

BIKRAM RAI

DESK OFFICER

Sushil Koirala sat behind his desk at Singha Darbar on Tuesday (*above*) to assume office as Nepal's 37th prime minister at a time of unenviable challenges. With a self-imposed warranty period of one year, his prime ministership is on a tight deadline to deliver. Within hours of taking office, PM Koirala was already in fire-fighting mode in a you-promised-no-we-didn't row with the UML over the candidacy of Bam Dev Gautam as Home Minister. His next challenge is to form a lean and mean coalition, conduct local elections, and write a constitution all within 2014.

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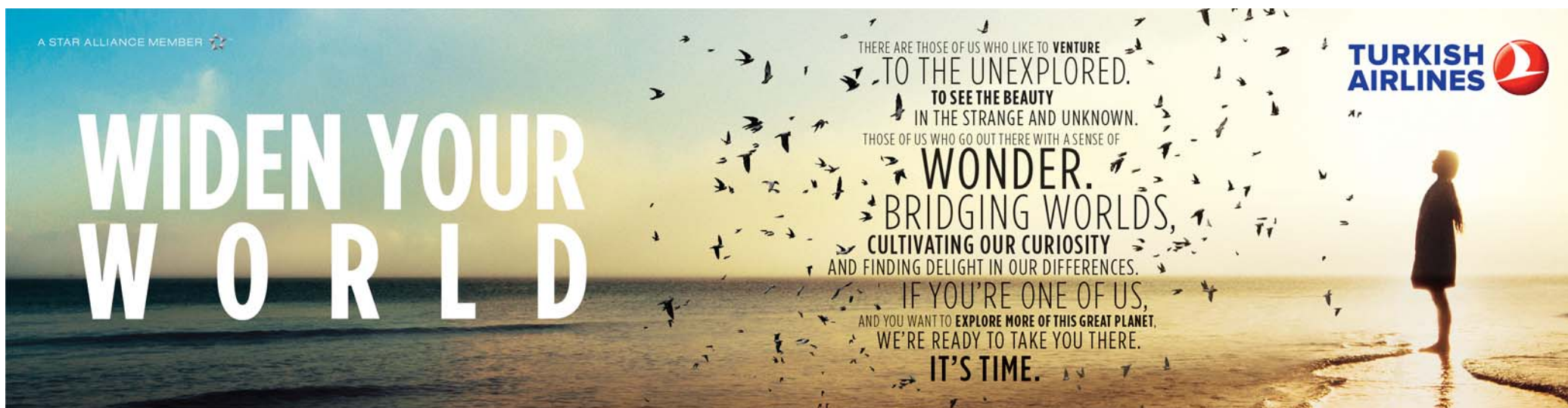
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JYAPU SPIRIT

For a glimpse into the traditions of Jyapus, visit this lesser-known museum in Patan.

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ANOTHER CROSSROAD

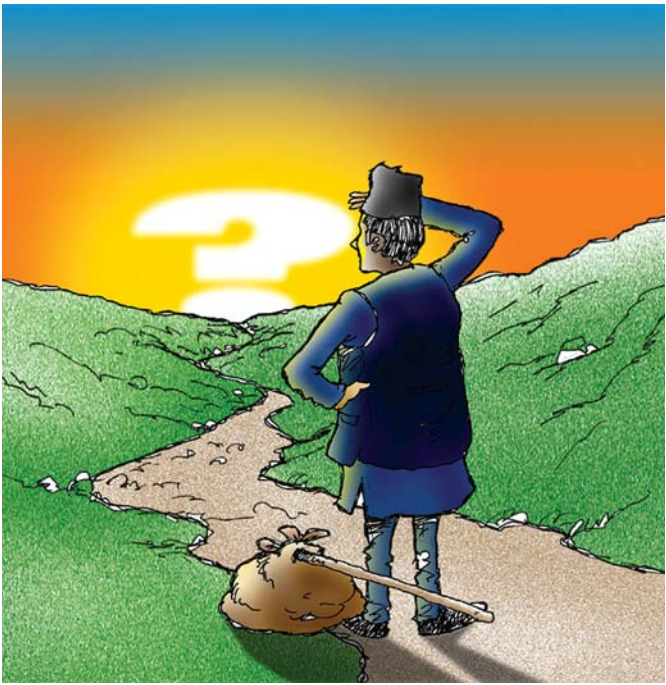
We have just done a search in the *Nepali Times* online archives of all editorials over the past 10 years for the word ‘crossroads’. It is one of the most frequently used words to describe this country’s prolonged political transition. We described various ceasefire agreements during the conflict as ‘crossroads’, the post-royal massacre period in 2001 was a ‘crossroad’, the make-or-break events of April 2006 and the ceasefire later that year were also ‘crossroads’, and we referred to the country being at a critical ‘crossroad’ after the dissolution of the first Constituent Assembly in May 2013.

Now, with Sushil Koirala being sworn in as the country’s new prime minister, there is a feeling we are at another crossroad. The country can travel ahead towards a new dawn of stable democracy and prosperity, it can be mired once again in chaotic political infighting, or it can go over the edge into an abyss.

The fact that it has taken nearly three months after the elections for parliament to even convene and elect a new prime minister does not bode well for the future. Negotiations between the NC and the UML to form a coalition cabinet have run into predictable difficulties over ministerial slots, which probably mean further delays in government formation. So, for now, we just have Sushil Koirala and Ram Sharan Mahat being sworn in.

If he had asked for our advice, we would have suggested to Koirala that he do a Sonia Gandhi and be a kingmaker by pushing forward a younger protégé, but neither Sher Bahadur Deuba nor Ram Chandra Poudel. The Nepali people would have respected Koirala even more for personal sacrifice, which has been the

He may have once hijacked a plane, now Sushil Koirala needs to steer the country towards stability



BILASH RAI

hallmark of his life. He would have set a wonderful precedent by bringing in new blood and would have earned respect and authority far beyond the temporary glory of prime ministership. But in the dog-eat-dog world of Nepali politics, that would have been asking for too much, even of Sushil Koirala. However, Koirala has let it be known that he intends to stay in Baluwatar only

for one year, or until the constitution is written, whichever comes first.

The prime minister’s first order of business is to provide the kind of leadership and statesmanship for compromise and accommodation shown by his cousin in the post-2006 period so that the new constitution is written, printed, and bound by deadline. It is not as difficult as some of the politicians make it sound with their grandstanding. The only real issue holding up an agreement is what kind of federalism we should have. Here the election results give us a sensible roadmap: devolution to elected autonomous local units that are economically viable and politically feasible.

Working out a consensus on the constitution would need the prime minister’s full attention, but he is already mired in the familiar power-sharing games of coalition formation. In this, he has to contend with challenges within his party as well as from the UML, which has already shown how petty-minded it is by boycotting the prime minister’s swearing in. One thing Sushil must try to avoid is his late cousin’s habit of the cynical and ruthless squelching of rivals within the NC, which ended up weakening and splitting the grand old party and setting the country’s democracy back a decade.

Koirala has always been in the shadows of his more charismatic, ambitious (and sometimes corrupt) relatives and in that sense is an unknown entity. One thing is for sure though, as long as he heads the government we will not be able to say that corruption in this country ‘starts at the top’. Behind that hirsute, enigmatic visage and mumbling diction may still be the man the country needs at a time when it is once more at the crossroad.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

DOING GOOD

Nepal dropping to the bottom of the rankings on the freedom to do business does not surprise anyone (‘Doing well by doing good’, Editorial, #693). This is yet another reminder that it is high time we focused our energy and attention on the country’s economy. But do those in power care? And what was the point of the conference on Business Ethics for a Prosperous Nepal? All the businessmen, who provided millions of rupees for election financing that enabled the old men on chopper rides, will begin getting favours once the Congress and UML led government begins its tenure. We all know which big business families have evaded taxes. But without these companies, the Nepali media will bleed dry, so they are always hesitant to highlight such stories. At the moment, no institution in Nepal can talk about ethics.

Bibek Karki

● We have waited far too long for politics to correct itself and as a result Nepal’s economy is currently on life support. First the war set us back by at least two decades, then we had to go through a protracted transition process, and now we have wasted six years trying to draft a new constitution. How much longer do we wait? I know *Nepali Times* is big on safeguarding democratic principles, but I for one would not mind having a semi-autocratic government if that lifts millions of

Nepalis out of poverty and provides respectable opportunities for our youth to earn an income.

Janu

● Out of the 28 million Nepalis, only a handful of men have brought shame and dishonour to Nepal. First, the Shah dynasty looted us, but they are gone now. Then came the Koirala family, Sher Bahadur Deuba, Madhav Nepal, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and Baburam Bhattarai et al. We are well aware of how they exploited the country. Yet, we are helpless against them. We can no longer allow 100 men to destroy our future and destiny. Something must be done today; otherwise we will live without water, electricity, petrol, jobs, or food.

Narayana Prasad

SHARING SORROW

It is encouraging to see women whose lives were torn apart by the conflict trying their best to get back on their feet (‘Sharing sorrow to ease pain’, Juanita Malagon, #693). We definitely need to hear more success stories of conflict victims who have started new lives, gotten re-married, and are taking part in the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. However, articles like this make me question what the war was fought for? What did we gain from 10 years of violence and will the Maoists, who were heavily defeated in November polls, ever be made to repent for putting so many lives at stake just to rise to power?

Sapana Thapa

● For our political leaders, integration of Maoist combatants into the national army last year signaled the end of the peace process. But thousands of victims and their families are still desperately searching for answers and have yet to experience true peace.

Gaya

● To lose family members is painful enough, but to not get any closure about their disappearance or death is probably the most terrible thing a person can experience. And to make things worse, the government makes relatives wait for 12 years before they can claim property rights and other entitlements. Without the monetary support, families have to suffer grave mental and financial ordeals. The state needs to take responsibility for its citizens and provide families with a) the truth, so that they have some kind of closure, and b) immediate compensation, so that they can lead the remainder of their lives with some kind of peace.

