In our obsession with dead-end politics, a news item last week on the shocking surge in female foeticide in Nepal went barely noticed. The report delved into how the legalisation of abortion five years ago has led to the proliferation of ultrasound clinics across the country allowing parents to terminate pregnancies if they are girls. Activists estimate that 50,000 unborn females are aborted in Nepal every year. The slaughter of daughters is the result of deeply-rooted patriarchal values, a preference for boys in many Nepali cultures, a belief that sons are needed to perpetuate the family lineage, the need to pay dowry to marry daughters, and the reluctance to allow daughters to inherit property. This is largely an urban middle-class phenomenon across South Asia, and is so entrenched that despite the spread of education and gender awareness, old habits die hard.

However, increasing numbers of Nepali women are breaking stereotypes and getting their PhD degrees, serving in the army and police force, climbing Mt Everest, running ministries, while juggling their domestic responsibilities side by side. These women show that if given a chance, they can take care of their families, earn a living, and be as independent as their male counterparts.

DIFFERING DRESS CODES:
Police women on duty look on as a woman dressed in a bright red sari passes by after attending a Teej program.

Bigger, better, and broader by Dasain?
by Sunil Pandey
The government’s no-nonsense approach to road expansion is up against diplomatic pressures.

THE NORTH OF FACE
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SLAUGHTER OF OUR UNBORN DAUGHTERS

In our obsession with dead-end politics, a news item last week on the shocking surge in female foeticide in Nepal went barely noticed. The investigative report by Ramji Dahal in our sister publication Himal Khapatra dike into how the legalisation of abortion to marry daughters, and the reluctance to allow ultrasound scans to determine if they are girls. This does not include abortions carried out without parents knowing the gender of their babies, half of which are likely also girls.

The slaughter of daughters is the result of deeply-rooted patriarchal values, a preference for boys in many Nepali cultures, a belief that sons are needed to perpetuate the family lineage, the need to pay dowry to marry a girl, to regulate inheritance, and the reluctance to allow daughters to inherit property. This is largely an urban middle-class phenomenon across South Asia, and is so entrenched that despite the spread of education and gender-awareness, old habits die hard.

The discrimination against girls in Nepal now starts even before they are born. As they grow up, many girls are discriminated against within families and by society—discouraged from going to school, fed last, not taken to hospitals if they fall sick, married off young, denied citizenship, abused or trafficked, sometimes by their own relatives.

This is why, while women live longer than men in most developed countries, the ratio of men to women in Nepal is skewed at 1.04 to 1.0. In his well-known research paper, Amartya Sen showed that the preference for sons in China and South Asia had resulted in more than 100 million ‘missing’ women.

Surveys carried out in Nepal have shown that half of those who want sons visit clinics to determine the sex of the child. If it is a girl, the daughter-in-law then faces pressure to undergo an abortion and is tortured or even killed if she refuses.

- Twenty-one-year-old Jyoti Harian’s husband poured kerosene on her and set her on fire after she gave birth to a daughter.
- Indu is the mother of two daughters, and was five months pregnant when her teacher husband Rohit beat her so badly she lost her baby. He then married another wife.
- Prenama and her husband are from well-to-do families in Kathmandu and graduates of an Australian university, but the mother of two daughters left her husband after being tortured and forced to abort four times after ultrasound scans showed the foetus to be female.

A mother of two daughters in Siddhauphal was pressured to take an ultrasound after she became pregnant and forced to abort, but the foetus turned out to be a boy. The hospital paid her Rs 100,000 and threatened her not to reveal the story. Some doctors tell their patients their babies are girls, even if they are not, just to lure them to abort and make more money.

These horror stories are becoming increasingly commonplace, and thrive because of the lack of implementation of laws that ban sex selective abortions, and prohibit termination of pregnancies after more than 12 weeks of pregnancy. Without regulation, and the over-commercialisation of medical care are also to blame.

But the real culprit for Nepal’s female genocide is patriarchy in all its deplorable manifestations. The only long-lasting remedy to such deep-seated injustice is to accelerate efforts to eliminate gender discrimination through education, better regulation, and law enforcement.

BORN AGAIN CA

This is a very well argued editorial, but I have major misgivings about going for general and local elections without closure on the federalism debate (Born-again CA, Editorial, #621). Identity-based campaigning and ethnic tension will make any future elections violent and far from fair and free. So although it does look like Dahal is trying to gain maximum leverage by reinstating the CA, that may be the least harmful of all the terrible options we have.

BOB

- The Prime Minister admits he is no longer in control, the President’s hands are tied, we are functioning without a parliament, constitutional bodies do not have power, and there is no budget. This prolonged vacuum is a recipe for disaster. Reviving the CA or holding elections are both viable options, but they are just that: options. If the politics fails, both options can be catastrophic. If the politics succeeds, they can be sorted out, both are viable options.

RAM ASHISH

- Those who say 80 per cent of the constitution was already completed by 27 May are wrong. How could most of the constitution be written when disagreements over major issues like identity based federalism, constitutional court and executive, and presidential system were yet to be resolved. When all those years were not enough, why should they come to an agreement over contentious issues, Dahal wants us to believe that if the CA is revived he can magically forge consensus among one and all.

GOVIND GIRL

- Somebody please just write the constitution so that we can all get back to business. How hard can it be? A constitution is a set of universal rights, it’s hardly political and doesn’t even make specific stipulations about the interest of every life group, district, ethnicity etc. We could probably download a constitution from the internet, and fill in the blanks.

SUMAN UPRETY

- All this talk about ‘briefly’ reviving the CA is simply a Maoist tactic to prolong the party’s time in power. The Maoists don’t want elections because they know they will not get a majority. Also Dahal is determined to dislodge Bhattarai from office and he sees a CA revival as the easiest way to make that happen.

