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DEVAKI BISTA

Going away

While the western plains are getting back to normal, the violence in the eastern Tarai shows no signs of subsiding. Four more protesters were killed on Wednesday, bringing the total killed in the past month to 33. That evening, top leaders in Kathmandu invited dissatisfied groups for talks. Madhesi leaders met in Bhairawa on Thursday to demand withdrawal of the Army, implementation of past deals and treatment of wounded protesters.

The three parties must try harder to get dissidents on board before they pass the constitution. Symbolic gestures matter as much as meaningful concessions. An inclusive constitution that lays the foundation for a just and democratic Nepal is within grasp, but needs urgent confidence-building measures. The constitution should not be a document that pushes the country into another violent multi-ethnic conflict, but one that ensures true devolution for peace and prosperity.

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SUV SPECIAL

INSIDE

FUTURE IMPERFECT: Police beat up a protester trying to block the East-West Highway in Lahan on Thursday, while on the same day Madhesi youth line up for documents at the Police office in Kathmandu (above) so they can go abroad for work.

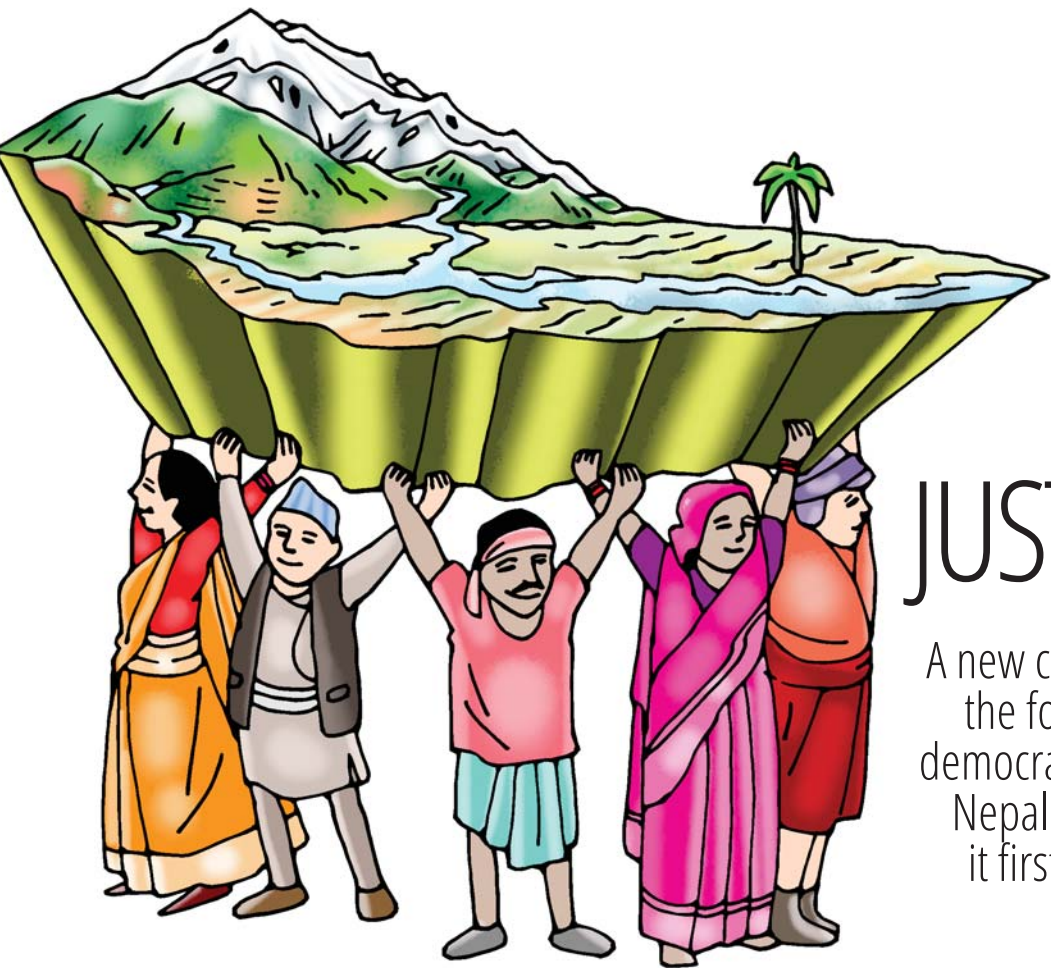
DILIP SINGH

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JUST DO IT

A new constitution that lays the foundation for a just, democratic and prosperous Nepal is within grasp, but it first needs confidence-building measures

Writing an inclusive, democratic constitution was supposed to be the final chapter in the country’s peace process, which has now lasted nearly as long as the conflict. In the past decade, Nepal has gone from war to peace, from a monarchy to republic, the former guerrillas have been disarmed and demobilised and some integrated into the national army to serve in UN peacekeeping.

The Maoists waged war for a new constitution that would ensure equality, social justice and devolution of political power from Kathmandu to people who had been historically excluded from decision-making. And that is where things have been stuck: despite two elections for a Constituent Assembly to draft the constitution, negotiations on its content have been deadlocked, mainly over the issue of how many federal states there should be and what they should be called.

Under fire for delayed earthquake relief, politicians in Kathmandu tried to redeem themselves by putting constitution-writing on a “fast track” to show voters that

they were not completely feckless. On 8 May, the four of the main political forces in the governing coalition and the opposition struck a deal that they would form a national unity government after the constitution was promulgated.

However, the draft they rushed to the Assembly had major flaws: clauses treated women as second class citizens, it left loopholes to muzzle the media, and didn’t satisfy the demands for greater autonomy from the leaders of the Madhesi and other marginalised ethnicities. These groups were particularly incensed that when the number of provinces went from 8 to 6 and then 7, it left them out.

Violent protests then broke out in different parts of the country, and 35 people have been killed in the past four weeks – including eight policemen who were lynched in Kailali on 24 August by Maoists who had infiltrated the Tharu protest. Large swathes of the country have now been shut down or are under curfew for nearly a month, blocking the country’s trade lifeline with India.

The MJF-D having quit the four-party group that signed

the fast-track agreement, the NC, UML and the main Maoists pushed ahead with debating the draft in the Constituent Assembly this week. The process is fraught because this hurried draft is neither inclusive nor sustainable. It may be true, as the government argues, that this is the best that can be expected after eight years of deadlocked negotiations. But the boundaries appear to be an exercise in electoral gerrymandering more than a blueprint for stability and prosperity. The aboriginal Tharu community feels particularly overlooked by the boundaries that have been drawn.

The whole premise about this constitution is all wrong: the top guns from the three main parties are trying to bulldoze the document through because they are in a hurry to form a new government. Under a backroom deal, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala is supposed to step down after the constitution to make way for the UML’s K P Oli. Pushpa Kamal Dahal probably has the promise of a high-profile position. It is truly tragic that a document that has such importance for the future of Nepal is being decided on the basis of such short-term power play.

Oli figures that the current level of violence in the Tarai is containable and he can fix things once he becomes prime minister, address the demands of the plains-based and indigenous parties, resolve the crisis, and take full credit for rescuing the country from the brink. But that is a dangerous gamble. Anger is rising among the disenfranchised in the plains and among indigenous ethnicities which feel that their demands for political autonomy are being ignored by the political class in Kathmandu.

Nepalis have suffered enough from a decade of war, another decade waiting for a peace dividend that never materialised, and then this year’s devastating earthquake. The last thing we need is for ethnic and communal tensions to flare up over the constitution. A note of caution for outsiders meddling in the Tarai right now: it is not making Nepal more stable.

The three parties must try harder to get dissidents on board before they pass the constitution all by themselves as they are planning to do by 21 September. Symbolic gestures do matter, and so do meaningful concessions. The gap between the two sides on federal boundaries is not very difficult to resolve, the Tharus can be convinced to move three Kailali constituencies to Province 5 and Province 2 can be extended eastwards.

A new constitution that lays the foundation for a just, democratic and prosperous Nepal is within grasp. But first it needs confidence-building measures for trust, and then the political will to move forward together without leaving anyone behind.

The constitution should not be a document that pushes the country into another violent multi-ethnic conflict, but one that ensures true devolution for peace and prosperity.

YOUR SAY

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CONSTITUTION

Those who are pleading to accept a regressive constitution are actually complicit in the crimes against the nation ('Open and shut case', Editorial, #774).

Mukesh

■ Every nation will use force to protect civil order. Unarmed protestors is a lie. These protestors were armed and had murderous intent. I do not hold the collective group responsible-not the entire Tharu community, but certainly those who showed up. These are volatile and fluid situations which are exacerbated with maleficent leadership.

Nam

■ As an old saying in Sanskrit puts it, the more you delay, the further away you get from the original objective. ('Birthing a new constitution', David Seddon, #774)

Namah

■ I understand the concerns of the minorities but burning vehicles and vandalising public property is not the solution. This will only sow seeds of hatred in the minds of others who

suffer. Bloodshed, violence and riots have never produced results to anyone’s benefit.

Nyas Yadav

FEDERALISATION FOLLY

The writer seems to misunderstand federalism. ('The federalisation folly', Bihari K Shrestha, #774). It does not mean dividing the country but rather devolving power from the centre to other parts of the country. Federalism is a mechanism that makes it possible for every person who makes up Nepal’s mosaic to live in dignity. It allows people to break free from social and religious barriers and promote equitable development of the country.

Gagan

■ Nepal needs a truly democratic setup where every person irrespective of caste, ethnicity, religion, and so forth has equal rights and equal voice. Slicing and dicing the country into any number of subgroups (especially if such subgroups are likely to accord disharmony) will be counterproductive in the long-run development and prosperity of the nation.

Nepali

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Nepal should have reservations based not on caste and tribe but economic status ('Lessons from India’s Patel movement', Om Astha Rai, #774). If Nepal follows India’s example, it will be divided.

Sukhoi

■ The Patel movement was not an anti-reservation movement. It was actually pro-reservation, i.e. Patels wanted to be included. But you are right in saying that those at the top within ethnic groups don’t need reservations. Dalits and highly marginalised ethnic groups do, and so do underprivileged Bahuns and Chhetris. Without affirmative action, marginalised groups will be even more marginalised.

R Rai

■ This is the best article on the topic I have read in the context of Nepal. We need history books on these issues.

Ravi Raj Kaur

MINI-NEPAL

If only we could rebuild as quickly as they set the pavilion for the expo ('Mini-Nepal in Milan', Sushila Budhathoki, #774).

Shiwani Neupane

■ People all over the world find Nepal interesting. Capitalise on this for tourism and exports. An overall strategy is needed.

