Nepali politics is getting to look like this traditional annual Maghe Sakranti bull fight in Nuwakot on 15 January (left). Cynics say a country gets the leaders it deserves, and politics is a spectator sport. In addition to crushing shortages of fuel, power and food Nepalis also have to come to terms with an establishment made up of convicted murderers, kidnappers, war criminals, passport fakers, and ministers who sanction only “pre-paid” transfers and appointments. The hopelessness is turning to apathy, and even the prime minister has had enough and has taken a few days off in Dhulikhel.

The Supreme Court ruling against any more extensions of the Constituent Assembly after 31 May should have imparted a sense of urgency to politicians and lawmakers, but, alas, no. Public opinion polls show growing disillusionment with the rulers, most people don’t care about whether Nepal is federal or secular, whether we have a directly elected president or not. They want jobs, security, health and education. Politicians who can take the bull by the horns to prove they can deliver have a chance in the next elections.
NELUMA TIPPING POINT

Forming a government of national unity may be just the right opportunity to bring in clean technocrats.

The mystery of why some populations rise up to spontaneously protest, while others don’t is the subject of academic research at universities around the world. There are several PhDs waiting to be done about the high pain threshold of Nepalis. How long does a societally endures sustained and chronic hardships until it breaks? What is Nepal’s tipping point?

We mutter and shrug: no diesel, no petrol, no gas, no electricity, no cash, no jobs, no passports, no problem. There is little hope of things getting better anytime soon, and the hopelessness is aptly to apathy.

Cynics say we have the leadership we deserve. As long as the people are willing to be made up of murderers and shoplifters, war criminals and passport fakers, we don’t deserve any better. In any other country a motorcyclist who has waited four hours in the cold rain for petrol, watched government vehicles jumping the queue, and then finds the fuel has run out when he gets to the pump, would run amok and start a riot. Even the Basidya faction of the Maoists only threatens an urban uprising, it never actually seem to want to do it even though there is plenty of reason for people to rise.

Some theorists have speculated on why this is so: the legendary capacity of Nepal to tolerate hardship and suffering, our society’s self-centeredness, we wait for our society to tolerate hardship and suffering, we wait for Nepalis to tolerate hardship and suffering, we wait for. It never actually seem to want to do it even though there is plenty of reason for people to rise.

This is also why elected representatives of the people, the government and civil service are so unresponsive to the people’s needs. They habitually ignore public opinion.

For IDA Opinion Poll Report: info@ida.com.np

TIPPING POINT

For IDA Opinion Poll Report: info@ida.com.np

NEW NEPAL

Instead of promoting a government system that corresponds with its personal prejudices, it would be better if Anurag Acharya wrote columns that are based on real arguments and critical analysis. ‘New Nepal’s old school,’ #87. So what if he doesn’t like the ‘old’? Does it mean we do away with a democratic system too, because it is so? I do not understand why Nepalis are suddenly so adamantly opposed to a directly elected executive head. Hiter, Suharto, Hugo Chavez, Rajapakse. Mujahite were executive heads who were elected by the people. Do we want a similar ‘leader’ in Nepal? Do we want to waste another 20-30 years waiting for our very own Nepal Spring?

Bibek

The term ‘new Nepal’ is now a popular word in our lexicon, but does it mean precisely? Are we talking about some consumer brand here or a country which embodies a certain geography, history, people, heritage, and identity? Do we want a new territory, wipe out our history, disown our heritage and identity and replace our people? The past, present and future of a country are always a continuum: we can improve, change or add some elements but we cannot replace it with something entirely new. Or is ‘new Nepal’ a euphemism for the ‘creation through destruction’ doctrine followed by people like Shhattara and Dhalai? Like a previous reader said, if we think belonging to the 1990s (and all of Nepal’s history as some would want us to believe) was wrong and old, then for the sake of a ‘new Nepal’ we should do away with democracy too.

Ushaft

I don’t understand what all this fuss is about? Newspapers are private corporations who will publish stories that will attract advertisers and bring in maximum revenue. They are not beholden to publish the truth. They run a business and if people blindly believe what the media tells them then it is their problem. As the saying goes: ‘check your ears before running after the crow.’

Jange

OUTER RING ROAD

The Aas may have meant it as tongue-in-check but the Outer Ring Road proposal was planned to preserve the environment of the valley with the concept of regulating urban sprawl and making it less octopus-like. But some communal elements are against it as they feel that it will change the demography of the valley against the Newar population. Kathmandu as the power centre of the country will grow at an unprecedented way in any case. The Outer Ring Road for Kathmandu is a must.

Dh

DEVELOPMENT

After a long time, I got to read something positive about Nepal. ‘Development without government’, Anurag Acharya, #857. Bravo Mr. Jagadish Ghimire, your dedication and service to the country makes me proud to be a Nepali. In Nepal, the government is the problem and not a solution and I think all of us would benefit if the government empowered the people and let them do all the work.

Suman Shrestha

FONDATION

Kudos to Bonnie Ellison (‘Foundation for the future’), Brittany Searle, #587) I truly admire her efforts to introduce green buildings and use solar power to light the building. No more dark nights for the children and what a great educational tool! Hope, our policy-makers learn from Ama Ghar. What we need in Nepal today is more positive community-led activities in place of empty promises and rhetoric.

