The CA is ‘bugged’

The second Constituent Assembly is consistently in the news, but not for the reason it was elected: to write the country’s new constitution.

The latest negative news is that when CA members started getting itches and rashes, it was discovered that the chairs in the main hall and the committee rooms were infested with bed bugs. “At least this will keep them awake,” quipped a cartoon character in a Nepali newspaper. That was a reference to pictures published in newspapers showing a near-empty CA with even the members present all snoring away.

CA members have come under blistering attack in the media for pressuring Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat to dole out Rs 50 million in pork barrel funds in the new budget for their constituencies, up from Rs 1 million currently. Even though the CA is still missing 26 nominated members, the total outlay would be a whopping Rs 9.1 billion. Oblivious to the public mood, 223 CA members on Wednesday presented another list of demands: tax-free vehicles imported, increases in house allowance and body guards. Cumulatively, the demands have tarnished the image of the CA members, spreading the public perception that they are not serious about meeting the deadline for writing the constitution by January 2015. This has added to the general sense of drift in government and the bureaucracy, with many urgent appointments and decisions pending.

CONTEMPT OF FREEDOM
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

A NEW NEPAL RISES
THIS IS IT
BY RUBEENA MAHATO
PAGE 3

NEPAL’S FAITH HEALERS
Belief in traditional healers is still strong in Nepal, and could complement modern healthcare.
PAGE 16-17
I

licutors and demagogues jall journalists and dilute democracy to such an extent that it doesn't surprise anyone. In Nepal's history, we saw the feudal Rana regime ruling with an iron fist, we experienced the intolerance of three decades of absolute Panchayat monarchy, and the authoritarian streak of King Gyanendra who tried to turn the clock back after 2001.

And when they were elected to power in 2008, the Manists showed their true colour by physically attacking media outlets critical of them. The extreme left and the extreme right are both hardwired to suppress the press, so they were just acting accordingly.

But it is when a political party which swears by core values of democracy starts trying to muzzle the media, however, that we have to start being worried. Whatever you may say about the feckless NC and UML governments of the 1990s, they at least believed in an open society. The NC's Nabarhi Acharya, who has a rather sweeping portfolio as the Minister of Law, Justice, Constituent Assembly and Human Rights Affairs, has taken a personal interest in pushing through a Contempt of Court Bill in parliament. Under Clause 4, the proposed bill seeks to define contempt of court as any report or expression that casts aspersion, defames, undermines the public's trust, or spreads lies about the court or judges.

Minister Acharya's haste and timing in trying to ram this bill through parliament, when there are so many other more urgent matters to attend to, is telling. It follows the controversy and uproar over the appointment of eight judges to the Supreme Court in April which he vigorously backed.

As it turned out, six of those eight had skeletons rattling loudly in their closets. Some were self-confessed polygamists, others had a record of protecting drug smugglers and criminals.

In the past, the Supreme Court has ruled against the Nepal Medical Council's decision to restrict the quota for MBBS admissions to a private medical college. Last week, a newly-appointed justice has freed on bail the chairman of the private medical college. Last week, the newly-appointed justice has freed on bail the chairman of the private medical college. Last week, the newly-appointed justice has freed on bail the chairman of the private medical college.

The current political climate in which the proposed Contempt of Court Bill is being debated is telling. It follows the controversy and uproar over the appointment of the Supreme Court judges. The bill is being pushed through parliament, where a large majority of the members are affiliated with the ruling party.

The proposed Contempt of Court Bill seeks to expand the definition of contempt of court to include expression on social networking sites and online forums. The bill also proposes to increase the penalties for contempt of court, including fines and imprisonment.

The government's move to pass this bill comes in the wake of several instances where journalists and media outlets have exposed corruption and irregularities in the public sector. The government has denied the allegations and has accused the media of spreading false information.

The Contempt of Court Bill is being argued in the same context as the recent cases of media outlets being sued for publishing information that is considered to be defamatory or offensive. The government has also sought to introduce a new law that would make it easier to sue for defamation.

The proposed Contempt of Court Bill is seen as a tool to stifle freedom of expression and to silence critical voices. The bill has been criticized by media organizations and human rights groups for being overly broad and for infringing on the right to freedom of expression.

The proposed Contempt of Court Bill is expected to be passed in the upcoming parliament session. The government has said that it is necessary to ensure the respect for the institution of the court and to maintain public confidence in the judiciary.
A New Nepal also rises
Nepal’s rural women are holding up more than half the sky

In Kathmandu’s stagnant air, things stay predictable and banal. It is hard to stay motivated in a job which brings you face to face everyday with everything that is wrong in the country. Politicians say the same things, reporters regurgitate them, and editors have run out of ways to say the same thing in different words. My big fear is that I will still be writing about CA III two years from now.

When the cynicism gets overwhelming, I pack my bags and head out of the capital, and while this has increased my faith in this country and its incredibly resilient people is restored, I come back and everything that is wrong in the country.

In the small towns and hamlets of the hills and Tarai, Nepali women are at the forefront of change, increasingly assuming more decision-making roles in their families and communities. Partly it is because the men are missing – away in the Gulf, away in work. Women-headed households are the norm, and while this has increased their workload, it is transforming traditional gender dynamics.

The Agriculture for Food campaign honoured 22 women farmers in Kathmandu recently. They came from all over the country and had overcome great odds to become model farmers and leaders in their communities. Their husbands are away in Dubai, Punjab or Saudi Arabia and most were raising their children alone, and doing well.

Tankanaya Magar from Morang ploughed her own fields even though it is not socially acceptable. Rajkumari Sada (pic, above) from Mahottari broke social conventions and overcame discrimination for being from the Mulahar community.

Surja BK from Dadeldhura used her success as a vegetable farmer to abolish the chaupadi system that consigned women to the cowshed every month. The superstitious believe that bad luck will befall the family if the women are not banished: cows will die and harvests will fail.

“I demolished the chaupath, used the income from selling vegetables to buy a cow, and consumed its milk when I was menstruating just to prove that the cow couldn’t die. I forced my neighbours to believe me,” Surja BK said.

Rajkumari was ecstatic that she could afford to send two children to school, build a bhakarti and a new latrine. Kashikala Tamata from Mugu recounted how she was the first Dalit in the village to grow vegetables and how life is now much different from when her family had to forage for food.

Women now do much more of the work in the farms than men, but only a tenth of Nepali women own land. National agricultural policies are not made with women farmers or their priorities in mind. These women farmers and many more like them have turned their lives around with little or no help from the government. Most of Nepal’s progress has happened not because of, but despite the government. How much further ahead would we have been if politicians displayed more integrity, if we had better governance and the central government didn’t interfere and sabotage community-led initiatives.

There is a tendency in over-indulged Kathmandu to dismiss the work of non-profits and rural cooperatives. While they could be more transparent and inclusive, local NGOs, women’s groups, and community forestry user groups have been central in bringing about the small changes we see across rural Nepal today.

