Despite reckless apathy and negligence of successive governments after 2008, Nepal’s young entrepreneurs, the private sector, scientists and community groups are overcoming crippling shortages of electricity, fuel, food and water.

Nepal leads the world in biogas technology, community micro-hydro projects, and captive solar systems. Nepali companies are forging ahead with innovative alternative energy installations, rainwater harvesting, and organic farming.

Nepali Times is organising the first-ever EcoFair 2012 this weekend to showcase examples of ecologically-sound and sustainable lifestyles. Visit Nepal Academy from 11-12 February and learn to be self-sufficient and live with shortages of everything.

Energy emergency p4
The real story behind the shortages of petrol, diesel, cooking gas, water and electricity

My Two Paisa
by Paavan Mathema
Forget about inviting new investors or encouraging new FDI in 2012, we will be lucky to keep the ones we have
F
or an example of an elected leadership that has exhibited utter disregard for the national interest, the welfare of its citizens, and the country’s reputation and standing in the international arena, none surpass the successive governments that have (mis)ruled Nepal since 2008.

For a country reeling under a crippling power shortage, no new hydropower generation capacity has been added in the past two years. The construction of the last big power project began 11 years ago. In major river schemes have pulled out due to local opposition, lack of political support and the obduracy of the bureaucracy. Power cuts are therefore going to last at least till 2020 (see p5).

Looking at the chronic fuel, food, power and water crises, one would think that anyone deliberately out to destroy this country and sabotage the economy couldn’t have done a better job. The opportunity cost of all this is hurting every sector. Even in areas where this country had earned international recognition, like community forestry, the past three administrations have been responsible for wholesale plunder and setting the clock back 30 years. There are nearly a million Nepalis working in Qatar, yet our national airline only has three flights a week to Doha and Kuala Lumpur.

Nepal has repeatedly missed the deadline on ratifying the amendments to the Montreal Protocol on the phaseout and control of refrigerants and other chemicals that warm the atmosphere. We are the only country in Asia not to have ratified them, and this means we can’t draw on $2 million dollars in technical assistance from the United Nations. The draft law was approved by the previous government, but successive governments have been just too distracted to push it through the CA.

In 2009, the cabinet decided to set up a Disaster Management Authority to oversee a $120 million plan to prepare Nepal for earthquakes, but the legislation has been languishing in the parliament ever since.

Next week, Nepal will be internationally blacklisted for failing to ratify two crucial international conventions of which it is a signatory: the Mutual Legal Assistance Bill and Extradition Bill. It is a cruel irony, but sadly not all at surprising, that for a country that so dependent on remittances transfers and during Nepal Investment Year, we may be declared a pariah for international financial transactions.

Yet, despite such reckless apathy and negligence, Nepal’s young entrepreneurs, private sector, and local organisations are forging ahead with innovative alternative energy installations and building a sustainable future. In urban solar power, garbage recycling, micro-hydro power, biogas, organic agriculture, Nepalis have shown what can be achieved with a forward-looking problem-solving approach.

We have created opportunity out of adversity. It is to showcase these examples of ecologically-sound and sustainable lifestyles that this newspaper is organizing the Nepal Times Ecofair 2012 over the weekend in which we hope will be an annual affair.

We hope to see you there.

IDENTITY CRISIS
Thank you for pointing out how very few women are speaking on the subject of women’s rights, or having discussions on facebook on ‘Identity crisis’, Editorial, #592. It’s always the big boys doing the big talk, and neither the media nor the leaders seem concerned that a large portion of the population is completely silent on matters of interest. Perhaps it’s not such a bad idea to have a woman’s province or ‘Sristan’ like the Assam called it. A Sristan of the women, by the women, and for the women.

Rita Shrestha

- Despite our ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity, we haven’t got a clear-cut idea of mother Nepal. We are Nepalis first with a common citizenship. Although the dignity of the individual is of absolute importance, a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood is essential in a pluralistic and heterogeneous society. There can be no progress without unity.

DG

- Having ministers or powerful politicians in Kathmandu from particular ethnicities has not helped the concerned communities in anyway. So instead of fighting over the number of Brahmin, Chettri, Madhesi ministers, it would be more worthwhile to count the number of good schools and teachers in the districts, or the number of jobs that are being created so that thousands of Nepalis don’t have to migrate to foreign countries. What Nepal really needs is visionary and capable leaders who will put the interests of the people and the country first regardless of their ethnic and regional affiliations.

Rahi

FATHER
Thank you Rubena Mahato for a hard hitting and timely article (‘In the name of the father’, #592). The focus should instead be on granting a mother the right to pass on her Nepali citizenship to her children regardless of whether the father is absent, unknown or an Indian, Chinese, Mexican, or German. Yes even the son of a Nepali woman and an Indian man is a Nepali.

Indira Oli

- One thing that Rubena Mahato missed out which is sadly not a priority on the national agenda, but which is personally important to me, is what happens when there are two mothers involved? What happens when a Nepali-kechan couple decides to adopt a child or conceive one through medical intervention? How does the child get citizenship, or will heshbe be rendered stateless as well? At a time when same-sex marriages might be legalized in the new constitution, this is an important question. But since our country is in political turmoil, and since we are still a very intolerant society when it comes to sexual minorities, I guess this issue will have to “wait” and remain in the closet just like us.

Asth K

Children of mothers who conceived after being raped, children of single mothers, children of expatriate women, children of parents with mixed nationalities, adopted children: all have full rights to citizenship. Enough of the ultra-nationalist, ‘we must protect the purity of mother Nepal’ propaganda. Denying citizenship to innocent children many of whom come from very disadvantaged backgrounds is not going to safeguard our country’s sovereignty.

