

# NEPALI Times

#685

13 - 19 December 2013

20 pages

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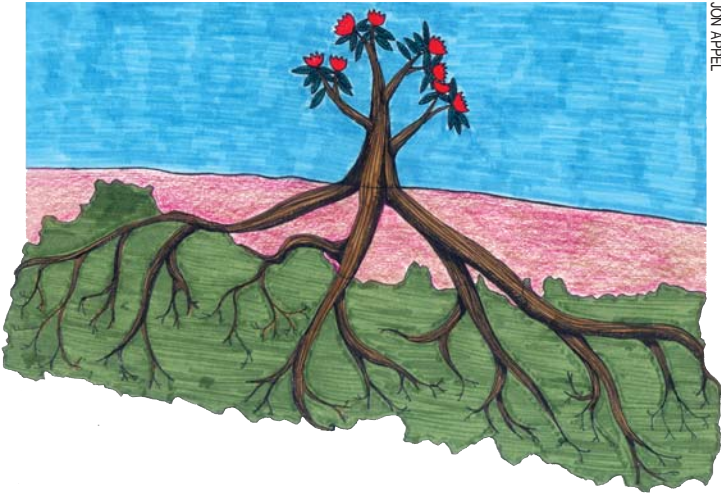
THE ROOTS OF DEMOCRACY

It took only a few years after the first people’s movement in 1990 for quarrelsome political leaders to get bogged down with greed. The rot started at the top, but at the grassroots democracy was taking root. Local elections were guaranteeing accountable local leaders who had to perform to get re-elected and to rise up the ranks to national politics. The Decentralisation and Local Self Governance Act of 1998 wasn’t perfect, but it empowered elected local bodies and institutionalised the political authority of VDCs, DDCs, and municipalities.

Like politics, all governance is local. The success stories of the past two decades all happened because communities were democratically empowered. Community forestry wouldn’t have taken off without local democracy. The result actually changed Nepal’s midhill landscape (see page 16-17). Grassroots democracy is not possible without participation, which is not possible without communication, and Nepal’s community radio revolution dovetailed ideally with grassroots democracy. When given command over their own destiny, elected local bodies have successfully protected their forests, managed schools and health-posts, repaired bridges and trails, and built their own microhydro plants.

What happened after 1996 is a part of the fateful dismantling of local democracy by the insurgent Maoists who saw it as a threat to their armed struggle. By the time the conflict ended in 2006, nearly all the 4,000 VDC buildings across Nepal had been physically destroyed, many elected representatives were killed, others fled to the cities.

Another threat to local democracy came from national democratic leaders themselves. Since the 1997 local elections had been swept by the UML. When the time came in 2002 for the next local polls, the NC Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba used the excuse of the war to cancel them and he refused to legally extend their term. It was a blunder



JON APPEL

The people have understood the link between grassroots democracy and development, most politicians still haven’t

that cost the country dearly and together with the conflict pushed the country’s development back by decades.

Ever since, Local Development Officers and bureaucrats appointed by Kathmandu have been running local councils. Since 2008, the ruling parties set up a ‘four-party mechanism’ to oversee local development and the VDCs and DDCs were soon infected with the corrosive and corrupt politics at the centre. Forestry user groups and school committees are now politically polarised. In the absence of elected municipal councils, Nepal’s cities are bursting at the seams with unplanned growth, crumbling infrastructure, mountains of garbage,

and rivers that have turned into sewers.

The reason everyone has been reluctant to go for local elections is because of the fear of losing. But after the November’s CA election, there is new interest among the UML and NC. There is nothing to prevent local elections from being held by April, the Election Commission says it can do it with electronic voting.

The Himalmedia Public Opinion Survey in May showed people are dissatisfied with the prolonged absence of local representatives. Asked when there should be new local elections, nearly half the respondents said ‘right away’. The people have understood the relationship between local democracy and development, most politicians still haven’t.

The Maoists, still smarting from their humiliating defeat, should see local elections as a chance to redeem some of their lost support. By eschewing violence and projecting itself as a party of change, local polls can be a golden opportunity for the former revolutionaries.

Politics abhors a vacuum and it is time to fill the void at the local level so that the engine of development can be kickstarted after 18 years. The parties are bickering again about whether or not to change the president, but announcing local elections should be the new parliament’s first order of business.

At the village or district level, it doesn’t really matter which party a candidate belongs to, as the best and most honest managers get the job. Local development can decentralise decision-making, spur local development, create jobs in agriculture and infrastructure, improve services, reduce urban pressure, and most of all improve the lives of the majority of Nepalis who live in rural areas. We just have to make sure that local councils are more inclusive than they were in the 1990s and truly representative of Nepal’s diversity in order to give hitherto neglected communities a say.

ON THE WEB

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TWO DECADE DETOUR

This editorial could/should have been written six years ago (‘The two decade detour’, #684). The focus on drafting a new constitution has been a white elephant and always secondary to nation development. Healthcare, water, electricity, infrastructure, education, employment should have been the top priorities for the first Maoist government and those who followed. But the Nepali people allowed their rulers to ride roughshod over all aspects of democracy and development with power politics, multiple prime ministers, bandas, and blanket impunity. The elected politicians are to blame, but a great deal of accountability must go to the ‘people’ who stood by idly and let it happen.

Flexibility1

Why just two decades? Why not start counting from BP Koirala’s time? It’s been a lost century for Nepal.

AP

More than a detour, it has been two decades of wavering. Ever since the monarchy was abolished and the country adopted a democratic system of governance, we have been pushed into a vortex of political and economic chaos. The prime responsibility of a political group attempting to change a system of governance is to first give concrete shape to the new form of governance. In the case of Nepal, the pro-changers bought down the old system without carefully thinking about what to replace it with. Both the

ultra-left and the moderate splinter groups ruled the country in phases and made lofty promises of drafting a new constitution. But in practice, they worked - deliberately or inadvertently - against it, thus drifting from the main goal of giving a constitution to the country.

On the economic front, the country has slipped badly from its six-seven per cent growth rate over the years. The major challenge before the newly elected CA is to set up a well-defined constitution and usher in rapid economic growth with greater focus on infrastructure building while maintaining a balance between development and environment.

Ashok Mishra

Since the people have put their faith on the Nepali Congress, it deserves to lead the government. Two decades ago, the NC did a good job on the economic front, but that also led to widespread abuse of power and blatant corruption. Over the years, the NC and UML became the worst symbols of a democratic system. That was the reason why the country lost two decades in the wilderness and why the Maoists won a large number of seats in 2008. We don’t want to go back to those days. A clean government is the need of the hour and we have Sushil Koirala, one of the cleanest political personalities at the moment. He should pick leaders like Gagan Thapa so as to remain faithful to the people’s mandate.

Kamal Kishor

We must find a way to detach the economy from politics. As long as we have a vibrant economy and the power, privileges, and perks of the politicos drastically curtailed, it will not matter to common people who warms the PM and president’s chairs.

Jwahaar Talchabhadell

BEHAVE

Yes, the poll results are a clear rejection of the Maoist party and I would argue much of its agenda (‘Behave yourselves’, Bihari K Shrestha, #684). The people preferred the more balanced federalism model proposed by the two mainstream parties, particularly the NC, which has from day one opposed the naked power grab by the Maobadi and Madhesbadi parties in the name of ethnic federalism. The votes received by the UML (and to an extent the RPP) are also indicative of a rejection of the politics of communalism practiced by the the UCPN (M) and its Madhesi allies. Too much change was forced down the throats of Nepalis too quickly and the people decided they wanted change at their own pace.

AD

OBAMACARE

Nepal does not need Obamacare or a universal insurance policy (‘Bringing Obamacare to Nepal’, Buddha Basnyat, #684). Many Nepalis still have to travel for days just to get an x-ray done, or spend thousands hiring an ambulance to get to a tertiary centre because the district hospital does not have enough oxygen bottles. Therefore, our

government should focus on repairing existing infrastructure, building new ones, and ensuring they are well-equipped and run by competent professionals. Also a lot of the money earmarked for healthcare is being wasted due to corruption and an inefficient system. First let’s work on utilising this money properly and then we can talk about amendments to the health policy.

Abhishesh Wagle

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is barely an epitome of healthcare legislation. There are people on both sides of the aisle who think this bill is anything but potent, yes Democrats too, in solving the US healthcare crisis. ACA is definitely a step in the right direction, but barely a model that other countries should look up to. After all, the initial plan when the first legislation was put to the House of Representatives, was for the act to be a single care provider, meaning government provided healthcare for all, like Medicare and Medicaid. Of course, this was before the insurance companies started writing the bill for ‘the people’ and influencing key lawmakers. So Dr Basnyat, please don’t advocate a half-baked, watered down legislation to the Nepali populace with no real solution. Dream big and go single-payer.

John

For universal healthcare, Nepal needs to look to European, Southeast Asian, and Australian models. The US system is too fragmented.

Sant

RUBY IN THE ROUGH

The double standards against women are so deeply rooted in our society that it will take a long time to eradicate them (‘Ruby in the rough’, Mallika Aryal, 684). Having said that, it is really inspiring that women like Ruby Khan are breaking the mould and standing up for women’s rights. I think it’s high time for our society to realise that a woman’s place is not only limited to the kitchen and that they can be equally competent as men. Breaking age old stereotypes will be difficult, but with individuals like Ruby leading the way, there is a silver lining.

Isha Thapa

CORRECTION

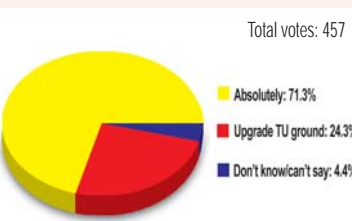
In ‘Himalayan myth busters’ (Kunda Dixit, #684), reference to the Mohonk conference erroneously said it took place in Canada. Mohonk is actually in upstate New York.



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #685

Q. Do you think it's time to build a new national cricket stadium?



Weekly Internet Poll # 686. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Will women make up 33 per cent of the new CA?



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# Dahal's political harakiri

Pushpa Kamal Dahal is digging a big hole for himself by rejecting the election outcome

It has been two weeks since my last fortnightly column in this paper in which I pointed out the political immaturity of the UCPN (M) and its need to snap out of it. There is nothing new to report on that score, the party is still in deep denial.

The Maoists stubbornly refuse to concede defeat and to take moral responsibility for the poor showing. This individualist decision is intended to keep Pushpa Kamal Dahal immune from taking responsibility for the setback and the threat to boycott the CA is an effort to distract attention from having to resign as party head.

Other defeated Maoist leaders have also joined in the bandwagon and are accusing the Army, the Election Commission, and even India of rigging the polls and alleging dark conspiracies. A majority of the top leaders have

not yet dared to defy the erroneous decision of the party for fear of exclusion from the list of seats for proportional representation. Only a few leaders, who had not actively engaged in elections and not enlisted for the proportional quotas, have been resisting the series of wrong decisions of the party leadership.

