Dil Kumari Oli, 20, brought her month-old baby boy along to the SLC examination centre in Butwal this week. She gave her English exam nursing her baby, and is also taking exams in Economics and Education in the coming week.

She has brought along her fifth grader niece, Ganga, to the exam room. “If the baby cries, I give him to my aunt to breastfeed,” says Ganga.

Dil Kumari’s husband is a former Maoist guerrilla and she had completed up to Grade 8 in Dang.

Common good
An award-winning partnership between a private school in Kathmandu and government schools in Dailekh aims to bring quality education for all.
Once is enough?

Being a third world nation can no longer be an excuse to be third rate where tourism is concerned

to get through. Once outside, they find they have to pay hefty fees to enter cities that are full of trash, garbage and crumbling infrastructure.

Two Tourism Ministers ago there was an effort to try and make the departure holding areas less like gas chambers, but they are back to being scruffily, unventilated, and reeking of unwashed latrines. That minister gave up trying to shake off the image of that claustrophobic airport tax. However, for proof that it is possible to run a clean and efficient airport, one only needs to climb upstairs to the restaurant and lounge run by the Radisson Hotel.

Less said about TIA’s rubber stamp security the better. The four unsolicited pre-departure pats are a joke. The airport police’s idea of ‘beefed up’ security is to add another layer of bureaucracy and an extra frisking on the apron before boarding, instead of fixing unserviceable x-ray machines. It if any consolation, Nepalis are treated even more shabbily than tourists by immigration and customs officials in their own country.

The sole port of arrival and departure gives the first and last impression to visitors, and sadly it shows Nepal in all its grubby microcosm, replicating the squalor, corruption, and the dismissive rudeness of officialdom outside. Down the hill from the airport, the triangular folly known as Tinkune has more than a decade been a symbol of a failing state. Nepal has the look of a country that doesn’t know where it is going, and doesn’t care if the rest of the world knows it.

We understand it is a structural problem that stems from the corrupt politics that has blighted not just the immediate government, but governance overall. And perhaps the poorest country in Asia doesn’t deserve to have a slick airport. But if tourism is such an integral part of our economy, and means so much for the image we project about ourselves, the least we can do is to make it easy and pleasant for visitors to come to Nepal, and stay on.

One must get rid of the shabby habit of trying to fish tourists. Stamp their passports and let them stay for two months. Why force them to stand in line for hours filling forms? There is something that attracts tourists to Nepal even when we make it difficult for them to understand how many more would visit if we reduced the aggravations.

A mountain of tourist is still coming to Nepal despite everything we do to deter them. Perhaps the first step is to make tourists first to overcome lack of information, shoddy web sites, problems with bookings, and not being able to pay online. The information that is available is dominated by reviews and feedback from tourists complaining about over-charging, grimy hotels, sites, problems with bookings, lack of information, shoddy web sites, and tourists being stranded for days by shutdowns.

Then there is the cost of getting to Nepal. Leaving aside flights, which has deliberately priced itself into a premium bracket, it is much cheaper and more convenient for tourists to go to neighbouring countries than to come to Nepal. Treks in northern Thailand, Laos and the Indian Himalaya are much more reasonably priced and less of a hassle to get to. With Burma throwing open its doors, tourists now have additional options.

And it is the infrastructure they land at TIA that arriving tourists find out what we really mean when we promote ‘adventure tourism’. The airport is not for the faint-hearted, the queues snake through the dimly lit, low-ceilinged arrival area. The signs showing which line is for what. Tourists without visas end up waiting more than an hour before boarding, instead of fixing unserviceable x-ray machines.
In a world hungry for new and exotic locales, Bhutan has positioned itself as an exclusive and unspoilt destination. But there are worries that the growth in visitor numbers might undermine the culture of the Himalayan kingdom.

Best known for measuring national development with its Gross National Happiness Index, Bhutan now wants happy tourists to play a larger role in national development. Over the past four decades tourism has followed a policy of ‘high value, low volume’ visitors. A daily tariff is set at $250 for each traveller, which is intended to limit the number of tourists but still attract significant foreign exchange.

“We don’t want a lot of people at one go,” explains Tshering Tobgay, who owns a resort in the Paro Valley, “the policy has avoided the excesses of mass tourism. This is a small country, we don’t want a lot of tourism to come in and spoil our culture and heritage like in other countries.”

Tourism contributes more than US$2 million in annual revenue and the government hopes to boost arrivals to 100,000 by 2013. The tourism industry is second only to hydroelectricity sales to India as a foreign exchange earner.

Kesang Wangdi, director general of Bhutan’s Tourism Council, says tourism will play a greater role in Bhutan’s development in the future. “It is one of our key priorities because of its potential to contribute to more equitable socio-economic development in terms of alleviation of poverty issues and employment generation,” says Wangdi.

Although Bhutan’s GDP is among the highest in South Asia, one-third of the population is in poor. Wangdi says that tourism can support local community development by improving the lives of people in the countryside.

“With the exception of hydropower we don’t have any other viable industry. So tourism is getting a lot of attention, but we also have to be careful that too much expectation is not put on tourism to solve all the issues,” says Thuji Dorji Nadik, also from the Tourism Council.

Bhutan’s latest tourist marketing slogan is ‘Happiness Is a Place’. The capital, Thimphu, and Paro are the most important centres for tourism, with the cliff-side Tiger’s Nest monastery overlooking the Paro valley a must-see destination.

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In 1998, the government enforced a ban on Nepali women going to the Gulf for work after news of Kani Sherpa’s death in Kuwait following abuse by employers got widespread media attention. The decision was supposed to protect women and ensure that such tragedies did not happen again. But the ban only helped to make matters worse: more and more women started going to the Gulf through illegal channels, using forged documents and risking even more exploitation at the hands of agents and employers. After the Foreign Employment Act 2007 was passed, the ban has officially been lifted, and there are no restrictions on women migrant workers going abroad. But the perception of a ban remains, and this has led many women to continue using illegal routes. The Department of Labour estimates there are now more than 200,000 Nepali women working in the Gulf of which only 4 per cent have legal work permits in those countries. “Brokers are taking advantage of the information gap and are trafficking women to the Gulf through visit visas,” Saru Joshi Shrestha of UN Women told Nepali Times. More than 3,200 Nepali women have been intercepted at New Delhi Airport in the last few months after the government requested Indian authorities to stop Nepali women transiting there to go to the Gulf on visitor visas. Immigration officials at New Delhi airport told Nepali Times they intercept up to five Nepali women every day on forged passports or visas.