David Seddon

FOREIGN HELP

Dr Wan Shaw Pong, thank you for this extremely generous and touching gesture. ('Help from far', Sarthak M Sharma, #774). It is when the people of Nepal are truly in trouble that people like you help. I am certain Nepal will get through this rough patch and will always remember its well-wishers.

M. Akram Khan

DISCONNECT AND DISCONTENT

Segregation is by no means an answer to Nepal’s inherent problems. ('Disconnect and discontent', Tsering D Gurung, #773). Segregation based on ethnicity and religion is an even more slippery slope, and sometimes I think that’s precisely the reason why politicians covet it. This allows them to further manipulate people’s “demands” for their own benefits.

XOXO

Times

THIS WEEK

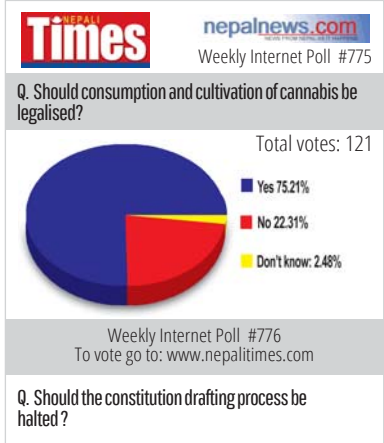


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Rights activists demand equal representation of women in the new constitution on Wednesday at Baneshwor by *Gopen Rai* (85 likes)

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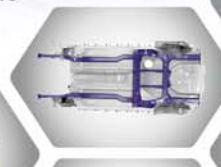
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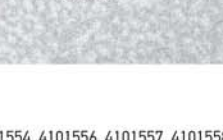


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Point of no return

Unless both sides pause and find mutual terms of agreement, we are headed for a dangerous collision in the Tarai

It has become a daily ritual now: learning of the rising death toll in protests in the Madhes. Four protesters gunned down by police in Mahottari, dozens injured. A 60-year-old man shot dead in Saptari. Twenty injured in Biratnagar as demonstrators tried to burn down a border check post.



BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

Streets of the 20 Tarai districts look like a war zone with logs and stones and bricks strewn along roads. Charred remains of torched vehicles dot the highways. At least nine districts remain under curfew. The Nepal Army is still out in Kailali and Parsa. The month-long agitation has now claimed 34 lives. In Janakpur, protesters have torched government offices and about 1,000 vehicles from eastern Nepal are stranded in Sunsari and Siraha. Many buses and trucks have been set on fire. Yet, Home Minister Bam Dev Gautam tells us that things are “under control”. The Tarai agitation has reverberated in the Constituent Assembly in Kathmandu as well. So far, 82 lawmakers from 12 political parties, including Bijay Gachhadar-led Madhesi Morcha and independent lawmakers have walked out of the constitution-drafting process. Another 24 Nepali Congress lawmakers, mostly Madhesis and Tharus, are threatening a walk-out. UML’s 37 directly-elected Madhesi and Tharu lawmakers are wavering,




DEVAKI BISTA

but those in UCPN(M) have met Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and warned of a boycott. For a Constituent Assembly of 601, these numbers may still not add up to much, but if one considers the composition of CA then a mass exodus of Madhesi and Tharu lawmakers from the house raises serious questions on the legitimacy of the ongoing process. Earlier this week, CA Chairman Subhas Chandra Nembang told us that the constitution-drafting process had entered a “narrow tunnel” in which there was no room for maneuvering, and there was no alternative but to head towards the light at the end. But is it a light, or a conflagration? Surendra Chaudary, a Tharu

leader from the NC, represents the moderate voice of the Madhes and was among his party’s CA members who met Prime Minister Sushil Koirala on Tuesday. He had strong words when we met him this week: “For Madhesis and Tharus from Jhapa to Kanchanpur, there is no alternative but to continue with the movement. It has reached a point of no return. From here on, the CA will either pause and engage with our genuine demands or trample over our bodies to declare an unjust constitution.” The NC has the most lawmakers, with 51 of them directly elected, but it is on the verge of imploding as senior leaders, and not just Madhesis and Tharus, have warned of a walk-out if the party fails to


engage with protesters. With the moderate leaders from mainstream parties abandoning the process, there is a looming fear of an extremist upsurge in Madhes. The appeal by Jwala Singh’s armed group last week with a rabble-rousing appeal is a worrying sign. It is not as if the protests turned violent overnight in Tarai districts. It has been building up, and the government had a clear intelligence warning about infiltration of ex-combatants in Kailali on 24 August. Even before violence erupted in Parsa and Rautahat, the local administration had alerted the ministry. But there is a lack of coordination within the security apparatus. The Home Minister had a public spat with IG of

Police, and the jurisdiction dispute between Nepal Police and Armed Police Force could have been one of the reasons for the Tikapur killing of eight policemen and a child. Tharu CA member Rukmini Chaudhary had warned about protests turning violent when I met her in Kailali last month. “So far, it has been peaceful but as the street gets radicalised and outsiders infiltrate protests, leaders will stop leading and the crowd will stop following.” As the events in Tikapur showed, those were prophetic words. The violence in the Madhes, the police crackdown and military mobilisation has antagonised an already agitated local population, threatening to drag the entire region into a spiral of violence. To be sure, the deployment of security forces has helped to prevent mob rage and vandalism in many places. But Prime Minister Koirala should know that when the number of heads pouring onto the streets outnumbers bullets and batons, police and soldiers cannot contain it. Jitendra Thakur of *Gorkhapatra* daily, who was beaten up by protesters on Wednesday’s clashes in Morang recounted the horror to me: “I kept telling them in Maithali, I am a journalist and a Madhesi, some of them even recognised me. But they continued to beat us up. I am really worried, things could get much more violent here.” A senior NC leader in Kathmandu describes the Prime Minister’s lack of leadership is like the tail wagging the dog. “He is neither leading the government or the constitution drafting process.” And the man really in charge is UML Chair KP Oli, it is his ambition to be prime minister that is dragging this on. Unless Koirala acts quickly to de-escalate tensions by halting the constitution process and engages with the disgruntled constituencies including Tharus, Madhesis, women and Dalits, Nepal’s constitutional exercise is doomed to fail again. [@Anurag_Acharya](#)




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Masochism in the Madhes

The agitation in the Madhes will not lead the Madhesi people anywhere



SHYAM GUPTA

In order to exert pressure on the Nepali establishment in Kathmandu, the soil of Madhes has become ground zero for violent protests in which the Madhesi people themselves have suffered the most.

It is unclear to the leaders themselves what they are fighting for, except the general feeling of traditional neglect and lack of respect by the rulers in Kathmandu. In the Tarai towns today, we see strangers, nameless faces using uncharacteristic violence. Who are these people? Which unseen power sponsors them?



COMMENT
Jivesh Jha

The Madhesi leadership has asserted on many occasions that the movement is no more under their control. If so, whose control is it under, and to what end? Who are those people on the streets of Birganj, Gaur, Janakpur and Tikapur? No one seems to recognise them. And why are the protests most violent in demonstrations organised by Madhesi leaders who lost the 2013 elections?

The unspoken belief is that the violence is being perpetrated by hired goons from across the southern border. In fact, go to any border town today and everyone is convinced about it. But why? Who benefits from the communal hatred that is being fanned in the plains against the hills? Is it

to exert pressure on the Nepali establishment? If so, the Madhesi people will be the biggest losers.

The fertile soil of the Madhes has been the cradle of civilisations past, and the nativity site of our gods and goddesses: Lord Rama, King Janak, Sita, Gautam Buddha and the philosopher Kumaribhatta. Of the six Sanskrit philosophies, five emerged from the Mithila region of the central Tarai.

Today, the sacred town of Janakpur, where goddess Sita was born, has become the epicenter of the current Madhes struggle. People are facing great hardships as the whole region has been shut down now for more than a month. Demonstrations for Madhesi rights are led by stone-pelting strangers whose aggressiveness surprises even the organisers of the protests.

The humbled Madhesi leaders are looking more and more like those from Nepal's other mainstream parties. Their leaders have squandered every opportunity to uplift their constituencies when they were in power in Kathmandu. Now thoroughly discredited in the eyes of their own people, they want to be in power again, and this is what this game is all about – to enhance their political bargaining power in the name of autonomy for the Madhes.

So, they get their agitation crowd-funded, mainly from across the border. It's not just the Madhesi politicians who are provoking this agitation for their political survival. Let's not name names, but NGOs and activists are willfully pouring oil on the fires so that they can source funding from naïve donors for

their 'just cause of the oppressed people of the Madhes'.

The leaders and the NGOs are selling a utopian dream of how the Madhes will be transformed into an economic dreamland if only the plains can be an autonomous province. And the way to achieve this is by rousing communal hatred against the hills, highlighting the failure of the Nepali state to address Tarai livelihoods, and the discrimination against Madhesis in the hills. Some of this is true, but it all rings a bit hollow when the president, vice-president and many national leaders in Kathmandu are Madhesis.

Many Madhesis are smart enough to see right through all this. But many others are not, and given the joblessness and economic frustrations of especially young Madhesis, there is anger there that can easily be stoked. For years, the real sons and daughters of the Madhes worked to their bones to nurture their soil to grow bountiful harvests. The Madhesis are even more worried than people in Kathmandu about the influx of newer settlers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

It's the politicians which allowed this to pad up their vote banks, and that is what the Madhes should be agitating about. It is disastrous and suicidal for the Madhes to make the movement violent, and to drive hill settlers out. Let's think twice where are we going, who our real enemies are. Let's build solidarity with fellow-Nepalis. Let's try to make sure that there is no anti-Madhes backlash in the hills from this violence because that is exactly what the agitators want.

Both the administration and the Madhesi leaders should take initiatives to build bridges instead of burning them. Let's stop this masochistic madness in the Madhes, it benefits no one, least of all the people of the Nepal Tarai. 🇳🇵

The author is a Kathmandu University graduate. He is currently studying law in Dehradun, India.

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Left, right and centre

Polarisation in the Nepali media is becoming a part of the problem

‘Chances of having statute in accord slim’, read the banner headline on an English language paper in Kathmandu this week. Its sister paper in Nepali on the same day had the headline: ‘Constitution by September planned’. A page 1 story on another paper said: ‘All doors closed for new talks’.

If the contrasting headlines confuse you, you are not alone.



BETWEEN THE LINES

Tsering Dolker Gurung

Given the wide gap in the coverage of the constitution-writing process and politics in the national media, it's becoming increasingly difficult for an average reader to make head or tail of the news, let alone the op-eds. The partisan interests of the media, the political alignment of its editors and the bias of its reporters are blatantly on display.

It has come to the stage where you cannot grasp the complete picture of what is happening in the country without scanning all

the big papers. But who has the time for that?

