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WRITING ON THE WALL:
A Congress activist paints
a message calling for
elections in Bhotahiti on
Tuesday morning.

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

For whom the bell polls

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?

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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 Baluwater's way of saying that the prime minister is not an obstacle for elections.

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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.

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The dog mother
For Gyani Deula and her 21 adopted dogs, it's Kukur Tihar every day

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FOR WHOM THE BELL POLLS

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?

One picture that went largely unnoticed this week was of Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai testing an indigenously-designed, low-cost electronic voting machine (*pictured*) 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 showing 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 and media cronies to attack him in public, reeks of hypocrisy. It also raises strong questions about their seriousness in holding elections and writing a new constitution.

Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun went as far as to accuse President Yadav of planning to stage a coup d'etat. This is a serious allegation and 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 Pun, therefore, was just his master's voice.

The Maoists are so insecure that they are now afraid of their own shadow, and ascribe power ambitions on



DINESH SHRESTHA

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

a ceremonial president 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 600 million.

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

It would behoove Bhattarai and Dahal not to sabre rattle 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 level best to try 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. Nepalis want the parties to stop bickering, 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 ministry (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 paralysing uncertainty, and still meet the Election Commission's deadline to announce local and general elections by May 2013.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

DID THE PRESIDENT CALL?

While writers and editors argue over what deals will be forged next or when leaders will come to an agreement, why does no one ever question the absolute ridiculousness of this entire set-up ('Did the President call?', Editorial, #628)? Who gave these 'top four' leaders the mandate or legitimacy to sit behind closed doors and decide the fate of 27 million Nepalis? The people who we elected to the CA are long gone and the ones who are making all the important decisions do not have public backing. Shouldn't we the people get to decide through a national referendum if we want to revive the CA or would rather go for fresh polls? Where is our democratic right? Letting people vote every four years (or every six to ten years in the case of Nepal) alone does not make a country democratic.

Renu R

- Nepali Times hailed the Maoists as great heroes and the harbingers of change and helped them get to power. The paper never called them terrorists, even though they terrorised Himalmedia. Now Bhattarai, Dahal, and their fellow comrades have shown themselves to be the monsters they always were. There is no use complaining over spilt milk, NT.

Jiten

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 Naya Nepal. But I feel the people Anurag interviewed for his column are not completely representative of the Tarai. Where are the women's voices? They toil in the harsh sun all day and run the economy. What about the people of Pahadi origins? Does their opinion not count?

Gita Karki

- Growth in GDP has remained at less than five per cent in the past four years, and whatever growth has been achieved has largely been due to agriculture and services, not manufacturing. Thousands of young Nepalis flee the country every year to do the lowest paid jobs in the Middle East and south-east Asia. Despite the much-hyped WTO membership, Nepal's trade statistic remains dismal. And yet Ram Sharan Mahat and Surendra Pandey cry wolf about the government's preparation of a full budget. So no wonder the seeds of another movement are being sown, the country really needs a genuine movement.

Binu

OUR GURKHAS

Congratulations Zakaria Zainal for your exciting project ('Our Gurkhas', #628). Your pictures of retired Gurkhas from the Singaporean police speak volumes by themselves. I wish the government of Nepal and the country as a whole learned to respect and appreciate the talent, work ethics, and the self-discipline of the repatriated Gurkhas. Had we tapped into the technical



ZAKARIA ZAINAL

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

Anonymous

- 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 find their true place at home and abroad. Nepal and the British government have used the Gurkhas as a diplomacy tool in the international market and collected huge revenues, but neither country has bothered to make sure that these soldiers are treated fairly and given their due share after retirement or repatriation.

Yam Gurung

BEST FOOT FORWARD

Thank you Bhrikuti Rai for highlighting the excellent work of Jamuna Gurung and the Nepali 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 dribble it like Messi. What makes her journey even more special is that she worked her way up from a small town girl to 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 more golden boots and hopefully an international trophy.

Mina Shrestha

POLLS APART

I don't know if Jimmy Carter was right in calling the Nepali 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 able to draft a constitution before aiming to be the global election adviser?

BNS

- 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 radio talk-show hosts who play on these fears for their own vested interests.

