Nepalis took an inordinate interest in following the results of the US presidential elections this week, and there was great rejoicing over the victory of Barack Obama. The outcome of America’s elections didn’t really matter in Nepal, so could this be our way of showing support for democracy at a time when there are no signs here of elections any time soon?

One picture that went largely unnoticed in the media this week was of Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai testing an indigenously-designed, low-cost electronic voting machine (see inside) which allows ballots to be cast by simply touching the election symbol of the party voters opt for. This photo-op must have been Baluwatar’s way of saying that the prime minister is not an obstacle for elections.

But the manner in which Bhattarai and his party Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal are saying one thing about President Ram Baran Yadav in private, and goading their comrades to attack him in public, reeks of hypocrisy. It also raises strong questions about their seriousness in holding elections and writing a new constitution.

For whom the bell polls

The dog mother
For Gyani Deula and her 21 adopted dogs, it’s Kukur Tihar every day
Nepalis took an inordinate interest in following the results of the US presidential elections this week, and there was great rejoicing over the victory of Barack Obama. The outcome of America’s elections didn’t really matter to Nepal either way, so could this be our way of showing support for democracy at a time when there are no signs here of elections any time soon?

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But the manner in which Bhattarai and his party Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal are saying they are backing the Madhesis is a deliberate effort by the ruling party to muddy the waters and amass an even bigger war chest by prolonging its time in power. It is a time-honoured tradition among the Maoists to shift the blame on a convenient scapegoat whenever intra-party dissent or criticism gets out of hand. Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun went as far as to accuse President Yadav of planning to stage a coup d’état. This is a serious allegation and a deliberate effort by the party to create the impression that they are now afraid of their own shadow, and ascribe power ambitions on the part of the prime minister who has in word and deed, to a fault, stuck to the book. In fact, if any criticism had to be leveled on the president it would be that he has been too timid and not more proactive with the parties for their repeated stalling tactics. Which must be why the Maoists are working themselves up into a frenzy to mask their own failings, and to take attention away from their wholesale plunder of the government treasury.

The only way out of the current impasse is to hold fresh elections by first setting up an inclusive government of minority leadership. It doesn’t help that there is an abundance of scoundrel politicians and a lack of decent ideas would be a formula to allow Bhattarai to keep his job, let the NC as the second biggest party have its choice of minister (our guess is they’d pick Home), let the UML take Finance, and give the Madhesis what they want.

This would clear the block, end the paralyzing uncertainty, and still meet the Election Commission’s deadline to announce local and general elections by May 2013.

The Maoists are so insecure that they are now afraid of their own shadow, and ascribe power ambitions on the part of the prime minister who has in word and deed, to a fault, stuck to the book. In fact, if any criticism had to be leveled on the president it would be that he has been too timid and not more proactive with the parties for their repeated stalling tactics. Which must be why the Maoists are working themselves up into a frenzy to mask their own failings, and to take attention away from their wholesale plunder of the government treasury. The latest example of this is the highly irregular decision to award Rs 200,000 each to recruits that UNMIN disqualified for being child soldiers. The total bill: Rs 60 million.

Bhattarai and Dahal seem to have cordial talks when they meet the president, but unleash their sidekicks to publicly denounce him using threatening or sitting on ordinances. Interestingly, Dahal showed undue haste in meeting President Yadav on Tuesday, probably to smooth over any presidential feathers that were ruffled by Pun’s remarks.

It would behove Bhattarai and Dahal not to sate their taste in public, they need the president more than the president needs them. And the same goes for the NC, UML, and the monarchist parties, who seem to be trying their best hard to provoke the president to make a move to oust Bhattarai.

The opposition should know by now that public opinion is strongly against rocking the boat and prolonging the political uncertainty. Nepal wants the parties to stop bluster, pass the budget, and get on with preparations for elections.

The only way out of the current impasse would be to hold fresh elections, and a precursor to that is a consensual government made up of the main political players. Everything else is a delaying tactic. Working backwards from that, the least evil and most workable idea would be a formula to allow Bhattarai to keep his job, let the NC as the second biggest party have its choice of minister (our guess is they’d pick Home), let the UML take Finance, and give the Madhesis what they want.

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REVEALING RUSHDIE

Of course, Salman Rushdie is going to be selective when writing about his family (‘Revealing Rushdie’, Ajaz Astral, #628). Not everyone is Orhan Pamuk. And given his recent Americanisation and the token Pulitzer, I also assume that the Ajaz that Rushdie would open the floodgates when writing about ‘east’ Pakistani politics. But knowing that Rushdie has chosen to sharpen axe for their own vested interests, I feel the need to dub over his enthusiastic as I did last.

Regarding Rushdie ought to be thanked for writing so venomously and rightly too, about the grand old witch in Middleton’s children.

NOT EVERYBODY’S CUP OF TEA

I don’t doubt the resentment and disappointment simmering among the Madhesis (‘Not everybody’s cup of tea’, Anurag Acharya, #628). They have been badly let down by the political system of Nepal. But I feel the people of Nepal should be represented in the government.

Bhupati or Dahal

The only way out of the current impasse is to hold fresh elections by first setting up an inclusive government.

ON THE WEB

www.politica.com.np

BEST FOOT FORWARD

Thank you Binita Rai for highlighting the excellent work of Jamuna Gurung and the Nepal women’s football team (‘Best foot forward’, #628). Jamuna is a true hero and an inspiration to thousands of young Nepali girls who want to bend it like Beckham or the Illy girls. What makes her journey even more special is that she worked her way up from a small town girl to be the captain of the national squad. I can only imagine the difficulties she had to face given the lack of resources and finances that our players are up against. I am certain she will bring home many gold medals and hopefully an international trophy.

