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KIRAN PANDAY

IN A JAM

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 Bhothe 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.



INTERVIEW

Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood speaks to Nepali Times about being in the news for all the wrong reasons.

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DELINKING 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 obvious. Untying the knot is still easy, everyone knows what needs to be done. Politicians of every hue repeat it over and over everyday: "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 delink politics from the economy and development, as researcher Raul Schiappa-Petra argues in his Guest Column (*below*).

In the past two months of the current fiscal year, guess how much money the government has spent on development: 0. Zero. Zilch. 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 centre means 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. But it means by Dasain, government-run hospitals will have run out of medicines, government school teachers will stop getting salaries.

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 only 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,

but they can't do much when parliament is paralysed.

The other big crisis will be in revenue. Last year, too, the budget was presented to parliament but had not been passed, but at least taxes were still being collected. This year, collection is approaching zero. The result of all this under-investment will be felt this winter, on top of the daily 18-hour power cuts.

We could easily say the solution is to resolve the politics as soon as possible. But that seems to be too much to ask right now. What we can say is this: "Even if you can't agree on power-sharing, at least agree on a minimum economic and development program so that country can keep functioning. Don't punish the people for your greed and your inability to get along."

Learning from Peru's transition



GUEST COLUMN
Raul Schiappa Pietra

On 20 November, 2000, Alberto Fujimori resigned as Peruvian 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.

In May, Fujimori had won a third term in a rigged election. 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 Vladimiro Montesinos, Fujimori's right-hand man, political operative and Machiavellian head of the powerful National Intelligence Service, was seen bribing 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.

In May 2000, the Organization of American States (OAS) set up a

roundtable between the government and the opposition. Eduardo Latorre, former Dominican Republic foreign minister, was appointed as OAS facilitator for negotiations that led to a transition government.

Two days after Fujimori's resignation, Valentin Paniagua, President of Congress as part of the agreement negotiated in the roundtable, was proclaimed president until 28 July, 2001. Paniagua put together a cabinet of independent personalities. To guarantee their neutrality, all of them pledged not to run in the coming election.

While the conditions of the current political deadlock in Nepal are quite different, there are elements in this successful Peruvian experience of a decade ago that may be relevant.

First, the transition government was formed with independent, prestigious figures who did not run in the next elections. This guaranteed that there were no ulterior political ambitions at play. That could be the trick here in Nepal.

Second, this was clearly defined as an interim government and thus had a narrowly focused

mandate: to set up presidential and congressional elections for 8 April, 2001, and to finalise and run the government until a newly elected one was installed.

Here in Nepal, a transition government like this could be charged with the precise agenda of facilitating the conditions for the constitution-writing process and calling for the next elections within a pre-defined time frame. This would not be the time for any other important policy decisions.

Third, the roundtable, though facilitated by OAS and Latorre, was negotiated by the political actors of Peru. The mechanics of dialogue sessions and press conferences, as well as the role of Latorre, provided transparency in the negotiating process. This prevented the excesses typical of closed-door discussions. Politicians had to face public opinion with their demands. In Nepal, if politicians had to do their horse-trading in front of a respected facilitator and then explain their demands to the press and public, they might discover reason.

If the next cabinet is formed with respected, independent

figures a lot of political haggling will be off the table. Political parties would be left with their core job only: writing the constitution. By being strictly defined as an interim government, and not a 'real' government, its job would not be making policy changes. Rather, it should run an efficient government until a new, elected government with a clear mandate takes over.

Thinking that the current government is 'real' rather than interim has seriously complicated the Nepali transition process. It has shifted the focus from writing the constitution to power struggles. The mandate of the last election was clear: write a constitution. It was never to run a government, which should only be approached as a caretaker job.

Doing the same thing again and again, and somehow expecting different results the next time, does not work. Looking at what has worked elsewhere is a good way to start.

Raul Schiappa-Petra studied Religions at the University of Chicago, and is currently doing research in Nepal.

