The peace and constitution process has ground to a halt, mainly because of a disputed provision in the new constitution about whether or not Nepal should have a presidential or parliamentary system of government. Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has not tried to hide the fact that he seeks to become the executive president. When the NC and UML objected, Dahal did not just stall negotiations, he went back on previous commitments agreed to in the sub-committee he himself heads.

The political parties all share the blame for obstructing progress, but by far the greatest responsibility for the current deadlock goes to the Maoist party, and particularly its chairman. The internal rift within the party has been a useful bargaining tool for Dahal in negotiations with the opposition, but he has now played this card once too often. Neither the NC or UML should have any problems with a presidential system, there are plenty of examples where it has worked. There are also places where it has been a disaster. The real issue is that the executive should be accountable, should have renounced violence and proven a commitment to democratic politics. The others are reluctant to trust a party that has often shifted the goal posts, keeps threatening violent state capture, or plunders the state coffers. Chairman Dahal is both the problem and the solution to this stalemate.

Faith in healing

Faith healing complements modern life

Reflecting on our past

Editorial

One step forward, two steps back

The peace and constitution process has ground to a halt, mainly because of a disputed provision in the new constitution about whether or not Nepal should have a presidential or parliamentary system of government. Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has not tried to hide the fact that he seeks to become the executive president. When the NC and UML objected, Dahal did not just stall negotiations, he went back on previous commitments agreed to in the sub-committee he himself heads.

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When the first month of Baburam Bhattarai taking office last November, there was dramatic progress on peace and constitution. Hopes were raised that this time, politicians were committed to move ahead. Three months later, the process is stuck again. The blame game has reached a crescendo, and we are lost in a tangle of distrust and dispute between and within parties.

The peace process got a boost with the agreement on the numbers and modalities for integration and re habilitation of Maoist fighters. A State Restructuring Commission was formed, and although packed with political appointees, it was a step forward. The Dispute Resolution Sub-committee, headed by Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, rapidly removed most of the 200 contentious issues in the new constitution. It finally looked like this Constituent Assembly would be able to meet its final deadline by 28 May.

Now, the whole process has ground to a halt. The political parties all have to take a share of the blame for obstructing progress, for putting their personal and parliametrical interests above the national need for closure, and for the colossal opportunity cost of the prolonged transition on governance, the economy and delayed development.

But by far the greatest responsibility for the current deadlock goes to the Maoist party, and particularly its chairman. Dahal’s inability and unwillingness to stand up to the hardliners within his party has made him go back on most of the progress cited above. In fact, it looks like he is in a full transition on governance, the economy and delayed development.

Parties all have to take a share of the blame for obstructing progress, this Constituent Assembly would be able to meet its final deadline by 28 May.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal is both the problem and the solution to the deadlocked peace and constitution process

but by going back on what had already been agreed to in the sub-committees he himself heads. This is a classic case of the one step forward and two steps back strategy that the Maoist party has practiced since 2006.

Neither the NC or UML should have any problems with a presidential system, there are plenty of examples where it has worked. The problem is that the directly-elected president provision in the constitution is being put forward to fulfill the personal ambition of one man, and not because of its suitability for the country.

As we have argued in this page before, there are compelling arguments for all three governance systems proposed. There are examples of executive presidential systems that have succeeded spectacularly, and in just as many countries where they have failed miserably. The same goes for the parliamentary system. The real issue here is the executive should be accountable, and should not have an opportunity to become a dictator. Democracy has been derailed once too often by demagogues who used the electoral process to gain power. I don’t agree with this.

By the time we find out whether or not Dear Leader Dahal is desirable, it will be too late.

Do we trust with a powerful executive president a party that hasn’t yet publicly adjudged violence, still believes in state capture through rebellion, wants to turn Nepal into a ‘people’s republic’, wants mandatory military training for all citizens, and in government has treated the national treasury as its party war chest?

The person who desperately seeks the mantle of president has time and again shown through wildly contradictory statements that he can’t be trusted. He has been on camera boasting about how he lied and misled the international community. Foreign governments are wary of him, he has issued open threats to the media, [Dahal] shown himself to be manipulative and venal. And that’s not just us saying it, disillusioned revolutionaries within his own party use these arguments.

It has become de rigueur for puritans to tar all parties with the same brush, to spread the blame for the delayed peace and constitution process, and place all political parties equally. It’s time to call a spade a spade and pinpoint the obstruction.

Chairman Dahal has a great opportunity to rebuild trust by delivering on past promises, publicly renouncing violent rebellion, and showing statesmanship. Dahal is both the problem and the solution.
Is it just us who are confused by the sight of fraternal student organisations of all three main parties uniting to spread mayhem on the streets, while their parent parties hold the nation hostage through divisive politics? Even more ironic: one of those unions protesting the fuel price hikes belongs to the Maoist party, which leads the coalition government that raised the prices.

This week youth and student wings of various parties took to the streets across the country, picketing against the fuel price rise and inflation. The 13 student and youth factions of the major parties, including the Maoists, shut down Kathmandu valley on Wednesday. Staged protests like these, act as safety valves so frustrated youngsters can vent their anger through random tyre burning and windshield shattering. Street protests and hooliganism release the pressure of social discontent.

However, to look at the protests as spontaneous public reaction to inflation misses the point. There are larger issues that affect the students and youth of this country than rocketing fuel prices. One thousand young Nepali men and women leave the country every day for lack of employment opportunities. Private education is unaffordable for most and public education lacks quality. While the nation is reeling under 18 hours of power cuts a day in certain areas, efforts to revive the economy have become victims of bad politics.

If the country had strict legal enforcement, the corrupt petroleum mafia would not have been able to create an artificial shortage of LPG and other petroleum products for the past two months. If we had invested in public transportation and made a timely switch to renewable energy sources that are in abundance, we would not have ended up with an anemic economy running on expensive fossil fuel. Petroleum deposits are running out globally, diesel and petrol are going to be scarcer and more expensive, and we have no long-term plan to deal with this.

