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DEVAKI BISTA

BARRING PROGRESS

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 \$1million 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.

CENTRE AGAINST PERIPHERY

EDITORIAL

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HIGH TENSION IN SINDHULI

BY RAMESH KUMAR

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VACUUM IN THE VILLAGES

BY KUNDA DIXIT

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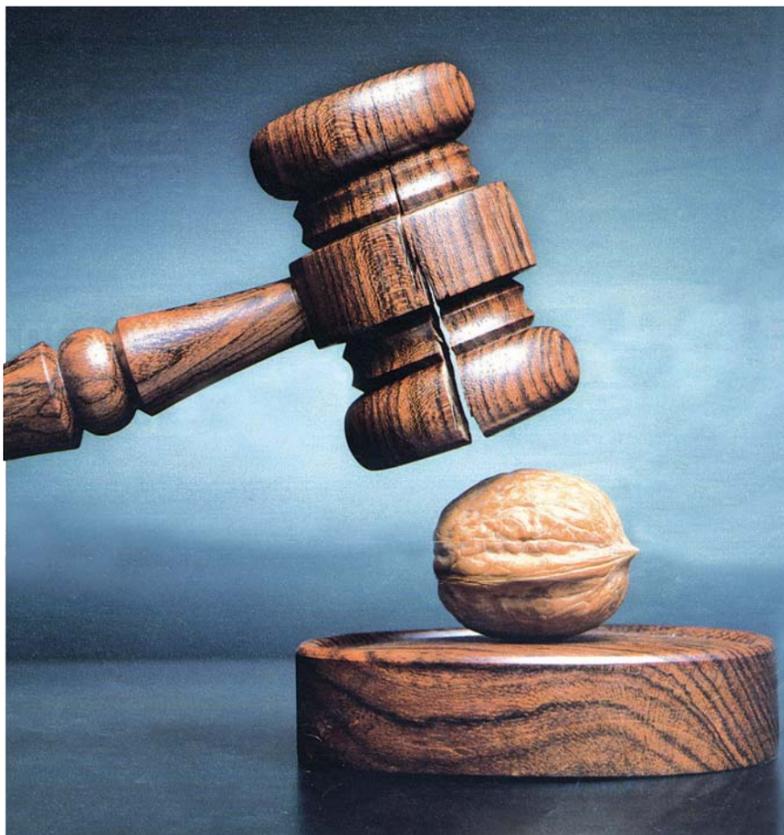
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CENTRE AGAINST PERIPHERY



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 stranglehold 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 the Chure 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 Sher 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 chairman to be accountable, miracles happen. By the late 1990s rural Nepalis were showing that they could take charge of their own destiny, manage health and education, preserve forests, and maintain irrigation canals on their own.

But even this achievement could not withstand the violent onslaught of the extreme left and the extreme right. The Maoists chopped off the feet of democracy in the countryside, and an autocratic 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.

Ever 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 their electoral 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 the people, like we did last year in a nationwide public opinion survey, and you find overwhelming support for immediate local elections to kickstart 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 hyenas. National infrastructure projects like the World Bank-funded transmission line from Tama Kosi is obstructed by a few local goons not answerable to the people (see page 16-17). Major hydropower projects are delayed because of local extortionists.

Politics abhors a vacuum. The void at the local level is being filled by criminals, when it should be composed of elected councillors so we can make up for two lost decades of development. We just have to make sure local bodies are more inclusive than before by weighting representation by women and marginalised.

There is no reason why all this can't happen while the debate on the constitution goes on, while we decide what kind of federalism 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.

nepalTIMES.com

The roots of democracy, #685
Two polls, #681
All politics is local, #612

ON THE WEB

www.nepalTIMES.com

WOUNDS OF WAR

Excellent article! Brilliantly written and could not agree more ('Healing the wounds of war', Rubeena Mahato, #702). Truth, justice and reconciliation are important building blocks of a civil society, if not the most important yet it always manages to take a back seat in our country. We seem incapable of rising above vested interests and short sightedness.

Jaya

It is ignorant for the the writer to say that the changes brought are not due to the armed rebellion of Maoists. It was indeed a catalyst for the transformation of Nepali politics and even society as a whole, which was being overshadowed by the Shah kings. Please refer to the history books and find out if any revolution in this world was accomplished without taking up arms. Be it America, Europe or any other country in the world which brags about being the biggest advocates of democracy in today's world. You don't get freedom without sacrifice, may be this does not apply to some of our haves friends but not for a majority of have nots.

