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#789

1 - 7 January 2016

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BEGONE 2015

Having survived a year like the one that just ended, 2016 has to turn out better for Nepal. The country was punished first by God, then by our own incompetent leaders, and now by India. We are glad to bid goodbye to 12 painful months, and would like to think that Nepal woes have bottomed out. There is now nowhere to go but up.

Still, the attrition is taking its toll on 28 million Nepalis and the two million homeless earthquake survivors whose misery is multiplied manifold. This humanitarian disaster is now becoming a crime against humanity.

YEAR ON YEAR
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AUTHORITY TO
RECONSTRUCT
BY OM ASTHA RAI PAGE 13

SICK OF THE COLD

Special report from Rasuwa, Gorkha and Sindhupalchok on earthquake survivors.

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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

YEAR ON YEAR

2015 could have been worse, here’s hoping 2016 is kinder to Nepal

Having survived a year like the one that just ended, 2016 has to turn out better for Nepal. The country was punished first by God, then by our own incompetent leaders, and now by India. We are glad to bid goodbye to 12 painful months, and would like to think that Nepal's woes have bottomed out. There is now nowhere to go but up.

Despite everything that went wrong, however, and as incongruous as it may sound during this period of national crisis and hardship, it must be said: things could have been worse.

It starts with the Turkish Airbus that veered off the runway at Kathmandu Airport on 3 March. If the nose wheel hadn’t collapsed and brought the plane to halt in the soggy grass, it could have been a major catastrophe. As it turned out, Nepal got away with having its international airport closed for four days leaving nearly 100,000 people stranded during the peak tourist season.

Seven weeks later, we were struck by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake, and powerful aftershocks that rocked central Nepal for months. Nearly 9,000 people were killed, three million people affected, more than 700,000 buildings were destroyed and Kathmandu’s historic towns damaged.

Yet, as we wrote in this space in May, we got off relatively lightly. The doomsday scenario of a mega-quake in Kathmandu had predicted at least 100,000 fatalities, with unimaginable damage to buildings and infrastructure. The fact that the main quake measured less than 8 magnitude and struck during the daytime on Saturday, the shock waves were of a low frequency which saved most ferro-cement



structures, and the shaking lasted less than a minute, saved countless lives. Telephones and electricity were working right away, the highways were not cut off and Kathmandu airport was not damaged. The earthquake was a warning to get our act together before the real Big Ones, which are yet to come.

The earthquake forced guilty politicians to push for regime change, but for that it was first necessary to rush through a new constitution. That was the last element of the peace process, and although it had flaws it was passed by a democratically elected assembly. In their hurry, the Big 3 parties forgot that the Tarai isn’t just a vote bank, but is also populated by Madhesis, Tharus and others. Tarai leaders who had lost the 2013 elections after being thoroughly discredited for their greed and incompetence latched on to this lapse (and fanned the flames) to launch an agitation, which India backed with a blockade of the border.

India’s siege of Nepal has now lasted nearly five months. There could have been a silver lining in all this, and the hardships could have perhaps even be justified, if the blockade had spurred efforts towards self-reliance and trade

diversification, and a strategic shift away from dependence on Indian petroleum. We hear assurances from the government, but we don’t yet see a strategic national commitment to those goals.

Meanwhile, the attrition is taking its toll on 28 million Nepalis and the two million homeless earthquake survivors whose misery is multiplied manifold. Dialysis patients have to cut visits because kidney centres are running out of fuel, hospitals are out of essential drugs, children in tents are dying of cold. This humanitarian disaster is now becoming a crime against humanity. Yet, the world couldn’t be bothered.

Lately, there have been signs that the Oli-led coalition in Kathmandu and the establishment in New Delhi have realised that this isn’t helping anyone, and are looking for an exit. However, the population in the plains has now been so radicalised by the Madhesi Front and brutal state crackdowns that the leaders are no longer in total control of the streets.

Our hope for 2016 is that in the upcoming weeks the two amendments to the constitution will get the nod from parliament, and the proposal to defer provincial delineation for three months will be agreed upon. That will set the stage for confidence rebuilding efforts both between New Delhi and Kathmandu as well as between hills and plains within Nepal.

The egotistical politicians in India and Nepal have recklessly held hostage Nepal’s 28 million long-suffering people. They must end this suffering, and owe us at least this much.

Times

THIS WEEK



GOPEN RAI

Most reached on Facebook
The wreckage of 2015 by Siran Liang
For Nepal the past four months under the border blockade has been an economic earthquake, leaving most businesses and industries in ruins, consumers and investors reeling. (13,532 people reached)

Most shared on Facebook
Homeless in winter by Om Astha Rai (89 shares)

Most popular on Twitter
Touchy-feely bilateral relationship by Ass (43 retweets, 51 favourites)

Most visited online page
Deciding to de-escalate by Kanak Mani Dixit (1,164 views)

Most commented
Deciding to de-escalate by Kanak Mani Dixit (18 comments)

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

LIVING DANGEROUSLY
The writer has once again failed to comprehend the problem in its proper depth and perspective, and has instead hastened, rather naively and probably fashionably too, to blaming the government and Kathmandu for the ills that are not ('Years of living dangerously', Anurag Acharya, #788).

Bihari Shrestha

Anurag is one of the very few columnists with an honest and unbiased view of the prevailing situation, his assessment of the happenings in the Tarai and elsewhere will be thoroughly missed.

Ambarish Palit

When blaming just Singha Durbar and Kathmandu for all the country's woes, one forgets that most of the ministers including many Madhesis running the country for the last 25 years are not from Kathmandu. The politics they bring into Singha Durbar is just a reflection of the same politics they have been doing locally. It is easy to point fingers at a perceived enemy like Singha Darbar/Kathmandu, but change and the fight against discrimination has to start

at the grassroots level to be meaningful. In its absence, both local and national politics and debate will continue to remain confined to fights between different feudal lords and their followers for the right to rule over the people, instead of being about people's welfare.

Dev Batsya

I didn't agree with all you wrote. However, you wrote passionately from the heart, thought lucidly with your head and left indelible impressions of your travels with your hands.

Namah

DECIDING TO DE-ESCALATE
Nepalis should ask their corrupt politicians to stop blaming India and get their act together ('Deciding to de-escalate', Kanak Mani Dixit, #788). What you have seen is simple "Arm Twisting", not "Blockade". If it would have been blockade Nepal would have been destroyed by now.

Frederick S Pardee

We should not forget that this is not an isolated case of Indian atrocity against landlocked Nepal. Two earlier blockades, dumping of the Bhutanese

refugees on Nepal and steadfastly refusing to help solve the problem for the last 25 years and hosting the Nepali Maoists who went on to kill 18,000 fellow Nepalis from the control and command centre in the Indian capital are few examples from the past.

BS

Besides a strong penchant for tea, the British Raj really seem to have taught our Indian neighbors how to dominate and enslave a weaker nation.

Hurray

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #789

Q. Should the Madhesi Morcha accept an all party committee to redraw federal boundaries?

Total votes: 201

Oli government 57%

India 24%

Madhesi Morcha 17%

Opposition 2%

Weekly Internet Poll #790

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Are you hopeful for 2016?

Times

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The endless transition

A strong, stable and democratic Nepal left alone to solve its own issues is the best guarantor of India's national interest

Eight months after an earthquake and four months into an Indian blockade, as a new year dawns, Nepal is in crisis. The state, as usual, is nowhere to be seen.

Agitating Madhesi cadre blockade border points with India's support, using violence to escalate protests and incite confrontation. Instead of exercising restraint, the police go on a shooting spree, killing innocents.



THIS IS IT
Rubeena Mahato

Ordinary Nepalis and earthquake victims have been left to fend for themselves as political forces battle it out. The blockade has pushed millions of Nepalis to destitution, and the economy has been irreparably hurt. We might be heading towards imminent state failure if things continue at this pace.

