The sun’s still shining but the nights are perceptibly colder, and once we breast the coming wave of Tihar and Chhat festivities, we’ll feel the oncoming cold all the more. With loadshedding looming on the horizon, we’ve all got cause to celebrate a glittering festival of lights. Practically speaking, the festive season is drawing to a close and many of us will be thinking of what’s to be done at school and work for the rest of the year. Ditto the politicians, who seem to be making some headway with the High-level Taskforce. Fingers crossed, they won’t wholly disappoint us.

Even without that concern, there’s plenty to be happy about for Ganga and Deepak, Bhutanese refugees who were resettled from Jhapa to the United States in 2008. They are now living with their extended family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and are featured in this week’s photo exhibition in the Jhapa refugee camps, This Time.
POLITICIAN

My morning starts by drinking milk that comes in a plastic pouch ('Bags to grab', Shahani Singh, #525). In the afternoon a fruitseller packs my fruit in a plastic bag. Late in the evening, I dump my garbage packed in a plastic bag. Forget the narrow addiction of galis in Kathmandu strewn with plastic packets of potato chips, instant noodles, pan parag, khami etc. I don't believe removing plastic bags from one store in Kathmandu can uplift the face of the entire city. However, if NB can bring a campaign program for NTY 2011 to make it a year without plastic bags, someone can hope for a change. In the meantime, let plastic bag manufacturers go to hell.

AWESOME SPEECHES

President Obama: As you are in India, what about having a mountain flights of Everest, and a brief mountain flight of Mount Everest, and a brief mountain flight. As you are in India, what about having a mountain flights of Everest, and a brief mountain flight of Mount Everest, and a brief mountain flight.

MORAL GROUND

There is no moral equivalency between Col. Banister and Kham (‘Cocking a snook’, Damakant Jayshi, #525). Banister is accused of overstepping his authority as an army officer while waging a government-sanctioned war against Maoists (who were designated as terrorists at that time). Kham is a pure cold-blooded murderer who killed for his smuggling and extortion business in peace time (this may very well have been sanctioned by his party bosses, we don't know). I am not trying to condone Banister for his alleged misuse of authority, but you cannot write an article implying that both Kham and Banister are guilty to a similar degree. Please also don't forget that Prachanda, as a leader of the Maoist Army, was directly supervising killing, torture and massacre during an internal conflict and trying to maintain his military-style regime, blooded murderer who killed for the sake of professionalism and culture and taxpayers' capital ad nauseam? Why are the NC/UNM/Maoist trio visiting London instead of thrashing out issues in the inter and intra-party meetings? Most politicians in Nepal who have been accosted and oppressed by the law enforcement agencies have subsequently gone running to foreign lands begging for international interference. The irony of it all, of course, is Chairman Dahal’s message from the Chinese. Stung by the Maharagante scandal (more of a claymore from the south than a genuine Chinese interest in buying off MPs tosecure a Maoist victory) and concerned by the ongoing instability in Nepal, the Chinese Government made sure its message got access to all and sundry: ‘Don’t rock the boat’, Nepal has increasing contact with China, but so far the indication is that the dragon nation is content to promote harmony in Nepal as long as Nepal does the same for China, getting by with a little aid from its friends. Dahal’s talk of a vague trilateral agreement between Nepal, China and India was simply a cover for the embarrassment of not having achieved anything politically advantageous for himself or his party. The message seems clear enough. With India busy with President Obama, and China too busy to be dabbling in Nepali politics, it looks like it’s up to us to sort out our own house. Once this round of junkets is over, with Tihar past us, the real work must begin.

NEPALI GOMBAS

Nepali Times would like to make it clear that in saying ‘a Tibetan monastery was resuscitated in Nepal’ (‘Tibetan monk came back to the community’, #524), we are not referring to the circumstance of a person coming back to a community. We are referring to the fact that the original name of the monastery owned by the Tibetan Buddhists, just as the Tumkot monastery does. Both monasteries are, of course, Nepali, and are managed, and maintained by Nepal’s devotes, Ed.

Q. Should Nepal be the official state language?

Sargam

Q. What budget should the caretaker govt present?

Total votes: 1,227

Valid votes: 1,227

Favourite replies (0%)

Complimentary replies (0%)

More votes to go! 

Election hangover

The Republican Party has already taken steps to lose the 2012 elections. Fresh from an election victory—they have wrested the US House of Representatives back from their Democratic rivals and strengthened their presence in the US Senate—party leaders are already talking arrogantly. The incoming House Speaker, Republican leader John Boehner, has summed up the next two years.

“We’re going to do everything—and more. We want to put together a package of legislation for whatever we can,” Boehner said on Tuesday as election results started pouring in. Arrogant? Yes. Effect? Disastrous. The former House Speaker has received a lot of promises during his tenure. Now seen as someone who made a strong rebuke for Obama, who is being asked by the people, especially their own base, which wasn’t delivering on his signature campaign issue, President Obama and his members could face the same fate if he doesn’t mend his ways.

