities to manipulate information in a transitional polity, it becomes almost impossible to guard against manufactured realities. The tape scandal involving Maoist strongman Krishna Bahadur Mahara and an unidentifiable interlocutor probably falls in the latter category.

The conversation on the controversial tape is perhaps factual. Mahara has not disowned it. The Maoists are more interested in the mechanism, morality and legality of tapping private discussions and intimate negotiations. In all probability, Mahara discussed things that he is recorded to have discussed. But with whom?

That gave another twist to the story in the media. He went on to disclose that they had been approached while socialising with the Chinese ambassador. Which is why the public brushed off the scandal with a shrug. That could be the reason the government has refused to take the matter seriously. Political capital is being made out of the scandal on the floor of the legislature, but no judicial investigation has been ordered so far.

It is all right for tabloids and sensational television to fall for planted stories. The mainstream media should know better than to credit media that want it contained. The Chinese man offers Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara Rs 500 million to help obtain a majority in the ongoing prime ministerial election. The Chinese delegation also gave a formal invitation to the President to attend the closing ceremony of the ongoing Shanghai Expo later this year, where he is likely to meet the Chinese President and Premier.

**UNMIN term**

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has extended the UNMIN’s term by four months for the last time, as requested by Nepal government and UCPN (Maoist) on Wednesday. It is the seventh time the

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**Dental Problems despite daily brushing?**

Time to change your toothpaste. Switch to Dabur Red Paste. Enriched with the protective goodness of Cloves, Mint (Pudina) and Szechuan Pepper (Timur) among 13 natural germ-fighting ingredients, Dabur Red Paste always keeps your teeth and gums healthy and strong. So much so, you’ll say -

**Problems तर हट !**
Dina Tamang picks up her exercise book when the school bell rings to signal the end of class. But she is not rushing out to play, the ninth grader at a government school in Lalitpur heads to a brand new computer lab. Dina sits at her own computer with the rest of the class and follows her teacher, Sabina Maharjan, intently with the intricacies of HTML coding.

Given the well-equipped digital lab, one would think that Dina goes to one of the city’s fancy private schools. But she is a student at the government-run Adarsha Saula School in Sainbu, 10 km south of the capital.

Unlike most public schools, Adarsha Saula has a computer lab with 20 computers, thanks to an initiative of the Rotary Club of Patan which has so far donated 273 computers to 27 government schools in Lalitpur District.

The initiative has helped at least partially bridge Nepal’s digital divide and the gap between private and public schools. “We realised that for children today it is no longer enough to be able to read and write, they should be computer literate,” says Siba Bhakta Rajbhandari, who heads the club’s computer donation program.

While the club grants the computers, the schools are required to build a suitable room with necessary furniture. The school is also responsible for employing a trained computer teacher.

At Adarsha Saula, for instance, Grade 6-10 get computer instruction and most students have at least two classes every week. “I wish we had more time on the computers,” says Dina as she handles the mouse to find a program icon on the monitor.

Rotary’s initiative in Lalitpur has to be replicated all over the country for the digital gap to be really bridged. Despite efforts such as the One Laptop per Child project, public schools in Nepal still remain technologically deprived. “We run computer classes only for Grades 7 and 8. The students are too poor to pay a fee, how can we afford to maintain the systems and train teachers?” complains Mina Shrestha, the principal of Balkumari School.

The government pays teachers’ salaries and gives minimum allowance for operational expenses, but does not provide additional support. Some schools charge the students a minimal fee for computer usage. Others have been collecting funds by letting the community use the computer after school hours.

But luckily for the students at Adarsha Saula, this problem does not exist. “Education today must include information technology,” acknowledges Bhim Sapkota, the principal. He is proud that his students will be computer literate and have better opportunities when they leave school.

When asked if the computer classes are helping them, tenth grader Rajendra Rai nods his head vigorously: “I now know I want to be a computer engineer when I grow up, and that is only because the school set up this lab.”

City businessmen help government schools with computer and internet access

Narrowing the digital divide

PAAVAN MATHEMA

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The club raised money locally and collaborated with international Rotary clubs to buy the computers. At first, the club gave a few computers to each school, but the children just didn’t get enough time on them.

“We now focus on setting up digital labs with at least 10 computers and a trained teacher,” explains Rajbhandari.

