Two decades after the Maoists launched their war by attacking a police station at Holesi of Rolpa district on the night of 13 February 1996, not much has changed in these rugged terraced hills (pic, above). The police station has been rebuilt, more young men are leaving for work, and the busiest part of Lihing bazaar is the IME office where families come to receive cash from migrant workers in the Gulf. Twenty years after the start of the war and ten years after it ended, the people of Rolpa feel their lives have not improved. Many here in the cradle of the Maoist revolution still support the party’s goals, but are disappointed that it has split and abandoned its spartanian goals.

Most people interviewed by Nepali Times said the armed struggle was ideologically right but behaviourally wrong. Maoist cadres here think theirs is an unfinished revolution even though the party’s main demands of abolition of the monarchy and writing a new constitution were met.

“The conflict made it possible to establish a federal democratic republic, and made Nepali people aware of their rights,” said Ganesh KC, 50, a local health post worker. Throughout the conflict, KC fed and sheltered both the Maoists and the state security forces, like most people in his village.

“When I heard about the ceasefire in 2006, I was happy and thought with peace there would be development,” he said.

Souvik Lee in Rolpa

FEBRUARY 14

On the Day of Love Nepali Times talks to Sayali and Kunal, who were on the Sharanitrawin platform on 25 April and miraculously survived the collapse of the tower in the earthquake.

PAGE 8-9
Aft near 6 months of being blockaded informally, India’s siege of Nepal was formally lifted this week by its proxies. Only the very naive or the extremely ill-informed still believe that the Nepal-India border was being blockaded by a bamboo pole guarded by a few men smoking in a tent.

Why New Delhi did it, and what India stood to gain strategically from throttling a smaller neighbour is a mystery. Students of international relations will be debating this long into the future, and no doubt someone will write yet another tell-all bestseller relying on Indian spooks spilling the beans. For now, we can merely attempt to connect the dots.

Whichever side of the debate you are on, whether or not you believe the blockade was the handiwork of the New Delhi establishment, there is one undeniable fact: the siege caused a humanitarian crisis among Nepal’s 28 million people that will be remembered for many decades to come. The prolonged disaster caused by lack of medicines and the suffering of the people, and for profiting from it by those in power, will linger on for decades to come. THE BLOCKADE

The most important lesson for Nepal from this crisis is to massage Big Brother’s ego and keep him happy.

The TMLP’s Mahanta Thakur admitted the other day that the blockade had to be called off without the main demands of the Madhesi Front being met. But he tried to put a brave face on it by adding that at least the people in the plains are now more aware of their rights and can’t be pushed around anymore. He’s probably right in that Madhesi leaders who lost in the 2013 elections will get more votes in the next election.

In Kathmandu, Prime Minister K.oir held out for five months by playing the nationalism card even though public anger against his government was growing. The Indians must have thought that the blockade would bring Nepal’s government to its knees, to wave the white flag, but underestimated the capacity of ordinary Nepalis to endure adversity and the manner in which the black market kept the country going.

The blockade dragged on for far longer than it should have because the party most responsible for it wanted to save face and take credit for lifting it. New Delhi deftly pretended to twist the tails of Madhesi leaders to lift the blockade, while Madhesi leaders competed among themselves to be more radical.

It was also prolonged because the establishment in Kathmandu was profiteering so much from the smuggling, and could scapegoat India to divert attention from its own failure of governance. Even the Nepal Army tried to take credit for ending the blockade by saying it happened after Chief Rajendra Thapa’s visit to India.

For Nepal, there are clear lessons from this crisis:

- When it comes to the crunch next time don’t expect the international community to rescue us.
- There is no alternative to building self-reliance in energy and diversifying our trade.
- Perhaps most important: It pays to massage Big Brother’s ego and keep him happy.

WARRIORS IN PEACE TIME

20 YEARS WASTED

The editorial, for some reason, is too kind on BRB and it also tries to lend respectability to the 40-point demand which was nothing but an excuse for the Maoists to wage a war in their quest for power (20 years wasted).

WHAT WAS IT ALL FOR?

So a spurious pretext did not get what he demanded and took up arms and went about killing 17,000 people. A cold blooded communal like BRB sees only violence as a means to power. Electoral system for him is hogwash. And there are still those who join this criminal in his new political adventure.

WHAT WAS IT ALL FOR?

- They are as guilty as BRB and Prachanda. I don’t feel sorry for them.
- Good article, but couldn’t we substitute the black market with something more genuine?
- They are so naive. No one gained from the blockade. Everyone lost. Bilateral relations between India and Nepal will be poisoned by this.
- No gain strategically from throttling a smaller neighbour.
- It was also prolonged because the establishment in Kathmandu was profiteering so much...
We are witnessing the death throes of civil society in Nepal. The days of the old wardens of democracy have now come to an end. The numerous groups and individuals who rallied in favour of democracy, freedom, progress and an open society over the past decades are now either too old or have been tainted.