The former Maoist rebels for politicians in the United States and elsewhere, including Nepal. It might be easy for some Democrats and their apologists to blame it all on the global economic recession that began manifesting itself in 2008, and the unemployment in the US. They might not admit publicly is the strong disconnect with the people, especially their own base, which wasn’t motivated enough to go to the nearest election booth. Boehner could face the same fate if he does not mend his ways.

The reality is the Obama Administration has achieved in two years what President Bill Clinton could not in his two terms over eight years: giving the United States revolutionary healthcare reform. Besides delivering on his signature campaign issue, President Obama brought in a stimulus package for the collapsing financial sector and propped up an ailing US automobile industry.

There are some lessons here number of Americans and people around the world as transformative. It might be easy for some Democrats and their apologists to blame it all on the global economic recession that began manifesting itself in 2008, and the unemployment in the US. They might not admit publicly is the strong disconnect with the people, especially their own base, which wasn’t motivated enough to go to the nearest election booth. Boehner could face the same fate if he does not mend his ways.

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They may be ugly, but billboard advertising is a huge and growing business

RUBEENA MAHATO

Any may complain that they are Kathmandu’s biggest eyesores, but streetside billboards are now the mainstay of the country’s advertising industry and a major source of income for the municipality. Stacked on top of each other on rooftops, obliterating the facades of new buildings and spreading across intersections, billboards have now become the city’s new skyline.

There are 35 companies specialising in printing signage, and the number of registered sites in the city core is now nearing 1,000. “Advertisers prefer billboards because they offer a very cost-effective way of promoting products compared to print and television ads,” explains Amit Gorkhali of Blitz Media. “They are also very visible, and relatively cheap.”

Despite their rapid spread, however, hoarding boards remain an unregulated business. A Supreme Court ruling in 2006 banned hoarding boards near temples and heritage sites, but there are no fixed criteria on the size, location, building materials or safety standards required to get a permit. Luckily no one was hurt when a storm blew down a giant hoarding board advertising a housing company last year, but it blocked the Ring Road for hours.

“It is very possible for similar incidents to take place in the future, we haven’t learnt our lesson,” says Awadesh Das of Ultimate Marketing, who has been advocating an insurance policy for hoarding boards. There are also examples of houses that have developed cracks because of the stress from scaffolds.

The municipality charges Rs 60 per square foot for hoarding boards, but has not been able to regulate their haphazard growth. The huge billboards outside Maitighar and Singha Darbar cost about Rs 1.4 million in rental to the advertiser. Outdoor billboards now make up a full 50 per cent of Nepal’s total advertising market. “Technically we cannot object to people putting up hoarding boards on their private property even if it makes the city look ugly. We are, however, working on guidelines that will make people adhere to certain security standards,” says Hari Bahadur Kunwar of the Kathmandu Metropolitan office.

Das of Ultimate Marketing says there should be a strict policy on size restrictions, locations and content of the ads. “The beauty of the city is being ruined because permits are granted haphazardly,” he adds. “The idea is to promote products without irritating the visual sensibility of the people.” He would probably concur with the widespread outrage over Coca-Cola’s garish billboards in Venice, which obscure a section of the famed Doge’s Palace that is under renovation.

As with most other sectors of the economy, unhealthy The expanding size and spread of billboards in Kathmandu are indicative of the growth in the market. Although there are no accurate figures, industry insiders estimate the market of hoarding boards to be a whopping Rs 1.5 billion, half of the total advertising industry. “The figure is not big, if we take into account all outdoor advertising,” Awadesh Das of Ultimate Marketing says.

The municipality earned Rs 10.95 million by taxing advertisers last year. Ten per cent of the city’s hoarding boards, however, have been evading taxes, and the municipality estimates a 25 per cent decrease in revenue this year after the ban on all liquor and tobacco billboards. The biggest boards are in Thapathali, New Road, Maitighar and Singha Darbar, where advertisers are paying between Rs 500,000 to Rs 1.4 million in rent every year.
Hoarding the boards

There are two types of companies working in hoarding boards. The first group have their own hoarding boards, flex printing facilities and in some cases, their own designers. They charge between Rs 300 to Rs 600 per square foot, including all charges, rental fees, and other taxes.

Other are advertising agencies that mediate with board owners, flex printers and authorities on behalf of the advertisers. They take about 15 per cent of the annual board rental. House owners are generally paid between Rs 50,000 to Rs 300,000 per year.

Early savings

Save the Children has partnered with Bank of Kathmandu to launch the "YouthSave" project, a multi-country learning project to encourage low-income young people aged 12-18 in developing countries to save through formal sources. Supported by The MasterCard Foundation, the project will be implemented in Nepal, Colombia, Kenya and Ghana from 2010-2014 by a consortium of four organisations led by Save the Children.

Say cheese

Nepa Hima Trade Link has launched ultra-compact, interchangeable lens system digital cameras – the α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α α alpha

Eco exchange

Him Electronics has announced that a customer can get Rs 15 off on every purchase of a Himstar CFL bulb, by bringing in an ordinary bulb in any condition. Himstar CFLs save 80 per cent power and come with an 18-month warranty. They are also available in warm tones.