Lal Thapa

It seems 17,000 Nepalis lost their lives so that a few Maoist leaders could transform from paupers to princes. Leaders like Dahal and

Bhattarai have lost all credibility, for they lied to the people and didn't live up to their promises of a new country. We must now move ahead and never allow men like them to occupy positions of power. A new breed of leaders should bring every one to the table and make decisions to improve Nepal. The era of corrupted politicians must end, and it must end now.

Narayana Prasad

The Maoist insurgency brought significant political changes and challenged the status quo but unfortunately has not followed through.

@pigreen

THE TALE OF TWO COMMISSIONS

This is an extremely delicate issue and needs to be handled with utmost caution ('The tale of two commissions,' Binita Dahal, #702). Transitional justice has never been easy, anywhere. Various international experiences clearly show that it's extremely dangerous to give political colour to transitional justice.

It's even more important to take the victims, whose cries for justice have been willfully neglected for years, into confidence. Judicial mechanisms that don't address their concerns won't be credible. It needs to be kept in mind at all times that we aren't looking for a flawless solution here.

However desirable, no any

transitional justice delivery system will be without flaws. The need, rather, is to find an optimal solution that strikes a delicate balance between the need for justice for the victims and forestalling any possibility of a return to conflict. Again, not easy. But there's no other way out. Sitting on a problem is no longer an option. The longer the transitional period drags on, the more complicated the issue of transitional justice will become.

Anil Karki

IRRECONCILABLE TRUTHS

Powerful editorial ('Irreconcilable Truths', Editorial, #702), the most persuasive I have read so far on the futility of the Maoist insurgency and its hypocrisy. The 'glorifiers of violence' will of course never agree because for them no price is too high for the liberation of the people as long as they don't have to pay it. The Maoists were against the status quo? Haha! That's the biggest lie of all.

Aidan

THE 3 R'S

The garbage situation in Kathmandu is atrocious ('Recycle, reuse, reduce,' Donatella Lorch, #702). It's appalling to see how people here have no civic sense whatsoever, but the government needs to be equally responsible and take serious action. Having a 'Solid Waste Management Act' on paper is

not enough, clearly made obvious by the amount of trash we're surrounded by. There aren't even proper dust bins or large garbage containers around the city and the ones that are there are overflowing with garbage. I have noticed people building small temporary shrines in garbage areas to prevent people from throwing their trash there. I think the most primary step to take is to have more garbage bins around and to educate people on the simple task of throwing their garbage in the right places. Also, at least the waste water treatment plant should receive electricity majority of the time, otherwise what's the point of it?

Namuna

Those mountains of garbage piles depict the civic and political culture of Nepal.

Nirmal Ghimire

Waste management is not only good with regards to energy and recycling but it leaves very little waste for landfills ('Wealth from waste', Bhushan Tuladhar, #702). As it is, the Sisdole landfill site is filling up and we already need other alternatives. But the health impact on residents living near the landfill site should also be taken into consideration. We get rid of our waste and dump it near their homes. Personally, it's a terrible concept and it can become a source of multiple health

and environmental problems around the landfill site. Waste management can drastically change this which is why it should be seriously promoted around Nepal.

Gyanu

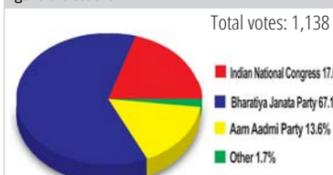
MOBILE REVOLUTION

This is great, a 'mobile revolution' in a very different sense ('Nepal's mobile widows', Juanita Malagon, #702). It's also a good initiative on WHR's part for helping women feel empowered. Having a mobile phone with them at all times is also a great security measure. Can't wait for the day when mobile penetration is 100 per cent and all single mothers have access to it.

Jen

nepalTIMES.com
Weekly Internet Poll #703

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



Weekly Internet Poll # 704.
To vote go to: www.nepalTIMES.com

Q. Do you think the TRC bill should be passed by the CA?

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



HERE WE GO
Trishna Rana



DEVAKI BISTA

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 ream 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 funneled into domestic tournaments, and cricket hungry Nepali fans would have had a chance to see their favourite stars live in action. 🇳🇵



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STATUS UNKNOWN: Indra Keshari Shrestha holds a picture her son Ganga Ram who was abducted by police in 2001 from Surya Binayak in Bhaktapur

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 wartime 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 a 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 Rajapaksa government swept all the dirty truths of war under the carpet through a Lessons-Learned Commission. Years of investigation into Gujarat massacres have led to nowhere and the prime accused is today India's front runner for the prime minister's post.