Aideedah

REVEALING RUSHDIE

Of course, Salman Rushdie is going to be selective when writing about his family ('Revealing Rushdie', Ajaz Ashraf, #628). Not everyone is Orhan Pamuk. And given his recent Americanisation and the token Pulitzer, I also assumed, like Ajaz, that Rushdie would open the floodgates when writing about 'evil' Pakistani politics. But knowing that Rushdie has chosen to dub over unpleasant memories, contrary to Italo Calvino's advice that a writer should not, I will not buy this book as enthusiastically as I did his last. Regardless, Rushdie ought to be thanked for writing so venomously and rightly too, about the grand old witch in *Midnight's Children*.

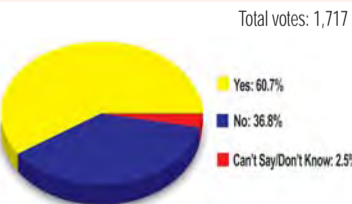
Anonymous



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #629

Q. Should the government be allowed to bring out a full budget?



Weekly Internet Poll # 630. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Is the opposition right to encourage the president to stop the government from bringing out a full budget?



JEERAWAT NATHALANG



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

By the people, for the people

The prolonged political deadlock in Kathmandu is trickling down to the grassroots, and undermining community spirit

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.


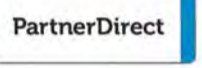
There are over 15,000 community-based user groups

in the country today. But the government is yet to formulate policies to determine their roles and jurisdiction. Moreover, there is a glaring disconnect between the working premise of various community user groups. This has hindered the growth and potential of the groups and eroded the gains of the community movement in Nepal.


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. ■





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'Palazzos decorated with pilasters'

A heritage conservationist takes a dispassionate, but pained, look at Kathmandu's hideous urbanisation

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.

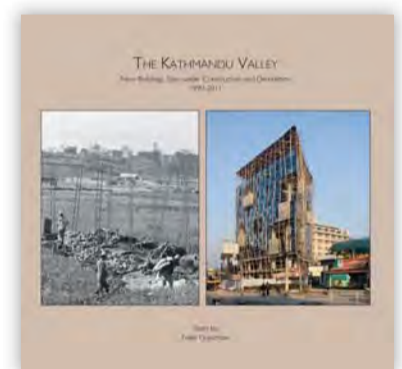
Gutschow uses a subdued, but pained, vocabulary to describe it all. As he says in the book: 'The curiosity I feel about this ongoing development has nothing denunciatory about it. The documentation of the construction sites does reveal a certain crudity, not to say brutality. Its aim is to achieve a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





ALL PICS: THE KATHMANDU VALLEY

Time travel in Kathmandu

The ambient space of the city is a cluttered and intermixed mish-mash



NEPALI PAN
Swati Pujari

Some 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 superceded by a globalised Kathmandu of soulless condominiums, ersatz 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 residence 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

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THE DOG MOTHER



PICS: BIKRAM RAI

TRISHNA RANA

For Gyani Deula and her 21 adopted dogs, it's Kukur Tihar every day

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 Sweetie (*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

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TRISHNA RANA



month to look after the chariot, and others helped set up her flower stall.

Gyani adopts every dog that is dumped at the temple, and takes care of them as if they were her own children. The 21 dogs are all registered with a nearby vet, and Gyani makes sure they get their shots and the females are neutered. The dogs get a breakfast of milk and biscuits and even a bowl of Pedigree dog food. The puppies are handfed with human baby food and eggs.

All this costs Rs 7,000 a month, and she still owes the

vet Rs 5,000 for the shots. Gyani's son and daughter-in-law left her because they couldn't handle the attention and resources she was devoting to her pets.

"It's difficult, but I will provide for them until I die, they are my family," she says matter-of-factly. "I worry about them once I am gone, what will my babies do? Who will feed them and love them?"

Gyani knows the names of all her dogs by heart. "That is Khaire, Kali, and Gore," she says, pointing out the mostly-female mongrels, "and those

are Amitabh Bachchan, Rekha, Sweetie, Bijuli, Naulo, and Bhakta Bahadur."

Despite the fact that dogs are gods in Nepal, and are worshipped this year on Kukur Tihar on Tuesday 13 November, hundreds of mongrel puppies are discarded on the streets of Kathmandu every year.

Gyani's dogs are gentle and friendly, even with strangers. They like to playfully chase bikes that circle the temple which they guard at night. They get up at four every morning, lining up in front of the temple and howling in unison as the priest rings the bell.

