No end in sight

Sagar Rana (above) has waited all night inside his car on a petrol line at Bhadrakali. It is now 9.30 AM on Thursday morning, the road is filling up with commuters driving to work. Sagar’s car is where it was when he joined the queue last night, his eyes are red from the lack of sleep. The pump has opened, but it will take another six hours for him to get to the head of the line and, when he does, he will only get a rationed 10 litres of gasoline into his tank.

“This is pure incompetence,” says Sagar wearily, “we are sick of a government that doesn’t care.” Right down the line, there is a similar refrain. Drivers seething with anger at the government’s inability to ensure adequate supply now for nearly two years. At the pump, goons force the attendant to fill up their tanks. Others in the line complain, and there is nearly a fist fight. It’s not that there isn’t the money to pay for imported fuel. The government doesn’t want to keep subsidising it, and is reluctant to raise the prices for political reasons. Not everything can be blamed on the international price of crude at $120 per barrel. Corruption, mismanagement, adulteration and the NOC’s monopoly in distribution are equally responsible.

In the short-term, fuel prices need to be raised, but consumers can be cushioned if the taxes are tied to the old price. The new government must also reduce taxes on electric cars and vans. In the medium-term, letting the private sector into fuel import and retail will control corruption and adulteration. And ultimately, there is no alternative but to reduce dependence on imported fuel by switching to renewables.

Ritesh has lost all patience: “Let the government double the petrol price to Rs 200, I don’t care. But stop torturing us like this.”

Editorial

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Luxurious Interior
Matches for all imaginations
The growth of Kathmandu Valley from rustic temple towns to a metropolitan urban sprawl has consumed its life force. Rather than gently welcoming newcomers to the city, it overwhelms them with its noise, chaotic rhythms of voices, steps, and how it looks like they have a perpetual rot, odours that assail the nostrils, and menacing touts. Koundalians, on the other hand, have become antediluvian in their chaos and filth may be depressing enough. But the situation in other towns of Nepal is worse.

It used to be said in rural Nepal that you knew you were approaching a village when human droppings started dotting the trail. Our towns proclaim their presence in even more dramatic ways. Black plastic bags line the air like balloons, open sewage overflow into pavements, endless queues of disheveled vehicles honk their horns, abandoned cows and stray dogs amble along thoroughfares, and aimless groups of people loiter the streets. Welcome to Nepal.

Despite their over-stressed infrastructure and underprivileged municipal facilities, from rural villages to urban towns, there is no place where life is easy. This can only mean more squallor and more nastiness in the future.

Economic growth and urbanization have gone closely interlinked that one without the other is impossible, and urbanization has made us have to be better methods of planning, building and managing towns than the free-for-all way in which we run our municipalities now.

Early this week, Nepal Engineers Association organized a workshop to discuss Public Private Partnership approach to municipal level development and services. Like most consultations, the event turned out to be largely ritualistic, but participants were successful in pinpointing the reasons why urban growth in Nepal's towns is unplanned and going wrong.

Like with everything else, the main reason is the absence of effective government in Singhara Darba. The lack of political leadership means that little is accomplished in the sense that the government everywhere has been at a standstill for over two years now.

Under-motivated, unwilling and mostly unsuitable executive officers head nearly all municipalities. They are mayors, metropolitan councillors and its executive members all rolled into one. Even if such a person is Brahman incarna, it is impossible for an individual to be the cook, the butcher, the cleaner, the janitor and the father of the town all at the same time.

Municipalities have remained headless since the last election, utilization of funds is at an all-time low. A fresh mandate from the electorate will only be possible after the new constitution is made, but till then there has to be a new way to demand accountability through an ad-hoc political setup. The fact that Baburam Bhattarai is an urban planning expert and the Maoists may soon lead a new government could be potential good news.

Even though they are glorified as local government units, most municipalities have to survive on doles from the central government. Kathmandu has no money to patch up potholes. Janakpur lacks resources to dispose of its garbage safely, and despite hosting the biggest revenue-generating customs office in the country, Birganj doesn’t have the budget to upgrade infrastructure on its own.

After the leadership and funds, the third most important factor of urban degeneration is the lack of people to run municipalities. Apprenticeship has its strengths, but it works properly only when it is combined with sound theoretical training. Tribhuvan University does offer a masters in urban planning, but most short-term programs run by donor agencies benefit consultants running the course rather than their trainees.

We will have to learn to build better cities to produce responsible citizens that do not begin to burn tyres, pelt stones and vandalize public property. Cities to produce responsible citizens that do not begin to burn tyres, pelt stones and vandalize public property. And to do that, we may have to get down to brass tacks right away to make up for lost time.
Porn is not new in Nepal (‘Porn wave’, #411). In 1984, when I was living in Nepal, a house in my neighbourhood used to charge an entrance fee and show pornographic films. There will always be a market for sex. What society needs to ensure is that there is protection for the girls involved in this trade, who take part in it unwillingly and are forced to do so due to poverty. As long as there are men who want sex, porn and prostitution will exist. Legalising this industry and protecting the workers should be the primary concern, not banning it. Nepal has far worse problems in society than sex. The solution is to criminalise the buying of sex, which will never happen in Nepal. So the only alternative is to legalise it, make testing mandatory, clean up the working environment and punish those who abuse these regulations.

