I have brought you thus far, is the message from Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai in his address to the nation on Thursday evening as he marked the emptying of Maoist camps. The move paves the way for integrating some of the ex-guerrillas into the Nepal Army, and finalising the constitution in the month that is left. Leaders have to find a way around two contentious issues: federalism and type of government. Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, keen to claim credit for progress so far, summoned editors on Wednesday to say the door was now open for a directly-elected presidential system.

KARNALI FOCUS

page 11, 12, 13

BY THE WAY by Anurag Acharya in Nepal’s outback, federalism holds the promise of making the government more accessible and accountable.

Not much of the $20 million the government spent on AIDS prevention and treatment finds its way to Dailekha, by Naresh Newar.

It’s that time of the month in Achham where the tradition to banish women to outhouses during menstruation dies hard, by Rubeena D Shrestha.

Contending with a tormented past, Kalikot works to reinvent itself.

HERE I AM

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As a retrospective, Nepali Times brings a selection of opinion columns from the past 600 weekly editions of the paper since May 2000 during which the country went from constitutional to absolute monarchy, suffered a war and a royal-military coup, saw a ceasefire, an interim government, the election of Maoists to power and the peace process. To read more, readers have free access to the full Nepali Times archive on www.nepaltimes.com

The Kathmandu spring

This State of the State column by CK Lal was censored from the 11-17 February 2005 edition of Nepali Times #234 after the February First coup by King Gyanendra. It is finally printed below for the first time.

Now that political stability is set to return, many journalists fear that they could be redundant. No shenanigans of party-chasing to report, no significant political affair to analyse, no perceptible trend in ground reality.

By going back to pontificate about, no more parachutists to brief, nothing but report, no peace-loving citizen in an unendurable state of reason and emotion. Reason demands that we learn to live in the rainbow eyes of the Buddha. It is finally printed below for the first time.

In his Under My Hat column, Kunda Dixit satirised the clampdown on the press and the column itself was censored in the #234 edition of Nepali Times of 11-17 February 2005.

Statutory Notice: An official Fact-finding Committee has pre-tested this column on lab animals and certified that it contains permitted synthetic dyes and preservatives and has declared it fit for human consumption provided the childproof seal is not broken at the time of purchase. However, one can’t be too careful during these perilous times so readers are advised to exercise individual caution on a case-by-case basis. Management is not responsible for the consequences, especially if perpetrators are apprehended puring this in broad daylight, charged with indecent exposure, and sentenced to 36 lashes with a wet rattan cane on each hind cheek.

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Leaders tried by Continued Freedom

Political leaders and activists who have not been taken into custody have complained that they were free to roam around the streets.

"It’s been a week and they have still not put us under preventive detention," complained a Nepal Congress leader on condition of anonymity, "a discrimination, what do I have to do, burn some more tyres?"

A multi-party group calling itself the All-Nepal Federation of Unjustly Undetained Politicians threatened to launch a decisive nationwide strike if their demand to be arrested without further ado is not implemented with immediate effect by the concerned higher-up authority.

The statement said: “If they don’t put us under house arrest, then we’ll go into cardiac arrest.”
Bandhomonics

Artika Bhatta’s Economic Sense column from Nepal Times #50 of 19-25 May 2002 about the epidemic of bandha.

In Nepal as in other South Asian countries, all parties that have come to power, or even remained in opposition, have used bandhas effectively and institutionalised it with the necessary ingredients of violence, coercion and fear. This is why even a banda called by an otherwise obsequious association or group of people is scary and so vehicles remain off the roads, shutters are down and all institutions are closed.

Many keen observers of our glorious way of life insist that bandhas are so successful in Nepal because they fit in perfectly with a core characteristic of the Nepali psyche-evuating work. Although methinks this is an overly cynical, possibly even defeatist position to take, it is true that bandhas are often openly discussed in terms of being a windfall break, especially for people in government, when one signs the attendance register, to be sure, but follows that by simply sitting back for a fun-filled day with exciting card games, endless cups of tea, naps and a few discreet moments of personal grooming. On a banda, even government civil servants, what an ironic description, at the highest level make no attempt to either work themselves or make sure that others do too.

Duty in distress

Column by Hari Roka in the afternoon of the royal massacre in the 6 June 2001 edition of Nepali Times #46.

I may be too hasty to hope that the People’s War being waged by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) against the whole system for over a decade would provide a new path for the nation. The surgery has helped push the nation further into confusion and disarray. It is not possible to expect this power to steer the nation away from the current crisis, since it is difficult to gauge how organised the movement is. It is caught between the still largely undeveloped political groups and the political confusion and anarchy that themselves have created. The biggest tragedy in the history of the country occurred in the royal palace on the night of 1 June, 2001. This incident and the events that followed it have destabilised the palace, which was perceived to be a solid and monolithic structure for more than 200 years. This last week has pushed the nation into an unprecedented dilemma and crisis. The Nepali nation is bewildered and alarmed.

At this moment of instability and lawlessness, many may be tempted to fish in muddy waters. But doing so would only invite more grief to people and the country. Events in the world and in neighbouring countries have already demonstrated that during times of such uncertainty, reactionary forces from inside as well as outside will try to push nations towards the precipice.

Underbelly of the beast

Kankan Mana Diilt writing from detention in Duwakot after the royal regime arrested him and other human rights activists in action in edition #39 of Nepal Times 16-20 April 2006.

