Predator state

A 20-year-old Nepali woman returning from three years of work as a domestic in Saudi Arabia was robbed and raped by airport officials. She has just found out she is pregnant, and says all she wants is to see the guilty punished. The accused are putting political pressure to be freed. The woman pictured spoke to Nepali Times on Wednesday in her rented room in Balaju.

Full story on page 11 and on www.nepaltimes.com
2013 is not going to be much better than 2012 in unsettling the political landscape of Nepal, by the looks of it. The past year was one of missed opportunities, squandered mandates, wasted prospects. It was marred by political brinkmanship, blackmail and relentless identity politics. Greed and corruption marred out this year, breaking all previous national and international records as kleptocrats ransacked the exchequer, plundered natural resources, and awarded each other massive contracts under the table. With the government itself setting the example, goons extorted, ran protection and awarded each other massive contracts under the table. With the breaking all previous national and international records as coalition are circling each other warily, unwilling to give the other an advantage open-ended deadlock is because the two top leaders of the Maoists it looks like we are headed for another 365 days of the same.

If the political parties are terrified of parliamentary elections in 2013, why don’t they at least agree to hold local polls and restore accountability to the grassroots?

RAPE FOR RANSOM
In Nepal we were happy and thankful about how we are not like Delhi’s the ‘rape capital’ of India. Nothing could be further from the truth (‘Rape for ransom’, Shashidhar Kumar Shah, #0635). All those horrible things that we read about raped women and girls in India — victim blaming, police apathy and zero protection — are all happening in our own backyard. But we are simply too busy talking about it.

RT
More shocking to me than the manifestations of power, patriarchy, and violence is the collusion of the Big Men in the government, police, and parties in hoisting up the crimes and rewarding the rapists by presenting the victims as wives. How insensitive can these men be? The only solution is a carnet and stick approach of education and punishment.

Lina
First, education and awareness of the authorities is a must. Secondly, the same should be applied to the villagers, and we must make sure that each person has the right to speak out and fight for their rights. There must be some kind of organisation that can help these innocent women, and provide them with security. And finally, there should be capital punishment to such rapists and life imprisonment to all who are involved, including the policemen. Shaahi

As a UK citizen married to a Nepali woman, with children who are half-Nepali, and working in Nepal to improve the education of thousands of primary children each year, I am beginning to believe that I am part of this problem. Maybe the country needs all of us to walk out. Educating these vile criminals is not the answer, but removing them from society is. And quickly.

Anonymous
I feel disgusted when I read this kind of news. I say we chop off their parts and see who dares to do this again. You can’t imagine that the Nepali state can do any worse in 2013, but it looks like we are headed for another 365 days of the same.

Kul Gautam
Victims of rape are traumatised and greatly devastated due to the incident. Their self-esteem falls and they get depressed. The incident tends to replay in their mind over and over again. How can they survive living with the person who devastated them? I strongly against the culture of rape victims marrying the culprit. The ones who force such decisions are all criminals.

Anonymous
This is sad, shocking, and very disgusting. Why are the accomplices to this heinous act calling themselves human? Sudha Sharma

SAVE THE CHILDREN
This is a unheard and heart-rending editorial ‘Save the children’, #0635. I agree that the preventable death of 200 children in Nepal every day due to government disinterest is like mass murder. The tragic and needless daily deaths of so many children should be headline news every day.

Kim Rolle
I’d like to add a small but important point. According to the latest United Nations inter-agency 2011 report, under-5 child deaths in Nepal have dropped down to ‘only’ about 100 per day. But that’s only the tip of the iceberg. We have huge rates of malnutrition, significant disabilities, mental retardation, other chronic illnesses, violence, and abuse which make the life of many surviving children miserable.

Kripa Basnyat
What we desperately need in Nepal is women leaders at the top. I mean a woman Prime Minister. Only then will things get better for women. Male Nepali politicians have not experienced any personal pain, shame, or grief. They are living comfortable lives and they know how to talk, that is all.

Bimala Thapa Magar
THE GOD OF CRICKET
We were all sorry to see Sachin lay down his bat (‘The god of cricket’, Ajay Ashraf, #0635). He will be remembered for uplifting the game of cricket, not only with his superb performance but also by elevating the sport to a higher plane and transcending sectarian and pseudo-nationalistic concerns. Anonymous

THE PAST FORETOLD
If the political parties are terrified of parliamentary elections in 2013, why don’t they at least agree to hold local polls and restore accountability to the grassroots?

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O
n 27 May, Nepal made a

trust with destiny
and at the stroke of the
midnight hour unceremoniously
dissolved the country’s first
elected body tasked with writing
a new constitution.

The prime minister promised
e new constitution
by 22 November. That
deadline came and went,
and the prime minister has
refused steadfastly to step down.
We are going through
the umpteenth presidential
ultimatum to the political
parties to come up with
a formula to set up a new
government to oversee elections.
If they can’t meet that deadline
by next week, which seems
likely, elections in May 2013 are
impossible.

A lot of people seem to think
that a consensus government
would be the magic wand
that would resolve everything
that would turn the clock back.