Anonymous


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"TIPPING POINT"

For IDA Opinion Poll Report: info@ida.com.np
When the first sitting of the CA declared Nepal a secular republic on 28 May 2008, it had vowed to draft a constitution to ensure an inclusive state by May 2010. We are nearing two years of the extended period, and the Supreme Court has ruled there will be no more extensions after 28 May.

The newly formed State Restructuring Committee has been given the task of proposing a viable federal structure, but its mandate is being dictated by a caucus of CA members from indigenous groups who all want their ethnic fiefdoms.

Recent public opinion polls by this newspapers and others have shown that a majority of respondents from indigenous communities themselves have misgivings about carving out provinces along ethnic lines. A poll in June 2011 by Interdisciplinary Analysts shows that the number of people who want to define their identity as ‘Nepali’ first and their ethnicity second has risen to 71 per cent.

We are trying to correct past mistakes by making an even bigger blunder on state restructuring. The way to address marginalisation and discrimination is by inclusion not by whipping up ethnic exclusion. We protect our national unity by recognising our diversity, not by fragmenting an already fractional state. By taking the path of ethnically demarcated federalism we will reinforce the same divisions in society that we have fought so hard against. Some super intellectuals see ethnic federalism as a viable and scientific move towards inclusion, but it is a case of an overdose of the wrong medicine.

Affirmative action policies are needed for the underprivileged, but such policies have to be forward looking and embrace inclusive identity, not create new, multiple barriers in society. It is no more just the Maoists, who originally brought in the ethnic debate as a mobilisation tactic during the years of war, who have been using identity politics to drive a wedge in society for divisive politics. By using identity politics to drive a wedge in society for divisive politics is short-sighted and self-destructive.
While other vehicle owners struggle to find a spot on the queue for petrol at gas stations, Vishwa Pratap Maskey drives his van past crowds. The shortage doesn’t affect him.

Maskey had bought a van to transport goods for department stores in Jawalakhel to his café in Boudha, but after watching a program on Discovery Channel which showed McDonalds using waste oil to operate its delivery vehicles, Maskey was inspired to experiment with his van. He imported an oil filter from China for Rs100,000 and used soybeans that were unfit for human consumption because of long storage to make his own bio-diesel. It worked, so he turned to experimenting with waste oil from frying doughnuts and french fries in his restaurant in Boudha to produce bio-diesel to fuel his car.

“It was a big risk. I had to invest a large amount for the oil-filter machine and there was no guarantee that I would succeed,” recalls Maskey, “but it went well, bio-diesel has saved me millions and I no longer have to worry about frequent fuel shortages.”

Maskey’s yellow van carries a “this vehicle runs on biodiesel” sign and has accumulated more than 20,000 km on the roads of Kathmandu till now.

No, Maskey’s van is not battery powered. He is one of the few Nepalis who actually runs a vehicle on bio-diesel made from plants.

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Maskey’s G-Café produces up to 40 litres of waste oil every day and this is enough to run the generator to provide electricity to his restaurant during power cuts. Maskey’s yellow van carries a “this vehicle runs on biodiesel” sign and has accumulated more than 20,000 km on the roads of Kathmandu till now.

He had hoped that after seeing his van, more Nepalis would want to also switch to bio-diesel, but Maskey is disappointed that there are few takers. “A policeman tried to confiscate my vehicle once, because it ran on fuel that he had never heard of and thought was illegal,” Maskey recalls, laughing.

Maskey says the type of bio-fuel he produces is best for NAE, DI and TDI engines for which he mixes 40 per cent diesel with 60 per cent bio-diesel. A four-cylinder 2 litre engine can run up to 10 km per litre. “If there was a centre where we could collect waste oil from hotels and restaurants throughout the valley, this could turn into a commercially viable venture and even heavy vehicles could start using biodiesel,” he says.

Currently 60 per cent of the country’s budget is spent on importing oil from India and Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) finds itself on the brink of bankruptcy. Adulteration and leakage of fuel is rampant and increased power cuts have heightened Nepal’s dependence on oil products. Although the government has made some effort to promote bio-fuel since the 1990s, Nepal still relies entirely on NOC.

Says Maskey: “Bio-fuel is not just a fashion statement for ecologists, it makes economic sense too. It is a necessity when fossil diesel is expensive or unavailable.”

As the fuel crunch hits, bio-diesel from waste cooking oil shows the way
Conflicts of disinterest
In government and private sector, we confuse governance with management

A voiding real or perceived conflicts of interest is something our politicians and businessmen find hard to practice. On the other side, when we, as consumers, come across instances of conflict of interest, in government or in the private sector, we don’t make a fuss as persistently as we should. Keeping quiet on small matters thus emboldens leaders to take more liberties to do what they wish, and their cumulative actions over time lead to a failure of governance – both in the political and the business sphere.

How then should we understand the constituencies of conflicts of interest?

Mistaking governance for management: in Nepal, this is the most common form of governance abuse. The press reports it, but nothing happens because we confuse governance with management. No sooner a new minister comes on board than he starts transferring civil servants. Like Home Minister Bijaya Kumar Gachchadak. Some even publicly promise not to transfer bureaucrats, only to break their own promise to fill the top ministerial positions with cronies.

Nobody tells the minister that his task is not to manage the ministry. Nor is it to meddle with its day-to-day affairs. His task is to govern the ministry so that it strives to meet the objectives set in various national plans and policy documents which set the directions for development for several years. But plans and policies are made when the minister thinks that he can make impulsive changes.