In their heyday, these stalwarts spearheaded movements against oppression and tyranny, took unimaginable risks, and sided with revolutionaries of the time. But over the years those very ‘revolutionaries’ have morphed into the tyrants they once fought against, and with them, civil society is no more ‘civil’.

The political neo-elite are embedded in a web of corruption, deceit, crime and injustice that is far more complex than it has ever been. The connections run deep and no one is untouched — not even civil society. Civil society, almost entirely comprised of the donor-driven NGO sector, has taken sides, sworn political allegiance and become trapped within the confines of the ‘paid activist’ role. It has dug a ditch for itself so deep that the leaders have become compelled to turn to their ‘activism’ for their daily dal bhat and the luxuries of modern day life. As a result, civil society is now more of a hurdle than a contributor to creating an accountable and just society.

Even ‘new’ civil society, if not already enmeshed with the politics of the post-2006 mandate, has turned the country’s sorrows into a profitable enterprise — whether they are selling poor governance, lack of accountability, inclusiveness or corruption.

All groups are in competition with each other for a limited pool of resources, scrambling for a piece of the civil society pie.

What this means is that the idea of coming together to push a common cause, a political or social goal, becomes impossible. With both party allegiance and resource competition to factor in, no civil society leader could possibly work towards a common goal with his or her peers on the same platform. Instead, there is wrangling and one ‘side’ is never seen where the other ‘side’ is.

In the past months we have seen multiple attempts on part of various youth groups and loose alliances to try and bring about change, to create a spark and try to change the status quo. They have rallied on the issues of the protests in the Madhes, the blockade, the corrupt state’s antics, or the human rights violations. Even political groups have been formed to change the way politics and society function. Yet, we have not seen a sustained and united front to champion any one of these causes, and little to no impact.

There is an infuriating silence on the part of the old bastions of rights and democracy. Among them, those who speak now do so on very selective issues. They were silent some years ago and those speaking up recently have now turned silent. But whether in 2006 or today, the issues remain unchanged and there is much work to be done.

It’s high time both sides got off their high horses, pushed their egos aside, and supported the younger generation that must take over the reins. They must prove they can rise above the politicians at the helm who are dictating who speaks and when. But instead of support and encouragement, what we see is that the youth have often been used by civil society towards political and financial ends — when their favoured parties have not been in power, when their political agendas have taken a dip, when they have wanted to pose a threat to the opposition or when they have seen a ‘project’ that could be developed through the hard work of the youngsters on the ground.

Out with the old
Nepal’s civil society is now more of a hurdle than a contributor to creating an accountable and just society.
The blockade that benefitted no one
... but the damage it caused will stay on

In September Madhesi parties left out of the constitution writing process decided to stage sit-ins at Nepal-India border checkpoints two days after New Delhi hinted that there could be obstructions.

In February, Madhesi parties reluctantly called off their border sit-ins three days after India started issuing customs clearance to cargo trucks stranded in Raxaul for the last five months.

There is ample proof that the blockade was not enforced by the Madhesi parties alone, their agitation was used by New Delhi in its bigger strategic goal of reining in Kathmandu. The blockade was followed – not preceded – by the decision by the Madhesi parties to block and reopen the border. Indian police who had earlier allowed protesters to cross into India and hurl stones at Nepali riot police, last week helped burn down the bamboo barricades set up at the Birgunj-Raxaul border bridge.

The Madhesi Front had no option but to call off its border sit-ins after it lost India’s backing. Even so, Pratinidhi Mahendra Raya Yadav put on a brave face. He told me on Wednesday: “Do not assume that we are dead, we will strike back with even more force.”

Now that the blockade has been lifted, it is important to ask who benefited from this five-month siege of a landlocked nation still recovering from a devastating earthquake. The answer: none but smugglers.

I put this to Surendra Lahiri, a Janakpur-based economic professor, who recently travelled across the Terai to study the economic impact of the blockade. He confirmed what I all suspect: “If anyone has benefitted from the blockade, it is undoubtedly smugglers.”

Lahiri says most unemployed youth who were riding bicycles till recently are now on brand new motorcycles purchased with income from black market fuel and Indian currency.

Smuggling became such a part of life, that Foreign Minister Kamal Thapa told a gathering of businessmen in January that if it was not for the smugglers, “the shortage of fuel could have been much worse.”

Nepal’s ruling parties, against whom the blockade was imposed, survived the five months of siege by playing the nationalist card, engaging Madhesi dissidents in incoherent talks, while negotiating directly with New Delhi. But did they not gain anything out of this crisis?

