

PAGE 17

PAGE 10-11



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FOR A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS

Two events this week portend significant impact on our economy. On Tuesday, the US dollar crossed the Rs 100 barrier (Rs 102 by Thursday) with a potentially huge impact on inflation and balance of payments. The same day, the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal held a press conference in which it announced an ill-timed and ill-thought ban on wide-body aircrafts flying into Kathmandu airport.

Taken together, this is like kicking an economy that is already down. There is precious little Nepal can do about the surging dollar because of the INR peg. The USD has strengthened by 15 per cent in the last six months against the Indian rupee and the Indian government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have been at loggerheads over the proper response and slow to react. Wednesday’s decision by the RBI to buy back INR 80 billion in bonds to shore up money supply tackles the symptom and not the disease. Liquidity had become tight after efforts to stem the INR’s free-fall raised interest rates.

The real problem has been India’s chronic current account deficit, which used to be covered by foreign investors pouring money into the country. But red tape, corruption, and economic slowdown in the West have kept investors away. Meanwhile, India’s imports especially of oil, coal, and gold has surged, putting pressure on the exchange rate. With elections coming up, Indian leaders will be expected to take populist decisions rather than bite the bullet (*see page 4*).

The 100:160 INR peg means that India’s woes have impacted directly on Nepal. The vast Indian economy can take knocks, but for Nepal crossing the psychological NPR 100 threshold could make an already precarious situation perilous.

A falling domestic currency need not necessarily be bad news for a country as long as it has sizeable exports,



Some of the economic challenges Nepal faces are beyond our control, but many of them are a direct result of our own incompetence

but only 12 percent of Nepal’s foreign trade is made up of exports. A strong dollar could also be hugely advantageous to a country so dependent on foreign remittances and tourism. Nepalis working abroad sent home USD 4 billion last year and this amount will automatically increase by more than 20 per cent when converted to NPR. Nearly 40 per cent of foreign remittances are sent

home just before the holidays, so the benefit of a strong dollar will be felt immediately in the next three months. Tourism pumped in an estimated Rs 32 billion last year and with the stronger dollar this total will also go up, even if the total number of visitors doesn’t.

Most of the remittances, however, are used up by Nepalis to pay for imports of consumer items, energy, and food. The dollar appreciation, according to one estimate, will trigger 20-30 per cent inflation in a market dominated by imports.

So, to sum up, there is nothing we can do to stem the rupee slide because of the INR peg. And what we should have done to take advantage of the strong dollar (boost exports, invest remittances in the productive sector) should have been done decades ago. It’s too late now.

CAAN’s (Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal) ill-advised decision to issue a half-baked statement about a “ban” on wide-body planes flying into Kathmandu because of cracks on the runway could not have come at a worse time. To correct one mistake (shoddy construction during asphalt overlay work two years ago allegedly due to corruption) CAAN made a blunder by announcing a ban that it couldn’t enforce. A decision of that magnitude should have been made in consultation with airlines and announced by the minister (*see report on page 5*).

CAAN met with the airlines Wednesday and lamely back-peddled stating that it wasn’t a “ban” per se, but just a “suggestion”. But the damage has been done, the news has hit the international wires and social media, panicking tourism wholesalers and individual travellers.

Some of the economic challenges Nepal faces are beyond our control. But many of them are a direct result of our own incompetence.

ON THE WEB
www.nepalitimes.com

PRICE OF PEACE

We knew hundreds of thousands of dollars were ransacked in the name of ‘peace process’, but the actual figures are appalling (‘The price of peace’, Rameshwor Bohara, #669). Yes, it was necessary to bring the Maoists into the mainstream, but why was nobody keeping check? Where was the government? Why did the international players keep silent (when a lot of the money came out of their pockets)? Everyone turned a blind eye just to accommodate the former rebels. Imagine if the peace process had taken less time and less money, the country could have at least made some progress. As things stand now, a few leaders are rich, but majority of Nepalis are still dirt poor just like they were before 1996. The status quo is well and alive. Long live the ‘people’s’ revolution.

Risti Bastola

• The Rs 20 billion spent on integration of former guerillas is money poured down the drain, money that could have been used on building roads, water supply, and schools. What did Krishna Bahadur Mahara use his \$4.6 million expense account for? The people deserve answers. The Maoist insurgency was an unnecessary ‘war’: a heinous spree of killing and extortion waged to bolster the fading fortunes of politicians who had repeatedly been rejected by the people in two successive elections. They were aided by the useful idiots in the intelligentsia and media who bought the Maoist propaganda of social injustice and oppression hook,

line and sinker and failed to see the profit-making enterprise that came in the guise of a revolution.

Aideeah

• Doling out Rs 20 billion so that Maoists guerillas would stop killing and harassing fellow Nepalis does not seem like a long lasting peace deal, but more like ransom. The plunder of the state treasury is an open secret, just look at those who got extremely rich overnight and those who were driven into poverty, insecurity, and are divided. The peace dealers need to come together, correct past mistakes, and steer the country back in the direction of peace, unity, and development.

Nyaya Bahadur

• It’s a universal truth that Nepalis cannot be trusted with money. But what were UNMIN, GIZ, and the multitude of other international observers and donors doing? They have been clearly caught sleeping on the job. If there is going to be an investigation into this sickening instance of corruption (which is highly doubtful), then the roles of these organisations must be scrutinised. Our high and mighty foreign friends need to answer some tough questions.

PP

• Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Baburam Bhattarai, and Mahara pocketed big chunks of the Rs 20 billion. Are we going to let them get away with such wholesale looting? Lokman Singh Karki arrested a puny officer at the airport for corruption, if he had the balls he would start with Dahal.

Sunil Kafle

• Now we know what the ‘people’s war’ and the killings were for: an excuse for Maoist leaders to rob the state and people and fill their own pockets. Imagine if the Rs 20 billion had been used towards development?

Latera

MORAL BANKRUPTCY

The real dons are the Maoist leaders who got away scot free after stealing billions of dollars from the Nepali people (‘Moral bankruptcy’, Editorial, #669). Ganesh Lama and company are small timers compared to don Mahara and don Dahal.

Tulsi

• *Nepali Times*, please stop complaining. It was people like you in the media who voted the Maoists into power and put them in the position they are in today. This is just an end result of trying to fix what wasn’t broken.

SS

CHAMPION OF JUSTICE

Thank you *NT* and Sarita Pariyar for a very comprehensive and emotional coverage of Dalit issues (‘Champion of justice’, #669). We have a long way to go and it will be a much more difficult road without an exemplary activist and leader like Suvash Darnal (*pic, above*) to show the way.

B BK

• Thank you *NT* for a piece that truly hits home. All men and women are created equal, there is no high or low. But Nepalis of the mythical ‘higher’ caste like to prove their superiority by attacking and inflicting physical pain on



I know things are changing if not in this generation, definitely by the next generation.

Shyam Mahato

• I had the honour of working with Suvash dai on some projects and am grateful for it. The good work he started has inspired many and will be carried on.

Nepali

SAME STORY IN INDIA

Thank you Ajaz Ashraf for your informative piece on the status of Dalit journalists in the Indian media and for pointing out the gross double standards rampant within the industry (‘It’s the same story in India’, #669). The Indian media tries hard to portray itself as forward thinking, modern, and the champion of the downtrodden, but it is actually built upon archaic and regressive values that protect the status quo of the caste system. I wish a similar study was conducted in Nepal to see how far journalists from the so called ‘lower’ castes have progressed in the media. I have a feeling the result won’t be too encouraging.

Renu Shrestha

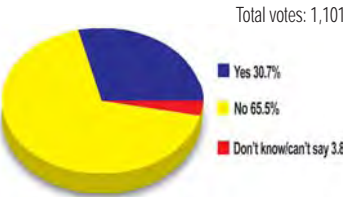
BELL THE CAT

By now it’s pretty clear to most Nepalis that elections are not happening in November (‘Who will bell the cat?’, Muma Ram Khanal, #669).Where do we go from here? Do we keep postponing polls until the demands of all the 130+ parties are fulfilled? Do we revive the dead CA? Do we let a few powerful men forge a new constitution behind closed doors? We wasted ten years in a needless war, six more to complete the peace process, how long will the rebuilding take? We cannot compromise the future of a new generation of Nepalis with this endless foot-dragging. Something needs to give.

Correction: In ‘The price of peace’ (Rameshwor Bohara, #669) the number of UNMIN verified ex-combatants was given as 17,602. The actual number is 19,602.



Q. Should the HLPAC postpone election dates to accommodate the 33 dissenting parties?



Weekly Internet Poll # 671. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. What should be done to guarantee CA elections?



Competing for consensus

Older parties are trying to reinvent themselves and new ones are maturing

This week, the High Level Political Mechanism held 'decisive' talks with the Mohan Baidya-led CPN-Maoists but despite all efforts to bring the party on board, the meetings ended with a vague agreement to seek an outcome through an all-party meet whose date has not been fixed. This was bound to happen. Just as we had predicted, despite the willingness of Baidya and senior leaders like Ram Bahadur



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

Thapa, radical deputies and their inflated egos prevented any meaningful outcome to this stalemate.

But the good news is that the Election Commission has refused HLPN's request to make changes in the election schedule. This will put pressure on CPN-Maoists to come clean on elections or abandon any political recourse. The fact that the Upendra Yadav-led morcha, Sarat Singh Bhandari's National Madhes Socialist Party, and Ashok Rai's Federal Socialist Party have already made over-the-table and under-the-table deals to participate in the polls, will also play in Baidya's mind. Still, the role of parent party in bringing the disgruntled CPN-M into the fold will be crucial.

At an interaction program organised by ABC television in Biratnagar, Pokhara, and Janakpur over the last few weeks, UCPN-Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has said his party has suffered from philosophical and ideological



angst ever since the end of the conflict, which lead to the split. But he questioned the decision of Baidya and Co, stating that as comrades who had fought for the agenda of drafting the constitution through a Constituent Assembly, it was politically incorrect of the party to stay out of the process.

Indeed, Mohan Baidya stands disoriented and cornered by leaders and cadre who are products of his own orthodox schooling. If he has any intention of remaining in peaceful and competitive politics, he will have to pass on a message to his cadre and most importantly his deputies in a language that they best understand: the end of the revolution was never to overthrow political opponents, but to establish a democratic society where all ideological grounds can compete for

influence through their programs and public mandate.

They must be told that holding a red flag alone does not make them champions of social justice and egalitarian society, that they must be willing to go door-to-door to convince people of their vision of society, and that elections are the best path to 'state capture'.

The UCPN-M under Dahal understood this fact after entering competitive politics and despite claims of electoral fraud, they did champion the vision of a just society that won them overwhelming public support during the last election. In a Pokhara interaction, Dahal confessed that the 2008 victory had made the Maoists belittle the efforts of other parties, especially the role played by the late NC President Girija Prasad Koirala which effectively ended politics of consensus between

the parties and polarised the CA.

In the final months before the dissolution of the last CA, we had maintained that the debate was not so much about what kind of constitution this country would get. That could have been resolved by a simple voting inside the CA. The main issue at stake was who got to take away the credit for laying the foundations of 'New Nepal'.

It became clear that the CA would not be able to deliver the constitution until all powerful forces were assured of their due share in the history. The sizable presence of the Maoists and their Madhesi and cross-party Janajati allies marginalised all other political forces in terms of agenda setting and ended this possibility, which was a major reason for the failure of CA-1.

Today, Nepal's political landscape is populated by older parties trying to reinvent

themselves and the new ones maturing in their vision. The parties know why they failed last time and what they need to do this time. The rhetoric has softened and the distortion created between identity-based federalism and its ethnic bogey, which became a major point of contention, is now becoming clearer.