Margareta, France

When you criminalise buying of sex you are indirectly discouraging selling of sex, are you not? If there are no buyers will there be no sellers. Pornography becomes dangerous when young people start believing what they watch and the perversion rife in it. Poverty is only one factor pushing women into prostitution. Please do not forget upbringing, culture, moral values and most importantly things like drug addiction, damaged psychology and circumstances like coercion, deception and blackmailing.

K Rai, UK

Common sense should prevail. The need of the hour is perhaps to focus on advocating, spreading the awareness and sensitising the issue in illiterate and impoverished communities. Hitherto, only a handful of ill-resourced agencies are working towards the prevention of sexual exploitation, trafficking and domestic abuse. The assistance may cease when foreign alms dry up. The ominous silence now of Nepali civics will only aggravate the situation. It is urgent to preserve the Nepali pride of being rich in conservatism, traditional and cultural values. Otherwise in years not so distant, Nepal will perhaps be a hot spot for international sex traders. Making sex a taboo is to victimise more young women and children.

Gavin, email

A country that tolerates the trafficking of its young women to become prostitutes in India and has no right to hold the moral high ground on porn. We have to stop this shameful real-life exploitation of our women before getting all worked up about reel-life smut.

Jujubhai, Asan

MILLION MUTINIES

‘A million mutinies’ (Editorial, #411). Instead of sermonising, Nepali Times should introspect and ask the question whether it has also been responsible to some extent for this mess. By constantly maligning politicians and eroding their credibility they have contributed in bringing about a situation where there is no one left to douse such fires when they start.

Ram Prasad, Chhauni

An excellent editorial and I have no words to describe the front page cartoon by Robin Sayami. No, the flag and country should never be torn apart. Let’s forget the divisions and unite for our beloved Nepal.

CK Shrestha, email

Fantastic cartoon. It says it all.

Sanita, Janakpur

FORWARDED

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Samsung, the Korean company better known for its monitors and cell phones, has launched an aggressive foray into the camera market that has been dominated by the Japanese giants, Sony and Canon.

“We don’t regard Nepal as a small country; this is an important market for us,” said Tony Myoung-Sun An, Sales Area Manager of Samsung’s Asia Group, who was in Kathmandu this week.

Korea’s Samsung had gone into a strategic partnership with Golchha Organisation’s Him Electronics in 2002, and since then Samsung has literally become a household name in consumer electronics. “Samsung fits perfectly with our portfolio. It is an international brand that is recognised for its quality and innovative products,” says Shekhar Golchha, Managing Director of Him Electronics.

Samsung currently holds 20 per cent market share in the consumer electronics sector, and Golchha says this is growing rapidly. It has built a strong brand image in the Nepali household appliances, with televisions, washing machines, home theaters, audio systems and microwaves.

“Cameras are no longer a family commodity; it is an individual product,” explains Myoung-Sun An and says Samsung wants to leverage its global leadership in digital technology to take advantage of the market broadening in cameras. The new models launched this week are in five series from 7.2 to 14.6 mega pixels, with one of the clearest LCD screens among new model cameras. And they don’t just click pictures; they have high-definition video capability in addition to the regular functions like digital image stabilisation and face recognition. Selected models also offer multimedia features; the camera can be used to listen to music, read novels and even watch movies. Consumers can choose the model according to their pocket size as the prices range from Rs 8,900 to Rs 120,000.

“Because Samsung is not essentially known for its cameras, we need to add value,” says Myoung-Sun An, “and in that the consumers are being offered high technology cameras at a comparatively lower prices.”

What set Samsung cameras apart is their unique designs that focus on being consumer friendly. With the feather touch technology, navigation is so simplified that one doesn’t need to be a professional to take great pictures.

Him Electronics’ Samsung showroom in Darbar Marg is already flooded with enquiries and orders for the new line of cameras, and Myoung-Sun An is convinced Samsung can soon be the best-selling camera in Nepal.

Golchha says the current political instability is having a dampening effect on the economy, but he is optimistic about the future. He says: “Of course it worries us. But what we try to do is see the light at the end of the tunnel. Today’s need is to focus on the economic agenda. When there is money in the pocket, everything else will fall into place.”

Paavan Mathema
Road to now here

Pokhara—One always is tempted to take the scenic drive to Pokhara, now that the notorious Krishna Bhil landslide has been banned through ingenious Nepal bio-engineering.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

Today, it isn’t the landslides that block the road, but obstructions by locals along the way. A national highway artery can be blocked for hours or days by any one of any reason. Or it can be just two vehicles that decide to change tyres right in the middle of the road, creating a monstrous traffic jam that make cars in the queue burn away precious fuel. A similar psyche works at the national level: a few politicians block Nepal’s progress. Out of ignorance or selfishness, they stop the flow of prosperity.

In Kathmandu, traffic jams are a daily occurrence. A few people keep millions back. They stop the flow of prosperity. One argument you hear here is that since the quality of tourists has deteriorated over the past two decades, houses and hotels haven’t been able to pay attention to repairs. The time is ripe for a serious re-think of our tourism strategy and products to ensure that there are more tourists both foreign and domestic coming and spending more time in the city. There should be more things to do, and opportunities of optimum utilisation of the lake and water sports. The combination of mountain and lake is stupendous. However, our ‘shutteronomics’ has turned this town into an ugly concrete jungle devoid of any sense of aesthetics.

One argument you hear here is that the current urbanisation model, large residential, industrial and agricultural, cannot be rectified as the cost of the restoration would be more than building a couple of new cities. However, other cities should be able to use the powers entrusted to them to stop the rot before it gets irreversible.

When was the last time we had real governance?

