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PICS: BIKRAM RAI



Snakes and ladders

Nepal's governance is like a game of snakes and ladders, as this image from Thursday afternoon at Singha Darbar shows.

The date for elections declared by Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai on 27 May came and went on Thursday. Normally, a government that can't hold elections as scheduled has to resign, but Bhattarai has resisted pressure from the president, opposition parties, and rivals within his own party to cling on.

In Thursday's address to the nation, Bhattarai sought to buy more time by saying he would "accelerate efforts" to

EMPTY SEAT: The table behind which Prime Minister Bhattarai is set up with microphones at the NPC office on Thursday afternoon in preparation for his address to the nation.

work for a consensus among the political parties to form an election government. This was as per an agreement made by Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and President Ram Baran Yadav to get Bhattarai to take immediate steps on a consensus government to set the date for next elections in return for passing the partial budget this week.

Saying "I want to tell it to you like this", Bhattarai laid out a list of achievements in the peace process despite the "fierce" obstacles he faced from the opposition. He said he was willing to "make any sacrifice" in order to achieve an all-party consensus for elections by April, but fell short of directly saying he would step down.

However, most are sceptical that an agreement on a consensus government that eluded the main parties for six months will suddenly happen in two weeks. 🇳🇵

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SLAPSTICK POLITICS

Politics in Nepal is so stuck that when it does move, it does so in fits and starts. The president passes a budget that isn't a budget because to oppose it would mean that the country's economy would grind to a halt. Not that the country is going anywhere, but not having even a partial budget now would have created an even more unholy economic mess than we are in at the moment.

The opposition strategy was to make the budget a bargaining chip in negotiations over leadership of an election government. But the wily Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai called their bluff. No politician, in the final analysis, wants to be seen opposing a budget that feeds salaries and allowances to the state system. Not even the president could afford to do that.

So the opposition winked to Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal to take their private acceptance of a two-third budget to the president on condition that he (Dahal) would get Prime Minister Bhattarai to step aside. We get the feeling that the NC and the UML, out of desperation, doth protest too much. Dahal, whose animus towards Bhattarai is well known, was willing to mediate. It was a face-saving device all around. So the budget was passed in the nick of time before the president could have legally pushed Bhattarai out for failing to hold elections as scheduled on 22 November, and failing to set a new date. You with us so far?

Elections have been announced, but no date has been set, which essentially gives Bhattarai open terrain to carry on for the foreseeable future as caretaker. At this rate he can ensure that there is a deadlock in negotiations

It is no longer enough to say that the Maoists are out to grab power, when the only way to prevent that is to pave the way for elections by joining an interim-government.

with the NC and UML by refusing to step down till mid-December, the Election Commission deadline to organise elections by May 2013. In that case, he will remain lame duck for the whole of 2013. The opposition, for its part, is so paralysed by paranoia that it has handed the prime minister victory on a platter by making his resignation a single-point agenda, and having no Plan B. This no-I-won't-yes-you-will deadlock benefits only Bhattarai because he can keep blaming the NC for being obstinate and holding up elections.

It's not that our PhD prime minister

is exceedingly smart, it's just that the NC is exceptionally daft. It's central committee is so polarised that the NC is in effect two parties. It cannot come up with a candidate to replace Bhattarai, and it doesn't have a proactive vision for the country that would be an alternative to the prime minister's agenda. And most importantly, the NC is fielding the same discredited batsmen, and not bringing out its agile and dynamic hitters. Forget the quarrel over who gets to be prime minister, even as an election campaign strategy this is a blunder.

It no longer suffices to say we can't let Bhattarai continue because he will cheat, what we really want to know is how is the opposition going to prevent that by staying out of government? It is no longer enough to say that the Maoists are out to

grab power when the only way to prevent that is to pave the way for elections by joining an interim-government.

The so-called 'leaders' of our country don't seem to have learnt from the stinging slaps on the cheeks they have got. The whacks on the faces of Messrs Khanal, Koirala, and now Dahal, are symbolic reminders to the party bosses about the outrage the public and their own cadre feel about their behaviour.

The country has no stomach for another agitation. The NC and UML are badly advised if they think the people will spontaneously pour out into the streets to oust Bhattarai. They want our bickering politicians to sort out their quarrels, agree on an all-party election government, and hold polls in six months time and let the chips fall where they may. Is that too much to ask?



BILASH RAI

ON THE WEB
www.nepalitimes.com

IF NOT NOW, THEN WHEN?

Like the editorial suggests, keeping Baburam Bhattarai as prime minister and letting the NC and UML divide up the government and announce elections seems to be the only way to end this deadlock ('If not now, then when?', Editorial, #630). The NC can't even come up with a candidate for prime minister, how will they run the country? If we don't make this move now, we will find ourselves in the exact same position a year from now.

Jit

- Now that the government has declared the new date for the polls, Bhattarai and his gang have a free pass to rule until April-May 2013 just like the article recommends. But who is to say that the elections won't be postponed again just like the CA was postponed five times before it was finally killed? And isn't anyone worried that by allowing Bhattarai to lead till next elections we are helping him build the stage for a one-party or one-man autocratic rule?

Kamana Thapa

- Instead of the egoistical Bhattarai who is doing pork-barrel politics all the time, why not let a Madhesi say Bijay Kumar Gachhedra, Mahanta Thakur or Upendra Yadav lead the 'election government'? Such a proposal will not only break the current impasse, but also ensure that the polls are impartial and fair if it is

headed by a small party.

Bhaicha

- From Surya Bahadur Thapa to Baburam Bhattarai, Nepali PMs are unethical, corrupt men who put personal ambition and priorities before the need of the people and nation. Nepal needs educated and financially independent men and women to lead. The leaders that have come before were all beggars and they had only one idea in mind: to steal the wealth of Nepalis for their own personal gain. If we cannot find a way to get rid of them, then we deserve the fate we are dealt with.

Sri Ranga Nath

NO MOVEMENT

Great analysis by Anurag Acharya ('No movement', #630). There is no alternate to fresh polls and now that the 'new' election date has been finalised, the leaders have to come to an agreement on the number of constituencies and the nature of federalism.

Reason

- Elections, elections, elections. Reinstating the same old set of incompetents or replacing one set of incompetents with another via election is no solution.

KK Sharma

THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPHS

Thank you *Nepali Times* for bringing the photos of Nepalis from 150

years ago into public view ('The first photographs of us', Kanak Mani Dixit, #630). It seems the British residents in Kathmandu did something good after all instead of just meddling around with Nepal's internal politics. Thanks to them we can now reflect back and 'see' who we were as peoples and as a nation a century and half ago. The pictures show naive, innocent, and simple Nepalis who lived in extreme poverty and the concept of being photographed was so foreign to them that none of them are smiling.

Anonymous

- It's fascinating to see these old photographs, but the portraits are not that different from people we see in the remote hills of Nepal even today. It



is amazing how little has changed in a century and a half. If anything, life has become harder for such people because of degradation and depletion of natural resources.

A Nepali

TIBET'S BURNING ISSUE

Thank you Ajaz Ashraf for a well-written article about the self-immolation being carried out by young Tibetans ('Tibet's burning issue', #630). By burning themselves, the self-immolators are not showing any hatred or vengeance against the Chinese oppressors. Rather they are dying for the cause of free Tibet without causing any harm to Chinese lives and property. As far as Nepal-Tibet relationship is concerned, a free and just Tibet is in Nepal's best interest as an open border (like in the past) will boost trade and improve people to people bond.

Tashi Lama

- The discourse on Tibet is usually so polarising that it was a pleasure to read Ajaz Ashraf's balanced piece. There is a lot said about how Tibetans who set themselves ablaze are inciting violence and going against the teachings of the Buddha, but I, like Ajaz find it an expression of people's frustration and an ultimate form of protest. Unfortunately, the Chinese know only one way of dealing with people's desire for justice: extreme repression.

Savita R

RETURN TO INVESTMENT

As a lawyer working with foreign investors helping them invest in Nepal, I agree with Pooja Tandon ('Return to investment', #630). There isn't much foreign lending, and commercial lenders are not willing to finance projects in Nepal. The withholding tax rate for foreign interest is 15 per cent, it should be reduced to less than five per cent for approved infrastructure projects. Labour laws should be made more flexible. Because of infrastructure problems and dismissal procedures in labour laws, we will still be unable to compete. We only have double tax agreements (DTA) with seven countries, but we have labour exporting agreements with more than 30 countries. This shows where the government priority lies.

