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Casting shadows

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Revisiting 1995

It may come as a surprise, but India’s 1950 treaty is highly unfavourable to it.

It showed the fragmented nature of Nepali political opinion, but gave Nepal a chance to understand the Indian security establishment’s concerns and reflect on what overhauling the treaty would mean. What became quite clear is that no side is quite sure how to stand up and defend the 1950 pact anymore. This may come as surprise to many, but the Indian side feels the treaty is highly unfavourable to it. Those clauses that held any advantage in the security realm are now non-operational, while the Nepali parties benefit from other provisions. An Indian participant argued how millions of Nepali citizens enjoy national treatment in India without a reciprocal arrangement. What would revising the relevant clause mean for them? Particularly when India is planning to introduce national identity cards for its citizens? Would they need work permits and visas, and is what Nepal wanted? A preconditions for the open border was a special security relationship with absolute cooperation. But Nepal was not seen to be as sensitive to Indian concerns. While and the open border was meant for the nationals of these two countries, many third national countries were also enjoying the benefits from other provisions. A former official argued for a regulated border regime to track cross-border movement. For their part, Nepali politicians, particularly the Maoists and UML, feel the treaty is inherently unequal, signed as it was when a newly independent India was dealing with a decaying, feudal Rana regime on its last legs. Dr Bhattarai noted that the treaty was based on India’s Himalayan frontier policy. Specific provisions, according to him, give India a de facto say over Nepal’s security, be it through consultations about third country threats or the acquisition of arms. The change in context needed a new arrangement. He added that Nepal had also enjoyed an advantage in the economic and commercial realm, the weaker economy, i.e., Nepal, should be given preferences and privileges. Claiming one-third of border activity was illegal, led to a loss of revenue for the state and encouraged crime. Bhattarai agreed with the need to regulate the border. After all, the Maoists see out migration as a liability that helps sustain the old semi-feudal economy. But this was not a position shared by all Nepal participants. Madheshi leaders emphasized the roti-bet relationship and said revising the open border arrangement would devastate lives and family. They pointed to the huge working class population, including pushcarts, who would suffer. It is clear that Nepal is yet to develop a broad national consensus on the 1950 treaty and the border. While doing so, it should be aware of the risk of ending up with more unfavorable arrangement.

MEAN STREETS
All is not well in the state of Nepal. I can empathize with Rabi Thapa (‘Fist-happy’, #491) but let’s not throw in the towel. Why could have imagined that the mean streets of New York City would be cleaned up within a mayor’s term when everyone had almost written this city off? Let’s look at our neighbours down south and we can realise that the road to renewal is slow but if there is a committed focus on improvement, things will improve.

CORRUPTION, INC
Who will be held accountable and by whom? The running gouts of the so-called revolution - the self-serving thugs-politicians, or the scared, ever-comprising public (‘License to loot’, #491)? What we need is not for non-officials to lay down arms, impunity must be stopped and the state needs to ensure this by force, if needed. Some semblance of law and order must be re-established in order for anything else to work.

NFS’ SINGAPORE
I think there is a middle path between Singapore style dictatorship and a freewheeling democracy (‘Be careful what you wish for’, #491). I also believe that the rich have their own Singapore within Nepal. They have uninterrupted power supply and water, wine and dine like the Nepali politicians and give whatever they want. It is the poor who suffer in this unending madness. All they can do is go to Malaysia and work for peanuts.

ROPEWAY
This article (‘Learning the ropes’, #491) shows that small things do help make big differences. In the last seventeen years I used to train grass-roots level health workers in a campus in Tansen, Palpa. We regularly visited surrounding villages and rural health posts as part of the field-education. The students would often ask me to take care of fodder, trees, green vegetables in the karela bath, helped develop transplanting materials and local herbal health products, and taught health and sanitation to the school kids. These small things made a huge difference in the lives of the people.

Q. Should we have a referendum on the monarchy?

Total votes: 3,299

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On the web

www.nepalitimes.com
Junket journalism

The bias of reporters is reflected in what they decide to report on, and how

B ias is built into the very concept of news. No report of an event, or the background and circumstances of its occurrence, can ever be fully free of the attitudes and beliefs of the person doing the reporting. In fact, propaganda is an essential element of the media that most of us in the profession find it unnecessary to explain that our values get reflected in whatever we do.

The degree of predisposition may vary, but few journalists can honestly claim that they are completely objective. Even in straight reporting of facts, the slant of a reporter or news editor is reflected in the phrasing of captions or placement on the headlines, the angle of photographs, the wearing of caps or placement on the page. Political wrangling is page one because most journalists in Nepal consider it to be urgent enough to bring it to national attention. Events of economic and cultural significance go to the tail end of a news broadcast or to the inner pages of the papers, even though they may be more urgent or important.

Ravindra Mishra is a professional journalist for the BBC/Nepal Service but a media activist of some repute who unabashedly promotes causes close to his heart. But once in a while, he doesn’t hesitate to censor even widely celebrated authors, like the author of the Union, believes Sanjel’s experiments in affordable education need a bigger laboratory. He has thus decided to sponsor the construction of a string of these schools all over the country.