For many of us, our daily dose of news still comes from a single source: a newspaper we subscribe to and when the editorial of the paper is skewed in favour of a particular group or political ideology, we are influenced by a single narrative. The bias of the paper gets rubbed onto the reader, resulting in audience segmentation. Those who adhere to the paper's views have their beliefs reinforced and become more extreme in their thoughts, those who don't switch to another one. Just like cliques

on social media, we prefer to engage amongst members of closed groups, shutting off dialogue and fragmenting public opinion.

Polarisation in journalism doesn't just happen in Nepal, of course. In the UK the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* represent two ends of the political spectrum. In the US it is Fox news and MSNBC. Save for few propagandist tabloids and news channels, the Nepali news media, had so far escaped being pigeon-holed. The centre was the position most chose to keep.

The coverage of the

Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006 is a prime example. Newspapers and TV channels all hailed the deal as 'historic', signs of progress and democracy in the country. Reports following the peace accord were more or less with uniformity regardless of who the publishers were.

That's not the case anymore.

Since the constitution writing process began and following the dissolution of the first constituent assembly, the gap between newsrooms in Kathmandu has grown -- reflecting the political polarisation and the ideological battles of the left and right.

The publishers' stance manifests itself in the newsroom, widening the gap on the debate on the constitution, for instance. All this became much more stark after the violence in Kailali on 24 August. While those leaning towards the left underplayed the incident, and shaped the narrative to emphasise the root causes of Tharu ire, the right-leaning chose to report on the brutality of the lynchings and the murder of a baby.

If you read, listen and watch news today, it isn't so hard to see which party line the paper is toeing. Some, including this

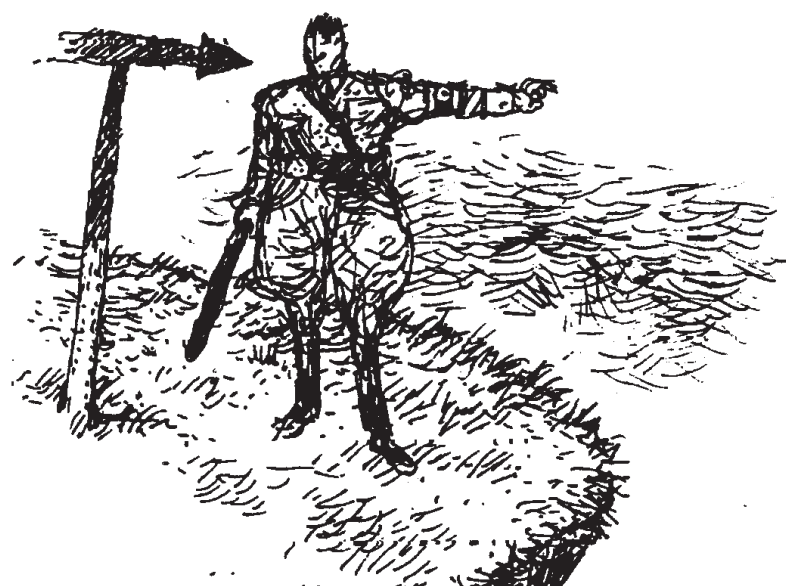
paper, have been supportive of the current government's moves on the drafting process, and pushing for a timely constitution regardless of dissenting voices. Then there are others who seem to be more aligned with those parties that lost badly in the CA-2 election. These have been extremely, and sometimes needlessly, critical of the state and of the draft constitution.

While the mainstream reporters haven't actually been fabricating stories, their selection of what to cover and the slant that conforms to their political agenda and editorial line is a worrying trend. By limiting space to include only views that match one's own, the media has left no common ground for opposing views to come together, perpetuating society's divisions.

The formation of these ideological ghettos result in each ground taking a more extreme political position and an overall polarised political discourse.

In the end, individual news items may be scrupulously accurate on facts, but as a whole, they may be missing a balance. And that can only hurt the credibility of the journalists and their media outlets. 🇳🇵

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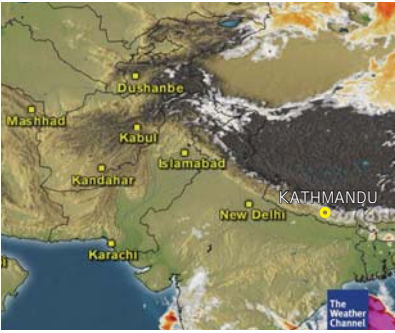
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STÉPHANE HUËT



GOPEN RAI

Much has already been said about Sanduk Ruit, pioneer eye surgeon and Magsaysay Prize winner who has done Nepal proud. He developed an affordable surgery technique to enable tens of thousands of underprivileged people around the world to see again.

The story of Ruit's life (*see review, page 12*) is an inspirational one, of a young boy from one of Nepal's remotest areas who showed what hard work, determination and vision can achieve. This story is specially relevant at a time when Nepalis are fighting for privileges based on ethnic origin, forgetting the principles of meritocracy.

Born in Olangchungola in the northeastern corner of Nepal to a life of extreme hardship, Ruit was soon boosted by the will to do his best to help people. After attending school in Darjeeling and Kathmandu, he started his medical studies in Lucknow.

When Ruit returned, he worked as a general practitioner at the Nepal Eye Hospital where he understood that curing eye disease could improve people's lives. He decided to specialise in ophthalmology in New Delhi.

"I saw the poverty and understood the need of Nepalis," he explains. He started looking for cost-effective ways to make people who had gone blind due to cataract see again.

Ruit, who believes in destiny, says he was lucky to meet 'interesting people' who helped him in his mission. It started with Fred Hollows, a New-Zealander Australian doctor. "We started dreaming over a glass of whisky in 1985," Ruit recalls.

For six years Ruit toured rural areas of Nepal with a team of doctors and implemented the revolutionary and inexpensive cataract surgery technique that he had perfected with Hollows. This

affordable operation which enables prompt recovery was going to change the lives of tens of thousands of patients who had lost their sight.

Ruit soon understood that goodwill and commitment were not enough. "Some thought we were mad, wondering how a country like Nepal can provide such medical services," he remembers. "So we had to formalise our technique and publish many articles in international medical journals."

Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology (TIO) was then opened in 1994 in Kathmandu and today performs 400,000 surgeries a year. It now has ophthalmologist centres in 70 districts, and Ruit even goes to Ethiopia, Tibet, Cambodia and North Korea to organise eye camps.

After the 25 April earthquake Ruit led a group from the TIO in various affected districts of Nepal to provide shelter, food

and emergency medical treatment with funds raised in Nepal and abroad. Most recently, Ruit is working with Pilachhen Conservation to restore several heritage sites in Kathmandu that were destroyed during the quake.

For a man who has achieved so much, and is an international celebrity, Ruit is down-to-earth and humble about his accomplishments. "We are good ambassadors for Nepal abroad," he says with characteristic modesty. "All this has happened because we have kept politics out of our work."

Ruit is optimistic and believes in the potential of the Nepali youth. Twenty-one years after the creation of Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology, he says he can now relax a little: "We have a crop of young, competent and committed doctors who work much better than me." 🇳🇵

HONDA

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HONDA

EVENTS



Images of Nepal,

An exhibition of black and white images taken by Jan Møller Hansen before and after the 25 April earthquake.

Till 22 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4218048

Climbmandu,

The biggest climbing event in Nepal.
12 and 13 September, Astrek Climbing Wall, Thamel, (01)4419265, info@astrekclimbingwall.com, www.astrekclimbingwall.com

Run for Nepal,

A 5k virtual race to raise fund for Oxfam Intermón which is helping victims of Nepal earthquake.
12 September, www.irunfornepal.com



Ncell App camp,

Call for mobile app developers to submit their ideas to compete at the second edition of Ncell App Camp.
Application deadline 20 September, 9802772267, www.ncellappcamp.com

Climate + Change,

A dynamic exhibition exploring the effects of climate change on the Hindu Kush Himalayan region.
Till 30 September, 9am to 5pm, International Mountain Museum, Ghari-Patan, Pokhara, (061)460742, www.internationalmountainmuseum.org

Life talk,

Indian spiritual teacher Brahmakumari Shivani will give a talk on 'The Balance Sheet of Life'.
12 September, 9am to 11am, Nepal Bharat Library, Nepal Airlines Building, New Road Gate, (01)4410900, embassyofindia.kathmandu@gmail.com

Swing dancing,

Learn to swing dance for free.
12 September, 3pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172, sanzey@hotmail.com

Call for submission,

Photographers, curators, photo-based artists, historians, anthropologists are invited to submit works and ideas for digital projection, discussions, performances on the theme 'TIME'.
Deadline 15 September, www.photoktm.com

Help rebuild,

A special fund-raising print sale to contribute towards the rebuilding of heritage sites in Patan by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT)
www.photoktm.com/#support

Nepal Cup 2015,

A charity football tournament to raise funds to rebuild quake-affected schools in Nepal and promote the country as a tourist attraction.
2 to 4 October, Dasarath Rangasala Stadium, Tripureshwor, info@nepalcup2015.com, www.nepalcup2015.com

Quake photobook,

Nepal425 launches a crowd-sourcing drive for printing a coffee table book featuring 700 pictures of the earthquake. All proceeds from the sales will go to quake-affected.
www.nepal425.com

Wholeness,

Artist Puran Khadka whose work is a meditative abstraction full of spiritual awakening exhibits his paintings.
Till 30 October, Park Gallery, Pulchok, (01)5522307, contact@parkgallery.com.np



The Yeti Run,

Test your strength, stamina and teamwork at Nepal's first obstacle race.
26 September, St Xavier's School, Godavari, 9841226397, pareshkshrestha@gmail.com

DINING

Garden Tea House,

Go on a dessert-binge at this lovely tea house.
Shankhamul, (01)4781377

Lal Durbar Restaurant,

Authentic Nepali dinner with cultural shows.
Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01)4248999, reservation@laldurbar.com



Barista Lavazza,

The Valley's best European inspired coffee-culture cafe serves excellent mochas and lattes, don't forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich.
Jawalakhel, (01)4005123, barista.nepal@gmail.com

Natssul,

Reminiscent of the establishments in Seoul's Hong dae district, this eatery strives to be the best Korean restaurant in town.
Pokhara, (61)229198



Newa Lahana,

Authentic Newari flavours with killer views of surrounding Macchegaun and towering Chandragiri hill.
Kirtipur, 9813849358



Vootoo,

The new home of Newari cuisine that also has a safe continental menu for those who are not yet ready to experiment with new dishes.
Lajimpat, (01)4005222

MUSIC



Psyche-Folk,

Singer-songwriter, Jerusha Rai, returns to her hometown for her first show with Yuvash Vaidya on keys and beats by electro musician Tshering Sherpa.
Rs 500, 11 September, 7.15pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

