After last week’s failed talks the government and the Madhesi parties are back to old games: wait for the other side to blink first. Three protesters were killed in Saptari this week. The security forces and the protesters are engaged in a tug of war to control movement along the East-West Highway.

Chances of resumption of talks in Kathmandu remain slim. But informal consultations continued this week between chief negotiator Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Prime Minister KP Oli, and between Oli and the Indian ambassador.

The main issue is the fate of three districts in eastern and two in the western Tarai. NC and UML hardliners want them to be part of the hill provinces, while the Madhesi parties demand they be included entirely in the two Tarai provinces. PM Oli is equally adamant, saying this week: “I don’t know how many more days I will survive, but I will work for the Nepali people till I die.”

New Delhi, the third and probably the most important player in this brinkmanship, is also waiting for Kathmandu to concede to the Madhesi demand on demarcation of Tarai provinces. Realising that he cannot mend his relations with New Delhi, Oli is trying his best to be remembered as a true nationalist before his tenure as probably Nepal’s shortest-term prime minister ends.

Meanwhile, Nepal’s 28 million people are in the throes of a severe nationwide humanitarian crisis. Hospitals are running out of medicines, patients are dying in ambulances stuck at barricades, and nearly half the country’s schoolchildren in the Tarai have not been able to attend classes since August. The most brutal impact of the blockade has been on the estimated 2 million people still living in makeshift shelters seven months after the earthquake. The government’s inaction on relief delivery, its failure to set up a Reconstruction Authority and now the fuel shortage caused by the Indian blockade have prevented survivors from rebuilding permanent homes before the worst of the winter months arrive in the mountains. (Field report from Upper Gorkha on page 14-15)
The most brutal impact of the blockade has been on getting winterisation supplies to the estimated 2 million people still living in makeshift shelters. Seven months after the earthquake, the government’s inaction on relief delivery and its failure to set up a Reconstruction Authority has prevented survivors from rebuilding permanent homes. Nepal’s overall poverty rate, which had fallen from 45 per cent to 22 per cent in 15 years is now expected to go up dramatically. The earthquake drove 700,000 people below the poverty line according to one estimate, and the blockade has already pushed another 800,000 into poverty. Prices of most food items and essential supplies have tripled because of the rise in fuel costs and hoarding. Inadequate medical care and the lack of transportation are eroding the dramatic gains Nepal has made in reducing infant and maternal mortality.

The slight increase in vehicular movement along the highways and in cities recently shouldn’t fool anyone. It is the ‘informal economy’ fraud: smuggling and black market traders are now taking over the supply and distribution of petroleum products. The country’s economic growth has now been scaled down to a pitiful 2 per cent this year, and we may go into minus if the blockade drags on (see As It Happens by Om Astha Rai on page 4).

Released on Tuesday, the government’s White Paper on the economic impact of the earthquake, unrest in the Tarai and the Indian blockade makes for sombre reading: the government’s revenue from taxes is down Rs 38 billion in the last four months alone, and the private sector’s losses have crossed Rs 200 billion. More than 200,000 people have been laid off as industries closed down. Tourism is down by half, ports, guides and teashop owners have lost income.

The country hasn’t gone completely belly-up only for two reasons: remittances from the estimated 4 million Nepalis working outside the country, and because of smuggling across the open border. At a seminar on Tuesday, we heard that 16 VDCs of Saptari received Rs 148 million in remittances from the Gulf and Malaysia in merely two months.

How long can the country bear this? The coalition government led by Prime Minister KP Oli has convinced many Nepalis that this is all India’s doing. People don’t really need to be persuaded that New Delhi is using Madhesi grievances as an excuse to throw its weight around. But as winter sets in, and the hardship reaches a critical level, the symbolism of this David and Goliath struggle is going to be lost on people standing two days to get half a cylinder of gas. The moral high ground ceases to have a strategic advantage if the misery level crosses a tipping point. It is a tribute to the legendary tolerance of Nepalis and our capacity to endure pain that we haven’t reached that stage yet.

The rulers of Nepal and India are waiting for the other to blink first. Nepal’s prime minister seems oblivious to the anger on the streets of the Tarai over his suppression and apathy, and seems to be hoping that the longer the blockade continues, the more hostile Nepalis will be towards India. But what is much more unconscionable is what India’s prime minister is trying to achieve with the siege of Nepal and this unfolding humanitarian emergency.
May the force be with you

Nepal needs a force for change, willing to speak truth to power and for social justice, democracy and development

Nepal society. It will be a campaign not for power but for truth. The idea of intellectuals ‘speaking truth to power’ is a noble and admirable one: one thinks of men like Jean Paul Sartre, Regis Debray, Edward Said and Noam Chomsky. These present at a recent inaugural meeting were Mahanta Thakur, Upen德拉 Yadav, Pradip Gir, Ram Chandras Jha, Gopal Dahi, Paulina Ratna Tuladhar, Rabi Bhakta Shrestha, Khagendra Sangraula, Chaitanya Subba and others. One can only gather from this that the movement will be a broad ‘church’, adopting a critical, non-partisan approach to the political, social and economic issues facing Nepal.

