COTTON CANDY CLOUDS

A boy sold cotton candy at Teukal on Sunday, 30 December, as the Gurung community celebrated its new year.

Becoming their fathers

For the sons of Singapore Gurkhas, joining the elite corps is a way out of unemployment in Nepal

THE WAR ON WOMEN

Editorial

The gender agenda

We shall overcome

page 2

page 3

page 4
E D I T O R I A L

The prolonged political disarray and ensuing impunity are fostering gender-based crime.

Thousands of women were tortured, raped, killed, and disappeared during the conflict. It’s been almost seven years since the war ended, but the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is still in limbo because of the colluding of the warring sides which are now benefiting from the establishment. War criminals have gone unpunished. Perpetrators of atrocities mingle openly with politicians. It is this culture of impunity that allows people like Parsum Baran and others to think that they can get away with rape and murder.

Demonstrators this week held placards calling for stricter laws and fast track courts to deal with rape and domestic violence. But we all know laws won’t suffice, Nepal must examine the patriarchal values that perpetuate such atrocities.

What does it say about our culture which excuses men when they grope, leer, cat-call, assault women on public transport, at movie theatres, in the vegetable market. Worse, they put the blame on the woman: she asked for it, her clothes were too revealing, she should not have been at a party so late at night. And even inleigh is the state sending when the police ridicule and harasses victims, refuses to file their case, and holds them guilty instead?

While the demonstrations in front of Balawatatar might provide a quick fix to the women and their families, the only long-term solution is to raise young Nepali men and women differently. Teach them that women’s bodies are not free-for-all objects of desire, they have a voice and their consent is important.

And instead of commodifying the female body, the media, movies and tv should be at the forefront of trying to change social attitudes.

THE WAR ON WOMEN

Nepali rulers were probably glad that the public’s attention shifted over the new year away from despatched protests in the streets of the capital against the latest atrocities against women.

But that should be short-term relief, for the reason why gender-based violence, and stigmatisation are so persistent in Nepal is because politicians have forgotten what it all about — the lives of the people, it’s their job to ensure the safety, security, and rights of vulnerable citizens.

It is the prolonged political disarray and the ensuing impunity that has led to a breakdown in law and order and an increase in gender-based crime.

It is not enough anymore to use the excuse of entrenched patriarchal culturally-accepted gender inequality to explain away the epidemic of violence against women in our society. We had a system in place since the restoration of democracy in 1990 to set things right, and after the 2008 elections we had the most representative legislature ever in Nepal’s history. Laws were passed, but enforcement has been feeble. A male-dominated society has been slow to change behaviour, and the priority for media has been male-dominated politics.

The past few weeks was robbed and raped and return from Saudi Arabia, a domestic helper was murdered in Kathmandu, two young women were burnt alive by family members in Banke and Bara. These latest atrocities pushed public outrage beyond the tipping point.

But inquiries at Maiti Nepal show that there are 3-5 women every week who are robbed, exploited, blackmailed, and abused by airport personnel. Sita was just the latest, and her story only came out because relatives dared to complain to the authorities.

Ironically, the protests in Balawatatar and Singha Darbar this week have provided the government an opportunity to earn brownie points and project itself as a champion of gender equality without having to change the status quo or answer difficult questions. If the Bhattacharjee government can fast track these cases and put criminals behind bars, the Nepali media with its notoriously short attention span will move back to covering political news in the way that only women who make it to the news will be the semi-mute models.

The problem is not only in Nepal’s politics, but also in our society. Both shape and get shaped by each other. Our moral decay is the heart of the problem.

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BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya
nepalitimes.com
See video

In May 2005, six-year-old Anuska was abducted from a playground near her house in Sinamangal in Kathmandu. Few days later her decayed body was found in a neighbour’s house. The little girl had been raped, tortured, and murdered. Anuska’s parents fought hard to put the suspect behind bars, but could not bear to see the culprit released after a week or so behind bars. Within a year of the crime, they had left the country for good.

Since November, while activists were marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, not a week has gone by without media reports of more atrocities. The crimes make a mockery of the government’s avowed commitment to protect its citizens and expose a rot that has seeped deep into our patriarchal society.

