Workers at the 465MW Tama Kosi project of Dolakha district (left) are rushing to complete the project in the next two years. However, the World Bank-funded 75km Khimti-Dhalkebar transmission line to feed this power to the grid has been stuck for two years due to protests from villagers who have asked for a $1 million compensation for land. A senior World Bank team that went to Sindhuli last month was threatened and manhandled by locals. Several other key transmission lines are also delayed because of local opposition.

New hydropower projects are expected to generate 2,000MW in the next three years, but if the transmission lines are not rigged up, some Rs 32 billion worth of electricity would be wasted annually, and power rationing would continue. The solution is to foster accountability through local elections to village and district councils. But local elections haven’t been held for 16 years, leading to lawlessness and corruption at the local level that has brought development to a standstill and threatened national-level projects like Tama Kosi.

A deal worked out between the main parties last year stated that local elections would be held within a year. That deadline, like many others, has lapsed. The political will for local elections is sadly lacking among Kathmandu’s smug and self-absorbed rulers.

This week: Nepali Times Special Coverage on local elections.

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There is no political will for local elections among Kathmandu’s smug and self-absorbed rulers.

Since the end of the conflict seven years ago, we have had as many governments. There have been two national elections for Constituent Assemblies. This is pretty dismal, but what is even more shameful is that we haven’t had local elections for more than 16 years now. After deliberately being allowed to lapse in 2002, physically destroyed during the conflict, and then left in limbo without elected functionaries, the country’s village, district and municipality councils have been the target of every central government: be it an absolute monarchy, armed rebels, democratic coalitions, elected revolutionaries, or technocratic governments. Despite the lip service they pay to decentralisation, Kathmandu’s rulers, whatever their ilk, don’t seem to want to let go of their stronghold on the central government.

No wonder the capital and other cities look the way they do. No wonder development is at a near standstill across rural Nepal. No wonder much of the Church is desertifying in front of our eyes. No wonder ever more Nepalis are migrating for work because there are no jobs, and no hope for the future.

The Shrit Bahadur Deuba government dissolved elected local councils in July 2002 using the war as an excuse, but really because the NC didn’t want the UML to win again. When King Gyanendra held local elections in February 2006, most didn’t bother to vote and not just because of Maoist threats.

Everything that has worked in Nepal since 1990 has been because of local ownership and community participation. Community forestry took off because grassroots democracy allowed user groups to set their own agenda. Democracy won’t work without participation, and participation is not possible without communication, and the success of Nepal’s community radio revolution fortified grassroots democracy.

As we see in a field report from Kushadevi of Kavre district (see page 16-17), when democracy empowers the people to force their elected VDC chairs, council members, and municipalities, miracles happen. By the late 1990s rural Nepalis were showing that they could take charge of their own destiny, manage health and education, prevent forest fires, and maintain irrigation canals on their own. But even this achievement could not withstand the constant onslaught of the extreme left and the extreme right. The Maoists chopped off the feet of democracy in the countryside, and an authoritarian king decapitated it in Kathmandu. What we are left with today is a headless and limbless torso, which is why it is taking so long to get democracy to work again.

Even since the conflict ended in 2006, every successive government has used one pretext or other not to hold local elections. A deal worked out between the main parties last year stated that local elections would be held within a year. That deadline, like many others, has lapsed. Ever since the parliamentary defeat, the UCPN(M) has gone cold on local polls, although they should see it as a great chance to redeem their lost rural support.

Ask any person, like this year in a nationwide public opinion survey, and you find overwhelming support for immediate local elections to kickstart the development. The people understand the relationship between local democracy and service delivery, most politicians don’t. Village and district councils are now run by bureaucrats, or by a mechanism of local parties.

Corruption is endemic, central allocations for rural services and development are mostly plundered by local political Dynasties. National infrastructure projects like the World Bank-funded transmission line from Tama Kosi is obstructed by a few local gonsu not answerable to the people (see page 16-17). Major hydropower projects are delayed because of local extinguishment.

There is no reason why all this can’t happen while the debate on the constitution goes on, while we decide what kind of federal structure to have, or while we discuss transitional justice. First you need the political will for local elections, a commodity that is sadly lacking among Kathmandu’s smug and self-absorbed rulers. Nepali Times
Playing on the back foot

Cricket like politics is best started at the grassroots

As the first leg of the Indian Premier League (IPL), the biggest 20-over cricket spectacle of the year, gets underway in UAE, our own cricketers have been on a war path against Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) demanding among other requirements a major overhaul of the 31-member body and timely payment of players’ salaries and perks. The week-long standoff between the board and players finally came to an end on Wednesday after the formation of a Planning and Monitoring Committee with the goal of overseeing CAN and the future of cricket in the country.

Headed by Yubaraj Lama, member secretary of the National Sports Council, the five-member committee consists of the national team captain, coach, and representatives from CAN, and Ministry of Youth and Sports. This adds another layer of bureaucratic red tape and is likely to bring more conflict of interest. Like in national politics, Nepal’s sports fraternity has taken up the farcical exercise of creating vaguely named committees as the solution to all problems when those who are paid to do the job fail to fulfill their duties.

In the first of its kind elections in December 2011, CAN elected Tanka Angbuhang, who is also a Central Committee Member of the UCPN (Maoist), as its president. While the elected members could not be replaced as the players had demanded, rather than setting up a Planning and Monitoring Committee, it would have been wiser to settle on a date for the next elections and also to create clear guidelines on who can be part of the board (for example former cricketers, athletes, or those who have made significant contributions to Nepali sports) as well as the tenure in order to minimise political appointments. With board members currently under the purview of the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority, perhaps CAN will be forced to finally clean up its act and show some degree of institutional accountability and transparency.

An affiliate member of the International Cricket Council (ICC) since 1988, Nepal was promoted to associate member in 1996, but we are still nowhere close to breaking into the currently 10-member elite club of test playing nations. In a country where players are not paid their salaries on time, rarely get to compete in practice matches, and where the infrastructure is almost nil, it’s surprising to see our cricketers – both men and women – and especially those from the younger age bracket – competing with teams far better experienced and endowed than themselves and doing well.

Imagine if these talents had been backed up with support from the government and the medley of sports councils. The government’s recently launched ‘Common Minimum Program’ envisions a cricket national academy and an international stadium for cricket, but without a clear deadline or budget, who is to say this plan too won’t turn out like the Mulpani Stadium which has been ‘under construction’ for almost a decade now.

Then there are chimerical dreams of building a stadium each in the five development zones. Cricket like politics is best started at the grassroots. So while ‘five-star’ stadiums are good in the longer-term, smaller grounds with proper equipment and training and a mix of slow and fast pitches to get players used to different conditions, and incentives, both financial and otherwise (like free education and housing) should be the way to go in building a new crop of players.

However, cricket in Nepal has been a missed opportunity. If Nepal had even a couple of world-class stadiums and a few shrewd cricketing diplomats with savvy business sense, we could have hosted international matches and tournaments like UAE, also an associate member, is doing with the IPL and Pakistan since 2009. This way our cricketers could have played warm-up matches and gotten regular international experience, CAN could have earned a good side income which could then be funnelled into domestic tournaments, and cricket hungry Nepali fans would have had a chance to see their favourite stars live in action.
**“Forgive and move on”**

BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

A* year-old son Ganga Ram was abducted by police in 2001 from Surya Binayak in Bhaktapur. As I sat talking with Ganga Ram’s family in Maharajganj this week, the extent of their loss and tragedy hit me. His sisters Ruby and Narayan told me that both their husbands, Rajendra Mali and Basu Dev Chhwal, were affiliated with the Maoists and were also abducted by the security forces in 2003 and 2004. They were never seen again. The sisters are glad their father Tulsi Narayan did not live to hear horrific tales of Ganga Ram’s torture in Nepal Army’s Surya Dal barracks.