This week, both Baburam Bhattarai and Pushpa Kamal Dahal publicly stated that they are against ethnic federalism and that it must not be confused with the demand for identity-based federalism. Now it is the NC and UML's turn to make their position public about identity-based federalism which has galvanised the Dalit, Madhesi, and Janajati constituencies and was agreed upon in the last CA by all political forces. We do not want the ghost of the last CA haunting us again, do we? 🇳🇵

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BIZ BRIEFS

Tie-up

Samsara Money Transfer is partnering with Al Zaman Exchange of Qatar. A memorandum of understanding was exchanged between Executive Vice-Chairman of Samsara Money Transfer Jeewan Babu Shrestha and Al Zaman's Managing Director Abdullah Ahmed Al Zaman to seal the deal. Nepalis living in Qatar can now send money to their families through Al Zaman and cash can be collected from any of Samsara's 1,800 agent locations across the country.



One more

Nepal Investment Bank started its 44th branch in Barahathawa, Sarlahi. Chief Executive Officer of NIB, Jyoti Prakash Pandey inaugurated the branch during a function on 15 August. The opening of the new branch is part

of NIB's strategy to focus on inclusive banking and support the agricultural activities of the region reads the press statement.

Colour contest

Registration is now open for the 2nd NMB Bank Inter School Heritage Painting Competition 2013. The competition is scheduled to be held on 21 September and students from grade 8 to 10 are eligible to participate. According to the statement released by the bank, the aim of this event is to create awareness about the importance of heritage among younger Nepalis.



Cash cash

Pepsi celebrated the closing of its 20-20 campaign which ran from 16 June to 6 August by handing out prize money to 11 lucky winners. Rohit Kohli, Unit Manager for Varun Beverage (Nepal) and Gaurav Kumar,

Country Manager for PepsiCo, gave away the grand prize worth Rs 2 million to Bal Kumari Basnet while the 10 daily winners took home Rs 100,000 each.

The mighty fall

The Indian rupee has weakened rapidly in recent months, with the exchange rate against the US dollar dropping by 15 per cent to Rs 64, since early May. As a symbol of India's economic strength, the rupee's fall has provoked more than the usual hand-wringing and angst at home and abroad. But the slide has been long in coming and recent market uncertainty has merely been a wake-up call.

The reason for worry is that India has lost international competitiveness and has been buying time by borrowing from fickle lenders. Growth momentum has fizzled and with inflation persistently high, Indian producers are struggling to compete in world markets. The current-account deficit is increasing relentlessly, owing to a widening trade deficit (now at 13 per cent of GDP), raising the danger of a balance-of-payments crisis.

Indian GDP grew at heady rates of 8-10 per cent per year between 2004 and 2007, a period that seemed to herald a decisive break from the anemic 'Hindu rate of growth'. Reforms had unleashed new entrepreneurial energies and the prospect of a brighter future lifted people's aspirations.

With foreign manufacturers piling in to satisfy a new hunger for consumer durables, India turned its gaze outward. The global economy – in a phase of buoyant expansion – welcomed India's information technology services. Bangalore (the information-technology hub), Bollywood, and yoga became

symbols of India's soft power. That was the moment to invest in the future.

But the opportunity was wasted. Infrastructure did not keep pace with the economy's needs. And, more deplorably, educational standards lagged. And, even when times were good, India never gained a foothold in the global manufactured-goods trade. Today, domestic investment has plummeted, exports are languishing,



and GDP growth is down to around 4.5 per cent per year.

Moreover, India has developed a tendency for chronic inflation, owing to an unhappy combination of supply bottlenecks (caused by poor infrastructure) and excessive demand (thanks to persistent public deficits). Budget deficits offered what appeared to be a free lunch, as the resulting inflation eroded the real value of public debt, while the government had privileged access to private savings at near-zero real interest rates.

With so much largesse to spread around, the government became a source of contracts with annuity-

like earnings, which offered robust returns for those with political access. That weakened the incentives for entrepreneurship. And, as India's external position deteriorated, the rupee became significantly overvalued between early 2009 and late 2012, trading in a narrow range while domestic inflation galloped ahead in a global environment of relative price stability.

Amid weakening competitiveness, the rupee was propped up by increasingly unstable foreign sources of funds. Traditionally, nearly half of India's trade deficit has been financed by remittances from Indian expatriates. Part of this flow is steady, because it supports families at home; but much of it is opportunistic investment seeking real returns. According to recent data, remittances have slowed or even fallen slightly.

Similarly, long-term foreign investors have had reason to pause and the country has been left to finance its external deficit increasingly through short-term borrowing, the most capricious form of international capital.

To avert a disorderly fall, short-term macroeconomic management requires officially engineered depreciation through administrative methods and restraints on external borrowing. A depreciated rupee should help revive Indian exports and lift growth. But, in the absence of complementary action, depreciation – whether engineered or market-driven – will make matters worse.

Ashoka Mody is visiting professor of International Economic Policy at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University.
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Home sweet home

A housing for low-income families in Lalitpur is attracting many potential customers

According to the 2011 census, 58 percent of Kathmandu's 1.7 million strong population lives in rented spaces. In fact 30 per cent of all Nepalis live in rented houses or apartments and this number is only likely to increase as more people migrate to cities in search of jobs and better lives.

However, the housing business boom in the capital and other major cities is only targeted towards middle and high class, leaving low-income families with few housing options. To fill this gap, Lumanti Support Group For Shelter, an NGO dedicated to the alleviation of urban poverty in Nepal through the improvement of shelter conditions, is building minial rent housings with the motto: safe and prosperous home, every citizen's right.

According to Sama Bajra, managing director of Lumanti, the organisation has so far constructed and renovated over 4,600 houses which have been rented out for a nominal fee. It has also been working to provide safe and secure homes, drinking water, education, and community empowerment in Kathmandu and 16 other metropolitans.

Model Housing

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of Lumanti's work on housing the poor, the group's first rental housing in Dhobighat, Lalitpur was inaugurated. Speaking at the program Minister for Urban Development Chabi Raj Pant (pic above) said this housing would serve as a model for others and called on private enterprises to follow in Lumanti's footsteps by venturing into housing options for the lower-income Nepalis. He said the organisation had the full support of the government. At the same program, Secretary of Ministry of Urban Development, Kishor Thapa informed about the ministry's plan to draft a code of conduct for those living on rent which will be implemented soon.

"There is a need for the government to start programs that will help lower-income families and displaced communities," said executive director Lajana Manandhar. Manandhar said that if the government would provide lands, Lumanti would be happy to build the houses.

Spread across 3,080 square feet (nine aana), the housing complex in Dhobighat can accommodate upto 24 families and took a year and half to complete. UK based NGO



Ramji Dahal

Homeless International provided financial assistance with total bill coming up to cost Rs 20.25 million. The rooms have been designed keeping small families in mind. Every room measuring 180 square ft has an attached bathroom, and a veranda. Architect Amit Bajracharya says the buildings are earthquake-resistant and there is facilities for rain water harvesting and solar as well.

A room costs Rs 3,000 monthly. Utility bills are paid separately by the tenants. More than 150 families have already booked rooms and a seven-member committee will now assess the applications and pick the most in need. Families with children, families without private vehicles, families headed by women, and students from outside Kathmandu, will be given priority.

According to Bajra, the rooms will go out on rents starting mid-September. Tenants will be required to sign a two-year contract and pay an advance of two month's rent. A 10-point rule for residents has also been drafted.

Construction for a second similar housing has already started in the same locality. "The second one will have 30 unit homes," informs Bajra. Like the apartment, this one is also supported by Homeless International. The total cost for this housing is estimated to be around Rs 30 million.



The rental housing in Sangam Basti, Lalitpur is fully equipped with attached toilet/bathroom, kitchen and bed room

When is a ban not a ban?

KUNDA DIXIT

The aviation and tourism sector in Nepal has reacted with dismay at the decision on Monday by the civil aviation authorities to ban wide-body flights to and from Kathmandu, saying it would be disastrous for the economy. Tour operators and hotels say they have been inundated with panicked emails from groups and customers with bookings for the autumn season.

The head of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) Ritesh Chandra Lal Suman told a press conference on Monday that his agency had written to airline operators not to

bring in wide-body aircrafts with more than 250 seats because of the persistent problem with cracks on the only runway at Nepal's only international airport.

"We have informed the operators of the limitations of the runway," Suman said, "we have asked them to use smaller aircrafts or reduce the payload on flights."

However, airlines using Kathmandu airport seemed confused about whether this was a complete ban or just a suggestion, from when it will take effect, and for how long. In fact, some airlines said they had never received the letter CAAN claims to have sent them.

"To us it seems that CAAN is trying to get off the hook by passing the buck and appearing to be doing something

about the runway," said one operator on condition of anonymity, "and we haven't been instructed to stop flying in wide-bodies."

Of the international airlines operating to Kathmandu, Thai Airways, Korean Air, Dragon Air, and Air Asia regularly bring Boeing 777s, or Airbus 330-300s. Other airlines like Qatar and Etihad fly in 330s in the peak tourist season, most other airlines use Boeing 737s and Airbus 320s.

"We have taken this as a request letter, not yet as a mandatory rule," said Joy Dewan, local representative for Turkish Airlines which is launching a direct link to Istanbul from 2 September using Airbus 330 aircraft. "Stopping long haul flights completely just when the tourist season is about to start would be terrible. The timing is disastrous."

The runway at Kathmandu airport was built in 1968, although it has been extended and reinforced after that. The last asphalt overlay was done in 2011 and the contractor appears to have done shoddy work because the surface has developed cracks and peeled off in places along the southern end of the runway. The airport has been closed several times in the past two weeks, forcing planes to burn fuel on long holds while emergency crews repaired the cracks.

Some airline executives say CAAN and the airport management are trying to deflect attention from a CIAA probe on alleged corruption in the 2011 runway repair contract and show that it is taking action. CAAN could also be pre-empting

possible legal hassles in case of an incident by issuing an open-ended and vague directive. In fact, Civil Aviation has blamed everything from contractors, monsoon rains, afternoon sun, unstable soil, to landings by heavy jets.

Two representatives of international airlines that *Nepali Times* spoke to said safety was their primary concern and the runway was indeed in bad shape. A major overhaul of the runway would mean closing down the airport just at the start of the tourist season. There are no other international airports in Nepal and none of them have runways capable of handling large jets.

CAAN is taking the advice of a Spanish contractor, Ayesa Ingenieria, which is said to be inspecting the runway and will be giving a report next month. Faced with a groundswell of criticism CAAN met with airline executives and has now been pursuing an option of getting operators of heavy jets to reduce fuel and cargo loads. One irate travel trade official told *Nepali Times*: "CAAN should have waited till the Ayesa report comes out, and met with airlines before making that hasty announcement of a ban."

Said Bharat Kumar Shrestha of the Airlines Operating Committee (AOC) representing international airlines: "All the airlines have already made their bookings and it will be impossible for them to cancel them on wide-body aircrafts without major disruptions." 🇳🇵

Civil Aviation has tried to patch up past mistakes by a blunder in its handling of Kathmandu's runway fiasco



ON THE THRESHOLD: The southern end of the runway at Kathmandu airport where chronic cracks have appeared on the left and right side of the centre line.

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Old, but handy

MATTHIES WEITZAL
and CHRISTINE MERK

Would you throw gold, silver, or other precious metals into the trash? Probably not intentionally. But if you have thrown away an old mobile phone, not realising that it contains a host of recyclable metals, you are not alone. The average American disposes of a mobile phone every two years, with only one out of 10 dismantled and recycled.

