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Cooling off period

Despite a boycott by the opposition alliance, the Constituent Assembly has given itself more time to finish work on a questionnaire for the CA to decide on federalism, multi-culturalism, secularism, local governance, inclusion and prior rights of indigenous people. Although the ruling coalition sees this as an extension on the voting process, the real intention, it seems, is to buy time for informal negotiations with the Maoist-Madhesi alliance. Moderate second-echelon leaders within the NC and UML who haven't yet burned their bridges

with the opposition have taken the lead in initiating discussions. The atmosphere is so vitiated between and within the parties, as well as the government and some members of the international community there is a feeling that everyone needs a cooling off period. The people, who didn't have much faith left in the leaders anyway, are struggling to survive amidst much more immediate concerns of shortages of gas, electricity, water and petrol. There is almost a sense of relief that confrontation over a constitution that will satisfy nobody has once more been put off.

THE 'F' WORD
EDITORIAL PAGE 2



TO THE VOTE: The Proposal Drafting Committee meeting on Monday to finalise the agenda for voting on the constitution.

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INTERVIEWS

Asian Development Bank President speaks to Nepali Times how Nepal can unleash its potential.

PAGE 6

EU Ambassador Rensje Teerink explains why Kathmandu-based envoys met a Madhesi intellectual espousing secession.

PAGE 15



MARRIAGE MUSIC

It's just another hectic day at work for a busy wedding band in Kathmandu.

PAGE 10-11

nepalitimes.com

Watch video of the Everest Band Baja

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THE ‘F’ WORD

We Nepalis tend to underestimate our own capacity to muddle through. There were all kinds of predictions that if the deadline of 22 January for a new constitution was not met the country was doomed. Two weeks later we are still chugging along. Negotiations have come to a halt, the political discourse has got more belligerent, and each side is waiting for the other to blink first — but no one seems particularly bothered by it.

The people, who didn't have much faith left in the leaders anyway, are struggling to survive amidst much more immediate concerns of shortages of gas, electricity, water, petrol. There is almost a sense of relief that a looming confrontation over a constitution that will satisfy nobody has once more been put off.

In fact, the question being asked is that if a compromise is so difficult in this polarised situation, then maybe it's not such a great idea to pursue the mirage of a consensus for now. All the parties seem to be willing to let things coast along for a bit longer, allowing time for a cooling off period to let behind-the-scenes negotiations resume.

The trouble is that things are not cooling off. In fact, the atmosphere has got even more poisoned with UML leader KP Oli hinting that the Maoist-Madhesi alliance can be bought off with Rs 10 billion, and the UCPN(M) leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal promising fire and brimstone in return. Even more worryingly, there doesn't seem to be any backdoor talks taking place amidst all the posturing and sabre-rattling which is being dutifully bannered in the talking head journalism format of the mainstream media.

Last week in this space we tried to figure out why negotiations on the constitution failed when it was so close to an agreement on 21 January. The conclusion is still that it was the dispute over a power-sharing arrangement in which disagreement over the five Tarai districts was used as an excuse. The demography of the two districts in the west and

If federalism is a *fait accompli* let's try to minimise the damage that it will cause

three in the east were altered by Panchayat-era transmigration from the hills. The personal political ambitions of NC-UML leaders from these areas has got mixed up with Madhesi aspirations for federal provinces along the plains. State demarcation would also be of strategic interest to Nepal's provinces vis-à-vis India if mammoth dams planned on the Karnali and the Kosi push through in the coming decades.

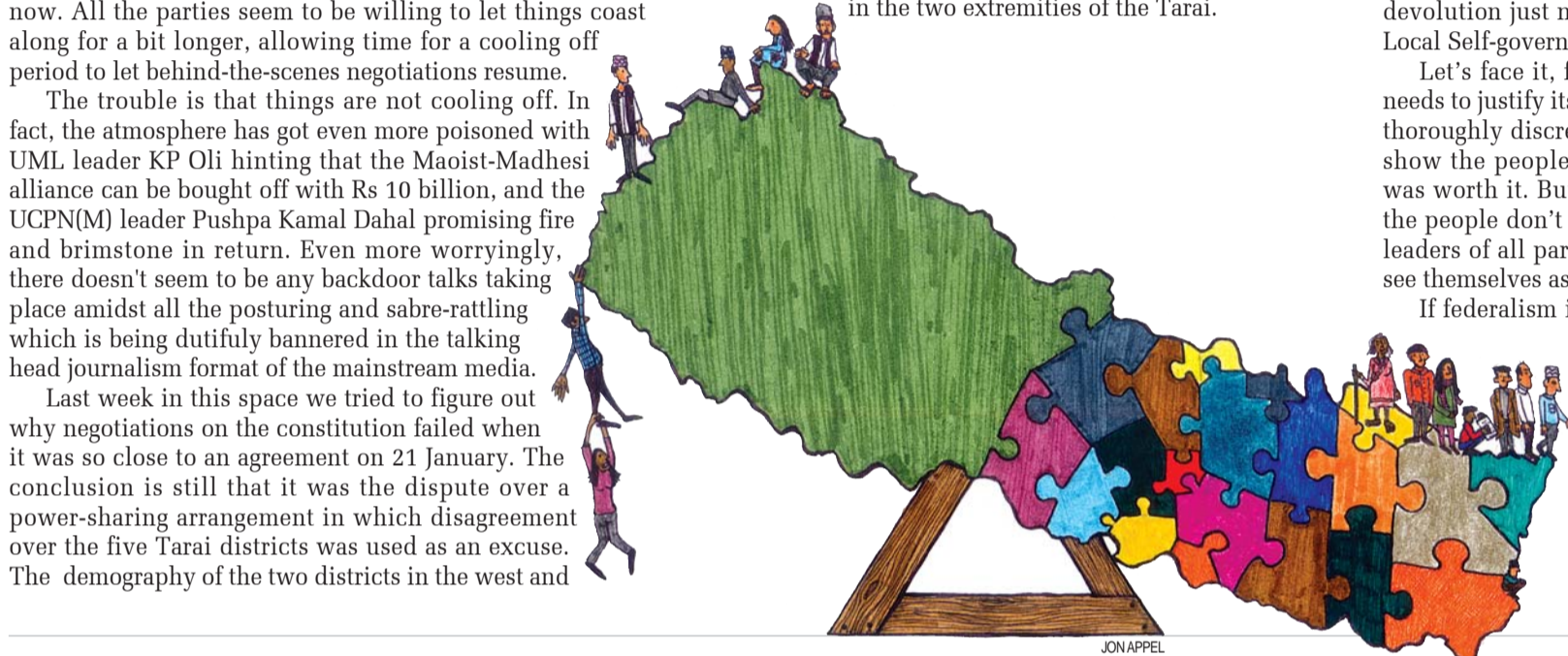
We have to be thankful the last-minute compromise being bandied about to partition the five districts VDC by VDC based on their population composition did not go through. This is where 'give-and-take' could have been a disastrous 'lose-lose' because of the danger of igniting ethnic pogroms in the two extremities of the Tarai.

Most political leaders say it is too late to backtrack from the concept of federalism. But they couldn't be further removed from what the people actually think. Nepalis have serious misgivings about federalism. An authoritative nationwide public opinion poll by Interdisciplinary Analysts (IDA) confirms the figures from last month's Himalmedia Public Opinion Survey 2015 that only one-fourth of Nepalis (26%) support federalism, but even they are against naming provinces after ethnic entities. And, a majority of pro-federalism Nepalis (53%) say geography must be the basis for creating federal units. IDA has disaggregated this data and found that a majority even in the plains and among Janajatis agree with the general population.

Do we really need federalism to have inclusive grassroots development and devolved democracy? Not necessarily, argues columnist David Seddon in the opposite page, and the veteran Nepal hand puts forward viable ideas on how devolution just needs to build in genuine inclusion in the Local Self-governance Act of 1999.

Let's face it, federalism is the trophy the Maoist party needs to justify its ruinous conflict. Its leaders, most of them thoroughly discredited, need a new federal constitution to show the people that all that blood-letting and suffering was worth it. But comrades, read the writing on the wall: the people don't want federalism. The only reason the top leaders of all parties now want federalism is because they see themselves as warlords of those future provinces.

If federalism is a *fait accompli* let's try to minimise the damage that it will cause and maximise the benefits in terms of regional autonomy and decentralised decision-making. Let's use it to harness natural resources equitably, create jobs at home and lift living standards. That is what the people really want, and that is what the negotiations should be all about.



YOUR SAY

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CONSTITUTION

It will have to be a give and take ('Solutions from within', Editorial, #743).

1. States according to geography
2. Judiciary recommended by Head of Government, approved by parliament
3. President: directly elected by people (2 terms max, each of 4 or 5 years).
4. Member of Parliament based on number of districts + population of district. (ensures sparsely populated districts get a say).
5. Nationalisation of natural resources (air, solar, water, etc.).

Namah

■ Namah, your points are all logical and progressive. But I fear that there is no progressive environment in Nepal at the moment, which is conducive to your points being implemented. The situation reminds me of those plants that have to be burnt to the ground and completely destroyed only for them to regrow after the first rains.

Socrates

■ Ambedkar was an alarmist and short sighted as well ('The statute of liberty', Anurag Acharya, #743). Quota/reservations were meant to be reviewed every 10 years in India. What happened? A social program ended becoming the de facto rule. Go and interview thousands of kids across India and find out what they really think about reservations. Generations of scheduled tribes/

castes have taken advantage of reservations and done quite well for themselves. Did Ambedkar really believe that by antagonising various castes with unfair representation, there will be true social reform and amalgamation? Social justice cannot be ordained by a piece of paper. Generational change requires a generational leader. India just might have one in Modi. Where is ours?

N

■ Yves Leterme must have forgotten Belgian politics was a big joke internationally ('Lessons from Belgium', Cynthia Choo, #743). Remember the trolls and memes dedicated to your politics? Which is why it's understandable why you're defending the CA members' vandalism. Nepal must learn from world politics and it's a good thing to gain inputs from leaders from other countries but it should stop comparing its issues with America and European countries. Those are developed countries with high HDI. People are better off there. Nepal should take lessons from how ethnic federalism fared in poor countries with low HDI.

Mahendra Shah

NEPAL AIRLINES
If NA starts flying to Delhi I will be the first to book a ticket ('Saving Nepal Airlines', #743). Despite my friends warning me of delays, I always chose to fly NA in the past. The 15 minute delay never bothered me. What bothered me more was Nepalis choosing to fly expensive Indian

carriers and complaining about NA's service without even trying it. Recently my Delhi to Kathmandu Jet Airway flight got delayed by 1.5 hours. I didn't complain nor did other passengers (mostly Indian). If we all offer support and fly our own flag carrier instead of a foreign airline, the day will not be far when we can be once again proudly say 'I fly Nepal Airlines'.

Sherap

DISASTER RELIEF
Sadly, the story of the flood refugees is forgotten by government officials because they are no more in the headlines. ('Left in the cold', Mallika Aryal, #743). It's the same with every disaster every year. The answer is to build local capacity to cope. Victims of the 1981 floods did it well in Lalitpur.

