

NEPALI Times

#794

5 - 11 February 2016

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GOPEN RAI

BRAIN GAIN

While studying business in the US, 29-year-old Suraj Shrestha (above) came across a campaign by TOMS shoes. The for-profit company based in California donates a pair of shoes for a child in need for every pair it sells. The idea struck a chord with Shrestha, and he put a plan in motion to replicate the business model upon his return to Nepal.

"Most of the projects in Nepal are donor-focused. Once the funding stops, the projects stop as well," says Shrestha adding, "The for-profit model ensures sustainability."

Started in July 2014, Shrestha's eye-wear company Anthropose works with the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology to provide pro-

bono cataract operations for every few pairs of sunglasses it sells.

Shrestha's endeavour, however, hasn't come without hitches. Anthropose's first free procedure event was supposed to be held in January 2015, but was delayed due to political instability. The event was then scheduled for May, but the earthquake struck in April. And when it was finally held in October 2015, only 62 out of the 150 people identified as needing assistance received free operation; the rest couldn't make it to the campsite due to the fuel crisis.

Despite the hardships due to the political environment and the hurdles associated with running a business here,

Shrestha remains positive. "I always believe that there are ways to work around any problems," he says. "You can't shy away from starting something saying the market in Nepal is small. In today's age when everything is so interconnected you don't have to direct your focus in Nepal alone. If we didn't have opportunities in Nepal, how come we have a billionaire here?"

Shrestha is among a growing number of Nepalis who are returning to Nepal to start businesses. These young social entrepreneurs are bucking the trend and giving back to Nepal what society gave to them.

Sahina Shrestha



PANDA

Kalu and Kali were found abandoned in a Rolpa forest, and nurtured by the Budamagar family. They are now resettled at the Kathmandu zoo.

PAGE 6

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SUBHAS RAI

20 WASTED YEARS

Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

This week marks 20 years since the start of the Maoist conflict, and in a few months it will be 10 years after it ended.

It was Baburam Bhattarai of the Samyukta Jana Morcha, the electoral avatar of the underground Maoists, who on 4 February 1996 presented the government of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba with a list of 40 demands that he wanted fulfilled in two weeks ... or else.

Deuba did not pay much attention, as he was unduly distracted with infighting within his Nepali Congress party and an impending visit to New Delhi. Bhattarai never intended to wait two weeks anyway, and launched simultaneous attacks on police stations across the country on the night of 13 February 1996. A day before Valentine's Day, the Maoists went on the warpath.

The attack on the Holeri police station was led by Barsha Man Pun (currently secretary of the UCPNM and former finance minister) and Nanda Kishor Pun (now Nepal's vice-president).

Bhattarai knew that many of the 40 demands were not within the Prime Minister's power to fulfill: like clipping the wings of the king and royal family, removing 'unequal' clauses in the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty, and scrapping Gurkha recruitment. And there were absurd demands that seem to have been included just so that the list would contain a total of 40: banning 'lurid'

Bollywood movies, and 'ending cultural pollution' of the nation. So, Deuba took off for New Delhi and it was while he was still in India that he heard that the Maoists had started a war back home.

There was much -- and fervent -- hope for democracy and development after the street protests in 1990 that led King Birendra to lift the ban on political parties and the writing of a new constitution. The press was unshackled, and foreign investment flooded into the country. Local elections ensured accountable leaders, and for the first time, democracy delivered development.

Yet, democracy was slow to address entrenched social inequity, social injustice and structural discrimination. The Maoist war set out to address these problems, but as Professor Krishna Khanal tells our correspondent Om Astha Rai on page 14-15, the 40 points were just a ruse for the Maoists to get to power. And because the objective conditions for revolution were so explosive, the spark they lit in Holeri in 1996 spread like wildfire across the country. A feckless state fanned the flames with characteristic mismanagement

and apathy. When the state did act, security forces unleashed brutal crackdowns in the Maoist heartland, pushing ordinary people -- who had wanted no part in the war -- to the Maoist fold.

It was a calculated rebel strategy to target elected village and district councils. By the end of the conflict the Maoists had bombed 90 per cent of VDC buildings. More than

17,000 people died in ten years, 1,400 are still listed as 'disappeared', tens of thousands were wounded, and millions were internally displaced or became refugees in India. There were massive human rights violations by both sides. Development was pushed back by decades, infrastructure projects got further delayed, jobless youth left the country in increasing numbers to find work overseas.

The conflict and prolonged political transition delayed major hydropower and infrastructure projects, which is why we still suffer 15-hour power cuts every day. Investors fled, jobs disappeared, and nearly 18 per cent of Nepal's population, mainly young men, work abroad.

Looking back at the 40-point demand, Maoist ideologue-in-chief Baburam Bhattarai should have a tinge of regret. But he probably does not because Maoist communists are not one to say 'sorry', or admit they are ever wrong. Now, Bhattarai has erased the 'c' word from the manifesto of his non-communist New Force party. His website no longer has pictures of himself as a young revolutionary. He has photoshopped his own history.

Bhattarai's 40 points included some pretty outlandish demands, but you couldn't argue about many other socially progressive ones like a minimum wage for workers, free health and education, an effective disaster relief mechanism, protection of domestic industry, and job creation through infrastructure development.

One of the 40 Maoist demands from 1996 was the 'elimination of corruption'. Laudable, but lamentably laughable today given the level of graft we witnessed during the two Maoist governments since 2008. Today, the Maoist party has fragmented into five pieces and is a shadow of its former self. A loony fringe led by Netra Bikram Chand hasn't learnt its lesson and is still talking about a 'protracted war'.

Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

THIS WEEK



SURESH BIDARI (5,556 PEOPLE REACHED)

Most reached on Facebook

Stop and Go
Five cargo trucks entered Nepal through Birganj-Raxaul border on Friday for the first time in four months since the Indian blockade started in late September.

Most shared on Facebook

Last but not least by Jan Meijer Hansen
(27 shares)

Most popular on Twitter

Losing Paradise by Kunda Dixit
(30 retweets, 15 favourites)

Most visited online page

Walking the holy river by Lucia De Vries (810 views)

Most commented

Border Control (5 comments)

BORDER CONTROL

I wonder whether these politicians even know what the people actually want ('Border control', Editorial, #793). Do they even bother to visit their constituencies once the election is over? Why make the people suffer?

Kumar

■ How can you call this an Indian blockade when it is the opportunist Madhesi leaders who are not allowing vehicles to cross over into Nepal?

Nitin

■ The blockade is partially enforced by Tarai protesting groups and remaining work is being done by India, by intercepting trade on the other side. No group can hold a 1000km long border without any help.

Aham Brahma

■ The main reason why there is little support for the Madhes movement is because it is led by a group of men who have been rejected by their own people. There is no leader in the Madhesi Front today that is able to command genuine respect and loyalty from the Madhesi people. That's the reason they keep visiting New Delhi and neighbouring Indian states for

support as they aren't getting any back at home.

Shyam

UNSAFE WORKPLACES

The economy would be even less viable without remittances but in the long run this is no way to achieve sustainable development ('Unsafe workplaces', Om Astha Rai, #793).

Pigreen

■ When has the Nepali government ever been pro-active? All our leaders know to do is wait for a situation to get worse and then react only after mounting public pressure.

Sunita L

■ The government should seriously work towards creating jobs at home to retain young men and women from venturing overseas where they are prone to exploitation and unsafe conditions. Remittance alone will not sustain the nation forever.

Pabitra

WALKING THE HOLY RIVER
It is high time people realise that cleaning up of Bagmati will require more serious

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

efforts than just fishing out plastics and other waste every weekend ('Walking the holy river', Lucia De Vries, #793). If you really want the river to remain clean, stop throwing your waste there.

Kumar

■ They are building sewage canals leading to the river without treatment, and expect the river to be clean?