The dogs are all devoted to Gyani, they pull at her sari if she is going out on an errand, and sulk when she is away. At night they sneak into her tiny room and snuggle at the foot of her bed.

As it got dark one evening this week, Gyani set out mattresses and blankets for her dogs under the shed where the chariot wheels are stored.

Gyani has seen people in fancy cars stop, dump the puppies on the sidewalk, and go inside the temple to pray. Threading a marigold garland, Gyani says: "What kind of dharma is that? God will punish them one day for their cruelty." 🇳🇵

[nepalitimes.com](#)

A trekker's best friend, #601
Tashi's trek, #540

Watch interview with Gyani Deula 🎥

Han Suyin's Nepal



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 fictitious 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 McParland



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EVENTS

DAKINI, witness a visually stunning circus performance with breathtaking costumes and exceptional skills that magically bring to life traditional Nepali storytelling. *Rs 500 for children, Rs 1000 for adults, 10 to 11 November, 3pm and 6pm, Bulls Club, Nakkhu, tickets available at The Summit Hotel, Moksh, Café Soma, Electric Pagoda, 9818165730, info@circuskathmandu.com*

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. *9 to 11 October, 12 to 6pm, Nepal Tourism Board and Basantapur, www.planetnepal.org.np*

Oh! Star Duniya, the Nepali edition of Nil Chaudhary's play about ordinary people's dream of becoming film stars. *Rs 150, runs till 10 November, 5pm, Sarwanam Theatre, (01)4438947, sarwanam.org.np*

Candle walk, join fellow revellers as they walk through the city of Patan welcoming the Newari New Year. *13 November, 1.45pm, Lalitpur, (01)5260381*

Couch fest, watch short films selected from the likes of Sundance, CFC Worldwide Shorts, Seattle International Film Festival among others. *10 November, 6pm, Sattya Media Arts, Jawalakhel, www.couchfestfilms.com/films-2012-Kathmandu.html*

Our Gurkhas, an exhibition of photographer Zakaria Zainal work who will also launch his book *Our Gurkhas: Singapore through their Eyes*. *10 to 11 October, 10am to 5pm, Yumaa Fine Art Gallery, Dharan, facebook.com/gurkhas.sg*

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



HUMAN RIGHTS FILM WEEK 2012, a screening of Nepali and international features and documentaries on humanitarian and gender issues. *17 to 24 November, www.hrffn.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. *2 to 12 November, 5.30pm, Siddhartha 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*



MUSIC

DELIGHTS OF SOLITUDE, world-renowned cellist and ethnomusicologist Franck Bernede will perform select compositions of JS Bach on the violoncello. *Rs 750, 17 November, 6pm, Vajra Hotel, Swayambhu, limited seating, booking advised, (01)4271545*

Atif Aslam live, let the Pakistani superstar warm you your hearts as the winter sets in. *13 November, Dasrath Rangasala*

1974 AD reunite, 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)4780534, (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-7pm, (01)4259185*



CHA CHA CAFÉ, this Japanese restaurant is popular for its spaghettis and burger steaks. Thamel New Dish, grab filling meals like pork momos, spring rolls and chop seuy with excellent value for money. *Khicchapokhari*

Haddock, big compound with ample parking space, its western and Thakali dishes are done to perfection. *Jhamsikhel, (01)5546431*



YIN 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 10pm, (01)4701510*

Falcha, give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab. *Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur*

Sal's Pizza, almost round, almost cheap, always delicious, the cheesiest pizzas in town. *Lazimpat, behind Jazz Upstairs*

GETAWAYS

Haatiban Resort, tucked away near a jungle at the side of a hill with a 270 degree view of the Valley this is the ideal getaway 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. *Bhetani, Bardiya, info at info@mangotree lodge.com*

Hotel Heritage, enjoy the exquisite architecture and traditional ambience, but make sure to book your rooms online with NepalSutra. *Bhaktapur, (01)6611628, info@nepalsutra.com*

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Bombay Masala

consists of diced boiled potatoes mixed with onions, green chillies, ginger, 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 Kebab (Rs 280) for starters. The kebab consists of bite size pieces of succulent chicken marinated in spices and yoghurt and has flavours oozing in each strand of meat. The dish vanishes before you realise leaving you wanting more.

