As the election euphoria evaporates, it is down to realpolitik again. The first test of whether the victorious NC and UML have turned a new leaf will be if they resort to their dog-eat-dog rivalry in the formation of a new government in the coming weeks. It also remains to be seen how the Deuba and Koirala factions of the NC work out a power-sharing deal and who becomes prime minister. If the past is any indication, they will be fighting tooth-and-nail. So far, the UML is insisting on a new president, say Subhas Nemwang, in return for letting the NC lead the government. In all this, all Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal could do was head off to the Election Commission on Wednesday with 13 losing parties to demand vote recounts (pictured).
The centrist Nepali Congress and UML shouldn’t see this as a winner-takes-all mandate

age of persuasion and performance. The people don’t want to be treated as fools and fed empty slogans, they want exactly what is going on, who is lying and stealing. 

In their euphoria of victory and overblown vermillion rallies, the NC and UML may think that the table has turned and they can go back to their winner-takes-all behaviour. The people remember only too well the parasitic politics of the NC-UML rivalry in the 1990s. Some of the most strategically corrupt and opportunist leaders from that era, unfortunately, have managed to get themselves elected this time too.

Are there no rules and procedures in this country? The Maoists can do whatever and whenever they please? Bhattarai and Dahal like gods, like kings. We shouldn’t have expected anything different from a mass movement. But when the Maoists cried foul now.

อกlahas out, NC/UML back in town, Dahal’s inability to pull off some reconciliation commission? Surely we can go back to Paris Danda and redraw the boundaries and names of federal provinces. In a country with 126 ethnic groups and 123 languages, this has to be done with care, redressing historical exclusion through devolution of political power to the regions. Call it federalism if you want, but it means reviving the process of community-led development by elected local representatives that had begun in the mid-1990s. Only this time we need to build in inclusion of the disenfranchised and marginalised into local elected structures. For that, the first order of business is to conduct local elections. Nepal needs to get its politics back on track so investment-led growth and development can create jobs, just like it had started happening in the early 1990s.

The first Constituent Assembly was deadlocked over the boundaries and names of federal provinces. In a country with 126 ethnic groups and 123 languages, this has to be done with care, redressing historical exclusion through devolution of political power to the regions.
The UCPN (M) has reacted badly to its humiliating defeat in the elections. As results started coming in last week, the Maoist leadership concluded at a meeting conducted at 3am that the polls were rigged and that they were victims of an international and internal conspiracy to defeat them.

The immature reaction demonstrated that the Maoist leadership had become unhinged and was behaving in a politically unbalanced way. On the evening of 19 November, Pushpa Kamal Dahal had himself asserted that the polls had been free, fair, and independent. It had been Dahal’s proposal in the Hetauda Plenum to have the Chief Justice lead an election government. Although this was opposed by civil society, professional organisations, and the Bar Association, the elections took place because there was no other alternative.

Initially, the Maoists’ reaction could be blamed on the shock of defeat. But the party is still behaving in an irrational way. By playing bad losers, the Maoists have shown themselves to be anti-political, irresponsible, and still prone to making threats about going back to war. This has demolished what little credibility the party had earned in the past two years. The Maoists have no alternative but to accept the election results, not doing so would lead to a further dangerous split. The Baburam Bhattarai faction of the party doesn’t look like it will abandon the Constituent Assembly and Dahal may be driven into Mohan Baidya’s fold.

The party would be better advised to analyse the reasons for the defeat and to take steps to correct some of them. A post-mortem of the election result shows that there were many reasons why the UCPN (M) had to bear such an undignified loss:

1. The people’s abhorrence of political violence and the behaviour of Maoist cadre in intimidating and extorting ordinary people.

2. Popular rejection of ethnic politics and the Maoist support for federalism based on single ethnicity. The Maoists were blamed for planting the seeds of extreme ethnic politics both by backing ethnicity-based federalism and Madhes autonomy. The election results showed that this agenda was rejected by many Janajatis and Madhes themselves.

3. It is true that secularism, federal republicanism, and the formation of a Constituent Assembly were mainly Maoist agendas which won support of the people in 2008 because voters thought that these would bring peace. But after seeing the arrogance of the Maoists in power, voters figured out that the promises were just slogans.

4. The Maoists were blamed for the failure in writing the constitution and the popular perception was that they just wanted to remain in power.

5. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, in particular, was blamed for being obsessed with returning to power and not caring too much about constitution-drafting.

6. Dahal became the Maoists’ main liability during the polls because of his contradictory statements, public lies, and the perception that he lacked integrity.

7. The CPN-M took away 90 seats and split the vote bank. Many CPN-M cadres actively campaigned against the parent party candidates. This fact alone was enough to cost the Maoists the election.

8. Even after the split, the real revolutionaries within the UCPN (M) became disenchanted with the leadership and were unhappy with the party embracing opportunistic newcomers.

9. The luxurious neo-capitalist lifestyle of the leadership (particularly Dahal and Hisila Yami) made the party unpopular with the cadres and the masses.

10. Maoist supporters and ex-fighters who had sacrificed all, had been wounded or suffered during the conflict asked: “What was it all for?” They had seen the party leadership siphon off allowances and compensation meant for them and the elections provided the perfect opportunity to exact revenge.

Muma Ram Khanal was a central member of the Maoist party during the conflict. His column, Inside Out, appears fortnightly in Nepali Times.
NEW DELHI -- The case of the double murder of 45-year-old Hemraj Banjade (the house-help from Arghakhanchi district in Nepal working for a family in the Delhi suburb of Noida) and 14-year Arushi Talwar was finally decided by a 'special CBI court' in the Indian capital on 25 November. The gavel came down against Rajesh and Nupur Talwar, the dentist couple parents of Arushi. The husband committed the double-murder, with the wife as accessory to cover-up.