There is also sweeping criticism of foreign aid for being wasteful and encouraging dependency, but outside help in education, health, skill-development and empowerment of women has paid off. Granted, we don’t have roads and airports and high-rise buildings, but the economy is stagnant, the government has failed.

Six years ago, as a young reporter, I travelled across the eastern Tarai districts of Bara and Rautahat talking to Madhesi women who were the first in their families to venture out of their homes. They were learning to read and write, had enrolled their girls in schools, had obtained land ownership and were contributing to family income.

The 22 women farmers honoured recently spoke of similar struggles, and broke down when they shared tales of the hardships they overcame. They are all proud of their achievements: having the money to send their children to school, becoming the primary breadwinner, owning a piece of land and earning social acceptance and respect.

The women of this country have quietly taken charge. If only there was elected and accountable local government, a more responsive and caring political centre, and elected MPs who are not preoccupied with doling out Rs 50 million to each other, this country would finally rise.
Progress on hold

Acquiring land for large infrastructure projects is deterring investors

Last month, construction began on the much-awaited Mechi-Mahakali Electric Railway that will be the backbone of mass transportation in Nepal in the future.

The Minister for Physical Planning and Transport Bimalendra Nidhi laid the foundation stone for the project’s 106-km Simara-Bardibas section of the tracks, and devoted a large part of his speech beseeching local people not to delay the project.

But the very next day, locals from Ranigunj obstructed construction of a 5km bed track citing inadequate compensation offered by the government for their land. Since then, construction has ground to a halt.

The railway is also plagued by controversy between government departments. For example, the Department of Wildlife and Nature Conservation and the Chitwan National Park have opposed a proposed railway alignment that would bisect the park.

“The state is ready to compensate the locals to acquire their land as per the law, but how will it be possible if they start demanding unreasonably high compensation and obstruct major projects like this one,” says Ananta Acharya, director general of the Railway Department.

Land prices shoot up as soon as large infrastructure projects are announced, making the projects unfeasible. In 2013-2014, not a single km of transmission lines were added to Nepal’s electricity grid despite the Rs 6 billion earmarked for it. This year Rs 13.5 billion was set aside for cross-border transmission lines to import power from India, but there has been no progress.

A 220kV transmission line that stretches 75km from Sahare of Dolakha to Bhaktapur on the East-West Highway was started a decade ago. But the power lines that will feed electricity from several new hydropower projects in the Tama Kosi Valley to the national grid have been stuck for over two years because locals have demanded $1 million in compensation for three pylons in Sindhuli.

“We have had several rounds of discussion but the locals in Thaiba and Khokana are demanding 100 per cent compensation which we simply cannot accept,” says NEA’s Pushparaj Khadka. “Even if we generate sufficient electricity, we can’t feed the growing demand of Kathmandu unless we complete this transmission line.”
The NEA is now looking for experts to implement additional infrastructure projects as it lacks skilled or educated laborers.

But other experts admit that as long as the state is perceived as unstable and corrupt, any investor promotion and protection could really heighten concerns.

Institute of Ophthalmology's Vision Honored award ceremony for his work overseeing the global design strategy of Kia Motors.

The Tanahu Hydropower Ltd has prepared the resettlement and indigenous compensation demands. There is no serious dispute over the compensation and livelihood programs in the Melamchi valley. Among other projects, the composition line transmission projects sometimes face problems, as the government's regulations can provide only 10 percent of the land price for the strips below the electric lines as usufruct, while people often demand acquiring the land.

So, would you say this is a major deterrent to foreign investment in Nepal?

Investor confidence seems to be gradually improving, but it is still affected by political stability concerns under the ongoing transition. There are also a range of governance-related and labor union problems. Bottlenecks in infrastructure are severe, particularly power and transport. Human capital is also constrained, lacking skilled or educated laborers. Investor confidence can still be secured if the government wholeheartedly invites and welcomes private investors of indigenous industries, and protects them by proactively helping them resolve any impediments, be it labor disputes, power supply, problems on governance, etc. Given that crippling power shortage is likely to be resolved in the next few years and political transition is also progressing, initiating such genuine investor promotion and protection could really heighten confidence. Consensus among political parties on key economic development agenda will also help.

What are some important steps the government or parliament should take to remove obstacles for urgent infrastructure projects?

I agree that land acquisition and compensation will be increasingly challenging, in view of the need to accelerate infrastructure development, rapidly rising land prices due to urbanisation, people's sentiments with their lands, and limited experienced personnel to handle the process. The present Land Acquisition Act 1977 is also outdated, lacking pertinent provisions such as for informal settlers and indigenous peoples. Presently, ADB is facilitating the government to draft a national resettlement policy to provide an umbrella framework to set out key principles and procedures. Establishing scientific land valuation guidelines is also pursued as critical, as indisciplined valuation is causing a lot of confusion and tensions locally. Kenichi Yokoyama, the ADB's representative in Nepal said (see interview).

But other experts admit that as long as the state is perceived as unstable and corrupt, any new policy will be a challenge to apply on the ground.
The United Nations member states are now participating in the post-2015 development agenda dialogue. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are to be achieved by 2030 are set to supersede the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September 2015. Some MDGs have fared better than others, and results have differed from country to country. In Nepal’s case, we have registered dramatic progress in reducing maternal and child mortality rates and have been hailed as a role model among least-developed countries. This is the result of joint efforts of the local communities, the government, UN agencies, INGOs and donors. The media’s role was no less important.

When the media points out weaknesses in a program or reports on bungled-up or incompetent implementation of development projects, it actually helps in improvement. A number of organisations and government officials see the value in independent media’s work and support it. In the absence of this watchdog role, it would be difficult to get a holistic picture of a country’s interlinked challenges. A general or investigative piece about how projects, goals and initiatives are faring is necessary to keep stakeholders on their toes. Transparency, accountability, access to justice and good governance are not just noble abstracts but are rights of citizens. They get frequent mentions in manifests of political parties before the elections and in annual government programs. That they do not just remain on paper is one of the responsibilities of a free media.

Developing countries should therefore take SDG # 16, which speaks about freedom of the media, no less seriously than others. Rather, they should go beyond currently proposed measures. The Global Forum for Media Development (Full disclosure: I am a Steering Committee member of this network) has welcomed inclusion of targets for capable institutions, media freedom, and access to information by governments. GFMD believes the inclusion of targets on freedom of expression and access to information would help build stronger media and civil society institutions to closely and independently monitor all post-2015 development commitments. The Open Working Group of the UN General Assembly proposed last month that SDG #16 (‘Achieve peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law, effective and capable institutions’) should include sub-goals to ‘improve public access to information and government data and promote freedom of media, association and speech’. Public access to information and government data is a vital element of a functioning democracy. The world over, we have seen that if there is an attempt to deny access to information, people try to find ingenious ways to get it. At times, it could lead to dangerous misinformation which is counter-productive, especially in today’s digital age.

