

# NEPALI Times

#525

29 October - 4 November 2010

16 pages

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KIRAN PANDAY

## Take to the skies

When more attention is paid to who flies where and for what reason than the two prime ministerial elections that were scheduled this week, you know something's not quite right. The northern skies were particularly crowded, with PLA commanders and Maoist Chairman Dahal himself popping over the border to China. President Ram Baran Yadav's visit, to cap the week, put a more official gloss on proceedings.

But apart from reiterating China's stance on Nepal ("sort out your relationship with India") and Nepal's stance on China ("One China"), little transpired that helped clear up matters back home. If only the political skies were as clear as what trekkers in Pokhara would have woken up to recently. For the time being, we remain hopeful that the High Level Task Force, which had its mandate extended, will come up with some answers.

**Bihari Krishna Shrestha** highlights what's gone right in Nepal's development

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**Damakant Jayshi** cocks a snook at the Nepal Army and the Maoists

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# CORRUPTION, INC.

Lila Mani Poudel, Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office, has had a torrid Dasain. It all began last year when, travelling home to Gulmi, he noted with shock the state of the Prithvi Highway leading out of the Kathmandu Valley. Overloaded tipper trucks carrying wet sand and rocks excavated from river beds had sunk deep ruts into the highway. Upon his return to work, Poudel instructed the transport management department to prohibit overloading. The reports that landed on his desk suggested progress was being made.

To his horror, Poudel discovered the road was in far worse shape when he travelled home this Dasain. "They tricked me," he lamented in a front-page editorial in *Nagarik* last week alongside a photo of a section of the ruined highway between Naubise and Nagdhunga. Those in the excavation business have always claimed they were providing employment and paying hefty taxes. Indeed, they may have lined the pockets of the relevant authorities with millions. It has been estimated repairs will cost upwards of a billion and a half rupees.

Poudel's travel travails were far from over. He observed that at several points along the highway, either police or apparently unauthorised men were collecting fees from public transport vehicles, including the microbus he was travelling in. This was taking place under various pretexts, with or without receipts. Poudel called the police chief of Chitwan to complain, en route. The incident led to the suspension of four police personnel. They subsequently accused Poudel of using his position to interfere with a legitimate fine they were imposing on the driver.

Lila Mani Poudel's run-ins with two separate rackets



DIPESH SHRESTHA

illustrate the extent to which corruption has permeated Nepali society and the state. The long-suffering Nepali public, of course, is well-habituated to both direct corruption (through extortion of 'taxes' by public officials) and indirect corruption (whereby abuse of public resources such as highways is swept under the tarmac, so to speak). The average Nepali is also largely helpless in the face of such criminality.

But what does it say to us when a high-ranking official at the Prime Minister's Office is as helpless in the face of corruption? It may surprise us in the first instance that someone might attempt to command back the tide of

corruption in Nepal; get beyond that, and we begin to understand that even a well-meaning, well-placed individual is largely ineffective in the face of a whole network of corrupt individuals.

Sadly, this week's headlines have already confirmed the truth of this. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, Nepal is now ranked 146 among 180 countries. Perhaps we should take solace in the fact that people like Poudel still exist, and are expressing their opinions loud and clear. If a whole network of Nepalis began to say 'No!' to corruption, the tide might actually begin to retreat.

## ON THE WEB www.nepalitimes.com

### MONKEY BUSINESS

Hurling shoes at the Indian Ambassador by the Maoists in Solu is an example of a monkey displaying his bottom to show it is redder than the other monkey's to gain favour from his female mate ('Propaganda war', CK Lal, #524). The Maoists are trying to prove they are close to the Chinese and that they are very much against the Indians.

gole

- Why has Dr. Lal not mentioned that the Maobadis were created by the Royal Nepal Army to counter parliamentary parties? The Indians merely took them away and used the Maoists against the king and his army. This is something in Hindi that they call 'using the shoe of the wearer to beat him'.

pdekaji

- An accurate and refreshing article from CK Lal. Contrary to saying nothing, this article pinpoints the fact that the Indian media is willing to write anything at the South Block's bidding. I find it incredible how frequently 'Indian news' is nothing but pro-Indian essays at the cost of all of Bharat's neighbours who, in the eyes of Indians, appear to be nothing more than enemies, terrorists, and obstructionists. The only exception would be the Commonwealth Games where the Indian media skewered the administrators of that fiasco.

hange

### DIRTY BUSINESS

Instead of building a 'Turd World Golden Gate' they should have spent the 20 million rupees on improving the sanitary conditions at the airport or made a separate exit gate ('Once is not enough', Ass, #524). Tourists don't come to see an airport gate.

DG

### MORE MONKEYS

The Constituent Assembly has become, as a famous Nepali saying goes, 'bandarko hatma nariwal': a coconut in a monkey's hands ('The value of deadwood', Damakant Jayshi, #524). Isn't the current political quagmire an outcome of the combination of 'runche rajniti' (crybaby politics) of Nepali Congress and UML, and the 'makhedau' (opportunism) of the Maoists? Believe me, both Marx and Gandhi would be surprised to find what kind of PUNDITS practice politics in Nepal. What a terrific place, where neither 'satyagraha' nor 'dialectics' work!! It is not a surprise why the adage says that Nepal is ruled by the Lord of the Animals (Pashupati). How long will the Nepali people have to endure suffering and humiliation, once ruled by the Ranas, then by the Shahs, and now by a bunch of Bahuns, being treated as a herd of silent cattle and sheep? Tell me who is going to benefit from the ongoing limbo!

Anonymous

### TIBETAN COOL

This was a touching story ('Tale of two gombas', Rabi Thapa, #524). Exemplifies the glamour of Tibet with the visitors and

relative lack of PR for our own ancient vanishing assets.

nepkt

### IMPASSE

It is very true that we don't have any choice than to wait for the political wrangling caused by the absurdity of Poudel's candidacy and the ignorance of arrogant Maoists ('Forcing tasks', Editorial, #524). Besides these two issues, all other issues seem insignificant.

To date, the biggest hurdle is the Maoists' abomination towards dismantling of their armed groups. They know that without force they can't achieve their goal of a totalitarian regime. This is because at the core of their philosophy lies their belief that parliament is a tool through which revolution can't be achieved and to achieve their goal they need an authoritarian system in the guise of a presidential system.

However, the reality is also that the Maoists have gone through tremendous transformations in philosophy, tactics, programs and policies: maybe not as democratic as we would like but still far more positive than the Maoists who signed the 12-point agreement. In that aspect Dahal's appointment should be considered positive. He is the only personality in the Maoists who can come to agreements with others. So let us hope that Dahal will bring some positive results to the table.

Kamal Kishor

"If the representatives of the Nepali people cannot decide on certain issues that

matter to our future, then perhaps, as was suggested last week, the people themselves can decide through a series of referenda?"

Now you're talking! This is easily the first sensible stance NT has taken up on the nation's politics in the last 5-6 years (I don't remember NT ever supporting referenda before this issue!) Finally begun to see the light? Or is it just the final reckoning that you can't keep selling your LIES anymore?

If Nepal's media outlets, like NT, had enough sense, honesty and integrity earlier, it would surely have saved the country and its people a whole lot of trouble. But better late than never, as they say, and rooting for referenda is the best that media houses of Nepal can do to salvage the situation (and make up for their mistakes).

Satya Nepali



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 525

Q. Do you think the High Level Task Force will succeed?



Weekly Internet Poll # 526. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What budget should the caretaker govt present?





# We know what works

Devolving power to local user groups ensures participation, transparency, accountability and development



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Bihari K Shrestha**



JEERAWAT NA THALANG

At first glance, Nepal's numbers don't look good. The country remains one of the poorest in the world. Even though 70 per cent of the workforce is in farming, agriculture has stagnated. There is large-scale transfer of labour to urban areas and abroad.

Since most rural families do not have sufficient work on their own farms, they migrate to do dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs abroad. This is tragic because our demographic dividend is being enjoyed by other countries that had no hand in nurturing our youth.

But there is a brighter side. Where authority has been entrusted to the people themselves, Nepalis have come up with world-class success stories. In a couple of decades, Nepal's forests were not just restored, but made more productive than in the past.

The catalyst was the concept of user groups that was derived from the Decentralization Act of 1982. Today, there are over 15,000 forest user groups across the country managing their own commons. The concept of user groups is indigenous to Nepal. For centuries, the people of Jumla have used local committees to manage and maintain irrigation canals. As a young civil servant in the 1980s, I adapted this traditional concept of the local management of commons into the government policy on local development that eventually went on to become the centerpiece of the decentralisation legislation.