“They tortured my husband, but my brother was just a child who had nothing to do with the war,” Ruby said, her voice trembling as she looked across the road at the high walls of the Bhairabh Nath concentration camp in Lajimpat where her husband was believed to have been tortured.

Like many of the victim families on both sides, Ruby’s family was displaced from their home; they lived in constant fear of the midnight knock, and in hope that they would live to see those who wronged them brought to book some day. But it seems the victims of this cruel war will have to live with their wounds and die with it, their tormentors redeemed because of the nation’s need for closure.

“I guess my mother will die like my father, without knowing what happened to her son, since she is too old and sick to start a hunger strike, and she does not have national and international support behind her,” says Narayan. On the table in front of her was a front page story about the tabling of the bill to set up the Truth and Reconciliation and Disappearance Commissions.

If passed, the TRC will only ask the victims to forgive, forget and get on with their lives with meager compensation. The bill defines rape, torture, custodial killings, forced disappearances, among others as ‘grave human rights violations’, crimes which merit prosecution. However, it also gives power to the Commissions to grant amnesty, and in such cases closing door for prosecution. The Commission can also put cases in a state of limbo, citing lack of evidence. Even in cases which are ultimately recommended for prosecution, the bill leaves several legal hurdles for the victims, giving the Attorney General the discretion over whether or not to file the case as per the recommendation of the Commissions. Since the Attorney General is a political appointee and the cases that reach AG’s office will ultimately be settled politically, the entire process of justice will be an eyewash. Perpetrators on both sides will never answer for their crimes.

Five years ago, when the Maoists were in power, everybody blamed them for obstructing the drafting of the bill. Today, the party is in minority, the parties have presented a bill which is even weaker than the one before. The Nepali Congress government is trying to save its own leadership status.

which was in command of the police and army during the war years and under whom many of the cases of illegal detention, torture, execution and rape were committed. The parties, including the Maoists, have not just been ignoring war-time excesses; they have been rewarding known perpetrators with promotions.

Three weeks ago, the government formed a drafting committee and invited stakeholders to submit their suggestions. Human rights groups had specifically warned not to give the Commissions powers of amnesty and leave filing of cases to the discretion of the Attorney General. They had suggested all cases of grave violations must go for trial, and only if the victims were convinced by perpetrator’s admission of guilt would the Commissions have the power to seek amnesty for the perpetrator from the highest authority in the land, the President. Unsurprisingly, none of these suggestions were incorporated in the bill.

Even more appalling is that a section of the national media is now arguing that the peace process should not be held hostage to the demand for justice by the survivors. If closure has to come at the cost of victims’ right to justice, so be it.

The facade of untruths and forced reconciliation is not just happening in Nepal. After the Sri Lankan war the Rajapaksha government swept all the dirty truths of war under the carpet through a Lessons-Learned Commission. Years of investigation into Gground zero war crimes and genocide have to led to nowhere. The facade of untruths and forced reconciliation is not just happening in Nepal. After the Sri Lankan war the Rajapaksha government swept all the dirty truths of war under the carpet through a Lessons-Learned Commission. Years of investigation into G

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The backlash against the BJP

Asking a friend who is of a radical leftist bent at a recent party in Delhi which party she was going to vote for, “I am a committed ABM member,” she replied, “a ABM isn’t a bank.” The acronym stands for Anybody But Modi. Its followers seek to identify the party best positioned in India’s month-long staggered elections to challenge prime ministerial aspirant Narendra Modi, leader of the Hindu-right BJP. So ABM supporters will tactically vote for any party or candidate that is capable of defeating the BJP, no matter what its ideology is. To vote against the BJP is to also vote against the ABM’s prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi.

You may think that ABM supporters are mostly Muslim, but they aren’t. Even the BJP’s supporters are mostly Muslim. But they aren’t. Even the BJP’s supporters are mostly Muslim. You may think that ABM supporters are mostly Muslim, but they aren’t. Even the BJP’s supporters are mostly Muslim. You may think that ABM supporters are mostly Muslim, but they aren’t. Even the BJP’s supporters are mostly Muslim. You may think that ABM supporters are mostly Muslim, but they aren’t. Even the BJP’s supporters are mostly Muslim. You may think that ABM supporters are mostly Muslim, but they aren’t. Even the BJP’s supporters are mostly Muslim.

Overnight, the ABM factor will determine the voting decision of many individual, but we will have to wait till next month to see if it has swelled. It includes constitutionalists, communists, socialists, liberals, secularists. Muslims, devout Hindus dismayed at the politicisation of their religion, bohemians, gays, lesbians, people in live-in relationships, feminists, bookworms, scholars, conservatives who don’t wish to impose their values on others, and victims of policies favouring big business. Ostensibly, a majority of non-Muslim ABM members are often, but not always, middle class as well as upper caste. For instance, in Varanasi last week, an intellectual from the Dalit caste muttered wistfully: “Nothing can make me happier than seeing Arvind Kejriwal defeat Modi. Hindutva’s sharpest edge is reserved for us Dalits, and Modi symbolises that.” Yes, he is an ABM member. The man who fixes my computer was an ardent Modi fan, but perceiving an authoritarian streak in him, he will not vote for him now. The computer man is an ABM. A friend trembles at the idea of India having a prime minister whose administration in Gujrat stalked a woman. He, for sure, is an ABM member. Protection to Hindutva is a sufficient, but not the only reason to qualify for ABM membership. People are turned off by Modi’s authoritarian streak, his affinity to big business, his spreading personality cult, and his refusal to appear live on tv. A waiter at a plush hotel in Varanasi could wear the ABM badge. Even though he is a traditional Congress voter, he confessed he would have voted Modi had Kejriwal not stood from Varanasi. But it may be too late for ABM to challenge the Modi juggernaut. The ABM factor will determine the voting decision of many individuals, but we will have to wait till next month to see if it has critical mass.

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Received by Ajaz Ashraf

LOOK OUT

The Delhi Paramedical and Management Institute, in partnership with Autism Care Nepal (ACN), organised a half-day Autism Awareness Seminar on 7 April. Discussions included key factors in determining autism in kids and was attended by personalities from the medical sector.

Coca-Cola Nepal is sending four lucky draw winners to Brazil to watch the World Cup live. With its ‘Under-the-Crown’ campaign, effective from 10 April to 25 May, customers can SMS the unique code under the bottle caps to participate in the draw.

Qatar Airways has announced that it will be adding Al Hofuf in Saudi Arabia to its list of international destinations. The Doha-based airlines will also double its weekly flight frequency to Gasim, while flights to Madina will be increased from five to seven times per week.