The government has a directive for sending domestic workers to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and UAE to make employers more accountable and reduce abuse. But destinations such as Hong Kong and Lebanon are still illegal, and activists want female labour attaches in countries where there are more than 1,000 Nepali women working. “It’s not that the government hasn’t done anything to protect migrant workers, but the efforts are small compared to the scale of the problem,” says Padma Mathema of the National Human Rights Commission. The agency, Pourakhi, set up by returning Nepali women trained 750 women in organic farming, candle making and handicraft so that they don’t have to go back and face abuse. Many are now running small businesses. Most Nepali women say they would stay in Nepal if they could earn just Rs 6,000 more per month, so the long-term solution to migration would be to create jobs within Nepal. Says Pourakhi’s founder, Bijaya Rai: “It is despair that forces women to migrate for work. We should be able to create an environment where migration is a choice and not a compulsion.”

“LUCKY TO BE ALIVE”

Bhagwati BK, left for Kuwait to support her four children and an alcoholic husband. She had knife cuts all over her body, and her employers dumped her at the airport. The Nepali embassy came to her rescue and flew her home. “I am lucky to be alive,” she says.

Madhu Biswokarma, left for Saudi Arabia in hopes of a better future but has come back with scars all over her body and face. She was brutally beaten by her employers, who knocked off her teeth, banged her head with pointed heels and cut her with shards of broken glass. In 2009, nine Nepali women committed suicide during a nine month period in Lebanon alone. Returnees brought back horror stories of abuse and exploitation.

But when asked if they would go back, most will say they have no choice and hope they get better employers next time.

Sangita Lama was raped by her recruitment agent in Nepal and was threatened not to tell anyone. When she gave birth to a baby girl in Kuwait, her employer sent her back to Nepal. (Some names of women have been changed at request.)
To hell and back

Nepali women workers are exploited at home and suffer horrific abuse abroad, but a woman minister sacks an official trying to clean up the Labour Department

to these unsafe places altogether but they are desperate and the government has nothing to offer,” Bijaya Rai Shrestha of Pourakkhi told me. “The best thing is to ensure that women go through legal channels, because they will go anyway. Undocumented workers are the most vulnerable to exploitation and have problems getting compensation.”

It is almost always the same story. Poverty, domestic violence, and a lack of opportunities drive women to approach unscrupulous recruiters. They sell land, or take loans at high interest rates to go to countries of which they know little, with no skills or language. Upon arrival, their passports and visas are confiscated and they are made to work like slaves. Many women come back with babies fathered by employers, hundreds are languishing in jail after being raped, and an unreported number take their own lives as a last refuge.

The government says it lacks resources to control the exploitation of Nepali women by Nepalis themselves. Nepal doesn’t have an embassy or adequate staff in many countries, and diplomats are undermined or do not know how to negotiate with Kuwaiti or Saudi officials.

In the last four months, Purna Chandra Bhattarai, the new director general of the Labour Department tried to clean things up. He had sanctioned Rs 40 million in compensation to wronged workers, took action against errant recruiters and refused to register agencies that did not fulfil minimum standards. This was the first time someone tried to do such a thing in a department known for corruption and exploitation. But under pressure from the ‘manpower mafia’, Labour Minister Sarita Giri unceremoniously removed Bhattarai last week.

There may be few things beyond our control, but the government could easily pressure the minister to leave honest civil servants like Bhattarai alone. It could sign MOUs with safer destinations like Hong Kong and Singapore, train them in household skills and language before they leave, offer them safeguards and insurance. It could ratify ILO Convention 189 to protect the rights of domestic workers.

What is stopping the government from ensuring something as simple as providing workers with contract papers in Nepal? We complain about abuse abroad, but the exploitation starts here. If only the state made sure that the provisions of the Foreign Employment Act are strictly enforced, there would be a huge improvement in the condition of migrant workers.

All migrant workers should be compulsorily given pre-departure orientation, recruiters who charge more than the government’s upper limit as service charge or do not fulfil the conditions of work contracts should be punished, Nepali embassies abroad should be more accountable and better able to come to the help of those stranded.

This is the least the government can do for women like Bhagwati see box who would have never left if they could earn few thousands in the country itself.

Most work as domestics, are unregistered and outside the purview of legal and state protection when they face abuse by employers.

At Pourakkhi, an organisation set up by returned women migrant workers themselves, there isn’t a day that goes by without one raped or battered woman being brought from the airport to the shelter. Most have been so brutally tortured, they return with bruises, broken bones, teeth knocked out, or so emotionally scarred that they are unable to speak.

Others are victims of financial exploitation, made to work 21 hours a day with very little food and in dire conditions. Yet year after year, despite the publicity these stories garner, Nepali women continue to travel to India and the Gulf to work as domestics, caregivers and nurses. It is their blood and sweat that has kept the country afloat, but the state couldn’t care less about their welfare.

“We wish the government could stop women from going abroad should be more pre-departure orientation, recruiters who charge more than the government’s upper limit as service charge or do not fulfil the conditions of work contracts should be punished, Nepali embassies abroad should be more accountable and better able to come to the help of those stranded.

This is the least the government can do for women like Bhagwati see box who would have never left if they could earn few thousands in the country itself.

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YAK ATTACK

What do you get when you combine mountain bikes, a 400+ km trail, 15,000 m climb, snow, ice, and crossing the highest accessible mountain pass in the world all in 11 days? Torq Yak Attack. Ranked by Mountain Bike UK Magazine as one of the five toughest mountain bike races in the world, Yak Attack completes its sixth race around the Annapurna Circuit.

Being an avid mountain biker who has lived in Nepal for the past five years, I had to participate in the 6th edition of Yak Attack. This year had the longest international field with professional and experienced recreational riders from all over the world taking part.

The race started with four hot and dusty days of back roads from Kathmandu to Besti Sahar. Some participants suffered dehydration in the intense heat that accompanied the steep, rocky roads during the long stages.

On the fifth stage that marked our entry into the mountains, Besti Sahar to Taal, the first 32 km was an undulating climb on a dusty road. The “reward” as we escaped the heat: 5 km of ice and snow. It remained, mostly flat and level, the longest stage, from Kagbeni to Tatopani reminded me of what mountain biking is truly about.

