Elephants have excellent memory and they never forget. Nepali leaders, on the other hand, are notorious for their forgetfulness and the ease with which they backtrack on promises. Procrastination and postponement have become a way of Nepali politics, and the people tuned off long ago. The leaders had promised the people who elected them that they would have a deal to break the deadlock before the Dasain deadline. It didn’t happen. Then they said they would use the festival season for ‘mind fresh’, and come up with a consensus. That did not happen either. Now they are promising a deal ‘by Tihar’.

The reason there is no deal is that no one really wants a deal. This elastic transition benefits everyone: the Baburam Bhattarai-led Maoist-Madhesi coalition is perfectly happy to extend its tenure so it can self-enrich itself on a grand scale from state coffers, rigor mortis seems to have set in on the Nepali Congress and UML which have become parties singularly lacking in new ideas, Pushpa Kamal Dahal is terrified of facing the electorate which is why he wants a CA reincarnation by hook or by crook, the rump Maoists also want a stab at prime ministership but don’t really care how they get there, and the Madhesi parties are comfortable being sought-after kingmakers.
Nepal’s political leaders had promised the people who elected them that they would have a deal to break the deadlock before the Dravid deadline. It didn’t happen. Then they said they would use the festival season for ‘mood-fresh’, and come up with a consensus. Emerging from the holidays basking from excessive sunshine, they sat on sofas at the party tea parties this week promising a deal by Tikar. Procrastination and postponement have become a way of Nepali politics, and the people are tired of facing the electorate which is why he wants a CA reincarnation by hook or by crook, the rump Maoists also want a stab at prime ministership, but don’t really care how they get there, and the Madhesi parties are comfortable being sought after kingmakers. Dahal is flogging a dead horse while he tirelessly pursues his demand to resurrect the Constituent Assembly. The reason he is obsessed with this option is because he can gain some momentum on his real goal of being an executive president by exploiting identity politics, sidelining his party rival Bhattarai, and extracting elections off the agenda. Few within his party trust Dahal anymore, but the wily Chairman has found strange bedfellows in NC politicians Sher Bahadur Deuba and Ram Chandra Poudel to back his resurrection. The irony of it all is that Deuba and Poudel have no love lost between them, but they have fallen for Dahal’s argument that he will scratch their backs if they scratch his. Besides the technical, legal, and even ethical issues over CA revival, the most important argument against it is that we all know what will happen next: once the CA is revived it can be made to extend its mandate, perpetuate themselves, and a big waste of resources. Besides, most people have grown tired of facing the electorate which is why he wants a CA reincarnation by hook or by crook, the rump Maoists also want a stab at prime ministership, but don’t really care how they get there, and the Madhesi parties are comfortable being sought after kingmakers. Dahal is flogging a dead horse while he tirelessly pursues his demand to resurrect the Constituent Assembly. The reason he is obsessed with this option is because he can gain some momentum on his real goal of being an executive president by exploiting identity politics, sidelining his party rival Bhattarai, and extracting elections off the agenda. Few within his party trust Dahal anymore, but the wily Chairman has found strange bedfellows in NC politicians Sher Bahadur Deuba and Ram Chandra Poudel to back his resurrection. The irony of it all is that Deuba and Poudel have no love lost between them, but they have fallen for Dahal’s argument that he will scratch their backs if they scratch his. Besides the technical, legal, and even ethical issues over CA revival, the most important argument against it is that we all know what will happen next: once the CA is revived it can be made to extend its mandate, perpetuate themselves, and a big waste of resources. Besides, most people have grown tired of facing the electorate which is why he wants a CA reincarnation by hook or by crook, the rump Maoists also want a stab at prime ministership, but don’t really care how they get there, and the Madhesi parties are comfortable being sought after kingmakers.

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Anil
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Nirmal Nepal
Leaving things to keep afflatoxin is very risky. No one knows when a storm might come. What gets us to the other side of the storm is action. But our country has been left in the lurch for too long.

Rajan Kaffe
THE FOREIGN FINGER
I agree with Dipak Gyawali’s review of the book Nepal in Transition ("The foreign finger", #272). When I read Mao’s chapter, I also felt it contradicted or rather undermined all other analyses in the book. In fact, Mao’s review goes beyond the book and undermines all scoffs at most existing literature on Nepal’s transition. If only one instance of behind-the-door agreement led to such an upheaval, one can imagine what mayhem would be unleashed if many of the clandestine agreements between Nepal and Indian leaders were made public fully public.

Srijan Nepal
THE PAST FORETOLD
Parleys are no mood to go for fresh elections (‘The past foretold’, Anarug Acharya, #626). The more ‘democratic’ one can only hope that the few mayhem would be unleashed if many of the clandestine agreements between Nepal and Indian leaders were made public fully public.

Colin Cooper
I can’t believe Anurag is advocating a consensus government, he will have to declare one. The CA may be dead for those who benefit from the way things are. For those of us who suffer everyday under transition, it is the only redeem. 95 per cent of the CA work is complete. So going to polls just because leaders cannot agree on a few points is stupid and a big waste of resources. Besides, the election has nothing to do with the constitution. It is merely a power arrangement between Dahal and others who are desperate to out Bhattarai and get a piece of the pie. The best solution is to make the Constitution the bottom line for any agreement even if that means reviving the CA.

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Revealing Rushdie

The real reason why Salman Rushdie’s parents chose to settle in Pakistan and not India are not revealed in his memoir, Joseph Anton.