Political haggling can be removed if the transition is led by technocrats



ON THE WEB www.nepalitimes.com

IN A HOLE
Oho, Now NT is for local elections, is it? (Publisher's Note, 'How do we get out of this hole', #519). Should we read your earlier issues of the Times when the King as trying to conduct local elections. Did you not opposed it then? Has India told you to advocate it now? And you seem to be one of our intellectuals who think Democracy and Communism can be amalgamated. Haha, why not ask the lion and the lamb to live in harmony, through consensus?

K K Sharma

- "I have a dream..." said Martin Luther King. "I shall live in it..." concluded Mr Kunda Dixit. I admire his optimism...but the fact is that NC and the UML parties are both hobbled by the interplay of two factors a) dealing with day to day developments, reacting to Maoist actions and b) guiding their

efforts to meeting long-term objectives. The fact is that none of them have the requisite leadership skills to deal with the situation. They are making frantic efforts, no doubt about that. I would place my bet on the idea that they need to reboot their proverbial systems, redefine the conditions they are in, and then figure out how to get themselves to the desired objective.

Slarti

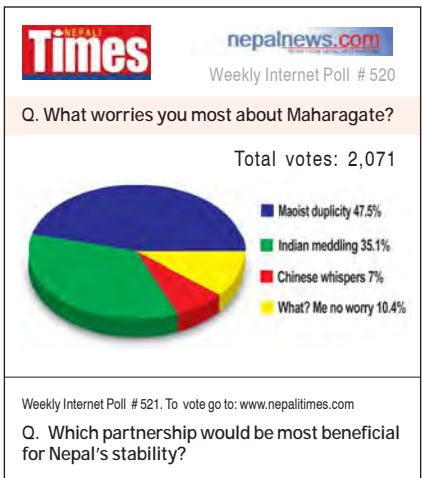
- We will never get out of the hole, as long as we have journalism like this: where instead of featuring the biggest story like the parliamentary corruption scandal (Mahara/Chinaman connection), the publisher choses to rehash the same old "mixed political vegetable story": little bit of this and little bit of that. OK, getting along is the best thing, but politics is not that simple.

Sudhir

- How do we get out of this hole? I have the answers:
 1. First, ask the makers of the Interim Constitution and blacklist them so that they will not repeat the same mistakes or new ones in the new constitution to be drafted.
 2. Ask the UML and Madhesi Parties what they meant by neutrality. The Nepali people did not elect them to take this position in the CA. If the UML, as the third largest party in the CA, is playing the game of being "neutral", then they deserve to be punished by the people in the next election.
 3. Take out the salary and benefits of those CA members who remain neutral.
 4. Downsize the current caretaker government by keeping only 2-4 key portfolios
 5. If the new constitution cannot be drafted and approved by the CA within the extended time period, the first head that should roll be of the CA Speaker.No more extensions of the CA. I

challenge to Maoists to refuse to take any salary and benefits at least for the one year extended period if the constitution is not drafted. Shame on all you political parties.

Harka Yonjan



Indian insecurities



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

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 weak political centre in Delhi. Congress hegemony had broken down, newer caste alignments were taking shape, the Hindu right was gaining strength, and the era of coalition governments was in its nascent stage.

But as usual, defying all



The Nepali state must be sensitive to Delhi's security concerns

doomsday predictions, India not only survived but thrived in the 1990s and after. There were episodic issues, but the centre regained strength. Older parties came to terms with rising regional aspirations. Newer elites were accommodated. Communal riots occurred, but did not destroy the larger Hindu-Muslim equilibrium. Indo-Pakistan tensions persisted, and the Kashmir militancy grew, but India's unity held. In fact, between 2002-8, violence in Kashmir steadily dipped.

The left did warn 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 hyphenated with 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 rocked Kashmir. The administration's confused and then repressive handling of the situation has led to further alienation, which the separatist leadership 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.

Then there is the concern that another Mumbai-type attack is possible. The way events are

unfolding in the Af-Pak theatre 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 Nepali 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 inefficiency and insensitivity is strengthening the Indian security hardline approach. If the Delhi hawks win, the Nepali people will lose.