DUWAKOT-Taken in by Kathmandu’s royal regime with two dozen other protesters last week for willfully (and with prior announcement) breaking the curfew order, this writer had an opportunity to see how a militarising autocratic state machinery can ride rough-shod over some of the weakest members of society. It was an opportunity to take a look at the underbelly of the regime. The writer has seen during our incarceration is something that the privileged with contacts in high places or money to buy oneself safe passage rarely care to see or understand.

Four kids were resting inside a bus at a bus stop where they work as cleaners when they were dragged out. Dhudha Timilrana, 17, of Heluta, Buddha Lama, 16, of Sindhupalchok, Ramesh Thapa Magar 17 and Ram Lama, 20, of Chappagam. They have all been moved elsewhere. Individuals who are in the lowest class bracket in detention get the toilet that is furthest and the rice that is the worst. It will be important for the ICRC to determine their fate and whereabouts.

One year itch

The late Saubhagyab Shah wrote a regular Guest Column, and this is an excerpt from the #41 edition of Nepali Times 23-29 March 2007.

There must be something in our national psyche that makes the Nepali mood swing so swiftly between irrational exuberance and incorrigible pessimism. Much has happened politically in the past year that has generated immense enthusiasm for the future. The whole state machinery, the political parties, civil society, and regional and ethnic forums had begun to focus their energies on the task of holding the elections to the constituent assembly. For a moment it seemed as if we could all live together happily ever after. Alas, except for just the small matter of the South that had been forgotten during the celebrations. The sudden violence that engulfed the eastern Tarai left April’s triumphant paradigm in tatters. There was the sight of mighty leaders and their auxiliary intelligentsia first dismissing the Madhesis as U-turns in the ascendance of an upsurge of a few miscreants, then threatening the use of force to put out fires supposedly ignited by fundamentalists and reactionaries, and finally making a 180-degree turn to embrace the same revolts as their own - all within a week.

Murkier and murkier

Prashant Jha’s Plain Speaking column dealt often with the fate of the Madhes Movement through the eyes of the elections. This one is from edition #39 of Nepali Times 21-27 March, 2008.

The main enemies of the Madhesi people are the present Madhesi leaders themselves. It is now increasingly apparent that the second Madhesi movement of January-February happened only to generate a support base and ensure political survival for the three parties in power. The Thapas can be no different. The Mass Anagha movement (determination) did little to help ordinary Madhesi. The promise of inclusion had already been made earlier, and was only reiterated. All the three-week agitation did was channelise Madhesi discontent, and generate a wave. But in less than a week, the Madhesi parties blew it all away.

Thapadom

Manjushree Thapa in this column from #40 of Nepal Times 13-30 June 2003 pokes fun at the return of the days of the Thapas.

The new plan to defeat the Maoists is supposed to win the “hearts and minds” of Nepal, but this slogan which might have made sense three-and-a-half years ago when it was rejected by Girija Koirala, is a joke today. The Maoists have already won the hearts and minds of much of Nepal including many intellectuals in Kathmandu. If the prime minister thinks the way to win over the villagers is to send more political survival for the three parties. Their demands (unde...
Thai Airways International has completed 44 years of operation in Nepal. The airways has announced special promotional fares for destinations like Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Australia, and Japan.

Real winner
Real has announced Rajendra KC from Kathmandu as the first week winner of its recently launched Real Fruit Power Contest. KC has won an imported mountain bike. Real Fruit power Contest, is a 13-week long SMS based competition with the bumper prize of Rs 500,000 as scholarship.

Celebration on wheels
Syakar Company, the authorised distributor of Hero Honda motorcycles in Nepal, has launched its New Year scheme. Customers will receive discount up to Rs 6500 on the purchase of every bike or scooter and Philips home appliances, and a chance to win Philips products worth Rs 100,000.

Spreading love
The Live to Love Foundation promoted by the venerable Drukpa Lineage, a 1000 year old Buddhist sect headquartered in the Himalayas, announced Michelle Yeoh as its second ambassador. The internationally renowned actress Yeoh joins well known Indian film star Aamir Khan as the brand ambassador for the Foundation.

One stop solution
NepalSutra, a web portal which caters to the needs of people travelling to Nepal has been launched. The online interactive medium helps travellers browse through options regarding travel, adventure, dining and shopping in Nepal.

Spreading wings
Sanima Bank has opened its newest branch at Butwal-8, Amarpath. The branch was inaugurated jointly by Directors Mahesh Ghimire and Bharat Kumar Pokharel along with Chief Executive Officer Kumar Lamsal. With this recent addition, Sanima now has 22 full-fledged outlets throughout the country.

Cover
Made in Nepal
Making and marketing of the brand Nepal

Editorial
Never Again

Commentary
Sealed brains – Kiran Nepal and Rameshwor Bohra
United against extremism – Purushottam Dahal
Banking on Agriculture – Tulasi Gautam

Reports
Fleeting Machines
12 point course
Living on other’s future

Interview
Pradeep Gyawali
With the May deadline for the constitution looming, our legislators will be burning the midnight oil again. However, with national attention focused on the constitution, we forget that the parliament is also responsible for addressing state bills and policies and endorsing necessary reforms.

Perhaps it’s wrong to expect any extra effort from our lawmakers, who have failed to complete their primary task even after several extensions of the deadline. But it’s been over a year since any major bill facilitating trade and commerce was endorsed by the parliament. In fact, over two dozen acts and policies pertaining to the business sector have been collecting dust in the parliament and ministries, some for over five years.