There is certainly no indication here of anything resembling a Maoist tendency, rather a loosely articulated something that people of different interests. Stating that the NC, the Praja Parishad, the UML and the UCPN (M) have carried out ‘historic works’ at different times in history, Bhattarai suggested that none of these parties has been able to construct an ideology consistent with the present age and times. This has prompted the formation of a new force, he added. Devendra Poudel, a member of the New Force Campaign, however, also argued that the new force had to be forged as the objectives of the ‘People’s War’ had not been secured, despite the sacrifice of 17,000 lives.

The campaign has drawn up a nine-point commitment paper, but so far its comments on specific issues have been rather vague. On the new Constitution, for example, BRB commented that ‘it can be compared to a half-filled glass. It should be made complete by filling the remaining half through constitution amendment and the problem resolved.’

The position of the new force on the current protests in the Tarai is also fairly non-committal. It recognises that the divisions between Hills and Tarai constitute a serious problem and need to be addressed, but BRB had also indicated that he believes the protests have ‘got out of control’. The new force will need to do better than that if it is to play any useful role in what is clearly a major political issue, exacerbated by the Indian ‘blockade’. It is all very well, and probably correct, to say that the two issues of the Madhes and of relations with India need to be addressed separately. But a stronger position is required from any movement wishing to emerge as a new power in Nepali politics.

After holding a closed two-day session with his supporters, most of them from the UCPN (M), BRB held a press conference on Tuesday to announce the first phase of Naya Shakti Nirman Abhiyan (campaign for building new force) naming those who would be under the ‘leadership’ of the new force. The eight districts of this region were already ones with some of the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) scores in Nepal. Schools have been forcibly shut for over three months. Local farmers are busy blocking the border at a time when they should be harvesting paddy and preparing to plant wheat. At a program in Kathmandu this week, Janakpur based economics professor Surendra Labh said: “If it were not for remittances, the people would have already started eating each other’s flesh in the Tarai.”

It seems that Nepal’s economic crisis is now full-blown, and Nepal cannot endure it any more. But the economic crisis we have dealt with so far may not be the main shock. If the Kathmandu-Madhes face-off continues, it could turn out to be just a teaser of a more devastating economic meltdown.

For now, we are just worried about immediate petrol and cooking gas shortage and have not even begun to fathom the longterm impact of this crisis. The sooner we begin to think about food and energy security and trade diversification the better will the country’s state be in the long run.

But for the time being, we urge you to participate so we can work to mitigate the devastating impact of the economic crisis.

Omer Astha Rai

The GADFLY

GOPEN RAI

THE GADFLY

As It Happens

Om Astha Rai

Nepali Times

27 NOVEMBER - 3 DECEMBER 2015

Full-blown economic crisis

The current crisis is just a teaser for an even more devastating economic meltdown

“…I had not survived the earthquake,” said a middle-aged woman with whom I struck up conversation at a local tea stall this week. She looked upset, and didn’t speak for several minutes. I didn’t push her to explain her statement.

Then she spoke up again. “I have run out of cooking gas, the dealer is asking Rs10,000 for a new cylinder. That is half of my husband’s salary. How can we continue to live this way?”

In his first address to the nation last week Prime Minister KP Oli tried to sell Nepal a utopian dream of an end to load-shedding within a year, introduce electric public transport in Kathmandu immediately and attain self-sufficiency in agriculture by 2017. Oli’s words sounded hollow, unrealistic and even nonsensical – proven by none other than his own finance minister Bishnu Poudel who released a White Paper this week. Poudel’s figures about the combined impact of the earthquake, Madhes movement and India’s blockade on Nepal’s economy were beyond dismal.

Since Madhesi protesters began blocking the Birganj border days after Nepal’s new constitution was promulgated on 20 September, revenue collection from the country’s biggest customs point in terms of trade volume has been nearly nil. The Department of Customs had set a target of Rs 7 billion from Birganj during October. It didn’t even reach 1 per cent of that.

India’s not-so-tacit support for the cause espoused by Madhesi leaders in enforcing a blockade has certainly complicated transit problems, but customs revenue collection was badly hit even before the Indian blockade. Already reeling under damage caused by the April-May earthquakes, Nepal’s economy began to dip when the Madhesi parties launched their anti-constitution movement in the Tarai 100 days ago.

Nearly 2,200 factories have been shut along the Tarai’s industrial corridors, more than 200,000 people have lost their jobs and inflow of tourists has suffered. With remittance still suffering. With remittance likely to hit double digits. This is the worst economic crisis Nepal has ever suffered. Hence, it is the central Tarai districts that have been most impacted by the Madhes protests.

The eight districts of this region were already ones with some of the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) scores in Nepal. Schools have been forcibly shut for over three months. Local farmers are busy blocking the border at a time when they should be harvesting paddy and preparing to plant wheat. At a program in Kathmandu this week, Janakpur based economics professor Surendra Labh said: “If it were not for remittances, the people would have already started eating each other’s flesh in the Tarai.”

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Om Astha Rai
Ending AIDS

SATISH PANDEY

A year containing a general AIDS epidemic, Nepal has seen a remarkable turnaround in recent times. The country has managed to scale up treatment and prevention efforts effectively, resulting in a significant decline in HIV prevalence.

The most recent data suggests that there are approximately 10,000 people living with HIV in Nepal, with 29 per cent of them women. However, in the 15-24 age group, women with HIV outnumber men by 1.5 times highlighting the vulnerabilities of adolescents and young women.