Anjan Neupane

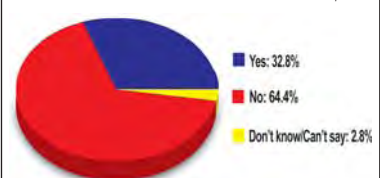
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Weekly Internet Poll # 632. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. Who should lead the electoral government?

Making us sick

Unhealthy politics is turning into an epidemic that has infected hospitals and schools



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

One of the hallmarks of Nepal's prolonged transition is that it has led to a crisis of legitimacy at all levels. The system of checks and balances is weakened and contending claims of authority and legitimacy within institutions of the state are breeding contention and conflict. The endemic corruption at the national level has trickled down to the grassroots where the absence of elections has eroded accountability. Deteriorating law and order, impunity, and political interference are all indications of an ailing state, and nowhere are the symptoms more glaring than in the country's universities and medical institutions.

Tribhuvan University is now so plagued by politics that it is closed more days in a year than it is open. Kathmandu University, which was spared such interference, last week saw the unceremonial removal by the government of its long serving founder, Suresh Raj Sharma.



In the last six months doctors, staff, and students of two leading hospitals in the country have been on a warpath. Govinda KC of the TU-affiliated Institute of Medicine (IoM) went on a fast unto death in July against political interference in the hospital administration. Top positions at the hospital had been vacant for almost a year because the political parties competed to put up their own candidates.

"This is no place for politics. We take life and death decisions here," a doctor at the Teaching Hospital told me. However, last week's appointment of Bhagwan Koirala, one of the country's leading and most respected surgeons to the top job has been universally welcomed.

However, on the other side of town, at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS) a similar protest against the high handed appointment of a Madhesi minister's sister as the new vice chancellor has affected services. The new chief has sought to undermine PAHS' mission to educate motivated doctors who are trained and willing to serve in Nepal's rural

hospitals.

In Maharajganj, Dhulikhel, and Patan, the motivation of the politicians installing their cronies and relatives is clear: to lay their hands on the Rs 3 million or so 'donations' that students have to pay for their medical degrees.

"Patan Hospital is among very few government institutions which does not lose money, we have proved that over the years. There is no need to fix something that isn't broken," says Lila Raj Acharya of the hospital management.

Students got involved in the protest after the new management allegedly threatened to cancel admission of the first year students and suspend the scholarships of others. Sixty per cent of students in PAHS are from remote districts studying on scholarships who will serve in the villages when they graduate. (See page 4)

A student from a remote mid-west district told me that she had already given up on her dream of becoming a doctor when PAHS provided her with an opportunity. "When I graduate and go back to the village, my people won't have to travel for days for treatment," she told me.

Corrosive national politics has infected government medical schools and now threatens to undermine the commitment and motivation of students like her who see a medical degree not in commercial terms but as a public service.

A recent UN report has lauded Nepal's efforts in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in reducing child and maternal mortality. Another survey conducted by the Nick Simons Institute (NSI) on doctors who graduated from IoM between 1983-2004 suggests doctors with rural background or those with paramedical experience were more likely to serve in rural areas.

Enrolling more students from remote areas may not guarantee that they will all go back to serve in the villages, but institutions like PAHS also made radical changes in their curriculum to ensure that the new breed of doctors not just learn medicine, but take a rights based approach to public health.

A thoroughly disgusted PAHS adviser told me the other day: "The new vice chancellor was appointed as a fund raiser for her brother's party. She is incompetent and untactful, she must go."

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Why some doctors stay and others go away, #618
In an ailing state, #618

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BIKRAM RAI

Bad prescription

KIM LAMA

The only medical school in Nepal designed specially to train doctors to serve in rural areas has been paralysed by the political appointment in August of a new chief. Angry staff at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS) have partially shut down the hospital in protest for the third week running.

Nepal's private and government medical schools produce 1,500 doctors each year, but half of them migrate overseas and the ones that stay in Nepal choose to work in urban areas. But PAHS was designed to train doctors to serve in district hospitals. Sixty per cent of the students are from underprivileged families, and their scholarship requires them to work for up to four years in rural areas after they graduate.

However, political appointment of new vice chancellors this year have plagued both PAHS and TU Teaching Hospital (TUTH) in Maharajganj which were set up with similar philosophies of training rural doctors at a time when private medical schools are being commercialised and have political

protection.

A fast-unto-death hunger strike in July by Govind KC, a TUTH doctor, forced the government to cancel the nomination of a political appointee there. In PAHS, there is deep concern among doctors and international partners that the appointment of the politically connected new Vice Chancellor Sangita Bhandari to replace founder, Arjun Karki, will undermine the hospital's mission to train rural doctors.

"The new VC has not respected the abilities of the founding faculty members," says Bharat Yadav, professor and chair of the Department of General Practice at PAHS. "We have built this academy from the ground up, but she and other recruits do not understand our mission."

Bhandari, who is related to powerful Madhesi politician and former minister Sarat Singh Bhandari, has told media that she faces opposition in PAHS because she has tried to clean up the hospital of corruption. Her appointment of Soumya Bajracharya as rector prompted PAHS staff to stage sit-ins and lock-outs of the hospital. Bhandari brought in the police to break the protests. Stakeholders convinced agitating staff on Sunday

Political appointee threatens medical schools with mission to train rural doctors

not to let their struggle affect medical treatment and care of patients.

Kedar Baral, professor and chair of the Department of Community Health, says PAHS' entrance criteria and curriculum are designed to bring out motivated doctors. "The current VC wants to change the entrance criteria, and recruit more students who pay huge fees," says Baral, "this will turn PAHS into just another medical school. It will no longer be a school for rural physicians."

Shrijana Shrestha, professor of paediatrics, says PAHS staff had initially given Vice Chancellor Bhandari the benefit of doubt, but the new chief showed scant regard for the hospital's mission, and has been disrespectful of faculty. "The current dispute risks the mission of service of PAHS, and

Bhandari is a bad role model," Shrestha adds.

PAHS has tried to change the trend of Nepali medical students migrating abroad or gravitating to private clinics in cities. Its International Advisory Board took a strategic and difficult approach different from traditional medical education in Nepal by selecting competent and compassionate students using IQ and personality characteristics testing, and teaching an innovative curriculum that is strongly community orientated.

"PAHS actively recruits capable students from rural and remote Nepal with the view that these students with existing ties will more likely want to serve in those areas," says Katrina Butterworth, professor of General Practice at PAHS.

Over the past decade, the International Advisory Board has involved over 200 educators, scientists, doctors, and other health care providers from all over the world. One such volunteer doctor is Darren Nichols from the University of Alberta in Canada.

Says Nichols: "We are volunteers who share the vision of building peace in Nepal through health equity. PAHS has a brave and visionary mission of serving the neediest people of Nepal, a mission that has attracted a global following."

The dispute has threatened ten years of work by PAHS founder, Arjun Karki, and his team to develop the institute as a role model not just for Nepal but for other developing countries.

A private medical school in Nepal charges more than Rs 6 million for an MBBS education. PAHS costs less than half of that for applicants, but 60 per cent of its students are on full or partial scholarships. More than 80 per cent of students are from outside Kathmandu, more than half of the students are women, and many are from marginalised communities.

Associate Professor, Sabita Rana, says the political appointment of an inappropriate vice chancellor threatens to unravel PAHS' achievements. "We risk losing local faculty who have sacrificed better salaries to teach PAHS' more demanding course, we risk losing the trust of district hospitals, we risk losing our essential international partners, and most importantly, we risk disappointing our students who have come to learn that medicine is a social service, not a way to get rich quick," she explains. 🇳🇵

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President Xi's Singapore lessons

China's new leader must learn from Singapore's experience with legitimacy of single-party rule through growth and eliminating corruption



WORLDWIDE
Michael Spence

NEW YORK – China is at a crucial point today, as it was in 1978, when the market reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping opened its economy to the world.