With changes in local and international business dynamics and technological transformation it is essential to review existing laws and introduce new policies. Acts and policies, and their reviews are drafted by the concerned ministries, forwarded to the government which then tables it at the parliament for endorsement. However, in Nepal’s case, this route seems to take years to complete. Our economy is forced to run on guidelines that are more than two decades old in some cases.

More than three months into the “Investment Year”, our Foreign Trade Regulation Act and Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Policy are still under review. Also under inspection are the Intellectual Property Policy and Anti-dumping Act. According to UNCTAD’s latest World Investment Report, Nepal is in the bottom rung alongside Afghanistan, North Korea and Bhutan when it comes to attracting foreign direct investment. FDI commitment to the country declined by 48.35 per cent in 2010-11. Among other factors, bureaucratic hurdles and unclear policies discourage foreign investors. The review is expected to comb out unnecessary clutter from the policies and streamline the investment process. If we want the investment year to bear fruits, we must expedite the review method.

Hydropower, our most prized investment sector has received much attention. But the proposed Electricity Act and the Electricity Regulatory Commission Act, prepared in 2008 and registered in the parliament in 2009, are pending. The Industrial Enterprise Act is dated 1992 and has not moved forward from the review stage for years. Garment manufacturers and exporters have been seeking speedy approval of the bill for setting up two Special Economic Zones for garment, carpet and handicraft industries. The bill has been awaiting the parliament’s approval for the past three years. Bills relating to labour, competition, quality standardisation, property and asset management are also pending.

Bills have not been passed even when we are bound by our pledges to international organisations. Nepal narrowly escaped being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force, the global anti-money laundering watchdog for not endorsing three bills- Mutual Legal Assistance Bill, Extradition Bill and Bill Against Organised Crime two months ago. The bills have still not been passed and as the extended deadline ends, we are bound to run into trouble again. Our Bank and Financial Institution Act has not set the operational guidelines either for international banks which are scheduled to enter the Nepali market soon.

The lack of political will to make the economy a priority and push for timely reforms is preventing these bills from being approved. The only area where there is no backlog is tax laws, which are conveniently changed with the budget. The private sector has been lobbying for the endorsement of these bills. But in order to have a more conducive business and trade environment, our lawmakers need to be pressurised. Of course, this doesn’t mean every bill in question should be given the green light in a hurry. But what can be completed in a few days, should not take five years.
Lately, as the world’s highland countries were in Kathmandu to discuss climate change, and as the Great Himalayan Trail-wallahs approached the end of their odyssey, two Himalayan events were also held in the capital. One was the launch of the book *Fire Treasures of Great Snow: The Story of Kangchenjunga* by Norwegian mountaineer Jon Gangdal. The other, the opening of an exhibition of wide-format Khumbu photography by American mountaineer and mountain portrait-artist Jeff Botz.

Gangdal’s work is a competent history of all Himalayan mountaineering woven around his own climbs ending with the ascent of Kangchenjunga in 2009. The photo exhibition is a living black-and-white tribute to Sagamatha-Chomolongma and nearby massifs. The book is printed and published in Nepal in high quality, while the pictures are exhibited at Image Arc gallery at Kulima Tole in Patan.

Gangdal writes of his own mountain climbing journey in the self-deprecating style of the great Himalayan raconteurs. For those of us who grew up on the lore of Mallory, Tilman and Shipton, he opens up the world of early non-English explorations of the Himalaya. While we know a bit about the French, mainly because of Maurice Herzog’s *Annapurna*, the author reminds us of European climbers beyond the English-rendered accounts. The legacy of Norway in Himalayan exploration is an eye-opener, for a country that is known to Nepalis today almost exclusively as a ‘donor’. Long before even Amundsen made his mark as a polar explorer; in 1907 two 21-year-old Norwegians pioneered on Kangchenjunga. Carl Wilhelm Rubenson and Ingvald Monrad Aas understood the value of the native porters, writes Gangdal, a sharp departure from the ‘colonial expedition leaders from countries with strong imperialist traditions, whose style of leadership can be observed even today.’

The author quotes from the historical work *Fallen Giants*, that Rubenson and Aas were ‘the first to discover and publicise the remarkable mountaineering abilities of the Sherpas’. Gangdal’s own desire to climb Kangchenjunga was fired by the low celebrity status of a mountain whose name was so difficult to spell, the high rate of expedition failure on the ‘least known and riskiest of mountains’, its difficult approach, challenging weather and the lack of mountaineer traffic on the flanks.

The author unearths rare archival material on the German explorations of the Himalaya between the two world wars, starting on Kangchenjunga with Paul Bauer in 1929. Discomfort with the Nazi era, replete with the Swastika flag on the Himalayan glaciers, seems to have led to some timidity among the Germans from claiming their rightful role in Himalayan exploration, but history is history, says Gangdal.

Like so many mountaineers who develop deep links with highlander societies, Gangdal devotes himself to the upliftment of the Rolwaling people. Long before even Amundsen made his mark as a polar explorer, in 1907 two 21-year-old Norwegians pioneered on Kangchenjunga. Carl Wilhelm Rubenson and Ingvald Monrad Aas understood the value of the native porters, writes Gangdal, a sharp departure from the ‘colonial expedition leaders from countries with strong imperialist traditions, whose style of leadership can be observed even today’. The author quotes from the historical work *Fallen Giants*, that Rubenson and Aas were ‘the first to discover and publicise the remarkable mountaineering abilities of the Sherpas’.

