The Maoists have upped the ante with black flag protests that disrupted convocations at both Tribhuvan University and Purbanchal University this week. In the lead-up to Dashain, was this just a last show of strength or did the black flags really mean something? For the students who had long awaited their graduation ceremonies, such scenes were unlikely to inspire confidence in their futures. Dashain may be around the corner, but Nepali politics is still on the road to nowhere.

Chaaait!
Our cities are down on charm, but kites still channel our spirits.

Mall-mandu
Malls have caused a stir in Kathmandu, having redefined not only lifestyles but shopping itself.
The relationship between the ruling coalition and the main opposition party in the legislature continues to deteriorate. From waging black flags at ministers, Maoist cadres have resorted to pelting stones at them. This is a dangerous precedent. Unfortunately, the government doesn’t seem to be in a mood to ease an inch of political space to the Maoists. This makes the likelihood of a rapprochement remote.

Should the standoff in Parliament and the confrontation in the streets continue, the drafting of a new statute will be delayed, if not altogether sabotaged. The second casualty will be the functioning of the government, which has already been brought to its knees by various armed groups operating in the eastern hills and the central Tarai. The third impact will be the most cataclysmic: the ongoing peace process will unravel, with all the attendant complications and consequences.

The term failed state is one of the most misunderstood and misused of our times. But the possibility appears to be staring us in the face. Girja Prasad Koirala and Madhav Kumar Nepal could not have been more eloquent in their appeal to the people. It is now clear that both parties, as well as the Maoists, are of the same mind: there has to be some other way to end the stalemate.

Koirala believes the deadlock can end with the formation of a high-level coordination committee. He has to take the initiative if his prescriptions are to be taken seriously. Nepal thinks the Maoists can be brought into the present coalition by launching a broad initiative, and support. A high-level coordination committee. He has to take the initiative if his prescriptions are to be taken seriously. Nepal thinks the Maoists can be brought into the present coalition by launching a broad initiative, and support.

In any case, an extension can be pronounced candidate. A broad package deal is then arrived at. And in the first few months of 2010, cutting short the time for public consultations, ignoring opposition from some quarters, a statute is pushed through.

For this to happen, there needs to be a dire sense of urgency across the political spectrum. Common fears – of losing their relevance of the process collapsing, of inviting risk of being sunk by the Maoists and its breakaway armed groups. No matter how many berths the prime minister adds to his cabinet, they will not be enough to accommodate all the minister-aspirants and keep his wobbly coalition aloft. There has to be some other way to end the stalemate.

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Unlike the Maoist leaders in their rumpled clothes, UML stalwarts dress well and are generally presentable. That could be one of the reasons television reporters prefer them to the stuffy politicos of the NC.

Ranking leaders of the UML are extremely articulate in outlining the deficiencies of bourgeois parties like the NC. They combine combativeness and witticism in criticising what they call the leftwing extremism of the Maoists. The UML seldom censures rightwing politicos.

But it’s in attacking each other that the rhetoricians of Balkhu Palace excel.

It’s enough to hear Jhalnath Khanal on Madhav Nepal or vice versa to keep abreast of the latest innovations in verbal abuse. But even by the high standards of the vitriolic exchanges among UML leaders, Comrade Khadga Prasad Oli is a class unto himself. His acid observations on party colleagues advocating a policy of accommodation towards Maoists, the new ‘class enemies’ of the UML, are unforgettable.

Oli has headed to Japan for Dasain. The public space will be a little less stormy in the weeks to come. But acrimonious exchanges between the Nepal and Khanal cliques are likely to continue. However, it’s unlikely the UML will implode anytime soon. The ferocity of verbal duels between faction leaders notwithstanding, rumours of the death of the united UML are greatly exaggerated.
Malls have caused a stir in Kathmandu, having redefined not only lifestyles but shopping itself. Unlike locally owned mom-and-pop stores, which cultivate relationships with individual shoppers, malls rely on mass appeal and commerce.

Shopping malls first emerged in the early 1920s in the United States, where they replaced department stores, but didn’t grow into today’s gigantic mega-malls until the 1980s.

They filtered into Asia following the meteoric growth of the East Asian economies in the 1990s, and gave rise to a generation of hip youngsters who indulged in a new ‘mall culture’. They didn’t so much shop in malls as ‘hang out’, which meant chatting, watching movies, browsing shops, bowling and gaming – the whole nine yards of modern-day entertainment for kids.

Kathmandu’s malls are far smaller than their international counterparts but like them have sparked a new lifestyle.

“I hang out in malls during weekends with my friends and we usually eat, bowl and watch movies,” says student Sarif Maharjan.

