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

SOMETHING’S GOTTA GIVE
BY ANURAG ACHARYA PAGE 3
We have come to expect Nepal’s politicians not to stick to schedule. Statecraft in Nepal is a 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 will 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 route 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 compromises to be worked out on the contentious matter, our politicians can always come up with some excuse or other to postpone and procrastinate. They have become experts at it.

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 work 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 these urgent goals. So, no one should be surprised that the deadlines 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.

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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.

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.

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 ministerial authority, 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.

Something’s gotta give

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

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Who moved the chewing cheese?

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, Shankuwasa, 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 abroad, the domestic market is stagnating and driving away farmers and investors.

Starting from the bottom

Kalapat 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 (ISAP) wanted to track down some nomadic yak farmers last December, but 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 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.

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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 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 entrepreneurship’ event. 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.

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 know-how, 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.”

Tah Ef Ming

www.sap.org.np

(977)4427422

Who moved the chewing cheese?

Even as churpi becomes popular abroad, the domestic market is stagnating and driving away farmers and investors.
Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) is reportedly making plans to stop financial institutions and banks in the country from charging their customers service fees. According to the planned ‘Protection and Financial Customers and Financial Literacy Related Provision’ directive, customers cannot be charged any fee for the payment of their loans that are earlier than scheduled. The NRB said that this extends to other services as well, such as opening or closing deposit accounts and retrieving bank statements.

Bio spirits
BIOTECH Spirits Nepal has launched two new liquors in the market. The drinks—BIO Whisky and BIO Vodka—was invented by Srinivasa Amarnath, a well-known Indian Ayurvedic doctor.

Fuel up
Vishal Group announced the official launch of Royce energy drink at a program in the capital. “We are responding to the market’s demand for a great tasting energy drink, and we are excited we can do this while maintaining the delicious, authentic and top quality ingredients,” said Arpit Agrawal, the director of Vishal Group.

Silky sheen
Bergen and Jenser Nepal has launched its luxurious premium paint Bergen Silk in Nepal. “Silk is known for being one of the safest luxury emulsions available in the market,” reads the press release.

Gone to the dogs
The chewy, gum-like texture and the flavorful taste of the churpy make it an excellent snack for dogs. Owners approve of the digestible churpi as well, as many dog chews in the market are made of rubber and plastic, which can be dangerous if swallowed. “They are a great treat and chew and my dog has no digestive issues,” says Luanito, a customer from Florida who feeds her dogs churpis from the Seattle-based Himalayan Dog Chew, which ships its products to other states in America, Canada, and even Japan. OT Dog from Texas and Highland Dog Chew from Scotland also import the cheese from Nepal and use it to make their products.

Many dog owners appreciate the long life of these chews, as compared to the conventional ones, which justifies their slightly higher price. A small package with a single chew currently sells for $10. Since manufacturers and nutritious ingredients to the churpi, the chews help increase the strength of the dog’s teeth and protect their gums.

Another big problem is the inconsistency in the size, shape, and packaging of churpis, as Ram Mani Paudyal from the Agro Enterprise Centre, the agricultural wing of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, pointed out during the meeting. Since there is no standard manufacturing process, quality can fluctuate dramatically.

Currently, the ISAP team is looking to provide basic healthcare training to farmers in the mountainous northern area of the country, so that milk production is improved as well as introducing a method of standardisation, for example by using stone casts of the same size, so that more countries become eager to import churpis.

For the industry’s well-being in the long-run, a system to guarantee hygiene and a centralised certification process are going to be equally important. The emerging international market for churpi-based dog chews makes for very strong motivation to do so.

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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, complemented 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 running, yet wanted to lose themselves to the surrounding nature, opted for the 27km route. From Shivapuri, the 27km route runners diverged from the 50km route by following a long ridge trail to Okhreni. 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 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.
This week makes it ten weeks since it last rained in Kathmandu. The westerlies have come as far as western Nepal. A deep moist front has swept all their moisture. At that rate change the weekend. A low pressure system is moving east from the Pacific Ocean and the situation may bring some precipitation to the Tarai and upper Mustang. Expect low visibility and inversion haze in the Tarai and the Valley.

KATHMANDU

BHRIKUTI RAI

ALL Pics: BIKRAM RAI

IT’S A BOY!

A newborn elephant brings joy in Sauraha

Bhrikuti Rai

Last Monday, residents of Gaida Chok in the touristy village of Sauraha, Chitwan woke up to the high pitched trumpeting of Srijana Kali, a 38-year-old elephant in the throes of labour. Blinded by the pain searing through her body, the soon-to-be mother elephant screamed louder as she tried to break free from the shackles that held her powerful legs. The mahout tried to calm her down, unsuccessfully.

After nearly 48 hours, Srijana delivered a healthy baby boy on the afternoon of 6 January. When the mahouts rushed to pull the baby out and cut off the umbilical cord, she shooed them away with a protective cry and pulled the newborn lovingly towards her with her trunk. Within an hour, the frisky calf was already trying to stand up on his tiny legs.