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My mother is Nepali and father is an Indian (State of himbij, #592). I consider myself a true Nepali because I was born from a Nepali mother’s womb in Nepal. However, the state has denied me the right to citizenship for 20 years and I have lived to be a refugee without any national identity. My friend, the other hand, whose father is Nepali and mother a Japanese holds citizenship to her children regardless of the name of the father’, #590). The

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We are into the fifth year of the first Madhes uprising and if Girija Prasad Koirala was alive, he would have looked back and admitted his failure to gauge local sentiment cost this nation dearly. The estrangement of Nepali politics with the Madhes outlived him.

This week when Minister JP Gupta warned about severing ties with the state, it drew howls of protests. But he was not speaking his own mind, he was echoing the larger sentiment across the Tarai. If lawlessness, refusal to recognise the Madhesi identity and suspicious eyes of Kathmandu’s hill establishment was not enough, state apathy towards the misery faced by the Madhesi people has pushed this constituency towards the tipping point.

The power struggle in Kathmandu makes headlines everyday, but this is in shameful contrast to how little people in the capital are aware of the woes of those living in the plains. There are hundreds of villages across 20 districts of the Madhes with no roads. There are villages right on the East West Highway that are not on the national grid. Few have drinking water and sanitation. Thousands of Madhesi youths have been denied education, and those who have gone to schools don’t have jobs because they can’t prove they belong to this land. Hundreds languish in jails, guilty or innocent, with no legal remedy because ‘officially’ they don’t exist. With no hope for a better future, many have migrated or resort to cross-border crime.

Many in eastern Tarai froze to death this winter. But the fatalities were reduced to statistics in the media, the numbers masked the glaring ostracisation of a people who don’t count because they are dirt poor. There is a gathering storm over the Madhes and choosing not to see will not wish it away. The Madhesi Janadhistha Forum, which led the first and the second Madhes uprising has since disintegrated into three factions and there is a political vacuum in the Tarai. Public opinion polls have shown that the Tarai people are as disillusioned with their own leaders as the traditional rulers in Kathmandu.

Madhesi leaders including Gupta are themselves facing corruption charges and there is nothing that can make them in power for most of the period since CA elections, Madhesi parties have done little to improve the lives of those they claim to represent.

Rajkeshor Yadav of MJF-Republic admitted to me: “The political leadership including those in Madhesi parties have failed to even symbolically integrate Madhes with the Nepali state.” While thousands of Maoist combatants are being integrated in the army as a political compromise, the state failed to appease Madhesis with even a symbolic gesture.

The unreasonable delay in the implementation of the Inclusion Bill by the Public Service Commission is another case in point.

For a while, the fact that the president and vice-president were Madhesi diminished the anger in the plains, but many still see Nepali nationalism defined by the traditional Kathmandu rulers in daura suruwal. The humiliation of being called a traitor in your own land is something 65 percent of the population will never understand.

The burden of statelessess and exclusion is at the heart of the demand for ‘One Madhes’. Leaders like Yadav admit that the Madhes may be embroiled in resource conflict with upstream provinces in a future federalist structure, but they find identity more important in the here and now. The fault lines of ethnic politics are real and the bigger parties are faced with twin challenges of balancing issues of identity with maintaining social harmony. It may be relatively easy to address the demands of the agitating hill ethnic groups by ensuring radical changes in the state structure that grants autonomy.

But the real challenge is still what it was three years ago: can Kathmandu convince half this country’s population which lives in the plains that they are not second-class citizens?
The real story behind the shortages of petrol, diesel, cooking gas, water and electricity

DEWANRAI

The figures just keep getting worse: Nepal’s diesel consumption has grown three-fold in the past five years mainly because of the electricity shortage. Nepal’s fuel bill grew by 36 per cent last year to Rs 80 billion, and that was Rs 10 billion more than all our exports put together.

The government buckled under student protests last month and offered a 33 per cent subsidy to students and ‘poor people’ on petroleum products. No one knows what constitutes ‘poor’ and how to organise the distribution of subsidised fuel.

A cabinet meeting last week decided to release Rs 2 billion to NOC to clear its bills with Indian Oil. But that money hasn’t yet reached NOC, besides it owes the Indians Rs 4.5 billion.

ELECTRICITY

If you thought the petroleum scenario was scary, the electricity crisis is worse. Even the chief of general services at Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), Gosai KC throws up her hands in despair: “I will not live to see load-shedding free day in my life time.”

No power has been added to the national grid for the past two years, even though demand has grown 20 per cent in that time. Five hydro projects are expected to start operation in the next five months, but they will add only 40 MW to the grid when the winter shortfall is over 700 MW.

“After we produce enough to meet present demand, we need generation capacity to grow at 100MW per year,” says NEA board member Krishna Prasad Dulal. “But lack of planning and poor execution has landed us in the present situation.”

The government is trying to encourage investors into hydropower. Nepal Rastra Bank has made it mandatory for commercial banks to make 10 percent of their total lending to the agriculture and energy sectors within the next three years. The cabinet last week endorsed a 10-point work plan to reduce power rationing, offering a 30 per cent increase in the PPA rate for ongoing and new hydro projects from domestic investors. The new rate is set at Rs 4.80 during monsoon and Rs 8.40 during winter per unit.

“The work plan has addressed our demand but it would be better if it could also include projects which are already operational,” says Subarna Das Shrestha of the Independent Power Producers Association of Nepal (IPPPAN). “We want the government to implement it, we will do our part.”

