The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) released the final report of Nepal’s Population and Household Census conducted in 2011 this week. The 278-page report points towards dramatic changes in Nepal’s demography that will have greater social, political, and economic significance in the days to come.

One of the highlights of the census report is the staggering number of absentees. Close to two million Nepalis were registered as absent in the report and since the census was conducted during the monsoon, it did not take into account seasonal migrants who left the country after sowing the fields and returned only during the harvesting season. The government may boast about high remittance inflow, but behind the glow of foreign currency are the stories of common Nepalis who are have to abandon their families for harsh lives in distant lands with uncertain future.

At a time when the country is reeling under an energy crisis, industries are shutting down, and few jobs are being created at home, people may have little choice than to leave. And unless the state takes serious steps to check this exodus of robust manpower, prospects of long-term growth in Nepal remain bleak.
politics gets a bad rap because its practitioners are generally so self-centred, power-hungry, and corrupt. Most people with integrity and a vision are put off by what they perceive as the dirty business of today’s talking heads in the evening TV news are rebutting capability to govern for four years, and lifted their living marketplace of ideas through which citizens can select that can be fixed if politicians put their minds to it. turn the clock back. Democracy is the messiest system in the past, but many forget that authoritarianism has been democracy. It’s fashionable to argue that democracy ex-revolutionaries have come to blame the system of hopelessly disillusioned with ‘trad pols’ and elected in Nepal largely because of the antics of a succession of politicians. The appointment of a political patient’s or his relatives will seek to get her own relatives will appoint the VC, then no matter who is chosen, she or he will always be a political appointee. Even founder Anurag Karki was a political appointee of GP Koirala. Dr CP Maskey, the current chief of service commission is also a political appointee. If PAHS really wants to keep positions and the educational foundation free from politics, it should oppose the system that draws politics into institutions. Attacking an individual will not help.

PEOPLE AND POWER
Any one year, I have been hearing about the political and violent people of Nepal. I don’t have to make good money for myself and will seek to get her own relatives admitted into the school. All the hard work and effort of Dr Ajay Karki and the selfless staff is going to be wasted if she is not removed. The politicians have robbed the country of every good thing, and now they want to reamark the little that is left.

Rosie

PERSPECTIVES
Any number of changes in the government are going to change the chaotic political environment in any substantial way (‘Slapstick politics’). It will just actually add fuel to the fire. There have been enough discussions, consensus meetings, and tea parties already. What we need now is for the leaders to come up with an actual solution not hollow assurances and sound bites to fool the people.

Bhimraj Gurung

It would be naive to think that President Ram Baran Yadav’s seven-day deadline for the parties will work. Even the patients are not willing to heed to the advice made for the greater good, there is no way to treat them. The current symptoms suggest that we are heading towards a state of dead-end politics.

Nirula

BAD PRESCRIPTION
The appointment of a political candidate like Sanga Shrestha as the vice chancellor of Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS) angers the Bad prescription (Kim Lama, #631). Like all Nepali political candidates, I have no doubt that Sanga Shrestha will use her position to make good money for herself and will seek to get her own relatives admitted into the school. All the hard work and effort of Dr Ajay Karki and the selfless staff is going to be wasted if she is not removed. The politicians have robbed the country of every good thing, and now they want to reamark the little that is left.

Anonymous

I worked for a year at PAHS and was very happy with the way things were managed, especially the mutual respect that junior and senior doctors and staff had for each other. It’s truly upsetting to read about the political circus that draws politics into institutions and I kindly request the people who are in power to meddle with PAHS to show more respect towards the founding members of the institution.

Sajin

If PAHS’s constitution says that the chairman (not the prime minister) will appoint the VC, then no matter who is chosen, she or he will always be a political appointee. Even founder Anurag Karki was a political appointee of GP Koirala. Dr CP Maskey, the current chief of service commission is also a political appointee. If PAHS really wants to keep positions and the educational foundation free from politics, it should oppose the system that draws politics into institutions. Attacking an individual will not help.

Bhutan

Whoever does the photo-shopping/ designing at Nepali Times is a genius.

Denzil Gurkha

But if everything is lost, what will they do? They cannot eat money to survive. I do? We as Indians really need to think harder and decide what we stand for and how we project ourselves as a nation. ‘Mumna Bhaal’.

SANTOSHA

There are no human rights, freedom of speech, or freedom of expression in China (‘President Xi’s Singapore lessons’, Michael Spence, #631). And yet the writer is only concerned about the economic stability and longevity of the highly oppressive one-party state. The only way a country can truly progress is by balancing money and morality. Singapore has made so far because of its multiparty system and open society. It’s due to influential academics and analysts like Spence to keep reminding China to respect human rights and live for the greater good in the world.