The political regimes in South Asia have become a safe haven for war criminals and mass-murderers. But the almighties presiding over sacrilege of justice in their land would do well to learn from global experience where perpetrators of Nazi era war crimes and genocide in Cambodia, Rwanda and elsewhere are being brought to book even to this day. Capt Kumar Lama is not an exception, only an indication of what is to come to the guilty who should think twice about travelling abroad.

One victim had told the drafting committee members at a hearing: "We have waited enough. If you deny us justice this time, we will take matters into our own hands." 🇳🇵

"Forgive and move on"

Thirteen years is a long time to be waiting for a son whose face is almost fading from the memory. "I can neither live nor die peacefully without knowing what happened to my son," an ailing Indra Keshari Shrestha says feebly. Her 14-

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

All cases of grave human rights violations must go for trial, but victims must also have the power to forgive

hunger strike, and she does not have national and international support behind her," says Narayani. 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, yet 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



BY THE WAY Anurag Acharya

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 Narayani told me that both their husbands, Rajendra Mali and Basu Dev Chhuwal, were affiliated with the Maoists and were also abducted by the security forces in 2003 and 2004.



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The backlash against the BJP

I asked 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



SCMP/COM

can trounce the BJP. The ABM is a post-2011 phenomenon, gathering members directly proportionate to the rising crescendo of Modi-for-PM. It received a fillip at the battering of the Congress in the assembly elections in December, conveying to all that the Congress couldn't become a pan-India bulwark against Modi, that it was imperative to rally behind a party expected to lead the fight against him in an ABM member's constituency.

Overnight, the ABM membership 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 Gujarat stalked a woman. He, for sure, is an ABM member. Opposition 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. ashrafajaz3@gmail.com



LOOK OUT
Ajaz Ashraf

defeating the BJP, no matter what its ideology is. To vote against the BJP is to also vote against the BJP prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi.

You may think that ABM supporters are mostly Muslim, but they aren't. Even the BJP's own former Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, who exhibited the ABM symptoms weeks before he was expelled from the party, could be classified as ABM. To be a committed ABM member you must have a deep antipathy to Modi, toxic enough to cast aside your existing ideological affinity for one party in favour of another one only because it

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New trio

Hero MotoCorp recently launched three new two-wheeler motorbikes in the market. With these latest models--the Splendor iSmart, the Xtreme and the Pleasure scooter-- the company hopes to appeal to more customers and meet more of their needs.

Arabian nights

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 Gassim, while flights to Madina will be increased from five to seven times per week.



Under The Crown

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.

Sweet treat

Turkish Airlines celebrated the Nepali New Year in style at the Kathmandu airport. The airlines decorated its counter and the staff wore T-shirts bearing New Year greetings while treating passengers to a whole range of sweet delicacies.



Autism Awareness

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.

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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

HARIZ BAHARUDIN

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 catalyst 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 40 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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Father of Nepal's gobar gas industry, #377
Mission Nepal, #197
More power to the villages, #144
Nepalki chhori Helen, #81
Sickness and health in Kathmandu, #32



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.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
30° 15°	29° 12°	29° 13°

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SIMMA RAI TAKES OFF

“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



BIKRAM RAI

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HONDA
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EVENTS



May day,
workers of the world unite. 1 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



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

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

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

Open house,
featuring the work of artists Arpita Shakya, Ashuram Khaiju, and Palpasa Manandhar.
Runs till 7 July, 11am 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 big and small gather at one place.
Runs till 21 April, 10am to 5pm, Bhrikuti Mandap

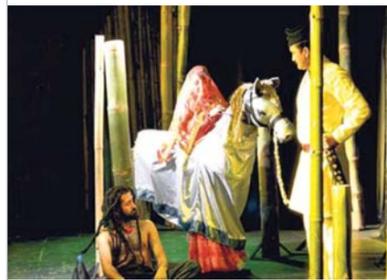


Buddha Jayanti,
celebrate the birth of the great philosopher in the country of his birth.
14 May

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

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

The spirit of youth,
join dynamic young leaders and motivational speakers to share ideas at Youth Action Fund Nepal's annual gathering.
19 April, 11am to 6pm, Embassy Restaurant, Lajimpat



Rashomon,
watch the Nepali adaptation of one of cinema's greatest whodunits.
Rs 200, runs to 10 May, 5.15pm, except Mondays

DINING

Yin Yang Restaurant,
east meets west 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



Lanhua,
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)696920, 9817136896

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

Wunjala Moskva,
treat your palette to Newari and Russian dishes in the lush garden with ancient trees and trickling streams.
Naxal, (01)4415236

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

New Tushita Restaurant,
relaxing ambience and good food. Don't miss out on their penne 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. *Jhamsikhel*

Pagoda Chinese Restaurant,
head to this jade palace if you are in the mood for Chinese with clean, green and peaceful environment.
Park Village Resort, Budhanilkatha, (01)4375280, pvh@wlink.com.np

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

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



Krishnarpan,
a specialty Nepali restaurant at The Dwarika's Hotel serving 6 to 22 courses of authentic Nepali meal.
The Dwarika's Hotel, Battispatali, (01)4479488

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

STEP BY STEP

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 Eelum 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.

