HOT AIR

The High Level Political Mechanism may as well be floating high above the Nepali nation for all it has achieved in the last month. After much-publicised early wrangling about who should be in it and who should not, and whether such a mechanism is even necessary (or legitimate), it is at a standstill.

At ground level, the major political parties have not resolved their differences. Constitution-writing is continuing apace, even though the drafts from the Constituent Assembly’s thematic committees are marked as much by the notes of dissent they contain as by the fact that they have actually been completed. Some call for the May 28 deadline to be extended, but there is a feeling that the deadline will actually be met through typically Nepali eleventh-hour negotiations. What kind of fractious constitution will make its way to the Nepali people by the end of this is as worrying as the doomsday predictions for missing the deadline.

Let’s hope the High Level Political Mechanism comes down to earth before the hot air runs out.

This weekend, take your pick - Maha Shiva Ratri or Valentine’s Day? If the latter, read Uncommon Love (p7) for inspiration and check our Valentine’s special (p8) for ideas.

PLAIN SPEAKING
Federal realities p2

NATION
Self-destruct p4
A HEALTHIER NATION

This is still a land where people die of simple, preventable causes. A lung or stomach infection, easily treated by modern medicine, can be fatal in Nepal.

Infectious diseases are spread by germs ingested with food or water, inhaled into the lungs, or transmitted through unprotected sex. The first line of defence against infection is awareness. You need communications to fight communicable diseases. If treatment is necessary, then prevention has failed, and prevention should be the core thrust of our national health strategy.

Information about water-borne diseases and what cause them has made the public and health officials more sensitive about prevention. The dramatic progress in child survival in Nepal in the past decade is due mainly to awareness spread through media and schools about the dangers of drinking contaminated water, or about Lynchsyphilis treatment is necessary then prevention has failed, and prevention has made the public and health officials more sensitive about prevention. The dramatic progress in child survival in Nepal in the past decade is due mainly to awareness spread through media and schools about the dangers of drinking contaminated water, or about Lynch.

Apart from more awareness on country, Nepal needs more hospitals and affordable drugs. More than half the doctors in Nepal practice inside the capital's Ring Road, so more needs to be done to retain doctors in district hospitals by giving them incentives to do so.

We all know the familiar refrain of the pandemic: "We are all in this together." But there are many who feel left behind, marginalized by the established systems.

The greater challenge is not just treating the symptoms of disease, but addressing the root causes that lead to poor health. This requires a more comprehensive approach, involving education, economic empowerment, and community involvement.

The government has launched various initiatives to improve health care, but much work remains to be done. We need to ensure that everyone has access to quality health care, regardless of their background.

Let us join hands to create a healthier nation for all. Together, we can make a difference. Let us be the change we wish to see in the world.

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Dalit doubts

Guest Column
Mitra Pariyar

In his Kantipur column of 20 December Hari Roka, a pro-Maoist commentator and lawmaker, argued that part of the reason why India opposed the Maoists promoting a federal state was that it feared “the establishment of a new social system based on the redistribution of property and freedom from untouchability would have consequences on its states close to Nepal”.

The statement is, inter alia, representative of how the Maoists continue to use Dalits in their propaganda. They have always claimed that theirs is a movement of the oppressed masses, and indeed many Dalits have sacrificed their lives for the cause. However, Roka’s claim about untouchability rings hollow because there is little evidence to show that the ex-rebels actually care about the deeply entrenched problems of low castes.

On the contrary, Dalits increasingly feel they have had the rug pulled out from under them, not least because of the Maoists’ unilateral declaration of autonomous ethnic states. Firstly, Dalits are not going to have their own autonomous state; they will be a tiny minority in all states. More importantly, Dalits suffer indignities and injustices not only at the hands of Bahuns and Chhetris, but also from Rai, Limbus, Madhesis, Gurungs, Magars, Newars, and others.

A 2006 report in Nepali Times stated: “In the hotbed of Tarai ethnic politics, mainstream Madhesi rights activists, anti-hills people vigilantes, Maoist splinter groups and Tharu groups are demanding everything from greater autonomy to secession. But Madhesi Dalits are nowhere in the equation” (‘Sideswiped’, #320). The parties’ attitude to Dalits in the Tarai and the hills remains the same, despite the pressure of massive political changes.

Hugo Gorringe, a British anthropologist who studied Indian Dalits, observed: “untouchability, it is clear, is irreconcilable with nationhood, and undermines the democratic project.” The Nepali Congress and UML, despite their democratic credentials, have always refrained from taking Dalit issues seriously; their own workers and supporters regularly practice untouchability. The former rebels’ initial enthusiasm about doing away with caste-based subordination has also been ephemeral. For instance, the Maoist government didn’t, despite the popular expectation, start anything concrete to help Dalits; neither did it attempt to include them in important positions. Although they have been insisting on federal states named after particular groups, they have not yet articulated their policies on how untouchability can be effectively tackled.

Whilst Dalits are still struggling to become bona fide citizens of Nepal, they will have to fight separately to become the citizens of autonomous states as well. Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar’s prescription for the Dalit movement was: “educate, agitate, organise”. The implementation of autonomous ethnic states is likely to hinder these strategies, not least because the Dalit movement will then be dispersed and consequently further weakened.