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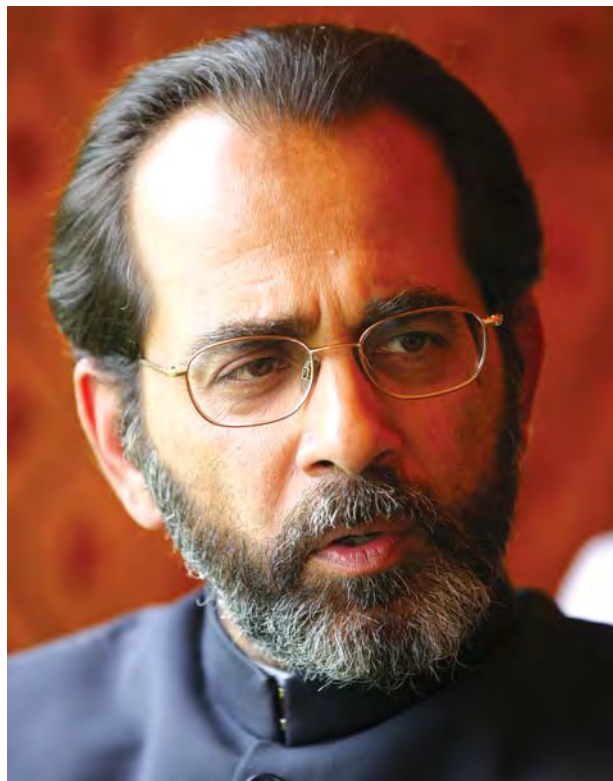
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“India would like to see stability return”

Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood spoke to *Nepali Times* on Wednesday touching upon the political deadlock, his embassy's response to media criticism, on the Mahara Tape and UNMIN extension. Excerpts:

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 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. Secondly, to date, Dabur has not been given any evidence of the defective product on which a controversy was raised in a certain section of Nepali media. As far as the embassy's response is concerned, I must clarify that it is part of the embassy's duty to safeguard interests of Indian citizens as well as Indian businesses. At the same time, I have also said that if any wrong doing on the part of Dabur (Nepal) is proven, the embassy will be as forthright in demanding that Dabur (Nepal) maintains its stated quality standards.

As far as stoppage of newsprint is concerned, this is incorrect. The consignment was held for customs examination. Now and then, certain consignments are held up for detailed examination and with the Embassy's intervention, the consignment was released well within acceptable timeframes. Greater cooperation on the part of concerned Nepali entities would have been helpful. There

have been other instances, too, where consignments are taken up for detailed examination but do not get dragged into media controversies.

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.

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 50 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 you will recall, Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, after being sworn in as Prime Minister, was in India on an official visit in September 2008 which he himself described as "highly successful and satisfactory". He paid a second visit two months later for the BIMSTEC Summit. Even after his resignation in May 2009, we have maintained our interaction with the Maoist Party as with all other political parties. Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has also stated that he wants to maintain good relations with India. Our External Affairs Minister who visited Nepal in January this year and Prime Minister's Special Envoy Shyam Saran who visited last month, both had detailed exchanges with him. It has been pointed out to him that India is a democracy and there is a public opinion in India, therefore, anti-Indian statements made by some Maoist leaders and affiliated organizations are not consistent with building better relations.

Is this linked to the intensification of the Maoist insurgency within India itself?

India and Nepal have an open border and movement of people takes place in an unregulated manner. The Government of Nepal has consistently assured us that it would not permit the use of Nepali territory for activities directed against India. Some Maoist leaders have made certain provocative statements but as yet, there has not been any evidence of current operational links between the Maoists in Nepal and the Naxalites in India. Given our security concerns however, the situation remains under constant observation by the concerned agencies.

Does India feel that its current policy on Nepal is yielding the desired results?

India would like to see political stability in Nepal. This is first and foremost, the task for Nepali political leadership. As I have mentioned, our 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 Indian policy that can bring about political stability but the desire and commitment of Nepali political leadership. As in the past, India has always indicated its willingness to support the efforts of the Nepali political leaders. With a return to political stability in Nepal, I think we will be able to accelerate the forward momentum in our bilateral relations.



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Full interview



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Of jobs and toilets

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

I am often asked about the differences between the private sector and the development sector. In the former, goals are narrower 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 sound loftier with an overtone 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 reduce poverty.