JUNGH

- We have wasted an incredible amount of money and energy in the last six years, but have very little to show in terms of achievement. The political class has been running the country without local and general elections. Democratic rules which are respected elsewhere are being blatantly bypassed by those in power. And highly vitriolic反射到 hospitals if they fall sick, married off young, denied citizenship, abused or trafficked, sometimes by their own relatives.

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The development industry

While international donor agencies preach equality and inclusion, their own practices and polices couldn’t be further from it. Officials who have jumped ship. The development industry also creates ‘rents’ for employees in the form of higher education overseas, travel to attend workshops and trainings, and consultancy ‘opportunities for civil servants. It has altered the incentive structure in the government machinery. Rather than performing signed responsibilities, many government officials are actively seeking ways of capturing rent. Id and senior government officials at district and central levels often take unpaid leave work as consultants in development organisations. There has been a steady increase in graduate and st-graduate programs in development studies throughout Nepal. Their focus is on critically examining the development sector from a multi-disciplinary perspective, but to produce effective and efficient development bureaucrats who are to manage projects, or carry out monitoring and evaluation. Students are trained to market themselves adequately for creative development jobs rather than to pass the government civil service exam. The glamour of a job in the development industry attracts students to these schools and perpetuates the view that government jobs are inferior. The development industry is producing new inequalities and exclusions not just between ‘Nepali nationals’ and ‘Nepali internationals’, but between nationals and internationals. Senior decision-making positions within agencies are set aside for internationals, and Nepali citizens are not allowed to compete for them and have to work under the supervision of international ‘experts’, regardless of their qualification and experience. This divide is reinforced by a significant difference in pay scale between national and international staff, which is particularly visible when Nepali staff and their international colleagues travel domestically: the subsistence allowance varies considerably. Hierarchies within the development industry on the basis of citizenship are often justified on the grounds that international staff are more competent, have cross-country experience, and are politically neutral. But the growing numbers of Nepalis with qualifications from leading universities question such justifications. Because of its command over financial and technical resources, the development industry can define what constitutes knowledge and creates a ‘knowledge hierarchy’. In-depth understanding of the Nepali economy, society and polity are often relegated as secondary or peripheral to knowledge of global contexts. The development industry is one of the largest and most influential actors in the processes governing the restructuring of Nepal. While it preaches equality and inclusion as a fundamental agenda for new Nepal, its own day-to-day practices and polices couldn’t be further from it. It is time that the Nepali state and society also hold the development industry accountable.

Bimbika Sijapati Basnett teaches at the Nepal School of Social Sciences and Humanities in Kathmandu.

L ast Dasain, I overheard an elderly relative blessing someone nearby: “I hope you get a job in an international development organisation, and when you do don’t forget to take your great aunt around in a big jeep.” Though amusing at the time, the remark was a glaring reminder of the impact of the development industry in Nepal. Multilateral and bilateral agencies, international NGOs and community groups benefitting from donor support now make up an economic sector just like manufacturing, banking, and tourism. The development industry employs people, transacts services, carries ideologies, and negotiates politics. More than 60 per cent of Nepal’s development expenditure comes from overseas development assistance, supporting basic services in health, education, water, sanitation, and infrastructure to benefit marginalised communities. More recently, the development industry has been playing a critical role in supporting demands for greater social inclusion. Development organisations have been strategically empowering previously excluded communities to demand greater rights and recognition. However, it is also exacerbating existing development challenges and producing new forms of inequalities and exclusions. The development sector is an important and highly sought-after source of employment for educated Nepalis. Jobs are well-paid and also include other benefits such as pension schemes, health coverage, education subsidies, training, or overseas travel. These are justified on the grounds of professionalising the sector and providing incentives to employees. But the unintended side effect has been to diminish the Nepali state’s capacity to compete, and to reduce its ability to attract and retain high quality human capital. The ‘best and the brightest’ have either been absorbed by the development industry or are constantly negotiating ways of benefitting from it. The ranks of bilateral and multilateral agencies are filled with government experts, regardless of their qualification and experience. This divide is reinforced by a significant difference in pay scale between national and international staff, which is particularly visible when Nepali staff and their international colleagues travel domestically: the subsistence allowance varies considerably. Hierarchies within the development industry on the basis of citizenship are often justified on the grounds that international staff are more competent, have cross-country experience, and are politically neutral. But the growing numbers of Nepalis with qualifications from leading universities question such justifications. Because of its command over financial and technical resources, the development industry can define what constitutes knowledge and creates a ‘knowledge hierarchy’. In-depth understanding of the Nepali economy, society and polity are often relegated as secondary or peripheral to knowledge of global contexts. The development industry is one of the largest and most influential actors in the processes governing the restructuring of Nepal. While it preaches equality and inclusion as a fundamental agenda for new Nepal, its own day-to-day practices and polices couldn’t be further from it. It is time that the Nepali state and society also hold the development industry accountable.

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Beam it up

Satellite phones will be an essential item for Nepal during treks and emergencies

specialises in the Asia and north-Africa region, while Inmarsat phones work all over the world although both don’t work as well at the poles (which shouldn’t affect us here in Nepal). With Iridium, there are always three satellites within range no matter where you are in the world.

Cost-wise, Iridium phone sets tend to be more expensive, and the subscription and cost per calls are also more. Iridium tends to drop calls more often as it switches satellites, and this adds up the cost of calling.

Iridium, Thuraya, and Inmarsat all have dealers and showrooms in Kathmandu, and most of their customers are trekking and mountaineering groups as well as relief agencies. During the war, however, Maoist guerrillas as well as the security forces were using satellite phones too. There is now also interest from embassies, aid agencies, and Nepali companies which want to prepare for a major earthquake that will throw out all communications, including mobile phones.

