Nepali woman’s citizenship is only a piece of laminated paper. It allows her to live, work, vote and spend money in this country, but doesn’t allow her to pass those rights to her children.

A man goes to the district office, gets citizenship papers for his children within few hours, no questions asked. No one even bothers him with the details of his marriage or intruding questions about the whereabouts of the mother. A woman goes to the same office, she doesn’t just have to produce the father’s citizenship but prove that she was, or is, married to the man.

She has to put up with insults and ridicule, and still return empty handed. Last year, the Supreme Court made a landmark ruling allowing mothers equal rights to get citizenship for their children as fathers, but the administration is defying it. Rights and gender groups are outraged that instead of removing the discrimination, a task force has recommended that citizenship criteria for the children of Nepali women married to foreigners be tightened even further in the new constitution.

DAUGHTER’S DAUGHTER: R. Gurung (face blurred) is unable to get citizenship for her daughter after her husband abandoned the family. Says Gurung: “I gave birth to my daughter in Nepal, but I can’t get her Nepali citizenship.”

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IDENTITY CRISIS

All signs point to the ethnic demarcation debate getting even more heated and unpredictable in the months before 28 May.

Behind the scenes, the tension is building. Many women or members from marginalised communities getting access to education and opportunities than others in the past. It will take time to change, and will change only if the skewed balance of social justice in Nepal is redressed, there is a more equitable distribution of education, and prospects for growth are equalised. Past exclusion has to be addressed with a systematic change in state policy and an accelerated mechanism to allow the traditionally disadvantaged to catch up through affirmative action.

But in trying to address these imbalances, there are the twin dangers of: a) adopting too simplistic an approach to who constitutes the caste elite, but multiple cleavages among hill ethnicities. It is said, but not surprising, that the State Restructuring Committee’s disputed report is being greeted by protests from janjati and Tarai-based communities who feel excluded. We are sure to see increasingly rancorous disputes about the territorial boundaries of future ethnocentrically demarcated provinces.

This is what happens when you set up a commission with political appointees, most of whom are made up of NGO workers. The absurdist of a ‘Narayan’ province, a non-territorial ‘Dalit’ province, and arbitrary boundary-setting show sloppily

ONE STEP

If Dahal is the problem, standing in the way of 25 million Nepalis, why are we still tolerating him? One step forward, two steps back, Editorial, #589. Why don’t we eliminate the problem? How can we let a few people like Dahai, Bhattarai, Deuba, Koirala hijack the interests of an entire nation? What about the needs of the people? We need jobs, we need investments to boost the economy, we need better food, medicine and free education for those who cannot pay the tuition. If Dahal is the problem, why don’t we eliminate him?

The Maoists were never really as popular as we had thought. Our government is not going to be too pessimistic about Nepal so soon. Bhusanendra

CABIN ENERGY

Advice for Bhattarai and his comrades: improve the law and order situation in your own backyard, before you can control the rest of the country. Otherwise Bhattarai’s revolution will be best to put state structure in deep freeze and tackle it when the politics becomes more stable.

Whatever we do, the bottom line should be the unity of the Nepali state. Fortunately still, there is much more holding us together than tearing us apart.

Kamal Kishor

STREET DRAMA

To subsidise petroleum products, the government needs to have the money (‘Street drama’, Anurag Acharya, #589). But if government is as poor as the country. The more we ask for concessions, the more the government will resort to quick-fix solutions such as begging or aid from international donors. Let’s stop the bandas and forget about foreign aid and subsidies, and work hard to make ourselves self-sufficient.

Bhupendra Kahanal

• The Maoists were never really interested in empowering ordinary Nepalis. Their politics revolves around anti-rebellion, mono-cultural policies and grabbing power and Dahai will probably give trivial concessions to the NC and ULN and help his way to the presidency. Nepalis are already suffering, they will suffer even more under Dahai’s presidency, but will survive. The important question is will the NC and ULN leaders survive Dahai’s regime?

Kamal Kishor

NEPAL UNITE

Thank you Vijay Lama for your honest, optimistic and heart-felt article about this. ‘Who says Nepal is divided’, Vijay Lama, #589. I hope the ultra-rightists and ‘clean’ Nepalis who practice and promote such ideas will be shamed.

Nagorna

Lama is correct when he says it is the hill politicians who have divided the country. There is an open ‘bhagdanda’ of government posts and appointments among certain groups which continues to divide the country. Even Dahai and Bhattarai’s revolution was not designed to help the marginalised communities. How can the Tomangs and others call themselves Nepalis when they are not treated as Nepalis by the people in power, year after year?

Bal Tamang

• Centuries of celebrating ‘common’ culture and history helped certain sections of the society to move ahead whereas others were left behind. If we want long term peace in Nepal, we have no other option than to institutionalise affirmative action in the new constitution.

Ram Kumar

DIRTY BUSINESS

Well done Paawan Mathema, you have highlighted a very serious issue (#590). It is time for us to do a comprehensive study of business environment vis-a-vis investment friendly nations like Singapore and Sri Lanka, and push the government towards a Security and rule of law is something very important and it is time for PM Bhattarai and his aides are working closely to make it happen. Let’s not be too pessimistic about Nepal so soon.