Private sector companies are not immune from this disease of mistaking governance for management. Look at any feuding board at a bank. The nub of the problem often boils down to board members’ imagining themselves as supermanagers, and undermining the importance of salaried professional staff to interfere into the daily activities of the bank. Micro-managed institutions are rarely well-governed.

Treating institution as personal fiefdom: no minister thinks of himself as the steward of public trust about his ministry. Given the state of Nepali politics, wherein the same incompetent politician gets elected and selected no matter how many times elections are held, the minister does not fear voter backlash. He fears others from his party usurping power from his hands.

He thus has little incentive to do things that his voters appreciate. Instead he uses his stint to amass a war-chest which can be used to win the next election, whenever that will be. He thus treats the ministry as his personal piggy-bank, from which he will extract as much money as possible.

Private companies fare no better, though, in the banking sector, Nepal Rastra Bank’s regulations are making it harder for bank boards to treat their institutions as extensions of their personal offices. Still, the tales of board members abusing their institutions’ assets for their personal benefits are boringly numerous.

What, then, is the antidote? Constant vigilance and increased competition. Increasing civil society’s vigilance in the form of investigative press reports, lawsuits and shareholder activism keep the errant politicians and the businessmen on their toes. To a large extent, it is already happening in the political sphere: voters who know that most politicians they elected in April 2008 to draft the constitution have let them down. But as of now, they do not have any credible democratic alternatives to those that they elected.

With regard to governance of private sector companies, regulations can only go so far, and there have been cases of regulators held captive by the interests of the entities under regulation. Making it easier to both open up companies and allow foreign companies to set up offices in Nepal is likely to lead to greater competition, which, in turn, is likely to reduce conflict of interest issues in Nepali companies.
Everyone makes ‘em, most people break ‘em, others just fake ‘em. This riddle has limited validity, because few look back to take stock after the novelty of the new year wears off. Giving up vices and embracing virtues is all that new year resolutions are about; most of us fail epically.

But we’d be forgiven for believing the more successful among us actually stick to their 12-month plans, being made of somewhat sterner stuff. So imagine, if you will, the end-of-year celebrations at Paradanda. Under the avuncular visages of past despots, our dear leaders are clinking whisky glasses between mouthfuls of succulent sekwa, toasting each other with rare abandon amidst a haze of smoke. Then Dahal pops the question:

Ani, what are your resolutions for this year, Baidya-ji?

Baidya (with a cheeky grin): Um…give up violence?

(Uproarious laughter, loudest from the hard-drinks coterie, including Dahal.)

Dahal (giggling): Any others?

Baidya (more soberly):
1. Oppose any kind of accommodation with capitalist lackeys and reactionaries.
2. Assume mantle of revolutionary leader.
3. Disrupt elections.
4. Seize absolute power!

(Baburam Bhattarai and the soft-drinks coterie look nervous, Dahal discomfited. But compelled by the historical inevitability of New Year resolutions, he turns to BB, beaming)

Baburam-ji?

BB (metronomically):
1. Complete army integration, decide on model for federalism, promulgate constitution.
2. Assume mantle of can-do leader.
3. Win by a landslide in elections.
4. Seize absolute power!

(Silence, then cheers. Baidya looks miffed, and demands of Dahal)

And you, Prachanda ji? What do you resolve?

Dahal (thoughtfully): I propose a fusion resolution.

1. Oppose any kind of accommodation, while toadying to capitalist lackeys, reactionaries, and progressives.
2. Retain mantle of revolutionary, can-do leader.
3. Win by a landslide in disrupted elections.
4. Seize absolute power!

(Cheers, jeers, and much clinking of glasses follows, late into the night.)

We must leave our jolly comrades for now, but consider this. How would you manage if each of your resolutions was challenged by equally powerful counter-resolutions, or simply undermined by one of the seven deadly sins? Say you want to give up smoking. But come Friday night you can’t resist puffing in the cancer because the drag is irresistible, goes so well with those equally forbidden gulps of whisky and crunches of sukuti, and everybody else is doing it so why can’t you?

Of course, private resolutions like avoiding cancer or heart disease are right for you, it’s the execution that’s troublesome. More complex decisions – on politics, economy, career, society – prove to be proper dilemmas. In these cases, crowd-pleasing fusion à la Dahal may work to your advantage.

As the incremental progress of our much-maligned peace process suggests, the middle road may be the one most likely to get you where you’re going. So follow, if you can, the example of our leaders, be prepared to compromise – at least a little – on those noble intentions. That way you may achieve some part of them rather than fail completely, and move forward rather than round and round in circles, ending where you started at the beginning of each new year.

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After a winning year and a boost in regional rankings for the national team, Nepali fans were looking forward to more breathtaking football action in 2012. But those hopes were dashed.

Just two days into the new year Nepali football turned into a footbrawl. Several players were suspended or banned for physically assaulting opponents and referees, and disobeying match officials in the on-going A and B division league matches.

The National A Division League match between Manang Marsyangdi and New Road Team (NRT) on 2 January got increasingly hostile as the game entered injury time with NRT leading by one goal. Both teams resorted to fist fights soon after Manang’s Nirajan Khadka deliberately pushed NRT’s Rajan Adhikari. Sachin Amatya issued red cards to five players, but the brawl continued and riot police had to be called in.

Khadka was lucky to get away with just a yellow card. But due to the severity of the offence, Vijay Gurung and Sujal Shrestha from Manang and Laxman Ruchal, Asimjung Karki and Raghu Prajapati from NRT were handed a three-match ban.

