As Nepal braces itself for a third week of blockade and nearly two months of Terai-wide shutdown, it is becoming clear that the Madhesi people’s struggle has turned into a proxy war for New Delhi. India has denied this is a blockade, and the international community is conspicuously quiet, wary of antagonising New Delhi. There is a near blackout on news about the Nepal blockade in the Indian press, and this does not seem important enough for the international media.

But even Indian customs officials at the border are not trying to hide it anymore. This is an out and out blockade, let’s call it what it is.

In Kathmandu talks have begun with Madhesi dissenters. Two meetings have been held and a third round is scheduled for Friday.

Law Minister Narhari Acharya has registered the first amendment bill of Nepal’s new constitution to address two major demands of Madhesi parties: proportional representation and demarcation of election constituencies in proportion to population in the Terai.

A parliamentary session is also scheduled for Friday to elect a new Prime Minister. But it looks impossible to secure consensus of all parties on any one name. Therefore, Parliament will begin the process to form a majority government. The UML has already proposed its Chair KP Oli as prime minister with the backing of the UCPN(M). Even if NC does not abide by its deal with the UML, Oli is hoping to be elected with the backing of fringe parties.

What Nepal now needs is a unity government capable of implementing the new constitution, ensuring political stability and expediting economic development. But before all that, dousing the fire in the Terai and easing supply of essential commodities before Dasain is what all Nepalis want right now.

PROXY WAR

EDITORIAL

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COMMENT

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BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE

BY THE WAY

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INDIA-LOCKED

GUEST COLUMN

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FORGOTTEN SURVIVORS

Political wrangling has kept the Reconstruction Authority in limbo, prolonging the pain of earthquake survivors.

BY OM ASTHA RAJ AND SAHINA SHRESTHA

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WIDEN YOUR WORLD

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VISA
As Nepal braces itself for the third week of the Indian blockade and nearly two months of a Tarai shutdown, it is becoming increasingly clear that the standoff between the two neighbours is not really about the recently-adopted constitution or the rights of the excluded plains community. It is about bristled egos in the New Delhi establishment trying to teach Nepali politicians a lesson for not listening to them.

As we reported from the central Tarai last week, a majority of Madhesi people were not agitating in the first couple of weeks after the constitution went ahead in August. Riot police started over-reacting across the plains, dominate others based on class, gender, Nepal is not landlocked, it is once again a victim of New Delhi's attempt to muscles. India-locked, by Bihari K Shrestha (16 shares)

The Indian blockade is no longer about the April-May earthquakes. The Dasain festival is just one week away, and this seems to have bolstered the Nepali government embodies privilege to the Madhes and the constitution, the Indian blockade is no longer about the Madhes or the constitution.

This is now turning into a serious nationwide humanitarian crisis, worse in terms of economic damage than the April-May earthquakes. The Dasain festival is just one week away, and this seems to have bolstered the Madhesi leaders to get their people to teach the capital a lesson by blocking the highways to India.

But by now the Madhesi people's struggle for dignity has turned into a proxy war in which they are doing India's bidding. It was not a coincidence that the Madhesi Front decided to cut off supplies to Kathmandu by blocking border points only after India's Ministry of External Affairs merely took note of 'a' constitution and expressed concern over 'difficulties' facing Indian freight companies and transportation due to the 'prevailing unrest' in the Tarai.

India has denied imposing a blockade against Nepal, and the international community seems to be wary of antagonizing New Delhi to raise the issue. There is a near blackout on news about the Nepal blockade in the Indian press, and it is not important enough a story for the international media until more people die. But the reality is there for all to see: even the Indian customs officials at the border are not trying to hide it anymore. This is an out and out blockade, let's call it what it is. Madhesi parties have not staged sit-ins at all border points. But the supply of essential commodities, most importantly fuel, is not getting through even at checkpoints where there isn't a single protester.

This is now turning into a serious nationwide humanitarian crisis, worse in terms of economic damage than the April-May earthquakes. The Dasain festival is just one week away, and this seems to have bolstered New Delhi's resolve to squeeze even harder for every last concession it can get – even on matters that have nothing to do with the constitution.

The Indian establishment first leaked seven points it wanted amended in the new constitution, immediately denied it, then this week stated that it is indeed their official position. But even that now seems to be just a ruse for New Delhi's other uncles' demands, like pressure to grant a controversial contract for a fast-track highway joining Kathmandu with the Tarai to an Indian company. India also seems to be opposed to KP Oli replacing Sushil Koirala as prime minister, and has a whole host of demands on security and other issues that we haven't even heard about. The blockade is no longer just about the Madhes or the constitution. But what led us to where we are today is largely the doing of our own political leadership. As a country that shares a long porous border with Nepal, we should have been sensitive to India's security concerns. Knowing our overwhelming economic dependence on India, our leaders should have known the limits of our political elbow room.

Still, it is hard to figure out how antagonising most of the Nepali population will help India in the long run. Winning an Indian state more important than losing a neighbouring country? Silly question. It probably is.

Your Say

**SHOWING WHO'S BOSS**

**HIGHWAY TO DHAMPSU**

**NOT ABOUT THE CONSTITUTION**

**YOUR SAY**

**SURESH BIDARI**

**Kiran Maharjan**

**Bairagi Khukuri**

**Namah**

**Jivesh Jha**

**Sushil Sharma**

**Santa Gaha Magar**

**Kunda Dixit**

**Steve K**

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North and South

This is an internal Nepali problem that should be resolved through dialogue, not intimidation, protests or a blockade.

to India. Sher Bahadur Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal also made the pilgrimage.

Does every Nepali leader need to go to India to get approval? If not, why should a leader of any sovereign country send aides to gain a foreign country’s consent before assuming premiership? The world does not disappoint when you close your eyes. Ignoring facts and selective reporting erodes journalism ethics and readers’ trust.

Who is to blame for this crisis: the Madhesi parties, ruling parties or India? All India says it wants it for the ruling parties and the Madhesi groups to engage in protests or a blockade. They have their actions have made life difficult in Kathmandu. Kathmandu.

But this may finally make Kathmandu understand what people in Tarai have been going through. Officers were elected by us, so they are answerable to us. We have to make it clear to them that this is an internal problem and should be resolved through a dialogue, not intimidation, protests or a blockade. We force the insurgents to keep to their word.

