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WHO IS IN CHARGE?

Top leaders from the four main parties appear to be at a loss about how to convince Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi into accepting the post of Chairman of Election Administrative Council.

Even though the clock is ticking for elections in June, there doesn't seem to be a sense of urgency among the parties which spent all day Thursday in internal meetings. They are expected to approach Regmi again on Friday to persuade him that he won't just be a rubber-stamp leader.

Earlier this week, Regmi voiced concern that he would

be a mere puppet of the all-party political mechanism. The chief justice is also worried about the resistance among and within the UML, NC, and the fringe parties to his appointment, and the threat by student unions of street protests against him.

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai took time Thursday to send out optimistic tweets: 'It's good all major political forces are now united to form electoral govt under CJ. We have now to

ensure constitutional validity Any Advice?'

Another tweet: 'Let's now focus on holding elections by 1st week of June. Electoral govt under CJ is the last alternative for that purpose. Please no hassles.'

However, election officials say it is already too late to hold elections in June. And it would be impossible if they have to tinker with voter lists and constituencies, or ensure photo-

IDs for voters.

Everyone agrees that only fresh elections will get Nepal out of the current impasse. But elections for the sake of elections may not resolve anything, and it would be better to prepare for

Editorial
Electing to go
for elections
page 2

clean and free voting, even if it is in November.

Kunda Dixit



TSUM

Sonam Lama writes about his home valley in the Himalaya that is a spiritual refuge

page 6-7

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ELECTING TO GO FOR ELECTIONS



BIKRAM RAI

The art of compromise is based on the premise that both sides in an argument give in a little. Unfortunately, politics in Nepal has become a zero sum game where both sides want all or nothing. Every concession is seen as a sign of weakness. Our so-called leaders don't just want to be top dog, they want to be the only dog.

This was the reason for the democratic decay and disillusionment after 1990. Groupism within the Nepali Congress, the factionalism within the UML, or the rivalry between them held the whole country hostage during the 90s. Politicians incapable of thinking beyond their narrow partisan or personal interests squandered the hard-won gains of the people's movement. They couldn't even stand together to confront the growing Maoist violence that was sweeping the country.

After the ceasefire in 2006 and in the political roller coaster post-2008, we see the same malaise. Only this time the Maoists are also in the fray, and the former revolutionaries are behaving no differently than the parties that they fought a war to replace. Despite declaring themselves to be a 'civilian party' in their Hetauda Convention, the Maoists are still using threats, extortion, and intimidation as standard operating procedure. They may not openly carry guns anymore, but they still believe

Only fresh elections will get us out of this rut, but they have to be clean and violence-free

that political power comes from the implicit threat of using a gun.

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai has agreed to step down in favour of Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi to lead an Interim Election Council to hold polls in June. We have argued in this space that this was a bad idea because it blurred the separation of powers between the executive and judiciary. It was a proposal by one party that wanted to remove the last remaining hurdle in its quest for absolute power. After dissolving the assembly, buying into media, coopting the police, appeasing the army, infiltrating the bureaucracy, only the Supreme Court was standing in the way.

The feckless democratic opposition walked right into the Maoist trap. Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal was betting on the political parties being so tempted with the possibility of seeing Baburam Bhattarai step down that they'd ultimately come around to supporting the CJ

idea. And that is what happened. Even die-hard anti-Maoists in the UML and NC who had opposed the idea mysteriously changed their minds overnight. It is a needlessly risky road, when there were other more acceptable alternatives available. But if this is the only way there will be the compromise necessary to hold elections in June, so be it.

The NC and UML have to take their share of the blame in the Maoists coming up with this proposal. If they had agreed to join a Bhattarai-led all party government six months ago we wouldn't have to jump through hoops to get here.

As things stand now, it is Regmi's turn to have doubts about the wording of the deal. The UML leadership, too, is having second thoughts. The young turks in the NC are on the verge of a mutiny, and the openly selfish smaller parties in the Bhattarai coalition want to sabotage the deal. There are other snags: the photo-ID citizenship requirement to be able to vote, the re-demarcation of constituencies to reflect the 2011 census and including those who have turned 18 since 2008. Regmi himself fears that the parties will use him as a rubber stamp to endorse decisions by the all-party political mechanism, and he has told them to look for someone else if that is the case.

These delays mean that it is also looking very tight for elections in June. The Maoists used muscle in 2008 to cheat and intimidate, this time they have money too. The NC and UML know what happened five years ago and will also be investing in deterrence. Criminalised militant groups are still active under political protection in the Tarai.

Everyone agrees that only fresh elections will get us out of this rut. But elections for the sake of elections will not be the answer. It is better to give the new Chairman of the Interim Election Council time to organise free and fair voting, even if it is in November.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

HIGH COSTS, LOW FARES

Imagine airplane fares in Nepal as a private sector product and priced differently depending on which passport you hold ('High costs, low fares', Sunir Pandey, #643). One price if you are Nepali, another if you are Indian, a third if you are French. Fine if you are talking about a government-owned or supported carrier, where Nepalis pay taxes and are theoretically entitled to a lower price. But why should a foreigner pay more for a ticket than a Nepali on Buddha Air, which is a private company? Imagine if a Nepali went to the US and was told he would have to pay double for a ticket on United Airlines because he didn't have an American passport? This is all about Nepalis not understanding how free and fair markets work. They don't get it when it comes to petrol and they don't get it when it comes to airplane tickets. They need to wake up.

Pkrugman

- The fare policy is quite absurd and it's unique to Nepal. Local fares are being forced down to unprofitable levels due to competition and overcapacity, while foreigners are charged some of the highest fares anywhere, meaning that only high-end tourists and those on work-related travel fly in Nepal. By lowering the difference between fares or offering competitive web-based (regardless of who you are) fares according to supply and demand, companies

would partially address the over-capacity problem.

Lkhola

- Karnali people used to have mixed feelings about Yeti/Tara Air, but it's not the case any more. I remember when Tara Air could not base its Twin Otter in the autumn of 2012. The new single engine airlines charged the Karnali folk three times the fares that Tara used to. Tara also conducts a certain number of subsidised flights every week to the remote airfields for the local Karnali people. Now which private airlines does this?

Tara Supporter

- Birendra Basnet's excuse appears very weak. Why blame rivals for a 'smear campaign' when maintenance lapses required the intervention of Pratt & Whitney and the suspension of three senior engineers? Blaming software glitches is ridiculous. Anyone who knows anything about aviation is aware that maintenance records are checked and crossed checked all the time. Blaming software for maintenance lapses does not sound reassuring at all.

Fly Guy

- The main reason the fares have gone down on main trunk routes, at least for Nepalis, is because passenger numbers have gone up which has allowed airlines to go for higher capacity aircraft with lower per seat km cost. Buddha has benefited the most with its fleet of ATR's and if others want



to stay in the game, they will have to follow simple market rules. As far as 'Kuires' not getting the similar treatment as Nepalis, sorry dudes, this is the only privilege we get for holding a Nepali passport. You know how hard it is to get a visa for us to your more civilised countries? Just kidding. May be these Airline companies will offer net based competitive fares direct to flyers (Kuires and Nepalis) when the competition gets tougher or some common sense prevails in their heads.

Krishna S

- Good article from Captain Lama as always ('Keep the flag flying', Vijay Lama, #643). A national carrier that serves the interest of Nepal would be so great. Hopefully the politicians will learn to let it remain independent and run by professionals one fine day. I disagree, however, on the domestic involvement of the national carrier. It would be cheaper

and more efficient to incentivise private carriers such as Tara Air, Sita Air, Goma Air, Kasthamandap etc to ply remote routes. Let it concentrate on where it's required and where private Nepali airlines cannot go because of high investment and risk involved.

TS

- The former RNAC was the training ground for technicians, pilots, marketing persons, planners, and others which helped enhance aviation in the private sector. It had been doing very well till at least the 90s and later got into the clutches of people with vested interests who had no love for the company.

Khem Lal Bhusal

- There seems to be quite a bit of flag waving by Capt Lama so often when the misery of Nepal's civil aviation comes to the surface. I understand his frustration. What else can he do but rant against the prevailing culture and/or rock himself as a very patriotic man amidst the toxic environment. I pray one day he gets the chance to cure the ills of his sector to keep the flag flying.