Mina Shrestha

POLLS APART

I don’t know if Jimmy Carter was right in calling the Nepal election in 2008 ‘free and fair’ (‘Polls Apart’, Ram Pant, #628). However, extrapolating from that and arguing that Nepal should have the right to advise the US about how to conduct a free and fair election is laughable to say the least. Shouldn’t, we first show the world that we are capable to draft a constitution before aiming to be the global election adviser?

Anonymous

The voter suppression the US saw during the 2012 elections is just the first glimpse of the soft underbelly of a country that sees itself as the beacon of hope and liberty in the world. Despite all the talk of empowering minority and changing demographics, or perhaps because of it, many conservative whites, especially in the South, seem deeply uncomfortable with the idea of minority leadership. It doesn’t help that there is an abundance of scoundrel politicians and a lack of decent ideas would be a formula to allow Bhattarai to keep his job, let the NC as the second biggest party have its choice of minister (our guess is they’d pick Home), let the UML take Finance, and give the Madhesis what they want.

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Aideedah

"'know-how' and work culture of these men, Nepal would not be on the last row among the poorest countries in the world." - Gita Karki

"Gurkhas have been fighting for and protecting the UK, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Brunei for more than 200 years. And yet they are struggling to get their due share after retirement or being given a job, let the NC as the second biggest party have its choice of minister (our guess is they’d pick Home), let the UML take Finance, and give the Madhesis what they want.

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Aideedah
BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

BAGLUNG — The deadlocked politics and protracted transition in Kathmandu has trickled down to the grassroots, and nowhere more so than here in this stunningly scenic district on the lap of Dhaulagiri.

The democratic deficit, the budget paralysis, and the fact that there have been no local elections for 12 years have seriously impacted development and the community spirit that this country was once famous for. Highways are blocked regularly by political groups, schools closed by extortion rackets, public health is in shambles, and the lack of investment has increased the exodus of young men from districts like Baglung.

But even when the absence of elected bodies at the national and local levels left a governance vacuum in the country, it was the communities that kept the grassroots democratic structures intact. Community forestry user groups, traditional community-managed irrigation, and micro-hydropower projects managed by elected local groups kept the country going.

Primary school teacher Netra KC from Chhisti VDC says villagers used the community forestry model of dividing households into social and economic categories to manage local schools. “We found that the model helped us provide the best to the most needy, also ensuring that the most-abled section took greater share of responsibilities,” he told me.

In the absence of local elections, villages are governed by all-party mechanisms that reflect the power proportion from the 2008 elections in Kathmandu. These have lacked accountability, and have recently degenerated into a four-party dictatorship steeped in corruption and loot.

Nepal’s long-suffering villages have been hit hardest as existing drinking water schemes were not maintained, irrigation and agriculture extension went into limbo, and VDCs and DDCs were only interested in creaming off budget allocations to award road contracts to themselves.

This eroded the acclaimed success of user groups in Nepal, particularly in forestry, irrigation, drinking water, and rural electrification. Many of them had become examples of inclusive development, successfully providing and administering services, accumulating savings. A user group in Baglung is investing the Rs 3 million of savings in a small hydropower project.

But despite their democratic structure and past success, user groups have so far been functioning as ad hoc institutions to make up for the absence of the state. There is no legal framework to define their role or regulate their actions. Now due to the lack of elected accountable officials, user groups are also being politicised and turning into hotbeds of corruption. Although regular elections are held within user groups, they are dominated by powerful local elites and party leaders who divide up the spoils.

The constitution has established local communities’ rights over natural resources and there are sectoral policies (and acts) in place to harness these locally available resources. However, the overlapping provisions and inconsistency between various acts pose a major challenge.

For the last four years, Nepal’s politics has revolved around few parties and their interests. People don’t expect this to change in the near future. But if Kathmandu does not have any solution to offer rural Nepal, the least it can do is not become a part of the problem.
When German architect and urban planner Niels Gutschow first arrived in Kathmandu Valley in 1962, what he saw blew his mind away. “There was only one word to describe it,” he recalls in his new book, The Kathmandu Valley, “it was pristine.”

When he returned eight years later in 1970, not much had changed. But in subsequent years, as Gutschow got involved with heritage conservation work in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, he was stunned by the accelerated transformation of the Valley’s urban space. It wasn’t just the physical buildings, but the festivals, rituals, and the small everyday glimpses of a rich urban civilisation were all losing their lustre. The availability of cement, steel, and glass was radically changing Kathmandu’s cityscape.

As an architectural planner, Gutschow was saddened by this, and admits there may have been some romanticism, even orientalism, behind his fascination with the old world. But in The Kathmandu Valley, he takes a deliberately dispassionate attitude to documenting the spreading urban ugliness, looking as a detached observer at how lifeless grey slowly took over the chlorophyll green of the farms and terraces.

“I was here to document the building heritage of the Newars,” recalls Gutschow, whose encyclopedic life’s work, Architecture of the Newars, was published last year, “but since 1990 I found myself becoming a chronicler of change.”

The Kathmandu Valley is a depressing picture book, documenting in meticulous detail the steady decline and decay of the original urbanscape of the capital. It has horrendous examples of malignant concrete tumours that pass for modern Nepali construction from the formless homes on the outskirts of Kirtipur to the new highrise condominiums. There is no need for text as the stark black-and-white photographs record the loss of the historic fabric of the urban cores of Kathmandu, Patan, and the outskirts of Bhaktapur.

Gutschow uses a subdued, but pained, vocabulary to describe it all. As he says in the book: “The curiosity I feel about this ongoing development has nothing denunciatory about it. The documentation of the construction sites does reveal a certain crudity, not to say brutality. Its aim is to achieve a largely unemotional presentation of one aspect of reality.”

