The historical Patan Darbar Square is hosting a first-time literature festival over the weekend. More than 30 well known national and international writers will hold forth on languages, minority voices, journalism, politics, history and books, books, books. They include Akshay Pathak, Alka Saraogi, Jug Suraiya, Namita Gokhale, Shazia Omar, Tarun Tejpal, William Dalrymple, Mohammed Hanif and our own Abhi Subedi, Anbika Giri, Naryan Wagle, Rabi Thapa and Sanjeev Uprety, among others.

Patan’s literary jatra

The Nepali translation of Ani Choying Drolma’s auto-biography, Singing for Freedom, titled Phoolko Ankhama is being launched later this month.

Rabi Thapa on reading between the lines at the Jatra

Next week, a young Nepali woman with cerebral palsy, whose only way of communicating is by writing with her foot, is being awarded Nepal’s most prestigious literary prize, the Madan Puraskar.

Collection of Wayne Amtzis poetry, Quicksand Nation, looks at Nepal’s war in the context of the unhappy peace that preceded and followed it.
A cross-section of Nepalis we spoke to on a swing through central Nepal this week were unanimous in their support for Baburam Bhattarai. After months of paralyzing deadlock, there is hope that the new prime minister’s intellect and integrity will help unknot the hopelessly tangled political knot.

Ordinary Nepalis are clutching at straws. This positive perception of Bhattarai, even by those not traditionally well-disposed to the Maoist front that allowed Bhattarai to be propelled to Singha Darbar. They brush aside the Maoist support for the Madhesi autonomy proposal as politically expedient, and they are even willing to ignore the clause on the general amnesty to those accused of wartime atrocities. This desire to see Bhattarai succeed has prompted many activist wallahs to soft-peddal the agreement that made him prime minister.

But the international community has now taken serious note of the amnesty clause. Undeterred, the newly appointed Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai has made an outrageous statement that all murder cases against Maoist leaders from the war years will be dismissed. The NC and UML, after initially promising to behave themselves in the role of a constructive wallah, are now saying that they will not “soft pedal” the agreement that made him prime minister.

The prime minister, as vice-chairman of his party, and a PhD will not have to be told about what a dangerous game this is. While he keeps one eye on the current crises, Bhattarai may have to devote his clumsy attempt at protecting the caste flank, but if pushed too far with ethnic politics and this may further polarisation of Nepali society. Kirati is almost zero, are they magically going to get the force of water, to reach the 17th floor? Would there be any use of superhuman intellect such as Anurag Acharya who compares the bombing of church to disaffection with America in the 9/11 decade?

The statement by Gopal Kirati this week that there is no “euphoria” about floating a movement of Bhum Chhetris is a dangerously cynical attempt to exploit a further polarization of Nepali society. Kirati is so close to Pushpa Kamal Dahal that he staged a noisy demonstration against the lack of Janajati representation in the previous cabinet at the behest of his boss. Which leads us to the conclusion that Dahal is now worried that his party may have pushed too far with ethnic politics and this may cost him votes in the next elections for a large chunk of “high” caste voters feel alienated. This is his clumsy attempt at protecting the caste flank, but it seriously risks driving a wedge in Nepal’s social fabric between Bhum Chhetris vs the rest.

The statement by Gopal Kirati this week that there is no “euphoria” about floating a movement of Bhum Chhetris is a dangerously cynical attempt to exploit a further polarization of Nepali society. Kirati is so close to Pushpa Kamal Dahal that he staged a noisy demonstration against the lack of Janajati representation in the previous cabinet at the behest of his boss. Which leads us to the conclusion that Dahal is now worried that his party may have pushed too far with ethnic politics and this may cost him votes in the next elections for a large chunk of “high” caste voters feel alienated. This is his clumsy attempt at protecting the caste flank, but it seriously risks driving a wedge in Nepal’s social fabric between Bhum Chhetris vs the rest.

The statement by Gopal Kirati this week that there is no “euphoria” about floating a movement of Bhum Chhetris is a dangerously cynical attempt to exploit a further polarization of Nepali society. Kirati is so close to Pushpa Kamal Dahal that he staged a noisy demonstration against the lack of Janajati representation in the previous cabinet at the behest of his boss. Which leads us to the conclusion that Dahal is now worried that his party may have pushed too far with ethnic politics and this may cost him votes in the next elections for a large chunk of “high” caste voters feel alienated. This is his clumsy attempt at protecting the caste flank, but it seriously risks driving a wedge in Nepal’s social fabric between Bhum Chhetris vs the rest.
**Where justice is a game**

**BY THE WAY**

Anurag Acharya

On 25 April, 2006, with the nation still in a state of euphoria after the people’s movement, 15 security personnel under the command of army captain Prahlad Thapa Magar raped and murdered Sapana Gurung, a resident of Belbari of Morang. The medical report confirmed she had been shot dead after being raped. When villagers demonstrated in front of the army base, security forces opened fire, killing six people and injuring dozens.

A parliamentary probe confirmed the involvement of Prahlad Thapa Magar and two others, Bir Bahadur Mahara and Nirmal Kumar Panta, recommending immediate arrests and a criminal investigation. Five years on, the incident has vanished from the public memory. “Even after repeated request, the government has refused to give us a copy of the report,” says Mandira Sharma of Advocacy Forum who has been following the case.

At least 16,000 people were killed in the war. There is no official study to show how many died in direct combat on both sides and how many were actually raped, tortured and murdered. But even some emblematic cases like that of Maina Sunuwar and Muktinath Adhikari are enough to expose the fault-lines in our judicial system.

When Maoist politburo member Agni Sapkota, accused in the murder of Arjun Lama of Kavre in May 2005, was appointed Minister for Information and Communication in the Jhalnath Khanal government, there was widespread condemnation by human rights bodies nationally and internationally. A delegation of Nepal’s human rights activists even filed a PIL in the Supreme Court but they could not prevent Sapkota from taking the office.