Nirmal Ghimire

LOST IN TRANSITION

It's common sense what Prof Johan Galtung says, that as long as there is inequality and injustice there will be violence in society ('Lost in transition', Editorial, #643). It is the media's job to expose these precursors to conflict. And after conflict, as the Bangladeshis are finding out, violence can erupt again if

revenge is allowed to fester in society. Thank you for this Editorial, it should be read by all Nepali politicians, especially the Maoists.

Bela

- If Johan Galtung loves the Maoists so much, he should start a Maoist revolution in Europe instead of his peace consultancy in Nepal where journalists like the editor of *Nepali Times* seem to think he is some kind of guru.

Lila

- It's interesting to see the Norwegians lecturing about how to end the conflict. They have, of course, been among the leading champions of the Maoists, never seeing how doing so made them little better than the Maoist cream they covered for.

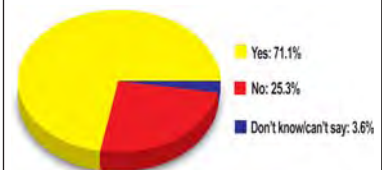
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Weekly Internet Poll #644

Q. Should the parties have appointed commissioners at the Election Commission before announcing polls?

Total votes: 775



Weekly Internet Poll # 645. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you think elections will take place on 5 June once the parties agree on who should head the next government?

Agree to disagree



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

The unlocking of political horns by appointing the chief Justice as the head of an election government, although unpalatable to many, is still welcome. It was not just the best of the worst options, it was the only option.

Politics, as someone said, is the art of the possible. When all other alternatives, from a consensus government led by Baburam Bhattarai to one led by Sushil Koirala, failed to gain acceptance there really was no other way. Politics must overcome barriers to keep the affairs of state running. And when the issue at hand is about ensuring continuity to democracy through franchise, the CJ card was the only one left on the table. Critics of the formula may have a valid point about separation of powers, but they must also be able to offer a solution.

The country has been without an elected body for almost a year, there haven't been national elections for eight years and local elections for 13 years. The drafting of the constitution which was an integral part of the agreement that brought an end to the war is in limbo. Important bills are stuck at Shital Niwas and the electorate has become a silent bystander to endless political squabbling. This cannot go on, and if it takes a technocratic government to reinstate republican order, so be it.



CJ as the head of the electoral government will only make sense if the parties agree not to disagree about polls end-May

To understand why successive governments after 2008 have been unable to deliver what they set out to do requires deeper analysis of the interim constitution and the political backdrop in which the governments came to power. Article 43 (1) of the interim constitution mandates that all government decisions be consistent with the spirit of the People's Movement and as per political consensus among the parties. While the spirit of the movement has been elaborately laid out in the preface, the constitution is silent on what amounts to consensus. The lack of clear authority and jurisdiction has been used by the opposition to bash the Maoist-led coalition which has been blamed for the dissolution of the CA, even when it was all the political parties which were in perpetual disagreement.

If a future electoral government is to ensure timely elections, it has to be given a clear mandate and delegated the requisite authority to do what it needs to hold free, fair, and timely polls. For that to happen, the parties must agree not to hold the elections hostage to their incessant bickering.

Chances are that disagreements over forms of governance, state restructuring, and the content of the Truth and Reconciliation and Disappearance Commissions will erupt again in the new Constituent Assembly, and again stall the new statute. But people want the parties to resolve those issues in the chambers, and not play politics with them on the streets.

The powers that may have agreed to appoint the CJ as the head of the electoral government, but the devil is in the details. The decision has not been owned by many of their own leaders, and the fringe parties are angered by their exclusion. The CJ has refused to become a rubber stamp for the all-party mechanism which seeks to run the country de facto. Then there are practical and logistical difficulties in holding elections by May or June.

Luckily for the people, parties in the government as well as in the opposition are doomed to cooperate as long as the present Interim Constitution exists. So for their own sake and the sake of the people, they must go for elections at the earliest, May or May not.

Undoubtedly, this is a desperate move by parties who have cancelled each other out by their single-minded obsession with power. But it would be an exaggeration to say that democratic politics has failed in this country.

A few months ago, Sushil Koirala whom some see as a leader of the 'democratic forces' against Maoist 'authoritarianism' was charged with having sold out when he was proposed as the consensus candidate by Pushpa Kamal Dahal. In 2011, when Jhala Nath Khanal became the prime minister he was publicly labelled a Maoist puppet by fellow comrades Madhav Nepal and KP Oli. Now, Justice Regmi is accused of being a Maoist henchman.





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Innovating a new Nepal

Mahabir Pun needs help to scale up his award-winning work in a remote Myagdi village to the national level

KUNDA DIXIT

Mahabir Pun won the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2007 for his project to bring wireless Internet to rural Nepal, but he found out last week that the Internet was also a great way to remotely get through to the prime minister.

Pun had met Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai a year ago to discuss his pet idea to set up a National Innovation Centre to promote creativity and generate jobs so Nepalis don't have to migrate abroad for work. Bhattarai had nodded, said it was a great idea and instructed his office to implement it.

As expected, nothing happened. Whenever he came to Kathmandu from his native village in Myagdi, Pun followed up with the ministries and all he got was smiles, pats on the back, and nodding of heads.

Last week, Pun vented his frustration with a direct Tweet to the Prime Minister's Twitter handle, @brb_laaldhwoj, and through a message posted on the listserv of NNSD (Nepal Network for Social, Economic and Environmental Dialogue) whose members include Nepal's top academics, civil society activists, politicians, and bureaucrats.

'After talking to responsible political leaders, high level bureaucrats, development agencies, and educated elites in Kathmandu for more than a year, I have a feeling now that nobody cares about the immense need of one innovation centre in Nepal in order to uplift Nepal from a beggar nation to a well-to-do nation,' Pun began his passionate appeal.

He went on to lament that while donor agencies poured billions of dollars into Nepal, no one seemed interested in stemming the haemorrhage of working age people out of the country. He said he was shocked to read in the papers that the cabinet had sanctioned Rs 3 billion to buy helicopters for the Nepal Army.

'If the government has that much money to buy helicopters, how come it cannot provide half a billion rupees as loan to help start an innovation centre?' Pun asked.

Pun has registered a non-profit company called Nepal Abiskar Kendra with noted ex-bureaucrats like Rameswor Khanal, the man behind the Chilime Project, Dambar Nepali, and others in the advisory board. The plan is to build a 10MW hydropower plant, and sell electricity worth \$6 million a year to the grid.

That money will be used to service the loan and run the centre sustainably into the future. It will use information technology to help creative Nepalis with financing and know-how to launch businesses. Pun is seeking a soft loan of \$6 million for equity to build the hydropower plant, either from the government or a multilateral donor.

Pun posted his message on the NNSD bulletin board at 7:45PM on Friday, and within three hours there was a SMS from the Prime Minister's Office summoning him to Baluwatar the next morning. This was surprising because the all-party negotiations on setting up a CJ-led election government were reaching a critical stage.

Pun cleared security to enter Baluwatar, and within five minutes Bhattarai was there with Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun, Chief Secretary Krishna Hari Baskota, and the PMO Secretary Lila Mani Poudel. The PM began by saying he had read Pun's Twitter message and fully agreed with the concept of a Nepal Innovation Centre, and he asked the Finance Minister how the government could support it.

The meeting dragged on for an hour, and Pun remembers that as expected the minister and the secretaries had no concrete ideas about how the government could help finance the 10MW power plant. But before the entire PMO, including the prime minister, went off for a picnic in Godavari, the meeting agreed to invite the World Bank, ADB, and other multilateral agencies to push the idea.

"It will be a miracle if the Secretary finds a single donor to contribute a soft loan for the innovation," Pun told *Nepali Times*, "let's wait and see."

As a boy, Mahabir Pun used to graze sheep in the high meadows near the village of Nangi below the Annapurnas. Going to school, he had no pencil or textbooks. Most of his neighbours became British Gurkhas, but Pun got an education and a scholarship in the University of Nebraska.

Unlike most other Nepalis, however, Pun returned to Nepal. He didn't just come back to Kathmandu but went back to Nangi to see how Information Technology could help his community leapfrog into the Internet age.

With the Nepal Innovation Centre, Mahabir Pun is trying to scale up what he has done in Nangi to a national level. His plan may have a better chance of being funded under a technocratic government than under one led by political parties. Or better still, Pun should be a part of the technocratic government? 

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SULAIMAN DAUD

In a country where nearly half the population is unemployed, any new opportunity that creates jobs and stops Nepalis from being forced to migrate has to be welcomed. CloudFactory, a Kathmandu-based technology start-up company, is doing just that.

