Less than a week after assuring Nepal-based envoys that he was going to ensure the Truth and Reconciliation Bill reflected international norms, the Bhattarai government on Wednesday at midnight sent police to detain policemen in Dailekh involved in the investigation of a journalist’s murder in 2003. The case of Dekendra Thapa, the Dailekh reporter who was tortured and killed by the Maoists during the war, has become emblematic of the state of impunity in the country. It also reflects the determination of the Maoists in government not to dig up wartime atrocities by their cadre and by the army and police.

The irony of the midnight action in Dailekh was that district police chief Sharada Prasad Chaudhary, and Inspectors Indra Subedi and Kiran Neupane were held by a police unit sent from Surkhet and Nepalganj and accompanied by truckloads of about 600 Maoist YCL. All three were transferred on Thursday afternoon for failing to maintain ‘peace’.

Dailekh has been tense this week as the Maoists staged their District Convention, and the opposition parties tried to prevent Prime Minister Bhattarai on Wednesday from attending to protest his attempts to stop the investigation into the Dekendra case.

Among the police team investigating the case, only Inspector Binod Sharma is still in his job.
transitional injustice

The seemingly docile Baburam Bhattarai is unleashing a wave of dictatorial whims, and also shattering the hopes of Nepal’s ‘transitional justice’, Editorial, #639). The families of thousands more Dekadars who lost their lives won’t ever forget and forgive those for raging a seemingly futile war and calling war criminals the biggest obstacle in healing the wounds of the bloody conflict.

Kroo Singh

get used to it

Thank you Damakay Jaisw for your incisive analysis of Bhattarai’s megalomania (‘Acharya, #639). Justice must be seen as even-handed and crimes committed by even more people have to do with a competent government that has the capacity to command institutions to conduct polls in a free and fair manner.

Anonymous

skeletons in the closet

This is the time when the very essence of justice is being hijacked by a few elites for their parochial political gains (‘Skeletons in the closet’, Anurag Acharya, #639). Justice must be seen as even-handed and crimes committed by both sides need to be given equal weight.

Bilu

umbilical of impunity

While Kanak Mani Dixit’s blog captures the outrage that is rightly directed at the UCPN-M for their position on Col Lama’s arrest and the Dekadara Trappa case, it continues the Nepal Times line of blaming the Maoists for ‘transitional injustice’ (‘Umbilical of impunity’, www. nepaltimes.com). It remains a fact that the entire political establishment is committed to impunity. That is the problem: if it was only one party, there would be at least some room for remedy. What is required is advocacy that targets the entire establishment (including the NC, UML, and the Maoists) with the Maoists represent a united front against truth and justice. One can only hope that Dixit is using the access he has to non-Maoist leaders to argue the case strongly just as it is there. It is strange he chooses not to do so in print. As long as those advocating for justice advance narrow political agendas the chance of progress in ending impunity will be small.

Simon Robins

all in a country like Nepal there is no need to conduct a separate transitional justice mechanism. All we need is a group of honest lawyers who are able to resurrect the deaths for the sake of justice. The people who Dixit believes should be involved in human rights jurisprudence aren’t any good because they are only concerned about footing donors to UN NGOs and enjoying foreign trips in the name of justice.

Nirmal Ghimire

sick city

Thank you Nepal Times for raising your voice against Kathmandu’s air pollution (‘Sick city’, Anu-Karin Esmath Lampou, #639). Just a small correction: WHO guideline value for PM10 is 20 micrograms per cubic metre and for PM2.5 5 is 10 micrograms per cubic metre. As these are the guideline values for annual mean they should be used as reference values while assessing the health impacts of Kathmandu’s air quality. It should also be noted that air pollution levels in winter in the Valley are much higher than the annual mean because of temperature inversion, lack of rain, and operation of brick kilns.

Bhusan Tuladhar

as a Kathmandu-based who has lived here all her life and who drives in this dust bowl, I can only imagine what my lungs must be going through. What else can we do on a personal level except buy one of the bulkier masks that actually provide some protection and maybe start walking to work even if it’s for two days a week to lessen our contribution to the city’s pollution? Moving out of the Valley and setting up nearby sometimes slightly less polluted might also be a good idea, but as we all know it’s easier said than done.

RT

my wife and I had planned to spend winters in Nepal during our retirement, but after our most recent visit we have sadly had to drop that plan, partly due to the pollution and congestion in the Valley.

Amanda Mclean

We might as well get used to Nepal becoming an international pariah

by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) by endorsing the Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition Treaty through ordinances in June. The third bill on Anti-Organised Crime Act was not passed because of political pressure from the Maoists and their Madhesi coalition partners, who fear travel bans for their ill-gotten wealth. The draft bill also got snared in politics as the opposition put pressure on the president not to pass ordinances. Nepal was put on FATF’s ‘grey list’, but this will only make the crisis worse at a plenary meeting in Paris in February. Unless the Finance Minister takes urgent steps to endorse bills on anti-terrorism and organised crime, amendments to the act on anti-money laundering and automation of the Financial Information Unit (FUU) at the Nepal Rastra Bank to ensure transparency and exchange, Nepal risks being declared a rogue state.

For a country so dependent on tourism, migrant labour, exports and foreign investment, this would be catastrophic. It will put our international trade and reputation at risk and Nepaliss living abroad will be under stricter surveillance and scrutiny. Nepal risks being permanently blacklisted from all international financial transactions, and join the ranks of outcast states like North Korea and Iran.