Pokusottam Neupane recently won a TVS RTR — 160cc Apache bike through a lucky draw on Call Kantipur, from LG’s ‘lawalaskar’ offer that started in April.

Hang on

Hang Ten, a California-based lifestyle brand, has opened a showroom at Tamrakar Complex, New Road, and a retail outlet at the Blue Bird Mall, Tripureshwor. Hang Ten caters to young adults and kids clothing and accessories and is brought to Nepal by South East Traders.

Scratch

Customers of Gorkha and Bishwakarma Cement get a chance to win Yasuda domestic products through a scratch card from the ‘Sukhi Pariwar’ offer for every 20 sacks of cement purchased.

Choppers

Fichtail Air has signed an agreement with Eurocopter, Singapore and is bringing two new AS350 B3 Ecureuil helicopters to Nepal. The choppers, which are suited for high altitudes and difficult climate, will be delivered by early 2010.

Fitness freak

The Jasmine Fitness Club and Spa was opened at the United World Trade Center, Tripureshwor. The club offers facilities such as heated swimming pool, gym, sauna, and beauty parlour. The monthly membership fee is priced at Rs 16, 500 per month for singles.

NEW PRODUCTS

TABs: Drinking Water Purification Tablets Aquatabs, manufactured at Rs 16, 500 per month for singles.

Choppers

Choppers for high altitudes and difficult climate.

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When was the last time we had real governance?

When was the last time we had real governance?
Letter to the editor, Kantipur, 5 August

As the Miss Nepal contest draws near, opposition to it has been raised once more. This isn't new. In 1994, Ruby Rana became the first Nepali to be crowned amidst unnecessary controversy, partly orchestrated by the media. But the Kathmandu Jaycees continues to organise the contest every year.

Every competition has its limitations and Miss Nepal is no exception. Some people just can't qualify. But for any college student, five feet and above there is no problem. Look at it this way: at least someone gets to show off her talent.

The argument that beauty contests must be banned because they take women into the world of glamour is an attack on individual freedom itself. That is an individual choice and it's none of our business. Why are the protestors mainly women? Could there be an element of the stereotyped 'jealous woman' at work here? A winner is honoured, not oppressed. A Miss Nepal has a choice to appear or not appear on television.

Then there is the objection to the bikini round while representing Nepal in the internationals, but to win a title it is necessary to play by the rules. It may not be acceptable in our culture but it is in theirs, and women from a multitude of cultures will be there.

We talk about modernisation, and hope to catch up with developed countries. Is it oppression when you participate in a contest out of your own free will, or when you rally against a changing society? Does it make any sense to burn tyres or take part in a contest that brings out your talents?

From the Nepali Press

Savor

the taste of Indian Kebabs and Curries by famous Chef Anil Khurana especially flown in from Hyatt Regency Delhi.

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Venue : The Cafe
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Prachanda meets Pushpa Kamal

Suresh Kiran in Nepal, 10 August

Everyone knows Comrade Prachanda, but not many know Pushpa Kamal Dahal because it is only recently that he has emerged from underground. They met after a long time last week by chance.

Pushpa Kamal said to Prachanda, “After you won the elections you forgot all about me. Why don’t you look me up anymore?”

Prachanda replied, “It’s not like that...um...I’m very busy these days.”

This enraged Pushpa Kamal, “You have all the time to visit the Indian Embassy, or dine with dips but you don’t have time for me?”

Prachanda tried to calm him down, “It’s not like that. You know how it is with politics, I’m busy with that.”

“What politics?” by now an angry Pushpa Kamal was shouting, “before the elections you said you’d be president.”

Prachanda scratched his head: “Yeah, that didn’t quite work out. But I know thinking of making you the Prime Minister.”

“I don’t want to be the Prime Minister. I know you are going to betray me,” said Pushpa Kamal.

Prachanda patted Pushpa Kamal on the back, and said: “That’s not going to happen. First I’ll propose my name, if that’s rejected then I’ll put forward yours. One of the two is sure to be accepted.”

We All will be there in IHTEC Fair, What about you.....?
True democracy is not possible without transparency in the government sector: its expenditure, the activities of the political parties and public corporations. The 25 political parties in the constituent assembly have the responsibility of running the country and writing the constitution. But Nepalis also want the parties to be transparent in their policies, their agenda and their expenditure.

But not one political party submits its records to audit. In fact, this lack of transparency has meant that we are still unaware of the number of members in a party, their fund-raising sources, how they manage their finances and their expenditures.

Legally, all parties have to submit annual financial records to the Election Commission but few do so. “Parties have repeatedly ignored our request for audited statements,” says EC spokesperson Laxman Bhattarai. During the CA elections, EC had given permission to each political party to raise up to Rs 460,000 without disclosing the source of income. But the commission has no idea whether the parties adhered to this requirement.

Civil society activist Devendra Raj Panday says that Nepali political parties must practice transparency. “The parties shouldn’t trick the citizens of this country,” he adds.

Insiders say the Maoist need more than Rs 2 billion every year. The party says it raises this money from membership fees. Maoist office secretary Keshab Nepal says: “Since we gained a majority by winning people’s trust, we are trying to be more transparent.” He says that although the Maoists are the largest party, they have the smallest budget.

The UML also claims that its main source of income is membership fees. But it is difficult to believe that parties like UML and the Maoist with 100,000 members each can function purely on fees. UML member Astha Lakshmikisays her party is very transparent and its party congress reviews a statement of accounts. The NC doesn’t have a membership fee and runs solely on donations and doesn’t keep open accounts.

