Nepalis keenly waiting for a resolution of the Indian blockade were disappointed when post-festival talks billed as ‘decisive’ ended inconclusively on Wednesday.

Chief negotiator Pushpa Kamal Dahal proposed an all-party panel to redraw federal boundaries in return for Madhesi parties suspending their agitation, but this was rejected outright.

“Such panels are meant for immediate relief from the crisis, not for long-term solutions,” said Manish Suman of Sadbhavana Party. “We are not ready to take the bait this time.”

The Madhesi Front has instead asked Dahal to come up with a more concrete proposal on its demand for two provinces in the Tarai. The Madhesi leaders know that the ruling coalition, which includes anti-federalists Kamal Thapa and Chitra Bahadur KC, will be divided over this which would add pressure on the UML.

Even Dahal seems to be waiting for the right moment to unseat Prime Minister KP Oli and lead a new coalition government with the NC and Madhesi parties. He is cozying up to the Madhesi and also India by projecting himself as more accommodative to their demands.

Oli is now trapped. He is convinced India will not lift the blockade as long he is in power. He is playing the nationalist card, but that will not work if the economic crisis caused by the blockade deepens.

With all sides engaged in political brinkmanship, the country is facing a humanitarian crisis and economic meltdown. Hospitals are running out of medicines, development has ground to a halt. This is not a blockade, it is a siege.

A country can only be politically independent if its domestic affairs are in order. India may be behaving like a bully, but Nepal’s nationalistic bravado is not backed up by an ability to stand on its own feet.
Nepalis are proud to proclaim that we are South Asia’s oldest nation state, that was never colonised. We fought off the East India Company, but when the British laid a siege to Kathmandu Valley in 1816 we used our trust and profiting vastly from being the conduit for most of Nepal’s trade with the west. That relationship across the Iron Curtain came to be known somewhat derogatorily as ‘Finlandisation’, but it allowed Helsinki the elbowroom to exercise national sovereignty despite the Russian Bear breathing down its neck.

Other countries in Eastern Europe like Hungary and Czechoslovakia strained at the leash, and paid a heavy price for standing up to Moscow; they suffered full-scale military invasions in 1956 and 1968. Even after the Soviet Union broke up into little pieces Putin’s Russia is still using the iron fist approach in Georgia and Ukraine. The United States, too, has intervened covertly and overtly all over the Americas (and the world) to stop left-leaning governments from coming to power or to ensure oil supplies.

Closer to home, smaller countries on India’s periphery are all pulled by its gravity to varying degrees. Even leaving aside Pakistan, New Delhi’s relations with its neighbours have been characterised by chronic friction. Being too strategic for its own good, Sikkim got swallowed up in 1975, India midwifed the birth of Bangladesh, but bilateral relations have always been rocky. Sri Lanka’s Tamil separatist war became an extension of Tamil Nadu state politics, sucked India into a military quagmire, and lead to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by a suicide bomber in 1991. Bhutan’s rulers have decided that India’s presence is a given, and have leveraged partial sovereignty for an economic bonanza from hydropower exports. Even so, the rulers of Druk Yul sometimes run afoul of Delhi as they did in 2013 when India flexed its muscles by blockading gas supplies. Nepal’s Anglophile Rana rulers since Jang Bahadur have devised pragmatic ways to accommodate belligerent larger neighbours.

Throughout the Cold War, Finland came up with a clever plan to coexist with the Soviet Union, winning its trust and profiting vastly from being the conduit for most of Moscow’s trade with the west. That relationship across the Iron Curtain came to be known somewhat derogatorily as ‘Finlandisation’, but it allowed Helsinki the elbowroom to exercise national sovereignty despite the Russian Bear breathing down its neck.

Independence is a relative concept. Sovereignty is a relative concept. Independence is not an Indian blockade, it is an Indian siege. Nepal’s hospitals are running out of emergency medicines, earthquake survivors haven’t got relief and an entire country of 28 million is being held hostage. The Buddha is not smiling…

decided that Britain was too powerful to go to war with to regain territory lost in 1816. Independent India inherited some of the divide and rule tactics of the British in Kathmandu, but it must be said that they did it a lot more crudely. During the Nehru years, the 30-years of Panchayat, through the post-democracy period of the 1990s and the decade of conflict, India behaved like a border-farmer, arm-twisting, neighbourhood toughie. There have been only a few years during which bilateral relations could be termed healthy and harmonious. Most Indian politicians, bureaucrats and diplomats have come across as petulant and mean, while many Nepali leaders have been either utterly servile or thoughtlessly confrontational.

That there have been two Indian blockades before this, the last one in 1988-89 when the Indo-Nepal border was sealed for 13 months, should have given a succession of Nepal’s rulers sufficient time to implement a long-term strategy for self-reliance and import-diversification. We did neither. And the most glaring impact of those failures are here for all to endure: an economy hopelessly hooked to petroleum, hollow pledges about developing agriculture. No action, no preparation, no alternatives. A country can only be politically independent if its domestic affairs are in order and its economy is on a healthy growth trajectory. Which is why Nepal today is not independent, but in dependence.