Madhukar Upadhyaya

SURROGACY
One of the leading hospitals in Nepal is going to announce the surrogate medical tourism soon ('Wombs for rent', Binita Dahal, #743). Nepal might just turn into a hub for surrogacy.

Sunil Regmi

■ I would advise Nepali lawmakers to watch a documentary called 'Google Baby'.

Sara

■ Surrogacy may indeed be a question of demand and supply as Binita Dahal points out. However, as she also underlines, in her excellent investigation, promoting commercial surrogate motherhood in a

country where patriarchal values are entrenched, where the government is corrupt to the core, and there is weak regulation opens up the possibility of massive exploitation and abuse of women. As we have seen with kidney transplants, male family members often work in cahoots with the organ traffickers. Yet another threat to Nepali womanhood.

Jens

ART
Can someone explain to me why his exhibition was free for visitors ('The root man', Cynthia Choo, #743)? There is always time, money and effort associated with any work that's deemed good enough for an exhibition. Why even ask to showcase his talent when you can't even provide the transportation, let alone pay him? Sadly, the museum themselves intentionally exploit such artists in the name of art.

Sanjay

■ As beautiful as they are, Jaya Raj's sculptures are extremely expensive ('Carving his niche', Stéphane Huët, #743). I tried to get a sculpture of a small Buddha head, but when I saw the price, I passed on to a lesser exposed sculptor. It is clear that he has travelled around and has familiarised himself with pricing his items for rich western clients. Sometimes I wonder if his items are expensive because they are beautiful or because the rent at Babar Mahal Revisited is so high.

Hurray

Times

THIS WEEK



KENJI KWOK (21 LIKES)

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Carving his niche by Stéphane Huët, Cynthia Choo, Kenji Kwok and Ayesha Shakya

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 **Most popular on Twitter**
Solutions from within, Editorial (15 retweets, 12 favourites)

 **Most visited online page**
Wombs for rent by Binita Dahal (927 views)

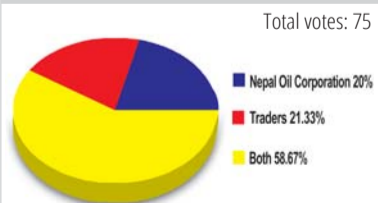
 **Most commented**
Solutions from within, Editorial (10 comments)

Timesnepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #744

Q. Who is responsible for the shortage of LPG gas?

Total votes: 75



Weekly Internet Poll #745
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should NC-UML halt voting process to resume talks with Maoist-Madhesi?

DEVOLUTION without FEDERALISM

There are many other ways to ensure proper representation without the need for federalism per se



DEVAKI BISTA

If a major concern of Nepal's pro-federalists with regards to a new Constitution is to reduce the power of the central state, the domination of the political process by the old elites, and to increase the representation of those who have been disadvantaged and arguably 'marginalised' in the political process, then this could be achieved without the need for federalism per se.



THE GADFLY
David Seddon

First, the Constitution should be based on popular democracy (loktantra) universal human rights and the explicit protection of the rights of minorities and disadvantaged groups. The definition of citizenship should be broad and generous, indicating a commitment to gender equality with regards to citizenship by birth and recognising residence. Every effort should be made to provide citizenship papers as soon as possible to all who qualify. All citizens should have the right to individual liberties and freedoms and the protection of the state and all adults the right to vote – some consideration might be given to reducing the voting age.

Real devolution of power and resources to elected district and village councils as per the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999 (passed but never really implemented, perhaps with supplementary legislation) would immediately effect a re-structuring of the state. If the number of districts in the Tarai were to be increased from the present 20 to say 45, to allow for greater equality of population as between districts, then a House of directly elected district council representatives would create a powerful basis for the representation of blocs of local and regional interests. There could be two representatives from each district, one man and one woman.

In such a House, 'Madhesis' for example could, if they wished to represent themselves as such, have a decisive voice. Alternatively, they could align themselves in other ways to

promote a variety of different interests so could the representatives from remote regions.

Proportional representation is clearly a way of enabling minority interests to have a greater chance of representation than they usually do in first-past-the-post systems, but if an anchor in local constituencies is regarded as desirable, then a mixed system of proportional representation together with first-past-the-post at the constituency level could be adopted – as it was for the elections to the first Constitutional Assembly.

This allowed that first Assembly to demonstrate an unprecedented diversity and range of representation, and gave the Maoists the largest share of seats. Pushpa Kamal Dahal has already, not surprisingly, shown an interest in a greater role for proportional representation in any future system of political representation.

Regarding governance, there is a strong argument for having a directly elected President, with a limited period office. But in order to command real authority, the president should renounce all other roles, at least for the period of the presidency, whether party political, judicial or other. He or she should not be a part of the executive, but should represent the nation as a whole, and preside over a National Planning Commission and a National Security Committee, to ensure a unified strategy for sustainable economic development and national security.

The legislature could be a directly elected National Assembly as at present, but elected on a mixed proportion and first-past-the-post system countered by a House of Local Representatives with powers of scrutiny. The judiciary should be strictly separate from – and independent of – both legislature and executive.

As to the government itself, there are many possibilities, but its constitution must surely aim to balance effectiveness with representativeness. Single party governments have both advantages and disadvantages, as do coalitions. The same is true of a minimalist inner cabinet with a powerful Prime Minister and Prime Minister's office, and a larger, more inclusive government with a less 'presidential' First Minister. @pigreen



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Putting wind in the map

Areas of Nepal have wind profiles ideally suited to meet peak electricity demand

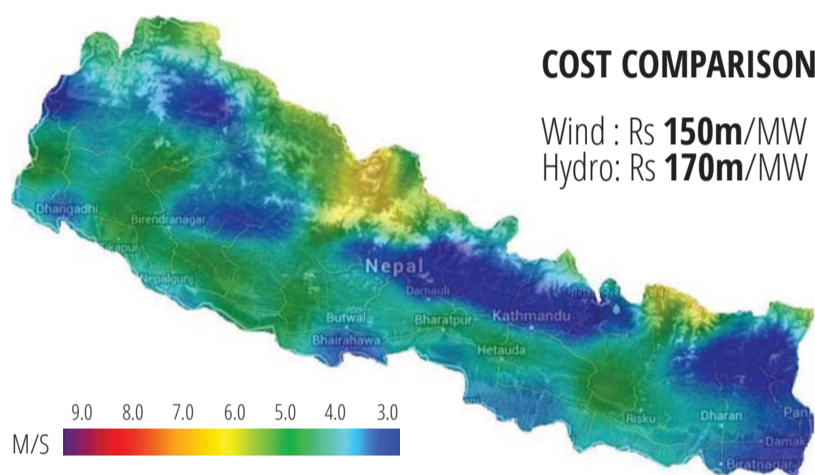


KUSHAL GURUNG

Last year, Denmark supplied nearly 40 per cent of its electricity from wind energy. This is quite unusual because utilities often try to keep its share of wind energy below 20 per cent as it is so intermittent. Denmark proved that wind can be part of an effective grid integration system and predictability.

The Global Wind Energy Council predicts that wind could supply up to 19 per cent of global electricity by 2030. The Indian wind energy sector has an installed capacity of more than 20,000MW of wind energy and China will cross 100,000MW by next year.

Nepal is not the windiest country in the region, but a United Nations Environment Programme report in 2008 shows a potential of more than 3000MW



of wind power. The figure may look tiny compared to our hydropower potential but it is more than four times our current installed capacity.

The World Bank has begun Nepal-wide wind mapping as part of its Energy Sector Management Assistance Program and its internal assessment shows that some places in Nepal have wind profiles ideal to meet peak demand in the evening. Another study by the US National Renewable Energy Laboratory suggests that some wind sites in Nepal are near existing transmission lines.

But do we have what it takes to harness our wind energy potential? Wind projects are relatively quick to install, and takes much less space than large solar arrays. If there is

road access, equipment and no political obstructions, a 100MW wind farm can be built within six months. Our primary concern would be road access to wind sites since bigger turbines mean cheaper cost of electricity generation.

For a wind project, however, big does mean huge. A modern wind turbine usually has a capacity to generate 3MW with each of its blades as long as 50 m — almost the height of Dharahara. The blades cannot be disassembled and need to be delicately handled. So, road access can be a major obstacle to install large wind turbines. Unless highways are widened and improved, we may be restricted to smaller wind turbines for now.

The cost of wind power has been declining and it is now

at par with fossil fuels for new electricity generation, but it is still unlikely to attract private investment into Nepal if the conditions are the same as for hydropower projects. Many countries have come up with various policy instruments to promote the renewable energy:



the US has tax credit for renewable projects, India has Accelerated Depreciation Tax of up to 80 per cent for wind projects, while the Philippines has a lucrative feed-in tariff rate. Without such incentives, on-grid wind projects may not take off even if we put proper infrastructure in place.

Nonetheless, there could still be opportunities for captive generation, as many of our industries are paying a hefty price for diesel backup power. Wind projects, like other renewables, are much cheaper than diesel generators. Additionally, wind plants cost less than hydro plants: one megawatt of wind power costs Rs 150 million compared to Rs 170 million for hydropower, and can be completed much faster.

The current electricity shortage is here to stay for some time. Energy demand, including for electricity, will keep rising as Nepal proceeds to become a 'developing country' from a 'least-developed' one by 2022. We have already seen how time consuming hydropower projects can be, and with the possible impact of climate change on the Himalaya and river systems originating from them we may be putting all our eggs in one basket if we stick to a hydro-only policy.

A flexible energy mix is the way to go, and we need to be open to all options available. It is about time we put wind on our map. 🇳🇵

This article is part of a monthly series prepared jointly with the Energy Development Council of which Kushal Gurung is a member.

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■ Riding the wind, #532
■ Where the wind blows, #494

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Win-win

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Spread the love

Closeup has started this year's Love Message Fest. Messages can be sent till 10 February. Five lucky winners will get a brand new Samsung Galaxy Tab.



Bottoms up

Shree Mahakali Wine Pvt Ltd has launched two new premium wines Divine Wine White and Divine Wine Honey available in all major outlets across Nepal.

