"I'll smash your windshield unless the prime minister resigns"

The UML's Youth Association Nepal declared a four-day 'morning banda' this week to pressurise Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai to resign. The party said it was closing down the streets for only four hours a day because it didn’t want to ‘inconvenience’ the public. But they enforced their shutdown by terrorising commuters who dared to get out, like this one in Dillibajar on Sunday morning. The police intervened on time and the car and its occupants escaped unscathed.

The opposition parties claim that a national unity government is the only way to break the constitutional void. The NC can’t decide whom to field as prime ministerial candidate, and this is making the UML impatient. The reason for this hurry is that political parties have no other source of cash to finance a future election campaign except to try to get into government and fill their coffers. Ransacking the state treasury while in office has become standard operating procedure.

Nepal is not poor, only poorly-governed. And it will stay that way unless the electoral process is reformed with strong laws to regulate campaign financing.

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ULTIMATE PHILIPS TV EXCHANGE
T he Kathmandu chattering class is a bit full of itself, and likes to collectively call itself ‘buddhi jib’. Literally, pundits who make a living out of punditry. It is getting to sound like an echo chamber, as self-proclaimed intellectual desecrate the electoral arithmetic for the next polls, whenever that will be held.

We see much less chatter and more action, but old habits die hard. Which is why there is microscopic analysis about which Madhav Dixit has the fraction in the Tarai, what the Maoist split means in the far-west for the NC and how the UML can regain lost grass-roots support. There is speculation about how issues of federalism and ethnicity will play out, and how identity politics could upset calculations. 

Guessing the outcome of elections is an international past-time, and we can't do much to change the way politicians and political parties approach elections. But, Universally, there's goof-populism, time-honored populist policies, whipping up paranoia about immigrants, accusing rivals of selling out on natural resources to foreign investors, or postponing urgent decisions on the economy because of what it might mean for a party's standing in the polls. Whether in recent elections in Greece or France, the worst retrograde politics in the United States, or the next polls in Nepal, politicians are hard-wired to behave with short-term time horizons and be single-minded in their pursuit of votes.

What is different about Nepal compared to more mature democracies is that fatal flaws in our electoral system make it far more directly to governance failure. Elections should be the mechanism through which citizens select the most efficient and honest managers to make laws and run the country for four years. But the way they are actually run, elections embed coalition and coalitional party politics so that the rot spreads right through society.

Political parties have to raise money from businesses to finance elections either to buy votes or buy goons. When they get to power, they have to repay their benefactors in contracts. There has been so little investment and businesses are so cash-strapped, however, that political parties have to make sure they amass as much resources as possible while in government so they can finance future campaigns. Incumbent politicians today don't even try to hide the plunder of the exchequer while in government because it has become standard operating procedure.

Nepal's multi-party democracy started decaying almost as soon as it was restored in 1990. It wasn't for any inherent flaw in the system, but the way it was mishandled by those with electoral mandates. Freedom fighters from the 1960s who suffered long years in jail and exile showed very early on that they couldn't handle power. Suffering incarceration and persecution for the cause of democracy isn't, it seems, necessarily guarantor of leadership qualities.

Neither, it seems does taking up arms: the Maoists in power have proved to be just as greedy and selfish in the other fellows. The only difference is that they have honed ransacking the treasury into a fine art, and combined with past and on-going extortion, this gives them a formidable war-chest. You can be sure the current Maoist Madhav Dixit cancellation will step down when it has had its fill, and there is nothing left to steal from the state.

They say Nepal is not poor, only poorly governed. And it will stay that way unless we reform the electoral process with strong laws to regulate campaign financing. Until then, all intellectual navel gazing about the relative standing of the parties is pointless.
The political parties in Kathmandu may still be undecided about what the "new" Nepal would look like, but here in the east people seem to have already decided at the level where it matters the most. Traveling across five districts of Nepal's east, one gets a sense of what real grassroots aspirations are: a more accountable and inclusive society.

Thousands of Janajatis taking to the streets in Kathmandu may have spread fears of national disintegration, but here on the ground the quest for identity is not the bogey it is being made out to be. The national media has been exaggerating fears of communal violence and focuses a lot on negative reports about groups enforcing shutdowns, and social media promotes hate speech. But here, the reality is different. People have become more tolerant of differences and acceptance of the necessity of a more inclusive society.

"They tell me now I am a citizen of a Limbuwan state. I don't care what that means as long as we can have politicians we can reach," Purna Shrestha, a 37-year-old daily wage earner from Jhapa, said. Shrestha has never been beyond Jhapa and doesn't really care who rules in Kathmandu.

Yadunath Khanal has been teaching Political Science for the last 15 years here in Panchthar's local campus, and for the last 15 years here in Kathmandu. "We can reach," Purna Shrestha, a 37-year-old daily wage earner from Jhapa, said. Shrestha has never been beyond Jhapa and doesn't really care who rules in Kathmandu.