Deng was substantially influenced by an early visit to Singapore, where accelerated growth and prosperity had come decades earlier. Understanding other developing countries' successes and shortcomings has been – and remains – an important part of China's approach to formulating its growth strategy.

Like Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan in their first few decades of modern growth, China has been ruled by a single party. Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP) remains dominant, though that appears to be changing. The others evolved into multi-party democracies during the middle-income transition. China, too, has now reached this critical last leg of the long march to advanced-country status in

terms of economic structure and income levels.

Singapore should continue to be a role model for China, despite its smaller size. The success of both countries reflects many contributing factors, including a skilled and educated group of policy makers supplied by a meritocratic selection system, and a pragmatic, disciplined, experimental, and forward-looking approach to policy.

The other key lesson from Singapore is that single-party rule has retained popular legitimacy by delivering inclusive growth and equality of opportunity in a multi-ethnic society, and by eliminating corruption of all kinds, including cronyism and excessive influence for vested interests. What Singapore's founder, Lee Kuan Yew, and his colleagues and successors understood is that the combination of single-party rule and corruption is toxic. If you want the benefits of the former, you cannot allow the latter.

China, too, most likely wants to retain, at least for a while, the benefits of single-party rule, and delay the transition to 'messier' governance influenced by multiple voices. In fact, a



pluralistic system is already evolving under the umbrella of the Chinese Communist Party, a process that may eventually lead to citizens gaining an institutionalised voice in public policy. To maintain single-party legitimacy, and thus the ability to govern, narrower interests must be overridden in favour of the general interest.

Many insiders and external advisers believe that the Chinese state's role must change (not necessarily decline) to create the dynamic innovative economy that is key to navigating the middle-income transition

successfully. Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and Mao Zedong and Deng in China gained their peoples' trust as founders and initial reformers. But that trust dissipates. Succeeding generations of leaders do not inherit it completely, and must earn it. That is all the more reason for them to heed the lessons of history.


China's new leaders should first reassert the Party's role as defender of the general interest by creating an environment in which narrow interests, seeking to protect their growing influence and wealth, do not taint complex policy choices. They must demonstrate that the Party's power, legitimacy, and substantial assets are held in trust for the benefit of all Chinese, above all by fostering a pattern of inclusive growth and a system of equal opportunity with a meritocratic foundation.

There are times when muddling through (or, in the Chinese version, crossing the river by feeling the stones) is the right governing strategy, and there are times when a bold resetting of values and direction is required. Successful leaders know what time it is.

Feeling the stones may seem like the safest option for China's


next president, Xi Jinping, and China's other new leaders. In fact, it is the most dangerous. The only safe option is a radical realignment of the Party with the general interest.

The issue, then, is whether the reformers who carry the real spirit of the 1949 revolution will win the battle for equitable and inclusive growth. The optimistic (and I believe realistic) view is that the Chinese people, through a variety of channels, including social media, will weigh in, empowering reformers to push through a progressive agenda.

Time will tell. But it is hard to overstate the outcome's importance to the rest of the world. Virtually all developing countries – and, increasingly, the advanced countries as well – will be affected one way or another as they, too, struggle to achieve stable and sustainable growth and employment patterns. 


www.project-syndicate.com

Michael Spence, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics at New York University's Stern School of Business and Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution. His latest book is *The Next Convergence: The Future of Economic Growth in a Multispeed World* www.thenextconvergence.com



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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Bliss in ten days

Meditation may be the real path to gross national happiness

JENNY LING

The assurance of a calm and peaceful mind and the ability to better handle life's ups and downs have Nepalis and foreigners flocking to meditation retreats around the country.

Those seeking a spiritual experience in Nepal have increased significantly over the last ten years, and meditation tourism is now nearly on par with trekking. Last year, nine percent of all tourist arrivals to Nepal were for pilgrimage purposes compared to 11 per cent for trekking.

A substantial portion of pilgrims came to attend meditation and yoga courses at ashrams and monasteries in Nepal. Among the most popular is Vipassana meditation, even though it involves a strict, ten-day schedule that includes meditating ten hours a day and

abstaining from talking.

Angelique van Leeuwen (*pic, right*), a 38-year-old writer and photographer from Holland, completed a ten-day course in August. "It was tough but doable," she says, "my mind was on 24/7 overdrive, and Vipassana was intense, but the technique made me more focused, I feel more calm."

With the celebrations and indulgences of Dasain and Tihar behind them, a lot of Nepalis are also joining the courses to detoxify their minds and bodies. Roop Jyoti, a Vipassana meditation guru, says the technique teaches people how not to get upset in life.

"People are looking for peace of mind," Jyoti explains, "after you sit through a course you can deal with your anger and fear and emotions in a better way, it cleans your mind of all the impurities, and also makes you physically healthy."

Vipassana is an ancient



meditation technique taught and practiced by the Buddha 2,500 years ago, and it was revived and popularised in India in 1969. There are now Vipassana meditation centres in 25 countries, and in Nepal they are in Lumbini, Pokhara, Birganj, Chitwan, Surkhet, and Kathmandu.

During a course, students are taught a breathing technique called anapana before

progressing to Vipassana which literally means 'to see things as they really are'. The aim is to develop a calm and equanimous mind by observing the breath and sensations in the body to subdue craving and aversion.

But with a demanding daily schedule that includes rising at 4am and ten hours of seated meditation, Vipassana is not for the faint hearted or weak willed. There are five 'sila' (moral rules) which students must follow: not to kill, lie, steal, undertake sexual misconduct or consume intoxicants.

They must also abstain from making eye-contact, reading or writing and, perhaps the most difficult for some, maintain noble silence, only talking about the technique with teachers.

Despite the intensity of the sessions, the number of people attending Vipassana courses has grown in the Kapan centre alone from 2,500 people three years ago to nearly 5,000 last year.

When the centre started in 1981, most of those taking the course were Buddhists, now all religions and nationalities take part.

"People in their 80s are coming, teenagers, medical doctors, and professionals, males and females, it is very diverse," Jyoti says.

After reading about Vipassana in a newspaper 15 years ago, Nanda Kumar Sharma felt compelled to enroll. Since then the 44-year-old has completed nine more courses and is currently a volunteer administrator at the centre.

"At the time I was feeling nervous and my mind was very stressed," says Sharma, who meditates daily to better manage stress and attends a ten-day course nearly every year. 🇳🇵

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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Where to meditate

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www.np.dhamma.org

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Contact: + 977 1 4821268, kopan@mail.com.np
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The Ministry of Agriculture Development (MoAD) is implementing the High Value Agriculture Project in Hills and Mountain Areas (HVAP) with financial support from International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in partnership with SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and the Agro Enterprise Centre (AEC). The project aims to integrate poor people in rural areas especially women and marginalised groups in high value chains and markets for improved income, employment opportunities and ability to respond to market demand and opportunities based on marketing agreements with private agribusinesses. As an implementing partner and a technical support provider, SNV Nepal is responsible for the implementation of pro-poor value chain development.

International Consultant for Capacity Assessment-Vacancy Code 2012-27

The objective of this assignment is to develop AEC's overall direction setting, strategic priorities and options based on organisation strong experiences and foundation.

- Requirements:**
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 - Experience on strategic planning, organisational assessment, monitoring and institutional development including gender and social inclusion issues;
 - Experience conducting qualitative and quantitative research/study;
 - Clear understanding of methodology and experience of using different tools and techniques including multiple-relation analysis;
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 - The consultant should have a native speaker level of English;
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Interested candidates are requested to visit: <http://hvap.gov.np/noticedetail.php?id=52> to review the Terms of Reference before applying.

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We do not appreciate third-party mediation based on this advertisement.



