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GO, NO GO

The countdown from 10 has begun for the 19 November elections. It is being presented by the government and the international community as an exercise to move forward on the new constitution and drive the

country towards stability. But with a radical faction of the largest party not taking part, there are doubts about whether polls will resolve anything. The antics of

the boycotters is also distracting voters from impunity for war crimes by some of the candidates, the plunder of the treasury by those in power since 2008, and the issues of federalism and state structure. The question is not 'if' there will be elections, but under what circumstances and at what cost they will be held.



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DINESH SHRESTHA



Small and bright

Our very own Shalee Basnet talks about bringing the house down with her stand-up comedy act in the US.

PAGE 7



Langtang calling

The closest wilderness to Kathmandu got a record number of trekkers this season. Langtang (pic, above) is showing the way to poverty alleviation through tourism.

PHOTO ESSAY BY DINESH SHRESTHA

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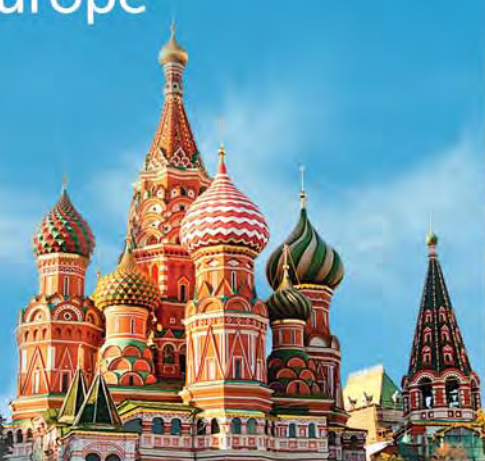
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THE WAGES OF SIN

The daily countdown from 10 has started for election day on 19 November. It is an election that is being presented as a panacea for getting the country moving forward again. But the people have been fooled too often to believe in cure-alls.

But despite all its flaws, this is an election that can offer the people's verdict on a slew of issues. By turning out in larger-than-expected numbers, voters will be sending a message against those calling for a boycott. By voting out the discredited old faces who had many chances in the past and blew it, the people will show they want positive change. By casting their ballots for 'weak' women candidates that the Big Four have fielded so that their national leaders can win, the people can finally prove that you can't fool all the people all the time. A strong showing by political parties that stand for democracy, pluralism, and non-violence will show that these are still the values that this country wants to be governed by. The election result will also give us an idea about the people's preference for the kind of federalism and state structure they prefer. However, if the old politicians still win with huge majorities and honest candidates are trounced, it will mean that block voting, ballot-buying, intimidation, and cheating are still rife.

The people will send their strongest message, however, if they defeat those who espouse violence in politics. Despite their entry into the mainstream and the split in the party, the UCPN (M) has never formally abjured violence and continues to exploit the residual fear of physical reprisal to cow down opponents and extort people. Even though the EC on Wednesday rejected the nomination of convicted murderer Balkrishna Dhungel, other Maoist candidates accused of war crimes and many who continue to speak only the

The criteria for electing a candidate has changed. This time, voters are asking: does he have blood on his hands?

bullying language of threats are standing. Then there are the parties of the Tarai that openly use quasi-militant groups who are in fact cross-border criminals with political protection. It may be too much to hope for, but a clean coercion-free election would see the exit of crooked candidates who need crooks to get to power and stay there. The NC and UML, however much they'd like to portray themselves as the victims of Maoist violence and threats, have in the past used strong-arm tactics themselves whenever they have been in power. In fact, one of the reasons the Maoists went underground and took up arms against the government was because of state repression at election time in the 1990s against

communist candidates in the mountains of mid-western Nepal. These habits die hard and they are using these tactics again in some places. The UML has the Youth Force on a leash and the NC its Tarun Dal. Both justify them as deterrence against the Maoist YCL. However, the physical assault by UML goons on a journalist who deigned to ask UML candidate Ishwar Pokhrel a question during an interaction last week and Pokhrel's inability or unwillingness to reprimand cadre proved that even the Unified Marxist-Leninists are afflicted with vestigial violence.

Unlike the 2008 election when many Nepalis voted for the Maoists not because they liked them, but because it was a vote for peace, this time the people know that all the talk by erstwhile revolutionaries about liberating the people was just that: talk. Clinging to straws, the party has tried to use the ethnicity agenda to recruit voters much in the same way they used it to recruit cannon fodder for their war. Which is why the 2013 replay of the CA election will be one where the Maoists will be held accountable for the violence and

brutality that they inflicted on the people in a war they waged in the people's name. Nepali voters this time are not afraid to ask: what was it all for?

In two weeks, Nepalis will be voting for the candidate they think is most likely to deliver them better healthcare and education, create jobs, build roads, and not be too greedy while doing all that. And, oh yes, can we finally get a constitution that won't make everything worse?

At the back of everyone's mind, however, will be one thought: does this candidate have blood on his hands?



JON APPEL

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

DIVIDED WE DON'T RULE

Do you think by citing wrong data and facade of a survey with a malicious intention, you can fool the Nepali nation ('Divided we don't rule', Editorial, #679)? I am sure you will agree that the different communities residing in Nepal now need to renegotiate the terms of staying together. Your idea to write up the editorial based on the wrong opinion survey and data is your intention to force war on this nation and express your inner desire for national disintegration. Please read the history of India and see how it became a successful nation with so many different nationalities and communities by coming together and practicing the democratic polity.

Arpan

- We need to start by admitting that the Nepali nation comprises of various nationalities and communities. People who have been ruling Nepal before and after 1989, need to demonstrate a broader understanding of this reality which is not coming through in this editorial. It is not the leaders, but the gang of opinion makers who are on overdrive these days.

Ramesh S

- Has anyone thought genuinely

and practically about how having a Limbuwan, a Kirat state, a Newa rajya is going to divest power away from Kathmandu to other cities? Beyond the highly charged identity politics gibberish, has any serious thought been put into the federalism agenda?

Rai

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

First of all it's beyond shameful that out of the 13 million women in this country (well technically let's say 6-7 million eligible by age) the 130 political parties cannot even field 1,000 or 1,500 female candidates ('Boys will be boys', Trishna Rana #679). Secondly, even their election manifestos are largely devoid of gender issues. It's like we women, our concerns, our voice just do not matter. Right now the entire national discourse is consumed by ethnic-identity based states, but if ethnicity is such an important identity marker, shouldn't gender also be considered?

GVR

- Let's be honest here, how much influence did the 197 women and 404 men in CA-1 really have? I know I sound very cynical but it does not matter if there are 601 women or 601 Janajatis in the assembly. In the end it will be the four-five men (Dahal, Bhattarai, Khanal, Koirala, Nepal and perhaps even Baidya) who will decide what our new constitution

looks like and how many and what types of federal states Nepal will be divided into.

Kumud

- One must also look at the lack of interest from top women leaders from all major political parties in contesting polls. Sujata Koirala, Chitralekha Yadav from the Nepali Congress and Bidhya Devi Bhandari from the UML come to mind.

Bijaya

- There is widespread and blatant discrimination against women in this country. It exists all over the world, but probably is not as prevalent as in third world countries. However, I think instead of pointing to the top with political leaders, we can make changes if we start from our children, families, students and so on. If we could educate them to respect women and treat them as an equal at a young age, maybe it will bring a significant change sooner or later.

B

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON

A very emotional and interesting story of a mother and son who faced a lot of hardships ('The return of the prodigal son', Guna Raj Luitel #679). Despite what the world threw at them, both of them continue to remain warmhearted

individuals and don't seem to have any grudges against anyone who made them suffer, instead they want to help them. Thanks to the teaching of Buddha for making people compassionate and generous. Three cheers to the mother and son from Tsum.

Tashi Lama

- I am also from Tsum and was saddened to read about Chumba Lama's childhood. Congratulations for your success and all the best wishes for the philanthropic work you're doing in our hometown.

Pema Nobu

(DIS)QUIET IN NEPALGANJ

A constitution doesn't have to be perfect. It can be amended with time, as suited to contemporary ideals as long as the chosen leader is a progressive one ('Disquiet in Nepalganj', Mallika Aryal, #679). The biggest dilemma for Nepali people now is having the ability to choose capable leaders by detaching their personal emotions.

Max

- The sad reality of this election is that we need the big boys. No matter how much we would love to see new, fresh faces and ideas, the cabal of powerful men won't let the constitution

be written unless they have a large say in it. So the disappointed populace of this country can vote for independent/young/new candidates. But we all know what the end result will be.

Tara

- It is surprising how a nation as big as India wrote its constitution in around two years while Nepal which is not as diverse is still stuck with constitution writing. The only way out seems to be to take each proposal one by one and get that item passed if it is approved by the 2/3 rd of the majority in the CA.

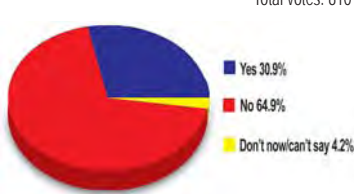
Anand Mohan



nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #680

Q. Are you going home to vote in 19 November elections?

Total votes: 810



Weekly Internet Poll # 681. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you think the second CA will write a new constitution?



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Biting the ballot

The country will go for polls on 19 November, but at what cost?



Nepal's security agencies who are part of the council, are not too happy about having to deal with the CPN-Maoists with their hands tied. The Army deployment is only psychological; no one expects them to go after the CPN-M with their guns blazing.

The APF and Army chiefs have politely asked the government to clear the political arena themselves, advising Regmi to seek help from actors within political parties, civil society, and the international

community.