Qatar Airways

New trio

Arabian nights

Under The Crown

Sweet treat

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Arabian nights

Under The Crown

Sweet treat
What started as a bird-watching trip by a few naturalists in the 1950s has turned into Nepal’s biggest non-governmental development partner and catalysts in education, health, infrastructure and hydropower development. When Bob Flemming, Carl Freiderichs and their families came to Nepal, they were equally struck by the need for quality education and health services as by the birds that were endemic to the country. Since it was established in 1954, United Mission in Nepal (UMN) has helped set up 48 organisations and smaller NGOs that work in similar areas.

The emphasis has shifted slightly over the six decades and now the organisation, still funded by Christian organisations abroad, focuses more on inclusion and breaking down discriminatory barriers especially in rural Nepal. This includes discrimination against women and Dalits. Rather than work upfront, the organisation partners with local communities so that people themselves realise why discrimination is unjust. “We don’t want all our good work to stop or regress when we leave, so we are building long term capacities for our partners and communities to continue to multiply that change,” explained UMN’s Executive Director Mark Galpin.

In Bajhang, UMN and its partners have fought the ostracisation Dalits face by organising awareness programs in schools and local communities. When UMN went to Bajhang, discrimination was so severe that Dalits were not sold milk by non-Dalits for fear their livestock might suffer. UMN and one of its partners decided to break down this discrimination by offering to support non-Dalits in milk production, on the condition that they sold the milk to everyone, regardless of caste. A large number of people signed up, lured by the prospect of extra income, and also sold milk to Dalits.

“These kinds of changes are what we aim for. Only when there is change in attitude, can people move forward,” Galpin told us.

UMN has continued its work through hospitals in Tansen and Okhaldhunga, treating more than 120,000 patients, performing 8,545 operations and 2,834 deliveries till date. What is even more commendable is that no one is refused treatment. Those unable to pay are sponsored by the hospital, and last year 5,106 people received Rs 19.5 million worth of free care. “Our focus is on compassionate, holistic and quality health care,” said Galpin.

Although UMN has done a lot in 60 years, they still feel they have a long way to go. Lately, they have had to deal with rising expectations. “What we do is we build capacity, but because we work long-term, people sometimes also expect us to help them build houses and other infrastructure,” Galpin explained.

Then there is also the challenge of hiring qualified staff to work in remote areas. UMN’s fieldwork commitments require staff to stay in remote places for extended periods of time, which might not appeal to everyone.

Says Galpin: “Our greatest desire is to see poverty and injustice eliminated from Nepal so that people can fulfill their potential. At UMN, we want to work ourselves out of a job.”

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Mission not impossible

Even after 60 years, the United Mission to Nepal remains a major non-governmental player in Nepal’s development.
The temperature is below normal for this time of year mainly because of the filtering action of desert blown sand. This thick haze is not due to Kathmandu Valley dust (although there is a bit of that) it is sand blown from as far away as the Arabian Peninsula and the Thar. The reduced radiation subdues thermal activity along the mountains. The last westerly front passed without much precipitation but lots of wind and dust. Expect some evening buildup on Friday and over the weekend, with isolated wind-driven rain in places. Snow in higher reaches.

KATHMANDU

BIKRAM RAI

“Go, see the world. Reach for your dreams. Go, fly away. Fly like a bird.”

These words of poet Shrawan Mukarung are a powerful expression of the tug of a relationship that pulls people leaving on an airplane. Hundreds of families are torn between these two emotions every day at Kathmandu airport.

Up-and-coming talent Simma Rai has used Mukarung’s words, grafted it to a dreamy melody by Nhyoo Bajracharya and in her husky, longing voice sings a heart-wrenching anthem to Nepal’s uprooted population called Uda Timi (Go, fly away).

Simma, 26, has a bachelor’s degree in engineering and is currently studying sociology. But her covers and rendition of Uda Timi posted on her Soundcloud account has already won her thousands of fans all over the world. While in college, she used to do imitations and stand-ups which led her to perform on stage. Egged on by friends, Simma took part in a singing competition which she won. The win convinced her of her talent.

“I remember trying to copy Asha Bhosle’s style and I thought I could do something because everyone who’s heard me said I could do quite a lot more,” says Simma.

Freshly graduated, she taught computer programming to undergrad students at Apex College, even though her mind was always on music.

After a short diversion into engineering and sociology, Simma is now committed to music and is taking classes in classical Hindustani music from singer Sangeeta Pradhan and piano classes from Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. The singer has also done solo performances at restaurants like Moksh, Attic, Casa de Casa, where she mostly sings jazz, Hindi and English numbers.

Uda Timi is her first original Nepali song. After the feedback she received on her Soundcloud page, she is now working on two other songs to be composed by Kali Prasad Baskota and Nhyoo Bajracharya.

Even though her parents are from Bhojpur, Rai was born and bred in Kathmandu. Which is why, even though she says she is influenced by Narayan Gopal, Shanti Thatal and Sukmit Gurung, she has a repertoire mostly based on rock, pop, and jazz standards.

Currently, Simma is busy planning a music video for Uda Timi and wants to release an album some day. This young woman will fly high, just like the protagonist in her song. Just hope she won’t fly away too far.

Anushil Shrestha

www.soundcloud.com/simma-rai
DINING

Yin Yang Restaurant, 
ratatouille, as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Add a little spice to your life with the pad thai or green curry. If you can't handle the heat, fall into the safety net of its western dishes. Thamel, 10am to 10pm, (01)4701510

New Tushita Restaurant, 
relaxing ambiance and good food. Don't miss out on their grenn with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. Lajimpat, (01)44432957

Lhakpa’s Chulo, 
Nepali dal-bhat, Newari khaja, Swiss Rösti, Italian Risotto, and Thai green curry – take your pick. Jumla

Pagoda Chinese Restaurant, 
relaxing ambience and good food. Don’t miss out on their penne with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. Lajimpat, (01)44432957

Lhasa Bar, 
enjoy a beer or a splash of cocktail at this springboard for excellent young musicians starting out on the Thamel circuit. Thamel, 985101043

Kashi, 
spread out over a large terrace overlooking Phora Darbar, Kashi offers a delectable plate of Newari delectables. Darbar Marg

Ubhauli, 
celebrate the arrival of summer with the Kirat people of Nepal. 14 May

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

Scooter Diva Cup, 
safely race fellow female scooter riders and win the Scooter Diva Cup 2014. 3 May, 10am, Monster Bash, Kupandol

Random impact, 
an exhibition of contemporary arts and performances. Runs 09/18 April, Alliance Française, Teku

All that glitters, 
an exhibition of the art of British artist Annette Ashworth. Runs 06/22 April, Celsius Gallery, Pulchok, 9841224573

Open house, 
featuring the work of artists Aripa Shukya, Ashrum Bajrangi, and Fabiana Maranathan. Runs 07/7 July, 1am to 6pm

Mother’s day, 
pay homage to those who bore you and continue to bear you. 29 April

Twannasin, 
an exhibition of paintings by Bipana Maharjan. Runs to 25 April, 12 to 7pm, except Saturdays, Artist Proof Gallery, Pulchok

Nepal Industrial and Technology Exhibition, 
nepal’s industrialists and small gather at one place. Runs 23/24 April, 10am to 5pm, Bhrikuti Mandap

Buddha Jayanti, 
celebrate the birth of the great philosopher in the country of his birth. 14 May