Nepal’s largest mall, City Centre (top), is a milestone in Nepal’s burgeoning mall culture. It has a food court and a 4D theatre where the seats rumble and shake in response to the events unfolding on the screen, adding another ‘dimension’ of sensation. And of course, it has dozens of chic, modern brand name stores.

Mansini Agrawal of City Centre says, “Attracting customers means not just having good shops but entertaining them as well. People should be happy when they leave the complex.”

Recently opened Sherpa Mall has now become the hip spot for youngsters. “I just love the ambience,” says Sanam Shrestha, 18, enjoying an ice-cream. “It’s a great hangout.”

Located in Darbar Marg, Sherpa Mall is especially popular with the young adult crowd as it offers a good mixture of dining and shopping.

But there is a darker side to the mall boom. Kathmandu’s old network of stores, some of which have been around for many generations, are feeling the heat as they lose business to newer, glitzier competition.

Sambrina Napit, who owns a store opposite City Centre, says she’s lost 50% of her business since the mall began operations and is now considering closing down. “We just can’t compete. They can offer huge discount schemes because they buy things in bulk, which we can’t do,” she complains. A neighbouring store has it worse, having lost all of its business to City Centre’s supermarket Big Mart.

But these stores will find reprieve among shoppers who dislike malls for reasons of service and culture. If you want a traditional cushion cover, for example, a mall’s probably the last place you would visit. Local stores also cultivate close relationships with individual shoppers, so their service is invariably better than what malls can offer.

Our shopper says, “I can go to this clothes store that my family has used for generations, and the shopkeepers will know exactly what I want because he’s known my family for so long.”

So far, the service in malls has caused some resentment among shoppers, and not only because they’re unaware of each shopper’s individual needs. The service is just bad, period.

Architects Prajita Joshi and Shobhana Rajbhandari complain, “We can’t even tell the salespeople apart from the shoppers.”

Another common complaint is that salespeople seem indifferent to their customers, showing them what they ask for, but rarely encouraging them to explore other styles and colours and so forth.

Compare this to the scene in traditional sari stores, where salespeople will throw down dozens of rolls of saris to entice hesitant customers. This kind of enthusiasm is rare in malls.

Along with the high prices, this is partly why malls haven’t fared as well as their proprietors hoped, although business certainly isn’t slumping. Prices are high because malls have to cover for lighting, parking spaces and air conditioning. There’s also ample competition, with at least half a dozen malls already in the city.

“I have some doubt about sales, but it’s a start,” one proprietor insists. It’s make or break for many this Dasain – the gloves are off and the sales are on.
Oodles

Jagdamba foods launched Miho instant noodles earlier this month. Manufactured using Japanese technology, Miho is available in chicken and vegetable flavours.

Banking up

Everest Bank announced net profits have increased by 37 per cent compared to last year. The bank will be providing bonus shares of 30 per cent and cash dividends of 30 per cent. Everest Bank also inaugurated its 35th branch in Thamel last week.

Festive savings

Keeping in mind the festive season, Global Bank has launched ‘Parivar Bachat Yojana’. The scheme will provide customers up to 10 per cent interest on fixed deposits.

Gems

Bajaj launched ‘Sun Chandni Hira Moti’ for Dasain and Tihar. Anyone purchasing a Bajaj motorcycle is eligible to win gold, silver, pearls or diamonds.

Lucky scratch

LG is providing a ‘Koryo ki soryo’ offer for Dasain and Tihar. Buy an LG mobile and scratch a card to win up to Rs 100,000.

Guarantee win

The ‘Ahai LG’ festive scheme gives buyers of LG electronics the chance to win a range of gift hampers from silver coins to LG products.

Big deal

Jyoti Group, distributor of Philips TV in Nepal, is offering a ‘Big Deal’ this festive season. Get a free trolley bag and home theatre system on the purchase of any LCD TV.

Looking ahead

The Beed was told yesterday that predicting stock prices is about looking forward and not to past trends. One wonders whether this is a lesson we can apply more generally in Nepal: look forward, not backward. Reading some of the news pieces from last week confirmed my alarm.