These are just two cases of justice being denied, not because of lack of evidence or laws, but because supremacy of law has been challenged by political and military institutions that refuse to submit to its jurisdiction. Last month, the Maoists and the Madhesi alliance signed 4-point deal which, among other things, talks about extending blanket amnesty in excesses perpetrated during the conflict period. After taking office, Baburam Bhattarai clarified that the cases will first be investigated to ascertain the seriousness of the crime. It is within government’s power to grant amnesty, but given the history of atrocities, it is ethically wrong and violates the victims’ right to justice.

Similarly, the failure of the government to ensure civil court trials against army and police involved in extra-judicial killings and shameful silence on the matter across the political spectrum and civil society is an indication that security institutions have not submitted to civilian control. Investigation into civilian casualties is jurisdiction of the state and the Nepal Army’s refusal to cooperate in prosecuting personnel involved in such cases in a civil court makes it a violator of the law of the land (Army Act 2006, Art. 63, 66).

Yubraj Sangraula, who defended Agni Sapkota as Attorney General told me this week: “The court cannot prosecute a person on the basis of an FIR and a report which does not have a legal standing.” Experts like Sangraula believe the problem lies in Nepal’s criminal justice system which lacks the institutional framework to bring the crimes committed in special circumstances like war, where no FIR are led or statements have not been submitted, within the legal jurisdiction.

Global experience shows perpetrators often assume power and use their positions to escape prosecution. Nepal’s post-conflict managers must learn from it and come up with legal provision for an independent body that can probe into such cases and ensure effective remedies where grave injustice has been done. The need for an independent Truth and Reconciliation body stems out of this logic.

In the last few weeks, the Baburam Bhattarai government sent a positive message about its commitment to democracy and rule of law. But if it is sincere about what it says, it must help in the investigation of wrongdoings involving its members. Similarly, Nepal Army’s empty commitments to civilian supremacy will not clean its tainted human rights record.

The administration of justice is the foremost duty of the government, and Bhattarai has the job of bringing all sides to the table to complete the peace process, while making them accountable for their deeds.

The pursuit for justice has been a mirage. It can’t wait any longer.
Sajha Sawal is 200

When Narayan Shrestha of Sajha Sawal radio discussion program goes anywhere in Nepal these days, people throng the venue just to catch a glimpse of the dapper presenter. It just goes to show how popular radio is in Nepal and reflects approval for the way in which Shrestha afflicts the powerful.

Friday, 16 September marks the 200th episode of the immensely popular Sajha Sawal radio discussion program that has been broadcasting continuously since 2007 on the BBC Nepali Service.

“It was hard to get people to ask questions initially,” Shrestha admitted in an interview with Nepal Times this week, “they mostly gave suggestions. We had to run an orientation on how to ask questions.” Four years later, the program’s format has become famous for sharp and hard-hitting exchanges between public figures on the stage and a citizen audience. Imitation being the best form of flattery, Sajha Sawal has spawned a whole lot of similar radio and TV discussion programs. But when it started four years ago, it was a revolutionary format for radio and TV in Nepal: common people asking questions to a panel of invitees which included political leaders, bureaucrats and experts.

“Our idea initially was to involve the common people’s voice in constitution making and peace process,” Shrestha says, but as the program started traveling across the country the discussions soon ranged from agriculture, foreign employment, local development and infrastructure.

In the last 200 episodes, Shrestha has witnessed big political leaders being humbled by ordinary citizens, like when Pushpa Kamal Dahal was silenced by a question from a student in RR Campus.

But ultimately, Shrestha says, the public’s concern is not with the nitty-gritty of politics or tedious theorising by civil society stalwarts but with day-to-day survival issues. “They just want the politicians to get in order so that they can get by,” Shrestha says. “People are concerned more about availability of seeds, fertilisers, jobs, better schools for their children and health facilities.”

One of the most memorable episodes on Sajha Sawal was with Horticultrist Kedar Budhathoki who developed a unique wilt-resistant, high yielding variety of tomato called Srijana. The program which was shot in Budhathoki’s farm elicited a wave of enthusiasm among Nepalis.

“Even till today we get at least one call a week inquiring about Budhathoki’s super tomatoes,” Shrestha says.

Besides listeners nationwide who tuned in to the BBC Nepali Service, Sajha Sawal registers 7,000 hits a week in the BBC Nepali’s website and is popular among the Nepali diaspora. The program also travelled to the UK and US where issues concerning overseas Nepalis were also discussed.

Rubeena Malito

HARIDEVI ROKAYA in JUMLA

JUMLA - I was 16 and waiting for my SLC results when I made my first radio program for the Karnali’s first radio station here in Jumla. It was a program for children, to provide them with knowledge they would not get from textbooks in an entertaining way. It was challenging and exciting for me, but it also brought plenty of criticism in our patriarchal society. I had gone against the traditional norms of society, and what was expected of young women. I had to go out into the countryside to collect information for my program, often in the company of men. The work at the radio meant staying late at the station, meeting new people every day. All this gave plenty of grist for the gossipers in town. Fortunately I had a mother who was fully supportive and cushioned me from the criticism.

My colleague Krishnamaya Hamal’s mother wasn’t as supportive, and came under so much pressure at home that she had to abandon her dream of working as a journalist. There are many young women like her in the Karnali who have had difficulties and we challenged societal norms to set up Nari Awaz.

In this we were assisted by women working in different fields in Jumla who had the conviction that a radio station would strengthen their voice and make a difference in a society that is lagging behind the rest of the country precisely because more of its women are not involved in decision-making. It has been an uphill struggle, but the day the transmitter went up and stood against the deep blue monsoon sky was the proudest moment of my life. It is now a question of providing meaningful and relevant content to the listeners of Nari Awaz, who I might add are not just women. Nari Awaz may be an all-women radio station but its most important role is to educate and inform Members of the Karnali as well.

Today, I believe the Karnali Zone has a reason to smile. Women in the Karnali now have a sizable presence in the media sector; and Nari Awaz will set an example for other women to also take up journalism to spread awareness about the role women can play in uplifting the Karnali community.

Haridevi Rokaya is the Jumla correspondent of the BBC Nepali Service.
I
n the 14 years since Radio Sagarmatha became the first FM station to get a broadcasting license, Nepal’s radio revolution has survived regime change, crackdowns in newsrooms, and crippling power cuts.