People writing their memoirs are prone to concealing embarrassing episodes of their lives to cultivate the image they have of themselves. It’s a frankly Salman Rushdie’s memoir, Joseph Anton, too suffers from.

It is implausible he did not, as he claims, know or guess the reason why his parents chose Pakistan over India late in their lives. He has also glossed over the controversial role his family members played in Pakistan’s early years. A sister of Rushdie’s mother, Negin, was married to a general who established the ISI, Pakistan’s premier intelligence agency. Negin’s other sister was the wife of a colonel who mercilessly sanitised the official biography of Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Then, Rushdie remains silent on the issue that the probation of his father, Anis, in the prestigious Indian Civil Service (ICS) was terminated because his birth record was found forged.

For the last 12 years he was deputy editor at Outlook magazine. The contract between the Pakistan government and Bolitho usually made it mandatory for him to submit his manuscript to a specially designated official for approval. The ofﬁcial was none other than Col Malik. The portions he deleted can now be read in Sharif Al Mujahid’s In Quest of Jinnah.

At the time of Partition, Negin’s sister, Amina, was married to Col Majeed Malik, who worked as Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s aide and became the country’s first Principal Information Ofﬁcer. In his book, Immortal: A Life in Journalism (translated by Khalid Hasan), Imran Aziz blamed Col Malik for issuing Pakistan’s ‘first press advice’. Soon after Jinnah made his famous speech of 11 August, 1947, Col Malik reportedly asked the Dawn newspaper’s FE Brown to omit the portion in which a promise was made to recognise the right of non-Muslims to practise their religion.

The irony of Rushdie’s uncle playing Mr Censor doesn’t end there. Col Malik expunged large sections of Hector Bolitho’s ofﬁcial biography of Jinnah (Jinnah: Creator of Pakistan). The contract between the Pakistan government and Bolitho made it mandatory for him to submit his manuscript to a specially designated ofﬁcial for approval. The ofﬁcial was none other than Col Malik. The portions he deleted can now be read in Sharif Al Mujahid’s In Quest of Jinnah.

Rushdie’s other aunt, Tahira, was married to Shahid Hamid, Jr. Col Hamid opted for Pakistan and established the ISI, in the process becoming its first director-general. He played an instrumental role in the coup Field Marshal Ayub Khan staged to become Pakistan’s military dictator, subsequently retiring in 1964 as Maj Gen. In 1978, he was inducted into the cabinet of President Zia ul-Haq, whom he served for three years.

Yet, Rushdie doesn’t mention the role his uncles played in the making of an authoritarian Pakistan, which he details. References to them could have denied Rushdie the opportunity to impart a touch of mystery to his parents’ shift to Pakistan. It could also have made their migration appear a tad opportunistic – it may have made it seem more ‘normal’.

It’s also possible Rushdie is deeply embarrassed by his aunts’ husbands, wishing to disown them in the same manner city-slickers do away their country cousins. You suspect this as he is effusive about his actor-aunt, Uzma Butt, a Pakistani citizen, and her famous sister, Zohra Segal, an Indian. Uzma was married to Hamid Butt, Negin’s brother, and the couple shifted to Pakistan around the time the Rushdies did.

Rushdie also skirts around the story the London-based journalist Danish Khan says for Pakistan and established the ISI, in the process becoming its first director-general. He played an instrumental role in the coup Field Marshal Ayub Khan staged to become Pakistan’s military dictator, subsequently retiring in 1964 as Maj Gen. In 1978, he was inducted into the cabinet of President Zia ul-Haq, whom he served for three years. Rushdie’s other aunt, Tahira, was married to Shahid Hamid, Jr. Col Hamid opted for Pakistan and established the ISI, in the process becoming its first director-general. He played an instrumental role in the coup Field Marshal Ayub Khan staged to become Pakistan’s military dictator, subsequently retiring in 1964 as Maj Gen. In 1978, he was inducted into the cabinet of President Zia ul-Haq, whom he served for three years.

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Rushdie also skirts around the story the London-based journalist Danish Khan did for Mumbai Mirror, in which he quoted from documents obtained from the National Archives of the British government to prove Anis was dismissed from the ICS for presenting forged documents pertaining to his date of birth. Danish’s story prompted London’s Evening Standard to do an item on it, for which Rushdie was asked for a response. He shot back, “My father died 24 years ago, and was not a public person, the fact that his son is in the public eye is no reason to exhume such ancient matters.”

Mr Rushdie, one can say the same thing about personalities you have lampooned in your novels.
RAM PANT

BOSTON — When Jimmy Carter visited Nepal in 2008 to observe the first election after the end of the conflict, he observed polling in some urban centres and immediately pronounced them ‘free and fair’.

As it turned out, the election that voted the Maoists into the Constituent Assembly as the largest party was ridden with widespread voter intimidation and booth capturing. The Maoists would probably have won anyway, but with a smaller margin.

Given allegations of rampant election process irregularities in the United States in the run-up to presidential elections on 6 November, it looks like Carter should actually devote more attention to electoral inconsistencies in his country in addition to advising developing countries.

In the run-up to poll day, the US media has been rife with reports of attempts at voter suppression, voter fraud, misuse of absentee ballots, and campaigns to intimidate African American families, students, and the poor who may vote Democratic.

But by far the most serious allegations are about voter suppression in crucial swing-states such as Ohio, where pro-Republican Party activists have been trying to intimidate voters likely to vote for the Democratic Party.

A recent survey showed that 11 per cent of American voters do not have a driving licence or photo ID. Among people above 65, this goes up to 18 per cent and a quarter of African Americans do not have IDs necessary for voting.

