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POKHARA PACKAGE

**TAKING FLIGHT:** Kevin, the Egyptian vulture, enjoys a mid-flight snack while soaring above Pokhara last week with paraglider pilot, Scott Mason.

For dramatic parashawking video and interactive Pokhara map.

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## POLITICS AS USUAL

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER  
EDITORIAL  
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HOME SWEET HOME  
BY ANURAG ACHARYA  
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BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

The formation of a new government three months after elections must be some kind of a new world record. In Nepali politics, we are always breaking records of this type, so no surprise there. In fact the surprising thing is that it hasn't taken longer. We have to be thankful that despite the delay, a coalition cabinet has finally been formed more or less following the rules of electoral democracy. The largest party got the job of hammering out a coalition and after prolonged haggling, formed a government with the second largest party in parliament.

So far so good. But we have seen since 1990 that however arduous cobbling together a coalition government may seem, the job of sustaining that partnership and actual governing is much more difficult. Today, the task is even more fraught because besides governing, the government and elected assembly are also supposed to write a new constitution within one year. Three months have already been squandered in feckless dithering. There is every indication that the fractious governing parties with added distraction from a vengeful opposition made up of the Maoist and Madhesi parties will soon lose track of the ball. Sushil Koirala, whatever one may say about his integrity, doesn't have the personality to fix infighting. We would be glad to be proved wrong, but there aren't too many encouraging signs.

The most glaring deficiency of the new cabinet is its inability to reflect Nepal's true ethnic, gender, and geographic diversity. In fact the cabinet has become living proof that we have regressed since 2008 in having an inclusive Constituent Assembly and government.

This wouldn't have mattered so much if the ministers



No surprise that government formation took so long. The surprising thing is that it didn't take longer.

in question were truly brilliant managers or specialists, but many of them are not even elected. It is a reflection of how little democratic practice has progressed since 1990 that most of the UML and some of the NC ministers are cronies of powerful puppet masters. If the Home Minister

was going to be Bam Dev Gautam anyway, why did we have to wait so long for an agreement on cabinet formation? Here, the internal dynamics within the NC and UML are more to blame than any major differences between the two parties.

To be sure, there are some respectable veterans in the cabinet, but the imbalance in its overall composition and the preponderance of unelected members do not do justice to the faith the Nepali people put on elections and dishonour the risks they took to exercise their democratic right to vote back in November.

The euphoria of elections has once more been replaced with dismay. The ministers are back to speechifying, again lecturing to bored audiences about 'the way things should be'. Don't expect this lot to pay much attention to the plight of the Adhikari couple who are very near the end as they protest the lack of justice for the murder of their son during the conflict. Don't expect much progress on other war crimes, or on a meaningful Truth and Reconciliation Commission being formed.

An Economic Summit and Hydropower Conference are happening and we will hear a lot of speeches about the energy crisis and the need to encourage investors. Development will get lip service when what we really need is concrete steps to hold local elections.

Compared to Bangladesh, which suffers an intractable Battle of the Begums, or the ruinous Red-Yellow War in Thailand, and cycle of uprisings in Ukraine, Egypt or Venezuela, Nepal's political paralysis is actually not looking that bad. We may just have to tell ourselves that it could be a lot worse.

DIWAKAR CHETTRI

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

TWIN OTTERS DOWN

Nepal's air safety record is not just poor, it is downright appalling ('Twin otters down', Kunda Dixit, #695). More than 130 people have died in plane crashes in the past eight years, that means 16 fatalities at an average annually. We could pressurise the state and private companies by boycotting air travel all together until industry standards improve drastically. However, the alternative - road travel - is even worse. A bus or truck runs off Nepal's highways every other month. The price of human life seems so minuscule in this country, I don't see an effective solution any time soon.

Janu

Why is the Civil Aviation Authority not held accountable for the poor safety record of Nepal's Airlines? Aren't the officials at CAAN responsible for ensuring that planes are maintained and pilots have proper qualifications before they are allowed to fly?

Roshan Shrestha

My heartfelt condolences to the families of the passengers and crew on board the ill-fated Nepal Airlines 9N-ABB. I am from Germany and have been working here for the past three years. Before I left home, my friends and family made me promise that no matter what happened, I would never travel on a domestic flight in Nepal. I haven't broken my promise yet, but I must say travelling

by bus or car (even within Kathmandu) is equally scary and dangerous. I wish the government would do something to protect its citizens. How many more lives have to be lost for the state, the airlines, and bus/micro companies to wake up?

Thomas K

The most tricky and dangerous airport to land in is Paro, Bhutan. Yet because rules and procedures are strictly followed, the country hasn't had a single crash even though the airport is used regularly by Airbus 320 jets.

Tenzing

COMATOSE GOVERNMENT

Nepal has made little progress in a decade and a half and yet we remain silent ('Comatose government', Editorial, #695). We continue to be fooled by empty promises from the same leaders who collectively destroyed the country. Even though there is no electricity for most hours of the day, taps run dry all over the city, and inflation is at an all-time high, nobody seems to have a problem. Why don't we as a nation have the courage to do something about the state of affairs? I believe it is every bit our fault as the politicians that not much has changed in a long, long time.

Kedar Bista

All the leaders have promised to deliver a new constitution within a year, but I wonder if they even believe in their own words. And if the experiences of the past eight years are anything to go

by, sticking to deadlines is not a strong point of our politicians. They wasted the first three months after elections trying to agree upon a prime minister and now they are taking their own sweet time deciding on the various ministerial portfolios. How long will they make us wait this time is anybody's guess.

Renu Shrestha

Nepal is in a state of coma at the moment because Indians like Jaya Prakash Narayan, Chandra Shekhar, Surjeet Singh, and Shyam Sharan have not come to wake us up. Nepal's will take definitive action after instructions arrive from our southern neighbour, once the Indian general election ends in May.

KK Sharma

When men without any character or strong morals are put in leadership positions, it is disastrous for the country. The new Prime Minister Sushil Koirala doesn't have the mettle to complete a new constitution in a year. Besides, Sher Bahadur Deuba is already trying to pull him down. UML leaders Madhav Nepal, Jhalanath Khanal, Bamdev Gautam are all traitors. And the less said about Baburam Bhattarai and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the better. Their PM stints speak volume.

Narayana Prasad

ARCHITECTURE OF DEMOCRACY

It is shameful for a poor country like Nepal, where more than a 1,000 young

people line up every day outside Tribuvan Airport to seek low menial and dangerous jobs elsewhere, to have a 601- member legislature ('The architecture of democracy', Bihari K Shrestha, #695). Even the richest country in the world, the United States, only has 435 members in the House of Representatives. To add insult to injury, the Constituent Assembly is used as a rubber stamp to approve the decisions made by the so called High Level Political Commission. This is not how a democracy works. A normal democratic process depends on three tenets: rule of law, accountability, and transparency. None of the 130 plus political parties is transparent and leaders have siphoned millions of dollars from their party coffers and businesses.

Khagendra Thapa

UN(HAPPY) HOMES

The case of the three Sherpa children, who were trapped in Kathmandu's sleazy orphanage industry, is sad ('Un (happy) homes', Sunir Pandey, #695). The state must regulate orphanages and companies and agents who are found guilty should be fined. Organisations that place international volunteers in Nepal (and elsewhere) have very little knowledge about what actually goes on in the homes. They visit the host institute only one or two days a year, sometimes not even that. For example the New York-based Project Abroad has been supporting a criminal orphanage in Cambodia for years. Even though it is aware of the

abuse and corruption taking place, it continues sending volunteers.

Anonymous

LIGHTS, CAMERA

The success of *Loot* generated renewed interest in Nepali films specially among the young crowd ('Lights, camera, copy paste', Sarala Gautam, #695). I had started watching Nepali films more frequently in the past few years and would even drag my friends along. But after sitting through terrible movies like *Chhadke*, *Chapali Heights*, and most recently *Jholay*, I am sad to say that I won't be spending another rupee on a Nepali film. Underestimating an audience's intelligence is the biggest mistake a filmmaker can make and our director and producer saabs continue to do so with great regularity.

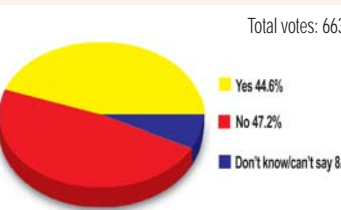
Gyanu Sharma



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Weekly Internet Poll #696

Q. Are you happy with Subash Nembang's appointment as CA chair?



Weekly Internet Poll # 697. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What do you make of the size of the new cabinet?



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BIKRAM RAI

**SOLEMNLY DECLARE:** PM Sushil Koirala administers the oath of office to his deputies, UML's Bamdev Gautam (*far right*) and NC's Prakash Man Singh (*second from right*).

is here to stay and it may have only strengthened this democracy. But it has also bred instability. One way out would be to empower the executive, who seems to be held hostage to the diktat of the legislature, where everybody is playing a kingmaker to suit their own greed.

While our political pundits keep stoking fear of potential absolute diktat of the executive, they find the instability bred by ambitions of those in the legislature unnecessary to check.

Insanity is, as Einstein would say, doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results. If the Koirala government survives long enough to write the constitution, he may just prove Einstein wrong. 🇳🇵

# Home sweet Home

The stand-off over the Home Ministry shows how little Nepal's politics has changed in 25 years

The two week stand-off between coalition partners NC and UML over the Home Ministry portfolio is finally over and we have a 21 member cabinet in place. But looking at the gender, caste, and ethnic composition of the new cabinet, it is clear that politics is still the exclusive domain of Brahmin and Chhetri men. It



**BY THE WAY**  
Anurag Acharya

was a winner takes all fight over morsels and the old dogs won hands down. The few new faces are the only relief.

There is little point in speculating now why Sushil Koirala was finally forced to cede the Home Ministry to the UML. The poor man himself will never know, whether those he sent to talk on his behalf actually made any bargains.

But we know who ordered the final round of drinks at the Radisson. The hands-off policy does not seem to apply under the table, it seems.