Then there are the so-called Super Six projects that total 190 MW which are expected to gain momentum after this agreement. NEA itself has another five big projects (including Upper Tamakoshi and Chilime) totalling 480 MW be completed by 2017. By that time, Nepal will have surplus power during rainy season but there will still be a shortage in the dry season because demand will also grow.

“Load shedding will remain well beyond 2017,” explains Sher Singh Bhat of NEA, “we need at least 4,000 MW of run-off-river projects or a 1,000 MW reservoir project to end power cuts.”

But local opposition, extortion, labour militancy have all delayed existing projects, including the construction of critical transmission lines. Sunil B Malla at the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat paints an apocalyptic picture: “The economy will collapse when power cuts reach 18 hour coupled with fuel shortage.”

Energy emergency

You don’t need to go far these days to see proof of gross mismanagement and government incompetence. The dark cities, long queues of cars and motorcycles at gas stations, locals commandeering LPG delivery trucks contrast sharply with the political wrangling over power, the peace process and constitution. The economy is a wreck, and investors have crossed the tipping point.

Oil

The petroleum shortage is due to the state-owned Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) not paying its bills to Indian Oil. NOC’s monthly losses are a staggering Rs 1.2 billion despite the increase in fuel prices last month.

“The bottom line is that the selling price is way below the buying price,” says Mukunda Dhungel of NDC. The utility loses Rs 14 for every litre of diesel it sells, Rs 454 per LPG cylinder and Rs 3 per litre of kerosene. It makes a small margin on sale of petrol and aviation fuel, but five times more diesel is consumed than petrol.

In the past five years, crude oil prices have roughly tripled from around $30 per barrel to around US$110. The supply chain has also been disrupted because of per barrel to around US$110. The supply chain has also been disrupted because of

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<th>SCARY FIGURES</th>
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<td>Total installed capacity: 700MW</td>
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<td>Power generation in winter: 300MW</td>
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<td>Power demand in winter: 1,500MW</td>
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<td>Demand growth: 10 per cent per year (100 MW)</td>
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To be added by September 2012: 400MW
To be added by 2017: 800MW

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<th>TOTAL ENERGY</th>
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<td>Nepal's consumption of 410,000 million gigajoules of energy every year is equivalent to 5.3 million tons of oil, or 15,000MW of electricity</td>
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<td>Petroleum products make up 10%</td>
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<td>Electricity 2%</td>
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<td>Biomass (firewood, dung) 78%</td>
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PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

DEWAN RAJ

Times
4 NATION

10 - 16 FEBRUARY 2012 #591

Biomass (firewood, dung) 78%
Mind your own business

Mixing business with politics is driving investors away

A
dydropower drought, labour union storms, blizzards of local opposition, and the constant tornadoes of extortionist politicians—that about sums up the investment climate two months into the government’s self-declared Nepal Investment Year 2012.

This is not just the result of outdated policies, it is also because there are deeper ethical problems with a rent-seeking government apparatus. The current Maoist-led coalition has given a whole new meaning to the phrase ‘red tape’.

Since January, we have looked at the business environment in this fortnightly space. The disturbing thing is that every other week there are new bad examples to cite.

The latest victim is Unilever Nepal, whose factory has been forcibly locked out this week after workers launched a strike demanding double salaries and allowances, interest free housing loans and house maintenance fees. There is a limit to labour demands, but these are so outrageous that it wouldn’t be surprising if Unilever follows in the footsteps of Surya Nepal which closed down its state-of-the-art garment factory in Morung last year after similar suicidal demands by unions.

For an illustration of what such militancy can do, just look at over-unionised West Bengal and how far it is lagging behind other states in India.

Genuine labour problems can be solved through dialogue. But when labour wings of political parties use strikes for payoffs, negotiations don’t work. A consignment of raw material of Sherpa Adventure Gear, the internationally recognised Nepali brand has now been stuck at customs for over 45 days. The production line has come to a halt, orders promised are in a limbo simply because the Minister of Commerce and Supply is too busy playing ethnic politics and organising a banda in far-western Nepal on Friday.

“I can deal with load shedding, I can deal with strikes, but having to deal with kleptocrats in power is beyond my capacity,” an exasperated Tashi Sherpa of Sherpa Adventure Gear told us this week from Europe where he is promoting his spring lineup. “It is impossible for honest investors to prosper or work in such an unhealthy environment.”

Nepal has slipped heavily in the global index of transparency, accountability and corruption in recent years, falling eight places to 154th from 2010 to 2011 in Transparency International’s annual report.

Nepal also faces the risk of being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a global anti-money laundering body, as the Parliament sits on the three acts that were supposed to be approved within 2010. Of the three acts, the Mutual Legal Assistance Bill and the Bill on Extradition Treaty have been registered at the parliamentary secretariat, while the bill on Organised Crime is stuck in the cabinet. At present, illegal outflow of capital from Nepal has outpaced official development assistance Nepal receives, precisely because of the risky investment climate within the country. If blacklisted, Nepal’s financial system will lose its credibility as FATF has warned its member countries to take strict measures against blacklisted countries that pose substantial money laundering and terrorism financing.

These should be terrible news for Nepal’s rulers. But do they know? Do they even care? Forget about inviting new investors or encouraging new FDI in 2012, we will be lucky to keep the ones we have.
Nepal’s protracted transition to a new nation-building process at the national political scene could take pointers from rural communities which have found new ways to resolve local disputes.

In the absence of elected representatives, disputes over unmet development needs have to be resolved by the people themselves. The formal justice systems are not accessible enough, especially for the poor and the marginalised. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms managed by community elites are too hierarchical.

Besides, when a third party intervenes to resolve a community dispute, it often results in a one-sided punishment to make winners and losers, sowing a new seed of long-term animosity in the community.

