In 1970, when Crown Prince Birendra got married, as a wedding present the German government renovated the Pujari Math in Bhaktapur. The Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP) grew out of this restoration and set in motion a 17-year German involvement in reviving the town, which had become a faint shadow of its former self by then.

Today Bhaktapur retains the ambience of the original Kathmandu Valley civilization more than any other town. It has preserved not just the unique architecture and culture of the Newari people but is also a model for town management.

Return to glory

More on page 11-13
Only decisions that President Yadav and Prime Minister Bhattarai take jointly will have a semblance of legitimacy in the current political limbo.

TAKES TWO TO TANGO

For those who have given up hope on Nepal, President Ram Baran Yadav stands out as a symbolic bulwark against dictatorship, disintegration and disharmony. The fact that the son of an ordinary farmer from Mahottari, and a lifelong freedom fighter, should disharmony. The fact that the son of a patient guardian. He is unflappable and awkward in his new office, and immediately embodied himself in the persona of a patient guardian. He is not within earshot of the media, in public Yadav projects the persona of a patient guardian. He is not the most scintillating speaker, lead to brain drain and capital outflow. KK Sharma

Let’s call a spade a spade: burning buses and destroying school property are acts of terrorism, and the perpetrators are cowardly extortionists and criminals who need to be punished. ‘Democrat’

People who incite violence and defend their actions by saying “the end we’re going to achieve will justify the violence that we’re using” are cowardly and suffer from mental bankruptcy. Bhattarai and his comrades are nothing more than wimps. ‘Nirmal’

Rubena hits the nail on the head when she says we have become a land of anarchists where the moderates remain silent and the extremists make the most noise. The mere thought of these criminals assuming leadership roles after a decade or so makes me sick. ‘Sail’

This is another well-written article by Rubena and I completely agree with her; it’s high time we questioned our value system. From incompetent, corrupt politicians, to blanket impunity for criminals, and violently enforced bondas, Nepal’s moral fabric has completely collapsed. But sometimes I feel like the way we Nepali tolerate everything, we deserve to be in this mess. ‘Anonymous’

I am not trying to justify violence, or support the old cliched argument for class warfare. But imagine a Nepali who earns Rs 6,000 per month (which is higher than the average national income of Rs 7000 annually), and has two children whom he cannot send to private schools which charge anywhere between Rs 4,000 and Rs 15,000 every month. Would he feel differently about the recent incidents? ‘Democrat’

Although this is a good piece, Rubena’s article is simply about the disparity between state and private schools which is an underlying reason for the attacks. The private schools earn abnormal profits, but have no sense of social responsibility. Also the article only blames the Maoists, but the NC and UML are equally responsible. ‘Shyam Banstel’

After reading this column, I was reminded of Rubena’s earlier article where she wrote about the need for journalists to show ‘honesty and integrity’ and go away with double standards. But if she really believed in what she preached, she would have acknowledged the Maoist connection to Rato Bangala School, which was attacked. Would NT rework that entire column to the incident only if other schools had suffered? ‘Ironic’

Anger management. Since we live in a pluralistic society we need to accept views from across the political spectrum (‘Anger management’, Anurag Acharya, #614). But when a journalist justifies violence against children because he waving the same flag as the criminals on the streets, he loses his credentials. Also Anurag’s violence is needed to make an unrepentant state hear the voices of the marginalised’ argument has already failed spectacularly in Nepal. We tested this hypothesis during 10 years of war and what did we get? Devastation, loss of lives, grief and a pushing back of the country’s development. Yes there is an urgent need to address the class divide in education, in politics, in the job market. But burning buses of rich schools is not the way to go about bringing change. Violence only makes things worse. ‘Bina S’

The bus-burning hodgins are not innocent, poor, talented-but-cheated youths. They are paid for being full-time goondas of the party, and are often given luxuries not available to even very educated and hard-working Nepalis. This double standards become clear when you look at the lavish lifestyles of YCL or ANAP-SU-R leaders. ‘Usha Bh’

It’s refreshing to read such polar opposite opinions from two columnists in every paragraph. I appreciate his smart play on words, but the editor needs to cut down on blatant vulgarity. I don’t want to recommend this article to a colleague, because I am worried that she might think I found ‘deaf and dumb’ job very clever. Moral policing is not cool, but it’s such crudeness that gives rise to it. ‘Seven’

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Extending the extended

I am eagerly waiting to see how the Ass analyses the fireworks that took place between bickering and worstmen at the seventh plenum (‘Extending the Extended Central Committee’, backside, #614).

The initial gimmickry was fine, but now the Ass is using expletives in every paragraph. I appreciate his smart play on words, but the editor needs to cut down on blatant vulgarity. I don’t want to recommend this article to a colleague, because I am worried that she might think I found ‘deaf and dumb’ job very clever. Moral policing is not cool, but it’s such crudeness that gives rise to it. ‘Seven’

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CERTAIN UNCERTAINTY

When people understand, leaders will follow (‘Certain uncertainty’, editorial, #614). I was particularly disappointed to see that they match the quality of private schools speak out or take action to improve government schools so that they will not be a cause for concern. Time to wake up, and imagine the need for journalists to show ‘honesty and integrity’ and go away with double standards. But if she really believed in what she preached, she would have acknowledged the Maoist connection to Rato Bangala School, which was attacked. Would NT rework that entire column to the incident only if other schools had suffered? ‘Ironic’

Kudos Rubena Mahato for your outstanding analysis of the recent attacks on schools (‘The uncritical uncritical mass’, #614). I really appreciate your perspective, honestly and the ‘could care less about upsetting any side’ attitude with which you approach your column. Burning school buses, destroying school computers and threatening teachers highlights the growing contempt of violence and impunity in our country. And it is almost as if, you put your point out, is that these goondas who are currently raising havoc on the streets, he loses his credentials. Also when private schools are targeted, many parents will be compelled to send their children to India, which will allow Nepali investment in the foreign market? ‘Memories and evocative anecdotes’ (W24) on page 8 was written by Rabi Aryal.