One of the reasons for Nepal's success is that people living with HIV are at the forefront of community and home-based care. They provide regular support for people on anti-retroviral Therapy (ART) and also ensure access to the drugs. Despite elusiveness and care, continued stigma and discrimination, the introduction and expansion of ART has transformed the situation of people living with HIV in Nepal.

Nepal's response has been backed by a sound national strategy that is grounded on evidence-based, tailored approaches. They focus on targeted interventions for female sex workers, people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men and transgender people, and move labour migrants and their spouses. This approach has yielded impressive results with stabilizing or even declining HIV prevalence among key populations, even though access to ART needs to be improved, and awareness campaigns maintained.

Of the people living with HIV in Nepal, 68 per cent were identified through HIV testing. Nearly 37 per cent of them were women. The HIV programs have consistently tested around 2,000 people as HIV positive. The current programs in Nepal need to be adequate support including anti-retroviral treatment. In 2014, it was estimated that there were more than 2,600 AIDS-related deaths while there were nearly 1,500 new HIV infections. Nepal has to improve the overall quality of lives of people with HIV to ensure their longevity. The best way to contain the epidemic is through a rapid decline in new infections.

Globally, HIV programs have come a long way in the past three decades. From initial shock and fear, we have entered a phase where it is possible to see a world without AIDS by 2030. UNAIDS has come up with an ambitious fast-track targets of 90:90:90 by 2020 in Nepal. Having 90 per cent of people living with HIV knowing their status, 90 per cent of people identified as having HIV enrolled in ART, and 90 per cent of ART-enrolled achieving viral suppression.

The next five years are crucial for the donors, government, civil society, and other stakeholders to show commitment and solidarity in order to accelerate HIV response. Maintaining status quo or slowing down the response will undo the successes attained so far. We cannot afford this for the present and the future generations.

Satish Pandey is a public health professional, and currently the Country Director of NACSP Nepal.
The people are exhausted, they cannot know how much longer this impasse will continue. The idea of a prosperous and just Nepal is a mirage. The immediate impulse may be to respond, to rebel, to march. But what would it be for and whom would it be against? Importantly, who is a suitable alternative to KP Oli, or this government? And it is in searching for this answer that the absence of hope is most felt.

@bidush

Bidushi Dhungel

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A Nepali mountaineer-turned-relief worker is in the race to win NatGeo's Adventurer of the Year

Pasang Lhamu Sherpa shares her name with Nepal’s most iconic female mountaineer. And just like her namesake who in 1993 became the first Nepali woman to climb Everest, the 30-year-old mountaineering instructor from Solukhumbu is determined to overcome gender stereotypes, and make her mark in a field dominated by men.

In 2006 Pasang completed a diploma course in mountaineering from France’s National School of Ski and Alpinism, becoming the first Nepali woman to achieve an instructor license. She went on to be the sole woman climbing instructor. The rest, as they say, is history.

Despite an increase in the number of women guides in the country Pasang says she is the sole woman climbing instructor. She has trained dozens of climbers including the Seven Summits Women’s team, a group of Nepali women who climbed the highest mountains in each of the seven continents last year. At present Pasang divides her time between Nepal and the US, where she works as a guide with Alpine Ascent International during summer.

Pasang has been nominated for this year’s NatGeo Adventurer of the Year along with ten others from America, Afghanistan, Brazil, Germany, South Africa and Switzerland. She is currently leading the public poll with more than 50 per cent of the votes.

“I think what sets me apart from other nominees on the list is that I have not only been recognised for my mountaineering work, but also for efforts to help victims of the earthquake in remote villages,” says Pasang.

When the earthquake hit central Nepal in April, the Lukla native was drinking tea with a client near Base Camp on Mt Everest. After the initial tremors stopped she heard a loud boom and looked outside to find that the Base Camp had been hit by an avalanche. "It was the scariest thing I’d ever seen," she recalls. But instead of heading down to Lukla to catch a plane out Pasang rushed to Base Camp to help with rescue. She was especially worried about an Indian group that she had met only a day before, but was relieved to find them safe.

“The scene at the base camp resembled a war zone. Gas cylinders had been blown up into pieces, only poles of the tents remained, it was incredibly heartbreaking” she remembers.

Once in Kathmandu she and her husband got together with friends and began to raise money to buy food and tarps which were first distributed to villages on the outskirts of Kathmandu. Pasang regularly posted about the group’s relief efforts on Facebook which helped in attracting more supporters. Her large network of friends all over the globe also helped the fundraising. The couple then shifted their focus to villages in Gorkha, dispatching emergency supplies and organised health camps. They are now preparing to distribute blankets and warm clothes to Salyantar in Dhading. Both husband and wife are dedicated to helping the needy and want to move onto rebuilding homes for quake victims if they can gather the required fund.

More than successful summit of K2 in July last year Pasang and her friends had made plans to climb Kangchenjunga to further spread their message about the impact of climate change on the mountains. That dream is on hold for now. She says: “All three of us felt it would be selfish to raise funds to set personal records when the money could be used to help those most in need.”

Tsering Dolker Gurung

To vote for Pasang Lhamu Sherpa
nepalitimes.com
FALLING FOR IT

You can now skydive in Pokhara.

