Assamese singer wows music lovers in her ancestral homeland with popular love ballads that have got rave reviews.

Says Milan Newar Amatya: “My father told me not to limit myself to singing for 300,000 Nepalis in Assam, and to sing for 30 million fans in Nepal.”

MEET MILAN

The checklist for 2014 include the following:

1. Each party overcome fierce internal pressure to finalise the PR list by the thrice-extended 30 December deadline.
2. Interim Electoral Council finalises 26 names for the nominated list in the CA.
3. The cabinet will have to consult the political forces, but should not be dictated by them in finalising the list.
4. Once the 601-strong membership of the new House is finalised, it elects a prime minister and the president orders the Constituent Assembly to convene.
5. A new government is set up to take the country forward and revive stalled development.
6. Get all party agreement to conduct local elections by April 2014.

This roadmap may appear straightforward, but is fraught with pitfalls every step of the way. Tuesday’s four-point deal may have been needed to break the deadlock, but is an inherently undemocratic exercise that allows a group of elderly men to bypass an elected legislature. The PR mechanism was also designed to make the Constituent Assembly representative, but has been hijacked by the main parties who tend to nominate members to appease internal factions. Political parties have retreated to hotel resorts to finalise their PR lists over the weekend.
The checklist for the next few weeks is as follows:

- Each party must finalise its Proportional Representation list and pass that on to the Election Commission for verification. The PR mechanism was designed to make the Constituent Assembly representative, but has been hijacked by the main parties who tend to nominate members to balance disgruntled internal factions. Every party, including the NC-UML, faces pressure from the CA rank and file to be ‘rewarded’ with CA membership.

- The Interim Electoral Council will then decide on the 26 names for the nominated list. This, again, is a process to allow under-represented communities to be in the CA and also to bring in the new generation of writers, demographers, and social scientists. The cabinet will have to consult the political forces, but should not be dictated by them in finalising the list.

This roadmap may appear straightforward, but it is fraught with pitfalls every step of the way. The four main political forces may have papered over their differences in the High Level Political Mechanism with their agreement this week, but they each face internal challenges to finalise the PR lists. Which is why the parties have asked for another extension of the deadline till 30 December. The HLPC, given its track record, will try to interfere in the nomination of the 26 extra members. Then there remains the daunting task of cobbling together the new government. Let’s not expect a new CA and government before February.

Tuesday’s four-point deal may have been needed to break the logjam, but it is an inherently undemocratic exercise that falls into the same trap as the last CA of bypassing an elected legislature and retaining the monstrosity on power by a handful of elderly men striking murky backroom deals.

That the Nepali Congress and UML so easily acquiesced to allowing the HLPC to be an extra-constitutional and unaccountable power centre is a pity. It shows they have still not learned from the debacles of the past. It also proves that the UCPN (M), smarting from its electoral defeat and ridden with internal rifts and contradictions, wants a handle on power to compensate for its poor showing in polls.

The HLPC should be an advisory body and major decisions should be taken by the parties on the strength of their mandate from the people. That is what democracy is supposed to be all about.

To do list

After breaking the political deadlock this week, the main parties need to move swiftly on their checklist

- Once the 601-strong membership of the new House is worked out, the Election Commission will vet it and concurrently ask the prime minister and the president to convene the Constituent Assembly and parliament respectively. The chairman and other legislative officials need to be chosen.

- Only then will the president ask the parliament to set up a government, either made up of a coalition or a consensus.

- New government is set up to take the country forward and revive stalled development.

- Get all party agreement to conduct local elections by April 2014.

- If we want anything meaningful to come here and tell our government to

- Where are all the social media, posseco nationalists when you need them? They get so riled up when someone says ‘Buddha was born in India’, but they couldn’t care less about the hundreds of Buddhist and Hindu art pieces and idols that have been trafficked across the globe. It would be better if they spent all that pent up energy persuading foreign governments to recover what is rightfully ours.

- If Nepali is serious about healing and moving on, then the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is the only way out. Talking about restorative justice outside the framework of the TRC becomes an endless exercise in finger-pointing and scoring political points. The unwillingness of parties and the security forces to establish such a body shows not just a fear of reprisals that the author suggests, but in my opinion, a wilful desire to play the politics of pain and suffering.

- ‘Just for war victims’ need public pressure and unpaid campaigning by rights activists, media, and international community.

- Compensation worth Rs 5,000 for Silk Rain and only five years of prison for the culprits. Is this for real? Those immigration of hundreds of invaluable idols and paintings that were stolen from Nepali temples that now adorn the bedroom and living rooms of people who have neither spiritual nor religious connection to them. Back where they belong. Buddha Paint, (PR), Radha Krishna Deo

- Perhaps the new constitution will introduce such laws to prevent the exploitation and trafficking of our labours. Radha Krishna Deo

- The Nepali political forces may have papered over their differences in the High Level Political Mechanism with their agreement this week, but they each face internal challenges to finalise the PR lists.

- The Interim Electoral Council will then decide on the 26 names for the nominated list. This, again, is a process to allow under-represented communities to be in the CA and also to bring in the new generation of writers, demographers, and social scientists. The cabinet will have to consult the political forces, but should not be dictated by them in finalising the list.
Proportional Representation was supposed to give marginalised and underprivileged Nepalis a say, but the new CA will be more exclusive and weld together the names of members who will complete the 601-strong assembly.

