The monsoon hasn’t yet been officially declared as “failed”, but it is mid-July and only 30 per cent of paddy fields in Nepal have been planted. Terraces like these (see pic) on the outskirts of Bhaktapur have rice because of irrigation. Urban sprawl is also encroaching into arable land in the Valley and the Terai, reducing harvests even further.

It’s not just the monsoon that is delayed. The 2014-15 budget, which was supposed to be presented to parliament on Friday, has been postponed because the power struggle within the UML has prolonged the party’s Convention. A deficient monsoon will impact on agriculture and will bring down Nepal’s GDP growth projections, and spike inflation.

Meanwhile, within the CA’s echo chamber, it is the politics of everything: the politics of budget, politics of corruption, the politics of crime, politics of identity. And it has become politically incorrect to question federalism, especially one that is based on single-ethnic identity.

In their obsession with the distribution of power in the new constitution, members have forgotten to question the political sustainability and economic viability of future provinces. We are putting the cart before the horse by carving up the country into supposedly autonomous states, when there is no economic base for that autonomy.
 Contempt of Freedom

As per the Contempt of Court Bill, a bench, which has suffered the alleged contempt, has the right to pass judgment in the contempt case (‘Contempt of freedom’, Editorial, #714). Both the offended party and the adjudicator being the same person or body is something that infringes the separation of powers principle. In such a case, contempt of court only serves to irrationally narrow the scope of the rule for judges to settle personal vendettas.

Contempt of court is aimed at safeguarding the independence of the judiciary. But care needs to be taken that it doesn’t serve to give a heavy price for media and individual freedom. If the government’s motive behind introducing this law is to put a fact to curtail legitimate criticism, the effect on society will be severe.

Anil Karkee

Child Predators

We should avoid trial by media, and not treat these cases as guilty until proven innocent (Child predators, Sunir Pandey, #714). Evidence from all parties involved and even those who have been arrested of this certainly seems like a castigation.

Kumar

- Laws on cases that are sub judice that prohibit media from discussing cases in the courts may be fine and dandy in countries where the court system is clean, and society abides by the rule of law. But in a country where judges can be bought, the Supreme Court itself is made up of crooks and the corruption watchdog is headed by the corrupt, it is the media’s responsibility to keep the pressure on the courts.

- The fourth estate then becomes the institution of last resort to provide the check and balance when the executive, legislative and judicial branches are weak and discredited.

- Great investigative story, don’t take your eyes off these criminals as they try to manipulate the media and the courts. They have powerful friends in high places.

Goma

- I am really worried about the lack of due process in this case. The man may very well be a paedophile, but it hasn’t been proven yet. It means anyone can be framed in social media, and he is guilty even if he is proven innocent in a court of law.

Jib

- I hope the guilty receive maximum sentence if they are proven guilty. But right now I think the accused should also receive a certain degree of privacy like not having their names released in public. Sarah and Hope get a pass, so why shouldn’t they at least until a court decision is finalised.

Krishna

Women Power

At a time when journalists hardly venture outside Kathmandu valley for their forages, thank you Rubeena Mahato for bringing this story from the far-flung (‘A New Nepal also rises’, Rubeena Mahato, #714).

When I visited my village last January, I found that most men had left to work in the Middle East and Malaysia. In the absence of these men, women have been left to take care of their entire households. Besides performing their traditional duties, I saw that women were also doing work that was earlier thought to be of male domain. The participation of women in every sector has seen a growth and the women literacy rate and percentage of girls attending schools and colleges are at an all time high. I believe our women will be the ones to change our society, in fact they have already started.

Sarku Subba

Progress on Hold

The problem seems to be about valuation and rent seeking, but also more than that it has to do with the government’s inability to calculate, and the citizen’s inability to remain within the box. I suggest an alternative value (‘Progress on hold’, Bhikhu Rai, #714).

The concerns of infrastructure projects should not be just about private property and valuation. The subject of attempted change must be brought about by the infrastructure projects. These problems are ignored by the citizens and the government.

The communication challenge can be overcome and must building can occur only through pre-project negotiations. In that sense, I am very much for negotiation to occur before the project’s start.

One thing great about limitations is that they tend to make valuation easier. We are so used to looking at infrastructure projects along the lines of unlimited returns and unlimited source of energy, we forget that these projects have finite dimensions to them. For some reason, the locals connect to this through their fine level experiences with the language. I think there is a need to bridge these different perceptions of realities between both parties. Thanks for spurring a healthy debate on this issue.

Probat Gautam

Saarcasm

That is a great summary of politics, as (‘Sharik attack’, Backside #714) You left out the role of Indian “intelligence” in making it all happen!

Jaya

Nice as usual.

Basanta Raj Onda

THE POLITICS OF EVERYTHING

Why carve up the country into supposedly autonomous states, when there is no economic base for that autonomy?

While in the 1990s the damage bad politics could do was limited, this time bad politics will set the country’s future on a wrong trajectory.

In the CA’s echo chamber, it is the politics of everything: politics of identity, politics of inclusion, politics of reservation, politics of prior rights. It has become politically incorrect to question federalism, especially one that is based on single-ethnic identity.

And in their obsession with the distribution of power in the new constitution, committee members have forgotten to question the political sustainability and economic viability of future provinces. We are putting the cart before by carving up the country into supposedly autonomous states, when there is no economic base for that autonomy.

Economists have raised valid concerns about how federalism as it is envisaged will mean wasteful duplication, potentially dangerous competition for scarce natural resources and perpetual discord over the fairness of the allocation of federal tax revenue, most of which will be confined to two future provinces.

Nepal’s future government should be decentralised, there is no debate about that. The new constitution should be first and foremost about ensuring stability, raising living standards, promoting equity. Unfortunately, the kind of federalism they are fasting on us will lead us to chronic instability, and make us all poorer and less equal.

Let’s face it, outsiders who prescribed federalism as a medicine for our ills got it wrong. Instead of steady-state politics, Nepal will turn into a volatile tinderbox. We haven’t thought federalism through, and are rushing headlong into it only because it was a slogan to restore peace in 2006. We are not prepared for its political consequences, and we have totally ignored the economic price we will all pay for it.
The generation gap

Nepal's aging political leadership is running out of time in more ways than one.

The recent experiences of our southern neighbor, however, should provide some hope for senior leaders in Nepal. Sixty-five per cent of India's 1.2 billion population is 35 or under and yet the country picked 63-year-old Narendra Modi over 44-year-old Rahul Gandhi to chart its future. In Modi, the youth of India chose a man with a proven track record of delivering on his promises and bringing economic growth and prosperity.