On the 22 km from Taal to Chame the next day, we spent half the time with our bikes on our backs hiking up steep trails, and then we rode through thick mud, loose and rocky trails for the remainder of the journey. To the joy of most riders, the trail from Chame (2,570 m) to Manang (3,540 m) widened and was almost completely bike-able. But participants had to adjust to altitude. The race had already lost three participants due to mechanical, physical and work-related issues before Chame. Stomach problems would claim two more experienced international participants before the mountains were finished. A day of rest and acclimatisation in Manang, was followed by the two toughest stages of the race. Manang to Thorong Phedi (4,450m), while mostly ride-able, was a challenging stage that finished at an elevation of 4,400 m, a height that most of the international competitors had never been to before. The next stage, the Yak Attack signature, was a 4 am start that had all of us carrying our bikes in the snow up to the top of Thorong La Pass. It was cold, dark, and icy as we made our way to 5,416 m. On the last stretch we were lashed by harsh winds that literally stopped racers in their tracks. While I fared well going up the pass and was in 5th place at the top, the start of the descent on the other side offered another test: a mix of trying to ride, falling, and pushing the bike down 5 km of ice and snow. It included 10 minutes of frozen pain, lying on the snow after a crash. The beautiful stretch from Mukihthia to Kagbeni reminded me of what mountain biking is truly about.

Only one more, 60 km stage, from Kagbeni to Tatopani remained, mostly flat and downhill. After what we had experienced on the previous stages, only two finishers were there in the top 10. Meanwhile, the traditionally strong international racers had already lost three from mechanical and physical issues before Chame. Stomach problems would claim two more experienced international participants before the mountains were finished. A day of rest and acclimatisation in Manang, was followed by the two toughest stages of the race. Manang to Thorong Phedi (4,450m), while mostly ride-able, was a challenging stage that finished at an elevation of 4,400 m, a height that most of the international competitors had never been to before. The next stage, the Yak Attack signature, was a 4 am start that had all of us carrying our bikes in the snow up to the top of Thorong La Pass. It was cold, dark, and icy as we made our way to 5,416 m. On the last stretch we were lashed by harsh winds that literally stopped racers in their tracks. While I fared well going up the pass and was in 5th place at the top, the start of the descent on the other side offered another test: a mix of trying to ride, falling, and pushing the bike down 5 km of ice and snow. It included 10 minutes of frozen pain, lying on the snow after a crash. The beautiful stretch from Mukihthia to Kagbeni reminded me of what mountain biking is truly about.

The Yak Attack is one of the most challenging races on the international circuit. The course is demanding and requires that riders are fast on their bike, but also good at carrying their bikes and can hike quickly. The range in landscape was one of my favourite aspects of the course. With racing on the dusty, hot valley floor to the high alpine snow, rock, and single track. I wasn’t surprised but was still impressed with the ability of the Nepali riders. They climbed like they had wings. This race has a lot of potential for growth and will attract the type of racers that likes more than just a challenge on the bike. “It’ll attract those seeking true adventure.” - Sonya Looney Topeak Ergon Racing Team


HEALTH CARE WORKERS

A nurse’s hard work and determination is helping save the lives of hundreds of women and children

When Yasoda Ojha started working as a nurse in her district in Doti 14 years ago, pregnant women coming to health posts for pre-natal checkups were unheard of. Vaccination centres were empty and hundreds of children were not immunised. Today, the queues outside Ojha’s clinic are so long she can hardly keep up with demand for healthcare in her village of Mahua. On 12 March Ojha was presented with the Nick Simons Award for her relentless work with pregnant women and children in Doti. For the past four years the Kathmandu-based Nick Simons Institute has honoured healthcare workers in rural Nepal who have overcome financial obstacles and lack of resources to help communities. Ojha’s journey from a young nurse to successful healthcare professional wasn’t easy. She grew up in a remote part of one of Nepal’s remotest districts, Mahua, limited to a hilltop, 29 km from the district headquarters of Dipayal. Despite being poor, Ojha’s parents made sure to send all her four children to school. And although she was married at 16, she was lucky to have an understanding husband who encouraged her to complete her education and become a nurse. In 1997 Ojha travelled to Dipayal where she began her ANM (auxiliary nurse midwife)
through been this, sounded like paradise. Wrong. Around 4:30 am howling winds woke us up and the head wind remained throughout the stage, with wind and sand biting into our eyes and skin. The Tatopani Hot Springs, cold beer, and the end of the Torq Yak Attack 2012 beckoned.

As a first time participant, the heat was the most challenging. As we reached the mountains, I became stronger and had my best day crossing Thorong La. I was happy with my performance and proud of my Nepali friends who continued to do very well. Congratulations to Ajay Pandit Chhetri for winning the competition, third year in a row and Narayan Gopal Maharjan for coming in second.

Six internationals finished faster than any other had experienced and stage race, Peter Butt, finished third place, the first international to do so. Yak Attack is an amazing race and challenges mountain bikers in every way: long stages, long climbs, high altitude, long bike-a-rike, demanding technical descents, and food-related troubles that can make even experienced locals suffer.

This is a race that puts Nepal on the mountain biking map. This year, the number of international competitors (20) outnumbered Nepalis (12) for the first time in the race’s six-year history.

Hot off Annapurna, Ajay Pandit Chhetri and Narayan Gopal Maharjan are on their way this week to compete in the Cape Epic in South Africa, the largest stage race in the world. This is a direct result of their success in Yak Attack and the support of past participant John MacGillvray. Ajay also joined the Torq Fitness UK training and racing last summer with help from the organiser, Phil Evans.

More pictures and video: http://nepalsutra.com

YAK ATTACK 2012 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ajay Pandit Chhetri</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>25:15:44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Narayan Gopal</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>26:14:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peter Butt</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>27:44:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mangal Krishna Lama</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>27:47:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>29:49:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dharit (Sanjito) Rai</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>31:50:21</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Raj Kumar Shrestha</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>31:53:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tej Bahadur</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>32:05:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Aayman Tamang</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>32:15:48</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kush Green</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>32:20:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Chin Bikram Lama</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>32:32:51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tyler McNaughton</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>33:16:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Gareth Jones</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>33:39:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sonya Looney</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>34:13:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Paul Topham</td>
<td>UK</td>
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<td>Jeni Rowlatt</td>
<td>UK</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Carena Dean</td>
<td>Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Doug Brain</td>
<td>UK</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Dawa Sherga</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Phil Evans</td>
<td>UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Chandra Chhetri</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Henri Lesewitz</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Micke Fyhrus</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Niel Cottam</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>45:03:32</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Henri Lessowitz</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ajay Narangha Rana</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>45:35:17</td>
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</tbody>
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More pictures and video: http://nepalsutra.com

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She was also instrument in establishing a 24-hour safe motherhood program at Mahua which has not only benefited women in the village, but also those from surrounding VDCs. Olja believes that in addition to round the clock service, timely referrals to the district hospital has helped save the lives of hundreds of mothers and their newborn.