But if anyone believed the country is close to witnessing the first session of CA-2, they couldn’t be more wrong. The battle lines are just being drawn. From sons to daughter-in-laws to business heavyweights who sponsored election campaigns, each leader is looking to include a loyalist in the assembly. With no local elections in the last 16 years, the CA has also become a natural launch pad for many political aspirants.

As the tussle for seats threatens to turn into a Kathmandu-centric, Bahun-Chettri male dominated floor, parties should remember why we introduced the mixed electoral system in the first place. Since direct polls heavily favour powerful male candidates from big parties, after much debate and deliberation, the PR ballot was used for the first time in Nepal during the 2008 CA elections so that marginalised, underprivileged citizens would also have a say in the making of the constitution. And although this year’s poll results confirmed Nepalis’ aversion to the politics of ethnicity, their votes were not for the centralisation of power, but for devolution.

From 12 women in the 1999 parliament to 197 in the 2008, we have come a long way. But Nepali women are likely to be the biggest losers in this new CA. With only 10 women candidates winning the First Past the Post (FPTP) race, the EC called on all parties to allocate at least 50 per cent of their PR seats to women, so that the floor would have 33 per cent female representation this time round.

However, in the absence of a clear legal provision, few are likely to follow this guideline as shown by Kamal Thapa led RPP-N which sent only nine women out of the total 24 seats. Dalit representation is even worse with only two candidates making it through the FPTP.

“Women are given tickets only out of compulsion and even then the leaders behave as if it’s a waste,” says Parvati DC Chaudhary from Dang-1, who was among the six winning female candidates out of the 21 that the NC fielded in the direct race. “Realistically, I don’t see any of the parties allocating half their PR seats to women, but it would be good for their own image and give them more credibility.”

In a country where women make up more than half the population, giving them equal number of seats in the parliament should be a no-brainer. Bringing ethnic minorities and marginalised groups into the national mainstream was one of the major commitments of the 2006 Janandolan, which all big and small parties seem to have backtracked from. Expecting the current lot of leaders to demonstrate the magnanimity and sense of fairness needed to have a CA that is as inclusive (if not more) than its predecessor is futile.

Therefore for future elections, the Election Commission should amend the PR system to have open lists which will allow voters to express their preference for particular candidates, not just parties. That way, we are not left at the mercy of selfish leaders.
Hutaram Baidya, 93

Nepal’s first agricultural scientist and a lifelong campaigner to save the Bagmati River, Hutaram Baidya, died on 24 December of complications from pneumonia.

Baidya lived in Tripureswor where he saw the gradual deterioration of his beloved Bagmati River. In 1971, the river was thick enough to float a boat on. But a few decades later, the river was winding its way through a cesspool that gagged at its very sight. It was then that Baidya took the first steps towards cleaning up the river, visiting the homes of 300 citizens and explaining to them the importance of saving the river.

However, despite 25 years of campaigning he could smell and see until his last days how the river he was trying to save was dying in front of him. Baidya died at an early age, but he left his mark upon the world. Only a few years after his death, the government started the Bagmati Rejuvenation Project, which has been a great success in improving the quality of the river.

Baidya’s early work was organic agriculture and how it was possible to achieve higher yields without the use of chemicals. At a time when Nepal had no roads, Baidya toured across the length and breadth of the country promoting new ways to increase harvests without agro-forestry. He kept reminding people that farmers need to participate and own activities designed to improve their living standards with new farm inputs.

Baidya left behind a powerful legacy among the young citizens of the capital about the need to restore the Bagmati and it is the public awareness that he helped initiate that has led to the frequent campaigns to clean up the river and its banks.

River activist Megh Ale credited Baidya for his interest in joining the Bagmati campaign. “He told me very early on that just rafting down the river to make officials see how bad the river had become, was not enough,” Ale said.

Also at the funeral were Home Minister Madhav Ghimire and Chief Secretary Lila Mani Poudel. “We will honour Hutaramji’s work by carrying on his campaign, he has left us a lifelong campaigner to save the Bagmati and its banks,” Ghimire said.

Hutaram Baidya, a man who devoted his entire life to saving the Bagmati River, was cremated at Pashupati and religious heritage.

The young citizens of the capital about the need to restore the Bagmati and it is the public awareness that he helped initiate that has led to the frequent campaigns to clean up the river and its banks.

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Vacancy ads, especially those of Kathmandu-based development organisations, mostly point out that along with women and minorities, people with disabilities are encouraged to apply. Yet, there are few physically challenged people who are hired. Despite affirmative action, it is still difficult for them to find jobs. Organisations want to publicise the fact that they are inclusive in vacancy ads, but when it comes to filling those positions the announcements do not necessarily result in the employment of people with disabilities. Part of the reason is that employers don’t want to bear the burden. But that is not the whole story.

Could it be that, despite being educated and skilled, most Nepalis with disabilities are not sure about how to navigate the daunting mores of a job market, let alone to find out whether a prospective employer has disabled-friendly infrastructure at the office.

A year ago, the Ministry of Women, Social Welfare and Children, National Federation of the Disabled-Nepal, the Association of International NGOs (AIDN) and its INGO members, Merojob.com, Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), and FNCCI joined forces to hold a one-day Job Fair in Kathmandu for the disabled. More than 1,000 visitors and 500 people with disabilities attended it at the World Trade Centre in Triopureswer.

By the end of the day, Merojob.com had collected almost 600 CVs of people with disabilities and matched them with prospective employers’ requirements. Twenty-eight people with disabilities got full-time employment in organisations such as Sherpa Adventure Gear, Karuna Foundation, Vienna Bakery, Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, FNCCI and Siddhartha Development Bank.