They were so enamoured by his performance in Gujarat that many simply chose to overlook his nefarious past. If the top crop of Nepali leaders is successful in drafting a new constitution by the end of this year, Nepalis too will forgive them for their past blunders. Given that most of them are in their early to mid-60s, today's politicians have at least a decade to set things right, groom a new generation and chart its future. In Modi, the youth of India chose a man who is 35 or under and yet the country picked 63-year-old Narendra Modi over 44-year-old Rahul Gandhi to chart its future. In Modi, the youth of India chose a man with a proven track record of delivering on his promises and bringing economic growth and prosperity.

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 recyclables, and creating a place that is balanced in terms of waste. The design of the hotel is influenced by traditional Nepalese architecture, yet it is modern and sustainable. The hotel has implemented several energy-efficient practices, such as using solar panels for electricity, and has an on-site organic farm to source fresh produce. All these efforts contribute to a stronger connection with the environment and the local community.

In conclusion, the Green Village Hotel in Pothana, Nepal, is a shining example of how sustainability and responsible tourism can coexist. It demonstrates that it is possible to create a high-quality and eco-friendly destination while also supporting the local community and preserving the environment. For travelers who are passionate about sustainability and responsible tourism, the Green Village Hotel provides a unique and rewarding experience.
The battle of single mothers

AMANtha PERERA
in COLOMBO

When the family finally returned to Vavuniya in late 2011, Rajan was faced with the seemingly impossible task of building her life from scratch. She was no stranger to hard decisions. Even before the war forced them to flee, Rajan had to toughen up, since her occupation as a moneylender meant she had to be firm with her clients about repayment and interest rates.

She slept on the shop floor every night, along with her 12-year-old son, despite the very real threats of theft, and even violence. “I know what I have to do, I know how to take care of my son, and myself,” the feisty single mother tells IPS.

Rajan’s life has been one of upheaval and turmoil in the last five years. In early 2009, when Sri Lanka’s three-decade-old civil conflict showed signs of reaching a bloody finale, Rajan and her family prepared to face a drawn out period of violent uncertainty. Their “home” was a massive displacement camp known as Menik Farm in the northern district of Vavuniya.

“We run our own households and are some of the most resilient in the former conflict zone,” said M S M Kamil, head of the economic security department at ICRC. “I think what they have gone through in the past three decades – as individuals, as families, and as an entire community – has made them resilient. They feel that they can survive [and] take care of their families whatever the circumstances are,” he added.

In early 2014, the ICRC gave her the funds to start up a small business. Milliampati chose to raise goats and purchased a small herd of about 10 animals. She keeps them in a shed of 40.

She has sold ten animals at roughly 100,000 rupees (about $700) and is using the money to construct a small house. “Because the sale of male goats does not provide a steady income, she has found employment as a cleaner in the nearby village school, for a daily pay of about 600 rupees (4.60).”

Milliampati’s father, who deposits her meagre monthly savings of 25 dollars in her son’s account to get One Time Password for each transaction, is a clear indication that children aged between five and 14 years, are living proof of the truth behind Kamil’s statement. Her eldest boy is disabled, and cannot hear or speak. To make matters worse, her husband left her and the three children following the war’s end.

In early 2013, the ICRC gave her the funds to start up a small business. Milliampati chose to raise goats and purchased a small herd of about 10 animals. Six months on she has a herd of 40.

She says she needs at least 10,000 rupees (about $80) a month in order to survive, but other families say they need at least twice that amount.

“While women like Milliampati scratch out a barebones existence, thousands of others have fallen through the cracks altogether, according to Saroj Shrivasthavat, head of the Centre for Women and Development in Jaffna, capital of the Northern Province.”

“Tigers fought a final bloody battle against government forces. The two escaped the fighting alive, but with no possessions except the clothes they were wearing. For the next two-and-a-half years, ‘home’ was a massive displacement camp known as Menik Farm in the northern
Press freedom pundits have passionately debated the contradiction between freedom of expression and judicial contempt, within and outside the court. But there seems to be a general agreement among scholars that ‘Contempt of Court’ is a loosely defined concept in law - the Proteus that can take any shape and form.

The honourables sitting on the highest bench should know, The Sunday Times. The newspapers had published a report in September 1972, criticizing a verdict by the British court on settlement claims of families affected by a pharmaceutical company called Distillers. The Sunday Times faced contempt charges and was banned from publishing further reports on the matter.

The European Court ruled in favour of Article 19 of ICCPR which guarantees freedom of expression and press freedom. After five years of intense deliberation, the European Court cited breach of corruption, lamented in his final days at the Supreme Court that Nepal’s judiciary had become a hotbed of corruption because of tainted justices.

In his attempt to rid the judiciary of corruption, Shrestha took action against several incompetent judges and recommended imprisonment of a sitting judge to the parliament, unprecedented in the history of Nepal’s judiciary. Before leaving office Shrestha wrote: “Only if there are honest people heading public institutions and constitutional bodies, can corruption be effectively checked.” It is indeed sad that, barring our spartan Prime Minister, few heading constitutional bodies or state institutions today are uncompromised.

The resolute stance taken by UML Minister Lal Babu Pandit against allowing a corrupt bureaucrat to be transferred to the Finance Ministry, despite being bullied by Finance Minister and Home Minister from his own party is an example worth emulating.

For far too long, the honest and upright within political parties and Nepal’s bureaucracy have been silent witnesses to corruption and abuse of power of their bosses. It is time they found their voices.

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The dissolution of the first Constituent Assembly and the hopelessness surrounding the second have convinced not just common people, but also the generation of younger leaders about the incompetence and fecklessness of their party bosses, young leaders who are now increasingly finding their voice within the party and holding the top brass accountable.

Anurag Acharya is program manager at the Centre for Investigative Journalism.
Not only was the southwest monsoon late by two weeks, even when it arrived it was weak. The first week of July saw only 20 per cent of normal precipitation in Kathmandu Valley. The rest of Nepal, and indeed the whole Subcontinent is not faring much better. Two-thirds of India has received seriously deficient rainfall so far. The culprit is super-typhoon Neoguri which was such a vast circulation in the western Pacific last week that satellite images show it pulling moisture from as far away as the Indian Ocean. Hey, that was our rain! The monsoon should get back to more normal levels from this weekend on.

KATHMANDU

A minority within a minority

Abdul Rehman, a 63 year-old jewellery boutique owner in Thamel, leaned across a counter overflowing with colourful beads and bangles to explain why he hadn’t had anything to eat or drink all day.

“We are keeping control over ourselves,” said Rehman, “and if we do it for one month we can do it in the remaining eleven months.”

Ramadan began last week with the appearance of the new crescent moon, and as in other parts of the world, Nepal’s Muslims fast during the day for a month of self-control, prayer and spiritual reflection.

Although only 4.2 per cent of Nepal’s are Muslim, it is the country’s third most practised religion after Hinduism and Buddhism. Tibetan Muslims like Rehman, however, are a minority within this minority and number only between 300-400.

The Tibetan Muslim community is close-knit because of its shared history of migration and hardships. Most of them fled to Nepal after China’s occupation of Tibet in 1959.

