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# HOT AIR



**PLAIN SPEAKING**  
Federal realities

p2

**NATION**  
Self-destruct

p4

This weekend, take your pick - Maha Shiva Ratri or Valentine's Day? If the latter, read Uncommon Love (p7) for inspiration and check our Valentine's special (p8) for ideas.

The High Level Political Mechanism may as well be floating high above the Nepali nation for all it has achieved in the last month. After much-publicised early wrangling about who should be in it and who should not, and whether such a mechanism is even necessary (or legitimate), it is at a standstill.

At ground level, the major political parties have not resolved their differences. Constitution-writing is continuing apace, even though the drafts from the Constituent Assembly's thematic committees are marked as much by the notes of dissent they contain as by the fact that they have actually been completed.

Some call for the May 28 deadline to be extended, but there is a feeling that the deadline will actually be met through typically Nepali eleventh-hour negotiations. What kind of fractious constitution will make its way to the Nepali people by the end of this is as worrying as the doomsday predictions for missing the deadline.

Let's hope the High Level Political Mechanism comes down to earth before the hot air runs out.

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# A HEALTHIER NATION

This is still a land where people die of simple, preventable causes. A lung or stomach infection, easily treated by modern medicine, can be fatal in rural Nepal.

Infectious diseases are spread by germs ingested with food or water, inhaled into the lungs, or transmitted through unprotected sex. The first line of defence against infection is awareness. You need communications to fight communicable diseases. If treatment is necessary then prevention has failed, and prevention should be the core thrust of our national health strategy.

Information about water-borne diseases and what cause them has made the public and health officials more sensitive about prevention. The dramatic progress in child survival in Nepal in the past decade is due mainly to awareness spread through media and schools about the dangers of drinking contaminated water, or about *nun-chini-pani* treatment. Similarly, we see a sharp inverse correlation between Nepal's falling

maternal mortality rate and rising female literacy

But awareness by itself doesn't bring about behaviour change. Awareness alone wouldn't mean people could access clean drinking water if taps hadn't been installed in villages. Knowledge about HIV doesn't translate into condom use if prophylactics are not available, too expensive, people are too squeamish to buy them, or if those buying sexual services refuse to use them.

We know what to do to improve public health in Nepal. Apart from more work on awareness, the country needs more hospitals and affordable drugs. More than half the doctors in Nepal practice inside the capital's Ring Road, so more needs to be done to retain doctors in district hospitals by giving them incentives to do so. Caesarian



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

sections can be done in only 20 of Nepal's 75 districts. Mid-level health workers, nurses and midwives need training and motivation, like that being provided at the Solukhumbu Technical School in Phaplu (see p11).

Diseases like TB, malaria, encephalitis, typhoid, diarrhoea and pneumonia can be treated with drugs. But they are not just medical problems. The root causes of sickness in Nepal are societal discrimination, economic disparity and political neglect. This can't be treated with medicine.

Most diseases that kill our children, strike mothers at childbirth and keep Nepal's life expectancy low have the same root causes. Just knowing that, and spreading the message, should mean that we have won half the battle.

*KD*

# Federal realities

**PLAIN SPEAKING**  
**Prashant Jha**

What do the following have in common: the grand old man of Nepali politics Girija Prasad Koirala; neo-liberals Ram Sharan Mahat and Binod Chaudhary; orthodox Marxists like Chitra Bahadur KC; ethnic entrepreneurs like Laxman Tharu and Kumar Lingden; Panchayat veterans like Surya Bahadur Thapa and Pashupati Rana; perennial revolutionaries like Matrika Yadav; anti-Maoist crusaders like KP Oli; progressive young Turks like Gagan Thapa; Madhesi messiahs like Upendra Yadav and Mahant Thakur; respected lefty scholars like Pitamber Sharma and Chaitanya Mishra; VDC level government servants; and most of Kathmandu's media owners and journalists?

None of them agree with the 14-state model proposed by the CA's state restructuring and power sharing committee.

One group fears the disintegration of the country. This is a flimsy argument. National maps can't be altered so easily. Federalism will only make the state stronger by giving marginalised citizens a

sense of ownership. It will connect the country in ways like never before. In fact, the possibility of a conflict and a weakening of the state is much higher if Nepal does not federalise. In any case, federalism has already been decided upon, and the decision will not be reversed.

Other critics, including technocrats, believe the state does not possess the institutional capacity to sustain such a model. This view has some merit. Fourteen states will mean fourteen separate legislative, bureaucratic, police, and judicial machineries. Do we have the required financial and human resources for such a gigantic enterprise? If states lack capacity, federalism may become merely ornamental. Some Maoist leaders privately agree, and have been toying with the idea of six provinces.

Bureaucrats argue the present debate on federalism risks reversing the achievements made by local government. In the proposed delineation of powers, local bodies have not been granted powers much beyond the Local Self-Government Act. The additional complication is that there is a great overlap of functions with the provincial

government. Will the latter usurp the role of the grassroots bodies, making the state even more distant for those in rural areas? The Indian experience shows the reluctance of state governments to share money and powers with Panchayats and municipalities. More thinking is clearly required to delineate the local-provincial authority interface.

Planners also point out that east-west federalism, instead of the north-south zones, will mean inadequate utilisation of resources. This may be technically true but politically, north-south is not feasible given the Madhesi sentiment. Also, there will inevitably be inter-state co-operation. It is flawed to say that the Madhes cannot use the water resources of the hills, or hills cannot use the agrarian and industrial strengths of the Madhes. In federal set-ups, states can build on each other's comparative advantages through joint mechanisms.

The third, and most vocal, school of skeptics includes 'national' (mostly Bahun-Chhetri) politicians who believe that the map is too ethnic-centric, ignores Nepal's mixed settlements and is a recipe

for riots. This view too has some merit but tends to present a highly distorted and alarmist picture. The present model is not entirely ethnicity based. And as Mahendra Lawoti argues, whichever way you carve out the provinces, some groups will have a majority.

For those worried ethnic provinces will favour those they are named after, the logic of electoral politics should be reassuring.

Take the present Madhes map from Jhapa to Birganj. Six demographic blocks will control the politics – Yadavs, Tharus, Muslims, Dalits, OBCs and guess what, pahadis. If any Madhesi party adopts a chauvinistic, hate-mongering approach, they will lose the pahadi vote entirely, and will be defeated. The same argument applies everywhere, and means new multi-ethnic alliances will emerge in all provinces.

This is not to defend the present map or underplay the dangers of ethnic chauvinism, but to highlight that there is space for compromise. Incorporating ethnicity is a political compulsion, but we need to avoid making ethnicity the sole determinant of political choice.

The good news is that the map can only get better from now on. The bad news is whichever way it turns out eventually, there will be plenty of people ready to burn the constitution. 🇳🇵

Federalism may not be as bad as it's carved up to be

## ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

**LISTEN UP!**  
Some suggestions for TIA ('Snailport', #488).

- 1 Have all TIA staff wear professional looking uniforms
- 2 Keep all the bathrooms super-clean
- 3 Provide free wi-fi. Install power ports for people to use laptops, etc.
- 4 Turn off the damn TV in the final waiting hall. Nobody wants to watch sappy Bollywood movies while waiting for their plane.
- 5 Have an visible information booth.
- 6 Recruit and retain a diverse set of competent staff to represent TIA as a mini-Nepal.
- 7 Have a well-functioning Corruption Hot Line so people can file complaints if they receive requests for a bribe and

make the number very visible.

**8** Ban smoking everywhere inside and around TIA.

*Singapore*

**GREAT LEAP BACKWARD**  
Yes, frequent attacks by Maoists and other parties on companies operating in Nepal and unnecessary demands make any investor nervous about Nepal ('Great leap backward,' #488). No doubt the Maoists have done the most damage. During wartime they destroyed all the infrastructure we had in the rural areas because they wanted to create a vacuum. In my town we were without electricity for two years because they destroyed the publicly owned power station, and all bridges. Even today, clearly aren't trying to create a

business friendly environment. Why don't they learn from West Bengal?