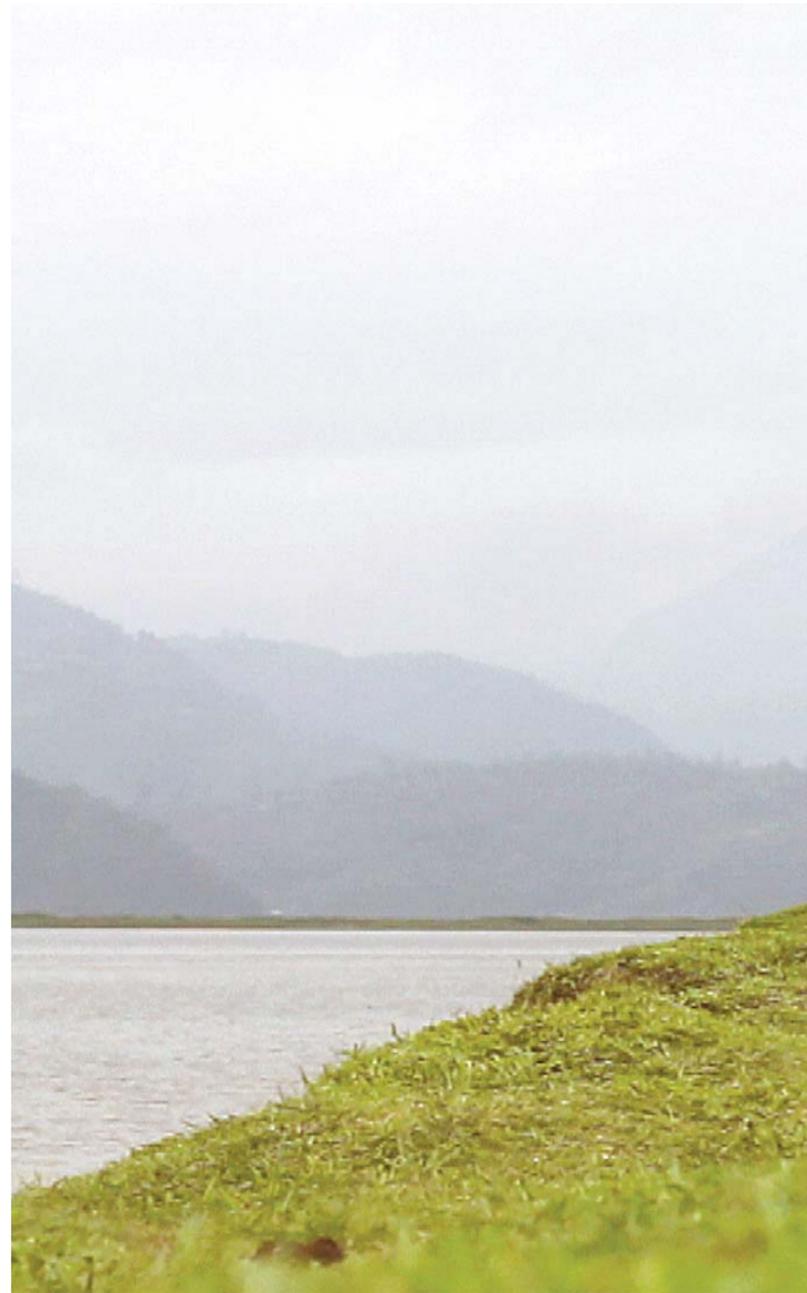
Rijal's innovative and inventive melding of words and song go straight through the heart like an arrow in *Paurakhi*, another jagged-edged composition about a migrant worker who abandons home for "Muglan". It is a timeless story, communicated through the poetry

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*.



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

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.



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

SANGITA SHRESTHOVA
in HOLLYWOOD

Sold in Los Angeles

"I wonder if this is 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 Bansa 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 myself through writing and singing, listening to diverse sound qualities and seeing 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 cliché, 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.

Pailaharu features the arbaja, sarangi, nagara and my original composition and voice. Gandharva

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.

nepalitimes.com

Watch Red Monsoon trailer
Watch Paurakhi music video
Watch Paila Haru music video



slavery within Nepal, trafficking of women to the Gulf to work as household help, as well as young Nepali women sold for prostitution across the northern border in Tibet.