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Exclusive enclaves cannot make an inclusive state

The way upper caste Newars treat lower caste Newars, the way upper caste Madhesi treat Madhesi Dalits, the way Tamangs in Rasuwa exclude other poor sub-groups in their own community prove that federalism is not just the character of the dominant group. Then there are unaddressed questions of gender and sexual minorities. Will the ethnic practices of the state impinge upon the rights of women and the sexual minorities in the name of culture and traditions?

We have repeatedly argued in this page that exclusive enclaves cannot make an inclusive state. Ethnic federalism is not the answer to the historical exclusion faced by millions of Nepalis. Rather, what we need are policy interventions at various levels of government with a strong democratic base. Nominating Madan Puranjay to the SRC was fine, but what about policies to educate thousands of Dalit children in the hills and Madhesis, ensuring their rightful stake in nation state building?

Federalism based on population, geography and resources along with policies of positive discrimination including reservation and quotas for the marginalised are the best ways to level the playing field in the long run, provided the state invests on quality education, health care, and employment. The NC and UML must overcome their fear of ‘losing out’ to the Madhesis and support radical changes in state policies that address social imbalances.

The parties must remember that offering ethnic lobbyists to appease their vote banks will only lead to multiple exclusions in the future. Why should a Newar be forced to live in a Kirat state? And does it mean all Newars should seek refuge in Kalmot or the non-Newars of the capital head towards their respective states? What about the ones without a state? Do they no longer belong in Nepal?

Those who are adamant that an ethnically divided state is still the best solution for Nepal should look to our southern neighbour for answers. Ask a Bihar in Maharashtra or a Manipuri in Delhi why they are unable to register their complaints at a police station about abuses they face in public buses and workplaces. Let’s learn from the mistakes of others. It’s not too late to stop ourselves from making hasty, populist decisions based on identity politics that we will rue for generations.

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The ball is back in the court of the parties. Instead of running after the Supreme Court for another CA extension beyond 28 May, if the parties honestly engage on points of contention, the constitution can be drafted in a matter of weeks if not days. They can begin by asking the right questions.
Nepali Times: You seem to enjoy field trips to the hinterland more than the Kathmandu diplomatic circuit. Australian social worker Stephanie Wollard says the idea of Seven Women was offered treatment and has now partially overcome her disability, but after she started working with Seven Women has been a catalyst for change in many women’s lives, improving their self-esteem, giving them a place to share experiences as well as providing their families a chance to lift themselves out of poverty. Many of the women used to face harsh discrimination at home and social stigma in their villages because of their physical disabilities. By augmenting their income, Seven Women has made the women more socially and financially independent. “Working for a fair wage has enabled the women to be economically empowered,” Wollard told Nepal Times’ Susan Grace: “I feel it’s important to be proactive in reaching out to communities in Nepal and endeavouring to make a difference. I’ve traveled to nearly 40 districts so far and hope to cover at least 50 of the 75. I’ve learned a lot during my visits about living standards, health and education services, how people were affected by the conflict, and what their expectations are now. These visits help me evaluate whether Australia’s aid projects are meeting the mark or not.

Are they? The Australian aid program has doubled in the last three years, it is now nearly $30 million and set to increase further. AusAID’s program is focused on working with the government to improve education and health services. We also have a water and sanitation program in partnership with Water Aid, and a program which helps people start small businesses. We also have a scholarship program for Nepalis to undertake post-graduate study in Australia, and an active alumni association here.

What has been your biggest challenge so far? I am fortunate to be in Nepal during a time when the country is going through a major transition to peace and democracy, although the delays in the constitution writing and finalisation of the peace process are of concern. Since I arrived after the landmark 2008 elections, my biggest challenge has been to comprehend the effects of the 10-year conflict in all its complexity. I hope to be here during the next elections, I will be very interested to see the outcome.

What do you love most about Nepal, and what do you find the most disheartening? I find the scenery here some of the most beautiful I have ever seen. However, so often it is the case that people living in these beautiful places have extremely hard lives. One of the images I will never forget is of women trudging along the roads carrying enormous loads of fodder and firewood on their backs. Local people wherever you travel are exceedingly friendly and hospitable, something which Australian tourists always comment on. I admire the toughness of the Nepali people.

I find rising corruption levels disheartening. Corruption concerns me because Nepali people deserve better and it impedes our development efforts. I raise concerns about corruption regularly with the government and political leaders but I sometimes feel that people here have become resigned to corruption. If it isn’t brought under control, our aid program here could be jeopardised.

You are a strong proponent of women’s education and empowerment. Why are you so passionate about this issue? There is no doubt that Nepal cannot develop properly without more resources to improve the situation of women. The main challenge is working to change the traditional attitudes - a good example is domestic violence which must be tackled at all levels of society.

Why media projects in Myagdi and Baglung? This year, one of the organisations supported by the Embassy’s Direct Aid Program was the National Media Development Centre. I inaugurated a training session on 16 January for 20 journalists from Myagdi and surrounding districts. The media here has an important role to play in Nepal’s democracy and I want to show our support. We are sponsoring five media training sessions altogether over the next few weeks, all in remote districts. The Embassy funded the Human Rights Film Centre to train five young Dalit women to produce ten documentary films on women’s struggles to gain access to education, and on inter-caste marriages. We screened the films in Baglung a couple of weeks ago and hope to publish them in Kathmandu and elsewhere. The projects gave a voice to women from a marginalised community to tell their stories to a wider audience.