Keerthana Shrestha

● Since it is in the best interest of all the current political forces of Nepal from the UCPN (Maoist) to the Congress to the UML and the Army, there is no doubt that future government(s) will use all their might to keep skeletons from the war hidden in the closet. The only real hope for victims and their families is if thousands of ordinary Nepalis turn up outside Singha Darbar and Baluwatar, not because they are being egged on

by INGOs, but through the goodness of their hearts to demand justice and truth for their brothers and sisters. Such a movement will take time and a show of unity that has often evaded us Nepalis, but I believe it is possible.

Maya Karki

CONSERVATION MATTERS

I completely agree with Hum Gurung: infrastructure development around the Chitwan National Park and other protected areas shouldn’t be carried out without consulting local stakeholders and measuring the environmental impact (‘Conservation matters’, #693). If the proposed railway is given the green light, it will set a dangerous precedence for other similar projects. Decades of conservation efforts will be wiped out, poaching will thrive, and we stand to lose our rich biodiversity. I hope Gurung’s piece and the previous *Nepali Times* report will encourage discussions within the conservation circle and among policy makers.

Sumeet Shrestha

REAL TO REEL

Prabin Shrestha’s journey from being confined to a wheelchair to becoming a sought after video editor is truly inspiring and I salute his efforts (‘Real to reel’, Tsering Dolker Gurung, #693). I hope his biopic, *Mokshya*, is equally good and may his story encourage those living with physical disabilities to make the best of what they have.

Sanjay Gupta

ALPACA FARM

Nepal is already well-known for pashmina shawls, if marketed correctly, alpaca wool blankets can become equally popular, which will help improve the state of our economy and provide more jobs for locals (‘Alpaca farm’, Meghna Bali, #693). Although on the expensive end, encouraging more farmers to expand into the alpaca market and advertising the benefits of the wool can greatly increase sales abroad.

Aneesha Thapa

● Wow, alpacas are ugly, I wonder why their wool costs so much? Besides, not everyone can afford to raise alpaca in Nepal, we don’t have the knowledge or the resources to raise an animal that is originally from South America. If only we could make use of the animals and plants available locally.

Siddharth Sharma

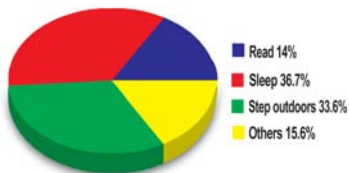


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Weekly Internet Poll #694

Q. What is the best way to kill time during load-shedding?

Total votes: 577



Weekly Internet Poll # 695. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Which leader should be the new home minister?



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BIKRAM RAI

The year of living dangerously

It's very simple: KP Oli needs Bam Dev and Bam Dev wants the Home Ministry

No surprise that Monsieur Sushil Koirala has become the 37th prime minister of this country, with conditional support from the UML. Two weeks ago, we were taken to task for suggesting that his government was doomed even before it was formed. But that is the way the cookie has always crumbled in Nepali politics.

After 1990, no government was able to deliver on its commitment because they were all busy fire-fighting and trying to survive challenges from rivals within and without. Political allies are bought with attractive promises or posts and perks. But the promises are rarely kept and the governments come tumbling down.



BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

From the day a prime minister is elected, he is more worried about sour competitors rather than the pressing issues of the nation. It needs exceptional

resourcefulness and statesmanship to quell adversaries and still find time and focus on running the country. So don't blame an ailing old man if he has no appetite for the new constitution.

For those of us who have seen this drama being staged seven times in the last six years, there is nothing ironic about the UML threatening to unseat the prime minister it voted to power less than 24 hours ago. It's very simple: KP Oli needs Bam Dev Gautam and Bam Dev wants the Home Ministry. The fact that the local elections may be taking place sometime soon makes the Home Ministry the most sought after office, as the one running it has unparalleled advantages of controlling and mobilising bureaucracy and the police.

A compromise may be reached in the coming weeks, but the media mongering over portfolios has exposed the hollow unity expressed by the two oldest parties claiming to deliver the constitution within a year.

To be sure, parties in the CA will have their own sets of differences over the vision and structure of New Nepal. The NC and UML, together command a two-third majority in the CA, but disputes over portfolios and running the government can easily spill over into the CA. The two parties still differ on many issues, particularly on forms of government and number of federal units.

But even if the NC and UML stick together throughout the process, they alone cannot dictate the statute drafting. A constitution is a document of consensus and if Nepali society is to emerge out of this long drawn political transition, it is imperative that the new statute be adopted by all constituencies. This can only happen if Dalits, Madhesis, Janajatis, women, and sexual minorities, who have been historically wronged, are actively involved at all levels of statute drafting in the CA.

They may be the largest parties representing the aspirations of a majority, but the NC and UML leadership cannot be dismissive of the grievances and demands made from the hitherto marginalised. They must be willing to engage with the identity politics of Madhesis and the Janajatis. The Maoists and Madhesi parties may have championed the inclusive agenda so far, but the aspiration for self rule and autonomy is not partisan.

Sushil Koirala may have just entered Singha Darbar, but he is already running out of time. He has an unenviable job of keeping his business as the head of the government, apart from his role as the leader of the largest party responsible for drafting the statute. 🇳🇵

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Italy 3:30 pm The First Assignment (1h 26m)	Lithuania 3:30 pm Back to Your Arms (1h 29m)	Czech Republic 3:30 pm Little Girl Blue (1h 3m)	
France 5:30 pm Viper in the Fist (1h 40m)	Hungary 5:30 pm Eszter's Inheritance (1h 27m)	Portugal 5:30 pm Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl (1h 3m)	
		Spain 11:30 am Take my eyes (1h 42m)	
		Netherlands 1:30 am The Dark House (1h 41m)	
		Sweden 3:30 pm Beyond (1h 35m)	
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HARIZ BAHARUDIN

Teaching for the future

In 1989, Wendy Kopp used the ideas of her Princeton thesis to found Teach for America, a non-profit organisation that aimed to recruit and train college graduates to teach at secondary schools for two years in needy communities in the US. 28 years later the organisation expanded into Teach for All, a global network of teachers that works on the same philosophy. Kopp was in Kathmandu earlier this week for the induction of Teach for Nepal’s second group of Fellows. Excerpts from her conversation with Ashutosh Tiwari:

Ashutosh Tiwari: How do you aim to eliminate worldwide educational inequity?
Wendy Kopp: Children’s socio-economic backgrounds shape their educational outcomes, which in turn impact their life. It’s a deeply systemic problem for which there is no one single solution. One way to address this is by getting the most promising young leaders to commit to teach in the neediest communities. Ultimately, we are working to generate a group of leaders who will act with great conviction and urgency to address core issues in the field.

Young graduates in Asia are generally not interested in teaching, and those who do, don’t consider themselves leaders. What do you have in mind when you talk about teachers as leaders?
By leaders, we mean that people who share the understanding to work together must be in positions of responsibility in the educational sector. We need them all to understand that it is possible for kids to achieve this even if they face extreme poverty, lack resources and have low expectations.

How has the TFA model of training graduates to teach for two years worked in different countries?
It would not have made sense if we modeled the worldwide network on the American one.

In India, Chile, and Lebanon, we met with local social entrepreneurs who had the vision but needed support on how to materialise this ambition. Despite obvious cultural differences, we learnt that the solutions are similar and shareable, and that there are more common grounds than differences.

What makes the most effective teachers?
Teachers who develop close relations with their students and families have deeper understanding of local contexts and this helps them be effective. Also, most successful teachers know where they see their students in 10 years and thus help the child create more options. When faced with problems, effective teachers do not blame children, parents or the school system but persevere. Despite this, each partner program has its own requirements, and we just help them build on others’ success.

In Nepal, parents are reluctant to allow their children to teach in high schools and would rather want them to get ‘real’ jobs. How do you convince them otherwise?
It is important to ensure that the initial groups of selected students have experience as well as parental backing. Testimonials from these provide ground for further conviction among those still unsure. Over time, with a build-up of examples, parents can be persuaded. Here, we also need to look at safety and remoteness issues.

Two years after college may look like forever for fresh graduates, but we know careers span decades. Teaching gives candidates experiences, understanding, exposure and opportunity. This short-term investment will pay off in the long term.

In the US, Teach for America has been criticised for being “an elitist program” which places “ill-trained young teachers” in difficult schools where “teachers who belong to unions are then replaced”. How will you respond if TFN faces similar criticism in five years?
Most criticism stems from misconceptions. We’re not saying our Fellows will change the world in two years or that our training is the best available. Also, we’re not replacing existing teachers because we can’t force our Fellows into schools that don’t want them.

What we must accept is children in low-income socio-economic brackets and remote locations are four-grade levels behind those from privileged backgrounds. And a good education is important for them to break out of poverty.

People say we need to eradicate poverty first, but we can also bring problems in education under control if we channel talent and leadership. Sixty per cent of our alumni stay in education, so we’re asking students to take their career’s first step with us.

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Peaceful but not prosperous



IPS

AMANTHA PERERA in COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's war-battered Northern Province had reason to celebrate when the results of a countrywide exam were announced last December. Of the 16,604 students from the province who sat for the exam, 63.8 per cent secured the required marks for entry into prestigious national universities.

It was a spectacular performance for a region wrecked by three decades of sectarian conflict that ended in May 2009 with a military offensive.

"Education was always seen as a ladder to a better life in this region – even before the war. Once again people seem to be thinking about that," explains Sivalingam Sathyaseelan, Secretary to the provincial Ministry of Education. However, as Sathyaseelan points out a good education does not mean a good job or even gainful employment in the province. "Lack of employment has forced graduates to either move out or

settle for manual jobs."

The country's overall unemployment rate is around four per cent of the labour force, but the figures for the north are exceptionally high, almost double that of the national rate.

Rupavathi Keetheswaran, a government agent for Kilinochchi district, says that as post-war assistance reached an end and income levels suffered, many families either headed by women or with disabled family members have found it hard to make ends meet.

Ramalingam Sivaparagasm, a national coordinator with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) says children in secondary schools were most prone to being pulled out of school. "The primary reason is lack of livelihoods – the responsibility of earning falls on children," he said.

