In his first week on the job Khil Raj Regmi is systematically ticking off his main agenda items in order of priority:

- Form a cabinet of technocrats
- Fill headless constitutional bodies, most importantly the Election Commission
- Amend constitutional provisions for elections
- Day-to-day governance
- Get disgruntled small parties to row in the same direction.

But the first test of whether Chairman Regmi can stand up to the Big Four will be if he agrees to Lok Man Singh Karki’s CIAA candidacy. If Karki is appointed, it will confirm the worst suspicions that the cabinet is a rubber stamp body.

Regmi regime Editorial page 2

Unfree and unfair
by BIHARI K SHRESTHA
page 3

Free from fear
by ANURAG ACHARYA
page 6

KTM’s BEST KEPT SECRET:
Just four hours up from the city is a hike to Chandragiri that offers views that are out of this world (pic, right).
It is not clear if the four-party mechanism is supposed to recommend actions to the non-political Cabinet or issue directives.

has become a four-party dictatorship. What of the other smaller parties? Some token consultations have been made, but the 22 are as disgruntled as ever. The nominee of the Maoist and Madhesis for the new head of the CIAA would have been laughable if it wasn’t so bizarre. The only good thing anyone has to say about Lok Man Singh Karki is that he is ‘decisive’. He is to head the same anti-corruption agency that once labelled him ‘unfit for any government position’.

Let’s face it. As the editorial rightly points out, our political parties never had faith in pluralism and separation of powers (*Let’s face it*, # 647). Asking why Raj Regmi to lead the government to conduct election was the least preferable choice, but the parties took that course because they were unwilling to compromise on the issue. What we can do is hope this government functions within a framework and is allowed to go about its duties without political interference. Transparency will be key and everyone should help out. But the major responsibility lies with civil society members who need to make sure that the parties do not violate Nepal’s democratic processes any further and adhere to the rules during election time.

Kamal Krishna

Before we have polls, the Regmi-led transition government needs to ensure an atmosphere free of fear, intimidation, and propaganda from candidates and parties. Educating leaders and the public about the importance of elections, their rights and responsibilities, how it will be conducted, how to report intimidation, and how to maintain discipline should be the state’s first priority. Non-political volunteers can be used for this massive ‘education’ campaign.

Babushod

Wide Open Field

A very revealing set of data from this year’s Himmadra poll (*A wide open field*, # 647). Key points for me are the respondents’ views on foreign interference, deciding how to federate Nepal, and their non-support for specific parties. The over-riding problem though is that the same old politicians are merely being recycled with virtually no fresh choices being given to the people.

Floresta

The most interesting thing about the poll is that Nepal do not want provinces based on ethnicity. We didn’t know that Kathmandu residents didn’t want that, but to see that this is a national trend is heartening. It is also a beautiful thing to see the Maoists down in the polling numbers. May they fall even further. They are dogs suitable only for cannibalising the world’s greatest country. Let us throw them out.

Paul

The main message from this poll seems to be to the Maoists: if you change your behaviour and stop threatening, extorting, cheating people you may just get a part of that 50 per cent that hasn’t decided yet. If not, may Stain help you.

Sara

No matter what this poll shows, the sad truth is that the Maoists will win a majority not because people would vote for them voluntarily, but because they have locked the state coffers to such an unimaginable extent that they will have the muscle and moxie to rob the elections in their favour.

Chanda

Looking at the data, one can assume that the next government will be a NC-UML coalition with a Congress prime minister and one or two opportunistic little parties. The Maoists will be in the opposition as rulers of the streets (you can imagine what that entails).

Krishna S

It really doesn’t matter who we vote for. They will all have their turn before another election. The votes only decide the order of the new round.

Posan

The results of this year’s polls looks like a pro-NC campaign.

Drasha

Can Nepal Times publish more details on the methodology used like significance level, error per cent?

Erratic migrant

FOR GRABS

I was living in Nepal during the first people’s movement in 1960 and told anyone who asked for my opinion at the time that Nepal needed a presidential system because political parties’ inability to achieve constitutional democracy is a major responsibility of the parliament promised instability from frequent government changes (*Up for grabs*, *Kanda Dixit*, # 647). 25 years and uncounted new governments later, the facts have vindicated that the parliamentary model is not appropriate for the country.

Under the current system, politicians worry from day to day whether a coalition partner is going to dump them and form a new government with their opponents. This encourages the worst form of short-term thinking, with every politician looking to staff government offices with as many of their cronies as they can, so they can funnel as much loot as possible into party and private accounts, national progress be damned. Long-term planning (let’s face it, in Nepal planning three or four years ahead counts as long-term doesn’t happen now because it is guaranteed that the current party in power won’t be around in two years, let alone three or four.

Nepal needs an election cycle based on the calendar, with predictable changes every three or four or five years, where politicians are in office long enough for voters to be able to see the results of their policies.

Thomas

FEMININE FM

Thank you Annie O’Kaine for your report on female-run community radio stations across Nepal (*Feminine FM*, # 647). It made me happy to see that despite the political mess that we find ourselves in (blame the old senile men), these women are doing the best with limited resources to spread democracy through the airwaves and helping other women cops with and understand difficult issues like domestic violence. Great job, keep it up.

Renu Shrestha

OFF THE ROAD

Wow, kudos to Rab Thapa and team for venturing out into wild Nepal (*Off the road*, Rab Thapa, # 647). I am not a trekker and will have to try the ‘traditional’ Annapurna Circuit first, but the way Rab describes the rocks and corners of Manang and how trails only known to locals, really made me want to pack my bags and join the team. Also the photos are breathtaking.

RT

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REGMI REGIME

The ultimate test for the Chairman of the Interim Election Council of Ministers, K.P. Oli Raj Regmi, is his new 11-member cabinet of ex-bureaucrats will be whether or not they can hold elections in November or whether.

In his first week on the job Regmi is systematically ticking off his main agenda items in order of priority:

* A new form of technocrats
* Fill headless constitutional bodies, most importantly the Election Commission
* Amend constitutional provisions for elections
* Day-to-day governance
* Get disgruntled small parties to row in the same direction

Given the mess that he inherited, Regmi has an enviable task in the months ahead. There is a fuel and intimidation, and how to maintain transparency will be key and the Election Commission and election dates are sorted out, the new cabinet has to get down to rescuing the economy from freefall. Nepal’s macro-economic parameters which were always healthy no matter if the politicians were in tatters, is now showing signs of serious proflapse because of extended political abuse.

It is outside the purview of the interim government to take big decisions and address long-term crises, but the economy needs emergency care. And even if Regmi can just do a Qureshi, a lot of Nepalis will thank him for it.
Unfree and unfair?

Regmi’s minimum agenda is to ensure law and order for elections

After decades of corrupt, incompetent, and irresponsible misrule by politicians of all stated ideological hues, the chief justice-led election government is the best thing to have happened to the people of Nepal.