When the Maoists came overground and their popularity in the Madhes dwindled, the Indians sided with the regional Madhesi forces to maintain their influence over the local population. Besides, China’s intentions kept New Delhi suspicious of Kathmandu. This threat perception means that Indian foreign policy in Nepal has been geared at keeping the neighboring population across the open border happy, even at the cost of chronic tension with Kathmandu.

No amount of diplomatic overtures or undiplomatic threats will force the Indians to ease the border restrictions at least until the Bihar elections. New Delhi has apparently conveyed this message personally to most senior Nepali leaders.

This raises a serious question: Are the instruments of those like the UML’s KP Oli, who seems to be in a great hurry to become the next Prime Minister. Is he using an “undeclared” blockade as an excuse and playing the anti-India card to distract attention of the people from the real issues? Have some leaders in the negotiation team deliberately hardened their position on f o r g a i n g a n d e m e n t t o the constitution? Is the constitutional amendment bill being used as a bait to propel Oli to power?

Perhaps, it is time for informed citizens, intellectuals of this country to confront the political leadership with these questions, rather than blaming the political parties for India’s favours or negligence. The government is happy about it. Protests have taken a direct hit. Not a single protester has died in more than nearly two weeks now.

There is a crippling shortage of essential items, and the economy has taken a direct hit. A single Nepali is happy about it. Protests in Tarai have turned more peaceful and strategic which has prevented further fatalities. However, the country is now divided and 47 percent along ethnic lines between North and South. There are now two courses of action. One is to blame someone, whether it is political leaders of ruling parties or Madhesi or India. Another is to reflect on how we got here.

The protests continue in Tarai against the constitution to the credit of 1968 Constitution. Many in Kathmandu protested against India with slogans like BackOffIndia. Blaming India and deluding itself is an option to get back. But so far, it seems to have only hardened the Indian position.

The constitution fiasco and Kathmandu’s inability to accommodate grievances of Nepalis from the Tarai has upset India and eroded our diplomatic and economic ties. Let us not delude ourselves: the solution to our current problems can come from within Nepal and the only way is via a meaningful dialogue between the political parties and the dissidents in the South.

Talks are going on, but the negotiations started nearly two months after the agitation started and more than 40 people were killed. The government was simply not serious about holding a meaningful dialogue or showing any flexibility until the fuel shortages made life difficult in Kathmandu. The international community is an option to get back. But so far, it seems to have only hardened the Indian position.

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SAHINA SHERSTHA

Growing up in a village in Darchula in remote northwestern Nepal, Birendra Singh Johari would often impersonate local policemen. He admired their crisp blue uniforms and knew that he wanted to be a policeman who he grew up.

That dream came true in 2001 when Johari joined in the Nepal Police as an assistant sub-inspector. Four years later, he was promoted to sub-inspector.

“It was a big day for me and my family,” says Johari whose family migrated to Nepal in the late 1950s from India. “I had always dreamt about serving my country.”

In the latter part of his career Johari has been involved with the Crime Investigation Bureau of the Nepal Police and heads the Mahakali Regional Investigation Team which is involved in tracking smuggling operations across India-Nepal border.

Johari’s contribution to wildlife conservation earned him the WWF Abraham Conservation Award this year. He told us after the award ceremony this week: “Wildlife contraband is a transnational crime. It may have decreased in Nepal, but it continues in India, and that affects us in Nepal as well.”

During his tenure in Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of Nepal Police, Johari led 12 anti-poaching operations which led to the arrest of 30 poachers. Wildlife parts including five sets of leopard skin and 4.8 kg of tiger bones, six sets of red panda skin and two rhino horns were also confiscated.

Most recently Johari and his team foiled smuggling operations in Kanchanpur and Baitadi where, acting on a tip-off his team hauled wildlife parts and nabbed smugglers entering Nepal with endangered animal parts.

“Working to catch criminals who operate crossborder is not easy. There is a whole nexus with people operating in different layers,” he explains. “People living near the Nepal-India border are the ones involved in poaching and smuggling. Then there are the middlemen and finally there are those with contacts in China.”

Sujit Acharya of the Energy Development Council spoke to Nepali Times about how our energy policy failure led to the current blockade, and how to plan for the future.

Nepali Times: What is your view on the fuel crisis caused by the Indian blockade?

Sujit Acharya: I do not understand why we Nepalis are angry at India for trying to impose their will on us. We need to stop blaming others, and ask what have we done to be self reliant. Stipens won’t do that for us.

Nationalism is strengthened by doing real constructive work and not waging street protests. It is tragic, the total failure of what is called the Government of Nepal to move the country towards economic and political independence. And I am deeply disappointed in the bureaucracy of Nepal that has driven our country into the bottom rung of nations with their managerial and existential liabilities.

What should be our priority?

To reduce our dependence on imported petroleum products. We spend 46 per cent of our annual budget and 55 per cent of our foreign currency to buy petroleum products from outside. Nepal’s petrol and diesel imports went up by 14 per cent this year and the Customs Department stated vehicle imports went up sharply by more than 30 per cent. This means that we are almost fully dependent on outsiders to go about our daily lives, and more dependence on the outside means they will try to force their policies on us which may not suit our national interest.

And if we do not agree, they could try to impose their will on us just as it is happening now with the unofficial blockade.

How is the Government of Nepal to be blamed?

Had we been living an electric motorcycle, electric car or an electric bus, we would not be facing problems today. Had we allowed our electricity generation projects to be developed, would we care about cooking gas shortages? Instead of exempting electric vehicles and electric cooking stoves from taxes, the Ministry of Finance does exactly the opposite. Instead of building a nationwide electric vehicle charging station network, the finance ministry holds a deal to build a petroleum pipeline to import more petroleum products from India. The Ministry of Energy has also failed to fulfill domestic energy demand. And then there is the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources, which has wasted its time in useless microeconomic debates on contractual irregularities instead of a major one on drafting a much needed Energy Act that ensures long term energy security. It boggles the mind why common sense hasn’t prevailed.

But how is it possible to run the country without any petroleum products?

It is entirely possible. Instead of importing petrol or diesel based motor vehicles move to electric with favourable fiscal incentives. The world in the next 20 years is going to be running mainly on electric vehicles and electricity based infrastructure. So first we must convert our petrol pumps into electric charging pumps, nationwide in a strategic manner. Estonia did that in four years. Bhutan will be running only on electric cars by the year 2022. Cooking stoves can run on clean electric induction stoves. This is not a distant dream, it can be done in five years.