Some believe that untouchability cannot be tackled until caste is annihilated; others think it can be challenged by emphasizing the socioeconomic relationship between castes on the basis of modern national laws over customary ones. We should attempt to integrate low castes with other castes or ethnic groups to pave the way for a more egalitarian society. Ethnic federalism will only institutionalise and solidify caste or ethnic boundaries, instead of undermining them.

The Maoists are likely to lose the support of many Dalits and others by pushing for their retrograde demand for ethnic federalism, even if it helps them in the short term. Like most Nepali citizens, Dalits want to live in peace with more dignity and better economic opportunities. This simple dream cannot be fulfilled if the powers that be don’t give up their stance on ethnic federalism under the facade of revolutionary change.

Ethnic federalism will further marginalise Dalits

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I

Seemed like an ordinary evening. It was a week after Dasain, and Arati Sharma was at her parents’ home in Dholi Chaur, Kathmandu. Her mother had made dinner for the family earlier in the evening. Arati was getting ready for bed when suddenly her mother started foaming at the mouth. Realising she had consumed a poison of some kind, Arati rushed her mother to Bir Hospital and admitted her to the emergency room.

Bimala Gautam died 12 days later of organophosphate poisoning, commonly known as poisoning by pesticide. She was 38 years old.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among women in Nepal. A report published by the Family Health Division has found that women face unique social and economic conditions. After months of conflict and violence, a report published by the Nepal Police registered 10-15 suicide cases each week.

Self-destruct

Why are so many Nepali women killing themselves?

Kathmandu, she took odd jobs to support her husband and young daughters. In a report filed with the police, her daughter wrote, “We don’t really know why she took her life. But since no sons were born in the family, the pressure might have told on her.”

There have been no specific studies on the causes of suicide in Nepal. What is known, however, is that women face unique social and psychological conditions that force them to take desperate measures. In 2008, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Saathi, a women’s NGO based in Kathmandu, analysed gender-based violence in Surkhet and Dang districts. Over 80 per cent of respondents reported experiencing domestic violence from their husbands and other family members, and 74 per cent were forced to participate in non-consensual sex, also known as marital rape.

“Whatever was disturbing is that during focus group and individual interviews, the majority of those women said they had felt suicidal,” says Barkha Rana, president of Saathi, who also led the research. “Only a few say they actually attempted suicide. But the majority of them said they wanted to die (maulam marma maan hap)”

There is no specific data linking domestic violence with suicide. But experts say trauma, depression and other mental illnesses are among the common psychological after-effects of domestic violence.

“Mental violence at home is virtually impossible to prove. But it can be speculated that this could lead to feelings of helplessness and desperate measures,” says Michiyo Yamada, Gender Program Officer at UNFPA Nepal.

Victims of domestic violence have little legal recourse. The government has not developed any comprehensive legal programs to prevent violence against women, nor has it met international obligations to protect women from violence or punish perpetrators. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal famously announced that he would open a hotline to his people to assist women in critical conditions. After months of complaints, the phone now rings at the other end of the line. Women are prompted to leave a message but no one responds to them.

The upward trend in suicide can be avoided, says Kirti Bhattacharya, gender advisor at UNFPA. “Every suicide is a cry for help; an unmet need for urgent intervention for a woman who is trapped in a situation where she has reached the limit of her capacity to cope with violence, abuse and discrimination. These women desperately need support.”

(Names of the victim and her family members have been changed)

IN THE NEWS

Prem Tinsulsonada International School

A warm invitation to attend a special information seminar

Shangrila Hotel, Lazimpat, Kathmandu

6.00 pm Friday 19 February 2010

Prem Tinsulsonada International School is a leading day and boarding school in Chang Mai, Northern Thailand. Prem is an International Baccalaureate World School offering all three internationally-recognised IB Programmes.

Prem has high academic standards and an outstanding academic faculty. Prem graduates attend top universities worldwide. Boarders are accepted from Grade 5 and share comfortable apartments in a secure and serene setting. Prem currently has boarders from thirty-five different countries.

The President, Mr David Baird, will be in Kathmandu to present detailed information on the school, the exceptional boarding facilities and the specialist professional golf, tennis, cricket and football academies.

To reserve your place at the seminar please contact Sukalshana on 9851 096 689, 9808132496

To find out more opportunities to excel at Prem, please contact David Baird by telephone on +6 81 960 7840 or at davidba@premcenter.com

www.premcenter.com enquiry@premcenter.com
The dramatic murder of media entrepreneur Jamim Shah in broad daylight dominated the news for much of this week. It’s not yet clear whether this incident can be characterised as a ‘propaganda of the deed’ (wherein a symbolic act of violence against a structural target means to evoke a broader meaning) or a revenge killing. Whatever the case, the incident sent out a chilling message even Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal had to agree with: public security in the capital city is in shambles. But few journalists focused their attention on the security lapses in one of the most security sensitive zones of the country.

Media coverage of Shah’s murder revealed that journalists in Nepal continue to put a premium on the oldest function of the profession, which is to provide accurate and detailed information about what really happened. Few Nepali mediapersons have imbibed the dictum of interpretive journalism: “Don’t just tell the story; tell the audience what it means.” False leads and high failure rates make both interpretive and investigative journalism an expensive affair. Barring few exceptions, media outlets in Nepal aren’t financially robust enough to support such high-risk, exploratory pursuits. Most of what appear as investigative reports in the Nepali media are either exogenous by competitors or planted stories. The Anglo-American press long worked according to the thesis that every word cut helped publishers save money. Latin American journalists propounded a new genre of reporting, where stories could be extended if it helped make events comprehensible. The basic assumption of so-called imaginative journalism is that facts are often ugly but the truth is invariably beautiful. So if a story can be made more attractive by emphasising lost opportunities and future possibilities, then what could have happened or is likely to unfold is as much “news” as what has already happened.