Conservative groups in Ohio have been using the excuse of voter fraud to install large billboards to warn voters that they need photo IDs even when it is not true. This is done to intimidate Democratic party voters from showing up at polling booths on election day. In 2008, 64 per cent of African Americans voted, a higher turnout than usual, that is credited with Barack Obama’s victory.

Recently, billionaire William Louis-Dreyfus put an ad in The New York Times in which he accused some political entities of suppressing people of ‘a different political persuasion’ from voting. Louis-Dreyfus went on to describe voter suppression as an assault on democracy and pledged $1 million to a non-partisan group to prevent this practice.

I emigrated from Nepal to the United States in 1958, but never since the Civil Rights Act of 1965 have I seen as much discussion on suppression and electoral fraud as is happening during this election campaign. We Americans preach democracy in our country and throughout the world and sometimes that makes America an international laughing stock. But if democracy is weakened in America, I believe it will also be weaker elsewhere.

America has changed. The level of ethics in society is on the decline. The cost of running for office is high at all levels and the necessity of campaign financing corrupts elected officials, making them beholden to large donors. The Supreme Court is more political than it ever was in the past, but it did recently support the Justice Department’s efforts to prevent voter suppression in five counties in Florida.

Obviously, voter intimidation and suppression in the US is not as serious as in developing countries, but serious enough for it to threaten the outcome of this closely-fought election. The question is: why is the United States imitating the worse forms of electoral practice from the Third World?

The other worry is about vote tampering. A large per cent of the votes in Florida is from absentee ballots or people voting early and this is where the potential for fraud is high. Yet, absentee voting has tripled since 1980 and now makes up 20 per cent of all votes in America. Absentee ballots and postal voting, where the chances of fraud are highest, can now determine the outcome of elections.

With 18 per cent of Nepalis living outside Nepal, the issue of absentee voting is going to be crucial in Nepal as well. But if the Carter Centre can advise Nepal on elections, why can’t Nepalis also have the right to advise Americans in controlling voter fraud? It may not be as onerous a task as many foreigners think that some day Nepal’s past Election Commissioners who have conducted relatively clean elections despite huge challenges could be deployed to monitor US elections also.

Out of this world

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The biology of luxury

Our inherent need to keep up appearances and display wealth is keeping the demand for luxury goods high despite the global recession.

Antoine Danchin

Despite the global economic crisis, sales of luxury goods are surging worldwide. Why? While marketing has contributed to the rise, the luxury market’s robust growth is actually rooted in biology.

Discussions about the structure of human thought have long been dominated by the Enlightenment view that reality is composed of four elements: space, time, matter, and energy. But recently, a fifth element, information, has entered the debate. And information, it turns out, is crucial to understanding the fundamental drivers of luxury-goods consumption and thus to predicting the luxury market’s future.

While animals use colourful displays and complicated behaviours to signal fitness and strength, humans display and complicated behaviours to signal fitness and strength. Humans use luxury goods to demonstrate economic health. But more than a symbol, buying luxury goods could indicate future success, owing to the selective advantage that showing off provides.

Success, owing to the selective advantage that showing off provides, could indicate future success. But more than a symbol, buying luxury goods could indicate future success, owing to the selective advantage that showing off provides.

For example, those who use cosmetics known to be expensive often seem healthier, more vibrant, and more attractive than those who do not. This is not the result of efficiency (the most effective cosmetics frequently become pharmaceutical drugs). Rather, it signals a lifestyle that values the preservation of beauty and youth. Cosmetics, like all luxury products, gain influence not from their production or even their purchase, but from their visibility.

As more than a symbol, buying luxury goods could have any function, society needs information about their cost. This has been true to varying degrees throughout history – sometimes resulting in price bubbles.

False information, such as counterfeit goods, jeopardises the competition-based selection process. Animals commonly use mimicry to capitalise on knowledge – or fear – of another’s strength. By imitating an animal with a well-known protective profile, a weaker one may enjoy selective benefits without the costs.

But mimicry’s success in nature depends on the ratio of the original to the ersatz. If there are too few of the original, at least a few will likely sire a healthy progeny. Given that females bear the physical burden of offspring, an unobtrusive appearance is more advantageous – and thus more common – in nature. But humans are social creatures with no natural predators, so female competition is more widespread – and demonstrative performance and display are more likely.

The cost dictates the display’s effective display is costly. Developing complex, vibrant plumage demands significant energy and genetic resources. Genes are difficult to maintain, demands significant energy and genetic resources. Genes are difficult to maintain, and thus more common – in nature. But humans are social creatures with no natural predators, so female competition is more widespread – and demonstrative performance and display are more likely.

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Therefore, assessing whether luxury goods will maintain their impact, and thus their appeal, requires monitoring the extent of counterfeiting.

Given that luxury goods provide individuals with a competitive advantage, higher luxury-goods sales could indicate a brighter economic future for a country. In a time of crisis, countries in which luxury goods play their selective role effectively are the safest bets for productive investment.

Antoine Danchin is an honorary professor at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong and President of AMABiotics SAS.

BIZ BRIEFS

Flying easy

Qatar Airways announced its plans to launch daily flights to the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh from early next year. The Doha-based airline will be the only Middle Eastern carrier to operate into Cambodia with services scheduled to start from February 20 onwards. The airline has also introduced offline payment solutions for reservations made on its website. Passengers can now book tickets online and pay later at a Qatar Airways reservations and ticketing office.