The distinguishing feature of user groups is that everyone, rich or poor, high caste or low, men or women, participates in decision-making that makes its management transparent and its leadership accountable. Forestry is not the only area where devolution of decision-making has resulted in progress. Of the 72 developing countries, only seven, including Nepal, are

projected to meet the Millennium Development Goals in child and maternal survival by 2015.

Again, among the main factors behind this success are local Mothers' Groups and Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHV), which were conceptualised and set up in 1988. All women above 15 are organised into mothers' groups. Each group selects one member as a FCHV, who is then trained by the government. Like in forest user groups, the principles involved are the same: participation, transparency, accountability.

These successful local initiatives prove that given the opportunity, Nepali villagers can organise themselves for their own betterment. When national and external resources are deployed in conjunction with local organisational capabilities, the results are dramatic, like the progress in maternal and child health.

However, our national malaise has been that we haven't learnt from these successes and haven't replicated them in other areas like education, agriculture and local job creation.

Our successes are now being challenged by second-generation problems.

Community forests could not effectively address equity issues, and are now being plundered, reportedly by the minister and his local henchmen. What is even more disturbing is that the NC, UML and the Maoists have not raised their voices against the unravelling of past gains. Despite successes in child and maternal health, 60 newborns and 6 mothers continue to die every day across the nation. Half of Nepal's under-five children are undernourished.

The paradox of Nepal's development is that while we have the proven methodology for accelerated poverty reduction and national development, the

country's poverty rate has been re-estimated upwards, at 65 per cent. The institutional foundation for progress in forestry and maternal and child health were laid during the much-vilified Panchayat years. As an insider in those days, I must add that politicians then were not paragons of integrity or

democratic virtues, either. But King Birendra overrode the objection of politicians with vested interests and authorised the implementation of the decentralisation act, which changed the face of Nepal.

Unfortunately, given the structure under which the DDCs and VDCs function today, they

are governed by the same rules of the political game as at the centre. Devolution, to be meaningful to the people, has to go all the way down to the roots, to the stakeholders themselves, not to their representatives at higher levels. If donor agencies want to be professionally honest to themselves and improve delivery, they must learn from Nepal's home-grown successes and build on them.

A vast proportion of our people continue to live in unacceptable destitution. But, as someone intimately involved with introducing the concept of local user groups in the forestry and health sectors, we have shown that with just a few right policies, we can turn things around quickly.

*Bihari Krishna Shrestha was with the National Planning Commission, and the ministries of health and physical planning and local development.*

*This article is based on his address at the Madan Puraskar Award Ceremony on 10 October. A longer version of his speech is available*

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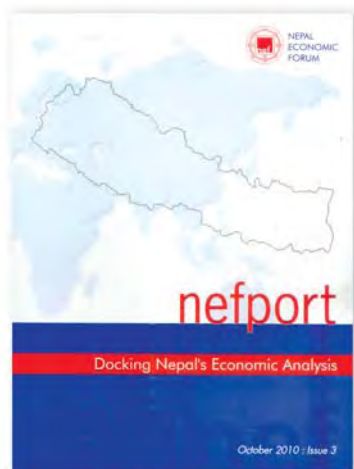
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# The economy, at a snapshot

PAAVAN MATHEMA

In Nepal, politics has always taken the front seat while issues of economic development have been dealt with as an afterthought. It has been four months since caretaker Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal resigned, but the new government is yet to take shape. This political stalemate has daunting effects on all sectors of the economy, but the foremost concern is the delay in the presentation of the budget. The special budget of Rs 110 billion will soon run out; unless a full-fledged budget is announced immediately, the government will not even be able to pay salaries to civil servants, let alone finance development activities. This pressing concern is strongly underlined in the third issue of *nefport*, a quarterly overview of the economy produced by Nepal Economic Forum. The report also highlights significant developments across the main



economic sectors of the country.

According to the report, the World Economic Forum's latest Global Competitiveness Report lists 15 problematic factors to consider while doing business in Nepal. Government instability/coup ranks as the most problematic, and Nepal slipped five positions in the Global Competitive Index for 2009/10. Despite this, we have made significant progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and are on

## The third issue of *nefport* is a vital contribution towards understanding and highlighting the economy

track to achieve targets by 2015. GDP may not grow at the targeted 5.5 per cent but can be expected to grow at 3.5 per cent.

On the international business front, Nepal's trade deficit was recorded at over Rs 216 billion as imports shot up by 33.2 per cent, with a 9.7 per cent fall in exports. The surprising fact is that petroleum, vehicles and gold constitute the biggest imports in a developing country like ours.

However, according to an ADB report, Nepal ranks second in South Asia in terms of product upgrading and diversifying exports. This means that Nepal has significant opportunity to reverse its negative export growth; we have


a comparative advantage in over 100 products. *nefport* recognises that investments have to be made to set up industries for these products. What is worrying is the lack of political stability and a conducive environment to encourage investors. The deficit could also improve if the government cut back on imports of goods that are already produced in Nepal.

Meanwhile, Nepal's balance of payments has been kept afloat by remittances and foreign aid. The global economic crisis had limited impact on earnings from remittances, with Nepali workers sending back Rs 231.7 million. The growth rate of remittances may have decreased, relative to the increase in labour migration, but countries like Malaysia and Korea still favour Nepali workers. During the first eight months of FY 2009/10 Nepal experienced a 60 per cent increase in aid commitments amounting to Rs 76.7 billion. The task is to tap into this for development activities.

Agriculture continues to be one of the most important

sectors for the country with 73.9 per cent of the population engaged in it, contributing 33.03 per cent to the national GDP. But this sector has seen little growth due to the late, erratic monsoon and the lack of fertilisers. Things look good so far for Nepal Tourism Year 2011, with total visitors already up by 19 per cent compared to last year.

Another important sector for Nepal is the banking sector. The liquidity crunch has eased and lending has opened up. NRB's regulations for the real estate market have been helpful in monitoring the risk of investments in the sector. The real estate sector, unsurprisingly, witnessed a 25 per cent decline in transactions. *nefport* also looks into the strides made in the fields of education, health, media, energy and infrastructure.

While the report is an encouraging step towards analysis of the country's economic status, it would be more valuable if the significance of the numbers cited were explained in more depth. Considering that *nefport* claims to cater to private sector perspectives, one would hope for more linkages between macro-economic issues and the private sector, as well as coverage of public-private partnerships. Nevertheless, it constitutes an essential update on the country's economy. 



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## High reach

Ncell has launched its high-speed internet service in Khumbu valley, below Mount Everest.

"We are very proud to announce the world's highest mobile data service," said Lars Nyberg, President and CEO of TeliaSonera, the majority owner of Ncell. Located at an altitude of 5,200 metres, the new 3G base station enables locals,



climbers and trekkers to surf the web, send video clips and e-mails, as well as to call friends and family back home. Ncell says the rates are cheaper than that of an average satellite phone. TeliaSonera has decided to invest over 100 million dollars during 2011 to cover all 75 districts in Nepal.

## Lucky scratch

Morang Auto Works, the sole distributor of Yamaha motorbikes, has launched 'Yamaha Note Chhapau Offer' which will entitle buyers of Yamaha SS125, YBR 125, Yamaha Enticer and Yamaha Alba YBR 110 to a scratch card. The cards offer a chance to win between Rs 5,000 and Rs 1 million.

## Goodwill grows



Goodwill Finance opened its fifth branch at Indrachok, Kathmandu. The new branch will provide ABBS facility, remittance, fund transfer, locker and cheque transfer services.

## Colourful win

Seventeen winners of Berger Paint's 'Berger Rangey-haat offer' were presented with their prizes. The scheme is still running but already a diamond necklace, eight Sony LCD TVs and 8 microwave ovens have been won.

## New showroom

Morang Auto Works, a dealer for JCB India's construction equipment, has opened a new



showroom for JCB products in Sanepa, Lalitpur. The showroom provides sales, servicing and genuine JCB parts.

# Looking east

## Cambodia has lessons to offer for Nepal's tourism



RABI THAPA



**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
**Artha Beed**

**S**iem Reap (Cambodia): After the horrendous ordeal of sending couriers back and forth over three weeks to get a South African visa recently, it was a pleasant surprise to apply for a Cambodian visa online and get it within 24 hours. Cambodia opened up again to the outside world just a decade and a half ago, but seems to have got this part of it right and now attracts two million visitors a year. Here in Nepal, we are still thinking of the magic number of one million, with Nepal Tourism Year just round the corner. If we are to ease our visitors' experiences at Immigration, it might be worth considering electronic visa systems like that of Cambodia.