CloudFactory already employs 600 workers, most of them are college-aged along with 80 staff members, and it aims to hire 5,000 more by the end of the year. The company is based around the twin resources of crowd-sourcing and the Internet. The organisation sources for large-scale digital projects from across the globe, and then breaks them down into simple tasks that are then distributed to its pool of workers.

"We are thrilled to provide work opportunities for so many people in Nepal by the end of this year," said Mark Sears, CEO



of CloudFactory at a company event called 'We LOVE Nepal' at City Centre Mall last week. About 300 of his employees were treated to a free screening of *Captain America* to thank them for their hard work.

CloudFactory has a lot to celebrate. The company's data entry services are in high demand and extra work has been coming in, including digitising receipts from the United States and collating medical records from Canada.

With the extra workload, CloudFactory can therefore afford to hire 5,000 more people by the end of 2013.

But Sears doesn't intend to stop there, his long-term goal is to 'connect' one million people in Nepal and other countries through the Net and generate income for people who could in turn do social service for their communities.

"There is so much potential in Nepal," says Radhesh Pant, the CEO of the Nepal Investment Board who attended the event. "But someone needs to step up to make the most of it, and it starts with people like those in CloudFactory."

Sushant Satyal, a 'cloud worker' who joined the company when it only employed 30 workers, says the organisation encourages young people like him to perform community work as a way of giving back to society what society gave to them.

CloudFactory's example is not just the usual corporate social responsibility, it hopes to integrate a sense of community in its workers, a new corporate model where its employees are not just workers, but also pillars of the community.

Sushant and others like him know the road ahead is not smooth, with power cuts and political disturbances, integrating their professional work at CloudFactory with community action will be difficult. But it is an example of the talent pool existing in Nepal, and an innovative way to create jobs and a sense of commitment to the community. 

www.cloudfactory.com



HEADS IN THE CLOUDS: Team Leader Sushant Satyal and 'Cloud Seeder' Jyotshna Thapa are just two young Nepalis who work at CloudFactory. Satyal says: "I like the fact that CloudFactory encourages us to give back to society what society gave to us, whether it is by volunteering our time or by donating some of the money we earn."

BIZ BRIEFS

Clean sweep



Skoda division of Morang Auto Works (MAW) in partnership with the

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) will distribute 300 improved cooking stoves in Makwanpur. A joint press release said the one year partnership will complement ICIMOD's ongoing work related to black carbon and air pollution.

Flying high

Etihad Airways, the national carrier of the United Arab Emirates, reported net profit of US\$42 million in 2012, up by 200 per cent from 2011.

The last year saw strong improvements in revenues, passenger numbers, and cost control.



Colourful life



Kansai Nerolac Paints India, a subsidiary of Kansai Paints Japan has started operations in Nepal under the brand name Kansai Paints Nepal. According to a press statement, KNP had acquired 68 per cent stake in Nepal Shalimar Paints last year.

Free holiday



The eight holiday winners of Bajajtantra campaign have left for a five day trip to Thailand. Hansraj Hulaschand the authorised distributor of Bajaj motorbikes in Nepal launched the campaign.

Happy homes

Asian Paints Nepal has launched Apex Tile Guard, high-quality emulsion paint. The company says Apex Tile Guard is the only clay tile and brick coating available in the Nepali market which has the ability to protect tiles and bricks from harsh weather conditions.



Easy business

International Finance Corporation is supporting the government of Nepal in simplifying and automating procedures for issuing licences and other approvals for investors. It is supported by the UK Government and the Norwegian agency for Development Cooperation.



Climbing fun



Astrex Climbing Wall and NepalSutra are organising Wall Spiders to promote climbing culture in Nepal on 22 and 23 February. The competition is open to 14-24 year olds.

Happy birthday



Waterfront Resort in Pokhara celebrated its first anniversary. The staff of the resort donated blood and cleaned the surrounding lake to mark the occasion.

Six and counting

Triveni Byapar has opened its sixth showroom in Banepa featuring products from Yasuda, Panasonic, Daewoo, Sanyo, Moulinex, and Tiger. The showroom offers a variety of home electronic appliances.



Customers first



International Money Express began the IME Customers' Special Week from 19 February.

On this occasion IME is giving Ncell SIM worth Rs 99 talk time for free to each customer for every transaction made at IME Centres and private agents across Nepal.

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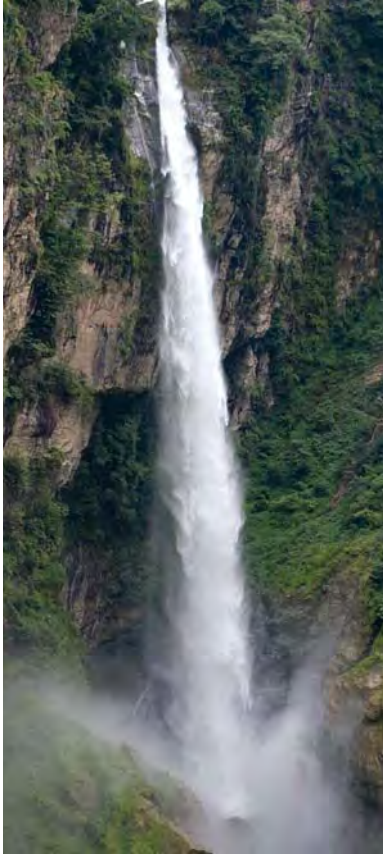
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SONAM LAMA in GORKHA

For decades, trekking in Nepal was synonymous with Everest or Annapurna, which got 90 per cent of the adventure tourists who visited Nepal every year. But that is slowly changing. As roads snake up to Manang and even Mustang is connected to the highway grid, trekkers are looking for regions untouched by the internal combustion engine. Because of its proximity to Kathmandu, its mountain wilderness and the rich Tibetan culture, the attraction of the Manaslu Circuit is spreading by word of mouth. The trek follows the mighty Budi Gandaki River that scythes between the Himalchuli and Ganesh Himal ranges, cutting steep gorges with spectacular waterfalls. The trail follows the river and leads up across the Larkya Pass (5,400m) and into the Manang Valley, which is the route taken by most trekkers at present. But at the confluence of the Shiar River and the Budi Gandaki an hour and a half walk from Philim, if you take the right fork on the road you reach the mystic and holy Tsum Valley. If there is a Shangri

La in Nepal, this is it. The Guru Rimpoche is said to have meditated here, and there is even a cave where the Mila Repa stayed. Tsum is one of the sacred hidden valleys of the Himalaya called 'beyul' - places of such tranquility and beauty that they make mortals meditate on the eternal and allow them to transcend to a higher spiritual plane. Beyul means 'hidden lands' in Tsumpa and Tibetan, where people fled to in times of strife for safety, or in peace time to pray and meditate. Within these valleys there are nooks and crannies that are even more secluded, where saints go to find bliss. And then there are stories, told by monks at night around the hearth, of places so sacred and secret that they exist in the border between reality



In the Mountain of the Soul

Tsum Valley is a spiritual refuge for those who want to escape the world



ALL PICS: LOBSANG CHHIRING LAMA



Holy book

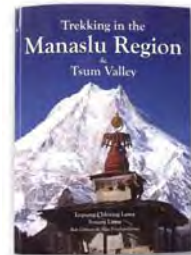
Most books about Nepal's trekking destinations are written by Europeans or Americans, and contributors to tourist guides written by foreigners. The few books on the Himalaya by Nepalis are by Kathmandu-based writers.

Now comes one of the first guidebooks to an exotic trekking locale written by a native. Sonam Lama (pictured, left) was born in the Tsum Valley, and his village school was only up to Grade 5 so he had to come down to Gorkha for high school. After that, he studied engineering in Kathmandu, but felt perpetually homesick. On clear days in Kathmandu, when he saw the Ganesh Himal range looming on the northwestern horizon he couldn't bear it any longer and trekked home.

Lama went to Darmstadt in Germany to study urban development, and specialised in sustainable emergency architecture in Barcelona before returning home to Nepal. He couldn't stay in Kathmandu, and organises research expeditions to remote valleys, and is an adviser at the Tsum Welfare Committee which works on education, cultural heritage

conservation, health improvement, and tourism development in his home valley. Tourists had just started trickling in, and he was convinced that eco-tourism was the future with a potential to lift living standards.