Children mainly seek work in the construction sector or in agriculture. The two sectors have boomed in the province due to the construction of thousands of houses and roads as well as the traditional dependence on

Education is improving in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, but there are few job opportunities

agriculture.

Education official Sathyaseelan says that when graduates and others with higher educational qualifications struggled to find jobs, it acts as a deterrent for younger students.

"When younger students see others struggling to get jobs, they find that education does not help much and want to quit," he admits.

In a survey by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees released last year, an overwhelming majority of the war displaced who have returned to the Northern Province said they had no complaints on how the region's education system has been revived. The survey of 997 households found that "87 per cent of the respondents are satisfied with the quality of education."

But education – one of the fruits of peace – has not spelt prosperity for the Northern Province.

Says Sarvananthan: "Till date there is no targeted incentive scheme by the government for the private sector to invest and generate employment in the north."

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A tale of two nations, #692

Longer version

EVEREST BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Ice cool

EOL, the sole authorised distributor for Godrej Appliances in Nepal, officially launched the range of Godrej EDGE Pro models last week. "The Edge Pro refrigerators seek to provide consumers with maximum space, maximum cooling, and maximum energy efficiency," reads the press statement.



E-ducation

Everest Bank organised a hand-over program at its corporate office on Monday, where CEO AK Ahluwalia distributed computers to Balkrishna Karki, head master of Shree Triveni Higher Secondary School in Udayapur.

Marked down

Dreams Merchant Nepal recently launched smart voucher, a privileged discount booklet that contains coupons of various business houses in the market. As per the company, the booklet will be printed on a quarterly basis.



Love birds

Fishtail Ultralight has announced special price for couples who want to enjoy a 15-minute sojourn in the sky. According to the offer, couples can now enjoy a 15 minute ultralight flight for Rs 10,000. The offer is valid upto 17 February.

Charge up

Red Bull organised a series of events titled 'Red Bull College Game' at various colleges to promote its partnership with the ongoing Shahid Smarak RedBull 'A' division football tournament. So far the event has been to seven colleges in the Valley.



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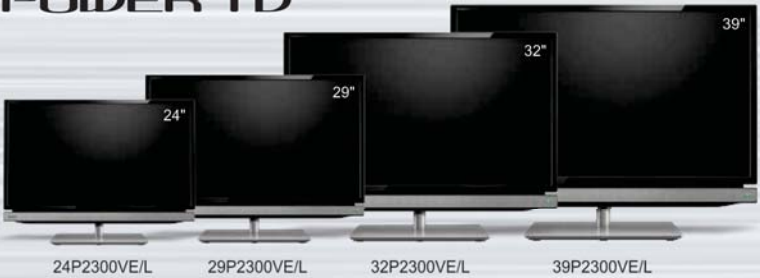
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BIKRAM RAI

Whose Home is it anyway?

Sushil Koirala's first of many hurdles is to untangle the home ministry knot

Nearly three months after elections, Nepal got its 37th prime minister in Sushil Koirala on Tuesday. That makes six PMs in six years. But no sooner had the voting concluded in the CA



HERE WE GO
Trishna Rana

hall, a bitter but all-too-familiar turf war erupted between the UML and Nepali Congress over ministerial portfolios.

So far, Koirala has rubbished

the UML's claims of an unwritten agreement on naming Bamdev Gautam the Home Minister in the new cabinet. Senior leaders within the NC also argue that the portfolio should stay within the party so as to establish a political culture. UML leaders, on the other hand, have refused to join the government unless the NC yields to its demands. Earlier, the UML mysteriously dropped its insistence on a new election for president, ostensibly after NC assurances that it would get Home.

The Home Ministry has been

a coveted bastion of power and wealth with the Police, APF, intelligence services, and 75 Chief District Officers under its direct control. And with local elections slotted for later this year, whoever lands the job will yield considerable influence on the future course of Nepali politics. The NC's humiliating defeat in the local polls of 1997 when Gautam was Home Minister, means that the party is extremely averse to see the man who knows all the tricks of the trade back in the same ministry.

While it's not surprising

that this particular portfolio is being so fiercely contested, Koirala and UML Chairman Jhulanath Khanal are also using the pretext of an inter-party feud to buy time as they settle disputes within their own ranks. With the NC, General Secretary Prakash Man Singh and cousin Shekhar Koirala are both vying for the lucrative post. Similarly, Khanal who lost the UML parliamentary party leader elections to KP Oli last week, might not be too keen to hand over such a vital ministry to Bamdev Gautam, who is Oli's strongest ally.

Prime Minister Koirala's first order of business is to untangle the Home Ministry knot. Then he has to sort out the allotment of other powerful portfolios and that, we know from experience, can be a long-drawn process. There is a real danger that Koirala might fall into the same trap as his UML-counterpart Khanal, who spent nearly half his six month stint as PM in 2011 trying to form a full cabinet.

For most of his 60-year political career, Koirala has been content playing second fiddle, working quietly in the background. Now that he is the top boss, it's time to exhibit the kind political acumen that has been often missing from Nepal's leaders and be willing to assert his authority on a polity with deep cleavages. His major challenge will be to reconcile with and work alongside key political players like the UCPN (Maoist), RPP-N, and Madhes-based parties who all voted against him.

Unlike many of his predecessors in Baluwater, Koirala is free from the shackles of past mistakes and has the support of almost three-fourth of the assembly as well as the general public. The septuagenarian leader might have a hard time remembering all the seven point and five point deals that his party has signed on till date. But if Koirala can deliver on just three goals by February 2015: conduct local elections, complete the new constitution, and provide basic services and safety to citizens - he will have achieved what even his illustrious cousin, Girija Prasad, couldn't and Nepalis will remember him as a great statesman.

Carrying the country's conscience

CHAITANYA MISHRA

Dr Govinda KC's revolt against the rampant corruption and greed within Nepal's medical sector deserves far greater praise than what he has received so far. The physician at the Tribhuvan University Institute of Medicine (IOM) is not only challenging the university, but also the government and the major political parties.

KC's fast is also a wakeup call for us ordinary Nepalis to do our best, to be honest, and to provide the best quality service to the public. However, we prefer to overlook this aspect of the doctor's protest because that would require us to accept our weaknesses and admit that we are not performing to the highest standards.

The magnitude and implications of the events of the past month have been gravely misunderstood by the Teaching Hospital, Nepal Medical College (NMC), as well as the general public. In our myopic view, nepotism and corruption is inherent only in the medical sector. Nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, the astronomical fees that medical students are charged undoubtedly invite a rather 'visible' and substantial degree of corruption. But every occupation in Nepal suffers from this affliction because qualities like professional integrity and excellence in the workplace are simply not valued in this country.

Corruption is not only the illegal transfer of cash though. The use of political and economic



DEVAKI BISTA

power for example to appoint party apparatchiks to professional positions, is also corruption. Dr KC's larger struggle is, therefore, not just against TU, but against political parties and leaders who abuse their influence to construct patronage networks in medical universities and elsewhere.

Administrators who make their way up the professional ladder in such a deplorable manner have to pay back their 'masters' either in kind or cash. Heads of campuses and colleges return the

favour by hiring teaching staff based on political-party membership, rather than qualification. Some of the rectors and chairmen serve as conduits through which black money is passed through. They easily admit students with 'connections' and provide affiliation to undeserving colleges. Supervision is reduced to nil. As a result, these officials become bereft of integrity and lose their credentials as impartial academics. They are mere pawns in a never ending political game.

In most campuses under Tribhuvan University, student unions act as proxies for the political parties and have the decisive say on who is appointed to adjunct or contractual teaching faculty positions. Having gotten neither a good education nor any professional experience, the thousands of graduates that TU churns out every year are, unsurprisingly, second-rate. However, the corruption that takes place within medical colleges pales in comparison to the real cost that the country has to bear when an entire generation of qualified labour force is squandered.

The political parties have spread their tentacles so wide and deep that they are stifling progress at all sectors and levels, whether it be schools and colleges, industries, businesses, or even government ministries. KC's initiative, in this context, is admirable. But without effectively addressing the structural roots of corruption and rent seeking, the problem won't go away just through one man's efforts.

A much larger-scale initiative with a sustainable coalition of professionals and skilled workers, school teachers, trade unions and workers, entrepreneurs, civil society, urban residents is needed to enforce true change. This is far easier said than done. Dr Govinda KC has taken the first step, now we need to get behind him.

Chaitanya Mishra is a professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in Tribhuvan University.



The brilliantly clear weather this week is caused by the leading edge of a low pressure system that will move into the central Himalaya this weekend, bringing much-needed rain to Kathmandu and snow in the higher mountains. This is not unseasonal and will bring down the maximum temperature in the Valley into the teens on Saturday. Things should clear up by Sunday, though warming the daytime temperature.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
20° 6°	19° 5°	15° 4°

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SENCHELUNG LIMBU

Last July it wasn't just 15-year-old Bimal Gharti Magar's equalising goal that created a buzz at the SAFF Championship being held in Kathmandu. Thousands of Nepalis glued to their television sets and later on YouTube for match highlights couldn't stop gushing about the articulate and erudite commentary heard during Nepal's decisive match. The voice belonged to former presenter of the popular show *Call Kantipur*, Suraj Giri, who was only in his fourth match

behind the mike.

"I have loved playing football since my school days, so I didn't think twice about stepping into the commentary box," explains Giri. "Although we were conducting the live broadcast from a van outside the stadium, I enjoyed each match as if I was right at the centre."

The 21-year-old began his stint as a sports commentator in 2012 during the Soaltee Super Sixes cricket tournament. At first it was sheer curiosity that led Suraj to speak on air. But after former Indian test-cricketer VVS Laxman praised his work, Giri realised he was made for the job.

Exciting though speaking to the masses is, Giri admits it is also a lot of hard work. He spends hours listening to international commentators like cricket expert Harsha Bhogle and makes notes of how the veterans bring the game alive to their TV audience. He is also meticulous in planning his shows and likes to learn the minute details of a player's career.

Says Suraj: "Since there isn't much information available on our athletes, it is difficult to prepare. So I spend most of my

time scouring the internet and talking to experts."