You get nostalgic for the Nepal-India border while

crossing over from Thailand to Cambodia. Those who think that Nepal and India should shut down the open border and implement a visa regime at the border should take a tour of this border point. Middlemen cash in by filling in Thai immigration forms and the customs folks don't complain as there is a lot of tea money to be made. Thai goods flow into Cambodia while people flow into Thailand in search of jobs. It is fascinating that there are nine casinos in the Cambodian border town of Poi Pet just for the Thais to come and gamble. Casinos are not permitted in Thailand and like in Nepal, Cambodian locals, as per law, cannot gamble. It would be interesting to see a similarly regulated border between Nepal and India. Would Nepalis line up to cross over and gamble away their savings in Indian casinos? The contrast between the ease of e-visas and the actual chaos at the 'regulated' border once more

highlights the advantage of open borders.

In Cambodia, the US dollar is the preferred currency in use and the local currency, which stands at 4000 Riel to the dollar, is used only for change. With more transactions being based on plastic cards and mobile phones, what will be the future of paper money or the currency? If the Nepal-India currency peg is here to stay, maybe it is time for Nepal to consider making the Indian Rupee also legal tender here. Informal money exchanges will go out of business; informal money transfers will become formal. And if Indian tourists and investments are going to be dominant in Nepal, such an arrangement could be advantageous.

Cambodia has figured out the importance of English and, unlike its neighbour Thailand, believes that English is the language best suited to riding the wave of globalisation. Our

tuk-tuk driver spoke good English and spent his evenings doing management courses. While he was waiting for us in between trips, he was reading a Kotler marketing book with a dictionary on the side. Thailand's beaches and sex industry may not be overly concerned about what's lost in translation, but there's no doubt the nation as a whole makes little effort to embrace English for the sake of non-Thais. Nepalis, like Cambodians, can't afford to neglect English, especially in the service sector. Not only does it service international clients better, but a world of global information and job markets open up.

The spectacular sights of Angkor, next to Siem Reap, draw people from round the world, and will continue to do so for years to come. We could do the same with Lumbini, which has the potential to attract millions of Buddhists. Such projects would be able to absorb the unemployed local population and open up avenues for public-private partnerships.

Cambodia also provides hope for the future of conflict-affected countries. A country battered by violence, little seen and understood in other parts of the world, has been able to rebuild quickly. Over a hundred hotels have been built in Siem Reap, which edges out Phnom Penh in terms of the pace of construction. They buy expensive electricity from Thailand, but as long as they can recover the cost from customers they are happy. Nepal has not gone through anything close to what Cambodia experienced in violence and class elimination. For all the doomsayers who see Nepal as a failed state, if a country that went through so much can be rebuilt, then there is surely a better future in store for Nepal. [www.arthabeed.com](http://www.arthabeed.com)

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KIRAN PANDAY

# Cocking a snook

 **MY TAKE**  
**Damakant Jayshi**

Two recent events news items, one on 23 October and the other on 27 October, are indicative of the government's and the Maoists' total disrespect for the rule of law and the need to address human rights abuses. Yet again.

The first piece of news was about alleged human rights violator Colonel Raju Basnet of the Nepal Army. On 20 October the cabinet, on the recommendation of the Ministry of Defence (which in turn acted at the behest of Army Headquarters), handed Col. Basnet a two-year extension.

2004. The battalion was then led by Basnet, a lieutenant colonel at the time. Both the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the UN's human rights body in Nepal, OHCHR, have recommended investigations against Basnet and a suspension until the investigations are completed.

The extension Basnet has just been granted is distasteful from whichever angle you look at it. Basnet should be facing a civilian court, not getting an extension. An ad hoc court of enquiry that the army formed under Brig. Gen. Sharad Neupane in 2006 actually found Lt. Col. Basnet guilty and ordered his detention. This much is known. What followed the recommendation is not.


The Maoists, on the other hand, have carried on with the farcical pretense that they are punishing Kham. The party has

While the army's and the Maoists' actions are nothing new (after all, they have prevented civilian court trials for the most heinous crimes), Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal's remarks on Basnet have been the unkindest cut of all.

According to news reports, PM Nepal has already passed his verdict on Col Basnet: the officer is innocent. Nepal said that unless a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) rules Basnet to be otherwise, he is innocent. This is a joke.

The formation of the TRC is uncertain and given the mood in the Nepal Army and the Maoist Party, it is unlikely to see the light of day very soon. Even if it is formed, it will be ineffectual. A previous attempt to set up the commission failed in 2007 because both the government and the Maoists had agreed on a very weak commission. The terms of reference had effectively exonerated all accused of gross violations even before the commission came into existence.

Perhaps the prime minister meant the officer is innocent until proven guilty. However, by giving an extension to an army officer accused of the murder of nearly 50 people, the government has demonstrated its insensitivity. It was also the Nepal-led cabinet that announced the awarding of medals to senior police officers to mark Democracy Day early this year, officers who had implemented a shoot-to-kill policy while facing off with pro-democracy demonstrators in 2006. When a prime minister speaks the way Nepal has done, you know that justice for conflict-era victims will continue to be delayed.

The least the government and the army can do now is immediately withdraw the extension and hand Basnet over to the civilian authorities for investigation. The Maoists should do the same with Kham.   
[damakant@gmail.com](mailto:damakant@gmail.com)

## It's no surprise that the Maoists and the Nepal Army defend their own, but PM Nepal's comments are the unkindest cut of all

The second news item referred to the Maoist Party's 'taking action' against one of its Central Committee members, Kali Bahadur Kham. The latter, also one of the deputy commanders of the PLA, stands accused of murder and there is an arrest warrant out for him.

Basnet has earned a level of notoriety that few others in the Nepal Army can rival. He is implicated in the alleged arbitrary detention, torture and disappearance of 49 suspected Maoists at the Maharajganj barracks under the Bhairabnath Battalion between 2003 and

so far shielded him and prevented the police from arresting him. Kham, along with three other Maoist combatants, allegedly tortured a Kathmandu-based businessman, Ram Hari Shrestha, in Shaktikhor cantonment in Chitwan in 2008. Shrestha succumbed to his injuries.

In this case too, NHRC and OHCHR have called for an investigation. A court has ordered Kham's arrest. What did the party do in response? It gave him a berth in their expanded Central Committee. Now the party is talking of 'punishing' him.

### THIS WEEK

#### Futile election

Parliament sat through another round of voting for the prime minister's post on Tuesday. This was the 13th round of PM elections and the lone candidate, NC's Ram Chandra Poudel, was again unable to obtain a simple majority in his favour. In the election, 144 votes were cast, with 98



lawmakers in favour of Poudel, two against him, and 44 staying neutral. The majority of CA members, belonging to UCPN (Maoist), CPN-UML and Madhesi Janadhikar Forum, did not take part in the voting. Following the vote, a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of the Legislature-Parliament decided to hold the 14th round of voting on 29 October.

#### Deadline extended

The High-level Taskforce has extended its deadline by 11 days as it failed to complete its assigned tasks within the scheduled time. An all-party meeting on Sunday agreed to give the taskforce more time to resolve contentious issues among the political parties that have hindered the constitution-drafting process. Two hundred and twenty issues have been identified so far in 8 of the 11 thematic CA reports.

#### Foreign visit

President Ram Baran Yadav left for China to attend the closing ceremony of Shanghai Expo 2010 on Tuesday. He is leading a 17-member delegation that includes the tourism minister, foreign ministry officials and the president's advisors and aides. Yadav will also meet top Chinese leaders including Premier Wen Jiabao during the visit. Meanwhile, UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who had gone to China last week to attend



the same program, returned on Tuesday evening. He also met top Chinese officials and leaders of the Chinese Communist Party. Dahal organised a press meet at the airport upon his arrival and said he asked the Chinese officials to hold talks with the Indian Government in the presence of Nepali representatives to form strategies on Nepal.

#### Going up...in corruption

Nepal has been ranked 146 in the Corruption Perception Index 2010 released on Tuesday by Transparency International. With an index score of 2.2 out of 10, Nepal falls in the group of 'highly corrupt' countries with Iran, Yemen, Libya, Cameroon, Haiti, Paraguay, and Ivory Coast. Results from 2009 and 2010 indicate that Nepal is Southasia's second most corrupt country. Afghanistan is the region's most corrupt, ranked at 176, whereas Pakistan is seen as less corrupt than Nepal, ranking 143.





MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

“I want to cook a cake that no one wants to eat”

# The artist as an old man

RABI THAPA

“King Mahendra informed me that there were no galleries here,” says Syed Iqbal Geoffrey, recounting the royal response to his letter of 1962, in which he expressed a desire to visit Nepal. “But he said I could exhibit in the palace. Alas, I had other commitments at the time. I’m so glad to have finally made it here.”

The monarchy is now defunct, and the palace itself may be a museum, but there’s no shortage of galleries in Kathmandu these days. This week, Siddhartha Gallery is featuring an exhibition of ‘supracollages’ from the Indic artist Geoffrey, *The Seven Henry Series: In Search of an Ideal Landscape*.

