Killing fields

SPARE A THOUGHT FOR THE LIVING: A butcher waits for killing time at the Gushimal Mela in Bariyapur, Bara.
The new proletariat

If you want a glimpse into the lives of Nepali migrant workers, fly with them. Avoid the more expensive routes, and opt for the NAC direct flight to Kuala Lumpur, or the more time-consuming route through Dhaka. What one gets is a crash course in Nepal’s ethnic diversity, economic stagnation, failed politics, and the survival skills of its citizens.

PLAIN SPEAKING Prashant Jha

As a meal was served on our way to Dhaka, I looked across to my co-passenger, who was slouched in his seat, staring blankly ahead. He saw me peel off the cover from the meal box, and get a fork out. With an eye on my tray, he cautiously did the same with his own, then smiled, “Ke gane? This is my first time.”

Lakhmadesa Mukhia was from a small village in Saptari and was going to work “in a company”. He explained how he landed the job. “I used to hang around the village doing nothing. An agent was looking for people and came to me. My father said I should go. We paid him 70,000 RM every month – approximately Rs 10,000.”

Was he happy? “Ke kushati, what happiness? I spend all my time in the factory and both my Chinese owner and Tamil supervisor are cold-hearted and mean. They do not even allow me to pray regularly or go to the mosque. I have four children, and I haven’t seen them for over two years. The money is good and I have paid off my family’s debts. But because of other emergency expenses, I haven’t even been able to build a house or buy land.”

The interesting thing about Mukhia was his confidence. “I am illiterate. When I first left Nepal, at every step – airports, planes, roads, factories – I used to feel so scared. I made a mistake and people would abuse me. Now I just walk straight with my head held high. And if I have to fill in a form, I just scratch my name, leave the rest, and negotiate with the person at the counter,” he said with a twinkle in his eye.

Most workers had not kept in touch with Nepali politics. But they instinctively understood Nepal’s diversity better staying outside than they may have being in Nepal itself. At Dhaka airport, as the names of passengers were screamed out for boarding passes, each ethnicity seemed to be represented – Tamang to Chaudhary, Mahato to Magar. There was a visible fraternity that had evolved in the course of their journey to Malaysia, far from the Amazon, Tamang to Chaudhary, Mahato to Magar.

When I asked Saqib, and other workers, what they thought of Nepal, all of them agreed that they had seen a bit of the world, there was a common refrain to their answers. “Nepal is totally stupid. Even Kathmandu looks backward to us now. There is nothing to do at home, and we cannot earn even this much. When we talk to our families, they only mention the bandhs and strikes. The problem is there are no factories in Nepal. If there were, we would have jobs.”

Nepal’s political class, especially the Maoist dogmatists, should start thinking about how they will deal with this newly assertive “proletariat”, which has far greater exposure than many in the urban lower middle class. This class will not fall for false promises easily. And despite owning several billions of the capitalist machinery, it sees the benefits of industrialisation.

Consequently, a new proletariat will have to be part of any new political design.

INHUMAN Gadhimi Mela is nothing but a barbaric and inhuman tradition (Animal fights, #477). The people who carry out the slaughter are invariably drunk. What I don’t understand, the need to drink if the people are so drunk. It’s time to wake up and live in a civilised manner. Just as in India, animal sacrifices should be banned here. Happiness comes from helping, not hurting. Let us hope this Gadhimi festival will be the last.

Chandra Gurung, www.nepaltimes.com

SOLHEIM’S PAST I was not happy that Nepal Times gave space to Erik Solheim’s interview (Nepal needs a homegrown solution, #477). It would have been appropriate to have a small introduction related to his past political (oppose negotiating) role in Sri Lanka. He allegedly helped LTTE secure arms covertly during the period he was involved. He was rightfully kicked out from Sri Lanka and just look at the marvellous achievements thereafter. Need we say more?

Arunman Ananta, email

HOORAH FOR HOFTUN I met Hoftun while working with a hydropower company in Kathmandu but did not know that he started Tansen Hospital and how Martin Chawang was set up. After knowing all this I must say Hoftun is a true friend of Nepal. It is often said that these men are born to do these things. Sir Hoftun has taken this to heart.

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MILESTONE The blogs online are a milestone. I’m not sure if they’re ever going to be printed, but I wouldn’t mind, since I’m sure Nepal Times knows the majority of its readership is online.

Aawartan Discuss, Nepal

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CORRECTIONS
- SN Power, not Norfund, has agreed to jointly develop projects in Nepal and India with ‘In Power’. “In Power” owns 46 per cent of SN power. Nepal has a homegrown solution, #477
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Jaleshwar

Jaleshwar - The district headquarters of Mahottari is divided into two distinct parts. The temple of Jaleshwarnath, dedicated to Shiva in his benevolent form as the supreme lord of water, is still the main attraction. Visitors from surrounding villages throng the shrine every Monday. The haat – a marketplace where barter used to be the dominant means of trade till quite recently – gathers twice a week on the banks of the holy tank close by. Here petty trade and idol worship coexist in harmony.

The eastern section of Jaleshwar is the seat of temporal authority. Almost all government offices are located along a north-south road that connects the army barracks with the CDO office. The district hospital and schools too are in this area for the convenience of the families of public servants. Increasingly, however, government officials are to be found in Janakpur, from where they commute everyday.