Lama, now 34, decided to collaborate with his friend from primary school in Tsum, Lobsang Chhiring, to publish a guidebook. Lobsang used to work for the Nepal Police, quit after the Maoist insurgency, and now works for the Norwegian Cruise Lines. While Lobsang took pictures spanning 10 years, Sonam wrote the explanatory text. *Introduction to Trekking in the Manaslu Region and Tsum Valley* was launched last month by Himalayan Map House.



Introduction to Trekking in the Manaslu Region and Tsum Valley
Himalayan Map House, 2013
144 pages
Rs 1,250
www.himalayanmaphouse.com

The Manaslu and Tsum regions are one of Nepal's last Himalayan jewels ... however as magnificent as the mountains are, it is perhaps the people of Nepal that are its greatest asset. Below these giant peaks they are hardworking, boisterous, industrious, endearing, brimming with humour, versatile, vibrant, and hungry for change. As new dirt roads begin to snake along the deep gorges and high meadows, progress will surely begin to change the region. Trekkers visiting the Manaslu and Tsum regions are sure to be smitten by this magical place. All will leave with a renewed inspiration for life ...

from the *Introduction to Trekking in the Manaslu Region and Tsum Valley*

and mysticism, between the temporal and the spiritual.

The biggest challenge for tourism in Nepal is to preserve our traditional heritage and way of life while we open up to the world. From Humla to Mustang to Tsum, we face the same challenge. The younger generation, mesmerised by the ersatz of modernity that comes with roads and tv forget the true value of their sacred traditions.

Tsum Valley is the starting point for the holy Kyimolung Trail, the 120km sacred circumambulation in Nepal and Tibet of Siringi Himal. Pilgrims used to trek around the mountain till Tibet became out of bounds, but they still do the partial trek on the Nepal side.

Tourism in the Manaslu Circuit has been picking up with nearly 4,000 trekkers in 2012, but only one-fourth of that number went to Tsum which was opened only in 2008 as a restricted area for which visitors need a permit from the immigration office in Kathmandu.

One of the ways that we can strike a balance between the traditional and modern is by promoting sensitive tourism so that visitors, aware of the need to preserve local traditions, generate

funds for environmental and cultural conservation. This is the successful Annapurna Conservation Area model that is also being replicated in the Manaslu region, with tourism income ploughed into the local economy. Homestay tourism is being promoted, local guides are being trained, and alternative energy resources used. However, tourists and trekking agencies complain of harassment and corruption in the restricted area permit procedure.

If these issues can be smoothened, Manaslu and the Tsum Valley have the potential to be the next big thing in trekking in the Himalaya, and a model for balancing preservation with prosperity. Manaslu can be loosely translated as 'The Mountain of the Soul', and the Tsum Valley in its shadow can be a spiritual refuge for those who want to escape the stress of the modern world. 🇳🇵

Sonam Lama is a native of Tsum Valley and an architect who specialised in emergency housing in Germany and Spain.

nepalitimes.com

Home away from home, #632
Kyimolung, the blessed land, #201



OYSTER PERPETUAL DATEJUST

SULUX CENTRE
Woodland Hotel Complex, Durbar Marg
Kathmandu, Nepal


ROLEX



EVENTS

MO:MO: MANIA, the biggest momo festival in Nepal, including free drinks, live music, and games for children. *Rs 650 for adults, Rs 450 for children, 23 February, Bhrikuti Mandap, 3pm*

Pranamaya Yoga, an Ashtanga yoga weekend retreat in the hills with Ellen Johannesen. *Rs 11,500, 23 to 24 February, Namo Buddha Resort, info@pranamaya-yoga.com*

Sustainable workshops, learn how to make briquettes and a recycled roof so that you can lower your electricity bill. *Rs 150 per day, 28 to 3 March, 10am to 4pm, Hariyo Chowk, www.hariyochowk.sattya.org/2twodayworkshop/*

Mustang, a spiritual odyssey, an exhibition that showcases thangkas, photographs, sand mandala, installations, and dance from Mustang. *Runs till 13 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery*

Eco fair, see a wealth of stalls and activities on what local schools and businesses are doing to promote the protection of the environment. *Rs 50, 22 February, 2.30pm, The British School, Jhamsikhel, (01)5521794*

Cycle rally, students of British School invite you to participate in their rally to raise funds for a charity in Dhading. *23 February, 7.30am, Patan-Basantapur-Jhamsikhel, 9851109546*

Documentary film-making workshop, explore principles and components of social-issue documentaries with Czech-Canadian film-maker Kristyna Balaban. *Rs 2,500, 20 February to 6 March, Sattya Media Arts, Jawalakhel, www.sattya.org/2013/02/socialissuedoc*

The play of plays, see this humorous play to know how frantic it is during a theatre production. *Rs 100 and Rs 200, runs till 2 March, Sarwanam Theatre, Kalikasthan*

Mustang trail race 2013, be part of a group of athletes and get the experience of a lifetime by running through the roof of the world. *27 April to 10 May, info@mustangtrailrace.com*



WALL SPIDERS, come and see 100 young male and female climbers compete in scaling walls as they prove their worth in lead, speed, and boulder categories. *Rs 200 to register in competition, 22 to 23 February, 10am onwards, Astrek Climbing Wall, Bhagwan Bahal, Thamel, (01)4419265*

MUSIC

Come taste the band, spread the word around, Deep Purple's gonna be in town - first and last chance to catch the legendary band live in Kathmandu. *15 March, Dasrath Rangasala, Tripureswor*

DINING



HIMALAYAN PIZZA, this Italian restaurant has enough options to keep both adults and children coming back for more. *Thamel*

Tian Rui, if you're looking for genuinely good Chinese food this restaurant is the place to go. *Thapathali*

Cafe Cheeno, comfortable and elegant, Cafe Cheeno is the perfect place to have a cup of coffee and chat with friends. *Patan Dhoka*

The Village Cafe, authentic Newari food straight from the heart. *Pulchok*

Noyoz, this tiny little joint serves food that tastes like your mother's home-cooking. *Bhatbhateni*

Yeok Teck, the most intriguing part of the menu is the variety of 'mock meat' dishes on offer. *Bhanimandal*



HERITAGE KITCHEN AND BAR, quick, friendly service, good Thai food, and the charm of the refurbished old Newari building. *Thamel*

Mulchowk, the blend of culinary expertise and charms of a bygone era. *Babarmahal*

Kasi, spread out over a large terrace overlooking Phora Darbar, Kasi offers a delectable plate of Newari delicacies. *Darbar Marg*

Backyard, incredibly reasonable prices, modest and simple food has made this restaurant a favourite among Nepalis and foreigners alike. *Jhamsikhel*

Bombay Masala, flays the limits of geography with a wide variety of cuisine. *Pulchok*

Buzz, the food at Buzz is good and wholesome, it will leave your palate buzzing. *Baluwatar*



CAPITAL GRILL, the American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone's tastes. *Bhatbhateni*

Just Baked, haven for those with a sweet tooth. *Battisputali*

Bagaicha, serves Nepali, Indian, Chinese, Continental, and Thai dishes. *Jawalakhel*

GETAWAYS



Mum's Garden Resort, head out to Pokhara for a peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages surrounded by a lush green garden with great views of Phewa Lake and the Annapurna range. *Lake Side, Pokhara, (061)463468, www.mumsgardenresort.com*

Temple Tree Resort and Spa, a peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna, it'll be hard to leave once you get here. *Gaurighat, Lakeside, (61)465819*

Himalayan Wellness Centre, a one-stop centre for a relaxed mind and healthy body inside the Park Village Hotel. *Budhanilkantha, open all week, 9801066661, www.himalayanwellness.com.np*

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निम्न बुकिङ्ग काउण्टरहरूमा पनि ग्राहक बनाईन्छ:

कमल कौशल स्टोर्स: न्युरोड, ४२२२४५६ | त्रिसा सप्लायर्स: लमजुङ, ४८४१४१७०४५ | गोर्खा न्यू एण्ड स्टेशनरी: सोलुखुम्बु, ४३५५७६० | जयबागेश्वरी कम्प्युटेशन: जयबागेश्वरी, ४४६७०३४
एस् एस् सेटार्ड: बसुन्धारा, ४३५६४७५ | सिस्टम फोटोकपी: पाटनढोका, ५५५०१७१ | न्यू लालिच प्रिन्टर्स: लमजुङ, ५५४३५८२ | निसा बुक्स: लमजुङ, ५५३९५५७ | अंकुर ट्राभल्स: गढाचौर, ६६३३५५८ | भण्डारी साईबर: नैतीदेवी, ४४९८४९४ | किपु बुक्स: कीर्तिपुर, ४३३९७७५
न्यू पि. पि. बुक्स: कलकौ, ४२८०६७३, ४२८२४५९ | दीपसेवा कम्प्युटेशन: कोटेश्वर, ४६०००७० | सुमिता क्लासिफाईड: नयाँ बानेश्वर, ४९०४२३७ | साई न्यूजिक: बापनाउँ, ४४६९३५५, ४४६३५९२

Cycles of change

History is full of stories of great civilisations that once flourished with culture, attained prosperity, then made some grave mistakes, and now only exist as fragmented archeological sites, or have simply moved into the pages of bland history books.