“The migration was purely on the basis of religion during the Cultural Revolution,” Rehman said. “The elders thought, ‘Ok for us we would stay – but what about the future of the children?’ So therefore they migrated.”

Kashmiri Muslims used to trade with Tibet, and in the 16th century the Fifth Dalai Lama asked some of them to stay, granting them religious freedom and rights. They married into the local community and gained converts.

Abdul Rehman’s nephew, Enayat Tako said that both Muslim and Tibetan are equally important elements of his identity. “We want to save our culture, that’s why we mostly marry within our community,” he said.

Like many others, Rehman and Tako’s families first fled to Kashmir and Darjeeling because of their ancestral links to India, later moving on to Nepal for economic opportunities.

Despite cultural and language differences, Tibetan Muslims have integrated well with the other Islamic communities in Nepal. Kashmiri, Indian and Tibetan Muslims all pray together at the same mosques, and celebrate Ramadan together.

“A Muslim is a Muslim, we don’t differentiate,” said Rehman.

The combination of the Islamic faith with Tibetan culture is being passed down to the younger generation as a joint effort between the family and the community. Tako’s 17 year-old daughter and 14 year-old son attend a secular school in Kathmandu. But they read the Quran at home and worship at Jame Masjid on Fridays. On the streets, they speak Nepali but at home, it is Tibetan.

The shared history of migration and the efforts to preserve their heritage have forged strong bonds within Nepal’s Tibetan Muslim community. And the mutual experience of Ramadan each year keeps it strong.

Amina Banu, the Tibetan Muslim founder of Banu’s Total Fitness gym, described how the community comes together each night for iftar, the breaking of the fast, and how the holy month provides the time to grow closer to God and to one another.

Said Banu: “Iftar is always done in my sister’s house. Everybody comes together and we pray ... we cook and it is like a festival. We stay together overnight.”

nepaltimes.com

Ramzan Kareem, W15

When it comes to maintaining a beautiful lawn, nothing makes the cut like Honda HRU197MT1DUA Lawn Mower, where great feature and great performance meet great value.

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- Starts first time, every time with Honda’s famous one pull easy start system.
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nepaltimes.com

BASIL EDWARD TEO

A minority within a minority

Nepal’s Tibetan Muslims mark Ramadan with fasts and feasts

CLARE HENNIG
**DINING**

**Arena sports lounge**,
Rub shoulders with fellow sport fans and watch the World Cup finals together. Make new friends or enemies.
Thamel

**Phat Kath**, nothing better after a long work day than to chill out with tasty finger food, reggae music, and 2 or 1 cocktails during happy hour.
Thamel

**Green organic cafe**, eat fresh, right from the source. This cafe has its own farms where vegetables, grains, dairy and fruit are produced. Detox and indulge in healthy treats.
Thamel, across Roadhouse Cafe, (01)4215726

**Helena’s**, breakfast made better when served with sunshine, cool breeze, and a panoramic view of the Kathmandu Valley.
Chabahur Mon, Kathmandu, (07)4046797

**iDoYo Ushi No Hi**, savour exquisite Japanese delicacies at Mako’s to celebrate the Japanese eel festival.
18 to 20 July, Mako’s Japanese restaurant, The Dwarika’s hotel, Battisputali

**Delight**, nothing better than to chill out with tasty finger food, reggae music, and 2 or 1 cocktails during happy hour.
Thamel

**Downtown**, go Indian at this restaurant, although it serves Chinese and Continental food too. Don’t miss out on the briyani.
Pulchowk Road, Patan, (01)5010751

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**EVENTS**

**Grand Finale**, cap off World Cup 2014 with good music and company.
13 July, 7pm to 14 July at 6am, Dibya Hospitality, Dibya Nagar, Kathmandu

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

**Reload yourself**, opening of the Entrance cafe, live music by Kramasha Nepal, the Fusion House and Saddle Silled Starch.
12 July, 2pm and midnight, The Entrance Cafe, Hanforthkawan, Lalitpur, (01)5555617, 9841595814

**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.
19 July, Facebook.com/kathmandukora

**I have an idea**, get creative and jump into the melting pot of ideas to foster positive change in Nepal
13 July, 3 to 6pm, Nepal Academy Hall, Kamaladi, Kathmandu

**Sushi making**, learn how to make sushi the right way from chefs at Tamura restaurant.
12 July, 2 to 4pm, Hotel Kido House and Tamura Japanese Restaurant, Thapathali, Rs. 1500, 9803226840

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**SUSHI**

**Amalgam**, a series of talks around the ongoing exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery
13 July, Performance art, looking at the performances of Sunil Sigdel, Jupiter Pradhan, Prithi Shrestha, Saurav Bhandari, and Nikha Shrestha.
20 July, Socio-political perspective in art, questioning the role of the artist as an informed citizen.
27 July, Street art, spreading socio-political messages through art in the local community.
Siddhartha Art Gallery, Batari Moti Road

**Delegate effectively**, brush up on your delegation skills with this five-day (two hours a day) workshop. Reduce your work burden as a manager and increase your team’s effectiveness.
13 July, 10am to 1pm, 16 July, 2 to 4pm, 23 July, 10am to 1pm, 28 July, 10am to 1pm, King’s College, Bijuli bajar, Kathmandu

**Beyond auto mode**, learn how to use your camera beyond its auto function. Don’t just be a button pusher; take control of your pictures.
Registration until 18 July.
20 to 31 July, 5.30 to 7pm, Rs 6000, Canon Imaging School, Maitry Bhawan, New Road

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**SUSHI**

**Retrospective**, a look back at the oeuvre of senior artist and cubism enthusiast Surendra Pradhan.
Art of 10 July Fund Raising Centre, Thapathali, Rs 300, 9841224433

**Learning about success**, learn in depth of Nepal’s youngest scientists, Kishor Raj Lohani, talk about how he went from being a dropout to a scholar.
11 July, 4.30 to 6pm, Trade Tower Business Centre, Thapathali, Rs 200, 9841224433

**Muna Madan**, Nepal’s favourite epic on stage again.
Runs till 16 July, Rs 100/200/300/500, Rastriya Nachghar, Jamal

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MUSIC

Devika Bandana,
catch the songstress with over 300 hit songs to her name in her live solo comeback performance.
Hotel Radisson, Lajimpat, Kathmandu. 9801184474.

Shastra Agrawal,
the best of Hindustani classical every new moon night.

GETAWAYS

The end of the universe,
sit in a family-run hotel that is located atop Mahankal hill. It is believed to be one of the oldest hotels in the area. Mahankal Mandir, Nagarkot, Bhaktapur, 9741020969.

Waterfront Resort,
head to this eco-friendly resort right in front of Phewa Lake. Sedih Height, Pokhara. (01) 466 303/304, 9801166311, sales@waterfronthotelnepal.com

Jule mountain mountain resort,
resting 2050m above sea level, the eco- farm boasts a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic homestay experience. Shivapuri Bageshwar National Park, (00) 371-2399.