To cover up for his party's defeat, Dahal constituted a probe committee, but who did he get to lead it? Barshaman Pun, a longtime loyalist who himself suffered a humiliating defeat in the direct election. This was obviously not going to be a credible investigation, it would just endorse whatever Dahal has decided as his next course of action.

As expected, Pun's probe commission simply seconded Dahal's allegations of an election that was "institutionally, structurally, and methodically" rigged. The whole idea is for Dahal to blame anyone but himself for his party's election debacle. However, no one really believed the Pun commission, so the UCPN (M) is now demanding an independent commission to investigate alleged cheating in the polls.



It is obvious to everyone what Dahal is doing and what is surprising is that the chairman doesn't realise that people see through his strategy of diverting attention from his party's dismal performance under his leadership. Dahal knows all too well that the clamour could grow for his resignation and to take responsibility for his failure of leadership. There is a precedent here, when the UML lost in the 2008 election, Madhav Kumar Nepal took responsibility and stepped down. Dahal can't afford to do that since it would mean his nemesis, Baburam Bhattarai, would then become more powerful than him.

The Constituent Assembly has a court designed specifically to investigate allegations of cheating by parties who have evidence of serious irregularities. And if the parties are still not satisfied, a commission can be formed to look into all matters relating to the CA election. It is surprising that without exhausting all these options, the UCPN (M) has decided to stall the entire proceedings of the Constituent Assembly. This is cynical, irresponsible, and outrageous. It shows that the Maoists are still not comfortable with the democratic way of doing things.

The latest is that the Maoists have threatened not to send in the list of PR candidates to the Election Commission until an independent commission is set up to probe poll irregularities. Moreover, it has initiated talks with other regional and ethnic parties who also fared badly in polls to form a political front. If the UCPN (M) commits more follies like these it risks being further marginalised.

The best course of action for Dahal & Co would be to graciously accept the party's defeat, analyse the reasons why it happened, correct those mistakes in the future through parliament and the constitution-writing process. After all, just like there are no permanent enemies in a democracy, there is no such thing as political harakiri. Leaders can always live to win another day. 🇳🇵

Muma Ram Khanal was a central member of the Maoist party during the conflict. His column, Inside Out, appears fortnightly in Nepali Times.

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# A Nepali Nelson

The wait for our own Madiba is going to be a long and grueling one

As the world mourned the death of former South African President and anti-apartheid crusader Nelson Mandela, many Nepalis silently wondered when we are going to have a leader like him. If the events of the past month are anything to go by, then the wait for our own Madiba is going to be a long and grueling one.



HERE WE GO  
Trishna Rana

There was a nagging sense of déjà vu this week as the Election Commission was forced to postpone the dates for parties to submit their final proportional representation list at the behest

of the Nepali Congress. Memories of the multiple, unsuccessful extensions to the previous Constituent Assembly and delays in holding polls still rankle. Sticking to deadlines has never been a strong suit of our political leadership and old habits die hard.

The eight day extension can be excused as a minor hitch if we look at the bigger picture. However, if our newly elected representatives were serious about respecting the 'people's mandate' they should have had their party lists ready by Tuesday. From the time the last CA was dissolved to 19 November polls, they had 18 months to prepare it. The wrangling within the NC and other parties over who gets to



NIMESH RAI/KANTIPUR

sit in the assembly should have taken place months ago. Yes, no one could have predicted the exact number of PR seats, but a little foresight and better decision-making by the top

leadership and the new CA could have conducted its first session before the new year.

For their part, the first and second runner ups – UML and UCPN (M) – seem

**TIME'S UP:** Leaders of the major parties during the High Level Political Committee meeting at the Peace Secretariat office in Babarmahal on Wednesday. Since they could not reach an agreement, there will be another round of discussions on Saturday morning.

unwilling to budge unless their individual demands are met even if it means needlessly prolonging CA proceedings and the formation of a new government. When a provision in the interim constitution says that the president and the vice-president will remain in office until the new constitution is drafted, the UML's insistence on having new faces for these ceremonial posts is petty. If the UML is really in a hurry to see one of its own in Shital Niwas, then it is in the party's best interest to get the constitution out of the BICC hall within the one-year deadline.

And the longer the Maoists cry foul, the more their demand for an independent probe committee looks like a strategic ploy to save face and avoid coming to terms with their embarrassing defeat. The UCPN (M) calling for a constitutional amendment to make consensus politics a mandatory provision, on the other hand, shows a complete lack of faith in other parties and a deep seated fear of being left behind.

However, this provision will lead to further obstruction in the assembly because each ruling will require the approval of all forces and thorny issues like federalism would never be passed by the floor. Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Co would do well to remember that if they keep stalling the CA forming process, the people will run out of patience and in future elections the Maoists might not be able to muster even the 80 seats that they won this time.

Nepalis showed up at polling booths in record numbers in November not because they were worried about state structure and federalism, but because they wanted a stable government that would look after their day-to-day needs and deliver on development and basic services.

Let's not delude ourselves. Our leaders will never be the statesman that Nelson Mandela was, a man with a strategic national vision, but willing to compromise and take everyone along. The least they can do now is to end this seven-year long, messy transition by relieving the chief justice of his duties, setting up a new cabinet, and letting the 601 CA members begin their job.

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# Innovation and inequality



STEFANO SCARPETTA

Even while many developing and emerging economies lifted millions of people out of extreme poverty, the perception that growth meant greater inequality was always bubbling below the surface. But now increasingly persistent unemployment and under-employment are giving new impetus to the rise in inequality, as the OECD reported to the G-20 in July.

Indeed, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, youth unemployment now averages 16 per cent in advanced countries and exceeds 40 per cent in some European countries. As a result, the challenge of inclusive growth has moved to the top of the global economic-policy agenda.

It is often said, for good reason, that the widening income

gap largely reflects technological change, which has drained many economies of blue and even white-collar jobs, while channeling the fruits of improved productivity to high-skilled elites. But the digital revolution can also enable inclusive growth. Internet applications and other communication advances are spreading knowledge and information to millions of poor people.

Improved labour-market efficiency is another piece of the solution. In many countries with high jobless rates, employers cannot find people with the right qualifications. The solution is twofold: better market information and better connections between the world of education and the world of work. That is why it is critical for countries to invest in high-quality schools that provide ample career-related guidance and

counseling so that a successful school-to-work transition can start when tomorrow's workers are young.

While most countries aspire to move toward a 'knowledge society', this should not mean downplaying technical and vocational education. On the contrary, advanced economies need many skills and high-quality technical education, especially if followed by effective apprenticeship programs, can create smooth transitions from school to work. Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and other developed countries are rightly praised for this. Germany's youth unemployment rate is under eight per cent and a steady supply of skilled labour helps to sustain the country's success as an exporter.

To be sure, this model cannot be adopted in every country – for one thing, it requires a high degree of trust between labour and management. But some practices can be modified for use elsewhere. The G-20 countries have recently adopted comprehensive guidelines for quality apprenticeships; each member country should adopt the most appropriate strategy within this broad framework.

There are many innovative approaches to sharing growth more equally. But they all point to a fundamental truth: if young people and the disadvantaged are to find satisfying and rewarding jobs, governments, employers, educational institutions, and civil-society groups all have an important role to play. Our economies' long-term sustainability depends on it. [www.project-syndicate.org](http://www.project-syndicate.org)

## EVEREST BANK BIZ BRIEFS

### Rise of silver

Lalitpur Handcraft Association (LHA) organised the first ever 'Silver Jewellery Day' on Thursday. The one-day expo supported by GIZ featured two dozen stalls and also had live demonstrations of silver jewellery production process. During the press meet, the organisers stressed the importance of such events to highlight and promote the silver handicrafts industry of Nepal.

"The demand for Nepal-made silver jewellery is on the rise, especially in the European market," said Juni Bajra Bajracharya, the general secretary of LHA. "Thus, it holds immense export potential," he added. Silver jewellery is one of the major exported handicrafts of Nepal. But slow production process has resulted in failure to meet surging demands.

### Star date

HH Bajaj launched its new 'Meet and Greet Paras' campaign on Monday. As part of the campaign, buyers of Bajaj Pulsar bike will receive an invitation to spend quality with the captain of Nepali cricket team, Paras Khadka.



### New wheel

Syakar Trading announced the winner of its Honda Lifestyle Upgrade offer on Tuesday. Asha Thapa of Bhairahawa won the bumper prize: a BRIO car.

### US bound

Qatar Airways announced its seventh gateway to the USA. The airline which currently operates flights to four US cities-Houston, New York, Washington DC and Chicago- from Doha will fly to Dallas from July. Earlier in the year the airline announced its plans to fly to two other US destinations- Philadelphia and Miami from next year.



### Sweet treats

Gulab Sweets, one of India's largest sweets' brand, has opened its first outlet in Kathmandu. Gulab Sweets and Restaurant in Sundhara serves more than 100 varieties of mithais and snacks according to the press release. The restaurant also offers North Indian, South Indian, Chinese and Continental cuisine.

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# (Mis) interpreting the mandate



The losers in the polls are asking the winners to ignore the results and accept the agenda that was rejected by a majority of Nepalis

Imagine this scenario: the UCPN (Maoist), most Madhesi parties, and recent Janajati-centric political parties got 371 seats in the Constituent Assembly election (the combined strength of the Nepali Congress and UML and without



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Damakant Jayshi**

including their share of the 26 nominees). It would be close to two-thirds majority in a 601-member assembly or even better than that.

Now imagine the thoroughly trounced NC and UML saying a) though we lost, our agendas have not been defeated, b) we will not accept a federalism model other than the one that we mentioned in our manifestos, c) we demand an amendment to the interim constitution to remove the option of taking decisions based on majority votes if the consensus fails and we will not recommend the names of our members under the proportional representation system unless our demands are met.

Let us not try to pretend anymore what the mandate means and what it does not. *Nepali Times* published multiple surveys since 2008

in which respondents across the country rejected the federal model proposed by the UCPN (M), the Madhesi parties, and later Janajati groups (the last of which actually split from their parties on the question of single ethnicity-based federation). Some political parties and pundits chose to ignore and dismiss those polls. Now that election results have backed the survey results, these very people are attempting to explain why they voted the way they did.

Basically, the NC and UML are being asked to disrespect the mandate and accept the demands of the parties that fared poorly and whose agenda has been rejected by a majority of the people. Both these parties have stood firm against any kind of arm-twisting. But if they resort to uncalled for compromises, there is no doubt they will get a severe drubbing in the next election.

Except for those who advise the disgruntled parties in

private and write opinions in public, most see this as blatant blackmail by the losers. These parties should be mindful of the precedent they are setting: losers in elections can attempt to hold up the process of government formation.

The election could have been held earlier with the UCPN (M) taking credit for delivering the constitution and formally concluding the peace process. The last occasion for the UCPN (M) to redeem itself was in the final days of the previous CA in May 2012. When different models of federalism failed to break the deadlock in the CA (the last agreed was 11-state proposal to which even the Madhesi parties had agreed, but Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai backed out of it the very next day), the NC and UML suggested two options. Either incorporate all the agreements reached by then and pass the constitution as a work-in-progress or just pass the Preamble of the new constitution and preserve the parliament part of the CA to help conduct government business and hold the new election. Bhattarai who sensed a threat to his government with reports of Mohan Baidya, NC, and UML leaders discussing a no-confidence motion against him, refused both the options and dissolved the assembly half an hour before its extended deadline expired on the midnight of 28 May 2012.