The case has polarised society here between those who firmly believe that the Talwar couple was innocent and others maintaining this as a case of poor, powerless, and foreign domestic helpers being made easy targets of violence. A trail of incompetent investigations of the UP Police and CBI marked the five-year-passage of this case, with the press following it with great interest due to its sexual intrigue.

The body of Arushi was found in her bedroom the morning of 16 May 2008. The immediate suspect was Hemraj, but then his decomposed body was discovered in the terrace upstairs the next day. Other Nepali migrant workers were dragged into the net of investigations and subjected to narco tests, 'brain mappings', psychological evaluations, and polygraph tests. The workers included Krishna, Rajkumar, and Vijay, who were later released, but the stigma remained so strong that they are all said to have left for Nepal.

The Talwars were sentenced and they apparently plan to submit an appeal to the Allahabad High Court and from there, if required, to the Supreme Court. As the case seems set to proceed through the Indian judicial system, the issues and implications for Nepali society need to be considered back in Kathmandu. At the basic level, it is an agonising testament to the failure of politics to guide the economy that Nepali citizens of plains, hills, and mountains continue to have to go to India (Himachal's 'kalapahad' apple orchards, Punjab's wheat fields, Bombay bylanes, etc) as they have historically, for the sake of feeding their families.

While the Uttarkhandis (from Kumaon and Garhwal) were roughly at the same place and status in the plains as Nepalis some decades ago, they have since moved up the social ladder. The Nepalis, on the other hand, are competing with others communities who have entered the occupations of domestic help such as chowkidari, restaurant labour, workshop helpers, and agricultural work.

The various marginalised groups within India (adivasis, Dalits, and others) and Bangladeshis are in competition. The Indian citizens of Nepali origin are faced with some of the same, as well as other challenges.

Several criminal cases over recent years have hurt the image of Nepali migrant workers in India and the name of the ‘bahadur’ has been sullied. The extraordinary media interest in such cases, especially where the urban middle and upper classes are victims, has had the effect of negative labeling.

The media interest on 'manpower' issues related to the high-visibility labour migration of Nepalis to Malaysia and the Gulf diverts attention from the very poorest undocumented workers in India. There are few studies of Nepali workers in India and matters related to their social status and security are ignored with fatalistic negligence.

The political instability in Nepal has affected employment and this must be reversed so our citizens won’t have to go elsewhere for work, a move that disrupts family life, weakens the home economy, and creates a cumulative burden of national psychological distress.

The media interest on 'manpower' issues related to the high-visibility labour migration of Nepalis to Malaysia and the Gulf diverts attention from the very poorest undocumented workers in India. There are few studies of Nepali workers in India and matters related to their social status and security are ignored with fatalistic negligence. The government in Kathmandu has not even placed an ambassador at Banarkamba Road for more than two years.

As Nepal transitions towards more representative and accountable government, the single focus and goal for policy-makers and politicians should be on generating mass-level dignified employment within Nepal.

Hemraj Banjade was forced to serve a society and economy far away from his own. When the departure of Nepali citizens for work in India ends, it will indicate that Nepal is about to fulfill its historical promise as a nation-state to its citizens.

Kanak Mani Dixit

Himal Southasian January 1997: 'Lowly labour in the lowlands.'
Here's to losing

The long interview with Nepal's football gods, the nation's chief protagonist. Like our interest in Salman's football antics and the nation's football heroes, this kind of obsession does not square with our natural suspicion of Big Brother. The result is an adulteration with our natural suspicion of Big Brother.
Little Tibets

As the number of refugees decline, Tibetan schools in Kathmandu replace them with Nepali students

It is morning assembly at Atisha Primary School in Ekantakuna and the students are chanting a Tibetan Buddhist prayer and singing two national anthems. The principal speaks to the children in Tibetan.

But the school, opened in 1984 for the children of Tibetan refugees and one of four in the Valley, is running out of students. There are now only 54 students from Kindergarten to Grade 5, the lowest number enrolled in a school that used to have 130 children.

“Each year we have more than two students who leave because their family has migrated to either the US or Canada,” explains principal Buche, who thinks the school’s days are numbered.

In the 1990s there were still 20,000 Tibetan refugees living in Nepal and today the population has dwindled to 13,000. Limited rights and lack of legal recognition in the host country have sent many looking for a better life abroad.

Although there is no strict code that bars non-Tibetan students into the Ekantakuna school, students have been deterred by the compulsory Tibetan language. This may have to change if the school wants to attract non-Tibetan students in order to survive, Buche admits. Currently more than half the students in Tibetan schools are sponsored by benefactors.

The school was set up so refugee children could learn in their own language, and earlier that was the reason parents sent their children here. But now, even Tibetan parents prefer the private school system which has better English instruction.

“Most children find Tibetan difficult and force parents to send them to private English schools,” says Norbu Tsering, headmaster of Namgyal Higher Secondary School in Sundarijal which is the only Tibetan school offering 10+2 and has 450 students. It is seeing a decrease in enrolment even though it was number four in a college ranking by Himal Khaharpatrika last year.

Tibetan schools would have been much worse off had it not been for the influx of students from Nepal’s northern districts whose mother tongue is Tibetan. In fact, the Srongtser Bhrikuti Boarding School in Boudha has reported an increase in enrolment with half its 750 students Nepalis.

“It is easier for these students to fit in because they share the same culture as Tibetans and they get quality education at half the price of private schools,” explains Tsering.
AYESHA SHAKYA

Matrika Devkota was 15 when he first started suffering from symptoms of depression: long periods of sadness, fatigue, loss of appetite, difficulty concentrating at school. He visited doctors in his hometown of Gorkha, but they were dismissive and told him that he was just going through a normal teenage ‘phase’. “It was the darkest time of my life. I knew I needed help, but didn’t know where to go,” recalls Devkota.

