

An advertisement for HIDESIGN. The left side shows a man and a woman in a classic room with large windows and yellow curtains. The woman is sitting on a wooden desk, holding a red leather bag, while the man stands behind her. The right side features the HIDESIGN logo, which is a stylized 'H' inside a shield-like shape, followed by the text 'HIDESIGN' and 'real leather crafted the forgotten way'. Below this, the text 'HIDESIGN BOUTIQUE' is displayed, followed by the address 'Below Laxmi Bank, Harihar Bhawan, Pulchowk' and the phone number 'samjhana 5524812, 9849947346'. The bottom right corner shows a close-up of a green leather belt with a silver buckle and a silver bag with a green strap.

SELF-RIGHTEOUS VIOLENCE



DIWAKAR CHHETRI

It is not in the terms of reference of die-hard Maoists to ever admit they were wrong, or to say sorry.

will also be unrepentant about their belief in murder of a human being as a political principle. As it turned out, most of the victims of the Maoist war were innocent Nepalis who wanted no part in a conflict waged in their name. They were villagers forced to serve as human shields, poor men and women recruited by both sides to be cannon fodder, or civilians killed in the state's brutal counter-insurgency.

In India, the S. R. Sankaran Committee which tried to bring about a negotiated settlement to that country's own

Maoist war acknowledged in a report that the root causes of violence lay in societal inequities and injustice. But the Committee said retaliatory brutality was neither politically, nor morally justified. Non-violent, democratic struggle is always more effective in the long-run, and it doesn't leave the corrosive residue of counterviolence, and the mass suffering of innocents. Gandhi himself reminded the world about the limits of violence.

In interviews during the war, including one to this paper in 2002, Baburam Bhattarai said that the Khmer Rouge genocide was exaggerated "western propaganda". After the war in 2008 he justified violence by saying that it "has to be seen from a historical and political perspective". His boss, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, told a group of editors in 2006 that he had never condoned torture, but admitted instructing his fighters to execute class enemies with a "bullet to the temple".

He hasn't rescinded that order, and until he does, we will be forced to believe that the Maoist ideology of violence is still in force. In any other democratic country in the world, only an obsolete fringe party would still believe in violence as a political doctrine. Here in Nepal, such a party happens to be the biggest one in the legislature. Unless all political parties in Nepal officially, publicly, in words and deeds, give up violence and stop protecting war criminals, there is a danger volatile identity politics of the constitution-writing process can ignite ethnic bush fires.

It is time for Pushpa Kamal Dahal to realise that a public renunciation of violence will not be seen as a defeat, in fact it will most likely ensure his victory in a future election. And he wouldn't even have to cheat, or threaten anyone.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

ONCE IS ENOUGH

Your editorial hits the nail on the head ('Once is enough?' #597). Nepal is a beautiful country, full of wonderful people, but its government sucks, its airport stinks, and its officials are sinfully corrupt. People keep visiting Nepal only because of its friendly people (number one) and its scenery (number two). Tourists are willing to pay if they get good service, but they don't want any hassles when they pay through their noses. And they don't want to feel like they are being robbed everywhere.

Johann

- I have often tried to find an explanation for what is wrong with our country. The editor sums up my sentiments in one short sentence: '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.'

Dil R Joshi

- Teaching the immigration and security staff basic etiquette could be a starting point. They treat us as if we are criminals and that they are doing a favour by letting us go in and out of the airport.

Raghu

- The editorial forgot to mention the domestic airline cartel which thinks it is perfectly acceptable to charge foreigners two to three times the normal fare, despite the fact that this is not practised anywhere else in the world, resulting in some of the highest domestic fares in the region. Even foreigners who have lived in Nepal for years are not exempt. Imagine the vast areas of the country (beyond Pokhara and Lukla) that would open up to tourism if this changed.

M Smith

- When my family and I visited Nepal a few years ago, my wife had just fractured her foot and was on a wheelchair. After we arrived at the airport, we were pleased to be assigned a friendly elderly porter to push the wheelchair around. He volunteered to take our visa forms and fees through the counter. Half an hour later, with visas in hand and all our luggage accounted for, I happily gave him a generous tip, which he pocketed without even looking, which I took as another sign of his good customer service orientation. It wasn't until departure three weeks later that I found out why Grandpa didn't bother to look at how much I had given him. He had taken money from us for visas for our children, but visa for children their age is actually free, so the tip was only a small fraction of the money that he had earned by scamming us out of the visa money. I filled out a complaint form, but never heard a thing.

Ripped Off

- We read this article on the same day we arrived in Kathmandu from Delhi and our experience was no different. It was a one-hour flight, but we spent two hours in line for visas. There were no signs, and the staff was not very helpful. It leaves a very poor first impression on visitors. If the Nepal government needs our money, just take it and stamp our passports, don't make us wait around uselessly.

Janet

- My Tibetan friend was harassed by a policeman at the departure gate and was forced to pay \$100 otherwise he would have missed his flight. This sort of thing happens every day. Like the government the airport is run by corrupt, incompetent men.

Savitri Gurung

HELL AND BACK

Another wonderful article Rubeena Mahato ('To hell and back', #597) on the plight of migrant workers. The only reason Nepal hasn't turned into a failed state is because millions of young people from this country send money home from India, the Gulf or Malaysia, but the way our government treats them is truly shameful. In my travels, I frequently meet fellow Nepalis, and they all say it's a tough life. But what disheartens them the most is the apathy shown by embassies as well as authorities in Nepal. Meanwhile migrant workers from the Philippines and India are protected by the state.

BJ

- I couldn't agree more with Rubeena Mahato. The plight of Nepali female workers is not something new, it has always existed, but the only difference is that it can no longer be ignored. I am happy there are some female journalists who are exposing ministers like Sarita Giri who are a disgrace to all Nepalis.

RDR

- Nepali Times should forward this article to the prime minister and our idiotic leaders. Protecting our nation's income generating population should be their top priority, but are they ever going to learn? As for those under-motivated officials, they are the product of nepotism and are rampant not only in the Gulf nations but everywhere.

Ramprasad

- I have been hearing about the exploitation of Nepali workers in foreign countries since I was a child. Does this mean the Nepali government has made no efforts to improve the lives of the workers in the past two decades? What a shame.

Sugar

WRONG TIME

Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Ban Ki-moon, or for that matter anyone who wishes to, can visit Lumbini as commoners and perhaps have a discussion at a nearby resort about the state of the country ('Wrong visit at the wrong time', Kul Chandra Gautam, #596). Doing this would remove any negative symbolism that a visit by Ban in the capacity of the head of the UN and Dahal as leader of one of the most violent parties of Nepal would create. As for Dahal co-chairing the Asia-Pacific Cooperation and Exchange Foundation, I am sure there are hundreds of Nepalis who are more qualified, well-respected and without any political associations or dogma, who could be given the responsibility of developing Lumbini.

Kachk

- Anything to do with Lumbini should be co-chaired by Buddhists and not violent communist atheists.

S Sherpa

- It was extremely short-sighted of Kul Chandra Gautam to portray Ban Ki-moon's visit as if he was coming to personally meet Dahal and Maoist cadres. The Secretary-General was visiting Nepal to promote the birthplace of the Buddha and meet ordinary Nepalis. We should not have made a big deal about who invited him or who would go to receive him at the airport. It's really unfortunate the visit has been postponed.

Suman

- I don't understand this sudden outrage over Dahal. We have known about his past deeds for the last 16 years, but intellectuals and diplomats like Kul Chandra Gautam had no problems when he became prime minister, or went to New York to address the UN, or when he fraternised with democratic leaders

like GP Koirala, Sushil Koirala and Khanal. Why didn't he demand for investigations or approach the UN on behalf of Nepalis back then?