Education first

Under the Nepal-India Economic Cooperation Program the Embassy of India in Kathmandu and District Development Committee signed a MoU to provide Rs 43.39 million for construction of building at Shree Rambhi Higher Secondary School in Palpa. This is the district’s sixth development project in the district under India’s Small Development Projects.

New partnership

Etihad Airways will expand services to East Asia with codeshare services to Hong Kong from February 2013 in partnership with Air Seychelles. The new codeshare complement Etihad Airways’ expansion in mainland China and provides passengers from Hong Kong with seamless connectivity through Etihad Airways hub in Abu Dhabi to key destinations in Europe and the Middle East.

Showing support

Surya Nepal Asra Social Entrepreneurship Award (SNASEA) 2012 has announced the 15 finalists. From the finalists, five entrepreneurs will be awarded on 18 December. SNASEA rewards, recognises and supports social entrepreneurs all over Nepal and encourages others to follow these exemplary individuals who are solving social problems through market-driven models.
In between putting tika, visiting relatives, and house hopping, Jamuna Gurung makes some time to revisit the football ground at Jana Sewa School in Ramailo, Morang. This is the ground where the Nepali women’s football team first learnt to kick a ball. “This is where it all began,” she says running her fingers across the faded wooden goal post.

At five feet one inch, it’s hard to believe Jamuna has scored a record 25 international goals in just four matches and won the golden boot for being the leading goal scorer at the recent SAFF Women’s Championship in Sri Lanka. But her small frame belies her immense mental toughness.

Born and brought up in Ramailo, a remote village in Bayarban VDC in Morang, Jamuna was one of the few girls interested in the game. However, this did not deter her from entering the sports even if it meant being the only female player in the team. “Every time I watched my brothers play, I felt like I belonged more at the football ground than in the stands,” she recalls.

Bruises and broken bones followed, but she carried on with sheer determination and at 14 she was selected for the national women’s football squad at the 4th National Game in 1999. She got her first taste of international football the same year when she participated in the Asian Cup in the Philippines. “It was after my stint in the Philippines that I decided to take up football professionally,” she explains.

The cool-headed forward is also quick to give her family full credit for her success. In a country where social acceptance for female athletes is still difficult to come by, her late brother Dambar Gurung not only coached and mentored the precocious young talent, and her twin sister Ganga, but also kept their passion for the game alive. Despite the initial success, her spirits were soon dampened by the constant power struggle at All Nepal Football Association (ANFA). In the ten years after she made her debut,
and the team’s performance at being organised, the players international tournaments brimming with confidence. gold next time,” says Jamuna and hope to bring home the we are training really hard in the region except India. But consistently good against teams Championship. “We have been two from the SAFF Women’s the South Asian Games and runner-up trophies: one from the team has bagged three better after the South Asian young talents,” she admits. However, Jamuna is still hopeful that the Nepali team can make it to the top of regional tournaments has been heartening. However, despite ANFA’s large budget very little трекли down to the women’s team. As a result, women train with shoddy infrastructure and and meagre resources. Female players weren’t even paid a monthly salary until two months ago. A female player now earns Rs 5,000 each month compared to Rs 10,000 for men. Getting advertisers and larger audience for women’s games is also a hurdle.

“IT’s hard especially for girls who are starting out their careers from small towns where training and facilities are not even half as good as the cities. Unless we improve this it will be hard to catch and retain young talents,” she admits.

However, Jamuna is still hopeful that the Nepali team can make it to the top of regional rankings if current lot of female footballers play well and set a good launchpad for younger players.

Many of her contemporaries gave into family and financial pressures and left the game. Many of her contemporaries gave into family and financial pressures and left the game. With Dasain over, many in the Nepali women’s netball team quickly became one of the most powerful punch. The team of 18 to 22 year olds was put together six weeks before the tournament. Due to time constraints, most of the players were selected from the national basketball team since netball is very similar to basketball. Tarli Young and Michele Norwood who volunteered to coach the team recall spending countless hours watching YouTube videos and taking rigorous notes on tactics and moves. The players, out of which only three had played netball before, trained for six days a week for two months.

“We even got our hands dirty, lifting kick-bags, mats and heavy taekwondo equipment from the court as we shared the same court for practice. But none of the girls ever hesitated to go the extra mile,” recalls Limbu who is a model by profession. Until three months ago, netball was a game heard by few and played by even less in Nepal. But Deepak Lama’s determination to bring the game to the country made the formation of a national netball team possible. Lama found out about the sport through a friend in Australia, where the game is immensely popular.

“I love sports and I have been active in Nepali sports for some time now. I feel like netball will catch on quickly because basketball is so popular already,” he says. He contacted the Asian chapter of the International Federation of Netball Association that made Nepal a representative. Within a few months the Nepal Sports Council officially recognised the National Netball Association. Lama who is now the general secretary of the newly formed Nepal Netball Association, aims to encourage more youngsters by introducing the game in schools and colleges.

“The girls performed much better than we expected and it was a great opportunity for them to gain exposure. With better training we hope they will progress to the top three in the next tournament which will then encourage other Nepali girls and boys to join the sports,” explains Lama with an eye to the future. 

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All that jazz

If you couldn’t make it to the Jazz for the Next Generation gig yesterday, don’t worry because Surya Nepal Jazzmandu is looking to rock your night through its fresh birthday.

Artists from Switzerland to Norway and Thailand to France have flown in, settled down, warmed up and are ready to go. “I can’t wait to be playing salsa in Nepal,” says Marlow Rosado of USA, “I am very proud of my roots and happy that they have reached so far and brought me here.”