Balthali Village Resort,
a small, cozy retreat with a bird’s eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses. Balthali, Kavre. 9851075818.

Himalayan wellness centre,
a one-stop centre for a relaxed mind and a healthy body inside the Park Village Hotel. Budhanilkantha, open all week www.himalayanwellness.com.np

Neydo Monastery,
a monastery and guest house, Neydo is home to many significant religious sites of the great siddhas. Leave your troubles behind and book a room. Pharping, Kathmandu www.neydohotel.com/contact.html

Dish Home Nepal’s World Cup targeted event ‘Ball in the Mall’ began last week. Along with being surprised by celebrities at different venues around town, customers also get the opportunity to win gift hampers at the program. The customer engagement program is on until 13 July.
11 July, Sherpa Mall, 12.30 to 6.30PM, former Miss Nepal Sadikchhya Shrestha
12 July, KL Tower 2.30 to 6.30PM, Shristi Kafle and singer Sanjay Shrestha
13 July, Civil Mall, 2.30 to 6.30PM, former Miss Nepal Usha Khadgi

Music at the museum,
spend an evening at the City museum and revel in chamber music with the Krishnarpan duo. 12 July, 6.45pm, Rs 450, tickets available at the museum, Cafe Soma (Ram Shirley) and Lakuri Cafe (Babarkot)

Ball in the Mall
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On the 14th floor of a new high rise apartment coming up on the outskirts of Kathmandu, an Indian construction worker sits right at the edge, using pieces of wire to tie steel rods into bundles for reinforced concrete beams.

At that dizzying height, he works without a helmet or harness, and has no time to enjoy the view of the valley spread out below him. The building is on the flight path toward Tribhuvan International Airport, and an Air Asia jet carrying Nepali workers to and from Malaysia roars by overhead. Because most young Nepalis have migrated to Malaysia or the Gulf, the workers here are from Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, and some from the Tarai.

"Why worry about ropes and helmets if the pay is so low," says the worker, not bothering to look up when asked why he is not using a harness.

Other workers are perched precariously on flimsy bamboo scaffolding high up on Mero City, a new apartment complex coming up in Dhakaikhel. The apartments here will sell for up to Rs 40 million when completed. The 130 construction workers earn Rs 800 for a 14-hour work day.

They live in the lower flats of the building they are working on to save on rent. Many of the workers from the Tarai say they haven’t gone abroad either because they couldn’t afford the hefty fees demanded by labour recruiters, or are not familiar with the procedures to get a passport.

A Nepali worker from Bardia says he is taking a few days of unpaid leave to go home for rice-planting.

The outcry over bonded workers in the Gulf in the international media masks the exploitation of Nepali workers within Nepal by Nepali contractors. Kathmandu’s construction boom depends on cheap labour, and until laws are enforced to protect their rights, they will continue to be vulnerable.

The truth is, Nepali construction workers don’t have to go to Qatar or the UAE to be ill-treated.

As we started down the long staircase, a construction supervisor came up and rudely asked us what we were doing at the site. After finding out we were photographing and interviewing the workers, he threatened us and warned us not to come back.

PICTURES: MILAN POUDEL  
TEXT: PRASHANT GNNAWALI

Himalmedia is looking for Marketing Executives to augment the current sales team of its trend-setting products: Nepali Times, Himal Khabarpatrika and their online editions.

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Believe it or not, *The Lego Movie* is more or less the *The Matrix* – but with millions of Legos. Once again, Hollywood, seemingly having run out of all original intellectual property, has turned a beloved toy into an animated film. Fortunately for us *The Lego Movie*, while culling heavily from *The Matrix*, actually has a rather wild sense of humour. While played by the robotic Keanu Reeves saying “I know Kung Fu” in the nineties film, the Lego version of Neo, is played here with verve and tongue in cheek hilarity by Chris Pratt and is thankfully named just plain old Emmet. Emmet is a cog in the wheel of a seemingly utopian Lego land where “Everything is AWESOME.” That is until it turns out that he is the unsuspecting, clueless “one” who is destined to find the “piece of resistance” and save all Lego Land from being... wait for it... glued down by Krazy glue. If you think all of this is very silly, you are right, it really is. But if you choose to embrace the silliness, you and your children might be delighted by the clever post-modern hodgepodge that is skillfully stitched together to make this ultimately delightful film.

I will not say that this film will actually edify Lego lovers. While it tips its hat to all the intrepid, young, creative builders, this film is really just Warner Bros. attempt to tap into the highly lucrative children’s market. Fortunately, the writers of the film, Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, have maintained a keen sense of humour at the banal task they were given – going all out by poking fun at themselves and pretty much every single other franchise including Batman, Superman, and of course, *The Matrix*. 

*The Lego Movie* is also a testament to the ongoing phenomena that even highly trained actors will jump on a bandwagon if it’s well written enough, and made for children. The film boasts a cast including Will Ferrell, Elizabeth Banks, Liam Neeson, Morgan Freeman, Channing Tatum and Jonah Hill. Despite my persuasions, if you continue to feel that this film might still be too painful, go bear the snappy jokes that will catch you unaware and make you laugh out loud. Then of course, since I must do my all to keep the adult’s attention, ladies and gentlemen, there is a cameo by Hans Solo and Chewbacca. Yes, yes, they are Lego figures, but honestly, who cares, right? The sequel to *The Lego Movie* will be out in 2017.
There is waltz, lots of contemporary dance forms, but very little ballet in Kathmandu based dance group Anzel Crew’s rendition of the Russian classic, Swan Lake, which opened this week at Mandala Theatre.

The result is a goulash of gyrations that distract from the performance, as do the technical glitches and the excess of acts in this 50 minute show. First premiered in Moscow in 1877, Swan Lake has taken 140 years to arrive in Kathmandu, and keeps to the original theme of extreme contrasts: black and white, good and evil, the idea of faithful love with a twist of a love triangle.

This production, directed by Nandita Kc and choreographed by Anzel crew casts Odette as the innocent and dainty swan queen who is torn between her feelings for two prince brothers—the Black Swan and the White Swan. As characterised by their colours, the black swan, the younger of the two, is ambitious and arrogant while his elder brother’s gentle and kind nature makes him the more beloved one. The queen's heart is divided between them as she tries to figure out exactly who she truly loves. Since this is the world’s most famous ballet, you already know the tragic ending.

At the press conference before the play’s premiere, co-director Mohammad Nazir Hussain, who also plays the Black Swan, said he attempted to show the intimate relationship between dance and drama. Unfortunately, the team falls short largely because of poorly choreographed routines -- the strong point of the original.