Namah

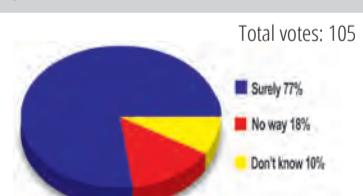
■ Wow, can't believe people still consider this river sacred. It's a holy mess.

Concerned Nepali



nepalitimes.com
Weekly Internet Poll #794

Q. Should India lift the blockade now?



Total votes: 105

■ Surely 77%

■ No way 18%

■ Don't know 10%

Weekly Internet Poll #795

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you support the Madhesi Front?

LAND FOR PEACE

Gains of Nepal's land rights movement has come not from bloodshed and war, but from a non-violent social movement.

In the larger scheme of things, the petty games that politicians play to keep themselves relevant should not matter much. They have done it year after year, decade after decade — it's the same plot and even the characters are the same.

An impoverished, disaster-prone country should have more things to worry about: climate change, the exodus of the young and able, or a moribund economy. But Nepalis are doomed to be



THIS IS IT

Rubeena Mahato

consumed by politics of the worst kind. The collective energy of this nation is spent on who gets to preside over the government and how to unseat the incumbent that is only weeks into its tenure. Everything, including suffering of earthquake survivors due to government apathy and incompetence, is secondary.

If it wasn't for the enormous potential that this country possesses, it would have been difficult not to be enveloped by cynicism and crippling despair. For 20 years a grassroots, non-violent social movement has been slowly sweeping across the country organising the poorest and the most marginalised to live a life of freedom and dignity. It has 100,000 members who are landless, land-poor, former Haliyas, Kamaiyas, Kamlaris and Dalits and they have been spearheading a struggle for land and agrarian rights in Nepal.

The National Land Rights Forum (NLRF) has obtained land titles for more than 39,000 landless and tenant farmers, and has played a pivotal role in the introduction of the Joint Land



CSRC

Ownership Policy, helping to establish equal ownership of land for women. It was a result of a long struggle that culminated in an eight-day sit-in by a thousand landless women in Khula Manch.

The advocacy of this group along with other Dalit organisations was instrumental in ensuring inclusion of the provision that guarantees land to landless Dalits in the new constitution. Several progressive land provisions in the constitution, including a stop to forceful evictions, stem directly from the work done by this movement. The Dalit chairperson of NLRF, Lyam Bahadur Darjee, told me recently: "The new constitution uses the exact words we proposed on ending dual land ownership."

In a society where power has traditionally been exercised through control over land, those without land ownership lie at the bottom of social and economic hierarchy. The poorest in Nepal are those who do not own the land they till. Excluding the landless has been one of the ways to maintain Nepal's unequal power relations. It is no surprise that Dalits both in the hills and plains are predominantly landless.

To see a campaign led by some of the most deprived and marginalised communities in Nepal effect policy level changes amidst uncooperative and at times hostile state institutions, proves how powerful and transformative social movements can be. More than anything else, for me, it was also an affirmation of the power of non-violent action and activism. Full disclosure: I work in an organisation that collaborates with the NLRF, but I witnessed the power of community empowerment with my own eyes.

OPINION 3

At times it is difficult to run campaigns because most activists are poor and have to work to earn daily wages. Despite this, there is real drive and motivation among members and a belief in their collective strength to influence change.

Talking to them, I couldn't help but think of political parties who have exploited the agenda of land reform to gain popular support. Land Reform was in fact one of the main demands of the Maoists when they launched their armed struggle exactly 20 years ago this week. They conveniently abandoned it once in power.

These hard won reforms in land governance have come not from bloodshed and war, but from committed advocacy by a non-violent social movement.

Political violence and blackmail have become accepted routes to power in Nepal, but it is only through peaceful struggle and participation in democratic processes that any real social or political change can be achieved. Changes sought by violent means are short-lived and cause more damage than the good they were supposed to deliver. However, social movements led by the land-poor are well and alive in Nepal, as they are willing to take the long but rewarding road to freedom. ☺

families send children to school. Led by women, Dalits and other ostracised groups, the movement has also helped challenge norms of gender and caste. Recently, NLRF contributed inputs for the sixth amendment to the Land Act and is now working to provide feedback for Land Use Policy so that the policy protects the interests of the land-poor.

To be sure, there are challenges

ahead. Thousands of landless families live in abject poverty, and policy reforms are difficult to implement when many in state institutions and bureaucracy come from landholding families whose interests clash with the landless. Land rights activists are routinely harassed, arrested and have their settlements burnt down. Peaceful demonstrations and rallies are disrupted as the campaign is often perceived to be anti-government.

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The Stifling Burden of Hierarchy

Instead of having one king, Nepal is now burdened with a dozen petty rajas each jealously guarding their party throne.

Seasons change, times change, fashions change and even our national crises change, from constitutional to natural disaster to economic blockade all in a row, yet somehow Nepal's political leadership stays forever the same. The very system of governance has morphed from absolute monarchy to multi-party

leaders to look busy while still enjoying the snacks and perks of office. But the question remains: why aren't these discredited individuals ever thrown out?

A closer look has your scribe suspecting the noble concept of parliamentary democracy was no match for the hierarchical system so deeply ingrained in Nepali society. Through selective adoption of democratic principles our leaders have created a sham Potemkin democracy, while maintaining the rigid party hierarchy that suits their purpose. External criteria such as elections and party conventions are fulfilled to keep the donors happy but the inner workings of each party are hollowed out, tightly controlled by senior leaders who stifle any attempt at internal democracy.

In most countries, parties strive to select the most qualified leader with the best chance of winning an election. Here,



BIKRAM RAI

the most senior stalwart gets his turn and hangs on forever, spending more time returning favours than actually governing. Whether that person is the best choice for the party and country is irrelevant, demonstrating the historic transition from age-old monarchy to modern democracy is superficial at best. Within each party's chain of command the static mindset of royal privilege remains unchanged and firmly intact. Instead of having one king, Nepal is now burdened with a

dozen petty rajas each jealously guarding their party throne.

Time honoured though it may be, the custom of constantly deferring to one's elders is largely responsible for the country's current mess. This mindless deference, and lack of critical thinking it engenders, originates in the traditional family structure and passes seamlessly into the realm of democratic politics, despite being deeply anti-democratic by nature.

It's probably no coincidence

the country's oldest party has the country's oldest leaders. Congress was the personal fiefdom of Girija Prasad Koirala until he breathed his last, passing on the mantle to Sushil, his loyal yet ancient nephew. The times cried out for dynamic leadership, with Nepal teetering on the edge of chaos as Sushil teetered on the edge of the podium mumbling incoherently, but nothing could stop the imperative of hierarchy. Party and country be damned, which they were, but at least Sushil got his turn, which was the whole point.

The Congress leadership convention presently underway is verging on theatre of the absurd, as Sushil runs (limps?) yet again for the top spot. Adding insult to injury, there's another washed-up Koirala in the race. As Girija's daughter, Sujata claims the party as her own, despite her embarrassing record as an incompetent and deeply corrupt Foreign Minister.

Whatever happened to retiring gracefully and allowing someone younger to come up through the ranks? Answer: Hierarchy.

The Maoists, for their part, never even pretended to take democracy seriously, nationally or internally, and Prachanda's despotic role as party-boss is based on Stalinist permanence. Despite their devastating defeat in the last election and frequent splintering into rival factions, El Supremo is not about to forfeit his hard won seat at the national feeding trough, a position he fought a bloody war to achieve.

Most of the Madhesi 'leaders' now raising hell in the Tarai lost both their seats and credibility in the last election, so represent nobody but themselves. Yet the chaos of the crises and their loud-mouthed opportunism has reinvigorated their careers as self appointed representatives of the people who rejected them.

That leaves the UML and KP Oli, whose dogged years as factional leader finally paid off in getting his name on the PM roll. The fact he's completely unqualified is confirmed by his inability to solve any of the country's pressing problems, as the earthquake victims still wait for help, the blockade continues, and the biggest black market scam in Nepal's history flourishes openly.