Democracy day, 
Nepal celebrates the ousting of the monarchy. 24 April

Filmlab, 
learn film history, storytelling, screenwriting, cinematography, editing, project handling and network with professionals. 12 April to 15 May, Docskool, Gaurighat, register at (01)4251235

The spirit of youth, 
join dynamic young leaders and motivational speakers to share ideas at Youth Action Fund Nepal’s annual gathering. 19 April, 1am to 6pm, Embassy Restaurant, Lajimpat

Lanhu, 
for the best of Chinese at great prices. Lakeside

Sarangkot Forays Restaurant, 
have a Sarangkot special breakfast while enjoying spectacular views of the mountain ranges. Sarangkot, Pokhara, (061)4160120, 871-2099

Mulchowk, 
the blend of culinary expertise and charms of a hospitable era, Babarmahal

Wunjala Moskva, 
serve your palette to Newari and Russian dishes in the lush garden with ancient trees and trickling streams. Naxal, (01)4411526

Hyderabad House, 
dine like the famous Nizams of old Hyderabad. Bhatbhateni

Krishnarpan, 
a specially Nepali restaurant at The Dwarika’s Hotel serving 6 to 22 courses of authentic Nepali meal. The Dwarika’s Hotel, Bhatbhateni, (01)4479488

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Music nights, catch the best of the jazz and eclectic soundscape.

Kripa Unplugged, young aspiring musicians, give their own renditions of classics. youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged

Darbar Marg Festival, join Indian invaders Eshtopia and a load of Nepali musicians to welcome summer.

Reggae night, get a load of Jah music from Chari Amilo Kala Samuha every weekend. Rs 200, 25 April, 6pm, Base Camp, Jhamsikhel.

English Premier League
19 April, Chelsea vs Sunderland, 10.15pm
20 April, Norwich City vs Liverpool, 4.45pm
22 April, Man City vs West Brom, 00.45am
27 April, Liverpool vs Chelsea, 6.30pm
3 May, Everton vs Man City, 10.15pm
4 May, Chelsea vs Norwich City, 8.45pm
6 May, Crystal Palace vs Liverpool, 00.45am
11 May, Man City vs West Ham, Norwich City vs Arsenal, Cardiff City vs Chelsea, Hull City vs Everton, Liverpool vs Newcastle, all 7.45pm

La liga
19 April, Atletico Madrid vs Elche, 00.00am
21 April, Barcelona vs Athletic Bilbao, 00.45am
26 April, Real Madrid vs Osasuna, 11.45pm
28 April, Villarreal vs Barcelona, 00.45am
3 May, Barcelona vs Granada CF, 7.45pm
5 May, Real Madrid vs Valencia, 00.45am
7 May, Valladolid vs Real Madrid
11 May, Celta Vigo vs Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid vs Malaga, Elche vs Barcena
18 May, Real Madrid vs Espanyol, Barcelona vs Atletico Madrid

UEFA Champions’ League
23 April, Atletico Madrid vs Chelsea, 00.30am
24 April, Real Madrid vs Bayern Munich, 00.30am
30 April, Bayern Munich vs Real Madrid, 00.30am
1 May, Chelsea vs Atletico Madrid, 00.30am

The FA Cup
17 May, Arsenal vs Hull City, 9.45pm

Football season may be over in Germany but things are still undecided in Europe’s other premier competitions.

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)

Music nights, catch the best of the jazz and eclectic soundscape.

Temple Tree Resort and Spa, a peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlor, and sauna, if it’s hard to leave once you go in. Gainghat, Lakeside. (01)4608199

Park Village Resort, far away from the bustling crowds yet so close to the city. Budhanilkantha, (01)4375208, pkh@wlink.com.np

The Last Resort, test your limits with carpentry, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping. Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok. (01)4708251/1347

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

Buddha Maya Gardens Hotel, add value to your tour inPokhara with a stay at probably the best hotel in the area. Lumbini, (01)5011105, info@tmgh.com

Shivapuri Cottage, escape the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu and enjoy peace, tranquility, good food, and fresh air. Rs 3,500 per person per night inclusive of dinner and breakfast. Budhanilkantha, 9841379137

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Red Monsoon and Lochan Rijal’s score for it are both original and originate from Nepali roots.

Long after listening to five-minutes of Pailaharu on YouTube, the first-time viewer is left with the words, rhythm and melody of this haunting new song by Lochan Rijal echoing inside the head, and realises why he is the most original new singer to appear on Nepal’s soundscape in recent years.

The song strikes resonance with the dark storyline and mood of Excelum Dixit’s movie Red Monsoon (releasing 9 May), which deals with contemporary Nepali themes of domestic violence and alienation of the modern urbanite amidst a backdrop of society in turmoil.

Rijal’s innovative and inventive melding of words and song go straight through the heart like an arrow in Paurakhi, another jagged-edged composition about a migrant worker who abandons home for ‘Muglan’. It is a timeless story, communicated through the poetry and music of a modern-day Nepali bard.

Both Paurakhi and Pailaharu use traditional Nepali instruments like the sarangi fiddle of the traditional gandarva troubadours and their lyrics are based on their story-telling style through textured layers of everyday hardships and pain. Rijal has also revived the arbaja and its lute-like sound quality which had become all but extinct in Nepal. (See interview)

Lochan Rijal is a singing academic. Born in Panchthar, and raised in Biratnagar he has an MA in ethnomusicology from Norway. He currently teaches music at Kathmandu University.

There were hints that this was a talent waiting to burst forth when he became the first singer to win four awards at the 2006 Hits FM Music Awards for Best Composition (Pop), Best Composition (Rock), Best Vocal (Pop) and Best Album for Coma.

Nepali Times: What is the process behind your creations: music, lyrics, where do you start?

Lochan Rijal: Lyrics and music to me are influenced by whatever I see and observe. Whatever you are experiencing is the story and the truth, and it is these that create art. Any art is storytelling, and that story may not remain my own after it is told; it belongs to the audience once they have heard it. I always start with the music. A tune comes to me, and the lyrics just fit in. I am not a poet, so I don’t begin with words.

STEP BY STEP

Lochan Rijal spoke to Nepali Times this week about his music and career.

After the book comes the movie about Nepali girls trafficked to India

SANGITA SHRESTHOVA in HOLLYWOOD

“Isn’t this going to have a Slumdog feel to it?” The man next to me asked as we waited to be let into the theater at Arclight Cinemas in Hollywood last week. This was the world premiere of Jeffrey D Brown’s Sold at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles (IFFLA) on 8 April. Based on Patricia McCormick’s acclaimed novel of the same name, Sold is a story of a young Nepali girl’s excruciating journey to a brothel in Kolkata.

Given the prominence sexual violence had received in India over the past year, IFFLA’s decision to screen Sold as this year’s opening feature film was likely intended to make a statement about the Festival’s commitment to social justice. An impressive entourage of Indian, American and Nepali actors - Gillian Anderson (X-Files), David Arquette (Never Been Kissed), Seema Biswas (Water), Tillotama Shome (Monsoon Wedding), Hari Bansha Acharya, and Madan Krishna Shrestha and celebrated British actress Emma Thompson as the executive producer – ensured that the Sold premiere was sold out.