Stay connected

Broadlink Network and Communication has launched Wi-Fi and internet-based telephone services that can be accessed through pre-paid internet vouchers. Calls between two Broadlink users are free.

New packs

Surya Nepal has launched Surya 24 Carat, a premium segment cigarette in Bevel Edge cigarette packs. Surya 24 Carat is priced at Rs 106 for a pack of 20 and is available in Kings as well as Lights variants.

Humla and Humlis really aren’t all that different from the rest of Nepal

Humla’s no Siberia

It was as a schoolboy in Kathmandu in the ’60s that I first came to know about Humla-Jumla. The names of the two districts were always bundled together, as if they were geographical Siamese twins. And the very name, Humla-Jumla, evoked such images of remoteness and difficulty that they could well have been tracts of arid land somewhere on the moon.

Our maths teacher used to joke that we should pay attention if we wanted to build bridges in Humla-Jumla someday. What Siberia was to the USSR, Humla-Jumla was to Nepal. Thirty years later, visiting Humla, it seemed things were a little different from what I had imagined, but not all that much.

Politics: Humla’s politics are the same as in most places in Nepal. Humlis say that they elect their representatives, who then take up residences in Kathmandu, where, engrossed in the details of party politics, they hardly find the time to either visit Humla or raise Humli concerns in parliament.

Old Humlis complain that the nature of local politics has changed too. Young, politically active Humlis are more eager to trade blows on behalf of their political parties than for Humla’s development. The result is that the old fear the young, and stay away from matters of local governance, and the young have splintered themselves into party-political factions – which makes getting anything done locally a maddeningly byzantine all-party appeasement task.

NGOs: NGOs get knee-jerk bad press in the Kathmandu media, in part because it’s possible. It’s similar to most other places in Nepal, full of hard-working people who want to lead better lives as far as health, income and education are concerned, full of promise and potential for further growth in trade and tourism opportunities. Humla could be hobbled by dysfunctional local politics and ignored by political representatives and national parties. Yet the district is inching forward, through NGO-assisted local efforts.

These days, just as Nepalis living in the Tarai hard towns look at the wide roads being laid down in Nitish Kumar’s Bihar and ask why we can’t do the same, Humlis look at Chinese infrastructure on the other side of the border and wonder what’s stopping the development of infrastructure in Humla and other high-altitude regions. Clearly, it’s possible.

In many ways, Humla is hardly the moonscape I had visualised as a child. It’s similar to most other places in Nepal, full of hard-working people who want to lead better lives as far as health, income and education are concerned, full of promise and potential for further growth in trade and tourism opportunities. Humla could be hobbled by dysfunctional local politics and ignored by political representatives and national parties. Yet the district is inching forward, through NGO-assisted local efforts.

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Going to a spa was once a luxury reserved for foreigners or those with deep pockets. The body twisting at the local hajam was quite enough for men and women preferred to splurge on beauty parlour services rather than bother with expensive body treatments. But as the spa and wellness industry in Nepal has grown, it’s no longer necessary to visit a five-star hotel; many independent spas have opened their doors around the city, and at affordable rates. Spa owners admit that their clientele is now an equal mix of Nepalis and foreigners. “The demand for spas grew as people started travelling and experienced spa treatments abroad,” says Sadhana Tuladhar of Prana Spa. “Changes in lifestyle have also encouraged people to opt for spa services.”

From ayurvedic to Thai and Swedish, spas here offer a whole growing wellness.

PAAVAN MATHEMA

Nepal has the potential to develop into a spa destination.
range of treatments, including traditional Nepali treatments. They’re not just about massages either, and offer hydrotherapy, reflexology, facials, and body treatments. Spas have also expanded their services to cater to the beauty needs of their clients by providing manicures, pedicures, and even hairdressing services. “With local clients, our salon is more popular,” says Meghat Chaudhary Shakyia of Midas Day Spa and Saloon.

According to the Spa and Wellness Association Nepal (SWAN), there are about 20 spas in operation right now. Most independent spas are day spas and also offer medical consultations. With Nepal Tourism Year 2011 just round the corner, SWAN is working with Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and the Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) to explore the possibility of developing Nepal as a spa destination. “The industry is growing and Nepal has great potential,” says Hem Nath Regmi, Secretary of SWAN. “But there is a need for us to develop the infrastructure and regulations to facilitate it.”

At present, spas are concentrated in Kathmandu but there is room for them to expand into tourist destinations like Pokhara, Sauraha and the trekking areas. There is also a need to develop specialised manpower for the industry and guarantee the sourcing of the supplies needed to run a spa. Spas have had to train their staff abroad or bring in foreign specialists for in-house training. Efforts are being made to set up training facilities in Kathmandu. Tranquility Beauty Academy in Lazimpat has been providing spa-related courses for beginners and professionals with certified trainers. “There is a very high demand for therapists in Nepal as well as abroad,” says Bhushan Phaju, Director of the academy, who also runs Tranquility Spa. “Therapists are among the highest paid in the hospitality industry and even basic education is invaluable.”