“We have to be prepared for an eight magnitude earthquake that is sure to hit Kathmandu someday,” says Amudan Jung Rana of the Dubai-based Thuraya dealer, Constellation, in Kathmandu. “It will be critical for coordinating search, rescue, and relief.”

Next month, Thuraya is introducing its XT Dual model which can accommodate two SIM cards, one for the satphone, and one for normal mobile service. It has a stronger body and better battery life compared to earlier models. It can also be hooked up to a laptop and used as a satellite modem for Internet.

Since remote trekking areas (or Kathmandu after an earthquake) will not have electricity, it is a good idea to also buy a 5–10W solar charger to keep the phones and laptops going.

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PAY AS YOU GO

THURAYA

Thuraya pre-pay has a flat rate of $1.49 per call except for hard-to-reach destinations. The post-paid calling rate is $1.34. Thuraya to Thuraya calls are $0.80 a minute. It also offers special SIMs for 80 developing countries, including Nepal, where the calling rate is $0.75. The XT Dual will cost up to Rs 145,000, while earlier models are cheaper.

www.thuraya.com
www.constellation.com.np
01-5549252

INMARSAT

14 Technologies is the dealer for the London-based Inmarsat, and is offering its IsatPhonePro for about $700 plus. Prepaid users pay 95 cents per minute to call anywhere in the world, while post-paid users pay 68 cents.

www.satelliteinnepal.com

IRIDIUM

Iridium’s standard offer is a $70.99 monthly fee with 20 minutes free and $1.29 for every additional minute. The annual fee is $449.

www.iridium.com

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Keep in touch, #495

Hello would be the best bet. CDMA phones and modems have more coverage around the district capitals. But there are still large parts of remote Nepal that are out of reach of GSM signals, and this includes the increasingly popular Budi Gandaki Trail, Rolwaling, Langtang, and Dhaulagiri. Here the only way to keep in touch will be through satellite phones.

Among satellite phones, there are three choices: Inmarsat, Iridium, and Thuraya. Here, too, people have their favourite phone systems, and all three have their pros and cons in terms of cost, reliability, and signal quality. Most people still choose satellite phones by their looks, and as with human beings, this can be deceiving since beauty is only skin deep.

Thuraya and Inmarsat provide coverage through geo-stationary satellites that orbit the earth 36,000km out in space above the equator so that they are always above the same point on the earth’s surface. Iridium, on the other hand, links handsets to a fleet of 66 or so low-orbit satellites only 600km above the earth’s surface.

Unlike mobile phones, satellite phones need to be pointed at the satellite and you need to be outdoors-sometimes they don’t even work inside tents. Iridium has a shorter time lag, while geo-stationary satellites have up to two seconds lag during conversations. In terms of coverage, Thuraya

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Linked for life

Nepali Times: How do you assess the progress of the IT industry in Nepal in the last 20 years? Dileep Agrawal: Not only have IT businesses mushroomed in the last two decades, but we have been able to reach the homes of millions of ordinary Nepalis and increase their access to high-end technology. Most urban families in Nepal have at least one computer and increasing numbers are connected to the Internet through their mobile phones or through cable. The younger generation in particular is very hooked. You can see them surfing the net while on a microbus. However, due to the government’s outdated policies, we have not been able to bring in latest technologies like WiMax.

How do you compare your company’s performance within and outside the Valley? Although Kathmandu is our primary market, our services are available in 58 districts. We have also teamed up with Mahabir Pun to come up with ways to expand our services to rural areas. In Dadeldhura and parts of Eastern Nepal, our wifi-based services are really popular.

What kind of policies should the government introduce to ensure the IT sector’s growth? Firstly, the state must update existing infrastructure so that they meet international standards, and bridge the gap between us and rest of the world. Also, instead of viewing private companies as a threat, the government should create a level playing field for everyone.

What special services can patrons look forward to as part of your 17th anniversary celebrations? We are extending our monsoon package, and offering two months worth of extra services on cable internet, and one month extra on wireless service. Both come with free installation.

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the IT sector? Only two per cent of Nepalis use cable internet, so opportunities are plentiful. However, IT policies need to be changed and made more conducive to innovation and creativity. Infrastructure also needs a major overhaul. Only then can private companies and entrepreneurs take full advantage of Nepal’s growing appetite for up-to-date technology.