Tashi Lama

The main recharge area of the ground water system of the Gangetic plains lies at the base of the Chure Hills (‘Help save the Chure hills’, Birtha Shrestha, #631). Indiscriminate logging and mining are devastating the Chure and putting the largest ground water system of South Asia under serious threat. The loggers, miners, and their bosses are definitely filling their pockets right now, but if everything is lost, what will they do? They cannot eat money to survive. I hope people realise that their greed will cost them and the future generations dearly and pray that good sense will prevail.

Sashi B Bhish

Thank you Asha for speaking up, most journalists and media houses either kept quiet or immortalized Bal Thackeray with their over the top eulogies (‘Paranoid politics’, #631). I was appalled to see Bollywood fractamente, sport stars, and the business community, coming out to express their ‘utter grief’ at losing a ‘great soul’. Much of the outpouring might have been to avoid a backlash, but it’s ridiculous that people who are supposed to be role models are supporting a man who has ordered death and violence against anyone who is different.

RR

The outsourcing of gig following Thackeray’s death is an example of our hypocrisy and duplicity. As long as it is the ‘others’ who suffer we look the other way. The moment we are so proud of and which was in perfect display during his funeral procession would have been more welcome if it had been used to counter the Shiv Sena when they were exercising their muscles against whatever they found unacceptable. We as Indians really need to think harder and decide what we stand for and how we project ourselves as a nation.

Mumna Bhaal’.

SINGAPORE LESSONS
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Tashi Lama
In a state of flux
Nepal's changing demography provides conditions for broad socio-economic transformation, but is the political class ready to lead the country in that direction?

BY THE WAY

This week the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) released the final report of Nepal’s Population and Household Census conducted in 2011. The 278-page report points towards dramatic changes in Nepal’s demography that will have greater social, political, and economic significance in the days to come.

The rise in literacy rate, women’s increased share in the economic pie, and robust working age population are encouraging indicators for a growing economy. However, these broad scale changes warrant deeper scrutiny and analysis.

The last decade has seen significant improvement in Nepal’s literacy rate. Female literacy has jumped from below 35 to 57 per cent. Recent reports from various organisations also point towards improved enrollment rate for girls in primary, secondary as well as higher secondary education. However, the rise in the number of women leaving households and those owning property points more towards the absence of male population in the economy than women’s empowerment. Besides, the literacy rate of women, especially those from the most deprived sections including Dalits and Muslims remains disappointing.

The other important indication from the census report is that 57 per cent of the country’s population is of robust working age. This excludes close to two million absent population who have migrated to other countries in search of better opportunities.

The protracted political crisis, leading to economic downturn, has frustrated the young population who are leaving the country in large numbers. The productive age-group is also the most assertive and failing to address their needs could sow new seeds of conflict in Nepali society. The growing militancy among the youth, especially those in various youth wings of major parties and in the Tarai’s armed groups is a disturbing sign. The recent attacks on the party heads of NC, UML, and UCPN-M are bitter experiences that Nepal’s political class would do well to learn from.

The Census reveals that almost half of Nepal’s population now lives in the Tarai. This dramatic demographic shift is due to accelerated in-migration from the nearby hill districts. The harshness of life in the mountains - the absence of basic amenities like roads, electricity, and drinking water as well as the digital divide - is forcing people to move towards more accessible Tarai districts.

“Madhes is already an agricultural and industrial hub, and with growing national and international investments, it will become the backbone of Nepal’s economy in the coming decades,” says sociologist Chaitanya Mishra.

However, in-migration from the hills is also creating a cultural flux which could lead to bitter conflict for social, political, and economic control over Madhes. The political parties will look to consolidate their position in the Madhes, which is sure to become a hot-bed of Nepali politics in the coming days. The Madhesi Morcha will lobby for more constituencies in the Tarai to increase its influence in national politics, while the growing number of people from non-Madhesi origin, who now make up one-third of Madhes’ population will also play a crucial role in setting agendas for future elections.

Needless to say, New Delhi’s plans to influence its stake in Nepali politics through Madhes will be even more pronounced. The signs will emerge in the coming weeks as the parties look for a ‘consensus candidate’.

Given the comprehensive coverage, the Census report also provides useful information to the planners in terms of reflecting upon the impacts and future needs. The trend of population exodus from the mountains points towards the need to invest in basic infrastructure in the region and address the digital divide. Similarly, growing density in the cities demand expansion of services and security.

Nepal’s demographic changes provide material conditions for its socio-economic transformation and it is the responsibility of the political class to lead the country in that direction. But by engaging in endless bickering, Nepal’s political parties will not just betray public faith, they will be guilty of failing the institution of politics.
Our ama, our hero

Graphic journalist tells the story of Pushpa Basnet and her children through comics

When Pushpa Basnet visited the women’s prison in Sundhara seven years ago as part of a college social service trip, she had no idea that one afternoon would alter her life radically. Seeing the condition of the children trapped behind bars along with their incarcerated mothers moved her so much, she came home and told her parents she wanted to take care of the children and give them a better future.