Transit point

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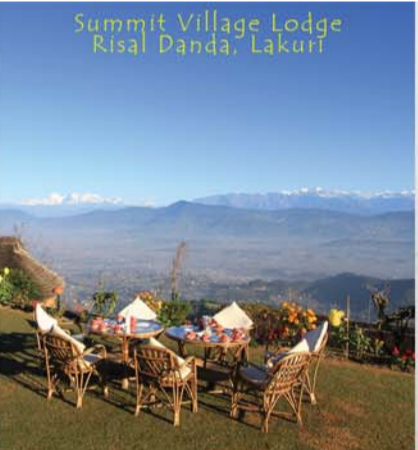
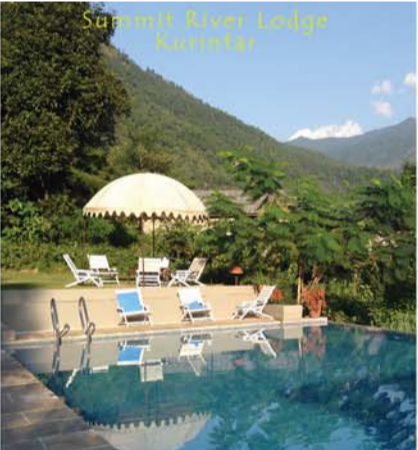
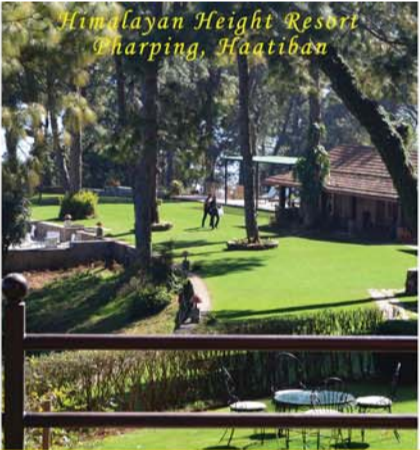
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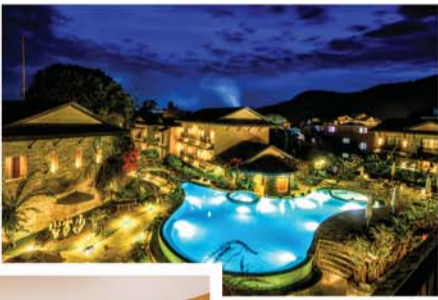


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Rulers and the ruled

Two recent surveys, one in this newspaper and another by Interdisciplinary Analysts (IDA), show the people's responses that are a stinging rebuke to the political leadership of this country. Never in our recent history has there been such a disconnect as there is now between what the people want and what the political parties are concerned with.

The Himalmedia Public Opinion Survey 2015 conducted in Kathmandu two weeks before the 22 January constitution deadline demonstrates exactly that. While the people are worried about jobs, health, education, and inflation, the politicians are obsessed with getting to power and staying there. The Survey showed that the people are fully aware that the demands for federalism and identity are just a political ruse.



THE DEADLINE
Damakant Jayshi

Both the Himalmedia and IDA surveys don't make pleasant reading for politicians, but what do they care what the people think? More than 40% of those surveyed said they couldn't be bothered about what kind a constitution is adopted. "Just get it over and done with," seems to be their message.

Like in previous nationwide Himalmedia polls, this one also showed a gap between what politicians, commentators and analysts deem and think is important, and what matters most to the people. Inflation (64.3%), unemployment (42%) and corruption (36.3%) are top priorities for the people, just like in the past. After a quick glance at the flood of readers feedback in Nepali and English language newspapers one can add the poor service delivery and shortages of essentials to the long list of woes.

It is as if the political party leadership is living on a different planet from the people

The government and the parties have not only missed delivering the statute on their self-imposed deadline of 22 January, they have also repeatedly missed providing basic services. A case in point is the current shortage of cooking gas, which by most accounts is artificial and caused by a politically-protected mafia that has its tentacles from the bureaucracy right down to the distributors.


Even Minister for Commerce and Supplies Sunil Bahadur Thapa has found it difficult to round up the crooks, but the buck stops at the Prime Minister Sushil Koirala's desk for this and other governance failures. In the far west, there is crippling shortage of petrol and diesel because tanker drivers are on strike demanding a raise.

The basic services, mostly absent, are not limited to fuel and cooking gas. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) has been cutting power more frequently than its revised load-shedding schedule, which keeps adding to the darkness.

Here's another example of dim-wittedness on the part of the government and the traffic police department. Under pressure from an alarming spike in the number of avoidable road accidents on highways and city streets, they came out with a code governing the drivers of public transport.

Again, the response demonstrated the disconnect between the rulers and the ruled. One laughable directive was not to carry an 'overload' of passengers. Do they even realise what kind of buses ply on highways, especially on local routes? Are those safe? More importantly, are there enough buses to cope with passengers? You can print codes of conduct but it's not going to work because people will board the buses, tractors, trax, trucks, no matter how overloaded they are.

In the highways, if you miss a bus you don't know when the next one will be coming. So, one has no choice but to take whatever is available. Drivers alone are not responsible for overcrowding. Reaching schools, colleges, health posts/hospitals or some other destination is important to all of us, not just those traveling on government vehicles which are bought from the taxes we pay in the first place. When it comes to city traffic, there are unworkable guidelines on overcrowding, all buses at all times are overcrowded during my daily commute. so am I breaking the law when I ride a bus?

The political leadership is breathtakingly out of touch with the people's pulse. The final responsibility, however, rests right at the top. The people's message to the rulers they elected is: don't waste too much time on the constitution, just govern well. 
@damakant



KENJI KWOK

“More optimistic now about Nepal”

Takehiko Nakao, President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), believes Nepal has huge potential for development that can only be unleashed with political stability and improved governance. He spoke to *Nepali Times* during a three-day visit to the country this week.

Nepali Times: What is your assessment of the progress that Nepal has made in infrastructure and development?

Takehiko Nakao: Nepal's achievements in meeting Millennium Development Goals in health and education have been dramatic. But it is lagging behind in energy and transportation infrastructure. It is very difficult to attract serious foreign investors in this situation. It is unfortunate that a country with such vast hydropower potential hasn't had reliable power supply. The NEA needs to improve transmission, generation, and also the regulatory framework. It is good that there is more trust between India and Nepal today, and because of Prime Minister Modi's visit the PTA has been signed and several projects are moving ahead. The ADB is helping with upgrading airports at Lumbini and Kathmandu, and these are important steps to leave a good impression of the country.

You have repeatedly stressed on investing in human capital. How exactly is the ADB helping Nepal in this regard?

Education is the basis through which Nepal can catch up with other growing Asian countries. Enrollment is up, but the dropout rate is still high and Nepal needs to invest in improving the quality of education, secondary schooling and in technical and vocational training. Because of the instability of the past decades, the country hasn't been able to benefit from the potential of education, but it is now time to unleash it. The insurgency has ended and I have an impression that there is a narrowing of differences between the political leaders in different parties, so Nepal shouldn't miss the chance to pass the constitution and work on stability.

But large infrastructure projects in Nepal have been delayed even during times when politics was stable, like Melamchi. It seems to be more of a problem of governance?

Yes, governance is important, and in my meetings it seemed that the government is serious about addressing corruption and improving governance. One of the reasons this country can now move forward is that unlike in the 1970s, there is an international consensus on development and there aren't different ideologies in China, India or Southeast Asia. Some countries tried the more socialist approach to development, but today almost everyone is in agreement about the way forward. They know that without proper policies there will be no development.

And what if the instability continues despite the promulgation of the constitution?

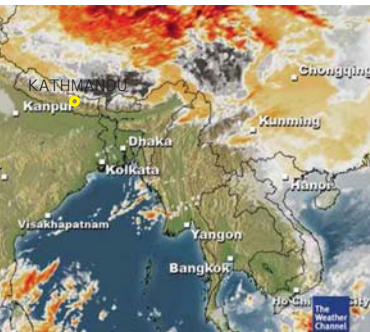
You have to remember that the per capita income of Nepalis is very low, and it is one of the eight remaining low-income countries while other countries have progressed to middle-income status. Development-wise Nepal may be lagging behind but it also means Nepal can move ahead faster to catch up. I have a very strong belief that if the government passes good policies, sometimes the achievement is even better than what international observers would expect. That happened to China, and people never thought about China becoming such a big economy in a period of 20-30 years. So I think Nepal can do it if there is more seriousness. But to do that, it is very important to mobilise the power of the people. So there are many ideas about constitutions and it is the choice of the people, but what is important is to have an integrated approach to development. It is important to empower marginalised regions and different groups, but for this comparatively small economy what is more important is to mobilise total resources of the country.

In many of the countries that ADB works in, the lack of transparency is a big problem. How does a bank with a zero-tolerance policy deal with this, for example in Nepal?

I got the message that the government is serious about transparency. One of the ways to deal with this, from the ADB side, is through the procurement process which is based on the competitive bidding, whether it's international or domestic. We always check the integrity issues whether there is wrongdoing within the contract by the government and contractors. And also we are supporting capacity building for anti-corruption work, what kind of systems can support transparency and in the government's procurement system. So, public-finance management as a whole should be more streamlined and those are things that we are trying to do.

This is a very short visit for you but are you slightly more optimistic after your visit than you were before you arrived?

Yes I would say so because I feel that there is once again a consensus on how the country should develop, and so that is encouragement to me. And also, there is more stability, there is no insurgency anymore. In several other countries there is still an issue of security and safety, but that is almost over here. And that is really encouraging.



The sudden westerly squall was uncharacteristic for winter rain, and brought welcome respite for farmers and cleared up the pollution in Kathmandu Valley. This means the sun is now not filtered by smog, and will start heating up the ground. After staying in the low single-digits, the minimum temperature will begin to rise starting the weekend. The maximum will still remain in the vicinity of 20 Celsius. The lingering water vapour from Tuesday night's rain will leave residual clouds buildup towards afternoon.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
19° 3°	19° 5°	19° 9°

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DEVAKI BISTA

STÉPHANE HUËT

For nearly three decades, the Siddhartha Art Gallery (SAG) has become Kathmandu's own art installation: hosting the most prestigious art festivals and exhibitions. Synonymous with Siddhartha is its founder, Sangeeta Thapa who gave herself the goal of showing the very best of Nepali art based on merit.

Most connoisseurs of art in Nepal and abroad would agree that Thapa has achieved her goal. The past five years have been particularly vibrant for Thapa as she involved herself in diverse projects.

Though it hasn't always been easy in the past 30 years, Thapa has never stopped doing what she likes most. "Inactivity is

death," insists the self-professed workaholic.

Her love affair with art began as a child when her father, who was a UN diplomat, took her to shows and exhibitions around the world. "He instilled his love for the arts very early on," Thapa said in the balmy courtyard of a restored Rana palace outside her gallery.

Immersed in this environment, Thapa was determined to become an artist since she was five. Later, she went to the West Sussex School of Arts and Design in UK, but stopped after one year feeling guilty about not following the career path of her father.

"The art was just about me," Thapa says, "but I thought I could serve people as my father did." She started studying mass communications and

anthropology at the George Mason University in Virginia in the USA. But art pulled her back, again.

In 1983, Thapa visited many galleries in Kathmandu and felt there was something missing. "The whole production of exhibitions was crying out to be managed better," she said.

While creating her network in Kathmandu, she had the idea of showcasing artists in her own way and opened Siddhartha Art Gallery with artist Shashikala Tiwari in 1987. They started exhibiting noted Nepali artists of that time and went back in history of Nepali art to exhibit the works of Nepali masters.

After some years of showcasing the same artists, Thapa felt the need to propose more innovative works. "I was seeking new narratives," she explained, "and I was happy to see young artists in

the art community." The gallery helped launch a new generation of Nepali artists such as Sujan Chitrakar and Ashmina Ranjit.