Something is different this time. The murder of domestic worker Saraswati Subedi in the heart of the capital three weeks ago, the rape of a returning migrant worker by a policeman after robbing her of hard earnings at Kathmandu airport, and the two separate so-called ‘honour killings’ in Bara and Banke of young women who were burnt alive allegedly by family members galvanised media attention because of the sheer brutality of the crimes. Perhaps inspired by similar protests in Delhi, rights and gender activists and ordinary citizens have taken to the streets outside the prime minister’s residence and office demanding justice. At the forefront of the demonstrations are the families of the victims, students, and common folks disgusted by the state’s lack of interest in protecting the guilty. Despite what cynics say, these are spontaneous and largely independent protests, and as such there is a whole spectrum of demands. While some just want immediate action on recent rapes or murders, others have demanded the resignation of the home minister and even the prime minister. Some activists want better security for women, while others press for longer-term structural changes and enactment of laws equalising gender rights that were pending in the last parliament. Whatever the demand, they all boil down to addressing existing male-centric legal and social arrangements that tolerate, embolden, and even protect those who perpetrate violence against women. The patriarchal values are so deep rooted that they manifest themselves within families, in the community, and the nation as a whole.

While the protests get louder outside the walls of the seat of political power in Kathmandu where celebrities amplify the slogans, there have been no such sustained protests in the districts of the eastern and western Tanzi where rape and murder of women have taken epidemic proportions as we reported in this paper last month.

Until the citizen’s movements against gender-based crimes reach a critical mass and the government’s response goes beyond verbal assurances and political fire-fighting, the current movement will lack both the critical mass and staying power. The root reasons for gender violence lie in the organic linkages between culturally nurtured psycho-social behaviour and the tolerance of these crimes by state and society.

They also show a glaring failure of Nepali social science academia to investigate the larger socio-political context of gender violence in this country. Which is why gender activists are still preoccupied with a political battle for representation, while the global debate has moved on to the third wave.

After a week of sit-ins and stand-outs, the government has agreed to probe recent cases and promised new directives within a month. But there is no word on the hundreds of pending rape cases in courts across the country, including those from the years of conflict involving high ranking security officials. The occupiers of Baluwatar are getting the headlines, but if these larger issues are not followed through, there is a danger the movement will ultimately fizzle out despite all attempts to breathe life it through social media.

The gender agenda

The epidemic of violent crimes against women exposes a rot that has seeped deep into our society.
At 12, she lost her innocence and was made to feel ashamed for something that was not her fault

The young girl could be among hundreds of girls and women who are molested or abused on the streets, in the fields, in homes or workplaces throughout Nepal every day. Violence against women is suddenly news, with each new crime getting front page treatment with a headline that begins with the word ‘another’. But sooner or later, the crimes will be routine again to be consigned to a tiny item in the inside pages that one glances at before turning the page. The most disenfranchised, abused, and violated people in Nepal are its women. It makes no difference which ethnicity, caste, religion or socio-economic background they come from. Whether they are educated women from Kathmandu or an illiterate Dalit woman in the eastern Tarai, they are all victimised. They learn from very early on to live in fear of men. By their good fortune of being born female in this country, boys are valued more than girls. The discrimination starts even before they are born; the spread of ultra-sound scanners has skewed the male-female ratio in urban Nepal. The boy gets to go to school, even if the girl is more studious. Boys are taken to hospitals even for minor ailments, while girls have to be really sick. Girls get to eat last, have to cook, wash and forage for firewood and fodder. The dropout rate for girls is double that for boys in rural schools.

It’s not the little boy’s fault, his doting parents instill this discrimination in him, and ensure that it is passed down to another generation. The boy grows into a young man with a monumental sense of entitlement. He may not be rich, educated, or handsome, but he is more important than a woman, any woman.

Nepali men will continue to prey on women until this mindset changes, until male sexual aggression stops being seen as the norm, glorified in movies and media, to be rewarded and propagated through parental and peer pressure. Men are acceded the power to taunt women, pass lewd remarks, grope, molest, rape, and murder. The policeman who looted and maltreated Sita is a by-product of a culture of rape where abusing women is almost sanctioned by society despite being proscribed by state laws.