The elite's half hearted attempt to graft modern democratic principles onto the old hierarchical system, while maintaining their privileges, was doomed to fail. Our party bosses, much like the royal aristocracy they replaced, apparently prefer the deference and blind loyalty their position commands, as well as the impunity it grants, over any new-fangled imported concepts.

The earthquake's aftermath was further proof Nepal's only hope lies with the young, who mobilised admirably while the old leaders hid at home. With the country still held hostage to the same outdated concepts that got us in this mess, today's youth may already be old before their voice is finally heard.

MOVING TARGET
Foreign Hand

democracy to Pointless War to royal coup d'état to Feuding Democratic Republic, yet the same old tired faces attend the same old meetings as if nothing's changed at all.

Which, for them at least, it hasn't. Holding a meeting to sort out problems created in previous meetings seems to be an end in itself and the best way for our

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BIZ BRIEFS

New in town

Huawei unveiled its new smartphones, Mate 8 and GR5 in an event at Bangkok recently. The upgrade to Mate 8, Southeast Asia managing director Thomas Liu claims, is due to the popularity of Mate 7. The model stated to launch this month in Nepal targets the youths and boasts of superior processing speed and power backup. GR5, modelled for business persons, comes with a 3000 mAH battery which lasts up to 24 hours once charged, according to the company.



Winterland mania

Sipradi Trading, sole distributor of Tata passenger vehicles in Nepal, along with TATA Motors recently launched "Winter Wonder". Customers, on every purchase of Zest, Bolt and Storme, will be eligible to get a Yamaha FZ_S FI V2.0, a Samsung Note 5 and free accessories worth Rs 25000.



KTM in Ktm

Hansraj Hulaschand, sole distributor of European motorcycle manufacturer KTM, launched its exclusive outlet at Pulchok along with its second exclusive service center at



Jawalakhel recently. The showroom will offer customers a range of KTM bikes as well as KTM Power-wear merchandise.

Brand new Honda

Honda has introduced three new motorcycle models in the Nepali market: HONDA MSX125, HONDA CB500F and HONDA CRF 250M. These motorcycles are priced between Rs 599,000 to Rs 999,000.



Turkish Airlines recently partnered with Warner Bros. for the promotion of *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. From 8 February through mid March 2016 travellers can book flights to Gotham City and Metropolis to experience the home cities of the superheroes virtually.

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Home away from home

Rescued red pandas from Rolpa find a new home in Kathmandu's zoo

SONAM TASHI LAMA

Lahari Budhamagar burst into tears last week when she arrived at the Kathmandu Zoo to hand over a pair of red panda cubs that she had rescued and raised for five months in her home in Gam of remote Rolpa district. They had become like pets, and were hard to let go.

Last August, her husband, Man Bahadur, was foraging for wild mushrooms in the forest when he heard an unusual chirping sound. He found the brown and white newborns lying helpless in the undergrowth, malnourished and motherless.

Man Bahadur, 59, took the feeble creatures home thinking they were fox cubs and tried to feed them meat, but they threw up. Then he and his wife tried feeding them goat milk, which they seemed to like.

It was only after he noticed

the cubs had green scat that he realised that they were pandas, and started feeding them bamboo shoots. Red panda are not related to China's giant panda, and actually belong to the squirrel family and live in canopies of mountain forests in central and eastern Nepal.

The cubs were named Kalu and Kali. As time wore on and the baby pandas grew larger, the Budhamagars felt it was no longer prudent to keep them at home, even though they were healthy and active and their attachment to the pandas had grown strong.

Man Bahadur approached the District Forest Office at Libang, and was advised to take the pandas to the zoo in Kathmandu. Rolpa District Forest Officer Hari Narayan Mandal agreed that because the cubs were almost pets, re-assimilating them back into the wild would be difficult.

LIKE PETS: Lahari Budhamagar (*above*) with one of the red panda cubs at her home in Rolpa. The pandas were named Kalu and Kali and grew up on goat milk.

The Budhamagar couple (*above*) rescued and raised Kalu and Kali for three months before handing them over to the Central Zoo last week (*right*).

However, red panda expert Angela Glaston isn't optimistic about the pandas being able to thrive in the zoo. "I would be more inclined to leave them in the mountains and let them gradually get used to survival in the wild," she said.

Even so, Kalu and Kali seem to be doing well at the zoo and have made friends with another panda from Ramechhap, named Gauri, which was rescued in 2013.

With the increasing frequency of live trapping of wild animals like pandas, bears and leopards in Nepal, there is a mounting need for government-sponsored wildlife rehabilitation centres



that can properly relocate animals back into the wild.

A survey in 2013 in Rolpa revealed that 98 per cent of the population were unaware of the existence of the red panda and 100 percent were unfamiliar with the value of conservation efforts or legal status of the species.

Budhamagar, now an empty nester, hopes to meet politicians while in Kathmandu to tell

them about the need to have a rehabilitation centre for rescued wild animals. 

Sonar Tashi Lama is with the Red Panda Network. redpandanetwork.org

 nepalitimes.com
Watch video of cubs at home

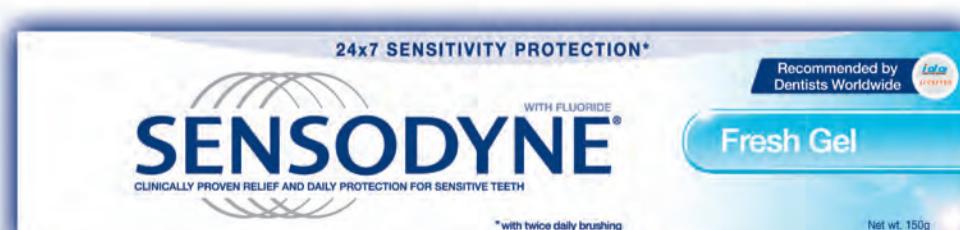


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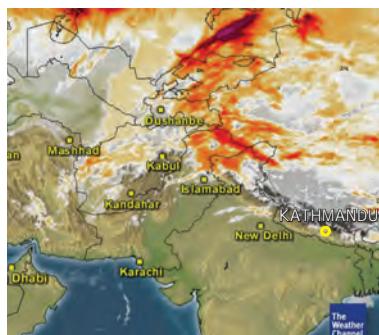
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The westerly fronts this season have been few and far between, with a severe drought now affecting a swathe of central Nepal's midhills. Looks like all the snow fell in the American eastern seaboard. This means more dust in the air right across north India, and mixed with pollution it filters the sunshine, keeping the maximum temperature low. The minimum temperature, meanwhile, is higher than normal because of the blanket effect. There is a weak low pressure system riding the jetstream which should arrive over Nepal late Sunday, with the possibility of some rain and snow early next week. But don't bet on it.

FRIDAY

20°

4°

SATURDAY

20°

6°

SUNDAY

19°

8°



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**LIVING
THE
DREAM**

Rendezvous with
Sanyukta Shrestha,
a bridal wear
designer with a
conscience

SMRITI BASNET

For London based bridal wear designer Sanyukta Shrestha (pic, right), being in fashion isn't just a nine-to-five job – it's a way of life. A typical day begins with a team meeting, followed by a string of strenuous discussions with brides-to-be to finalise the perfect size, shape and style of their wedding gowns.

Despite the constant stress of work, the 34-year-old is always in pursuit of new goals. Her unremitting dedication and elegant designs have earned her nominations for Best Bridal Designer and Best Bridal Collection for the 2016 UK Wedding Awards.

"My desire was always to bring out the inner beauty within every woman and to be able to do that on the biggest, most important day of a woman's life is truly fulfilling for me," she says.

Following the lead of her older sister's interest in literature and women's rights, Shrestha found solace in the world of

liberal arts. Most of her childhood memories, she recalls, are of listening to poetry, attending literary festivals, and frequenting book launches and charity events with her sister. "I was determined that whatever I do in my career has to be in the creative sector," she shares.

