A state can't be in transition forever. Since 2006, Nepal has been treading the thin line between progress and anarchy, no country can survive such uncertainty for long, something will have to give. It is time the politicians vying for berths in government realised the extent of the suffering that their greed and short-sightedness is costing the long-suffering people of this country, the people whom they have always taken for granted.

If he is remembered for nothing else, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai would like to leave his mark on Nepal's capital with his ambitious road expansion drive. But he is finding that demolishing buildings was the easy part.

Nepal's most developed and educated district now also aims to be its cleanest and greenest. With investments in hydropower and education, the district is also recycling water and has a ban on plastic bags. The reason for success is a political consensus among the political parties, something that has eluded our national politics.

One more reason to bank with us

Around the world, Standard Chartered is known for its steadfast stability and quality of service. For the past 25 years we have brought our best to Nepal and for the same we are “Bank of the Year 2012” - a major international award that recognizes our pursuit of excellence in the financial industry. We thank and congratulate our hardworking team, stakeholders and all of our valued customers who have always stood by us.

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When Pushpa Basnet won the coveted CNN Hero Award last week, social media was abuzz with comparisons with her namesake, Pushpa Kamal Dahal. One paper published a cartoon in which the social worker was tagged ‘Pushpa Hero’ next to the Maoist Chairman who was labelled ‘Pushpa Zero’. Indeed, Pushpa Basnet’s award did not just draw attention to the plight of disadvantaged Nepali children and her struggle for social justice, but also demonstrated the power of one. She showed how one person can make so much difference in the lives of so many by being selfless, compassionate, and committed.

When Pushpa Basnet stepped out of the airport in Kathmandu on Saturday night, we all celebrated her sacrifice on behalf of disenfranchised toddlers forced to grow up behind bars with their jailed mothers. Exactly a year ago, Anuradha Koirala, was also recognised as a CNN Hero. But she is also a symbol of what the Nepali state can’t do about them. The amount of the suffering that their greed and shortsightedness is costing the long-suffering people of this country, the people whom they have always taken for granted.

In the absence of the state, Nepalis are either fending for themselves or helping other Nepalis in their struggle for day-to-day survival. invisible. Nepalis are either fending for themselves or helping other Nepalis in their struggle for day-to-day survival, or to battle injustice and discrimination. In a country where government mattered, there would be shelters where women who have been trafficked, or are at the risk of being sold into slavery could find refuge. There would be institutions of the state that could spring into action to rescue women like Shikra Hasmi who, in a tragic irony, was burnt alive by her suitor in Bardia even as ceremonies were held there to celebrate her wedding.

There would also be children’s homes for those who are abandoned or whose parents are unfit to look after them. Unfortunately, the only government orphanage, Bal Mandir, has set a terrible precedence. There would also be children’s homes for those who are abandoned or whose parents are unfit to look after them. There would also be children’s homes for those who are abandoned or whose parents are unfit to look after them. If the state can’t be in transition forever. Since 2006, Nepal has been treading the thin line between progress and anarchy, no country can survive such uncertainty for long, something will have to give. It is time the politicians vying for berths in government realised the extent of the suffering that their greed and shortsightedness is costing the long-suffering people of this country.

Our leaders care to look beyond musical-chairs politics: senior citizens, such citizens would have to wait the winter of their lives on the streets. While we count the billions spent supporting 601 CA members, five prime ministers and presidents for four years, we leave out the opportunity cost of mixed development. Millions of children have missed out on education, hundreds of thousands of farmers have had to sell their lands and migrate abroad, tens of thousands of young women have been sold by family members to traffickers. This is the real cost of the last six years.

It’s wrong to accuse Ashraf of attacking Hindus and favouring Muslims just because his last name indicates that he might be an adherent of a certain faith. His articles focus on the mentality of politicians like Narendra Modi and Bal Thackarey who take advantage of radical supporters and their tribal mentality.
When the conscience keepers of society show elastic ethics, it is time to worry

By Anurag Acharya

O ne of the indicators of an ailing democracy in any society is the dumbing down of the media and the suppression of the views of the other side.

In the last two decades, the Nepali media has exercised greater freedom than those in other South Asian countries, deregulating radio and unshackling the press. However, the Nepali media faces threats to freedom over-commercialisation, politicalisation, state pressure, and self-censorship. The nexus of crime and politics has made it dangerous for journalists to use their constitutionally-guaranteed freedoms.

Beyond the stereotype of flag-waving journalists and away from the glamour of celebrity media, there are hundreds of young reporters struggling to be heard. While the decision to quit may be down of the media and apply for a manual job in South Korea may be

right to independent information that we uphold.

A local reporter in Panchthar who works for a mainstream daily told me recently that he had no say in the way his reports were edited by his parent paper in Kathmandu. “Sometimes they get published in a way that compromises our professional integrity,” he lamented.

Recently the Information and Communication Minister ostensively sacked the editor of the state-controlled NTV for higher in this society of telling truth to power.