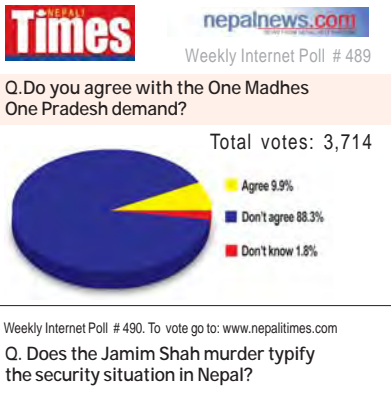
*Suresh*

**HIGHER GROUND**  
Thanks for writing something so inspiring ('Café with a conscience', #488). Most of my friends and I dream of owning a coffee shop. We can't help but fantasise about our dream coffee shop. But Higher Ground is more than a coffee shop. Being a big fan of its coffee and desserts plus its ambience, I can't help but ask myself if I could do something so meaningful yet cool, a place where people would love to work and go hang out as well. Its great to know that this social enterprise has helped so many.

*Rekz*

## On the blogs

**East West with Kunda Dixit: Is turning Nepal into Singapore even desirable?**





# Dalit doubts



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Mitra Pariyar**

In his *Kantipur* column of 20 December Hari Roka, a pro-Maoist commentator and lawmaker, argued that part of the reason why India opposed the Maoists promoting a federal state was that it feared “the establishment of a new social system based on the redistribution of property and freedom from untouchability would have consequences on its states close to Nepal”.

The statement is, *inter alia*, representative of how the Maoists continue to use Dalits in their propaganda. They have always claimed that theirs is a movement of the oppressed masses, and indeed many Dalits have sacrificed their lives for the cause. However, Roka’s claim about untouchability rings hollow because there is little evidence to show that the ex-rebels actually care about the deeply entrenched problems of low castes.

On the contrary, Dalits increasingly feel they have had the rug pulled out from under them, not least because of the Maoists’ unilateral declaration of autonomous ethnic states. Firstly, Dalits are not going to have their own autonomous state; they will be a tiny minority in all states. More importantly, Dalits suffer indignities and injustices not only at the hands of Bahuns and Chhetris, but also from Rais, Limbus, Madhesis, Gurungs, Magars, Newars, and others.

A 2006 report in *Nepali Times* stated: “In the hotbed of Tarai ethnic politics, mainstream Madhesi rights activists, anti-hills-people vigilantes, Maoist splinter groups and Tharu groups are demanding everything from greater autonomy to secession. But Madhesi Dalits are nowhere in the equation” (‘Sideswiped’, #320). The parties’ attitude to Dalits in the Tarai and the hills remains the same, despite the pressure of massive political changes.



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

## Ethnic federalism will further marginalise Dalits

Hugo Gorrington, a British anthropologist who studied Indian Dalits, observes: “untouchability, it is clear, is irreconcilable with nationhood, and undermines the democratic project”. The Nepali Congress and UML, despite their democratic credentials, have always refrained from taking Dalit issues seriously; their own workers and supporters regularly practice untouchability. The former rebels’ initial enthusiasm about doing away with caste-based subordination has also been ephemeral. For instance, the Maoist government didn’t, despite the popular expectation, start anything concrete to help Dalits; neither did it attempt to include them in important positions. Although they have been insisting on federal states named after particular groups, they have not yet articulated their policies on how untouchability can be effectively tackled.

Whilst Dalits are still struggling to become bona fide citizens of Nepal, they will have to fight separately to become the citizens of autonomous states as well. Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar’s prescription for the Dalit movement was: “educate, agitate, organise”. The implementation of autonomous ethnic states is likely to hinder these strategies, not least because the Dalit movement will then be dispersed and consequently further weakened.

Some believe that untouchability cannot be tackled until caste is annihilated; others think it can be challenged by emphasising the socioeconomic relationship between castes on the basis of modern national laws over customary ones. We should attempt to integrate low castes with other castes or ethnic groups to pave the way for a more egalitarian society. Ethnic federalism will only institutionalise and solidify caste or ethnic boundaries, instead of undermining them.

The Maoists are likely to lose the support of many Dalits and others by pushing for their retrograde demand for ethnic federalism, even if it helps them in the short term. Like most Nepali citizens, Dalits want to live in peace with more dignity and better economic opportunities. This simple dream cannot be fulfilled if the powers that be don’t give up their stance on ethnic federalism under the facade of revolutionary change.

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INDU NEPAL

It seemed like an ordinary evening. It was a week after Dasain, and Arati Sharma was at her parents' home in Dhobichaur, Kathmandu. Her mother had made dinner for the family earlier in the evening. Arati was getting ready for bed when suddenly her mother started foaming at the mouth. Realising she had consumed a poison of some kind, Arati rushed her mother to Bir Hospital and admitted her to the emergency room.

Bimala Gautam died 12 days later of organophosphate poisoning, commonly known as poisoning by pesticide. She was 38 years old.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age, a report published by the Family Health Division has found. Almost 16 per cent of deaths among women between the ages of 15 to 49 are suicides. This figure has shot up dramatically since 1998, when only 10 per cent of the deaths were attributed to suicide.

The suicide tally has gone up across the board. Police figures from 2008 showed that there had been a 40 per cent increase in suicide in the preceding four years. In fact, death by suicide was higher than the death toll inflicted by the conflict in some years.

But the number of suicides among women is higher than that among men. Kathmandu Metropolitan Police registers 10-15 suicide cases each week, the majority of which are women.

Why are women killing themselves at this alarming rate?

Bimala Gautam was the sole earner in her family; her husband was inebriated most of the time. Living in a rented apartment in



BILASH RAI

# Self-destruct

## Why are so many Nepali women killing themselves?

Kathmandu, she took odd jobs to support her husband and young daughters. In a report filed with the police, her daughter wrote, "We don't really know why she took her life. But since no sons were born in the family, the pressure might have told on her."

There have been no specific studies on the causes of suicide in Nepal. What is known, however, is that women face unique social and psychological conditions that force them to take desperate measures.

In 2008, United Nations

Population Fund (UNFPA) and Saathi, a women's NGO based in Kathmandu, analysed gender-based violence in Surkhet and Dang districts. Over 80 per cent of respondents reported experiencing domestic violence from their husbands and other family members, and 74 per cent were forced to participate in non-consensual sex, also known as marital rape.

"What was disturbing is that during focus group and individual interviews, the majority of those

women said they had felt suicidal," says Bandana Rana, president of Saathi, who also led the research. "Only a few say they actually attempted suicide. But the majority of them said they wanted to die (*malai marna mann lagyo*)."

There is no specific data linking domestic violence with suicide. But experts say trauma, depression and other mental illnesses are among the common psychological after-effects of domestic violence.

"Mental violence at home is virtually impossible to prove. But it can be speculated that this could lead to feelings of helplessness and desperate measures," says Michiyo Yamada, Gender Program Officer at UNFPA Nepal.

Victims of domestic violence have little legal recourse. The government has not developed any comprehensive legal programs to prevent violence against women, nor has it met international obligations to protect women from violence or punish perpetrators. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal famously announced that he would open a hotline to his office to assist women in critical conditions. After months of complaints, the phone now rings at the other end of the line. Women are prompted to leave a message but no one responds to them.

The upward trend in suicide can be avoided, says Kiran Bhatia, gender advisor at UNFPA. "Every suicide is a cry for help; an unmet need for urgent intervention for a woman who is trapped in a situation where she has reached the limit of her capacity to cope with violence, abuse and discrimination. These women desperately need support."

(Names of the victim and her family members have been changed)

### THIS WEEK

#### Take two

Vice President Parmananda Jha took the oath of office for the second time on Sunday - this time in Maithili and Nepali, probably just to make sure no one tries to dispose of him again. The Supreme Court had nullified his oath of office taken in Hindi. last August. Jha's title was



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

restored after the parliament amended the interim constitution to allow office holders to take oath in their native languages.

#### Murder in broad daylight

The murder of media baron Jamim Shah in front of the French Embassy on Sunday gripped the capital last week. A man connected to India's mafia don Chhota Rajan called a television station to claim responsibility. Police confirmed the killing was linked to the mafia underworld. They found the motorbike used by the gunmen to flee the scene, and surmised that they had already left the country.

