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As participants launched Tourism Year 2011 at Tundikhel last Friday, shadows of another kind were threatening to engulf Nepal's media fraternity. Cue Psalm 23:4 from the Bible: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.



KIRAN PANDAY



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Casting shadows

We editors express deep anguish and strongly condemn the killing of Arun Kumar Singhaniya, the chairman of Janakpur Today. The killing, on the one hand, shows the fearsome form of cowardice and criminality, and on the other, the total absence of government.

This incident occurred less than a month after the killing of the Managing Director of the SpaceTime Network, Jamim Shah. Immediately after the killing of Singhaniya, criminals threatened the editor of Janakpur Today, Brij Kumar Yadav, as well as journalist

with the Naya Patrika daily Manoj Ghartimagar, for publishing an interview of the only police officer arrested in the Jamim Shah incident. Before this, similar threats were issued

Violence can't deter the pen

against Kantipur Publications and The Himalayan Times. The government's insensitive passivity and total lack of accountability has helped boost the criminals' intention to force

the media to deviate from its duty amidst increasing insecurity. Criminal activities in the guise of politics have targeted the free press, civilian security and other fundamental norms and values of democracy.

We demand that the government immediately make efforts to arrest the criminals involved and bring them to justice. At this moment, we pledge that we will never surrender press freedom, which has been established as the legacy and symbol of people's rights, whatever the circumstances.

- Ajaya Bhadra Khanal, **The Himalayan Times**
- Akhilesh Upadhyay, **The Kathmandu Post**
- Ameet Dhakal, **República**
- Jiwendra Simkhada, **Annapurna Post**
- Kiran Nepal, **Himal Khabarpatrika**
- Krishnajwala Devkota, **Naya Patrika**
- Narayan Wagle, **Nagarik**
- Prashant Aryal, **Nepal**
- Prateek Pradhan, **Karobar**
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WORKING ON PLAN B

With 12 weeks to go for the constitution deadline, even the diehard optimists have given up on it being written in time. There is still too much to do and too little time to do it.

Every Nepali knows why, and they squarely blame the political parties for having forgotten why they were elected. A porter in a remote district in Nepal, a sidewalk vendor or a college student would, if asked, be unanimous in agreeing that it is the leadership of the political parties and their greed for power that has delayed constitution-writing and obstructed the peace process.

In any other democracy, this would be cause for serious concern. But not here, it seems. The lack of accountability of a loser-takes-all government, the reckless adventurism of a mauled Maoist opposition and the politicised lobbyists of civil society have all ensured that no one is really worried about public opinion. They have all bypassed the assembly elected

to formulate the constitution and have held the country and the peace process hostage with their bickering.

So, if it is certain that the new constitution is not going to be ready by May 28, the question is: what is Plan B? There are wild predictions of political chaos, fears of a street uprising by the Maoists to capture power, presidential rule and martial law so the army can take over. None of this need happen. As Chairman Dahal himself has said often, not writing the constitution by the deadline is not going to mean the sky will fall.

Saner voices will prevail because none of the three political parties want things to spin out of control, their control. The real worry is that the three parties decide to extend the deadline and then go back to sleep again. The real hurdle has always been the inability of the UML, NC and the Maoists to forge a political consensus, and the reason they haven't been able to do that is because they can't agree on the conditions under which the Maoists will be brought back into government.

Hardly anyone disputes that the new constitution can be written with the Maoists out of government. But the triangular distrust among the Brahmin men in the three parties (and with others within their own parties) is so great

that no one seems to be able to untie the knot. There are other areas of disagreement: repeated Maoist threats of capturing power by force, their deliberate use of violence to terrorise others, for instance. The Maoists probably feel that these are pressure tactics to force the other two parties to take them into government, but it is having the opposite effect.

There is also a big gap in the drafts submitted by the 11 committees to the plenary. The Maoists want a presidential system, while the NC is rooting for a parliamentary democracy. That could be debated, but the Maoist attempt to write a totalitarian constitution with the judiciary subservient to government, a compulsory draft, and its opening of a Pandora's Box with ethnic-based federalism are dangerous portents.

If we are indeed going to buy six months, we have to make sure we write a constitution that guarantees democracy, pluralism and social justice. We have waited four years, we can wait six more months after May. But we have to do it right.

Revisiting 1950



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

Patna—The India-Nepal conference organised by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs this week in Patna featured the cream of the Nepali political landscape. Dr Baburam Bhattarai, Barshaman Pun 'Ananta', Pradeep Giri, Bimalendra Nidhi, Gagan Thapa, Pradeep Gyawali, Pradeep Nepal, MJF(D)'s Jitendra Dev, Sadbhavana's Anil Jha, and former bureaucrats and journalists participated in the seminar titled 'Towards a New Era in Nepal'.