On Wednesday, United Nations Resident Coordinator for Nepal Jamie McGoldrick took the unusual step of issuing a press statement on behalf of international missions in Kathmandu including India, China, Britain, United States, EU, and others, urging anti-poll groups to respect democratic rights of the public to take part in the elections. Interestingly, the Home Ministry had come out with a list of 16 districts deemed sensitive in terms of

electoral security of which 10 are Tarai districts with very low influence of Baidya-led Maoists.

We are less than two weeks away from the polls, yet there is a looming fear and an air of uncertainty about the final week and the polling day itself. The question is not 'if' there will be elections, but under what circumstances and at what cost they will be held.

The Election Commission claims it has made a comprehensive security arrangement for the polls with an unprecedented number of security personnel and mobilisation of Nepal Army for the first time in the country's electoral history. But it has yet to tell us against whom we need such heavy protection: rival parties contesting polls, those picketing against it, or those standing in the shadows with their own vested interest. ■

On the misty morning of 30 October, Indian Border Security Force exchanged gunfire with two men bound on a motorcycle trying to enter Nepal through the border town of Bihar's Sitamadhi opposite Sarlahi district. Whether the BSF got the two isn't clear, but Indian intelligence passed on the information that the fleeing men were hired assassins paid to target Madhesi-leader Mahanta Thakur.



BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

The Kathmandu media ignored the news, probably because it was too preoccupied with the festivities. What did get a lot of coverage was the assassination of a Muslim candidate from Bara district also shot dead by an Indian hitman hired by a political rival from his own party. There is a possibility that one of Thakur's rivals could have been trying to do the same. We won't know that until there is an investigation, but there is no word on one.

In the last two months, Nepal's graph of political violence has spiked. Two trends are clearly visible: first, violence instigated by boycotting political parties led by the CPN-M to upset voter registration and other election related activities. The second type of violence are

planned assaults on election candidates by rivals within the parties or others taking part in elections. Nearly all election related security debate is centred only around the former.

Political parties including the Nepali Congress, UML, and UCPN-Maoists have clashed in several districts during the election campaign with daily reports of confrontations. You can now follow the Citizen's Campaign for Clean Election (CCCE) on Facebook and Twitter for feeds on violence as it happens. Socket and pressure cooker bombs have been found at rallies, probably laid by the CPN-M, but seem to be designed more to scare people than kill them. There have been arson attacks on campaign vehicles, fist fights, and abductions of rival cadre.

The violence is expected to escalate further in the 10-day closure the Maoists have called in the run-up to election day. However, the reactive way that the security apparatus has behaved doesn't inspire much confidence. So far, the Home Ministry still seems to be treating the situation on the ground as a political one.

A few days back, the National Security Council Secretariat submitted a confidential security analysis report to the Chairman of Council of Ministers Khil Raj Regmi advising the government to find a way to get the boycotters to call off their action. The long and short of it is, the heads of

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SLUM SUCCESS

By taking complete charge of community development, residents turn their illegal squatter settlement into a model town

BEN CONNER

Walking on a muddy trail in northeast Kathmandu, sights and smells of a sordid city assault your senses. Frail dogs mingle with one another, scantily clothed children throw rubbish in the gutter. If you make an unassuming left turn, you are jettisoned to Ramhiti.

The street here is concrete, there is no hint of refuge at all within the vicinity, no dark sludge piling in the gutters, no chip bags blowing in the wind. It is as if the entire area is vacuum-sealed. Houses lining the road pop in vibrant colours, alluding to Ramhiti's complex heritage and demographic diversity. Businesses are thriving. One of the cleanest and relatively prosperous neighbourhoods in Kathmandu, however, is an illegal squatter settlement whose residents face the threat of eviction and demolition of their homes every day.

Located between Kapan and Mahankal, Ramhiti is considered one of the oldest squatter settlements in the Kathmandu Valley. Established in 1981, the community has undergone 30 years of development and locally-led initiatives aimed at raising the quality of life of inhabitants while making it more welcoming to visitors. This combination adds to both the long-term happiness of its residents and makes the neighbourhood attractive to public officials.

"We feel the need to prove to the government that we're a positive influence on society," explains Lapka Lama, community organiser and resident of Ramhiti. "By keeping the area clean and implementing self-sufficient projects, we hope to show the authorities that we deserve to stay."

Before 2003, Ramhiti was nothing more than a dirt path with scattered housing and rampant poverty. When Lumanti, an NGO working

with Nepal's slum dwellers, helped establish a women's savings and loans program within the settlement, residents realised that the means of alleviating poverty and modernising the settlement were at their fingertips. So they took complete control in changing the



face of their neighbourhood.

With financial assistance from Lumanti, residents built a new school that was later transitioned into a state-supported educational facility. Since the community has been taking care of its own needs, Ramhiti has the implicit blessing of the government. In 2007, the community upgraded the road that jets through the settlement, making it accessible to vehicles and promoting further foot traffic on the popular tourist route that extends from Boudhanath to Kapan Monastery.

Projects like these have increased business flow in the area and also drastically improved its aesthetics. Today, the 2,000 plus inhabitants of Ramhiti make a ubiquitous effort to keep the settlement as pristine as possible. Says Lama, "The cleaner we make it, the less likely that they will kick us out."

As children parade the street with their kites, residents take a break from their mid-afternoon conversations to revel in the small paradise they helped create. Hopefully, future generations of Ramhiti will build upon the community's prosperity and uphold its strong ties. 🇳🇵



A roof of one's own

Two and a half million inhabitants call Kathmandu Valley their home today, but there are not enough roofs to go around. Rural exodus fuelled by a decade long war, mass urbanisation, and a lack of vision in urban planning mean that the poor don't have many options when it comes to housing. Until recently they were forced to build homes on the city's outskirts, often in flagrant violation of building codes. But a Nepal-based NGO, Lumanti, might just have an answer to housing Kathmandu's urban poor.

Last July, Lumanti oversaw the construction of the Valley's first-ever rental-housing unit in Dhobighat that will provide shelter to 24 low-



income families. Years of political instability have disintegrated any relevant housing aid provided by government agencies, while private developers have almost exclusively focused on luxury apartments and high rises for the wealthy.

Lumanti fills a role left vacant by both a state too irresponsible to fund public housing and private construction companies too greedy to consider anyone besides the wealthy. With poverty levels within Kathmandu at 30 per cent and housing prices sky rocketing, the project couldn't have come at a more crucial time.

By building the first apartment complex for the poor, the organisation hopes to bring the public and private sector together to not just provide a temporary fix, but a long-term solution to housing those most in need. "If the government is ready to provide land, Lumanti is ready to start a housing program," says director Lajana Manandhar. "But the participation of the private sector is also crucial."

Throughout the world, urban poverty is characterised by disenfranchisement and segregation. But rather than condemning impoverished populations to the fringes of the city, which only drives them further into extreme poverty, Lumanti is setting an example for other housing projects by integrating its most vulnerable. Located in a fairly affluent, service rich neighbourhood of Patan, the new rental



FOLLOW ME: Ramhiti, an illegal squatter settlement in northeast Kathmandu, is one of the cleanest and prosperous communities that is taking care of its needs.

BEN CONNER



facility features many amenities that are imperative for struggling families as well as offering easy access to retailers, transit, and most importantly, the rest of the city.

Currently, the Department of Urban Development

and Building Construction (DUDBC) is also on the brink of beginning a project aimed at creating six blocks of low-cost rental housing in Ichangu. Such a venture would be unprecedented and provide hundreds of needy families with adequate shelter. Like Manandhar, Shambhu KC, acting director of the DUDBC, stresses the need for a collaborative effort between different organisations for the housing projects to succeed.

Lumanti's work, however, is much more than an innovative housing scheme. By operating low-income housings in all varieties of neighborhoods throughout the Valley, these units have a better chance of being successful while integrating otherwise segregated demographic groups. And the Lumanti model is also awake up call for the private and public sectors and NGOs to pull resources, expertise, and ideas from one another so that the poor can have safe, dignified homes.

EVEREST BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Qatar joins oneworld

Qatar Airways last week became part of the global airline alliance, oneworld, making the only one among major Gulf carriers to join any airline network.

'Becoming part of oneworld, which holds more awards than any of its competitors, will strengthen Qatar Airways' competitiveness, enabling it to offer customers an unrivalled alliance global network served by partners that include leading airlines from every region,' Qatar said in a statement.



The airline joined oneworld just one year after receiving an invitation, making its induction one of the fastest in the alliance's history. A more typical timeline for an airline to comply with the many membership requirements of oneworld is up to two years.

Joining oneworld is a milestone in the growth of the 16-year-old airline, which is one of just seven carriers worldwide rated five-star by the Skytrax airline quality agency. Qatar Airways serves more than 130 destinations in 70 countries. More than 20 of its destinations and five countries – Ethiopia, Iran, Rwanda, Serbia, and Tanzania – will be new to the oneworld map.

Other oneworld members include American Airlines, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Qantas, Finnair, Japan Airlines, LAN, and Malaysian Airlines.



Car shop

Laxmi Hyundai's authorised dealer for Banepa Standard Automobiles recently opened a new showroom in the area. "People of Banepa will no longer have to travel to Kathmandu to purchase a new Hyundai vehicle," said Surkrishna Vaidya, director of Standard Automobiles at the opening. Hyundai cars are available in a price range of Rs 1.4 to 10.2 million.

Winning numbers

Syakar has announced the second lucky draw winners of its Festive Bonanza offer. Namrata Singh (0538), Shruti Pokhrel (2035), and Bikram Shahi (0739) have each won Philips airfryer through the fortnightly lucky draw.



Double dose

Etihad Airways has announced its decision to increase flights to Abu Dhabi and beyond from daily to twice a day. Last month, the airlines celebrated its 10th year anniversary and offered special prices on travel to 10 European and American destinations.

