

NEPALI Times

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ECONOMIC BURDEN

With just over four months to go for elections, it looks like the international community is more keen on elections than we are. The run-up to elections has been characterised by chronic bickering and lack

of preparation by the parties. Voters seem disgusted with the same old political figures. Nepalis, like this grass cutter outside the Ministry of Local Development in Singha Darbar on Tuesday (above), are more concerned about

day-to-day survival. Economic growth estimates released on Wednesday ahead of the budget show it will be below target at 3.6 per cent this year. The Nepali rupee nearly hit a record 100 to a US dollar this week, feeding inflationary pressures.

SOLUTION IS ELECTION
EDITORIAL PAGE 2



KATHMANDU
WAR ZONE PAGE 17

THE
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THE ELECTION SOLUTION

With just over four months to go for elections, it does appear as though our international partners are more keen on holding it than Nepal's leaders. Voters, for their part, are thoroughly disinterested and apathetic because they don't see new elections resolving anything. What's the point of voting for the same old people who failed to write a constitution the last time, they ask.

This cynicism is understandable, but it won't lead us anywhere. The only way to break the impasse and give some momentum to the political process is to have a new vote and hope for the best. However, the run-up to elections has been characterised by chronic bickering and a singular lack of preparation by the parties. It is as if they are resigned to the fact that polls won't happen as scheduled in November. They must also sense the acute disillusionment among voters and are afraid of losing, but are too consumed by greed and ambition to make way for a new generation of leaders with fresh ideas and perspectives.

The parties are also distracted by deep-seated rivalries and divisions within themselves and are in a wait-and-watch mode. The two Maoist parties are in the throes of an intense power struggle at the top between Baburam Bhattarai and Pushpa Kamal Dahal. The animus between them has peaked with Bhattarai's resignation from his top post, hinting that Dahal should do the same. The Baidya faction threatened to go back to war in Pokhara, offered talks a day later, and then the very next day, in a surprise move, its two top leaders flew off to China. The NC and the UML, meanwhile, have no new ideas of their own and only act in reaction to moves by the UCPN (M).

India's Minister of External Affairs, Salman Khurshid, air-dashed to Kathmandu and met 35 leaders



If the parties are going to decide everything anyway, what is the point of having a large and expensive Constituent Assembly?

ON THE WEB

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NO SUPPLY, ONLY DEMANDS

The Maoists set the example during the war and afterwards proved that one can literally get away with murder ('No supply, only demands', Editorial, #663). So why shouldn't water suppliers go on strike to uphold their right to cheat consumers?

Nepali Chap

- Such unruly behaviour on the part of business owners is a direct legacy of the 10 long years spent in the jungle. They have absolutely no respect for laws and regulations; whatever they demand, they get. Ordinary Nepalis and the media need to put pressure on the government so that these criminal cartels are brought under the rule of law.

Basant

FROM NOWHERE TO NOWHERE

As a transportation engineer by profession and a native of Gorkha, I am deeply concerned about this ambitious road project which could cause much cultural and architectural damage in Tsum Valley ('Road from nowhere to nowhere', Sonam Lama, #663). The project seems to be driven by the wild ambition of greedy politicians and contractors who are lured by the prospect of pocketing large sums of money. This is also an example of how the National Planning Commission as well as other state organisations in Nepal function: driven by political ambition and blind faith in technology, they are willing

to do just about anything especially when the monetary stakes are high.

Prabin Jung Thapa

- Over the last 40 years, my husband and I have visited Nepal 14 times. We have trekked all the standard routes and some not so well known ones as well. While we understand that roads can open access to medical care, markets, and convenience, we have also seen the economic ruin and depression that roads can bring to villagers on former trekking routes such as the Kali Gandaki Valley. Nepal is one of the few countries left in the world where enviro-tourists can walk for days in a natural road-free environment, but at the same time, these precious sanctuaries are becoming increasingly sought after. They are being destroyed by new roads. When they are gone, they are gone forever. Lama is right: if the Tsum road is to go ahead, it should be an alternative approach that protects holy sites and a vital trekking route.

Sue and Howard Dengate

- The development of roads is indeed a double-edge sword. In today's world, roads are imperative for development. Unfortunately, road-building comes with its share of negative effects. A partial solution is to identify the socio-economic-cultural impacts in the region where the road is being built and try to mitigate these factors. However, a well-travelled and exposed person like Lama should not be making such anti-development comments and should lobby with

concerned ministries and departments instead.

Vijay Gurung

Well-planned and durable roads are undoubtedly a better option than having no roads. They open up new avenues of employment. Pursuing cultural preservation does not mean we have to lock the place down.

Som Nath

- This is a good piece by Pranab Man Singh ('Making inroads', #663). And here is my two cents on the issue: dear tree huggers, hippies, and sycophantic environment-brokers, please refrain from commenting on the disadvantages of roads. As a poor country, we need roads to spur economic growth, period.

Sanam L

DOOMED TO REPEAT IT

They say only fools learn by repeating mistakes. That tag fits perfectly well on us Nepalis as we are once again woefully unprepared: remember the 2008 polls ('Doomed to repeat it', Trishna Rana, #663)? The 11-point agreement says polls have to take place before December, I doubt adding a month will help much. So what is it going to be? Hardcore back door negotiations with Mohan Baidya and friends to make elections take place in four months by hook or crook or will our leaders keep on extending the deadline and say: sometime in 2014, stay tuned?

Sweta S

- Inclusion is good and as the writer points out, we need as many Nepalis from as many social-economic-political-

in nine hours on Tuesday. His message before leaving Delhi, in meetings with officials here, and before departure from Kathmandu underlined just one main message: to strengthen democracy and ensure stability, Nepal needs elections as scheduled.

The leaders who lined up to meet him at Dwarika's Hotel heard it, but will they listen? Baidya and his deputy, CP Gajurel, will probably get the same message in China where there will also be strong pressure for the Maoist party to reunite before elections.

The Baidya faction has agreed to talks with the Big Four, but there will be some give and take in return for their agreement to take part in the polls. However, we see the bigger hurdle in how the internal dynamics within the UCPN (M) play out in its Plenum next week.

There are larger, over-arching questions of whether it makes sense to have a bloated 601-member CA made up of the same party proxies as before. Why elect 491 or 601 members to an expensive CA when it will be the same four party syndicate that will decide everything anyway? Why not convene a roundtable meeting of the four big forces to iron out most of the contentious issues beforehand?

That way the election can be to an assembly that will adopt what has already been drafted by the previous CA for the new constitution and leave the contentious issues for later. This would avoid the volatility that is sure to accompany elections when the campaigning is going to be dominated by communal polarisations.

If it is stability and progress we want, this may be the least harmful way forward. An election should be a solution, it shouldn't make things worse.

Q OF THE WEEK

What is your favourite adventure sport in Nepal?

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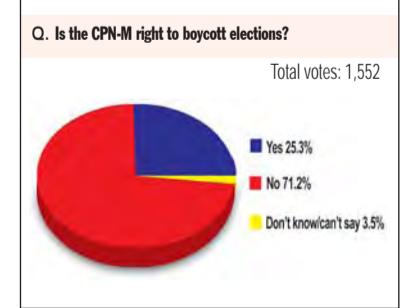
Sarad Pradhan: Rafting
Richard Bull: Paragliding
Rishab Khanal: Bungee
Vineet Sharma: Mountain biking
Bob Mason: Parahawking
Yash Kumar: Himalayan marathon
Andy Collins: Yak milking
Suraj Aryal: Trekking
Douglas DiSalvo: Visa extension
Komal Shah: Driving bike on Nepal bands
Sigmund Stengel: Nepali toilets
AS HO KA: Dandi biyo
Nisha Sharma Pnageni: Bungee
Gc Rabindra: Paragliding, kayaking
Sudeep Kandel: Ultra marathon

This week's Question:
What do you like best about monsoon?
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Weekly Internet Poll #664





OUMAIMA GANNOUNI



BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

In the muddled political landscape of Nepal, dissenting voices, no matter how feeble, project themselves into the headlines. For a democracy grappling with transition, the country has been exceptionally tolerant, even towards undemocratic and unconstitutional demands made from the streets.

From the far-right, demanding that country rolls back to a Hindu fiefdom to the ultra-left, vowing to unleash another Armageddon, the interim political order has provided space for all kinds of agonists. But the country cannot afford to get perennially stuck in this interim quicksand. The fundamentals of this new republic must be

institutionalised through a statute drafted by a representative body ASAP.

Presently, the country's political equation is delicately balanced with parties on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, which is what makes consensual politics so difficult. There is no functioning legislative body and the existing interim government was formed as a result of unwilling compromise among major political parties. It also derives its legitimacy from the same loosely defined political consensus.

So, the decision by the interim electoral government, led by Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi, to announce CA elections for 19 November must be seen in the same light. There may be no constitutional basis to the claim, but in any democratic society, an election is the most democratic choice. There may be apathy in the general mood of the country,

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Breaking up and making up

National and international political constellations are all in favour of November polls

but people who have remained without representation for over a year wouldn't mind elections if the polls put Nepal back on track.

As good neighbours, both India and China have pledged their support for elections. The Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi, who was in Kathmandu in June, and the Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid who made a day-long stop on 9 June met leaders from all political parties. They engaged more with some, but conveyed near identical messages.

Everybody isn't exactly warming up to the idea of the November polls, however, the few loud men picketing against elections can at best be considered as that jittery lot that is nervous about being judged to their strength, and at worst, be ignored as attention seekers.

Two of these are Mohan Baidya and Upendra Yadav, but both have suddenly started making conciliatory remarks.

To read between the lines, as the man who considers himself undisputed champion of Madhesi agenda, Yadav is unhappy with the way Mahanta Thakur and Bijay Gachhadar have overshadowed him. There is a general speculation that Yadav is not among the favourites down south, which is why earlier attempts by Madhesi intellectuals and civil society to bring him together with Thakur did not succeed.

Besides, the fact that their stance on the Madhes isn't too far apart proves that the differences lie elsewhere. So, the much talked about unity among Tarai politicians, whether or not it includes Upendra Yadav, will not just be about the Madhes.

Mohan Baidya's CPN-M seems the more disoriented. Surrounded by comrades in deep sulks like CP Gajurel and Pampha Bhusal, Baidya has a tough job confronting their inflated egos and bringing them around on the issue of elections.

The party does not have a large enough support base to upset the polls as it claims and will end up as a fringe party if it contests elections on its own. But Baidya knows the opportunity cost of not contesting is much higher. So, even if he missed Salman Khurshid's message in Kathmandu, he probably got the Chinese version of it in Beijing with an extra bit of advice on the strength of re-unity.

If he is not foolish enough to reject the polls, Baidya will have limited choice of either seeking a broader alliance with the UCPN (M) or going for the party unity.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal, for his part, has never lashed out at his mentor for splitting the party because he always knew that the honeymoon with the Madhesi parties weren't going to last forever. He will politely welcome Baidya & Co back in the party, not because he wants to, but because he needs to. ☐

SHAH RUKH KHAN
AND HIS AQUARACER

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Kathmandu, Nepal.

TAXI!

Kathmandu's airport taxis look like museum pieces ...

SUNIR PANDEY

You have just landed in Kathmandu and the last thing you need after a long flight and a long line at immigration is to be hassled by taxi touts who want you to pay through your nose for a ride into town in a 40-year-old Datsun.

After decades of wrangling and rumours of kickbacks in high places, Kathmandu airport taxis are finally going to be replaced by the latest model sedans, hatchbacks, and vans.

"Every time I come to Kathmandu, I avoid the airport taxi and head over to the departure area and hail a cab that has just dropped a passenger," says David Dubois, a French photographer, "that way I never get fleeced by the airport taxi service."

Now, arriving passengers like Dubois won't feel so bad about paying exorbitant rates for an airport cab because the museum pieces are being replaced by newer cars. Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) management has struck a deal with airport taxi owners to add new cars to its service



PICS: DEVYANI SHIWAKOTI

and retire some of the antique models. Forty green-plated white Ford Classics, Ford Figos, and Maruti Eecos will be lined up at the arrival area from August. Another 160 will follow by the start of the tourist peak season in October.

"We had been planning this for many years and we're glad to have finally found a balance that satisfied all parties," says Shyam Sundar Shrestha, deputy manager at

TIA. "Now our new taxis will have uniformed and name-tagged drivers who can speak English with visitors."

The current charge-as-you-like practice will also be upgraded to a standard prepaid service. Passengers will make a payment at a counter in the arrival lounge and then hand the receipt to the driver at the end of their ride.

All these years, taxi owners, under powerful unions with

political protection, were cheating passengers and refusing to pay any fee for their lucrative business. Not only were the cars old, but passengers were overcharged, service was terrible, and the cars usually broke down on the way into the city. The new taxi service will also provide the airport with an additional Rs 3,200,000 in revenue each year.

As early as 2003, some

taxis owners had tried to get their old cars replaced, however, negotiations stalled with the government on taxes and on what should happen to the old cars. Fights broke out between owners. Now, the Airport Hawai Yatru Sewa Byawasthapan Limited (AHYSBL) has won the taxi-replacement bid and will be handling airport transport.

Purushottam Simkhada of AHYSBL says they convinced

Steering clear

Nepal has an outside chance to move up the ladder on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) list of member states who have pledged to stop money laundering and financing terrorist activities within their borders. Ever since Nepal signed on to the global anti-money laundering body in 2010, it has been fulfilling its obligations, but at the very last minute.