"It was a memorable day for all of us because privately raised elephants in Sauraha have rarely delivered a healthy baby," says Dhruba Giri of Sapana Village Lodge, who bought Srijana in 2012 from Golaghar Resort in Meghauli when she was already nine months pregnant.

Elephants have a lengthy gestation period ranging from 22 to 24 months where they require more rest and better diet. Taking care of an expectant elephant costs about Rs 70,000 per month and since she cannot be used for safaris, resorts lose out on business. Hence most owners don’t want their female elephants becoming pregnant. Srijana, who was impregnated by the notorious wild elephant Dhrube, is only the second privately-owned elephant in the village to become a mother in a long time. Her baby will be named after the nwaran ceremony this week.

"For us, elephants are gods and the newborn is a good omen," says Giri. "We will give Srijana the best possible care and let her recover completely.”

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See Video

Honda Big Gear

This New Year 2014
Get BIG GEAR OFFER on purchase of Big Bikes.
Get cash discounts up to Rs. 40,000.
Happy New Year until stocks last!
**EVENTS**

**Salut**, be one of over 550,000 students all over the world to learn French.
Session starting on 27 January, Alliance Francais 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.
27 January, 9am, (registrations start at 8.15am), wfebnepal@gmail.com

**TRADING PAINT**, an exhibition of the work by artist Julian Parker Burns.
27 January to 22 February, 200am to 7pm, Image Aik Gallery, Kulimha Tol, Patan Darbar Area

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

**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 to 25 January, 10am onwards, Kumari Cinema, Hall 1

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

**DINING**

Lal Durbar Restaurant, authentic Nepali dinner with cultural shows.
Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01)444-9199, reservation@laldurbar.com

New Tushita Restaurant, relaxing ambience and good food. Don't miss out on their penne with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce.
Lalitpur, (01)443-2957

**Tian Ru**, if you're looking for genuinely good Chinese food this restaurant is the best place to go.
Thapathali, (01)444-32957

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

**Alfresco**, for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights.
Sothe Crowne Plaza, 473999

**NEW TUSHITA RESTAURANT**

Restaurant

**SWASTHANI FAST**, a month of reading the pilgrims' tale of the Kathmandu Valley of yore.
23 January to 24 February

**MARTYRS’ DAY**, Nepal pays respect to the martyrs of the first pro-democracy uprising.
30 January

**MADE IN NEPAL**, join over 500 makers and sellers of quality Nepali products and services.
23 to 26 February, 10am onwards.
Bhrikut Mandap, 941235-9957, swasthiani@gmail.com

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)700043

**TRISA**, with dishes like flame-broiled prawns, crispy chicken, and khao soi, it would be foolish to ignore this restaurant's charms.
Lajimpat

**BHU**: the food is good and wholesome, it will leave your palate buzzing.
Baluwatar

**Bhaktapur Animal Welfare Society and Poor and Helpless Girls Home.**
24 January to 25 January, 10am onwards, Kumari Cinema, Hall 1

**KUMARI CINEMA**

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

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

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24 January to 25 January, 10am onwards, Kumari Cinema, Hall 1

**92 THEATRE AND RESTAURANT, LALITPUR**

Restaurant

**MADE IN NEPAL**, join over 500 makers and sellers of quality Nepali products and services.
23 to 26 February, 10am onwards.
Bhrikut Mandap, 941235-9957, swasthiani@gmail.com

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.
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Lajimpat

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Baluwatar
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' nischal@photocircle.com.np

Starry nights, munch on the tenderloin with Ciney Gurung performing live.
Rs 1,499, 3 January, 7pm onwards, Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, (01)4412999, Ext. 7520/7515

Shastriya Sangeet, dabble in the magic of Hindustani classical music every new moon night.
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

LAST RESORT, canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping – test your limits at the Last Resort.
Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525/1247

Barahi Jungle Lodge, the first eco-jungle lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks the Chitwan National Park, spa, boutique guest room, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.
Andrauli, West Chitwan, www.barahijunglodge.com

Glacier Hotel, a lovely place to stay complete with a waterfront terrace, free wifi, children’s playground, and probably the best spa in town.
Gangkhouse, Lakeside, Pokhara, (01)461372

Shivapuri Cottage, escape the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu and enjoy peace, tranquility, good food, and fresh air. Rs 5,000 per person per night inclusive of dinner and breakfast.
Budhanilkantha, 9841371927

NABE RADIO #3, party with Gianni Denitto, Bazzi Bazzi Bazzi, and Tiening Sherpa.
Rs 100, 24 January, Places Restaurant and Bar

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. Sun has two solo mixtapes to his name and is working on his debut album in early 2014.
21 January, House of Music, Thamel
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 Istanbullu 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, kofa, kebab, sabji, sakkhar), legal terminology (adalat, hazir, zamanat, yanik), military terms (dushman, barood, chaku, durbin), 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 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 Bosporus. 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 Istanbullus) making it my own.’