When Mahato travelled to lay foundation stones for Sanjel’s schools, a herd of reporters from Kathmandu followed him wherever he went. Glowing accounts of his philanthropy then appeared in the press. Almost identical photographs of Mahato doing puja in a pit as his family looked on adoringly were published in the dailies. The media willingly became a propaganda tool for what it had decided was a worthwhile cause. Seemingly disinterested, neutral and objective reporting is the most effective publicity vehicle. Perhaps that could be the reason politicians use suggestive tip-offs to get desired coverage.

Businesses exploit inauguration or anniversary ceremonies for business purposes. Social entrepreneurs rely on friendly journalists to push their reformist agenda. All these techniques are variations of ‘embedded journalism’: seemingly objective dispatches by reporters receiving hospitality and other facilities from organisers.

Soch, Karna Lahat, is built into the very structure of the media. The idea or the person behind it. The meeting has achieved little of the ambitious agenda set by the three parties to end political wrangling is page one because most journalists in Nepal consider it to be urgent enough to bring it to national attention. Events of economic and cultural significance go to the tail end of a news broadcast or to the inner pages of the papers, even though they may be more urgent or important. The High Level Political Mechanism decided to form a State Restructuring Commission at the Godavari Resort meeting on Wednesday, but progress remains elusive. The Maoists want the Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month.
The real Bihar

PATNA – Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar cannot stop smiling. Five years ago, Bihar was synonymous with corruption, crime, malgovernance and was blamed for pulling the rest of India down. This year, it has been rated as the state with the second highest growth in India, and has been featured in the national and international media. Kumar himself has won several ‘Politician of the Year’ awards.

How did he do it? That was the question all Nepali participants had when Kumar came to speak at the India-Nepal conference held in his state capital earlier this week. ‘I don’t think there can be any better way of looking at what Nitish Kumar did in his state capital earlier this week,’ Dr Baburam Bhattarai was paying close attention. He got up and told Kumar, “Despite our ideological differences, I am inspired by you today. I tried to do similar things when I was finance minister. My question is how did you ensure that when I was finance minister, the faster port connectivity due to better roads and bridges on the Ganga as examples, ‘If there are any reservations about India’s intentions in Nepal,” he said, “please remove them. India is your biggest well-wisher. Go anywhere and there is only a positive feeling about Nepal. We are entirely with you and hope multiparty democracy in Nepal will succeed.”

Perhaps we should be looking to the example of Bihar after all, rather than Singapore and Switzerland.

And his answers could not have been more relevant for us in a week when public insecurity is at its peak.

“The mantra is to establish rule of law. Earlier, there was fear and criminals had state protection. Now, we have trials for cases and witness protection. The same act is strictly applied. There is no interference in investigations. Now people feel a crime will lead to punishment.”

Kumar said tackling law and order had been essential to changing the public mood. “People are willing to spend and invest now. Land prices are high. There is no interference in investigations. Now strictly applied. There is no witness protection. The arms act is now, we have trials for cases and criminals had state protection. We wanted a caste, and everyone has been more relevant for us in a week when public insecurity is at its peak.

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There is a sense here that non-Maoist political parties in India will not be willing to take the Maoists at face value anymore. Unless the Maoists abide by their pat promises, the coming months could see rising confrontation and violence.

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What really matters?

Asthutosh Tiwari

First, the questions: will Nepal have a new national constitution at the end of the next 85 days? Will Nepalis have access to new machine-readable passports (MRP) by this April Fool’s Day so that the new passport holders can study, travel and work abroad? Will the central bank have a governor by the end of this Nepali calendar year? Will the killers of media businessmen Jamim Shah of Kathmandu and Arun Singhaniya of Janakpur be caught and brought to justice?

Depending on whom you ask, the answers lie on the negative side, ranging from “can’t say” to “no.”

Second, the context: Nepal has had two years, 601 Constituent Assembly members, and ample domestic and foreign assistance to draft a constitution. Likewise, it has had almost ten years to roll out the new MRP passports. The post of a central banker is too important to be left vacant for long in these economically uncertain times. And journalists and media businessmen have been beaten, kidnapped, shot at and killed before in the last three years, with – let us remember – nary a suspect tried or jailed.

Against that backdrop, this meta-question: What is it about Nepal and Nepalis that makes us look like we really cannot get our act together for anything? One answer could be: a lack of a sense of priority or a sense of what really matters.

An inability to stick to priorities is the sticking point for Nepal

Two years ago, when the Constituent Assembly was put together, it had only one priority: to draft the constitution and present it to the republic. The rest, through important, could come later.

But in the intervening months, that priority was pushed aside by the leaders of political parties, who changed the interim rules several times to suit their own convenience rather than serve the demands of the priority. The result is clear to see. Could there be a more egregious example of political incompetence?