The impeccable professional credentials and courage that Khil Raj Regmi brings to his new office put the political parties to shame for their collective failures. Logically, the role of taking over from squabbling and non-performing politicos and organising elections should have rightfully gone to President Ram Baran Yadav, but he seems to have been passed over for being pro-NC. The unnecessary diminution of the stature of the presidency also has its own implications for the credibility of the present election government.

While Regmi may be committed to holding an election that is free and fair, the present law and order situation is not conducive to one. In 2008 the Maoists blackmailed voters by threatening to go back to the jungle if they did not win, that can’t be allowed to happen now.

The Badiya faction held the country to ransom by imposing a series of shutdowns last week through intimidation and mindless destruction of public and private property. It has targeted Radisson and Ncell, promised fire and brimstone and a poll boycott. Maoist leader Devendra Paudel threatened rights activists with ‘stern action’ if they did not stop demanding the arrest of murder convict, Balkrishna Dhungel. On Sunday, the Maoists unleashed their YCL to hijack the Occupy Baluwatar protests.

If this is the way it’s going to be, you can kiss a peaceful election goodbye. Dhungel is just the tip of the iceberg, there are many political figures with criminal convictions or culpability who made it to the last CA and are most likely to be candidates in the next elections. Regmi has his work cut out: get the new Election Commissioner to purge the candidate list of such elements.

The sense of impunity among the parties is too deeply ingrained and the police are just mute spectators when confronted with mayhem in the name of politics. The fact that the security forces forged an understanding with the Baburam Bhattarai-led government not to prosecute war crimes is a question mark on their role of providing electoral security. As it is, all major parties have militant wings, euphemistically called ‘youth’ organisations, who are going to use muscle during the campaign and on election day.

Another challenge for the new government, particularly Chief Secretary-turned-Home Minister Madhav Ghimire, will be to restore the professionalism and integrity of the security forces which have been decimated by years of political interference. Can he sanitise them and tell them who’s boss? Then there are spoilers from our ‘near abroad’ who could put a finger in the pie.

The Regmi government has a near impossible task, especially with the four-party high level mechanism itching to interfere in every decision. This is where the international community has a crucial role to play, too, by backstopping the electoral machinery with necessary hardware and logists. India, China, US, EU, and the UN have to come together in a consortium to help an election government they had a hand in creating, so they have a stake in free and fair elections. This time, it has to be more than former US President Jimmy Carter stamping a premature seal of approval as he did in 2008.

Bihari Krishna Shrestha is an anthropologist and was a senior official in the government.
Although statistics say access to water in Nepal is 62 per cent that figure is debatable because it isn’t a regular access. It means that people have some drops of water sometimes during the week, and it’s not 24/7. 

Ashutosh Tiwari, WaterAid

Where is the bathroom?

There used to be a time when you could tell you were nearing a village in Nepal when you saw signs of open defecation along the trails. No anymore. Slightly more than half the population now use toilets. A government campaign backed by NGOs to declare VDCs open defecation free is yielding results and saving lives.

There is also greater awareness about the links between killer infections and poor sanitation and contaminated water. The number of children dying from diarrhoeal dehydration has come down by half in the last 15 years. Nepal’s infant mortality declined by 42 per cent over the last 15 years, while under-five mortality has declined by 54 per cent. Still, one in every 22 Nepali children dies before reaching their first year and one in every 10 does not survive to the fifth birthday.

But there is still a long way to go. Poor drinking water, sanitation, and malnutrition are silent emergencies that don’t grab headlines like a bus crash or crime because the victims are mainly poor and they die silently, scattered across the land. More can be done to improve the health of the children of poor Nepali families by building toilets than distributing medicines, more lives can be saved by installing a safe drinking water system, in a village than starting a new clinic.

In parts of the country where most rain falls in three months, rainwater harvesting could help improve water supply and sanitation. Tyler McMahon of SmartPaani says rainwater collection could help communities, households, and schools on the high ridges.

“The conjunctive management of rainwater and groundwater recharge can help improve water security with minimal investment,” explains McMahon. a

Juanita Malagon

Toilets for all ASAP

Two members of the British House of Lords were in Nepal to take part in the launch of the South Asia Regional Campaign on Sanitation this week in which MPs from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, and ex-CA member from Nepal took part. The campaign was organised by WaterAid and its partner NGOs and urged governments to ensure that the one billion people in the region have sustainable access to improved sanitation. Lord Ian McCall (right) of Dulwich, who is a surgeon, and Lord John Edward Hollister Montagu, left, Earl of Sandwich, spoke to Nepal Times this week.

Nepali Times: Why did you choose to come to Nepal during World Water Week? McCall: We’ve come to talk about the need for sanitation and related infrastructure. We’ve been struck with the fact that to often talk about the need to get the economy right and then we can invest in infrastructure and sanitation. Actually, our experience in the UK has been the reverse. In the 1850s, when the River Thames became more and more like a sewer and it was called The Great Stink, the government was forced to take action. It was an enormous success. Improving sanitation improved health. We’re here to tell the government to invest in sanitation so that children’s lives can be improved bearing in mind that you have to get on with that rather than wait until the economy grows.

Montagu: I’ve been here before and I think Nepal is special. I believe in the power of civil society. When we visited Thirtha village in Janakpur, where the Nepal NGO Lumanti is working with the community members, I was impressed to see how the people themselves have been installing latrines, sometimes private sometimes for the community. Nepal has a long way to go, but it can do it because all these non-governmental organisations are working together with the government.

What can be done in Nepal to improve water and sanitation? McCall: The important thing is to make sure the local infrastructure is right and that you’re treating people properly. Sanitation workers have more impact on public health than medical doctors. You have to have proper infrastructure and sewers have to be made properly. That is how you improve the whole public health system.

What can the government do? Montagu: The government needs to work with NGOs and other organisations and support their work.

McCall: The government can make sanitation a high priority. That means, providing more funds, monitoring the results, and educating people so that benefits from sanitation can spread over into public health, tourism, livelihood and so on.

How do you see Nepal in 10 years in terms of access to sanitation? Montagu: We want to see many, many more indoor toilets. This is very important in development and it’s happening already. It’s education as well, what you’re taught in school with hygiene. In some cases, bringing toilets inside the house can be perceived as a foreign initiative and likely to be rejected by the community.

McCall: The first thing is not for us to come in and tell people what to do, but to do everything with them and not for them so they own the solution. There are countries in Asia like Sri Lanka and Thailand which are quite advanced in sanitation and it’s not because they have more resources, but because they made sanitation a priority, which once done, they are able to do other things.
Money in, money out

Growth in remittance is an indication of the abject political and economic state of Nepal

hard time attracting foreign investments, remittance acts as an important source of external financing along with debt, equity, and development aid. However, growth in remittance is an indication of the abject political and economic state of Nepal. According to the World Bank, remittances (unlike private capital flows) tend to rise when the recipient country experiences an economic slump bought on by a financial crisis or political stalemate. As times get harder here, migrants are sending more cash to help out their families and friends. We have also failed to utilise the large amounts of remittance for investments or to generate capital. Around 85 per cent of money sent home by migrant labourers is spent on consumption and many families don’t have any long-term savings. Rising demand for imported consumer products like electrical goods, cars, and bikes means that for every dollar earned, 25 cents goes right back out. Two per cent of remittance goes into real estate, but investments in businesses, infrastructure or the industrial sector is almost zero.