Such violence and indiscipline has tarnished the reputation of clubs and has hurt them because of the absence of their best players. Since Pokhara, NRT has not won a single game. On 4 January, it lost against a new team, Mitramin, and again to Police Club on 6 January and Himalayan Sherpa. Previous title holder and tournament favourite Manang Marsyangdi, has also fared poorly and has slid down the point tables.

In a similar incident on 25 December, players of Gyan Bhairab Youth Club manhandled referee Sudish Pandey during the Martyr’s Memorial B- Division League at the Police football ground in Maharajgunj. Sudesh Giri was suspended for two years while his teammates Sunil Bhandari, Bharat Gurung, Kuldip Karki and Deepak Karki received one year suspensions. For the first time in Nepal’s football history a Division B club was demoted and asked to pay Rs 75,000 penalty. Coach Amik KC, Team Manager Kishor Ranjit and officials Niraj Thapa and Bishwas Thapa will also face charges.

Nepal’s U-16 team seems to be quickly picking up the bad habits of their seniors. During a SAFF U-16 Championship match against Bangladesh on 4 January, Rangrihang Rai pushed Mohammed Sawir into the ground after the Bangladeshi player had tackled Vishwas Shrestha. Although referee Ahmed Aslam from Maldives was hesitant to issue a red card to Rai in front of a full capacity home crowd, the fans showed their disapproval by throwing water bottles at the players.

ANFA Football Development Director, Sanjeev Mishra sees a need for strict regulations: “When there are no serious repercussions it is easy for players to attack opponents and match officials.” Although the career of many big named players are on the line, the fans and ANFA are the biggest losers.

Hari Khadka one of the most effective Nepali strikers, reminds players that in order to succeed on the field, they must learn to control their aggression and respect their opponents: “Football is a naturally aggressive game and the ability to control aggression is the most important skill for any player.”
Cy& 7: Identity, three photography installations: Navarasa, Ink’d and The Tales of Dirty Feet by talented photographers. 9:30 am to 5pm, 6 January to 15 February, Galleria CUC, Deeya Complex, Maharajgunj

Ultimate Digital Photography Workshop, learn everything about photography. Fees Rs 5000. 6 am to 9.30 am, 15 to 24 January, The Image Park (Opposite of Peanuts), New Road, 844124341, 8441497639

Event: Pranayama Power Yoga, Pranayama brings a month-long yoga session for a healthy start to the new year. Rs 350 per class, starting from 2 January. 7am to 8pm, 1805, Kantipur, info@pranayama-yoga.com

Artistic emotions

Opening on 22 January, Sunday at 4.30 pm, Emotions in Motion is a collection of paintings by Govinda Prasad Sah that takes viewers on a journey through a spectrum of emotions. Featured at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, the exhibition will be inaugurated by John Tuckett, the British Ambassador to Nepal.

Born in the terai region, Sah was interested in various art forms from an early age. He trained under a number of Newari instructors at Kathmandu College of Fine arts and his ambitious work earned him the nicknames ‘Lion Heart’ and ‘Azad’. After graduating from Tribhuvan University, he went on to earn his Masters degree from the Wimbledon University, he went on to earn his Masters degree from the Wimbledon

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Getaways

Amtrip Adventures, be a part of the Amtrip Bungy or Swing Jump Event. Rs 3700 per person for one day or Rs 4500 per person for an overnight stay, valid until the end of January. Amtrip, Narayani, 4444990, 4444620, www.amtrip.com.np

Fullbar Resort, enjoy the scenic view as you pamper yourself with tennis, golf, drinks and dinners. Rs 6000 per person for 2 nights and 3 days. Pashupati, 4461618, 4462348, resv@fulbari.com.np, sales@fulbari.com.np

Dwarika’s Pristine region offers new hope to revive trekking in 2012

Apa and his team will travel from Kangchenjunga to Api-Saipal carrying a national flag handed to them by President Ram Baran Yadav at his office on 12 January in Kathmandu. He is accompanied by twice Everest summiteer Dawa Steven Sherpa, Saurav Chakal and Sanir Jung Thapa on the 1,700 km and 120 days trek across 20 districts of Nepal.

The trek has been organised by Himalyan Climate Initiative in coordination with the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, with the support from DFID, British Council, SNV, NTB, TAAAN and other Great Himalayan Trail Development Program partners, to draw attention to the impact of climate change in the Himalaya and promote the GHT as a new trekking product.

Dawa Sherpa posted this on Facebook. “We started walking today. We have a few aches and pains as we adjust to carrying 50 kilo packs on our backs. It’s beautiful out here and the people are super friendly. People have been coming up to us on the trail and wishing us well. The local radio stations and press have been very generous to us in spreading the word. Apa Debu truly is a celebrity.”

To follow the Climate Smart Celebrity Trek on Facebook: HIC Climate Smart Trek www.nepaltimes.com

Unleashing Kangchenjunga, #585

Pristine region offers new hope to revive trekking in 2012

The long march, #541

Five months, hundreds of mountains, seventeen hundred kilometres Following the Karnali, #531

Nepal’s silver lining runs the length of the country To follow the Climate Smart Celebrity Trek on Facebook:

GREAT HIMALAYAN TRAIL

W h at makes Dwarika’s latest edacious undertaking distinct from other Japanese restaurants in Kathmandu is showmanship. Like the jo-ba-kyu of Kabuki theatre, Mako’s manager Mako san presents a five-act production in an intimate setting that savors of how the Japanese do fine dining.