In the Tarai, many victims are forced by their families, communities, and even police to marry the rapist. Although recent high profile cases have become matters of national discourse, Nepali society has always been steeped in discrimination, abuse, and exploitation of its women. The trafficking of young women to brothels in India and now to work as domestics in Gulf countries are proof that slavery is alive and thriving in modern Nepal. The lack of outrage in society about this, and the acceptance and even collusion of the male-dominated ruling class in trafficking are shocking. Even more appalling is the fact that many young women have been sold off by their own relatives.

Our society’s code of conduct stigmatises the very women who are victims. They are accused of ‘polluting’ community values if they are raped. If a woman has an opinion, dresses in jeans, has male friends, it is entirely her fault because she is being beggared for trouble. Films, tv shows, music videos, and popular media perpetuate this temptress myth through a cross-border culture industry. The ‘good girl’ listens and obeys while the ‘item girl’ is served up as a sexual opiate.

So what do I tell the 12-year-old girl? That the monsters she needs to worry about are not in the movies, that they could be her teacher, her uncle, her friend, her doctor, a stranger in a bus? Do I tell her that she needs to learn to protect herself because the police and the courts won’t? But I will tell her that change will come. That Nepali women are beginning to speak up, press charges, and raise their united voices. That tomorrow will be better than today, and collectively, we shall overcome.

Rubeena D Shrestha is the editor of Wave magazine.
India's second wind

MARTIN FELDSTEIN IN NEW DELHI

The Indian economy is coming back. After several years of disappointing performance, the authorities are shifting to policies aimed at boosting the annual growth rate closer to the roughly nine per cent level that India achieved from 2004 to 2008. That won't be easy.

India has many handicaps and lacks many of the things that are needed to sustain rapid growth. Although the country has outstanding universities and technological institutes, the primary-education system is disastrously poor. And yet, despite everything, India's economy did record roughly nine per cent growth for several years, and even now is growing by nearly six per cent annually, behind only China and Indonesia among major economies. One key to India's economic success is a large population of technically educated entrepreneurs, who are creating new companies and building a modern middle class.

After several years of disappointing performance, the Indian economy looks set to return to its former glory.

\textbf{BIZ BRIEFS}

Powerfully slim

LG Electronics has launched the world's slimmest Bezel 3D TV in Nepal. With a bezel of less than 1 mm, the LG CINEMA 3D Smart TV enables smoother and more immersive 3D viewing.

Secure future

Everest Bank appointed Sadichha Shrestha (Miss Nepal 2010) as its brand ambassador and launched a new deposit product called Sadichha deposit targeting youngsters to encourage regular savings.

Winning streak

Maruti Suzuki India Ltd won awards in all the segments in NDTV Car and Bike Awards 2013. The new Alto 800, which is soon being launched in Nepal by CG Automobile was awarded Emity Hatchback Car of the year while Suzuki Dzire and Suzuki Erizo were awarded Sub Compact Sedan of the year and SUV of the year respectively.

Early savings

Bank of H indigenous in partnership with the Children and local NGOs is conducting financial education campaign across Nepal to promote awareness about banking activities and saving habits among the youth.

Green awards

Students of Katay School won prizes at the International Conference on Environment in Malaysia organised by ENA Asia Environment and Malaysian Nature Society Kathmandu held last month.

Winter care

Vaseline Total Moisture distributed prizes to the winners of Mero Amazing Skin campaign. Kalpana Shakya won a trip to Bangkok while the others took home smart phones.
Back from the climate cliff

Farmers in eastern Nepal keep a climate diary to help them cope with erratic weather caused by global warming

BHRIKUTI RAI in ILAM

The climate conference in Doha last month was another missed opportunity to stop the catastrophic warming of the planet. Known by its wordy official name, the 18th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), was also confined to just that: words.

The Doha Climate Summit failed to set significant emission goals and concrete financial commitments to arrest emissions. The future of those countries most vulnerable to climate variability is now hanging by the climate cliff.

Far away from the energy-intensive desert capital of Qatar, the world’s largest producer of natural gas, here we are in the lush mountains of the eastern Nepal district of Ilam. Farmers are already feeling the effects of climate change, with erratic monsoons, unseasonal rains, and freak storms. But farmers cooperatives are working to build resilience so that they can cope with the extremes of weather.