What does the government need to do?

Convert transport and cooking infrastructure from petroleum towards domestically generated electricity. The Ministry of Finance needs to wake up and see that any tax on imported electric vehicles, and electric cooking stoves and provide even more facilities for such that will be assembled inside Nepal. It needs to wake up and see that any tax projects for domestic consumption as it will power the entire electric cooking and transport infrastructure.

The Nepali Army should be appointed side contractor for all transmission lines, since everyone else has failed. Waive off Environmental Impact Assessment for all projects up to 200 MW to ensure more rapid generation. This needs the Ministry of Forest to sign land lease and tree cutting agreement within 90 days of developers submitting applications that commit them to planting two trees for every one that is cut. All solar projects above 1 MW that can be brought into the national grid within 1 year to get a power purchase rate of Rs. 20 per unit for 30 years with complete waiver of all clearances. And finally suspension of oil imports and electricity connection to any person, community or party that creates any kind of disturbances for whatever reasons at the site areas of electricity projects.

The bottom line is this: Nepal can never ever become economically independent without developing a renewable energy economy.

sujits@edcnepal.org
In 1998, Singaporean David Lim led his country’s first successful expedition to climb Mount Everest. Since 1999, undeterred by the effects of a rare nerve disorder, he has gone on to lead more than 15 mountaineering expeditions around the world. Ashutosh Tiwari caught up with the sought-after mountaineer and motivational speaker at a leadership program hosted by the National Banking Institute (NBI) in Kathmandu.

**Teamwork is an individual skill**

How is leading a climbing expedition similar to leading teams in today’s corporate environment? It’s similar in that you are coping with fast changing external environments while leading a team, often of disparate personalities, into a challenging situation. Over a longer time frame, leading an expedition requires several skills such as creating a motivational environment to thrive in, seeking debate and making decisions together, winning buy-ins for some of the unpopular decisions, and ultimately choosing the right environment to thrive in, seeking business continuity plans.

In your presentation, you mentioned that micro-behaviours tell us a lot about people. How can executives make use of this idea? Instead of deciding or judging people on the basis of highly subjective criteria such as personalities, perceived promises or rumours, executives should borrow concepts from the coaching world. You focus on transforming specific, observable behaviours (SOBs) when working with people to produce specific outcomes.

By focusing on people’s SOBs, we move the emphasis towards actual behaviours that support a goal. This can define confrontational situations, especially when a party has agreed to do a task but their SOBs say otherwise. You also talked about ‘creating a winning culture’. How does an organization create its culture and why is getting that right more important than getting the strategy right? A big aspect of implementing any strategy is getting people to practise winning (and not ‘whining’) attitudes, habits and behaviours. Winning teams know what they need to do to keep winning know this, and will do so. But this sort of culture can only be created if top management focuses on developing the attitudes, habits and behaviours of their people to achieve the shared goals.

Nepali organizations face a lot of shocks today, most of which are unpredictable and outside of their control. How can organizational leadership embed ‘resilience’ into their framework of day-to-day work? Resilience, or the ability to bounce back from shocks and setbacks is both an institutional imperative as well as a personal one. Companies can, for example, develop IT solutions to back up data, and develop business continuity plans should natural or man-made disasters happen.

As research shows, personal resilience can be learned. But in order for this to happen, people need to learn to assess the extent of the setback with perspective of what else they have experienced. This has to be followed by adapting to the new changes and habits required to move forward, and what supporting elements they need: such as close counselling from friends and confidants, and then feedback to assess if they are adapting appropriately.

Talking about resilience, after your triumphant return home in 1998 after the Everest expedition, you were diagnosed with Guillain–Barré syndrome, which has made you unable to make use of your (natural) legs. Still, you have managed to climb mountains around the world? Where does your determination come from? My determination comes from a fascination in finding out what I am able or unable to achieve, on and off the mountains. That’s how that fascination has expressed itself, in the past 15 years in a slew of organisational improvement solutions and programs. I am still interested to find out what makes a group of people succeed. I also think that we should focus on what we can change (the future), and not on what we can’t change (the past).
Both the longest and biggest festival in Nepali culture, Dashain is celebrated by worshipping goddess Durga in all her manifestations.

13 October, Ghatasthapana: Jau (barley) is planted in a kalash (vessel) filled with holy water to germinate jamara (barley) is planted in a kalash (vessel) filled with holy water to germinate jamara

20 October, Fulpati: Seventh day on which fulpati (jumra, different types of flowers and banana stalks) is brought to Kathmandu from Gorkha. Generally, families bring fulpati to their prayer rooms.

21 October, Maha Astami: The day of Kaali Kali puja to worship Kali, a demonic avatar of Goddess Durga.

22 October, Maha Nawami and Dashami: The day marks the victory of goddess Durga over the demon. The Taleju temple at Hanuman Dhoka is opened for the public only once a year. The dusk ceremony at Darbar Square and ends at ideal Model School (facebook.com/nepalfoundationmodel), Kathmandu.

27 October, Kojagrat Purnima: Tika goes on till this day, concluding Dashain.

Help rebuild,
A special fund-raising print sale to contribute towards the refurbishing of heritage sites in Patan by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) (www.nepalink.com/shop)

October beer festival,
Nepal’s first beer pong tournament, with live music from Ashaya and the Steam Injurs 2:00 pm onwards, 17 October, 2016, @ Rosanna, Lajimpat, 9851186972

Dhauwa,
KOMOD is collaborating with Mahal Sampath to produce a Nepali teletext, ‘Dhauwa’, on raising awareness about air pollution from open fires. Premiering 11 October, 8:50 PM on Nepal Television

Empower her,
Eleven participants will pick their idea of a service impact project, winners receive seed fund money.