Mainstream media headlines
in the last few weeks, including
front page editorials in
Thursday papers paint Pushpa
Kamal Dahal and Sushil Koirala
as solution-seekers with no
as victims of an obdurate
prime minister. The editorials
buy into the feeble excuses
of these two obsolete leaders,
who replaces Bhattarai, will
be willing to concede that
the winners wants to take all
which is what made 2012 such
a dismal year to possibly break
the deadlock.

The opposition also forgets
that Koirala, or anybody
who replaces Bhattarai, will
need the cooperation of all
constituencies when they come
to power tomorrow. So, what
does not happen in the opposition
would turn the clock back.

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Nepal’s fiscal cliff in 2013

If Nepal doesn’t ratify its international anti-money laundering commitments next year it will join other rogue states.

Now, there is another crisis that could shut out all investment for good. Nepal faces the risk of being permanently blacklisted from all international financial transactions and join the ranks of pariah states like North Korea and Iran if it fails to ratify an anti-money laundering and terrorism convention.

In February 2012, Nepal narrowly escaped being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force. In June, the FATF again extended its deadline for Nepal after the President approved two crucial bills, the Mutual Legal Assistance Act and the Extradition Treaty Act through ordinances after the government tabled them at the eleventh hour. But the anti-money laundering and terrorism parts of the package were not passed because of opposition from some Madhesi and Maoist members of the coalition government.

When the Nepali team travels to Paris in January for a face to face meeting with the FATF, they will be informed of the commitments they must fulfill so that the FATF plenary that sits in February will not decide to blacklist Nepal for failing to make progress on its commitments.

The FATF wants the country to adequately criminalise money laundering and terrorist financing, establish and implement adequate procedures for identification and freeze terrorist assets, and implement adequate procedures for confiscation of funds related to money laundering.

In other words, Nepal must amend the Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorism Act of 2008 before the deadline in June 2013. Also, a meeting of the FATF in October concluded that it was concerned about Nepal’s dillydallying over the Bill Against Organised Crime. Members of the ruling coalition seem to lack the political will to push through with the bills because they are afraid that their own cross-border dealings will be exposed.

However, the consequences of being blacklisted will be dire for Nepal’s economy which is dependent on international remittances and tourism. The few investors who remain are likely to be asked to leave, importers would suffer as international trade was hampered, and international money transfers would be affected.

“A country likes ours cannot afford to disengage from the international economy and go rogue,” said Sidhant Raj Pandey, CEO of Ace Development Bank. “It would be a grave move.”

It would also mean that international banks could block the accounts of Nepali diplomatic missions, just like Citibank which closed the accounts of Nepal’s embassies in Washington and New York. Foreign donors could impose more stringent conditions for aid and grants, once the country is blacklisted.

Baikuntha Aryal, joint-secretary at the Ministry of Finance told Nepal Times that the ministry was working hard to make sure Nepal fulfills its obligations before the deadlines pass.

“We have been lobbying the government across all levels to convince them that Nepal has nothing to gain from not abiding to international commitments,” said Aryal. “Once we meet the FATF officials in January, we will be clearer about our position.”

This year, the bills were opposed by some Maoist leaders who claimed it was against Nepal’s ‘national interest’ to ratify such legislation. Later, the opposition joined in the bandwagon, saying the caretaker government had no mandate to table the bills and urged the President not to approve them.

Now, as the parties run circles around each other in search of political consensus to form an electoral coalition government, Nepal’s other equally pressing need is likely to be neglected until the last hour.
Investing in the future

Nepal needs a definitive economic agenda in the new year, and urgent action not to be an international pariah

P

The endorsement of bills on anti-terrorism and organised crime, amendments to the act on anti-money laundering and automation of the Financial Information Unit (FIU) at the Nepal Rastra Bank to ensure transparency and exchange of information will pose the biggest challenge in 2013. Failure to pass these bills will put our international trade and reputation at risk and Nepalis living abroad will be under stricter surveillance and scrutiny.

Investments are going to be critical development, which will in turn lead to a stronger and more competitive economy. However, the ongoing political deadlock has led to sluggish progress. Due to the musical chair of politics and differences among parties, the country has not been able to stick to a pre-determined economic agenda. And since no dramatic breakthroughs are expected to happen any time soon, the state of our economy might become more volatile in 2013 making the continuity of the past policies in the absence of wider political consensus highly questionable.

We need a definitive economic agenda in the new year and cannot afford to let politics overrule the economy. However, with elections announced for in April, it is likely that the parties will waste the first quarter of 2013 trying to build consensus and the economy will be forced to take a back seat once again.
While people in Kathmandu and other urban areas continue increasing their carbon footprint by using diesel generators, driving gas-guzzling SUVs, or relying on bricks baked by firing coal, some Nepali companies are switching to renewables like solar or biogas energy wherever they can.

But, one bank has offset its carbon use by investing in improved stoves. When the proprietors of Ace Development Bank in Kathmandu found out through a carbon audit that their company emitted 250 tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and they decided to do something about it.