The big parties have given CA seats to people from the business community instead of their own members, raising questions about the nexus between politics and business.
Organic growth

SHRADHA BASHYAT

Dawn is breaking. Overnight, rain has made the monsoon clouds hang low over the surrounding mountains, but Baburam Kunwar is already heading off to his fields in Godavari. He works meticulously and efficiently, checking each and every lettuce leaf, the tomato plants, the root crops for signs of damage from insects and worms. Kunwar works in an organic farm, but because he is not using chemicals to kill off insects and other pests he has to be extra vigilant about this precious vegetables being destroyed. But the reward for the hard work is not just a higher price for his veggies in Kathmandu’s market, but also a sense of pride that he is not poisoning his environment.

Kunwar’s crispy-fresh greens may not have the artificial plumpness and shine of commercially grown vegetables, but they are more vitamin and mineral rich, and a whole lot healthier.

The combination of local and natural is what makes the produce of farmers like Kunwar stand apart. Kathmandu Valley is historically renowned for its rich vegetable crop which has found its way into traditional Newari cuisine. But today, with urban sprawl crowding out the fertile farmlands into the Valley used to grow vegetables in the past—centuries ago, everything was fresh and organic. Kunwar's crispy-fresh greens are organic and natural is what makes the produce of farmers like Kunwar stand apart.

Increased health awareness among the upper middle class of Kathmandu now means that customers are willing to pay the 20 per cent extra for organic produce. But with inflation, people are getting more choosier and conscious of their health, says Newa, who plans to set up a wholesale market specialising in organic food.

There is an organic food bazaar at the Summit Hotel Organic Food Market on Wednesday and Sunday. Over the weekend, a time when the Maoists are about to lead the government, many have wondered why there isn’t a McDonalds in Durbar Square. Where to buy organic food:

Organic Village in Baluwatar, Bakundole and Kupondole, Bakundole and Kupondole Bakery Cafés all over Kathmandu, Bakundole and Kupondole Bakery Cafe chain that serves organic food in Thamel or U Café in Sanepa. There is an organic food bazaar every Wednesday and Sunday at the Summit Hotel, where many fast food wallahs have kept away due to high prices. Reeka Oemisch is opening an organic snack shop—Organic World and Fair Future in Basantapur and says consumer awareness will grow. Shari Khadka, owner of an organic farm in Panauti, says: "The difficulty is that people don’t understand what organic food is. The first thing one notices in an organic farm is that it’s full of insects—ladybirds, bees, earthworms and butterflies. Many of these are good organisms that help eat harmful insects, or like earthworms naturally fertilise the soil. A commercial farmer, on the other hand, is essentially a monocrop, whereas a pesticide kills all the good insects and worms along with the few bad ones."

Slow into

Nepal’s unique status as one of the last countries in the world without international fast food chains may be coming to an end, ironically at a time when the Maoists are about to lead the government.

Many have wondered why there isn’t a McDonalds in Durbar Marg, a Pizza Hut in Pokhara or a Starbucks in Namche, while others count it as a blessing that Nepal is one last unspoilt corner of Asia where the golden double arch hasn’t yet made its appearance.

We asked Nepali businessmen why multinational fast food chains have kept away from Nepal. "It has a lot to do with low purchasing power here," suggests Brij Tuladhar, managing director of Bluebird Mall which has a popular food court. "Although the demand for fast food is rising, the taste preference of Nepali consumers is inclined towards Chinese and Indian rather than western food."

However, the success of the Bakery Cafe chain that serves sandwiches, fries and burgers shows that fast food may not just be a fad. Bakery was started by Shyam Kashyapati with his first outlet in Tindhara in 1991. Since then he has opened nine Bakery Cafes all over Kathmandu, and even one in his native Tansen Valley.
rest in fast food

But Pizza Hut and KFC are sniffing around

in 1998 and in Butwal in 2001. Kakshapati told Nepali Times he feels there is great potential for international chains to set up business franchises in Nepal. “They are simply waiting for the right time to enter the market. The consumers here are already exposed to their brand name. Once they set up, the market will follow,” he explains.

 Asked if he is nervous about competition, Kakshapati adds: “No, it will keep local restaurateurs on their toes, force us to improve our standards too.”

The lifestyles of the young in the cities are changing and so are their eating habits. Nuclear families in which both spouses are working are becoming the norm. Eating out has become convenient, and not just on special occasions. “Nepalis have become more experimental in their taste, they are eager to try new items in the menu,” explains Chandan Kayastha, owner of Roadhouse Café, “we see real potential for the food industry to grow.”

Given this, what seems to be keeping The Colonel and Big Macs out is the high franchise cost. For example, the annual fee for a McDonalds franchise is said to be in the $ 1 million range in this part of the world. Even if the novelty effect may bring in customers initially, businessmen doubt if there will be a good return on investments, especially because of the high franchise cost. “Independent businessmen do not have the resource or infrastructure to sustain such a risk,” says Gagan Pradhan, owner of Himalayan Java, the trendy coffee joint in Thamel.

Most locally owned restaurants themselves are working under tight margins. There is an acute shortage of even the basic supplies like fuel, gas, electricity and water. Raw materials are of inconsistent quality, prices fluctuate wildly and there is always the threat of labour problems. All this has kept businessmen as well as potential international investors away from Nepal.