At Adarsha Saula, for instance, Grade 6-10 get computer instruction and most students have at least two classes every week.

“I wish we had more time on the computers,” says Dina as she handles the mouse to find a program icon on the monitor.

Sabina Maharjan (pic, top) says the students are eager to learn more than what is prescribed in the curriculum. Recently, the school acquired an internet connection, allowing students to learn not just word processing but also to navigate the internet.

Chaudhary Group is following up on its Gyan Uday Scholarship campaign, with a new scheme to give away notebooks to school students nationwide. Coupons for the computers will be found in packets of Wai Wai instant noodles. Lucky winners will get small laptops designed for educational purposes. Under the Wai Wai Gyan Uday Micro-Laptop Yojana an adult who wins a coupon has to nominate a school student to get it.

Nepal Times

17-23 SEPTEMBER 2010 #520

NATION | 13

PICS: NEL DEEY

Dailekh bridges the digital divide #360

Instead of one laptop per child #360

Lucky laptops

NepalTimes.com
There were days when Kathmandu’s movie-goers were herded into creaky seats, got pushed and shoved, and had to tolerate rowdy crowds. All that changed with the revamp of Jai Nepal and Kumari cinemas in 2000. Now, Quest Entertainment takes the movie-going experience another leap forward with the launch of QFX: the first movie exhibition brand in Nepal to be unveiled with Central Cinema in Civil Mall, the first all-digital multiplex in Nepal.

“The idea behind QFX is to give a consistent brand experience and quality assurance to the audience,” says Bhaskar Dhungana of Quest Entertainment.

Dhungana and his partners, Nakun Uddin and Rajesh Siddhi, could have tied up with an international brand, but decided to go the difficult way.

“We did not want to sacrifice our identity and perhaps half the revenue only for a logo and good management. Our experience in Jai Nepal and Kumari has given us the confidence that we are capable of building a globally competitive brand ourselves,” Dhungana told Nepali Times.

This is organic growth from the renovation of Jai Nepal, ten years of running quality movie theatres in Kathmandu, film production and distribution, and even helping the digitisation of cinemas across the country.

With QFX, the group wants to build a modern Nepali brand with global appeal. “QFX exudes confidence, adventure and the spirit of contemporary Nepali youth,” explains design consultant Nabin Joshi who helped with the branding of the new venture.

“Business is fraught with risks, but what we do know is that quality sells in Nepal,” explains Dhungana, “we renovated Jai Nepal at the peak of the war, nobody thought it would work but we proved that the market existed.”

Rubeena Mahato
Annappurna Post: You are running in the election for the post of president in 12th national convention, why?
Bhim Bahadur Tamang: My candidacy is for change, to make the Congress progressive and committed to those left behind. I gave my candidacy to address the aspirations of the party cadres. We are the basis from where the party can move forward.

How is your own candidacy seen by cadres?
Aren’t they asking for younger leaders?
The youth are longing for change. We have given priority for the aspiration of the youth. I believe they will take the decision wisely. The party is stuck in old tradition and norms. There is a need of a complete makeover to meet challenges that we are facing today. We want that change and we are prepared for that.

But you have opened a third faction. It is not a separate panel within the party. It is rather an attempt to institutionalise the party’s spirit. We have returned to the democratic socialism of BP Koirala. This ideology is our stepping stone. More than 40 per cent of the members of the NC are youth, the new generation needs to be inculturated in these values.

You were lying low for a long time, why have you suddenly announced your candidacy? Are you being put up by someone?
It is not true. I was always active within the party. I have always been saying that NC should be result oriented. Search for an alternative leadership had begun before 11th convention. This is just continuity.

What is the Congress’ future?
The future of the Nepali Congress is bright, that is why I am joining the leadership fray. Only a new Congress can address the country’s current problems. The party is now personality-driven, we want to end this so the leadership comes from ideas.

Is there a possibility of the party splitting after the convention?
If the factionalism is based on losers and winners only, it can lead to disaster. We have to rise above factionalism.

Do you think the current leadership is a failure?
It is obvious to all. Sher Bahadur Deuba became prime minister thrice, Shushil Koirala became the acting party president. I have met them in person and asked their support. I told them that my candidacy is not against them but for a change.