On Tuesday morning, shoppers at Ason Tol in the heart of old Kathmandu were pleasantly surprised to find drum sets and amplifiers in the place of lettuce and cauliflower as Cadenza Collective set up shop not to trade, but to amuse the curious crowd with a short performance along with a music video shot of the band’s new single Hip Break.

On Friday night Man’s s in Jawalakhel will feature Beat Kestli, who will perform traditional jazz mixed with R&B and Latin rhythms. Nearby in Moksh, Jhamsikhel, the traditional jazz mixed with R&B and Latin rhythms. Nearby in Moksh, Jhamsikhel, the traditional jazz mixed with R&B and Latin rhythms. Nearby in Moksh, Jhamsikhel, the traditional jazz mixed with R&B and Latin rhythms. Nearby in Moksh, Jhamsikhel, the traditional jazz mixed with R&B and Latin rhythms. Nearby in Moksh, Jhamsikhel, the traditional jazz mixed with R&B and Latin rhythms. Nearby in Moksh, Jhamsikhel, the traditional jazz mixed with R&B and Latin rhythms. Nearby in Moksh, Jhamsikhel, the traditional jazz mixed with R&B and Latin rhythms. Nearby in Moksh, Jhamsikhel, the traditional
Look who’s Bach

The French Embassy in Nepal and Vajra Hotel bring you Delights of Solitude, an evening of solo works of German composer JS Bach. World-renowned cellist Franck Bernede will be playing Suite G-Major BWV 1007, Partita A-Moll BWV 1013, and Suite D-Minor BWV 1008 on the violoncello.

Franck Bernede is a cellist and ethnomusicologist who has been trying to bridge the musical cultures of the East and the West. He has researched extensively in Nepal, specialising on the Gandharbas of central Nepal and also the traditional Newari music of Kathmandu. He holds a doctorate in social anthropology and ethnomusicology and is the founder and director of the Singhiri Research Centre, a Nepal organisation dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the music and dance of the Himalayan region.


To be fair, Buzz does have fries on its menu, but here they are fresh with a bite to them, and there are chicken momos too, though I haven’t tasted them yet. The food at Buzz is definitely all grown up.

The restaurant also serves a variety of cocktails and mocktails and its version of Thai food is pretty good. Buzz has turned into a joint that people return to over and over again which says a lot about the place and the food it serves.

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Looper is the perfect film to go and see in the theatre to celebrate the holiday season. It is a time-travelling, twisting thriller starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt (one of the most promising up and comers in Hollywood) as the young Joe, a hired assassin who kills targets sent back from the future so that the body and the crime are essentially untraceable.

Sound complicated? You have no idea how much hysterical the plot actually becomes and I will not attempt to explain the byzantine plot here. It is better to see and experience the film in real time with no particular pre-conceived notion so that you fully enjoy it.

Rian Johnson, the director, and Gordon-Levitt have collaborated before in Johnson’s first feature film Brick (2005), another twisty noirish thriller that sealed Gordon-Levitt’s reputation as an intense and very talented young actor. While Brick and The Brother’s Bloom (2008) are both very watchable, they fall into the trap of being highly complicated, but perhaps lacking the little bit of heart that would have allowed them to transcend their genre. This is the usual pitfall that awaits any young, dynamic, writer and director types like Rian Johnson.

I am happy to say that though he has not made the same mistake with Looper. With an excellent cast including, Bruce Willis (as the older Joe), Emily Blunt as a young mother protecting her disturbed but powerful child, Paul Dano as a nervy young assassin, Piper Perabo as a stripper with a heart of gold, and Jeff Daniels as the arch villain sent back in time, the film is able to carry its complicated plot with the help of the afore-mentioned cast, slick cinematography, and very real existential questions that leave you thinking.

It is rare that an action packed, slickly self-indulgent action thriller leaves you with questions and keeps the post movie debate alive and kicking.

The writing is shocking and unexpected, and afterwards you will find yourself asking, “Who exactly would I take a bullet for?”

While, hopefully, this is not a question anyone need follow through in the real world, it is important in the grand scheme of things. Is the love of a mother for her child enough to change his nature? Is that love more sacred than that between a man and a woman? Can one really alter the course of history with sacrifice? As one of my friends put it afterwards, “If you could go back in time and kill Hitler, would you?” Well, I can’t answer that question, even for myself, yet I find its premise fascinating and very disturbing.

Watch Looper for thrills, a bit of mind-boggling time travel, crazy complications that will leave your mind slightly addled, great performances, and some heart-wrenching questions at the end of it all.

Looper is currently playing in theatres in Kathmandu.
Not everybody’s cup of tea

BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

This week, while the political parties in Kathmandu were having their tea parties, I dropped in at a local tea shop in Biratnagar with the morning paper under my arm. It was packed with rickshaw pullers and day labourers. The Dasain festival for them is less of a celebration, more of an opportunity to make extra money.

On one corner, two graying men were engrossed in their own conversation in Maithili. “Chhath ke pahile ta kuchho na hoyi. Aa, chhath ke baad, neta sab sangh ke upar gadbada rahi, te thulo babbal hete,” one of them was saying rubbing tobacco in his palm.

The rulers of New Nepal in Kathmandu are perennially undecided about the future, but in a tea shop 400km away in the eastern Tarai, ordinary citizens are pretty sure about what is going to happen. The mood of the Madhes, which makes up half the country’s population, is of increasing impatience with the disarray and apathy in the capital.