Similarly, over the years, with bureaucracies politicised to a point where few bureaucrats want to stick to priorities that could be dismissed by their routinely changing politically appointed ministers, the MRP issue sat on a shelf, only to be dusted off a few months before the end of the 10-year deadline. As for the delay in appointing the central banker, that is one more example of how institutions have been weakened. Instead of having a qualified person leading the institution at the earliest, the political parties are jockeying to secure the post for one of their apparatchiks.

And the agitating journalists, who have run through the whole spectrum of letter-writing campaigns, editorialising, dharna, gherao and julus before, should be asking themselves: what makes them hope for a better result this time? Rather than continue to serve the public a déjà vu of their earlier tactics, the media fraternity should now re-examine its playbook and asking itself what its priority is. It’s time to preserve, relentlessly, through the police and legal channels. Nothing else will send a stronger signal of the media’s determination.

Individuals become productive by deciding what their priorities are, and then sticking to those priorities by learning to cut out distractions. Institutions such as the Constituent Assembly, Foreign Ministry, Central Bank and the media fraternity will serve their public mandate well by first figuring out what they alone can do, and then doing that task well. Else, there will be much noise and no signal.
Urban sprawl is gobbling up Kathmandu’s farms at an unprecedented rate, and may wipe them out within a couple of decades.

From 1976-2009, the proportion of cultivated land in Kathmandu dropped from 61 per cent to 40 per cent. Experts say the average farm size has shrunk considerably too. Farmers have found it more profitable to sell their farms, usually to people seeking to build houses, than work on them, as rapid urbanisation has caused land prices to surge ahead of agricultural yield. The rising cost of living has hastened the process.

Forty-year-old Sanu Khadka works all day on a two-ropani plot in Pasikot on the outskirts of Kathmandu but barely manages to feed her family of three. Her husband chips in by working odd-jobs in the city.

“My family has lived here for three generations and our farm used to be a lot bigger. But we’ve had to sell everything as living expenses have risen. With land prices so high, how can a poor family afford not to?” Khadka says.

Such decisions, multiplied many times over, have deformed the cityscape. While farms on the outskirts are more or less contiguous, those closer to the centre of the city alternate with residences to form an unseemly patchwork pattern.

Things weren’t always this way. During the Malla era, the fertile areas around river banks were reserved for farms. Waste from settlements, which were higher up, would flow down to the farms, fertilise them, and then run off into the river. Bharat Upadhyay of the Center for Environmental and Agricultural Policy Research, Extension and Development (CEAPRED) explains: “Back then, there were clear directives on what land could be used for which purpose. The prime reason for the current urban sprawl, and the damage it has caused to urban agriculture, is the fact that there is no operative land use act.”

The loss of urban farms has had several negative social consequences. Food production per capita in Kathmandu has dropped precipitously and now accounts for only a third of the city’s food supply. That figure is projected to drop as more migrants flood into the city. Kathmandu was once totally food self-sufficient.

It’s also bad for the environment, since the lost farms could have put the city’s solid waste to productive use and would have been less detrimental to the underground water supply than the houses that have replaced them.

It also means there are fewer jobs for city farmers. Shyam Lama and his wife arrived in Kathmandu from Rasuwa 13 years ago and keep a small farm on a vacant plot left under their care by the owners. Yet Lama spends most of his time looking for odd-jobs in the city since the farm requires only one person’s labour.

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Don’t say, jus’ play!
Interior design may be a new trade in Nepal, but traditionally, Nepali homes have always had a functional aesthetic. Today, the interior design market is growing as people have begun to recognize the need to create “beautiful indoor living spaces”, as Kunal Lama calls them.

Lama, owner and designer of Café Mitra, is currently helping to renovate Hotel de l’Annapurna. He says it is all about using creativity and technical solutions within a structure to make it functional, practical, and attractive as per the client’s wishes, along with the designer’s own touches. That much is evident in the chic interiors of Café Mitra, which fit organically into a traditional two-storey structure in Thamel.

“But the problem with this field is that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder,” Lama cautions, “which means that very often, the designer and the client do not see eye to eye.”

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Interior design is more of a passion than profession in some ways. The good thing is it need not be a nine-to-five job, even if it requires attention to detail and a knack for harmony. Siddharth Gopalan is an established interior designer who has managed this in diverse works such as the Roadhouse café, La Dolce Vita and Dhokaima Café. Educated at the Gujarat institute of Environmental Design, he has been working for the past 11 years in Kathmandu.

“God is in the details,” is all Gopalan has to say, and he has put this motto into practice in his designs. When he started out in Kathmandu, interior design was not even considered a profession. Despite his early struggles, he now believes interior design has good potential in Nepal. Gopalan acknowledges that interior design is challenging, and requires one to be at the cutting edge. He waits for clients to specify their requirements, then works on a concept and a detailed plan that is put into action once he visits the site. Different spaces have different requirements and different requirements are compatible with different concepts. It is essential, says, Gopalan, to undergo an apprenticeship.

At 26, Varun Rana, a budding architect and interior designer, sets up interior designing as catering to the client aesthetically. The University of Washington graduate says every designer wants the work to be his. In reality, he has to accommodate to what the client wants.