As the theater lights dimmed, I was a bit apprehensive that *Sold* would further re-affirm the stereotype of victimhood that characterises Nepal's geopolitical relations with India. Sure enough, the first moments of the film draw the audience into the

impoverished but innocent setting of a Nepali village where we meet Lakshmi (Niyar Saikia), the film's 13 year-old protagonist and her struggling farmer parents.

Set against a picturesque Himalayan backdrop, the family's daily struggles escalate as heavy rain destroys their harvest. At a village celebration, Lakshmi encounters a young woman who offers her



work in the capital. With promises of a good income, Lakshmi's family is easily lured into signing a 'deal.'

We then see Lakshmi set off on a journey that eventually ends in a Kolkata brothel. For the rest of the film, Nepal and her family become a painful and nostalgic memory, as Lakshmi battles and suffers through the realities of forced commercial sex work.

Though Nepal is important to the overall

story, the country's role in the film is small and symbolic, leaving space for the film to focus on character development and personal stories. As Lakshmi experiences episodes of extreme cruelty, we cringe in disgust. There are also beautiful moments of humanity and solidarity, that provide much needed hope in the brothel's otherwise dreary world.

Jeffrey Brown answered questions afterwards and somewhat surprisingly didn't spend time discussing his film-making 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.

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 become a real anchor for movements. www.soldthemovie.com

nepalitimes.com

Review of the book



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. After 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. 

Sunir Pandey

nepalitimes.com 
 Watch trailer 

MUST SEE



HAPPENINGS



UMA BISTA

LET'S TALK: Prime Minister Sushil Koirala attends the all-party meeting to discuss the Krishna Prasad Adhikari murder case at his residence in Baluwatar on Tuesday. UCPN(Maoist) boycotted the meeting.



NGIMA GELU LAMA

NEW BEGINNINGS: A guitarist performs at a New Year concert in Kathmandu on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

POWDER UP: A devotee throws vermilion powder during the Sindoor Jatra celebrations at Thimi on Tuesday.



NEPALNEWS

SINGING NUN: Ani Choying Drolma (centre, in maroon) was appointed the first ever UNICEF Nepal National Ambassador at the President's office in Sheetal Niwas, Maharajgunj on Friday.

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Bringing Bohemia to Nepal

Situated in the heart of Europe, the Czech Republic is steeped in history and abound with cultural treasures. The government has taken great care to preserve its architecture despite the wars and see-sawing frontiers that have ravaged Europe in the past.

From early Romanesque influences to the popularity of Gothic and Baroque architecture, the nation boasts one of the highest numbers of medieval structures and can be endearingly called 'a country of castles and chateaux'. With 37 of the most interesting castles and chateaux on display, the exhibition *Czech Castles* at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, in conjunction with the National Museum of the Czech Republic, is a visual experience that transports visitors to the medieval grandeur of Bohemia and Moravia.

REVIEW

With all three floors of the gallery devoted to the exhibition, the selections of the structures are based on their historical significance and their architectural and artistic value. Amongst the sites on display are popular UNESCO world heritage sites like Český Krumlov, Kutná Hora and the iconic Prague Castle as well as other historic structures such as Karlštejn Castle, Křivoklát and Jindřichův Hradec.

Upon entering, the visitor is greeted with a 19th century painting of the imposing Prague Castle as well as an entire wall dedicated to photographs and portraits of the St. Vitus Cathedral and the Golden Lane within



the world's largest ancient castle. With its elevated significance, the 9th century castle reflects the history of the Czech nation and is now a symbol of Prague. Similarly, Český Krumlov and Karlštejn Castle, two of the most iconic places in Czech Republic depicting Gothic and Baroque architecture and go-to destinations for visitors to the country, are placed within close proximity.

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

HAUS CAFE

The walk down the road from Pulchowk to Jhamsikhel has become every pedestrian's worst nightmare. The amount of dust and smoke the street blows almost makes one speed-walk to reach the other end. Had it not been for photos of friends who enjoyed their new years at the recently opened Haus Café, I would have never ventured down this dusty boulevard.

Like Casa Toscana which was housed here previously, Haus Café is minimilastic in design. The simple and clean choices of furnishing, and the big windows that adorn its front give the place an airy feel, quite a contrast from the road outside.

Haus Café has a delightfully designed menu, with icons and descriptions perfectly laying out the offerings. And the cuisine is no less extensive: Haus offers Mexican, Italian, American and even combinations of these.