At a cyber cafe in Phidim, which was in the throes of yet another shutdown called by CPN-Maoists, two young students were critical of the political parties in the east, demands for political autonomy have become more coordinated, restrained and mature. "Remember, these were homegrown movements and lacked leadership, so it is natural that they were anarchic, but that is slowly changing," he told me.

Indeed, the nine factions demanding Limbuwan are now organised under a coordination committee while an armed Khumbuwan movement recently renounced violence and has pledged to enter peaceful politics. There is no such thing as a righteous stance in politics, there are only politically-correct decisions. Whether we like it or not, identity politics is here to stay at least until we as a nation are prepared to deal with it as a necessary path to redress past exclusivity. To do that, the old-fashioned centralised decision-making must first give way to a more progressive politics that includes all.

Our leaders should stop telling people what is good for them and start listening to what they want: a federalism that celebrates Nepal's diverse identities.
E very time an earthquake hits anywhere in the world, alarm bells start ringing in Kathmandu, classified as the city most vulnerable to a catastrophic quake.

On 18 September last year, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake rocked eastern Nepal and northeast India. The number of casualties was miraculously low, but the fact that a faraway earthquake killed three people in Kathmandu was a warning that brought back memories of the Great Earthquake of 1934 which killed 10,000 people in the Valley.

Nepal ranks high on the list of nations at risk from earthquakes, and Kathmandu is the world’s least prepared city for earthquakes. Japan and New Zealand proved that even in the deadliest of earthquakes, preparedness can help reduce and avert the loss of lives.

“Despite our vulnerability to a powerful earthquake, the lack of preparedness here is mind boggling,” says Amod Dixit of the Kathmandu based Nepal Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) as he took visiting Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs and Foreign Affairs Richard Marles on a walkabout through the warren of narrow alleys in Patan this week.

Marles was here to inspect progress on a project to retrofit schools in Kathmandu Valley to make them earthquake resistant which is being supported by AusAID and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Earthquake experts say that unsafe buildings are the single greatest cause of deaths in earthquakes. Retrofitting schools and hospitals will not just help save lives, but also be the best way to pass on earthquake safety information to families and the community.

“Schools build future citizens and this project protects the future,” said Marles after inspecting the school where students performed an earthquake safety drill. Teachers and students talked with Marles about how they have been sharing their earthquake preparedness knowledge with their families and friends.

“Awareness is key,” he added as he walked along the wide hallways inspecting the retrofitted classrooms.

In 2009, Nepal’s international partners and the UN got together to form the National Risk Reduction Consortium to better prepare for future disasters, including earthquakes. School and hospital retrofitting was considered the best place to start.

The UN’s Resident Coordinator, Robert Piper, accompanied Marles on the school inspection. He told the students about the importance of being prepared.

“To protect the future, children need to be safe first and the time is now.”

www.nset.org.np

Functioning and undamaged schools can provide hope and shelter in the aftermath of a future earthquake in Kathmandu

PICS: BIKRAM RAI

Visiting Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs and Foreign Affairs Richard Marles (right) inspecting the retrofitted classrooms of Tri-Padma Vidyalaya School in Lalitpur.

15 schools in the Valley have been retrofitted in the last fiscal year and nearly 121 more will be completed in the coming year. The retrofitting programme only covers government schools, and experts are worried about thousands of private schools housed in unsafe buildings.

“Many private schools are housed in residential buildings, which are rarely monitored for earthquake safety putting hundreds of children at risk,” says Jhapper Singh Vishokarma, engineer with the Department of Education, which is working with technical assistance of NSET to make schools safer.

Walking past the congested residential areas of inner Patan where houses look nothing more than stacks of bricks fighting for every inch of space, Marles made his way to the spacious premises of the Tri-Padma Vidyalaya School in Lalitpur. The school has recently been retrofitted and hopes to serve as a shelter for the local community after an earthquake. The students and teachers have been practicing earthquake safety drills over the past year, which has helped spread awareness about earthquake safety beyond schools.

“We are proud to be one of the safest schools in the community,” said a beaming Bidya Panday, the school’s principal.

Since schools have the largest concentration of people on any given day, building safe schools will not just help save lives, but also be the best way to pass on earthquake safety information to families and the community.

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nepaltimes.com
Renting a Womb

Cradling a crying newborn in her arms, 28-year-old Kruti looks into the face of the baby boy she will soon have to give away. She gave birth a few weeks ago for a Canadian couple at a clinic in Gujarat. It’s the second time she has carried another couple’s child in a rent-a-womb trend that is part of India’s growing medical tourism industry where commercial surrogacy is now worth $2.5 billion each year.

“It’s my choice to become a surrogate mother,” says Kruti, “I feel good about myself for helping a childless woman have a baby.”

Critics suggest the practise exploits women in poverty, but Kruti says she has few other options. “I’m illiterate, but I dream that my own children will be educated in a good school. For that, I need lots of money,” she explains.

And she’s not alone. It is estimated that surrogate mothers delivered 20,000 births across India last year. Most mothers are poor women living in urban slums and can earn up to $10,000 for carrying a baby, a huge amount for women who earn less than Rs 200 a day.