Civil servants had a day off to celebrate Civil Servants Day, adding to an already long list of holidays. How can they bear to look at themselves in the mirror? They probably don’t, which is why they’re more self-congratulatory than critical. My favourite Fire and Ice Pizzeria announced its closure due to union issues. If we cannot retain existing foreign investors forget about luring new ones! Here is a great entity that had the potential of being franchised in South Asia and Southeast Asia, and it had to close because of a few haggling staff members. The Central Bank is considering capping bank CEO packages. How regressive! If banks perform, it’s because the management and shareholders are paid well. A better way to cut costs would be to have more efficient and transparent performance-based bonuses and removing the offices of all non-executive chairpersons and directors from banks. The Securities Board is taken to ransom by some promoters who want to sell their shares and a group of self-proclaimed selfless investment protection groups that do not want the Securities Board to follow the law. A bunch of former diplomats get together to discuss economic diplomacy and as elsewhere in the nation, time does not matter. Waiting for the minister, the program starts an hour late and attendees who have been invited do not know whether they are to speak or not. The list is endless.

We need to pull ourselves out of the past and look ahead

While we should do our best regardless of the bureaucracy, the bottom line is that it needs to go. Now that we can buy sim cards over the counter, we don’t need bureaucratic permission to make phone calls. ATM cards have eliminated the need to pay to take money out of one’s own bank account. If we could register our companies online, it would save us the whiskey money we’re made to pay at registration offices.

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What should we take away from these stories? Our government and bureaucrats may be terrible, but that shouldn’t keep private organisations and citizens from doing their part. Look forward, not backward. Americans waited eight years for Bush to go, but such leaders didn’t serve as chaps in the wheels of the economy. It’s only in Nepal that we cover up our own inefficiencies by blaming our bureaucrats for the bad health of the economy. It’s only in Nepal that we cover up our own inefficiencies by blaming our bureaucrats for the bad health of the economy.

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In short, leveraging technology and thinking about the future can only take us ahead. Isn’t that where we want to be? www.arthabeed.com

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Dasain’s devils

Shiva Sharma in Saptahik, 11 September

Simply put, being alert is the only way to steer clear of escalating crime in the valley. In the rush before Dasain, Kathmandu is becoming as infamous for robbery as Patna, Siligudi and other crime-prone Indian cities.

Police reports show crime is taking place regularly in isolated alleys, peaking during load-shedding hours, with cases of severe injuries when victims try to fight off robbers. A woman was mugged in stark daylight in Malisadehi and was beaten up the following day by the same group because her jewellery was gold-plated. Says Rabina Rai, another victim in Thamel, “When a gang of thieves surround you, there’s no option but to give up.”

Investigations point to an expanding network of organised crime as groups of young robbers team up all over the valley. One reason could be the extremely low number of security personnel on the beat. One policeman has to attend to the needs of over 1000 citizens in the capital, even though the international average is 300. It doesn’t help that many criminals manage to get released early.

The muggers have become sophisticated, and use code language to communicate. Travelling on public transport, for instance, they zero in on rich victims. If the target isn’t an easy one, they don’t hesitate to use weapons. Burglars are also steadily increasing in number. Surprisingly, reports indicate that intruders are more active by day than by night, with 15 out of 24 burglaries reported last month happening around noon.

Such criminals, according to Damodar Dawadi at Hanuman Dhoka Police Station, are usually not poor. They’re often youths from rich families who are unable to meet the high costs of purchasing drugs and paying for their extravagant lives.

However, the police are not solely accountable for ever-increasing crime. An equal portion of blame goes to these youths’ guardians and the government. If parents were responsible for their children or if the government provided enough jobs, crime would not be seen as an option.

With Dasain approaching, crime rates are expected to soar as people are more likely to be travelling with cash and jewellery. Those without may then decide to take the opportunity to share the wealth.

E-bike

Lal Prasad Sharma in Kantipur, 15 September

Electric bikes are selling like hot cakes in Pokhara. It’s thanks to its uncountable conveniences: for the lighter versions, you don’t need a licence, a number plate, a bill book, or a helmet. The cherry on top is these bikes are economical, easy to ride and environmentally friendly.

Says Indian Army retiree Shiva Dhakal, “The light weight of the bike makes it extremely easy to ride.” And who wouldn’t want one at a price of merely five rupees?

It’s thanks to its low running cost. An electric bike goes for up to 100 km for a mere five rupees. Nevertheless, load-shedding has stymied the growth of the market for electric bikes.

Politcal language

Kiran Panday

It is said people get the leaders they deserve. This is true in a democratic country because people elect their leaders. But in a country where people are tolerant and civilised, how is it that our leaders act against all civilised norms and yet are condoned for it? If we consider the speeches of our politicians over the past few days, it is a national shame that we accept them as leaders.

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal did a commendable job condemning a recent speech by Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal. But shah’s use of offensive language in public communications. Travelling on public transport, for instance, they zero in on rich victims. If the target isn’t an easy one, they don’t hesitate to use weapons. Burglars are also steadily increasing in number. Surprisingly, reports indicate that intruders are more active by day than by night, with 15 out of 24 burglaries reported last month happening around noon.