In the 1960s, the staid Anglo-American press was hit by what came to be called ‘New Journalism’. This adopted fictional forms to present facts, and description, narrative and character development often took up more space than cold realities. This later evolved into inspirational journalism, where the grimmest of events were analysed for a glimmer of hope and lessons for the future. The power elite loves inspirational journalism. When stories appear as fated – what has happened has already happened – the question of accountability recedes into the background. Somehow, getting on with life has emerged as the dominant trend of journalism in Nepal. With life and livelihood threatened from all sides, influential mediapersons have learnt to survive by preaching pompously to the Maoists, military, mafia and mercantilists without clamouring for accountability. Even though a compromise, preaching through the press doesn’t demean journalism. Prompting on behalf of vested interests, however, devalues the profession.

The consumer base in Nepal isn’t large enough to generate enough advertising revenue for the daily newspapers, television channels and FM stations entering the market in hordes. But the interests of some of these media entrepreneurs extend beyond the commercial. Some have political ambitions. Others may just be investing in the media for glamour, influence or stature. At least a few of them seem to be bent upon using the media to promote and protect their business interests, legitimate or not. Such a clash of interests has created the conditions for a small-scale Nepali version of the Pulitzer-Hearst skirmishes of the late nineteenth century.

The Nepali media has made it look as if Jamim Shah, with his supposed Dawood Ibrahim and ISI links, deserved his fate. The government is thereby absolved of its dereliction of duty in ensuring the security of its citizens. Do you hear anybody asking for the resignation of globe-trotting Home Minister Bhim Rawal on moral grounds? When the country is in a whirl, it’s not easy for the storytellers to take a position and stand by it.  

The storytellers

Plenty of print about what, not much about what it means

The Himalayan

Appointments

ON WEDNESDAYS

Land the best jobs the country has to offer! Turn to the Appointments section every Wednesday in your favourite newspaper.

It’s easily the biggest platform for jobs there is. And the easiest way to break free!
In search of the Rupee

India offers help

The Indian Railway Board invited Nepali businessmen to attend a discussion about how railway infrastructure could be improved along the Indo-Nepal border. Ashok Kumar Baidya, vice-president of the Parsa Chamber of Commerce, requested the addition of an overhead bridge in Raxaul, extra coaches and railway lines, and a high-speed rail service from metro cities to Birganj. Baidya also requested India to build an east-west railway from Kathmandu to Nautanwa and develop railway infrastructure at Gorakhpur.

Food aid

The Government of Japan has agreed to grant Nepal over Rs 556 million to help cut food deficits in several districts. Under the agreement, Nepal Food Corporation will use the grant to distribute rice through its national distribution network. As of 2009, Japan had invested $3 billion yen in Nepal. General Tanaka said he hoped the assistance would address the needs of local people and thereby help move the peace process along.

Computers for students

Rotary Club of Patan handed over 106 computers and printers to nine public schools in Lalitpur district. Vocational education will also be provided. Approximately 4000 students and the local community are expected to benefit. The funding of $25,000 was provided by a Rotary Matching Grant project with Rotary Club of Grapevine, USA. Rotary Club Patan has handed over 326 computers worth $100,000, making it the largest computer donor in the country.

Hyundai

Laxmi Intercontinental inaugurated its new Hyundai showroom in Thapathali on 10 February. The opening was inaugurated by Gi Baek Lee, GM of Asia Pacific region, and Yoo Sung Gui, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Korea.

Call me!

Yasuda Mobile launched its latest SIM COMA phone, which has a colour display and FM radio, and will be available at UTL customer call centre at Halfstar. You can also get a free UTL SIM on purchase of the phone.

Energy drink

Clickz, an energy drink from Thailand’s Osotspa Company, is being launched in Nepal. Osotspa will be partnering with Moata Durga Marketing Solution in Nepal.

Look beautiful

After the successful launch of its permanent hair removal and skin rejuvenation laser treatment facilities, Touchbeauty laser clinic is offering new services - skin resurfacing for acne scars, burn and surgery scars, sun damage recovery, melasma, stretch mark reduction, tattoo and blemish removal and much more.

Free remittance

Everest Bank entered into an agreement with Habibi American Bank to allow Nepalis in the US to send inward remittances to Everest Bank to allow Nepalis in the US to send inward remittances to Everest Bank to allow Nepalis in the US to send inward remittances to Everest Bank to allow Nepalis in the US to send inward remittances to Everest Bank to allow Nepalis in the US to send inward remittances to Everest Bank to allow Nepalis in the US to send inward remittances to Everest Bank to allow Nepalis in the US to send inward remittances to Everest Bank to allow Nepalis in the US to send inward remittances to Everest Bank. The agreement, Nepal Food Corporation will use the grant to distribute rice through its national distribution network. As of 2009, Japan had invested $3 billion yen in Nepal. General Tanaka said he hoped the assistance would address the needs of local people and thereby help move the peace process along.