International banks could block the accounts of Nepali missions, just like Citibank which has closed the accounts of Nepal missions in Washington and New York. Foreign donors could impose more stringent conditions for aid and grants once the country is blacklisted.

Politicians who went over short-term horizons and are notoriously selfish, but only in Nepal are they so unmindful of their own self-interest.

we might as well get used to nepal becoming an international pariah

25 - 31 JANUARY 2013 #644

Nepal's present rulers are pushing the country into a state of statelessness so systematically that it almost seems deliberate. It is now coming up to nine months that a caretaker government is being led by a lameduck prime minister. We haven’t had a parliament since May, and no sign that there will be elections any time soon. The Supreme Court is being depleted of justices, the Election Commission is commissioner-less, as are the corruption watchdog and other constitutional bodies.

The president could break the logjam, but his role is ceremonial and the use of residual powers is restricted by an interim constitution that has no precedence for this kind of checkmate. The bureaucracy and police are demoralised by political intervention, and the resulting impunity has set off a crime wave, especially in the Tarai (see page 11).

We have also risked becoming a financial pariah, known as a country that is ruled by war criminals who have pardoned themselves. We also risk becoming a financial pariah unless the government sends the president a bill ratifying by ordinance an anti-money laundering law. Nepal narrowly escaped being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATT) by endorsing the Mutual Legal Assistance and Extradition Treaty through ordinances in June. The third bill on Anti-Organised Crime Act was not passed because of political pressure from the Maoists and their Madhesi coalition partners, who fear travel bans for their ill-gotten wealth. The draft bill also got snared in politics as the opposition put pressure on the president not to pass ordinances. Nepal was put on FATF’s ‘grey list’, but this will only make the crisis worse at a plenary meeting in Paris in February. Unless the Finance Minister takes urgent steps to endorse bills on anti-terrorism and organised crime, amendments to the act on anti-money laundering and automation of the Financial Information Unit (FUU) at the Nepal Rastra Bank to ensure transparency and exchange, Nepal risks being declared a rogue state.

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Politicians who went over short-term horizons and are notoriously selfish, but only in Nepal are they so unmindful of their own self-interest.
The longer this endless transitional period drags on, the more painful it is for us families of victims of the conflict. The past month, especially, has proven beyond doubt that truth and justice are not priorities for this government.

The Disappearance, and Truth and Justice Commissions, which should have addressed the grievances of victims have themselves become victims of political horse-trading. The leadership is preoccupied with attaining and retaining political power by any means, undermining and instrumentalising justice.

Government and non-government efforts have abused and wasted resources generated in the name of victims and abused them for their own political or fund-raising ends. The trend is to look at victims ‘only as victims’, and not as campaigners of justice. This perspective has not changed even after the failure of the constitutional process.

After facing abuse during the conflict, the families of victims now face abuse by the government, political parties, corporate non-governmental groups, and partisan civil society activists. A donor-oriented, state-controlled process has not allowed a victim-centred discourse. The state has played with the psychology of victims, either throwing money at the problem in the name of reparation, or ensuring that its disbursement undermine long-term peace and the state of impunity will persist, to be drafted, otherwise the bill languishing with the president will go through with it. The bill was written by former war criminals, and is not acceptable. There is the political will to try to merge the two commissions all recommendations of the Dhungana, Mallik, and Rayamajhi were never held accountable. The recommendations of the Dhungana, Mallik, and Rayamajhi Commissions all gather dust, blacklisted individuals were never made public.

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai’s latest moves to protect those involved in wartime atrocities just follow this trend. Kuber Singh Rana who was implicated in wartime excesses was promoted to police chief, the Nepal Army’s Raju Basnet who was involved in the disappearances of civilians from Bhairabnath Battalion was rewarded. Ironically, policemen known to have been involved in the death and torture of Maoist journalist Krishna Sen were promoted by this Maoist government. For the families of victims, the only bright spots have been the investigation into the detention, torture, and murder of Deka Thapa and the arrest in the UK of Col Kumar Lama. But in both cases, the Maoist government has shown its contempt for justice. The opposition parties spoke out against Col Lama’s arrest, and then proceeded to shamelessly politicise the Dekendra Thapa case. The government’s response to these cases have not just weakened the discussion on the proposed commissions, but also undermined the truth and justice agenda of the victims.

The leadership of the army, police, and administration as well as the former rebels has tried to protect each other from the need to face up to the guilt of their past. But a cathartic coming to terms with the crimes of the conflict is necessary to stop vengeance and a relapse into violence and conflict.

The families of victims want truth, they want to be compensated, and they want justice. But these demands have been sidelined in the current state of impunity and mutual accommodation between former enemies. When they are raised, the victims’ agenda tends to be just a fund-raising bullet point for Kathmandu-centric NGOs. This actor-tendency of civil society groups ends up paying lip service to victims, and holding superficial dialogue. Although the Maoist government seems to be slightly more receptive to a reworked bill on the formation of proposed commissions after a stern warning from donors last week, it doesn’t look like there is the political will to go through with it. The bill languishing with the president was written by former war criminals, and is not acceptable.

The voices of victims need to be heard if a new bill is going to be drafted; the state of impunity will persist, undermine long-term peace and ensure that our wounds from the war never heal.