The rise in fuel prices has hit the students, no doubt, but they are not alone. It is unreasonable to demand subsidy for students without actually identifying what category of students are the needy, and without proper mechanism to ensure the subsidy is not misused. Providing a subsidy for a section of the population on goods whose price in the international market fluctuates every week is unsustainable and irrational in the long run. It affects the development expenditure and compromises on drinking water, health and education projects for the remote areas.

Even before the protests intensified, government was already giving into protesters’ demands and said it was willing to reconsider the decision if other parties support. Obviously, Baburam Bhattarai does not want to sign the bankruptcy papers alone. So there is little surprise that the government relented when it finally did.

It’s also quite apparent that the current protests have more to do with forthcoming student union elections than anything else. All student unions feel they will lose out in the race if they don’t take part in these protests. It is absurd that the youth groups have united while their parent parties are at each other’s throats. If mutual self-interest works in student politics, why shouldn’t it work in national politics?

Politics is only as effective as the ability of the polity to demand accountability from the elected representatives for their actions. Students and the youth factions of the parties are as much responsible for the political mess we are in because they have their own share in this inglorious legacy of bad politics. Those who believe that Nepali politics can change for the better if the current generation of leaders hand the baton to the next should have seen the youth wing members beating up sidewalk traders on Wednesday for daring to defy their shutdown.

Destroying public and private property and terrorising traders and commuters have become the standard operating procedures in making a banda a ‘success’. No matter how you look at it, a banda requires violence and fear to be enforced, and thus violates the fundamental human right of citizens. The leadership of all the parties should know they are playing with fire. The tyre smoke they unleash will one day choke them as well.
The Scottish company that found a billion barrels of oil in India said it is still interested in Nepal but won’t drill without a big improvement in the political situation in the country.

The new chief executive of Cairn Energy, Simon Thomson, said the company believes the licences it was awarded in the Tarai region in 2004 may contain the geological and commercial ingredients of success. But Thomson indicated Cairn may decide it has no future in Nepal unless there is a quick end to the political problems which have made it impossible to explore for oil and gas in the country so far.

“What has stopped us has been the political position, in that we just haven’t been able to move forward with the activity that we wanted to do,” Thomson (pictured, above) told Nepali Times.

“Nepal remains of interest,” he added. “The question is can we actually move forward and generate activity? That remains to be seen.”

Nepal’s politicians will have to work hard to convince Thomson that the country should have a place on his agenda at Edinburgh-based Cairn, where he became chief executive in July last year. Thomson succeeded Sir Bill Gammell, a Scotland rugby star who is a friend of ex-US president George W Bush and went to school with Tony Blair, the former British Prime Minister.

During 30 years in charge, Sir Bill led Cairn on a push into South Asia which culminated in the company making a series of bumper finds in the desert in Rajasthan from 2004. Success in India propelled Cairn into the oil and gas premier league and won it a place in the elite FTSE 100 stock market index. Amid booming global demand for oil, production from the finds will flood the plains and foothills of the Himalayas in August 2004, on attractive terms.

Cairn Energy recently sold a controlling stake in the Cairn India operation to India’s Vedanta Resources for $5.5 billion. The deal was finally completed in December following months of wrangling in India. Cairn Energy retained 22 per cent stake in the Indian operation. Directors will use some of the proceeds of the Indian success to fund the search for similar transformational finds in other countries.

On 24 January Cairn shelved plans to award Sir Bill Gammell £2.5m shares for his work on the Vedanta deal following pressures from some shareholders.

Cairn India’s Sri Lanka subsidiary announced last year that it struck natural gas in Sri Lanka’s offshore Mannar Basin in the very first well it drilled in the narrow strait. The company has spent $1.2 billion on a pioneering hunt for oil and gas in the icy waters off Greenland, and is also looking at the waters off Spain and off Lebanon in the Mediterranean.

A company spokesperson said Cairn will seek meetings with ministers and officials in Nepal to help management assess its options. Cairn Energy has an office in Kathmandu but has been focused on analysing data previously collected by others.

The company was awarded 100 per cent stakes in five licences in the Tanai, Chitwan and Dang region in August 2004. In August 2005, six months after former king Gyanendra seized political control, the company declared contractual force majeure, suspending its work commitments in view of the security situation, and lifted it again in January 2010.

Even if Cairn stays in Nepal it could be years before it produces any oil in the country. In the giant Mangala find in Rajasthan in 2004, Cairn struck oil seven years after it started work. Production from the field started in August 2009.

Mark Williamson is a business correspondent at The Herald, based in Scotland.
Dirty business

If we want to encourage investors we have to change the rules of the game

I have a business proposition for you. I need you to invest your money, but without guarantee of returns. I cannot promise you security of your investment or save you from labour problems. Be ready with a fat wallet to fill pockets of greedy government officials to even move your business file from one table to another. Will you be interested? Any sane businessman will say: “Go away.” However, these are the parameters under which foreign investors work in Nepal. Let’s face it. If you had money you would go elsewhere. There isn’t much attracting investors to Nepal.

The CEO of a multinational investor admitted that the biggest time consuming part of his job here is to extend his visa every four months. You have to pay Rs 5,000-5,000 to expedite the process, or you will be left out in the cold for months. And this is someone who has invested US $100 million in Nepal. The case of Cairn Energy (see p4) is another case in point. If Cairn finds oil and gas in the Tarai, the whole country will benefit but if unsuccessful it will lose the millions it has spent so far. The Scottish company is taking a calculated risk, but we have made it inordinately risky both with our political fluidity, corruption and tedious bureaucracy.

According to the United Nation’s body on trade, investment and development issues, UNCTAD’s latest World Investment Report, Nepal is in the bottom of the heap with Afghanistan, North Korea and Bhutan when it comes to attracting foreign direct investment. As per Department of Industry statistics, FDI commitment declined by 48.35 per cent in 2010-11. FDI increased by 30 per cent during the same period in Bangladesh.

The list of investor woes is long: power cuts, shutdowns, militant labour, extortion, local opposition, tedious paperwork, corruption, low productivity and skill of the workforce. “It is embarrassing,” the Nepali in-charge at the Kathmandu office of a multinational company confessed to us this week. “As a Nepali, it is embarrassing to explain to our head office what those in power demand to get work done here. These are foreign companies, they don’t pay without a receipt.”