For the past two years, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been working with the Ministry of Local Development, IDDGs and VDCs in Mahottari and Sindhuli to implement a project to strengthen dispute management capacity at the local level.

In Mahottari, local Hindu and Muslim groups had planned religious functions at the same spot on the same day. Neither side was giving in and friction was growing. Mediators stepped in to navigate the opposing arguments and helped both groups to realize that the Hindu festival could be held on any day, whereas the Muslim festival, which is determined by the phase of the moon, had to be held on a particular date. The Hindu group showed flexibility by agreeing to organise their function after the Muslim event. Moreover, both the groups also agreed to respect each other’s religion and thus, the potentially serious inter-religious dispute was amicably resolved.

Three brothers were quarrelling in Sindhuli over the inheritance of family property while their elderly father was not willing to give it up as long as he was alive.

Mediators found out that the father, who was ill, was willing to divide the property to the sons provided that he and his wife, the mother of the three sons, would be well taken care of in their old age.

Finally the sons and the father came up with an agreement that incorporated the needs and wants of all sides: the partition of the property and the role of each son to take care of their parents. After each of them signed the agreement paper, the three sons bowed deeply and took the blessing of their father. The frail father, who was overjoyed, stroked the heads of his sons, a sign of restored family unity.

For each pilot VDC, 27 volunteer mediators (3 persons including at least 1 woman from each ward) are selected through a socially inclusive process and trained in dispute resolution.

Community Mediation Centers within VDCs offer free mediation services to locals to resolve disputes. Mediators are trained to be impartial facilitators who don’t pass judgment but listen attentively, ask pertinent questions, clarify issues, assist in seeing the dispute from the point of view of the other side, empower disputants to generate optional scenarios by themselves and to eventually resolve disputes in a win-win way. An agreement therefore addresses concerns and interests raised by both sides (see box).

Mediators focus not only on how to resolve contentious issues but also on how to rebuild relationships between two parties. This is particularly important because in almost all cases, community disputes arise among neighbours or family members who have to continue to live side-by-side.

There are lessons here for dispute resolution at the national level as well. Having observed the ways in which Nepali political leaders come to an agreement, they are more likely to fall back on a ‘package deal’ involving a series of different points, such as a 4-point deal or a 7-point agreement. When one contentious issue emerges, the leaders will not just focus on that single issue, but use the occasion to delve into past grievances or future concerns to finally come up with a multiple point resolution.

Curiously this pattern is also reflected in community mediation. The disputants, who are either neighbours or family members, revisit their past and explore their future together when resolving a dispute at hand by a multi-point ‘package’ agreement to realise that the Hindu festival could be held on any day, whereas the Muslim festival, which is determined by the phase of the moon, had to be held on a particular date. The Hindu group showed flexibility by agreeing to organise their function after the Muslim event. Moreover, both the groups (pictured, right) also agreed to respect each other’s religion and thus, the potentially serious inter-religious dispute was amicably resolved.

Next time there is a clash in the national politics, the experience of the villages of Sindhuli and Mahottari may offer an inspiration for creating a win-win scenario and rebuilding a harmonious relationship for the betterment of all.

Naoko Kitadate is a consultant with JICA’s Strengthening Community Mediation Capacity for Peaceful and Harmonious Society Project (COMCAP).
When Judith and Top Thapa were working on a Swiss-aided project in Dolakha in the 1980s, they used to pass the town of Charikot often. Situated on a ridge overlooking the Tama Kosi and in the lap of Mt Gauri Shankar, they were mesmerised by the scenic beauty of the place. In particular they had an eye on the hilltop outside town from where there is a 360 degree view of the surrounding mountains.

Judith is from Switzerland and Top’s parents, who had migrated to Burma, returned to Nepal when he was just 11. Both were employed in rural development projects of Swiss Development Cooperation in Dolakha, and they had just got married.

“We had worked in rural development and we came to realise that for future sustainability, jobs had to be created,” recalls Top, “and we felt we had to get into tourism.”

They decided to buy the hilltop above Charikot and start a small hotel. But as with everything in Nepal, there were obstacles every step of the way. It took two years to battle the red tape, three more years to organise water supply. Says Judith: “We enjoyed the place so much, the view was so dramatic that we were convinced the place had potential, and while waiting we started collecting building materials.”

Their patience paid off, and Charikot Panorama Resort was finally opened in 1995. Designed by Swiss Nepali architect Kai Weise as a series of small chalet-style bungalows, a dining area for 30 guests and a conference room, the Resort had just started getting bookings when the conflict broke out. Nepal’s tourism industry tapered off, and there were no guests. The Thapas closed down, and just maintained the buildings in the hope of better days.

Better days did return after the 2006 ceasefire, and traffic has picked up especially in the past two years. Kathmandu-based expatriates started coming here for long weekends, and with four major hydropower projects going up in the district, Charikot has the feel of a boomtown.

“We never had any ambition to be big, we want to remain small, hire local staff, buy local produce,” says Judith, who wants to specialise in niche tourism offering village walks, bird-watching and one-day hikes in the surrounding forests.

With a new dirt road to the 3,800m high Kalinchok, the shrine on its summit has suddenly become accessible for day trippers. Kalinchok offers one of the most spectacular panoramas of the Himalaya in Nepal with a sweep of the northern horizon from Annapurna to Khumbu.

“This is the most peaceful and scenic places I have ever been to in Nepal,” said a Kathmandu businessman after spending new year’s at the resort, “it is only four hours from Kathmandu and doesn’t feel touristy, the resort feels like home.”