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Six conditions

A constituent assembly was announced in 1951 but it never materialised due to a top-of-the-range between the political parties for power. The Maoists’ 10-year insurgency and 18-day Ananda II made it possible after six decades.

We have only nine months to write the constitution. Doubts are creeping into people’s minds as to whether it will be written on time. The government that was formed after the President’s unconstitutional move has not exhibited honesty in the constitution-writing and peace process. In other words, the present government is the main obstacle to writing the new constitution.

The CA committees have been working on drafting the new constitution. The CA has already started discussing the drafts submitted to it. A 15-member committee headed by Laxman Lal Karna has been formed to incorporate issues raised in the thematic drafts of the constitutional committee. Six of the 11 thematic committees have already submitted their preliminary drafts and concept papers to the CA.

The constitutional committee compiles all drafts, incorporating suggestions from the CA sessions, and prepares a draft for the new constitution. This draft will be taken back to the people for their opinions. Then discussion on each article begins in the CA before the constitution is finalised.

There is no consensus on major issues among the major political parties in the CA. There seems to be agreement in principle on issues such as democracy, federalism, periodic elections, forms of political system, civilian liberty, freedom of speech, human rights, adult franchise, autonomy, inclusion, socio-economic transformation and social justice but there are differences among the parties. Some parties think the parliamentary system is democracy but we have put forward the presidential, president-prime ministerial and consensus and inclusive models for discussion.

The current government is the main obstacle to writing the constitution on time

The principles and models will be developed to meet the needs of the country. Federalism is now accepted by all but whether it should be implemented on the basis of language, ethnicity or geography is still unsettled. Similarly, we need to have more rounds of discussions on what kind of election system we should adopt, how we can ensure the representation of women, Dalits, Janajatis, minorities, marginalised communities and the people of Karnali. This is important because in the previous electoral system, only people from the ruling class and people with money and muscle won the elections.

The first past-the-post system does not ensure representation of the diversity of Nepal.

The issues of contention are whether the federal republic should be the rule of elites or the masses, whether to strengthen institutions representing the people or unselected institutions operating from behind the curtains, how to ensure civil and individual liberty, how to recognise the identity and ensure the rights of oppressed communities, regions and genders. Should we adopt the principle of socio-economic transformation or allow the big fish to eat the small fish? These issues should be discussed to reach a consensus.

These issues can be resolved if the following six conditions are met.

1. First, the political parties should forge a consensus on the peace process, the basic principle of state restructuring and the model of army integration.
2. Second, there should be agreement on the universal principle of the constitution to proceed with the discussion on thematic drafts of the constitution in the CA.
3. Third, the current government does not have the legitimacy to carry on the peace process and constitution writing. Therefore, a new government should be formed under the Maoists’ leadership. Fourth, we need to build trust among the major political forces without the help of foreign forces. Fifth, we need to guarantee peace and relief for socio-political transformation and sixth, there has to be dialogue with armed and unarmed insurgent groups.

The constitution will be written on time if these conditions are met. If not, conflict is inevitable.

Totalitarians and democrats

Nabindra Raj Joshi, NC CA member, Kathmandu-8

How have you spent your time in the CA?

We are members of the CA and the Parliament at the same time, so we have dual responsibilities. But the Maoists have been obstructing parliamentary proceedings. This has affected constitution-writing and disrupted the peace process. We hold committee meetings but other things do not look encouraging.

Will the constitution be written?

We are trying our best. We have to give something to the people within the stipulated time. Constitution writing is also part of the peace process.

Where is the debate on a people’s parliament and the house of representatives heading?

We are committed to democratic norms and values. No one should have hidden agenda. The main conflict is between totalitarian and democratic forces.

What do you think of the Maoists’ proposal for state restructuring?

Their concept is not viable geographically, economically or socially.

Are any efforts being made to win over those who think autonomy will lead to the disintegration of the country?

There should be consensus on the basic principles of constitution writing to move ahead in this process. Federalism does not work with the politics of revenge and slaughter. We can take our opponents into confidence if there is unity among the pro-republicans.

What needs to be done to write the constitution on time?

Consensus and cooperation among political parties, unhindered parliamentary proceedings and helping state mechanisms to function smoothly.

Consensus is the key

Dharma Sheela Chapagain, Maoist CA member, Jhapa-4

How satisfied are you with the CA business?

The constitutional committee remained idle in the absence of the committee chair for the past three months. This affected the business of sub-committees under it. Since the election of the committee chair things have been gradually gaining momentum.