Shyam Basnet

Q. What will President Yadav do in the current impasse.

President Yadav is an improbable personality to wear that mantle. He became president by fluke four years ago because Girija Prasad Koirala and Pushpa Kamal Dahal were in a competitive bid to stab each other in the back for the job that they cancelled each other out. Yadav himself was first reluctant and awkward in his new office, and immediately embodied himself in the persona of a patient guardian. He is not the most scintillating speaker, lead to brain drain and capital outflow. KK Sharma

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The seventh plenum of the UCPN-M, which concluded in Kathmandu last week will be remembered for all the wrong reasons. But besides the chair chucking, fist-fighting and ugly factionalism, the meet was historical in terms of the decisions that were taken: most significantly to hold a general convention in February next year.

For the first time in its history, the party which waged a decade long war against the ‘feudal and corrupt’ state is on its way to fight democratic deficit and weed out corruption within its ranks. The largest party has been rattled by revolt and the leaders seem to have realised that there is an imminent existential threat to the party if they don’t mend their ways.

After the party joined formal politics in 2006, cadres have complained about financial and moral corruption among their leaders, but the leadership had not allowed an open debate on the issue. The taboo was finally broken on the third day of the plenum after members of youth wings and ex-combatants demanded that party reveal details of income and expenses of the last six years.

An ex-brigade commander Kamala Naharki raised ethical questions over the character of the leaders. “Why is the party sheltering corrupt and morally bankrupt individuals? Is this what our friends and families died for?” she asked.

Naharki’s statements reflect a general perception within the Maoists that the ‘air-conditioned lives’ of the top leaders in Kathmandu have conditioned their way of thinking, that the leaders have abandoned the true purpose of getting to power and made it into an end, instead of a means to a larger good. As a result, a party which calls itself the vanguard of the peasants and working-class may slowly be eroding its legitimacy among the people it claims to champion.

This is a major fallout of Nepal’s multi-party democracy, which has been discussed often but left unaddressed. How can a country be run democratically by political parties that are undemocratic in their culture? When parties are run on the whims of few ambitious men, it gives them unfettered power to chart their course. The corruption and impunity that we see in national politics have strong resonance with the same inside the parties.

For the politics of money and muscle power to end, the institution itself must be made stronger and more influential than those running it. It’s a daunting task which requires honest and upright leaders who command popular support. The UCPN-M’s commitment to promote internal democracy, accountability and transparency is a welcome move and it should back them by taking concrete steps in that direction. Despite its split, it is still the largest party and enjoys support due to its agenda for change. But the party which has set out to change society must first change itself.
Healing Nepali hearts

A charity that channels tourism profits directly to benefit poor cardiac patients has saved many lives

TRISHNA RANA

Growing up, Jayanti Shah saw her grandfather, uncles and family members suffer and succumb to coronary heart disease. So, throughout her life, the former princess looked for ways to help heart patients and make cardiac care more affordable and accessible for Nepalis.

But Jayanti Shah was one of the members of the royal family killed in the massacre at the Narayanhithi Palace in 2001, and her wish remained unfulfilled. Her mother, Helen Shah, established the Jayanti Memorial Trust (JMT) in her memory and wished to turn her vision into reality.

For the past decade, the Trust in partnership with two state-run cardiac hospitals (Shahid Gangalal National Heart Centre and Mammen Cardiothoracic and Transplant Centre) has saved the lives of more than 2,000 patients. It helps spread awareness among Nepalis about how to take better care of their hearts, and how heart disease doesn’t just afflict the affluent.

The unique feature about JMT is that it runs on the profit generated by the FishTail Lodge in Pokhara which is owned by Jayanti Shah’s family. One of the best-located hotels in Pokhara because it offers views of the reflection of Annapurnas and Phewa Lake, Fish Tail was attacked twice by the Maoists during the war and was closed till 2008.

With renovations and professional management, Fish Tail is now doing well and transfers 100 per cent of its profits to the Jayanti Memorial Trust for the treatment of Nepali heart patients. The Trust also accepts private donations, some from grateful former patients themselves. And although the Trust started as a private initiative, it is now managed by an independent board to become a model for other charitable organisations.

People in Nepal donate money and that is where their social work ends, many don’t bother to find out where their money ends up. We are transparent and our donors know exactly what their money is being used for,” explains Shirjeena Rana, secretary of the Trust.

Selection of patients eligible for the Trust’s support is left entirely to the doctors. Fees are paid directly to the hospitals to settle medical bills. To make patients more responsible towards their treatment and recovery, the Trust encourages them to contribute whatever they can towards their treatment. JMT also sponsors the social service unit at the Teaching Hospital which helps needy families find alternate sources of support.

JMT member and former Nepali ambassador to the UK, Singha Bahadur Basnyat, organised a charity musical event that raised 15,000 pounds to get JMT started. A musician himself, he produced the CD In Memoriam dedicated to those who died in the royal massacre and to raise money for JMT.

“I expressed through music what I felt inside, but the most fulfilling part of it was that the Trust is carrying on the memory and wishes of Jayanti Shah,” says Basnyat.

Chief cardiac surgeon at the Manmohan Centre, Bhagwan Koirala, has been involved with the Trust since its inception. He admits that he was at first sceptical about a scheme started by the former royal family, but now says it is one of the most fulfilling things he has done in his career.

“Even if we can provide just Rs 20,000 during an emergency, we save lives,” he told Nepali Times, “lack of money should never be the reason why a patient has to die in a hospital in Nepal.”

Besides covering the medical expenses of underprivileged heart patients, JMT regularly organises free health camps in Pokhara where locals get through checkups and counselling. It also donates streptokinase injections used in emergency procedures after a heart attack, and artificial valves to hospitals in Kathmandu.

The Trust brings cardiac specialists from the US to Nepal so that doctors can share experience and expertise, train each other and build stronger partnerships.

Rana says the Trust plans to open free diagnostic centres in district hospitals, but the bureaucratic maze is a deterrence. She says: “We can’t go it alone, only by working together can we bring about real improvement in cardiac health in the country.”

pjmt@mail.com.np

Second innings

Bikash Dahal (name changed) was 19 when he lost his parents to HIV/AIDS. Bikash’s father was neck deep in loan which he had borrowed to pay for treatment. Soon after his death, the bank seized their house and family property leaving Bikash and his two younger sisters with nothing. To make things worse, the teenager and his youngest sister fell ill with heart complications. The younger one succumbed to the disease due to lack of treatment. A local foster home finally took notice and took in the two children and paid for Bikash’s travel expenses so that he could get a check-up at Gangalal Hospital in Kathmandu.