One of the greatest achievements of the 1990 movement was the opening of the Nepali media space and the democratisation of the radio spectrum. Fearless reporting through the difficult years of war and during the Gyanendra era 2001-2006 often came at a heavy price. Uma Singh, Dekendra Thapa, Birendra Shah, Krishna Sen, Gyanendra Khadka, and Ambika Timilsina were killed during the conflict and transition. They contributed to strengthening Nepal’s democracy and upholding the free press, and lost their lives doing so.

It may be difficult for a self-proclaimed, free-thinking journalist to admit that the Nepali media has become an extension of the political war in which contending editorials and op-eds are perennially engulfling in a bitter war of ideas, each seeking to establish itself by attacking the other. When civil society itself is polarised, it is unrealistic to expect the media to behave differently. But it is when dissenting voices are stifled by political infiltration of the media or political figures buying into press holdings that there is concern for the well-being of the free press. We in the media often forget that it is not our freedom that needs protecting, it is the citizen’s

The mainstream press in Nepal is still only paying lip service to the political war and during the Gyanendra era 2001-2006 often came at a heavy price. Uma Singh, Dekendra Thapa, Birendra Shah, Krishna Sen, Gyanendra Khadka, and Ambika Timilsina were killed during the conflict and transition. They contributed to strengthening Nepal’s democracy and upholding the free press, and lost their lives doing so.

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Throughout history, mistreatment of minorities – whether ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, regional, ideological, sexual, or other – has fuelled violence and devastated societies worldwide. Egregious cases in the last century include the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, the Khmer Rouge killing fields in Cambodia, and the genocide in Rwanda.

The abuse of minorities, and reactions to it, often are linked to fault lines in conflicted societies. Minorities tend to experience economic inequality and political marginalisation. This negative trend shows no sign of waning. While international treaties, national laws, more and stronger institutions, improved education, and efforts by organised religious groups to foster respect for minorities can help to ameliorate the problem, collective efforts have so far fallen woefully short.

The problem will not disappear until people stop tolerating intolerance. And events – from the indiscriminate killings by the Lord’s Resistance Army in central and eastern Africa to the attacks against Christians by the Pakistani Taliban – show that bigotry remains deeply embedded.

Moreover, globalisation and instantaneous communication technologies have made it impossible to contain conflict within national borders. Domestic economic and political grievances can now buttress discontent across regions and continents.

Ethnic conflict in countries such as Kenya, Sudan, Sri Lanka, and the former Yugoslavia underscores the challenge of reducing intolerance and eventually eliminating it. But some other multiethnic societies such as Tanzania and Burkina Faso have largely escaped communal conflict. Others, including Belgium and Cameroon, have avoided serious conflict, but have experienced significant acrimony over the treatment of linguistic and regional minorities. And, in different periods, Lebanon has managed and mismanaged official policy toward religious and ethnic minorities. Understanding the factors at play in these countries can help policymakers and religious and civil-society leaders to address intolerance.

Intolerance emanating from organised religion is perhaps the most inexcusable. On the one hand, all organised religions teach peace and love for others, and they have often intervened successfully to prevent or mitigate conflict. On the other hand, at certain times in their history, organised religions have allowed, encouraged, and even propagated hatred and violence. And fringe elements often use religion to espouse violence against particular groups.

In recent decades, Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders failed to speak out early and effectively against the genocide in Rwanda. Similarly, rather than condemning the adoption of terrorist tactics by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and al-Shabaab in Somalia, and the destruction of Sufi shrines in Mali by Ansar Dine, a radical Islamist sect, Muslim leaders have remained largely silent. While none of these groups represents a majority point of view, they do exert significant influence and probably believe that they are acting in the interest of the majority.

Developments following the Arab Spring might provide some indication of the prospects for religious tolerance. In Egypt, with its 10 per cent Coptic Orthodox Christian minority, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Mohamad Morsi won the presidency in a free and fair election, after which Morsi resigned from the party, saying that he would allow him to represent all Egyptians more effectively, and promised that he would respect minority rights. Yet subsequent actions designed to give him unprecedented executive power raise concerns about these early positive steps.

By protecting minorities, Morsi could demonstrate to other governments and political movements the importance of minority rights and encourage them to behave likewise. But it remains to be seen whether his Islamist political base, including hardline Salafists, who won some 20 per cent of the parliamentary vote, will be tolerant of the Muslim minority in the months and years to come.

Syria will be an even more important test. The Alawites, who comprise only 11 per cent of the population, dominate President Bashar al-Asad’s crumbling regime. While the ruling minority has been generally tolerant of Christians, Kurds, Druze, and Turks, who together comprise 28 per cent of the population, the regime has long oppressed the Sunni majority. If a Sunni-controlled government replaces the current leadership, its decision to protect minorities’ rights would be particularly encouraging.