The Namaling Community Development Centre (NCDC) has formed farmers’ groups in the villages of Ilam to build locally managed weather stations that help them keep daily records. The farmers were given short training on the use of the instruments and are now keeping a ‘Climate Diary’.

“The farmers are now able to understand the weather patterns and the consequences to some extent without being introduced to the term and concept of climate change,” explains Yogendra Lal Shrestha of NCDC that has installed mini weather stations to record temperature, humidity, and rainfall.

Schools in Ilam also have climate diary projects in which they record weather conditions and link it to the health of the students. “We are trying to analyse weather conditions of the months when the students record highest absence from school due to illness,” says Chitrakala Baraili of Saraswoti Niwas Lower Secondary School in Kanyam village. They hope that interpretation of data will help students take precautions during certain months to avoid missing school.

The rain gauge, thermometer, and the hygrometer are monitored twice a day by representatives of each farmers’ group. At the end of each month they also plot the number of cloudy days, thunderstorms, and rain to discuss at fortnightly meetings.

For Saraswati Khusal, 21,
of Bhanjyang taking weather records has become a daily ritual. With technical assistance from NCDC, she has learnt how to read the instruments. “Not just me but everyone in my family has now learnt to make measurements,” explains Saraswati who says 17 households of Bhanjyang Farmers’ group have shown more interest, to analyse and draw a correlation to their harvests. Officials hope that in two to three years farmers will be able to correlate weather conditions with plant diseases as well as to human health. They hope to be able to predict and adapt to erratic weather and climate variability.

Saraswati’s father-in-law, Narayan Khulal, 70, who takes up her responsibilities when she is away from home, says the climate diary has made him all the more sure about changing weather conditions. Says Khulal: “The fog period has extended significantly compared to the past and so has the humidity and cases of fungal infection on plants and we now have it on record.” He also says that the growing use of artificial fertilisers has affected harvests. “Earlier the diseases that could be cured using ash and animal dung are now resistant to even strong pesticides,” he says.

The Khulals like many other families in Ilam have gone back to traditional organic farming methods, and hope that with the climate diary they will be able to spot at least some trends in weather patterns and be prepared so they don’t lose the market values of their produce.

While the implementation of local adaptation plans for climate vulnerable communities in the impoverished far-and mid-western region under the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) is finally taking off, farmers in Ilam are well on their way to building capacity to adapt to the wrath of nature through their own efforts.

WEATHER WOMAN: Saraswati Khulal at the mini weather station in Bhanjyang, Ilam (left). The daily weather conditions are recorded in the climate diary as shown above.
Cultural Rejuvenation, an exhibition of art of Deepa Bajracharya’s work. 5 to 11 January, 10am to 5pm, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal.

MUSIC

Joint family, the nine member reggae band is raring to go and awaits your presence on the first Friday of 2013, Rs 200, 4 January, 8pm, House of Music, Thamel.

Live at Cafe 32, live music and delicious food every Friday. 6pm onwards, Cafe 32, Battisputal.

CHOPSTIX, savoury Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Try the famous drums of heaven. Kumaripati, (01)456598.

HADOCK, big compound with ample parking space, its western and Thai dishes are done to perfection. Jhamshikhati, (01)554631.

Salt & Pepper Rusto Lounge, espresso, mocha, latte, frappuccino, puffy, beers and flavour shisha, with an outdoor lake- view terrace. Lakeside, Pokhara, (01)465048, 946210568, www.saltandpeppernepal.com

SARANGKOT FORDAYS RESTAURANT, have a Sarangkot special breakfast while enjoying spectacular views of the mountain ranges. Sarangkot, Pokhara, (061)69620, 9817363696.

Boudha Restaurant and Cafe, taste your time in the café’s free wifi zone as you enjoy wood-fired pizzas, home-made pastas, and the Tibetan pizza. Boudha, (01)4452885.

Cinnamon Grill and Lounge, mouth watering delicacies with live music, try their grilled tenderloin steak and delicious food every Friday. Boudha, Kathmandu.

STOP MOTION ANIMATION WORKSHOP, learn how to make your own animated films by designing and creating characters and backgrounds, storyboard, capturing images using camera and latest computer software and compiling and editing them. 5, 6, 12, and 13 January, 11am to 4pm, shreyans@sattya.org.