The quality of the content may not match the quantitative growth of radio from Jumla to Taplejung, but the stations have been serving people so far left out of the information sphere. Travelling across Nepal today, one of the most noticeable things apart from new roads are the new transmission towers. Even in the remotest of places, there are FM stations playing songs in local dialects, running adult literacy classes and SLC tuitions on air.

These radios achieve a rare goal in a country where half the people are still illiterate: they keep the people informed, engage them in the information production process and help in development and rural empowerment.

Four months back while travelling through Darchula in far-western Nepal, I met an enterprising farmer, Hari Singh Mal. After hearing horticulturist Kedar Budhathoki talk about a wilt-resistant variety of tomatoes, Hari Singh introduced tough tomatoes known as Srijana in his farm. The breed developed by scientist Budhathoki yielded him 10 kg of tomatoes from a single plant.

Since Nepal Telecom extended its service to Gokule, Hari Singh is now a mobile user and listens to Saugat FM, broadcast from neighbouring Baitadi in his new handset. BBC Nepal and the Ujyalo FM network are now the most popular programs being syndicated by local stations. Programs on current affairs, national politics, economy and agriculture reach people all over the country via these channels.

Numerous FMs are run solely by women (see overleaf), a phenomenon that is yet to happen in print or TV. There are now all-women community radios in Parbat, Udaypur, Morang and many other places. Bringing in women, farmers, students and the rural community into its programming and production, community radio comes closest to being a democratic media in Nepal today. It empowers citizens with information, and spreads awareness about rights and development.

Now radio is on the cusp of a new revolution: extending its reach through the internet. “Radio are no more restricted to the range of the signal from the transmitter, we can now broadcast worldwide through the net,” explains Gopal Guragain of Ujyalo FM which recently made the switch to digital first streaming audio through the net. Ujyalo is now being heard by Nepalis in 105 countries and gets regular feedback from Saudi Arabia, US and UK, with 5,000 hits daily. This has led to a more diaspora-focused programming and allowed global Nepalis to connect to the concerns of their communities back home. A Jhapali living in the US can now directly listen to a local FM from Damak. People can go back to programs in the archives, listen, comment and view the content in a multimedia format.

Many people today hardly remember the struggle and years of lobbying that have gone in freeing frequency modulation for private broadcasters. Today, community radios in Nepal are grappling with coming-of-age problems like political control, commercialism, centralised syndicated content, and erosion in quality of programming. The challenge is to preserve the participatory and grassroots nature of the medium, ensure sustainability and find ways to improve quality amidst rising commercial pressures.

Cheers to Great Moments!

Nepal Ice now brings to you true World Class Super Deluxe Beer made from Danish Malt & German Hops in new attractive bottles.
Nepali Times: Your book deals with the young JS Calcutta of the 1960s. Is Calcutta home?
Jug Suraiya: My heart is indeed in Calcutta. But it is a Calcutta of the past, the people and places that made it what it was are no longer there. You can’t call the past your home. So where is home for me? I’m not sure. But I’d like to think of home not as a geographical location but as a dispersed domain, a constituency made up of my readership. My home is where people read me.

When is it the right time for a journalist to do a book?
When the irresistible urge to do a book overcomes the almost immovable inertia of laziness. At least, that’s the way it was in my case. Like Nike, I knew that I had to just do it.

What is the role for satire when everyday politics itself feels like a tragic-comedy?
No satire or spoof can be as outrageously farcical as the conduct of the great majority of our so-called political leaders, who should more aptly be called our political bleeders because by their corrupt ways they leach all the blood out of the body politic, which is you and me. Can you further satirise or spoof someone who already is a caricature of greed and arrogance? You can’t. In our subcontinent, the satirist is a Don Quixote tilting against windmills in a losing battle.

What can we do to make journalism sharper and more hard-hitting so as to get politicians and bureaucrats who rule our daily lives sit up and take notice?
Perhaps one idea might be to have a day-to-day Corruption Report, like we have the daily Weather Report, which would record the exact number of reported bribes paid the previous day, and to whom.

You keep coming back to Kathmandu, what is the attraction?
Desmond Doig introduced me to Nepal way back in 1969. Since then, my wife, Bunny, and I have both fallen in love with the country and have visited it more times than we can count. What is it that draws us here? It’s a sense of belonging, which is the gift that the people of Nepal so generously and so spontaneously give to all those who visit the country. We’d like to thank Nepal for the recurrent gift of hospitality that it has always given us.

In the beginning of his new book ‘The Times of My Life’ Jug Suraiya recounts the heady young days at JS magazine, the iconic Indian magazine for the pre-internet, pre-cable, pre-Shining India youth of India. ‘I never wanted to be a journalist,’ he writes at the beginning of this book. But he did, and has been with The Times of India, writing a weekly Sunday Column called ‘Jugular Vein’ as well as a comic strip called ‘Dubyaman’ depicting the post 9/11 world. Suraiya is one of the international speakers at the Kathmandu Literary Jatra this weekend. Nepali Times caught up with him before he left Delhi for Kathmandu (with his passport):
THOMAS BELL

In her autobiography, *Is Life a Thorn or a Flower?* that won this year’s Madan Prize, Jhamak Ghimire writes about her struggle to learn the written word despite suffering from cerebral palsy that left her unable to speak and paralysed since childhood. Ghimire taught herself to write by clutching a twig with her toes.

At 30, Ghimire has now been thrust into celebrityhood with an autobiography that describes her struggle for self-expression, battling discrimination from the community and family, fighting fatalism and superstition in Nepali culture at the same time.

She describes the first time she wrote the letter ‘ka’. “I could not share that moment’s joy with anyone, my first letter was written in the dust on the ground and in my heart I could pronounce it. I was so happy that I rewrote the letter many times."

Ghimire recalls how writing on the ground made her foot bleed, yet her initial efforts went unnoticed. “Just so that people would see what I had written I wrote a big ‘s’ and left it there, but far from looking at my letter people stepped on it and my first letter got erased without anyone seeing it.”

Besides her prize-winning book, Ghimire has published four volumes of poetry, two books of short stories and many newspaper columns. “I am very happy to get the award,” she wrote, replying to questions with a pen between her toes. “At the same time I feel a sense of responsibility. I will start writing again soon.”