Sex trafficking from Nepal into India has received significant international coverage and has become the subject of numerous documentary projects. Today, this trafficking route has been replaced by sexual...
Was it a conscious decision to move from pop to your new style? It was a conscious decision, but it was also my own “paila haru”. Step by step you move in the direction you feel is right. Careers are hit and miss. When I was playing Western instruments and style, it was because that is what I had access to. Now, I would like to spend my life exploring the timbre of as many instruments as possible, expressing as many colours as I can through these instruments.

For instance, the arbaja used to be played by the Gandharva along with the sarangi for hundreds of years. My latest music actually brings back the lost duet of the male arbaja with the female sarangi. 

How did you get involved in Red Monsoon? I had never thought I would work on a movie, especially with the kind of music that I practice now. After seeing the rushes and reading the script, I felt my music matched Eelum Dixit’s vision and future in film work. The movie is honest, deep and important. I also found that when I read the script and watched the footage, musical and lyrical ideas began to take shape in my mind. Every time one of the characters in Red Monsoon spoke, it was genuine and I felt inspired by the art. It is a raw film, and the instruments I work with at the moment were a perfect fit.

How did the music and movie complement each other? In Red Monsoon we have authentic Nepali instruments playing in an authentic Nepali film. This film is not a cliche, and neither are the instruments that I play in it. Music and movie are both original, both originating from Nepali roots. Fifty years from now, this combination of film and music will be an authentic documentation of this period in Nepal’s history.

As a music scholar, researcher, instrument preservationist, it is my mission to contemporise local instruments and bring them to the mainstream. Eelum has tried to do the same: bring local issues embedded in tradition and history to the mainstream through the medium of cinema.

Pailabahu features the arbaja, sarangi, nagara and my original instruments are mixed with Newari percussion played by German musician scholar Fabian Bakels, all of these come together in Red Monsoon. Red Monsoon is true to the core, and speaks for many of the lives and intricacies that make up Kathmandu Valley society. I am proud to be a part of it, and hope that the Nepali audiences feel the same way.

The enthusiastic response from the audience to the film that night was a reminder that a feature film can do much more than entertain, it can be a real anchor for movements.

Jeffrey Brown answered questions afterwards and somewhat surprisingly didn’t spend time discussing his filmmaking process but instead focused on sex trafficking. He noted that sexual slavery was happening in the US as well and asked the audience to become a part of the solution.

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GABBEH

At this time of the year, locals of Nepal’s culturally Tibetan, eastern village Olangchung Gola will be racing against time to get in supplies from Kathmandu before the monsoon. They will be bartering essentials for mule-loads of hand-woven carpets. Unfortunately, there isn’t a Nepali film about these people or the women that make these rugs. Instead, we will have to console ourselves by watching one that features an entire clan of nomadic people from eastern Iran who are known for a similar seasonal trade.

Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s Gabbeh opens with an elderly couple arguing with each other about who gets to wash their precious possession when a young woman magically appears out of it. She says her name is Gabbeh (like the carpet) and she wants to run off with her lover on horseback (again, like the woven design). But her father will not get her married unless they find a bride for her 57-year-old uncle, a wandering teacher whose intuition tells him a woman singing like a canary near a well in spring-time will be the one.

As Gabbeh and her family move through the valleys looking for such a match, her suitor follows secretly on horseback. She is kept busy at home because she has to finish a carpet before the wedding and her lover howls from close-by at midnight to show his impatience. But father says mother is pregnant and, as the eldest of seven siblings, Gabbeh has to be at home to help.

Summer ends, autumn passes in an instant, and mother gives birth. But Gabbeh is still under surveillance of her rifle-wielding father as they travel on foot from one town to another. From close, the horseman finally sends word – it’s now or never and Gabbeh must choose.

Despite the lean simplicity of the story, Gabbeh is anything but skin and bones. Each frame oozes with a rich personal touch and feeling for the dramatic Iranian landscape and its inhabitants. It is as if Makhmalbaf only needed this everyday story about a young girl pursued by her lover and kept in check by her father, so that he could skip between the rituals of rural life and their charmingly quaint banalities to make visual poetry.

Life is colour, a character declares matter-of-factly, and Gabbeh is truly like a pristine garden seen through a kaleidoscope. If his characters need yellow dye for their rug, Makhmalbaf mixes wheat flour and a sparrow, and there appears a canary as well as a woman who sings like one, as if common sense demanded such a fantastic leap. Right from the first frame on, the carpet – now no longer a household item but a metaphor – unravels the story behind its making.

Before he made films Mohsen Makhmalbaf spent time in jail for stabbing a policeman in the days before Iran’s revolution. As he got out, he decided his country needed cultural artefacts, not coercive politics. In making Gabbeh, Makhmalbaf weaves the most pertinent strands of his country’s heritage into a truly singular masterpiece.
Organized within the revered Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, the exhibition Czech Castles: Exhibition of the National Museum of Czech Republic is a visual experience that transports visitors to the medieval grandeur of Bohemia and Moravia.

Each historical structure is displayed separately with an assortment of photographs and illustrations, accompanied with information on the history behind it. Furthermore, each floor also has a monitor playing videos displaying the 3D models of the selected castles and chateaux, providing viewers with an immersive experience to understand the layout of these structures in greater detail.

The exhibition does justice to the grandeur of Czech architecture and at the same time portrays the preserved beauty of Bohemia and Moravia. To those who have visited the Czech Republic before, they will leave feeling nostalgia for the country while others will feel a deep yearning to go visit it.

Ayesha Shakya
Czech Castles: Exhibition of the National Museum of Czech Republic
4 April – 25 May 2014
Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu
BEING A DOCTOR

Over the centuries, many physicians have written poignantly in both fiction and non-fiction genres about life, suffering, and hope. These have inspired many health professionals to follow a career in medicine. Cutting-edge medical research published in prestigious medical journals is important, but it is the true human stories that resonate with our lives that continue to fascinate.

Here is a short, heart-rending story entitled Food for Thought from Mumbai by Sunil Badve that first appeared in the Annals of Internal Medicine (2005; 143-149).

Dhavantari Buddha Bannayat, MD

This short essay not only evokes deep compassion but also reveals today’s stark reality of medical practice in South Asia against the background of poverty.

In August 1996, I joined Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Hospital (LTMGH) located near Asia’s largest slum, Dharavi in Mumbai, India, as an internist–house officer. Initially, I had a difficult time managing the huge workload. One of the central tasks of the house staff was to discharge as many patients as possible on pre-emergency days to make room for the many anticipated admissions on call days. The house staff who kept their ward census in single digits were most valued. Those who failed to do this invited reproach from the registrars.

One day, the hospital admitted a middle-aged worker with fever, who responded to anti-malarial treatment and was soon fit to go home. In the morning of the pre-emergency day, I filled out his discharge forms. However, during my evening rounds, I found him still sitting on the hospital bed. I told the patient that he had been discharged and should leave. I admit I was quite rude to him. The poor man didn’t argue. I left to attend to other patients, completed my evening rounds, and began to see the new admissions.

Then I witnessed something unforgettable. While the discharged patient sat on his hospital bed, his two small children quietly hid beneath the bed and shared a limp–smacking meal—the hospital food meant for their father. It was obvious from their faces that these children seldom enjoyed such nutritious food. Soon after, the gentleman went home with a satisfied heart and his children with full stomachs. My heart sank. I was stunned to see that this poor man had overstayed his visit just to feed his children on a day that he could not earn his daily wages because of hospitalisation.