Over-zealous planners would do well to accommodate businesses

The bajar area links these two parts and is the belly of the town, almost literally, as it houses all the main eateries, mithai shops, beer bars and arrack outlets. This is where journalists gather in the evening, politicians hold court in front of paan shops and manpower agents try to lure unsuspecting villagers into low-paying jobs in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the Chowk no longer glitters. With the en masse departure of the Marwari shopkeepers, shopping is not the attraction it used to be.

There are economic reasons behind the out-migration of this vibrant business community. Janakpur has emerged as a bigger commercial centre and attracts traders from smaller towns in the vicinity. Enterprise traders have moved as far as Birgunj and Lahan, and some have even moved to the capital to make their fortunes. But the most important factor behind the flight of Jaleshwar’s Marwaris is psychological.

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A half-dismantled shopping centre in the bajar (see box) stands as a monument to the humiliation of the most respected Marwari trader in town at the hands of an arriviste UML politico. Perhaps to remind locals of their complicity in the crime as bemused bystanders, the owners of the once-magnificent house have left the skeleton intact.

When it was built in the late eighties, Siriya Marwari’s house looked too imposing to be in a town as sleepy as Jaleshwar. But the venerable Seth wanted to impress local government officers with his wealth, taste and power. Engineers and builders were brought in from Mujaffarpur and construction material was procured from Kathmandu and Patna. The top floor of the building was to house his family while businesses were to operate from shuttered fronts on the ground floor. For the first few years, it appeared as if the town finally had a commercial landmark. But jealousy is the evil twin of success.

After the political changes of 1990, the old Seth found it hard to learn new tricks to do business with the UML upstarts in town. Mayor Balkrishna Dhakal used his proximity to Khadga Oli and Madhav Nepal to push through demolition orders, ostensibly to widen a road where few buses ply even today. The building was defaced and rendered unusable. Unable to bear the humiliation, the most well-known Marwari family of Mahottari left Jaleshwar for good.

With the big businesses gone, the town wears a somewhat dehydrated look. Other than government vehicles, there are few cars to use the recently widened and freshly paved roads. Unsure of the variety and quality of locally available goods, shoppers prefer to go to Janakpur for bigger purchases. Local temples have few patrons and schools and colleges routinely fail to raise funds for additional infrastructure. The Maoists are the new UML around town, with former revolutionaries such as Mayor Dhakal settled into comfortable bourgeois life.

For politicians looking for cheap popularity, eminent domain (the right of the state to take private property for public use) is a useful tool, and one that makes the rich quaver. The right to property, however, is the sine qua non of economic development. Jaleshwar’s sad story bears testament to a clash in which the state won the battle, but everyone lost the war.
Politics of aid

Donors violate their own international commitments

A good mop would be useful,” says Kanti Hospital staff

Suffer the children

MARIANNE HEREDGE

Kanti Children’s Hospital is the only government hospital for children in Nepal, and it will soon have 500 beds for the children who come from all over the country. Most patients are from the poorest families. But Kanti lacks even the most basic equipment, so those who can afford it head elsewhere.

In Nepal, there is not enough government support for healthcare. Most people have to pay for their medical treatment. Nurses administer injections, but friends and families of patients take care of the sick, bringing food, and running out to the pharmacy for medicines. While there are many trained nurses in Kathmandu, there are not enough nurses in the wards, especially in government hospitals like Kanti. Doctors in government hospitals have to survive on a salary of around Rs 15,000. It’s no wonder that some doctors spend a few hours at the hospital then slip off to private practices to make ends meet.

Many of the health problems of the children at Kanti are hardly ever seen in the west, where they are detected early or

There are no longer prevalent. In Nepal, with its limited number of often inaccessible, understaffed health posts, conditions such as rheumatic heart disease are regularly misdiagnosed and left too late. Many of these health problems are avoidable, but when nearly half the population is illiterate, then basic knowledge about healthcare is as much the problem as anything. In Kanti, the burns ward is full of children who strayed too near the open fire that is used for cooking in the majority of village homes, and burn cases from 40% stoves. Malnourished children are also a common sight.

There is little equipment in evidence. In the Cardiac ward, up to half a dozen children are treated for various heart conditions, mostly rheumatic heart disease. When ten-year-old Padma Tamang’s heart ecchased

SILENT WITNESS: Gopal Chaudhary suffers from similar heart problems as Padma Tamang, who he watched die. Gopal’s condition has improved more recently, and he is scheduled for an operation at the Shahid Gangalal Heart Hospital.

(he stopped breathing, though she continued breathing) there was nothing anyone could do besides watch her die. There was no defibrillator, no ECGr, no child-sized masks and 10 precious minutes were wasted changing an empty oxygen tank. A little boy in the opposite bed, Gopal Chaudhary, watched quietly. The look of fear in his face spoke volumes.

About three kilometres north of Kanti is a new heart hospital, the Shahid Gangalal National Heart Hospital. Under a government assistance program, poor families who cannot afford the cost of surgery can seek free treatment for children under the age of 15. Why can’t the children with heart problems go there? I asked. The answer is that the heart hospital can only admit cardiac patients with a recent catheterisation procedure, or surgery, so the child is diagnosed and any existing infections are dealt with, or she has to wait. Depending on the seriousness of the problem, this could be from one to two months to a year or more. Kanti Children’s Hospital needs so many things. Face masks that fit children, basic life-saving equipment and even blood, as well as well-trained nurses to monitor and perform observations. Help is also urgently needed for poor families to afford what can be expensive courses of treatment. Even giving priority to simple but essential things like clean wards is vital, which in the case of the leukaemia patients can be a matter of life or death.