Open mic,

Calling all aspiring singers.
Every Tuesday, 7pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172, sanzey@hotmail.com

Cadenza Live,

Enjoy Afro-Caribbean grooves from this famous Nepali jazz band.
11 September, 8pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172, sanzey@hotmail.com



Spirit X Live,

Come on up for some electric delight.
11 September, 8.30pm, Capital Grill, Bhatbhateni, (01)4428426, grillcapital@gmail.com

Chill Bump Live,

This English-speaking, French-made rap duo will make you jump with their unique and powerful beats that piqued Wax Tailor and C2C's attention.
18 September, 7.30pm, Alliance française of Kathmandu, (01)4241163, (01)4242832, general.afk@gmail.com, www.alliancefrancaise.org.np

Plebeian Live,

Feel the groove with this Nep-Indie band.
Rs 200, 18 September, 8pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172, sanzey@hotmail.com

Baulu Jatra,

Put on your shoes, gather your energy, and get ready for the 'Slamming brutal death metal' bands.
26 September, 1pm to 6pm, Purple Haze, Thamel, 9843695278, 9803145286, 9813041899

GETAWAYS

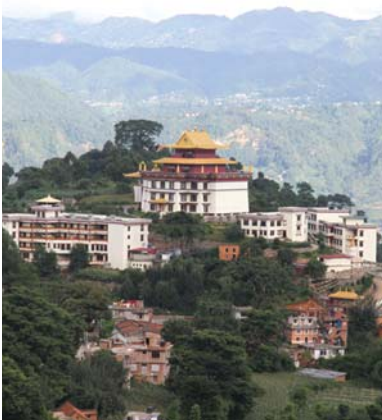
Raniban Retreat,

Situated at the other end of the Phewa Lake and nested inside Raniban forest and the World Peace Stupa, this retreat has one of the best views of the Annapurna range.
Phewa Lake, Pokhara, (01)4411855



Monsoon Madness,

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Rs 5555 net per person, till 30 September, Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, (01)4420252, (01)412999, 9818721492, 9860617403, shangrilavillage@hotelshangrila.com



Neydo Monastery,

A monastery and guest house, Neydo is home to many significant religious sites of the great Siddhas. Leave your troubles behind and book a room.
Pharping, Kathmandu, (01)6924606, www.neydohotel.com



Milla Guesthouse,

If you prefer the quiet, and admire a mix of old and new, this is the perfect place to stay. Not too far away from the city, yet worlds apart.
Bhaktapur, 9851024137



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Helping the poor to see

Some lives are lived for the pursuit of happiness, a sense of fulfilment derived from serving others selflessly. One such person is Sanduk Ruit, Nepal's world renowned doctor who decided to go into medicine after seeing his siblings die during childhood of easily-preventable infections in a remote corner of northeastern Nepal.

Ruit's life is an inspiration for everyone everywhere, not just for fellow-Nepalis (see page 7). But it is especially relevant at a time when it has become fashionable for us to be cynical, when Nepalis like to run down Nepal in order to justify moving abroad. Ruit's life is proof that there is a lot left to be done here, and money can't buy the sense of personal fulfilment one gets from helping fellow-Nepalis in need.

Friends had often told Ruit to write a memoir. But the man is too busy giving the gift of sight to thousands (and too modest) to sit down and write about himself. Which is why when David Oliver Relin (the author of the best-selling *Three Cups of Tea*) decided to do Ruit's biography, he convinced Relin to also include his fellow-ophthalmologist, the American climber Geoffrey Tabin. The two doctors set up the Himalayan Cataract Project and have been working together to fight blindness across the world for the past two decades.

Relin actually came to Nepal in 2012 to climb and also work on a biography of Apa Sherpa, who at that time was getting ready



GOPEN RAI

to climb Mt Everest a record-breaking 20 times. But he was introduced to Ruit and was fascinated by the life of a Nepali doctor who worked his way up from a remote village to set up a world-class eye hospital in Kathmandu, and perfect a technique to bring down the cost of a cataract operation from \$3,000 to \$20. And even more surprising: perform those operations in field hospitals in the middle of nowhere.

Ruit and Tabin complement each other. The quiet, committed Nepali instils a sense of purpose on the often-wayward American. They fund-raise together and go around the world to help the poor to see. We trace the



Second Suns
Two Doctors and their
Amazing Quest to Restore
Sight and Save Lives

by David Oliver Relin

Random House, 2013
Hardback, 415 pages

details of Ruit's life from Olangchungola, to Kathmandu, on to India, and marvel at a dignified man with a quiet sense of destiny. We find out about the indisciplined Tabin who bunked medical school to climb mountains. We read about how their lives intersect and intertwine to make the world a better, brighter place.


Cataract blindness and the artificial intra-ocular lens made in Nepal (see page 10-11) have now restored the eyesight of many around the world. It has saved the lives of people ready to commit suicide after going blind, mothers have seen their children for the first time, and one blind shepherd said

REVIEW

after his operation, "I'm not only seeing the sun, I feel I am the sun." A Nepali woman

who had been blind all her life marvels at seeing snow mountains for the first time: "Do you see how they shine?"

As a Nepali, some of Relin's descriptions of rural Nepal sound a bit naive and awe-struck, you get that sense of an expat reading too much into things that we take for granted. The book is linked to the tragedy of Relin's own life. After allegations that he had fabricated parts of *Three Cups of Tea*, the journalist and writer was under medication for depression. He worked on *Second Suns* throughout this period, but committed suicide just before the book was released in June 2013.

The allegations against Relin hurt his credibility and also affected the sale of *Second Suns*. This is a pity because the story of the lives of Ruit and Tabin deserve wider dissemination so they can inspire more people around the world.  Kunda Dixit

Because of the gung-ho responses from many on social media, it was hard to resist a visit to Bodhi Books and Bakes, a new addition to Maharajgunj's expanding food hub. When we went there, it was easy to see what the Twitterati meant: the place is cozy, serves excellent cakes and has a collection of books that would make any bibliophile holler with excitement.

This is a food review, granted, but the books deserve a special mention. The café has everything from Cervantes to E.L. James, and Shashi Tharoor to Milan Kundera. One could easily spend an entire day just reading here or otherwise engaging in intellectual chitchat.

The café has a rich collection of cakes and pastries, all of their recipes concocted by its owner, Bidushi Dhungel, who is a political columnist for this paper. We first went with the red velvet cupcake (Rs 100). Very few cafes bake this cake in Kathmandu, and those that do can't do it so well. This one was delectable, but a tad buttery.

We then ordered the



PICS: SARTHAK SHARMA

Bodhi Books and Bakes

profiterole (Rs 100) and the apple pie (Rs 150). The profiterole is probably the café's best creation. Positively oozing with cold custard cream and coated with thick chocolate, the giant profiterole should be on the list of all who go there. The apple pie was no less scrumptious, but again a lil' too heavy on the


butter.

After moving around the café to digress a little, we tried its mushroom and cheese patty (Rs 100). It was excellent: the cheese filling was generous but did not cloy, and the overall taste was truly satisfying.

The only disappointing

dish we had was the cheesy pasta with tuna (Rs 110). The pasta was exceedingly dry, and tuna was truly lacking. The dish could have used a dash of spices and garnished with a few herbs to enhance the overall taste.

Bodhi Books and Bakes is truly a sanctuary,

nevertheless. A quiet, snug place that titillates the appetites of both the epicurean and the erudite. 

Sarthak Mani Sharma

How to get there: Find the street that leads to Chappal Karkhana in Maharjganj. Bodhi Books is a few meters west on your right.



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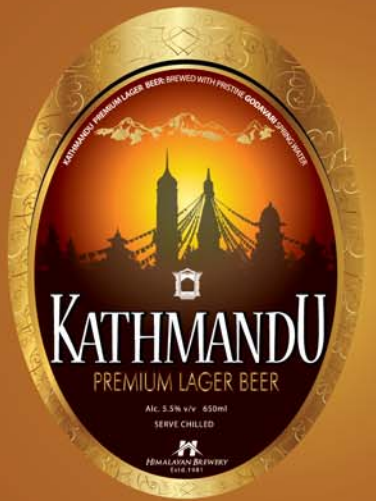
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Imitating nature

Nepal's most modern printing facility, Jagadamba Press, now makes natural colours come alive with its state-of-the-art equipment.





LIGHT AFTER LIFE: Technicians from Nepal Eye Bank prepare to excise corneas from a deceased seven-year-old girl at Pashupati a few years ago. Samita Aryal, Shova Karki and Ram Pyari Karki, (right) are eye donation counselors at TUTH and persuade grieving families to donate the eyes of dead relatives.

JANAASENBRENNEROVA

Seeing is believing

As the number of donors grows, Nepal becomes self-sufficient in corneal transplants

SAHINA SHRESTHA

It is just another day at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Maharajgunj. Three women in white aprons and masks walk through the postmortem ward looking for deceased patients.

Despite the overpowering stench, they locate the body of a 26-year-old man who committed suicide that day. They carefully pry open the eye-lids and inspect his eyes, and nod at each other.

Then they approach the family of the young man waiting outside, and start by gently asking them about him. How old was he, was there a reason why he killed himself, was he in otherwise good health? Then they ask the father the most difficult question of all: would he allow them to donate his son's eyes? The family goes to a corner to talk about it, and finally gives consent.

For Shova Karki, Samita Aryal and Ram Pyari Karki every case is different and difficult. Not all families agree. But when they do, the three feel a sense of fulfilment for having made it possible for two living persons to see.

"This is not an easy job," admits Karki, "approaching family at a time of grief and loss even with the best intention doesn't always result in a donation. But we keep at it because the rewards are so great."

The job requires empathy, perseverance and excellent interpersonal skills. There are five eye donation counsellors at TUTH and Bir Hospital and they belong to the Nepal Eye Bank's Hospital Cornea Retrieval Programme (HCRP). For the past three years they have been persuading grieving families to donate the eyes of deceased relatives.

Across town at the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology, 17-year-old Pranjal Dhital can see again in his right eye after he receives a

cornea transplanted from a dead donor. Pranjal is a little dizzy as he walks out of the operation theatre, but he has a flicker of a smile as he sits up on the bed with his bandaged eye.

Pranjal's right eye got infected when he was little, and he gradually went blind. At Tilganga, doctors said he needed a corneal transplant but had to wait a month. Pranjal's father Raja Ram Dhital doesn't know who the donor is, but says: "We are really grateful to the family, it is because of them that my son can see again."

Corneal blindness is the second major cause of loss of sight after cataract in Nepal. But unlike cataract, where the lens of the eyes can be replaced with artificial ones, the only way to treat corneal defect is through transplantation.