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EVENTS

LIVING PICTURES, watch Nepali and Finnish films every Wednesday evening. 31 October to 28 November, 9.30pm, Moksh Restaurant, Jhamsikhel

Human rights film week 2012, screening of Nepali and international features and documentaries on humanitarian and gender issues. 17 to 24 November, www.hrffn.org for schedule and locations

AWON Christmas bazar, latch on to the yuletide spirit and visit this one stop destination for handicrafts, clothing, candles, paintings, brass and metal ware, silver jewellery, and other handmade items. Rs 100 for adults, Rs 50 for children, 1 December, 10am to 4pm, Hyatt Regency Boudha, 9851022363, 9851934190



INTRODUCTION TO VJ-ING, learn the art of video jockeying with renowned video director and light designer Mathieu Crette. Rs 1,500, 21 to 24 November, 10am to 5pm, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, apply by 18 November, shreyans@sattya.org

Sattya rooftop sale, donate clothes, appliances, books or decorations to charity and support Ama ko Ghar. 1 December, 11am to 5pm, Sattya Arts, Jawalakhel, (01)5523486, 9818409207



KATHMANDU INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL, witness films that explore the diverse and complex ways in which people relate to mountains at the tenth edition of KIMFF, and also take part in discussions, on-demand screenings, guest lectures, book and photography exhibitions, and workshops for aspiring filmmakers. 7 to 11 December, 11 am to 5 pm, Raastriya Sabha Griha, Nepal Tourism Board, Brikutimandap, (01)4440635/5542544, www.kimff.org

Thamel mall festival, enjoy Japanese, Newari, Manange, Tibetan, Korean, and Chinese food, and take advantage of discounts on clothing, jewellery, fancy and accessories. 2 December, 9am to 9pm, Thamel Mall, 9841801391

Adolescent girls in Nepal between tradition and modernity, an exhibition of Thomas Kelly's works which demonstrate the role of adolescent girls in Nepali society. 7 to 16 December, 8am to 6pm, Indigo Gallery, Naxal, (01)4413580

Stolen childhood, participate in this photography and documentary competition that aims to record lost childhoods, and win prizes worth Rs 50,000. Entry fee Rs 300 for photography, Rs 800 for documentary, 21 November, 12pm onwards, Nepal Tourism Board, 9819214828

MUSIC

Live at Café 32, live music and delicious food every Friday. 23 November, 6pm onwards, Café 32, Battisputali, (01)4244231

So you think you can sing, unleash the bathroom singer in yourself to the world. 25 November, 5 to 7pm, The Factory, Thamel



KCM INTER-COLLEGE MUSIC COMPETITION, rock the living daylights out of your competitors, and win up to Rs 145,000 in cash and kind. Rs 5000 registration fee, 15 December, 10am to 7pm, Fun Park, Bhrikuti Mandap, (01)5201997

DINING

Tass and Tawa, savour a wide variety of Nepali meat dishes and reserve your palate for the heavenly Chusta. Pulchowk, Kathmandu



BRIAN'S GRILL, enjoy burgers, steaks, and Tex-Mex cuisine at this American-styled steakhouse. Dillibajjar

Shambaling Hotel, this newly opened hotel promises a fine dining experience. Boudha

Little Italy, go vegetarian at this new Italian food chain and don't forget to end your meal with the chef's special, chocolate bomb. Darbar Marg

Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, overnight package with accommodation, dinner, and breakfast. Dhulikhel, (01)4479488



BYANJAN, enjoy great food at an affordable price. Shrimp cocktails, grilled fish, and desserts are favourites among guests. Lakeside, Pokhara

Chilly Bar and Restaurant, quality food and wide selection of drinks with great views of Phewa Lake. Lakeside, Hallanchok, Pokhara, (061)463614/463163

Cosmopolitan Cafe, located in the heart of Basantapur, this cosy cafe offers arguably the best chicken sizzler in town. Basantapur (along Kathmandu Darbar Square), (01)4225246

Tamarind, a multi-cuisine restaurant, it offers an exquisite range of drinks and food. Jhamsikhel



YIN YANG RESTAURANT, east meets west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Add a little spice to your life with the pad thai or green curry. If you can't handle the heat, fall into the safety net of its western dishes. Thamel, 10am to 10pm, (01)4701510

Krishnarpan, a specialty Nepali restaurant at The Dwarika's Hotel serving 6 to 22 courses of authentic Nepali meal. The Dwarika's Hotel, Battisputali, (01)4479488

Everest Steak House, an old-school joint for everything steak, indeed a sanctuary for meat lovers. Thamel, Chhetrapati Chok, (01)4260471



KOTETSU, authentic Japanese dishes that cater to your needs and taste buds. Lazimpat

GETAWAYS

Shivapuri Village, eco-tourism close to the Shivapuri National Park replete with a charm of bygone days. Patishwara, Shivapuri National Park, (01)4017725, 9851034141, info@shivapuri.com.np



TEMPLE TREE RESORT AND SPA, a peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna, it'll be hard to leave the premises once you enter. Gaurighat, Lakeside, (61)465819



GRAND NORLING HOTEL, countryside weekend package offering suite rooms, swimming, gym, massage, and discounts on other facilities. Gokarna, (01)4910193



JUANITA MALAGON

Chameleon spirit

Noted photographer of Brazil's Amazonia exhibits in Kathmandu

SAY CHEESE: Maureen Bisilliat is not used to being in front of the camera. She feels more comfortable behind the lens.

switches from English to Spanish to Portuguese with equal ease, but it is her pictures that communicate what she wants to say.

Bisilliat started as a photojournalist 50 years ago when she travelled extensively throughout Brazil, narrating the daily life of the indigenous people in the Amazon. "I had read and enjoyed the tales by Brazilian writers like Joao Guimaraes Rosas, Euclides da Cunha, and Jorge Amado, and something clicked and I wanted to go to the places they wrote about to tell those stories in pictures," she explains.

Her family's nomadic ways gave her a sense of not belonging anywhere, and made her like a chameleon, blending with the environment. But photography allowed Bisilliat to root her to one place, and that

was Brazil.

"I'm able to adapt easily, and to recognise when I need to be present or absent, seen or not seen," she says.

Taking pictures for her is like getting out of yourself to penetrate into others' worlds and spirits, forgetting your own self. She also explains that indirectly she identifies herself with the people she took pictures of, and that helps her find her roots and connection with the earth.

A selection of 14 photographs from Xingu in the Amazon is being exhibited at the festival, and Bisilliat says she was amazed while selecting the pictures about the similarities between Brazil and Nepal. 🇳🇵

Exhibition in Siddhartha Art Gallery at Babar Mahal Revisited
25 November-21 December
www.artmandu.org

JUANITA MALAGON

Maureen Bisilliat didn't mind travelling nearly 30 hours non-stop from Sao Paulo to Kathmandu this week. She didn't mind that she had to attend a social event on the evening she arrived. She was happy to explore Bhaktapur the next day.

At 82, Bisilliat has the energy of a teenager and the curiosity of a child.

Which must be why she is always doing something, somewhere around the world. This time she is in Nepal exhibiting her photographs as part of the Kathmandu International Art Festival that begins Sunday.

A trained painter, a professional photographer, a photojournalist, and a documentarist, Bisilliat was born in England, the daughter of an Argentinian diplomat and a British painter. She

Festival of the arts



Modelled after major art events like the Venice Biennale and the Sao Paulo biennial, the Kathmandu International Art Festival is a month-long festival that begins on 25 November. Artists from 31 countries collaborate on this year's theme: 'Earth/Body/Mind' during the city-wide showcase.

There will be installations that fill entire rooms, exhibits in stunning traditional spaces such as Mul Chok at Patan Darbar Square, and even a multimedia piece projected onto the Bouddhanath Stupa.

25 November to 21 December, 10 am to 5 pm
Siddhartha Art Gallery, Patan Museum, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, KCAC, Summit Hotel, British Council, Boudha Nath, Nepal Art Council, Image Ark Gallery, Nepal Investment Bank, Nag Bahal, Central Zoo

www.artmandu.org
(01)4438979/4218048

Hariyo folks

Opening soon is Hariyo Chowk, a space created for artists, community members, and everyone else who is interested in sharing their work and learning from others. Its founders at Sattya Media Arts Collective have billed it as a platform to experiment, demonstrate, and educate about topics like organic



gardening, composting, recycling, building with natural materials, and adopting simple low-impact technologies. Drinks, snacks, oven-fired pizzas, music, and visuals by VJ Nye Blen await you at its opening ceremony.