And yet, we can't really expect anything different from a country where the intellectual leadership defends the rights of political groups to wield terror, violence and even a blockade against their own people. What else can one expect in a country where people are expendable for the sake of pursuing some abstract, untenable political

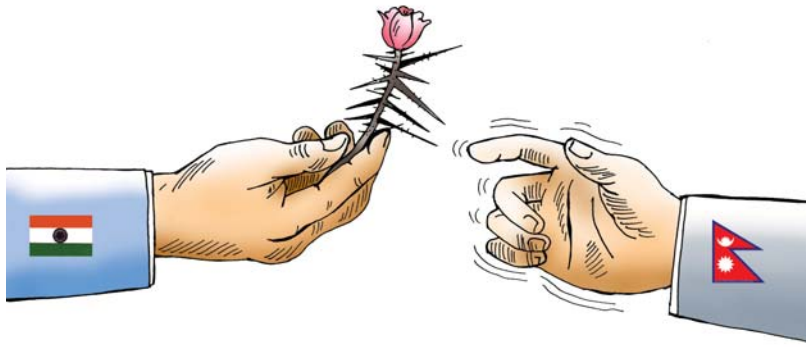
goal? What does democratic process mean when after years of war and political turmoil, Nepal finally gets a constitution through popular vote but is told to throw the document into the bin instead of improving on flaws because it doesn't satisfy few groups?

The truth is that even if the government is able to fulfil all the demands of Province 2 activists including demarcation that stands at odds with claims of other ethnic groups, there will be no respite because we would have given legitimacy to political blackmail and violence.

For years we were told that Nepal can only achieve development and democracy if we get a new constitution through a Constituent Assembly. A civil war was fought to achieve this goal, but after the conflict ended we were told federalism was the answer.

The last decade was spent trying to figure federalism out. And now we are being told we need a new framework for defining Nepali nationalism. Whenever Nepal has tried to settle these issues through a democratic process, political forces who lost have trampled on them.

Ultimately we have to make a decision: do we want to continue the impasse by letting brute



force decide our political fate, or do we want to evolve through continuous practice of democracy, accommodating grievances through inclusive policies and accountable politics? The second option is not possible in this endless and unstable transition.

Corrupt and incompetent leaders, weak institutions, structural discrimination over decades of authoritarian rule, economic inequality are key internal factors driving conflict and instability in Nepal. But it has to be said that being landlocked with an overbearing neighbour has been the bane of Nepal's existence, and from which much of our current problems of state-building and democratic consolidation arise.

Constitution making is fraught with challenges and Nepal's success in finally drafting one was an indication that we had passed a vital test of democratic transition and were headed on

the right direction. But every time Nepal makes progress in institutionalising democratic institutions and achieving a semblance of stability, new problems are created.

Each time Nepal has tried to assert its independent status, India has responded with tough measures including blockades. India has been a destabilising force for Nepal, fomenting domestic conflict to maintain its control. From Maoists in the past to the Madhesi Front now, this has been India's tried and tested method to dominate internal politics. Constant upheavals has also left Nepal unable to focus on economic development and institution building. More significantly, there is little incentive for democratic politics in Nepal because India's approval matters more than popular endorsement, and ostensibly, dissatisfied political forces turn to India for gaining leverage

in internal politics. Some civil society voices have become so servile and compromised that few dare to raise a voice against the Indian siege. People inside India oppose the blockade but here in Nepal our own say India is not responsible. Any criticism of Indian intervention is labelled ultranationalism. It is fascinating that while there is seething anger against the Indian blockade amongst common Nepalis, some of our prominent thinkers have disappeared from public sphere just so that they do not have to discuss the blockade or accept that there is one.

When enemies within are helping to weaken and delegitimise the state, there cannot be a positive outcome for Nepal. Eventually, a deal will be reached, the blockade will be lifted and the Madhes crisis will be resolved to an extent. But as long as India's foreign policy in the region is dictated by its desire to maintain hegemonic control, neighbours like Nepal will remain trapped in endless transition.

India should know that a strong, stable and democratic Nepal left alone to solve its own issues is the best guarantor of Indian interests. Coercive diplomacy, inherited from the days of the Raj, no longer works, and will alienate allies and diminish its influence.

The only way Nepal can move forward is by rejecting violent politics of all kinds, balancing state-building with democratic deepening and redefining the terms of our relations with India. And this is where our efforts should be invested in the coming years. ■

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Reams of Dreams

In each of the ten stories that make up *City of Dreams*, the author has tried to pull off something quite different

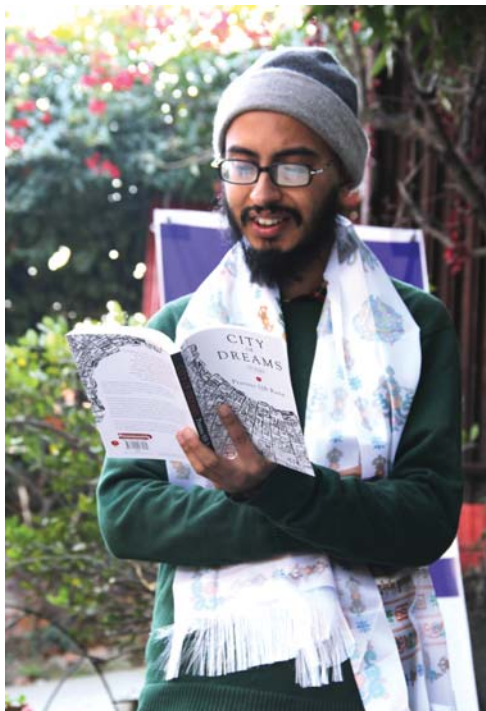
There are at least two ways to go about telling a story. More straightforward, though not necessarily easier, is to document societies and situations that amuse, frustrate, illuminate. Writing in Nepal, in English, one is tempted to do so simply because it hasn't been done to the satisfaction of the writer, as much as a national and international readership. The risk is an anthropologizing or exoticizing bent that may overshadow the "meaning" of the text.

The alternative is to go straight for the jugular through the mechanism of a central conceit, a fictitious assumption. The advantage is the reader can be more easily convinced, if s/he agrees to suspend disbelief, that there is more to the tale than the tail that you see. The risk, if the writer places too much trust in the reader or has not, in fact, bothered to justify the conceit, is confusion.

Why should a book review begin in such didactic fashion? You may only want to know if *City of Dreams* is good, or bad. But in freely indulging himself in both social realism and fable, Pranaya SJB Rana (*pic*) has rather forced this reviewer to approach his debut collection of short stories crab-like, each pincer holding up a quite different species of fictive āhārā.

In truth, I dove straight in. The eponymous opener, about a man who likes to walk the streets of Kathmandu, and the next, about a man who stumbles across an intermittent muse on the streets of New York, sucked me into a phantasmagoric landscape strongly reminiscent of Calvino and Borges, both declared inspirations of Rana. The stories charmed me, just as the author's winning entry to this year's Writing Nepal had, which told of

RABI THAPA



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a man who can't stop taking photos. I was convinced Rana had grown tired of documenting – perhaps he felt enough had been made of the preoccupations of Kathmandu's middle class – particularly given the visceral realism of earlier stories of his. The prose was accomplished, the possibilities rich; I felt a rare excitement.

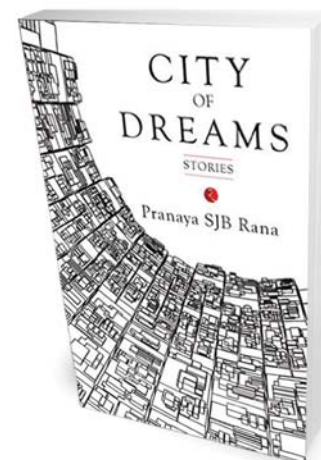
But herein lies the paradox of one's first anthology. These are often cobbled together from stories written over time and

space, encompassing formative periods of doubt, learning and inspiration. They can be uneven, both in stylistic approach and quality. And so it is with *City of Dreams*. The third story brought me back down to earth with a jolt, brusquely dispelling the mystery of the first two. Despite the fluent writing, the clever observations of human relations, "Dashain" seemed half-baked, even mundane. Perhaps it simply struggled to live up to the opening stories.

There are other stories in *City of Dreams* that, despite their lurid content – a girl who works in a massage parlour, another who suffers abuse in a Kathmandu home – appear to be going through the motions of documenting tragedy, performing the rites of social realism simply because they are worthy, downtrodden subjects. I couldn't help but think that gender balance aside, the autobiographical author – the pained, meditative yet ultimately losing, sinking male protagonist – worked best.