From the opening act, where the narrator performs a monologue of love prose, surrounded by the corps de ballet (only called that because they are in tutus) the dance routines are clumsy, uncoordinated and lack finesse. These ballerinas don’t even stand on their toes, and attempts at a pirouette were almost comical. One could argue that Swan Lake performed in a Himalayan hinterland will never match the original, but if the dancers can’t do ballet why choose to stage a ballet?

As is the case with our films and television, it seems even Nepali theatre like to turn on the decibel level. Yes, theatre calls for theatrics but you don’t have to bust ear drums. When a director undermines an audiences’ intelligence, and feels the need to spell out everything, such as the use of a narrator in this performance, the audience is left with little to do. The narrator, who erupts onto the stage almost every five minutes, dramatically elucidates paragraphs of prose and ends up irritating the viewer. The scene where she breaks down into an almost psychotic rant is perhaps when the play hits its nadir. You can’t inject Bollywood theatrics into a Swan Lake production in Kathmandu.

But all is not lost. In between the cringeworthy moments, the scene when the queen meets the Black Swan for the first time is quite beautiful. The Black Swan’s aggression and his desire to be with the lovely princess comes through with his stern stances and emotive eyes. The waltz between the White Swan and the queen is another beautiful moment. As the two glide across the stage, for a brief moment, the audience gets a fleeting glimpse of their characters.

Kathmandu is spreading. The edges of the city creep further and further outside the ring road like pizza dough, turning this large city into an extra large meal. It won’t be long before other restaurants, not just households, follow suit of Walter’s Mitho Mitho.

Formerly in Jhamsikhel, half of Walter’s kitchen was a casualty of Kathmandu’s road widening project. This problem’s forward thinking solution was a spacious re-imagining, now in Bhaisepati, of the former small backyard restaurant.

After a soft opening in December 2013, eight months later Walter’s busy hours are unpredictable since it’s off the beaten path of habitual eateries. But its expansive culinary tastes and relaxing beer garden could make the hills temporary.

There’s lots of room at Walter’s. There’s a small street-side stall serving goodies from their own Vienna Bakery still in Jhamsikhel. Inside the walls the tranquil beer garden is lined with benches and pleasingly features a traditional Austrian bowling alley, while further in the confines is lounge seating spread across the grass, a small bar tucked still further in the back, as well as monsoon-proof indoor seating.

Try to knock down all nine pins while drinking a Gerkinke beer (Rs 370). That’s just one example of the Nepali-German/Austrian fusion integrated at Walter’s.

I wanted to order curry wurst (Rs 300), to check as many boxes as possible of the multicultural offerings, however the server shook his head with disapproval. That wasn’t to say it isn’t good, but something about my countenance that evening said abort the Nepali-German fusion mission. Diplomatically he suggested the German bratwurst. But there are plenty of Nepali, German, Italian, Mexican, and even Middle Eastern dishes too for a multicultural clientele.

The pozzo balls (Rs 210) were touted as the chef’s special. This appetiser seemed bland at first, but offered a great deal of nuanced flavour. What could be the favorite meal of nine year-olds everywhere, the perfectly round fried balls filled with potatoes and cheese bend to the will of your biting teeth, but don’t break initially, as if to make sure you are determined to eat it, before finally giving way to its warm dairy interior. The hot garlic sauce wasn’t spicy, but a tangy take on traditional marinara sauce, which went well with the pozzo balls’ muzzarella filling.

German bratwurst (Rs 180) was too obvious a decision not to be a good one. Visually charred, the casing was not tough to inhibit enjoying the chewy sausage. The potato salad also backed the norms, since the large wedges in a vinegar-based dressing was a delightful departure from typical heavy mayonnaise-based potato salads mashed together.

Three Americans came in on a mission for Viennese chocolate crepes (Rs 280), which did not go unnoticed. After the first bite I was glad their choice became mine.

The sweet crepes were not oozing out of the thin pancake despite how forcefully I pressed on the soft top to ooze it out. But the delicate serving of chocolate left me wanting more, rather than sick from a sugar overload.

It’s only a matter of years, months or maybe even a week before many more cultural and culinary destinations like Walter’s envelop the rapidly expanding area outside the ring road.
Gosainkunda Festival

On 9 August, 2014, the eve of Janai Purnima, Gosainkunda Lake (4300m) will be the venue for the climactic enactment of the greatest Vedic story. In their quest for amrit (the elixir for spiritual immortality), the titans and the gods collaborated in churning the ocean. Mount Mandara was selected as the churning stick, the greatest Vedic story. In their quest

The Mount Medicine Society of Nepal (MMSN) and the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) carried out a double blind, randomised controlled trial to see if the most commonly used drug for the prevention of AMS, Diamox, would be helpful in these rapid ascents. Although there are proper studies with leech bites will also come in handy. The lake area is completely free of leeches, except at specific locations. Diamox is also helpful in preventing and treating AMS, especially for some of the problems will help. But pilgrims find the hardship. But pilgrims find the hardship.

Fest up with the sub-par picture quality on your mobile device, and thinking about stepping up to a DSLR camera? A major sticking point, when it comes to DSLR cameras, is their cost, which deters most of us from investing in one. However, in recent times cheaper, entry-level DSLR cameras from reputed companies have been doing the rounds. Samsung’s NX1100 is one such offering; a compact, perfectly capable and feature-packed shooter at an extremely attractive price.

For its class, the Samsung NX1100’s boasts a rather impressive spec sheet, with a 20.3 million pixel APS-C CMOS sensor, an ISO range stretching from 100 to 12,800, full HD movie recording and a maximum of 1/4000 second shutter speed especially standing out. The NX1100 incorporates Samsung’s smart filters technology, which enables you to make adjustments to manual settings such as aperture, shutter speed, ISO, white balance and exposure compensation simply by pressing a button on the lens. Other key features include 8fps continuous shooting, Sweep Panorama functionality, Smart Filters that apply a range of creative effects to your photos and an iScene mode, which enables photographers to select scene modes via the lens. Although there is no built-in flash on the Samsung NX1100, there is a hotshoe, and the camera ships with a small flash unit which slides into the hotshoe. As a bonus, Samsung has teamed up with Adobe to provide Lightroom 4 with the NX1100 for free, which allows users to simply and quickly enhance their images with a plethora of creative techniques.

At the end of the day, image quality is the ultimate test for any DSLR camera, and the Samsung NX1100’s vibrant, realistic colours and sharp detail make it a great option for someone looking to take their photography beyond cell phones at a great price.

Yantrick’s Verdict: Retailing at approx. Rs 35,000 in New Road, the Samsung NX1100 offers photographers making the jump to interchangeable lens cameras a lot of flexibility and creative potential.

“I recommend Sensodyne for all day every day sensitivity protection.”

-Dr. Spiro Condos, dental practice in the US
Picking the World Cup winner is like picking your favourite cultural dish: Germany’s famous breaded Schnitzel or Argentina’s all day Asado BBQ? Whichever your fancy however, both teams have styled themselves with different flavours to great success.

