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TOH EEMING

Outside, looking in

After turning out in huge numbers five months ago to vote in a new government and Assembly to write the constitution, the people are feeling left out. Just like the bystanders kept out of Tundikhel on Sunday (above) as VIPs watched the annual Nepal Army horse parade. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala faces flak for not making much headway in filling vacant positions in the government, the CA, the Supreme Court, constitutional bodies and in Nepal's embassies abroad. The political will to act must come from the party leadership which needs to look beyond narrow partisan advantage to the long term national interest.

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URGENT NEED FOR A SENSE OF URGENCY

Perhaps no prime minister in Nepal in recent memory has enjoyed a shorter honeymoon period than Sushil Koirala.

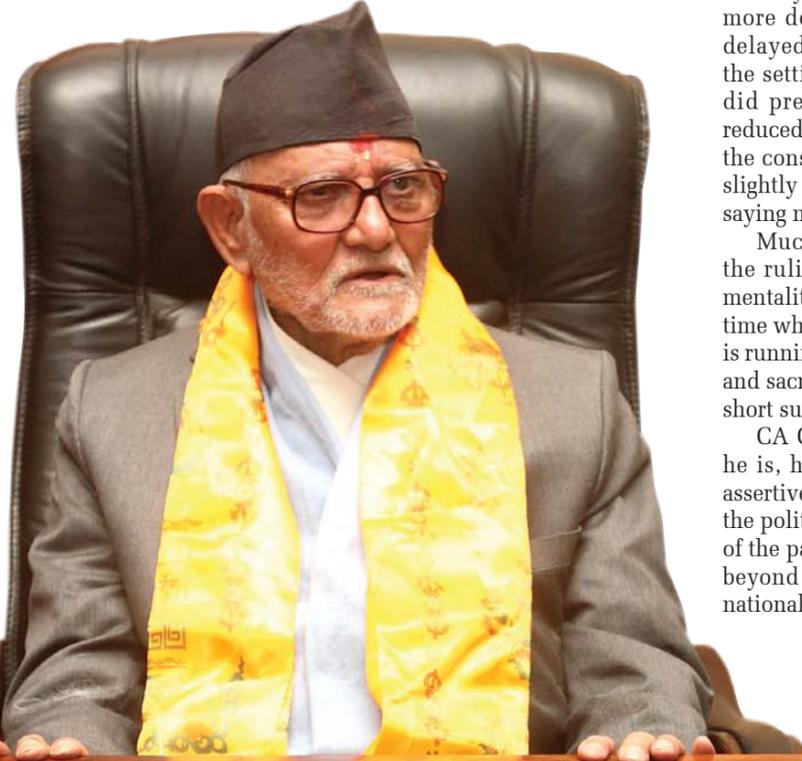
While no one doubts his integrity and sacrifice during decades of struggle for democracy, Koirala is coming under withering attack from inside and outside his party and this onslaught is reflected in prominent and scathing media coverage (see page 19).

The premature declaration of failure of elected leaders often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is what happened during the mid-1990s when the chronic bickering between the NC and UML and high-profile scams covered obsessively by a newly-free media led to a sense of betrayal and hopelessness in the public. This prompted many to dismiss democracy itself, when they should have blamed the lack of accountability among the ruling elite.

To be sure, Koirala has no one to blame but himself. Never known for charisma or leadership qualities, this behind-the-scenes party organiser has been thrust into having to multitask and fulfill the roles of statesman, mediator, manager, wheeler-dealer and arm-twister. In the two-and-half months since he assumed office, he hasn't even been able to set up a PMO, he has no real advisers, has not been able to fill cabinet posts, nor has he added 26 nominated members to the Constituent Assembly. Constitutional bodies are still headless. We don't have ambassadors in 12 countries, including India and Thailand where we haven't had envoys now for nearly three years.

Both the UML and NC are mired in internal disgruntlement and power-struggles. They haven't been able to nominate their constitutional party committees, and there is sharp criticism of the leadership of both parties from within their own ranks.

To say that the government is on autopilot would be inaccurate because that presumes it is on a pre-planned flight path.



BIKRAM RAI

There is an urgent need for a sense of urgency. To say that the government is on autopilot would be inaccurate because that presumes it is on a pre-planned flight path. Governance is suffering the absence of leadership at the top and there is confusion down the line. The recently agreed on Common Minimum Program between the coalition partners looks great on paper, but there is no indication anyone is actually following it.

In the longer term, the likelihood of the constitution actually being finished by December looks more and more doubtful by the day. There was some much-delayed forward movement in the past week with the setting up of the CA committees and good sense did prevail when the number of committees was reduced. Now we are all waiting with bated breath for the constitutional timetable. Things are moving with slightly more velocity than the first CA, but that is not saying much.

Much of the paralysis is due to the members of the ruling coalition emulating the winner-takes-all mentality of the Maoists after the 2008 elections. At a time when the constitution is a clear priority, and time is running out, there needs to be a spirit of compromise and sacrifice. But those seem to be qualities that are in short supply in the top echelons of political power.

CA Chairman Subhas Nemwang, gentleman that he is, has responded to criticism about his lack of assertiveness in the last CA by twisting some tails. But the political will to act must come from the leadership of the parties who, even at this late stage, need to look beyond narrow partisan advantage to the long term national interest.

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

700 WEEKS

What will be the fate of our lying and murdering Netaji haru, if there is no constitution within the next 8 months? ('700 weeks', Editorial, #700). Will we continue to garland them and sing their praises?

Narayana Prasad

■ What a remarkable ringside view of modern Nepali history. Congratulations to *Nepali Times* for its consistent excellence in doing what it does week after week for us. Best wishes.

SU

DIGITAL HIMALAYA

Amazing visualisation! ('Nepal's recent history on pdf', Mark Turin, #700). However, it's still clear that most of the traffic comes from the US and Europe. Apart from Nepal and India, most of Asia appear only as little dots. Maybe Digital Himalaya and the resources it houses needs to have better outreach and publicity over the Asian region to increase their traffic from the sub-continent.

Ishan Neupane

■ 2.5GB (or even 40GB) is hardly 'big data'. Just wondering if mirror sites could be placed within IPX (Internet Exchange) of Nepal, since this would speed up downloads. Also wondering if there is a torrent out there for us to download the

entire archive locally onto our own drives?

Namah

THE DEMOCRATIC IMPERATIVE

The benchmark of democracy should be performance, i.e., accountability and transparency in governance ('The democratic imperative', Rubeena Mahato, #700).

@siromanid

■ Democracy is not just about voting in elections but it has also to do with the structure inside parties and is concerned with the inclusiveness of political regime.

@pigreen

CAN KOIRALA DELIVER?

If only there were 10 more political leaders like Sushil Koirala, a rare breed in the sea of dirty and corrupted Nepali politicians ('Can Koirala deliver', Damakant Jayshi, #700). Koirala can and will deliver the relief Nepalis have longed for and died for, for he has no desire or need to tell lies or amass wealth in the name of public service unlike many others. Clean the rat infested Nepali politics. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Best of luck Sushil Da, Jai Nepal, Jai Nepali!

Prasad

7 WONDERS OF NEPAL

All the places look equally intriguing

('7 Wonders of Nepal', #700). Nepal's blessed with such natural beauty, it's unbelievable. For my next holiday, I'll definitely be heading to one on the list. I am thinking Dolpo.

Shreema

■ Thank you *Nepali Times* for this wonderful tip sheet for destinations in Nepal, I have posted it on my travel website. I think I will start with Pulchoki on my next visit.

McCallister

QUEEN'S ENGLISH

I seriously don't understand the logic behind teaching curriculum at school in a foreign language instead of mother tongue or a national language of a sovereign country ('Queen's English in a new republic', Tsering Dolker Gurung, #700). To develop ourselves or our country we don't need to learn an alien language. Look at Japan, most European countries, China or Korea. They are all developed with very high literacy rate not in English, but in their own languages. Nepal seems to be colonising herself in today's independent world. This is all because of the proximity we have in our mindset with once British colony India. In India, you are an inferior person if you don't speak or are not educated in English, which seems to be the thinking in Nepal too.

Lal Thapa

■ There is no doubt that English is

extremely important in the international arena. However, this does not mean that we stop respecting our mother tongue. In Nepal, the English medium schools fail to place equal importance on Nepali and children are taught their ABCs before *ka, kha, ga*. It reflects a colonial mindset of our educationists, parents who think that learning to speak English is greater than the content of education.

Jash Bahadur

■ Language is just a medium of communication. It helps you present your thoughts into words, so people can understand what you are trying to express. That said, a person who understands English has a better chance of excelling in life. If you know English well, you may not really have to learn any other language to be successful this world.

Luv Nepal

MOUNTAIN BIKE CHAMPS

Sports can really uplift a nation's morale, as seen by what our cricket team did for us this T20. Similarly, mountain biking needs to be encouraged more and the riders need better coaching to compete on an international arena (Make way for Nepal's mountain bike champs, Tyler McMahon, #700). Having the advantage of riding in such harsh terrain and climate, Nepali riders have a chance of excelling on the world stage. Let's hope

this continues and we see our riders raising our flag internationally.

Geeta Rajbhandari

MORE HOLY COWS

Ass seems to have gotten his lost mojo back. This is one of the funniest things I have read in a long, long time ('More holy cows', Ass, #700). Welcome back donkey!

Suman G

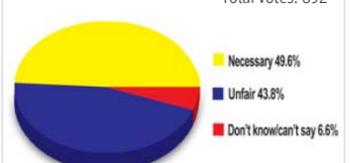
■ Funniest line: 'They like newspapers mostly because newspapers contain a lot of garbage which is good for their digestive system.' This is excruciatingly funny, thanks Ass for making fun of everyone and everything, including your own profession. The self-deprecation makes this world-class satire. A Fan.

Sumina

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll #701

Q. What do you think of the recent hike in petrol price?

Total votes: 892



Weekly Internet Poll # 702.
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Who do you think will emerge strongest from India's general elections?

Modi's momentum

What will the elevation of a Hindutva hawk do to his country, and how it will impact on Nepal?

As it becomes ever-clearer that Narendra Modi will be the next prime minister of India, questions abound as to what the elevation of the Hindutva hawk will do to his country, and also how it will impact on Nepal. On India, unless Modi unexpectedly turns benevolent upon entering 7 Race Course Road, one can expect a further build-up of societal acrimony as the high-caste, hard-line agenda defines discourse, governance and geopolitics.