Rini is 27, and delivered her first surrogate baby last January. She got paid $6,000 and introduced five other women from her slum to the clinic.

“Since my husband dumped me three years ago, I could not raise my two children by myself,” she says, arguing that she sees nothing wrong with the practice.

Clinics charge parents between $12,000 and $30,000 for the surrogacy service for a package that includes fertilisation, the surrogate mother’s payment and delivery of the baby at the hospital. According to the World Health Organisation, up to 10 per cent of couples worldwide are unable to have children. Many of them visit in-vitro fertilisation clinics, and around two per cent need surrogate mothers to help them give birth to a child. India has about 1,000 in-vitro fertilisation clinics, and more than half of them provide commercial surrogacy.

Surrogacy is allowed in some states in North America, but in India it’s two to three times cheaper. And while some people support surrogacy itself, others say it sees babies treated as commodities and there are no laws to protect the rights of surrogate mothers. The women often don’t get any special pre- or post-natal care.

A draft law called the Bill of Assisted Reproductive Technologies was finalised two years ago, and aims to protect Indian surrogate mothers. It is due to be tabled in parliament this year and if it passes, commercial surrogacy will remain legal, but with stricter regulations.

Under the draft law, a woman acting as a surrogate mother must be between 22 and 34 years old and can only give birth to a total of five babies, including her own children. Rini, who has two children of her own, says she aims to be a surrogate mother again. She says: “It is the truth that I did it for money. We all do it for the money.”

www.asiacalling.org

Draganor, the sister airline of Cathay Pacific, will increase its services from September onwards and offer daily flights between Kathmandu and Hong Kong. The company has been operating flights to Kathmandu since 2007.

Dragonair

Sprite organised a Mega Beach Party at Pokhara with 400 winners of the Sprite Bato Clear Challenge, which encourages the youth to think of ‘fresh’ ideas for various situations. The winners also received mobile phones.

Sprite

Syakar, sole authorised distributor of Philips in Nepal has opened a new outlet in Surya Birayak, Bhaktapur. The showroom features LCD/LED TVs, music systems and a range of other home appliances.

Syakar

Surya Nepal Asha Social Entrepreneurship Awards (UNASEA) is calling for application and nomination for social entrepreneurs. The award, sponsored by Surya Nepal, organised by ChangeFusion Nepal and supported by National Business Initiative, brings the good work of exceptional entrepreneurs into the limelight.

Surya Nepal Asha Social Entrepreneurship Awards (UNASEA)
The power of one man’s photography to bring alive Nepal’s landscape, history and culture

Mukunda Bahadur Shrestha, a photographer barely known to the public today, spent the 1970s and 80s travelling across Nepal, photographing its mountains, cultures, and people – images that introduced the country to the world. An exhibition at Siddhartha Gallery from 10-20 August allows exciting insights into the sources of visual heritage contained in his archive.

Shrestha’s travels took him to the Himalayan mountains, festivals and places of cultural and historical importance. The images were part of his professional career, but the real treasures in his photographic archive can be found elsewhere: Shrestha also photographed for himself and his family, developing further his unique and very personal style of portraying people and capturing situations of everyday life and ritual.

In these works his true mastery of the medium becomes obvious, reaching beyond the habitual skills of a craftsman, Shrestha extensively experimented with the aesthetic quality of images, trying out different perspectives and composition techniques as well as formats. He was always in search for a photograph that captured the personality of a person or the emotional and aesthetic quality of a certain scene in the best possible way.

When the Nepal Picture Library team visited Shrestha’s home for the first time, out of his closets and from under his bed came countless boxes and bags full of negatives and slides he had collected over the years, none of which had ever been seen in public. In the year following the discovery, more than 11,000 slides and negatives from his collection were digitised in archival quality using the latest Hasselblad scanning equipment.

Looking through Shrestha’s photographs and collection, the importance of archiving projects becomes obvious – especially in the context of the rapidly changing cultures of Nepal. The vast transformative process the country has been going through in the last decades also had its aesthetic implications. The visual appearance of everyday life has changed dramatically and irrevocably. The aesthetic outlook of profane and religious life of the Nepali people has changed parallel to the upheavals of the political
MAKING MEMORIES:

1. Mukunda Bahadur Shrestha in an undated photo.
2, 4 and 8. In the aftermath of the 1959 Tibetan uprisings in Lhasa, large numbers of Tibetan refugees crossed the border into Nepal. But not everyone fled the Chinese invasion. Numbering over 6000, the Khampas, often known as the last Tibetan warriors, were strongly built, long-haired men who travelled around on horsebacks and interacted little with the locals.
3 and 7. Taken about 40 years ago, this set of photos depicts the bathing of the Machhindranath chariot. The ceremony takes place at Chobhar, where the Bagmati flows out of the Kathmandu Valley (1970s).
5. A huge fish caught in Phewa Lake in Pokhara during a visit by King Mahendra (1968).
6. Trekking somewhere in the mid-western mountains, Shrestha took this photo of three young girls and a dog (1970s).