What progress have you seen to raise the status of the Dalit community? There has been progress, particularly with laws that address caste-based discrimination, although implementation is lagging. Dalits are represented in the Constituent Assembly, are better organised and are raising their voices. A challenge remaining is inter-caste marriages, which can result in violence or even death for young people who have dared to choose each other as partners.

Moving mountains

Handicraft export business empowers handicapped Nepali women

during a visit to Nepal last month. “This has allowed them to pay school and medical bills,” Seventeen-year-old Ram Maya Amagi was born with a speech defect, but after she started working with Seven Women was offered treatment and has now partially overcome her disability, raising her self-confidence. "This is the greatest achievement in my life so far," Amagi says. A student of international development back home in Australia, Wollard says the idea of Seven Women is based on creating change through social and economic empowerment. “When I met these women I wanted to work with them to improve their lives not dole out money,” she explains, “now they are independent. They enjoy life, they don’t just struggle to survive.”

Wollard says she had seen fair trade projects in Nepal that were not sustainable, she was determined that Seven Women would be different. It wasn’t easy. Logistics was a challenge, the women had to overcome self-doubt about their abilities after years of discrimination and progress in producing quality goods was slow. But with Wollard’s guidance many of the women are now aiming to train others, hoping that they too can help women like themselves. Some are even looking to develop their own businesses, with handicapped women even employing non-handicapped women.

Said Wollard, “Slowly, as they received training the women were able to make good quality handmade products that drew them a wage and were sold internationally, this gave them an immense sense of pride.”

http://www.blessed-life.com/
Kathmandu Spring

Even for constitution, water, roads, electricity, cooking gas, petrol, diesel, security

Imagine running a business or trying to make a living in Nepal. You have to be a tax-paying citizen, I’m fed up with the way this or any other government has repeatedly failed to enable the provision, let alone the delivery itself, of basic services. A political process that is numb to people’s pain for a long time ceases to be legitimate in any sense. This is the sort of situation we want our leaders to avoid when we cheered them to power. For someone who was so politically clumsy that he ended up courting controversy even on the mind-numbingly simple matter of keeping government information secret, how can anyone hope that the PM can really see sufficiently far into the future to make his plans come true? When nice-sounding grand visions trump many realizations, with the cloying theme of sharing messages, laced with the echoing theme of national unity that give an illusion of a revolution taking place outside one’s window.

But for real changes ahead, there is no substitute now for another Kathmandu Spring that throws up alternatives to the present crop of leaders. Such a spring would not be against multi-party democracy. It will be against the same old political parties with the same old netas for their collective crime: like failure to deliver for the majority: a national constitution, followed by sufficient clean water, mud networks, electricity, cooking gas, petrol, diesel, and, most of all, a safe and secure future to live as one pleases in one’s own country without ruffling feathers – all these add up to an option. Leaving Nepal up to its government as an adviser is another way of creating a cell phone (
x

Highway to Berlin

When director Deepak Rauniyar presented his wish last year that his film Highway be selected for the Berlin International Film Festival, little did he know that his dream would come true. Highway will be screened at the 62nd Berlin Festival in the Panorama segment, along with 27 other movies. This entry is a first for any Nepali film at an international film festival. This year, Highway is also the only selection from South Asia and has qualified for the Best First Feature film award at the Berlinale, against the backdrop of a bandana. Highway explores five different relationship stories that connect during an ill-fated bus journey from eastern Nepal to the capital Kathmandu. Highway is co-produced by Luxembourg Films, a New York-based film production company, and Samer M Diet and Lorin P Diet.

High on tab

The world’s cheapest tablet, the Ubislate 7+, has been introduced in Nepal by Glimoz Nepal. Priced at just Rs 6,000, the device features internet connectivity through GPRS and Wi-Fi. Users will also have access to Android applications. Likewise, the device which also functions as a cell phone comes with expandable memory of up to 32 GB and a USB port.

Record sales

Sells sold 483,700 vehicles worldwide during the first half of 2011, a record for the Czech-based manufacturer and an impressive 20 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2010. June proved to be a particularly strong month, as it recorded the best ever June figures of 81,300 vehicles sold across its global network of dealers. It has been the most successful year in automobile sales in the company’s history.

Better services

Hansade Hunadach, authorised dealers of bajaj motorcycles, has upgraded its services through Manakamana Trade Link and Khan Automobiles. The upgraded showrooms in Lahari & Rajpuri will provide world class services to their customers and also sell genuine spare parts of bajaj motorcycles.

Easy money

Himalayan Bank and Transint International Inc., a New Jersey, USA based remittance company have signed an agreement to provide remittance services to Nepal residents in USA. Through this partnership, customers will be able to easily send money to Himalayan Bank accounts and other Nepal bank accounts in Nepal.

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Eco fair

Nepal Times Eco Fair 11-12 February at the Nepal Academy Kamaladi will also feature speakers on sustainability and the environment. The list of invited speakers include:

- Shweta Tulshar
- Imorin Mathema
- Ram Dhital
- Judith Chase
- Susanne Badoch
- Judith Chase
- Bikash Adhikari
- Himadri Palikhe
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For more information, please visit the official website of Nepal Times Eco Fair.