While the value of the metals in each phone is low, the massive number of sets that end up in landfills or incinerators – roughly 135 million in the United States alone in 2010, according to the Environmental Protection Agency – amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars of wasted resources annually. Given that mining landfills for mobile phones is expensive and inefficient, consumers need a stronger incentive to recycle their old devices. A compulsory deposit on mobile phones could provide it.

Although collection agencies offer cash in exchange for old mobile phones, few people know that they exist. For those who do, the promise of a few dollars is inadequate to motivate



them to expend the time and effort needed to find and go to a collection point. Indeed, the payment will probably not even cover the cost of the gas needed to get there.

By contrast, recouping a deposit of, say, \$25 could prove to be a much more powerful incentive. Given that the deposit must be paid at the time of purchase, it would increase awareness of the device's inherent value. More important, the higher dollar amount would make the effort of returning the phone worthwhile for a much larger proportion of the population, regardless of whether they identify with the goal of preserving resources. People would be less likely to keep old devices tucked away for no reason if their own money was on the line.

Deposit schemes could help promote recycling of used mobile devices

Such a scheme would likely be met with some resistance, with mobile phone producers arguing that by increasing the cost of their products, the deposit system could undermine demand, especially from poorer customers purchasing cheap phones. But their profits are on the line either way: if people continue to dump valuable resources, the price of mobile phones – not to mention the prices of other electronic devices – will rise just as surely.


That is because the problem of electronic waste extends beyond the squandering of the metals themselves. Mining and manufacturing metals is a costly, energy-intensive, and, often, ecologically destructive process. Smelting copper ore, for example, is more than twice as energy-intensive as recycling copper.

Furthermore, mobile phone batteries contain toxic substances, including heavy metals like cobalt, lead, and zinc. If the device is incinerated or left to degrade in a landfill, these substances can leak into soil and groundwater, seriously harming human health and the environment. Just as a deposit system has enabled Germany to substantially reduce the uncontrolled disposal of toxic car batteries, such a scheme

could help keep toxic mobile phone batteries out of the waste stream.

A mobile phone deposit system could be the first step toward a wider scheme aimed at all consumer electronics, more than half of which are not properly recycled. Given that larger devices like computers and televisions contain even more precious metals, an effective system for encouraging proper end-of-life treatment is essential.

Of course, several practical questions will have to be resolved before introducing a mobile phone deposit scheme. For example, what should be done about phones for which no deposit has been paid, whether because they were already in circulation when the scheme was launched or because they were purchased abroad? One solution would be to record the serial numbers of all mobile phones for which a deposit has been paid. The benefits of higher recycling rates would surely offset the associated administrative costs.

A mobile phone deposit system would promote recycling, reduce mining, conserve resources, and limit toxic waste. So why aren't policymakers speed-dialing each other to ensure that such a system is implemented? 

Matthias Weitzel and Christine Merk are researchers at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.
www.project-syndicate.org



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BEING BELI

TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

“Every actor needs a role that will define them as an artist. This is mine,” says Samuna KC of her latest avatar Beli Basnet, a mentally disturbed woman in *Swapnamahal*. Those who have watched the play, an adaptation of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the second production of Freelancers Nepal, a theatre group Samuna helped establish with friend and director Eelum Dixit in 2011, will agree. KC gives us an enthralling peek into the world of an emotionally vulnerable Beli, who is unable to recognise the fine line between fantasy and reality, and at the risk of offending other actors, *Swapnamahal* is her show.

Asked if similarities between Beli, an aspiring actor, and herself helped her understand the character, Samuna confides that she actually had a tough time relating to Beli's need to settle down with a man and start a new life because that is something the real Samuna has never experienced. But after a month of being Beli every evening at the

Samuna KC steals the show with her passionate portayal of a mentally-ill woman

Mandala Theatre in Anamnagar, the character seems to have grown on her. "There is a certain beauty of living in another person's world, even if just for a day," she says. "I will miss Beli once the show is over." It is this attachment to characters and their lives that makes KC's performance stand out.

After completing high school in 2005, Samuna joined Gurukul Theatre for a two year stint with veteran actor Sunil Pokhrel and his team and then moved to India to study drama at MS University in Gujarat. "In India the whole community is involved with theatre and comes for shows. Here very few people turn up, mostly

students. It's still difficult to make a living from theatre," she explains.

Surprisingly though, the theatre lover almost gave up the stage as the monotony got to her. To keep things interesting, she branched out into translating, directing, producing plays, and even dabbled in movies. In fact, the Nepali *Swapnamahal* is Samuna's take on Williams' classic, another reason why she seems so at ease with the story. "It was challenging, but also very satisfying to be able to mould a classic according to my vision," she says. "The original script is extremely strong in terms of character development and dialogue, which in turn helped make our adaptation powerful."

After a successful one month run, Freelancers Nepal is organising a charity show of *Swapnamahal* for the benefit of flood victims of western Nepal this weekend. 🇳🇵

SWAPNAMAHAL

Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoka



ACTION: Samuna KC (*left*) on stage with Sarita Giri (*right*), who plays Beli's elder sister, during a performance of *Swapnamahal* at Mandala Theatre in Anamnagar.

PHOTO COURTESY:SAMUNA KC



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HONDA



EVENTS



A PEOPLE WAR, an exhibition of photographs that portrays the reality of Nepal through 10 years of insurgency. *Everyday except Tuesdays, 11 am to 4 pm, (01)5549948, www.madanpuraskar.org*

Bagmati festival, celebrate the river that nourishes Kathmandu, with parades, rafting, and cleanliness programmes. *Runs till 24 August*

Gunla, the Newari month of festivities has begun, be alert with your cameras to take great photographs. *7 August to 6 September*



SWAPNAMAHAL, Beli Basnyat wants to build the castle of her dreams but can she escape her past? Starring Samuna KC and Sarita Giri

in the charity rerun of Tennessee Williams' classic *A Streetcar Named Desire*. *Rs 500, 23 to 24 August, 6.15pm, Rato Bangala School, Patan*

Kathmandu book swap, Love Books? Love Coffee? Join other bookworms to exchange books and drink your favourite brew. *Second Saturday of every month, 2.30pm, Yellow House, Sanepa, ktmbookswap.wordpress.com/2013/08/07/august-bookswap/*

Swim and lunch, enjoy your weekends with a dip in the pool and savour a mouthwatering lunch with a glass of beer. *Rs 999, Saturdays, 11am to 6pm, Waterfront Resort, Pokhara, (61)466 303/304, www.waterfronthotelnepal.com*

FEM Fashion, the supermodels of Nepal will sashay down the ramp just for you. *Rs 1,500, 30 August, Aroma Restaurant and Bar, Jhamsikhel*

Teej, celebrate the festival of women by hiking to Jamacho for a 'Darr Khane' picnic. *August 31st, <http://sevensummitswomen.org/>*



MAHABHARAT, watch the epic performed by the students of Kathmandu University High School. *Rs 100 & Rs 300, 4 to 5 August, The Village Theatre, Uttar Dhoka, Lajimpat, (01)4230729*

Lekhako tutulko, the students of Ace College have come up with yet another comedy at their annual play show. *Rs 300, 2pm and 5pm, 23 August, Rastriya Nach Ghar, Jamal*



BOTTOMS UP, take your taste buds and olfactory nerves on a joy ride at the 10th Annual wine tasting festival. *Rs 900 per half litre, July to August, Kilroy's, Thamel, (01)4250440/41*

DINING

Bubbly Brunch, let the subtleties of Arabian cuisine tease your palate, pasta if you're not too adventurous with food. *Rs 1,1000, 11am to 3pm, Saturdays, Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-La, (01)4412999 (Ext. 7520/7515)*



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

Mongolian BBQ, gobble generous quantities of roasted meat and wash it down with a glass of mocktail, with traditional music playing within earshot. *Rs 1,099, 7pm onwards, Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, (061)462222 Ext. 5055*

Pagoda Chinese Restaurant, head to this jade palace if you're in the mood for Chinese. *Budhanilkantha, (01)4375 280, pvh@wlink.com.np*

Chez Caroline, exquisite food, glorious sunshine and more. *9am to 10pm, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01)4263070/4187*



TAMAS-LAYA, promises a refined dining experience, try the prawn tempura, fisherman's fish, and Balinese chicken satay. *Naxal, Kathmandu*

Saigon Pho, spacious interior with authentic Vietnamese dishes. *Lajimpat*

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*

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

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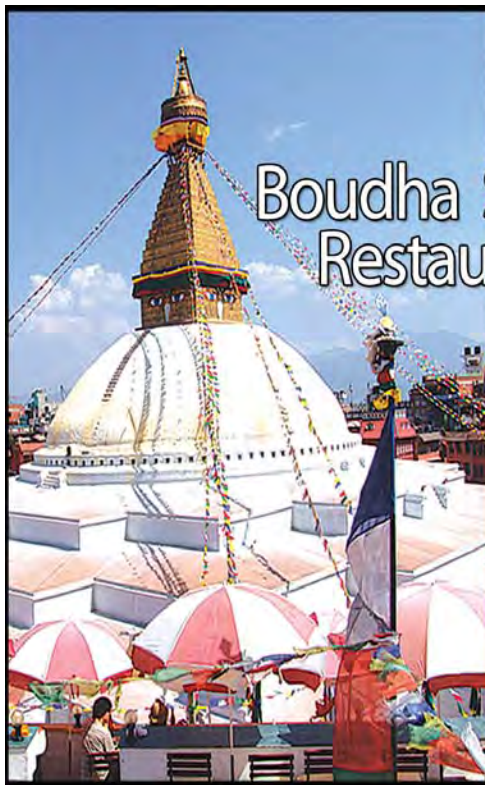


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MUSIC

Punk show, featuring Squirt Guns, MC FreeDumb, and the mostly-female combo Tank Girl. *Rs 200, 7:30pm, Backyard BBQ, Jhamsikhel*

Starry Night BBQ, catch Ciney Gurung live as you chomp on your meat stick. *Rs 1,299, 7pm onwards, Fridays, Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, (01)4412999 (Ext. 7520/7515)*



LE BANQUET DES ANGES, a concert by Aurelie Barbelin and Nicolas Meyer. *23 August, 6pm, free entrance, Russian Culture Centre, Kamalpokhari*

Tuborg stage shows, your favourite Nepali rockstars at a town near you. *31 August, Narayanghat*



COBWEB LIVE, Nepal's oldest rock band are back to spin a few tales and a few hips. *24 August, Swimming Pool, Satdobato*

GETAWAYS



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MANGO TREE LODGE, culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park. *Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotree lodge.com*

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BIKRAM RAI

YOUTH POWER

As the parties bicker about agreements about election, the country has already stumbled into the 90-day period. Apathy towards the polls runs high among the urban and semi-urban youth even though the young are most populous voters. To lure the large youth demographic to vote, whenever the elections take place, an election awareness initiative Netaman proposes to hold a series of events and produce 100 videos to find the solutions and the solution-walas in order to foster a spirit of democracy ahead of the polls.

www.netaman.com
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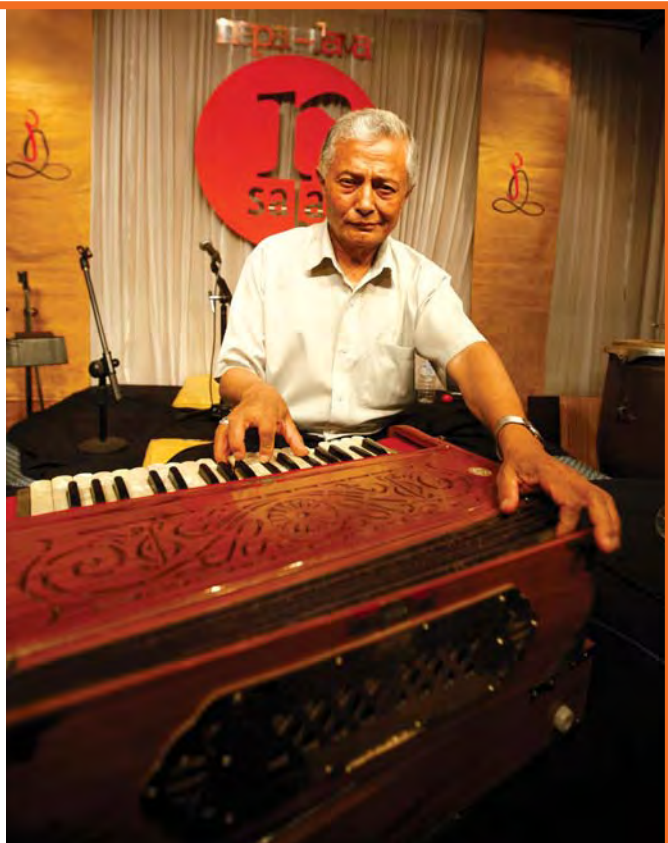
- Manchester United host Chelsea on 26 August in what could be the acid test for both clubs' title aspirations.
- In Spain, Barcelona edge Real Madrid on goal difference, but the season has only begun. Both play away from home this round.
- Juventus will hope to begin their defence of the Serie A by routing Sampdoria and AC Milan visit Verona.
- German champions Bayern Munich have won both fixtures so far, but are in third with 6 points.