The Bill Against Organised Crime, passed through an ordinance in February, kept Nepal from being blacklisted and losing foreign investors at the last hour. The Mutual Legal Assistance Act and the Extradition Treaty Act were also passed right before the deadline in 2012.

After Khil Raj Regmi's government passed the Anti-Money Laundering Act and the Proceeds of Crime bill in June, Nepal once again finds itself in FATF's 'grey' category. This means that

although the country has fulfilled its basic obligations, it remains under constant surveillance. If a visiting team finds Nepal's progress in the next few months satisfactory, it might recommend FATF to take us off the list. But if we fail to show further progress after that, we will be back to square one.

Contrary to premature reports celebrating Nepal getting clearance within three months, Baikuntha Aryal, joint secretary at the Finance Ministry says the ordeal is far from over. "There is a plenary in October and FATF will decide whether to send a team for an onsite visit," he says. "We will know the details when and if they arrive in Nepal."

At the FATF plenary held in Norway from 19 to 21 June, Brunei, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Bolivia were removed from the grey list and given a clean chit for improving implementation of anti-money laundering laws.

A mutual evaluation report published in July 2011 revealed that money-laundering and terrorist financing in Nepal occurs through profits made from drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms trafficking, corruption, counterfeit currency, tax evasion, and gold smuggling. Since then, the country has made steady progress and fulfilled all legal obligations.

The Finance Ministry is now pushing the government to create acts and directives to implement these laws once it receives the list of new requirements from FATF. "There are talks of yet another mutual evaluation in 2015. If we continue to make steady progress till then, we could break out of the grey list," says Aryal.

Sunir Pandey

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Nepal's fiscal cliff, #633
Get on with it, #593

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Party
(is not yet over)

... finally they are going to be replaced by newer cars



BEFORE AND AFTER: A vintage 1976 model Toyota (left) still takes passengers from the airport to the city, but brand new green-plate Chevrolet Figos like this one (above) will start replacing them next month.

everyone from owner to driver to agree to this change. "The deal we made with the ministry allows us to keep some of the relatively newer vehicles," he says. "For taxi drivers, we have arranged for soft loans so that they may become taxi-owners. The really old vehicles may be sold off to scrap yards or whoever finds them useful." Transportation rules in Nepal forbid the re-registration of vehicles of more

than 20 years old. The airport is busiest between 11am to 3pm and sees around 1,500 passengers arriving every day. Together with the Sajha public bus service, passengers will have a range of options of going into town.

Says Shrestha: "The airport had a bad reputation because of the old taxis, hopefully that will not be the case anymore as we phase out the old vehicles."

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BIZ BRIEFS



New leadership

AK Ahluwalia has been appointed as the new Chief Executive Officer of Everest Bank. According to the press release Ahluwalia has more than 32 years of banking experience at Punjab National Bank, India and holds the post of Deputy General Manager in the parent organisation.



A1 tablet

Mercantile Office System launched Acer Iconia A1 tablet in Nepal. The Google Android 4.2 OS based Iconia A1 is powered by 1.2GHz Quad-Core processor, features 16GB of internal storage and up to 32GB of expandable memory.

Easy investment



NMB bank has issued five years closed scheme worth Rs 600 million called NMB

Sulav Investment Fund-1. Sixty per cent of the fund will be invested in shares and the remaining forty per cent will be invested in bonds and debenture reads the press statement. The fund will be managed by NMB bank's subsidiary company NMB Capital.

Hold my hand



Unilever Nepal Limited (UNL) handed over a cheque worth Rs 500,000 to the Prime Minister's relief fund for victims of floods and landslides. Managing Director for UNL, Srikanth Srinivasamadhavan along with Ravi Bhakta Shrestha, director UNL handed over the cheque to.



Education first

Sipradian Sahayata, established by employees of Sipradi Group, has provided full scholarship to 10 students of Shree Bishnu Devi Siksha Sadan School in Satungal. The organisation also provided different educational materials, uniform, shoes, and bags to the school children.



Shining future

Clinic Plus Shampoo has declared Nirmala Mahat and her daughter Swastika and Reena Thapa and her daughter Aakriti as winners of its fifth audition (mid-western region) of its Clinic Plus Healthy Hair Contest. The winning mother-daughter duo in the nationwide finale will receive scholarships worth Rs 500,000

Celebration time

The Ford Heritage Month concluded in Nepal last week. The finale was celebrated with felicitation of Vintage Ford Owners, who were presented with appreciation letters from Ford Motor Company and miniature of Model A.



Cash full

Pepsi announced the third week's daily winners of its Pepsi 20-20 campaign. The winning numbers are 683679X, 104776C, 223196N, 791863U, 879694F, 842417N and 778769Y. The grand prize winner will take home Rs 2 million at the end of the campaign.



Lucky winners

Nepal General Marketing, authorised distributor of Hero two-wheelers in Nepal announced the winners of its new Baaf re Baaf scheme. Dinanath Prasad, Dipendra Chowdhary, and Ramesh Yadav have won Philips products worth Rs 100,000 rupees, Rs 70,000, Rs 50,000 respectively.

When war becomes a memory

Comrades who fought alongside each other have charted out different futures for themselves

AMIR JOSHI

Jaya Bahadur Nyasur looked on with indifference last week as ex-Maoist combatants were formally inducted into the national army. The 35-year-old from Makwanpur, who opted for voluntary retirement in 2012 after six years in the UN-supervised camp in Nawalparasi, was engaged in hand-to-hand combat with some of them not too long ago.

Although he has no regrets about choosing retirement, like thousands of his former

comrades Nyasur feels let down by uncaring leaders and is beginning to question what it was all for.

"I dedicated my life to the party and the revolution and didn't ask for anything in return. But look at me now. I have a family of five to look after and I was injured," he says. "The party doled out millions so the son of our leader could climb Mt Everest, but it couldn't care less about people like me. I feel used."

After the regrouping process in January last year, 7,365 former combatants opted for voluntary retirement and only six chose the rehabilitation package. Of the 1,430 who qualified for integration into the Nepal Army 1,352 passed out from eight training centres in Trisuli, Saljhand, Itahari, Kharanitar, Rajhene, Hile, Surkhet, and Boradari on 5 July, marking the end of seven years of the peace process.



Today Nyasur lives with his wife and four daughters in a rundown shack near Bhimsengola in Kathmandu. He lost his hearing, much of his sight, and both his arms during the battle of Hetauda in 2004. The Rs 6,200 he received as compensation government has

long run out.

An American journalist offered to take his daughters to the US for schooling but Nyasur turned it down saying his daughters should study in Nepal and contribute to the development of their motherland. It's a decision

he regrets deeply. With his monthly income of Rs 6,800 as a helper, he cannot afford to send his daughters to school.

"Those who never had to witness the violence and destruction of war have now amassed enormous wealth and are running the country, while



WOUNDS THAT HAVEN'T HEALED

While the peace process might be over, there are thousands of women across Nepal seeking justice for wartime rape

TOOFAN NEUPANE
in NEPALGANJ

On 23 November 2004, a group of army men came to Purna Maya's home in Dailekh and accused her of feeding the Maoists. She was blindfolded, dragged out of her house, and taken to the barrack in Kadachaur where five men raped her mercilessly for hours. When she tried to resist, fists and boots rained down on her. Once they were done, they threw her in the middle of the street and left her for dead.

Purna Maya survived her wounds, but her life has never been the same. She came to Surkhet Hospital for treatment and has not returned home to Dailekh since then because she does not want to face the taunts of society. In September 2011,

she finally had the courage to file a complaint at the District Police Office in Surkhet, but DSP Deep Kumar Basnet turned her away by saying an allegation must be made within 35 days of the incident. The Supreme Court too was similarly unresponsive. Only in December 2012, did the United Nations Human Right Committee register her complaint.

With the help of NGOs the 40-year-old travelled to Cambodia last year to talk to women from around the world who had experienced sexual violence. With the knowledge she gained from her trip, she started an all-women's group for violence and torture survivors in Surkhet.

Pavitra is a member of this group. She was abducted by the



PICS: AMIR JOSHI

those of us who scarified our lives on the front lines for the equality and freedom of fellow Nepalis are being neglected by the state and have nowhere to go. I would like the leaders to step into our shoes for a day," he says.

Twenty-seven-year-old

Nanda Rai from Dhankuta joined the Maoist army when he was 17 and after the conflict chose to be integrated into the Nepal Army. He says he decided to join because he wanted a fresh start and live a life of dignity.

"If I had gone home, people

Maoists from Surkhet when she was 17 and still has nightmares of being brutally tortured and raped and even years after the incident, the scars of that night are fresh in her memory. Her husband of one year left her the moment he found out and she now earns her living washing dishes at a hotel.

Kalpana (name changed) from Satokhani, Surkhet was washing clothes when three Maoists invited her to a meeting. She had no idea what awaited her. For one and half months, the Maoist combatants repeatedly raped Kalpana and forced to become a porter. She was finally allowed to go home because of bad health, but hasn't told her family about the rape till today.

Bimala who is also from Satakholi has equally horrifying memories of war. Raped and beaten by seven Maoist guerrillas, the scars of that night are still visible on her stomach. Although she kept it a secret from her husband, she confided to female Maoist

cadre. But so far she has neither received any support from the state or the Maoist's disciplinary commission.

There are thousands like Purna Maya and Pavitra, but very few lodge a complaint due to fear of social stigma and further victimisation. According to the *Nepal Conflict Report* published by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of the 100 registered sexual violence cases, the army is responsible for the all but 12. The report also says that one third of the victims are girls under 15 and even pregnant or mentally disabled women were not spared.

News of the induction of combatants into the Nepal Army made headlines last week and political analysts were quick to hail it as an auspicious end to the peace process. But true peace will come only when the rapists are tried and put behind bars. ☺

nepalitimes.com

Rape for ransom, #635



SAME BUT DIFFERENT: Former Maoist combatant Jaya Bahadur Nyasur (left) from Makwanpur has no regrets about choosing retirement, but feels let down by uncaring leaders and wonders how he will support his family. Saral Paudel (above) from Sindhupalchok who also opted for retirement, has not lost his revolutionary zeal and works in his village indoctrinating students in communist ideology.

in my village would look down on me, now that I am in the army they will show a little more respect," he says. Looking back, he feels the war was not only pointless but also robbed thousands of young Nepalis like him of a bright future.

"Selfish leaders took advantage of our desperation and manipulated us into fighting on their behalf," he says, "they are in power now, but what have they done for the thousands who sacrificed their lives for the revolution?"

Unlike Nyasur and Rai, 35-year-old Saral Paudel from Sindhupalchok has not lost his revolutionary zeal. Paudel was active in village politics from a young age and even though he came from a middle-class family, he was convinced about the need for liberation

through armed struggle.

"I do not regret my past, am proud of my achievements, and feel there is better future for the nation. If our party is given 10 years, we can turn Nepal around and make it more prosperous and equitable," he says.

Believing that all his hard work during the war would go to waste if he joined the Nepal Army, Paudel chose voluntary retirement. Since then he has been working as the district-in-charge for the UCPN (M) in Sindhupalchok where he indoctrinates students and labour union members in communist ideology. He recently published a book named *Krantika Kathaharu*, a collection of his diary entries from the war (see box).

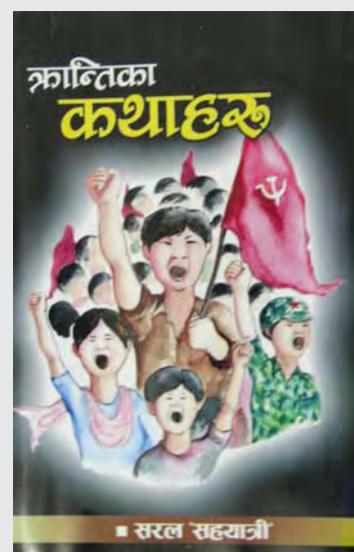
Paudel is frustrated with the integration process and how party leaders stopped paying attention to the rank and file. "There are certain norms that need to be applied when two major forces of the country are merged. I have continuously expressed my dissatisfaction about the management of ex-combatants, but sadly no one bothers to listen," admits Paudel.

As the discontent of former combatants festers, there is a danger they may flare up into bigger problems. Yet, the voices of these young foot soldiers are all but drowned out by musical-chair politics.

Says Nyasur, "We need food, we need opportunities, we need development. But both the state and the party have failed to look after common Nepalis. We fought for 10 years and nothing much seems to have changed." ☺

nepalitimes.com

Remember what happened, East West by Kunda Dixit
A war of words, #579



Writing about a revolution

After three attempts to publish his war-time diary as a book, Paudel had given up. But his wife Asmita encouraged him to finally finish it. *Krantika Kathaharu* (Stories of the Revolution) were published recently by Paudel's Third Division of the Maoist army.

Paudel had a fellow-warrior and friend during the conflict named Kabita. She once asked him: "What will you write if I die in this war?" He had replied flippantly and asked her what she would write. "I will write a poem for you since my name means poem," Kabita had replied.

She died in the battle of Runjatar and Paudel decided that he would start writing a diary which was published as a book in which he remembers fallen comrades, details of various battles, and his strong dissatisfaction with the integration process. He writes about Kabita's courage in proposing to marry a comrade who was junior to her.

Paudel was seriously injured in the battle of Ramechhap and the book details the years after the conflict when he decided on the retirement package.