Things are now clearer. In 2000, world leaders adopted what has been called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) "eight time-bound global and local targets on income poverty, hunger, maternal and child mortality, disease, inadequate shelter, gender inequality, and environmental degradation". The targets are set to be achieved by developing countries, including

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 NPC and 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

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

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 massive 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 businessmen, elected to the CA and who enjoy doubling up as economic statesmen in the media, could have been credible advocates for jobs 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 toilets.

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 Birateshwor 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 20 per cent better pick up and 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 Mela: Hyundai Santro, i10 and i20 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.



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"Good health begins with better nutrition"

Amrit's rocky road

The music is rock, but the rhythm of its madal heartbeat, the melody of its flute interludes and the earthy jhayure lyrics give Amrit Gurung's new album a distinctive Nepali sound.

This is 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 Manang, Lamjung.

"Joga le hunchha bheta, maya le hunchha samjhana," sang an elderly man in a remote village in Gulmi one night. Amrit jotted down the lyrics and memorized the tune, immediately struck by

the simple truths that hinted at a deeper philosophical meaning.

That is how most of the songs in Nepathaya's ninth album 'Aina Jhyal' were created. At the album's launch on Tuesday, Amrit was interviewed on stage by his friend and colleague Kiran Krishna Shrestha of nepa-laya about the importance of travel to his music.


"The journey itself is the message," Amrit replied, "it makes exposure to new sounds and experiences possible, it relaxes your soul. You travel to get away from it all, but you also travel to arrive. It is the most satisfying thing you can do."

Amrit has travelled through nearly all of Nepal's 75 districts, mostly walking alone, humming the tunes he's picked up along the way, the songs evolving as he crosses bridges and climbs stone paths.

"My gurus are the villagers I have met on the trails singing from hilltops


as they graze their cattle, or the lyrics I have picked up from women cutting grass," Amrit explains.

Aina Jhyal is a collection of ten exquisite fusion numbers rendered by Nepathya, a band that has itself become a metaphor for journey since it has seen 21 faces in 20 years. Only Amrit Gurung is still there. Says Kiran Shrestha: "Nepathya has evolved as a musical platform. Band members stay as long as they want and they move on."

In Aina Jhyal, Amrit Gurung himself has (to paraphrase TS Eliot) come back to where he started to see the place for the first time. 

Kunda Dixit

See also: *Indu Nepal's Politically Cracked, The patriot*, p.11

 nepalitimes.com/blogs/kundadixit
For more and video from Aina Jhyal

Das autos are here

The German carmaker Volkswagen, the world's second biggest car maker, has made its official entry into Nepali roads with Pooja International of Vishal Group.

Last week's big bang launch of the car is expected to translate into brisk sales before Dasain. "We're an established international brand and it is important for us to spread our presence not just in Europe but also all over Asia," says Armin Keller, the Executive Director-Sales of Volkswagen for India and the Far East. VW had delivered 60 cars even before the official launch.

Volkswagen is not an unfamiliar brand for Nepal as classic Beetles were brought in when reconditioned cars were imported here. But Nepali consumers will now see that there is more to Volkswagen than the bug, popularly known as "bhyagute gadi". In addition to the new Beetle, the VW showroom in Panipokhari showcases three sedans and two SUVs. With the high demand for hatchbacks in Nepal, the Polo and Vento will also soon be available.

When asked if VWs can survive the rough road conditions of Nepal, Vishal Agrawal of

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 Jetta, 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 After-sales 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.

"Volkswagen is 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 aims to own 10 per cent of the market share."

Paavan Mathema

There's more to Volkswagen than the Beetle



KIRAN PANDAY

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 Lapchi* (extensively studied by anthropologist and Tibetologist Tony Huber), which, according to its colophon, was compiled by a Buddhist monk in 1901.