Cash, cash

Morang Auto Works has announced the fifth week winners of its Yamaha Wajandaar Scheme. Seven lucky winners were awarded cash prize worth Rs 25,000 each. Under the scheme, customers get a scratch card with every purchase of Yamaha bikes and scooters and can win from Rs 5,000-100,000.



Lucky fellow

International Money Express announced the winner of its Dashain Ma SLC campaign at a function held in the capital. Mukti Lal Shrestha of Rupandehi was declared the lucky winner of a brand new Hyundai EON car. Also at the program winners of last week's lucky draw were presented with their prizes.

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BIKRAM RAI

The road to safety

Kathmandu's chaotic streets don't afford a space for pedestrians and cyclists

BHRIKUTI RAI

It has been two years since renowned conservationist and wildlife academic Pralad Yonzon lost his life in a road accident near Balkhu while cycling home from his office. The accident brought attention to the dangers that bicycle commuters face in the city everyday. Little has changed since that fateful evening as Kathmandu's chaotic streets continue to be just as dangerous. The government's decision to construct cycle lanes between Tinkune and Maitighar, and Kalimati and Balkhu has been the only glimmer of hope for hundreds of pedestrians and cyclists.

"It is great that the government is finally constructing the much-delayed cycle lanes," says Shail Shrestha of Cycle City Network Nepal, an organisation of cyclists in the Valley, "but the inter-connectedness of the tracks matters the most in road safety and the state needs to pay more attention to this aspect."

In 2005, the decision to construct a 44km long bicycle track in the city was passed after Nepal signed the Velo Mondial Charter and Action Plan for Bicycle Friendly Communities. The charter provides a blueprint

to promote bicycle travel as an efficient, environmentally-friendly alternative to motorised transport. For eight years the proposed cycle lane was suspended, but work has finally resumed to make Kathmandu more cycle and pedestrian friendly.

The 2.6km Maitighar to Tinkune stretch will have a 2.5 metre wide cycle lane on both sides while the 1.3km strip between Kalimati and Balkhu will have a 1.5 metre wide lane on one side. However,

the government hasn't yet conducted a feasibility study to identify areas in other parts of the city where new cycle tracks could be built. "Cycle lanes need to complement other modes of transportation, but the space crunch doesn't allow us to accommodate them even in the recently expanded roads," admits Shyam Kharel, head of the Kathmandu Valley Road Improvement Project. To ensure the safety of pedestrians, the project has set aside 30km as sidewalks on the widened roads

around the city.

Inspector Kumar Thapa from Metropolitan Traffic's Kalimati branch, which also covers the Balkhu intersection, claims that the crackdown on drunk driving has reduced the number of accidents. In the last seven months, his office received only one cycle accident and fortunately, the rider wasn't badly injured. "There are far less mishaps on the road now because of the new drinking and driving law. However, without dedicated cycle tracks

CRIME SCENE: A mural (above) marks the exact spot on the Ring Road near Balkhu where conservationist Pralad Yonzon was run over by a truck on 31 October 2011.

and footpaths, safety is still a big concern," says Thapa. "I personally don't feel safe while crossing busy intersections in Kathmandu."

There were nearly 4,000 road accidents last year and around 200 fatalities in Kathmandu alone. Transportation experts say that until there are more bus bays and stricter punishments for offenders, reckless drivers will continue disregarding the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Speaking at a training program on sustainable urban transportation in Kathmandu last week, Bhushan Tuladhar of UN Habitat, who is an avid cyclist himself, emphasised the need to completely overhaul the Valley's transport system to make roads safer for everyone. Said Bhushan: "Even rivers turn their course in 12 years. It is time Kathmandu returns to being a city where people enjoy walking and cycling." 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Pralad Yonzon, 60, #577
Killers on the run, # 598
Cyclists and the city, #579



Remembering Pralad

After losing Pralad Yonzon in a road mishap in 2011, his family lodged a case against truck driver Parsuram Thakur. Narayani Transport, the company Thakur worked for, used its connection with powerful transport cartel and the police to prove the driver's innocence and won the case. The Yonzons received Rs 2,00,000 in compensation, but were left with a life-long distrust of Nepal's justice system.

"All we wanted was truth, but when money and politics get in the way of justice, we become helpless," says daughter Patanjali Yonzon Shrestha. "We hoped our case would discourage rash driving and persuade thousands of victims to seek justice," she explains, "but in the end we had to give up our fight." Shrestha blames the half-hearted investigation by the police and misinterpretation of eye witness Bibek Sharma's testimony as the main factors in losing out.

In his illustrious career, Pralad worked to study the habitat of the endangered red panda in Langtang for his PhD and preferred a people-centred approach to conservation. To commemorate the late scientist's birthday on 21 May, the Yonzon family organised the first annual symposium on Nepal's red panda this year. They also plan to carry on his conservation legacy through the Resource Himalaya Foundation that Pralad set up.



The moisture riding on the back of the low pressure trough across the Tibetan plateau may trigger some showers in higher altitudes over the weekend. A countervailing high pressure system over northern India, however, is cancelling out the Tibetan trough and the Indo-Gangetic inversion haze up to the Himalayan midhills in Nepal blocking mountain views will peter out. The temperature will drop further with minimal at nine celsius.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
20° 10°	20° 9°	20° 9°

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Laughing matter

SHAILEE BASNET

‘Hello, I am Shailee Basnet from Nepal. How many of you know nothing about Nepal? We are a beautiful country right in between India and China. The entire world is looking at India and China, how dumb can you be not to notice Nepal?’

When my opening joke filled the venue with laughter, I could see my dream coming true right before my eyes. During my brief stint as a stand-up comic in the US, I received more love and support than I ever imagined. The audience roared with laughter, organisers invited me back, and fellow comics provided valuable encouragement. Stand-up comedy is not very well known in Nepal, but is a huge part of American culture. Hundreds of artists compete and moving up the laughter ladder is a hard struggle. Those who make it big, gain name, fame, and fortune through TV, movies, and stage performances.

I was afraid that for a rookie like me from Nepal, it would be impossible to find opportunities to get on stage. But standing on the American stage was a big dream. And as they say, where there’s a will, there’s a way. During my four months in USA, I took part in eight shows in Colorado and one in New York.

Like most newcomers, I started at open mic nights in clubs and restaurants where artists get five minutes each to show their talent. A good performance can land you a gig at showcase events. As luck would have it, on the night I went to watch a show at Comedy Works in Denver, local sensation Hippyman was on stage and he recommended my name to the Boulder Comedy Show after we met on a bus the same evening. After my first performance, I was booked for two more shows and was warmly welcomed for open

mic gigs at Johnny’s Cigar Bar for five consecutive Tuesday nights.

It was the response of fellow comics at open mics that made me realise how big an opportunity I had landed at Boulder Comedy Show. Some of them had spent months rehearsing and had gone through video submission process to get a slot. They were surprised to know that I had already performed there and was invited again. Based on my performance at open mics I was invited for a couple more showcases.

A petite girl from a relatively unknown country talking about American culture; that was part of my appeal for the local audience. American stand-up comedy centres on very personal subjects like sex, but my focus is first world



versus third world contrast. I use the guise of fights between me and my American husband to present this contrast, roll everything from Obama to Miley Cyrus to toilet humour in this concoction, and you’re golden. For instance:

When you marry someone from another culture, there are lots of differences. For example my husband eats with fork and spoon, I eat with my hands. In my culture,



ERIK SPINK

it’s important to touch the food and feel the texture, both

going in (eating) and coming out (excreting). I mean he’s a wiper, I’m a washer. Sometimes I wonder which idiot thought of using paper when water has been around forever. Oh you think I’m gross. Think about it, I am the cleanest person in the room right now.

Stand-up comedy is one of the last remaining professions in the US where the term ‘female’ is still used to denote a woman

artist. It was interesting to see more female performers at an open mic in New York. The hosts asked me to come back in my next trip and suggested I participate in the annual comedy competition ‘Stand-up for Diversity’. I never expected to receive so much adulation and encouragement in comedy, specially in the US. Being able to promote Nepal through the medium of laughter was truly motivating. I’m back home with new-found energy and confidence to have the audience in fits from bigger stages. 🇳🇵

Shailee Basnet is a former journalist and coordinator of Seven Summits Women Team, a group of Nepali women mountaineers who aim to climb the seven highest peaks in the seven continents. She performs at stand-up comedy events around Kathmandu.