BINITA DAHAL

When I first saw pictures of skydiving near Mt Everest last year, and heard of the price tag (see box) I thought I would never be able to afford it. But now that skydiving is offered in Pokhara, the price is relatively reasonable, especially if it is a once-in-a-lifetime treat.

The next thing to overcome was the fear of jumping off an aircraft and freefalling through the air. But once I watched some of the videos of skydiving in Nepal on YouTube I knew I had to do it.

My friends who had done it before told me it was less scary than bungee-jumping. I called up a friend who had bungeed with me some years ago, and he first balked not because of the jump but because of the cost. However, once he saw the video he messaged back: “Hunchhu, I’m in.”

I came across information about the skydiving trip in Pokhara which was organised from 12-15 November on social media and called up Explore Himalaya which also organises skydiving in the Everest region.

So, on 15 November, we met up with the tandem master Ryan Jackson in Pokhara for a detailed briefing about techniques, body posture during freefall and safety issues. I was in capable hands: Jackson has done more than 5,000 jumps and quite a few of those have been in Nepal.

We hopped into a helicopter and I got strapped with Jackson and had to actually sit on his lap while we climbed above Phewa Lake amidst the stunning backdrop of Machhapuchre and the Annapurnas. We got the thumbs up when the helicopter reached 12,000ft and jumped off. During the 40 second of freefall, I did not get a feeling of falling. In fact, it was more like flying. The air rushing past felt like a thick cushion that kept us afloat. I could hear myself screaming with the excitement, a feeling of exhilaration I have

8 ADVENTURE SPORTS

Ultralight Flights
Pokhara offers ultralight flights ranging in duration from 15 to 90 minutes. Prices for a 15 minute flight around Pokhara begins at Rs 12,000.

www.ultralightinlpokhara.com
+977 614 666 93

Zip Lining
HighGround Adventure’s famed zip line will drop you 2000 vertical feet reaching speeds of up to 120km/h. A descent on this exhilarating cable costs Rs 7,200.

www.highgroundnepal.com
+977 614 631 74

Paragliding
Several companies offer paragliding within Pokhara. Experience scenic views of the city, Phewa Lake and its surrounds from high above. Prices start at Rs 8,000.

www.parahawking.com
+977 614 666 93

Parahawking
A combination of paragliding and falconry, parahawking, was developed by British falconer Scott Mason in 2001 and pioneered in Pokhara. Single tandem flights start at Rs 15,000, with Rs 1,000 from every flight donated to vulture conservation projects within Nepal.

www.parahawking.com
+977 614 666 93

www.hypokhara.com
+977 614 631 74
After the success of Everest skydive, Explore Himalaya is now offering annual skydiving trips to Pokhara. Skydivers are flown 12,000ft above Pame Danda, west of Phewa Lake, the dropzone for the jump. Although not cheap, skydiving in Pokhara is relatively affordable compared to Everest skydiving. Nepalis are charged Rs 75,000, for Indians it is Rs 80,000 and it costs US$800 for foreigners.

So far 100 foreigners have skydived in Everest since it was launched in 2008. For the Everest skydive solo jumpers pay US$25,000 and a tandem jump is priced at US$35,000.

never before experienced in my life. Two photographers who were freefalling alongside, steered themselves with their hands and came close enough to give me a high five and even pose for photographs and video.

This was a whole new dimension than the other falling sport: bungee jumping. For one thing, it lasts longer, and you have less a feeling of falling through space and more of floating. It is also much more exciting than the more sedate paragliding. The only scary part is when you jump off the aircraft, which just lasts a few seconds. After that, the adrenalin takes over.

After 45 seconds, Jackson pulls the chord, the parachute unfurls above us and we glide. My only regret was the feel of floating did not last longer. Jackson let me steer the parachute so I could take us down to the drop zone in Pame.

Being back on the ground was comforting, but I was already missing the excitement of the fall. ▶

Bungee & Swing

Introduced only last year by Highground Adventures, the company also responsible for bringing up ziplining to Pokhara, bungee is fast becoming one of the most popular adventure sports in the lake city. A single jump costs Rs 7,200.

Paddle Boarding
Rent a paddle board and explore Phewa Lake at your own leisure. One hour, half day and full day rentals are available with charges ranging from Rs 800 to Rs 3,000.

Kayaking
Kayaking is another alternative for touring the glassy waters of Phewa Lake yourself. Boats can be rented for an hour to full day and prices range from Rs 200 to Rs 650.

Rafting
A half day of rafting on the upper Seti River starts at around Rs 5,000 depending on the season.

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www.raftnepal.org
Phone: +977 989 660 1684

www.paddlenepal.com
+977 147 002 39

www.paddlenepal.com
+977 980 660 1684

www.highgroundnepal.com
+977 614 663 49
**Brick by Brick**

Eleven Nepali artists share their perspectives on the current needs of the country through their artworks. (see story on page 13)

Event details:
- Venue: 5 to 27 November, Park Gallery, Lalitpur
- Contact: 9849513017, parkgallery.com.np

**Kathmandu**

A brief ride.

A monthly meet-up of cyclists followed by Critical Mass, 27 to 29 November, Shivapuri National Park, and breathtaking Himalayan views.

**Ambient Valley Festival**

Featuring Nepal's famous alternative artists and musicians, with live art, music and breathtaking Himalayan views.