While Sushil was having problems expanding his cabinet, two former Indian ambassadors and a renowned professor were sitting at a television interview in New Delhi trying to explain to their people, how deals are struck in Kathmandu.

When the interviewer asked Prof SD Muni, if the Koirala government will be a stable one, the self-styled Nepal watcher replied that it depends on whether or not international forces (read India) see moves in Kathmandu to be acceptable. Asked about Sushil Koirala's 'rumoured' standoff with the Indian Embassy, Jayant Prasad, who left Kathmandu only weeks before the last CA elections, said that the man had integrity and denied that Lainchaur had strained relations with him.

But it is a fact that the Indians aren't exactly thrilled to see Sushil in power. They had made their preference known when they rolled out the red carpet for Sher Bahadur Deuba in New Delhi last year, ahead of his party president. But this is hard ball politics and one isn't always spoilt for choices. Diplomacy is an art of dealing with the nastiest in a nicest way. For example, who would have thought Bam Dev Gautam would be everybody's overnight favourite?

Every time a government is formed or brought down, we point the index finger southward, not realising that in doing so, three other fingers are pointed back at us. Rarely do we see, how personal ambition and greed of leaders actually play a much more decisive role in making or breaking alliances in Kathmandu.

Sushil Koirala is now leading a government, with most members of the cabinet forced unto him by the coalition partners and by powerful rivals within his

own party. The man leading the country is in control neither of his home affairs, nor his government's foreign affairs.

Two and half decades back, when Nepal became a democracy for the second time, we decided to adopt a parliamentary system of electing representatives to the house, which then elected a council to run the country. In 2008, we adopted a mixed electoral system and nominated more members from underrepresented communities than the directly elected ones. This was necessary to ensure that we were a more inclusive democracy, but it created a hybrid legislature which has weakened executive in a way that we saw four political governments topple in four years after the first CA was elected. Ultimately, the house was dissolved as a bureaucratic government took over for a year to hold the elections.

In November, we elected another CA. Again, no party is in the majority in the house. Given the mixed electoral system, there is little chance of that happening. The coalition culture



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# THE SEWAGE CANAL



## The Valley's once holy waters are finally being cleaned up

SUNIR PANDEY

Under Thapathali bridge, the once holy Bagmati is in a sorrowful state. Crows and kites swoop down on the refuse and because of the overpowering stench, few dare cross the river. The parks and temples along the banks are deserted. The oozing black sludge flows past shantytowns with outhouses perched over the water.

It looks hopeless, but under

moral pressure from activists who have started voluntarily cleaning the solid waste from sections of the river, the government is finally starting to act. Last year it signed a \$137 million agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the OPEC Fund to have the Bagmati cleaned up in four years.

The Bagmati's main problems are solid waste dumping and the raw sewage drains that empty into it. Four main systems need to be

in place for the river and its tributaries to regain its past glory: sewage mains along the entire stretch of the river, treatment facilities, water reservoirs at the source of the river, and the completion of the much-delayed Melamchi Drinking Water Project.

The laying down of 260km of sewage pipelines has already begun. The sewage mains from Gokarna to Guheswari and on to Min Bhawan are already in place. Rabindra Raya, an engineer at the High Powered

Committee for Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilisation, says his team will finish linking Sundarimal to Sundarighat by 2016.

Secondary sewage lines from homes to the mains are also being constructed. However, with electricity and water-supply networks crisscrossing the track and controversies surrounding land encroachment, the project is moving ahead at a sluggish pace.

The second part of the agreement between the government and ADB includes

the construction of wastewater treatment facilities at five points (Gokarna, Guheswari, Sallaghari, Balkumari, Dhobighat) along the Bagmati. Raw sewage will be treated and released back into the Bagmati and the Kathmandu Valley Waste Water Management Project plans to generate energy from the sludge.

Currently there is only one wastewater treatment facility at Guheswari. But since the time it was built in 2002, the capital's population has grown 2.5 times

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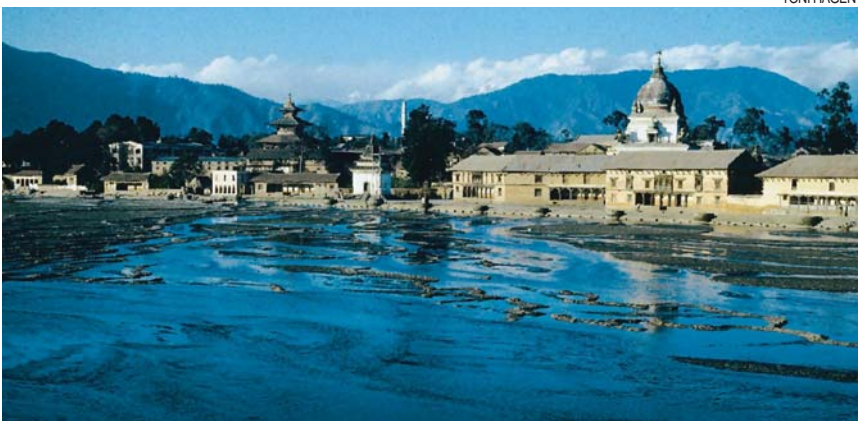
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TONI HAGEN



PICS: BIKRAM RAI

PAST AND FUTURE: The Bagmati from the Thapathali bridge in the 1950s (top) and today with the construction of sewage mains along the banks at Sankhamul (left). Raw sewage flows into the Bagmati below Pashupati (above).



and the Bagmati didn't stand a chance. Power cuts affect the efficiency of treatment and will hamper the new plants as well. A final treatment plant will be built at Khokana with a capacity twice as much as all the other five combined. Kathmandu residents will be hoping that the Ministry of Urban Development shows better foresight and planning this time round than it did 30 years ago while building a similar plant on the Hanumante River, which shut down within a year of starting.

The High Powered Committee also wants to construct a 19m dam at Dhap, near Sundarijal so that the reservoir can get recharged with monsoon rains as well as input from the Melamchi during the summer and release the water in the dry season. Another 70m dam at Nagmati, what Raya calls a dream project, would at full capacity allow a year-round release of water into the Bagmati.

The ultimate success of the Bagmati plan depends on the completion of the Melamchi Drinking Water Project, which is slated for 2016. The water demand for the Valley is now 330 million litres per day and Melamchi will supply 170 million litres. There are also plans to pipe water from nearby Yangri and Larke rivers, which will deliver a further 340 million litres to the capital.

But it is not only the Bagmati that needs attention. The river's major tributaries (Bishnumati, Tukucha, Dhobikhola, Manohara, and Hanumante) are in an even sorrier state. Laying down 130km of sewer pipes along all these tributaries would be needed if the Bagmati is to ever be cleansed.

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

Take me to the river, #514  
Reviving the river, #505  
An unholy holy river, #357

EVEREST BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Encouraging investment



Nepal Economic Summit 2014 organised by the government and Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) took place from 24 to 26 February in Kathmandu. The three-day event brought together representatives of private and public sector from 12 countries to encourage investment in Nepal's hydropower, tourism, and agriculture.

Trial class

Shikshalaya Kindergarten is organising an open house for prospective parents on Sunday. The school is located in Lakhechaur in New Baneshor.



Hat Trick

Asian Paints Nepal won the Best Quality Award of 2013 by Nepal Quality and Measurement Department. This is the third time that the company took home the prize.

Musical partner

Gorkha Brewery joined hands with Sounds of Season as its sponsor. The musical event, a part of the ongoing climate +change exhibition at Babarmahal saw popular Nepali folk ensemble Kutumba perform with local artists from Janakpur, Helambu and Kathmandu.



Colourful Luck

Berger Paint has announced the winners of its Rangichangi Utsav offer, where more than Rs 2 million worth of prizes were handed out. The biggest winner, Lalita Manandhar from Chakupat, Lalitpur, walked away with Rs 500,000.

Star Power

Paras Khadka, captain of the national cricket team, has been appointed the brand ambassador of Samsara Money Transfer. "Khadka will endorse the company's products and services, as well as other promotional programs," reads the press release.



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Early Wednesday morning, news of sexual abuse and mismanagement at Ama Ko Ghar, an old age home and orphanage in Kathmandu, made front page headlines in



HERE WE GO  
Trishna Rana

a national daily. In our mad scramble to be the first to broadcast this latest scandal, Nepali media outlets didn't bother with background research to corroborate the report. It wasn't until much later in the

day that we heard orphanage owner Dil Shova Shrestha's side of the story. By then, she had suffered irreparable damage to her reputation and another orphanage in Godawari with the same name had to issue a clarification.

With police inquiry into Ama Ko Ghar still ongoing, it would have been best if news outlets had waited for the investigators' verdict before passing judgment. This is not the first time though that Nepal's media has caused harm through haste.

Last Sunday, when the Nepal Airlines twin otter crashed in

# At the mercy of mercenaries

Protecting and rehabilitating the most vulnerable segments of society were never priorities for any of the past five governments

Masine Lek of Arghakhanchi district, TV channels and newspapers confirmed the death of all passengers and crew and published their names and photographs even before the rescue team had located the accident site. Instead of showing empathy towards the families of victims, we tossed aside whatever little ethics we had and joined the ugly rat race for half-truths. Nepali media (both traditional and new) has now turned into an echo chamber of personal opinions masquerading as facts.

Despite the media's inherent frailties, the Ama Ko Ghar story has helped put the spotlight on the seedy underbelly of Nepal's orphanage industry once again. The 35 children that Dil Shova was caring for were taken away by officials from the Central Child Welfare Board on Wednesday because she did not have a licence to run a children's home and the children were living in very poor conditions, both

allegations that she has admitted to.

Just a week ago, Bishwa Pratap Acharya of Happy Home Nepal (HHN), an orphanage in Dhapakhel, was taken into custody on child-trafficking and corruption charges.

These two cases are far from isolated. Child rights experts estimate that there are about 500 registered 'homes' and 15,000 'orphans' in Kathmandu Valley alone. It's a hugely profitable, but highly unregulated sector. Many of the so-called 'orphans' have been lured away from poor families with promises of free care and education. Earlier, international adoption used to be the main source of revenue for these child care centres, but with countries like the US, UK, and Canada making it almost impossible for their citizens to adopt from Nepal, agents are squeezing as much money as they can from foreign volunteers and through child trafficking.