In Dhanusha to the east, which was the hotbed of the Madhes uprising in 2007, noted Maithili writer Rajendra Bimal told me: “The leaders should know that dishonest inclusion will prove fatal for the nation.” On the surface, the border towns of Biratnagar, Rajbiraj, Siraha, and Janakpur, which saw some of the most violent protests in 2007-2008, seem uninterested in the conspiracies being hatched in the far away capital. But people here are not just aware, but getting jittery about the headlines that talk of ‘postponing’ identity and federalism: two issues that galvanised the Madhes movement.

“If they declare a constitution without finalising the federalism issue, there will be protests. If they choose to go for election without making a concrete decision on federalism, there will be protests,” says 28-year-old Birendra Sah, a student from Janakpur. “If any party thinks they can sideline the issue by luring few Madhesi netas, they should come here and talk to us.”

Nepali politics is not just full of irony, it is also full of idiosyncratic personalities who defy conventional wisdom of class, caste or any ideological political premise. So there is little surprise if a prominent leader of a party proposes Pushpa Kamal Dahal as probable PM candidate at the same time as another leader of the same party is worried about a Maoist design for state capture. For those who thought the hue and cry over government change was about dealing with the supposed Maoist threat, this should be a rude awakening. The opposition discomfort is not about the Maoist government, but about the cozying relationship between Bhattarai government and New Delhi.

However, for most of the country’s 28 million people, it never mattered who rules in Singha Darbar as long as they have a government that delivers services. And here in the Tarai’s urban centres it is still also an emotional struggle for dignity and respect for identity.

Who governs this country is not as important as how it is governed. But that message has never got through to the rulers in Kathmandu. Federalism may be an abstract concept in the capital, but here in the plains it is a demand that contains an aspiration for self-rule that cannot be dismissed over a cup of tea.

The preliminary results of the 2011 census show that there has been a huge movement of population from the mountains to the plains. In some districts, up to one-third of the people have migrated out, mostly to the Tarai. This transmigration trend is not just reshaping the demography of the country, but it will have a lasting impact on democracy as well. The future of Madhesi politics will depend on how leaders address the aspirations of the Madhesi people with that of recent migrants from the north.

In the eastern plains, it is festival time and soon people will be busy harvesting the ripening rice. But the seeds of yet another movement in the Tarai is also being sown.
When I arrived in Singapore for the first time, it was a surreal experience. Compared to my home in Nepal, Singapore was surrounded by so much water. I looked forward to visits to Pasir Ris beach for annual picnics with my friends from the Gurkha Contingent. And we brought our families too. There, I would watch my son, born and raised in Singapore, take a leisurely swim by the beach. Our wives and their children too will enjoy the pristine waters we cannot get back home in Nepal.

Retired staff sergeant Chandra Bahadur Thapa, 79, holds up a framed photograph of himself on office duty in 1976, three years before retirement. He served 1952-1979.

When the Gulf war broke out 20 years ago, I remember clearly how the Singapore Gurkha Contingent was called into action. Iraq was, and still remains, a major oil exporting country. The price and security of oil escalated because of the war. Immediately, we were tasked to protect Singapore’s offshore islands and the oil refineries from terrorist sabotage.

Retired corporal Shanta Bahadur Gurung, 50, 1981-2006

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Retired corporal Shanta Bahadur Gurung, 50, 1981-2006

Singaporeans prepared to cast their vote in the 1959 general election under a new constitution. There was enthusiasm in the air as Singapore became independent. Singapore Gurkhas, myself included, were called for election duty and were deployed at various locations where political candidates declared their intention to contest a seat in parliament. The result: Lee Kuan Yew’s People’s Action Party won 43 out of 51 seats.

Retired sergeant Tulsi Prasad Gurung, 77, holds up an old photograph taken in 1966 of his section of men. 1951-1972

In the 1950s I witnessed the Maria Hertogh riots. Standing guard at the old Supreme Court, I remember seeing Maria, reluctantly, being ushered into the car with her biological mother and driven away. Malay and European communities rioted because of a court ruling to give custody of young Maria Hertogh to her biological parents after being raised as a Muslim for eight years. Outside the Supreme Court, the army had to be called in and a curfew declared.

Aerial photograph of Singapore’s Central Business District dominates the living room wall of Bhabhindra Bahadur Malla’s modest home in Pokhara. The picture was taken in the mid-1980s, the year I was born. Bhabhindra pointed to key landmarks, places with fond memories. Many of the buildings or places have changed I said. He replied: “That is Singapore, always changing.”

His story was one of the many I collected in this anthology of portraits and stories of retired Singapore Gurkhas in Singapore and Nepal. The Gurkhas are famous for their bravery, loyalty, and impartiality but Singaporeans know little about them and their families who live in a barricaded compound in Mount Vernon Camp.

There are over 2,000 retired Gurkhas in Pokhara, Bhairahawa, Dharan, and Kathmandu, and I tracked some of them down for this book which serves as a visual archive of an invisible community. Their memories and their stories, if not collected, will be forgotten. Remembering these Gurkha veterans is to give them a place in the history of Singapore and Nepal.

How is Lee Kuan Yew and his family these days? I guarded his residence, and most of us from the Gurkha Contingent have guarded 38 Oxley Road at least once. I remember seeing Lee’s daughter and two sons while they were still young. Now, they have all grown up and doing well, I hope. Now the eldest son is prime minister too, right?