There is removed understatement in his preface, where he describes how Corinthian columns with vase-shaped capitals and Tympanums have become ‘fashionable’. There are ‘ruined contraptions’, the terrace farms below Thimi are covered by ‘three-to-five-storey boxes devoid of any formal ambition’. The book has images of billboards atop the houses along Tin Kune, the ‘palazzos decorated with pilasters’, and the new status symbols of aluminium composite panels with mirror glass on street-front buildings.

Gutschow has used his photographs to document in place and time the current visual landscape of Kathmandu without any embellishment or intention to make the images more beautiful or more ugly. They are just there, monumental follies to greed, a lack of concern about seismic safety, and singularly devoid of the sophistication and refinement shown by ancestors who built beauty and harmony into our cities.

Kunda Dixit

The Kathmandu Valley
New Buildings, Sites under Construction and Demolition 1990-2011
Seen by Niels Gutschow
Himal Books with the Saraf Foundation for Himalayan Traditions and Culture, 2012
190 pages
Someday places have a captivating distinctness with a life of their own, a living, breathing organism. Kathmandu Valley is one such place. Things in Kathmandu don’t just happen; they develop over time and come into existence because of what the place and the people require and demand. It is a response of the built environment to the place, history, culture, people, and climate.

The vernacular architecture of Kathmandu evolved during the Malla period, an era of intricately carved timber framed buildings with deep red mud brick facades, sloped roofs of tiles over a layer of mud supported by timber trusses. The houses had thick brick walls with cupboards and niches embedded in them. The palaces and residences at the Darbar Squares of the Valley lent an aesthetic excellence to the era that has lasted to this day. Yet, what is not adequately discussed is how these celebrated architectural achievements responded to the Valley’s scenic setting, and transformed through the wrenching change of the recent past. What is the new vernacular architecture of Kathmandu today? Is it suited to what we want the city to be?

By taking it for granted, we tend not to value adequately this architectural legacy. Which is why the treasures of the Malla period and the living culture that they embody are being superseded by a globalised Kathmandu of soulless condominiums, erotic office blocks with aluminium composite panels, glass-skinned malls, and vast billboards. With the new grammar of Kathmandu’s built environment, we have not just wiped out the historical heart of the Valley, but also marginalised the cultural heritage, lifestyle, festivals, and communities that it represents.

There is a temptation to over-romanticise the past. The past can be explained, studied, and usually makes sense. The present, however, seems cluttered and chaotic. In architecture, buildings from a previous era, temples, palaces, courtyards, monasteries, residences, have all been studied in relation to their proportional, utilitarian, and symbolic relevance.

So it makes sense when the ground floor of a Newar resistance is not used for living purposes or when there is a circumambulatory space around the central shrine of a temple. The thick brick walls insulate against cold and heat.

Today, this is replaced by multi-disciplined and multi-cultural built spaces, a borderless egalitarian environment. On one hand there is a representation of many aspects of design found outside of Kathmandu, brought in by a cross-cultural metropolis, on the other is a nameless international style that is based on a global aesthetic and design principles.

The ambient space of Kathmandu is therefore a cluttered and intermixed mish-mash: history and heritage rub shoulders with a non-descript globalised look. Except for few recent examples of heritage conservation, an emerging Malla renaissance, and an effort to evolve a modern vernacular, for the most part the architecture of Nepal’s capital symbolises the confusion and chaos of the country’s current socio-political state.

This development doesn’t just threaten our heritage, it also doesn’t provide solutions to the everyday life of the Kathmandu urbanite. The Valley needs a new vernacular that values the past, while preparing us for a trying future.

Swati Pujari is an architect and editor of SPACES magazine. She is also involved in the conservation of the Swoyambhunath Mahachaitya. swati.pujari1@gmail.com
At 5:30pm every evening, a plump, middle-age flower seller at the Ganesh Temple in Kamaladi brings out three pots of rice, dal, and meat. She sits on a mat on a corner of the street, and feeds her furry four-legged friends. Like a mother tending her children, Gyani Deula talks to her 21 dogs, coaxing them to eat up. She heaps ladles full of rice and curry into their bowls. Bijuli is one of the shier dogs who prefers to eat alone, so Gyani gets up to feed her separately. Gyani has lived on the temple grounds all her life, after being abandoned by her family she has found canine companionship more rewarding. “The dogs have been more loyal, caring, and protective than any friend or relative,” says Gyani, hugging Sweety (pic, far left). Gyani started adopting dogs three years ago after she found abandoned puppies in a carton dumped near the temple. The 54-year-old makes a meagre living selling flowers to pilgrims and sets aside part of her earnings to buy food for the dogs. The Seto Machhendranath committee pays her Rs 1,000 a
Han Suyin, the author and physician famous for writing the novel which became the Hollywood film Many Splendoured Thing, died at age 95 last week at her home in Lausanne, Switzerland. In Nepal, she was best known for her semi-autobiographical, almost confessional, novel The Mountain Is Young which in 1958 introduced Nepal to the world at a time when the country was just opening up. She visited Nepal for the coronation of King Mahendra and like her other novels, Han Suyin bases her plot on contemporary Kathmandu with fictional names for actual personalities, including Fr Marshall Moran and Boris Lissanevitch. The story centres around an English writer, Anne Ford, whose husband is a retired colonial civil servant. When her writing reaches a stalemate she decides to move to a missionary school in Kathmandu and become an English teacher. While in Nepal, she meets and falls in love with a Nepali engineer, and begins a process of self re-discovery. The love story comes with many threads involving loyalties to tradition, and dedication to emotional demands. The novel combines the resuscitation of a writer along with her reawakening as a woman. The Nepali character in the novel is based on a real-life Indian engineer, Vincent Ruthnaswamy, who was working on the Tribhuvan Highway and with whom Han Suyin had a relationship and later married to live with in Bangalore. The daughter of a Hong Kong father and a Belgian mother, Han Suyin became a doctor. By describing an exact picture of the time she lived in Nepal, Han Suyin was able to introduce Nepal with The Mountain is Young which became a best-seller because of its erotic passages. After 54 years of its publication, the book still sells well at Pilgrims and Mandala book stores in Kathmandu. If she returned to Nepal today, Han Suyin would be intrigued to find that politicians inspired by Mao Zedong won an elections and are in power in Kathmandu. The author became controversial in the 1960s for her support of Mao’s policies, and for excusing the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution. Skye MacFarland
Events