Her biggest challenge was to create an appreciation from the Kathmandu audience for whom the new genre of artwork was not as comprehensible. And while the gallery churned out exhibitions, five years ago Sangeeta set up the Siddhartha Art Foundation to use the medium of art to educate and engage the community.

In was during the height of conflict that Siddhartha organised *The Open Doors Project* which brought artists and citizens from marginalised communities and disparate social backgrounds together in the quest for dialogue and peace.

Another project, *Shanti: An Art for Hope*, involved an exhibition and concert dedicated to the 327

children killed during the conflict. A monument in Sinamangal documenting the names of these 327 children is a testimony of this project.

With a grant from the Danish Centre for Culture and Development (CKU), the Siddhartha Art Foundation is currently organising various talk programs on art and curation to encourage the next generation of Nepali art managers.

At the same time, Thapa is preparing for the third edition of Kathmandu International Art Festival (KIAF) in March 2016. The first two themes were Status of Women in Nepal and Climate Change, and the next KIAF will focus on the city and urban issues.

Thapa's only regret is that there isn't an actual museum of contemporary art in town. She adds: "I'm working on it." 🇳🇵

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EVENTS

**Nippon cinema,**

A two-day Japanese film festival organised by the Embassy of Japan in association with Japanese Language Teachers' Association of Nepal.

27 and 28 February, Tribhuvan Army Officer's Club, Tundikhel, (01)4426680, cultural-emb@km.mofa.go.jp

Indo-Nepal,

A joint exhibition by Nepali artists from Banaras Hindu University.

Till 18 February, 11am to 5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4218048, sthapa@mos.com.np

Clean up,

Talk by Rabi Karmacharya on the use of technology to maximise the impact and presentation of household waste management survey by Krisha Sthapit. 7 February, 11am onwards, Café & Shop Mitini, Lazimpath, 9843547288

10 minutes drama,

An innovative concept giving an opportunity to theatre aficionados and people with no theatrical backgrounds to showcase their artistic potential.

22 to 28 February, Sarwanam Theater, Kalikasthan, (01)4011027, 10minutesdrama@gmail.com

Saturday Bazaar

Local organic producers come together to host this weekend market.

7 February, 1 to 5pm, Maan Nam, Naxal, (01)4415613, nepalgolfzone@hotmail.com

Curation 101,

A workshop with Veerangana Solanki

to discuss the role of a curator through dedicated material on exhibition design and documentation.

20 to 24 February, Siddhartha Arts Foundation, 984-9519933, nischali.oli@gmail.com

Sustainable art,

An interactive session with artist Samar Singh Jodha on the topic of "Sustainability and Capacity-building through Art," moderated by Kunda Dixit, Editor of Nepali Times.

6 February, 5.30pm, Himalayan Bank Auditorium, Kamaladi, 984-9519933

**Journeying for art,**

Painting exhibition by a promising young artist-Dhwoj Gurung.

Till 12 April, Park Gallery, Pulchowk, Lalitpur, (01)5522307, www.parkgallery.com.np

Slam Finale,

After two rounds of workshops and auditions, the top 20 poetry slammers compete in the final round of QC Awards – Youth Poetry Slam. Rs 50, 7 February, 12pm, Mandala Theatre, Anamanagar, (01)5536974, wordwarriorsnepal@gmail.com

Art market,

A place to sell and buy paintings, prints, posters and design products, live gig by Herbal People.

7 February, 12 to 3pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, (01)5006665, contact@image-ark.com

DINING

**Manny's,**

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Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01)4248999, reservation@laldurbar.com

Japanese goodness,

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Garden Terrace Restaurant, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, (01)4273999

Valentine night,

A free rose and a free glass of hot mulled wine followed by a free Irish coffee on Valentine's Day in a balloon filled dining room.

14 February, K-too Beer and Steakhouse, Thamel, (01)4700043.

**Vootoo,**

The new home of Newari cuisine, as well as a continental menu for those who want to play it safe.

Lazimpath, (01)4005222

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MUSIC

**Tribute to reggae,**

Joint Family Internationale celebrates Bob Marley's 70th birthday and opens the Black History Month 2015.

Rs300, 6 February, 8pm, House of Music, Thamel, 985-1075172, sanzey@hotmail.com

Wave tour,

Wave Magazine celebrates its 20th anniversary with a series of concerts.

Rs100, 7 February in Pokhara, (01)5010773, info@wavemag.com.np

Uglyz live,

Back in Nepal to celebrate the 10th anniversary of their debut album.
7 February, Trisara, Lazimpat, (01)4410200, trisara.restaurant@gmail.com

**Underground,**

Local metal bands get together to celebrate Underground Nepal's fifth anniversary.

Rs300 (door sale), Rs 250 (pre-sale),
7 February, Purple Haze, Thamel,
981-8405754,
mail@nepalunderground.com

GETAWAYS

Jhule mountain resort,

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Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park, Lapsipedi-3, Jhule, (01)6212399

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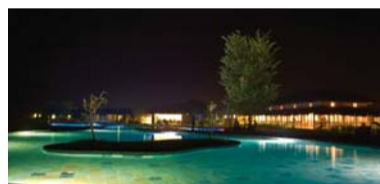
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Himalayan Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha,
01-4370286, peace@wellness.com.np

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Gharipatan, Pokhara, (61)462222,
(01)4410051, shangrilavillage@gmail.com

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Date: 14th February, 2015
Venue: The Lost Horizon Cafe, Hotel Shangri-La
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TSERING DOLKER GURUNG

6.30AM

It's still dark outside and in the dimly-lit room at Patan's Tadhoka, members of the Everest Band Baja are busy preparing to perform at a wedding: their 30th engagement of the season. The members put on their uniforms: black trousers, white shirt and a trademark red coat with golden epaulettes and sit down for a last minute rehearsal.

6.45AM

Band leader Ram Kumar Pariyar signals that it's time to leave. The 16 members lug their trumpets and drums, and squeeze into a microbus and set off for the day's big event: a Newari wedding in Balaju.

8.00AM

The band has arrived for the ring ceremony, but the groom is nowhere to be seen. They wait outside, huddled for warmth. Some are smoking, others are goofing around. A relative of the groom shouts at them: "Don't just stand there, play something."
Trumpeteer Abin Pariyar, 21, is used to the rudeness. "Even though the stigma about being untouchables is not as prevalent as before, we are still looked down upon because we belong to a lower caste and are treated accordingly," he says.
A majority of Kathmandu's wedding bands are owned and operated by Pariyar (Shilpi) families from Western Nepal, who have been in the trade for generations. Their traditional flutes and horns were replaced with modern instruments long ago.

Everest Band Baja was started by Ram Kumar's father, Bhim Bahadur Pariyar in the late 1950s. Ram Kumar, 56, took over the business when he was 22. All four brothers work for the same company. Middle brother Sudarshan Pariyar is the band master, while his other two brothers help with administration.
"It's a family-run affair," says Ram Kumar. His eldest son, Pabitra is also in the band and plays the clarinet. Pabitra will take over his uncle's role once the latter retires.
While Ram Kumar would like to see his children and grandchildren continuing the family profession, he says the younger ones are opting for other jobs.
"This is a seasonal job where the



A DAY IN THE
KATHMANDU V



TUNING IT

After the death of their parents, brothers Suman Pariyar and Sujan Pariyar from Bhaktapur had to quit school to work full time. Sujan, 20, joined the Everest Band Baja in 2007 where he played the euphonium. Three years later, Suman, 21, followed in his brother's footsteps and joined the band. While Suman has rejoined college and is now a management student, Sujan says it is unlikely he will go back to school.
"Circumstances were such that I had to drop out and we can't both afford to go to school," says Sujan. The brothers earn Rs 800 per event and do not have any other jobs. They hope to open a company of their own

in the future.
Since he took charge of the shop, Ram Kumar has trained over 70 young boys to play wedding instruments including clarinets, trumpets and drums. The trainees get accommodation and food and Ram Kumar pays them Rs 500 to play at events.
All band members are Shilpis, but why aren't there any female band members? Ram Kumar replies: "There are a lot of drunk men at weddings. If they are disrespectful towards our girls, we won't be able to defend them by fighting back because they are our employers, so it's best to not bring them".





numbers of our bookings are determined by the stars," says the 56-year-old. "So, I am fine with my children choosing to do something else." His son nods.

In the last two months, there were only six auspicious dates for a wedding, meaning the band didn't make much money. The group gets between Rs 26,000 to Rs 35,000 per wedding, and each member is paid Rs 1,000 per day. It's not much, band members acknowledge, but it is better than being unemployed.

The 32 musicians (they are all male) at Everest Band Baja are between 16-45. Most of the younger ones received their training at Ram Kumar's studio and are part-time students as well. (see box)

Besides weddings, the band makes extra

cash performing at events. Last month, they put on a show at the launch of author Joe Niemczura's book *The Sacrament of the Goddess* at Patan Durbar Square.

12NOON

The Janti is finally ready to leave, two hours behind schedule. The band has to lead the procession on foot from Balaju to the bride's house in Kalimati. Family members of the groom travel in cars and only step out a few metres from the bride's house to dance on the streets, as tradition demands.

Throughout the way, the band attracts angry glances from motorists whose commute has been disrupted by the

wedding procession. "They are just one of the many who think of us as nuisance," says Sudarshan.

8.00PM

It is late by the time the Everest Band arrive back in Patan. Tomorrow is another day and another wedding.

nepalitimes.com

■ A day in the life of Everest Band Baja



THE LIFE OF A WEDDING BAND



PLAN TO WED?

For Santosh Tamrakar, a sales and marketing director, who was still reporting for work two days before his wedding, hiring a wedding planner was the best decision of his life.

"To wed in Nepal is a big, big hassle," said the 34-year-old.

In addition, both him and his bride's parents were busy at work during the engagement. "We had no time to decide and pick good food, banquet locations or decorations," he said.

Tamrakar is not alone. More couples are choosing to hire professional wedding planners to oversee their big day. Sarvadev Sigdel of Nepal Wedding Planners said the number of couples seeking his services have tripled since he started his business four years ago. He said this is because of time constraints and western influences.

"Brides are getting ideas from watching television programs, and have become more specific about what type of wedding they want," he said.

Nepal Wedding Planners offer to plan an assortment of weddings based on the couple's choices, that could range from royal to garden settings or following the bride's favourite colour scheme. "The couples have their preferences, and we serve as an extra hand to help them have the most perfect special day."

The ability to customise one's wedding without having to fuss over the minute details has made the wedding planning business quite lucrative. When Nepal Wedding Planners first opened for business, there were only one or two other wedding planners in the city, now they are all over Kathmandu.