Business plan competition,
King’s College is organizing a business plan competition to promote social entrepreneurship in Nepal Deadline: 9 October, 9818032872, 9844484727

Sculpting possibilities,
Nepal Council Art Centre (NCA) is presenting the work of Nepali and Dutch artists in a fund-raising exhibition 10 October, 12 pm to 9 pm NCA, Bagbazar, Chabahil

Business plan competition,
King’s College is organizing a business plan competition to promote social entrepreneurship in Nepal

Trans-Himalayan,
Chinese artists Zhao Yang’s oil, water paintings on Nepal and China celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Opens 11 October, 6pm, Nepal Art (NAC), Babarmahal, (01)4718048, 4457930, shop@nac.org.np

Famous Dalai Lama, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, will visit Nepal on 11 October for a two-day visit. On his visit, he will attend an event at Kathmandu Durbar Square and meet with government officials. He will also visit the Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu. The Dalai Lama’s visit is expected to boost tourism in Nepal.

Artist Kiran Manandhar makes a vibrant return after a long pause

In an effort to create something refreshing, Kiran experiments with his composition, colour and texture. In many of his acrylic pieces on canvas, his brush strokes create different layers that often make it difficult to determine the exact shapes or figures of the women or men in his paintings.

In this way, Kiran’s pieces often remind us of the famous paintings of Picasso. Stylistically, there are some similarities. Like Picasso, Kiran uses colour as an expressive element and often depicts women and men as floating figures in his paintings. In many of his scenic paintings of mountains, one can see the abstract expressionist influence of Jackson Pollock. While his art may have hints of Western influences, the essence of Kiran’s exhibit Shakti remains very much Nepali and the embodiment of the landscape, culture and deities of Nepal.

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**DINING**

- **Chez Caroline**
  Authentic ambiance, exquisite French food, glorious sunshine and more.
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- **Soaltee special**
  Soaltee Crescent Plaza is featuring special menus from seven award-winning chefs until November.
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- **Bodhi Books and Bakes**
  This newly opened café offers a rich collection of cakes and pastries and good books.
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- **Taza**
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- **Vesper Café**
  Great for leisurely dining, serves diverse foods that reflect Italian lifestyle.
  Khammam, 01-5348179

**MUSIC**

- **The Latination**
  India’s reputed Latin jazz outfit brings you festive sounds from salsa and rumba to modern jazz, and Afro-Latin rhythms.
  9 October, 7:30pm, Alliance Française, Gorkha Road, Trarpani, Kathmandu.
  (01)424160

- **Gharana Music Festival**
  A one-of-a-kind international classical music festival organised by the Gharana Music Foundation.
  5.30 to 8.30pm, 1 to 11 October, Hotel Pok and the Inn, Dharan.
  www.gharanamusicfoundation.org

- **Atithi Resort and Spa**
  A quiet sanctuary that fuses Nepali tradition with modern amenities.
  Lakeside, Pokhara. (01)440806, info@atithiresort.com

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  A new weekend getaway that lets visitors experience the joys of working in a farm.
  Activities include harvesting vegetables, cleaning farm and feeding animals.
  Starts 11 October, every Sunday, 8.30am, The Vegetable Garden, Lajimpat, Rs 2000 (includes transportation, breakfast and lunch), 9841776448

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**GETAWAYS**

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- **Ankit Tiwari Live**
  Popular Bollywood singer comes to town for the first time.
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- **Jazzmandu**
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  4 to 10 November, www.jazzmandu.org

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  Three days, two nights in a deluxe room, complimentary breakfast and one free meal, lots of discounts on other services.
  Rs 6899 net per person on two sharing basis. 28 October, Sherpa Ta Village Resort, Pokhara.
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- **Tiger Mountain Lodge**
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  www.tigermountainpokhara.com, (01)42642, 981094974

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THE HOUSE OF GOD

A place of worship in New York’s Little Nepal becomes a symbol of religious tolerance

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
in NEW YORK

Till four years ago, the St Matthew Lutheran Church in Jackson Heights, New York used to cater to the neighbourhood’s Christian community. But this area of Brooklyn has seen a sizeable influx of Nepali immigrants in the past decades and has come to be known as Little Nepal. New York’s Sherpas and other Buddhists needed a temple of their own, and started looking around for property. They spotted an ad in the Internet saying a church was for sale and immediately called to inquire.

The location and size of a 70-year-old brick church with tile roof seemed ideal. The price quoted was $1.25 million and the Nepalis managed to raise $800,000 from the estimated 5,000 Sherpas living in the New York area. The rest of the money they borrowed from other Nepalis.

Today, a shiny bronze figure of the Buddha sits below where there used to be a crucifix and altar. Instead of a cross on the roof, the former church is festooned with colourful prayer flags that flutter in the New York autumn breeze.

Imitating nature

Nepal’s most modern printing facility, Jagadamba Press, now makes natural colours come alive with its state-of-the-art equipment.
“When we first came to look at this building, we immediately liked its brick construction, and wondered how we could convert a building with a cross into a gumba,” recalled Dawa Jangbu Sherpa of the United Sherpa Association. “But we had to spend some money on changing the furniture and fixtures which had carved Christian motifs on them.”

The local municipality did not initially give permission for the church to be sold, and agreed only after they were convinced that the church was moving elsewhere because they needed more space. That is how the building had not only a change of ownership, but also a change of religion.

Says Dawa: “We had thought that there may be opposition from the Christians living in Jackson Heights if we removed the cross and crucifixes, so we waited. We had experience from Nepal that religion could be a sensitive issue.”

So for a few months, a Buddhist place of worship was located in a building with a cross. However, the contractors renovating the church convinced them no one would have any problems, and Dawa remembers heaving a sigh of relief.

The renovations alone cost another $150,000 and today there are prayer ceremonies in the temple every Sunday. There are also researchers working on Buddhist cultural and religious studies who make it their base.

The basement, Sherpa Kidung Hall, can accommodate 200 people, and can be rented out for public functions.

“We don’t discriminate against anyone, we don’t say this is exclusive for our religion only, and this temple is a living example of religious co-existence,” says Dawa. Indeed, on a recent Sunday the prayer room was filled with Sherpa women in traditional dress, Nepalis of various ethnicities and American Buddhists.

Fittingly, the day four years ago that the Buddha figure was consecrated and the Jackson Heights Gumba inaugurated happened to be Christmas.
There are some terrible films that you can watch while stuffed in a plane on long haul flights that can make you happy even while you know that under any other circumstances you wouldn’t be caught dead watching that kind of trash – you all know what I mean. “Spy”, however, the new, hilarious, Melissa McCarthy vehicle is not one of those sometimes acceptable horrors.