24 November, 3pm onwards, Hariyo Chowk, Patan,
www.sattya.org/projects
(01)500044, 9851139957

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Pokhara: Sabha Griha Chowk, Pokhara, Tel: 061-206570 U.K.: Aldershot, London, Tel: 0044-7824332127, 1252409272 Hong Kong: 12/F Gofuku Tower 62-64, Woosung Street, Jordan KLN, HONG KONG, Tel: 00852-27838955, Fax: 00852-25538966

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SOMEPLACE ELSE

pretensions at the door and find yourself a comfortable corner and just relax. As one regular told me, this is one of the few joints around town that resembles an American bar. You can sit at the bar and watch the game on TV, or just sit by yourself and nobody will disturb you, or strike up a conversation with a willing stranger.

This is not a place that demands you to dress up and be seen with the 'right' people. You could enter in your pyjamas and nobody will care or judge. Its this nonchalance that keeps young Kathmandu residents coming back for more. And when I say young I don't mean irritating young teens who speak accented Nepali at the top of their lungs and indulge in very public displays of affection. There are students and professionals, both Nepali and expats looking to end their day with a relaxing drink and bits and bites before heading home.

Though Spain holds the



PICS: PRAMOD SHRESTHA

BACKYARD

honour of inventing the platter of appetisers served with alcohol, tapas culture is native to Nepal as well, as manyNepalis indulge in snacks and alcohol after office hours and then head home for their main meal. And Backyard provides an array of appetisers, ranging from the

usual momos and fried meat to the intriguing 'what is alu'. 'What is alu' (Rs 130) is a plate of potato wedges fried with whole cumin and green chilies that goes down well with Backyard's hot rum punch. We also had the Wanton Soup (Rs 180), a warm broth with strong garlicky flavour that is nourishing and perfect for the season. The shaphaleys and momos are a big hit with Backyard's regulars, but we picked the Chicken a La Kiev (Rs 350) instead. The outside was a tad too enthusiastically fried and tasted charred in parts, but once we carved into the

meat, the butter gushed out onto the mashed potatoes. The flesh was fresh and moist, but it could been more flavourful with the addition of some pepper and a dash of herbs.

The food, like the place is modest and simple, which is not a complaint and the price incredibly reasonable. The owners made a conscious decision to stick with dishes that their cook knows how to prepare well and their decision has definitely paid off. Don't go expecting a fine dining experience and you won't be disappointed. 🇳🇵

Ruby Tuesday

How to get there: take the fire-brigade road in Pulchok, pass St Mary's back gate, Backyard is the second house on your left.
015548968



Drink responsibly

Dangerous Liaisons



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

For anyone who has already seen the riveting 1988 version of *Dangerous Liaisons* directed by Stephen Frears and starring stalwarts like Glenn Close, Michelle Pfeiffer, Uma Thurman, and John Malkovich, you might be slightly sceptical of a remake of the same by South Korean director Hur Jin-Ho.

Based on the 18th century French novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, the film narrates the story of several characters whose lives are ruined by love and the heartbreak that comes from betrayal.

Even if you know or guess how the story ends, this particular adaptation is still more than worth watching for its setting (1930s Shanghai), costumes, gorgeous cinematography, a strong ensemble cast, and above all, for a glimpse into the absurdly lavish lives of Chinese socialites just before the advent of communism.

The lovely Ziyi Zhang (from *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*) plays Du Fenyu the chaste and pure of heart widow who becomes the centre of a bet between jilted, conniving socialite Mo Jieyu (played ferociously by Cecilia Cheung), and the womanising playboy Xie Yifan (Jang Dong-kun).

Mo has just been dumped by her lover, another rich tycoon, for a virginal schoolgirl, and she entices Xie Yifan (whom she calls just 'Fan') to deflower the girl as a test of his prowess. The handsome but fatally louche Fan agrees, however, he is distracted due to circumstance by Du Fenyu who is his distant cousin and is therefore staying at his mansion-like residence.

Captivated by her serene exterior and seeming indifference to him, Fan pursues Fenyu with every weapon in his arsenal, confusing her with love letters, overt sexual overtures, gentle teasing, and his own natural charm.

As Mo teases him over his lost cause, the two wager that if Fan can get Fenyu into bed then Mo shall give herself to him.

Circumstances become increasingly complicated when Fan falls in love with Fenyu. He refuses to acknowledge his emotions, having never felt such a thing before, meanwhile, Mo continues to plot revenge on her former lover by arranging for Fan to sleep with his innocent schoolgirl fiancée.

Yes, the plot is complicated, but the fine acting carries us along. We are enthralled by the intractable treachery of Mo, who, even after Fan dumps Fenyu after having made her love him, cannot accept that he still loves this other woman.

There are a few nail biting scenes of betrayal that are grim and engrossing at the same time. Somehow, even though laughably extreme in principle, the act of betraying a loved one out of pique seems to make for extremely good cinema.

I would watch this version of *Dangerous Liaisons* for its elegant, restrained filmmaking that brings to life the abjectness that can accompany falling in love, the destructive power of jealousy, and the hunger for power that can eventually, if not somehow checked, metamorphose into pure bitterness.

If you ever believed that only the French could have thought up such an extreme concoction, think again when you see this Chinese adaptation. It seems, unfortunately, that appalling behaviour dogs humans everywhere, and yet we are not averse to watching it as entertainment.

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer

Examining tests



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

The assumption that medical screening can help detect diseases early enough and save lives is not always true. With a plethora of tests available, screening has become confusing and conflict-ridden.

A good example is ovarian cancer screening. Recently the US Preventive Services Task Force (a body designated to advice on the validity of screening tests) stated that women with an average risk of ovarian cancer should not be screened for the disease. The American Cancer Society concurs.

The no-screening recommendations were based on a 13 year long large scale study of 78,000 women aged between 55 to 74. Half of these women underwent ultrasound examination and blood tests (which include studying biological markers for cancer), and the other half were not screened. Surprisingly at the

end of the 13 years there were no differences in death rates from ovarian cancer in the two groups. Crucially, 10 per cent of those screened (about 3,200 women in the study) had 'false-positive' results which led to over 1,000 women requiring unnecessary surgery to remove their ovaries. Obviously there were complications from the surgery such as infections and blood clots. What happened?



The ultrasound revealed benign ovarian cysts which could not be distinguished from malignant cancer without surgery. Furthermore, the blood markers which were supposed to detect cancer were sometimes elevated for reasons other than cancer, not an uncommon finding with screening tests. But habits die hard and many doctors

continue to screen for ovarian cancer, regardless of these findings or recommendations.

Unfortunately, these controversial screening tests are not limited to ovarian cancer alone. Controversy, for example, rages on about prostate cancer screening for elderly men. Some studies have shown prostate cancer tests to be beneficial and many others have not. Despite minor benefits, potential harm from biopsies, over diagnosis (finding cancer that would never become clinically detectable), and treatment complications have to be strongly considered.

In all this confusion, it is almost tempting to take a fatalistic stance and not perform any tests. But that would be counterproductive because there are many well-established and useful tests for appropriate age groups such as PAP smears, colonoscopy, dermatological check for melanoma, and ultrasound screening for aortic aneurysms to name just a few. If you have the financial resources (as there is no universal insurance), these tests are indeed useful and highly recommended.



DIPESH SHRESTHA

ALMOST FULL: Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun declares a two-third budget at Singha Darbar on Tuesday afternoon amid protests from the opposition after President Ram Baran Yadav approved the budget earlier in the day.



MIN RATNA BAURACHARYA

WATCHING YOU: Tourists gather on the banks of the Bagmati opposite the cremation site in Pashupatinath to observe and take pictures of funerals on Wednesday afternoon.



BIKRAM RAI

SHINE ON: Devotees offer coconuts and light oil lamps in honour of the sun god, Surya, during Chhath puja in Rani Pokhari on Monday.

READERS' PHOTO



DAVID SINGH

ROCKING BOATS: Boats await customers on the bank of Phewa Lake on a peaceful afternoon.

WEEKEND WEATHER

See that patch of orange over northern India in this satellite composite made on Thursday morning? That is colour-enhancement of a westerly front that is bringing some precipitation into western Nepal on Friday. It will get to Kathmandu Valley on Saturday, but with some cloud cover and not much by way of rain. However, the upper Himalayan valleys may get some snow flurries in western and central Nepal down to 4,000m. This is a fast-moving system so it will pass by Sunday, bringing down the minimum temperature by a notch and perhaps early morning mist mixed with smog in the Valley.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
24°-7°	23°-5°	24°-4°

Paranoid politics

India's secularism did not kill Bal Thackeray, death did



As Mumbai poured out on the streets to catch a glimpse of the cortege of Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray this week, many TV anchors thought his critics had been suitably mocked into silence. They claimed the outpouring of grief for the death of Thackeray vividly illustrated the echo his politics had among people.