But it would also be oversimplifying to say realism, bad; fabulism, good. "The Presence of God" is fantastical, but its central device seems inspired more by B-horror than any substantive philosophy. On the other hand, the gentle disintegration of "Our Ruins" as much as the violent denouement of "The Child" are as real as can be, yet work beautifully.

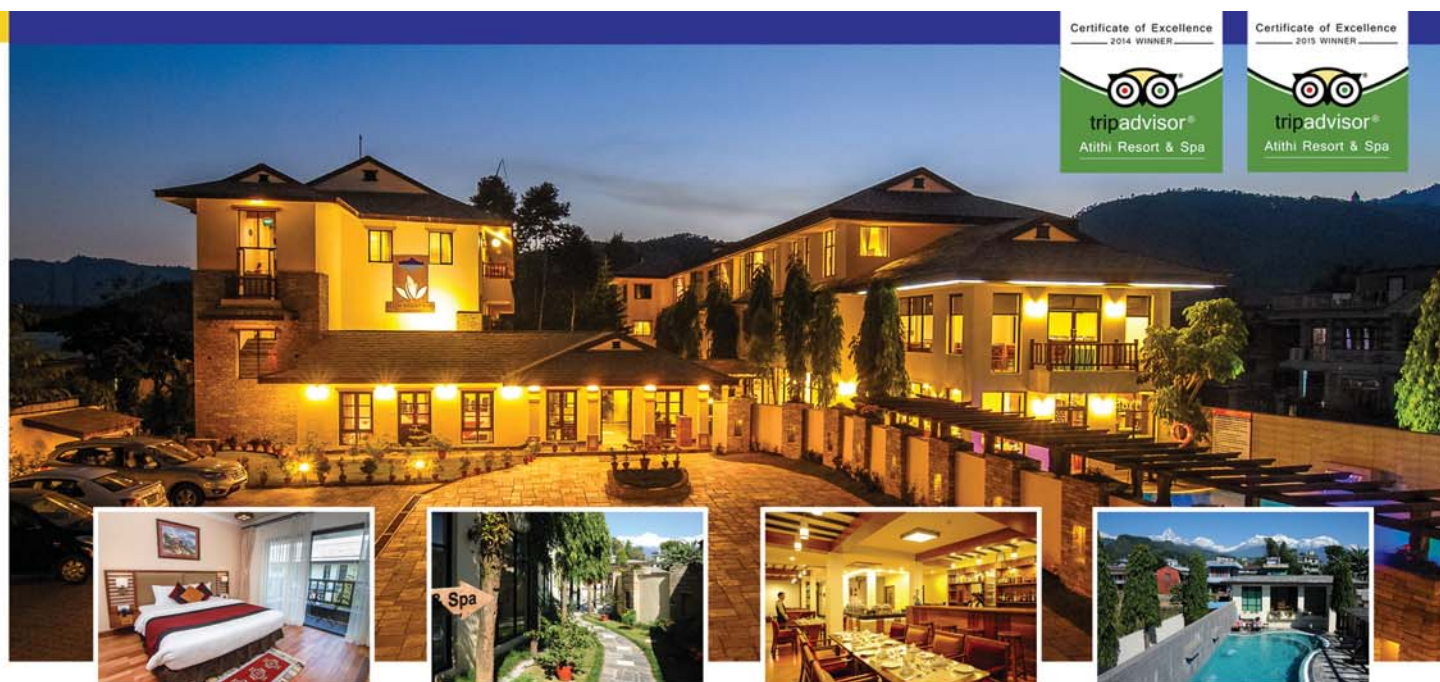
There are experiments too, in which Rana plays around with points of view. Dead men speak, finally sorry for the



City of Dreams
by Pranaya SJB Rana
Rupa Publications, 2015

misery they have caused. City folk bounce off each other in a day's trajectory, a voyeuristic narrator allowing us sneak peeks into their lives as we pass them. These tableaux not only hint at Rana's imaginative power, they also demonstrate that he is a bold writer, willing to push against the boundaries of what we might have come to expect of South Asian writers. In each of the ten stories that make up *City of Dreams*, the author has tried to pull off something quite different. That he succeeds to the extent he has done is a tribute to the city we live in as much as Rana's prose skills – even in a losing cause, the writing is always careful, sometimes scintillating, and promises much in what remains a sparsely populated field. 🇳🇵

This review was originally published on www.lalitmag.com on 22 December 2015.



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City safari on rickshaw



BIRAT ANUPAM

While overcrowded buses were a common sight on the streets of Itahari in the past, restrictions on movement of big vehicles imposed by Madhesi protesters have increased the popularity of electric rickshaws among passengers in this Tarai town. From farmers to students, to even protest organisers, can be seen riding on these three-wheelers which can accommodate upto 8 passengers. Seeing the demand among commuters, local Bhole Paswan (*pic, above*) recently closed down his fruit stall, and purchased an electric rickshaw for Rs 270,000. On an average Paswan earns Rs

1,000 a day ferrying passengers in his new vehicle. “I am confident I can earn back my investment within six months,” he says. Travelling in this new vehicle is also relatively inexpensive. A short commute within the city costs passengers Rs 20 while a longer-distance travel to neighbouring Dharan costs Rs 600. Locally known as ‘City Safari’ the e-rickshaws have especially become popular among students and youths who usually reserve the vehicle to go on picnics and excursions. Electric rickshaws are now being used to transport not just

people, but also commodities such as vegetables and daily essentials to the market. The boom in the use of city safari has pleased both its operators and environmental activists. Yatri Shekhar, an Itahari-based journalist and also a campaigner of KIC (Keep Itahari Clean) says electric rickshaws are vital for green rides. “We planted more than a thousand tree saplings in Itahari sub-metropolitan city spaces and introduced intra-city and inter-city electric vehicles like City Safari. This is a great start to campaign for a green city,” he says. Sonu Jayanti, a theatre artist and another KIC campaigner, says that it is now time for the authorities to promote green rides in bigger cities like Biratnagar and Kathmandu as well. Electrical engineer Raj Kumar Gupta says that the mid-hill highway can be made a green highway where only electric vehicles are allowed to travel. Battery exchange or charging centers can be housed at various points of the highway, and Nepal can ask for carbon budget and other credits from the international community, he says. “The government should try to end load-shedding and promote electric vehicles for the long term,” says Gupta. “The Indian blockade is a wake-up call.”  *Birat Anupam in Itahari*

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

New look

Chivas Regal has unveiled a new design for its 12 Year Old bottle that now features the brand signifier more prominently on the glass bottle, in addition to including signatures of founders James and John Chivas.



asking banks and financial institutions to raise minimum paid up capital requirement to Rs 8 billion by the new financial year 2016/17, prompting many institutions to opt for merger.

Mahindra on top

Indian automobile manufacturer Mahindra & Mahindra's XUV 500 has ranked the highest in a customer



satisfaction assessment 'Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout

(APEAL) Study' conducted by JD Power. The study is based on owner evaluations.

Becoming one

Bank of Kathmandu Chairman Hem Raj Subedi and Director Prakash Shrestha last week signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Lumbini Bank Director Subarna Lal Shrestha for a merger of the two institutions. In July Nepal Rastra Bank had issued a directive

Festive price



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Touted as the 'slimmest dual-SIM phone' the Elife S7 was earlier priced at Rs 31,999.