The bank purchased emission reductions of 2,800 tons from the Dhading-based community organisation, Rural Mutual Development (RMD) for Rs 360,000. The Emission Reduction Purchase Agreement, between Ace as buyer and RMD from being emitted into the atmosphere every year. The environmental group Winrock International is working with the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC) to promote improved cooking stoves in Nepal, and hopes to install over 5,000 such fuel-efficient stoves in Dhading, Sindhupalchok and Dailekh districts.

“We hope to finalise more carbon trading projects with banks in a few months,” says Binod Prasad Shrestha of Winrock International. For banks like Ace, verified emission reductions offer a way to offset unavoidable carbon emissions and thus contribute to the protection of the environment.

Besides trading in carbon, Ace has also contributed to rhino conservation and helped upgrade the rhino enclosure at the Central Zoo in Jawalakhel.

“The Kyoto Protocol helped set up the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) to allow developed countries flexibility in meeting their emission obligations by offsetting their emissions and purchasing carbon credits from countries like Nepal through forestry or renewable energy projects that help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Certified Emission Reduction (CERs) can then be further traded in the international carbon market. By 2009 Nepal had earned $2.1 million through carbon trading from its globally-acclaimed biogas program. The AEPC has been involved in developing CDM projects that replace firewood and fossil fuels with clean energy through forestry, microhydel, solar and improved water mill projects. One biogas plant helps stop 60,000 tons of carbon from being spewed out into the atmosphere when the methane generated by fermented cowdung replaces firewood as fuel. However, Nepal is still way behind India and China in cashing in on the Clean Development Mechanism.

Says Raju Laudari of AEPC: “We lack research based baseline data. For instance, we don’t even have the data to quantify the immense potential of our hydropower and how much Right climate to trade carbon

Bank becomes first Nepali company to go green by buying carbon credits
carbon it will replace.” And although the government wants to encourage the private sector in carbon trading, it lacks clear guidelines and expertise. The climate for carbon trading is not conducive because of its plummeting price in the international market. Carbon was trading at up to 30 Euros per ton in 2008, while the current price hovers around 1 Euro, making carbon trading much less feasible than before. In addition, the entire CDM process has come under fire in Europe because of fraud, and criticism from environmentalists that it doesn’t really reduce total greenhouse gas emissions. But at least in Nepal, Ace has shown the way to companies aspiring to be green by pioneering carbon trading.

CLEAN SWITCH: Many households in Dhading have replaced traditional stoves with Improved Cooking Stoves (top) helping cut carbon emission. Ace Development Bank (below) uses electric cars to reduce its carbon footprint and also harvests rain water.
**POKHARA STREET FESTIVAL**, join the party as the lake city celebrates the Gregorian and Gurung new years. 28 to 1 January, Pokhara

**B-boying competition**, shake and bake, and do whatever it takes to win a cash prize of up to Rs 50,000. 28 January, 10.45am, Dasrath Stadium, 984925612/9849685110/9841721736

**PEDAL FOR A CAUSE**, the cycle rally aims to collect funds for the treatment of 2-year-old Pratik Bhandari of Godawari who has leukemia. 29 December, 7am, Basantapur, 9808856112, 9818272056/9851102042/9803276895

**Live at Café 32**, live music and delicious food every Friday. 6pm onwards, Café 32, Salt and Pepper Restro Lounge, Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)463484, 9846210568, www.saltandpeppernepal.com

**THE HERITAGE**, escape the hodgepodge of the tourist hub as you relish delights like paella and panna cotta. Thamel

**Ultimate photography workshop**, learn the tricks of the trade from professional photographers Shahnawaz Mohammad and Rajeeb Maharjan. Rs 2,999, 3 to 5 January, 7:30am, The Image Park, New Road, 984124034/9844786389/(01)4244348, theimagepark@gmail.com

**Step motion animation workshop**, learn how to make your own animated films by designing and creating characters and backgrounds, storyboarding, capturing images using cameras and latest computer software, and compiling and editing them. 5, 6, 12 and 13 January, 11am to 4pm, shreyanss@satya.org

**KJC winter camp for kids**, music, movies, drama, arts, and a range of outdoor activities to keep your children excited this winter. 30 December to 11 January, for children aged 6 to 14. (01)5051504, info@kjc.com.np

**SINNERS in heaven inferno**, celebrate the new year at the mother of all parties, and you could even win a round trip to Hong Kong. Rs 31 December, 8pm, Hotel Yali & Yet, (01)4248998

**KUSOMANIA**, go see the biggest rockers in town at this live musical extravaganza as a part of Kathmandu University School of Management’s annual festival. Rs 150/500/1000, 29 December, Army Of Officers’ Club, 981653494, 9846210568, www.kusomania.com

**DRAGON CHINESE RESTAURANT**, try the Kung Pao Pork if alone and the Mai Cao if with company. Lakeside, Pokhara

**Falcha**, give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab. Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur

**NEW TUSHITA RESTAURANT**, relaxing ambience and good food. Don’t miss out on its penne with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. Lazimpat, (01)44432957

**EVEREST STEAK HOUSE**, an old-school joint for everything steak, indeed a sanctuary for meat lovers. Thamel, Chhetrapati Chok, (01)4260471