The same is true for freedom of media, freedom of speech are under increasing attack in many countries. Some South Asian countries, which even a decade ago could claim to have fiercely critical, credible and free media, can no longer do so. One way to redeem themselves is to support efforts to ensure inclusion of free media, freedom of speech and access to information in the SDGs. Nepal should join those nations that are working towards this end. There’s a very broad consensus among the UN member states on goal number one of the SDGs: Poverty eradication, building shared prosperity and promoting equality. It aims to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. With inequality rising, for example in India and China, an independent watchdog is needed to monitor progress. That watchdog is the media. Implementation of the new goals would hinge on independent media monitoring globally and within countries. As the agency mandated to promote free, independent, and pluralistic media, UNESCO could take a lead role in monitoring progress toward the achievement of these goals. Its work with press freedom and access to information makes it the right agency. We know that media matters not just to ensure a robust democracy, but also to foster the peoples’ participation necessary for development.

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Seven women, seven summits, #613
Women on top, #647
nepalitimes.com
#714      4 - 10 July 2014

The rainfall deficit for June was nearly 40%, which will have serious consequences because it was right at the start of the paddy planting season. The monsoon is picking up speed, albeit belatedly. Expect light night rain over the weekend with bright mornings and getting overcast towards afternoon. This is the usual daily weather pattern during the monsoon, but for now the precipitation is expected to be lighter than normal.

KATHMANDU
ARE WE THERE YET?:
Four of seven team members (pic, l-r) Pema Diki Sherpa, Chunu Shrestha, Asha Kumari Singh, and Nimdoma Sherpa conquered the summit of Mt Denali in Alaska on 24 June, their sixth summit on seven continents.
PICS: ANG TSHERING LAMA

What does the top of North America look like? It's no longer surprising that seven Nepali women can tell you.

But for the record: “The weather is foggy but it’s great being here.” That is how Asha Kumari Singh described the view from the 6,194m summit of Mt Denali on 24 June at 1:45pm.

Thirteen days after arriving at base camp on Kahiltna Glacier, five members of the Seven Summits Womens Team from Nepal reached the top: Chunu Shrestha, Nimdoma Sherpa, Asha Kumari Singh, Pema Diki Sherpa, and cameraperson Ang Tshering Lama.

The successful climb of Mt Denali in Alaska (also known as Mt McKinley) was their sixth climb of the highest peaks on six continents since they climbed Mt Everest in 2008. The team is scheduled to climb Mt Vinson in Antarctica in December.

Fog was just one of the elements that made for a difficult climb. The team waited, bags packed, for five days at Camp 14 at 4300m for the weather to clear. The final summit push started at 7.50am on 24 June and it took them six hours to get to the top. During their descent, the women waited out a blizzard still high up on the mountain.

“To protect from wind, the climbers need to build an ice wall which we hadn’t done in other climbs,” expedition coordinator Shailee Basnet explained via email. “So weather was certainly a much bigger factor than other mountains.”

This was also the women’s first self-supported climb which presented its own challenges. Including backpacks and sleds full of supplies, they were pulling over 50 kgs each on the glacier. In contrast to Mt Everest which is only 3,000m from Base Camp to top, Denali’s base is at nearly sea level, making it a 6,000m ascent.

Not all of the seven women reached the summit. Maya Gurung was diagnosed with pneumonia before the climb. Pujan Acharya was affected by a shoulder problem that hampered her last climb and Shailee Basnet had to stay back at camp to take care of logistical issues.

“Along the way we’ve met numerous people who have shown implausible belief and trust in what we are doing. That’s the fuel that keeps us going,” Basnet said. “Also, our strength is certainly being a team. We motivate, support and correct each other all the time.”

Their reception in North America has been overwhelmingly positive. They have been noticed, and come across people absolutely in love with Nepal.

The women will be speaking at the Lions International Club at the Air Canada Center in Toronto. The US State Department has also organised a week-long tour of meetings and media interaction in Los Angeles and Washington DC.

The cycle of receiving support, and sharing it again in return as positive ambassadors for Nepal and for women, truly exemplifies their slogan: “Together we reach higher.”

ARE WE THERE YET?: Four of seven team members (pic, l-r) Pema Diki Sherpa, Chunu Shrestha, Asha Kumari Singh, and Nimdoma Sherpa conquered the summit of Mt Denali in Alaska on 24 June, their sixth summit on seven continents.
A night with Mao, fancy a date with a dead dictator? 4 to 6 July, 5.30pm, Theatre Village, Uttar Dhoka

DJ Zumba, dance and stay fit as 25 zumba instructors from Kathmandu collaborate with a DJ. 27 June, 5 to 11pm Hotel Radisson

Cha cha cha, learn one month’s worth of Salsa in four days. Rs 1,000 for singles, Rs 1,500 for couples, Monday to Thursday, 7.30 to 8.30am/5 to 6pm/6 to 7pm, Salsa Dance Academy, Bhatbhateni

Epic love, catch the screening of Indian Classic Umrao Jaan. 4th to 7th, 2pm, Indian Cultural Centre, Narayani, (01)4412715

Retrospective, a look back at the oeuvre of senior artist and cubism enthusiast Surendra Pradhan. Runs till 15 July, Park Gallery, Pulchowk, parkgallery.com.np

Open house, featuring the work of artists Anjali Shrestha, Ashwani Khola, and Palpuna Maranath. Runs till 7 July, 7am to 6pm, Gallery Meeder, Chokopar

Amalgam A series of talks around the ongoing exhibition at Siddharta Art Gallery. 6 July, Printmaking, a review of the works of Saurganga Darshandhari, Sushma Maharjan, Surendra Maharjan, and Kabiraj Lama, 3pm 13 July, Performance art, looking at the performances of Sunil Sigdel, Jupiter Pradhan, Prithvi Shrestha, Saurganga Darshandhari, and Bhikha Shrestha, 3pm 20 July, Socio-political perspective in art, questioning the role of the artist as an informed citizen, 3pm 27 July, Street art, spreading socio-political messages through art in the local community, 3pm Siddharta Art Gallery, Babar Mohan Restored

BFF, adopt a dog from Animal Nepal’s shelter – the local mixed breeds are healthier and better adjusted to local conditions than pedigrees. Rs 150, animalnepal.org, (01)5538068, 9841334537

Muna Maidan, Nepal’s favourite epic on stage again. Runs till 16 July, Rs 100/200/300/500, Arjun Koirala, Jamal

Ropain, go to the fields and celebrate the rice-planting season. 6 July

BFF, try out the best brews from Belgium. Grill Me, Thamel

Pack my lunch, mother’s cooking delivered to your doorstep. 9880406546, www.facebook.com/packmylunchnepal

Backyard, incredibly reasonable prices and modest and simple food at this no-nonsense restaurant. Jhamsikhel