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Women on top, #647
Seven women, seven summits, #613

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EVENTS

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www.siddharthaartgallery.com



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6 November, the first day of the fest begins with a dip in a 'holy' river

7 November, the 36-hour long fast starts

8 November, evening offerings are made to Lord Surya on this day.

9 November, the sun is worshipped and people break their fast at sunset.

Be a superhero, help 300 under-privileged kids watch their favourite superhero on big screen; to donate, <https://www.facebook.com/events/7262727738763>, 11 November, 11.30am, QFX Kumari Cinema, Kamalpokhari

Tell your story, make a 1-2 min video about how girls are changing the world; *contest open to girls aged 12-25, winner takes \$10,000, www.letgirlslead.org*

Click, click, a 12-day workshop
for new shutterbugs, *Rs 4000, 11*
November, 7am, Artudio, (01)4002037,
9851180088, 9851182100

Talking ideas, this week the thinktank discusses what is happening in Nepal, *12 November, 3pm, Martin Chautari, Thapathali*

B-BOYING TOUR, Dharan-based b-boying group Da-Pace is travelling to six major cities to promote tourism through dance, *tour starts 15 November*



DINING

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

Little Italy, go vegetarian at this new Italian food chain and don't forget to end your meal with the chef's special, chocolate bomb. *Darbar Marg*

Salt & Pepper Restro Lounge,
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cocktails, liquor, beers and flavoured
shishas, with an outdoor lake-
view terrace. *Lakeside, Pokhara,*
(061)463484, 9846210568,
www.saltandpeppernepal.com

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

Saigon Pho, spacious interior
with authentic Vietnamese dishes.
Lajimpat

New Dish, grab filling meals like pork momos, spring rolls, and chop suey and enjoy excellent value for your money. *Khichchapokhari*

The Heritage, escape the hodgepodge of the tourist hub as you relish delights like paella and panna cotta. *Thamel*

The Yellow House, enjoy sumptuous breakfast prepared with organically source ingredients and the freshest bread this side of town. *Sanepa*, (01)5522078



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

MUSIC

Kripa Unplugged, young Nepali musicians and seasoned veterans give an acoustic rendition of their favourite songs. <http://www.youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged>

Synkronize II, for those who move like Jagger to electronic dance beats, 8 November, 6.45pm onwards, Brians Grill, Dillibajar



HE'S BACH, cellist Frank Bernede plays the works of JS Bach; drinks, snacks and dinner after concert. *Rs 1,000, 8 November, 6pm, Café des Artes, Thamel, (01)4411778*

Reggae beats, get down to some reggaeton with reggae act Chari Amilo Kala Samuha, *Rs 200, 9 November, 7pm, House of Music, Thamel*

Mohit Chauhan live, everyone's favourite balladeer is coming to town,
Rs 500 to Rs 5,000, 30 November,
4.45pm onwards, Dasrath Stadium,
Tripureswor, 9818842177



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

Grand Norling Hotel, countryside weekend package offering suite room, swimming, gym, massage, and discounts on other facilities. Gokarna, (01)4910193

Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, overnight package with accommodation, dinner and breakfast. Dhulikhel, call (01)4479488 for reservations

Temple Tree Resort and Spa, a peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna- it also hosts three different restaurants to cater to your needs. Gaurighat, Lakeside, (61)465819

Running in the mountains

The first edition of the Manaslu Mountain Trail race is all set to begin this Saturday. The seven-day race will take runners through some of Nepal's most stunning Himalayan landscapes as they make an arc around the world's 8th highest mountain. Combining running and trekking, the multi-stage race gives participants a unique opportunity to explore local culture and surroundings.



The race is spread over Nepal's best trekking trails and runners get to experience life of different communities as they pass from subtropical Hindu villages to Buddhist settlements in the mountains. The route even takes in a visit to the Tibetan border.

Proceeds from the event will go towards building the Samdo hydro-project which is helping bring electricity to the Samdo village.

9 to 22 November
www.manaslutrailrace.org

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LONG FO LANG

The closest wilderness
a record number of



PICTURES by DINESH SHRESTHA

Normally, Langtang National Park gets 13,000 visitors every year. But this autumn alone there were more than 10,000 trekkers hiking in the wilderness area closest to Kathmandu Valley.

At the park entrance in Dhunche, more than 500 entry permits had been sold one day alone last month. Yet there could be many more tourists visiting Langtang if the infrastructure was better and the destination was properly marketed both for Nepalis as well as foreign nature lovers.

Langtang Valley is a treasure trove of biodiversity because of its altitude and climate variation from the sub-tropical banks of the Bhote Kosi to fast-flowing streams roaring through dense coniferous forests and alpine meadows to the glaciers below Mt Langtang (7,227m). It is difficult to imagine that you are only 35km horizontally and two km vertically from Kathmandu.

Langtang National Park is home to 250

bird species and 32 species of mammals including wild dogs, thar, ghorals, serows, musk deer, red pandas, black bears, and snow leopards. The red panda is the iconic species of Langtang and the canopy of trees along Lama Hotel is alive with them. Although poaching and habitat destruction had reduced the numbers of these animals, they have recently seen a comeback. There has also been an increase in the numbers of blue sheep and mountain goats in the past few years.

To protect this biodiversity and ensure that the community is involved in environmental protection, this 1,710 sq km area directly north of Kathmandu Valley was designated a national park in 1976. The park has 54,000 inhabitants within a 420 sq km buffer zone established in 1998.

The national park and the region surrounding it are also the areas where the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Project (TRPAP) is trying to establish a model for direct income generation from trekking through home stay at Tamang homes,

- DYNAMIC SCENERY:**
- 1 Kyangjin in 1974.
 - 2 Kyangjin today has grown into a base camp for trekkers exploring Upper Langtang.
 - 3 This lake on Langtang Lirung glacier does not exist in trekking maps from 20 years ago and shows the dramatic effects of global warming.

promotion of local produce, hot springs, and cultural programs.

Already the boom in trekking has spiked prices. Locals need to budget Rs 2,000 a day for stay and food, while foreigners need to pay a Rs 3,000 national park entry fee, \$20 for the TIMS card, and Rs 4,000 a day for food and lodging. More of this money is now going to local families, but the poor state of the trails shows that the national park's revenue is not being put to good use.

There is a surprising growth in the number of Nepali trekkers and this number would probably grow if tourism was also promoted domestically. A drawback is that locals are reluctant to rent out rooms to



GING OR TANG

ss to Kathmandu got
trekkers this season



LANGTANG
[Map below]

KATHMANDU

Nepali hikers even when rooms are available and word of this gets around.

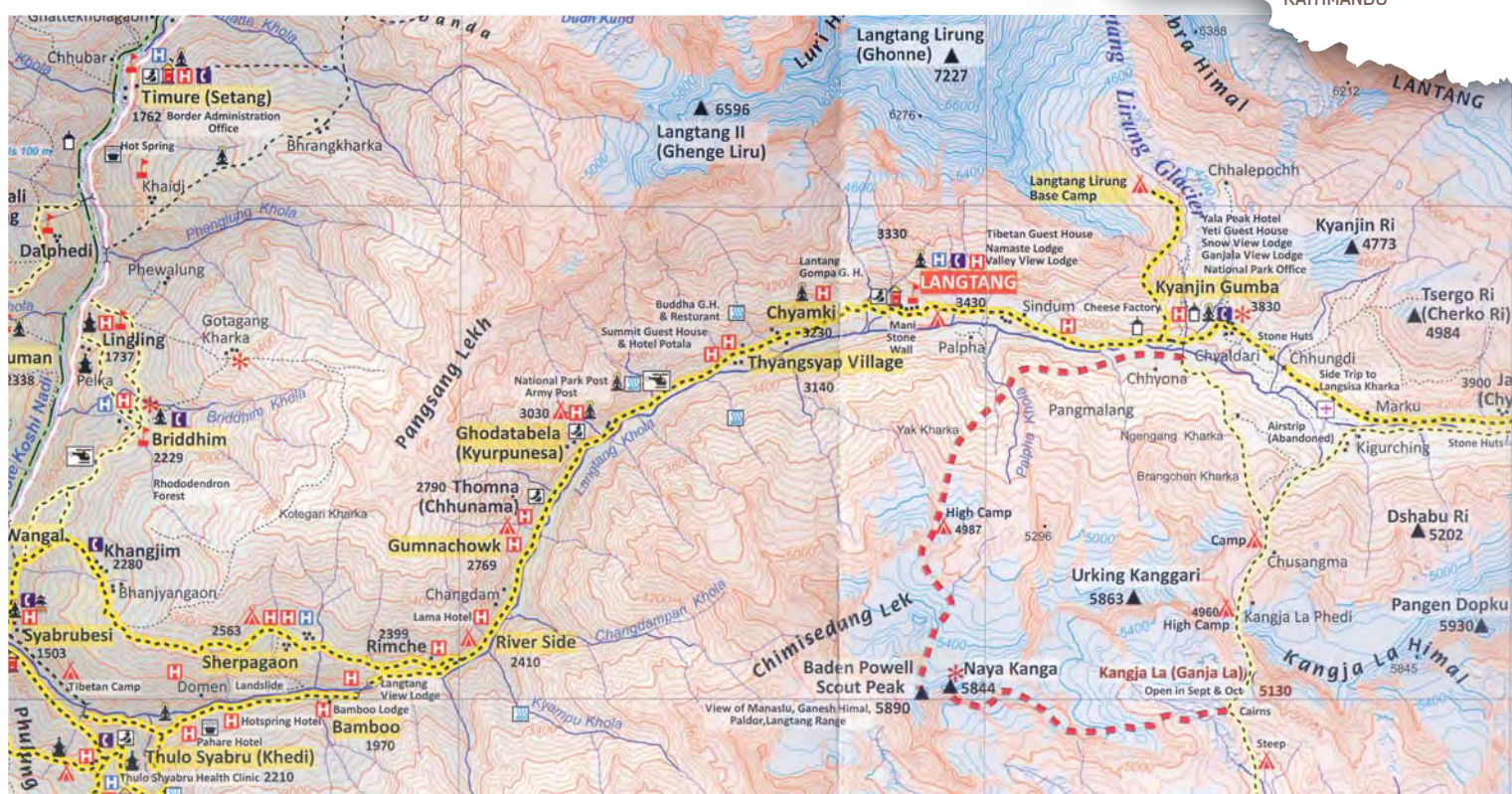
Langtang is now fairly easy to reach since one can get a bus or jeep right up to Syabru. The first night's halt at Lama Hotel is by the noisy Langtang River, next day it is Langtang village with the glacier seracs hanging menacingly above, and the third day the Valley opens up at Kyangjin. This can be a base camp to explore side valleys and climb Kyangjin Ri (4774m) or Cherkho Ri (4984). The delicate beauty of the fluted west face of Gang Chhenpo is a constant friend.