Cynthia Choo





SONG ONE

It hasn't been that long since I wrote a review of *Begin Again* (2014) a right charmer of a film starring Keira Knightley and Mark Ruffalo - that deals with real musicians making real music that sticks in your mind for months to come.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

So, it was with a great deal of anticipation that I awaited *Song One*, another film about musicians, starring some real ones that premiered initially at the Sundance Film Festival in January last year. Perhaps the reason for my disproportionate amount

of excitement had something to do with the fact that Johnny Flynn, who can only be described as a throwback to the English troubadours (really there is no other word for his kind of music), plays the lead role of James Forrester in said film.
Mesmerised, circa a decade ago, by the show he played with Laura Marling (another one of Britain's great, young, singer/songwriters) in a small New York venue, I would have been perhaps a little disappointed had I been told that he would foray into cinema - although perhaps, in hindsight, it might have been inevitable on account of his romantic (in the Shakespearean sense) good looks.
Considering that *Song One* would have been a hideous film had Flynn been a bad actor, I am relieved to report that playing across Anne Hathaway as his love interest, Franny, Flynn does hold his own. Natural as he is the man is not a great thespian: his talent

lies firmly in the world of music.
Still, Kate Barker Froyland, the director, has been astute in her casting of Flynn as a famous musician who has had a great deal of success with his debut but has stalled while writing his follow-up album (incidentally, this is not a reflection of Flynn's personal musical career). When Franny searches James out to understand why her comatose musician brother Henry (Ben Rosenfield) dropped out of college to follow in James's footsteps, she stumbles onto one of his solo performances where he shifts effortlessly from the guitar to the violin in a one man show that highlights the lead character's inherent charm and suitably shifts the film's trajectory away from the clichéd kind of melodrama that most of us abhor.
I will stop there, for this is not quite a romantic comedy, much less so than *Begin Again* albeit perhaps a little clumsier and noticeably darker, and I do not want to give the game away. With the incredible music and the palpable attraction between the characters, *Song One* is a film that will keep you more than suitably entertained, visually and musically; especially considering that all the songs were composed by Jenny Lewis and Jonathan Rice - two indie darlings that write the catchiest of tunes. 🇳🇵

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■ Trailer

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HAPPENINGS



PARTNERS: Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat and ADB President Takehiko Nakao launch the ADB-Nepal partnership publication in Kathmandu on Tuesday to mark the 25th anniversary of the Bank's involvement in Nepal.



JAW JAW: the Constituent Assembly's Proposal Drafting Committee holds its second meeting at Singha Durbar on Sunday.



ADIEU: National Taekwondo champion Deepak Bista announces his retirement at a program in Radisson Hotel on Saturday.



GROUND LEVEL: A young devotee looks up while offering prayers by rolling on the ground at the Hanuman Ghat, Bhaktapur, on Tuesday, the last day of the month-long Swasthani Brata Katha festival.

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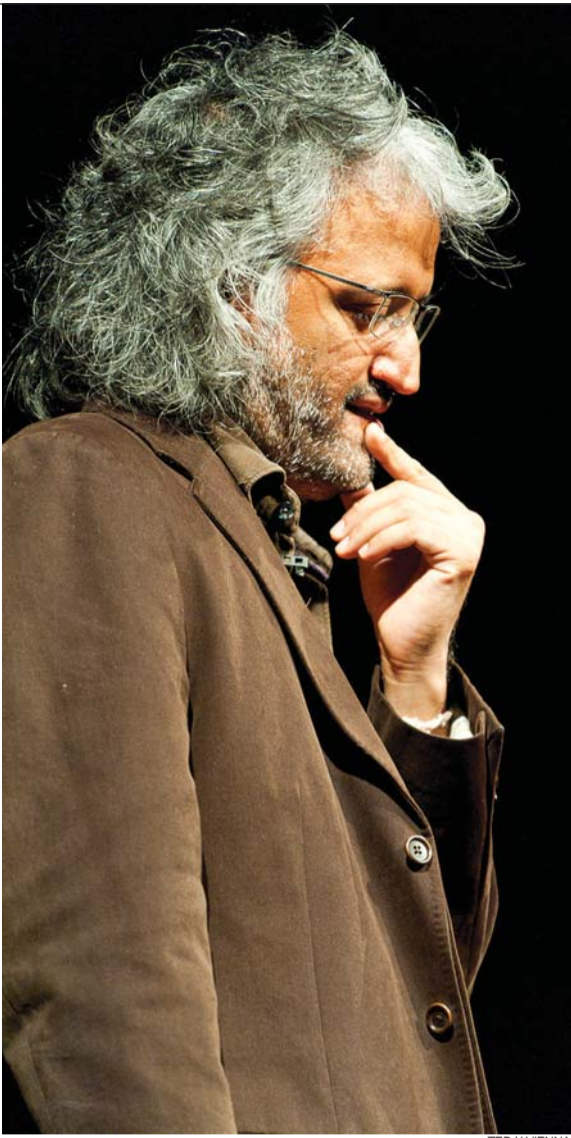
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KENJI KWOK



TED X VIENNA

Samar Singh Jodha

Indian artist Samar Singh Jodha has for the past 20 years been pushing the envelope of photography and film to address social issues like development, human rights and conservation.

Which brings us to the question: isn't art supposed to be art's sake? Does art need a cause? The debate is probably as old as art itself, but Jodha has no doubts about where his sympathies lie. It lies with people who are disenfranchised, and issues that are marginalised by the juggernaut of worldwide consumerism.

Art itself is getting homogenised in the meat grinder of globalisation, and Jodha wants to rescue the medium before it is too late so that it can retain its honesty and

character. Art has gone commercial, many investors see dollar signs when they see a work of art. And a handful of "experts" decide subjectively what is an important piece of work and what is not.

In a work about migrant miners in the coal mines of Assam, Jodha shows us images of the shacks of miners made from scrap metal crafted from the very raw materials that they sweat in inhuman conditions to excavate.

Jodha's works have been shown in galleries and museums in Mumbai, Delhi, Barcelona, Boston, Frankfurt, London, New York, Washington DC and Australia. Jodha's eight-year long project on ageing in India remains the single biggest social communication project in terms of outputs and outreach. Extracts of it were showcased at Whitechapel Gallery, London and Fotomuseum, Zurich in 2010.

His five-year work on the making of world's tallest habitat was featured on Discovery, National Geographic as well as exhibited at New York's Skyscraper Museum. His television project has been showcased worldwide (most recently at The Needle On

The Gauge in Adelaide, Australia) and described by *The New York Times* as 'A beautiful series of photographs (that) documents the now-pervasive presence of television in Indian life.'

Bhopal - A Silent Picture, a 40 foot installation was showcase by Amnesty International during the Olympics in London, with 150,000 visitors at the multi-media public art project. Phaneng - his award winning portraiture project about the disappearing Tai Phake, a Buddhist tribe in India's northeast was seen at Religare Art, New Delhi in 2008 and Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. in 2010. He continues to work closely with this endangered community.

Jodha is in Kathmandu this week, and will be showing a film and discussing his works at a talk moderated by Kunda Dixit at the Himalayan Bank Auditorium .

Talk by Samar Singh Jodha
5:30 pm, Friday 6 February
Himalayan Bank Auditorium
Kamaladi
www.samarsinghjodha.com

One can easily be overwhelmed by the infinite scrumptiousness offered by Soaltee Crowne Plaza's new seasonal Hakka and Szechwan menu.

With over 30 mouth-watering mains to choose from, and five types of desserts, China Garden promises a satisfying Chinese spread ideal for anyone with a palate.

The standout dish was the Jumbo Prawn Szechwan (Rs1,590). The tiger prawns were not only fresh but stir-fried with an authentic sweet and spicy sauce that hit the spot.

Flavoured with Szechwan spices and Chinese condiments, the sauce made the dish taste authentically Chinese while setting the bar pretty high for the rest of the meal: and perhaps for other Chinese restaurants in Nepal.

The rest of the dishes did not let us down either. The stir-fried soya bean sprouts (Rs 875) did not sound that appealing at first, but its simplicity was elevated by quality ingredients like sliced shitake mushrooms, immaculately fried tofu and garden greens.

Meat lovers will relish the Hakka style steamed pork and yam



away with Szechwan's cuisine numbing heat.

With starters and mains staying true to aesthetically Chinese cuisine, the chefs at China Garden took the chance to switch up traditional Chinese dessert ingredients with modern style French plating. It paid off.

The sweet potato dumplings (Rs 520) were the perfect balance of savoury and sweet: quintessential of a Chinese dessert. The modest pieces of sweet potato were coated in a shell of chocolate and coconut, giving the creamy tuber a little crunch and sweetness, all in a single bite.

These sweet potato dumplings could singlehandedly convince anyone that Chinese desserts are comparable to, if not better than, saccharine sweet western ones.

This is not the first time the Hakka and Szechwan menu has been offered at the China Garden. The overwhelming popularity of the menu convinced the restaurant to bring this seasonal menu

back for a second time. And with the fresh, quality ingredients and consistency with taste, the Hakka and Szechwan dishes may be back for the third time.

Cynthia Choo

China Garden's Hakka and Szechwan promotional menu is offered to 6 Feb 2015 at Soaltee Crowne Plaza Hotel

China Garden

(Rs 1,000). Braised in wine sauce till tender, the layers of mouth-watering pork belly melts in your mouth instantly.

It was no surprise that we had to try an authentic Hakka dish 'Yam Abacus' (Rs 875) from the promotional menu focusing on Hakka cuisine. A dish that is tedious to make in general and difficult to make just right. The Yam Abacus at China Garden was soft yet chewy -- showing that the chefs spent ample time to steam and carefully knead the yam to

achieve this perfect consistency.

The only item that failed to meet the high standards was the stewed mutton with pickle and shallots (Rs 1,050). It comprised of chunks of mutton simmered in pickle and rice wine.

Perhaps the presentation could have been better with delicate slices of meat rather than random small chunks. It could have used less rice wine as it appeared more like a soup.

Despite the presentation issue, the dish did not compromise in

flavour with a slight hint of rice wine complementing the mutton without overpowering the taste.

With such overindulgence the chefs played it safe with savoury rice and noodle staples, serving up Mushroom Corn Fried Rice (Rs 580). It was a simple, not overly greasy dish that could complement the heavy flavours of any of the main dishes.

According to Executive Chef Yuba Raj Pokhrel, the kitchen is staffed by cooks of Chinese descent who have trained and worked in India. This must be why the dishes tasted authentically Chinese, without getting a bit carried

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H. Pylori: the good and the bad.

In 1982, to the astonishment of the medical world, two Australian scientists, Barry Marshall and J. Robin Warren discovered a bacterium 'helicobacter pylori' (H. pylori) to be the main cause of gastritis and peptic ulcers.



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Peptic ulcer disease (PUD), a distinct 'break' in the lining of the stomach, is a well-known problem in Nepal. Many patients come to the doctor saying they have "gastric", meaning "gastritis", which is the inflammation of the lining of the stomach. Gastritis is one of the most common medical issues of concern reported in both rural and urban Nepal.