SOUTHASIA BEAT
Kanak Mani Dixit

There are many ways a Modi administration could affect Nepal, from the cross-border capillaries to Singha Darbar and the Constituent Assembly. This is a country that has opened itself up so wide to external influence that one hopes Modi's plans do not require Nepal as a prop for any purpose.

As sometimes happens with radicals once they enter office, the responsibilities of governance may modulate Modi's activism. The Gujarat Chief Minister comes from so far to the right, however, and his mentor-organisation, the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), is so keen to dig in that the move to the centre will take time, if it happens at all. His loyalty to the RSS seems total, as confirmed in a tv interview on Wednesday: "I learnt to work hard from the Sangh ... I owe it all to the RSS."

Modi's war chest is bursting at the rivets, filled by corporate India from the Ambani brothers on down, and the print and electronic media is glad for his top-up. In column inches and airtime, Modi leaves the others far behind. He has crafted a masterful election campaign, spending lavishly on lighting, sound and projection at rallies.

Modi's outreach ranges from patriotic jingles (sung by Udit Narayan Jha) to mass-scale cellphone texting. The orange-blue campaign colour combination is fetching, and Modi watches you from everywhere on the roads, out of banners and billboards. On social media, he is



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INDIA ELECTIONS
2014

said to have an IT battalion that pounces on anyone who dares criticise 'NaMo'.

The candidate's oratory is harsh and accusatory. The campaign promises a 'Modi sarkar' rather than a BJP government, and within the party Modi is pulling no punches as he dictates to his peers and monopolises the appointment of candidates. Modi uses Pakistan to bait adversaries, he exaggerates his role in Gujarat's economic transformation, and political Hindutva is the battering ram

of his strident campaign. The strategy for the all-important Ganga heartland is epitomised by the presence of Yogi Adityanath, the fire-spewing, Muslim-baiting mahant of Gorakhnath Temple, who leads Modi's charge in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Many in Hindi-speaking northern India seem to be looking forward to a Modi win. The RSS and Sangh Parivar are already jubilant and planning to consolidate during 'Modi raj' by placing cadre and fellow travellers in state institutions, from the universities to commissions and public sector enterprises.

The competing parties seem unable to effectively counter the Modi bandwagon. The Congress is adrift and open to ridicule, its underbelly soft after a decade in power leading the UPA coalition. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's reticence contrasts with the fiery Modi, and Rahul Gandhi the Anointed's lacklustre performance in a January interview with TV hotshot Arnab Goswami served to de-animate the Congress rank.

Arvind Kejriwal of the Aam Aadmi Party has been a master tactician, but his resignation

as New Delhi chief minister after barely 49 days in office is seen as abandonment by many voters. As for the communists – the photograph showing the glum gentlemen of the CPM releasing their election manifesto on 20 March said it all. In the end, it may be the 'regional ladies' (Mayawati, Mamata and Jayalalitha) who will blunt Modi's strike, whether in opposition or in coalition.

Is it possible to decelerate the Modi chariot? While the middle-class adult northern Hindu males are bedazzled by the chief minister's promise of economic growth, the poorer mass including the Dalit may not entirely buy that or the Hindutva agenda. The women voters of India may hold a more nuanced view on Modi than the menfolk who form opinion.

If there is an electoral upset that defies the psephologists, it will be because the BJP campaign is all about Modi the man and not BJP the party, its policies and programs. And the memory of the riots of 2002 in Gujarat, the killing of Muslims, may finally emerge with some strength at the

ballot box.

If it is inevitable that Modi will lead the government, the ideal would be a coalition that blocks his adventurism and restrains the RSS sledge hammer. Perhaps the professional bureaucracy of India – starting with North Block and South Block – will also play a role.

Rather than fret over how Modi's Hindutva-laced ultra-nationalism will affect Nepal, it is better for Kathmandu to put its house in order and for the polity to emerge capable of setting its own priorities and taking its own decisions.

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Healthy makes wealthy

Making traveller's health a priority could attract more tourists to Nepal

HARIZ BAHARUDIN

It has become a joke among tourists visiting Nepal that a stomach or chest infection is mandatory. No one has calculated the opportunity cost to Nepal's tourism from poor water and air quality, but everyone agrees that it must be preventing a lot of people from visiting the country.

US Ambassador to Nepal, Peter Bode, told the second Nepal Travel and Tropical Medicine Conference in Kathmandu last month that health concerns are always at the back of the minds of tourists. "It is now not a question of what Nepal has to do, but what Nepal must do for the tourists coming here," Bode said.

The conference, which was organised by CIWEC Clinic's Travel Medical Centre, saw the participation of medical and tourism professionals. CIWEC says diarrhoea tops the long list of ailments that afflict tourists. One-third of all sick tourists suffer some form of stomach infection.



Sixteen per cent of tourists suffer respiratory problems. The proportion of diarrhoea cases has been consistently high over the years, but CIWEC believes it can be lowered if proper measures are enforced.

"The high rates of diarrhoea have not changed in the 32 years...we can lower these rates by improving restaurant hygiene," says CIWEC Medical Director

Prativa Pandey, adding that this would involve proper training of staff and maintaining regular checks of restaurants.

This is a view echoed by David Schlim, who is president of the International Society of Travel Medicine: "Everyone thought if you don't eat certain things you won't get diarrhoea, but that is not the case. Around the world it has been confirmed that eating

at unhygienic restaurants is the leading cause of diarrhoea. If we improve hygiene, people will eat here, they will remember they did not get sick, and they will return."

Five per cent of all sick tourists are afflicted with Acute mountain sickness (AMS) which is also the main cause of death for trekkers and mountaineers. But AMS is preventable if there is awareness of symptoms and care during ascent.

Those who suffer from AMS climb too fast, not giving their bodies time to acclimatise. It is recommended that climbers stop for a day or two of rest every 700m, and sleep at lower altitudes whenever possible. CIWEC feels there is still not enough awareness about these preventive measures.

"Although quick helicopter rescues can be arranged these days, the number of deaths caused by altitude sickness hasn't gone down," says Pandey.

Nepal's tourist numbers doubled in the past four years to 800,000, and is expected to cross 1 million in the coming years. According to the World Travel

and Tourism Council, total visitor numbers is expected to grow by nearly 9 per cent in 2014. Last year, tourism contributed Rs 145.3 billion to the GDP (8.2 per cent) and supported 1.12 million jobs. Investment in tourism in 2013 was Rs 14.6 billion and this is expected to rise by 3 per cent.

As the numbers go up, CWIC says the health of visitors should be a number one priority. The Clinic is also worried about death and injury to tourists in highway and aircraft accidents as well as adventure sports like rafting and paragliding, and even rhino attacks in national parks. The number of paragliding companies has increased from one to 19 in the past ten years, and there have been two accidents in the past two months alone, one of them fatal.

Still Schlim remains optimistic: "Nepal is definitely a safe place to visit. The medical infrastructure we have here is excellent, and people are taken care of. What we need to do now is make travellers' health a priority in tourism." 

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Killer Climbs #698
Trekking Bring Medical Care to the Annapurnas, #193
Himalayan Health Hazards, #144

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ROAD TO RECOVERY: Michael Kadoorie (left) inspects a hydrotherapy pool built with support from his foundation for patients at the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre near Banepa on Thursday.

KUNDA DIXIT

Kadoorie in the land of Gurkhas

Hong Kong electricity tycoon willing to help Nepal, but not yet ready to invest in hydropower

When one of Asia's richest men whose family fortune came from electric power flew into Kathmandu in his own Gulfstream 3 executive jet last week, some thought he was here to invest in hydropower.

Sir Michael Kadoorie, 73, the descendant of Iraqi Jews who settled in Shanghai in the 19th century and set up China Light and Power Holdings Ltd, has a net worth of \$9.5 billion and is on the *Forbes* list of the world's biggest billionaires. His company provides 75 per cent of its electricity in Hong Kong, and has invested in power plants and hotel chains across Asia and in Australia.

"I have been hearing about Nepal's enormous hydropower potential and talk of selling it to India ever since the 1970s," Kadoorie said at a stopover during his whirlwind tour of Nepal last week, "I would love to feel that this is the time, but Nepal is in transition and the investment climate has to be right."

Kadoorie is involved in electricity in Nepal, but in providing it to villages in remote parts of Nepal with grants for microhydro plants. Last week, he

inaugurated a 60 kilowatt project in Chaurikharka near Lukla that will provide power to 250 households. The charity is also involved in installing solar units in Dolpo, building foot bridges across Nepal, helping leprosy and burns patients.

The family's involvement in Nepal began with Michael Kadoorie's uncle, Horace, who had been involved with helping refugees from China in Hong Kong in 1949. A British Gurkha officer convinced the family that retiring soldiers needed help with agriculture back home in Nepal. What started out with Horace Kadoorie's involvement with Gurkhas has now diversified into health, education and infrastructure even after he died in 1995.

"The joke in the family was that my father Lawrence earned money and my uncle Horace spent it," Kadoorie says. "My uncle had a deep attachment with Nepal and the Gurkhas and we are carrying on the work he started."

Michael Kadoorie's hobbies include photography, flying helicopters and collecting classic cars. It was while driving a restored Ferrari in 1998 that he

had an accident and spent two months recovering from serious injuries. This prompted the Kadoorie Charitable Foundation to support the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre near Banepa in 2008. Last week he inaugurated Phase 2 of the Centre for physiotherapy, occupational therapy and Nepal's first hydrotherapy pool for patients undergoing rehabilitation (*pic, above*).

"I know from my own experience that rehabilitation needs a lot of passion that comes from the heart," Kadoorie said, "and it was a facility like this in Nepal, especially the hydrotherapy, that enabled me to recover quickly."

The Centre helps with long-term rehabilitation of spinally injured patients, most of them women who have fallen from trees while collecting fodder. But there are an increasing number of patients who are injured in highway accidents.

After inaugurating the hydrotherapy unit that he helped support, Kadoorie's parting quip was: "Next time I come here, I may plunge into the pool."  Kunda Dixit



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EVEREST BANK BIZ BRIEFS



Winning colours

Asian Paints has announced the winners of its 'Dream Home' contest. The lucky winners will be travelling to Singapore, Malaysia and Pokhara.