That day I learned a lesson not found in Harrison’s Principles of Internal Medicine: that I was fighting not malaria or any other disease, but the deadliest affliction known to humankind: poverty. Now, years later, I walk the well-appointed, air-conditioned corridors of P D Hinduja National Hospital in Mumbai, a privately run, state-of-the-art facility located just three miles from LTMGH. But I am still reminded of poverty—for example, when our kidney transplant recipients stop taking immunosuppressive treatment and die rather than sell their property and burden their family, even when they have a treatable disease.

Now I understand the meaning of the words of wisdom told by my mentor, Bharat Shah: “What is adequate [treatment] is not practical, so what is practical has to be adequate.” As I think back to 1996 and remember the poor man and his two hungry children, I wonder: Do the best recommendations published in renowned journals really apply to our poor patients?

GIZMO by YANTRICK

Mostly a hit

After a long wait the latest from Samsung’s flagship Galaxy S’ line of smartphones is finally here. The Galaxy S5 line of smartphones has always been well appreciated by critics and users alike, and it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that some of the best smartphones have come from the Galaxy S series. The S5 is an ideal smartphone, which excels at everything that matters—Android 4.4 KitKat OS, a bright and beautiful display, a blistering quad-core processor, and an excellent camera.

The design follows in the S4’s blueprint, and sticks to its silver-framed rectangular front face. However, the back panel motif has been tweaked with tiny dimples now dotted over a matte rear cover which cut down glare and hide accumulated fingerprints. The phone comes in four colours: black, blue, gold, and white, and dimensions of 5.9 x 2.85 x 0.32 inches, and weighs in at 146g. Many critics of Samsung have fretted over the lightweight, plasticky and flimsy design that the company’s phones have become infamous for, and looking at the S5, one may have similar complaints but do reserve your judgements until the phone is switched on.

A dazzling Super AMOLED full-HD 5.1 inch screen adorns the S5, which boasts a pixel density of 432 Pixels per inch. Icons appear razor-sharp, menus pop-out from the screen and images and web pages appear vivid and crisp. Videos and games are pixel-perfect, stutter-free and super-smooth. Powered by Qualcomm’s new Snapdragon 801 quad core processor (2.5 Ghz) and with 2GB RAM, the device is lightning fast, and bids farewell to noticeable lag.

Whizzing around the system’s Android version 4.4.2 (KitKat) was a breeze, and burning through games with high-quality graphics and streaming HD videos was refreshingly smooth. Storage is taken care of via the on-board 16GB or 32GB memory space, both of which can be expanded to 128GB (yes, you read that correctly) via a useful micro SD card slot.

Other than the upgraded processor and operating system, the S5’s rear camera has also been enhanced and boasts a 16 megapixel camera, up from 13 megapixel in the S4. Battery capacity has been slightly improved too, from 2600mAh to 2800mAh, while high-end features like the IR Blaster, NFC, etc. remain. From a among a gamut of new features that the S5 offers, the fingerprint scanner, the heart-rate monitor, and the water-proof chassis stand out the most.

Yantrick’s Verdict: While not a massive upgrade over S4, Samsung S5 boasts top of the range specs and features which very well may seal Samsung’s place on top of the Android smartphone pyramid.
The quest for justice unites two women whose relatives were killed and disappeared by the Nepal Army and the Maoists.

BHRUKUTI RAI

Last Thursday, Purnimaya Lama and Debi Sunuwar were arrested by police from Singha Darbar along with 18 other human rights activists who had gathered to protest the amnesty provision in the bill on Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Commission of Inquiry on Disappearances (CID), which were tabled in parliament on 9 April. Sunuwar’s daughter Maina was 15 when she was tortured and killed by officers of the Royal Nepal Army in 2004 and Purnimaya’s husband Arjun Lama was abducted by the Maoists in Kavre in 2005 and was never seen again. Since then the two women, like thousands of Nepalis who lost their children, parents, siblings or friends to extrajudicial killings by state security or the Maoists have been seeking truth and justice.

The NC-UML coalition tabled the bill even though it was weaker on providing justice to the survivors and relatives than the one drafted by the Bhattarai government two years ago. The three parties agree that conflict-era crimes, except for grave ones, should be addressed by the Commissions and not by normal criminal courts.

But both Lama and Sunuwar say the bill is unacceptable. “The clause on general amnesty is an insult to the victims and their families who have been fighting so long to see the perpetrators tried and punished for their actions,” Sunuwar told us on Wednesday. One of the most vocal activists among relatives of conflict-era victims, Sunuwar filed a complaint at Kavre District Police Office in November 2005, naming alleged perpetrators, including Captain Niranjan Basnet.

It was only after the conflict ended that Maina’s body was finally exhumed in March 2007 from inside the army base in Panchkhal. The Kavre District Court had issued orders for the arrest of the four accused in 2008 but they are still free.

Says Sunuwar: “We are being treated as second class citizens in our country, our hopes of justice have died now. We will be forced to take things in our hands if this situation continues.”

The bill tabled last week defines rape, torture, custodial killings and forced disappearances, among others as ‘grave human rights violations’, crimes which merit prosecution. However, it also gives power to the Commissions to grant amnesty, and in such cases closing door for prosecution. The Commission can also drag cases out, citing lack of evidence. Her quest for justice for her husband’s death has taken a toll on Purnimaya Lama’s health. She is now 50 but looks older, and is frail. Her father-in-law died a few years ago without ever finding the whereabouts of Arjun Lama, and Purnimaya now worries about her own health.

“My body can’t take all the stress and at times I feel this fight will drive me insane,” says Purnimaya.

Former Maoist ministers Surya Man Dong and Agni Sapkota, have been charged with involvement in Arjun Lama’s abduction. “My husband was not involved in the war, his murderers, instead of being punished became ministers. We are humans, our fight will not end unless we get a closure.”

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As Bhim Neupane walked up the dusty trail to the village of Katanje, he greeted women carrying oversized loads of fodder grass, asking how the children were doing in school. He stopped at a tea shop, and was welcomed warmly with smiles and namastes. He spoke to farmers and asked about their water buffaloes, whose individual names he seemed to know by heart.

That was in 2000, and Bhim Neupane (pic, above) had been re-elected chairman of Kushadevi VDC. He told me then: “People are now aware, they are able to plan and work together to improve their living standards.”

Fifteen years later, I was walking again with Bhim Neupane along the same path, which is now a motorable road. VDCs were dissolved by Shar Bahadur Deuba government in 2002, local bodies across Nepal have had no elected councils since. Even so, Neupane is approached by families who want citizenship papers certified, and he is still asking them about their cattle.

Local obstruction of major transmission line is a microcosm of Nepal’s lack of progress

Radiation that they say will cause malformed fetuses, cancer and blindness. An Energy Ministry proposal to build a road below the transmission lines was also rejected by locals who are camping out on pylons points.