Engineer and energy planner Anil Chitrakar will look into the positives and negatives of crucial periods in Nepal's history and assess the present state of the country so that we may make correct decisions to avoid an Ozymandian fate in the near future.

22 February, 9.30am, Hotel Shankar, Lazimpat, cgsnepal@yahoo.com
Rs 100 for members, Rs 400 for non-members, tea, and coffee included

Mark Davidson and Miracle Wine advertisement featuring a man holding a glass of wine and several bottles of wine. Text includes: "PRESTIGE WINE IN NEPAL", "MARK DAVIDSON AND MIRACLE WINE", "TELEPHONE: 01 4252841", and "AUSTRALIAN CERTIFIED ORGANIC".

Degaa Restaurant advertisement showing the interior of the restaurant and three plates of food. Text includes: "Degaa Restaurant", "Kumari pati, Lalitpur | 5008679", and "Yeah!!! You will love it.....".

Barah Jewellery Industries Pvt. Ltd. advertisement featuring images of women wearing jewelry. Text includes: "बराह ज्वेलरी इण्डस्ट्रिज प्रा. लि.", "BARAHA JEWELLERY INDUSTRIES PVT. LTD.", and contact information for Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Hong Kong.

Wall Spiders Youth Climbing Competition advertisement featuring a person climbing a wall. Text includes: "WALL SPIDERS YOUTH CLIMBING COMPETITION", "ON 22ND/23RD FEBRUARY 2013", "Free Entrance for the Event", and contact information for Astrek Climbing Wall.

Ruslan 100% Pure Music advertisement featuring a logo and the text "SOMEPLACE ELSE".



PICS: CINDREY LIU

As the old saying goes, the best way to stay healthy is to eat like a king in the morning, eat like a peasant in the afternoon, and eat like a pauper at night. If you happen to be around Pokhara's Lakeside, Caffe Concerto Pizzeria Restaurant is the ideal place to start your day with a breakfast fit for royalty. A two-storey building opposite the former royal

palace, Caffe Concerto is also known for its Italian style menu of pizzas and pastas. But to our surprise, its breakfast menu had better choices than most other restaurants in Pokhara or in the capital. Our first order was the Platter B/F (pic, right), which we assumed stood for breakfast. A large plate of cheese and breakfast meats served with a thick slice of

Caffe Concerto Pizzeria

toast and a mess of roasted potatoes, it was a very hearty meal for just Rs 290. The cheese went well with the ham and salami, but the peach jam served with the toast was a pleasant surprise. As we were more familiar with blackberry and raspberry jam, trying the peach jam was a novel experience. It turned out great on toast

without being too sweet. We also ordered the American breakfast set (pic, left), a slightly pricier option at Rs 335, but one that didn't disappoint when it arrived. You can choose omelette, scrambled or sunny side up egg. In the end we settled on scrambled. The eggs weren't as fluffy as we had hoped, but the croissant made up for it. Warm and buttery, soft on the inside and crispy on the outside, it was so good we felt like ordering a whole basket to take home. Being more tea lovers than coffee junkies, we also ordered

a pot of mint tea. The menu boasted that the range of herbal teas was made with fresh herbs grown in Concerto's own garden and infused with honey. For a reasonable price of Rs 140 the smooth, sweet tea was the perfect choice to finish off our meal. The cafe also provides free Wi-Fi and a selection of fresh Gelato (Italian ice-cream) for those with a sweet tooth. Before you go for a late morning stroll along Phewa Lake, drop by Concerto for a long, lazy holiday breakfast to start your day on the right foot. Sulaiman Daud

How to get there: the restaurant is located near Phewa Lake, opposite the former royal palace.



Ruslan Vodka advertisement featuring a group of people sitting on a beach and a bottle of Ruslan Vodka. Text includes: "Join The V Generation", "RUSLAN VODKA", "100% Pure Vodka", and "Drink responsibly".



AMOUR



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Last year in June I reviewed *The White Ribbon*, a film by the Austrian director Michael Haneke that won the Palme D'or at Cannes in 2009. I chose to write about that film then in order to celebrate his winning of the Palme D'or at the Cannes Film Festival again, in 2012, for *Amour*, a film that has become available to us just now.

Amour is every bit the minimalist masterpiece that I had anticipated over the last few months of waiting. Made for an astonishingly low sum of 7.3 million euros, the film traces the final months of Georges (Jean-Louis Trintignant) and Anne (Emmanuelle Riva), an elderly couple living in an old but spacious and elegant apartment in Paris filled with oil paintings and a well used, perfectly tuned piano, depicting a lifetime's worth of the appreciation of beauty.

The film starts explosively but mellows into scenes portraying the simple harmony between the couple, the affection they feel for each other, their ease in each other's company, and the comfort with which they live during their gently waning years. Then one morning at breakfast, Anne suffers from a stroke, and their lives change irrevocably.

As George cares for Anne over the course of her illness she inevitably deteriorates; it is then that we see why the film is titled *Amour* (which is the French word for love).

Even while Georges is forced to hire nurses to care for Anne, he continues to treat her with a tenderness that comes from long years of companionship. When she won't drink water at some point, spitting it out at him because she has

lost the will to live, Georges smacks her, not out of irritation but from fear, desperation, and exhaustion.

It is little scenes like these, slowly built up with the precise and unerring eye of the director, with the help of his cinematographer, the great Darius Khondji, that binds the film together creating an effect which is so subtle yet so realistic that the audience feels we are indeed witnessing this couple's lives unfolding right before our eyes.

Haneke's style has always been slow, watchful, patient, and non-judgmental. While contemplating this beautiful yet painful film I was reminded strongly of another domestic drama, the film *A Separation* (2011) by the Iranian director Asghar Farhadi (also reviewed in the *Nepali Times*).

Both films deal with families disintegrating, a subject that can easily descend into melodrama and messiness. Yet both of these directors are skilled and restrained enough to allow the actors to work on behalf of their excellent scripts, trusting in their skills, and in the mysteries of the human condition, that when treated with the sleight of hand of a wise director can be so much more compelling than any thriller.

Amour has been nominated both in the Best Foreign Language as well as Best Picture categories this year. The Academy will probably pick *Lincoln* over *Amour*, and while both are great films, *Amour* deals with the stuff of life with so much grace and power that it resonates in the mind forever.

Winning in the Best Picture category is an honour, but not necessarily the best judge of the greatest film. Come Oscar night (well, early morning for us on the 25 February), I will be holding my breath. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer

Fighting fibromyalgia



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

For 38-year-old Sita Rana the throbbing pain throughout her body was becoming unbearable. In the last three months, she was having difficulties concentrating and sleeping and feeling very tired. She also had a long history of anxiety. Taking 'brufen' (ibuprofen) didn't make her feel any better. During a regular check-up, the doctor discovered tenderness on the muscles of her neck, back, arms, and legs, but there was nothing unusual in her laboratory tests.

Sita suffers from fibromyalgia. It is a common affliction that affects about five to ten per cent of Nepalis and is not specific to geography, ethnicity or climate. The causes are

unclear, but the disease occurs in a 9:1 female-to-male ratio and is associated with disturbed sleep and abnormal pain perception as in Sita's case.

Earlier, the diagnosis criteria for fibromyalgia required patients to demonstrate pain at 11 of 18 tender pre-determined sites (back of neck, arm, hip etc). However, this strict guideline has been left out in updated diagnosis manuals because it led

to massive under-diagnosis.

Ten years ago if patients like Sita showed up at our clinics, we would usually refer them to the 'bone' doctor (an orthopedic surgeon). Today there are experts like Buddhi Paudyal, a rheumatologist at Patan Hospital, who deal with the disease. But general internists should be able to help patients with fibromyalgia as well.