The UCPN (M) missed the boat and it has paid the price. Now it is time to move forward. The work is cut out for the NC and UML to try and accommodate the concerns of the disgruntled parties. It would be generous to offer some government posts to the UCPN (M) and some others, but it's not absolutely necessary.

The two largest parties ought to try for sincere consensus on accommodating the concerns of the Maoists, Madhesi, and Janajati parties on federalism. Since federalism turned out to be such an emotive issue during the last few weeks of the first CA, it requires sensitive handling. Those who want a real federal structure in the country will not settle for a cosmetic arrangement, whatever the new states are called. The more important point is whether there is genuine devolution of power, real decentralisation in terms of resource-mobilisation and sharing, and whether there is a mechanism to prevent the federal government from unnecessarily interfering in the affairs of the state.

All need to show responsibility, keep their partisan interests on hold, and for once think what is best for the country. The coming days will show us if the parties have learnt their lessons. 🇳🇵

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## EVENTS



**WORD WARRIORS LIVE**, poetry by the garden with Kathmandu's best slam poets.

Free entrance, 14 December, 3 to 5pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, [theyellowhouse.com.np/contact.html](http://theyellowhouse.com.np/contact.html)

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

Deadline 31 December, [www.letgirlslead.org](http://www.letgirlslead.org)

**Tree of life**, an exhibition of the paintings on the Mithila cosmos by SC Suman.

Runs till 6 January, 5-30pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal

**Degree maila**, watch this humorous play on contemporary Nepali society.

Runs till 15 December, 4-30pm, except Mondays, Mandala Theatre, Anamnagar, 016924269

**Child and family photography workshop**, learn how to take photos of your child before it grows up. Rs 3,500, 19 to 21 December, 7 to 9-30pm, 9841279544/9841240341

**Bihani film**, watch two films 'Search' and 'Serendipity' by filmmaker Govinda Siwakoti, food and beverage afterwards. Rs 500, 13 December, Nanmlo Gardens Restaurant, Patan

**Seed freedom, food freedom**, a lecture by world-renowned environmental leader and recipient of the Right Livelihood Award Vandana Shiva.

22 December, 3pm, Shanker Hotel, Lajimpat

**Climate+Change**, an awe-inspiring educational science exhibition about climate change and Nepal's Himalaya.

December to April, Nepal Art Council



**SUPER SATURDAY**, table-topping Arsenal visit challengers Manchester City. 13 December, 6pm, Reggae Bar, Thamel

## DINING



**DRAGON CHINESE RESTAURANT**, try the Kung Pao Pork if alone and the Mai Cao if with company. Lakeside, Pokhara

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

**Bubbly Brunch**, the best of the Mediterranean in shawarma and pasta.

Rs 1,100, 11am to 3pm, Shambala Garden and Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat, (01)4412999 ext. 7520, 7515

**Mike's Breakfast**, huge breakfasts and an endless supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting characterise this cafe, popular among tourists and locals alike.

Naxal, (01)4424303

**Tass and Tawa**, savour a wide variety of Nepali meat dishes and reserve your palate for the heavenly Chusta. Pulchowk, Kathmandu

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

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

**Chilly Bar and Restaurant**, quality food and wide selection of drinks with great views of Phewa Lake.

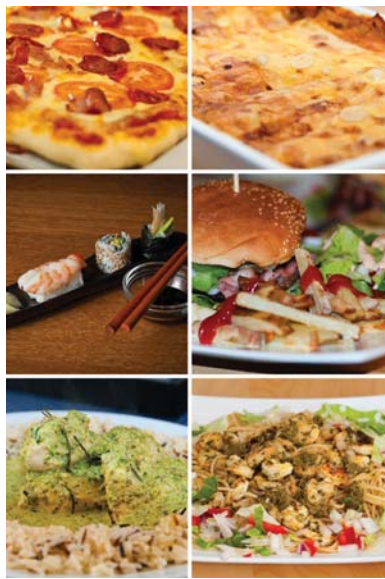
Lakeside, Hallanchok, Pokhara, (061)463614/463163

**Le Sherpa**, past the dustbowl chaos on the road outside is culinary paradise. Panipokhari, Lajimpat

**Falcha**, give yourself away to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab.

Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur

**Club Amsterdam and Café Bar**, great food, exotic cocktails, live band, BBQ, and more. Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)463427



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

## MUSIC

**Starry Night BBQ**, catch Ciney Gurung live as you munch on tenderloin.

Rs 1,499, 7pm onwards, Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat, (01)4412999, Ext. 7520, 7515



**CHRISTMAS JAM**, live concert by Adrian Pradhan and Sabin Rai.

24 December, 6pm onwards, Tamarind Restro, Jhamsikhel & Embassy Restaurant, Panipokhari

**Kripa Unplugged**, young Nepali musicians and seasoned veterans give an acoustic rendition of their favourite songs.

8.30pm and 10.30pm on Saturdays, TTV, [www.youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged](http://www.youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged)

**Shastriya Sangeet**, dabble in the magic of Hindustani classical music every new moon night.

1 January, 3-30pm, Ram Mandir, Battisputali

**Cancion del Mariachi**, listen to latin and gypsy jazz with Monsif Mzibri and Hari Maharjan and drink jugs of sangria. Every Saturday, 7pm onwards, New Orleans Cafe, Jhamsikhel

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The 11th edition of Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival is upon us. Here is a selection of films from the International and Nepali Panorama competitions.

### 13 December MAIN HALL

**11am**, winner of the Why Poverty competition

**12.30pm**, *Sky burial*, dir. Tad Fettig, 12'; *Kamlahari*, dir. Cristoph Schwaiger, 52'

**2.30pm**, *Playing with Nan*, dir. Dipesh Kharel/Asami Saito, 88'

**4.30pm**, *Chasing rainbows*, dir. Sahara Sharma, 88'

# Uphill, downhill

### ANNEX

**12pm**, *The odd sound out*, dir. Pernille Sihm & Idamaria Schouwandreasean, 6.5'; *No place is far away*, dir. Michelle Ibaven, 75'

**2pm**, audio-video presentation by Gerda Pauler on the Great Himalayan Trail

**4pm**, *In the shadow of the sun*, dir. Harry Freeland, 84'

### 14 December MAIN HALL

**11am**, *Life at altitude*, dir. Qiao Yan, 18'; *To sing to live*, dir. Zhao Gang, 62'

**1pm**, *Antim Yatra*, dir. Keshab Pandey, 33'; *Mani*, dir. Ella ChayYin Chi & Sonam Lama, 45'

**3pm**, *When Hari got married*, dir. Ritu Sarin & Tenzing Sonam, 75'

**5pm**, *Red Monsoon*, dir. Eelum Dixit, 88'

### ANNEX

**11.30am**, *A drop of gold*, dir. Christophe Peladen, 11'; *The hanging village*, dirs. Veronique, Anne, and Erik Lapied, 70'

**1.30pm**, *The blinding sunlight*, dir. Yu Liu, 85'

**3.30pm**, *Journey for happiness*, dir. Marie Veno Thesbjerg, 22'; *Breathing the smell of the sky*, dir. Benoit Aymon, 52'

### 15 December MAIN HALL

**11am**, *Himalaya Bhotia between Nepal and Tibet*, dir. Denis Olivier Poulet, 75'

**1pm**, *Lost dreams*, dir. Ankit KC, 6'; *Jhyauli*, dir. Rakesh Kayastha, 30';

*Chora*, dir. Subarna Thapa, 25'

**3pm**, *Memoria*, dir. Elisabet Yr Atladottir, 7'; *Mustang Rising*, dir. Amitabh Subedi, 73'

**5pm**, Closing and prize distribution; *The Epic of Everest*, dir. John Noel, 85'

### ANNEX

**11.30am**, *A new perspective*, dir. Corey Rich, 9'; *The hidden path*, dir. Hossein Jehani, 20'; *86 centimeters*, dir. Tshering Gyelsthen & Peter Burgh, 39'

**1.30pm**, a talk by Stephen Goodwin on mountain tourism journalism

**3pm**, *Loden* – the little monk, dir. Andre Hormann, 25'; *Mission to Caucasus*, dir. Marco Preti, 52'

*11 to 15 December*

*City Hall, Exhibition Road (01)4440635, www.kimff.org*

## Education for peace



For the seventh time, Nepathya is setting off on a nationwide tour to 10 new cities, this time with the aim of voicing the concerns of children.

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|-------------|-----------------------|
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| 16 December | Gularia, Bardiya      |
| 18 December | Lamahi, Dang          |
| 20 December | Abu Khairani, Tanahun |
| 22 December | Myagdi, Beni          |
| 24 December | Gagan Gaunda, Kaski   |
| 29 December | Patan Darbar Square   |

*nepalaya.com.np, (01)4412469/4437893*

## A green Christmas



If Bing Crosby's song 'White Christmas' is hammering in your head this season, look for a green Christmas next week. After all, it's the season to be eco-friendly.

Instead of chopping down fresh pine trees and branches, you can have a small tree in a pot, look after it throughout the year, and then when Christmas finally arrives you already have the habit of making it grow. Or why not follow the tradition in the Philippines where fresh pine trees are too expensive and locals prefer to make decorations out of bamboo stalks and then decorate them with lights?

But, perhaps the best option is to plant poinsettias inside and outside the house, its red petals the perfect symbol of Christmas.

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# THE RED HEADS

The discovery of a new species of vulture has created excitement among conservationists

TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

Last December, 40-year-old Saraswati Rawat was making her daily round of her farm in Dharmapani of Tansen when she stumbled upon an unusual looking nest belonging to a pair of vultures that were unlike any other spotted in the area before. Like most Nepalis, the Rawats considered vultures as harbingers of bad luck and wanted to destroy the nest immediately. Little did they know that their accidental discovery would lead to a breakthrough in the study of vulture conservation in Nepal.

The nest, as a group of ornithologists from Animal Rights Nepal later confirmed, belonged to a pair of red headed vultures, the first recorded sighting of the species in Nepal. For the past year, the team has been studying the behavioural patterns and recording the activities of the two birds through binoculars

and digital cameras. Recently, the experts noticed a different pair of vultures using the same nest which has led them to believe that a significant number of red-headed vultures maybe present in the area.

Locally called soon giddha, the species was historically abundant and found widely across the Indian Subcontinent. However, in recent decades, as with other species of vultures, a sharp decline in its numbers has been reported. In countries like Singapore and China where they were found in large quantities only 30-40 years ago, the red-headed vultures are now extinct.

Among the seven species of vultures found in Nepal, three (oriental white-backed, long-billed, and slender-billed) are listed in the critically endangered list of International Union for Conservation of Nature, the oldest and largest global environmental

organisation.