Kathmandu kora, join hundreds of cycling enthusiasts and ride for 50, 75, or 100 km to raise funds for a birthing centre in Pyutar, Lalitpur. 18 to 19 July, facebook.com/kathmandu.kora

Busy Bee, head over for live rock and pop performances in English, Nepali and Hindi, indulge in their beer and pizzas to waste the night away in good fashion. Lakeside, Pokhara, (08)4248999, reservations@lalduhar.com

In Bruges, try out the best beers from Belgium. Grill Me, Thamel

Little Italy, go vegetarian at this new Italian food chain and don’t forget to end your meal with the chef’s special, the chocolate bomb. Jhansikhel

Hole in the wall, great beer and sizzling barbeque, and also organic tea and coffee. Runs to 25 July, Thamel

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

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

Jersey fest, wear your team’s jersey and jump in the pool if you’re not kept busy by the bubble machine and the trampoline. Rs 499, 5 July, 1pm onwards, International Club, Sampa

The written word, chance for young writers to hone their skills at this one-day workshop. 5 July, Thames International College, Old Baneswor, Call 9851074130 to register

Cinemandu, one more chance to watch the popular film Aatadhi and another acclaimed short Baansali. 4 July, 4 to 6.30pm, Nepal Bharat Library, free entrance
**GETAWAYS**

**Starry Night BBQ,**
catch Ciney Gurung live as you chomp on your meat stick. Rs 1499, 7pm onwards, Fridays, Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, (01)4412999

**Reggae night,**
get a load of Jah music from Chari Amilo Kala Samuha every weekend. 4 July, 6pm onwards, Shambala Garden Café, (01)4412999

**Shaatriya sangeet,**
the best of Hindustani classical every new moon night. 27 July, 4pm onwards, Balthali

**Music at Manny’s,**
live Hindi and Nepali pop music with Shubnam Gurung and Dinesh Quartet, Manny’s Eatery and Tapas Bar, Jawalakhel

**Balthali Village Resort,**
a small, cosy retreat with a bird’s eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses. Balthali, (01)465918

**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. Kathmandu, (01)470278

**Waterfront Resort,**
head to this eco-friendly resort right in front of Phewa Lake. Waterfront Resort, Pokhara, (61)466303/304, (01)4410051, shangrilavillage@gmail.com

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

**Himalayan wellness centre,**
a one-stop centre for a relaxed mind and a healthy body inside the Park Village Hotel. www.meditationsneakers.com

**Famous Farm,**
wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze walking in through the courtyards. www.rural-heritage.com

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

**Spiritual spirits at Dhokaima,**
Nilo Ailara: Aila with lime and Triple Sec with bottom layer of Blue Curacao.

**KNOCK-OUT**

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With just eight teams remaining in the World Cup, you can’t miss a moment. Here are the fixtures for the quarter-finals:

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**Famous Farm,**
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With just eight teams remaining in the World Cup, you can’t miss a moment. Here are the fixtures for the quarter-finals:
Nepal’s boxing team trains for the Asian Games in September in Korea

BASIL EDWARD TEO
Minu Gurung (pic, left) listened carefully and followed her boxing coach as she trained at the Dasrath Stadium this week. Two months before the 2014 Asian Games in Korea, Nepal’s boxing team is intensifying its training.

Whistle in one hand and timer in the other, Gurung’s coach Om Kumar Maskey locks his sights on her as she bobs and weaves away from her sparring partner. He shouts out instructions: ‘Block! Power! Box!’

Gurung, 24, is here six days a week, two times per day, with the team of ten boxers who go through a mix of strength and conditioning, technical training and sparring sessions.

“In the last Asian Games, boxing was the only sport to bring Nepal a bronze medal,” says Maskey, who has high hopes for Gurung, the youngest boxer in the team.

Minu joined the army five years ago just so she could join the National Boxing Team. “I hope to win a gold medal in September in Korea,” she says simply, but with determination.

The Nepal boxing team has eight men and two women. Most are from the Nepal Army, Nepal Police and the Armed Police Force. Only one is a civilian. While the selection process is open to all, security personnel have an edge due to their discipline, physical fitness and budget for training they receive.

Coming from a family of athletes, Gurung was imbued with a fighting spirit since she was young. Her mother was a competitive hockey and football player, and her elder brother is also a boxer in the Indian Army.

“My mother and brother were always supportive of me,” she says, “but initially my father disapproved of my boxing since he thinks it is a brutal sport. But he approves now, since I began winning competitions.”

In the selection tournament in June she won Gold, securing a selection for the games. The male team plans to select five members.

In the ring, Gurung gets no special treatment just because she is a woman. She trains with the guys, and sparring with bigger and stronger opponents is no problem as she relies on technique and speed.

“I may not be a hard puncher with knockout power, but I have good defence and I am also a good counter fighter,” says Gurung.

Purna Bahadur Lama (pic, top left), a boxer from the Armed Police Force, is the oldest member on the team. Although the veteran first laced up his gloves at 16, this is the first time he was selected to be on the team for the Asian Games.

“This will be my first Asian Games, but it might also be my last,” he admits, “my body is not what it used to be.”

After Korea, Gurung plans to compete in the Asian Boxing Championship in December, and hopes to represent Nepal in the 2016 Olympics.

She says: “I have big dreams but I also have the willpower to make them come true.”

At 33, Purna Bahadur Lama is the oldest boxer on the team. The 2014 Asian Games he says might be his last competition.

Coach Om Kumar Maskey demonstrates a defensive boxing move to Minu Gurung during a training session.

Minu Gurung prides herself as a speedy counter puncher rather than a knockout artist.

Lama lands a straight left on a teammate who fights at a weight class 10kg heavier.

Lama and 2010 Asian Games bronze medallist Deepak Maharjan (right most) looks on as Gurung spars in the ring. Due to a right knee injury, Maharjan is still unable to train at full strength.

Boxers wrap their hands before sparring and bag work to protect their knuckles and wrists.

“A strong lower body is a must, as proper boxing technique utilizes power from the thighs and hips to throw a punch and evade punches.

Ultimately, boxing is an individual sport despite the help and instruction.

Shadowboxing helps make boxing techniques second-nature to the players.
Why do we watch bad action movies? Not all of us do, but personally I feel compelled to watch the summer blockbuster extravaganza of the year because of the faint hope in my heart that it will dodge the usual pitfalls of one-dimensional characters, dreadful jokes, wildly outlandish end of the world scenarios, and redeem itself by somehow developing new ground-breaking action scenes.

The fourth installment of Michael Bay’s Transformers franchise is quite frankly rather bad. It is too long, generally banal, and the Transformers are mostly annoying and unappealing characters (except for the endearing, heroic Bumblebee and the always magnificent Optimus Prime).