Before proving his mettle in sports commentary, Giri made his foray into the small screen after winning Image Channel's VJ Hunt in 2009. Back then, he was given charge of call-in request shows. Taking inspiration from his late uncle Prabin Giri, former news anchor for Nepal Television, Suraj announced his arrival in 2013 with the massively popular *Call Kantipur*.

Giri explains that his large fan following motivates him to deliver his best on air. "I am glad that my love for sports has turned into a profession, but I still have a long way to go before I can consider myself successful," says one of the most famous and promising faces in Nepali television. 📺

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Goal, #672
By the fireside, #653
See Suraj Giri's videos

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Television presenter Suraj Giri is taking over the airwaves with his eloquent sports commentary



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EVENTS



IN CONVERSATION, leading political scholar Lok Raj Baral talks to journalist Sudheer Sharma. *21 February, 4pm, Nepal-Bharat Library, New Road*

Day of the destroyer, flock to Pasupati with thousands of other devotees and sing praises to the Lord that taketh. *27 February*

Gyalpo Losar, the Tibetan and Sherpa community celebrate the new year. *2 March*

Trading paint, an exhibition of the work by artist Julian Parker-Burns. *Runs till 21 February, 10am to 5pm, Image Ark Gallery, Kulimha Tol, Patan Darbar Area*

Swasthani fast, a month of reading the pilgrims' tale of the Kathmandu Valley of yore; plenty of photo opportunities at Pasupati and Sali Nadi. *Runs to 14 February*

Go green, a week-long festival showcasing viable green technologies and practices, at the ongoing Climate+Change exhibition. *Runs till 24 February, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal*

Valentine's Day, all the love birds and those still flying solo, perchance romance? *14 February*

Democracy day, Nepal marks its original popular uprising. *19 February*

Incoming, the festival of colours and watery missiles, Holi, is within range. *16 March*

Art attack, a double header exhibition of the works of Anil Shahi and Sujan Dangol. *14 February to 8 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal*

From the bottom of my heart, spoken word poetry from Word Warriors Nepal and a performance by Rohit John Chettri. *14 February, 6pm, Attic Bar, Uttar Dhoka*

Watching girls, screening of Fredieric Louf's film *J'aime regarder les filles*. *14 February, 6pm, Alliance Francais, Teku*



NOODLING, stake your claim as Nepal's top graphic designer and win up to Rs 25,000 and a spot at an exhibition in prizes. *Send entries to events@thecitymuseum.org by 20 February*

DINING



SAIGON PHO, spacious interior with authentic Vietnamese dishes. *Lajimpat*

Ghar-e-kabab, serving the best of north Indian cuisine, with live Sarod recitals on some days. *Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg*

Chilly Bar and Restaurant, quality food and wide selection of drinks with great views of Phewa Lake. *Lakeside, Hallanchok, Pokhara, (061)463614/463163*

Lal Durbar Restaurant, authentic Nepali dinner with cultural shows. *Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01)4248999, reservation@laldurbar.com*

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

Shambala Garden Café, dance with your beloved to the crooning of singer Ciney Gurung. *Rs 1,800 for single, Rs 3,500 for couples, Hotel Shangri-la, (01)4412999 ext. 7520/7515*

K-too, go in for the best steak in Thamel, a warm dining room, live sports on TV, and free Irish coffee with every main course and seasonal specials. *Thamel, (01)4700043*

MUSIC

Welcome to the jungle, celebrate Valentine's Day with live acoustic music, DJ sessions, fireshow and win awards for bustin a move. *Rs 500 for single, Rs 800 for couples, 14 February, Moksh, Jhamsikhel*

Ambassador's valentine, make merry this Valentine's Day with DJ BCash, Dharmendra Sewan, and Bittu. *14 February, 2 to 12 pm, Embassy Restaurant, Lajimpat*



RAAG PAHADI, the maestro flautist Hari Prasad Chaurasia comes to Kathmandu. *Rs 1,000 upwards, 16 February, 4pm, Pragya Pratisthan, Kalimati*



VALENTINE JINGLE, celebrate Valentine's Day with Sabin Rai and the Electrix. *1 March, 3-30pm, Ram Mandir, Battisputali*

GETAWAYS



POKHARA GRANDE, a swimming pool to escape from the tropic heat, a massage parlour and spa to loosen up and a gymnasium to release stress, great options all around. *Lakeside, Pokhara*

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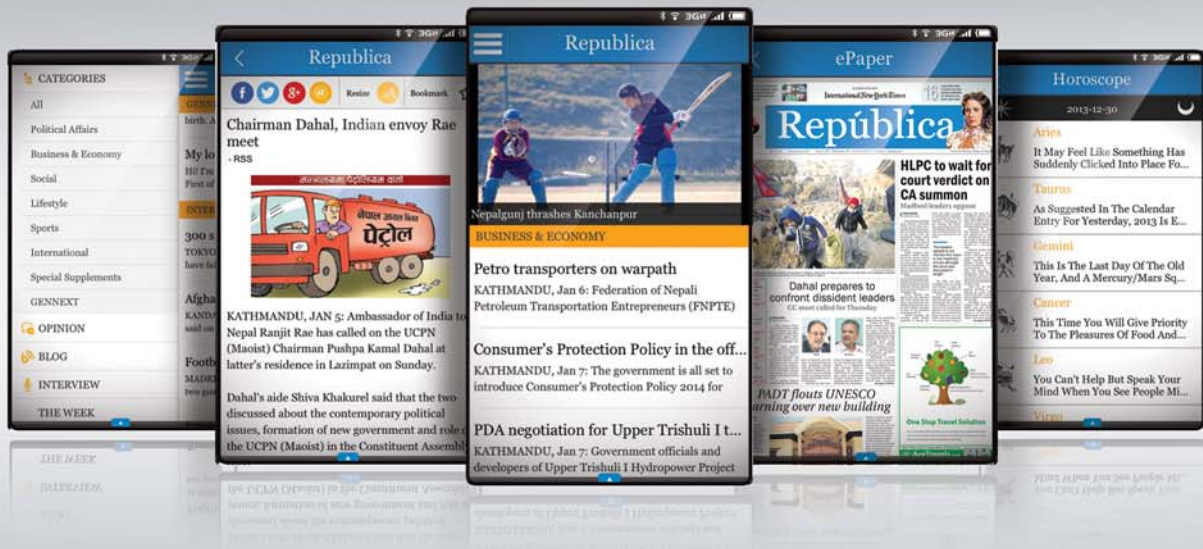
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STEAL AWAY

Al-fresco restaurant at Soaltee Hotel brings you a one-off Valentine offer. Start your meal from a selection of starters. Sample the simply enamorado, tuna and egg beans, or novio meil, oven baked tomato wedges and sweet basil pine nut pesto marinated with olive oil. Proceed next to the soups du jour: Padrino's amiga, shrimp, wild mushroom with oven roasted zucchini, or Amour: asparagus, American corn, and garlic flakes with smoked cognac. Wash these down with delectable cocktails. For the main course, choose between Romeo and Juliet Fantasy, Norwegian salmon fillet and beer battered prawn marinated with English mustard and citrus, or Peter's komida – cheese pinwheels with broad beans and saus



putaniska. Round off your culinary adventure with dessert in the form of anillo palma de mall orca, macerated cheese hearts in strawberry cherry liquer.

14 February, 7pm onwards, Al-fresco, Soaltee Hotel



Hotel Annapurna and Qatar Airlines invite you to their annual Valentine Day fundraiser for Jayanti Memorial Trust, an organisation that spreads awareness about heart-related diseases. This year's party, Egyptian Night will feature sensual belly dancing to match the occasion. Following this invigorating performance is an authentic Egyptian buffet where you can taste food right from the kitchen of the pharaohs of yore. An open bar will be at your service throughout the evening.

14 February, 7pm onwards, Pool-side garden, Hotel Annapurna, Darbar Marg

Trickle down

The ongoing Climate+Change exhibition brings exciting programmes this week:

15 February, workshops for children on creating disaster themed stories, followed by a screening of the Disney film *Wall-E* and *FernGully*. 12 to 2pm, 2 to 3:30pm, 5:30 to 7pm

19 February, 11th hour, screening of Leonardo di Caprio's film about the state of the natural environment and the consequential jeopardy for humans. 5:30 to 7pm

20 February, Solar mamas, film about Rafea, a young Bedouin mother, who attends a programme that aims to make solar engineers out of poor women in Egypt. 5:30 to 7pm

Climate+Change
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Women on the screen

Celebrate the power of women at the upcoming European Union Film Festival.

20 February
11:30 am, *Applause*, Denmark, 83'
1:30 pm, *After five in the forest*, Germany, 94'
3:30 pm, *The first assignment*, Italy, 86'
5:30 pm, *Viper in the fist*, France, 90'



21 February
11:30 am, *Princess*, Finland, 98'
1:30 pm, *House*, Slovakia, 90'
3:30 pm, *Back to your arms*, Lithuania, 89'
5:30 pm, *Eszter's Inheritance*, Hungary, 87'

22 February
11:30 am, *Kuma*, Austria, 88'
1:30 am, *Lora from morning till evening*, Bulgaria, 94'
5:30 pm, *Eccentricities of a Blonde-haired Girl*, Portugal, 63'

23 February
11:30 am, *Take my eyes*, Spain, 102'
1:30 am, *The Dark House*, Netherlands, 101'
3:30 pm, *Beyond*, Sweden, 95'

Celebrating women, 20 to 23 February, QFX Kumari – Hall 2

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ALL TOGETHER: Miniature clay figurines draw the Rato Macchendranath chariot (above). Among the museum's collection of traditional Jyapu musical instruments are items like yakwa baja that no one knows how to play anymore (below).

PICS: TOH EE MING

Guardians of the Jyapus

TOH EE MING

Community museum encourages younger generation to care more about their cultural heritage

For those wanting a quick peek into Nepal's history, Kathmandu is teeming with museums of all shapes, sizes, and varieties. While some like the grand Patan Darbar Museum are doing a good job at preserving our past, others lay decrepit. Now there is a new addition on the museum map: the Ethnic Community Museum in Lalitpur built by the Jyapu Samaj.