**Artists and Musicians**

- **Artists:** Featuring works by Maureen Drdak and Youdhisthir Maharjan on display until 27 November, Park Gallery, Lalitpur
  - Contact: (01)4218048/4433930, siddharthaartgallery.com
  - Works on display include Eleven Nepali artists share their perspectives on the current needs of the country through their artworks.
- **Musicians:**
  - **Ambient Valley Festival:** Featuring Nepal's famous alternative artists and musicians, with live art, music and breathtaking Himalayan views.
  - **Brick by Brick:** Eleven Nepali artists share their perspectives on the current needs of the country through their artworks.
  - **Les Héritiers:** Screening of the French film by Marie-Caroline Mention Schaar.
  - **Ohoikama Café:** Beach the cold with indigenous cocktails at the Baktun Bar.
  - **Helena’s:** Something of an institution in the tourist district, the restaurant has the best view of the Valley from its rooftop.
  - **Dhokaima Café:** Beat the cold with indigenous cocktails at the Baktun Bar.
  - **Mezze:** A great atmosphere, friendly staff, and reliably satisfying pizza with a view of the Old Palace.
  - **Kairos Café:** A great atmosphere, friendly staff, and reliably satisfying pizza with a view of the Old Palace.
  - **Bodhi books & Bakes:** A bookstore-cum-patisserie.
  - **Shakuntala:** Sample 10 of Nepal’s finest brews and learn which you like best.
  - **Fortuna:** Enjoy traditional festive biscuits and mulled wine.
  - **Dhokaima Café:** Beat the cold with indigenous cocktails at the Baktun Bar.
  - **Christmas Bazaar:** Shop for gifts from local artisans, enjoy traditional festive biscuits and mulled wine.
  - **Farmers’ market:** Local producers gather to sell organic vegetables, dairy products, artisanal bread and pastries and home-made goodies.

**Yoga retreat**

Leave the chaos and clutter of daily life behind and slip into the tranquil, restorative space of this Yoga Intensive.

Event details:
- Venue: 28 to 29 November, Hotel Chok, Pharping
- Contact: 9831357007, pranamaya-yoga.com

**Park Village Resort**

Far away from the madding crowd, yet so close to the city.

Event details:
- Venue: Budhanilkantha
- Contact: 014700525/4701247, thelastresort.com.np

**Kasara Resort**

A luxury resort located in the lush setting of the Chitwan National Park. For those who value their privacy and prefer a more secluded stay, Kasara offers two private villas with private pools.

Event details:
- Venue: (01)4700525/4701247, thelastresort.com.np

**Music**

- **Music workshop:** Live music with master classes with classical pianist Joana Reio.
- **Folk Music Festival:** The fifth edition of the International Folk Music and Film Festival.
- **Monkey Temple Live:** Set list consists the band’s original songs as well as covers.

Event details:
- Venue: 28 November, 6pm, Irish Pub, Lajimpat
- Contact: 9801038501, Monkey Temple Live

**Reggae Sundown**

Drum and Base Reggae by Dj Mama Brusqy (Briony)

Event details:
- Venue: 27 November, Base Camp, Arun Thapa Chok
- Contact: 9813570076, Monkey Temple Live

**Nepal Music Festival**

Nepal’s biggest volunteer-run music and culture festival, includes performances by noted bands and fun activities.

Event details:
- Venue: 28 November, 6pm, Irish Pub, Lajimpat
- Contact: 9801038501, Monkey Temple Live
I n a brooding atmosphere heavy with eerie violins and the threat of an emotional thunderstorm, John Osborne’s Look Back in Anger as presented by Garden Theatre opens in a small drab apartment set in 1950s working-class England. As the production artfully explores a battlefield of contrasts, relationships, and disappointment, the audience journeys with the characters through their attempts to love one another in a world that rejects them as strongly as they have rejected it.

Osborne’s play follows the story of Jimmy (Divya Dev Panta) and Alison Porter (Akanchha Karki), a young and unhappily married couple who appear hell-bent on ripping one another’s self-esteem to shreds. Living with them is Jimmy’s best friend Cliff Lewis (Jalshakhan Bharati) who, over time, has also become a very close friend and ally to Alison. Helena Charles (Gunjan Dixit) joins in the second act as the snobbish friend out of town. These four educated, disillusioned, and vulnerably snobbish friends, Alison and Helena have seen their relationships, creating one destructive interaction after another, and in turn making the infrequent tender moments so much more heartbreaking to witness.

While at times the play seems to be a platform for Jimmy Porter (and therefore John Osborne) to complain about all that is wrong with the world (much in the style of Holden Caulfield), the cast does a fine job of using the text to examine the complexity of platonic, erotic, and familial relationships.

Bharati’s energetic yet tender performance as Cliff comes as a welcome contrast to the brooding and pampered Jimmy who seems only able to show love when it’s too late. This unlikely pair of longstanding friends is nonetheless destined for success both on the stage and within the world of the play, with a great physical and emotional connection only true friends can display.

A more likely yet more tragic pair of friends, Alison and Helena have seen their relationships go in quite different directions: Alison suffocates in her marriage while Helena thrives in her acting career. But circumstance reunites them just in time. Helena, as well as Alison’s father (Colonel Radcliff, played by Sande Malik), is a remnant glimpse into the upper-class world of sophisticates that Alison left behind to be with Jimmy. These four characters—friends, enemies, lovers, allies—clash throughout the play, ultimately brimming over with unhappiness and only a splash of love.