Kunda Dixit
THE ISTANBUL STOPOVER

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 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.

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.
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 cardboard cutout stereotypes like ‘the pretty dumb, bitchy blonde’ and the ‘straightlaced, 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. Enrving 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.
A 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 Karachi 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.

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Another current trend for the Astori group is that of the restaurant’s reputation 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 take 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. Following 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 akin to local-style pizza, trading a simple mix of fresh tomato, garlic, olive oil and fresh herbs for a cheese-garnished 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.

Tell you what, we’re going to press Rosemary Kitchen really outdid itself on its mains. The Mongolian barbecued 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 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, Petala 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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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. 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 Italian tourists suffocated to death state. Just last month, Chinese and Italian tourists suffocated to death in semi-unconscious state. 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.

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Becoming Mohammad Yousuf

Believe it or not, societal antigraft efforts in Pakistan were a significant factor behind the decision of former Pakistan 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.

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 stigma associated with jobs considered polluting. But the quest for respectability was believed for most as conversion did not liberate them from performing menial tasks linked to their caste.

Yousuf’s father was a tailor at a railway station and he himself was apprenticing at a tailor’s shop until, because of the psychological debilitating impact converted to Islam, losing the sympathy and respectability was belied for themselves of the social stigma and equality, hoping to rid themselves of the stigma.

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 Ahmed and Sajjan Muneer. They prayed together, board sessions together, but for the sole exception of Shabab Akhter.

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 Youhana 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.

Youhana may have liberated himself from poverty through cricket and bought some 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.

ashrafajaz8@gmail.com

Making a complete mess

While Krishna Adhikari’s first 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-un-to-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 is, to sacrifice their own lives.

The not 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 parents 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 politically 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 Sushil Sharma. What makes Sharma’s rise to IOM’s top post, 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 or 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 shakeup. While acts of individual drip 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 notorious 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 steeped so deeply in partisan politics that expecting radical change at the moment is futile until politics on the top sorts itself out.
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.

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 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, Pritivi Bar and Café (see right) and Bū Kebā in Sanepa are quaint attempts at promoting Nepal’s organic produce market.

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.

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. 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
9841210600/014442244
Office: Lajimpat (opposite Madhavasti)
Back to earth

Pithvi 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. Pithvi 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.

Pithvi Bar and Café, Sanepa
9808230472
www.facebook.com/Pithvikathmandu

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 100°C, to form a dark brown syrup. Four plants should be enough to produce one litre of syrup.

For more recipes: nepalitimes.com

Not a usual resort...........
.....refresh yourself

See more:
- #690
- #652
- #652
- #588

NATION 17
Quakes and women

The 8.4 magnitude earthquake that struck Kathmandu on 15 January 1934 caused massive property damage and claimed a total of 5,519 lives of which 4,069 were women. Similarly, out of the 5,005 people that were killed in the 1995 Kobe 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 shoulders. 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.

Bhuvaneswori 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 Sushma Gurung, chair 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

18 FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

Weekly bazar poll

In weekly polls conducted with the support of The Asia Foundation, Himal Khabar asks 371 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.

What should be the criteria for states?

- Federal
- Unitary
- Confederal
- Don’t know

Chair: Prime Minister

Hospital hunger strike

Kathmandu, 16 January

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 IOM’s preliminary reports found him culpable. The IOM 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 Kathmandu. He threatened to expose others if jailed.
Distress call
Up to 300 Nepali students are stranded in Malaysia after a college lied about providing lucrative jobs for graduates

DAMBAR K SHRSTHA

B

inod 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.

All 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.

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 Gyan Raj Upadhyay of Reутa, 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 already paid the Malaysian college, so it is the college's mistake. We are trying to get the embassy to pressure Lence so that our students are compensated."

Nepali Times contacted Ishwar Sapkota of Putalisadak’s Oxon Institute and Consultancy, which sent the most Nepalis to GCC/LA, and Sapkota claimed that the newer students were not faring that bad and were only a little homesick. 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.

The students are currently housed in the hotel where they have been trying to get work from the local immigration authorities, but with no jobs available, they are running out of money. "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 homesick. 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.

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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. I will stop drinking and driving. (I have stopped driving and have been concentrating strictly on the drinking part for the last two weeks.)
5. I will try to lose 20kg. (After the recent diarrhoea vomiting attack, am halfway there.)
6. I will save water. (Haven’t flushed the toilet since January 1st)
7. I will stop using bad words. (WTF is now the World Taekwondo Federation, as far as I am concerned.)
8. I 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. I will save electricity. (Haven’t used any, cuz there ain’t none.)
10. I 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 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.

The eh-Maleys know 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.

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 gubberment by spring.