More mumbai

Jet Airways on Friday announced an additional daily flight on the Mumbai-Kathmandu route from 30 March. "In our bid to expand our business and coverage in international and domestic sectors, Jet has decided to increase frequencies," said Gaurang Shetty, senior vice president of the airlines.

JET AIRWAYS



Won again

Qatar Airways clinched the award for Best Premium Service facilities at the Skytrax World Airport Awards 2014 held last week. This is the fourth time that the airlines has won the award.

Double treat

CG Electronics, authorised dealer of LG for Nepal, has launched a new gift scheme 'LG Lifetime of Smiles offer'. Customers can now choose from a range of gifts on purchase of any LG products.



In partnership

International Money Express (IME) and Vibor Development Bank have signed an agreement to facilitate remittance disbursement in Nepal. All six branches of the bank can now receive remittance sent through IME worldwide.



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DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

DOLAKHA FARMERS LEARN TO ADAPT

Crop diversification helps farmers deal with climate change and deters labour outmigration

NINA HOLMELIN
in DOLAKHA

Khursani, lahsun, kerau and alaichi might be all common ingredients in Nepali cooking, but until recently they have not been widely cultivated. But as midhill farmers grapple with erratic monsoons and uncertain markets, these crops are providing an alternative source of income.

Farmers in remote parts of Nepal grow a few vegetables for their own consumption, but with spreading roads,

irrigation systems, seed distribution and training programs, they are diversifying to vegetables, spices and tree crops. As in Dolakha (*pic, above*), this has enhanced the adaptive capacity of farmers to deal with climate change and unpredictable markets for food and labour.

Sixty-six per cent of households in Nepal are still engaged in farming, mainly growing rice, wheat, maize and millet. However, as land fragmentation continues, most people are not able to fulfill their food and consumption needs. Many migrate for work to Kathmandu, Malaysia or West Asia. However, they do not earn as much as

they were promised. The remittances they send back to Nepal are no doubt of crucial importance, but the price may be high.

Male outmigration is also increasing the workload for those who remain - the women and elderly. Food inflation and fluctuation in the last six years have put additional strain on subsistence households.

A pressing question is whether there is potential for value creation and increased productivity in rural Nepal, if more people choose to or have to return to agriculture. What are the options and the challenges for those who want to invest in local farming as an alternative to migration?

Here in Dolakha young people have started moving back to the countryside and are profiting from cultivating new crops like cardamom, tea, garlic, cauliflower, potatoes, peas, tomatoes, chilli peppers and ginger, alongside traditional food production. Some people are focusing on medicinal plants, such as the cancer medicine Himalayan Yew (*Lothsalla*) or in honey production, while others are experimenting with kiwis, pears and oranges. The local *bimiro*, fruit with its sweet melon-like pulp and slight lemony flavour, is another potential cash crop.

Local innovation and experiments to cultivate new crops and improve farming

methods are making villagers better equipped to face a future with an uncertain climate. Changing precipitation patterns and unpredictable monsoon rains will increase the risk of crop failure. Farmers who combine traditional food production with spices, vegetables and fruits are less vulnerable to crop failure because the risk is spread over a larger part of the year.

At present, the most common adaptation strategy in the event of a failed harvest is to use money earned from the sale of winter vegetables to buy rice later on in the year. In the long term, experimentation with new varieties of rice and grains and diversification of income through cultivation of new crops for sale are helping reduce vulnerability and poverty in rural areas.

Small-scale farming households have limited experience with producing for the market and do not have the necessary trade networks. Cultivation of potatoes and vegetables is therefore often the first step of crop diversification, as these crops can also be eaten if they are not sold. Chilli and cardamom can achieve higher market prices, but cannot fill the hungry stomach. They are thus less attractive for the most land-poor and marginalised farmers, but are a good option for more prosperous ones.

In Dolakha, unlike remoter parts of Nepal, the spread of roads, irrigation and establishment of credit and savings groups and trading cooperatives have helped farmers innovate. Sustaining these investments in agriculture can have positive effects both for the productivity of food crops and for income generation in rural areas. Families, and especially young men, must see it as a viable and realistic option to invest their labour and resources in agriculture, if the goal is to improve rural food security and development.

Nepal's ever-increasing reliance on unskilled labour migration accompanied with increasing food imports is not a sustainable strategy for ensuring national and household food security. Instead, if efforts are made to transfer useful lessons about how to foster local development, innovation in agriculture and new opportunities for income in rural areas, the success from places like Dolakha could become an inspiration to other parts of Nepal and the Himalaya to cope with the effects of climate change. 🇳🇵

Nina Holmelin is a research fellow at CICERO Center for International Climate and Energy Research in Norway.

Apocalypse here and now

The new report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is much more pessimistic than most had expected. The Fifth Assessment Report of Working Group 2 was released in Yokohama this week and states that continued emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases are a clear and present danger, and not something that will happen to remote and poor parts of the world in the future.

For the Himalaya, the report is a sobering reminder that global warming is not just about melting glaciers and mountains devoid of snow. Climate change is already

impacting on weather, with erratic rainfall patterns, frequent cloudbursts, delayed onset of monsoons. The report says there is already 'a breakdown in food systems'. This is much more worrying than receding glaciers.

"We are not primarily responsible but are the victims of climate change," says Sandeep Chamling Rai, international adaptation coordinator for the World Wildlife Fund.

Where water management is poor even at the best of times, these disruptions will have a major impact, exacerbating existing shortages. Cities are already running out of drinking water,

irrigation systems are going dry, groundwater tables have gone down and this will impact on harvests. "Changes in rainfall pattern, temperature and extreme weather events will ripple through the entire food production and distribution system," says water resource analyst Ajaya Dixit.

Nepal can adapt by giving subsistence farmers a choice of crops (*see adjoining article*), lessening dependence on rain-fed agriculture by investing in irrigation and creating new rural jobs in agro-processing to improve farmer incomes.

The poor in the Himalayan region have been forced to adapt to hardships, and water stress caused by global warming is an added burden. Global warming is here and now, it is already affecting the most vulnerable people, and it will get worse in the years to come, experts say.



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We are now really into the spring-summer dry season. The temperature in the plains isn't high enough to trigger massive buildups along the mountains, and the high pressure keeps the moisture out. This has limited local thunderstorms, which will come later in April. However, Eastern Nepal will get one or two big storms along the midhills into Friday, there will be some passing clouds in and around Kathmandu with chances of brief rain in the higher reaches. Weekend will be hazy and hot.

FRIDAY	27° 13°	SATURDAY	26° 14°	SUNDAY	27° 14°
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THEN AND NOW: Everest summiteer and American filmmaker David Breashears gives students a guided tour of the Climate+Change exhibition.



CLIMATE+CHANGE

the reality of climate change in Nepal - a veritable Damocles' Sword if there was one.

The genius of Climate+Change, however, has found expression in the wild variety of events it has hosted, from the ICIMOD Haat Bazaar featuring agro-products from across the Hindu Kush to treasure hunts and critical mass cycling events. Students in particular have been encouraged to visit and make use of the activity room (with free wi-fi) on the ground floor, when they are not engaging in the Saturday workshops or attending screenings of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* or the animation classic *Fern Gully*. A series of seminars, including on how Nepal's tourism could adapt to climatic challenges, provided platforms for discussion. The ever-popular PechaKucha staged its latest edition on 23 February, with mini-presentations ranging from the hazards of medical waste to sustainable housing.

Finally, the temporary exhibits, including the eye-catching creations of SUS. TAIN.KTM, have highlighted the emotional impact of environmental issues. Zadie Smith notes that "there are hardly any intimate words" for climate change, so when Nepali artists express their shock and disgust at what is happening to their neighbourhoods, they take us with them: the first step to effecting positive change rather than submitting to it.

Sometimes the longevity of an exhibition is its worst enemy. But all good things come to an end, although the organisers' outreach with the travelling BookBus means it's not just Kathmandu that has benefited from certain inconvenient truths. Climate+Change runs for another week, even as the valley begins to simmer for the summer. So what better time and place to make sense of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's latest, sobering findings?

Nepali kukur

Climate+Change Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, runs until April 13. www.facebook.com/climatepluschange www.climatepluschange.org

Change within, change without

ICIMOD's multimedia exhibition has engaged a range of Nepalis, and may trigger the shifts in mindset needed to adapt to climate change

Over the years, Nepal has hosted any number of events related to climate change, hardly surprising considering we live in the shadow of the Himalaya, the 'third pole'. Receding glaciers and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) are only, if you'll excuse the pun, the tip of the iceberg in this regard.

Many such events have been limited to publicity stunts: if turning the lights off for 'Earth Hour' in a nation chafing against power cuts is harmless enough, one can't say the same for flying a cabinet of politicians to Everest

Base Camp (and 600 delegates to Copenhagen) in the lead-up to climate negotiations. Climate change has never been cooler (or hotter, if you prefer), but few comprehend what exactly it means for Nepal, and what we should do about it.

The Integrated Centre for Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is well positioned to explain. It has been conducting scientific research in the eight countries of the Hindu-Kush Himalaya for three decades, but more recently has concentrated on outreach to the communities that live in the

Himalaya. The major multimedia exhibition Climate+Change could be seen as the culmination of this approach, and ICIMOD found worthy partners in the American Embassy, UNICEF, Thinc and photo circle, among others.