The other downside of remittance is that it is its effect on our labour force. Not only are we letting go of thousands of young Nepali women every year, but families who depend on males from relatives abroad are losing their motivation to work or do business. Those who have brothers or sister working outside the country increasingly believe foreign employment is their only way out. To make things worse, the state, foreign investors, and the private sector are hesitant to invest in regions where out-migration is high due to unreliable workforce. It’s high time the government revamped its remittance policies and started using the dollars coming from abroad to generate jobs at home and stem the mass exodus. Money from remittance can be used for micro-investments and micro-financing in sectors like agriculture and trading. Big investments in manufacturing might not be feasible, but small investments would serve as baby steps in increasing entrepreneurship and engagement of the private sector in Nepal.

Surveys show that returnee migrant workers and their families who might be interested in investing or starting their own business usually lack the acumen and skills. Understanding their motivation, developing capacity, and equipping them with the necessary skills should therefore be a top priority for the state. Only then can it influence their consumption and investment habits.

As 30 per cent of young Nepali men work outside, more and more women are managing households on their own. They should be the focus of government policies. If women with remittance funds are encouraged to start businesses through incentives like tax subsidies, they will not only create employment for themselves but also others in the community.

BIZ BRIEFS

Fresh look
China Tourism has unveiled its new logo featuring four modern Chinese characters, which together signify, ‘Beautiful China’. According to the press release, the new logo represents different elements of Chinese culture and marks a new chapter for China Tourism.

Raining discounts
Index Furniture has launched its annual sale that will run until 1 May. The sale offers 20 to 30 per cent discounts on various products including stools, sofas, dining sets, recliners, and coffee tables.

Drink it right
Diageo and its distribution partner Global Trading Concern have launched DIAGEO Bar Academy in Nepal. The academy is the largest regionally accredited bartending course in Asia Pacific, the press statement says.

Mobile money
Bank of Kathmandu has re-launched its mobile banking service ‘M-Paisa’ in association with Hello Paisa Network. The service will be available for customers of Nepal Telecom service ‘M-Paisa’ in association with Hello Paisa Network.

This is IT
Sunway International Business School and Student 2 Professional (S2P) organised an interaction program on 9 March. According to the press release the participants discussed the potential for mobile application development in Nepal.

Easy cleaning
LG has introduced bag-free vacuum cleaners. Available in 1800W and 2000W, the vacuum cleaners have ergonomic design and the mini ellipse cyclone system separates and compresses dust and debris effectively, the company said.
After nine months of to-ing and fro-ing over reinstatement of the dissolved Constituent Assembly, then a year of haggling over who should lead an elections government, Nepal will hold another CA elections later this year.

For an electorate that has been denied franchise for so long, it doesn’t seem to matter that no dates have been announced yet. In fact, opinion polls have shown that the majority of people are past caring when, or if, elections are held.

The political parties that are drafting election manifestos and getting ready to kick-start campaigns face an apathetic and disinterested public. The reason is that they have been let down so often by the same netas in the last four years. But despite widespread disillusionment, elections are still the safest and quickest way to bring a country derailed by a prolonged transition back on track.

Unlike earlier elections, this one is being held under a technocratic government made up of government managers, most of them batch-mates. This presents both opportunities and challenges. All we need now is a firm commitment from political groups on the left, right, and centre for clean and non-violent polls.

We need a firm commitment from political groups on the left, right, and centre to participate in clean and non-violent polls and to abide by the code of conduct. To be sure, emotions will run high and there will be heated exchange of words in the media and when leaders share a podium. But the parties must remember that elections are about winning over the people’s confidence and not just about defeating the opposition. The two are not the same. It is about what you will do, not about what the rival party will not.

Already there are worrying signs of the rhetoric getting out of hand. Leaders threatening to break the legs of opponents, candidates turning a contest of ideas into personal battles, and portraying the polls as a winner-takes-all game.

Since few of the candidates can boast about performance, the elections will be a referendum on the nature of federalism and forms of governance that remained contentious in the last CA. There may be two clear sides emerging, one led by the Maoist-Madheshi coalition and the other led by the NC and UML. Editorials and pundits are already presenting it as a fight to finish between ‘democrats’ and ‘radicals’, between ‘progressive’ and ‘traditional’ forces. Elections should be about ideas, but mixing sectarianism, ethnicity, or regionalism into the campaign to rabble rouse would be disastrous.

And we in the media must resist stoking fear and overtly taking sides and help moderate a charged political climate. The mainstream must overcome its bias and accept, until proven otherwise, that every political party contesting the election is a legitimate political force under Nepal’s interim constitution and poses no danger to the core values enshrined in it. As long as their political agendas and programs do not go against the spirit of the constitution, they have every right to seek popular endorsement for their programs through elections.

As an institution that has stood by democratic values, the media must maintain its own integrity, impartiality, and code of ethics. The fourth estate has an important role in creating an environment for free and fair elections that are fought on discourse, debate, and political programs rather than driven by subjective and often imagined categories.

For all the controversy it has generated, the party less technocratic government ensures that state powers are not abused for unfair advantage and once the Election Commission takes full shape, all stakeholders will be bound by its code of conduct. The deployment of the Army for election security could be an added safeguard against cheating and violence.

If Nepal is able to hold peaceful elections free from fear, winners will have a chance to push through programs in a future assembly for a stipulated period and we may finally have a constitution. No matter which side gets more votes, it will be a victory for democracy.
We are now officially entering the hot and dry season, and the time of greater water stress. On World Water Day on Friday, let’s think about rainwater harvesting, not because it is a green thing to do but because it is smart. However, there isn’t much by way of rain on the horizon. It is too early for the summer storms, and the westerlies are not packing the kind of moisture we need. However, there will be buildups over the mountains in the afternoons into the weekend with brief passing showers. Kathmandu valley will be hazy, dry and hot but not a life threatening cloud.

**KATHMANDU**

With hundreds of preschools to choose from, picking the right fit for your child can be daunting

A dmission season is in full swing and like hundreds of other young parents in town you are trying your best to keep up with the merry-go-round: visiting schools, collecting brochures, scanning newspapers, making frantic calls to friends and families for advice. After all, your precious toddler deserves the best. Until a decade ago joint families with grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins all living under the same roof was the norm in Nepal. Today’s urban parents don’t have that safety net and most work full-time so there is no one at home to take care of the kids. Pressured by an increasingly competitive education system even stay at home mothers (and fathers) are rushing to enroll their children in good preschools which are seen as stepping stones into the formal education system three or four years down the line. No wonder early education has become a highly lucrative business in the country and preschools are mushrooming everywhere, your neighbourhood probably has a couple. Choosing the right fit for your child couldn’t get any tougher.