Nepali charities such as Social Action Volunteers (SAV) have been working for twenty years at Kanti to help the poorest families with the costs of medicine and other expenses, including training expenses for those from outside the valley. SAV is trying to help the poorest families, but with limited resources can only scratch at the surface of a far bigger problem.

Rabin Subedi is a campaigner with the Nepal Policy Institute, a member of the Reality of Aid Global Network.
**Golf players**

Surya Nepal Kheparyalani and Nepal Golf Association joined hands with the Surya Nepal 10-Years Youth Golf Coaching Programme selected Dinesh Prajapat, Sanji C.K. and Sonam Lama as the ‘Camp of Excellence’. They will now be playing in the prestigious Surya Nepal Golf Tour.

**Branching out**

Kumari Bank opened its 20th and 21st branch in Koteswore and Budhanilkantha. The bank plans to open more branches outside the Kathmandu Valley and reach a total of 30 branches by the end of the year.

**Soaring high**

Monotek International and Samsara opened two new agent locations in Nepal: one at Everest Base Camp (5365m) and the other in Nameche Bajar (3460m). The former is now the highest money transfer agent location in the world.

**Forefront**

Biswa Bikash Bank has extended its branches in Kushma, Parbat, marking its third anniversary. The bank and are located in Annapurna Complex, Darbar Marg.

**Steps forward**

City Development Bank presented its annual progress report at its 3rd annual general meeting held last week. The bank has been able to make a net profit of Rs 6.5 million with an investment of Rs 960 million. It has collected deposits worth Rs 1.19 billion this year. The bank has a total of five branches and preparing to open a new branch in Damjual in the near future.

**Spreading wings**

Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and Pizza Hut have finally opened in Kathmandu. The two American food chains were brought to Kathmandu by Deyyani International in partnership with NMB Bank and are located in Annapurna Complex, Darbar Marg.

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**Banking basics**

 Oreos and KFC.

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Staged affair

Amrit Kharel in Janauli, 25 November

UML and its allies hastily passed the budget during a farcical parliamentary session after the Maoist party suspended House obstructions.

They completed discussions on budgetary allocations to the 27 ministries and the Prime Minister’s office on Tuesday alone.

The Maoist party didn’t participate in the discussions.

Analysts say that by passing the budget without the participation of the opposition, the government has set a bad precedent.

This is the first time in Nepali history that the budget has been passed with the leading opposition party absent from the legislature. However, this is not the first time the budget has passed without support from the leading opposition party. When NC leader Ram Chandra Poudel was House speaker, the budget was passed despite the total opposition of the UML.

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal claimed the budget is pro-people. However, the Maoists for suspending House obstructions. He said it was not the parties intention to stop the exhibition.

Show disrupted

KANTIPOUR, 25 November

Mukti Rijal told local organiser Ganesh Niraula of the Youth Media Centre, llyu better stop this program or else. The Maoists said the pictures in the exhibit would incite the minds of innocent school-children. However, Maoist regional in-charge of Sunsari-4 Manoj Shrestha said it was not his party’s intention to stop the exhibition.

Long-distance runner

Kiran Nepal and Ramshwor Bohara in Himal Kalaupatika, 16-30 November

Hari Bahadur Rokaya is a three-time national marathon gold medallist. He’s achieved another hat-trick by winning the Everest marathon thrice. He has qualified for the Social and Barcelona Olympics marathon and won a silver in the South Asian Games marathon. The 45-year-old Rokaya now lives in Jumla and is working to set up a high Altitude Athletic Training Centre in this remote corner of the Karnali. Wherever he went, he was training more than 30 long-distance runners at 2,400 m above sea level along the banks of the Tila River. One of his trainees, 13-year-old Umesh Rokaya, is training to take part in the 2010 Everest marathon. He is also training 12 army runners for next month’s Army Cross Country Race. Rokaya is working to raise the Rs 10 million necessary to start his centre, but meanwhile he is trying to at least finish building a 200m race track in Jumla, which has no stadium. Unfortunately, the athlete selection process is dominated by big people in Kathmandu and Jumla is always left out, as it was for the South Asian Games selections and the Asian Athletics junior Championships in Singapore. Still, Rokaya is not deterred from his dream, he is still running, and he has got his son to hook him up to the Internet so he can take on the task of fundraising. And that is an even more difficult marathon.

Whatever Sujata wants

Letters to the editor in Nagarkot, 24 November

Apparently Sujata had the desire to ride the most expensive car in the world. Maybe her father understood this while forcing the prime minister to promote her to deputy prime minister. Maybe she did not want to return to Nepal while spending Rs 300,000 to sleep in the presidential suite of the best hotel in Singapore. What would she do here? There are hardly any places to spend the country’s budget. After all, it’s one of the least developed countries.

- Ren Kumar, email

Sujata’s expenses in Singapore should not be covered by the state. She should return the money. Then she can do whatever she wants.

- Sagar, London

Where did Sujata get the courage to spend so recklessly? There is a limit to nepotism. She can be a minister without winning elections. She can spend the state’s money whenever and however she wants. Aren’t there any laws to control her?

- Tapas Magar, Lalitpur

Sujata is the princess of the Federal Republic of Nepal. What can we do? We can only defeat her during elections. Which we did. Although she lost the elections, she became a minister anyway.