Ghimire’s book will soon be published in English. The prominent Nepali novelist and translator Manjushree Thapa praised Ghimire’s work. “Jhamak Kumari Ghimire’s expression seems to have gained elegance not despite, but because of, the physical challenges she has overcome,” says Thapa, “she speaks for an entire generation when she writes: ‘Father! Why are you siring renegade children like me?’”

nepaltimes.com

Jhamak speaks, Book Review #516
A renegade child of the hills #468
Of poverty and poems #105
Jhamak ghimire by Chhong256

AUTUMN-MOON CELEBRATIONS
12th Sept - 25th Sept 2011

As the warm autumn nights make their way to the end of the harvest season, beautiful sky lanterns floating in the air signal the start of the Autumn-Moon Festival, come celebrate this auspicious festival with your loved ones while you savour our delicious moon-cakes and a spread of the choicest Chinese cuisine, only at the No. 1 Address in Kathmandu.

Lunch and Dinner Specialties: Sea Food Hot Pot, Stir Fried Spaghetti, Mushrooms Red Pepper and Honey, Autumn Moon Cake, Quick Fried Garlic Prawns

BARAHA JEWELLERY INDUSTRIES PVT. LTD.
Hand Office: New Road Gate, Kathmandu
Tel: 432296-64, Fax: 01-4232011
P.O. Box: New Road, Kathmandu, 432296-64, Fax: 01-4232011

Direction Exhibition & Convention Center
A/4, First Floor, G-Block,7th Avenue, Kathmandu Tel: +977 (0) 1 432296-64, 432296-65
P.O. Box: GPO Box 432296-64, Kathmandu, 432296-65

DECC
Opens banquet services
www.decccentre.com

Element Blood Glucose Monitoring System

For the demonstration and home delivery call: 1313290051
email: sale@fairford.com

nepalitimes.com

Jhamak speaks, Book Review #516
A renegade child of the hills #468
Of poverty and poems #105
Jhamak ghimire by Chhong256

A complimentary Heineken Beer for every guest.
The Kathmandu Literary Jatra is a three-day festival that provides a platform for discourse on Nepali literature. Held at different venues within the Patan Durbar Square complex, the festival will host 55 national and 12 international writers and poets and feature readings, workshops and discussions pertaining to Nepal and South Asia.

**JATRA DAY I**

Venue: Patan Museum Courtyard

- **Time: 2pm to 3.30pm**
  - Inauguration

- **Time: 4pm to 5pm**
  - Session: Writing and Change. Sujeev Shakya, Rabindra Mishra, Gopal Thakur and Sarad Pradhan

- **Time: 5pm to 6pm**
  - Session: Getting Things Done! Presented by Rotary Club of Taia. Karma Shakya introduced by Prafulla Man Singh Pradhan

**JATRA DAY II**

Venue: Patan Museum Courtyard

- **Time: 6pm to 7pm**
  - Poetry Recitations in Different Languages
  - Venue: NMB Hall (Inside Adarsha Kanya Niketan School)

- **Time: 4pm to 5pm**
  - Session: The New Age of News presented by The Asia Foundation. Akhilesh Upadhyay, Kunda Dixit, Mohammed Hanif, Prashant Jha and Tarun Tejpal

- **Time: 5.30pm to 6.30pm**
  - Session: The East India Company, the Mughals, and the Gorkhali Empire. William Dalrymple in conversation with Kanak Mani Dixit

Venue: NMB Hall

- **Time: 3.30pm to 4.30pm**
  - Session: Uncovering the Truth. Tarun Tejpal in conversation with Anagha Neelakantan

- **Time: 4pm to 5pm**
  - Session: Being: A Woman, Becoming a Writer. Gyanu Pandey, Anbika Giri, Sanjeev Uprety and Momila

- **Time: 5pm to 6pm**
  - Session: The Power of Social Media. Anil Chitrakar introduced by Nayan Pokhrel Sindsulaya

Venue: Patan Durbar Square

- **Time: 10am to 11am**
  - Session: Narratives as a Window to History. William Dalrymple and Ashiya Adhikari

- **Time: 11am to 12pm**

- **Time: 3.30pm to 4.30pm**
  - Session: Bridging the Language Divide. Alka Sarangi, Asmiile Prasad, Yuyutsu RD Sharma and Namita Gokhale

- **Time: 2.30pm to 3.30pm**
  - Session: The New Age of News presented by The Asia Foundation. Akhilesh Upadhyay, Kunda Dixit, Mohammed Hanif, Prashant Jha and Tarun Tejpal

- **Time: 4.30pm to 5.30pm**
  - Session: Immersed in Nepali Literature. Abhi Subedi introduced by Anmar Raj Joshi

- **Time: 5.30pm to 6.30pm**
  - Session: Open Minds: Libraries and Treasure Troves of Stories presented by German Book Office. Akshay Pathak, Reshu Ayal Dhungana, Paro Arand and Shazia Omar

Venue: NMB Hall

- **Time: 1.30pm to 2.30pm**
  - Session: Ashoka Mauryan and his Legacy. Nayanjot Lahiri introduced by Rohit Ranjitkar

- **Time: 2.30pm to 3.30pm**
  - Session: Dalits in Nepali Literature. Ahuti, Bidusha Dhungel, Khagendra Sangraula and P Sivakami

- **Time: 3.30pm to 4.30pm**
  - Session: Immersed in Nepali Literature. Abhi Subedi introduced by Anmar Raj Joshi

Venue: Patan Durbar Square

- **Time: 10am to 11am**
  - Session: The Power of Social Media. Anil Chitrakar introduced by Nayan Pokhrel Sindsulaya

- **Time: 11am to 12pm**
  - Session: Open Minds: Libraries and Treasure Troves of Stories presented by German Book Office. Akshay Pathak, Reshu Ayal Dhungana, Paro Arand and Shazia Omar

- **Time: 8am to 10am**
  - Session: Heritage Walks. Sign up in advance

- **Time: 10am to 11am**
  - Event: Poetic Pie: Slices from Different Languages

These events are free and open to the public.
Imago Dei offers a glimpse of Kathmandu’s well to do in mid-week play: broods straight from Stepford breeds into an adjacent art space discuss over frites and beauty queen runner-ups primp up in an adjacent art space. The café maintains the standard Chinese stir-fry. Sanepa’s U rice, and tasted more like a Spanish or Filipino reduction, doesn’t do justice to the Spanish or Filipino dish. The meal was too salty, according to the server, has been long unavailable. Then, why advertise? So to our dismay, we opted for the taco wrap, which was disappointing: chopped Mexican taco wrap, which served with malt vinegar,Rs 400 and could be better dip was good but not worth into a moo-shoo style wrap. (barely traceable) folded salad and minced chicken starter or snack, the spinach and artichoke dip and chips is a cheese concoction that will leave customers relishing in seconds. Desserts like homemade macaroons and tiramisu pair well with a cup of French-pressed brew or a cup of imported liqueur.