However, the failure to look after the well-being of children and elderly lies squarely on the shoulders of the state. After two weeks of belligerent posturing over ministerial portfolios, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala finally managed to cobble together a 21-member cabinet on Tuesday. But the fact that the top posts at the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Affairs and the Ministry

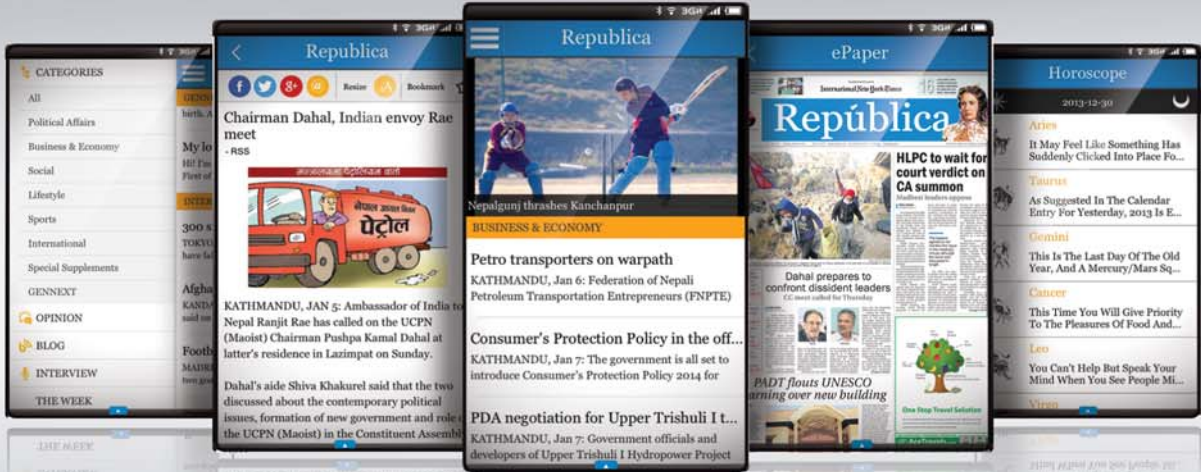
of Peace and Reconstruction remain vacant is a testimony to just how little the government cares about its most vulnerable citizens.

For Nepal's political leaders, the peace process came to an end with the integration of the rebel forces into the national army in August last year. However, it wasn't just the soldiers who were left in a limbo. Thousands of orphans and aged parents found themselves homeless with little to no support. Many are now fending for themselves on the streets or are trapped in the cycle of exploitation and abuse. Protecting and rehabilitating this population were never priorities for any of the past five governments.

The challenge at hand is to cut down on the staggering number of child and elderly care homes, provide clear guidelines for existing institutions, and implement a strict review system while building up government services. However, the tentacles of profit from these centres run so deep into the state machinery that administrators are averse to clamping down on them. Until then, our children and senior citizens will be left largely at the mercy of mercenaries who see them as nothing more than dollar machines and even those doing a good job become sullied by association. 🇳🇵

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**POKHARA PACKAGE**

**DINING**

**Busy Bee**, head over for live rock and pop performances in English, Nepali and Hindi, indulge in their beer and pizzas to waste the night away in good fashion. *Lakeside, (061)462640*



**LEMON TREE**, one of the loveliest bamboo porches overlooking the main stretch of the Lakeside road, it provides a lovely setting for chilling out with beer and snacks, and is famous for fresh fish caught from the lake. *(061)463246*

**Byanjan**, stands out among the countless establishments on Lakeside for its crisp interiors, quite ambiance and of course, the food. *Lakeside*



**NATSUL**, a Korean restaurant for all things barbeque, from succulent pork to crunchy vegetables; you can have delicacies cooked right at your own table or partake of the dedicated barbeque pit. *Lakeside, (061)229198*

**Lanhua**, for the best of Chinese at great prices. *Lakeside*

**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. *Lakeside*

**Maya Devi Village Restaurant**, Enjoy a BLT sandwich breakfast with fresh fruit, muesli and curd in the lap of a Phewa Tal sunrise. Visit the magnificent vultures in their enclosures. *9806647917, www.mayadevivillage.com*



**KOTO**, Japanese cuisine of the highest quality, served with meticulous attention; food fanatics will find themselves in a haven sashimi and tempura. *Lakeside*

**ADRENALINE**

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Paragliding Nepal  
www.paragliding-nepal.com



Sunrise paragliding  
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P.O. Box 125  
Tel: 061-463174 / 061-461869  
sunrise-paragliding.com/

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(061)466314/463698  
info@nepalparagliding.com.np,  
team5nepalparagliding@gmail.com  
nepalparagliding.com.np



**TREKKING:**  
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(061)462066 /465515  
3sistersadventuretrek.com



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facebook.com/paddlenepal  
paddlenepal.com

Rapidrunner expeditions  
Info@rapidrunnerexpeditions.com  
(061)462024  
rapidrunnerexpeditions.com/Rafting\_%26\_Kayaking\_in\_Nepal.html

Adrenaline Rush Nepal  
Pokhara Office Location:  
Hallan Chok Intersection, Lakeside  
(061)466663, 9816632097,  
9816613975  
info@adrenalinenepal.com  
adrenalinerushinfo@gmail.com  
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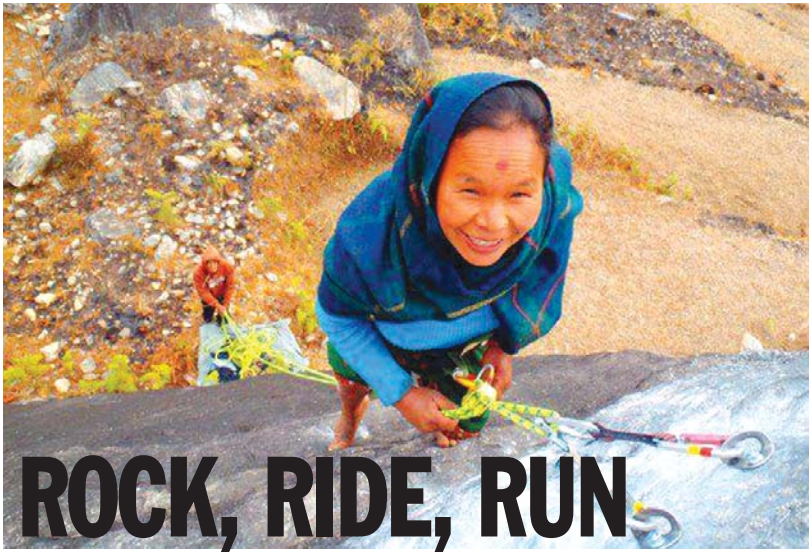
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*Himalayan outdoor festival 21 March, Hattiban Resort, Pharping*



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**THE RIGHT NOTE**

For connoisseurs of all ages and persuasion, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory presents a free music education programme.

- 1. Master classes and workshops** by James Miley and team from Williamette University, USA, on guitar, piano, bass, drums, wind instruments, and improvisation.  
*24 to 28 March, 2014, 8am to 9pm*
- 2. Training for music teachers** by Mike Nord, music educator at Williamette University.  
*25 to 28 March, 8am to 9pm*
- 3. Fusion beat**, a concert where east meets west.  
*28 March, Patan Darbar Square, free entrance.*

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory,  
(01)5013554, info@katjazz.com.np, www.katjazz.com.np

**GET A SLICE OF THAT**

**A**lfresco restaurant at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza has introduced a special pizza menu this spring. With Chef Expertise curating your order, relish not only Italian but also American, Arabic, Australian, Chinese, Danish, French, Mexican, Swedish and Thai flavours in the delicious toppings.  
Sample authentic Neapolitan pizzas, with tomatoes and mozzarella cheese, anchovy, salmon, capers and olives, as well as the Australian Classic with braised lamb, roasted almond & kiwi with barbeque sauce. Mayo jaga has toppings of corn, pimentos, teriyaki potato, noori and miso marinated shitake, herb mayo along with wasabi paste for the Japanese flavor. Swedish thin crust



pie pizza comes prepared with peanuts, banana, curried chicken, saute leeks and pineapple, while gotaland Danish pizza comes topped with sausage, Swedish meatballs, pickled gherkins berry jam garnished with corn flakes.  
And if you feel adventurous, 14 others like the jalapeno black bean or the falafel pizza await your picking.

*Alfresco Restaurant, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, February 21 to March 9*



**GOLF:**  
Himalayan Golf Course  
Majeri Patan  
9856021150  
himalayangolfcourse@hotmail.co.uk  
himalayangolfcourse.com



**MUSEUMS:**  
Gurkha Memorial Museum  
British Gurkha's Pokhara Camp  
(061)441762/441763  
gurkhamuseum.org.np  
Open every day from 8am to 4:30pm  
Nepalis: Rs 20, SAARC nationals: Rs 80, Others: Rs 150

International Mountaineering Museum  
Ratopahiro  
(061)460742/460343  
internationalmountainmuseum.org  
Open every day 9am to 5pm  
Nepalis: Rs 50, Students: Rs 35, SAARC nationals: Rs 100, Others: Rs 300

Annapurna Butterfly Museum  
Prithvi Narayan Campus  
tripadvisor.com/Attraction\_Review-g293891-d2178232-Reviews-Annapurna\_Butterfly\_Museum-Pokhara\_Gandaki\_Zone\_Western\_Region.html



## ZIP IT

It may look like a cable car, but that is as far as similarities go. With a 56 percent incline and a length of 1.8 km, SkyZip offers a 2,000 feet drop from Sarangkot to Hyamja at speeds of over 140 km per hour. SkyZip is the first of its kind in South Asia and also the longest in the world. The user is securely strapped on a seat which is attached onto the cable. A magnetic breaking system brings the seat to a halt at the landing. Strap up for a speedy trip down to Hyamja, with a panoramic view of the Annapurna range. [highgroundnepal.com](http://highgroundnepal.com)