Ram Kumar Bhandari represents a network of the victims of the conflict and is chairperson of the Committee for Social Justice.
The hall was packed with students, faculty, film buffs, and members of the public for the screening of the new wave Nepali feature film, Highway. Although the movie has been screened in mainstream cinema in Nepal, this was only the third time it was being shown in the United States.

Last week, the Yale Himalaya Initiative and the Nepali Association of Yale Affiliates (NAYA) hosted the screening of Highway, and a discussion with the director, Deepak Rauniyar (pic, right), in New Haven, Connecticut. The movie has generated considerable debate within Nepal and outside and having finally seen it, I can appreciate why. The film is as provocative, risky, and powerful as it is unusual, and it’s a credit to the creativity of the director, the producers, the brilliant actors, and crew that they pulled it off.

I have never seen a film like this, from Nepal or anywhere else, both in terms of its genre and the flexible elegance of its composition. The premise and conceit of the plot, a series of characters thrown together by chance on a long distance bus journey, battling through numerous

Mark Turin reviews Highway, a unique and searing film that deserves a place in Nepal’s film history.

Mark Turin is an anthropologist and linguist who directs the Yale Himalaya Initiative and the Digital Himalaya Project (www.digitalhimalaya.org).
Equally invested

As an alternative source of funding, Private Equity has the potential to turn small businesses in Nepal more competitive and better managed firms.
Shiksha Nepal is spreading the joy of reading by bringing books closer to children

BHRIKUTI RAJ

As buildings are torn down and bulldozers fight for legroom with motorcylics, micro-buses, and pedestrians, the Shankhamul-Baneswor stretch looks like a warzone. A modest five storied house at Shankhamul is among the few roadside buildings that were saved from the Bhattari government’s road rage. On the fourth floor is a large room where 24-year-old Prem Bohara is busy rummaging through heaps of books scattered across the green patchy carpet. This is the office of Shiksha Nepal, an organisation spreading the joy of reading by bringing books closer to children throughout Nepal.

Few schools in Nepal have libraries and reading books other than what is required by the curriculum is still a luxury for many. Started by Prem Bohara and Megha Pradhananga Malla in 2012, Shiksha Nepal believes that reading stories and poetry in Nepali and English will help children improve their comprehension, expose them to diverse cultures and lifestyles, and make them well-rounded citizens.

“It’s not just remote villages, many schools in big towns don’t have libraries either. So Nepali children don’t develop a habit of reading outside of class. Sadly even those who like to read, can’t find books,” explains Prem who caught the reading bug late in life (see box).

Prem, Megha, and their team are currently busy trying to collect 100,000 books for the Euta Kitab Literacy Campaign 2015 so that every child in Nepal has a book. Three thousand books have already made their way to the Shankhamul office mostly through individual donations. And in June last year the organisation gifted 1,000 books to students in five schools around Dolpa, Prem’s home district, as part of the pilot project for Euta Kitab.

Benefactors are asked to donate children’s books instead of adult novels because they aren’t very useful for students in remote Nepal. And to make giving easier, specially for those living abroad, Shiksha Nepal accepts monetary gifts.

“Many people don’t know what books are suitable for young children in public schools in Nepal, so we also encourage our supporters to give us money which we then use to buy age-appropriate books,” explains Megha.

Seeing the success of the pilot project in Dolpa, schools...
Driven by books

Swami Vivekananda’s autobiography is the only book Prem Bohara remembers reading during 13 years of schooling in Dolpa. “We read one of the chapters from his autobiography in our Nepali class in grade 10,” recalls Prem. He was 18 when he first visited a library, the one in his college in Pokhara. Since then he has been bitten by the book bug and spends hours reading in the library.

With his new found hobby, Prem began collecting books and taking them back to his village in Mahpbal, Dolpa whenever he could find time and would give them to the local children. Within a year, his friends were donating so many books that the 24-year-old journalism graduate did not know what to do with them. So he started Shiksha Nepal in 2012 with his friend Megha to make it easier to manage the books, help ship books to parts of the country that are not linked by road networks yet.

What began as a holiday project is now a full-time job for Prem and he says the response from donors as well as the children who are reading books has been overwhelming. Through the Euta Kitab campaign, he hopes to help children across Nepal develop a love for reading from a young age, something he did not get to do as a boy. Says Prem: “Books locked behind glass cupboards used to scare me. But now I want to see those books in the hands of Nepali children.”

www.shikshanepal.com
B-boying competition, shake and brake, and do whatever it takes to win cash prizes up to Rs 50,000. 26 January, 10.45am, Dasrath Stadium, 984905612/984946851/9847727376

Film competition, make a short, attractive, and appealing film on the themes of ‘wealth creation’ and/or ‘economic development’ and win prizes up to Rs 165,000. 28 January, 9851015280

Ultimate photography workshop, explore studio photography with highly experienced photographer Shahnawaz Mohammad. Rs 5,000. 30 January to 2 February. 7am to 9pm. The Image Park, New Road

MUSIC

RATO MATO, Diwak Gurung will team up with his old bandmates from Albatross to play songs from his album Rato Mato, so get a taste of Nepali neo-folk while it lasts. Rs 200. 25 January, 7pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Live at Café 32, live music and delicious food every Friday, 8pm onwards, Café 32, Baitaputali, (01)4244231

DINING

INTIMATE NEPAL, an exhibition featuring the works of young Nepali photographers. 16 to 28 January, 10am to 5pm, except Saturdays. Alliance Française, Teku, (01)4241163/4242832