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

In Dependence
This is not an Indian blockade, it is an Indian siege.
Selective outrage

Some events are more important than others

This week the world mourned the victims of the Paris terror attacks which claimed 129 lives. The international community released statements condemning the massacres, monuments across the globe were lit up in the French tricolour and candlelight vigils were held, including in Kathmandu (pic). On Facebook people used a feature which allows an overlay of the French flag over one’s profile picture. On Twitter the solidarity hashtag #prayforparis went global. While much of the content on social media platforms were for solidarity with the French people, the level of attention given to Friday’s attacks in the French capital also made many question the Western media’s news judgement.

Why didn’t a similar attack carried out only a day before in Beirut that killed more than 40 receive similar coverage? Why weren’t the Kenyan flags flying on Facebook when an Al Qaeda attack in a university in Kenya killed 150 students in April? Where is the international outrage over attacks by Boko Haram which continues to kill and maim in Nigeria?

This is not to say that the media does not report on terror attacks outside the western hemisphere. But the truth is that when Beirut was attacked, it didn’t get 24-hour saturation news coverage. When Kenyan students were slaughtered in school it received much less priority than Paris. TV pundits didn’t do a minute by minute analysis of the Boko Haram attack on a mosque in September that killed 117 Muslims.

Closer to home, India’s blockade of Nepal until recently was virtually ignored by the international press. Why is a siege that is much more devastating to Nepal’s economy than the earthquake not newsworthy enough? A terrorist attack in Lebanon or Iraq or Syria is not as shocking as one in London or Paris because it is far too common, journalists argue. Some even claim that despite their best attempts to push news items about non-European, non-American countries, readers are simply not interested and rarely click on such stories.

Meaning, news is driven by what readers want to read. The measure of an importance of a life is the number of hits it will get online. Then there’s the factor of familiarity. The average news consumer in Europe will have little idea about political goings-on in Nepal, the reasons for the blockade are just too convoluted to be explained simply in inverted pyramid style. Nepal is unfortunately not strategically important enough for journalists and their readers in the West.

OK, we can understand the western press isn’t bothered, but why isn’t the Indian media interested? Except a few op-eds by anti-Modi liberals, most coverage of the Nepal crisis in the Indian media reads like leaks dictated by the Ministry of External Affairs.

The result: Despite a blockade that has crippled the lives of 28 million people for two months, much of the world has no idea what is going on here. Hospitals have run out of medical supplies, businesses and schools have been forced to shut due to lack of fuel, earthquake reconstruction has come to a standstill. Shortage of essential commodities has caused immense suffering and hurt the poor the most. There may not be blood and gore on the streets, but what Nepal is going through is an enormous crisis that should be newsworthy by any measure.

It took the world only few hours to read and hear about the attacks in Paris. Sadly it took an attack in Paris for many of us to learn about the bombing the previous day in Beirut. Therein lies the problem with the definition of news and the news cycle: it is selective compassion and outrage.

By now most of us have read the heartbreakingly testimonies of the survivors in Paris. We know who the assailants were and we know that France has now declared war on ISIL. We also know of Diesel, the French police search dog that was killed by terrorists on Wednesday’s raid. Due to media’s obsessive coverage of Paris, we will never forget what happened there for a long time.

With the same could be said about the tragedies in Kenya and Nigeria and all the other countries that continue to escape the limelight.

@Chenreyang
Democracy and the demographic shift

The movement of Nepal’s population within the country is having a profound impact on its politics.

SARTHAH MANI SHARMA

When a draft copy of the 2011 census report was shown to Nepal’s leading demographer, he was stunned. He thought there had been a mistake.

“Some of the figures were so surprising I asked the statisticians to check the whole report again,” Yagya Bahadur Karki, a former member of the National Planning Commission, recalls.

The Central Bureau of Statistics eventually published the census report, which gave a glimpse of the tremendous movement of people from hills to plains, from rural to urban areas and migrations abroad for work. The figures have huge implications for public policy, politics and, in particular, appear to be at the root of the current unrest in the Madhes.

“The result of the 2011 census are more important than ever because they suggest that Nepal has undergone a profound demographic transformation in the last decade,” says Karki.

The most significant aspect of these changes, and one that appears to be fuelling protests in the Tarai, is the accelerated transmigration of hill settlers down to the plains. The number of hill Bahuns, Chhetris, Limbus and other ethnic groups as a proportion of Tarai’s population has risen sharply in the past decade. In 2001, lifetime migrants in the Tarai, who include people not born there, numbered 1.1 million, and ten years later, that figure had increased to 1.4 million. “This increases the importance of assimilation and communal harmony between different ethnic groups,” says Ptumbher Sharma, former Vice-Chairman of the National Planning Commission who advocated including Bhasa in the Madhes Province 2. He says the current boundaries ignore the case for integration of hill and plains populations.

“The demand for proportional representation based on population is justified one because of the increasing population of the Tarai,” he explains.

The other dramatic demographic shift is in the population growth rate, which hovered at slightly above 2.2 per cent for the early 2000s but dropped to a startling 1.35 per cent in 2011. Some took this to mean that Nepal had defused the population bomb, while others argued that the figure is misleading because the census excluded Nepalis who had been living abroad for more than six months.

But demographer Karki says that even if we include the absentee population in the census, the trend was done in 1991, Nepal’s population growth rate has still plummeted.

The average life expectancy of Nepal is now 71, at par with countries like Indonesia, Egypt and Ukraine. “Growth in life expectancy is an outcome of investment made by the government in health and education sectors over the last two decades,” says economist Swarnim Wagle.