Believed to be the first settlers in Kathmandu Valley, Jyapus are indigenous farmers with a long, proud, and rich history. And instead of waiting for the government, the locals took the initiative to preserve and promote their tradition and artefacts and started a museum in October 2012.

"We want our children, grandchildren, and future generations to learn how our ancestors lived," says General Secretary Santa Man Maharjan. "If we don't educate them, our history will be forgotten."

To get to the Ethnic Community Museum, one has to first enter the imposing brick-red, Malla-styled Jyapu Academy building, down a flight of stairs and into a dimly lit hall. The room is divided into three main sections, featuring agricultural and cooking tools, musical instruments and traditional clothes, as well as symbolic items used during festivals.

At first glance, the museum seems spartan and small. The items are crammed closely together on tables draped with red velvet cloth. While tiny



handwritten labels tell us the names of the objects, no descriptions or dates are provided. But Maharjan is more than happy to give a personalised tour.

As he shows us around and explains the value of artefacts, like the bhusi (a kitchen implement to stack dishes and drain water), or the sua tyapu (a copper pot to store water), there is a deep sense of pride in his voice. For Maharjan, the collection is a testament to the independence, pragmatism, and innovativeness of his ancestors.

The word 'Jyapu' literally means 'competent worker' in Nepal Bhasa and the pottery and work tools are very much telling of the community's origins as farmers, musicians, and artisans. Then there are items like the yaakwa baja (a string instrument) that no one knows how to play anymore. These serve as

grim reminders of how culture can be so vulnerable when there is no one actively safeguarding it.

A stroll through the museum provides visitors a brief glimpse into the richness of Nepal's ethnic fabric. In one exhibit, miniature clay figurines draw the Rato Macchendranath chariot. Another exhibit depicts the various castes in their traditional dresses, which correspond to a panoramic backdrop of Nepal's unique topography.

One level down, black-and-white portraits of old Kathmandu hang on the walls, showing landmarks like Lagankhel, Bagmati River, and Patan Dhoka. The exhibit dwells on similar themes, like the fear of an eroding ethnic identity amid the frenzied pace of urbanisation.

For Maharjan and his team, it is a race against time to acquire these treasured items. The current collection was partly sourced from donations from the community and discarded items. "If we don't collect these objects, they will vanish," he admits.

For the future, the Jyapu Samaj plans to install interactive screens for the exhibits and organise live demonstrations of various crafts, but the lack of funding is stifling the museum's prospect. Interest is waning too. The museum now gets less than 20 visitors a day, a far cry from when it first opened two years ago. It tends to be dwarfed by its more famous cousin, the Patan Museum, and time-starved tourists are less willing to venture beyond Darbar Square.

But for those with time to spare, the Ethnic Community Museum is worth a visit: you will be helping in the local's quest to keep the Jyapu memory alive. 🇳🇵

Jyapu Samaj, Yala
Bhola Ganesh, Lalitpur
(01)5544857/5544844
www.jyapusamaj.org.np

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Return of the past, #682
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NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Former British Gurkhas, who decided to stay back in Nepal, are doing well for themselves and their community

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

After serving 15 years in the Gurkha Regiment in the United Kingdom, Prem Begha returned home in 2003. While his retired friends began applying for permanent residence in the UK immediately after their arrival, Begha was determined to stay in Nepal and give back to society.

"For 200 years, we have been fighting and dying in foreign wars," the former soldier explains. "I felt it was time we began contributing to our country."

Begha, who started Gorkha Savings and Gurkha Development Bank, is also the chairperson of Gorkha FM and is working to

revive his bank's fortunes after it came under fire two years ago due to financial irregularities.

Following years of fighting for equality, Gurkhas recruited after 1997, were granted permanent residence visa to the UK in 2003. May 2009's landmark ruling then granted residency rights to Gurkhas who retired before 1997, and who had served at least four years in the British Army, along with their families. Despite respectable and relatively comfortable lives in Nepal, thousands have left their homes, relatives, and friends to resettle in England in hopes of better state benefits, free healthcare, greater savings, and educational and employment opportunities for their children.

Towns like Dharan, Damak, Pokhara, Butwal, Itahari, and Palpa, known for their large settlements of former Gurkha soldiers and family, are now deserted. According to Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organisation (GAESO) out of approximately 44,000 retired men, 60 per cent have left for the UK. Nepal loses around Rs 12 billion a year in remittance due to this

exodus.

Like Begha, Keshar Bahadur Ale Magar of Bardiya also decided to stay back and started Gorkha United School in his home district in 2005. During the war, the school was bombed by the Maoists and sensing impending danger, many of the shareholders fled, leaving the institute's future in grave uncertainty. Most of the founding members, who were ex-Gurkhas, eventually migrated to England. Despite immense challenges, Ale stuck on. Today, Gorkha United is one of the most coveted high schools in the region, which has won several awards for producing stellar SLC results.

"I dropped out of school in seventh grade. It was only after attending vocational training in the UK that I understood the importance of education," admits Ale. "I wanted to invest in quality education in Nepal because that is where our future lies."

Gajendra Ipso returned to Dharan in 1993 after 17 years of service. The 56-year-old is actively involved in the fight for equal treatment of the Gurkha soldiers and encourages families to explore opportunities in Nepal before



Keshar Bahadur Ale Magar

hurrying off to a foreign land. In the last decade, Ipso and his former colleagues have expanded the services of Gorkha Savings and Cooperative. It was his vision and hard work that led to the construction of the Rs 50 million worth Gorkha Shopping Complex at the heart of Dharan's Bhanu Chok.

"A lot of ex-soldiers move abroad to secure a better future for their children. But they don't think twice about what they are losing back home," bemoans Ipso. "If all of us leave for the easy life and privileges in foreign countries, nothing will ever improve in Nepal."

In Kathmandu alone, there are more than three dozen cooperatives, shopping centres, and schools run by former servicemen. However, entrepreneurs and as well as analysts feel that successive governments in Nepal have failed to tap into the immense investment opportunity that the Gurkhas' steady source of income would have provided.

"We failed to recognise the immense contribution of the ex-Gurkhas in keeping the local economy afloat. We can't only blame them for leaving Nepal," says Keshav Acharya, economist and former advisor at the Finance Ministry. "We need to learn from India on how to best utilise the skills and resources of the diaspora community to spur growth in the country."

Although not all their business ventures have succeeded, the ex-soldiers don't have any regrets of investing and losing money in their homeland.

"When I was young, I worked like a dog trying to please the gora sahibs," says 70-year-old Meherban Lingden of Damak, who has dabbled in real estate, cooperatives, and retail, and is now the chairman of Saptarangi FM station in the district. "Finally I am getting to do what I want and enjoying every bit of it here in Nepal." 🇳🇵

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12 YEARS A SLAVE

In 1841 Solomon Northup, a free black man, is kidnapped from his home in Saratoga Springs, New York and sold into slavery in Georgia. He is forced to work as a slave for 12 years under horrific conditions before he is finally able to find a white man who will believe his story and help him return to his wife and his family. This is a true story.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

A film like this is a tricky thing to make. Steve McQueen, the talented black British born director has always had a very specific style, having moved into narrative cinema from a visual arts background (he won the incredibly prestigious Turner Prize in 1999), and his two

excellent former films *Hunger* (2008) and *Shame* (2011) are both very much in keeping with his cool but hard hitting style. So while *12 Years a Slave* is horrifically difficult to watch, McQueen has adapted his sensibility to do justice to this deeply troubling story that not only re-exposes the terrible injustices of slavery but actually addresses an even more disturbing question, the question of our own humanity.

Supported by a truly extraordinary cast with Chiwetel Ejiofor as Solomon Northup (who is renamed Platt when he is sold into slavery); Michael Fassbender (who has played the lead roles in both of McQueen's former films) as Edwin Epps a half crazed slave owner; Lupita Nyong'o as Patsey, the long suffering paramour of the sadistic Epps; Benedict Cumberbatch as William Ford, a slave owner who sees Platt's value, but chooses to turn a blind eye; and Brad Pitt as Samuel Bass, a Canadian wanderer who finally ends Platt's imprisonment; this is a film that perhaps would not have resonated as much without the above mentioned ultra-stellar ensemble.

So why would anyone watch such a film? After all, by now, we are all familiar with the documentation of the evils of slavery, the injustices done, the lives ruined even generations on. I can only answer that it is perhaps never too much to be reminded of what human kind can do to each other because of our superficial differences: the colours of our skin, the separation of gender, and of course, the differences in religion.

12 Years a Slave is a good film, a hard film to watch, but you will not regret seeing it. It is not McQueen's best and had the story not been based in truth, perhaps I might even have accused him of slight histrionics, not in the subject matter, but definitely in the all too heavy and jarring score by Hans Zimmer. However, McQueen's film forcibly exposes us to one of the truly terrible times in our history - jarringly reminding us that no matter how sophisticated we are today, we were and still are capable of treating each other like animals.

12 Years a Slave will most probably win Best Picture, the academy likes films about serious matters. Ejiofor will be cheated if he is not awarded Best Actor along with Nyong'o for her heart-breaking turn as the abused Patsy. McQueen, however, being British, will probably suffer the most, falling through the cracks. 🇳🇵

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HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

HERE I COME: Nepali Congress President Sushil Koirala leaves the Constituent Assembly hall after being elected as Nepal's 37th prime minister on Monday.



DEVAKI BISTA

UNITED WE STAND: Students and doctors of TU Teaching Hospital protest in front of Shital Niwas, Maharajganj on Tuesday to express solidarity with Dr Govinda KC's hunger strike.



DEVAKI BISTA

THE END: Outgoing Chairman of the Interim Election Council Khil Raj Regmi (right) addresses the nation in his farewell speech at Singha Darbar on Tuesday. Regmi also announced his resignation from the post of chief justice.



DEVIKA GHARTI MAGAR

LET'S DANCE: People from Tharu community perform Barka dance at Folk Drama Festival in Ghorahi, Dang on Tuesday.