Look into Imago Dei to meet friends and colleagues over snacks or cakes and coffee, but steer clear of price-over snacks or cakes and coffee, but steer clear of price-

Imago Dei’s redemption aside from its inviting space is found in its ends. As a starter or snack, the spinach and artichoke dip and chips is a cheese concoction that will leave customers relishing in seconds. Desserts like homemade macaroons and tiramisu pair well with a cup of French-pressed brew or a cup of imported liqueur.

Look into Imago Dei to meet friends and colleagues over snacks or cakes and coffee, but steer clear of price-

Venue: Manga Hiti (Dhunge Dhara)
Time: 10am to 7pm
photo.circle presents Retelling Histories
16 to 18 September
“Retelling Histories,” organised by photo.circle, explores Nepal’s cultural memory through an exhibition of archived photography from old family albums, dug up and contextualized. As part of the Nepal Picture Library, the project engages viewers in Nepal’s history and identity through images.

Somewhere Else
Imago Dei
Marco Pollo

Up road from Darbar Marg, find the cafe facing the eastern wall of Narayanhiti Museum
Safe drugs

In Western medicine, there was a time when a famous doctor would proclaim the usefulness of a certain medicine and many of us in the medical profession would agree wholeheartedly, without questioning. Now, you need hard evidence. In the 1950s, it was Bradford Hill who started the process of doing proper drug trials to determine the efficacy of drugs.

The evidence-based concept is now called randomised controlled trial (RCT). In the classic RCT, to determine if drug X works for a disease y, first you need an adequate sample size of patients with disease y who will be administered the drug X. To a similar number of patients you need to administer a sugar pill or a dummy pill, called a “placebo” in medical speak. Then over a certain period of time, if you can show that those in the drug arm of the trial did better than in the placebo arm of the trial, you may be able to conclude that the drug X is effective against the disease y. But the difference in effectiveness has to be what is called, “significant”. And this significance is determined by statistical testing which tries to eliminate “chance” as the cause for drug X being more effective. To eliminate the chance factor, randomisation is very important. For example in determining who receives the placebo versus the drug in question, the choice has to be random. If the patient is pre-selected to receive the drug or the placebo then you have introduced bias (chance) into the study.

One of the first diseases to be subjected to human trials was tuberculosis. At one time only one drug was used for TB, then RCT’s revealed that the disease responded significantly better to combination therapy than just one drug. This lesson was carried over for a more modern scourge, the HIV virus against which a combination therapy is now utilized.

RCT’s are now also made use of for studying the efficacy of vaccines. The injectable typhoid vaccine that is used worldwide was first studied here in Kathmandu by Dr I L Acharya and colleagues in the early 1980s using the RCT concept.

Finally, besides efficacy, adverse events or side effects of drug also have to be assessed properly to avoid the kind of tragedy that the drug “thalidomide” caused. So, a world of regulations has spawned around RCTs to make sure drugs are safe and effective.
RABI THAPA

Telling tales?

The Kathmandu Literary Jatra is in town. The glorious courtyards of the Patan Museum are set to play host to unprecedented intellectual discourse over the weekend. Three score and more national and international writers will hold forth on languages, minority voices, journalism, politics, history and books, books, books. The cynic may deride such events as mere celebrity chaff, but this is as much about bringing writers to their audiences – for intellectual interaction – as anything else. For Nepali audiences keen to get a grip on how their many-hued country is being represented in these crucial times of uncertainty, the Jatra may provide some answers.

For writers of fiction, questions of representation have always been tricky. This is especially the case for those using languages that don’t originate in the societies that they are describing. Take a Nepali writing in English about Nepal: who is the writer writing for? Locals or globals?

In Nepal, if a writer’s compatriots are not full of praise for her latest work, they are liable to be attacking her for having misrepresented the Nepali culture, as if there were ever such a monolithic culture beyond the outdated, state-sponsored notions of dhaka topi and dalbhat. So when Samrat Upadhyay debuted with ‘Arresting God in Kathmandu’ (2001) and dared to allow his characters to indulge in carnal relations, there was something of an outcry.

While no one could deny the fact of Nepalis having sex (otherwise we wouldn’t be here at all), many felt that it was unnecessary to dwell on the fact. It was smutty, it was not representative of Nepali culture, they said, why exaggerate?

Many more words have flowed under the Bagmati Bridge since, and the river ain’t getting any cleaner. Or perhaps it’s just the stodgy nature of some Nepali readers. Ten years on, I published, and was predictably criticised for apparently dwelling too long on Kathmandu’s indolent youth, who couldn’t possibly spend all their time on smoke, sex, and swearing. Just because you’re an upstanding citizen who disapproves of your sons and daughters doing the same, I wanted to tell them, don’t imagine everyone else is.

But the flip side to excessive (thus supposedly unrealistic) reality is exoticisation. We’ve all heard about Orientalism, but what about Self-Orientalising, whereby a writer internalises Western notions of the East, and imbues her fiction with an excess of spirituality or exotica? Take Upadhyay’s debut again. Does the juxtaposition of ‘Gods’ and ‘Kathmandu’ in the title not invoke the idea of Shangri-La, never mind that ‘arresting’ them speaks of a more mundane reality? Again, before the publication of my own book, the publisher and I spent quite some time debating the title, cover and the blur on the back. It was important to represent it in a certain way, and needless to say, we disagreed. Come the next round, I almost dare not dwell on steaming cups of tea, spices, arranged marriages, gods and demons any longer than is necessary. lest I be accused of exoticising my own culture, either out of romanticism or a calculated eye to the bottom line.