Geoffrey made his mark early, snagging the Paris Biennale award in 1965 at the tender age of 25. But while he enjoyed the acclaim that followed, unprecedented for an artist of Asian origin (he was born in Chiniot, now in Pakistan), he was not content to wallow in bohemia. Fuelled by a highly developed sense of injustice,

Geoffrey took up a degree in law, graduating with honours from Harvard. Both art and law dovetailed into his pursuit of the truth, and he made a living out of subverting everyday expectations (particularly of the elite).

Decades later, Geoffrey seems as combative as he ever was, as an artist and lawyer. In the 1990s, he earned some notoriety for defending Aimal Kasi, a Pakistani who was eventually executed for the murder of two CIA employees in the US. Then in 2005, he sued the Hayward Gallery in London for 65 million pounds for the loss and damage of 300 of his works (the gallery had offered him compensation of 65,000 pounds).

Geoffrey did not win either of these cases, but they do illuminate his approach towards the world. More, perhaps, than any background research on him does. What he represents as an artist is by no means clearer after a session of googling. In person, Geoffrey does little to dispel the idea that

he is either an unrivalled genius or a supremely egotistical self-promoter, albeit a distinguished, personable one. He peppers the conversation with asides that I have no means of verifying, mirroring what he has proclaimed online: “I refused an invitation to be elevated to the Supreme Court of Pakistan”; “My work... was a watershed in twentieth-century art”; and so on.

He isn’t particularly forthright about his own art, either, photographic reproductions of which sprawl on the table between us. I ask him to explain the thrust of his work, and the mechanics of one of his playfully thoughtful collages to illustrate this, but he suggests that to give me an explanation in words would negate the need for ideation through his art.

Geoffrey does explain that he considers the process of creating his ‘pain-things’ more important than the endpoint. He is constantly at work, even on works he may

have begun a quarter of a century ago, and carries his ‘art ammunition’ wherever he goes (he draws out a stick of glue and some pens from his jacket, smiling mischievously).

He has plenty of advice for young artists struggling to make a mark in a society that too often undervalues art, or values the more commercial aspects of it. “I admire artists who don’t bother too much about commercial acceptance,” he declares, before adding in a softer tone: “But one may have to compromise to survive. I would tell young artists to evolve a strategy which is unique to their special circumstances, perhaps even using different identities, like Jekyll and Hyde... there is no harm in doing a bit of commercial work, if the artist can devote the major portion of his life to what he really believes in.”

Certainly no such considerations appear to have stopped Syed Iqbal Geoffrey from doing what he likes, making fun of the establishment the whole time.

He takes pride in citing an art critic’s appraisal of him as “not catering to the needs of society but rather creating them”. But in the next breath, he ridicules the same critic: “I suggested that I would burn my works outside the Pasadena Art Museum in California, let the clouds of smoke move to the museum, and that would be my exhibition. He took it *seriously*—he wrote a whole article about it!”

With the passage of time, Geoffrey may have come to recognise the limits of what he can lay claim to. This does not dampen his spirit. “People call me a has-been,” he concedes, before fixing me with an earnest gaze. “And I tell them: at least I have been a has-been!”

*The Seven Henry Series: In Search of an Ideal Landscape*, runs from 28 October to 17 November, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, Gallery hours: 11am to 6pm, 12pm to 4pm on Saturdays, 4218048



# Sugar



I am not a fan of sports movies, let alone baseball movies. There's something about the predictable trajectory of a hero who 'overcomes all odds' that just makes me cringe. So it was with some reluctance that I slotted in the only choice left to me the other night: *Sugar*, the story of a baseball player from the Dominican Republic who struggles to make it to the major league in the United States. Let's just say there was something about the typo-laden blurb at the back that convinced me to take a second look.

I didn't regret it. From the very beginning, *Sugar* radiates a

gritty authenticity. Whether it's in the sports academy where Miguel 'Sugar' Santos (Algenis Perez Soto) is honing his skills, or the run-down, lively neighbourhood outside San Pedro where he dreams of making the big time with his family, it's clear directors Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck have done their research (it helps that most of the dialogue here is in Spanish!).

Of course, Sugar gets his break and moves to the US. But he soon finds out it's not good enough to be just *good* in the production line of minor league baseball players, when one injury can deny you the one shot you

may have of making it. Add to this the cultural shock of moving in with a host family in the midst of the cornfields of Iowa, and Sugar soon becomes a very confused, if perennially charming, young man. For a refreshing take on the genre of sports flicks that will appeal to anyone who has ever emigrated, *Sugar's* one sweet hit.

*RT*

**Sugar (2008)**  
Runtime: 120 minutes  
Cast: Algenis Perez Soto, Karl Bury, Michael Gaston  
Directors: Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck

# A flight of freedom

*Udaan* is Vikramaditya Motwane's directorial debut and he makes a fine start by telling a story of a rebellious teenager forced to live by his father's rules. After being abandoned for eight years in a boarding school, Rohan (Rajat Barmecha) returns home to his abusive and military-strict father Bhairab (Ronit Roy) and a six-year-old step brother, Arjun, who he didn't even know existed.

Bhairab is less of a parent and more of a boss who demands to be addressed as 'sir' instead of 'papa'. Rohan wants to be a poet and is a skillful storyteller but his aspirations hold no meaning for his father. Instead he is compelled to enrol in an engineering college and work at his father's factory every morning. Rohan resents his



father, his life and the half-brother who has taken over his room. But his relationship with Arjun slowly changes as Rohan realises that the little one is also a victim of their father's wrath.

*Udaan* is the story of Rohan's courage, and his determination to break free. Some might find it a bit slow-paced but its pauses are beautifully filled by Rohan's lyrical poems and the soothing soundtrack. The small cast has been well chosen and Barmecha shines as the quiet, determined Rohan.

*PM*

**Udaan (2010)**  
Runtime: 135 mins  
Director: Vikramaditya Motwane  
Cast: Rajat Barmecha, Ronit Roy, Ram Kapoor, Aayan Boradia

## EVENTS

**The Seven Henry Series: In Search of an Ideal Landscape**, an exhibition of supracollages by the acclaimed Indic artist Syeed Iqbal Geoffrey. *Starts 28 October, 5.30pm, till 17 November, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, Gallery hours: 11am to 6pm, 12pm to 4pm on Saturdays, 4218048*



**Planet Nepal Contemporary Art Exhibition**, installation art and exhibition by various artists. *2 November-10 November, 5.30pm, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur, Gallery Hours: 11am to 6pm, Saturdays closed, 5521120*

**Hope: An International Schools' Art Exhibition**, an exhibition by students of international schools in Kathmandu to help the flood survivors of Pakistan. *29 October, from 5pm to 7pm and 30 October, 10am to 3pm, Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka*

**A People War Exhibition**, Nepal's conflict history in pictures. *Every day except Tuesdays, 11am-4pm, Patan Dhoka. For school visits, call 5549948, www.apeoplewar.com*

**Lazimpat Gallery Café**, screening of *Suryoyo*, a documentary by Turkish filmmaker Selda Meral. *Starts 6.30pm, Lazimpat*

## DINING

**Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Cafe**, enjoy wood-fired pizza with a superb view of Boudha stupa and free wifi, candlelight dinner options are also available for the romantics every full moon night. *Boudha, 2130681*

**Waffles promotion** at The Lounge from 12.30pm to 4.00pm every day, **Vegetarian Buffet** at The Cafe every Tuesday from 6.30pm, and **Arabian Nights** at The Cafe every Friday from 6.30pm at *Hyatt Regency, Boudha, Kathmandu, 4491234, 4489362*



**Singma Food Court**, for the best Singaporean and Malaysian cuisine in town. *Pulchok, 5009092 and Bhatbhateni, 4411078, foodcourt@wlink.com.np, www.singma.foodcourt.com*



**Ghangri Café**, a quiet place with comfortable sofas and a lovely courtyard, perfect for those sunny afternoons. Although famous for their open sui mai, they offer a few other great dishes as well. *Pulchok*

**Roadhouse Café**, serves pizzas cooked to perfection in wood-fired ovens. *Jhamel, 5521755*

**Ramalaya Tea Room**, now open for dinner, experience Chef Mohit's creations from Cider-brined Pork Chops to Guava Cheese, also 10% discount on evening dinners to all *Nepali Times* readers when they mention this ad. *Pani Pokhari, near Japanese Embassy, for bookings call 4006589, 4006589, www.rde.com.np/index.php/tea-room*

**Organic Café and Salad Bar**, hearty breakfasts and healthy salads while you catch up with your reading or emails in the heart of Thamel. *Chakshibari Road, Thamel, 4215726*

