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IDENTITY CRISIS

When the cabinet endorsed a new crop of Nepali ambassadors recently, the good news was that many of them were career diplomats. The bad news: most were from traditionally-privileged caste groups. Even more worryingly, no one really thought there was anything wrong with that until a parliamentary committee raised the issue.

Every day we see other potent reminders of just how exclusionary the Nepali state and society remains. A list of senior civil servants, politicians at the village and district level, and movers and shakers within each of the big parties continue to be dominated by the traditionally privileged caste groups.

The Constituent Assembly may be the most inclusive legislature in Nepal's history, but just look at who is calling the shots there. Who are the ones who are quarrelling or doing the most talking? Not too many women or members from marginalised communities getting up to speak on the floor of the House. Even on Facebook, where the number of Nepalis with accounts has now crossed 1.1 million, it is the men and the 'high' castes who dominate.

This is natural, and the result of some sections of society having better access to education and opportunities than others in the past. It will take time to change, and will change only if the skewed balance of social justice in Nepal is redressed, there is a more equitable distribution of education, and prospects for progress are equalised. Past exclusion has to be addressed with a systematic change in state policy and an accelerated mechanism to allow the traditionally disadvantaged to catch up through affirmative action.

But in trying to address these imbalances, there are the twin dangers of: a) adopting too simplistic an approach to who constitutes the 'disadvantaged', and b) replacing one form of exclusion with another. A supposedly 'high' caste person living in Bajhang, for instance, is more historically marginalised and economically disadvantaged than a person from an 'indigenous' community in Kaski or Khumbu. The other trap is to try to correct past wrongs with the future

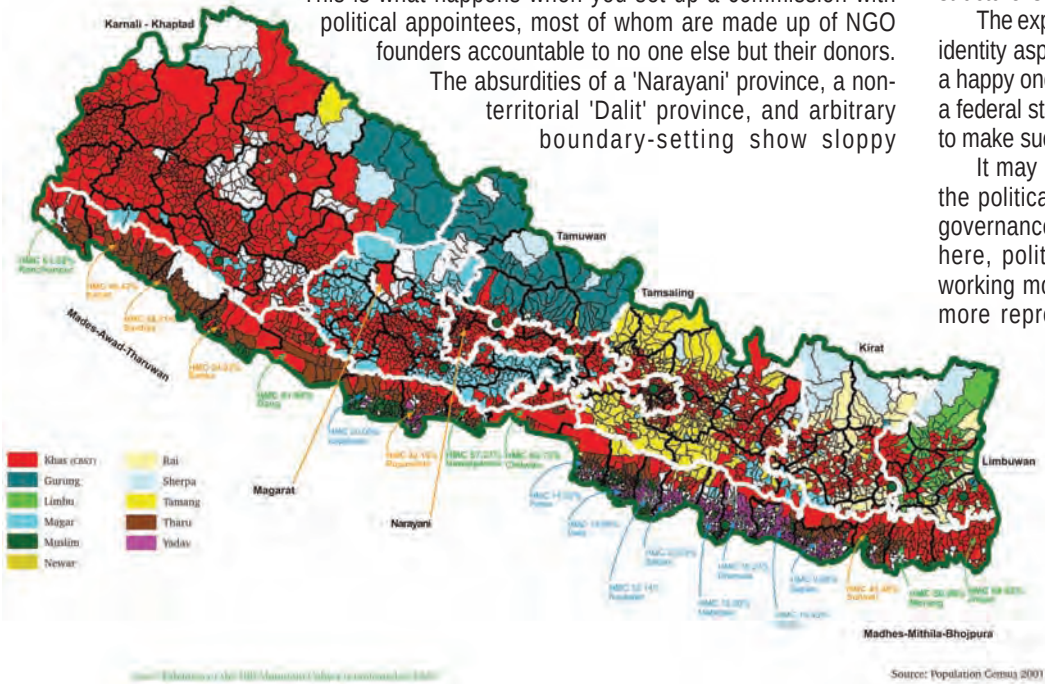
All signs point to the ethnic demarcation debate getting even more heated and unpredictable in the months before 28 May.

blunder of identity politics and ethno-territorial fragmentation.

This is fraught with consequences because it is not just going to be about the hill-plains divide, not even about reducing the dominance of the caste elite, but multiple cleavages among hill ethnicities. It is sad, but not surprising, that the State Restructuring Committee's disputed report is being greeted by protests from janjati and Tarai-based communities who feel excluded. We are sure to see increasingly rancorous disputes about the territorial boundaries of future ethnically-demarcated provinces.

This is what happens when you set up a commission with political appointees, most of whom are made up of NGO founders accountable to no one else but their donors.

The absurdities of a 'Narayani' province, a non-territorial 'Dalit' province, and arbitrary boundary-setting show sloppy



gerrymandering that are going to create huge problems in the future.

Of Nepal's nearly 4,000 VDCs, not a single one is mono-ethnic. No single ethnic group is numerically dominant in any of the proposed future federal provinces, even in the ones that are named after those dominant there. Since the last census, Nepalis have become even more mobile, living cheek to jowl with each other. Migration, urbanisation and inter-ethnic marriages are integrating Nepal like never before. Some mountain districts have lost up to one-third of their original population.

It could be potentially catastrophic to decide on these complex matters at a time of such political volatility as now. We can't trust such sensitive provisions in the new constitution with potentially far-reaching, long-term consequences on populist leaders who have exhibited a short-sighted and single-minded obsession with power and greed. A new constitution can't be written to suit the personal ambition of one man, or to accommodate the competing claims of those who define themselves through identity politics. Future state structure is too important to be left to politicians.

The experience of other countries that have tried to accommodate identity aspirations through ethno-federalist structures has not been a happy one. Nepal's interim constitution gave us the fait accompli of a federal state, we may therefore have to work within that parameter to make such a structure least harmful to this country.

It may be prudent to remind ourselves why we want to recraft the political order in the first place: for true devolution and self-governance at the grassroots. We are not re-inventing the wheel here, political decentralisation through local elections was a working model in the 1990s, we just need to tweak it so that it is more representative and addresses the genuine concerns of those left out of political decision-making in the past.

All signs point to the ethnic demarcation debate getting even more heated and unpredictable in the months before 28 May. It would be best to put state structure in deep freeze and tackle it when the politics becomes more stable.

Whatever we do, the bottom line should be the unity of the Nepali state. Fortunately still, there is much more holding us together than tearing us apart.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

ONE STEP

If Dahal is the problem, standing in the way of 28 million Nepalis, why are we still tolerating him ('One step forward, two steps back', Editorial, #589)? Why don't we eliminate the problem? How can we let a few men like Dahal, Bhattarai, Deuba, Koirala hijack the interests of an entire nation? What about the needs of the people? We need jobs, we need investments to boost the economy, we need petrol, water, food, medicine and free education for those who cannot pay the tuition.

Ramesh Thapa

- The Maoists were never really interested in empowering ordinary Nepalis. Their politics revolves around terrorising opponents and grabbing power and Dahal will probably give trivial concessions to the NC and UML and bribe his way to the presidency. Nepalis are already suffering, they will suffer more under Dahal's presidency, but will survive. The important question is will the NC and UML leaders survive Dahal's reign?

Kamal Kishor

STREET DRAMA

To subsidise petroleum products, the government needs to have the money ('Street drama', Anurag Acharya, #589). But our government is as poor as the country. The more we ask for concessions, the more the state will resort to quick-fix solutions such as begging for aid from international donors. Let's stop the bandages and forget about foreign

aid and subsidies, and work hard to make ourselves self-sufficient.

Bhupendra Khanal

- These demonstrators don't even know the meaning of protest, conditions to protest, and human rights. And if they really cared about the poor students and ordinary Nepalis, they would not constantly disrupt our daily lives. What is more depressing is these 'student' activists are supposed to be the future leaders of Nepal, but I shudder to think about the havoc they will unleash when power is handed over to them.

Yash Kumar

NEPAL UNITE

Thank you Vijay Lama for your honest, optimistic and heartfelt article ('Who says Nepal is divided?', Vijay Lama, #589). I hope the ultra-rightists and Nepalis who practice and promote exclusionary practices read your piece. Indeed it is true that most Nepalis want to be known first as Nepalis and then as proud Gurungs, Tharus, Brahmins and Chhetris.