During the entire performance an image of Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski, the brooding and abusive yet unfortunately charming icon of American theatre, hangs over the dingy apartment these characters share. Whether as inspiration, aspiration, or parallel for the playwright, the main character, or both, the image serves as a flashback to other ill-fated relationships of the stage. This visual cue and the powerful performances from the cast leave the audience questioning why these friends hurt each other in such awful ways, and how they could possibly love—or believe they love—one another in spite of it all. Perhaps the answer lies within our own relationships, which we are inevitably left to consider after attending this worthwhile performance.

Rose Schweitz

Look back in anger

Design & Direction Shankar Rijal

Until 1 December

Mandala Theatre, Anamnagar

(01)4249761, 9851200052

Buy 1 art piece, build 3 homes

The smell of fresh paint and live music greets guests at the ‘Brick By Brick 2072’ exhibition at Park Gallery in Patan. With the participation of young musicians Tshering Sherpa, the exhibition is presented the soundscape of Nepal in trap/future beats from the southern United States.

Tshering who is also known by his ananym “GNIRESHT” performed in the opening and linked his music to one of the artworks. Viewers can find the piece with his name on the first floor and use earphones to listen to his music. The ‘Brick By Brick 2072’ team is aiming to build at least 50 houses in quake-affected areas in Nepal. The auction is an important part of the exhibition to show that art can be converted into homes. “One solid house costs around $800-1,000 to build. So the bids in US will start at $2,400 and be called Art for three houses,” explained Samaya who came to Nepal to volunteer four months ago.

Seulki Lee

Brick By Brick 2072

Until 27 November at Park Gallery, Pulchok, (01)6522307
SPECTRE

A Bond film - for those who are so inclined towards the dapper, suave, womanising, martini drinking, reckless but irresistible, fictional character who is also known as 007 - is a thrilling prospect.

Now in its 24th iteration, and the fourth film starring Daniel Craig, the series has arguably been at its strongest. Craig’s tenure as the urbane, psychologically complex, possibly fatally flawed spy started with Casino Royale (2006) in an origin story that traces his first real affair of the heart with the lovely, treacherous, heartbreakingly vulnerable Vesper Lynd who was played to winsome perfection by the stunning Eva Green.

Already a cynic, and a killer with a license, Bond’s character becomes even more nebulous and opaque through his multitudinous pursuits of arch villains over the course of Quantum of Solace (2008), the unforgettable Skyfall (2012) - where we learn about his boyhood and his home. It is therefore rather unfortunate that the series culminates with Spectre, a problematically long bore of a film that basically has several interminable, linked set pieces that do very little to enhance a plotless film.

Daniel Craig looks tired, stony faced by his own boredom and weary of the inevitable, unbelievable shenanigans he must resort to in order to expose the shadow behind Spectre - a character that Bond fans will recognise as a reboot of an old villain from the canon, complete with a fluffy white Persian cat.

Much too has been made of the 50-year-old Monica Belluci as the latest Bond woman. Don’t hold your breath - as gorgeous and intelligent as she is, she does not transcend the archetype of the typical ‘bed ‘em and leave ‘em’ Bond female.

If that is progression it is easily negated by the 47-year-old Bond’s (Craig’s actual age) real love story with Dr. Madeleine Swann – played by a 30-year-old Léa Seydoux. Surprisingly or unsurprisingly, the 17-year difference between the two was conveniently ignored by the industry and the world which could not stop itself from commending the makers on casting Belluci, an ‘older’ female actor.

Running at 150 minutes, Spectre’s main problem is its length (I found myself looking at my watch, more than once), and stilted by Craig’s pouty, blasé performance - a not too subtle hint that he’s done (though he is technically under contract to film a final fifth film).

Personally, I think the man needs a break and we need a new Bond. For what it’s worth, my candidate of choice is the fantastically debonair Tom Hiddleston - after his turn as the morally corrupt but incredibly likeable villain Loki in the Marvel films - he could bring a darkness and life to Bond that has hitherto been impossible.

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

WINNING DUO: Former UN Assistant Secretary-General, Kul Chandra Gautam presents the UNICEF Award to Amy Benson and Ramyata Limbu (behind in green) for their film Drawing The Tiger at Film South Asia festival on Sunday.

HELPING NEPALI: President of Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) Shesh Ghale (right) hands over medicines worth Rs.3.8 million to Health Minister Ram Janam Chaudhary at the Department of Health Service in Teku on Tuesday.

IN MEMORY: Madhesi leaders observe a minute of silence to remember 50 people killed in the Madhes protests at Maitighar in Kathmandu on Monday.

HAPPENINGS

MIDDLE MAN: Former Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai (centre) along with supporters announced the launch of a two-month campaign for formation of his new party at Babarmahal on Tuesday.

WINNING DUO: Motorcyclists ferry large amounts of petrol bought at Thori in Parsa through Chitwan National Park on Wednesday.

IN MEMORY: Madhesi leaders observe a minute of silence to remember 50 people killed in the Madhes protests at Maitighar in Kathmandu on Monday.