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Their success in the male-dominated world of Himalayan climbing will encourage Nepali women to follow their dreams, even when the path is a precarious, uphill ascent.

Stephanie Maxheim, French climber

Maxheim was determined to change all that and her first step was to organize a joint French-Nepali women’s expedition to the 6,814m-high Mt Ama Dablam last November. The goal was to collaborate with female Nepali climbers and provide a challenging summit and enhance their technical skills.

“I wanted to meet the women of Nepal, to get to know them, their lives,” Maxheim explained in Kathmandu recently.

With the help of Everest Women’s 7 Summit Eco-Action she connected with two qualified female climbers, Pema and Dawa Sherpa from Rolwaling. French climber
Ingrid Engelbrecht joined the team, and Maxheim recalled: “Leadership responsibilities were as challenging as the climbing.”

The expedition set off for the Khumbu in early November 2011, accompanied by Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, a female Nepali guide and three male Nepali guides. “It was ten days before we really began communicating with each other, but as we became more comfortable with one another, we began sharing thoughts on femininity and cultural perceptions,” Maxheim recalls.

Engelbrecht was surprised to learn from her Nepali climbers about the discrimination and stigmatisation that Nepali women face, especially in rural areas. Women who are able to find employment as porters and guides have financial independence and other opportunities that are unheard of for traditional Nepali women who live relatively sheltered existences dominated by oppressive, patriarchal rules.

There are women-run companies that have broken free. Three Sisters Adventure Trekking (www.3SistersAdventure.com), has worked since the mid-1990s to empower Nepali women, trained over 800 women providing female guides and porters for female trekking parties. Friends Adventure Team and Himalayan Mentor (www.HimalayanMentor.com) in Kathmandu also provide female trekking guides for female tourists.

Engelbrecht and Dawa summited Ama Dablam on 23 November and the achievement was all the more symbolic because it showed what Nepali women are capable of if they were given the same opportunities and status in society as the men.

The expedition not only gave experience and skills to Nepali climbers, but Pema and Dawa are now mountaineering guides themselves. Said Maxheim: “Their success in the male-dominated world of Himalayan climbing will encourage Nepali women to follow their dreams, even when the path is a precarious, uphill ascent.”

Ingrid and Dawa summited Ama Dablam on 23 November and the achievement was all the more symbolic because it showed what Nepali women are capable of if they were given the same opportunities and status in society as the men.
EVENTS

DINING

Valentines Day Special, celebrate love with dance, face painting, photo booths and special sweet dishes this Valentines Day. Rs 200, 14 February, 3pm onwards, Bagaicha, Jawalakhel, 9841721736, 9841593121

MUSIC

Garage Sale for a Better World, Animal Nepal and 1905 are organising a charity garage sale to encourage animal care in Nepal. 2 February, 10am to 2pm, 1905, Kantipath

GIHE Youthfest 2012, music, food and unlimited entertainment with performances by Nepsydaz, Albatross and Adrian Pradhan. 11 February, 7pm, GEMS Complex, Dhapakhel, 9849831493, 984930042

Emotions in Motion, an art exhibition by Govinda Sah with exquisite modern paintings. Closes on 7 February, 11am onwards, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal Revisited

Cycle 7: Identity, three photography installations: Navarasa, Ink’d and The Tales of Dirty Feet by talented photographers. 9.30 am to 8pm, 6 January to 15 February, Galerna CUC, Dhipha Complex, Maharajgunj

Buddha Bar, offers a warm and cozy space for intimate conversations over a large selection of drinks. Thamel, 9817023295

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

Chopstix, savory Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Begin your feast with the Dragon Chicken, it’s one-of-a-kind. Kumarapati, 5521178

Trisara, get ready for some affordable but equally scrumptious srnoo-dubs-its crispy chicken and khao soi is worth a mention. Lazimpat

BBQ Station, a place for those of you who simply can’t do without meat. BBQ Station offers a chance to make your own Barbeque on coal. Trisara

Mako’s, an elegant fine dining Japanese restaurant at Dwarika’s Hotel which serves authentic Japanese cuisine. Timings are 11.30 to 14.30 and 18pm to 22pm. Dwarika Hotel, Battisputali, 4479488

BBQ Station, a place for those of you who simply can’t do without meat. BBQ Station offers a chance to make your own Barbeque on coal. Trisara

Ultimate Photography Workshop, Artudio presents the 12th session of digital photography workshop. Rs 3000, starting from mid-February. 9am to 9pm, Artudio, Lazimpat, 9841484825, 9841737800

Dining

Buddha Bar, offers a warm and cozy space for intimate conversations over a large selection of drinks. Thamel, 9817023295

Pink Floyd Tribute Concert, a tribute to the one of the most influential rock bands in history. 11 February, 2pm to 7pm, Bagaicha, Jawalakhel!