Will the constitution be written on time?

The CA regulations allotted two years to write the constitution. But the CA calendar has been rescheduled time and again. This has shortened the time available to discuss the draft papers in the CA sessions. The political parties should put their differences aside and come together to expedite writing of the constitution. But the persistence of conflict among them is not favourable to completing the constitution on time.

Don’t you think the provisions to appoint the Chief Justice from outside the pool of Supreme Court justices will hurt the judiciary? This is one of the alternatives for appointing the Chief Justice. It is intended to rationalise the judiciary, not influence or weaken it. The Chief Justices appointed from within the existing pool of justices have not performed well in the past. So we suggest using an elected institution to appoint them.

What should be the official state language?

Nepali should be the language of communication. Hindi is the language of communication in the Madhes but it is also an issue related to national sovereignty. Hindi is linked with imperialism and can never be the official state language.

The CA seems to be divided between democrats and republicans. This is a conflict between old and new mindsets. This clash is also seen in the CA committees. Feudals and elites have already disfigured democracy and they want to do the same in the CA. We would have accepted it if it was pro-public democracy.

To the totalitarians and democrats

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The monsoon will subside, the sky will again turn deep blue, the wind will change direction and the paddy fields will ripen to gold. It’s Dasain. Time to shop, party, eat, drink and most importantly, fly kites.

Kids will climb to their rooftops and terraces and the collective victory cry of ‘Chaaaaaait!’ will ring in the ears of city folks.

The earliest written account of kite flying comes from about 200 BC when the Chinese general Han Hsien flew a kite over the walls of a city he was attacking to measure how far his army would have to tunnel in to reach the defences. This ingenious method of surveying worked. His troops tunnelled into the inner city, surprised the enemy and were victorious.

It is believed that kite flying was eventually spread by traders from China to Korea and across Asia to India. Each region developed a distinctive style of kite, flying techniques and the cultural context in which to fly them. So we don’t actually know if kite flying came to Nepal from the north or the south.

Choosing a kite is an art in itself. Our cities are down on charm, but kites still channel our spirits.

Nepali kites have no tail and two sticks of equal length are crossed and tied in the centre. A string pulled tight across the back of a cross-stick bows the surface, making the kite self-balancing. A specialty of traditional Nepali kites is the hand-made lokta paper out of which they are made.

These days lokta kites are becoming something of a rarity, and you’re as likely to come across a plastic kite with random brand names patterned across it. But many kite enthusiasts prefer the lighter and more manoeuvrable ‘Lucknow’ variety, which is flattened with a conch shell and sports distinctive stripes.

Lucknows are the Spitfires of kites, with classic dog-fighting qualities: capable of sharp turns and diving attacks, they emit a hissing sound in a dive and have good line response.

The cost of a kite in Kathmandu ranges from Rs 5-50 and lines cost Rs 200-1000. The most popular kite shops are in Asan and Kalimati. It’s not too late for a spin in the sky!
For the first time, I've joined my father in the ceremonial run-up to Dasain, the festival commemorating the Goddess Durga's defeat of the demon Mahisa. Good over evil and all that jazz, you know. We toast the gods and our extended families, don new clothes, drink and drive, eat and gamble to excess.

Next to my saronged father with our holy threads on parade, we follow in a corner of the attic the lead of the guru as he directs us to offer the rice grains, rice, ice and ice—ice! A sized brass idol on a lion all but obscured now with garlands, grain and grass. There are coconuts wrapped in red cloth, an oil lamp burning through a leaf plate, and a whole assortment of offerings. There's also an earthenware jar filled with water and coated with dung wherein barley seeds have been planted. The seeds, sprouting vigorously from day three on, will make good jamara to go with the traditional Dasain blessings.

Guru trickles water into our palms, then leads us through soothing, singing Sanskrit incantations. He lights an oil lamp and hands it to my father, who rotates it slowly. The priest chants, ringling a small brass bell, and I make the best of a damaru. The light from the lamp throws shadows across the room and bathes our faces, warm and calm.

What does it mean that I have willingly joined to these rituals when I do not believe they are any more than just that? I have no antagonism towards these gestures, these gods—in fact my renewed, outsider's gaze grants me the curiosity and patience for renewed, outsider's gaze grants me the curiosity and patience for what it is that this whole thing were about. A friend complained: "It's great, but if this whole thing were about something, then it would be game, he wouldn't have to be away."