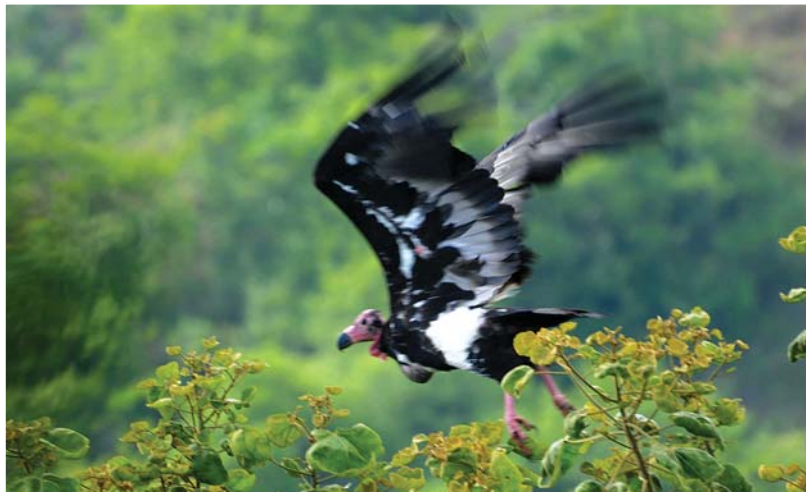
“The discovery of soon giddha in Nepal will lead to greater developments in vulture conservation efforts in the country,” says Krishna Mani Baral, an oncologist with the Animal Rights Nepal team.

Conservation work across the region intensified since 2004 when India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal agreed on the ‘Kathmandu declaration’ and pledged to ban the use of diclofenac, a veterinary steroid commonly used to treat livestock, which was determined as the main cause of death among the birds. In 2006, the Nepali

government also imposed a ban on the manufacturing, sale, and import of the drug. As a supplement to the banned diclofenac, the government permitted the use of Meloxicam.

There are now vulture breeding

centres in three of the eight South Asian countries. Nepal’s progress in safeguarding the birds and their habitats has been particularly impressive. We led the way in establishing community managed provisional vulture safe zones,



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CLIFF BUCKTON

areas that have lower chances of diclofenac poisoning. So far, eleven districts in the country have been declared 'diclofenac free'.

Another unique effort is the 'vulture restaurant' which was started by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) in 2012. The restaurants are basically feeding centres where the birds are given carcasses free of the harmful diclofenac. The centres purchase elderly or sick cows from farmers, look after them, and treat them. Once they die, they are fed to the natural scavengers. Staff say there has been a double-fold increase in the number of vultures within a year ago. Currently, there

are six such restaurants and BCN plans to open more.

Although, they lack the appeal of other mammals and rarely revered in any culture, vultures are essential for our eco-system. Says Baral: "Unfortunately, since they are not naturally attractive birds, the importance of vultures to the environment has been overlooked."

As professional scavengers, vultures play a vital role in aiding nature's sanitation process by consuming dead carcasses. Fewer of these birds mean more food for stray dogs and the improper management of carcasses leads to

an increase in the contamination rate. The decline in vulture population also puts the Buddhist sky burial tradition practiced in some Himalayan communities in jeopardy.

However, the work of organisations like BCN and Animal Rights Nepal provide hope that these beautiful creatures will get a second chance at resurgence. 🇳🇵

[nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

The vultures are circling again, #606  
Circling back, #484  
Soaring again, #286

# Found in Nepal



## HIMALAYAN GRIFFON

Altitude: below 900m to above 5,000 m



## INDIAN VULTURE

(Lamothunde Giddha)  
Critically endangered  
Recently discovered in Nepal (Nawalparasi), population status and distribution not known



## LAMMERGEIER

Altitude: rare below 1,000m and normally resides above 2,000m



## RED-HEADED VULTURE

(Sun Giddha)  
Critically endangered  
Altitude: below 3,100m



## WHITE-RUMPED VULTURE

(Dangar Giddha)  
Critically endangered  
Altitude: widespread below 1,000m and up to 3,100m during summer



## EGYPTIAN VULTURE

(Seto Giddha)  
Endangered  
Altitude: below 915m and found up to 3,810m



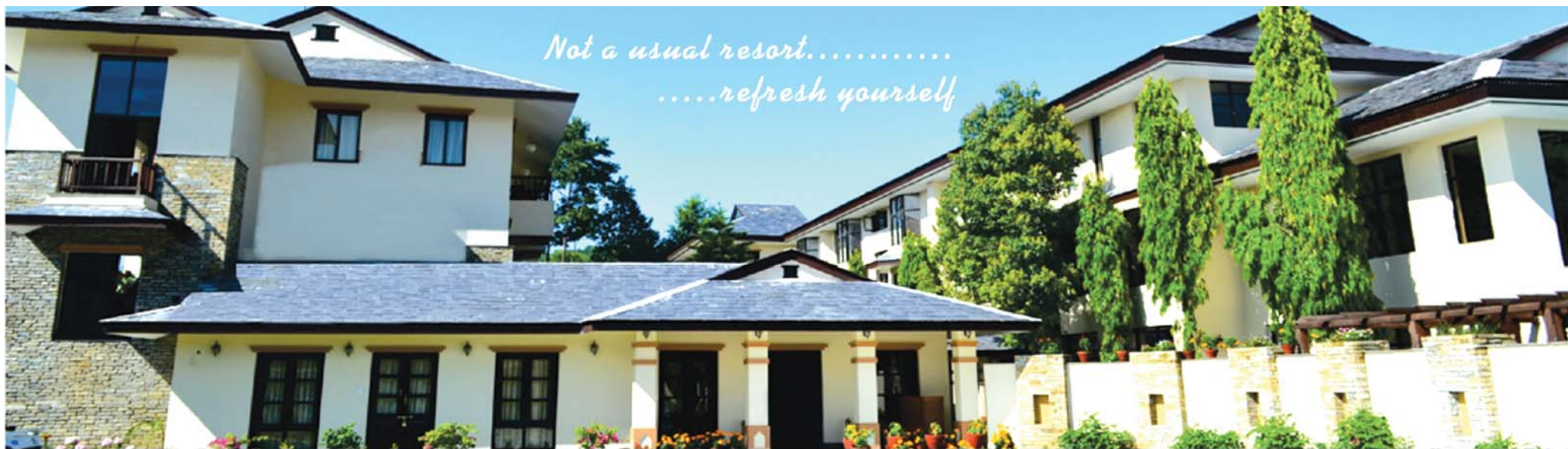
## SLENDER-BILLED VULTURE

(Sano Khairo Giddha)  
Critically endangered  
Altitude: spread below 350m up to 2,050m



## CINEREOUS VULTURE

(Raj Giddha)  
Passage migrant  
Altitude: below 4,900m



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The annual and beloved Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) is once again upon us bringing with it a slew of more than worthy short and feature length films to impatiently choose from. As usual with the array before us it is inevitable that we'll see a few but miss a few regardless of our careful timing and planning. Clearly,



**MUST SEE**  
**Sophia Pande**

also, it is impossible to review more than a few films in this column, but I encourage all of you to go to City Hall (Exhibition Road) and watch as many as you can in addition to the two gems that I have the privilege to write about here.

*When Hari Got Married* (14 December, 3pm) a charming documentary by Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam is set in Dharamsala and follows a hyper-articulate and charismatic taxi driver named Hari who is on the verge of getting married to a suitable Brahmin girl called Suman whom he has never seen. Trying to break out of the rigid traditions of his fairly rigorous family, Hari intrepidly manages to obtain Suman's telephone number and establishes a relationship with her via phone, where he teases her, coaxes her to speak with him, and teaches her to say 'I love you' in English.

While all of this is engaging enough, it is the filmmakers'

# KIMFF 2013



**SKY BURIAL**




**WHEN HARI GOT MARRIED**

patience in staying with Hari – day in and day out, learning about his life and interacting with his family that truly pay off in the viewing. We may all be familiar with the insularity that can come from our culture: its treatment of women, its assumption that women should and ought to be married off (at which point their home is with their husband), and other such shockingly outdated conventions – but seeing it play out in real life with real people is a thought-invoking pleasure that only a good documentary can bring to us.

Documentaries can assume

many forms. Much argument has been made for the cin ma verit  aspect of it, where we are shown, as much as is possible, a 'slice of life'. *When Hari Got Married* is a rather lovely example of this, a film which seems slight at first, but digs into the very way in which we lead our lives, observing minutely without judging, but made with such skill that we can't help but to have questions.

Then there are the documentaries that are like mesmerising tone poems, made about philosophical subjects such as life, birth, and death which cannot be approached with the same kind of narrative structure that we have become accustomed to. *Sky Burial* (13 December, 1.30pm) a short documentary set in Mongolia and made by Tad Fettig follows the sacred and esoteric rituals performed by a monk who has carried the tradition of the Tibetan Sky Burial forward through generations. With gorgeous cinematography overlaid with Buddhist philosophy describing the nature of attachment and the freedom of the soul, the film is a meditative document of a ritual where the body is torn apart and made to be unrecognisable so that the soul cannot return to it.

The films at KIMFF are as diverse as they come. I hope that you will view at least a few this week. 

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## HAPPENINGS



ANANDA RAM DANGOL

**HAPPY FACES:** UCPN (M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal (*left*) with UML leaders Jhalanath Khanal (*centre*) and Madhav Kumar Nepal (*right*) leave the Peace Fund Secretariat office in Babarmahal after the three-party meeting on Tuesday.



NEPALAYA

**ROCK ON THE ROAD:** Amrit Gurung, lead singer of Nepathya, performs in Damak on Tuesday as part of the band's Education for Peace Concert Tour.



BIKRAM RAI

**MITHILA CALLING:** Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae (*centre*) visits SC Suman's (*left*) Mithila Cosmos exhibition at Siddharth Art Gallery in Babarmahal on Tuesday.



BIKRAM RAI

**MOUNTAIN PEOPLE:** David Breashears (*right*) of GlacierWorks inaugurates the 11th Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF) at City Hall, Exhibition Road on Wednesday.

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# Degree Maila

There is a vapid listlessness in the unnamed village of Daya Hang Rai's play *Degree Maila*. The local drunkards are playing cards at a tea-stall whose owner happily obliges with refills. Young boys are deliberating on how to impress the opposite sex. The women, as usual, find themselves on the periphery.

REVIEW

When an approaching vehicle breaks the monotony, the locals are visibly agitated: who dare drive through the newly dynamite-blasted track without the permission of the entire village?

The troublemaker, as the audience discovers, is none other than protagonist Maila (Pradeep Kumar Chaudhari). The only one in the village to hold a degree,



SUNIR PANDEY

Maila enjoys the immunity provided by his education and exposure to the outside world. While others seem resigned to their fate, the graduate has big plans for his hometown. By building new roads and better infrastructure to attract tourists and constructing a hydropower plant nearby, Maila hopes to bring about a reversal of fortune for the villagers.

It is never mentioned what Maila is trained in or what he has done with his degree to merit such hope. But the fact that none of the residents have stepped outside the village, is enough for them to trust him. How will our hero fare under the weight of expectation?