“Designing is a responsibility you have to take very seriously and what you owe that responsibility to is your conscience,” says Rana. The advantage is that while selling designs, one has to make compromises to the clients’ taste. The advantage is that you leave a little of yourself behind in your work.

“People don’t see what you do, but they feel it,” he says. Ultimately, Rana dreams of establishing an internationally accredited design school that will teach students how to change, transform, and beautify spaces.

Rana, Gopalan and Lama all agree that patience is the most important characteristic of interior designers. Formal education and passion bring a certain quality and richness to interior design. It’s not the profession for those seeking to get rich quick, but the dividends lie elsewhere—or perhaps within your favourite four walls.
Knick-knacks
“Would I buy this for my own home?” is the question. Rishi and Sumaina Saral always ask when choosing pieces from all over the world for Casa, their newly opened home accessories store. Walk into the bright and airy showroom and find yourself tempted by items ranging from lamps to bedspreads that scream contemporary chic. Not looking for a big purchase? Then the variety of little knick-knacks for your home will keep you engaged for hours on end. Anamnagar, Singha Darbar East Gate, 410 2684

Cheque-book shopping
Turn your home into a hotel with Emporios’ line of extravagant furniture. With an impressive showroom spanning two levels, Emporios is sure to satisfy those with cash to spare, offering anything and everything a hotel house needs. Forget your wallet and get your chequebook ready; it’s a lot lighter to carry around. Teku, 410 4522

Heavenly painting
Berger Paints’ Cosmic line of paints combines advanced computerised paint technology with the ancient Chinese practices of ‘Feng Shui’ (living in harmony with nature) to create a balanced union aimed at providing you with peace of mind. Tinkune, 446 6038

Paintastic
Whitewashed walls are now a thing of the past—colours can be used discerningly to create a palette that infuses character into a home. Asian Paints has been adding colour to the Nepali landscape since 1983. For those mindful of how colours can create harmony, Asian Paints offers a large variety of emulsions, including the premium Royale Play and Royale Glitter lines. Thamel, 441 7606

Iron lady
Specialising in iron furniture, Akarshan Interiors is the brainchild of owner Sabita Dhungana. Dhungana has been tinkering with the properties of metal and transforming them into works of art for the past 17 years. Due to the lack of a proper supply of electricity to power modern machines, Akarshan crafters employ unconventional methods. Instead of welding, they use the traditional coal methods to manipulate iron. The process makes for a clean and natural looking final product. Kupondole, 554 5055

Tread softly
Try the carpets that Status Trading brings in from Indonesia, Switzerland and Abu Dhabi, among other places. Their selection spans common ribbed carpets to high-end cut-pile and loop pile carpets. Putalisadak, 422 8382

Modern living
Madan Joshi and Primo Tuladhar established Furniture Land 10 years ago, pioneering the import of modern furniture from China, the manufacturing processes of which marry high quality and competitive prices. Whether customers pick from the ‘signature’ line of products or the rest on offer, they can be assured of an excellent after-sales experience. Bluebird Mall, 422 4797

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New arrivals

Speed Dealer.

Furniture therapy
Named after his mother, Bipin Mishra’s Karuna Interior specialises in design and home accessories from his outfit in Dillibajar. Step into this cozy shop and enjoy the warm hospitality of Mishra, who readily dispenses design ideas and decor tips. Dillibajar, 443 4181

Ripe woodwork
The grand old dame of the furniture industry in Nepal, Bira Furniture has been in operation since 1963 and is the brainchild of family patriarch Padam Shrestha. Bira Furniture’s longevity is testament to the quality of its woodwork, which includes parquet flooring, beds and sofas. While the company built its reputation on classical style wooden furnishings, it now also offers contemporary designs and products—most notably pre-fabricated houses that allow for quick assembly and modifications. Patan Industrial Estate, 552 4118

Fresh antiquities
Serving a niche market, Duhrar Décor offers a variety of furniture based on historical styles such as neo-classical and Victorian, among others. The wooden furniture is made from mahogany or Burma teak, and lives up to its antique brand by lasting well over a hundred years. Teku, 422 2203

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New arrivals

Speed Dealer.
EVENTS

Women's cycle rally, to mark women's day and to celebrate womanhood and promote eco-friendly riding, from Basantapur Darbar to Patan Darbar Square, 7:30-10am, 6 March

Tasalu-Kathmandu Scrolls, Alliance Francaise presents an exhibition of paintings by Juliet Solé, 26 Feb-19 March, Siddhartha Gallery, Babor Mahal

ICIMOD Open House, Biodiversity show, solar technology demonstrations, photo exhibition, street drama, quizzes, food stalls and more, 6 March at ICIMOD headquarters in Lalitpur, 500022

Himalayan hash house harriers, a running club with a drinking problem, meet every Saturday to run a course around the Kathmandu Valley, details at aponarch.com/hhhh/

Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Tai Chi 10-11.30am Saturday, Yoga 8.30-9.30am and meditation 5-6pm weekdays, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402

People After War, permanent photo exhibition, every day 11am-4pm, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoika, for bulk school bookings call 5521393

MUSIC

Live acoustic music, Desmond, Anthony & Jim with blues and American folk, 7 pm, 6 March, New Orleans, Patan.