Many employers reported that at first they did not know what to make of employees with disabilities. There was curiosity on both sides. But once the work started, they generally found the new employees eager to learn, were hardworking and productive. Most said that they would make hiring qualified employees with disabilities an explicit aspect of future recruitment plans.
Buoyed by this success, the ministry got together with other agencies and UNICEF earlier this month to hold the second Job Fair. This time, the theme was to ‘break barriers and open doors for an inclusive society and development for all’. The fair broke new ground by having sign language interpreters and volunteers to escort, guide, and assist visually impaired and other physically disabled attendees.

There were organised discussions on the challenges employers face when hiring people with disabilities, on how self-employment was a viable option, how to revise and present CVs that play up one’s strengths. There were more than 25 stalls that showcased products, services, and information, either created by or catering to the disabled like the one of a model urban office toilet aimed at influencing the mindset of commercial property developers.

Nepal’s National Census 2011 showed that more than 500,000 Nepalis, or about two per cent of the total population, is living with disabilities, half of them women. What the job fairs showed was that even against such difficult odds, many younger people with disabilities, especially in the urban areas, have educated themselves, acquired skills and are in search of opportunities.

They represent a significant, but hitherto untapped potential for Nepal’s labour market. Companies need to look at this not just as a part of their corporate social responsibility, but as a valuable human resource option for qualified and motivated staff. The annual job fairs have succeeded in driving this message home.

WHEELCHAIR FRIENDLY: A demonstration toilet (above) at the second annual Job Fair for the physically challenged in Kathmandu last week (left). Two per cent of Nepal’s total population is physically handicapped.
Looking back 2013

POLITICS
In an unprecedented move, the four major parties agreed to stay out of Singha Darbar, choosing instead to task Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi to conduct the second Constituent Assembly elections. After six months in power, the bureaucratic government finally delivered. Election day on 19 November saw a historical turnout of more than 80 per cent and a changed mandate.

HUMAN RIGHTS
As parties meandered over the composition of a proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission, ‘protecting the peace process’ became a convenient euphemism for both the Maoists and the security forces to push a blanket pardon for all those involved in war crimes. The low points this year: the Bhattarai government’s efforts to quash the investigation into the murder of journalist Dekendra Thapa of Dailekh in early January and the glaring apathy of the state towards Nanda Prasad and Gangamaya Adhikari, who are on a hunger strike in Bir Hospital asking for an inquiry into their son’s murder by the Maoist during the war.

ECONOMY
Nepal fulfilled its Financial Action Task Force (FATF) obligations at the last minute in July, achieved only because a party-less government didn’t face opposition, and thus improved its chances of moving out of the FATF grey list. But with more than 1,000 youngsters lining up at Kathmandu airport every day to escape the drudgery and hopelessness, Nepal cannot afford to leave economic growth by the wayside even as it begins the torturous process of government formation.

SOCIETY
In July, Shakti Samuha received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in recognition of its relentless efforts to rescue and rehabilitate Nepal’s trafficked women. Started in 1997 by Sunita Danuwar and fellow survivors, it was a well-deserved acknowledgment for a Nepal woman who battled overwhelming odds not just to survive trafficking and sexual slavery, but is determined to help others like her.

TOURISM
Much has changed on the world’s highest peak since Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa first set foot on the summit of Everest 65 years ago in May 1953. Mountaineering has become highly commercialised, taking away much of the risk and adventure that early explorers faced. As the Earth warms, Everest is melting, making climbing more difficult and stretching the resources of the high Himalaya.

SPORTS
With a last-ball win over Hong Kong in last month’s T-20 qualifiers in Abu Dhabi, Nepal qualified for the ICC T-20 World Cup 2014 in Bangladesh. When the team took a victory lap through Kathmandu earlier this month, players were greeted by boisterous cheers from thousands of fans who had thronged the sidewalks. But as the euphoria of their outstanding success slowly wears off, the team must capitalise on the momentum and focus on the future.

ARTS
Debutant director Sahara Sharma, whose film Indreni Khojda Jaanda opened at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival, won the Nepal Panorama award. Nepal’s singing nun Ani Choying Drolma collaborated with Indian musician AR Rehman. And Milan Rai’s butterflies flew across the globe with messages of peace and positivity.
After a freezing prelude, winter has set into its more normal rhythm over Nepal. The westerlies carrying snow-laden clouds made it as far as Nepal's western border, but didn't give us a white Christmas. There is no other frontal system in sight so expect clear, though often hazy, winter days into the new year. There hasn't been any rainfall in Kathmandu now for over two months. Winter rains usually arrive the first week of January and we have to keep our fingers crossed for that. The weekend will see a further drop in minimum temperature to as far as 2 degrees on the Valley's outskirts. The resulting inversion will trap polluted city air under the heavier cold air layer.

KATHMANDU
RISHEERAM KATTEL
nepalitimes.com

When Milan Newar Amatya won the 'best contemporary female singer' at last week’s Radio Kantipur Awards, it was a culmination of more than a decade of hard work. Her journey had started in 2003 when she came second in the All India Musical Competition. The contest catapulted Milan to fame among Nepalis in her hometown of Guhati, Assam and local fm stations were swamped with requests for her songs. Even after the euphoria over the event had subsided, Milan kept herself busy with live performances and managed to release her first album, Kanchi, in the same year.