End of the World Tour III, a series of gigs with bands like Equals and Rage Hybrid. 3 February, 5pm onwards, Gar’s Terrace, Thamel

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Black Pepper Café & Pub, cosmopolitan dining and drinking in a traditional style courtyard, try the apple sauce pork chops and enjoy the good service. Kousondole Heights, Lalitpur, 5521697, 5536926

Chez Caroline, for business lunches and relaxed dinners, Babar Mahal Revisited

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

Bronco Billy, a restaurant in town

Going Green is not just a trend anymore, it’s a way of life.

Visit the first ever Eco Fair in Nepal and discover a lifestyle that respects and co-exists with our environment.

Meet ‘green’ entrepreneurs, learn from the experts and buy beautiful products that are totally eco-friendly.

Engage, be inspired and have lots of fun.

Free entrance for visitors bringing 2 KILOS of waste paper for RECYCLING at WEPCO and JAMARKO stalls.

To register for the Eco Fair seminar in the fair Type Eco-space=Name and send to 5004
Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Cafe, enjoy wood-fired pizza with a superb view of boudha stupa and free wifi. Boudha. 2136861

The Ghungri Cafe, a quiet and relaxing place with delicious food. Although known for their open momos, its Chef Salad is equally delicious. Pulchowk, 528703. ghungricafe@hotmail.com

Kaiser Cafe Restaurant & Bar, have a BBQ lunch and a glass of wine or beer inside the peaceful Garden of Dreams. Thamel. 4653491

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GETAWAYS

Ace Travels Winter Package, enjoy a luxurious yet affordable holiday winter package with Ace Travels to countries like Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. Offers start from Rs 48,800 per person in a 4 nights and 5 days tour package to Thailand, call its toll free number 1600106000

Fulbari Resort, enjoy the scenic view as you pamper yourself with tennis, golf, drinks and dinners. Rs 6900 per person for 2 nights and 3 days. Pokhara. 4461916, 4462248, resv@fulbari.com.np, sales@fulbari.com.np

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Japanesse Crepe House Station

O

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Vitamin supplements

Drug companies that make vitamin supplements are not exactly ecstatic these days. Recent medical journal data show the benefits of taking vitamin supplements may be exaggerated. It is well established only to ensure an adequate intake of folic acid (B9) in young women and B12 and vitamin D in the elderly.

So, there is no good reason to take some of the highest-selling vitamins (A, C and E) routinely if you are eating a normal, balanced diet. In fact, a placebo-controlled trial among Finnish smokers taking a high dose of vitamin A supplement showed that there was significantly increased lung cancer rates in the vitamin A cohort. Consuming biologically-active substances (vitamins) should not be assumed to be risk free.

A pooled analysis of data from 26 clinical trials including 105,065 subjects found that vitamin E supplements were associated with an increased risk of death. Similarly, another study of 11,350 people showed that preventive use of over 200 mcg of vitamin C per day did not reduce the risk of developing a cold or the severity of cold symptoms. So much for the sugar-flavoured vitamin C pill you popped this morning.

Folic acid (B9) deficiency leads to birth defects which occur early in pregnancy before most women know they are pregnant. Folic acid is available in beans, peas, orange and dark-green vegetables which we do not seem to get enough of. Hence supplementing the diet of women of child-bearing age with folic acid has decreased the incidence of these birth defects in their offspring.

For sure, in impoverished areas of the world like Nepal where there may be vitamin deficiency in the regular diet, taking vitamin supplements may be prudent. For example, vitamin A deficiency leads to night blindness in the developing world. Deficiency of vitamin C causes bleeding gums and slow healing of wounds. Vitamin A is found in dairy products and yellow or orange fruits, and citrus fruits are rich in vitamin C.

Neither do vitamin supplements seem to prevent heart attacks, strokes and cancer, diseases prevalent in both the rich and poor worlds.
Conservation Nepal. their migratory patterns," says has forced birds to change populations and climate change the brink of extinction. several migratory and birds on depend on wetlands, including 867 bird species found in Nepal species. Nearly a quarter of the globally-threatened animal to many of the 89 importances. Limited knowledge about their worried that they are not given ecosystems of global and they are important for runoff during the dry season and they are important for agriculture. Nepal has 20 wetland ecosystems of global significance, but Khatri worries that they are not given priority in the national agenda. Furthermore, Nepalis have limited knowledge about their importance. Wetlands in Nepal are home to many of the 89 globally-threatened animal species. Nearly a quarter of the 867 bird species found in Nepal depend on wetlands, including several migratory and birds on the brink of extinction. "Destruction of wetlands and pollution of rivers and lakes have led to dwindling bird populations and climate change has forced birds to change their migratory patterns," says Hum Bahadur Gurung of Bird Conservation Nepal. Both Gurung and Khatri are keen to draw attention to the importance of wetlands by marking World Wetlands Day on 2 February. The date marks the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, and this year’s theme is ‘Wetlands and Tourism’. They are also celebrating the day by releasing the findings of a nationwide bird census carried out in January (see box) and want to draw the attention of the government to make necessary laws and implement protection measures for wetlands. Khatri says his organisation wants to use this year’s World Wetlands Day to integrate wetland protection with eco-tourism so that money from visitors can be ploughed into conservation work. For this it is important to involve local people living on the fringes of wetlands so that they have a stake in the protection of the water bodies. So far 463 households directly dependent on wetlands have been identified for alternative livelihood support around Ghodaghodi Lake in Bardiya and Kosi Tapu Wildlife Reserve in Sunsari.