Sudha

- The NC and the UML have been collaborating with the Maoists for the past six years. I'd like to see Kul Chandra Gautam demand NC and UML leaders not to work with the Maoists unless they shun violence and start following his 'three preconditions'.

Nirmal

- It's ironic that a staunch communist like Dahal is co-chairing an international organisation on Lumbini. I thought communists (especially followers of Mao) were atheists, against old culture, old habits, old thoughts, and old ways of living. Did Dahal and his comrades have a change of heart? Someone should remind dear leader that the area surrounding Pashupati and the Bagmati also need lot of work, perhaps he would be interested in leading that committee as well.

Bal Budder

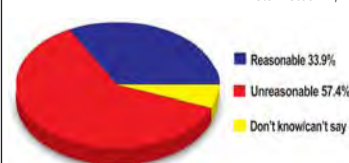
Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #598

Q. The Parliamentary committee's intervention in the West Seti D project is

Total votes: 1,145



Weekly Internet Poll # 599. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Who is responsible for the frequently increasing petroleum prices?

With two months to go before the mandate of the Constituent Assembly expires, despite major hurdles, the political parties have made progress on both the peace process and constitution. Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai spoke to *Nepali Times* on Monday about the challenges in the next 60 days.



DEVAN RAI

“Constitution by 27 May”

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai speaks about the challenges in the next 60 days.

Nepali Times: How has the last seven months as Prime Minister been?

Baburam Bhattarai: It has been challenging, but I am doing the best I can.

But you have come under a lot of criticism.

The criticism comes from heightened expectations. Perhaps, I have to do more to meet those expectations.

You had promised to lead the country out of the transition phase by completing the peace process in three months.

Yes, but I also said it required a national consensus which unfortunately we could not forge. With the other half of the stakeholders in the process sitting in the opposition, I cannot single handedly move ahead. I am doing my bit to gain their confidence but they also have to be equally willing to cooperate.

What about your own party members taking to the streets against you?

I admit there are serious political and ideological differences within the party right now. We are trying to talk to Baidyaji and other comrades and take them along. But this will not change the party's commitment towards peace and constitution. I appeal to all citizens and friends of Nepal not to fall for any statements made by individuals.

What about your quote in the media where you supposedly 'threatened' the country with

another war if the constitution is not written?

I am really shocked about how my statements were quoted out of context, I was pointing out the potential dangers of a political vacuum. The war was not personal, it was a gainst the system, it is unfair to demonise individuals. Remember, out of 16,000 that died, most were Maoist cadres. Does anybody question the brutality of the state?

The UML says it is impossible to complete the peace process as long as you are in power. They want you to resign.

Those who are demanding my resignation forget they were in government for almost two years before me, and not a single task of peace process was completed. In seven months, I made sure the cantonments were emptied and today parties are at a point of no return on the peace process. So, let the people be the judge of my performance.

But you have not been able to curb excesses by your own coalition partners?

I cannot make decisions based on what comes out in the media. I look into the matters and wherever necessary take action. But these are official decisions and I will not make public statements in favour or against anybody.

And why was it necessary to give Rs 20 million to your chairman's son's expedition to Mt Everest?

It was not the first time the

government had taken such decision. This one became an issue because it involved a particular individual. Personally, I may agree or disagree about it, but there was widespread protest and the team decided not to take that money. Let the issue rest there.

Deadlines have come and gone, when will the integration process begin?

We are at a stage of the integration process where only a few issues remain. The final work on integration will begin very soon. We are also making final preparation to form the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a commission to look into cases of disappearances. Once these two tasks are completed, the peace process will make a quantum leap.

Will the TRC and Disappearance committees be formed before 27 May?

Definitely, the integration and formation of these committees will take place simultaneously. We have almost finalised the basic structure of the commission, once it is completed we will pass the bill and the commissions will take shape. This will happen before 27 May.

It looks like the form of governance and federalism will deadlock negotiations on the constitution?

The constitution reflects the political power balance in the country. So no party is going to have a constitution of its choice. We have to find a middle

ground for which every side has to compromise. On forms of governance, I think there will be a sharing of power. And on federal structure, we have to compromise on the number of federal units. I am sure parties will come to that point soon.

By mixed sharing, do you mean directly elected executive? Will that be a president or a prime minister?

I think in a country like ours we need a directly elected executive. We have made this proposal but the NC and some other parties have reservations about it. So my guess is, we may have a directly elected president with a prime

minister elected by a legislature parliament. That could be a compromise.

What about the disagreements regarding ethnic federalism?

It has already been agreed in the legislature parliament that the basis of federalism would be both identity and economic viability. So these are unnecessary disputes, and there is no point in raising them.

In our previous interview with you in August last year, you said we only need a 'moment of sanity' for consensus, has the moment arrived yet?

In multiparty politics, one has to have patience to bring diverging interest groups to a common platform and that takes time. But we are moving in the right direction and a new constitution by 27 May is possible.

nepalitimes.com

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Baby ready for preschool?

If you have a toddler at home, you are most likely scanning through newspapers, asking friends and relatives, and making a list of possible preschools.

Although it is difficult to determine the number of preschools in the valley, you are sure to find at least one school in every neighbourhood.

As nuclear families become the norm, urban Nepali couples no longer have the privilege to leave their young toddlers with grandparents, cousins or relatives. The absence of a family safety net, coupled with working parents, have led to a surge in demand for preschools in the past decade.

However, with preschools mushrooming everywhere including international franchises, choosing the right fit for your child can be a daunting task.

Nawaraj Baskota of Kavya School says that as long as parents do their homework and prepare ahead of time they should be fine. His advice to anxious parents: "They should visit schools, talk to other parents, decide on their budget and then make an informed decision for their children."

Most preschools in Kathmandu cater to the 18 month to 5 year age group and offer classes, extra-curricular activities and childcare.

"Young children need special care," explains Roshan

Singh of Bal Batika Day Care and Preschool and adds, "We train our teachers to understand the requirements of each child and create a nurturing learning environment."

While previous generations of Kathmandu residents learnt to read, write and calculate only in schools, children today are expected to acquire these skills before they even begin first grade.

Moving away from the traditional rote learning, preschools today use interactive methods to help children understand the basics of alphabets, numbers, colours and shapes. Preschools have thus become places where children are prepared to transition

successfully to formal educational system.

"Preschools help children develop social and emotional aptitude as well as language and cognitive skills," says Binti Basnet of Euro Kids, "we provide them with a strong base so that they go on to do well academically and socially when they enter schools."

However, some parents are worried that their children will not be able to cope once they leave the safety of preschools and go into more 'traditional' schools. Dipti Acharya of Bridge Water International School feels differently and says, "Students who are used to progressive methods of teaching while in preschool have better

understanding of concepts, and can thus easily grasp the lessons in their new schools."

Anwesh KC of Olympia Primary School agrees with Acharya and adds that primary schools are beginning to apply alternative methods and use technology in classrooms.

However, all this comes at a premium price which many parents cannot afford. But preschool owners explain that the fee they charge is appropriate for the range of facilities on offer.

Trained teachers, colourful classrooms, toys, games, spacious playgrounds, and even swimming pools mean that preschools today are well equipped to keep children busy and provide a interactive learning environment for your little ones. 🇳🇵

Stuti Sharma and Paavan Mathema

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PICS: BIKRAM RAI


Preschool checklist

- Stimulating curriculum
- Qualified, trained and caring staff
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- Clean and safe facilities
- Hygienic food
- Welcoming, friendly and homely environment
- Spacious playground



Nurturing young minds

After successfully launching the International Baccalaureate diploma program for the first time in Nepal, Ullens School has now opened its kindergarten wing. Inspired by the teaching practices of Bank Street College of Education in New York, Ullens Kindergarten aims to provide quality education with a focus on experiential learning. The school recently redesigned its infrastructure to make it child friendly. Reshu Aryal Dhungana of Ullens Kindergarten says, "Our classes are designed to allow children to learn through their interactions with nature and practical activities. We don't want to teach only alphabets or numbers; we want them to become creative thinkers who have strong social skills and problem solving technique."