At the heights of her popularity, her father Ganesh Newar suggested that she give her talent a shot in Nepal. “He told me not to limit myself to the 300,000 Nepalis in Assam, when I could sing for 30 million fans in Nepal,” recalls Milan.
So in 2010, she moved to Kathmandu and within a year released a self-titled album. After establishing her presence on the airwaves, offers for playback singing began to pour in. Milan, who has previously sung in Assamese, Mishing, Bodo, and Rajasthani, was the voice behind the hit song Slowly slowly from the recently released Nepali film Kali.

Now a household name in Nepal, Milan also performs regularly for the Nepali diaspora across the globe. In 2012, she won the ‘best female pop singer’ at the Image Awards.

“I am glad I moved to Nepal because nothing compares to working and performing in my ancestral homeland,” says the 30-year-old, whose grandfather migrated from Sankhawasabha.

Assamese singer woos music lovers in her ancestral homeland

‘When I come on stage, whether it is in Nepal or India, my only concern is to make sure the audience is enjoying every bit of my performance,’ she explains. “Seeing the crowd cheering me on and singing along is very satisfying.”

Currently the singer is busy preparing for her soon-to-be-released album, which says will be a fusion of all genres of music she grew up listening to. Says Milan: “I am grateful to the Nepali music fraternity for welcoming me to the industry with so much love and support. They inspire me to make music every day.”

nepalitimes.com
Watch music videos

MEETING
MILAN
RISHEERAM KATTEL

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Watch music videos
SC Suman. Runs till 6 January, 5.30pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal

MAGHE SANKRANTI, a month of reading Swasthani, a pilgrimage tales of the Kathmandu Valley of yore. 25 January to 14 February

Happy Holidays, celebrate the coming of Gregorian new year in style. 31 December

Early days, a workshop for new photographers and hobbyists who want to explore possibilities of a career in photography, free gift hamper worth Rs 1,000. Rs 2,599, 25 to 31 December, 7 to 9 am, Image Park, New Road, 9841279544, 9841240941

Winter camp, give your children a chance to make good use of their holidays by learning music, arts, and drama. 25 December to 30 January, 30.30 to 4.30pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamikhel. 014233594, www.kjijazz.com.np

Momo for change, clothes donation drive for Heartbeat Foundation, with all the momos you can eat. Rs 300. 29 December, 2 to 6pm, Ramapokhari

Climate+Change, an awe-inspiring educational science exhibition about climate change and Nepal’s Himalaya. December to April, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal

Tell your story, make a 2-2 min video about how girls are changing the world; contest open to girls aged 12 to 25, winner takes $10,000. 31 December, www.letgirlslead.org

CRITICAL MASS, join hundreds of cycling enthusiasts to promote cycling culture and road safety in Nepal. 29 December, 5pm, Basantapur

Tree of life, an exhibition of the paintings on the Mithila cosmos by Lal Durbar Restaurant, authentic Nepali dinner with cultural shows. Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01)4248999, reservation@laldurbar.com

Lhakpa’s Chulo, Nepali dal-bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, and Thai green curry - take your pick. Jhamsikhel

Backyard, reasonable prices and modest and simple food have made this restaurant a favourite among Nepalis and foreigners alike. Jhamsikhel

TASS AND TAWA, savour a wide variety of Nepali meat dishes and reserve your palate for the heavenly Chusta. Pulchowk, Kathmandu

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. Jawalakhel

Byanjan Grill, its open patio is a great place to sit, enjoy a book, take in the view, and gorge on delicious cuisine when the hunger kicks in. Barahi Chok, Lakeside-6, Pokhara, (061)466271

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SALUT, be one of over 550,000 students all over the world to learn the French. Session starting on 27 January, Alliance Francaise Centre, Teku

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XAVIER’S CALLING, reminisce the sublime and the ridiculous of your school days with fellow alumni. 28 December, 2pm onwards, 32 Xavier’s School, Jawalakhel

WUJIALA MOSKVA, treat your palette to Newari and Russian dishes in the lush garden with ancient trees and trickling streams. Jawalakhel

Dhosikama Cafe, exquisite ambience, friendly service, cozy bar, place to see and be seen at. Patan Dhoka

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Education for peace, Nepathya
finish off their seventh nation-wide
tour with a climax in Kathmandu.
29 December, Patan Darbar Area,
(01)4412469/4437893,
nepalaya.com.np

Andromakers, let the all girl duo
charm you with their jingles.
Rs 200, 13 January,
6pm, Café des Arts

Shastriya Sangeet, dabble in the
magic of Hindustani classical music
every new moon night.
1 January, 3.30pm, Ram Mandir,
Battisputali

SAROD SANDHYA, watch maestro Suresh Raj Bajracharya
and his group The Sarodists as
they tug at your heartstrings with
contemplative raags.
4 January, 2.15pm onwards,
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Patan Museum

Nepathya’s seventh nation-wide
tour with a climax in Kathmandu.
29 December, Patan Darbar Area,
(01)4412469/4437893,
nepalaya.com.np

Andromakers, let the all girl duo
charm you with their jingles.
Rs 200, 13 January,
6pm, Café des Arts

Shastriya Sangeet, dabble in the
magic of Hindustani classical music
every new moon night.
1 January, 3.30pm, Ram Mandir,
Battisputali

SAROD SANDHYA, watch maestro Suresh Raj Bajracharya
and his group The Sarodists as
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Nepathya’s seventh nation-wide

...
When snow fell in Bardiya

Nepathya concludes nationwide concert tour with a message of peace and education

The Nepali folk-rock band Nepathya had got to Gulariya last week as a part of its nationwide concert tour and had just started into its all-time favourite hit, Bheda ko Oon Jasto. The audience, couldn’t keep still and were all up dancing to its jaunty rhythm and beat when snow started falling on the stage (pic, centre).