SUPPLY ON: Motorcyclists ferry large amounts of petrol bought at Thori in Parsa through Chitwan National Park on Wednesday.
**Déjà vu**

A look back at the headlines, news and articles published in the Nepali press during the 1989 Indian blockade shows what is happening in Nepal today is merely a recap of what Nepalis went through 25 years ago. Here are some examples:

1. In 1989, India had imposed a blockade on Nepal seven months after a 6.9 magnitude earthquake hit eastern Nepal. This time, India’s blockade comes just five months after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake devastated central Nepal.

2. Just as present, newspapers back then were replete with news about fuel shortages. The only difference is: people queued up for kerosene back then but they are now lining up for petrol and cooking gas.

3. Prime Minister KP Oli has said India is treating Nepal as if the two countries are at war. Oli is echoing what prominent civil rights activist Devendra Raj Pandey said in 1989: “India is treating us as if we are at war.”

4. India denies imposing blockade against Nepal, saying cargo trucks are passing through border posts unaffected by Madhesi protests. An article published in Deshantar on 2 April 1989 reads: “India, through Indian media, is claiming that it has not stopped supply of essential commodities to Nepal. But even goods purchased before the blockade remain stranded on the Indian side.”

5. Newspapers back then too had published reports showing what prominent political leaders were saying. ‘India is treating us as if we are at war’, reads a Deshantar on 2 April 1989.

6. Newspapers currently face a shortage of newsprint paper. Newspapers back then were also forced to reduce pages.

7. The international community which is usually vocal about any political development in the country has surprisingly stayed silent on the current blockade.

8. Nepal living around the globe have been demonstrating against India’s blockade. In 1989, Nepal demonstrated in front of the UN headquarters in New York urging the international community to put pressure on India to lift the blockade.

9. Nepal had tried to play the ‘China card’ even in 1989 by importing fuel from its northern neighbour. The 30 April issue of Deshantar reported that three tankers had reached Khassa from China.

10. Nepalis are criticising their leaders for ignoring lessons of the 1989 blockade. Newspaper clips from 1989 show Nepalis had lambasted their leaders even back then for forgetting the first Indian blockade of 1971.

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**Speak up**

Chandra Shekhar Adhikari and Jagdishwar Pandey in Kanpur, 22 November

Diplomatic missions in Kathmandu seem to be unaffected by India’s blockade of Nepal.

The international community which is usually vocal about any political development in the country has surprisingly stayed silent on the current blockade.

A few countries have released individual statements expressing concern over the humanitarian crisis caused by acute fuel shortage, but the missions here have yet to condemn India’s actions.

Each day the Nepal Oil Corporation receives more than a dozen recommendation letters requesting supply of fuel to various embassies. The government has made special provisions to provide fuel to diplomatic missions.

According to an employee at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had the government not made such provisions, then the international missions would have been forced to speak up against the blockade.

The United Nations mission in Nepal has also kept quiet on the issue.

The SAARC Secretariat which is based in Kathmandu and is currently headed by Nepal has also remained silent.

According to experts on diplomatic affairs, Nepal has failed to open a discussion on the subject through the Secretariat. The government has shown no concern towards making the diplomatic missions understand that the ongoing internal conflict and Indian blockade are two different things.

It is Nepal’s responsibility to reach out to them, but so far we have not been able to do so,” says Bresh Bahadur Thapa, former Minister of Foreign Affairs.

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**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

If someone is trying to capture Nepal’s lands, then go to the border and fight a war.

Madhesi leader Upendra Yadav in an interview with atlantideskor.com, 26 November
WINTER EMERGENCY FOR QUAKE

The double impact of the earthquake and blockade pushes an already deprived region into deeper crisis this winter

KUNDA DIXIT
IN GORKHA

Beneath a deep blue Himalayan sky and hemmed in by mountains on all sides, winter has come early to the villages of Upper Gorkha. The pastel green Budi Gandaki tumbles past the settlement of Ghap, which used to be a busy stop for trekkers on the Manaslu trail before the April earthquake.

The earthquake destroyed the Nubri Primary School in Ghap. But delays in approving standard designs for schools and budget allocation for rebuilding means that seven months after the earthquake, students are taking lessons in 30,000 tented classrooms like these across the mountains of central Nepal.

Down the Valley in Phillim, it is the same story. Eighty students at the residential Buddha Secondary School spend nights in tents because dormitories were damaged by the earthquake. The girls are crammed into a small room in one of the few buildings still intact.

For Principal Mukti Adhikari an even more pressing problem is finding enough rice to feed the children. Landslides triggered by the earthquake blocked the trail so supplies haven’t got through. Even the helicopter lifeline is disrupted now because of the blockade.

“The first blockade was caused by the earthquake, this is our second blockade,” says Adhikari ruefully. “If we can’t find rice we have to close the school and send the children home.”

The blockade hasn’t just hit transportation of supplies to these villages cut off by landslides. A shortage of raw materials in Kathmandu means relief agencies haven’t been able to source enough sleeping bags, blankets and tent material. Even supplies that are available cost up to three times more now.

It is not just the blockade that has deepened the misery of the estimated 2 million people in 14 districts who are facing winter in makeshift shelters. Political disarray in Kathmandu has meant that the Reconstruction Authority is not functioning, and much of the money pledged by international donors lies unspent.

