While studying business in the US, 28-year-old Sunil 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 eyewear company Anthropos 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. Anthropos’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 campsites 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 billion-dollar 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 them.”

Sunil Shrestha

Full story page 8-9

PANDA

Kali and Kali were found abandoned in a Tansen forest, and raised by the Budimagal family. They are now resident in the Kathmandu zoo.
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 Holiya police station was led by Barsha Man Pun (currently secretary of the UCPN(M) 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 culture of depoliticisation 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 process was unshackled, and foreign investment flowed 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 Ashta 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 Holiya in 1996 spread like wildfire across the country. A faceless 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 tortured, 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 has no photos of himself ever holding the ‘c’ word.

Bhattarai’s 40 points included some pretty outlandish demands, but you couldn’t argue about many of them being practically social 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.
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 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 anti-government campaign is often perceived to be 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 step to forceful evictions, stem directly from the work done by this movement. The Dalit chairperson of NLRF, Lyam Bahadur Barje, told me recently: “The new constitution uses the exact words we proposed on ending dual land ownership.”

In a society where power is 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 uncompromising 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.

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.
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.

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

A closer look has your scribe suspicioning 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 donkeys happy but the inner workings of each party are hallowed 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, 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 chair’s command the static mindset of royal privilege remains unchanged and family 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 antidemocratic by nature. It’s probably no coincidence the country’s oldest party has the country’s oldest leaders. Congress was the personal battlefield 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 tested on the edge of the podium mumbling incoherently, but nothing could stop the impetus 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 bums (limps?) yet again on the stage, adding insult to injury, there’s another washed-up Koirala in the race. As Girija’s daughter, Sushil 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, the ruling party is not about to forfeit his hard-earned seat at the national feeding trough, a position he fought a bloody war to achieve.

Most of the Madheshi ‘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 crisis and their loud-mouthed opportunism has reinvigorated their careers as self-appointed representatives of the people who rejected them.

That leaves the UML and K.P. 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 alfa’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 voices is finally heard.
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.

Fly to Gotham City
Turkish Airlines recently partnered with Warner Bros. for the promotion of Batman’s Supermen. Down of

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 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.
Home away from home

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

SONAM TASHI LAMA

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 helplessly in the undergrowth, malnourished and motherless.

Man Bahadur took the two 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 they were pandas, and started feeding them bamboo shoots. Red pandas are not related to China’s giant pandas, 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. At time were one and the baby panda grew larger, the Bahadur couple felt it was no longer prudent to keep them at home, even though they were healthy and active and their attachment to the panda 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 Murali agreed that because the cubs were almost pets, re-acclimatising them back into the wild would be difficult.

However, red panda expert Angela Gianinni 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 Ramchechhap, named Guurti, 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 per cent were unfamiliar with the value of conservation efforts or legal status of the species.

Budhanagar, now an empty nest, hopes to meet politicians while in Kathmandu to tell them about the need to have a rehabilitation centre for rescued wild animals.

Sonam Tashi Lama is with the Red Panda Network.

nepaltimes.com

Watch video of cubs at home.
FRIDAY

SUNDAY

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 heart and pulmonary illnesses due to respiratory diseases. 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.

KATHMANDU

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 finalize 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 unrelenting dedication and elegant designs have earned her nominations for Best Bride 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 is 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 Lakshita 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 Tulshi Mahal, Matha Arom, 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 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: visit www.hitched.co.uk/awards or www.sanyuktaashrestha.com

Voting closes on 11 February 2016.
WORKING AT HOME

Leading the young

Pujar Malla, 36, has enjoyed a
prominent engineering career:
has also promoted innovation and
growth in public administration
at the World Bank, supporting
the governments of China & India.
He now works as a MUPP 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 tend to
abroad, eventually return because of patriotic
sentiments and the realization of professional
opportunities. “If there are challenges here, there are also
opportunities,” he says.

Malla is one of the founders of Dajuwa,
an initiative in which members work with
government ministers, MPs, and youth leaders
in Nepal. The project stems 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 dependency on the
government.