Nepathya’s event managers had organised artificial foam to descend on the stage right on cue as the lyrics described how snowflakes in the high villages of Rasuwa resembled puffs of wool. The students on the front rows couldn’t sit still anymore and jumped up to dance, not just here but in every other of the 10 packed performances held all over the country in Nepathya’s just concluded Education for Peace Concert Tour.

The tour happened at a time when schools were still being disrupted by political activities and as the band returns to Kathmandu for a final concert at Patan Darbar Square on Saturday 29 December, it has raised awareness about the importance of the links between education and peace. The tour started in Chitwan and went to Jhapa, Sarlahi, Kapilbastu, Bardiya, Dang, Tanahu, Myagdi, and Kaski.

Nepathya founder and leadman Amrit Gurung is convinced about the importance of quality education for Nepal’s future and says that despite the end of the conflict, education is still being affected by politics and violence. And everywhere that Nepathya performed, Gurung’s message underlining the importance of education was greeted with wild cheers of approval from the young audience. The optimism and euphoria following the election results also affected the positive vibes at every venue.

Gurung says he was pleasantly surprised by the overwhelming support not just during his performances of evergreen hits like Resham, Bheda ko Oon Jasto, Talko Pani, Chhekyo Chhekyo, but also when locals turned up spontaneously to garland him and take him around town in rallies reflecting Nepal’s ethnic diversity.

Besides the hits, Nepathya also sang songs with a message of peace, tolerance, and unity. Every concert ended with an evocative rendition of Rato ra Chandra Surya, which has become Nepal’s unofficial national anthem.

In between songs, Gurung solicits responses from the audience with messages like: “This country doesn’t just belong to politicians, it is ours too. Let’s brighten Nepal’s future by keeping schools free from politics.” More than 40,000 school students were displaced during the conflict and missed school.

In an interview with Nepali Times, Gurung said he has never been as emotionally affected by the support he got as during this concert tour. The singer exhorted audiences everywhere to not forget that they are Nepalis first and only then from different communities and the country can be strong and prosperous if it is united.

When Gurung introduced members of his band to the audience, he emphasised the fact that each of them came from different ethnic backgrounds. “Look at us here on stage, we represent Nepal’s diversity, but we make music together. Similarly, our nation can move forward if we work together.” Proceeds from the sale of tickets to the concerts will be donated to families of conflict victims and for the education of underserved children.
Students at the Nepathya concert in Ratnanagar, Chitwan on 6 December. Special seats were allocated for students at all venues.

Amrit Gurung singing Bheda ko Oon Jasto in Gulariya, Bardiya on 16 December as artificial snow fell.

The band gets a traditional welcome in Bara, Morang.

Gurung with teachers and students of Himalaya School in Damak. The building behind was constructed with proceeds from the Nepathya concert.

The Nepathya team bus along the East-West Highway in Sunsari.

The band performing in Damak on 10 December.
When Kar Wai Wong’s greatly anticipated film The Grandmaster premiered at the Berlin Film Festival earlier this year, I could hardly contain my excitement and anxiety. Excitement because each and every single one of Wong’s films are a visual treat: lush, lyrical, filmed with great attention to detail, and shamelessly romantic. Anxiety because, since 2007’s slightly disastrous My Blueberry Nights (Wong’s first film in English) he has produced nothing of significance. So it is with relief that I gleaned that The Grandmaster had been met with more than critical adoration.

For those who are unfamiliar with Wong’s oeuvre, I will alert you in advance that his films are pure art house, meandering through almost non-narrative, and almost always leaving gaps in narrative that make one either intrigued or irrationally scratching one’s head – depending on your ability to immerse yourself in this particular director’s magic.

The Grandmaster is no exception. The film follows the life of Ip Man (played by the great Tony Leung who is a fixture of Wong’s films) a master of the Wing Chun school of Kung Fu in the 1930s. Ip Man, by his own admission, has lived a life of ease and privilege for his first 40 years, happy in his marriage to his beautiful cultured wife Cheung Wing-sing (played by the radiant Song Hye-kyo) until a clashing of the Kung Fu cultures of northern and southern China upsets his equilibrium. What follows requires at least a basic knowledge of Chinese history of the period if you don’t want to miss the depth and nuances of key parts of a story that hardly bothers to explain the historically complex period in which it is set.

There are many characters in this intricate and sometimes confusing film so pay attention and be patient. All of the storylines intertwine and pay off, albeit some in more satisfying and others in slightly more subtle ways - but then again, that is the mystery that captivates most Kar Wai Wong fans.

It is impossible to talk about The Grandmaster without mentioning the stunning cinematography by Philippe Le Sourd, a departure from most of his previous films which were shot by the savant Christopher Doyle. Regardless of Doyle’s legacy though (at one point one could not speak of Wong’s films without mentioning Doyle – they were that intrinsically linked) Le Sourd has more than stepped up to the challenge, rendering this film unforgettable with beautifully lit sets and camera work that is extraordinarily sophisticated.

As with most great works of art, The Grandmaster does not give us pre-determined truths, happy endings, or any kind of tangible story arc for that matter. Rather we have to satisfy ourselves with the emotions that play across the faces of great actors like Leung, Hye-kyo, and of course Zhang Ziyi (who plays Gong Er – a highly skilled martial artist herself).