As you swing past Kyangjin and Langshisha Kharka, you start getting an indication of what a high-altitude Himalayan hike is all about: 360 degrees of mountain views.

The more adventurous can return to Kathmandu via the famous, but treacherous, Ganja La (5,130), the pass directly south of Langtang Valley. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

Springtime in Langtang beyul, #352
Nearly heaven, #42



HIMALAYAN MAP HOUSE



BYZANTIUM

Budgeted at a modest £8 million, *Byzantium* is a small, but surprisingly pleasing little film. It has its fault in that the movie is sometimes superficial in reconciling its different plot points, however, due to Neil Jordan's



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

exuberant direction we are swept along regardless of the various questions that inevitably arise in one's mind. This film is about vampires (or soucrians as they called themselves in their old-fashioned 200-year-old manner) and if you know your pop film history you will remember that Jordan is somewhat an adept at vampire films having directed the unforgettable *Interview with the Vampire* in 1994. Whether you liked the film or not, it was undeniably a cultural phenomenon and an early

precursor to the now ubiquitous vampire phenomenon that has pervaded television, cinema, and of course fiction. *Byzantium*, therefore, is worth seeing because it is a rather grimmer take on vampire lore. Clara (Gemma Arterton) and Eleanor (Saoirse Ronan) are a mother and daughter team, trapped forever in their 20 something and 16-year-old bodies respectively. Moving from town to town with Clara supporting them by prostituting herself, the two are clearly on the run from something wicked as they struggle to sustain themselves in a world where women are constantly victimised - especially when they find themselves powerless and penniless on the streets. Ending up in a seaside English town, Clara befriends a susceptible but kind-hearted man called Noel (Daniel Mays) who has just inherited the Byzantium Hotel, an old, dilapidated but still charming place that Clara converts into a brothel. Disgusted with her loving,

but practical and slightly crass mother, Eleanor drifts around town befriendng a strange young man called Frank (Caleb Landry Jones) in the process. Over the course of their stay in this small town, we begin to learn the story of how Clara and Eleanor came to become vampires through Eleanor's writings. It is perhaps their gothic backstory that is the most compelling aspect of this film - along with Ronan's nuanced and quite heart-wrenching performance as an old soul trapped in a perpetually too young body. If you have read any vampire related fiction you will be familiar with the usual existential angst that most thoughtful vampires face - that of having to live an immortal life. Most of the drama in these stories centres around finding that compatible partner with whom to spend it with. Witness the success of the *Twilight* books and films that avidly manipulate this somehow eternally engaging plot line. *Byzantium* offers a rather more toned down, but much more lovely story between Eleanor and Frank with a secondary and slightly morbid, but also quite pleasing bonus happy ending for Clara. As I mentioned earlier, *Byzantium* does have its faults, but if you can look past the slightly choppy storytelling and Arterton's sometimes grating performance, you will find yourself settling into a perfectly acceptable escapist fantasy with hints of real gravitas in the form of the phenomenal Saoirse Ronan. 🇳🇵

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HAPPENINGS



GOTCHA!: Senior superintendent of Police Bijay Kayastha briefs the media on Wednesday after arresting serial killer Abhisekh Raj Singh who has confessed to killing six people.



SIBLING TIME: A boy receives offerings from his sister on Bhai Tika, the fifth day of Tihar on Tuesday.



ROCK ON: Nepali rock band 1974 AD performs at a concert in Basantapur on Sunday.



ALMOST READY: Workers at a food processing factory in Mangaltar, Kavre help dry noodles on Saturday.

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When media students in Nepal are asked what first comes to their mind about Bangladesh, most reply “poverty”, “floods” or “hartals”. Very few in Nepal know that Bangladesh has a higher per-capita income, it grows enough food to feed itself, it is the world’s major exporter of medicines, or that it has Shahidul Alam of Drik Picture Gallery.

Shahidul Alam is Bangladesh’s best-known photographer and someone who has worked tirelessly to change the international image not only of his native country, but also of what he calls the Majority World. His photographs of Bangladesh and other parts of the world have made him an international conscience-keeper, his images exposing injustice and hypocrisy, but also providing tantalising hope for a better tomorrow.

Nepal’s photojournalists have known Shahidul through the many workshops he has conducted in Kathmandu and some have returned after training at his Pathshala photography school in Dhaka to be accomplished photographers themselves. His latest photo book, *My Journey as a Witness*, reaches out to a wider international public with his life’s work and philosophy. And it is fitting that the legendary Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado and India’s Raghu Rai have written tributes to their colleague. ‘We both come from a tradition of concerned political photojournalism in the truest sense of the term,’ writes Salgado, ‘a photojournalism whose purpose is to denounce injustice.’

But unlike many who carry the world’s burden



REVIEW

with a missionary zeal, Shahidul’s personality and photography are not self-important or arrogant. Both in person and in his pictures, he comes across foremost as an artist who thinks before pointing his lens. There is a purpose to his pictures where the photographer slips into the background and lets the protagonist or the image tell its own story. For Shahidul, it is not enough that he is a good photographer, he wants others to be as good as him. Hence his establishment of Drik, Pathshala, the Chobi Mela biennial of photography in Dhaka, and now the Majority World photo agency in

London.

The book provides an in-depth look at Shahidul’s main passions: documenting injustice, exposing environmental degradation, and bringing to light global inequality.

Many of his works will relate to Nepalis and possibly inspire photographers here, especially the stunning images from his adventurous journey following the Brahmaputra from its source in Tibet till the Bay of Bengal, the series on Bangladeshi migrant workers, Bangladesh’s Naxalites, and Crossfire, his latest expose of summary executions



Shahidul Alam
My Journey as a Witness
Skira Editore, Italy
Bengal Foundation, Dhaka
2013
Hardcover 224 pages
ISBN: 978-88-572-0966-1

by the dreaded Rapid Action Battalion. Shahidul has been eye witness to the Sri Lankan tsunami, the Kashmir earthquake, cyclones, tidal waves, and floods. But everywhere the images are not of despair, but of survival and the human spirit overcoming adversity. The pictures come with explanations, ruminations, and revelations in the accompanying text.

Shahidul is scathing about photographers and Western donor agencies who rely on a distorted self-perpetuating image of ‘Third World’ hopelessness and victimhood. Perhaps the reason Nepali students have a distorted image of a neighbouring country is because they are fed only negative ones by Western filters. This book is an eye-opener, it will quite literally change your point of view on the world.

Notes Shahidul: ‘A camera may be used with extreme sensitivity or not at all. That the camera never lies is the biggest lie of all.’

Kunda Dixit

nepalitimes.com

Watch video of Shahidul Alam



1905

Every Saturday morning, 1905 restaurant in Kantipath hosts a farmer’s market that is a celebration of sorts. Fresh, organic vegetables, high altitude rice and beans, freshly made mozzarella, goat cheese, mustard oil, herbs, organic tea, a variety of bakery items, pickles, apples from Dolpo, and produce from the Valley and its vicinity are all laid out in the open air sheds in a bountiful and colourful display. There is also a smattering of familiar international faces selling cheese, sausages, and pastas.

The rustic tables a few steps below the verandas of the bungalow are laden with a variety of breakfast, brunch, and lunch dishes. You can choose from the table with items from the swarming market outside,



or freshly cooked pasta, roasted chicken, eggs, and a wide choice of baked breads. Nepali tea or brewed coffee from the restaurant’s kitchen is always an option. There is usually a healthy mix of locals, expats, and tourists and the fusion of different languages and cultures reminds one of the taverns and bistros of Europe.

Part of the Bahadur Bhawan complex that was home to Boris Lissanevitch’s Royal Hotel for a while and now houses the offices of the Election Commission, the 1905 bungalow too, has had several avatars. It was a

‘pleasure place’ when first built in 1905, then a club house, the International Club after 1951, and now a charming eatery. The central point is the bar which is flanked by a few separate rooms and then the outer ring of the veranda.

The starters or canapé (Rs 350-500) are arguably the best in town: one would travel miles for the smoked salmon packed with light cream cheese and fresh chives, and crab cakes with bok choy dressing, topped with pasta salad. Even the humble chicken, seared and smoked in Teriyaki style, and the vegetable brochette, drizzled with olive oil and vinaigrette and a mix of soft

cheese vie for style and taste with the imported delicacies.

If you still have space for mains, try the fresh grilled trout (Rs 995) from the rivers of Nepal. Delicately grilled and matched with lemon butter and herbs sauce, the fish was light and tasty, this diner’s personal favourite from the menu. The other two mains we opted for were herbed stuffed chicken breast in white wine sauce (Rs 800), which was juicy, and an eggplant manicotti (Rs 495) over in a homemade pasta and tomato gravy, which made for an ideal vegetarian dish. For desserts among several tempting choices, we ordered assorted fruits, grapes,

apples, pears, and kiwis (Rs 305), which was given a tasteful zing by a pour of some fragrant liqueur.

Within a decade of taking charge, 1905’s MD Shoba Rayamajhi has made a distinct mark in the Nepali hospitality industry. The enterprising and delightful businesswoman is always around to greet and meet her guests, so set some time aside to chat with her.

Rainbow Diner

How to get there: from Darbar Marg head to Thamel Chok, take a right towards Kantipath at the four-way intersection. 1905 is on your right next to Global Bank.