Even though Nepali culture has constantly evolved and changed in the past, the aesthetic transformations have speeded up to an extent that was unknown in the past. Today, a long time after his photographs were taken, Shrestha’s oeuvre has grown in importance, reaching far beyond its mere aesthetic qualities. Many of the photographs he took over the years are of great value for historians and people interested in the anthropology of Nepal. A journey through the historic imagery allows the viewer a glimpse into the past and the photographs bear the power to evoke the cultural transformations brought about in the past decades for a few moments. In future, scholars wishing to work on the cultural systems of vanished cultures will have to rely heavily on archives and historical collections.

It is projects like Nepal Picture Library that preserve visual heritage by treating and rescuing images as primary sources. They might not have been of great relevance at the time when they were created, but today, in a changed cultural context, their contents suddenly become of great importance. Nepal Picture Library not only contributes to the study of Nepali photography, but also generates knowledge and raises questions about how issues of memory, identity, and history can be explored through images.

Alban von Stockhausen is a Nepal based anthropologist and photographer who has worked in several international projects on ethnographic images and photographic archives.

Postcards and Beyond
The Mukunda Bahadur Shrestha Photo Collection
11-20 August
12 noon - 7 pm
Siddhartha Art Gallery
Baber Mahal Revisited

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LIFE TIMES

EVENTS

KABAB AND BIRYANI FESTIVAL, showcasing a wide variety of kababs and biryanis from across South Asia, 9 August to 26 August, The Yellow Chick, Bluebird Complex, Tapseeshwar, 4701088

Rainbow City: a mural art project with discussions, lectures and workshops with artist James Bum, Rs 300, runs until 14 August, 8am to 4pm, Kathmandu University School of Arts, Mandikatar

CLIMBMANDU, outdoor festival to promote climbing culture among the youth in Kathmandu, 18 August to 20 September, art exhibition by Manish Harijan, 22 August to 20 September, 9am to 5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal, 4218048

Production Oriented Theatre Training, two-month long workshop for acting enthusiasts on every aspect of theatre, Rs 3000, 7am to 9am, register by 24 August, Sansarman Theatre, Kalikasthan, 4422519

PALETI UTSAV, a four-day celebration of Nepal Adhunik music, 8 August to 12 August, OMY School, for tickets contact 9857039322, 9818192569

Nepeft 3, band competition with cash prizes and a chance to open for Nepali band Decapitated, Rs 5000 for registration, 25 August, 9pm

PALETI UTSAV - an event for music enthusiasts, with a wide variety of genres and performers, showcasing Nepali Adhunik music.

THE RISE OF THE COLLATERAL, an art exhibition by Manish Harijan, runs until 6 September, 10am to 6pm, Baluwatar, 4218048

PALETI UTSAV - an event for music enthusiasts, with a wide variety of genres and performers, showcasing Nepali Adhunik music.

DINING

THE RISE OF THE COLLATERAL, an art exhibition by Manish Harijan, runs until 6 September, 10am to 6pm, Baluwatar, 4218048

Himalayan Java, this Thamel establishment, more known for its coffee, serves excellent sandwiches too. Thamel, 9841386652

Le Bistro Restaurant & Bar, the outdoor dining area evokes a great atmosphere for a night of drinks with friends and family. Thamel, 98701770

HADOCK, big compound with ample parking space, their western and Thakali dishes are done to perfection. Boudha, 2130681

PALETI UTSAV - an event for music enthusiasts, with a wide variety of genres and performers, showcasing Nepali Adhunik music.

YOOGLE RESTAURANT & BAR, try their tender steaks and Thai-style salads. Jamsikhel

Casa de Cass, offers continental delicacies, baked goodies, brewed coffee and everything in between. Jawalakhel

New Dish, you will be in for a treat here as it serves one of the best pork momos in town. Worchipokhari

Cibo, a sandwich bar at heart, this cafe serves one of the best sandwiches in town. Lazimpat

BOUDAH STUPA RESTAURANT & CAFE, enjoy wood fired pizzas with the superb view of Boudha stupa on the backdrop and free wifi, candlelight dinner options are also available for the romantics every full moon night. Boudha, 2130681

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

Yin Yang Restaurant, east meets west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Add a little spice in your life with their pad thai or green curry. Thamel, 4701510

Pumpernickel Bakery, get an early breakfast or brunch with interesting choices of bread, experiment with their goat cheese or yak cheese sandwiches, or have a sip of coffee in the classy indoor dining area. Thamel, 7.30am-7pm, 4259185

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MUSIC

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Number of the Beast, a concert in tribute to heavy metal band Iron Maiden. Rs 125, 11 August, Mahalaxmi Chowk, Patan, 985101043

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mattered wife and children.

By the end of the evening, as he was

few drinks and gorge on meaty delights.