The World Bank’s country director for Nepal, Johannes Zutt, travelled to Sindhuli last month to find out for himself what was holding things up. At a hearing held in the DDC Hall with local political leaders and stakeholders, the agitated leader of the ‘Transmission Line Resistance Committee’ Surendraswor Moktan surrounded Zutt, manhandled him and demanded $1 million compensation. Locals have got the World Bank’s country director for Nepal, Johannes Zutt, travelled to Sindhuli last month to find out for himself what was holding things up. At a hearing held in the DDC Hall with local political leaders and stakeholders, the agitated leader of the ‘Transmission Line Resistance Committee’ Surendraswor Moktan surrounded Zutt, manhandled him and demanded $1 million compensation. Locals have got the

The World Bank is required to send another inspection team to the site because locals have cited that their indigenous rights are being trampled upon against provisions in ILO 169. The Bank has admitted that there may not have been enough consultation with locals before the work began. The delay in the transmission line is expected to have long-term repercussions on Nepal’s energy security. The transmission line would take power from Bhote Kosi, Khimti and Tama Kosi to load centres in eastern Nepal, reducing system loss. It would also free up the Hetauda substation currently carrying 220kV transmission. Each of these hydropower projects in the Tama Kosi Valley to the national grid has been struck for over two years now because of extortion by locals in Sindhuli.

Work on the 220kV transmission line that stretches 75km across the mountains from Sahare of Dolakha to Dhalkebar on the East-West Highway (see map) was started a decade ago. The Rs 1 billion project has already installed 181 pylons, but work has ground to a halt due to opposition in two VDCs that has prevented 13 pylons from being erected.

According to the Electricity Act of 1993, people have to yield 15m of property on either side of the wires and are paid 10 per cent of the prevailing rate, and are being trampled upon against provisions in ILO 169. The Bank has admitted that there may not have been enough consultation with locals before the work began. The delay in the transmission line is expected to have long-term repercussions on Nepal’s energy security. The transmission line would take power from Bhote Kosi, Khimti and Tama Kosi to load centres in eastern Nepal, reducing system loss. It would also free up the Hetauda substation currently carrying 220kV transmission. Each of these hydropower projects in the Tama Kosi Valley to the national grid has been struck for over two years now because of extortion by locals in Sindhuli.

As Bhim Neupane walked up the dusty trail to the village of Katanje, he greeted women carrying oversized loads of fodder grass, asking how the children were doing in school. He stopped at a tea shop, and was welcomed warmly with smiles and namastes. He spoke to farmers and asked about their water buffaloes, whose individual names he seemed to know by heart.

That was in 2000, and Bhim Neupane (pic, above) had been re-elected chairman of Kushadevi VDC. He told me then: “People are now aware, they are able to plan and work together to improve their living standards.”

Fifteen years later, I was walking again with Bhim Neupane along the same path, which is now a motorable road. VDCs were dissolved by Shar Bahadur Deuba government in 2002, local bodies across Nepal have had no elected councils since. Even so, Neupane is approached by families who want citizenship papers certified, and he is still asking them about their cattle.

Local obstruction of major transmission line is a microcosm of Nepal’s lack of progress

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The delays in Sindhuli have also dampened the overall investment climate in Nepal for projects backed by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Construction of some 15 other transmission lines are also delayed.

The Nepal Electricity Authority says new hydropower projects are expected to generate 2,000MW in the next three years, but if the transmission lines are not rigged up, some Rs 32 billion worth of electricity would be wasted annually, and power rationing would have to continue.

Nepalis are paying a heavy price for the absence of local elections

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: As VDC chairman of Kushadevi of Kavre, Bhim Neupane in 2000 (of Kushadevi of Kavre, Bhim Neupane). Last week, 12 years after VDCs were dissolved, he was hiking up the mountains to explore the possibility of homestay tourism to augment income of villagers.

have been more wrong.

To be sure, national level politics was a mess back then, as it is now. The Maoists were impatient for regime change, their bloody insurgency had entered its fourth year. Local elected officials were their first targets, and by the end of the conflict three-fourths of the 3,900 VDCs across Nepal had been destroyed.

Kushadevi’s VDC block which also housed a health post and training centre was bombed twice, and the Maoists killed charismatic and respected local leaders like Krishna Sapkota in 2002. Sapkota was tortured and decapitated, his head displayed in the village square to terrify others. Neupane stayed in Kushadevi through it all.

Today, there is little sign that there was ever a war here. The VDC has been rebuilt, Kushadevi has prospered because of its proximity to Kathmandu. Bhim Neupane surveys his scenic village from a hilltop, and says: “This is what local democracy can do, we made this happen.”

Indeed, it was during his two five-year tenures as VDC chairman that Neupane upgraded government schools, added a TV+2 campus, rehabilitated health posts, built 50 km of roads that today provide access to markets for Kushadevi’s dairy and vegetable farmers. He brought drinking water to far flung wards, irrigation for off-season vegetables, and Kushadevi was lit up at night with microhydro power.

The VDC also stood guarantee for insurance so farmers were not ruined if the costly livestock died. “Buying a buffalo was a gamble, but insurance reduced the risk and it lifted many farmers here out of poverty,” Neupane recalls.

Across Nepal, VDCs have been run since 2006 by an unelected club of the three main parties and a government-appointed secretary. But people still turn to charismatic chairmen like Neupane for leadership and advice. Villagers in Kushadevi have given up on the government, and now take their own initiative when something needs to be done.

“Nothing has been built here in the last 12 years,” says Laxman Humagain, a Kushadevi native. Kathmandu-based quarry tycoons have bought off entire mountainsides to feed the capital’s construction boom. Families have been displaced, springs have been dried, roads steeply graded to feed the capital’s infrastructure deficit.

The restructuring process has already claimed the jobs of its three most senior officials, and requires all its top managers to reapply for their own positions. The Bank is expected to adopt 14 global practices like agriculture, poverty, finance and water. Specifically, Kim has set two objectives: end extreme poverty and boost incomes of the poorest 40 per cent in all developing countries.

The Bank has been in Nepal for nearly half a century but there is little sign that of it is the Bank’s fault. While Nepal is widely applauded for poverty reduction that has been achieved through remittance receipts than its own economic performance, it still remains the poorest in Asia with a huge infrastructure deficit.

The country is today drained of most of its workforce, the trade deficit is worse than ever, unemployment and under-employment remain high, health and education services lack quality. Under-five malnutrition, a major indicator of the country’s health status, is still high. And 79 per cent of the children enrolled in school ten years ago have been “lost in transit” – they never showed up for the recent SLC exams.

Nepal has been a world class performer in community forestry despite the World Bank. Its multimillion dollar forestry project in the 1970s didn’t yield results, and it took the devolution of ownership to local forestry user groups for forests to be restored.

Similarly, Nepal also managed to come up from the bottom of the pile to be ranked among the topmost performers in the world in achieving the MDGs in child survival and maternal mortality rate reduction. This too happened due to the empowerment of the mothers’ groups and their female community health volunteers at the grassroots, beginning 1998.

While both these successes were based on domestic innovations through the decentralisation initiative of the much demonised Panchayat regime, donors to Nepal including the World Bank and the UNDP have failed to emulate and replicate these successes across other sectors of development. Worse, two major donor agencies, the UNDP and the DANIDA, even contributed to wiping Nepal’s grassroots-based decentralisation initiative in their pernicious bid to appropriate this agenda for themselves during much of the 1990s. Their baby, the so-called Local Self-Governance Act of 1999, distorted the sanctity of user groups, leading to the anarchy and corruption that pervades local bodies today. By and large, the donor agencies with their high-handedness and lack of accountability to authority has been more of a detriment to Nepal.

While Kim banks on the Bank being “faster”, equipped with “better knowledge” and “easier to work with” as a result of the restructuring, he should be wary of politicians (who are mostly corrupt) and bureaucrats (who are given to telling the Bank what it wants to hear as long as it means more loans and grants).