Their conclusion was truly misplaced, for the popularity of Thackeray was never in doubt; what had always been was the sanity of his politics.

Usually, death unites people, at least momentarily. It helps them to paper over sharp differences, and even ignore injustices the departed perpetrated. This possibly explains the mammoth crowds at Thackeray's cremation. Yet what should not be forgotten was what we did not or could not witness - the emotions among those whom the Shiv Sena leader reviled and ranted against.

They included South Indians, communists, Muslims, Bangladeshi migrants, Pakistanis, Biharis, liberals, boys and girls indulging in the harmless joys of Valentine's Day, couples snatching moments of privacy in parks, journalists, in fact just about anyone who chose to differ from him or did not share his worldview.

Thackeray roared against former cricketer and commentator Sunil Gavaskar's decision to participate in the ceremony the Pakistan



government had organised to felicitate Imran Khan and his men for lifting the World Cup in 1992. Nevertheless, Gavaskar flew to Pakistan, saying that in a democracy, everyone was entitled to his or her opinion.

During the Kargil conflict, Thackeray demanded that thespian Dilip Kumar should return the Nishan-e-Imtiaz honour that Pakistan awarded him. Kumar refused. This week, TV anchors did not turn to Gavaskar or Kumar or other social groups for their views on the legacy of Thackeray. We in the subcontinent desist from speaking ill of the departed.

Yet it is also true that the media would have feared the consequences of criticising the man whose politics was predicated on fear and violence. Look at the fate of a 21-year-old

woman who posted a comment on her Facebook page criticising the shutdown in Mumbai on the day Thackeray died.

She said: 'Respect is earned, given, and definitely not forced. Today, Mumbai shuts down due to fear, not due to respect.' She and another woman (*pic, above*) who had 'liked' her comment were arrested, and Shiv Sena goons ransacked her uncle's orthopaedic clinic.

For Thackeray, respect and fear were synonymous. His politics was based on fanning paranoia. He invented a monster, pummelled him, brought him to the knees, then promptly found another monster for people to turn their wrath on, followed a third, and so on. His politics aimed to have people live in constant anxiety. His cure for it was to have them

create a group which they could scare to abject helplessness. This was Thackeray solution, his followers' catharsis.

Thackeray established the Shiv Sena in 1966 to harness the deep frustration in Maharashtra. That was a decade of immense pessimism: the hopes India's independence had engendered had been belied. Jobs hadn't multiplied to meet the demands of the aspiring classes, India had lost a war to China, the country was in an economic slump, and Marathi-speaking people were anxious that their culture could get swamped because of migrants.

Such fears were not unique to Maharashtra. What was unique to the state was that it had a leader called Thackeray, whose followers attacked South Indians and Gujaratis in the

misguided belief that their presence in Mumbai was the reason the sons-of-soil could not find employment.

Once the novelty of targetting them lost its novelty, Thackeray turned to the communists, assassinating their leaders and breaking their unions by driving a wedge between those from Maharashtra and the migrant outsiders. No doubt, he succeeded because of the help he received from the ruling Congress and mill-owners, chary of strikes and bandas. In the 70's, the city was already in thrall to Thackeray.

Thereafter, he turned to portray the Muslims as the enemy, as the rhetoric began to have resonance at the time the campaign against the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya took off. He portrayed Muslims not only as the bane of Maharashtra but of entire India, publicly accusing them of being traitors or illegally entering India from Bangladesh. He boasted his followers had brought down the Babri Masjid, and fomented the grisly 1993 riot against Muslims. In his rhetoric, the Indian Muslim, the Pakistani, the terrorist, and the enemy were overlapping categories, as he sought to exploit the popular revulsion against terrorism plaguing India. It brought his party to power in 1995.

Obviously, the Indian state could and should have booked him for unlawful treatment he subjected his supplicants to. Yet it condoned his action, at times even connived with him to ensure his power did not abate. This prompted a journalist-friend to remark: "Secularism did not kill Thackeray, death did." 📧

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ANURAG ACHARYA
in BAGLUNG

Faced with Kathmandu's reluctance to devolve political power to the grassroots, Nepal's rural communities have started quite literally taking power into their own hands.

The remote village of Chhisti in Baglung district has no roads, and a footbridge across the Kali Gandaki is its lifeline to rest of the world. But it has electricity because the villagers knew better than to wait for the government.

It took locals three years to carry 627 logs across the river and set up the transmission lines and in 2008, following a request to Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, Army helicopters dropped transformers. Now, Chhisti is one of the few remote villages in Nepal that is connected to the national electricity grid, and what makes it even more unique is that power distribution is efficiently and honestly managed by the local community.

One of the advantages of community management and distribution of power is that there is minimum pilferage, and voluntary monitoring of the leakages. Up to 60 per cent of the power in Tarai districts and Bhaktapur are stolen by hooking up illegally to transmission lines.

Each household pays a minimum charge for 20 units at Rs 4 per unit, and this is less than what households pay in urban areas. The money is used by the community to maintain the distribution system. Although the village falls under the rotational power cuts of the grid, the electricity is of higher quality than power from microhydro projects.

"Electricity has opened our eyes to rest of the world and made us more aware of things around us. It will prove instrumental in transforming the lives of people in this village," Yam Bahadur Chettri of Chhisti Electricity User Group says proudly.

Community managed rural electrification started in the late 1990s when the people of south Lalitpur district came together to connect their isolated villages to the national grid. One of the pioneers was Dilli Ghimire, who felt that access to quality electricity is a basic right and



POWERFUL HANDS: Villagers of Shankhar Pokhari in Parbat district pay their electricity bills to the local user group.

PEOPLE and

Nepal's rural communities are taking electric power into their own hands

the state had the responsibility to provide the service.

"After all, the rivers originate and flow through our villages so the people here have as much right to its electricity as the cities," Ghimire said, walking up to Chhisti recently along the banks of the Kali Gandaki.

However, rural electrification is not cost effective when sparsely populated villages are spread out over difficult and often inaccessible terrain.

Women have benefited the



ALL TOGETHER: Dilli Ghimire (second from right) attends a meeting of Chhisti Electricity User Group in Baglung.



ALL PICS: ANURAG ACHARYA



POLES APART

The wooden electricity poles supplied by the NEA in Chhisti have become useless in less than five years. The poles were supposed to be chemically treated to last for at least 10 years. The adjoining village of Jaidi in Parbat district faces similar problems.

NEA is the responsible body for procurement and supply of materials including electric poles. But the communities complain that the supplied materials are substandard and have been urging the government to transfer the responsibility to the user groups instead.

POWER




most from having electricity, saving valuable hours grinding and husking grain in electric mills. Children helping out with domestic chores during the day don't have to study under flickering kerosene lamps at night. Farmers learn about seeds and fertilisers and market prices of their produce on television.

"We have lived most of our life in darkness, but we wanted our children to grow up in light," says Nirmala Poudel, another member of Chhisti's electricity user group. Her daughters Anjana, 7, and Asmita, 11, both love watching health related programs on TV and say they want to become

doctors and treat fellow villagers. The government has realised that the long term benefits of rural electrification cannot be outweighed by simple arithmetic of profit and loss. Bylaws passed in 2005 require the government's Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) to foot 90 per cent of the cost of providing electricity to villages. But people like Ghimire in the National Association of Community Electricity Users Network say the bylaws do not offer enough, and in fact rural electrification needs to

be unbundled from the NEA, which is a profit making body because rural electrification initially doesn't make business sense. Even though Chhisti has grid power, 600 households here still depend on a nearby microhydro plant for electricity. A small policy change is all that is needed to ensure that electricity from thousands of microhydro plants all over the country is fed into the national grid. This could add up to 10MW of power if it can connect small hydroelectric stations all over Nepal and help reduce NEA's

technical losses by improving transmission in rural areas. Today, there are over 239,000 households accessing power through 227 electricity user groups across 47 districts in the country and their numbers are growing. Nepal's community led rural electrification movement is turning into yet another success story, not because of the government, but in spite of it. 

nepalitimes.com 

Power to the people, #547
Power sharing, Nepali style, #512



“Never again”

Interview with Prakash Dahal by Babita Basnet, *Ghatana ra Bichar*, 21 November

Babita Basnet: Have you renounced public life for the sake of your private life?