Taas and Tawa is the perfect spot to
dinner." Their formula has worked

very well. They also place the utmost

importance on hygiene and have open

kitchens in all three restaurants. "It

helps us maintain quality control and

encourages the staff to retain cleanliness

and order. Also since the patrons can see

how the food is prepared, they trust us

more," adds Shiva.

Tass and Tawa is the perfect spot to
grab a quick lunch, lighter than a full

plate of dal bhat, but filling nonetheless.

It is also very popular among bankers

who like to network and discuss business

and with families during the weekend

who come to enjoy the live telecast of the

Olympics on the large screen.

How to get there:

In Pulchok, enter the street opposite

Namaste Supermarket, about 60

metres in, turn right.
The monsoon is almost past its peak now but a low pressure trough is still lingering around the foothills of the Himalayas. The Western region saw plenty of rainfall earlier but the monsoon is now expected to shift towards central and eastern Nepal. Temperatures will not soar anytime soon and humidity will remain high. Expect light daytime rain on Friday and Saturday and a sunny interval on Sunday. Monsoon rainfall will remain constant throughout the week.

**ETHNIC IDENTITY:** People watch a Lahe Dance in Biratnagar, Jhapa during the program to mark the 18th International Day of the World’s Indigenous People on Wednesday.

**WEEKEND WEATHER:**

**HAPPENINGS**

**MUST SEE**

**Sophia Pandey**

**T**he dexiurus and adventurous Michael Winterbottom, a sometimes under-rated British filmaker has made yet another surprising film. As ever, none of his works even remotely resemble each other in style or genre even though he is obviously directing sometimes up to two films a year. His films are always searching, sometimes almost experimental, at other times quite classical (check out 9 Songs, or A Mighty Heart for examples of the former and latter respectively).

With Trishna, Winterbottom has taken yet another new turn in directing, choosing to adapt Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of The D’Urbervilles, but, set in India, and starring the doe-eyed Freida Pinto as Trishna. The film is a character study, and Pinto is captivating in it. Having previously thought her to be a bit banal, she surprises in this film, carrying its weight with elegance and grace, even in the most emotionally difficult scenes. Pinto is only 27-years-old, yet she manages to be both girlish and womanly, switching from one to the other through the film that chronicles the life of a young village girl in Rajasthan who happens to catch the eye of an upper-class Indian man who has just returned from Britain to look after his family's posh, palatial hotel.

After Trishna's father has an accident and wrecks the jeep upon which the family's livelihood depends (she is also in the vehicle at the time of accident), Jay Singh, played by the newcomer Riz Ahmed, who speaks with an unforgottably grating, almost patois English accent, offers her a job in Jaipur at one of his father's hotels. Suddenly able to earn enough to support her entire family, Trishna, the only educated daughter, takes the offer and moves to Jaipur, reluctant to leave her family, but left with no choice. She arrives at the hotel with a broken arm, and is picked up by Jay himself at the bus station. They speak with each other in English, as he is not comfortable in Hindi. She also initially calls him "Sir", and seems oblivious to his obvious discomfort at her presence.

By comparison, we Nepali physicians have it easy. We don't have to fill out long forms after every visit nor do we have to worry too much about malpractice litigation, although Nepali lawyers are clearly lurking in the background. But surely we Nepali physicians have to ask ourselves if we are always working in the best interests of our patients (when we don't follow simple guidelines like washing hands with soap and water), even if in the US and other developed countries seemingly unnecessary hassles may be interfering with patient care.

The doctors follow rules (like wearing masks and head covers) while performing even minor procedures on patients so that infections are prevented. Even senior doctors are reprimanded if they are found disobeying these rules. Naturally many senior doctors have not been able to adapt well to these changes. In addition, many doctors in the west are experiencing insurance-company hassles, government regulations, malpractice litigation, not to mention nurses and fellow doctors bearing tattoos and thinking nothing of their behaviour.

**DHANVANTARI**

**Sushila Basnyat, MD**

Before antibiotics came to the rescue, our job as physicians was mainly custodial: we tried to take good shelter, and food. But when the need was utmost, we tried to take good medicine. Physicians' lotions, potions, and medicines were all derived from nature. American physician, Lewis Thomas observed in 1937 that if being in a hospital bed made a difference produced by warmth, shelter, and food. But when antibiotics became widely available starting from the 1940s and 50s, methods of treatment changed forever.

There are now effective prevention and treatment measures for many infections and non-infectious illnesses. We have moved beyond treatment in a big way into the realm of evidence-based medicine. Many hospitals in the west especially in the United States are now run by administrators and nurses at various levels who make sure doctors follow rules, and regulations set by the administration so that infection is under control.

For example in many US hospitals there are random camera monitors to ensure doctors follow rules (like wearing masks and head covers) while performing even minor procedures on patients so that infections are prevented. Even senior doctors are reprimanded if they are found disobeying these rules. Naturally many senior doctors have not been able to adapt well to these changes. In addition, many doctors in the west are experiencing insurance-company hassles, government regulations, malpractice litigation, not to mention nurses and fellow doctors bearing tattoos and thinking nothing of their behaviour.