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Life Times

When Anusha Bhujel left home to be with her girlfriend Suman Tamang three years ago, she had never met another lesbian couple. “I had read about them in newspapers and knew they existed. But I always wondered where.”

Anusha was forced to flee from her home in Jhapa when her parents found out about her relationship with Suman. They had met at a cultural exchange program. When Anusha told her parents about her girlfriend, they tried to marry her off with a man.

Anusha and Suman got married, but struggled to set up house. Anusha was 20 years old and had just finished intermediate level education. “We were headed towards Kathmandu but I fell ill and we had to stop in Biratnagar. I didn’t have my certificates with me and couldn’t get a job. Suman had hers but she couldn’t find a job either.”

Then they found out about Blue Diamond Society, an LGBT advocacy organisation, where they made new friends and even found jobs. Anusha’s relationship with her parents is still strained. “They keep asking me what I am going to do when I am old. And who I am going to rely on for support,” she says.

“But I am happy that I can live with the person I love,” she affirms. For her, Valentine’s Day isn’t just about Anusha and Suman, but also about their gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender friends who are free to celebrate their love. “We get together, cook a feast and wish each other happiness.”

Love transcends all boundaries, but sometimes you need a little technology to get the message across. For Gopal Dahal and Nika Moktan (pictured), cyberspace was just that medium.

Both knew of each other, and Gopal was smitten by the lovely Nita. But he had a problem. “I could not gather the courage to approach her face-to-face.” But with the help of online chatting, his sentiments eventually reached her. It was in cyberspace that their romance bloomed.

After dating for eight months, online and offline, Gopal and Nita got married. Despite being from different castes, the bond that they had formed in cyberspace was strong enough to overcome potential complications. Four years hence, their love has borne fruit in the form of their two-year-old son and baby girl.

Such online romances are not very common in Nepal. Sanam Shrestha, managing director of online dating and matrimonial portal nepalmatrimonial.com, cites several reasons for this. “Online dating is not popular, probably due to the Internet’s unavailability or high price,” says Shrestha. “Nepali culture is also not that open to online dating yet, unlike India.”

However, Shrestha predicts that the online scene could be a hit with younger generations. The increasingly frenetic lifestyles of today might also compel Nepalis to consider online dating a viable solution.

As long as the internet is up and running, Gopal and Nita’s love connection will continue to be an inspiration for future cyberspace lovers.

Across the seas

If a Nepali migrant worker made a list of things he missed about home, at the top would likely be the name of a spouse.

Separation places heavy strains on a marriage. Migrant workers must face the disappointments and bewilderment of their new settings alone, and may not always be able to communicate readily with their loved ones. At home, their spouses often have it harder, having to put up with in-laws and manage households single-handedly. Separation can also breed suspicion.

Inevitably, there is heartbreak. One woman who now works at Higher Ground Bakery in Jawalakhel (“Café with a conscience,” #488), hasn’t heard from her husband in Malaysia for five years.

Uncommon love

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Yet many couples manage separation quite well. “Thirty-year-old Dambar K Shrestha married Sarita Shrestha (pictured) after an eight-year courtship. She left to work in Hong Kong just five months into their marriage, but the two visit one another at least once a year and communicate daily through Skype. While they won’t see each other for Valentine’s Day this time around, Shrestha has made plans.

“Last year, I sent her an album made of Nepali paper full of our pictures. This time, I’m thinking of sending something similar, maybe even a rose. I know she’ll like it,” he blushes.

Beyond boundaries

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Aphrodisiac menu for couples on Valentine’s Day, including Tantric kiss cocktail, shrimps in a glass, Caribbean chicken, spicy chocolate cake. Rs2500 per couple, Délices de France, Thamel, 4260328

Roman by the fireplace with a rose, unlimited free French Sparking Wine with superb continental cuisine, Kilroy’s, Thamel, 4250448/41

All-day Valentine’s Day package at the Mind-Body Library, Screening of Ghost 10am, Lunch 12pm, Lecture on love and loving 2pm, Love Healing Meditation, 4pm, Babar Mahal, 9841896000

One Love – A 12 Hour Marathon Epic Love Story, from PlayMySound on the Outdoor Terrace and Indoor Lounge at The Factory, Thamel, 5006201

Closeup Valentine’s Dance at four locations: 19th5 in Kathmandu, Club Paradiso in Pokhara, Hotel Namaskar in Biratnagar, Hotel Aroma in Nepalgunj, 2pm-6pm (all venues), www.partynepal.com for details

That 70’s Valentine. Soul Train plays disco! Moksh, Jham Sikhel. Rs500 entry with a glass of wine, www.partynepal.com

Five-course Valentine’s Dinner for Rs5000 per couple at Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency, overnight for Rs6200 including breakfast, access to the spa, and late checkout, 4491234/4489362

Purchase a Samsung mobile over Rs9000 from IMS Tele Trade, get a free lunch or dinner for a couple at Tipsy Bar & Lounge, Darbar Marg, until 15 Feb.

Aqua Java Zing, Valentine’s special heat ravoli, strawberry & cappuccino-kissed cake and more, sizzler festival, 4254809

BBQ season is back every Friday

Starting Friday 19 February with a Lamb roast

Summit club members will enjoy a complimentary glass of wine, and a selection of cheeses.