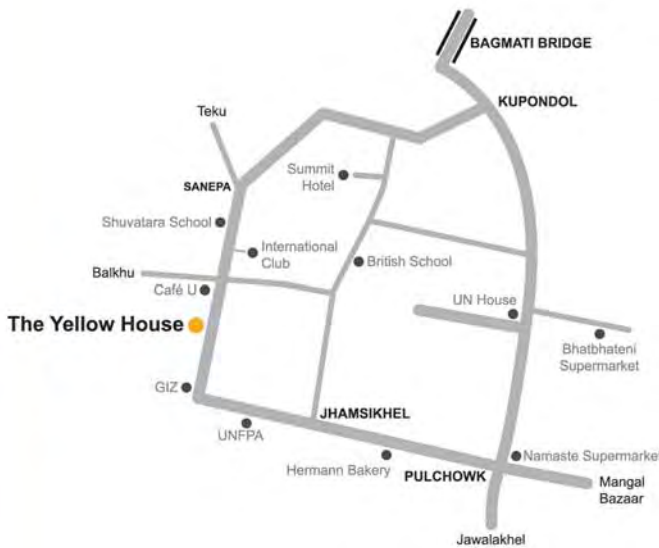
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The care in healthcare

It is often said that more mistakes in medicine are made by those who do not care than those who do not know. Beyond a strong understanding and background in medical science, being compassionate towards



DHANVANTARI

Buddha Basnyat, MD

patients is obviously a very important part of a healthcare worker's job description.

When we were in medical school, there were no special classes on compassion. But teaching this skill is easier said than done - some would even argue whether it can be taught at all. And in countries like ours where many citizens still struggle for access to basic health services, there is always the debate of quality versus quantity. Nevertheless, it is imperative

that we inculcate a sense of responsibility and greater concern for patients among future doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers.

Compassion comes from a 14th century Latin word which translates to 'suffering with' or a 'co-sufferer': *com* means with and *passion* is suffering. Another word almost synonymous with compassion is empathy. Tracing its root to the German term 'einfühlung', meaning 'a feeling into', empathy is probably a notch below compassion in the intensity of feelings generated for the suffering of others.

Many of us whether involved in the practice of medicine or not would agree that treating patients with care and understanding can relieve much of their emotional suffering and make an important contribution to their recovery, often times rivaling the effect of drugs (although scientifically this may be hard to prove). But in practical terms, not everything

requires scientific proof if the outcome is successful with no harm done.

Clearly a doctor cannot be very emotionally involved with her patient because this may interfere with rational, proper treatment. But in many doctor-patient encounters, excessive emotional involvement is not the problem. Rather it is the unfortunate and utter lack of care on the doctor's part for her patients' feelings that is more worrying.

For decades, both scientists and healthcare workers have been deeply interested in the moral implications of properly understanding and sympathising with patients in order to help them more effectively. With research on compassion/empathy growing rapidly, cognitive neuroscience is definitely undergoing a revolutionary change. Studies show that some of the same neural systems that are activated when we are in physical pain become engaged when we observe the suffering of others. Researchers are also working on finding out more about how empathy develops in chimpanzees and other primates, how it is elaborated in children, and the circumstances that trigger empathy.

However, one could argue that our preoccupation with biomedical medicine has clearly diminished the compassion and empathy part of medicine. But a deeper sympathy for our patients has to be an essential quality of the modern technology of medicine.

US President Barack Obama often speaks very articulately about empathy. In 2006, a year after Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans, Obama emphasised the importance of seeing the world through the eyes of others who are different from us in a commencement speech he gave at Xavier University. Clearly when healthcare workers choose to broaden their ambit of concern and truly sympathise with the plight of their patients, we will have taken a giant step forward. Our goal should therefore be "to cure sometimes, to relieve often, but to comfort always".



GIZMO by YANTRICK

Theatre house

Sony's BDV-N7100W Home Theatre System, a truly masterful blend of sound, design, and features bundled into an affordable package, should automatically end up on the bucket list of gadget enthusiasts across the globe.

Since the days of the Walkman, Sony has been a vanguard in the entertainment business and with market-leading brands like PlayStation, Bravia HDTVs, and VAIO laptops, the Japanese electronics powerhouse certainly knows a thing or two about what the tech-masses desire. With that in mind, Sony's BDV-N7100W Home Theatre System is a simple yet stunning entertainment gadget that capably follows in the footsteps of its iconic cousins.



The moment you unbox the unit, you will begin drooling at its sleek, futuristic design and fall in love with the BDV-N7100W even before you plug in a single wire. Once you have properly installed the system, it's viva la viewing and gaming revolución. Your box comes with a single main unit along with one subwoofer, one centre speaker, two front speakers, and two rear speakers and delivers a whopping 1000W of sound. The main unit harbours a Blu-ray player and a touch-sensitive LED display to access all the system's features and tweak its settings to your needs. Once connected to a HDTV or a projector, the unit's interface is smooth, easy to navigate, and extremely user-friendly.

If you thought the BDV-N7100W's design was spectacular, wait till you hear it roar. With speakers pumping 1,000 watts of crystal clear sound, your movies and games will jump into life. From the earth-shattering explosions in *Batman* trilogy, to middle earth's battle sounds and music in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, to Al Pacino's ramblings in *Scent of a Woman*, to Hugh Grant's soothing whispers in *Notting Hill*, the device delivers a detailed and powerful cinematic performance in true 5.1 home theatre style.

With features like NFC and Bluetooth technology packed into the BDV-N7100W to wirelessly stream music from your NFC/Bluetooth capable mobile device, along with its built-in Wi-Fi capability, accessing media content on your HDTV has never been easier.

The system comes with a price tag of approximately Rs 65,000 and is not yet available in the Nepali market. So now might be a good time to sweet talk your bideshi cousins and friends into sending you an early Christmas gift.

Yantrick's verdict: a perfect companion for your HDTV, Sony's latest home theatre system will make going out to watch movies rather redundant.



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Pre-poll polls

Predicting the outcome of elections based on opinion polls is fraught with danger in India and Nepal

An exciting aspect of India's election season is the opinion poll that media houses conduct, staking their reputation to predict the seats political parties are expected to win.

Such opinion polls have a high degree of reliability in societies possessing a relatively uniform culture and are largely



LOOK OUT
Ajaz Ashraf

middle class, but in India and Nepal, where there are huge disparities in income, literacy, exposure to the media, and sharp cultural differences, opinion poll predictions have been wide of the mark at times, much to the embarrassment of those who commission them.

For instance, in 2004 none of the opinion polls in India anticipated the voting out of the government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The failure of opinion polls to always predict the eventual results of national or state results correctly has spawned suspicions about the motives of those conducting or commissioning them. Are they merely opinion-seekers? Or are they also opinion-makers, hoping their findings will swing votes for the party they are inclined to or are in league with? More importantly, do opinion polls influence the voting intentions of the electorate?

Nobody has ever tried to measure the effect opinion polls have on the voter's decision. However, a clue to its possible impact was

provided in India through the unprecedented decision of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is making its debut in the Delhi Assembly election of 4 December, to release all its in-house surveys. Most parties in India also commission surveys, but rarely disclose their findings at a specially convened press conference, preferring to utilise the data so generated for devising their poll strategy.

Why is the AAP utilising its own opinion surveys to hard-sell itself? For weeks now, it has launched a blitzkrieg of radio jingles citing its surveys to claim its leader, Arvind Kejriwal, is well ahead of others as the most preferred chief ministerial candidate, that the party matches the Congress and BJP in popular support. These jingles never

fail to mention that it was political scientist Yogendra Yadav, one of India's foremost psephologists and now an AAP member, who had supervised the surveys, in the hope that the glow of his professional credibility would dispel the shadow of doubt from falling over their findings.

You can't but conclude that the AAP's strategy has been devised to fight the battle of perceptions, a fight traditionally tilted against emerging forces. Voters have their own perception of who is in the race to win an election and who isn't, based on their own political understanding, past experience, and individual inclinations.

Unless voters are ideologically motivated towards one party, they prefer not to waste their votes in case

their original or first choice is perceived to have no chance of winning. Instead, they cast their vote either for the party which they think is best placed to win, or for its rival, in case they are ideologically allergic to the likely winner. This phenomenon in political parlance is called 'negative voting'.

For a while, there has been a campaign that the AAP means well and has invigorated Delhi's politics, but it is essentially a 'vote-katua' or vote-splitting party. This perception could have spawned negative voting and damaged the AAP. For those potential AAP voters who are alienated from the Congress because of scams and mis-governance, the phenomenon of negative voting would mean casting their ballot for the BJP. By contrast, AAP supporters wary of the BJP's communal agenda would rally behind the Congress despite their disenchantment with it. In addition, those not ideologically inclined or indifferent to the governance issue would line up behind the party which they believe has the best chance of winning the December poll for the Delhi Assembly.

In this sense, the AAP released its surveys to counter the campaign that it can only split votes and not win on its own. Its surveys show it has gained a substantial momentum and is engaged in a neck-and-neck race with the national parties. Independent opinion polls also place the AAP a close second or third in the race, each predicting that Delhi is likely to have a hung Assembly. This has the AAP leaders smiling, for they believe the sharp edge of the phenomenon of negative voting has been blunted.