During the group stages, many touted the 2014 World Cup as the best ever, but the knockout rounds were much more measured, save for one dramatic exception. Still there have been 167 goals scored in the tournament, four short of the modern record.

Germany, the historically stout defensive side, and Argentina, the flash attacking side of Maradona and now Lionel Messi, have switched roles, with delicious results.

When Germany scored their second, third and fourth goals in a span of 176 seconds, approximately 176 million tvs were switched off before the remainder of the 7-1 humiliation. Statistics are the spice of football, and rather tellingly, Germany cleared the ball 20 times throughout the match, while Brazil only cleared the ball four times. Clearly, every time Thomas Mueller and crew were in on goal, the ball didn’t come out.

It could be argued that Brazil’s futility determined the outcome of two games, with both the Netherlands and Argentina playing a textbook foil to the wide open thrashing Brazil suffered. Writer and Nigerian Super Eagles supporter Teju Cole tweeted that the second semifinal’s “Opening exchanges are cagier than a prison inside of a zoo”, and neither team escaped. Only three other matches had fewer completed crosses, this in 120 minutes no less. And the semifinal featured the most total passes of any match in the tournament (1457) and passes completed (1146), further evidence of a pedestrian outing that both teams were determined not to win.

But you don’t need statistics to tell the story. First, anyone who watched either of the semifinal matches in the early hours of the morning was floored by the first and bored by the second—no statistics needed. Secondly, statistics on FIFA’s website labelled Brazil as the best attacking side with 100 attempts at goal, and labelled the best defending side also as Brazil. Metrics aren’t the best way to describe a football match anyway. Football is about passion. It is a religion. And even when Argentina is playing Germany in the final, they feel like they are taking on Brazil in the Maracana Stadium for one big Asado.

Matt Miller

Schnitzel or Asado?

World cup finalists benefit from new recipe for success

LUCKY NUMBER 11

11 corners scored in the World Cup Finals
11 combined goals by stars Neymar, Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Luis Suarez
11 goals by tournament’s top 2 scorers, James Rodriguez and Thomas Mueller
11 goals scored by Brazil
11 goals allowed by Brazil, the most by any team this World Cup

11 penalties scored in the World Cup Finals 11
11 combined goals by stars Neymar, Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Luis Suarez
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The number of Nepali women filing for divorce is rising

Bihikuti Rai

It is the monsoon wedding season in Nepal, and yet another marriage procession accompanied by a loud band makes its way down the narrow alleys of Kathmandu.

While many newlyweds have left for their honeymoons in Pokhara or Chitwan, other young couples are making the rounds in Kathmandu’s crowded court rooms seeking to divorce.

Usha and Bikesh are among them. They filed for a divorce in Kathmandu District Court earlier this year and it was finally approved last month. Their marriage did not even last a year.

The number of divorces has doubled in the last five years to 1,824 in 2013, most of them filed by women. One in ten family-related cases filed in the courts are divorces, and have overtaken cases relating to land, money lending, and inheritance.

“The rigid boundaries governing traditional Nepali life are starting to crumble and so is the notion of marriage. People are embracing divorce as an option if they cannot get along,” says Advocate Sapana Pradhan Malla.

“However, only a small section of the urban population is socially and economically empowered to exercise these choices.”

Women can directly file a case for divorce in Nepal’s courts, whereas men have to appeal through the local Village Development Committee or Municipality. But women’s rights activists caution that more women filing for divorce doesn’t always mean empowerment.

Malla explains: “Many women who file for divorce may not be making free choices because most of them get nothing or very little from their husband’s property share after divorce.”

Polygamy is illegal, and in most cases men force their wives to file for divorce in order to let them remarry. According to Nepali law, if a wife takes her share of property, her husband is allowed to remarry without divorcing his first wife.

Women’s rights activists say that such provisions encourage and abet polygamy. Although the 11th amendment to the Muluki Ain, which entitles daughters to inherit property at birth, might have improved the chances of social and financial safety for women after divorce, not all women have the upper hand in such negotiations.

While 28-year-old Usha did file for a divorce in a court, she had to agree on an out of court settlement. She was unable to afford legal fees to fight for a part of Bikesh’s property. “It could have taken me years to get my share of the small plot of land that I was entitled to after divorce, so I decided to settle,” she says.

Usha says she would have not filed for divorce if she didn’t have a supportive family and a stable job. “I may have committed suicide if I had to endure the mental torture from my in-laws,” says Usha, who admits she made the wrong decision to marry in a hurry due to family pressure.

Psychologist Karuna Kunwar, who counsels young married couples, says that societal pressures to get married against one’s will is a major factor in failed marriages. “Young people’s aspirations are radically different from that of their parents and grandparents and when they are forced into marriage, it falls apart quickly,” she says.

Although there are no national statistics on divorce, sociologists say that changing livelihoods coupled with urbanisation are leading to new dynamics of married couples in both urban and rural areas.

“With the high rate of foreign employment and migration, the connection to family and wider kin has become brittle,” says sociologist Chaitanya Mishra. “Without these agents of stability, it is difficult to save marriages from falling apart.”

There are no statistics to prove it, but women’s rights activists say the increased female literacy and the number of love marriages (as opposed to family arranged one) has also contributed to the rise in the divorce rate.
The procedure to obtain a divorce for women is easier than for men, but alimony or any other form of maintenance expenditure will be paid to the divorced wife only if the cause of the divorce is established to be the husband. The husband will then provide maintenance to the wife only for five years or until she remarries. However, the provision of maintenance is at the court’s discretion and is awarded only in cases where the wife does not have a source of income.

Grounds for divorce

FOR MEN
- If the wife lives separately from the husband for more than three years
- If the wife attempts to take the life of, or causes disability, or any serious physical damage to the husband
- If the wife has a sexual relationship outside marriage
- If the wife slopers

FOR WOMEN
- If the husband remarries
- If the wife is thrown out of the family house
- If the husband lives separately from the wife for more than three years
- If the husband attempts to take the life of, causes disability, or serious physical injury to the wife
- If the husband is impotent
- If the husband attempts rape

Rashika came to Kathmandu to attend college a few years ago. She began dating her classmate Bishal who convinced her to move in with him, promising to marry her after graduation. It was a convenient option: to live with the man she loved, as well as cut down on living expenses in Kathmandu.

But her partner started becoming very possessive, telling her what she should wear, who she should talk to, and began keeping tabs on her accounts on social networking sites. “He won’t even let me leave, threatening to tell my parents about our past and ruining my future,” says Rashika, who is still living with Bishal.

The increasing trend of live-in relationships among young people in Kathmandu has brought with it a whole set of problems in a society that is still culturally conservative. It is usually women like Rashika who suffer when relationships fail. Some men turn violent, and the young women have nowhere to report it.