The doctors recommended immediate surgery and referred him to Jayanti Memorial Trust which footed his entire medical bill. Bikash recovered quickly and is back in his village leading a healthy life. “I have been given a new life, I want to use it to look after my sister and foster parents,” he says.
HOTEL RADISSON
H otel Radisson in Lazimpat has hosted heads of state, foreign diplomats and rock stars. But even an international hotel chain like Radisson is not immune to Nepal’s chronic energy crisis. Like every grid-connected building in the country, it does not take long until here, too, the lights go out and the diesel guzzling generators take over.

In an effort to slash its diesel bills, which makes up a large chunk of the operating costs, and maximise its energy consumption, chief engineer at Radisson, Kiran Joshi, is introducing innovative methods. “We want to become an energy-efficient business, because for us saving energy means saving money,” says Joshi.

Radisson is a good example of what the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and the German aid agency, GIZ hope to achieve through their new energy efficiency centre (EEC) in 2011 to encourage the eight most energy intensive industries in Nepal, such as hotels, to reduce their energy consumption and save money.

In corporation with district chambers, the EEC will carry out awareness programs in industrial towns across Nepal. EEC will also train 40 energy auditors to conduct 40 audits in private companies, under the supervision of long-term experts and regional experts from each of the eight industry.

Company owners and managers will be advised to replace incandescent bulbs with energy-efficient LED bulbs, regulate the temperature of boilers and insulate pipes to reduce heat loss and raise water temperatures. Through these initiatives, EEC aims to cut energy consumption by 10 per cent in at least five of the 40 selected companies until the program ends in 2014. “Convincing companies is not always easy,” says Susanne Bodach, energy and environment expert with the EEC. “Many might ask how they can save energy when they don’t have enough electricity in the first place.”

Some companies are deterred by the initial cost of introducing energy-efficient systems. Even banks are hesitant to provide loans, because it’s more profitable and risk-free for them to finance real-estate projects rather than such initiatives.

With the energy crisis getting worse and fuel costs rising, a new joint FNCCI and GIZ program is promoting more energy efficiency in the private sector.

However, simple measures like changing light bulbs or insulating pipes don’t need much investment and companies can cut down production costs in a short time and lower their dependence on expensive imported fuel.

Besides persuading companies or banks to invest in energy-efficiency projects, changing the industry culture is another challenge. Bodach says some companies are not even aware of how much energy they use because they don’t have records. Establishing a culture of energy management is therefore a crucial part of EEC’s plan.

As asking workers to adapt to newer technologies is also difficult. “You have workers and plant operators who have been doing their job for 20 years and then a young energy auditor comes in and tells them to do things differently. This can create problems,” explains Bodach.

EEC feels the government isn’t particularly keen on energy-efficiency programs, because most work happens behind the scenes, there is no visible physical structure like a PV plant and the results are less tangible. “Policy makers usually don’t like such projects, because there are no ribbon cutting or inauguration ceremonies,” says Bodach.

While countries like India and China are already including energy efficiency in their energy strategy, the energy policy in Nepal is still in its infancy.

Despite the challenges, Bodach is optimistic that the program will be successful and the targeted energy consumption cut of 10 per cent will be met. “We hope we can exceed our target,” she adds.

Bodach is also hopeful that companies will make efforts to continue the initiative in the long-run even after the project ends in three years. “The 40 energy audits will hopefully produce 40 good entrepreneurs who are willing to implement energy-efficient systems and be role models for other entrepreneurs,” she says.

Gyanendra Upadhyay, long-term energy and environment expert with EEC, who was involved in the joint Nepali-Danish program, says the response so far from partner organisations in the districts has been positive as they feel the EEC program is more-suited to their needs.

nepaltimes.com www.fncci.org www.giz.de

**BIZ BRIEFS**

**Ride upgraded**

Morang Auto Works, the sole distributor of Yamaha in Nepal recently launched the upgraded version of the Yamaha SZ-R 150cc bike available in red, white and black. It also started Upgrade Yourself campaign with test rides and a chance to win cash prize up to Rs 50,000.

**Unbeatable offer**

Chevrolet has introduced Chevrolet Thriller Campaign, offering discounts up to Rs 2,50,000 on its three models Aveo, Uva and Optra. The offer also includes three years warranty and three years of free maintenance.

**Picture perfect**

Pashupati Paints has announced the winning pictures of the Hamro Nepal photography contest organised by Artstudio Nepal in collaboration with Pashupati Paints. Of the 4,000 entries in the competition, the winning pictures have been incorporated in the Pashupati Paints Calendar.

**Spreading wings**

NMB Bank has launched NMB visa debit card. Customers will now have greater access to their accounts from more than 200,000 ATMs and 2.5 million point of sales (POS) terminals in India and Nepal. NMB Bank has 2 branches, one extension counter and 23 ATM outlets across the country.
located in the heart of Patan just down the alley in Durbar Square, Traditional Homes Swotha is the right combination of simplicity and elegance. Doing more with less, and adding only what’s needed, the owners have renovated this 80-year-old Newari home but kept its heart. Traditional wooden windows, closets, low ceilings and pillars are all intact.

While the house retains its Newari architecture, it displays a tasteful fusion of the old and new and is equipped with amenities to match a fancy hotel. “Why tear down a charming old house with so much history, when we can easily integrate our contemporary lifestyle and needs into it,” explains general manager, Camille Hanesse, “Homes like Swotha are not only beautiful, they are perfect for Kathmandu’s climate and you can enjoy all the comforts of modern houses.

Swotha also gets brownie points for being an environmentally and socially conscious business and promoting sustainable practices. Solar power keeps all rooms brightly-lit during power cuts and provides guests with 24-hour hot water. Window frames from the old house have been turned into classy glass tables. The housekeeping staff and management come from the community, while the cotton curtains, sheets, carpets and soaps are all made by locals from Patan.