After spending years in isolation with little support or understanding from friends and family, Devkota was finally able to give a name to his illness at 25. His sister-in-law took him to the Mission Hospital in Gorkha where he was diagnosed with chronic depression. It took him only five years of therapy and medication to make a full recovery. With an ISC degree in forestry, Devkota began working as a forest ranger in Dang. But something did not feel right. He quit his job and decided to dedicate his life to rehabilitating mental health patients and helping them lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Devkota started out by caring for homeless patients from a room office in Ekantakuna. Then in 2008, he opened an NGO called Koshish which focuses primarily on women and children who have been abandoned and left by their families. Currently, the protection home in Ekantakuna houses 13 women, including four with children, and three men.

The 42-year-old’s unwavering commitment to improving the quality of life of mental health patients earned him the prestigious Dr Guislain ‘Breaking the Chains of Stigma’ award in 2013 for helping bring about the integration of mental health care into general health care system. The award was given to him by the World Health Organization (WHO) Foundation.

Devkota opened Koshish in 2008 to help rebuild the lives of mental health patients who have been abandoned by their families. Currently, the protection house in Ekantakuna (above) houses 13 women, including four with children, and three men.

THE CAREGIVER: Matrika Devkota (above) opened Koshish in 2008 to help rebuild the lives of mental health patients who have been abandoned by their families. Currently, the protection house in Ekantakuna houses 13 women, including four with children, and three men.

In order to have well-trained mental health facilities, this way we can integrate treatment and also reduce the shame that patients face.”

While individual advocates like Devkota play a vital role in promoting mental healthcare in Nepal, the state’s efforts in the field have been abysmal. The government introduced a Mental Health Policy in 1997, which aimed to make services available to the general population by 2000. More than a decade later, there is little to show for. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare has pledged Rs 500,000 to Koshish. But donations to private organisations are of little use when there are no long-term plans in place.

Less than one per cent of Nepal’s total health budget is allocated for mental health. Most of this money goes to the 50-bed Mental Hospital in Patan. The facilities are too meagre to accommodate growing demand. There are only 32 psychiatrists and a handful of clinical psychologists and psychiatrically trained nurses in the country, mostly in cities.

In order to have well-trained professionals, better facilities, and develop a more sensitive approach to mental illness both the state and individuals like Matrika Devkota have to work as partners.
Tell your story, make a 1-2 min video about how girls are changing the world, contest open to girls aged 12 to 25, winner takes $10,000. www.letgirlslead.org

Guerrilla celluloid, learn from travelling director Uzair Sawal how to make a film on a shoe-string budget or less, 4 to 5 December, 0700 to 4pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel. www.satty.org, www.uzairsawal.com

Telling a Tale, Kitchen Dramas, world premiere of a play adapted from short stories written by Nepali women and girls. 6 December, 2pm, Theatre Village, Uttarakhand.

Walk for Human Rights, students from over 100 schools will convert their walls into banners and walk to end violence against women. 10 December, Kathmandu.

First sight, Sushmita, Pratigya, Khil Kumar, Sunathi, Roda, and Ganga cannot hear but they have learnt photography and invites you to their first ever photography exhibition. 30 November to 3 December, Siddhartha Art Gallery, (01)4218048, 9818209743

South Asian poetry festival, Free verse under the open sky poets from Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. 7 December, 11 am onwards, Basantapur Darbar Square; 8 December, 11 am onwards, Patan Darbar Square.

Open bazaar, it’s never too early for the Yuletide spirit when it comes to shopping. 7 December, 12 to 4pm, Embassy, Pani Pokhari, Lajimpat.

150 years of humanitarian action, a photo exhibition celebrating 150 years of the Red Cross. 30 November to 2 December, 0700 to 4pm, Patan Museum Gallery.

Pagoda Chinese Restaurant, Head to this jade palace if you are in the mood for Chinese with clean, green and peaceful environment. Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, (01)4412999, pvh@wlink.com.np

Barista Lavazza, the newest addition to the Valley’s European inspired coffee culture cafes serves excellent mochas and lattes, don’t forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich. www.facebook.com/barista.lavazza.nepal

Mongolian BBQ, start your weekends the right way, with traditional music. Rs 1,499, 7pm onwards, Shangri-la Village Resort, Lajimpat, (01)4412999, Ext. 7510, 7515

Mohit Chauhan live, everyone’s beloved balladeer is coming to town. Rs 500 to Rs 5,000, 30 November, 4.45pm onwards, Dasrath Stadium, Tripureswor, 9818842177

Kripa Unplugged, young Nepali musicians and seasoned veterans give an acoustic rendition of their favourite songs. 8.30pm and 10.30pm on Sundays, TTV, www.youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged

Women rock, female singers, musicians, and slam poets come together to speak out against violence against women. 6 December, 7.30pm, The Attic, Uttar Dhoka.

Shastriya sangeet, dabble in the magic of Hindustani classical music every new moon night. 2 December, 03pm onwards, Ram Mandir.

Starry Night BBQ, catch Ciney Gurung live as you munch on tenderloin. Rs 1,499, 7pm onwards, Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat, (01)4412999, Ext. 7510, 7515

BUBBLY BRUNCH, the best of the Mediterranean inshawarma and pasta. Rs 1,100, 11am to 3pm, Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat, (01)4412999 ext. 7510, 7515

Shangri-La Village Resort, spend your weekend under the shadow of breathtaking mountain views, landscaped gardens, water bodies and a relaxing ambience. Gharpant, Pokhara, (01)462222, (01)4410051.