Anu, a technician at a media house, was a victim of domestic violence after she moved in with her boyfriend for almost two years. He beat her and also took money from her. “When I found out about his other affairs, I was sad, but I still asked him to marry me,” she says, “but after that the physical assaults got more severe.” She decided to leave him despite his threats. She couldn’t complain to anyone since live-in relationships are not legally recognised.

Many women from such relationships take shelter at women’s organisations and try to start a new life. Women activists say live-in relationship needs to be recognised by law so victims can seek legal recourse in case of domestic violence or disputes related to children who may be born out of marriage.

“It is becoming urgent to address the legal issues related to non-marriage partnerships,” says Menaka Thapa of Raksha Nepal which works with trafficked women and shelters women from broken live-in relationships.

India’s Supreme Court determined guidelines for live-in relationship last year while adjudicating dispute between a live-in couple where the woman had sought maintenance from the man after the relationship ended. Shared household expenses and pooling of resources are some of the guidelines the Court framed within the expression ‘relationship in the nature of marriage’ for protection of women under Domestic Violence Act. In Nepal, there is no such legal recourse.

It is even more difficult for women who give birth to children during the relationship and are abandoned later. Rima (pic, below), 21, from Makwanpur has nowhere to go after her partner of eight years refused to marry after she gave birth to a baby girl who now can’t get a birth certificate. “He says that she isn’t his daughter and now I am worried about her future,” she says. Rima now works at a restaurant to pay for her daughter’s education.

Women in live-in relationships are even more vulnerable when things go sour

MINA SHARMA

Living together

Living together at women’s organisations and try to start a new life. Women activists say live-in relationship needs to be recognised by law so victims can seek legal recourse in case of domestic violence or disputes related to children who may be born out of marriage.

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Justices retreat

Taking part were Chief Justice Damodar Sharma who is also the Chair of the Judicial Commission, Law Minister Nirahau Acharya and 11 Justices of the Supreme Court. The self-reflection was organised in response to public exposure through the media of the behaviour and past record of some of the justices. A Supreme Court source said participants all agreed that judges needed to correct their own mistakes and themselves adhere to principles of judicial ethics.

In a paper presented at the conference, Justice Keshav Neupane of the Judicial Commission said the justice system needed to be more transparent, accountable, accessible and a system needed to be more transparent, accountable, accessible and a system needed to be more transparent, accountable, accessible and a system needed to be more transparent, accountable, accessible.

He said the incidence of contempt of court were increasing because of the erosion of public faith in the judicial system. But he defended the bill on the contempt of court, saying it was an internationally accepted method to address the respect and trust in the justice system.

At the meeting, Justice Gopal Purajati and others justify blamed ‘organised trial by media’ for the difficulties in the administration of justice. The press was giving “news” rather than “news” in a coordinated attack on the Supreme Court, a source quoted one judge as telling the meeting. However, Neupane said that if judges informed their behaviour, displayed integrity, and used their conscience, they would not have to resort to contempt of court directives.

“The press is deliberately interfering with the justice system. Journalists are pronouncing verdicts, this is making it difficult for justice to be administered, such direct and blatant intervention have to be stopped.” Neupane quoted as saying. However, another working paper blamed contradictory interim rulings on similar cases for the confusion and drift in the judicial system.

Minister Acharya said a concrete recommendation was needed on how stakeholders, including the media, could help restore the public’s trust in the judiciary.

No discrimination

Interview with Man Bahadur Nepali, the newly appointed Chairman of the National Dalit Commission, Hindalba, Patan, 6 July

Himal: How do you feel after being appointed the chairman of the National Dalit Commission? Man Bahadur Nepali: I take it as an opportunity to prepare future plans to uplift the Dalit community.

What are your main priorities? The Dalit Commission does not yet have a legal standing. So we need to have a fully empowered commission. We need short-term and long-term plans by bringing together the government, non-government and all stakeholders in one platform.

What steps has the commission taken to address Dalits’ issues since it was formed 12 years ago? The Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2013 is the commission’s biggest achievement. However, it hasn’t been properly enforced. The efforts of the commission to guarantee the economic, social and political rights of the Dalit community are commendable.

Why do the minorities and marginalised communities among the Dalits feel left out? Nine castes in the hill region and seventeen castes in the Terai region fall within the marginalised Dalit category and the nature of suffering differs from place to place. Majority of the people below the poverty line are Dalits and even among them, most are the marginalised Dalits. However, a lot needs to be done to increase their access to education and health by improving their economic and social status.

What are the main challenges of the commission? Racial discrimination and untouchability is an embarrassment for a modern and civilised society. Although racial discrimination has been eradicated legally, this is not the case in practice. The main challenge now is to have a state without racial discrimination.

It costs up to Rs 20,000 to travel to Ganjipur and back. Kunwar says her office has appealed to NGOs for help because they don’t see government support materialising any time soon.

The WCWCD has also yet to get papers approved before it travels to India. Two weeks ago it wrote to NGOs for help and got a positive response, which officials believe could help the documents pass through the bureaucracy.

Locals of Nepalganj have repeatedly written to the government about the situation. After that the MPs pushed to award themselves Rs 50 million they have demanded, but to earmark it for the development budget of their constituencies equally. The NC’s caretaker chair Ram Chandra Poudel has formally taken the initiative to take the decision so the CA members will be forced to follow suit.

That is the party’s viewpoint, but it is doubtful if leaders in government will go along. Given the character of CA members, you can never be sure. Even six months later, they haven’t taken a single decision to provide relief to people, they haven’t made progress on the constitution, they haven’t gone back to their constituencies, but want to award themselves Rs 50 million each. To take such a step knowing the public’s disgust with the lack of progress is not just cynical, but a stab in the back of voters. Government ministers are looking out for themselves and their cronies and relatives.

To be bluntly selfish, and obsessed with increasing their personal allowances and facilities, is the height of shamelessness.
Post-conflict stress syndrome

Psychological scars of conflict on young survivors take longer to heal

TAYLOR CALDWELL

In 2002, Rabina (pic, right) and her family were travelling home for Tihar when Maoists fished them from the bus along the East-West Highway near Malangwa. Rabina and her younger brother, Rabin, both suffered severe burns and their mother, Anju, died in the hospital in Raxaul after two agonising weeks. Rabina, now 17, is one of Nepal’s more well-known “post-conflict” children. There has been overwhelming support for the family since their story was first reported 12 years ago. The siblings have received free treatment at Sushma Koirala Memorial Burns Hospital in Sankhu and had fees waived at the Bright Horizons Children’s Home at Matatirtha. Rabina does well in class and looks forward to joining her father in Patlaiya to start a business after graduation this year. Rabina and Rabin still have some plastic surgery procedures to undergo at the hospital, which they visit once a year. But there is no institutional support to help address their mental trauma, since neither the school nor the hospital offer psychological care. Both children have nightmares and are haunted by the memory of what happened 12 years ago.