**New Dish**, grab filling meals like pork momos, spring rolls, and chop suey and enjoy excellent value for your money. Khichapokhari

**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

**THE FOOD DIET**
Winter camp at Borderlands, send your kids packing into the jungle where they get to develop their leadership, communication, and basic life skills while taking part in outdoor and extra-curricular activities such as tent crafting, rock climbing, canyoning, abseiling, cooking and art, music, and dance lessons. 5 to 12 January. Borderlands Resort, Bhotechchaur. (01)4361214, 9802025666, www.borderlandsresorts.com

GETAWAYS

ROCK REUNION

Lovers of music rejoice, the old horses of Nepali rock 1974AD are back again. Having made history by attracting 50,000 fans to their 2002 Rock Yatra concert, 1974AD expect to do it all over again.

This time the concert will be a tour de force of sound and visuals, rock guitar going hand in hand with light projections as never seen before. So be there or miss the crowning moment of the legendary band’s musical journey.

Part of the funds collected will go towards creating a scholarship at St. Xavier’s School. 25 December, gates open at 2pm St Xavier’s School, Jawalakhel Rs 300/500/1000 (get partial refunds on tickets at a partner bank)

BAGAICHA

Within one year, Bagaicha (which means garden in Nepali) has already built a strong reputation for itself, largely for its spaciousness. In a place like Kathmandu where open spaces are virtually nonexistent, a parking capacity for 60 cars and over 200 bikes is quite impressive. On a normal day Bagaicha can host around 200 guests, but it has also catered to groups over 500.

The menu is extensive offering a little bit of everything - Indian, Chinese, Continental, Thai, and Nepali. So I did what I have learnt is the wisest thing to do when faced with so many choices: ask the server for recommendations. And the recommendations were as eclectic as the menu, ranging from tom yam kai to pasta with chilli flakes to chicken mughlai.

Bagaicha’s chef Rek Bahadur Raut has worked in Kolkata, Amritsar and Dubai and this probably explains the diversity of the dishes plated up.

We decided to start with the nam tok kai, the restaurant’s most popular dish. Marinated, julenoned, and crisply fried chicken strips with parsley and onions all tossed together in Thai hot sauce with a little bit of tart and a little bit of sweet is an excellent companion to the drink of your choice. The vegetable skewers were text and the usual culprits; onions, capsicum, tomatoes, mushrooms and paneer, were lined up and impaled together in an Italian sauce marinade for our dining pleasure.

The tom yam koong, Thai shrimp soup with button mushrooms and galangal and lemon grass was hot, tangy and warming - the perfect dish for chilly winter evenings. The chicken biryani came piping hot in a copper dish, garnished with boiled eggs and cashew nuts and maraschino cherries. Many restaurants get this dish so wrong because they season it too liberally and make it so rich so wrong because they season it. Many restaurants get this dish so wrong because they season it too liberally and make it so rich.

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The restaurant is divided into different areas with a large hall and outdoor seating and also private rooms for bigger groups. On Friday nights Bagaicha dishes up live music and dancing with ‘live’ barbeque stations. However, it does not fit under any label. What makes Bagaicha endearing is that you can decide what kind of place you want it to be: a reasonable place for a work day lunch, a place to hang out with friends and get drinks at the end of a long tiring day, or for a romantic rendezvous or a big boisterous meal with the entire family. Do give it a visit and discover your own Bagaicha.

Ruby Tuesday

How to get there: At the Jawalakhel roundabout, turn left and head towards the Adidas showroom. There is a little lane right next to it. About 150 metres in, look to the left and you will see the signboard for Bagaicha.
Walking into the theatre to watch “The Hobbit” had caused me some anxiety, I’ll admit. It is with some trepidation and real concern that I decided to see the film, the first of three, adapted from the novel by JRRT Tolkien of the same name.

The anxiety I felt also had, in part, to do with the fact that I have loved the former “Lord of the Rings” trilogy, also directed by the very same Peter Jackson. However, while the “Lord of the Rings” films were based on an actual trilogy, this film is part of a much longer and more complex story, and with only the broadest of acquaintance from the books, I was somewhat apprehensive about the film.

The Hobbit, for those who do not know, is a prequel to the “Ring” trilogy and tells the story of Bilbo Baggins, an unlikely hero, as he is guided through Middle-earth by Gandalf, Smaug, and of course, the dragon Smaug.

The film begins with a prologue, in which we see a group of dwarves on a quest to reclaim their lost dwarf kingdom of Erebor. This is an excellent introduction to the story, and sets the stage for the rest of the film.

The film is well done. It is a faithful adaptation of the book, and does justice to the characters and their adventures. The actors are excellent, and the visual effects are stunning.

However, there are a few things that could be improved. For example, the pacing of some scenes could be better, and the dialogue could be more engaging. Also, the use of CGI was excessive, which detracts from the overall experience.

Overall, though, I would recommend “The Hobbit” to anyone who enjoys fantasy films. It is a well-made and entertaining piece of cinema that will delight fans of the books and the films alike.