Kiran L

- What Vijay Lama describes was my exact feeling as I attended the Tamang Losar with my sisters' family who had come from India. I proudly took them to Tundikhel to witness a peaceful gathering to celebrate a great festival that not only belongs to one ethnic group, but to the entire nation. But the celebration was totally ruined when the political leaders started giving speeches. In the future please don't turn these cultural celebrations into

a platform for politics by inviting these senseless leaders. We will enjoy our Losar much better without them. Happy Losar!

Sherpa

It's time the media gave more coverage to positive news than the same old speeches of our so called leaders. We need people like Vijay Lama to write more motivational articles to raise our morals.

Ngorgima

- Lama is correct when he says it is the politicians who have divided our country. There is an open "bhagbanda" of government posts and appointments among certain groups which continues to divide the country. Even Dahal and Bhattarai's revolution was not designed to help the marginalised communities. How can the Tamangs and others call themselves Nepalis when they are not treated as Nepalis by the people in power, year after year?

Bal Tamang

- Centuries of celebrating 'common' culture and history helped certain sections of the society to move ahead while others were left behind. If we want long term peace in Nepal, we have no other option than to institutionalise affirmative action in the new constitution.

Thapa

- This article is full of irritating clichés and banal generalities. Yes our socio-political agenda is being hijacked by petty provincialism, but the answer

is not sugary appeals and harping on a golden age that never was. We can progress collectively as a nation and society, only by facing the harsh realities.

Nepali

- I thought the fourth estate was supposed to portray reality, so why are we being fed fairy-tale like articles such as this one? Hanging out with friends from different castes at a bar or seeing a bunch of city people at a Tamang festival doesn't depict Nepal's reality. Mr Lama should look beyond the comfort of his cockpit. If he did, he would realise that our society is more divided than it ever was. However, division is not inherently bad because the traditionally marginalised communities are finally speaking up and demanding greater equality.

Sabindra Lama

- Kudos to Capt Vijay Lama for this outstanding article. I want to hear similar words from the mouths of our leaders. Vijay Lama is a true Nepali. It is true our first identity is Nepali. This is a good lesson to our seasonal politicians who are sowing the seeds of communal violence.

Ram Kunwar

DIRTY BUSINESS

Well done Paavan Mathema, you have highlighted a very serious issue ('Dirty business', My Two Paise, #589). It is time for us to do a comprehensive study of business environment vis-a-vis investment friendly nations like Singapore and Sri Lanka, and push the government towards it. Security

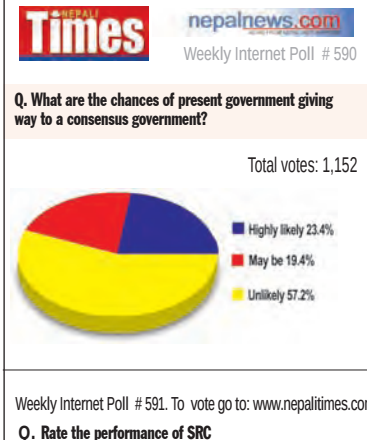
and rule of law is something very important and I am sure PM Bhattarai and his aides are working closely to make it happen. Let's not be too pessimistic about Nepal so soon.

Bhupendra

CAIRN ENERGY

Advice for Bhattarai and his comrades: improve the law and order situation in your own backyard, uphold the law of the land religiously, convince the old guards and do away with dead ideologies like Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism and Maoism ('Cairn still in wait-and-see mode', by Mark Williamson, #589). Foreign direct investment will flow in our country. Otherwise Bhattarai's empty promises are not going to be enough to persuade seasoned international investors.

DG



Asking the right questions

Exclusive enclaves cannot make an inclusive state



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

For a sign of things to come, go no further than the spectacle on Tuesday of Sherpa CA members blocking the entry of the State Restructuring Commission as it tried to go to the prime minister's office to hand over its majority report. When the Commission was formed in November, there were already serious doubts about a group of political appointees delivering a fair solution to the vexed issue of federalism that would be acceptable to all. The partisan winner-takes-all attitude of some commission members, extended deadlines and failure to produce a joint proposal did little to appease people's skepticism. Now the public seems to have accepted the futility and the short shelf life of the reports. They will make the headlines for a week, NGOs will publish glossy pamphlets in English for the benefit of

The way upper caste Newars treat 'lower caste' Newars, the way upper caste Madhesi treat Madhesi Dalits, the way Tamangs in Rasuwa exclude other poor sub-groups in their own community prove that feudalism is not just the character of the dominant group. Then there are unaddressed questions of gender and sexual minorities. Will the ethnic practices of the state impinge upon the rights of women and the sexual minorities in the name of culture and traditions? We have repeatedly argued in this page that exclusive enclaves cannot make an inclusive state. Ethnic federalism is not the answer to the historical exclusion faced by millions of Nepalis. Rather, what we need are policy interventions at various levels of governance with a strong democratic base. Nominating Madan Pariyar to the SRC was fine, but what about

policies to educate thousands of Dalit children in the hills and Madhes, ensuring their rightful stake in nation building? Federalism based on population, geography and resources along with policies of positive discrimination including reservation and quotas for the marginalised are the best ways to level the playing field in the long run, provided the state invests on quality education, health care

and employment. The NC and UML must overcome their fear of 'losing out' to the Maoists and support radical changes in state policies that address social imbalances. The parties must remember that offering ethnic lollipops to appease their vote banks will only lead to multiple exclusions in the future. Why should a Newar in Dharan be forced to live in a Kirat state? And does it mean all Newars should seek refuge in Kathmandu while the non-Newars of the capital head towards their respective states? What about the ones without a state? Do they no longer belong in Nepal? Those who are adamant that an ethnically divided state is still the best solution for Nepal should look to our southern neighbour for answers. Ask a Bihari in Maharashtra or a Manipuri in Delhi why they are unable to register their complaints at a police station about abuses they face in public buses and workplaces. Let's learn from the mistakes of others, it's not too late to stop ourselves from making hasty, populist decisions based on identity politics that we will rue for generations to come. The ball is back in the court of the parties. Instead of running after the Supreme Court for another CA extension beyond 28 May, if the parties honestly engage on points of contention, the constitution can be drafted in a matter of weeks if not days. They can begin by asking the right questions. 🇳🇵

their benefactors and there still won't be a compromise consensus on state restructuring. There is no point going into who dominated the proceedings in the commission. The ones who are crying foul wouldn't have done anything differently if they had the majority in the group. What is of bigger concern is that even after squandering two months and precious resources on hotel and conference bills, we are back to where we began. The political leadership is once again the main culprit. The Maoists who were the first to use identity politics to mobilise fighters during the war, must acknowledge that ethnic autonomy is not a viable option in a diverse society like ours. Privately they already do, but they can't say so publicly for fear of a backlash and losing face. Similarly, the Madhesi parties ratcheted up the rhetoric of One Madhes so much that they can't back down now. The demarcation of the boundaries are going to be so complicated that appeasing one janajati group is sure to anger another (see map). Dalits, Madhesi and Janjatis are not marginalised only due to their ethnic identity. Poverty, illiteracy and exclusion from the national mainstream reinforced the fatalistic outlook with which the powerful class looked down upon them for centuries. Just as high caste groups in remote areas are also marginalised and underprivileged, this 'brahminical' mentality is not exclusive to Brahmin and Chhettri leaders alone.



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नेपाल सरकार

संचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय

संचना विभाग

“Nepal must improve the situation of its women”

Australian Ambassador Susan Grace often travels in the districts to gain first-hand information about gender, education and sanitation projects. Brittany Searle of *Nepali Times* spoke to her after a recent visit to Baglung and Myagdi to ask about her impressions.

Nepali Times: You seem to enjoy field trips to the hinterland more than the Kathmandu diplomatic circuit?

Susan Grace: I feel it's important to be proactive in reaching out to communities in Nepal and understanding local conditions. I've travelled to nearly 40 districts so far and hope to cover at least 50 of the 75. I've learned a lot during my visits about living standards, health and education services, how people were affected by the conflict, and what their expectations are now. These visits help me evaluate whether Australia's aid projects are meeting the mark or not.

Are they?