One such concoction was our first dish: the Mexican Pizza (Rs 489), which came topped with ingredients like roasted minced chicken, tomatoes, two different types of cheese and spring onions. Our very first bite left the three of us oohing and aahing in pleasure and we agreed that it held its own



PICS: HARIZ BAHARUDIN

against pizza powerhouses like Fire and Ice or Roadhouse Café. Each bite offered a different burst of flavor, and the crust was neither too thick nor too thin.

Next, we had the Spirali with Mushroom Sauce (Rs 389), although our first choice was Grilled Shrimp Pasta (Rs 689),

which the waiter informed wasn't available that day. Being ardent meat lovers, we were doubtful if a vegetarian pasta would live up to its non-veg counterparts.

But what a delight it turned out to be. The pasta served was evenly coated and not drenched in cream sauce, giving the dish a

simple uncomplicated taste. The generous supply of condiments meant each spoonful we took had at least one of the juicy, chewy sautéed mushrooms, although the dish was already heavenly thanks to the coated pasta itself.

Even though we knew Haus Café was worth a second visit after our mains, the dessert made sure we would not backtrack on our promise. The Chocolate Loaf and Coffee Sauce (Rs 229) was a visual treat - a mighty crown of dark chocolate wafers sitting on a chilled unset block of chocolate ice cream drizzled with fragrant coffee sauce, and served with cream coated coffee beans.



Each spoonful was better than the previous. The crunchiness of the wafers provided a nice balance to the smooth, rich chocolate sauce.

Haus is generous with its portions and one should refrain from over-ordering. As we were about to leave, their manager informed us that Haus's speciality lie in its baked goods so don't forget to try from an array of delectables when you go there. 🇨🇪

Hariz Baharudin

How to get there: Cross the overhead bridge at Pulchowk, and take the road leading towards the Maruti Showroom. Haus Café is located on the left in what used to Casa Toscana.



Great Food Deserves Carlsberg

That calls for a Carlsberg

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).



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, 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 lip-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 immune suppression or when patients with end-stage renal disease stop dialysis because of exhausted financial resources. It is a bitter fact that many patients in India prefer to receive inadequate treatment or even stop 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 practice guidelines and treatment 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 S5. The Galaxy 'S' 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, has dimensions of 5.59 x 2.85 x 0.32 inches, and weighs in at 145g. 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 ver.

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 correct) 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.

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JUST WANT JUSTICE

The quest for justice unites two women whose relatives were killed and disappeared by the Nepal Army and the Maoists

BHRIKUTI 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 Niranjana 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



STILL WAITING: Janak Bahadur Raut, Gyanendra Raj Aran, Bhim Bahadur Shrestha (top l-r), Sabitri Shrestha, Debi Sunuwar, Purnimaya Lama, Sanumaya Lama (bottom l-r) gathered in Kathmandu on Wednesday after the TRC bill was tabled at the Constituent Assembly last week.

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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Whereabouts unknown, #671
How Maina was killed, #313

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KUNDA DIXIT
in KAVRE

As Bhim Neupane walked up the dusty trail to the village of Katunje, 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-

lected 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.

VACUUM IN



PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

VDCs were dissolved by Sher 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 cattles.

After visiting Kavre, Dang, and Rupandehi in 2000 to meet elected village leaders like Neupane, it was clear grassroots democracy was finally delivering development. Cynics who said democracy was a luxury for a poor and illiterate country like Nepal could not

High tension in

RAMESH KUMAR
in SINDHULI

A major transmission line that will feed electricity from several new hydropower projects in the Tama Kosi Valley to the national grid has been stuck 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 compensation for land used for pylon pads. The arrangement has worked everywhere except in Kamalimai and Bhimeswor VDC of Sindhuli.

Now, villagers led by a few vocal oppositionists have also asked for compensation for property owners up to 2,500m on either side of the high voltage lines citing dangers from

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 pylon 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 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.

"The incident left me feeling threatened," Zutt said later.

Local villagers admit opposition to the transmission line is not fair, but say they are afraid to speak out. They say the agitation is led by those outside the 15m strip who got no



compensation. Locals have got the Lawyers for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples to complain in writing to the United Nations, the World Bank headquarters and filed a writ in the Supreme Court. The CPN-M's C P Gajurel has also opposed the transmission line because he says it would be used to export power to India.

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 directly to load centres in eastern Nepal, reducing system loss. It would also free up the Hetauda line to feed Kali Gandaki power to Kathmandu.

WIRELESS: Although pylons have been erected, obstruction in Sindhuli has delayed the Khimti-Dhalkebar transmission line by two years. Local agitators have camped out at the pylon points (*right*) demanding \$1million in compensation from the World Bank.