However, the egg chicken katti roll was a big disappointment. Although the chicken is well-cooked the spices don't seep out of it. We feel the cook went overboard with tomato sauce making the

roll too sweet and the salty omelette only made things worse.

Bombay's butter naan (Rs 30) gleaming with generously slathered butter goes well with almost everything. It is just as good dipping in the creamy paneer butter masala (Rs 220) or as an accompaniment to the delicious tandoori chicken (Rs 425).

Although the tandoori was a little too charred on the sides it manages to get the flavours from the yoghurt, 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)




ICS: ZAKARIA ZAINAL

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 refilled 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 light lassi definitely refreshed us after a hearty Indian meal.

Bombay Masala is a great place to try a wide range of cuisines without burning a big hole in your pocket. However, just make sure that the ever smiling waiters get your orders correct. 

Trishna Rana

How to get there : located right beside Sajha Petrol Pump, Bombay Masala Fast Food isn't hard to miss.



SKYFALL



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 didn’t know already), the phenomenal Judy Dench as ‘M’, Ralph Fiennes as the initially questionable but later reliable Gareth Mallory (a former army lieutenant colonel turned bureaucrat), Ben Wishaw as the new, nerdy, but endearing as ever ‘Q’, Albert Finney in a surprising, adorable role which must be kept secret at this point, and



all of the aforementioned exceptional actors directed by the great Sam Mendes.
So does the movie live up to expectations? Not quite. Which is not to say that you shouldn’t go see it. *Skyfall* packs some delights regardless of its sometimes casual pacing and a few interminable “oh, I’ve seen that before” action scenes. Of course, I can’t mention all of them here to protect the readers from spoilers, but I can say that, if anything, watch the film for the revelation of what *Skyfall* means. I can guarantee that it won’t be what you think, far from it.
In the 50 years that Bond has been around, there have

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 revamping 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 *Royale* ended, with Bond, now harder and more cynical than ever, coolly hunting down Vesper’s killers.
In today’s world, studios 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 filmmakers 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 sometimes annoying Bond girls are present, there are two, in fact, and just to lure the viewer a little further (and this ‘spoiler’ I can’t resist), Moneypenny returns.
Skyfall is currently playing in theatres. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer

With love, from animals



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

As 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, rickettsial 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 bacterium (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



BIKRAM RAI

extremely challenging to make a proper diagnosis of these seemingly new illnesses. In fact, we have problems diagnosing even well-established, old bacterial diseases most of the time.
For example if you talk to clinicians around the Valley, they will say that brucellosis, a bacterial disease which is transmitted by eating infected meat or unsterilised milk may

be important to consider in patients with long-running fever. But we are hardly ever able to make a clear microbiological diagnosis which is vital because clinical assessment alone is never enough.
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. Indeed whenever there is an outbreak in Nepal, the laboratory set up is often inadequate.
We need to have reliable microbiological laboratories which can make definitive diagnosis of these zoonotic illnesses. 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 clinics cannot provide. Without this kind of medical support we will be completely unprepared to handle zoonotic illnesses and face a major crisis when a pandemic strikes. 🇳🇵



BIKRAM RAI

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.



SUNIR PANDEY

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



MIN RATNA BAURACHARYA

DOUBLE-USE: Street hawkers use the overhead bridge in Bhotahiti to display their goods on Tuesday morning. Many pedestrians jaywalk across the busy street instead of using the bridge.

READERS' PHOTO



MANGAL

LONG PATIENCE: People queue for hours to get inside the Taleju Temple in Kathmandu Darbar Square on the day of Maha Navami. The temple opens for general public only once a year on the ninth day of Dasain.