Once in the bedroom, its minimalistic and aesthetically-pleasing design impresses the visitor. However, you might find that the dim lightings and unstable Wi-Fi are not conducive to skyping. The lack of phone in the room also means you have to keep running up and down the hotel to ask for room service, which shouldn’t matter at a time when everyone has a mobile.

The old world charm and genuinely friendly and helpful staff more than make up for the shortcomings, which look like minor teething problems. Restaurant staff is willing to go the extra mile to prepare new soups to suit your taste buds, provide mosquito nets, and even help remove a spider in the middle of the night as happened to this visitor.

Swotha was started by a consortium of investors that includes an architect, and the attention to detail is remarkable. Let’s just hope that since imitation is the highest form of flattery, there will be more bed and breakfasts like this opening up in Patan so visitors are not required to stay in the tourist ghetto of Thamel.

www.traditionalhomes.com.np
**Third World Guest House**

Overlooking Patan Durbar Square, the old palace and the Krishna temple, Third World Guest House was the first of the pensions in this old town. It offers a spectacular panorama of the palace of the Malla kings, and the hotel’s biggest asset is its location. However, Third World Guest House lives up to its name in terms of service, and although it is meant to be a ‘Newari’ house, the cemented facade and interiors hint at an identity crisis of sorts.

The lodge has 10 bedrooms, one of them is a penthouse with a balcony, attached kitchenette and WiFi. The staff is friendly, although some of the information is lost in translation and any specific request may need prompting. Ear plugs are recommended because the bells and chanting at Krishna Mandir start quite early and the dogs in the square are noisy.

The penthouse is $35 per night, which is a bargain even if it is just for the location.

Candice Neo  
+977-1-5522187

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**Newa Chen**

Renovated and refurbished from a Newari residential home believed to be at least 350 years old, guests at Newa Chen are looked after like family members. You can enjoy a simple English breakfast on the second floor next to the breezy window, which overlooks the quiet courtyard and home of the owner, Devendra Shrestha. Newa Chen was originally his family house, now preserved as a guest house under a UNESCO restoration project.

The traditional windows, low beds and low-ceilinged bedrooms all recreate the charm of a bygone era. Because of the low ceiling, visitors need to bend their heads when they enter the room. This could be uncomfortable until you are told that this is a way to show respect in local custom. The attic room on the top-most floor displays a collection of old jugs and ovens used by the family and gives guests a better understanding of Newari culture. Newa Chen is the ideal place to get acquainted with Newari lifestyle and feel at home away from home. Rooms range from $15-45.

Candice Neo  
www.newachen.com

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**We’ve moved!**
“Why should a film be real?”

Director Deepak Rauniyar defends his unflinching portrait of contemporary Nepal in his new film, *Highway*.

Present in everyone’s lives? Nepali people hear this stuff on the radio, on the TV, everyday, so why can’t they see it in a movie?” Rauniyar quoted one explanation he received from a bureaucrat in defense of the censorship: “He told me: ‘Why should a film be real?’

There is a unique freedom that the bus ride provides, away from the constraints of society, bringing together a cross-section of individuals with diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. During their journey the passengers transcend shortcomings of their private lives.

There are no happy endings. The young guy man pulls back the rubber sheet to identify the dead body of his transgender friend. The army lieutenant tracks down his wife run down by a car and finds she has lost a baby not his.

The band is left, unpaid, in full wedding outfits. The camera bounces with the uneven road.

The road is not smooth, just as life is not smooth. The road is not smooth, just as life is not smooth, the bus ride provides, away from the constraints of society, bringing together a cross-section of individuals with diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. During their journey the passengers are cut off from each other, disappearing into the dark, urban sprawl, each drawn back into the solitary enclosures of their private lives.

There is a unique freedom that the bus ride provides, away from the constraints of society, bringing together a cross-section of individuals with diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. During their journey the passengers transcend shortcomings of their private lives.

“Each character is a window into a hidden facet of Nepali society,” Rauniyar says. The viewer gets a glimpse of these outsiders, real after real of secrets. A woman gazing on stage at a dance club as her eyes fill with tears, a young girl about to become a bride smoking a cigarette alone in a locked bathroom. These visceral glimpses into the secret lives of the passengers are performed with the same violence with which the film attempts to redefine Nepali cinematic identity, against the overwhelming, homogeneous presence of imported cinematic formulas from South Korea and India.

Highway embodies the changes that Rauniyar wishes to see in contemporary Nepali films. “First and foremost, we have to start telling our story,” he says. “So many directors are watching Bollywood or Korean movies and using those formulas to make movies for Nepal, but we need our own stories.”

This is not supposed to be an easy film to watch, said Rauniyar, acknowledging his intention to frustrate viewers accustomed to smooth plots with the interruptions of one banda after another, and repeated recordings of failed cell phone network messages as a secondary soundtrack for the film. “A banda is a great example of selfishness, of forgetting the rights of others,” he said.

Rauniyar is surprised about the censors excising the part with Limbuwan activists. “Why censor in films something present in everyone’s lives? Nepali people hear this stuff on the radio, on the TV, everyday, so why can’t they see it in a movie?” Rauniyar quoted one explanation he received from a bureaucrat in defense of the censorship: “He told me: ‘Why should a film be real?’

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The band is left, unpaid, in full wedding dress in the rain.

“The lack of a resolution reflects the betrayal our society is experiencing,” explained Rauniyar. “I wanted the viewer to feel as lost and alone as each of the characters, if we are not together, we are nowhere.” And yet the viewer is left with the sensation of hope, a memory of all that could have been.

Highway has encountered anger and criticism on its Facebook page. This is the worst movie of all time”, says one. Another commentator accuses the film of being un-Nepali because it was shot by an Indian cinematographer and produced by an American, even claiming that Rauniyar intended his film to cater to a European audience rather than a Nepali one. There are also strong arguments in support of the film’s innovations.

“Like it or dislike it,” Rauniyar said, “you cannot avoid it.”
E l Mediterráneo is small, clean and elegant and reminiscent of the tiny, usually family owned and run restaurants that dot the Spanish and Portuguese landscape. The clean white washed walls, blue ceiling and general air of wholesomeness gave me the illusion of that I had been teleported to the Mediterranean to indulge in some hearty paella and fresh seafood and cold sangria. But all good things, even food, must come to an end and such was the case with El Mediterráneo.