But one factor that could change all that would be a tourism boom and a trickle down of income to young Nepalis exposed to western brands. Several international chains are now reportedly exploring the Nepali market and trying to cash in on the first player advantage.

Varun Beverages, bottlers of Pepsi in Nepal is hoping to open a Pizza Hut outlet this year and KFC is expected to follow soon after. R J Corp, the parent company, appears to be interested in setting up a franchise network starting next year. Although political stability is still an issue, there is optimism that things will settle down once the new government is formed.

Publicity is not expected to be a problem since most young urban Nepalis are already exposed to the brand. The franchises would be a new ‘cool’ place for urban youngsters to hang out, provide office-goers a new option to grab a quick bite and also for trekkers sick of eating dal-bhat nonstop for three weeks in the mountains.
Economic

How to maximise the benefits from vocational education

Geoff Pines, Principal of Greenwich Community College in the UK, was in Kathmandu to speak about the benefits of vocational training. He talked to Nepal Times about the importance of vocational education in Nepal.

Nepal Times: Why vocational training?
Geoff Pines: I’ve been involved in education all my life. But unlike the traditional schools, at a vocational school an individual’s talents surfaces easily. The issue here in Nepal, like in the UK, is that vocational education is seen as a poor relative of academic studies, which is a wrong concept. Every country needs business and in order to have well-rounded employees, vocational education is an area of importance and should be focused on very seriously.

Over 200,000 Nepalis go abroad to work every year. How important is job-oriented education in a country like this?
Vocational skills are beneficial for any individual. They play an important role in the long-term as they help the industries, which in turn help in the economic development of the country. Vocational education is also important because it has a positive effect on business and attracts foreign investment. If vocational education is emphasised, it will yield high quality employees who will be recognised not just in the country but beyond the borders.

Is there a role for the private sector to be involved? The private sector plays a very significant role as it provides and acts like the knowledge unit. This plays an important role in the long-term as they help the industries, which in turn help in the economic development of the country. Vocational education is also important because it has a positive effect on business and attracts foreign investment. If vocational education is emphasised, it will yield high quality employees who will be recognised not just in the country but beyond the borders.

There is no big infrastructure project or employment guarantee program which could give people money and dignity. It is simple: if you do not deal with the youth bulge, there will be conflict.

Combine this unemployment with the collapse of the administrative and security apparatus of the state. There is no local government, the bureaucrats are not accountable to anyone, and they have no political direction. The state lost out at a critical moment when it did not capitalise on its post-election legitimacy and the total illegitimacy of the armed groups. That was the best time to weaken extremists and we lost the chance.

Where the state does exist, it is corrupt. As long as the cops get a share of the loot, they prefer not to confront criminals. The parties use the armed groups as a card to promote the politics of divisiveness. Businesses and even NGOs are now reporting to be using armed groups against rivals. A conflict economy is slowly taking root in Madhes, and some sections are quite happy with the lawlessness.

Across the eastern Tarai there is unhappiness. A trader can’t transport products because of blocked highways. A Dall labourer in a northern Siraha village is unhappy because he barely gets 3 kg of rice as daily wage. A Muslim is unhappy because his community is being victimised by the Madhes hegemony. There are no institutions to deal with the discontent, which means all the unhappiness and anger will be manifested on the streets.

After Kathmandu parties do us a favour and form the government, they should turn their gaze southwards and start building the state.
training is the way to go

per the needs of the employer and businesses. At Greenwich College in India there is no vocational education course that doesn’t guarantee a job on completion. There is no point teaching a course which is of no use to businesses, that would be a waste of time and money. The relationship between private sector and job of education is a mutually wasteful activity which is of no use to businesses, that would be just a waste of time and money.

Lack of regulation and monitoring has led to widespread exploitation of poor Nepalis by fellow Nepalis. Individual instances of cheating and abandonment of recruits at foreign airports fill the media every day. But there are other aspects of foreign employment that don’t get as much attention: the increasing number of deaths of workers abroad. In 2007 alone, 754 Nepalis died in the Gulf and Malaysia. Besides accidents, there is a mysterious increase in the number of workers whose deaths are registered “heart failure” in the Gulf.

There has been an alarming increase in cases of domestic violence, even murder. Due to suspicions of infidelity, parents, especially single women, have been killed in the Gulf. Children falling into bad habits due to lack of supervision are other social side-effects.

No major impact study has been done on how the money that the workers send home is spent. With food prices increasing, a larger chunk of it probably goes to the upkeep of the family back home in other words, what is the social cost? Nepal families pay for overseas migration? Is it worth it? How do we maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of foreign employment until we find the jobs for them at home?

Labour migration is a business and like any business it is driven by the laws of supply and demand. Nepal has to compete with other countries for the price of labour and to compete, our workers need to be more skilled, productive and disciplined.

But government policy on recruitment erodes our competitive advantage. By offering only unskilled labour, we undermine the earning potential of our nationals. An independent bureau must replace the Labour Department so it can work in marketing and welfare services independently and efficiently and reduce exploitation and fraud. It could also facilitate access to information, an effective insurance system, counselling, equal opportunities to women, tap niche markets and provide loans to people from remote areas and unprivileged groups.

At present, Nepali migrant workers are squeezed by both the government policy and recruiting agencies. That is no way to treat the heroes who sustain our economy with their sweat and tears.