Vacuum power

CG Electronics, the authorised sole distributor of LG brand for Nepal, has unveiled its new range of vacuum cleaners. Designed and engineered in South Korea, these vacuum cleaners have extra large pot beretta of 21L dust capacity with dust indicator, and 2200W motor.



prabhu BANK

CELEBRATING 20 years

नेपाली वित्तीय क्षेत्रको कारोबारमा अग्रणी एनएमबि बैंक, देशले लिएको आर्थिक मार्गचित्र अनुरूप आम नागरिकको समृद्धि एवं देशको प्रगतिमा समर्पित रहँदै हामी आज २० औं वर्षमा प्रवेश गरेका छौं । यस सुखद अवसरमा हामी अभि आम नागरिक र देशको हितका निम्ति कटिबद्ध रहने प्रण गर्दै हामीलाई आजसम्म साथ दिनुहुने समस्त ग्राहकवर्ग एवं शुभेच्छुक महानुभावहरु, शेयरधनी महानुभावहरु, साभेदार संस्थाहरुका साथै सरोकारवालाहरु सबै प्रति हार्दिक आभार प्रकट गर्दछौं ।



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move beyond

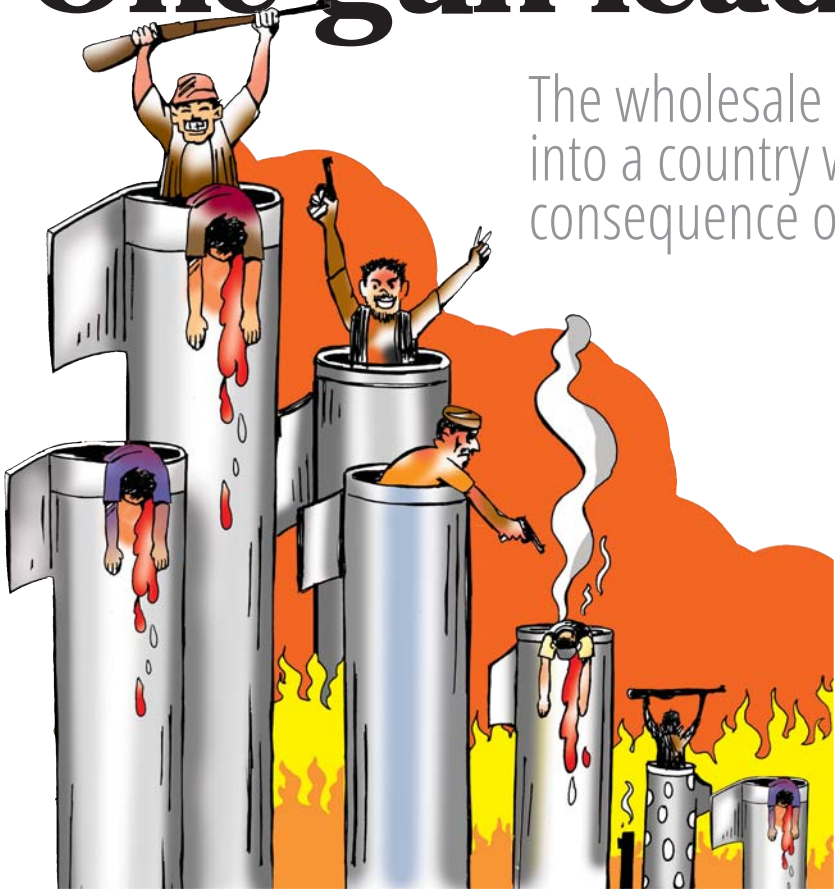
Collateral Damage 4

One gun leads to another

The wholesale introduction of countless illegal firearms into a country where few existed is yet another tragic consequence of The Pointless War

No matter how you look at it, Nepal is in a terrible mess these days on every front. From the government’s callous neglect of the earthquake victims, to a constitution so flawed it blew up the Tarai, to the never-ending blockade and outrageous corruption, the break-down of services has got to the point many are asking: “You call this a country?”

 **MOVING TARGET**
Foreign Hand



But let’s not forget, dear reader, the one lesson we’ve learned the hard way over the years: no matter how bad things get in Nepal they can always get worse.

If the nation’s many woes could be summed up in a few snappy sound-bites the Hand would retire happy. But it’s no simple thing for a nation and its leadership to deteriorate to such abysmal levels and nothing rots this bad overnight. Rather it takes decades to weaken the state and its institutions through a thousand cuts to get where Nepal is today.

Hence the Collateral Damage series, a depressing attempt to figure out how we got in this quagmire while posing that eternal question: All for what?

As the search for answers lurches from the obscure to the obvious we inevitably come to the matter of guns and their astonishing proliferation. The wholesale introduction of countless un-registered, illegal firearms into a country where few existed is yet another tragic consequence of The Pointless War that looks like it’s here to stay.

Sticking with the obvious, Nepal was a much safer place before the war than it is now. Not only were very few weapons around but the current culture of violence had yet to be introduced. Most guns that did exist were registered with the authorities and the right to keep a private fire-arm was tightly regulated. The system was actually quite effective, especially when compared to the

chaotic free-for-all since the war began.

The conflict created unprecedented demand, keeping gun-runners and the illicit firearm makers of Bihar and the Tarai working overtime ever since. *Nepali Times* carried a piece on this thriving trade way back in 2001 issue #54 (Arms & the Men). Business stayed brisk even after the war, as Maoists and their spin-offs needed weapons to conduct their flourishing extortion, kidnapping and protection rackets.

Once the state lost its monopoly on coercion, losing its exclusive privilege to bear arms was a foregone conclusion.

What came first, the guns or the coercion is like the chicken or egg mystery, rendered irrelevant once the cycle’s set in play. The only

certainty is that one gun leads to another, and as Maoists raided government armories and extorted money to buy more weapons the situation went from bad to worse.

In 2003 the government responded by distributing guns to newly formed vigilante squads called Village Defense Leagues. The rationale was a sign of desperate times: people needed protection against marauding gangs of armed Maobaddies and their side-kick Khaobaddies. With the state under constant attack, all pretence of arms control was abandoned and many of these weapons ended up in the hands of the very same people they were meant to protect against. If you think that’s ridiculous, read on.

The 2006 Peace Agreement included explicit clauses on disarmament that were openly flaunted from day one. The pathetic array of ‘arms’ surrendered by Mao-kiddies, newly recruited teens to fill the UN cantonments, included broken pistols bought from scrap dealers in Bihar, pressure cookers and pieces of plumbing for future pipe-bombs. These bits were solemnly paraded to the containers in a splendid display of UN sponsored theatre of the absurd. Meanwhile, when nobody was looking, the real weapons and those trained to use them mysteriously vanished, only to resurface later as the YCL.

The Peace Agreement brought war to the nation’s cities and a

flood of weapons onto the black market. The resulting surge in gun crime got so bad the Birganj Forest Committee and local school board allotted funds to acquire illegal firearms to protect themselves against all the other illegal guns out there.

The few studies on the subject invariably admit nobody really knows how many weapons are in circulation and there’s no way of finding out. According to a report issued in 2013 by the NGO ‘Small Arms Survey’ some 440,000 guns are in private hands, of which 55,000 are supposedly registered. But they hasten to state this is an educated guess at best, adding that most of the un-registered weapons are likely in the hands of criminal gangs.

With every spasm of chaos our politicians inspire, including the on-going lawlessness in the Tarai, government control over the illicit arms trade weakens further. All reports indicate pistols, both home-made and branded imports, are readily available in Kathmandu for a few thousand rupees. If I’m ever driven to hunt one down I’ll let you know current prices in my final column.

None of this would matter, of course, if Nepal had turned into a proletariat paradise as promised. In the meantime, the police are left with the dirty work of catching heavily armed criminals while those responsible for the scourge continue to enjoy the many perks of power. 