While I admit to having watched “Spy” on a plane, I am very happy to report that while, as the name overtly states, the film is indeed a spoof (it has to be with McCarthy in it) on the male dominated suave spy genre – the film is anything but a ‘let’s pass the interminable hours to my destination” kind of plane flick.

Written and directed by Peter Feig, who created the excellent but short-lived “Freaks and Geeks” in 1999 (which now has a cult following) and directed “Bridesmaids” (2011) and “The Heat” (2013) – both hit comedies starring female leads the likes of Kristen Wiig and Sandra Bullock (and of course McCarthy). “Spy” is a hilarious hybrid animal unto itself that cleverly subverts a genre without pulling its punches, and even more importantly, stepping too far over the edge by trying too hard to be funny.

McCarthy plays CIA analyst Susan Cooper, an unlikely CIA employee who guides her partner Agent Bradley Fine (Jude Law) from her desk while he goes on hyper covert missions involving life and death and, of course saving the world from apocalyptic destruction. The plot runs on normal spy film tropes involving deaths, double crosses and covert ops, all of which are over the top but with fairly hideous villains, causing viewers to become somewhat invested in their overthrow.

McCarthy of course makes it into the field, supported by a brilliantly talented cast of characters who will have you in stitches with their almost believable antics and ludicrous but highly enjoyable stunts which are really not too far removed from films like “Furious 7“ - the Vin Diesel vehicle that delights in outdoing itself.

McCarthy herself, a brilliant comedienne is captivating as the hesitant, diffident Susan Cooper who transitions back and forth between self doubt, and fierce feistiness as she combats rampant sexism, pre-conceived biases about large women who work desk jobs and a world that claims to be a post-feminist one but is any thing but. So do not be one of those people that are ridiculed implicitly in the film and do make an effort to see “Spy” - it’ll have you in stitches and in a few years time you will be glad you got on the McCarthy bandwagon sooner than the rest of those doubters.

Made in Pakistan:

Women select jewelry at an exhibition of Pakistan-made products at the United World Trade Centre in Kathmandu on Tuesday.
Now, a trekking app
Throw out your hardcopy guidebook and navigate with your phone on your next trek

**Taste of Singapore**

A part from its iconic skyline and reputation as one of the most liveable countries in the world, there is one more thing synonymous with Singapore. No, not just the haze. It is its food. With dishes ranging from Hainanese Chicken Rice, Chilly Crab and Roti Prata, the tiny city state offers a multi-ethnic cuisine that is the most eclectic in this part of the world.

Good news for us, we can now experience this culinary treat in Nepal too. Soaltee Crowne Plaza is featuring special menus from seven award-winning chefs until November and we were there to sample the Singaporean/Chinese cuisine by celebrity chef Sam Leong that is on offer till next month.

To begin with, we sampled a glass of the Wolf Blass Cabernet Sauvignon 2011. Pleasantly rich in taste, a few sips of the wine was enough to set the mood for the evening. We started off with an appetiser, the tempura lychee stuffed with crab meat (Rs 1,050). Garnished with spring onions and sweet sauce on the side, the salty and sweet components of the dish complemented each other perfectly. With its lychee exterior and crab meat stuffed inside, the mixed blend brought out a unique flavour. Although the exterior was crispy, the tempura was light and did not feel too oily.

The second on the appetiser list was the Chef’s signature wasabi prawns (Rs 1,150). Sprinkled with sesame seeds and resembling dumplings, the prawns were soft and the lightest tinge of wasabi was enough to tingle your tastebuds. The appetisers did what they were supposed to: make us crave for more.

The wok-fried chicken made of home-made black pepper sauce with ginger and spring onions (Rs 850) was divine. The spice from the black pepper sauce was just enough to mellow the lingering taste of the wasabi, and similar to the appetisers, the chicken was fried lightly and was just the right amount of crispy.

The next main dish was the braised egg noodles with shitake mushrooms and poached vegetables (Rs 750), which left us in a gastronomic swoon. As a quintessential Cantonese dish, it was not heavily seasoned, bringing out the natural flavour of the food. After feasting on seafood and chicken, the only vegetarian option on the menu made the dinner feel wholesome.

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To end the three course dinner we had the mango pudding with candied pears, basil and pistachios (Rs 390). While the pear compot may have been a tad too sweet, its pairing with the mango pudding blended well.

This is a different par from food you get in hawker centres around Singapore. Chef Leong’s innovative fusion cuisine lifts simple dishes to a loftier level. Suffice it to say, you won’t be booking a flight to Singapore before Dasain when you have a little Singapore right here in Soaltee.

The current menu is featured from 28 September to 11 October and customers can choose between a two course or three course meal, the latter featuring a free second glass of wine. The coming weeks will be taken over by Chef Takagi Kazuo for Japanese cuisine, Dean Brechtschneider for bakery items and Theo Randall for rustic Italian cuisine.

Ayesha Shakya
We all feel sad once in a while, and usually these feelings fade within a few hours or days. However, feeling down can sometimes be more than just a passing phase. Depression inhibits the ability to function within daily life, and causes grief to your loved ones as well. Treatment should be sought for this common, but serious illness.

World Health Organization estimates that about 350 million people in the world are affected by depression. Depression can cause isolation and keep you from getting help. But it does not have to rule your life. With proper treatment and support, you can effectively treat depression, and regain control of your life.

Major depression is extremely debilitating. The ability to work, concentrate, sleep, and simply enjoy life is hindered. While you may only experience major depression once in your life, it is typically marked by multiple occurrences.

Persistent Depressive Disorder is characterised by consistent feelings of sadness and worthlessness for two years or more. Bouts of major depression are intermittent with periods where it is less severe. Disruptive Mood Regulation Disorder is indicated by a loss of temper multiple times a week accompanied with an irritable and angry mood.

Certain other forms of depression occur in specific circumstances. Psychotic Depression is severe depression with some form of psychosis, including delusions and hallucinations. Postpartum Depression happens to some women after giving birth due to hormonal and physical changes, and is more severe than regular ‘baby blues’.

Another type, Seasonal Affective Disorder, occurs when a person feels depression in the winter months due to lack of natural sunlight.

Depression is most likely caused by a combination of genetic, biological, psychological and environmental factors. If someone in the family has depression, you may be more susceptible. It is also possible to have depression if it doesn’t run in the family at all. Circumstances such as the loss of a loved one, compromised financial security, a difficult relationship, or other emotional traumas may cause depression.