WEEKEND WEATHER

The cyclone that hit the east coast of India was blown out of the way before it could inject moisture into Nepal’s air space. There are no threatening westerly fronts headed our way, and a high pressure holds sway over northern India. All this portends a sunny weekend ahead. However, the minimum temperature is also going to fall as the pressure system brings wind from the northwest. Mornings in Kathmandu will be clear, with some pollution haze caused by an inversion layer. But this will lift and be blown away by the afternoon breeze from the west, giving clear, unfiltered sunlight that will take temperatures up to the mid-20s.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
25°-9°	25°-8°	26°-7°

Subcontinental identity

Present-day South Asia remains shackled to its past



LOOK OUT

Ajaz Ashraf

Anyone who has even a passing interest in the history of the subcontinent knows the circumstances in which the maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir acceded to 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, goading 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 President Gen Zia-ul-Haq, who would mark out the pages on Jinnah's dietary habits in Stanley Wolpert's *Jinnah of Pakistan* before presenting to his guests. Gen Zia'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 *Himal*. Your presumption that the book is dated evanesces as you thumb through it, for you realise 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 1998, demonstrates that the contest to give a certain persona to Jinnah is an extension of the passionate debate over the kind of personality secular or Islamic Pakistan should acquire.

Since 1998, 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, provide 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."

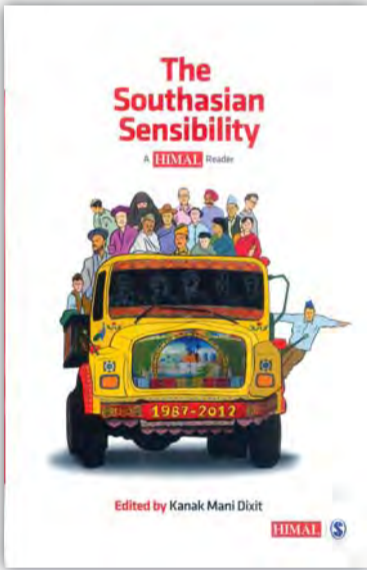
Written in 1992, Kanak Mani Dixit's *The Dragon Bites Its Tail* explodes the deliberately created myth of Bhutan being an idyllic country, which is fortunate to have a sagacious royal family, hailed worldwide for introducing the concept of Gross Happiness Index (GHI). As you read through Dixit's textured narration, you wonder what the results of the GHI survey were in south Bhutan, where the Nepali-speaking people or Lhotshampas live. Over the years Thimpu has deprived them of their citizenship through retrospective changes in law, imposed on them an official code of culture, and sponsored goons to chase thousands out of the country, where they had been living for generations.

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 structures separating Hindus and Muslims, whom the 2002 riots have divided more irreparably than ever before. In an elite government colony, three children got off their cycles on seeing him. "Terrorist," one screamed. Why? "Because you are a Mussalman," responds the child, adding, "get out of here, this is a Hindu area."

In his 1996 essay, Sanjoy Hazarika speaks of the plight, among others, of the Chakma and the Rohingya, whose doleful tales are headlines even in 2012. Indeed, democracy reinforces as well as redefines identities derived from religion, caste, language, and ethnicity. So *Understanding the Nepali Mandate*, written in 2008, presages the political salience the Madhesi were to acquire over the next four years. Nepal's confrontation with the politics of identity hasn't yet perhaps reached its apogee. At times, these identities become the basis of bloody conflict between the state and social groups. Is there no way out but to stymie them until they accept the terms of the state?

The way out lies in compromise, says Ramachandra Guha, urging that the writer and the intellectual 'need to keep away from an identification with one party to a dispute'. They must persuade each party to move beyond dogmatism, and insist on upholding the rights to freely elect one's leaders, to seek a place of residence and company of one's choosing, to speak one's language, and to practice one's faith. These are precisely the contentious aspects of the question that the book seeks to answer: who are we, really?

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Alexis Berger: photographed by Melvin Sokolsky

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A photograph showing a small, partially ruined stone structure with a red brick tower on a hillside, surrounded by green vegetation and mountains in the background. The structure appears to be a small shrine or chapel, with a red brick tower on the left and a stone wall on the right. The hillside is covered in green vegetation, and the background shows more mountains under a cloudy sky.

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.

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.

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:

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

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

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



students

As students flee Mustang's harsh winter, their schools struggle to survive



DISTANCE EDUCATION: (from l-r) The Mustang trail is dotted with shrines representing wisdom, compassion, and strength.

Jana Jyoti Primary School in Geeling has 50 students from kindergarten to Grade 8, most of them boarders from surrounding villages.

Lakpa Gyatsen is a former Tibetan refugee and the principal of Jana Jyoti. Gyatsen gives a tour of the garden to German trekker Manfred Kopfer with whose support the school built a greenhouse to grow its own vegetables.