**Aqua Java Zing**, soar high on a low budget, buy one cocktail, get one free, buy two hookahs, get one free, only during happy hours from 2pm to 6pm. *Ganesh Man Singh Road, Thamel*

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

**Kakori at Soaltee Crowne Plaza**, Kebabs, curries and more, enjoy Indian food at its best. *Everyday 7pm to 10.45 pm for dinner, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal, call 4273999 for reservations*

**Saturday BBQ Brunch**, enjoy a mouth-watering Mongolian BBQ at Gokarna Forest Resort. Every Saturday, *Gokarna Forest Resort, Gokarna, 4451212, info@gokarna.net, Rs 1500 plus taxes*

**The Kaiser Cafe Restaurant & Bar**, enjoy a pleasant BBQ lunch in the ambient settings of The Garden of Dreams. *Every Sunday, 12pm to 3pm, Kaiser Mahal, Thamel, Rs 1200 per person, 4425341*

## MUSIC

**Jazzmandu**, a week-long jazz festival with performances from artists around the world:

**Valley Jams** at Upstairs Jazz Bar (Lazimpat), Moksh (Jhamsikhel), and House of Music (Thamel).

Performances by Simak Dialog, Alukomarai and others. *29 October, 7.30pm to 9.30pm, Rs 400*

**Gokarna Jazz Bazaar** at Gokarna Forest Resort. *Live music by Ari Hoenig, Cadenza Collective, Kutumba and others. 30 October, 2.30pm to 10pm, Rs 699*

**Jazz for the Next Generation** at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel. *31 October, 2.30pm to 4.30pm, free*

**Jazzmandu Master Class** at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel. *1 November, 4.30pm to 5.30pm, free*

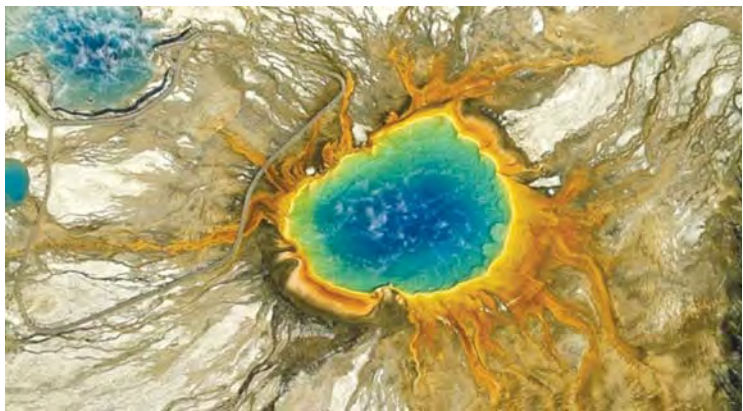
**Jazz at Patan** at Patan Museum Square, Ari Hoenig trio, Cadenza and Friends. *2 November, 4.30pm to 5.30pm, Rs 1199*

**All Star Fever** at Shambala Garden, Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat. Individual sets followed by a final jam. *3 November, 6.30pm to 10pm, Rs 799*





# Planet Nepal



Friday, 29 October  
Patan Museum

11am-5pm: discussions on the environment with ENPHO and ICIMOD, documentary screening of Ushuaia (Nicolas Hulot, Nepali version) and Home (Yann Arthus-Bertrand, Nepali version, above pic)

Patan Darbar Square

- 5.30pm : Official opening
- 5.55pm : Conceptual Light design/Installation by Karl Knapp
- 6pm : Kutumba in concert, Nepali folk instrumental ensemble
- 6.30pm : Performance Installation Fusion by Karl Knapp and Salil Subedi
- 7pm : Lo'Jo Trio in concert (below pic), French world band



Saturday, 30 October  
Patan Museum

11am-4pm: roundtables on the environment with ENPHO and ICIMOD, documentary screening of Ushuaia - A la recherche des Hommes - Nature (Nicolas Hulot, French version)

Patan Darbar Square

- 11am : Start of an all-day performance by students from Kathmandu University Centre for Art and Design & Lalit Kala Campus
- 12pm : Exposition of the 'Rickshaw Project' and meeting with the artists
- 3pm : Performance by Salil Subedi & EarthBeat 'Looking for Eco' with live audience interaction
- 4pm : Lo'jo Trio in concert, French World Band
- 7pm : Tryo in concert, French Reggae Band

Sunday, 31 October  
Patan Museum

11am-5pm: roundtables on the environment with ENPHO, ICIMOD, and Fairplaylist ('Music industry and the Environment'), with screening of Home (Yann-Arthus Bertrand, English version) and Pani (Water, in Nepali with English subtitles), followed by a discussion with director Sushma Joshi

Patan Darbar Square

- 3pm : Performance by Salil Subedi & EarthBeat: 'Looking for Eco', with live audience interaction
- 4pm : Tryo in concert, French reggae band
- 7pm : Planet Nepal concert with Kutumba, Nirnaya Da'NSK and Rock Sitar

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# Smoky homes

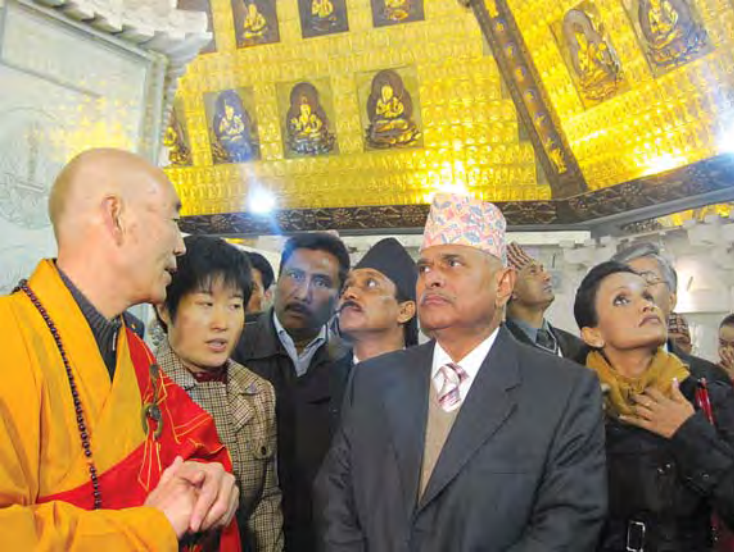


**DHANVANTARI**  
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Three decades ago, Dr Mirgendra Raj Pandey and his team showed that indoor pollution from open hearths was a major cause of ill health in Nepal. This prompted the construction of better chimneys and smokeless ‘chulos’ to help people breathe better. But the problem persists, as women continue to cook on open hearths; nearly 2 million people in the developing world have died prematurely due to indoor pollution. Recently, Hillary Clinton took up this cause by helping

introduce more efficient, inexpensive and user-friendly stoves in village homes in the developing world. A program is to be headed by the United Nations Foundation, which is a charity. Despite the existence of such programs, one of the most common problems seen in hospitals in Nepal today, especially in the winter time, is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). An important finding from Dr Pandey’s early works in Jumla, rural Kathmandu and the Tarai was that women suffered much more from COPD, leading to early heart failure and death, regardless of the fact that they smoked much fewer cigarettes, bidis, and tamakhu than men. There was an obvious correlation between the

high prevalence of COPD and the hours spent cooking with firewood and cow dung patties in soot-filled kitchens. Besides COPD, a host of other problems are caused by smoky homes and open fireplaces: eye problems, heart problems, lung cancer, pneumonia, and burn injuries, especially to children who play around open hearths. Burn injuries are particularly troublesome, given that even if a child survives being burnt by a fire, the initial injury may lead to burn contractures of the surrounding skin. This requires ‘release’ operations, which may not be feasible in a village in Nepal. Despite these dangers, villagers are reluctant to change their cooking habits, as for them, smoke provides warmth during winter and prevents termites from eating away their roofs. It is apparent that villagers are not informed of the dangers of the open hearth, or do not understand its effects yet. This lack of education lies at the root of the prevalence of COPD. Disseminating information and ensuring its understanding will be as important as installing a new stove or chimney. Without it, programs such as the one initiated by Clinton are bound to fail, regardless of their good intentions. 🇳🇵



**TOUR TIME:** President Ram Baran Yadav visited Famen Temple in Xi’an, in China’s Shaanxi Province. He is scheduled to take part in the concluding ceremony of Shanghai Expo 2010, and will meet the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during his week-long visit to China.



**PILGRIMS PROGRESS:** Devotees from the Muslim community wait at Tribhuvan International Airport to travel to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia as part of the hajj pilgrimage.