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T
here have been some positive achievements in the Constituent Assembly in the past year and a half, but things could have gone much faster and smoother. There are now misgivings that the new constitution will not be written in the next six months.

The reason is not that the CA is unable to write it in time. It is because we are stuck in a political quagmire of deep ideological divisions between the main political parties on issues like federalism. The UML and the Maoists want provinces based on ethnic, linguistic and geographical identity while the NC, RPP and others reject ethnic provinces.

There is also disagreement over state structure. Earlier they couldn't agree on having a presidential or parliamentary system but all wanted a pluralistic non-party democracy. Now the Maoists want a 'unicameral people's assembly' and a standing committee within it, which will run the government. They also want the judiciary to come under the legislature, and there are differences over the electoral process.

These are not just procedural issues, there are now fundamental differences in the political value systems of the parties. Normally, post-conflict countries chart out their political future early after the demobilisation of fighters. Here, even the Maoist government did little to move the process of integration forward, raising suspicions that it wants to keep its army at least until the first elections under the new constitution.

Furthermore, the biggest weakness of the constitution-writing process has been that we sat down to write it without first laying down basic principles. There was a constitutional court, but all it did was oversee elections. So there is no ideological foundation to build the constitution on, and it has become an open-ended free-for-all. Suggestions were collected, but now everyone is arguing over every word.

A CA member that graces the rostrum is, at a few minutes later, sitting down to lead a committee discussion. Committees drafts reflect the views of their chairs with the others registering pro forma dissent. A major flaw in the process was not separating the function and roles of the constituent assembly and parliament from the very beginning.

So, most party representatives want all or nothing. Constitution writing is not a zero-sum game. And there is now a dangerous tilt to the right, with some arguing that it was a mistake to give away so much to the Maoists. There is a danger that these forces will use the excuse of a delayed constitution to come out into the streets.

The disagreements in the drafting committees all stem from the basic political differences between the parties over power sharing. Whenever the political leaders meet, it is to discuss who should be in power, not the constitution. In fact civil society organisations funded by donor agencies seem more preoccupied with the constitutional process than our political leadership. A sovereign nation cannot write a new constitution solely on the basis of outside support and money.

The Maoists are bogged down by internal rifts. They say one thing to their cadre, another thing at the Khila March and quite another thing to the international community. The other parties, by not giving space to the moderate line within the Maoists, are making them more aggressive.

Then, there are our southern and northern neighbours. Both India and China are following the identity-led constitution-writing process with some degree of alarm because of the effect this could have on their own domestic security concerns. The UN, on the other hand, doesn’t want Nepal’s peace process to be a failure just because our politicians can’t get along. The UN may therefore lobby and even exert pressure, but there is no reason to get worked up about this.

Further delays in constitution writing will not only invite a dangerous political crisis, but also increase external interference. If we can finish the new constitution and set democratic institutions in place India’s role, for one, will automatically be reduced.

So, what do we do? Four things:

1. Bring the politics back on track
2. Don’t argue over form, but substance
3. Enforce the rule of law
4. Leave space for constitutional amendments

Clearly, the most urgent need is to set up a power-sharing coalition based on the proportionality of members in parliament. Then, agree on basic political principles of democracy and pluralism and leave the details for the committees to work out. After that the rest will fall into place.

Krishna Khanal is a professor of political science at Tribhuvan University.

Kushiram Pakhrin, Maoist CA member, Gorkha

What are you doing these days?

I am busy with the protests carried out by my party. Besides that, I am also participating in the boycott of the parliamentary meeting.

How is the constitution-writing process going?

There has been some progress in that area. The CA is still working on six out of ten committees’ drafts. The other committees are also preparing their drafts.

At this rate will the constitution be framed in time?

Unlikely, given the current political climate. That being said, if the parties can reach a consensus there is a possibility that it can be written in seven months.

Who is delaying the constitution-writing process?

Presently, the political parties who are in power are the ones obstructing the progress.

What kind of state restructuring would you suggest?

We have to opt for a federalist state that is demarcated by caste, language etc.

Your party has proposed that the Lamas who do not belong to any caste be given a region. But that way some other castes are neglected. We are not neglecting them. They will be categorised not just according to caste and ethnicity, but more on the basis of geography, language and tradition.

What is your experience of the CA?

Because of the Maoists, the CA is representative and inclusive. There are now discussions about backward and disadvantaged groups. But oppressed and marginalised groups are still being ignored because some of the groups within the CA are still opposed to this inclusion.

Kiran Panday

“Maoists made CA inclusive”

Everyone’s despairing

Arzu Rana Deuba, NC CA member, Dadeldhura

What are you doing these days?

When the CA and parliament were suspended, I spent a lot of time on official trips abroad. I attended programs on development, environment and social service in Delhi and Germany between Dasain and Tihar. Since then, I have attended two meetings of the State Restructuring Committee.

What is your experience of the CA?

I am not very happy with the CA. I was part of the NC in the Constituent Assembly of 1990, which I think was not as bad as the current one.

Your party’s boycott of the parliament is continuing. Why?

The major concern of our party is that the CA will not write the constitution. We are not going to take part in it, because we are against the idea of the CA and its work. We want a federal state, but the CA is not moving towards that.

What do you think of the CA’s work so far?

I think the CA’s work has been very slow. The constitution has not been completed yet. It is not clear when it will be completed.