Meanwhile, twenty-seven of Nepal’s hill and mountain districts showed a negative population growth rate between 2001 and 2011. Demographers say that if this trend is not reversed and jobs are not created, more than half of the districts in the hills will be empty in 50 years.

Experts call this the period of ‘demographic dividend’ for Nepal — a duration of 20 to 30 years during which the working-age population is slightly greater than the population of the dependent age. A demographic dividend can spur economic growth if the government can spend on education, health and training to develop the skills of the workforce.

But if the population growth rate continues to decline Nepal may soon go the way of countries like Singapore and China with their ageing population. According to the United Nations Population Fund the average life expectancy of Nepal could reach nearly 80 years by 2050 and the fertility rate will tumble down to 1.75 — far below the replacement rate of 2.1.

Demographers refer to the ‘population pyramid’ to describe the country’s age structure. By 2050, Nepal’s will look less like a pyramid and more like a tree, top heavy with the elderly. Is Nepal prepared to cope with these transformations? Economist Keshav Acharya has a qualified yes. “Only if the state spends more on pension and medical care of the elderly and re-thinks the retirement age,” he says.

Like many developing countries, Nepal can also reap the demographic dividend by spending to enhance the productive capacity of the working-age population.

Without that, the youth bulge will be out of work and may choose increasingly to migrate, which will trigger further demographic imbalances in the country. More than anything else, though, the government must use demographic figures as crucial tools to form public and economic policies. Karki concludes: “The numbers aren’t just numbers. They bear important messages.”
Electrified transportation

The blockade should be a wakeup call for the government to actively promote electric transport

SAHINA SHRESTHA

One would have thought that with the petrol shock of the two-month Indian blockade, the government would get moving double quick on a campaign to introduce electric transport.

After years of lobbying by energy activists, the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport had finally drafted the Environment-friendly Vehicle and Transport Policy last year. But, as with most previous plans promoting use of clean energy vehicles, it never got off the ground.

What’s worse, there is no sense of urgency even with the current fuel crisis.

On paper the policy looks great. It advocates the production and use of zero emission vehicles for public transport, establishing charging stations and infrastructure for electric vehicles, and conversion of petrol cars to electric.

It also proposes setting up 11 electric charging stations with double feeders around Kathmandu’s Ring Road and establishing battery-recycling infrastructure.

But, as with most previous plans promoting use of clean energy vehicles, it never got off the ground.

A review of various transport plans of the government over the years shows the same story: lots of promises on paper but very little results. The sixth, seventh and eighth five-year plan all mention expansion of trolley buses. The tenth five-year plan all mention expansion of trolley buses. The tenth five-year plan all mention expansion of trolley buses.

Despite immense popularity, the government cut the trolley bus service in 2001 and formally shut it down in 2009. In 2005, it refused to let Safa tempos run on electricity, going electric is not a farfetched dream,” says Umesh Raj Shrestha, president of Electric Vehicles Association Nepal (EVAN) says: “The government needs to be more serious and work towards implementing the policies in place.”

Ganga Bahadur Thapa of Nepal Economic Concern Society (NCES), who lobbied for the policy, agrees. “Lack of coordination and commitment between various sectors of the government is the main reason nothing happens,” he says. “If nothing else, the current fuel crisis should be a wakeup call.”

In a recent media interview the newly appointed Minister of Commerce Ganesh Man Pun said: “In the long term it is important to reduce consumption of imported fuel by developing hydro electricity on our own and promoting the use of electric vehicles.”

But gauging from the government’s foot dragging in implementing EV friendly policies, that may be a long time coming.

“If we can generate enough electricity, going electric is not a farfetched dream,” says Shrestha. “It is not too late to start developing the infrastructure and to promote EVs.”

This is not the first time Nepal has faced an Indian blockade. We didn’t learn from the 1988-91 blockade. We didn’t learn from the 1999 petrol block. We didn’t learn from the 2008 petrol blockade. We didn’t learn from the 2009 petrol blockade.

No surprise that we didn’t learn from the 2001-02 stated that electric vehicles and solar chargers would be ‘expanded throughout the country’. It also suggested that zero emission vehicles would be exempt from customs duty.

To be sure, the government did cut customs duty on electric vehicles by half in this year’s budget and zero emission cars are exempt from the Rs 30,000 road tax.

The government charges one percent custom duty for import of SAFA Tempo chassis, engines, motor, battery, and battery charger making it cheaper to import EVs rather than manufacture them in the country.

The Department of Transport Management says it is currently working on the guidelines for policy implementation but activists believe the delay is intentional: the government is dragging its feet due to pressure from powerful car dealers and revenue from taxes on vehicles and fuel.

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Both the government and the protesters realise this stalemate is not helping anybody, but...

...who will bell the cat?

The fact that people like Mihir should ask such uncomfortable questions is a blot on Nepali democracy. It exposes the pretense of an inclusive society we have been putting up since a Madheshi was elected first president of the republic seven years ago. And we have continued with this hypocrisy, electing women as president and speaker of parliament but don’t yet confer equal citizenship rights to their children.

Let us accept that if 45 people have died and thousands of those agitating in the streets for three months believe this constitution is flawed, they may have good reasons to be angry. Or are we going to live in denial and say that the personal interest of a few Madheshi leaders is forcing hundreds of thousands onto the streets?