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**ETHNIC IDENTITY:** People watch a Lahe Dance in Biratnagar, Jhapa during the program to mark the 18th International Day of the World’s Indigenous People on Wednesday.

**ROAD CLEARANCE:** The road near Singha Darbar is deserted during the 6 to 9 am transport strike called by the UML affiliated Youth Association Nepal on Wednesday morning.

**UNDER MY UMBRELLA:** Devotees line up near Krishna Mandir in Patan on the occasion of Krishna Janmasthami on Thursday.

**WATCH TRAILER**

All DVDs reviewed in this column are available at:
MUSIC AND EXPRESSION, Thamel, Phone # 014700902
nepalitimes.com

**Watch trailer**

**T**he dexiurus and adventurous Michael Winterbottom, a sometimes under-rated British filmaker has made yet another surprising film. As ever, none of his works even remotely resemble each other in style or genre even though he is obviously directing sometimes up to two films a year. His films are always searching, sometimes almost experimental, at other times quite classical (check out 9 Songs, or A Mighty Heart for examples of the former and latter respectively).

With Trishna, Winterbottom has taken yet another new turn in directing, choosing to adapt Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of The D’Urbervilles, but, set in India, and starring the doe-eyed Freida Pinto as Trishna. The film is a character study, and Pinto is captivating in it. Having previously thought her to be a bit banal, she surprises in this film, carrying its weight with elegance and grace, even in the most emotionally difficult scenes. Pinto is only 27-years-old, yet she manages to be both girlish and womanly, switching from one to the other through the film that chronicles the life of a young village girl in Rajasthan who happens to catch the eye of an upper-class Indian man who has just returned from Britain to look after his family's posh, palatial hotel.

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License to ride

For the last eight years, hearing-impaired Nepalis have been working relentlessly to get the state to change its laws so that they can obtain their driver’s licence. However, the government is reluctant to address the issue and doing its best to stall the process.

In countries like the US and Japan, the hearing-impaired can drive private and public vehicles. However, Nepal’s Motor Vehicle and Transport Management Act 1993 Article 47 prohibits people who cannot hear sounds on the street to drive.

“Why are the hearing-impaired denied driving licences, when vehicles aren’t even allowed to use horns around schools, hospitals and other sensitive areas? This is outright discrimination,” says Raghav Bir Joshi, the only hearing-impaired member of the now defunct CA.

Joshi, who got his motorcycle licence 30 years ago and his car licence in 1996, used to drive his own car to the CA meetings and is leading the movement for deaf drivers. “When hearing-impaired people get behind the wheels, our entire focus is on driving and we use the rear-view mirror frequently, which decrease the likelihood of accidents. I have been driving for the past three decades and have had no mishaps so far,” he explains.

Shrijana Singh, the first female deaf driver in Nepal, started driving after seeing the hearing-impaired in Sweden driving. Like Joshi, she hasn’t had a single accident in the last three years since she started riding her scooter.

Although national law forbids issuing licences to the deaf, Nepal signed the UN’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010 which calls for countries to guarantee fundamental rights of the disabled and treat them equally at all times.

To avoid addressing this paradox, the state is pushing the campaigners into a bureaucratic maze. They are sent from one government office to another. Officials make promises to grant licences when there are “safer” roads and better services. But the assurances are mostly just lip-service.

In 2006, a petition requesting the government to repeal Article 47 finally reached the cabinet after years of passing through administrative loops. But since the cabinet did not consider it a “priority”, the file was promptly returned to the Ministry of Labour and Transport Management (MoLTM) and eventually misplaced.

In August last year, Deputy Attorney General Prem Raj Karki sent a letter urging the ministry to provide better road signs, hearing aids, and ‘special’ mirrors for the hearing-impaired so that they can get their licences. However, Anil Gurung, under-secretary of the MoLTM argues the demand for licences cannot be met because it is against the law.

Problems arise when deaf people have to renew their licences. Deepak Kumar Shakya, president of Kathmandu Association of the Deaf, obtained his licence long after he actually started driving. But when he went to renew it after five years, officials seized his license and told him deaf people couldn’t drive. Shakya has now resorted to driving without a licence, which could land him in a legal mess if he gets caught. Babukaji Sherpa has also been driving without a licence since it was confiscated in the same manner.

Sushil Karmacharya, 30, who has US and Nepali licences, says the government refuses to give permits to the hearing-impaired because it assumes disabled people have no skills or capabilities and thinks they are useless. Unless this attitude changes, Karmacharya feels it will be hard for the community not just to obtain driver’s licences, but also to make real progress.
Secondary school teacher Shrikanta Sapkota never thought that as a visually-impaired person he could ever use a computer. But in the last few years, he is active on Facebook, and uses the Internet daily to prepare his lesson plans.