For those who only dimly remember reading “The Hobbit”, this film will delight you by reminding you of all you have forgotten. For those who haven’t read it, maybe now you will? As for those who read it once a year, every year, well, perhaps you’ll miss some of the things you read, but I think you will also find a number of other things that only an extremely well-researched film can do. That is, to implant your mind with visual images that will enhance and perhaps even surpass that which your imagination previously created in your head.

As ever with Peter Jackson, the computer imagery and the action are breathtaking. The cast welcomes back veterans such as Ian McKellen as Gandalf, Cate Blanchett as Galadriel, Hugo Weaving as Elrond, and briefly, Elijah Wood as Frodo and Ian Holm as the older Bilbo.

The company of dwarves who set out to reclaim their lost kingdom of Erebor is a joy to watch. The actors are excellent, and the chemistry between them is perfect.

The Hobbit is a good film, and I think it will appeal to a wide range of audiences. It is a well-made piece of cinema that will delight fans of the books and the films alike.

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As ever with Peter Jackson, the computer imagery and the action are breathtaking. The cast welcomes back veterans such as Ian McKellen as Gandalf, Cate Blanchett as Galadriel, Hugo Weaving as Elrond, and briefly, Elijah Wood as Frodo and Ian Holm as the older Bilbo.

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BHRIKUTI RAI

Sita went to Saudi Arabia to work as a domestic three years ago. An agent in Pokhara found her a job, got her tickets via Delhi, and organised a passport in someone else's name. When she returned to Kathmandu in November, the 20-year-old from Bhojpur was arrested for possessing a fake passport at immigration. Then her ordeal began: not from abusive employers in the Gulf but from Nepali immigration and police.

After being threatened with detention by immigration officials at Kathmandu airport, and scared of being jailed and bringing dishonour to her family, Sita admitted her true identity. During the interrogation at the immigration office in Kathmandu police constable Parasram Basnet agreed to help her out only if she gave him a part of the 9,500 Ryal (Rs 222,624) she had saved while working abroad. When she refused, the officials snatched her bag and took her money, saying it was for “high-ranking officials”. Then she was asked to sign a blank piece of paper by immigration official Somnath Khanal, who said if she told anyone what had happened he would throw her in jail.

Meanwhile, Basnet was busy playing good cop and offered to get her a ticket to Bhojpur. He took her to Bhaneshwor and raped her repeatedly through the night. “He almost strangled me to death when I screamed for help,” says Sita, who only remembers being smothered with a pillow and passing out. In the morning, her purse was open, with her remaining money also gone. Basnet then put her on a bus to Bhojpur and gave her his contact number. He kept calling her over the next month, pressuring her to marry him. Ashamed, Sita didn’t speak about her ordeal until she broke down one day and told her sister everything. Her family was outraged and filed a complaint against Basnet and Khanal on 16 December. Says Sita’s father: “We don’t care about getting the money back, all we want is justice for my daughter.”

A report submitted by a probe panel formed under the Ministry of Home Affairs on Sunday accuses immigration officials Ram Prasad Kutirala, Tika Pkhrel, Somnath Khanal and Parsram Basnet for the robbery. The senior immigration officials have been suspended for two months, while Basnet is in jail. The Home Secretary said this week all the accused would be punished under the Civil Servant Act 1993, but Sita’s family wants Basnet to be charged for a criminal offence. Sita has just found out she is pregnant, and doesn’t want to keep her child. Sita wears a blue embroidered scarf and peers out of a small window in her rented room in Balaju, and gives her young nephew a dazzling, dimpled smile. She sees us to the door, and says: “Now, I just wish they get punished for what they did to me.”

Sita left her home in Bhojpur five years ago, worked at a restaurant in Pokhara before she left for Saudi Arabia after an agent gave her a passport belonging to Bimala KC and sent her to Delhi. In Saudi Arabia, she was abused by her employers. “They treated me like an animal,” recalls Sita, “not just the house owners but even their children used to beat me mercilessly.” When her employer tried to rape her, she escaped and got another job in a household where the employers were kinder. She saved enough to send presents home, and at the end of three years decided to come back to Nepal with her savings.

Sita’s case would probably have been forgotten if her cousin hadn’t caught Basnet and taken him to the police station at Hanuman Dhoka. “We told him what had happened earlier, maybe the guilty would have been punished by now,” says the cousin, who runs a tea shop near Balaju.

Basnet reportedly tried to stop Sita from lodging a complaint, and even offered to return the money. Sita is now searching for counselling and assistance, in the fight for justice and hopes to get back on her feet.

Sita’s name has been changed.

The privilege of grief

In hierarchical societies people empathise with the suffering of those who share their circumstance. As the 23-year-old woman continues to battle for her life, it may seem callous to doubt that Delhi’s outrage at her plight emanated from the hierarchy of sorrow. In the physiotherapy student and her friend, the young see themselves: they too go on dates, see movies in plush multiplexes, and take buses. We didn’t see ourselves in Thangjam Manorama, a 32-year-old Manipuri woman, into whose house personnel of 17 Assam Rifles broke on 11 July 2004 and dragged her away. Her body was subsequently found, scantily clad, bearing nail marks and bullet wounds. Her family alleged she had been raped and killed. The spokesman of Assam Rifles said she was a member of the Peoples Liberation Army, and was shot dead as she tried to flee while taking the soldiers to the militant outfit’s hideout.