Democratic governments are often perceived as more respectful of minorities, given that, unlike autocratic regimes, a democratic system with an elected legislature, independent judicial system, strong civil society, and free press provides citizens with opportunities to express their views and pursue justice. But while democracies do have a better record of protecting minority rights, a democratic system does not guarantee respect for minorities any more than autocracy ensures their repression. An enlightened autocrat can be just as protective of minority rights as a solidly democratic government.

That said, when it comes to respecting minority rights, democracies have a far better record than autocracies. This is one of the main reasons why, throughout history, democracies have rarely fought each other. The Alawites, who comprise only 11 per cent of the population, dominate President Bashar al-Asad’s crumbling regime. While the ruling minority has been generally tolerant of Christians, Kurds, Druze, and Turks, who together comprise 28 per cent of the population, the regime has long oppressed the Sunni majority. If a Sunni-controlled government replaces the current leadership, its decision to protect minorities’ rights would be particularly encouraging.

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Look at any graduating MBA class and you will immediately notice the glaring imbalance between the sexes. In a batch of 100, there might be 30 female students at most. These women perform as well or better than their male counterparts, are highly ambitious, and equipped with the skills and business acumen to succeed at the highest ranks of the corporate food chain. But 10 years after graduation, most are lost to the corporate environment are taking them away from senior management positions. Why do Nepali women shy away from senior management positions both in the public and private sector?

Does our traditional education system train them to undervalue their competence? Or are women so disillusioned with aggressive corporate competition that they have no aspirations to be a part of the C-suite? Or are there socio-cultural barriers and invisible biases at play?

One way to explain this gap is to say young, talented Nepali women are more attracted towards positions in NGOs, INGOs, and bilateral aid agencies. Job security, flexible work hours, perceived status of working with an international agency and a preference for more cooperative and less competitive environment are taking them away from the corporate corridors. This further discourages young girls because they have no role models or mentors to guide them.

The other reason why so few women are heading government institutions, judiciary, bureaucracy, financial institutions, businesses and enterprises is because of the boys’ club mentality. Men have dominated the upper echelons and boardrooms for so long, that there are many visible and unseen barriers to entry for women. The male-culture prevalent within corporate circles alienates many women and the lack of family-friendly work climate makes it tough for them to balance the demands of work and home. Besides, deep rooted beliefs about women’s roles mean that they receive unequal pay for the same job, or are pigeon holed into positions that have little prospects of career advancement.

However, research shows that women are more adept at skills needed to succeed in decision-making environments. Women display greater intuition, mental flexibility, long-term planning, imagination, articulation, and have better social and people skills than men. A Credit Suisse research shows that stocks of few global companies performed better after inclusion of women on company boards, which made these companies little more risk averse and a little less leveraged. Women on boards can make corporations a bit more conservative in taking unwarranted risks and building shareholder value.

We have more women in Nepal’s corporate sector, perhaps cooperatives, development banks, and finance companies could have avoided the current financial fiasco as their female board members would have tempered risky investments and checked for governance lapses.

Engaging more women in businesses, therefore, is not just about promoting diversity or gender equality in the workplace. It’s about bringing the best talents on board and making use of their vision and skills so that the company can perform better. It’s time the public and private sector recognised the unique contribution as well as the needs of its women officials and started providing flexible working options. Female managers on their part will need to take greater initiative to take their careers ahead, and become mentors for younger managers.
If he is remembered for nothing else, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai would like to leave his mark on Nepal’s capital with his ambitious road expansion drive. But he is finding that demolishing buildings was the easy part, coordinating between various government departments and rebuilding the roads are much more difficult.

A year after bulldozers tore through the narrow roads up Lajimpat and Gairi Dhara, some of them are being blacktopped. But Kathmandu is still looking like it has been struck by a mega-earthquake and the streets are enveloped in a perpetual pall of yellow dust.

Facing flak for the slow reconstruction, Minister for Physical Planning, Works, and Transportation Hridayesh Tripathi took a group of engineers and journalists to inspect the progress. Tripathi admitted work was slow, but that road-expansion was top priority for the coalition.

So far, only parts of two priority areas have been blacktopped: Kamal Pokhari-Gaushala and the Sital Niwas-Baluwatar road. Work started on Wednesday to tarmac the Bhagwati Bahal-Bhatbhateni stretch.

There are still some houses that have refused to be torn down, and there are bottlenecks near the Russian, Chinese, French, American, and Japanese embassies which have refused to give an inch.

On one stretch from Sano Gaucharan to Sifal Chaur, half the road is taken up by debris, while the water mains below the other half have been ravaged by traffic. As a result, the road is obscured by a fog of dust and turns into a river of sludge when water is supplied once a week.

Rajan Sarki was forced to close his shoe shop near Maligaun alley because the hut in which it was rented was torn down. “The rent here is higher, and my old patrons don’t yet know that I have shifted here,” he says. Bakeries, groceries, and meat shops have been similarly affected, not just by the move but also by dust.

The government is keen to finish laying down water and sewage pipes and moving electricity poles over the winter before blacktopping the roads. Altogether 95km of roads have been earmarked...
for re-construction, but the Kathmandu Valley Town Development Committee (KVTDC) wants to increase it to at least 116km.