First off, the food is all Spanish. Well, that is what I had been led to believe by the menu, which the waiter who condescendingly told me, “Oh that’s the way it’s meant to be.”

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Paleti celebrates the Adhunik

El Mediterráneo is small, clean and elegant and reminiscent of the tiny, usually family owned and run restaurants that dot the Spanish and Portuguese landscape. The clean white washed walls, blue ceiling and general air of wholesomeness gave me the illusion of that I had been teleported to the Mediterranean to indulge in some frizzy paella and fresh seafood and cold sangria. But all good things, even the Seafood Paella (Rs 100) at El Mediterráneo are not what I was expecting. Closer investigation revealed bits of squid and octopus and other bits of seafood. Knowing how difficult it is to find good seafood in Kathmandu, I was willing to forgive the gaffe if it wasn’t for the waiters.

However, the Seafood Paella (Rs 450), which the menu at El Mediterráneo very simplistically explains and I quote ‘something like a hiriyani’, was a big turn-off. Google images of seafood paella and compare it with the one on this page to see what I mean. A mush of under-cooked short-grain rice drowning in tomato sauce with nary a shrimp in sight is not what I was expecting. Closer investigation with my fork revealed bits of squid and octopus and other bits of seafood. Knowing how difficult it is to find good seafood in Kathmandu, I was willing to forgive the gaffe if it wasn’t for the waiters who condescendingly told me, “Oh that’s the way it’s meant to be.” The Calamar Renello (Rs 570) – squid stuffed with a mouth-watering mixture of spinach, paneer and raisins went a long way in redeeming the restaurant. At this point, I would have loved a glass of wine or even some sangria in a pitcher, but sadly though the bar menu offers a variety of ‘hard drinks’ there isn’t any wine on it. For dessert we had Natillas (Rs 160), a custard dish with milk and eggs that tasted a lot like pureed burfis and their summer special, Mango Mousse (Rs 160), which was okay. What was not okay, however, is the way we were treated. Many restaurants especially in busy tourist ghettos like Thamel and Pokhara’s lakeside are guilty of ignoring locals in favour of foreigners. Although not welcome, such behaviour is still understandable, because the businesses in these areas rely largely on foreigners. But El Mediterráneo in Jhamsikhel, which is a favourite among Kathmanduites and expats alike.

Besides, I paid for my meal, asked for no discounts and am always polite to the waiters.

I walked into El Mediterráneo really excited and eager, but I left with a bitter taste in my mouth, not from the food, which is more than adequate, but from the despicable attitude of the waiters. My presumed bank balance and the colour of my skin were enough for the restaurant to put me in the ‘second class’ category, while they served people with lighter skin tones like celebrities.

Getting there: El Mediterráneo is in Jhamsikhel opposite Epic Mountain Bikes.
A narrow escape

DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Twenty-four-year-old Purna Rai from Khotang in eastern Nepal was admitted to Patan Hospital with bacterial meningitis. After four days he recovered completely and both he and his wife, who was nursing him, were overjoyed.

Once the diagnosis was made by performing a spinal tap (which allows for the patient’s cerebrospinal fluid to be properly examined), the treatment was straightforward. A powerful, intravenous antibiotic was prescribed. Although meningitis is life-threatening, the patient had a prompt, and uneventful recovery with the raging fever and throbbing headache disappearing in quick time.

More than the medical aspect, the case was fascinating because of how Purna made it to Patan Hospital.

Purna had fallen ill in Khotang for a day with headache, high fever and bouts of vomiting. His condition deteriorated when he became delirious and then lost consciousness. His family knew that the situation was life-threatening and called up their closest relative in Kathmandu.

The relative wasted no time in arranging for a helicopter to fly to Khotang which brought Purna promptly to a hospital in Kathmandu.

Many patients from the hills of Nepal suffer from meningitis and other potentially curable but dangerous illnesses everyday. But the outcome is not as positive as in the case of this patient. In Purna’s case the whole family understood the seriousness of the situation and worked effectively to rescue the young man.

In addition, the family had enough financial resources and contacts to arrange for a rescue helicopter. In the context of Nepal, the sequence of events and how well they were orchestrated are miraculous. However, it was still a tremendous financial burden for the family which is still trying to pay off the loan.

In Nepal, a catastrophic illness like this can push even relatively wealthy people to grinding poverty. Unless this problem is dealt with effectively by strengthening primary healthcare in places like Khotang and providing universal healthcare, severe illnesses which lead to immense financial problems will continue unabated.

It is unfortunate that India (whose example we seem to follow in all matters) has not taken the lead in health issues for the masses in South Asia. Dr K Srinath Reddy of India said that due to high cost of healthcare, 40 million Indians are pushed into poverty each year. There is an abundance of expensive, state-of-the-art medical institutions in the country, but very few Indians have access. Perhaps with political will, Nepal can take the lead in healthcare.

Ded Rauyari’s new film, Highways is an experimental film for Nepal in many ways. It is the first film that anyone has directed to date, here, in which all of the acting of the considerably large cast is improvised. Astonishingly, the dialogue too was largely improvised, and, as a result, for the first time in Nepali cinema, we hear our language spoken as it is on the streets and in our homes and not in the stilted accented versions we have become used to in other Nepali films. The literature that we studied growing up is now being spoken as it is on the streets and in our homes and not just read backwards as each character’s previous history is revealed. Most laudable is the diversity of the actors in age, gender and ethnicity. This, of course, is the higher motif that lies behind the title Highway – not merely the story of a bus stuck on a road, but also of a cross-section of the country coming together at different periods in their lives and somehow interacting - cooperating constructively for a common goal.

Some of the performances are the best I’ve seen to date in Nepali cinema. Reshe Sharma as the dance-bar girl with a small daughter, who is also the girl friend of the bus-driver, is raw and heart wrenching as she portrays the bravery that is required of single women in a dodgy profession in a fast developing metropolitan city. Likewise, Shristi Ghimire is charming and very convincing as the vulnerable young medical student torn between her lover Roni (played by Saudal Mall) and the America returned boy Abhir (played by Karma) that she is headed to marry.