Live on ESPN, Star Sports, Star Cricket, Ten Sports, and Ten Action.

Paleti

Squat down, the doyens of Nepali music are back this year at the Paleti Festival. National Poet Madhab Prasad Ghimire, who says he has enjoyed the live versions more than the radio broadcasts of Nepali classics, will open the proceedings. Deji Baraili and Dawa Gyalmo will evoke the Darjeeling of the past, harmonising for yet another rendition of the evergreen 'Mayalu le'. And back from his sell tour of Australian cities, Prem Dhoj Pradhan will close the festival in grand style.

Tickets: Rs 1,000 per show
Dates: 30 August, Madhab Prasad Ghimire, 31 August, Deji Baraili and Dawa Gyalmo 1 September, Prem Dhoj Pradhan
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“An ecosystem for electric mobility”

Chetan Maini is the founder of Reva Electric Vehicles, India’s first mass market battery-operated car. Two years ago, Reva partnered with the Mahindra Group to start Mahindra Reva. Maini was in Kathmandu this week to launch the new e20 model and spoke to *Nepali Times*.

Nepali Times: You were originally a solar guy. How did you get into designing and selling electric cars?

Chetan Maini: Actually, I was building toy cars that ran on batteries even as a boy. And I took that passion with me to the University of Michigan and Stanford when I was in a team designing solar-powered cars that came first in a cross-US race. Later, we also took part in the across Australia World Solar Challenge. That is how I came up with the idea of the Reva: to take electric cars into a mass market. And when I visited India, I really felt with rising pollution and petroleum consumption, the country needed an electric vehicle.

But you seemed to be ahead of your time. India wasn’t ready to go electric.

We were too busy with the technical challenge of building an electric car that was lightweight, cost-effective, had a decent range, and could be charged quickly. We knew we were on the right track. The other challenge was to raise money to build 40 prototypes, but we did. The Reva sold 2,000 in Bangalore and there are about 1,200 in London and 4,500 in Norway.

You came to Nepal to try to sell them here too.

Yes I came here in 2002 to explore the market and I am glad to see that there are more than 100 Revas on the streets and from what I hear from the owners they are very happy with the car.

How did the new e20 model come about?

We were always trying to improve the technology, make the car bigger, and extend the range. We had taken the new design to the Frankfurt Auto Fair in 2009 and there were many other electric car manufacturers there. We really felt the time was right to come up with a design for the future of mobility. It wasn’t just about reducing emissions but eliminating them completely not just in the running of the car, but in the manufacture as well.

You have chosen Nepal to be your first international market for the e20. Why so?

Well, the previous model has been received well, the market has matured. Petroleum is scarcer and more expensive, Nepal faces the same challenges as we do in India in terms of pollution, traffic, and

petroleum dependency. Also, the new model is perfect for city driving in a place like Kathmandu which has been a test track for Revas in more ways than one (*laughs*). But for us it’s not just about selling one brand, it is about working with customers and the government on creating an ecosystem for cars that run on renewable energy and with Mahindra’s network in Nepal we have that opportunity to expand the market for electrics.

Why did you decide to partner with Mahindra?

It was a perfect fit. We were strong in technology, we had a new model that was a game-changer. And Mahindra had the distribution network, technological backup, the financing, and was also on the lookout for an electric solution to all its platforms from 2-wheelers to 16-wheelers. The new green plant we have put up in Bangalore to build the e20, for instance is 35 per cent powered by solar energy and every new car first gets a charge from solar panels. Reva Mahindra plans to build 30,000 e20 vehicles there in the coming year.

What can governments do?

Government policy is crucial in making EVs more accepted. An electric vehicle may cost a little more, but its running cost is up to10 times less. The Indian government introduced incentives in this year’s budget and state governments have also announced subsidies. All this will boost demand. Government needs to look beyond tax revenue and calculate what it will save in the long-term in the petroleum import bill.



KUNDA DIXIT

After driving a Reva-i around Kathmandu for six years, I had hardly any complaints about the little bugs.

Yes, people made fun of the electric vehicle (EV), children would point at me from the back of school buses and laugh, impatient motorcyclists would overtake from the left and right simultaneously. My ego could handle all that. But there were two negative points: it was cramped, and the car gave you endurance anxiety every time the a/c reduced the range.

Reva Mahindra’s new e2o (energy to oxygen) has solved those two problems and has brought a futuristic car to the Nepal market that is no longer just a golf cart.

This next-generation EV, with bells and whistles, offers a whole new concept in green private mobility. The dimensions are nearly that of a Wagon R (although it is a two-door) and the range is extended to 100km thanks to the environmentally-friendlier lithium-ion batteries instead of lead cells.

Everything about this EV feels different from the Reva-i: the smooth ride, the glass cockpit, automatic windows, and the ability to control charging, a/c or to lock doors remotely via iPhone. The designers have given as much thought to mobility as they have to connectivity and inserted a SIM card to help it communicate with its makers in Bangalore in real time. Any malfunction and the controllers will notify you via SMS while you are stuck in traffic at Baneshwor.

Not everyone will immediately take to the e2o: it is lanky, narrow, and looks a gnu from the front. The front grille is needlessly oversized, the windows are smallish and restrict all-round visibility from the cabin. The tiny rear windows, for some reason, don’t open. It sits high on the road since the driver’s seat is on top of the batteries, so from the inside it actually feels like an Ignis or Terios.

But the rear end is well-proportioned and the car’s silhouette ultimately grows on you. The skin is dent proof (since it’s not metal) and is scratch proof because the colour is



SHOWPIECE: Chetan Maini of Mahindra Reva (*right*) with Cabinet Shrestha (*left*) of Agni Group at the official launch of the new model electric e2o in Nepal on 14 August.

LED lights and lithium batteries will revolutionise solar lighting systems in Nepal

Seeing the light

When you see the new generation of compact solar lighting you think why no one thought of it before. Well, for one, the technology wasn’t there before. The reason solar lighting was so expensive and bulky was because photovoltaic cells were till recently unaffordable. And since solar works only in the daytime, battery storage meant large and heavy lead or SLR tubulars with limited lifespan. The time has now come. Solar lighting has now become small, light, compact,

and more affordable. The new technology is set to revolutionise off-grid outdoor lighting for streets, courtyards, parks, and parking lots. All this because the price of PV panels has come crashing down and storage has become lighter and smaller due to lithium ion batteries. Future Green Energy is one of the new Nepali companies specialising in compact outdoor lighting systems and after you see what they have to offer you wonder why we are still stuck with obsolete lead-solar systems. Even grid-powered sodium vapour lights are now out-of-date. Because power cuts are

here to stay in Nepal for at least another five years, one installs solar systems not just to make a green statement but because there is no choice. In fact, some of the new systems are even more useful for Kathmandu offices and residences than for rural areas. “Solar is not just about being environmentally friendly or for energy saving,” explains Rajan Rayamajhi of Future Green Energy, “it is sometimes the only solution.” To be sure, solar lighting has been with us for decades. Nepal’s rural areas have benefited from government subsidised household



PICS: ARJUN KARKI

LITTLE BIG EV

Kathmandu's roads are a test track for the futuristic e2o

impregnated into the plastic mould. Inside, it is spacious even in the back with plenty of leg and head room to spare. This is a great improvement on the Reva, but the cabin doesn't compare in comfort and finishing with other similar-sized Korean or Indian hatchbacks.

The large diameter steering gives the controls a light touch even over potholes on the city's rough roads. The transmission knob of the Reva-i has been moved to make it look like an automatic gear shift although, of course, the car doesn't have a gear box. The B for Boost option has the familiar torque kick while overtaking. The dashboard is made of state-of-the-art touchscreen display that controls the audio, the energy management system, and even a very handy

reversing camera to allow you to make a quick U-turn on a narrow lane.

Unlike the Reva's analogue displays, the e2o has a backlit speed dial that also gives you the charge and km left on the battery. Another difference is the keyless dongle to open doors and even to authenticate the start press.

Which brings me to the minus points. What if the battery runs out on the dongle and you can't open the car? Wonder if it is wise to be so over-electronified in a vehicle in Nepal. The touchscreen display is a bit distracting in the beginning (memo to self: keep eyes on the road).

The display can also be affected by ambient glare that makes it hard to see. With a lithium-ion battery, one would expect a

greater range and a shorter charge time, but it is a huge improvement on the Reva-i, so I am not complaining too much.

All this is more than compensated for by the zero emission and the fuel efficiency of the e2o. It may not make much sense to have an electric car in India where 70 per cent of grid electricity is generated from coal-fired plants, but in Nepal we are mostly hydro. Even in the worst load-shedding winter days, you need just five hours of charging every four days or so, and that gives you up to 100km without a/c.

If you average 10,000km a year in a 1.0 litre petrol hatchback, you are probably burning 1,000 litres of fuel which will set you back more than Rs 120,000 a year.

At Rs 80 per 100km, the e2o's electric

bill would come to about Rs 8,000 a year. However, add the cost of the lithium batteries which have to be replaced in five years for Rs 300,000, although by 2018 the price of lithium may come down, and the price of petrol is only going to rise.

So, all in all, the e2o still saves you money in the long-term. But more importantly, you will also sleep more soundly at night. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Adventures of a battery bug, Kunda dixit's East West blog
The little green car, #618

Video review of e2o: 🎥

of day (at night)

solar schemes, villages off the national grid have depended on solar, and telecom operators have used photovoltaics to power towers in remote areas. But they all needed heavy truck batteries to store power for night lighting.

No more. The Chinese

company Leadsun's five watt stand-alone, off-grid street light system can be installed in 10 minutes on an existing pole. The top panel has PV cells that charge an in-built lithium phosphorous battery all day, the LED heads switch on automatically at dusk

and turn off after dawn, and a motion sensor keeps light on low power until movement is detected. But the beauty is that it uses a tenth of the energy for the same lumen power from free-of-cost solar energy (*see table*). A range of similar systems

are available for courtyards and parking lots with lower wattage and even lower costs.