Writer Sayad Ashok gives his actors ample room to improvise and as a result

they are able to inject subtlety and intriguing quirks into their characters. For instance, all the actors speak in wildly varying accents even though they're from the same place. The audience must take this as an occupational hazard and not as a handicap, because most performers come from all over the country.

Despite his excellent acting as a policeman in *Dasdhunga*, director Daya Hang Rai is better known for his comic roles. Almost all the characters exude this personal touch and the play has its moments of great spoofing. In that regard, viewers may find it a bit similar to popular comedy soaps set against rustic backdrops. Whereas most of these serials can't seem to wean themselves off overused stock sounds, *Degree Maila* has a live band making music throughout its running time.

Sunir Pandey

*Degree Maila*  
Cast: Pradeep Kumar Chaudhari, Sirjana Subba, Somnath Khanal, Umesh Tamang, and others  
Director: Daya Hang Rai  
Writer: Sayad Ashok  
Live music by Adha Sur  
Rs 200 (Rs 100 for students), Mandala Theatre, Anamnagar, Runs until 15 December, 4.30pm, (01)6924269, 9841355560

# The Lunch Box

It is hard to miss The Lunch Box in Kuponhole. The bright yellow signboard with the joint's name screams for attention and is big enough to draw at least a glance from any pedestrian who walk the Kandepta-Hotel Summit road. After seeing groups of happy faces in front of the restaurant on numerous occasions, this reviewer was encouraged to pay a visit.

As soon as you walk into this tiny establishment, all your senses come into play. The walls, plastered with pictures of all-

American fast food delights are as pleasing to the eyes as the lunch options spread across the counter. The appetising smell of smoked sausages further appeases the senses in a delightful sway.

SOMEPLACE ELSE

After the initial excitement of seeing so many options on offer quenched down, we settled on our first order: double deluxe hot dog with Polish sausages (Rs 295). As promised the hot dog was massive. I don't know how Polish sausages, taste but going by the sheer size of the sautéed chicken roll I wouldn't mind going



to Poland just for the sausages. Filled with melting cheese, mustard sauce, and veggies oozing out, every bite is a tasty mouthful.

With names such as Wrigley field hot dogs to Chicago burgers, the owners of the Lunch Box seem to be ardent followers of American baseball. Claimed to be the biggest burger in town the ultimate Chicago Burger (Rs 250), doesn't disappoint in size. With generous layers of ham, egg, cheese, chicken patties, and potato chips on the side this is the burger to go for when you are hungry as a horse. But sadly like many other burger joints in town, the burger's downfall lies in its bun. Failing to

hold the enormous portions of the meat and veggies, the bun spoils what could have been a heavenly experience.

Besides fast food, the Lunch Box also offers lunch specials, different cuisine each day of the week. It was Wednesday so we had the non-vegetarian Newari set (Rs 210). It had the quintessential Newari items and the portion was large enough for two.

Although there is a wide range of drinks on offer, the lemon iced tea (Rs 75) that we ordered was frothy, but lacked the citrusy flavour, propelling us not to experiment with our drinks.

We ended our meal on a sweet

note with a brownie and a scoop of vanilla ice cream (Rs 100) which although not the best was good enough to make us leave the place in happy spirits.

The extremely friendly staff, reasonable price, and most importantly the enormous portions of cheese filled goodness will definitely bring me back to this lunch box. The Lunch Box also offers take away lunch packs for busy office goers.

Biru

How to get there: head right from Kandepta in Kuponhole towards Hotel Summit. The Lunch Box is on your left beside Sarvanga Hospital.



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# Biggest losers

Nepal has very few obese people, but as young, urban Nepalis adopt increasingly unhealthy food and working habits we together with the rest of South Asia are set to be an overweight nation. Overweight is defined as a body mass index (BMI = kg/m2) of 25 to < 30 and obesity is defined as BMI of 30 or more.



**DHANVANTARI**  
**Buddha Basnyat, MD**

Forget about having rippling, abdominal muscles. Just keep your weight in the normal range. Shedding even a few kilos and increasing physical activity can help prevent plenty of medical complications like high cholesterol, diabetes, heart

disease, arthritis, and increase a person's lifespan.

Patients on a diet generally lose about five per cent of their body weight over the first six months, but by 12 to 24 months they are back to 'mangal man' (square one). The long-term ineffectiveness of diets may be due to compensatory changes in energy expenditure that oppose the maintenance of a lower body weight as well as genetic and environmental factors. Here are some common diets used for weight loss.

The Atkins diet which lets you eat fat and protein to your heart's content with very low carbohydrate is probably impractical in Nepal because of the lack of variety of meat and fish. The LEARN (Lifestyle, Exercise, Attitude, Relationships, and Nutrition) diet is based on intensive lifestyle modification and may be too 'idealistic' for many but very beneficial if you can bring about these changes in your life. The Zone diet comprises of 40 per cent carbohydrate and 30 per cent each of protein and fat.

My favourite, however, is the

vegetarian-based, fat restricted Dal Bhat diet also known as the Ornish diet, named after Dr Dean Ornish, a professor of medicine from the University of California in San Francisco. But I think even the good doctor would be stunned at seeing the mountain of rice that many Nepalis consume here twice a day with minimal exercise.

Probably the only group of people in Nepal that can efficiently deal with this vast amount of rice-eating are porters along the Himalayan trails. A modification of the Ornish diet with controlled rice consumption but plentiful dal, vegetables, and a side of tasty achar, may be a very suitable and practical option for the Nepali palate.

Some diet programs are easier than others. Therefore, it is crucial to have a diet plan tailored to your individual needs. Setting attainable targets is equally vital in ensuring successful weight loss. Getting advice from nutritionists and joining self-help groups can help make it easier to keep up with diet regimes.

Very few people are able to just exercise and lose weight without controlling their calorie intake. Breaking the bad eating habits that led to weight gain in the first place requires immense will power and months, even years of hard work. Slow results often dampen people's resolve. But there is no silver bullet for weight loss. Being patient, sticking to a suitable diet plan of your liking and gradually decreasing calorie intake, exercising sensibly, and keeping a positive attitude will go a long way in losing weight. 🇳🇵

**GIZMO by YANTRICK**

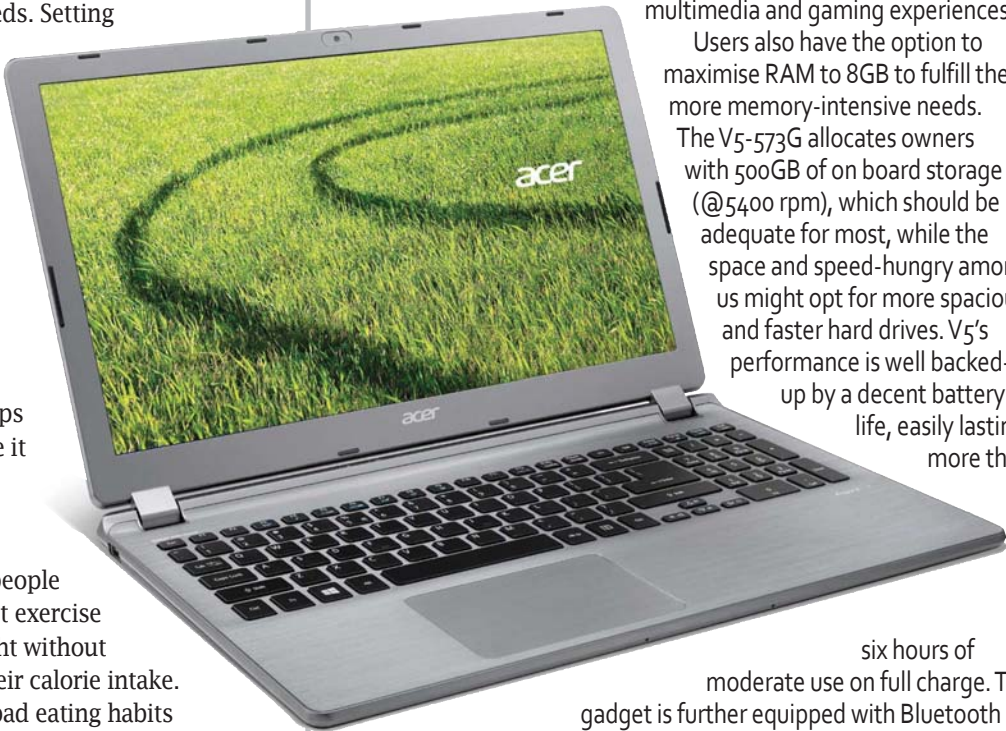
# Thin and smart

Acer's V series notebooks are built for easy portability, offer good battery lives, and deliver decent performance with the specs on board. The V3 models are the cheapest, but are let down by low specs. The V7, although blessed with top specs, does not come cheap. The V5s, on the other hand, strike a perfect balance between price and performance and the Acer V5-573G, in particular, deserves a look-in.

A flawless blend of metal and plastic, the V5-573G is a great looking device with the silver grey-metallic front cover giving it a premium feel. At less than one inch thick and weighing a lowly 4.5 lbs, the notebook is easy on your back, while the 15.6 LED HD display is extremely easy on your eyes.

Well-armed for everyday office and home use, the V5-573G is built to run natively on the Windows 8 64 Bit Pro Operating System, which is powered by a fourth-generation 1.6GHz Intel Core i5 processor, 4GB DDR3 RAM, and 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GT 720M graphics card.

While most laptops these days handle office tasks effortlessly, the V5-573G impressively masters the more demanding multimedia and gaming needs. Full HD movies and graphics-intensive games/programs run smoothly and look stunning. The four speakers built into the notebook project rich, clear, and powerful sound, which allow for complete multimedia and gaming experiences.



Users also have the option to maximise RAM to 8GB to fulfill their more memory-intensive needs. The V5-573G allocates owners with 500GB of on board storage (@5400 rpm), which should be adequate for most, while the space and speed-hungry among us might opt for more spacious and faster hard drives. V5's performance is well backed-up by a decent battery life, easily lasting more than

six hours of moderate use on full charge. The gadget is further equipped with Bluetooth capability, three USB, one HDMI slot, and a card reader to meet your everyday computing needs.

Priced at around Rs 85,000, the V5-573G's design, performance, and specifications easily rival those of more 'fashionable' laptop brands like Samsung, HP, and Dell, while saving you Rs 15-20,000. 🇳🇵

**Yantrick's verdict: good specs, killer design, and competitive pricing are what make Acer's ultrathin V5-573G notebook a worthy buy.**



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The astonishing performance of India's anti-corruption citizens' party has injected a new idea into the country's fractured polity, an idea likely to affect the 2014 general elections. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) stumbled at the finish-line in the Delhi Assembly election this



LOOK OUT

Ajaz Ashraf

week, but it ensured the city-state had to contend with a hung Assembly and perhaps witness yet another round of election.

More significantly, it has made it difficult to predict the magnitude of the wave that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can generate in next year's general elections. The Delhi result suggests that wherever a credible alternative to the Congress exists, the BJP's Narendra Modi might not be able to wean voters to his fold.