The Australian aid program has doubled in the last three years, it is now nearly \$30 million and set to increase further. AusAID's program is focused on working with the government to improve education and health services. We also have a water and sanitation program in partnership with Water Aid, and a program which helps people start small businesses. We also have a scholarship program for Nepalis to undertake post-graduate study in Australia, and an active alumni association here.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

I am fortunate to be in Nepal during a time when the country is going through a major transition to



GRASSROOTS MEDIA: Australian ambassador Susan Grace (standing, centre) poses with journalists at a training program organised by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) and the Australian Embassy last month in Beni.

peace and democracy, although the delays in the constitution writing and finalisation of the peace process are of concern. Since I arrived after the landmark 2008 elections, my biggest challenge has been to comprehend the effects of the 10 year conflict in all its complexity. I hope to be here during the next elections, I will be very interested to see the outcome.

What do you love most about Nepal, and what do you find the most disheartening?

I find the scenery here some of the most beautiful I have ever seen. However, so often it is the case that people living in these beautiful places have extremely hard lives. One of the

images I will never forget is of women trudging along the roads carrying enormous loads of fodder and firewood on their backs. Local people wherever you travel are exceedingly friendly and hospitable, something which Australian tourists always comment on. I admire the toughness of the Nepali people.

I find rising corruption levels disheartening. Corruption concerns me because Nepali people deserve better and it impedes our development efforts. I raise concerns about corruption regularly with the government and political leaders but I sometimes feel that people here have become resigned to corruption. If it isn't brought under control, our aid program here could be jeopardised.

You are a strong proponent of women's education and empowerment. Why you are so passionate about this issue?

There is no doubt that Nepal cannot develop properly without more resources to improve the situation of women. The main challenge is working to change people's attitudes - a good example is domestic violence which must be tackled at all levels of society.

Why media projects in Myagdi and Baglung?

This year, one of the organisations supported by the Embassy's Direct Aid Program was the National Media Development Centre. I inaugurated a training session on 16 January in Beni for 20 journalists from Myagdi and surrounding districts. The media here has an important role to play in Nepal's democracy and we want to show our support. We are sponsoring five media training sessions altogether over the next few weeks, all in remote districts. The Embassy funded the Human Rights Film Centre to train five young Dalit women to produce two documentary films on women's struggles to gain access to education, and on inter-caste marriages. We screened the films in Baglung a couple of weeks ago and hope to publicise them in Kathmandu and elsewhere. The projects gave a voice to women from a marginalised community to tell their stories to a wider audience.

What progress have you seen to raise the status of the Dalit community?

There has been progress, particularly with laws that address caste-based discrimination, although implementation is lagging. Dalits are represented in the Constituent Assembly, are better organised and are raising their voices. A challenge remaining is inter-caste marriages, which can result in violence or even death for young people who have dared to choose each other as partners.

Moving mountains

BRITTANY SEARLE

During her first visit to Nepal, Australian social worker Stephanie Wollard saw seven women in a tin shed on the outskirts of Kathmandu making handicraft items. She set up Seven Women, a charity that helps women learn skills and generate income by selling products in Australia. The number of women has grown from seven to 100 in two years.

Seven Women skills training centre is located at the same tin shed where the women once worked, and is in partnership with the fair trade group, ESPA (Entire Power in Social Action) Nepal. The women are trained in embroidery and other skills, and their products are marketed and sold through volunteers in Australia and the proceeds are all repatriated to Nepal.

Seven Women has been a



catalyst for change in many women's lives, improving their self-esteem, giving them a place to share experiences as well as providing their families a chance to lift themselves out of poverty.

Many of the women used to face harsh discrimination at home

and social stigma in their villages because of their physical disabilities. By augmenting their income, Seven Women has made the women more socially and financially independent.

"Working for a fair wage has enabled the women to be economically empowered," Wollard told *Nepali Times*

Handicraft export business empowers handicapped Nepali women

during a visit to Nepal last month. "This has allowed them to pay school and medical bills."

Seventeen-year-old Ram Maya Amagi was born with a speech defect, but after she started working with Seven Women was offered treatment and has now partially overcome her disability, raising her self-confidence.

"This is the greatest achievement in my life so far," Amagi says.

A student of international development back home in Australia, Wollard says the idea of Seven Women is based on creating change through social and economic empowerment.

"When I met these women I wanted

to work with them to improve their lives not dole out money," she explains, "now they are independent. They enjoy life, they don't just struggle to survive."

Wollard says she had seen fair trade projects in Nepal that were not sustainable, she was determined that Seven Women would be different.

It wasn't easy. Logistics was a challenge, the women had to overcome self-doubt about their abilities after years of discrimination and progress in producing quality goods was slow. But with Wollard's persistence many of the women are now aiming to train others, hoping that they too can help women like themselves. Some are even looking to develop their own businesses, with handicapped women even employing non-handicapped women.

Said Wollard: "Slowly, as they received training the women were able to make good quality handmade products that drew them a wage and were sold internationally, this gave them an immense sense of pride." <http://www.blessed-life.com/>

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STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

Imagine running a business or trying to make a living in urban areas in Nepal. Not a drop of water flowing from the taps. An acute shortage of gas for cooking. Long lines for petrol and diesel, and power cuts that go on for 18 hours a day.

If these are not palpable signs of complete failures of accountability, with government in cahoots with cartels, then we should lobby with the New York-based record setter book of World Records to recognise us as the record holders in the category of highest levels of pain endured while trying to live normally in the capital city. Anywhere else in the world, this sort of urban hardship would have been enough to foment a popular revolt.

To be sure, well-to-do pundits will prattle about that elusively cute quality called resilience that we Nepalis supposedly show in the face of extreme hardships. But as a tax-paying citizen, I'm fed up with the way this or any other government has repeatedly failed to enable the provision, let alone the delivery itself, of basic services. A political process that is numb to people's pain for a long time ceases to be legitimate in any sense. This is the sort of situation we wanted our leaders to avoid when we cheered them on with the shouts of New Nepal only a few years ago.

But instead of getting solutions, we get insults to

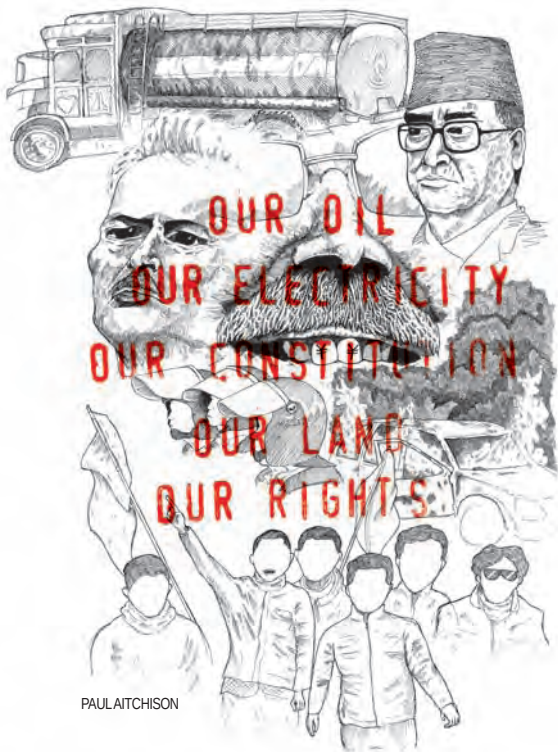
injuries. The prime minister, who has spent his adult life demonising the free market and blowing up symbols of development such as bridges and schools, recently unveiled his vision for creating 700,000 new jobs in 17 different areas. It's as though the PM thought that if he just waved a magic wand, investors would come flocking, and jobs would appear.

The question is: what to do? Keeping quiet, muttering from the sidelines, minding one's own business and not ruffling feathers—all these add up to an option. Leaving Nepal for better opportunities in India, the Gulf and the West has long been the rite of passage for millions of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled Nepalis. The more the able-bodied citizens leave, the fewer there are inside the country to cause trouble in the villages and on the streets.

Finding a way to join the government as an adviser is another win-win option: one can take credit if something good gets done, and blame others when nothing gets done. Then there's the promise of Facebook-style online activism: impassioned status updates and vigorously shared messages, laced with the cloying theme of national unity that give an illusion of a revolution taking place outside one's window.

But for real changes ahead, there is no substitute now for another Kathmandu Spring that throws up alternatives to the present crop of leaders. Such a spring would not be against multi-party democracy. It will be against the same old political parties with the same old netas for their collective crime-like failure to deliver for the majority: a national constitution, followed by sufficient clean water, road networks, electricity, cooking gas, petrol, diesel, and, most of all, a safe and secure future to live as one pleases in one's own country without breaking any law. 🇳🇵

For someone who was so politically clumsy that he ended up courting controversy even on the mind-numbingly simple matter of keeping government information secret, how can anyone hope that the PM can really see sufficiently far into the future to make his plans come true? When nice-sounding grand visions trump many small but iterative steps of unglamorous execution, our future is doomed to look better only in distant dreams, while our present remains oppressive.