Most investors we talked to said the last four months of the present government has been the worst they have ever seen in terms of corruption and extortion. It is no surprise that the government has been the worst they have ever seen in terms of corruption and extortion. It is no surprise that the government has been the worst they have ever seen in terms of corruption and extortion. It is no surprise that the government has been the worst they have ever seen in terms of corruption and extortion.

Other than geographical and cultural proximity, the reason may be that they do not have to worry about extending visas. This is an open market and if Nepal wants investors, foreign or local, it will have to clean up its act. We have a terrible reputation, and the new Nepal Investment Board needs to do a lot of catching up in the investment year 2012-13.

The legal and practical problems faced by investors have to be resolved so that they have hassle-free experiences. We aren’t offering the best deals, so there has to be incentive to invest. The bureaucracy is slow, and the political will is absent. But Nepal does have some unique selling points. We are strategically placed to attract investors. Nepal is slow, and the political will is absent.

But these advantages are far outweighed by the chronic political instability and the lawlessness of the land.

Education first
Himal Remit has donated Rs 200,000 for infrastructure development at Shree Birendra Higher Secondary school in Parbat. On the occasion of Himalayan Bank’s nineteenth anniversary its CEO Ashok Subh Rana handed over the money to the school’s principal.

New for old
CG Electronics, the authorised distributor of LG Electronics in Nepal, has launched a new LG Exchange Offer to provide LG LCD or LED TV to broaden its consumer base. According to the scheme, consumers will receive LG LCD or LED TV in exchange of an old TV of any brand.

Easy money
Bank of Kathmandu has introduced BOK international debit card and prepaid card in the market. The card can be availed by all customers having Foreign Currency Account and also by customers who travel in the near or distant future and seek foreign currency exchange facility. The international debit card (prepaid card can be used in all ATM & POS having Visa network) is valid all over the world.

Smart lighting
Explore International one of the trading subsidiaries of Panchakanya Group has launched Oberon Lighting System in Nepal. Explore International will oversee the marketing & strategic aspect of the product. The energy-saving and environmentally-friendly products are designed in Singapore with aim to provide quality and high value to the customers.
Runners in wonderland

Despite the snow and darkness, this year’s Annapurna 100 was exhilarating for both marathoners and spectators.

MIIKI UPRETI in KASKI

If high altitude marathon was an Olympics event, Nepali runners would do the nation proud.

It has now become a tradition every new year’s to organize the Annapurna Marathon. Together with the Everest Base Camp downhill run, it has now become a fixture in the international marathon scene.

This year, 140 runners from 25 countries set off in the pre-dawn darkness from Pokhara lakeside on January 1, 2012 on the Sixth Annapurna 100: an ultra-trail with 50km, 70km, and 100km options.

The runners first went up the Baglung highway to Milan Chowk, then broke off into the trail to Hemja and Dhampus. It was easy to get lost, and some of us did lose our way, but that is part of the challenge of the Annapurna 100: you have to find your own route.

From Dhampus we followed the Annapurna trekking trail, but the weather suddenly turned with rain and snow. From Landruk down to the Modi Khola, we stepped gingerly on slippery rain-soaked boulders.

Then we ascended again 600m up in the 1km horizontal distance to Gandruk.

This is the thing about marathons in the Himalaya, horizontal distance doesn’t mean much because you have to factor in the vertical part of the trail.

Gandruk is the junction of the 70K, 100K, from where the 50K wallahs run down to the finish line at Birethanti. It was my dream to complete the 70K, but the Ghorepani Ridge was sure to be in snow and darkness would have set in by the time I reached the ridge. I was fully equipped, and mentally prepared to run in the dark, but not with snow and possibly ice on the trail.

So, reluctantly I headed down to Birethanti, finishing the 50km race in 9 hours and 20 minutes.

The real heroes were the 70K and 100K runners that day, tired but still smiling.

Some were forced to run right through the night with only the light of their headlamps. There was a great sense of camaraderie with runners waiting in the darkness as the last of the marathoners of the 100K event touched the finishing line.
50K

Upto Ghandruk, 70K 100K same route

Nepali Runners Men’s Event

100km
1. Aite Tamang 11:30 (Nepal Army)
2. Sudip Kulung 11:33:02
5. Upendra Sunuwar 12:28:28

70km
1. Samir Tamang 7:58:55 (Nepal Army)
2. Bire Bahadur Gurung 7:50:16 (Nepal Army)
3. Bikash Shali 8:33:38
4. Chhinsukang 8:58:16 (Nepal Army)
5. Krishna Karki 9:00:48 (Nepal Army)

50km
1. Horn Lal Shrestha 4:27:16 (Nepal Army)
2. Puma Tamang 4:40:17 (Nepal Army)
3. Ram Kumar Khali 4:48:00 (Nepal Army)
4. Shyam Kumar Parajuli 5:15:38 (Nepal Army)
5. Kumar Singh 5:16:40 (Nepal Army)

Nepali Runners Women’s Event

50km
1. Mani Kala Rai 6:15:10
2. Dang Bahadur Shrestha 6:55:34
3. Doma Shrestha 7:20:33

Foreign Runners Men’s Event

100km
1. Christophe Le Saux (France) 13:18

70km
1. Marco Giudice (Italy) 12:11
2. Yasuaki Takeda (Japan) 12:14
3. Tony Ballantry (UK) 14:32

50km
1. Peter Gijsels (Belgium) 6:03
2. Shinsuke Ogura (Japan) 7:48
3. Michael Haseldine (Australia) 7:54

Foreign Runners Women’s Event

70km
1. Xing Ruling (China) 14:35
2. Cecilia Bellotto (Italy) 15:17
3. Kajla Fink (Switzerland) 18:15

50km
1. Claire Price (UK) 7:00
2. Victoria Loaki (UK) 7:31
3. Dominique Price (Canada) 8:35

Kam samai khale bhane hunde. Patinakak borna
raha raaat pati hunde. Kam gare khane laganu pati
hunde. Chorer, dhaire, chlater, loote khane po laganu
 pard. Jo jahna raha june kam gadeo ut yasima ramanu
naa ghoran gano pa samangit bheran gane
Sadivostho. Kam na shakti ho, bhakti ho
r mukhi ho. Kamako idhast gare, patinakak samana
nare.
Cycle 7: Identity, three photography installations: Navarasa, ink’d and The Tales of Dirty Feet by talented photographers. 9.30 am to 6pm, 6 January to 15 February, Galleria CUIC, Deeya Complex, Mallangur.