KJC winter camp for kids, music, movies, drama, arts, and a range of outdoor activities to keep your children excited this winter. 6 December to 11 January, for children aged 6 to 14, Rs 15,000, Babarmahal Centre for Nepal Connection, babarmahal.sattya.org.

GETAWAYS

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 extracurricular activities such as tent crafting, rock climbing, canyoning, abseiling, cooking and art, music, and dance lessons. 5 to 12 January, Borderlands Resort, Bhotekoshi, (01)4381214, 9800205686, www.borderlandsworld.com.

Hotel Barahi, escape the chilly of Kathmandu and head to Pokhara to enjoy a great view of Phewa lake along with other charms of the lake city. Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)9061463536.

EVEER PANORAMA RESORT, if you can’t get enough of the Himalayas in smoggy Kathmandu, a great view from the top of the Mahabharat is just what you’re looking for. Damak, (01)4412864, info@everestpanoramaresort.net
The Japanese organisation Eco Party has been promoting environmental awareness to school children through various activities, and this time, they have lined up a dance competition to promote the reuse of plastic. In a symbolic display of solidarity, the participants will also use reusable plastic products as props in their dance numbers. Selection rounds have been held in Lumbini, Pokhara, and Kathmandu, and the children are raring to compete and win the Rs 100,000 scholarship prize. The evening will be topped off with a light show in addition to the hip shaking, and VJ Shinya Takaoka will be providing the pulse all day long.

Bust a move

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5 January, Boudhanath Stupa
9818723428, 9803502713
www.ecoparty.tv

SOMEPLACE ELSE

Capital Grill is my new favourite restaurant. The American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit a variety of palates and tastes. It is the perfect place to disappear on a romantic dinner date, or to go with the kids and enjoy a loud raucous meal, which is what I did.

The restaurant has been open for a while now, but hasn’t really gained the popularity it deserves thanks to the road widening campaign which made this oasis appear like a war trench for more than half a year. But with the road paved and blacktopped, and new businesses opening up in the same building, Capital Grill should get itself ready for a steady stream of customers because the food is that good.

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The Japanese organisation Eco Party has been promoting environmental awareness to school children through various activities, and this time, they have lined up a dance competition to promote the reuse of plastic. In a symbolic display of solidarity, the participants will also use reusable plastic products as props in their dance numbers. Selection rounds have been held in Lumbini, Pokhara, and Kathmandu, and the children are raring to compete and win the Rs 100,000 scholarship prize. The evening will be topped off with a light show in addition to the hip shaking, and VJ Shinya Takaoka will be providing the pulse all day long.
Your pulse in your hands

DHUDAVANT
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Twenty years ago, if a doctor wanted to find out the amount of oxygen in a patient’s blood, she would have to take a blood sample each time. Today, healthcare professionals around the world use a portable, non-invasive device called the pulse oximeter (pic, below) to determine how much of the haemoglobin (the protein in the blood that carries oxygen from the lungs to the tissues) is saturated with oxygen. Patients simply insert their index fingers into the oximeter and it instantly gives a reading.

Oxygenated blood and non-oxygenated blood absorb light differently. The pulse oximeter takes advantage of this phenomenon and readsily shows on the screen how much oxygen there is in the blood. The other readings in the screen is the heart rate. Since an adequate flow of blood to the finger is necessary, the pulse oximeter will give incorrect readings if someone has cold hands or is in shock. Nail polish also interferes with accurate reading.

In a country where cardiopulmonary (heart and lung) diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, pulmonary TB, rheumatic heart disease etc. are so prevalent, this device is clearly helpful. Today a pulse oximeter costs only Rs 5,000 so even hospitals and clinics in remote corners of the country can afford one.

Many pilgrims and trekkers who are travelling to high altitudes also carry this device. When people ascend to higher elevations, the barometric pressure decreases, and together with this the saturation of oxygen also falls. Unfortunately, there can be a wide range of correct values for a particular individual to state with confidence whether the person has adequate oxygen saturation or not for that altitude without symptoms. So just basing the diagnosis of altitude sickness on the reading of the pulse oximeter is discouraged. The oximeter reading needs to complement the patient’s history.