So yes, opinion polls do seem to have an impact in India's sprawling capital where political awareness and media exposure is high. Its impact in rural areas is perhaps more questionable. In Nepal, opinion polls rating parties and candidates have been banned. Perhaps India should follow suit? 🇮🇳

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A BURNING DESIRE TO HELP

German plastic surgeon dedicates his life to treatment and training in reconstructive surgery in Nepal



KUNDA DIXIT

Andreas Settje had a comfortable, well-paying job as a surgeon and a settled family life in Germany when, one day 15 years ago, he saw an ad in the paper from a German charity to help set up a burns hospital in Nepal. It was fated that he should get the job. He sold his house and moved

with his wife and two daughters to Nepal in 1999. He came for two years, but ended up spending nearly nine, helping establish the Sushma Koirala Memorial Burns Hospital in Sankhu and training Nepali doctors and nurses in plastic surgery. There was a conflict going on and they had to treat war wounded from both sides. When the Sankhu Police Station was attacked by

the Maoists, the hospital served as an emergency ward for the sudden rush of wounded. In 2002, a bus travelling on the East-West Highway was firebombed by the Maoists during Tihar 11 years ago this week. Passengers Anju Regmi and her two children were severely burnt and Anju died two agonising weeks later at a hospital in Raxaul. Her husband Bhakta Bahadur, who works as

a forest ranger in Patlaiya, was left to take care of the children Rabina and Rabin. After *Nepali Times* reporter Naresh Newar wrote about them, there was an outpouring of support for the children. The Bright Horizons boarding school offered scholarships and after he read the story, Settje offered to perform extensive reconstructive surgery on

Rabina and Rabin. This week, the sister and brother celebrated Bhai Tika in Patlaiya and it is hard to tell that the two were once so horrifically disfigured. They are doing well in Grades 8 and 9, are self-confident, and are popular with their classmates. The story of the two children was featured in Kesang Tseten's award-winning film, *Frames of War* in 2009.



ANDREAS SETTJE



ANDREAS SETTJE



BHAKTA BAHADUR REGMI

A NEW LIFE: The original story of Rabina and Rabin in *Nepali Times* of 2 December 2002 and the children after the first of many skin graft operations at the Sushma Koirala Memorial Burns Hospital (*left*). On Tuesday, Rabina and Rabin pose after celebrating Bhai Tika at their home in Patlaiya (*above*). Andreas Settje (*below, right*) and his team performing reconstructive surgery on an ex-Maoist combatant at a field hospital in Kailali (*below, left*).



“The kind of personal satisfaction and sense of achievement I have in Nepal is hard to describe in words,” says Settje, now 53, who was on one of his annual trips back to Nepal last month. But more than the individual cases, he is happy to have helped establish a core group of surgeons and nurses trained in plastic surgery who now work in hospitals all

over Nepal. While performing surgeries in field hospitals, Settje gets translation help from his two daughters who grew up in Sankhu and speak fluent Nepali, as well as his wife Kerstin, who is a nurse. One of Settje’s colleagues, Raju Pandey, has set up Nepal Plastic Surgery Aspatal in Harisiddhi and Niranjan Bista has set up his

own reconstructive health department for reconstructive surgery at Nepal Medical College in Jorpati after specialised training in Germany. Binod Karn now runs a unit for plastic and burn surgery at the Nepalganj Medical College in Kohalpur. Sundesh Maskey runs a similar department at the Kathmandu Medical College. “The skills are important,

but what is more vital is a commitment to the job of healing,” Settje explains. “It is a thankless job because most patients expect to get back to their former selves and that is impossible when wounds are severe.” After finishing at Sushma Koirala, Settje has been involved in ManMayaMed, a charity named after one of his first patients who was so badly burnt that her chin was joined to her chest. The group supports training for Nepali doctors and nurses and has set up a self-help Burn Ladies Group in Sankhu where former burn patients take care of others like them who, besides physical injuries, need psycho-social counseling. A donor community of 5,000

people in Germany raises money for ManMayaMed’s work in Nepal and Settje returns as often as he can for on-the-job training in latest surgery techniques and field camps in western Nepal where he thinks the need is greatest for burns and accident victims. Thirty per cent of burns among women in Nepal is from suicide attempts, five per cent are caused by domestic violence, and the rest are accidents. The incidence of acid attacks on women is also on the rise in the Tarai. There are more female burn patients in Nepal and women need more help because many are stigmatised for being disfigured. The most important part of burn care is immediate treatment, which raises the chances of survival and successful surgery. Settje says his job in Nepal is not finished: “We really need to emphasise fresh burn treatment and to raise the survival rate for those with more than 30 per cent burns.”



ANDREAS SETTJE

THEN AND NOW: Bishnu Lama (*far left*) was severely burnt 12 years ago and now, at age 43, after extensive revision surgery. She is a self-employed mother of two boys.

Man Maya Bastola (*left*) after whom Andreas Settje named his charity for burn victims showed dramatic transformation after reconstructive surgery. Man Maya was burnt when she was five and did not get immediate treatment which led to grotesque contractures. Settje performed 15 operations over two years. She is at the Burns Ladies Group in Sankhu preparing for her SLC.

www.manmayamed.de

nepalitimes.com

A burning problem, #581
Rabina and Rabin in hospital, #124
Segement of *Frames of War*

Is being Christian a crime?

Jagdish Pokhrel, *Setopati*, 6 November

सेतोपाटी

It's a common characteristic among Nepalis to insult or condemn those whose beliefs don't line up with ours. In politics, the NC criticises the Maoists, the Maoists scorn the UML, republicans tackle the royalists, and the royalists disparage the republicans. Similarly, many so-called experts have not shied away from making cowardly remarks about minority religions like Christianity, just because they follow a different belief system.

Today, Hinduism and Islam are gaining popularity in America and Europe. There is at least one masjid in all 50 states. If tomorrow temples are built in every state, would the Americans stop working and start engaging in rabid discussions of such matters? Probably not because



unlike us, they do not waste their time gossiping. Only in a country where there is more talk less action, is there so much drama surrounding 'indigenous' and 'foreign' religions and ethnicities. No wonder we are so far behind in terms of development.

In Nepal there is always a lingering accusation that Christianity is funded and promoted solely by foreigners. Such allegations are baseless. Yes, many churches receive donations from abroad, but if we look more closely, foreign money is involved in every tiny detail of our lives. From the food we eat, to the cars and motorbikes we drive, the wrist watches we wear, computers we use, none of them are domestically made. When food is distributed

in famine-struck districts like Karnali, international aid is involved. There is no political party in the country that doesn't receive donation from other nations. We are so quick to describe Christianity as a 'foreign' religion, but how often do we wear Nepal-made daura-suruwal, gunyo-cholo or ethnic dresses? And should we just discard everything because they come from abroad?

As long as Nepal does not become politically and economically stable, it will continue to be dependent on foreign help for even the most basic needs. This is not just the predicament of Christians, but of the entire country.

Christianity is seen as the main culprit in turning Nepal from a Hindu state to a secular one. Perhaps we Christians should be happy about this, as we are being credited for something we did not do. Even when Nepal was a Hindu kingdom, Christians never made the demand for secularism. We never organised any protests or called for bandas. Secularism is one of the most important pillars of a republican nation and we support it whole-heartedly. But we also know that just a mere tag is not going to end the intolerance or solve the problems that we face in our day-to-day lives.

In a truly secular country, there is a deeply embedded respect for diversity and multiple cultures and beliefs. Nepal is a Hindu-majority country, so naturally a lot of our customs and practices are still heavily influenced by Hinduism. The president attends Bhote Jatra, but not Eid or Christmas celebrations. The longest holiday in the year is also a Hindu festival. Many temples across the country are supported by state funds. Yet, some Hindus want the entire constitution to be written in their name. Is this not extremism?

It is human nature to make mistakes. Christians are guilty of making errors, even Hindus have their weakness. Thus, it is my humble request to everybody to not pick on one particular group. If any accusations made against us can be proved, we are willing to rectify them immediately. But we cannot accept the Taliban-style culture of suppressing religious minorities and not letting the number of churches or Christians grow and prosper. We live in a democratic society and everyone is free to choose his or her religion. Not allowing a person to do so is a severe violation of human rights.

Back to square zero



federalism, they should get it.

Major political parties are pushing the federalism agenda as if it is a magic wand that will solve all of Nepal's problems? What are your views?
KC: Suddenly the debate is centred on ethnicity-based federalism, but they don't reflect what the people really want. The whole uproar surrounding federalism has already done much harm by stoking communal violence. Yet certain political leaders continue to drive forward their agendas without consulting the people's representatives. They seem least bothered that local elections haven't taken place in 16 years and are fine just hiding behind the federalism mask. They still want power concentrated in the centre.

So are regional and ethnic identities not important?
Sahani: Both identities are necessary, but it is all about how we manage them. Right now, federalism is inevitable for Nepal, although there are many who oppose it on principle. Regarding the country's future, it is not federalism but people's awareness on key national issues that will decide how Nepal will fare.

Interview with Chitra Bahdur KC, chairman of Rashtriya Janamorcha, and political analyst Dil Sahani.
BBC Nepali, 2 November



Why are you opposed to federalism?
Chitra Bahadur KC: Federalism is impractical in Nepal's context because the administrative costs of sustaining such a system will simply be too high. It is strange how suddenly everyone is forcing the federalism agenda and people's representatives are now required to write a constitution within the frameworks of federalism.

Dil Sahani: If the Nepalis want

How do you think the federalism debate will pan out in CA-2?
Sahani: Parties are driven by their personal short-term gains rather than the spirit of nation building, so we can expect a lot of disagreements on the assembly floor, but we cannot take the next big leap without embracing federalism. In the end, regardless of how we decide to govern the country it is the leadership that matters.

“We don’t want charity CA seats”



Outline News Service, 3 November

Interview with CPN-M Chairman Mohan Baidya.

Outline News Service: The government is ready to mobilise the army. Do you think polls will be held on 19 November?
Mohan Baidya: Mobilising the army just to hold elections means that the parties have failed at politics.

But the government and parties seem very sure of elections taking place on time. What will you do?
We will boycott it, as will the people. We will not let it be successful.

We are with the people and we will always be amongst them. I don't know who is giving you these misleading reports.

The state says it is capable of taking your party under control if the situation gets out of hand. The media keeps on saying that the government is taking us seriously and that they are taking extra precautions, but we're not quick to believe any of this.