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Reimagining the everyday

Imagine the streets you walk everyday lined with mirrors. All of a sudden, you become aware of the moments playing out simultaneously around you. Disorienting yes, but this is how Julian Parker-Burns presents everyday life in Kathmandu, in his newest exhibition, *Trading Paint*.

Although Julian's mixed media technique is not a novelty in itself, it is his eye for detail that makes his art truly successful. From bus conductors, to sleeping dogs, and butcher shops, the artist has taken elements of street life, captured them on in camera, and then composed them into a single montage layered with a variety of textures and acrylics. The end product blurs the line between what is real and what is not.

As you step from one piece to another, you begin to see Kathmandu as Julian sees it: a visceral, vibrant wonderland. The whirling frenzy of wheels and engines in *Motorcycle Ride*, reminds one of the lawlessness and chaos that rules the streets here. Then there is *Stairs* which like many of his works has certain fluidity, causing your eye to constantly move back and forth. Inspired by the countless steps leading



TOH EE MING

towards Swayambhunath, the stairs in *Stairs*, converge in an infinite loop, not unlike a modern-day MC Escher painting.

Another remarkable thing about Julian's work is that it is tactile. When you are able to feel the relief and contours of the art and not just enjoy the view from afar, the experience becomes much more enriching.

REVIEW

While most of the 20 pieces on display are chaotically spectacular, there are some that call for deeper contemplation. *Holding up Kathmandu*, is one such work. Divided into two segments, the upper half of which shows a bright blue sky, a globe dotted with major landmarks like Boudha, the Narayanhi



Palace, and Singha Darbar, and the bottom a man staring at his reflection in a pool of water, a lone figure against a muted purple landscape, the piece maintains a fine balance between subtle and loud.

This image of water and reflections is recurring and embodies the artist's theme. "Things don't happen in one space, it happens everywhere. To create a reflection of one moment, he puts it all in one whole scene to create harmony," explains Marie Ange Sylvain-Holmgren, managing director of Image Ark Gallery.

"My art is about universal interconnection; the desire to see an environment from all sides all at once," writes Julian on his website. As stated, his latest exhibition achieves that and it is easy to find yourself sucked into this romanticised world he has so deftly portrayed. It is little wonder, then, that when you step out, you will see this city with a fresh set of eyes. 🇳🇵

Toh Ee Ming

Trading Paint by Julian Parker Burns
17 January - 21 February
Image Ark Gallery, Pulchok
www.julianparkerburns.com

As with the multitude of restaurants encircling the Boudhanath Stupa, the best thing about La Casita De Boudhanath is perhaps its rooftop, which offers unparalleled view of the glorious world heritage site. But unlike the others, whose menu is plagued by the unexciting momochowmein variety, this fairly new establishment run by a Spanish couple offers a specialised menu. The photobook styled menu has a host of Mediterranean cuisine with Spanish being the restaurant's speciality.

After the initial excitement of being so close to the stupa wore off and my friends had clicked enough pictures to run their batteries out, we settled on our drinks: two mojitos, one caipirinha, and one mocha frappuccino to start with.

Less than five minutes after our order, our smiling waitress had our drinks on the table. The mojito (Rs 260) was refreshing. With just the right amount of rum, lime, sugar, and mint, it was the perfect drink for the sunny day and one that was gulped down in under a minute. Our other cocktail, the caipirinha (Rs 240), however was a miss. Even after checking with the bar, we failed to taste any vodka in it. The chilled mocha frappuccino (Rs 190) though better



PICS: HARIZ BAHARUDIN

LA CASITA DE BOUDHANATH



than most served around town was low on caffeine. Unless you are very particular about your coffee, the drink is enjoyable.

Our only tapas order - a small plate of chicken croquetas (Rs 250) - looked gorgeous; fried golden brown and served with a

dip of mayonnaise and fresh salad on a platter. But a bite later, we had different thoughts. The batter that encased the chicken was too thick for our liking and the meat itself cooked a bit bland. However, the dip and salad were delicious.

Amongst the day's specials,

we chose to indulge in desserts and didn't regret our decision two desserts later. The blueberry cheesecake (Rs 300) was neither overwhelmingly sweet nor strong and the blend of berries and cheese was just right. For its price though, we felt that the slice was a tad tiny, but like they say all good things come in small packages.

The churros (Rs 295) that this reviewer in particular was most excited about, didn't have the soft interior these famous Spanish doughnuts are known for, but worked because of the hot chocolate dipping sauce that they were served with. The generous cup full of decadent molten cocoa tasted so good that we were competing for spoonfuls long after the dough sticks were gone.

There's still a lot that I want to try at this place, namely the salads, which seemed to be a favourite among regulars, judging by their dominating presence in every table. Until then I keep my

judgement open on La Casita's food. But go there for the friendly staff, quick service, cosy ambience, and the view best enjoyed from the terrace. 🇳🇵

Hariz Baharudin

How to get there: Turn right as you enter Boudhanath, and walk towards Khumbu Hotel. Look for a red brick building, La Casita is located on the second floor.



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Making the genetic switch

What is common between a Nepali drinking milk (and experiencing the usual upset stomach) and high altitude adaptation? The DNA.

About 7,000 years ago, Northern Europeans learnt how to digest milk, a clear human evolutionary change. But many people in South Asia including Nepal have not made this genetic switch and predominantly suffer from lactose intolerance (milk



DHNAVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

indigestion), which accounts for our ‘pet gadyang gudung’ after consuming a glass or two of milk. The newest example of documented evolutionary change may well be in the field of high altitude adaptation by the Tibetans and Sherpa people.

Independent reports some years ago from Beijing Genomics Institute (the world’s largest genetic research centre designed to sequence the precise order of billions of chemicals within the molecule of DNA), Case Western Reserve University in Ohio, and University of Utah have detected mutations in a gene which helps the Tibetans to adapt to high altitude. The gene, called Hypoxia Inducible Factor (HIF 2 alpha, to be precise), seems to be able to assist in properly adapting to high altitude in the same fashion that the Europeans avoid milk indigestion by a genetic switch.

There are high altitude dwellers in other parts of the world such as South America, but the natives there do not seem to properly adapt at high altitude; in fact they mal adapt, probably due to lack of changes in HIF.

Chronic mountain sickness (CMS), also known as Monge’s Disease after a well-known



Peruvian high altitude scientist, is a common disease in South America among residents of altitudes above 2,500m. It is characterised by excessive red blood cells (polycythemia) and leads to edema, heart failure, and lethargy. CMS is completely different from acute mountain sickness (AMS), which is characterised by headache and nausea in short-term travellers to the Himalayas.

The Altiplano in South America that stretches across Bolivia, Peru, Chile, and Argentina, is the largest and highest plateau after the one in Tibet. In cities and towns that fall on the Andean Plateau, CMS is commonly seen. CMS is also seen in certain high altitude areas in Colorado, USA, and more recently amongst the thousands of Han Chinese who have recently arrived in high altitude towns and cities in the Tibetan plateau such as Lhasa.

None of these other high altitude residents possess the mutation in the particular HIF gene, thus strongly suggesting a genetic contribution to the adaptation in the Tibetans and Sherpas. Migration to a low

altitude results in the resolution of CMS.

Altitude adaptation is also important for animals living at high altitude. Brisket disease is seen in regular cattle who are taken to high altitude. There is obvious water collection (edema) in the forelegs and neck of these animals due to heart failure caused by low oxygen. The symptoms improve and the animal is eventually cured by taking it back to low altitude. Colonel Dr Anand from Chandigarh, Punjab described a very similar disease to Brisket in young Indian soldiers stationed at high altitude near the border with Pakistan. The soldiers also were cured of their illness on descent.

But the animal which has learnt to survive (indeed thrive) at high altitudes is the yak. Even at 5,000m the beast has no problems with lack of oxygen. Studies in yaks have revealed useful changes in the HIF gene, suggesting that certain varieties of this gene may play an important role in adaptation even in animals. Indeed, there seems to be a positive genetic contribution to both long-term human and animal habitation at high altitude in the Himalayas. 🇳🇵

GIZMO by YANTRICK

Painting pictures

It is every cine enthusiast’s dream to own a projector. After all who wouldn’t want to enjoy their favourite movie played out life-size on their living room walls. But these beasts were always so ridiculously priced that for average joes like Yantrick it was only a wishful thinking to actually purchase one.

But now with renowned projector manufacturer Optoma introducing a range of HD projectors at affordable prices, Yantrick’s dream of enjoying a cinematic experience at home seems much more achievable.

Optoma’s HD131XE is one of the least expensive full HD home entertainment projectors available in the market today. But its low price doesn’t mean Optoma has sacrificed on the quality.

Available in sleek black or white finish, the HD131XE sports a fairly stylish design, and weighing in at just 6.4 pounds and with dimensions of 12.7 x 9.2 x 3.8 inches (LxBxH), it is highly portable, perfect for those always on the move. Connection options at the rear of the HD131XE are aplenty, with 2 HDMI inputs especially handy, and the physical controls sit atop the HD131XE. You also have the option of operating it via a remote control. Once connected and powered on, the on-screen menus are simple and navigation around the menus, and calibration of the projector shouldn’t pose a problem.

Once you plug in your HDMI cable, and start projecting your high-definition content, that is when the magic begins. Projecting at full HD resolutions (1080p), the HD131Xe is what your HD movies and games were made for, especially when you consider the 300 inches (maximum) size images that the HD131Xe is capable of displaying. The HD131Xe’s Digital Light Processing (DLP) with BrilliantColor technology, 2500 lumens brightness, 1.07 billion colours, and an impressive 18000:1 contrast ratio, all




contribute to a vivid, clear, crisp and all-round brilliant viewing experience. The HD131Xe is also 3D compatible. It was tempting to call in sick, stay at home and watch all the

3D blockbusters that I had missed out on.