Celebrating Holl, musical event with Pandit Indu Prakash, and students from Indian Cultural Centre, Thursday, 11 March at Indian Cultural Centre, Nashal, 4412692

JSC Jazz Quartet, every Saturday 8pm on at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat, 980160719

Chillout Lounge with DJ Miriam, every Friday at the Bourbon Room, Lal Durbur Marg, 4441703

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

Nepali Ghajals at D'Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30pm, 4468589

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

Jazz evening at Delices de France restaurant every Wednesday, 11am-2pm, 4320328

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

Basement Jam, live music every Friday at Bourbon Room, Lal Durbur Marg, 4441703

Live music with Anil Shahi every Friday with special BBQ at Royal Alina’s Café & Pub, Lazimpat, 475066

DINING

Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Café, for wood-fired pizza and free wi-fi Internet, 012130691

Vegetarian Buffet, every Monday, Oriental Nights, flavours and specialities of Asia every Wednesday, Arabian Nights for Middle Eastern specialties every Friday, 6.30pm at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/489362

Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babor Mahal Revisited, 4263070

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

Lavaza Coffee and Baskin n’ Robbins, at Blue Note Coffee Shop, Lazimpat, 4491234

A cafe’s café, Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoika, 5522113

Jazzabel Café, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8pm, Jhamsikhel, 2114075

Al Fresco, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, Kakori, for biryanis, curries and kebabs, 7-10.45pm, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 4279399

Teppanyaki meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara, 4463138

Reality Bites, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarka’s Group of Hotels, 9am-10pm, 4425341

Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Girey Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden every Friday 7pm, Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 60, 4421399

Himalayan Rainbow Trout at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4248999

Tiger for Breakfast, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4215068

Gokarna Forest Resort for a variety of sizzlers at Tripit bar, 4451212

Mexican Sojourn, mexican dishes and tequilas every Friday 7pm, Hotel Himalaya, Kupondole, 5523900

Pipabot, lunch and dinner, Baber Mahal Revisited, 4267857 or 972131390

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Church of St Francis, USA and Royal Norwegian Embassy, Kathmandu
HERE WE COME: Nepali fans celebrate after the national cricket team beat the United States to win the Pepsi ICC World Cricket League Division 5 tournament in Kirtipur on Saturday.

WEEKEND WEATHER

SPLASH: Children wearing face-paint frolic in a pool in Kathmandu to celebrate Holi on Sunday.

ONE NEPAL: Artists from Janakpur perform ‘Sangor’, a Maithili play about national unity, as CASpokesperson Subhash Nembang watches at the Nepal Tourism Board Hall, Tuesday.

Did your paper arrive on time this morning? If not, call our Customer care @ 525 0002

PEPSI MUSIC BY THE MUSEUM

BIRDS FALL PREY: Roots & Shoots activists examine a dead vulture in Rupandehi on 26 February. It was one of 14 that died after eating the carcass of a dog poisoned by local authorities.

SPLASH: Children wearing face-paint frolic in a pool in Kathmandu to celebrate Holi on Sunday.
**Small help**

Getting children to school is the first important step

**INTERESTING TIMES**
Malika Aryal

RUPANDEHI – It’s 3am and time to rise for a small Musahar community in Soiya, a few kilometres from the highway to Butwal. The men and women here work as daily wage labourers in construction sites in nearby towns, so leave home at the break of dawn. A few hours later their children get ready for school. If they found work they leave home at the break of dawn. A few hours later their parents found work the day before they eat rice and vegetables. Often they just have rice and salt. Many go to school hungry because they don’t have anything to eat at home.

All the children here, for lack of choice, attend the government-run Singaha Primary School nearby. There are about 250 students at this school, and until last year less than 100 students used to attend regularly. Even those who showed up would run away by mid-afternoon. Students would repeat grades or quit school altogether.

The children from Soiya used to be extremely thin and small for their age, and their dark hair had lost pigment due to malnourishment. Going to school was not a priority – their hunger was. Little surprise that they would often run away rather than faint in class due to hunger.

This changed last year when the school received some funds thanks to a development worker’s initiative. The small amount provided by School Lunch for Nepal, monitored by the school administration and the community, pays for one meal a day for the kids, comprising fresh vegetables, fruit, lentils and pulses. Since the lunch program started, attendance in the school has increased by more than 30 per cent, new students have enrolled and students who quit have come back.

The changes speak more than numbers, however. A year later, the children in the school look healthier and say they actually look forward to coming to school every day. They are performing better in class: they do their homework, and are not running away in the middle of the day.

Their families’ financial situation hasn’t improved. There are days when they still show up to school hungry. But when they head out to school every morning they know for certain that they will eat at least one good meal. At lunchtime the children wash their hands and feet, sit on the grass under the warm winter sun and eat together. In less than 10 minutes their plates are clean. The joy on their faces as they line up for food each day is clear to see.