The smallest of these is a one watt Eco Light that gives the same lumen power as a 60 watt bulb that can be screwed on to the wall of a house. It has a sleek 4x6x2 inch weather-proof panel that has a PV cell, a lithium ion battery, a charger, motion sensor, and light detector: all for Rs 2,500.

Future Green Energy also markets home lighting solutions that will make existing rural solar systems obsolete. For example, its all-in-one solar home lighting kit has three 4 watt LED lamps with an USB output device to charge mobiles. No heavy truck batteries to lug to remote areas. A larger system that can power more lamps and also charge laptops would actually be quite useful in Kathmandu for the winter ahead

when daily 14 hours of load-shedding is anticipated.

"These things are so versatile, we can light up a large section of Nepal overnight," says Anudan Rana of Future Green Energy, "you save money on transportation of heavy batteries, there are no environmental problems from disposing lead cells, and the lithium ion batteries last longer."

However, the government and municipality don't seem to have woken up to the potential of LED head-lithium battery combo panels and are still pushing the troublesome and bulky lead-acetate and tubular batteries. 🇳🇵

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MUD

Every time I hear the phrase, “It’s a coming of age story”, I start to feel slightly sick. I realise that this is unfair since there are numerous very charming



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

and meaningful coming of age stories indeed. And yet, somehow that phrase, having been terribly overused, now comes to mean, at least in my mind, a slightly trite tale of some poor pre-adolescent boy or girl getting a rude awakening.

Happily, this is not so with *Mud*. While the film does indeed deal quite a bit with the tribulations of a 14-year-old boy called Ellis (Tye Sheridan) leaving behind his childhood and settling firmly into the terrible, heartbreaking teens, there are also quite a few other subtle and heart-tugging angles.

The eponymous character is played by Matthew McConaughey, an actor who in the last few years has miraculously turned his acting career around, going from indulging in shallow action hero

type roles where he is usually ridiculously fake-tanned, to nuanced, weighty roles in films like *The Lincoln Lawyer* (2011), *The Paperboy* (2012), and *Magic Mike* (2012). Who would have thought that former bad boy McConaughey had such hidden depths, and yet, in all of these aforementioned films he has proven himself again and again to be a very fine actor indeed.

Mud would not be the film



it is without McConaughey, and yet, it is far from a star vehicle. Instead, the script, which was also written by the director, Jeff Nichols, firmly centres around a fine ensemble cast, with little known but finely honed actors playing Ellis’s father Senior (Ray McKinnon), Michael Shannon is Galen, the pearl diving uncle of Ellis’s friend Neckbone (Jacob Lofland), and then we also have the great, understated Sam Shephard as Tom Blankenship, an enigmatic loner who is also a crack sharpshooter.

This kind of array is essential in a story like *Mud*, which switches from adventure to romance to family drama. When Ellis and Neckbone set off in their boat to explore an island off the grand Mississippi River, we think we are suddenly in the middle of a Mark Twain novel, albeit slightly more modern. The boys have heard of a boat that is stuck up in a tree, courtesy of the last great flood in the Arkansas area. They find the boat, but they also find Mud, who quickly befriends them with his tall tales and romantic back-story.

He has killed a man for the love of a girl called Juniper (Reese Witherspoon), he claims. He also claims that he is waiting for her to join him and that he plans to sail away with her on that boat which is up in that tree. As the boys get drawn into Mud’s life and his seemingly tall tales start to ring true, all hell breaks loose, there are snakebites, gun fights, broken hearts, and some unsolved mysteries. And through all this, the geography of the old South, now fading fast, plays a key role.

Some films have a charm that is hard to pinpoint. *Mud* is not a classic. Perhaps in a few years it will be forgotten. But, for the time being, it is one of the most decent and well made films I’ve seen in a while.

Mud has its heart in the right place. It is firmly a film for the family, you won’t have to cover your teenager’s ears, and if ever there was a more decent boy than Ellis in recent cinema, I’d like for someone to come forward and make it known. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Watch trailer



Full sleeved

As far as satellite phones go it is always function over form. After all, as long as you manage to make your SOS call, who cares if the device seems clunky and hardboiled, with an antenna that serves as a reminder of telecom evolution, right?

Thuraya, provider of satellite telecommunications in over 140 countries, seems to have found a much sleeker alternative. The new SatSleeve is a device into which you fit your iPhone to turn it into a satellite phone. If the thought of getting lost in Makalu gives you sleepless nights before you even embark, adopting this nifty solution could be a step in the right direction.

The SatSleeve is, basically, an adapter that looks like a two-tiered iPhone jacket. Fit your phone into the smaller one and then latch this union to the larger one with an antenna on the left. Once you pair these via Bluetooth and download Thuraya’s SatSleeve app from the App Store, you are ready to go.

If this combo feels a tad expensive, it’s because SatSleeve also comes with a battery pack. Should your iPhone’s battery drain, the backup available on the Sleeve will charge it up at the flick of a switch. It also comes with its own sim card, mic and speaker, and a button for SOS calls, meaning you can have your phone switched off and still make a call. Who you call is programmable through the app and should you get lost, the GPS on your set will make sure your signal beeps on a locator.

For now, the SatSleeve is limited to voice and text exchanges through the iPhone. But plans are afoot to offer mobile data and make it available for Android devices. Thuraya says it will explore other wireless media for pairing, but has not come up with any timeline.

Battery life extends to two days on standby and four hours on continuous talk time. Of course hardly anyone will exploit the latter option to the fullest, but if your pockets are deep enough to recite the Mahabharat on a time-lag phone call through space, do so by all means.

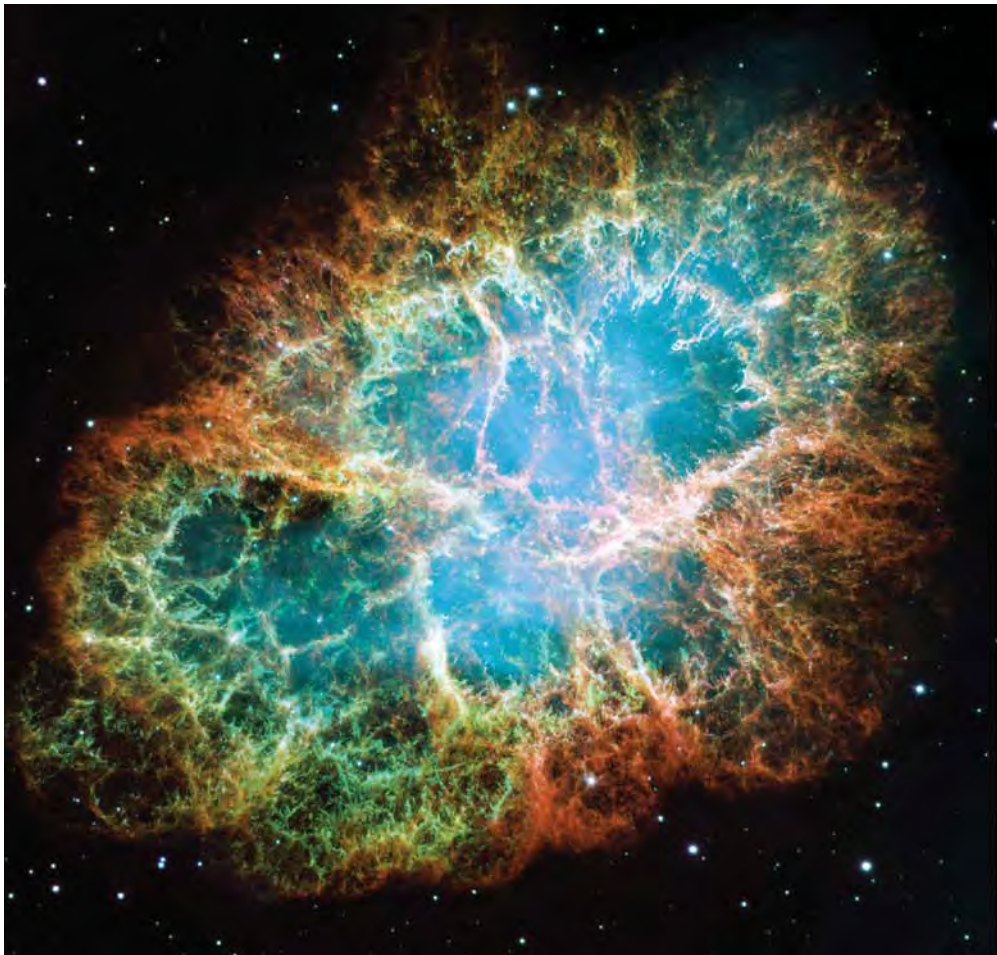
A SatSleeve for the iPhone 5 has been released worldwide but is yet to arrive in Nepal, so the one available in town works only with iPhone 4 and 4s. At Rs 90,000, it is cheaper than an actual satellite phone, yet does the same job. 🇳🇵



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Yantrick’s verdict: Get the sleeve if you routinely find yourself in lonely corners of the world with no one to relay Mayday to.



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RE VIEW

She has a dream

Although slavery was outlawed nearly a century ago and the Kamaiya culture was made a criminal offence in 2009, the practice is so ingrained in the Tarai that it is still accepted. In most cases the parents of the girls themselves sell or rent their daughters to landlords in auctions to reduce the burden of having to take care of them.

Shanta Chaudhary was one of them. At the age of eight, she was leased for Rs 7,000 a year by her parents who had nine other children and sent off to work in a family in Dang. She was homesick, had to work 19 hours a day, and live in the cowshed. When she made mistakes Shanta was rudely reprimanded by the landlord's wife and sometimes beaten.

Shanta yearned to wear a clean uniform and go to school like the children in the family she worked for, she wanted to eat rice like them. During the rainy season, when she got sick, there was no one to take care of her and she missed

her mother terribly. There were also decent households where she was treated well and she used to go to watch movies with the landlord's daughter.

Most kamlari girls face rape and abuse, so when Shanta became a teenager and had to fend off aggressive, unwanted advances from men, she got married to a friend for companionship and to keep herself safe. Her first son is handicapped, her second baby died of undernourishment, and when she tried to break free village goons set fire to her hut.

Unlike other kamlari girls, Shanta decided to do something about the injustice and became an activist. She joined the UML party and became a nominated member of the Constituent Assembly so she could realise her dream of a Nepal free of the exploitation, discrimination, and abuse thousands of other women like her had to suffer.

After the CA was dissolved, Shanta decided to write about her life. And

what a life. Told in simple, heartfelt sentences, you have to fight back tears as you learn of the tragic injustice that little girls like Shanta had to suffer. But there is little bitterness or resentment here, only a determination to set things right. Between the lines, you get a glimpse of the fierce fortitude of this remarkable woman.

Shanta Chaudhary says she was inspired to write her book after reading Jhamak Ghimire's masterpiece *Jeevan Kanda Ki Phool*. Struck by polio and confined to a wheelchair, Ghimire wrote her book with her toes and become an inspiration for many Nepali women.

But even after finding her place in the national legislature, nominated to the powerful parliamentary committee on natural resources, and given a chance to contribute to the new constitution, Shanta was appalled by the way fellow MPs looked down on her for being a Tharu. "Even there, they made fun of my clothes, my accent, and the fact that I was illiterate," she says, eyes brimming with tears.

Shanta, now 34, taught herself to read and write while in the CA. And after the assembly



Kamlari Dekhi Sabhasad Samma (Nepali)
by Shanta Chaudhary
Sangri-La, 2013
Rs 250

was dissolved started writing her book because she feared that despite the laws, indentured servitude of girls from her community would continue. Shanta's biggest regret is that the new constitution wasn't passed last year and the CA was

dissolved, but she is happy she could take the plight of her people to the highest law-making body in the land.