Her family thought she was crazy because Pushpa neither had the experience or the money to start such an ambitious project. Today the 28-year-old is president of the Early Childhood Development Centre (ECDC) in Budhanilkantha and her selfless work and dedication has made her one of the ten finalists for CNN’s Hero of the Year award. The winner will be announced on 2 December.

Started in 2005, ECDC currently houses 40 children whose parents are serving time. Pushpa and her team send the children to school, nurse them back to health, provide psycho-social counseling, and help them rebuild their lives. In the last seven years, ECDC has freed more than 100 children from jail. Pushpa travels regularly to prisons all across the country, making agreements with jailers, parents, and ECDC and bringing children to Kathmandu. She also runs a day care centre near Sundhara prison for children under six whose mothers are in jail and has been training the women to make handicrafts for the last few years.

The stories of the children at ECDC are illustrated here through a series of comics by graphic journalist Dan Archer. “Comics are a powerful way of getting readers to experience testimonies from a first person perspective,” says Dan. “I wanted to put the children’s stories front and centre for the first time.” He is currently working on adapting testimonies of trafficking survivors into comics and using the cartoons to engage with a younger, hard to reach audience, and teach them about the dangers of human trafficking.

Dan is fundraising for his project on an online site called kickstarter that has different reward patterns according to the amount pledged.

www.ecdcnepal.org
www.archcomix.com
www.kickstarter.com
www.heroes.cnn.com
www.nepalitimes.com

Growing up behind bars, #570
Watch Dan’s introductory video

www.cnnheroes.org
Reinventing brand Nepal

Nepal’s abysmal economic performance is often linked to its geography: ‘India-locked’ on three sides with China on its north. However, being landlocked does not necessarily destine countries to poverty. While not having direct access to the sea does have its disadvantages, there are plenty of opportunities as well. Take Switzerland for example.

opportunities as well. Take Switzerland its disadvantages, there are plenty of destine countries to poverty. While not being landlocked does not necessarily sides with China on its north. However, this requires methodically feed its professional key business partner for many advanced comparative advantage. It can overcome competing in areas where it has no towards creating a blue ocean and stop

We might not have mass production potential as China, but we have some homemade high-end products like Pashminas, rugs, khukri knives, speciality cheese and now adventure gears and wristwatches to flaunt. Despite the political chaos, tourism still remains our biggest selling point and Nepal hospitably still defines our brand equity.

We lack well-linked, economically viable value and supply chains in Nepal, but the country can certainly become a value chain partner for various high-end international brands. For instance, niche high-end products like Sherpa Adventure Gear and Kobold watches have exploited the Himalayan charm very well. Kobold, a renowned US watch company has set up a workshop in Nepal, assembling Himalayan Everest edition watches, the dial of which is made up of a piece of rock collected from the summit of Mount Everest (each watch sells for around $ 15,000).

Nepal has also been a popular MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) destination for our Indian neighbours especially for weddings. The first tier Indian cities might have lost interest in Nepal, but we still have the attention of the second tier cities.

Like Switzerland, Dubai and various African countries, Nepal needs to find alternative revenue sources as a means of lessening its dependence on foreign aid, which will eventually dry up. Being landlocked it should move towards creating a blue ocean and stop competing in areas where it has no comparative advantage. It can overcome its poor economic track record by identifying a viable ‘brand’ that is not determined by political manipulation. With its natural charm, Nepal has the potential to shape trends and become a key business partner for many advanced economies. However, this requires determined leadership and direction.

BIZ BRIEFS

Online incline
CG Electronics, the leading company in durable consumer goods and digital technologies, launched its online e-store at www.cgdigital.com.np on Tuesday. The e-store offers customers the widest range of CG products like audio visual, home appliances, mobiles and offers brands like CG, LG, Toshiba, Godrej, Onida, TCL, Kelvinator, Lava, and Rico. The full line of products can be now easily purchased online 24X7 through credit/ debit card, net banking, and Cash on Delivery (COD) as well.

High five
Etihad Airways, the national carrier of the United Arab Emirates, recently celebrated five years of services to Nepal. Since its commencement in 2007, the airline which offers connections to more than 87 destinations around the world, has carried more than 500,000 passengers from Kathmandu.

Taking the lead
Ace Development Bank signed an Emission Reduction Purchase Agreement (ERP) for Improved Cooking Stoves (ICS) carbon credit trading with Rural Mutual Development (RMD) in Dhading. Under the agreement, Ace will buy Emission Reduction from 1,935 ICS in the district and revenue generated from this carbon offset initiative will be utilised for further promotion of improved cooking stoves.

Speedy reach
Syakar trading company, authorised distributor for Honda motorcycles and scooters in Nepal has named Kapuri Brothers Enterprises in Baitadi as its new dealer. Kapuri Brothers also has Honda showrooms in Biratnagar and Ilam.
Home away from home in Tsum

AMELIA PRIOR

A rooster crows loudly and outside, the snow peaks towering above are silhouetted in a lightening sky. Here in northern Gorkha’s Tsum Valley, the finger of Nepal jutting out into Tibet, time stands still for trekkers and it takes time when they wake up in the morning to process where they are.