Pabitra

And we all fall down

Nepali rupee free-fall hits the economy hard

PAAVAN MATHEMA

Like a conjoined twin, the Nepali rupee has been tumbling down with the Indian currency, and hit an all-time low selling rate of Rs. 97.69 against the US dollar on Tuesday this week. The NRs has been continuously weakening against international currencies, but in the last four months it has experienced a sharp depreciation of 11.5 per cent with the dollar.

The US dollar is rising on the international exchange rate arena, stepping on the financial crisis in Europe and the unstable Euro. Investors and financial institutions are now putting their money on dollar-dominated assets and making it stronger against all major currencies, including the rupee. The exodus of foreign capital from India since May has made the IRs fall sharply. Rising demand for gold is also hurting the Indian rupee. This fiscal year, the IRs became one of the worst performers among major Asian currencies. With our currencies pegged at Rs 1.6, the turn of events has directly impacted the NRs.

Theoretically, this depreciation should boost



our exports. Nepali products become cheaper and thus there should be a rise in their demand. But the basket of goods we export is relatively smaller in comparison to our import volume. According to data published by the Trade and Export Promotion Centre, in the first 10 months of fiscal year 2012-13, the total exports of the country increased by only 1.6 per cent to Rs 62.71 billion, as compared to the same period last year. In fact, for Nepal, a depreciation of our currency hurts our exports to some extent because a proportion of our

exports require imported raw materials.

Meanwhile, imports in the same period had increased to Rs 494.95 billion, an increment of 21.3 per cent. Pressure from the strong dollar is bound to push this number even higher. The expensive imports will have a lasting effect on the market: even cheap Khasa-bajar goods will become more expensive. This will soon be reflected on retail prices. Vendors are already preparing to increase the price of their imported goods and this will push our inflation further up. The only benefit

is the increase in import tax revenue.

The saving grace is that our IRs peg is still at the golden NRs 160 and two-third of our imports from India is still transacted in IRs. The Nepal Rastra Bank had allowed import of more than 160 products against US dollar payment from India. But in the first 10 months of this fiscal year, the country imported goods worth Rs 31.41 billion using the provision, down from Rs 47.46 billion during the same period last year. However, our import from India against IRs also includes petroleum and as India imports about 75 per cent of its own petroleum requirement, the increased price will be transferred to Nepal.

The most worrying effect will be for hydropower developers as their costs will multiply with the rising dollar, adding to high cost of financing. The Nepal Electricity Authority has signed power purchase agreements with Khimti and Bhotekosi hydropower projects in dollar terms and this means the NEA's losses are bound to grow.

Nepal's cost for debt servicing will also go up, although most of our credit is long-term in nature and the

payments will be made at the exchange rate of the payment date. Another outflow of dollars is in education. Every year, thousands of students leave the country to study abroad. In the year 2011/12, Nepal sent over 9,000 students to the US alone and is the 11th largest source of foreign students in the US. The bills in dollars are paid by their parents in Nepal.

The only bright side is perhaps the increased value of remittance caused by the appreciation of the dollar. Nepal sells dollars to pay for its balance of trade deficit with India, so it may ease our burden with India.

At the time of going to press, the dollar was selling at the rate of Rs 96.31. This slight improvement is the result of a wide set of measures employed by the Reserve Bank of India and market regulator SEBI on Tuesday to prevent the rupee from slipping down beyond the 12 per cent it has fallen since the end of April. Given that our exchange rate with the dollar is determined by our pegged rate with India, there is little Nepal Rastra Bank or the market can do to sway the rate. Our focus should be on managing its strain on inflation rate, already in double digits. 

The golden goose



The recent collapse of gold prices has not really changed the case for investing in it one way or the other

fear of a second Great Depression. Later, some investors feared that governments would unleash inflation to ease the burden of soaring public debt and address persistent unemployment.

As central banks brought policy interest rates down to zero, no one cared that gold yields no interest. So it is nonsense to say that the rise in the price of gold was all a bubble. But it is also true that as the price rose, a growing

number of naïve investors sought to buy in. Lately, of course, the fundamentals have reversed somewhat, and the speculative frenzy has reversed even more.

China's economy continues to soften; India's growth rate is down sharply from a few years ago. By contrast, despite the ill-advised fiscal sequester, the US economy appears to be healing gradually. Global interest rates have risen 100 basis points since the US Federal Reserve started suggesting – quite prematurely, in my view – that it would wind down its policy of quantitative easing.

With the Fed underscoring its strong anti-inflation bias, it is harder to argue that investors need gold as a hedge against high inflation. And, as the doctors and dentists who were buying gold coins two years ago now unload them, it is not yet clear where the downward price spiral will stop. Some are targeting the psychologically compelling \$1,000 barrier.

In fact, the case for or against gold has not changed all that much since 2010, when I last wrote about it. In October of that year, the price of gold – the consummate faith-based speculative asset – was on the way up, having just hit \$1,300. But the real case for holding it, then as now, was never a speculative one. Rather, gold is a hedge. If you are a high-net-worth investor, or a sovereign wealth fund, it makes perfect sense to

hold a small percentage of your assets in gold as a hedge against extreme events.

Holding gold can also make sense for middle-class and poor households in countries – for example, China and India – that significantly limit access to other financial investments. For most others, gold is just another gamble that one can make. And, as with all gambles, it is not necessarily a winning one.

Unless governments firmly set the price of gold, as they did before World War I, the market for it will inevitably be risky and volatile. In a study published in January, the economists Claude Erb and Campbell Harvey consider several possible models of gold's fundamental price and find that gold is at best only loosely tethered to any of them. Instead, the price of gold often seems to drift far above or far below its fundamental long-term value for extended periods.

So the recent collapse of gold prices has not really changed the case for investing in it one way or the other. Yes, prices could easily fall below \$1,000; but, then again, they might rise. Meanwhile, policymakers should be cautious in interpreting the plunge in gold prices as a vote of confidence in their performance. 

Kenneth Rogoff, Professor of Economics and Public Policy at Harvard University, was the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund from 2001 to 2003.

KENNETH ROGOFF in CAMBRIDGE

In principle, holding gold is a form of insurance against war, financial Armageddon, and wholesale currency debasement. And, from the onset of the global financial crisis, the price of gold has often been portrayed as a barometer of global economic insecurity. So, does the collapse in gold prices – from a peak of \$1,900 per ounce in August 2011 to under \$1,250 at the beginning of July 2013 – represent a vote of confidence in the global economy?

To say that the gold market displays all the classic features of a bubble gone bust is to oversimplify. There is no doubt that gold's heady rise to the peak, from around \$350 per ounce in July 2003, had investors drooling. The price would rise today because everyone had become convinced that it would rise even further tomorrow.

Doctors and dentists started selling stocks and buying gold coins. Demand for gold jewelry in India and China soared. Emerging-market central banks diversified out of dollars and into gold. The case for buying gold had several strong components. Ten years ago, gold was selling at well below its long-term inflation-adjusted average and the integration of three billion emerging-market citizens into the global economy could only mean a giant long-term boost to demand.

That element of the story, incidentally, remains valid. The global financial crisis added to gold's allure, owing initially to



SIKKIM

Small and beautiful

Sikkim is a peaceful Himalayan border state of a little over 600,000 population which joined the Indian union by its peoples' wish in 1975. After the candle light episode of 9 September 1992 inside the Assembly Hall and the accentuated political activities that followed, Pawan Chamling was finally sworn in as the Chief Minister of Sikkim on December 12, 1994.

After taking charge of people's government as the 'first servant', Pawan Chamling, changed the perception of a border state. Perhaps no other border state can boast of the low crime rate, lack of extremist activities and violence and stable law and order situation that Sikkim enjoys today.

After fourth consecutive win and into his 19 years as the

Chief Minister, with 100% MLAs and MPs in his wings, Shri Chamling is today the longest serving Chief Minister in India. He is a man forever committed to the cause of Sikkimese people, to make Sikkim as the first organic state, kutchha house free state, poverty free state, literate state and a developed state in India within the 12th Five Year Plan. Chamling's aim is to develop Sikkim's economy through nature friendly, green industries such as eco-tourism, floriculture, organic farming, hydro-power generation, pharmaceutical, and the likes.

On 20th May 2013, the Government under the able leadership of Shri Pawan Chamling, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim, has completed 4 years in its 4th term, thereby completing 19 years of continuous selfless service to the State and its people. It is indeed a historic

achievement since no other Government has been in office continuously for almost two decades in the State. This proves the unstinting faith reposed upon the leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister by the people of the State.

In the past 19 years, the State has seen tremendous progress in all sectors of the society. Be it economic development, industrialisation, organic farming, tourism or rural development, social justice and empowerment, health, education, capacity building, the State has set an example for able administration and commendable progress. Though it is one of the youngest State of India, it is now proving to be one of the most pioneering. The State has become a model for others to emulate. Laurels and awards conferred upon the State by the Central Government, and media houses only go to vouch for the astonishing stride

the State has taken in the nearly two decades of the pro poor and people centric State Government.

The Government has steered the state towards holistic and sustainable socio-economic development by making available the best services and infrastructure for both the rural and urban population. With so much achieved, there is a rising sense that Sikkim can export peace and its paradigm of development to the rest of India. In many ways, it is already doing so. Doves of ministers and other policymakers are visiting Sikkim and lauding the efforts of the State Government.

Not wanting to rest on its laurels, the State Government under the dynamic leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, continues relentlessly to reach development, peace, progress, prosperity and wellness to every doorstep in the State.





ORGANIC SIKKIM

The Government has made substantial interventions towards promotion of organic farming in the State. Greater emphasis on soil testing, better land management practices and soil health management have helped improve the organic crop production. To make Sikkim fully organic, 50,000 hectares have been earmarked for organic conversion in a phased manner under Sikkim Organic Mission, 2015.

Sikkim is one of the first States to have initiated livelihood schools in organic farming in order to train the youth in this discipline. Sikkim is to produce 50 lakh cut bulb orchids within the next couple of years from more than 5,000 green houses. Horticulture is being promoted by increasing the area under cultivation of fruits and flowers. The Government has developed a unique model of floriculture farming by adopting cluster- approach of 20 to 100 farmers. In order to leverage the State's strength in floriculture, it is envisaged to set up a state of the art flower auction centre and post- harvest infrastructure in Pakyong, near the upcoming Greenfield Airport. Recently concluded 2nd International Flower Show 2013 was successfully organized with nearly 2,00,000 visitors and participants from 22 nations.



SPECIAL FOCUS ON TOURISM

Sikkim has emerged as one of the most sought after tourist destinations in the country. The State is promoting village and rural tourism and home stays in a big way. With a view to protect its fragile ecology, the State focuses more on Eco-Tourism. Promotion of pilgrimage tourism by developing premiere destinations like Char Dhaam, Buddha Park, Samdrupse, etc have seen success. It is aimed to bring Sikkim within the Buddhist Circuit. Future

plans of the state government includes development of Ramayana Village, Tantra Mantra Jantra Centre, development of Birds' Sanctuary, Butterfly Park etc. The State also has many tourist attractions in the pipeline, such as the Skywalk at Bhaleydunga, the Sleeping Buddha at Singik, North Sikkim. Considering the enormous potential of the tourism industry, the State Government has not left any stone unturned for exploiting its potential to the full.



HEALTHY SIKKIM

Health services continue to be a top priority of the State Government. Sikkim is fourth in the country to achieve reduction in the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR). The life expectancy in the State has increased by over 2-3 years over the last 18 years. The Chief Minister's Comprehensive Annual and Total Check-Up for Healthy Sikkim (CATCH), which was launched in 2010, has so far, covered about 90% of the population and the programme is expected to be completed by the end of this year. State has also introduced Mukhya Mantri Antodaya Upachar Bima Yojana for BPL families and host of other health services including Mukhya Mantri Antyodaya Pustahaar Yojana, Mukhya Mantri Jeevan Raksha Kosh, Mukhya Mantri Netra Jyoti Yojana and Mukhya Mantri Sravan Shakti Samriddhi Yojana. Sikkim is the first state in the country to provide Free health services, medicines, free treatment outside Sikkim to BPL families and first state to provide for free Hepatitis B vaccination.

INVESTMENT SCENARIO IN SIKKIM

The State Government has been pursuing a policy to generate hydro-power on a sustainable basis. Construction of hydro-power projects on PPP mode, such as the Teesta III 1200 MW project, is progressing well. The 99 MW Chujachen hydro-electricity power project is also likely to be commissioned by this year. This will be an addition to the already commissioned 510 MW Teesta Stage

V and 60 MW Rangit Hydro Power Projects. There are around 24 Hydel Power Projects under various stages of development. More than 54 industrial units have been set up since 1995 including pharma units, breweries, hotels etc. This shows that the State Government has provided a perfect investment environment for potential investors.



CONNECTIVITY IN THE STATE

As a landlocked State, Sikkim is heavily dependent on its road infrastructure for practically all purposes. Re-surfacing/re-carpeting of 383.00 Kms of road has been completed which is 65% of the targeted length. Surfacing works for remaining roads is under progress. Construction of Greenfield Airport at Pakyong is scheduled to be completed by next year and railway project upto Rangpo in the first phase and later to be extended upto Nathula is also in the pipeline. State received the Bharat Nirman Award from the Central Government for its outstanding work.