Mark Wahlberg as the lead character Cade Yeager manages to retain a little gravitas as he runs, jumps, wields an alien saber, and tries to rescue Tessa (Nicola Peltz) his blonde, long-legged, daughter (thankfully she appears to have brains, just enough to not infuriate the viewer). Stanley Tucci almost saves the film in his role as Joshua Joyce, a brilliant inventor who has strayed a little from the righteous path - but in general this film is exactly the kind of pulp the Hollywood mill churns out year after year shamelessly raking in hundreds millions in the process.

Bay admits to making his films for teenage boys. Indeed, why not, the world is full of teenage boys needing to be entertained. Unfortunately, in addition to being self-indulgent the hapless Bay is “stunningly, almost viciously, untalented” to quote David Denby, the veteran film critic at the hallowed New Yorker. While this is pretty scathing I couldn’t agree more.

It is absolutely fine to defend the films you make - however that doesn’t make you a better filmmaker. Bay’s ability to intersperse his interminably boring films with bursts of action packed frenzy almost make his films worth watching. But more often than not the sequences leave the viewers, especially in these days of 3D, feeling outright nauseous and even more spatially confused.

So why write about such a film in the ‘Must See’ column? It’s altruistic, to help those poor souls (myself included) who feel irresistibly drawn to the theater despite their instinctive hesitation. We know the film is going to be awful and yet we go.

Readers beware, this is a bad and overly long film. The villainous plot preposterous, the characters border on the verge of repellant, and the action is not good enough to withstand the general mediocrity. Filmmakers targeting teenage boys take note; you can do better, so much better.

**MUST SEE**

Sophia Pande

**TRANSFORMERS:**

**AGE OF EXTINCTION**

**BUDGET PLAN**: President Ram Baran Yadav addresses the Parliament regarding the government’s policy and program for the next fiscal year on Sunday.

**RAIN FEST**: Participants at a paddy harvest festival program celebrate it with a race in the muddy fields at Banepa on Sunday.

**SPRING SUMMER 2014**

**SHOE-A-HOLICS**

**HAPPENINGS**

**BIKRAM RAI**

**MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA**

**RAIN FEST:** Participants at a paddy harvest festival program celebrate it with a race in the muddy fields at Banepa on Sunday.
Oscar Wilde once famously quoted “art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known.” The exhibition Amalgam-2014, which opened on 27 June at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, stands to be another testimony to that statement. Featuring 42 unique pieces by 26 contemporary artists, the exhibition showcases a diverse assortment of art expressed through a range of mediums.

One of the most extensive presentations within the exhibition is the painting series The Blank Frame by Hitman Gurung. Consisting of five different sets of paintings, the central piece (see pic) depicts a faceless hospital patient sitting in a wheel chair, his face replaced by an empty frame. The four smaller paintings of a CT scan, hospital equipment and blood depict the process of surgery. Similar to his previous exhibition I Have to Feed My Country and My Family, that was shown in February at the same gallery, Gurung says he was inspired by the true story of a Nepali migrant worker in Malaysia who suffered a brain hemorrhage and had to return back to his village in Dhankuta.

In placing the lone figure against a backdrop made up of a collage of pictures of Nepali migrant workers, the artist highlights the collective struggles they have to go through. “My work is a metaphor for the countless victims of labour that return from working abroad,” said Gurung.

Another series of paintings by Rajan Pant called Sandurapur demand attention. While some artists refrain from experimenting with too much color, Pant uses an extensive range of contrasting colors to depict daily life in the village. Apart from catching your eye, the exaggerated use of color breathes life into the paintings.

As an annual program hosted by the gallery, it gives space to established artists as well as up and coming artists.


Ayesha Shakyu Amalgam-2014 27 June to 28 July 2014 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited

LONG BEFORE LALITPUR BECAME HIP AND JHAMSIKHEL TURNED INTO A RESTAURANT LANE, THERE WAS ONE ESTABLISHMENT THAT DILIGENTLY FED MANY HUNGRY SOULS OF THE DISTRICT ON THIS SIDE OF THE BRIDGE. WITH COMPETITION SPRINGING OUT LEFT, RIGHT AND IN-FRONT, DOWNTOWN RESTAURANT CONTINUES TO ATTRACT PLENTY OF PATRONS WHO WANT TO TRY SOMETHING NEW WITHOUT HAVING TO ORDER FROM OTHER CUISINES.

Lunch is their busiest hour as most office-goers in the area come here. The atmosphere was the same when this reviewer went in this past Tuesday to sample more than their naans. It is fairly easy to find a seat as the restaurant is spacious. The brightly lit restaurant lets in all the natural light of the bustling street, but leaves out the noise.

But if you are in a hurry, it is best to visit the food stalls at Bhat Bhateni across the street because orders here can take up to 30 minutes to arrive.

Serving a mix of Indian, Chinese and Continental dishes, Downtown offers a wide selection from each cuisine. In an attempt to try something new and refrain from ordering old favourites, we asked our waiter for recommendations.

We settled for Mutton Biryani (Rs 350) from a handful of choices. This rice dish was definitely the best dish of the day. Topped with egg and tomato, the rice that could have visually passed for Spanish rice was fragrant and flavourful, with just the right amount of spice. The mutton was tough, and if you weren’t in the mood to attack its meaty defenses, it served more as an expensive garnish.

Similarly, the Chicken Tikka Masala (Rs 230) did not disappoint, and its tender chicken chunks were delightful when wrapped with the garlic naan (Rs 80). Especially when disguised in a dark, thick curry like the tikka masala, chicken too often still has bones hidden like land mines. But the Chicken Tikka Masala was pure meat, which facilitated the enjoyment.

Another curry dish Chicken Mughlai (Rs 210) was equally good. My companion, an Indian food lover was in the mood for some rumali roti that day. However, because this thin flat bread usually folded like a handkerchief didn’t feature on the menu, we had to make do with the Peshawari naan (Rs 80). The dry fruits filling made the sweet naan sweeter. A dish in itself, it was easy to forget about the curry and just go on nibbling this sweet, sweet bread.

Not wanting to leave the other cuisines out, we quickly spotted an interestingly named Asspolo Pizza on the continental menu. In homage to the back page, we ordered the eight-sliced pizza.

Unfortunately, the only thing interesting about the Asspolo Pizza (Rs 255) is its name. Despite already having a Chicken Pizza on the menu, this is essentially a chicken pizza. Unsurprisingly the cheese was yak, not mozzarella. Its crust was thick and a little dry, and while edible, it definitely cannot hold a candle to many better places out there.

Downtown has been a favourite for sometime now. Barring its continental menu, orders usually result in a satisfied tummy.

How to get there: Downtown is located in Hanuman bhawan, right next to Saraswati book store.
Since 2010, the Tarai region has seen a dengue outbreak every monsoon. It seems the outbreak could be on the move from the Tarai region and into the city. This month alone, three cases of dengue have been reported in the valley. This spread is not surprising because of two reasons: a migrant population with the disease, and the abundant supply of the particular vector (carrier) mosquitoes. Dengue is pronounced “deng” with the u being silent.