Then came the lakhe, the dancing red demon shaking his black head, and hissing the sound of boards as he finds his way, the minatory decentralized by drums. The Minatory is a four-member unit of drummers, but then new bands have cropped up with a whole assortment of drummers.
by example

DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES: Women CA members participate in an interaction program organised by the CA Women’s Caucus with support from UNDP and International IDEA on 3 September.

DEWAN RAI

Women lawmakers prove their sceptics wrong

Women CA members are not who they were 16 months ago. With the help of workshops funded and organised by the UNDP’s Centre for Constitutional Dialogue and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), a thriving women’s caucus has taken up women’s issues with flair and passion.

“We are close to success in ensuring our rights in the new constitution,” says Dawa Sharma, coordinator of the Women’s Caucus in the CA and Maoist CA member. The caucus has already prepared a charter of women’s rights and provisions and submitted it to the CA chair for inclusion in the constitution. It has also been collaborating with different organisations to facilitate workshops and meetings on women’s issues as well as electoral systems and fundamental rights.

The Women’s Caucus spares the entire political spectrum but its members are conscious that ideological biases should take a back seat. “There is a profound understanding among us,” says Mohammadi Siddiqui, co-coordinator of the caucus and NCP CA member. “The CA members need not abide by the party whip.”

The CA is historic in more ways than one. One third of its members are women from different communities and professional backgrounds. The Women’s Caucus was formed to seize the opportunity to address the wide range of issues faced by women in our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, male-dominated society.

There was some scepticism initially. The very diversity of the Women’s Caucus convinced some there would be little common ground. Others suggested many women CA members lacked the expertise to participate in discussions. But the caucus has already submitted its suggestions to all 11 thematic committees to be incorporated in the new constitution. “We are 197 members and we are united when it comes to our concerns. There is no way the CA can ignore our demands,” Siddiqui says.

The Women’s Caucus is lobbying for 50 per cent participation of women at all policymaking levels, inclusive and proportional representation in the new parliament and women’s rights as fundamental rights in the new constitution.

“The new constitution should include a provision of compensation for violating fundamental rights as a deterrent to perpetrators,” says Maoist CA member Sharmila Dura. She also suggests adding administrative rights to fundamental rights to ensure women’s inclusion in the administrative sector. If they succeed, Nepal will join the ranks of just 15 countries that have a separate article for women in their constitutions.

Until very recently, Nepal had the dubious distinction of being among a handful of nations with lower life expectancies for women than for men. If the Women’s Caucus gets its way, we may have real reason to be proud of the way we treat our women.
When her father died of pneumonia, Asmaya Pariyar was shattered. But rather than stay sunk in gloom, Pariyar went to Banepa to train to become an Assistant Midwife as part of the Rotary Club of Kathmandu-Midtown’s ‘Health, Hunger and Humanity Grants Project’. She will return to her village next year to put into practice the lifesaving skills she has learned.

“My father died because of pure ignorance. I want to study so I can be informed and teach others,” explains Pariyar.

Dozens of girls in villages across the country have followed suit. The 3-H Grants Project, which has a total endowment of over $300,000, has brought girls from ten remote western districts to Banepa. There they are given an eighteen-month course on reproductive health. Along with birth attendance training, the girls are given orthopaedic and dental training. With the help of microcredit, they will be able to establish independent clinics in their hometowns.

The project is the brainchild of German Rotarian Hartmut Bander, who worked with Rotary Club of Kathmandu-Midtown and Darmstadt Bergstrasse. He started the project after witnessing the dilapidated state of health posts in rural Nepal.

The objective is to empower villagers to help themselves so they won’t have to depend on the largesse of government or NGOs. Says project contact person C.K. Golcha, “The problem with sending city dwellers to help out in villages is that they cannot adjust to the environment there. But if you train locals, their love for their birthplace will drive them to go back and do something productive.”

The first batch of graduates are all set to return to their villages. Shy and self-conscious when they first arrived in Kathmandu, they’re now brimming with self-confidence and eager to make a difference. Project manager Rajaram Joshi notes, “The graduates feel they don’t need to stay in Kathmandu to earn money.”

Rina Thakali of Jomsom confirms this, adding, “We are privileged to have been given this opportunity. And we cannot wait to give something back.” The girls will continue to receive support once they’re working back in their villages. Pariyar, for instance, will be sent back home with Rs 1,26,000 and all the necessary equipment to start up a mother-child health clinic. The interest on the amount will help Pariyar sustain herself and maintain the clinic.