When Rita Singh started Mickey’s International in 1987, there were only two others in the Valley. That number has grown more than ten folds in the last decade alone. “A simpler registration procedure means that anyone interested in opening a preschool can do it easily. Many have made a business out of it. This was not the case back then,” says Singh.

Spacious play area, safe environment, and well-qualified teachers top most parents’ list of requirement when selecting a preschool. But to keep pace with the intense competition, many of the newer preschools seem to focus on infrastructure rather than quality of teaching. “See whether the teachers are trained or not, go through the school’s curriculum. Don’t look only at the hardware, look at the software,” advises Singh.

Another factor most parents tend to overlook is the student-teacher ratio. “Children at this age need individual attention which is not possible if the teacher has to look after a lot of kids at once,” explains Madhu Rai of Sarita Indra Preschool in Biratnagar.

Preschools, however, are no longer just about fun and games. Moving away from the traditional rote learning, preschools today use interactive methods to help children understand the basics of alphabets, numbers, colours, and shapes in an interactive learning environment. Many are also developing ‘ambitious’ curriculums to make sure their students have an edge over their peers. But as long as your four-year-old is learning social and emotional skills, making friends, and building a strong foundation, you shouldn’t worry too much if she cannot recite her multiplication tables yet. “Children have different thresholds for learning so if they are burdened with too much at once they will stop enjoying the process,” says Hima Pradhan, a psychologist at a high school in Kathmandu, “if you want your children to benefit in the long-term make sure their school engages them in different hands-on activities and gives them plenty of time to play.”

Keeping these in mind, decide on a budget, sit in on a few classes, talk to potential teachers, and pick your top three.
Himalayan rush, run, swim, or cycle around Begnas Tal and promote healthy, community-based tourism around the lake.

30 March, Pokhara, 9851102046

Backyard screenings, watch great cinema while enjoying delicious food. Rs 100, 2 to 28 March, every Thursday, 6.30pm, Backyard Café, Jhamsikhel

HOLI, join thousands on the streets of Basantapur, Thamel, Patan, and Pokhara to celebrate Holi, the festival of colours with much fanfare and enthusiasm. 26 March

EVENS

PRANAMAYAYOGA, special weekend workshop with internationally renowned guru Emil Wendel and partner Anouk Petzoldt. Rs 4,000, 23 to 24 March, Pranamaya Yoga Studio, Thamel, www.pranamaya-yoga.com

With love from France, Image Ark Gallery invites you to a dual exhibition of French artists Nicholas Henry and Flora Lato. Runs till 28 March, 2pm to 5pm, Image Ark Gallery, Patan, 0124506665

Lalitpur Festival 2013, an international celebration of the best arts, crafts, culture, tradition, and businesses of the SAARC region in the city of fine art.
28 to 3 April, Lalitpur

BOUGAINVILLEA, serves Nepali, Indian, Chinese, Continental, and Thai dishes.
Jawalakhel

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

Everest Steak House, an old-school joint for everything steak, a sanctuary for meat lovers. Thamel, Chhetrapati Chok, 014260471

Mulchowk, a blend of culinary expertise and charms of a bygone era, enjoy a wholesome meal in a beautiful setting. Babarmahal

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

www.nagariknews.com
**GETAWAYS**

**ALICE**

Getaway to a Swiss music event.

23 March, 6.30pm, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat, (01)4242832/4241163

Live at Cafe 32, live music and delicious food every Friday.

**HOLI AT SUNKOSHI**

Experience Holi with delicious food, beach volleyball, bonfire, and rafting on demand during the festival of colour.

Rs 2,000 for day-trip, Rs 2,500 for overnight stay, and Rs 3,000 for Holi celebrations, 26 March, Sunkoshi Beach Camp, (01)4381214/4381723

**GARDEN of DREAMS**

Recently voted by Time magazine as one of top 24 hideaways in the world, the Garden of Dreams is a firm favourite among those who seek isolation in the middle of the metropolis. Dine at the Kaiser Cafe, admire the artfully maintained flora, or grab a mat and lie down to read a book, so close yet blissfully far away from the chaos of Kathmandu.

Garden of Dreams, Thamel, (01)4425340

**MU'MS GARDEN RESORT**

A peaceful and comfortable stay in beautifully designed cottages surrounded by lush green garden with great views of Phewa Lake and the Annapurna range.

Lake Side, Pokhara, (061)463468, www.mumsgardenresort.com

**THE LAST RESORT**

Canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping – test your limits at the Last Resort.

Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525/1247

**TONI’S NEPAL**

On the 10th anniversary of Toni Hagen's death, Heritage Gallery has revived his classic photo-exhibition on Nepal, one that was held 20 years ago and inaugurated by Late King Birendra.

When Hagen first arrived in Nepal in 1950, he was assigned merely to take aerial photographs of the country’s incredible terrain. By the time of his death in 2003, he was one of the most respected advocate of sustainable development in Nepal. Traversing across 14,000 kilometres of unchartered territory, the geologist in Hagen ultimately found Nepal’s “people more important than its rocks”. Hagen took hundreds of photographs in his 12 years of travelling on foot and they have become the only window to the Nepal of the past.

Runs till 31 March, Heritage Gallery, Toni Hagen House, Gachhen, Bhaktapur, (01)8631377

**THE KATHMANDU VALLEY PRESERVATION TRUST**

The Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) inaugurated the recently restored Golden Door Ensemble (funded by the German government) and Yantaju Shrine (gifted by Lamu Amatya in memory of her husband Bhubaneswar and mother-in-law Sita Devi) in Mulchowk courtyard, Patan Durbar

**THE YELLOW HOUSE**

Bed and breakfast for the light traveller.

Sanepa, (01)5553869/5522078, www.theyellowhouse.com.np

**THE ROADHOUSE**

The Roadhouse Cafe, wood-fired pizza, coffee and more!
The long ridgeline of Chandragiri south of the Valley offers views that are out of this world, and it’s only a four-hour hike away.