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Menu makeover

T here is one more reason to visit the Coffee Shop at Hotel Annapurna this winter. The restaurant’s menu recently got a fresh makeover under American chef Brian Swiger who took over the kitchen in June. With over 40 new dishes representing South West, Italian and Creole cuisines, the newly minted menu may befuddle many but worry not. Each dish is an ode to the three cuisines Swiger spent years specialising and this admiration comes well displayed on the plate. We had the luxury to taste two appetisers, two mains and a dessert from the new menu. The Pork Confit Wonton, our first appetiser set just the right mood for our tasting. Light and refreshing, the perfectly prepared wontons were filled with a delicious mix of tomato, unions, pork, and sesame seeds, and together with the orange ginger sauce pleased our palates immensely. Our second appetiser was the South West Egg Roll. With a crunchy base of tortilla topped with shredded chicken, kidney beans, corn and spinach all rubbed in aromatic spices, this was another crowd favourite. For mains we had the Mushroom Cheese Sandwich and Chimichurri Pork Chop. The hero of the sandwich was the bread- Italian focaccia which as the chef informed was baked inhouse. Accompanied with a vinegar based coleslaw and fries, the mushroom cheese sandwich makes for a good lunch option. The Pork Chop at the Coffee Shop takes the title for being the best in town. The meat was tender and full of taste. Apart from these dishes, the menu also features few of Swiger’s signature dishes which include Creole Barbecue Shrimp, Mexican Tortilla Soup, Catfish Po’ boy. But, if you are not much of an adventurous diner, there are plenty of local favourites such as Dosa and Dum ka Mang to gorge on. The Coffee Shop, Hotel Annapurna, Durbar Marg

Speaking out

A selection of films from the ongoing Human Rights Film Focus

YALA MAYA KENDRA
29 November
11am, China blue, story of a seventeen year old girl who works at a Chinese sweatshop

2pm, Sari soldiers, six women’s courageous efforts in an escalating civil war in Nepal

30 November
10am, Saving face, a Chinese-American lesbian and her traditionalist mother are reluctant to go public with secret loves

2pm, Quest for honour, an activists works to investigate and eradicate honour killings in Kurdistan

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Education for peace

W hen the right to movement and speech was curtailed during the insurgency, Nepathya toured across the country to spread the message of peace and harmony among the people.

Now for the seventh time, Nepathya is setting off on a nationwide tour to 12 new cities, this time with the aim of voicing the concerns of children.

6 December, Ratananagar, Chitwan
6 December, Birat Chek, Morang
6 December, Damak, Jhapa
6 December, Lalbaidi, Sariahi
6 December, Taushali, Kupinbasu
6 December, Lamahi, Dang
6 December, Abu Kharem, Tanahun
6 December, Myepd, Beni
6 December, Gagan Gauda, Kaski
6 December, Patan Darbar Square

www.nepalaya.com.np, (01)4412469/4437693

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Bhathal, Bhaktapur

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FORGET US N
Nepal is a country of contradictions. The stunning Himalayan landscape, among the most fascinating and beautiful on the planet, stands out in sharp contrast to the widespread poverty and a lingering sense of hopelessness among the tens and thousands of Nepalis who live at the margins of society.

Like most other districts in the mid-west, the men of Jumla have migrated to bordering Indian towns for seasonal employment and there are only women, the elderly, and children to be seen. One cannot avoid thinking about the future of these children. Where will they go and what will they be doing in a few years? Will the boys follow in the footsteps of their fathers? The women, on the other hand, get up just before sunrise and toil in the fields and in their homes until late in the evening. How long will they carry on for?

Hari Sunar was my trekking guide 20 years ago when I first walked around Lake Rara. I met him again during my most recent trip. Hari and his family are Dalits and traditional goldsmiths by profession. In 2003 at the height of the insurgency, Hari’s father went out for a morning walk not realising what was going on in Jumla Bajar. He was mistaken for a Maoist and shot dead by the Army. Another local, who arranged our trekking this time round, recalls how he was forced to feed Maoist combatants for 10 years just so that his neighbours would be spared the bullets.

During the dark years of war, the people of Jumla were witness to numerous atrocities and human rights violations. Hundreds were tortured, raped, disappeared, and killed in the district by both the state and the rebel forces. Like other families across Nepal, Hari and his friends in Jumla await the truth.

Lalit Jung Shahi of the Nepali Congress won in the direct ballot in Jumla-1 last week. But promises of a new constitution, of new ways of governance do not make much sense to the people here. Shahi and the 600 members of the future CA would do well to heed to Jumla’s plea for closure.

Jan Møller Hansen is a photographer working with social documentary. He lived in Nepal from 1991-1995 and is back in the country working at the Embassy of Denmark in Kathmandu.
Thor: The Dark World

Aside from the horrendously selfish and infuriatingly vain running commentary by the two men sitting behind me during the first half of Thor: The Dark World, I would say (after I had gotten over my initial grumpiness) that there were bits of the film that I thoroughly enjoyed.

Chris Hemsworth is god-like as usual as Thor, and while poor Natalie Portman’s character, Jane Foster (Thor’s love interest) is sadly without any kind of spark, we do have once again the lovely and hilarious Kat Dennings reprising her role as Darcy Lewis, Jane’s intern, and then of course there is the formidably talented and devilishly attractive Tom Hiddleston as Loki, the morally challenged but charismatic brother of Thor, as well as the elegant Rene Russo as Frigga, Thor and Loki’s mother, Anthony Hopkins as Odin, Thor’s majestic father, and the ever great Idris Elba as Heimdall – the sentry to Asgard, one of the Nine Realms and Thor’s home world.

The plot of the film is nothing extraordinary: an old nemesis of Asgard, the Dark Elf Malekith, armies after a millennia to destroy the universe (anything less than the utter destruction of the universe these days is regarded as unworthy story matter). Somehow, Jane Foster, herself an astrophysicist, manages to absorb the Aether, a substance that Malekith must possess in order to obliterate the world as we know it, and of course, Thor must step in to save the world and the woman he loves. Yes, yes, I know it sounds boring, but let’s just accept that we all know it turns out well and we’re just along for the ride.

Go see the film if you think it’s your cup of tea; it has some hilarious one liners, a cameo here and there from the other Marvel films, the now obligatory bonus at the end of the credits that teases us into anticipating the next gazillion dollar blockbubber, and noisy spectators aside, it all makes for a fun and relatively restrained 112 minutes of fun.