Shah founded the first television cable network in Nepal, Space Time Network, and used to run two newspapers before they folded - Space Time and Space Time Today. He was also the president of Channel Nepal, the first private television company.

#### Sent them packing

The last of the disqualified combatants were released on Monday with the discharge of 283 combatants from the fifth division of the People's Liberation Army in Rolpa. Peace Minister Rakam Chemjong said more than 2000 combatants took part in the formal discharge process that took place on 7 January, while more than 1600 of them left voluntarily earlier. Later in the week, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal accused the Maoists of exaggerating the number of PLA combatants in the camp in order to obtain the allowances they are entitled to. "Forty per cent of the combatants have already deserted the cantonments just the way the disqualified combatants did," Nepal said in Nepalganj on Wednesday.

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# The storytellers



**FOURTH ESTATE**  
**C K Lal**

The dramatic murder of media entrepreneur Jamim Shah in broad daylight dominated the news for much of this week. It's not yet clear whether this incident can be characterised as a 'propaganda of the deed' (wherein a symbolic act of violence against a structural target means to evoke a broader meaning) or a revenge killing.

Whatever the case, the incident sent out a chilling message even Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal had to agree with: public security in the capital city is in shambles. But few journalists focused their attention on the security lapses in one of the most security sensitive zones of the country.

Media coverage of Shah's murder revealed that journalists in Nepal continue to put a premium on the oldest function of the profession, which is to provide accurate and detailed information about what really happened. Few Nepali mediapersons have imbibed the dictum of interpretive

journalism: "Don't just tell the story; tell the audience what it means."

False leads and high failure rates make both interpretive and investigative journalism an expensive affair. Barring few exceptions, media outlets in Nepal aren't financially robust enough to support such high-risk, exploratory pursuits. Most of what appear as investigative reports in the Nepali media are either exposés by competitors or planted stories.

The Anglo-American press long worked according to the thesis that every word cut helped publishers save money. Latin American journalists propounded a new genre of reporting, where stories could be extended if it helped make events comprehensible. The basic assumption of so-called imaginative journalism is that facts are often ugly but the truth is invariably beautiful. So if a story can be made more attractive by emphasising lost opportunities and future possibilities, then what could have happened or is likely to unfold is as much 'news' as what has already happened.

In the 1960s, the staid Anglo-American press was hit

## Plenty of print about what, not much about what it means



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

by what came to be called 'New Journalism'. This adopted fictional forms to present facts, and description, narrative and character development often took up more space than cold realities. This later evolved into inspirational journalism, where the grimmest of events were analysed for a glimmer of hope and lessons for the future.

The power elite loves inspirational journalism. When stories appear as fated – what has happened has already happened – the question of accountability

recedes into the background. Somehow, getting on with life has emerged as the dominant trend of journalism in Nepal. With life and livelihood threatened from all sides, influential mediapersons have learnt to survive by preaching pompously to the Maoists, military, mafia and mercantilists without clamouring for accountability. Even though a compromise, preaching through the press doesn't demean journalism. Prompting on behalf of vested interests, however,

devalues the profession.

The consumer base in Nepal isn't large enough to generate enough advertising revenue for the daily newspapers, television channels and FM stations entering the market in hordes. But the interests of some of these media entrepreneurs extend beyond the commercial. Some have political ambitions. Others may just be investing in the media for glamour, influence or stature. At least a few of them seem to be bent upon using the media to promote and protect their business interests, legitimate or not. Such a clash of interests has created the conditions for a small-scale Nepali version of the Pulitzer-Hearst skirmishes of the late nineteenth century.

The Nepali media has made it look as if Jamim Shah, with his supposed Dawood Ibrahim and ISI links, deserved his fate. The government is thereby absolved of its dereliction of duty in ensuring the security of its citizens. Do you hear anybody asking for the resignation of globe-trotting Home Minister Bhim Rawal on moral grounds? When the country is in a whirl, it's not easy for the storytellers to take a position and stand by it.

**The Himalayan**  
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# In search of the Rupee



**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
**Artha Beed**

At Bhadrapur airport recently, when I told a cop I had just returned from India, he started flipping through my passport in search of Indian currency bills. It reminded me of Kesang Tseten's wonderful documentary *In Search of the Riyal*. Yes, security personnel at airports will frisk you for things to keep, and why not? Training does not exist in the Nepali bureaucratic dictionary, so they think they have the right to open up people's purses and strip them like their US counterparts do. You will notice this every time you travel through Toxic International Airport (TIA). Foreign travellers are asked for a souvenir or their last rupees, since cops think the non-convertible Nepali rupee is useless outside Nepal. As Nepalis, our heads hang in shame as we watch them carry out their indiscretions right under their superiors' noses. Do they think it is their right to make hay while the sun shines because they have gotten their jobs through *bhansun* or nepotism?

This Beed often wonders how people can be so bold as to boast of building houses worth ten times their legitimate lifetime earnings. Perhaps it's because people are so ready to congratulate them for discovering a short cut to success. Why is it that the troublemakers in an organisation are those who get their jobs through relatives? Those who are where they are because of *source-force* do not understand the value of merit. Will we ever build a meritocratic society? The fact that people will use family connections to land a job working with people they don't even know shows how indifferent they are to the perceptions of corruption. This Beed keeps on harping on the 'two laddoo syndrome': why would people who bribe gods leave mere mortals alone? It's in our genes! However, more disturbing is how we use obstruction to flaunt power. Is this not a form of corruption too? Look at the way VIPs like the roads to be cleared for their movement. And if this means

declaring a holiday on the day one leaves the country, then they've hit the jackpot, never mind the millions of rupees down the drain. The same mentality can be seen in the Very Ignorant People (another set of VIPs) that like to stop traffic when a wedding janti or procession is going on. With weddings taking place in the thousands each family competes with other to ensure it can block the traffic the longest and create the most problems for commuters. All those who were trying to drive around this Sunday must have experienced the same. How do we end this mayhem and bring about a change in culture? Is it a sense of civic courtesy that compels people to think about other's rights too? Can someone volunteer at wedding jantis to keep the traffic in order? Can a cop be made to understand that his job is to conduct security checks and not to fleece passengers? Can 2011 be simply devoted to ridding TIA of its toxicity and making the airport memorable for all the right reasons? And Kesang, how about a documentary entitled *In Search of the Rupee* that exposes all of this!  [www.arthabeed.com](http://www.arthabeed.com)

## Nepalis are too used to corruption to even recognise it

## India offers help

The Indian Railway Board invited Nepali businessmen to attend a discussion about how railway infrastructure could be improved along the Indo-Nepal border. Ashok Kumar Baidya, vice-president of the Parsa Chamber of Commerce, requested the addition of an overhead bridge in Raxaul, extra coaches and railway lines, and a high-speed rail service from metro cities to Birganj. Baidya also requested India to build an east-west railway from Kakarbhitta to Nautanwa and develop railway infrastructure at Gorakhpur.

## Food aid

The Government of Japan has agreed to grant Nepal over Rs 556 million to help cut food deficits in several districts. Under the agreement, Nepal Food Corporation will use the grant to distribute rice through its national distribution network. As of 2009, Japan has given 8.9 billion yen in food aid to Nepal. Mizuno said he hoped the assistance would address the needs of local people and thereby help move the peace process along.

## Computers for students

Rotary Club of Patan handed over 80 computers and printers to nine public schools in Lalitpur district. Vocational education will also be provided. Approximately 4000 students and the local community are expected to benefit. The funding of \$25,000 was provided by a Rotary Matching Grant project with Rotary Club of Grapevine, USA. Rotary Club Patan has handed over 326 computers worth \$100,000, making it the largest computer donor in the country.

## Hyundai

Laxmi Intercontinental inaugurated its new Hyundai showroom in Thapathali on 10 February. The opening was inaugurated by Gi Baek Lee, GM of Asia Pacific region, and Yoo Sung Gul, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Korea.