To reserve your table contact: 5521810

Venue: Summit Hotel

Time: 6pm (forward)

Price: Rs 900/-

Valentine’s Day

Lunch and Venue

Cafe Bliss

Jalmarath, Jale, Lalitpur, Nepal, Tel: 5207732

Dance party

Rs 500 entrance 

1 pm onwards

BBQ

Sanepa Road, Kupandol Tel: 977-1-5011713

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EVENTS

Help Haiti! Fundraising concert with live music from Kultumba and special guests, Rs1450 including buffet, all proceeds to the Red Cross, 7pm onwards, Feb 13, at 1905, Kanipath, 9808744476, 9808033938

Toronto Nepali Film Festival, program of 10 Nepali fiction, documentary and animation films, Iris Town Hall, University of Toronto, 12pm to 10pm, February 13, www.tnff.ca, contact curator@tnff.ca or 4168781526

Electro-Cardiogram: Internal Stories, paintings by Brendra Pratap Singh, until 16 February, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamisikhel, 5521120

Othello: The Sen of Nepal, performance by Nepal Shakes from 5-14 Feb, Kamal Mani Theatre, Patan Dhoka. Tickets available at Dhokaima Café (Patan), Chez Carolyn, (Babar Mahal) and Nanglo Bakery (Darbar Marg)

Literally Figurative - An International Art Exhibition, drawings by Kapil Mani Dixit and students of North Lake College on nudity, 17-26 February, Imago Dei Gallery, Nagpokhari, 4442464

The Glory of the Himalayas, French-Nepali dance show by renowned French dancer Manjujishree Pradhan, 5.30 pm, 12 February at Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari,

MUSIC

An evening of Shiv Stuti and bhajans by renowned Indian singer Bhuvnesh Komkali at Hans Sohda Mandap, Pasupatinath, 11 February, 6pm

Live workshop and concert from Australian band Tigaramuna, 11am & 2:30pm, February 14, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamisikhel, free entrance, 5013554, www.kajazz.com.np

JSC Jazz Quartet, every Saturday 8pm on at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat, 9803160719

Jazz evening at Delces de France restaurant, every Wednesday, 11am-2pm, 4283026

HyJazz at the Rox Bar every Friday evening and Sunday Jazz Brunch at The Terrace with live music from Inner Groove, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4489362, 4491234

Saturday African Nite, with African food and music from 8pm at Jazzbel Cafe’, Jhamisikhel, 2114075

Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227388

Some like it hot, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarka’s Hotel, 7pm, 4479498

Happy cocktail hour, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7pm

Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7pm at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212

Irish Pub, solo singer-guitarist J. Ryan every Wed & Fri, 7.30pm, Lazimpat.

DINING

Australian Wine Dinner, savour 12 different varieties of Australian wine, 17 Feb, 6pm onwards, Rs2500 (excluding taxes), 4491234

Experience the Gyaokok (hotpot with T-momos, meats and more) for lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, 4412999 or at Royal Saino Restaurant & Bar, Darbar Marg, 4230890, 4230778

Famous stews of the world, enjoy famous stews of the world at the Rox Restaurant, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 6.00PM onwards, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/ 4489362

Strawberry High Tea, 4.30-6.30pm, The Lounge, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4489362

Vegetarian Buffet, every Monday, Oriental Nights, flavours and specialties of Asia every Wednesday, Arabian Nights for Middle Eastern specialities every Friday, 6.30pm at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4489362

Live continental BBQ Fiesta, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30 pm everyday

The Corner Bar, 5-7pm, 3-11pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4418118

A café’s café, Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 5522113

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Space Cowboy

**CRITICAL CINEMA**

A Angelo D'Silva

The buzz around the Oscars this year is all about the tussle between two of the ten Best Film nominees, the commercially successful Avatar (with a reputed $2 billion in box office earnings) versus the critically acclaimed The Hurt Locker. Of course, that Avatar’s director James Cameron was once married to The Hurt Locker’s Kathryn Bigelow makes for good copy. But Bigelow may have made 2009’s most gripping film. The Hurt Locker is a taut thriller that’s certainly superior to Avatar in most respects, and elicits further questions about the perception of American military action.

The Hurt Locker is set in 2004, one of the most violent years of the continuing Iraq occupation. Action is centred on a three-person team of the US army’s Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit. ‘The Bravo Company’, has recently lost its team leader with 38 days left on its rotation. Staff Sgt. William James (Jeremy Renner) takes over, but his reckless methods have Sgt. J.T. Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) and Spc. Owen Eldridge (Bryan Geraghty) on edge. As James attempts to disarm ever more imaginative and deadlier devices of mayhem, Sanborn tries to keep them all alive.

Jerky hand-held camera work has practically become an industry standard, but Bigelow and her team deliver an immersive and thrilling experience. Her masterful grasp of suspense makes for an electric atmosphere even through long portions of inaction. The evolving dynamic between the characters and Bigelow’s ability to explore their psyches raises her film to another level. The Hurt Locker may well deserve the label of the ‘best film on the war in Iraq’ to date.

Of course, there have been very few successful feature films exploring the war in Iraq. There is a creeping sense, too, that many critics are united in their appreciation of The Hurt Locker on the virtue that it puts politics aside, unlike other movies about the war. Indeed, in experts who disarm explosive devices for enormous civilian casualties, we have a category of the military practically beyond reproach. But should we care whether the US soldiers portrayed are decent and sensitive (or compelling and sympathetic) when we adjudicate whether the American adventures in West Asia are just?