Theatre training, gain a comprehensive grounding in the performing arts. 1 February to 29 April, Sushita Arts Academy. (01)401566, www.sushitaartsacademy.com

EVEREST STEAK HOUSE, an old-school joint for everything steak, indeed a sanctuary for meat lovers. Thamel, 10am to 10pm, (01)4701510

FUJI BAKER, tucked in Chakupat this bakery of flours homemade goodies like apple pie, pain du chocolat, and banana cake. Chakupat, Lalitpur

ALFRESCO, for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights. Soaltee Crowne Plaza, (01)4273999

Chopati, savoury Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Try the famous drums of heaven. Kumaripati, 5551118

NEW DISH, grab filling meals like pork momos, spring rolls, and chop sueys with excellent value for money. Khiccha Pokhari

EVENTS

PUBLIC SPEAKING AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT, an opportunity to master the skills required for a gregarious public life taught by media personality Malvika Subba. Rs 3000, Rs 2000 for students, 1 to 3 February, 10am to 5pm. Umangal Hall, Indreni Food Land, New Baneshwor, 985101569

Reneable energy week, explore possibilities for wind energy in Nepal. Runs 16 to 26 January, Bhikul Mandap, Nepal

Professional email-writing workshop, improve your communication skills and make email-writing a strong aspect of your resume. Rs 4000, 30 to 31 January, 10am to 4pm. Career Master, Nepal, Pulchok, (01)552491/594922/32963031778

EVENTS

DRAGON CHINESE RESTAURANT, try the Kung Pao Pork if alone and the Mai Cao if with company. Lakeside, Pokhara, Tamarind, a multi-cuisine restaurant, which offers an exquisite range of drinks and food. Jhamsothi

SARANGKOT FORDA RESTAURANT, have a Sarangkot special breakfast while enjoying spectacular views of the mountain ranges. Sarangkot, Pokhara, (061)696920, 9817136896

ALFRESCO, for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights. Soaltee Crowne Plaza, (01)4273999

Chopati, savoury Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Try the famous drums of heaven. Kumaripati, 5551118

NEW DISH, grab filling meals like pork momos, spring rolls, and chop sueys with excellent value for money. Khiccha Pokhari
Return of the native

Nepal International Indigenous Film Festival (NIFF) is ready to kick off its seventh annual festival and filmmakers from all backgrounds who have an interest in indigenous issues, knowledge, and culture are invited to apply.

Each year, NIFF explores indigenous themes, and this year’s program will focus on ‘Equal Access and Participation of Indigenous Peoples in Media’. The selected films will be screened by Taiwan Indigenous Television and receive royalty from the station.

25 to 28 April, City Hall, Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road (01)4102577, ifa_festivals@yahoo.com, www.ifanepal.org.np

The Village Cafe

As newcomers to the Valley, we have been looking around for a place which is close to our workplace, serves delicious food, and is also gentle on our wallets. The Village Cafe in Pulchok is the right place for us.

The dining area is located in the open, with large umbrellas to provide shade. The plants and flowers placed beside the tables give the impression that you’re eating in a garden, a welcome respite from the noise and dust of the city. Next to the restaurant is a shop run by Sabah Nepal, selling handicrafts, clothes, and accessories and offers an interesting diversion while you wait for your order to arrive.

If you are unfamiliar with Newari cuisine like us, we suggest you ask the waitresses for recommendations. The menu item on the menu and always serve with a smile. The menu is a little confusing, made up of four separate laminated pages instead of one booklet. However, there are useful descriptions in English printed beside each dish.

For starters we ordered a plain bara (Rs 500) and mushroom bara (Rs 90) from a number of other toppings like egg and vegetables. The plain bara was excellent, fluffy, crisp, and very tasty. The mushroom bara, while bigger and laced with shredded black mushrooms, was a little soggy and not as good as its plain Jane cousin.

The cheese pakoda is by far the best thing on the menu. For just Rs 60, you get five deep fried cheese balls, crunchy, and full of flavour. It was so good we ordered a second round and were tempted to add another plate. For variety we tried both the egg and the peanut butter chatamari. The egg chatamari (Rs 60) was a little spicier than expected, while the peanut butter chatamari (Rs 90) seemed better suited for a dessert than a main course since it was so saccharine. Although we ordered a ‘large’ portion of chicken chhwela (Rs 150), it came in a small bowl barely enough for one. Fortunately the chicken itself was delicious, lightly fried, and marinated in a spicy red sauce.

We ended our lunch on a sugar-high with two yamari dumplings. The chaku yamari (Rs 35), stuffed with sweet dark molasses and sesame seeds, contrasted strongly with the khwa yamari (Rs 35), with its lighter filling of raisins, cashews, and condensed dry milk. While both make for excellent desserts, the contrast between them is remarkable and speaks to the diversity of Newari dishes.

With its home-made quality food and affordable prices, we will probably make The Village Cafe our regular lunch and dinner joint. However, its small portions may not satisfy someone who has skipped breakfast and would like a very filling meal. Then again, you could always order second and third helpings. And as foreigners, we probably need some time getting used to Nepali portions.

Best of all, we left with a content tummy and happy heart knowing that our meal (in a small way) was helping disadvantaged women become bread earners for their families.