New Wangden Carpets and Furniture Exhibition, check out the Wangden Carpet Collection by Rupert Smith or browse through Nepali and Tibetan carpets and furniture. 17 December to 30 January, 4pm onwards, Indigo, Garden, Narayal, 4413580.

Ultimate Photography Workshop, Ariduto presents the 12th session of digital photography workshop, Rs 3000, starting from mid-February, 7am to 8am, Ariduto, Lazimpat, 8441489425, 8441379780.

Nepset Reloaded, Nepset is back with bands like Ambrose, White and many more. 10-12, 28 January, 1pm, House of Music, Thamel.

Black History Month, celebrate the spirit and culture of African Americans with music and literature events and documentary screenings. House of Music, Thamel.

Jazz Night, Fusion Jazz and vocals by Sady Shah with delicious French dishes. 27 January, 8.30 pm, New Orleans, Jawalakhel.

Dining

Bench Burger, be it fish or steak burgers, Bench Burger offers many types and tastes to satisfy your palate. Khemagai, Patan.

Grill Me, a haven for meat lovers, the restaurant stays true to its name. Jawalakhel.

Fire and Ice, home to some of the most delicious pizzas in town. Thamel, 4269210.

Chongqing Fast Food, gear up for some mouth watering Chinese dishes like Sour and Spicy Pork and Kung Pao Chicken. Thamel.

Casa de Cass, offers continental delicacies, baked goodies, brewed coffee and everything in between. Jawalakhel.

Cha Cha Café, the Japanese restaurant is popular for its spaghetti and burger steaks. Thamel.

Events

Talk on Newar and the Trans-Himalayan Phylum, Dr George van Driem talks about Newar linguistic and genetic ancestries. 31 January, 11am, Martin Chautar, Thapathali.


Emotions in Motion, an art exhibition by Govinda Sah with exquisite modern paintings. Closes on 7 February, 9am onwards, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal Revisited.

GIHE Youthfest 2012, music, food and unlimited entertainment with performances by Nepspydar, Abarcross and Adrian Pradhan. 11 February, 11pm, COMS Complex, Dhobighat, 9849511171, 9849831493, 9809530042.

CAN Info-Tech 2012, be tech savvy as you browse through gizmo and gadgets in this tech expo. 26 to 31 January, Bhrikuti Mandap.

Golden Moments, a tribute to Elvis Presley with Prith Banj and Tom Bartlett as Elvis Presley, 28 January, 7pm onwards, Garden Terrace Coffee Shop, Soake, Thahasil, 9811087187.

Music

Dining

Fusion Jazz and vocals by Sady Shah with delicious French dishes. 27 January, 8.30 pm, New Orleans, Jawalakhel.

A hotel that doesn’t use plastic water bottles, a briquette-maker and orphans with green thumbs

Handy waste

Fuel prices have increased again and people are finding it more and more expensive to heat their homes and businesses. “An alternative to traditional energy sources for heat is briquettes,” says Sanu Kaj Shrestha of the Foundation of Sustainable Technologies (FoST), which has been advocating the production and use of briquettes since 2004. A briquette is a block of combustible material made from biomass waste that has the same utility as firewood. Fuel briquettes can be produced from bio-degradable residues including paper, sawdust, scrap wood, dried leaves and weeds, rice husks, and kitchen waste. A two-inch thick briquette six inches in diameter can burn for about 40 minutes. Shrestha says that a briquette emits 70 per cent less smoke than wood, thus reducing indoor air pollution. FoST gives training courses on briquette production and usage in 40 districts. A briquette pressing machine costs Rs 7,000 and can produce over 20 kg of briquettes a day.

Briquettes are priced at Rs 20 a kilo. FoST has been encouraging its trainees to start commercial production so that they can generate income from briquettes. Shrestha has shared this technology in Afghanistan, Cyprus, Cambodia, India and the Philippines.

Green thumbs

Some of Kathmandu’s youngest green thumbs in a Balkot children’s home have ditched the ‘orphan tag’, and replaced it with a ‘green tag’ in an effort to give Nepali children a more sustainable future. Chairperson of the Maya Children’s Organisation, Bikash KC, says his ambition was to develop a home and a schooling system to support the children from the ‘grassroots’. KC has transformed a handful of Balkot’s orphan children by introducing them to a more sustainable lifestyle. “We’re trying to make the kids think greener,” he says. “We also want to make the children’s homes more homely rather than have them live in institutions.” One of the three children’s homes that KC is involved with is called Hamroghar Children’s Home, meaning ‘our home’. Green thumb and orphan Nagar Magar, 15, lives in an Australian-funded orphanage called Meg’s Home in Balkot. He’s been trying to set up a green club at school as a result of KC’s mentoring. “We are learning how to manage crops and the green club will help in recycling,” he says. “The degradable products will go into a compost pit, plastic goods will be recycled.”
A flip through Trisara’s menu presents token characters from the typical Kathmandu supper club like American Chopsuey, chicken chilly, sadhekos, pakodas, and tempuras, Irish Pub, for the simple reason that the place actually feels like a bar. Don’t miss out on the Irish coffee. Lazimpat, Ananda Bhawan, 4418027

New Dish, you will be in for a treat here as it serves one of the best pork mono in town. Khichapokhari

The Yellow Chili, Sanjeev Kapoor’s restaurant with Indian cuisine and local delicacies. Bluebird Complex, Thapathali

Just Baked, a cozy café with amazing pastries and friendly ambience. Old Baraistown