Shanta Chaudhary's book, *Kamlari Dekhi Sabhasad Samma* (From Kamlari To CA Member) adds to a growing corpus of books by inspiring Nepali women, including Jhamak Ghimire, Radha Poudel, and Tara Rai.

Samman Humagain

nepalitimes.com

Watch interview



The setting has hardly changed: the old brick walls and the flooring look ancient and the menu we are told has remained constant. Once you enter the big room the focus shifts to the formidable woman in

the middle who is the director, manager, chef, and cashier all rolled in one.

On the large round iron tawa straddling the centre of the room the chef is cooking baras, an essential preparation in any Newari household, especially during festive occasions and a signature dish at Honacha. It is made out of lentil generally of the dark variety (moong and mas), soaked overnight, crushed and pounded, mixed with masala which varies in every household and minutely sliced fresh herbs before being shaped into round,

flat roti, ready to be lightly fried in mustard oil. It is fragrant and tasty on its own but can be topped with fried egg sunny side up, or mince meat and some hot chutney. Alu tarkari is another favourite among locals and bideshis alike. The soft and melting potato curry is piled high on another large tawa and is served in small steel plates.

The crunchy and spiced sukuti, sun dried and smoked meat of buffalo or antelopes is found in all parts of the country whereas chhoyala, is unquestionably a specialty of Newari cuisine. The fresh meat thoroughly marinated



in mustard oil, paste of ginger, garlic, hot spices, and a crunching twist of lemon juice is slowly cooked in a hot coal oven. The meat is deliciously chewy, as only buffalo meat can be. Chiura, beaten rice, again a common and long lasting cereal, and aila serve as integral companions of the hot and hearty meal.

The constant flow of customers through many decades of its uninterrupted existence is ample proof of the quality of food and value for money that Honacha provides. A full meal with cold drinks for four sets your wallet back by a mere Rs 500. If you want to breathe in the multiple flavours of the common men and women of the country, there is no better place than Honacha. But if you are one of the delicate ones, take home some baras, switch on your favourite channel, and enjoy them with apéritifs in the comfort of your home.

Rainbow diner

How to get there: Honacha is located right behind Krishna Mandir.

In the heart of Patan Darbar Square behind the majestic edifice of Krishna Mandir you will come across a narrow alley. As in most of Patan, the streets are littered with colourful shops displaying silver jewelry and handicrafts. Unexpectedly you will find a low doorway that leads you through a dark and drab passage to Honacha, one of the most popular eateries in the city. It is a mix of an old time European bar, a pub, and restaurant with roots deep into Nepali history.

SOMEPLACE ELSE

There were no restaurants at all before the late 1940s, except bhattis like these and they too were few and far between. Farmers travelling from the outskirts of Kathmandu to sell their produce lingered around at these eateries, drinking aila or jaand (a milder and thicker brew), and tasty snacks, before making the long walk back home. They formed the bulk of Honacha's customers. But it was not unusual for rich merchants or young aristocrats to drop in surreptitiously for a few sips of the forbidden brew and romantic forays.



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1,552 CONFIRMED DEATHS WITH HIGHEST (292) IN MORANG DISTRICT

PIC: KUNI TAKAHASHI/THE NEW YORK TIMES
SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES (2010-11)/NYT

The Muzaffarpur mystery

Infections of the nervous system are potentially the most dangerous and difficult to treat because reaching a correct diagnosis is hard. And if you live in a country like ours where even simple diagnostic tests are unavailable or problematic to process, then such infections can turn life-threatening.



Take meningitis for example where the final diagnosis is made through a simple lumbar puncture which involves inserting a needle from the back into the spinal cord and obtaining the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) for examination. Microscopic study of this fluid helps in determining the cause of illnesses so therapy can be started. But it is easier said than done and specially challenging to carry out in South Asian hospitals.

So when a mystery illness

related to the nervous system broke out in Muzaffarpur, Bihar in 1995, diagnosis was, unsurprisingly, difficult. Even after hundreds of cases, doctors like the ones at Shri Krishna Medical College Hospital (*pic, above*) are stumped.

The disease is characterised by sudden onset, swelling of the brain, and like most other infectious diseases, it is seasonal, seen almost exclusively during the summer. But the usual suspects - meningitis or Japanese encephalitis - that plague this part of India and Nepal are not to be blamed.

Indian health authorities working with the Centres of Disease Control and Prevention in the United States have put the disease under the 'acute encephalitis syndrome' category. Since the illness does not spread through human to human contact like tuberculosis or typhoid, researchers are now looking into viruses, bacteria, fungi, and carriers (like fleas, rats, mites, livestock) for

answers.

The Muzaffarpur mystery will need painstaking work and a certain degree of luck to be decoded. However, in nearby Nepal recent studies on the causes of central nervous system infections have produced fascinating and potentially life-saving findings. In August this year, researchers from Patan Hospital with Abhishek Giri as lead author published the first prospective DNA and culture-based study of 87 adult patients with acute neurological problems in the open-access Scientific Reports (publishers of *Nature*). Besides the usual meningitis causing bacteria, enteroviruses in the CSF was also discovered for the first time in Nepal. When these viruses cause meningitis the disease is less severe (called aseptic meningitis) and does not require long-term antibiotics.

Since antibiotics are readily available over the counter at most pharmacies in Nepal, they are being grossly abused by both patients and doctors. As a result, significant bacterial infections are now becoming resistant to commonly used antibiotics. One of the important lessons doctors and medical professionals can learn from this study is to consider the possibility of aseptic meningitis in patients with acute neurological problems and avoid over-prescribing antibiotics (like TB drugs) for long periods of time.

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HAPPENINGS



GOING STRONG: Health Minister Bidhyadhar Mallik meets Nanda Prasad Adhikari at Bir Hospital on Tuesday. The Adhikari couple have been on a hunger strike to demand justice for their son Krishna, who was killed by the Maoists during the war.



LET'S TALK AGAIN: Leaders of the High Level Political Mechanism during their meeting with dissenting parties in New Baneshwor on Tuesday.



STRINGS ATTACHED: Devotees light oil lamps outside Bagalamukhi temple in Lalitpur on Wednesday morning to celebrate Janai Purnima festival.

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YES
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WILL

SATISH ACHARYA

Modi's Obama wish

Narendra Modi harbours a desire for a more autocratic presidential system of government in India

Barack Obama's slogan, "Yes, we can", is not definitive. It presumes that 'we' the people face tremendous odds in banding together to achieve a common goal. And because success was not a certainty by Obama, the slogan inspired people to try to achieve their goal. To put it another way, Obama was implicitly telling people, yes, we can succeed but we may also not.



LOOK OUT

Ajaz Ashraf

The Chief Minister of the India state of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, doesn't harbour such nagging doubts. In Hyderabad recently, the man who sees himself as India's next leader, used the slogan: "Yes, we will." Not for him the possibility that those who constitute 'we' may still be a minority of the Indian electorate, which is infinitely more varied than America's.

Indeed, "Yes, we will" presumes success and precludes failure. Modi's certainty is the certainty of the monarch. "Yes, we will" is a declaration of success, while "Yes, we can" is a statement of intent.

The two slogans represent two contrasting personalities: one is a democrat, the other has authoritarian tendencies. Some would even question Modi's definition of 'we'. Is he talking of India and Indians in the same manner as Obama did about America and Americans, exhorting people, despite their ideological and cultural differences, to come together to usher in change?

Perhaps Modi's plagiarism

conceals his fervent wish that India had had a presidential system of election and he didn't have to countenance the complexities of the parliamentary system of election. India's election is fought at multiple levels. No doubt, there is a contest among leaders of political parties anointed as prime ministerial candidates. But there is also an intense competition in every parliamentary constituency among party candidates to win the popular mandate.

Voters are therefore faced with a dilemma: should they vote on the basis of their preference for the most suitable among prime ministerial candidates? Or should they vote for the nominee most likely to resolve the problems their constituency faces?

It's because of this dilemma that Modi is desperate to provide a presidential flavour to the 2014 General Election, being acutely aware that he could perhaps easily trump Congress leaders on the popularity sweepstake, none of whose reputation can possibly escape singeing from the fire of disapproval and discredit consuming the UPA government. In invoking Obama's slogan, Modi, to borrow a term from psychology, was responding to his repressed wish.

His unfulfilled wish for the presidential system of election surfaced in his Independence Day oration. In the Indian political tradition, debates between prime ministerial candidates never had space. But this did not deter Modi from demanding: "Mr PM, the nation wants us

to spar against each other... Come let us have a debate between Gujarat and Delhi."

American style presidential debates have become infamous for the undue emphasis placed on empty rhetoric, brazen spin, and meaningless persona the hopefuls seek to project. Modi is undoubtedly a confident communicator. But he is also among those who puff their chests, dissimulate, and boast.

Modi has inherited the BJP's fear of the social diversity of India, believing an overarching ideology steeped in Hinduism can paper over the caste, linguistic, and regional differences. It imitates the philosophy underlying the European nation-state, which, more often than not, comprises a national territory having one language and religion. To dislike or detest who you are often speaks of self-hatred. Attempts at a makeover mirroring another system reveal the inferiority of the imitator.

It has been nearly a century-old endeavour of the Sangh to deploy Hindutva for effacing the caste, linguistic, and regional particularities of India. Communalism is perhaps its most effective tactic to achieve this goal.

Obviously, they are still far away from bringing about the transformation they have in mind.

Till then, Narendra Modi's rhetoric and slogans will reflect his party's communal agenda as well his wish for a presidential system of election, which appears tailored for a society having a great degree of uniformity. ashrafajaz3@gmail.com



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For better or for worse

OJASWI SHAH and ANURAG ACHARYA

When millions of Nepalis from all walks of life took to the streets in the spring of 2006, it was hoped that the 19-day, non-violent rebelling would end not just the conflict but also lead the country through a swift, democratic transition to stability and development.

Seven years on, the Constituent Assembly has been dissolved, elections are looking iffy again, and the transition drags on. To be sure, Nepal has made remarkable gains despite impending political impasse.

The maternal and infant mortality rates have gone down dramatically and school enrolment rates are one of the highest in the region. Politically, the people have been empowered from subjects to sovereign citizens of a republic. Nepalis today are more aware of their rights and have learned to organise as well as articulate themselves. The state institutions, in turn have become empathic and forbearing towards previously excluded peoples.



SANTOSH YADAV

ALREADY GONE: Bhuti Khatun lost her house after violence broke out between Hindus and Muslims in Sareswor, Siraha district on August 9.

Nepal’s law and order situation has changed for better, but the people still feel insecure

However, the prolonged transition is taking a toll on everyday life as interim arrangement is proving insufficient to ensure effective state deliveries including security, concludes a recent study titled *Snapshots of Local Security and Justice Perceptions in Selected Districts of Nepal*, carried out in 10 districts of Nepal across five development regions and published earlier this year.

Going beyond conventional preoccupation with political conflict and resulting violence, the report acknowledges that the overall security situation has improved with a decline in crimes like kidnapping and extortion,

mostly as a result of exemplary police-public collaboration. However, there appears to be an epidemic of gender-based crimes like domestic violence resulting from alcohol and substance abuse, dowry-related violence, sexual harassment, and rape. Even in Kathmandu, the research shows high incidences of violence against women. In many cases, violence was linked to socio-cultural practices such as polygamy, child marriage, and women’s limited access to property and citizenship rights. Even with greater female participation in political, social, and economic life in recent years there has been a rise in the number of registered cases of violence.