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."

nepalitimes.com

Himalayan teacher, #616
Kunda Dixit's East West blog

ALL PICS: KUNDA DIXIT



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About turn for Thawang



Editorial, *Kantipur*, 7 November

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

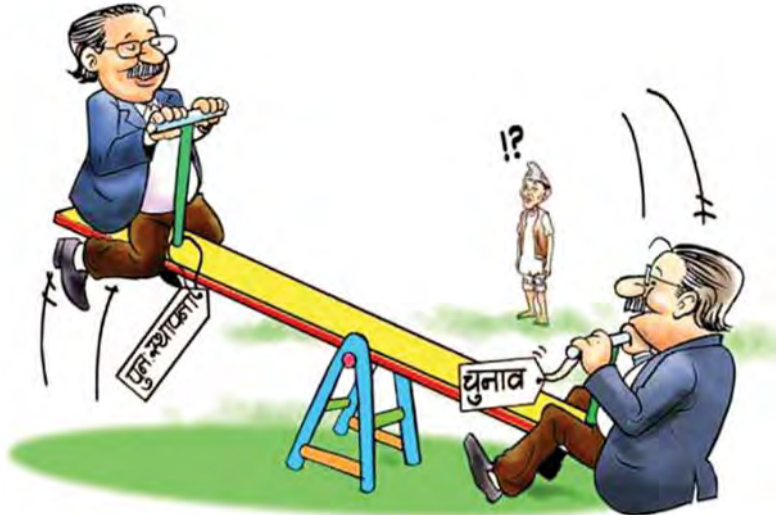
injured. Yet, six years after the signing of the peace accord, Thawang residents see no sign of relief or reconstruction.

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

Santosh Buddha Magar, who is considered a ‘big leader’ in the area, recently joined Mohan Baidya’s CPN-M and public opinion in the village today is driven by the party. However, the locals have already made it clear to Magar that they will not take part in any kind of violence as in the past. This is one of few positive changes in Thawang.

Throughout its history, Thawang has seen promises made and easily forgotten, and this is the reason why the Maoists have become so unpopular. But Thawang is only one among countless villages and towns across the country stirring with discontent.

All of this is due to the unstable political transition and the failure of the state to make the economy a priority. This has in turn caused people’s living standards to plummet. The political leadership must address these issues at once. A permanent constitution, stable rule, and good governance are imperative for this to happen.



CA revival Polls

Rabindra in *Nepal*, 4 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“I am a person of high moral principles and my actions in life are driven by my conscience.”

NC leader Chiranjibi Wagle in *Naya Patrika*, 3 November

NEPALI TWEETS



Bhawana @Bhawana

Follow

ओबामा या रोमनी जस्ले जितेपनि हाम्रो नेपाली दाजुभाई, दिदीबहिनी र आमाबुवा सबैलाई दुई छक भात, आलु या मकै खान पुगोस्..

Obama or Romney, whoever wins, let’s hope our Nepali brothers and sisters have enough to eat.



Tweet of the Day @TatoNaChhara

Follow

देशाँ चुनाव हुन नसक्या मतलब छैन, ओबामालाई बधाइ दिदै फुर्सद छैन नेपालीलाई - @Ektaare

We Nepalis are not worried about the lack of elections here, and are busy congratulating Obama.



लात्ते भकुण्डो @Bhakuundo

Follow

प्रधानमन्त्रीको कुर्सी कसैले हल्लाउन सकेनन तर कयै मिनेट अगाडी आफै हल्यो । #Earthquake #Nepal

Nobody could shake the PM’s chair, but a few minutes ago it wobbled on its own. #Earthquake #Nepal



shivani singh tharu @shivanitharu

Follow

पारिजातको उपन्यास ‘पर्खालभिन्न र बाहिर’ पढ्दा भन्न मन लाग्यो । तिम्मा कामरेड नेताहरु कम रेटका नेतामा स्थलित भईसके पारिजात !

After reading Parijat’s *Parkhal Bahira Ra Bhitra*, I feel like telling her: your comrade leaders have turned into low-rate leaders, Parijat!

Difficult diversity

Bijay Chamling, *Rajdhani*, 7 November

राजधानी

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.”

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Animal republic

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.

ॐ

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.

ॐ

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 tranquilisers. 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.

ॐ

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 blaring sirens and commandos wielding SLRs.

ॐ

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.




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ISSN 1814-2613