Yet we should have seen ourselves in the hundreds of Manipuri women who stormed the Assam Rifles Headquarters in Imphal, scores of them stark naked and holding placards which read: ’Indian Army takes our flesh’. How much are the mothers of sisters or daughters would walk naked to protest against rape if the allegation had been doublefut.

On 30 May 2009, Neloar and her sister-in-law Aisya were found drowned in Kashmir. The locals accused the security forces of raping the women and then drowning them. A 1994 United Nations Human rights report implicated Indian soldiers in 882 rape cases between 1990 and 1992.

In 2011, the state of Haryana which borders Delhi registered 733 rape cases. Many of the victims were Dalit women, and there were no street protests. Nor are we评判ical. Reports of sexual violence indigenous women are subjected to in the districts with Maoist violence.

It is inevitable in a hierarchical society to privilege the grief of some over others. It is also natural for people to empathise with the suffering of those who share our circumstances. Such is the manipulative skill of the powerful that it persuades us into believing that some are deserving of the tragedy we otherwise find despicable. As for our bustling metres, we do not become furious as long as rape is confined to the slums. This is the reason why the 572 cases of rape last year did not provoke Delhi into besieging the bastions of power. We forget that an increasingly dehumanised society, with its forever widening gulf between rich and poor, can only produce criminals who can’t be tamed by laws.

Perhaps there is no reason for us to be perennially pessimistic. It is possible that protesting against the plight of Dalis can understand through their own experience the pain and anger of the marginalised. Hopefully, they’d learn that their redemption lies in smashing the hierarchy of sorrow.
More than a quarter of Nepal’s annual budget is bankrolled by bilateral donors, but three Nordic countries that together make up 18 per cent of aid to Nepal seem to have less clout here than more high-profile countries. Norway, Denmark, and Finland, whose total combined population is less than that of Nepal, contributed more than $450 million in 2010-11, making them the second-largest bilateral donor grouping after Britain.

However, because Nordic aid is confined to ‘soft’ sectors such as human rights, gender, and social justice the three countries are often in the background compared to geopolitically important players such as the United States, India and China. In pre-holiday interviews, the three Nordic ambassadors in Kathmandu showed impatience with the lack of progress on issues like transitional justice, impunity, constitution and government formation. (See box)

“Nepal is right between two of the fastest-growing economies in the world, and it should be able to do much better than it is doing now. So why doesn’t it happen?” Danish ambassador to Nepal, Jesper Mortensen, asks rhetorically.

To be sure, despite a decade-long conflict, Nepal has seen remarkable progress in poverty reduction, and is close to achieving its Millennium Development Goal targets by 2015, especially in health and education. Much of this was possible because of sustained behind-the-scenes support from Nordic donors. However, the emphasis of European and other donors to reach the disenfranchised and marginalised, and their advocacy in favour of federalism has provoked a backlash in Kathmandu with the government putting unprecedented pressure on them to channel aid to approved sectors.

The Foreign Ministry and the National Planning Commission are more assertive and want roles in vetting projects. Foreign Minister Naryan Kaji Shrestha has told donor representatives that they should concentrate on infrastructure, agriculture and energy. A landmark report on exclusion supported by the World Bank and DFID has not been released because of government pressure, and a five-year UN Development Assistance Framework report was finally approved after references to discrimination and citizenship were excised.

Norwegian ambassador Alf Arne Ramlen, said they would continue to work with the government on structural areas that have a bearing on poverty and inequality. However, there will be a transition from social sectors to infrastructure in the coming years with Finland dropping human rights as a priority.

The political will not to
The solution is to build up national capacity. It’s very much about transitional justice so society can move on after a conflict period. It’s never easy if you have to make sure that all the rules are followed and if the same time not rock the boat too much. The international consensus is that you need to go through that difficult phase of pursuing the perpetrators on all sides. This is a Nepal problem and Nepal needs a Nepal solution. Nepal politicians, political leaders, the president, will have to come up with some model, some compromise, where they agree on terms and conditions for having elections and writing a constitution. This stalemate cannot go on for very long time. It’s urgent now.

Morten Jespersen,
Danish ambassador

Norway, Finland, and Denmark together contribute the second largest assistance to Nepal. But conspicuous by its absence is Sweden.

In 2007, the Swedish government decided to focus foreign aid to fewer countries in order to increase the quality and efficiency of aid. Nepal was not among the countries identified. However, Swedish aid reaches Nepal through multilateral donor projects, such as the UN and the Nordic Development Fund. Sweden was involved in supporting the Melamchi project but pulled out 10 years ago, and the country doesn’t even have an embassy in Kathmandu. However, the Stockholm-based group, International IDEA, is present in Kathmandu.

Explains Norwegian ambassador to Nepal, Alf Arne Ramslien: “There is space for Sweden also, every country has its own focus...you lose some of the effect if you spread your resources too thin.”