## GREEN SCENE

# Bags to grab

Fibre and cotton bags will experience a second coming at Bhatbhateni Supermarket and Departmental Store for Tihar this year. The store will begin by supplying 1,200 attractive, fibre bags at Rs 15 apiece, and 300 cotton bags at Rs 30 apiece, and hopes to go through this stock during the Tihar shopping season. The cotton bags carry the slogan "Use Cloth Shopping Bags and Save the Environment!" and the fibre bags look good for this season, coming in a shapely, bright orange design. The campaign received a lukewarm response last year, compelling the store to revert back to plastic bags. But store managers are optimistic about favourable consumer behaviour for the festive season. “A lot of customers asked for fibre bags during the Dasain shopping week – they seemed not to mind spending an extra Rs 15, as they were already spending a lot for Dasain,” says Pushkar Rai, HR manager at Bhatbhateni. The



store has placed a Rs 1 charge on polythene bags as an incentive for customers to use eco-friendly bags instead. Funds collected will go towards improving the Thirvam Road, which runs from Bhagwati Bahal to the police headquarters in Maharajganj. The Thirvum Sadak Sudhar Samiti (Thirvum Road Improvement Committee) has been given the responsibility for repairs while Bhatbhateni itself intends to plant trees along it. Building a green parking lot in front of the Nepal Rastra Bank in Baluwatar is on the agenda as well, as long as enough revenue is generated by the campaign. Plastic bags may be handy garbage bags, or great for endless packaging and storing of food items, but they are an unmitigated disaster otherwise. It’s enough to cast your eye over urban streets (and rural trails) across the country to realise that once discarded, plastic bags are literally forever. They choke drains, host mosquito larvae and may even leach out chemicals such as cadmium and other neurotoxins into food products stored in them. Fibre and cotton bags cause no such problems. Fibre bags are weaker than those made of cloth, but are waterproof and a safer alternative to polythene. Cotton bags are worth their price, for they last longer. An occasional wash and the bag is as good as new (and bacteria-free), and the next time you head to the supermarket you just take it along with you. At Rs 15 and Rs 30 respectively, the fibre and cotton bags selling at Bhatbhateni are a steal. 🇳🇵 *Shahani Singh*



**PICTURES SPEAK:** UNFPA and the Forum for Women, Law and Development marked the 10<sup>th</sup> year of UN Resolution 1325, on women’s roles in maintaining peace and security, at the Nepal Art Council, Thursday.

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**WEEKEND WEATHER**  
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Except for a high pressure system building over northern India, no major disturbances are on the horizon. The pressure gradient in this system has brought the wind in from the west, which means there are much clearer skies and colder air. The temperature is dropping at 1 degree Celsius a week. Expect sunny autumn days and clear nights in the coming week. Inversion induced smog and mist will mark the skies of the Kathmandu Valley.

FRI	SAT	SUN
26-15	25-14	25-15



# Festive fervour

Dasain is still the grand old man of Nepali festivals



**KALAM**  
**Rabi Thapa**

The grand festival of Dasain is finally over. What's changed and what's not in the way we celebrate such an event tells us something about the way we ourselves are adapting to life that is more commercialised, westernised, and reflective of the developments of the last few years.

The general trajectory of this season of festivals has long remained the same. Once the monsoon begins to clear, we all start preparing, mentally and materially, for the working holidays to come (for work it is for many of us, whether it's shopping for the family, hosting parties, or making social visits). Judging by the proliferation of malls and Dasain offers in the Kathmandu Valley, shopping is an altogether more fraught affair these days. But clearly there are people lining up to buy motorbikes (get a free camera!), cameras (win a motorbike!), and falling for the usual sales.

Dasain is meant to be about meeting, eating, drinking and gambling with family and friends. There are plenty who choose to take advantage of other offers to up and leave the country altogether these days, but for most Nepalis the fundamental joy of catching up with one's extended family is undiminished. Yes, people



complain that they have to spend hot days (and a couple of rainy ones this year) trooping across country and city to receive tika from people they may not see for the rest of the year, but I'd like to think they don't *really* mind. At least once a year, a circle is completed of one's blood relations, and this grounds an individual within the most ancient part of his or her society. And if you can't quite travel to *pharen* to be with all your loved ones, you can at least, through wire and web, see just how they are celebrating little Dasains, in Boston, in Doha, in Pune.

For those who imagine Dasain has less significance in a more secular and fragmented society, the sight of determined family units pounding the streets with big red tikas on their foreheads is rebuttal enough. Does custom compel those who can ill afford it to spend time and money beyond their means every Dasain? Perhaps. Has Dasain, for this reason, become "a dasha (ill omen) for the mass of the people", as the fun-loving in-charge of the Cultural Division of the UCPN(Maoist), Ninu Chapagain, put it last year? Not likely, if his solution is to

"promote local festivals" that presumably also demand expenditure. To his credit, Chapagain himself argued against the hypocrisy of those communists who speak out against Hindu culture, but use its festivals, Tihar in particular, to collect money for their 'parties'. In doing so, he concedes that political ideology too often loses out against the juggernaut of culture. Cue pictures of Chinese visitors to the Nepal Pavilion at this year's Shanghai Expo, making offerings to every statue of Buddha they came across.

In a charming reversal, Dasain manifests itself best in the blessed emptiness of Kathmandu once hundreds upon thousands evacuate the valley for homesteads across Nepal. The exodus is more dramatic with each passing year, and serves to underline the meaning this festival holds for so many of us, regardless of economics, ethnicity, or the times that be changing. The more things change, the more they stay the same.



[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)  
Communists don't celebrate Dasain, #471

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**NEW DELHI**—Barack Obama, the sixth American president to visit India since it gained independence, arrives at a trying time, both for the United States and for India. Some of Obama's closest advisers have just resigned, opening an awkward gap on national security and the economy—the focus of his meetings with India's government.

For India, the issues on the agenda for Obama's visit are immense and complex, and the options for resolving them are extremely limited. Those related to security in Afghanistan and Pakistan are as treacherous as they have ever been. Bilateral economic, trade, and currency disagreements may not be as bitter as they are between the US and China, but they are thorny, and lack of resolution is making them more intractable.

Nuclear non-proliferation remains one of Obama's priorities, as does the sale of US civilian nuclear technology to India, for which former President George W. Bush cleared the way. And Obama will be keen to know what help India can provide with Iran, a country with which India has smooth relations, owing to their shared worries over Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Given this potent list of challenges, what are the prospects for Obama's passage to India? Some years ago, I was queried by then US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, who was helping to prepare President Bill Clinton's visit. As India's foreign minister at the time, I told him: "Why make the visit destination? Be content with the directional," or some such words.



That response retains its flavour today: as new directions in India-US relations are set, new destinations will follow.

All state visits are overloaded with lofty, superfluous rhetoric. US-India summits are particularly prone to this hubris: the Great Republic meets the World's Largest Democracy. It would be better for both countries to shed some of these marigold garlands of cloying adjectives.

Another feature of such summits – the trading of lists of ‘must do’ and ‘can do’ items – also should be retired. It is both demeaning and tedious to treat an arriving US president as a stars-and-stripes Santa Claus, to be presented with lengthy wish lists. Likewise, despite America’s pinched economic circumstances, Obama would do well not to use his visit to peddle US wares. Although trade is an effective lubricant of good relations, these sorts of talks are for

the 'sherpas', not Obama and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, to handle.

These two great countries, 'natural allies' in the words of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, should reflect on what they have accomplished together since 1998, in order to map what lies ahead. Theirs is now a relationship of equals, so their national interests need to be reconciled on everything from Pakistan to climate change.

Indeed, Obama is placed in a unique position for an American president, a position that he appears to comprehend, though his opponents in the US do not. Power today begins in the acceptance of the limits upon it. This is also true of an India that is only now coming to recognise its new status in the world, in which the country's limits and responsibilities have expanded mightily.

Ours is an unstable

neighbourhood, one that America has entered without fully understanding the consequences—for India and for the neighbourhood. India must ask Obama hard questions about how security is to be assured, but, before doing so, it needs to ask the same questions of itself.

India must make clear – and the US must recognise – that a subcontinental country of a billion-plus people cannot be kept within the categorical confines of ‘South Asia’. The US must accept and candidly discuss the damaging consequences of its military, diplomatic, and political overreach – of a ‘war too far’ that has brought the region to its current ugly impasse.

What can the two countries do, separately and together? Both leaders must accept that history is destiny, and that the irrefutable logic of geography is a determinant of it. This is the only relevant and

reliable guide in meeting the region's complex challenges.

The constraints on US options, the veto of circumstances, offers little room for diplomatic improvisation. Here the greatest constraint is America's difficult and worsening relationship with Pakistan. India must understand this troubled partnership, into which America entered with its eyes wide open, though it would help if the US accepted that India has paid – and continues to pay – a very high price on this account. Only through such acceptance can the two countries chart a common future.