The report highlights positive initiatives taken by Nepal Police to be more gender-responsive. The work carried out through their Women and Children Service Centres in coordination with community-based organisations like women’s groups and para-legal committees have contributed to this change. However, more needs to done in terms of strengthening, capacity-building as well as resourcing and staffing of these centres.



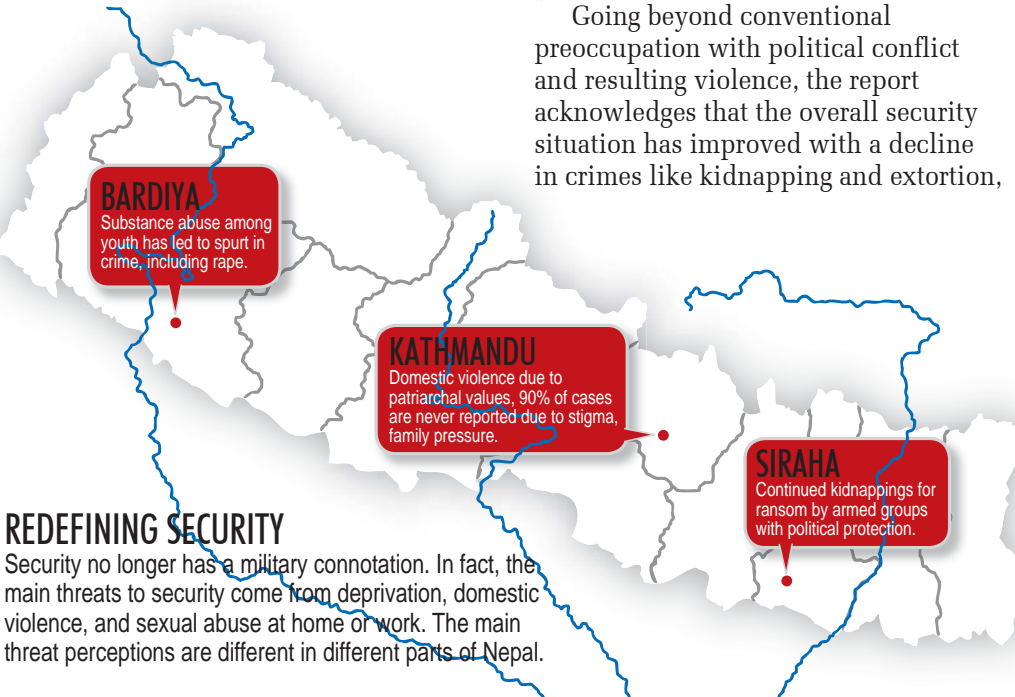
The report also lists ‘political party interference in criminal investigation’ as an obstacle in undermining security and justice. Similarly, extortion, kidnapping for ransom (of business persons and their family members), and manipulation of tender-bidding processes continue to be a main security threat to business people.

Additionally, frequent shutdowns in the districts by protesters obstructing traffic, cutting off supply lines, and resorting to vandalism are an obstacle to an environment that is conducive for an overall growth of the private sector.

Despite these challenges, proactive policing and leadership and commitment displayed by some district police officers have increased public faith in the security apparatus. However, as the report points out, these encouraging developments have been slowed down by poor infrastructure and asymmetric resource allocation, which leads to poor outreach.

For instance, public-police partnership which has proved to be an effective way of combating local crimes needs adequate investment in community-level infrastructures. Resources and manpower allocated for delivering public security are being diverted away to cater to the needs of the influential at the very top. Similarly, services targeted at providing security to women and children are underfunded and not prioritised. 🇳🇵

Ojaswi Shah is Project Officer at Saferworld and was involved in the preparation of the report. Anurag Acharya is Program Manager at the Centre for Investigative Journalism.



REDEFINING SECURITY

Security no longer has a military connotation. In fact, the main threats to security come from deprivation, domestic violence, and sexual abuse at home or work. The main threat perceptions are different in different parts of Nepal.

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CATCH US IF YOU CAN: Leaders of UCPN (M) attend the orientation program of YCL's Newa State Committee at Rastriya Nach Ghar, Jamal on Wednesday.

Angered by the cabinet's decision to go ahead with the investigation into the murder by the Maoists in 2004 of Krishna Adhikari, Pushpa Kamal Dahal launched into yet another vitriolic attack against those demanding justice for war era crimes and threatened "stern consequences".



HERE WE GO
Trishna Rana

The fact that he was speaking to ex-guerrillas of the YCL was meant to show the government and human rights groups that he meant business. His deputy Baburam Bhattarai also spoke and took to twitter to justify the violence unleashed by the party during the conflict, arguing that since the bloodshed was for a 'revolutionary' they should not be under the purview of criminal investigation.

This is not at all surprising coming from a man who has never renounced violence and openly bays for "blood of patriots and tyrants" on social networking sites. With less than three months before the scheduled election date, the country's largest party is once again proving how unworthy it is of the people's trust and support.

Whenever questions of transitional justice and prosecuting conflict era excesses are raised, the Maoists resort to intimidation that harks back to their wartime tactics of threats of violence. Earlier this year,

Truth, justice, constitution

Unless wartime ghosts are exorcised, an election will not be the end of the peace process

Maoist cadre in Dailekh roughed up locals who were angry about the Bhattarai government quashing the investigation into the torture and murder of journalist Dekendra Thapa.

In March, UCPN (M) cadre bullied protesters at Occupy Baluwatar for demanding the arrest of Bhattarai crony Bal Krishna Dhungel who was convicted of murder of Ujjan Shrestha in Okhaldhunga in 2004. The anniversary of the Doramba massacre last week in which an army patrol summarily

executed 18 unarmed Maoist cadre during a ceasefire went largely unnoticed – indicating a conspiracy of silence between the two former enemies who now represent the state.

The Maoist-led coalition had an implicit understanding with the security forces to let bygones be bygones and did everything in its power to grant blanket amnesty to perpetrators on both sides of the conflict. During his time in Singha Darbar, Bhattarai even pushed a TRC ordinance that not only had provisions for amnesty, but also merged the Disappearance Commission bill into a toothless Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Today the same leaders argue that conflict era cases should be addressed exclusively by a TRC. Krishna Adhikari's frail parents have been on hunger strike off and on since January, they have been detained, sent to a mental

asylum, deported back to Gorkha and are now in hospital. They are not convinced their son's murderers will face justice. No one knows how long they will have to wait.

According to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of November 2006, the TRC was supposed to be established within six months. November elections are looking doubtful and it might be a while before Nepal gets its second Constituent Assembly. Issues of federalism and state restructuring will dominate a future CA not the conflict's violent legacy.

However, if the main goal of writing a new constitution is to stabilise Nepal's politics and bring it back on track after almost two lost decades, such major political transformation cannot preclude justice. And it



should be clear to both former warring sides and the Nepali public that as long as we don't exorcise the ghosts of our brutal past, true progress won't be possible.

Victims and their families are yet to recover from the physical and emotional trauma of losing loved ones. Then there are the residual effects of war that we can see in the criminalisation of politics, a growing gun culture, and increase in domestic violence.

Just like a new constitution isn't the magic wand that will solve all of Nepal's problems, the TRC isn't the answer to a more peaceful society. But it is at least a starting point. Unless larger transitional justice issues are bought into the mainstream debate of constitution writing, everyone will lose even if elections happen on time. 🇳🇵

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“Draft constitution in one hand and a memo in the other”

Nepal, 18 August

Interview with the NC’s central committee member and former lawmaker Gagan Thapa.

Nepal: Will elections take place on 19 November?

Gagan Thapa: India doesn’t have a fixed election date, yet the elections are confirmed there whereas sadly in our case, the date has been fixed but elections are unconfirmed. It was the same scenario in 2008. We can see that political players are gradually heading towards elections, but Nepalis are doubtful that the deadline will be met. There is also no guarantee that all parties will take part in polls. However, it is imperative to have elections on 19 November, there can be no extensions. If we change the date, the future of our country will be in jeopardy and there is a danger that polls might never take place.

How can the dissenting parties be convinced to come on board?

The challenge is to bring three political powers into the electoral process: Mohan Baidya’s CPN-M, Upendra Yadav’s MJF, and Ashok Rai’s United Socialist Party. All major political parties including the NC are making efforts and we are close to reaching a deal on issues raised by Yadav and Rai’s parties. But the CPN-M’s unwillingness to participate in the elections is making other parties believe that they don’t have to take part either. This sets a dangerous precedent. Since polls cannot be postponed under any condition, we don’t have the time to form a new government as per Baidya’s demand.

Can such a difficult election process guarantee a constitution?

We are all responsible for the failure of the first CA, we should not repeat past mistakes. Once we come to a basic agreement on contentious issues, we can open them up for public discussion. If this is not possible, we’ll have to look for other ways.

What about the shape and size of the CA?

Experience from the precious CA provides us with a guideline on how big a CA should be and how to conduct elections through a mixed system. No political party is pressing for a



particular number at the moment. So the entire country can be considered as one constituency following the fully proportional system. This means only political parties can contest for elections and CA seats will be allocated according to the percentage of votes collected. If we conduct CA elections in this way, the CPN-M might take part.

Are you saying we should change our electoral system?

We already tried out the mixed system once. We have reached this far because of agreements between different parties and actors. If we open up the possibility of fully proportional system, then we might be able to bring the dissenting parties on board. As per the number of votes, a CA member can be appointed. Also, community and area participation will be determined in the same way. After the elections, we will all take our own proposals to the CA. Whichever system the public favours, we can adopt that one.

How is the NC preparing itself to face the public?

There are two things the party is working on for the upcoming elections. The NC will present its version of what the new constitution will look like, if people like our vision, then they can come and vote for us. Second, we will have a detailed list of programs that we will implement if we get to form a government. This means we will be walking with a draft constitution in one hand and a memo in the other.

Clearing the air

Baburam Bhattarai, Facebook, 18 August ,

facebook

These are the main points I made during a program called 'Identity and Federalism' in Itahari on 15 August.

- Federalism is a tool with which to end racial/national marginalisation and head towards capitalist/ socialist development while decentralisation is mostly used to make administration convenient for a centralist government.
- The term ‘ethnic’ (jaati) denotes a stable human community or nation/nationality which has been developed through time, common language, residence, economic activities, cultural practices, worldviews, and national character. But in the Nepali language, ‘ethnicity’ is commonly used to mean race, which is confusing.
- In Nepal, no one community/ nationality has a clear majority and none of their individual nationality has developed to the standard of claiming a separate nation-state.
- State identity is single just like a person’s identity and names are single. In Nepal’s case, the old tyrannical ruling elite has been continuously and consciously trying to wipe out the identities of victim communities/nations.
- In Nepal, the claims of Newars for linguistic/communal identity, those of Seti-Mahakali and Karanali for regional/historical identity, and the communal/national identities of others are completely valid.
- Even if the state is named after one victim community/nationality, other residents need not be scared.
- There is a qualitative difference between ‘Limbu State’ and ‘Limbuwan State’ or ‘Magar Pradesh’ and ‘Magarat State’. ‘Limbu State’ refers to a state based on the Limbu ethnicity, whereas Limbuwan refers to the ancestral residence of the Limbus, which is also the place of residence of other communities. There is no question of one ethnic group getting right of residence and chasing others away.

NEPALI TWEETS



Rubina shrestha

Follow

अरु दिन राजनीतिक दलहरूले गर्ने वोटकीलाई गाइजात्रासँग तुलना गरेर गाइजात्राको अपमान नगररस = जनहितमा जागी (हल्का देको क्या) । D

Let's not insult Gai Jatra by comparing it to the everyday antics of political parties. #SaidinPublicInterest

सन्दीप

Follow

जान-धर्मले समाजमा विभेद पैदा गर्छन्, यिनलाई हटाउनु पर्छ भन्ने, अनि त्यही जान र धर्मका आधारमा गरिने आरक्षणको बकाबत गर्ने! व्यवस्थामक लाग्छ!