The Kosi Tapu was the first wetland site of international importance identified in Nepal, and is the largest with 17 types of wetland within its perimeter. Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands in Nepal has also begun a home stay program for tourists and birdwatchers in Kosi Tappu so that income is injected directly into the village economy. "Introducing activities like kayaking or rafting in wetlands, not only generates awareness but also helps increase incomes for local communities," says Khatri. Khatri and Gurung are working together to organise bird watching events in Kosi Tapu, Pokhara, Jagdishpur and other wetland sites on Friday. What worries Khatri is that although national legislation, park rules and regulations have been passed to protect biodiversity around wetlands around the country, enforcement remains weak. He says: "The National Wetland Policy is finally awaiting cabinet approval, but that is just the beginning. In Nepal, it is always the implementation that is a bigger challenge."
State of limbo

Thousands of Nepalis are stateless because the state does not give citizenship in the mother's name

On 27 February last year, the Supreme Court made a landmark decision in Sabina Damai’s case by establishing the mother’s nationality as a basis to grant citizenship.

Sabina doesn’t know who her father is and went to court after the district office repeatedly turned down her request for citizenship citing absence of the father. The verdict came as a ray of hope for many Nepalis who have been refused citizenship because of a discriminatory law that makes a father’s citizenship mandatory for an offspring to be eligible for citizenship. It is not enough for the mother to be a Nepali.

The Supreme Court ordered the Home Ministry to immediately start giving out citizenship certificates also based on a mother’s papers. The ministry sent letters to all district administrations to start giving out citizenship after the decision in Sabina Damai’s case.

RUBEENA MAHATO

In the name of the father

The Nepali state still does not recognise maternal lineage as a basis for citizenship

Mass murderers and criminals will not have their Nepali citizenship revoked, but fatherless children have no place here. Even after a clear Supreme Court verdict in Sabina Damai’s case that established a mother’s right to transfer citizenship, CDO offices still demand a father’s citizenship and a marriage certificate when a woman applies for citizenship for her offspring.

Meera Dhungana, the lawyer who fought the case of Sabina Damai says district administrations are defying the court’s order. “How can some district offices get the letters and others not?” she asks.

“They are not willing to believe that a woman can give her name to her children.”

S. Rai, 65, has spent most of his life trying to get Nepali citizenships for her sons

character, and still return empty handed. The fact that she is a Nepali and her children were born in this land does not matter. What matters is that the father of her children has refused to acknowledge them, and so they don’t deserve to be Nepalis. Thousands of Nepali men and women whose fathers have abandoned their families, or do not cooperate with the mother, are rendered stateless. Without citizenship papers, they are not eligible to apply for jobs, hold property or get a passport to travel abroad.

The Nepali state does not have their Nepali citizenships revoked, but fatherless children have no place here. Even after a clear Supreme Court verdict in Sabina Damai’s case that established a mother’s right to transfer citizenship, CDO offices still demand a father’s citizenship and a marriage certificate when a woman applies for citizenship for her offspring.

Meera Dhungana, the lawyer who fought the landmark case told me: “They will defy the Supreme Court, but they won’t change their mindset.”

It gets even more difficult when a Nepali mother is married to a foreigner. Instead of resolving this issue, a high level task force has recommended that the new constitution have even stricter provisions for Nepali women marrying foreigners to get citizenship rights for their children. A Nepali man’s foreigner wife can get a Nepali citizenship as soon as she can prove she has relinquished her earlier citizenship. But a Nepali woman’s foreigner husband has to stay in Nepal for 15 years before he can be considered for citizenship. Their children can be naturalised after that but will still not be eligible to contest top posts like head of the state, prime minister and chiefs of parliament, judiciary and security agencies.

These new provisions will directly infringe upon a woman’s right to marriage and family, right to choose the place of residence and right of her children to choose their citizenship. What’s worse is that these provisions were proposed by ‘revolutionary’ members of our Constituent Assembly who claim to be champions of gender equality.

Anyone arguing that all this is grossly unfair is usually met with a readymade answer from our uber-nationalist men who have to protect Nepal from being ever-run by Indians marrying our women. It seems only women are capable of endangering this country’s sovereignty even when it is mostly corrupt men who are involved in the forfeiting of citizenships and passports. Why should Nepali women have to pay the price for the dishonesty of a few men? Why should their children suffer? Can we seal the border if you are so insecure about Nepal’s sovereignty?

Time for CA members, men and women, to stand up for the basic human right to citizenship for tens of thousands of present and future stateless Nepalis.
who are over 40. Her husband committed suicide soon after marriage, and his family disowned her. Rai raised her two sons by herself, and made sure they were well educated. But now can’t get proper jobs, or own businesses or property.

A. Shrestha was married to an Indian national, but separated few years later. The authorities have asked her to furnish the father’s citizenship and their marriage certificate in order to process her daughter’s citizenship papers. “I am worried about my daughter’s future, where should I go?” she asks.

Many women are now seeking citizenship papers through illegal channels. “They are forcing women like us to commit a crime out of desperation,” Shrestha says, “is this the nationalism they are trying to protect?”

Dhungana says the Supreme Court has given a very clear verdict, and adds: “It is now up to the state to act on it.” (Some names of mothers in this story have been changed at their request.)