PAUL AITCHISON

Highway to Berlin

When director Deepak Rauniyar expressed his wish last year that his film Highway be selected for the Berlin International Film Festival, little did he know that his dream would come true.

Highway will be screened at the 62nd Berlin Festival in the Panorama segment, along with 27 other movies.

This entry is a first for any Nepali film at an international film festival. This year, Highway is also the only selection from South Asia and has qualified for the Best First Feature Award. Set against the backdrop of a banda, Highway explores five different relationship stories that connect during an ill-fated bus journey from eastern Nepal to the capital Kathmandu.

Highway is co-produced by Louverture Films, a New York-based film production company, and Sameer M Dixit and Lonim P Dixit.

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer

BIZ BRIEFS



High on tab

The world's cheapest tablet, the Ubislate 7+, has been introduced in Nepal by Gizmos Nepal. Priced at just Rs 6,000, the device features internet connectivity through GPRS and Wi-Fi. Users will also have access to Android applications. Likewise, the device which also functions as a cell phone comes with expandable memory of up to 32 GB and a USB port.

Record sales

Skoda sold 454,700 vehicles worldwide during the first half of 2011, a record for the Czech-based manufacturer and an impressive 20 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2010. June proved to be a particularly strong month, as it recorded the best ever June figures of 81,300 vehicles sold across its global network of dealers. It has been the most successful year in automobile sales in the company's history.



Better services



Hansraj Hulaschand, authorised dealers of Bajaj motorcycles, has upgraded its services through Manakamana Trade Link and Khan Automobiles. The upgraded showrooms in Lahan & Rajbiraj will provide world class services to their customers and also sell genuine spare parts of Bajaj motorcycles.

Easy money

Himalayan Bank and Transmit International Inc., a New Jersey, USA based remittance company have signed an agreement to provide remittance services to Nepali residents in USA. Through this partnership, customers will be able to easily send money to Himalayan Bank accounts and other Nepali bank accounts in Nepal.



Eco speakers

Nepali Times Eco Fair 11-12 February at the Nepal Academy Kamaladi will also feature speakers on sustainable living and the environment. The list of invited speakers include:



Bhushan Tuladhar	UN Habitat	11 Feb	1000 - 1045
Susanne Badoch	Energy Efficiency Center	11 Feb	1100 - 1145
Surendra Bhakta Mathema	Nepal Micro Hydro Power	11 Feb	1200 - 1245
Mausam Khanal	Nepal River Conservation Trust	11 Feb	1300 - 1345
Franziska Huebsch	Nepal Biogas Promotion Center	11 Feb	1400 - 1445
Ram Dhital	Alternative Energy Promotion Center	11 Feb	1500 - 1545
Amrit Singh Thapa	E-energies	12 Feb	1000 - 1030
Bibhuti Man Singh	Society of Nepali Architecture (SONA)	12 Feb	1045 - 1130
Shardha Vaidya	WEPCO	12 Feb	1145 - 1230
Bikash Adhikari	Nepal Bio Gas Promotion Center	12 Feb	1245 - 1330
Himadri Palikhe	GIZ Include	12 Feb	1345 - 1430
Sanu Kaji Sharestha	Foundation for Sustainable Technology	12 Feb	1445 - 1530
Raj Kumar Thapa	Solar Solution	12 Feb	1545 - 1630
Judith Chase	Everything Organic Nursery	12 Feb	TBA

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Nepali women climbers



PICS: PASANG LHAMU SHERPA



“ Their success in the male-dominated world of Himalayan climbing will encourage Nepali women to follow their dreams, even when the path is a precarious, uphill ascent. ”

Stephanie Maxheim,
French climber

ALONZO LUCIUS LYONS

Something was missing from Stephanie Maxheim's four previous mountaineering expeditions to Nepal. "Where were the women?" the climber from Chamonix wondered.

Although a successful all-women's expedition to Mt Everest in 2007 set an example for other women climbers, and there are many trekking guides who are women, Nepal's gender disparity is reflected in the low participation of women in mountaineering expeditions.

Maxheim was determined to change all that and her first step was to organize a joint French-Nepali women's expedition to the 6,814m-high Mt Ama Dablam last November. The goal was to collaborate with female Nepali climbers and provide a challenging summit and enhance their technical skills.

"I wanted to meet the women of Nepal, to get to know them, their lives," Maxheim explained in Kathmandu recently.

With the help of Everest Women's 7 Summit Eco-Action she connected with two qualified female climbers, Pema and Dawa Sherpa from Rolwaling. French climber

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BURTSEV EVGENY

Ingrid Engelbrecht joined the team, and Maxheim recalled: "Leadership responsibilities were as challenging as the climbing."

The expedition set off for the Khumbu in early November 2011, accompanied by Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, a female Nepali guide and three male Nepali guides. "It was ten days before we really began communicating with each other, but as we became more comfortable with one another, we began sharing thoughts on femininity and cultural perceptions," Maxheim recalls.

Engelbrecht was surprised to learn from her Nepali climbers

about the discrimination and stigmatisation that Nepali women face, especially in rural areas. Women who are able to find employment as porters and guides have financial independence and other opportunities that are unheard of for traditional Nepali women who live relatively sheltered existences dominated by oppressive, patriarchal rules.

There are women-run companies that have broken free. Three Sisters Adventure Trekking (www.3SistersAdventure.com), has worked since the mid-1990s to empower Nepali women, trained over 800

WOMEN ON TOP: (From left to right) Dawa Jangzum Sherpa on a rock face, and on the summit of Mt Ama Dablam with Ingrid Engelbrecht and Pasang Lhamu. The women's team below the mountain with Stephanie Maxheim and the precariously perched Camp 2 with Kangtega and Thamserku in background.

women providing female guides and porters for female trekking parties. Friends Adventure Team and Himalayan Mentor (www.HimalayanMentor.com) in Kathmandu also provide female trekking guides for female tourists.

Ingrid and Dawa summited Ama Dablam on 23 November and the achievement was all the more symbolic because it showed what Nepali women are capable of if they were given the same opportunities and status in society as the men.

The expedition not only gave experience and skills to Nepali climbers, but Pema and Dawa are now mountaineering guides themselves. Said Maxheim: "Their success in the male-dominated world of Himalayan climbing will encourage Nepali women to follow their dreams, even when the path is a precarious, uphill ascent." 🇳🇵

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EVENTS



Valentines Day Special, celebrate love with dance, face painting, photo booths and special sweet dishes this Valentines Day. *Rs 200, 14 February, 3pm onwards, Bagaicha, Jawalakhel, 9841721736, 9841593121*



Garage Sale for a Better World, Animal Nepal and 1905 are organising a charity garage sale to encourage animal care in Nepal. *4 February, 10am to 2pm, 1905, Kantipath*

GIHE Youthfest 2012, music, food and unlimited entertainment with performances by Nepsydaz, Albatross

and Adrian Pradhan. *11 February, 11am, GEMS Complex, Dhapakhel, 9849511171, 9849831493, 9808530042*

Emotions in Motion, an art exhibition by Govinda Sah with exquisite modern paintings. *Closes on 7 February, 11am onwards, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babermahal Revisited*

Cycle 7: Identity, three photography installations: Navarasa, Ink'd and The Tales of Dirty Feet by talented photographers. *9.30 am to 8pm, 6 January to 15 February, Galleria CUC, Deetya Complex, Maharajgunj*



Contemporary Forms, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre presents 'The Prakriti Project Eternal Visions - Contemporary Forms' by Rabindra Shakya and Maureen Drdak. *9 to 26 February, 5.30 pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited*

Ultimate Photography Workshop, Artudio presents the 12th session of digital photography workshop. *Rs 3000, Starting from mid-February, 7am to 9am, Artudio, Lazimpat, 9841498425, 9841379780*

MUSIC

Black History Month, Risty Nails and Mukti N' Revival commemorate the spirit of blues artists. *Rs 200, 3 February, 7.30 pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel*



Pink Floyd Tribute Concert, a tribute to the one of the most influential rock bands in history. *11 February, 2pm to 7pm, Bagaicha, Jawalakhel*

End of the World Tour III, a series of gigs with bands like Equals and Rage Hybrid. *3 February, 5pm onwards, Gee's Terrace, Thamel*