It costs less than Rs200 to feed a child every month. To cut costs further the school has started growing its own vegetables. The teachers are extremely committed. Some regularly contribute from their salaries to a fund that has helped improve classrooms and buy uniforms for students.

There is no doubt that our government schools are in terrible shape and our education system is a shambling. Lack of resources, infrastructure and funds aside, the low attendance of children is the biggest challenge teachers face. The lunch program at Singaha Primary School is a small step, but it has already improved the lives of 250 children immeasurably. Teachers are motivated because they are seeing results – more children in classes, better performance and positive feedback from parents.

Now the teachers and the community are thinking of new ways to make this small school better. Often, we are so bogged down with big issues we don’t think about what we can already do. A simple initiative like School Lunch for Nepal proves how important it is to address the small challenges first. Hungry children, even if they attend classes, will not learn much. Providing them with a meal a day is only a beginning, but a fundamental one.

www.lunchformepal.org

For contributions

**TASSIA KOBYLINSKA**

We are in a roadside café on the East-West Highway, tired and crumpled from nine hours folded into a hard bus seat. A young boy brings us cups of chiya. It is after midnight, he looks about 10 years old. Jay pulls out his camera and flicks on the record button, the boy scurries away.

“You must ask for his permission first,” I tell Jay.

“I want to make a film about child workers’ rights in Nepal,” he says. “This is one of the big problems we have here.” He’s right about that, and yesterday he wanted to make a film about the lack of roads in the mountain regions, and before that he wanted to make a film about the lack of facilities in rural schools. He wants to film everything and I believe he will.

Jay is 18, and we have just come back to Kathmandu from a trip to his home village in the far western district of Doti, where he has been filming the story of his life. Jay was 13 when he left the school playground one hot day in June five years ago. He joined the cultural front of the Maoist PLA, which had been performing at his school, and spent a year and a half underground before he was arrested.

“I had nothing to stay for here,” he says in his film, looking around the dark one-room house he once shared with six younger siblings and his parents. “There is so much poverty, my school only goes up to grade seven and anyway I couldn’t study, there are no lights, no books and no room.”

Jay’s story is not an unfamiliar one. Most of the estimated 6,000-9,000 children who joined the Maoists during the conflict have a similar story to tell. But Jay is the first to do so in a documentary shot by Nar Bahadur, but conceptualised, directed and edited by himself. His story will be screened in May in Humla.

The Through Our Eyes video project is a collaboration between CWIN-Nepal and Rising Eye Film. It targets young people and children associated with the armed conflict. The participants are trained in digital video production and editing, and the entire process from conception to public screening is driven by the young people themselves. The result will be a series of short films that will be used as a development and awareness raising tool in Nepal. The films aim simply to relate the stories of young people caught up in conflict, without any political agenda.

“A former child soldier makes a film about himself and the conflict...” says Sumnima Tuladhar of CWIN-Nepal. “It is a representation of conflict and reconciliation portrayed by young people in their own voices, which are too often overshadowed by adult or expert views in Nepal.”

Participatory video can be an empowering and cathartic experience. The young people have an opportunity to reflect on and re-evaluate their experiences, dispel any sense of stigma and shame, and help other young people with similar backgrounds.

Both Jay and Nar Bahadur have taken their stories to the medium like fish to water. Jay, with his endless ideas for documentaries and Nar Bahadur, with his calm and controlled filming, display a professional awareness and talent for composition.

Back in CWIN’s Kathmandu studio, they are discovering their own voices.

Get involved. www.rovingeyefilm.co.uk

Dmission

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There is so much land here, but there is not a single piece for us. Maybe it is not in our destiny.

So say the women from the Musahar community around Sapahi VDC of Bara. They have spent their lives working for landlords, yet remain as impoverished as ever.

Over the last few decades, the landless people here have built meagre huts to accommodate themselves and their children. They have been here for all or most of their lives, but have no formal title to the land they live on.

Society and state has sidelined these people, but there is no shortage of those who wish to exploit their plight for political gain. The recent clash between state security and squatters in the forests of Dudejhari resulted in the deaths of six people. If a way isn’t found to address the needs of the landless, Dudejhari may prove to be just a precursor of things to come.

This story was produced as part of the OUC-Pathshala-photo.circle photography exchange program that took place from 11 January-7 February in Kathmandu.
Jaga Majhi walks into his village of landless squatters in Sapahi VDC, Bara district.

“I worked more than 40 years for landlords, I don’t have a piece of land, what else can I do?” Jaga can’t remember the exact year of his birth, though his citizenship card says 1938.

There’s not much of note inside Jaga Majhi’s mud hut, where he lives with his eldest son and grandchildren.

“I worked many years for political parties. I have two children and I want to send them to school but I don’t have a job. I go to the jungle to collect firewood and sell it. We are totally dependent on the forest,” says Sat Jivan Sharma, 27.

A local youth teaches children from the village. But most children here don’t go to school and if they do, drop out early.

The locals struggle with the cold in the early winter mornings.