Sunam Dave

How to get there: From the Ashok Stupa alongside Pulchok Road, follow the road north past the NCell telecom building and look out for the Village Cafe’s sign on the left.
**Lincoln**

Lincoln is Steven Spielberg’s masterpiece, with a little help from Daniel Day-Lewis. In many ways, this latest profound and layered film is Spielberg’s most thoughtful and adult film to date. Perhaps that is an absurdly lofty thing to say about the beloved director of Jaws (1975), E.T. (1982), the Indiana Jones films (well, not the last one), and yes, the first Jurassic Park (1993), but all of these aforementioned films, though spectacular and limenitely watchable do not have even a fraction of the gravitas of Lincoln.

Based in part on Doris Kearns Goodwin’s biography of Lincoln Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln, the film concentrates on the final four months of the president’s life when the civil war is coming to an end and the South is on the verge of surrender. Recognizing that slavery can only be truly abolished in America by adding an amendment to the constitution itself, and this too before the end of war after which the former status quo of entailment may be re-established, Abraham Lincoln and his trusted advisors race against time and the turning tide to create a needed United States of America.

While everyone knows the tragic end of Lincoln’s life, I imagine not many of us have given it any real thought outside of our school history books. Watching Spielberg’s film will change that.

By some sort of intangible actorly alchemy, Daniel Day-Lewis has become Lincoln himself, channeling that great man’s spirit, if you will. When he speaks in his weary but always humorous voice, everyone around him is riveted, enraptured by his long-winded but endearing anecdotes and jotted by his endless wisdom and magnanimous nature.

Watching Spielberg’s film will change that.

**Out of Grasp**

For two months, 57-year-old Ram Bahadur had been staggering around the house and feeling unsteady. He had difficulties turning over in bed, sitting, and getting out of his car. He was drooling, his legs, and trunk with a gradual slowness of movement. Emotional changes are also often present, and simple tasks such as talking, walking, and eating may become difficult.

Although Nepali doctors are familiar with the disease, as with most other illnesses in the country, quantitative data is based exclusively on research carried out in developed countries. Approximately one percent of the 65 and older age group and 2.5 percent of the 80 plus population are affected by Parkinson’s.

The diagnosis is made clinically, so no fancy blood or imaging tests are required except perhaps to rule out other problems which simulate Parkinson’s disease. These ‘look alike’ problems could be drug-induced (for example, anti-psychotic drugs) Parkinsonism or post-traumatic Parkinsonism (note: with classic Parkinson’s disease there are no prior triggers like drugs or trauma).

Even Alzheimer dementia patients experience rigidity and slowed movements during the later stages of their disease which could throw off doctors trying to make a diagnosis. It is important to make these distinctions because therapy may be different. For example, if the symptoms are due to exposure to certain drugs the specific drug needs to be stopped or replaced for definitive therapy.

Exercise can help maintain physical and mental functions in Parkinson’s disease, and drugs to increase dopamine levels in the brain or to improve the brain’s ability to respond to dopamine are available. Such medications can reduce tremor, stiffness, and slowness and improve muscle control, balance, and walking. Patients can also find help online among a wide variety of support groups.

**The Mill**

A man walks by as members of UML-affiliated student union take out a rally at Exhibition Road on Tuesday demanding the government to punish the murderers of journalist Dekendra Thapa.

TRUE STORY: Nepali Congress president Sushil Koirala (centre) chats with Ram Chandra Paudel (right) at the party’s central committee meeting in Sanepe on Sunday.

**Reading School:** Students travel to school in a muscle-powered cart on the Sunkhel-Nepalgunj highway on Tuesday afternoon.

**Up and Down the Mountain:** A man carries hay for his donkeys and cattle early in the morning in Simikot Lagna, Humla.

**Weekend Weather**

Kathmandu will continue to freeze under a cold spell caused by winds sweeping down from the mountains. Combined with moisture from last week’s rain, this will cause morning ground fog in the Valley as well as some of the transverse river valleys in Central and Eastern Nepal. There is no major westerly disturbance, just some fast-moving high altitude cirrus on the jet stream. Afternoons will be warm, but still below 20 celsius and it will feel colder because of fresh breezes.
ALL FALL DOWN: A warehouse near the Nepal-India border in Janumaha, Banke district lies in ruins, symbolic of the paralysed economy in rest of the Tarai.

BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

ALL FALL DOWN: A warehouse near the Nepal-India border in Jamunaha, Banke district lies in ruins, symbolic of the paralysed economy in rest of the Tarai.

On a cold January afternoon six years ago this week, a few obscure Madhesi leaders gathered at Maitighar Mandala and torched copies of the interim constitution saying it did not address their desire for recognition and representation.

Euphoric about sidelining the monarchy and reclaiming Singha Darbar, the coalition of former Maoist rebels and democratic parties in the interim government ignored the protests, and underestimated the anger. Some actively stoked the Madhes fires, hoping to use it to weaken Maoist influence in the Tarai.

Demonstrators at the Mandala roundabout were arrested, sparking further protests, first in Lahan and then in the rest of the Tarai. Dozens of Madhesi leaders from various parties, including sitting ministers, left their jobs and defected. The protests turned violent, leaving 56 dead, stoking Pahadi-Madhesi tensions and forcing tens of thousands of Pahadis to flee the Tarai.

The government finally relented and included the agenda of federalism and inclusion in the interim constitution. Along with republicanism and secularism, Nepal was to be a federal and inclusive state. Six years later, the inclusion bill died with a legislature that was allowed to lapse. Had Nepal gotten its constitution on 27 May last year, 23-year-old Arjun Sah from Mahottari would have gained citizenship of this country in the name of his mother. But in a few months, he will be a stateless MBA graduate instead.