Tsum is one of numerous holy valleys, or beyul, in the Himalaya where the Mila Repa or Guru Rinposhe are believed to have meditated. Mila Repa is supposed to have meditated at the Piren Phu Cave more than a thousand years ago, and seeing the serene mountain panorama there one understands why the sage chose this spot. Nearby is the Mu Gompa monastery with spectacular views.

Lhakpa, the mother of the house in Chekampar, is boiling water for tea and tsampa for breakfast for her family as well as the two trekkers who are home-staying with her. In this unique concept, hikers in the Himalaya stay not in commercial lodges, but with individual families, providing income directly to the hosts.

Tsum Valley is ideally suited for home-stay trekking since it hasn’t yet got a developed infrastructure like other popular trekking valleys in Nepal. The region to the north of Ganesh Himal only opened

Home-stay tourism injects income directly to local families in Nepal’s remote Himalayan valley.
It is most common to start the Tsum trek in Arughat, about a 10 hour bus ride from Kathmandu via Gorkha. There are stops in Labu Besi, Karla Besi, Jagat, Lokpa, and Chumling as one follows the Budi Gandaki in the normal Manaslu Trek route. Setting up a home-stay in Tsum is possible through various travel companies. In Tsum, cost is up to Rs 2,000 per night, food included. A licenced guide is required for all trekkers. Hiring a porter is also helpful, especially if lacking trekking experience, as climbs can certainly get steep. Both guest houses and campsites are available overnight. Prime trekking season for Tsum is mid-October, after the monsoon and before the weather gets too cold.

Before CNN put them on the international tourism map, the tiny Magar villages of Thumki and Namje in Shanuka district were overlooked in favour of more popular destinations like the tower in Bhedetar, Namje bajar, and countless picnic spots along the way. Today tourists from Biratnagar, Dharan, Jhapa and even as far as Sikkim show up looking to enjoy local hospitality and comfortable lodging.

Currently, five houses in Thumki and five in Namje are participating in the program and the villagers welcomed their first guests six months ago. For Rs 300 per night for a room with extra charge for food, guests can enjoy a meal of gundruk, dhedo, sisno, and local alcohol. In the evenings, they can take part in tradition Magar dances and songs called Hurra. Thirty-year-old Nil Kumari Magar (pic, right) of Thumki who takes care of her two children on her own after her husband migrated to Saudi Arabia, says the home-stay has enabled her to broaden her horizons. “At first we didn’t know what home-stay meant. We became more confident after the training. It’s a good opportunity for us to interact with fellow Nepal and foreigners and learn their way of life and culture,” she admits.

With increasing number of men leaving the villages in search of employment abroad, the home-stay program has given women an opportunity to supplement their household incomes. Guests buy vegetables from the farms, and take home bottles of pickles and alcohol produced locally.

Thumki Learning Grounds (TLG) which promotes alternative models of development and ecologically sustainable practices in the area, helps households with logistics and training. It is also the contact organisation for tourists who want to know more about the project.

“It’s good to see people from the community supporting the initiative. The District Education Office recently organised a meeting in Thumki and the officials stayed over for a few nights, police officers have been coming over as well,” says Tanka Bhujel, principal at the Grameen Janata Higher Secondary School nearby, who was a member of the advising committee. “If we can get more tourists to visit, then the families can rely entirely on their earnings from home-stay tourism.”

www.learninggrounds.org

Trisha Rana
Himalayan glaciers had melted down. Two floors below in the same building, adults, Rs 50 for children, 1 December at 6am, HIndi Reynog Goudcha, (01)5122263, 9851934190

Satya rooftop sale, donate clothes, appliances, books or decorations to charity and support Aama ko Ghar. 1 December, 10am to 6pm, Satya Arts, Jawalakhel, (01)5523486, 9814906207

Boomerang Restaurant & German Bakery, offers a large selection of cuisine for those who want to enjoy a full meal and desserts. Lakeside, Pokhara, (01)46/142/46/278

Hadock, big compound with ample parking space, its western and Thakali dishes are done to perfection. Jhamshed, (01)5540431

MOUNTAINS COME ALIVE

Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) is back in its tenth reincarnation. Altogether 62 films representing 28 countries will be screened in the competitive, non-competitive, and Nepal Panorama categories. Top ten films from the Educating Nepal short film competition will also be featured in the festival, and all movies are eligible for Audience Awards.