This film is the work of a mature and subtle filmmaker, a man who has honed his skills over the years. It could, in fact, be called the work of a grandmaster of cinema.
A newcomer to the famous ‘restaurant lane’ of Kathmandu, it was safe to say my eyes, as well as my stomach were in for a feast. Had I not been a first-timer, I may have gone for the fancier (and better known) Moksh opposite it. However, my weakness for the vinyl, rock and roll, and good old neon signs made me go to preserve it, woven together by the always handy theme of enacting a pastiche on the patriarchal and the lengths women (are or are not) forced to go to safeguard their reputation. Srijana, on the other hand, isn’t totally convinced of her impending marriage.

Scenarios like these lend themselves easily to adaptation, but some of the scenes in the play portray a post-industrialist Europe that doesn’t yet have a Nepali counterpart. For example, parts of Somnath Khanal’s Somnath Gabler is too forcefully done to address issues of rivalry and sexual intrigue (if any) in Nepali academia even though it alludes to the sort of chauvinism reflected in Nepali idioms like pati baseko (bolting women’s efforts).

All this sets the stage, as director of the meta play Somnath Khanal changes actors and entire sections during the dress rehearsal of his dream play, A Doll’s House. We gather that Junu’s Nora is threatened by Krogstad who plans to blackmail her husband Torvald. And while Nora dismisses Dr Rank’s infatuation, Junu has to deal with the affection of Suresh, who plays Rank. And as Torvald’s selfishness drives Nora out of their house, Junu’s husband arrives with similar convictions to further blur the lines between rehearsals and real life.

The European settings and idealist dialogues of the mock play take centre stage for most of Prayogshala, but it is the often seamless transition from a 100-year-old body of work to the unspoken norms of present Nepali society that saves the play from digressing into a stale khichdi.

Sunit Pandey

Prayogshala
Director: Rajan Khatiwada
Script writer: Samuna KC
Cast: Sunir Pandey, Suresh Sapkota, Janu Bista, Chanda Rai, Srijana Adhikari
Mandala Theatre, runs until 3 January (except Mondays), 4:30pm, Rs 200 (Rs 100 for students), 016924269

"...more than made up for the minor setback. I was pleased to see the menu had an extensive list of mostly Western and some Nepali dishes and for my ‘first course’ decided on the cream of chicken soup (Rs 190), which was rich and deep, yet not at all heavy, add to it pieces of tender chicken and herbs and you have yourself a reliable (albeit safe) starter. I later added the vegetable sandwich (Rs 190) which came with the usual suspects (cucumber and tomato) and old French fries accompanied with tomato sauce (surprise, surprise). The sandwich was dry despite the coleslaw and was overall, below average.

Deciding my palette needed a little adventure, for my main course I ordered the grilled herb marinated chicken sizzler (Rs 350), which came with a side of mashed potatoes, gravy, and seasoned vegetables. And finally, something hit the mark. True to its name, the dish arrived on a bed of lettuce with a sizzle to die for and mouth watering tenderness. The meal could have done without the mashed potatoes as the seasoned vegetables mixed with noodles were ample, however both were satisfactory. The highlight of this dish was in any case, the chicken, which was marinated to perfection with thyme, coriander, and an array of other herbs. To my delight, the sizzler remained blisteringly hot throughout the course and easily outflanked its predecessors.

Retro is definitely worth a visit if you ever get bored with the Jhamel usuals and crave a mean sizzler, however it is by no means the best of the lot. My recommendation, head out with friends on a Tuesday, Friday or Saturday night to enjoy the ambience of the live bands and Retro’s array of cocktails, beers, and spirits and if you’re in the mood, flavoured sheesha.

Meghna Bali

How to get there: Enter Jhamshikhel road from the Pulchok fire brigade, cross St Mary’s School wall and look for a large Moksh signboard on the right. Enter the alley, Retro is on your right.
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Sex and the office

The Tehelka scandal has led to the question of whether consensual sex with subordinates at the workplace is harassment

sex and the office

The Indian media has been agog over the Tejpal case ever since. In the deafening howl, the shrill TV talking heads, however, refrained from asking a question on the original sin: is it ethical for editors and senior journalists in positions of power to have consensual sexual relationships with their subordinates?

Inherent in this question is the assumption that in an unequal relationship involving the boss and his subordinate, consent is often manufactured insidiously and silently. The subordinate understands the cost involved in turning down the boss’ overtures. She can also fathom the benefits accruing from the liaison: an out-of-turn promotion, for instance. It’s a bias the courts in the United States have, rather archaically, called ‘paramour preference’, States have, rather archaically, called ‘paramour preference’, which invariably vitrates the work environment.

But even as media slammed the Tehelka editor, they desist from mentioning the phenomenon of paramour preference that is rampant in Indian media houses. It isn’t possible they are oblivious of it. Some of the talking heads have been guilty of it themselves. This phenomenon of bosses hitting on women journalists under them arises from the peculiar nature of power in the media. The power to decide who is good or bad, or which story needs to be killed or played up, is in its very exercise, to a great extent, subjective. The responses of two editors to a story can be remarkably different.