In other words, the diagnosis of altitude sickness is history-based, and the pulse oximeter reading in addition to the history should be used like a confirmatory test. If you carry this device during a high altitude trek or pilgrimage, it may be best to use it only if you have actual symptoms of acute mountain sickness (excessive tiredness, headache, and nausea). Otherwise, the pulse oximeter may serve to trigger an unnecessary anxiety attack in predisposed people at high altitude.
David Heathfield, a storyteller from the UK, was invited to Nepal by the British Council to hold workshops with students and teachers on the craft of storytelling. Before he began his career as a storyteller, Heathfield used to be a teacher and understands the importance of oral communication in the classroom and the pivotal role stories play in developing the imagination. Nepali Times caught up with him recently in Kathmandu.

Nepali Times: How receptive were Nepali children to your storytelling?

David Heathfield: The children have been amazingly receptive. I conducted two story telling workshops with students at Rato Bangla School and was blown away by their level of enthusiasm and participation. I was also very impressed by their competency in English and the way they used the language to express themselves so creatively.

How do Nepali children compare to children around the world?

From what I have seen so far, Nepali children are high achievers and their accomplishment at the workshops was outstanding. We were creating stories together and they responded with a great degree of maturity and imagination. They were eager to participate, wonderfully open-hearted and were just really comfortable expressing themselves with each other, which I found very exciting. A good storyteller is able to tell stories from the heart and these children had that skill in abundance.

Nepal has a long tradition of storytelling, how do you think Nepalis can preserve this tradition in the era of digital media?

Oral storytelling which has been practiced in Nepal for generations should be the heart of education, but unfortunately it is often sidelined. The face-to-face interaction between teachers and students which you get through this kind of storytelling is a very powerful teaching and learning tool. However, teachers can still incorporate modern technology into traditional methods by recording the stories so that they remember all the details and know the story well enough to re-tell it. teachers and students which you get through this kind of storytelling is a very powerful teaching and learning tool. However, teachers can still incorporate modern technology into traditional methods by recording the stories so that they remember all the details and know the story well enough to re-tell it.

How can Nepali students and teachers learn from other countries to build upon their storytelling skills?

I think it’s really important to first know about stories from your own background and culture, but listening to stories from other countries is a great way to learn about their cultures. Within each story you tend to get very specific features of the culture where it comes from, which makes sharing information about traditions through storytelling a very creative way to learn. We in the west have a lot to learn from Nepali tradition. When we don’t have access to computers or the internet, we can fall back on Nepali style of oral storytelling.

Do you think storytelling should be used as an indirect means of talking about sensitive issues?

Absolutely, that is one of the central objectives of storytelling. A story acts as a metaphor for sensitive issues, making it a very simple and safe way to explore uncomfortable topics. It allows children and adults to have discussions on issues they would otherwise find hard to talk about. It’s a way we can learn about how we behave, or how we should behave, and explore the darker side of human actions through the lenses of traditional tales.

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Yeti Airlines operates 7 Jetstream-41 advanced turbo prop aircrafts catering to widest network sectors every day.
I t’s 4.30 in the morning and 18-year-old Sai Roka and 60 other boys dig up sand and rocks in pitch darkness with their bare hands and fill their dokos. After some stretching exercises, they strip off their sweatsuits and windbreakers in the starting line, each carrying 25kg on his back.

At the sound of “go”, they break into a full sprint and run “Ayo Gurkhali”. Toughened by twice-weekly trainings, most run the five km course with minutes to spare. They are from the Lotus Training Institute, a centre that prepares young men for stringent selections to join the ranks of the elite force, which has served Britain for almost 200 years and Singapore since 1949.

There were 7,819 potential recruits last year and only 236 were picked: 176 for the British Army and 60 for the Singapore Police Force. At Lotus, boys chosen for the final round of selections run twice a day at dawn and dusk to build speed and stamina. Afternoons are spent in Mathematics and English classes. They train with the doko every Monday and Friday. Saturday is their only day off.

Sai and four other boys from Lotus are “banjas” – the sons of Singapore Gurkhas who grew up in Singapore. Kushal Thapa, 19, who was born in Singapore and returned to Nepal in 2007 when his father retired, says living in the Gurkha Contingent’s Mount Vernon Camp made him yearn for the military life as well.