Prakash Dahal: Not really. I don't think any person can be successful if he is not happy privately. And to say that a leader or a public figure doesn't have a family life is totally wrong. The only difference is that they have more responsibility towards the country and society. It's not that I have given up my public life. It's just that I think people should learn from their mistakes rather than running away and I'm on the path of reform currently.

Although you were married, you had close relations with Bina Magar. How did that come about?

Some friends, who still have to pay the Rs 400,000 climbing fee, were making angry statements against the party while we were at Everest. Apparently, they had made plans to attack me because they thought I got special treatment at the base camp because I was 'Prachanda's son', while their status as central committee members and commanders of the YCL did not



do them any good. And some friends gave completely inaccurate statements to the media. As a result, my wife Srijana left me. Bina also experienced something similar. These events bought us together.

Where are you right now and what have you been doing?
I am in India, and I spend time studying

and reading up on current affairs. I have internet connection in my room, and this has made it easier for me to access news and interact on social networks. That is how I spend my days.

What about future plans?
I can never go away from politics.

You grew up with politics, so how does this sudden separation feel?
I may be away from politics these days, but politics is on my mind 24 hours a day. I even worked for a while and collected valuable experience. I read a lot of books on politics, so I haven't cut myself off.

When will you return to Nepal?
There is a time for everything, and currently I am busy gaining knowledge about great many things. I might come soon, who knows.

Who do you love the most? And who do you respect the most?
I love my party and its chairman the most since I am a member of the party. And I love my parents because I am their son. The chairman of our party Comrade Prachanda is someone I respect the most.

Are you in contact with your family?
I am in touch with my mother. No matter how many mistakes you make, a mother will always forgive you.

The only son leaves the family, the father's party splits, and he gets slapped in public. What has

happened to the Prachanda family?
My father tried a lot to save the party from breaking apart. I feel very sad when I read the false accusations made against my father by those who left the party. Even though it may seem like I have left the party, I will give up my life for Comrade Prachanda any day. And I was very upset when I found out that he was assaulted in public. I wanted to break down and cry. Having been together during the war, I am sad that I have not been able to be by his side and fight against these conspirators.

You must be proud to be Prachanda's son, but surely you must have your share of misery for carrying the family name.
I feel more pride than anything else. There are some forces, deeply rooted throughout the course of history, that are intent on derailing the country's progress, and have nothing better to do than defame our chairman.

What do you have to say to people who keep a keen interest in you?
I feel that I have let a lot of people down with my past behaviour. I couldn't support the chairman when he needed me the most, and that pains me. I have learnt my lessons, and I promise to you all that I will never repeat my mistakes.

NEPALI TWEETS

salokya
इयास माओवादीले केको खुसियालीमा यो थाई नभएको बन्द फिर्ता लिएको हो कुत्ति ? यो विजसिमा twitpic.com/bf5h9l कारण नि खुलाएको रैनछ
What prompted the dash Maoists to take back their banda that nobody knew about? Even this press note fails to explain.

Navin Khatriwada
मंसिर ७ मा चुनाव हुन नसकेका कारणहरु समाधान भएका हुन ? ? छैनन् भने, भुचो चुनाव घोषणा गरेको वैशाखमा फेरी ?
Have the obstacles to elections on 22 November been removed? If not, why the hell have they announced polls in May?

Kanak Mani Dixit
बाबुराम भट्टराई सरकारलाई पदच्युत गर्न आवश्यक दर्शन र लक्ष्य सरल छन्, यसका लागि जनआन्दोलनको ऊर्जा खर्च गर्नु नपर्ने हो। ekantipur.com/kantipur/news/ ...
The philosophy and logic needed to depose Baburam Bhattarai's government are simple, we don't have to waste our energy with a people's movement.

बाबाजी™
"चलाउ बाबाम चलाउ । सरकार कब्जा गरेपनि, सत्ता कब्जा गरेपनि गर तर जनतालाई सुखसुविधा देउ" -भनेर म भन्दैन । लोकतन्त्र आखिर लोकतन्त्र नै हो ।
"Go ahead BRB, go ahead. Capture the state, seize power, but make sure to provide ordinary Nepalis with basic services," I won't say this because a republic is a republic.

Drone Raaz Sharma
आजको सम्बोधन किन ? सामरिक समाजको भेला र जनजाती पाटी गठनलाई भोलिको पत्रपत्रिकामा दोस्रो पृष्ठमा धकेल्न, आफ्नो अनुहार पहिलो पृष्ठमा छाप्न ?
Why is the PM addressing the nation today? To put his face on page 1 in tomorrow's newspapers and push the news of the civil society and Janajati party meetings to page 2?

A slap in the face of security

Sundar Dahal, *Kantipur*, 19 November

Before he was assaulted, UCPN(M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal was greeting guests enthusiastically at the party's tea reception at Bhrikuti Mandap on Friday. Party cadres, well-wishers, and ordinary Nepalis had all arrived to get a glimpse of their leaders. Dozens of hands were seeking Dahal's attention, and he had to attend to each person if only out of formality.

From a security point of view, this was incredibly unsafe. Dahal did not even keep a foot's distance between himself and the guests, and anybody could have easily attacked him. Having awaited his turn, Uttam Kunwar of Kutneta, Baglung eventually slapped Dahal. Last Friday's blow completed the slappage circle: top leaders of all three parties have now been attacked by their own cadres.

But on a more serious note, this episode got the home administration worried about VIP security. On Sunday the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) announced that it will unveil a new VIP-security procedure within three weeks. Shankar Koirala, chief assistant secretary of the Law and Order Division, will be heading the taskforce.

"Our goal is to find out how to improve and strengthen the security provided to VIPs and VVIPs," said Koirala, who did not want to reveal the ministry's official line on these matters.

कान्तिपुर

The new security program comes at a time when the ministry was already planning to brief all Personal Security Officers (PSO). Currently, personnel from Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, National Investigation Department, and the Nepal Army are deployed in various capacity.

The Koirala-led taskforce will investigate ways to upgrade security arrangements for the residence, offices, roads taken, and the destinations travelled to by VIPs. The taskforce will also focus on improving the command and control of the personnel. A security code of conduct for VIPs will be made, which will require them to undergo self-defence training. It is international practice for government officials to be familiar with security procedures and even the president of the United States takes self-defence classes.

However, MoHA officials admit that as long as VIPs do not cooperate, no amount of security preparation will help. "The leaders need to follow instructions because security forces alone can't stop such premeditated attacks," said an official.

At the UCPN(M)'s tea reception on Friday, there were hundreds of police personnel under the command of SSP Jaya Bahadur Chand, and the event was notable for its heavy security. But ultimately Kunwar's hands reached Dahal because he strayed beyond the protection line. "The PSOs weren't vigilant, and VIPs were equally unaware," said an officer investigating the incident.



Yesterday Today
Book: Politics of violence
कान्तिपुर Batsyayan in *Kantipur*, 19 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Slap on Chairman Dahal's face is an assault on democracy.”