In harmony with Dwarika’s blend of traditional acccents and modern luxuries, Mako’s is well-designed and carved from wood: bamboo staves aloft complement a carved from wood: bamboo staves aloft complement a

Japanese bill of fare. The California Roll has gained popularity even in Japan, securing its entry in the standard Japanese bill of fare. The dainty pinches dished with

complements of a wet towel and a warm cup of green tea so gingerly poured, an amuse-bouche of sautéed aubergine strewn in a soy, ginger, and fish stock reduction serves an auspicious introduction. A cloudy orb of miso, fermented soybeans and barley, sits undisturbed at the bottom of a soup bowl only then to be stirred and sipped and ends the first course.

Kyu (Denouement). In

Dwarika’s joins a list of exceptional additions to Kathmandu’s table, highly priced, but nonetheless deserving of an encore. The much anticipated Great Himalayan Trail- Climate Smart Celebrity Trek was flagged off from Taplejung in eastern Nepal on Tuesday, and is led by Apa Sherpa who has scaled Mt Everest 21 times. Apa and his team will travel from Kangchenjunga to Api-Saipal carrying a national flag handed to them by President Ram Baran Yadav at his office on 12 January in Kathmandu. He is accompanied by twice Everest summiteer Dawa Steven Sherpa, Saurav Chakal and Sanir Jung Thapa on the 1,700 km and 120 days trek across 20 districts of Nepal.

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Dawa Sherpa posted this on Facebook. “We started walking today. We have a few aches and pains as we adjust to carrying 50 kilo packs on our backs. It’s beautiful out here and the people are super friendly. People have been coming up to us on the trail and wishing us well. The local radio stations and press have been very generous to us in spreading the word. Apa Debu truly is a celebrity.”

To follow the Climate Smart Celebrity Trek on Facebook:

HIC Climate Smart Trek www.nepaltimes.com

Unleashing Kangchenjunga, #585

Pristine region offers new hope to revive trekking in 2012

The long march, #541

Five months, hundreds of mountains, seventeen hundred kilometres Following the Karnali, #531

Nepal’s silver lining runs the length of the country

Mako’s

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No history of trauma or any dull ache in his right heel, he walked around. There was a short period of time when he typically feel better for a heel even as he was operating experiencing pain in his right heel. Ram Bahadur was a surgeon that runs from the heel and fascia is a band of tissue in the picture. The plantar fasciitis is a common problem of pain (inflammation) and (sole) Fasciitis hat on earth is Plantar can in pain without any therapy. Improve within a year even on patients. Athletes who are constantly pounding their feet on a hard surface are also liable to suffer from plantar fasciitis. Obese people and people above Obese people will need to temporary period of time. Athletes with plantar fasciitis may need to modify their activity and opt for relative rest for a temporary period of time. Obese people will need to lose weight. Not walking bare feet and using shoes with good arch support and cushioned heels may help. Massaging and stretching the fascia in the morning, for example, by rolling the foot over a can may be beneficial. Besides taking ordinary pain medicines, using ice on the heel pad after exercise or just soaking the feet in warm water can provide temporary relief. Some doctors will inject steroids orial into the fascia, but this is more of a drastic measure for pain control. In most instances the pain will improve within a year even without any therapy. A story will help illustrate the pitfall of crowd-pleasers by managing to delight and shock, while the film is made to appeal to a large audience it sidesteps the general vs south, race against race. Differences. No的男人 are that tend to the needs of the uppity white Southern upper-class. A film with such a description could easily be a feel-good, irritating candy-like horror on right and wrong, north vs south, race and gender and, of course, differences. While the film, adapted from a novel by Kathryn Stockett, is made to appeal to a large audience it sidesteps the general pitfalls of pleasers by managing to delight and shock, therefore resonating in our minds till much after. Here in Nepal, the film is a gentle reminder of the horrors that people can inflict upon each other even in times of peace, women against women, race against race. Starkly turning the dialogue, the humour and sensitivity that runs throughout the story, and the spectacular existable cast. We have Emma Stone as Skeeter Phelan, the college graduate intent on getting her name as a journalist by recounting the stories of Abilene Clark (played by the soulful, thoughtful Viola Davis), Minny Jackson (a feisty Octavia Spencer), and her nun Constantine Jefferson (acted with warmth and grace by Cicely Tyson) among others. Skeeter could so easily have been a paradigm of the annoying Tintin-like journalist focused only on getting “the story” but her humour and her sass make her much more. A tad awkward, unfortunately a bit too brainy, and supposedly not very pretty. In any case like Emma Stone’s Skeeter learns to give as good as she gets from her impossibly catty debutante peer group as she slowly starts to realize that being different, and independent, in the deep South in the 1960s also means one to be that much braver to stand up for one’s beliefs. At that time, being black and doing the wrong thing could still get you lynched, being white and standing up for the civil rights movement could get you shot. It is impossible to describe here all the wonderful stories and characters within this rich and delightful film. Its power lies in its fearless portrayal of the horrors and indignities that these stoic black women suffered as they raised the children of white families (most of whom go on to become hortid replicas of their parents), and its ability to bring to life an assortment of fully rounded characters that braved their way through such malice and indignities, great and small, with humour, with decency and with spirit. This is a story about the strength of women. However, it does not mean that it is a film only for women. Any good story ought to be able to transcend gender, class and race. “The Help” is such a story. Although it was made in a supposedly post-feminist, post-racial Occidental world, even in the West the memory of racism and the presence of sexism in near and painful enough that it ought to be memorialised still.
Organic growth, #440

Paatlekhet, 12 kms down the mountain from Dhulikhel, seems like just another scenic village you pass while speeding down the Arniko Highway.