## EVENTS

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

**Dual worlds**, an exhibition of the works of artists Anil Shahi and Sujan Dangol. *Runs till 7 March, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal*

**Bazar minar**, appreciate the work being done by social entrepreneurs and exchange ideas and knowledge from visiting experts and investors. *1 March, 1 to 5pm, Embassy Restaurant, Lajimpat*

**Cleaning up**, the Goddess Bangalamukhi needs your help to keep her premises neat and tidy. *1 March, 8am, Bangalamukhi Temple, Patan*



**TOUCH WOOD**, the famous Edo-period woodblock print artist Toshusai Sharaku is given a modern interpretation by Japan's contemporary artists. *1 to 11 March, 9.30am to 4.30pm, Embassy Hall, Japanese Embassy, Panipokhari*

## MUSIC



**REGGAE NIGHT**, get a load of jah music from Chari Amilo Kala Samuha every weekend. *Rs 200, 28 March, 6pm onwards, Base Camp, Jhamsikhel*

**Vultures will feed**, party with Jugaa and other Nepali thrash and hardcore bands. *Rs 200, 1 March, 11am onwards, Fluid Bar, Thamel*

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

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

**Shastriya sangeet**, dabble in the magic of Hindustani classical music. *1 March, 3pm onwards, Kirateswor*

## GETAWAYS

**Atithi Resort**, a perfect place to stay, nearby pool, massage, sauna, and delicious food of your choice. *Shantipatan, Lakeside, Pokhara, (61)466760, (01)4002077*

**Raniban Retreat**, situated at the other end of the Phewa lake and nested inside the Raniban forest and the World Peace Stupa, this retreat has one of the best views of the Annapurna range. *Phewa lake, and Pokhara. World Peace Pagoda, Pokhara, (61)692136, 9841382053*



**WATERFRONT RESORT**, head to this eco-friendly resort to make your stay right in front of Phewa Lake. *Sedi Height, Pokhara, (61)466 303/304, 9801166311, sales@waterfronthotelnepal.com*



**SHANGRI-LA VILLAGE RESORT**, set amidst peaceful surroundings with a breathtaking mountain view, landscaped gardens, water bodies and a relaxing ambience. *Gharipatan, Pokhara, (61)462222, (01)4410051, shangrilavillage@gmail.com*



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### AVAILABLE COLOURS



### AWARDS





# DINING WITH VULTURES

“Don’t make any noise and don’t move in a big group like monkeys,” our guide, Danny Biddiss, warns us. Following his directions, the eight of us file in a single line and make our way towards the observation hide. Peeking out from the tiny windows, we watch as three men heave a cow carcass into a small grassland clearing. Two leave and one stays behind to



POKHARA PACKAGE

skin the cattle. Danny calls him the ‘cow caretaker’. We wait. One by one the diners arrive. Within minutes about 50 vultures jostle for space, squabbling and flapping as they fight for their share of the meal. In less than an hour, lunch is over. All that remains of the cow are its bare skeleton, polished clean of flesh. It is just another day at the vulture ‘restaurant’ in Gachok, a small village just 13km north-west of Pokhara. Started in 2010 by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), the restaurant is a feeding centre for vultures where they are provided diclofenac-free meals. Sick and dying cows are purchased from nearby villages. The staff ensures that these animals have not been treated with the poisonous drug, the main cause for the catastrophic decline in vulture population. On average

the centre houses about 20 cows. Once they are dead, the carcasses are then fed to the vultures. While the initiative was developed to conserve the dwindling vulture population, it has benefited the locals too. Villagers, who would earlier just dispose off their sick cattle, can now earn a small income from their sale. BCN and its partners also invest a part of the earnings from eco-tourism activities like parahawking (see next page) into organising livelihood enhancement programs. The group has so far provided training on tomato farming, pig farming, and bee-keeping to locals. The positive spin-offs from this initiative have helped change villagers’ attitudes towards the endangered birds. Says Danny: “Thanks to the restaurant, the locals now have a financial incentive to care for the vultures. It’s a win-win situation.” Bird Conservation Nepal operates 11 other vulture feeding centres in Chitwan, Kailali, Nawalparasi, and Rupandehi.  *Toh Ee Ming*



The red heads, #685  
Vulture feeding centre




PICS: HARIZ BAHARUDIN



TOH EEE MING



## LAKESIDE LIVING

What Thamel’s tourist ghetto is to Kathmandu, Lakeside is to Pokhara. Teeming with seedy, dirt cheap lodgings, it is a backpacker’s dream come true. Don’t get us wrong, though. The town is more than capable of catering to the high-end, opulence seeking holiday makers. It’s the ones in the middle – those who have some paisa to spare, but don’t necessarily want to burn a hole in their wallets – that usually have a hard time. *Nepali Times* recommends affordable accommodations with excellent services and amenities suitable for everyone from your seven month toddler to 70 plus grandparents.



### GLACIER HOTEL

For those looking to stay in the heart of Pokhara’s thumping district, Glacier Hotel is the place for you. The lodge is nestled right beside the breathtaking Phewa Lake, making it an excellent starting point for a morning walk or jog. Moreover, everything in Lakeside is at a walking distance. The rooms are large, spacious, and comfortable. Owner Rajendra Dhakal, who used to be an art collector, has a keen eye for detail and many of his personal collection adorn the walls of the hotel. Glacier’s undeniable charm and quirkiness set it apart from its competitors.

**Glacier Hotel**  
 Gaurighat,  
 Lakeside  
 (061)463722/206964  
 glaciernepal.com



**Waterfront Resort**  
 Sedi Height,  
 Lakeside  
 (061) 466303/466304  
 waterfronthotelnepal.com

### WATERFRONT RESORT

Just 20 minutes away from the bustling Lakeside, a small slice of heaven awaits at Waterfront Resort. The two-year-old resort won TripAdvisor’s Travellers’ Choice award in 2013 and deservedly so. In the early mornings you are treated to sights of the fog rolling over the verdant mountain range, local fishermen paddling past in wooden boats, going

about their day’s business while the lake quietly glistens. Towards the afternoon, the sky fills with colourful paragliders. As you sit by the pool and enjoy these amazing scenes, you are filled with a deep sense of serenity. Clean, comfortable rooms offering unparalleled views of Pokhara Valley, a delicious breakfast (included in the room price), a swimming pool beside the lake, and an outdoor coffee bar all make for a pleasant stay. If you are worried about the distance from the city centre, fret not. The resort operates a free bus service.





Pokhara is  
setting an  
example for  
responsible  
eco-  
tourism



## IT'S A BIRD

A TripAdvisor review promised parahawking to be the closest-ever to nature kind of experience. However, I had my reservations. Did I really want to fork out an extra Rs 10,000 to have a bird be my guide and eat off my arm?

While I sat calculating the worth of undertaking this adventure, my pilot introduced me to Kevin, a small, curious-looking Egyptian vulture, nothing like the huge, ravenous bird that I had pictured. In a way I was glad. In the case of an attack, I could escape with minimum injuries. However, Kevin had a fierce habit of turning his head and making eye contact with everyone in his sight. When our gaze met, my biggest fear about this

whole experience resurfaced: what if he bit my finger off?

With the thought still looming in my head, we took off and before long were high up in the air. My pilot began to read out instructions on feeding Kevin. Even though a little hesitant, I held my hand out with shaky confidence. Kevin, the veteran that he was, swooped down and took the piece of meat from my hand expertly and then went back to flying in his seamless way. This was his reward for guiding us to thermals, currents of warm air that are used by both birds and paragliders while flying to conserve energy. It was amazing to see a bird so close. The sight of his shiny feathers in the clear blue sky was picture perfect.

A combination of paragliding and falconry, parahawking was developed by British falconer Scott Mason in 2001 and pioneered in Pokhara. Although the feeling of feeding the birds in mid-air while taking in the majestic views of Pokhara is hard to match, what made my experience really enriching was knowing that part of the proceeds from the parahawking would go into different vulture conservation programs like the feeding centre in Gachok (*see right*). The flight operator even offers you the option to visit one of the vulture restaurants in the area, which is another incredible experience in itself. 🇳🇵

Hariz Baharuddin

[www.parahawking.com](http://www.parahawking.com)  
9806647917

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

Parahawking video



## CHACHAWEE

Pokhara is the grown-man and woman's ultimate playground and party paradise. But for children who are too young to paraglide, zipline, kayak, and bar hop, a trip often ends within the confines of their hotel room. Seeing this dearth of activities, Dinesh Prasain started ChaChaWee Fun Park Resort.

ChaChaWee started as an amusement park in 2012 and was expanded into a hotel this year.

Sprawling out across a lush green lawn with spectacular views of the Annapurna range, the park offers dozens of rides and games to keep the children busy the entire day. Parents can leave their little ones in the care of the well-trained, friendly staff and enjoy downtime. The resort boasts of 15 rooms, furnished with stone floors and wooden furniture exuding a rustic, cosy ambience and organises shorts treks around the valley on request.

ChaChaWee's laidback vibe and out-of-the-way location make it perfect for staycations, especially for stressed parents who want a quick get-away from city life.



**ChaChaWee**  
Funpark Resort  
Gharipata  
(Behind the airport)  
(061)466652  
[chachawhee.com](http://chachawhee.com)



## ATITHI RESORT AND SPA

The latest addition to Lakeside's sprawling hotel-scape, Atithi Resort & Spa is luxury at its best. For those looking to pamper themselves, the resort offers a multitude of spa options and claims to using only the best oils and soaps. After a massage or a rejuvenating yoga session, it'll be a sin to ignore the resort's pristine jacuzzi, which like everything else about the resort is beautiful. If you love to laze around, Atithi has a bunch of hammocks perfect for jumping in with a book, drink in hand, and Mt Macchapuchhre in the horizon.

From the exquisite rosewood furniture to the calming scents that greet you as you walk in, to the choice of music, every component adds a certain richness to the resort, missing in many others. The rooms are spacious, comfortable, and inviting and offer all the modern facilities imaginable.

The Satkar restaurant, which overlooks the pool, whips up delicious meals and rolls out the best breakfast spread of the lot which had us going for seconds and thirds throughout our stay.