Ganesh Gurung is a sociologist with the Nepal Institute of Development Studies and chairperson of the National Network on Safe Migration.
Moscow–Prophets, it is said, are supposed to be without honour in their homeland. Yet Moscow has just witnessed the extraordinary sight of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, disdained and once-exiled author of the Gulag Archipelago and One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, receiving the honour in their homeland. Yet are supposed to be without honour in their homeland. Yet are supposed to be without honour in their homeland. Yet are supposed to be without honour in their homeland.

It is a sad testament to Russia's current mindset that it is Solzhenitsyn the anti-modernist crank who is being remembered, not Solzhenitsyn the towering foe of Soviet barbarism and mendacity. Today, his writings are seen as buttressing the state, not individual freedom. Works such as The Red Wheel series of novels, a tedious account of the history of Imperial Russia and the creation of the USSR or his last book A Hundred Years Together on the history of such things as an ex-KGB man and sees the Soviet Union's collapse as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of modern times. Solzhenitsyn accepted Putin as a ‘good dictator’.

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TRIBUTE
Nina Khrushcheva

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The tragedy of Solzhenitsyn is that although he played a mighty role in liberating Russia from totalitarianism, he had nothing to say to ordinary Russians after their liberation, except to chastise them. Yet perhaps one day we Russians will escape our false dreams, and when that day comes, the heroic Solzhenitsyn, who could never surrender or be corrupted, will be restored to us. But it is now that we need that Solzhenitsyn most. Project Syndicate

Nina Khrushcheva teaches international affairs at The New School in New York.

Solzhenitsyn's published works:

- One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962; novel)
- An Incident at Kuretskaya Station (1963; novella)
- Matryona's Patch (1963; novella)
- For the Good of the Cause (1964; novel)
- The First Circle (1968; novel)
- Cancer Ward (1968; novel)

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REVIEW

W

ith movies like Eternal Sun shining of the Spotless Mind (2004) and The Science of Sleep (2006), director Michel Gondry had managed to return to movies a certain sense of wonder, even bewilderment at the magic of film. Eschewing the digital bewilderment at the magic of director Michel Gondry had and The Science of Sleep (2006), film, Be Kind, Rewind the to try it himself. With his newest kind of invitation for the viewer that he evokes is a backwards. The ‘how-did-he-do-simply running the film the camera, even something as tinkering with the mechanics of playing with perspective, material form of wizardry—one he is a practitioner of a more technical achievement (and special effects of late that have reached dizzying heights of unprecedented, capturing the playful and experimental essence of his approach.

Be Kind, Rewind probes the strange antipathy between an industry that is preoccupied and a call for action charm s and inspires Be kind, rew ind, rew atch, repeat family resemblance with the source material, but the scenes of production with their improvised sets and costumes are surprisingly fun, and sometimes frustratingly short. The Rush Hour 2 sequence recreates on a playground jungle gym set as the high-rise building of the movie’s action movies is ridiculously grin-inducing. With an amorphous ketchup, Gondry allows himself to pull back the curtain to peak at his cinematic alchemy to beggar

CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D’Silva

technical achievement (and despairing depths of mediocrity), he is a practitioner of an inanimate, material form of wizardry—one that is all the more enchanting for us, knowing that it is a brick playful with perspective, tinkering with the mechanics of the camera, even something as simply running the film backwards. The ‘how-did-he-do-th is question is a kind of invitation for the viewer to try it himself. With his newest film, Be Kind, Rewind the invitation has never been more cleaner or inviting. Pastisau, New Jersey, a place that seems to stretch up one urban block under a highway is the economically depressed neighborhood that is home to ‘Be Kind, Rewind’, an anarchistic video store that rents actual VHS movies. The film’s central relationship is between Mike (Mos Def), the oddball mechanic from across the street. When Jerry electro-magnetises himself and accidentally erases every cassette he works for his father figure Mr. Fisher at the VHS store, and Mike’s best friend Jerry (Jack Black), the oddball mechanic the family joke about her name. says Lucky Sherpa, making a

A lucky Sherpa

A s one of the few Sherpa members of the Constituent Assembly, Lucky will be one of drafting a new constitution on behalf of her people—a branch of Sherpas that lives in the Arun Valley of Sankhuwasabha. Lucky’s father was the first Sherpa professor and when he came to teach at Tribhuvan University, her family moved to Kathmandu where she was educated. Lucky graduated with a masters in economics.

‘It’s a long way for Lucky from Madh Mulkharka, where the rest of the clan still lives to being the UML representative in the assembly. “Most of my extended family didn’t get the opportunities I had and I am determined to work for their upliftment so that no Nepali is left behind,” Lucky told Nepal Times on a trek through her home district recently. Negotier by rules in faraway Kathmandu, and the apathy of the district administration in Khandbari to the concerns of the mountain people means that the people of northern regions of Sankhuwasabha are even more remote than Humla or Mugu.

“I guess you can cal me lucky,” says Lucky Sherpa, making a family joke about her name. There are layers upon layers of neglect: people are marginalised because they live in far-flung areas, their voice is feeble because they come from indigenous communities, they are not educated and don’t have the reach, they are poor so no one listens to them, or they come last because they are women says Lucky. “At the national level, the indigenous movement is getting a voice, but here you won’t find many people like me who can speak out.” That is why Lucky set up the Himalayan Indigenous Women Network (HIWN) to promote and protect the rights of indigenous mountain communities, focusing on women.

She explains how information is power and because indigenous women don’t speak Nepali they are left out of decision-making in government offices. There are things that can start within the communities: girls must be given the same opportunities as boys can speak out.” That is why Lucky set up the Himalayan Indigenous Women Network (HIWN) to promote and protect the rights of indigenous mountain communities, focusing on women.