Kushiram Pakhrin

“Maoists made CA inclusive”
Korean films are so popular DVD sales rival that of Hindi movies

A young man reluctantly helps a drunk girl he doesn’t know regain her senses, but, alas, is jailed for all his troubles when people suspect his intentions. Hollywood’s *My Sassy Girl*, Bollywood’s *Ugly Aur Pagli* and Kollywood’s *Mero Sansar* all begin with this scene, copied from Korean blockbuster *My Sassy Girl*, which was released in 2001.

This is no one-off, either. Korean films and serials have gripped audiences worldwide. *My Sassy Girl* was so popular in Asia people began making comparisons to Hollywood mega-blockbuster *Titanic*. Hollywood actors and producers immediately took notice and a spate of successful remakes of Korean movies hit the market. Many American theatres even run Korean movies with English subtitles.

The trend has caught on in Nepal as well. This year’s *Mero Euta Saathi Cha*, for example, is a remake of Korean movie *Millionaire’s First Love*, and many scenes from *Sano Sansar* were lifted from Korean films. Director of *Mero Euta Saathi Cha* Sudarshan Thapa says the movie was in part an ‘experiment’ to test local receptiveness to remakes of foreign films. It seems the movie’s success at the box office has proven his point.
However, Korean films themselves may be more popular than remakes, as the popularity of DVDs of Korean films attests. DVD shop owner Ganesh Ghimire says Korean films have been popular here since the emergence of Korean language schools in 2007, particularly with Nepalis seeking work in Korea. He suspects that initially many people bought Korean films to learn the language. The movies have gained a much broader appeal since, even though much of the audience today doesn’t understand Korean.

Indeed, Korean movies are now so popular DVD sales rival that of Hindi DVDs, the traditional heavyweights in the local market. Dev Chulagain, who runs a DVD shop, confirms this: “While people only buy recent Hindi films, there is demand even for Korean movies released four to five years ago.”

People are especially keen on 2001’s My Sassy Girl, 2006’s A Millionaire’s First Love, 2008’s Ta Gugi, and romantic movies more generally. Inevitably, Korean language and fashion have caught on. For example, instead of saying “I love you,” many have started using the Korean equivalent, “Sarang hye.”

Part of the reason Korean films have been so popular is that they are easier to relate to. Bollywood films are shot in western locations these days and tend to have fanciful plots. It’s no surprise, then, that demand for Bollywood movies has diminished just as that for Korean films has grown. Usha Lama knows the names of Korean actors by heart. She says, “Korean films are fun and easy to relate to.” Director Thapa is also a fan. “Korean films are thoughtful, and commonplace plots are presented very well.”

Romantic Korean films can also be slow and plodding and have turned off some, like Mero Sansar director Alok Nembang. But they continue to grow in popularity and are easily accessible on TV channels like Arirang or the Internet. A couple of years ago, Nepal Television and Doordarshan began running Korean TV serials. Many more TV channels air these shows today. Businessmen add that cinema halls that show Korean movies have made a lot of money. It’s clear the K-wave is here to stay.
Those who make the little changes are the ones who actually transform our society

Roshani Didi left everything behind to build a new life in Timbu, but had to live apart from her husband for many years, with three children to raise, due to misunderstandings with his family. That was when she built the lodge. It carried sand, bricks, helped the workers, did whatever I could fin him with. It was all alone but don’t give up so easily.

Today Roshani Didi and her husband are back together running the place. They have regular trekking guides bringing in groups, but Roshani Didi’s cooking is so popular that bankers and Melamchi engineers for lunch. It’s as busy as you can imagine.

Roasmine Didi grew up in Sinduphalchok, but moved to Kathmandu for higher studies. Later, she got involved with a local NGO that works to rescue trafficked women. She was sent to Timbu for work, as Helambu was, and still is, plagued by girl trafficking. It was here that Roshani Didi met her future husband, a local Sherpa. They fell in love and decided to get married, despite their families’ objections to the union of a Chettri woman and a Sherpa man.

HELAMBU A row of two-storied concrete buildings can be seen as the local bus enters Timbu, a town after Melamchi Pul in Sinduphalchok. This is the starting or ending point of the Helambu trail. Tea houses and lodges are sparse here, and those coming down from Sermathang or Gosainkunda stop over in Timbu.

This row of buildings is one of the most popular lodges in Timbu. It has several rooms, separated by corrugated sheets, and it backs directly onto the Melamchi River. Everyone in the village knows the lodge as Roshani Didis. The kitchen starts buzzing with people from 6am, by which time Roshani Didi (pictured below) will have been up for more than two hours. Little boys and girls stop on their way to school to buy candy, workers stop by for a cup of tea, teenage boys come to buy rice on their way back from school, farmers stop by for a drink of raksi, Melamchi engineers for lunch. It’s as busy as you can imagine.

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Malaise oozed through my pores as I lay bedridden with a cold and a persistent fever. But my housemates were not going to let me slip away. Home-made remedies kept cropping up – prayers, hot ginger water with honey, steam inhalation, a cloth around my head, the works! What I then realised, after entertaining them and subsequently recovering, was this – you are not really Nepali if you are not a self-prescribing doctor. Which made me wonder…how powerful is this ‘jhankri science’?

