



BIKRAM RAI

Bull by the horns



We can't think of too many other places in the world where history repeats itself as a farce as often as in Nepal. Proof is the front page of *Nepali Times* exactly two years ago in which we showed the Maghe Sankranti bullfight in Nuwakot to illustrate how chronic disputes over power were leading to the inevitable dissolution of the Constituent Assembly.

Two years later, just like the bulls in this year's festival on Wednesday (left), the politicians are up to the same mischief. CA2 is convening two months after polls on 22 January. There are still major hurdles: the nomination of 26 members to the CA, resolving intra-party disputes in all four main political forces, negotiations between the NC and UML over prime ministership, and the cabinet composition. See page 2-3

IT'S THE CONSTITUTION, STUPID
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SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE
BY ANURAG ACHARYA PAGE 3



CHURPI

Shunned by Nepalis, hard Himalayan yak cheese is finding an export market as a popular dog chew in North America.



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IT'S THE CONSTITUTION, STUPID

We have come to expect Nepal's politicians not to stick to schedule. Statecraft in Nepal is governed by Parkinson's Law: "work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion".

The last elections were postponed twice. The tenure of the first Constituent Assembly was extended four times. Last month, the Election Commission had to extend the deadline for submission of the PR lists from the parties twice. So, no one should be surprised that the newly-elected Assembly is convening one month behind schedule, on 22 January, without the 26 nominated members who would have made it complete with 601 members. The reason for that is the same as the reason for all other delays: petty political wrangling.

The big question now is whether CA2 will succeed where CA1 failed, and the political parties will be able to abide by their self-set target of writing a new constitution within one year. From the kind of delays over easily surmountable disputes (like the one about whether it should be the President or the Chairman of the Interim Electoral Council which should be calling for the CA to convene that stalled matters for two weeks) it doesn't look like that deadline will be met. But no matter, our politicians can always come up with some excuse or other to postpone and procrastinate. They have become experts at it.

Opinion is divided about whether the rout of the UCPN(M) in the elections will make it easier or harder for compromises to be worked out on the contentious issues that deadlocked the House last time. Given that it is the same leaders of the same parties asking for the same consensus-driven negotiations over the same points of disagreement does not bode well. It doesn't look like the defeat of the parties espousing the agenda of ethnic and territorial politics will be reflected in the negotiations over state structure and form of government.



JON APPEL

It is tragic that the writing of a document with such far-reaching consequences for the country's future should be in the hands of political figures whose time horizons are so short

After crossing the first hurdle of convening the CA, parliament will have to elect a new prime minister. For that the NC, as the largest party, has to first resolve its own internal power struggle. Then it has to negotiate with the UML to form a coalition. President Ram Baran Yadav and the institution he represents have become a pawn in the UML's bargaining with the NC for plum positions in the next government.

A constitution is a national blueprint to ensure equality, justice, security and prosperity. It is written by this generation for the welfare of the next generations of Nepalis. But the last thing on everyone's mind seems to be a new constitution. It is tragic that the writing of a document with such far-reaching consequences for the country's future should be in the hands of political figures whose time horizons are so short.

Constitutions do not succeed or fail, they are not rigid documents. Their worth will depend on how the values they espouse are respected in letter and spirit by future leaders. The foremost test of Nepal's new constitution will be whether it will protect the country's national unity, ensure stability, democracy, rule of law. And that will happen only if the inclusive document addresses and begins to resolve society's current maladies: entrenched injustices and discrimination, inequality, under-development and destitution.

Sadly, those urgent goals seem to be the last things in the minds of those who dominate the national political discourse today.

ON THE WEB

www.nepaltimes.com

TIME HAS COME

A difference is a difference whether it is 10, 15 or even 75 minutes ('An idea whose time has come', Editorial, #689). When we find no problem maintaining a flag with most unscientific design, from the point of fluttering, why should we worry about 15 minutes difference with a neighbouring country, economic rational aside? The earth takes four minutes to move one degree on its axis. Based on which our time meridian currently is set at 86d25m, well with our boundary, making it 5h45m ahead of GMT. A scientific Nepali time meridian will be best placed in the middle of country's length and it works out to 84d15m (midway between 88d15m and 80d15m). If so, the clock needs to be set at 5h37m ahead of GMT, a good eight minutes slower from current 5h45m. This makes Nepal time run ahead of Indian time by not just 15 but a more scientific, from our angle, of 23 minutes. Setting our time to 6h or even 6h30 ahead of GMT as suggested, will have our time meridian set at 90d and 97d30m, well outside our national border.

Armugam

WHERE ARE THEY?

The apathy shown by the Nepali government towards those missing after the floods in Uttarakhand is symptomatic of our blatant disregard for the safety of migrant labourers whether it is in India, South Korea or the UAE ('Where are they?', Bachchu BK, #689). Our ministers and political leaders are quick to extol the

importance of foreign remittance sent by the workers, but fail to convert their words into action. Other embassies have emergency evacuation plans: they send out warnings, are quick to locate the whereabouts of their citizens, and assist survivors to get home safely. Let alone sending a rescue team, our government is not even bothered about helping families of the victims figure out whether their loved ones are dead or alive.

Nisha

- It is heartbreaking to see families of the flood victims holding on to the hope that their sons, husbands, fathers, might come back one day. It's high time the government showed some responsibility towards its citizens and confirmed the status of those who were in Uttarakhand at the time of the tragedy, so that their families can have closure.

Pasang Lama

- It is not without reason that Nepalis today will go to any length to get rid of their green passports in exchange of another. Our government is a mess and sadly it is still run by the same cabal of selfish, power-hungry morons, who in the past two decades have collectively destroyed this once hopeful nation. The welfare of common Nepalis is not on the state's priority list, unless political leaders stand to gain something from it. Let's be honest, what could these thousands of possibly dead migrant workers be able to give them, neither votes nor support. So screw them, seems to be our government's mantra.

Kesar Limbu

FIGHT CONTINUES

A young girl leaves her family and toils in Saudi Arabia for three years in hopes of a better future and how do we treat her when she returns home ('The fight continues', Bhrikuti Rai, #689)? Immigration officials rob her of her hard earned savings and a police constable, whose duty it is to protect ordinary citizens, takes her to a hotel and rapes her. A year after the event, despite ample proof, the court lets senior officers walk off freely and hands out a paltry five year sentence to the rapist. Where is justice in this country? I hang my head in shame on behalf of all Nepalis.

JB

- Yes, Sita was carrying a fake passport, but rape and exploitation of an already disadvantaged populace was not the answer. The immigration officers should have followed the rule of law. The abhorrent act committed by these four men has not only destroyed Sita's life, but also given a clear message to thousands of Nepali men and women working abroad: your money matters, you don't.

Mahesh

- This report would have been much more interesting if the writer had given us a better insight into Sita's life a year after the dreadful incident, rather than simply rehashing past events. As a reader, I want to know how this case has affected Sita and her family, socially and economically? Has the family

faced any kind of discrimination in their village? Is she able to work now? But thank you, nonetheless, for following up on Sita, haven't seen other papers doing the same.

Swastik

FALL DOWN

In Nepal, communist and kongressi predicaments have led to infinite political parties, limited largely to individual influences ('And they all fall down', Muma Ram Khanal, #689). Portraits of historic communist leaders, manifestos, symbols, and jargons loaded with communism could satisfy the boys of Nepali communism and even work as long as there is uniformity. However, voracious bahunbad only leads to fragmentation and confrontation.

Anonymous

HEMANTA'S HOME

Why is there no mention of conservationist Hemanta Mishra's key period of his career as member secretary of the then King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation ('Hemanta's home in the wild', Lucia de Vries, #689)?

Jamarkattel

- As a tour operator in the UK, I am also considering taking out elephant safaris from our tours. Not only do our guests feel unhappy about the treatment of the elephants, they also complain about the ruckus that tourists create, completely ruining the wildlife experience. I especially disapprove of the elephant washing spectacle which is also

dangerous - I believe someone was crushed last year. The whole nature of Chitwan has changed and it now feels like a theme park. My other grumble is about rubbish and the burning of plastic: bad for humans and wildlife alike.

Bridget Harris

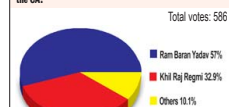
NEXT STOP

For the upcoming general elections in India, the Aam Aadmi Party should pick Pawan Chamling, the four-time chief minister of Sikkim, instead of political scientist Yogendra Yadav from Haryana ('Next stop: Haryana', Ajaz Ashraf, #689). Currently, Sikkim is the most prosperous state in the country, completely electrified with an astounding annual growth of seven to eight per cent. If the AAP takes such an initiative, India will become the most prosperous and the largest democracy in the world.

Anonymous

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #690

Q. Who do you think should call the first meeting of the CA?



Weekly Internet Poll #691. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com
Q. Is fasting an effective method of protest?





Something's gotta give

The NC's undemocratic internal politics is at odds with its electoral victory

There is a tipping point in every crisis, and in the case of the Nepali Congress it could not have come at a more inappropriate time. For too long the NC top brass had been forestalling the party's internal crisis, but they cannot do that anymore because this time it is not just their own party they are holding hostage.



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

After Sushil Koirala was elected president at the party's general convention in 2011, it was assumed that his clean image would keep in check the naked ambitions of his senior colleagues and hold the party together.