He will have no job, no property rights, no travel documents, and will join thousands of other young Madhesi youths who are born in the shadows and live in perpetual exclusion.

The decade-long conflict and seven years of power deadlock have paralysed the national economy, jobseekers far outnumber available jobs. Out migration from the Tarai to the Gulf, Malaysia, and India is greater than ever before. But Madhesis like Sah don’t even have the luxury of leaving, at least not legally.

The Madhes still falls in the penumbra of the Kathmandu-centric media, and the simmering anger and frustration of more than half the people of this country who live in the plains are often ignored or forgotten. Falling between the cracks are stories like that of 19-year-old Sukhi Lonia who was killed last month in Banke allegedly by police acting on instructions from a local strongman because Lonia had dared to marry a girl he had his eye on.

“Every month we receive at least half a dozen cases of illegal arrests, detention, torture, and sometimes fake encounters by the police,” Dipendra Jha of the Tarai Human Rights Defenders (THRD) Alliance told me this week. Illegal detention and torture is rife in Siraha, Sarlahi, Saptari, Mahottari, Rupandehi, and Banke where poor Madhesi boys are arbitrarily arrested by the police under the Arms and Ammunitions or Narcotics Act, only to extort money from the family.

It is getting increasingly difficult to distinguish between criminals and politicians, and police routinely act hand-in-glove with smugglers and kidnappers. The Home Minister’s constituency of Sunsari has become a hotbed for crime and contraband trafficking. A 22-year-old man from Siraha was recently arrested by the police who allegedly demanded Rs 500,000 from the family for his release.

Last week, locals attacked Upendra Yadav at a function organised to mark six years of the Madhes uprising in Saptari. At a different function in Siraha, the families of 2007 martyrs refused to grant the podium to the Minister for Information and Communication Raj Kishor Yadav. Madhesi’s anger is now directed at their own leaders who have neglected the interests of their own constituency.

In this January’s murky, sunless winter public dissatisfaction with betrayal simmers like a straw fire in the plains. It is only a matter of time before the fire bursts through again. When Martyrs’ Day is marked next week, the families of those killed in 2007 will ask their leaders: what did they die for?

Pain in the plains

Six years after the bloody uprising in the plains that claimed 52 lives, the Madhes still simmers.
Every act of kindness counts

There are many young Nepali women social workers out there who aren’t CNN Heroes

SANTA GAHA MAGAR

Diksha Chapagain of Taplejung lives with a family of 27 members on the outskirts of Kathmandu. They are not blood relations, but disadvantaged people whom Diksha has adopted. Her ‘family’ includes eight-month-old Ashrita and 70-year-old Bir Bahadur Tamang, and 16 others are of school-going age.

Ten years ago, when Diksha was 20, she saw a child rummaging through a rubbish pile looking for something to eat. She took him to hospital, but found out he could not speak, so she started taking care of him on her own. Diksha found the need of Kathmandu’s poor and abandoned so great that she set up the Pabitra Samaj Sewa Nepal.

When her children go to school, Diksha goes house-to-house collecting clothes, food, or money for the upkeep of her ‘family’. All the children share the same surname, Nepal, and call their simple house, which is...
Nanda Baburam Shrestha and his wife Laxmi came to Kathmandu 26 years ago looking for work, and found a job at a brick kiln in Dhapakhel. Brick by brick, they saved enough to rent some land to farm tomatoes and vegetables, and their income doubled. Nanda got himself trained at the Nepal Agriculture Research Council in Khumaltar and with money borrowed from a community development scheme, expanded their farm.

Nanda and Laxmi spent their childhood gathering firewood and fodder in the mountains of Dolakha, today they earn enough to send their children to good colleges in Kathmandu. Daughter Samjhana achieved distinction grades in her SLC exam and is studying nursing while son Saroj is doing well in high school. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the parents live for their children, and they are living proof that dedication and integrity has its rewards.

The farm has now grown, the Shresthas have added four cows and a buffalo, and make up to Rs 30,000 a month selling milk and vegetables. The two have now bought a plot of land, and hope to build a home that they can pass on to their children.

Rati Maharjan built on government land, home. Sabita Uperti, 26, of Dolakha used to work at the National Disability Fund, but left to do more meaningful work for children with mental and physical disabilities. She set up her own shelter in Sinamangal where the children learn to do ordinary things until they are confident enough to go to school on their own.

It isn’t easy for Sabita to raise money to run her home, so her centre charges parents who can afford to pay for their children’s rehabilitation. So far, Sabita has helped more than 30 children overcome their disabilities.

When Sharmila Thapa became single six years ago, she realised how difficult life can be for young women who live alone. So with six other single women, Sharmila set up the Samida Women Development Forum in Lajimpat which provides training and life-skills to victims of domestic abuse.

Menuka Thapa, 31, runs Raksha Nepal to educate and rehabilitate women who work in the sex industry, and she is currently sheltering 10 women and 25 minors. Menuka has educated and trained more than 300 girls and women so they can stand on their own feet. Menuka knows their pain because she grew up as an orphan herself in a family of nine siblings. She came to Kathmandu to learn music, but saw how women at dance restaurants were abused and set up Raksha Nepal. Menuka says rescuing exploited girls is difficult because dance bars and the sex industry enjoy political and police protection.