Jhankris and other practitioners have been an integral part of Nepali society, even if the practice is not as widespread in our cities as it is in the rural areas. They are believed to possess supernatural powers and the knowledge of mastering spirits. Shamans take on the role of priests and doctors to heal patients and ward off evil spirits. Matas are a relatively new concept: these are individuals who periodically become possessed by a god, and they diagnose problems, suggest remedies, and predict the future. Despite the advent of modern medicine, some still find solace in having a jhankri slaughter a goat and beat them with a broom to rid them of spirits!

Intrigued by the idea of a mata who could possibly predict my future and save me a lot of time deciding on a career or whom I would marry, I made my way to Baluwatar last week. When I was admitted, I saw before me a young woman with eyes closed, apparently in a trance. Right off the bat she asked me whether I had a younger sister. I was impressed but was it just a good guess? Curious to find out more, I told her that I had a nagging leg ache and poor eyesight. She advised me to make offerings to Bangalamukhi and pray for a speedy recovery. I asked her about my future, and she said that I would live close to my parents and settle down happily. Pleased enough, I made my obeisances and left – though unsure where I should go next, the temple or the pharmacist.

A couple of days later, my grand-aunt narrated to me a bizarre incident. She’d been on her way back from the Budhanilkantnath market, and was drawn to a large crowd. A man had fallen to the ground and was writhing, as if in an epileptic fit. People tried sprinkling water on his face to resuscitate him, but it only aggravated his convulsions. Then through the crowds a man came up, promptly removed his shoes and began urging the sick man to partake of the fumes of his socks. Miraculously, the man regained consciousness and thanked him profusely for his kind gesture. A strange genre of smelling salts!

I have encountered a fair number of superstitious people in Nepal, including myself. Some blow on their fingers if they happen to touch their necks, refrain from crossing the road if a black cat crosses their path, and abstain from stepping on brooms. Psychologists maintain that superstition is the result of ‘adventitious reinforcement’. B.F. Skinner demonstrated that you can create superstitious behaviour in animals, too. When an animal is placed in a box with a device to automatically dispense food every five minutes, the animal will typically develop superstitions behaviour. For instance, if the animal happens to lift up its right foot just as the food is dispensed, it will then repeat this behaviour, which will be intermittently reinforced. Soon enough, its superstitions behaviour will become well established, just like in humans. If politicians believe that feigning illness can work in their favour when the going gets tough, perhaps ‘jhankri science’ can beat out this superstition so we can get on with building New Nepal?
Sherpa in Alaska

Everest. Thirty-nine bodies remain on McKinley. As many as 150 bodies remain on Everest.

In 2004, the Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation established the Khumbu Climbing School in PhuNuru’s village in Nepal. About 30 students were in the first class and about one-third had already summited Everest, but not one of them knew how to tie a figure-eight knot used in rock climbing to secure climbers to their harnesses, President Jennifer Lowe-Anker said.

The 29-year-old married father of two girls spent a month this summer in Alaska getting job training on 20,320-foot Mount McKinley, the highest peak in North America. He was on a scholarship from the Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation, named after the famed mountaineer who died in an avalanche in the Himalayas in 1999, where his body remains.

PhuNuru wants to bring mountain rescue to the Khumbu

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It turned out to be the perfect classroom. PhuNuru joined McKinley’s high mountain ranger patrol on June 3, and has participated in half-dozen rescues. He had barely settled in when rangers at the 14,200-foot camp got an emergency call. Two men who were roped together had fallen a couple of thousand feet.

Me and two friends go running up there, take some oxygen, some medical kits and everything we can carry, he said. We go there and they both already dead.

PhuNuru helped recover the bodies, which were flown off the mountain.

Four people died on McKinley this year. Since 1932, 106 people have been killed on the mountain ó about half as many as on Everest. As many as 150 bodies remain on Everest.

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PhuNuru, who has summited Everest four times, is an instructor at the school. When he returns to Nepal at the end of October, he will share what he learned and plans to establish a professional rescue team on Everest.

The knowledge will save lives, he said. Even though more than 200 people have been killed on Everest, the mountain has no rescue team. If a climber needs help, it is up to expedition guides to decide if a rescue should be attempted. Sometimes that means telling clients who have paid tens of thousands of dollars to summit Everest that their dream will have to wait. Sometimes it means that help comes too late.

That was the case with British climber David Sharp in 2006. Dozens of climbers who were headed to the summit walked past Sharp lying in a rock alcove on Everest as he froze to death.

By the time the decision was made to send a sherpa to help Sharp, it was too late. The sherpa pulled Sharp from a rock alcove and placed him in the sun and gave him oxygen, but his limbs were frozen in place. He couldn’t walk, even with assistance. Sharp was placed back in the alcove where he was found dead the next day.

A week later, sherpas rescued another climber who was left for dead near the same spot.

Author Nick Heil wrote about the infamous 2006 climbing season on Everest in which 11 people died in his book Dark Summit.

It is an extremely risky proposition to try and stage a body removal up high, Heil said. Nowadays people are kind of prepared when they go up to a place like Everest to see corpses.

Some of the bodies of people who have died on Everest are within sight of the climbing routes, remarkably preserved in the extreme cold. PhuNuru said it would be better to get the bodies off the mountain, but Heil said removal is not always possible.

After a season or two these bodies are effectively welded into the landscape, he said. ‘You literally have to chisel them out.’

PhuNuru said body removal pays better than other jobs on Everest but many sherpas find the work distasteful. For those who want to do it, the rescue and roping techniques he learned this summer will be useful, he said.