The Delhi election mirrored the proverbial race between the hare and the tortoise. The tortoise was the AAP and the two political behemoths – the Congress and the BJP – symbolised the hare. The AAP doggedly began to crawl from the starting line six months before the assembly election, choosing its candidates for a clutch of constituencies and sending teeming volunteers on house-to-house calls.

The AAP ran the race on its own terms, trying to be the change it was campaigning for and winning hearts. It mustered a campaign kitty of only INR 200 million, disclosed the names of its donors, did not use musclemen, withdrew a candidate who hadn't disclosed cases pending against him, and



HINDUSTAN TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

# HARE OVERTAKES TORTOISES

India's anti-corruption citizen party has potential to upset next year's general elections

fielded just one contestant (out of 70) who had prior experience of assembly or parliamentary polls.

The AAP also largely eschewed the politics of identity. It opted to speak in a cross-sectoral language, best exemplified through its campaign against extortionately high electricity and water bills, linking it to corruption: a compromised government formulating policies to benefit the big businesses operating in the utility sector. It was an audacious attempt to fashion an

appeal across classes.

The AAP's exceptional performance testifies to the emergence of a new group of Indian voters and the advent of a new political consciousness in the bustling metros. The new voters are willing to forget their class-caste-religious identities to create a common and shared space for participating in politics as citizens. They believe it is time to replace the venal system with one that is both transparent and effective and define their political role as unceasing, not confined to

casting their vote every five years.

For sure, AAP leaders will now step into the national arena. In the 2014 general elections, the party will target 40 constituencies in eight cities having a population of over five million, another 20 big-city constituencies, and a few surrounding Delhi. The AAP's strong showing in the capital will inspire its volunteers into believing it is possible to divorce money-muscle from election, for the small to trounce the big, and that politics is not necessarily the last refuge of scoundrels.

The AAP's rise impacts the BJP more than the Congress, which has been steadily losing ground for factors too stark to retell. For one, the BJP has been traditionally stronger in urban than rural India. Second, BJP prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi has come to personify development and decisive leadership, but his self-avowed attributes have in no way altered the project of turning India Hindu. His campaign appeals to urban aspiring classes and those sensitive about their Hindu identity.

During the 90s, a resurgent Hindutva had found a match in the policy of granting

**TWIST IN THE TALE:** Members of the Aam Aadmi Party celebrate the party's astonishing performance in the Delhi Assembly election at AAP office on 8 December.

reservation to socially and economically backward classes. This arrested the BJP's rise, but the reservation policy is today bitterly divided and perhaps dissipated. Might not the repackaged Hindutva, with Modi as its brand ambassador, have to contend in urban India against the competing contrarian idea of the AAP?

There are imponderables to factor in. One, the political mindsets of metro citizens differ remarkably from those in smaller cities and towns. For the latter, the pull of identity politics still remains strong. Two, the AAP is also limited by the four months that remain for parliamentary elections. Three, can the AAP convince urban voters to cast their ballot in the 2014 elections considering it is inconceivable it can lead a coalition? But then, the Indian electorate has become so inured to a hung Parliament that it might be willing to give the AAP clout to transform the political system. [ashrafajaz3@gmail.com](mailto:ashrafajaz3@gmail.com)

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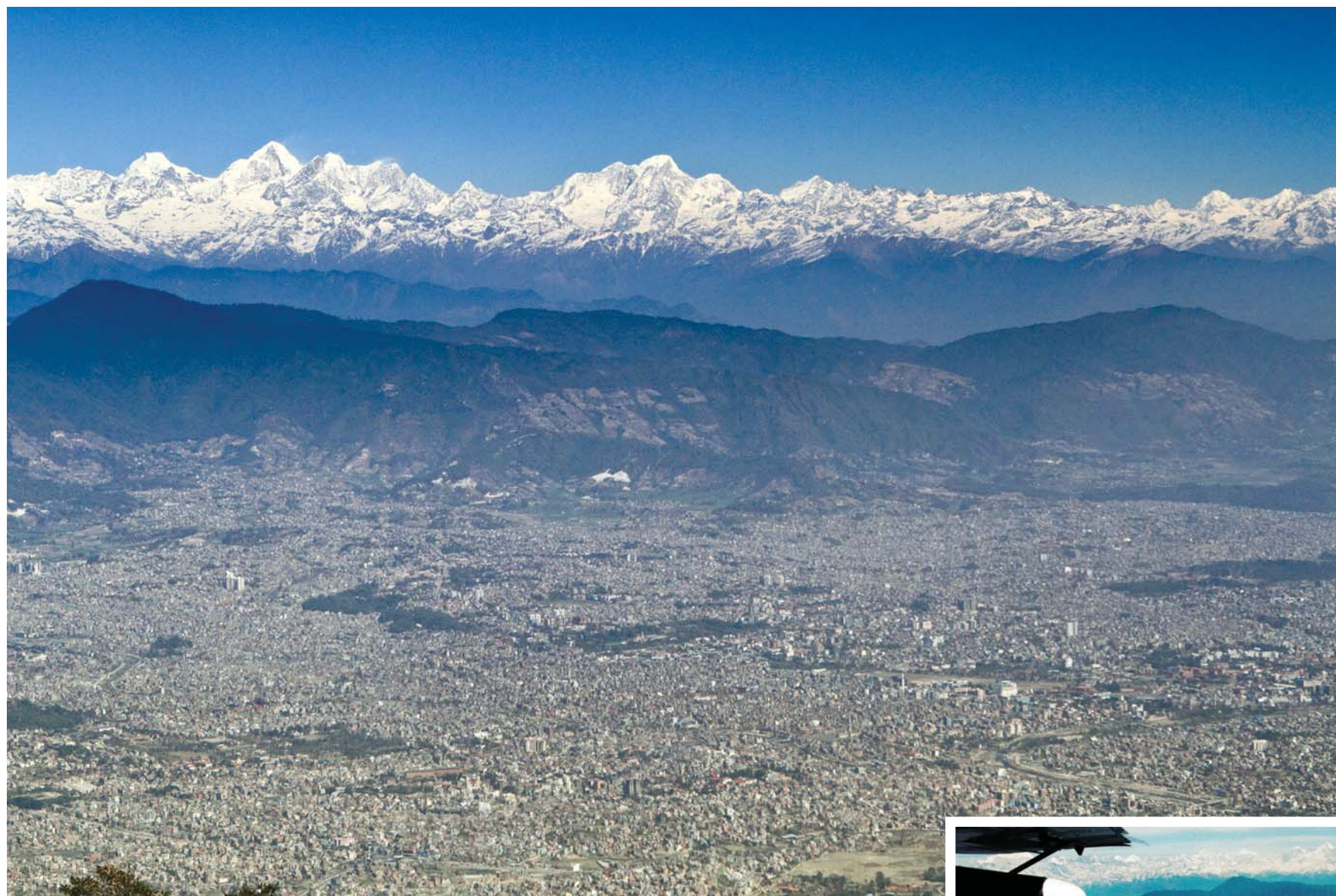


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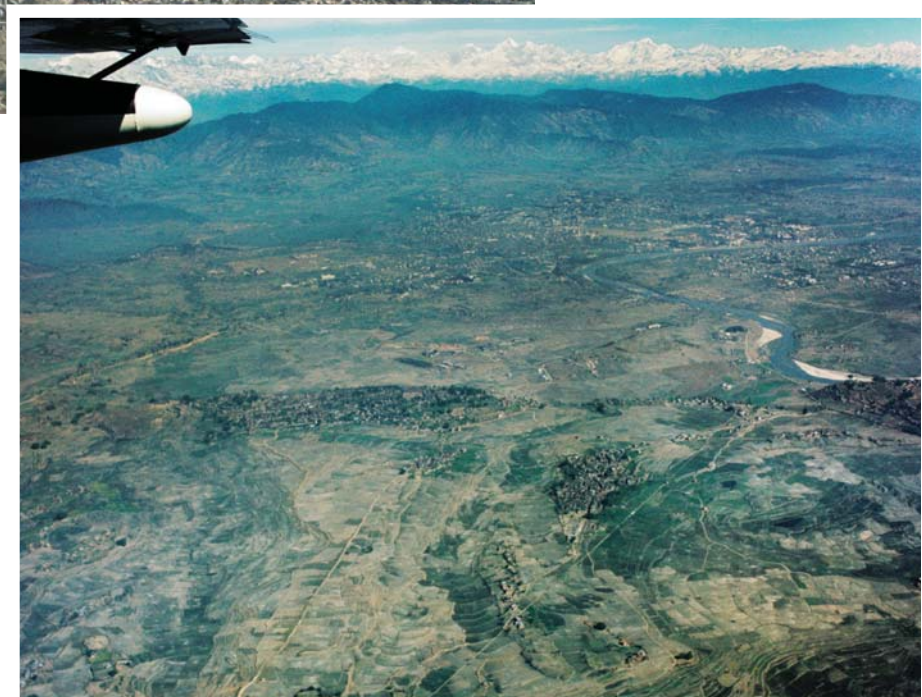


# THE VALLEY FROM THE AIR,



**THEN AND NOW:** Photograph of Kathmandu Valley taken by Erwin Schneider in 1972 from a Pilatus Turbo Porter (*below*) and in 2013 by Dinesh Shrestha from Champadevi (*left*) showing the dramatic urban growth.

Schneider's detailed aerial picture of Baneshwor and Kathmandu Airport and a Google Earth image taken 41 years apart (*right*) show how houses have encroached on farmlands.



KUNDA DIXIT

Erwin Schneider was a mountaineer and a legendary map-maker, his meticulous chart of Mt Everest and other parts of the Himalaya made his surname a trademark in cartography. In 1971-72 Schneider undertook an ambitious aerial survey of Kathmandu, using the photographs to make detailed maps of the Valley.

The maps remained, but the precious negatives had

disappeared until Heidelberg University professor Niels Gutschow and Hermann Kreutzmann of the Freie Universitaet in Berlin found them hidden in tin cans at the Technical University of Munich. They decided to publish them in the context of map-making and urban development to record just how fast Nepal's capital has changed from an intensively cultivated Himalayan Valley into a chaotic city. The book combines unique black and white photographs with the

maps made using them and is a collector's item for everyone interested in Kathmandu.

The images in the book give us a glimpse of the Valley from the perspective of time and space. The contours of terrace fields from the photographs 40 years ago provide a 3D relief effect to the pictures, matching the map contours. The outskirts of Kathmandu look bucolic with a few farmhouses surrounded by fields and crisscrossed by braids of an unspoilt Bagmati and its

## The way we were

**Pictures taken decades apart show how community forestry has restored Nepal's midhill vegetation**



The Himalaya in Nepal is the most-densely populated mountain region on earth. Its landscape is closely linked to land use patterns, especially forest tenure. When forests are nationalised and traditional community-

management systems destroyed, they disappear. Handing management back to communities revive them.