SOCIAL JUSTICE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The State Government has introduced large number of welfare schemes to enable people live a life of dignity and respect. Women have 50% of Panchayat seats reserved for them and 30% in government jobs. Unmarried women pension for those above 45 years at the rate of Rs 600 per month is being granted. Folk dancers, singers, folk practitioners are also acknowledged for their contribution in the society and thus they are given an honorarium of Rs 600 per month. Special allowance under Sishu Bhatta for children of different gender orientation has also been initiated. These children are bestowed with Rs 2000 per month upto 6 years and thereafter 100% sponsorship for their education till graduation level. Compassionate appointment scheme is also introduced for non-gazetted employees. Another significant scheme in the state is the Chief Minister's Rural Universal Financial Inclusion Programme launched in 2010 which has helped the rural people tremendously. Sikkim's progress can be seen in its growth rate which was 22.8% during its 11th Fifth Year Plan.

Green Sikkim

Nature has blessed the State with rich biodiversity, exquisite species of flora and fauna and it is a well known fact that Sikkim today is a Biodiversity hot spot. Some of the steps undertaken by the State Government are Compulsory Environmental Education introduced in all schools, "Smriti Van" a green concept initiated in the State to plant trees in fond memory of near and dear ones, ban on green felling, killing of wildlife, grazing in reserved forest areas, ban on use of plastic and poly bags, 10 Minutes to Earth etc. State Biodiversity Park at Tendong was created in 2001. The state Forest Area has increased by 3.53% from 44.06% in 1995 to 47.59% in 2009. Sikkim has been rated as 'most sustainable' State as per findings of Centre for Development Finance, Chennai. Chief Minister Shri Pawan Chamling was also awarded the Greenest Chief Minister Award by Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, 1999.



HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT



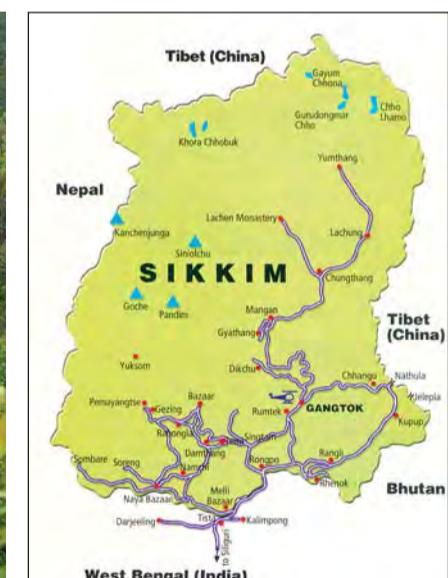
The State Government values long-term investment in human resource development. Sikkim has recorded an impressive improvement in the literacy rate, which currently stands at 82.2% which was only 56% in the year 1993-94. The teacher-pupil ratio of 1:14 is also impressive. The State Government has launched the Chief Minister's Meritorious Scholarship Scheme to sponsor meritorious children at Class V level in best public schools within and outside the State. The Chief Minister's Special Merit Scholarship to fully sponsor students who are admitted to the 20 top universities of the world, Prerna Yojana and Small Family Scheme, free education upto graduation level, free distribution of textbooks, exercise books, school uniforms, school bags, raincoat, shoes, socks and laptops, Grant of Rs.1 lakh cash incentive for school toppers of Class X & XII levels and many more such programmes

are linked to academic excellence among students and to encourage the students to excel at the State and National levels. The State Government has dedicated 20 percent budgetary allocation to the Education Sector. An additional 10% is also being spent in programmes like coaching the educated Sikkimese for IAS and allied services, training for army and banking service, aeronautical, atomic engineering etc in reputed Institutes of Hyderabad, Chennai and Delhi.

In 2003, Sikkim became the first State in the country to start the Directorate of Capacity Building and Institute of Capacity Building, coupled with Livelihood Schools at each of the Constituencies to promote the skills of the unemployed youth to make them employable in productive activities. The initiative has seen a great success and those who have got trained in these Institutes have now got placed in good jobs.

RURAL PROSPERITY

All rural beneficiary oriented schemes are being implemented by duly following a beneficiary-centric approach. The state Government has earmarked 70% of its budget for rural development and aims to make Sikkim a poverty free state. Sikkim is the 1st Nirmal Rajya state in the Country. There are 30 Block Administrative Centres across the State in order to facilitate day-to-day administrative work of the villagers. Panchayati Raj Institutions have been strengthened for people's empowerment and sufficient powers have been devolved at the grassroots level. The 18 Central Flagship Programmes, which form a vital part of the development strategy in the State and more than 20 State Missions, are being robustly implemented in a transparent and thriving manner. Sikkim aims to become Kutch House Free state by 2015. While 99% of the households in Sikkim have been covered with electricity, the BPL families are provided 2 points of free electricity connections and free electricity upto 50 units.



SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The state government is leaving no stone unturned to improve the socio-economic condition of the people and the existing infrastructure. New strategies adopted by the state government seeks to further balance social and economic development, protect the environment and ecology, develop necessary infrastructure and garner adequate resources for the welfare of the people.

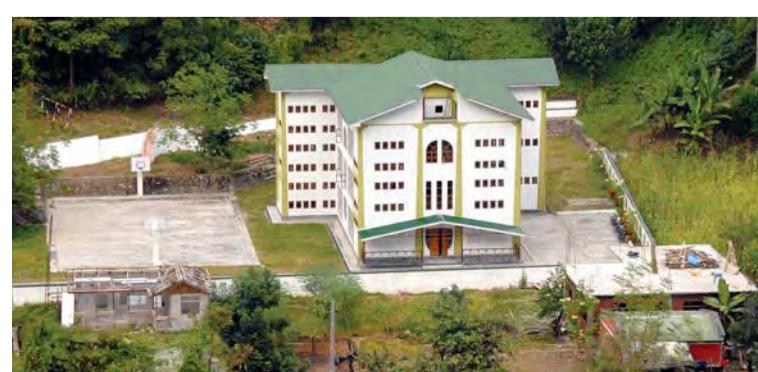
Sikkim has made commendable progress and has achieved a number of milestones in its development stride and efforts

are on to put the economy of the State on a further higher growth trajectory.

In the last 20 years, the State Government led by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim has consistently worked towards ensuring effective functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Nagar Palikas. The State Government has ensured a Free and Open Media. As a Himalayan Border State, it has remained peaceful all thorough. Thanks to the democratic spirit and sense of mutual respect, the people have

redefined the concept of a border state as being very peaceful and progressive.

Sikkim's story is unique because of its citizen-centric policies, which are strongly grounded in the fundamental philosophy of equal opportunities and equitable growth. Visionary leadership is all about ensuring that the poor, especially the rural poor, also benefit in equal measure – something that the present State Government can take pride in having achieved in Sikkim.





'We turned our challe

**Interview with
Pawan Chamling,
Chief Minister of Sikkim
and President of the Sikkim
Democratic Front (SDF).**

Why do you think the people of Sikkim have placed so much faith in you and voted you to power four times?

I have immense love and respect for the people of Sikkim. I have never betrayed or disappointed them. Whatever promises I have made, I have fulfilled them with utmost honesty. What they see is what they get. I have said from the beginning that I would rather die than betray them. And I have lived by this motto. I have utilised the people's trust to serve them and ensure their safety. This is why the citizens trust me and have supported me through all these years.

How has Sikkim managed to progress this quickly even though it is isolated from the central government in Delhi?

We are a remote Himalayan border state surrounded by China, Nepal, and Bhutan and are far removed from the capital in Delhi. Due to our geographical isolation and sensitive location, we have had to face a lot of

SECTOR WISE HIGHLIGHTS AND ACHI

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

- Free education up-to graduation level.
- Free distribution of textbooks, exercise books, school uniform, school bag, raincoat, shoe, socks and laptops.
- 20 per cent budgetary allocation dedicated to education.
- The state government sponsors educated youth for IAS and allied services, training in defence service and banking services in reputed institutes of the country.
- Chief Minister's meritorious scholarship scheme to sponsor meritorious children at class V level in best public schools in state and country.
- Chief Minister's special merit scholarship full sponsorship for students who are admitted to the top 20 top universities of the world.
- Prerna Yojana and small family scheme.
- School toppers at class X and XII levels granted Rs 100,000 cash incentive.
- In 2003, Sikkim became the first state in the country to start directorate building and institute of capacity building.
- Introduction of environmental studies, studies on organic farming, life skill based education, digital format education.
- Literacy rate of 56 in 1994 increased to 82.2 per cent.
- CM's self employment scheme introduced to provide soft loan to educated unemployed Sikkimese youth.
- Skill development training and other livelihood schemes initiated.

in 2009 for treatment outside Sikkim for general people.

- 100% reimbursement available for government employees
- First state in the country to provide for free Hepatitis B vaccination.
- Free MMR vaccines for children launched on 15 August 2009 under immunisation program of the state.
- Compulsory annual health check up under the CATCH program initiated.
- Sanction of honorarium to Accredited Social Health Activities (ASHA)
- One-time maternity allowance of Rs 5,000 at the time of institutional delivery in hospital.
- 300 Rs. as nutrition allowance for new born baby for the initial period of six years.
- Provide iron folic acid tablet for females between 13 to 45 years old.
- Calcium tablet provided for both men and women above 45 years old.
- Life expectancy increased by over two years during the last 18 years.
- Sikkim was fourth in the country to achieve reduction in the infant mortality rate (IMR) between the year 2009 and 2011. 26/1000 in 11th plan.

RURAL PROSPERITY

- Earmarking of 70 per cent budget for rural development.
- Poverty ratio reduced to over 13 per cent in 2011.
- No cases of extreme poverty in Sikkim. Sikkim will become the first poverty-free state in the country within five years.
- Mukhya Mantri Awas Yojana (MMAY) launched in 2008. This



scheme offers a free modern house of over Rs 500,000.

- Sikkim to become Kutchha house Free State by 2015.
- Rural sanitation -first Nirmal Rajya in the country in 2008.
- Provided two points of free electricity connections.
- Free electricity up to 50 units provided to BLP families.
- Electricity - 99 per cent of electrification done.
- 99 per cent coverage achieved with regard to drinking water supply.
- Regular elections of village and urban representatives held under the 73rd and 74th amendments acts of constitution.
- Decentralisation and devolution of power.
- Library in all Panchayat

Bhawans.

- Sanction of schemes to cooperatives up to Rs 30 million to generate employment opportunities at the GPU level.

FOOD SECURITY

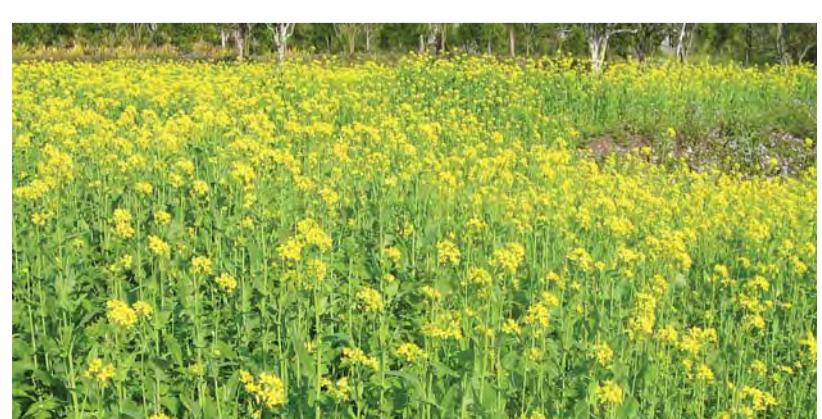
- Distribution of 50 kg free rice

per month per BPL family.

- Distribution of 50 kg rice per month per BPL family at Rs 1.
- Distribution of 50 kg rice per month per marginal BPL family at Rs 2.
- Distribution of 10 kg free rice per month per elderly citizen.

HEALTHY SIKKIM

- Free health services, medicines, free treatment outside Sikkim provided to BPL families –the first state to provide this
- Medical aid upto Rs 200,000 under Mukhya Mantri Jeewan Raksha Kosh scheme introduced





Challenges into opportunities'

hardships. Only 14 per cent of our land is cultivable, the rest is taken up by mountains, rivers, forests. But we turned our liabilities into assets, we harnessed the rivers to produce hydro power. We made conservation of our natural resources and wildlife a priority and used them to attract tourists.

What others saw as disadvantages, we turned into opportunities. And the results have been exceptional. Sikkim hosts thousands of visitors from Indian and abroad every year. Twelve hydro-power projects are currently under construction from which the state stands to gain INR 20 billion annually in the near future. Since sustaining the state's growing population through traditional farming is becoming increasingly difficult, we have decided to make a gradual switch to organic farming. This modern form of agriculture will allow us to make the best use of limited arable land, increase productivity, and protect the fertility of our soil. By 2015, Sikkim will be fully organic.

We have been able to promote and maintain harmony between diverse ethnic groups and communities in Sikkim

by treating everyone equally and providing social justice to all. Our citizens also have access to high quality state services. The people trust and value their government wholeheartedly and this has definitely helped in the development of the state. We have brought about enormous changes and progress in Sikkim by always putting the people first and displaying great political will. The transformation would not have been possible without strong political will.

There are no opposition parties in Sikkim. How have you been able to maintain such a stronghold in the state?

There are opposition parties in Sikkim. But their politics is wrong. They are involved in politics not to serve the public but for their own self-interest. Since they don't have a people-centred agenda, they haven't been able to win the trust of the Sikkimese people and the citizens too have time and again rejected these parties.

The SDF is on the people's side. Our only concern is the safety and prosperity of the citizens. Our politics is

for the people, with the people, and through the people. Sikkimese people have seen and experienced this first hand. They are the pillars of democracy and we have supported them fully and in return they have put us in this strong position.

Is the SDF's work in the field of social justice a reason behind its longevity?