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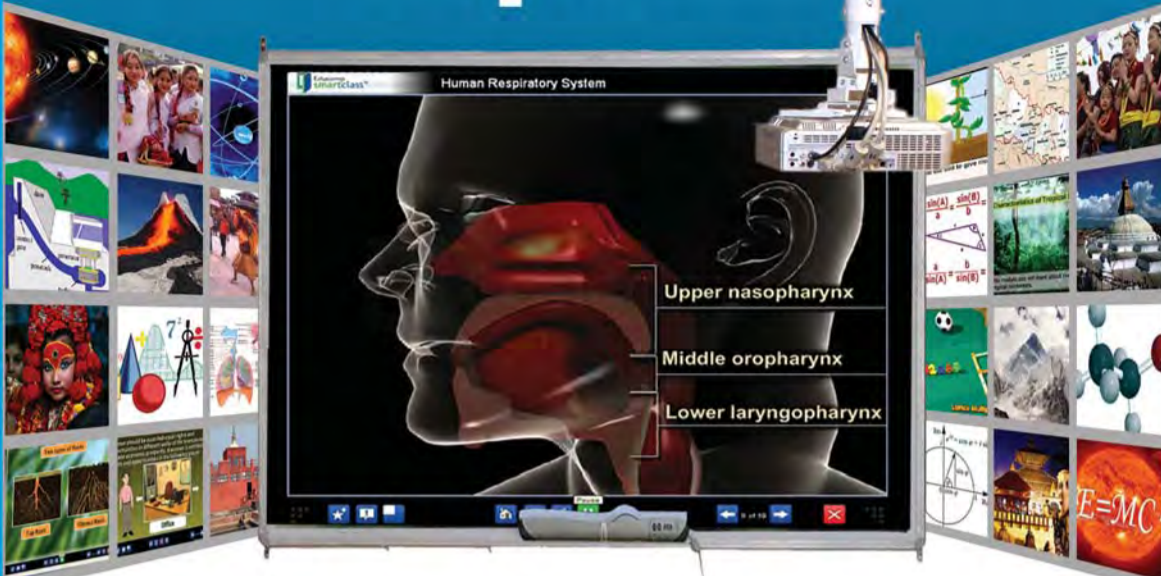
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The wildest dreams



Luculia

Exciting exhibition of 200-year-old drawings of plant specimens from Nepal

TIRTHA BAHADUR SHRESTHA

Usually the Siddhartha Art Gallery at Baber Mahal Revisited showcases contemporary artists from Nepal and abroad. This week's unique new exhibition of 200-year-old drawings of Nepali plants may not be strictly "art", but depicts the meticulous visualisation of leaves and flowers by the scientist-artist, Francis

Buchanan.

The paintings are from the archives of the Linneau Society in London and are based on the pioneering work Buchanan did in 1802-1803 when he came to Kathmandu on an East India Company mission to the Nepal Court. The exhibition was inaugurated last week by British ambassador, John Tucknott, and on hand to introduce the exhibition was Mark Watson of the Royal Botanical Garden in

Edinburgh.

The history of plant exploration of Nepal goes back to antiquity through ayurveda, but there hadn't been any specimen collection and taxonomical studies. Buchanan collected over 1,000 plants and many turned out to be new species. He pressed his specimens between papers that absorbed moisture, a technique still used by collectors, and stored them at the British

Museum. The Linneau Society also archived his manuscripts and drawings.

Buchanan placed great importance on local plant names and frequently incorporated them into their new scientific Latin names, even distinguishing Nepali names from Newari ones. A large part of this work was included into David Don's *Prodormus Florae Nepalensis* in 1825. But the drawings at the Linneau Society

remained a hidden treasure until they were discovered by Mark Watson, who was fascinated by the quality of the paintings.

Most botanists hired artists to draw valuable specimens, but we don't know the identity of Buchanan's artist. We also don't know what Buchanan looked like because, unlike other explorers from the 18th and 19th century, he left no portraits for posterity.



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of Kew



Camelia

The exhibits at the Siddhartha Art Gallery are beautifully framed, the illustrations are fine and capture the details of flowers and leaves with natural freshness. Most illustrations are life-size and the gallery almost looks like a herbarium.

‘Sungava’, the Nepali orchid, is pictured as *Epidendrum damunsuttea* using the Newari name, ‘Damunsutta’ which Buchanan collected from the forest below Swayambhu. The orchid doesn’t survive there anymore, and nor does the Newari name for it. Sungava was later renamed *Dendrobium densiflorum*, and is depicted on a Nepali postage stamp and its trade is restricted.

The painting of the ‘Chilaune’ plant depicts a small twig with fresh green leaves that appear leathery,



Schima

and flowers have pure white petals opened to a small cup, disposing a bunch of stamens that surround the central pistil. It is typical of a tea family flower. Another member of the tea family, *Camellia kissi*, known as ‘Hingua’ in Nepali is the chief ingredient for Tibetan tea prepared with salt and yak butter. For Buchanan this plant was new to science, and he inscribed it as *Camellia hengua*.

Buchanan’s use of Newari ‘Lukuli Swa’ for his wild cinchona as *C. luculia* survived in botanical jargon as the genus *Luculia*, and the pink flowering



White flower

shrub is now known as *Luculia gratissima*. Unfortunately, the name ‘Luculi Swa’ is no more in use in Newari. Its drawing is somewhat incomplete, the artist having left the lower leaves unfinished in order to save time and conserve paint material.

One Indian artist of the time employed by botanists was Vishnupersaud (Vishnuprasad), but it is unlikely he was Buchanan’s artist because a *Luculia* plant he drew for another collector in *Tentamen*



Dendrobium

flora Nepalensis’ (1824) has different draughtmanship than the one in the Buchanan collection.

Buchanan later changed his name to Hamilton for inheritance purposes and a large number of plant names bears his double-barrelled name: Buchanan-Hamilton, shortened to Buch.-Ham. In Nepal, Hamilton is known also as a historian and traveller. He also studied the fresh water fish in Nepal’s rivers.

Buchanan was perhaps the first one to discover, collect and draw Nepal’s incredible biodiversity, which Kipling later eloquently described as: ‘The wildest dreams of Kew are the facts of Kathmandu’.



Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha is a noted Nepali botanist, who has extensively studied Nepal’s endemic plantlife.

Till Sunday 1 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited www.siddharthaartgallery.com/



BIKRAM RAI

From portrait to self-portrait

Spanish photographer Antonio Nodar has photographed over 1,000 artists all over Europe and he is now in Nepal at the behest of the Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre at the Patan Museum.

‘The Nepal Album’ of ...from portrait to self-portrait... brings a timely counterbalance and fascinating insight into the minds of contemporary artists in Asia: how they see themselves and interpret their own culture. Fifty-eight year-old Antonio Nodar was born in Galicia and worked in theatre before his career as a photographer for newspapers in

Spain. From 1996 he has been working on ...from portrait to self-portrait... and launched Volume 1 with 242 European artists in 2011.

Since his arrival in Kathmandu in February Nodar has been working with Nepali artists, painters, sculptors, cartoonists, traditional Pauba painters and Mithila artists. The current work features over 300 artists from across Nepal in which they are allowed to freely “re-work” photographic portraits of themselves that Nodar takes, the result is combined artistry that includes a conventional black

and white portrait with often playful embellishments by the individual artists.