Cutting straw is dusty work.

Women of the Musahar community work the fields. “We can’t actually remember since when we’ve been working for landlords. We get Rs100 for a day’s work.”

Shyam Chaudhari, 17, studies in Class Seven at a local government school but works the fields in his spare time.
The Maoists recently concluded that the new constitution won’t be promulgated by the deadline. They hope to cash in on the delay by laying the groundwork for revolt. Leaders have already been assigned tasks toward this end.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Mohan Baidhya, Baburam Bhattarai and Ram Bahadur Thapa head the technical, ideological, political and organisational fronts respectively. Earlier, the core team of Dahal, Thapa and Baidhya used to look after overall responsibilities of the party. The party has included Bhattarai in its core team this time.

All six members of the technical team are founding members of the armed insurgency. This front will be responsible for inducting the disqualified PLA back in the party, and holding talks with the government and international community for the integration of the PLA.

The technical front used to look after arms and military training during the insurgency. It has now been entrusted with the responsibility of developing strategies for possible confrontation with the army in the future and setting up military bases in urban areas. The organisational front is responsible for resolving internal conflicts and unifying the party.

The political front will find ways to work in union with other parties on the issues of linguistic, ethnic, regional rights.

The ideological front, led by Mohan Baidhya, is responsible for preparing the party’s strategic policy, analysing national and international political developments and conceptualising strategic slogans. The Kharipati meeting of cadres settled on ‘federal democratic republic’ as one such slogan that encompassed five short-term plans: constitution writing, the peace process, PLA integration, national independence, national and regional unity government.

One of the most dreadful incidents of the insurgency occurred in Bandarmudhe, Chitwan, in 2005. Thirty-eight people were killed and 70 were injured when a packed bus ran over a landmine planted by the Maoists. BBC World Trust held a discussion with the survivors of the incident and others aggrieved by the state on a radio show.

How are you doing these days?

Krishna Adhikari (survivor): Five years later, it looks like things are getting better.

Durga Maya Magar (survivor): Things look better now. I am having back pain. I always wear a chest belt. We’re just going about our lives.

Why do people seem to forget the past?

Adhikari: It is natural for people who have been tortured, and for no apparent reason, not to forget about it.

How do you feel when you see or hear talk about the army and police?

Parbati Kandel (daughter killed by security forces): It’s definitely not a good feeling. They remind us of our past, the pain, harassment and sleepless nights.

How do you feel when you hear about the Maoists?

Magar: It is painful. I get angry when I see them.

Can we move ahead if we always keep holding our grudges?

Buddhi Pandey (tortured by the security forces): Society has changed since then. At this stage, we have to think from a different level and move ahead.

Adhikari: Until and unless the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is formed to look into the atrocities from both sides and bring the perpetrators to justice, people won’t easily forget what happened to them. It’s not just the compensation that they care about.

Kandel: It was a nightmare. Once there is a new constitution in place and since the peace process has begun, we have to forget our past and live together.

Is it possible?

Magar: I don’t think so. When I recall the incident, it feels like yesterday.

Pandey: It is not easy for those who were directly affected by the incident to forget it. The compensation cannot replace the loss they suffered. To ease their pain, the new constitution should be written and the country should prosper under it.
Provinces based on development regions

DURGA PRASAD POUYDAL

T he constitution writing process is stuck in the debate of state restructuring. The Committee on State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power has proposed 14 ethnicity-based provinces—its opponents argue this will provoke civil war.

Ethnicity-based provinces seem to be the idea of foreign experts. The UNDP’s Human Development index 2009 has analysed our social diversity from an ethnic perspective. This could be seen as a strategy to fuel ethnic conflict in a country situated between the two emerging super powers, India and China, and drag them into regional conflict. But if it is aimed at bringing ethnic groups into the mainstream of development, one has to look at other social aspects and possible consequences.

Our political leaders think state restructuring is as easy as drawing a map on a paper sheet. They seem unconcerned about other aspects of society and are bargaining hard for their own gain. There are various aspects of federalism that must be taken into account: physical, institutional infrastructure and human resources. We have to have resources to study this. Nepali politics is infested with personal and party interests. The prolonged transition of the country has made government institutions incompetent.

If political parties are considering developing a new structure with donor support, it will not change the situation. Developing a mechanism alone is not sufficient. Take the failure of the Decentralisation Act 2000. Nepal is unique for its physical, social and cultural diversity, and its intertwined nature. By ignoring the existing social fabric, we risk destabilising communal harmony and relations. For instance, Tami lands are burning into desert, and can be protected only if we save the Chure areas.

It should be noted here that there have not been open discussions on restructuring the state. It indicates the parties must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign. Take One Nation, Prades. The proposal must have ulterior motives, which is an ominous sign.

Kanchampur is impractical. The question is: what has compelled us to restructure the state when there is so much investment and risk involved? Past efforts have been misrepresented. Not all the policies were faulty. They failed to yield results as they were never implemented due to feudal characteristics and a corrupt mentality. Therefore, it would be wise to make reforms in the existing structure, which can bring about a stable government and economic development.