## Call me!

Yasuda Mobile launched its latest C88 CDMA phone, which has a colour display and FM radio, and will be available at UTL customer care at Hattisar. You can also get a free UTL U-SIM on purchase of the phone.

## Energy drink

Clickz, an energy drink from Thailand's Osotspa Company, is being launched in Nepal. Osotspa will be partnering with Maata Durga Marketing Solution in Nepal.

## Look beautiful

After the successful launch of its permanent hair removal and skin rejuvenation laser treatment facilities, Touchbeauty laser clinic is offering new services - skin resurfacing for acne scars, burn and surgery scars, sun damage recovery, melasma, stretch mark reduction, tattoo and birthmark removal and much more.

## Free remittance

Everest Bank entered into an agreement with Habib American Bank to allow Nepalis in the US to send inward remittances to beneficiary accounts in Everest Bank of upto \$2000 free of cost.

## Consulting Opportunity

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This will involve a 22 day consulting assignment commencing for 2 days from 24 February, 2010 and the remainder of the work to be completed in March 2010.

#### Deliverables:

1. Updated gender and social inclusion audit manual.
2. Audit report with recommendations and action plan for improvement.

#### Requirements:

- Expert knowledge and experience of gender audits and related issues.
- Masters degree in gender studies, social science or related field.
- Outstanding Facilitation Skills with capacity building and training experience.
- Demonstrable experience and familiarisation with social inclusion issues in Nepal.
- Language: English and Nepali.

You can request a TOR through e-mail ([nepal@snvworld.org](mailto:nepal@snvworld.org)).

Female candidates and candidates from marginalised casts and ethnic groups are encouraged to apply and are given special preference.

Please send your application, CV, daily rate and references of work by **1700 hours 18 February, 2010 to: [nepal@snvworld.org](mailto:nepal@snvworld.org)**



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## Across the seas

If a Nepali migrant worker made a list of things he missed about home, at the top would likely be the name of a spouse.

Separation places heavy strains on a marriage. Migrant workers must face the disappointments and bewilderment of their new settings alone, and may not always be able to communicate readily with their loved ones. At home, their spouses often have it harder, having to put up with in-laws and manage households singlehandedly. Separation can also breed suspicion.

Inevitably, there is heartbreak. One woman who now works at Higher Ground Bakery in Jawalakhel ('Café with a conscience,' #488), hasn't heard from her husband in Malaysia for five years.

"I was 14, and he was 26, when we got married. I haven't heard from him in a very long time and he doesn't send any money. It's tough because I have three very young children to take care of," she says.

Yet many couples manage separation quite well. Thirty-year-old Dambar K Shrestha married Sarita Shrestha (pictured) after an eight-year courtship. She left to work in Hong Kong just five months into their marriage, but the two visit one another at least once a year and communicate daily through Skype. While they won't see each other for Valentine's Day this time around, Shrestha has made plans.

"Last year, I sent her an album made of Nepali paper full of our pictures. This time, I'm thinking of sending something similar, maybe even a rose. I know she'll like it," he blushes.

# Uncommon love

## Love bytes

Love transcends all boundaries, but sometimes you need a little technology to get the message across. For Gopal Dahal and Nika Moktan (pictured), cyberspace was just that medium.

Both knew of each other, and Gopal was smitten by the lovely Nita. But he had a problem. "I could not gather the courage to approach her face-to-face." But with the help of online chatting, his sentiments eventually reached her. It was in cyberspace that their romance bloomed.

After dating for eight months, online and offline, Gopal and Nita got married. Despite being from different castes, the bond that they had formed in cyberspace was strong enough to overcome potential complications. Four years hence, their love has borne fruit in the form of their two-year-old son and baby girl.



Such online romances are not very common in Nepal. Sanam Shrestha, managing director of online dating and matrimonial portal nepalmatrimonial.com, cites several reasons for this. "Online dating is not popular, probably due to the Internet's unavailability or high price," says Shrestha. "Nepali culture is also not that open to online dating yet, unlike India."

However, Shrestha predicts that the online scene could be a hit with younger generations. The increasingly frenetic lifestyles of today might also compel Nepalis to consider online dating a viable solution.

As long as the internet is up and running, Gopal and Nita's love connection will continue to be an inspiration for future cyberspace lovers.

Valentine's Day is more than just a dinner date for Nepalis who've overcome geography, society and plain shyness for love

## Beyond boundaries

When Anusha Bhujel left home to be with her girlfriend Suman Tamang three years ago, she had never met another lesbian couple. "I had read about them in newspapers and knew they existed. But I always wondered where."

Anusha was forced to flee from her home in Jhapa when her parents found out about her relationship with Suman. They had met at a cultural exchange program. When Anusha told her parents about her girlfriend, they tried to marry her off with a man.

Anusha and Suman got married, but struggled to set up house. Anusha was 20 years old and had just finished intermediate level education. "We were headed towards Kathmandu but I fell ill and we had to stop in Biratnagar. I didn't have my certificates with me and couldn't get a job. Suman had hers but she couldn't find a job either."

Then they found out about Blue Diamond Society, an LGBT advocacy organisation, where they made new friends and even found jobs.

Anusha's relationship with her parents is still strained. "They keep asking me what I am going to do when I am old. And who I am going to rely on for support," she says.

"But I am happy that I can live with the person I love," she affirms. For her, Valentine's Day isn't just about Anusha and Suman, but also about their gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender friends who are free to celebrate their love. "We get together, cook a feast and wish each other happiness."





## Valentine Special



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VALENTINE'S SPECIALS



**Aphrodisiac menu** for couples on Valentine's Day, including Tantric kiss cocktail, shrimps in a glass, Caribbean chicken, spicy chocolate cake, Rs2500 per couple, **Délices de France**, Thamel, 4260326

**Romance by the fireplace with a rose**, unlimited free French Sparking Wine with superb continental cuisine, **Kilroy's**, Thamel, 4250449/41

**All-day Valentine's Day package** at the **Mind-Body Library**, Screening of *Ghost* 10am, Lunch 12pm, Lecture on love and

loving 2pm, Love Healing Meditation, 4pm, Babar Mahal, 9841896000

**One Love – A 12 Hour Marathon Epic Love Story**, from PlayMySound on the Outdoor Terrace and Indoor Lounge at **The Factory**, Thamel, 5006201

**Closeup Valentine's Dance** at four locations: **1905** in Kathmandu, **Club Paradiso** in Pokhara, **Hotel Namaskar** in Biratnagar, **Hotel Aroma** in Nepalganj, 2pm-6pm (all venues), [www.partynepal.com](http://www.partynepal.com) for details



**That 70's Valentine**, Soul Train plays disco, **Moksh**, Jhamsikhel. Rs500 entry with a glass of wine, [www.partynepal.com](http://www.partynepal.com)

**Five-course Valentine's Dinner** for Rs5000 per couple at **Rox Restaurant**, Hyatt Regency, overnight for Rs6200 including breakfast, access to the spa, and late checkout, 4491234/4489362

**Purchase a Samsung mobile** over Rs9000 from **IMS Tele Trade**, get a free lunch or dinner for a couple at **Tipsy Bar & Lounge**, Darbar Marg, until 15 Feb.