Kotetsu, high quality Japanese dishes that cater to your needs and taste buds. Lazimpat

GETAWAYS

Amtrip Adventures, be a part of the Amtrip Bungy or Swing Jump Event. Rs 2000 per person for one day or Rs 4500 per person for an overnight stay, valid until the end of January, Amtrip, Naval, 4444890, 4444820, www.amtrip.com.np

Dechenling, the place to head for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, their pleasant and spacious garden is ideal for big gatherings. Thamel

Dragon Café, try your favorite snacks at a reasonable price, Kumaripati

Fulbari Resort, enjoy the scenic view as you pamper yourself with tennis, golf, drinks and dinners. Rs 650 per person for 2 nights and 3 days, Pokhara, 4461918, 4462248, resv@fulbari.com.np, sales@fulbari.com.np

Likewise, for vegetarians, the Crispy Garlic Mushroom with Garlic Potato (Rs 130) stirs up a stinking, delicious delight that would stave off even the most dogged necker.

TRISARA

Among the non-vegetarian options, the Flambeed Prawns (Rs 280), sautéed in Mekong Whiskey and basil leaves and featured on a bed of bok choy, are a savory complement to a stiff drink, but a bit on the salty end. Drink up.

Of the many chicken options, the Crispy Chicken (Rs 175) marries strips of meat tendered and fried to an even crisp and dotted with a garlic chili blend.

SOMEPLACE ELSE

The recently opened Trisara in Lazimpat risks running up against the humdrum of the ‘’restro lounge’’: a garden patio, coffee tables, bolstered settees, a gamut of drinks and quick nibbling at good prices suggest a worthy contender for a night out on the town.

Black Pepper Café & Pub, cosmopolitan dining and drinking in a traditional style courtyard, try the apple sauce pork chops and enjoy the good service, Kingsville Heights, Lalitpur, 5521897, 5536926

Dechenling, the place to head for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, their pleasant and spacious garden is ideal for big gatherings. Thamel

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For chow, Khau Soi (chicken Rs 250; shrimp variation, Rs 300) is pure comfort. The Thai-Burmese chicken dish is simmered in a thin coconut curry, similar to massaman or yellow curry, and served with a separate bowl of plain egg noodles. The popular street food is a perfect merienda, a light afternoon snack to sate that pre-prandial craving.

Reliable standards for cancelling and nibbling at good prices suggest a prospective happy hour haunt. But still in its nascent stage, at what was the former Royal Hana Garden (vestiges remain like a copse of bamboo trees and an empty hot tub), Trisara has a chance to better showcase its culinary potential, namely in its main courses, and redeem its edenic subtitle: a ‘Garden in Heaven’.

Marco Polo

Pass the Hotel Shanker going north on Lazimpat and right into the garden driveway

GHT UPDATE

The Great Himalayan Trail - Climate Smart Celebrity Trek team is well on their way towards Kangchenjunga base camp and has passed through Ghunsa Thursday. After a warm farewell by Taplejung locals, the team has commenced the trek at Suketar on 22 January. They were immediately hit by heavy snowfall, as it made its way down to the headwaters of the Tamur river.

The team updates its progress on Facebook. They are currently on the first section out of ten on the 1.700km Great Himalayan Trail that will take four months to complete. So far the team hasn’t come across any difficulties and Dawar Sherpa has said with his famous understatement: “Tough times are out of the way for few days.”

Team member and journalist Saurav Dhakal posted this cryptic sentence on Twitter: “Sorry friend for less update due to less internet footprint.” The team is led by Aja Sherpa who has climbed Everest 27 times. Along with him is two times Everest summiteer Dawar Steven Sherpa, Saurav Dhakal and Samir Jung Thapa. Follow them:

On Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/climatesmarttrek
On Twitter: #GHT12
Healthier Nepal

In these days of political doom and gloom, there is a welcome news about Nepal’s health indicators. The World Bank’s health assessment of Nepal gives something to cheer about.

Even though Nepal’s gross national income (GNI) is three times lower than India’s, Nepal’s health indicators have surpassed India’s when the opposite was true a few decades ago. In 1990 Nepal was behind in every development indicator. This phenomenal improvement appears almost paradoxical, given that Nepal is the poorest amongst the neighbouring countries being compared.

The government’s health programs and international and national NGOs will be quick to claim credit, but perhaps the contribution from hard-earned remittance sent directly to their families in village Nepal by self-sacrificing Nepalis abroad may well be significant. The improved health indices data is also in keeping with the recent finding, albeit controversial, that Nepal’s poverty level may have fallen by about 15 per cent. Levels of poverty and health indices are in general correlated. Although Bangladesh with somewhat similar GNI outpaces Nepal in most categories, clearly the neighboring countries being compared.


WEATHERCOAT
All Guard

WE DIDN’T START THE FIRE: Students belonging to 13 students unions ended their torch rally, Tuesday, on the eve of their bands against the petroleum price hike. The government decreased the prices on Thursday.

BEATING THE DRUMS: Limbus perform Chyabrung dance at the International Conference on implementation of indigenous people’s right to self determination and autonomy in Dharan on Saturday.

Gift wrapped: Indian Ambassador Jayant Prasad hands over buses and ambulances to Nepali charities on the occasion of the 63rd Indian Republic Day on Thursday.
Who says Nepal is divided?

Glancing at the front pages of the newspapers these days, or watching the evening news, one gets the overwhelming impression that Nepal is breaking apart. Media is not interested in the good things that happen, highlighting people who struggle to make a contribution to their communities and society. Things going right don’t make news, things have to break to be considered a ‘breaking news’. Reporters give undue importance to the corrosive rhetoric of those who want to carve Nepal up into small pieces, they highlight the handful of spoilers and ignore the vast, silent majority of Nepalis who want to live in harmony and peace.

Politicians play with fire when they whip up ethnic animosities in the name of correcting historical discrimination. Yet, the media unthinkingly gives the most prominent coverage to those who shout the loudest, who say the most outrageous things. As a pilot and talk show host myself, I have come to realise the enormous potential for the media to set things right in society by offering hope through the power of good example. Yet, I wonder if the media is now a part of the problem.