A journalist from Saptari recently emailed me a video clip of a UML supporter saying on camera: “I am a UML cadre and have nothing to do with the movement but when police enter our house, beat up women and children and fire at us indiscriminately, you cannot blame us for coming out on the streets.”

Unfortunately, the national discourse has now been overshadowed by the undeclared Indian blockade. The mainstream media has been highlighting the demands of Madhesis to the forefront.

To be sure, the Indians are putting pressure on their government to ease off the blockade, but KP Oli should realise by now that flirting with Chinese oil diplomacy is not in Nepal’s long term interest either. Our public diplomacy has been even more disastrous. Instead of asking the Indians to #ackoff or cribbing against #IndiablocksNepal, had the media and civil society collectively pressured government to reach out to the dissenting groups while opening diplomatic channels with New Delhi things would not have deteriorated to this extent.

We may have run out of cooking gas, be forced to take overcrowded buses to work, our hospitals may have run out of essential medicines. But in Bara, Parsa, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Siraha, Saptari, Sunsari and Morang, Madhesis have been fighting for worse for much longer. If Dasain and Tihar were painful in the hills, Chaths in Madhes have not been exactly a celebration. Yet, if they have resolved to stay on the streets for so long, we better believe they have genuine grievances. The smartest thing K P Oli has done in the last three months is to convince the Madhesi parties to sit for talks this week. There seems to be some genuine discussion on both sides that the stalemate is not benefiting anybody. But finding a genuine solution will still take a lot more political will.

@Anurag_Acharya

#MadhesSpeaks

A social media campaign aims to bring voice of everyday Madhesi to the forefront

BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

“I don’t remember exactly how long I was unconscious, because I fell unconscious,” Karna recalled, his anger and pain easy to see, “when I woke up I was lying in a hospital bed. The kind of abuses they hurl at Madhesis makes you wonder if you belong to an inferior category of human race. You work in the media, tell me, you think you belong to an inferior category of human race.”

Karna could have been burned to a pile of smouldering tyres. Had he not been lucky, he would not have had the chance to explain. The smartest thing K P Oli has done in the last three months is to convince the Madhesi parties to sit for talks this week. There seems to be some genuine discussion on both sides that the stalemate is not benefiting anybody. But finding a genuine solution will still take a lot more political will.

A smart media campaign aims to bring voice of everyday Madhesi to the forefront.

AYESHA SHAKYA

Much of the news coming out of the long Madhes in the past three months has been centered on protests, violence and the blockade. In the midst of all this, while the demands of political leaders are reported widely in the media, the voice of the silent majority of Madhesi has been lost.

Kumar partnered with the online platform Madhesh Youth and Madhes Adhikar Samghar Samiti, a local youth group, to organise MadhesSpeaks in his hometown of Janakpur. The campaign was kickstarted at the Janaki Temple, where people were asked two questions:

1. What do you want in Nepal?
2. What needs to be done to resolve the crisis?

People were asked to use any language they preferred, so long as their responses contributed to a dialogue in a constructive manner. Over 100 locals wrote their thoughts on a piece of white paper and their photographs were shared over social media.

From children to senior citizens, a common thread running through the responses was: the desire for equality and dignity. Apart from the frustration over not being able to resume with their daily lives, people do not support the Pahadi-Madhesh divide and want to bring an end to the crisis together. Furthermore, as a self-directed and decentralised campaign, the organisers have focused on making the campaign as inclusive as possible.

“Pahadi” is a term used to describe the people who are native to the plains of Nepal, while Madhesis are the indigenous population of the Tarai region. The term “Madhesi” is often used to refer to the people of the Madhes region, which includes the eastern part of Nepal.

The response to the campaign has been largely positive, with people from the entire political spectrum engaging in constructive discussion. While changing perceptions is a gradual process, the solidarity expressed in the campaign is a positive sign to move forward.

“When people do not travel to Turi, there is a lack of knowledge and information, and social media can be used to bridge that gap. It was used in a positive manner during the earthquake to disseminate information, it can now help us to increase pressure on the government to act fast,” adds Kumar.

Another hashtag trending online is #KTWileNepalMadhes, where people of Kathmandu have expressed solidarity with the people of Madhesh. Although the campaign has garnered some backlash for being patronising, Kumar disagrees: “We are going through a critical time and all support ought to be constructive.”

After Janakpur, the campaign was organised in Birganj and Lahan and the final leg of the campaign, called #NepalSpeaks, will take place in Kathmandu on Saturday, November 21.

n the evening of 3 November, Mihir Karna from Birganj was on his way to a hospital to attend to his ailing sister-in-law. There was a curfew but Karna was carrying medical documents to convince the police in case he was detained.

Unfortunately, he was given no opportunity to explain. Near Panchthar, a group of AFP personnel beat him an inch short of life and threw him into a pile of unsuspecting tyres. Had his neighbours not rescued him, Karna could have been burnt to death.

The kind of abuses they hurl at Madhesis makes you wonder if you belong to an inferior category of human race. You work in the media, tell me, you think you belong to an inferior category of human race.

Karna recalled, his anger and pain easy to see, “when I woke up I was lying in a hospital bed. The kind of abuses they hurl at Madhesis makes you wonder if you belong to an inferior category of human race. You work in the media, tell me, you think you belong to an inferior category of human race.”