**Aqua Java Zing**, Valentine's special heart ravioli, strawberry & cappuccino-kissed cake and more, sizzler festival, 4254809



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## EVENTS



**Help Haiti!** Fundraising concert with live music from **Kutumba** and special guests, Rs1450 including buffet, all proceeds to the Red Cross, 7pm onwards, Feb 13, at 1905, Kantipath, 9808074476, 9808063398

**Toronto Nepali Film Festival**, program of 10 Nepali fiction, documentary and animation films, Innis Town Hall, University of Toronto, 12pm to 10pm, February 13, www.tnff.ca, contact curator@tnff.ca or 4168781526

**Electro-Cardiogram: Internal Stories**, paintings by Birendra Pratap Singh, until 16 February, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamsikhel, 5521120

**Othello: The Sen of Nepal**, performance by Nepal Shakes from 5-14 Feb, Kamal Mani Theatre, Patan Dhoka. Tickets available at Dhokaima Café (Patan), Chez Carolyn, (Babar Mahal) and Nanglo Bakery (Darbar Marg)

**Literally Figurative - An International Art Exhibition**, drawings by Kapil Mani Dixit and students of North Lake College on nudity, 17-26 February, Imago Dei Gallery, Nagpokhari, 4442464

**The Glory of the Himalayas**, French-Nepali dance show by renowned French dancer Manjushree Pradhan, 5.30 pm, 12 February at Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari,

## MUSIC

**An evening of Shiv Stuti and bhajans** by renowned Indian singer **Bhuvnesh Komkali** at Hans Sobha Mandap, Pashupathinath, 11 February, 6pm

**Live workshop and concert** from Australian band **Tigramuna**, 11am & 2.30pm, February 14, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, free entrance, 5013554, www.katjazz.com.np

**JSC Jazz Quartet**, every Saturday 8pm on at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat, 9803160719

**Jazz evening** at Delices de France restaurant every Wednesday, 11am-2pm, 4260326

**HyJazz** at the Rox Bar every Friday evening and **Sunday Jazz Brunch** at The Terrace with live music from Inner Groove, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4489362, 4491234

**Saturday African Nite**, with African food and music from 8pm at Jazzabell Café, Jhamsikhel, 2114075

**Live band** every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288

**Some like it hot**, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, 7pm, 4479488

**Happy cocktail hour**, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7pm

**Rudra Night** live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7pm at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212

**Irish Pub**, solo singer-guitarist J. Ryan every Wed & Fri, 7.30pm, Lazimpat.



## DINING



**Australian Wine Dinner**, savour 12 different varieties of Australian wine, 17 Feb, 6pm onwards, Rs2500 (excluding taxes), 4491234

**Experience the Gyakok** (hotpot with T-momos, meats and more) for lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, 4412999 or at Royal Saino Restaurant & Bar, Darbar Marg, 4230890, 4239077

**Famous stews of the world**, enjoy famous stews of the world at the Rox Restaurant, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 6.00PM onwards, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4489362

**Strawberry High Tea**, 4.30-6.30pm, The Lounge, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4489362

**Vegetarian Buffet**, every Monday, **Oriental Nights**, flavours and specialities of Asia every Wednesday, **Arabian Nights** for Middle Eastern specialities every Friday, 6.30pm at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4489362

**Live continental BBQ Fiesta**, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30pm everyday

**The Corner Bar**, 5-7pm, 3-11pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4411818

**A cafe's café**, Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 5522113



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# Space Cowboy





**CRITICAL CINEMA**  
A Angelo D'Silva

The buzz around the Oscars this year is all about the tussle between two of the ten Best Film nominees, the commercially successful *Avatar* (with a reputed \$2 billion in box office earnings) versus the critically acclaimed *The Hurt Locker*. Of course, that *Avatar*'s director James Cameron was once married to *The Hurt Locker*'s Kathryn Bigelow makes for good copy. But Bigelow may have made 2009's most gripping film. *The Hurt Locker* is a taut thriller that's certainly superior to *Avatar* in most respects, and elicits troubling questions about the perception of American military action.

*The Hurt Locker* is set in 2004, one of the most violent years of the continuing Iraq occupation. Action is centred on a three-person team of the US army's Explosion Ordinance Disposal unit. The 'Bravo Company' has recently lost its team leader with 38 days left on its rotation. Staff Sgt. William James (Jeremy Renner) takes over, but his reckless methods have Sgt. J.T. Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) and

Spc. Owen Eldridge (Bryan Geraghty) on edge. As James attempts to disarm ever more imaginative and deadlier devices of mayhem, Sanborn tries to keep them all alive. Jerky hand-held camera work has practically become an industry standard, but Bigelow and her team deliver an immersive and thrilling experience. Her masterful grasp of suspense makes for an electric atmosphere even through long portions of inaction. The

Immersive or embedded? Kathryn Bigelow's excellent *The Hurt Locker* is a moral minefield in itself

evolving dynamic between the characters and Bigelow's ability to explore their psyches raises her film to another level. *The Hurt Locker* may well deserve the label of the best film on the war in Iraq to date. Of course, there have been very few successful feature films exploring the war in Iraq. There is a creeping sense, too, that many

critics are united in their appreciation of *The Hurt Locker* on the virtue that it puts politics aside, unlike other movies about the war. Indeed, in experts who disarm explosive devices for enormous civilian casualties, we have a category of the military practically beyond reproach. But should we care whether the US soldiers portrayed are decent and sensitive (or compelling and sympathetic) when we adjudicate whether the American adventures in West Asia are just?

The frequent complaint of 'aestheticised violence' that gets lobbed at crass entertainment is often excepted by critics in the appreciation of an 'authentic' representation of violence. But the critic's conviction that we are approaching something like a real experience expresses a wish to be taken in.

James' reckless behaviour, bordering on the suicidal (not to mention his disregard for the safety of his comrades), would make him a very poor candidate for the kind of work he is doing. The supposed experiential perspective of the soldier (informed by a script by embedded journalist Mark Boal) forgoes the perspective of the native. Absent Arabs sets bombs, and in one scene reminiscent of a spaghetti western, right down to the whistling score, snipe at our heroes. None of this would be very important if *The Hurt Locker* were not presented, in every frame, as a simulacrum of reality.

In the final analysis, *The Hurt Locker* might actually share something with its competitor at the Oscars, *Avatar*, a work of fantasy on the moral American in a violent landscape. Doesn't our protagonist traverse the mean streets of Baghdad in rubber armour reminiscent of a spacesuit, his comrades calling him a cowboy? The American Wild West finds a home in the hot deserts of Iraq. Can we be forgiven, then, if our thoughts begin to consider what wars may have been fought over the whims and fantasies of one Texan cowboy? 🇺🇸

*The Hurt Locker*  
Starring: Jeremy Renner, Anthony Mackie, Bryan Geraghty  
Director: Kathryn Bigelow  
131 min, R.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**UNITED WE STAND:** Nepal Chhetri Samaj heads through Pulchowk to Tundikhel for a rally against ethnic federalism, Thursday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**CELEBRITY SADHUS:** Photographers jostle to click one of thousands of holy men converging on Pashupatinath for Maha Shivaratri, Thursday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**MAGHE JHARI:** Tuesday's seasonal downpour had pedestrians in Basantapur flaunting their monsoon umbrellas.




KIRAN PANDAY

**ROSES ARE RED:** Students vie with each other to compose the most romantic love letters at a competition organised by the Nepal Student Union, Tri Chandra College, Wednesday.




MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA


**UP AND ABOUT:** Disabled journalist Gajendra Budathoki is presented with a specially equipped scooter by Everest Insurance Company Ltd, Monday.




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**WEEKEND WEATHER**  
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Tuesday's rain was the first winter precipitation in Kathmandu for several years, and bodes well for the general state of the climate. Kathmandu got 25mm, while the western parts of the country, which are usually the driest, got double that amount. It has also cleared up the skies. This weekend will be clear and sunny, leading to rises in daytime temperatures, which will easily touch 20 degrees. Morning temperatures, however, will drop. Prepare for some wide temperature fluctuations this weekend.



FRI	SAT	SUN
		
16-6	20-6	21-6

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# Sounding Solukhumbu

SMRITI MALLAPATY in SOLU

## Ultrasound machines prove to be sound investments for a village in Solukhumbu

An ultrasound machine like the SonoSite 180 Plus can cost upwards of \$14,000. It is a portable, battery-and-AC-powered, high image quality device. The 'drop-tested' SonoSite MicroMAXX, with wireless data transfer facilities, costs over \$21,000. These are not devices you'd expect to find in a Nepali village.

But Phaplu Maternity Centre in Solukhumbu owns five such devices, all donated by the American company SonoSite. While pregnant women in Kathmandu pay over Rs1500 for three ultrasound visits to a health professional to monitor their baby's health and growth, pregnant women in Solukhumbu are serviced in their own villages, for free.

For almost a year now, local NGO Himalayan Health and Environmental Services Solukhumbu has run a pioneering pilot program whereby nurses from the district hospital in Phaplu travel to all of the VDCs below Chaurikharka every three



SMRITI MALLAPATY

months to provide routine ultrasound check-ups.