And, because this needs to be addressed: a word to anyone who reads this column and thinks poor old Thor is unworthy, yes, cinema can and should be art, but it can and ought also to be pure fun. Don’t stick your nose up in the air about films like Thor – they allow thousands of people across the world to forget their troubles and lose themselves in pure fantasy for a few short hours – and that is no small thing.
Guilty unless proven innocent

In Anup Baral directed, Court Martial, trooper Ram Bahadur (Sudam CK) is doomed. Facing court martial for killing one officer and wounding another, his case is almost already decided. Presiding at the bench to spell out the imminent sentence is Col (younger brother of Ram Bahadur), a man of fierce reputation who has little time for subtleties.

But Ram, it turns out, is the ideal soldier. Polite and respectful, he has never had discussions, let alone fights, with anyone. His superiors speak glowingly of him and are puzzled why he would be trigger happy when on duty. To his credit, Ram even refuses to say anything against the prosecution when asked to the witness stand. So why did he do it?

Not convinced with what lies on the surface, his lawyer, Captain Bikas Pokhrel (Sushbabha Thapa), makes some unsettling discoveries. An army man with a brother fighting on the other side of the war, Pokhrel knows that feudal tendencies run deep in the army. Ram Bahadur in a Dalit and his surviving target Captain GB Rana is a proud and chauvinist aristocrat. The two have a history of one-sided abuse, which Pokhrel, the knight in shining white to Rana’s pantomime villain, is keen to expose. The Nepali translation of Indian writer Shudesh’s hit play, Court Martial, about semi-feudal and caste-first India of the early 90’s fits seamlessly to the Nepal of 2013. Deepak’s hero is a low-ranking soldier, compelled to obey without question every order that comes his way, despite legal guarantees to the contrary.

Court Martial marks the first ever theatrical performance for veteran Kollywood actor Rajesh Hamal. Where was he all these years? Or rather, where were we? Director Anup Baral deserves our gratitude for extracting such a layered performance from him. But it is Sushbabha Thapa’s smiling, well-read lawyer who steals the thunder from the great hero of Nepali film. Can his persistence save Ram Bahadur from punishment or will fate hand out poetic justice?

Sanit Pandey

Court Martial

Cast: Rajesh Hamal, Sushbabha Thapa, Divya Maitikey, Karma, BR Rana, Dayabhung Rai, Sudam CK

Directed by Anup Baral

Music by Laxman Kunwar

Rs 300 & Rs 500, Theatre Village, Uttar Dhika, Kunl 2 December, 5pm,
975213261,
www.actorstheatre.com.np

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Gaia Restaurant & Coffee Shop

Gaia Restaurant & Coffee Shop is easy to miss if you’re not looking for it. Tucked in a quiet alley off Amrit Marg in Thamel, its dusty white and maroon sign competes with a tantalizing white and maroon signboard to attract you towards Jyatha. As you are walking, keep an eye out for a white and maroon signboard to your left. It will point you to the Gaia Restaurant.

How to get there: once you enter Thamel, take the first left leading towards Nagarjun. As you are walking, keep an eye out for a white and maroon signboard to your left. It will point you to the Gaia Restaurant.

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Lawrence Miller

Get to know: once you enter Thamel, take the first left leading towards Nagarjun. As you are walking, keep an eye out for a white and maroon signboard to your left. It will point you to the restaurant.
Krishna Kumari, 24, from Palpa arrived at the hospital complaining of palpitations. She felt her heart was racing. When she was 12, Krishna had fever and developed uncontrolled movement of her limbs and tongue for a month although she never lost consciousness. In her adolescence she also had painful joints and the pain migrated from one large joint such as the knee to the next. But this too subsided over time with aspirin.

On examination at the hospital, the doctor detected abnormal heart murmurs and asked Krishna to undergo an echocardiogram to confirm the murmur on physical examination of patients. Students are extensively tested on their ability to pick up this murmur on auscultation. A typical murmur. Students are extensively tested on their ability to pick up this murmur on auscultation. A typical murmur.

In medical schools in Nepal, listening to heart murmurs caused by rheumatic heart disease is an important part of training. The most commonly affected heart valve by rheumatic heart disease is called the mitral valve and narrowing in the region of this valve (mitral stenosis) causes a typical murmur. Students are extensively tested on their ability to pick up this murmur on examination of patients.

The skill of carefully listening to heart sounds with the stethoscope and determining the kind of murmur and which heart valve it may be originating from is gradually disappearing. This is because it is so much easier to do an echocardiographic study and generally come up with a precise diagnosis. It would be ideal if doctors today carried out physical examinations with the same rigour as their predecessors and used echocardiogram to confirm the diagnosis. But the good news is that ultrasound technology is developing so rapidly that small, portable, and user-friendly echocardiogram machines are available for use even in remote corners of Nepal.

What is most important in the treatment of rheumatic heart disease is monthly injections of penicillin. A sore throat caused by streptococcus bacteria which is a very common cause of pharyngitis can easily exacerbate the heart condition of a patient with rheumatic heart disease. Hence, monthly injections have been found to be useful in preventing further valvular damage which sometimes requires surgery.

Thanks to the immense and exemplary work of cardiac surgeon Bhagwan Koirala, who initially headed the Shahid Gangalal National Heart Centre in Kathmandu, many Nepali patients now have access to proper heart surgery in Nepal. Around 60 per cent of those with ARF develop rheumatic heart disease. ARF is prevalent largely in developing countries because of poverty and overcrowded settlements.

In the last 60 years, the treatment of rheumatic heart disease has been significantly improved. There are monthly injections of penicillin which has been found to be useful in preventing further valvular damage which sometimes requires surgery. In developing so rapidly that small, portable, and crystal clear audio.

The AE2w’s sleek design brilliantly complements its excellent sound. The black metallic casing oozes class, it is cushioned around-ear fit, and weighing in at a mere 145 grams, the headphone allows for hours of extremely comfortable listening. The AE2w utilizes Bluetooth technology to wirelessly connect to your device. The device is capable of connecting simultaneously to two devices, which is handy especially when you are watching a movie on your laptop/tablet and you happen to receive a call on your phone.