Which is why I wasn’t surprised to find too many reporters at the Sonam Tamang new year celebrations at Tundikhel on Tuesday. This was a celebration not just of the Tamang community, but it belonged to all Nepalis. We saw Newars, Bahuns, Chhetris, Gurungs, Rais and Limbus all mingling and enjoying themselves in a rich microcosm of Nepal itself. Under a bright blue sky and the warm glow of a winter sun we celebrated a new Nepaliness that is united by its diversity. Who says Nepal is divided? Who says Nepalis can’t live as one united family like they always have? Who dares break Nepal up?

Whenever I speak to Nepalis in Kuala Lumpur, Doha or Hong Kong, they speak as if they belong to a joint Nepali family. People never talk about what divides them, but what unites them: the languages, cultures, festivals and the land of mountains, valleys and plains that we are proud to call our own. We speak in Nepal, the language that cements us, about the shared history that our ancestors built together. We say we are Nepali first, and then we belong to our various nationalities. There is no point going into who settled here first. Except for some of the 103 ethnicities in this country, we all came from somewhere else and came to become Nepalis at heart. In the past few years, I have attended the new year celebrations of Nepal’s other communities as well. Everywhere I find the same sense of harmony and tolerance of diversity. No one is trying to exclude any other community.

Yet, in the narrow minded politics of today we see leaders trying to drive a wedge between ethnic groups, carving up a united nation into overlapping provinces with confused boundaries, trying to create walls and fences where there aren’t any. It was telling that when the prime minister arrived at Tundikhel on Tuesday and the politicians started delivering their tired old speeches, no one was listening. Only the reporters were taking notes.

The Tamang new year celebration on Tuesday proved Nepalis are more united than ever.
Modern medicine and faith healing can complement each other in Nepal

Brittany Searle

Nepalis have retained their faith in faith healing despite the spread of modern medicine, and they desire a spiritual dimension to treatment that they don’t get from doctors.

Nepal’s traditional dhami-jhankri and shamans offer a parallel health care system in a country where hospitals are either overcrowded, expensive or don’t help patients get better. Even practitioners of western medicine admit there may be aspects of this traditional form of healing that can complement modern treatment methods.

Mark Zimmerman is with the Nick Simmons Institute in Kathmandu and has been a doctor in Nepal for the last 25 years. “The first thing we were taught in medical school is that faith heals,” he explains, “whether a doctor, a surgeon, a faith healer or alternative medicine person, if I can engender your faith it will increase my chance of healing you.”

Many think that faith healing is only practiced in remote parts of Nepal, but there are dhami-jhankris who are in demand even in Kathmandu. And in the heart of the capital is the Shamanistic Studies and Research Centre where both locals and foreigners flock to be healed, cleansed or spiritually awakened.

Founded by Mohan Rai in 1988, the centre aims to revive shamanism by reintroducing it to the modern world. Rai, who comes from a long line of traditional healers, believes that shamanism complements western medicine by re-introducing the spiritual element to healing.

“I am trying to explain to the world that shamanism is not primitive but can add to modern medicine,” explains Rai.

Australian Laura Martino is taking a course at Rai’s centre and is learning traditional drumming, organizing spiritual ceremonies, and making field trips to places in Nepal with a strong tradition of shamanism. “I didn’t plan to come to Nepal, I just stumbled across faith healing,” she says, “but everything has fallen into place. You can say it’s a coincidence, but it’s more than that.”

Shamanism, Korea’s tech-savvy believers who complement their belief in Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity

Jason Strother in Seoul

Bows of fruit are laid out on the altar. There are also bottles of whiskey and a meter-high stack of Marlboro cigarette cartons. With a grin, Korean shaman Tae Eul says his gods like to drink and smoke.

You’d be mistaken if you thought tech-savvy South Koreans only worshiped smartphones and the latest cars – many believe in an ancient, animistic spirituality. At the center of Korean shamanism is the mudang, or shaman, the medium between the material and spirit world.

“People hear about me through word of mouth,” explains Eul, from inside his temple on the slopes of Korea’s Mt Samgak. “I try to figure out how the energy of the universe...
GETTING BETTER

Tamangs, Newars, Rais, Limbus and many other ethnic groups in Nepal have strong ties to faith healing. It is not a religion or a culture, but an indigenous practice with ties to nature. Ceremonies often involve the village dhami-jhankri attempting to address the spiritual imbalance within a patient, performing pujas to appease ancestral spirits or drawing an offending spirit from the body.

According to shamanistic practitioner Mohan Rai, faith healers can do a lot at the end of the day they are only medium between the patient and the spirit world. The effectiveness of treatment often depends on the mental attitude of patients, who have to will themselves to get better and put their faith in the spiritual healer.

In modern medicine the effectiveness of belief in healing is best captured in the concept of the Placebo Effect, where patients are given sugar pills and are told they will feel better. Doctors agree that in one-third of the cases they treat, patients are healed of their ailments even if the pill doesn’t contain any active ingredients. Many patients get better because they believe they will be better.

The reason for the continued popularity of faith healers in Nepal has often been explained by the people’s limited access to hospitals. In the 1980s when there was even less access to hospital care than now in remote Jumla, the people’s trust in faith healers was put to good use to treat the biggest killer of children in western Nepal: acute respiratory infections. The infant mortality rate came down dramatically as a result.

Ravi Shankar, assistant professor at Manipal College of Medical Sciences in Pokhara and a leading voice for integrative medicine, believes traditional and modern forms of treatment should go hand-in-hand. “The two are very different and I believe knowing the strengths and weaknesses of each, and respecting each other are important.”

Despite their scientific training both Shankar and Zimmerman agree that medicine is only effective if patients believe in it. And Rai, who has worked at teaching clinics across Nepal, says he prays that science, technology, healers, and therapists can come together.

“Let’s work together,” he says passionately, “you do it the scientific way, but if you miss something you may be missing a lot of things. If you can’t do it maybe we can.”

While China and India have recognised the practice, in Bhutan and Mongolia traditional Tibetan healing is part of the national health care system. Even in China, the Tibetan medicine industry is booming with factories producing more than 100 medicines every day.