For the Thapas, it has been a lifelong dream come true to run the resort. Says Top: “We don’t want to get rich doing this, we live modestly, provide jobs for local people, and that makes us happy.”

www.charikotresort.com
thapamaag@gmail.com
Tel: 049 421245
Inspired by Miss Moti

Kripa Joshi’s Miss Moti takes a plus-size woman’s anxiety about her body and turns it into a comic book with a strong message: size does not matter.

The word ‘moti’ in Nepali means ‘fat’ if the ‘t’ is pronounced hard, and means ‘pearl’ if the ‘t’ is soft. The concept behind the character comes from a painting Joshi submitted as part of her MFA thesis for the School of Visual Arts in New York. In 2006, she took the plum, self-conscious woman from her painting and transformed her into Miss Moti, the main character of the comic book. At a time when the definitions of beauty are becoming increasingly narrow with skinny and fair being the most important feminine qualities, Miss Moti is a role model for some of us heavies.

Joshi says, “I wanted to tell the story of an ordinary person with an extraordinary spark. My mother who is also tall and fat like Moti was my biggest muse.” Joshi was inspired to experiment with comic book format after reading graphic novels and meeting comic artists in the US. “In Nepal we usually think of comics as funny and light-hearted like the Tin Tin or the Archie series,” she explains, “but after I saw the wonderful work of rising artists in New York, I realised that comics can be a great medium for serious storytelling.”

Joshi is fascinated by traditional Mithila art, and has retained a similar style in her drawings. While she has completed the air-based Miss Moti and the Cotton Candy and the earth-based Miss Moti and the Big Apple, she plans on completing a fire comic volume incorporating all five elements: earth, water, fire, wind and ether.

Apart from the Miss Moti anthology, Joshi wants to make a graphic novel about her great grandmother’s life from the Rana regime to the present. “It’s challenging to put 90 years of real life onto paper and cartoon,” she says. Joshi recently conducted a comic workshop at Sattya Media Arts Collective where she met many promising Nepali artists and had words of encouragement for them: “Just because someone can’t draw well does not mean they cannot have comic strips,” she told them, “the key is to start small, self publish and distribute your own work.”

www.missmoti.com
www.kripajoshib.com

EVENTS

VALENTINE’S DAY SPECIAL, celebrate love with dance, face painting, photo booths and special sweet dishes this Valentine’s day.
Rs 200, 14 February, 3pm onwards, Bagaicha, Jawalakhel. 9841721736, 9841379780

Contemporary Forms, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre presents ‘The Prakriti Project Eternal V – Contemporary Forms’ by Rabindra Joshi was inspired to

THE FACTORY, a trendy residential for a refreshing experience in the chaos that is Thamel. Great food and drinks,

DINING

CINNAMON GRILL AND LOUNGE, mouth watering delicacies with live music. Try the grilled tenderloin steak and quiche lorraine with fresh fruit salad. Jhamsikhel, 5521339

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with zesty music. Don’t miss out on the cheesecake, it’s a must.

**SOMEPLACE ELSE**

Lhsa Bar, enjoy a beer or a splash of cocktail at this springboard for excellent young musicians starting out on the Thamel circuit. Thamel, 9865101043

**CHOPSTIX,** savory Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Begin your feast with the Dragon Chicken, it is one-of-a-kind.

Kumarpali, 5531118

**CHEZ CAROLINE,** for business lunches and relaxed dinners. Babar Manail Revisted

Maya Kendra, 5522113

**Dhokailma Cafe,** exquisite ambience, friendly service, cozy bar, place to see and be seen at. Patan Dhoka, Yala

Singma Food Court, for the best Singaporean and Malaysian cuisine in town. Patan, 5009692 and Dharatadi, 4411978, foodcourt@ wlink.com.np

Lazy Gringo, fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine.

Lhasa Bar, 5531217

**GETAWAYS**

Fulbari Resort, enjoy the scenic view as you pamper yourself with tennis, golf, drinks and dinners. Rs 6500 per person for 2 nights and 3 days, Pulchok, 4461918, 4462248, resv@fulbari.com. np, sales@fulbari.com np

ACE TRAVELS WINTER PACKAGE, enjoy a luxurious yet affordable holiday package with Ace Travels to countries like Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. Offers start from Rs 48,800 per person in 4 nights and 5 days tour package to Thailand. call its toll free number 1660510060

Day 27

A ps Sherpa and his team who are on a 120-day long trek on the Great Himalayan Trail have resumed their journey (see arrow,above) after reaching Khardung on 31 January. The team was felicitated by local officials, PNCCI, and media among others. Apa Sherpa and his team are traversing the country along the 1600 km trail which covers 20 of Nepal’s Himalayan districts to raise awareness about the effects of climate change in the Himalayas.

The events leading to the trek will be telecast in a show ‘Third Eye’ on Sagarmatha Television on Friday at 9.30 pm which will feature the team and the Great Himalayan Trail. Among pictures of majestic mountains and starry skies, team member twice-Everest summiteer, Dawa Sherpa has posted a photo of himself on Facebook with a beard (pictured). He adds: “We are planning not to shave or get a haircut until the end. Great Himalayan Beard!” The team is expected to reach Lalia by Wednesday next week and is accompanied by the German ambassador to Nepal, Verena Grill von Roedoen on this stretch of the trail.

On Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/climatesmarttrek
Follow on Twitter: @TheGHT_Nepal
On Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/climatesmarttrek.org.np

Station BBQ

Inside seating at Station BBQ is comfortable but impractical for proper dining. Glass coffee tables and low-lying armchairs have us huddling over our plates. Frankly, the lounge feel is as overdone as cover bands in Thamel. Slap on a different name to Station BBQ and you’ll easily get another res-tumed resto in the Jhamsikhel or Lazimpat style.