Although there was a significant rise in the number of locals seeking healthcare, the women were still reluctant to give birth at the hospital because of the cost. However, the government’s decision to provide free delivery has changed that. Olja is busy at the health post throughout the year. “Except for two hours on the day of Dhanu, I am always here,” she says crediting her husband and her staff for being supportive.

The women at Ojha has attributes its success to the commitment of the people involved and says, “Had it not been for the loyal and dedicated team, the safe motherhood programs would not have been as successful.”

While Olja is happy about the Nick Simon’s award, she says what is much more encouraging for her is the special place she has found among the locals.

She explains, “I am very close to the people I treat, and everyone who comes to seek treatment here are like family. And knowing that my work has touched the lives of so many people inspires me to work harder each day.”

The women of Doti have immense respect for Olja and tell her, “We come here because of you. We have completed our studies in you.”

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The gift of life, #291
**EVENTS**

**LIFE TIMES**

**EVENTS**

**IDEAS OF MARCH**, support the ‘underground’ music scene of Nepal with the annual concert featuring bands like Severe Dementia, Antim Graham and Jindaabas. 29 March, 1pm to 7pm, Bhrikuti Mandap Fun Park

Kutumba Playing for Heritage II, Kutumba will be travelling across Nepal generating awareness on preservation and protection of local heritage. Until 15 April

1974 AD Concert, catch an exclusive concert by the famous 1974 AD. Rs 200, 31 March, 7.30 pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamikhel

**NEPPEST MARCH**, bringing together all the metal heads with performances by Anitm Graham, X-Mantra, Kaladin, Garurth, The Exorcist, Daisintegrated, Trisukha. 24 March, 1 pm onwards, Bhrikuti Mandap. Call 9841277775

Baja Gaja, playing live every Tuesday, 7.30 pm onwards at Moksh, Pulchowk, Call 5526212

**THE OLIVE GARDEN**, now offering a revamped dinner menu from March 14 onwards with various trout dishes. Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat

**COMFORT ZONE**, expansive restobar with a decent range of cocktails and barbecue meals. Thamel

Rox Restaurant, enjoy Sunday Pranzo at Rox Restaurant. 12pm to 3.30pm, Hyatt Regency, 44912214

**MUSIC**

**BUCHANAN HAMILTON EXHIBITION**, celebrate 200 years of biodiversity research in Nepal. 24 March to 1 April, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

Earth Hour, be part of WWF’s global initiative spanning 135 countries and millions of people to cut down energy consumption by turning off your lights for an hour. 31 March, 8.30 pm to 9.30 pm, worldwide

Anusara Yoga Workshop, team and practice yoga with the internationally renowned teacher Jonas Westing. 23 March, 5 pm to 7.30 pm, 1905 Restaurant, Kanti Path. info@pranamaya-yoga.com

Resting Stops, don’t miss the exhibitions, slam poetry and musical performances. 24 March, 3.30 pm onwards, KCAC, Patan Museum

**DINING**

IDEAS OF MARCH, mystery and romance.

Corporative Mask Party, enjoy a night of fantasy, mystery and romance. 23 March, 5 pm onwards, Vintage Cafe and Pub, Durbar Marg, 984040568

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Baber Mahal Revisited

Night Bazaar

Baber Mahal Revisited is now opening its door after dark on the last Thursday of each month. Guests can enjoy an evening of shopping, entertainment and cultural extravaganzas in the picturesque setting of a beautifully 8 palaces. The night bazaar will offer an array of products and services, ranging from creative home decor, apparel, accessories, handicrafts, books, gifts, culinary delights and more, made by social entrepreneurs of Nepal.

The first night bazaar will be 29 March from 6-9pm and will feature 19 unique exhibitors:

- **Kirtipur Handicraft Industry**: Knitted toys, keyrings, women and baby apparel made by the women of Kirtipur
- **Janakpur Women’s Development Centre**: Range of products with Mithila elements handpicked and designed by the women of Mahila Art hand painted and sold by the underprivileged and marginalized women from the region.
- **Business Service Centre (BSC) for Empowerment**: Accessories, handicrafts, candles, incense, flower stall
- **Children and Youth First (CYF)**: Arts and crafts and recycled products
- **Designer students from Lord Buddha Education Foundation**: Recycled bags, baby apparel and accessories made of scrap materials
- **Ganesh’s Cove**: Children’s books (Published by: Usborne, Scholastic, IPDA) and action selection
- **Seeing Hands Nepal**: Handmade stone baskets and mugs using eco-friendly materials by women from various ethnicities
- **Inclusion Empowerment Centre (IEC)**: One-of-a-kind funkly painted in all natural tees, and an interesting collection of handmade nepali crafts
- **Neo Art**: Women’s apparel, handmade bags and jewelry
- **Insight Living**: Handmade sustainable home wares
- **News Occur**: Wooden candle stands, mirrors and Newari arts and crafts, supporting the livelihood of traditional Newari craftmen
- **Seeing Hands Nepal**: Therapeutic massage experience like never before, provided by a team of professional visually impaired master masseurs
- **Cafe Brown Sugar**: (run by ex-drug users)
- **Mimos**: Women’s apparel, handmade bags and jewelry
- **Papal Bot Lifestyle**: Traditional Tibetan Chang, Khapsey (Tibetan cookies) and Laphing (traditional Tibetan savoury dish)
- **The Village Cafe**: Traditional Newari Cuisine prepared by home based workers