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I

hitting low income earners expenditure on food, and is per cent of their consumption power, who spend around 65.1 is eroding people’s purchasing figure hard to digest. Inflation especially food prices, find this to cope with rising prices, Nepalis who are struggling monetary policy for 2011-12. target set in the budget and higher than the seven per cent inflation to be at 8.3 per cent, especially of food items, in prices contributes about three-quarters services prices while determining 53.18 per cent to non-food and low because it gives 46.82 per The central bank’s figure is 14.7 per cent in 2010-11 to 7.7 per cent in 2011-12 do not reflect reality. What prices in Nepal have historically moved in tandem with prices in India, thanks to our pegged exchange rate and huge volume of imports. About one-third of price variability here is determined by prices in India. After 2007-08, when the global economy was struck by food, fuel, and financial crises, prices in Nepal started to remain stubbornly sticky at high level. It showed one directional changes only in response to food production and availability domestically, ie when supplies went down, prices went up. But when supplies moderated, prices remained sticky at high level. What happened? As monetary policies (money supply and interest rate) have little traction on inflation in Nepal, supply side constraints and oil prices are weighing heavily on food and non-food prices. Since aggregate consumption has always been high (about 90 per cent of GDP) for a long time, there is very little extra pressure coming from demand side. Major pressure is exerted by supply side factors along with unjustified price speculation and rigging of product and factor markets by middlemen. First, some wholesalers have deliberately withheld stocks to bump up prices in order to earn abnormal profits on the eve of Dasain and Tihar when the demand for essential food and non-food items is pretty much price inelastic (demand barely changes with respect to changes in prices). Second, though recurrent bandas temporarily disrupted distribution of essential items, wholesalers and retailers capitulated on the strikes to stick to higher prices even after the normalisation of suppliers. Third, middlemen are distorting prices and calculatingly keeping them high. For instance, transportation cost and some leakages do not fully justify more than 50 per cent increase in prices of fruits and vegetables after they reach Kalimati from Bharatpur. Powerful politically affiliated middlemen and associations act both as monopsonists (only they purchase food from farmers), and monopolists (only they sell food to wholesalers), in effect depriving farmers of the true price by stifling competition and also burdening consumers with artificially inflated prices. Fourth, each time supply disruption occurs and oil prices are raised, there is inflationary expectations in the market, especially among retailers who preemptively up prices and keep it higher than the norm of taking 10 to 20 per cent profit only. Fifth, the frequent hike in fuel prices and load-shedding hours have increased cost of production, which are ultimately reflected in the retail prices. Such fluctuations affect costs at production site, distribution chains, and retail stores. Furthermore, the continually rising imports of goods, especially those from outside of India, and the depreciation of the Nepali rupee have further pushed up prices. Now, what can the government do about this? For imported goods, there is little it can do to influence prices because they are determined externally. For those goods produced and sold domestically, especially food items, there is no other option but to strictly supervise distortionary activities by the movers and shakers of the market. It means clamping down on middlemen, setting up fruit and vegetable wholesale markets in strategic shopping locations, monitoring retail prices, and booking those who deliberately withhold supplies against the existing supply policies. Furthermore, the government could also lower import tariffs on food items, raw materials, and intermediate goods.

www.sapkotac.blogspot.com www.chandansapkota.wordpress.com
Growing up in Begnas village in the stunningly picturesque Kaski district, Saraswati Adhikari has been close to the land since childhood.

The knowledge of the seasons and the weather, seeds and their planting times, the herbs and fruits in the surrounding forests all come naturally to her. Saraswati cannot read or write, and she learnt these things from her parents and in-laws who themselves got the knowledge from their parents.

Today Saraswati is not just a source of knowledge for farmers in Kaski, but from various other parts of Nepal and even foreigners. More than 130 trainees from different corners of the world visit Saraswati’s farm overlooking Begnas Lake every year to learn about organic farming, agro-biodiversity, and permaculture. With her husband, Surya, she grows 160 plant species like medicinal herbs, rice, vegetables, and fruits, including the less common ones such as coffee, kiwi, and avocados in her hillside farm.

Saraswati gives full credit to the Pokhara-based organisation, LIBIRD (Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research, and Development), a non-profit that seeks to conserve local biodiversity so farmers can benefit. Saraswati and Surya took part in a LIBIRD training 15 years ago where they learnt about using the rich plant life of the surrounding mountains to breed new crop varieties and preserve locally-adapted seeds.

Sharing what she knows

An illiterate female farmer dreams of setting up an agricultural college one day.

TONG SIAN CHOO in KASKI
Today, Saraswati’s farm not only meets the needs of her family, but also serves as a learning centre where visitors can rent rooms as part of a homestay program to gain knowledge about organic farming.

“I am very happy and satisfied now that I have become more famous,” Saraswati laughs, half-mocking herself. She is encouraged by people from other parts of Nepal and overseas calling her on her mobile to acknowledge her efforts, and ask for advice on vermiculture or coffee production of which the couple are pioneers in Nepal. Most foreigners come from the US and UK and depending on the season up to 10 volunteers stay at the farm every month to help with chores and learn organic farming techniques, or get first-hand experience in coffee planting and processing.

“My biggest satisfaction is that I am able to share my knowledge and learning with my visitors, and let them take the knowledge back to farms in their own homes,” she says. Besides conserving agricultural biodiversity, she and her husband have also successfully improved local varieties of rice by cross-breeding. With the support of scientists from LIBIRD and other groups, Saraswati’s farm has produced up to seven improved varieties of rice, including the famous Pokharel Jethobudo which is favoured by consumers for its soft texture, unique aroma, and taste.

As the breeding process requires intense concentration, Saraswati has taken over the role from her husband as his eyesight is failing, and his hands are not dexterous enough for crossing rice stamens. In 2010, Saraswati was given the Best Innovative Farmer Breeder by LIBIRD.

As a result of their hard work, the family income has tripled from the increased harvests and from renting rooms to homestay guests and volunteers. The Adhikaris have therefore been able to afford to send their son abroad for studies.

At a time when Saraswati and her husband should be thinking of retirement and enjoying the fruits of their lifelong work, the couple is brimming with new ideas. Although she cannot read or write herself, Saraswati’s dream is to set up an agricultural college in Kaski to help other farmers preserve their traditional farming knowledge from disappearing forever.

Says Saraswati: “As long as my eyes, ears, and hands can support me, I will continue to do my best and pass on what I know to a new generation.”

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As a pioneer and leader in Nepal’s ICT industry, WorldLink has proudly served the nation for 17 years. Thanks to your trust and support, the services that we started from two computers in a small room have now been expanded to 1897 villages and 56 municipalities in 58 districts. Our success has inspired countless and instilled hope during turbulent times. We started with a dream to connect every Nepali with high quality and affordable telecommunication services, and today, we reaffirm this commitment to our nation.