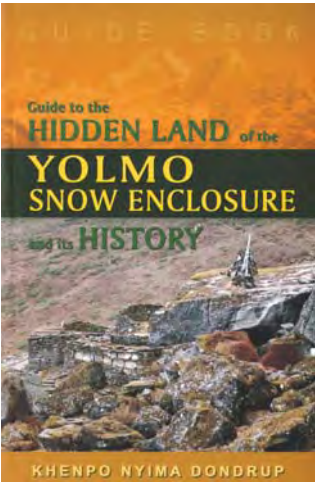
Guide to the Hidden Land of the Yolmo Snow Enclosure and its History, a 28-page religious travel companion by Khenpo Nyima Dondrup, translated into Nepali by Punya Prasad Parajuli and Padam Singh Gale, and into English by Matthew Akester, is an edited and annotated compilation of a number of Tibetan-language guides to Yolmo (also known as Helambu in Nepali). 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 39 colour plates illustrating notable sites, sections on the two major Tibetan Buddhist religious traditions found in the area (Nyingma and Kagyu), a synopsis of the existing guidebooks on the region, a discussion of the Yangdak Chok meditation cave and a list of 33 locally-important religious 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

Guide to the Hidden Land of the Yolmo Snow Enclosure and its History
by Khenpo Nyima Dondrup
Vajra Publications 2010
ISBN: 978-9937-506-465, 28 pp, colour plates, monochrome map

Mark Turin directs the *Digital Himalaya* and *World Oral Literature Projects* at the University of Cambridge.



EVENTS



Film talks in Pipalbot, screening of *Frames of War* by Kunda Dixit as part of his *A People War* book discussion series. *Saturday 18 September, starts 6pm, Pipalbot, 4267657, 9808260727, pipalbot108@yahoo.com, bookings required*

Enigma, solo art exhibition by Yash Vardhan More. *Till Friday 17 September, Imago-Dei Café Gallery, Nagpokhari, 4442464*



Vulture Conservation Festival 2010, vulture nest watching, jungle hiking, camping and other activities, organized by Roots and Shoots Nepal. *From 24 to 26 September, Basabasahi, 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*

Gaijatra, solo painting exhibition by acclaimed artist Ragini Upadhyaya Grela. *Till 20 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4218048*

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

House of Music, screening of *Fairytale 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, 3pm, 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 Siddhartha 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*

MUSIC

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, Jamshikhel, 5526212*

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



Bourbon Room, live performances by Cine Gurung. *Every Wednesday, Bourbon Room, Durbar Marg, 4441703*

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, 4491234/4489362*

DINING



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*

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sure to charm and impress. Begin your feast with the Dragon Chicken, it is one-of-a-kind. *Kumaripati, 5551118*

Pumpnickel Bakery, get an early breakfast or brunch with interesting choices of bread and sandwiches. Experiment with their goat cheese or yak cheese sandwiches, or have a sip of coffee in the classy indoor dining area. *Thamel, 7.30am-7pm, 4259185*

Dhokaima Cafe has a new menu, try the Blackened Norwegian Salmon and Grilled Shrimp Ajillo. *Patan Dhoka, 5522113*

Le Bistro Restaurant & Bar, the outdoor dining area invokes a great atmosphere for a night of drinks with friends and family. *Thamel, 4701170*

Hankook Sarang, serves up the incredible tastes of Korea, including superlative steamed rice. *Thamel, near Roadhouse Café*



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*

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Valley belly



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, 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 the gate when 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 course 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 imodium 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. 🇳🇵

GREEN SCENE

Potty photo prize

Most Nepalis and travellers to Nepal will have built a toilet paper ‘nest’ around the seats of a public bathrooms, to avoid direct contact with the commode. Others still prefer the no-contact squatting toilet because they are presumed to be relatively safer. Microbiologists say that disease-causing germs do not survive long on toilet seats and transmission would require the presence of a sufficient number of germs to cause illness. But one could never be sure



SHAHANI SINGH

in Nepal. Are public toilets here even studied? The danger of contracting external germs lies in other places too: the toilet door handle, the faucet, and the flush handle, which some of us might have just kicked and pulled down to avoid hand contact, leaving others to contract the germs from our shoe soles. Who cares? The business is done with, isn’t it? Apathy, disregard and ignorance has made answering nature’s call outside of the home fraught

with danger. Men have it easier, since they don’t 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 hovering 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 three 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. 🇳🇵 <http://cleanenergynepal.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/brochure-52.jpg> Water, Sanitation and Hygiene - Resources Centre Network Nepal, 4493188 *Shahani Singh* See also: *Of jobs and toilets, Strictly business*



KIRAN PANDAY

HOMEWORK: The Nepali Congress held its central working committee meeting at party headquarters in Sanepa on Wednesday to prepare for the party's national convention, which is expected to yield a resolution to the political deadlock in parliament.