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I
Asian subjects from Myanmar and the UK.
Even though several of its temples and monuments were destroyed in the April earthquake, the Patan Museum has become a major attraction in a town that is itself seeing a cultural rebirth.

This month, Patan hosted Nepal’s first international festival photography, Photo Kathmandu, and many of the annual Jazzmandu concerts. Next week, it will host the Film South Asia festival of documentaries. Patan has emerged as not just a day trip for tourists visiting Kathmandu, but one with a rich cultural event calendar, classy new pensions and cafes that have made it a destination in its own right.

But the star attraction of Patan is the Museum with its priceless collection of Hindu, Buddhist and Tantric artefacts all housed within the grounds of Keshav Narayan complex. The monuments of the Patan Durbar had been strengthened during renovation by the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) and survived the earthquake. However, the east wing of the Sundarichok, which was in the process of being restored during the quake, collapsed and is currently being rebuilt.

Each section of the Museum has separate galleries specialising in particular aspects of Nepal’s Buddhist and Hindu heritage, all tastefully arranged within historic buildings that are themselves museum pieces. The galleries outline the history and the spread of Buddhism, an explanation of Tantricism as well as the various manifestations of Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu. The detailed written accompaniments to all exhibits provide a fine balance of introductory information and comprehensive history. A gallery on the ‘lost-wax’ process of bronze craft has step-by-step displays that are educational as well as aesthetic.

Since its refurbishment, visitors can also access the newly-opened Mulchok Courtyard with the resplendent Yantaju Shrine as well as the Sundarichok showcasing the ornate details of the immaculately carved 16th century Tusha Hiti Step Well. The courtyard also houses KVPT’s own exhibit explaining the restoration and an Architecture Gallery with fascinating insights into the building principles of Kathmandu Valley monuments.

Also accessible is the royal garden of the Patan Palace with the exquisitely restored Bhandarkhal Tank with views of the Taleju Temple whose roof suffered earthquake damage and is currently being repaired. The Museum’s self-claimed goal is ‘the interpretation of sacred art, culture and iconography of Hinduism and Buddhism through preservation and exhibition’. The Patan Museum achieves this both for tourists as well as Nepali students with information about the very core of Nepali culture.
On 26 February this year, work started on the reconstruction of the Bhai Dega Temple in Patan Darbar Square (left). The original three-tiered Shiva temple which was built in 1678 collapsed in the 1934 earthquake, and had been hastily rebuilt in a Mughal dome style. It is an indication of just how long reconstruction can take in Nepal that Bhai Dega started being rebuilt 82 years later, just before another major earthquake struck Kathmandu Valley in April. Bhai Dega will now be rebuilt along with three other temples within Patan Darbar Square that were destroyed on 25 April. Several other temples suffered serious structural damage in this year’s earthquake and will have to be torn down to be rebuilt. KVPT (Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust) has taken responsibility for the reconstruction of these temples as well as the damage to the Patan Museum and several of the monuments in the palace square.

“The museum is a key historical and cultural centre and has now become one of Patan’s major attractions,” says Rohit Ranjitkar, the organisation’s director since its establishment in 1991. Most of the repairs at the museum involve retrofitting for structural stability. The Museum has also become the repository of the carved columns and religious figures that were salvaged from the collapsed temples after the quake. These original items will be used in reconstruction, allowing the damaged structures to be returned to their original state.

“Originality is a key aspect of KVPT’s restoration,” notes Ranjitkar, “many buildings were rebuilt with only a façade of original style after previous earthquakes, we try to preserve their original look in its entirety.” For the few items that require replacing, mostly intricate woodcarving, the KVPT has a skilled base of local craftsmen who have been working with the Trust in previous restoration work. The main problem now is the lack of resources and official apathy about the reconstruction of monuments. KVPT is trying to overcome this by sourcing funding from private businesses and organisations.

KVPT’s restoration of historic buildings preserves more than the physical monuments themselves, but also the festivals and culture of Kathmandu Valley that they represent. Says Ranjitkar: “It is important to preserve tangible history, as well as the intangible.”
Brick by Brick,
Eleven Nepali artists share their perspectives on the current needs of the country through their artworks.
Opens 5pm, 20 November, until 27 November, Park Gallery, Lalitpur

Help rebuild,
A special fund-raising print sale to contribute towards the rebuilding of heritage sites in Patan by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT).
[URL]

Ambient Valley Festival,
Featuring Nepal's famous alternative artists and musicians, with live art, music and breathtaking Himalayan views.
27 to 29 November, Shivapuri National Park

Critical Mass,
A monthly meet-up of cyclists followed by a brief ride.
5.30 pm, 27 November, Basantapur, Kathmandu

Mountain ghosts,
Screening of A Ghost of the Mountains, a film by Samir Jung Thapa, organised by Cultural Studies Group of Nepal (CSGN). Followed by discussion with the filmmaker and wildlife experts.
9.30am, 27 November, Moskh, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur

Climate march,
March to push for right climate plans.
1pm, 29 November, starts at Thapathali bridge.