In that case, the development regions could be developed as provinces, and constituencies could become village assemblies and municipalities. Ethnic representation can be ensured even in village assemblies. Village assemblies could be entrusted with responsibilities to plan and implement programs for localities. District Development Committees could be transformed into district assemblies, which could act as intermediaries between village and provincial assemblies, the latter representing development regions.

This would be much easier than completely restructuring the state, as the necessary infrastructural and institutional development is already there. Assembly members would be elected from constituencies. These regions are divided north to south connecting the Himal, hills and Terai. This will keep the geographic and physical balance of the provinces intact.

The provincial assemblies would be free to make policies for their provinces but they would take decisions on natural resources in coordination with the central government. We know the existing structure actually works. We have knowledge about the existing institutional and physical structure. We know the strengths and weaknesses of these regions. However, political consensus is a must for the transformation of existing development regions into provinces. This would significantly reduce the cost of federal administration as well as the social, political and economic risks involved in the new federal model.

“Constitution a must”

Ratna Sherchan, NC CA member, Baglung

Which committee are you in? How is the work?

I’m a member of the Constitutional Council. We’re stuck currently because some subject committees haven’t submitted their drafts. The report of the subcommittee headed by Sapa Pradhan Malla is also being discussed.

Isn’t the deadline for the draft 6 March?

There’s still some disagreement about state restructuring and PLA integration. Once those issues are sorted out, then the constitution can be finished by the May 28 deadline.

Doesn’t that look increasingly unlikely?

Yes, in the sense that leaders have forgotten their responsibility to the main task of constitution writing. But I’m still optimistic. If they reach consensus on key issues then the constitution will be written on time.

What will happen if time runs out while you’re working?

This is a hypothetical scenario. I still believe we can finish on time.

“At most, six months extension”

Sarala Regmi, Maoist CA Member, Bardiya-1

Will the preliminary draft for the Constitution be ready by 6 March?

That will be difficult. Sometimes the committee president is absent, other times something else goes wrong. It’s been tough to work quickly. Nine committees still have to submit their drafts. So how will we finish by the deadline? We’re just waiting for committees to submit drafts.

Should the deadline be pushed back once more?

First, the parties should get their act together. If the parties reach consensus, then we can meet the deadline.

What if there just isn’t enough time?

If that’s the case, then the deadline should be pushed back for six months. That requires consensus among the political parties. But we can’t delay the deadline more than six months. Even if it means working all day and night, we must get the constitution done in time.

It seems like it’s technically impossible to write the constitution now. Looking at the working style in the CA, that does seem to be the case. But we must get our act together.

“Infrastructure for life”

Harish Pradhan, Jana Dan Adhikari, Baglung

How are you getting the constitution done on time?

We are working all day and night. As a result, our Tagungslokal has become a day and night operation. It seems likely we will finish the constitution on time.

Why is it so important to complete the constitution on time?

The constitution is the foundation for the country. It is the starting point for all other laws. People have been waiting for it for so long. If we can’t finish it on time, it will create a crisis in the country.

Isn’t it technically impossible?

If that’s the case, then if parties agree, the deadline can still be pushed back.
At the India-Nepal Jamboree in Patna last week, Baburam seems to have had some sage advice for the Indian Baddies. Sit down for talks without conditions with the Govt of India, he told a TV interviewer. Not sure why he said that, after all, he sat down conditionally for talks with His Majesty’s Govt many times, way back when.

The stars of the Patna conference were BRB and Ananta. But while everyone was supposed to fly together from KTM to Delhi in the morning and then catch the connecting flight to Patna, the two comrades were stuck in a Standing Committee meeting in Kathmandu. They took the next flight to Delhi, but missed the connection to Patna and were forced to spend a night at the dengue mosquito-infested Centaur Hotel. Design or accident? Nepali conspiracy theorists in Patna were left wondering whether the comrades used the time to rest and bond or to meet some Delhi biggies on the side.

Just as the Nepali media is obsessed with who’s meeting who at a given time and for how long, the Nepali delegation was busy speculating about who was secretly meeting who. On the return flight, BRB was whisked away during the three-hour layover while the rest waited for the flight to Kathmandu. Laldhoj was so late he was brought right to the plane just before the hatch closed. Naughty… naughty. Who knows, maybe he was just catching up with JNU classmates. Back home, Awesome must’ve been getting paranoid, though.

Meanwhile, back home in Nepal Kangresis in Banepa and Sanepa were coming to blows. The Maoists are beating each other to a pulp, the UML are beating up the Maoists, the Maoists are beating up Kangresis, and Kangresis are beating each other up. Time to call for a ceasefire.

The astrologers had said the Shah dynasty would end with its 13th incumbent, and so it came to pass that Gyani was the last one on the throne. However, the more perceptive among us have also remembered another prediction by a southern palm-reader who had ruled that Nepal could have a baby king after an interruption in the monarchy. So it looks like if the current political chaos continues one shouldn’t rule out young Sri Punch Hridayendra on a restored peacock throne.