Start your walk from the Hatiban Resort, which can be reached via the turnoff on the highway to Pharping. The eastern sky turns from pink to gold silhouetting the mountains, as you walk through a scented dew-wet pine forest and race the sun to the top of Champadevi (2,278m) which is the first peak on the way to Chandragiri (2,545m). After that the trail dips a bit and goes...
The unmistakable silhouette of the world’s highest mountain from 200km away. As you climb from Hatiban towards Chandragiri, Everest gives the illusion of growing taller as it emerges from behind the mountains of Rolwaling. Five other eight-thousanders are visible. This is the best hike you can make because the views are always with you throughout the long walk along the exposed ridge. You can also just keep walking along, beyond Chandragiri all the way to Chitlang Pass and descend to Thahlot, but this will take you the whole day or more. Unlike other tourist areas around the Valley, there are no resorts and the likelihood of seeing other hikers is minimal. Take plenty of water, there are no streams or water sources. One great way to finish off your Chandragiri climb is to make a leisurely descent to Hatiban Resort (keeping an eye out for the abundant bird life) and even spend the night before returning down to the city the next day. The only problem is that some misguided donors have decided to put stone steps all the way up to Chandragiri from Hatiban, thinking trekkers prefer steps. There is also talk of a Manakamana style cable car from Kirtipur to the top soon. Which is all the more reason to get up there before the rest of the city arrives.

The unmistakable silhouette of the world’s highest mountain from 300km away. As you climb from Hatiban towards Chandragiri, Everest gives the illusion of growing taller as it emerges from beyond the mountains of Rolwaling.
RUST AND BONE

The title Rust and Bone is enigmatic. Going into the film, one doesn’t quite know how these two disparate nouns will factor into this story of two very star-crossed lovers who struggle with themselves and their bodies, kicking and screaming their way to a happy ending.

Jacques Audiard’s latest film is tough to watch. It’s tough on the audience, tough on its actors; its cinematic style unglamorous and unforgiving. Regardless of these aspects of Audiard’s (I have not seen his previous films but have read of his quirks), the film is strikingly compelling, causing the viewer to both cringe as well as be unable to take her eyes off the screen, a combination that can only really be achieved by a master.

So much of reviewing cinema has to do with taste and I will admit freely that Audiard’s style disturbs me as much as Clint Eastwood’s in films like Mystic River (2003) and Million Dollar Baby (2004). Both directors tend towards extreme drama, milking the viewers’ emotions, mostly using the guise of working class issues, gender, and other such political subjects to excise their heavy handed manipulation of the audience, torturing us (almost gleefully) with the awful things that inevitably happen to their main characters (most of whom are not very likeable).

Undeniably both directors are highly talented even while their methods are rather underhand. Luckily, this particular Audiard film, though sharing the above-mentioned distasteful elements, manages to transcend its genre mainly through the astonishingly riveting and humane performances of its two main actors, Marion Cotillard and Matthias Schoenaerts.

Cotillard plays Stéphanie, a whale trainer who suffers a horrific accident when an orca suddenly demolishes a stage on which she is standing. Waking up to find both her legs amputated above the knee, Stéphanie, a beautiful but slightly repressed woman, goes into an inevitable decline.

Enter, Alain, played by Schoenaerts, a brutish young man with a small daughter, who drifts into Antibes to stay with his sister after a nebulously described split from his wife. Alain is self-centered, mostly callous with his son, careless with his sex life and not particularly careful with his words. Having met Stéphanie before her accident, when he rescues her from a bar fight, he is strangely not disconcerted when she calls him post accident from her specially equipped apartment and from a wheelchair.

What follows is riveting due to the naturalness of the two central characters. Even while dealing with the harshest of issues, Cotillard and Schoenaerts portray their characters without artifice, always drawing us into their overly sentimentalising their tragic, almost sordid situations. It’s hard to know why one would want to watch a film... Rust and Bone leaves us with so many questions, some of which might be deserving of deeper study. Does one really want to watch a beautiful woman in her prime, lose her legs and drag herself off her hospital bed in anguish? Do we want to witness the scars that are inevitably going to happen to their main characters (most of whom are not very likeable)?

I cannot answer any of these questions, but I will say that, if nothing else, Rust and Bone is worth seeing for its performances and one transcendent scene involving Cotillard as she visits the orcas after her accident, on crutches and walking, ever so slowly on her prosthetic legs. Perhaps after watching this wrenching scene, one can finally get an idea of what the title may mean.

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**GIZMO by YANTRICK**

**Verdict:** Yantrick is no Luddite, but can’t see an immediate mass-adoption of the Paperwhite for two reasons. Readers who were used to dedicated page-turn buttons in earlier Kindles might have some trouble getting accustomed to this, but it is no big deal. However, the Paperwhite could definitely have done better with a dedicated home button that would take you directly to the menu. At the moment you have to tap the screen for all kinds of navigation.

The Paperwhite is also a much more simplified version of the earlier Kindles. Amazon has done away with the most of the political hot issues to-speech which was as lousy as Microsoft Sam. Unlike most tablets, it doesn’t have an automatic light sensor, meaning you will have to change light settings for each new location. It comes with a PC-connecting USB cable and a not-a-wall-charger, the so-called-ad-frees versions are not really ad-free, and the only way to turn off Wi-Fi is to turn on the ‘aeroplane’ mode, which then logs you out of any network you’re connected to. Many have fussed over its non-expandable 1.25 GB storage, but with a capacity of 3,100 books there’s nothing to fret about.

The Paperwhite, priced at 119 USD ($11,000) for the basic Wi-Fi version, is not available for direct sales in Nepal but you can order one from the folks at artillo.com who will be glad to ship it to you for nominal charges.

Verdict: Yantrick is no Luddite, but can’t see an immediate mass-adoption of readers from the paperback to the Paperwhite. But mark my words, it is here to stay.
Christie’s removes stolen Nepal artworks

Four painted wooden covers of palm-leaf manuscripts had been put up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. They were pulled out last week after objections from academics and specialists of Himalayan arts. Each of the four paintings was unmistakably identified as the property of the National Archive in Kathmandu, based on comparison with images in an inventory created by the Nepal German Manuscript Project in 1970. The rarest of the four works is a 12th-century wood cover which is believed to be one of the oldest known painted art objects in Nepali history.

It is the cover of a manuscript of the Shichaharmahasangraha and depicts ascetics and deities across a red background. Shiva, Uma, and Narad are at the centre, with other assorted deities worshipping linga-yoni and a yojotirlinga. It would have fetched anything up to $50,000.

The painting had previously been reported missing in a 2009 book on Hindu Miniature Paintings of the Kathmandu Valley by Suniti Mainali. The provenance provided by Christie’s on its website said the paintings belonged to a private collection, acquired in Paris in 1959-60. In an email to Prof. Jinah Kim of Harvard and Alexander von Rosspatt of Berkeley, Sandhya Jain-Patel, head of sales at the Indian and South East Asian Department of Christie’s wrote: “Since first learning this information on these Nepali book covers we immediately conducted further investigation and based upon your help and information from your investigation, we decided in concert with our consignor that we will be withdrawing all four lots of Nepalese wooden book covers from the sale.”

She added that the collector has offered to cooperate to return the book covers to Nepal.

When asked to comment, the Director General of the Department of Archaeology, Bhesh Narayan Dahal told Nepal Times: “We have also received information about the auction and I have directed the National Archive to find out more.” Over at the National Archive, chief Prakash Dahal at first wanted to know how this paper found out about the theft. On the record he told us: “We don’t know exactly when it was stolen and we were also surprised to hear about it.”