In the interest of the poorest 40 per cent in Nepal, the Bank’s restructuring in Washington must be guided by the following do’s:

- build on Nepal’s successful experiences
- build institutions owned and managed by users themselves
- ensure verifiable accountability as condition for disbursement
- make resources accessible to the 40 per cent at the bottom

And the don’ts:
- don’t be arrogant
- don’t think you know everything, there is a lot Nepal can teach you

Bihari Krishna Shrestha is an anthropologist and retired civil servant.
Give and take
Rama Parajuli, 16 April, BBC Nepali Service

Interview with Law Minister Narhari Acharya about the much-debated TRC bill

What kind of discussions are taking place with the UCPN(M) about their condition in the CA? We are already taking steps to resolve this through discussions. So far the court case is concerned, it is up to the court and not us to take it to a logical conclusion. Our discussions with the Maoist will be of a political nature, about what is necessary at this moment for the country. For example, we want everyone to be positive about this bill because it is something all of us agreed to in the past.

Both national and international human rights stakeholders have heavily criticised your bill. I have read many articles and opinions recently, but I have also found some of them have misunderstood things. For example, people keep talking about general amnesty but the bill doesn’t even consider the possibility of such a thing.

But doesn’t the bill include provisions for pardoning perpetrators? In the bill, we’ve said that pardons may only be given in full agreement with the survivors and victims’ families. I’ve noticed that there is no talk about this in the media. What can I say? How much can the CA revise this part.

Isn’t the bill also criticised for failing to categorise any serious crime except rapes? We have categorised these things, but it may be true that survivors’ definitions differ from ours. We have included what sort of gross human rights violations the commission can decide upon and have even given it the power to decide what sort of crimes are not pardonable at all. Have you placed extra judicial killings, homicides, tortures, and disappearance in your category of gross human rights violations? Of course they are well-defined in the bill.

So these crimes are unpardonable? It is up to the commission to decide what is suitable for reconciliation or pardon.

Can you reveal what you were asked not to talk about? Some parties, not the NC, had asked us to remove both persecution and pardons. But what kind of law will that make? What everyone needs to understand is that an individual alone can’t make this law, and as soon as there are two people working on it there will be a difference of opinions.

Since there were two sides, you must have made compromises? Is it a crime to do so when the peace accord itself is a grand negotiation?

But both human rights activists and victims’ families complain that you have given the commission the power to pardon. Well, we can’t ignore demands to make the commission neutral, answerable, independent, and of a high standard. We’ve done whatever we can to make this happen. For example, an independent body headed by ex-chief justices will be making recommendations, not the government. We want the people to have faith in the commission.

So when will this bill be passed and when will the commission be established? We ask everyone to cooperate so that the CA can pass the bill. After that is done, the government will set up a body to make appointments for the commission. And after that, we are committed to giving the commission whatever resources it needs.

Stop child trafficking
Editorial, Himal Khabarpatrika, 6 April

Opening an ‘orphanage’ has become big business, a way to make money in the name of social service. The homes promise education to the parents of children. Being in the care of one they are in Kathmandu the children are either exhibited to foreigners who donate for their support, or are sent to poor families in the names of the to-do’s, and some are even sold for foreign adoption. The trafficking business has political protection, which is why enforcement of the law is feeble.

Part of the reason for this societal apathy towards trafficking is the legacy of impunity and the culture of ‘anything goes’. When known perpetrators of abductions, rape, torture and murder walk around freely, it sends the message that crime pays. The shocking part of trafficking is that the government sanctions it. The government allows some children homes to sell children for overseas adoption for $5,000. It is a government racket.

This is why there are orphanages around every corner. They are concentrated in tourist areas of the country, where traffickers find easy money from bleeding heart donors. It is not just the traffickers who are guilty, so is the government, the political parties and citizens who turn away from facing this crime head-on.
नयाँ वर्षमा नयाँ हिरो छधिन्छ, लाखों लाख खेलाइन्छ

नयाँ वर्षमा नयाँ हिरो छधिन्छ, लाखों लाख खेलाइन्छ

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नयाँ वर्षमा नयाँ अफकर
Read this and win a gold bar

What is this country coming to? Do I now have to bribe you to read this column, or what?

However, since it has now been firmly established through several readership surveys that no one actually reads a paper newspaper anymore, guess I can get away with writing the most outrageous stuff about the pillars of our society and get away with it. So here goes: BEEEEP is a monkey, Comrade BEEEEP is a donkey, and so are the other honourable BEEEEPs in the BEEEP Constituent Assembly, the LONG BEEEEEEP and ANOTHER EVEN LONGER BEEP are a bunch of @$$#0!&$. Where, feels good to get that off my chest.

Thank the Higgs Boson that the press is still independent in this country and the freedom of expressionists is guaranteed by our yet-to-be-written constitution, otherwise I wouldn’t be allowed to make the aforementioned x-rated comments even if no one actually reads them. In Nepal, we have a knack for knocking down anyone who gets ahead. So, it is a matter of knatial pride that the Ksnepali press can get away with such slanderous libel without denting its credit rating. This is proof, if proof is still required by international freedom watchdogs, that democracy in Nepal is still, if not alive and kicking, then at least crawling around on all fours with its tail wagging between its legs.

With those formalities now out of the way, and with permission from Madam Chair, I would now like to turn to the next item on the agenda this week, which is to note that at least one organisation in Nepal is already federal: the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industriousness (FNCCI). The new panel at the helm of that august body apparently wants to do something to end the scrouge of corruption once and for all. Great idea. It is heartening to note that Nepal’s top tycoons last week solemnly swore (meaning, they took an oath, not uttered unprintable words like BEEP and BEEEP) that, as a part of their belt-tightening and austerity drive they will not be bribing any government officials and politicians anymore. “We can’t bribe anyone because we are already being extorted, we just can’t afford to give kickbacks,” said one business typhoon speaking on condition that he doesn’t, in fact, exist.

An emergency meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday, which started six hours late because the Higher-than-ever Level Political Mechanics of the Secular Federal Republic had gone to Pashupati for the Muktinath Baba’s Mahayagya, looked at various ways in which the government could deal with this unexpected development that removes one of the most efficient methods so far devised to spread the wealth around. The no-bribe policy of Nepal’s Big Businesses may lead to a serious shortfall in revenue for officials, and set off a snowball effect on consumer spending, forcing the Finance Ministry to revise drastically downwards its premature announcement of an annual GDP growth rate of 5 per cent.

Now that the Israeli ambassador to Nepal has shown that it is perfectly kosher for a diplomat to go on strike against his foreign service back home, our own government may want to borrow that idea. Singha Darbar has no recourse now but to announce an escalating agitation against transparency beginning in the new year starting with a dot pen-down strike at all offices, a sit-down strike at the gates of FNCCI and a symbolic protest turning their pockets inside out. It could culminate in a relay hunger strike at their places of work in which government officials will forego afternoon tea and biscuit break on alternate working days. If that doesn’t prompt businessmen from lifting their ban on bribes, then may Pashupatinath save us all.

What? The bhattas are on strike?

Soundbite of the week from Comrade Ugly Sapkota: “A tiger is not vegetarian.” Yeah, some are man-eaters.