“The banjas speak English very well so they have an advantage at the interviews. Physical fitness is more easily trained,” he explains. More than 20 Lotus-trained banjas have successfully enlisted so far, including his son.

The day before central selection, Sai posts on Facebook: “It’s our turn tomorrow and we are ready to go. Goodbye to Facebook.” The other banjas leave messages of encouragement on each other’s pages. About two weeks later, congratulatory notes start trickling in on Sai’s Facebook. A phone call to his father confirms that Sai has been selected.

Arjun Rana, 17, also idolises his Gurkha father. His Facebook profile picture is a montage of photos of him and his father lifting weights and flexing their muscles under the caption, “Like father, like son.”

After completing his O levels in 2011, Arjun decided against continuing his studies in Singapore even though his father had some years to go before retirement. “I can always go for further studies later, but the chance to join the army will run out in a few years,” he says.

Upon their return many banjas find themselves strangers in their own land and have a hard time adjusting to life in Nepal. They cannot read the Devanagari script and speak only broken Nepali so continuing their education is challenging. Enlisting in the Gurkhas is not only a way to keep their forefathers’ legacy alive, but also an escape from unemployment in a country where 46 per cent of the population is without jobs.

The Singapore Gurkhas are just as keen for their sons to don the signature broad-rimmed hats and khukuris. In Singapore, “When are you going to start training for the army?” is a frequent conversation opener between the older men and the boys.

Sai’s father, Harka Roka, 37, is staying at the Lotus hostel during his leave to support his son’s bid to enlist. Anxious for his son to excel, he reminds Sai that something as minor as spitting – a common occurrence in Nepal – could kill his chances at the British camp. When an English speaker arrives at the training centre, he summons his son to speak to the visitor for ‘maximum practice’ ahead of his selection interview.

Former Singapore Gurkha Yem Gurung, 52, who retired in 2004 has been running Lotus for the past six years. He says the banjas raised in Singapore are not as tough as the boys who have grown up in Nepal’s rugged terrain. But if they clear the fitness tests, the Singapore boys have a better chance of success because the British Army prefers better-educated soldiers.

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Arjun also makes the cut. About three weeks after entering the British camp, a photo of him looking sharp in uniform appears on his Facebook followed by a post from him: “I thank each and everyone of you who have supported me in one way or another to help me achieve my dream. Will get back to Facebook next year. Farewell."

While Sai and Arjun follow their fathers’ footsteps, hundreds of banjas have been rejected and will have to struggle in Nepal to find work and a sense of belonging. *Fading photos: Staff Sergeant Chandra Gurung (above), 70, with a memento from the day he received an award presented to him a few years before his retirement. The poster on Sergeant Lal Ale’s fridge (right) reminds him of his favourite beer during his time in Singapore from 1978 to 2004. Gurkhas usually put up police mementos and Merlion decorations in their home, but other uniquely Singaporean items can be found too.*
Singapore's Gurkha Contingent was formed in 1949. The unit saw action in the ensuing decades against militant unions and in racial riots, where their image as a neutral force became an asset. Today, they are entrusted with protecting Singapore’s most important people and installations. Their signature broad-rimmed hats and khukuris are familiar sights outside top ministers’ homes. Thousands of Nepali teenagers apply to be Gurkhas in the British Army and Singapore Police Force each year, but less than 200 will join the ranks of this elite fighting force. Singapore Gurkhas and their families return to Nepal after their retirement, but many of their children want to follow in their father’s footsteps.

His Gurkha hat still fits Staff Sergeant Neutra Gurung’s head 10 years after her retirement (right).

RACING TO SINGAPORE: Aspirants who want to be selected for the Gurkhas at a private training centre on the banks of the Sati River in Pokhara fill dokos full of stones and run uphill to build up stamina and endurance. They run the course twice a week.

**Lions in the Lion City**

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His Gurkha hat still fits Staff Sergeant Neutra Gurung’s head 10 years after her retirement (right).
One-woman wonder

Dilip Poudel, Nagarkot, 1 January

When Dilsari Chhantyal of Dadagaun, Baglung, returns home from Chhamaya’s clinic in Baglung, her children like to boast to their friends about how well they are treated there.