“There is no end to the number of roads that need to be widened,” says Ram Prasad Shrestha, an engineer of KVTDC. “We had picked up speed during the early part of the drive, but recently things have slackened because of the uncertainty over the budget.”

Although most people in Kathmandu credit the Bhattarai government of “at least doing something”, among those who have lost property and haven’t got compensation there is festering anger. The cost of tearing down and widening roads has already exceeded Rs 1 billion, and completing the blacktopping will cost another Rs 5 billion, and that does not include compensation.

TOP PRIORITY: The government has earmarked the above roads for immediate blacktopping (brown: widened roads, black: blacktopped sections).
**EVENTS**

**BATKO CINEMA**, six movies, six screenings, six fabulous opportunities to watch amazing documentaries on the streets of Patan, 6 to 21 December, Thursdays and Fridays, 6pm onwards, Patan, 9813485716, (01)5523486

**LEADERSHIP IN SOUTASIA**, diplomat, writer, thinker, and former governor of West Bengal, Gopal Krishna Gandhi will address chronic issues that continue to affect and ravage Southasian societies. Open to all, 10 December, 6pm, Hotel Aparna, Durbar Marg, (01)4472807/5447279

**Piano lessons**, a month-long tutelage under Thomas Duvigneau who shall be teaching rhythm, sight reading, scales, simple and advanced harmonisation, piano solo, and comping. 9 December to 9 January, 5 sessions a week, (01)5352354, info@katjazz.com.np

**BIRDWATCHING**, catch a glimpse of one of the 34 species of globally threatened bird species who call Nepal their home. 15 December, 7am, Phewa lake, cultural shows, or indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery on the hotel premises.

**T & PEPPER RESTRO LOUNGE**, espresso, mocha, late, frappuccino, cocktails, liquor, beers and a beautiful rooftop view. Lakeside, Pokhara, (051)483484, 9482210688, www.tpepperpeki.com

**Live at Café 32**, live music, and delicious food every Friday, 6pm onwards, Café 32, Battistapul, (01)4244237

**DINING**

**Salt & pepper restro lounge**, 15 December, 7am, Hotel Heritage, (01)6614231

**Freros, visit for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights. Sohoire Chinese Plaza, (01)4473999

**KOTETSU**, authentic Japanese dishes that cater to your needs and taste buds. Lajimpat

**Chopstix**, savoury Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Try the famous drums of heaven. Kumaripati, 5551116

**GETAWAYS**

**Winter camp at Borderlands**, send your kids packing into the jungle where they get to develop their leadership, communication, and basic life skills while taking part in outdoor and extracurricular activities such as tent setting, rock climbing, canoeing, abseiling, cooking and art, music, and dance lessons. 8 to 12 January, Borderlands Resort, Bhotechadi, (01)4381214, 9802025668, www.borderlandsresorts.com

**Hotel Barahi**, enjoy a great view of Phewa lake, cultural shows, or indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery on the hotel premises. Lakeside, Pokhara, 01-4602400, www.nepalsutra.com

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**MINDFULNESS MEDITATION**, join Jharna Bajracharya for a deeply enriching journey into your mind. 9 and 10 December, 10am to 4pm, Pranamaya Yoga Studio Boudha, Pipal Bot, regular via info@pranamaya-yoga.com, 9894099220

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

**Hotel Heritage**, enjoy the exquisite architecture and traditional ambience, but make sure to book your rooms online with NepalSutra. (01)4701510, 9851002920, info@nepalsutra.com

**NO NAME RESTAURANT**, enjoy a great view of Phewa lake, cultural shows, or indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery on the hotel premises. Lakeside, Pokhara, 01-4602400, www.nepalsutra.com
Changing childhood

Well-known photographer Thomas L. Kelly gives us a rare insight into the world of young Nepali girls and boys as they navigate their way through different kinds of Nepal: the traditional and modern, the privileged and deprived. Organised by the German aid agency GIZ, the exhibit Adolescent Girls in Nepal: Between Tradition and Modernity displays photos of girls carrying heavy loads on the fields, girls who dream of becoming football stars, nurses, and teachers, and girls whose certificates from religious schools are not accepted. Each portrait reveals the challenge of being a young female in today’s Nepal, but also their strong will and desire for a better future.

7 to 16 December, 8am to 6pm Indigo Gallery, Naxal (01)4413580

PHOTOS: Ruby Tuesday

SOMEPLACE ELSE

Housed in a refurbished old Newari building called Deva’s Arcade, the Heritage Kitchen and Bar is decorated in carved wooden pillars, red and black draperies and glossy brasswork. In the storeys above and below, there is an art gallery, a traditional craft store, and a newly opened pashmina shop, all of which offer a visual treat even before one enters the restaurant.

However, the two-year-old Heritage owes its popularity through word of mouth by satisfied consumers, and not the mock-cultural milieu. These days, it boasts a new menu that the owners hope will draw not only tourists and trekkers but also locals back to Thamel.