Doctors mostly prescribe anti-depressants like amitriptyline which can also double up as pain and sleep medicines. However, since many are still not aware about fibromyalgia, they might recommend pain killers like ibuprofen which have little effect.

The focus of treatment, however, should not be only to eliminate the pain, but also to improve function and quality of life through various exercises like aerobics and strength training and relaxation techniques like yoga and Tai Chi. 🇳🇵



DIPESH SHRESTHA/NAGARIK

BRIGHT FUTURE: Children activists of CPN-Maoist stop a driver in Baneswor on Tuesday for defying the party's banda.



KRISHNA SINJALI

MUST BE YUMMY: Singer Kunti Moktan (left) greets Dhimal girls selling their traditional food at the first Mechinagar indigenous festival in Jhapa on Saturday.



CINDREY LIU

SWITCHED OFF: A woman texts while walking past a sign in Kamaladi on Wednesday that discourages the use of cell phones during driving.

READERS' PHOTO

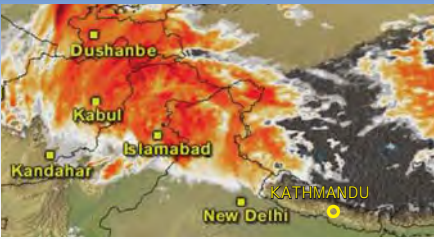


ARNE WALDERHAUG

KARATE KIDS: Children run up and down the stairs leading to Boudhanath stupa early in the morning.

WEEKEND WEATHER

Sunday's temperature is just about the average for February. This bodes well for replenishing Kulekhani and winter crops. A fresh westerly front will pump moisture up the Himalayan slopes, bringing some isolated showers with occasional thunder and lightning in the high Himalaya into the weekend. Snowfall in the high valleys will add to the woes of domestic air and road travel, since the northwesterly wind is also keeping the maximum temperature low, while the minimum will go up a notch. Things will start warming up only midweek next week.



FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
22° 6°	23° 8°	22° 6°



NEPALI TIMES

SUICIDE BURNER

The self-immolator and the suicide bomber both believe death is the only recourse left to secure justice



LOOK OUT
Ajaz Ashraf

It is conceivable a Tibetan could in the future set his or her body on fire, in one of those Western countries whose fate it is to live in unrelenting media spotlight. It is also possible to imagine what the response to such an

act would be: frenzied coverage of the incident by the media, a crescendo of criticism against Beijing, and prominent voices demanding the Dalai Lama issue a statement condemning self-immolation as a form of protest. You can only hope the world won't have to witness the horror.

Yet, it is an idea which is perhaps incubating in the Tibetan diaspora deeply frustrated at the world's

indifference to self-immolations in their homeland. In India, home to the Tibetan government in exile, no prominent leader, not even from the opposition, nor the palpably anti-China media in India has been unduly bothered by the rising number of Tibetans setting themselves on fire.

On 12 February, 25-year-old Duptse turned himself into a raging fireball at the Boudha temple in Kathmandu. A week

previously, Lobsang Namgyal became the 100th person to commit self-immolation since 2009. The current total: 102 self-immolations and 85 dead. It's an overwhelmingly a movement of the young: 77 of the 102 self-immolators were between 15- 29.

It seems logical for Tibetans to seek more spectacular settings for self-immolation, for their unique form of protest not only seeks to defy Chinese rule, but to also persuade through their suffering an indifferent world of the need to mount pressure on Beijing to grant them their cultural and religious rights.

These twin messages of defiance and a cry for support constitute the meaning of almost every Tibetan self-immolation, invariably carried out outside famous monasteries or public places, thus providing the opportunity for capturing on camera or video the horror of their burning to death. No doubt, the downloading of these ghastly scenes on the internet suggests a network of activists hoping to exploit self-immolations for garnering support for the Tibetan cause.

Beijing has grasped the message of defiance implicit in the self-immolations, evident in its decision to flood Tibetan towns with troops, and crack down after every suicide by burning. But such defiance, Tibetans know, will not acquire a salience until the international community is repulsed into overlooking the

economic underpinnings of its relations with China. Might not then it occur to the Tibetans to carry directly their message of self-immolations to the cities in the West, much in the way Islamic suicide bombers did with their horrific methods?

Indeed, the self-immolator's psychology closely resembles the suicide bomber's. Both believe death is the only recourse left to secure justice. Both choose to die because they wish through their sacrifice to provide a better future for their people. Yet, what distinguishes the suicide bomber from what cultural theorist Terry Eagleton calls the 'martyr', or the person who fasts to death for a cause or demand, is that the latter doesn't injure or kill others, just as the self-immolator doesn't.

Nevertheless, considering the escalation in self-immolations in Tibet, it seems there is an inexhaustible supply of people waiting, just as the earlier generation of suicide bombers spawned more deadly imitators. At the apathetic response of the world to their plight and Beijing's refusal to accept their key demands, is it not possible for the potential self-immolator to reinterpret the Tibetan Buddhism creed of non-violence, much the way the Quranic injunction against suicide was?

ashrafajaz3@gmail.com

nepalitimes.com

Tibet's burning issue, #630



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No big deal

There will be minimal benefit to Nepal from the hike in minimum wage for workers in Malaysia

SUNIR PANDEY

When the Malaysian government increased the minimum wage for domestic and foreign workers to at least RM 900 (Rs 25,172) last month, Nepalis there were overjoyed.

Back in Kathmandu the media splashed headlines about the move, and projected growth in remittances from the nearly half-a-million Nepali workers in Malaysia. Recruiting agencies were flooded with queries from people eager to get on the next plane to Malaysia.

But what the Malaysian government gave with one hand, it was pressured to take with the other. It announced the minimum wage increase and a month later, workers were required to pay a housing and food levy to employers after it came under pressure from factory owners.

"The cabinet's decision to make migrant workers pay for the levy is immoral and unjust," said the labour group, Tenaganita about the levy, "migrant workers as one of the least paid and most exploited workers in the country will see a further erosion of their meagre income."

The labour welfare organisation, Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (Jerit), submitted a complaint to the government about abuse by employers of the minimum wage policy in which benefits such as transport, overtime, and other allowances were revoked. The wage hike has also stirred anger among Malaysian workers, who feel foreign workers got bigger hikes and have more allowances than them.

The 40 per cent rise in wages, it was argued, meant the workers could now afford their own housing and food. An average Nepali factory worker who used to earn RM 350 had his wage increased to RM 900, but would have to spend up to RM 100 on average on food and housing per month, meaning that the hike would eat into a chunk of his savings.

As frustration rose among foreign workers, including Nepalis, in Malaysia, the first strike this month shut down a

furniture factory in Johore that refused to implement the minimum wage. But the anger was even greater among factory owners, who said the wage hike would make them uncompetitive. The Malaysian Employers Federation, an umbrella body of manufacturers, lobbied the government to get tough and even deport striking workers.

Fadli Adilah, Charge d'Affaires at the Malaysian Embassy in Kathmandu told *Nepali Times* foreign workers were essential to fuel Malaysia's economic growth and keep the industries running.

"It's all about supply and demand," he said, "the minimum wage decision applied to both foreign and domestic workers, and we don't expect there to be a drastic change in the number of Nepali workers in Malaysia."

The Embassy doesn't expect recent decisions to dissuade workers from going to Malaysia, and the wage controversy doesn't seem to have discouraged Nepalis from seeking work there. In fact, statistics point to the contrary.

Malaysia still remains the third largest foreign employer of Nepalis after India and Qatar (see below). On average, more than 10,000 Nepalis leave for Malaysia every month, and nearly 120,000 have gone there since July 2012.



NARESH NEWAR

HARD WORKERS: Nepali workers throng the small Nepali Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. The embassy had no comment on the resistance from many Malaysian employers to implement the government's minimum wage policy for foreign workers that went into effect on 1 January.

Even before the Malaysian government raised the minimum wage, employers there had warned that the Malaysian furniture industry would be hardest hit. Petrol stations, where thousands of Nepalis work, said they also would not be able to afford the higher wages. In December 2012, business owners had asked their government to withdraw the decision fearing negative impact of the move on small and medium-sized companies.

The Nepali Embassy in Kuala Lumpur failed to respond to our queries about the impact of the wage hike on total remittance figures from Malaysia, or if it expects Nepalis workers to think twice about going there. The embassy website does have a pop-up notice informing

visitors of the rise in wages.