It is this subjectivity which leads to intellectual harassment of both men and women journalists. At times, it is because of ideological differences between them and their editors, or because their stories mitigate against their interests or of the owners. However, for a woman whom the editor covets, intellectual harassment, or the threat of it, becomes an impossible move to counter in the amorous game of securing consent to his predatory advances. Either the person resigns, or remains reconciled to her marginalisation, or succumbs to the pressure to preserve or further her career. The line dividing consensual relationship from sexual harassment is hazy. India’s Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, which was passed following the outrage over the gang-rape in Delhi last December, has added Clause C to Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code, which reads: ‘Whoever, being – (a) in a fiduciary relationship; … abuses such position or fiduciary relationship to induce or seduce any woman either in his custody or under his charge or present in the premises to have sexual intercourse with him, such sexual relationship not amounting to the offence of rape, shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment … which shall not be less than five years, but which may extend to 10 years and also be liable to fine.’

In other words, the new clause takes into account the inherently unequal relationship involving the boss and a subordinate and provides ample scope for the latter to claim that her consent for sexual relationship was induced or prized out. It is possible to argue that the Act borders on being draconian. Nevertheless, editor-subordinate relationships are also discriminatory to others in the office, creating as they do an illegitimate locus of power, fanning suspicions of the boss being biased towards his partner and consequently unfair to others and creating a conflict of interest. Considering the provision of The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, Indian media houses need to evolve a code of ethics requiring the journalist in a supervisory role to report his romantic dalliance to the HR. One of the two could, as is done in American companies, be transferred to another department, thus addressing the conflict of interest provision and obviating the possibility of invoking the penalty under Section 376 C. Since the editor supervises the entire editorial team, the transfer of his love interest to another place or department won’t enable him to evade the provisions of Section 376 C. For him, you can say: “No sex please with the office staff, you are the boss.”

ajazashraf@yahoo.co.uk

Role reversal: Tarun Tejpal, founder and editor-in-chief of Tehelka, speaks with the media at Delhi airport while on his way to a court hearing in Goa on 29 November.
Most Nepalis don’t have access to surgery, for things as common as cesarean sections, burns, cancer, or vehicular accidents. One in 10 of the diseases can be treated with surgery, yet the rural poor have no access.

Tired of hearing excuses on why surgery wasn’t possible for the rural poor, Nyaya Health, which works with a hospital in Achham in western Nepal, has built an innovative new crowdfunding model. Patients who require complex care grant permission for their story to be told online and then anyone around the world can directly fund a portion of their cost of care for as little as $10. Funders are given updates on the patient’s status.

The stories of patients on the site, captured by photographer Robert Fogarty of Dear World, reveal the transformation crowdfunding has brought patients who otherwise would have gone untreated. A 60-year-old farmer wrote she would “age without fear” after her fracture was repaired with surgery. A new mother held her baby and shared the message that they “could have died at home” were it not for a funded safe birth and a young boy who fell from a guava tree and fractured his leg said, “Now I can be a doctor.”

In 2013, the website raised money for 86 urgent operations in its hospital in Bayalpata of Achham. Nyaya Health’s strict rules on transparency help recruit donors and improve efficiency. Patients can be identified and their stories put up online for funding within one day.

“The idea that surgical care is too expensive and that it cannot be scaled, simply isn’t true. And this crowdfunding model is further disproving that idea,” says Nyaya Health CEO Mark Arnoldy.

Nyaya Health is becoming known for its remarkable ability to refute ideas many hold about delivering healthcare to Nepal’s poorest, Arnoldy says, and the crowdfunding idea is the most effective yet.

Practitioners say crowdfunding has the potential to become a model for rural healthcare in developing countries, transform popular understanding of poverty and health issues, and hold healthcare providers accountable.

Nyaya’s Arnoldy sees crowdfunding as a step in the right direction of being able to provide this type of comprehensive care for the poor. “Most important for us as healthcare providers is that crowdfunding is much more than a new source of financing,” he says.

“The very standards it inherently demands as a model - that patients are identifiable and costs will be made transparent - have led us to create a new national referral network in Nepal,” he explains, adding that case costs advertised by the Nyaya Health campaign include everything from diagnosis to follow-up care.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has stated that referral care for patients once they leave the clinic after an initial diagnosis is a common weakness of health systems in developing countries. Says Arnoldy: “This model of investing directly in the healthcare of another human being makes global health more accessible for a larger population.”

The Nepal government is so impressed with Nyaya’s contribution to medical care in Achham and surrounding districts that last month it signed a new partnership agreement, doubling its cash funding and providing pharmaceutical goods from its supply chain.

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7 pm onwards
Rs 4999 nett per person
Rs 7999 nett per couple
Rs 2999 nett per child
(Below 12 years)

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NEW YEARS EVE
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- Lavish International Buffet
- Free Flow of Drinks
- Dj Peaks
- Door Prize Calore
ELECTING FOR GOOD HEALTH

We can build on the hope generated by last month’s polls by conducting local elections soon.

GLOBAL AND LOCAL: A staff at Bayalpata Hospital (left) in Achham takes down details of an expecting mother for possible crowdfunding through the internet. Voters line up at district headquarters in Mangalsen (centre) to cast their ballots on 19 November in the hope that government services will improve.

They had started streaming down the narrow trails not long after sunrise. The hills of Achham, bathed in golden morning light, provided a stunning backdrop to the line of men and women making their way down towards the village school.

Throughout the day they continued to come: people from all castes, young and elderly with canes, folks with disabilities. Teachers. Farmers. Midwives. All to participate in last month’s elections, defying threats of violence and overcoming disillusionment with candidates to exercise their democratic right.