KIRAN PANDAY

TALENT QUEENS: The Blue Diamond Socieity organised the 'Mr and Miss Third Gender Talent Competition 2010' at Rastriya Nachghar on Sunday to mark its 10th anniversary. Raj Hussein and Megna Lama won the titles.




KIRAN PANDAY

UNITED IN PRAYER: The Kashmiri Masjid in Kathmandu saw the Nepali Muslim community come together to celebrate Eid on Saturday. Eid marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

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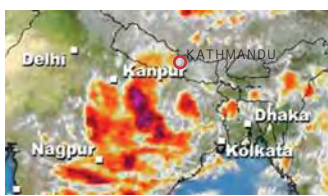
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WEEKEND WEATHER
by **NGAMINDRA DAHAL**

In the recent weeks, the axis of monsoon trough supported by the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone has positioned itself across Nepal. This satellite radar composite taken on Thursday morning shows moisture billowing up across the Indo-Gangetic plains. But it also shows that the jet-stream is now migrating southwards again and pushing the cloud front back from western Nepal. This could signify the retreat of the monsoon. Officially, the monsoon is supposed to close by mid-September, but the trend has been for it to linger longer. Central and eastern Nepal should expect some more last gasps of the monsoon over the weekend before sunnier and drier days next week.



FRI	SAT	SUN
		
28-19	27-20	28-19

The patriot



**POLITICALLY
CRACKED**
Indu Nepal

Amrit Gurung is his own man, and a quirky one at that. The frontman of the folk-rock band Nepathya is well known among his circle of friends for his daily hour-and-half-long walking commute from his home in Hatiban to work in Kalikasthan, where he spends his days in his basement office perfecting his music. In fact, we were almost unsurprised when he showed up in full hiking gear at a recent photo shoot when he had been specifically requested to wear something formal.

"I'm a little odd," he offered as an apology. In reality, the choice of clothing speaks of his outward-looking relationship with the city he lives in, ready to drop everything, whenever he feels like abandoning its claustrophobic streets to journey through the rest of the country.

The man who seems so ill at ease with fame is a master traveller, using it as an opportunity to collect material for his songs. But, his travels are more than that. He gathers up the stories of the people he talks to, photographing them and their surroundings to add to the stacks of his photographs (he only switched to digital two years ago). He has travelled more widely, talked to more people and taken more pictures than any journalist I know.

Some of these stories inspire his music, while others become a direct part of it. After seeing the picture in the newspapers of a 20-day-old baby girl who had survived lethal crossfire during a bus journey with her mother during the war, Amrit travelled to Mainapokhari where the incident had occurred. The memory of that day became the title track of his album *Ghatana*, a 25-minute long commentary of the incident and the nation we had become, "terrified of the future ahead of us".

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



NEPALAYA

Unlike the cynics among us who see Nepal as a nest of self-obsessed politics, Amrit sees it for what it is, and his subtle 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 Shikchya* (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-rock 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

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Plants and slants



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

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 later 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 taping private discussions and intimate negotiations. In all probability, Mahara discussed things that he is recorded to have discussed. But with whom?

The identity of the person at the other end of the line is not clear even though his possible motives are. The impersonator wanted to take advantage of Mahara's gullibility and kill two birds with one stone: defame the

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



Chinese and demonise the Maoists. You don't need to be Sherlock Holmes to crack the case. That an India-based television channel first played the tape, is a definitive pointer.

Then, Kantipur daily's editor, Sudheer Sharma, wrote a front-page commentary revealing the way certain diplomatic mission had made attempts to plant the story in the media. He went on to disclose that they had been approached while socialising with the Chinese ambassador. That gave another twist to the

whole episode. Apparently, the mainstream media and diplomatic missions in Kathmandu are much closer to each other than we thought.

The Nepali audience seems to be better at detecting deceptive coverage than many journalists realise. Despite persistent approach to blow the tape controversy into a scandal, the news of seemingly incriminating conversation has failed to penetrate the public imagination. The Nepali audience has dismissed the whole affair as one of those things that make politics what it is: a cesspool.