“What people don’t realize is that if we are
part of the problem then we are also a part of the solution,” says Malla. “To date, 50 Dajuwa
fellows have worked with various MPs and
ministries, with 10 of them currently based in Nepal.

Apart from Dajuwa, Malpas Organisation
also oversees five for Nepal, which organizes
workshops in different sites around the globe,
in order to network and mobilize individuals
who want to contribute to development
initiatives in Nepal.

Jet setting Asia

The primary reason for Dajuwa’s return was the
economic difficulties of ending 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 his
University of Pennsylvania graduates Fred Wang and Vincent
Sanchez-Garcia.

“I have been living out of my suitcase for the past year,”
says Pandey, who spends much of his time traveling on
business. Having earned 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
to expand their online marketing but lack the
technical ability to create and manage their own website.

While Pandey enjoys working closer to home,
his says for a young company like theirs, there are
logistical challenges in Nepal. “I spend most of the time
thinking about the back-end issues 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. “Money here in Nepal isn’t about investments and
capital but starting a business. My suggestion is they should
focus on getting a minimum viable product first and then
start a business. Get something that sells and get the
market feedback immediately. Once you have the proof
of concept, you can scale up.”
**Brain gain**

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 Biroova Ventures, a business management consultancy firm. Their first venture was a shared office space in Baluwatar.

“My college friends in the States had opened up a similar co-working space in 2009 - that’s when I first introduced 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 Prasat Shrestha, who sees a growing trend of a freelance, outsourcing and start up 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 Uttara Bhikeshikha along with his partner, Krishnan Rana, also a US returnee. The Platform Inc (pl) strives to be much more than just a co-working space, as it provides design solutions for business cards and rents out its portal 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 Palchok, Bikalpa Art Center (BAC), was founded by Samy 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 cafe 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 where they work. People look for boundaries,” says Mahato. He hopes for stagnant mindsets to change to 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 Biroova, 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 into 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.

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**SMRITI BASNET**

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**WOMEN ONLY**

Haushala Creatives is a rights-based women’s cooperation that works with women to support women working and Life Vision Academy, a boarding school for underprivileged youth in Bhaktapur. It opened an all-female co-working space in Lopnepa in January 2016 to encourage women entrepreneurs. Says co-founder Haushala Zimba: “We also have an evening hour slip through which we hope to provide women working after office hours with a decent 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 1956 to 1980. 5 to 7 February, 11am to 4pm, Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap.

Cycle for a cause, Join the Annapurna Puci cycle rally for cancer awareness. 7.30 to 10.30 am, 6 February, Tinkune.

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. 20 March, Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoka. (01)5507050, (01)5507059

Meet with Dr Mahabir Pun, Interact with and learn more about social entrepreneurship from Magguyaw winner Mahabir Pun. 9 February, 11am to 4pm, Kathmandu.

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 Horse, Sanepa. (01)5553869

Digital mapping, A workshop on digital mapping by Storytel. 7 February, 11 am to 1 pm, Mahabir’s Centre for Nepal Connection, Thamel. www.storytel.com

The Vagina Monologues 2016, Himalayan Rush! A collection of experiences and female voices on sex, relationships and violence against women. 12 to 14 February, 5 to 9 pm. Tickets: Rs 200 (full students), Rs 260 and Rs 500 (phone booking required). Mandala Theatre, Annapurna

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.
Hamasteel, (01)2238272, (01)2238552

The Sunrise Restaurant, Begin your day with a special breakfast to diner for two. Price: Rs 2500+ per person including a glass of red or white wine.
6 to 10pm onwards, 14 February, Hotel Park & Pool, for reservations: (01)4478999 Ext.: 2865

Korea Pongyang, Anirang Restaurant, The only restaurant in Kathmandu offering North Korean food. Bardari Mang, (01)4523424

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 inspired menu.
6 to 10pm, Olive Garden Restaurant, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, (01)4471810, asept@radisson.com

Photography workshop, Learn the A-Z of photography with this 12-day course offered by School of Creative Communication. 10 February onwards, 7 to 10am, Jupordel, Rs 6,500, (01)5564710/5800011952, scicommnd@gmail.com

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

DIETING

Dining out, Enjoy a lavish dinner at Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Tsim Sha Tsui.
6 February, 5.45pm onwards, Patio 747, RHCP by Electric Air and Monkey Temple.