**Shanti Patan,  
Lakeside**  
(061)466760/ (01)4002077  
[atithiresort.com](http://atithiresort.com)





There are some giants of Italian cinema: Fellini, Antonioni, the Taviani brothers, and now, without a doubt, with *The Great Beauty* (*La Grande Bellezza*) Paolo Sorrentino. Even if Sorrentino never makes another movie, his legacy



will remain with this astonishingly beautiful film that while undeniably paying homage to Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and Antonioni's marvelous *La Notte* (1961) to name just a few, also manages to retain its very specific and magical originality. Multi-layered in numerous ways,

## THE GREAT BEAUTY

the viewer is often left breathless at the spectacle, the virtuoso cinematography, and the heady dialogue as we follow the decadent life style of one Jep Gambardella (Toni Servillo), a once successful novelist turned socialite who has somewhat lost his way in the sixth decade of his life. Jep has an amazing (and undoubtedly fictitious) apartment in Rome that looks out onto the Colosseum. He

gives the best parties in town that include Italian aristocracy, artists, pseudo artists, and the generally blasé Roman intelligentsia, all of whom stay behind to moan the loss of this or that albeit in a particularly witty Italian fashion.

But how can I describe the breadth of this film in mere words? Sorrentino is a filmmaker who understands that cinema can have endless visual possibilities and he reaps the talents of his obviously brilliant cinematographer, Luca Bigazzi, giving us a portrait of that eternal city, Roma; one that is unforgettable in its sheer luminosity.

This is essentially a film about existential angst: at one point, after being asked repeatedly why he never wrote another novel, Jep finally responds truthfully saying that he kept waiting for *La Grande Bellezza*, but never found it.

In a complex film like this, which asks questions about life and death and art and everything else of worth, we never really find the answers, just endlessly beautiful set pieces that are so sophisticated and complicated that they represent life itself in all its messy glory.

Perhaps I sound too lofty, but since you haven't seen it and I have, let me continue to wax poetic on a film that should and ought to have won both the Palme d'Or this past year at Cannes, as well as the Foreign Language Film category at the Academy Awards next week.

*The Great Beauty* is a film that I will certainly be returning to time and again, along with the other above mentioned eternal greats. The only difference being that this film has a mischievous and highly engaging element of humour both visually and in the dialogue that are original to it, elevating it to a truly sophisticated hybrid that poses philosophical questions constantly without ever taking itself too seriously.

If you have time for just the one film this week, pick up this one. Do not be afraid of its blatant art house origins, for as with the best of films, once you are absorbed in it, you will not be able to take your eyes away. It is just a bit of a shame that if you don't understand Italian you won't know whether to read the subtitles or watch the glorious spectacle. 🇮🇹

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

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### HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

**WE DO:** Prime Minister Sushil Koirala administers the oath of office and secrecy to the newly appointed ministers at Shital Niwas, Maharganj on Tuesday.



BHRIKUTI RAI

**ECONOMY FIRST:** Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat (centre) gives the inaugural address at the three-day Nepal Economic Summit that began in Kathmandu on Monday.



NARAYAN MAHARJAN/NEPALNEWS.COM

**HOLY DAY:** A sadhu enjoys a nap on Sunday afternoon at Pashupatinath. Thousands of devotees have convened around the temple premises in preparation for Thursday's Shivaratri.



DEVAKI BISTA

**HARD WORK:** Women from Hadikhola, Makwanpur return home on Monday after collecting firewood from Chitwan National Park.

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REVIEW

Anil Shahi's *Smile with me* and Sujan Dangol's *Through my stories*, are the fourth installation in the series produced by winners of the Australian Himalayan Foundation Art Award. Both are being exhibited at the Siddhartha Art Gallery.

Centred on the artists' interpretation of the various facets of human life, each painting highlights an individual's personal struggles as well as the social, and in Nepal mostly political, contexts within which they occur and must be dealt with.

Although both Shahi and Dangol's paintings are shown together, the stylistic approach between the two couldn't be more different. Shahi's paintings, like *Smile with me* and *Inside out*, focus on appearance and reality. He uses masked figures of the Joker, symbolising humour and laughter, with faces tainted with red. A superficial smile plastered on a raging person illustrates the multiple levels on which humans must operate. Never mind inner angst, Shahi seems to suggest, we must constantly put up an act to hide our vulnerabilities and show whoever is watching that we are strong enough to shield ourselves. His



TO HEE MING



electricity (*pic, far right*). The weathered face of a grandmother stares back at the viewer, a wrecked car hints at the futility of aspiration.

Together, the series highlights the transition of life from childhood to adulthood and ultimately to old age and how perspectives and aspirations change with time. 🇳🇵

Ayesha Shakya

*Proceeds from the sale of two paintings from each exhibition will be designated for future artists in affiliation with the Australian Himalayan Foundation.*

*'Smile with me' and 'Through my stories' An exhibition of Anil Shahi and Sujan Dangol's paintings Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal Runs until 7 March, [www.siddharthaartgallery.com](http://www.siddharthaartgallery.com)*



POKHARA PACKAGE

charming establishment stood out. The atmosphere is relaxed; no pretences and that ethos is well reflected on its food as well. Yes, the menu definitely needs some work, but a visit to Bamboo is justified even if just for a nap on one of those huge, comfortable chairs that I am now obsessing over. 🇳🇵

Hariz Baharudin

*How to get there: At the edge of lakeside, turn left and walk past Mike's restaurant. Bamboo Kitchen and Bar is just a few metres ahead.*

BAMBOO KITCHEN AND BAR

Like Kathmandu's Jhamsikhel, one is truly spoilt for choice at Pokhara's food district. Every establishment boasts 'best views' of Phewa Lake and proudly displays its Lonely Planet rankings, but only a few deliver. Bamboo Kitchen and Bar is one such place.

Staying true to its name, the restaurant is built in a traditional bamboo house style. The huge bamboo chairs and big cushioned couches add to the relaxed ambience and it was tempting to forget about breakfast altogether and doze off, but we had a review to write.



PICS: HARIZ BAHARUDIN

The English breakfast (Rs 390) - a set of toast, scrambled eggs, sausages, and baked beans - sounded irresistible on the menu. On the plate, however, the breakfast fared poorly. We were served two pieces of lukewarm toast, a meagre serving of sausages, a gob of baked beans. The eggs were the only saving grace of the set; they tasted great and didn't require any extra seasoning.

Our second order of egg sandwich (Rs 370) was a far better bargain. The mayonnaise and herbs filling was the perfect combo and the fresh lettuce and

cucumber added a nice crunch to the dish. Although the sandwich was not much to look at, it assuaged our hunger.

No breakfast is complete without pancakes. At Bamboo's they are listed under the desserts section (don't ask why), but don't be dissuaded by the misnomer. The towering stack of triple banana pancakes (Rs 270) was warm, fluffy, and decadent; the best we've had so far in Nepal. The pancakes had actual banana slices in them and the generous scoop of vanilla ice cream, which came on the side, complemented the dish perfectly.

A review of Bamboo's bar would have been incomplete without trying out its cocktails and drinks so I went in again later in the evening. The heady concoction of vodka, gin, rum, and tequila with a splash of cola made the Long Island Iced Tea (Rs 300) the perfect drink to unwind with after a day of cycling to Pame. For the teetotalers, the bar also offers a wide selection of refreshing milkshakes (Rs 130).

As I sat there with a drink in hand and watched the sun set along with dozen other diners, it was easy to see why in the vast sea of eateries, this



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# Getting rid of elephant foot

In an effort to control lymphatic filariasis, the government launched a massive drug administration campaign last week in 10 districts including Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Dhankuta, Terathum, Accham, Bajang, Bajura, and Darchula. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 61 of Nepal's 75 districts are affected by lymphatic filariasis (locally known as hatipaile) and about 10.6 million people in the



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

country are at risk. Lymphatic filariasis is a mosquito-borne illness like malaria, Japanese encephalitis, and dengue fever. The mosquito in all these cases serves as a vector for these varied diseases, which are actually caused by parasite (malaria and filariasis) and different groups of viruses

(Japanese encephalitis and dengue fever). In addition, the mosquitoes are of different species. To study these diseases it is crucial to examine the various mosquito vectors and its feeding habits in the human population.

The parasite (wuchereria bancrofti), which the mosquito injects into humans, is elusive and Dracula-like, appearing only at night in the host's blood stream. Clinically the presentation of lymphatic filariasis can range from being asymptomatic to frequent coughing episodes to the full-blown elephantiasis.

In Nepal, the disease may also present as a hydrocele (water-filled scrotum) and keep surgeons busy. Fixing a scrotum with hydrocele is one of the common, easier operations that senior doctors will delegate to the interns. Although lymphatic filariasis is usually not life-threatening, it is clearly a nuisance.

All the customary precautions against mosquito bites also apply

to this disease: using nets and insect repellents and cleaning stagnated, dirty water sources where the insects could breed. However, the good news is that there is a very effective medicine called diethylcarbamazine (DEC) for the prevention and control of elephantiasis. Millions of people have taken DEC with no serious side effects. Some patients may experience mild fever, chills, nausea, or headache, but these are short-lived.

In Nepal and other countries of endemicity, governments are using community-based interventions to treat entire at-risk populations. The rationale behind this approach is that mass distribution of the drug given once every year for about five years will profoundly suppress the bug in human hosts. If the suppression is sustained then transmission (spread of the disease) by the mosquito is interrupted.

These campaigns are coordinated by the WHO and ably supported by two pharmaceutical companies, Glaxo SmithKline and Merck and Co, who in 2000 made a pledge to donate the drug for free. It is reported that over 700 million people in over 50 countries have participated and the disease has been eliminated in certain defined areas.

If your child is over two years old, if you are not pregnant, and have no chronic illnesses and other contraindications, it is a good idea to consider taking DEC. In a smart move, the government is administering albendazole, which cures worm infestations in the intestine (a widespread problem in Nepal), alongside DEC. This is very useful because intestinal worm infestation, particularly hookworm, is the main cause of anaemia (lack of the oxygen-carrying haemoglobin in our blood) in our part of the world. So two diseases are being efficiently dealt with by one control program. 🇳🇵

**GIZMO by YANTRICK**

## Roomba solid

Remember Rosie, the robot maid, from *The Jetsons*? Oh, what wouldn't the sloths among us do to have a Rosie of our own. Cooking isn't much of a problem because we can always order in. But nothing makes our hearts cry in despair as much as the weekly apartment cleansing.