The term ‘massage’ still has negative connotations here and the spa industry has been trying to overcome that image. Spas often have to turn away male clients because they specifically ask for a lady therapist. “But the perceptions are slowing changing,” says Rabi Shah of Zen Experience. “It has helped that security is now tighter, with police often raiding ‘massage parlours’ that provide illegal services.” Spa owners have been lobbying with NTB to launch a rating system for spa and massage facilities so customers can differentiate between the services provided.

Is your spa for real?

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Choose your oil

Lavender: headaches and body aches
Juniper: dry skin
Spikenard: joint aches
Palma Rosa: anti-wrinkle
Artemisia: brain and respiratory problems

The Social Responsibility: Equal Opportunities for all

We prioritize social issues. We have been collaborating with many NGO’s and NGO’s to bring social changes in lives of many (special groups like, minors, disabled, and underprivileged groups from such organizations are mostly eligible. We already have been educating newly women and these fellow students have become professional colleagues after graduation.

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Festive Mood, an exhibition of etching prints by young Nepali artists, 31 October to 14 November, 10.30am to 5.30pm, Park Gallery, Lazimpat, 4419933, parkgallery@wlink.com.np, Saturdays closed.

The Seven Henry Series: In Search of an Ideal Landscape, an exhibition of supracollages by the acclaimed Indic-British artist Syyed Iqbal Geof, an exhibition of installation art and etching prints by young Nepali artists. Every Friday, 7pm onwards, Shambhala Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri-la, 4412999

Media Discussion Series, screening and discussion on Shriomani Dawad’s Surunghdehi Saharsamma, a documentary on radio stations operated by the Maoists during the war, 4 November, 3pm, Martin Chautel, Thapathali, 4238059, 4120207

Free Workshop on B-boying, organised by the famous B-boying team from The Everest All Star A, 13 November, 3pm, Makh Auditorium, Jhamshikhet, Lalitpur, 5013554, info@katjazz.com.np

Starry Night Barbeque with live music by Cine Gurung, Every Friday, 7pm onwards, Shambhala Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri-la, 4412999

Live music with a Rylan, Every Wednesday and Friday, 7.30pm onwards, Karaoke every Sunday, 7.30pm onwards, Irish Pub, Ananda Bhavan, Lazimpat

Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Cafe, enjoy wood-fired pizzas with a superb view of Boudha stupa and free wifi, candlelight dinner options are also available for the romantics every full moon night, Boudha, 2130681

Singma Food Court, for the best Singaporean and Malaysian cuisine in town, Pulchowk, 5009082 and Bhatbhateni, 4411078, foodcourt@wlink.com.np, www.singma.foodcourt.com

Ramalya Tea Room, now open for dinner, experience Chef Mohit’s creations from Cider-brined Pork Chops to Guava Cheese, also 10% discount on evening dinners to all Nepal Times readers when they mention this ad, Park Polihani, near Japanese Embassy, for bookings call 4006589, 4006589, www.roe.com.np/index.php/tea-room

Waffles promotion at The Lounge from 12.30pm to 4.00pm every day, Vegetarian Buffet at The Cafe every Tuesday from 6.30pm, and Arabian Nights at The Cafe every Friday from 6.30pm at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4498124, 4498562

Dhokaima Cafe has a new menu, try the Blackened Norwegian Salmon and Grilled Shrimp Ajillo. Patan Dhoka, 5521113

Walter’s Restaurant & Bar, offers gourmet cuisine in the regal setting of Babar Mahar Visited, 4253337

Everest Steak House, an old-school joint for everything steak, A sanctuary for meat, Thamel, near Chhetripahat Chowk, 4260471

1905 Restaurant, feast on roasted delights within this converted aristocratic residence. Welled ambience and green surroundings make it an oasis within the city. Kantipath, 4215068

Pumpennickel Bakery, get an early breakfast or brunch with interesting choices of bread and sandwiches. Experiment with their goat cheese or yak cheese sandwiches, or have a sip of coffee in the classy indoor dining area. Thamel, 4259185

Tourist and Traveller

The walls of Pipalbot Lifestyle at Babar Mahar Revisited are adorned with a unique collection of paintings called Alchemy-watercolours and weaves, made with a technique using watercolours and soap. The artist is Bangkok-based Peter Delahaye, who specialises in abstract art. The collection also includes his designs, interpreted into natural fibre rugs by Tim Linkin’s team of designers and weavers.

For those curious about his techniques and willing to explore their own, Delahaye is conducting a painting workshop on the theme ‘hiding and revealing’. “It’s a chance for people who perhaps have never painted before to experiment themselves and understand how I work to make abstract paintings,” says Delahaye. The workshop will accommodate 10-12 participants for a 3-hour session in which Delahaye will demonstrate and explain how one of his paintings was made and the thought processes behind it. The floor will then be open for the participants to experiment with his and their own methods.