Despite being many miles away from home, Nepal traditions and customs are a big part of our lives here in Mount Vernon Camp. I look forward to celebrating Dasain when elders put tika and bless relatives. There are drinks and food all day. It’s like Chinese celebrate New Year and the Malays celebrate Hari Raya. The most important thing: such festivals help bring the family together.

Have you eaten? I am sorry I do not know any English. Good that you are Malay and can understand what I am saying. I can still speak the language a little even after leaving Singapore 40 years ago. Sometimes, here in Nepal, we speak in Malay to practice among ourselves. Then, since the 1950s, Bazaar Malay was the common language used by your parents and grandparents and that was how we communicated. I think now, English is more common.

Every three years when I was in the Gurkha Contingent, I would pack my bags and prepare for the long journey back to Nepal. We Gurkhas are entitled up to six months home leave every three years. That is when many of my friends got married, and they brought their wives to Singapore to start a family. It was usually an arranged marriage. From routine guard duty work to quelling disturbances in Singapore, I now find myself ploughing the fields of my village in Baglung district preparing for the next harvest. It is tough work, but I get to see my parents and village friends back home. We traded our rifles for the sickle.

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Ours Gurkhas: Singapore through their eyes

Kathmandu
2 to 5 November, 12 to 7pm
Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal

Pokhara
7 to 8 November, 10 to 5pm
Pokhara Sabha Griha, New Road

Dharam
10 to 11 November, 10 to 5 PM
Yumaa Fine Art Gallery, Putili Lane


**One decade, one PM**

Shobhakahr Pantahi, Nepal Samacharpatra, 30 October

Speaking at a mass gathering at Aghakanchi, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai said that if he is given 10 more years to rule he would end poverty and unemployment and transform Nepal into a prosperous country. He claimed his government had already taken steps in the right direction and would increase per capita income to $3000 if given the opportunity.

Referring to the opposition’s demand for his resignation, the PM said that there can only be consensus through a package deal which will see him reinstalled as the head of government. “The interim constitution doesn’t have provisions for another government after the elected one resigns,” he said.

The PM also stated confidently that consensus will be reached by mid-December, and that his party is keeping its options open for either a temporary CA revival or polls in order to work around political and constitutional complexities. “All of us are in one boat right now and if it sinks, we will all go down,” he added.

Former Minister for Peace, Reconstruction, and Physical Planning, Top Bahadur Rayamajhi said at the same program that only the UCPN (M) could effectively lead the way because the country had already adopted their agendas. Rayamajhi also assured locals that he had plans to expand the historic Masurpata fields in Aghakanchi and turn it into an international standard stadium.

**Overcoming the deadlock**

Editorial in Darshan, 30 October

In the wake of deepening political crisis both Singh Darbar and Shital Niwas have become active players. While the president in the wake of deepening political crisis both Singha Darbar and Shital Niwas have become active players. While the president in the wake of deepening political crisis both Singha Darbar and Shital Niwas have become active players. While the president in the wake of deepening political crisis both Singha Darbar and Shital Niwas have become active players. While the president in the wake of deepening political crisis both Singha Darbar and Shital Niwas have become active players. While the president in the wake of deepening political crisis both Singha Darbar and Shital Niwas have become active players. While the president is busy consulting constitutional and legal experts.

Under extreme pressure from the opposition parties, the president has been urging the parties to go for elections at the earliest. However, on Sunday, a group of former Supreme Court judges told Baburam Bhattarai that elections cannot be held without making a few amendments in the constitution, which requires endorsement from the parliament.

There is no arguing against the elections, but in order to avoid a constitutional vacuum due to the retirement of election commissioners and ensure voting rights of the newly eligible population, the parties must revive the legislature parliament. Furthermore, Nepal’s interim constitution is a document of political consensus. So for the sake of forging an agreement, the parties can go beyond the prescribed constitutional premise and even restate the CA for a short time if necessary.

**Imports from India up**

Annapurna Post, 29 October

Although production of paddy has gone up in Nepal in the past year there has also been a sharp increase in the import of rice from India in the last fiscal year. Just in the past two months Nepal imported Rs 1.14 billion worth of rice from India, a whopping 680 per cent more than the same two months last year when only Rs 12 million worth of rice was imported.

Besides rice there has also been an increase in other food crops from India. The import of potatoes, for instance, is up by 40 per cent compared to last year. Nepal’s trade deficit with India has shown a bigger gap because of food and petroleum imports. Nepal imported petroleum products worth Rs 15.28 billion from India in the past two months alone, representing Nepal’s single biggest import item. Even the import of fruits from India has gone up by 120 per cent compared to last year, according to the Central Bank. The imports of vegetables, livestock, dairy products, and tea from India have all risen sharply.
Back to square one

Himal Khabarpatrika,
17 October - 15 November

Inspired by revolutionary women leaders like Rosa Luxemburg, Jiang Qing, Clara Zetkin, and Nadezhda Krupskaya, young Nepali girls picked up guns during Nepal’s decade long insurgency with the dream of liberating their kind from exploitation and destitution.

The Phulmatis, Rupmatis, Batulis, and Putalis who had once identified themselves with their international icons even took up revolutionary names and did their best to live up to their noms de guerre. They did not break down even after being tortured and raped and many even sacrificed their lives for the movement.

Six years onwards, the tables have turned and these brave women have become as helpless as before. The Phulmatis and Roopmatis who broke social barriers and married across castes to end discrimination are now disowned by their families. Homeless, they are forced to wait at the doorsteps of the leaders with whom they once walked shoulder to shoulder.