Relief agencies and private groups who were filling the gap have now been hit by the fuel crisis and haven’t been able to get urgent supplies before winter. The UN, which was operating five Mi-8 helicopters had to ground them because of a funding crunch and lack of fuel, and there is a backlog of 1,000 tons of supplies to airlift before it terminates operations by end-December.

“We are concerned that delays caused by the lack of fuel will lead to a second humanitarian crisis this winter,” says the head of DFID in Nepal, Gail Marzetti, “the situation is serious especially for children and the vulnerable.”
DFID has been supporting the airlifts to remote areas, and also works with partners to distribute supplies and manage shelters in hard-to-reach places like Prok, Keraunja and Tsum.

“Our immediate priority is to get thicker tents, blankets, sleeping bags, gloves, foam mattresses and smokeless stoves in the next week to as many shelters as possible,” says Sudip Joshi of the Czech relief agency, People In Need, which mobilises local communities to design distribution to the most vulnerable groups first.

Despite the challenges and setbacks, Gorkha is cited as the district which has managed earthquake relief best, coordinating the activities of nearly 100 relief agencies since April. CDO Udhav Timilsina is a no-nonsense bureaucrat who is impatient to see results, and he is angry about the delay in getting rice to the school in Philim.

This week he set up a task force to ensure that the trail damaged by landslides and floods in Yaru Bagar is immediately repaired so mule trains can take supplies up the Budi Gandaki even if helicopters aren’t available.

Timilsina wants to have a technical assessment before a conference in Pokhara next week that will showcase Gorkha’s experience in earthquake response to see if it can be replicated in some of the other affected districts.

He instructs his team: “We need to get things moving right away. I will not tolerate any more delay in opening the trail.”
Everyone knows that Indian Prime Minister Modi has a soft spot for Nepal. He came here first as a pilgrim and then as a messiah, he has adopted a Nepali and would like to adopt Nepal as well. I don’t have a Modicum of doubt that there isn’t a minute in a day that he doesn’t give a thought to our nation’s welfare and wellbeing.

Mr Modi has consulted arm-chair experts and Nepal-watchers in New Delhi and after long and thoughtful consideration imposed a blockade on Nepal for our own good. It is his ingenious way to make Nepal a strong and united country. Guess what, it’s working!

Not since the Anglo-Nepal War (which we lost) are Nepalis as united as we are today. Just look at the names our commies give themselves: CPN Unified Marxist-Leninists, CPN (Unity Centre) and the Unified Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (which at press time had broken up into five unified pieces).

Only very few people know this, so don’t tell anybody I told you that NaMo’s secret strategy is to keep Nepal in India’s vice-like grip until Nepalis can learn to stand on their own four feet and be more self-reliant and self-obsessed. He has given us a chance to contribute to reducing greenhouse gases by moving to a renewable energy economy and he less dependent on fossil fuels. He has promoted The Cow as our national animal by taking us back to burning its dung. And since he is such a fan of President Xi Jinping, he has convinced us that our salvation lies in increasing trade and cooperation with Communist China.

And still there are those ungrateful Nepalis on Facebook who are lampooning NaMo, calling him names and making unkind cartoons. Stop it already. (Direct quote: “We are keeping careful tabs of FB posts. You are either with us or against us.”)

Anyhoo, it is good to see that the legendary ingenuity of Nepalis has taken over and we’re coming up with ever-cleverer ways to turn this crisis into an opportunity for opportunists and profitiers. We could go on and on listing all the examples that illustrate the can-do attitude of the citizens of this country, but in the national interest we will only present a few here:

1. Most restaurants in the Thamel Autonomous Region have Modified their menus to make best use of the limited fuel available. For example, Wood-fired Pizzas used to be the exclusive domain of Nepal’s hill elite. Now it’s for the proletariat as well -- all pizzas are wood-fired. And just to set themselves apart, fancier eateries are serving Cowdung-fired Pizzas. (Extra topping of fresh patties with anchovies optional.)

2. Our friendly neighbourhood momo shop ran out of gas long ago so it has concocted a range of energy-efficient unsteamed dumplings that have duck kachila fillings served with sesame sauce seasoned with peanut paste and timur.

3. The hottest new food fad in town is the He-buffalo Steak Tartare. Fittingly, it is served RAW.

4. In Kalanki, Bajeko Sekuwa Corner is offering Blockade Barbecue of goat innards roasted over old tyres. A customer swore by the new dish: “There is a tangy new flavour to the meat that I had never tasted before.”

5. Among the amendments Parliament is debating this week is to change the country’s official name to: Democratic Black Market Federal Kleptocratic Secular Socialist Paradise of Nepal (United).

6. To honour border traffickers who risk their lives daily keeping our nation’s supply lines open, parliament has also voted to nominate Old Smuggler as Nepal’s New National Drink.

7. Nepal’s distilleries are now being converted into refineries, producing bio-ethanol instead of vodka. (Driver to Mapase Police: “I haven’t had a drink, but my bike has.”)

8. Empty gas cylinders have been put to good use as road dividers.

9. The shortage of essential medicines means that private hospitals have not been able to force patients to undergo expensive and unnecessary operations. This has enabled the public to save Rs 10 billion over the last two months, according to one unusually reliable guesstimate.

10. Nepal used to spend Rs 60 billion a month to import petroleum. The blockade has saved us so much money that we now have a trade surplus with India.