Those who tend to have repeated issues of gastritis are advised to avoid a long list of food, which is not always practical in Nepal. Prior to the discovery of H. Pylori as the main culprit of PUD: stress, spicy food, production of excessive acid and certain lifestyle habits were believed to be the primary causes. Hence the approach to treatment was completely different. Patients were prescribed rest and medicines such as antacids, but the problem was recurrent. Marshall and Warren shared the 2005 Nobel Prize for their discovery of H. Pylori. Their discovery has a very interesting story behind it. Marshall drank a culture of the bug from a Petri dish to confirm if H. Pyloric caused gastritis. He expected to suffer from the effects after days or weeks, but experienced the symptoms of gastritis within 3 days. He found



the lining of his stomach wall was swollen and inflamed after a gastric endoscopy was performed on him. While it may not be as deadly as the bacteria that cause tuberculosis, typhoid or cholera, H. pylori infects more people than all these three diseases combined. Individuals of low socioeconomic and education status are more likely to get infected by the H. Pylori. This fact is clearly reflected by the epidemiological evidence which reveals that there is a 30 per cent prevalence of H. Pylori in adults in developed countries whereas it is 80 per cent in developing countries. The treatment for PUD is generally an antacid and two weeks of two specific antibiotics that successfully cures about 90 per cent of the individuals.

This medical therapy has clearly revolutionised the treatment of PUD and brought relief to thousands of people. Although drugs like aspirin and ibuprofen can cause PUD, H. Pylori is a more universal cause of PUD. However, it is possible that the story of H. Pylori causing gastritis may not be as straightforward as it seems. There is some recent, strong scientific evidence to suggest that H. Pylori is not just a wayward villain causing PUD. The presence of H. Pylori in humans may be protective for childhood asthma, hay fever and some skin disorders. This is an example of the staggeringly complex relationship between humans and microbes in disease causation. Finally other than H. Pylori, there are other sinister causes of stomach ulcers which have to be kept in mind. Globally, stomach cancer is the fifth leading cancer and affects more elderly patients than younger ones. 🇳🇵

GIZMO by YANTRICK

GAMER'S DELIGHT

While most laptops are reserved for work, study, and casual entertainment: hardcore gamers will no longer have to stick to 'normal' laptops that are unable to play the latest games at full resolution. Dedicated gaming laptops have been out for a while, and the Dell-owned Alienware line is considered the market leader in producing one of the best gaming machines. The company scores again with the Alienware 17 R1, a perfect combination of gaming power and performance. Gamers are guaranteed to start fawning over the Alienware 17 R1 from first sight. Sporting a metal case with a neon-lit alien head logo on the back-panel and black-matte rubber



casing on the inside, along with a multi-colour customizable neon-backlit keyboard: the Alienware 17 R1 looks built to last. Boasting a mammoth 17.3-inch LCD touchscreen, games appear sharp and vibrant from all viewing angles on the Full HD display. Being the cream of the crop of Intel's processors, the R1 runs on an Intel Core 4th Generation 2.50GHz i7-4710MQ Processor (with 6MB Cache and a 3.50GHz Turbo Mode) which runs the Windows 8.1 (64-bit) operating system, along with a whopping 16GB Dual Channel DDR3L at 1600MHz and a NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M with 2GB GDDR5 graphics card. All combine to produce the best gaming experience on a portable device. The spacious 1TB SATA hybrid internal hard drive (@5400 RPM and 6Gb/s) will give you more room to have your media collection always available

on this device. It also comes with a DVD RW Dual Layer Slot Load Drive. The R1 has an impressive audio powered by a built-in Klipsch speakers and Creative SoundBlaster Pro Studio Software. A 2.0MP Full HD webcam and a dual digital microphone array also allows for crystal clear Skype sessions. Gamers' connection needs have not been neglected either with 3 SuperSpeed USB 3.0 Ports, a SuperSpeed USB 3.0 Port with PowerShare Technology, a Mini-Display Port, a HDMI 1.4 Output, a 9-in-1 Media Card Reader, Killer 1525 802.11ac 2x2 WiFi and Bluetooth 4.1 — all at your disposal. 🇳🇵 **Yantrick's Verdict: Packed with capabilities that satisfy the high-performance demands of gamers, the Alienware 17 R1 is also made to impress with its great build quality and handsome design. At NPR 2 lakhs, this is certainly for users that value and appreciate specifications over its price tag.**

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DEVAKI BISTA

“We should have probably waited for a less sensitive moment.”

Nepali Times spoke to the Head of Delegation of the European Union to Nepal, Ambassador Rensje Teerink, about the objections from the Nepal government to European envoys recently meeting a Madhesi leader espousing separatism.

Nepali Times: Were you surprised by the reaction from the government about your meeting with a Madhesi intellectual?

Rensje Teerink: At the outset, let me clarify the background of our meeting with Dr Raut, as there have been many rumours and allegations circulating in the press. We were apprised of Dr Raut's case via local human rights organisations that pointed out that he had been the victim of serious human rights abuses. When Dr Raut approached several EU embassies with the request for a meeting we discussed the possibility of meeting him weighing the pros and cons. We were aware that he was seen as an agitator. On the other hand, there was the human rights issue and the fact that Dr Raut was not convicted of any crime yet. As you know, the EU is a staunch defender of human rights principles worldwide. Most times, human rights law is needed precisely to protect those who are rejected and unpopular. Refusing a meeting would not have been very consistent with these principles. We therefore decided to grant him an appointment to hear his grievances, which is something we routinely do with people from many different groups, be they Madhesi, Janajatis, Dalits, etc. And to be clear, contrary to what is being repeated in some media, we saw him as EU heads of missions. It was not a meeting exclusively held by the Danish Ambassador and myself. In fact, the Danish Ambassador was not even present, she was represented by her DCM.

To be honest, we were more surprised by the reactions in the media. Numerous allegations were doing the rounds: that it was a 'clandestine' meeting, that I had travelled to Chitwan to meet Dr Raut in jail, that we had some sinister agenda by kindling the fires of separatism in the Tarai, etc. What is disappointing here is that no journalist thought it necessary to pick up the phone to hear first-hand what was going on. As to the Government, there was no immediate reaction after these press reports. It was

only during the briefing session with the international Community on 22 January that the Honourable Foreign Minister referred to the obligation to respect diplomatic norms, pointing out that MOFA should be informed of meetings with political leaders and activists. This prompted us to seek a meeting to explain the background to him. This meeting took place on the 26th. We were not surprised by the government's reaction. It's only natural that they reacted the way they did, after all, the rumours flying around were quite serious. We had a cordial and frank discussion both with the Honourable Minister Pandey and with the Honourable Prime Minister.

What has been the response from top government leaders, including the prime minister, to your clarification?

The top leaders made their point very clear. The MOFA pointed out that it grants a lot of freedom to diplomats accredited to Nepal compared to other countries. We asked whether we had breached diplomatic norms when meeting with Dr Raut. The response was that they didn't think we had breached the norms but they would have appreciated being informed about the meeting. The MOFA also highlighted the particular sensitive timing at which the meeting had taken place. The way Dr Raut is perceived in Nepal at this particular juncture means that a meeting should better have been avoided. We fully acknowledged this.

But can a meeting with a political activist really be described as 'apolitical'?

We never referred to this as an 'apolitical' meeting. When a breach of human rights is discussed the meeting is per definition political. But the issue at stake was not to discuss the situation in the Madhes or to condone Dr Raut's ideas of separatism. We made it very clear from the outset that we would be in listening mode as his ill treatment was concerned but that it was

not our role to comment on or endorse his political agenda.

Would you agree that on this issue you crossed the line of diplomatic propriety? In hindsight would you have done things differently?

There is perhaps a grey area here. The Vienna Convention states in Article 41: '1. Without prejudice to their privileges and immunities, it is the duty of all persons enjoying such privileges and immunities to respect the laws and regulations of the receiving State. They also have a duty not to interfere in the internal affairs of that State. 2. All official business with the receiving State entrusted to the mission by the sending State shall be conducted with or through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the receiving State or such other ministry as may be agreed.'

Does meeting a political activist mean that we interfered in the internal affairs of the State? If yes, then we indeed breached diplomatic protocol, but then so have numerous other diplomatic actors, who have also met Dr. Raut and many other actors. Moreover, if we have to conduct all our business through the MOFA it would make our day-to-day work effectively impossible. As mentioned earlier, MOFA didn't think we had breached protocol but highlighted the sensitivity of the case and the unfortunate timing. Ultimately, MOFA's stance should be our guiding principle. Would we have done things differently? The EU will always be willing to listen to people's grievances if so requested, except if these people are convicted criminals, which is not Dr Raut's case for the moment. In this particular case, in hindsight, we should have probably waited for a less sensitive moment. In the past, Dr Raut has held public conferences with the presence of many international actors. His ideas were well-known at the time; that he talks to people does not mean that interlocutors agree with him.

It's a pity that the EU is now associated with 'meddling' and 'interfering'. Those who are familiar with our work here know that we always have tried to play a constructive role. We support a stable and prosperous Nepal and we try to do our bit by providing development cooperation and by fostering investments. As we said in various public statements, we have no specific views on the Constitution: that is something for the Nepali people to decide.

The government is reacting to public opinion pressure on issues like proselytisation, so why would European ambassadors be defending conversion?

That is another misunderstanding. The EU absolutely does not support conversion. The reference by the British Ambassador concerned the right to choose one's religion, as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That is something completely different. If I want to become a Buddhist tomorrow, nobody should be able to stop me. That said, I will be frank in saying that I'm not comfortable with so-called NGOs who exploit people's poverty in order to lure them into converting. This is unacceptable to the EU and we would never support such NGOs or religious organisations.

What is your assessment of how the constitution process is going, and what in your view would be the ideal outcome?

It's a moving target at the moment. We're of course disappointed that a deal could not be reached although the parties seemed very close on the eve of the deadline of 22 January. But we remain optimistic. As for the outcome, I look towards the long term: with the promulgation of the Constitution Nepal will be able to move on with other urgent issues, such as local elections, economic growth and development. That will be Nepal's moment and the EU is committed to continue supporting this process.

END PAIN,

ANJANA RAJBHANDARY

Anita, 44, started withdrawing from the social scene. She started gaining weight. She said she had misplaced the joy in her life. She was depressed, but people thought she would get over it. She did not. She was found dead in her bedroom recently next to an empty bottle of pesticide.

The rate of reported suicides in Nepal is increasing, and although more men kill themselves than women, suicide is still the leading cause of death among women in the 15-49 age group. Even in this cohort, girls and women between 10-24 are at higher risk.

The problem was highlighted by the widely-reported suicide last year of a 15-year-old girl in eastern Nepal ostensibly after Brazil lost in the World Cup semi-finals against Germany. Experts say suicides are just the outer manifestation of a hidden epidemic of mental health illness in Nepali society.

"Mental health is not just a biological or medical issue that can be treated with medication, there is a need for psychosocial support," says clinical psychologist Mita Rana at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. Up to 15 per cent of mothers in her hospital experience postpartum depression that could develop into psychosis, which makes them susceptible to suicide and

infanticide.

The tragic suicide of Nepal's most-renowned and up-and-coming film director Alok Nembang at age 40 last year was said to be caused by depression. His personal diaries and a suicide note revealed Nembang's deep feelings of hopelessness.

Internationally, 90 per cent of all suicides are attributed to mental health causes and depression is the biggest risk factor. One in every five children and adolescents have mental health problems. The social and psychological effects of growing up in an abusive home can haunt individuals for life. There has been a rise in adolescents engaging in self harm by cutting themselves. It is a clear cry for help, and yet this usually goes unnoticed till it is too late.