The permanent exhibition, which opened at the Nepal Art Council in December, was impressively comprehensive. The ground floor introduced visitors to climate change in urban Nepal through text (in English and Nepali), photos, visuals and installations, the most striking of which were the plastic cubes sealing in found objects from the beleaguered Bagmati River - batteries, locks of hair, used condoms - which said as much about the recent history of our civilisation as about our attitudes towards the environment. The first floor, in turn, focused on the importance of transboundary cooperation in addressing risks. But it was the top floor, with GlacierWorks' sweeping Himalayan vistas interspersed with short profiles of mountain residents, including Everest summiteer Apa Sherpa, which really brought home

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EVENTS



The transporters,
an exhibition of New York based artist Sahara Shrestha.
Runs till 8 April, The City Museum, Darbar Marg

Film Lab,
learn film history, storytelling, scriptwriting, cinematography, editing, project handling and network with professionals.
12 April to 15 May, Docskool, Gaurighat, register at (01)4251335



Czech castles,
the National Museum of Czech Republic comes to Kathmandu with an exhibition on the country's castles.
9 to 25 April, 10am to 5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal

Street art at tings
catch the amazing work of Imagine Nation artist Sneha Shrestha on display.
Runs till 4 April, 6 to 8pm, Tings Tea Lounge, Lajimpat

T20 World Cup,
all the big boys play the shortest format of cricket.
Runs till 6 April, airs on Star Sports 4



Ram Nawami,
celebrate the life and deeds of the Lord of Satyayug. *8 April*

Random impact,
an exhibition of contemporary arts and performances.
5 to 18 April, Alliance Francaise, Teku

Strings for smiles,
a concert to raise funds to build a community-run library in Dailekh.
Rs 150, 5 April, 1 to 4pm, St Xavier's College, Maitighar



Bandipur festival,
spend this new year at Bandipur, a quaint old Nepali trading town and now a popular tourist destination.
12 to 16 April, 9am to 7pm, Bandipur, Tanahun, 9851046368

All that glitters,
an exhibition of the art of British artist Annette Ashworth. *9 to 22 April, Classic Gallery, Pulchok, 9841224753*

Kurakani,
writers Sarubhakta Shrestha and Amar Neupane in conversation.
4 April, 4pm onwards, Nepal Bharat Library, New Road Gate, free entrance

Climate+change,
the four and half month long exhibition on the changing environment in the Himalaya comes to an end next week, be sure to catch it if you haven't been there yet.
Runs until 13 April, Nepal Art Council Babarmahal

Health camp,
free screening for vector-borne diseases on the occasion of World Health Day.
7 April, 8am to 2pm, Chirayu National Hospital, Basundhara, 9801138222

DINING

Chopstix,
savory Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress.
Kumaripati, (01)5551118

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

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



Boudha Stupa,
don't miss out on the Gyakok, authentic hot pot with dumplings, meat, and vegetables. You can also choose from the many wood-fired pizzas or have a candle-lit dinner every full moon night. *Boudha, (01)4485585*

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

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



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

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

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

Capital Grill,
the American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone's tastes. *Bhatbhateni*

Dhokaima Cafe,
exquisite ambience, friendly service, cosy bar, place to see and be seen at. *Patan Dhoka*



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

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MUSIC

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Musical nights,

five days of jazz and eclectic music. *2 to 6 April, Casa de Cass, Pulchok, (01)5010100*

Shastriya sangeet,

dabble in the magic of Hindustani classical music. *15 April, 3pm onwards, Ram Mandir, Battispatali*



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 aspiring musicians give their own renditions of classics. *8.30 and 10.30pm, TTV, youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged*

Music Jams,

enjoy great live music every Tuesday. *Moksh, Jhamsikhel*

GETAWAYS

Raniban Retreat,

situated at the other end of the Phewa lake and nested inside 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*

Barahi Jungle Lodge,

the first eco-jungle lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks the Chitwan National Park. Spa, boutique guest room, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool. *Andrauli, West Chitwan, barahijunglelodge.com*

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. *Lakeside, Pokhara*



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yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu. *Himalayan Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha (01)4375280, 980106661, peace@wellness.com.np*



The living goddess

Kumari has embodied the Nepali nation. The health and mood swings of the living goddess could portend epidemics, earthquakes and the fall of rulers. Many articles, books and films have come out about Kumaris, including one by former Kumari Rashmila Shakya in 2005.

The latest book on Kumaris is British travel writer Isabella Tree's *The Living Goddess*, which was released in Kathmandu this week. Join Tree for a discussion on the Kumari tradition and dive deep into the heart of Kathmandu.

Tree is the author of three other non-fiction books and writes frequently for *Conde Nast Traveler*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer*.

4 April, 9.30am, Shanker Hotel, free entry

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AWARDS





TOH EE MING



AS THE LIGHTS WENT DOWN

Kutumba is the first-ever band to perform atop Swayambhunath



TOH EE MING

While cities around the world commemorated Earth Hour 2014 by switching off their lights, here in Kathmandu, it was marked a little differently. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Nepal collaborated with a string of artists including renowned folk ensemble Kutumba for an evening of music, poetry, and art atop the majestic Swayambunath Stupa on Saturday.

"It is a great privilege to play here. We are excited because along with playing our music we'll also talk about our duty to fight climate change," said Pavit Maharjan, percussionist of Kutumba.

With their performance, the group also became the first-ever band to perform atop the world heritage site. The band members stood on platforms while they played, as a sign of respect for the heritage site.

Kutumba, who is often credited for the successful revival of forgotten folk tunes from villages and

bringing them to the mainstream music scene, has been an avid supporter of various social causes. The band had earlier been a part of advocacy campaign for children's rights to education. "Our music has always been about giving back to society," Maharjan told *Nepali Times* in an earlier interview.

Along with their popular tunes, Kutumba also played *Planet Nepal* a special song dedicated to the environment.

While Kutumba energetically dished out tune after tune, renowned artist Ashok Man Singh spontaneously worked on a live painting, and slam poet Ujjwala Maharjan read a piece dedicated to nature.

Earth Hour, which began as a lights-off event in Sydney in 2007 is now marked in more than 7000 cities worldwide. Participants are requested to turn off their non-essential lights for an hour at a designated time set by the organisers. 🇳🇵

Giving and receiving



HARIZ BAHARUDIN

For the past three years, the Surya Nepal Asha Social Entrepreneurship Awards has been honouring individuals, who with their creative approach to businesses, have become valued changemakers. This year's recipients were noted for their efforts in promoting organic farming, developing eco-friendly methods to avoid water wastage, advocating for farmers' rights, combating respiratory diseases and demonstrating continued commitment towards women empowerment. The third edition of the awards also presented a special recognition to Sanduk Ruit and the team of Tilganga

Institute of Ophthalmology for their contribution in providing medical services to Nepalis from every social strata.

The five other finalists were Ratna Bahadur Newar of Tamakoshi Community Resin and Turpentine, Shanti Shrestha and Nirjala Shrestha of Friend Handicraft, Sunita Nhemaphuki of R&D Innovative Solution, Tej Kumari Tiwari of Nepal Society of the Disabled Multipurpose Cooperative and Ujjwal Chapagain of The Himalayan Rabbit Farm. Sponsored by Surya Nepal, the award was organised by ChangeFusion Nepal.

Dipak Prasad Koirala

Dipak Prasad Koirala comes from a family of farmers. Determined to combat unfair practices in farming and save farmers from exploitation by dishonest middlemen, Dipak started Junar Kendriya Sahkari Sangh. The cooperative, which now represents 7500 households, and 48 local level cooperatives, produces, processes,



and markets sweet orange (*junar*) at a commercial scale. Through the collective effort of both the government and private sector, this project has been able to provide farmers a higher source of income and also help them gain administrative knowledge and expertise.



PICS: HARIZ BAHARUDIN



Fulmaya Tamang

With the aim to encourage the women in her village to become more independent and assertive, Fulmaya Tamang of Kavrepalanchok started the Bhattedanda Women Farmers Cooperative. Initially, accused of being a thief for collecting monthly membership fees to start informal savings account for members, Fulmaya is now a respected name. With over 400 members, Bhattedanda Women Farmers Cooperative today is the most successful cooperative in the district. Besides providing low interest loans to farmers, the cooperative has also introduced a savings program which has given hundreds of children a chance to attend school.

Madhukar KC

Over 80 per cent of Nepal's population, mostly women, cook on firewood, straw or dried dung. Indoor smoke caused by traditional wood stoves is seen as the number one cause of respiratory tract infections in the country. In a bid to reduce these health risks, Madhukar KC decided to improve the stove's



design. It took KC 13 years, and a grueling 33 attempts before he perfected the air flow filter, which ensured proper oxygen flow to the fire. An impact assessment in Lele, Lalitpur, found these improved stoves use up to 70 per cent less wood.



Prem Bahadur Lama

When Prem Bahadur Lama of Sanga in Kavre first established Ashapuri Organic Farm, he was ridiculed by other farmers in the area. But Prem, who began growing and consuming organic produce after being diagnosed with arthritis, wasn't deterred by the mockery. Spread across five hectares, the farm now produces 30 kg of vegetables daily, helping Prem earn Rs 1.5 million each month from the sale of 60 varieties of vegetables and fruits in Kathmandu and Singapore. Prem has also been providing training to farmers from nine districts at the farm, after which they are then given the freedom to sell their produce and earn a living for themselves.

Suman Shakya

As an eco-friendly answer to Kathmandu's acute water shortage, Suman Shakya started SmartPaani, a company that develops, installs and maintains environmentally friendly rainwater harvesting systems, water filtration and water recycling. Within two years of its establishment, more than 400



SmartPaani systems have been installed in schools, offices and homes across the city. Suman plans to further his eco friendly cause by expanding SmartPaani beyond the valley and develop more water systems to help as many people as possible.



THE ACT OF KILLING

During Suharto's military takeover of Indonesia in 1965, more than 500,000 people were murdered in state-sponsored anti-communist purges that lasted months. Families of victims were stigmatised and ostracised, the perpetrators of the war crimes were rewarded, and are still enjoying power. History books airbrush this sordid slaughter.

American filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer has gone where no one has dared to tread in his film *The Act of Killing*. He gets former executioners, death squad leaders and torturers re-enact their crimes. Not only are they unrepentant, but they boast about their sadism, looking forward eagerly to the stardom they think the film will give them.

We are introduced to gangster-turned-assassin, Anwar Congo who recruits subordinates and

accomplices to make his own movie by re-enacting the killings he carried out in the manner of Hollywood movies he loves best.

Congo is a willing participant and his 'co-actors' all behave as if they have nothing to hide or be afraid of. What about revenge by children of communists, Oppenheimer asks off-screen. "They won't dare. We will exterminate them," is the reply.

Congo takes Oppenheimer to the offices of politicians, mayors, newspaper editors, and leaders of the Pancasila Youth paramilitaries who are more than happy to recount on camera the atrocities they perpetrated half-a-century ago.

After filming each sequence, from dreamy dance numbers to police style investigations to village raids, Oppenheimer lets the wiry Congo and his obese assistant Herman sit down and watch the dailies, as it were, to assess their progress. In

these episodes of analysis and planning, Congo is openly facing up to the past for the first time in his life.