Soon after the interview, Damal shot off an email to Jain-Patel of Christie’s that asked her to provide the name and address of the collector. “We expect your and his/her full cooperation in speedily returning the objects to the National Archives.”

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Four delicious dishes for $495

A bonus feature story by Sandhya Jain-Patel

Last week at the newly-opened Chinese restaurant La Soon in Bhanimandal, Lalitpur, I happened to be joined by two female entrepreneurs, Sulaiman Daud and Maria Himmermann. Run by two female entrepreneurs, Dolly Yakthumba and Maria Himmermann, La Soon offers a fairly limited yet adequate range of western cuisine, along with more practical as a quick lunch getaway. Leave a few hours free this evening and perhaps order a bottle of wine as you catch up with friends over dinner. Otherwise, we will have to take legal action and for that we will contact Interpol,” Damal threatened. It is unclear how the case will proceed since there is no known record of when the pieces went missing, if the loss was documented, and whether or not a police report is available. An official claim by the police and subsequent request by Interpol to US authorities would likely begin the process of returning the stolen objects, experts say. However, there have been cases in the past in which foreign collectors have voluntarily returned stolen art.

Kunda Dixit

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Bhanimandal, Lalitpur might not be the first place that comes to mind when you think of fine dining. But away from the city centre and tourist hubs along a quiet street, there is a restaurant that offers Western dishes in a comfortable setting.

La Soon Restaurant and Vinortheque is a lengthy name, but the joint itself is small and cozy. Located on the second floor, it’s a nice place to have a long lazy meal while looking out onto the street below, perhaps while reading a magazine from the collection on hand.

Originally situated in Pulchok, the restaurant recently moved to Bhanimandal, perhaps to take advantage of the large expat community that lives here. Run by two female entrepreneurs, Dolly Yakthumba and Maria Himmermann, La Soon offers a fairly limited yet adequate range of western cuisine, along with more familiar local fare.

We decided to try a vegetarian and a meat dish for our starters. The fried spinach ravioli (Rs 210) resembled pastry shells with spinach and cheese filling. Dipped in a spicy salsa sauce, the medley of flavours made it a good starter. In contrast, the chilli chicken (Rs 275) was almost too spicy. Served in a spicy salsa sauce, the medley resembled pastry shells with spinach and cheese filling. Dipped in a spicy salsa sauce, the medley of flavours made it a good starter. In contrast, the chilli chicken (Rs 275) was almost too spicy. Served in a spicy salsa sauce, the medley resembled pastry shells with spinach and cheese filling. Dipped in a spicy salsa sauce, the medley of flavours made it a good starter. In contrast, the chilli chicken (Rs 275) was almost too spicy.

Our main courses were similarly satisfying, served in big portions and very tasty to boot. The grilled pork chops at Rs 495 was a little pricey, but the dish itself was excellent, the meat tender and succulent. I strongly recommend the mashed potato as a side, it’s rich with melted butter and complemented the pork chop perfectly.

The pasta with cream sauce (Rs 320) is a better choice for those looking for a lighter meal. Served with olives and your choice of chicken or tuna, it was piping hot and very filling. I prefer my pasta dry and the kitchen was happy to accommodate my request for less cream sauce.

We ended lunch with chocolate souffle with vanilla ice cream and orange sauce (Rs 175). It’s only big enough for one and the orange sauce was frustratingly dizzled on the plate in pseudo-artistic style rather than on the souffle. However the warm, sweet chocolate went very well with the scoop of vanilla ice cream.

La Soon is an excellent place to have a nice dinner in a quiet, peaceful surrounding, although the slightly expensive dishes and remote location make it less practical as a quick lunch getaway. Leave a few hours free this evening and perhaps order a bottle of wine as you catch up with friends over dinner.

Sukainam Daud

How to get there: Once at Ekantakuna, turn into Bhanimandal. La Soon is directly opposite Laxmi Bank on the second floor.

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Foursome details of Christie’s

Sandhya Jain-Patel, head of sales at the Indian and South East Asian Department of Christie’s, put four paintings up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. Christie’s has been accused of putting up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. Christie’s has been accused of putting up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. Christie’s has been accused of putting up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. Christie’s has been accused of putting up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. Christie’s has been accused of putting up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. Christie’s has been accused of putting up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. Christie’s has been accused of putting up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. Christie’s has been accused of putting up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza. Christie’s has been accused of putting up for auction to be sold at Christie’s on 19 March at New York’s Rockefeller Plaza.
One in four Nepalis is diabetic. Thousands have died and hundreds more suffer from visual impairment, blindness, or kidney failure due to complications of having high blood sugar levels for years.

Yet public awareness and understanding of diabetes is still very low. Children are taught about major killers like malaria, TB, HIV/AIDS in school, but diabetes unfortunately does not fall in this list.

The good news is that the government now provides free hemodialysis in select hospitals like Patan Hospital. For hundreds of diabetics whose kidneys can no longer filter impurities in the blood, this free service (which otherwise costs upwards of Rs 25,000 per month) is allowing them to live longer.

Diabetic nephropathy, a progressive kidney disease, is the major reason why so many Nepalis have to undergo hemodialysis. Nephropathy may be functionally silent that means patients may not show any symptoms for 10 to 15 years after the onset of diabetes. The commonly-used dipstick test (a strip of paper put into a urine sample) will pick up albumin (protein) only when nephropathy is in its advanced stage.

Therefore, it is imperative for diabetics to keep their blood sugar level under control during these ‘silent years’ to avoid (or postpone) renal failure. Because once the albumin becomes significant enough to be detected by dipstick, there is a steady decline in renal function with the rate of blood and plasma filtering in the kidney decreasing on an average of 1ml/min per month.

Since the normal function of the kidney is to filter about 125ml/min, this steady decline will lead to kidney failure in about 12 years after diagnosis of diabetes. However, if blood sugar is kept in check and spilling of albumin in the urine is prevented, this complication can at least be postponed or avoided.

Our emphasis has to be prevention though. Healthy and balanced diet, regular exercise, and maintaining age/height appropriate weight will help keep blood sugar to a normal of 70-100 mg/dL. Alongside taking their medicines or insulin shots, those with diabetes too should follow these three steps to lead longer, healthier lives. ☺️

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Keep Waiting: An old woman sits down next to the road connecting Kuukhuni Dam near Hetauda.
More than 3,500 Nepalis were interviewed nationwide in 38 districts for this year’s Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll in mid-February, and for many of them the disappointment with national politics has trickled down to the district and village level. DDGs, VDCs, and municipalities have been without election councils now for 11 years and the resulting lack of accountability is affecting the lives of Nepalis everywhere. Six in every ten respondents said local elections should be held ‘immediately’, without waiting for national elections for a Constituent Assembly.