While the façade suggests that the menu would be swamped by Nepali and Newari delicacies, this was thankfully not the case. The emphasis, surprisingly, was on Thai cuisine. The Thai beef salad (Rs 350) comes with marinated and char-grilled rump steak cut into slices into which are tossed cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, mint and coriander, and mixed in a sweet and spicy sauce. The ground and roasted crispy rice on top adds an interesting texture to the dish.

Pho ko (Rs 150) or fried lungs in Nepali style was the other surprisingly good appetiser we sampled. Fried pieces of goat lungs slathered with tomatoes and chilies were a pleasant change from the regular versions we had elsewhere.

Since we were told Thai food was the chef’s specialty, we ordered the Khao Pad Kapro Kai (Rs 325): minced chicken cooked with black mushrooms, served with plain rice and topped with a fried egg. The dish didn’t quite pack the punch that is typical of Thai dishes but still stimulated our taste buds.

The Kang Phed Kai Nua (Rs 400) remained true to its Siamese roots, zinging about our palate with its vibrant flavours. This spicy curry cooked with coconut milk is seasoned with fish sauce, lemongrass and galangal, and goes great with plain steamed rice.

In addition to its quick friendly service, The Heritage boasts an open terrace and food that is indicative of other Thamel restaurants of a similar standard, all of which guarantee that I will return to The Heritage once again. You will too.

Ruby Tuesday

How to get there: get to Narsingh Chok (it’s the second crossroad) in Thamel, and turn left, after about 100 metres, look up to your left and you’ll see the signboard. For Thamel regulars, the entrance to The Heritage is right next to Sandwich Point. (01)4254343
The final 300

no oxygen equipment that worked and climbers still experimenting with various machines.

What they accomplished that day in terms of exposing the human body to such high altitude and cold was a medical and physiological landmark. The difficulty breathing at these altitudes is captured in many documentaries where the excessive panting of the climber is the dominant noise in the background. This panting is bad enough even with oxygen cylinders. Although Sherpa and Hillary finally climbed Everest in 1953, they had oxygen bottles to support them. It was only in 1978 that Italian Reinhold Messner and Austrian Peter Habeler completed the final 300 metres that had eluded Norton and Somervell without supplemental oxygen. But why did it take 54 years for climbers to successfully ascend to the top without additional oxygen?

Scientists in the 1970s and 1980s believed that without supplemental oxygen, the human body would have reached its point of exhaustion and even taking a single step would be impossible. So conquering Everest was out of the question. This conclusion arose from the maximum oxygen uptake which determines a person's level of fitness. However, the calculations were misleading as Messner and Habeler proved. Other medical reasons were the overpowering hypoxemia (cold temperatures) and hypoxia (lack of adequate oxygen) that caused climbers to turn back.

Clearly climbers like Norton and Somervell were outstanding human beings. Norton went on to become the governor of Hong Kong, and Somervell gave up a promising career as a surgeon in England to become a medical missionary in South India.
The town less travelled

TRISHNA RANA

The eastern district of Ilam has a lot going for it. With one of the highest literacy rates in the country and exceptional local leadership, it is a model of development for its poorer cousins like Taplejung. Tea and cardamom farming have sustained families for generations and the trade is still going strong with farmers looking to go organic to boost their incomes. The Green City initiative has made plastic bags a thing of the past and locals are working together with the municipality to manage solid waste (see page 12-13).

However, it takes a quick three-hour drive into Darjeeling to realise how much of Ilam's potential is going to waste especially in tourism. On the other side of the border, throngs of tourists from Kolkata, Sikkim, and an equal number of foreign travellers just for space in the city's famous Chowrasta square. From early morning, visitors line up at roadside stalls for a breakfast of omelette sandwiches and momos and the hustle and bustle continues till late at night. While some of the Western crowd come here to relax, enjoy the panoramic views, and visit tea estates, others use Darjeeling as a stopover before or after their Kangchenjunga trek or to climb Sandakpu, the highest peak in the region.

On the Nepali side, except for devotees who come to Mai Pokhari and NGO workers on field visit, you hardly see any tourists around Ilam. Scruffy guesthouses litter the main street. Ilam bajar shuts down promptly after sunset, although a few restaurants remain open till 7 pm.

“The government only cares about the Kathmandu, Chitwan, and Pokhara golden triangle. Outside of those three cities, it hasn’t made much effort to promote tourism or build infrastructure,” explains Dharma Gautam, a civil society activist.

While Ilam excels at most development indicators, it has fallen behind on tourism.

There are no records of the number of people who visit every year and neither are there any information centres. Visitors either have to scour the internet for info or find their way around through word of mouth.

Darjeeling and Ilam are not much different in terms of geography: beautiful tea gardens, panoramic views of the Kanchenjunga range. In fact Ilam is cleaner and more peaceful than the Indian town. Migration over the years from western Nepal has led to a fusion of Tamang, Gurung, Lepcha, and Brahmin cultures and lifestyles. And the landscape stretching from the Tarai to the hills is home to many species of animals and birds including the red panda.