What kind of changes would you bring about in the party?
About 90 per cent people are living below poverty line. We should reach for them. We should be able to introduce programs for them to help uplift their lives. The NC’s objective is to build the country and make everyone within the country prosper.

Foreign intervention is blamed for the delay, your take?
It is wrong to view external factors as the reason behind our failure. We should sort out our internal problems ourselves. No one trusts the Maoists. They fear the Maoists will impose an autocratic rule, curtail freedom, seize property and extort.

 Doesn’t the leaked tape show foreign intervention is on the rise?
That was Krishna Bahadur Mahan’s voice in the tape, but he has denied it. The issue is in parliament now. The house will discuss the issue and come to a conclusion. It should be an issue of investigation within his party.

What is the government’s view?
The parliamentary committee should look into the issue first. The state will take up the issue only if the committee fails to settle it. The issue of horse trading has been raised by all sides, and CP Mainali and Anil Jha have confessed to it publicly. It has been learnt that the YCL escorted a group of people to the house of a Maoist supporter in Sanothimi and tried to split all parties. They have given the country a bad name.

Are rumours of presidential rule credible?
I don’t think it is possible. But what if the country fails, the economy collapses, and the parliament fails to elect a new prime minister? It is not the president but the political parties who should be blamed. Why should I stay in Baluwatar and the Singh Durbar when the budget and other processes have been stalled? I should be allowed to work fully, or this uncertainty should end.

Are you trying to win the vote of confidence in the parliament and continue with your post?
I have already resigned. There is a procedure to follow. I don’t want to act stupidly. Politically, I could claim it, but it should be constitutional.
NAC faces pilot shortage

Sushil Bhattach in Nagarkot, 13 September

A month ago when Nepal Airlines Corporation (NAC) invited applications from pilots to fill in the vacant posts, there was not a single response. This is the second time since NAC has failed to hire new pilots.

Why are pilots no longer interested to fly in NAC? NAC officials themselves know why. “First, the private airlines pay way more than NAC and second there are not enough guaranteed hours, and our allowances are not competitive,” said a NAC official.

NAC’s management is different from private airlines, and the prestige attached to being a government employee has been steadily eroding over the years. “We do not get paid market rates, and because NAC doesn’t have planes we can’t get enough flying hours,” says Nepal Airlines Pilots Association’s Subha Raj Shrestha. He says NAC management hasn’t been able to hire new pilots, and hasn’t been able to stop the haemorrhage of pilots to other airlines.

Recently, the airline put out a vacancy ad for 20 junior captains for its international flights, but there wasn’t even one applicant. “We had hoped to get at least one applicant,” rues NAC’s Raju Bahadur KC, “two or three people took application forms, but none came back with it.”

NAC presently has 11 pilots for its domestic flights and 29 on its international flights. But NAC’s acquisition of new aircraft is on hold, which is why new pilots haven’t shown interest. New equipment would mean the pilots would in the future get to fly to Europe and Japan, NAPA chairman Capt YK Bhattachari says: “Because NAC salaries are so low, pilots just aren’t interested.” Private domestic airlines offer salaries of Rs 350,000 for domestic flights, but NAC pilots earn only Rs 100,000 if they fly 75 hours in a month.

NAC pilots are threatening to go on strike before Dasain if their demands for better facilities and salaries are not met by the management.

Rotten roads

Ram Krishna Bohara in Naya Patrika, 10 September

In Dhorpatan, Baglung, you can get three apples for just a rupee. The going rate for apples in Nepal right now is Rs 90-120 per kilo.

The apple farmers of Dhorpatan have been compelled to slash their prices to a bare minimum because their produce has not been able to reach the market. Continuous rainfall has damaged the road to Baglung bajar and Botahn village, which was used to get at least some of their produce to consumers there and elsewhere in previous years.

“There are roads through which we could have reached the market, most of them are damaged,” says Prem Bahadur Dharti, a farmer. “The transportation costs are too high for us to use those roads.”

Apple farming is done on 84 hectares of land in Dhorpatan and its surrounds. “In the absence of a market, thousands of apples are being turned into liquor,” says Jeevraj Dharti, who owns 150 apple trees. He adds that it takes a day’s walk to reach the nearest market and the apples cannot be transported by porters. They have demanded that the roads be repaired.