Look Back in Anger,
John Osborne's play, directed by Shankar Rijal, portrays the disillusionment among youth in the 1950s.
5.15 to 7pm, 20 November to 2 December, Mandala Theatre, Anamnagar

Dining

Fire & Ice Pizzeria,
For the best Italian pizza in town.
[Phone]

Dan Ran,
The best Japanese food this side of Bagmati. Try one of the bento boxes with a fresh lemonade.
[Phone]

Dechenling,
The place to head to for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, pleasant and spacious garden, ideal for big gatherings.
[Phone]

Black Pepper Café & Pub,
Cosmopolitan dining and fancy beverages in a traditional style courtyard. Try the apple sauce pork chops and enjoy the good service.
[Phone]

Kathmandu MTB Fest,
The ultimate cycling fest with prizes up to Rs 800,000.
Register: kathmandumtbfest.com
20 to 22 November, Hattiban

Events

Park Village Resort,
Far away from the madding crowd, yet so close to the city.
[Phone]

Bipul Chhetri live,
Perform live Nepali folk music with Bipul Chhetri.
19 December, Sano Gaucharan Ground, Gyaneshwor

The Vesper House,
Stop by for the best in Italian and all local favourites, in their breezy outdoors seating. Also a great venue for wine connoisseurs.
[Phone]

Dhokaima Café,
Beat the cold with indigenous cocktails at the Rukhumi Bar.
[Phone]

Phalano Coffee Ghar,
Provides a welcome respite from the usually over-priced eateries around Pulchok and Jhamsikhel.
Pulchok Road, Lalitpur, (01)5524655

Mum’s Garden Resort,
Head out to Pokhara for a peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages at 50% off, surrounded by lush green garden with great views of Phewa Lake and the Kainrapa range.
Lake Side, Pokhara, (08) 14614614, www.mumsgardenresort.com

The Yellow House,
Bed and breakfast for the light traveller.

Gokarna Forest Resort,
A forest sanctuary to help you relax and breathe, and also encourages meditation, just a 20-minute drive away from Kathmandu.
Gokarna, (01)4451212, info@gokarna.net

Film South Asia,
Do not miss this biennial festival screening stimulating, provocative documentaries from all over South Asia. (see page 7).
19 to 22 November
Kino Mitro Kendra, Patan Diksho

Folk Music Festival,
The fifth edition of the International Folk Music and Film Festival.
26 to 29 November, Restniga Naxo Chor, Jamal, Kathmandu

Dancing and Dining as the sun sets over the ancient city of Patan.

Nepal Music Festival,
Nepal's biggest volunteer-run music and culture festival, includes performances by noted bands and fun activities.
28 November, 12 to 8pm, Bhrikuti Mandap, Pradarshani Marg

The best options for dining and entertainment this week.

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It's your life. Make it large.
Hi everyone,

I love this quote that I read which says something like: ‘You know that tingly feeling when you like someone? It is common sense that tingly feeling when you like someone, especially a romantic interest, or someone who is a right fit. Just like hours, and in your case it has been a couple of days. I am actually quite surprised that you have not already called or texted him yet. The fact that you haven’t is quite impressive.

Hi Anjana,

I have been dating a guy for a few months now. He asked me out to dinner last week on Wednesday but cancelled it last minute because he said his friends had made plans that he did not know about so he went to that. That was the second date he cancelled. I was annoyed because he did not ask me to join him. I sent him an angry text saying ‘text me when you can fit me in your super busy schedule.’ It’s Sunday night now and I have still not heard from him. Should I call and apologise for my snappy text to him? I might have made him angry, it was my fault. This is just so confusing.

Annoyed & Confused

Ask: Waiting to hear back from someone, especially a romantic interest, can be extremely excruciating. One minute can feel like hours, and in your case it has been a couple of days. I am definitely not a fan of people who cancel plans last minute, it shows lack of consideration or seriously bad planning skills. However, in this case–how do I put this as gently as possible? It does not seem that he is that invested in the ‘relationship,’ if you have been dating someone for a few months, you should have met his friends already–unless he just made all these new friends now. If he wanted to invite you to go out with his friends, he would have. If he wanted to go out to dinner with you, he would have. If he wanted to text you back, he would have already done that. I am sorry to say this but it does not look like he is as invested as you are. It could be wrong; perhaps it was an important only friends hangout night. However, it is a universal truth that when a person genuinely likes someone, s/he would try their best to see the other person and spend time with them. People are never too busy, it is a matter of priorities. He does not see you as a priority so it is your decision whether you are okay with being an option. The smart thing to do is just let this one go, do not call/text/stalk him. You will thank yourself down the line.

You need to be with someone who makes time to be with you, and does not leave you angry and confused. Good luck.
It’s that time of year again when the documentary form is highlighted by the Kathmandu International Film Festival (KIMFF) and the biennial Film South Asia 2015 (FSA), both of which give us in Kathmandu an opportunity to engage with a wide, incredibly varied range of subjects.

KIMFF was slightly marred last year by political meddling when the Rajapaksa government applied pressure on Nepal to pull the screening of *No Fire Zone* (reviewed here) - a visceral, journalistically rigorous documentary that indicted the Sri Lankan government and its complicit army in an allegedly calculated genocide killing thousands of innocent Tamils in 2009 in the push to win the war against the Tamil Tigers. It is fitting therefore that FSA this year is showing *News from Jaffna* - a 28-minute long documentary that follows the path of a young female journalist, Thadsa, who works for *Uthayan* - a widely known daily paper run by Tamils out of Jaffna. The paper refuses to blink in the face of widespread media censorship - which exists, as Thadsa points out in one of her investigative pieces, whether you are Sinhalese or Tamil. As Thadsa embarks on an investigation to try and locate the whereabouts of Nimalarajah, a Tamil journalist who disappeared over seven years ago - we see the fear that pervades throughout – from the people she interviews, to her own editor Premananth who has seen the paper through arson (its press was set on fire) and murder (two journalists were killed by the paramilitary).