“The entire district is connected by well-built roads and buses run regularly, although they tend to be overcrowded. The Sandakpuk trek can be done from the Nepali side as well from Deurali. The point is not to turn Ilam into another Pokhara. But there is money to be earned even through small-scale tourism. Home-stay programs offering local Ilami flavours can be an option. Agrotourism can be another alternative where students and interested visitors can live on farms and experience the production process first-hand.”

Mingma Sherpa who runs the well-known Hotel Chyangba along with her family (pic above) gets a steady stream of local customers during lunch. When we ask her what Ilam can do to attract more tourists, she replies matter-of-factly, “What tourists?”

The backbone of the district’s economy and the bread earner for generations of Ilamis, the tea industry pales in comparison to Darjeeling. While, the Darjeeling Tea brand is recognised around the globe, tea from Ilam only sells in the domestic market.

The tea industry in Ilam, on the other hand, has very little state support and is thriving mainly through the efforts of individual farmers and cooperatives. Surya Khadka, manager of Suryodaya Organic Tea Industry Cooperative in Fikkal, says the farmers are trying to use more organic fertilisers to attract international buyers. But he adds that the lack of technical know-how is a problem. When a major bug infects the tea gardens, they have no experts to turn to and have to control the disease through trial and error.

“The National Tea and Coffee Development Board has been of no help to us. The board does not even have a tea expert, it’s ridiculous” he admits.

While Ilam excels at most development indicators, it has fallen behind on tourism which could inject more money into the local economy and lift living standards.

The points for Ilam include a very low crime rate and lack of pollution compared to Darjeeling. For an urban dweller, taking a taxi from Durbar square to Chowrastra can take 3 hours. In Ilam, the entire district is connected by well-built roads and bus services are regular. But there is money to be earned even through small-scale tourism. Home-stay programs offering local Ilami flavours can be an option. Agrotourism can be another alternative for students and interested visitors can live on farms and experience the production process first-hand.

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People even travel all the way to India to see tea being processed in the estates.
Green Ilam gets greener

Nepal’s easternmost district of Ilam is known for its diligent citizens and scenic tea gardens, but it is also showing the way about how towns can be cleaner and greener with community participation and competent leadership.

The main strength of this district bordering Darjeeling in India is its educated population, and the visionary leadership of its elders. The district capital is now a model municipality promoting health, education, and an environment-friendly outlook.

NCDC’s climate change officer Aava Shrestha told us during a recent visit: “Natural resource management and energy efficiency are central to the concept of developing Ilam as a Green City and that is what we are working to do.” (see box)

Ilam’s network of micro hydro power currently benefits 20,000 people in and around Ilam, and has only three hours of power cuts a day. Two wards are using bio gas for cooking and to generate fertiliser for vegetable farms, and work has started to install solar-powered street lamps.

Ilam banned the use of plastic bags in 2010, earning it the Green City credential. The scheme is working well: shopkeepers are fined Rs 500 and shoppers fined Rs 200 on the spot for using plastic bags. The fine was a deterrence in the beginning, but most people now voluntarily shun plastic bags.

Partnering for Ilam

Inspired by a Peace Corps volunteer, Homnath Adhikari started Namsaling Community Development Centre (NCDC) to uplift rural development in Namsaling VDC, Ilam 30 years ago. Today Namsaling is a strong partner of the Ilam municipality in implementing successful development projects that have put Ilam on the national and international map.

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“We had to take this drastic step not just because plastic was littering the streets, but...”

Eastern Nepal’s model township is on its way to becoming the country’s first Green City.
also because it was polluting water sources, clogging water pipelines, and producing toxic fumes when burnt at garbage dumps,” says Dharma Gautam, a civil society activist. The municipality has set aside land to process bio-degradable waste and turn it into compost. One of the major focus of Green City is on solid waste management and the municipality is raising awareness to create zero waste at source. Each shop has a large green bin for disposing waste, and many have started sorting waste. There are dustbins attached to every electricity pole on the road, and litter-free zones have been declared to protect water sources.

Namsaling is working with the municipality to develop community managed water supply systems. The town’s population has doubled to 32,000 in the last 10 years, yet there is reliable water supply. The 25-bed district hospital will soon start recycling all its water by filtering it through a reed bed. Green belts have been set up by reforesting denuded slopes around the town.

The key to Ilam’s success has been that unlike national politics, the local political parties have worked together on good governance. “The cooperation of all the political parties and the decision of locals on priority projects have helped Ilam even during tough times,” explains Gautam. It also helps that Ilam’s budget has increased by almost 25 per cent in the last few years because it was rewarded for its performance in overall development indicators.

Ilam Calling

For journalist Kedar Sharma returning to his village in Kafark, Ilam after living in Kathmandu for almost three decades was anything but planned. It’s been a few months since he and his wife Kiran headed east to give life to their long cherished dream of starting a restaurant and the couple admit they are loving every minute. Says Kedar: “We are still getting used to the laid back way of life in Ilam while also working on setting up our restaurant Barpeepal Bisauni in Aitabaare.”