These cadres gave up their lives and future for the leaders who have shown complete disregard to their sacrifice. The women who provided security to people like Baburam and Prachanda are today left searching for their own safety. All they get from their erstwhile comrades is empty assurances.

Having fought the war for 10 years, they are forced to watch powerful people monopolise the party while those who fought to establish it are deserted by the leaders.

The leadership seems to have put their trust on outsiders and wartime deserters, rather than the faithful ones. Those who openly criticised the party until recently have now become its greatest advocates. And those who were absent from the battlefields while the war raged on in the countryside have been unconditionally reinstated.

Since then the establishment has been involved in suspicious financial dealings, abandoned its pro-people ideals, and failed to achieve its political goals. The party that was the most revolutionary when it came to women’s liberation now openly promotes oppression.

Yesterday, those who abused women were punished and Comrade Chairman would tell us, “Women are our iron pillars against counter-revolution.” Today, these iron posts have been left to rust and those who bled and toiled for the revolution have been all but forgotten.

For the women who joined the revolution, the party was their home. But now they are living like orphans. The dreams of living and dying like Rosa, Jiang, and Nadezhda are shattered. From being Jwala and Kranti, the women have reverted back to being Batuli and Putali.

Aruna Rayamajhi

SAGAR SHRESTHA
And now for Tihar

As Dasains go, this year’s festive season had a somewhat somnolent quality. I don’t know about you, but many of us logged 18 hours of sleep a day, waking up only to gnaw at a martyred mountain goat, belching frequently in a loud and careless manner, chewing the cud by re-eating juicy morsels of aforementioned ex-goat picked out from between one’s molars, plopping paans in the mouth, pocketing marriage winnings, turning over, and going back to sleep. I know what you’re muttering: how is all this different from a non-Dasain you’re muttering: how is all this different from a non-Dasain? Well, I say, the annus horibilis? We say, the annus horibilis? 

Research into the circadian rhythms of an average adult male in this country shows that our sleeping patterns are essentially the same, Dasains go, this year’s Dasains go, this year’s. As citizens of a landlocked Himalayan ex-kingdom where the Buddha was born and that has never ever in its entire history been colonised by aliens from the Planet Voth, we have all had a nice long vacation and now, fully rested, we once more plunge head-first into the task of prolonging the political status quo and sine qua non, to mention the quid pro quo.

Once more this year, vegetable activists (some of my best friends among them) raised objections to the decapitation of buffaloes during Nepal’s greatest carnivorous festival. They should perhaps be thankful that at least we gave up cannibalism not too long ago. Also, sooner or later, most Nepalis will be forced to become vegetarians over Dasain because at current inflation rates, a goat will be worth its weight in gold. We are still way behind the Americans who are expected to massacre about 30 million turkeys this Thanksgiving, equivalent to Nepal’s human population.

Those watching the body language of our politicians at various political tea parties this week couldn’t help wonder why these back-slapping, jovial leaders observed laughing their heads off at each other’s off-colour jokes, can’t seem to agree on anything during closed-door meetings? And why, if the differences are so stark, they haven’t strangled each other yet? In any other country, a self-respecting Maoist party never splits because the dominant faction physically exterminates a dissident faction in an internal purge before it can even break away. Could it be that our totalitarian is less totalitarian than other totalitarian?

The differences between the two Maoist parties are manifested in leadership tussles of trade unions, fraternal organisations, and even on who should control the YCL. Former young commie, Comrade Sagar who heads the YCL’s Valley Committee, has decided it is much more lucrative to go it alone when it comes to extortin because he can keep all the profits, whereas earlier he had to share it with the party. Communard Sagar has now set up the ominous-sounding Unemployed Youth Organisation Pvt Ltd, yes, the same one whose graffiti you see along walls all over the capital. Interestingly, though, the outfit is not affiliated to the mainstream Baddie party and it has been extorting the living daylights out of just about every business in town during Dasain. The Unemployed Youth is made up of the biggest gangsters in town and appear to have eaten into the Comrade Chairman’s own fundraising efforts which is why he is boiling mad. Worse, the Unemployed Youth are now extorting Casinos and other business interests in which PKD has a stake. It was bound to come to this: when there is no business, the Unemployed Youth is made to extort the living daylights out of just about every business in town during Dasain. The Unemployed Youth is made up of the biggest gangsters in town and appear to have eaten into the Comrade Chairman’s own fundraising efforts which is why he is boiling mad. Worse, the Unemployed Youth are now extorting Casinos and other business interests in which PKD has a stake. It was bound to come to this: when there is no business, the Unemployed Youth are now extorting Casinos and other business interests in which PKD has a stake. It was bound to come to this: when there is no business, the Unemployed Youth are now extorting Casinos and other business interests in which PKD has a stake. It was bound to come to this: when there is no business, the Unemployed Youth are now extorting Casinos and other business interests in which PKD has a stake. It was bound to come to this: when there is no business, the Unemployed Youth are now extorting Casinos and other business interests in which PKD has a stake. It was bound to come to this: when there is no business...

Anyway, no sooner had we done with Dasain, and Tihar is upon us. There are workaholics among us who will insist on going to work in the coming week. Woe on such spoil sports, they need help. It’s not that we are less lazy the rest of the year. But ‘tis the season we can really let ourselves go by wallowing in sloth. But we sometimes lapse into exortion and ball. Vigilance. That is what is required, vigilance against anyone who earns more than others. Why resolve the crisis when everyone benefits from prolonging the quo vadis, or shall we say, the annus horibilis?