As of January, we have instated a new rating system based on a ten-point scale that accounts for the total experience at the time of review, where a 5.0 is satisfactory. Station BBQ gets a 6.0 in my book because it was unprepared to withstand the downpour, nevertheless dishing out a delectable pork chop and making an attempt at a unique dining experience.

Marco Polo.

Final Station BBQ in Jhamsikhel, across from Hermann’s Bakery and two houses down
Hepatitis E vaccine

A potentially life-saving vaccine for our part of the world was recently approved by China’s State Food and Drug Administration. The world’s first commercial hepatitis E vaccine (Hecolin) is now available in China, and the Chinese are targeting the vulnerable population in Nepal’s health ministry will look to the successful use of the JE vaccine, instrumental in decreasing JE futility. While most parts of China to vaccinate women of child-bearing age and patients with chronic liver disease who, if affected by hepatitis E often suffer life-threatening complications of this viral disease.

Hepatitis E, like typhoid fever, is a water-borne infection that has caused epidemics in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Central America. According to the WHO, one-third of the global population may have been infected by the virus, and an estimated 14 million people have the symptomatic disease annually with 300,000 deaths and 5,200 stillbirths. Doctors who look after pregnant women in Nepal know full well the possibly tragic outcome (by some estimates 30 per cent) in pregnant women who are affected by this virus who may go on to suffer fulminant hepatic failure and death.

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A network of social workers, environmentalists, child rights and animal rights advocates who form the BrickClean Network (BCN) have termed traditional bricks ‘Blood Bricks’. They say the industry is one of Nepal’s ‘dirtiest little secrets’ and are lobbying responsible citizens to opt for clean and green bricks.

The kilns exploit the most desperate people, thousands of children mould bricks or work as donkey handlers. “Each time I visit a brick factory I am outraged,” says Pramada Shah, activist with Animal Nepal. “The mules and donkeys are almost always overloaded, underfed, and made to work even when they are sick or pregnant.”

BCN is trying to promote socially responsible brick-making and has introduced a certification system in which brick factories are labeled as red (worst), orange (improving) or green (excellent). The network uses 18 criteria related to environment, child labour, workers’ conditions, and health and sanitation to rank factories. This year’s certification shows that Nepal does not have a single ‘green’ brick maker. However, three factories, Shree Satyanarayan, Shree Brahmayani and Bungamati Iha Udyog, receive the orange label.

“Middlemen or naikes prey on the most desperate: flood victims from Sarlahi, Tharus from Dang, Dalits from Kavre and Makawanpur, landless from Rukum and Rolpa,” says Helen Sherpa of World Education, “any disaster can push a family into a cycle of declining poverty, marked by six months of work in a brick factory.”

Child workers include those with disabilities. The workers’ health tends to deteriorate in the factory’s polluted working environment, in which people live in makeshift huts, with poor sanitation. Brick factories move to places with lower rent and cheaper labour, leaving behind a trail of devastation. A recent government study shows that the industry annually scoops up 1 million cubic meters of fertile soil in the valley alone to bake into bricks.

Of the estimated 750 brick factories in the country, only 450 are registered with the government. Recently factory owners protested against having to pay VAT, arguing that the industry does not import raw materials and provides much needed jobs to countless people.

“We are speaking of a very profitable industry which runs on coal from India and is not exactly the best employer. Why should this industry be treated differently?” asks Usha Manandhar of BCN.

Manandhar says the BCN certification has the potential to end this type of modern-day slavery and clean up the environment. www.brickclean.net

Bricks are often produced by bonded labourers, including children

Brick factories are the Valley’s number one polluters

Over 1,000 mules and donkeys haul bricks and are made to work till they drop
Nepali Times: You were involved as a constitutional adviser in Nepal since 2006. How does it feel to come back to see that the process is still stuck?

Yash Ghai and Jill Cottrell: It is sad, when the country needs to move forward on many fronts. We feel anger at the reluctance of the traditional elites to engage in serious discussions with the marginalised groups on their concerns. Anger also at the betrayal of the people whose struggle enabled the four major political parties to grab power.

Were we perhaps a bit too ambitious in expecting peace and constitution process to move so fast?

No. The country was ready for a move to a new political order. The monarchy had been vanquished. The civil war had come to an end. A popular uprising had rejected the old system and defined the agenda of reform. Some broad consensus had been established between the Maoists and the major political parties. But by the same token these political groups hijacked the jana andolan. Despite the earlier enthusiasm of the Maoists for fundamental social reform, they and their new political partners had little interest in change, as is obvious from their numerous ‘x’ point agreements. Politics quickly slipped back to the post-1990 constitution style, with intense rivalry among these elitist political groups dominated by a handful of old warriors. The exclusion and marginalisation of the Janjatis, Dalits and women continued.

Two levels of politics emerged: one between Maoists and the three parties, focused largely on the self-interest of their leaders, complicated by intra-party disputes, and the other between them and the marginalised groups, where the former were the masters and the latter supplicants, almost always triggered by violence and other forms of disruption. This prevented a proper national discourse on political and economic reform. In the arrangements for the interim administration and for constitution making, the four parties excluded others and ensured their total control of the Constituent Assembly and prevented it from becoming a truly national gathering.

Still, it wasn’t supposed to be easy.

Transition from war to constitution is seldom easy, but it is our impression that the issues that have bedevilled the process have not much to do with the aftermath of the
war as such–after all a Comprehensive Peace Accord preceded the adoption of the Interim Constitution—and much to do with political rivalries among the elite. And their arrogance, manifested in their contempt of experts, and of people’s participation in public affairs.