Likewise, it would be unwise for the US gratuitously to offer China a role in the affairs of a region that includes India itself – something that Obama appeared to do during his visit to China earlier this year, when he mentioned China as having a role to play in Kashmir. The US should also stop questioning India's relationship with Iran, a neighbour with which India is linked by many centuries of economic, cultural, and even civilisational ties.

Two great peoples and countries, although now locked in a 'strategic alliance', may occasionally fall out of step with one another, as India and the US have – for example, over global climate negotiations. But, at such moments, Obama might do well to recall Vajpayee's words during Clinton's visit, when he quoted Walt Whitman's poem 'Passage to India':

“Sail forth – steer for the deep  
waters only,

Reckless O soul, exploring, I  
with thee, and thou with me,

For we are bound where mariner  
has not yet dared to go."

*Jaswant Singh, a former foreign minister, finance minister, and defense minister of India, is a member of the opposition in India's parliament.*

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# Empowering young entrepreneurs



**T**wenty-year-old Pushpa Basnet was on a college field trip to a women's jail in Kalimati when she met Kanchi, daughter of one of the inmates. Basnet, unaware that when parents are imprisoned their homeless children often stay with them, was surprised to see a child there. "At that moment I knew I had to do something to make the lives of these children better," says Pushpa. That was when she opened the Early Childhood Development Centre.

Now, seven years later, Pushpa is sheltering and educating 35 children whose parents are in jail. She also runs a day care centre for children who are too young to be away from their mothers. But though she collected money from friends and family to support the centre, she was all too aware of the need to become self-sufficient.

Help arrived in the form of Change Fusion Nepal, set up in 2008 as part of Change Fusion Thailand. Pushpa entered the organisation's *Nepal Young Social Entrepreneurs Competition* in 2009, and was among the five young social entrepreneurs selected for interest-free loans, technical assistance and mentoring. With the support of Change Fusion Nepal (CFN), Pushpa has been able to train mothers in jail to make handicrafts and textiles. The products they make have found a lucrative market not just in Nepal but in America, Europe and Asia.



CFN

## Change Fusion Nepal helps transform job seekers into job providers

"We were not just looking for innovative ideas but people who had the commitment to work for it," says Luna Shrestha Thakur, founding director of CFN. "It was important for the business ideas to not just be profit oriented but also to have a positive impact on the community." Prospective entrepreneurs had to be between the ages of 20-35.

CFN received 60 applications for the competition. The selected individuals attended a capacity-building workshop and received continuous mentoring from CFN. "While the numbers of youth going abroad are on the rise, just the interest that the competition generated shows that there are young motivated individuals who see entrepreneurial opportunities in Nepal's problems," says Thakur.

One such entrepreneur, selected alongside Pushpa, was Ranjit Kushwaha of Bara. He sought a solution to the problems of poor rickshaw pullers in Bara, who paid the bulk of their daily earnings to rickshaw owners. With seed money from CFN, Ranjit and his team of 17 volunteers set up a cooperative that allows rickshaw pullers to purchase a rickshaw on an installment basis. Sumina Shrestha, Urmila Malakar and Sambhu Poudel were the other three individuals selected by CFN, to implement projects related to potato farming, Newari handicrafts and olive farming.

Now that CFN is getting returns on its first phase of investment, it has begun planning for a second phase. A CFN team will visit six districts – Parsa, Tanahu, Bhojpur, Mustang, Dang and Kailali – starting December to interact with local youths about the possibility of locally feasible and environmentally sustainable social enterprises. Then, Change Fusion Nepal will once again call for project proposals. This time, it will select 25 projects.

"It's not that we don't have people or ideas," says Ashutosh Tiwari of Entrepreneurs for Nepal, who also mentors the projects involved with CFN. "But organisations like CFN band such people together, giving them access not just to funds but also to a support system for expert advice, and help them develop their own networks."

Paavan Mathema

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Closing date for applications is Wednesday, 17 November, 2010. Previous applicants to the post advertised on 10 July, 2010 need not apply.





KIRAN PANDAY

Editorial in *Janadisha*, 26 October

जेनदिशा

By saying that the system favoured by the Maoists resembles that of King Mahendra’s panchayat system, Nepali Congress’s Ram Chandra Poudel has proved his character. By equating

Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal with King Mahendra, he has mocked the country’s sovereignty and freedom. When the Congress leaders were working hand-in-hand with the monarchy, Chairman Dahal was already leading the People’s War to abolish it. At a time when NC and UML leaders did not even want to hear about a

# Blame game

constitutional assembly, Chairman Dahal was unifying the people for its sake. When Chairman Dahal refused to bow down to foreign powers and gave up the prime minister’s chair, NC and UML leaders were calling on them for favours. The Maoists and their chairman have played a progressive role in the country’s social, economic and political sector. Comparing the party and its chairman with the panchayat system and Mahendra not only shows Poudel’s political bankruptcy but the extreme nature of his mindset.

Poudel earned less than half the votes that Dahal received and lost more than 12 times. Yet he has been contesting the elections for the prime minister’s post as a lone candidate. Not only Nepal but the whole world knows how democratic he is. Poudel himself has been playing a role similar to Mahendra by sacrificing issues of

national benefit and letting the country be captive to foreign commands. The totalitarian panchayat system and Mahendra’s reign were a part of India’s grand design and in the hope that his prime ministership will also be possible through India’s designs, Poudel has created an impasse in the country. Regardless of the political system, Nepali leaders have always set their hopes on the ruling party in India.

If NC’s leader Ram Chandra Poudel says that the Maoist proposal to change the present system of governance and implement a progressive structure is similar to Mahendra’s panchayat system, is the system he wants any different? He has to answer this question or be ready to face the consequences of being a foreign agent.

# The cow herder

Bhusan Yadav in Birgunj,  
*Himal Khabarpatrika*, 2 October-1 November

हिमाल

Shyambadan Yadav, a software engineer left his fancy job in the city to become a dairy farmer in his village. He knew it was a huge risk, but he overcame his doubts and mortgaged his family land to set up a dairy plant in his village with an investment of Rs 10.7 million. “The poor have always remained poor, and they haven’t had a way out. I decided to take the risk to improve their livelihood,” he says.

Today, Yadav’s plant has changed the lives of 1,500 local farmer families. “With work opportunities available in the village, the number of people migrating to India for work has gone down and the lifestyles of villagers have changed for the better,” notes Sadhu Yadav of Parshurampur. Sadhu, who worked in Punjab for seven years, now raises cows in his village and delivers milk to Shyambadan’s dairy every morning.

Shyambadan Yadav was earning a salary of Rs 50,000 at the Bhagwati Steel Company in Birgunj when he decided to venture into dairy farming. “My job only paid for my family, this industry supports hundreds of others,” he says. The one-time engineer now wakes up at five in the morning and does all the farm work:



BHUSAN YADAV

cutting grass, feeding cows, and cleaning their waste. He raises 10 cows on his farm and buys 1,800 litres of milk from the farmers every day.

Yadav has also invested in 40 buffaloes for poor families from nearby villages without taking collateral as surety for the loans, which can be paid back with the milk they sell in the dairy over an extended period of time. Work is already underway to invest in 300 buffaloes for other poor families. “I want families without any land of their own to be able to pay for their children’s education,” Yadav says.



AHMAD ISKANDAR

# Deplorable airport

Yashoda Timsina in *Nepal*, 31 October

नेपाल

The government has announced next year as Nepal Tourism Year and is planning to bring in one million tourists to the country. The campaign will formally start in four months, but given the sorry state of the country’s only international airport, the ambitious goal sounds like a big joke. I was in the airport recently on my way to Bangkok. In the check-in wing, a tourist came out of the toilet,

cursing. There was no water or toilet paper in the restroom. I wondered if government officials are aware of the deplorable condition of these toilets. But apparently, high-ranking officials only pass through the VVIP room and use the toilet there. They are clearly not aware of the inhospitable conditions passengers and tourists have to tolerate. Without regulation and monitoring, things are bound to be unbearable once the expected tourists come in. Is this how Nepal Tourism Year will succeed?



Why are you asking how his Dasain was? He’s an MP, every day is Dasain for him.

नागरिक Robin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 25 October



# Corruption at the core

Lila Mani Poudel in *Nagarik*, 24 October

नागरिक

I received an unusual number of calls from early in the morning on 22 October, inquiring about the suspension of four police personnel in Chitwan. The suspended personnel were not the sons of politicians, administrators or millionaires. I don't think they had amassed a fortune by penalising public vehicles plying on the highway, to be deposited in foreign banks. And I don't believe punishing those who extract money from public vehicles will curb the prevailing corruption.