Celebrating Black History Month, you've grown with the music of many black artists, now you have a chance to learn it. *Free entrance, 5, 12 and 19 February, 10am to 12pm, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory*

DINING

Mako's, an elegant fine dining Japanese restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel which serves authentic Japanese cuisine. *Timings are 11.30 to 14.30 and 18pm to 22pm. Dwarika Hotel, Battisputali, 4479488*

Buddha Bar, offers a warm and cozy space for intimate conversations over a large selection of drinks. *Thamel, 9851053235*

Cha Cha Café, this Japanese restaurant is popular for its spaghettis and burger steaks. *Thamel*



Trisara, get ready for some affordable but equally scrumptious snacks- its crispy chicken and khau soi is worth a mention. *Lazimpat*

Black Pepper Café & Pub, cosmopolitan dining and drinking in a traditional style courtyard, try the apple sauce pork chops and enjoy the good service. *Kopundole Height, Lalitpur, 5521897, 5536926*



BBQ Station, a place for those of you who simply can't do without meat. BBQ Station offers a chance to make your own Barbeque on coal. *Jhamsikhel*

Milk Coffee and Cocktail Café, coffee house during the day and a cozy lounge serving cocktails at night, try its yarchagumba and molecular cocktails



along with the famous Starbucks. *Woodland Complex, Durbar Marg*

Chopstix, savory Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Begin your feast with the Dragon Chicken; it is one-of-a-kind. *Kumaripati, 5551118*



1905 Restaurant, feast on roasted delights within this converted aristocratic residence. Walled ambience and green surroundings make it an oasis within the city. *Kantipath, 4215068*

Chez Caroline, for business lunches and relaxed dinners, *Babar Mahal Revisited*

The Yellow Chili, Sanjeev Kapoor's renowned restaurant with Indian cuisine and local delicacies. *Bluebird Complex, Thapathali*

Bronco Billy, a restaurant in town



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offering Tex-Mex and Indian dishes. They make their own corn tortillas, which gets a big thumbs-up. But really, we can't wait to try its Margaritas. *Pulchowk, opposite Namaste Supermarket*



Yin Yang Restaurant, east meets west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Add a little spice in your life with their pad thai or green curry. If you can't handle the heat, fall into the safety net of its western dishes. 10am to 10pm, Thamel, 4701510

Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Café, enjoy wood-fired pizza with a superb view of boudha stupa and free wi-fi. *Boudha, 2130681*

The Ghangri Café, a quiet and relaxing place with delicious food. Although known for their open momos, its Chef Salad is equally delicious. *Pulchowk, 5528703, ghangricafe@hotmail.com*

Kaiser Cafe Restaurant & Bar, have a BBQ lunch and a glass of wine or beer inside the peaceful Garden of Dreams. *Thamel, 4425341*



Picnic, enjoy this Korean restaurant with affordable prices and heaping portions. *Thamel*

Cinnamon Grill and Lounge, mouth watering delicacies with live music. Try the grilled tenderloin steak and quiche lorraine with fresh fruit salad. 5521339, *Jhamsikhel*

Aalishan, serves authentic Indian delicacies. Try the special chicken biryani and chicken reshmi kabab. 5550039, *Jawalakhel*

GETAWAYS



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Day 20

The Great Himalaya Trail team is heading downwards to the Arun river in Khandbari before climbing again towards Khumbu. The four member team led by 21-time Mt Everest summiter is on an epic 1,600km 120 day traverse of the Nepal Himalaya. On the 19th day of the trek on Wednesday, there was a chirpy status update from Linda Bezemer, a trekker who seems to have tagged along with the team, saying: "Impressive to walk with Apa Sherpa. I'm very proud I can catch up!" seems to be a sign that everything is going well for the celebrity trekkers.

Pictures of Apa Sherpa with a Nepali flag in view of the Kangla Pass (*pictured*) and breaking a trail through the snow with Tenzing Dorje were posted in Facebook as the team heads away from the most eastern point of their trek.



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SOMEPLACE ELSE

Outside the white table cloths of any great gustatory capital are portable kitchens, sidewalk hawkers and hole-in-the-walls, at which loyal locals and the occasional tourist queue for a quick fix. These junctures of brief transactions not only afford conveniences that seam the urban patchwork but also intimate a city's romantic allure of anonymity and seemingly endless possibility. To this end Kathmandu is no exception, where open-air finger food (mostly fried) is such a common fixture, often taken for granted.

Around the corner from Tip Top's famed samosas and croquets in New Road, the four-month-old Japanese Crepe House Station caught my eye with its hand-painted, clean typography befitting of an artless lemonade stand. But in lieu of lemons, street side fare is consecrated in the unlikely marriage of the land of the rising sun and the quintessential



French flapjack. A mock display of plated crêpes in variation, which could either tempt or creep, is typical of manicured models found in the vitrines of Tokyo sweet shops and ice cream parlours. All smiles, orange bonnets and matching aprons complete the outfits of the station's coquettish crêpières who dub the cookie-cutter charm of Orange Juleps and Western fast food chains.

Fitted with a flattop crêpe pan, wooden trowels (batter spreader) and a long steel spatula, the station is



PICS: MARCO POLLO

ostensibly authentic. Crêpes are made to order and customized to one's preference. The batter is reliable and uniform, but cooking time can be extended a tad for that perfect golden edge.

Fillings are limited to sweet combinations of seasonal fruit—namely strawberry, pineapple, banana, mango, and apple—standard ice cream flavours, chocolate sauce and cinnamon.

Uniquely Nepali, the Khuwa crêpe, stuffed with khuwa (that sapid milk solid somewhere between fresh cheese and

curd) and enveloped with whipped cream, is a local favourite.

Missing are classic crêpe ingredients like lemon, powdered sugar, or Nutella (or a pseudo-brand of the hazelnut chocolate spread), as well as savoury crêpes or galettes, easily prepared with a hunk of local cheese and a sprinkling of garden herbs.

It's do or die for alfresco food stalls like the Japanese Crepe House, where common comforts and irresistible price tags make the grade. It may be too early to gauge if crêpes will catch on or kick to the curb, but already, the warm handheld snack is popular with teenie boppers and could only compliment ubiquitous juice stands and mithais. With a second stand in Sundhara already, the Japanese Crepe House is an eager venture, which if tweaked, could make a blissful blintz. 

Marco Pollo

From Bishal Bazar walk towards Darbar Square and stop before crossing Freak Street



The Desendants





MUST SEE

Sophia Pande

It is difficult to claim that one comes from a perfect family. Perhaps the 'perfect' family does not even exist. No matter how much one might love one's parents or relatives there are always unsaid words looming over the dining table. Alexander Payne's The Descendants deals with the story of one such, now almost archetypical, dysfunctional American family.

Matt King (George Clooney) returns home from a work meeting one day to find that his adventure-loving wife, Elizabeth (Patricia Hastie), has suffered a brain injury while racing a motor boat. Stunned and regretful at his neglect of his wife in the recent past, Matt casts around for things to do with his youngest daughter, the ten year old Scottie (Amara Miller), only to find that Scottie is wayward, lonely, and inclined to give the finger to anyone or anything she doesn't like.

When Matt is gently told by the doctors that Elizabeth's condition is deteriorating and that her will states that she be taken off life support his world starts to disintegrate. Previously Elizabeth had been the one looking after the children while Matt worked vigorously at his law firm. All of a sudden he is faced with two willful girls who swear profusely, are frightfully behaved, and have a barely veiled contempt and bitterness towards both their parents. It is only when Matt goes to the next island over (they live in what ought to be an idyllic Hawaii) to pick up his 17-year-old daughter Alexandra (Shailene Woodley) who is in an expensive boarding school/rehab center for naughty girls (she drinks, she likes older men) that we begin to realize why the girls are the way they are.

Alexandra confesses to Matt that she hates her mother because she knows that she is too much like her. She also claims that she caught Elizabeth cheating on Matt. Matt is

stunned. He confirms Alex's story with some close friends who admit that Elizabeth had been planning to leave Matt for her lover.

The story thus far is formulaic enough. What causes it to transcend its seemingly mundane subject matter is a superb performance by George Clooney. Super stars like Clooney are rarely able to escape playing versions of themselves in movies that are essentially star vehicles (think Julia Roberts and Tom Cruise). Clooney is astonishing as the bumbling, shambling middle aged dad with a nerdy side-part that almost manages to conceal his good looks. His unmannered, unaffected, and baldly honest performance as a father faced with trying to help his daughters deal with the ugliness of life: death, dishonesty and infidelity is what makes The Descendants an entrancing film.