The Indian delegation consisted largely of former bureaucrats and academics. Former ambassador Deb Mukherjee, former deputy national security advisor Leela Ponappa, RAW chief during the drafting of the 12-point agreement Hormese Tharakan, former Intelligence Bureau director AK Doval, constitutional

expert Subash Kashyap, serving Indian officials, and Nepal experts were present.

There were different sessions on the Nepali peace process, water resources, federalism, and the role of the media and civil society.

But the most interesting conversation was regarding the 1950 treaty and the open border.

It may come as a surprise, but India feels the 1950 treaty is highly unfavourable to it

It showed the fragmented nature of Nepali political opinion, but gave Nepalis 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 willing 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 Nepal continues to enjoy benefits 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

concerns. And while the open border was meant for the nationals of these two countries, many third national countries were using it for other purposes. 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 also argued that while India had 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 Nepali participants. Madhesi leaders emphasised the *roti-beti* relationship and said revising the open border arrangement would devastate lives and families. Others pointed to the huge working class population, including pahadis, 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 a more unfavourable arrangement.

Does the Nepali state want a special relationship with India based on the logic of socio-economic integration and security linkages? Or does it want to chart out a more autonomous path and have a friendly, but routine, bilateral relationship? Answering that fundamental question will unlock the India-Nepal maze.

ON THE WEB www.nepalitimes.com

MEAN STREETS

All is not lost in the state of Nepal. I can empathise with Rabi Thapa ('Fist-happy', #491) but let's not throw in the towel. Who 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.

NGS

CORRUPTION, INC

Who will be held accountable and by whom? The guntoting cadres of the so-called 'revolutionaries', the self-serving thug-politicians, or the

scared, ever-compromising public ('License to loot', #491)? What we need is for non-state actors 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.

Prithvi Raj

NEPAL'S 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 Singaporeans and get 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.

Divas

ROPEWAY

This article ('Learning the ropes', #491) shows that small things do help make big differences. In the late seventies 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. Our students worked with the local folks to take care of fodder, trees, grew green vegetables in the karesa bari, helped construct latrines using local materials, and taught health and sanitation to the local school kids. These small things made a huge difference in the lives of local people.

Devendra Pant

On the blogs

nepalitimes.com/blogs

The Brief

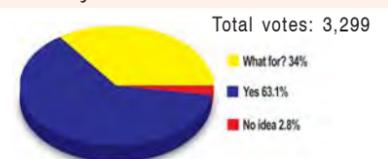
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Junket journalism

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



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

Bias 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 such an essential element of the media that most of us in the profession

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 Nepali 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 censure even widely celebrated authors, like the author of the

Union, believes Sanjel's experiments in affordable private 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 dispassionate, 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.

Somehow, the media reports about the extension of Sanjel's schools in the countryside gave the impression that its financial sponsor was more important than the idea or the person behind it. This may have had unintended consequences for the credibility of reporters practicing junket journalism. We are all propagandists, but we need to be mindful of the principles and personalities we promote.



RAJESH GURUNG

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 headlines, the angle of photographs, the wording of captions or placement on the page.

Political wrangling is page one because most journalists in

Nepali bestseller *Soch*, Karna Shakya. However, when that controversy appeared to be careening out of control, he publicly apologised.

Recently, Mishra has taken up the cause of Samata Shiksha Niketan and its promoter Uttam Sanjel. In a country where philanthropy is rare, Sanjel's efforts to provide affordable education to the poor are indeed admirable. Upendra Mahato, a Nepali billionaire who made his fortune in the independent republics of the former Soviet

THIS WEEK

Fiddling while...

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 commission to refine the 14-state federal proposal submitted in the Constituent Assembly, while NC and UML have argued that it should provide recommendations for a scientific (read different) federal model.

The meeting has achieved little of the ambitious agenda set by the three parties to end differences in the Constituent Assembly, find an agreement on Maoist combatants' integration and create an environment of trust among the parties.

Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has said his party wants at least 10,000 combatants integrated into the army, and has refuted claims that he made a pact with Girija Prasad Koirala to integrate only 3,000 combatants. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal claims the two leaders made such an agreement before the Constituent Assembly elections. Koirala is mum on the subject.

Meanwhile, the Maoist party has mobilised recently released disqualified combatants into a

paramilitary unit. "The new outfit will be of a higher order than the YCL," a Maoist leader said.