Congo admits he has nightmares from "killing people who didn't want to die" and seems especially troubled by one victim he beheaded who stared at him lifelessly. As the film progresses, the initial appeal of becoming famous by filming his past seems to be replaced by Congo having to confront his past. Will Congo finally flinch?

Oppenheimer started working on the film back in 2003 by interviewing victims' families, and was forced to improvise after survivors and families of the killed felt it was still unsafe for them to appear in person. You see how raw this wound still is when most of the film crew are credited as 'Anonymous'.

By departing from standard documentary practice and getting the perpetrators to play victim to their own crimes, Oppenheimer achieves what generations of Indonesians have been held back from: acknowledgement, empathy and dialogue. His film is a stark reminder of how easily humans can go from being ordinary citizens to monsters.

Snubbed by the Oscars, even though it won every other major award, *The Act of Killing* is important cinema, and will be a benchmark for filmmakers for years to come.

Sunir Pandey

nepalitimes.com Watch trailer



HAPPENINGS



IN CASE OF FIRE: Nepal Army soldiers practice a rescue drill at Devi Dal barracks in Makwanpur on Monday.



TOWERING: The Seto Machhindranath chariot under construction before next week's Machhindranath festival at Darbar Marg on Tuesday.



WANT JUSTICE: Artists protest at Sorakhutte, demanding compensation for the death of singer Manju Mahat who was killed in a road accident on Sunday.



HORSING AROUND: Nepal Army soldiers perform stunts to mark Ghode Jatra at Tudikhel on Sunday.

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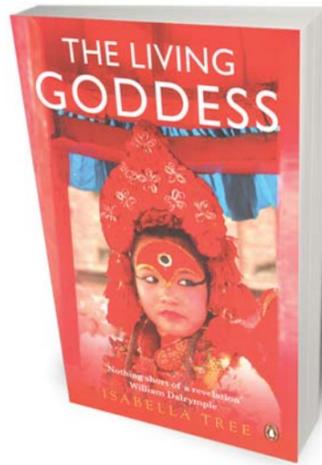
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The Kumari story

When Nepal opened up to the outside world in the 1950s and the first early tourists started coming in, they were mandatorily required to photograph cremations at Pashupati, monks in Boudha and monkeys on Swayambhu. The other must-see was the Kumari Temple, and the living goddess of Kathmandu soon became a subject of enduring fascination for foreigners.

Many articles, books and films have come out about the Kumari, including *From Goddess to Mortal: The True Life Story of a Former Royal Kumari* written by former Kumari herself, Rashmila Shakya in 2005. The latest book on living goddesses, is by British travel writer Isabella Tree's *The Living Goddess*, which was released in Kathmandu this week.

Because it is written by a journalist, *The Living Goddess* is heavy on research and interviews as it delves into the cultural history of the tradition of the living goddess. There is not a lot of it that is new there, but Tree digs deeper to investigate the symbolism and faith that has allowed the Kumari tradition to evolve and survive several regime changes in Kathmandu in the



past centuries.

Tree goes back to the history of the Malla dynasty in Kathmandu Valley and the Shah kings from Gorkha who conquered them in 1767. The Kumari tradition may have emerged as a Mahayana Buddhist practice, but is inextricably tied with the Devi-worship of Hindu kings and the emergence of Kathmandu as a centre of tantric beliefs and rituals. For Prithvi Naryan Shah to arrive at Hanuman Dhoka Palace on the day of Indra Jatra and touch the feet of the Kumari was a dramatic public relations move, and

REVIEW

attempt to ensure that the Valley that he had finally conquered would accept him as king.

As Tree explains, the Kumari then came to embody the Nepali nation. The health and mood swings of the living goddess could portend epidemics, earthquakes and the fall of rulers. The book lists instances where premonitions have come true: King Tribhuvan died in 1955 six months after the Kumari reportedly refused to put a tika on his forehead, his son King Mahendra died when he failed to pay his respects to the Kumari in 1971, the Kumari's hair was unruly and couldn't be tied properly into a knot during the first People's Movement of 1990 and apparently the caretaker could only successfully tie it after King Birendra decided to become a constitutional monarch, or that three weeks before the royal massacre of 1 June 2001 the Kumari had broken into rashes.

In the great political churning after the royal massacre, King Gyanendra's rule and the Maoist conflict, the Kumari's royal links became the reason that its accepted religious role started being questioned, human rights

activists said the Kumari tradition was 'child abuse' and even filed a writ in the Supreme Court in 2005 to have it discontinued. Tree interviews activists, priests, former Kumaris and concludes that allegations of mistreatment and abuse of the young girls are mainly based on rumours - just like the false belief that the husband will die if an ex-Kumari marries.

There are obvious reforms that can be made into the practice, the Kumaris should be allowed to lead more normal lives with better education, but Tree makes a convincing case for keeping a tradition that has come to be the symbol of the unique cultural heritage of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation. After all, it even survived the transition from monarchy to republic and the dramatic instance in 2007 when both the King and the President came to pay their respect to the living goddess at the Kumari Chen.

Indeed, cultural preservation is not just about renovating temples, it is also about preserving the rituals and festivals. **Kunda Dixit**

Isabella Tree will be speaking at the Cultural Studies Group Nepal at 9am on Friday, 4 April at at Shanker Hotel, Lajimpat.

nepalimes.com

Life after the living goddess, #569
The prime minister and the Kumari, #368
Isabella Tree at Jaipur Literary Festival

DAN RAN

Dan Ran is by far my most favourite Japanese restaurant in the Jhamsikhel area. It opened its doors around 10 years ago and was one of the first eating establishments to open in what has now cringe-worthily become known as Jhamel. It says a lot about Dan Ran that in all these years it has not had to advertise or resort to gimmicks to promote itself.

Dan Ran stands for good food and that is about it. The décor is modest and unassuming, aged and worn cane furniture outside in the garden and seating for another thirty people on the low tables inside. The crockery more often than not is chipped and mismatched. The menu is messily hand written on a whiteboard that the waiter brings to the table. The wi-fi is iffy at best. And yet it is one of the busiest restaurants in this area.

In the many years that I have eaten here, not once I have walked out discontented or unhappy. It is one of the few places that I assuredly recommend to genuine food lovers for the food has



PICS: RUBY TUESDAY



always been consistent and first-rate, the service friendly and courteous and the restroom always clean.

My lunch on this visit started with Yakko (Rs 180) which is homemade tofu served cold with

crushed ginger and chopped green shallots to which you add soy sauce and their chili pepper powder mix- light, healthy and so delicious. Their lemonade (Rs100) is fresh and not too sweet and provides a nice balance to the

meal though you may prefer a chilled beer, a decanter of sake or a cocktail like the Aduwa Breeze (Rs 350). The prawn tempura roll (Rs 570) is a good sized sushi that is firm and tight, the texture of the nori wrap perfectly complimenting the subtle flavor of the deep fried crustacean. Of all the things on this earth that pickle, ginger has got to be the best; the wasabi adds the required heat and the burst of flavours in your mouth can best be described as an orchestrated piece of culinary magic.

Ask the waiter for the day's special and he will drag out another white board from which to make your selection. This time we went with the sea bass fish steak

bento lunch box (Rs 690). While the price may seem steep, the dish does come with rice, miso soup, pickles, salad, grilled vegetables, greens and a side dish of beans; all in all a very satisfying meal. The desserts on offer that day were the chiffon cake and green tea ice cream (both Rs 150 each). We opted for the ice cream, although the taste took a little getting used to, its lightness and palate cleansing properties provided the perfect conclusion to an already excellent meal.

For over a decade Dan Ran has gone about preparing good quality food very quietly and unobtrusively, and kept its patrons, like me, coming back for more and more. **Ruby Tuesday**

How to get there: From the Fire Brigade in Jhamsikhel, take the road that leads to St. Mary's School. Dan Ran is on the right.



Great Food Deserves Carlsberg

That calls for a **Carlsberg**

Staying in Nepal

What percentage of the new medical graduates from the growing number of medical colleges will stay in Nepal? Of those that stay in Nepal, what demographic features characterises them versus those that leave? These were questions that Dr Mark Zimmerman and his colleagues set out to find in a study (based primarily on the findings of Nepal's oldest medical college, Institute of Medicine (IOM), Maharajgunj) published in the Aug 14, 2012 issue of the *British Medical Journal*.



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

These questions are obviously important for policy makers in Nepal to help determine which kind of medical graduates will stay home and render their services to Nepali society. Previous studies in high income countries have shown that medical graduates with rural backgrounds are more likely to work in rural locations. So, one of the question was, would the study from Nepal also replicate this finding?

The authors tracked 710 graduate doctors from the first 22 classes (1983-2004) of IOM to their current practice locations. They analysed seven factors including gender, age entering medical school, place of birth, place of high school, type of pre-medical education, and academic rank. Results showed that from these 22 classes, roughly a third each were working in Nepal's rural district (27 per cent), in Kathmandu (37 per cent)

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

More than a third of the doctors who graduated from the government's Institute of Medicine between 19885-2005 now work abroad. Breakdown by country:

188 United States	4 Japan
20 United Kingdom	2 India
8 Australia	2 New Zealand
8 South Africa	2 Bangladesh
7 China	2 Sweden
4 Canada	9 Other

and abroad (36 per cent). Of those working abroad, 188 (73 per cent) were in the United States.

The fascinating finding was that those who had worked as paramedics prior to medical school (for example as health assistants) were twice as likely to be working in Nepal and 3.5 times as likely to be in rural Nepal compared to those graduates who only had a college science background. And in keeping with studies from high income countries, a rural birthplace was also independently associated with working in rural Nepal. Entrance to medical college at an older age also

made it more likely that the doctor would work in rural areas.

Clearly the study had limitations. Only one medical school was taken into consideration, and it was limited to the time period of 1983, the first graduating IOM class, to 2004. The data is therefore ten years old now during which time many medical schools have mushroomed and many students have graduated. Nonetheless, this is a painstakingly carried out baseline study with important, unique findings

Sadly India, with over a population over 1 billion and a long track record of many English medium medical colleges, does not seem to have published any recent studies in good quality, peer-reviewed journals tracking its medical students as this study has done. So in a sense, this study from Nepal has filled an important void, and the authors are to be commended.