This has been made possible by a unique cybercafe in Pokhara that specialises in teaching the blind how to navigate the net. The Inclusive Empowerment Center (IEC) is a non-profit working to encourage interaction between the blind and the sighted, one of the first in Nepal. Two out of the 10 computers in the IEC cafe are equipped with JAWS, an assistive audio technology that aids the blind to navigate websites, reading out everything on the screen and guiding users to read and type on the computer.

Sapkota, 26, who used to depend on his peers to check emails, felt that being computer illiterate was a handicap. “Sometimes I have private emails that I don’t want people to see,” he says, “now I can do everything myself, it makes me feel more independent and confident.”

The part-time radio journalist also finds that being able to use the computer challenges the stereotypical assumptions in Nepali society towards the blind. “People used to think that blind people are a burden and can’t do anything,” he adds, “but I want to show them otherwise.” Sapkota learnt computer skills at IEC and now frequents the cyber cafe daily and uses the computer for about an hour each time.

As a social enterprise, profit from the cafe goes directly to the funds used to train students at the IEC (read box). Founder Khom Raj Sharma, who is also visually-impaired, felt that equipping young people with computer skills allows them to gain more knowledge and enables them to get better-paying jobs.

“Nowadays, there is so much information online, that blind
Despite being born blind with his left eye and having lost his sight in his right eye, Khom Raj Sharma has been passionate about computers ever since he realised how much it is sighted peers use the machine. That was 12 years ago. “They were doing everything on the computer, writing, watching movies, sending messages. I was so amazed,” he recalls. So he enrolled at the Technical and Skills development Center for Blind and Disabled in Kathmandu for six months. Since then, he has been an advocate for computer literacy of the visually-impaired and founded the IEC in 2009 to train the blind in computer skills. He says: “Now everything is done online. How can we be left behind?”

people are disadvantaged just because they can’t use the computer,” Sharma says. Another regular user, Sagar Subedi, wants to take an even greater leap: he intends to do computer engineering in the future after he has mastered programming. The 24-year-old sociology undergraduate has been learning how to use the computer for about six months with one hour classes at the IEC every morning. “It helps me keep in touch with friends overseas,” he says. As a massage therapist, the Internet also allows him to read reviews of his service with one hour classes at the IEC every morning. “It helps me keep in touch with friends overseas,” he says. As a massage therapist, the Internet also allows him to read reviews of his service if he is able to Google for information through cyberspace. “Being able to Google for information helps me in my studies,” he says. While he pays about Rs 1,500 for the class, students with financial difficulties get their course fees lowered or waived.

However, out of the 60 blind people trained by the IEC, only five are active users at the cyber cafe. “Many of them are still not confident enough to use the computer regularly,” Sharma says. “We still need to encourage them.”

To motivate them, the cyber cafe gives a 50 per cent discount to visually-impaired users. Sighted customers have to pay Rs 25 an hour. The IEC also installs the Non-Visual Desktop Access (NVDA) software, another assistive technology for the blind, in the personal laptops of the trainees to aid them in their private use.

Reading books is also no longer a problem, as the cyber cafe can help scan physical reading material and convert them into a version that can be understood audially. Sharma says: “I’m looking forward to the day when blind people can have access to the computer if they need it and can use it without support.”

The neighbourhood surrounding PN Campus and Pokhara Institute of Engineering is dotted with Internet cafes where locals and tourists of all ages can be found using Facebook, skyping with friends or making calls to India, US, or the UK. The IEC Cafe (pic, below) is no different, except that some of its most regular customers are visually-impaired.

Khom Raj Sharma, founder of the Inclusive Empowerment Centre (IEC), started the cafe in April to promote computer literacy among the visually-impaired. The centre has been providing computer, Internet and English language training to the blind for the past four years. With the new cafe, students can now use computers with assistive technology and surf the net for less than Rs 20 per hour. The earnings from the cafe help support the centre, which means Sharma and team don’t have to depend on donors and can use the profit to cover training fees for those who can’t afford.

With more and more organisations like IEC learning how to balance their bills while also being self-sufficient and socially responsible, social entrepreneurship is catching up quickly in Nepal.

But Subedi remains undaunted and constantly seeks to gain more knowledge through cyberspace. “Being able to Google for information helps me in my studies,” he says.
The 100 million party fund

By BIKRAM RAI

Two cooperatives, Labourers Cooperative Limited (LMM) and Himshikhar Savings and Loans Cooperative Limited received Rs 50 million each from the fund and are registered in Kathmandu and Lalitpur under the chairmanship of Maoist trade union leaders Ganesh Prasad Regmi and Shiva Prasad Kattel respectively. Madhuban Savings and Loans Cooperative Limited operated by Maoist leaders and cadres in Gulti received Rs 30 million.

As soon as these cooperatives received the money, the officials promptly took out loans for themselves. Seven members of the Maoist New Raaya ethno-federal unit and secretaries of trade unions took between Rs 80,000 to Rs 165,000 from LMM. None of them are unemployed, whereas the rules of the fund state that only the jobless can apply for a loan.