The Rotary Club plans to train many more midwives and run similar projects in other parts of Nepal. With national maternal mortality rates still unacceptably high, a local effort such as this will have positive impacts right across the country.
When Sherpa Adventure Gear opens its international flagship store near Darbar Marg on 1 October, it will be a dream come true for Tashi Sherpa. Unlike other Nepalis who have emigrated to the west, Tashi travelled in the opposite direction. At a time when foreign investors are abandoning Nepal, he has decided to invest in Nepal. Tashi has not just returned to Nepal, but is setting up the world headquarters of his Sherpa Adventure Gear company in Kathmandu.

“I am a businessman, this is not a charity,” says Tashi, “I came here because there is a high return on investment and Nepal has a very strong brand.”

Looking around at the Sherpa down jackets, parkas, t-shirts and thermals in the store that is preparing for a soft opening next week, Tashi explains that the ‘Made in Nepal’ tag on the items is itself part of the branding for his products. “It wouldn’t be the same if it was Made in Bangladesh or Made in Cambodia,” he explains. Sherpa now makes most of its products in Nepal and Tashi says this is a strong selling point at a time when consumers around the world are turning against big multinationals outsourcing to China or southeast Asia.

The elegant brick and glass five-storey flagship store houses Sherpa’s research and development unit, and will have two floors of clothing and trekking hardware that will be a one-stop shop for down jackets, sleeping bags, tents and trekking gear. The top floor will have a bed and breakfast called The Terrace. “What we have tried to do is offer guests a family atmosphere in the middle of Kathmandu with all the modern amenities,” explains Tsedo Sherpa, Tashi’s daughter and vice-president of the company. “This is an American company with a Nepali soul. We want to prove to the world that Nepalis can be the best in the world.”

The décor of The Terrace is modern, and the furnishings reveal Tibetan and Sherpa influences. Indeed, the functional elegance of The Terrace is so cozy that two of the eight rooms already have guests in them – even though it hasn’t opened yet.

Kunda Dixit
www.sherpaadventuregear.com

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EXHIBITIONS
- Nepal Rendezvous - Nagarkot Workshop, paintings by Bangladesh and Nepali artists at Hotel de l’Annaapurna, Darbar Marg, till 31 Oct, 4218048

EVENTS
- The Soloist, movie at Lazoim gallery Cafe, 18 Sep, 5.30PM, 4428849
- Raise The Red Lantern, screening at Documentary Open School, Gaughali, 18 Sep, 5PM, 4471104
- Film South Asia 2009, Festival of South Asian documentaries, 17-20 Sep, www.filmsouthasia.org
- Patan Press Club, meets every Thursday at Chokama Cafe, 6PM, 5522113
- Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Tai Chi 10-11.30AM, Yoga 8.30-9.30AM and Meditation 5-6PM weekdays, Kesar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402

MUSIC
- Baja gaja, every Tuesday at Mohuk, Pulchok, 7.30PM onwards, 5528272
- Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288
- Sunday Jazz brunch and live music at the Terrace, Hatt appointed, 12-3.30PM, 4491234
- Jazz evening at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM, 4290326
- Som like It Not every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel, 7PM onwards, 4479488
- Happy cocktail hour, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Cafe & Bar, Thamel, 5-7PM
- Nepali Ghajala and songs at O’Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 5.30PM onwards, 4485859

DINING
- Coffee, Chocolate and Caramel, every evening at The Lounge, 4.30-6.30PM, 4491234
- Cafe’s cafe, Dhokaima Cafe, Patan Dhoka, 5522113
- Jazzabell Cafe, relaunched at Jhamsikhel, 2114075
- The Corner Bar, 5-7PM, 4522211
- 3-11PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4418188
- At Fresco, for home made pastas, steak and freshwater trout, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999
- Kakori, for biryanis, curries and kebabs, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 7-10.45PM
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Darbar Mahal Revisited, 4283070
- Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle East at The Cafe, Hatt appointed, 4491234
- Teppanyaki meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara, 4436318
- Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazoim, Rs 600, 4413999
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Cafe, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4423341
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Garden of Dreams, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402
- Tiger for Breakfast, breakfast everyday at 10AM, Kantipath, 4215068
- Stupa View Restaurant, for vegetarian creations & clay oven Pizza at Bouddha Stupa, 4480262

GETAWAYS
- Dhiulchek Lodge Resort offers an overnight stay for Rs 1600 till 30 Sep, 4222399
- Relax Package at Hatt appointed Kathmandu for Rs 5555 plus taxes, for a night of double occupancy with breakfast, complimentary use of spa. Offer valid for Nepalis and local residents only, 4489800

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@jainepal.com

DIRECTOR SUDHANSHU THAPA PRESENTS HIS DEBUT FEATURE, MERO ETA SADHI CHA. TOUTED AS A ROMANTIC MELODRAMA, THE BIG BUDGET MOVIE IS ABOUT CHILDHOOD FRIENDS JAY (AYAN SIGDEL) AND SHIKHA (NAMRATA SHRESTHA) WHO PAIR UP AT THE CORNERSTONES OF THEIR LIVES. SHIKHA IS A SMALL TOWN GIRL WITH SMALL DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS WHEREAS JAY IS THE RASCAL HEIR TO A FAMILY FORTUNE. HOW THEY MEET AND REALISE THEIR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER IS FOR YOU TO FIND OUT.