Organised by: ChangeFusion Nepal in association with: Baber Mahal Revisited, BBC, NBI and Give2Asia (The Asia Foundation)

https://www.facebook.com/BMRNightBazaar
A pastery than pizzeria. Thamel and would be better dubbed a with upstairs seating juts off a hotel in The two-and-a-half-year-old bistro topped separately in four parts. The ham, mushrooms, olives and artichoke Stagioni (Rs 425), is a sizable pie of but customisable pizzas are not readily for self-cooked barbeque or order for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights. Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999. Jhamsikhel mutton skewers and pork chops. to enjoy scrumptious enjoy the scenic view of Pokhara as you pamper yourself with tennis, golf, drinks and dinners. Rs 6500 per person for 2 nights and 3 days, Call 4461918, 4462248. Holiday at Grand Norling Hotel, Gekaria. One night and two days at Rs 4500 and two nights and three days at Rs 7000. Call 447948. Fulbari Resort, enjoy the scenic view of Pokhara as you pamper yourself with tennis, golf, drinks and dinners. Rs 6500 per person for 2 nights and 3 days, Call 4461918, 4462248. 7th Annual Sundance Music Festival, join the live musical extravaganza with bands like Joint Family, Soul Train Featuring Rainer Pusch (Germany), The Acoustics (Shanti Music), Himalayan Connection, and DJ Phuchhey. (Rs 3500, 24 to 25 March. The Last Resort, Cal 4701247/4700225 for bookings. Alchemy takes the consolation prize for an attempt at authenticity. The two-and-a-half-year-old bistro with upstairs seating sits off a hotel in Thamel and would be better dubbed a pasteria than pizzeria. Pizza at Alchemy, though intact, is not its forte. The options are standard, but customisable pizzas are not readily afforded. Its speciality, the Pizza Quattro Stagioni (Rs 435), is a sizable pie of ham, mushrooms, olives and artichoke topped separately in four parts. The dough itself is light and crispy but void of any lasting flavour and is more akin to unleavened bread, matza or a plain faterre. The mozzarella and the tomato sauce are scant, and though the sectioned toppings present an aesthetic layout, the quatro stagioni leaves an unsatisfying experience. But don’t brush them off just yet. Alchemy strains a Spaghetti alla Puttanseca (Rs 385) al dente mingled in a spicy tomato sauce, anchovies, olives, capers, garlic, parsley and E.V.O.O. (extra virgin olive oil). Traces of anchovy were faint but the dish overall was top notch. Complimentary bread to mop up the plate is sadly absent. The Ravioli with traditional meat sauce (Rs 385) is just shy of impeccable. The ravioli is rich and the cheese, though not quite ricotta as advertised, is creamy. Spinach, also advertised, was missing from the stuffing. Alchemy may have taken some shortcuts in its mains but for dessert, it cuts no corners. You can try the homemade rum raisin gelato among other flavours (Rs 100/110 cone or cup). But here is my suggestion: upon entering the restaurant, it is best to go ahead and order a slice of Tiramisu (Rs 200), yielding proper time to thaw the ‘pick-me-up’ layers of cake, coffee and cream. Or if you’re running late, order the cake with a slot of hot espresso and then douse the cake with no shame. Sure, there are no ladyfingers or mascarpone. But after a bite of arguably the best rendition of tiramisu you’ll find within reach, all is forgiven.

GHT Day 65
A pa Sherpa and his team reached Beni of Myagdi district (arrow, above) on the 65th day of their Climate Smart Celebrity Trek. The 21-time Everest summiter (seen right with flag) is on an epic four-month 1,600 km traverse of Nepal from east to west. Sherpa and his team were felicitated by locals at a press meet organised in the Red Cross Office of Beni. Speaking on the occasion, Apa Sherpa said, “Glacial lakes are getting bigger as the mountains melt, we have to protect downstream valleys from the threat of climate change.” He also requested Annapurna Area Conservation Project (ACAP) to involve locals while making policies which impact the daily lives of people living in Annapurna region. The purpose of the Climate Smart Celebrity Trek is to highlight the impacts of climate change in the Himalaya and promote the Great Himalayan Trail as a tourism product. The trail starts from Tappejung in the east and ends in Darchula in western Nepal. On Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/climatesmarttrek Follow us on Twitter: @TheGHT_Nepal http://www.climatesmarttrek.org.np/
Diarrhea at the summit

DHANVANTARY

Buddha Banayat, MD

When an article entitled “Gastroenteritis on top of Mt Everest” appeared in a medical journal, some doctors thought it was about climbers having diarrhoea on top of Mt Everest. However, the article was about a summit meeting of diarrhoea in travellers. Still many involved in wilderness medicine felt the title was relevant for Nepal.

It is said that when western travellers and trekkers return home from Nepal, there are two groups that are asked in quick succession for which the answers are usually “yes”. Did you have a good time, and did you get sick? Sick usually means having the runs (Delhi belly), Montezuma’s revenge are other colorful terms, although for the victims these may not be very funny.

Diarrhea at the summit is a relevant topic in this spring trekking and climbing season because many trekkers and climbers on the way to the summit will suffer from gastroenteritis, another more scientific term for diarrhoea. Many of these trekkers are fully compliant with the precautions which need to be taken in order to avoid diarrhoea. These measures include frequent hand-washing with soap and water or using the alcohol-based, hand-cleaning solution, drinking only boiled or reliable bottled water, eating steaming, hot food and generally avoiding raw salad. But these measures may not be enough.

Food handlers who will be involved in the preparation and serving also need to adhere to the stringent guidelines. Indeed, the decline in the rate of travellers’ diarrhoea in countries like Nepal may have plateaued. One explanation is that the traveller is doing all he or she can for prevention, but for the decrease in diarrhoea rates to be sustained, food handlers too may need to take proper precautions including storage and refrigeration of food supplies. With rampant power cuts in Nepal, adequate refrigeration will continue to be a problem, especially in Kathmandu where the traveller may need to spend a few days to make arrangements for the climb or trek.

Helicopter rescue is often necessary for travellers with severe gastrointestinal problems on the trail. Many a climbers’ dream of summiting has remained unfulfilled because diarrhoea is so severe and uncomfortable that the climber has to be abandoned.

The most important improvement would be for the traveller to go home and say “yes, I had a good time”; and “no, I did not fall sick.”

When a film is made by a typical crime drama/lawyer-procedural hybrid and in some ways it is strange that it is so good. Indeed, the decline in the rate of travellers’ diarrhoea is utterly innocent, and his explanation of how he got himself into this situation is so absurd that Haller begins to think it might just be true. Slowly though, as Frank Levin (a marvelously bearded William H. Macy) Haller’s investigator starts to dig into the case, a few troubling details surface. Roulet’s knife is the knife found at the scene, and Haller is troubled that Louis has lied about its existence. As the case starts to unfold Haller is struck one day, as he is poring over the crime scene details, at the unusual bruises on the face of the attacked prostitute. She has only been beaten, very severely, but only on the left side of the face. Something clicks in his head – a few years ago, he had defended a certain Jesus Martinez (Michael Pena), now in San Quentin prison for life, against a similar case -same bruises on the prostitute, except this time she had been raped and knifed to death. Martinez, too, had sworn that he was innocent.