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As Nepal’s most modern printing facility, Jagadamba Press is known for its state-of-the-art equipment. But we never forget the human touch.
photography workshop, Canon school of Imaging offers you an opportunity to enhance your skills and gain in-depth knowledge on the nuances of digital photography. Rs 4500, 1 to 10 October, 5.15 to 7.15 pm, Mahi Bhawan, New Road, 2903309, 201378, workshop@canon-nepal.com, register by 30 September

Ncell Nepal literature festival, prepare yourself for lively discussions at this celebration of literature and you might just get to question your favourite writers. 29-30 September, Nepal Academy, Kamaladi

inheriting statelessness, an exhibition of paintings by Saroj Bajracharya along with the launch of the book Future of History. 21 September to October 5, Park Gallery, Pulchowk, 9803187665

Japanese culture exchange program, a showcase of dance, music, arts, and documentory to raise funds for children’s home. Rs 500, 6 to 8.30 pm, Patan Darbar Museum, Patan, ladymystiqua@facebook.com

Weaving Art and Change in Nepal, featuring limited edition of carpets, sculptures, books, and paintings. 23 September to 7 October, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal, 421840, 4483979

Sandook annual showcase, a chance to purchase meticulously handcrafted ornaments and other products. 15 to 16 September, 11 am to 7 pm, Shivi, Jhamsikhel

Indian film festival, in celebration of Bollywood art. 14 September to 7 October, Babarmahal, 4218048, 9849302685, 9841245862, 9841751968, 9808336264, call 9841245862, 9849302685, Kumari, Kathmandu, for tickets.

electric car rally, share or drive your electric vehicles to Sanga and enjoy a fun day at spinal injury rehabilitation centre to raise funds for the centre. Rs 500, 21 September, 9 am to 2 pm, Sanga, Kathmandu

Cycle for tourism, brave the heat and cycle for two days from Kathmandu to Sauraha on a tour led by the cyclist Pushkar Shah in order to promote domestic tourism and cycling culture.

Sautara Roof garden, a chance to purchase carpets, mementos and other products. 27 to 29 September, 9803607694, nepal.wcf@gmail.com

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Brace yourself for the biggest shopping extravaganza this festive season

Mahabir’s Centre for Nepal Connection

Months are on from over, but the festive mood has already set in. Lifestyle Expo 2012 will add to the festivities in the run up to Dasain and Tihar celebrations from 12 to 16 October. The expo is one of a kind mega fair that will cater to the demands of modern consumers by bringing more than 300 exhibitors under a single roof. Himalmedia, House of Rajkarnikar, Direction Nepal, and Global Expositions Management Services are collaborating to bring the ultimate consumer gala event in a month’s time. The expo will provide a one stop solution for festival shopping with style. Popular clothing lines, gadgets, home décor, and furnishing outlets will all be housed under the same roof for your convenience. If you are planning on a family trip during the holidays, travel agents at the expo will help you pick the most sought after destinations at bargain prices. If you are tired of shopping for Dasain clothes, you can check out the hottest two wheelers and four wheelers, or sample the latest mobiles, laptops, and music systems. School and college goers can take part in inter-college band and quiz contests. The best bands stand a chance to win cash prizes up to Rs 250,000 and recording contracts. For those who are looking to get inked, the expo will host Kathmandu’s top tattoo parlours.

And the fun does not stop there. There will also be more than a dozen events including rock concerts, karate demonstration, dog shows, fashion show, talent shows, and spectacular fireworks. So mark your calendars and get ready for five days of non-stop fun, food, and bags full of festive goodies. See you at the expo.

11am to 8.30pm
12 to 16 October
Bhrikuti Mandap

ON 4 March 2012, Mahabir Pun announced through Facebook that he was opening a restaurant in Thamel to fund the Himanchal Higher Secondary School and Nepal Wireless Networking Project. He appealed to his friends and well wishers to help him collect Rs 1 million, but made it clear he wasn’t asking for donations. He would return the loans in three years at 10 per cent interest. Money poured in from across the world, and six months into the campaign Pun revealed that Mahabir’s Centre for Nepal Connection had opened its doors.

Located on the first floor of Sagarmatha Complex in Mandala Street, if all goes according to plan, the Centre will become a hub not just for those looking to bring about real change in Nepal, but also for those looking for a good meal. It is a commendable thought that every single rupee from the restaurant’s revenue is used to educate youngsters who could someday grow up to be the next Mahabir Pun.

The place came together very organically. Kathmandu’s mayor, Keshav Shapat, financed the furnishings. Architect Sanjay Shrestha designed its interiors for free with ceiling light which mimics a circuit board. Shrestha also used environmentally-friendly LED lights that utilise no more than 33 watts at a time. Lavazza donated an espresso machine, the projector is a gift from Chaudhary Group, and WorldLink is providing free wifi. Binod Shrestha, who has worked in the Gulf was hoping to start his own restaurant, but didn’t have the financial means. He has joined the centre as the head chef and receives training about food preparation, storage, hygiene, and cooking tips from a chef in San Francisco, virtually, every day.

Moving on to the food, we had nachos with mango salsa for starters. A cheesy plate of refried beans and jalapeno peppers served with a knock-out salsa. The dish was fiery, tart, sweet, and crunchy all at once. We followed this with chicken marsala, a grilled chicken seared in olive oil with mushrooms, onions, and port wine. The port adds a rich welcome flavour to the dish. I will definitely go back to the Centre, for there are many dishes on the menu that I want to try, such as the beef patty melt and the red wine chicken which are said to be heavenly. Also the farm-house salad already has its long list of admirers and I can’t wait to join the list. And most exciting of all, the dessert menu will be out in about a fortnight.