When interviewed in 2012, the grand old man of the grand old party had told me he had no ambitions for power, he just wanted to strengthen internal democracy. Despite Pushpa Kamal Dahal's luring invitation to lead the government, Koirala had made it clear that he did not want to be the Prime Minister. But that was then.

Today, Koirala has been lobbying inside the party, trying his best to convince everybody

why he should be allowed to lead the government, as well as keep the party presidency, a strategy championed by his brother late Girija Prasad Koirala. This stems from fear inside Koirala's small coterie, mostly other Koiralas and loyalists, who see the NC leadership as the family inheritance it has been for 70 years.

Although Sushil Koirala's poll ratings are high, he does not command popular support inside the party like his brother did. The party general convention in six months will most certainly see the end of Koirala domination both in the NC and in Nepali politics. So, it does make sense for him to insist on prime ministership, and relinquish the party presidency.

The next in line for PM is Ram Chandra Poudel, who is waiting for an opportunity to redeem himself from the ghosts of humiliating 17 failed attempts at premiership in Constituent Assembly votes in 2012. An NC insider admits that Poudel has offered his loyal support to Deuba for the party presidency, should Deuba support his candidacy for PM.

Deuba is spoilt for choice here. He can bargain with Koirala for the PM post in exchange for party presidency

but he also has Poudel's offer on the table. Under mounting pressure, the three leaders finally held a meeting on Wednesday where Koirala reportedly made a win-win offer to both Deuba and Poudel, that will allow him to have his cake and eat it too.

In case, Koirala does become Prime Minister, chances are

that he may have to leave presidency to Poudel who is also next in line for the post, and offer all major portfolios in the next government to Deuba's nominees. But knowing that he has a bright chance in the next general convention, Deuba may just be tempted to be prime minister for the fourth time.

Even after becoming the

largest party in the November elections, the NC faces more challenges from within than from outside in forming the government. The trifurcate power struggle inside NC that remained unresolved after the party's general convention three years ago, has come to haunt the leadership.

Despite repeated calls by senior party leaders, and youth leaders like Gagan Thapa and Chandra Bhandari to resolve all issues democratically through broader consultation inside the party, Koirala finalised the party's PR list by carving it out 60-40 between himself and Deuba.

Once again, the top three leaders are sitting behind closed doors, striking deals to suit their personal ambitions. The 'package deal' will most probably finalise not just who gets to lead the government, but also who bags plum cabinet posts. Chances are, camp leaders and greedy kingmakers flaunting 'foreign support' will once again prevail over young, visionary leaders with charisma and integrity.

When the NC-led government is sworn in soon, it will be hailed as a glorious comeback for the party that has historically led Nepal's democratic struggles. Only a handful of insiders will know how hollow its internal democratic credentials are. But that's democracy for you. ■

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PICS: STAMADENBA

Who moved the chewing cheese?

Even as churpi becomes popular abroad, the domestic market is stagnating and driving away farmers and investors

HARIZ BAHARUDIN

Churpi (or durkha) is to Nepalis what chewing gum is to the outside world. These hard chewy cubes of cheese can be enjoyed for hours, while the softer ones are used in cooking as momo filling and in soups.

Made entirely by hand,

farmers from regions like Taplejung, Shankuwasabha, Dolakha and Rasuwa first extract milk from chauris (female yak-cow hybrids). When the milk is boiled, it leaves a solid mass behind. This mass is then wrapped in a cloth to soak up all the excess liquid and then hung out to dry. Finally, the churpis are placed over a fire and the

smoke allows them to ferment and acquire their characteristic taste.

Some farmers sell these churpi to tourists who pass by their villages. Those who have enough approach distributors, who package the churpi and ship them to other parts of Nepal. Most people here who buy churpi obtain it in this way.

Even as churpi becomes popular in the US, UK, Italy, and Japan as dog chew (see right) and its export value grows, the domestic market is stagnating. The industry is held back by a cycle of low demand which discourages farmers from undertaking the long and laborious manufacturing process, which in turn drives



HARIZ BAHARUDIN

CHEESE CHASE: (l-r) A herder chases her yaks in Sankhuwasabha with Mt Makalu on the horizon, a woman purchases packets of churpi at a store in New Road, Nima Funju Sherpa earns enough from the churpi trade to send her children to schools in Kathmandu.

away potential investors.

When Nepalis eat durkha, it is only in small amounts. Even trekkers returning from the high Himalayas buy a few packs as souvenirs. As such, farmers would rather focus on products like normal cheese which bring them more profit with significantly less effort.

A kilo of these hardened cheese fetches up to \$110 in the international market, which is about a hundred times more than what it retails for here. However, the trade remains an untapped source of income because there just aren't enough farmers producing export-quality churpi at the moment.

For the past year, a non-profit called Institution for Suitable Actions for Prosperity (ISAP) has been studying the issues plaguing the industry and presented its findings at the 'Potential and challenges for churpi production and



HARIZ BAHARUDIN

When the team from the Institution for Suitable Actions For Prosperity (ISAP) wanted to track down some nomadic yak farmers last December, they were given a simple instruction: "Once you reach the village, park your motorbikes, and walk straight up."

After a two hour-long bumpy motorbike ride from the town of Jiri to

Starting from the bottom

Kalaptar village, they found themselves staring up at the enormous Mane Hill. With virtually no one in sight and the forest surrounding them on all sides, the only way was up. It took almost an entire day before the team managed to locate the elusive yak herders.

This was one of the more harrowing moments of the churpi project, recalls ISAP executive director Pankaj Parajuli (pic, centre), whose interest in the yak cheese delicacy was piqued while trekking through the Langtang region last year. Yak herders who peddled milk to him had complained of little demand for churpi in the mountains. Yet, there was a shortage of supply in the city. Curious, the team trekked to Taplejung, Shankuwasabha, Dolakha and Rasuwa in central and western Nepal to interview farmers and identify the root of the problem.

ISAP was started last May by three friends - Pankaj, Biwa Giri, Agraj Dangal - who were fresh out of college and wanted to encourage young

Nepalis to start their own businesses so that not all of them would migrate abroad for work. Others have since joined the venture through word-of-mouth.

The institute provides mentorship, financial assistance, technical knowledge, and helps small firms connect with the national market by creating links between interested buyers and producers.

Besides churpi makers, Pankaj and his team are currently working with pickle manufacturers and tomato farmers. They hope to market these products, which have a huge potential in overseas markets, in order to help poor Nepalis break out of the cycle of poverty and become self sufficient. They are also filming a documentary series on successful youth entrepreneurs, in hopes that many more will be inspired to start their own companies.

Says Pankaj: "I feel like I have all these unearned privileges, and I have to do something to repay my debt to society."

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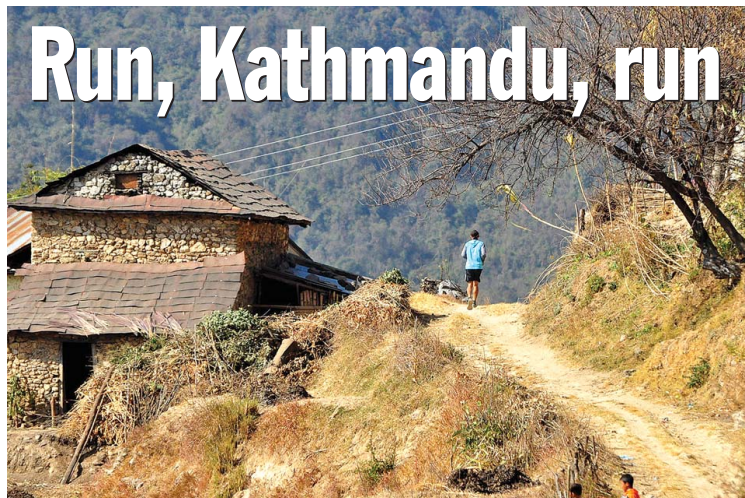


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Mountain running is one of the fastest growing sports in the world, yet the potential of Nepal's trails is still largely untapped. On 11 January, Ultra Trail Kathmandu kicked off at Shivapuri National Park to encourage local participation in trail running events and to support Nepal's talented athletes.

Over 90 professionals, enthusiasts and amateurs started the 1100m vertical climb to the summit of Shivapuri. Organised by Trail Running Nepal, Ultra Trail Kathmandu offered participants three different routes: a tough, exacting and scenic 50km

route for experienced runners willing to take up the challenge, complimented by 27km and 11km routes for participants trail running for the first time.

Involving a climb up to an elevation of 3410 m, coupled with some hard descents and technical trail sections, the 50km route became a natural allure for more experienced runners. Starting at the Shivapuri, runners followed a long ridge trail to Chisapani, onto Mulkharkha, through a forest trail to Nagi Monastery and then descending down the same trail to complete the route.

Those who lacked experience in extreme trail

The first edition of Ultra Trail Kathmandu attracts professionals and amateurs alike

running, yet wanted to lose themselves to the surrounding nature, opted for the 27km route. From Shivapuri, the 27 km route runners diverged from the 50km route by following a long ridge trail to Okhrene. Descending down a jeep track to the Bagmati River, runners continued on the forest trail to

Nagi Monastery, then followed the jeep trail back to the finish line.

The least challenging of all three routes was the 11km route where runners directly follow the forest trail from Shivapuri to Nagi Monastery and conclude their route through the jeep trail to the finish line.

While inaugural editions of races are often plagued with confusion and last minute glitches, the collective effort and hard work by Trail Running Nepal, the team of volunteers and the overall high spirit of the runners ensured that the competition continued smoothly and kept the frustration levels to a minimum. Apart from a few runners who strayed from their intended route due to uncertainty over course markings, all returned to the finish line in good spirits and without incident or injury.