...from portait to self-portrait... KCAC at the Patan Museum open daily from 10.30AM – 5PM till 11

April 2012 www.kathmanduarts.org www.antonionodar.com

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Interview with Sanjiv Maharjan, one of the artists



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COMMENTARY
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Maoists are not Communists
Sunil Prajapati
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REPORTS
Woes of victims
Taking the nation hostage
Million questions

LITERARY DEBATE
Literary figures debate on nuances of the language

HIMAL Khabar Patrika
March 29 - April 12

EVENTS



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

Girls Night Out, dance the night away as you enjoy this exclusive girls night out. Rs 700, 30 March, 6.30 pm to 11.30 pm, Lakhey Restro and Bar, Durbar Marg



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

Poetry Slam Workshop with Screen. IN, attend a slam poetry workshop with Ujiwala from Word Warriors followed by a special screening of *Louder Than a Bomb*. 7 April, 12pm to 4pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective

Spring Camp, 10 days Spring Camp for children to empower themselves through music, art, dance and outdoor activities. 2 April to 6 April and 8 April to 12 April. For more information call 5013554

MUSIC



IDES OF MARCH, support the 'underground' music scene of Nepal with the annual concert featuring bands like Severe Dementia, Antim Graham and Jindabaad. 31 March, 1pm to 8pm, Bhrikuti Mandap Fun Park

April Uprising II, watch live performances by Rai ko Ris, Tank Girl, Space Cake Break and The Doltish. Rs 200, 6 April, 7pm to 10pm, House of Music, Thamel

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



PARIKRAMA IN CONCERT, catch famous Indian band Parikrama live in action with other bands like Cobweb, Abhaya and the Steam Injuns and X-Mantra. Tickets range from Rs 100 to Rs 400, 31 March, 11am to 8pm, Jawalakhel Football ground, Jawalakhel, 9801032067

DINING

Lazy Gringo, fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine. Jawalakhel

Comfort Zone, expansive restobar with a fantastic range of cocktails and barbeque meals. Thamel



YIN YANG RESTAURANT, east meets west as you sample 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 their western dishes. Thamel, 10am to 10pm, 4701510

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



CAFE HESSED, for those with a sweet tooth, offers a delicious range of cupcakes and doughnuts. Jhamsikhel

Chopstix, savory Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Try the famous drums of heaven. Kumaripati, 5551118

Dhokaima Cafe, exquisite ambience, friendly service, cozy bar, place to see and be seen at. Patan Dhoka, Yala Maya Kendra, 5522113

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

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



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



CAFEREENA, the extensive menu has something for everyone. Try their famous chips chilly. Sherpa Mall, Durbar Marg



IRISH PUB, for the simple reason that the place actually feels like a bar. Don't miss out on their Irish coffee. Lazimpat, Ananda Bhawan, 4416027



ZOM HRANGA

As the Air India flight from Kolkata started its descent into Kathmandu, I had a feeling of déjà vu. My last visit to Kathmandu five years ago was also to participate in the Pro-Am event of the Surya Nepal Masters golf competition at the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort. Despite the chaos of the airport terminal in Kathmandu, the potholes

and dust outside, it was like a homecoming to be back in the familiar and serene surroundings of Gokarna which is one of the most scenic golf courses that I have played on. The view of snow-capped Mt Dorje Lakpa, the dense primeval forest, undulating fairways and impeccable greens are unique, and the physical exertion of just walking the 18 holes is by itself a tiring but pleasant experience. The Surya Nepal Golf Open was introduced in 1993 at the Royal Nepal Golf Club as the first professional

Defending our honour at Surya Masters

Zom Hrang (left) is a tourism executive, golf enthusiast and lives in Kolkata, also in picture are (l-r) Sri Lankan pro Anura Rohana, Biresh Paul and LB Singh.

competition in the country. The venue was shifted to Gokarna when the course was officially inaugurated six years later. The game has grown in popularity over the years (as has a prize money for the pros) and over 30 professional golfers and almost 100 amateurs participated in this year's Surya Masters event. The management of the Gokarna golf resort has done well to maintain and promote the course with a view to boosting golf tourism. My friends Biresh Paul, Buddha and I were paired off with the Sri Lankan pro Anura Rohana who is a past winner of the competition, and the format was what is known as a 4 ball-better ball where all 4 members of the team tee-off and the best ball is chosen for the second shot which again is played by all the team members, and so on and

Abhijit Chadha wins

In a case of triumph of youth over age, Abhijit Chadha, just 20, won the 19th Surya Nepal Masters at Gokarna last week, beating Vijay Kumar and Nepal champ Shiva Ram Shrestha, who tied with Mukesh Kumar for the third spot. The partisan Nepali crowd was rooting for 27-year-old Shiva Ram Shrestha but the pro from Chandigarh shot a final round of 4-under 68 and walked away with a Rs 646,000 cheque and trophy. Vijay scored an even par card of 72. Shiva Ram went 1-over 73 and Mukesh submitted a card of 71. Tashi Tsering won the amateur section with 8-over 286 and finished tied-25th overall.

On hand to congratulate the winners were Nepal's chief secretary Madhav Prasad Ghimire, Sanjiv Keshava, MD, Surya Nepal (pictured, below).



so forth. This format of the game focuses on team effort more than individual performance and we combined well as a team. The group led by Nepal's top golfer Shiva Ram Shrestha fought hard but eventually we managed to beat them to win the Pro-Am event. The thing about winning a competition, especially a prestigious event such as this, is that we are obliged to come back the following year to defend our title. It's a bit like defending your honour. Looking forward to next year's Surya Masters at Gokarna. 🇳🇵



SINGMA FOOD COURT, for the best Singaporean and Malaysian cuisine in town. *Pulchok, 5009092 and Bhatbhateni, 4411078,*

Bench Burger, be it a fish or steak burger, Bench Burger offers many types and tastes to suit your palate. *Krishnagalli, Patan*



NEW ORLEANS, offers a wide variety of western dishes that are scrumptious yet healthy. Try the rosemary chicken and hamburgers. *Jhamsikhel, 5522708*

Lhasa Bar, enjoy a beer or a splash of cocktail at this springboard for excellent young musicians starting out on the Thamel circuit. *Thamel, 985101043*



CHONGQING FAST FOOD, gear up for some mouth watering Chinese dishes like Sour and Spicy Pork and Kung Pao Chicken. *Thamel*



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. *Jhamsikhel, 5521339*

GETAWAYS



CHITWAN SAFARI TOUR, exciting wildlife safari in the Chitwan National Park at Rs 4999. Call Ace travels at 4411830

Holiday at Grand Norling Hotel, Gokarna. *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*

Spring Break @RSR, have the time of your life along the sandy banks of the mighty Trishuli river with unlimited food, drinks and music. *Rs 3500 per person (room), Rs 3000 per person (tent), 31 March, River Side Spring Resort, Kurintar, 9841386652, 9849186888, 9813287921*

Music by the Museum



Hits FM 91.2 and House of Music are organising the 5th edition of Music by the Museum with Ani Choying. All proceeds will be donated to the kidney hospital, Arogya Kidney.

Ani Choying began recording songs in 1996 and released her first album Cho in 1997. Since then she has released eight more successful albums and has been actively spreading the message of peace, harmony and wisdom through her soulful voice. She recorded her first Nepali album Moments of Bliss with local musicians which helped her gain a special place in the hearts of Nepalis. Her songs and original music have appeared on various albums including "Head Maasage" by Soul Flip, BMG Company and the "Buddha Bar" compilation by George V Company in France.

Date: 6th of April
Time: 6:30pm
Venue: Patan Museum
Tickets: Rs 1500
For bookings: Contact Hits FM: 4780534.



SOMEPLACE ELSE



PICS: MARCO POLLO



Party palaces in Kathmandu are as ubiquitous as its temples. In the business of pomp and circumstance, they go hand in hand. A wedding or conference crasher would have flopped in his mission, if the hosts had skimmed on the open bar or buffet.

Catering at such venues usually covers an assortment of continental and Asian standards, and 8 Degrees in Jhamel—for better or worse—is no exception: tandoori and pasta and Chinese and Fire Balls!