The road to becoming a woman indigenous leader is a bumpy one. Nepal’s political arena and the indigenous movement are dominated by men. But Lucky chooses to focus on the common denominator: indigenous groups feel the same social, political and economic exclusion, which can be amended by the revised constitution.

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She explains how information is power and because indigenous women don’t speak Nepali they are left out of decision-making in government offices. There are things that can start within the communities: girls must be given the same opportunities as boys and women need to be educated about their rights.

“Already,” adds Lucky, “participation and the sense of politics among women are emerging. We are becoming aware that we should be involved in politics at local and central levels, otherwise our issues will not be heard.”

The Himalayan Indigenous Women Network (HIWN) to promote and protect the rights of indigenous mountain communities, focusing on women.

The road to becoming a women indigenous leader is a bumpy one. Nepal’s political arena and the indigenous movement are dominated by men. But Lucky chooses to focus on the common denominator: indigenous groups feel the same social, political and economic exclusion, which can be amended by the revised constitution.

Lucky is determined that it won’t just be luck that will give women from indigenous communities the same opportunity she had for education.

Sraddha Basnyat

 Himalayan Indigenous Women Network www.hiwn.org.np
**EXHIBITIONS**
- Duet of Fantasies by Promina Shrestha and Ranendra B. Mali, 8 August - 7 September, 10AM-6PM, Gallery 32, Dent Inn at Heritage Plaza II, Kamaladi. 4241942
- Amalgam-2008 an exhibition of paintings by national and international artists till 8 September at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, Sunday - Friday 11AM-6PM and Saturday 12-4PM. 4438979.
- Teju Festival 2008 till 10 August, United World Trade Center, Tripureswor. 4428588
- Health and Fitness Expo 2008 from 21-24 August, United World Trade Center, Tripureswor. 4117104

**EVENTS**
- The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2008 by David Ludden, 3:45 PM, 12 August, Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari.
- Dancing/yoga-latey with Shabira Rao.
- The Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2008 presented by Party Nepal, 9 August, 9PM, Rs 500.
- Fusion and Looza Band every Friday night, Bhumti Resto Lounge, Lazimpal. 4412183
- Asparagus Promotion at Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards 21 August. 4483961
- Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shahgrilla, Kathmandu. Rs 600. 4412999
- Lavazza coffee Italy's favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4279399
- Hot summer spicy food at the Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Kupondole Heights. 5544872
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Cafe, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- Steak escape with Kathmandu's premier steaks for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- Silent disco party at the Sunrise Cafe, and Russian specialties at Bar Puskul. 4421634
- Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs, Cocktails and Grooves at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails. 4273999
- Retro Brunch Barbeque with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at Le Meritien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- Gymkhana with live music by Inner Groove at Fusion-the Garden of Dreams, operated by Le Meritien. 4248999
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and mire at Roadhouse, Bhaktapur 4425687, Pulchowk 5521755 and Thamel. 4250440
-splash Bar and Grill, Hotel Radisson, 7PM every Friday. 4411818
- Stein special at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- New menu at Dohkaima Café, Patan Dhoka. 5522113
- Indian Food Promotion at The Café, Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards until 17 Aug. 4483962
- Sixth Annual Wine Festival until September at Kitroy's, Jyatha. 4250440
- Retro Nite presented by Party Nepal, 9 August, 9PM, Rs 500, Cube Bar, Kamaladi
- 28th Yala Maya Classic
- Monsoon madness package at Shangri-la Village Resort, Patan Dhoka, Rs 500. 4412999
- Health and Fitness Expo 2008 from 21-24 August, United World Trade Center, Tripureswor. 4117104

**MUSIC**
- Retro Nite presented by Party Nepal, 9 August, 9PM, Rs 500, Cube Bar, Kamaladi
- 28th Yala Maya Classic, a classical music series, 18 August, 5PM, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 100. 5553787
- TGIF at Jazzabelle Café every Wednesday and Friday from 6.30 PM onwards. 2114075
- Ladies night at Jatra Café & Bar on Wednesday with live unplugged music by D Shehan
- Hy Jazz Club every Friday from 8.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4483960
- Fusion and Looza Band every Friday night, Bhumti Resto Lounge, Lazimpal. 4412183
- Rudra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212
- Sunset music by Himarta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.

**DINING**
- Indian Food Promotion at The Café, Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards until 17 Aug. 4483962
- Sixth Annual Wine Festival until September at Kitroy’s, Jyatha. 4250440
- New menu at Dohkaima Café, Patan Dhoka. 5522113
- Masala, an Indian restaurant on Jawalakhel, St.Mary’s school road. 4421634
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- Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shahgrilla, Kathmandu. Rs 600. 4412999
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- Steak escape with Kathmandu’s premier steaks for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- Bourbon Room Restro-bar open for lunch and dinner with over 100 cocktails, Lal Darbar. 4273999
- Cocktails and grooves with jazz by Inner Groove at Fusion-The Bar at Dwarika’s, every Wednesday. 4411818
- Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel. 4273999
- Ily espresso coffee at the Galeria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails. 4250440
- International buffet at the Sunrise Café, and Russian specialties at Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and mire at Roadhouse, Bhaktapur 4425687, Pulchowk 5521755 and Thamel. 4261817
- Retro Brunch Barbeque with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at Le Meritien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- Dhamaka a Nepal style barbeque with a pan-Indian fusion at the Silkibar and Grill, Hotel Radisson. 7PM every Friday. 4411818
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Girey Gurung, Rs. 666, at the Shambla Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 8481290619
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4425251

**WEEKEND WEATHER**
The monsoon this week showed maturity, a more self-confident monsoon that dumped major rain right across central and western Nepal. The system that brought this mixture is an intense front stretching right across northern India, as we see in this satellite radar image taken on Thursday morning. A distinct characteristic of this year’s monsoon so far has been the higher number of isolated rainfall events of shorter duration compared to the light sustained rainfall of previous years. After this monsoon pulse wears itself out, as it heads west early next week, the rain will come down in afternoon storms tapering into night rain. In the meantime, expect a wet and cloudy weekend.