That determination led Shrestha to the Lakhota Fashion Institute in Nepal, where after graduating, she moved to the UK for postgraduate studies at the London College of Fashion. Today she runs her flagship boutique in London and her collection can be found in bridal boutiques across the UK and Ireland. Shrestha's designs are inspired from heartfelt interactions she has had with her clientele. "In my collections I capture the dreams and stories that brides have shared with me over the years," she says.

However, Shrestha's work is not only about keeping up with the latest fashion trend, but also about making a conscious effort to give back to society. "I make sure the production process of my collection is ethical and as eco-friendly as possible," she says.



Having volunteered with the Women's Rehabilitation Centre Nepal and World Wildlife Fund Nepal in her youth, she was inspired to use sustainable fabrics and source them from fair trade certified manufacturers for her designs. She uses materials like hemp, organic silk, organic cotton, bamboo, and lace.

"Sanyukta Shrestha is beauty with a conscience. That is our ethos and the main message we deliver with every gown," she says. All hand-loomed organic cotton and

bamboo fabrics come from Tulsi Mehar Mahila Ashram, and the fabric used for her hat collection is sourced from other villages in Nepal. More cutting-edge ecofibres are sourced from Italy and France.

Shrestha now plans to bring her clothing line over to Nepal. "I have great plans and I would love to expand globally. But one can't rush things; the business has to grow gradually and continuously," she said.

Even while keeping her nose to the grindstone, Shrestha is grateful for the full support of her family and makes sure to set aside ample time for them. "I love being with my little daughter Ameya and my husband. I think my family life is the perfect balance to my work life," she added.

Nonetheless for Shrestha, her work will never stop being an integral part of her life. Her determination for greatness never ceases, even in her sleep. "I am a very vivid dreamer – I find inspirations in my dreams at night."

To vote for Sanyukta:
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www.sanyuktashrestha.com
Voting closes on 11 February 2016.

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WORKING AT HOME

The Ministry of Education issued 30,696 'no objection letters' to Nepali students leaving for higher education abroad last year. Although the mounting influx of hopefuls wanting to leave the country is a cause for concern, there are just as many Nepalis who return home after garnering international exposure. Those who come back bring with them new skills and ideas that are constantly translating and adapting to suit the business environment and society here.

Nepali Times talked to a few of them.



Leading the young

Pukar Malla, 36, has enjoyed a decorated high-tech career: he has led engineering design at Intel, AMD, and Silicon Graphics, and has also promoted innovation and inclusive growth at the World Bank, supporting the governments of China and India. He received a MS/PhD in Electrical Engineering from Cornell University, before earning a Masters in Public Administration at Harvard University. After the earthquake in April, Malla and his wife decided to move back to Nepal for good.

Malla believes that Nepalis that go abroad eventually return because of patriotic ties and the realisation of professional goals. "If there are challenges here, there are also opportunities," he says.

Malla is one of the founders of Daayitwa, an initiative in which members work with

government ministers, MPs and youth leaders in Nepal. The project stemmed out of his work with youth, finding that it was not the lack of talent or resources in the country but the lack of collaboration and innovation that stunted growth. He saw an expansive culture of blame and too much dependence on the government.

"What people don't realise is that if we are part of the problem then we are also a part of the solution," says Malla. To date, 56 Daayitwa fellows have worked with various MPs and ministries, with 30 of them currently based in Nepal.

Apart from Daayitwa, Malla's organisation also oversees Run for Nepal, which organises walkathons in different cities around the globe, in order to network and mobilise individuals who want to contribute to development initiatives in Nepal.



Jet setting Asia

The primary reason for Atulya Pandey's return was the bureaucratic difficulties of extending his visa in the US. But, Pandey took advantage of his predicament, turning it into the expansion of Page Vamp, a New York based company he co-founded with fellow University of Pennsylvania graduates Fred Wang and Vincent Sanchez-Gomez.

"I have been living out of my suitcase for the past year," says Pandey, who spends much of his time travelling on business. Having created more than 7,000 sites since its launch, the company now has distribution partners in 11 countries and users from more than 80 countries.

Page Vamp allows users to create websites from their Facebook pages, which is especially beneficial for small businesses that are trying to expand their online marketing but lack the technical abilities to create and manage their own website.

While Pandey enjoys working closer to home, he says for a young company like theirs, there are logistical challenges in Nepal. "I spend most of my time thinking about the basic requirements and how to fulfill them," says Pandey.

Regardless, the young entrepreneur insists that opportunities exist wherever there are challenges. For those with ideas on starting their own business, Pandey has some advice: "Many here in Nepal think about investments and capital when starting a business. My suggestion is they should focus on getting a minimum viable product first and forget about the investment. Get something that sells and get the market feedback immediately. Once you have the proof of concept, you can scale it up."

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

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पुराना ग्राहकहरूले पनि नवीकरण जरी चस योजनाना सहभागी हुन सबूद्देह।

Bumper Prize जा २०७० नाथ १ गल्टेसि २०७३ पुर्न वसालसर्वत्रका वार्षिक ग्राहकहरूलाई सहभागी गराइँदै।

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काठमाडौँ: अनन्त (९८४९९९९९५७), विजय (९८४९४६४८०२), ब्रजेश (९८५९००४५४६),

दिलिप (९८०९७२८०२), कपिल (९८९८०२०२२)

पोखरा: शिवहरि (९८५६०५६९१२), इटहरी: नरेश (९८५२०५७६९१), विराटनगर: रोशन (९८२०३२१६३),

तुठवल: अनिल (९८५५०५०२२३), नारायणघाट: युधिर (९८५०२४४४०)



Hitting the right chords

Singer, songwriter and music producer Rohit Shakya wears many hats. The 28-year-old is the co-founder of Fuzz Factory, a media production company that started with humble beginnings. Originating from a bedroom studio and an inexpensive DSLR camera, Fuzz Factory Productions has grown into a sizeable video production company, credited with some of the most creative music videos in the industry.

A graduate in audio engineering from SAE Thailand, Shakya's decision to return

was influenced by the opportunities Nepal provided. "Every little thing you do here can make a difference and lead up to greater things," he says.

Shakya admits that political turmoil, lack of infrastructure and uncertainty can be frustrating but says the country also offers room to experiment and grow.



Brain gain

GOPEN RAI

The word is e-commerce

Aman Thapa, 28, gambled on the idea of opening an e-commerce business in Nepal after being frustrated by spending hours shopping online for the right shoes. Additionally after witnessing his grandmother use Facebook, he saw how far the internet had spread and made a bet on himself.

What began as a startup in a garage in Garidhara in 2011 is now a flourishing venture that employs 32 people. Thapa's Sasto Deal is today one of the most successful e-commerce ventures in Nepal and is in the process of



launching a new program that will provide a convenient and free market for booking flight tickets online.

"The domestic e-commerce market here is like a blue ocean, meaning there isn't as much competition as overseas," he says.

Last year the April earthquake forced

Sasto Deal to suspend operations for two months and internet traffic plummeted by half. Thapa admits it is harder for the business to prosper and to execute the board's strategy. Yet, he remains optimistic. "If you can sustain in Nepal, you can sustain anywhere," says Thapa.

operation; the rest couldn't make it to the campsite due to the fuel crisis.

Despite the hardships due to the political environment and the hurdles associated with running a business here, Shrestha remains positive. "I always believe that there are ways to work around any problems," he says.

Says Shrestha: "You can't shy away from starting something saying the market in Nepal is small. In today's age when everything is so interconnected you don't have to direct your focus in Nepal alone. If we didn't have opportunities in Nepal, how come we have a billionaire here?"

Sharing an office

Co-working spaces started by young Nepalis are on the uptick in Kathmandu

SMRITI BASNET

By the end of his first year of college in the US, Vidhan Rana had already decided that he would return to Nepal post graduation. He came back in 2010, and in less than a year, founded Biruwa Ventures, a business management consultancy firm. Their first venture was a shared office space in Baluwatar.