The workshop will take place on 13 and 14 November at Pipalbot, Babar Mahar Revisited. The cost per session is Rs 3,000 including tea, snacks and painting supplies.

Techniques of abstraction

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Mr Ford’s in town

Ford Figo sold 50,000 units in India in the first seven months after its launch and as Ford launches in Nepal, it is hoping to replicate this success. “We expect 70 per cent growth from the Asia-Pacific and African region. Nepal is part of this strategy and an important market for us,” says Michael Boneham, President and Managing Director, Ford India.

Hatchbacks and compacts have dominated the car market in Nepal and Ford has made an apt entry with its first small car, Figo. In fact, Nepal is Figo’s second export market. Boneham claims that with Ford, Nepali customers will get value for their money and enjoy a low cost of ownership.

Ford has opened its new dealership with GO Automobiles under Golchha Organization to market its cars here. Along with Figo in the hatchback segment, Ford is rolling in Fiesta, a sedan, Ranger, a pick-up and the more familiar Everest, an SUV.

“Figo and Fiesta have been made for Indian roads and are thus are built to run on road conditions similar to Nepal,” says Akash Golchha of GO Automobiles. “Ranger and Everest, which come from Thailand, have fantastic off-road capabilities.”

Ford’s new showroom in Thapathali is already showing off these models and the service centre in Swayambhu opened with a three-day Ford Carnival. The event was a family affair, and showcased Ford’s range while offering facilities like spot exchange, finance and insurance along with games and refreshments. Spare parts are readily available and Ford also makes child parts, which allows the customer to change independent components at a lower cost.

“We target is to sell 600 units during our first year,” says Golchha, and GO Automobiles might be on the right track to achieve that target, with bookings for 100 cars even before the launch.

Paavan Mathema
Help! I’m on Everest

Can you imagine Everest climbs becoming so popular a visit to the top of the world will be like going to Disneyland? The way helicopter technology has taken off, it’s now possible to hover at 9,000m in a Eurocopter. This can only be described as revolutionary, as previously, helicopters could barely fly up to 5,500m.

Last spring, Swiss pilots and climbers, working in tandem with Nepali pilots, successfully rescued Spanish climbers at an altitude of 7,000m in the Annapurnas. They not only saved lives but also made history. Ironically, their record-breaking feat will tempt many climbers to ascend higher and take more risks.

Presently, helicopters predominantly help trekkers suffering trauma in the mountains, life-threatening altitude sickness and its complications, severe hyponatraemia and frostbite, neurological problems like strokes, and acute visual compromise due to the hypoxia (low oxygen) of the mountains. Now, climbers with similar problems at much higher altitudes than trekkers (>6000m) may be whisked off the mountains. Imagine how the 1996 Everest tragedy, which Jon Krakauer wrote about in the bestseller ‘Into Thin Air’, might have played out if Eurocopters were around them.

The rescues are as dramatic as the pictures suggest. The helicopter hovers above the rescue area while an experienced climber slides down a cable from the helicopter. He lowers himself down to the injured climber, forms a human sling, and both are then carried to a safe area. But what about those fierce Himalayan winds when you are dangling from the end of a cable with blades of ice surrounding you? Clearly, the pilot has to be very competent, a real-life James Bond? Swiss pilots, renowned for their rescue work in the Swiss Alps, are the most experienced in this regard.

“The famous Dr Oswald Oelz, a physician-climber, has clear-cut views on rescue in the Himalayas. ‘You are in part killing the adventure. If you get into trouble you just call a helicopter. In the past you either had to fight your way out or you died,’ he says. He may have a point. Unless you are that hoolishly climber stuck on a Himalayan precipice...”

Plastic-free Ilam

After a month-long campaign and trial period, Ilam Municipality has completely banned the use of plastic bags in the city. People now take a jute bag with them when they go shopping. Shopkeepers use either paper or leaves to wrap goods if customers don’t have their own bags.

Tea entrepreneurs have agreed to use Nepali paper to package tea. The municipality has recalled polythene bags from all shops and a team led by municipality executive officer Yubaraj Dahal has been monitoring the market. If a shopkeeper sells goods in a polythene bag he will be fined Rs 500, while shoppers will be fined Rs 200 for using them.

Dahal argues that the drastic steps were necessary as plastic was littering an otherwise clean and green Ilam. The municipality has set aside 38 replicates of land (>19,000 square metres) for processing degradable waste. “Our goal is to develop Ilam as a green city within two years by processing all the waste generated here. The Finnish ambassador has promised support, and has already visited the proposed site.”

Ten thousand trees will be planted along either side of the roads within the municipality, which has also implemented plans to attract tourists for Nepal Tourism Year 2011.

ART OF THE ORDINARY: French Ambassador Jean-Charles Demarquis opened the Planet Nepal Contemporary Art Exhibition at KCAC, Jhamsikhel on Tuesday. The artworks were showcased at the Planet Nepal festival.

AWARDING EXCELLENCE: Rotary International District 3292 established the Gopal-Kamala Raj Bhandari Rotary Award for Vocational Excellence, to be awarded once in two years to those making outstanding contributions to society. The award is worth Rs 1 million.