There is a wide range of signs and symptoms experienced by individuals with depression, and it differs from one person to another. Frequency and length of symptoms may vary depending on the individual.

Common signs and symptoms of depression include persistent sadness, hopelessness, guilt, irritability, restlessness, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, headaches, digestive problems, overeating or loss of appetite, and thoughts or attempts of suicide.

The effects of depression may be different from one individual to another. Not everyone diagnosed with depression will feel the same effects. Some more common effects may include physical health problems, weakened immune system, self-harm as a way to cope, suicidal ideations or attempts, loss of self-confidence, increase in high-risk behavior, substance abuse, learned helplessness, loss of social network, end of relationships, and work or school-related problems to name a few. Depression also affects the loved ones of the individual in various ways, such as increase in stress, change in financial responsibility due to job loss, and, end or loss of relationships among others.

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October 10 is World Mental Health Day.

About 350 million people in the world are affected by depression, and most will never seek treatment.
SAHINA SHRESTHA

Insurance claims for damaged property have soared in the aftermath of the April earthquake, but despite calls to settle claims there have been inordinate delays. The Insurance Board directed the insurance companies not to delay payments for claims after customers complained that they were made to wait endlessly for no apparent reason. Even though claims are now being settled, a new problem has arisen: under-compensation.

Customers claim that insurance companies are under-valuing the damage to their buildings so they can get away with lower payments. For their part, insurance companies say that the payment is done according to the reports submitted by independent surveyors, calculating depreciation costs and also under-insurance by customers.

When Anup Baral, a Kathmandu-based businessman, bought a home, he took out a loan from a financial institution. As per the regulations, the institution insured the house. When the earthquake happened, he thought that the premium he had paid for years would cover the cost of his damaged wall. But when he went to claim the insurance, he realized that his property had been underinsured and his insurance did not cover the outer walls of his house.

"At first, when they were insuring the property they said I wouldn’t have any problems in settlements. After the earthquake, I found out that the financial institution had insured only a part of the money I had borrowed from them and not the whole amount," said Baral.

Baral had insured his office building as well, and even there the compensation he received from the insurance company was hardly enough to cover the damage. He is one of many who had insured their properties and felt cheated by the insurance companies after the earthquake. "If the amount doesn’t even cover the repair of the damage what is the use of the premium we pay every year?" asked Baral.

Deep Prakash Pandey, CEO of Shikhar Insurance agrees that people need to be compensated properly but says for that the consumers have to disclose the value of their property accurately and not limit the insurance to the amount they have borrowed from the bank.

"Knowing the right way of buying insurance and under-insurance are the two main problems I see now," he said. "There has to be a change in the traditional way of doing insurance also. People have to be careful about all the information and not just consider the premium cost in their policy and ensure that their property is not underinsured."

But consumers point out that the insurance companies don’t explain what the insurance covers or what underinsurance is while insuring the properties. "How are we to know that the house insurance doesn’t cover the boundary wall?" The CEO executive said there should explain the policy in detail to us. And the Insurance Board should monitor these things," said Baral.

Raju Raman Poudel, Director of Insurance Board says the consumers must be aware of the clauses and be careful about including reinstatement values, saying, "The clauses are written in the papers the consumers sign up but they don’t know what they are signing up for. He told us: "The clauses are written in the papers the consumers sign up but they don’t know what they are signing up for. But consumers point out that the insurance companies don’t explain what the insurance covers or what underinsurance is while insuring the properties. "How are we to know that the house insurance doesn’t cover the boundary wall?" The CEO executive said there should explain the policy in detail to us. And the Insurance Board should monitor these things," said Baral.

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Prof. Niranjan Manandhar, a geoscientist at Department of Survey, Nepal, says the precision control points used for different types of mapping are not only the bases for the design of most infrastructures but also serve to measure the movement of the earth during earthquakes. Hence, having a modern geodetic data is crucial for disaster recovery process. "We can achieve by establishing networks of Continuously Operating Reference Stations (CORS) or active control points. A study conducted by Geodetic Survey Branch suggests a distributed network of 147 CORS at a 30km inter-station distance to achieve real time geodetic network. Says Manandhar: "If active control points are installed, it is going to be a major leap since the existing datum is collected by passive control points."
early six months after a deadly earthquake, political aftershocks have prevented the 3 million affected people from receiving through the government the $4.1 billion pledged by the international community for rebuilding their homes.

The government formed the National Reconstruction Authority two months after the 25 April earthquake, and then on 13 August appointed Govinda Raj Pokhrel as its CEO. But parliament failed to ratify the ordinance to set it up, so Pokhrel is heading an organization that doesn’t formally exist.

“I was off to a flying start,” says Pokhrel. “We had collected a strong team and policies were being formulated. So it was a complete shock when I found out that the Reconstruction Authority was no longer a legal government entity.”

Most agree that Pokhrel, who headed the National Planning Commission, was the right man for the job. He had shown to be an efficient manager who had prepared the International Conference on Nepal’s Reconstruction two months after the earthquake and finished a Post Disaster Need Assessment (PDNA) report in time for it.

But before Pokhrel set up his new office and hired staff to begin reconstruction works, the ordinance through which the authority was formed expired without being replaced by a bill. And the new bill through which the authority could have been legally institutionalised is unlikely to be passed by parliament any time soon because the UML doesn’t like Pokhrel, who is seen as an NC appointee.

To be sure, the main opposition UCPN (M) had also delayed the parliament proceedings on ratification citing provisions in the bill. But now it is the UML that is putting a spanner in the works. Parliament has forwarded the bill to its legislation committee, which will cut down the number of amendment proposals and send it back to the full house.

UML legislators say the present draft of the bill is ‘very weak’ and will not be strong enough to rebuild earthquake-hit areas. Most importantly, they have sought a political person as the authority’s executive chief and involvement of legislators from the earthquake-affected districts.

Reconstruction in ruins

Political wrangling has kept the Reconstruction Authority in limbo, prolonging the pain of earthquake survivors

GM ASTHA RAI and SAHINA SHRESTHA
Aber the 25 April earthquake destroyed his mud-and-stone house in the remote village of Panglang in Sindhupalchok district. Laxman Tamang built a timber and tin shelter on the edge of his maize field. He lived through the monsoon in this flimsy, leaky structure. Tamang, his wife, children and elderly parents are now braving to survive the harsh winter in that crowded hut, as there is no sign of any help from Kathmandu to rebuild his home.