"My college friend in the States had opened up a similar co-working space in 2009 – that's when I was first introduced to the concept," shares Rana.

A novel idea at the time, shared office spaces have now gained significant traction in Kathmandu. Nepalis like Rana who have studied and worked abroad are returning and transforming the normative work culture by utilising spaces that defy the convention of a single organisation office.

Co-working spaces typically provide basic facilities like internet, private meeting rooms, and electricity at cost effective prices due to resource sharing across multiple organisations.

Another advantage of co-working spaces is the opportunity for companies to network. "I have seen companies working in the office space come together, collaborate and open up new business," shares Rana.

For entrepreneur Prasan Shrestha, who sees a growing trend of a freelance, outsourcing and startup market in Nepal,

the benefits of co-working spaces are unmistakable for modern businesses. "The cost of living and cost of rentals is skyrocketing, relatively, for a country like Nepal. People will slowly start looking for cheaper places to work," he says.

After working in Silicon Valley, Shrestha moved back to Nepal in 2013 to set up The Platform Inc in Uttar Dhoka along with his partner, Krishant Rana, also a US returnee. The Platform Inc (pic) strives to be much more than just a co-working space, as it provides design solutions for business cards and rents out its postal address for clients working from home. Its online initiative, The Platform Social, will soon be launched with the aim of fostering collaboration between organisation members.

Another multi-function co-working space in Pulchok, Bikalpa Art Center (BAC), was founded by Saroj Mahato and his wife Mahima Singh in early 2013. BAC is a non-profit that looks to provide innovative art experiences to a variety of audiences, and features an art centre and café that hosts community events. The diversity of clients that BAC attracts is vital to the organisation: "As a result, different people come here which gives people working in the space a chance to interact with various individuals," shares Mahato, who began the enterprise after working in South Korea.

Despite the successes of these innovative workspace schemes, they are still dealing with major hiccups along the way. The April



earthquake and subsequent fuel crisis have been heavy blows for businesses. "It has been tough. Membership has gone down because people don't have fuel in their vehicles to come here," says Mahato.

There is also the problem of breaking with tradition and getting people to think differently about what constitutes an office space. "In Nepal, people want privacy even

WORKING TOGETHER:
Members work at The Platform Inc, a co-working space set up by entrepreneurs Prasan Shrestha and Krishant Rana in 2013.

when they work. People look for boundaries," says Mahato. He hopes for stagnant mindsets to change in the future to encourage more platforms for networking.

This cultural shift might begin with the influence of workers with experience abroad, Mahato notes, as at BAC, they are more open to the idea of a collaborative space. Similarly at Biruwa, 40 per cent of associates are Nepalis who have returned from overseas. Also at Platform, the majority of clients have previously studied in India, which Shrestha says reflects the evolving Indian startup culture. Although there are Nepali entrepreneurs, IT freelancers, and NGOs coming in, awareness of these collaborative spaces in Kathmandu is still low among locals.

Nevertheless, entrepreneurs developing shared offices are optimistic that with more exposure, the concept will take off. "I think in five years, Nepal will understand the concept of a co-working space more because of its growing popularity globally," said Shrestha.

WOMEN ONLY

Haushala Creatives is a rights-based women's cooperative that sells hand-sewn products to support working women and Life Vision Academy, a boarding school for underprivileged youth in Bhaktapur. It opened up an all-female co-working space in Sanepa in January 2016 to encourage women entrepreneurs. Says co-founder Haushala Zimba: "We also have an evening hour slot through which we hope to provide women working after office hours with a secure space."

EVENTS

Asian Enduro Series,
Navigate exciting terrains with the first Asian Enduro Series.
5 to 10 April, Kathmandu,
Tickets available at www.enduro.asia



Looking back,

An exhibition of photos taken by Tony Hagen during his travels to Nepal between 1950 to 1980.
5 to 7 February, 11.30am to 4pm,
Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap

Cycle for a cause,

Join the Annapurna Post cycle rally for cancer awareness.
7.30 to 10.30 am, 6 February, Tinkune,
Tickets available at annapurnacyclerally2016.eventbrite.com



Himalayan Rush,

Gear up for the fifth edition of Himalayan Rush triathlon series and experience the thrill of trail running, cycling and fresh water swimming.

26 March, Begnas, Pokhara,

(01)5550758/(01)5550759



Meet with Dr Mahabir Pun,

Interact with and learn more about social entrepreneurship from Magsaysay winner Mahabir Pun.

9 February, 11am to 4 pm, Kathmandu



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DINING

Losar,
The Tamang and Tibetan communities in Nepal mark the beginning of a new year.
9 February



Art market,
Shop directly from artists and artisans.
6 February, 12 to 4pm, The Yellow House, Sanepa, (01)5553869

Digital mapping,
A workshop on digital mapping by Storycycle.

7 February, 11am to 1pm,
Mahabir's Center for Nepal Connection, Thamel
www.storycycle.com

The Vagina Monologues 2016,
Hear out a collection of experiences and female voices on sex, relationships and violence against women.
12 to 14 February, 5 to 7pm, Tickets: Rs 200 (Valid student ID), Rs 300 and Rs 500 (phone booking preferred), Mandala Theatre, Ananagar



बाल साहित्य महोत्सव
BAL SAHITYA MAHOTSAV

Bal Sahitya Mahotsav 2016,
The children's literature festival is back with its second edition. The two-day event aims to inculcate the habit of reading in children and hopes to take this initiative to other districts in Nepal.
8.30am to 4pm, 6-7 February, Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoka, (01) 5522614

Photography workshop,
Learn the A-Z of photography with this 12-day course offered by School of Creative Communications.
10 February onwards, 7 to 9am, Kupondol, Rs 6,500, (01)5546705/9840061192, scc.kathmandu@gmail.com



Year of the monkey

Usher in the Chinese New Year with a lavish dinner at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu's The Cafe Restaurant. Indulge in delectable Chinese dishes, with a choice of varied vegetarian as well as non vegetarian spread. Diners will also get a chance to win airline tickets for two and a three-night stay at Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui.

8 February, Rs 2000++ per person
Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha
(01)4491234

Tasneem's Kings Kitchen,

A charming restaurant proposing the unique flavours of distinctive Bohra Muslim Food.

Jhamsikhel, 9801282727, (01)2239532

The Sunrise Restaurant,

Rekindle your romance with a candle lit dinner for two. Price: Rs 2500+ per person including a glass of red or white house wine.

6.30 pm onwards, 14 February, Hotel Yak & Yeti, For reservations: (01) 4248999 Ext.: 2865



Korea Pyongyang Arirang Restaurant,

The only restaurant in Kathmandu offering North Korean delicacies.

Darbar Marg, (01)4233243

Olive Garden,

The Olive Garden at Radisson Hotel has rolled out a special fish menu for the months of January and February. Enjoy a variety of local and international fish with a Mediterranean styled menu.

6 to 10pm, Olive Garden Restaurant, Radisson Hotel, Lajimpat, (01)4411818, outlets@radkat.com.np

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MUSIC

Rock night,

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6 February, 1 to 6pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, 9849332059

Sabin Rai and The Electrix,

Enjoy a musical evening with Sabin Rai and The Electrix.
6 February, 5.45pm onwards, Patio 747, Boudha



Diwas Gurung Live,

Acclaimed song writer and guitarist Diwas Gurung is back in K-town.
19 February, 6pm onwards, Moksh, Rs 300

Tribute to AC/DC,

The Midnights Riders' ultimate tribute to AC/DC.
13 February, 3pm onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, 9849076217

Joss Stone in Nepal,

Don't miss out English soul star, Joss Stone's first performance in Kathmandu. Tickets available at House of Music, Moksh, Sound Factory and Jazz Upstairs.
18 February, 6pm onwards, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, Rs 4990 (including dinner), for bookings: (01)2299759, 9843600948/9851075172.