Were there predictions of heavy rain during the festive weeks of October? The latest office forecasts of the weather department are that the total rainfall was below normal (only half of the monthly quota). November marks the brisk month of the year with little hope of any rain. Satellite images of Wednesday morning show signs of the early arrival of the monsoons, nor are there any other sources to feed the clouds with moisture. A high-pressure system rules the current weather pattern of northern India and Nepal. Days will be sunny with occasional breaks of cloud due to the movement of the easterlies. Open right cloud means a Labour stop in morning, rain elsewhere, by Tuesday or Wednesday. sunny weather for a non-rainy weekend ahead.

WEEKEND WEATHER

Although there were predictions of heavy rain during the festive weeks of October, the latest forecasts show signs of the early arrival of the monsoons, with little hope of any rain. Satellite images of Wednesday morning show signs of the dry weather pattern of northern India and Nepal. Days will be sunny with occasional breaks of cloud due to the movement of the easterlies. Open right cloud means a Labour stop in morning, rain elsewhere, by Tuesday or Wednesday. sunny weather for a non-rainy weekend ahead.

TIME TO REAP: Potter’s square in Bhaktapur was all gold on Tuesday as the locals winnowed rice from the fresh harvest.
I am concerned that the title of this article might get the Nepali Times website banned because the government has recently decided that websites that include ‘sex’ in their content are dirty and should not be accessed.

The initial list of banned websites included explicitly adult websites along with more innocent ones, including the website for punk band the Sex Pistols, the movie Sex and the City, and the news aggregator The Huffington Post. It showed that the authorities, in this case the Nepal Telecommunication Authority, are completely out of touch with basic cultural and media milestones. It also highlighted the fact that sorting out the wheat from the chaff is an incredibly difficult task.

The Home Ministry said the ban was enforced because young people are addicted to porn, and are running around crazed committing sex crimes. Except there have been no studies on the link between porn and crime in Nepal and there are no numbers to prove there is one. In fact, sex crimes actually declined following the legalisation of pornography in Denmark in 1969. This is not to diminish the role of aggressive law enforcement, longer prison sentences, scientific investigation methods, and community programs in curbing crime. What was remarkable in Denmark, however, was that as soon as the blue stuff became easily available, interest in pornography went down and sales of all kinds of porn material declined.

In the mainstream newspapers, there seems to be an unwillingness to challenge the wisdom of the ban, perhaps because talking about sex or images of sex openly isn’t very becoming in Nepal. This ban, however, isn’t just about porn but what could come after. If the reason is that porn is simply ‘bad’, then it is not and should not be the government’s job to enforce morality.

There are legitimate arguments about the vices of the porn industry. Studies have shown that child pornography is the fastest growing form of porn on the internet. Many countries have restrictions on child porn and forced participation, and those producing or marketing porn must register their activity and pass appropriate inspections to address these concerns. Around 10,000 porn films are made in Hollywood every year and, as most of Tiger Wood’s mistresses will testify, there are women who do want to make a living out of it.

That illegal activities are present in an industry is not always an argument for banning the whole industry, otherwise most industries would be banned. The real problem is that of censorship. This infringes on two pillars of a free society – freedom of expression and freedom of information. Conversely, the restriction of these freedoms is essential to totalitarian societies such as China and Iran. If the government is allowed to restrict freedom of expression and information because of a shallow argument like ‘porn is bad’, how long until editorials that ‘threaten stability’ are prohibited?

Like the body searches on the road every night, the government has implemented the ban as an easy fix for crime. The fact that it has failed to demonstrate maturity and intelligence is all the more reason we should be wary of such attempts to limit individual freedom. Honestly, it might be a better use of their time if the bureaucrats educated themselves about the Sex Pistols. I would be happy to lend them a CD.

The clumsy attempt to ban internet porn reveals the idiocy of those in charge.
This week, Kashish Das Shrestha opened a photo exhibition (organised by UNHCR and curated by photo.circle) in the refugee camps of Beldangi and Sanischare in Jhapa, portraying the lives of those who have left for resettlement in the United States over the last three years. This Time features photos from Atlanta, Baltimore, and Pittsburgh, and is part of a larger photo and video project on the lives of resettled Bhutanese refugees in six cities across the US.

Among those featured in This Time are Ganga and Deepak, who moved to New York in June 2008 as part of the resettlement program. In March 2009, Nepali Times ran a story on Ganga and Deepak, who had been dating in the refugee camp in Jhapa and got married in New York. This year, Kashish Das Shrestha revisited the families, who have since moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Ganga and Deepak now have a daughter, Dipisha, and both work in a fruit packing factory. They often get overtime and use the opportunity for extra income as Ganga’s parents are around to take care of the baby while they are at work.

A new life

Ganga’s siblings Bishnu, Yubraj and Bhagirathi in the Neopaney family’s apartment in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The family’s second oldest daughter, Tuka Devi, continues to live in New York with relatives while pursuing her education.
Ganga and her daughter Dipisha, who was born in New York last year. She moved with her family to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, soon after.