Nurses Pema Lamu Sherpa, Sani Sherpa and Auxilliary Nurse Midwife Bhagawati Gurung walk for up to three days as is, with a SonoSite in tow, to reach their patients. The images from the ultrasound tests are stored in a computerised database for three years. First timers as well as women with twins, fetuses in breech or transverse positions, or birth complications, are referred to the hospital in Phaplu if necessary.

"The ultrasound program has really helped in early recognition of women at

risk for difficult deliveries," says nurse-in-charge Pema Sherpa, who has herself examined over 500 women in these villages. In a recent case, she referred a pregnant Pashi Sherpa of Tingla VDC to the hospital because of the large size of her baby's head. Pashi was then sent to the maternity hospital in Thapathali, Kathmandu, where a successful operation took place just last week.

Sonograms save lives, a luxury given that 281 out of 100,000 live births result in complications leading to the mother's death (DHS, 2006). Nationwide, only 18 per cent of deliveries take place in an

institution, only 44 per cent of pregnant women receive antenatal care once and only 29 per cent receive antenatal care at least four times. The government has promised free delivery services across the country, but this remains unfulfilled.

Back in Solukhumbu, however, Gau Maya Rai of Kanku VDC has almost reached the full term of her maiden pregnancy. As recommended, she arrives at Phaplu Maternity Centre, where Pema Sherpa conducts an ultrasound scan for the size, femur length, and heartbeat of her unborn child. Here she will also receive free maternal care, including a Rs1500 transportation subsidy from the Ministry of Health and Population.

Construction for the Phaplu Maternity Centre was sponsored by the INGO Sherpa-Med Germany. The centre functions as an extension of Solu Hospital, set up in 1975 by Sir Edmund Hillary. Since July 2009, over 80 pregnant women from around the district have accessed the maternity centre's services.

For now, Gau Maya Rai awaits delivery in the luminous and spacious wood-panelled 'Suzanne's Shelter', donated by Planned Parenthood of Western Washington. Looking at her, one can't help but think these portable ultrasound machines are a perfect fit for the needs of rural communities in Nepal, who often can't access services in district headquarters. Phaplu Maternity Centre shows us what can be achieved with targeted technology transfer. But such investment will have to take place on a much larger scale if maternity services are to reach other deserving communities across Nepal. 🇳🇵

# Nursing Nepal back to health

DAMBAR K. SHRESTHA in SOLU

Besides making medical treatment affordable for Nepalis, the biggest challenge in ensuring universal health care has been retaining doctors and nurses in district hospitals and village health posts.

Various strategies have been tried: increasing allowances, improving facilities, or adding training components for rural medical staff. But out-migration of health personnel to the cities and as nurses and caregivers abroad has continued apace.

In the last three years, Himali Health and Education (HHE) has started a training program in Phaplu of Solukhumbu to turn high school graduates into Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM). The first batch had 40 students, mostly from Solu

itself, but the second and third batch of 80 students are from remote districts across Nepal.

"The idea was to make sure rural health workers stayed in the village," explains HHE's Dingma Thondup Sherpa. "That is why the training centre itself is in a remote area. All the students from the first batch are working in remote villages of Solukhumbu now.

The ANMs are trained at the Solukhumbu Technical School and come from Rasuwa, Mahottari, Rukum, Dolpo, Humla, Jumla, Bajhang, Bajura and Kalikot districts. Most trainees are Dalits, Janjatis and from

## A unique training institute in Phaplu is transforming health care in rural Nepal

remote districts where health care is rudimentary.

With support from various donor agencies, HHE's program used to be free. Because of a lack of resources students have to pay for food and lodging now. Says Sarita Sunar from Kalikot: "I never dreamed I'd ever come to eastern Nepal to get free training in health care. I am going to repay this by working for my community back home in Kalikot."

The Phaplu centre has two fulltime trainers but also uses the service of the doctors, nurses and health assistants from the district hospital. "Historically we have seen that ANMs have a great impact on reducing maternal and child mortality in the villages, and our trainees will be contributing to that effort," says trainer DB Tamang.

In Solukhumbu itself there has been a surge in awareness about preventable infections that kill young children after the ANMs have been sent to remote health posts, Tamang says. 🇳🇵



PICS: DAMBAR KSHRESTHA

"My village doesn't even have a doctor, let alone a nurse. After I finish my course, I am going to take this knowledge back with me to Dhunche."

**Pramila Tamang, 19**  
Dhunche, Rasuwa



"I will go back to Humla and work as a nurse because we have very high maternal mortality. Doctors and nurses don't want to stay in Humla, but I will work in my village because saving lives is more important than earning lots of money."

**Tsering Yangjin Lama, 20**  
Simkot, Humla



"My village is two days walk from here, there is little education and awareness about health, we can't even get *jivan jal* for oral rehydration. My wish is to improve the health of my village."

**Tirsana Rai, 17**  
Cheskam, Solukhumbu



# Road to riches

Highway will bring Nepal and Tibet ‘in from the cold’

JOANNA JOLLY, BBC in RASUWA

Nepal-Tibet border. The mountains here are some of the most remote and inaccessible in the world. But deep in the valleys next to the green, flowing waters of the Kyirong River, Chinese construction workers are blasting through the jagged landscape to turn an ancient trading track into a modern road.

This small stretch of road - just 17km long - from the border to the Nepali town of Syabrubesi is costing the Beijing government almost \$20 million. But it’s an important investment because this mountain pass not only connects Tibet to Nepal, it’s also

the most direct land route to India’s capital, Delhi.

“There is an old Chinese saying, ‘To get rich, build roads first’,” says the Chinese team’s engineer Zhang Peng. “When this road is ready, living standards and the economy around here will improve,” he says. “Nepali people will be able to visit Lhasa, in Tibet, and other parts of China, and Chinese tourists and businessmen will come here.”

The road will make a huge difference to communities on both sides of the border. Traders still walk the old path that runs alongside the new road - an ancient thoroughfare across the



# Valentine na salentine



KALAM  
Rabi Thapa

How times have changed. More obviously, it’s about the new generation pushing out from the cracks of the conservative hide of old Nepal: how these boys and girls hang out together and do god knows what together in private and not-so-private settings in and around town; how the very nature of relationships, including those sealed with Vedic mantras in front of the sacrificial fire and banged in by the clamour of a big brass band, has shifted in sync with western models and Nepali realities; and how Valentine’s Day has become big business here in much the same way Dasain, Christmas and the various New Years have become.

Of course the times keep on a-changing, and to reminisce over the days when holding hands in public was impossible, or how friendly teasing could induce a couple who’d never actually spoken to fall in love is futile, and indicative of one’s own incapacity

roses are red  
violets are blue  
trash is dumped,  
and so are you

or unwillingness to move with the times.

But it is that time of the year again, like it or not. Whether you see the new ways as a perversion of Nepali culture or an opportunity to enhance (or create) your own love life, Valentine’s Day is here and ignore it you cannot. Embrace it publicly (and your special friend) and you’ll be in equally romantic company in bars and restaurants across town. Celebrate it privately, and you’re compelled to admit you’re trying to be more romantic than usual simply because everyone else is doing so. Deride it publicly, and you’ll be making a big deal out of something you proclaim is just the opposite. Stay at home alone, and you’ll either be wishing you had someone

to spend the evening with or if you do have someone, wondering why the two of you have cynically arranged to spend the evening apart, out of spite. You just can’t win.

It would perhaps be easier if, as in the days of yore, Valentine’s Day was simply a high school charade. Everyone is now expected to be part of this Hallmark Holiday and may be found wanting if he or she does not join in. The media has joined in wholeheartedly in demanding you declare your love to someone, anyone, and the climax of the wedding season a week in advance has only added fuel to the fire. Everyone is in on the conspiracy – the heavens, the economy, and all your friends.

Even grandmothers have been heard complaining about their recalcitrant grandsons: ‘He doesn’t come to see me anymore because I told him to get married. *Hoina*, others go and do love-serve. He doesn’t even do that, does he want to be a *jogi*?’