For someone who eats out so often, I like the idea of indulging myself without feeling guilty because I know my money is helping improve someone’s life even if in a very small way. I really love the message that Pun is promoting through his restaurant: we don’t have to wait to make a big difference, together all our small contributions will amount to a big change eventually.

On a separate note, we have decided to remove the rating system because we feel our readers base their judgments only on the number of ‘forks’ we award rather than what we say about the food. The ‘forks’ also don’t do justice to my entire gastronomic experience. Besides, eating out in Kathmandu is like taking part in a lucky draw: one day I might love the food served by a restaurant, but the next day the same place might disappoint me.}

Ruby Tuesday

How to get there: In Thamel, get to Manda Street and Mahabir’s Centre for Nepal Connection is on the first floor of Sagarmatha Complex.
Curing cancer

DHRANVANTRI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

T o the surprise of many people, improvement in cancer treatment which had remained stagnant for decades is finally taking off, and revolutionary treatments, if you have the financial means, are now available.

In 1973 US President Richard Nixon declared war on cancer by signing the National Cancer Act. Nixon’s administration had hoped that unlike the disaster in Vietnam, the fight against cancer would be a more popular campaign leading to a quick victory. More than 40 years later, Nixon’s crusade which brought this dreaded disease into the limelight by providing more political and financial support for research, diagnosis, and treatment seems to have finally made an impact.

Even though treatment for cancer boils down to burn (radiation), slash (surgery), or poison (chemotherapy), research has now made it possible to deploy highly targeted related non-toxic agents guided by genetics. This therapy not only includes drug, but also substances called monoclonal antibodies which have brought about important, therapeutic advances. For example Trastuzumab, sold under the trade name Herceptin, is a monoclonal antibody which is now effectively used to treat certain types of breast cancer. Monoclonal antibodies for common cancers such as lung and colon cancer are also available these days. Imatinib (sold as Gleevec in the US, Glivec in Europe and Australia, and Veetat in India), used against a special kind of leukemia called chronic myeloid leukemia (CML), is the poster boy for new cancer drugs which are different from monoclonal antibodies.

Gleevec costs about US $50,000 per patient for a year, but due to the generosity of people from abroad and a Western drug company, hundreds of patients with CML in Nepal can obtain this effective drug for free. Gleevec’s working mechanism is genetic, based, so unlike other cancer drugs which indiscriminately kill off all dividing cells (hence people on chemotherapy may go bald), Gleevec targets particular cancer cells.

Many other cancer drugs like Herceptin are very expensive and not freely available to patients in countries like Nepal. Manufacturing these new cancer drugs in developing nations is difficult due to long-standing patent laws. Western governments and drug companies claim that these stringent laws need to be in place to make new drug discoveries possible. However, as expensive cancer therapy becomes more and more effective, difficult ethical questions will arise for which there will be no easy, clear-cut answers.

Almost piles the very talented Amy Adams who is pitted against the phenomenon of Meryl Streep playing an unforgettable Julia Child as the film flashes back and forth in time, outlining the sometimes hilarious, sometimes painful struggles of these women as they pursue their passion of cooking.

Does this sound light, fluffy, and banal? Light and fluffy yes, but never banal, the film soars with humour and warmth, with a wonderful supporting cast and luxuriant hung pang indulging cooking sequences.

As Julia Child faces off with snotty French chefs at the Cordoue Bistro who initially turn their nose up at her because she is a woman, she is supported by her loving diplomat husband Paul, played to perfection by Stephen Furst. Similarly Julie is also encouraged by her husband Eric (Chris Messina) who is alternately frustrated and delighted, all the while being extremely well-fed, throughout his wife’s experiment.

It is not that these films are particularly meaningful or profound, it is just that the Sleepless in Seattle, You’ve Got Mail, and Julie and Julia trio carry the hallmark of a remarkable woman who clearly knew how to live, and eat, really really well, keeping all important things in perspective, and was somehow also able to channel these skills into some very fine, heartwarming, soul cleansing cinema.

Settling into any of these films is like settling into the arms of a loved one, or dear friend, ready with either a favourite blanket or a glass of excellent red wine and knowing that the next few hours will be bliss.

Ephron’s passing induced an astonishing number of loving obituaries and essays memorialising her legendary warmth, her unswerving friendship, and her ability to give perfect advice on everything from how to find the best restaurants to how to travel in perfect comfort.

Tom Hanks, who starred in both Sleepless in Seattle and You’ve Got Mail wrote that to thank him after one of their collaborations, Ephron called him up to inform him that someone was coming to their house to plant a tree for them, and which kind of fruit tree would they like? They chose oranges, and are nourished by that tree’s fruits to this day.

Another favourite anecdote by one of her obituary writers entails overhearing a young woman walking down the street talking on her cell phone saying, “I didn’t even know her, but I still feel like crying”. This is more or less how I feel, but, having her films to watch is somewhat of a comfort.

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Ijhar Pamariya of Laxmipur of Sarlahi district was returning home last Monday after working in his fields all day. The 50-year-old farmer was passing a road block erected by locals who were protesting the delay in the installation of electric transformers, when six Armed Police Force (APF) men attacked him with batons and boots.

The tired farmer did not even have the strength to defend himself against the indiscriminate beating. He died on the spot. The post-mortem confirmed death due to severe beating.

“I told them he was just a passerby, but they kept punching and kicking him and then they also attacked me,” said Jamiuluddin Mansoor, who was injured. Twelve villagers were also hurt, including 40-year-old Jilam Khato, who was sitting inside her home when the APF ransacked it and beat her up too.

A few months ago, a rickshaw-puller from Shivanagar of Kapilvastu district was killed by men from the APF and Nepal police near the Indian border. According to the report filed by the victim’s family, Mangare Murau was transporting alcohol from across the border when the police asked him for a bribe. The poor man had nothing to offer and was beaten and kicked. Murau died two days later.