Amchi Namgyal from Delpa, one of the participants at the Shechen workshop, began his training at age 12 under his father’s guidance. But the tradition of the knowledge passing from generation to generation is changing after the establishment of Tibetan medicine schools.

The Nepal government’s reluctance to give the Tibetan medicine system recognition has socially and economically marginalised Amchis in the country, affecting their ability to make effective medicines. Tibetan medicine has been practised in Nepal for the past 3,000 years and forms a part of the traditional and faith-healing culture even after the advent of modern medicine. Amchis say they work not just with the patients’ bodies, but also their mind and soul. They don’t just try to cure one ailment at a time, but look holistically at the person and seek long-term solutions.

Until a decade ago, there were only a handful of Tibetan clinics in the country. Today there are more than 20 just in Boudhanath. Many operate under the ‘Ayuverda’ label, something Amchi Bista doesn’t approve of. He says: “This is not a branch of Ayurveda. It has its own unique identity that should be maintained and this is possible only when we get due recognition.”

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In Korea, religious beliefs are not always mutually exclusive. For example, a mother might pray at a church, then a Buddhist temple, and then visit a mudang all in hope of bringing good luck to her family. It’s this intrinsic search for spiritually-divined good luck that keeps the nation’s 50,000 mudangs in business, says David Mason, author of Sacred Mountains, a book on Korean shamanism.

“It seems to me that many Koreans are still shamanic believers at the core of their psychology and then layers of Buddhism or Confucianism, then Christianity and modern scientific thinking as the outer layers.”

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Nawaraj Mainali in Naya Patrika, 23 January

The police have arrested sixteen bankers in the last eight months for embezzling millions of rupees from financial institutions, while more than hundred officials who face charges are on the run.

Nepal Rastra Bank and Police’s Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) began a joint investigation campaign eight months ago which first led to the arrest of Gorkha Development Bank’s former president D.B. Bamjan who had siphoned off five million rupees from the bank. Thirteen other members were implicated for misappropriating funds and the Nepal Rastra Bank had issued warrants for their arrests.

Six people involved in the misuse of money in Merchant Capital have also been arrested while Pawan Karki, the prime suspect and former board member along with 35 others are hiding from the police.

Nepal Share Market, one of the oldest financial institution in the country is also embroiled in controversy. Its CEO Yogendra Prasad Shrestha was arrested in October for embezzling 2.61 billion. Similarly, officials of Samjhana Finance and Progressive Finance were also arrested while the officials of People Finance are on the run. CIB’s chief DIG Upendrakant Aryal says that even though banking fraud is a serious criminal offence, negligent laws and lack of investigation promote such behaviours in Nepal’s banking sector. However, Aryal claims that since the arrest of many bank officials, the number of financial irregularities has decreased.

While most of the culprits have already fled the country, some who have political connections are still in Nepal.

Interview with Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bijay Kumar Gachhadar in Kantipur, January 22

What is the feeling in New Delhi regarding Nepal’s peace process?

BG: India has been very supportive throughout Nepal’s peace process and political transition. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, home minister, defense minister and leaders in the opposition, everybody extended their good wishes for a speedy completion of the peace process and constitution writing.

Is the Indian establishment still suspicious of the Maoist led government?

India is very positive towards the present coalition government led by the Maoists. I do not see the possibility of a change in the government, except in case of a national unity government.

What role will India play in the improvement of Nepal’s security forces?

Alongside helping us establish a police academy, they have promised to provide lethal and non-lethal weapons and the non-lethal weapons are expected to arrive soon. We also requested for logistical assistance for the Nepali police so that we have better patrolling, fire brigade and riot control facilities.

You have been criticised for breaching diplomatic protocol. What do you have to say about that?

Shiva Shankar Menon is a friend of mine. My meeting with him was unofficial and very personal. Besides, we have to rise above protocols at times to understand the significance of an incident.


Basu Khitiz in Annapura Post, January 21

The new Aspire S3 Ultrabook:

With instant ON technology, tight and slender form, and a long battery life, the new Acer Aspire S3 Ultrabook is powered by the second-generation Intel® Core™ 3 processor. Bring you fresh and easy life on the go.
Being Together Growing Together

Education
- 200 schools/campuses constructed in 70 districts.
- 200 scholarships provided to Nepalese students annually to study in India and Nepal.
- Mannavasal Memorial Polytechnic set up in 2008 because the first polytechnic providing technical education in 2 engineering streams and other vocational courses.
- Polytechnic at Hiranwa to be constructed for engineering degree in 4 streams.

Health
- Fire-started OD-1 complex of Bire Hospital (Kalabhatka) constructed with a capacity to accommodate 2500 out-patients.
- Super-speciality Trauma Centre at Bire Hospital, Kalabhatka constructed for the treatment of trauma patients.
- BPICU Nala, the flagship cooperation project, is the largest public-sector hospital-auto medical college outside Kathmandu valley.
- 21 hospitals constructed in 17 districts.
- Availability of oxygen sat at household level progressively increased (91.8% in 2018). As a result, rate of G2T in Nepal has decreased from 55% in 1965 to 6% in 2007.
- 342 ambulances and 66 boxes covering 76 districts have been gifted since 1994.
- 425 high C4D/Infra patients operated, 87,000 surgeries performed, optical devices provided to 27,000 students through Nepal, Neta Yoti Singh Telecommunications
- NBRs 11.8 billion provided for laying 900 Kms Optical Fibre along the East-West Highway and 80 stations of 3G/2G equipment.

Roads and Bridges
- 80 Kms of the East-West Highway from Mahamaitaileda to Mechi (Mahendu-Raj Mand) constructed.
- 22 bridges on Kachiapo-Mahamaitaileda section of the East-West Highway constructed.
- First phase of Terai Roads Project, currently under construction, covers 19 roads of 40 Kms in 12 Terai districts worth NBRs 11 billion. Phase-II will cover 400 Kms.