The reality is high officials in Nepal amass a huge amount through their juniors, like these suspended personnel deployed in the field. This is how they ensure a regular income for themselves while appearing clean before the law. The juniors readily accept the deal as it is an opportunity for them to earn extra money under the protection of their seniors. This is how corruption expands and establishes itself as a culture. Corruption in the workplace will prevail as long as junior officials submit themselves to their seniors and agree to be their pawns.

I have sympathy for those suspended personnel. But there is no place for sympathy or consideration in running an administration. It should be guided by law and justice, in the absence of which we face lawlessness.

I am one of the few secretaries who use public transportation to travel outside the valley, in this case to my ancestral home in Gulmi. The government bus fare between Kathmandu and Gulmi is fixed at Rs 750. But people were charged Rs 1,150 for the route. Since all tickets to Gulmi were sold out in Dasain, six families hired a microbus.

When I saw police personnel collecting money from public vehicles at different places on the



highway, I called the police chief and chief district officer of Chitwan district to inform them about the incident. Having overheard my phone conversation, our microbus driver requested me not to take the issue any further. He feared that police would harass him later on the same route.

After I called the police chief, an SP of Chitwan district called me to inform me that the traffic police had given our vehicle a receipt for the fee collected. I told him I needed no explanation of the incident, as I had witnessed what had happened myself. He asked for our vehicle number and kept calling to ask us where we were. It became apparent later that he would produce receipts from the receipt book he had with him to cover up the money we paid at different places.

On entering Gulmi in Ridhi Bajar, our vehicle was levied Rs 100 as vehicle tax. When I told the collector that was the rate for buses, he looked at me angrily, banged on our vehicle and left without a word while police stood by as mere spectators. We felt insecure and left quietly. There were many other such incidents along the route of arbitrary fees being collected with or without receipts.

I have a government Toyota car. I can drive. But I often take a public bus to go back to my village. I am shocked by police behaviour in Chitwan district, and am concerned about just how the general public can respond to police misdemeanours when even someone who has access to the police chief is helpless before corrupt officials.

I hope the incident and subsequent suspensions will encourage honest police personnel across the force.

*The author is Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office.*



## Khukuris to ploughshares

Kantipur, 25 October

कान्तिपुर

Sankhuwasabha: Maoists in the district have started commercial farming to support their activists and pay off party loans. They have been raising pigs on a piece of land they have leased in Ramche and have also started vegetable and fish farming. The land has been leased for Rs 22,000 a year and the Maoists hope to start earning income from pig farming in six months.

Party secretary Dewan says that they took up farming because the party did not have a sustainable source of income. A local NGO helped the Maoists start commercial farming. A Janjagaran group has been formed among the conflict victims in the party and they are being supported to take up farming. Vice chairman of the group, Lal Bahadur Tamang, says that improved breeds of pigs will soon be made available to poor farmers.

The party needs about Rs 200,000 every month for the living expenses of its activists, says Dibya Baral, member of the party's district secretariat. An additional Rs 150,000 is needed every month for the treatment of some three dozen Maoist activists who were injured during the war.

## Employment in employment

Nagarik, 25 October

नागरिक

The overseas employment sector and related businesses have generated thousands of jobs in the country, a report by the Nepal Institute of Development Studies says. According to the report, 344,000 people are employed in services related to overseas employment in the country while more than 250,000 people go abroad for employment every year.



About 18,000 people are employed in health examination centres, orientation centres, advertising agencies, photo studios, restaurants and other services that cater to the overseas business. Five thousand people are employed in various manpower agencies and 321,000 people are working as manpower agents, the report says.

The private sector earns about Rs 81.2 million every day from the overseas employment sector.

Chairperson of the Association of Foreign Employment Agencies, Somnath Bataju, says that almost 75 per cent of all workers have gone abroad while 20 per cent cannot afford to seek foreign employment. The majority of those going for foreign employment are people from Dalit and ethnic communities, he says.

Forty-four per cent of households in Nepal have at least one member who has gone abroad for work.

## Traffic in a jam

Bishnu Poudel in *Nayapatrika*, 22 October

नागरिक

Four traffic police personnel stationed in Chitwan, including a sub-inspector, have been suspended for penalising the vehicle in which the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office was travelling.

Secretary Lila Mani Poudel, along with his family, was heading to Kathmandu from Rupandehi in a reserved microbus when he was stopped by traffic police for a regular check in Ramnagar, Chitwan. The traffic police penalised the vehicle Rs 100 for plying on the highway without a route permit. According to the police on duty, they also issued a receipt, No.5054. But Poudel reprimanded them for penalising his vehicle.

Police personnel Dipak Puri, Bikram Bhusal, Tirtha Raj Thakuri and Sub-Inspector Hari Chhetri were subsequently suspended.

"Secretary Poudel did an injustice to us by exercising his power," complained one of the suspended personnel. "Poudel talked over the phone for half an hour and scolded us," he told *Nayapatrika*, "We told him that he might be a big person but the charge was as per the law."

The suspended personnel said they had never thought action would be taken against them for enforcing the law.

The Regional Traffic Police Office, Hetauda, sent a letter on Thursday informing the four policemen of their suspension. "You are suspended for illegally extracting money from vehicles", states the letter, but there is no mention of the penalty the police claim to have applied.

*Nayapatrika* could not reach Poudel or SSP Nawaraj Dhakal at the Regional Police Office, Hetauda, for comment.

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# Honesty, the best policy



NEIL DIXIT

The Ass was determined this week to boycott all news on the Umpteenth Prime Minister Election (UMPE), but is forced to react to a rival donkey who conjured up the headline: ‘Poudel Misses Lady Luck in 13th Attempt’. Since when did this have anything to do with luck, ladylike or otherwise? Can’t say we don’t have our hearts in the right place, tho. All we can add is: “Better luck next time in the 14th attempt. Over ‘n’ out.”

I know. We all had our uh-oh moment when it transpired that the cholera outbreak in Haiti possibly has a Nepal connection. The UN is investigating if the sewage overflowing from the septic tanks of the Nepali contingent of MINUSTAH into a nearby river has cholera. And if it turns out the bacilli in question are indeed the Vibrio cholera 01 Ogawa biotype El Tor then we are literally up shit creek. Besides war crimes, selling M-16s to Hizbollah, and corruption in APC procurement, cholera is one more black mark for Nepali Blue Helmet peacekeepers. However, it is a little hard to understand all the media hoo-hah about Haiti. Cholera is our national disease, we have outbreaks in Nepal all the time and no one in the international media ever gave a hoot.

The other matter that made headlines this week was the Transparency International report card that was interpreted differently by different papers, with some saying ‘Nepal Most Corrupt Country in the World’ and another that said ‘Nepal Most Corrupt in South Asia’. Let’s make up our minds, folks. But one paper put the best spin on our utter corruptibility as a nation by using the banner headline: ‘Nepal Still Strong in Corruption’. In fact, the country seems to be going from strength to strength as far as malfeasance is concerned, if you take another report in the papers this week that revealed that villagers are having to be bribed Rs 1 to use a newly built public toilet as a special promo. When there is so much palm greasing going on, and people are being ripped off left and right, at least one lodge in Ghandruk has decided to set itself apart by highlighting its integrity (pictured).

Narayan Man, the president of Bhaktapur, hit the nail on the head when he simplified Chairman Awe-struck’s visit to China in simple layman’s language. “He went there just to irritate India,” quoth Bijukchhe. That said, it looks like the Chinese let it be known that they are rather miffed that their country’s good name has been dragged into the mud with the Maharagate Tape. Beijing wants Nepal to be stable and predictable, not volatile and jumpy, which is more and more the way PKD is behaving as he finds the prime ministership slipping further away from his grasp. No senior Chinese leader met Chairman Awful, which was a message in itself, and the main instructions from the party’s foreign relations dept was: “Sort it out with India and don’t keep bothering us, we’re busy.” And that’s not all, the Chinese also instructed the Maoist delegation to go back to Nepal and tell everyone that was the message they got. Dutifully carried out by PKD at his arrival press con, as well as Fire-breathing Sapkota in his interview with John.

Com Fearsome tried to put a brave face on it and said that he proposed to the Chinese a tripartite strategic alliance between India-Nepal-China. But he failed to convincingly explain what this proposed Trans-Himalayan Axis is meant to do.

Meanwhile, back home businesses are facing post-Dasain extortion as local baddies raise money for the Extended Assembly in Palungtar next month. In Gorkha, every family is required to donate one mattress, or else. Tourist buses are being fleeced from Sarangkot to Charikot (Medal of Honour for the American tourists who reported the extortion to police in Dolakha; the ten grand was returned to them).

Anyone worried about the Maoist obstruction to the budget can rest easy. The budget will get a green light as soon as PKD’s own allowance and the CA members’ salaries and cantonment transfers dry up.

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