The Nepal Eye Bank has been running its cornea retrieval programme at hospitals since 2013 after being associated with the global non-profit, Sight Life. When it was set up 20 years ago, the bank used to import corneas from the US through the International Federation of Eye and Tissue Banks. Since then it has extracted corneas from the cremation site at Pashupatinath by going from family to family and trying to coax them to donate the eyes of dead relatives.

"Today, hospitals are the main source of corneas," explains Shankha Narayan Twyana of the Nepal Eye Bank, "not only has the number increased, but the quality is also better."

One reason families are more willing to donate the eyes of deceased relatives is that the Nepal Eye Bank thanks them in a public ceremony that is also a memorial for the donor. More than 700 pairs of corneas were donated last year in Nepal at collection centres in Pokara, Dhangadi, Hetauda, Birganj, Biratnagar, Mechi and Kathmandu.

"We have now become self-sufficient in corneas," says Sanduk Ruit of Tilganga. "We harvest enough corneas we need from all over Nepal."

Still, the Nepal Eye Bank admits a lot more needs to be done. Most Nepali families are still hesitant when it comes to organ donation, but through the mass media there is more awareness that their decision can change someone's life. 🇳🇵



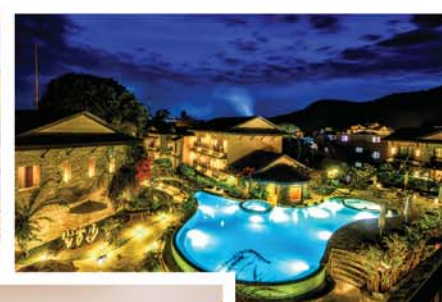
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Queen of Earth

For much of Alex Ross Perry's *Queen of Earth*, the camera angle is hardly still: it zooms into one character's face only to twitchily move into another's and awkwardly peers over the shoulders of actors. This cinematographic technique perhaps reflects the caprices of the movie's troubled characters themselves, who are seen in fits of laughter one moment and wild weeping the next. Through all of this, an eerie sound leaves viewers evermore on edge.

This 90-minute psychological thriller begins with Catherine (Elizabeth Moss) berating her boyfriend (Kentucker Audley), who is going to leave her for another woman. A blubbing mess, her eyes looking like dark bags because of the ruined make-up, Catherine yells at her boyfriend, who looks surprisingly


nonchalant.

We see Catherine next in a retreat with Virginia (Katherine Waterston), who she says is her best friend. But the label of 'best friend' belies the deep complexities in their relationship. The two constantly exchange gibes, for example. At one point in a house gathering, Catherine chokes on chips and crawls helplessly into her bedroom, but is helped by nobody, least of all her best friend. But there are also times when there is deep affection, as, for example, when Catherine lovingly draws a portrait of Virginia.

In between are flashes of the earlier relationship between James and Catherine, which seems to be a source of trouble for Virginia. ("Cripplingly codependent," she calls it.) Now, the tables have turned. Virginia is visited by her

boyfriend Rich (Patrick Fugit) all too often, something that Catherine hates. "You pry into the lives of others to conceal how worthless and boring your own life is," she tells Rich. Rich is also somehow the reason her father killed himself and is the cause of "all depression" in the world. Cups are thrown, and Catherine almost strangles Rich at one point.

Queen of Earth truly tantalises. There is, for example, mention of Catherine's father, a "prominent artist", over and over again. It's obvious that one reason Catherine is so manic may be that she had troubles with her father, though what exactly, we are not told. In another instance, Catherine tells a visitor, "I could kill you right now, and no one would even know" - only viewers know that she is only half-joking. Thus, *Queen of Earth* troubles its viewers with dangerous questions all along. Will Catherine kill herself? Will she kill somebody?

The movie tries to unpeel the complexities of its characters, but because it doesn't tell us everything, it leaves most of the unpeeling to us. And viewers readily jump in to do this, thanks to Moss' most compelling performance and Perry's commendable directing that make this movie so thoroughly watchable.  **Sarthak Mani Sharma**

 **nepalitimes.com**
■ Trailer 

HAPPENINGS



WE'RE LEAVING: MJF (D) Chair Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar (*sitting*) informs Constituent Assembly Chair Subhas Nembang about his party's decision to boycott the constitution drafting process on Tuesday.



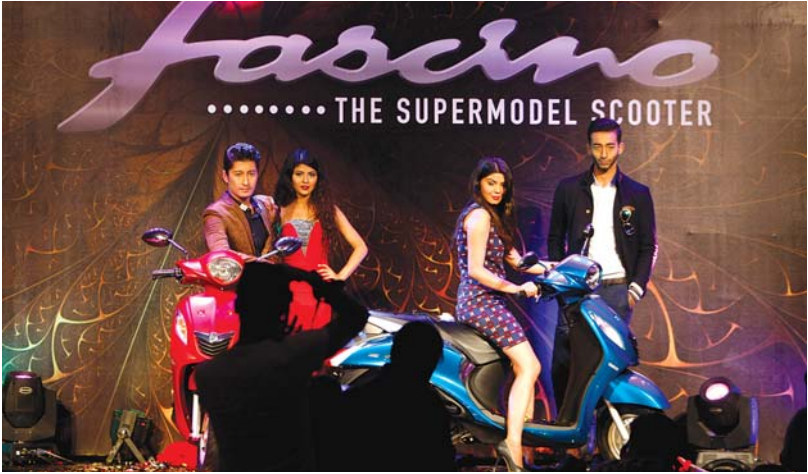
SWEET VICTORY: Govinda KC accepts a glass of water from a young child, ending his hunger strike on Sunday after the government agreed to fulfill his demands to curb corruption in the medical education sector.



TOON TIME: Minister of Foreign Affairs Mahendra Bahadur Pandey scans an art work at an exhibition showing educational cartoons at Nepal Art Council at Babar Mahal on Monday.



LIL' LORD: A young boy dressed as Lord Krishna holds a flute to his lips on the occasion of Krishna Janamasthami on Saturday.



READY TO RIDE: Models pose during the launch of Yamaha's new scooter 'Fascino' at Soaltee Crowne Plaza on Monday.

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A prince had to kiss Snow White to bring her back to life. Cinderella's prince called her the love of his life but forgot what she looked like, and had to put the shoe on every girl in the kingdom. Fairy tales are great, but they tend to show that women need to be saved.

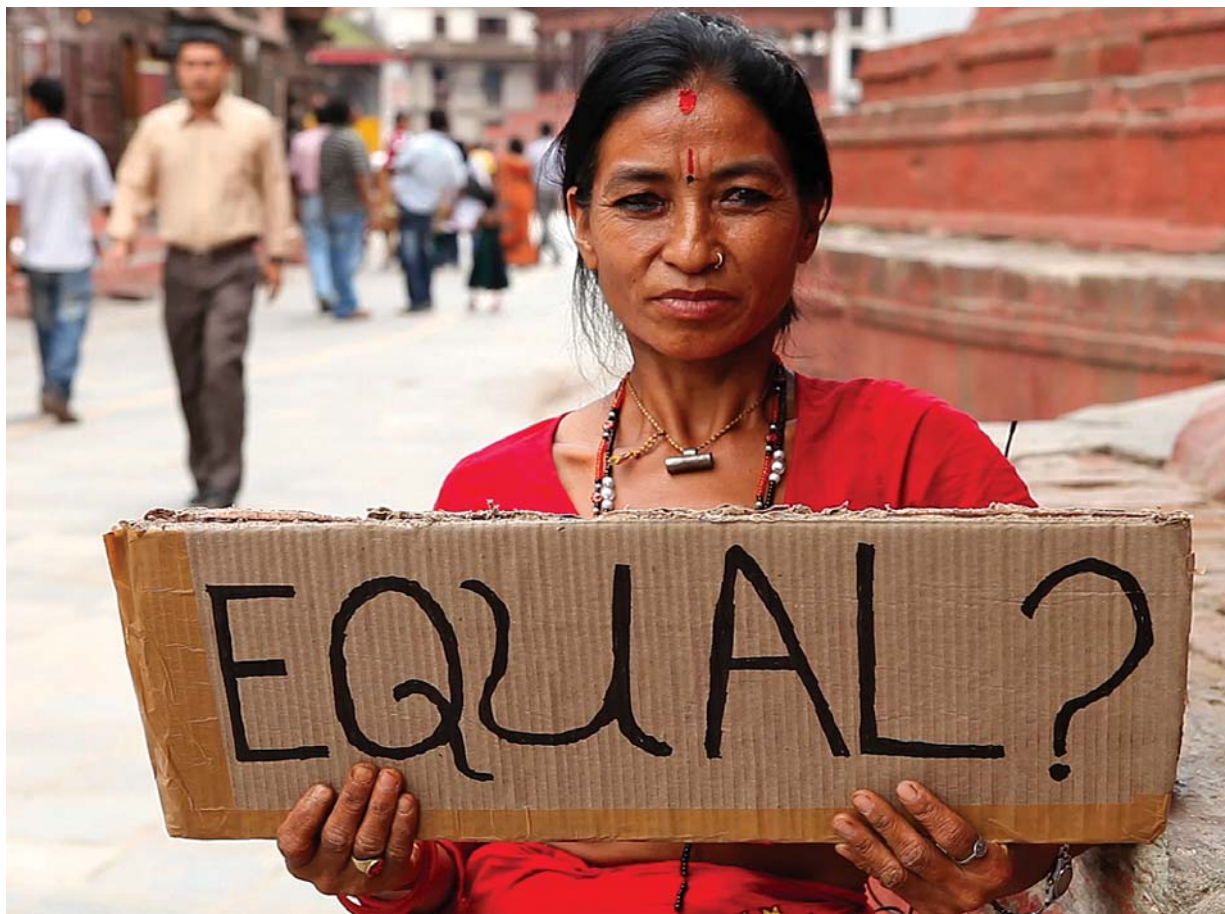


ALL IN THE MIND
Anjana Rajbhandary

When I was in sixth grade and talking in the library, my teacher told me, "Women are to be seen and admired, not heard." It made me feel that it was wrong to have a voice, that as a woman, I should not have an opinion.

As girls, we get programmed from a very young age about what we can and cannot do. Family, society and culture tell us who we are and how we need to be. We get treated differently based on our gender, our talents and our looks.

Girls are born with a life map of how to be and expected to follow a trajectory of tradition and convention without questioning why they have to do so. Most women follow it without thinking. Shouldn't more women explore



WORLD BANK

Rescue me not

Family, society and culture tell women who we are and how we need to be, and what we can and cannot do

and find their own ways in life?

Most of us don't take the time to find out what our authentic self is but choose (with a heavy heart) to stick to the stereotype society has plastered all over us where we

need to be rescued.