‘Selling out, or telling it like it is? Getting real in South Asian fiction’ is the title of the session I will be moderating on the final day of the Kathmandu Literary Jatra (replacing the one on biography with Patrick French). It will feature Indian writers Namita Gokhale and P Sivakami and Bangladeshi writer Shazia Omar, and will attempt to apportion blame between writers, publishers and dear readers. This session, along with 30 others, will attempt to get at the story behind the story, literally and literarily. This, we hope, is what the Jatra is all about.
Selbon Tamang (pictured, right) is 52, and for most of his adult life he has been searching for a bride in his village of Sisipu of Nuwakot. But there aren’t any. This village 90km north of Kathmandu has no young women left: they have all been trafficked to brothels in India.

“I have been searching for a bride for the last 11 years, but only underage girls are left in the village,” says Kanchha Tamang, 37, of Sisipu. Ghangphedi’s population growth has gone down to below replacement rate fertility.

“I have been searching for a bride for the last 11 years, but only underage girls are left in the village,” says Kanchha Tamang, 37, of Sisipu. Ghangphedi’s population growth has gone down to below replacement rate fertility.

Selbon is not alone. There are hundreds of young men here in northern Nuwakot who can’t find brides. It is estimated that more than 5,000 of the women from this remote mountain region are in brothels in Mumbai and other cities in India.

Parents’ names or where they came from. They have been given Christian names and identities.

In the website of Michael Job Centre, the girls are falsely depicted as children of Christian martyrs in Nepal murdered by Maoists. The Centre runs on the donations given by Christians from all over the world for ‘orphans’.

In one of the pages of the website was where we first saw pictures of Anna Bella, Daniela, Persius and Jael (Christian names given by the centre, original names withheld). Their mother and brother had made a three

Parents’ back home. They were rescued from the centre last week at the initiative of the Esther Benjamin Memorial Foundation (EBMF), Nepal, Childline India and the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) at the state of Tamil Nadu.

EBMF got into action when the families of four girls from Humla requested them to find their missing daughters. The parents of the girls had sent them along with their brothers in the care of Dal Bahadur Phadera, a local politician.

Many families in Humla had paid Phadera Rs 5-20,000 to get their children out of war-ravaged villages at the time and educate them in boarding schools in Kathmandu. The boys are still in the institution run by Phadera, but the girls, between 3 to 7 years old, were taken away nine years ago. Their families never heard from them.

When rescued, many girls didn’t remember their parents’ names or where they came from. They have been given Christian names and identities.

In the website of Michael Job Centre, the girls are falsely depicted as children of Christian martyrs in Nepal murdered by Maoists. The Centre runs on the donations given by Christians from all over the world for ‘orphans’.

In one of the pages of the website was where we first saw pictures of Anna Bella, Daniela, Persius and Jael (Christian names given by the centre, original names withheld). Their mother and brother had made a three
days journey from Humla to join us in Kathmandu for the trip to Coimbatore in India’s southern tip. Persius and Joel’s mother Shangmo Lama had never before been in a car before. After a long and tiring journey to Coimbatore, a frail Shangmo smiled for the first time when we stepped inside the gate of the Centre to get back her daughters. She had waited nine years for this moment.

At first, the principal of the centre flatly denied having any Nepali girls brought to the centre. But she was forced to accept having illegally kept the girls as orphans when the photos of the children and the mother were shown.

Outside, a very Nepali looking girl’s face stopped me. After few exchanges in English, I asked if she was Nepali. The girl’s face brightened up. Lynsy then gave me her Nepali name, informed there were now 23 of them left in the centre and that they have not forgotten to speak Nepali. Soon the news spread of the team from Nepal and Nepali girls surrounded the principal’s office.

There was noisy chatter and a sense of jubilation in the office. Some of the girls were seven years old and all had parents and families back home and hadn’t heard from them in all these years.

It was an emotional scene when Shangmo met her girls, who at first failed to recognise their mother. But her brother’s daughter Daniela instantly recognised her aunt. PP Job, the centre’s ringleader, has denied having known that the children had relatives in India. “My wife was sold by her own relatives to a brothel in Kolkata,” says Lal Bahadur Tamang of Shikharbesi. The trafficking ringleader, Chhipa, alias Kale Tamang, was finally caught last year in an organized operation by the police.

However, anti-trafficking activists are worried that middlemen are trying to slow down the repatriation process.

Eighteen-year-old Selmendo Ghyangphedi run their own brothels in Mumbai or Kolkata to recruit. Ghyangphedi is now planning to bring PP Job and his accomplices to India, and house them in an institution here. It is a clear case of trafficking,“” said Nandita Rao, Childline’s lawyer told Nepali Times. The Centre is now under investigation by the social welfare department in Tamil Nadu and has been given 15 days to furnish details and prove that it was not involved in child trafficking. On Monday, 500 activists from different Hindu organisations staged a protest outside the centre.

“Poor countries are turning into a missionary haven for religious zealots and this has led to a new form of trafficking,” says Philippe Holmes of Esther Benjamins Memorial Foundation. The girls are now on their way home by train via Gorakhpur.

The girls had kept the memory of their home and Bhutan who were also kept in the centre are now underway. But even if the children are reunited, their years lost, separation from parents and loss of identity will never be returned.

There are those who return to tell horrific stories of abuse and exploitation. Among them is Thulimaya (name changed) who has returned after working in brothels in Mumbai for 25 years. As seems to be often the case, after five years of working in a brothel, Thulimaya started running her own.

Kamal Sitaula, a teacher in Shikharbesi believes young women at first don’t know that they are going to be sex workers. They are attracted by the glamorous tales of wealth by relatives who have returned from Mumbai or Kolkata to recruit. Sitaula estimates that 60 women from Ghyanggichi run their own brothels in India, and they regularly seek fresh young girls from the village.

Eighteen-year-old Selmendo Tamang’s (pictured, left, centre) own uncle took her to Rasuwa to sell her off. “It was only when police arrived that I realised I was about to be sold,” Selmendo recalls. Her marriage to Aitaman Tamang last year was been the only marriage in Sisiphu in the last eight years.