THE VILLAGES

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

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: As VDC chairman of Kushadevi of Kavre, Bhim Neupane inaugurates a microhydro plant on Gudgud Khola in his village in 2000 (*far, left*). 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 terrorise 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 10+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 gone dry as excavators claw at the slope and tipper trucks groan through clouds of dust. Neupane says the quarries would be strictly regulated if there was an elected village council.

Neupane gazes out to the east at folds of mountains in fading shades of blue, and says wistfully: "We were elected then, we were accountable to the people, and there was a sense of collective destiny. Without elections there is no accountability, and people have no motivation to work together." 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

All politics is local, #560
Think nationally, act locally, #702

Banking on the Bank

Making the restructured World Bank more relevant to Nepal

After nearly two years leading the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim is overseeing a major restructuring to counter its "creeping irrelevance". The problem is structural: its six regions have been operating more as six regional banks, and "knowledge wasn't moving from one region to another". The Bank is also seen as being "too slow and bureaucratic" and "risk averse", and that it is "happier building metro systems in China than getting its hands dirty in Afghanistan".



COMMENT

Bihari Krishna Shrestha

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 to show for it. Not all of it is the Bank's fault. While Nepal is widely applauded for poverty reduction that has been achieved more 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 70 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 1988.

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 willfully 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 wrecking 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 for 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

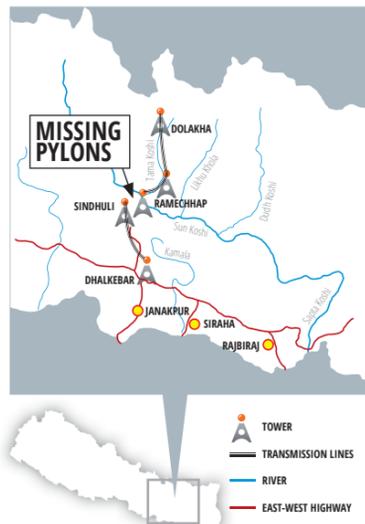
Bihari Krishna Shrestha is an anthropologist and retired civil servant.

Sindhuli

The delays in Sindhuli has 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. 🇳🇵



RAMESH KUMAR

Give and take

Rama Parajuli, 16 April,
BBC Nepali Service

BBC
नेपाली

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

What kind of discussions are taking place with the UCPN(M) after they disrupted the CA?

We are already taking steps to solve this through discussions. As far as 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 I can't say is how much the CA will revise this part.

Isn't the bill also criticised for failing to categorise any serious crime except rapes?

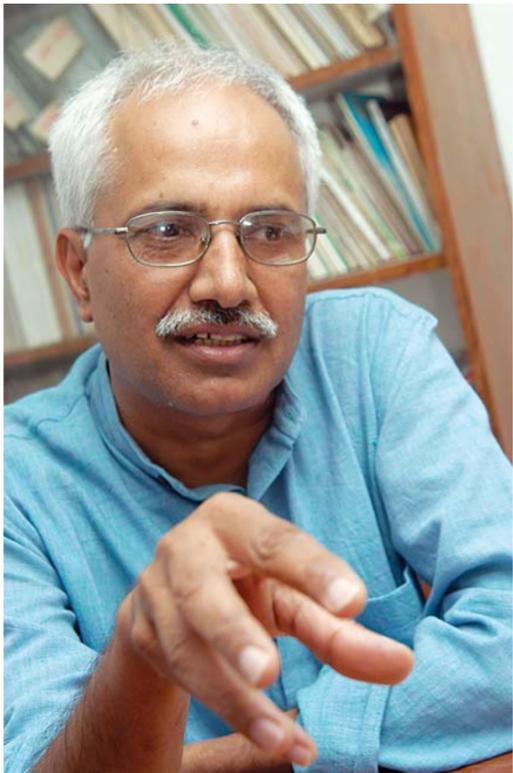
We have categorised these things, but it may be true that others' definitions differ from ours. We have included what sort of gross human rights violations the commission can decide upon and have even given it the power to decide what sort of crimes are not

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.



constitution seven years ago. The government cannot forget this fact. **But don't people from your own party say the NC doesn't feel strongly about this because it knows many people connected to the regime it ran in those days will be investigated if your bill is passed?**

All these is hearsay and guesswork. I am an NC member but nobody has told me anything like this. It is true that I have sometimes been requested not to bring these issues up, but I told them that it is crucial we discuss it.

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 setup a body to make appointments to the commission. And after that, we are committed to giving the commission whatever resources it needs.

But human rights activists say this is where the commission can recommend letting criminals go free.