**MUST SEE**

Sophia Pande

*Made very simply but with eloquence by Kannan Arunasalam, a human rights lawyer himself, this documentary is particularly poignant at this specific point in time in our own history as we struggle to become as inclusive as possible. Both countries have been through debilitating conflicts and while Sri Lanka ploughed through its Tamil dissenters (yes, they were armed secessionists who employed unforgivable terror tactics, however, the element of tacit anti-Tamil sentiment must be underscored here) we must take a breath to realise that we cannot and must not do the same with our issues involving people who have been historically marginalised; rhetorical and literal xenophobia must stop. Sri Lanka’s freedom of press and freedom of speech is still staggering to recover, even after the unexpected ousting this year of the formidably corrupt (morally and otherwise) Mahinda Rajapaksa who actively disappeared dissenters during his regime. Nepal’s democracy, though flawed, still has a chance to use dialogue and must invoke its latent duty to protect and care for every single citizen as we move through these difficult times. Our struggle may not yet have been documented in film, but we should not have to wait for such an indictment - the world is watching us.*

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*nepaltimes.com*
Neither here nor there

Shree Lal Sah in Kantipur, 16 November

An influential member of the Indian parliament, Tathagata Satpathy, has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi about growing anti-Indian sentiments in Nepal. Satpathy said that India’s “unofficial” embargo against Nepal has caused shortages of fuel, medicines and food in a landlocked country wrecked by a devastating earthquake just six months ago. He said this was an issue of human rights.

Satpathy, a Biju Janata Dal leader from the Indian state of Odisha, was on a family holiday in Nepal two weeks ago. He has already returned to New Delhi, and said he hadn’t get a reply from Modi. Excerpts of letter:

You have yourself visited Nepal not long ago and must have gotten a sense of our shared history. At the moment, I am saddened to say that our long-standing good relations with our common neighbour are in peril.

If you are getting reports from the Ministry of External Affairs officials that project a peaceful and happy situation there, I must tell you that it is not so. I have a strong suspicion that officials seem to have their own ideas and interests in mind when judging the situation based on what I have seen and after interacting with the local people.

When the Ramas came to power, they seized land from the Madhesis who had been living in the Terai. These lands were leased out. Jungles were converted into farmlands and soon the Tarai began to produce surplus food and grain which were sold across the border to India. Back then Madhesis were seen as well-to-do Indians by their own government, when I asked them about Nepal, expressed dismay and displeasure as to why that country dared to charge fundamentals of their constitution without discussing with India. I wonder if our MPhound can dare to speak in similar fashion, say about Bangladesh and Burma. Not to speak of Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The excuse of Madhesis opposing the border crossing. We sent fuel to meet Kathmandu’s demand, but the people there haven’t received anything. Where did all the fuel disappear? questions Arbind Sharma of the Nepal Petroleum Dealers’ Association.

The Home Ministry had instructed the administration in Morang to send 75 per cent of all fuel supplies entering from Jajarkot to Kathmandu. Since the blockade, 106 gas tankers from Biratnagar alone have been sent to Kathmandu, amounting to 134,620 cylinders of LPG. Yet, consumers here have not been able to purchase cooking gas, even though they spend days waiting in queues.

According to Brihanpuri Customs Office, there has been no obstruction to the supplies of fuel or other goods entering from Jajarkot. Likewise, much of the fuel supplies coming from Kakarbhitta and Belahaiya have also been sent to Kathmandu. Obstruction to fuel supplies entering from Belahaiya have somewhat eased in recent days.

To be sure, even though there have been no protests or sit-ins at the far-western border, Gauriphanta, only half the normal fuel supplies have been entering from the border crossing.

Where is the oil?

Agayag, 17 November

Two months since India imposed its blockade, 145 tankers of petrol, 477 of diesel and 142 of gas have entered Nepal from the eastern border, Jajarkot, alone. Of these, 108 tankers of petrol, 357 of diesel and 156 of gas were sent onto Kathmandu. But the residents of the capital are still bearing the brunt of a shortage of fuel.

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Seven months since the earthquake, what little help survivors were getting to rebuild has been halted by the Indian blockade

SAHINA SHRESTHA
in SINDHUVALCHOK

On 25 April, when the earthquake devastated central Nepal, relief groups warned that shelters needed to be built before the impending monsoon. The rainy season has come and gone and winter set in, but government inaction and the Indian blockade means two million people are still homeless.

The Reconstruction Authority has been mired in Kathmandu’s politics, and the $4.1 billion promised by the international community soon after the quake cannot be disbursed. The UN and private relief groups involved in relief and reconstruction have cut back on deliveries because of the lack of fuel.

The last time we visited the village of Majhi Gaun overlooking the Indrawati River 50km

“We do not exist”
Twelve-year-old Amrita Majhi says she has aged a lot after the earthquake. She had just given birth to her son Om 17 days before the earthquake during which she was on her way to a health post.