Chhamaya Thakur, chief of the nearby health post, likes to say Chhamaya is a one-woman hospital. She says people like to praise her soft-spoken, attentive approach to healthcare. They say Chhamaya is a one-woman wonder who treats cases of fever, pneumonia, diarrhoea, removes troublesome teeth, and even tends to pregnancy cases.

A woman in Duddagun, Myagdi, who walked a whole day to get some medicines for her ailing stomach, claims there is magic in Chhamaya’s prescriptions. “I don’t know what it is, but I get cured as soon as I come here,” she adds.

There are no doctors at the primary health center in Burtibang, and trips to hospitals in Baglung’s headquarters and Burtibang are expensive for people in Baglung’s headquarters and Burtibang.

Chhamaya even tends to pregnancy cases. A woman in Dadagaun, Baglung, says Chhamaya is a one-woman hospital. She says people like to praise her soft-spoken, attentive approach to healthcare. They say Chhamaya is a one-woman wonder who treats cases of fever, pneumonia, diarrhoea, removes troublesome teeth, and even tends to pregnancy cases.

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Chairman Awe-inspiring never ceases to inspire awe and wonder among friends and foe alike. But PKD’s renowned multi-forked tongue is now getting so tangled up that he has outdone Orwell with his doublespeak, graduating to triplespeak and beyond. A Kathmandu tabloid has tabulated recent PKD statements:

15 November: “Kangres should first agree on a PM candidate”
19 November: “Let’s have a technocratic PM”
29 November: “Only a Madhesi PM is acceptable”
1 December: “A Kangresi PM even for one day”
15 December: “We will have a consensus gov’t by tomorrow”
16 December: “Who said a Kangresi PM is acceptable?”
20 December: “How about Badal as PM?”
22 December: “I can’t convince Baburam, you try to talk to him”
1 January: “If no agreement, let’s revive the CA”

The eternal search for Nepal’s new PM has come a full circle with BRB visiting civil society leader Devendra Dai and Gutch making a house call on Demon Nath at their respective residences this week. The two were naturally rather flattered that they are being considered to be pradhan monkeys. Which leads the Donkey to wonder why it wasn’t offered the post too. Remember that a technocrat PM was originally an idea Awesome floated in order to have a hand-picked loyalist, and he later gave up that proposal in favour of Jhusil Kira because he thought the Kangres leader would be more malleable. Now, BRB has hijacked the idea of a civil society PM knowing fully well that it will be shot down by the UML, NC, and even PKD himself and doesn’t have the chance of a snowflake in hell to be implemented. Our PhD PM threw a red herring to prolong his incumbency till February and everyone fell for it. Sheer genius.

If your business hasn’t yet received a letter signed by Baidya Daddy and Cloudy Uncle asking for a 10 lack donation then maybe you are not important enough to be noticed, and should make a career switch. The Cash Baddies and the Dash Baddies have stepped up the fund-raising competition for their respective Conventions in the coming weeks. The Dash Baddies are gearing up for their jangaut on Push 25, so their request is more urgent. The letters are usually followed by phone calls where the exact amount is specified, and the threat unspecified. Along New Road, Dash comrades are going shop-to-shop terrorising owners by saying they’ll go back to war if they don’t get a donation. The Cash Baddies, being in government, aren’t as pushy since they can treat the exchequer as their personal ATM.

Why was PKD in BKK? That was the question that consumed everyone in Manu this week. This being Nepal, everyone believed the most conspiratorial theory instead of the official one that Sita was getting a checkup at Bumrungrad. Among the theories:

- PKD was feeling envious that ex-Kingji took his wife to Singapore for her checkup
- Chairman wanted to get back at the president for going off to Delhi for his checkup
- Daddy and Mommy wanted a reunion with Sonny Boy Prakash
- PKD met RAW in BKK
- Thailand has some Awesome beaches
- APECF Consultation
- All of the above

Headlines of the week:
- Bhattarai rejects Koirala as PM
- Koirala rejects Dahal as PM
- Dahal rejects Bhattarai as PM
- Koirala rejects Koirala as PM

Clout to his camp by not just wooing away PKD loyalists, but also exhorting top comrades from Kiran Kaka’s Dashies to defect. BRB is making overt overtures to Comrade Big Plop to join his retinue, dangling carrots in front of his face, and triggering air raid sirens to go off in both the PKD and Baidya camps.

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