One of the differences between road and trail running is perhaps the camaraderie

THE FASTEST: Winners of the women's 50km route, Manikala Rai (left) and Lizzy Hawker (right) pose with their certificates at the finish line.

that easily develops between runners, despite the competition between them. This was obvious at the post race dal bhat meal where runners enjoyed spending time together, sharing food and conversation, before eventually heading homewards.

"Brilliant race, fabulous course, wonderful experience," said Susan Huntenth, one of the non-resident foreign participants following the end of the race.

Far from the hustle and bustle of the valley, the thought of running through beautiful ridge lines, winding forest descents and hillside villages will surely make any running enthusiast eagerly anticipate the next race on 3 January, 2015, when Ultra Trail Kathmandu will return to Nepal. Lizzie Hawker

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EVENTS

Easel work, learn the basics of painting landscapes in water colour, and drawing and painting portraits.
18 January for portraiture, 25 January for landscapes, seats limited, Park Gallery, Pulchowk

Vice versa, an exhibition of paintings by Saroj Bajracharya.
Runs till 18 January, 11am to 5pm, Sarwanam Art Gallery, Kalikasthan



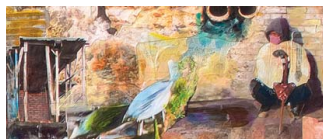
CLIMATE+CHANGE, an awe-inspiring educational science exhibition about climate change and Nepal's Himalaya. December to April, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal

Of the young, listen to Anil Chitrakar expand on entrepreneurship opportunities for engaging the youth.
9 February, 4pm, free entry, Nepal Bharat Library, New Road

Every story has a story, five startup founders share their business journeys.

Rs 200, 15 January, 4 to 6pm, Russian Cultural Centre

TRADING PAINT, an exhibition of the work by artist Julian Parker-Burns.
17 January to 21 February, 10am to 5pm, Image Ark Gallery, Kulimha Tol, Patan Darbar Area



Salut, be one of over 550,000 students all over the world to learn French.

Session starting on 27 January, Alliance Francaise Centre, Teku

World forum on ethics in business, take part in the dialogue to strengthen human values and ethics in the private and the public sectors at the conference that will look at the government's role in enabling legislation and ensuring effective regulatory oversight, the judiciary's role in enforcing laws impartially and businesses' role in ensuring ethical behavior.

17 January, 9am, (registrations start at 8.15am), wfbnepal@gmail.com



SONAM LOSAR, the Tamang community celebrates new year.
31 January

Jai Ho, watch Bollywood's favourite muscle-man Salman Khan send villains packing to hospital beds;

with proceeds going to Bhaktapur Animal Welfare Society and Poor and Helpless Girls Home.

24 January, 6.30pm onwards, Kumari Cinema, Hall 1



SWASTHANI FAST, a month of reading the pilgrims' tale of the Kathmandu Valley of yore.
15 January to 14 February

Martyrs' Day, Nepal pays respect to the martyrs of the first pro-democracy uprising. 30 January

MADE IN NEPAL, join over 150 makers and sellers of quality Nepali products and services.

13 to 16 February, 10am onwards, Bhrikuti Mandap, 9841578957, nyef@fncci.org



DINING

Lal Durbar Restaurant, authentic Nepali dinner with cultural shows.
Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01)4248999, reservation@laldurbar.com

New Tushita Restaurant, relaxing ambience and good food. Don't miss out on their penne with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce.
Lajimpat, (01)44432957

Tian Rui, if you're looking for genuinely good Chinese food this restaurant is the best place to go.
Thapathali

Cosmopolitan Cafe, located in the heart of Basantapur, this cosy cafe offers arguably the best chicken sizzler in town.
Basantapur, (01)425246



K-TOO, if you're tired of the cold, go in for the best steak in Thamel, a warm dining room, live sports on TV, and free Irish coffee with every main course and seasonal specials.
Thamel, (01)4700043

Buzz, the food is good and wholesome, it will leave your palate buzzing. Baluwatar



8 DEGREES, from lemon lassis to spicy pork stews, this is a great place to try continental dishes. Jhamsikhel

Alfresco, for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights.
Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999

Sarangkot Forays Restaurant, have a Sarangkot special breakfast while enjoying spectacular views of the mountain ranges.
Sarangkot, Pokhara, (061)696920, 9817136896

Capital Grill, this American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone's tastes. Bhatbhateni

Alice restaurant, step in for scrumptious Thakali, Chinese, Continental and Japanese cuisine.
Gairidhara, (01)4429207

TRISARA, with dishes like flambeed prawns, crispy chicken, and khau soi, it would be foolish to ignore this restaurant's charms. Lajimpat



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30 January, 3-30pm, Ram Mandir, Battisputali

Kripa Unplugged, young Nepali musicians and seasoned veterans give an acoustic rendition of their favourite songs.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged>



NABE RADIO #3, party with Gianni Denitto, Bzzt! Bzzt! Bzzt!, and Tsering Sherpa.

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Andrauli, West Chitwan, www.barahijunglelodge.com

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Gaurighat, lakeside, Pokhara, (61)463722

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State of change

The ongoing Climate+Change exhibition brings exciting programmes this week:

18 January, animals of the Hindu Kush region, workshop for children to learn about and create, from junk, toys of wild animals.

18 January, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal, nischal@photocircle.com.np



20 January, water in the mid-hills, a panel discussion with Aditi Mukherji, Dipak Gyawali, and other experts on the ecology of the lesser Himalaya.

20 January, 4pm, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal

Entry and participation are free of charge

Climate+Change
Runs till April, Nepal Art Council
9849519933,
nischal@photocircle.com.np



Heems in the Himalaya

Best known for being part of the popular hip-hop group Das Racist, Himanshu Suri is an MC from Queens, New York, currently on a tour around Asia. Suri has two solo mixtapes to his name and is working on his debut album in early 2014.

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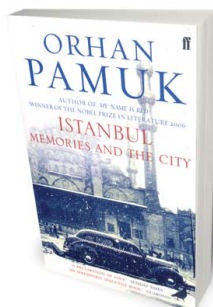
Between east and west

No matter how often you have heard about Istanbul being the city that straddles two continents, it is still a pleasant surprise to be in a megapolis with an Asian heart and a European mind. You are constantly reminded of the intermingling of the two: the outgoing hospitality, easy confidence, spices and food from the east, check-to-jowl with the efficiency, orderliness and cosmopolitanism of the west.

For a Kathmandulay, it is a compliment to be mistaken for an Istanbulli on Galatas Bridge and being asked for directions. And on the hill of mosques, there are a surprising number of people who look like cousins or aunts back home. The street signs and stray bits of conversation from passersby contain words that have a familiar ring.

On the pedestrianised Istiklal Street, a bookshop is called Insaan Kitap. A shop making rubber stamps advertises the prices of its Hazir Haraf. The newspapers are called Zaman or Duniya. There are the names of foods (*badam, halwa, kofta, kebab, sabji, sakshar*), legal terminology (*adalat, hazir, zamanat, yaniki*) military terms (*dushman, barood, chaku, durbin, maidan, tope*) and everyday words (*awaz, jabaf, dost, hawa, kalam*) which came to Nepali from Turkish via Urdu. The word for airport is Havaalani. In fact, even the word 'Urdu' has Turkic origin and means 'army camp'.

The best way for visitors to immerse themselves in Istanbul's rich culture, history and lifestyle is not to read Lonely Planet but grab Orhan Pamuk's autobiographical *Istanbul Memories and the City*. Pamuk is a Nobel laureate and the most internationally known Turkish writer. While many find his novels too intricate and disturbing, they have



Istanbul
Memories and the City
Orhan Pamuk (translated)
Faber and Faber, 2005
348 pages
\$15

as common themes the adjustments Turkey has made to fit between east and west. However, his non-fiction book on the city he grew up in gives an outsider an insider's view of Istanbul's past and present, putting a transit visitor's fleeting passage through it in perspective and context.

A lot of us in Nepal from joint families will find familiarity in Pamuk's childhood in an eight-storey apartment with his extended clan living on different floors. Every neighbourhood street, every neighbour, shop or café has a memory that is linked to Turkey's turbulent past, as the city was buffeted by waves of history from the Byzantine era, the Mongol invasion, through the imperial Ottoman period, Kemal Atatürk's secularist campaign right down to the present day where two bridges and a new tunnel now cross from Asia to Europe over and under the Bosphorus. Pamuk tells the story of his life and his country through the heartbeat of a city he never left.

Pamuk writes: 'The city into which I was born was poorer, shabbier, and more isolated than it had ever been in its two-thousand-year history. For me it has always been a city of ruins and of end-of-empire melancholy. I've spent my life either battling with this melancholy, or (like all Istanbulli) making it my own.'

Kunda Dixit





THE ISTANBUL STOPOVER

TSERING DOLKER GURUNG in ISTANBUL

A day is never enough to explore a city, but when you have an overnight layover between flights it'll have to do. At least it is better than spending all that time in the malls that modern airport terminals have come to resemble.

Compared to all the other places that airlines serving Kathmandu offer layovers, Istanbul is one where it is worth taking a city tour. Turkish Airlines (see box, below) which began its operations in Nepal last September, is offering passengers with more than six-hour layovers in international connecting flights a free city tour.