We don't think about questioning or filtering through the irrational beliefs that are tattooed in our brains, being told, for example, not to touch

any books during periods. But no one has a rational explanation.

Why not? It is not easy and usually painful to disagree with norms that have been practiced for generations, but at one time

slavery was acceptable but that changed.

Kathmandu's cosmopolitan women are smart and educated, but they struggle conforming to and living under the pressures of appearing to be a good daughter-in-law, wife and mother, despite what they feel on the inside.

This is nothing more than a way to control women and if they revolt, family and society manipulate them to feel guilty for actually wanting to be happy and living a life they love. We are so heavily influenced by the world that most families prioritise what society prefers than their own child's happiness.

One truth I learned is that if you live your life trying to make society happy, you will never be happy. Society will always find something wrong and it will always point at a fault that you need to work on. There is a difference between being true to yourself and giving up on common sense and doing whatever you want. If more people chose to be happy than conventional, there would be fewer individuals judging us in society.

In the end, it's not enough for my prince to buy me glass slippers and take care of me financially. He needs to be smart and kind who sees me as an equal partner in life where I make my own money. I am a hopeless romantic and I still believe in love but I do not need to be rescued: I can save myself. ❏

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- Privileged freedom, #751
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DAVID SEDDON

The Battle of Sari Bair was the last major offensive of the Gallipoli campaign. By now around 25,000 casualties had been suffered by the Allied forces alone, and none of the main objectives had been achieved. The general assault on the peninsula had failed.

On 15 August 1915, Hamilton finally sacked Stopford and a number of division and brigade commanders. The command of IX Corps was given to Major-General Beauvoir De Lisle, commander of the 29th Division until Lieutenant-General Julian Byng could travel from France to assume command. In all, three new generals were brought in from the Western Front to revitalise the dispirited command. The generals still did not recognise the full extent of the disaster for which they were largely responsible, although Hamilton, uncharacteristically, now admitted that the Turks had the 'moral ascendancy' and asked for 45,000 reinforcements to bring his existing force up to strength and a further 50,000 as fresh divisions.

Even in London, doubts were now being expressed about the



Dardanelles 'expedition'. But fighting continued throughout the second part of August. The Allies continued to attack the hills and ridges, against stiff Ottoman opposition and continued to suffer both the incompetence of their leaders and heavy casualties. Cox's Indian Brigade, with its Gurkha battalions, for example, was now only 1,500 men strong.

As the shape of the new front line firmed, Hamilton planned one further attack to try to link the Suvla landing to Anzac. This required the capture of a group of hills: Scimitar Hill and the

'W' Hills from Suvla, and Hill 60 from the new Anzac sector. The attacks were to commence on 21 August. At Suvla, de Lisle had the 29th Division and the 2nd Mounted Division which had been moved to Suvla as additional reinforcements. The 29th Division was to attack Scimitar Hill while the 11th Division was to take the W Hills on the south of the Anafarta Spur. The 2nd Mounted Division was in reserve near Lala Baba on the far side of the salt lake.

Scimitar Hill was captured briefly, but the attackers were

driven off or killed by the defensive fire from the Ottoman troops, who dug in higher up the spur. Furthermore, the undergrowth ignited in the August heat as a result of flying sparks, bursting into flame and burning many of the wounded. The 2nd Mounted Division were then called to join in the assault and advanced, marching in extended formation, straight across the salt lake, under fire the whole way. For a second time the hill was captured, briefly, before being lost for a second and final time. The attack of the 11th Division towards the W Hills was also held up by strong Ottoman defences.

By 20 August, after the Battle of Scimitar Hill, in which 5,300 casualties were suffered among the 14,300 troops who took part on the Allied side, the British commanders began to turn their attention to consolidating their meagre gains. The attack on Hill 60, which began in the afternoon of 21 August, went on for more than a week. This was the last battle of the Gallipoli campaign and is described by Carlyon as being 'as heroic and pathetic as any battle of Gallipoli'. The Indian Brigade was involved in this last futile assault.

The attacking force was based on General John Monash's Australian 4th Infantry Brigade, which had spearheaded the advance on Hill 971 and now took up position in a gully known thereafter as Australia Valley

that led towards Hill 60. Also involved were the remnants of the 29th Indian Brigade including the Gurkhas, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade and three British New Army battalions. All battalions were severely under strength with many of the soldiers wracked by dysentery.

On the afternoon of 21 August the first assault was made by Australians of the 13th and 14th Battalions together with the 5th Battalion of the Connaught Rangers. With no effective artillery support, under fire from Hill 60 and neighbouring Hill 100, the infantry were decimated. The undergrowth caught fire, burning many of the wounded to death. By nightfall, the Indian Brigade had managed a foothold on the lower slopes of the hill. The 18th Battalion of the 2nd Australian Division - which had never previously seen action - was sent to reinforce them.

The Aussies arrived at midnight on 22 August, all 750 of them. The men were fresh and healthy, in stark contrast to the veteran troops, but were inexperienced and ill-equipped, even by Gallipoli standards. They were sent straight into battle 'with bombs and bayonets only'. They suffered 383 casualties, half of them dead. The Hill remained in Ottoman hands.

The assault resumed on 27 August and further progress was made up the slope, but the summit of the hill was still held by the Ottomans. On the night of 27 August 1915, the 9th Light Horse Regiment was also sent in to what proved to be the final assault on Hill 60. One wave of about 80 men led by Lieutenant Colonel Reynell, lost its way and was caught in the open by Ottoman machine guns. Reynell and 27 of his men were killed.

After nearly a week of fighting, the Australians eventually reached the summit and captured some trenches. But even then, the Allies were unable to dislodge the determined and desperate defenders. By the 27th, one half of the Hill was taken but the Ottoman forces still remained in control of the other half: the vital northern face which overlooked Suvla.

Attack and counter-attack continued until 29 August, when the Allied offensive finally ceased. There had been 2,500 Allied casualties in all on the Hill. By now, total casualties in the August Offensive, including those evacuated because of illness, had reached 40,000. @pigreen

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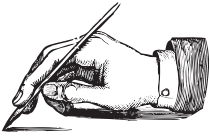
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Collateral Damage -1

Defending the right to cheat

The civil war that should never have happened is behind us but collateral damage continues to plague society. This is the first of a series, sure to be depressing, on the Pointless War's many tragic spin-offs.



MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

Naya Nepal post 2006 witnessed the empowerment of everybody all at once, with every imaginable group suddenly clamouring for attention. Long overdue, no doubt, after centuries of oppression, but once the legitimate causes were aired many dubious causes followed, perhaps the most bizarre being the demands of special interest groups for the right to cheat.

Students were at the vanguard of this alarming new trend. Your correspondent recalls a groundbreaking case several years ago of an entire class caught cheating on their SLC exams. Instead of being contrite, as one might expect, the students

went on a rampage, trashing classrooms and roughing up teachers. Demonstrations were held to protest this gross violation of their right not to study or learn anything and still pass.

Others soon followed suit, whenever the government tried to enforce laws and regulations. Taxi drivers declared a strike to protect their right to rig up ingenious ways of making the meter jump, like beeping the horn or pumping the brakes. They were enraged the government dared interfere with their time-honored right to overcharge.

Food suppliers raised a ruckus when the state had the gall to impede their ability to create

false shortages and arbitrarily raise prices.

Minibus drivers of the valley went on strike after a series of accidents brought attention to their kamikaze driving, demanding the right to run over pedestrians without fear of prosecution. More recently, the LPG gas mafia was up in arms when the authorities had the nerve to check weights and fine dealers caught breaking the law. Subsequent policies to ensure smooth supply and avoid shortages, real or created, were met with closures and threats from the gas wholesalers.

An amusing demonstration was held by the gold dealers association, normally a sober lot, who hit the streets in defense of a colleague caught using a faulty scale. One would think honest jewellers should congratulate the government for catching someone tarnishing their reputation, but maybe that's just my Logic Syndrome acting up again.

Manpower agencies recently shut down in protest of new regulations that stopped them from pocketing fees for visas and

air-tickets already supplied by foreign employers. They'd been getting away with cheating poor migrants for years, helped by the many politicians with financial interests in these agencies.

One doesn't have to look far to discover where people got their role models. Political leaders have been fiercely protective of their right to pillage and cheat both the people and state institutions since the advent of democracy in 1990.

When the state tries to do its job and apply the law it's often blocked by those in power. Post peace agreement the Maoists insisted that no party member could be prosecuted, even when caught red-handed committing a crime, for fear of 'derailing the peace process'. Hundreds of war-time cases were dismissed overnight and a free-for-all ensued, with the police reduced to a purely ceremonial role, any crook worth catching walked free after a call from the Home Ministry. Convicted murderers representing the Maoist party in the CA were high profile examples of this unholy alliance between politics and crime, suddenly protected by law.

Two recent cases exposed the continuing nexus between criminals and our political class. UML leader KP Oli was aghast when a don nicknamed Chari died in a firefight with police, demanding he be declared a martyr (to what exactly, he didn't say). According to UML statements this well-known criminal 'could have been a great man', which might be true if only he'd chosen a career path that didn't include robbery and

murder. Watching the one-who-would-be PM defend an infamous low-life was troubling, proof positive our leaders firmly believe they're above the law.

As if to confirm all parties are equally guilty, another mafia don nicknamed Ghaite was shot by police and this time Congress was enraged, demanding punishment (instead of applause) for the cops, calling it a staged encounter and outright murder. The word 'martyr' was again bandied about, as if a national hero gave his life for the glorious cause of founding a criminal state.

In every case the politicians feel their right to keep a stable of thugs to do their dirty work was infringed upon by the police, whose job it is to catch such people. This profound disrespect for the law is mirrored in all those groups vigorously defending their right to cheat and grab whatever they can, as one does from a sinking ship.

This unfortunate narrative was launched by politicians in the 1990's, who lurched from one crisis to the next while enriching themselves at every turn. As they lost credibility the Maoists attacked the state, setting a violent precedent that continues apace (witness recent murders of police by mobs in Kailali). Destabilising everything has been official Maoist policy since 1996 and the results of this active undermining of state institutions are visible today. Special interest groups are simply following the example set by their national leaders, demanding the right to cheat with the same impunity enjoyed by those at the top. 🇳🇵

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BACK WITH BABIES

Women migrant workers returning penniless and with children face a double stigma at home

ROJITA ADHIKARI

Rama Rai travelled to Kuwait six years ago with dreams to build a better life for her family back home. She was cheated by her agent, abused by her employer and raped by an acquaintance. After serving an 11-month jail sentence for possessing a fake passport and an expired visa, Rai came back to Nepal penniless and with a baby.