The frequent complaint of ‘aestheticised violence’ that gets lobbed at crass entertainment is often excepted by critics in the appreciation of an ‘authentic’ representation of violence. But the critic’s conviction that we are approaching something like a real experience expresses a wish to be taken in.

James’ reckless behaviour, bordering on the suicidal (not to mention his disregard for the safety of his comrades), would make him a very poor candidate for the kind of work he is doing. The supposed experiential perspective of the soldier (informed by a script by embedded journalist Mark Boal) forgoes the perspective of the native. Absent Arabs sets bombs, and in one scene reminiscent of a spaghetti western, right down to the whistling score, snipe at our heroes. None of this would be very important if The Hurt Locker were not presented, in every frame, as a simulacrum of reality.

In the final analysis, The Hurt Locker might actually share something with its competitor at the Oscars, Avatar, a work of fantasy on the moral American in a violent landscape. Doesn’t our protagonist traverse the mean streets of Baghdad in rubber armour reminiscent of a spacesuit, his comrades calling him a cowboy? The American Wild West finds a home in the hot deserts of Iraq. Can we be forgiven, then, if our thoughts begin to consider what wars may have been fought over the whims and fantasies of one Texan cowboy?

The Hurt Locker
Starring: Jeremy Renner, Anthony Mackie, Bryan Geraghty
Director: Kathryn Bigelow
131 min, R.
Ultrasound machines prove to be sound investments for a village in Solukhumbu

A unique training institute in Phaplu is transforming health care in rural Nepal

Nursing Nepal back to health

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SMRITI MALLAPATY in SOLU

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Nursing Nepal back to health

SMRITI MALLAPATY in SOLU
Road to riches
Highway will bring Nepal and Tibet ‘in from the cold’

JOANNA JOLLY, BBC in RASUWA

Nepal-Tibet border. The mountains here are some of the most remote and inaccessible in the world. But deep in the valleys next to the green, flowing waters of the Kyirong River, Chinese construction workers are blasting through the jagged landscape to turn an ancient trading track into a modern road.

This small stretch of road - just 17km long - from the border to the Nepali town of Syabrubesi is costing the Beijing government almost $20 million. But it’s an important investment because this mountain pass not only connects Tibet to Nepal, it’s also the most direct land route to India’s capital, Delhi.

“There is an old Chinese saying, ‘To get rich, build roads first’,” says the Chinese team’s engineer Zhang Peng. “When this road is ready, living standards and the economy around here will improve,” he says. “Nepali people will be able to visit Lhasa, in Tibet, and other parts of China, and Chinese tourists and businessmen will come here.”

The road will make a huge difference to communities on both sides of the border. Traders still walk the old path that runs alongside the new road - an ancient thoroughfare across the

Valentine na salentine

KALAM

Rabi Thapa

H ow times have changed. More obviously, it’s about the new generation pushing out from the cracks of the conservative hide of old Nepal: how these boys and girls hang out together and do god knows what together in private and not-so-private settings in and around town; how the very nature of relationships, including those sealed with Vedic mantras in front of the sacrificial fire and banded in by the camarion of a big brass band, has shifted in sync with western models.

It would perhaps be easier if, as in the days of yore, Valentine’s Day was simply a declaration of love to someone, anyone, and everyone was in on the conspiracy - the heavens, the economy, and all your friends. Everyone is in on the conspiracy – the holidays, the various New Years have become.

Of course the times keep on a-changing, and to reminisce over the days when holding hands in public was impossible, or how friends viewing could induce a couple who’d never actually spoken to fall in love is futile, and indicative of one’s own incapacity to spend the evening with or if you do have someone, wondering why the two of you have cynically arranged to spend the evening apart, out of spite. You just can’t win.

It’s a jungle out there. Perhaps those of us who can’t bring ourselves to drift glaze-eyed through the couples reciting couples reciting couplets along the lines of roses are red, violets are blue sugar is sweet and so are you should pack their bags and head into the hills this weekend to celebrate a love more divine, that of the twelfth century Bhakti poet Mahadeviyakka for Shiva:

I love him O mother. Listen.

So my lord, white as jasmine.

I love the Beautiful One
with no bond nor fear
no clan no land
no landmarks
for his beauty.

Even grandmothers have been heard complaining about their rebellious grandsons: ‘He doesn’t come to see me anymore because I told him to get married. Hehna, others go and do love-song. He doesn’t even do that, does he want to be a jagi?”

It’s a jungle out there. Perhaps those of us who can’t bring ourselves to drift glaze-eyed through the couples reciting couplets along the lines of roses are red, violets are blue sugar is sweet and so are you should pack their bags and head into the hills this weekend to celebrate a love more divine, that of the twelfth century Bhakti poet Mahadeviyakka for Shiva:

I love the Handsome One
he has no death
decay nor form
no place or side
no end or birthmarks.

I love the Beautiful One
with no bond nor fear
no clan no land
no landmarks
for his beauty.

So my lord, white as jasmine,
is my husband.

Take these husbands who die,
decay, and feed them to your kitchen fires!