The SDF has been fighting for the social, political, educational, religious, intellectual, and economic freedom of the Sikkim people. Our goal is to transform Sikkim into the best state in the country through the active participation of the citizens. We have fulfilled all their basic needs and ensured social justice and safety. Furthermore, all different ethnic and religious groups have the right to identity and equal access to opportunities. Good governance has been the backbone of our rule and that is why people trust us.

Do you think Delhi's outlook on Sikkim has changed?

Sikkim used to be considered a backward, undeveloped state. By implementing the right policies and making development a priority, we have managed to give Sikkim a complete facelift. Today other Indian states are paying greater attention to us and their outlook has also changed. As a result, the central government takes Sikkim's more seriously and gives our issues greater importance.

- Subash Devkota

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT



on plantation areas and water sources areas in 1998.

- Imposed ban on the use of Diclofenac, chemical responsible for extinction of birds' family.
- Smritivan was launched in 1999.
- 'State Green mission' launched in 2006.
- State bio-diversity park at Tendong created in 2001.
- State glaciers commission constituted in 2007 for glaciers study and action plan.
- 10 minutes to earth program started since 15 July 2009.
- The state forest area increased by 3.53 per cent (from 44.06 per cent in 1995 to 47.59 per cent in 2009).
- All state highways and other roads declared as eco-highways.
- Sikkim rated as most sustainable as per findings of centre for development finance, Chennai.
- Greenest chief minister award by centre for science and environment, New Delhi, 1999.

GREEN SIKKIM

- All development environment-friendly
- Banned green felling, killing of wildlife, grazing in reserved forest areas and ban on the use of plastic carry bags.
- Grazing and tree felling banned

TOURISM

- Introduced concept of eco-friendly tourism.
- Promotion of home stay, village tourism, culture tourism, adventure tourism, concept of ban bas, akanta vas tourism mooted in Sikkim.
- Promotion of pilgrimage tourism to develop premiere destinations like Char Dham, Buddha Park, etc., and promotion of Buddhist circuit.
- A giant 150 feet tall statue of Guru Padmasambhava built at Samdrupse; 137.50 feet tall statue of Lord Buddha installed at Buddha park, Ravang, South Sikkim; 150 feet tall statue of Chenrezig being constructed at Pelling, West Sikkim.
- Development of birds' sanctuary at Pelling, West Sikkim and butterfly parks in North Sikkim.

ORGANIC SIKKIM

- All products of Sikkim will be fully organic and within two years, Sikkim will become a



fully organic state of India.

- Export potential of products like Temi tea, vegetables and orchids leveraged.
- Sikkim to increase production of cut bulb orchids to commercial scale.
- 2nd international flower show 2013 successfully organised with worldwide participation.

INVESTMENT SCENARIO IN SIKKIM

- 510MW Teesta-IV, Hydro-Electric project already commissioned.
- 60 W Rangit-II hydro-electric power project already commissioned.
- 99MW Chuzachen hydro-electric power project to be commissioned by May 2013
- Nine mega hydel projects under construction.

belonging to different gender orientation) At IRS 2,000 per month up to six years and thereafter 100 per cent sponsorship for their education till graduation level.

- Samajik Sewa Bhatta of 600 Rs per month introduced in 2008.
- Compassionate appointment scheme introduced for non-gazetted employees.
- Chief Minister's Rural universal financial inclusion program launched in 2010.
- Sikkim's growth rate recorded spectacular 22.8 per cent during 11th FYP.

CONNECTIVITY

- 1994: 1700 km.
- 2011-2012: 3600 km.
- We have constructed 1900 kms of roads within 18 years.
- Bharat Nirman award received from the central government.



- More than 54 industrial units set up since 1995 including pharma units, breweries, hotels.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

- Women have 50 per cent of Panchayat seats reserved for them and 30 per cent in government jobs and higher studies.
- Unmarried women pension for women above 45 years at IRS 600.
- 600 Rs honorarium given to folk dancers, singers, folk practitioners.
- Special allowance under Sishu Bhatta for children of transgender (children

UNIQUE TRAITS

- Most peaceful border state in the country.
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- Best law and order situation, with lowest crime rate in the country.
- Best green state of the country.
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'Ten Minutes to Earth'

Fatalism and disasters

We need to rescue the gods from human attributes we have ascribed them



LOOK OUT
Ajaz Ashraf

The numbing scale of death and destruction in Uttarakhand makes you wonder whether it could trigger a crisis of faith and redefine the complex relationship involving man, society, and god.

All natural calamities fundamentally challenge the notion of god as omnipotent, omniscient, and all-loving. This was enhanced as last month's flood tragedy in the Indian state of Uttarakhand bordering Nepal killed thousands who were on pilgrimage there. For them to die in what were moments of extreme piety not only seemed frightfully irrational, but an unpardonable betrayal by god (or gods) who they had gone to worship.

No doubt the unpredictable ferocity of nature, indiscriminate construction, and environmental degradation combined to intensify the damage in Uttarakhand. Yet the believer can't help but ask questions that the atheist typically poses: is god not supposed to protect people, at least the religious, from



calamities? What wisdom does god have in raining destruction on the world?

These are questions philosophers have pondered over the centuries. They broadly divide evil into two categories: horrific actions man perpetrates against others and disasters or accidents which claim lives. If there was a god, all-powerful and all-loving, wouldn't (s)he have created a world without evil? Their ideological rivals counter it by saying a world without evil would have made free-will redundant and blurred distinctions between good and repugnant.

The free-will argument is relevant to evil that man willfully spawns, such as massacres, but can't be

extended to natural disasters. These are consequences, from the perspective of faith, from the will of god. Yet, as the votaries of faith argue, the scale of destruction can be mitigated through measures humans can take. For instance, constructing buildings resistant to earthquakes, or as in Uttarakhand, not raising structures in flood plains or denuding forests that help check landslides. Though these measures entail high economic costs (or sacrificing gains) – the poor can't make their houses earthquake-resistant, can they? – the believer, nevertheless, could incorporate elements of the atheist's arguments to redefine the idea of god.

Unfortunately, Uttarakhand

has triggered a contrary response. Many believe the dead were blessed for they were called to the abodes of gods to take their last breaths. This is almost a universal response from people to pilgrims dying, say, in a stampede in the haj or kumbh melas, forgetting that it is contradictory to praise god who chose some to die but also saved many others, as happened in Uttarakhand.

Through such beliefs we seek to rationalise the randomness of life and absurd situations. From this perspective, god is turned into an imperious lord, killing people or keeping them alive in accordance to his whims. Obviously, the faithful believes the actions of god have a higher reason beyond the comprehension of ordinary mortals.

In our attempts to reconcile what is seemingly incomprehensible, we have not only turned irrational but also compromised the value of human will. Despite the terrible tragedy in Uttarakhand, there is a whisper of astonishment at the Kedarnath Temple having remained intact even as several buildings around it were washed away in the floods, though there is evidence that many buildings around the temple survived the

flood. This selective assigning of meaning portrays god as selfish, raining havoc on people even as he insulated a place of worship from devastation.

Could there not be geological or architectural reasons for the Kedarnath temple notwithstanding the impact of flash flood? Is it not possible that the building material of the Kedarnath temple, presumably sourced locally, was superior to the brick-and-mortar constructions of the present times? Might not this worldview, which demands a complete surrender of will, explain our indifference to, say, building laws and rapacious violation of environment?

Such questions are not largely asked as commercial gains accrue from promoting a religiosity of an irrational kind. Traditionally, pilgrimage symbolised a rite of passage, an enduring of physical hardship and spiritual crisis, to pay respect to the gods in their abodes. Modernity has made possible instant spirituality, as thousands are ferried by buses and cars, even choppers, to the feet of their gods.

What is needed is to rescue god from attributes we assign to him, attributes which serve our own self-interests. ashrafajaz3@gmail.com

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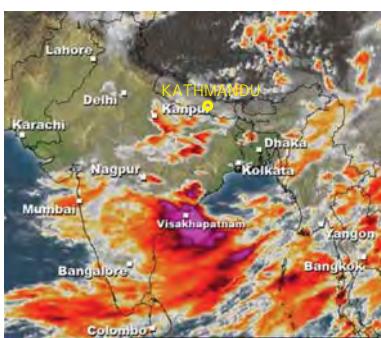


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A series of monsoonal pulses are headed our way after the south west monsoon's short breather last week. Precipitation has picked up over the eastern mid hills and most parts of the country will be cloudy throughout this week with light shower and thunderstorm in the evenings. After last week's short sharp bursts of rain in the evening and night, Kathmandu will receive heavy rainfall and thunder over the weekend.

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WORD BY WORD: Kavitha Dinesh is the first in her family to learn Tamil (above). Nepali students' proficiency in Tamil has made them indistinguishable from local children (right).



Moving images

As a senior cameraman for Indian television networks, Bidesh Gharti Magar, 29, does not fit the stereotype of Nepali workers in India. Born to a working class family in Kerala, Magar's father worked at an oil factory in Alleppey until 2002. While his parents moved home to Pyuthan, Magar came to Chennai and worked as an assistant cameraman for seven years at Sahara Samay, a national news channel.

Since 2008 he has been freelancing for different national news channels including Times Now, an English-language Indian news channel. "I have never felt discriminated at work because of my Nepali ethnicity," admits Magar. Although he lived in Nepal for two years, the lack of job opportunities forced him back. Says the cameraman: "I would happily return to Nepal to my family if only the pay was as good as it is here."

TALKING TAMIL

First generation Tamil speakers of Nepali origin have embraced the language as their own

BHRIKUTI RAI in CHENNAI

Kavitha Dinesh's nimble fingers move swiftly across the blackboard as she writes her name in English and Tamil. When she joined Chennai Primary, a Tamil-medium school in the quiet neighbourhood of Giriappa, in 2012 the six-year-old could hardly speak the language. Today not only is her Tamil more fluent than her Nepali, but she is also doing remarkably well in her classes.

Kavitha, whose father works as a gatekeeper, is among the 10 Nepali students at Chennai Primary. As private schools in the city become increasingly expensive, Nepali migrants most of who work temporary jobs as household helpers, waiters, and guards are compelled to send their children to public schools even though Tamil, not

English, is used as the medium of instruction. Teachers here admit that the first three months are the most difficult as the students feel more comfortable with fellow Nepalis. "They are first generation Tamil learners whose parents neither speak nor understand the language, so naturally it is difficult in the beginning," explains Principal Rama Thyagaran, "But once they get over their fear, they are surprisingly quick in picking up Tamil and their progress in and out of the classroom has been impressive."

Anil Nagari, one of the first Nepali students to be admitted at the school is now in Grade 5. Anil whose family is from Silagdi in Doti is currently the class captain and helps moderate parent-teacher meetings. "Without him we wouldn't be able to communicate with Nepali parents," admits Thyagaran.



Anil's father Jaggu Ram Nagari is a watchman at a clothing store in Pondi Bajar, Chennai's thriving shopping district and is proud of his son's accomplishment. "Now that my son is fluent in Tamil and English, I no longer feel shy visiting fancy malls," he says. "I wish I could send him to a private school, but can't afford it." Nagari hopes his sons won't have to toil on foreign soil like him and plans to get their Nepali citizenship cards soon.

Anil, like his Nepali peers, has only heard

about his father's land. He says: "I want to visit Nepal once, but I will come back because I want to play cricket for India like Dhoni." He prefers speaking Tamil over Nepali and has also begun teaching the language to his mother.

The biggest challenge for Thyagaran and her teachers now is to find a way to retain Nepali students because many keep switching schools as their parents move around in search of jobs, some don't go back at all. ☐

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HONDA

“We meet by chance and we love by remembering”



Amrit Gurung's Nepathyā will be the first Nepali band to perform at the Wembley Arena in London next month

Twenty years after it came together and became a household word in the country through its distinctive Nepali folk rock, Nepathyā is travelling to Britain for a high-profile gig on 3 August at the Wembley Arena.

For founder, frontman, vocalist, and lyricist Amrit Gurung, it has been a long journey from the backwaters of his village in Kaski, through experimenting with guitars and flutes in college in Kathmandu, travelling mostly on foot through most of Nepal's 75 districts, to be the most recognised face and voice of modern Nepali music.

Many band members have come and gone in the last two decades, but Amrit has stayed behind in Nepal and still leads Nepathyā. In those years, the country has been through conflict and political turmoil, but Gurung has used the medium of music through travelling concerts to spread the message of peace and education.

During the height of the conflict, Nepathyā toured the country across land-mined highways, past scenes of recent ambushes, performing at concerts. Gurung is a modern-day rock gandarba and believes that Nepal can only get ahead with better education and the underlying theme of all his concerts is to get children to school.

But lately, he has been troubled by Nepal's aimless politics and the parties

stoking non-existent ethnic tensions to expand their vote banks. He makes no efforts to hide his distrust of federalism based on identity in a culturally diverse country and says it will lead to the fragmentation of the Nepali nation. “I am a Nepali first and then I am a Gurung,” he says. “It is the Nepali language that binds us and it is this language that I have put to music with a Nepali heartbeat.”

It is this message of unity that he is taking to London next month, not just the unity of Nepal but also the coming together in peace of humankind across national frontiers. The Wembley Arena is a much sought after venue for international bands like U2, The Who, Bob Dylan, and Cliff Richards and Santana will be performing there next week.

“It is a great honour for Nepal and for Nepathyā that we will be at the Wembley Arena, it will allow Nepalis in the UK to also feel proud about their home country,” says Kiran Shrestha of nepa~laya, Nepathyā’s management company that is organising the concert with Subsonic Routes and Parcha Productions.