Besides the screenings, KIMFF will also host talks on grassroots filmmaking, “Know Your Himal” quiz, photo and alternative book exhibitions, and documentary and filmmaking workshops. 7 to 11 December, 11am to 5pm, Rattiya Sabha, Central Tourism Board, Brikutimandap, (01)4440635/5542544, info@everestpanoramaresort.com

Hotel Barahi, enjoy a great view of Phewa lake, cultural shows, or indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery in the hotel premises. Lakeside, Pokhara, 061-460/17/463526
Recipe for disaster

Renowned geodesist John Galetzka from the California Institute of Technology will conclude the lecture series that Cultural Studies Group of Nepal has been organising throughout the year. Galetzka, who spends much of his time in remote, earthquake prone parts of the world gathering samples, collecting data, and developing networks of monitoring instruments, will talk about the geology of Nepal. Take advantage of his expertise and learn how Nepal’s position along major fault lines makes a recipe for disaster.

30 November, 9:30am, Shangri Hotel, Lajimpat Entrance free for members, Rs 400 for non-members, tea/coffee served csgnepal@yahoo.com
www.facebook.com/CulturalStudiesGroupOfNepal

Paint the town blue

The sixth edition of Himalayan Blues Festival is here to extend the festive mood of the Valley residents. Artists from the US, Norway, Finland, and Nepal promise to concoct a treat for the ears, and scare off any premature winter blues that have threatened to set in. If you missed the opening shows yesterday, be sure to attend the rest of the party over the weekend.

SCHEDULE
Blues Big Bang, 30 November, 6:30pm onwards, 1905 Restaurant Wentus Blues Band (Finland), Sean Carney (USA), Amy Hart (USA), Oh no! Blue elephant with no hat or straw is flying on air (Norway & Nepal NSV faculty), Matt (USA), The Midnight Rider (Nepal), Ugra (Nepal), All star jam session.
Blues Garden, 1 December, 7pm onwards, Garden of Dreams Night (Nepal), Wentus Blues Band (Finland), Sean Carney (USA), Amy Hart (USA), The Midnight Rider (Nepal), Ugra (Nepal), All star jam session.

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KASI

The food at Kasi is adequate, but insipid and boring. The food is very reasonable and so are the drinks. Kasi regularly puts together music shows and soirees and the atmosphere is perfect for that, sipping a glass of red wine and listening to good music. It’s also a good place to disappear the only way to enjoy the space is to travel up to roof tops. It is for these reasons that Kasi will likely be around for a good number of years.

Ruby Tuesday

How to get there: In Darbar Marg, look out for Benetton shoe shop. On the left of it is a small alley, enter the building right at the back and walk up three flights of stairs.

(01)4220787

Recipe for disaster

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HERZOG films it is for the strange and deeply bizarre characters that inhabit them. Christian Bale plays Dieter Dengler, the young, happy go-lucky, slightly annoyingly starry eyed pilot who gets shot down on his first mission over Laos at the very beginning of what would become the Vietnam war.

When he is captured by the Viet Cong and taken over land to a guarded camp, he meets five other prisoners. Two are Asian, but not Vietnamese, their nationality is never discovered, and two are Americans. As with all such camps there is already an established hierarchy when Dieter arrives. Gene (Jeremy Davies) is the leader, a bit of a bully, and obviously also a bit mentally unstable. Also present is Steve Zahn’s character Duane Martin, a gentle, quite tender hearted person with chronic stomach problems. Dieter’s indomitable spirit. Finally, they sit tight they will be rescued. One can only be thankful that Herzog, in his eccentricity, decided to make this film twice.

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Super stem

WHEN developmental biologist John Gurdon died, back in 1962 he was 19, he was ranked last among 250 boys studying biology at Eton. His teachers thought he was stupid.

Gurdon was jointly awarded the 2012 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine with Japanese stem cell researcher Shinya Yamanaka with whom he shared the 750,000 pounds prize money.

In 1962 Gurdon produced living tadpoles from the adult cells of a frog. He extracted the cell nucleus of the frog which contains chromosomes, the genes that carry heredity information. He then injected these chromosomes into a frog’s egg whose own nucleus had been removed. The new genes took over, the new nucleus was now called transcription factors. These transcription factors are basically proteins made by master genes to regulate other genes. So finally the genetic answer to Gurdon’s discovery of creating tadpoles was revealed by Yamanaka. How fitting then that they won the Nobel Prize jointly.

Many people object to stem cell research on ethical and religious grounds because they feel it interferes with the mysteries of nature. But stem cells, primitive cells from which mature tissues of the body develop, are very useful in regenerative medicine. Gurdon has the potential to treat heart disease, diabetes, and Parkinson’s by regenerating old damaged cells and tissues. So biologists and other scientists like Yamanaka have forged ahead despite these moral battles.

New transcription factors which regulate other genes and allow people to better adapt to high altitude have been discovered at higher altitude destinations. This is relevant for us because Sherpas seem to have this gene which perhaps allows them to perform better while climbing the tallest peaks in the world.