Everything is fair in love, war and politics. Persuasion, bribery, punishment and deception are considered inalienable components of politics. All sides in a multi-cornered contest use these methods to neutralise or overcome their competitors. Which is why the public brushed off the scandal with a shrug.

Last year, the disclosure of the Shaktikhor videotape, in which Pushpa Kamal Dahal was shown claiming credit for misleading

parliamentary parties, tricking UNMIN and taking the gullible government for a ride, failed to create widespread indignation. The social elite in Kathmandu cribbed about it for a while and then it was forgotten as soon as Dahal was evicted from Baluwatar. Readers seem to know how to sift through news breaks.

The Mahara-tape affair was clearly a sting operation, but the media can claim no credit for unearthing it. Whenever an interested party releases 'news', it becomes a plant and media stands to lose its credibility. It is possible that revelations so far have been mere pressure tactics to make the Maoists fall in line.

Leaders in the anti-Maoist alliance know very well that the Maoists were nurtured by the country that wants it contained now. They could be next.

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 televisions to fall for planted stories. The mainstream media should know better than treating it as news. Free media needs to use its own judgement in separating information from propaganda. A slight slant can sometimes be forgiven, but wholesale adoption of plants will cost the media its credibility. 🇳🇵

THIS WEEK

Chinese delegation
A 21-member Chinese delegation comprising senior leaders led by Vice-premier He Yong arrived in Kathmandu on Saturday. The delegation met the President Ram Baran Yadav, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and top leaders of political parties.

This is the highest-level Chinese delegation visiting Nepal since the peace process began. The visit comes at a time of the parliament's failure to elect a new prime minister in two months since the PM resigned, and the release of an audio tape in which a 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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Problems पर हट !





UNMIN's term has been extended. The mandate has now been extended till 15 January. Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal signed the four-point agreement which also commits the special committee to implement all provisions in the peace agreement. All pending points in the peace agreement will be completed by 15 December, before the extension expires.

Cross-border crime
Security and local administration officials of the bordering districts of Nepal and India have agreed to help each other in controlling cross-border crimes, including activities of the armed groups in Tarai districts.

At a bilateral meeting held in Nepalganj on Monday, security officials of Nepal and India agreed to share information on cross-border criminal activities and help each other in arresting the most wanted criminals. The Indian officials also assured help in tracking down the members of the Tarai armed groups operating from India.

RIGHT CLICK: Sabina Maharjan, a computer teacher at Adarsha Saula School, instructs a student during her class.



PICS: NEIL DIXIT

Narrowing the digital divide



PAAVAN MATHEMA

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 spearheads the club's computer donation program.

The Rotary Club of Patan was awarding scholarships to students when the schools said they needed help to set up computer labs. But,

Rajbhandari said, the club first wanted to make sure the computers were properly used and maintained.

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.

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

City businessmen help government schools with computer and internet access

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.

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." 🇳🇵



nepalitimes.com
Dailekh bridges the digital divide #360
Instead of one laptop per child #360

Lucky laptops

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.



BIKRAM RAI

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, Nakim 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. Quest has invested Rs 120 million in launching QFX at a time when most investors are shying away from Nepal. Central Cinema uses state-of-the-art 2K projection and sound technology that is the first of its kind in the region. Central has three theatres, all 3D enabled, a bowling alley, food court, restaurant outlet, a play-area for children, and is built with handicap-friendly features. Security standards that are consistent with a global exhibition brand have been followed. “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*



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The Third Force

Interview with the NC's Bhim Bahadur Tamang in *Annapurna Post*, 10 September

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

Annapurna 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 member of the NC

are youth, the new generation needs to be inculcated 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 been always 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 to 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 program for them to help uplift their lives. The NC's objective is to build the country and make everyone within the country prosper.

“NC for changed Nepal”

Interview with the NC's Gagan Thapa in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 1-16 September

हिमाल खबरपत्रिका

Himal: Do the youth really have an agenda in the NC convention?

Gagan Thapa: This agenda is an opportunity for the party to integrate youth who make up the majority of the country's population. The young leaders of NC have national and international exposure and are thus more open. Their inclusion into the executive committees will influence the party's decisions, priorities and the working style.