For many years, Rabina refused to ride a bus, recalls his father BhaktaBahadur Regmi, who is a forest ranger in Patlaiya. “Whatever support we got came from private individuals, charities, the hospital and school after reading our story in the media,” says Regmi. “There has been no help at all from the state.” But Rabina looks at the positive side, and says the insurgency changed her life by allowing her the opportunity to have a good education. There are thousands of children like Rabin and Rabina across Nepal who were orphaned by the war, and carry psychological scars.

Srijana Pakhrin was 12 when her father was taken away by soldiers. The army later told the family he was shot while trying to escape. Srijana was so traumatised she retreated into a shell and went into depression. She started doing well at school after few years, until the Maoists took her in their cultural troupe. “She came back depressed again and started falling back in her studies,” recalls her mother, Nani Maya Pakhrin. Srijana, now 24, had an inter-ethnic marriage and is nursing a year old son in a village in Makwanpur. “There are times when I still get anxious and depressed thinking about my father and my lost childhood,” says Srijana who is still on medication. Srijana’s elder brother dropped out of college and went to Bahrain to work as a security guard. He returned to Kathmandu few months ago to get married. Although the family has picked itself up financially after losing their father, Srijana’s brother is still angry at everything that they had to go through.

“When we begged for the state’s support after my father’s death, but there no one came forward with help,” he said with bitterness. After we spoke to Srijana in Kathmandu recently, her brother told us to delete all her photos. “We don’t want the world to feel sorry for us,” he said, “thousands of people saw my family’s grief in film and photos, pitted on our sad lives which only made me more angry and humiliated.” Bhusal Rai

Time doesn’t heal

Srijana Pakhrin was 12 when her father was taken away by soldiers in Makwanpur. The army later told the family he was shot while trying to escape. Srijana was so traumatised she retreated into a shell and went into depression (see box). Both Rabina and Srijana were profiled in Kesang Tseten and Prem BK’s documentary, Frames of War, along with other widows and mothers who lived through years of brutal violence.

Throughout the insurgency, both the Nepal Army and the Maoists involved children in political violence. The Maoists systematically recruited children as young as eight as “whole timers”. Most were disqualified by UNMIN from being allowed into cantonments, and many are now adults without jobs and prospects. The escalation of the conflict in 2004 saw an increase in the murder, torture and detention of children by both the Nepal Army and Maoist militia. Data about the fate of children affected by the conflict varies wildly, but it had a disproportionate impact on children. Up to 700 children have been killed or wounded by IEDs and mines since the end of the conflict in 2006. While donors have poured money into clearing landmines, not much has been done to help victims of psychological trauma. “The main obstacle to our work is the idea that mental health is a lesser priority,” explains Pitambar Koirala at the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) which helps former child soldiers with post-traumatic stress.

TPO’s studies have shown a high incidence of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder among child soldiers as they grow up. But help reaches only a tiny fraction of those who need it. For every young person like Rabina who shows great resilience and manages to move on and leave the past behind, there is another survivor like Srijana whose mental scars have not healed.

“Issues related to children’s physical and mental well-being need to be given priority in the peace process,” says Parbati Shrestha at TPO. “The government should take full responsibility, and our role is only to support this task.”

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TROYON"
A
der staying awake two nights in a row watching the
World Cup semis, the Ass is writing this week’s column
while fast asleep. So I would appreciate it if you didn’t
draw open the curtains, or make any loud noises and sudden
movements. Just go away, and wake me up in time for the finals.
At risk of being called a spoilsport let me play the devil’s
advocate here, and for argument’s sake, put it to you that
football is actually a pretty boring game. Football is said to be
directly derived from an ancient Aztec tournament in which
two teams kicked around decapitated heads of members of the
other team in a blood-soaked arena. And it has been downhill
ever since.

Watching football is now so excruciatingly dull that it
makes even die-hard fans like me doze off ten minutes into
the first half, especially if the match is taking place in the wee
hours, so called I have been told because that is when most
boys in boarding school wet
their beds.

In stark contrast, ice hockey
is absolutely riveting because
it is a vicious combination
of kick-boxing and a sword
fight involving a high speed
chase on skates around a
rink. American football is
another modern contact sport
that is scintillating because it
combines the physical attributes of trench warfare with the
Pamplona bull run.

In comparison, football is a really good cure for insomnia.
Essentially, football (or “soccer” to the Moms out there) entails
having 22 men in mohawks and tattoos running amok kicking
each other in their gonads for 90 minutes without scoring,
at the end of which they continue to play pointlessly on for
another 30 minutes, after which each side gets five target
practice shots. Then they strip in full view of 3 billion people
and exchange jerseys.

How to make football more exciting? That question has
bedeviled mankind ever since the collapse of the Aztec
empire. The Ass has a few humble suggestions for Sepp,
FIFA’s boss-for-life:

1. Move the goalposts. Increase goal post width from 9m at
present to 25m so there are more chances of goals being
scored. What we want to see are scores in the finals like
Argentina 73 - Germany 9.

2. Allow offsides. Strikers will be allowed to loiter around
the enemy goal post waiting for a long pass.

3. Don’t level the playing field. In fact, incline it at 15
degrees to give the stronger side the advantage of running
downhill and scoring more goals.

4. God gave us hands. But hands are allowed only for throw-
inns and goalies. What a waste. Let’s grab the ball and hit
the ground running.

5. Allow fouls. Players should be allowed to tackle using
Muay Thai and Ninjutsu techniques to bring down enemy
players, and the referee as well if he doesn’t behave
himself. Hooliganism in the D area will also be allowed.

6. Allow diving. Players who feign falls should not be given
yellow cards, they should be given an Oscar in the Best
Supporting Role Category.

7. No hands on crotches. Defenders setting up a wall to face
a free kick near the penalty area will no longer be allowed
to protect their crown jewels with their hands. It’s a
disgusting habit.

8. Sack referees and linesmen. We don’t need them,
they just slow the game down by stopping play at the slightest
excuse. And let’s replace the vanishing spray with pepper
spray and let players settle scores on their own.

9. Change shape of balls. Look at the Americans, they
took a dreary game, changed the shape of the ball from a round object into something
resembling a near-earth asteroid so it would bounce much
more crazily. And they have so much more fun.

10. Increase the number of players. Populating the field
with more players will liven up the game. Up number of
players on each side from 11 to 56. Mix teams with men
and women players, and get them to take off their jerseys.

In this manner, football will be much more exciting. More
goals will also mean more commercial breaks, and that
means more sponsors, and that means we can have the World
Cup every year instead of every four years.

FIFA is under tremendous pressure to move the 2022 World
Cup from Qatar because of 50 Celsius heat and labour
rights issues. Solution: move the games to Kathmandu.
So, no need to import Nepali workers to
build air-conditioned stadiums. It’s a win-
win, and we can rename it the FIFA Third
World Cup.