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EVENTS

Renewable energy expo,
An exhibition of renewable energy technologies organised by Alternative Energy Promotion Centre.
1-3 January, Bhrikuti Mandap, Exhibition Road



North Face Kathmandu Ultra,
Begin this year with a little huff-and-puff: challenging running events from 12km to 80km in the Shivapuri National Park.
2 January, registration: North Face store (Sherpa Adventure Outlet), Tridevi Marg, (01)4445101

Street dance festival,
Get primed up for hip hop in one of Nepal's biggest international street dance festivals; winners will take away cash prizes.
2 January, 10am to 3pm, GAA Hall, Thamel

Leadership workshop,
Learn the ABCs of leadership with Abdus Miya, founder of Open Space Nepal.
7 to 11 January, 3 to 5pm, registration: office@leadershipcorner.org, 9801115094

CAN Info-tech,
Don't miss the year's most exciting info-tech and entertainment conference.
28 January to 2 February, 5pm onwards, Bhrikuti Mandap, Pradarshani Marg

SparkX Nepal,
Join a group of 15 entrepreneurs and take advantage of the support and connections to build your business.
9 to 17 April, registration: sparkinternational.org/sparkx-nepal

Farmers' market,
Local producers gather to sell organic vegetables, dairy products, artisanal bread and pastries and home-made goodies.
8am to 1pm, Le Sherpa, Lajimpat, every Saturday, (01)4006587, 9802028777

Creative Rendezvous,
Workshop on 3D artwork using papier mâché, clay and cloth with Rajesh Yadav.
Rs 3,600, sattya.org/creative-rendezvous



Donate a blanket

One of Nepal's most popular online shopping sites, Sasto Deal, has launched its 'Donate a blanket' campaign.
Each blanket costs Rs 500. So far, Sasto Deal has received pledges of over 700 blankets from donors in Nepal and from around the world and has distributed over 200.
The blankets collected will go to the victims of the earthquake in Gorkha, Dhading, Sindhupalchok and villages on the outskirts of Kathmandu.
Donors can pay for the blankets through Sanima Bank, Nepal Investment Bank or Esewa and can also submit the payment at Sastodeal Office in Tripureshwar. International donors can make their payments through Paypal.
sastodeal.com/page/donate-a-blanket

DINING



Mezze by Roadhouse,
Spot a superstar at one of Kathmandu's most popular restaurant.
Mercantile Plaza, Darbar Marg, (01)4223087



Irish Pub,
Don't miss Kathmandu's most hip and happening pub.
Ananda Bhawan, Lajimpat, (01)4416027



Red Carpet,
Look down at the busy and happening Darbar Marg while dining at a lavish, cozy place that serves mouthwatering cuisines.
Sherpa Mall, Darbar Marg, (01)4257705

Le Trio,
Amazing jholmomo and others from this cozy eatery.
Restaurant lane, Jhamsikhel, (01)5521674

Embassy,
Away from the hustle bustle of the streets, enjoy the variety of multi-cuisines foods at a place ideal for business meets and casual rendezvous.
Panipokhari, (01)4424040

MUSIC

Recalling 90s grunge,
All Stars, Sound Chains Pilots and Newaz will conjure up the awesome 90s grunge
20 February, 1pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel



Guitar Fest 2016,
A guitar competition for all music lovers.
Auditions from Jan 18 to 28, Sushila Arts Academy, 9849040554

Underside,
Head-bang in this winter tour of the Underside
January 2, 2pm onwards, Club 25 hours, Tangal



Tribute to Bon Jovi,

Miracles will perform the ultimate tribute to Bon Jovi.
23 January, 3pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel

GETAWAY

Atithi Resort & Spa



Tucked away in a quiet neighbourhood just about five minutes of walk away from the lakeside, Atithi Resort & Spa in Pokhara provides a complete relaxation package. The hotel offers modern facilities and is well-known for its spa and yoga experience.
Especially for those coming back from a long exhaustive trekking trip and seeking for some leisure in the hotel, Atithi will definitely be a good choice. Get a good night's sleep away from the lakeside bustle, and greet the new day from the sun-bathed balcony facing Mt. Macchapuchhre, get a soothing massage to ease the sore muscles and exhaustion, then a drink or a doze under the warm afternoon sun in the garden...there's so much more you can enjoy, on your own, or with family and friends.
Atithi would not let gourmets down with its talented staff at the restaurant. The breakfast buffet is generous, offering a wide range of both Nepali and western-style foods. Whether you are seeking healthy oatmeal with hot milk, or an appetising curry with roti, the warm and fresh foods on the breakfast spread is bound to satiate your appetite.
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WOMEN FLYING HIGH

XIAOTONG XU
IN POKHARA

When 24-year-old Prativa Bogati (*pic*) was a young girl her gaze would constantly be up at the sky, watching paragliders above the lake. She dreamt that one day she'd like to fly like them. Her dream has been fulfilled, today Bogati is one of four Nepali women who are licensed



HIGH FLYER: Prativa Bogati, 24, (*left*) soaring with a passenger above Pokhara recently. She is one of four licensed Nepali female commercial paragliding pilots.

specifically for her to pilot their paraglider," he says.

There is a shortage of commercial paraglider pilots, and Timilsina says women fliers like Bogati have proven that women can be as professional as the male pilots.

Yogesh Bhattarai of the Nepal Airports Association says there's no gender bias in the paragliding industry and the association is now trying to increase the involvement of women in the field by sponsoring the training for young women.

For her part, Bogati believes if one is hardworking and professional, gender should not matter, and predicts there will be more young women like her training to be pilots. In fact, women pilots have themselves become a tourist attraction. This week three Chinese tourists insisted on being photographed with Bogati.

As she unfurls her parachute for another jump off Sarangkot this week, Bogati says: "If men can do it, so can we." 🇳🇵

www.facebook.com/FLY-NEPAL-Paragliding

nepalitimes.com

■ Watch video of Paragliding in Pokhara

commercial paragliding pilots.

Since it was introduced as an adventure sport 19 years ago, paragliding has become the mainstay of Pokhara's tourist attraction. The field used to be dominated by men, and still is with more than 100 male pilots in the business. But women are making inroads.

Bogati got her license three years ago, and believes women are discouraged both by the high cost of training and lack of family support for them to enter a male

domain.

"Although my husband was supportive, my family wasn't too pleased with my choice, they thought I was crazy for trying to make a career out of jumping off mountains," Bogati laughs.

Bogati worked as a receptionist at a paragliding company while simultaneously undergoing her flight training which lasted two years and cost Rs 1.7 million. Her husband, who ran a café in Pokhara, financed her classes but the money was

still not enough. So, the couple took a bank loan.

But years of struggle seemed worth it when she flew her first passenger as a tandem pilot. Her son was one of her first clients. "He is happy and proud to say his mom is a paragliding pilot," says Bogati.

Bharat Timilsina, the owner of FlyNepal Paragliding Company, is proud to have Bogati among his crew and says she is one of his most popular pilots. "There are many customers who ask

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Star Wars: The Force Awakens

How do you reboot what is arguably the most beloved cinematic franchise in the world? These days it seems all you have to do is call in J.J. Abrams, the man responsible for the excellent *Star Trek* (2009) origins film, its sequel *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013), and before that a number of smash TV hits such as *Fringe*, *Lost*, and *Alias*, some of the most talked about, wildly inventive sci-fi shows in the past 15 years.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

Abrams helms this seventh installment (the plan is to make another trilogy) of the Star Wars films with great skill, co-writing and directing with an ease and confidence that stems from being a lifelong fan of the original core material. The 49-year-old film savant (he writes, composes musical scores for his material, and produces) is adept at sifting through and separating the key ingredients of old favourites,



adapting the best elements into tight, action packed, humour filled scripts that are tailored as homages to the films that inspired him through his childhood.

This is a very good thing for all of us who grew up loving the original Star Wars films, because while there's plenty for the Millennial generation in terms of cool spaceships (there is another Death Star), and operatic intergalactic warfare, there is also more than enough for those who have an incurable nostalgia for light sabers, cute beeping robots, exaggerated, intricate hairdos, black masked villains with altered voices, and, of course, some very furry aliens that communicate largely by wailing and roaring.

That is probably the most I can say without entering into the now dangerous territory known as "spoiling" - but I cannot really

leave you with just a paean to Abrams. *The Force Awakens* has taken its life from the imagination of the gifted writer/director, but it also boasts a number of new talents that spin it out of the realm of being just a continuation of the Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, and Han Solo's stories (all these roles are reprised by the

original cast that really need not be named individually) bringing in new, fascinating character arcs that introduce a fresh line of Jedis, some of whom have already gone over to the dark side.

Much has already been made of the new ensemble cast members, hyperbolising their potential to become the new stars of their generation. While time will indeed tell, after all Carrie Fisher and Mark Hamill are immortalised by the original Star Wars films but never achieved much subsequently, the fresh faces, in particular that of Daisy Ridley who plays the gamine, naturally gifted pilot Rey (there's a hint for you right there), leaves you at the end of a breath-taking film really wanting more. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



RSS

CALL OF DUTY: Prime Minister KP Oli launches the East-West Highway cleanup campaign on Thursday at Damak in Jhapa.