DAKIN, witness a visually stunning circus performance with breathtaking costumes and exceptional skills that magically bring to life traditional Nepali storytelling. Rs 300 for children, Rs 1600 for adults. 9 to 11 November, 3pm and 6pm. Ballroom, The Summit Hotel, (01)4780534, (01)5528362 for tickets

Our Gurkhas, an exhibition of photographer Zabirda Zainal work who will also launch his book Our Gurkhas: Singapore through their Eyes. 10 to 11 October, 9am to 6pm, Moksha Fine Art Gallery, Dharan, facebook.com/gurkhas.np

Living pictures, watch Nepali and Flemish films every Wednesday evening, 31 October to 28 November. 9.30pm, Moksh Restaurant, Jhamshed

Hotel Heritage, an ideal getaway for Kathmandu residents. For details, call (01)4371537/561

Planet Nepal 2012, a rich and varied program including performances, concerts, documentary screenings, exhibitions, workshops and panel discussions on the arts and the environment of Nepal. Discussions on the arts and the exhibitions, workshops and panel concerts, documentary screenings, program including performances, Planet Nepal 2012, a rich and varied programme,apatkan.com

Music

DELIgHTS OF SOLITUDE. world-renowned cellist and ethnomusicologist Franck Bernede will perform select compositions of JS Bach on the violincello. Rs 750, 17 November. 9pm, Vaga Hotel, Swayambhunath, limited seating, booking advised, (01)4271445

Adil Ansari live, let the Pakistani superstar warm you hearts as the winter sets in. 11 November, Dasrath Rangasala

1974 AD reunion, the old horses of Nepali rock n’ roll are joined by Phiroj Syangden after four years of separation. Rs 1,200, 9 November, 4.15pm, Patan Museum, call 9851075172, (01)4780334, (01)5528362 for tickets

Dining

PUMPERNICKEL BAKERY get an early breakfast or brunch with interesting choices of bread, experiment with its goat cheese or yak cheese sandwiches, or have a sip of coffee in the classy indoor dining area. Thamel, 7.30am-5pm, (01)4259186

Cha Cha Cha Café, this Japanese restaurant is popular for its spaghetti and burger steaks. Thamel New Dish, grab filling meals like pork momo, spring rolls and chop seuy with excellent value for money. Khicchapokhari

Hadock, big compound with ample parking space, its western and Thali dishes are done to perfection. (01)4701510

Candle walk, join fellow revellers as they walk through the city of Patan welcoming the Newari New Year. 13 November, 1.45pm, Lalitpur, www.planetnepal.org.np

Human Rights Film Week 2012, a screening of Nepali and international features and documentaries on humanitarian and gender issues, 17 to 24 November, www.hrfn.org for schedule and locations

The digital tribe, a group exhibition on the changing cultural, social, and individual values in the age of digital connectivity. 11 to 12 November, 9.30pm, Siodartha Art Gallery, (01)4218048

Tres Flamencas, internationally renowned dancer Clara Ramon introduces the Spanish Flamenco for the first time in Nepal. Rs 1200, 8 to 9 November, 6 to 8pm. Russian Cultural Centre, Kamal Pokhari. 9813930267

Cha Cha Cha Café, this Japanese restaurant is popular for its spaghetti and burger steaks. Thamel, 7.30am-5pm, (01)4259186

Nyb Yang Restaurant, east meets west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Add a little spice to your life with the pad thai or green curry. If you can’t handle the heat, fall into the safety net of its western dishes. Thamel, 10am to 3pm, (01)4701510

Falocha, give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab. Jhamshed, Lalitpur

Sal’s Pizza, almost round, almost cheap, always delicious, the cheesiest pizzas in town. Laxmpal, behind Jazz Upstairs

Getaways

Haatibar Resort, tucked away near a jungle at the side of a hill with a 270 degree view of the Valley this is the ideal gateway for Kathmandu residents. Pharping, Kathmandu, (01)4371537/561

Mango Tree Lodge indulge in culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safaris at the Bardia National Park. Sherpa, Bardia, info at info@mangotreelodge.com

Hotel Heritage, enjoy the exquisite architecture and traditional ambience, but make sure to book your rooms online with NepalSutra. Bhaktapur, (01)601626, info@nepalsutra.com

Couch fest, watch short films selected from the likes of Sundance, CBC Worldwide Shorts, Seattle International Film Festival among others. 10 November, 6pm, Satty Media Arts, Jawalakot. www.couchfestfilms.com/ films-2012-Kathmandu.html
to stem the tide with an impromptu solo on the saxophone. Later on, Cadenza too had to face the dark. But the band didn’t lose a beat either. With Navin Chhetri launching into a drum solo as if the load-shedding was scripted. Working up the crowd with some old numbers, Cadenza also played some newer tunes. Perhaps another album is in the can already. And who wouldn’t love a 20 minute rendition of Sam in Ghana. More please.