The same people who want to get rid of castes and religion because these create divisions in society, advocate for reservations based on castes and religion. Hilarious.



Zarathustra

Follow

सबैभन्दा राष्ट्रपति न्या हो, जसलाई देशले खातिपेट लखेटेर अरु पुर्याउछ तरपनि उ आफु लखाइ नखाइ काम गरेर पैसा यता पठाएर देशलाई ख्याउछ!

The person who sends all his savings back home to feed his country even though it chased him to Arabia, is a true lover of the nation.



HIRAN

Follow

बडैफल्को निहुमा आफ्ना हजारौं कार्यकर्ताको निमज्जता पुर्वक हत्या गरिएको विरोधमा नेपाल कुखुरा संघद्वारा आन्दोलनको घोषणा ।

Nepal Chicken Association announces protests against the callous murder of thousands of its workers because of bird flu.

WEEKLY BAZAR POLL #24

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 is about Nepalis’ opinion on the upcoming elections.

Do you think CA polls will be held?

No 39%
Not on 19 November 34.2%
Don't know 25.8%

Who will you vote for if there are elections?

NC 23%
Won't say 19.3%
Don't know 18.7%
UML 14.2%
UCPN (M) 12.6%
RPP-Nepal 5.3%
Madhesi parties 5.1%
CPN-M 1.3%
Others 0.5%



NAGARIK

Amrit Bhadgaule, Nagarik, 17 August

नागरिक

Every morning Hari Bhujel from Chame, Manang district gets up at 5.30 and makes the long walk downhill to Timang carrying letters. The ninth grader from Lokpriya Higher Secondary School is a mail boy and the proud owner of the keys of Chame’s post office. At Timang he picks up a parcel brought to

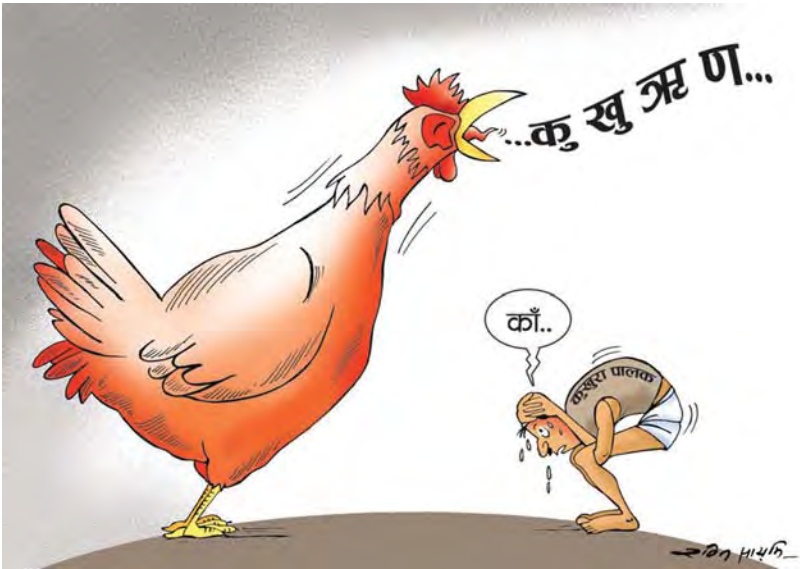
Hari, the mail boy

him by another employee. The two relay instructions to each other and head off in their own direction. Hari leaves the parcel in the post office, goes back to his rented room, eats, and runs off to school.

Although the journey from Timang and back takes three and a half hours, Hari never misses classes. In the evenings, he does homework and revises the day’s lessons. In winter, when it is bitterly cold and snow makes travelling arduous, Hari is up before everyone else. His friends and teachers admire his hard work, good grades, and unfaltering postman’s duty and have nicknamed ‘dack’ boy. But he is also an exceptional student who likes writing essays and is sharp at quiz competitions. His drawing won the second prize at a competition held on Republic Day. With the Rs 2,200 prize money, Hari bought his school uniform.

It’s been a year since Hari started distributing mail. His father, who used to be the village post man, passed away last year and his mother got the job as consolation. But since his mother is a labourer, she couldn’t find time to carry mail, which is why the job was passed on to Hari. When asked if it is difficult holding a job while being a full-time student, the young boy replies: “I’ve gotten used to it now. If I don’t work, we don’t get to eat.”

Hari earns a monthly salary of Rs 4,300 that helps sustain his family of three. The mail boy does not have big plans for the future. “I must become a good man,” he says. But his family, who migrated from Gorkha, is poor and principal Krishna Das Koirala worries that the school’s brightest student will be forced to abandon his education after his SLC exams.



Chicken: “Cock-a-doodle-debt!”

Man: “Do”

Shirt: Poultry farmer

नागरिक Rabin Sayami in Nagarik, 21 August

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“We have activists in all 240 constituencies, meaning we will win 100 more seats than anyone else.”

UML Chairman Jhalnath Khanal quoted in ekantipur.com, 22 August



BIBI FUNYAL

Navin Singh Khadka, *BBC World Service*, 19 November



A while ago, former prime minister and UCPN (M) leader Baburam Bhattarai took to Twitter and claimed that hardliners of all persuasion, NGOs benefitting from foreign aid, and donors were colluding to prevent elections in Nepal and push the country into turmoil.

“The fact that international powers are operating against Nepal’s interests is common knowledge to most Nepalis,” says Netra Bikram Chand of CPN-M. “Everyone wants to keep Nepal in transition for as long as it takes to get what they want.”

Another former minister, Kamal Thapa, says of his experience while in charge of the Home Ministry: “If the CIAA or some other body investigates this in the future, perhaps we will know more. But I can say with certainty that protestors were paid huge sums of money by foreign powers during the uprising in 2006 and the government was aware of this.”

There is no proof to Thapa’s accusations, but foreign diplomats in Nepal express worry that Nepal’s transition will never end.

“Despite consistent efforts, there are issues where the political parties have not agreed among themselves. We are worried about this because we want to see Nepal become

more stable,” says Alexander Spachis, the European Union’s envoy to Nepal.

When I ask him about why Nepali politicians blame foreign powers for creating instability in the country, Spachis responds: “I don’t think the problems of Nepal are imported from elsewhere. Plenty of Nepalis are educated, they have travelled abroad, even live abroad, so they have different opinions about the type of development they would like to see here. But it seems that the ones who are in power are doing everything they can to stifle this progress.”

When I ask Andrew James Sparks, who was recently appointed the British ambassador to Nepal, what

he thought about the frequent accusations of ‘outside interference’ he said: “If the political parties want to move forward in a democratic manner they should focus on how best to represent the people and keep Nepal’s independence intact. This, we feel, is what Nepalis want. Instead of ranting about what big powers do, they must do their best to institutionalise the wish of the people through the constitution.”

However, there are Nepali politicians like Jitendra Dev, leader of Madhes Janadhikar Forum - Loktantrik, who do not believe there is foreign intervention. “Not writing the constitution when we had the chance and still talking about another CA election is solely our fault. In fact, I feel that the international community is concerned about our stability and wants Nepal to do well.”

Norwegian ambassador Alf

Arne Ramslien has his own interpretation: “Blaming foreign countries helps certain local actors evade responsibility. Parties and leaders might be making use of such a strategy.”

If those within Nepal see a foreign hand everywhere, surely there is competition between them as well, because not all their interests concur. When I ask Ramslien whether or not this makes Nepal more unstable, he replied: “Nepal’s situation cannot be viewed in isolation from regional issues. Its neighbours India and China are the largest countries in terms of population. This is important and you can clearly see competitive interests between the two when it comes to Nepal. But such geo-political rivalry exists elsewhere in the world as well.”

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Out, out damn spot

Airports are in the news these days. No, am not talking about the potholes on the runway. It is about the controversy over Chairman Awesomeful taking his Land Cruiser into the domestic airport and being driven right up to his Buddha Air flight to Bhairawa the other day. The police on duty started flipping through the instruction manual on who is and who isn't allowed to the tarmac and apparently neither an ex-guerrilla chieftain nor an ex-PM are on the list. As heir apparently to be the first Executive President of the Federal Syndicated Republic of Nepal, PKD thinks he has certain entitlements. The APF cops at Bhairawa, however, didn't think so and they stopped the carcade from advancing beyond Checkpoint Charlie. The Chairman's ego was bruised badly and he pulled rank to call the Home Minister who called Police-in-Chief Rana. Obviously the VIP Room isn't good enough for this Very Impossible Person.

This brings to mind the antics of someone who PKD has said was his "mentor": the late GPK (hmm, hadn't used those initials in a while in this column). This was 2004, Gyanendra had bolted himself to the throne and was

hunkering down for a long war. Girjau was getting impatient about being kept in the doghouse by His Majesty KingG and his pro-democracy protests on the streets weren't gaining any traction. One day, the royal police stopped GPK from taking his car to the plane during one of his frequent flights to Biratnagar. Girjau blew a gasket. And to teach Kingji a lesson, he declared a bund and unleashed the full force of his hired goons: vandalising anything that moved at the Baneshwor intersection. GPK was just following his old habit of holding the country hostage whenever he was angry at someone. This glorious tradition has been handed down to the Taruno Dull who closed down Chitwan last month because the police dared to arrest some of their hooligans who beat up a bunch of Indian pilgrims. But GPK also imparted knowhow about this unique method of democratic

extremism to PKD which he (Lotus Flower) has perfected as a form of non-violent terrorism.

And so on to The Dear Leader, who, now that the revolution is nearly over, has the habit of behaving as if life is one great costume party. Recently he donned Armed Police fatigues as he shadowed Comrade Daddy and no action was ever taken for having broken strict rules about abuse of the uniform. This week, just to make sure that The World's Greatest Dad wasn't stopped again by some upstart airport cop from taking his car to the plane, Commandante Prakash was on the tarmac even before the plane arrived with a walkie talkie.

All kinds of rumours floating around about why PKD is looking the other way to allow the police investigation into the

Krishna Adhikari murder: because it is BRB and Com Yummy whose Gorkha Brigade was involved in the crime. "Out, out, damn spot," the erstwhile First Lady seems to be saying. Publicly, however, nothing unites PKD and BRB more than the common threat of being called into account for wartime excesses. Not only for trying to protect their own cadre, but for rewarding and promoting their former enemies in the police and army responsible for crimes against human beings.

The most dramatic U-turn of this elections campaign so far must go to @BRB_laaldhwoj for his surprising abandonment of the demand for federal units based on single-ethnicity. Alert readers will remember that this was the main plank of the

revolution for which Dr'sab was ideologue-in-chief. This was the 'non-negotiable' Baddie demand that led to the demise of the last CA. And now, what do we see? BRB slyly dropped the demand by the wayside hoping no one noticed.

The Cash Baddies fanned out across the country this month to assess the party's chances at the polls and they are taking their confidential reports directly to the CM at HQ. The prognosis is not good. PKD used to call public opinion polls biased, but now it's his own trusted comrades telling him that the party has lost its edge. How to get the polls postponed by hook or by crook (but mostly by crooks) and put the blame squarely on Baidya Baba's door? No sooner had PKD stepped down as Chief Mechanic and handed over to Jhusil Da, he changed his statement to say no way elections won't be held in November. Editor's note: Lotus Flower always means exactly the opposite of what he says.

Heard at the veggie market: "Onions are so expensive we will now need US dollars to buy them."

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