BEYOND THE BLOCKADE: (left to right) FNCCI Vice President Shekhar Golchha, former secretary of Ministry of Commerce and Supplies, Purushottam Ojha, Jay Nishant, Officiating President of NICCI, Shashi Kant Agrawal, Indian ambassador Ranjit Rae, former finance minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari, and vice president of CNI, Anuj Agarwal at a program on bilateral trade on Tuesday.



GOPEN RAI

LET'S PRAY: President Bidya Bhandari with Home Minister Shakti Basnet and other guests at Pasupatinath after offering special prayers for the country's welfare on Tuesday.



NEPALARMY DPR

WELL DONE: Chief of Army Staff Rajendra Chhetri hands over the best player award to Anjali Waiba of Nepal Army at the third COAS International Women's Football Tournament held at Bhadrakali on Sunday.



GOPEN RAI

LET'S DANCE: Kirati women celebrate the Sakela Ubhau festival with a traditional dance at Tundikhel on Saturday.

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BHANU BHATTARAI

Pay per patient

Pramod Acharya/ Centre for Investigative Journalism in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 27 December-2 January

हिमाल खबरपत्रिका

A year ago the Center for Investigative Journalism had carried out an investigation which exposed the trend of ambulance drivers being paid commission to bring patients to Kathmandu hospitals. New investigations reveal the malpractice is still rampant in the city, with most big name hospitals involved.

Ambulance drivers bringing patients to Kathmandu first phone hospital officials, and negotiate a price. If the patient is suffering from a critical ailment, and is likely to be admitted for a longer time, drivers receive higher commission.

Posing as an ambulance driver, this reporter spoke to officials of 10 different hospitals over phone to make a similar deal. “Of course, we will pay you. That’s just how the times are,” said Sandip, an official at Blue Cross Hospital.

Shankar Lama of Kalanki-based City Center Hospital agreed to pay Rs 15,000 while Basanta Khadka of Vayodha Hospital

promised a cut from the patient’s final bill. Another well-reputed hospital, Norvic, was also found to be involved in this malpractice. The hospital’s deputy general manager Hanuman Golchha said he’d pay upto Rs 6,000 per patient (*see conversation below*).

Most negotiations, an ambulance driver informed, are done over the phone. Some wary officials, however, ask to meet in person.

Doctors were also found to have provided confidential information of patients to hospital officials before their negotiation with ambulance drivers.

Other hospitals that are guilty of this practice include International Friendship Children’s Hospital, Shivajyoti Hospital, Alka Hospital, Ganeshman Singh Hospital, Janamaitri Hospital and Hams Hospital.

In the past, some hospitals were known to present motorcycles as ‘bumper gifts’ to ambulance drivers who brought them many patients.

Meanwhile the Ministry of Health, Nepal Medical Council and the local administration continue to turn a blind eye to this misconduct in the medical sector.



A recorded phone conversation between the reporter and Hanuman Golchha, deputy general manager at Norvic Hospital.

Reporter: Hello
Hanuman Golchha: Hello
Reporter: Is this Hanuman sir?
Golchha: Yes, speaking.
Reporter: Sir, it’s me. I had earlier called at the reception.
Golchha: Who is calling?
Reporter: I had called to say I am bringing a patient from Chitwan.
Golchha: Oh, okay.
Reporter: When I told the person I am bringing the patient to Norvic, and if there’s anything I can get in return, the person asked me to talk to you.
Golcha: So tell me what you want.
Reporter: Please arrange the expense for me.
Golchha: How much do you need, I’ll let others know.
Reporter: Hmm, the patient will most likely be put in ICU and be admitted for long.
Golchha: Okay, come here and we can discuss.
Reporter: How much will you give, sir?
Golchha: First come.
Reporter: Previously too I was promised something else and given another.
Golchha: I have never paid anyone till today.
Reporter: It was Ankit sir who paid me last time.
Golchha: How much did he promise, and how much did u get?
Reporter: I was paid only Rs 4,000.
Golchha: So how much do you want?
Reporter: I had earlier also asked for Rs 8,000.
Golchha: No, 8,000 is not possible. I can give you upto Rs 6,000.
Reporter: Can you please increase a little?
Golchha: You keep bringing and we can continue negotiating.
Reporter: Is it okay to meet you when I get there?
Golchha: Once the patient is admitted I will be immediately notified, and then I’ll inform the counter to pay you.
Reporter: Okay, then.

POLITICS OF LIES

Birendra KM in www.ratopati.com

रातोपाटी

Four months after the Madhesi people began protests against Nepal’s new constitution, the unrest continues with no end in sight. Among the factors that have prolonged the government-Madhesi Front face-off are the lies spread by both sides. They fuel hatred against each other and deepen the polarisation. While the agitating parties are spreading lies to provoke Madhesi people, the ruling parties are doing the same to belittle the Front and weaken the Madhes movement.

The biggest lie spread by the Front is that the new constitution has stripped Madhesi people of all their rights. Pinki Paswan, a post-graduate student in Dhanusha district, says: “The constitution has given no rights to us.” She cannot point out exactly which rights the Madhesi people have not got in the constitution.



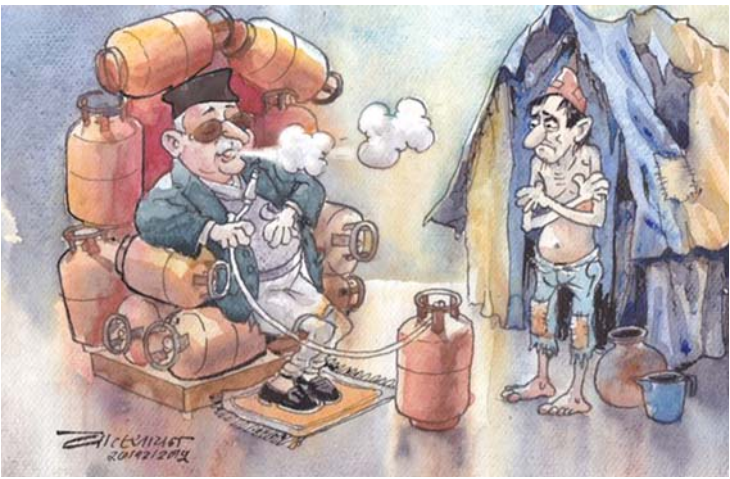
The ruling parties say the Madhes agitation is just a struggle of political survival of some discredited Madhesi leaders, and India is using it as a proxy war to bring the Nepal state to its knees. Anju Silwal, a student in Kathmandu, says: “India is using Madhesi protesters to swallow our southern plains and then the whole country.”

Paswan and Silwal are representative voices of two different communities, and their understanding of the Madhes movement has been shaped by the propaganda of both sides.

To say that the new constitution has given no rights to Madhesi people is to mislead them. The new constitution is regressive on some issues, but this is not reason enough to dismiss the product of years of political struggle and negotiations. And it is equally misleading to say that the Tarai unrest is not an outburst of Madhesi anger.

It is true that Madhesi protesters have resorted to senseless violence in some places. But if peaceful protests are ignored, they are bound to turn violent. Nepal has witnessed several political movements in its recent history, and stone-throwing was always considered ‘peaceful’. Police used limited force to quell protests in the past. But this time in the Tarai police have been treating Madhesi protesters with excess brutality. The longer the unrest continues, the more violent will be the protests. The state is reluctant about readjusting future federal boundaries, fearing that tinkering with the proposed states will lead to violence elsewhere. The Front, for its part, needs to justify the deaths of so many Madhesi people by getting the government to agree on revising state boundaries.

The only way out of this crisis is for both sides to compromise, and that can happen only through negotiations.



कान्तिपुर

Batsayan in *Kantipur*, 27 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“What is the use of a gun given to police if they cannot use it to save public property?”

Home Minister Shakti Basnet in www.onlinekhabar.com on 31 December, responding to an allegation that police used ‘excessive force’ to quell Madhesi protests.

Indian patients suffer

Deepak Gyawali in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 20-26 December

हिमाल खबरपत्रिका

Every year thousands of Indians from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh visit the Shree Rana Ambika Eye Hospital in Bhairahawa for eye surgery. The hospital known for its low cost and high quality of service in ophthalmological care treats close to 15,000 Indian patients each year.