His acting is not showy, he does not steal any scene, he does not fall into the trap of playing the maudlin, stricken widower. There are moments of real humour in this film, and a few moments of heartbreak. The scene of Matt saying goodbye to his wife on her death bed is simple, only a minute long, and will probably cause anyone who watches it to feel an awful wrenching of the heart.

We all deal with our own specifically difficult families. We love them, sometimes we hate them, and we are stuck with them. The Descendants is a film where everyone concerned, the characters and the viewer, slowly come to the realisation that in the end, however difficult, the only thing that matters is family. 🇳🇵

All DVDs reviewed in this column are available at the writer's favourite

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Watch trailer

Vitamin supplements



DHANVANTARI

Buddha Basnyat, MD

Drug companies that make vitamin supplements are not exactly ecstatic these days. Recent medical journal data show the benefits of taking vitamin supplements may be exaggerated. It is well established only to ensure an adequate intake of folic acid (B9) in young women and B12 and vitamin D in the elderly.

So, there is no good reason to take some of the highest-selling vitamins (A,C and E) routinely if you are eating a normal, balanced diet. In fact, a placebo-controlled trial among Finnish smokers taking a high dose of vitamin A supplement showed that there was significantly increased lung cancer rates in the vitamin A cohort. Consuming biologically-active substances (vitamins) should not be assumed to be risk free.

A pooled analysis of data from 26 clinical trials including 105,065 subjects found that

vitamin E supplements were associated with an increased risk of death. Similarly, another study of 11,350 people showed that preventive use of over 200 mg of vitamin C per day did not reduce the risk of developing a cold or the severity of cold symptoms. So much for the sugar-flavoured vitamin C pill you popped this morning.



Vitamin D supplement, however may be useful in the elderly, especially those with dark skin with limited exposure to sunlight. Vitamin D will strengthen bones and prevent fractures. Older people may not be able to absorb vitamin B12 found in meat and fish.

Folic acid (B9) deficiency leads to birth defects which occur early in pregnancy before most women know they are pregnant. Folic acid is available in beans, peas, oranges and dark-green vegetables which we do not seem to get enough of. Hence supplementing the diet of women of child-bearing age with folic acid has decreased the incidence of these birth defects in their offspring.

For sure, in impoverished areas of the world like Nepal where there may be vitamin deficiency in the regular diet, taking vitamin supplements may be prudent. For example, vitamin A deficiency leads to night blindness in the developing world. Deficiency of vitamin C causes bleeding gums and slow healing of wounds. Vitamin A is found in dairy products and yellow or orange fruits, and citrus fruits are rich in vitamin C.

Neither do vitamin supplements seem to prevent heart attacks, strokes and cancer, diseases prevalent in both the rich and poor worlds. 🇳🇵



WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The storms that battered the eastern Mediterranean earlier this week have been speeding towards central Asia and will arrive over Nepal on Friday, bringing considerable cloud cover and some snow flurries over the higher valleys. This will cap the maximum temperature below 20 Celsius on Saturday. However, the clouds will pass by Sunday bringing back the sunny weather and southwesterly wind, raising temperatures slightly. Kathmandu Valley will have smoggy mornings, and the rest of the country will be affected by Indian haze till 3,000m.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
		
19-02	19-05	21-05





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BIKRAM RAI

DIVIDING UP: Coordinator of the State Restructuring Commission (SRC) Madan Prasad Pariyar submits the commission's report to PM Baburam Bhattarai on Tuesday. SRC has proposed an 11-state federal model based on ethnicity and language. A separate report was submitted by the dissatisfied members of the commission.



BIKRAM RAI

GO SOLAR: CA member Gagan Thapa and DIG Ganesh Raj Rai inaugurate Nepal's first solar-powered bus stand at the old bus park opposite Tudikhel on Wednesday.



GOPAL GARTUALA

TUSKEN TERROR: A wild elephant takes a stroll in Birtamode main road, closing down a part of the East-West highway and the market for a couple of hours. In the last six months more than 10 people have been killed by wild elephants in eastern districts.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



BHRIKUTI RAI

When Nepalis talk about water bodies they often think only about rivers. But for conservationist Top Khatri, it is all about wetlands.

However, Khatri, who is the national project manager of Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands in Nepal (CSUWN), says it is difficult to get officials and locals alike interested in marshes, swamps, floodplains and lakes which form a vital part of Nepal's aquatic ecosystem.

"Wetlands are not wastelands," says Khatri, who adds these vital water systems are being threatened by encroachment, pollution and drainage. "These is very little awareness about how important they are for the environment."

Although wetlands account for only five percent of Nepal's total surface area, their importance far outstrips their size. Wetlands are important stopovers for migratory birds, they are rich repositories of biodiversity, they recharge groundwater by storing monsoon runoff during the dry season and they are important for agriculture.

Nepal has 20 wetland ecosystems of global significance, but Khatri worries that they are not given priority in the national agenda. Furthermore, Nepalis have limited knowledge about their importance.

Wetlands in Nepal are home to many of the 89 globally-threatened animal species. Nearly a quarter of the 867 bird species found in Nepal depend on wetlands, including several migratory and birds on the brink of extinction.

"Destruction of wetlands and pollution of rivers and lakes have led to dwindling bird populations and climate change has forced birds to change their migratory patterns," says Hum Bahadur Gurung of Bird Conservation Nepal.

Both Gurung and Khatri are keen to draw attention to



“Wetlands are not wastelands”

Conservationists battle ignorance and apathy to put Nepal's endangered wetlands on the priority protection list

the importance of wetlands by marking World Wetlands Day on 2 February. The date marks the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, and this year's theme is 'Wetlands and Tourism'. They are also celebrating the day by releasing the findings of a nationwide

bird census carried out in January (see box) and want to draw the attention of the government to make necessary laws and implement protection measures for wetlands.

Khatri says his organisation wants to use this year's World Wetlands Day to integrate wetland protection with

eco-tourism so that money from visitors can be ploughed into conservation work. For this it is important to involve local people living on the fringes of wetlands so that they have a stake in the protection of the water bodies. So far 463 households directly dependent on wetlands have



been identified for alternative livelihood support around Ghodaghodi Lake in Bardiya and Kosi Tapu Wildlife Reserve in Sunsari.

The Kosi Tapu was the first wetland site of international importance identified in Nepal, and is the largest with 17 types of wetland within its perimeter. Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands in Nepal has also begun a home stay program for tourists and birdwatchers in Kosi Tappu so that income is injected directly into the village economy. "Introducing activities like kayaking or rafting in wetlands, not only generates awareness but also helps increase incomes for local communities," says Khatri.

Khatri and Gurung are working together to organise bird watching events in Kosi Tapu, Pokhara, Jagdishpur and other wetland sites on Friday.

What worries Khatri is that although national legislation, park rules and regulations have been passed to protect biodiversity around wetlands around the country, enforcement remains weak. He says: "The National Wetland Policy is finally awaiting cabinet approval, but that is just the beginning. In Nepal, it is always the implementation that is a bigger challenge."

Bird census

To mark World Wetlands Day on 2 February a water bird census has been organised throughout Nepal. The annual census is held throughout Asia, and in Nepal it is organised by Bird Conservation Nepal, Himalayan Nature and Bird Education Society.

Two hundred volunteers fanned out across Nepal in January from Kosi Tappu, Chitwan National Park, Rara Lake to Ghodaghodi Lake. "By including locals and volunteers, we are encouraging a sustainable method of conducting a bird census," says Hem Sagar Baral of Himalayan Nature.

So far the volunteers and groups involved have gathered data through a direct count method where data collectors are given a bird form and site form. The bird form is to register the total numbers of birds seen at a certain time in a wetland while the site form is to collect information about the coordinates of the site and to see if the site is endangered or polluted.



HEM SAGAR BARAL/HIMALAYAN NATURE

After the data is collected, Baral uses the raw findings to make a complete count. The final count will be released on Friday and will help conservation groups to plan out future efforts to protect wetlands which are important habitats of migratory and resident bird species.

Although it is too early to predict whether the bird population has decreased or not, Baral says from what he has seen in Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve, the number of water birds seem to be decreasing.

Says Hum Gurung of Bird Conservation Nepal: "The census will help us gauge the trend in bird populations."