In Nepal, the number of patients seeking help has risen dramatically, says Renee Gerritzen, a Dutch psychologist practicing at Anicca in Kathmandu: "Four years ago, 10 per cent of my patients were Nepali, now half of them are Nepali." Gerritzen takes this as a positive development because people are overcoming the stigma.

Nepal's conflict and natural disasters also have a strong impact on the mental well being of survivors. Mostly diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder, they require therapy, support and time. There is a danger of psychiatrists overmedicating patients even though some do need antipsychotics which could be abused or sold.

THE LIVING: Gita Pariyar with her five children at their home in Chitwan after Gita's husband Dhan Bahadur killed himself last year after considering himself a failure for not being able to feed his family. Dhan Bahadur's two previous wives had died because he couldn't afford their treatment. Gita herself is struggling to cope after her husband's suicide. She says: "If I don't earn enough during the day, the children go to bed hungry."

SABITA SHRESTHA



In the shadow of



BILASH RAI

The suicide rate in Nepal's most prosperous and literate districts is rising alarmingly

MARTY LOGAN
in ILAM

When 14-year-old student Sujan Lamgade killed himself in Ilam Bajar two months ago, his death highlighted a disturbing rise in the number of suicides in one of Nepal's most prosperous districts.

Thirty-seven people killed themselves in this eastern district bordering Darjeeling between June-December 2014, according to an unofficial tally. If the trend continues, the year's total will eclipse those of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when Ilam gained a reputation as Nepal's suicide capital. The number of people killing themselves had dropped to 12 three years ago.

"The numbers are going up again," said Bhupal Khatiwada of the Namsaling

Community Development Centre (NCDC). When the suicide rates went up alarmingly in 2002-2003, the organisation ran a campaign to raise awareness about mental health issues, train health workers, and do a survey.

Like other people interviewed, Khatiwada has his own ideas about why the district is plagued by suicides: young people leave home to study and lack family support, older ones are unable to adapt to the lifestyle changes they see in upcoming generations. The fact that Ilam has one of the highest literacy rates could also be a factor.

"If someone said there was bird flu in Ilam, lots of resources would be available to deal with it, but not for mental illness. The government doesn't have the data or resources to address it," Khatiwada told Nepali Times.

Researchers at BP Koirala Institute

NOT LIVES

A hidden mental health epidemic is leading to an increase in suicides in Nepal



In Nepal, men above 35 have the highest rate of suicide, and relatively prosperous districts like Ilam and Chitwan have some of the highest suicide rates in the country (see adjoining story). Regionwise, the Mid-Western and Western areas have the highest suicide rates and the lowest in the Central Region (see map). The remote district of Rukum, for example, registered 10 suicides in the past four months, and police said the main cause was family disputes.

“The government has to invest

more on mental health as the current budget for treatment and counseling is less than one percent of the total health budget,” said Nir Prasad Giri of the Nepal Mental Health Foundation.

If mental illness is the disease, suicide can be the result. Health experts advise that the problem be addressed at the source. However, mental health has such social stigma that most families don’t want to discuss it and many patients fear being labeled “mad” if they see a

counselor. (See column)

“Mental health is a relatively young science in Nepal, there is little awareness, people may consult astrologers or shamans as respected counselors, and because of taboos and lack of awareness people do not seek help,” said Lisa A Gautschi, a transpersonal psychologist with the Isha Centre in Patan.

The Nepali word for mental illness “bahulako” can span everything from patients with epilepsy to psychosis. Nepal’s Muluki Ain even bars “mad” people from standing in an election and be a member of the board of any organisation.

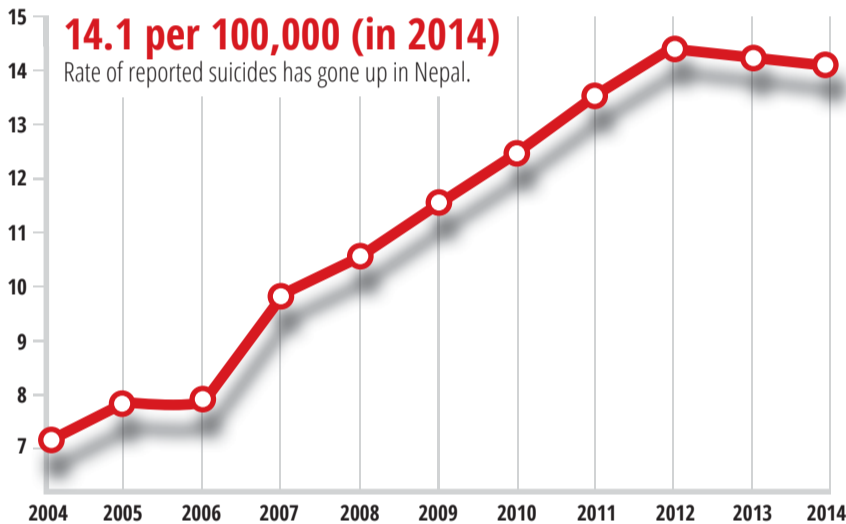
“First, the language and definition need to change,” says Nagendra Luitel, a researcher at Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation that works on mental health and psychosocial issues in Nepal. “Legal policies on suicide need to change as it is considered a crime.”

In an increasingly consumer-driven urban setting, we have to remind ourselves to look beyond ourselves and pay attention to people around us. We all know someone with mental health illness, but what are we doing to help? Do we even acknowledge it, or do we ignore it?

It is important to be empathetic and non-judgmental towards individuals with mental health illness. It takes courage to ask for help, and it is the family and community’s responsibility to provide it. With awareness, knowledge, treatment and support, most people diagnosed with mental health illness are able to live happy and healthy lives.

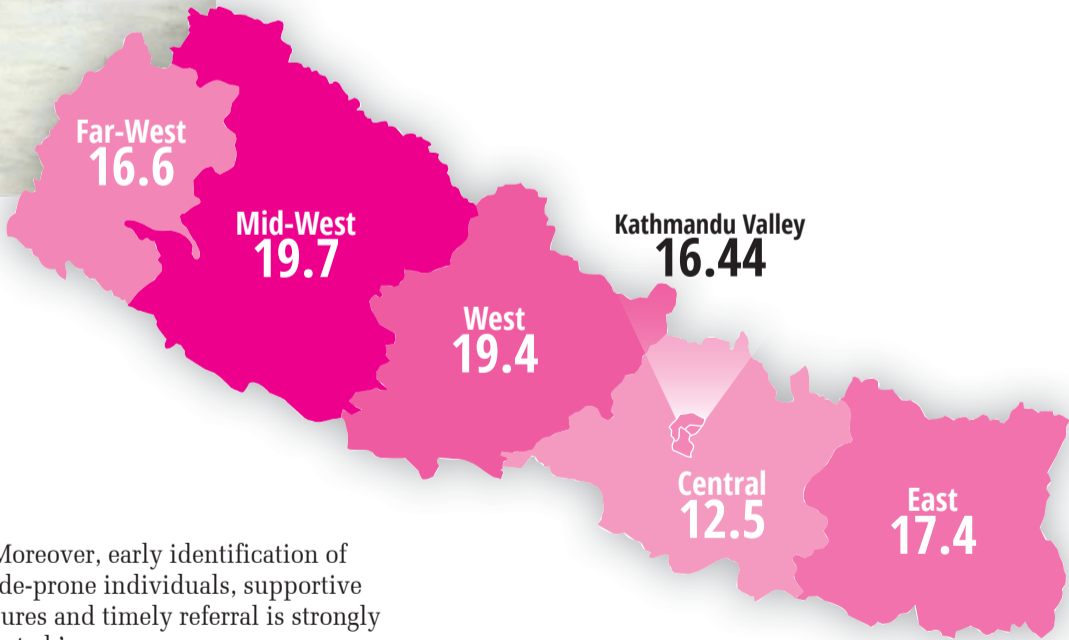
Some names of patients have been changed. 📌

TAKING LIVES



FEELING SUICIDAL

The number of people killing themselves per 100,000 population is highest in the Mid-western Development Region, but the districts with the highest suicide rates are Ilam and Chitwan.



Anjana Rajbhandary is a Mental Health Rehabilitation Technician and a sub-editor at Nepali Times.

death

of Health Sciences in Dharan has been researching the causes of the rise in suicides in eastern Nepal for years. One review of patients brought to the hospital after suicide attempts found that 75 per cent of them had psychiatric disorders: in 37 per cent of cases it was depression.

‘Nepali society puts much emphasis on relational, social, familial coherence. Disharmony appears to be the subject of much distress ... far more than any other category of stressor,’ concluded the study, published in the Journal of Traumatic Stress Disorders and Treatment, in June 2014.

A 2011 study of 100 patients who had attempted suicide found that 58 per cent had mood disorders, mostly depression, but the majority of them had no prior psychiatric care. ‘The government should launch awareness programs targeting younger generations,’ suggested the authors.

‘Moreover, early identification of suicide-prone individuals, supportive measures and timely referral is strongly suggested.’

Deepak is a college student in Kathmandu who grew up in Ilam. Two years ago a friend of his killed herself while also studying in the capital. “She was a normal girl,” Deepak recalled in an interview. “I didn’t know she was going to do anything like that, she was happy.”

The student said her family and friends told him afterward that she had been depressed. For him, that word is code for a family dispute over a relationship, usually one between young people of different castes. Unfortunately, most young people remain fearful about seeking counselling and treatment because of the stigma.

Soon after taking over as chief of Ilam’s District Health Office one-and-half years

ago, Raj Kumar Pokharel, sent a plan to his superiors in Kathmandu to do a small, but systematic study to learn the exact reasons for suicides so solutions could be found.

Pokharel is trying to shift some money from his budget to partly pay for his plan, but much more money will be needed to train health workers to treat mental illness and deliver psycho-social counselling, and raising awareness among the population.

Beyond Ilam, some work is being done to address the mental health of Nepalis. For example, the government has signed an agreement with Transcultural

Psychosocial Organisation (TPO Nepal) to implement a pilot project in two districts: Chitwan and Pyuthan to train health workers, raise awareness in schools and public awareness to combat the stigma associated with mental health.

“We are all very aware that mental health support is needed not just for some districts but for all 75 districts,” says TPO Nepal Executive Director Suraj Koirala. But he says scaling up the program will happen gradually because of the government’s lack of resources. The network also made suggestions for updating the mental health provisions of the Health Act, which is under review. 📌

Cracks in the Madhesi front

Marred by deep distrust, Madhesi parties look incapable of serving the Maoist interest

OM ASTHA RAI

The ruling NC-UML coalition looking determined to bulldoze through a new constitution through a vote in the Constituent Assembly and the opposition UCPN (Maoist) and Madhesi Front alliance equally resolute in preventing it. But both sides have a new headache: deep distrust among themselves.

Constituents of the 30-party opposition alliance led by the Maoists are distrustful of each other and fear backstabbing, raising doubts over success of their agitation against the NC and the UML's efforts to settle the disputed issues of the new constitution through a vote.