That number is however down by half post the blockade with many patients choosing to postpone their surgery dates due

to difficulties faced in crossing the border.

According to hospital manager Amod Kumar Singh, the number of Indian patients visiting the hospital has gone down by 60 per cent.

Fifty-year-old Karan Yadav who came from Uttar Pradesh says many of his neighbours are afraid to come to Nepal. “They say there is turmoil and it will be very difficult for us to get here,” he said.

The hospital treats over 194,000 patients each year, out of 33,000 surgeries performed in a year, 15,000 are on Indian nationals.



SETOPATI

Why is Mahato in ICU?

www.setopati.com, 30 December

सेतोपाटी

Madhesi leader Rajendra Mahato was injured in a clash as he tried to block the Nepal-India border check-point in Biratnagar on Saturday. He then walked to the Indian side, but was taken back to Golden Hospital in Biratnagar by an ambulance. He sustained a minor injury to his head, and doctors wanted to discharge him after bandaging his wound.

However, Mahato asked doctors to conduct a CT Scan and photos of him doing the tests spread on social networking sites, prompting Madhesi protesters to vandalise and torch public property in Janakpur.

Mahato insisted on being admitted into the ICU, and when doctors prepared to shift him to the observation ward he demanded a discharge paper and went to BP Koirala Institute of Health Science (BPKIHS), Dharan where he got himself admitted into intensive care. Orthopedic specialist Yagya Raj Kharel, one of the three doctors involved in Mahato’s treatment at the BPKIHS, said: “His minor wounds have already healed.”

After a few days in the ICU, Mahato has now been shifted to the general ward. The BPKIHS’s press officer Sujendra Tamang said: “He is all right, there is nothing to worry about.”

However, Mahato’s Sadbhavana Party is still claiming that he is in a critical condition and is undergoing treatment in the ICU. The party even performed prayers in Rajbiraj for Mahato’s speedy recovery.

Authority to reconstruct

The Reconstruction Authority finally has a chief, but now there is no money for helicopters

OM ASTHA RAI

Eight months after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake devastated central Nepal and six months after donors pledged \$4.1 billion to support reconstruction, a cabinet meeting last week finally appointed the CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority.

He is Sushil Gyewali, a civil engineer with a degree in urban planning and was heading the Town Development Fund, and he is a man in a hurry.

“My first priority will be to reassure families that help is coming, and to take up winterization of shelters on a war-footing,” Gyewali told *Nepali Times* on Tuesday.

The Authority has its task cut out: it needs to catch up with lost time and ensure effective disbursement of reconstruction grants and credit subsidies through local communities to ensure accountability.

Gyewali will work with three committees for consultation, policy formulation and monitoring implementation. He says the authority will emphasise job creation and skills building during reconstruction, and to extend this by example to other parts of the country not affected by the quake.



He says he will move simultaneously on four fronts: urban renewal and heritage restoration, rural housing and community services, rebuilding schools and health posts, and rehabilitating livelihoods.

Gyewali’s appointment came as a surprise because he was not a frontrunner for this coveted post and the appointment had been delayed by rivalry between the UML and the NC. Known as the urban planner who improved Butwal, his appointment is said to have been personally pushed by Prime Minister KP Oli.

Govinda Raj Pokharel, former head of the National Planning Commission and appointed CEO earlier, was actually Gyewali’s teacher at Pulchok Engineering Campus. He remembers Gyewali as a bright student and adds: “The new CEO understands our political culture well, and he has hands-on knowledge about working closely with local government bodies.”

Another huge advantage for Gyewali is that the government has already managed enough money to kick-start reconstruction work on the ground – something Pokharel couldn’t do because he was CEO of an Authority that had ceased to exist.

The government has earmarked Rs 91 billion for reconstruction in this year’s budget, and some donors like China, Germany, the World Bank and the ADB have already signed separate agreements of their pledged money with the Ministry of Finance.

“We now have more than enough money to begin reconstruction,” says Baikuntha Aryal, Chief of the Budget and Program Division at the MoF. “We are ready to disburse money as and when the Authority requires it.”

Donors who had pledged money for Nepal’s reconstruction at a Kathmandu conference in June 2015 are now racing to sign agreements with the MoF. “We are grateful that the reconstruction authority now has its CEO,” said Kenichi Yokoyama, the Country Director of the Nepal Resident Mission of the Asian



Development Bank (ADB). “We have already lost several months, and we need to work faster and harder to make up for it.”

However, the road ahead is not smooth. If the past is any guide, Gyewali will face formidable political interference. Pokharel was the NC candidate for the post and lost his job because Oli did not support him. Pokharel has another word of warning for Gyewali: “The \$4.1

billion will not be enough, and it will be a huge challenge to meet the cost of reconstruction.”

The donor pledge is also conditional on the money being spent efficiently and without leakage. Yokoyama

of the ADB warns: “It will be difficult for us to provide the remaining 50 -70 per cent if the reconstruction project funded by us is not completed by 2017. Implementation is therefore critical.”

But even before that, Gyewali’s priority is to save earthquake survivors from dying of hypothermia and infections during this unusually bitter winter. However, just when

delivering earthquake relief to remote villages is needed more than ever, the World Food Programme (WFP) has run out of money for its helicopter flights.

The UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) coordinated by the WFP carried out 4,784 sorties in the last eight months, transporting 876 tons of food and 1,763 tons of supplies to remote mountain villages. But the UNHAS terminated its service on 31 December meaning that the lifeline for most earthquake shelters in remote areas will be cut.

This week the European Union announced Rs 340 million for the WFP to deliver shelter and emergency reliefs to mountain communities, but this money is not for helicopter charters.

If the delivery of winter supplies to the two million people in temporary shelters is Gyewali’s first priority, then his first big huddle will be transportation. 🇳🇵

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Few here remember a winter as difficult as this one

SEULKI LEE
IN GORKHA

Life has always been hard in villages among the narrow valleys and towering, jagged snow peaks of northern Gorkha, but few here can remember a winter as difficult as this.

First it was the earthquake on 25 April, then there was the problem of transportation caused by the Indian blockade and the fuel crisis.

With its epicentre just 20km northwest of the district capital, northern Gorkha bore the brunt of the earthquake as the mountains were torn apart. Huge landslides wiped trails off the map. The gashes are still visible on the steep slopes above the Budi Gandaki gorge.

Not a single house was left standing on the ridge-top settlement of Sipchet here in the Tsum Valley, a finger of Nepal that juts out into the Tibetan plateau behind Ganesh Himal. With the trails cut, survivors among the 37 families were left to fend for themselves with only occasional helicopter flights — the only contact with the outside world.

“Everyone here has been sleeping in tents for last eight months,” says Gopal Lama, 49. “There are no toilets, no drinking water.”

After a while, even the helicopter flights became less frequent as operators ran out of aviation fuel due to the Indian blockade. Winter clothes and supplies did not arrive on time, and villagers in Tsum and the neighbouring Nubri Valley were left to fend for themselves.

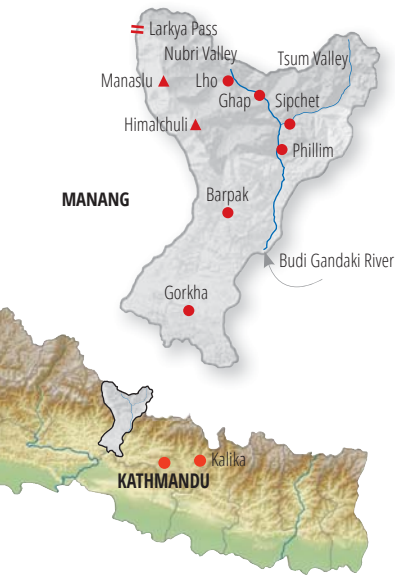
From Thursday, the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) which had handled helicopter charters, stopped emergency flights because it ran out of money (*see page 13*). Relief agencies that were coordinating assistance for health and education clusters have also stopped work as of 31 December.