However, the results of the study give us cause for thought. The IOM which admitted most medical students with paramedic background stopped doing this for unclear reasons and clearly reversed its procedure and limited its admissions to generally very young doctors with a science background.

Based on the findings of this study, the unnecessary shift has been counterproductive to efforts to get doctors to stay. There are obvious exceptions to this rule, and one of them is young Dr Amogh Basnyat who recently graduated from IOM and works in rural Kalikot District Hospital in western Nepal as a MD GP providing vital medical service (including performing the life-saving Caesarian sections when necessary) in this remote area. And there is also the new Patan Academy of Health Sciences, which through a series of elaborate tests and interviews focuses on choosing potential medical students who are truly motivated to work in rural settings.

GIZMO by YANTRICK

Slim and svelte

Electronics giant Sony, with its Xperia range of smart phones, has established itself as a force to be reckoned with in the smartphone market. However, when it comes to tabs, Xperia's popularity still lags behind Apples and Kindles of the tech world. This may soon change with the release of Sony's newest the Xperia Z2 tablet.

An improved version of the existing Tablet Z (launched last year), the Z2 packs in a new processor, adds the latest Android KitKat software, and further slims the design down. Yantrick has to give it up for the designers who not just managed to make the tab lighter (Tablet Z was already the thinnest, lightest tablet around the time of its release) but also more powerful.

Measuring at a mere 6.4mm thick, and weighing in at just 426g, the Z2 tablet is portability defined. Design-wise, the Z2 tablet has followed in the footsteps of its Xperia smart phone cousins; an all-glass front design, while the back panel is a smooth expanse of matte white or black plastic, and tucked into the top-right corner sits an 8-megapixel camera. Also like the Xperia phones, it is completely waterproof. An infrared blaster also sits atop the Z2 tablet, allowing you to use it as a remote control for your TV.

The Xperia Z2 Tablet's 10.1-inch screen boasts full HD resolution (1920 x 1200 pixels), giving it a pixel density of 224 ppi, making it well equipped to tackle high-definition videos, games and web pages. The display is extremely crisp, which is helped by the high brightness of the screen and the Z2 Tablet's excellent handling of colour.

The Z2 Tablet is powered by Android's mobile OS, and ships in the latest version of Android (4.4.2), tweaked to Sony's Xperia feel. New users might quickly get hooked just by navigating its simple

interface. Stuffed into that innocuously sleek Z2 tablet frame is a hefty quad-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 801 processor (clocked at



2.3GHz), 3GB of RAM, and on-board storage of 16GB (additional storage of up to 128 GB is available via a microSD card)- an impressive lineup of specs that allow for a smooth gaming, web browsing and HD movie viewing experience. Capably backing up the specs is the Z2 tablet's battery, which manages to last despite a full working day of fairly intense use.

Yantrick's Verdict: Solid specs, extremely light, thin frame, and a beautiful screen, along with its dust and water-proof features make the Z2 a suitable choice for those on the lookout for a top-end tablet.

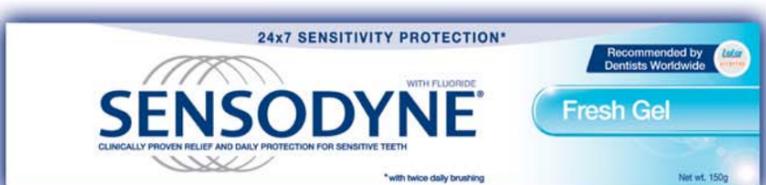


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Too little, or too much freedom

"We used to have lots of don'ts but now we have lots of do's"

KUNDA DIXIT
in RANGOON

Burmese student activist Soe Myint had practiced the hijack many times. But when the real day came to brandish a fake bomb and force open the door at the front of the plane, he found he had burst not into the cockpit, but the toilet.

Today, 24 years later, Soe Myint laughs heartily at the goof-up as he drives us through leafy streets to the office of the *Mizzima* magazine that he edits.

It was 1990, the Burmese junta had launched a brutal crackdown on students who had led the street uprising in Rangoon two years previously. Soe Myint fled to Bangkok, but was appalled that the world wasn't paying attention. As a result, some students decided to carry out a "peaceful hijack" of a Thai International flight from Bangkok to Rangoon and take it to Calcutta with 220 passengers.

"I have no regrets," says Soe Myint, "we didn't use guns or bombs and no one was hurt." The Burmese students got support from Indian politicians like George Fernandes to set up *Mizzima*, a Burmese news service in exile. In 2003, Soe Myint and other hijackers were acquitted by an Indian court.

Soe Myint is now back in Rangoon as editor of *Mizzima*, proof of just how fast Burma has changed in the last two years. Among his partners are businessmen close to the same military junta that once hunted down democracy activists.

Mizzima now has a strong business and development focus, and while still supporting political reforms, takes the line that political stability matters more than democracy in order to attract foreign investors to Burma.

Potential investors are arriving by the planeloads to cash in on the opportunities that have opened up after four decades of isolation, to exploit Burma's huge mineral and petroleum wealth, its mobile penetration rate of less than 2 per cent, and the country's enormous tourism potential.

There is also geopolitics - strategically located Burma is leaning more towards ASEAN and the West to limit the overwhelming past Chinese influence over the economy and politics. For western donors and NGOs, Burma is the flavour of the month.



PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

After nearly 50 years of being banned, private media has exploded with new newspapers and online sites. Burma has risen six places to rank 145th in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index, ahead of Malaysia and Singapore.

"We used to have lots of don'ts but now we have lots of do's," says U Kyaw Yin Hlaing of the Burma Peace Centre, "the question is how will the media use that freedom. Where will the responsibility lie?" There are worries that unbridled freedom

will hurt ongoing efforts to forge peace with ethnic separatists in the north and east who have been fighting the Burmese state now for more than half a century.

Even Aung San Suu Kyi, who spent 21 years under house arrest for freedom is worried there may now be too much freedom. "Without a free press to check those who are in power, we will not be able to defend the rights and freedoms of the people," she conceded at a recent international media conference in Rangoon, but added, "but democracy

PRESSING FREEDOM: Editor-in-chief Ross Dunkley (above) of the *Myanmar Times* weekly survived the military junta, and with media reforms, his paper is now poised for growth with new investors and is turning into a daily.

doesn't give unlimited rights...it demands equal responsibility back."

Recent arrests of reporters who exposed a chemical weapons factory, and intimidation of journalists, show that press freedom in Burma still comes with strings attached. *Time's* Hannah Beech was refused a visa to attend the media conference after writing a cover story with a picture of radical Buddhist monk Wiratha that was straplined, 'The Face of Buddhist Terror'.

The Burmese media itself has also been criticised for muted coverage of the organised killings of Muslim Rohingya people in Rakhine state, or carrying openly racist content supporting the government's insistence that the Rohingya register as 'Bengali' in this week's controversial census, the first in 30 years.

Even Suu Kyi has refused to condemn the anti-Muslim policies of the state outright so as not to spoil her chances ahead

of next year's presidential elections. Burma's military constitution has a clause that bars presidential candidates with foreign spouses and children, which was written specifically to exclude her.

The constitution also ensures that the military retains its dominant role by allocating 25 per cent of seats in parliament for officers appointed by the army chief. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) is pushing to amend the constitution, while the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has launched a signature campaign against the amendment.

The military has also won the support of the radical Buddhist clergy led by Wirathu, and many here believe that the USDP is mixing religion and politics for electoral advantage. Suu Kyi, even though still reverently called 'The Lady', isn't as vocal in supporting Rohingya rights as she may want to be.

The only hope for Burma may be that there is so much money to be made here that the transition will inevitably lead to political stability and reconciliation. 🇲🇲



THE SHAKY PILLAR OF INDIAN

This month's Indian election is a battle to preserve the country's founding principle of secularism

The largest democracy in the world is going to parliamentary polls for the 16th time since independence from Britain in 1947. The month long voting will be closely watched not just in India but in its neighbourhood perhaps like never before because the outcome will decide future of India, and impact on South Asia and beyond.



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

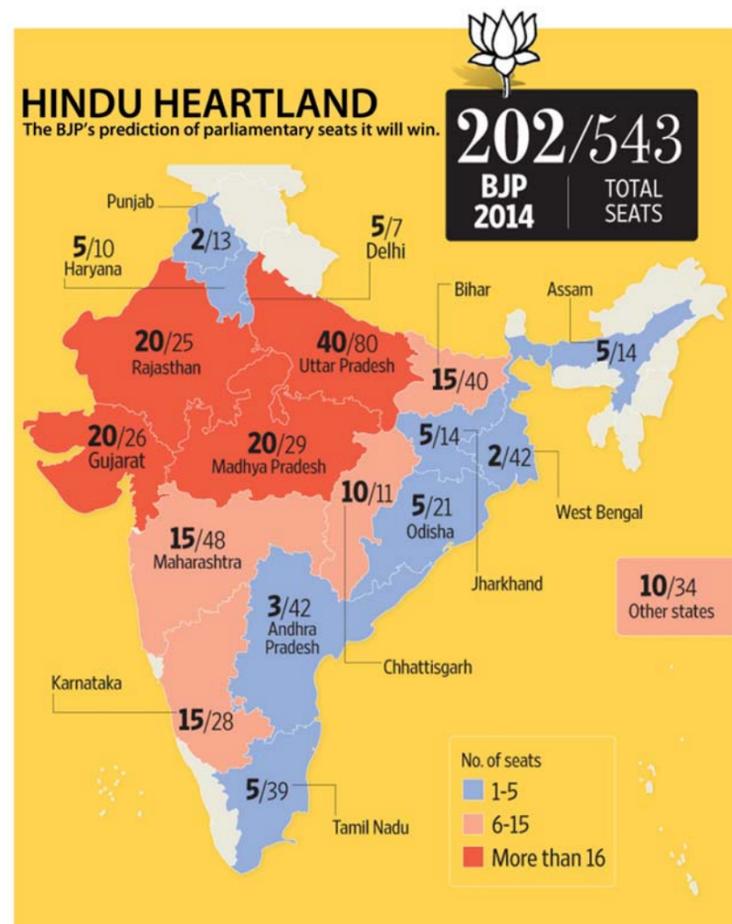
A never-before 814 million people will be exercising their franchise this time. The retirement of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, coming of age of the young Gandhi scion Rahul who leads the Congress, and the dramatic rise of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) out of an anti-corruption citizens' movement make this election interesting.