The parties seem willing to accommodate the CPN-M by offering readymade seats in the second CA? What are your thoughts?
Rubbish. It's wrong and childish to make such proposals. We won't accept it because we are not into politics for charity CA seats. We are fighting for justice for the people. If we wanted seats we would have fielded candidates.

Ministers are saying that instead of inciting violence like criminals, you would have gone to the people if you were a political party.
The ones who underestimate the people always say such things. They only want to impose their ideals on others. We are carrying the people's agenda and our popularity is growing every day.

Will you only boycott or also disrupt?
The people will do what they desire. We will boycott peacefully. But the people are angry and they may disrupt it.

Your cadre have been attacking candidates. Have you lost faith in the rule of law?
We believe in the rule of law. It is the four-party syndicate who made illegal amendments to the constitution. Why did they submit the executive to the judiciary? They have trampled democratic principles. The people are angry about this, that's why these incidents have occurred.

Are you planning to go underground?



India sends spacecraft to Mars.
Pushpa Kamal Dahal: Can you send a spacecraft to Nepal? I am sick of travelling in helicopters for the election campaign.

कारोबार Rabi Mishra in *Karobar*, 7 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ Elections will happen because the international powers want it. ”
Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar of the MJF-L speaking at a campaign rally in Sunsari, quoted in Ujyalo FM, 5 November

Jagdish Ghimire, 68



The death of noted Nepali author Jagdish Ghimire on 30 October has left a void in the world of Nepali literature and rural development.

Ghimire and his wife Durga devoted their lives to the upliftment, enlightenment, and healthcare of their Ramechhap district through the Tamakosi Sewa Samiti they helped set up. Ghimire studied and worked abroad, had good prospects to rise up the ranks of international development organisations, but decided to come back not just to Nepal, but go back to his beloved Manthali of Ramechhap.

Ghimire always loved literature and had written plays and poems, but it was after he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a rare form of blood cancer, eight years ago that he blossomed and excelled as a writer. In constant pain despite the metal spinal brace he had to wear and in need of frequent treatment in Nepal and

abroad, Ghimire took to pouring out his soul through two path-breaking and award-winning books that took Nepali literature by storm. It was as if he knew his time was limited and needed to finish it all before he left us.

His special bond with Ramechhap and the Tama Kosi River that flows through it is evident in his book *Anatarmanko Yatra* (Journey of the Conscience) in which he wrote about his life, his work in community development, and fight with cancer. The book won him the prestigious Madan Puraskar in 2010. 'Immerse my ashes in Manthali, the land of my ancestors where Tama Kosi meets Sukajor,' he wrote in his book.

He gave up his job in a development agency in the UK to return to his village in Ramechhap which he wanted to develop as a model for other districts in the country. Ironically, the man who set up a

district hospital that provided affordable and quality healthcare to the poor of Ramechhap was himself struck down at age 68, when he was at the peak of his creative energy.

Antarmanko Yatra is a memoir a tale of life and death, but his last book, *Sakas* (Agony) is written in the throes of anguish. The author's pain transmits itself in his writing as the country's torturous history and the centuries of hardships that Nepalis have suffered. It is a historical novel, that tells the tale through fictitious characters who are constantly tortured by factual rulers, landlords, masters, and overlords.

Jagdish Ghimire set through words the outlines for his society's transformation. It is only when we know our past and learn from its mistakes, that we can chart out a just future. Till then, our consciences should not rest, just like Ghimire's didn't. *Kunda Dixit*

Inger Lissanevitch, 85

Inger Lissanevitch, 85, passed away in her apartment in Bhaktapur on Monday afternoon. Inger was the widow of Boris, the Russian émigré who opened Nepal's first hotel in 1951.

The Danish met Boris at his 300 Club in Kolkata in the late 1940s. They were married in Copenhagen in December 1948 and returned immediately to India. In 1951, they relocated to Kathmandu following the downfall of the Rana regime and the return from exile of their friend, King Tribhuvan.

Boris opened The Royal Hotel in what is now the Election Commission offices in central Kathmandu. He persuaded Tribhuvan to issue the first tourist visas to Nepal and played host to a range of famous mountaineers and dignitaries and even orchestrated the state visit of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip to Nepal in 1961.

While Boris - who was

more than 20 years her senior - pursued his ever-fanciful business interests, Inger looked after their four children and was popular with the hotel's guests, including author Han Suyin, whose novel, *The Mountain is Young* featured a character based on her, in which she was described as a 'Nordic goddess'.

"In the 15 years we have been married, I have only spent two evenings alone with him," she told author Michel Peissel for his memoir-cum-biography of Boris, *Tiger for Breakfast*.

Inger played another important role in the day-to-day running of the family and hotel: that of Boris's long-suffering accountant. "He was a terrible businessman," she told me in an interview in 2011, "he didn't think about money at all, so that was left to me." Her affection for her husband was impossible to dispute, however, and was rivalled only by that which she felt for her beloved Kathmandu.



After Boris' passing in 1985, Inger continued to live in Nepal and after suffering a robbery, moved to Bhaktapur. She preferred the comparatively

quiet atmosphere there to the bustle of the capital, where the rapid, unplanned urbanisation of the city left her pining for the intricate Newari architecture that had once dominated the city.

In the final years of her life, Inger lived independently with the care of architect Rabindra Puri, who she became friends with in 2002. She described Puri as 'the second most fascinating man I've ever met' - after Boris of course - and it was with his family and her friends that she spent the evening of Laxmi Puja at a private party in Bhaktapur.

She died of a suspected stroke the following day. Inger is survived by her three sons: Mishka, Alexander, and Nicolas and their families. She was cremated at Pashupatinath on Thursday.

Colin Cooper

A memorial service will be held at the British cemetery in Lainchour on Sunday at 3pm.

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Moderate Hardliners vs Hardline Moderates

The sky is dark with parachutists descending on Kathmandu for the election story and some of you have been asking the Ass off the record whether there will be polls next week. My answer has been a categorical “yes and no”. Others ask if there will be mayhem, my emphatic reply is “maybe”. And some of you want to know whether if it is safe to eat the momos and my answer to that is: “Only if you boil the buffalo first.” There are lots of rumours flying around and Ass’ advice is to believe all gossip until it is proven that they are only half true.

One conspiracy theory that is gaining currency is that The Cash is actually instigating The Dash to try to disrupt the elections and have them postponed because Awesome has a bad feeling about it. He has started seeing ass-trologers (not me) and wearing strange rings and lockets. But even if the boycott and sabotage by Hyphen Maoists doesn’t scuttle polls, the Bracket Maoists feel they will benefit if there is a low turnout. How they came up with that conclusion we don’t know, but the idea may be that only battle-hardened ex-gorillas will go out and vote if pressure cookers and



BRIG SAMACHAR

plumbing pipes start showing up at voting booths on 11/19.

The clincher was Bijay Gachhadar who didn’t even see the irony of what he was saying when he told a rally in Sunsari this week: “The election will happen because the international community is determined to have it.” Oh yes? And not because Nepalis want it?

Some of this is not just in the realm of rumours. The National Investigation Bureau (our version of the NSA) has presented CJ KRR with an assessment in which it concludes that Unserer Fuhrer is out to sabotage elections on some pretext or other. The reason Awesome is feeling

awful these days is that there is low turnout and feeble applause at his rallies no matter how many marigold garlands he is bedecked in. This is not surprising since he has been literally using gallows humour by saying he is willing to get himself hanged and in the same breath confessing that his real ambition is to install himself as executive president after the new constitution is written, or when Ram Burrun retires, whichever comes first. But what really gets PKD’s goat is when BRB is greeted with more applause than him.

The two are on their East-West Highway campaign run this week and the idea is to declare a serial bund on the country’s main transportation artery before the Dashies get

a chance to inflict a 10-day nationwide shutdown next week. The Mechi-Mahakali Highway Campaign sounded great when it was conceived by party strategists in Kathmandu, but it seems to have backfired somewhat on the ground because everyone who is stuck in the monstrous traffic jams has been cursing the organisers. By promoting itself in the Tarai as the party that is solidly for autonomy for the Madhes, the Cash is seeking to compensate for the loss of votes in the midhills. However, the campaign rallies are held in highway towns where there are large concentrations of hill migrants who are not so hot on autonomy for those south of the East-West Highway.

The Homely Minister’s unconvincing answers and attempt to pass the buck in an interview on BBC Nepali this week proved that the govt has no plans at all on how to deal with strikers next week. Gimme Ray’s answer when asked what the police would do when the Dash start cremating buses: “The people will resist.” Gubberment is spooked by the threats from the Hyphen wallahs, but the breakaway faction is also in a disarray as election day

approaches since it looks like the 10-day strike and the boycott call is going to be counter-productive. Terror tactics may scare some of the people some of the time, but bunds tend to fizzle out after Day Two. Baidya Ba aka Kiran Kaka has now started thinking about the existential crisis that is going to hit him post-election. He was tempted to agree to Awesome’s offer of 26 nominated seats in the new CA, but Big Plop wouldn’t hear any of it. In fact the rift between the moderate hardliners and the hardline hardliners is now reaching a breaking point. This is going to be a national crisis: what are we going to name the faction of the Dash that breaks off? Confused? Flummoxed? Don’t worry, none of us can make any head or tail of it either. But here is a short and handy guide to the various Maoist faxons:

- Cash (Prachandra)
- Dash (Baidya Ba)
- Gash (Big Plop)
- Crash (CP)
- Rash (Pra-cash)
- Brash (Baburam)
- Hash (Hisila)
- Gnash (Narankaji)
- Lash (Lilamani)
- Mash (Bina Magar)
- Sash (Sita)

The Ass



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