The seamless transition from your movie to your call is truly practical. The AE2w is also superbly backed up by its built-in rechargeable Lithium-ion battery and a microphone to take calls. With a range of 30 feet, your days of wireless freedom have truly arrived. The AE2w is capable of running for up to 30 hours, with a rechargeable Lithium-ion battery which lasts approximately eight hours of intensive use on full charge. If you happen to run out of juice, then you also have the option of removing the microphone to take calls. With a range of 30 feet, your days of wireless freedom have truly arrived. The AE2w is capable of running for up to 30 hours, with a rechargeable Lithium-ion battery which lasts approximately eight hours of intensive use on full charge.
As assembly elections to the Indian capital approach, the new Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) faces a host of accusations, most of which are either unfounded or difficult to prove. It's not known what impact these accusations will have on the AAP, but the anti-corruption citizen’s party has re-imagined contemporary Indian political culture.

The AAP has reclaimed the ideals of Indian democracy that have been so persistently violated over the decades that they are now simply dismissed as manifestations of bygone idealism. The AAP’s charm lies in its audacity in attempting to translate this impractical idealism into reality.

When the AAP was formed less than a year ago, Indian political pundits thought it was bound to be a non-starter. Presumably, they reached this conclusion because their own perception of the political culture’s sheer imperviousness to impulses of change. They said that in order to succeed, a political party must adhere to one or two of the six principles of the Indian polity and the AAP did not seem to subscribe to any of them.

The first principle: charisma. The AAP lost the services of its most charismatic leader, Anna Hazare, who was opposed to his comrades entering politics. Charisma, we all know, helps overcome organisational shortcomings. Second: money. It was deemed the AAP couldn’t possibly muster the massive financial resources required to be competitive, even in a quasi-state such as Delhi. Its anti-corruption rhetoric was bound to alienate corporate money-bags, as would its avowed principle of making public the names of donors.

The third principle: cronyism. Its members had no prior experience of electoral politics and did not belong to families steeped in Indian politics for generations. The AAP, therefore, could not depend on India’s famed patronage system to gather votes. Fourth: firepower. The party lacked the muscle considered necessary to intimidate the poor into casting their ballot in its favour. Fifth: manpower. The AAP didn’t possess cadres who have been ideologically schooled and trained, as is true of the Left parties and the BJP. And the sixth and most important principle: audience. The party’s appeal was said to be confined to the middle class, which is considered notoriously fickle in its political allegiances and too indolent to even turn up at the polling booth. The AAP’s rhetoric did not even target a populous caste, which could constitute its committed voter-base and to which they could then weld other social groups.

Almost all opinion polls have predicted that the AAP is slated to perform well. Should it indeed poll a respectable vote-share, it could perhaps become the only new Indian party in recent times to succeed even as it flouted the six basic principles of India’s political culture.

No doubt, the last 30 to 40 years have seen a plethora of political parties emerge on the Indian landscape. However, most of them have been splinters from one or another organisation and have had as their spearheads those who were already seasoned politicians. For the first time in four decades, the AAP could emerge as the only new, centrist party to hold its own in an Indian election.

It has taken the AAP tremendous energy to defy the existing political culture. Its activists are what a friend calls democracy’s guerrillas, politicians overcoming obstacles through ingenious methods, whether in collecting funds or launching their poster-war or social media jousts.

The AAP’s ability to gather ‘clean money’ is decidedly the reason behind the hypocritical attacks the Congress and BJP have launched against its relatively small kitty of Rs 200 million. Should the AAP manage a good showing next month, its experiment could spawn a ripple effect in India’s more than 100 urban constituencies. It could then test the electoral waters in neighbouring Haryana state, where the opposition seems dispirited and decimated, and enter Mumbai, where goonda-gardi is considered the rite of passage for politicians. Should it fail, it still would need to be applauded for endeavouring to restore democratic ideals to the Indian polity. E: ajazashraf@yahoo.co.uk

Democracy’s guerrillas

For the first time in four decades India is getting an alternative political party to hold its own in elections

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Democracy's guerrillas

For the first time in four decades India is getting an alternative political party to hold its own in elections.
GOING LOCAL

This year, voters supported candidates familiar with their constituencies

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

Pre-poll predictions indicated that this time round, voters were more drawn towards local aspirants with credibility and a proven track record. Barring a few exceptions, most constituencies rejected high-profile, ‘tourist’ candidates and cast their ballot in favour of locals, regardless of their caste, ethnicity, or party affiliation.

Pitted against heavyweight Pushpa Kamal Dahal in the fiercely contested Kathmandu-10 constituency, Nepali Congress’ Rajendra Kumar KC, who is a native of Chobhar, defeated Dahal by a margin of more than 7,500 votes. In 2008, he had lost to Dahal by 11,000 votes. KC started his political career in 1974 as chairman of Chobhar Ward-2. KC mayoral of Mechinagar and worked to

is a well-known figure in the area and has worked alongside locals on various community projects.

In Jhapa-4, UML’s Rabin Koirla managed to woo voters with years of development work in the region. Born in neighbouring Panchthar district, Koirla spent most of his childhood in Jhapa and completed his education from here. Starting in 1990, Koirla remained a district committee member for 19 years. Then in 2009, the party elected him to the district chairman post where he has served two terms so far. After winning the 1998 local elections, he served as mayor of Mechinagar and worked to

bring electricity to the municipality. Koirla was also instrumental in turning the gravel road in Kakarbhitta bajar and the one joining Kakarbhitta–Bahundangi into concrete roads. Currently, he is the vice-chairman of Mammohan Memorial Hospital in Birtamol and has also headed the management committees in Kakarbhitta Multiplie Campus and Kakarbhitta High School.