Narayan Dahal of Jhapa came back to Nepal in December 2012 after seeing out a three-year contract at a plastic factory in Selangor. His employers housed him at a hostel and even paid for medical checkups. Narayan admits his employers were kind, and that other Nepalis he met in Malaysia were not as lucky. Nevertheless, he still wants to go back.

"My monthly salary was about RM 460," he says. "Maybe I can earn double if I go back soon. Hopefully I will also get to work overtime."

Malaysia depends heavily upon foreign labourers, considered cheaper alternatives to local workers who tend to switch to better jobs more frequently, and treats them at par with domestic workers.

But given the recent strike and debates about minimum wages, with companies looking to cut costs, it seems likely that thousands of people like Narayan will find that their chances of earning a higher minimum wage depends more on their employers' financial capability than any state decision to increase it. 🇳🇵



KUNDA DIXIT

Arabian plights

One in every five person on the streets of Doha is a Nepali. Qatar is the second largest employer of Nepali workers after India, and the gas-rich Gulf state will be a major source of remittance for the country for the next eight years as it embarks on a multibillion dollar construction scheme to prepare for the football World Cup in 2022.

This week, Human Rights Watch concluded that Qatar will be a 'crucible of exploitation' ahead of the games because of poor working conditions for foreign workers from the subcontinent, including Nepal. In January, the Nepal embassy in Qatar successfully negotiated a raise in minimum wage and allowances for Nepalis from 800 riyal (Rs 19,161) to 1,200 riyal (Rs 28,742).

This has resulted in a drop in demand for Nepali workers say recruitment agencies in Kathmandu. Qatar is also feeling the pinch of a construction slump as international gas prices collapse because of the increasing use of shale gas in the US. Every month, nearly 20,000 Nepalis, mostly men, leave for Qatar.

nepalitimes.com

Let them eat burgers, #404
"Political stability for economic progress", #415



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Spineless backbone

With small-scale production and limited access to markets, rural Nepali farmers are stuck at the bottom of the food chain



ECONOMY STUPID
Puja Tandon

By now more than 76 per cent of Nepalis who depend on agriculture for their livelihood have gotten used to empty promises made by successive governments to 'develop' and 'prioritise' the agricultural sector. While most farmers produce barely enough to feed their families, even those looking to sell their goods are held back by the lack of road networks and difficulties reaching the market.


The tradition style of farming in Nepal, while enough to sustain a family, cannot accommodate large-scale production. Maintaining the quantity and quality every year is particularly difficult under this method. Small-scale production, inefficient methods, along with soaring transportation bills mean that production costs in Nepal are significantly higher than rest

from the farms. But what about the farmers who live in the remote hills and far corners of the country? They not only have to walk for days to reach the nearest market, but fearful that their produce will go bad, many are compelled to slash their prices to a bare minimum.

At the state level, the challenge is to adopt a blue ocean strategy and take on niche marketing which can be supported by our scale of production. There is no harm if our produce is costlier than those from India and elsewhere if we can package and position them as unique and distinctive. However, this requires better research and policies regarding what and when to produce. The government will also have to come up with better agricultural aid policies to make sure that farmers aren't being forced into methods or activities that outsiders think are 'best' and the money is going to those who have a good track record in business.

Farmers also need greater support in terms of soil testing facilities, storage, and knowledge about improved techniques. Providing training in business literacy through co-operatives and encouraging the bigger co-operatives to venture into processing will help. And introducing classes on agriculture and entrepreneurship in schools in rural Nepal will go a long way in equipping future farmers with the tools for success. Entrepreneurs

who want to invest in agriculture should look into opening processing and grading units closer to production sites instead of bigger towns and cities. This will not only help them get hold of better quality produce, but they can also save up on transportation costs.

When farmers and their co-operatives are taught to think, strategise, and manage the type, quantity, and quality of their produce, the market will automatically come to them. However, how much people should expect from a government which has repeatedly failed to provide even basic commodities like fertiliser in time for planting season is open to debate. 



of South Asia and we cannot even think of competing with our northern and southern neighbours. To make matters worse cheaper produce from India that flood our markets erode the competitiveness and confidence of our farmers.

However, even within the country farmers have a hard time selling their goods. Since farm goods are highly perishable they have to be purchased from the site within a few weeks or cold stored. If farmers are lucky enough to live along highways or major road networks, they can at least carry their fruits and vegetables to the markets or the buyers can collect them directly



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Indecent proposal

Binita Dahal, *Kantipur*, 19 February

क्रान्तिपुर

Judging by his silence, it seems that Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi does not want to lose the opportunity of becoming the next prime minister. He is fully aware of the principles of power separation, having studied each article of the constitution for 40 years. But with the top post in sight, he seems determined to write his name in history. That could be the reason he wants to avoid controversy before everyone agrees to his leadership.

The CJ has not done anything outstanding during the 20 months of his tenure, and there is no way to say whether he will perform better as PM, especially in times of constitutional crises. In case we forget, it was under his leadership that the number of justices in the Supreme Court was stuck at six, and instead of promoting people who performed well he sent them packing. People admired Regmi for not extending the Constituent Assembly's deadline back in May, but that too played a part in inviting this crisis.

Among the three organs of the state, the judiciary is considered the most upright and justices don't engage in open rivalries, in contrast to politics. How will a man who has spent 40 dignified years fare in the cat-and-mouse race for power? Unlike at the Supreme Court, where the CJ faces no pressure, at the PMO Regmi will have to compromise and keep everyone happy. What will happen to the judiciary's clean image after the parties drag the CJ down to their dirty games?

PM Baburam Bhattarai knows all too well about Regmi. Dozens of decisions made by his government have been stopped by the SC, and court records show that no other government has made as many controversial decisions. Bhattarai has even said publicly that the SC did not let his government do anything. By bringing Regmi to the doors of Baluwater, it is evident that Bhattarai wants to influence these cases. Amidst the political wrangling, will the CJ-PM be able to send people like Bal Krishna Dhungel to jail?

The UCPN(M) did not propose the CJ's name for the PM's job so that killers within the party get sent to jail. Having already given orders to free journalist Dekendra Thapa's murderers, this government knows that merging the executive with the judiciary will work in its favour. If that is so, why does the CJ covertly show that he wants to leave his dignified career and entertain proposals floated by a party that grants amnesty to known killers? If that is not the case, why doesn't Regmi speak up strongly against the proposal?

The opposition's efforts to make Regmi prime minister just to replace Bhattarai will deliver momentary gain. They must realise that the Maoists only want to postpone election dates by floating Regmi's name. So instead of trying to overthrow Bhattarai, they should work on strengthening the Election Commission to hold polls under Bhattarai's leadership.



BIKASH DWARE

Letter to the CJ

Suresh Prasad Acharya, President, Campaign for Informed Citizenry, *Facebook*, 20 February

facebook

An open letter to Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi, who looks tempted by the prospects of becoming prime minister, about the Constitution which says: 'The sovereignty and state authority of Nepal shall be vested in the Nepalese people.'

1. Please remember that in the absence of a parliament, the sovereignty and state authority of the country automatically shifts on to the Nepali people.
2. The preamble of the constitution expresses full commitment towards a democratic system containing, amongst others, an independent judiciary. If this is so, i) should the incumbent CJ be under the direct influence of the four parties through a 'political mechanism' that has been recently agreed upon? ii) Who will a CJ-PM be answerable to in the absence of a parliament? and, iii) who will authorise court proceedings against the 'last resort' CJ-PM if his government can't hold polls in June?
3. If the incumbent CJ is to become prime minister through 'unconstitutional' agreements

- between the four parties and 'unconstitutional and unauthorised amendments' to the constitution by the president, will it be necessary to re-examine or supercede the interpretation of law and constitution in the light of the then CJ Anup Raj Sharma's decision over the Royal Commission for Corruption Control?
4. Will the Army, which has always claimed it will 'only remain under the control of a constitutional government', obey the orders of an unconstitutional government? In other words, how will you make the Army obey your command?
 5. How do you, as CJ, explain Article 102 (4) of the constitution which gives the Supreme Court final power to interpret the prevalent Constitution?
 6. Have you shown interest to become prime minister with the full knowledge of Article 103 (4), according to which you will have to declare that you are unable or not healthy enough to remain as CJ if you are to become PM, and will you demand from the four parties that they let you resign first?
 7. How do you, as incumbent CJ, explain Article 106 (1-2) of the existing Constitution which places limitations on the postings of a Supreme Court justice?
 8. Will you have to suspend Part 6 of the Constitution, which governs the nature of the parliament, as long as you are prime minister?
 9. Will you also have to suspend the post of the chief justice as long as you are PM?
 10. Will 'Amendments to the Constitution, part 21' have to be suspended before you become PM?