Call 4442230 for show timings at Jai Nepal
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This is a great recipe to add to your repertoire of dishes to enjoy with friends, family, and special occasions.

Grilled Lemon & Herb Chicken Kebabs
(Serves 4-6)

1 kg chicken
1/2 cup lemon juice
1/2 cup olive oil
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
1 tablespoon chopped thyme
1 tablespoon chopped rosemary
1/4 cup white wine

1. Cut the chicken into bite size pieces. Mix the rest of the ingredients together and marinade the chicken pieces for at least two hours before skewering them. Preferably marinate the chicken overnight in the fridge to ensure it soaks up all the flavours of the marinade.

2. Grill the chicken on a hot grill for 2-3 minutes on each side. Soak up all the flavour of the marinade.

by GRAHAM SYDNEY

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15-27 17-19
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

There was a surprise change in the weather pattern early this week. Powerful Siberian high pressure has lifted moisture to both arms of the monsoon. The satellite images indicate that the rains are likely to come back again, but gradually, and will fall during the night before the end of the monsoon. By now it is confirmed that this month will receive less than its quota of rain.

Q. Will the big three parties be able to resolve the political deadlock before Dasain?

Weekly Internet Poll  # 469

Q. Most of the 110 militant groups are:

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<th>Group Type</th>
<th>Total votes: 2,265</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maoist</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>969</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>656</td>
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Total votes: 2,265

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SPOTLIGHT: Noted Indian thespians Shabana Azmi and Farooque Shaikh perform ‘Tumhari Amrita’ at Kamalmani Theatre in Patan Dhoka on Wednesday. Proceeds from ticket sales will go to the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre in Kavre.

STAGE FRIGHT: Seven prominent civil society members are introduced at Tuesday’s ‘Himsa Antya’, a program to raise awareness about ending violence in the country.

MEET ‘N GREET: Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, attended by Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood, arrives at a press conference in Dwarika Hotel on Tuesday during a two-day official visit to Nepal.
Braying for help

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated - Gandhi

Where are they? wonders Pramada Shah of Animal Nepal as we wade through shrubbery in a community forest adjoining Animal Nepal’s sanctuary in Chobhar. Moments later we enter a clearing where, against the backdrop of the Bagmati river, the donkeys live. They scavenge for food in garbage dumps, give birth at busy intersections, and are treated despicably by a community that has come to regard them as pests.

As part of their outreach program, Animal Nepal has conducted a general survey of donkeys in Lalitpur’s kilns and organized regular donkey clinics and public awareness campaigns. They have also begun work on a donkey sanctuary in Godavari, funded by the Brigitte Bardot Foundation.

Most importantly, they want to work directly with kiln owners. “The main problem is a lack of awareness. There are so many small things that can be done,” says Lucia de Vries of Animal Nepal. These include stripping them with rudimentary harnesses to prevent soring and giving them enough water. Shah and De Vries hope kiln owners will agree to abide by a code of conduct.

So far the response has been positive. When alerted to the needs of their animal workers, kiln owners enthusiastically took up their cause. They agreed that healthier and sturdier donkeys generate more value. Animal Nepal has also encouraged concerned people to adopt donkeys, which are fairly easy and inexpensive to manage and public awareness campaigns.

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The knottier problem lies ahead. The government has yet to pass the Animal Welfare Act to protect animal rights, existing documentation is difficult to track down, and it is unclear if the act protects Working Animals’ like donkeys and mules.

“We are a hundred years behind the rest of the world when it comes to animal rights, but some won’t be put up for adoption because they’re handicapped and have gone through too much. There, treatment will continue until they die, in Shah’s words, “peacefully.” In the lush sanctuary, that end will be far happier than the tortured lives they lived in the brick kilns of Lalitpur.

The neighbours, far from being annoyed, are enthralled and the two have become major celebrities. “Friends are over all the time to play with them, especially the little one,” says Allison.

If you’re interested in adopting a donkey, go to http://animalnepal.org/adoptadonkey.html or call 9841-334337.