The changes are starkly visible and the best way to tell the story is through before and after pictures, as Fritz Berger and colleagues



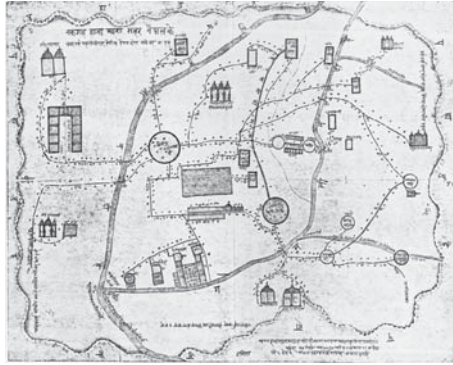
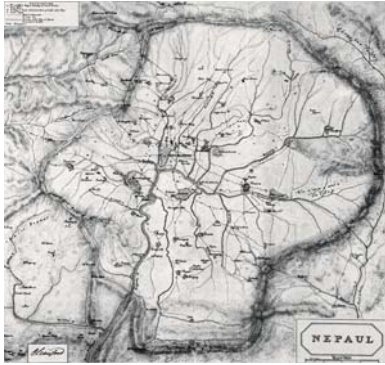
have done in their new book, *Changing Landscape in the Highlands of Nepal, Sikkim-India, and Pakistan: A Photo Journey*. Nepal's midhills forests vanished after the Private Forest Nationalisation Act was promulgated in 1957. It took a full 40 years for the

canopy cover to be restored after a corrective legislation leased the degraded commons back to communities. "The photographs demonstrate that the forest landscape of Nepal has improved since the forest land tenure process started in the 1990s," Berger says in the



# 41 YEARS AGO

## Kathmandu looks dramatically different from the perspective of time and space



**MAPPING CHANGE** (from left to right, above): The earliest known map of Kathmandu by Charles Crawford in 1802, the first map by a Nepali in 1873 by Chandra Pandey and the 1:50,000 map of Kathmandu Valley based on Erwin Schneider's aerial photographs 1975.

Schneider's aerial shot of Boudha four decades ago (left) shows us the pace of change.

tributaries. The white stupa of Boudha stands prominently amidst a jigsaw of paddy fields. The Ring Road has not yet been built, but the newly-made Kodari Highway and the new runway at Kathmandu airport are the only two prominent straight lines in a Valley that is dominated by curves. The towns are dense clusters with temple squares and ponds, hemmed in by farmlands and the rectangular compounds of Rana palaces.

Schneider first entered Nepal in 1930 after trying to climb Kangchenjunga from Sikkim. He came again to attempt Mt Everest in 1955 and did a detailed survey of the

Khumbu to make the famous 1:25,000 map of Mt Everest that is still used by trekkers. He went on to map Langtang, Hinku, Rolwaling, and other areas and his photographs from the 1950s now form a valuable visual archive for before-and-after images to record the effects of climate warming.

For the Kathmandu maps, he went up with the legendary Swiss pilot Hardy Fuhrer in a Pilatus Turbo Porter to take aerial photographs. These were then plotted by Fernando Grifoni of Aermap in Florence into maps through stereophotogrammetry. With the Department of Housing and Physical Planning, more

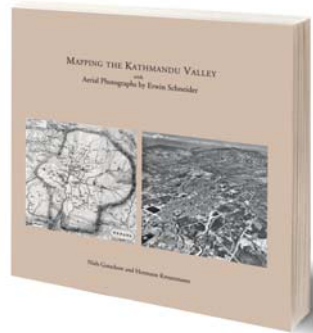
detailed maps were made of the Valley to assist in town planning.

Gutschow and Kreutzmann have used the book to also delve into the cartographical history of Kathmandu from the surprisingly accurate very first known map of 'Nepaul' by Charles Crawford dated 1802 and the work of the first ever Nepali map-maker, Chandra Pandey, in 1873. Then there are the maps in books on Nepal by Sylvan Levy (1905) and Perceval Landon (1927). Later maps became tools in urban planning, most of which were ignored by successive governments. Which is why Kathmandu has turned out

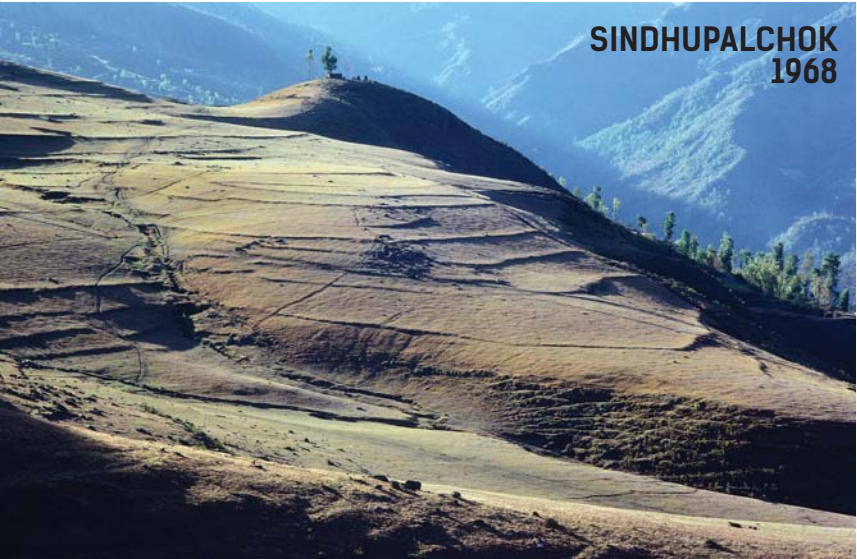
the way it has. Even as early as 1968, Gutschow recalls, a western-educated Nepali urban planner called Kathmandu a 'mad house'.

This collection of Schneider's aerial photographs is a photographic documentation of a Kathmandu that is no more. The book will be launched on 13 December at a new Documentation Centre at the Tara Gaon that will include other contributions by writers, scholars, and artists for heritage preservation. 🇳🇵

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**Mapping the Kathmandu Valley**  
With Aerial Photographs by  
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**SINDHUPALCHOK**  
1968



**SINDHUPALCHOK**  
1994

**PHOTOS SPEAK:** Before and after photographs can give us a glimpse of the passage of time. The most dramatic pictures are those of the resurgence of forests in Jiri in Sindhupalchok in just 25 years because of community forestry.

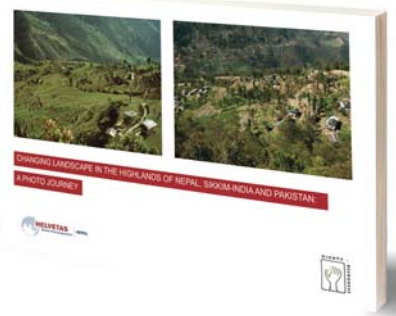
introduction to his book.

But the pictures also show the deforestation that follows the building of new roads, when pastures turn into farms, and new urban centres spread and put pressure on surrounding forests. The effect of out-migration can also be seen in

pictures of Manang taken in 1973 and today: the millet fields are fallow because there is no one to work them. While the forests in Nepal and Sikkim are coming back, in Pakistan they are depleting.

'Photos speak' is the conclusion of the authors

and the most dramatic pictures are those of the resurgence of forests in Jiri in just 25 years. For the authors, this is a lesson: 'One thing we can learn is that policy matters and so do institutions and their governance.' 🇳🇵



**Changing Landscape in the Highlands of Nepal, Sikkim-India, and Pakistan: A Photo Journey**  
Bharat Pokhrel, Fritz Berger, Anupama Mahat Bidari, Robin Niraula  
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Fighting corruption

Shreekamal Dwivedi,  
9 December, *Setopati*

सेतोपाटी

Every year on 9 December thousands of people around the world take to the streets chanting anti-graft slogans to mark the International Day against Corruption. But for a country like Nepal where corruption is deeply entrenched, it will take much more than slogans and speeches to rid our system of this practice. The belief that it's not wrong to abuse power and authority for personal gain lies at the core of corruption. And we have no one but ourselves to blame. When our loved ones are able to bend rules for personal gains, we pat them on the back. But if we see others doing the same, we immediately point fingers at them. People in my neighbourhood boast of how they 'settled' a deal with local officials in return for regular water supply. It is unfortunate that we take pride in acquiring a larger share of government services through malfeasance. At the

same time, we look down on honest people who refuse to abuse their authority for personal benefit. Taking and giving petty bribes at government offices to get things done is the most rampant form of bribery. However, the more potent ones aren't easily visible because they take place at the policy-making level among powerful individuals who bleed the state treasury dry by using



public fund for personal use. One slight change in policy can lead to billions in windfall. Officials use their influence to land lucrative government contracts and in return, they use low quality products and come up with excuses to delay work,

so that the money keeps rolling in. Tax evasion, which costs the country millions in revenue, is one such kind of corruption that a common man fails to notice. But it is the corruption within politics that has the most severe consequences on the country and its people. Laws are bent and broken to benefit the powerful and rich. Billions are embezzled and nothing is done about it because these people enjoy political protection. Those with high connections find ways to lease public properties for long periods at unbelievably low prices. They change the designs and capacity of large hydropower projects which further hurt our already faltering economy. Corruption at all levels in the state mechanism threatens to weaken the system that is supposed to monitor irregularities. A country cannot head towards development when corruption threatens the very foundation of nation building. Strong anti-graft laws alone won't solve the problem. Unless corruption is considered socially unacceptable, it will be impossible to stop the epidemic.

Prachanda's changing portrait

Guna Raj Lohani, *Nepal*, 8 December

नेपाल

In November, a Facebook friend tagged me in a photo of a painting of Prachanda I had made eight years ago for the Nepal Communist Party's famed Chunbang meet. The caption read, "What happened to the Guna Raj Lohani who made this portrait of Prachanda with so much love?" The picture is one among many others that I was asked to make for Chunbang where I was in-charge of hall decorations. Besides Prachanda's portrait, which he personally asked me to make, I painted portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao that were to adorn the meeting hall. While working on the portrait, I felt a deep sense of pride and achievement. After all, this was a man who had led a revolutionary people's movement and for whom I had the utmost respect. During the meeting, Prachanda talked about the need for a new communist manifesto which he promised would be written by the party. We began to regard him as the greatest leader after Mao. At the time, I was also in the process of writing his biography. With his excellent oratory skills, Prachanda had developed the ability to easily convince people. His greatest asset was his ability to adapt. He could quickly judge a person's capability and didn't refrain from making use of able individuals. Before Chunbang, Baburam

Bhattarai described Prachanda as having a volatile personality. But after the meet, Bhattarai somehow seemed to change his opinion and said the chairman was as dynamic as Lenin. It is true that Prachanda lacks the patience to focus on a single goal because of which he lacks the stability needed for a statesman. But if he made up his mind about something, he would achieve it anyhow. I do not see that Prachanda of 2005 anymore. He has left behind his ideals and forgotten his party's objectives. It is little wonder why the people who used to look up to him and love him including myself are gradually distancing ourselves from him. There were days when I used to proudly walk around with his photo in my pocket. But those days are long gone. Only when a leader has the support of his followers, cadres, and the general public can he achieve greatness. But when the same leader jumps from one social class to another and in the process destroys the ideals that he created in the first place, he loses all respect. Prachanda undoubtedly played a crucial role in Nepal's communist movement. It is for this reason that his portrait was considered important enough to be placed alongside other great leftist leaders. But the moment a public personality strays from the path that he set out for himself, he loses his aura and power. Prachanda committed this cardinal sin of politics.