The capacity of the venue is 5-12,000 and tickets are being sold for £28.25, through ticketmaster.com. Nepalis from across Britain, Belgium, Netherlands, Norway, and even the United States are travelling to London to attend.

Gurung himself is very excited about

the UK concert and says it is an honour to be performing in a country that has such a reputation for being the cradle of pop and rock. “It is a dream to be at the centre of world music and to take the message of unity and to bring people together,” admits Gurung, who will be performing up to 25 of his hit songs.

Indeed, those sentiments are right out of one of Gurung’s most popular songs from his album *Aina Jhyal*: “Joga le hunchha bheta, maya le hunchha samjhana.”

Kunda Dixit

Nepathyā

Wembley Arena, London,
Sat 3 Aug 2013, 19:30
www.wembleyarena.co.uk/events/detail/napathyā

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nepalitimes.com

A musical journey, East-West by Kunda Dixit Singing for Nepal, #609
Watch video of Nepathyā's Australia tour



JAM PACKED: Nepathyā performs at Sydney Town Hall in 2012 as part of their Australia Tour.



TURNING KATHMANDU INTO A WAR ZONE

Paintball is livening up Kathmandu's laidback style and aficionados can't seem to get enough of firing marble-sized paint balls at each other

PRANAV RAJOURIA

Ducking as bullets whiz past, listening alertly to shouts from the enemy camp to gain territory, the rush of adrenaline as one crawls from bunker to bunker for cover, sweat trickling down, breath held, gun aimed, and ready to fire.

After 10 years of conflict, one would have thought Nepalis had enough of warfare, but a visit to one of the paintball arenas in the capital these days proves the opposite is true.

Paintball is livening up Kathmandu's laidback style and aficionados can't seem to get enough of firing marble-sized paint balls at each other. Players suit up in protection gear armed with marker guns and paint ball ammo to deploy around a replica of an urban battle zone. There are bunkers made of sacks filled with sand, tires piled on top of each other, broken down buildings that serve as sniper hideouts, and plants offering cover.

A paintball arena in Sanepa called (what else?) Battlefield is the one that attracts most customers. "Battlefield is different because it uses limited space really well, the staff are very friendly," says Aryaa Acharya, a student regular.

Four friends, Roshan Chamling, Priti Aveng, Prerana Joshi, and Manish Jung Joshi, thought of an event which would attract people of all ages as well as be something fresh in Nepal and introduced paintball at Battlefield last year.

The arena has since grown in popularity after hosting the first ever paintball tournament in Nepal which saw a turnout of over 50 participants.

"The prime location and making this activity worth the time and money helps attract new and old enthusiasts,"

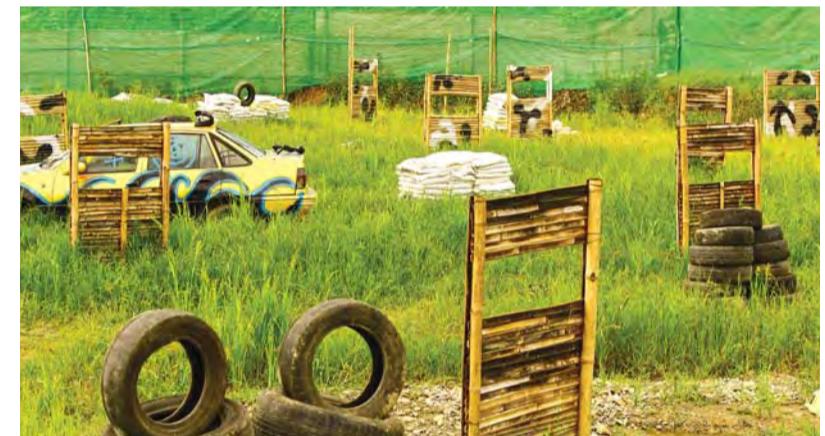
Chamling explains. Though the mean age of customers is 18-25 Roshan Chamling says 45 and even 50-year-old Nepalis as well as Kathmandu-based expats also come to play. A Pokhara venue is planned. The equipment, including markers by Tippmann and paint balls are all imported from the US.

"I am glad I came," said Sameer Sharma, a US resident who is in Nepal on a summer break, on a recent afternoon, "I did not realise I was missing such an exhilarating experience."

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EVENTS



BORN INTO BROTHELS, watch an award winning documentary about children of prostitutes in Sonagachi, Kolkata's red light district. **12 July, 5.30pm, Satty Media Arts Collective, Jhawkhel, (01) 5523486**

Bhanu Jayanti, Poemandu pays tribute to Bhanu Bhakta Acharya to celebrate the 190th Bhanu Jayanti. **12 July, 3pm, Nepal Bharat Library, Nepal Airlines Building, New Road**

La Fete Nationale, celebrate Bastille day with Petanque contest, screening of *The Illusionist*, a French party, and French brass band Somewhere Over the Tempo. **12 July, 3pm, Alliance Francaise of Kathmandu, Bansi Ghat Marg, Teku road, (01) 4241163/4242832**

Photography Workshop, beginners and enthusiasts take your photography skills to the next level in a workshop designed to nurture your creativity to the fullest. **Rs 6,000, 12 to 14 July, 7.30 to 9.30am, The School of Creative Communications, Kupondol, (01) 5546705/9841242307**

Mcube Chakati Guff, an evening with

Min Bahadur Bham where he talks and presents on 'Journey Through Screen'. **12 July, 4 to 6 pm, Gallery Mcube, Chakupat, Lalitpur**

Paintball Battle, show off your skills in the ultimate paintball battle. **Rs 500, 13 July, The Target Arena, Sanepa**

Explorations in photographic medium, photo.cirlce along with seven BFA students of Kathmandu University bring to you an exhibition that plays around ideas of memory, home, and family. **Runs till 14 July, 11 am to 6pm, Bikalpa Art Centre, Arun Thapa Chok, Jhamsikhel**



MONSOON YOGA @ MONASTERY, engage in classic Ashtanga yoga, walk to a famous meditation cave nearby and learn about Buddhism from the abbot of Neydo Monastery. **Rs 9750, 20 to 21 July, 8am to 7pm, Neydo Monastery, Pharping, Pranayama Yoga**

Book collection, help Phan Nepal collect educational materials for the youths of five districts. **July 14, 7 to 8.30 am, Santwona Multiple Campus, Shantinagar, Public Health Action Nepal**

AI and Storytelling, meet people from various walks of life, explore and

discuss the role of the Nepali media in facilitating the changing political scenario of Nepal. **14 to 18 July, 11am to 2 pm, Sindhuli, Nepal**

Parda, watch the Nepali adaptation of Tennessee Williams classic *A Street Car Named Desire* by the Freelancers Nepal. **19 July, Mandala Theatre, Anannagar**

Critical Mass, be a part of a cycling movement that is taking place in 300 cities around the world and pedal around town on the last Friday of every month. **26 July, 5.30 to 7.30pm, Tundikhel**

Goalmaria, Bangladesh's Own Island, a photo exhibition by Bangladeshi photographer Munem Wasif that revolves around water problems faced by his country. **25 July to 15 August, 10am to 6pm, Alliance Francaise of Kathmandu, Teku road, (01) 4241163/4242832**

Bottoms up, let your taste buds and olfactory nerves go on a joy ride at the 10th Annual wine tasting festival at Kilroys. **Rs 200 per glass or Rs 800 per ½ ltrs. July to August, Kilroy's, Thamel, (01) 4250440/41**



GOAL, team up with friends and take on other teams in the KTM Nights Cup, futsal tournament. **Rs 8000 per team, 27 to 28 July, 8 am to 8pm, Grassroots Recreational Centre, Mandikatar, 9841342635**

DINING



YAK RESTAURANT, serves authentic Chinese food, try the mala tofu, chicken with fungus and spicy pork spare ribs. **Boudha, Kathmandu**

Weekend Brunch @New Orleans, enjoy buckwheat waffle and pancakes with fresh low fat yogurt, fresh juices and much more with live music on Sunday. **Patan, Patan, (01) 4241163/4242832**



MOMOTARAU, step in for mouthwatering Japanese delicacies, try its diverse variety of fresh noodles and authentic sauces. **Sanepa Main road, (01) 5521988**

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

Fuji Bakery, tucked in Chakupat this bakery offers homemade goodies like apple pie, pain du chocolat, and banana cake. **Chakupat, Lalitpur**

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

Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Cafe, bide your time in the cafe's free wi-fi zone as you enjoy wood-fired pizzas, home-made pastas, and the Tibetan gyakok. **Boudha, (01) 4485585**

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



TRISARA, with dishes like flambeed prawns, crispy chicken, and khau soi, it would be a folly to ignore its aromas. **Lajimpat**

Haddock, big compound with ample parking space, its western and Thakali dishes are done to perfection. **Jhamsikhel, (01) 5546431**

Chongqing Fast Food, gear up for some mouth watering Chinese dishes like Sour and Spicy Pork and Kung Pao Chicken. **Thamel**



8 DEGREES, from lemon lassis to spicy pork stews, this is a great place to try continental dishes. **Jhamsikhel**

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MUSIC

COBWEB LIVE, live performance by the legendary Nepali rock band. Rs 1200/dinner, 13 July, 8 degrees, Damkal Sadak, Pulchok, (01)5543740

Live at **Cafe 32**, live music and delicious food every Friday. 6pm onwards, **Café 32**, Battisputali, (01)4244231

Music Jams, enjoy great live music every Tuesday. 7pm, **Moksh**, Jhamsikhel



DRUMMER'S DAY OUT, the skin bashers take centre stage. Rs 100, 13 July, 2.30 pm onwards, **Moksh Bar**, Patan

Live acoustic **Music**, listen to live music while feasting on delicious pizza, risotto and more. 15 July, 8 to 10pm, **Fire and Ice Pizza**, Tridevi Sadak, Thamel



A People War

'A People War', a permanent exhibition of photographs housed at the Peace Museum in Patan Dhoka, portrays the reality of a war stricken nation. The pictures on display are not only a testament of the loss and grief suffered by ordinary Nepalis through 10 years of insurgency and the price paid by the nation, but also a caution to never repeat our past mistakes.

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Come together for Baitadi

Every year on the third Saturday of July, riders from different countries come together for a social cause. In the first year they rode in support of a school and orphanage in Kathmandu. This year the bikers will raise money to build an eco-friendly birthing facility in Sharmali village of Baitadi district. Be a part of their effort to provide a safe and secure building and a warm and welcoming environment for the children and women in rural Nepal.

Date: 20 July
Kathmandu Kora Cycling Challenge 2013
Register for free at: www.socialtours.blogspot.com/2013/06/kathmandu-kora-cycling-challenge-2013.html



Do you go to the cinema a lot and usually come back disappointed? Well, here's what you can do to make things right: write a script, win \$2,700 worth prize money, and then make your own film.

Nepali Cinema Script Writing Competition 2 is back this year looking for new talents. And judging from last year's winner, *Ritu*, which is currently under production, what could possibly stop your story from seeing the light of day?

Last day for submission: 15 August
www.newnepalincinema.com/script2013



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Out of Africa



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Perhaps one of the most enduringly beautiful love stories ever told on cinema, *Out of Africa*, made in 1985 by the late and great Sydney Pollack, continues to captivate both the heart and the mind almost two decades later.

Based on Karen Blixen memoirs of the time when she had a coffee plantation in Kenya, the film begins with the famous opening line: "I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills." And so begins the story of one exceptional woman's journey to find herself the kind of life she had always hoped to lead, but couldn't in her richly comfortable but sheltered life in Denmark.

Karen Blixen who is also known as Isak Dinesen, the famous writer, is played in this film by the divinely talented Meryl Streep in perhaps the performance of her life. Streep fleshes out Blixen's strengths, her vulnerabilities, her headstrong charm, finding her somehow, a voice that is both richly modulated, gravely witty, charmingly accented, and with a low pitch that is entirely different from Streep's own normal

speaking voice. Perhaps in some ways it can be said that this voice that Streep has so painstakingly constructed is the defining aspect of the film, which starts and ends with Karen Blixen's own words.

Blixen was a storyteller before she became a writer, her ability to spin a tale out of almost anything being one of her chief charms. But when she arrives in Africa with her bone china, her cuckoo clock, her books, and her silver cutlery, she is emblematic of the kind of insular coloniser who lands on a strange and wild country, clueless to her surroundings, wanting only her creature comforts, but also the romance that is indelibly linked to the African continent.

Slowly, as she struggles with her failing coffee crop, the Kikuyu tribe that live and farm on her 4,000 acres, and with her husband Baron Bror Blixen who she married solely so that she may have the freedom to travel to Africa, Karen comes into her own in a series of beautifully photographed vignettes, depicting in ravishing detail Blixen's love affair with the continent - which becomes a character in and of itself.

Among these African hills, Blixen falls in love with Denys Finch Hatton (played by the strikingly handsome Robert Redford), a free spirited game hunter who knows Africa for what

it is, a land that is blessed with beauty and bounty, but on the verge of change.

Over the course of the First World War, both Bror and Denys go off to fight for the British army on the African frontier, leaving Karen to deal with the plantation on her own. During this time, we begin to see the other love story in this carefully crafted, subtly nuanced, wonderfully written film: the love story between Karen Blixen and the majordomo of her household Farah (played in a delightfully humourous and sensitive manner by Malick Bowens). Throughout Blixen's stay in Africa, Farah remains by her side, through Bror's philandering, Denys's erratic comings and goings, natural disasters, a bout of syphilis, and many other tribulations.