Local units of government are responsible for citizenship, birth and marriage registration and other paperwork, and birth and marriage registration are responsible for citizenship, Constituent Assembly.

For national elections for a ‘immediately’, without waiting elections should be held ten respondents said local everywhere. Six in every affecting the lives of Nepalis lack of accountability is for 11 years and the resulting without election councils now municipalities have been down to the district and village level. DDGs, VDCs, and politics has trickled down to sizeable 26% said they still approached council members elected in the last local elections in 1998. The fact that people still go to their elected officials even though they don’t hold any formal positions anymore is an indication of the residual respect accorded to local officials. However, successive poll results from the past three years show a gradual erosion of the people’s trust in local political leaders. When asked to compare between national-level leaders of political parties and local ones, nearly 55% said they were ‘the same’. More people (nearly 20%) thought they were worse, and only 17% thought local leaders were ‘better’ than national ones. More than half the respondents (52%) now say that their trust in political parties has diminished in the past few years and less than 9% felt that their trust had improved. The Poll had a battery of questions on the public trust of other institutions like the army, police, bureaucracy, media etc. ‘Distrust of the police’ is at 24%, and it is higher in the Tarai. The people are similarly distrustful of the civil service, with a full one-third of Tarai respondents saying so.

As in previous years, those fairing comparatively better include the army, the justice system, and media. Nearly 46% said they trusted the media the most or enough, but the percentage of those who trust the media more than 3-4 years ago has gone down from 62% in 2011 to 41% in 2013. As a central question, respondents were asked if there had been an improvement in electricity supply in the past 3-4 years. Nearly 55% in the Pahad and 73% in the Tarai thought it was worse. In comparison, most respondents noticed improvement in local health care and education. More people in rural areas (65%) felt schools had improved than in cities (53%). Similarly, the improvement in road access in the Himal and Pahad is reflected by those who felt that road connectivity was better (67% and 34% respectively).

Asked what should be done to improve services, nearly 55% felt that people would rather stay home and work harder than migrate. In a hypothetical question, respondents were asked what salary level would convince them to migrate abroad to work. More than three-quarters of migration respondents were asked how they wanted to increase their income. Three quarters said they would ‘work harder’ or ‘get a better job’, only 6% said they would migrate for work. Although there are an estimated 4.5 million Nepalis working abroad, what this result shows is that people would rather stay home and work harder than migrate. In a hypotetical question, respondents were asked what salary level would convince them to migrate abroad to work. More than three-quarters of them said between Rs 10-30,000, and the rest (mainly city-dwellers) would migrate only if they earned more than Rs 30,000.

WHO WANTS TO MIGRATE?
Respondents to the Public Opinion Poll were asked how they wanted to increase their income. Three quarters said they would ‘work harder’ or ‘get a better job’, only 6% said they would migrate for work. Although there are an estimated 4.5 million Nepalis working abroad, what this result shows is that people would rather stay home and work harder than migrate. In a hypothetical question, respondents were asked what salary level would convince them to migrate abroad to work. More than three-quarters of them said between Rs 10-30,000, and the rest (mainly city-dwellers) would migrate only if they earned more than Rs 30,000.

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A greener way to fly....

In 2010, Yeti Airlines took an initiative and launched “Green Far West Project” with a strong partnership with RAISA. The project aims to reduce carbon emissions and promote environmental sustainability in the Far-Western region of Nepal. To date, more than 0.1 million tree saplings have been planted and taken care of. Yeti Airlines contributes Rs. 20 / (one way ticket) and Rs. 40 / (round trip ticket) for Kathmandu-Kanchenjunga or Kavrepalang-Nepalgunj sector only. You are welcome to visit any of the community forest sites where your tree saplings are planted and taken proper care.

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From technology enhanced classrooms that deliver multimedia content and allow children to interact with objects and images they see on a screen to mini-libraries, separate art and science corners, and personalised wash areas and toilets, Kathmandu’s toddlers and their parents are spoilt for choice when it comes to preschools. It all depends on how deep your pockets are.

Most schools follow the Montessori curriculum developed by Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori. But there are some like Premier International Preschool and Ullens who provide the more exclusive International Baccalaureate affiliated kindergarten programs.

“Expats living here want their children to attend IB kindergartens because it is a globally recognised program and it is easier for the children to transfer from one school to another when their parents move,” says Pawitra Limbu of Premier International. However, with Nepali parents also looking for globally saleable education for their children, they too are willing to pay the higher fees.

Studies have shown that early childhood development programs not just give children a strong social, emotional, and cognitive foundation but also help to retain them at primary and secondary levels. While families in rural areas don’t have the same luxury as Kathmandu’s parents, the government is gradually expanding pre-primary education and has opened over 30,000 early childhood developments centres around the country with the aim of reaching out to children across 75 districts.
The development need of every child is different so teachers need to be patient and help children explore, experiment, and experience as much as they want to at their own pace.

Dipti Acharya, Bridgewater Preschool

The foundation years at preschool are crucial since this is the time when children develop their gross motor skills and their learning patterns.

Gita Puri, Rupy’s Children Castle

Activity based learning tailored according to the requirements of the students is essential for sharpening young minds.

Rajesh Chaudhary, Rajarshi Gurukul

Providing high quality education for children before they turn five yields significant long-term benefits. We put emphasis on children constructing knowledge through exploration and play.

Nadege Lecomte, Ullens Kindergarten

Our teaching strategies are tailored to student responses and requirements which are based on learning by playing methods.

Kabita Parajuli, Corona International School

No matter what kind of courses the schools claim to offer, parents should do some research beforehand and see if children are being overburdened by the curriculum.

Nawraj Baskota, Kavya School
Trans-boundary revolutionaries

Bhojraj Bhatt in Nepal, 10 March

He is wearing branded shades, military fatigues and boots, a shiny buckle with an American pistol in his holster, a cap with a red star and is standing with 10 other uniformed men in a row. He is the current Maoist chairman, Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’. Other Maoist leaders are present, but there are two taller men who don’t look Nepali wearing lighter uniforms.

This picture was taken in 1999 in Darboto of Rolpa and the two men are Balaji, still a politburo member of the Indian Maoists who by then had been killed. The two men are Balaji, still a politburo member of the Indian Maoists who by then had been killed. The two men are Balaji, still a politburo member of the Indian Maoists who by then had been killed.

The party also sent a photo to the Nepali Moaist leadership. From ‘Prachanda’ to ‘Don’t deserve to win a single seat’.