Dengue is the most widely distributed mosquito-borne viral illness, affecting an estimated 100 million people worldwide each year. Forty per cent (2.5 billion) of the world’s population is estimated to be at risk for infection. After biting an infected person, vector mosquitoes transmit the disease to a healthy person with another bite.

For most people, the fever, headache, eye pain and joint aches associated with dengue subsides in a week’s time. Severe pain on eye movement can be a key symptom for diagnosis as well. But doctors can treat only the symptoms in dengue because there is no specific antiviral.

Most people with dengue will recover, but for some severe cases it causes leaky capillaries that lead to shock. It is impossible to predict who will become critically ill and who will have an uneventful recovery from dengue.

The World Health Organisation however has listed some warning signs of severe dengue, such as persistent vomiting, abdominal pain, fluid accumulation, excessive lethargy or restlessness and increase in haemoglobin (which carries iron and oxygen) in the face of decreasing platelets, which help to clot blood.

Unfortunately, there is no commercially available dengue vaccine although there are candidate vaccines in initial stages. For prevention, use mosquito repellents (like odorous or DEET) and wear full length clothing and use mosquito netting.

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Because of the open border with India, many migrant Nepali and Indian labourers with the disease enter parts of Nepal, including Kathmandu, where it was hardly known to be present. Dengue fever originated from Africa during the slave trade in the 15th through 19th centuries. It spread into Asia through commercial exchanges in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Importantly, different species of mosquitoes transmit different diseases. So, the mosquito that transmits malaria will not transmit dengue. Mosquitoes that transmit dengue are called Aedes aegypti, while the female anopheles transmits malaria. But the dengue mosquito is generally a city dweller, unlike the malaria mosquito which is usually rural based. The Aedes aegypti is also an efficient vector for Chikungunya and yellow fever viruses.

Any patient suffering from a fever, particularly if there is a rash, should be considered for the diagnosis of dengue.

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LONDON – One billion people watched the opening match of the FIFA World Cup in São Paulo last month and hundreds of thousands will throng Brazil’s stadiums during the month-long tournament. For FIFA’s six major partners and the event’s eight official sponsors, this audience is nothing short of a gold mine. For viewers, however, that is probably not a good thing.

One of FIFA’s partners, Budweiser, was accused of compelling Brazil’s government to overturn a national law banning the sale of alcohol inside football stadiums. After an uproar, FIFA said in a statement: ‘Alcoholic drinks are part of the FIFA World Cup, so we’re going to have them.’

Sponsorship by companies like Budweiser, McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, and the convenience food giant Moy Park brings millions of dollars to the game. Promoting alcohol, sugary drinks, and fast food may mean massive profits for corporations, but it undermines the health of individuals and adds a costly burden on countries’ health-care systems.

Instead of focusing exclusively on alcohol’s potential to fuel violence inside stadiums, the media should be emphasizing the damage that alcohol and processed foods are causing to the world’s population every day. Over the last decade, global soft-drink sales have doubled; per capita alcohol consumption has risen, and tobacco use has increased.

Most of this growth is occurring in low- and middle-income countries, those least equipped to handle the health crisis. Health experts have traditionally lumped diseases into two categories: communicable diseases, which are caused predominantly by infection, and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) – that is, everything else. Among the NCDs, four conditions contribute most to early death or disability: cardiovascular disease, chronic lung conditions, cancer, and diabetes. In 2010, these four conditions caused 47 per cent of all deaths, including nine million deaths in people under 60 years. The over-consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and energy-rich processed foods are often framed as lifestyle choices. But the determinants of such choices are often removed from people’s immediate control.

The current system does not empower the United Nations and other technical agencies concerned with health governance to confront the determinants of poor health effectively. Large corporations have resources, lobbying power, advertising budgets, networks, and supply chains of which the UN can only dream. While the WHO skims by on $2 billion a year, the tobacco industry rakes in $35 billion in annual profits.

What steps can be taken to level the playing field? Consumers must be better informed about the long-term impact of sponsors’ products. When people raise their voices – say, to ban advertising for breast-milk substitutes or to demand access to life-saving drugs – big corporations often listen. Beyond being a key aspect of corporate social responsibility, curbing alcohol and junk food is in the long-term interest of corporations. Voluntary codes to limit sugar in soft drinks and reduce salt levels in processed foods are a positive step, but they are far from adequate.

Finally, every successful team needs a strong manager. International and national regulatory authorities must fill this role, setting and enforcing the rules of the game to protect the health of people worldwide. The World Cup has a profound social impact, including on global health. FIFA has a responsibility to ensure that the tournament’s viewers are not receiving a message that could make them sick.

Kent Buse and Sarah Hawkes

Kent Buse is Chief of Political Affairs and Strategy, UNAIDS. Sarah Hawkes is Reader in Global Health at the Institute for Global Health, University College London.

www.project-syndicate.org
Belief in traditional faith healers is still strong in Nepal, and could complement modern medicine

**The Power of Faith:** Mohan Rai teaches faith healing at the Shamanistic Studies and Research Centre in Kathmandu, showing that traditional healing is not just practiced in remote parts of Nepal, but also in the capital. The fact that many of Rai’s students are from the West also indicates a disenchantment with the limitations of modern medicine.

Doctors, too, shake a pill bottle of placebos to make patients feel better. Educated Nepalis are skeptical about healers who perform a dance around the fireplace to cure patients, and despite the cost, have more faith in modern medicine.

In 1990 researchers estimated there are 100 faith healers in Nepal for every health worker, and today the 15,000 medical doctors are primarily in the capital or abroad. This does not meet the demand for medical treatment.

Health experts say the staying power of faith healers should be incorporated into the national health system. Modern medicine now teaches students that it’s all in the mind, and the patient’s faith in treatment is almost as important as the medication itself.

Robin Basnet, a surgeon at Bir Hospital, says traditional healers also benefit from the body’s ability to heal itself. “The best doctors can keep patients alive until nature heals itself,” he says, “it just takes time, and they take advantage of that.”

Many families in rural Nepal still trust local shamans, even when there is a hospital nearby. Basnet recalls that he would see four to five patients a day while working in Solukhumbu, while the traditional healer would have 50.

Whether there really is a bad spirit causing pain or illness is not as important as the relief exorcising it can provide. Traditional healers’ dominion over both the physical body and the mind of the patient, as well as their ties to the community means they occupy the space between physical wellbeing and religious beliefs.

American researcher Steven Folmar, who is studying the...

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**Child predators**

Even compared to recent scandals in children’s homes, allegations of abuse at Bal Mandir are shocking

**SUNIR PANDEY**

When Sarah Robinson first came to Nepal with her son and niece in 2009, she took time out from sightseeing to visit Bal Mandir in Naxal. At the squalid state-run orphanage, Sarah’s niece happened to pick up a five-year-old blind girl. Sarah, a special-needs teacher back in the UK, decided to adopt the child.