For hors d'oeuvres, Fire Balls

(Rs 200), minced buffalo meat, rolled and tossed in a spicy Metron sauce, is essentially a passable buff chilly with a seductive name.

Among the chef's recommendations, the Chicken Cordon Bleu (Rs 350), chicken breast flattened and stuffed with ham and cheese, is decent but needs more filling or better yet could be smothered with the same white sauce used on the Spinach Cannelloni (Rs 225). Au contraire, the cannelloni crepes filled with cottage cheese and spinach over mixed greens, could ditch the white

sauce and swim in marinara instead. Otherwise, the plate is unworthy of a chef's hat.

Dishes with exotic names or hyperbolic tags tend to heighten expectations and disappoint. Watch your paws and don't fall into a marketing trap.

Stick to the Spicy Pork Stew (Rs 325). It's spicy, it's pork and it's stew—and oh, what a stew! The cubes of pork (fat-in) strewn in a well-seasoned broth are 'spoon-tender' and must have been simmering for days. Served with a mound of rice, the dish alone makes

the grade. Afterwards, treat yourself to a plainspoken Lemon Lassi (Rs 125). Remarkably, the odd combination doesn't curdle; it's a refreshing surprise.

The six-month-old, two-story complex complete with ample parking space and choice of function room is modern and neutral with its clean, beige decor and furnishings. Its designated restaurant, set in a wide banquet hall (possibly available for hire) and club tunes on play, will make diners feel like they missed out on a good party. Ultimately, at 8 Degrees it's best to crash than dine. 🇳🇵

Marco Pollo

Down Jhamel's restaurant row, set off the road, neighbouring reoccurring haunts like Roadhouse



BLACK SWAN



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

In the 2011 Academy Awards Darren Aronofsky's wondrous *Black Swan* lost out to Tom Hooper's heart-warming and beautifully crafted *The King's Speech*. Both films are excellent yet they are poles apart and perhaps impossible to compare. The Academy has always liked classic films, with their over 50 year old voting pool (on average), and so it is not surprising that the precocious *Black Swan* lost out to *The King's Speech*. Aronofsky's brave and shocking film is a few steps away from being the general crowd pleaser that is Hooper's film (Hooper also won "Best Director" that year) with its alarming portrayal of a young ballet dancer's disintegration under the pressure of the rigorous world of classical ballet with its emphasis on beauty and perfection.

Natalie Portman plays Nina – the vulnerable young dancer who's technique is perfect but who is woefully frigid – as criticised by Thomas her mentor and the artistic director of the ballet company. Thomas, played to lascivious perfection by Vincent Cassel, holds Nina's future in his hands – the ballet company will open its new season with Swan Lake in which its principal dancer must be able to dance two very distinct roles, the pure, innocent, and beguiling White Swan Odette, and the evil, seductive, mesmerising Black Swan – Odile. Thomas chooses Nina in the end but constantly taunts her as she repeatedly fails to embody the Black Swan to his liking.

As the opening day looms closer, the already slightly unstable Nina starts to unravel. She spends her days between the dance studio and the Manhattan apartment that she lives in with her overbearing and emotionally abusive

mother who treats Nina like a 6 year old. Erica, Nina's mother, played by the powerfully talented Barbara Hershey, is a failed ballerina herself, and it is clear that her obsession with her daughter is also mixed with a certain jealousy that Nina is the far better dancer.

As Nina starts to see darker versions of herself in mirrors and in dark corridors she also starts to have other more disturbing hallucinations. Aronofsky's unnering eye never tips us into the cheesiness of horror, yet horrific the hallucinations are in their indication of Nina's growing psychosis. Only Aronofsky, whose films are as diverse as *Requiem for Dream*, *The Fountain*, and *The Wrestler* could has taken a slightly sterile topic like the world of ballet and turned it into a rich, beautiful and terrific film.

As Nina sacrifices herself to the perfection of her art we are swept along by her passion and her madness. The ballet scenes, the intricate costumes, Portman's acting as she transitions from the beautiful but mousy Nina into the epitome of the Swan Queen are mesmerising.

Black Swan is a sublime film about the sublime. It is a beautiful incubus, a thriller with the heart of an art film that isn't afraid to push the boundaries of the viewers and of the artists who struggle to make such films. In the end, Portman won the "Best Actress" Oscar for her role, but in films like these it is truly the ensemble of cast and crew that deserve the award. 🇳🇵



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

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer

Placebo power



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Derived from Latin, the word "placebo" means "I will please". Hired mourners in medieval times chanted psalms which clearly sounded insincere; so the mourners were called placebos, as they were there just to please. In Western medicine the power of the placebo is now being reevaluated. One of the reasons for this is the burgeoning field of neuroimaging, the science which reveals the structural and chemical changes in the brain.

If the drug and the placebo pill (which the patient is told will work effectively) is given to patients with neurological illnesses like seizures or Parkinson's disease, and the radiological images show beneficial changes with either placebo or the drug, it is hard to refute the efficacy of the placebo. Studies like this have emphasised the placebo effect. If the results are similar, why not explore the potential benefits

of the placebo because it comes without side- effects and is cheaper than the chemical drug? Indeed, even the bastion of mainstream medicine, the Harvard Medical School, created a department last year wholly dedicated to examine the placebo effect.

Many in Nepal in complimentary medicine could have told Harvard that they have been exploiting the placebo effect for centuries.



Conventional medicine has a two- pronged approach based on drugs or surgery. But the human being, either in illness or good health is a complicated personality and clearly requires other modes of approach so that treatment with drugs and surgery will be enhanced. There is no question that the practitioners of complimentary

medicine spend more time winning over the heart and mind of the patient so that this approach in and of itself will have a soothing, therapeutic effect.

Recently in a major asthma drug study, patients in the placebo arm of the study did not show any improvement in the objective chemical markers, but they said they felt much better. Based on this study which was published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, some reviewers said that objective markers should not be the only criterion to consider. Acknowledging such a notion is heresy in established medical circles because we are so tuned in to just chemical or objective markers.

Of course this certainly does not mean that if someone is having a heart attack they should try to find a placebo pill; that would be counterproductive. They need to go to the nearby hospital emergency room. But there are many other non- emergency conditions in medicine where the placebo effect can work wonders. Stay tuned. 🇳🇵

WEEKEND WEATHER

The wind-blown sand haze that travels to Nepal all the way from the deserts of India, Pakistan and Iranian deserts as a seasonal phenomenon, although this year it is thicker and has lasted longer. But these go only up to 3,800m up which means most trekking areas are above the haze, but view points like Bandipur, Nagarkot and Sarangkot are not. The haze filters the sun, not allowing the ground to heat up as much as it should, which in turn subdues localised convection systems. However, there could be some localised storms into the early part of the weekend. by the way, pardon that inadvertent slip-up last Friday when the weather report in this space got repeated from the week before.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
26-11	22-13	26-13



BIKRAM RAI

WHEELS OF RAIN: Locals build the chariot of Seto Macchendranath, the lord of rain, in Darbar Marg, in preparation of Chaitra Dasain, when the Seto Macchendranath procession begins.



ANURAG ACHARYA

CITYWIDE SWEEP: Volunteers of the Clean Kathmandu-Our Kathmandu campaign conducted by Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) clean areas around Gwarko on Thursday morning. KMC plans to deploy 10,000 volunteers everyday for a week as part of the campaign.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

FUSING TUNES: The band Ashesh and Nekhvam performs with Norwegian violinist Vidar in Kathmandu last Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

SURVIVOR: A child from the slum in Thapathali after a dip in the Bagmati River on Wednesday evening.



BIKRAM RAI

CASHING IN: Customers wait to deposit payments at the Nepal Telecom (NT) office in Jawlakhel on Thursday. NT is one of the few public enterprises which yields profit, with a net gain of Rs 12.12 billion in the last fiscal year.