But the night belonged to Thai ensemble Rootman. With a four-man horn section, a DJ, a keyboardist, and a rhythm section that was keen to impress, its pyrotechnics set the crowd on fire. The entire band served up quite a treat, but Jariathik Hemnawan on trombone earns this writer’s praise for his cheeky brilliance. When Tito Puente Jr and Marlow Rosado invited rest of the artists on stage for the last jam, there were four horn players, five percussionists, three keyboardists, two guitarists, and a dancing singer on stage, all of whom were smiling like children and gleefully taking turns on each instrument. So much for languages, their faces said everything.

Perhaps Frank Zappa said it best years ago, “Music is the best.”

### Bombay Masala

Bombay Masala Fast Food’s name gives the impression of an Indian eatery. But Bombay dishes eat more than just tandoori delights, it offers Chinese and continental along with the regular masala, chow mein, and chips chilli.

The four page long menu has plenty of local delicacies to offer like Aloo Sadeko (Rs 110). Roughly translated as marinated potatoes, this colourful dish consists of diced boiled potatoes mixed with onions, green chillies, garlic, and just the right amount of lime juice for that lingering tangy taste.

Along with the aloo, we sampled the chicken katti roll (Rs 50) and Reshmi Sheikh (Rs 30) gleaming with generously mixed with onion, green chillies, ginger, garlic, and just the right amount of lime juice, lemon, and spices intact. Served with mint coriander chutney, a half portion should be enough for two.

After gobbling down two chicken items, we ordered mutton biryani (Rs 210). Unfortunately, when we cut through the beautifully decorated rice with slices of boiled eggs adorning on top, there were pieces of chicken waiting for us. Since the waiters had been so patient with us while we changed our orders three times and shuffled our glasses every few minutes, we didn’t complain and decided to settle on the chicken biryani.

Since the biryani had arrived on our table within minutes of placing our order, we were quite apprehensive about it. And it turned out to be the disappointment of the evening. Instead of the rich flavoured rice with subtle hint of saffron and juicy tender bites of mutton, what we got was bland fried rice with huge chunks of chicken tossed in mild spices for less than five minutes. The raita accompanying the biryani could have been the saving grace, but it was a bigger let down. The raita was not thick enough, it lacked seasoning and was nothing but a tablespoon of yoghurt mixed with water.

The sweet lassi (Rs 70) is the best way to end the meal at Bombay Masala. Although not as sweet to give us a sugar rush, the lassi was not thick enough, it lacked seasoning and was nothing but a tablespoon of yoghurt mixed with water.

### Jazzmandu, I’ll be seeing you

S

o the tenth edition of Jazzmandu has come and gone. Well done to those who made it, and to those who didn’t - you missed one hell of a party. And what a party it was at the eight hour Jazz Bazaar in Cokama where all local and international artists jammed into the wee hours of Saturday. After a breezy opening to the day’s program, Kutumba picked up the tempo and left a breezy opening to the day’s program, leaving the dancing crowd chanting for encores. When Urjazz were performing, everyone - “Here’s the ‘mandu’ part of the name gives the impression of an Indian eatery. But Bombay dishes eat more than just tandoori delights, it offers Chinese and continental along with the regular masala, chow mein, and chips chilli. The four page long menu has plenty of local delicacies to offer like Aloo Sadeko (Rs 110). Roughly translated as marinated potatoes, this colourful dish consists of diced boiled potatoes mixed with onions, green chillies, garlic, and just the right amount of lime juice for that lingering tangy taste. Along with the aloo, we sampled the chicken katti roll (Rs 50) and Reshmi Sheikh (Rs 30) gleaming with generously mixed with onion, green chillies, ginger, garlic, and just the right amount of lime juice, lemon, and spices intact. Served with mint coriander chutney, a half portion should be enough for two. After gobbling down two chicken items, we ordered mutton biryani (Rs 210). Unfortunately, when we cut through the beautifully decorated rice with slices of boiled eggs adorning on top, there were pieces of chicken waiting for us. Since the waiters had been so patient with us while we changed our orders three times and shuffled our glasses every few minutes, we didn’t complain and decided to settle on the chicken biryani. Since the biryani had arrived on our table within minutes of placing our order, we were quite apprehensive about it. And it turned out to be the disappointment of the evening. Instead of the rich flavoured rice with subtle hint of saffron and juicy tender bites of mutton, what we got was bland fried rice with huge chunks of chicken tossed in mild spices for less than five minutes. The raita accompanying the biryani could have been the saving grace, but it was a bigger let down. The raita was not thick enough, it lacked seasoning and was nothing but a tablespoon of yoghurt mixed with water. The sweet lassi (Rs 70) is the best way to end the meal at Bombay Masala. Although not as sweet to give us a sugar rush, the lassi was not thick enough, it lacked seasoning and was nothing but a tablespoon of yoghurt mixed with water. The sweet lassi (Rs 70) is the best way to end the meal at Bombay Masala. Although not as sweet to give us a sugar rush, the lassi was not thick enough, it lacked seasoning and was nothing but a tablespoon of yoghurt mixed with water.
With love, from animals

Dharmavtar
Buddha Basnyat, MD

A
s we bid farewell to the festival of animal sacrifice and get ready to worship our beloved pets, it's a good time to ponder over the potential diseases and infections that our four-legged friends pass onto us.

From Japanese encephalitis, rabies, malaria, brucellosis, swine flu, leptospirosis, ricketsial illnesses (for example the different varieties of typhus infections) are some of the common Zoonotic infections prevalent in Nepal.

Amazingly, typhoid, a frequent problem in Nepal has no connection with the animal kingdom, as the bacteria (salmonella typhi and paratyphi) responsible for this illness are restricted to humans beings. Lucky dogs. Otherwise all our street canines would be dead of typhoid fever in Kathmandu, which has the dubious distinction of being the typhoid capital of the world.