Two years later, Sarah was back in Kathmandu to begin the lengthy and difficult adoption process. Whenever she visited Bal Mandir, she’d have to ask her saying the child had “bad karma”, but Sarah was determined to adopt the girl, whom she...
relationship between mental health and traditional sacred beliefs in Lamjung district, says that with increasing societal stress, this emotional and mental space will become more important, not less.

Traditional healers should be retained as a valuable resource to address mental health because of the trust they command in the community. Mental health carries stigma in Nepali culture, and it is still not mentioned in the Ministry of Health’s updated actions for Essential Health Services.

Modern medicine has often fallen short where behavioural, emotional or spiritual factors are a primary cause of an ailment. But modern medicine can dovetail successfully with traditional healing practices, as Japanese researchers found 70 per cent of patients in a sample village in Nepal still visiting a traditional healer before going to a health post.

Banshet says he deployed local jhankris and lamas to deliver rehydration solutions to patients with diarrhoea, and found them to be highly effective. Faith healers could be at the frontlines of medical diagnosis and treatment, and potentially effective.

However, both Folmar and Miller warn of training traditional healers in modern methods. Jhankris “should not be uprooted or even interfered with in attempts to train them along unfamiliar to them.” Miller says because that could undermine their status in the community.

Dinesh Lama thinks jhankris should adjust to modern medicine, and not the other way around, and community leaders could convince faith healers to be part of the national health system.

Modern medicine is in the one laying down the rules that keep traditional healers out, and this attitude does not engender cooperation, reinforcing the divide. Patients therefore waste time and money reverting back to community faith healers when treatment doesn’t work.

Since families often visit traditional healers first, a clearly defined training program for jhankris would save lives and integrating traditional healers with modern treatment may actually strengthen the status of faith healers in the community.

Names of Sarah and Hope have been changed for safety and privacy reasons.

Sacred to profane

Established in 1964 to take care of orphans and abandoned children, Bal Mandir was a powerful institution with royal patronage. With Queen Ranita at the helm, it put together buildings and 50 ropanis of property which are now prime real estate.

Administered by the quasi-NGO, Nepal Children’s Organisation (NCO), Bal Mandirs across the country today take care of over 6,000 children in 11 homes. Since the loss of its royal backing, the NCO has been plagued by political interference and its buildings and property have been leased out to private individuals, amid allegations of huge kickbacks to political appointees in the NCO.

In 2011, the Public Accounts Committee of the legislature parliament ordered the NCO to operationalize its lease process. Considering the conditions at Bal Mandir, the Austrian charity Mitula Foundation agreed to manage the orphanages for five years in 2009, but pulled out within 12 months because of widespread corruption and mismanagement at the NCO.

“We had to cancel the project as we were not confident that we would be able to deliver on the objectives without risking Mitula’s reputation or an organization that refuses to pay bribes,” the charity says in an online post. One former Bal Mandir employee says the stakeholder has been involved in “selling babies” in the guise of adoption, so only filed an FIR with police on grounds he could deny her Hope if she accused him

On 16 June, Rabin Shrestha, now an ex-employee since a year and a half, and Rabin Chalise, an ex-student who ran a youth club at the shelter, were arrested by the Child Rights Investigation Bureau (CIB) again after child rights activists presented new evidence of repeated rape and abuse of other girls and boys at the orphanage.

According to the testimony of three autistic girls, the women would introduce themselves to the children as RoopYWod film stars Amitabh and Abhisek Bachchan and would lure them into drinking alcohol and watching pornography before abusing them, the latest incident occurred three days before their arrest.

They would organise ‘wedding ceremonies’ every Saturday and dress the girls in red saris and have them dance to music. One of them would spray water on the girls, who would then be forced to take off their wet clothes. This occurred during the afternoons, when Shrestha got a free pass at the orphanage. In the evenings, Shrestha used to take the children to a bar and then, having been groomed to prostitute, according to children’s accounts.

These detailed testimonies were presented to the CIB by child rights activists from ACR- Int (Action for Child Rights International). The evidence was cross-checked for veracity, and was so compelling that Shrestha and Chalise were arrested away right, while a third man was questioned but couldn’t be detained because of lack of evidence. Lawyer Sapana Pradhan Malla, who is fighting Sarah’s case, says this new evidence might help them get the Supreme Court to order the police to register and file a rape case against Shrestha. Their pleas to take five other pleas: amendment to the 35-day limit, a mandamus order to notify the case, to teach children about assault, to set up a child-abuse monitoring system at Bal Mandir and for the Central Children’s Welfare Board to come up with a manual for protection, and to order the police to register and file a rape case against Shrestha. They have also listed fi

As regards the doctor trained in Western medicine, the doctor trained in Western methods of diagnosis and treatment, though he may at first view the jhanki as his rival, I believe that a doctor would need to know that, at least according to the world-view of his village patients, the doctor is treating symptoms while the jhankri gets at causes. There is room, and need, for both. The doctor will certainly realize that a shared worldview between patient and physician can be a powerful factor leading to a cure.”
Students transferring from private to govt schools

Kalendra Sejuwal in Nagarik, 3 July

An increasing number of students are abandoning private schools after the government introduced higher education and technical scholarships for students from government schools. Apekshya Derkota’s father runs a private school in Surkhet, and she studied there till Grade 8. But she has transferred to a government-run high school even though she comes from a well-to-do family. What attracted her were the scholarships and incentives that students who graduate from state-run schools are entitled to. "I have heard that going to a government school has many advantages," says Apekshya, "besides, I like the teaching and atmosphere here better than the private school."

Janak Shahi, whose parents had sent him to a private school in Surkhet has completed Grade 8, and also decided to return to a government school in Kailkot. His family had migrated to Surkhet during the conflict, but he now sees a better future in a state-run school in his own home district. "If I get good marks in SLC from a remote district of Karnali Zone, I will be assured of a scholarship anywhere," Janak says, "that is why I came back." The government’s new policy sets aside scholarships and a quota for high school graduates from remote areas in government-run technical and higher secondary schools. The Surkhet District Education Office has reported a reverse exodus of students to government schools. Sabina Dahal graduated with distinction in SLC from the state-run Jana Secondary School in Surkhet, and was immediately accepted in the MBBS program of the Patan Health Science Institute. She is following her senior Kuber Khadka who received the same scholarship last year.

Jomsom cartell scrapped

Annapurna Post, 1 July

The Western Region administration has ended cartelting by local transport companies on the Beni-Jomsom route that had been causing hardships to pilgrims and tourists going by road to Mustang. Now vehicles from outside the area can use the 75 km stretch which was being monopolised by bus syndicates. "There won’t be any discussion this time, if there is any obstruction we will arrest and take immediate action," says Ajjan Kumar Karhi, of the Western Region administration. "This is a public road where we will not allow monopoly of certain groups."