Electrification/Power Projects
- 31 villages have been electrified through NBR grid.
- Solar electrification projects completed in 17 villages.
- Work to start on the upgrade of Bhak Nigri Substation, Nepalgunj.
- Assistance being provided for grid connectivity to enable importing an additional 200 MW of power from India.

Water
- Drinking water projects installed in more than 200 villages.
- An ambitious project to provide drinking water facility in Sololakham is being implemented.

Strengthening of Cross-border Linkages
- Integrated Check-Posts being established at five major points along the India- Nepal border namely: Raxaul-Birgunj, Sajha-Birgunj, Jogbani-Birgunj and Narayani-Birgunj. Work started on Raxaul-Birgunj with a cost of NBRs 3.92 billion.
- Cross-border railway links being constructed at five locations on the India-Nepal border namely Jaynagar-Darchula, Jogbani-Birgunj, Nathuwa-BSI, Raxaul-Birgunj and Narayani-Birgunj. Work on Jaynagar-Darchula, Nathuwa-BSI and Raxaul-Birgunj will be taken up in Phase-I with an estimated cost of NBRs 14.8 billion.

Flood Control and River Training
- NBRs 2.06 billion provided for the construction of embankments along Kali Gandaki, Bagmati and Karnali rivers. River training works along Ganges, Trishuli, Kali and Mahakali rivers in Nepal worth NBRs 231.28 million provided. River training works on Banganga River (Kapilvastu) initiated at a cost of NBRs 40 million.

Army Welfare Activities
- Disbursement of pensions worth NBRs 19.47 billion annually to 1,264 ex-servicemen.
- Educational scholarships for more than 225 students.
- 1,240 sickroom beds sharpened this year.
- 17 water projects completed benefiting 1.5 lakh people.
- 003 drinking water projects provided.
- 16 more projects being planned.

Upcoming Projects
- Solar Grid-Hub Birgunj.
- Mahendrapur-Tirathpur Road link.
- Science Learning Centre at Kathmandu, Kalabhatka.
- Eye Hospital at Kaptipath.
- Nepal-Ramchaur Multi-Purpose Dam

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Meeting point

Editorial in Kantipur, 25 January

PM Baburam Bhattarai has declared that there will be a breakthrough in the peace process by next week but we haven’t seen anything concrete so far. And if anyone is to blame for the protracted stalemate, it is the Maoists who have not given up on threats of a revolt in spite of joining the mainstream. The Bhattari and Dahal faction have given in to Baidya’s political blackmailing and endorsed revolt only to balance out the hardliners. However, the events of the last six years make clear that the Maoists cannot go back to the jungle.

Also is it okay for one party to jeopardize the entire constitution writing and peace process for its narrow interests? Dahal has done a good job keeping the party together and not letting it split. He should now show the courage and decide in favor of peace and constitution.

If the Maoists are ready to compromise for the peace process, the Congress should be flexible in the debate of governance system. If the Congress keeps on insisting on a Westminster model and the Maoists on a presidential system, there will be no way out. There are two options left now: the mixed model or a directly-elected Prime Minister and a ceremonial president elected by the parliament. The parties have to come to a decision soon.

The New York-based group, Human Rights Watch, says Nepal has failed to make progress on checking human rights violations. The report points towards a glaring apathy of the government and the political parties in addressing atrocities committed during the war, blaming the state for ‘weakening already dysfunctional justice system by ignoring court orders and appointing people allegedly guilty of serious rights violations to senior government positions.’

Several national and international reports have criticised Nepal’s poor human rights record in the past, and the report says refusal to extend the mandate of UN human rights field office this year is a major step backward and calls into question the commitment of the political parties in the government and opposition. Human Rights Watch director in Asia, Brad Adams concludes: “Nepal is no closer to fulfilling the lofty rights-focused commitments spelled out in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement now than when it was signed five years ago.”

Nepal flunks rights test

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This is because Demand and Supply Minister Lekraj Butt, in his wisdom, declared that the prices could go up even further. So the gas dealers are hoarding what they have. The Ass’ namesake, Comrade Butt, after saying no way he was going to roll back prices, has now been agreeing to one unworkable plan after another, like reinstating the dual price system, or stealing to pay off Indian Oil, which is all going to cost this bankrupt govt another Rs 4 billion a year. How is a government machinery that can’t even collect taxes from supermarket chains like VAT-Blatent going to ensure subsidised LPG for students without gas leaks? You’d think that by now our netas would have run out of excuses for a delayed constitution, but that would be unfair on their collective creative genius. The Kangresi blame the Buddies, the Buddis blame the Kangresi, the Eh-males blame both and vice versa. The Madhesis blame everyone else but themselves. But now Comrade Krishna “50 Karod” Mahara has come with his own theory: he blames the dreaded Foreign Hand for conspiring against a new constitution.

526 points in 5 years

Comrade Awesome’s foot-in-mouth syndrome seems to have suffered a relapse considering his recent utterances, the latest of which is this Freudian gaffe: “Why would I want to be executive president?” I am already more powerful than the president.” Lately he’s got a bee in his bonnet about a conspiracy hatched in “Hotel Revisited” to prevent him from being the Executive President. Ex-PM Koirala, who became PKD’s first guest at his new Winter Palace in Lazimpat, tried to calm him down by telling him he was at Caroline’s too and there was no such conspiracy. But Comrade Napoleon is convinced the sheep are ganging up against him.

The countdown has started for the demise of the BRB govt, and the Kangresi are already licking their chops. Comrade Prime Minister has been spooked by Lotus Flower’s latest utterances, and is openly consulting aides about PKD undermining him. BRB’s suspicions were confirmed when Maoist youth dressed in “Let Baburam Work” t-shirts were themselves showing him black flags. And in Palpa the other day, he noticed Awesome smiling slyly. But, for what it’s worth, BRB is going nowhere just yet, and he is still trying to cobble together a govt of national unity under his own leadership. Which, considering the alternatives, may not be such a bad idea.

Policemen checking for drunk drivers at night are all falling sick. Police don’t just have to endure bad breath as drivers do “Aahh”, but are being infected with tonsilitis, respiratory tract infections, even suspected tuberculosis.