Says Menuka: “No one would work in the sex industry if they had a choice. No woman should be driven to such desperation.”

www.rakshanepal.org.np

The power of one, #634
Growing up behind bars, #570
Nepal’s hero, #527

Shahar Safa Raakon Udakta Chunhat, Hami Savie Milinre Dinu Parche Sahay.
CIAA under threat

Prakash Shah, Kathmandu, 21 January

Out of 33 candidates only Saraw Praput Shah managed to pass this year’s Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) test, which qualifies pilots to fly in Nepal. The 50th CPL test administered by the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CIAA) was the first computer-based exam and was based on Europe’s Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) standard. Officials at CIAA believe the result might have been affected because of the new question pattern. The CPL test usually has a pass rate of 80 per cent, but this year’s result is the worst ever on record. Even the deputy director general of CIAA, Min Raj Upadhyay, was shocked by the results.

The result has left the 32 candidates distraught, and they are blaming CIAA for setting questions that are higher than the required level. “We were asked questions for captain’s level which even those who have passed earlier CPL tests won’t be able to solve,” said one on the condition of anonymity, “we are not asking for easy questions, but it’s not fair that we were asked questions that are meant for captains in Europe.”

The candidates claim the questions they were asked are meant for those who have completed the three year captain course. However, CIAA has denied such allegations. “The European standard test cannot be blamed. The exam was problematic only for those who returned from the Philippines and South Africa,” explains Upadhyay. With air crashes happening with frightening regularity, CIAA has made the technical examinations for pilots and technicians tougher and implemented strict criteria following Europe’s JAA. Since there is no provision for aviation courses in Nepal, students spend millions of rupees abroad. However, the daunting number of domestic airlines means that unemployment is scoring. According to the Air Pilot’s Association, there are more than 300 unemployed pilots in Nepal who have passed the CPL test.

“Difficult take off”

Arjun Subedi, Nakoark, 23 January

The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has stopped investigating over half a dozen cases due to political and administrative pressures. Cases including embezzlement of funds meant for Maoist combatants, misuse of the youth self-employment fund, financial irregularities in Kathmandu Metropolitan’s physical infrastructure development, fraud in the compensation for former Maoist combatants and high-ranking officials are all collecting dust at the CIAA office.

The misuse of funds meant for former Maoist combatants was confirmed a year ago, however, the CIAA has not shown any interest in the case so far. “Since Maoists themselves decided to investigate into the matter, we didn’t think it was necessary for us to get into it,” said former secretary Bhagwati Kumar Kafle at that time.

Similarly, a case was filed at the CIAA last year after it was revealed that Manist party was doling out money to its own cadre from the youth self-employment fund. However, details of further investigations have not been released till today. The compensation package to help families and victims of war also came under the radar as the state refused to include families of security forces who were killed during the war. However, the commission didn’t take the investigation forward because of the government’s order. Compensation provided to families of the Madhes movement martyrs also faces a similar fate.

According to procedure, once the CIAA confirms a fraud case, it has to pass them onto the special court. However, as many incumbent ministers and high-ranking officials are suspected to be involved, these cases are unlikely to move ahead any time soon.

Officials at CIAA admit to immense political pressure and intervention. “A single case is filed against influential officials, political leaders, or ministers, the pressure starts to accumulate. How do we work under such circumstances?” officials wonder in the condition of anonymity.

In the absence of a parliament, CIAA’s operations have been further hampered since it now remains without commissioners. The agency is supposed to have five commissioners including a chief commissioner, but is currently managed by a secretary. Bhupi Raj Pokharel, former chief of the Election Commission says, “How can an indemnity fund or constitutional body like the CIAA function under a secretary who is constantly pressured by his superiors.”

However, Ganesh Raj Joshi, secretary at CIAA says these are all false allegations. “Although it is difficult to work without commissioners the commission cases at CIAA haven’t been affected.” According to Joshi the irregularities regarding the youth employment fund and fund for former combatants are under investigation. He also claims that none of the proceedings at CIAA has been stopped due to political pressure.

Interview with NC leader Ram Sharan Mahat, BBC Nepali Service; 23 January

Ram Sharan Mahat: Under normal circumstances, no. But this is a special case because the days of Dakshin had great expectations from the state, the government only added insult to their injury.

But surely parties like the NC and UML, who claim to be the vanguards of democracy, could have discouraged their cadre from knocking down trees and blocking the roads?

In the past two weeks, the Maoists tried to demonstrate their power by bringing in hordes of cadre from other districts. Dakshin was only trying to counter the Maoists and challenge the PM for intervening in a criminal case.

What do you have to say about your cadre’s violent ways?

This happens everywhere on the local level when outsiders try to mess with their existence, such anger is understandable. The cadre were not following our directions, it was a totally spontaneous outbreak.

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Justice, interrupted

Sita and her family say the state’s obstruction of justice is slowly killing their spirits

FADING SMILE: Sita, with her nephew on her lap, is frustrated by the state’s delaying tactics and indifference.

HALL OF SHAME: Police constable Parsuram Basnet, Senior Assistant Somnath Khanal and Section Officer Ram Prasad Koirala (l-r)

More than a month after Sita filed a complaint against officials at the Department of Immigration (DoI) and the police constable who raped her, the 20-year-old’s quest for justice remains in limbo. And while long queues of protestors continue to gather outside Baluwatar in her support, Sita and her family are gradually losing hope.