If your stopover is longer, you can also book an overnight stay, a day tour of Istanbul's sights which include the famous mosques, the Bosphorus and the Spice Market. Each corner of Istanbul's Sultan Ahmet Square is decked in history. On one side, you have an Egyptian obelisk from the



TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

time when Istanbul was Constantinople, on the other are prime jewels of the Ottoman Empire, the Blue Mosque (pic above) and the Hagia Sophia, the church-turned mosque.

Unlike most heritage sites around the world which are either ruins or have ceased to function as living monuments, the ones in Istanbul continue to serve their original purpose. The sites are visited in equal numbers by both Christian Orthodox and Muslim worshippers, as well as tourists.

Originally a Roman-era church and later converted into a mosque during Ottoman rule, Hagia Sophia today serves as a museum like its neighbour, the Topkapi Palace, the seat of the Ottoman Empire for over 400 years. But an even greater attraction of Istanbul is the Bosphorus, that narrow and strategic waterway separating Asia from Europe, and the best way to get a feel of the channel is to take a cruise either to the Dardenelles or the Black Sea, or both.

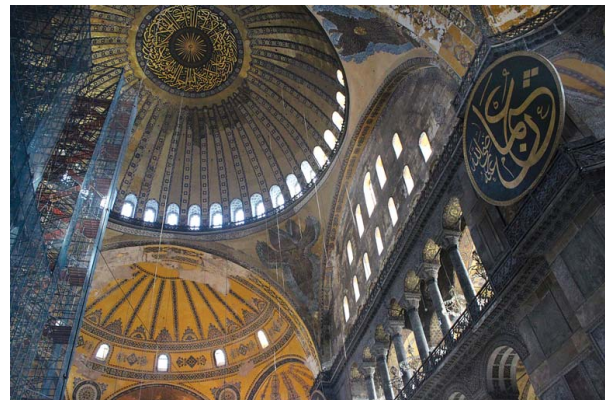
The other attraction is the Grand Bazar, which would be Kolkata's New Market multiplied 100 times. With more than 3,000 shops selling everything from precious stones to baklava, it is literally a shopper's paradise. The Spice Market down the hill is a sensory delight. Turkish shopkeepers are not aggressive, and even when they are making a sales pitch, they do it with a sense of humour. But avoid street vendors offering you a Chanel Mademoiselle for \$10, though.

When the bus is ready to take you back to the airport, take a sip of local chai (it's a Turkish word) or some of the strong local coffee to prepare you for the next leg of your long flight. ☐

nepalTIMES.com

Photo gallery

A day or two in Istanbul lets you relive pages from Turkish history, and provides a break between Asia and Europe.



TSERING DOLKER GURUNG



IN TRANSIT



When Turkey went through an economic crisis in 2001, its state carrier cut expenses and dropped loss-making routes to survive. In the following years, the government invited private companies to invest and Turkey's flag carrier has grown in ten years to become the fourth-largest airline in the world.

Turkey took advantage of its strategic location astride Europe and Asia to turn Istanbul into a stopover hub for international passengers. Over 20 per cent of Turkish's passengers come and go through Asia. Most passengers from Kathmandu connect in Istanbul to their onward destinations. Which means that if you have a 24-hour layover, the carrier will even help you with your visa so you can enjoy a day wandering between Europe and Asia.

The Spectacular Now

It is so refreshing to watch a film about young people coming into their own (notice that I didn't say 'coming of age') that actually has good (actually, great) writing, a storyline that doesn't make you cringe, and truly likeable characters that are not reduced to



MUST SEE

Sophia Pande

cardboard cutout stereotypes like 'the pretty dumb, bitchy blonde' and the 'straitlaced, brunette, nerdy but actually gorgeous (after the makeover) girl' and of course, how



can we forget the 'jock who has a heart of gold'.

The last film I watched and reviewed that managed to accomplish this was *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012), and while it was a charming film, full of whimsy and some great music, it didn't quite have the clarity and sensitivity of writing that elevates

The Spectacular Now to one of the loveliest films about youth and romance that I've seen in a while.

The story is simple enough. Sutter Keely (Miles Teller) is an amiable popular kid who dates the lovely golden haired Cassidy (Brie Larson), who is clearly a girl who wants something from her life. Tired of drifting around with the borderline alcoholic Sutter - whose flask is never far from his side, Cassidy dumps him - leaving the boy bewildered but unfazed, convinced he will get her back.

Driving home drunk one day after drowning his sorrows, Sutter ends up passed out on the lawn in front of Aimee Finecky's (Shailene

Woodley) house. Sutter being Sutter invites himself on Aimee's paper route after figuring out that she needs the help and so begins a little romance, with Aimee slowly falling for Sutter's goofy charm just as Sutter begins to realise that high school will not last forever and soon, everyone, aside from himself, will be off to college, Aimee and

Cassidy included.

The Spectacular Now avoids all the pitfalls of most screenplays that deal with young people interacting with older people. Sutter's geometry teacher Mr Aster (Andre Royo) while concerned about Sutter failing out of geometry is anything but the annoying self-righteous educator, instead he jokes with Sutter encouraging him with his hipster charm and saying with absolute sincerity that if Sutter fails, then he fails too.

Similarly great as the adults are Jennifer Jason Leigh as Sutter's hardworking mom, Sara, who is wry and loving at the same time and clearly overworked. Kyle Chandler (of *Friday Night Lights* fame) plays Sutter's estranged, alcoholic and thoughtless dad with pathos in a heartbreaking scene where he asks his teenage son to pick up the tab at a bar.

In fact, every scene in the film will surprise you - taking you in the opposite direction, subtly, from where you think it's going to go - that is how you write a film about an age old subject and still keep it new and engaging. With the help of Shailene Woodley and Miles Teller, clearly two of the most talented young actors around, this film will take you back to when you were young, living in that spectacular now, and it will make you think.

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Watch trailer

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HAPPENINGS



BIKASH DWARE

NEW OLD LOOK: Chairman of Interim Election Council Khil Raj Regmi (centre) inspects the Constituent Assembly building at Baneshwor on Tuesday. The first CA meeting is scheduled for 22 January.



DEVAKI BISTA

LET'S DANCE: People from Tharu community take part in Maghi Purnima celebrations at Tudikhel on Wednesday.



DEVAKI BISTA

IN SOLIDARITY: Students of Institute of Medicine attend a rally in Baluwatar on Tuesday to show their support for Dr Govinda KC, who is on a fast unto death against political interference in Teaching Hospital's administration.



MADHAV BARAL

FLYING SHOT: Teams from western and eastern (blue) region compete at the 18th National Women's Volleyball Tournament at Pokhara Stadium on Monday.

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Well versed in diplomacy

At first glance diplomats and poets do not seem to have much in common. But according to poet-diplomat Abhay Kumar, Cultural Attache at the Indian Embassy, the two professions do seem to have a lot more convergence than we think.

A few names stand out: the Mexican writer Octavio Paz was his country's ambassador to India, Pablo Neruda was once a Chilean diplomat posted in Rangoon and Colombo. The poet, St-John Perse, was the nom de plume of Marie-René Auguste Alexis Saint-Léger, a senior French diplomat, and the Yugoslav writer, Ivo Andric, was posted in Berlin as a diplomat at the start of World War II. All four are Nobel laureates.

Closer to home, Nepal's former ambassador in London, Singha Bahadur Basnyat, is an accomplished musician and the Brazilian ambassador in Kathmandu, Marcos Duprat, is



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

a well-known artist in his home country.

"Poetry and diplomacy are about words, symbolism, figures of speech, allusion, and not saying anything directly," explains Abhay Kumar, "a good poem is never direct." Kumar is in the illustrious company of other Indian diplomat-writers like Shashi Tharoor, Pavan Verma and Vikas Swarup, who wrote *Q&A*, the novel on which the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* was based.

Since he arrived in Kathmandu, Abhay Kumar has reactivated the centrally located Nepal-Bharat Library as a cultural venue for the arts with events like Poemandu, Conversations and Voices which feature young Nepali artists and actors, visiting writers, discussions and film screenings.

Kumar says he became a poet and diplomat somewhat simultaneously while posted in Moscow. "Poetry needs the mind to be pure and unburdened and creativity thrives when there is a coming together of different cultures. Russia with its rich literary tradition was an ideal setting to hone my poetry," he says.

Kumar is keenly interested in environmental issues and a lot of his poems are about the need to preserve nature, including his Earth Anthem which was launched in New Delhi and Kathmandu last year. His unofficial SAARC Anthem is a mixture of nine languages spoken in South Asian countries, and includes Bangla, Dhivehi, Dzonghka, Sinhala, Nepali, Pashto, Urdu, Hindi and English.

Kumar says he hopes that his song will inspire the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu to launch a competition among member countries to produce an official anthem, as do the EU, ASEAN and the African Union. □

Listen to the SAARC Anthem:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOTKEX87gYA

Rosemary Kitchen and Coffee Shop

As tourists turn from their guidebooks to TripAdvisor, WikiTravel, and the myriad other sites telling you where to go and what to do, restaurant competition in our fair city is changing fast. Now visitors and residents alike can review their own meals and experiences with a few clicks, and a restaurant's reputation can either skyrocket or crash at the will of its most recent patrons – all the while your humble reviewer feels increasingly redundant.

One restaurant currently enjoying popularity online is Rosemary Kitchen and Coffee Shop, which at the time of going to press occupies the top spot on TripAdvisor's Kathmandu section. Naturally we had to check it out.