Winner of Jhapa-4, Prem Giri from the UML has made a name for himself in the community as a social worker. Giri, who is the former chairman of Khudunabari VDC, runs an NGO and has been advocating for safe drinking water and health posts in the area. He has also travelled from village to village giving leadership training, nutrition education, establishing self-sustaining cooperatives, and writing project proposals for local organisations. Residents of Jhapa-4 chose Giri to represent them in the CA, not because of his ties with the UML, but due to years of hard work in the region.

The NC’s Dik Bahadur Limbu of Morung-9 was defeated in the 2008 elections by a small margin, but managed to crush another heavyweight, senior UCPN (M) leader and former finance minister, Barshaman Pun, this time round. Limbu started out in leftist

Swing voters

In weekly polls conducted with the support of The Asia Foundation, Himal Khabarpatrika asks 374 respondents in 12 cities across Nepal every Monday for their opinion on politics. One of the questions put out repeatedly was who they would vote for in the second Constituent Assembly elections.

From the first survey we did in the third week of August to the last one in the second week of November, right before the polls, it was clear that the Maoists wouldn’t do as well as they did in 2008. A large share of their dwindled support was redistributed among the NC and UML.

In August, one in five persons we interviewed said they were unsure which party they would vote for. This figure dropped to one in seven by November, but ultimately it was the undecided voters who decided which way the results swung.
“Constitution before 2015”

Interview with Rajan KC of the Nepali Congress who defeated UCPN (M) Gwalak, Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Kathmandu-10

Why do you think the people picked you over a powerful and influential leader like Dahal? Is it your political credentials or your persona that won you over?

I think it is a combination of my political credentials and my persona. I have worked for the people and have been involved in social work. If students cannot afford to pay their exam fees, Rai will do something about it. If people are involved in political parties, they will choose someone who is not only a good political leader but also someone who cares about their needs.

What makes you so popular in your constituency?

Over the past 20 years, I have worked among the people and contributed to development projects in the area. Neighbours believe that the NC can maintain peace in the country and steer it towards progress and prosperity. That is why they voted for me.

Will you be able to keep the promises you have made to the people?

This election was organised first and foremost to draft a new constitution. We will work on completing the constitution within a year and then focus on social and economic growth in the next four years. The 1990 constitution was drafted under the leadership of Congress and this time too we will work according to the people’s mandate.

Any message for your supporters?

First of all, I would like to thank everyone who voted for the NC. We plan to write a constitution that is inclusive of all identities and also helps erase the existing conflicts within our society. We will only create as many states as we can afford. The UML also agrees with our agenda.

Politics, but joined the NC in 1986. He has served as the village and regional level president as well as the party’s co-president for the district. His dedication to local development projects earned him the trust of his constituency. Chaudhary, who ran from an NC ticket, is currently the president of Laxmi Women Development, Savings, and Loan Cooperative. Raju Khanal also won in Chitwan-3 because of his emphasis on using local resources to kickstart development in the district. His friendly, polite nature also garnered him immense support.

Nara Bahadur Chand of the NC managed to defeat senior RPP leader and former Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand in Baitadi-2. He attributes his win to popular votes from commoners.

With additional reporting by Gopal Gadtaula, Kamal Rimal, Sabita Shrestha, Madhav Baral, Bachhu BK and Debika Chhatrimumagar.

Interview with Gopal Gadtaula, Kamal Rimal, Sabita Shrestha, Madhav Baral, Bachhu BK and Debika Chhatrimumagar.

Interview with Gopal Gadtaula, Kamal Rimal, Sabita Shrestha, Madhav Baral, Bachhu BK and Debika Chhatrimumagar.
The people of Nepal have fulfilled their duty, but will they get a constitution this time?

CK Lal: The first thing we can learn from this election is that Nepalis want a constitution at the earliest possible date. The people don’t want a complete upheaval, but an improved status-quo. So the challenge for the parties is to draft a constitution that treats everyone equally, addresses identity, is inclusive, and also regards capacity as a basis for federalism. They cannot afford to squabble among themselves like last time.

Minendra Rijal: Yes, it will be written. Both the NC and UML asked people to vote for ‘democratic parties’ and this time it looks like we will have a majority. But it doesn’t mean we will keep the Maoists out of the process.

Why is the UCPN (M) trailing so far behind in the vote count?

Agni Sapkota: People voted for us, but there was massive electoral fraud from the moment the officials transported the ballot boxes from the booths to the district headquarters. I can give you hundreds of examples.

But all national and international monitoring agencies said this year’s elections were far better than the 2008 polls.

Agni Sapkota: The Nepali public fully agrees with our agenda, but any vote has been suppressed. Certain parties are spreading rumours that we are crying foul because we have been defeated. But someday, the people will find out the truth about how their votes were hijacked in 2013.

A constitution can be written without us, but it will be an exact copy of the one drafted in 1990.

Second chance at nation building

Shreekamal Dwivedi, Setapaha, 26 November

In the last seven years, the country’s faltering economy went from bad to worse with thousands of people fleeing abroad for better opportunities. The same leaders who claimed to have fought a war to emancipate the marginalised, moved into lavish palaces. It was our mistake to have expected so much from such destructive minds. So this time round, the voters showed the Maoists such destructive minds. So this time...
Dr Baburam Bhattarai and me

If Dr Bhattarai hadn’t been born, my brother would be alive

RAMESH KHATRI

Even though I didn’t want to, fate has made my life intersect with that of Dr Baburam Bhattarai. The party of which he is the chief ideologue cruelly killed my brother, Mohan Khatri, at a hotel he ran in Mude of Sindhupalchok in 2002.

When they brought his body home after the post-mortem, my nephews told me: ‘Don’t look at his face, you won’t be able to sleep.’ My last sight of my brother was a body wrapped in a plastic sheet.

Those who had seen my brother said there was a big ‘khub’ gash on his brow, four of the fingers of his right hand had been chopped off, he had deep knife wounds on his neck. It was Dashain time and even sacrificial goats would have suffered more.