“I have nowhere else to go,” Tamang told us this week. “I had hoped to build a warm house before the winter, but that is unlikely to happen.”

In Kathmandu, the Reconstruction Authority has been stuck over its structure and rules (see adjoining article). Which means the $4.1 billion pledged by the international community to rebuild homes of families like the Tamangs is unspent. “I don’t know what’s going on in Kathmandu,” said Tamang. “I have heard that I cannot rebuild my house in the same way, but no one has told me how I can do it. I have also heard that the government will give us some money, but I don’t know when and how much.”

Although the earthquake had its epicentre far away in Barpak village of Gorkha district, Sindhupalchok was the worst hit with more than half the fatalities reported from here. Nearly 70,000 private houses were damaged, most of them irreparably, in Sindhupalchok alone.

Those who lost their houses spent this year’s monsoon in temporary shelters, and they are now worried about the winter season. Political wrangling over the authority is just prolonging the pain of the earthquake survivors.

Ran Chandra Sapkota is an earthquake-displaced person in Sindhupalchok. He has been living in a temporary shelter near where his house once stood. “My children cannot sleep well, they are always scared of snakes and insects,” he says. “But I do not have enough money to rebuild my house on my own. Nor has the government told us what earthquake-resistant housing model would be like.”

Dasin is just a week away, but families like the Sapkotas are in no mood to celebrate. On top of the earthquake damage, there are the woes of the Indian blockade. “This year’s Dasain will be joyless,” he says. “Those who lost their relatives are still mourning, and the homeies like me are not in a mood to celebrate.”

Sindhupalchok’s CEO Babhada Giri says, “We are doing nothing about reconstruction yet, we are still waiting for the Reconstruction Authority to begin its work.”

The government wants the reconstruction grants of Rs200,000 per family to only go for seismic resistant house designs, but because the authority doesn’t legally exist yet, the plans have not been made public.

Because of this, villagers in Barpak, near the epicentre of the 7.8 magnitude earthquake, have been rebuilding with the same unreinforced masonry. Gorkha’s assistant CEO Dipendra Poudel says, “Given the scale of damage, reconstruction might take longer and require more resources in Gorkha.”

With Kathmandu preoccupied with political issues like the constitution, the Madhes unrest, the blockade and the formation of new government, some earthquake-affected people and communities in Gorkha have started reconstruction on their own without waiting for the authority to approve new quake-resistant housing models.

In Barpak, the April catastrophe taught the locals that building safe houses was the best way to survive future earthquakes. So they waited for the government to come up with a master plan to build back Barpak in a better way. But they are now frustrated with the sluggish government, and a third of them have already rebuilt their homes.

Jit Bahadur Ghale, a local tourism entrepreneur in Barpak says, “The newly rebuilt houses might look a bit more sturdy, but they are not fully earthquake-resistant.”

The locals of Barpak say the government left them with no choice but to follow the same unsafe housing model by delaying the formation of the Reconstruction Authority.
Once perceived to be a Maoist ideologue, Baburam Bhattarai is now no longer with the party that he nurtured alongside his comrade Pushpa Kamal Dahal for two decades. He is now claiming to be just an ordinary Nepali. Even so, whatever he speaks or does will create political ripples for some time because the media and the international community still view him as the torch-bearer of a liberal Maoist ideology.

But when he was Prime Minister, Bhattarai performed no better than his predecessors in terms of effective service delivery. While in the party, he spent much of his time and energy justifying what Dahal’s leadership did. He is now speaking his mind freely. But will he do the soul-searching necessary? Will he publicly admit to his party’s mistakes during the war? After quelling the protests, Bhattarai claimed that there was a conspiracy to finish him off during the war. What he meant was that Dahal wanted to kill him when they fell out over strategy. He did not name Dahal, but no one but the supreme commander of the Maoist army had the power to terminate him.

Bhattarai was indeed stripped of his responsibility and put under house arrest. But his political line prevailed, and he led his party to the peace process following an India-brokered 12-point agreement with other parliamentary parties.

Nine years after the peace process, Bhattarai’s allegation carries significance and needs to be investigated. Dahal has to answer. But before that, Bhattarai has to himself answer many other more serious questions. He was the chief of the so-called parallel government’s people’s movement. So he is not just guilty of the deaths of the 17,000 people. What did Nepal gain or lose from the slaughter of so many people? Bhattarai is as responsible as Dahal is. He will not be able to justify his much talked-about new political force unless he answers this question.

Bhattarai was an elected representative of people in the post-1990 parliament. But he insulted the people’s faith in him by quitting parliament, just as he did now, and waging a decade-long war that led to the deaths of so many people. Maoist rebels butchered political opponents. He has not forgiven Dahal for the latter’s alleged conspiracy to declare him a traitor and terminate him. But he has forgiven himself for the deaths of innocent civilians? Is he sorry to the families of those killed by his party? If he is not, accusing Dahal of a murder conspiracy and forming a new political force will just be yet another sign of his hypocrisy.

Remembering the 1989 blockade

In 1989, the Rajiv Gandhi-led government imposed an economic blockade against Nepal because of a dispute over transit treaties and its perceived stance against China’s joining in the Non-Aligned Movement. The government made sure that block market didn’t thrive. Within 45 days, Nepal drew the international community’s attention to the problem. “We bought fuel from Bangladesh and planned to bring in more from Tibet,” said Budhathoki.

India refused to send supplies, deciding not to relent to international pressure. It did, however, agree to let fuel to be brought from Singapore but made sure that the process was difficult. Budhathoki himself went to fetch the oil from Calcutta. The government prepared to import 50 per cent of the fuel from a third country and instead the establishment of a stock rank in Parbatipat. World Bank and other donor agencies agreed to provide loans at a minimal interest rate.

The plan was to bring in the pipeline till Vigne in the first phase, Lhau in second phase and Parbatipath in the third phase. “We kept a secret so that India wouldn’t get a chance to sabotage the plan. Only the King, Prime Minister and I knew about it,” said Budhathoki. After India discovered Nepal’s plan, it proposed to build a pipeline till Arhikhet, but the government rejected the offer. According to him, Rajiv Gandhi had tried to contact the King but the latter was on a hunting trip. Realising that Nepal wouldn’t give in, Indian leaders including the former Indian Prime Minister came to Nepal and pressed Nepal leaders to overthrow the Sher Bahadur Deenanath Government. Nepal did overthrow the Parbatipath system. When Krishna Prasad Bhattarai’s government decided that India’s fuel stock was Nepal’s stock, we lost the battle,” said Budhathoki.