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unfurled on the summit of Manaslu a khada on which was written: “Peace in Nepal: Please stop killing, start talking!”

The author devotes considerable space to the Italian alpinist photographer Vittorio Sella, who explored the Kangchenjunga region as early as 1899, lugging a 30x40 cm large-format camera and tripod. Sella gifted posterity with fine Himalayan photography that is instructive till this day, including images of the Lepcha-Rong people who lived at the base of Kangchenjunga.

The American Jeff Botz is the modern-day incarnation of Vittorio Sella, though Botz’s own idol is Ansel Adams, photographer of the American West. While trekking in Nepal in the 1970s, Botz realised it was impossible to do justice to the high himals within the 35 mm frame. He taught himself to use a 10x14” camera, which he carried around the Upper Khumbu to expose poetic images. Botz introduces in exquisite detail the rock strata, overhangs, icefalls, seracs and snow fields. The views are unique even when the vantage point is standard, as in Thamserku from Tengboche, Everest from up on Gokyo, or the Khumbu Icefall close-up from the Base Camp. Botz’s capture of the summit pyramid of Tabeche, in this writer’s eyes, shows a mirror image of Ama Dablam standing across the valley, the same streaks of ice at the top and identical tilt of the torso (picture, overleaf).

Author Gangdal and the Image Arc gallery could perhaps help bring a Vittorio Sella exhibition to Nepal in collaboration. The book and the exhibition both represent, one hopes, a barometer of the times. Peace is returning, and with it the alpinists and photographers willing to write, photograph, print and publish. All of which can only help Nepal make up for the lost decade-and-half.
**EVENTS**

**ORGANIC GINGER / NATTI SUNTI**, Siddhartha Art Gallery and the B.P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation present a performance art by Snihita Caraspa. 11 April onwards, 11am to 5pm. Babermahal Revisited, Babarmahal.

**PLACED NUANCES**, paintings on display by Neera Joshi Pradhan. 6 April to 19 April, Park Gallery, Lazimpat.

**Canvas City**, explore street art as you experiment with stencils, wheel painting and stickers at this art workshop. 14 April to 15 April, 11am to 3pm. Satya media Arts Collective, Jhamalikel.

**Learn Photography**, learn the basics of photography in this 12 day long session. Rs 3,000, 17 April to 28 April, 7am to 9:30am. 4244348, 9841246341

**INVENTION IN TRADITION**, an exhibition of paintings by Umesh Shah. 6 April to 23 April, 10:30 am to 5:30 pm. Park Gallery, Pulchowk, 5522307

**Finding the Story**, a part of Satya’s creative non-fiction writing workshop. Apply by April 20. April 23 to April 27, 7am to 3pm. Satya Media Arts Collective, Jhamsikhel.

**NEPSTEIN: BEGINNING OF THE END**, this promotional gig of Decapitated features an array of bands like Amokkshan, Bidroha, Imperium and Scarlet Void. Rs 100, 28 April, 2pm onwards, Neon Pub, Thamel.

**MUSIC**

**SUFI NIGHT**, Hamro Fellowship presents Hernat Rana performing for charity for Hospice Nepal. Rs 1000, 20 April, 7pm onwards. Patan Museum, Mangal Bazaar. For tickets contact 9802051400

**PASTO VOSTRO**, a pretty place with some great pasta. Their bacon wrapped sausages are a must. Thamel.

**NEPALIDAY 2012**

**NEPALIDAY 2012**, a day dedicated to promoting Nepal. Features a wide variety of cultural performances. Park Gallery, Lazimpat, 4411818

**New Year’s Eve, catch Monkey Temple**

**HIT Nepali THEATRES on June 15.**

**five different stories in which all the**

**characters come together during an ill-fated bus ride from eastern Nepal to the capital.**

**However, making the film was quite a struggle itself. Rauniyar recounts, “We faced a lot of difficulties during production. We had to cope with fuel crisis and strikes. There were changes in shooting locations at the last hour. And just as we were about to wrap up the shooting, we also had to deal with a budget shortage.”**

**Fortunately produces Sameer M Dixit and Lonim P Dixit were able to bring on board Louverture Films, a New York-based production company which connected the film with an online funding site called kickstarter.**

**Highway created history by raising Rs 2.7 million which covered all post production costs.**

**“The response was overwhelming and the involvement and encouragement of anonymous supporters gave us the courage to keep going,” says Rauniyar.**

**Despite still challenges, the cast and crew are happy to have the backing of renowned technicians like Golden Globe winner Richard Horowitz who has composed the background score and David Barker who edited the movie. Rauniyar brims with confidence and says, “Highway will be a turning point for our film industry. It will encourage independent filmmakers to make movies with a difference and put Nepali cinema on the global map.”**

**DINING**

**NEPALI ART DECO**, a delicacy that serves again again. Opposite Namaste Supermarket

**BABA'S SPICES**, Thamel. Great food and drinks, with folk music and dance. Dillibajar.

**THE FACTORY**, a trendy stopover in the chaos that is Thamel. Great food and drinks, with zesty music. Don’t miss out on the cheesecake, it’s a must. Mund upscale, Street, Thamel

**HIGHWAY HEADING YOUR WAY**

**Highway**, the capital.

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A whole chicken from the four-year establishment will fetch you Rs 405, while a half is half at Rs 250 and a leg, Rs 125. The succulent bird comes with a standard red hot sauce but no mayo or ketchup. If you opt for a whole, ensure freshness and insist your choice of roast straight from the spit rod.