We don’t want to leave any body on the mountain, PhuNuru said.

Mary Pemberton, The Associated Press
T here’s something of a bait and switch involved in director Ruben Fleischer’s debut, Zombieland. With an R-rating that seems justified in the first few minutes of the movie—graphic violence with the zombie apocalypse in full swing, a glib narrator with a vulgar and coarse sense of humour and a few deadpanned topical jokes, and in the Juno territory of saccharine sappiness. When Romero, the grandaddy of zombie movies, is论如何 coloured by a well-loved Hollywood actor, who frequently dabbles in deadpanned topical jokes, and in the Juno territory of saccharine sappiness. When Romero, the grandaddy of zombie movies, is colourless by a well-loved Hollywood actor, who frequently dabbles in deadpanned topical jokes, and in the Juno territory of saccharine "sappiness," you'll quickly realise to your discomfort. When his neighbour comes knocking, she is a damsel in distress in the world of his apartment, the house he’s built up as he is playing video games. When his neighbour comes knocking, she is a damsel in distress in the world of his apartment, the house he’s built up as he is playing video games. Fleischer’s direction is even more effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. Fortunately, it distinguishes itself from really effective, thankfully. 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EXHIBITIONS

- Exhibition 2009 of Nepalese Buddhist and Hindustani Art Painting by Sudarshan Swati at Summit Hotel, Kupondole, till 30 November.

EVENTS

- Spanish Fiesta, at the Mirabe Hotel Resort in Dhulikhel, 28 November, 12PM onwards, 4493854, reservations required.
- Nepali Art: In Present Scenario, documentary screening, 28 November, 2:30-3:30PM and 5-6PM, Yata Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 5553767.
- Buddhist Walks in Ancient Kathmandu, breakfast and afternoon tea, 29 November, HMBCC, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4418021.
- WALLIE, movie screening at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe, 3 December, 6PM, 4428549.
- AWOM Christmas Bazaar with locally produced arts and crafts, 5 Dec, 10AM-3:30 PM, Hyatt Hotel, twomomic@gmail.com.
- Kathmandu Chorale, a winter concert at The British School, Jhamikhel, 12 December, 3:30PM and 6PM.
- Benefit concert for Street Dog Care, at Hyatt Regency Ballroom, by Ani Choying Doma, 19 December, 5-7PM.
- Patan Press Club meets every Thursday at Dhoika Cafe, 6PM, 5522113.
- Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, at Chhi 10-11.30 AM Saturday, Yoga 8.30-9:30 AM and Meditation 5-6PM weekdays, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4414002.

MUSIC

- HyJazz every Friday evening by Inner Grove at the Rox Bar, 4489362.
- Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyaust at Kausi Kitchen, Darbo Marg, 4227388.
- Sunday Jazz brunch, at The Terrace, Hyatt Regency with barbeque and live jazz by Inner Grove from 12-3.30 PM, 4489362.
- Live Band Sensation every Saturday till late with Apurish at Rox Bar, 4489362.
- Jazz evening at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM, 4260326.
- Some like it hot, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 699 at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel, 7PM onwards, 4478488.
- Happy cocktail hour, ladies right on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Cafe & Bar, Thamel, 5-7PM.
- Nepali Ghajals and songs at D Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday from 6.30 PM onwards, 4485889.
- Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam Nepal every Friday, 7PM at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212.

DINING

- Christmas Cake shop, christmas pudding, chocolate Santa Claus, lumpers and more at The Lounge, 30 November-31 December, 4491234.
- Strawberry...tagére, strawberry flavoured at The Lounge. 4-30PM. 4692683.
- Regency Kathmandu, 4491234
- Oriental Nights, all flavours and specialties of Asia every Wednesday at The Cafe, 6.30PM, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4491234.
- Thanksgiving Celebration, at K-Thru Bar & Steakhouse, Thamel, till 28 November, 4700043.
- Live continental BBQ Dinner at Splash, Rox Bar, 4489362.
- A cappella, Dhoika Cafe, Patan Dhoka, 5522113.
- Jazzball Cafe, relaunched at Jhamikhel, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8PM, 2114075.
- The Corner Bar, 5-7PM, 3-11PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4411818.
- Al Fresco, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 4273999.
- Kakori, for bryianis, curries and kebabs, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 7-10.45PM.
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4263070.
- Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle East at The Cafe, Hyatt Regency, 4491234.
- Teppanyaki meal items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Garichara. 4436319.
- Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 600, 4129999.
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Cafe, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dhankชำk’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4425541.
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambla Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards, 4419999.
- Himalayan Rainbow Trout at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4248999.
- Tiger for Breakfast, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4215088.
- Stupa View Restaurant, for vegetarian creations & clay oven pizza at Boudha Stupa, 4480826.
- Gokarna Forest Resort for a variety of sizzlers at Tripti bar, 4401212.

RECIPE

Bread & Butter Pudding

This classic, simple recipe is good for the colder months. You can also vary the recipe by replacing the raisins with sultanas or candied citrus peel, or by adding your favourites on (Serres 4-6).

Q. What did Girija and Prachanda find in Singapore?

R. They found the budget has been reduced.

Prochash the oven to 170C. Butter a large baking dish and line with the buttered bread. Mix the eggs, sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, salt and raisins together and pour the mixture over the bread. Allow to stand for 20-30 minutes so that the bread can soak up most of the liquid. Cover with a piece of aluminum foil and bake for 20-25 minutes. Remove the foil for an additional 15-20 minutes until it turns a golden brown. Serve with your favourite whipped cream.