Karen and Farah's relationship, strictly platonic, is a true meeting of the minds, with Farah's quiet stoic manner balancing Karen's determination and verve, and while Karen's soaring, passionate relationship with Denys is the heart of the film, undeniably Farah and Karen's friendship is just as poignant.

When Karen leaves Africa, having lost everything, she asks Farah to call her by her name. He does and she leaves - near perfect ending to a film about love, loss, the adventurous spirit, and the enduring bravery of an exceptional woman. ☺

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer



GIZMO by YANTRICK

TIME OUT

Ever missed an important call because you couldn't hear your phone ring? Ever wondered what your friends do with your set when you aren't around? Strap on the Sony Smart watch MN2 and find out.

This tiny gadget (15.5 gram), which is essentially a small screen (1.3 inch) with a multi-colour OLED display, is a neat toy for gizmo lovers. With a 10-metre range, you no longer have to worry about missing out on calls whenever you forget to carry your set while making a dash to the loo. Once you download the Smart Connect app from the Google play store on your phone, you can connect the watch to your phone via Bluetooth. Sony smartphone owners can skip this altogether as the app comes preinstalled.

The smart watch basically acts as a secondary display screen for Android phones (sorry windows and IOS users). The screen blinks and gently vibrates to notify users of incoming calls, messages, and emails, a feature that will come in handy during those long meetings when you want to check for updates without disturbing those around. While you can view your text messages and emails from the device and even receive Facebook notifications and twitter feeds, you cannot reply via the watch.



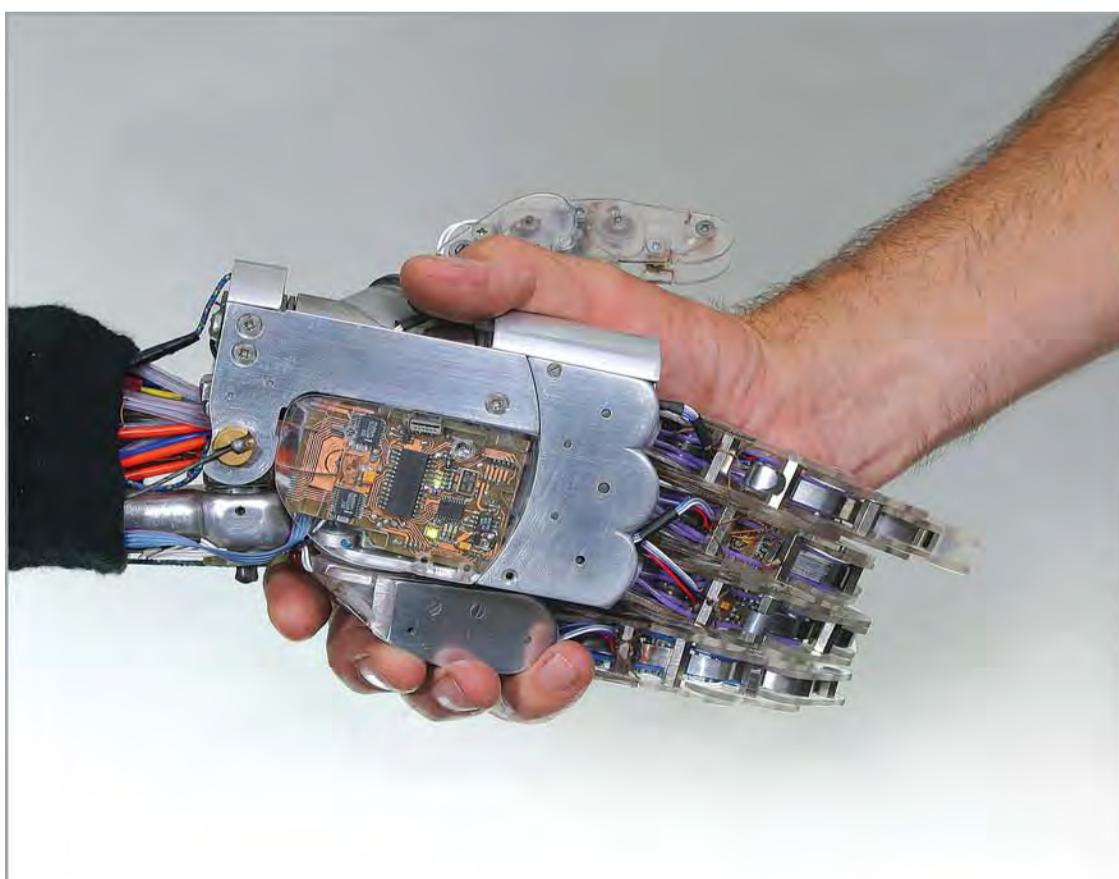
Screen Size: 1.3 inch, multi-touch colour OLED display
Thickness: 0.3 inch
Resolution: 128x128 pixels
Weight: 15.5 gm (main unit)/ 26 gm (watch band)
Screen Color: 65k (16 bits)
Operating System Compatibility: Android 2.1 and above
Battery Life: 14 hrs on one charge
Connector Type: Standard USB charging
Bluetooth 3.0
Bluetooth range: 10 metres
Colour: Black and white

The multi-touch screen has a single button which is used for controlling applications. A single swipe will display the list of apps and you can also flick between notifications and playback music with the same gesture. Single tap for launching an application and a two-finger expand gesture to go back.

Once you press the power button, the home screen displays the clock, which can be changed to analogue or digital face from the phone. Time is also set automatically from the phone. With the VFinder app, you can see what your phone camera captures on the watch so friends will know not to fool around. And for those prone to misplacing their sets, the Find Phone app is your new best friend: with a tap of a button on the watch, the phone magically rings.

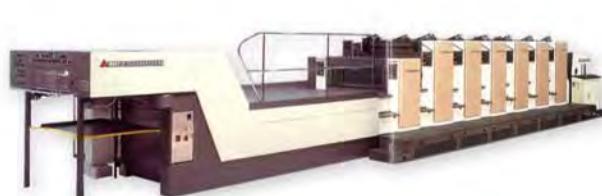
Will the MN2 turn you into a Jason Bourne or James Bond? No, however, for those looking to add another feather to their technophile caps, at Rs 15,000 the gadget is a reasonable buy. ☺

Yantrick's verdict: While it boasts a few snazzy features, the MN2 is unnecessarily dependent on the phone to make it a fun, functional gadget in its own right.



The Human Touch

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Give yourself the greenest gift

When Samrakchan Ghimire, an IT graduate from Jhapa first came to Kathmandu, he was immediately turned off by the concrete capital. "Everywhere I looked, I saw ugly buildings," says Ghimire. Determined to give Nepal's dwindling forests a chance to grow back, the 24-year-old got together five friends and came up with Birthday Forest.

The idea was simple: encourage people to plant trees on their birthdays (and special occasions) in one of the 17,000 community forests across Nepal and, for a small fee, the organisation would look after the plants till they've grown up. "It's easy to plant trees, but making sure they are taken care of in the long term is hard and that is where we help out," explains Ghimire.

However, like most start-ups, Birthday Forest didn't have enough funding. The IT professionals turned businessmen, then put their degrees to use and developed a mobile app to let customers make payments for the trees electronically. In April, the application

won a \$1,000 award at Pivot Nepal's annual competition for mobile app businesses in Nepal, which provided Ghimire and friends the financial impetus they needed.

After paying Rs 980 fee through their phones, clients can choose to travel to the site to plant the saplings or let the company do it for them. They can also have the tree named after themselves. Once planting is done, Birthday Forest takes charge of the tree for three years during which time customers are given regular photo updates about their plant. Says founder Roshan Karki, "We want owners to feel proud of their tree and treat it as part of their family."

A month into operations, Birthday Forest has helped plant more than 30 saplings and is now looking to get more businesses involved. "Banks and companies are already planting trees on their own as part of their social responsibility, but sustainability is always a concern. We make sure no tree goes to waste," says Karki. (01)4282268

birthdayforest@gmail.com
www.birthdayforest.org



SOMEPLACE ELSE

Café Swotha, established seven months ago by a consortium of six Nepali owners and managed until recently by Camille Hanesse, has emerged as a gastronomic crowd-pleaser on the outskirts of Patan Darbar Square.

Its intimate setting is attached to the restored Newari hotel, Traditional Homes Swotha, and its minimalist interior, open-fronted kitchen, and the unobtrusive sounds of Seu Jorge's acoustic, Portuguese-language Bowie covers, all serve to provide an atmosphere of sophisticated, romantic warmth.

A meal taken here a couple of weeks earlier was encouraging: the individually prepared lasagne with a rich tomato sauce and smooth, expertly prepared béchamel was a hit, especially



PICS: CC

Café Swotha

when accompanied with a glass of the near-ubiquitous, Indian-made, Sula red - quaffed, of course, for the antioxidants. And so expectations were high as we sheltered from the rain one recent Sunday.

The restaurant's lone waiter was ready, willing and able to accommodate our every need without resorting to the often overzealous attendance experienced in low season in

myriad other eateries. Water was frequently replenished, service was speedy (perhaps because the restaurant was otherwise empty) and we were encouraged - but not pushed - to browse through works by British artist Paul Aitchison, who also consulted on the menu and presentation in Swotha's early days in his other role as a Kathmandu-based chef extraordinaire. These illustrations, hanging in the



restaurant's waiting area, are also currently up for sale.

Swotha's menu comprises of a condensed list of Italian favourites, well-loved salads, sandwiches and an eclectic list of appetisers. We started with an item from the specials board: chicken fingers served with a carrot edamame bean salad and a honey mustard dressing (Rs 320). The tartness of the salad offsets the sweet dressing well, and the chicken, prepared in two-bite size pieces, was moist and tender.

Our mains consisted of a potato gnocchi (Rs 480), which, though lacking in salt and slightly overdone, came with a sauce of sundried tomatoes which more than made up for these minor transgressions. Less impressive was the Pasta Swotha (Rs 420), a generous portion comprising of the same sauce as the gnocchi, with walnuts, olives and surprisingly - given its billing - was brought to us stirred into a

messy nest of spaghetti.

This lack of attention to detail, it seems, could be Swotha's undoing. Food was served on cold plates, limp, half-hearted and somewhat superfluous garnishes of coriander and parsley. The lack of correct cutlery for the spaghetti (cries of 'chamcha dinus!' seem somewhat undignified in such surroundings) also betrayed traces of amateurishness amid an otherwise enjoyable dinner.

Dessert diminished these errors, however, with a slice of cheesecake (Rs 330), ordered to share presented exquisitely and executed well, resplendent with a honey dressing, a subtle smack of lemon, and a thin biscuit based that I suspect was constructed from Oreo-esque cookie. For me, this was a standout component in a pleasing but imperfect dining experience.

As earlier alluded, Swotha is clearly capable of greatness and not so far from achieving it. As things stand, I'd highly recommend bringing your beau for lasagne and dessert, a glass of wine or two, and a chance to experience an oasis of romance in a season defined by its downpours.

CC

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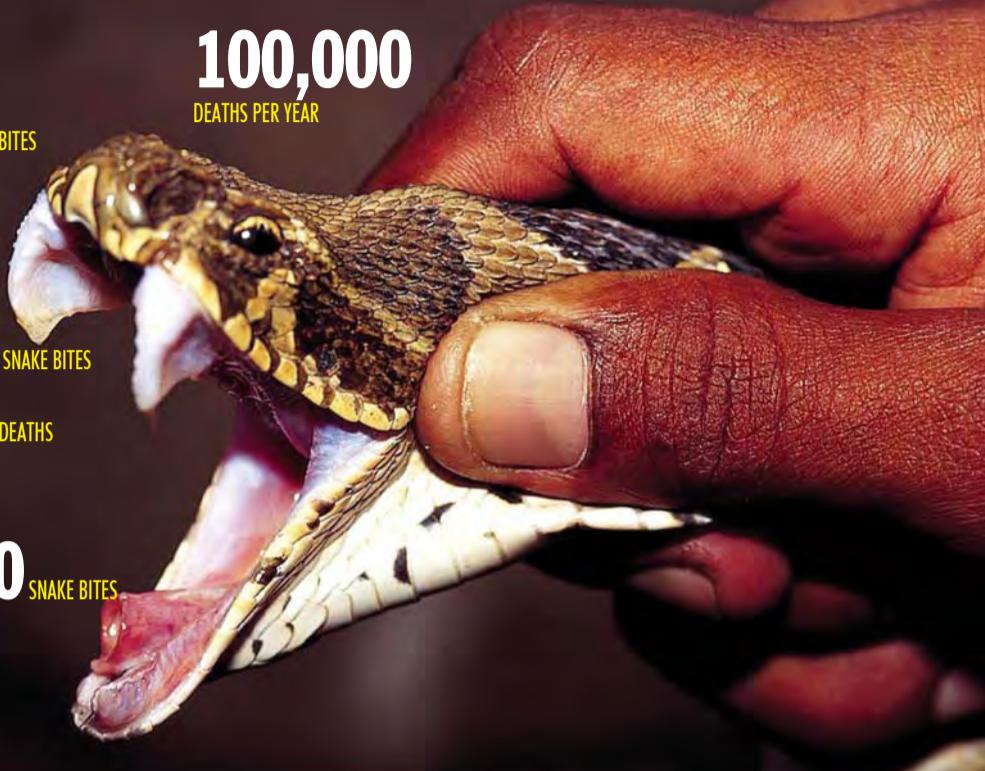
6000 DEATHS

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PEOPLE SUFFER SNAKE BITES EACH YEAR

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DEATHS PER YEAR



SOURCE: WHO (2009)

A pound of prevention rather than an ounce of venom



**DHAVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD**

In Kathmandu we worry about leech bites in the summer, but imagine how much more frightening and deadly a snake bite is. Many of us may not appreciate the fact that venomous snakebite is clearly an occupational hazard for our farmers in the Tarai especially in the summer months. South and South East Asia have been identified as having the highest number of snakebites per year. Conservative estimates would suggest that in Nepal there are about 20,000 bites and 1000 fatalities, almost all in the Tarai.