Alf Arne Ramslien, Norwegian ambassador to Nepal agrees. “If this political stalemate continues, it will be disastrous for development. In the present situation there is no willingness to invest in this country,” he says. “There is great interest from Norway, but why invest in an unpredictable situation when there are other countries wide open for investment?”

The three ambassadors interviewed for this article agreed that Nepal has great potential if it can implement elections in 2013 to pave the way for a new constitution. They also feel that sustainable growth, equity and inclusion can only be achieved through true political decentralisation and inclusion which is why Nordic development assistance is also being channelled to these areas. However, Nepal wants to see more emphasis now on aid and investment on transportation and energy in order to ensure growth and create jobs. Madhu Marasini at the Finance Ministry’s Foreign Aid Division told Nepali Times this week.

“The Europeans and the Nordic countries are more concerned about democracy and institution-building, but we wish to broaden the scope of cooperation in hydropower, infrastructure as well as sanitation.” Marasini admits, however, that besides political instability, transparency needs serious attention.

International donors, including the Nordics, have often been criticized for relying too much on government channels for implementation which makes them inefficient and prone to corruption. Yadab Bastola from National Alliance for Human Rights and Social Justice, a nation-wide network of grassroots rights groups, says donor resources would be best used by channeling it directly to the community level.

“Most international aid has been handled by bureaucrats or NGOs due to the lack of local elected bodies at the community level,” explains Bastola. “Even aid to the districts is divided up by the all-party mechanism and doesn’t go to communities. It is a huge problem.”

The three Nordic envoys are aware of this, but can barely hide their impatience with the political disarray. They want to balance the social sector with alternative energy, forestry and agriculture. They say Nepal’s problems have to be dealt with in a country-specific fashion, and a timeframe that will work for a post-conflict Nepal.
Surentra Poudel in Nagarkot, 22 December

After a bird flu scare forced him to abandon his poultry farm in Tanahu, and with no other way to take care of his family, Mohan Gurung left from his village in Tanahu have already still in Guatemala, but four other friends from his village in Tanahu have already entered the US. “We hope to be in America in the New Year,” Gurung said in a Skype conversation from Guatemala City, speaking on condition that his name be altered. “It has been a harrowing journey, but we are now excited because we are so close to reaching our goal.”

A network of human traffickers have facilitated Gurung’s journey so far, handing their human cargo of migrants from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka from one country to another across South and Central America.

Gurung’s journey began when he found out that a Dilu Gurung smuggled people to America, and paid him Rs 500,000 to take him up to Brazil. Gurung and four other friends easily crossed immigration at Kathmandu airport on 27 June even though they didn’t have Brazil visas. At Rio de Janeiro, they talked their way through check-in by saying they were transiting Brazil to go to Bolivia.

After landing in Sao Paulo, they flew on to Cochabamba in Bolivia where they got visa on arrival and travelled on to Brazil. After going to a Brazil visa, they flew back to Sao Paulo where Gurung and his friends went to a reception centre. They gave $450 a month till September. In Brazil Gurung met many Indians, and he was informed that he was to be taken to the US and joined one group, paying $900 to be taken up to Bolivia.

An Indian trafficker took them from Bolivia to Peru for $400 each where they were forced to destroy their passports and all travel documents. From Peru they were taken across the border to Ecuador and then to Colombia where they encountered military checkpoints, but easily passed through by bribing soldiers. They crossed thick jungles to speak into Panama, surrendered at an army checkpoint where they were given health checkups and sent on their way. The Indians don’t have it so good in Panama, where they are detained and deported if found to be from India.

Costa Rica was the next stop and it was relatively more difficult because the authorities detain illegal immigrants, and finger-print them if they want to apply for asylum. But Gurung’s group were given a ‘Salida’ exit document that required them to leave Costa Rica within a week.

Passing through Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras to Guatemala was smooth and on each step of the way they were handed over by one set of traffickers to another. Some traffickers take migrants in boats from Colombia, and some have worked with sea. Gurung is now waiting in Guatemala for his family to send him money so he can pay the traffickers who will take him to Mexico and to America.

Since April 2012, there have been 480 Nepalis who have passed through Guatemala of whom 400 have made it across the border to the US, but 180 of them have been caught at the border at US immigration.

Despite the risk and the expense, Gurung thinks the trip is worth it because of the chance of earning money so he can pay debts, and take care of his wife and family back in Tanahu. So far he has spent Rs 500,000 to pay the agent in Kathmandu, and another $6,000 to a series of traffickers from Brazil to Guatemala. Now he needs a further $6,000 to pay the final installment to get into the US. Once he gets the money transferred from Nepal, he is off.

Anti-INGO

The Social Welfare Council has said it will come down hard on INGOs which have violated rules that govern what they are supposed to spend their budget on. A 15-member taskforce has been set up by the SWC to investigate, regulate and punish international non-profits operating in Nepal that it says “show a lack of transparency”. The member secretary of the taskforce, BC Babrabina Kumar said the taskforce would begin acting immediately, inspecting the activities of INGOs, while inspections of NGOs would follow later. “There have been problems with NGOs all along,” he said, “but now even bilateral and multilateral donors have been found flouting the law. We have been asking these organizations for progress reports but a majority of them have never responded, so we decided to take action.”