But the real dramatic part is the emergence of Narendra Modi, Gujarat's chief minister and the

leader of India's Hindu right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), leading his party into the election that has pushed up the electoral barometer. NaMo, as he is known to his Hindu admirers, has led every public opinion survey.

Besides being touted as India's most successful chief minister, Narendra Modi is also arguably the most controversial political figure in Indian history. Blamed for presiding over the massacre of hundreds of Muslims in 2002 Gujarat riots by Hindu extremists closely linked to his party, the Indian Supreme Court in 2004 called him 'a modern day Nero' who looked the other way when women and children were being raped and slaughtered.

Although Narendra Modi was given a clean chit by the Special Investigative Team (SIT), national and international reports condemn his role in the riots. A US government report actually compares Modi with Hitler in his promotion of racial supremacy and hatred against minorities. The report states how Modi's Gujarat government prescribed school textbooks in which children were taught about Hitler's



'charismatic' personality without reference to the Holocaust, and referred to Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jew as 'foreigners'. Unsurprisingly, Gujarat under

Modi has outlawed religious conversion infringing upon the fundamental right to choose one's faith.

Modi is standing from



VARANASI -- The chant of 'Har har Modi' filled the air in Hinduism's holiest city of Varanasi. That the supporters of Narendra Modi dared to equate him with Lord Shiva was audacious. Modi is the candidate from the Hindu right BJP in India's elections next month. Challenging him in Varanasi is the leader of the citizen's party, the AAP.



LOOK OUT
Ajaz Ashraf

At a recent campaign rally in the city, Kejriwal had been criticising Modi's Gujarat model of development when the *muezzin's* call to prayer rent the air. Kejriwal paused in his speech. At the end of *azaan*, a cry of "Har Har Mahadev" arose, joined by thousands of voices, of which many belonged to Muslims. Perhaps never before had a Hindu symbol or slogan

been usurped from the BJP, that too, for uniting rather than dividing people.

Those few seconds symbolised Varanasi's syncretic mixture of Hinduism and Islam. Varanasi lives in binaries. The heaps of garbage mock its holiness. And Modi's decision to contest from Varanasi has triggered a countervailing force, now coalescing around Kejriwal.

Modi and Kejriwal exemplify two contrasting

philosophies and personalities. Modi has assiduously cultivated a persona of a decisive leader, emphasises growth, flaunts his proximity to big business, and dislikes engaging in debates. He struts and throws innuendos against his rivals, puffing up his 56-inch chest. Though his campaign focuses on development, to his obsessive followers he quintessentially remains the Emperor of the Hindu soul (*Hindu Hriday Samrat*).

Kejriwal, on the other hand, is puny, and in every way the man next door. He refuses to make the sartorial switch from the pant-shirt ensemble to kurta-pajama. This places him outside the entrenched political class, and imparts credibility to his stinging attacks against the politicians, their corrupt ways, their symbiotic relationship with big business. He rails against the development model he feels is loaded against ordinary folks, particularly farmers.

And it is in Varanasi that the epic battle is being waged between the larger-than-life personality of Modi and the perceived moral authority of Kejriwal.

It is a complex electoral arithmetic. No longer is it enough to add the number of Brahmin voters to those of Vaishya caste and credit it to the BJP's electoral account. You can't assume that Modi is bound to receive the overwhelming support of Kurmis, a peasant

"The vote in Varanasi"

The battle for India's soul is being waged in the Hindu heartland in next week's election

DEMOCRACY

Varanasi which holds special significance for Hindus. At a time when all surveys point to the BJP coming to power in New Delhi, Narendra Modi's move to contest from Varanasi is not just an appeasement of Hindus, it is also an electoral strategy to win over the largest state in India with most number of constituencies.

The AAP's corruption crusader Arvind Kejriwal took India by storm when he defeated the powerful Sheila Dixit in New Delhi last year. If he can repeat this in Varanasi against Modi, it could be another big upset. The Congress still looks undecided whether to field a weak candidate and help Kejriwal bag non-BJP votes, or to field its General Secretary Digvijay Singh who is keen to take on Modi.

Opinion surveys show that out of 543 electoral constituencies, the BJP and its allies could bag at least 200 seats (see chart). This is not enough to form a government at the centre, but sufficient to bring the Congress down from its position as the largest party.

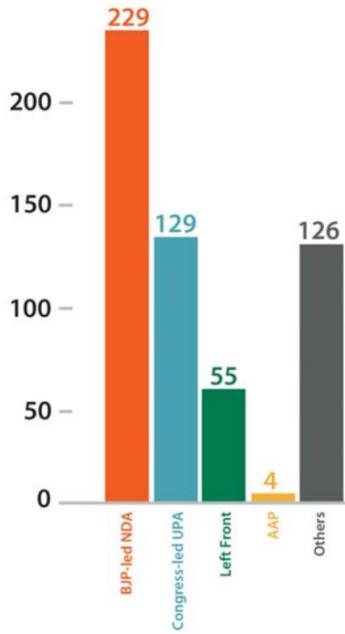
For its own sake, the fringe Left may back the Congress in post electoral alliance and powerful regional parties, especially those from the

southern states may once again be kingmakers. But irrespective of political alliances, it is eventually India's rising urban middle class that could prove decisive.

Not surprising that Modi is brandishing his much touted 'Gujarat model' to woo voters. However, his government has been criticised for handing over the State economy to the corporates, abdicating its decision-making role and forcing farmers out through land acquisition for Special Economic Zones.

If a Modi-led BJP comes to power in New Delhi in two months time, it could affect India's foreign policy in Muslim neighbours Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. And his hardline stance against India's Maoist insurgents will further constrict political space for those on the left political spectrum, and this could play out in Indian policy towards Nepal.

Modi's rise to power will embolden Hindu nationalists and their leader Kamal Thapa of the RPP-N which is the fourth-largest party in Nepal's Constituent Assembly. Thapa's demand of a return to the Hindu state is gaining popularity, although support for reinstating



the monarchy is lukewarm.

The battle lines have been drawn. The Modi-led BJP and National Democratic Alliance will fight the Congress' United People's Alliance, with Aam Aadmi Party, the Left bloc and regional parties looking for a post electoral alliances. This Indian election will not just decide who rules in New Delhi, it will test the democratic credentials of India's 80 per cent Hindu population and their faith in one of the formidable pillars of democracy: secularism.

nepalitem.com

Narendra Modi's interview where he walks out after being unable to face questions.



caste. A good many Kurmis are inclined to AAP, applauding it for highlighting the appropriation of agricultural land to benefit industrialists. There are Dalits whose loyalty to the matriarch UP chief minister Mayawati

wears thin, and are split in their admiration for Modi and Kejriwal.

Indeed, both have an appeal cutting across the caste divide. Modi's platform is grassroots Hinduism with the Gujarat development model. Kejriwal's crusade against corruption resonates across the religious, caste and class divide, especially in Varanasi where the crumbling infrastructure is blamed on corruption.

This isn't to imply that caste identities have melted away. But there are cracks in the mould of India's identity politics, perhaps because of two national personalities contesting from Varanasi. The reason caste divisions are eroding is partly due to migration to metros and people thinking beyond the politics of identity.

Reservation of jobs for the disadvantaged is now considered an irreversible aspect of social reality, blunting the backlash from the upper crust. Then there is the inability of subaltern caste leaders to meld together the heterogeneous Dalits through policies to improve their economic conditions.

Kejriwal has goodwill among Muslims for taking the fight into Modi's Gujarat, but this is not grounded in the politics of identity. The popular refrain among Muslim voters is that Kejriwal speaks of social and economic justice, which is what the community wants.

Incredible as it may sound, Modi hasn't as yet won Varanasi, as India's mainstream media make it out to be.

ashrafajaz3@gmail.com

The Muslim myth

At election time in India, the mainstream media likes to predict that Muslims will turn out in overwhelmingly high numbers to vote, driven by their passion for the politics of identity. No empirical evidence is ever furnished to sustain this narrative.

This has acquired the aura of truth in the last two decades as the Hindu 'upper' castes and middle class switched over from the Congress to the BJP. But what diminished the political heft of these groups was that Muslims and Dalits, who had sustained Congress domination for decades, didn't follow them into the BJP.

The reverse, in fact, happened. Alarmed at the BJP's habit of demonising Muslims to consolidate the Hindu vote, they sought to combine with other social groups to tactically exercise their franchise in favour of groups best placed to defeat the saffron alliance. In determining their primary interest and identifying parties most likely to promote it, Muslims don't behave any differently from other social groups. But what distinguishes the choice of Muslims from that of others is the importance they place on their own security.

Despite this, the voting pattern among Muslims is as diverse as any other social group. A Centre for the Study of Developing Societies survey of the 2012 Uttar Pradesh Assembly election shows that 39 per cent of Muslims voted

for the Samajwadi Party (SP), down from the 45 per cent in the 2007 assembly election. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) mopped 20 per cent of Muslim votes, an increase of three per cent from 2007. In other words, even though the SP won a majority in 2012, its support among Muslims was eroded,

The media is the message in stereotyping the Muslim voter in India

challenging the media's analysis which saw them as having played a crucial role in the rise to power of Uttar Pradesh strongman and scion, Akhilesh Yadav.

It's not just Muslims. The same CSDS survey shows that the BJP secured 38 per cent of the Brahmin votes in 2012, down from the 44 per cent in 2007, 29 per cent of the Rajput votes, registering a steep decline from the 46 per cent in 2007, and 42 per cent of the Vaishya votes, a 10 per cent decrease from 2007.

These figures show that Muslims don't rally behind one party, both Muslims and upper castes have their own political favourites, but the degree of support for them varies from election to election.

There is no denying that the BJP's support among the Muslims is negligible. And this is understandable since it has defined its politics as anti-minorities in order to shore up its Hindu vote. The BJP prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi may have chosen to harp on development, but for Muslims his very persona rekindles memories of the 2002 anti-Muslim riots in his home state of Gujarat.