Unfortunately, because snakebite primarily affects impoverished inhabitants, prevention, and medical management have been neglected. Furthermore there is a dearth of information. For example, many Nepali doctors will consult Western textbooks to treat snakebites; unfortunately

treatment of pit viper snakebites from the Sonoran desert in Arizona, USA is going to be significantly different for Nepali snakebites.

Russell's Vipers, Kraits, and Cobras are the three well recognised types of venomous snakes in Nepal. While Kraits and Cobras cause more of a neurological and breathing problem, viper bites seem to cause acute kidney or blood problems.

Dr Sanjib Sharma of the BP Koirala Institute in Dharan, who has published impressively about snakebites from Nepal in international, peer-reviewed journals, has shown that prompt motorcycle transport to a proper health facility by community volunteers in a Tarai village setting can save lives. At the health facility Sharma had trained personnel ready to administer anti snake venom and provide artificial ventilation when necessary.

Offering rewards for killing venomous snakes has been used as a method of preventing snakebites, but the ecological impact may be detrimental as snakes keep the rodent population in check and help with agriculture.

Knowing the behaviour pattern of the reptiles is far more helpful in prevention.

Russell's vipers are so common in paddy fields that farmers would do well to wear proper footwear all the time. The Kraits seem to mostly bite at night when people are sleeping. Since most Tarai residents sleep on floors using mosquito nets can definitely save lives.

It can be argued that the public health importance of snake bite has been largely ignored by medical science. Clearly one reason for this is that the vast burden of illness is in poor, tropical countries like ours. But snake venoms are indeed rich in proteins and peptide toxins that have specificity for a wide range of tissues receptors which makes these venoms attractive for new drug designs and could be potentially interesting for pharmaceutical companies in affluent countries. Clearly better documentation of snakebites and increased collaboration between clinicians, epidemiologists, and toxinologists would be very helpful in the prevention and treatment of this problem.



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HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

HELLO THERE: Visiting Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid met the Chairman of Interim Election Council Khil Raj Regmi on Tuesday. Khurshid was in Kathmandu on a day long visit.



BIKRAM RAI

NICE SHOT: Vice President Parmanand Jha at the annual photo exhibition organised by Photojournalist Club and Global IME bank at Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

SAFETY FIRST: Villagers in Myagdi plant saplings on Wednesday afternoon to prevent landslides in the future.

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Jailed abroad

Yashoda Timsina, Nepal, 7 July

नेपाल

For the last three years, Dhanpati Poudel of Parbat has been languishing at the Prey Sar prison in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh. Poudel along with Bangladeshi nationals Rafiqul Islam and Miah Kabir were arrested in April 2010 after letters allegedly bearing their names arrived at the British, US, and Australian embassies in Phnom Penh threatening an impending terrorist attack. The men were



sentenced to eight years in prison under the kingdom's anti-terrorist law in 2011. But 47-year-old, who ran an online business in Cambodia, claims he was unjustly convicted.

The letters warned the embassies of four refugees from India and Burma and accused them of having links to Al Qaeda and planning an attack on the embassies. Although local media reported that personal dispute in the South Asian restaurant business in Phnom Penh might have led to this letter and though there is no evidence linking the three to

any terrorist attack, the police went ahead and charged them. Poudel, who arrived in Cambodia eight years ago had been running an online business, but had overstayed his visa and the Cambodian police seems to have taken advantage of this.

There are six signatories of the letter – only first names, this is where Poudel believes the confusion began. One of signatures says 'Dep' and since Dhanpati also used Dip as his first name in short, this might have tipped off the police. Eventhough there is no evidence to show his involvement in any terrorist activities, Poudel says his pleas to prove his innocence have gone unheard. The local Non-Resident Nepalis chapter has been fighting on Poudel's behalf, but the Cambodian government and the Nepali Embassy in Thailand have been unresponsive. Nepalis in Phnom Penh claim Poudel simply got trapped by Cambodian government who is often criticised for human rights violation and lack of press freedom. "Every once in a while they jail innocent people like Poudel to show to the west that they are fighting against terrorism," says Ramesh Chettri who works in Cambodia.

The decision of the municipal court which convicted Poudel under anti-terrorist laws was upheld by the appellate court in October 2012. The case is now filed at the Supreme Court and if it also upholds the previous decision Poudel will have to spend additional four years and eleven months in prison. Of the two Bangladeshis who were also arrested, one has already been released while the other is in constant contact with his country's ambassador.

Breaking protocol



Editorial, Kantipur, 11 July

कान्तिपुर

In his whirlwind visit to Nepal, India's Minister for Foreign Affairs Salman Khushid advised our politicians to hold elections on time and pledged support in the form of election paraphernalia including 764 vehicles to help monitor polls. A week earlier, Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi came to Nepal for a few hours with the same message. Our neighbours' positive stance towards elections is welcome, even reassuring. But our political

parties, the reason behind these diplomatic visits, have let everyone down.

The way our leaders queued up to meet Khurshid shredded every notion of diplomatic protocol. According to official sources, Khurshid's visit was not centred on politics but on strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries. There was no reason for them to line up outside his hotel and later Khurshid even admitted he had never asked them to come.

Khurshid is one of India's senior ministers and it is not

surprising that politicians want to meet him. But there are rules that need to be followed. Our leaders know from experience that former prime ministers don't break lines to meet a visiting minister, but they chose to ignore this. Pushpa Kamal Dahal even cut his Singapore trip short and flew back to Kathmandu. Former prime ministers Baburam Bhattarai, Sher Bahadur Deuba, Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhal Nath Khanal acted as if they had never seen an Indian diplomat. Narayan Kaji Shrestha, who harps on the importance of protocol, acted as if he had never heard the word.

Our leaders may think what's wrong with meeting a foreign dignitary? Some even made excuses about security and lack of time. But this is not a technical issue and this has happened many times before. When India's President Pranab Mukherjee came to Nepal, Madhav Nepal and other leaders refused to go when they were invited. That they rushed to be first in line this time shows what has become of Nepali diplomacy. We must not blame our guests in such circumstances, it is we who should draw the line.

25 demands, your honour

Nagarik, 9 July

नागरिक

By fulfilling everyone's demands

– legitimate or not – this electoral government has earned itself a lot of applause from greased hands. So, without further ado, here's my list of concerns that this government should pay attention to:

1. Permission to sell adulterated gold on dodgy scales.
2. Sewage must be treated as an essential component of drinking water.
3. Allow businesses to mix water and pesticide in milk.
4. Reduce LPG cylinder volume, increase cartelling and commissions.
5. Let public buses charge whatever they want.
6. Ambulances should be encouraged to smuggle red sandalwood.
7. Increase supply of smuggled fertiliser, sugar, drugs, weapons, and banned medicines.
8. Fees at schools and hospitals must be increased without obstruction.
9. Criminals should take part in elections.
10. Forgive those found guilty of crimes and reintegrate them back to society.
11. Encourage the exhibition of khukuris, swords, spears, and guns during polls.
12. Stop hotel raids, start flesh trade.
13. Wipe out the CIAA, encourage graft.
14. Institutionalise corruption.
15. Boost illegal sand and gravel mining.
16. Give salaries to those who come to work once a month.
17. Grant registration to stolen vehicles to allow their sale.
18. Encourage black market, artificial shortages, bill forgery, and tax evasion.
19. Legalise drinking and driving.
20. Allow lawyers to practice politics.
21. Permit businesses to mix kerosene in petrol, stones in rice, lard in butter.
22. Encourage all to deplete jungles and sell wood.
23. Let everyone steal electricity and establish industries.
24. Pay no attention to bird-flu.
25. Grant banks permission to inflate interest rates.

In short, Prime Minister, you must end the rule of law.

Best regards,
Keshab Bhattarai
Associate Editor, Chitwan Post

NEPALI TWEETS

Kamal Thapa

गत मास वर्षको अनुभव, जलताको चाहना र राष्ट्रको यूक्तर हितलाई दृष्टिगत गर्दै राजा सहितको प्रजातन्त्र बारे जाविचार गर्ने।

Keeping in mind the experiences from the past seven years, the public's wish, and the nation's overall welfare, let's reexamine the possibility of a democracy with a constitutional monarch.

Anbika Giri

जनमटिलगा चालेन्ड अन फुलिला रे। अब उलीसँग फुलिलो हुनका लागि वर्षादिलमा भाइले याही एउटा जनमटिलगा मात्र याकीपैछ, फुलिलो हुनु स्वयम्भाविक हो।

Gyanendra looked very energetic on his birthday. Poor man can be active only one day in a year, it's natural for him to be excited.

द्यामर्य

ओ दोलिदं आज। युसिद आएका छन। सबै उनको सुन्न, लेख र हेले भस्त छन। प्रभुको अंगाडी मेरो आवाज कस्तूरे सुन्न र ??

Let it be, I won't talk today. Khurshid is here. Everyone is busy hearing him talk, writing about him, and trying to meet him. Who will listen to me when god himself is here?

WEEKLY BAZAR POLL #19

In weekly polls conducted with the support of The Asia Foundation, Himal Khabarpatrika asks 375 respondents in 12 cities across Nepal every Monday for their opinion on contemporary issues. This week's result of interviews about the supply of essentials:

1. What do you think of the recent strike on the supply of essentials?
Bad 58.5%
Unacceptable 35.5%

2. What should the government do about it?
Make laws and take strong action 40.2%
Cancel licences 19.7%
Compel them to stop 18.3%
Fulfil their demands 15%
Don't know 4.4%
Pay no attention 2.2%
Won't say 0.3%

3. What kind of laws should be made to stop this from happening?
Prohibit strikes 47%
Compensate consumers 42.9%



Mohan Baidya: "Who's sent me a message?"

SMS: "If you have not registered as a voter, please go and do it quickly." – Election Commission

कान्तिपुर Batsyayan in Kantipur, 7 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



Nobody went to Darchula after the floods. But they lined up to greet Salman Khurshid.

Rastriya Jan Morcha Chairman Chitra Bahadur KC, Naya Patrika, 11 July



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Symbolic elections

That must be some kind of a world record for a visiting Minister of a neighbouring country to meet an astounding total of 36 politicians in 7 hours, not counting lunch break. Nepali politicians seem to have taken the Nepal Tourism Board's motto "Guest is God" a bit too literally and trooped off to the Dwarka to pay their respects. But the real reason why there was a near stampede of Nepali politicians at the Street of 32 Butterflies, it has now emerged, is that they all thought they were meeting Salman Khan.



Besides maintaining its position of being the most corrupted country in South Asia, Nepal has belatedly also been recognised in the Guinness Book as having the highest per capita number of political parties this side of the Sewage Canal. And although both feats deserve much self-congratulation, the large number of parties has

unintended side-effects. For instance, even electronic voting machines from India do not have enough buttons for them to be any use here in November. And because we use party symbols so people can cast their ballots in sign language, the Election Commission has simply run out of symbols.

Since the most popular symbols like sun, moon, tree, hammer and sickle have all been taken, the commission has decided to take advantage of Nepal's biodiversity and put the country's flora and fauna to good use. For instance, to the list of election symbols which already includes cow, goat, and yak it has added: scorpion, yeti, vulture, porcupine, gecko, tadpole, earthworm, and (the Donkey is pleased to announce) a jack ass.

But methinks there are other easily-recognised everyday items that could still be employed as election symbols and there is sure to be a real scramble to get these. For



instance, since the hammer and sickle is now such a discredited election symbol, the party in question could replace it with handcuffs. And the disgruntled faction can have the grenade.

The election commissioners

should also think about using symbols to serve a dual purpose, for instance, giving the Family Party the election symbol of a condom would not only be appropriate to set that party apart from others, but also simultaneously spread awareness among the electorate about contraception.

And as the campaign to declare the whole country open defecation-free gathers pace, the forthcoming election could be the perfect opportunity to de-stigmatise the squat latrine and assist in the gubberment's campaign of Toilets for All by 2017.



Speaking of earthworms, wonder what's going to happen to all the kickbacks the previous gobblement collected on various airport deals, plane purchases, and hydropower contracts. Will the contracting parties have to cough up the moolah to new incumbents all over again? No wonder we keep being numero uno in the Transparency International Top Ten every year. Political party leaders again scored the highest marks in the 2013 Kleptocrat Index, which was surprising because

given the vast experience the new functionary at the CIAA has amassed over the years, one would have thought it would be the anti-corruption watchdog that would be most corrupt. Good thing we bribed the guys at TI to show that the media is the least corrupt institution in Nepal.



The real problem about elections is that no one gives a rat's ass (in a manner of speaking) about it. And that is because all the parties are too busy firefighting internal squabbles. The A-Baddies and the B-Baddies may be forced to reunite, but now there are splits within splits as Dash comrades disagree about whether to sit around a roundtable or to go back to war. The question on everyone's mind is what happens if elections can't be held in November? Will this partyless system of government continue, or will the High and Mighty Political Mechanism stage a coup and remove the Chief Minister?



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