Few stop here. But this is where Americans Judith Chase and her husband Jim have made their home, practicing and promoting a model of sustainable agriculture in their small but busy organic farm. There are more than 1,000 species of vegetables, fruits, berries and fodder here, all grown without using chemical fertilisers or pesticides.

The farm has a strict policy against using hybrid and GMOs and encourages use of Nepali open pollinated seeds. Even with less input the yield is high and their fresh produces are a hit in the organic markets of Kathmandu where they are bought in good price by expats and now an increasingly local clientele. But growing and selling organic products are only a part of what they do at their farm called “Everything Organic”.

The farm serves as a school to train Nepali farmers on the methods of bio-intensive agriculture based on deep-digging, use of compost and insect control through diverse cropping patterns and botanical sprays. “We teach farmers right from the basics, impart them the skills, and when they start cultivation, help them find market for it,” Judith says, “the goal is to develop a community of organic farmers with a cooperative marketing system.”

Judith is hopeful because a similar initiative she started in Thimi in the 1980s trained 200 local women many of whom are still growing organic vegetables. At Paatlekhet, she hopes to replicate the project on a larger scale. “There is no reason why Nepali farmers have to be poor or have to eat chemical-laced food,” says Judith, who is now looking to promote high value nuts and fruit trees among Nepali farmers.

On a clear Friday morning last week, a group of women from a nearby village were taking notes as Prem Lama, a pioneer organic farmer, was explaining the benefits of growing walnuts. Prem runs a very successful organic farm that supplies to hotels, restaurants and department stores in Kathmandu. Some of his salads and fruits are exported to Singapore.

“It is only a matter of knowing which crop grows well in which climate and are profitable,” says Lama who makes it to Paatlekhet to share his ideas with farmers every week. These women are on a month long residential training where they learn about the benefits of organic farming, master the techniques of double digging and prepare compost and herbicides from locally available materials.

By the end of the intensive course which the farm offers for free, the women are sent not just with the know-how to grow organic but a market for what they produce. A shop in Dhulikhel serves as the outlet for the freshly produced vegetables by local women. With more production, the nursery hopes the prices will go down and people would be more interested in purchasing organic products.

Nanumaya Tamang is a trainee, and recounts how using excessive chemical fertiliser had ruined her soil. “I could not break the ground with my axe. I have stopped using chemicals since then but the soil is still hard.”

Judith says there is a lot to be learned from local farmers and has started an initiative to save seeds by involving women. She says: “These seeds are well adapted to local soil and climate, and are better than imported hybrids. Why spend money on expensive imported seeds when we have better options in Nepal?”

www.everythingorganicnursery.com

RUBEENA MAHATO in KAVRE

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Saturday 14 January, the people of Kathmandu woke up to the strange sight of road dividers being removed, the streets being hosed down and the sidewalk swept clean. It was the unannounced flying visit of the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao who arrived at noon and left by 4PM.

Most people were happy with a cleaner city, but there were others who were at the wrong place at the wrong time. Ratna Tripathi, 71, from Kavre was visiting relatives in Baneswor when he was detained for half an hour along with dozens of commuters. "I just want to cross the street," he kept telling the police.

People were chased back from sidewalks into inner alleys. Even those watching from shops along the streets were asked to go inside. "Get him, kick him if he does not listen," a police sub-inspector shouted to his juniors.

Hundreds of police and army were deployed along Bauddha, Swayambhu and Ekanta Kuna, areas with substantial Tibetan populations. Ngawang Lakpa Sherpa (picture above), a monk from Lamidanda, was detained in Gaushala while trying to get to the airport to catch a flight home to meet his parents. The police searched his robes and luggage, but refused to let him go. Prem Lama, who was riding with Ngawang to the airport was also detained. Ngawang was bundled off to Gaushala police station and missed his flight.

"I am a citizen of this country and this is how I get treated, just because I am wearing a robe," Nawang told Nepali Times. Over 200 monks, pilgrims and even tourists with Chinese passports were detained because police suspected they may be planning an anti-Chinese demonstration. A vaguely "Tibetan look" was enough to get one arrested on the streets. A Vietnamese monk was arrested in Gaushala.

Near Pashupati, a bus carrying Indian tourists from Himachal Pradesh was stopped and taken to Gaushala police station. Dolma Negi, a member of the tour group, was questioned repeatedly about the purpose of her visit just because she had a Tibetan-sounding name. She kept saying she was a tourist like everybody else.

If the debate over whether to have a presidential or prime ministerial system is so polarizing, imagine what it will be like if we ever have a French model constitution. With the 31 May un-extendable deadline for the CA looming, the parties seem to be stuck over what kind of state structure and governance we should have in the new constitution.

While the Nepali Congress and the UML have teamed up with 16 smaller parties in favor of an 'improved' parliamentary system, the Maoists have patched up their internal rifts to vigorously push for a directly-elected executive president.

The Madhesi parties have not come out openly in favor of a directly-elected executive, which means they may have some reservations about the system. But as long as they are in the government, it is unlikely they will support the parliamentary system, either.