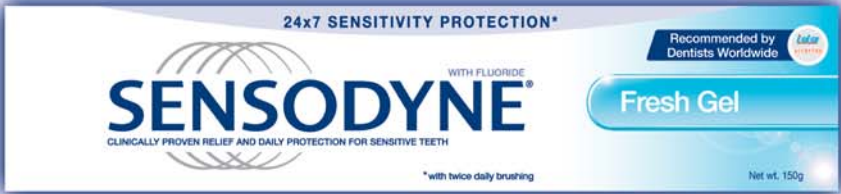
With a decent lamp-life of 3500 hours (6000 hours in Eco-mode) the HD131Xe will let you enjoy viewing sports, movies and games on a massive screen, and that too at the highest resolutions for years to come. 🇳🇵

Yantrick’s Verdict: Retailing for approx. Rs 75,000 Optoma’s HD131Xe projectors is one of the more affordable full-HD projectors available in the market. With the added bonus of 3D compatibility, it serves as an ideal home theatre system centre piece for tech-heads on a budget.



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India's left-of-centre Third Front

An alliance of 11 parties desperately tries to save itself ahead of general elections

The Indian general elections are now only three months away and its runup is being keenly watched not just in India, but in neighbouring countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Within India, the imminent re-emergence of a Third Front made up of 11 non-Congress, non-BJP parties as an alternative formation, is a hotly debated issue. A Third Front would



LOOK OUT

Ajaz Ashraf

be like pouring old wine into another old bottle in which the cork is missing and by election time the wine would have soured.

In the electoral mall, the Third Front seems like a vote-one-get-one-free offer. You vote for one of the 11 parties banding together and you will also have voted for the Third Front.

Four factors seem to have triggered the move to cobble a Left-led alternative front. One, the growing possibility of BJP prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi making deep electoral inroads in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar bordering Nepal, where state-based parties have been lead players till now. This has spawned Factor No 2: the anxiety that Modi's designs on the Hindi heartland could lead to antagonistic caste groups banding together under the overarching Hindu religious identity, leading to a sharp communal polarisation.

This situation is perilous for non-national parties which draw their support principally from a combination of the 'lower' castes and Muslim voters. Might not Modi's persona wean away sections of lower/middle caste voters to the BJP's fold? Might it also not drive the Muslims to the Congress or its alliance which,

at least nationally, is seen as the best bet to stop the community's bête noir, BJP, from coming to power at the centre?

A Third Front, thus, could communicate the message to Muslims that they have a secular national option other than the present UPA coalition. To the middle castes, it holds out the hope of a leader from a marginalised group becoming prime minister.

Three, the buzz the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has created through its decision to go national is a portent of the third space in Indian politics getting overcrowded. The 11-party Front tacitly marks out this space for traditional political outfits, challenging the AAP's appropriation. This also guarantees to the Left its moral and ideological preeminence in the non-Congress, non-BJP realm. This is why the Left has been attacking the AAP for not opposing the neo-liberal economic policies, which, from the Marxist viewpoint, is essential for any party to qualify for the Third-Front moniker.

Four, there are signs that Indian voters have started to assign a greater value to entities having a national presence or personality than they did in the last two decades. Perhaps the growing urbanisation of India has created an emerging consciousness that privileges the national over the regional and the politics of interest over that

of caste or religious identities.

In this sense, an entity such as the Third Front provides a national veneer to its constituents who have a predominantly regional personality. This places them, at least theoretically, on an equal footing with their regional competitors who are either the allies of the Congress or the BJP.

Undoubtedly, the Third Front is predominantly an electoral strategy, but its efficacy is debatable, largely because the regional or federal agenda has been in the public domain for far too long to retain the uniqueness of its flavour. If anything, the principle of regionalism appears diluted in comparison to, say, the National Front of 1989. A bewildering range of regional satraps are outside the Third Front umbrella, from Mamata Banerjee to Lalu Prasad Yadav to Prakash Singh Badal to Mayawati to K Karunanidhi to just about everyone from about-to-be-bifurcated Andhra Pradesh.

No doubt, the Left has helped cobble the Third Front in the hope of ensuring that the overall tilt of Indian polity is to left-of-centre and secular. But, really, can it become the ideological pied-piper of Indian politics with a tally of seats not expected to be anywhere near the high of 59 it reached in 2009? Only a delusional optimist would say 'yes'. ashrafajaz3@gmail.com

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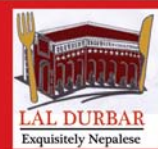
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GETTING OVER THE INFLUENCE

Crackdown on drink driving has lessened road accidents, but public attitude is harder to change

HARIZ BAHARUDIN
AND SUNIR PANDEY

More people will die from road accidents than from AIDS in the next 20 years, raising the number of traffic fatalities around the world to two million each year. The figures for Nepal are equally alarming.

Nearly 10,000 people have lost their lives on our highways since the war ended in 2006 and the fatality rate per accident is one of the highest in the world: one person died in every five accident last year. Traffic mishaps have now become the number one killer in the 20-30 age group in the country.

In late 2011, the Kathmandu Metropolitan Traffic Police (MTP) sought to address one of the biggest causes for

accidents here and introduced strict anti-drinking and driving regulations. Every night, about 35 surprise checkpoints are set up around the Valley, which double during weekends and festive season when people are more likely to drink. Police officers on duty stop each vehicle to inspect drivers, sometimes with breathalysers, but mostly by smelling their breath for alcohol.

Blood alcohol content (BAC) is the per cent of alcohol in the blood that increases with each drink a person consumes. Countries around the world use different BAC readings to determine drunk driving (*see box*), but Nepal has a zero tolerance policy, which means that any hint of alcohol in your breath and the police will arrest you.

Offenders have to pay a fine of Rs 1,000 and their licence is seized until they attend a mandatory hour-long class held by the police on the dangers of driving under the influence. Every time drivers are caught, their licence is hole punched; five holes and the document is revoked.

The campaign has dramatically reduced the number of accidents. Restaurant and bar owners report a drastic loss in business ever since the policy was implemented.

Considering the acute shortage of police manpower - there are only 1,000 traffic personnel to Kathmandu's 750,000 vehicle - this is an impressive achievement.

Between July 2012-July 2013, Kathmandu recorded 4,770 road accidents with 148 fatalities. In the past two years, the number of accidents decreased by 16 per cent and there have been half as many injuries.

Some critics argue that the reason the traffic police is so eager to book drunk drivers is because officers get to keep one-sixth of the revenue collected from the fines, which amounted to more than Rs 400 million in

2012. Superintendent Basant Pant, however, is adamant that public safety, not commissions, is their primary concern.

"Our goal is not to increase revenue so we can pocket a share. We want people to drink responsibly and not drive when intoxicated so that the roads are safer," explains Pant.

While the zero-tolerance policy has helped reduce accidents, its success in changing public attitude and



HARIZ BAHARUDIN

Safety first

Formula One enthusiasts were treated to a taste of the high-octane sport when two-time world champion Mika Häkkinen displayed his expert driving skills here last month. Mika was here to promote Johnnie Walker's 'Join The Pact Campaign', that seeks to spread awareness about the dangers of drinking and driving. The program encourages drivers to take the pledge that they will not consume alcohol when they drive and conversely to not drive after they have been drinking. The campaign was launched here last November and has accumulated over 28,000 responses online. 'Join The Pact' was started by Johnnie Walker in 2006, when Häkkinen and other F1 drivers began spreading the importance of responsible drinking worldwide. Mika has visited more than 30 countries to advocate the cause and Nepal is the first country in the region to host him as part of the campaign.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

How much is too much?

Police around the world use breathalysers to estimate the blood alcohol content (BAC) in drivers and the amount that person is permitted to consume varies from country to country. A number of factors like body type, weight, and food intake affect how quickly one's BAC rises. Even gender determines one's BAC level. For a man weighing 80kg, just 1.5 litre of beer is enough to make his BAC level reach 0.08. A woman of the same weight would only need a litre. Thinner people get drunk faster – a man weighing 45kg would only need a 700ml of beer to reach the same BAC level.



TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

CHINA:	0.02%
INDIA:	0.03%
GERMANY:	0.05%
THAILAND:	0.05%
SINGAPORE:	0.08%
USA:	0.08%
UK:	0.08%
Permitted BAC levels	

making people realise the dangers remains questionable. In the second year of the campaign, drink driving fatalities actually doubled and the number of injuries went up from 79 to 152. On New Year's Eve alone, traffic police detained 325 people for drinking and driving. At the mandatory classes held at MTP's offices near Singha Darbar, offenders are given a lecture about the dangers of driving while intoxicated and shown CCTV footage of accidents. This doesn't seem to deter first-time offenders though, because the four classes held every weekday run at maximum capacity.

"I was nervous because it was my first time," says a 25-year-old from Syangja. "But some older classmates were quite cynical about the whole thing and they didn't say they'd never do it again." The priority for drivers now seems to be to evade checkpoints at any cost. "The first time I was caught, I used source force to get my licence back," admits a 46-year-old resident of Jawalakhel. "The second time, I attended the class and paid the fine. Now I just don't drive my car on the main roads if I am drunk, I try to use smaller alleys as much as possible because there is no checking." Pant believes levying higher

finest and introducing harsher laws will be more effective in convincing people to stay away from the wheel after drinking. When a person under the influence attempts to drive, he risks not only his life, but the lives of passengers and other road users as well. Parents of teenagers caught in this potentially dangerous offence feel this deserves more than just a slap on the wrist. In Canada, the Mothers Against Drink Driving (MADD) aims to stop impaired driving and campaigns for tougher laws. The organisation also raises awareness on the perils of drink driving and offers support for accident victims. According to the United

States National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, MADD's efforts have managed to save more than 35,000 lives since 1982. However, in a culture that encourages heavy drinking and where children grow up seeing their fathers and uncles readily flaunting drinking and driving rules, even Pant accepts that change in behaviour will take a long time.

[nepalitimes.com](#)

Road kill, #666
Nepal's highways of death, #666
Dead on arrival, #579
Al Jazeera on drunk driving in Nepal

Congratulations !



We would like to extend heartiest congratulation and best wishes to **Mr Pushpa Man Shrestha**, Managing Director of Nepal Pashmina Industry and President of Nepal Pashmina Association for being honoured with Nepal Government's Commercially Important Person (CIP) by Honourable President **Ram Baran Yadav**.