Sides are sadly limited to french fries (Rs 75). A spicy cajun rice or even a baguette would be ideal. But if chicken is not your thing, go fish. The trout (Rs 395) comes whole, seasoned and grilled. But beware, the fish at the time of review was more bony than usual and irritating to pick out. Take a knife and debone before serving. Tea sandwiches are also available at the counter for Rs 75 including ham and cheese, tuna and grilled chicken on white bread with crusts off. Crab sandwiches (Rs 110) were out of stock but promise a rare treat in the valley. The grilled duck was also done for the day but is not cheap (Rs 995).

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True Grit

Joel and Ethan Coen are the genius film-making brothers who have perfected the art of taking a genre, any genre, and subverting it to make their very own supertwisted versions. The brothers have been making masterpiece after Blood Simple, A Serious Man, O Brother Where Art Thou, and No Country For Old Men since the 1980s. In Hollywood they have the rare honour of being allowed “first cut” by their producers - this means that they have the unusual privilege of always approving the final version of their films - with no producer interference whatsoever. You’ll never see a “Director’s Cut” version of a Coen brother’s film simply because each of their films turns out exactly as they want them to.

With True Grit, the 2010 remake of the 1969 version starring John Wayne, the brother’s have taken yet another classic genre and put their unmistakable stamp on it. Westerns are gritty, some people get seasick, fast-talking genre altogether, but this version of True Grit ought to be unmissable.

Starring Jeff Bridges as Rooster Cogburn, the one-eyed US Marshall who ends up shooting dead most of the criminals he pursues, Matt Damon as the slightly goofy, overly learned Texas Ranger LaBeouf (pronounced LuBeeF), and the wonderful newcomer Hailee Steinfeld as the 14 year old Mattie Ross, the characters in themselves are a rare delight to watch. The story is simply enough, Mattie Ross hires Rooster Cogburn to hunt down Tom Chaney (Josh Brolin) who shot her father, stole a new pony “Blackie” and pursues Cogburn who has tricked her by setting out before daylight. He has crossed the river on a ferry and has paid off the ferryman to escort Mattie back to town. Furious and determined, Mattie plunges into the river and hangs on to Blackie’s neck as the marvellous horse swims across the river. On the other side await a dour Cogburn and a livid LaBeouf who has joined the former to pursue Chaney who he has been tracking since he has murdered a senator (over a dog) in Texas. LaBeouf spanks Mattie, Cogburn points his gun at LaBeouf to make him stop, and thus begins an unforgettable adventure with three hilarious and unforgettable characters.

There are many, many charming aspects to this film, but perhaps the one that is the most pleasing is the excellent dialogue. Everyone speaks in full sentences, replete with rich, unusual words and some very original turns of phrase. When Mattie’s gun, the one she got from her dead father, misfires she is captured by Chaney’s gang and the following is the exchange between the perfect Mattie and the tin-foil head “Lucky Ned” Pepper.

Mattie Ross: If I had killed Chaney, I would not be in this fix; but my gun misfired.

Lucky Ned Pepper: [Chuckling] They will do it. It will embarrass you every time. Most girls like to play pretties, but you like guns do you?

Mattie Ross: I do not care a thing about guns, if I did, I would have one that worked.

In the end it’s hard to say which of the three characters is the one who has the true “grit” from the title. Even if you don’t like “Westerns”, watch this one. It is truly worth-while just to witness the unusual spectacle of a 14 year old girl track across the Wild Wild West with two crotchety, yet strangely loveable men in search of her father’s killer.

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

The Annapurna Sanctuary

DHAVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Cleaning may be next to Godliness, but in a practical sense, cleanliness has attracted many trekkers to the Annapurna Sanctuary region. Of course the mountain ringed amphitheatre with a panoramic view of Annapurna I (26, 545 ft) and Machhapuchchhre (22, 943 ft) among others helps entice visitors. But lately cleanliness has played an important part in attracting trekkers here.

In this trek along the Modi Khola and its tributaries, many Gurung villages dot the landscape with large campsites and tea houses with clean bathrooms and adequate drinking water. The contrast with Kathmandu is stunning. Many rhododendron and magnolia trees were in bloom with tiny gentians and primroses along the path. As you travelled from Ghurchuk (6,600 ft), to Chhomrong (7200 ft) to Dhikhola (1,830 ft) and beyond to the Sanctuary gates of the Machhapuchchhre Base Camp (12,160 ft), the spick and span presentation was hard to believe. A few years ago this trekking route had dirty bathrooms with toilet paper strewn across in many areas of the trail. But the entire area has undergone dramatic changes.

This cleanliness has probably led to less infectious diseases among both locals and visitors. There wasn’t a single case of gastroenteritis, which was once a common problem. Even porters along the trail were brushing their teeth, something I had not seen in many years of trekking.