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

Diwas Gurung Live, Acclaimed song writer and guitarist Diwas Gurung is back in K-town.
19 February, 6pm onwards, Patosh, Bhaktapur.

Barahi Jungle Lodge, The first eco-jungle lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks the Chitwan National Par. Andrauli, West Chitwan, (01)441113, bj@barahi.com, www.barahijunglelodge.com

Balthali Village Resort, A small, cozy retreat with a bird’s eye view of green terrace fields dotted with ochre painted houses. Balthali, Kavre, (01)55759818

MUSIC

Rock night, A 2-in-1 tribute show to Foo Fighters and RHCP by Electric Air and Monkey Temple.
6 February, 7 to 11pm, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel.

Tribute to AC/DC, The Midlands Riders’ ultimate tribute to AC/DC.
15 February, 7pm onwards, Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel. (01)8078271

All about Jazz, Acclaimed singer, songwriter and jazz pianist Tina devakar performs for the first time in Nepal. Tickets for the show will be available at Chokkara cafe and Mannys Taps and Eatery Bar.
5 February, 6pm onwards, Amritmani Theatre, Rato Bangala School, Patan Dhoka. Ticket price: Rs 500

 music festival

GETAWAY

Dwarika’s Resort
A historic palace retreat, drawing on ancient Himalayan knowledge and philosophy of care for nature and for oneself, set in magnificent natural surroundings.
(Dhulikhel), (01)486612, info@dwarikas-duwhotel.com

Buddha Maya Gardens Hotel, Add value to your travel in Lumbini with a stay at probably the best hotel in the area. Lumbini, (01)5822020, 9818123009, info@kmgh.com

The Yellow House, A charming restaurant proposing the unique flavours of distinctive Bohra Muslim Food.
Hamasteel, (01)2238272, (01)2238552

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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 chaos 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 controversial 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 harrowing 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 to 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 to do. “Nothing, no matter how crazy, will stop me in my efforts to get a good story.”

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 took her to the stories of other victims of sexual violence that she covers. 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.

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. 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.

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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 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 single-handedly 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, SIRON — 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 Aancela). 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 put her style. After assailing the politics relevant to help her candidate win, namely figuring out that selling “crisis” with Castillo or 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 satirizing 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 dilemma. Difficult to watch, occasionally stomach hurting hilarious, this is a flawed film made compelling by Bullock’s charm as an actor and innate comedic talent.

nepalitimes.com

MUST SEE

Sophia Pande

HAPPENINGS

CHIEF GUEST: Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli attends the opening of CII Infotech 2016 at Bhati kumandag on Friday.

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

MY TAKE: Indian journalist Bashu Dutta 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 Rokhana on the occasion of World Leprosy Day on Sunday.

NEW TUNES: Nepali fusion band Karta bhel perform at the launch of their debut album at Alliance Francaise on Wednesday.
Students without borders

Gopal Shanduk in Khalchepani 31 January – 6 February

Tenth grader Janauleundi Chaudhary, from Pakli village in Panchthar, has quite the arduous daily commute — she has to cross an international border to get to school every morning.

Chaudhary attends the Shalu-Aam Bhisti Singh Higher Secondary School across the border in India because there are no high schools in her village. Though her journey is far from home, Janauleundi feels just as comfortable in the neighboring country.

"It is difficult for me to understand or speak in Nepali. Since Mrinal and Ithawal are my mother tongues, it is easier to study there," she says. Instead of singing the Nepali national anthem every morning, she says "Cina gina man..." of the Indian national anthem.