The increase in police brutality in the Tarai in recent months ironically comes at a time when the overall security situation has actually improved, and Madhesi militancy has waned. The blue-and-grey camouflage fatigues of the APF, however, have become synonymous with harassment, corruption, and physical attacks.

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The hopelessness of Madhesi youth combined with state repression is a dangerous mix. Virtual ‘crossfire’ fatalities, illegal detention, and custodial killings. There are plenty of cases where police have been found to be involved in illegal detention of innocent Madhesi youths.

Ajit Lal Karna, a 26-year-old student from Janakpur, was abducted and tortured by the Central Investigation Bureau and Mahottari police before mysteriously releasing him near the Indian border. In some cases, the victims have died of torture, but the families have no way of proving the fact because no arrest warrants or charge sheets are filed.

The state has failed to protect its citizens during this prolonged transition from the very institutions it runs to serve them. In the absence of elected representatives, people have been at the mercy of local bureaucrats and the powerful police for the last 10 years. The corruption and misuse of power has become intolerable, and young Madhesi feel targeted again.

An average of 1,000 young Nepalis leave the country every day from Kathmandu airport, many of them are young men from the Tarai headed to Malaysia or the Gulf to work. No one keeps any record of how many cross the border to find work in India. With no jobs and few prospects, the young people of the Madhes have few options but to migrate. This is a recipe for another disaster in the Madhes: the hopelessness of the youth combined with state repression.

Back in Kathmandu, a young Madhesi student who works as a barber to make ends meet told me this week: “Whenever I go back home, the police look at my clothes and hair and frisk me. How often does it happen to Pahadis, I wonder?”
When Baburam Bhattarai came to power last August, he promised to give the choked roads of the Valley a major facelift. A year later, streets around Kathmandu have been dug up, houses built along roads have been demolished, sidewalks have vanished, and bulldozers are lined up along major thoroughfares. All that remains are heaps of bricks and rubble, and the city has turned into a dust bowl.

Although locals of Maharajgunj, Baluwatar, Lazimpat, Kamalpokhari, and Tahachal have been vocal in their protest against the government’s forceful demolition drive, it has not stopped the Kathmandu Valley Town Development Committee (KVTDC) from completely tearing down 100 houses and partially bulldozing a further 425. More than Rs 350 million has already been spent on the demolition program and the Department of Roads’ (DoR) purse is expected to be lighter by Rs 450 million by the time all the roads are rebuilt.

The government’s no-nonsense approach has surprised many, and earned Bhattarai more praise than contempt. However, officials at KVTDC are quick to point out that road expansion plans were laid down 33 years ago. “The Prime Minister has taken a bold decision to begin what should have been finished decades ago,” says Ram Prasad Shrestha, an engineer at KVTDC. According to him, the building code was amended twice in 1993 and 2008, but earlier governments failed to muster enough political courage to actually implement the policy.

According to the code, structures have to be built at a certain distance from the centre of the road or else they are illegal. But with the government keen to make up for lost time, even legal properties have not been spared. Rita Rimal bought a piece of land above the Dhhikhola River in Budhanagar. When the river threatened to wash away her holdings, she built retaining walls. Now her property has fallen prey to the KVTDC’s river control program, another

W
development scheme that is keen to ride the road expansion momentum. While the Maitighar-Tinkune, Shital Niwas-Baluwatar-Dillibazar, and Lainchaur-Golfitar stretch are on top of the government’s priority list, it has earmarked the road from Kamalpokhari to Ratopul to connect the city centre with the airport. 70km of roads have already been bulldozed in the capital, and there at least 20km more to go.

Bhattarai has promised to give Nepalis bigger, broader, and better roads by Dasain. But with one month to go until the festival, the campaign faces newer hurdles along the Lainchaur-Bansbari section. Earlier, the government got around the stay order petitioned by some influential residents of Lazimpat, but this time it is up against immense diplomatic pressures.

The American, Japanese, and French embassies lie along the Lazimpat road, and the former has asked the state to pay up to $3 million in damages should its walls be razed down. The Japanese embassy says it will cooperate with the Nepali government as long as diplomatic norms are observed.

According to the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Missions, “a host state must take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission against any intrusion or damage and prevent any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity”.

But if the government decides to pay all or some part of these damages, it will open up a can of worms and everyone affected will be entitled to compensation on their own terms. According to KVTDC’s Ramesh Kumar Kafle, compensation is given according to government estimates, which is lower than the market price.

People who depend on the roads for their livelihood, have an altogether different concern. Santosh Sah who owns a small restaurant on the Kamalpokhari-Ratopul section, says he is struggling to pay his bills because patrons have stopped visiting his shop due to the dust and grime. He had to sell his land in the Tarai just to keep his business alive. The next time the roads are widened, to ease traffic or otherwise, his shop will be gone.
Unhealed wounds

Bimal Khatiwads, Kantipur, 9 September

Purna Bahadur Buda of Thavang, Rolpa took up arms and joined the war when he was just 16. He took part in some of the bloodiest encounters during the conflict including those in Agrakahi’s Sandhikharka and Rolpa’s Khara where hundreds of his friends lost their lives. Though he survived numerous battles, he now regrets being alive because even six years after the end of the war he hasn’t received the compensation allocated for the wounded, and is compelled to walk around with bullet shells and shrapnel lodged in his body. “I became a Maoist and risked my life, but the party hasn’t even bothered to take these bullets out of my body, what can I expect now?” he says.