They have turned their abandoned ancestral farm in Karfok into their new home and started organic farming there. Sharma says Ilam’s potential as a tourist hub is yet to be explored. He hopes that with Barpeepal they will be able to introduce local delicacies of Ilam like niuro (fern) and makai chyakhla (cooked corn grits) to travellers and also promote tourism. “We don’t want to be like any other eatery that you find in Ilam bajar serving momo, chow mein and burger,” says Sharma, “we want it to be a place where people can come, lounge, enjoy good food and learn what Ilam has to offer.”
PM encircled by corruption

On Sunday, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai said: “I look like the corrupt, energy minister who is being brought up against me.” He went on to single out local government, development projects, labour, land reform, education and health as being specially grip-ridden. The irony of it all was that he was giving a speech on the occasion of the international day against corruption, and he and his party lead all these sectors. Bhattarai himself heads the ministries of urban planning, energy, and agriculture. Maoist vice-chairman Narayan Kaji Shrestha himself is the minister of local development. The labour minister is the two who have been in a relationship for the past one year and numerous photos of the couple on

Diplomatic disaster

Roshan Khadka, Naya Patrika
12 December

Nepali Ambassador to Brazil Pradhyumna Bikran Shah was seen riding a government issued vehicle with a local woman named Lub Jatureti. Sources say the two have been in a relationship for the past one year and numerous photos of the couple on Jatureti’s Facebook corroborate this claim. In one picture, the Nepali ambassador is seen standing next to the controversial Nabin Bhandari. Shah has been accused of having an affair with the daughter of the head of the Kathmandu Valley Drinking Water Pvt Ltd (KUKL), Bhattarai’s wife, Nita Shah. It is said have put pressure on the Kathmandu and Lalitpur municipalities to hire her sister, Tina, in charge of the state-owned company. Tina replaced Prajag Lal Joshi who was appointed to the post through open competition four years ago. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also responsible for appointing the controversial Nabin Bhandari to the post of joint secretary. Jha is the same person who handed over Rs 800,000 to the wife of Hindu activist, Kashi Tiwari, who was murdered by Bhattarai loyalist Prabhu Sail in 2006.

So ultimately if the solutions to all problems lie with you, then you must also make some compromises. I agree and our party has been reiterating that all alternatives have to be discussed. We have been talking to all the parties, the Madhesi parties, and even to the CPN-M. We have to come to an agreement about many things, and must compromise. In the next few days, there has to be an understanding between the NC, UML, and us, and mainly between the NC and us. Just like the close discussions between Girija Prasad Koirala and myself made the 12-point agreement in 2006 possible, the current crisis hinges on what the NC and us decide. By agreement, do you mean a mixed system of governance? No, no, not only that. That would be one alternative, but there could be others as well. In any case, there has to be an understanding between the NC and us. I told the leaders of the UML and NC just now not to take any decisions in excitement, because we must provide a solution. Your party has split and your militia has been integrated. Are you scared and trying to avoid the elections? That is totally untrue. Yes, the party has split, our soldiers have been integrated, and the crisis grows. But ask every member of our rank and file, and they will tell you how confident they are. I made calculations of all 75 districts and think we are not weak at all. In fact, we deeply suspect that it is parties like the NC and UML who want to lead the government and postpone polls in order to weaken us. Are you ready to hold elections in April 2013? Yes, we are fully ready and committed to polls in 2013.

From the Nepali Press

Diplomatic disaster

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GANEESH ACHARYA

Five years ago, if Nepalis living outside the country wanted to tune into their favourite radio programs from back home they would have to scour the internet for hours. Many Nepali radio channels didn’t have an online presence and even if the listeners had access, streaming audio was problematic.

Today not only are local radio stations improving their websites and extending their reach through the internet, but those studying or working abroad are establishing Nepal’s presence on the global airwaves by providing news, information, and entertainment to the diaspora community in their mother tongue. There are now six stations in the US and Australia, and a couple in South Korea. Gurkha Radio on British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) was the first Nepali language radio channel outside the country. Started in 1952 in Singapore to serve the Gurkha police and their families, the channel broadcasts on different FM and AM stations across 38 countries as well as on the internet. Currently there are 15 BFBS correspondents based in Nepal and the British radio recently opened a sister station in Kathmandu.

On the other side of the Pacific, Nepali language broadcasters are taking over the airwaves. Sanjeev Parajuli from Texas turns on the Radio Yuva app on his iPhone every morning at 6am and is a devoted listener of host Badri Sapkota’s Dharma Sandes (religious messages). “Every time I tune in, I feel like I am at home in Nepal,” says the 24-year-old student.