Bad parenting

Public enterprises need lessons on efficiency, not just bailout pocket money



MY TWO PAISA
Paavan Mathema

Last week, the government decided to hand out Rs 160 million to three loss-incurring public enterprises (PEs) in a bid to kick start their operations and rescue them from their debts. The recipients are Gorakhhkali Rubber Industry, Nepal Drugs and Janakpur Cigarette Factory (despite the government's anti-smoking campaign).

Although the bailout is conditional with restrictions on how the money should be used, it is not the best way to save these corporations. In spite of the growth in numbers, roles and scope of public enterprises in Nepal, their financial and other performances have been far from competitive.

There are 36 public enterprises under the government's control at present, and except for financial institutions, a majority of them are incurring losses that now amount to billions. And we are not talking about welfare centric corporations like Nepal Food Corporation, which has a loss of Rs 1.11 billion. Even commercial ventures like Janakpur Cigarette Factory has recorded a loss of Rs 800 million. Some of these companies are suffering losses despite having a monopoly in their sector, which can be minimised simply through administrative reforms.

Political interference in business is largely to be blamed for the state of the state's enterprises. Public corporations have turned into a playground for political appointees and nepotism, with unqualified candidates occupying even technical posts such as accountants or financial analysts. Such practices have not only deprived enterprises of capable and qualified leaders, but are also increasing the operating costs and leading to huge losses.

The Drinking Water Corporation has over 1,000 staff and bears a loss of Rs 180 million. Using their leverage as state-run enterprises to accumulate bad debts at state controlled commercial banks, public enterprises have become symbols of mismanagement and unaccountability. The Nepal Airlines is a clear example of how too many crooks spoil the broth.

According to the Finance Ministry, about half a dozen PEs including Nepal Electricity Authority, Employees Provident Fund, Nepal Insurance Corporation, Nepal Oil Corporation, Hydroelectricity Investment and Development Company, Nepal Timber Corporation and Gorakhhkali Rubber Factory are functioning without a chief executive.

The tendency of public enterprises to cry out to the Ministry of Finance for rescue during financial distress is not new. But a bailout which does not include business-sensible strategies will only be a temporary fix. Privatisation is thought to be the obvious long-term solution, but Nepal's privatisation drive, which changed ownership of more than 15 public enterprises in the last two decades, has left more companies inefficient and corrupt.

The government should now look into other alternatives to save the face of public enterprises. It is possible to use the co-operative model to reform these companies. The state can also contract out the management to private companies.

If the government intends to continue running public enterprises on its own, changes will have to be made. The establishment of Public Enterprise Management Board (PEMB), a semi-autonomous umbrella body which aims to regulate and oversee management of all state-owned ventures is definitely a step in the right direction.

PEMB is now in the process of appointing executive heads for the seven public institutions through a competitive application process. It should now seek to train public enterprises in the basics of prudent business strategies which focus on resource utilisation and wealth maximisation.

There is no reason why public enterprises should not be operated as businesses that are financially sustainable. 



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

When I met Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in July last year in Patna for a special on Bihar for this newspaper, he told me how he was criticised in the beginning for his party's alliance with the Hindu-right BJP, and his inability to deal with poverty and Naxalism.

He said: "But I did not let these negativities distract me and focused on positives that I could extract out of limited choices I had."

This week, when I interviewed Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai in his office, there were moments when he sounded exactly like Nitish Kumar. That may be understandable because Nitish invited Baburam to Patna last month as a chief guest for a conference, and our PhD prime minister seems to have adopted quite a few tips on governance from the Bihar book.

Despite negative op-eds and a growing media backlash, Bhattarai looked unperturbed. The critics, the opposition as well as his own party comrades are baying for his blood. Bhattarai, however, says he is trying to stay focused on his twin goals of peace process and constitution. And he had the look of a man who meant every word.

When Bhattarai took office in August, the peace process was deadlocked and there was general frustration about the protracted transition. Less than a week in office, he convinced the party leadership to hand over weapon containers to the Special Committee which created an environment for a dialogue with the opposition. This resulted in the 7-point MoU on a consensus on the rehabilitation package and the formation of the State Restructuring Commission.

Today, most of the combatants have left cantonments and the Nepal Army is already making preparations to integrate those who remain. For the first time in four years, there is real hope that bills on truth and reconciliation, and disappearance will be passed by the legislature parliament even though it remains to be seen if it will still have the general amnesty clause for Maoists and state security.

The pace of progress may not have impressed Bhattarai's critics, but to be fair to the man, bringing parties with contradicting ideologies and diverging political interests to agree on common grounds was an unenviable task. So far he has proven his worth. There are still criticisms regarding sloppy transfers, leniency towards

The last lap

The prime minister's exclusive focus on peace and constitution seems to be yielding results

unruly ministers, coddling cronies accused of human rights violations, and controversial visits by foreign dignitaries. But on the priorities of peace and constitution, he has outdone his predecessors.


This week he has been ensconced in secret meetings with Pushpa Kamal Dahal and moderate second-echelon leaders of the NC and UML to agree on an outline of a political consensus. Now that the Supreme Court has reiterated its refusal to extend its deadline, compromises on integration, state restructuring and form of governance are the only way forward.

On the governance front, the prime minister and the judiciary earned public appreciation after a sitting minister was jailed on corruption charges. Now, the expectations from this government to book the other bad apples have also increased. Bhattarai must make appointments of the commissioners in anti-graft bodies at the earliest to expedite

the corruption cases.

Faultlines in the parliamentary system bred instability and corrupt governments in the last decade, which led to growing support for a directly elected executive in the new constitution. This means individuals with personal integrity who are capable of rising above partisan interests and exhibiting statesmanship have brighter future.

Bhattarai has an opportunity to do just that, to steer the nation out of transition by taking all parties into confidence. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Sushil Koirala and Jhala Nath Khanal have a central role to play in this process.

The time for blame games, and taking the quarrel to the media, are long gone. The people have tuned off. It's time our leaders learnt a thing or two from Nitish 'Sushasan Babu' Kumar and focused more of their energy on solving problems, instead of becoming a part of them. 

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Killers on the

Lack of investigations of road fatalities denies justice to victims and emboldens rash drivers

ANURAG ACHARYA

It was just after 4 PM on 31 October last year when a speeding truck hit a bicycle on the Ring Road near Kalanki, it was the kind of incident that happens almost every day in Kathmandu's chaotic streets.

The truck, which belonged to Narayani Transport, was seized and the driver detained. The reason the accident got more than a small mention in the newspapers was that the victim was internationally renowned conservationist and wildlife academic, Pralad Yonzon, who always bicycled to and from work from his office in Dhobighat.

"I was driving from Kalanki towards Balkhu and at a distance, I saw a truck overtaking a cycle on the right side from behind and hit it," recalls Bibek Sharma, who rushed Yonzon to Teku Hospital in his vehicle. "The truck

paused for few seconds, then sped away. Pralad's left leg had been smashed."

Sharma called up Jujubhai Tandukar of Kalanki police station, whom he had met 10 minutes previously and told him what had happened. The police came to the hospital and recorded his statement. Later in the evening, another senior police officer also interviewed him. Yet, five months later, Sharma says he is surprised he still has not been summoned to testify in court.

Yonzon's family, lawyer and friends are also surprised and suspect there is a deliberate attempt by the police to not get the key witness to testify in court.

"We don't have anything against the driver or transport company, all we are asking for is a fair trial," Yonzon's niece, Sanjeevani who works with Wildlife Conservation Nepal, told *Nepali Times*, "now I understand why people take to the streets and smash things



PICS: WALLACE WOON

Young yogis on bicycles

Two Nepali youngsters pedal across South Asia to spread the message of peace and environmental protection



ALOK LAMSAL

When Rupak Khadka and Rajendra Sapkota finished walking through all of Nepal's 75 districts ten years ago to spread the message of environmental protection, their family and friends told them they had made their point and it was time to go to university.