Most tea shop owners have tried to cooperate with another to look clean and presentable by picking up paper along the trail and collecting cans and bottles at designated sites. Anti-pollution measures have been enforced. From Chhomrong onwards it is not possible to buy mineral water because plastic water bottles pollute and are unsightly. Impressively, it was not possible to bribe someone for mineral water. This is probably one of the few places in Nepal where there is no selective application of the law. Ozone-treated drinking water is often available for those who do not wish to carry iodine tablets or drink boiled water for water purification.

However even along this trek, it was noteworthy to see how the tobacco industry relentlessly pursues its cigarette sales campaign. A pack of Marlboro cigarettes which costs twelve dollars in New York is sold for two dollars here. Villagers smoking cigarettes (any brand) and cooking their meals in open hearths without a chimney will clearly suffer from more lung diseases.

But remember to take elastic bandages and ibuprofen for sprains and strains along this undulating, magnificent, stair-cased trail.

HEAVENLY ABODE:
A Tibetan carpet weaver in Olangchung Gola, a village in Taplejung, adds finishing touches to complete his creation, last Thursday.

OUT LOUD: Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Thapa speaks at the end of a torch rally, organised by the hardliner faction of the party in protest of the decision to deploy Nepal Army in PLA cantonments on Wednesday in Kathmandu.
JUMLA — After the Maoist camps and containers were emptied this week, the next step is the integration of former guerrillas into the Nepal Army. The parallel military structure that had existed uneasily through the peace process is now gone.

Nearly six years after signing the Comprehensive Peace Accord, the UCPN-M is now a civilian party. The Maoists, NC and UML have agreed on the numbers, ranks and the norms of the integration process, something that had bedeviled them in the past. Disagreements over the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission on Disappearances have also seemingly been resolved at the political level and the technical nitty-gritties need to be sorted out through side negotiations.

Gritties need to be sorted out at the societal level will only begin when the final pages of the constitution are written. The real integration at the societal level will only begin when the final pages of the constitution are written.

Traveling along the banks of the Karnali river from Kalikot to Jumla this week, I could sense seething resentment among the public, not just towards one party but the entire state machinery. The penetration of television and radio have kept people updated with what their leaders do, or don’t do, in faraway Kathmandu.

At a gathering in Jumla, people hurled angry questions at visiting Tourism Minister Loken德拉 Bista Magar and demanded to know what was taking the parties so long to finalise the constitution. They were especially displeased that foot-dragging on federalism was prolonging the integration of the long-neglected Karnali into the country’s development mainstream.

The region has been neglected and abandoned by successive rulers in the capital. Most health and education indicators of Karnali are way below the national average. People here do not have the luxury of patience. “We want a constitution and federalism so the government that is coming closer to us and we do not have to travel for days with a delegation to ask them to do what we are already paying them for with our hard earned money,” fumes Jagat Bahadur Khatri, a retired school teacher. It has been three months since the beginning of the new session and schools in Jumla and Kalikot still haven’t got their supply of text books.

The fear of going back to the status quo of an over-centralised state and the danger of ethnic fragmentation have dominated the debate on federalism. But in Nepal’s remote outback, federalism holds the promise of making government more accessible and accountable.

Here in Nepal’s remote outback, federalism holds the promise of making government more accessible and accountable for the first time anyone here can recall. We are free to live in the light of day and not have to travel for days with a stack of wood, if you fall off those cliffs they will use the same wood in your funeral pyre. The onset of the peace process and construction of the Karnali highway have given residents hope about the future. With better access to markets, farmers are earning income from apples, mushrooms, herbs and tea.

The dry weather and rocky mountains may be unsuitable for growing rice but they are not unproductive, says agronomist expert Chuman Singh Giri, who believes Kalikot has the potential for organic produce. Irrigation schemes and rainwater harvesting could reduce farmers’ dependence on rain-fed agriculture. Kalikot could also develop into a trekking and rafting spot along the scenic Karnali Valley, but for that the infrastructure has to improve.

For the first time anyone here can remember in this powerless district once battling for survival, the dreams of inhabitants have expanded beyond the desire to escape starvation.

Amurag Acharya in Kalikot
We still want to live

The government spent $20 million in 2010 for HIV response, but not much of it got to the village of Rakam

We still want to live

We still want to live

We still want to live

We still want to live

We still want to live

We still want to live

We still want to live

We still want to live

We still want to live

Mansara Sijapati smiles as she poses for a photograph, but then breaks down and cries when she tells her story.

Four years ago, her husband killed himself after strangling their three-year-old when he found out they both had HIV. Mansara was kicked out by her husband’s family and even her own mother refused to take her in.

“But I still want to live,” says the 31-year old Mansara even though she is landless and homeless. Her brother-in-law has given her refuge, but she can’t even afford food or pay for visits to Surkhet for her CD4 count to measure her immune strength.

According to the District Health Office (DHO) there are 185 people, mostly widows and children, living with HIV in Dailekh. A majority of them are here in the village of Rakam, but they get no help from the government. Their only hope is a local group called Parivartan Ko Lagi Pahuch (Access for Change) which distributes antiretroviral drugs once every two months.

Eight years ago, their three-year-old was killed and the government has not paid any compensation. For Mansara, her life is a never-ending struggle to survive.

Despite the government’s efforts, the epidemic in Dailekh continues to spread. According to the DHO, there are 185 people living with HIV in the district, with 112 of them being children.

“After detection we worry about breaking the news to them, and we try our best to console them,” says Sushil Bikram Thapa from the Nepal STD and AIDS Research Centre (NSARC). There are many cases where the news of HIV diagnosis is inadvertently revealed by family members.