Shouldn’t we have foreseen that the demand for ethnically-based federalism would be so polarising? Yes. In the last few decades many countries have been confronted by demands for autonomy by minority and other marginalised groups, often with horrendous consequences. There is now some understanding of how to deal with grievances that lead to demands for autonomy, which require long and patient negotiations. No politician that we met showed the least bit of interest in establishing and managing a federation. In other words, the demands need not have been as polarising as they have been.

What can we learn from history and the experience in other countries in addressing the genuine demands of the marginalised communities while preserving national unity? Social disruption is usually the result of social injustices. Without addressing injustices there can be no real social solidarity, essential to national unity. If the four-party alliance had taken the demands of the marginalised communities seriously, including political participation, negotiated solutions, and embraced them as full partners in the interim arrangements, there would not be the clamour for federalism today, with its complexity and we fear divisions among the marginalised communities that serve no one’s interest.

But can there be a compromise when positions are so rigid and it has become a zero sum game? Compromise is unlikely if there is no trust, the elite group has not even tried to establish trust among themselves or with the others. Even if a compromise is reached, it is unlikely to lead to realistic and workable solutions, driven not by reason but threats of violence. A terrible legacy that the politicians have perpetuated is the disregard of negotiations and the art of compromise. And the proposal by some members of the elite groups now to adopt the interim constitution, with its manifold manifestations of the 1990 Constitution, is bound to raise fresh suspicions of their motives. Back to square one… but compromise there must be, and when it is eventually achieved, the country will look back and ask why it took so long and who was to blame.

Is there also a compromise formula between directly elected executive president and parliamentary system? Is it workable? The French version of it is workable if there is a political culture of negotiations and compromise, which is missing here. In practice in the mixed system, if the president has a majority in parliament, it works like a normal executive presidency, and if not, power shifts to the prime minister with significant parliamentary features, and considerable tension between the two top officials. If both are elected, conflict and deadlocks are surely guaranteed.

Plastic-free treks

The sight of plastic bags flying in the wind or stuck in the branches of a tree have become a common all over the Nepal Himalaya where hundreds of thousands of tourists come trekking every year. This is not just an ugly sight, but since plastic bags are non-biodegradable they stay around for at least 1,000 years. Bags less than 20 micros are seriously harmful to health of human beings as well as wildlife as well. Ladakh and Bhutan have successfully implemented a ban on plastic bags, and Nepal could easily follow suit. Saying no to plastic bags and using cotton or re-usable bags is one of the easiest responsible acts that anyone can do to preserve environment. Trekking companies, national park rangers, local lodges and tea shops need to be on board.

On the occasion of Nepal Times Eco-Fair 2012, Jerome Edou and Adhish Gurung of Base Camp Trek are launching a campaign to ban single-use plastic bags in all national parks and trekking areas, and put the Nepal Himalaya firmly on the map as a Plastic Bag Free Zone.

“We want to make sure our children will not ask if plastic bags grow on trees,” says Gurung, who hopes the message will spread. He and Edou have just launched a Facebook campaign and are spreading the word along Nepal’s trekking trails from this spring season.

To join, contact Adhish Gurung of Base Camp Trek gurung.adhish@gmail.com +977-1-4411504 http://www.facebook.com/pages/BAN-the-BAG/173744819401819?sk=wall

Tomorrow at Nepal Academy

Gunicorn 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.

To register for the Eco Learn seminar in the fair type Eco-space-Name and send to 5904
Minting money

Nepal, 5 February

Political parties have hundreds of full-time cadres across the country, but nobody really bothers to find out how they earn their living.

In terms of numbers, the UCPN (Maoist) has half a million, NC has 3,11,000 thousand and the UML has 1,50,000 full-time cadres. MJF and MJF (D) workers also make up half a million.

According to Manma Sansad, a book on Nepali parliamentarians, 179 MPs (68 per cent) out of 263 said that they are ‘professional’ politicians. Similarly, 312 CA members (51 per cent) out of 601 mentioned politics as their main profession. If sister organisations and cadres from district to central level are included, the number of members from all political parties will add up to 1,50 million which is 6 percent of the country’s total population.

Donations and membership fees, the main sources of income for political parties, are not sufficient to cover the hefty costs of remuneration. However, despite the lack of steady income, many Nepali politicians enjoy lavish lifestyles which suggest that they must be involved in bribes, extortions and other illicit activities.

Organisations organise conferences, conventions, campaigns and mass gatherings to raise money for personal and party purposes. Many leaders have been implicated in dividing local development budgets among themselves and secretly pocketing the cash. The Maoists in particular have been using the state coffers for the past five years to pay off YCL members and other cadres.

Although political parties need to submit their annual reports to the Election Commission, there is no authority to monitor the parties’ expenses. The EC had instructed the parties to submit their reports by mid-January, but only 30 of the 81 compiled. Officials say that most parties are reluctant to present their report, because of a provision which requires all donors who contribute more than Rs 25,000 to be named. It is likely that without stricter policies, investigating such transgressions and making parties follow the rule of law will be impossible.

Chequemate!

Gajendra Bohora in Nagarkot, 9 February

Ex-Maoist combatants in Sakram sub-camp were handed over the first installment of their voluntary retirement packages on Wednesday. While some left the camps early with their children, others were busy packing. But all of them were disheartened at the prospect of bidding farewell to their comrades.

Rapid fire with the young turks

Himal Kharbapatrika, 12 February

Q: Do we need ethnically-demarcated states?

Gagan Thapa, NC: Ethnic states without right to self determination and priority rights is the best solution.

Rabindra Adhikary, UML: Ethnically based states in this day and age makes no sense.