The Neopaney household in Sanischare camp, Jhapa, now occupied by another family.

Virtual reunion

It has been three years since Ganga saw his aunt Shanti, who left Beldangi-2 refugee camp in Jhapa for the US. When he saw her full-size photo (below), tears filled his eyes. Shanti now runs a shop in North Dakota.

Many refugee family members have been separated during the resettlement of the last three years. They may have been able to write to each other and sometimes chat over the phone, but thanks to the ongoing exhibition This Time, those left behind now have the chance to actually see how their friends and family are doing in the United States.

Sancha Maya Tamang used to live in Beldangi-1, Refugee Camp Sector D. She’s now in Georgia. Secretary at the camp TB Gurung, after seeing a picture of her whipping up some hot and sour chana chatpate, says, “It’s strange to see her there, but I’m happy.”

Altogether 36,618 refugees have been resettled in eight countries in the last three years.

Gopal Gartoula
Guru of tea

Tannath Sharma retired from his job as the executive director of the National Tea and Coffee Development Board six years ago but that has not stopped him from travelling across the country teaching farmers about the benefits of tea farming. He has been involved in the development of tea farming in Nepal for the last thirty years. Farmers in Ilam, Panchthar, Jhapa, Terathum and Dhankuta fondly call him the teacher of tea.

The Bagmati Zonal Office of the Nepal Food Corporation has been recently set up. Crews were present to the Vigilance Centre is to be believed, the Food Corporation secretly distributed goats to VVIPs during Dasain. Goats were presented to the Food Corporation officials who frequently recounted the success of Ugandan farmers in tea farming. This inspired Sharma to start tea farming with four farmers in Ilam nearly 35 years ago.

Today, tea farming has spread to 18,000 farmers in five districts. Sharma himself has cultivated tea on 7.5 hectares of land in Panchakanya. His two sons are also working as tea specialists. He is disappointed, however, that his colleagues on the tea board did not make use of their knowledge after their retirement. “Rather than living an anonymous existence in the city, it is better to go to the villages to share one’s experience,” he says.

Wherever Sharma goes, he takes tea farming along. Thanks to his initiative, tea cultivation was begun in Nawakot, Sindulpokh, Dolakha and Ramechhap. Now he is visiting the villages of Bhaktapur and Kathmandu to explore the possibilities of tea farming there. He is also working to introduce a cooperative approach to tea farming. A National Tea Farmers Cooperative has been recently set up for the purpose.

“A cooperative approach will help in the commercialisation of tea farming,” he says.

The special budget for four months is about to run out. Warnings of an economic crisis if a full budget is not presented within two weeks have been doing the rounds. If the government and the opposition party don’t sort it out to pave the way for a budget, even the civil servants won’t be paid their salaries from next month on. The target rate of economic growth has not been achieved because in the last three years, the budget has not been presented on time. Delays in the budget have prevented the implementation of major plans and led to development budgets being frozen. Local governance is still weak, and it is difficult to implement the budget at the grassroots level.

Major projects have been stalled. The government’s policies and plans for the new fiscal year are dependent on the budget, too, so investors are waiting in confusion for new policies to be announced. Revenue has also gone down because new interest and taxation rates have not been announced. Revenue increased by 24 per cent last year but this year is expected to grow just 10 per cent. This is the lowest growth rate the country has experienced in five years. In turn, this decrease in revenue will affect the size of the budget next year.

The delay in budget presentation will also affect progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and in increasing job opportunities, narrowing financial disparity, and achieving regional balance and long-term economic plans.

Finance Minister Surendra Pandey says that there are no constitutional barriers to presenting the budget. “We are under a compulsion to present the budget immediately to prevent further economic crisis,” Pandey says, adding that when the new government is formed, it can always make modifications to the budget.

An option is for the 22 parties to bring out a consensus budget. But the main opposition, the Maoists, have refused to allow the introduction of a full budget under the caretaker government. Maoist leader Dev Gurung says, “We need to form the new government fast and then bring out the budget.” Gurung adds that the interim constitution does not allow a caretaker government to bring out the budget and that the law has to be followed under all circumstances.

Missing goats

Sagar Pandit in Naya Patrika, 2 November

The Bagmati Zonal Office of the Nepal Food Corporation has been recently set up. A team led by Police Inspector Inzina Bahadur Dangi of the Vigilance Centre excavated the site where the carcasses were buried. “The dozer could not pull out more than 120 carcasses from the site. There is clear evidence of corruption,” Dangi said.

An argument ensued between Corporation officials and the probe team members when the media was told about the number of carcasses found. Corporation stuff accused the investigation team of incompetence. But if the Vigilance Centre is to be believed, the Food Corporation secretly distributed goats to VVIPs during Dasain. Goats were presented to secretaries, directors and other high-level officials as Dasain gifts. And when the accounts did not match, Corporation staff simply inflated the number of dead goats, the probe team alleges.