Like Janauleundi, more than 30 children of Pakli cross the border to India to attend school every day. Since the village only provides schooling up to secondary, older students in Pakli must travel to Ranigpur, a town 34 km away, to attend secondary school. But due to travel constraints, some parents opt for an even longer route. “As the road condition to Ranigpur is bad, people prefer to send their children to Indian schools,” says Pakli resident Sury Chaudhary.

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

“Minya need to be drawn towards providing educational facilities at this side of the border,” said senior member Jypraksh Thakuri.

On the other hand, district education officer Hari Gajraman claims that the government has already made the expansion of classes a priority, but the problem remains one of oversight in coordination. He says, “If the schools are ready to take the initiative to develop their infrastructure, we are ready to help them with it.”

Stuck abroad

Jenak Raj Sapkota in Nepal, 25 January

Bhaswana 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.

On 9 September 2004, three years after he landed in Qatar, Shree Bahadur was met with an accident and was admitted to Hamid 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 Bhaswana.

Mandir and Bhaswana’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 18 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 affected 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.”
What was it all for?
Revisiting the 40-point demand of the Maoists 20 years later

OM ASTHA RAI

A grunt, bearded man was trying to enter Singh 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 Balaram Bhattarai and the woman was Pampa.Bhusal, the only female member of the original central committee of the underground Maoist party.

It was 4 February 1996, and Bhattarai was at Singh 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 Samyukt Insaan Mendha, the electoral front of the underground Maoists, the 40-point demand was Bhattarai’s handcuff.

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 an official tour that week.

Pampa 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 to leave.”

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

“We know 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 OPM-Maoist, the breakaway hardline faction.

We asked Deuba whether he had indeed dismissed the 40-point demand and why. “It included demands like curtailment of royal privileges which was not in my power to do,” he said. “Other demands like land reform and rights of the marginalized were my agendas too. But the Maoists did not give me enough time to negotiate or fulfill these demands.”

On the night of 13 February, a group of Maoist guerrillas led by Bashin Man Puschet up a mountain and attacked the Holi police post. They had just had World War I vintage .303 rifle and some knives. They also raided posts in Gorkha, Kavre, Sindhi and Bhtapurn 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 had been ten years since the conflict ended, but the wounds of war remain fresh. As he said today, Nepal is still asking if the war was worth it. Some of the 40 demands, like the abolition of new constitution and civilian control over the army, were met.

Others, such as demands relating to livelihood, citizenship, the economy, land reform and human rights remain unresolved despite the fact that the Maoists have led the government twice since 2008. The Maoists had also demanded the removal of the ‘inequity’ clauses in the 1950 treaty and nullification of the Tapovan Agreement. Neither Bhattarai nor Puschetu Kamal Dahal pushed these issues when they were prime ministers.

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 of our people.”

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
Twenty years after the revolution, former guerrillas say they have lost faith in the leaders of their Maoist party 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. Cripa 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 Urihari of Morang in 2003 as a communication hub and decided to go underground.

Thapa qualified to enter the Nepal Army with 2,360 other Maoist guerrillas in the integration process, but quit after six months of training in Kathmandu because he found it too gruelling. He now runs an acupuncture and massage treatment center in Urihari. He says "I have had enough of the politics. The leaders have strayed from the path. I am just happy that I could save my life to save many who were willing to die. Now I want to live in peace."
More hemming and hawing

It now appears that reports of the demise of the Okararchy were greatly exaggerated. Khadga Prasad Oli made a u-turn to his chair in Itali Water, and besides being the prime minister, is also a prime candidate for the honour of being assailed Nepal’s Clown Prince. He can survive any vote of no confidence in parliament by putting together the most inclusive government in recent Nepal 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 45 ministers, it’s just not large enough.

How will the Prime 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? Will he address the water shortage? For national construction, reconstruction and under-construction work 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 whistle-blowing duties if we did not bring to the attention of higher-up authorities that we are a nation running seriously short of ministerial portfolios. To the point where the government is emailing nationalizing 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 Co-operation 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 Mourning Around: As an An 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 food 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 Milkistry as well as the Ministry for Birds and Bees.

Ministry of Physical Therapy and No Works: This ministry together with the Department of Inertia, Stiff 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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