Can the Youth Campaign really be different?

It is imperative for young NC cadre to be leaders if they are to influence the programs and direction of the party. The majority of the country's youth are for democracy, but since they do not identify with the present leadership and the extremists are benefiting. The NC has to prove that it is a young party with fresh ideas.

For a long time, the NC remained steadfast on its commitment to democracy but was largely indifferent to social and economic issues. This left the field wide open for extremists of the left and right. With the younger

cadre base, the NC will be able to buck this trend. NC will stand for change again.

Won't this so-called youth wave affect the NC's principles and stance in national politics?

The NC's stance is that democratic principles should not be compromised. The party so far has reacted to the agenda of federalism and peace process only, issues of national importance have been sidelined. With the entry of the new trend, the NC's commitment to democracy will be strengthened, and it will go from being a reactive party to one that takes the lead in issues of national importance.

But isn't the party too rigid to change?

The NC has always been known as a party that successfully leads revolutions, but it fails to manage



the transition that follows. The next generation will change this.

Yet, the young members are going to be old by the time they get into leadership.

Those vying for chief leadership positions do not seem to take notice of the new trend sweeping across the ranks of NC throughout the country. But those who dismiss this demand for change do so at their own peril.

All together, now



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARY

Interview with Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal in *Gorkhapatra*, 12 September

गोर्खापत्र

Gorkhapatra: Do you think the vote on 26 September will elect a new PM?

Madhav Nepal: The Maoists should be clear about their intention to win the confidence of other parties. There is no alternative to working together for peace, stability and strengthening democracy. If the Maoists use horse trading for a majority, NC and UML will not join the government under their leadership.

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 Mahara's voice in the tape, but he has denied it. The issue is in parliament now. The house will discuss the issue and reach 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 Singha Darbar 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 shuld be constitutional.

Foreign play



Sushil Sharma on *BBC Nepali 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, India signed the 1950 treaty with Nepal, which was directly concerned with security. Ten years after the signing of the treaty, 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. Nepali students, at the centre of Nepali 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 skulls' 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. A little later, Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian visited Nepal, which was the first visit from the Chinese Ministry of Defence. He

wore plain clothes on board but alighted in the airport in an army uniform. The message was conveyed.

Chinese PM Lee Fung had told former PM Sher Babadur Deuba in his visit to China, that their relation with Nepal is important for security purposes. It was the first public statement of this kind from a Chinese high level officer in a long time. China had also expressed its intention to open a consulate in Nepal, when India opened a consulate in Birganj.

China has been following suit with India of providing assistance for development activities in the district. Bordering district Mustang is an example.

India is not only suspicious, but alarmed by the emergence of China. Indian premier Manmohan Singh's off-the-record remark that China was the major threat to India highlights the tensions.

But India and China also have common interests in Nepal to counter the West's inroads and support for the Free Tibet Movement. The Chinese delegation raised this concern during this week's visit. The presence in Nepal of UNMIN and OHCHR with support from the West is a headache for both India and China.

Both India and China also want stability in Nepal. This common interest might help Nepal's politics for an emergency, but safe landing.

bbc.co.uk/nepali/indepth/2010/09/100915_china_analysis.shtml



NAC faces pilot shortage

Sushil Bhattarai in *Nagaraik*, 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 guarantee 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 internal 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 Bhattarai 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 bazar and Bohara village, which was used to get at least some of their produce to consumers there and elsewhere in previous years.

"Although 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 mules."

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 Jeevial 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.



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Donkey trading

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 anymore?" he thundered. Reminds one of party spokesperson Com Dina saying during the crippling six-day national shutdown in June that that his 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.



Boasting 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 probly explains why a media



BIKASH KARKI

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.



The upshot from the whole scandal has been that the comrades have stopped using their phones. Not only do they refrain from political transactions on their mobiles, they now switch it off because a cell phone user can be located pretty easily if the device is on. And the reason the other parties have all fallen silent about Maharagate is that none of them know for sure that there aren't tapes of their own horse-trading. Always wondered why politicians only trade in **horses**, what's wrong with **donkeys**?



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."



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