If the movement for democracy had been delayed by six months, we would not have been in this situation now,” he added.

Budhathoki added that leaders should not compromise the country’s sovereignty. “Internal matters should be taken care of within the country. If people are not satisfied, India will give a chance to play games again,” he said.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s entry into the guest book at Pashupatinath Temple during his visit in August 2014:

The Pashupatinath Temple located on the banks of Bagmati is the centre of our faith. It is written in the Hindu Skanda Puran that Pashupatinath and Kashi Vishwanath are one and the same. Coming here on this day, I feel extremely emotional. I hope that the blessings of Pashupatinath, which connects both Nepal and India, will be bestowed on the people of both countries.

Narendra Modi

MODI BACK THEN

In 1989, the Rajiv Gandhi-led government imposed an economic blockade against Nepal because of a dispute over transit treaties and its perceived stance against China.

As the Minister of Commerce and Supply, Nabin Baruah then became the lead negotiator of Nepal with India. “Our country was struggling to survive. The blockade was difficult. Budhathoki himself went to fetch the oil from Calcutta. The government prepared to import 50 per cent of the fuel from a third country and instead the establishment of a stock rank in Parbatipat. World Bank and other donor agencies agreed to provide loans at a minimal interest rate.

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What might the leaders of the Madhesi-based parties do if they are granted an autonomous province? How will they govern? They will not be bothered much by those who lost their lives during the current agitation, they will be back to wheeling and dealing. Madhesi-based leaders missed the votes they got from citizens by offering positions in the Constituent Assembly (CA) to their own wives, relatives and wealthy individuals from the Hills. The choices they have made in the proportional representation (PR) to the CA is the strongest evidence of nepotism. What if the leaders of the Madhesi-based parties do if they are granted an autonomous province? How will they govern?

Meanwhile, Madhesi-based parties have also sold off positions to wealthy individuals from the Hills. In a meeting of the Sadbhavana Parliamentary Party, Narendra Shah was handed a PR seat after others failed to pay more than Shah’s Rs. 10 million commitment. Madhesi Janadharak Forum Democratic’s Bijaya Cacchhadar is also known to have sold positions to Gita Rana, Bahuram Pokhrel and Subodh Pokhrel.

A former personal assistant of Mahanta Thakur stealed Thakur’s car after complaining that he was not given a PR seat that he was promised.
India has blatantly blockaded Nepal to back a splintered bunch of disgruntled Madhesi politicians, who were humiliatingly rejected by the Madhesi voters themselves in the last election. They won a mere 11 seats of the total of 116 constituencies in the Tarai, and turned to India. New Delhi, mysteriously, finds it in its interest to side with Madhesi 'outcasts'. The agitating Madhesi Morcha is a fractious coalition of at least four sub-morchas which in turn is the coming together of over 13 different entities, more than one of which is a self-declared Bharatbadi.

Their main demand has been the implementation of the agreement that two of these parties had signed some nine years ago with the then Girija Prasad Koirala government that, among others, provides for delineating the whole of the Tarai as one province under federal Nepal. Given Nepal's variegated geography, this makes no economic sense, and it would also be potentially suicidal for Nepal because it would put the plains in the hands of Madhesi politicians and their mentors across the border.

What is even more perplexing is that India, which is aspiring to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has got itself embroiled in this misadventure out of which it has no perceived advantage or exit strategy. India's foreign policy has become the subject of ridicule around the world, even from pundits within India. Humiliation does not seem to matter to the Indian establishment.

Back in 1989 during the previous blockade, the World Health Assembly passed an amendment proposal by the Nepal delegation, which I had the distinction of leading, to a Palestinian resolution against an Israeli embargo calling for it include all landlocked countries. After three exchanges between me and an Indian delegate, the Assembly adopted an amended resolution to the utter embarrassment of the Indian delegation. The delegate passed on a threat that sounded exactly like the one recently issued by the Indian foreign secretary, S Jaishankar.

Soon after the 1989 embargo and regime change in 1990, India helped the ethnic cleansing drive of its protectorate, Bhutan, and ferried more than 100,000 of its own citizens to the Nepal border and dumped them there. Furthermore, while India has all these years complained of terrorist incursion by Pakistan, New Delhi has been complicit in providing a safe haven to Nepali Maoists whom India's government has officially declared to be terrorists.

No matter which party is in power, stranglepating Nepal into submission to India's whims of the day seems to be the only affordable arena where India can show its emerging power status despite the fact that it continues to remain home to the largest number of hungry and homeless in the world. We should also somberly reflect that no country in the world has come to Nepal's rescue on the blockade. Let alone material support, there hasn't even been verbal sympathy. No country wants to antagonise India and jeopardise its big market. Even China is cautious, but there is nothing stopping us from improving our road and air links to China. Even if we survive this blockade, there will be future ones.
Dasain postponed

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

It is hereby notified to all concerned that this year’s Dasain Festival has been postponed. The festival was originally supposed to be held in five phases starting 13 October, but has been put off because of the rowdy behaviour of some neighbours. All concerned should watch this space for new dates, but expect it to be held in April 2016 or thereabouts when it will be celebrated in conjunction with the new year to save diesel. Goats and buffalos earmarked for martyrdom will now be allowed to carry on with their daily lives until such time as they may again be required to be decapitated in the epic struggle of good against evil. For further information, contact the Department of Human Sacrifices.

BLOCKADE DIET

Still looking for a painless way to lose weight fast without having to forego the ice cream? Visit Nepal now and participate in the world’s most effective weight loss program, that guarantees to burn off your love handles in one week flat or your money back. Blockade Diet begins with the trek from Kathmandu Airport itself and follow Hillary and Tenzing’s walk-in from Banepa to Lukla. Carrying 14 kg rucksacks, high protein diet combined with chronic giardia will make you feel instantly lighter. After return, all sightseeing in Kathmandu will be carried out on all fours.

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Kathmandu wants to talk. You guys might get a ministerial berth or two!

The Ass