As the film progresses one is struck by the fact that every character in this film has a fully rounded personality, and is there for a reason. Even the seemingly random gang of Hell’s Angels that Haller defends for their various misdemeanours, and the alcoholic prostitute with a smart mouth come full circle in the story in an immensely satisfying way.

It is rare that such a typically genre film transcends its narrow boundaries and is able to really grip and entertain the viewer without being a sensationalising, overly violent version of itself. Brad Furman’s film is very much worth watching, and one wonders and hopes that his next film will be at least as good.

All DVDs reviewed in this column are available in the writer’s favourite DVD store: Music and Expression, Thamel, Phone # 014700092

epegtimes.com

Watch trailer

MUST SEE

Sophia Pande

The Lincoln Lawyer:

A side from the slightly baral and unfortunately alienated title, there is very little wrong with The Lincoln Lawyer. The film is a typical crime drama/lawyer-procedural hybrid and in some ways it is strange that it is so good considering that there is no real twist in the way the moitudes like Prima Fear, with Richard Gere and Edward Norton, promise and build up to. It is also very much worth mentioning that this very accomplished film is made by a relatively unknown Brad Furman who, just eleven years ago, was “assistant” to Julia Roberts in Erin Brokovich and The Mexican (note: doesn’t bother watching The Mexican). (note: don’t bother watching The Mexican).

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The Lincoln Lawyer:
This week marks the second death anniversary of Girija Prasad Koirala. Leaders from across the political spectrum, including his erstwhile arch enemies the Maoists, agree that they could do with his anchoring role in today’s fluid politics.

Love him or hate him, and there were many who did so in equal measure, GPK left a vacuum that has been hard to fill. Frustrated and disappointed about their inability to strike a compromise, today’s leaders really mean it when they rue Koirala’s absence.

We are coming up to another constitutional deadline and despite some progress on the peace process, things are pretty much stuck again. All main parties say they are not willing to give in on the ‘national interest’ and have stuck to their guns. At least GP would have had a cunning plan, but there isn’t a single statesmanlike figure among the main parties who commands the authority to make others listen. Even with Dahal, who comes closest, there is mistrust and manipulation.

The protracted political stalemate is taking its toll on ordinary people. On Sunday, Ramita Chaudhary from Bara district strangled her two children and then committed suicide. Ramita and her husband, both daily wage earners, were struggling to feed their children while paying off their accumulating debt. Ramita has freed her husband Mukti, whose name ironically also means freedom, from at least one debt.

There isn’t a day that goes by without mothers throwing babies off bridges and jumping off hospital roofs because they can’t afford dialysis treatment. These are acts of violence that are tearing apart our social fabric which in turn are direct consequences of political deadlock that has affected governance, development, service delivery, economic growth and job creation.

An Asian Development Bank report released this week says rising inflation in South Asia has pushed over 35 million people below the poverty line. The region is now tainting in the human development index alongside sub-Saharan Africa. The lack of jobs and inflation in food price is making it increasingly difficult for many to provide for their families.

So everyday 1,000 Nepalis fly out of Kathmandu airport for jobs in the Gulf and Malaysia. Thousands more cross the border to India on foot, as they have done for generations. Some manage to send back a portion of their savings, others either make it back in wheelchairs, in body bags or in coma. In the past three years, nearly 1,400 Nepali migrant workers have lost their lives in the Gulf and Malaysia alone, and the figure would be higher if India is included.

It has become commonplace now to demean politicians and be cynical about democracy. But only the agency of politics can ensure structural changes needed to reduce inequality, institutionalise aspirations of the marginalised and harness our full human resource potential.

But when politics takes centre stage for too long, the state loses its human face. Political headlines grab our attention every day with ever more gloomy news, and the national debate focuses disproportionately on the power struggles drowning out stories of unfolding personal tragedies. Hopes about a better tomorrow does not satisfy today’s hunger.

If the state has 20 million to fund an extravagant and meaningless ‘peace expedition’ to Mt Everest, it can certainly begin investing that money in a social safety net and planning to put into place a national health insurance scheme.

Nepal may meet its MDG targets by 2015, but more than half its citizens will still lack quality health care and affordable quality education. Thousands of children will continue to be denied opportunities for better lives.

If a family distressed by debt is unable to reach out to the state for help, the state has an obligation to find a way to reach out to them. We don’t need to wait for a new constitution to do this.

An A Hungry Revolution

When politics takes centre stage for too long, the state is dehumanised

ANURAG ACHARYA
The common good

ORA KWó in DAILEKH

U nder the global goal of Education for All (EFA) to train teachers to improve the quality of public basic education I had the privilege to contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by rewarding, supporting and disseminating outstanding teacher-related practices in developing countries and marginalised communities. The Dailekh School Project (DSP) was unanimously identified for the shortlist, and this month picked as one of the three winners. We felt like a real partner and contributor.

An ambitious public-private partnership helps spread the benefits of education for all in a remote district in Nepal

Everywhere I went in Nepal I saw dedicated educators and engaged partnerships. I felt their ownership of responsibilities, resourcefulness, synergy, and impact. My adjudicating role was to validate the claims, but I actually saw much more than had been articulated.

With the lived reality of a widening gap in education standards, the future of Nepali children will remain bleak if nothing is done. We want a model that improves the standard of education for the largest number of children with effective and cost-efficient inputs, making every stakeholder feel like a real partner and contributor.

At another level, the project can set an example in Nepal that service begins at home and at an early age. There must be a part of the self that watches out for others, especially among the privileged. The curriculum at Rato Bangala School has an in-built service component, students from affluent families experience the worth of working for a common goal and the common good.

The Dailekh project provides opportunities for parents to help out, and for the students to live in a village where they get life-changing experiences. When education is a privilege for some, but not all, what the educated do with their education matters a lot. In Dailekh, one of the poorest district of Nepal, material resources for education cannot compare with those in well-developed societies. Yet the hope of Education For All has been brought alive here by the collective leadership force: there is no single hero, and no competition for recognition.