All about Jazz,

Acclaimed singer, songwriter and jazz pianist Tina deVaron performs for the first time in Nepal. Tickets for the show will be available at Dhokaima café and Manny Tapas and Eatery Bar.

5 February, 6pm to 7.30 pm, Kamalmani Theatre, Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoka, Ticket price: Rs 500

GETAWAY



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Lumbini, (71)580220, 9801033109, info@ktmgh.com



The Yellow House,

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Sanepa, (01)5553869/5522078, www.theyellowhouse.com.np

Barahi Jungle Lodge,

The first eco-jungle lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks the Chitwan National Par. Andrauli, West Chitwan, (01)4411113, bjl@barahi.com, www.barahijunglelodge.com



Balthali Village Resort,

A small, cosy retreat with a bird's eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses.
Balthali, Kavre, 9851075818



Getting to the heart of the story

KUNDA DIXIT

In her recently-released book, *This Unquiet Land*, Indian tv journalist Barkha Dutt exposes chapter-by-chapter the fault lines of modern India: the appalling social inequities, structural violence against women, religious fanaticism, and the chasms of caste and class. And the reaction to the book in India's public sphere has proven just how entrenched those fault lines are.

Dutt has been pilloried on social media platforms, she has been vilified personally and her liberal agenda on gender, secularism and an open society relentlessly ridiculed. None of this is new for Dutt, of course, she is no stranger to controversy.

"I have realised that as a journalist in the age of Twitter you have to have a thick skin, the attacks can be vituperative and venomous," Dutt said while attending the Nepal Literature Festival in Pokhara earlier this week (pic). Indeed, while giving readers an eye-witness account of recent news events in India, *This Unquiet Land* devotes considerable space to Dutt's side of the story on how her Iridium sat-phone couldn't have given away the position of an Indian forward base to Pakistani artillery commanders, why it was essential for a journalist to cover events like the Taj attack live on tv, or her role in the Radia Tape scandal.

Well-wishers advised Dutt to say sorry and get it over with, but as she writes in the introduction to her book: '... there was absolutely



no way I was going to apologise for something I hadn't done ... if I have one regret about those hurtful few weeks it's only that I spent too much energy explaining myself.'

It is Dutt's tenacity and commitment to the profession that sees her through, values that she was brought up with by her journalist mother. Today, with nearly 3.5 million followers on Twitter, Dutt is one of those celebrity journalists who has found that the social web is double-edged: it can amplify her message but also be the medium for hate and anger. A look at Dutt's

Twitter timeline indicates that there is a lot of hate and anger directed at her, most of it from the Hindu right and from insecure men who feel threatened by her gender activism.

Dutt recounts going out to Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and the streets of Delhi to cover horrifying rapes and abuse of women, she finds out how caste, class and politics all come into play in protecting perpetrators. We revisit the story of Bhanwari Devi, the Dalit woman who was raped by upper caste men who are too powerful to be apprehended by police. And the gruesome and

tragic story of the medical student whose gang rape in a Delhi bus unleashed a firestorm of protests.

Almost as an afterthought, towards the end of that chapter, Dutt goes on to reveal for the first time about being sexually abused herself by a relative when she was ten. The ordeal seems to have shaped her career and fuelled her drive for justice through journalism. But by not playing up her own experience, she lends more credence to the stories of other victims of sexual violence that she covers.

Dutt is a staunch defender of the public service role of media, and is sensitive to generalised criticism of journalism. Yes, tv is dumbing down content, she says, but there is enough space for real debate on real issues. Yes, there are too many talking heads and they are all talking at the same time, but at least people can vent their feelings.

However, Dutt is keenly aware of the 'content hierarchy' and the way the news agenda is shaped by industry. She sees a need to balance commercialisation of media with independent and relevant content. In answer to a question in Pokhara, she admitted that Indian tv journalists can be boorish and inaccurate like when they parachuted in to cover last year's earthquake in Nepal, or in not doing enough to highlight the humanitarian impact of the blockade. But that is the way they cover domestic news events in India itself, they don't have anything against Nepal per se. Come to think of it, that is quite a strong indictment of the way the Indian



This Unquiet Land
Stories from India's Fault Lines
by Barkha Dutt
Aleph, 2015
324 pages, Rs 1,000 hardcover

media operates.

This Unquiet Land is a 'terrific' introduction to recent Indian history, and should be required reading for journalists everywhere — especially here in Nepal where the socio-political fault lines are similar. Dutt says the book has allowed her to understand India better, and concludes with what could be her motto: 'Nothing, no matter how crazy, will stop me in my efforts to get a good story.'



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OUR BRAND IS CRISIS



There is a reason why sometimes even predictable films about dislikeable, deeply flawed people can occasionally be extremely engaging. That reason is usually Sandra Bullock, Tom Hanks, or Melissa McCarthy — star power

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

like theirs is hard to ignore. They are the superstars who often play the everyman and make them extraordinary.

Sandra Bullock, always a luminous presence, proves yet again in *Our Brand is Crisis* that she can almost singlehandedly rescue a messy Hollywood product that takes a deeply complex subject,

slaps a formula on it, and hopes for the best.

Based on a documentary of the same name by Rachel Boynton, the film is about an election in Bolivia, where one of the presidential candidates, Pedro Castillo (played exceedingly well by Joaquim de Almeida), hires an American team of political consultants — based on the real life firm Greenberg, Carville, Shrum — to try and help his floundering campaign.

Castillo is a billionaire, and he is perceived by the Bolivian people as elitist, unfriendly, and clearly the opposite of being 'a man of the people'. The team of imported political spin doctors that try to help save his run consists of a group of relatively clueless North Americans. But redeeming the team is Jane Bodine, Sandra Bullock's hard as nails, Sun Tzu and Goethe quoting,

cigarette smoking, raw as heck but brilliant character who has a particularly ugly rivalry with Pat Candy (Billy Bob Thornton) — the other American advisor to Castillo's rival and front runner Rivera (Louis Arcella).

As a hilariously absurd game of undercutting and smear campaigns ensue, Bodine, or "Calamity Jane" as she has come to be known for her most recent crash and burn (against Candy), finally begins to hit her stride. After absorbing the politics relevant to help her candidate win, namely figuring out that selling "crisis" with Castillo as the only person who can helm a country in dire straits, is the best way to get people to vote for her man, out of fear.

Our Brand is Crisis glosses over the real issues in Bolivia in 2002, such as the fight for proper representation by indigenous people. The focus of this film, which cares nothing for the woes of real people, is on satirising the very real tragicomedy that is political campaigning — North American style.

The film is patchy because it has no real feeling for the setting or other important political issues that could have been given more attention, losing its place to the drama surrounding Bodine's moral dilemmas. Difficult to watch, occasionally stomach hurting hilarious, this is a flawed film made compelling by Bullock's charm as an actor and innate comedienne. ☺

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■ Trailer

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HAPPENINGS



CHIEF GUEST: Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli attends the opening of CAN-Infotech 2016 at Bhrikutimandap on Friday.



GOOD LUCK: President Bidhya Bhandari bids farewell to participants of the South Asian Games being held in India at Dasrath Stadium on Monday.



MY TAKE: Indian journalist Barkha Dutt discusses her book *This Unquiet Land* at the Nepal Literature Festival in Pokhara on Sunday.



BE AWARE: Children participate in a leprosy awareness program at Khokana on the occasion of World Leprosy Day on Sunday.



NEW TUNES: Nepali fusion band Kanta dAb dAb performs at the launch of their debut album at Alliance Francaise on Wednesday.

Students without borders

Gopal Bhandari in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 31 January - 6 February

हिमाल
बहरपत्रिका

Tenth grader Janaknandini Chaudhary, from Pakdi village in Kapilavastu, has quite the arduous daily commute -- she has to cross an international border to get to school every morning.

Chaudhary attends the Shahide Azam Bhagat Singh Higher Secondary School across the border in India because there are no high schools in her village.

Though the journey is far from home, Janaknandini feels just as comfortable in the neighbouring country.