The restaurant's cosy, Bohemian feel is made all the more so by the lo-fi Southern blues soundtrack and we took a table indoors as sitting in the garden at this time of the year was more or less unthinkable. But cosy is definitely the word and if you're looking for somewhere you



can gaze longingly into the eyes of your date, you might want to pick a place with a little more lighting.

Feeling their way through the dark, the friendly staff looked after us well all night, and opened by serving up starters of chicken satay skewers (Rs 279), bruschetta (Rs 249) and – a wildcard choice if there ever was one – a Bloody Mary soup laced with vodka (Rs 249).

Service was quick but the food perhaps a little lacking in refinement: the marinade on

the chicken was excellent, but something about the way stick-stabbed morsels are prepared in many of Kathmandu's restaurants leaves them dryer than my apartment's water supply tank.

The bruschetta was more akin to local-style pizza, trading a simple mix of fresh tomato, garlic, olive oil and fresh herbs for a cheese-laden festival of grease. Which is no bad thing, sometimes, but not quite as advertised. Meanwhile our Bloody Mary soup

offered up some of that missing freshness and the vodka kick definitely kept us alert.

However, Rosemary Kitchen really outdid itself on its mains. The Mongolian barbequed beef (Rs 349) was unexpectedly saucy, but flavoured with ginger and chilli and oh-so-tender. A generous serving of diced chicken breast in a Dijon mustard sauce (Rs 319) came with a side of scrambled potatoes and was equally delightful.

To finish, we tucked into those old familiar staples, apple pie (Rs 249) and carrot cake (Rs 199), both served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and both striking just the right notes of sweet and spice, hints of warming cinnamon running right through.

One of the problems with relying on TripAdvisor for your eating picks is that it is heavily weighted towards Thamel, the only



Kathmandu district in which the majority of tourists will ever eat. This in turn means that the city's other gems might be overlooked and that places serving perhaps more mediocre fare are unfairly spotlighted. Rosemary Kitchen is pretty good and I hear its breakfasts are superb, but it isn't reinventing the wheel with a menu you've doubtless seen before, if not in person then online. □

How to get there: from JP School in Thamel, walk straight past Hotel Family Home, Potola Guest House et al, and hook a right. Rosemary Kitchen and Coffee Shop is down a small alleyway on the left-hand side, but is well signposted.



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Be warm and safe

Nepalis living in remote mountain villages, where temperature regularly drops below zero during the dreary winter months, burn dung and firewood inside their homes to stay warm. In urban areas, along with burning wood and charcoal, gas and kerosene heaters are used to keep homes and offices nice and toasty.



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Smoke-filled rooms are, therefore, a common occurrence. Even when chimneys are installed to get rid of the smoke, inhabitants in these homes say they 'miss' the smoke because it provided a semblance of warmth. People also don't always follow instructions when using their heaters. Sickness or death due to carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning is a nagging problem during the winter.

In busy hospitals like Bir, Patan, and Teaching, there are occasional cases where groups of people, who slept huddled together in closed spaces burning firewood, are admitted in semi-unconscious state. Just last month, Chinese and Italian tourists suffocated to death in their hotel rooms. Sometimes the

diagnosis of CO poisoning is hard to make if a proper history is not taken.

The brain and the heart are the most sensitive target organs. Patients with minor exposures to carbon monoxide show vague symptoms like headache, lethargy, nausea, but higher doses may lead to confusion, seizures, and loss of consciousness. Cardiorespiratory arrest (heart and lung failure), hearing loss, dementia, and psychosis may also be features with higher doses. How carbon monoxide causes these effects is a fascinating study.

Haemoglobin, a protein in the blood, carries vital oxygen to various tissues of the body. Carbon monoxide has a liking for haemoglobin, which is 240 times that of oxygen, so it easily partners with the protein, unseating the oxygen molecule. Eventually when the haemoglobin circulates to the tissues in the blood, the tissues are bereft of any oxygen. This is when problems ensue.

There are also other forms of carbon monoxide exposure (more gradual exposure as opposed to acute poisoning discussed above) that many people in cities like Kathmandu and New Delhi encounter where air pollution is ubiquitous. CO is produced due to incomplete combustion of carbons

in fuels, chiefly the automobile engine. It is likely that many people living in these polluted cities (for example policemen) have five to ten per cent of haemoglobin bound to carbon monoxide, particularly if they are smokers.

Because most houses in Nepal, especially in the hills are built poorly with generally little insulation (thus providing ample ventilation), even where firewood and dung is used for fuel, carbon monoxide poisoning is not as commonly seen as one would expect.

At high altitude, when trekkers use stoves for cooking or heating inside a closed tent, they become susceptible to poisoning. Since there is already a lack of oxygen at that height, exposure to carbon monoxide puts trekkers at a 'physiologically higher' altitude. Sudden cardiac deaths in trekkers in the mountains could be caused by carbon monoxide poisoning. A more common problem, acute mountain sickness which presents with headache and nausea is sometimes mixed up with carbon monoxide poisoning.

Prevention as always is better than cure and making sure that there is proper ventilation (before we use firewood, stoves, and heaters) is a good idea. ☐

GIZMO by YANTRICK

Wake before it shakes

15 January marked 80 years since the great 1934 earthquake which killed 4,500 people in the Kathmandu Valley. The next big one is due any day and in its wake our cities will most likely resemble the sets of a post-apocalyptic movie.

In the long-term, we must focus on retro-fitting old houses to make them more earthquake-resistant and implementing tougher building codes so that the newer structures are more capable of withstanding a jolt. And even as our ministers and government officials turn the anniversary celebrations into mere photo-ops, it is worth remembering that even something as basic as investing in early warning systems like quake alarms will help save lives and limbs.

Manufactured by JDS Products, an American company with more than two decades worth of experience in the safety products market, the Quake Alarm is a simple, yet extremely effective device. Weighing in at just over 900 grams and a mere eight inches in size, the alarm is extremely easy to mount to wall. The white casing houses a nine volt battery (with five years warranty) and powers the device. But it's the reverse pendulum detection system which endows the alarm with life saving powers.



When an earthquake strikes, two types of waves emanate from its epicentre: 'P' waves (compression waves) and 'S' waves (shear waves). While the 'P' waves travel faster, the 'S' waves, although slower, carry the quake's destructive power. When the Quake Alarm's pendulum detects the speedier 'P' waves originating from hundreds of kilometres away, it produces a loud, distinctive sound warning residents of the impending quake. Depending on how close and deep the epicentre is, the gadget can provide up to 30 precious seconds for its owners to flee to safety.

Although you can't really put a price on the valuable seconds the device gives you by eliminating the guesswork involved

in detecting an earthquake, Quake Alarm can be ordered from Amazon or Harilo.com for approximately Rs 6,000 (including VAT, service charge, and shipping). A small investment today will go a long way in protecting hundreds of lives tomorrow.

So prepare your earthquake survival kits, practice your safety drills, and when the alarm goes off, gather your loved ones and head to safety. ☐

Yantrick's Verdict: with fault lines along the Himalayas ready to snap any time, the Quake Alarm is an absolute must for every school, office, and home in the Valley.



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Becoming Mohammad Yousuf

Believe it or not, societal prejudice against Dalits was a significant factor behind the decision of former Pakistani cricket star Yousuf Youhana to convert from Christianity to Islam and adopt the name of Mohammad Yousuf, writes former diplomat Shaharyar M Khan in his book, *Cricket Cauldron: The turbulent politics of sport in Pakistan*.



LOOK OUT
Ajaz Ashraf

Khan was the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board, between 2003 and 2006, precisely the period in which the Pakistani batsman became Muslim and began to grow his beard.

In his book, Khan says Yousuf probably converted because he wished to overcome the psychologically debilitating stigma of being a Dalit. Though a Christian, his forefathers belonged to the Dalit caste of sweepers and, as is true of millions, converted to Christianity in search of dignity and equality, hoping to rid themselves of the social stigma associated with jobs considered polluting. But this quest for respectability was belied for most as conversion did not liberate them from performing menial tasks linked to their caste.

Yousuf's father was a sweeper at a railway station and he himself was apprenticing at a tailor's shop until, because of a twist in fate, he burst upon Pakistan cricket, smashing centuries and amassing wealth. Yet, beyond his own community, his lowly social



origin was not forgotten. There were reports, Khan says, of "Yousuf stepping onto the cricket field only to be greeted – albeit by a small section of the home crowd – by taunts of 'choora aa gaya, bhangi aa gaya. (The sweeper has arrived).'"

The barracking crowds comprised Muslims, whose religion emphasises on the equality of human beings, but whose community in the subcontinent too has a social stratification of which caste is an essential element, albeit without the all-encompassing severity witnessed among Hindus. Perhaps it was

because of the persistence of caste among Muslims that the demeaning untouchability status of Dalits did not change at their conversion to Christianity in Muslim Pakistan.

The nomenclature of Christian became yet another marker for people employed in menial tasks. Even today, Pakistan's three million Christians are involved in what are considered polluting jobs, barring those who are the descendants of Goan migrants, settled mostly in the port city of Karachi.

Providing a historical perspective, Khan writes,

Alienated by the ambience of extreme religious fervor within Pakistani cricket team, one of its star batsman converted to Islam for social respectability

"Many such persons (Christians) adopted Muslim names to escape the daily derision, wore Muslim dress but remained Christians. Others converted to Islam, losing the sympathy and protection of the Christian Church and community without gaining a commensurate advantage with the Muslims."