No. The commission can only make such recommendations if there are facts to prove such cases. I think people are getting confused with the wording of the law.

Will the victims' families get the justice they've been waiting for all these years?

That's our aim. But we have to understand that this is transitional justice. We already have laws and courts in place to deal with crimes in normal circumstances. Though we tabled a bill recently, all of us know it was defined thoroughly in the peace accord and interim



नेपाल Rabindra in Nepal, 13 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ Let bygones be bygones. Forget all those who were killed, looted and tortured. Just try to prevent it from happening again. ”

NC leader Ram Chandra Poudel to relatives of war victims from both sides, quoted in *setopati.com*

Two views

An editorial in Kantipur and an op-ed in Annapurna Post looking at the two sides of the government's bill tabled in parliament last Wednesday for the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission on Enforced Disappearances.

RECONCILING US

Editorial, *Kantipur*, 13 April

कान्तिपुर

The government and the Maoists signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, which then paved way for the Interim Constitution and Constituent Assembly election. We cannot overlook this political reality and examine conflict era cases only under the existing laws. This will never lead to a solution.

The decade long conflict killed thousands of Nepalis and left an irreparable legacy of violence, for which the Maoists' decision to take up arms can never be justified. Perpetrators from both sides of the conflict cannot be pardoned for their involvement in serious criminal offences. But when it comes to other excesses that may have taken during the conflict, reconciliation after finding the truth is the only way out.

The objectives of the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission are to investigate grave conflict era cases, take action against those involved in those crimes and create a conducive environment for reconciliation for the remaining cases. Thousands of Nepalis lost their lives in the conflict and while the degree of loss might vary from one case to another, everyone should focus their attention towards healing the wounds of the war. The TRC shouldn't and cannot have any provision for blanket amnesty, but can have a provision to forgive the perpetrators with the approval of the victims.



KUMAR SHRESTHA/A PEOPLE WAR

The country needs a Truth and Reconciliation Commission right away. Instead of preventing the formation of the commission everyone should focus their attention towards making it more effective. And it would be best if all the discussion takes place at the elected parliament.

RISKY TRUTHS

Charan Prasai in *Annapurna Post*, 13 April

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

If perpetrators of conflict era atrocities are allowed to go scot free due to political pressure and victims are denied justice in the name of reconciliation, the country might get mired in another war. In the absence of justice, victims might be forced take the law into their own hands. And since in most cases the perpetrators are known, they will be at higher risk. There is a high chance the country's peace process might derail and the country might never be able to prevent another conflagration ignited by the lack of justice.

If the political parties agree on forming a commission by favouring the perpetrators, it will not lead to reconciliation. A commission that only has provisions for truth and reconciliation goes against international law and will make the successful completion of the peace process all the more difficult. If the commission is formed on the basis of this bill, it won't be accepted globally by the UN and the larger international community. The country's judicial system, the victims and all concerned parties will not accept such a commission.

Long term peace cannot be achieved by overlooking the victims' grievances and their demand for justice. It will weaken the building blocks of rule of law and democracy. So it is now for the political leadership of the country to open their eyes to the future consequences that this bill might invite.

Stop child trafficking

Editorial, *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 6 April

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका



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 living in remote areas, and once they are in Kathmandu the children are either exhibited to foreigners who donate for their support, or are sent to work at the homes of the well-to-do, and some are even sold for foreign adoption. The trafficking business has political protection, which is why enforcement of the law is lax.

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 murders 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 rate.

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 वर्षको नयाँ आफ्नै

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523644 • Kapilbastu 550160 • Kawasoti 541001 • Lahan 560955 • Laibandi 501628 • Mahendranagar 520745 • Mircharya 550803
Narayanghat 532567 • Nawalparasi 521002 • Nepalgunj 551598 • Parsa 583199 • Pokhara 537333 • Pokhara 539389 • Pyuthan
460464 • Rajbiraj 523542 • Sarlahi 521711 • Siraha 520442 • Surkhet 525196 • Tikapur 560426 • Tulsipur 520808 • Waling 440610

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: BEEEEEP is a monkey, Comrade BEEEEEP is a donkey, and so are the other honourable BEEEEEPs in the BEEEEEP Constituent Assembly, the LONG BEEEEEP and ANOTHER EVEN LONGER BEEP are a bunch of @\$\$#!&\$\$. Whew, 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 would not 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 knational pride that the Knepali 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

Dude you need to take off your shirt too.



DEV NARAYAN SAH

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 scourge 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 BEEP) 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.



The Ass

PAST PRESENT FUTURE

DIWAKAR CHETTRI