Zoonotic infections are so widespread that they actually make up nearly two-thirds of human infectious diseases. The three recent worldwide viral outbreaks, namely SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), bird flu (H5N1), and swine flu (H1N1) are all examples of infections passed from animals to humans. Even the HIV virus was transferred from chimpanzees to humans in the last century.

In countries like Nepal it's very likely that we will see outbreaks of Brucellosis in the future. Although private and government laboratories have mushroomed in Nepal in the last decade, microbiological methodology requires great deal of skills and meticulous work which these clinical laboratories cannot provide.

So the diagnosis of brucellosis remains a hunch because we lack specific testing techniques with properly spaced blood collections. We then treat the disease 'empirically' to the best of our ability. Such an approach to treatment is not restricted to brucellosis, but is almost standard practice for a host of other infections.

The franchise is the better for it, even though the most recent film doesn't quite live up to its lofty goals.

Nevertheless, a Bond film can never be wholly disappointing, and Skyfall is far from bad. The usually stunning, but also interminable “oh, I've seen that before” action scenes. Skyfall has attempted something different, an action film with real back story, creating a fuller and rounder Bond (and this ‘spoiler’ I can't resist). Moneyseven returns.

Skyfall is currently playing in theatres.

#nepaltimes.com Watch trailer

GET WELL SOON: Leader of CPN-UML, KP Oli, waves to his supporters outside Norvic Hospital in Thapathali before being airlifted to New Delhi on Sunday afternoon.

LATINO BEAT: Musician Tito Puente Jr from the US performs at the Jazzmandu concert in Gokarna on Saturday.

With love, from animals

must see

Sophia Pande

How not to miss the 23rd film in the James Bond franchise? Especially with the likes of Daniel Craig (as Bond – if you don’t know already), the phenomenal Judy Dench as M, Ralph Fiennes as the intial questionable, but later reliable Gareth Mallory (a former army lieutenant colonel turned bureaucrat), Ben Wishaw as Q, the new, red-tailed and outwitting ever ‘Q’, and Fiennes in a surprising, adorable role which must be kept secret at this point, and

has been hits and misses. Some have been due to terrible casting choices for Bond (Timothy Dalton comes to mind), and some have been due to terrible writing (case in point, the oozing cheesiness of the Pierce Brosnan Bonds where every other line is littered with hackneyed sexual innuendo). There is also, of course, the ever-relevant argument of who has played the perfect Bond thus far (Sean Connery of course).

So despite some people’s concerns that Daniel Craig is not quite English enough to be a great Bond, I think he comes in pretty close to Sean Connery. With Craig’s casting and the reweathering of the Bond franchise with the almost perfect Casino Royale (2006) where we go back to Bond’s early days and learn of the loss of his first love, Vesper Lynd (played by the luminous, impossibly lovely Eva Green), we finally understand some of the psychology behind the smooth, ever suave, lady-killing Bond that we have come to know.

Quantum of Solace (2008) followed in that vein, picking up where Royal ended, with Bond now harder and more cynical than ever, coolly hunting down Vesper’s killers.

In today’s world, studies can no longer justify even a Bond film where the main character is a casual killer. With Skyfall and the two films that precede it, the film-makers have attempted something different, an action film with real back story, creating a fuller and rounder Bond (and no, clearly I don’t mean fat) than we have ever seen before.

The franchise is the better for it, even though the most recent film doesn’t quite live up to its lofty goals.

Nevertheless, a Bond film can never be wholly disappointing, and Skyfall is far from bad. The usually stunning, but also interminable “oh, I’ve seen that before” action scenes, which is not to say that you shouldn’t go see it. Great Sam Mendes.

Amazingly, typhoid, a bacterial disease which is common Zoonotic infections (for example the ones most of the world. Brucellosis is often inadequate. The diagnosis of these zoonotic infections passed from animals to humans in the last century. Without this methodology requires great deal of skills and meticulous methodology requires great deal of skills and meticulous work which these clinical laboratories cannot provide. Without this medical support we will be completely unprepared to handle zoonotic illnesses and face a major crisis when a pandemic strikes.
Subcontinental Identity

Present-day South Asia remains shackled to its past

Ashraf Ajaz

Anyone who has even a passing interest in the history of the subcontinent knows the circumstances in which the maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir was put to flight by India and the subsequent decades of bloody consequences. But few know the story of the accession of Manipur to India.

A state tucked away in India’s northeast, Manipur’s ruler too had wanted to retain his independent status, going so far as to address Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, then India’s Home Minister, to remark, “Isn’t there a brigadier in Shillong?” Soon, the maharaja was virtually imprisoned in his residence, and intimidated to agree to the merger of his state with India. A battalion of the Indian army was deployed on 15 October 1949 to oversee the transfer of power.

Now switch to Pakistan, whose leaders are extremely conflicted about the persona and ideology of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Was his lifestyle that of the traditional Muslim? The answer was at least clear to General Zia-ul-Haq, who would mark out the pattern on Jinnah’s dietary habits in Stanley Wolpert’s Jinnah of Pakistan before presenting to his guests. Gen Za’s aim was to portray that he was remarkably different from the founder of Pakistan. Pakistani journalist Khaled Ahmed notes, “The Quaid’s daughter, Dina, living in New York, was secretly asked to deny that her father ever drank alcohol or ate ham.” Dina refused to oblige.

These two incidents are narrated in chapters in The Southasian Sensibility, a book Kathmandu’s Himal magazine has launched to commemorate its 25th year of publication. The essays have not been written specially for the book, but culled from the many past issues of the magazine. Your presumption that the book is dated evanesces on first sight. The essays, written at different points over the last 25 years, tell us about the persistence of our memories, and the manner in which the present in South Asia remains shackled to the past.