Last year, the rate was Rs 5 per apple, and production was 301 metric tons. This year, production has doubled to 675 metric tons, but most of this will be dried, turned into liquor, or simply left to rot.

Foreign play

Sushil Sharma on BBC Nepal Service, 15 September

A Chinese delegation led by assistant premier He Young arrived in Kathmandu just a month after a visit by Indian envoy Shyam Saran. This has been viewed as a manifestation of the dormant rivalry between the two neighbouring countries. When communism was founded in China, Nepal got its first elected prime minister, BP Koirala. It is said that Nehru had attempted to stop Koirala from visiting China, but did not succeed. Indian relations with Nepal went cold after King Mahendra took over. The then Chinese defence minister, Chen Yi, had spoken in a warning tone that an attack on Nepal would be tantamount to an attack on China.

Nepal students, at the centre of Nepal politics, vandalised Chinese stalls and pictures of Mao Zedong in Kathmandu then. Suspecting the incident was incited by India, the Chinese embassy had warned that it would ‘break the skull’ of those involved. India imposed a blockade when King Birendra bought arms from China, which ultimately led to the restoration of democracy in the country.

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Mahara Sir is intriguingly coy about the wiretap leaked to the press in which he is caught *in flagrante* on tape soliciting Rs 500 million from an unnamed Chinese intermediary. The Ass feels bad for Krishna Bahadur, who is actually among the more wholesome comrades. He is so honest, in fact, that he hasn’t even tried to deny it was his voice on the tape. It almost seems as if he wants to flaunt his connections with friends in high places in Hong Kong and Shanghai.

In an FM interview, Mahara Sir said wiretapping was a breach of his fundamental human right to privacy. “Can’t a guy talk on the phone privately in this country any more?” he thundered. Reminds one of party spokesperson Com Dina saying during the crippling six-day national shutdown in June that the party had the fundo right to enforce the strike by vandalising public transport and threatening people with bodily harm if they opened their shops or schools.

Boosting about one’s international intelligence connections is not new in Nepal. A Kathmandu tabloid in 1982 printed a list of supposed CIA assets in the establishment. It was a *bombshell* expose, but some KTM high-fliers were apparently miffed they did not make it to the list, and one was overheard saying at an embassy reception: “They think I am not important enough? This is an outrage.” Which probably explains why a media stalwart bragged on the front page last week that he got a call about the Mahara tape from Lainchour while he was in a house in Baluwatar “at a regular media briefing by the Chinese ambassador.” Wonder what Com Qiu thought of that disclosure?

Perhaps the only question more intriguing than the comrades engaging in fund-raising by fone was who was at the other end of the line. It now appears they were Chinese contractors and/or wildlife wholesalers who would have stood to gain enormously in hydropower and the trans-Himalayan trade in tiger components if the Baddies came back to power. Whew. For a moment there methot it was all about geopolitical rivalry.

The Chinese parliamentary delegation which was coincidentally in town this week wasn’t all that pleased about the manure hitting the propeller just as they arrived. The mule’s mole at the Soaltee overheard the head of the Chinese delegation telling a besuited delegation of Baddies in no uncertain terms that they took a very dim view of China’s good name being besmirched. “If you had to talk money, why did you do a dumbass thing like talking about it on the phone?” he is reported to have said, or words to that effect. To which Chairman Supercali-fragilistic said: “Cross my heart it won’t happen again.” PKD then laid out a litany of complaints about Dilli dilly-dallying on his PM candidature. Hey, why whine with the Chinese? BTW, did anyone sweep the Crowne-Plaza Boardroom for bugs? Wouldn’t be surprised if there is a tape of this, too.

Now that the UNMIN spat has been settled amicably (for four months) all eyes and ears are now turned to September 26 when the eighth parliamentary election for PM is finally supposed to yield a result. If the outcome is still negative, pressure will build up on Ceremonial Speaker Name Bang to crack the whip on the neutered parties. Com Subhas is sounding more and more like King Birendra when he says: “I have the authority to break this deadlock, but I don’t want to use my privilege.”

Headlines of the week:

- **CJ Soothes Ruffled Feathers**
- **NHRC in Doghouse**
- **And the winner is: Vultures Cry Fowl**

Donkey trading