Keshabh Khadka, a bio-medical engineer and Ashish Shrestha, an electronic engineer started Radio Yuva in Dallas, Texas a year ago. The duo began their journey hosting a talk-show called Khas Kura (special talk) at FunAsia AM, a South Asian radio channel. Although Keshabh was anxious about whether listeners would tune in and how they would react, he is pleased with the station’s stable following. Today thousands of users turn to Radio Yuva on their android and apple devices as well as through their website and the station employs 10 part-timers.

“Shows like NepMasti and Good Morning America provide recent news and gossip from Nepal and also the latest movie and pop songs, so our listeners don’t have to go searching on YouTube or other sites,” says Keshabh, “celebrity interviews are very popular with our audience.”

Down under in Australia, Hamro Internet Radio and Himalayan Radio have been filling Nepali homes with familiar sounds. With four stations in Sydney, Darwin, Perth and Brisbane, Hamro Internet runs 12 shows per week. Director Dikpal Dev Pangeni hosts Prasanga (experiences) as well as a show where he talks to Nepalis scattered across the globe through Skype called Sansarbhari Nepal (Nepalis around the world).

“Our radio focuses on Nepalis living in Australia, but our team is very diverse, we have Indians and Australians running shows,” explains Dikpal.

Although a small studio can function on a few laptops with internet connection, difficulties getting licences, managing time between part-time workers, and lack of funding are keeping potential broadcasters at bay. “Our programs are becoming increasingly popular and our audience wants more shows. But we don’t have enough money at the moment to expand,” laments Keshabh of Radio Yuva.

www.bfbs.com
www.radioyuva.com
www.hamrointernetradio.com

LOUD N CLEAR: Dikpal Dev Pangeni (far right), director of Hamro Internet Radio of Australia in the studio with his colleagues and Keshabh Khadka on air for Radio Yuva in Texas (below).

The goodness of bubbly freshness
as the political stalemate drags on, the Ass has taken the trouble of listing all the possible direction this great nation of ours could take in 2013:

1. Jhusil Da is PM and we all die of boredom
2. BRB continues as PM for life
3. President extends deadline for formation of consensus govt till December 31, 2022
4. PKD outfoxes BRB and makes himself PM
5. BRB outfoxes PKD and makes Yummy PM
6. We resurrect the monarchy and restore the Malla dynasty
7. Subcontract the country to LKY or GMR
8. Make Padam Kunwar a benevolent dictator of the proletariat
9. Prez appoints an Ass as prime minister
10. The world is ending next week, so who gives a fig?

Everyone blames the political stalemate on disagreement over a consensus government. The real reason is the upcoming general assemblage of the Unified-but-Divided Maoaddie party next month and the struggle for control between Lotus Flower and Red Flag. Signs of this have been apparent for some time, but it has now manifested itself in fist fights where PKD goons are giving BRB goons bloody noses and vice versa. It used to be the Dash Baddies and the Cash Baddies who were at each other’s throats, but Bash Baddies have also joined the fray. There is a tug-o-war to woo senior comrades, and PKD seems far ahead with the combined war chests of Mahara, Postman, Ugly, and Prabhakaran who between them control telecom, illegal sand and boulder mining, and have a monopoly on bulldozer rentals.

With all their energy expended on the coming showdown in January, Unserer Fuhrer is keeping everyone confused by pushing a new candidate for PM everyday. On Sunday he tells the president to call for a consensus government, on Monday he tells BRB to confront the president, on Tuesday he informs the Kangrejis that Jhusil Da has his blessings, on Wednesday he puts forward Comrade Cloudy as his preferred candidate, on Thursday he presses eh-Maleys not to agree to Jhusil, on Friday he tells Gutch there must be a Madhesi PM, and on Saturday he says maybe there should be a civil society prime minister. The multi-tongued Chairman’s gameplan is to allow BRB to continue until the convention and then swiftly move to make himself the next prime minister. He would then run circles around everyone so there would be no elections in May. But just as PKD is determined to take over, BRB is equally determined not to let go. The wily Comrade Chairman seems to have hoisted himself by his own petard but is convinced that ultimately money can buy him love.

Deputy PM and Firanghi Minister Kaji Naran Kamred has now decided his future lies in hanging on to the Chairman’s coat-tails. After giving donor agencies and INGOs a hard time on aid policy and registration, he has now trained his sights on the prime minister and president, accusing them of hobnobbing with foreign ambassadors and alien visitors without his permission. In a long tirade last week, he said he was so sick of his boss not listening to him that he is tempted to retire from politics and go seek nirvana. No one really believes Kaji wants to go to Kasi, and the real reason for NKS’ emotional outburst seems to be the fact that he wasn’t invited to the bash in honour of visiting King of Kashmir thrown by Lord of the Animals at Bijaybas.

No sooner did we see our ambassador in Brasilia in flagrante on FB cavorting with a rascous Brazilian lawyer than the tabloids have been full of rumours of Comrade Top Man being treated to a special screening of Talash in the arms of geishas. Eye-witnesses said they found the Gas Minister’s moves more entertaining than the on-screen drama.

Wake me up when there is a consensus.