Partly, this is because the essays invariably depict the traumatic project the idea of building a modern nation-state can degenerate into. Ahmed’s essay, written in 1986, demonstrates that the contest to give a certain persona to Jinnah is an extension of the passionate debate over the kind of personification that he was, and the memories of a society that must avoid that label.

Since 1988, flying bullets and exploding bombs have become additional arguments in the fiery exchanges between Islamists and others, prompting Pervez Hoodbhoy to write, “Why Pakistan is not a nation: To become one, he says Pakistan needs peace, internally and externally, private economic justice, and become a welfare state through the whittling down of massive holdings of landlords and assets of its army personnel.”

Hoodbhoy adds, “Most countries have armies, but as some have dryly remarked, only in Pakistan does an army have a country.”

Written in 1992, Kanak Mani Dixit’s The Dragon Bites Its Tail explodes the deliberately created myth of Bhutan being an idyllic country, which is fortunate to have a sasagous royal family, hailed worldwide for introducing the concept of Gross Happiness Index (GHI). As you read through Dixit’s textured narration, you know the circumstances in which the maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir was put to flight by India and the subsequent decades of bloody consequences. But few know the story of the accession of Manipur to India.

India, too, is engaged in battling the memories of many social groups. The sheer intransigence of these memories provokes the Indian state to deploy its formidable power to try to efface the ideas inherited from the past. It was much easier to pack-off the Manipur king than it has been to vanquish its underground militant groups. Prashant Jha toured Gujarat in 2006 to discover the Berlin-like security arrangements in place to protect the state from terrorist threats.

Pakistan should acquire. For more information call: 242 326 28 or e-mail: workshop@canon-nepal.com

www.facebook.com/canon-imaging
Across Nepal’s arid and remote region of Mustang, the trails are dotted with shrines with three chortens. The red one stands for wisdom, the white represents compassion, and the black is strength.

There is a strong quest for knowledge among families here who used to send at least one of their children to study to be monks at monasteries in Pokhara, Kathmandu or India. Lately, however, Mustang is struggling to meet the demand for education from parents who don’t want children to leave home to go to school.

It is not always possible. Because of Mustang’s harsh and windy winters when temperatures can plummet to minus 15 Celsius inside unheated classrooms, schools have to send students down to Pokhara for the winter.

Like the geese overhead that honk their way down migratory routes south along the Kali Gandaki, entire schools relocate for the four months till March.

The Dibya Deep Secondary School in Chosar, like others in Mustang, go into hibernation every November, taking hundreds of students and teachers down to Jomsom by foot, and then by bus to Pokhara in what has become an annual ritual.

Few schools here are allocated enough budget from the government, and depend on benefactors among Mustang’s far-flung diaspora and foreigners. Dibya Deep also benefits from neighbouring countries: the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu has set up a computer lab powered by solar panels, and the Indian Embassy helped build the hostel and gifted a pickup.

Mustang district earns more than Rs50 million a year from trekking fees on its restricted tourism. Last year, 3,200 permits were issued and tourists have to pay $50 per day to the Nepal Trust for Nature Conservation, besides their other costs. The district should get 60 per cent of these fees, but little of what the DDC in Jomsom gets finds its way here to the schools of Upper Mustang.

Dibya Deep has survived mainly because of the dedication of teachers like its principal, Hari Bahadur KC, who has spent 30 years in Chosar. “I am not just the principal,” KC tells us, “I am the bricklayer, the construction worker, the mason, the plumber, we do everything ourselves here.”

Now that the road from Jomsom has nearly arrived in Lo Manthang to meet the highway down from the Chinese border in Kore La, KC expects that running the school will be easier, and he can retain good teachers in this desolate landscape.

Further south in Geeling, the Jana Jyoti Primary School is preparing for its annual migration. Located on a trekkers’ stopover, the school has benefited from grants, and volunteer teachers who pass through.

Jana Jyoti successfully blends modern quality education with preservation of Tibetan language and culture so that the children learn early about their roots through songs, dances, and mother tongue instruction.

For principal Lakpa Gyatsen, this is life coming a full circle. His parents fled Tibet and settled in Geeling in 1959. He worked as a shepherd, got educated at the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu has set up a computer lab powered by solar panels, and the Indian Embassy helped build the hostel and gifted a pickup.

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Tibetan Refugee Camp in Pokhara, and is now back in Geeling to turn Jana Jyoti into a model school in Mustang.

“It’s like a dream to come back to work with the people I grew up with, and to give back to the community that helped us when we were refugees,” says Gyatsen, “although I still consider Tibet my homeland, Geeling is my home now.”

With help from other former refugees who have done well for themselves, Gyatsen is trying to make the school self-sustaining. It is difficult because most families of the 50 students are poor, and can’t afford the school and hostel fees. The school’s boarders from surrounding villages pay Rs 350 a month in fees, and also have to provide 250kg of firewood and 50kg of cowdung fuel to the school every year.

With help from trekkers like Manfred Kopfer, the school built a greenhouse last year, and now produces its own vegetables for the canteen, saving Rs 500,000 a year. Kopfer is back this year to see how the greenhouse is doing, and is delighted that it will pay for itself in three years.

“It’s amazing how much you can do with so little,” says the German trekker who is on his third trek to the region.

Now, Jana Jyoti has embarked on an even more ambitious plan to lease land near Geeling and plant 10,000 apple trees. In ten years, the school will be able to run on its own from the income of its apple harvests.

The primary school wants to add classes to SLC so that families don’t have to send their young children to expensive private schools in Jomsom.

Gyatsen says the long-term plan is to make the school self-sustaining from apple income, so it doesn’t have to depend on charity to run. He adds: “In ten years the school should be able to stand on its own feet. It’s just like raising a child.”