I have cancer and go for regular chemotherapy. But every time there was a band, the ambulance journey from my home to the hospital used to give me nightmares. The band enforces would stop the ambulance and ask, “Where is the sick one?” Due to my fractured back, I am not able to lie down while travelling so I would be seated. They wouldn’t believe me and demand the driver to turn back the vehicle. It used to get so frustrating that I started asking another person to lie on the stretcher so that we would be allowed to pass. The entire country has to suffer because of bandas. The economy is bought to a standstill. Millions of students are kept away from their classes putting their futures at stake. Daily-wage labourers and their families have to go to bed hungry. And those who are ill are deprived of timely treatment. Tourists are left stranded. Fresh milk, fruits, and vegetables go to waste while children cry for food. There is a sudden price hike of daily commodities and farmers and consumers have to bear the brunt. The violence and vandalism that are the sudden price hike of daily commodities and farmers and consumers have to bear the brunt. The violence and vandalism that are the sudden price hike of daily commodities and farmers and consumers have to bear.

I want to test your IQ. What comes after 8, 9 and 11? (a) Thank you. (b) No answer. (c) None of the above.

From Peoples War to Fragile Peace

Pandit Ram Prasad Bhatt in Nepal, 10 March

We will break their legs if they try to force elections upon us.

CPN-M Chairman Mohan Baidya talking to supporters in Kabhre, Himalkhabar.com, 18 March

From The Nepali Press
Nothing, but the truth

Perpetrator remorse and truth cannot be traded for justice

RAM KUMAR BHANDARI

The International Day for the Right to the Truth on 24 March is an occasion to remind ourselves that victims and their relatives have a right to know to the fullest extent possible the fate of loved ones who were disappeared, tortured, raped, and killed during the Nepal conflict. Whether this will include the character of ‘collective’ remorse, meaning it is also articulated as a community’s right to know the history of its own oppression. Civil conflicts involve direct acts of violence, but they also leave social, political, and economic legacies that linger long after a peace agreement.

Nepalis are entitled to respect and uphold the rule of law. Yet, known and alleged perpetrators of wartime excesses occupy senior positions in the military, police, and government. The right to truth therefore takes on a society-wide character beyond close relatives. Knowing the truth about the past is necessary to ensure that Nepal does not relapse into violence in the uncertain days ahead as a chief justice-led government attempts to hold new elections in a tense political environment. R2T is also a moral imperative because understanding the oppression of fellow citizens is a crucial safeguard for the future and renewing rule of law in a country divided by war. Should a TRC move ahead as planned, the voices of victims could be sidelined in favour of perpetrator amnesty. With the guilty from both sides holding senior positions in the state mechanism, there is active collusion between the Nepal Army and Maoists to keep the truth buried.

The Maoist party has threatened activists demanding the detention of Balkrishna Dhungel, who was convicted by the Supreme Court itself to life imprisonment for a murder in 1998. How is the chief justice-led government going to handle other cases of Rajendra Dhakal, Maina Sunwar, Arjun Lama, and many more?

The ordinance provides discretionary power to the TRC, which may recommend amnesty for serious crimes. But the Commission should not be a court which ‘the standard of proof’ more than the pain of victims. It is only the victims who can forgive or decide whom to forgive. Perpetrators cannot pardon themselves. If left unaddressed, the grief of relatives of victims will fester and turn to revenge.

The ordinance provides discretionary power to the TRC, which may recommend amnesty for serious crimes. But the Commission should not be a court which ‘the standard of proof’ more than the pain of victims. It is only the victims who can forgive or decide whom to forgive. Perpetrators cannot pardon themselves. If left unaddressed, the grief of relatives of victims will fester and turn to revenge.

The right to truth is known under international law. There is a misconception that truth can be traded for justice through the work of a ‘Truth Commission’. A precedent is the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was empowered to grant amnesty for politically motivated crimes including torture and forced disappearances in exchange for an apology and full self-disclosure of crimes. Is the perpetrator remorse enough? If the South African TRC was established today, it would not meet current international standards. The victims of grave human rights violations have a right to redress while being protected by domestic legislation as well as international legal norms. It is neither for the government nor an independent commission to decide whether or not that right will be upheld. The right to truth is known as an ‘autonomous’ right. The victims’ right to know the fate of relatives stands in addition to their right to justice.

In a courtroom, the process focuses on determining the guilt or innocence of the accused. The goal is not to satisfy a victim’s demands to know what really happened. Court cases may, but very often do not, reveal information about the circumstances surrounding a criminal act, the causes and facts of abuses, and most importantly, the whereabouts of a victim’s remains. This means the verdict may be determined in court without fulfilling the right to truth.

The right to truth also has special relevance at a time when those with power are threatening those who seek truth and justice. But why should truth and justice matter when those with power are threatening those who seek truth and justice? Right to the Truth on 24 March is an occasion to remind ourselves that victims and their relatives have a right to know to the fullest extent possible the fate of loved ones who were disappeared, tortured, raped, and killed during the Nepal conflict.

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Iran Kaka got a bit carried away in Kavre the other day and said his followers would break the legs of BRB and PKD if they came to campaign in his constituency. Something hasn’t quite worked out in the hard bargaining between the Dashies and Cashies and the Ass’ guess is it’s something to do with hard cash. Dash Baddies haven’t yet registered their party with the EC, so they must still be holding out for the possibility of a last minute alliance. An unholy dalliance of Baddies and Maddies, meanwhile, will keep them out of each other’s turfs.

May backfire, though, sticking together may just remind voters that the Maodeshi Coalition was the most corrupt government this country ever had since the Lichhavi Era.

It must have been really frustrating for the eight bahfuns inside 4-walls who lead the 4-party Mechanism to come up with names to fill up the 11-member cabinet. The High Priests want people who are not too independent and token women who are yes-men. To head constitutional bodies, they looked for candidates who are loyal, but settled for a royal.

The Donkey, being a wise guy, thought it had seen it all. But the proposal from the Gang of Four Bahuins to make Loktantra Man Sing the head honcho of the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authoritarians was a reminder that we ain’t seen nothing yet. This is like making a poacher a zoo-keeper.

The reason their appointments were delayed was because the Mechanism bargained hard into the night to push nominees who had been lobbying hard with top brass, even offering dough and/or moolah to party coffers as advance for their appointment. But the man who is really ticked off is Comrade Lila who now has to take orders from colleagues whom he outran to become Chief Sec just a few months ago.

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The Mechanism is still stuck on the date for elections. Not just RCP, even godless Commies who swear by Marx, Lenin, and Stalin first want to consult the astrologers about planetary alignments before they agree on a date. Chief Regmi, being a god-fearing man, also wants the stars aligned. So, expect a date as soon as meteorologists and astrologers agree on it.

After arresting people with long hair, the next target of Kathmandu’s Finest, according to a Police press statement this week, are kids throwing water-filled balloons over next week’s Holi days. But if you are a murderer that the Supreme Court has convicted to life imprisonment, that’s perfectly fine. This way to the podium, Sir.

The last topic on our agenda this week is the strange uttering of Comrade Octopus who was overheard telling sidekicks: “BRB’s utility is finished.” Was he speaking as himself or was he echoing the view of the DO who helped extradite his wife from Pune?

And the headline of the week must be: Indian Chicks Seized At Border.