Buda who is now the party’s company assistant commander opted for voluntary retirement during the reorganising process due to his injury. However, the monetary package he received wasn’t enough to cover medical expenses of removing bullets. So he bought a plot of land instead and runs a small grocery shop to earn a living at the squatters’ village in Padampaur, Chitwan. Like Buda, more than 220 former Maoist combatants who chose voluntary retirement have settled in the squatter areas around Padampaur and work as daily wage labourers.

Buda hopes to celebrate this Dassain with his parents in Rolpa, but knows that the injury won’t let him fully rejoice the festivities. “Our seniors are busy enjoying all the opportunities and privileges, while people like us are still waiting like we did in the beginning,” he laments.

Many of those who fought alongside him are among the richest and most powerful people in Nepal. How come you are still a driver? I am a committed party member and am willing to pick up a gun again if necessary. But I am not trained to loot and extort the public. So I am using my skills to survive until the party assigns me some other task.

But many people benefited personally under Dahal, didn’t they? Earlier, I used to ignore all this. But when it became too obvious, I told Dahal: “Comrade, this is wrong. You should stop it.” He merely replied, “These are just anomalies that will gradually be weeded out during the course of the revolution.” If I disclose everything about Dahal, people will beat him to death. But I must speak about his relationship with Ajay Sumangi. Sumangi has bought off every single person close to Dahal to have access to him. There is no limit to Dahal’s wrongdoings. When a leader turns his back on the people and joins the mafia, he is capable of anything.

Are you saying he lied about everything? The Dahal I know can put up any act. He can cry or smile at will but it’s all fake. Once I took him to my village where he stayed at my place. But later, I realised that he was just putting up an act to please us, the very people who wanted to be saved. I ended my relationship with Ajay Sumangi.

How do you assess Dahal and Bhattarai’s leadership in the party? Dahal and Bhattarai are worse than Govinda Raj Joshi and Khum Bahadur Khadka and their fate will be worse than Gyamendra Shah’s. People will bring them down one day.
With India getting ready to raise the price of petroleum again next week, it may behove the union of nine student unions here to save everyone the trouble and wait for the next fuel price hike in Nepal, and bundle all the bands into a big fat combo strike before Dasain instead of these piecemeal shutdowns. The students can’t even be trusted to organise a proper hurt-all. First, they announced it would be on Sunday, and abruptly changed the date to honour Shaheed Bimal Bhattarai, throwing all our plans haywire. Then they said it would be dawn-to-dusk on Wednesday, and changed their minds again to say it would only be from 6am to 12 noon. Then Ram Raja, Nepal’s pioneer bombardier breathed his last, and the bund changed their minds again to say it would be dawn-to-dusk. The students can’t even be trusted to organise a proper hurt-all. Dudes, get your act together.

The students have a lot to learn about the art of mayhem, and should take inspiration from the employee’s union at Greenwich Hotel which, in a list of 17 demands to management this week wanted all employees serving more than 20 years be given medals containing one kilogram of gold each. That will be one helluva medal, and begs the question how the staff in the autumn of their lives intend to wear it around their necks. Besides, with the price of gold bullion this week crossing Rs 170,000 an ounce, and given that there are 25 employees who have served over 20 years, the hotel management will have to fork out $2 million to make 24 carat gold medals.

So the Americans lifted the terrorist tag on the Baddies the very week that they [the Mao Mau] decided to let bygones be bygones and pardon themselves for all wartime atrocities. There is speculation about whether it is the Bracket Baddies, the Hyphen Baddies or the Matrika Baddies that the folks out in Foggy Bottom decided are now not really terrorists after all. None of the three groups that swear by Mr Zedong have publicly renounced violence, and one wonders whether the Americans know something we don’t. The Bracket comrades have called for a bund on Friday which they have warned will be “enforced strictly to make it a grand success” which is a euphemism for setting fire to unarmed taxis, and generally smashing anything that moves. The Hyphen comrades, not to be outdone, greeted the lifting of the terror tag by wreacking the bus of Delhi Public School in Dhaman on Monday for defying their extortion demand, and admitted to the vandalism saying the school had an “Indian name”. Guess the Kirkpatrick Doctrine is still in force: “We don’t care if they are sobsobitches as long as they are our sobsobitches.”

So it seems the Euro envoys were given the runaround by the Farang Ministry, which forwarded their request to meet the Prez about the TRC bill to Shital Nibus. But when Xenophobic Minister Kame Kazi found out, he gave his bureaucrats a tongue lashing. The media was summoned to publish a leak that the ministry had told the Europeans off, while the minister himself was reassuring the ambassadors that there was no problem. The Enigmatic Gai, meanwhile, slyly got the Cabinet to reimburse him Rs 3.5 million in tax payers’ cash for his spinal treatment in Japan.

The govt in its infinite wisdom has almost decided to go for a five-day week and give Sundays off in order to reduce the demand for electricity, and shorten load-shedding to 12 hours a day in winter. Um, tell me how this works: Govt wants to reduce power cuts so we can have electricity to work, but wants us not to work on Sundays to save electricity. Besides, how is 15 million Nepalis staying home on Sundays to watch Hindi teleserials going to save electricity? The only way to completely remove load-shedding is to give everyone a three-month vacation.

The final irony this week was that Baidya Kaka came to see Prime Minister Baburam (“I’m Not In Charge”) Bhattarai in Singha Darbar and delivered to him a 79pt ultimatum at the exact spot where BRB himself had delivered a 40pt demand to Prime Minister Brave Lion in February 1996. Com Laldhoj must have felt a familiar sense of déjà vu, especially when he saw that many of the demands were actually ones he himself crafted 16 years ago: ban Indian cars’ entry into Nepal, recapture Kalapani, etc. A gold medal coming right up for Baidya Kamred.