Although 207 INGOs have been registered with the SWC, it claims that a majority of them have not been responsive and have not sent it required regular reports. The council’s director, Madhav Prasad Manandhar said there are no records of how much money they brought into the country and what they spent it on. Kumar says the NGOs are flouting rules which require them to spend 60 per cent of their budget on an approved field of work.

Bhattacharya’s four pillars

Sanj Raj Adhikari in Kapilvasto, 21 December

The opposition has been on a warpath against Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai for eight months now, but he refuses to budge. Now, factions within the ruling coalition itself have added pressure on him to step down. His own Minister Baburam Bhattarai for eight months now, but he will not.

Singh Gurung was army chief. This is seen in the PM’s readiness to remove him against the will of India’s role in Nepali matters, and the PM even accepted Gaurav Samsher Rana. They have a similar understanding that the army is on his side. This is the basis for Bhattarai’s staying power in government. In the PM’s command within the UCPN(M) is growing within the party. In the PM’s own cabinet, Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun’s public declarations. In the public’s mind, Bhattarai is staying on only because of that technical reason.”

Ultimately, Bhattarai is also growing within the UCPN(M). He can choose to remove him against the will of his cabinet. Bhattarai’s command within the party is evident in the PM’s leadership of the Nepali Congress. Bhattarai’s command within the party is evident in the PM’s leadership of the Nepali Congress.

But the PM is unlikely to be met by Bhattarai’s government, President Yadav is understood to have told President Yadav that the army’s control lay with the government. Soon after, Bhattarai also reiterated the same thing.

The clothes we wear after birth and after death don’t have pockets, so we don’t spend our entire lives trying to stuff our pockets with money. Strange life.

Bhattacharya: “There’s no question of me leaving, the whole country will be destroyed.”

Debris: Development, constitution, elections, peace and security

Batsyan in Kapilvasto, 24 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Each of us was told to find out how the situation evolved, the king of Gorkha after winning the battle should be made prime minister?” asked Dhurba Subedi.

Narayan Man Bijukchhe, Chairman of Nepal Workers’ Union, has said on Annapurna Post, 27 December
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FEATURING DJ ASHAN & MC CLARK DEJH

28 DECEMBER 2012 - 3 JANUARY 2013 #636
When politics becomes so unpredictable, the only way to inject some certainty into our lives is by allowing analysts like yours truly to forecast the country’s future based on planetary alignments. The Astrologer General has decided that the Federal Kleptocratic Republic of Nepal is in the seventh house and Jupiter is aligned with Mars, so the President will have to keep on issuing new deadlines every week to the political parties to form a consensus government till at least July 2013.

Pundit Tantrik Bihangamraj Timilsina is former astrologer-in-chief of the Nepal Army, and in his illustrious career accurately predicted the downfall of a prominent general, who promptly excommunicated him. The soothsayer has in the past foretold the rise and fall of prominent kangresi politicians, and in an interview with a respected publication this week, he has even provided readers with his mobile number which the Donkey now reveals to loyal readers on condition that you keep it to yourself: 9841314120. Anyway, planetary alignments show that Jhusil Kaka’s chances of becoming prime minister are better than all his rivals, since Jupiter is in Capricorn, but he better hurry because after mid-January his chances of making it to Balu Water will vanish. Similarly, the cosmic location of Lien Brown’s planets are so crazy he doesn’t stand a chance of becoming prime minister for the fifth time. PKD’s heavenly bodies are so misaligned that he may as well just retire from politics, according to astrologers. About Kingi’s chances of restoring the monarchy, Pundit Bihangamraj says the moon is in the wrong constellation, but if the political parties continue to mess things up, who knows, the planets may just realign themselves and bring the Bad Shah back.

BRB is using every trick in the book to keep on clinging on to Balu Water, and is outfoxing the Old Fox in foxiness. At a meeting this week, BRB caught everyone including PKD, off guard by proposing that he would be agreeable to step down if Awesome replaced him. It was a masterstroke, and came from Ram Babu’s understanding that deep down that is exactly what Lotus Flower desperately wants. Then, to defuse pressure from the NC, BRB summons Bhai Gagan to Balu Water, sending the kangresis into a tizzy.

The aststrologer’s prognosis for 2013

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Multinational chains are jinxed in Nepal, it seems, and the latest travails of KFC just proves the point. No wonder McDonalds and Starbucks are so skittish about opening outlets in Kat Town. There is one Japanese international chain store that is not going to come to Nepal anytime soon (see picture) for obvious reasons, although who knows it may be wildly successful if it does. On a recent flight to Malaysia, Nepali workers suddenly all burst out laughing when the in-flight announcement ended with ‘Terima Khasi’, which loosely translated means ‘your mother is a goat’, or words to that effect. There was even louder and naughtier merriment when the meal trays were handed out, and the Nepalis on board were amused at the Malay words on the sugar sachets that read ‘GulaPutih’.

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