There are many great performances that induce both laughter and tears in this small gem of a film that has for the first time pushed the boundaries of our local, homegrown cinema (the film played at the prestigious Berlin Film Festival). Made simply, but not simple, with an experimental open-ended conclusion, Ded Rauyari has shown us that we can make good, and brave new cinema economically, but beautifully if our hearts are in the right place.

It is in theaters now, see it for a breath of fresh air and for its sincere and true contribution to our cinematic future.

HAPPENINGS

WEEKEND WEATHER

After a weak start, the Monsoon is finally on its normal track, having gained enough strength in the last couple of weeks to make up for the low precipitation earlier in the month. Expect high humidity throughout the weekend and intermittent rain mostly during nights. Residents of Kathmandu Valley will finally get to enjoy cool and calm weather while temperature continues to soar in the southern plains.

UNSAFE RIDE: Students go to school on a rickshaw van in Nepalgunj on Wednesday.

FRUIT FIESTA: A vendor at Shree Complex inPokhara awaits customers with an array of seasonal fruits.

SOUND BITE: Chief election commissioner Nikantha Upreti (left), along with Ram Chandra Poudel, Jhalanath Khanal and Pushpa Kamal Dahal are swarmed by the press after their meeting at the Election Commission in Kantisattar.

LIGHT FOOTED: Performers at Lyrical Dances program organised by Nritya Aagan at the Army Officer’s Club in Sundhara on Friday.

FRUIT FIESTA:

Watching trailer

Watch trailer

FRUIT FIESTA:

Watching trailer

Watch trailer

FRUIT FIESTA:
BHAKTAPUR

Forty years later, Bhaktapur is a living example of the successful integration of heritage conservation with town development

LUKAS GRIMM

Bhaktapur, the city of devotees, retains the ambience of the original Kathmandu Valley civilisation more than any other town. It has preserved not just the unique architecture and culture of the Newari people but is also a model for town management. Bhaktapur evolved out of a cluster of villages on the Valley’s eastern edge, straddling the vital trade route connecting India and Tibet. By the 10th century, the town was powerful and developed enough to crown its own king, Ananda. His dynasty, the Mallas, ruled Bhaktapur until 1768 when it was defeated by Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha.

During the Malla period, Bhaktapur enjoyed exposure to foreign cultures and ideas brought by passing trade caravans. Its strategic location not only brought resources, but also enough political importance by the beginning of the 14th century, King Jayasthiti Malla decided to make it the administrative and cultural centre of the Valley. Together with Kathmandu and Patan, Bhaktapur’s golden era of art and architecture took place between the 16th and 18th centuries. Artisans competed to build the most elaborate temples and courtyards for their rulers. Pride became priority. Money was of no concern as the three city states vied with each other through aesthetics. By the 18th century, Bhaktapur had reached its cultural climax and the seat of power shifted to Kathmandu.

The new and shorter trade route to Tibet through Kalimpong and Nathu La opened by the British in the 19th century weakened Bhaktapur’s role as a trade hub, and the final blow came with the annexation of Tibet by China in 1952. The new Kathmandu-Lhasa Highway built by the Chinese in 1972 bypassed the town all together. Large parts of the Bhaktapur were destroyed in the Great Earthquake of 1934. With the economy in a slump and the Mallas gone, the town was not just a political backwater but it had lost its cultural patrons.

In the 1970s, Bhaktapur was the third largest city in Nepal, but also its poorest. Its artisans and craftsmen migrated across Nepal and abroad in the agricultural off-season looking for work. Bhaktapur was only a faint shadow of its former self when the German government began its decade long involvement in the restoration and revival of this historic town.

Bikram Rai

Tourists take pictures in front of 17th century stone Vatsala Durga temple at Bhaktapur Durbar Square, a UNESCO World Heritage site.
The rebirth of Bhaktapur
A unique German-Nepali initiative has helped restore Bhaktapur to its former glory

Krishna Pranjapati

Krishna Pranjapati welcomes a visitor courteously at the gate and leads the way to his office next to Bhaktapur’s Durbar Square where he has been working for the past two decades, the majority of the time dedicated to the conservation of Bhaktapur’s architecture.

Having grown up here he has witnessed Bhaktapur’s evolution from a quiet town into a bustling city and has seen the effects of the BDP and the long-term results. “The BDP was very good for Bhaktapur. If I had not been studying I would have liked to work for the BDP very much.”

Asked what made Bhaktapur a success story, Pranjapati replies, “We used the money in the right places to solve problems in water supply irrigation, medicine, maintenance and conservation. The funds for all this come from the entrance fee and we use about half of it for conservation, the rest is spent on roads and infrastructure”.

For Pranjapati, Bhaktapur is a work in progress. Last year he oversaw the renovation of 53 wells as the municipality tackled water shortage. Many of his peers have left, and gone abroad, but Pranjapati is happy to have stayed behind to help his hometown. He says, “I get a lot of satisfaction from serving Bhaktapur. My dream is for Bhaktapur to be seen in the eyes of visitors like Rome is seen today.”

A serious effort was made to communicate with local inhabitants, and get their support. The result of these efforts is a functioning infrastructure which included a sewage system, private access to water for individual households and street upgrading.

The model of using tourist entrance fees for the city’s upkeep was also introduced. Investment was made in education, and in 2001 Bhaktapur opened its very own Khwopa College.

The BDP was the catalyst that got things going, but much of Bhaktapur’s success in urban management is due to the efficiency of the Bhaktapur Municipality led by the Nepal Worker and Peasant Party (NWPP) which has allowed the city’s cultural preservation and development to go hand in hand.

Krishna Pranjapati

NIELS GUTSCHOW

The first time Niels Gutschow visited Nepal was 50 years and 2 weeks ago, in July 1962. He was on his way to Burma from Hamburg by bus, which took him through several countries, including Nepal. In 1970, he came back to Nepal to work on the German-funded Pujari Math restoration. Gutschow fell in love with Bhaktapur and its people, and has since returned to it regularly.