Clearing the first hurdle

Rishi Dhamala, *Ghatana ra Bichar*, 11 December

घटना-बिचार

Interview with NC leader Ram Sharan Mahat

**Have you found a formula for consensus?** Nobody has an exact formula on how to go about forging consensus, but we believe holding discussions with various political players is the best method. The NC will organise official meetings with all parties. In fact, we have already begun preliminary talks. However, parties need to come on board without pre-conditions or intimidation.

**But the UML seems adamant about changing the president and vice-president. How will the NC clear this hurdle?** We don't understand why the UML is dying to amend the constitution. Bringing new people into these posts is not a relevant post-election scenario. If it was important, we would have discussed such possibilities when we drafted the 11-point and 25-point agreements. We don't buy into the UML's arguments, especially since the interim constitution has so clearly stated the rules for the president's term. And the NC is not in favour of having presidential elections.

**How can there be any consensus then?** This demand has been put forward only by the UML. There will be discussions on it. There may be other proposals, which might have their own points of compromise. We will talk through these possibilities.

**UML leaders say they will remain in the opposition if the Congress doesn't come up with a balanced power-sharing model.** That's not a big deal. A strong opposition has a role in democracy. Even we might stay in the opposition. Remember the Maoists stayed both in and out of power during the last CA? The important thing is that the next government will be led by an alliance. If we can be in an alliance with everyone it would be ideal, because the responsibility of drafting a new constitution lies with all the political parties who won the elections.

[nepalitimes.com](#)  
Read complete interview



Placard: Boycott

नेपाल Rabindra in *Nepal*, 8 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

**“ I try to talk to Khanal about the PR seats, but he makes excuses and says he has no time. When I heard he was travelling to the east, I got to the VVIP lounge in the airport before his convoy arrived, but nothing materialised. Do I have to wait by the road to meet my own party's president? ”**

UML leader KPS Oli, quoted in *Budhabar*, 11 December

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BIKRAM RAI

# Can't forget, won't forgive

It is hard to believe that the same party who registered a landslide victory in the first CA polls just four years ago, suffered an ignominious downfall at this year's polls. The UCPN (M) guaranteed the people revolutionary change, but failed miserably and betrayed the trust of thousands of Nepalis including former Maoist combatants and supporters. Seeing party leaders backtrack on their promises and turn into power hungry politicians, the voters used the polling booths to make their aversion to the UCPN (M) and its agenda evident.

[nepalihimal.com](http://nepalihimal.com)  
Read the original article

## YUVARAJ DAHAL, JHAPA

Until a few years ago, I used to be an active UCPN (M) member. But seeing how much the leaders have compromised on communist ideologies in exchange for comfortable lives in the capital, I felt it was pointless working for them.

The whereabouts of my brother Tara, who is rumoured to have been shot by the Army in 2002, remains unknown. When I was with the party, I tried my best to gather information about him, but was unsuccessful. My 69-year-old mother's only wish is to hear from her youngest son before she dies.

Like others who were disheartened with the Maoists, I went to the polling booth knowing whom not to vote for. The party has been made to pay a huge price for distancing itself from the people and only thinking about short-term gains.



## BHAGARU BHAGAT, MORANG

I left my six children and wife to join the Maoist revolution during the height of conflict in 2003. I was also the UCPN (M)'s village in-charge for a long time and worked really hard during the 2008 CA elections. After the Maoist party came to power, I went to ask for assistance for my blind son, who had just joined college but the leaders turned a deaf ear.

My friend's family was promised compensation after he was killed by the army, but they still haven't received the money. The leaders even looted the funds meant for the ex-guerrillas in the cantonments.

The past five years have been deeply disappointing. The party ignored the very people who had sacrificed their lives and careers for the revolution. I didn't want to be associated with the UCPN (M) anymore and didn't feel any of its leaders were worthy of my vote.

## RITA SEN OLI, PRESIDENT, CONFLICT VICTIMS' SOCIETY



I was waiting for my husband Gir Bahadur Sen Oli for lunch when I heard a loud explosion outside. An assistant sub-inspector, he was deployed for security at Rammani College, Butwal that day and was among the dozens of police officers who were killed in the ambush. He said he would come back for lunch after work, but that was the last time I ever heard from him.

It is difficult running the family with a fraction of his pension money. But more than that, what hurt me the most was seeing senior police officers, who I had hoped would help me and other families find justice, kowtowing to Maoist leaders. The UCPN (M) too failed to live up to its promise of providing justice to families of war victims on both sides. So when the same people who had abandoned us for all these years came asking for our votes, I was furious. There was no way I would vote for the Maoists.

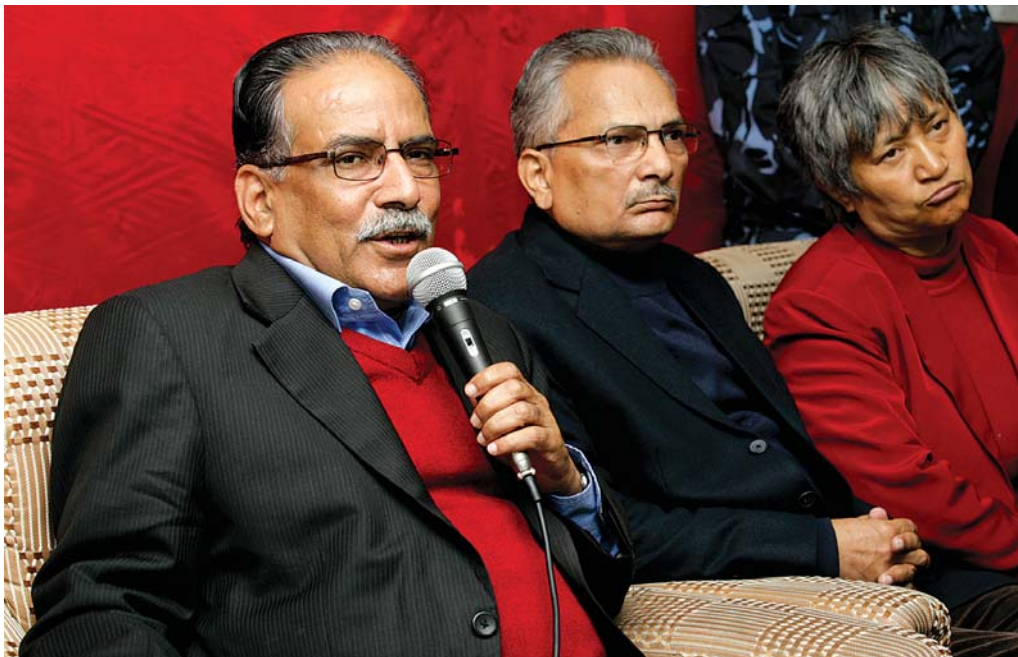
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# In hindsight

Kathmandu has been ranked #3 in TripAdvisor’s travellers’ choice ‘Top Ten Rising Destinations in Asia in 2014’. Ahem. If you have taken a look around The Mandu lately, you will have noticed why the federal capital of New Nepal made it to the list:

1. The street corner garbage pile is rising
2. Lots of high rises rising
3. It has a paper named *Rising Nepal*
4. The price of a kilo of onions is rising
5. People are rising and shining every morning
6. The barometric pressure has been rising
7. Parts of the city are rising from the ashes
8. The High Level Political Mechanism is rising again

9. Lots of dust still rising on Lajimpat road
10. Geologists tell us the Himalaya is still rising

Of all the sour grapes sound bites after the elections, the most astounding one came from the lips of Shri Rajinder Mahato, who said, and I quote: “The loss of the Madhesi parties is India’s loss.” That statement has been analysed to death by now, but the Ass’ take on it is that Mahato is keen to set things right in Nepal by standing as a candidate from Bihar in next year’s general elections in India.

And from the North comes the news item that China’s state media has listed the

benefits of unprecedented levels of air pollution in Shanghai and other coastal cities this month. *Global Times* said that there were military advantages of the smog as the country tried to enforce its air defence zone over the East China Sea, saying that the low visibility would make enemy missile ‘miss their targets’. Chinese tv said the smog was enhancing the sense of humour among the Chinese. All this is important information for the denizens of our Capital Valley in Nepal where the winter smog level is just as bad. Although we have no empirical evidence to prove that Kathmandu’s pollution has made us funnier as a people, it definitely serves as a military deterrence for countries that are hoping to interfere in our internal affairs in the future. If you can’t even see the tip of your nose, there is no way they can manipulate the composition of the next coalition led by the Mao-Deshi Dhan Adhikar Forum.

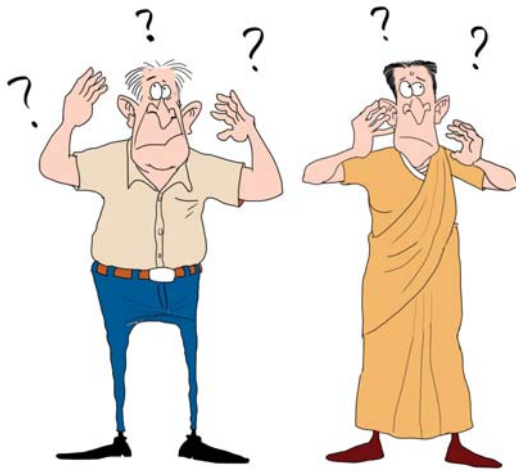
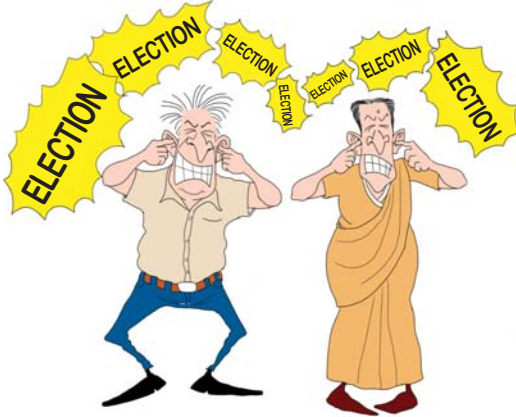
The latest competition among the politicians who did not fare well in the Conshitunot Ass-embly election is to issue threats left and right. The Cash Baddies have been threatening to take the country back to 1996, which is a veiled way to say that they may go back to killing people, not that they ever stopped. And after the Dashies lost the elections, they want to put us all on reverse gear back to the pre-ceasefire days of 2006. The royalists are even threatening a return to 1770 and the reign of Prithvi Narayan the Great. Nepal is probably one of the few countries in the world where politicians have such great hindsight and vie with each other to set the clock back.

The Ass



## PAST PRESENT FUTURE

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