The partners are not short of challenges, yet there seems to be enough power for continual strides forward. Obstacles are just seen as signposts of the road. The Dailekh project is an outreach program of the Rato Bangala Foundation (RBF) which is based on a commitment to transform schools into joyful, child-friendly community institutions. RBF teachers and parents share a belief that bringing quality education to the people of Dailekh will contribute to the goal of Education for All.

Dailekh was reached after a flight to Nepalgunj and then an eight hour rough jeep ride through the mountains. I was initially speechless with awe about the world that was so different from my own. We observed children in classrooms, and listened to trainers of the 10 month certification program for teachers, their trainees, and personnel in the District Education Office and VDCs.

Back in Kathmandu we had a meeting with a dozen members of Nepal’s educated elite who helped plan and advise the Dailekh project. They spoke inspiring about the importance of quality education and social justice, and we visited Rato Bangala School where training of educators parallels the schooling of children.

Model partnership

Private school in Kathmandu uses part of its fees to help with teacher training and upgrades for government schools in Dailekh

STUTÍ SHARMA and DUKSANGH DOLMA SHERPA in DAILEKH

D uring the war, Dailekh was in the frontline: classrooms had turned into barracks, school grounds served as helipads for gunships. Teachers and students faced constant threats of violence from state security and the rebel army.

Today one of Nepal’s least literate districts is rebuilding its educational base through a unique partnership in which an elite school in Kathmandu uses part of its fees to fund the training of teachers in government schools of one of Nepal’s poorest districts.

In the past three years the Rato Bangala Foundation has been training primary level teachers on innovative methods and fostering critical thinking skills in students, and has trained over 2,000 teachers in 523 government schools in the district.

Former teacher trainee Karn Bahadur Shahi is impressed with the progress so far and told Nepali Times, “Improvements are incremental, but schools in Dailekh have come a long way.”

Besides training teachers, senior students from Rato Bangala School also spend a month teaching children English and other subjects ahead of the SLC exams at Janata Higher Secondary School, Janata Primary School, Deep Shishu Primary School and Sri Narayan Primary School in Dailekh.

“It took a few days for the students to feel comfortable with us. But they were really smart and grasped the lessons very quickly,” said Atul Adhikari, an intern who taught in Dailekh this year, “we applied the same methods our teachers used with us in school which proved to be effective and they seemed to enjoy it.”

However, the difficulties of teaching in rural Nepal became apparent within the first week of the program when teachers’ unions affiliated to two political parties declared a nationwide closure of schools because their demands for benefits and salaries were not met by the government.

In addition to political instability, students in rural Dailekh are up against jarring poverty which means attendance is low and the dropout rate is high. Many families still can’t send their children to schools because they are needed in the fields or have to help with household chores.

Schools are forced to adjust...
their hours and teachers readily send students home if they have other responsibilities. Despite setbacks, the children are eager to get to their classrooms and some hike up to two hours each day roundtrip from home to school, while teachers work with limited resources to make their learning experience more enriching.

Shanta Dixit of the Rato Bangala Foundation is hopeful that Dailekh will have a higher quality of education. "The project will continue for another two and a half years," she says, "and by that time we will have more facilities like libraries and laboratories and make Dailekh’s school system stronger."  

RECOGNISED

The Rato Bangala Foundation has been awarded the 2012 UNESCO-Hamdan Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Prize for Outstanding Practice and Performance in Enhancing the Effectiveness of Teachers alongside the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences Schools Enrichment Centre in South Africa and the Banco del Libro in Venezuela. The $270,000 prize is given every two years and divided between the three winners. The award ceremony will be held on 24 April in Dubai in the presence of the UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova. Rato Bangala Foundation says it will plough the money into extending its Dailekh School Project.
Dashed hopes

Sarojin Adhikari, Kantipur
20 March

After his successful tenure as the finance minister in the previous Maoist government, everyone had high expectations from Baburam Bhattarai when he was elected as prime minister last August. However, the recent turn of events have raised serious doubts over his leadership abilities. The list of incidents that have tarnished his ‘clean’ image is long:

March 18: Health Minister Saroj Kumar Yadav gets intoxicated and misbehaves at a hospital. During the same day, secretaries from different ministries threaten to tender a collective resignation citing unnecessary pressures from the ministers.

March 16: The government decides to grant 2 million rupees to the Everest expedition team led by Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s son Prakash and nominates PM Bhattarai’s daughter Mamesi as a member of Cricket Association of Nepal.

March 14: Irrigation Minister misbehaves with Secretary Brinda Hada.

March 13: Government staff clash at Home Ministry following the controversial transfer issue.

March 6: Tourism Minister Lokendra Bista is arrested by immigration officers at Abu Dhabi Airport for travelling without a visa to Germany. February 27: Government decides to withdraw cases against 367 people involved in serious crimes.

February 21: Communication Minister Jayprakash Gupta is imprisoned over corruption charges.

February 18: Government does not celebrate Democracy Day.

January 26: Defence Minister Saradsingh Bhandari decides to grant citizenship to children based on ancestry. The Supreme Court issues a stay order.

December 27: Health Secretary Sohila Shrama resigns over differences with Minister Rajendra Mahatas.

December 26: China postpones Premier Wen Jiabao’s visit to Nepal citing ‘internal reasons’. Government decides to mass recruit 3,000 Madhesis in to the Nepali Army, but the Supreme Court issues a stay order.

December 4: Education Secretary Shanker Poudel resigns after the illegal transfer of officers.

November 13: The number of ministers in the cabinet reaches 49. Bhattarai says he doesn’t recognise all of them.

November 8: The prime minister appeals to the president to grant amnesty to lawmaker Balkrishna Dhungel who was sentenced to life imprisonment.

October 21: The government signs a BIPPA deal with India. Bhattarai says the agreement is a gamble.

September 26: Defence Minister Saradisingh Bhandari claims that 22 districts in the Terai might secede. An arrest warrant is issued against Land Reform Minister Prabhu Shah by Birgunj Police for murder allegations. The prime minister suspends both ministers on October 19.
Benup Bhatnari in Nepal, 25 March

10 years ago, Maoists accused Phaguram Chaudhari of being an army informan and killed him. Since that day Chaudhari’s wife, Ramkrishni has been struggling to raise her four children. Although he government announced compensation worth Rs 300,000 for families affected by the conflict, Ramkrishni found out about this provision only after other victims in the village told her. While she was getting together the required documents, her brother-in-law took advantage of her illiteracy, tricked her and took half the compensation amount.

“It took months to prepare my citizenship card, marriage registration certificate, police report and other documents,” she recalls, “but my brother-in-law presented himself as the rightful family member and claimed half the money.”