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Not just for the birds, #583
Feathered friends, #423
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State of limbo

Thousands of Nepalis are stateless because the state does not give citizenship in the mother's name

RUBEENA MAHATO

On 27 February last year, the Supreme Court made a landmark decision in Sabina Damai's case by establishing the mother's nationality as a basis to grant citizenship.

Sabina doesn't know who her father is and went to court after the district office repeatedly turned down her request for citizenship citing absence of the father. The verdict came as a ray of hope for many Nepalis who have been refused citizenship because of a discriminatory law that makes a father's citizenship mandatory for an offspring to be eligible for citizenship. It is not enough for the mother to be a Nepali.

The Supreme Court ordered the Home Ministry to immediately start giving out citizenship certificates also based on a mother's papers. The ministry sent letters to all district administrations to

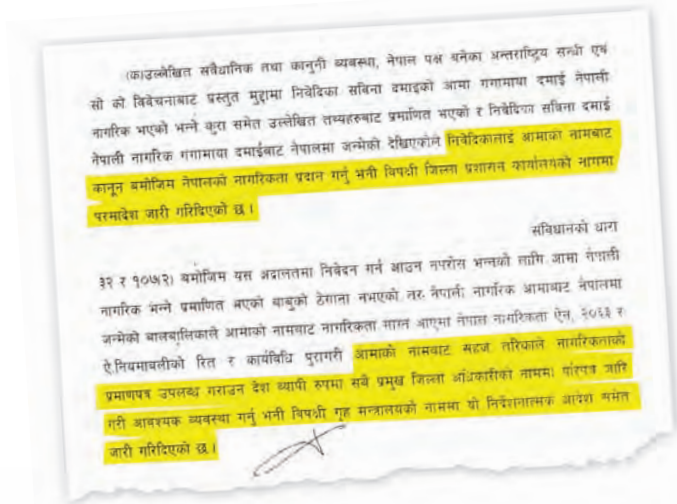
that effect, but most districts still ask mothers to bring their husbands' citizenship papers, marriage certificates and official letters proving the child was born to the father.

R. Gurung is unable to get citizenship for her daughter because the Lalitpur District Administration Office has refused to act on the Supreme Court's directive. The office says it hasn't got the letter from the court. Her daughter is appearing for SLC exams this year and will need citizenship papers for further studies. "How long should I wait?" asks Gurung. "I gave birth to my daughter in Nepal but can't get her Nepali citizenship."

Meera Dhungana, the lawyer who fought the case of Sabina Damai says district administrations are defying the court's order. "How can some district offices get the letters and others not?" she asks. "They are not willing to believe that a woman can give her name to her children."

S. Rai, 65, has spent most of her life trying to get Nepali citizenships for her sons

IN BLACK AND WHITE: Highlighted excerpts of Supreme Court's verdict in Sabina Damai case.



In the name of the father



THIS IS IT
Rubeena Mahato

One third of our CA members are women and they come from across the socio-economic spectrum. We have had women serve as deputy prime minister, defense minister and speaker of the house. Young Nepali women made up one-third of the fighters in the Maoist army during the war, and women were at the forefront of the street protests that brought down the monarchy.

One would therefore expect Nepali women to enjoy greater civil and political rights, in paper at least. Alas, Nepal's citizenship provisions reek of outright discrimination and orthodoxy. A woman's citizenship is only a piece of laminated paper. It allows her to live, work, vote and spend money in this country, but doesn't allow her to pass those rights to her children.

A man goes to the district office, gets citizenship papers for his children within a few hours, no questions asked. No one even bothers him with the details of his marriage or intruding questions about the whereabouts of the mother. A woman goes to the same office, she doesn't just have to produce the father's citizenship but prove that she was, or is, married to the man. She has to put up with all sorts of insulting remarks, questions about her

character, and still return empty handed. The fact that she is a Nepali and her children were born in this land does not matter. What matters is that the father of her children has refused to acknowledge them, and so they don't deserve to be Nepalis. Thousands of Nepali men and women whose fathers have abandoned their families, or do not cooperate with the mother, are rendered stateless. Without citizenship papers, they are not eligible to apply for jobs, hold property or get a passport to travel abroad.

The Nepali state still does not recognise maternal lineage as a basis for citizenship

Mass murderers and criminals will not have their Nepali citizenships revoked, but fatherless children have no place here. Even after a clear Supreme Court verdict in Sabina Damai's case that established a mother's right to transfer citizenship, CDO offices still demand a father's citizenship and a marriage certificate when a woman applies for citizenship for her offspring.

Meera Dhungana, the advocate who fought the landmark case told me: "They will defy the Supreme Court, but they won't change their mindset." It gets even more difficult when a Nepali



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

mother is married to a foreigner. Instead of resolving this issue, a high level task force has recommended that the new constitution have even stricter provisions for Nepali women marrying foreigners to get citizenship rights for their children.

A Nepali man's foreigner wife can get

a Nepali citizenship as soon as she can prove she has relinquished her earlier citizenship. But a Nepali woman's foreigner husband has to stay in Nepal for 15 years before he can be considered for citizenship. Their children can be naturalised after that but will still not be eligible to contest top posts like head of the state, prime minister and chiefs of parliament, judiciary and security agencies.

These new provisions will directly infringe upon a woman's right to marriage and family, right to choose the place of residence and right of her children to choose their citizenship. What's worse is that these provisions were proposed by 'revolutionary' members of our Constituent Assembly who claim to be champions of gender equality.

Anyone arguing that all this is grossly unfair is usually met with a readymade answer from our uber-nationalist netas: we have to protect Nepal from being over-run by Indians marrying our women. It seems only women are capable of endangering this country's sovereignty even when it is mostly corrupt men who are involved in the forfeiting of citizenships and passports. Why should Nepali women have to pay the price for the dishonesty of a few men? Why should their children suffer? Go and seal the border if you are so insecure about Nepal's sovereignty.

Time for CA members, men and women, to stand up for the basic human right to citizenship for tens of thousands of present and future stateless Nepalis.

who are over 40. Her husband committed suicide soon after marriage, and his family disowned her. Rai raised her two sons by herself, and made sure they were well educated. But now can't get proper jobs, or own businesses or property.

A. Shrestha was married to an Indian national, but separated few years later. The authorities have asked her to furnish the father's citizenship and their marriage certificate in order to process her daughter's citizenship papers. "I am worried about my daughter's future, where should I go?" she asks.

Many women are now

seeking citizenship papers through illegal channels. "They are forcing women like us to commit a crime out of desperation," Shrestha says, "is this the nationalism they are trying to protect?"

Dhungana says the Supreme Court has given a very clear verdict, and adds: "It is now up to the state to act on it."

(Some names of mothers in this story have been changed at their request.)

nepalitimes.com

Stateless in their own motherland, #563



WHO CAN BE CITIZEN?

According to the new draft provision in the new constitution, these are the criteria for citizenship. Lawyers say this is more regressive than existing laws.

- Both mother and father have to be Nepali citizens for the children to get citizenship by descent. The Interim Constitution accepts the presence of either parent.
- Children born of a Nepali and foreigner parent will not be eligible for Nepali citizenship unless the foreigner parent renounces his/her previous citizenship. In case they refuse to do so, the children will risk being stateless.
- A child born of a Nepali mother but whose father's status is unknown will not be eligible for citizenship.
- Children born in Nepal whose parents are unknown will get citizenship by descent but if one of the parents is discovered to be a non-Nepali, their citizenship will change to 'naturalised'.
- A Nepali woman's foreigner husband will have to live in Nepal for 15 years on a regular basis before being considered for Nepali nationality whereas the foreigner wife of a Nepali husband will get Nepali citizenship as soon as she relinquishes her foreign citizenship.

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HIMAL Khabarpatrika

30 January – 12 February

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Paying for war during peace



Kantipur, 30 January

कान्तिपुर

It has been more than five years since the end of the civil war, but post-war reconstruction and political instability continues to bleed the country's economy.

The Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, which was established in 2005, has distributed 4.4 billion rupees to more than 140,000 people including 17828 families who lost their relatives during the conflict and transition years. Besides providing compensation, the ministry has also been distributing relief packages under 14 categories to injured, tortured, displaced, illegally detained, widowed and orphaned Nepalis.

Even as we approach the sixth anniversary of signing the comprehensive peace agreement, the number of people who come to the ministry claiming to be victims of war and demanding for compensation remains high. The figures are likely to increase significantly in the coming years as many are yet to be compensated for the destruction of property during the war and Madhes movement.