Much of the emergency supply for winter like sleeping bags, smokeless cooking stoves and tarps which were to have been distributed by now, have been stuck at the Indian border for months. The backlog will be even more difficult and expensive to deliver to Upper Gorkha. A MI-17 helicopter of WFP could carry up to four tons of cargo at a time, but the smaller Écureuil AS350 will take four days to transport the same payload even with an external sling.

“We have delivered only half the winterisation packages in Gorkha, the other half is proving to be a challenge,” says Sudip Joshi of People in Need, a Czech charity.

The Oli government announced it was distributing Rs 10,000 per family to buy winter clothes. Relief workers see this as a publicity stunt, since most people in remote areas have to walk several days to Soti Khola and catch a bus to Gorkha to buy a jacket.

In Gorkha, there are more than 2,000 households in camps living inside huts made of corrugated sheets. Without insulation it is now bitterly cold and condensation falling from under



the roof is becoming a problem. Even when they are available, the price of essentials have shot up, and income from trekking was reduced to a trickle as tourism collapsed. Schools are now closed for the winter, and the few health posts in the region don’t have staff or sufficient medicines. Helicopters ferrying in supplies used to take sick patients to hospitals in Gorkha, but now even the flights are uncertain.

PICKING UP THE PIECES (clockwise from above): A family at Lho Monastery, which was damaged in the earthquake, waits for a helicopter to be evacuated to Kathmandu on Sunday.

An Écureuil helicopter carries a load of blankets in a sling payload from Gorkha to Ujiya.

A helicopter lands in Lho to take women and children down from the cold to warmer Gorkha.

A model seismic-resistant house under construction in Ghap.

Sipchet village in Tsum Valley was completely destroyed in the earthquake, and most of its 37 families have been living in temporary shelters.



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

Sick

Families who survived the earthquake are now fighting the winter chill

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
IN SINDHUPALCHOK

On a freezing morning last week, 65-year-old Sanman Majhi woke up before dawn and left his tin hut to collect firewood. His tattered clothes did not protect him from the biting cold, he was found lying unconscious on a frost-covered field nearby.

Majhi’s oldest son, Purna, was woken up and rushed to the spot to find some villagers trying unsuccessfully to revive his



ALL PICS: SEULKI LEE

of the cold



father.

"He was not dead, and we rushed him to Dhulikhel Hospital but he died on the way," Purna recalls.

While Purna is mourning his father's death, his ailing mother, 55-year-old Sani Majhi, (*pic, left with the citizenship card of her husband*) is suffering from cough and a chest infection. "It's so cold here, and it is cold inside the shelter even with a fire, my


mother is sick but I cannot help her," Purna says.

After their house was destroyed by the earthquake eight months ago, the Majhi family has been living inside a temporary shelter built from wooden poles, planks and tin sheets that they salvaged from the rubble. "Life was hard in the shelter," he says. "The cold has made it much harder."

Rewati Thapa (*pic, above*), a

midwife at the Thokarpa Health Post says two newborns have died here this month probably due to cold. She says: "After winter set in, the inflow of patients has gone up and we don't have enough medicines."

In Kalika village of Sindhupalchok, where the earthquake killed more people and destroyed more houses than anywhere else, nearly 700 families have been living in shelters for eight months. When they wake up, their mattresses and clothes are soaked with condensation from the corrugated roof.

With the National Reconstruction Authority delayed, the government promised Rs 10,000 for each homeless family to buy warm clothes. But this grant has not been distributed in Kalika. 



Looking forward to spring

The Manaslu Trail was becoming a popular alternative to the Annapurna Circuit and the Everest Base Camp trek. But after the earthquake destroyed the trails, the flow of trekkers is down to a trickle. Only the brave and really adventurous have been coming through.

It has been difficult even for villagers, who have to walk down the valley to buy essential supplies. "We had to crawl up and down the slopes like four-footed animals," says 50-year-old Dawa Dorje from Namrung, "it was very difficult for us, especially the elders."

The villages Lho, Namrung and Ghap which were on the trekking route to Larkya Pass have hardly seen any trekkers since April. Trails in the Nubri and Tsum Valleys are also badly damaged. One trekker who went through in October left the following warning in a lodge guestbook: 'Some trekkers lost their way because of the landslides and dangerous trails.'

Fortunately, some of the damaged trails are being repaired under a 'Food for Work' program supported by WFP both for relief distribution and to revive trekking like the trail from Ghap to Namrung (*above*). The Manaslu Conservation Area Project says most of the Manaslu Trail is now fine, except below Philim. And if that is repaired over the next few months, the Larkya Traverse will be open in the spring season.



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Happy New Yearful

Strange things start happening to a nation when a largish southward neighbour insists on squeezing its nuts, and won't let go. Survival instincts take over and the squeeze comes up with ingenious ways to get back at the squeezer in order to survive. We gird up our loins with renewed vigour to safeguard our national manhood. And in the absence of LPG cylinders, diesel and electricity, we set fire to the rafters to heat our homes.

It's that time of the year again when each of us individually (and in semi-underground criminal gangs engaged in keeping this nation afloat by

smuggling fuel across the border) have a choice: is it really such a good idea to embark on a new year at this point in time? I mean, do we actually want to go through another 365 days of this? If your answer is in the affirmative, and you have made up your mind to plunge headfirst into 2016 then go ahead, take the bull by the horns of its dilemma in a china shop, and let me compliment you on your courage, give your gonads a fond squeeze, and wish you godspeed.

May your remaining days in 2016 be filled with joy, prosperity, happiness, and a full cylinder of liquid petroleum at not less than 32 psi. May you have to wait less than 48 hours for 5 litres of petrol. May load shedding in your neighbourhood follow the schedule and, if it does, not exceed 12 hours a day. May your flush tank always be half-full of water, and not half-empty. May there be oxygen in the Intensive Care Unit when they wheel you in. May your transformer not explode when they switch on the electric crematorium.

On a more cheerful note, let me say that I know from past experience that new year resolutions, once made, are difficult to keep. However hard we try, by January the fifth, we are back to being grumpy couch potatoes with a poor sense of personal hygiene, and harbouring an unexplicable urge to keep warm by committing arson on the effigy of KPOji and NaMoji.

We need new year resolutions that are realistic, can stand up to peer review, and which we can actually take to the implementation phase. In view of the above, therefore, I have drawn up my personal list of new year resolutions which are not copyright and may be reproduced, stored in, introduced into a retrieval system, plagiarised, and transmitted in any form (digital, analog, Bluetooth or as an interstellar radio message from the Arecibo Observatory aimed in the general direction of the globular star cluster M13) provided these suggestions are not attributed to the author or publisher in a court of law:

1. I will try my best to be grouchy and cantankerous throughout the coming year. After all, what is there to be cheerful about?

2. I will take up smoking as a hobby in the new year as part of a personal effort to draw my life to a premature end.
3. Since it causes ulcer, I will stop drinking tea. And take up Jack Daniels instead.
4. I will try to read a book in 2016.
5. Cross my heart, I'll desist from making utterances that may be construed to be anti-Indian within earshot of the CIAA. I will only utter them after debugging my apartment.
6. I will spend less time aimlessly stalking random people on Facebook this year, and spend more quality time excavating lint from my belly button.
7. I will not work harder than I have to, I will not do today what I can do tomorrow.
8. We will hold our head high in the international community and tell a certain imaginary country to the South whose capital is made up of two words that begin with 'N' and 'D' that they needn't bother officially lifting the unofficial blockade because we're all raking it in.
9. In the new year we shall refrain from our national pastime of picking our noses in public, and if perchance, our fingers involuntarily start exploring hitherto uncharted sections of our nasal orifice we shall wash our hands with soap. (Only soap, since water is going to be even more scarce this year.)
10. I will try to convince the Oli Gobarment to allow me to be an adviser to the newly-formed Ministry of Livestock in the spirit of inclusion, since donkeys are under-represented in a Cabinet dominated by Brahmin bulls. And as long as I am at it, I will also lobby to bifurcate the Ministry of Agriculture further into the Ministry of Horticulture, Ministry of Aquaculture, the Ministry of Monoculture and Ministry of Counterculture.
11. I will endeavour to make a complete Ass of myself every week throughout 2016.



The Ass

Cheers to 366 days in 2016

Probably the happiest leap year !





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