It’s a jungle out there. Perhaps those of us who can’t bring themselves to drift glaze-eyed through the couples reciting couplets along the lines of *roses are red violets are blue sugar is sweet and so are you* should pack their bags and head into the hills this weekend to celebrate a love more divine, that of the twelfth century Bhakti poet Mahadeviyakka for Shiva:

I love the Handsome One  
he has no death  
decay nor form  
no place or side  
no end or birthmarks.  
I love him O mother. Listen.

I love the Beautiful One  
with no bond nor fear  
no clan no land  
no landmarks  
for his beauty.

So my lord, white as jasmine,  
is my husband.

Take these husbands who die,  
decay, and feed  
them to your kitchen fires!

(translated from Kannada by  
A.K.Ramanujan)



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JOANNA JOLLY

roof of the world that connects Nepal to the historic Silk route. Thirty-five-year-old Mingma Dorje Ghale has walked this small, rocky path since he was a child. He and his friend have just trekked back from Tibet, a day's walk away, carrying bottles of Chinese brandy on their backs. They plan to sell their goods in Nepal's border towns.

"When this road is built, I won't have to carry this heavy backpack up and down," he says. His friend's five-year-old daughter leads their yak. Until now, yaks and mules have been the only way to transport heavy goods across the border and children often take the job of leading them.

Mingma hopes that the new road will mean he can drive in and out of China and that his children will be spared the journey, so they can stay at home and attend school. "Life for the next generation will be easier," he says.

Squeezed between the growing economies of China and India, the Nepali government welcomes this sort of infrastructure project that it hopes will bring wealth to an impoverished nation.

The government is also keen to maintain a good relationship with its giant neighbour to the north. Nepal is home to a sizeable Tibetan community, many descended from refugees who've been fleeing Chinese rule since Beijing occupied Tibet 60



years ago.

China is worried that opening up the border could enflame an already unstable Tibetan plateau. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal says he has reassured Beijing that his government will not allow Tibetan dissidents to operate in his country. "China has only one concern, that is the concern of Tibet," he says. "That is why our policy towards China has been consistent. We believe in the One China policy, Tibet is an integral part of China and the soil of Nepal will not be allowed to be used against Tibet and China."

For those living in this remote border region, this policy is not a problem. Phurpu Tsering Tamang, a local turned trekking guide who is himself part-Tibetan, says for the local community gaining access to

Chinese wealth is more important than politics. "After the Chinese occupied Tibet, some people told us the Chinese are very rude and very tricky," he says. "But what I see when I visit Tibet is that they are building roads everywhere and they're building houses for the people, so they have an easier life."

Nepal will need to continue to reassure China even after this road due to open in two weeks, is completed. It's hoping to attract more Chinese investment - and eventually create a trans-Asian highway that will cut through the Himalaya, linking China to India and opening up Nepal further. 

Joanna Jolly is the BBC's Kathmandu correspondent. For more BBC coverage of South Asia go to [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia)



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# “I guess I’m like Lenin.”

Interview in *Naya Patrika*, 8 February

**Naya Patrika: How does Prachanda define ‘Prachanda’?**  
**Prachanda:** What kind of a question is that? (Long laugh) I’d never thought of it like that.

**Try thinking now.**  
You could say Prachanda is someone who can be as tough, or as flexible, as it takes to attain the ambitious goals that he has set himself. But these ambitions are not personal. He is someone who wants to depart a bit from the traditional ways of doing things for the sake of the people, the country and humanity itself.

**What would you think are the positive aspects of your personality?**  
Openness, simplicity, generosity. You could call this flexibility or weakness.



KIRAN PANDAY

**And the negative points?**  
It actually came up once in our party. That my personality was a bit unstable from time to time. I used to stress out quicker over events than others.

**What were you like when young?**  
Very shy. They used to call me ‘god’s cow’ (*deuta ko gai*). My Head Sir still wonders how a shy guy like me got into politics. If there was a fight in school, they used to come to me because they knew I was straight and wouldn’t lie.

**When do you get angry?**  
It’s like with everyone else: when I don’t get what I want or when things don’t go the way I want them to. I used to get angry at family members over petty matters, not any more.

**You do get emotional a lot.**  
It’s true, I’m a very sensitive person. That is why I get emotional very quickly. Even when reading a simple social novel or watching movies with a social message, I can’t control

my feelings. During the war, I used to get emotional over the sacrifice of each of our friends. And if I am presenting something, the content of my presentation sometimes makes me emotional. If it is a sensitive subject, I break into tears quite easily (Laughs).

**What you say behind closed doors is different from what you say in public.**  
That’s not true. However, one is a bit more diplomatic or polite in a room with someone whereas in public in front of the people one has to be down-to-earth. The message is the same, but some people don’t understand this. Lately, many have started telling me not to talk too much because what I say is controversial, and not to go to too many functions. I admit it is a weakness I have, and that is good advice.

**Who do you compare your personality with?**  
I have said often that my personality is closest to Lenin’s. Lenin is my role model: his forcefulness, flexibility, conviction and courage. He could take brave policy decisions. I’m not trying to say I’m like Lenin, just that I want to follow him.

**Why do you think your remarks are so controversial?**  
If you never go to the heart of an issue, you will never be controversial. When you put things straight and sharp, then it is debated and the issue is evaluated by everyone according to their class background.

**Is it because of your personal weakness that your public face has suffered a setback of late?**  
No, I don’t accept that. There is a class of people who monopolised power for a long time whom you can also call lackeys, feudal or dalals, who are trying to assail Prachanda’s personality. That is because I am a threat to their class interest. There is a domestic and international conspiracy to target Prachanda. But this has also convinced the public that it is necessary to save Prachanda.

**How do you use your free time?**  
I like to travel. I am especially attracted by mountains, waterfalls, rivers. I am refreshed by nature. That is why I scoot off to Tatopani or other places. In high school I used to play football, and then after graduation, volleyball. I also like to read and write.

**What are you reading now?**  
I’m reading the Chinese novel *Red Crag* for the second time.

**Lately you’ve been hitting out at India.**  
It’s not like that. When your politics are different then being diplomatic takes second place. We are now finished with the diplomatic phase with India, that is why the subject is now political. People don’t understand, or don’t want to understand that.

# Emotional Dahal

Ganga BC in *Kantipur*, 6 February

क्रान्तिपुर

The Maoist party standing committee meeting directed Pushpa Kamal Dahal to “to weigh and consider his words” before speaking.

The meeting concluded that his impromptu addresses have caused damage to the party’s and his own image. It asked him to consider the consequences of his speeches. It reminded other high profile party leaders of the same.

“A leader should speak only as required,” said one leader, “and the party chairman should be even more cautious.”

Dahal’s emotional speeches make good news but the party leadership has determined it also makes him look frivolous. The meeting suggested that he speak sensibly about party policy to bolster the party’s image as well as his own.

Dahal might indeed think twice before speaking now, even to his cadres in closed sessions. His speeches have caused two major controversies. The Shaktikhor video tape revealed the Maoist’s double standards in the peace process while the Khanna Garment audio tape soured relations with Baburam Bhattarai.

“The meeting asked leaders to speak sensibly so the party line is clear,” said party spokesperson Dinanath Sharma.

Dahal says he is emotional and frank by nature, “It is not only mass addresses. Even during the ‘people’s war’ I used to get emotional and speak my mind.”



"You don't have your ethnic province yet? Don't worry, we do!"  
Newspaper: Ethnicity-based provinces

क्रान्तिपुर Batsyayan in *Kantipur*, 6 February

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उज्यालो ९० नेटवर्क सानेपा

**अब सधैँका साथी**



# “Dalit liberation within ethnic provinces”

Tilak Pariyar, CA member, UCPN (Maoist), Banke-1

**What is the actual Dalit population in Nepal?**  
According to non-governmental sources, Dalits constitute 20 per cent of the population. The 1991 and 2001 censuses list the Dalit population as 16.2 per cent and 13.2 per cent respectively, but there has actually been a 3.4 per cent increase.