...Rome burns

Media and business houses expressed outrage after Arun Sinhaniya, publisher of *Janakpur Daily* newspaper, was gunned down in Janakpur on the day of Holi last Monday. A day after Sinhaniya's murder, an Indian businessman was shot at in Lazimpat, Kathmandu, but escaped without injury.

The Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce has given an ultimatum to the government to beef up security within a month. While denying the Federation's request to allow their security guards to bear arms, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal said that the security situation was so poor because Nepal Police did not have enough arms. The government has pledged to review the Special Security Plan, which was launched last July to provide security in 27 'sensitive' districts.

Several armed groups are competing to take responsibility for Sinhaniya's killing. Tarai Janatantrik Party-Madhes led by Mukesh Chaudhary, formerly of Madhes, Janadhikar Forum, has threatened to kill *Janakpur Today's* editor, Brij Kumar Yadav.

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New Wave

The real Bihar

PRASHANT JHA

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 feted 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.

activity has shot up. And we have backed it up with public investment in roads and bridges, which is a prerequisite to get more private investment."

Along with infrastructure, the Bihar government focused on improving education (getting more students, including girls, into schools); health (ensuring 24-hour doctor availability at primary health centres); welfare measures (pensions for differently-abled, the elderly and widows); and modernising agriculture. "My slogan has been growth with justice," declared Kumar.

Sitting in the first row, Dr Baburam Bhattarai was paying close attention. He got up and told Kumar, "Despite our ideological

because he has been facing a political backlash from the upper castes against the recommendations of a commission to have land reforms.

UML MP Pradeep Gyawali asked about how Bihar dealt with the politicisation of crime and the criminalisation of politics. Kumar answered, "Rule of law. Who belongs to which party is immaterial and there will be no protection if you are in politics. Once people realised that being in a party would not save them, this trend declined on its own." To NC MP Gagan Thapa's question about armed groups operating from Bihar that posed a threat to law and order in Nepal, Kumar said he was ready to cooperate if there was specific

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



PRASHANT RAVI

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 arms 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 are record sales of cars. Economic

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 high growth benefited all sections of society? Bihar also has a history of land inequality, how have you dealt with it?"

Kumar replied, "All the economic activities have led to job creation. We have ensured gender justice with 50 per cent reservation for women while recruiting teachers. We brought in special schemes for the most deprived Dalit communities. Roads don't have a caste, and everyone has benefited from them." Kumar skirted the land question, perhaps

information. He noted the reverse trend of Indian criminals using Nepali territory was also prevalent.

Kumar stated his belief that many of the changes in Bihar would also benefit Nepal. He cited the repair of Kosi in record time, and 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." 🇳🇵

Bhai-bhai?

The India-Nepal conference, with high-level Maoist participation, made it clear India wants to continue engaging with the Maoists. But the differences persist.

India remains doubtful of the Maoist commitment to multiparty democracy and would like to see actual proof of their transformation into a non-violent political party. The Maoists' recent 'national awareness' campaign has sowed further suspicions about whether they will be sensitive to India's security and commercial concerns.

The Indian establishment believes that the Maoists must dismantle their coercive apparatus and renounce violence as the first step to any political settlement. This would entail settling the PLA question so most combatants are absorbed into civilian life, and dismantling the paramilitary structure of the YCL. A question that is asked is: if the Maoists are indeed committed to becoming a

democratic party, why do they want their people to be sent to the army?

India is skeptical of the Maoist phraseology of 'multiparty competition', and would prefer them to make a clear commitment to multiparty democracy. In this view, the issue of the democratisation of the Maoists need not be linked to power-sharing.

India has also conveyed to the Maoists the message that its anti-India campaign could set into motion a chain of events that would not be under anyone's control. Protests by locals in bordering Indian towns against the desecration of Indian national symbols by the Maoists were cited as proof of the hardening of Indian public opinion. India has also taken the obstruction of the Upper Karnali project by the Maoists very seriously, with officials privately warning Maoists of potential consequences.

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 past promises, the coming months could see rising confrontation and violence.

What really matters?



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 persevere, 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. 🇳🇵

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Patchwork city

SUVAYU DEV PANT

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



KIRAN PANDAY

Rising land prices have hit Kathmandu's farms hard

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. "I do this and that. I don't really have a stable job. If our plot were bigger, say around six ropanis, then I could spend all my time working on it. But that makes no sense now."

But all is not lost. Although much of the city's farmland is unrecoverable, farmers can still make a lot of money by growing high-value or perishable crops, like tomatoes and mushrooms. Many inner-city farmers have already made the switch from cereals and are doing fairly well.