Why did Nepalis in Achham and other citizens throughout the country turn out in such great numbers? After two centuries of democracy, we in the United States struggle to hit 50 per cent turnout in elections, but in Nepal the national turnout was nearly 80 per cent. Whatever the nihilism, alienation, and despair that people face on a daily basis, a majority of Nepalis seem to aspire for progress. They hope for better schools, energy and water infrastructure, and quality healthcare.

My experience as a pediatrician here at Bayalpata Hospital of Achham has shown me that parents will stop at nothing for their children’s health and future. That is why people voted: there was conviction, at a mass, national level, that voting would somehow help them and, importantly, the next generation.

Yet, historic as these elections were in and of themselves, they are unlikely to translate immediately into material benefits for voters and their families. The chasm between politics and policy, policies and implementation, and implementation and social justice, is wide. This is a generational process. Perhaps an even more critical step is to conduct local elections, the democratic exercise that ensures accountability at the grassroots.

Local elections will bring local self-governance and the decentralisation process that started in 1990 and was truncated by the conflict, a full circle. It will mark a true end to the process where district officials are beholden to central leaders rather than local people.

As a physician, a father, and a global citizen, the images from last month’s elections for the Constituent Assembly in Achham will remain in my mind forever. The voters cast their ballots and returned along the dusty trails to their home villages, their thumbs marked not just with ink, but with pride and perseverance.

I was reminded of the great civil rights leader Martin Luther King’s convolution to social action: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Duncan Maru, MD, PhD, is co-founder of Nyaya Health.
Poor prince

Bhuvan Sharma, Naya Patrika, 13 December

Former crown prince Paras Shah who has been undergoing treatment at a rehabilitation centre in Changpi, Thailand, is said to be in trouble after failing to pay his monthly medical bills. Shah was admitted to the centre in March after suffering from a heart attack, which resulted in a two-week stay at Bangkok’s Samitivej Sukhumvit Hospital. Paras’ monthly bill of 150,000 Thai baht (approximately Rs 450,000) was being footed by his father, ex-King Gyanendra Shah. However, Gyanendra has been unable to send money to his son for some time now. Friends say failure to make the necessary payment has led the former prince to question the future of his treatment at the No. 2.

Even Paras’ Thai girlfriend Kanika Lin, who he had earlier proposed to bring home to Nepal, is believed to have stopped providing him financial support. His wife Himani Shah seems to have stopped caring either.

Paras is expected to be released at the end of the month and friends say that rehab has done him good. “We have noticed a huge improvement in his health and he also has a more positive outlook on life now,” explained one.

Paras moved to the Thai capital three years ago and since then hasn’t made a single trip back home. When he was hospitalised in March, his parents and wife paid him a visit. Gyanendra wants his son to return to Nepal only after making a full recovery and has been urging the ex-crown prince not to hurry.
Johnnie Walker.
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Some countries have a first past the post system of direct elections where the winner takes all, others have a weighted process where candidates are nominated under a proportional representation system, many countries have a combination of the two. But only in Nepal do we have a political system where, after an election, the loser takes all. There is nothing to stop a losing candidate from being a prime minister and losers can delay the process of government formation by insisting on a parallel mechanism to bypass parliament that, of course, they should lead. One month after the elections, the losing parties set out a list of five conditions and all the winners said was: “Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full.” Leading the process of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory is the Kangres, which seems so nervous about making mistakes in government that it is willing to let others lead it.

The man in the Congress inner circle who has always played the devil’s advocate is none other than Comrade Kristian Sitaula, who came out of nowhere to be the NC’s Alpha Male during Girjau’s reign. Together with Kaji Naran Kamred, he is always seen on the phone reporting back and taking instructions from anonymous interlocutors during breaks in meetings at the Peace Secretariat.

The Mao Buddies not only asked for (and got) a High and Mighty Political Mechanism, but threw a tantrum when the others refused to let Comrade Lotus Flower lead it. In the end, the two parties that had won the election rolled over and waved their eight collective paws in the air, agreeing to everything the Mau Mau wanted just to get them to agree to take part in the CA. In the final analysis it can be said that the NC, UML, and five hangers-on Madhesi parties decided to let Pukada save his ass by letting him save his face. It was a hole the Great Helmsman, who once proclaimed himself Nepal’s most powerful man, dug for himself. The only thing PKD could do to assert himself was to feebly add a handwritten ‘Prachanda’ after Pushpa Kamal Dahal in the list of signatories to the hardcopy of the four-point communiqué issued on Tuesday.

It looks like Chairman Awesome’s travails are just beginning as he faces a renewed mutiny within his ranks. His nemesis and rival, BRB, is pushing hard for PKD to relinquish one of the two top party posts and to bear responsibility for the party’s abject defeat in the elections. Because his grip on the party structure is not so strong, Laldhoj has taken the battle into cyberspace. The faceoff on Facebook between PKD loyalists and BRB has now reached a crescendo. After his thinly-veiled attack on his boss in a Facebook post, BRB was attacked from all sides, including by Dear Leader Prakash who let off a blistering fusillade on behalf of Comrade Daddy. Comrade Laldhoj had to resort to The Almighty in a Christmas Day FB post in which he quoted Voltaire to allude to his colleagues in the party: ‘God save me from my friends – I can protect myself from my enemies.’ Hint. Hint.

The final straw for Awesome is to be labeled a ‘revisionist’. In numerous interviews he has said that he hates the word and all it denotes. Which is why BRB knows that calling PKD a ‘revisionist’ is the worst insult, worse even then calling him the offspring of a female dog.