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Standing on ceremony

Sujit Mahat, *Kantipur*, 12 February

क्रान्तिपुर

Nepal's prime minister is the ceremonial head of 49 institutions, which means the country's executive head is compelled to attend unproductive formal programs throughout his term. Besides the Cabinet of Ministers, Security Council, National Planning Commission and Constitutional Council, the prime minister won't be missed if he steps down from the remaining 45.

"Most institutions want the prime minister as their chairperson to simply take favors through affiliation," says Chief Secretary Leela Mani Puoudel. "If the prime minister wants, he could make productive use of his time by stepping down from most of these positions."

The practice of appointing the head of the country as the chancellor of universities began during Panchayat and has become the norm even after the monarchy was abolished. Nepal's Prime Minister is the chancellor of nine universities. Besides universities, the executive head is also appointed at academies and several other 'high-level' committees.

Former finance secretary Rameshwor Khanal, who was also advisor to the prime minister, says, "Autonomous institutions like universities don't even require education ministers as chancellors." Khanal says institutions like High-Level HIV/AIDS Council and many other academies aren't going to be more effective by simply affiliating themselves with the prime minister.

"The Prime Minister needs to devote all his time for constitution-writing and economic transformation by stepping down from ceremonial roles," says Radhesh Pant, the chief executive officer of the Investment Board.

Nepal's prime minister is the head of the following institutions:

- 1. Cabinet of ministers
- 2. Constitutional Council

- 3. National Security Council
- 4. National Academy of Science and Technology
- 5. Nepal Academy
- 6. Music and Dance Academy
- 7. Lalit Kala Academy
- 8. Nepal Academy of Medical Sciences
- 9. Patan Academy of Health Sciences
- 10. National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities
- 11. BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences
- 12. Tribhuwan University
- 13. Kathmandu University
- 14. Purwanchal University
- 15. Pokhara University
- 16. Lumbini Buddha University
- 17. Nepal Sanskrit University
- 18. Far Western University
- 19. Mid-Western University
- 20. Agriculture and Forest Science University
- 21. National Water Resource Development Council
- 22. Tourism Board
- 23. Environment Protection Council
- 24. Climate Change Council
- 25. High level HIV/AIDS Council
- 26. National Information Technology Development Council
- 27. National Development Council
- 28. National Sports Council
- 29. Kathmandu Valley Development Council
- 30. National Development Problem Solution Committee
- 31. High level Peace Committee
- 32. Army Integration Special Committee
- 33. High Powered Committee for Integrated Development of Bagmati Civilisation
- 34. Administrative Reform Monitoring Committee
- 35. High level Investment Board
- 36. High Level Policy Committee on Organisation
- 37. National Population Committee
- 38. Decentralisation Implementation Monitoring Committee
- 39. Nation Tiger Conservation Committee



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- 40. National Planning Commission
- 41. High level Committee for Information Technology
- 42. Poverty Alleviation Fund
- 43. Lumbini Development Fund
- 44. Pashupati Area Development Trust
- 45. National Trust for Nature Conservation
- 46. National Commission for Sustainable Development
- 47. Nepal Scout
- 48. Investment Board
- 49. Karnali Academy of Health Sciences

Internal affairs

Saroj Raj Adhikari and Sundar Khanal, *Kantipur*, 12 February

क्रान्तिपुर

Less than 24 hours after Sushil Koirala was elected Prime Minister to head a coalition government with the UML, the fight for the Home Ministry has disrupted the proceedings in the parliament. The fact that the local elections may be taking place sometime soon makes Home Ministry the most sought after office, as the party running it has unparalleled advantages of controlling and mobilizing the bureaucracy and security forces.

Whichever party heads the HM also has a greater influence over sensitive matters like border issues and mobilising security forces. With China's growing concern over the movement of Tibetan refugees and anti-China protests in Nepal and India worried about terrorism networks spreading across the border, Nepal's neighbours also feel they are stakeholders.

Besides this, HM plays a crucial role in the transfer and appointment of security personnel and people spend millions in bribe to influence the administrators' decisions. Promoted officers then return the favour during election and

party conventions. Close to 2,000 people from Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Intelligence unit are directly deployed by the Home Ministry.

Given the vast amount of resources at the ministry's disposal, the Home Minister can easily embezzle from the financial assistance fund and intelligence fund. According to a source at the Home Ministry, the budget allocated for intelligence mobilisation is audited only by a high level officer selected by the Office of the Auditor General. Intelligence mobilisation alone receives more a Rs 10 million budget each year. In 2006, millions were siphoned off during the purchase of armoured personnel carriers (APC) for the Nepali peacekeeping mission in Sudan. This is only one example of how the Home Ministry can be a hotbed of financial irregularity.

Keeping tabs

Ram Bahadur Rawal, *Nepal*, 9 February

नेपाल

Costs for the second Constituent Assembly elections on 19 November:

Annual budget from the government	Rs	90,000,000
From the Peace Fund	Rs	4,490,000,000
Budget provided to security bodies	Rs	8,000,000,000
Cost of making Voter ID Cards	Rs	10,000,000,000
Election Assitance Project, UNDP	Rs	610,000,000
Expenses of citizenship distribution team	Rs	92,015,000
Aid from China	Rs	160,000,000
Vehicle aid from India	Rs	800,000,000
Ballot box aid from Japan	Rs	1,420,000,000
EU Aid	Rs	64,328,000
EU monitoring	Rs	474,880,000
Expenses of Idea International	Rs	77,520,000
Norwegian Embassy aid	Rs	29,428,600
Swiss Aid for Idea International	Rs	21,307,296
British Embassy Aid to NGOs	Rs	9,400,000
ESP/DFID Aid to NGOs	Rs	164,000,000
USAid for Carter Centre expenses	Rs	260,000,000
USAid expenses for The Asia Foundation	Rs	410,000,000
USAid expenses for NDI and IFEA	Rs	462,234,052
USAid expenses for Pact Inc.	Rs	2,500,000,000
Total expense	Rs	31,036,552,948
Total eligible voters	Rs	12,147,865
Cost per voter	Rs	2,481

Forget not

Khem Thapaliya, *Ratopati*, 13 February

रतोपाटी

Today is the 19th anniversary of the People's War. On 13 February, 1996, thousands of Nepalis took up arms for change and since then, they have been celebrating the People's War Day every year.

It is the biggest challenge for the Maoist party to stay true to what they set out to do and most importantly protect revolution and the revolutionary ideas that inspired thousands to heed their call. We cannot just shove away all that and backtrack from the original ideals and compromise for short term gains.



Over the years, the Maoists have earned a bad name because of the leadership's compromise and sudden change in lifestyle. It is important that they return to their initial promises.

This day provides an opportunity to remember the 14,000 martyrs that died during the struggle. So, let's pay our respect to the brave sons and daughters of Nepal who had the courage to sacrifice themselves for change.



Oli-speak

अन्नपूर्णपोष्ट Basu Kshitiz in *Annapurna Post*, 8 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“ Listen, you have to make me deputy prime minister and minister for foreign affairs, because even the foreigners support me. I will return the favour to whoever among you helps me. ”



NC leader Sujata Koirala to the party's top three leaders at a meeting in Sushil Koirala's house, Ghatana ra Bichar, 12 February





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Happy Ballantines

There will be many amongst us who will celebrate Valentine's Day on Friday with the same oomph and pomp we observe many other festivals in this country: by going bar hopping in Thamel. (This week's column is proudly sponsored by a liquor brand which comes in a small brown bottle, but shall remain nameless. Statutory Warning: reading this column while under the influence is illegal in some states. Hic.) The International Day of Love and Lust, however, is a good time to remind ourselves of our ancestors' obsession with sex. They left ample evidence of this hoary past in the temple struts and other erections in the Kathmandu Valley as proof of the outstanding and upright people we once were.

We didn't beat around the bush when it came to birds and bees in those days, we got straight to the point. Much of the corpus of invaluable ornithological and apiarian data has been carefully preserved in temple eaves of the three Darbar Squares so that posterity could retroactively learn from these 3-D interactive displays of holy erotica.

All you need is a pair of powerful binoculars for education fieldtrips to learn from our architecture (From Sanskrit: "archi"= dirty, and "tecture"= stuff). It is obvious from a cursory perusal of the temples that many of these fun and games our ancestors indulged in are now extinct. Just as well because it looks like what our forebears did in the intimacy of their homes was more like Greco-Roman wrestling than



knoodling.

Some temple struts look like they are straight out of a manual of the World Wrestling Federation and depict manoeuvre like 'Reversal' (which earns the player three bonus points) in which the man underneath completely reverses his position and comes to the top position. Another move is called the 'Crotch-lift', the aggressor executes a hold with his or her arms and legs, leading to front head-lock with amplitude.

We don't know what the final outcome of these bouts were, but our ancestors left graphic evidence that they also loved to wrestle with sheep, water buffalo, and other semi-mythical

fauna in order to test their strength and stamina. In fact, they were such eager sportsmen that they wrestled in groups, and sometimes they even wrestled with themselves. Warning to parents: some of these temples may not be suitable for minors and have been declared PG18 by the Director General of Copulation and Family Planning.

Following this grand tradition, it is important for us this Valentine's Day to value and preserve our grand traditions by paying silent homage to the acrobats who laid the groundwork of the society we are now proud to call our own. Without their seminal contribution, we would not be here today to pen these lines of tribute.

And now we can get back to a subject we are all much more comfortable with: political knoodling. Comrade Leftist God came out of nowhere to be the most powerful man in the UML and after a pact with Comrade Oily, secured a commitment to be his party's candidate for Homely Minister.

What Bum Dave hadn't bargained for, however, is that he'd be stabbed in the back by Makunay and Jhal Gnat who secretly sent word to Jhusil that having such a tainted man as Homework Minister would sully his (PM's) Mr Clean image. Hence the hitch.

Jhusil Da's main headache is not the UML commies, however, it is his own clan, in particular Suzie Q. The ex-First Dotter has been badgering Uncle Swoosh for Vice-Premier and Foreigner Minister when her only qualification for the post seems to be that she is married to a farang.

The Ass



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