Ask any parent here about their missing daughters and the standard answer is: “She is in college in the country alive for nearly a decade, and were full of pride as they sang the Nepali national anthem for the rescue party from Nepal. They had memorized the words from the mobile ring tone of a Nepali visiting the center.”

Said an ecstatic Sahita Bogati: “I want to go home. I would not mind walking all the way to Nepal.”

POST SCRIPT: EBMF is now preparing to file charges against Phadera on charges of trafficking. In India, child rights organisations have taken up the issue and are now planning to bring PP Job and his accomplices to book. Efforts to repatriate children trafficked from Tibet and Bhutan who were also kept in the centre are now underway. But even if the children are reunited, their years lost, separation from parents and loss of identity will never be returned.

Get out of jail
Kale Tamang alias Chhipa, 41, who has been responsible for many of the cases of trafficking from Nuwakot, was finally caught by police last month. In a career spanning 16 years since 1996, Chhipa is estimated to have trafficked at least 400 women. Police here say there are another 30 people who are still at large. However, anti-trafficking activists are worried that middlemen are trying to get Chhipa out of jail by posting a Rs 6 million bail.

Back with HIV
Kanchi Maiti is 49. She was sold to a brothel in India by her relatives when she was a teenager. When she got infected with HIV, she was sent back to Nepal. In the last three years, seventeen people have died due to HIV/AIDS in Shikharbesi alone. There are many women like Kanchi Maiti with HIV in Shikharbesi, and many have married because of the shortage of brides.
The government hasn’t yet granted permission to madarsas to run secondary level education. This has been a let-down for girls from the Muslim community in Nepalganj. Their dreams of pursuing higher education has come to an abrupt halt as their poor parents can’t afford to send them to public schools. Madarsa Darulam in Neplaganj has been running classes till Grade 8. The principal, Maulana Mustafa Nurani says: “We have met all the required criteria including a two storey building with 17 rooms but we haven’t yet been granted permission to run classes above Grade 8.”

Madarsas are religious schools run by the Muslim community where students are taught free of cost. Muslim parents who find the environment of other schools unsafe prefer to send their daughters to madarsas. So, parents hesitate sending their daughters elsewhere.

The inability of community run madrasas to fall in the government’s education policy has adversely affected the lives of many students.

The government hasn’t yet granted permission to madrasas to run secondary level education. This has been a let-down for girls from the Muslim community in Nepalganj. Their dreams of pursuing higher education has come to an abrupt halt as their poor parents can’t afford to send them to public schools. Madarsa Darulam in Neplaganj has been running classes till Grade 8. The principal, Maulana Mustafa Nurani says: “We have met all the required criteria including a two storey building with 17 rooms but we haven’t yet been granted permission to run classes above Grade 8.”

Madarsas are religious schools run by the Muslim community where students are taught free of cost. Muslim parents who find the environment of other schools unsafe prefer to send their daughters to madarsas. So, parents hesitate sending their daughters elsewhere.

The inability of community run madrasas to fall in the government’s education policy has adversely affected the lives of many students.
“Baburam has betrayed us”

Interview with Maoist politburo member Netra Bikram Chand, in Karobar, 11 September

Karobar: Why has the conflict within the party increased after the formation of Maoist-led government? Netra Bikram Chand: It is only natural because we have not yet agreed with the government formation process, its policies and programs. The issues that we had agreed on including army integration, state restructuring wasn’t implemented. We are leading the government but its policies have been changed. Especially on the army integration things haven’t gone according to our agreement. Before regrouping they moved ahead with arms handover. Even Jhalanath Khanal hadn’t agreed to that, and it has led to dissatisfaction within our party.

What is the main disagreement on?
There are two things that need to be concluded before the army integration. Whether or not the PLA will be included in the national army needs to be decided first. Depending on this decision further provisions regarding its structure need to be made. Furthermore, an effective relief package should be provided for the rehabilitation of the soldiers in PLA. But Babram Bhattari, after being appointed prime minister took Pushpa Kamal Dahal to his side and drifted away from the party’s decision.

What is the issue over the keys handover?
Everything rests on the keys. The pride of the people’s army and Nepal’s revolutionary movement lie on those keys. Handing over the keys is a symbolic gesture and means handing over the PLA too.

But your faction is said to have agreed to this. Sometimes even lies seem to work in politics. They shouldn’t have kept us in the dark over the changed decision. Pushpa Kamal Dahal had removed the decision of handing over the keys, but he changed this in the final decision. He put on a fake show.

But you seem to want the ministries, right?
Had it been about ministries we’d have given up our stand on these issues to please Prachanda and Baburam. We have only been opposing their decision because it contradicts our belief. Whether we want to give in to the status quo or move ahead has been the main issue amongst us.

Will the Baidya faction be a part of this government?
They have made a huge mistake by handing over the key. We are ready to work together if they are willing to correct their mistake. They have to take their decision back.

Is it true that the Baidya faction is dissolving the party?
Those who have been accusing us are just doing it for their momentary self indulgence. And as for the internal struggle, it will last only until everyone is ready to agree to come to single point of understanding.

Door: State
Package: Relief
Deven in Nagarik, 11 September

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“I have been receiving threats, but we will continue our supervision and nobody will be spared.”

Yubraj Shrestha, Governor, Nepal Rastra Bank
Ani Choying’s heart-rending story of her childhood and her decision to become a nun is told in simple, yet deep prose. Very early in life, Ani Choying learnt to be self-reliant, and was motivated to take up the challenges of life, and to help others like her. 

Being born to her mother was the first good thing that happened to Ani Choying, and being a nun was the second best. “If I had not become a nun, I would have probably been an unidentified wife and a mother of probably 3-4 children,” confesses Ani Choying. “My decision to become a nun and the blessings I from my mentors, has made my life more worthwhile. I am thankful that through the talent my Gurus helped me identify, I have been able to serve many people and our society.”

Ani Choying’s positive outlook on life has made her living proof that a troubled childhood is not the end of the world, but can open new horizons in life. Phoolko Ankhama is the Nepali translation of the original published in French in 2008 by Oh! Editions. French writer, Laurence Debril collaborated with Ani Choying in structuring the story.