Happy farmers

Naya Patrika, 31 January

नयाँ पत्रिका

Farmers of Palpa are earning thousands from commercial cultivation of Amriso or broom grass. Amriso grows well even in rocky landscapes, requires minimum investment and has a good market. Amriso is mostly used to make brooms as well as for fodder and firewood. The Forestry Office in Tansen is organising a campaign to declare Palpa an Amriso district and has been promoting Amriso plantations in government premises, private forests and along roadsides.

The district office had planted 19,000 Amriso saplings five years ago. Not only has Amriso improved the livelihood of local farmers but also helped in conserving the soil and increasing greenery.

"Rs 20 million worth of Amriso was exported from the district last year," Rambabu Paudel of Forestry Office said. "Some farmers are earning upto Rs 300,000 from Amriso alone." Locals are using profits from Amriso farming to help schools and other social initiatives.

The pursuit of happiness

Rapa Sharma 'Neha' in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 30 January-12 February

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Saraswati Magar, 35, of Ramghat, Pokhara had paid half a million rupees to a middleman for a fake marriage with a South Korean man, who is 20 years her senior. She has been living with him in Chanju for the past two years. "I was told that I would be free once I landed in Korea but I am forced to live with a man my father's age," she says.

Magar's husband neither pays her nor allows her to work outside the home. She

is just a wife to him. Now he wants her to give him a baby. If she refuses, he will not sign the necessary documents and Magar might end up behind bars.

Kamala Neupane, 26, of Ratmate, Pokhara and Nilam KC, 28 of Manthali in Ramechhap also share the same plight. "The middleman had assured me that the paper work was just a formality and I could work freely here. But the day I arrived here, I realised that I was sold just like Nepali girls are trafficked to brothels in Mumbai," she told *Himal Khabarpatrika*. KC is currently living with her

old Korean husband in Iksan. She had paid middleman Rs 700,000 thinking it was a fake marriage.

All three women understood the mess they were in only after they landed in Korea and were forced to work as bonded labourers. More than 1000 Nepali women have married Koreans to gain entry into the country. However, the Nepali embassy in Seoul only has records for 300 such women. Many of the Nepali women are physically assaulted by their husbands, but have no legal recourse and are left to suffer in silence.

According to Korean law, foreign women are eligible to receive marriage certificates within three months of their stay. They don't need work permits, but need their husbands' approvals every six months for visa extensions. The South Korean men many of whom are above 50 years, and either divorced or separated, want to marry Nepali women because they can easily use them as domestic help and free labourers.



Sword: Supreme Court verdict
Table: May 28

नागरिक Deven in *Nagarik*, January 30

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Mr Prime Minister, can you please explain to me what Jana-Satta is?”

US Ambassador Scott H DeLisi asks PM Bhattarai during their meeting in Singha Durbar on Wednesday, quoted in *Nagarik*.

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Successful return



Santa Gaha Magar in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 12 February

हिमाल

While 1500 Nepalis leave the country each day in search of better opportunities and brighter future, Bikram Pun returned back home with the determination to succeed.

Pun rented a piece of land in Golfutar, Kathmandu and decided to start commercial mushroom farming. He has been producing 400 Kgs of mushrooms monthly which he supplies to various hotels in the capital.

Pun works 14 hours a day and

says he enjoys working in the motherland. With rising demand for mushroom and seeds, the young farmer is planning to expand his business and wants to triple the production in coming years.

But he has also faced many challenges so far, with load shedding being the biggest problem. "It is important to maintain consistent temperature to get desired quality of mushrooms. I have to wake up in the middle of the night to check the temperatures when there is no electricity," he says. Pun has also incurred losses of over a million rupees in six months due to the power cuts, but has not lost hope yet.

Truth interrupted

Yam Birahi in *Annapurna Post*, 30 January

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

In 1980, Argentina became the first country to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Since then 34 post-war states have successfully established similar commissions. While providing justice is the primary aim of TRC, it also ensures that no such atrocities occur in the future. However, even after years of deliberation, Nepal has failed to deliver justice to the victims of the conflict.

The TRC bill has been stuck in the CA for more than a year and half and even if a commission eventually gets formed, justice for the victims and their families is not guaranteed. The political parties are pressing for mass amnesty

for all offenders, except in the case of rape and if this happens, there is little use of having a commission in the first place. "Just because the parties happen to reconcile their differences, they don't have the authority to condone the crimes committed. It should be up to the victims or their families to decide if they want to pardon the perpetrators," says human rights worker Charan Prasain.

The activists are frustrated over the apathy the state has shown so far towards their repeated calls to look into cases of forced disappearances, murders, rapes and other war crimes. Acting on the writ petition filed by activists, the Supreme Court issued a show cause notice to the government, but it has turned a blind eye to the SC's interim order.



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The bottom line

Only in Nepal would a senior govt official get away with what the **Energetic Minister** proudly announced last week: "The bottom line is that we will only have 14 hours of load-shedding this winter." And we are supposed to hug and kiss Comrade First-Past-the-Post for that? Bottom line, my ass. The donkey can easily see the Under-supply Minister now making a similar statement about the gas shortage: "LPG will be in short supply only till 2014." Or the Prime Minister saying: "Since it now looks like the new constitution is going to be much worse than the one we already have, we have decided to just keep the interim constitution and get it over with." May not be such a bad idea, after all.



The **State Deconstruction Committee** has decided to break Nepal up into 11 provinces, not counting a 'non-territorial Dalit province'. If we are going to be demarcating extra-terrestrial provinces like the proposed Dalitstan, why not address the concerns of other marginalised communities and also declare virtual states for them:

- a) Women's Province (also known as "Stristan")
- b) Squatters' Autonomous Region

- c) Non-Territorial Special Third Gender Zone
- d) Apanga Pradesh
- e) NRN Prefecture



Predictably, the SRC split into the State Restructuring Commission (Revolutionary) and the State Restructuring Commission (Democratic) and the only future course is to reconstitute a new Commission for the Restructuring of the State Reconstruction Commission (**CR-SRC**). In a similar vein, since Comrade Ferocious has decided to

bunk all meetings of the Dispute Resolution Committee that he heads, maybe he needs to set up a Task Force to Resolve Disputes Within the Dispute Resolution Committee (**TFRD-DRC**). And serious attention needs to be paid to the delays in implementing the 45-day Constitution Timetable that BRB had set out when he took office. The only way out now is to agree on a timetable to sit down so they can draw up a new timetable to adjust the old timetable.



Meanwhile, the grunted faction within the dis-grunted faction

of the original rump of the **Sad Bhavana Party** has decided to split into three new splinter groups. One of these is the faction led by Minister of Re-education Rajinder ("Rs 6,000 per Journalist") Mahato who recently declared that he would blockade Kathmandu.



Amidst all the doom and gloom sometimes you see a headline that is like a cloud with the silver lining. The news that the **Nobel Peace Prize Committee** is to be investigated for corruption was one such feel-good piece. Nepal's have no reason to be ashamed of the most corrupt govt in our history when, it seems, even the Nobel Committee is on the take. Which means that in hindsight, it was unfair to ridicule Girija Prasad Koirala and Pushpa Kamal Dahal's chances of jointly getting the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize. They may actually have had a stab at it if we had only got our act together to send an emissary to Oslo bearing gifts.



The other feel-good story this week is that the **United Kingdom** is on the verge of ethnic disintegration with Scotland about to break away. So, it's not just us. And, this one was the best: **Belgium** was shut down again on 30 January because of a bandh. So, does that mean the

Belgians are not going to get US visas, too?



In the old monarchy days, the king and the clown prince never travelled together in the same plane or car. But there seems to be no such rule for the Maoist holy trinity of BRB, PKD and MBK who last week commandeered the ex-royal Super Puma to make an aerial inspection of the new Fast Track Highway. Although they shook hands when they first met up at the helipad, the mule's mole noticed the three studiously avoided each other and there was a stony silence throughout the trip.



There is some serious miscommunication in the Balu Water communication unit. The PM's press adviser apparently didn't know the PM had invited a bunch of journalists for a tete-tete the other day. The invites went from another adviser via Facebook. BRB's well-wishers in the party have also told him point blank that his biggest liability is **Comrade First Lady**.



Headline of the week (with the Ass' aside):

Govt To Segregate Garbage (Wonder Who They Will Put Where)



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