Tiger for Breakfast is a personal butler, cook, driver, watchman, gardener to a wealthy female industrialist (Archana Puran Singh) in Singapore. He desperately wants to become rich and marry the love of his life, Anjali Kadakia (Kavita Khanna). Nita Jha (Neeru Malhotra (Suneil Shetty)), also comes to Singapore with the dream of striking it rich, but ends up as a taxi driver. Hyatt for Haripriya Chauhan (Sarika Seth), but her high-society parents do not approve of her marriage.

In the midst of all this is Harsha Chaddha (Poonam Shreadi), a show hostess. He decides the best way to double his money would be to marry his sari girl so off to a rich parents can give her a large dowry, so instead to be Harsha Chaddha’s own parents. But motives are a twofold.

A Benefit concert for Street Dog Care will take place at the Hyatt Regency Ballroom, with Ani Choying Doma, on 19 December, 5-7PM.

www.climate4life.org
DIVERSITY: Women don traditional clothes from various districts during the Third National Tourist Fair 2066 in Bhrikutimandap on Tuesday.

TRIBUTE: Wilda Campbell hands over an oil painting entitled ‘Fruit Seller’ by the late Rama Nanda Joshi to his wife Nirmala Joshi. The painting will be exhibited at the R.N. Joshi Museum.

THE FUTURE: Children perform at a program marking International Child Rights Day and four decades of UNICEF’s presence in Nepal at Pulchowk on Friday.

SUMMITEER: Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal congratulates Min Bahadur Sherchan, who climbed Mount Everest at the age of 76 years and 340 days. The Guinness Book of World Records recently recognised him as the oldest man to have achieved the feat.

STOP THE ABUSE: Actors perform a play depicting domestic abuse against women during the launch of the National Plan of Action for the Year Against Gender Based Violence 2010 at the Everest Hotel, Wednesday.
They’re really catching ‘em young these days. Baburam Bhattarai on Wednesday gave away prizes to those who stood first, second and third in the All-Nepal National Speech-giving Competition. With TV news full of netas giving bhasans, the kids obviously had a lot of practice.

Maybe next should be a Nepal Idol, not for singing but for speechifying. Showing the world what we do best.

Now that Kathmandu Fried Chicken has just opened there should be a slogan contest to get Nepalis hooked on the Colonel’s drumsticks. The Ass already has a couple of potential winning entries: ‘Karsapko Kukhuro’, ‘Rato Bhaley Kwayn Kwayn!’ ‘Noon Khwayeko Kukhuro’, or even ‘Khukuri Kaan…’

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High-level political mechanics

S o they’re going to set up another high-level political mechanism to sort out the political deadlock. Great idea. Maybe the previous high-level mechanisms were just not high enough to do the trick. Or perhaps there was something wrong within the mother of all mechanisms.

But at the rate we are going, our New Nepal is going to be a nation of mechanics who don’t know how to fix this mechanism. The Ass’s two cents is that even this new thingie is not going to work because it is too high level. The leaders who are currently a part of this mechanism either need supplemental oxygen to climb up to their bedrooms, or are civilian supremacists who can’t utter a sentence without threatening to take the country back to kingdom come.

So the best way out of the deadlock is to set up a not-so-high-level political mechanism with advisers to the senior leaders like Amaresh Bhai, Raghu Jee and Kamred Prakash in it. The advisers all get along like a house on fire, so it’s time to set up a High-Level Advisory Mechanism.

Expect Senior Leader Girija Prasad Koirala to be airlifted out any day again, because the docs in Singapore apparently found out the reason his remaining lung had stopped functioning altogether was because the onset of winter worsens the pollution in KTM Valley and made his haemo count plummet. Trouble is, even Biratnagar is polluted in winter, so the doctors have recommended moving him from Maharajgunj to Tokha. Now, that should take the political mechanism to an even ‘higher’ level.

The reason the Baddies are lately looking like chickens that have inadvertently had their heads separated from their thoraxes is not just that they managed at the nick of time to save themselves from splitting right down the middle by postponing the party convention till next year, but also because they mysteriously failed to get an invite to an international convention of communists in New Delhi last week. The Red World Conference had delegates and observers from 90 of the world’s fraternal communist parties attending. Representing Nepal was our very own fire-breathing Comrade Oli, who was personally invited by India’s CPI. Conspicuous in their absence were the Nepali Baddies, which is surprising for a party that regards itself as the vanguard of world revolution. It looks like Comrade Awesome has not just fallen foul of the Indian govt but also of Messrs Yechury, Karat & Co, Pvt Ltd.

As reported last week, the Baddies have stepped up extortion nationwide. Businesses across the country have received letters demanding anything between Rs 50,000-100,000 for ‘supporting the ongoing agitation for civilian supremacy’. That’s a great sales pitch because it’s like saying: ‘You are hereby required to donate money to us, or else…’ but if you do fork out the required sum, you can be assured your money will be put to good use to shut the country down for three days in December.’ Donors sent word to the donkey this week to deny they’d ever asked their partners to give in to baddie extortion. However, employees of donor-funded projects admit they regularly make office collections of percentages of salaries to keep local comrades happy without telling HQ, for fear they may be shut down.

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