The apprehension among Muslims about Modi could inspire them to turn out in extremely high numbers on the polling day. Or persuaded by the media hype that Modi's march to power is inevitable, they could be dissuaded from exercising their franchise in large numbers. Muslim turnout is usually lower than the national average, dipping to 46 per cent, as against the national average of 58 per cent, in the 2004 elections.

What explains the media stereotype about the voting behaviour of Muslims? Perhaps because journalists are overwhelmingly upper caste Hindus who buy into the BJP propaganda that the minority community coalesces around a party, ignoring past empirical evidence to the contrary, because of its attempt to protect and preserve its religious identity.

Ironically, the fact that the upper castes vote the BJP overwhelmingly is viewed as secular. It is this media narrative which creates communal polarisation in India, much to the BJP's advantage.

Ajaz Ashraf

Highways of death

Arjun Dhakal, *NNSD Online Network*, 2 April

The death of popular folk singer Manju Mahat in a traffic accident last week in Kathmandu has once again brought home the high fatality rate in Nepal's roads and highways. In the past decade road accidents have claimed thousands of lives across Nepal. According to the World Bank, almost 1.7 million people lose their lives in road accidents annually and developing countries contribute 90 per cent to the number of casualties, most of whom are youngsters. Nepal's public transportation is badly affected by the over commercialised private sector that is an example of market failure.

Although the crackdown on drunk driving has reduced the number of traffic accidents, much more needs to be done. Poor monitoring, reckless driving, technical failure of engine, lack of proper traffic signals, and several



economic reasons have turned Nepal's roads into highways of deaths.

Here are the main causes of the high fatality rate on Nepal's roads:

1. In the absence of proper monitoring, several old and overcrowded buses charging high fares run in rural areas that have poor roads. When these overcrowded buses have a mishap, the number of casualties is significantly high.
2. Influential cartels and committees running buses ensure that the drivers get away with minimum punishment, so there is no deterrence. It is cheaper for transportation companies to pay

compensation to the victims killed in road accidents than pay for their medical bills, which has increased the number of people being run over by vehicles on purpose to kill them.

3. Public buses in Kathmandu compete for passengers by speeding recklessly and risking the lives of several others.

4. Reckless driving is also a result of the fixed minimum amount that drivers have to pay vehicle owners daily. This leads to increased time at bus stops to put in as many passengers as possible and they make up for lost time by competing with other buses on the road.

5. Most drivers work long hours which increases their stress levels while driving.

6. Most road accidents involve collisions between two-wheelers and public vehicles. The number of cheap but unsafe bikes on our roads needs to be reduced, and a reliable public transportation system must be introduced as an alternative.

7. Everyone - pedestrians, motorcycle riders and bus drivers - need to follow traffic rules so that people who make mistakes are punished irrespective of the size of their vehicles.



Snail: Faster! Faster!!

कान्तिपुर

Abin Shrestha in *Kantipur*, 3 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“If NC and UML don't write the constitution, we will prepare a militia within 6 months”

CPN-M Secretary Netra Bikram Chand, *Naya Patrika*, 3 April



TB or not TB

BBC Nepali Service, 22 March



On March 24, the world celebrated Tuberculosis Day. In Nepal, 45,000 people contract the disease every year, and 10,000 of them fall through the cracks in the government's free treatment

scheme. The government bears 20 per cent of the cost of antibiotics DOTS treatment, while donor agencies pay the rest.

Rajendra Prasad Pant of the Nepal Tuberculosis Center (NTB) says infected people miss out on treatment because they live in remote areas, are not diagnosed or are not aware of the symptoms. Some are diagnosed but don't want treatment because of the stigma of being a TB patient.

Misuse of antibiotics is giving rise to Multi-drug Resistant Tuberculosis. Up to 70 per cent of Nepalis are carriers of the TB bacillus even though they may not show symptoms. The disease manifests itself when a person's immune system is down, for example when they are HIV positive. The main challenge for the government is to reach those who are missing out on treatment.

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Lost and confused

Kulchandra Neupane,
Kantipur, 1 April

कान्तिपुर

One of the few moves made by the government in recent weeks was the promotion of six joint secretaries to secretaries last month. But there are many more important decisions the government needs to take immediately. Five months after elections, the cabinet still hasn't nominated 26 remaining CA members. Six ministries are without ministers and eight secretary slots are vacant.

The delay in appointments of ambassadors has slowed the government's overall speed and efficiency. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala this week recommended a new Chief Justice but there are still a lot of decisions he needs to spearhead through the constitutional committees and the cabinet. "The procedure involved in day-to-day governance and administration is a new turf for PM Koirala and he keeps losing track of several important things that we constantly remind him of," says a close Koirala aide. "We have requested him to form an



effective secretariat to guide him but he is yet to take a decision."

Two months after taking office, Koirala still doesn't have a team of advisers. In the absence of a strong secretariat, there is very little coordination between Koirala and other ministers. Besides Dinesh Bhattarai as foreign affairs adviser, Chiranjivi Nepal as economic advisor and Secretary Basanta Gautam there is no one else by his side. Key central members of the NC don't want to advise the PM because they were not inducted into the cabinet.

Law Minister Narahari Acharya

feels that the government is working efficiently. "It is not the PM's job to get things done, he only directs the ministers and we have been working very hard lately," he says.

Koirala has been criticised for being distracted by officiating in minor programs when he should be taking the initiative. He has been travelling across the country, visiting his constituency in Banke. Says the aide: "He hasn't been able to move beyond meeting party cadres and doesn't know when to speak and when not to."

Lording over the grassroots

Chandrakishor Jha, Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 March-5 April

हिमाल

After the perpetrators of the Janakpur bomb in April 2012 that killed five Mithila activists were caught by the police, Madhesis are debating who really is in charge in the Tarai. That crime was the result of two local clans trying to finish each other off to control the budget allocations for local councils.

Sanjay Saha and Jiwanath Chaudhari, who were competing against each other in Janakpur, had risen to prominence because of the vacuum in local councils created by the absence of local elections. But they are not the only troublemakers in the Tarai, there are other members of organised crime who have political protection and have lined their pockets at the expense of the people.

It's been 16 years since the last elections for village, district and municipal councils were held. Without elected councillors, Janakpur like other towns had an all-party mechanism, but even this has been disbanded. Now, there is a distinct group of people who have assumed charge of local resources as if it is their personal property. These local warlords are a new class unique to the Tarai: they control the political economy that thrives on the open border and politicians are powerless to stop them.

The second Constituent Assembly elections were Nepal's most expensive, and part of the blame goes to the lifestyle of these middle men. Candidates are forced to distribute cash as soon as they enter villages, where local eateries have done away with beaten rice and yoghurt and have started serving barbeque and alcohol.

The politicians have a symbiotic relationship with the thugs. Also, by aligning themselves to new powers like ethnic committees, the local mafia enjoy more power than politicians. They use local youth as muscle to intimidate government offices to award tenders for infrastructure projects, and even mobilise a rent-a-riot at anyone's behest.

In many cases, government officials themselves have planned and benefited from fraud. When officials resist graft, they are threatened into making decisions favourable to the armed groups. A lot of the violence in the Tarai is directly related to this.

Trans-border organised crime has a monopoly over natural resources: roads, canals, bridges, levees and other infrastructure take longer than planned to be built because the middle men always want their cut. Illegal sand-mining, smuggling of aggregates and rocks, logging are a result of the democratic deficit at the grassroots.

It is now up to the government to hold elections in order to elect local representatives and provide legal alternatives. The future depends on defanging a group that is sabotaging democracy from taking root because they benefit from the lack of it.



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Replacing hammers and sickles

The latest from the Bolsheviks at Balkhu is that the Unified Communist Party of Nepal Marxist-Leninist wants to lose Comrades Karl and Vladimir from its suffix, and even drop the hammer and sickle as its official symbolism. The party had tried to do the same back in the early 1990s mainly to assuage the Americans that they were not real commies because the Soviet Union had just imploded and the Berlin Wall had come down. But the pragmatic comrades were over-ruled by the dogmatic ones and the hammer and sickle stayed as did the acronym, CPN-UML.

Now, to differentiate itself from the Maobaddies, the UML is trying one more time to banish the two tools of workers and peasants. The makeover is long overdue and coincides with the UML commissioning one of Nepal's better known architects to design a new HQ. Just as well because the edifice at Balkhu has always looked like a cross between a crematorium and a mausoleum.

There is, however, a hot debate raging in UML circles about what to replace the hammer and sickle with. If the Ass may be so bold, it would like to present a shortlist of possible new party symbols that would more accurately represent what the UML party now stands for:

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5



Another komunista looking for a new symbol is Comrade Red Flag, who is getting more and more disenchanted with the mother of all parties and its Chairman-for-life. BRB has been hinting aloud that he either wants to raise goats or start a new party, whichever comes first. The Third Force idea isn't getting much traction, though, because the prospective Young Turks from the other parties want him to first divorce his ex-First Lady who they

think will be a liability. Still, BRB is already preparing the ground to exit his party or re-enter academia. He was at KU last week lecturing management students and quoting Comrade Picasso, and didn't utter the 'M' word even once. And now he's got TU to invite him in as visiting faculty and eventually get tenure, just in case politics doesn't work out. BRB has been venting his frustration that he didn't get the credit he deserved for having contributed to the dissolution of the last CA and said, and I quote: "I did all the work but Baburam is Thandaram". Guy should've been a poet. Seeing the rise in frequency of his tweets, @brb_laldhwoj appears to have a lot of time in his hands (or shall we say fingers) these days. Doc did make a faux pas tho when he tweeted about Mahathir Mohamad being invited by @FNCCI and @GOI. It was only after his followers ridiculed him that he deleted the tweet and quietly replaced it with @GON. However, the most remarkable visual involving BRB this week was of the Ideologue-in-Chief of the Mau Mau demonstrating outside the CDO in Bharatpur office against police investigating the murder of Krishna Adhikari by his henchmen back in 2004. Guess who his bodyguards were: police.

SSR

CA Chair Nembang is sick of people calling him a wimp, so he is cracking the whip. He issued an edict banning cell phone use in the chambers. Why not just jam the signal? To be really taken seriously, however, he should also issue a ban on dozing off, spitting pan, nose picking and chair-throwing.

The Ass



PAST PRESENT FUTURE

DIWAKAR CHETTRI

They say I am not firm like YOU ...



Hope this works...



Could you tie the strings, please?



watch&see

ESPRIT

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