I could not sleep. ‘Don’t look at his face, you won’t be able to sleep.’ My last sight of my brother was a body wrapped in a plastic sheet. When they brought his body home after the post-mortem, my nephews told me: ‘Don’t look at his face, you won’t be able to sleep.’ My last sight of my brother was a body wrapped in a plastic sheet.

My other indirect relationship with Baburam Bhattarai is because of my friendship with his teachers at Luitel Bhattarai at the Putali Sadak Church.

In an interview in 2003 in Nepal Times Thomas Varughese had said: ‘Baburam’s goals are good, but the end does not justify the means. Baburam is smart, he should learn from history.’

Thomas Varughese did not teach Baburam violence. He learnt that in Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, inspired by other mass murderers in history. But from his speeches, it is clear Baburam’s conscience is bothering him now. He brought up The Hague at the Hetauda Plenum earlier this year and he must have realised that international law does not respect the revolutionary justice he used to justify the murder of fellow human beings. Maoist leaders now will have to think twice before visiting any other country besides India and China.

I had two chances to be face-to-face with Dr Bhattarai, but I couldn’t get myself to shake his blood-stained hand. Thomas and Mary Varghuese taught Baburam that one has to atone for one’s sins. The best way for Bhattarai to atone for his crimes is to change his behaviour, to abandon violence and embrace compassion.

I learnt forgiveness from Jesus Christ. I have forgiven Dr Bhattarai for my brother’s gruesome murder. What does forgiveness mean for me? I will never take him to court, nor will I seek revenge against him. But I will never respect a man who even today protects a convicted murderer like Bal Krishna Dhungel, or lets the YCL loose to break windows and other anti-violence demonstrations outside Baluwatar.

Without true atonement, Dr Bhattarai will not be respected even if he is powerful. The souls of 16,000 people will nag at his conscience. The spirits of Deksendra Thapa, Uday Shrestha, Mukthinath Adhikari, and countless others will pursue him until he admits his mistake and changes his ways. If the killers of Thapa could confess to his crime and ask for forgiveness, why can’t those who murdered my brother do the same, saying it would ‘endanger the peace process’. With that kind of plunder, development in the country didn’t stand a chance. Bloodshed can bring governments to power, but it will never ensure good governance. www.nepalchurch.com

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When he went to the United States in 2008, Baburam went to meet Thomas and Mary and his former teachers might have asked him: ‘Baburam where did you lose your way?’ They would not have agreed with a war that ended up killing 15,000 Nepalis, whatever the goal or their student wading in blood to come to power.

Baburam studied in a missionary school and became a revolutionary, just like another communist, Joseph Stalin. Before he died, Stalin had killed 20 million Russians. The only other communist who could kill Stalin in killing people was Mao, who was responsible for the deaths of up to 80 million innocent Chinese. Baburam used to have a figure of Mao in his office when he was prime minister. Even atheists, it seems, need to worship someone.

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For full version of Nepali text The villagers’ support kept me going, #116

History comes a full circle, #142
Youngish Turks and Old Geezers

It was bound to come to this. No sooner did the election result trends show the Kangresis and the A-Maleys far outpacing the A-Baddies, than they went back to their traditional fun and games of leg-pulling and back-stabbing. These are very early indications, but at this rate don’t expect a new cabinet to be agreed on before 2014. First, the triangular fight within the Kangresis among Lion Brave, Ram Chunder, and Shusu! Da has to be sorted out. SuxiQ rooting for Uncle Jhoos hasn’t helped the Koirala klan one bit, by the way, and we will need an interpreter for simultaneous translation from Nepali to Nepali if Uncle Buwa ever makes it to Balu Water. The Lion of the Far West is itching to become PM for the fourth time so he can work towards beating the national and international record set by Surya B. Lord Ram thinks he deserves national virginity. It is the thing that has made Nepal great is that we hate to lose. When it looked like we were losing against Gen Ochterlony in 1815, we signed a treaty with British India and gave away more than half our country just so we could keep our territorial integrity and national virginity. It is the same DNA that prompts the Bracket Baddies with both trying to outdo each other in royal will be between the NC and UML cadet to figure out that the other battle ministership. It doesn’t take a space

And if the Youngish Turks in both parties thought they would finally break the glass ceiling to be in govt, they have another thinking coming: the octogenarians have to kick the bucket first before the septuagenarians get their chance and only then will it be the young ones’ Palo. So, if the Old Geezers finally give Gagan Thapa a portfolio it probably will be the Ministry of Women, Children, Youth and Sports. Which, come to think of it, will be a great day for Nepali women and children, and may even improve our chances of scoring big in the T20 World Cup next year in Bangladesh.

Even though Nepalis are sometimes prone to snatching defeat from the jaws of victory in international matches, the thing that has made Nepal great is that we hate to lose. When it looked like we were losing against Gen Ochterlony in 1815, we signed a treaty with British India and gave away more than half our country just so we could keep our territorial integrity and national virginity. It is the same DNA that prompts the Bracket Baddies from accepting the rout in elections. Suddenly it was ‘grand design’, ‘hidden’ hand, and ‘international conspiracy’ once again. Faced with bitter criticism from within his party for fielding relatives and cronies, PKD had no option but to point his finger at the Army and an external, uncooked enemy. Interestingly, the losers all saw a hidden foreign hand but the winners (including Comrades Ugly, Horrible, Big Plop, Top Man, Powerful Brave) were fine with the results and were against boycotting the CA. Worried about anyone fight elections in the future? And then there is the strange saga of the Foreign Ministry being alarmed by ambassadors going all over the place having private teas with newly-elected leaders. It decided to write stern note verbales to all the embassies to stop it. But the leaders, who feel the visits boost their prestige, leaned on the Foren Min to write back. The same day, the election commission with 13 other smaller parties that didn’t win a single seat to complain of irregularities. For once, Commissioner Blue Throat stood firm and told them to bugger off.

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