"The government should support farmers to grow cash crops. There is a good market for such goods and Kathmandu's soil is well-suited to them," says Mahesh Prasad Pudasani of CEAPRED. In particular, the government should invest in better storage facilities. About a third of vegetables in urban market places go to waste from spoilage. Experts say Kathmandu's farms can produce up to 70 per cent of the city's vegetable demand.

It goes without saying that the government must also draft and enforce appropriate land use provisions and stem the rise in land prices. Until then, the likes of Khadka and Lama can only wait and watch as their livelihoods fall prey to urban sprawl. 

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ALL PICS: AHMAD ISKANDAR

DUKSANGH SHERPA

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 recognise 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.” Interior design is more of a passion than profession in some ways. The good thing is it need

Inner living

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, sums 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 disadvantage 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.

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Knick-knacks

“Would I buy this for my own home?” is the question Rishi and Sunaina Saraf 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 engrossed 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 cheque-book 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 practice 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*

Where to shop for your own four walls? *Life Times* recommends a few interior-enhancing trips.



PICS: AHMAD ISKANDAR/FOO CHEE CHANG

Modern living

Madan Joshi and Binod 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*



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*



Hint of nostalgia

With their ranges in oriental elegance and contemporary vigour, Life Style poses a difficult question to the customer – old or new? Owner Raju Karmacharya maintains that many of his customers prefer the oriental style. But for those who can’t decide, Life Style also offers expert consultation to guide buyers through the whole process. Welcome the new era by living in style. *New Plaza, 442 5402*

Fresh antiques

Serving a niche market, Durbar 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 2201*

Furniture therapy

Named after his mother, Bipin Mishra’s Karuna Interior specialises in design and home accessories from his outfit in Dillibazaar. Step into this cozy shop and enjoy the warm hospitality of Mishra, who readily dispenses design ideas and décor 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*

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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



Any one of us, a V-Day production of Eve Ensler's play *Vagina Monologues* to raise money for organisations that work to stop violence against women and girls, 7pm, 7 March, Nepal Academy Hall, 6221801 for tickets

Tasafu-Kathmandu Scrolls, Alliance Francaise presents an exhibition of paintings by Julien Sole, 26 Feb-19 March, Siddhartha Gallery, Babar 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, 5003222

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 Dhoka, 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 Holi, musical event with Pandit Indu Prakash, and students from Indian Cultural Centre, Thursday, 11 March at Indian Cultural Centre, Naxal, 4412629

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

Chillout Lounge with DJ Miriam, every Friday at the Bourbon Room, Lal Durbar 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 Nepali every Friday, 7pm at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212

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

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

Live music with Anil Shahi every Friday with special BBQ at Royal Alina's Café & Pub, Lazimpat, 417506

DINING

Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Café, for wood-fired pizza and free wi-fi Internet, 012130681

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

Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar 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

Lavazza Coffee and Baskin n' Robbins, at Blue Note Coffee Shop, Lazimpat, 4491234

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

Jazzbell 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, 4273999

Teppanyaki meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara, 4436318

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

Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden every Friday 7pm, **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 600, 4412999

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 Tripti bar, 44512126

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

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SANTOSH KHATIWADA

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.



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

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.



KIRAN PANDAY

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.



KIRAN PANDAY

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

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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Monday evening's storm, caused by a convective current of hot air breaking the icy tropospheric clouds, brought 30 mm of rain and hail and met the quota of precipitation for March all by itself. Satellite pictures from Thursday afternoon show a fresh westerly front nearing western Nepal and cloud cover spreading across the country, the result of strong low pressure on either side of the Himalaya. This weekend, enjoy warm mornings and sunny intervals with a possibility of brief showers during the day.



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Small help



INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

Getting children to school is the first important step



MALLIKA ARTAL

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 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 malnutrition. 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 enrollment 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 also 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 shambles. 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 plans that 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.lunchformenepal.org
for contributions

Through his own eyes

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 that given the chance, 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 sisters 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 Roving 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.

"*Through My Eyes* is unique," says Sumnima Tuladhar of CWIN-Nepal, "It is a representation of conflict and reconciliation as 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 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 that the edit process is a long and difficult one "I want to keep everything," laughs Jay, "but I know I can't, it will be too long and too boring."

He points to the screen where Nar Bahadur's camera sweeps across the Doti village, showing a family in a sunny yard. A woman is lying down, a shawl draped over her head. "She was sick," he frowns, "but there is no medicine there. So many people die from common and treatable illnesses. I want to make a film about that."