When the project began in 1970, it aimed to improve the living conditions of the people of Bhaktapur and restore the historic city. But although the infrastructure was being rebuilt and many historic temples renovated, the people weren’t necessarily happy. In 1979, there was so much discontent that the project had to be halted.

Studies were conducted to find out what the community wanted, and the project goals were adjusted accordingly by a Nepali manager. German ‘experts’ became German ‘advisers’ and the project took a new, more cooperative approach.

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When asked what he thought to be the greatest achievement of the BDP, Matthäus remembers.

In 1976, Matthaus was still living in Germany, applying to work in the BDP. The experiences previously gained in Nepal, such as speaking the language and having been around Bhaktapur helped Matthäus make up his mind and so he found himself in the infrastructure department that same year. Later he worked as a team leader and stayed on until the project ended in 1986.

When asked what he thought to be the greatest achievement of the BDP, Matthäus reflects, “There were a lot of challenges we faced and in the first phase we experimented a lot. To stop the project, take the lessons learned seriously and restructure the approach of the entire project are huge achievements.” In hindsight Matthäus is genuinely proud of Bhaktapur and its people, and says with a smile: “When I’m in Bhaktapur I feel at home”.

In 1970, when Crown Prince Birendra got married, as a wedding present the German government renovated the Pujari Math (pic, below) in Bhaktapur. One of the architects involved was Niels Gutschow (box).

Having visited Nepal for the first time in 1962, Niels knew what he was getting himself into. He had 108,000 Deutsche Marks for the project and spent six months restoring the 15th century monastery. The Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP) grew out of this initiative and set in motion a 17-year German involvement in restoring Bhaktapur to its former glory.

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Horst Matthäus

In 1970 Horst Matthäus was working for a German aid agency in Kathmandu and remembers driving past green fields to visit Bhaktapur. The city was in a state of complete neglect, he recalls, and had little to offer visitors other than the ruins of temples and monasteries. “Only hardcore tourists that were interested in architecture or history ventured to Bhaktapur because there were no toilets and no restaurants you could trust,” Matthäus remembers.

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When Götz Hagmüller first arrived in Bhaktapur in 1979, he was instantly fascinated by the Kuthu Math, its intricate wood carvings and unique Newari architecture. Within a week, the Austrian architect and preservationist rented the Math and made it his permanent home.

Today Hagmüller is a well-known figure in the Valley, and his restoration work of the Patan Museum and Kaiser Mahal serve as inspiration for architects and designers around the world.

Built more than 150 years ago, the Kuthu Math was maintained by one of the many guthis, trusts which care for temples, maths or other historic buildings and are an intricate part of Newari society. The 1934 earthquake devastated the Valley, but spared the Math to a large extent, damaging only the south wing. Since it did not fall under the BDP’s plan, Hagmüller spent three decades restoring the entire structure on his own.

Over the years he installed electricity, redid the water supply, drilled a 90 foot well and attached solar panels to the roof. Tucked away between neighbouring brick houses, the Math’s garden has evolved from a few citrus plants into a botanic paradise and stands as a testament to Hagmüller’s unrelenting effort.

The Math also features a small painted room, rediscovered during the renovation process. Restored by artists, it remains largely unchanged as Hagmüller is quite content with preserving old paintings. The largest room is located in the south wing, which according to Hagmüller used to be the sleeping quarters for pilgrims travelling through. It too has been rebuilt and now holds a small library in one corner.

Hagmüller says his determination to preserve the spiritual core of the Valley keeps him motivated. Like the Patan Museum and the Kaiser Mahal, the Kuthu Math is aesthetically pleasing, however it remains as practical to live in as it is beautiful.

Lukas Grimm
Promoting impunity

Interview with UCPN-M affiliated student leader Himal Sharma.

You were also arrested and kept in Bhairav Nath barracks, can you tell us what happened there?
I was arrested on 20 October, 2003 by Raju Basnet and taken to Bhairav Nath barracks. They had already arrested several of our friends including women comrades. All of them were blindfolded and handcuffed. At first they beat us to find out information. When we refused to give in, they started torturing us. Women were tortured and raped by senior officers. One woman was gang raped by 19 officers in front of my own eyes. Raju Basnet was one of them. She was in labour at that time and pleaded with them to let her give birth, but they did not spare her. Two hours later, she gave birth to a dead girl and later succumbed to her injuries.

What were you given to eat?
They gave us plain rice in a small tea cup every 18 hours, just enough to keep us alive for the next round of torture. Three of our friends starved to death. A 62-year-old man named Khadga Bahadur Buda was beaten to death because he asked for food. A husband and wife were stripped naked and asked to have sex in front of everybody. When they refused, the husband was severely tortured and the wife was raped.

You were thought to be dead, how did you survive?
On the night of 20 December, 2003 we were about to be taken to an undisclosed location in a truck. But they probably received orders from their commander, after which I and two other friends were sent back to detention. But rest of our friends were taken to Sh.lvapuri, shot and buried in the jungle. A soldier who saw the whole incident told us later.

Why were you not killed?
They were probably planning to kill me and my friends later. The torture did not stop, but this incident raised a storm in the media, and human rights organisations and the court got involved. That is why they could not kill me.

How long were you kept there?
I was detained in the barrack for 27 months. After the Supreme Court ordered my release, they let me go, but I was immediately arrested on false charges and put in Nakhu jail. I was tortured there as well, but compared to the barrack, the jail was a haven.

The name game

Gurang Luitel, Nagarkot, 25 July

Private schools have become the latest victims of Mohan Baidya led CPN-Maoist which terrorised numerous schools in the past week. Although the death of seven-year-old Kajol Baidya led CPN-Maoist which terrorised numerous schools in the past week. Although the death of seven-year-old Kajol Baidya led CPN-Maoist which terrorised numerous schools in the past week. Although the death of seven-year-old Kajol Baidya led CPN-Maoist which terrorised numerous schools in the past week. Although the death of seven-year-old Kajol Baidya led CPN-Maoist which terrorised numerous schools in the past week. Although the death of seven-year-old Kajol Baidya led CPN-Maoist which terrorised numerous schools in the past week. Although the death of seven-year-old Kajol Baidya led CPN-Maoist which terrorised numerous schools in the past week. Although the death of seven-year-old Kajol Baidya led CPN-Maoist which terrorised numerous schools in the past week.