For four days after the earthquake, they had very little to eat. When we met her five months ago, she was worried about her baby getting enough food. When we met her last week, nutrition for her child was still her main concern.

“The milk I produce is not enough for my son, I could have made supplementary food from our stored grain but it was all destroyed.”

Other new mothers in Majhi Gaun voice similar concerns. The children have been falling sick, pregnant women worry about proper diet and dread the winter. No one can afford the exorbitant bus fare to the nearest health post in Dolalghat.

An hour’s drive along a rough dirt track north of Melamchi is the village of Tipeni which was devastated during the April earthquake. In the monsoon walking is the only way to get here, and this isolation has made it even more difficult for the government to provide earthquake relief to the village.

But private relief groups have been filling the gap left by the government, and the Kathmandu Hub of the international youth organisation Global Shapers has been helping 50,000 residents of 10 surrounding VDCs with their most pressing need: medical attention.

Recently the villagers finally received the emergency Rs 15,000 from the government and many of them used this amount to buy furniture, kitchen utensils and strengthen their shelters. But many, including pregnant women and new mothers, are still sleeping on cold floors.

“We lost our house and all our belongings with it,” says Parvati Majhi, a mother of two. “It is not just a house we need to rebuild, it is our entire lives. The government has forgotten we exist.”

The villagers have little expectations from the government, but they had hoped that at least the NGOs and foreign aid organisations would come by. But even that is now jeopardised by the fuel crisis caused by the Indian blockade.

Says Manju Majhi: “We were not getting any help, and now this blockade has doubled prices of everything we need. What will we do?”

There are signs of undernourishment among the children, who don’t look like they are dressed for winter.
Now that the festival season is over, and all the sacrifices of the past month or so slowly come to an end, it is time for this government to take another well-deserved rest until next year’s Dasain-Tihar.

Nepal is living proof of the adage that when the going gets tough, things get tougher. But unlike nanny states with social welfare systems, Nepalis have a perfect live-and-let-live understanding with their rulers: we don’t expect anything from our government and the government leaves us alone.

With so many earth-shattering events happening minute by minute these days in ongoing installments of Indians vs Cowboys, it is but natural that we journos have a light to be anywhere anytime because the bike has no petrol, so we make things up as we go along.

An official Fact-finding Committee has pre-tested this column on lab animals and certified that it contains preservative and has declared it fit for human consumption provided the childproof seal is not broken at the time of purchase. However, one can’t be too careful during these perilous times so readers are advised to exercise individual caution. Management is not responsible for the consequences if items fall out of the overhead lockers.

KATHMANDU — The ruling collision will soon be expanding the cabinet with 50 more deputy prime ministers by bringing in all disgruntled and ungruntled elements.

Just having six deputy prime ministers was inadequate to meet the demands of the present national crisis,” said the government spokesman, “the cabinet meeting will henceforth be held in the National Stadium.”

Constitutional experts clarified that there are no statutory limits to the number of deputy prime ministers per capita that a country can legally have, and its total strength can easily be expanded until a country can legally have, and its total of deputy prime ministers per capita that a country can legally have, and its total of deputy prime ministers per capita that a country can legally have, and its total strength can easily be expanded until everyone in the cabinet is a quasi prime minister.

Planes Allowed To Carry Passengers On Roof

Due to the ongoing fuel crisis that has reduced the number of domestic flights, the Civil Aviation Authoritarians of Nepal (CAAN) have lifted the ban on travel on the roof of aircraft.

“A limited number of passengers will be allowed to sit on the fuselage, provided they wear helmets and have something to hold on to,” a CAAN official told a press meet. “This will also boost Nepal’s adventure tourism by offering visitors a unique form of travel found nowhere else in the world.”

NOC To Use Black Magic

The Nepal Oil Corruption has denied it is engaged in the black market of petroleum supplies in the country but said it was using all means necessary, including black magic, to ensure adequate petrol, diesel and gas supplies to consumers during the ongoing blockade.

Since normal supplies may take a long time to be restored, NOC said it had been forced to resort to supernatural interventions by invoking the devil, evil spirits and voodoo techniques to ensure that petrol pumps are well stocked. The decision took on added urgency as reports came in this week that fully-laden tankers had started mysteriously disappearing from the Thakot depot.

Said a NOC source: “We are also running out of lubricants to grease the palms of senior ministers, so we will be looking for alternative supply routes from China.”

Smoking Banned

In light of the forthcoming Climate Change Conference in Paris, Nepal has banned smoking along trekking trails as part of the country’s contribution to curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

“We want to show that we are serious about saving the planet, and we also want to save visitors and locals from the hazards of passive smoking,” said the Minister of Tourism, adding, “anyone has a light?”

Kathmandu Gets Bullock-cart Taxis

The government has given tax licenses to taxi owners to convert their vehicles into bullock-cart taxis. The four-wheel drivers will be deployed at the airport, where incoming passengers have been stranded because of the lack of transport into the city.

The city’s street fauna, including a herd of cattle usually found chewing the cud at the Jorpati intersection, have been harnessed and will be ferrying tourists to their hotels in the Thamel area.

“We believe this will restore Kathmandu’s bucolic charm by taking us back to the age of oxcarts, and their byproduct of dried dung will also be a valuable source of fuel at tourist hotels,” someone, we forget who, said.

50 More Deputy Prime Ministers

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