**ABOUT TOWN**
- In The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon, the third sequel to the Mummy franchise, Brendan Fraser returns as explorer Rick O’Connell to fight the resurrected Imhotep (Angel Locsin). The mummy who was doomed by a double-crossing sorceress (Michelle Yeoh) to spend an eternity in suspended animation is awakened after Alex (Luke Ford), Rick and Evelyn’s (Maria Bello) son, is tricked. The relentless young archaeologist now must seek the help of his parents and together they must stop the mummy who awakens from a 2,000-year-old curse and threatens to force the world into his merciless, unending service.

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GUARDING THE PEACE: Japanese ambassador to Nepal Tatsuo Mizuno at a rally organised by the Alliance for Peace to commemorate the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima on Wednesday at Swoyambhu.

FUELLING ANGER: Tired of waiting in queue for eight hours at the Bansbari petrol pump, a motorcyclist heckles an attendant to fill up his tank. Usually motorcyclists are only given 5 litres.

PHOTO OP: New and outgoing members of the National Forum of Photo Journalists pose for a photo after its election on Saturday.

AUTHOR BEED: Prabhakar Rana speaks at the launch of the book Beed Bytes by Nepali Times columnist Sujeev Shakya (left) on Wednesday. The book is a collection of the Economic Sense column (see p5) from the past eight years.
Sowing wild oaths

Notice how the hoo-ha about the Vice President swearing in Hindi died out as soon as it started? Even when VP Jha ignored the Supreme Court order to come up with a written explanation, there was not a twitter. No prizes for guessing who had a hand in turning the anti-Hindi switch on, and who turned it off again.

You get rid of one set of royals and another set of neo-royals take over. Giriraja hadn’t finished his chores in New Delhi, so the Nepal Airlines flight had to wait at the tarmac the whole day to bring him back. Remember how Gyanu took the 757 on safari to Botswana? At Tin Kune, the intersection was closed for traffic for 45 minutes for the prime ministerial cavalcade could pass, reminding us of the bandobast for royal comings and goings. Government gray coats, army brass, diplomats and the panchaya kanyas all had to troop to the airport just as they did during the bad old days of monarchy.

If a prime minister who has already resigned can lead our delegation to the SAARCSTIC Summit, then it wasn’t such a big deal for Education Minister Pradeep Nepal, who resigned from the government with other UML ministers in April, to lead the Nepal delegation to the Olympics. The contingent has eight athletes and 30 officials, among them the good minister’s wife. Ms Nepal. In fact none of the UML ministers has yet given up their official residences or office vehicles.

But someone who couldn’t go to the Olympics even though he hasn’t resigned was none other than President Yadav. Notwithstanding the Ass’ exclusive report last week, it looks like the prez had to call it all off even after he had packed all his bags. The reason was an unexpected visit by the ambassador of a neighbouring country to the south the name of which begins with “I” which shall remain nameless, who apparently told His Excellency: “Naya Nepal mein to naya trend chahiye.” Or words to that effect. If Nepal’s head of state has to first go to India before he goes to China, then Yadav Sir should have just taken the morning Jet flight to Delhi on Tuesday, said a quick hi to President Pratibha Patil, and got back on the afternoon Jet flight to take the night Dragon Air flight to Hong Kong.

Pukada is looking a bit under the weather lately, which is why he sought spiritual solace from Yogi Kamalnarayanacharya of Muktanath whom he addressed as “SwamiJ” and touched his feet. Wait a minute, aren’t these guys supposed to be godless atheists? Or is Pukada getting pangs of conscience about all the deaths he caused and now wants to make acts of contrition? The encounter seems to have cheered up the Supremo, who emerged wearing a garland of cloves, jubilant after being blessed by the Yogi.

But is PKD concerned about feelers he is getting that it may be better to let BRB become prime minister for now. But strong lobbying from abroad has been met with an equal and opposite reaction from within the party where Mohan Dada and his left-hand man are said to be dead against the idea. Baburam got quite worked up at the Baddie central committee meeting the other day and went out of his way to prove that he wasn’t a raw spy. Later, he issued a statement to media listing all the anti-Indian things he has done in his life. But doh Lai Dhoj protest too much?

The Ass’ mailbox is overflowing this week with New Names for a New Nepal sent in by Ram Chaudhary, Mona, Jujubhai and Grimaji.

Entries to the New Name Contest should be sent to ass(at)nepalitimes.com

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Entry 16 August 2008 Backside #412

Gorkhapatra changed to Guru-kha-patra
Jhalanath Khanal changed to Jholnath Khanal
Rajbri changed to Rambraj
Maharadj changed to Maharaj
Sadikkobato changed to Sadikkobato (Seven parties are going everywhere, but getting nowhere)
Mahanarakpalika changed to Maharanpatika (due to existing hellish state of affairs)

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