The question to ask then is: in the absence of pecuniary gains accruing from conversion, why do Dalit Christians of Pakistan embrace Islam? Khan explains, "Being a member of the Scheduled Caste, even as a Christian, was a heavy cross to bear and converting to Islam was one way of escaping the stigma. Respectability was only possible through conversion."

Thus, it seems conversion to Islam provided a modicum of respectability and promise of equal treatment to even the poor Christian, prompting him or her to forego his or her spiritual inheritance and the 'sympathy' of the Church.

For Yousuf, not dependent on the church as he was wealthy, social respectability was paramount. "My sense is that the third motivation – the caste factor – may have partially

influenced Yousuf's decision," writes Khan.

Yet, it is debatable Youhana would have renounced Christianity had his team not been in thrall to Islam, courtesy the influence that the Islamic missionary group, Tablighi Jamaat, asserted through the dashing Pakistani opener Saeed Anwar, captain Inzamam-ul-Haq, spinners Mushtaq Ahmad and Saqlain Mushtaq. They prayed together, heard sermons together, but for the sole exception of Shoaib Akhtar.

In what reads a bit contradictory, Khan writes, "I feel that Yousuf's conversion was primarily due to his seeing the light as projected by his Tablighi colleagues – Saeed Anwar, Inzamam-ul-Haq, and Mushtaq Ahmed."

Did this 'seeing the light' also include the trio convincing Yousuf about the respectability he would acquire in the society, the stigma he would wash-off in his leap from one faith to another? Khan doesn't delve into this question, but he does write about the significance of Yousuf's conversion: "Yousuf Youhana becoming Mohammad Yousuf was one of their (Tablighis) greatest prizes to date. It eclipsed the conversion of pop star Cat Stevens who changed his appearance and name (to Yusuf Islam) to become a Muslim."

Yousuf may have liberated himself from poverty through cricket and acquired social respectability through conversion, but not the millions of Dalits, both Christians and Hindus, who clean the drains in urban sprawls and work as farm-hands in rural Pakistan in exploitative conditions. ashrafajaz3@gmail.com

Making a complete mess

While Krishna Adhikari's frail parents have been on hunger strike in Bir Hospital since 24 October demanding justice for their son who was killed by the Maoists during war, doctor Govinda KC of TU-affiliated Institute of Medicine began his fast-unto-death at Teaching Hospital last Saturday protesting the political interference in the appointment of deans. In a country where even two months after elections, we are nowhere close to forming a new government, the only way for citizens to make their voices heard, it seems, is to sacrifice their own lives.



HERE WE GO
Trishna Rana

The rot within Nepal's medical fraternity is not new and we have become inured to political leaders using students and teachers in state-run schools, universities, and hospitals as pawns. In 2012, KC was on a similar hunger strike to object the appointment of a politically-



backed candidate as dean of IoM. During the same time, teachers and students of Patan Academy of Health Sciences were on a war path against their new vice-chancellor, a Madhesi minister's sister.

Till the new millennium, the country had only one medical college. Today there are 19 schools, half in Kathmandu, which churn out around 1,500 doctors every year. Like most other South Asian countries, the medical school industry in Nepal is worth billions. A five year course costs Rs 20 million in average and owners spend anywhere between Rs 8-10 billion building campuses and have to wait almost two decades just to break even and turn a profit.

It's no surprise then that they openly indulge in shady backroom

dealings with administrators so they get medical affiliation certificates much earlier without fulfilling even the basic requirements or get permits to admit more students than what the existing infrastructure and staff can handle. And this is where the politico-business nexus operates: bumping party loyalists into top administrative positions in hopes of pocketing any windfall.

The former dean of IoM, Prakash Sayami, who was appointed in August 2012 after a similar furor over TU posts, resigned in December because he could no longer handle the pressure from all sides to provide affiliation certificates to five medical colleges. Once Sayami had been sidelined, it cleared the way for Sashi Sharma. What makes Sharma's rise to IoM's top boss, particularly disheartening, is that he is currently

under the investigation of the CIAA for alleged corruption and misuse of power during his time as vice-chairman of the Nepal Medical Council.

There are only two doctors for every 10,000 population in Nepal; the country needs more medical schools, not less. But producing thousands of badly trained doctors with little to no exposure is not the solution either. Quantity, quality, and equity should be made non-negotiable. But for this the power structures of the medical industry needs a thorough shake up. While acts of individual dissent like that of Dr KC help focus national attention on the impending decay, there has been little effort from within the universities and colleges to set things straight.

There is no doubt that the nebulous criteria for selecting administrators lies at the heart of the problem. Having a committee of tenured faculty, administrative and student representatives and making potential candidates undergo rigorous assessments would be the most practical solution. But our student, teacher, and even parent unions are seeped so deeply in partisan politics that expecting radical change at the moment is futile until politics on the top sorts itself out. www.smartpaani.com

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MEGHNA BALI

In wake of the Supreme Court's decision to temporarily ban genetically modified seeds from entering Nepal, fresh debates have been sparked outlining why a more organic approach to farming

and consuming food is less detrimental to our environment and health.

Over the past few years, the global appeal of going 'green' by opting for a more sustainable approach to food has hit everyone's radars and has locals and tourists alike seeking out places that serve

organic food in Kathmandu. While joints like the Green Organic Café in Thamel are long standing establishments in the organic food scene, new kids (literally) on the block, Prithvi Bar and Café (*see right*) and Bú Kebá in Sanepa are quaint attempts at promoting Nepal's organic produce market.

The new ventures should of course be praised for their response to growing consumer concerns about manipulated food; however, one hopes that the sudden influx of organic restaurants isn't part of the latest fad to take over the Valley.

Shristi Singh Shrestha, owner of Prithvi and an animal

activist believes that there is an increasing demand for organic and cruelty-free produce.

"People prefer organics for a number of reasons such as, the fact that it reduces farm pollution and toxic substances in the environment, there is no genetic manipulation, the belief that it is healthier and

The apple of his eyes



Yacón is a sweet, crunchy fruit that tastes similar to an apple, but unfortunately resembles the unassuming sweet potato. It comes in a variety of colours such as pink, orange, white or purple and is low in calories, making it a perfect snack for the health conscious. The fruit is useful in preventing acne, colon disease, constipation, diabetes, low immune system, poor gastrointestinal health, obesity, and osteoporosis.

Yacóns can be eaten raw or cooked and have traditionally been used in fruit salads, jams, puddings, and juices. Their peeled skin, once dried, can also be used to make nutritious organic tea.

The wonder fruit originates primarily from Peru, but can also grow in warm, moist climates and is typically farmed below 2,800 metres in mountain valleys. Yacón was introduced in Nepal by Sudarshan Karki in early 2000s after he switched from corn, maize, and wheat production to the South American

fruit. An avid researcher, Karki began experimenting with yacóns, believing that once known, they would become popular additions to every Nepali household. Unfortunately, due to their resemblance to a vegetable and the general lack of knowledge, yacóns are not as popular as initially imagined.

Geographically, the climate and agricultural conditions of Nepal are quite similar to those of the Andes in South America. Some of the basic staples used in Nepali cuisines such as potatoes and paprika also originate from this region. Perhaps in the future, other innovative farmers will adopt newer crops from Latin America.

Karki grows yacóns 100 per cent organically at his farm in Kavre and sells them for Rs 250 per kilo. Those interested in buying or growing the fruit can contact the farmer directly.

Sudarshan Karki
9841219698/(01)4442244
Office: Lajimpat (opposite Mahaguthi)



PICS: MEGHABALI

more nutritious and long term sustainability in general," explains Shreshta.

In response to Nepal's growing demands for food, farmers have employed the use of pesticides, fertilisers, and other agro-chemicals. This indiscriminate use of chemicals has resulted in several problems

Farmers and the commercial food industry are responding to Nepal's changing food attitudes

SWEET ROOT: Organic farmer Sudarshan Karki (*right*) harvests this year's yacón yield at his farm in Kavre. The fruit, which tastes like apple, originates from Peru.

such as pest resistance to pesticides and resurgence due to elimination of natural enemies, toxic residues in food, water, air and soil, degrading soil environment and ecosystem, as well as animal and human health hazards.

However, according to a study conducted by agricultural

experts Deepak Mani Pokhrel and Kishor Prasad Pant, a majority of farmers from the high and mid mountain areas in Nepal do not use chemical inputs in their farming. Sangita Thapa Magar, manager of the Organic Bajar located inside Bú Kebá, attributes this to the lack of roads and infrastructure because of which farmers cannot get hold of pesticides. Moreover, fertilisers in Nepal have always been a political commodity and every year the government struggles to provide adequate supply to farmers. Due to this lack of supply, irregular policy, and excessive price hikes, small and marginal farmers cannot afford these products and are encouraged to adopt organic ways as a result.

Even farming systems in the commercial agriculture pockets closer to the cities are shifting from mere increased production to resource sustainability and eco-friendly production techniques. This may well be part of the cycle of more ecologically friendly mindsets, where consumers now demand organic produce, where farmers produce it, and thus increasingly restaurants and cafés such as Prithvi and Bú Kebá exist.

While there has been great progress within the industry commercially, organic farmer Sudarshan Karki decided to get

Back to earth

Prithvi Bar and Café was started in late 2012 to promote healthy living and quality food among the people of Kathmandu. All the produce used in the restaurant's range of vegetarian dishes comes from its own farm and local organic farmers. The café emphasises the use of pesticide-free fruits and vegetables and promotes a cruelty-free lifestyle.