Now thanks to the US-based company, iRobot, our futuristic dream could finally come true with the state-of-the-art Roomba 790 robot vacuum cleaner. Gone are the days of loud, strenuous, and tedious vacuum cleaning and breaking our backs plugging and unplugging the cord. There is a (small) catch though: Rs 70,000.

Yes, we know, vacuum robot cleaners are not exactly rocket science and have been around for more than a decade. But the older models left plenty to be desired. Roomba 790 is the culmination of years of refinement and fine tuning to achieve the pinnacle of home automation and how.



Measuring a mere 14 inches in diameter and standing just under four inches tall, the Roomba 790 is compact enough to voyage under your bed or furniture and is one of the most aesthetically pleasing bots in the market. The metallic-blue top panel with gray accents and black side panels make this one a looker. Turn the device over to reveal the various detachable brushes/filters that do all the work, along with a dirt collection bin, while on-board optical sensors help navigate the Roomba.

The 790 comes with a neat collection of replacement accessories and a carrying case to keep things organised. The unit also ships with three of iRobot's Virtual Wall Lighthouse modules, small IR beam transmitters that function to keep the Roomba out of a particular room/area, or to force the Roomba to stay in a certain room/area until it is spotless.

iRobot's vacuum boasts an advanced cleaning head that picks up pet hair and embedded dirt on all surfaces, with more power than other robotic cleaners. Its ability to polish off dirt and debris exceeds that of rivals, in part because of its cleaning pattern, making several passes over the same spot, absorbing everything in its path. An operating time of four hours equates to longer vacuuming than any other gadget in the market and once out of juice, the Roomba automatically returns to its base station, where it should be fully charged in three hours.

The 790's Wireless Command Centre (read remote) allows users to initiate cleaning from any room in the house, to schedule cleaning, send the robot back to his dock, or choose a specific area to spot clean. Best of all, directional keys surrounding the 'clean' button means you get to steer the Roomba the way you would a toy car. 🇳🇵

**Yantrick's verdict: Cleanliness never comes cheap. But the convenience, unsurpassed cleaning capabilities, and loads of replacement accessories, make the Roomba 790 a worthwhile splurge**

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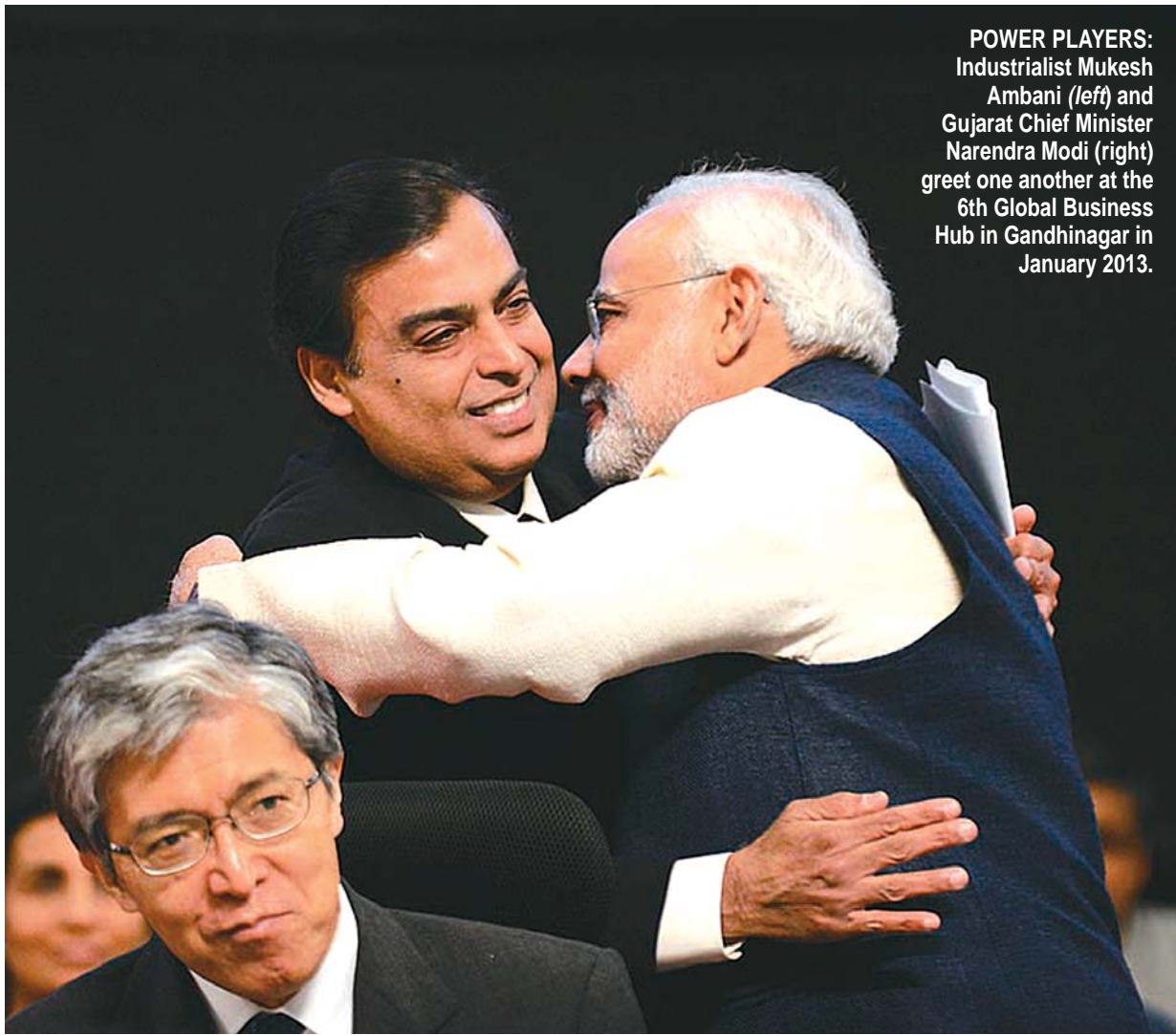
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**POWER PLAYERS:**  
Industrialist Mukesh Ambani (left) and Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi (right) greet one another at the 6th Global Business Hub in Gandhinagar in January 2013.

# TARGET: CRONY CAPITALISM

India's rebel party takes aim at big business ahead of April's general elections

to comprehend. But such misgivings were dispelled as they began to clap and cheer at Kejriwal's acerbic and snide remarks.

Partly, the response of the largely rural listeners testifies to the growing reach of the media. For instance, you can assume they have followed closely Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar's barb that Modi is a chaiwalla (tea-seller). Modi turned this remark to his advantage, not only organising discussions over tea, but also holding his impoverished background as a contrast to Rahul Gandhi's privileged upbringing.

Kejriwal has now given the tea-seller controversy a tweak. At Rohtak, he said, "Modi says he is a tea-seller. Then how is it that he has so many helicopters to fly around in?" The crowd laughed uproariously, suggesting they were not only well informed, but also connected to Kejriwal. In attacking the Ambanis, Kejriwal has broken the conspiracy of silence around the tycoon's clan and businesses. The Rohtak rally last week has further bolstered Kejriwal's image of being a rebel, a challenger who seeks to recalibrate the moral compass of India's politics. [ashrafajaz3@gmail.com](mailto:ashrafajaz3@gmail.com)

Mukesh Ambani was in the news in neighbouring Nepal recently for being among the Indian glitterati that flew in on private jets for the wedding of the son of Nepali hotelier Arun Saraf. But back home in India, the oil tycoon has been accused of influencing government policies and buying out politicians to assist leaders favourably disposed towards them.



**LOOK OUT**  
Ajaz Ashraf

Occasionally, Mukesh and his company Reliance have been pilloried in Parliament in New Delhi for allegedly inflating the cost of extracting gas from the Godavri basin to enhance their profits.

Nobody had ever imagined that Mukesh and his estranged brother Anil (who was also in Nepal for the wedding) could be brought under intense public scrutiny because of their formidable power. But all this unravelled very quickly on 23 February at a massive election rally of the Aam Aadmi Party. Everybody had expected its leader, Arvind Kejriwal, to launch a tirade against the Congress and BJP, but nobody had thought he would devote much of his speech on Ambanis' supposedly inimical influence on India's democratic politics.

It is too early to forecast the outcome of India's general elections in April, but Kejriwal has redefined the agenda for the polls: against Narendra Modi's plank of Gujarat-like growth and Rahul Gandhi's slogan of inclusive development. Kejriwal cited the Ambanis as an example

of the symbiotic relationship between big business and politicians at the expense of the common citizen, the 'aam aadmi'.

At his speech on Sunday in Rohtak, Kejriwal spoke on the issue of gas pricing. He talked about the cost of producing gas, the allegedly fraudulent method in escalating it, and why its price would skyrocket should Modi become the prime minister. The reason, he explained, was because Mukesh Ambani's Reliance was funding Modi's rallies and providing him its choppers. Mukesh couldn't be funding Modi unless there was a payback involved, he insisted.

This was decidedly unprecedented in Indian politics: it wasn't the politician, but the businessman who was represented as the Establishment. The Haryana chief minister may have been called a property broker, Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law, Robert Vadra, accused of appropriating massive tracts of land, Modi decried for currying favours with the corporate sector, but it was Mukesh Ambani who came out as the principal villain in Kejriwal's narrative. Both Modi and Gandhi were depicted as leaders working for the benefit of Ambani. In other words, to vote for Modi or Gandhi would be akin to voting for Reliance.

Kejriwal is trying to point out the rot in Indian politics brought about by crony capitalism. It is this, he argued in Rohtak, that leads to farmers being alienated from their land, for not being paid a requisite price for their produce, for the inflation, for the hypocritical silence on unpaid loans of the corporate sector even as there is

criticism over subsidies for the poor.