"It is difficult for me to understand or speak in Nepali. Since Hindi and Awadhi are my mother tongues, it is easier to study there," she says. Instead of singing the Nepali national anthem every morning, she croons "Jana gana mana..." of the Indian national



travel to Rangapur, a town 5km away, to attend secondary school. But due to travel constraints, some parents opt for an even longer route. "As the road condition to

anthem.

Like Janaknandini, more than 20 children of Pakdi cross the border to India to attend school every day. Since the village only provides schooling up to lower secondary, older students in Pakdi must

Rangapur is bad, people prefer to send their children to Indian schools," says Pakdi resident Saroj Chaudhary.

Brought up with an Indian education since young, growing numbers of children find their intellectual curiosities and affinities being met by Indian society rather than back home. Some are voicing concerns that not enough students are being encouraged to have an interest in issues specifically facing Nepal.

"Attention needs to be drawn towards providing educational facilities at this side of the border," says civil society member Jayprakash Pandey.

On the other hand, district education officer Hari Gautam claims that the government has already made the expansion of classrooms a priority, but the problem more than anything is

about complacency. He says, "If the schools are ready to take the initiative to develop their infrastructure, we are ready to help them with it."



सेतोपाटी

Rajesh KC in *Setopati*, 4 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Madhesis should also be recruited in the Gurkha regiment. **”**

Tarai Madhes Sadhbhavana Party Chair Mahendra Raya Yadav at a Madhes interaction program in Patna, India.

Stuck abroad

Janak Raj Sapkota in *Nepal*, 25 January

जेपाल



Bhawana and Mandir Nembang still remember the day their older brother Shree Bahadur Nembang left for Qatar. The country was in the middle of a civil war and Nembang, like many others from his village, was forced to find better opportunities abroad. Before his departure Shree Bahadur promised his younger siblings that he'd return soon. Fifteen years later, the two are still waiting.

On 9 September 2004, three years after he landed in Qatar, Shree Bahadur was met with an accident and was admitted to Hamad Hospital. He then fell into a coma

and has not recovered ever since. The loan Shree Bahadur had taken to go to Qatar has multiplied four times over with interest, and the family now owes more than Rs 400,000.

"We have no hope of our brother returning nor do we have any means to pay off the debt," says Mandir. "All our happiness ended with that one incident," adds Bhawana.

Mandir and Bhawana's parents passed

away over the course of waiting for their eldest child to return. And although both the siblings welcome the return of their brother, the process of bringing him back home isn't so easy.

"Until and unless we can provide the same level of service in government hospitals here, it will be too risky to bring the patients here," says Raghu Raj Kafle of the Foreign Employment Promotion Board.

Many migrant workers who are comatose and admitted in hospitals abroad have no recourse of being sent back to Nepal. The government does not keep proper records on the number and location of the patients. Some of them are yet to be identified.

After pressure mounted from host countries to take back the patients, a government committee was formed to study the situation of Nepali migrant workers in foreign hospitals. The committee found 16 comatose Nepalis in Qatar alone. It has presented its report to

the Foreign Ministry, and has concluded that the patients need to be shifted to government hospitals here.

Since an air ambulance is required to transfer the patients and payment needs to be made for all the hospital bills, Nepali embassies abroad do not prioritise sending Nepali patients back home. Most afflicted families do not have the means to pay the steep bills. Although Qatar has said it would provide a medical team and an air ambulance to transfer the patients, government hospitals here are ill-equipped to receive them.

Though there is public outcry to open well-equipped government hospitals that would take care of the patients, it is not clear as to who should take responsibility for all the costs. "We cannot bring the patients without paying the bills," says Kafle. "Who should bear the bills, the embassies or the families? This problem isn't easy to solve without proper policies in place."

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GOPAL GARTAUL
IN JHAPA

Nanda Bahadur Bohora was only 14 when he joined the Maoist militia. A year later, in 1999, he was part of the guerrilla force that attacked a police post in Kalikot and carried a double-barrelled 12 bore gun nearly as big as himself.



THEN AND NOW:
Anisha Limbu (*left*) was in Grade 8 when she quit school to join the Maoists. Today, she regrets her decision.

Kamal Singh Lama and Amrita Limbu during their wartime wedding at a guerilla camp (*right*). Lama now works as a mason in Jhapa and is struggling to take care of his family.

Nanda Bahadur Bohora (*far right*) was only 14 when he joined the Maoists. He is one of many former guerrillas who feel his party has forsaken him.

Once a battlefield medic in the Maoist militia, Girija Thapa (*below, right*) now runs an acupressure centre in Urlabari.

WARRIORS IN

The Maoists over-ran the base after a nightlong battle and captured 25 .303 rifles. In the next ten years, as Bohora grew into a man, he upgraded to more modern weapons: SLR assault rifles, INSAS, GPMG, and was trained to fire mortars. He became so good at making improved explosive devices that he earned the nom de guerre 'Explosive Expert'.

"We got stronger as we captured more and bigger guns from the police and army," Bohora, now 32, recalls. "I had faith in Chairman Prachanda, but not anymore."

Today, 20 years after the start

of the war and 10 years after it ended, Bohora is one of many former guerrillas who feel his party has forsaken him. His wife, also a Maoist fighter, was killed in action in the Sankranti Battle and his parents were killed after being tortured by the Army. He now lives with his second wife selling herbal medicines.

Bohara says his party leader sold out on the revolution, went soft and made many blunders when they got into government. He feels Pushpa Kamal Dahal, instead of resigning as prime minister should have stood his ground over the General Katawal affair in 2009.

"All the fighters supported the decision and the Chairman should have seen it through, but he lost whatever standing we had as a party after he stepped down," Bohora said.

Another former Maoist guerrilla, Kaman Singh Lama, agrees with Bohora. "The party no longer belongs to working class like us," says 35-year-old Lama, who was also a child soldier when he joined in 1999. He married fellow fighter Amrita Limbu. He now works as a mason in Jhapa, is deeply in debt, and says it is a struggle to take care of his family of four. He is determined to keep out of politics

What was it all for?

Revisiting the 40-point demand of the Maoists 20 years later

OM ASTHA RAI

A gaunt, bearded man was trying to enter Singha Darbar, but was being forcibly held back from the gate by policemen guarding Nepal's centre of power.

He was soon joined by a woman with short hair who was similarly stopped. But, to the astonishment of onlookers, she proceeded to the middle of the road and sat cross-legged in front of the wrought iron gate. She refused to move, and a minister's flag-festooned car was blocked.

The minister called the Prime Minister on the phone and the two were finally allowed in. The bearded man was Baburam Bhattarai and the woman was Pampha Bhusal, the only female member of the original central committee of the underground Maoist party.

It was 4 February 1996, and Bhattarai was at Singha Darbar to present Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba with the threat of a violent insurrection if his party's 40-point demand was not fully met in two weeks. As Coordinator of Samyukta Jana Morcha, the electoral front of the under-ground Maoists, the 40-point demand was

Bhattarai's handiwork.

Deuba, preoccupied with dealing with rivals within his Nepali Congress party, did meet Bhattarai and Bhusal in his office, but did not take the ultimatum seriously. He flew off to New Delhi on a state visit that week.

Pampha Bhusal recalls: "After Bhattarai read out all the 40 points, Deuba just said 'Ok, Ok, we will see'. I sensed that he was in hurry and just wanted us to leave."

As it turned out, the Maoists did not even wait for Deuba to respond to the demands. Even before the two week ultimatum had expired, Maoist guerrillas launched their revolution with attacks on a police post in Holeri of Rolpa district.

"We knew the state was not capable to address our demands," Bhusal told *Nepali Times*, "so preparation for a protracted people's war was underway even before we went to meet Deuba." Bhusal is now the spokesperson of the CPN-Maoist, the breakaway hardline faction.