This obviously requires further research. But there is no question these are exciting times in stem cell medicine, especially with scientists winning Nobel prizes in this field.
Twenty years ago this week, Indian society was polarised by the politics of the Babri Masjid demolition. Us, them and the others

Twenty years ago, this week, I was in a deep sleep—typical of people below 30 years, until the persistent ring of the telephone woke me. At the other end was a friend, a Hindu. His voice trembled as he said: “It is happening in Ayodhya. They are demolishing the Babri Masjid.” At those words my late morning grogginess sloughed off, as did the chrysalis of innocence in which I lived, from which emerged another man who was to discover a world tucked beyond the then existing limits of political imagination. It was a world in which hatred was the language of politics and violence a legitimate, even righteous, expression of inexplicable indignation.

Such was the cataclysmic nature of 6 December 1992: the day on which a medieval mosque in India’s Ayodhya was demolished to undo a wrong of history. That ‘medieval structure’, it was claimed, was built on the spot where Lord Ram was born. It was the day on which a new fault line emerged in Indian society. The word ‘they’, as my friend had used, acquired another meaning. Who constituted ‘they’ and who ‘we’? Religion was not always the factor determining membership to either of the two categories. You were ‘they’ or ‘we’ depending on your position on the Babri Masjid, whether you believed its destruction was a wedge driven into the very heart of India or, alternatively, an expression of Hindu resurgenacy, necessary as well as inevitable. ‘Them’ and ‘us’ wrote in the newspapers, openly making it known to which category they belonged.

The differences between the two groups were irreconcilable. It was thought pointless to engage members of the rival group in debate because it could have no closure. Soon suspicion seeped in, you avoided talking of the Babri Masjid, even politics, with those who you believed were on the other side. That religion was not the overarching canopy under which the ‘us’ banded together. ‘Them’ and ‘us’ were not a single entity. The imposition of identity is precisely the reason that despite the existence of two rival camps of non-religious ‘us’ and ‘them’ the Muslim community, on and after 6 December, became the ‘other’. No doubt, the BJP sought to create the ‘other’ for papering over the innumerable divides in India’s Hindu society, reflected in its hierarchical division of castes. Yet the party was unable to implement its agenda of making religion as the basis of nationhood.

The BJP failed to achieve its goal because it couldn’t muster a simple majority in the Indian parliament on its own. But this wasn’t because it lost the ideological tussle between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Rather, it was largely a result of subaltern castes preferring to support parties representing them than backing the BJP, which is the preserve of upper castes. Twenty years from 1992, ‘us’ and ‘them’ are, once again, divided sharply over the suitability of Chief Minister Narendra Modi of Gujarat becoming the prime minister of India. The battle rages on, so little has changed.
For years Deb Gurung saw children from his village in Gaunsahar of Lamjung district walk for hours every day to neighbouring villages or migrate to Pokhara and Kathmandu for better schooling. Gurung, a teacher at a local government school, was determined to change this.

He started a private school called Diamond Hill Academy in 2008 to provide quality English-medium education at one-third the cost of city schools. While many parents were happy that they wouldn’t have to send their children away any longer, making the school self-sustaining was a huge challenge for Gurung and his team.

During the first few years, there was a shortage of teachers, textbooks, and teaching materials. The two classrooms, made of bamboo walls and a tin roof were makeshift. In an effort to get more teachers, the school agreed to have volunteers from abroad eager to help Nepal’s rural education.

When Erik Bouchard (see box), a successful American investment banker offered to volunteer as an English teacher, Principal Shamsher Thapa of Diamond Hill Academy was too embarrassed to send photos of the school.

“He was worried that if I saw the state of the school, I would change my mind, and run away,” Bouchard explains.

When the American volunteer arrived, he noticed that despite the lack of resources, the children were thriving. Grade 2 students of Diamond Hill had better English skills than students in Grade 9 at government schools. As he became more involved with the school, the ex-banker put in money to build two new classrooms and a bathroom.

Bouchard then got his banker friends to donate five new laptops to the school. During school hours students get to use them and outside these times anyone from Gaunsahar has access to the computers. Students along with villagers are given free computer lessons before and after school which have helped locals build their self-confidence.

Diamond Hill now uses technology to focus on cultivating a child-friendly learning environment. It has banned corporal punishment, and Thapa is now convinced that there are more effective ways to teach students a lesson than by beating. “If you hit a student, she might behave momentarily, but it doesn’t stick with her in the long-run,” he explains. Instead, students are not allowed to participate in activities they enjoy like games or are made to read and write in the office room.

Although the education system in rural Nepal still has a long way to go, schools like Diamond Hill Academy are changing the rural landscape one student at a time by providing an enriching environment, good teachers, and modern infrastructure on par with city schools.

Says Bouchard: “The children are very capable and smart, they just needed support. The first few weeks I spent with them, I saw that even a box of pencils made a big difference to their learning. It’s amazing how much you can do with so little.”

www.diamondhillnepal.org

One school at a time, #631 Changing Nepal one girl at a time, #441
By the time his friends finished college, Erik Bouchard was already earning a six figure salary and on his way to the top of the corporate ladder. However, the higher he progressed, the less satisfied he was from his career. “Most people would have been thrilled to have my life, but I didn’t feel I was contributing to anything, but my bank account,” he says.