Saraswati Bhattarai came to Kathmandu a day before she was due to fly to Kuwait. That night, at the guest house in Gongabu a guest drugged and raped her. She flew to Kuwait anyway, gave birth there, and returned only to find her family had disowned her.

Desperate to support her family, Lila Dong took up a job as a housemaid in Lebanon where her employers beat her up regularly. She fled and lived with a Nepali, got pregnant, was caught for overstaying, gave birth in detention and was deported to Nepal.

These are just some of the stories of dozens of Nepali women who have returned with babies from domestic work, mainly in West Asia. In the last three years alone, the group supporting women migrant workers, Pourakhi, has received 41 women, some pregnant and others with children in its shelter in Kathmandu. There are many more cases which go unreported.

"These women face a double stigma, they return with no money and with a baby, which allows society to question the woman's character," says Satra Gurung of Pourakhi. More than 300,000 Nepali women currently work in West Asia, mostly in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Lebanon. One-third of them travel to these countries via India and more than half use illegal means such as fake passports which make them even more vulnerable. A study by the Foreign Nepali Workers Rescue Center found that nearly 90 per cent of women suffer from some form of violence, with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait being the worst offenders.

Sociologist Ganesh Gurung of the Nepal Institute of Development Studies has studied the problems faced by women migrant workers on their return home, and says ostracisation of women who come back with babies makes their stories even more tragic.

"The family and society are not accepting of women who come back with babies," says Gurung. "Without support and necessary guidance, some commit suicide while others resort to prostitution and go back to work in the same countries again."

In April, the government lifted restrictions on women younger than 30 from working as domestics in Gulf countries. Now, women aged 24 and above can travel to the Gulf for work, but only through authorised recruiting agencies. The Nepal government is also working on a policy to go into effect from next month that will require both worker and employer to sign work documents at the Nepal Embassy in the host country with the employer posting a \$1,000 bond as compensation in case the worker is abused.

"We believe these changes will help reduce problems faced by our women migrant workers and encourage more women to follow the legal route," said Raghu Raj Kafle at the Foreign Employment Promotion Board. The government hopes that if more women follow the legal course it will be easier to lodge complaints against abusive employers and agents.

Research has shown that Nepali women who go to work as housemaids in West Asia wouldn't have gone if they could have just earned Rs 10,000 per month in Nepal itself. ■

Some names have been changed.



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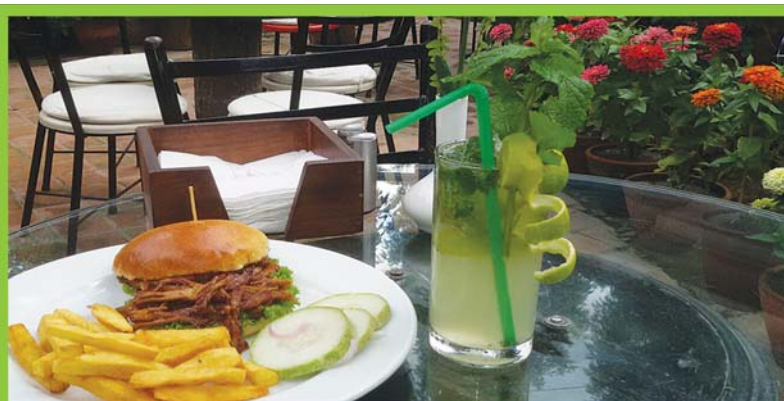


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LILA

Growing up in a family with seven sisters, 29-year-old Lila Dong dreamt of a grand wedding ceremony. But Dong knew her family couldn't afford it. Five years ago she left to work in Lebanon in the hope of fulfilling that dream. At first she enjoyed her work as a housemaid. She

had to look after the family's six children and perform all household chores. But soon the abuse began. Her employers often beat her up and the children treated her badly. Her employer even hit her while she was asleep in bed. She wanted to report the abuse to the police but a friend advised her against it. Lila then moved in with her friend into a spare room she had to share with a young man. When she found out she was

pregnant he told her he'd marry her. Both were soon arrested for overstaying their visas. She gave birth to her daughter in prison, and after her release Dong returned to Nepal with help from the Nepali Embassy. But her family never accepted her. Dong now lives in Kathmandu with her five-year-old daughter and works at a garment factory. She says: "My worry now is about getting citizenship for my daughter."

RAMA

Six years ago Rama Rai left for Kuwait with a fake passport and a one-year visa. Her agent had promised her a job as a household help and Rs 16,000 salary. On reaching Kuwait, Rama found out she had been duped: her employer told her the recruiters had already collected her annual salary in advance.

"I was shocked. I didn't know what to do, my visa was also expiring," she said. Rama then met a Nepali man who offered to help her with visa extension. She gave him the little money she had and the two began to live together. When Rama found out she was pregnant with the man's child, he left her. Unable to renew her visa, the 44-year-old was jailed for 11 months, and gave birth to her son while in prison. When

Rama finally returned home with her seven-month-old baby, there was no one to receive her at the airport. Her family in Illam refused to see her and told her never to come home. "Had I returned with bags full of money, my family would have accepted me with open arms," says Rama who now earns a living weaving carpets. "The money is not enough," she says. "There are nights when my baby and I go to bed hungry. That is when it is toughest."



SARASWATI



Saraswati Bhattarai came to Kathmandu a day before she was to fly to Kuwait. That night, at the guest house in Gongabu where she was staying, another guest drugged and raped her. "I broke

down but I calmed myself and boarded the plane to Kuwait the next morning," recalls Bhattarai. Bhattarai worked long hours, and was paid on time. Her troubles however began when

she found out she was pregnant. Her employers forced her to work throughout her pregnancy and refused to take her to the doctor. She went into labour, and gave birth in the car on the way to hospital. Her daughter was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and was kept in an ICU for 19 months. When doctors noted no signs of improvement, mother and daughter returned home to Nepal with help from the International Red Cross. "I came home with no money and a child that was not my husband's. I didn't know where to go," says Bhattarai who moved to Jhapa to live with a friend. Her daughter died a month ago, and Bhattarai still hasn't gathered the courage to talk to her husband, and her family has disowned her.

Safe house

The 20 beds at the Pourakhi Shelter in Kathmandu's Maharajganj area are always full. Every day it receives accommodation requests from women migrant workers who have come home after abuse and exploitation abroad. The shelter has a psychosocial counselor and two nurses. The women get help reconnecting and reconciling with families. Satra Gurung, general secretary of Pourakhi says sometimes the families are forced to take such women fearing legal action. Women who have returned with babies don't usually want to go back to their old lives. The shelter helps women readjust to their lives back in Nepal. www.pourakhi.org.np



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“Halt constitution-drafting”

Advocate Dipendra Jha with
Rabindra Mishra in
BBC Nepali Service, 9 September



BBC: Do you think it is possible to resolve the current political crisis through talks?
Dipendra Jha: Yes. But the government must create a conducive environment. It must ease curfews, announce relief packages for families of those killed and provide medical treatment for injured protesters. Only then can there be talks. The constitutional hurdles are not too difficult to overcome. All we need is a little more effort on building trust.

But clause-wise deliberations on the draft constitution are already halfway through, and the major parties are set to promulgate it by mid-September.
What’s wrong in halting the constitution-drafting process for three days if a new agreement can be signed with the agitating parties? The constitution can still be promulgated by mid-September even if we halt the process for now.

But agreement with whom, and about what? There are so many parties on the streets with so many political agendas.
There are a couple of major political alliances in the Madhes. I think the eight-province proposal floated by Bijay Kumar



Garchhadar’s alliance can be the entry point.

Even if Gachhadar’s proposal is accepted, Magars will still be agitating for a Magarat and Limbus for a Limbuwan.
Gachhadar has proposed several options. One is to create an eighth province by piecing together Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari and Siraha. This will address the demands of Limbus and Madhesis. Another option is to leave Jhapa in the eastern province but include the southern parts of Sunsari and Morang districts in the Madhes province. In the western plains, Kanchanpur can be left in the far-west province but Kailali should be in the Tharuhat province. Gachhadar’s proposal might not solve the whole problem, but it

will certainly douse the fire in Tarai.

Don’t you think the state should be restructured by a panel of experts, rather than by politicians?
Yes. But did our political parties accept the report of the State Restructuring Committee, which recommended 10 provinces to the first Constituent Assembly (CA)?

But members of that panel were divided, so they submitted two separate reports.
So, how can we guarantee that members of future panel of experts will not be divided?

So, what could be the way out?
Kathmandu must take the initiative to ease tension in the Tarai. The first CA, the State Restructuring Committee formed by that CA and the second CA’s Dialogue Committee all have accepted identity and viability as bases to create federal provinces. If we stick to that, everyone will own the new constitution. I don’t think the seven-province proposal endorsed by the NC, the UML and the UCPN (M) is worthless, even this has recognised some principles of identity and viability. For example, the province stretching from Parsa to Saptari was definitely carved out to fulfill the aspirations of Madhesis. But I agree that slight modifications are needed.



DILIP SINGH

Editorial, *Naya Patrika*, September 10



Trying to pass a constitution that doesn’t treat its citizens equally is not in tune with the democratic values of this country. By not addressing the concerns of dissenting voices, the leaders are only creating an environment for conflict to grow.

It is true that extremist forces have infiltrated the Madhes protests today. These forces want to push these protests to an extreme and call for separatism. Meanwhile, those in power believe that the agitating Tharus and Madhesis can be brought under control by use of intimidation. Instead of engaging in sincere talks with the agitators, our leaders are aggravating the situation by moving forward with a constitution that suits only their needs and wants.

The only way out of this muddle is to stop the constitution-drafting for a few days, and use the time to engage in sincere talks with the opposing voices. Those who are protesting in Madhes must also understand that there are limits to their demands. They must be ready for talks with the major political parties. There is no other alternative.

No Authority

Editorial, *Kantipur*,
September 10



Victims of April’s earthquake have suffered immensely. But the very existence of the body tasked with helping them, the Reconstruction Authority, is now in danger because of the government’s indifference. To receive help from donors, the government formed the Authority and appointed its chief through an ordinance which would have to be replaced with a bill within 60 days. This could not happen because of political wrangling and the government’s

inefficiency.

The government claims that the Authority has not actually been revoked. The three major parties have agreed to pass a bill in the Constituent Assembly (CA) to re-establish the Authority. On June 22, President Ram Baran Yadav issued the ordinance. Though a replacement bill was registered in the CA a month later, it was not presented in the parliamentary session. It is possible that the whole issue of the Reconstruction Authority will fall by the wayside because the political polarization is expected to deepen. It is imperative now that we heal the wounds of the quake-affected. For that, the necessary legal mechanisms must be urgently put in place.