Similarly, LMM provided loans of Rs 1.98 million to Rs 3.8 million to five groups of Maoist cadres led by Baburam Gautam, Jagat Bahadur Simkhada, Kumar Prasad Panta, Raja Timilina and Usha Devkota. Over the next three months, all five groups registered their own cooperatives and none of their intended livestock, food grain and sports equipment businesses ever saw the light of day.

The official rule states that cooperatives registered to one district may not operate in other districts. But both LMM and Himshikhar have openly flouted this rule and distributed loans as far as Kaski and Nuwakot. None of the groups that took loans have started new businesses as stipulated. In fact, Himshikhar even provided a loan of Rs 100,000 to Daily Sandesh, a non-existent newspaper.

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In the past, such projects have been used by parties to dole out large sums to their cadres and party loyalists. But to avoid misappropriation and ensure transparency, the state has decided to run the programme through cooperatives and government controlled banks in 240 electoral regions of all 75 districts. An accountable mechanism such as this will help ensure that the target of employing 50,000 youths will be met. However, the government still needs to take the opposition into confidence and seek their support if it wants the programme to truly succeed.
So the government has finally buckled under pressure of the extortionists to force colleges with English names to change their names to Nepali. Since the names of gods and goddesses like Saraswati and Lakshmi are already taken, schools will have to resort to using the names of demons: Rakshasa Medical School and Research Centre, Asura Academy, Mahisasura College of Management, etc. But what do to with existing colleges with established names? The solution may lie in turning the college names into the closest approximations to their Nepali counterparts according to this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OLD NAME</th>
<th>NEW NAME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pentagon College</td>
<td>Jangi Adda Kalejo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln College</td>
<td>Korata College of Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King's College</td>
<td>Rastropati's College, Pvt Ltd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Academy</td>
<td>Awesome Academy and Bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea International</td>
<td>Manang Morsyangdi National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Xavier's School</td>
<td>Sri 3 Acharya Bal Krishna School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White House International College</td>
<td>Baluwatar Antarik Bidyalaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASA School</td>
<td>Sarba Nas School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now that its days are numbered, the government has decided that the civil service should be more civil towards citizens. Instructions have gone out to all govt offices that employees will have to greet all visitors with smiles. The government will run special etiquette classes for cranky staff with laughter therapy so they can welcome those seeking services with a cheerful demeanour. But all this may backfire. A citizen who comes to complain about sewage coming out of his water pipe may not want a civil servant to be grinning all over the place.

For those of you who were wondering what all those chucka jams and half-assed bunds this week were all about, here is a quick summary. The NC, UML and Kiran Kaka's Kiranti Kurries all want Babuji to step down from prime ministership. So the Youth Association Nepal terrorised the population, broke the windshields of Maruti taxis, vandalised garbage collection trucks, set fire to random motorbikes, and harassed shopkeepers. Perfectly logical thing to do to bring down a govt. Works every time.

The trend of kangresi netas trooping off to the cooler continues unabated. The latest to be put behind bars is ex-education minister GR Joshi for siphoning off the education budget 15 years ago. The wheels of justice in Nepal may turn slowly, but they turn surely. Joshi was dashing off op-ed pieces about mismanagement in the education sector till a day before he was sent off to prison. And in the grand tradition of kangresis writing jail journals, Joshi will probably dash off a book or two as well by the time he comes out. As it is, it doesn't look like the NC has its act together to get into government any time soon (ask Kamred KP) so Joshi may as well salvage the situation, make things cosy for himself in his cell and catch up on the news with JP and the gang who are already in Bhadra Gaol.

It's not just VAT Bhateni and other private companies who are getting a free ride by evading taxes. Even the government is sucking the government dry. The Nepal Telecommunication Authority has cut all communication channels with Nepal Telecom over its refusal to pay 3 arabs it owes to NTA in royalty. Only in Nepal: NT is scamming the state, it is fleecing customers dry, it provides the shoddiest mobile service in the known world, and yet it distributes a fat bonus to its bloated staff.

Comrade Bum Dev says his Unified Marxist-Leninist party is not willing to join the opposition bid to oust the BRB govt because “the people are confused at the moment and cannot make up their minds”. Oh yeah? Go ahead, point the finger at the people again for your lack of gonads. Mr Leftist God then heaped blame on the monsoon rains for prolonging the Bhattarai grovelment, saying people are too busy planting rice to join a street movement at the moment. What next Kamred, are you going to blame your own party’s flip-flopping on global warming?

And lastly, but not leastly, we can’t let this week pass without another mention of Prof Mooney, who keeps revealing more dirty linen about India’s support for the Maoists in their war against a democratic government in neighbouring Nepal. A cordoning to the good prof, BRB was thick as thieves with uncooked honcho Mr Horlicks and another handler (code name: Bournvita). So, is Mooney trying to embarrass the Baddies at the behest of powers-that-be in Dilli, or is he shooting his mouth off just to be noticed so that contributors of NNSD will have something to rage about?