According to the new draft provision in the new constitution, these are the criteria for citizenship. Lawyers say this is more regressive than existing laws.

- Both mother and father have to be Nepali citizens for the children to get citizenship by descent. The Interim Constitution accepts the presence of either parent.
- Children born of a Nepali and foreigner parent will not be eligible for Nepali citizenship unless the foreigner parent renounces his/her previous citizenship. In case they refuse to do so, the children will risk being stateless.
- A child born of a Nepali mother but whose father’s status is unknown will not be eligible for citizenship.
- A child born of a Nepali mother whose parent’s status is unknown will not be eligible for citizenship.
- Children born in Nepal whose parents are unknown will get citizenship by descent but if one of the parents is discovered to be a non-Nepali, their citizenship will change to ‘naturalized’.
- A Nepali woman’s foreigner husband will have to live in Nepal for 15 years on a regular basis before being considered for Nepali nationality whereas the foreigner wife of a Nepali husband will get Nepali citizenship as soon as she relinquishes her foreign citizenship.

WHO CAN BE CITIZEN?

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HIMAL KHABARPATRIKA

COVER
In the Line of Fire Testing times for the young CA members

REPORTS
High on life +2 generation in abuse Economics of good and bad times Abducted lives

COMMENTARY
Storm in a tea cup by Radheshyam Adhikari Reformed land grabbing by Jagat Deoja
Paying for war during peace

Kantipur, 30 January

It has been more than five years since the end of the civil war, but post-war reconstruction and political instability continues to bleed the country’s economy.

The Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, which was established in 2005, has distributed 4.4 billion rupees to more than 140,000 families who lost their relatives during the conflict and transition years. Besides providing compensation, the ministry has also been distributing relief packages under 14 categories to injured, tortured, displaced, illegally detained, widowed and orphaned Nepalis.

Even as we approach the sixth anniversary of signing the comprehensive peace agreement, the number of people who come to the ministry claiming to be victims of war and demanding for compensation remains high. The figures are likely to increase significantly in the coming years as many are yet to be compensated for the destruction of property during the war and Madhes movement.

The pursuit of happiness

Rupa Sharma ‘Neha’ in Himal

Khabarpatrika, 30 January-12 February

Saraswati Magar, 35, of Ramghat, Pokhara had paid half a million rupees to a middleman for a fake marriage with a South Korean man, who is 20 years her senior. She has been living with him in Chanju for the past two years. “I was told that I would be free once I landed in Korea but I am forced to live with a man my father’s age,” she says.

Magar’s husband neither pays her nor allows her to work outside the home. She is just a wife to him. Now he wants her to give him a baby. If she refuses, he will not sign the necessary documents and Magar might end up behind bars.

Kamala Neupane, 26, of Ratmate, Pokhara and Nilam KC, 28 of Manthali in Ramechhap also share the same plight. “The middleman had assured me that the paper work was just a formality and I could work freely here. But the day I arrived here, I realised that I was sold just like Nepali girls are trafficked to brothels in Mumbai,” she told Himal Khabarpatrika. KC is currently living with her old Korean husband in Iksan. She had paid middleman Rs 700,000 thinking it was a fake marriage.

All three women understood the mess they were in only after they landed in Korea and were forced to work as bonded labourers.

More than 1000 Nepali women have married Koreans to gain entry into the country. However, the Nepali embassy in Seoul only has records for 300 such women. Many of the Nepali women are physically assaulted by their husbands, but have no legal recourse and are left to suffer in silence.

According to Korean law, foreign women are eligible to receive marriage certificates within three months of their stay. They don’t need work permits, but need their husbands’ approvals every six months for visa extensions. The South Korean men of whom are above 50 years, and either divorced or separated, want to marry Nepali women because they can easily use them as domestic help and free labourers.

Happy farmers

Naya Patrika, 31 January

Farmers of Palpa are earning thousands from commercial cultivation of Amriso or broom grass. Amriso grows well even in rocky landscapes, requires minimum investment and has a good market. Amriso is mostly used to make brooms as well as fodder and firewood. The Forestry Office in Tansen is organising a campaign to declare Palpa an Amriso district and has been promoting Amriso plantations in government premises, private forests and along roadsides.

The district office had planted 19,000 Amriso saplings five years ago. Not only has Amriso improved the livelihood of local farmers but also helped in conserving the soil and increasing greenery.

“Rs 20 million worth of Amriso was exported from the district last year,” Rambabu Paudel of Forestry Office said. “Some farmers are earning up to Rs 300,000 from Amriso alone.” Locals are using profits from Amriso farming to help schools and other social initiatives.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Mr Prime Minister, can you please explain to me what Jana-Satta is?”

US Ambassador Scott H DeLisi asks PM Bhattarai during their meeting in Singha Durbar on Wednesday, quoted in Naganik.
Santa Gaha Magar in Himal Khabarpatra, 12 February

While 1500 Nepalis leave the country each day in search of better opportunities and brighter future, Bikram Pun returned back home with the determination to succeed.

Pun rented a piece of land in Golfutar, Kathmandu and decided to start commercial mushroom farming. He has been producing 400 Kgs of mushrooms monthly which he supplies to various hotels in the capital.