NEPALI TWEETS

KTM_pal
यस्तो उराठ लाग्दो प्रजातन्त्र दिवस मेरो जिवनमा आएको थिएन। शायद यस्तो बेबितिमा मेरो देश कहिल्यै थिएन होला।
I have never seen such a depressing Democracy Day until today. I don't think my country has been in such disarray before.

विमिरी 'नाबु'
पहिले देखि 'जाले तन्त्र', 'प्रचण्ड तन्त्र', अलि 'बाबुराम तन्त्र', नै पेल्टे आएका विचरा जनताहरूले आज 'प्रजातन्त्र' सुन्दा डरले कामी रहेछन्।
Poor Nepali people who have been suffering under 'Gyane tantra', 'Prachanda tantra', and 'Baburam tantra' get scared when they hear 'Prajatantra'.

Kapil Dhital
सत्ताको साँघो अन्तै छ भनेर वाराभले पहिल्यै भन्दैपछि बेक्कार न्यौं ताल्छा लागेको सत्तामा के जानु भनेर गएछन नि खिलराज रेग्मी, कुन अचम्म भयो त ?
Why would Khil Raj Regmi want to take over power when Baburam Bhattarai said earlier that the key to state power lies elsewhere?

Pallavi Dhakal
यो राजनीतिक गतिरोधले मलाई लेखनाथले राणाकालका शोषित नेपालीलाई लेखेको पिजडाको सुगा याद गरायो। यानक बबुरो देशीको नाउमा हु म परेको छु पिजडामा।
The current political deadlock reminds me of Lekhnath Poudel's *Pinjada ko Suga* that he wrote for long-suffering Nepalis during the Rana regime. 'Poor me, I am trapped inside a cage for the sake of this country'.

prithivi raj
शुक्रबार सम्म प्रधानन्यायाधीशको नेतृत्वमा सरकार बन्छ - पोंडेल, कायैस लोकतन्त्रविरोधी पार्टी बन्दैछ - सुजाता: यिनी हरू एउटै पार्टी का हुन ?
Ram Chandra Poudel: 'We will have a government under the chief justice by Friday'. Sujata Koirala: 'The NC is becoming an anti-democratic party'. Do these two belong to the same party?

नौरव
स्कूलको सरस्वती पुजा कार्यक्रममा यालखरु हिन्दी 'फेविकोल' गीतमा नाचिराछन्। धनिक्या विहित भएका अवस्था।
Schoolchildren are dancing to the Hindi song 'Fevicol' as part of Saraswati Puja celebrations. No comment.

Shital
न एकता दिवस, न लोकतन्त्र प्रजातन्त्र गडतन्त्र दिवस... सबै नेपालीको नयाँ एकताको प्रतिक --- नेपाल बन्द +++ जोड्छ सम्पूर्ण देशलाई
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Crime wave

Himal Khabarpatrika, 17 February

हिमाल

- Himal Khabarpatrika has launched a Bazar Public Opinion Poll in its new weekly avatar with support from The Asia Foundation. The polls are conducted every week in 12 urban centres across the country from Damak in the east to Dhangadi in the west, and 375 respondents are randomly asked three questions in the marketplace. This week's questions were on the perception of security: 'How do you rate security in your town?'. Nearly 40 per cent said 'not good', and half said 'ok'. In response to a supplementary question ('What kind of crime is most prevalent in your town or city?') respondents were asked to name three top crimes.
- Theft **59%**
 - Threat **53%**
 - Kidnapping **30%**
 - Murder **30%**
 - Rape **29%**



"Let's have elections!"

नागरिक Rajesh KC in *Nagarik*, 18 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“You can't put words in my mouth, you can't tie me down.”

Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi reportedly telling PM Bhattarai on Tuesday what he thinks about the preconditions to becoming prime minister, *Jana Aastha*, 21 February



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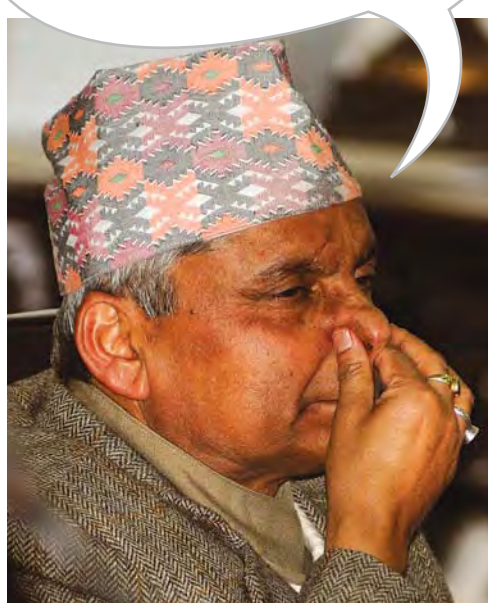
Something stinks here

The Justice-in-Chief is wavering about taking on BRB's offer to lead an election govt. Being a lawyer, he looked at the fine print, and it did look like he was going to be a puppet with the strings being pulled by the all-party mechanism. The parties have left it up to PM BRB to convince the CJ, since the two Balu Water neighbours have long been in cahoots. Because there was so much to-ing and fro-ing across the wall between the CJ and PM compounds, they've now installed a door to make it easier for the CJ and PM to sneak in and out without waking up the guards. Incidentally, this trap door was also used by the 12 leaders of the 4 parties to cajole the CJ on Wednesday night.



Whose ever brainwave it was to make the CJ lead the gobblement, it was truly inspired. But just so we have all bases covered, it may be necessary to think about alternative non-political independent personalities in case Regmi gets cold feet. Here is a list:

- Gyanendra Shah
- Shortest Man Chandra Bdr Dangi
- Charles Shobraj
- Miss Nepal Shristi Shrestha
- DJ Tantrik
- Pahupati ko Bhatta



There may be a slight unanticipated problem, though, what is the CJ going to do when as head of government he has to share the podium with Bal Krishna Dhungel whom he sentenced to life imprisonment for murder and whom the PM who made him CJ had released?



When the CJ does take over his job as the Temporary Chair of the Interim Provisional Election Adhoc Mechanism, his first order of business will be to set up an 11-member cabinet. To help him

decide, here is a list of jokey nominations on FB:

Prime Minister: Chief of Justice
Home Minister: Chief of Police
Defence Minister: Chief of Army
Finance Minister: Chief of Central Bank
Information Minister: Chief Editor, Gorkhapatra
Tourism Minister: Chief of NAC
Supplies Minister: Chief of NOC
Energy Minister: Chief of NEC
Foreign Minister: Chief of Non-Resident Nepali International Coordination Council
Health Minister: Chief of Trauma Centre

Now that their days are numbered, members of the Cabinet are raking it in as if there is no tomorrow. And guess what the Ministry of Traffic Jams managed to sneak through as one of its last decisions: lift the ban on new taxi licences and award 2,500 new ones. With those new cabs on the streets, they will have to widen the roads all over again.

Embassies that stubbornly resisted pressure from the Valley Road-Widening Authoritarians must be heaving a sigh of relief that the BRB govt is finally stepping down, thinking they will now stop getting letters to demolish their perimeter walls. With a prime minister who had done his

PhD in urban planning planning to leave, it is clear that the justice of the supremo court will not be land-grabbing. Who knows, road widening may even come to a grinding halt.

But just as they thought they didn't have to worry about the road, wham! Embassies got letters last week from the NEA to pay a minimum flat rate of Rs 30,000 for their electricity bills. Dips now have to pay for power supply that is not supplied. Besides being a violation of the Vienna Convention, they say it could also be construed as a crime against humanity.

Nepalis can proudly say we have the highest per capita number of national holidays. We had three New Years till



recently: the Gregorian, Bikram, and Nepal Sumbuts. Now we have added at least six more Losars. Nepal also has the most number of Communist Parties, and the total has gone up to 22 with the breakaway Dash Baddies and the emergence last week of the Communist Party of Nepal (Che) to complement the CPN (Enver Hoxha).

'Visit Nepal: The Land of Most Communist New Year Parties'.



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