Himalayan teacher: #616
Kunda Dixit’s East West blog
About turn for Thawang

During the insurgency, the Maoists made Thawang in Rolpa the capital of their revolution. Almost all houses served as shelters for the rebels, and most people gave up their possessions and even their lives to the ‘people’s war’. But today the locals are thoroughly disillusioned with the political system and enraged that the leaders with whom they once walked shoulder to shoulder have become billionaires overnight and forgotten the plight of the poor. Villagers say they won’t even let Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal enter their home, and they plan to wave black flags in protest if he shows up.

The Maoists started a commune of 33 families in Thawang during the war. After all these years, that experiment has failed and only 11 families reside there currently. Those who gave their all to the Maoist cause and went to reside in the commune have now nowhere to go. The state needs to provide them with some form of employment and also investigate their land rights.

Thawang also suffered immensely at the hands of the security forces during the conflict. Several houses were burnt down, and 33 people lost their lives. A similar number were captured, tortured, and injured. Yet, six years after the signing of the peace accord, Thawang residents see no sign of relief or reconstruction.

In the absence of state welfare, the community has taken the responsibility for development upon itself. The locals collected money and built infrastructure including micro-hydel projects and are planning to open a hospital soon.

About turn for Thawang

Editorial, Kantipur, 7 November

Bijay Chamling, Rajibhai, 7 November

Janajati leaders haven’t been able to announce a new party because of the differences in political ideology. They had set the announcement date for 9 August on the occasion of International Day of the World’s Indigenous People. But after numerous postponements, the date has now been shifted to December.

Since Janajati leaders of political and non-political background weren’t able to forge consensus, only the manifesto of the new party was made public earlier. At that time, those from non-political background had coined the name Social Democratic Pluri-National Party. However, former UML leader Ashok Rai is now trying to establish the Federal Socialist Party under his leadership.

Janajati leader Angkaji Sherpa says that the ongoing dispute about the new party’s political ideology has further pushed the announcement date back. “Our friends from different backgrounds haven’t been able to settle on the ideology yet,” says Angkaji. The leaders remain undecided on whether to embrace Marxism or federal democratic socialism. They are working towards including both ideologies within one party.

Janajati leader Dr Krishna Bhattachan says about the predicament: “It is easy to start on a clean slate, but try writing something on a half filled slate.”
CELEBRATE
THIS DASHAIN AND TIHAR WITH
THE HOUSE OF

JOHNNIE WALKER®
The more discerning among you who are visiting Nepal for the first time may have realised by now that we are a nation of animal lovers. Stay on till next week, and you will see living proof that with Shri Pashupatinath as the patron deity of this secular republic, members of our zoological society are a pampered lot. 

We shower considerable respect and devotion to our fellow creatures and this is evident in the way we allow higher mammals free access to our national highways, street intersections, and the runway at the country’s one and only international airport. In addition, they are free to attend to calls of nature anywhere, even in Open Defecation-Free Zones where higher primates like us are banned from doing so. They can munch on yummy plastic bags at garbage piles, and if they are buffalos, they can request an upgrade to cattle class as they travel from Raxaul to Imadol to be beheaded.

Every year, this adulation for our four-legged and feathered friends reaches a crescendo at Tihar when we set aside one day for specialised attention to each. We start on Monday this year by celebrating National Crow Day to honour Yamaraj’s roving ambassador and plenipotentiary here on Planet Earth. Being the smartest birds known to man, Their Excellencies already know it is their day. Devotees get up at the crack of dawn and travel to the banks of the Bagmati to feed them treats. But the crows at Sankhamool are usually already partaking of their communal breakfast of visceral remains of recently-deceased buffalos.

The crows are offered a plethora of sweetmeats which they totally ignore because despite its name, a sweetmeat is vegetarian and the crows would much rather dine on a plethora of rotting cadavers. But it’s the thought that counts, and how appropriate that at least once a year we recognise the valuable assistance that crows provide to the Kathmandu Metropolitan City as volunteer scavengers, and decorate them with one of the nation’s highest civilian honour in nationally-televised ceremonies.

Unfortunately, due to astrological coincidence, the dogs and cows have been slotted for worship on the same day this year. So on Tuesday dogs are gods, and we celebrate man’s best friend and reward Fido, Phuche, and Lucky for being around when we need them the most to provide us with security in these troubled times by yowling non-stop all night at everyone in general and no one in particular.

We get up at the crack of dawn on Dog Day to round up the neighbourhood dingo pack and feed them body parts of fellow animals, resisting the temptation to lace it with pulverised tranquillisers. Veneration of our nocturnal canine choir is a tradition that has been passed down to us from the ancient Egyptians who even built pyramids to immortalise dead pets. Giza has three of them: one each for Fido, Phuche, and Lucky.

Later in the day we worship cash. But it is also when our secular animal republic prays to the holy cow. An indication of the reverence we have for our ex-national animal is the right of way we accord to them along our major thoroughfares. No other animal, not even the prime minister’s motorcade on its way to Gorkha for a much-needed vacation is given as much priority as Kathmandu’s urban cattle population. In fact, the prime ministerial motorcade is forced to make a slight detour into the sidewalk when bovine traffic islands at Thankot refuse to budge despite blasting sirens and commandos wielding SLRs.

In conclusion, on behalf of all the animals who feel left out this Tihar, let me, as an Ass myself, assure them that they are not forgotten. Ours is an inclusive democracy in which all animules have equal right to be worshipped.

So from next year’s Tihar, by presidential ordinance, we shall also mark Rat Tihar, House Fly Day, the Day of the Vulture, the National Day for Monkeying Around, and, last but not leastest, Donkey Day.