It all started after the MJF (Democratic) Chair Bijaya Gachhadar, the leader of the Madhesi Front, tried to bring the ruling and opposition parties to a negotiation hours before the 22 January deadline ended. At the outset, all major parties agreed but Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoists quickly backtracked, clearly upsetting Gachhadar. On Wednesday he put forward another proposal for a three-province Madhes as a compromise over disputed districts in the eastern plains.

Later that night, when opposition lawmakers shouted slogans to stop the CA from forming a questionnaire committee, Gachhadar stayed aloof. He did not raise his fist, publicly displaying his dissatisfaction with the Maoist.

Since then, the distance and distrust between Gachhadar and other opposition parties have only grown, straining relations not just between the UCPN (Maoist) and



the MJF (Democratic), but also creating rifts within the Madhesi Front.

In an interview, Baburam Bhattarai accused Gachhadar of acting at the behest of the NC and the UML. Talking to Nepali Times, MJF (Nepal) Chair Upendra Yadav, a key figure in the Madhesi Front, not only backed Bhattarai's accusation but was blunt in berating Gachhadar.

"He (Gachhadar) is born to be a minister, he has no commitment to our cause," said Yadav. "All that he wants is a ministerial berth."

Yadav seems to have been enraged by Gachhadar particularly after the latter stopped the Madhesi Front from issuing a threat to walk out of the CA. On 1 January, Dahal

had warned of quitting the CA and urged the Madhesi Front to follow suit.

Yadav and Sadbhavana Party leader Rajendra Mahato, who nursed a joint grudge against the UML Chair KP Oli following a heated dispute between them last month, were keen to quit the CA and launch a 'fierce agitation'. Again, Gachhadar didn't agree.

"What do you mean by a fierce agitation? Picking up a gun? Waging a war?" Gachhadar reportedly told the meeting. "Solutions must be sought within the house, not on the streets." Gachhadar was supported by another member of the Madhesi coalition, the TMLP's Mahant Thakur, who has also been against

the idea of walking out of the CA.

Chandeshwor Khatwe, secretary of the MJF (Democratic), says Gachhadar's outburst was misreported by the media. "There is no dispute within the Madhesi Front about hitting the streets, but, unlike other Madhesi parties, we do not want to push the country into a new conflict."

Khatwe added, "We want to carry out street protests only to create pressure on the NC and the UML to come to a consensus with us. And that is still possible within the CA."

All is not well within the fringe parties either. Some of them have started distancing themselves from

the 30-party alliance. The Janata Dal is no longer with the alliance and claims that other smaller identity-based parties will also follow suit.

"Opposition parties have different interests," said Hari Charan Sah, Chair of the Janata Dal. "For example, we just wanted proportional electoral system. Because the ruling parties have agreed to it, there is no need for us to be in the opposition alliance."

The Maoist-Madhesi alliance was unnatural to begin with, and some members seem to be attracted by the Hindu royalist RPP (Nepal). Angered by the NC and the UML's decision to not hold a vote on republicanism, federalism and secularism, RPP (N) has publicly expressed their willingness to forge an alliance with the opposition.

A Maoist leader told Nepali Times it wasn't impossible: "We are open to everyone, be it Kamal Thapa or Mohan Baidya, but we have yet to discuss this issue." If that happens, a Maoist-RPP(N) alliance would be even more unnatural.

In its recent Central Committee meeting, the Maoists concluded that the people are not ready for a return to revolution which is why it is relying on the Madhesi Front to begin a new movement in the Tarai. The trouble with that is the Madhesi Front itself is marred by mutual mistrust among members. It is incapable of serving the Maoist interest, at least for the time being.

Even while warning of strong street protests, the Maoists look equally desperate to hold face-saving talks with the NC and the UML. In a meeting of the 30-party alliance on 4 February, Dahal expressed his frustration at the lack of overtures. 🇳🇵

For and against

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 4 February

कात्तिपुर

Disenchantment between the government and the international community at a time when the country is facing political polarisation is not a good sign. While Prime Minister Sushil Koirala's outburst at EU ambassadors may have been an opportunity to vent his anger, it could be a diplomatic mistake. Such a complaint should have been channeled through the foreign ministry. The government's displeasure stems from a clandestine meeting between two EU envoys and CK Raut, who has actively promoted secessionism. It is understandable that the government should react to such anti-national activities. The international community's opposition to the ruling coalition's effort to push the constitution to a vote seems to have also miffed the PM. But the internationals, including China and India, are only appealing for a constitution agreeable to all. Even the President has been asking for the same thing. This doesn't mean they are supporting the opposition. The CA is divided into two factions and only one is writing the constitution, this will push the country into further political turmoil. Even in terms of the recent political change and peace process, we were assisted by India and the UN. Therefore, it is erroneous to scorn creative suggestions just because it doesn't match our interests

Editorial in *Nagarik*, 4 February

नागरिक

International diplomats have overstepped their bounds with recent statement and actions. No sovereign country can tolerate that. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala needs to be commended for taking a stand against the European Union and their ambassadors. The international community seems to have mistaken the Prime Minister's tolerance for weakness. Almost all of those ambassadors represent democracies, yet they are opposed to a democratic exercise on the constitution. This

is ridiculous, yet unfortunate. A few ambassadors even met with a person openly espousing secession. The international community should take the PM's warning seriously.

Editorial in *Annapurna Post*, 2 February

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

A true statesman always swims against the tide and reveals truth at critical junctures. UML Chair K P Oli is tackling political forces spreading communal hatred in the name of federalism head on. He has not even spared foreigners providing monetary and logistical support to them.

Oli has said that the Maoists and other opposition parties will withdraw their protests and pave the way for the constitution writing if they are given Rs 5-10 billion. Although Oli made this statement at an internal party meeting, a statement like that by an important public figure cannot be overlooked. There is a very thin line between public and private for a senior politician like Oli.

Though it is difficult to gather evidence, there are indications that our political parties regularly receive funds from foreign entities. Oli's accusation against the Maoists is even more serious. Why are the Maoists, arguably the biggest force for change in the country and trusted by India after the 12-point agreement with the seven political parties, keeping mum?

The onus lies on Oli to prove his allegation. But the silence of the Maoists has fueled public speculation. It is now time for the government to issue a white paper on politics and money. If the political parties and leaders are themselves for sale, will they not sell out the country at the next opportunity? The money that has supposedly come for a 'revolution' needs to be investigated.

Oli must prove that his accusation is not just mud-slinging, but the beginning of a campaign to make political parties and leaders more accountable to the public.



Martyrs' day

सेतोपाटी

Setopati, 29 January

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“We are being bullied in the Constituent Assembly. It's got to the point where we can't tolerate anymore.”

Pushpa Kamal Dahal, UCPN (Maoist)
Annapurna Post, 5 February



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Deadly serious

Some of you have stopped the Ass in the street this week to ask questions like: “Which way is the country headed?” or “Is there going to be a constitution?” or “Have you seen PK yet?”

Being a veteran correspondent who believes that with great press freedom comes great responsibility, I am used to these questions and always make it a point to answer good-naturedly: “How the bloody hell should I know?” In fact, we hacks are as clueless, if not more clueless, about what is going on in this country as most of you, our valued clients. (The only difference is that we keep it a closely guarded secret.)

Even so, after decades of experience deciphering press statements that don’t say anything, we have become experts at reading between the lines. For instance, if the leaders of the opposition alliance and the leaders of the ruling coalition are described by their respective spokes as having had a “free and frank exchange of views at Singha Darbar” one can be sure they came to blows and one of them suffered a dislocated eyeball.



If, on the other hand, a one-on-one meeting between the UML Chair and the Indian ambassador in Balkot is described as being conducted in a “cordial and friendly atmosphere”, then it would be a safe bet that the two leaders probably sat face-to-face in stony silence for one hour and forty-five minutes until at least one of them fell asleep on the sofa out of sheer boredom.

Decades of experience has also made some of us in the media specialists in the art of reading body language and gestures when VIPs meet. How tight was the embrace between Obama and Modi, and were they also cheek-to-cheek or just cheek-to-jowl? How long did the bear-hug between Namo and Suko last when they met at the SAARC Summit? What

about eye contact, if any? Did one of them, unbeknownst to the press corps, have the other by the gonads?

The good thing about covering Nepali politics these days is that with all the verbal brickbats and non-verbal chairs being hurled around by politicians, one can be sure that what one sees is what one gets. There is no attempt to maintain diplomatic niceties and camouflage one leader’s feeling towards the other, no attempt to beat around the bush. We give it straight.

So, Comrade Oily accuses Baddie Dudes of asking for 10 Arabs in bribe to call off their agitation. The Cash Comrades, pooh-poohed it. “Whadya think, we would sell ourselves for so cheap?”

BRB, PhD, seems to be some kind of Freudian sexpert. For the last couple of years he has been making politically incorrect remarks casting aspersions about the gender, if any, of the UML (or to give the party’s full name: the Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist-Leninists).

Why a communistic party would have a gender classification, and who decides whether a party is male or female, has never been satisfactorily answered. But Comrade Red Flag seems to be unduly curious about whether the UML is a) male b) female c) other [tick one] and seems to have come to the definitive conclusion that the party is actually hermaphrodite. This week in a tweet, the atheist Doc compared the UML to androgynous characters from Hindu mythology, and even went as far as to say that the Unified Marxist-Leninists are impotent eunuchs, compared to his own gloriously virile party.

Not to be outdone, the Maoist-Madhesi Dalliance passed a strongly-worded resolution recommending that Comrade Oily get his head examined by a certified psychiatrist at state expense. Warming up to the theme, Awesome then went on to tell the meeting that as penance for having gone soft on the revolution, he’d also like to have his head cracked open and let the blood cleanse him.

By this point in this article, many readers must be laughing your heads off. “Hahahahahahaha,” you may be saying. “Hohohohohoho. Ass, you have really outdone yourself this week.”

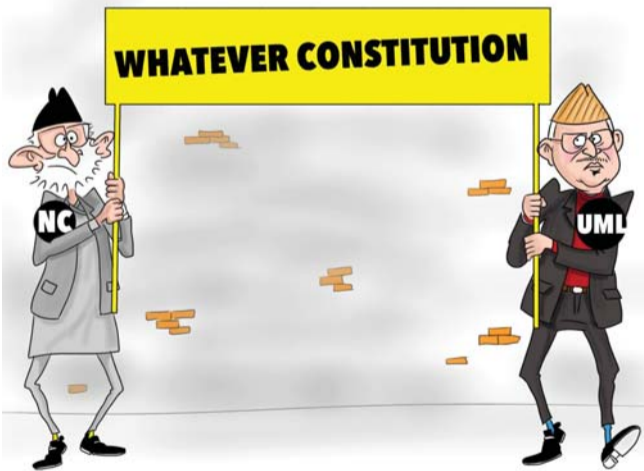
Sorry to disappoint you, dear customers, but the Ass is not making any of this up. Those are actual quotes from Nepal’s top political leadership. It’s all deadly serious.



The Ass

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