Initially, the audience which was made up of mainly farmers, was silent, making you wonder whether they were listening to him in rapt attention or found the complexities of crony capitalism difficult



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AMBIKA REGMI

BHRIKUTI RAI

Ambika Regmi was working in her vegetable patch at home in Jhapa one day last year when she heard that she had been selected to go to Israel. But unlike other young women in her village,

who had gone to Israel to work as caregivers for the elderly, Regmi had been chosen to take part in advanced agricultural training.

The 28-year-old had never been outside her village before she flew from Kathmandu to Tel Aviv last October. She is now a student at Kinneret College on

the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel. "Since it was my first trip abroad I was worried when I left Nepal, but everyday has been a great learning experience here," Regmi told us via Skype. "It is quite amazing to see how Israelis have such rich harvests in the desert. It has changed the way I look at farming."

# Nepal learns

A unique program has brought 200 young Nepali farmers to Israel to learn new farming techniques

Two hundred members of Small Farmer Agriculture Cooperative from all over Nepal are taking the 11-month advanced course in agriculture in Negev, Kinneret, and Arava in Israel. The 'learn and earn' program allows the Nepali farmers a chance to study by doing how Israel has made the desert bloom.

They learn how drip irrigation can make use of every precious drop of water. They find out about pesticides, commercial farming, and quality control of produce. Ambika shares her dormitory with 11 other female Nepali students and they often discuss plans to start businesses when they

return home later this year.

"We want to work on fish farming and move towards high value cash crops after returning home," says Sangita Bhandari, also from Jhapa.

There is a lot Nepali farmers can learn in Israel, which is a major exporter of fresh produce despite most of the country being a desert. "Only three per cent of Israel's workforce is involved in agriculture, but they produce enough to feed the whole country and also export the surplus," says Israeli Ambassador to Nepal, Hanan Goder Goldberger, who came up with the idea to send Nepali farmers to Israel. "We want the Nepali students to

# RURAL REVOLUTION

TSERING DOLKER GURUNG in ILAM

When Manmaya Budathoki decided to seek loans from a local cooperative to switch to tea after generations of subsistence farming, she had to take a lot of ridicule. "Back then cooperatives weren't as common or popular as they are now," explains the 55-year-old farmer from Phikkal of Ilam district. "Women were forced to take loans in the name of male relatives."

Today, Budathoki's prosperity helped change her neighbours' perspective towards cooperatives and encouraged many to follow suit. She is involved with Mahila Srijana Multipurpose Cooperative (MSMC) which now has 534 members. Established in 2000, MSMC is one of the first women's cooperative to open in the district.

"Our main aim is to make everyone self sufficient and thus we encourage women to build a business to sustain their families," says Mukta Devi Thapa of Mahila Srijana. The cooperative has been providing small loans of up to Rs 50,000 to members to be paid within a year.

Cooperatives such as MSMC have become a major source of lending in places like Ilam where a substantial number of farmers don't have access to regular banking services, or have to depend on loan sharks.


Although the government's 1990 deprived sector lending policy requires that banks allocate between 1.5 to 3 per cent of their loans

to under-developed areas of the country, more than half of the commercial banks have not complied and prefer to pay the fines for non-compliance.

Bank branches in Phikkal remain out of reach for the farmers since they don't have the collateral that commercial lenders demand. The National Living Standard Survey shows that cooperative loans increased from three per cent in 1996 to 14 per cent in 2011, while borrowing from formal financial institutions only recorded a four per cent growth.

Besides savings and loans, member-run cooperatives such as Mahila Srijana also provide skill development trainings to its members. Kecal Kumari Parajuli (pic, right), 28, says her confidence has increased after attending such training and made her more assertive in her community.

Nepal's cooperatives have also acted as catalysts to empower women through income generation. More than half the 22,000 cooperatives in the country are managed by women's groups. Out of all the cooperatives that faced closure in Ilam, not one was run by women.

However, cooperatives remain largely unorganised and the Cooperatives Act doesn't have proper monitoring which has led to the misuse of the 'cooperative' tag. 

nepalitimes.com

Interview with Kecal Kumari Parajuli

Cooperatives replace traditional money lenders in areas where banking services are still unavailable





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# from the Negev



SHANKAR SILWAL

take back lessons home about simple and effective practices like drip irrigation and market management and to expand beyond subsistence farming,” Goldberger told *Nepali Times* (see interview).

The Small Farmers Development Bank, which facilitated the training in

Israel, wants Nepali farmers to come back with skills in high value cash crops like ginger, honey, herbs, and dry fruit. “Agricultural cooperatives have helped farmers all over Nepal expand their business, but that alone won’t help if we do not embrace modern farming techniques,” says Jalan Kumar

**PRACTICAL LESSONS:** Nepali students of Kinneret visit a fish farming site near the Israel-Jordan border (left). Students in Arava during a class field trip.

Sharma, CEO of Small Farmers Development Bank, who hopes the first batch will return from Israel with innovative business ideas.

Upendra Adhikari used to work in a community radio in Dhading and is currently studying at Arava and working in a capsicum farm. He produces a syndicated radio program to disseminate what he has learnt to other farmers back home. Adhikari says: “If we can only bring home a fraction of what we are learning here and get help with capital investment, we could revolutionise farming in Nepal.” 🇳🇵

## Cooperating with cooperatives

Even though the first cooperative was set up in Nepal in 1957, it is only lately that the model has taken off. There are now nearly 7,300 agriculture cooperatives all over rural Nepal involved in micro-credit, agriculture extension support, and help with marketing produce.

Deposit collection in cooperatives all over Nepal has reached Rs 19.45 billion with almost three million members. The nationwide network of mostly self-managed microfinance institutions has promoted income generating activities in areas which are out of reach of commercial banking. These grassroots groups have invested in agriculture, dairy, education, and even local infrastructure projects. They not just perform basic saving and lending functions, but also exercise surveillance over members’ use of credit to prevent possible delinquency.

“This is Nepal’s little-known success story of small entrepreneurs who are helping themselves and doing

much better economically and socially,” says Keshav Badal, Chairman of the National Cooperative Federation of Nepal. “But cooperatives need proper regulation and monitoring to make them more productive and organised.”

The Small Farmer Agriculture Cooperative has now expanded its network with 350 new cooperatives across Nepal which have more than 70 per cent women members. In 2001, the cooperative took shape of a development bank its core focus is still empowering farmers and bringing investment in agriculture.

“There is a lot of prospect in agriculture in Nepal, but we need to move from traditional to modern farming practice to ensure greater productivity,” says Jalan Kumar Sharma of the Small Famers Development Bank.

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

Opting for coops #565

## Agricultural envoy



Unlike his diplomatic colleagues in Kathmandu, Israel’s ambassador to Nepal Hanan Goder Goldberger, is often knee-deep in mud in paddy fields or travelling in rural Nepal to find out more about farmers’ concerns. After a recent visit to Makwanpur he spoke to *Nepali Times* about his passion for agriculture.

**Nepali Times:** You seem to enjoy field trips to the hinterland more than the Kathmandu diplomatic circuit?

**Hanan Goder Goldberger:** I feel that travelling outside Kathmandu, even if it is just the neighbouring districts of Kavre or Makwanpur, is always such an amazing experience. I have travelled to 30 districts since my arrival here in 2011 and hope to cover as many districts as possible. I have learned a lot from my interactions with farmers and understanding their concerns.

**What are some projects that the embassy has started?**

We are working with the government and local organisations to improve education, health, and agriculture services through MASHAV, Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation. We collaborate with hospitals in Dhulikhel and Kathmandu in more than a dozen programs related to public health, trauma management, and community services. In 2010, the governments of Israel and Nepal signed an agricultural cooperation agreement and last year we sent the first batch of Nepali students for a yearlong agriculture training program in Israel.



**Tell us more about that. Where did the idea come from?**

We began training young farmers from Nepal so they could modernise agricultural practices. Around 200 students who are members of agricultural cooperatives

in Nepal are presently studying in Negev, Kinneret, and Arava in Israel. And the students there also get the opportunity to work in agricultural sector to get firsthand experience of the classroom lessons, support their education, living and travel cost. It is a learn and earn program which we hope will benefit several communities once the students come back and implement what they have learnt in Israel.

**What do they learn in Israel?**

Over the years Israel has successfully modernised its agriculture producing surplus to export despite its rugged landscape. We hope students who come to Israel will understand the immense opportunity of commercial farming in Nepal and take back lessons home about simple and effective practice like drip irrigation, quality control, market management to expand from subsistence farming. In the absence of modern farming techniques, Nepal is still not self-sufficient in agricultural products. How will farmers profit if the quality and quantity of their products are still what they used to be a decade ago? Nepal’s neighbours are fast growing economies, so they don’t have to worry about the market for their products.

**What prospects do you see for Nepal’s future development?**

Nepal has abundant natural resources and all it needs is sound policy and appropriate technology to tap it for economic growth. Taking steps towards modernising farming in at least few districts could be a great starting point. Despite the fluid political situation, Nepal has achieved a lot in terms of increasing literacy rate and the country is now in the middle of an educational revolution preparing skilled human resource in various fields. Now it is up to Nepal to ensure that it is able to retain the new generation of skilled workforce for the development of the country.



BHRIKUTI RAI

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# Supercop

Interview with SSP Ramesh Kharel, *News24*, 17 February



**Dil Bhusan Pathak: The public calls you a supercop because you are not afraid to put notorious criminals behind bars.**

**Ramesh Kharel:** I cannot tolerate any criminal. And it is the responsibility of every policeman to jail criminals.

**What about the 'dons' with political protection, who have received a lot of press recently. How do you deal with them?**

Let's not glamourise them. They are just petty thieves, no matter what they look like and what lifestyle they lead. They will always try to bend rules and it is unfortunate that politicians protect them. There are many people in the police force who fear the consequences of taking action against dons and feel such

a move might affect their careers.

**What exactly are these organised criminal groups involved in?**

The groups are involved in rampant extortion in the name of various political parties, collecting levy by threatening people, using force to monopolise various businesses. Unfortunately, their connections also extend to the police force, which we need to break.