I have lost count of the films he will make. Next time I meet him I give him a notebook and a pen. "Write them down," I tell him. "Write them all down and one day you can make them, one by one."
info@rovingeyefilm.co.uk

A former child soldier makes a film about himself and the conflict



TASSIA KOBYLINSKA



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3

No land for us

TEXT and PHOTOS KISHOR SHARMA

"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.



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1 Jaga Majhi walks into his village of landless squatters in Sapahi VDC, Bara district.

2 "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.

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

4 "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.

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

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

7 Cutting straw is dusty work.

8 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."

9 Shyam Chaudhari, 17, studies in Class Seven at a local government school but works the fields in his spare time.



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Groundwork for revolt

Bhojraj Bhat in *Nagarik*,
28 February

नागरिक

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 unison 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 and national unity government.



KIRAN PANDAY

“Can't let go of the past”



KANAK MANI DIXIT

BBC World Service Trust, 19 February

BBC WORLD SERVICE TRUST

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.

Chemonics International Regional Program Manager

Chemonics International seeks qualified candidates for the following position. This is a one year, full time position on the USAID-funded Nepal Transition Initiative (NTI) program which seeks to support Nepal's political transition. This fast, flexible program is designed to bolster the peace process; strengthen governance mechanisms; and support positive, non-violent community engagement in the country's political, social and economic future.

Regional Program Manager

This position will be located in Janakpur and requires significant travel in and around the Terai. Local expatriates encouraged to apply.

The Regional Program Manager (RPM) is responsible for oversight of the field office in Janakpur and all related grants and activities in the eastern and central Terai region, ensuring smooth implementation and adherence to USAID rules and regulations. The RPM will oversee the staff and office in Janakpur and will manage all financial, administrative and programmatic issues. The RPM will oversee the identification of potential grantees and the development and implementation of small grant activities, primarily in-kind, that support the ongoing transition to peace and democracy in Nepal as well as oversee programmatic and implementation monitoring of each grant activity in coordination with other staff members. S/he will advise on the evolution of the local political, legal and economic situation and on how to continuously adapt the regional NTI program to ensure that it remains relevant and effective. The RPM will report directly to the Chief of Party and advise him/her of program and administrative issues related to the field office.

- Strong written and spoken English language ability is required, Nepali or other local language a plus.
- Knowledge of USAID rules and regulations, especially financial.
- Experience conceptualizing, implementing, and monitoring small grant projects.
- Experience overseeing projects and project budgets.
- Minimum of two years experience working in a complex and challenging field operation in unstable developing countries with preferably at least one year in a supervisory capacity
- Desire and willingness to live in Janakpur

Please submit CV and cover letter to operations@chemonics-nepal.com and write the position you are applying for in the subject line. All applications must be received by **Sunday, March 14**. Only short listed applicants will be contacted. Position is subject to available funding and USAID approval.

Special

Security

Plan



Minister

Media

Criminals

नागरिक Robin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 3 March

Provinces based on development regions



DURGA PRASAD POUDYAL

The 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, Tarai lands are turning 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 Madhes Prades. The proposal must have been made with political aims in mind, since making a single province from Jhapa to

Kanchanpur 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 misinterpreted. 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 Tarai. This will keep the geo-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 Sapna Pradhan Malla is also being discussed.



PICS: MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Isn't it technically impossible?

If that's really the case, then if parties agree, the deadline can still be pushed back.

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 by 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.

Pataliputra who's who

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 from the airport 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.

✍

Wonder what the Indians made of the questions from the floor. While Gagan Thapa directly asked **Chieftain Minister Nitish Kumar** about 'terrorist groups' based in Bihar and carrying out attacks in the Tarai, Sadbhavana's Anil Jha wondered aloud if the present social justice movement in Nepal could expect India's support, like that for democratic movements in the

past. One man's terrorist another man's tourist?

✍

The man who kept Nepali netas entertained in Patna was tv show host Vijay 'Dishanirdesh' Pandey. While translating Ananta's presentation on federalism, he encountered difficult Marxist jargon and asked Dr Babu for help. Pandey said his '**bourgeois vocabulary**' did not equip him with the requisite skills, but he had come with a good stockpile of soviet-era jokes about Stalin that **got** even the comrades falling off their chairs.

✍

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 Gyanji 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.

✍

After ex-princess Sitashma's profile appeared on an online match site <http://www.expatmatch.com/s/view/2050115/s/0> she has revealed that it is a hoax. The princess, who now runs a boutique in Darbar Marg, said: "I don't have time to do all these things but looking at my photo and profile details, I figure someone close to me must have done it." Well, no harm in checking out the applicants.



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