The café is run by a group of young people, who have experience in the industry and understand the relationship between food and the accelerating rate of disease, who advocates that in order to lead a healthy life, it is significant to understand food patterns in conjunction with our body mechanisms.

The joint offers a range of natural products such as organic teas and on occasion features handicraft stalls run by local women. Prithvi also collaborates with musicians from around the Valley to help boost and encourage local talent. Food-wise, the café serves breakfast, brunch, vegan and vegetarian, as well as soul food from Tuesdays through to Sundays.

Prithvi Bar and Café, Sanepa
9808230472
www.facebook.com/Prithvikathmandu



SUGAR FREE SWEETENER

INGREDIENTS
8-10 kg of yacón tubers
(four plants)

METHOD
Wash tubers thoroughly and put them in a food processor to make a pulp. Then boil the pulp in a large pan, keeping the temperature at approximately 103°C, to form a dark brown syrup. Four plants should be enough to produce one litre of syrup.

For more recipes: nepalimes.com



innovative by importing the South American fruit yacón, or ground apple and has attempted to sell it domestically from his farm in Kavre (*see below*).

A self proclaimed non-conformist, Karki says he's always done things differently from his farming family. "I

convinced my father to stop using pesticides and growing corn, maize and wheat, and instead replace it with yacón which is extremely good for health and a fruit that could greatly benefit our society," says Karki. However, he is quick to admit that it's not easy to run a farm organically. "I had to stop growing avocados because every year the birds would destroy them. I was under pressure to use chemicals to get rid of them, but I never did."

We have always been a society dominated by agriculture, but over the last few years there has been a definite shift within Nepal's food culture. There is an increasing demand for food that features production methods that reject synthetic materials and compounds. It is important, however, for consumers to be aware that not everything labelled 'organic', is necessarily green. The cost of certification, inadequate understanding of what constitutes organic, and lenient regulatory requirements are just some of the constraints that keep the food on your table from being truly organic. 🇳🇵

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Seeing green, #652
Seeds of revolution, #652
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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

The Sharia way

Pradeep Bashyal, Nepal, 12 January

नेपाल

Forty-year-old Krishna Bahadur Budha of Rukum and Jabar Singh Darlami, 25, of Nawalparasi had never met each other before in Nepal. They were both caught without passports by immigration in Iran as they were trying to make their way into Europe. Their case would have languished in the local courts had Nepal's ambassador to Pakistan Bharat Raj Poudel not intervened. Poudel, who is also in charge of Nepali affairs in Iran, took their case up to Iran's vice president and the two men were pardoned. Although they are technically free to go, Budha and Darlami can't go back to Nepal because they don't have money to buy a ticket.

Budha and Darlami are not the only ones taking the backdoor to Europe. A new route for human trafficking has hundreds of Nepalis flying to the United Arab Emirates, crossing the Persian Gulf, and then going over land via Iraq and Turkey over to Europe. In the past year, Poudel says his embassy managed to return home dozens of Nepalis, sometimes in groups as large as 15.

Migrants caught in Turkey are usually handled by the International Red Cross, International Migrants' Alliance, and other human rights organisations and eventually sent back. Since these organisations aren't as active in Iran, it is difficult for those caught to make a case. And if the guilty parties cannot convince authorities that they have the

means to return immediately, they are treated as ordinary criminals by Iran's courts.

According to an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, countries like Iran and Iraq are not as open to other countries and their administration tends to treat those without papers on par with local criminals, instead of considering them victims of human trafficking.

Narayan Prasad Dhakal was working for the Al Amco company in Iraq when his visa expired and authorities put him in jail in Basra. Sushma Gurung was caught, accused of stealing \$10,800 and 250 grams of gold from her Iraqi MP employer. The government stipulated a Rs 170,000 bail on her and she is still in custody. According to a statement released by the Iraqi government on 3 January, three Nepalis - Kamal Tamang, Devi Bahadur BK, and Bal Bahadur - were caught begging in the country's northern Kurdistan province.

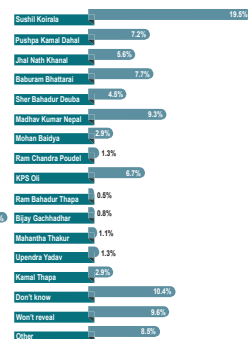
Because the migrants do not reveal the actual reason why they are caught, getting them to return home is harder. They always repeat what their agents have taught them, that they were 'kidnapped and sent here by a Bangladeshi agent', which makes authorities even more suspicious.

Earlier in 2013, five Nepalis were caught in Iraq after an agent convinced them he was sending them to Kuwait. They were given five-year sentences. After Nepal requested Iraq that they were innocent, the government decided to let two of them go free. The other three are caught in a blood money scheme, rescue from which is made near impossible by Sharia law.

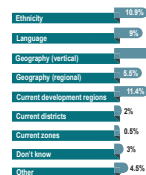
Weekly bazar poll

In weekly polls conducted with the support of The Asia Foundation, *Himal Khabarpatrika* asks 375 respondents in 11 cities across Nepal every Monday for their opinion on contemporary issues. This week's question was on the politics and state restructuring.

Which political leader do you trust the most?



What should be the criteria for states?



Hospital hunger strike

Kantipur, 16 January

कान्तिपुर

Sashi Sharma has made headlines since his appointment as the new Dean of Institute of Medicine (IOM) last week. This not the first time Sharma has landed himself in controversy, his name has been linked to scandals at the Nepal Medical Council where he was vice chairman. A complaint was filed against Sharma for irregularities there and his bank accounts and assets were frozen after the CIAA's preliminary reports found him culpable. The CIAA is preparing a detailed investigation to file a corruption case against him.

Sharma was appointed last week after Prakash Sayami resigned as the IOM Dean. Sayami refused to give into the pressure to sanction affiliations to four shady medical colleges. "The newly appointed official's qualifications and his background and his ability to monopolise TU's affiliations is why I am protesting," Govinda KC said before starting his fast unto death last week. "Distributing affiliations haphazardly to medical colleges will destroy the credibility of medical education which will eventually affect people's access to quality health care."

During Sharma's tenure at the NMA he bypassed regulations to increase the number of medical colleges and seat allocations in several colleges. "He sanctioned dubious papers for medical colleges that weren't supposed to have 100 seats but ended up getting approval for 175 seats," said a medical council officer.

Sharma has defended his appointment and challenged KC's protest. "The court will decide whether or not I am guilty," Sharma told *Kantipur*. He threatened to expose others if sacked.

nepalimes.com

For longer version



Binita Marhatta, *Annappurna Post*, 16 January

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

The 8.4 magnitude earthquake that struck Kathmandu on 15 January 1934 caused massive property damage and claimed a total of 8,519 lives of which 4,669 were women. Similarly, out of the 5,000 people that were killed in the 1995 Kobe

Quakes and women

earthquake in Japan, 60 per cent were women. The number of female casualties also outnumbered men by a big margin in the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia. Among the 202,656 killed, 181,252 were women.

Eighty years after the 1934 earthquake, Nepali women are still as vulnerable as ever. Their role in society is still largely confined to the four walls of their homes.

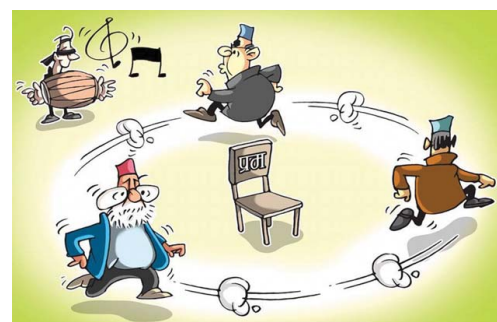
Women continue in their role as the caretaker of the house. The responsibility of looking after children and the kitchen still sits largely on a woman's shoulder. Since they are largely home-bound, women are the ones who are most prone to be the victims of a natural disaster like an earthquake.

Bhuwaneswori Parajuli, a gender specialist with National Society for Earthquake Technology Nepal says, "Women are still bound by social and

cultural norms and this is why they are likely to be the most affected. A large portion of women still lack basic education and further their limited interaction with the society because of their domestic responsibilities means they are less aware of the prevention actions that should be taken."

Men dominate most community earthquake preparedness groups, and there is little female participation. "Women are too busy at home," explains Sunita Shakya, president of Kirtipur Women's Group, which has been working to enhance community earthquake preparedness.

"When you make the women of the house aware of the dangers, the awareness about prevention and preparedness is spread to the entire family." "Only when a woman is educated and aware, is the family safe."



Chair: Prime Minister

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट Basu Kshitiz in *Annappurna Post*, 11 January

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"We lost the elections because our party organisation was weak and external forces exploited this weakness to conspire against us."



UCPN(M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, *Naya Patrika*, 16 January

Distress call

Up to 300 Nepali students are stranded in Malaysia after a college lied about providing lucrative jobs for graduates

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

Binod Gurung of Jhapa (*pic, yellow shirt*), 27, left his well-paying job in Dubai when he found out that he could earn twice as much in Malaysia. All he would have to do is enroll at Lence Academy for Rs 800,000, and the institution would take care of finding him a handsomely paying job. Within a year, Gurung would be earning thousands of dollars working on a cruise ship to the Caribbean; his food and accommodation would all be covered. The arrangements sounded too good to be true.