Pun works 14 hours a day and says he enjoys working in the motherland. With rising demand for mushroom and seeds, the young farmer is planning to expand his business and wants to triple the production in coming years.

But he has also faced many challenges so far, with load shedding being the biggest problem. “It is important to maintain consistent temperature to get desired quality of mushrooms. I have to wake up in the middle of the night to check the temperatures when there is no electricity,” he says. Pun has also incurred losses of over a million rupees in six months due to the power cuts, but has not lost hope yet.

Yam Birahi in Annapurna Post, 30 January

In 1980, Argentina became the first country to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Since then 34 post-war states have successfully established similar commissions. While providing justice is the primary aim of TRC, it also ensures that no such atrocities occur in the future. However, even after years of deliberation, Nepal has failed to deliver justice to the victims of the conflict.

The TRC bill has been stuck in the CA for more than a year and half and even if a commission eventually gets formed, justice for the victims and their families is not guaranteed. The political parties are pressing for mass amnesty for all offenders, except in the case of rape and if this happens, there is little use of having a commission in the first place. “Just because the parties happen to reconcile their differences, they don’t have the authority to condone the crimes committed. It should be up to the victims or their families to decide if they want to pardon the perpetrators,” says human rights worker Charan Prasain.

The activists are frustrated over the apathy the state has shown so far towards their repeated calls to look into cases of forced disappearances, murders, rapes and other war crimes. Acting on the writ petition filed by activists, the Supreme Court issued a show cause notice to the government, but it has turned a blind eye to the SC’s interim order.
The bottom line

Only in Nepal would a senior govt official get away with what the Energetic Minister proudly announced last week: “The bottom line is that we will only have 14 hours of load-shedding this winter.” And we are supposed to hug and kiss Comrade First-Past-the-Post for that? Bottom line, my ass. The donkey can easily see the Under-supply Minister now making a similar statement about the gas shortage: “LPG will be in short supply only till 2014.”

Or the Prime Minister saying: “Since it now looks like the new constitution is going to be much worse than the one we already have, we have decided to just keep the interim constitution and get it over with.” May not be such a bad idea, after all.

The State Deconstruction Committee has decided to break Nepal up into 11 provinces, not counting a ‘non-territorial Dalit province’. If we are going to be counting a ‘non-territorial Dalit province’ into the new constitution, why not address the concerns of other marginalised communities and also declare virtual states for them:

1. Women’s Province (also known as “Stristan”)
2. Squatters’ Autonomous Region (also known as “Apanga Pradesh”)
3. Non-Territorial Special Third Gender Zone
4. Apanga Pradesh
5. NRN Prefecture
6. e-Territorial Special Third Gender Zone

Predictably, the SRC split into the State Restructuring Commission (Revolutionary) and the State Restructuring Commission (Democratic) and the only future course is to reconstitute a new Commission for the Restructuring of the State Reconstruction Commission (CR-SRC). In a similar vein, since Comrade Ferocious has decided to bunk all meetings of the Dispute Resolution Committee that he heads, maybe he needs to set up a Task Force to Resolve Disputes. Within the Dispute Resolution Committee (TFRD-DRC) and serious attention needs to be paid to the delays in implementing the 45-day Constitution Timetable that BRB had set out when he took office. The only way out now is to agree on a timetable to sit down so they can draw up a new timetable to adjust the old timetable.

Meanwhile, the grunted faction within the dis-gruntled faction of the original rump of the Sad Bhavana Party has decided to split into three new splinter groups. One of these is the faction led by Minister of Re-education Rajinder (“Rs 6,000 per Journalist”) Mahato who recently declared that he would blockade Kathmandu.

Amidst all the doom and gloom sometimes you see a headline that is like a cloud with the silver lining. The news that the Nobel Peace Prize Committee is to be investigated for corruption was one such feel-good piece. Nepal has no reason to be ashamed of the most corrupt govt in our history when, it seems, even the Nobel Committee is on the take. Which means that in hindsight, it was unfair to ridicule Girija Prasad Koirala and Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s chances of jointly getting the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize. They may actually have had a stab at it if we had only got our act together to send an emissary to Oslo bearing gifts.

The other feel-good story this week is that the United Kingdom is on the verge of ethnic disintegration with Scotland about to break away. So, it’s not just us. And, this one was the best. Belgium was shut down again on 30 January because of a bandit. So, does that mean the Belgians are not going to get US visas, too?

In the old monarchy days, the king and the clown prince never travelled together in the same plane or car. But there seems to be no such rule for the Maoist holy trinity of BRB, PKD and MBK who last week commandeered the ex-royal Super Puma to make an aerial inspection of the new Fast Track Highway. Although they shook hands when they first met up at the helipad, the mule’s mole noticed the three studiously avoided each other and there was a stony silence throughout the trip.

There is some serious miscommunication in the Balu Water communication unit. The PM’s press adviser apparently didn’t know the PM had invited a bunch of journalists for a tete-a-tete the other day. The invites went from another adviser via Facebook. BRB’s well-wishers in the party have also told him point blank that his biggest liability is Comrade First Lady.

Headline of the week (with the Ass’ aside): Govt To Segregate Garbage (Wonder Who They Will Put Where)