But instead of settling down for a placid student life, the young duo decided to take on an even more challenging task: to bicycle across South Asia. The two are now back in Kathmandu after pedalling through India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

They set off in November 2009 with just Rs 10,000 in their pockets and decided to follow in Pushkar Shah's foot pedals.

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run



CRIME SCENE: A bicycle mural marks the exact spot on the Ring Road near Balkhu where noted conservationist Prahlad Yonzon (right) was run over by a truck last October.

up. Nobody listens to you otherwise.”

Pralad Yonzon was not just a conservationist, he was among the few responsible individuals in Kathmandu’s streets. “Imagine how much carbon we are not emitting if just one person decides to go green,” he used to say, and he decided to do something about it by using a bicycle. It was a mode of transport that he hoped would help restore the planet’s health, but he died trying to make that statement.

“Maila Ba was aware of the risks of cycling in Kathmandu but he continued,” Sanjeevani says, “he lobbied with the city to demand bicycle lanes and safer roads for pedestrians. The least this country can do is to show some respect and conduct a fair trial. We are not demanding any compensation, we just want truth and justice.”

Sources in Metropolitan



Traffic admit legal loopholes provide culprits of rash driving easy escape. However, half-hearted and motivated investigations not only deny justice to victims, they embolden rash drivers and encourage impunity.

Kathmandu is now a city of 2.5 million people, but its road network has expanded little in the last 20 years when the number of vehicles has also grown 20-fold. Traffic is chaotic, traffic discipline is nil and although the crackdown on drunk driving has reduced the number of accidents, rash drivers and vehicles with iron rods protruding from the back face no punishment.

There are more than 10,000 road accidents every year in Kathmandu and nearly 400 fatalities, and many of them are not really “accidents” but are preventable man-made mishaps caused by rash and negligent drivers, as was the case in Pralad Yonzon’s tragic death at age 60.

Yonzon’s family and lawyer are putting their faith in the upcoming hearing of the case this week, where they are hopeful the court will allow Bibek Sharma to testify. But they fear nexus between a powerful transport cartel and police will use money and muscle to prevent that from happening. The family has appealed to the public to come forward to show support. 🇳🇵



Bicycle blues

In 2005 the government decided to construct a 44 km long bicycle track around the city after signing the Velo Mondial Charter and Action Plan for Bicycle Friendly Communities. The charter provided a blueprint and set directives to promote bicycles as efficient, environmentally friendly alternatives to motorised transport. But the plan has been shelved just like the proposed bicycle lane from Maitighar to Tinkune which got suspended in early 2000. On January 11, the state announced another ambitious plan to build cycle lanes on all roads in the valley which are over 22 metres wide. Although the Chinese have completed their survey and are studying the designs, it’s hard to determine when construction will actually begin. Sources in the road department are also skeptical and say that the plan is unlikely to materialise.

“There is simply no space to construct bicycle lanes in Kathmandu,” says Shyam Kharel who is heading the Kathmandu Road Expansion Project under which road networks in Tinkune, Maitighar, Dillibajar, New Plaza, Kamal Pokhari, and Ratopul are being widened. “We may still be able to construct 5 metre wide lanes in the Maitighar-Tinkune section, but there is no space for bicycle lanes in other parts of the city. We barely have space for vehicles,” he said.

Despite increasing pressure from cyclist groups and environmentalists, the Kathmandu-Bhaktapur road was built last year without bicycle lanes, where speeding vehicles have killed 24 people so far. The much hyped bicycle tracks around the Ring Road are also in limbo.

Alongside Kathmandu Metropolitan City office which is responsible for inner city road networks and Divisional Road Office which looks after major roads in Kathmandu, the Kathmandu Road Expansion Project was recently formed to expand roads which experience heavy traffic flow. It remains to be seen how successful this new organisation is in upgrading Kathmandu’s choked roads.

nepalitimes.com

Watch Yonzon talk about Himalayan environment conservation Cyclists and the city, #579 Pralad Yonzon, 60, #577



Shah covered 400,000 km on his bicycle travelling through 150 countries and then returned home to Nepal to climb Mt Everest last year.

“We thought it would be cool to also go around the world and draw attention to the extreme environmental deterioration,” says Khadka, “so we started with South Asia.”

Sapkota says they were trying

to remind people of Buddha’s message about the need to preserve the environment and to keep the outside clean to be clean inside. “Buddha said saving nature is saving creation itself, so this was a spiritual pilgrimage for us,” Sapkota adds.

The Nepali pedalers found that not everyone shared their ideas of a clean environment and a clean mind. In Banaras they

were cheated by touts, they saw great gaps between the rich and poor everywhere they went and felt this was laying the seeds of future violence. And although people found them interesting, not many were willing to use bicycles to commute. Nepali ambassadors in New Delhi and Colombo were less than helpful, and even refused to see them.

But they did get a welcome from the nuclear scientist and former president of India, APJ Abdul Kalam who received them warmly and commended them on their symbolic journey to promote environmental awareness in South Asia. “The inspiration starts from within and motivation starts when triggered by simplicity,” Kalam told them.

In Bangladesh, the two got a hearty welcome everywhere they went. Aghast at the traffic, they even tried to get the people of Dhaka interested in

pedal power but they found the city moving away from rickshaws to diesel and petrol cars.

In Sri Lanka, the Nepali ambassador refused to see them. But by a complete coincidence, they ran into him a few days later at a function in Colombo. He was not feeling well, so the two taught him some yoga after which the ambassador said he felt much better. So he gave them Rs 5,000 and sent them on their way.

During their two-year cycle journey, as yoga practitioners Khadka and Sapkota often felt like the yogis who used to walk barefoot on fire, didn’t eat for a month or meditated naked in caves in the mountains. “There is a spiritual cleansing that comes with extreme physical penance, this must be why the ascetics did it,” explained Sapkota.

After completing their tour

of South Asia, the two are now planning to go further afield to southeast and central Asia, and have prioritised countries with problems of environmental degradation.

Their motto on the trip is ‘If you want to change the world, change yourself first’. Back in Kathmandu they are trying to promote bicycling, and lobbying for the creation of bicycle lanes in the capital. They were members in the group that convinced the municipality to invest in the bicycle lane parallel to the Ring Road on the Gaushala-Tinkune road.

Says Sapkota: “Bicycling is the ideal mode of transport for Kathmandu. The distances aren’t great, it’s neither too hot nor too cold, and easy to get around. Most importantly, bicycles don’t pollute and don’t need imported fossil fuel. It makes you and others around you live longer.” 🇳🇵

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“So-called intellectuals”

Pushpa Kamal Dahal in conversation with journalists at his residence on 22 March after the cancellation of the visit by UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon.

“I was part of the delegation which extended an invitation to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to participate in the International Conference on Lumbini. The visit by Secretary-General Ban had been set for the last week of April. We got a letter from the United Nations saying that the visit had been pushed from March to April because of his busy schedule. We agreed, and felt it was appropriate to go along with the Secretary-General’s schedule. We had already made our plans according to the time suggested by Secretary-General Ban.

Meanwhile, we completed the formation of the Greater Lumbini Development Directive Committee. We had already started setting up sub-committees and dividing work on plans for the world peace city and concept note for the conference. A group of people was unhappy that Ban was coming to Nepal, that Prachanda was going to



be coordinator of the Directive Committee, and that Prachanda and Ban would co-chair the international conference.

The conference was suspended after we received a message via the Foreign Ministry that, given the leadership here is confronted with the task of peace and constitution-

writing, it would be better to postpone the conference. It is unfortunate for Nepal that Ban’s visit has turned into such a controversial issue.