(Translated from Kannada by A.K. Ramakrishna)
China is worried that opening up the border could enflame an already unstable Tibetan plateau. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal says he has reassured Beijing that his government will not allow Tibetan dissidents to operate in his country. “China has only one concern, that is the concern of Tibet,” he says. “That is why our policy towards China has been consistent. We believe in the One China policy, Tibet is an integral part of China and the soil of Nepal will not be allowed to be used against Tibet and China.”

For those living in this remote border region, this policy is not a problem. Phurpu Tsering Tamang, a local turned trekking guide who is himself part-Tibetan, says for the local community gaining access to Chinese wealth is more important than politics. “After the Chinese occupied Tibet, some people told us the Chinese are very rude and very tricky,” he says. “But what I see when I visit Tibet is that they are building roads everywhere and they’re building houses for the people, so they have an easier life.”

Nepal will need to continue to reassure China even after this road due to open in two weeks, is completed. It’s hoping to attract more Chinese investment - and eventually create a trans-Asian highway that will cut through the Himalaya, linking China to India and opening up Nepal further. Joanna Jolly is the BBC’s Kathmandu correspondent. For more BBC coverage of South Asia go to http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia
“I guess I’m like Lenin.”

Interview in Naya Patrika, 8 February

Naya Patrika: How does Prachanda define ‘Prachanda’?

Prachanda: What kind of a question is that? (Long laugh.) I’d never thought of it like that.

Try thinking now. You could say Prachanda is someone who can be as tough, or as flexible, as it takes to attain the ambitious goals that he has set himself. But these ambitions are not personal. He is someone who wants to depart a bit from the traditional ways of doing things for the sake of the people, the country and humanity itself.

What would you think are the positive aspects of your personality?

Openness, simplicity, generosity. You could call this flexibility or weakness.

And the negative points?

It actually came up once in our party. That my personality was a bit unstable from time to time. I used to stress out quicker over events than others.

What were you like when young?

Very shy. They used to call me ‘god’s cow’ (Dewa ko gai). My Head Sir still wonders how I got into politics. If there was a fight in school, they used to come to me because they knew I was straight and wouldn’t lie.

When do you get angry?

It’s like with everyone else: when I don’t get what I want or when things don’t go the way I want them to. I used to get angry at family members over petty matters, not any more.

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You do get emotional a lot. It’s true, I’m a very sensitive person. That is why I get emotional very quickly. Even when I’m presenting something, the content of my presentation sometimes makes me emotional. If it is a sensitive subject, I break into tears quite easily (Laughs).

What you say behind closed doors is different from what you say in public. That’s not true. However, one is a bit more diplomatic or polite in a room with someone whereas in public in front of the people one has to be down-to-earth. The message is the same, but some people don’t understand this. Lately, many have started telling me not to talk too much because what I say is controversial, and not to go too many functions. I admit it is a weakness I have, and that is good advice.

Who do you compare your personality with?

I have said often that my personality is closest to Lenin’s. Lenin is my role model, his forcefulness, flexibility, conviction and courage. He could take brave policy decisions. I’m not trying to say I’m like Lenin, just that I want to follow him.

Why do you think your remarks are so controversial?

If you never go to the heart of an issue, you will never be controversial. When you put things straight and sharp, then it is debated and the issue is evaluated by everyone according to their class background.

Is it because of your personal weakness that your public face has suffered a setback of late?

No, I don’t accept that. There is a class of people who monopolised power for a long time whom people don’t understand, or don’t want to understand, or don’t want to listen. They knew I was straight and sharp, then it is debated and the issue is evaluated by everyone according to their class background.

The Maoist party standing committee meeting suggested that he speak sensibly about party policy to bolster the party’s image as well as his own. Dahal might indeed think twice before speaking now, even to his aides in closed sessions. His speeches have caused two major controversies. The Shaktikhor video tape revealed the Maoist’s double standards in the peace process while the Khanna Garment audio tape soured relations with Baburam Bhattarai.

“The meeting asked leaders to speak sensibly so the party line is clear,” said party spokesperson Dinanath Sharma.

Dahal says he is emotional and frank by nature, “It is not only mass addresses. Even during the ‘people’s war’ I used to get emotional and speak my mind.”

“Emotional Dahal”

Ganga BC in Kantipur, 6 February

The Maoist party standing committee meeting directed Pushpa Kamal Dahal to “to weigh and consider his words” before speaking.

The meeting concluded that his impromptu addresses have caused damage to the party’s and his own image. It asked him to consider the consequences of his speeches. It reminded other high profile party leaders of the same.

“A leader should speak only as required,” said one leader, “and the party chairman should be even more cautious.”

Dahal’s emotional speeches make good news but the party leadership has determined it also makes him look frivolous. The meeting suggested that he speak sensibly about party policy to bolster the party’s image as well as his own.

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Batsyayan in Kantipur, 6 February

"You don't have your ethnic province yet? Don't worry, we do!"  
Newspaper: Ethnicity-based provinces
“Dalit liberation within ethnic provinces”

Sanghu: Why did you oppose the concept paper on state restructuring?
Lyarkyal Lama: I did not oppose the paper in its totality. It has merits and flaws. Priyvi Naryan Shah’s contribution has been mentioned in the paper in the context of Nepali history and geography. But to borrow the words of fellow UML CA member Shanti Devi Chamar from Kapilvastu, if Shah’s contribution is worth mentioning, so is the contribution of Gautam Buddha. Including Buddha’s name in the new constitution will confirm that his birthplace is Nepal, not India as many believe.