**What are the main problems for Dalits?**  
There is no representation in government, there is social discrimination and they are

economically backward.

**Don't Dalits need a province as well?**  
It was right to give provinces to indigenous peoples and Madhesis on the basis of ethnicity because the solutions to their problems can be found from their own places. They need ethnic autonomous rule. Dalits need to seek their liberation from within these provinces.

**How will Dalit liberation be achieved in ethnic provinces?**  
Within autonomous ethnic provinces, Dalits should receive special privileges as compensation for the discrimination they have faced. If that happens then Dalits don't need a separate province. Dalits shouldn't seek their liberation alone, but

should seek justice along with other ethnicities.

**So Dalits want ethnic federalism, is that so?**  
Yes, federalism should not just be on the basis of ethnicity but on the basis of ethnicities that will have the right to self-determination and autonomous rule.

**What of those who say such an arrangement will fragment the country?**  
Federalism is the need of the nation. But the boundaries must be established by the parties, it shouldn't result in anarchy. Without self-determination, the provinces cannot be autonomous. But this is not in order to break the country apart.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

# Liberation without oppression



Lyarkyal Lama is the only CA member from the Yolmo community and the only UML Janajati CA member to criticise the ethnic federal model. He advocates inclusive and proportional representation with special privileges for ethnic communities. Translated excerpts from an interview with Sanghu:

**Sanghu: Why did you oppose the concept paper on state restructuring?**  
**Lyarkyal Lama:** I did not oppose the paper in its totality. It has merits and flaws. Prithvi Narayan Shah's contribution has been mentioned in the paper in the context of Nepali history and geography. But to borrow the words of fellow UML CA member Shanti Devi Chamar from Kapilvastu, if Shah's contribution is worth mentioning, so is the contribution of Gautam Buddha. Including Buddha's name in the new constitution will confirm that his birthplace is Nepal, not India as many believe.

**As a Janajati CA member, why are you not satisfied with a paper that proposes ethnicity based provinces?**  
It isn't possible to create ethnic provinces in a country where there are 103 ethnic groups. For instance, if the Bhote community with a population of 50,000 got

Jadan province, why shouldn't 150,000 Yolmos get a province too? A proportional representation system, on the other hand, will ensure all communities representation, big or small.

**Isn't it enough to give small communities special privileges?**  
We need both provinces and rights in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country such as ours. But it won't be wise in the long run to create ethnic provinces, since that would invite further conflict.

**What is wrong with the paper then?**  
Creating provinces and delineating boundaries has not been done properly. The provinces should comprise the Himal, hilly and Tarai regions. We can create 13 or 14 provinces. The Tarai people are demanding a Madhes Pradesh, which is not possible, since many other

communities live there. There should be three provinces in the Tarai, three provinces in the Himalayan region, and seven or eight provinces in the hills. Himali people living from Taplejung to Darchula have the same religion, culture and script. They all belong to the Bhote community. Therefore, they can be divided into three provinces based on geography. We have to take the help of experts and boundaries should be outlined scientifically.

**You are not in favour of ethnic federalism. Are you then in favour of Bahun-Chhetris?**  
I am not favouring anyone. When the committee proposed ethnic federalism, top leaders, specially Bahun and Chhetris, were concerned that other communities would take over the country. I asked them to think of how oppressed Janajatis, Madhesis and Dalits must have felt for 240 years. Yet under this

scheme, some marginalised communities will continue to be left out. How do you think they feel?

**What if we form a commission and resolve the issue of state restructuring?**  
It's a good idea but should have been done before. However, the commission would not be above the CA, which is not obliged to pass its recommendations.

**If these debates continue, the constitution won't be written by 28 May.**  
With political consensus and hard work, we can meet the deadline. If 601 CA members truly believe the new constitution should enable all communities to co-exist peacefully, then it will be done on time. The more important question is whether it helps make a new Nepal. We have been writing and rewriting constitutions since 1947. The point is to liberate the oppressed without trampling on the rights of others.

# Ethnic provinces will harm the nation



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Mohammad Aftab Alam, CA member/minister, NC Rautahat-2

**How many Muslims live in Nepal?**  
There are 1.2 to 1.3 million Muslims scattered across the country – in smaller groups in the hills but in the majority in five or six districts in the Tarai.

**What are the main issues the Muslim community has to address?**  
The main problem is that of economic backwardness, which affects other basic needs such as health and education.

**The State Restructuring Committee decided to designate provinces on the basis of ethnicity, what do you think?**  
This is totally wrong and is sure to invite more trouble. To designate provinces on the basis of either ethnicity or language is to wound the nation.

**What's the problem with ethnic or language-based provinces?**  
Restructuring should be on the basis of geography. But looking at the model the committee passed it seems as if the country is one of majority ethnicities, though no ethnicity has a majority here. How can

ethnic provinces be created in a country of minorities? In the name of inclusion and proportional representation, unqualified and incapable people are being pushed forward, how will this establish democracy?

**How will society be affected by granting political prerogatives?**  
State restructuring should not take place on ethnic lines, as those in the minority will be exploited. If within the same province, some are given the right to govern while others are barred from it by the constitution, then democracy cannot be consolidated.



# 3-party dictatorship

Kingji was so chuffed with the royal welcome he got in Panauti this week that the erstwhile incarnation of Vishnu is contemplating a similar walkabout on Friday at Pashupati on the occasion of Shivaratri. Both royalists and republicans are reportedly readying rival rent-a-crowds. Wonder whose chants will be louder: “Raja au desh bachau” or “Gyane chor desh chhod”?

Those of you who think that if the constitution will not be written in time a great calamity will befall the nation are wrong. It's actually going to be much worse than that. The international community will give up on us and then we won't be able to scapegoat India or UNMIN any more, and we'll have no one to blame but ourselves. Our leaders



have this amazing capacity to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, so the Jackass has come up with this drastic solution: Since there is never going to be an agreement on ethnicity-based federalism, and this will delay the new constitution indefinitely, how about a **ten-year moratorium on all Bahun leaders**? Why are the indigenous and janajati groups just demanding control of federal units? They should be allowed to take charge at the Centre and in the higher echelons of all parties. This would finally remove the bickering Brahmin men (MKN, JNK, BDG, PKD, BRB, GPK, RCP, PVT LTD) who can't agree on anything anyway. This is isn't as far-fetched as it may seem. It was implemented as the Kamraj Plan in India in the 1970s and capped the age of party leaders, allowing Indira Gandhi to come up the ranks.

The South Asian Games may have ended but the SAG saga continues. Nepal finally showed the world that we are a warlike country by winning seven golds, all in the martial arts category. And even in the categories we did not win, we displayed our martial tradition by roughing up linesmen, and if there were no Malaysian women referees to beat up, then we beat each other up. Here is a tip for the next South Asian Games, let's get all those ayogya ladakus and start training them in wrestling, boxing, kabbadi, wushu, taekwondo and Nepal's new **national sport of beating to pulp** anyone who disagrees with you.

The only non-martial art gold was in the marathon, which our athlete completed in a **world record time of 1 hr and 59 mins**. It was a world record because the Banglas laid out a course that was short by 5km. Sir Lanka (another warlike nation) nearly came to blows with the organisers in Dhaka because they had trained their marathoners to make a dash for it in the last 5km, but there was no last lap. At least we got to keep the gold.

Nepal used to have a partyless-Panchayat system, then after 1990 we brought in a party-based democracy, the whole of last week we had parties galore, and now it's looking like we have a **three-party dictatorship**. Which means we don't have to worry about the constitution not being written on time, the three parties will just sit down and figure out a way to pass the preamble on May 28 and postpone everything else by a year.

A media mogul is murdered in broad daylight in Kathmandu's Green Zone and the Home Minister continues with his China visit with the heads of all three security agencies. An unarmed traffic cop comes to the rescue while armed APF don't lift a finger to cordon off the area. If the ministers are not on foreign junkets, they are on domestic junkets. Not one, not two, six ministers including the prime minister choppered down to inaugurate a bridge over the Rapti on Wednesday. **If the Ass had a black flag**, he'd be out there flapping it about.

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