In desperate need of change, Bouchard took a short break from his hectic job in Singapore and moved to Nepal. He travelled to Gaunsahar of Lamjung district and immediately fell in love with the simple way of life and the beautiful landscape of the Nepal Himalaya.

However, while in Gaunsahar he noticed that many NGOs and charities which were set up to help the rural poor were actually far out of reach of people who needed help the most. Children were the worst hit and even their basic needs were not being met. “Children in remote areas were missing out and I wanted to help them and make sure they could make their way to college,” he recalls.

What started off as a holiday soon became the catalyst for an entirely new profession. Bouchard started the See Change Foundation, which focuses on meeting the health and education needs of children in rural Nepal. The charity will launch online early next year, but the ex-banker has already been working hard to make a positive difference in the lives of underprivileged children.

In the 13 months since his arrival, he has worked tirelessly to provide emergency health care to children, built two new school rooms and bathroom for Diamond Hill Academy (see main article), provided scholarships and found sponsors for children of poor families, and installed a sanitation system at a local orphanage in Besisahar.

Choosing all his projects through word of mouth, Bouchard wants to make as big an impact on the lives of Nepali children as they have made on his. “I haven’t made a dollar in a year, but I’ve never been happier,” says Bouchard, breaking into a wide grin. “I feel immense satisfaction knowing I’m making a difference and the work I am doing can make a lasting impact.”

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A thought for the far-west

The Federation of Chambers of Commerce in Kailali has begun a voluntary donation drive called ‘Mission One Paisa’. This region may be ‘far-west’ from Kathmandu, but for its residents it is close-by and personal. Perhaps that is why the locals were the first ones to donate to the cause.

Chadani and Dodhara VDCs lie across the Mahakali and are probably last on the far-west’s list of development plans. But leaders of Mission One Paisa say theirs is a dignified movement, aimed at alleviating poverty and encouraging locals to show more commitment towards regional development. They have made it a point to keep identity politics out.

In the recent past when efforts were made to divide the nation based on narrow ethnic or communal identities, the unity shown by the residents of the far-west was inspiring. If this initiative is taken forward with the same level of honesty and integrity, it has the potential to put the region back on the national map.

Terror in Tarai
Kamalesh Mandal, Rajshahi, 29 November

The rising unemployment in the Tarai districts is leading to an increase in the crime rate. The staggering number of cases where the police have been involved in cross fire with local criminals suggests widespread proliferation of small arms in the Tarai.

According to Mahottari district police, local gangs in the Tarai have been found in possession of homemade pistols, improvised bombs with detonators and large amount of ammunition. “The use of guns in petty crimes has become all too common,” says Suraj Khadka of Mahottari police, “the locals know the criminals, but they are so terrified that they refuse to come forward to provide information.”

The porous Nepal-India border allows criminals to easily buy homemade and Chinese pistols from border towns of Siliguri, Jayanagar, Sitamadi, and Raxaul. So far, the police have recovered more than 100 weapons in Mahottari district alone. The Home Ministry is aware of the political influence these armed groups use to evade prosecution by the police. But so far, it has failed to intervene.

Knowing right

Ranji Dahal in Nimal Khabarpatrika, 16-30 November

Nepal’s interim constitution guarantees the right to information to all citizens. However, government and non-government institutions are notorious for denying even the most basic information to the public. In many government offices, the bureaucrats ask people of “dire consequences” for pursuing sensitive matters or supply incomplete information.

Even the National Information Commission which is responsible for providing necessary information to the public has failed to deliver on its mandate. When a group of people seeking information from various institutions filed a complaint with the commission, the officials passed the buck back to them. Information Commissioner Sabita Baral admits that there is a tendency to withhold information in the bureaucratic circles and blames it on the change-resistant mentality of the officials.

A few months ago Mahendra Bhattarai, a student at Koteswor Multiple Campus was arrested on false charges for demanding financial information from the campus administration. Bhattarai, later filed a complaint at the commission seeking information, but the campus authorities defied the commissioner’s directive to disclose information, following which campus chief Govinda Bahadur Karki was summoned by the commission. But Karki has so far refused to provide information to Bhattarai.

In the recent past, when efforts were made to divide the nation on the basis of religious or ethnic identities, the unity shown by the residents of the far-west was inspiring. If this initiative is taken forward with the same level of honesty and integrity, it has the potential to put the region back on the national map.

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai quoted in Navajagat, 29 November.

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Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai quoted in Navajagat, 29 November.
The 18th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), also known as COP 18 is underway in Doha. More than 12,000 delegates from 194 countries have gathered here in the over-cooled conference halls.