Hemraj Bhandari, Maoist: Ethnically federalism will never work in Nepal.

Dhannar Gurung, NC: Ethnic states should be avoided at all costs. It won’t benefit anyone.

Lekhnath Neupane, Maoist: It does not suit a communist party to talk about ethnic states.

Rajkosh Taday, MJF (Ganatantrik): We don’t need ethnic states. Why do we want to repeat past mistakes of letting one group rule the other?

Badri Pandey, NC: Ethnic states and preferential treatment to indigenous communities would create newer exclusions and band one group against the other.

Abhishek Pratap Shah, MJF Nepal: We can’t go back on ethnic federation now.

Amrita Thapa Magar, UCPN Maoist: We want ethnic states with priority rights.

Former foes

Chadari Hamal, Nagarkot, 6 February

Former war time enemies, Balananda Sharma, the coordinator of the secretariat overseeing the integration process, and Chan Bahadur Maaski, Shaktikhor’s Division Commander are working together to ensure the successful completion of the retirement and rehabilitation program. The two of them are currently in Shaktikhor camp overseeing the demobilisation of thousands of ex-Maoist combatants.

Sharma and Maaski came face to face in at least two major battles in the mid-western region. After their encounter in Ganga’s Gorahi and Bhakuriang, Sharma left for the peace mission to Israel-occupied Golan Heights and the two did not see each other until after the 2006 peace agreement.

“Eight years ago, if I had seen him I would have shot him and the other Maoists. But the situation has changed significantly and I am now helping with their rehabilitation and providing them food and medicine,” says Sharma.

Maaski echoes similar sentiments, “If I had met him on the battle field, I would have killed him. Although we shared no personal enmity, we were on opposite sides of the war and that was our duty. But today when we stand together for the purpose of peace it’s a very special feeling and even though we sometimes talk about the past, it is done in good spirit.”

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Most people see India as Nepal’s big brother, but in reality Nepal is the elder one.”

Indian Ambassador Jayant Prasad quoted in Nepal, February 5.
Interview with Commerce and Supply Minister Lekhraj Bhatta, Annapurna Post, 8 February

“Why didn’t you protest against your party when it proposed a divided far west before? I had and I was labelled as anti-federalist in my own party for saying this. I was also called anti-Tharu. I think our party did not act maturely enough at the time.

Are you trying to become a leader of the Bahun-Chhetris? Not at all. I am just saying that the rights of Khas people should also be respected. If Madhesis and Janjatis fought for their rights, should we not fight against being categorised as ‘others’ in our own land?”

Successful Loot

Interview with actor Saugat Malla in Saptahik, 3 February

Saptahik: Why did Loot succeed despite its dark characters?
Saugat Malla: The narration and the dialogue were not scripted, we improvised. That’s what made the story believable.

But isn’t the dialogue indecent? It is a story of those living in the shadows of this so-called civilised society. The characters exhibit eroding social values through their dark ambitions and dialogue. If you knew one of these characters, you would know, there is no pretense in the way they speak.

Personally, you never bothered to complete your schooling, yet you have made it to the big screen? My father bought me a certificate from India after I refused to go to school. Not because I could not, but because I was not interested in what they taught there. I was more interested in people, their way of speaking, dressing and walking. You can learn more about acting by observing people around you than going through books. I only read what interests me. I have stacks of books that I like. Reading books and passing exams for a certificate are different.

Any ambitions? Yes, to succeed, maybe get international offers. There will be money in my bank account as well, and all my dreams will come true.
Minister Declares Bund

Himely Minister Gutch seems to think it is in his job description to coddle gangsters. An outlaw named Jayaraj who get a five year sentence for attempted murder and on whom the police have a warrant is on said minister’s side every time he heads east. The police escorts have to look the other way as the criminal attaches himself to the entourage. Obviously, Gutch feels he can get away with it because his boss, the prime minister, shared the podium with Comrade Ball Krishna Dhungel and made him sit next to the DIG of police. This is the same BRB crony who served eight years of a life sentence for murdering a neighbour. All we can say is: "the man has balls."

PKD is now getting so impatient that he is egging kangresi netas to make a power grab with a non-confidant vote. Awesome’s left-hand-man is Supply Minister Comrade “Red Hair” Butt who is deliberately prolonging the fuel crisis to make BRB look bad. Red Hair is also supporting PKD’s bid for directly elected presidencialship. But it gets even better: Comrade Butt has called for a far-western bund on Friday to protest the SRC report, the First Minister Ever to Call a Bund. The Tharus of the far west are organizing their own counter-bund next week. Ethnicity-based federalism is getting to be a can of worms inside a Pandora’s box for the Baddies.

Eavesdropping on the parliamentary committee hearings on new ambassadorships, the mule’s nose heard an ambassador designate being asked about the population and per capita income of the country he was being assigned to. His answer: “How should I know? I’ve never been there.” Needless to say, his ambassadorship was approved. Meanwhile, Ram “Comrade Partha” Karki is now getting disheartened about the Indians dragging their feet on his agremo. Rumours Delhi is displeased with his past associations with Gorkhaland and his role in smuggling arms across the eastern front during the war.

Methot it was only PKD who had foot-in-mouth disease, but the peace is turning out to be even more expensive. The war was costly, but the peace is turning out to be even more expensive. This govt has far outstripped any previous one in doling out money to its supporters from the state treasury, in fact the BRB govt is probably the most effective poverty-alleviation administration this country has ever seen. The war was costly, but the peace is turning out to be even more expensive.

Actual headlines this week (with the Ass’ aside in brackets): ‘Maoists Keep Mum’ (Dad Furious) ‘Minister Goes Mad’ (Others Follow Suit)