We asked Deuba whether he had indeed dismissed the 40-point demand and why. "It included demands like curtailing royal privileges which was not in my power to do," he said. "Other demands like land reform



CHANGING TIMES : Baburam Bhattarai during an interview with *Kantipur* four days before the Maoists launched their armed struggle against the state in February, 1996 (*left*). Bhattarai at the official announcement of his new political party, Naya Shakti in Kathmandu last month.



and rights of the marginalised were my agendas too. But the Maoists did not give me enough time to negotiate or fulfill those demands."

On the night of 13 February 1996, a group of Maoist guerrillas led by Barsha Man Pun crept up a mountain and attacked the Holeri post. They just had one World War I vintage .303 rifle and some knives. They also raided posts in Gorkha, Kavre, Sindhuli and Bhaktapur districts, and declared that they had launched their

revolution.

What the state initially treated as a minor law and order problem soon escalated into a full-scale nationwide war resulting in the deaths of 17,000 Nepalis by the time it ended in 2006. There were serious human rights violations by both sides, the economy was devastated, development was pushed back decades, investors fled, and the delays in hydropower and highway projects are still plaguing the country.

It has been ten years since the

conflict ended, but the wounds of war remain fresh. And till today, Nepalis are still asking if the war was worth it. Some of the 40 demands, like secularism, a new constitution and civilian control over the army, were met.

But other demands relating to livelihood, citizenship, the economy, land reform and human rights remain unaddressed despite the fact that the Maoists have led the government twice since 2008. The Maoists had also demanded the removal of 'unequal' clauses in the 1950 treaty and nullification of the Tanakpur Agreement. Neither Bhattarai nor Pushpa Kamal Dahal pushed these issues when they were prime minister.

Hari Bhakta Kandel, one of the original 19 central committee members of the Maoist party, says: "Our demands were genuine, and the war was necessary to achieve them. But the Maoist leadership deviated from our ideals and failed to address the demands."

Kandel, who like Bhusal also joined the breakaway CPN-Maoist, shared a room with Dahal in Kathmandu during his college years. He says Dahal was a simple and idealistic man back then. "But once in power he forgot what we fought for," he says. "We



PEACETIME

Twenty years after the revolution, former guerrillas say they have lost faith in the leaders of their Maoist party



of Morang in 2003 as a communication hub and decided to go underground.

Thapa qualified to enter the Nepal Army with 2,300 other Maoist guerrillas in the integration process, but quit after six months of training in Kharipati because he found it too gruelling. He now runs an acupressure and massage treatment center in Urlabari.

He says: "I have had enough of the politics. The leaders have strayed from the path. I am just happy that I could use my skill to save many who were willing to die. Now I want to live in peace."

THE 40 POINTS

The 40-point demand put forth by Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai on 4 February 1996 before launching the armed struggle against the state.

- Removing unfair clauses in the 1950 Treaty
- Nullification of the Tanakpur Treaty
- Restricting Indian trucks to protect domestic industry
- Closing Gorkha recruitment
- Work permits for non-Nepalis
- Restriction on flow of foreign capital
- Raising import tariffs and restricting imports
- Ban on Hindi films and newspapers
- Restriction on civil society groups like NGOs
- Electing a constituent assembly for a new constitution
- Removing royal privileges
- Civil oversight of police activity. Bringing army under the civilian command.
- Repealing the Security Act
- Freeing political detainees
- Curbing police brutality
- Compensation for the families of political detainees
- Compensation for the families of martyrs of Jana Andolan
- Declaring Nepal a secular state
- Property rights for daughters
- Ethnic autonomy
- Ending caste discrimination against Dalits
- Ethnic languages and bilingual instruction
- Freedom of press
- Intellectual freedom
- Decentralisation and local autonomy
- Devolution of power
- Giving land to landless tillers
- Seizing land from feudal capitalists
- Guaranteed employment. Providing unemployment compensation.
- Setting minimum wage
- Land for landless squatters
- Debt relief for farmers
- Subsidies for farmers
- Relief for drought-hit farmers
- Free health care and education. Regulating private education
- Guaranteed low inflation
- Building roads, water and electricity facilities in rural areas
- Protection for cottage industries
- Controlling corruption
- Safety net for homelessness, orphans, and the elderly

wanted to strengthen nationalism and raise living standards of ordinary Nepalis. But our nationalism is now weaker than ever before, and we are poorer than we were before the war."

Political scientist Krishna Khanal says revisiting the 40-point is pointless. "The Maoists never fought to get them fulfilled," he told us, "a faction of Nepali communists always thought they could overthrow the state and seize power through

violence, and the war was just an experiment to test that idea. It was all for power."

Twenty years down the line, Bhattarai does not even own up to the 40-point demands which he scripted. He is no longer a communist, and is setting up a new party called the New Force which aims to develop the country by attracting foreign investment – something he was dead against in the 40-point demand.

for the rest of his life.

Thinking about her own circumstances after the conflict, another former guerrilla, Anisha Limbu, now wishes she had never quit school in Grade 8 to join the Maoists. "I am dejected when I think of the war, but it was too late when I realised my mistake," says the 35-year-old, who is a vegetable farmer with two children.

"The leaders got to power stepping on us, but they left us to fend for ourselves," she says.

Girija Thapa was once a battlefield medic who risked his own life many times to save the lives of his comrades. "I'd be operating on a wounded soldier

as bullets whizzed by," Thapa recalls.

He was a certified medical attendant when Maoist leaders used his house in Urlabari

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More hemming and hawing

It now appears that reports of the demise of the Oligarchy were greatly exaggerated. Khadga Prasad Comrade is glued to his chair in Balu Water, and besides being the prime minister, is also a prime candidate for the honour of being anointed Nepal's Clown Prince. He can survive any vote of overconfidence in parliament by putting together the most inclusive government in recent Nepali history — it includes everyone.

However, I agree with critics of the government who have serious misgivings about the size of our new jumbo jet cabinet. They are right: with 41 ministers, it's just not large enough.

How will the Primate Minister

ever be able to pipe laughing gas into every household if his cabinet is so seriously understaffed? How is he going to harness the hot air and turn it into electricity? Who will shoot the breeze? For national construction, reconstruction and under-construction to happen on a warlike footing, we need an army of ministers, not the pathetic platoon we have now.

But we, mediapersons, would be seriously remiss in our whistleblowing duties if we did not bring to the attention of higher-up authorities that we are as a nation running seriously short of ministerial portfolios. To the point where the goabarment is mulling rationing ministries to 15 hours per minister per day. Which is why as

a last resort, the Commission on Commissions and Kickbacks must intervene decisively and instruct the PMO to set up new cabinet positions forthwith, without further ado, and no more hemming and hawing:

Ministry of Distortion and Extortion: This new ministry will counter anti-government propaganda and will be a one-window office for the incumbent ruling party's fund-raising activities.

Ministry of Illegitimate Affairs: Since the country is in the grip of smugglers, we need to carve out this ministry from the Ministry of Home Affairs in order to facilitate

a smooth supply of blackmarket diesel and create non-taxable liquidity from liquified petroleum gas.

Ministry of Adultery: With petrol, diesel and kerosene in short supply, this ministry will guarantee adequate distribution at all gas stations by mixing subsidised kerosene with petrol, and work in close coordination with the Ministry of Copulation and Labour.

Ministry of Home: This is the most coveted ministry mainly because the minister can work out of home, leaving his office for the Ministry of Misinformation and Telepathy.

Ministry of Horsing Around: As an Ass who worries day and night about the welfare of the country, it pains me to say that

we don't yet have a cabinet position dedicated solely to ensuring that there is enough fun and games for all citizens. Which is why I propose that the Ministry of Livestock be further subdivided into the Ministry of Animal Husbandry and Midwifery as well as the Ministry for Birds and Bees.

Ministry of Physical Therapy and No Works: This ministry together with the Department of Inertia, Sloth and Lethargy will address the serious epidemic of muscle atrophy in the bureaucracy due to prolonged period of inaction by requiring all ministers to burn a daily minimum number of calories with simple exercises involving stretching out the arm under the table.



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