When he got to Kuala Lumpur, Gurung found out that he was one among thousands of youngsters duped by the academy. Currently, students from India, Iran, and Bangladesh are toiling 12 to 16 hours a day, five days a week, in hotel kitchens in the capital for half the promised amount.

Gurung is now living in a hotel in Setapak with other Nepalis who share a similar fate. Their student visas have expired, passports seized by the college, and with no jobs in sight, they are quickly running out of money for food. One of the housemates filed a case against Lence Academy, claiming they were not given work or salaries as guaranteed.

Investigations carried out by the court have revealed that Lence Academy is actually Green City College, whose registration had been cancelled by the Malaysian government four months ago because it did not have an education licence. In the last two years, 300 Nepalis applied to GCC for courses in hospitality in cruise management.

"Eleven of us came here and found out we were cheated," says Kamal Rai of Dharan. "We told our agents not to send more students because they would be stranded. But they sent nine more within a month, promising them 'western lifestyles and education', as they did to us."

According to Gyani Raj Upreti of Rautahat, the college forced him and his friends to work long hours on their internship and withheld half their pay while making them attend classes during the weekend. After the students began protesting, a team led by the Educational Consultancies Association of Nepal (ECAN) visited Malaysia to hold talks with the college. However, many members of the delegation were the same people who sent the students to Kuala Lumpur in the first place.

ECAN President Rajendra Baral told *Nepali Times* after the meeting that the Nepali agents were not guilty of any wrongdoing. "The agents have



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTH

All LIES: Nepali students, who went to Malaysia for courses in hospitality management, are now stranded at a hotel in Kuala Lumpur after their college did not provide them with the jobs it had promised.

already paid the Malaysian college, so it is the college's mistake. We are trying to get the embassy to pressurise Lence so that our students are compensated."


But Nepal's ambassador to Malaysia, Niranjan Man Singh Basnet, says representatives back in Nepal were well aware of what Lence Academy was doing. "We want to see if the college will provide internships and jobs at five-star hotels as promised. And if not, we are trying to get a full refund for our

students," says Basnet.

"I found out that Green City was being run illegally and I told my agent about this. But he told me LA was a different school and everything would be fine," says Muskan Gaha Magar of Surkhet. When he reached Kuala Lumpur, Magar found out he didn't even have a proper bed. He is now in police custody because his visa expired and he knows he will never get that cruise job he was promised.

When *Nepali Times* contacted Ishwar Sapkota of Putalisadak's Oxon Institute and Consultancy, which sent the most Nepalis to GCC/LA, he claimed that the newer students were not faring that bad and were only a little home-sick. But the 20 Nepalis who went to Kuala Lumpur with Sapkota's

help in the last four months have nowhere to turn to after they found out what kind of college they were tricked into

Ambassador Basnet says many of the 200 who came to Malaysia in the past two years have already returned and the embassy is currently handling the cases of 35 students. "I will send letters to Malaysia's Ministry of Education if the problem is not solved soon," he says. But none of the students have received any indication that they will get a refund. 

nepalihimal.com

Strangers in a strange land, #669
Lost in migration, #510
Photo gallery

चित्रण: विमलकान्त, एलेक्ट्रिक, वरुण, बहादुर, पारस, गुरु, शम्भु ।

Hero

हाम्रा बाइकहरु टिकाउ छन् र अब वारेन्टी पनि त्यस्तै

तपाईं चाहनु हुन्छ आफ्नो जीवनमा हरेक चीज बढी
प्राप्त होस् - हियो पूरा गर्छ त्यस्तो चाहनालाई आफ्नो
विश्वस्तरीय गुणस्तरको आधारमा । अब हियो पेश
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सडकमा गुडी रहेका छन् ।

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आकर्षक बनावट

किफायती संचालन
र रेखदेख

उच्चतम
पुनर्बित्री मूल्य

*शर्तहरू छन् । वारेन्टी अवधि: ५ वर्ष वा मोटरसाईकलको लागि ७०,००० कि.मी./स्कूटरको लागि ५०,००० कि.मी. जुनसुकै पहिलो हुन्छ । १० जनवरी तथा त्यसपछि बिक्री भएका सबै नयाँ हियो बाइकहरूमा यो वारेन्टी लागू हुनेछ । हियो मोटो-कर्फका अधिकृत विक्रेता नेपाल जेनरल मार्केटिङ्ग प्रा. लि. तथा NGM का अधिकृत डिलरहरू मार्फत मात्र यो वारेन्टी प्रदान हुनेछ ।

रजिष्टर्ड कार्यालय: हियो मोटो-कर्फ लिमिटेड, ३४, कम्पुनिटी सेटर वसंत लोक, वसंत विहार, नयाँ दिल्ली - ११००५७, भारत, वेबसाइट: www.heromotocorp.com
अधिकृत विक्रेता: नेपाल जेनरल मार्केटिङ्ग प्राइभेट लिमिटेड, ज्योति भवन, ११११, कान्तिपथ, जी.पी.ओ. बक्स नं. १३३, काठमाडौं, नेपाल

Kathmandu Valley Kantipath 4225377, 4265617 • Buddhabari 4104540, 4104541 • Kumaripati 5008710, 5008711 • Putalsadak 4435155 • Balaju 4361786 • Balkumari 5006184 • Chabahal 4482395 • Tinkune 4466886 • Gyaneshwor 4428970 • Balkhu 4281908 • Jorpati 4912006 • Swoyambhu 4289737 • Bhaktapur 6613112 • Trisuli 561421 • Gathaghar 6638444

Outside of Valley Birtamode 543248 • Darnak 581463 • Itahari 580066 • Biratnagar 524350 • Biratnagar 440470 • Dharan 526600 • Dharan 526522 • Inarua 561498 • Gaur 521109 • Biratchowk 545227 • Rajbiraj 520442 • Bardibas 550552 • Lalbandi 501628 • Golbazar 540327 • Mircharya 550803 • Janakpur 523644 • Jaleshwar 521095 • Lahan 560955 • Siraha 520442 • Chandranigahapur 540739 • Birgunj 529667 • Birgunj 522772 • Hetauda 9855060386 • Parsa 583199 • Baratpur 526697 • Narayanghat 532567 • Gaidakot 502399 • Kawasoti 541001 • Nawalparasi 521002 • Butwal 542725 • Bhairahawa 524290 • Bhairahawa 523930 • Pokhara 539389 • Pokhara 537333 • Baglung 520174 • Damauli 560477 • Kapilbastu 550160 • Dang 560262 • Nepalgunj 551598 • Surkhet 525196 • Tikapur 560426 • Dangadhi 522484 • Attaria 551244 • Mahendranagar 520745 • Guleria 420608 • Waling 440610 • Tulsipur 520808



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The story so far

Two weeks into 2014, it is time to do a preliminary assessment of how the Donkey is faring in adhering to the new year resolutions that were adopted on 31 December. A pilot sample survey has shown that most resolutions are being strictly observed and the Ass is off to a flying start. To wit:

1. **I will stop smoking cigarettes.** (I'll stick to pot.)
2. **I will stop giving bribes.** (But I'll gladly take them.)
3. **I will cut the carbs.** (I cut the chocolate cake into smaller pieces before eating it.)
4. **Will stop drinking and driving.** (I have stopped driving and have been concentrating strictly on the drinking part for the last two weeks.)
5. **Will try to lose 20kg.** (After the recent diarrhoea vomiting attack, am halfway there.)
6. **Will save water.** (Haven't flushed the toilet since January 1st)
7. **Will stop using bad words.** (WTF is now the World Taekwondo Federation, as far as I am concerned.)
8. **Won't put all my eggs in one basket.** (Have been successfully deploying my chicken in different baskets after counting them before they hatch.)
9. **Will save electricity.** (Haven't used any, cuz there ain't none.)
10. **Won't be mean to co-workers.** (Called the CEO a SOB, and now don't have any co-workers to be mean at.)

✂

Alert readers must have noticed that two months after elections, our netas still don't know whether they are coming or going. I won't go into the gory details, since I have it on good authority that there are some minors present, but if Nepali politics was Roman times and we were all in a Colosseum watching gladiatorial contests it would be like blood was gushing out of the severed aorta of the defeated centurion amidst a huge roar of approval from the spectators, the lion would

knows that the public knows that it was the eh-Maleys who, after he lost in KTM-10, tampered with the ballot boxes in Siraha and sacrificed their own UML candidate to allow him (PKD) to salvage at least one seat. The Fierce One is right about cheating in the vote counting, but it was cheating to let him win! BRB also knows this inside story, and he is turning the screws on the defanged Chairman Lotus Flower at the centcom meeting this week.

✂

Poacher shoots
dead his friend
*Claims he mistook him for
a porcupine*

be dismembering a couple of yummy pilgrims even as we speak, and the winning side would be engaged in a three-way fight eviscerating each other, with the victor finally holding up the entrails and decapitated head of the wannabe prime minister.

✂

So, for those of you just back from your Xmas-New Year breaks, you haven't missed anything. It's still the same fun and games. Here is a brief summary of the story so far: Chairman Awe-inspiring

continue to be filled by a Madhesi.

✂

The inaugural session of the CA on Wednesday will just be a swearing in, and the action will start when infighting within the NC throws out a clear winner and that person can take the fight to the UML about cabinet formation. At the rate we are going, though, we'd be lucky if we had a gubberman by spring.



The Ass

PAST PRESENT FUTURE

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