Tibet relocation

Kantipur, 8 September



China is preparing to relocate the current residents of the earthquake-ravaged border town of Khasa to Xigatse, 200km to the northwest. The earthquake that hit central and eastern Nepal on 25 April affected Khasa as well and the residents were moved right after the quake. Some 43 Nepali families based there have also been relocated to Xigatse, while a few others have returned to Nepal. The Chinese are said to be keen to rebuild Khasa, and bring in mainlanders to live there.

“It is understood that China wants to establish a new settlement at Khasa, and we are going to be relocated to Xigatse,” a Khasa-based businessman told *Kantipur*.

Nepal’s Consul General in Lhasa Hari Prasad Basyal confirmed that China wants to rebuild the town as a modern and well-planned area and work has already started. “The reconstruction of roads has been done and they may start with the houses next,” he said, denying that that this was a forcible relocation. “I think they will let the ones who don’t want to move stay back.”

The border trading town of Khasa has remained closed following the earthquake. The Nepal Army and the Chinese Armed Police Force had cleared the road a few times but it was blocked again by landslides. Many container trucks with goods bound to Nepal are still stranded there.

Locals claim the resettlement plan is to discourage the illegal trade China believes has grown in the area because of the close ties between Nepalis and residents of the area. Officials say that even though China has security concerns it is also wary of the Tibetan refugees in Nepal.

The Chinese officials who have visited Nepal have always stressed the historic importance of the trade point and assured of developing the trade point that links the two countries. After the earthquake, China has pledged the highest amount for reconstruction.

Himal Southasian, a review magazine of politics and culture that publishes in-depth articles on issues and events in Southasia, is glad to announce the release of its latest quarterly, ‘Disaster Politics’, (Vol 28 No 2).

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Manufacturing fake doctors

The country's medical education system is infested by corrupt investors with political protection

RAMU SAPKOTA

The registration of medical colleges is a convoluted process in Nepal, but it can be made much simpler by bribing a thoroughly corrupt system. Our investigation has revealed a chilling truth: almost everything is for sale in Nepal's medical education. Nearly everyone is on the take: government ministries, the Nepal Medical Council (NMC), even the anti-corruption watchdog, the CIAA, and Supreme Court.

Anyone can be a doctor if you pay someone enough. Bribery is standard operating procedure in acquiring college licenses, student seats, manipulating monitoring teams, influencing the judiciary. The medical mafia will even guarantee that students with cash will pass not just their entrance exams but their final exams too.

It is because he has seen this ugly underside of medical education that Govinda KC has been on a fast-unto-death so often. His last 13-day hunger strike ended on Sunday after the government assured him that it would clean up the health care sector, but most experts say he may have to fast again because the promises ring hollow.

Every time the Institute of Medicine (IoM) and universities publish entrance exam notices, colleges go to the courts to get a stay order to allow admission of Indian students. Mysteriously, the courts always rule in favour of the medical colleges. We posed as students and secretly recorded an interview with Dhruba Poudel of

Universal Medical College, who boasted that he had connections with top judges and can win any case.

"No matter how weak students are, it is my responsibility to ensure they clear the tests, we just need the money. Everything will be taken care of," he told us, even hinting that he had bribed a certain bearded Chief Justice in the past (*see box*).

The vicious web of corruption begins after the investor with political protection applies for affiliation with some university. The Nepal Medical Council (NMC) inspects the new college to see if it has adequate infrastructure. Most medical colleges established in the past decade do not meet the minimum criteria. But the investors often 'influence' the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Population and various universities to get their permission.

In 2010 an expert committee found that the College of Medical Sciences in Bharatpur and Nobel Medical College in Biratnagar lacked adequate infrastructure and faculties. The NMC had provided a false report based on which the colleges were handed affiliation letters. Five years later, nothing has changed.

Determining the number of student seats for medical colleges is another task for which money changes hands. The NMC is supposed to monitor medical colleges to determine



GOPEN RAI

how many students they can take depending on the facilities. Colleges were found to have bribed the NMC and showed fake infrastructure and faculties. As a result, understaffed and ill-equipped medical colleges have mushroomed across the country, producing underqualified doctors and putting millions of lives at risk.

Baburam Marasini, a senior epidemiologist and former registrar at the NMC says: "The government has set clear guidelines but they have not been followed."

Our investigation also found that surprise inspections are often leaked to colleges, which then fill hospital beds with fake patients and temporary faculty hired overnight to meet the requirements.

Nirajan Kumar Yadav, a recruiter, admitted bringing 52 such faculty members from India for a Nobel Medical College inspection last month. Private medical colleges make up to Rs 10 billion every year. With that kind of money, colleges lobby hard among decision makers offering huge financial incentives to maximise the number of seats

while relaxing the criteria to run the MBBS program. It was the result of this intense lobbying, in 2013 NMC reduced the required number of beds in hospital for every student from 7 to 5.5.

Even the anti-graft body like the CIAA has been meddling in the council's affairs in determining seat numbers. In one letter dated 15 August 2014 about the proposed accreditations to Birat Medical College and Devdaha Medical College, and another on 1 December 2013 regarding the number of allocated seats for various colleges, the CIAA cleared the number of student seats on offer. The owner of Birat Medical College is a close family member of CIAA chief Lokman Singh Karki.

Jyoti Baniya served as an NMC member and says he was against this arbitrary CIAA decision. He told us: "There were no clear grounds on which the number of seats were increased in Gwarko's KIST Medical College." Baniya found out that the NMC was taking instructions from the

CIAA secretariat and when he questioned it, the CIAA filed a corruption charge against him.

It turns out that the owner of KIST, Balman Singh Karki is also the brother of CIAA chief Lokman Singh Karki.

On 17 September 2014, an investigation committee set up by Health Ministry showed serious irregularities by the NMC on seat allocations. Over the years, owners of medical colleges have invested huge sums of money lobbying to broaden the criteria set by the council. An official from a private college admitted to us they had to bribe health secretary Pravin Mishra and council chairman Damodar Gajurel to lobby for it.

The student admission process is another area of medical education with entrenched corruption. MB Kedia Dental College in Birganj, Kantipur Dental College in Kathmandu, and Universal Medical College in Bhairawa have all been taking donations for admitting foreign students without qualifying exams. In some cases, Nepali students have also been admitted as Indians to avoid the entrance examinations.

Satish Kumar Deo, who was head of NMC's ethical committee confirms: "We found many Indians and some Nepali students were admitted without sitting for entrance exams." Of the 19 students admitted to Kedia Dental College, 14 have already received practicing license from NMC.

Centre for Investigative Journalism



"We bribed the Chief Justice"

Dhruba Poudel, Universal Medical College, Bhairawa

A Centre for Investigative Journalism reporter posing as an agent who could bring Indian students to his college interviewed Dhruba Poudel of the Universal Medical College in Bhairawa and secretly recorded his conversation. Excerpts:

"We collected Rs 1.5 million from each medical college to bribe NMC officials to relax the MBBS program criteria. We also had to give Rs 300,000 to health secretary Pravin Mishra apart from the NMC officials. Our Managing Director Khumal Aryal

personally dealt with him."

"We also have connections in the courts, and we can use them to win any case against us. There was a case in the appellate court against the number of student seats that the NMC granted to us. A joint bench of justices Gopal Parajuli and Om Prakash Parajuli dismissed that case. (Khum) Aryal had a 'setting' with justice Gopal Parajuli through Kalu, the real estate broker. (Justice) Parajuli never hands down a ruling against us. We have to manipulate a 'setting' with the court's registrar, and he always refers our case to Parajuli's bench."

"I do not know if things have changed

after Kalyan Shrestha became Chief Justice, but our lawyers tell me that it is still the same. They can fix everything. Besides, (Justice) Parajuli is always there to help us. (Justice) Cholendra (Samsher JBR) is even more supportive. Even the bearded Chief Justice (Damodar Neupane) had helped settle a case against us. We gave him Rs 20 million in cash. He personally received the money."

nepalitimes.com

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Anthropomorphic autos

Evolution is coming a full circle in the post-Industrial Age as SUVs start resembling the humans who own them. This is entirely appropriate given that Darwin's theory about the survival of the fittest is amply evident in the dog-eat-dog world of Kathmandu traffic on any given day where the motto is: "Every Man for Himself." When might is right, it is politically correct to have a bigger car. And just as pets tend to resemble their masters, cars have started having facial expressions similar to their owners.

So, give it another couple of million years of evolution and automobiles will shed their hatchbacks and start walking around on two hind legs. In the old days, when they designed cars, they put an internal combustion engine inside a box and attached four wheels to it. These days, they take a Miss Universe and install a V8 6.2 litre Turbo-charged 420hp naturally aspirated powertrain and rig her up with a pair of Transverse Torsion Bar Suspensions



and Iron Cross Off-road Rear Bumpers.

Take a look at some of the cars stuck in traffic on the bridge, and you will mistake some of them for your aunt. Over there is one with a grinning radiator grill, and just behind it is the metallic golden model with bushy eye brows and a double chin. There are cars with sleek midribs, others look like they've had boob jobs, sedans with cute behinds, there are cars that speak to you. Yes, they greet you when you get in, and

hurl abuse in Cantonese if they notice you have driven off without putting on your seatbelt. There are cars that understand voice commands, and ones that throw tantrums and refuse to start unless you tickle them behind their carburetors.


Today's anthropogenic car designers strive to endow their creations with human attributes. So much so, that some cars even have sex. No, they don't mate in the garage when the lights go out (not that I am aware of, anyway). I mean cars these days are actually gender differentiated. There are cars that are definitely male, there are cars that are definitely female, and there are cars that are definitely other.

Take the new BMW X6M, for instance. With its protuberant Y-front grill and bulging bonnet, this is an unmistakably masculine machine that oozes testosterone from every pore and likes to run around in its undies. Or the soon-to-be-unveiled Mercedes Benz 2016 GLC which from certain angles bears an uncanny

resemblance to Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. But for sheer macho-ness there is nothing to beat the ultimate he-car: that stud from the Tata stable, the Hexa. The Hexa is to SUVs what Arnold Schwarzenegger is to the California gubernatorial elections.

On the other hand, the well-proportioned curvy chassis and aerodynamic headlamp lens with optional eye-lashes of the new Lexus RX350 make it most assuredly feminine. Then there is the new Rolls Royce Phantom with its spacious trunk of generous 700 litre storage capacity which, in hindsight, has striking parallels to Jennifer Lopez. The Mahindra E2O, on the other hand, with its quiet intelligence and unassuming charm, makes any male car on the road today look slightly retarded.

After that, there is the whole transgender range of cars of which we have problems pinning down the exact sex of, if any. The foremost example of this is the swarthily effeminate Audi Q5. Now tell me is that a he or a she, or none of the above?



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