A school's name shouldn't really matter as long as it provides quality education. But the cadres of revolutionary parties have resorted to cheap tactics to earn quick buck on the pretext of schools having non-Nepali names. Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, whose UCPN (Maoist) attacked and shut down Sanskrit schools a few years ago, is singing praises about Sanskrit and its importance today. For the CPN-Maoist, addressing the problems of the farmers reeling under fertiliser shortage isn't as profitable as vandalising schools as the latter is likely to provide moilah for the newly formed party. And the protest against schools will most likely end as soon as the party coffers are full. Instead of terrorising the future generation, the party should start by trying to change its name into Nepali.

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Nepal is generally known throughout the world for its culture, stunning geography and diversity. But local products like noodles, herbs, crazy hats, and pens are helping the country rebrand itself in the international and domestic market, and broaden its identity beyond being the land of the Buddha and Mt Everest.

Customers in over 80 countries buy seven billion worth of Nepali handicrafts each year. Statues, thankas, metal works, pashmina shawls and silk scarves reach China, Switzerland, Germany, USA and many other countries. Similarly, Nepal is the undisputed leader in the noodles market for South Asia. Today, Rara and WaiWai are not only international brands, but WaiWai has even managed to open factories in Sikkim, Guwahati and Rudrapur in India. Nepal has also taken a giant leap in the juice market with profits extending beyond six million.

Out of the 1,600 medicinal herbs found in Nepal, 162 are exported in half-processed forms to various countries. In the fiscal year 2007-08, export to India alone was worth Rs 660 million, but these figures could have been much higher. Since Nepal lacks laboratory facilities, herbs like yarsagumba, nettles, jasmine, mint, cinnamon have to be sent abroad for processing. As a result, only herbs that are well-known to foreigners find a market.

Among cash crops, tea, cardamom, and ginger reign supreme. Tea ranks among the top twelve crops of high-value exported to third countries, and Nepali tea has even overtaken Darjeeling tea. Nepal is currently the largest exporter of black cardamom used for medicinal and cosmetic purposes in the west. Ginger from Salyan and Pyuthan reaches the Gulf countries through India.

Nepali construction products are also performing well. Out of the 3 million tonnes of cement required annually in Nepal, over 70 per cent is produced locally.

The pipe industry has annual transactions amounting to Rs 1.5 billion. 80 per cent of Bhutan’s electricity transformer need is met by a Nepali-Thai company. After multinational companies like Unilever and Dabur entered the country, many products like Close-Up, Pepsodent, Babul, Dabur Lal are now made in Nepal. In fact, Dabur Nepal, sells 80 per cent of its products to India.

Another Nepali product, Star Line ball-pens are very popular in Australia, New-Zealand, Japan, Korea and the Gulf. The prime minister’s economic advisor Rameshwar Khanal says the rapid rise of Nepali products is a result of growing internal consumption which motivates companies to develop better quality products, which in turn improves brand value and increases exports.

However, Ratnaman Maharjan who exports handicrafts to the US, Europe and lately China laments the mass exodus of skilled and semi-skilled workers, many of whom now make handicrafts abroad. He says if this problem is not addressed, a whole generation of artists will never learn their ancestral art and those who do, will make Nepali handicrafts that sell under foreign labels.

According to Nepal Rastra Bank’s data, the total volume of exports for the first six months of the current fiscal year stands at Rs 35.92 billion, a significant increase from last year’s Rs 64.56 billion. However, imports still largely outnumber exports and the trade deficit has increased by five per cent to Rs 330 billion. Experts agree that this gap could be reduced if the companies paid more attention while marketing unique brands like herbs, mineral water, and textile.

Nepal Tourism Year 2011 and Visit Lumbini Year 2012 have played important roles in rebranding a country that went through 10 years of civil war. But greater possibilities in tourism, agriculture, and medicinal herbs still lie untapped.

Himal Khabarpatrika
M any well-wishers have taken the Ass aside at watering holes in the past week to ask for the donkey's take on the fracas at the Maobaddie Plenum where the Prime Minister was collared by Com Prabhakaran, and Chairman Awesome was nearly hit over the head by a chair. Well, my response to all these fun and games is: “Thank heavens it wasn’t a sofa.” These guys used to fight over the chair, now the chair is doing the fighting for them. The Baddie party split into the School-bus burning CPNM (Loony) and the Chair-throwing UCPN-M (Revolting), but now even the Mao Party looks like it is on the verge of bifurcating into the Extremely Moderate Faction led by BRB, and the Moderately Extreme Faction led by PKD.

Now that Professor Mooney has bared all in his chapter of treaties, etc. Then in 2004, Comrade Awe-Inspiring decided to go back on his written commitment and declared a “tunnel War” against India, and got his comrades to start burrowing tunnels all across the Himalayan hinterland in anticipation of what he said was an imminent Indian invasion. PKD then threw BRB. Com. Yummy and other sidekicks into the Gulag. But somehow the lack of coordination between the domestic spooks at the international baccalaureates (IB) and the international spooks at Uncooked (RAW). This is a golden opportunity for the Extremely Bad Baddies of the Hyphen Commies to stage a torch rally outside Lainchour in Siliguri and then Comrade Ale and Upadro in Delhi? Apparently, it was because of the kickback. What this means is that the country is not going to see the end to power cuts even by 2016. Bravo. Way to go. Attaboy. Solar Power Zindabad.

Being the respectful student that he is, PM BRB seems to still think Professor Manmohan Singh is his guru. He has tried to do a NAREGA in Nepal, which guarantees at least 100 days of employment for every citizen. It has worked brilliantly in India, but in Nepal, just before elections, such a scheme is bound to be used for mass vote-buying.

As the Ass predicted in the previous column, the Mao Mai Plenum has appointed a Chabbin Samiti to find out what happened to the Rs 9 arabs that the state exchequer gave to the contractors for the upkeep of the guerrillas. The Committee is chaired by Comrade Postman. Talk about a fox guarding the chicken coop.