Despite a Supreme Court ban, bus cartell are prevalent throughout the country. Like other bus syndicates in various parts of the country, the one in Beni-Jomsom earned notoriety for its virtual monopoly over passengers from villages in the Beni-Jomsom area. The transport companies were charging their passengers Rs 1,100 per passenger. Many people used to refuse to travel by road because of the high fares. The local transport companies were charging Rs 1,100 per passenger for a journey of 75 km. The government has now imposed a fare of Rs 800 per passenger for a journey of the same distance.

Optimistic future

Setopati.com, 1 July

Nepalis have become more hopeful about the second Constituent Assembly delivering a constitution, according to the most recent survey. The poll shows that the percentage of people who think the second CA will deliver the constitution has shot up from 23 per cent last September to 40.8 per cent in February. After the CA election last year, the overall outlook has become more positive on a number of issues from constitution writing to development and economic opportunities. The results are based on a multiple choice survey.

What do you expect from the Constituent Assembly?

- New Constitution: 52%
- Development: 42%
- More employment: 21%
- Peace: 21%
- Inflation under control: 17%

What do you expect the CA to draft the constitution this time?

- A lot: 33%
- Not much: 25%
- Extremely less: 11%
- Very much: 8%
- No hope: 8%

DERAILLED

Annapurna Post, 1 July

The construction of the first phase of Mechi-Mahakali Electric Railway has been halted for two weeks because of local obstruction over compensation. Locals of Ramgungi of Surkhai district have halted construction saying they want more money for the land that is being acquired for the tracks. The locals have also formed a struggle committee and put forward their demands to the Home Ministry and other concerned government bodies. "Unless the government revises the compensation for our land, the construction will be halted," stated Bishwamitra Rijal. Depending on the area, the government is paying between Rs 30,000 to Rs 2.2 million. Locals’ opposition has caused the construction company Gajarmukhi daily losses worth hundreds of thousands of rupees. "Construction materials worth millions of rupees have already reached the site but the work cannot resume unless the compensation issue is resolved," says site-in-charge Mukunda Kandel. The issue is being addressed at the ministry level.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"We need to be ready to fight again and if necessary we should be prepared to kill and be killed."

Pushpa Kamal Dahal, JanaAastha, 3 July

FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

18 - 4 - 10 JULY 2014 #714
They used to say it was a man’s job, but now women in Butwal are becoming equally adept at handling heavy duty machinery. From 2006 to 2013, more than 41,500 women across 65 districts have been trained for technical skills in a scheme run by the Swiss group, Helvetas. More than 65 per cent of them are self-employed now.

Women are learning to do jobs like cutting aluminium, repairing bikes, cars, televisions, cell phones and computers. They are also making furniture, shoes and glass, and working as drivers and security guards and at construction sites fitting houses with plumbing, electric wires, and marble floors.

“Earlier, when we told them we were training women, they used to ignore us and tell us to get their brothers and husbands instead,” recalls Balram Poudel at Helvetas which supports technical schools in Kapilbastu, Rupandehi and Nawalparasi.

At Peace Technical Centre, 32-year-old Sharmila Kumari Sharma and Dhan Kumari Khanal, 31, were dressed in helmets, aprons, gloves, and protective eye wear, learning how to cut aluminum sheets. “We’ll open a shop to sell aluminum products and take jobs to fit sites and homes,” says Khanal, now determined to become an aluminum fabricator.

At the Butwal Technical Institute in Butwal, Krishna Kumari Thapa is learning to operate a mechanical feeder. With each hit of her hammer, others around her are affected by her enthusiasm. She is here not because she wants a tough job but thinks she can earn more with the new skills.

“People told us women weren’t cut out for this job but we showed them otherwise,” says Mina BK. Her classmates Mina Aryal, 20, Rita Kumal, 19, and Anita Subedi, 20, are among scores of young women who have signed up at Butwal Technical Institute.

Some graduates have become trainers themselves. Basanti Tharu is training 22 people how to fit electric wiring, Sangita Tharu is the only woman in Basanti’s class, but she says there is no discrimination. “Basanti leads by example and we now see that women can do the same work as men and also earn as much,” says Sangita.

Locals are also happy that their women can now solve household problems that were normally delegated to men. Jyoti Chaudhari, 19, Ram Krishna Tharu, 21, and Mira Kumari Tharu, 31, who were three women in a class of 20 learning plumbing in Gajheda of Kapilbastu, want to go back after training and bring piped water to their homes.

In Nawalparasi, Khushbu Mahato wants to learn how to farm mushrooms. She is among five other women who are learning agricultural skills. All of them now want to open up a cooperative after training finishes and share profits.
Shark attack

For those of you who have lost track of what is happening in Nepal’s political sphere, here is a brief recap of the story so far:

1. PM Jhusil Da is in America indefinitely, and definitely no one admits to having ambitions on the succession question.
2. Caretaker Leftist God thinks he is taking care, but so do about a dozen Kangresi cronies who are hand-in-glove with crooks.
3. FM Ram Sharan has been told by his own party’s MPs they will sabotage his budget if they don’t get their 5 Corrodes each. FM did the math and doesn’t know where he can come up with 14 Arabs. (Bright Idea: The Kuwait Fund?) This is one scam that is not going to be debated in the Public Accounts Committee, that’s for sure.
4. Minister of Trees has found out it is a jungle out there in the Cabinet. His Chure Conservation Plan is opposed tooth-and-nail by colleagues who are bankrolled by timber tuskers and crushers.
5. We now know why Mahesh was banished to Forest and replaced overnight by Minendra at the MOIC. Plans afoot to sneak in a telecom tycoon thru the backdoor?
6. Five of Nepal’s 35 communist parties have decided to establish a “working unity”. So far, they had a non-working disunity. BRB is heading a constitution committee, while PKD is in cahoots with those opposed to the constitution. Lal Bhu has wrangled control of ratopati.com from Lotus Flower and its first expose was a dollar laundering scam implicating Comrade Awful.
7. Dept of Roadblocks has decided to finish off its unspent moolah before this fiscal year runs out. So it is repaving perfectly good streets overnight, and lubricating palms along the way. Too much of an effort to actually repair roads and plug craters in Sanepa, no?
8. Don’t waste time reading about the duel in the Eh-maleys between Makuney and Oily. Who gets to be party chairman is not going to make an iota of a difference to the rest of us.

One thing that is getting sharks in the government all excited is the SAARC Summit in November. The Prime Minister got it into his silly head to hold the Summit in Pokhara, which would have been a disaster for all the capital’s contractors and their cronies already salivating at the prospect of making a killing. Predictably, Pokhara was shot down in the Cabinet citing security and a shortage of casinos. Imagine all the beautification, resurfacing roads, installing street lights, and airport upgrading that has to happen on a civil war footing in Kathmandu from now till then. Imagine the cash that is going to be doled out, just the trickle down from kickbacks alone will improve the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of Nepal by four percentage points.