As a Janajati CA member, why are you not satisfied with a paper that proposes ethnicity-based provinces?
Lyarkyal Lama: It isn’t possible to create ethnic provinces in a country where there are 103 ethnic groups. For instance, if the Bhoti community with a population of 50,000 got Jidan province, why shouldn’t 150,000 Yoelmo get a province too? A proportional representation system, on the other hand, will ensure all communities representation, big or small.

Isn’t it enough to give small communities special privileges?
Lyarkyal Lama: We need both provinces and rights in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country such as ours. But it won’t be wise in the long run to create ethnic provinces, since that would invite further conflict.

What’s the problem with ethnic or language-based provinces?
Lyarkyal Lama: I am not against anyone. When the committees proposed ethnic federalism, top leaders, specially Bahun and Chaubis, were concerned that other communities would take over the country. I asked them to think of oppressed Janajatis, Madhes and Dalits must have felt for 240 years. Yet under this scheme, some marginalised communities will continue to be left out. How do you think they feel?

What if we form a commission and resolve the issue of state restructuring?
Lyarkyal Lama: It’s a good idea but should have been done before. However, the commission would not be above the CA, which is not obliged to pass its recommendations.

If these debates continue, the constitution won’t be written by 28 May. With political consensus and hard work, we can meet the deadline. If 601 CA members truly believe the new constitution should enable all communities to co-exist peacefully, then it will be done on time. The more important question is whether it helps make a new Nepal. We have been writing and rewriting constitutions since 1947. The point is to liberate the oppressed without trampling on the rights of others.

Ethnic provinces will harm the nation

Mohammad Aibah Alam, CA member/ minister, NC Rautahat-2

How many Muslims live in Nepal?
There are 1.2 to 1.3 million Muslims scattered across the country – in smaller groups in the hills but in the majority in five or six districts in the Tarai.

What are the main issues the Muslim community has to address?
The main problem is that of economic backwardness, which affects all the basic needs such as health and education.

The State Restructuring Committee decided to designate provinces on the basis of ethnicity, what do you think?
This is totally wrong and is sure to invite more trouble. To designate provinces on the basis of other ethnicity or language is to wound the nation.

What’s the problem with ethnic or language-based provinces?
Restructuring should be on the basis of geography. But looking at the model the committee passed it seems as if the country is one of majority ethnicities, though no ethnicity has a majority here. How can ethnic provinces be created in a country of minorities? In the name of inclusion and proportional representation, unqualified and incapable people are being pushed forward, how will this establish democracy?

How will society be affected by granting political prerogatives?
State restructuring should not take place on ethnic lines, as those in the minority will be exploited. If within the same province, some are given the right to govern while others are barred from it by the constitution, then democracy cannot be consolidated.

Liberation without oppression

Lyarkyal Lama is the only CA member from the Yolmo community and the only UML Janajati CA member to criticise the ethnic federal model. He advocates inclusive and proportional representation with special privileges for ethnic communities. Translated excerpts from an interview with Sanghu:
Kingji was so chuffed with the royal welcome he got in Panauti this week that the erstwhile incarnation of Vishnu is contemplating a similar walkabout on Friday at Pashupatinath on the occasion of Shivaratri. Both royalists and republicans are reportedly readying rival rent-a-crowds. Wonder whose chants will be louder: “Raja au desh bachau” or “Gyane chor desh chhod”?

Those of you who think that if the constitution will not be written in time a great calamity will befall the nation are wrong. It’s actually going to be much worse than that. The international community will give up on us and then we won’t be able to scapegoat India or UNMIN anymore, and we’ll have no one to blame but ourselves. Our leaders have this amazing capacity to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, so the jackass has come up with this drastic solution: Since there is never going to be an agreement on ethnicity-based federalism, and this will delay the new constitution indefinitely, how about a ten-year moratorium on all Bahun leaders? Why are the indigenous and janajati groups just demanding control of federal units? They should be allowed to take charge at the Centre and in the higher echelons of all parties, allowing Indira Gandhi to come up the ranks.

The only non-martial art gold was in the marathon, which our athlete completed in a world record time of 1 hr and 59 mins. It was a world record because the Banglas laid out a course that was short by 5km. Sri Lanka (another warlike nation) nearly came to blows with the organisers in Dhaka because they had trained their marathoners to make a dash for it in the last 5km, but there was no last lap. At least we got to keep the gold.

Nepal used to have a partyless-Panchayat system, then after 1990 we brought in a party-based democracy, the whole of last week we had parties galore, and now it’s looking like we have a three-party dictatorship. Which means we don’t have to worry about the constitution not being written on time, the three parties will just sit down and figure out a way to pass the preamble on May 28 and postpone everything else by a year.

A media mogul is murdered in broad daylight in Kathmandu’s Green Zone and the Home Minister continues with his China visit with the heads of all three security agencies. An unarmed traffic cop comes to the rescue while armed APF don’t lift a finger to cordon off the area. If the ministers are not on foreign junkets, they are on domestic junkets. Not one, not two, six ministers including the prime minister choppered down to inaugurate a bridge over the Rapti on Wednesday. If the Ass had a black flag, he’d be out there flapping it about.