Since then, the book has been published in 12 languages: French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, English, Portuguese, Russian, Polish, Slovenian and Hungarian. The Nepali edition of the book has been translated in collaboration with Girish Giri.

“I could have written three books during the time I spent working on this,” says Giri, “but it was a really worthwhile experience to collaborate with Ani on the Nepali translation.”

Kiran Krishna Shrestha of nepalayal says the book will be released before Dasain. “There are many books written and published around the world on Nepal, which remain unnoticed by Nepali readers,” says Shrestha. “This book marks the beginning of our effort to bring world literature on Nepal to the Nepali public.”

The book is being published in Nepali with formal arrangement with the original copyright owners, Oh! Editions of France.

For her part, Ani Choying says she is glad her book has come out in Nepali after being read in 11 languages. “I am glad my story is finally coming home to Nepal,” she says. She has contributed all the earnings from her book to the welfare of kidney patients in Nepal.

The English translation of Singing for Freedom is published by Pier 9.

Songs of peace, #554
Music video of Phoolko Ankhama

Nepal's famous ''singing nun'' few knew the true story of the struggle of this refugee child growing up in Kathmandu. In fact, the outside world knew more about Ani Choying than Nepalis themselves. Now, Publication nepa~laya is bringing out the Nepali translation of Ani Choying Drolma’s autobiography, Phoolko Ankhama.
The core of Sand Castle City/Quicksand Nation written in Kathmandu by Wayne Amtzis between 2003 and 2008, during the Maoist insurrection and aftermath, are emotive, sound-driven poems born of sickness and disquiet. It is an outsider’s attempt to empathise with a country and people tearing themselves apart and more universal ruminations on violence, torture, impunity and death. The work that opens and closes the book, however, was composed mostly in the early 1990’s and in the present day. These image-driven depictions of street-life in Kathmandu present a city-dweller’s recounting of the world he passes through; poems formed with a detached and an omnivorous eye. In the first instance the aim was catharsis and in the second, awareness. Says Amtzis: “The aim for the conflict poems was catharsis and for the street poems, awareness. My concern throughout was with how lives are lived and suffering endured.”

The reader can see the years of violence in the context of the unhappy peace that preceded and followed it. These are poems of witness that ask the reader to look through the images to the world that brought them forth, and feel through the sounded words to the emotions that engendered them. In both instances they ask that a judgment be made.

THE TASK

"peace decays forever" ––Jean Follain

A tall woman in a tent-like dress, raises a tray of rocks to her head. Coolness and heat at play on her skin, air and blood at war in her ease. As she treads the mud path, from rock-strewn street to wall-less tower, a hint of rain aslant the air, neither hurries nor halts her steps. From an all-day vantage, she stands in place and never moves, un-fold, unaccounted for, a traceable sadness drawing us to her eyes. Across the street, worlds apart, a trio of blind schoolgirls chatter as they walk. The sole seeing sister among them, clearing the path with her single-minded stare, wary at what stands in the way, yet sure-footed in her shepherding, as they are, hand in hand, in halting grace, linked in new-found pride that draws them in a single wave on and on...

Far from these lives, on the see-saw, in the grand public display, (while the usual sycophants and hacks –the better to see by- crowd and toss matches in the air) in packs, the leapfrogging leaders stammer and squeal…… as their bottoms settle in, as they push and rise, their feet barely touching the ground. So careless in the to and fro, in their squabbling rites of succession that they…… Or is just monkey see monkey do they do not care, they know they’ll make a monkey out of you. They know…… when the accounting is done it is the clerk in the requisite government of (first this one, then that) who explains –with registry, signature and stamp– how much it takes to initiate…… the glorious task at hand.
Something cooking in the kitchen cabinet

There are two ways to look at the prime minister’s decision not to fly business on his trip to New York next week. One is to see this as proof that he is anti-business. Or, we can say that by exposing himself to deep vein thrombosis risk, or splurging the national exchequer. Frankly, we don’t want a photo op with the head of the Nepali delegation in the General Assembly dozing off at the desk, so please do us all a favour, prime minister, and get yourself a free upgrade. What would be much more meaningful, though, and the Ass has just sent this email to (bhattarababuram@gmail.com) would be for the PM to refuse to use the VIP departure lounge at TIA and stand in line for one hour at immigration and x-ray with the rest of the hoi polloi and face what Nepal’s proles have to face every day. But all this may be academic because BRB now thinks flying 40 hours roundtrip with long layovers in cattle class is just too much trouble, and we hear that he is trying to call off the trip.

Ever heard of deep vein thrombosis?

And that may be just as well with all the knife-sharpening that is going on. Com Red Flag faces challenges on multiple fronts. The Baidya faction is now publicly accusing BRB of being a medium rare Indian stooge. The NC is up in arms about the 4-point pact and the promise to induct 10,000 Madhesis into the army. The UML’s right wing Oli faction is flirting with the Maoists’ left wing Baidya faction to undermine Baburam. And then there is Awesome the Enigmatic, who just can’t stand his vice-chairman’s superior intellect and is back to wearing his Hawaiian shirt which he always does when he is plotting some big breakthrough.

Another sure proof that the Baddies are girding up their loins for elections is that even a former Raja Baddie-turned-Mao Baddie Gopal “Shoe-thrower” Kirati is setting up an organization of Maoist Kshetris. Which has prompted Lekha Raj Bhatta, the Lion of the West, to revive his non-Tharu front for a territorial province in the trans-Karnali of which he is already the self-declared warlord. What has prompted all this, according to notoriously reliable sources, is that the Baddies realized rather belatedly that their ethnic identity politics was having an anti-Maoist backlash among the Bahun-Kshetris who make up nearly a third of the electorate.

All is not well in the governing coalition, the cabinet is still incomplete and some Madhesi ministers are openly de ant of the prime minister. Like Comrade JP refusing to be party spokesman, and telling BRB publicly that it would be better if he got one of his yes-men to do the job. But if the frequency and length of meeting between the Gang of Three, BRB, Sitola and Right Honourable Amreeso Singh is anything to go by, something is cooking in the kitchen cabinet.