UCPN(M) press statement, 17 November

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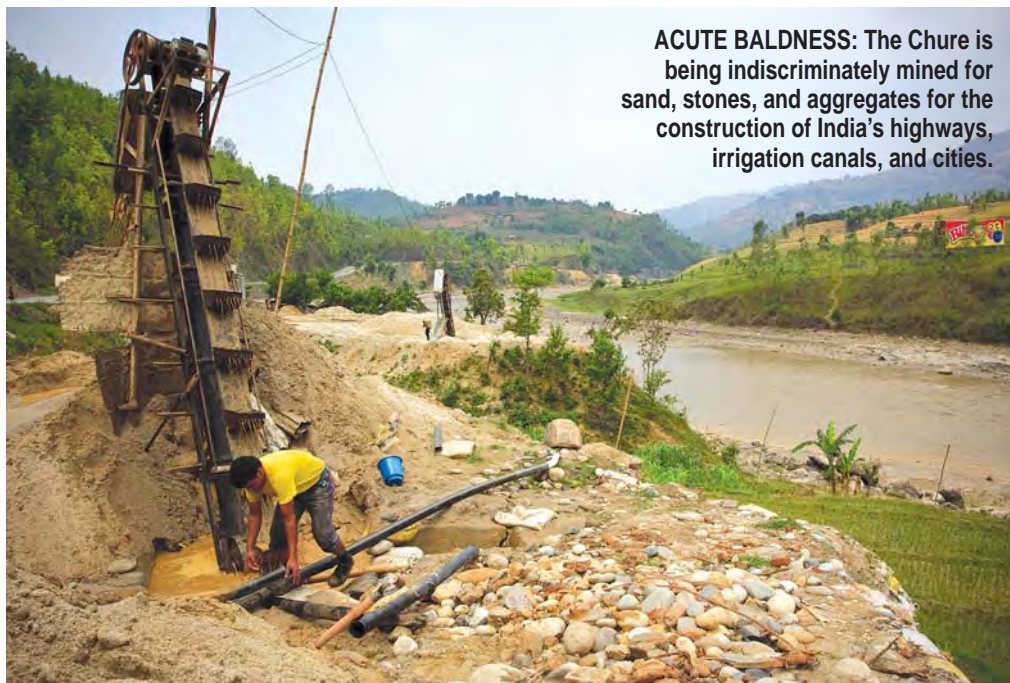
NEPALI PAN
Tirtha B Shrestha

In all the talk about the high Himalaya, the Mahabharat Range and the Tarai, the Chure Hills always fall between the cracks. These first wrinkles of the mighty Himalaya stretch from Mechi to Mahakali, they are a treasure trove of biodiversity, and have an environmental importance that few are aware of.

The Chure Hills are made of soft material, sand, sediment, and boulders, uplifted relatively recently in geological time as part of the formation of the Himalayan mountains. Because of their composition, the hills are much more sensitive to the loss of vegetation and other human activity, the impact of which can be felt downstream in the Nepal Tarai and down to India. This is why President Ram Baran Yadav has made saving the Chure Hills one of his priorities.

The biodiversity of the Chure forests is much greater than other parts of Nepal, and it is under severe threat. During the Rana era, the majestic hardwood timber from the sal forests of the Chure were exported to India to be turned into railway ties. Today, the Chure is being indiscriminately mined for sand, stones, and aggregates for the construction of India's highways, irrigation canals, and cities. The tragedy of it is that this is making the plains of India and Nepal prone to disastrous floods.

When the Chure loses its forests and huge gashes are opened up on its slopes



ACUTE BALDNESS: The Chure is being indiscriminately mined for sand, stones, and aggregates for the construction of India's highways, irrigation canals, and cities.

FOO CHEE CHANG

They say Nepal is 'landlocked', but it looks these days more like a country without 'locks'

by quarries, the monsoon rains can wash down the whole mountain. In Jhapa, the Ratuwa Khola used to flow under a bridge, now the sediment washed down from the Chure has buried the bridge itself.

The Chure is being desertified, and the forests have lost their indigenous King Cobra, and the world's largest flying bird, the stork. The pythons here are also threatened because of habitat loss, as is the pygmy hog. Naturalist Karna Shakya did his research on the pygmy hog decades ago. Shakya is still around, but the pygmy hog can't be found anywhere.

anymore.

What protected the forests of the Chure and the inner Tarai for centuries was malaria. But after the advent of DDT and the eradication of the malaria mosquito, the area became habitable. There was encroachment of the Chure from both the south and the north, entire villages were translocated from the mountains and these fragile hills didn't stand a chance.

King Mahendra's plan was to settle people south of the East-West Highway and preserve the jungles to the north of the road. But that policy was never

properly implemented, and the forests on the slopes of the Chure started balding. Now that the trees are gone, the next to go are the boulders, sand, and stones.

Nepal's soil, sand, stones, and boulders are being taken out of the country without revenue, without permission, in a wanton destruction of our natural heritage. They say Nepal is 'landlocked', it looks these days more like a country without 'locks'. But the politicians in Kathmandu with their power-addled brains have no time to think about this frightening destruction that will have far-reaching impact on the economy, livelihood, and future existence of our nation.

The politicians have slogans for state restructuring, but the Chure range that stretches from east to west doesn't register in anyone's consciousness. We are not worried about the indigenous inhabitants of the Chure like the Tharu, Chepang, Danuwar, Muhasar, and others. Neither are we worried about what the environmental destruction of the Chure will do to downstream plains with long-term consequences to Nepal's Pahad-Tarai and India's Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Enough words, let's act now to save the Chure Hills. 🍷

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

nepalitimes.com

Crisis in Chure, # 630
Out on a limb, #593
Crushed, #502

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Plutocracy of the Red Elite

The nation is still reverberating from The Slap that Comrade Ferocious got on his cheek while shaking hands with karyakartas at the Baddie Tea Party the other day. The YCLs beat the living daylight out of Padam Kunwar, who has become an overnight cyber celebrity. Now that all three leaders of the three main parties have been slapped, Madhesi leaders must be wondering who among them is next. Here are some tips to avoid injury:

- Resign from the post of Party President
- Employ robotic arms to shake hands at tea parties
- Get a look-alike as decoy
- Don't shake hands with suspicious-looking chaps, blow kisses
- Meet cadre only through Facebook, not face-to-face
- If slapped, turn the other cheek
- All guests at tea parties to be handcuffed first
- Leaders to mandatorily wear protective headgear at all times
- Challenge attacker to a wrestling duel

Something happened on Tuesday that upset the apple cart. Comrade Awesome, the most calculating neta ever to appear in the Nepali political firmament (and I'm saying that with genuine admiration) had agreed with the politicos that Prime Minister Red Flag would start the process of reconstituting the government by stepping down. PKD thought he had killed two stones with one bird by removing his nemesis from office and projecting himself as kingmaker.

It was on that assurance that the president, who was also looking for a face-saving way out, signed the budget ordinance. Although all sides tried to paint themselves as the winners in this deal, it was BRB who pulled a fast one and bought himself more time by leap-frogging the 22 November election date



and announcing yet another election for next year without saying when. The primordial minister in an unguarded moment (before his address to the nation on Thursday evening) had said he was going to be PM "for the next ten years". Looks like that wasn't just a slip of the tongue, he is going to make turning himself into a Jyoti Basu a self-fulfilling prophecy. But there is a sour note. BRB has been telling people within earshot of the media that he feels 'betrayed' by India. If that's

the case, wonder what they'd promised him.

The only guys who seem to feel they have lost out are the Eh-maleys and Kangresis who have retreated to their lairs to lick their wounds, and subject the Nepali people to yet another andolan. They have no one to blame but themselves by letting PKD run circles around them. If they only talked to each other, Lion Brave, Jushil Da, and Lord Ram would know that Awesome has promised prime ministership to all of them at some point or other. The other candidate who seems mesmerised by the thought of ascending to Balu Water is Demon Nath who is PKD's candidate for a 'technocratic' pradhan monkey.

There is a reason why this Plutocracy of the Red Elite is feeling so cosy staying on in power. There was a time when corruption in Nepal was a 10% here and a 10% there. People

talked about 'lakhs' changing hands below the table, and 'tea money' at the traffic office. What a Great Leap Forward this government has made. No one talks nowadays about anything less than corrodes and arabs in kickbacks. Road-widening is leading to the widening of the midriffs of a lot of YCL comrades and their commanders who monopolise the all-Nepal rentals of bulldozers. Apparently they are even giving themselves contracts for the 're-construction' of bridges destroyed during the conflict which don't even exist. Gutch's sidekick who has been caught several times in the police dragnet of mafia bosses, is also a major beneficiary of road-widening. I finally get it: that is why Farang Minister Kaji Naran Kamred is telling donors not to bother about funding human rights and inclusion in Nepal, and to channel their monies instead into 'infrastructure'.

Alert Ass fans have written in to say that the Nepali word 'paji' doesn't just mean 'armpit hair' but also 'adolescent donkey'. This donkey stands corrected and regrets the error.



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