As long as the parties are not talking about meeting half-way, wasting time in trying to impose their line on the other is going to mean further delays. In an effort to pressurise one another, the parties are opening side fronts. The Maoists have refused to budge on integration of their fighters, while the NC is stalling CA proceedings over the government's decision to legalise decisions taken by Maoist 'people's government' during the years of conflict. The Madhesi Front is threatening to bring down the government over the stalled four-point deal that helped form the coalition.
Nepal may have got record number of visitors during Nepal Tourism Year 2011, but the quality of their experience in general has suffered from harassments by trolls, theft and muggings. Nepalis have been exhorted to treat tourists like “gods”, but the reality seems to be far from it. A random sampling of visitors to Nepal shows that although most tourists admire the country and the people and say they enjoyed their stay, many were put off by the garbage, pollution, cheating and harassment.

The total visitors to Nepal last year was 735,932, less than the targeted 1 million, but a 22 per cent jump from 2010. The police said they reported 307 cases of theft of tourists in one year, but admit many cases of harassment and theft go unreported.

American student Calin Kearns was almost mugged outside Boudha recently, but managed to fend off her attackers with a pocket knife. “Perhaps my attacker also realised that I was twice his size and he ran off without looking back,” Kearns told us.

Sexual harassment of both the verbal or physical kinds plague female tourists. Australian Morgaine van Wingerden says her worst experience was being groped in a crowded market one morning. “I couldn’t tell who did it,” she says, “there seems to be a notion that tourists are available or that they have lots of money to spend.”

The Tourist Police, however, say that they only had one reported case of sexual harassment last year. Inspector Chini Maya Tamang of the Tourist Police says most of the complaints are thefts, and her job is to liaise between the victim and the local police regarding paperwork for insurance claims. “We treat both tourists and civilian cases with the same legalities in cases of sexual harassment and cases are handed over to the local police if investigation is needed,” said Tamang.

Although embassy websites and tourism guidebooks warn visitors about being aware of the situation, visitors say their most important source of information are chat sites and blogging sites where individual trekkers and tourists post their personal experiences.

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Hi and bye

Some visits are tediously long, and don’t yield results. The Chinese premier’s visit this week has proved to be one of the most fruitful ones, although it lasted only for four hours. There is a story by the close neighbour who has always stood by Nepal without interfering in its internal affairs which is very special, and the agreements signed between the two countries for cooperation on different areas have endured. This visit was no exception.

The visit came as a surprise for many, but that was because it was a precautionary step by the government to ensure the visit was not called off for the same reasons it was previously. The good news is, the visit has promoted Nepal’s image internationally and concerns about Nepal’s ability to host high profile visits, if any, have been removed. Besides, the misconception that Nepal has become a playground for anti-Chinese activities have also been cleared. Most importantly, the visit has earned us Beijing’s goodwill for the ongoing peace process and constitution drafting.

There is no point wasting time over what we did not achieve, but to appreciate the goodwill shown by the Chinese to arrange for the visit on such short notice. This can be the beginning of Nepal’s diplomatic rise and instead of being over-critical we should prepare for a historic visit by another neighbouring head of the government, the Indian Prime Minister in the near future.

Editorial in Naya Patrika, 15 January

The visit by Chinese premier Wen Jiabao has taken Nepal-China friendship to a new level. Wen and his team spent four hours in Kathmandu during which they signed over a dozen important agreements with Nepal on different areas of social, economic and cultural cooperation.

The visit was shelved for a while and there is little doubt, directly or indirectly, the immaturity displayed by the Nepali side was at fault. But the government rebounded and through its own initiative, arranged the visit on a short notice. Besides the increase in Chinese aid to Nepal, the visit by the government head of a global superpower has boosted Nepal’s international image. So, although a short one, the visit will prove to become a milestone in bilateral relations.

Editorial in Kantipur, 15 January

The Chinese Premier might have spent only four hours in Kathmandu but the length of his stay did not take away the importance of the message that it left behind. This was the first visit by a Chinese PM in a decade and it should have been marked by a national celebration. The secrecy surrounding the visit put off many, and some in diplomatic circles even questioned the importance of the visit. Chinese side officially declared it a state visit, thus dousing such speculations.

The political exchanges and agreements during the short trip are more noteworthy than the circumstance in which the visit took place. As soon as he landed, Wen and his team went directly to Singha Darbar where the two countries signed a dozen agreements. As per the agreement, Nepal will receive Rs 9.75 billion rupees in Chinese assistance, and Rs 1.6 billion rupees additional funds for the peace process. More than financial support itself, it is the political significance that explains the Chinese goodwill towards Nepal.

Editorial in Ghatana Ra Bichar, 18 January

Our cynical nationalists who like to play India off against China must have learnt a lesson from Wen Jiabao’s statement: “Nepal needs to deepen its friendship with India.” India is not just our neighbour, but the open border has enabled exchange of culture and traditions. Nepali daughters have been married to our Indian neighbours and their daughters have made homes here too. It is not a relationship that can be terminated at anyone’s whim. And yet, there are people who think they can benefit by forcing India and China to fight a proxy war over us. This does not seem to affect India much because it is preoccupied with its economy and upgrading its international status. China understands this and that is why Wen told Nepal leaders to sort things out with India. If China itself wants good relations with India, why do we want them to fight over us? It is clear that using the ‘China card’ to threaten India no longer works. In fact Nepal’s strategic location means we can benefit from greater cooperation between our two neighbours.