When Ramkrishni discovered that her brother-in-law had forged documents and spirited part of the reimbursement, she asked for help from her neighbours and relatives. Even though he had agreed to return the money a long time ago, Ramkrishni has lost hope by now.

Shanti Chaudhari who lost her husband in a mine explosion shares a similar story. She says she received only half of the declared amount while her brother-in-law took the other half and adds that relations with her family have turned sour over the past few months.

The state introduced the compensation package to help families and victims of war, but many are now fighting over it. For instance, Bholikili bought a small plot of land in the district headquarter with the government money, but her brother-in-law is claiming the land. Another widow Dhanadebi Chaudhari says her brother-in-law took away Rs 25,000 and her husband’s family regularly threatens her.

“I have had to suffer a lot because of my lack of education. Even after I got hold of my citizenship, my brother-in-law made it very difficult for me to get paid. But the money is compensation for my husband’s death and it rightfully belongs to me,” she explains.

From the Nepali Press

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The cancellation of Ban Ki-moon’s visit may have made some happy and others sad, but it has lowered Nepal’s international prestige.”

Former Nepali Ambassador to UN Jayaraj Acharya quoted in Kantipur Daily, March 22.

Partners in crime

Naya Janaidisha, 20 March

Five years since the Gaur massacre in which 27 Maoist cadres were brutally burnt alive, stabbed with spears and crushed to death with rocks, the murderers are still walking free. And despite being in government for most of the time since 2006, the Maoist party has not made any attempt to bring the guilty to justice.

After the incident, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal had visited Gaur and vowed to punish the culprits and compensate the victims, but he failed to deliver on his promises even when he was the head of state.

The Maoists had set up a probe committee led by politburo member Chandradev Khanal ‘Baldev’ which identified CA members Baban Khanal ‘Baldev’ which helped the criminals behind bars, the Maoists welcomed them into their party.”

The masterminds behind the crime are now leading the Madhes campaign and the ones who were supposed to deliver justice are close allies of the murderers.

Mother of all exams

Krishna Malla in Daunik Patra, 21 March

Twenty-year-old Di Kumari Oli began her SLC journey on Monday alongside 310 students at Karhi High School in Butwal. However, unlike the other test takers, Di Kumari has to balance her one month old son on her lap and is the only nursing mother in the exam hall.

Fortunately, she has been allowed to bring her fifth grade niece to help take care of the baby. Di who is originally from Shidari in Arghakhanchi is the wife of a former Maoist guerrilla, and completed up to Grade 8 from Sagram Higher Secondary School in Dang. Currently she is studying at the open school run jointly by the Educational Human Resource Development Centre and the District Education Office in Rupandehi.

Other unconventional test takers include a woman in Rukum who went on to join the UCPN (Maoist) party and is currently a Central Committee member. Jogendra Prasad Jaiswal, father of Ramakanta Jaiswal, who was among those killed on the fateful day expressed his frustration, “Instead of putting the criminals behind bars, the Maoists welcomed them into their party.”

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A lot of you have taken the Ass aside at parties this week to ask for my take on the whether it is true that PM BRB told the cabinet he had saved the national treasury Rs 10 million by giving Prakash ("The Son Also Rises") Dahal only Rs 20 million, when he had asked for Rs 30 million to climb Mt Everest. Sonny Boy went crying to Daddy when the deal fell through and said: "They won’t give me money, so bad they are.” Awesome Dad, being a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist knows his communism, and realises that the only way to defend the revolution is to only trust the fruits of one’s loins, even if they are spoilt brats. Which is why the far-sighted Great Leader has positioned the Dear Leader as next in line in the dynasty. He accompanied the Lumbini team of Comrade Avalokiteswore and Comrade Minendra to New York last year at state expense. Everywhere else he is Dad’s Computer Operator-cum-Body Guard. Good thing the prime minister cancelled the grant to Awesome, Jr. There were already Baddies lining up to ask for Rs 1 million to climb Pulchoki to save the constitution. One lunatic even claimed he needed 1 arab to go to the moon in order to save the peace process.

Actually, Comrade Sonny-Come-Lately is rather internet savvy and has been the lead architect in mobilising social media against Daddy’s rivals within the party and without, including Comrade Pumpa and Comrade Cloudy. But despite this, he couldn’t take the flak that the Everest funding fiasco generated on his status page last week, and committed Facebook suicide. But before deactivate his account, he had one last go at his critics, accusing them ominously of being part of a conspiracy to undermine Dad’s ambition to lead Nepal to glory. He also put on a brave face, and said he had "rejected" the measly 20 million that Baburam had given him. Anyway, the team flew off to Lukla this week and Comrade Fabulous has given his son 5 millions pocket money from party coffers, and said he will "manage" the rest from "other sources". Guess that will mean some of us will be getting letters from the official villa at Large Implant to mandatorily volunteer moola for the expedition. The team is aiming to reach the summit on 27 May, the exact deadline for the constitution, and if they can’t make it they plan to ask for an extension to the spring climbing season. If some team members lose their pinkies to frostbite, then the Ass’ guess is that they will demand 10 million compensation for every martyred finger and toe.

The PM Ram Babu is suddenly hurling fulsome praise at the Nepal Army, saying it has been playing a “positive role” in the integration process. As PM, he seems to have finally realised that throughout history this country has always been under de facto military rule. All but forgotten in all this mutual admiration between Balu Water and NAHQ is that the army FG blatantly defied the PM’s order to re-open to traffic the Mai Titi Ghar to Bhadrakali access road that the military usurped during the war, citing security. The prime minister is credited with demolishing half the city to widen roads, but it looks like even he had to surrender to the army’s wishes. He must have figured he has bigger fish to fry, and may not want to push the army too hard when he needs the brass to be generous on the induction criteria for the 6,500 ladakoos in the new Directorate. FG Meanwhile, it is a mystery to everyone why the Army High Command has chosen this particular time in the nation’s history to conduct anti-aircraft exercises throughout the country. Is an invasion imminent? If so, from which direction? Is that the air raid siren? NOTAMs have been issued for domestic flights to avoid flying over the army’s test firing ranges. One such target practice area is Surya Binayak, which as many of you know is right on approach to Kathmandu airport. Given the sharpshooting capabilities of our Chinese-made ack-ack batteries, the Ass has his fingers and toes crossed that the army will not bring down a domestic flight to Biratnagar with friendly fire.