Sita worked as a domestic helper in Saudi Arabia for three years before returning to Nepal in November. She was caught at Tribhuvan International Airport for possessing a fake passport. During the interrogation at the immigration office in Kallikasthan, police constable Parsuram Basnet agreed to help her out only if she gave him a part of the 9,500 Riyal (Rs 222,624) she had saved while working abroad. When she refused, Somnath Khanal of DoI took her money, saying it was for ‘high-ranking officials’. Once

DOI let her go, Basnet took her to a lodge in old Bus Park promising to help her get back to her home in Birgur. He then proceeded to rape her throughout the night. After Khanal was caught, he confessed that section officers Ram Prasad Koirala and Tika Pokharel were also involved. All three were suspended, but Koirala and Pokharel who have close ties to the NC and CPN-M respectively have ‘disappeared’ since the incident.

Sita’s high-profile case helped put the spotlight on gender violence and pressured the government to form a monitoring committee to investigate cases of gender violence including those of Saraswoti Subedi of Anamnagar, Bindu Kumari of Bara district, and Chhori Maya Maharjan of Kathmandu.

The committee which submitted its report to the prime minister on 16 January also implicated DOI’s Director General Surekh Adhikari and Director Leil Raj Pokharel. However, both men still remain in their posts. Angry protestors burnt the report in front of Bakewat last week saying the state was providing political protection to the criminals and trying to silence Sita through monetary compensation.

Sita is unaware about the report, but is getting increasingly impatient with the state’s obstruction of justice. While Basnet and Khanal are now behind bars, she wants section officers Tika Pokharel and Ram Prasad Koirala to be jailed immediately. “I don’t understand why the government is delaying the process and refusing to punish the criminals,” asks a frustrated Sita.

She admitted to having an abortion during a radio interview with BBC Nepal last week, and says she is ready to face the consequences. “Most of my relatives and friends in Bhojpur will eventually come to know about my situation,” she admits, “I just hope they won’t treat me like a social outcast.”

Instead of focusing on the past, she wants villagers to appreciate her courage and fight for justice. “What happened was not my fault. I hope I will be able to help other young girls from falling in the same trap,” she says. Sita is currently in therapy to recover from the emotional and physical trauma.

However, Sita’s struggle is starting to take a financial toll on her family as they shuttle back and forth between Bhojpur and the capital. Her parents had to go back home last week to take care of her youngest brother who is living with their grandfather. Even her brother in Kathmandu who has been her strongest advocate so far, is getting disillusioned by the state’s apathy. “It took my sister a lot of courage to come forward, I don’t want her hopes to be shattered,” he says.

While Sita is determined to fight to the end, she too has her weak moments, “We have been going from one government office to another appealing for justice and have reached this far, but the state’s lack of interest is killing our spirits.”

Bhrikuti Rai

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Although Chairman Lotus Flower may be a habitual liar, he has this awesome habit of once in a while blurting out the truth. But whenever he does that he immediately retracts his truthful statement, saying he was just joking. Remember, a couple of years ago, he was caught on candid camera saying he tricked the UN into thinking there were 30,000 guerrillas, and when the tape was broadcast repeatedly by TV channels he said: “Har, har, har, was just pulling your legs, yar.”

The other day, during an unguarded moment in Gorkha, he got carried away and voiced his innermost secret desire of badly wanting to be prime minister. When the next morning’s papers gave it banner treatment, he said it was just a ‘joke’. At this rate, Comrade Awe-inspiring is not just going to be prime minister soon, he is also going to be Nepal’s #1 Joker. The man is getting paranoid about being hauled over the coals at the ICC, which doesn’t worry him as much as not being able to junket in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, and London. So he has figured that the best way to eliminate the threat of persecution for perpetrating war crimes and to defuse the powder keg of an internal investigation of his involvement in purloining cantonment allowances is to be PM.

In the latest example of doublespeak, PKD last Friday assured sceptical Kathmandu-based envoys (BTW, how come the North and South ambies didn’t attend?) that the TRC Bill already met international standards. He then comes out of the Shang and tells waiting reporters that the TRC Bill is a shining example of transitional justice, and the Prez should ratify it by ordinance. Maybe this time the firanghis will finally realise how this man has taken them, us, and everyone else for a ride all along.

But have to hand it to Unserer Fuhrer, the man never gives up. After his tongue-of-the-slip confession that he would make a great prime minister, he is now talking tough ahead of the Hetauda Convention next month to appease hardcore cadre accusing him of going soft and abandoning the revolution. Which is why PKD is promising fire and brimstone and a return to violence from one side of his mouth, while with the other he is smoking the peace pipe with Lal Dean.

And in our ongoing Only in Nepal Series this week we present the following:
1. When police started cracking down this week on taxis fleecing passengers, taxi drivers went on strike in Tin Coonay demanding their right to cheat.
2. Homely Minister Gutch fell asleep during a program in Sunsari where businessmen were asking the government to ‘wake up’ to control extortion.
3. Irritation Minister Yadav’s SUV was car-napped from residence, setting off a police red alert. Turns out his drunk son-in-law had taken it out for a spin.
4. Wall graffiti next to garbage pile: ‘Provide jobs to unemployed youth.’
5. Cash Baddies who control the Finance Ministry send out letters to businesses to extort 7 corrodes for their party convention.
6. The prime minister tweets saying we can ‘shoot him’ if he can’t turn Nepal into Bihar.
7. Police arrest police in Dailekh.

Nepal’s #1 Joke

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