This episode has proven how narrow-minded and irresponsible our so-called intellectuals are. It has become clear to what level they can descend to fulfil their self-interest. As far as my understanding, the Secretary-General’s visit has not been cancelled. He will come to Nepal and we will hold the conference. The ‘intellectuals’ may have played some role in preventing the visit, but I do not believe their position was pivotal.

At a time when we should be engaged in completing the work of integration and constitution-writing, organising a conference with the participation of heads of state and government would have taken up to 10-15 days. On a personal level, I would have been greatly pressured. From one perspective, therefore, I was relieved to receive the news of postponement of the visit from the United Nations. We can now concentrate on peace and constitution-writing.”

Why the Maoists won’t split:

Naya Patrika, 27 March

राष्ट्रिय पत्रिका

- For the Baidya faction to be recognised by the CA, it will need at least 95 MPs after the split. But currently the group doesn’t have more than 72 MPs. Also it is not clear if those who have been backing Baidya in the inter-party struggle will support the agenda of separating completely from the parent party.
- According to the Constituent Assembly bylaws, a party can split by getting 40 per cent of the members in the Central Committee to vote. But the Baidya faction only has 46 members out of 148-member central committee.
- Despite being fiercely opposed to the party leadership, Baidya is not keen on dividing the party. Dev Gurung and Pampha Bhusal think likewise. The party establishment too is not in the mood to speed up the split by punishing Baidya and his supporters.



On the plate: Rights

“No no, federalism will lead the country towards disintegration.”

नागरिक Yubak in *Nagarik*, 27 March

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“If constitution is not drafted by May deadline, nobody will survive the resulting disaster.”

NC President Sushil Koirala quoted in *Annapurna Post* March 29



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Interview with Minendra Rijal, NC leader and Army Integration Special Committee member, *Nepal*, 31 March

नेपाल

Nepal: Has there been a consensus in the special committee?

Minendra Rijal: Last week, the PM tabled a proposal that went against earlier agreements and we protested. But now he has expressed commitment to initiate integration as per the 7-point deal and we welcome that.

Why was the PM's proposal unacceptable?

The number and qualification as well as the training duration must be as per Nepal Army's prescribed standards. We cannot compromise on legal norms and standards to accommodate somebody's interest.

But the PM's proposal, which was forwarded by the Nepal Army had accommodated these guidelines, hadn't it?

The proposal was tabled by the PM and not the Nepal Army. The proposal is full of clauses that run counter to the Nepal Army Act and its regulations. The PM and his party tried to force it

on us but since there was widespread condemnation, they are coming around to the 7-point deal.

Is the NC jittery about the Maoists dealing directly with the Nepal Army on integration?

There is no direct deal, and I repeat, the NA has not forwarded any proposal to the PM. So it is wrong to speculate.

What about the rumours that the Maoists will be given high posts in the new directorate?

It is not possible to give them any post above the Major, and even in the PM's proposal there is no such provision. But I don't think we should reject the proposal outright. Once the clauses that run counter to the 7-point deal are corrected, the proposal will be workable. The Maoists must understand that they cannot have their cake and eat it too.

Losing ground

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 March-12 April

हिमाल

Although the Maoists are making the power struggle look like a conflict between those who are behind 'peace and constitution' and those who want to return to the jungle, it is actually their internal problem. Even though the Baidya faction opposes parliamentary politics, it recognises that its power and legitimacy comes from the CA and it lacks the support of 40 per cent members to go against the establishment.

As long as there is the CA, the

Maoists won't split. Chairman Dahal who shifted his loyalties from one lobby to another until the CA was formed, might call upon his cadres for another revolt if the peace and constitution process is not completed. If that happens, there will be a conspiracy to dissolve the CA by delaying the constitution drafting till the deadline day, when there will be no other option left.

The opposition and establishment faction of the Maoists should understand that Nepalis will neither accept another revolt nor an infinitely extended CA in the country. Enough people already feel betrayed by the Maoists and dismiss their politics as conspiracy. The Maoist party should embrace the peace process and secure its place in pluralistic politics before it falls prey to more antagonism.



Teknarayan Bhattarai in *Nagarik*, 25 March

नागरिक

Noordev Basyal could not hold back his tears when he finally met his father Ramprasad and 75-year-old grandmother at his house in Palpa. Surviving a decade long conflict, the ex-Maoist combatant Basyal opted for voluntary retirement and

Homecoming

returned home. The family could not have asked for more.

Noordev married his comrade-in-arms Parvati in the cantonment and now has two children. He spends his days helping his father in the fields and looking after his ailing grandmother. "I am happy working in the fields now. If things get bad, I may go overseas to find work," Noordev says. Three weeks ago, another ex-combatant Pratigya Aire made a long journey from the cantonment in Rukum to her house in Palpa. Pratigya's husband Prakash, who is platoon commander in the Fourth Division is awaiting integration in the Nepal Army. Pratigya is still undecided whether she wants to return to her village or continue living in Rukum. For now, she and her two daughters are happy to be home.

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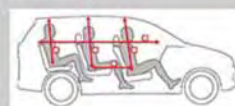
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Drive less, drink more



I, too, want to be a Minister Without Portfolio.

If there was any doubt that Nepal's Maoists are inspired from El Norte, then Comrade Supersonic's statement to the Stand-up Committee the other day should dispel all doubts. The chairman said: "The party has now taken a one party two systems approach." This could either signal PKD's inability to rein in Baidya Ba, or it could mean that the party is deliberately playing good-cop-bad-cop and keeping both options open (take to the house, or take to the streets) in case things fall apart on 27 May. And if figuring this out wasn't complicated enough, comes word that the Hardline Faction has itself split between those who want to split (Radical Hardliners) and those who want to just pressurise the Baddie Brass (Moderate Hardliners). If the party does split, the Ass has come up with a cunning way for the UCPN-M to retain its acronym by calling itself the **Un-united Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist**.

Shh, don't tell anyone that Awesome's most-trusted former guerrillas are now part of his intelligence apparatus, and his spies have infiltrated other party headquarters and even gone undercover into the hardline faction. In sting operations with hidden cameras, they record what is said in closed-door meetings and the recordings are at the disposal of Comrade Almighty by evening. Wonder if PKD himself is being spied upon by anyone else during his hush-hush meetings with kingG and the secret confabs with **Comrades Sitaula, Gyawali, Amreso, Jayant and Laldhoj & Co?**

This Tweet just in: It was bound to happen sooner or later, the price of a litre of petrol in #Nepal has now caught up with the price of beer. This

probably means motorcyclists will be driving less, and drinking more.

And it looks like the Traffic Police's crackdown on drunk drivers is yielding dividend: literally. At a press conference that other day to demonstrate the efficacy of the newly-acquired breathalyser sets during which "volunteers" were requested to imbibe alcohol and then blow into the tube, police said fines from tipsy drivers have now overtaken fines from illegal parking and other traffic offences. Together, the alcohol and seat belt fines have now become the single biggest source of revenue for the police. Advice to drunk drivers: don't stop doing what you're doing, otherwise the police may be forced to stop its crackdown on drunk drivers.

Considering the whopping chunk of government revenue that comes from the booze tax, it is conceivable that the fall in alcohol consumption could soon bankrupt the country. Bars and restaurants in The 'Mandu have reported up to 90 per cent drop in business since the anti-drink-and-drive campaign took off. There are rumours, hitherto unconfirmed, that the restaurant and bar association (**Rayban**) collected four million in cash and passed it on to the political powers-that-be to ease the ban, but without effect. Over Coke the other day, a Rayban member asked the Ass rhetorically: "They took our bribe money and they didn't lift the ban. What is this country coming to? Nothing works anymore."

This week's 'Only In Nepal Award' goes to the news item which reported that a Slovak woman who had been kidnapped by a cult has been slapped with \$1,650 fine for "overstaying" in Nepal by the **Department of Immitation**.



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