Editorial in Nagarik, 15 January

Despite a tight schedule, the Chinese premier took out time to meet all the major political stakeholders including leaders of the parties in opposition, during his short stay. Apart from giving continuity to regular support in Nepal’s development, China committed to provide Rs 1.6 billion rupees in budgetary aid for the peace process. But more than anything else, it is the Chinese goodwill gesture that has won them affection from Nepalis. It is unfortunate that the immature diplomacy shown by Nepal’s government not only delayed the visit, but the Nepali people could not even welcome the leader of a neighbouring country with flags and flowers on the streets of Kathmandu. Although both the foreign and home ministers visited Beijing to assure the Chinese about the security situation, China was still wary about anti-Chinese demonstrations. This is the reason why the visit was kept a secret until the last hour. Nepal has been China’s friend in need and barring a few diplomatic glitches, the relationship has stayed cordial and warm. When the world was against China, Nepal was among the few countries that supported the Chinese at the UN. The Chinese understand Nepal’s strategic limitations and international human rights commitments on Tibetan refugees issue, but the government must do more to ensure its turf is not used against its neighbour.

Quote of the Week

Nepal must continue its cordial relations with India. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during his recent visit to Nepal.

Nepal should strengthen relations with China. DPM Bijay Gachhadar quoting Indian Prime Minister Mannohan Singh on Wednesday.
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Who, What, Where, Wen?

That seems to have been the plan all along: string us along with the fuel shortage for nearly two months until the lines got longer and longer and the people got more and more desperate, and just before they started setting fire to petrol stations, raise prices, allow boarders to make a killing, let supply go back to normal so customers like us have a sigh of relief. Then the ruling party gets its own student win to organise some ‘controlled protests’ so the anger on the streets doesn’t get out of hand. Brilliant, it works every time.

Meanwhile, Chairman Dazzling has found the Pistachio Palace a security risk because of the narrow lanes leading up to the Naya Bazar residence, and has moved to a better appointed villa in Lazimpat. Now, neighbours won’t be able to ravesdrop on him channel surfing to watch him pass out on a sofa with his flagrante by local paparazzi. Ever since he was caught in the act, Chairman Sonny Boy has been compared to another important scion, clown prince Paras. But Dear Leader now wants to earn his own laurels. So, off he goes to climb Mt Everest this spring in the company of fellow-comrades. The idea is to trek all the way from Lumbini to Base Camp and then stick the hammer-sickle-carabiner banner on the summit. Both father and son seem to have this obsession

with Lumibini and a film epic called Red Star over Everest.

Time to have a dress code and etiquette lessons for our leaders, especially when they meet foreign dignitaries in winter:

1. Don’t give imported gladioli bouquets to visiting heads of state, especially if they are coming for only five hours.
2. Mufflers that cover head, ears and back of neck are definitely out.
3. So are turtlenecks inside jackets.
4. Whatever you do, don’t bad mouth your political rivals in front of the leader of a foreign country. Luckily Wen Jaibao’s interpreter couldn’t understand Fussil mumbling in his heard about the untrustworthy Maoists, so we were saved a major national humiliation:

- Newly appointed ambassadors, including Maobaddie political appointees, may also need a briefing before they set off to become roving national embarrassments and plebipotentiaries.

Just to recap, let’s make a three-point summary of the Wen’s visit to Nepal and Gachj’s visit to Delhi:

1. China gave us money to pay the Indians to import petroleum.
2. China told us to stop whining, and sort things out with India.
3. India told us to stop whining, and sort things out with China.

Homely Minister Bijay Babu followed Gomudee Wen’s instructions by the letter and promptly air-dashed to Delhi. On Wednesday he met PM MMS who told him: “What are you irritating the Chinese. Grow up?” (Or words to that effect). So Gachj invited him to visit Nepal for five hours, too. Wonder if the Injun Army knows it is dealing with a red sandalwood wholesaler who plays a crucial role in the decimation of south India’s forests by facilitating the transit of the contraband timber through Nepal to China. (Speaking of which, we hear Gachj Jr was pretty openly doing his collection rounds when he accompanied Dad to Beijing.) This must be what our government meant when we said we want to profit from our geostrategic location between India and China.

Firanghee Minister Kaji Naran Kamred alyf got the cabinet to endorse his plan to seek a spondilitis operation in Hokkaido for Rs2.5 million, and since most other cabinet members have skeletons in their own closets, no one dared ask him why the operation couldn’t be performed in Nepal itself since we have world class surgeons like Dr Devkota and Dr Bankota here. But get this, our tax payers are not just footing the bill for Kaji’s operation, we have world class surgeons like Dr Devkota and Dr Bankota here. But get this, our tax payers are not just footing the bill for Kaji’s operation, we are also paying for the ticket of his masseuse.

Yes, the same one who accompanied the minister to New York and the SAARC Summit.

Meanwhile, Awesome, Jr who fills in as computer assistant, bodyguard, and general purposes gopher seems to be bored silly in Daddy’s shadow. Ever since he was caught in flagrante by local paparazzi passed out on a sofa with his fly open in a Dhulikhel hotel last year, Comrade Sonny Boy has been compared to another important scion, clown prince Paras. But Dear Leader now wants to earn his own laurels. So, off he goes to climb Mt Everest this spring in the company of fellow-comrades. The idea is to trek all the way from Lumbini to Base Camp and then stick the hammer-sickle-carabiner banner on the summit. Both father and son seem to have this obsession