Chief of Bagmati Zonal Office of the Food Corporation, Anmar Bahadur Khadka, has denied the charge of corruption. According to him, goats died in previous years too. Khadka also accused the Vigilance Centre of conducting the examination in a slapdash manner. 

Budget, when?

Payshal Acharya in Nepal, 14 November
Cleaners gathering dust

Arjun Subedi in
Nagarik, 1 November

Cleaning vehicles donated by the
Chinese government worth
millions of rupees remain unused
because of government inefficacy
and tardiness. Two months after
their arrival, they are still parked
in the Kathmandu Metropolitan
premises. The arrival of the
vehicles was delayed by 10
months because of legal hassles.
The Metropolitan complains that
the Transport Management
Department did not register the
buses. The transport office, on the
other hand, claims the vehicles
weren’t brought in for
registration.

Chief of the Environment
Management Department of
Kathmandu Metropolitan, Rabin
Man Shrestha, says that all due
process had been followed, but
the transport office is demanding
COP (Conformity of Production)
documents. The Chinese
companies then sent the
documents through email,” Shrestha adds, “but the
department is now refusing to
register without paper
documents.”

The Transport Department,
however, denies it has received
any applications for vehicle
registration at all. “It has been
two months since the vehicles
have arrived but they have still
not applied for registration. And
they are blaming us?” wonders
Director of the Transport
Department Prem Kumar Singh.

The Chinese Government
donated 108 cleaning vehicles,
ambulances and road sweepers
worth Rs 300 million to
Kathmandu Metropolitan City
following the visit of the foreign
minister to Beijing last year.

American dreams

In a cyber café in Kathmandu, Santosh Khatri of
Kapilbastu was filling in DV forms with his wife
Sadhana, who works at Mega Bank. Khatri, who is
trying for the first time,
accused the political
leaders of ruining the
country. “If things were
fine here, who would want
to leave their loved ones
and move to an unknown
place,” Sukriya Giri of
Bhaktapur exclaimed.

Every year, towns
across the country witness
a large number of people
lining up to apply for the
lottery. Wednesday is the
last day for submitting the
DV forms this year. Nepalis
who have completed 12th
grade are eligible to apply for the DV. Two years of
work experience in an occupation recognised by
the US Labor Department are also accepted in place
of a degree.

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Eat, bray, love

We have the eating part all sorted out this Tihar. Love is taken care of because the parties are all pretending to have intercourse. It’s the braying I’m worried about. What is the Ass going to do to help the process along? All suggestions to ass(at)nepalitimes.com.

It is the time of year when each animule has his or her day. The crows are worshipped on Crow Day on Thursday. Dog Day on Friday is actually a national holiday. Cow Day on Saturday is when guys are actually holier than on other days. But why no Ass Day? Why doesn’t this asinine country have a day set aside for us donkeys?

While we proceed to finish off the goats that somehow escaped decapitation over Dasain (see rescued goat headed to Budhanilkantha, above) it may be time to ask ourselves what would have happened to Nepal’s rankings if Transparency International had found out about the goings on at the Food Corporation. Nepal would have pipped Afghanistan to be declared Asia’s most corrupt country.

Apparently the big goofs at the Food Corruption godown at Thapathali declared 250 goats were dead on arrival, so the chyangras were written off. The high mortality rate, however, raised alarm bells and the Auditor General ordered dozers to exhume and count the ex-goats. Forensic examination at the crime scene uncovered the remains of only 25 bokas and khasis. At the rate of 15,000 nepo per goat, means someone made a cool 33.75 laks. Niiice.

And now to politics where, I am glad to report, there is nothing new to report. Everything is where it was last week, and all is hunky dory. BRB’s barbs are getting a little barbier, and PKD tried to frame his comrade by sending his name for a Nepal seminar in Delhi so his ‘Indian connection’ would be exposed. Awesome is up to his old tricks.

There is a slogan going around: “If not Ram Chandra then Ram Baran.” The president may not endorse this, but someone should tell the Baron to order his chakaridars not to close down the airport at peak hour just because he is landing or taking off. NOTAMs for VVIP movement are a vestige of our feudal past and should be abandoned.

Had been ignoring Suzie Q because she hadn’t done anything outrageous for a while. But after her limo got stopped by the Army while she was on her way to send off Ram Baron, she vented venom and scorn at the PM and the COAS. Then she went to the Reporting Club and declared that the army was getting too big for its boots and there would be a military coup unless RCP stepped down. Like Daddy like Dotter.

Remember Girija Bau in 2004 unleashed his hired goons to unleash mayhem on the streets of the capital after Kingji’s army stopped him from driving to the tarmac to board a flite to Biratnagar? The Ass’ Maruti had its windshield shattered in that riot. Well, the real reason for Suz Ma’m’s frayed temper was that she wasn’t included in the Prez’s China entourage.

Looks like after a slew of China visits, everyone and their grandmother is headed south. Going to India are ex-king G, Lion Brave and Sun Brave. Last one leaving turn off the lights.

ass(at)nepalitimes.com