**How has your experience been while dealing with such high profile criminals?**

I am under tremendous pressure, but have never lost focus. There are many honest officers in our department who refuse to give in.

**So is it the politicians running the goons or the other way round?**

Unfortunately, goons have greater influence over politicians these days. They now have political ambitions because they have more power and money. Our society must be vigilant and not give criminals opportunity to make decisions that affect everyone.

**But what if the future leadership of Nepal Police falters?**

Times have changed. The chief of police cannot be replaced within days for simply having disagreeing with the home minister. We have the right to say no when the higher-ups try to interfere with our

work. Also the public is more aware these days, our media and judiciary are stronger and we feel glad to have their support.

**What are the reforms required within the police?**

Change should start from the individual level. We need to treat everyone as equals before the law and maintain a zero tolerance policy for all kinds of criminals. We need to have better rules to modernise the police administration. If we are not able to live up to people's expectations, it is because of our own shortcomings.

**How did you develop this zero tolerance policy?**

During a training session in India, the then chief election commissioner told us that if we wanted to earn money it would be better to do business. That philosophy still guides me.

**How does it feel to have a movie based on you called SP Kharel?**

It is matter of great honour not just for me, but the entire police force.

**What about those who criticise you for clamping down on the capital's night life?**

Our vigilance increased because most illegal activities take place during the night in Kathmandu. We have no problem with businesses running 24/7 as long as they are regulated and are functioning within the limits of the law.

**How has the public reacted to your time in office?**

I am immensely grateful for the help and support that our well-wishers have shown. They contact me through email and even text messages, which inspires me to do my best.

nepalimes.com

Watch interview

## Bye bye foreign junkets

Chudamani Bhattarai, *Annapurna Post*, 27 February

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

European and other western countries have decided not to host Constituent Assembly members in their countries for trainings on the constitution writing process. The European Union and American Embassy in Kathmandu have agreed on the decision following the previous CA members' failure to draft a constitution in four years.

Members of the first CA-I travelled to several European countries on fully funded foreign junkets. The CA members were criticised several times for spending most of their time on trips instead of working on the constitution writing process. If the decision is implemented, CA members including high level politicians will not be able to go on official excursions to the US, UK, Canada, Germany, France, Switzerland, Finland, Norway, Denmark among others. However, personal travel will not be affected by the directive. The ambassadors who have agreed on this decision hope that this move from the diplomatic community will remind Nepal's lawmakers of their one year time frame to complete constitution drafting.

"Although we haven't written to the Nepal government about this decision, we have already informed concerned authorities," said an official from European Union.



**Koirala:** Can never say I ever said I would offer Home.

क्रान्तिपुर Abin Shrestha in *Kantipur*, 24 February

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

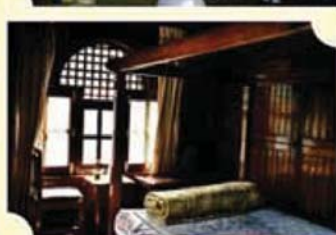


“India is playing hardball and our own party members are squeezing me. Just let the UML have Home.”

PM Sushil Koirala in a private meeting with senior leaders, *Jana Aastha*, 26 February

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Subodh Gautam, *Nagarik*,  
22 February

नागरिक

The Himalayan mountains have four layers: the Tibetan rimland, the high Himalaya, the midhills, and the Chure. These first wrinkles that rise from the Tarai plains stretch right across

Nepal covering 12.6 per cent of the country's land area. It is a treasure trove of biodiversity, but these hills are fragile because they are made up of sand, boulders, and a thin layer of top soil. Which is why the vegetation cover of the slopes is essential to prevent soil erosion and floods downstream.

# Fragile mountains

But the Chure is now in the grip of the sand and boulder exporting mafia who has ravaged the hills. A recent investigation showed 193 crusher units operating from Saptari to Kapilvastu, with excavators and tractors gouging out the Chure slopes.

The rapid destruction in Chure is driven largely by the growing demand for building materials to feed the construction of highways, irrigation canals, and cities across the border in northern India. Nepali companies supplied sand, stones for construction of the recently completed 1,650km expressway from New Delhi to Guwahati. The demand is likely to rise after the proposed 650km Indo-Nepal border road gets underway.

"The mining of stone and gravel is 50 times more than

the national demand," says Santosh Mani Nepal, who has been studying the mining trends in Chure area. "If it continues at this rate, the Chure will be gone." It is estimated that Nepal exported almost 8.7 million cubic metres of sand, stone, and gravel between 2009 and 2010.

This over-exploitation and denudation can have devastating impacts on the groundwater supply and unleash flashfloods and mudslides downstream in the Tarai and India. The soft and fragile hills have been known to dissolve in just a single monsoon season. President Ram Baran Yadav has made saving the Chure one of his priority projects of national pride, but like earlier programs it hasn't delivered much.

The environmental impact of sand and stone mining in the Chure is devastating. The slopes

have huge gashes in them and the roads have been wrecked by tipper trucks carrying twice the legal weight of gravel.

The state's security forces deployed in the area allow the mining mafia unfettered access. The mafia controls local opposition with threats and intimidation. Local forest officers say they are helpless because the CDOs choose not take any action on the operators even though the operators have flouted more than a dozen environmental regulations. The mafia has such a stronghold on the local administration to the power corridors of Singha Darbar and Shital Niwas that no one has dared to question their activities. Instead of curbing the indiscriminate mining, the government has given the operators licence to operate till mid 2014.

# Justice denied

Himalkhabar.com, 26 February

हिमाल

As Nanda Prasad and Ganga Maya Adhikari's hunger strike crosses 120 days, their health is deteriorating drastically. They are being kept alive through intravenous saline and oxygen masks. Doctors at Bir Hospital suggest putting the elderly couple in ICU, but they refuse to budge. "They are about to die, but the state could be least bothered," says social worker Sampada Bohara, who has been taking care of the two.



Earlier in 2013, the Adhikaris had been on a 48-day fast demanding an investigation into the murder of their son Krishna, who was kidnapped and killed by the Maoists in Phujel, Gorkha in 2004. The government promised to heed to their pleas and had convinced them to eat. But since none of the accused was summoned for further investigations, they resumed their fast-unto-death on 24 October.

"Don't do this to us, let us die if you can't give us justice," says a frail Ganga Maya as she passes in and out of consciousness.

Nanda Prasad and Ganga Maya spent the winter of their lives going from one government office to another hoping that their son's murderers would be put behind bars. Two suspects were caught last year, but the district police office in Chitwan refused to register a complaint and the perpetrators walked away scot-free. The formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is still a long way, as the Supreme Court scrapped the lopsided draft TRC bill in January.

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# Bribing officials not to be corrupt

Given the wheels within wheels of Nepali politics, it is difficult enough to find out what is going on, so it must be infuriatingly more frustrating to try to steer the course of events. Researchers and analysts should have given up long ago trying to influence the course of politics because there are just too many variables. Manipulators are manipulated by their own manipulations. When you can't ensure that a certain intervention will have a specific intended outcome, why bother? Which is why it is puzzling why the Underdone were rooting so exclusively for Comrade Leftist God in the Ministry of Interior Designs. Primordial Minister Jhusil stuck it out till the end saying he would entertain Bum Dave at Home over his dead body, but in the end the pressure got too much to bear. He saw a certain merit in giving control of the security apparatus to the UML rather than someone from Brave Lion's camp, but why were Shri Amrace, Shri Sitola, and their handlers pushing so forcefully for Comrade Balm and blackmailing Jhoos with an election for a new prez? What has Bomb Dev promised in return?



One of the few things that Nepalis can be justifiably proud of is our consistently outstanding performance in the annual rankings of Transparency International. In fact, a clean and uncorrupt Nepal is almost unthinkable, so much has malfeasance become a part of our national identity. Which is why we can't understand the zeal with which the CIAA is trying to clean up our tainted image. It is a matter of national importance that we maintain

our rank in the Corruption Index, even if it means bribing the folks at Transparency International. Because, let's admit it, we have lost the war on corruption. We have tried everything. First we passed laws against it, but that made it worse because crooks could just buy their way out once caught. We tried sending officials on study tours to Singapore, but they just came back with electronic consumer items and bribed their way through customs. We thought we could fight corruption in our fatalistic country by using religion and telling people that stealing was a sin, but they bribed the gods with ladoos. We tried superstition, spreading the rumour that those who gave or took bribes would



be punished in their afterlife to be reborn as prawns, but that just made them want to amass more wealth in this life. There is now hope that the Human Genome Project will be able to pinpoint the exact genes for greed. People who are genetically susceptible to purloining public funds can be detected well in advance if their DNA has gene sequences responsible for secreting the hormone, corruption-enhancing-receptor protein (CERP). And if they do, they can be debarred from holding public office. Human trials have begun and the government is starting by vaccinating immoral immigration officials. But what do we do while waiting for scientists to develop genetically-

modified Nepalis? One idea that is gaining currency, as it were, is to tax corruption. Levying a surcharge on graft and bribes would be like a vice tax on alcohol and tobacco and could be a massive revenue earner for the exchequer. A scaled rate would ensure that bigger bribes would fall under a higher tax bracket and we could even introduce tax at source for bribe givers. There could be tax exemptions for life-or-death transactions, for example when one has to bribe a doctor or a hospital to treat a patient. There can be tax holidays for bribes paid in the hydropower sector. We could also remove double taxation, so that someone who has bribed regulators abroad will not have to pay VAT on bribes paid here. Foreign diplomatic missions and international agencies will, of course, have duty-free status on bribes they dole out, since their presence in our country is governed by the Montreal Protocol. But for all this to happen, first we must legalise corruption which will mean that corruption will actually contribute to Nepal's GDP growth. Legitimising corruption will mean we don't have to waste any more time on frequent seminars and workshops on 'Accountability, Integrity, and Governance in the Context of the Civil Service'. If that doesn't work, the weapon of last resort would be to bribe officials not to be corrupt. At least it would mean that we retain our bottom of the table ranking in the TI Index.

The Ass



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