There are only two voluntary counseling and testing centres in Dullu Bajar and Chukla, both several days walk far away from remote VDCs with high HIV rates like Rakam. But even these two centres have neither the budget nor the support to take care of the epidemic in Dailekh.

“We are worried about the future of these children,” says Sushil Bikram Thapa. “We need more support from the government to help these children live a normal life.”

That time of

For four days every month many women in Achham move out of their houses into tiny sheds because they are deemed unclean, the gods will be angered and bring ruin upon hapless male members of the family, crops will wither and die, cows will stop giving milk.

The tradition of ‘chaupadi’ stems from ignorance and superstition, and requires married women to be banished to the cowshed for four days and unmarried women for seven days every month during their periods. Mothers and their newborn babies, too, have to go to the cowshed.

Ousted from their homes, the women have little access to clean water, face dangers from snakes and wild animals attracted by the scent of blood, are prone to physical assault, violence and even rape. Living in such unhygienic conditions exposes them to infections and disease.

The narrow, squat little outhouses are old traditions that banish women to outhouses during their periods die hard in mid-western Nepal despite literacy and affluence.
Beyond news

Suraj is just 12 years old. Ravi is eight and Siva is 13. They are all HIV-positive orphans living in Rakam who lost their parents to full-blown AIDS. Ravi asked visitors: “Are you here to help us?” Such questions are always inevitable, and journalists are often at a loss on how to respond to them. We parachute into villages, interview a few people and head back to the city with ‘exclusive’ interviews and ‘quotes’. We gather news, write reports and inform the public, and move on to the next story. But is that enough? Isn’t there a higher calling?

Shouldn’t journalists make sure that the responsible people, in this case, aid agencies and government, are held accountable and pressured to take action? In other words, is awareness enough? Shouldn’t there also be action?

If reporters do that, they are said to have crossed the line into activism, or called ‘NGO journalists’. But in places like the rugged, impoverished mountains of mid-western Nepal, journalists have a job not just to collect and disseminate information, but also to follow-up with the authorities in Kathmandu. Bearing witnesses to suffering is not enough when there is so much indifference around.

In Dailekh, officials at the DDC and the DHO blame apathy in Kathmandu to the AIDS epidemic here. We took that to the officials in Kathmandu. The UN and NCASC admitted frankly that they lacked information about what was happening, and promised to investigate. Let’s hope that happens soon.

Here in Kathmandu, the faces of HIV widows and orphans appear to urge action, forcing me to ask myself: “What have I done to alleviate their plight?” One thing is sure, writing about it is not enough anymore. Nareesh Newar

Sneak peak

Chaupadi has become one of those issues that people feel is no point in getting tested. The NCASC’s Hemant Chandra Ojha agrees that Dailekh needs serious and urgent attention, and has been hampered by the lack of strong advocacy from the district’s aid coordination committee. The government spent $20 million in 2010 for its HIV response, but it doesn’t look like much of it got to Rakam.

In Kathmandu, UNAIDS country chief Maria Elena Fillo-Borromeo is also surprised about why Dailekh falls between the cracks. “It’s amazing that there is big money but it is not going to a place like Rakam, we need to look at why this is happening,” she told Nepali Times.

The village of Rakam in Dailekh, which has been ravaged by AIDS, Mamrma Sijapati tells the story of a husband who committed suicide after strangling his HIV-positive daughter. The scene of beauty of a Karnali sunset masks the suffering of this neglected land.

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE (left to right):
The village of Rakam in Dailekh, which has been ravaged by AIDS. Mamrma Sijapati tells the story of a husband who committed suicide after strangling his HIV-positive daughter. The scenic beauty of a Karnali sunset masks the suffering of this neglected land.

Sneak peak

Radha Nepal Parijar is a single mother who has come back to live at her father’s house ever since her husband abandoned her for a younger woman. She had just returned from a day breaking stones and working in the fields. Her father’s house is among the better ones in the village and the shed lies in his property. She shows us the separate utensils which she has to use during her periods.

“My father works as a guard at the bank and has a steady income. He built this nice new house with many rooms and welcomed my son and me back,” she tells us, “he is also a Christian and does not believe in chaupadi, so we don’t have to send them to the sheds every month.”

Considering a woman to be unclean when she is on her periods is not limited to Achham, it is endemic among many Hindu families in Nepal, and even educated and wealthy women aren’t allowed to enter the kitchen, visit temples or touch male members of the family.

“Even though she is unclean, chaupadi women need a secure environment. But till there is a change of belief, till menstruation is not considered to be a normal, natural, biological phenomenon, this practice is going to continue,” says women’s rights activist, Manju Thapa.

This is starting to happen. In the district capital Mangalsen many women have stopped going to sheds once a month not because of awareness, but due to growing influence from remittances. More money means better houses with more rooms, and so there is space inside the house for that time of the month.

“My son and I have enough money to build separate rooms so the female folk do not have to go to the goth, the biggest problem is still poverty,” says Ambika Chalane, a young local politician.

Women are still isolated one month, but at least they are not sent off to the outhouse. Traditions change, but not always for the better, since women who used to at least have four days of rest once a month now have to work in the fields, gather grass for the cattle, break stones and collect firewood all day before retiring to the shed in the evening.