Even before the conference began there was scepticism among environmentalists and vulnerable nations about its outcome. The fact that the COP is being held in an OPEC country, which is the world’s highest per capita carbon emitter has put off many.

Besides, the failure to salvage an international legally binding climate treaty at the Copenhagen climate talks in 2009 has led to a low level of trust among the countries. Since then, much effort has gone into getting this multilateral process to move ahead.

Last year, at COP 17 held in Durban, rich nations racked by an economic crisis bought time to agree on an internationally binding treaty, postponing any agreement up to 2015, to be implemented by 2020. These delaying tactics have raised serious concern among the vulnerable countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the low lying island states. Nearly 100 countries whose total emission is less than six per cent of the global greenhouse gas emission have the lowest capability to combat climate change impacts.

The Doha summit is unlikely to make a major breakthrough, but activists and the vulnerable nations are doing what they can to achieve incremental milestones to reach a deal in 2015. One of the goals is to get the big economies to agree on a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

The Protocol is the only instrument under the UN framework that legally binds the developed countries (also termed as Annex I) to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The first commitment period of the protocol ends this year.

The report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) produced in 2007 states that in order to minimise the impact of climate change, global average temperature must not exceed two degrees. For that to happen, the global carbon emission must be reduced by at least 25 to 40 per cent by 2020 and 80 per cent by 2050 based on 1990 level.

However, the current trajectory shows an increase of 3.5 degrees in the same period, which could accelerate melting of the polar ice and snow caps in the Himalaya and climate stress.

The United States, the second largest greenhouse gas emitter in the world, is refusing to sign the Kyoto Protocol and setting a bad example. It has prompted countries like Canada, Japan, Russia, and New Zealand to move out of the protocol as well. They have also argued that the emerging economies including China, Brazil, and India should also take legally binding actions.

For developing countries like Nepal, another issue of interest in Doha is the commitment of support by developed countries in tackling climate impacts. During the Copenhagen meeting, developed countries had promised $100 billion per year in financial and technical assistance. In the next seven days, the LDCs will look to get the developed countries to agree on short-term financial pledges scaling up to the original commitment.

Nepal has been part of several rounds of COP negotiations in the past and as chair of the LDC Group for 2013-14, it will have a strategic advantage to forward its demands and be more vocal.

Raju Pandit Chhetri works with Climate Action Network-International, a network of more than 200 civil society organisations across the world working on climate change.
So you want to be a prime minister?

The president’s deadline looms as the Ass goes to press, and there are still no takers. There is no new government agreement because the parties can’t decide who should preside over a national election. The crus of the biocidal, as Frank Zappa used to say, is that they are all cancelling each other out. PKD cancels out BRB, SBD cancels out RCP, BKG cancels out MT & UV, and Brave Sun is being blocked by Brave Cloud. And PuKaDa is confusing everyone by sending mixed signals: telling the Madhesis they must lead an electoral government, while simultaneously egging on Messrs Kaji and Naran, Jhusil, Sher, Cloudy, and Gutch.

The only reason this is not already more complicating is because the eh-Maleys are not in the running. Thank Gods for that, otherwise we’d have the Red Bahuns of the Unfed Marxist-Leninists also kicking each other in the gonads. At this rate, the power struggle is going on till eternity unless we are encouraged to apply.

1. Agree on a rotational prime minister among 365 aspirants from all 36 or so parties so that everyone gets a shot at Balu Water at least once in a lifetime.
2. Declare a National Lottery and whoever wins, becomes prime minister for as long he, she, or it wants. Asses are encouraged to apply.
3. Ask the two main rivals in the four parties to pick straws until everyone is eliminated, then appoint a Young Turk.
4. Organise a roundtable of all 40 top leaders of the top parties and have them play Russian roulette. The last man left sitting is automatically prime minister since everyone else is dead.
5. Re-enact the Lig-Lig Marathon, and whoever can bribe the organiser to win can be declared the prime minister.
6. Have an Election Contest to narrow the field because both Sher and Jhus would be disqualified.
7. Televis e a Kaur Banega Corrnoju Pattip election, and find who has the potential to get rich quickest.

Amreshbabu apparently blew a gasket when he found out that certain journos were tweeting about him accompanying BRB to meet RBY, and that the prez scolded the pee-em for having a spook of a sidekick. The Ass has it on good authority that it did not happen that way. But Amparison was proving around Shristi Niwas before and after the prime minister was there, which is in itself intriguing. What everyone forgets is that the prez was following his agreement with Chairman Supercalifragilistic FG, which is unaffordable. Interestingly, that is where Daddy-G is headed next week.

Jhulsi Da is suddenly looking 10 years younger after Awesome convinced him he should shoot for PMship. The Congman is shoring up all his pluck and energy to show that he has what it takes to do the Paji Job. Brave Lion is a good Lord Ram is out of the way, but still secretly fancies himself back at the Sand Castle.

Our winning sound bite of the week comes from the Homey Minister: “I have a zero tolerance policy towards corruption.”