“If I can feed the cow when having my periods, why can’t I drink its milk? If I can collect firewood for the kitchen, why can’t I cook? If I touch a plant, it will die they say, then why am I allowed to breast-feed in the chaupadi?” asks Chalane.

Growing literacy is spreading awareness, but old traditions die hard. Chaupadi has become one of those easy buzzwords for NGOs to conduct awareness programs, and distribute allowances to participants. But local activists say many women who are ‘made aware’ go back to being banished to their sheds every month.
Residents of Kathmandu were in for a surprise on Friday as Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, ministers, police and army officials stepped out on the streets with brooms in their hands to launch the ambitious National Volunteer Campaign. However, delight quickly turned into frustration when discrepancies in the campaign budget were discovered. While the proposed budget for the week long program is Rs 20 million, deeper inspection reveals that materials for the campaign were purchased at much higher prices than their actual market rate. For instance, each mask cost Rs 35 and each pair of gloves was priced at Rs 50.

**SEE BUDGET:**

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People won’t question the 20 million if they see visible differences in Kathmandu’s sanitary standards. But if the campaign fails then each penny spent will be highly scrutinized. Also a week long cleaning spree is not the long term solution to the city’s problem. So the government should focus its attention on raising awareness and giving continuity to successful efforts such as fining those who litter public places.
Visionary hospital

Editorial in Nagarik, 9 April

Tilganga Eye Centre recently introduced laser technology for eye operations in Nepal. People with poor eyesight can opt to undergo this surgery and do away with their glasses. While the operation costs around Rs 280,000 to Rs 800,000 in other countries, Tilganga offers the service for only Rs 45,000. Officials at the hospital are hopeful that the affordable fee will help attract patients from foreign countries as well. Unlike other non-governmental organisations in Nepal which function as fronts for dollar hoarding, Tilganga is not only one of the best eye-care hospitals in Nepal, but it has earned acclaim both at home and abroad. In 2006 Dr Sanduk Ruit of Tilganga was presented the prestigious Ramon Magaysay Award for taking ophthalmologic services to remote areas of Nepal. Now that the centre has laid the foundation, our government along with other social organisations need to ensure that people who cannot physically visit the hospital still have access to the services. Private hospitals should also take lessons from Tilganga and stop focusing solely on profit maximisation and become more service oriented. We congratulate Tilganga team for making a great contribution to Nepal’s healthcare system and for taking on a pioneering initiative.

Boycott politicians

Ramchandra Baral, Aarsee Times, 9 April

While only a few weeks remaining for the CA deadline to expire, the progress so far has been disappointing. People are outraged at CA members and politicians for not delivering on their promises and pushing the country to uncertainty. Instead of speeding up the constitution writing process, our politicians were embroiled in one controversy after another and their reputation has been badly tarnished. If this trend continues, people are bound to get angrier and will become completely disillusioned with the present political system. Civil society and the media have to play a more active role in pressurising the politicians to fulfil their duties and a wide-scale campaign spearheaded by the media is the need of the day.

Let’s stop inviting CA members and politicians to unnecessary programs and giving them platforms to fool the public. Let’s keep them out of the headlines and front pages. Let’s hold them accountable to the promises they make through the media. Let’s stop publicising any businesses or enterprises that politicians are involved in until they draft the constitution. Unless these steps are taken, politicians are not going to clean their acts.

Hurry Hurry!

Kiran Bhandari in Nagarik, 12 April

After the major breakthrough in the peace process, UCPN Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal invited journalists to his residence in Lajimpat. An elated Dahal briefed the editors and reporters about the ‘bold’ decision he took by successfully completing the integration process and said he would play a similar role in completing the statute drafting also.

Throughout the press meet Dahal seemed in a great hurry and kept looking at his watch. Reportedly, PM Bhattarai was constantly calling Dahal from the special committee meeting. After half an hour Dahal left his residence in a hurry but to the surprise of the journalists who were still being served refreshments, in came Indian Ambassador Jayant Prasad followed by former NC lawmaker Amresh Kumar Singh.

Not surprisingly, Dahal was back at Lajimpat leaving Bhattarai and the special committee stranded. After being told about the Indian Ambassador’s unannounced visit, PM Bhattarai stopped calling and Dahal paid full attention to Prasad.

Hurry Hurry!
Taking to the streets

B aburam (“Demolition Man”) Bhattarai is doing what he did best during the war: destroy buildings, blow up bridges, reduce neighbourhoods to rubble. Old habits die hard, which is why he finds re-building the streets he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who razed the old quarter of Paris to build the wide boulevards so as to foil any barricade protests. And just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who razed the old quarter of Paris to build the wide boulevards so as to foil any barricade protests. And just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who razed the old quarter of Paris to build the wide boulevards so as to foil any barricade protests. And just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who razed the old quarter of Paris to build the wide boulevards so as to foil any barricade protests. And just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who razed the old quarter of Paris to build the wide boulevards so as to foil any barricade protests. And just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who razed the old quarter of Paris to build the wide boulevards so as to foil any barricade protests. And just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who razed the old quarter of Paris to build the wide boulevards so as to foil any barricade protests. And just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who razed the old quarter of Paris to build the wide boulevards so as to foil any barricade protests. And just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who razed the old quarter of Paris to build the wide boulevards so as to foil any barricade protests. And just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, just like Napoleon got Baron Hausmann to do the dirty work, he has demolished a much more difficult proposition. Having taken to the streets, BRB is looking like a reincarnation of Napoleon III who raza