Nepal lost over 200,000 jobs, inflation hit double-digits, post-earthquake reconstruction was delayed and the economy was pushed to such an extent that it may take a decade to recover.

Even India, the real enforcer of this blockade, failed to gain anything. Bhakth Bahadur Thapa, Nepal’s former ambassador to India, says that New Delhi squandered the goodwill it had earned after Prime Minister Modi’s visit last year. “If Kathmandu suffered damage in terms of economy, New Delhi suffered damage in terms of goodwill,” he said.

The Madhesi Front was the pawn in this Great Game of the blockade, and is probably the biggest loser. It consistently claimed to be the force behind the siege, but had to reluctantly relent when New Delhi put pressure to open the border. Manish Suman, General Secretary of Sadbhavana Party and MF, admits rather helplessly: “No one benefitted from the blockade, not even us."

Madhesi parties had calculated that Kathmandu’s rulers would be down on their knees within weeks of the border being blocked. “Little did we know that smugglers would rescue the government,” Suman said.

One thing the Madhesi agitation has done is made ordinary people aware...
except smugglers

angry with Kathmandu, and raised awareness among them about demanding equal rights in the new constitution. But India is unlikely to back them as strongly as it did this time.

India seems to have realised it went too far, and is on damage control mode. India’s External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj held a meeting with Prime Minister Oli on Tuesday in Kathmandu. She was accompanied by India’s National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, widely believed to be Modi’s eyes and ears on Nepal and chief architect of the blockade. Oli is visiting India in the third week of this month.

But Madhesi parties want to keep up the pressure on Kathmandu and benefit from the momentum generated by the blockade despite the public mood in the Tarai being against another blockade or strikes. As Fahri sums it up: “The common people in the Madhes will never want another blockade.”

8848 in town
A new brand of vodka, 8848 Vodka, was recently launched in Nepal. Distilled from soft French winter wheat, the vodka is priced at Rs 1,275 and is available in most supermarkets and liquor stores in Kathmandu.

Safe drive
8848 Vodka, was recently launched in Nepal. Distilled from soft French winter wheat, the vodka is priced at Rs 1,275 and is available in most supermarkets and liquor stores in Kathmandu.

Power phone
Cane recently launched the Marathon M5 lite in Nepal. Equipped with a 4000mAh battery, BMF rear camera and a 5MP front camera, the phone is the latest addition to its big-battery Marathon series. Customers will receive a free silver coin on purchase of M5 lite from 11 to 17 February.

Super saver
Cane recently launched the EON Edge in Nepal. With a price tag of Rs 11,999, it comes with a 1.3 GHz Quad Core processor, 2GB RAM, 13MP rear camera, 5.0 MP front camera and a 2000 mAh battery.

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What’s next in the Madhes?

Unrest will grow again in the plains unless Kathmandu initiates confidence building measures.

Finally this week, the Madhesi Front backed down from its five-month long border-centric protests, and the country breathed a sigh of relief. But the question on everyone’s mind is: how permanent is this?

The main leaders of the Madhesi Front say most of their original 11 demands have been ignored by rulers in Kathmandu, but they are mindful of the effect that the prolonged strikes and blockade have had on the general population. Which is why they will now put pressure on the government through other tactics.

The unspoken aspect of the change this week is, of course, the pressure that was brought to bear on the Madhesi parties from New Delhi. It is hard to fathom why India urged on the border blockade in the beginning, and then got the Tari-based parties to open the border.

There is specialization that Nepal’s Madhesi movement could just be a pawn in the power play between rival factions within the Indian establishment, while others say that the architects of the blockade found out that it wasn’t really working.

Whatever the reason, both India and the Madhesi parties needed a face-saving way out of a protest that looked like it was becoming counterproductive. A senior Madhesi leader confirmed to me this week that of late there was indeed pressure from India to lift the blockade.

There had been hints of a change in Indian policy ever since parliament passed two amendments to the constitution to address the Madhesi demands for proportional representation and altering electoral constituencies based on population. New Delhi said it was a positive step, and there were indications that they were softening their stance.

The Front said the amendments addressed some of their demands, but not others like the ones on the boundaries of the two Tari provinces, as well as citizenship criteria. Madhesi parties were also getting worried that the longer the stalemate dragged on, the more it would benefit radical, criminal, and openly separatist forces in the Tari.

With the danger of the rug being pulled from under them, they were looking for an exit strategy that would not look like capitulation. Which is why the announcement about the change in tactics was made. It is conceivable that the agitation will pick up again in spring when the three-month deadline for provincial border demarcation comes close.

Kathmandu needs to address its trust deficit with the Tari parties — the leaders just don’t believe their assurances. “We are watching closely how they will implement the constitution, our feeling is that they are not serious about the promises they have made,” one leader said.

The long and short of it is that the border blockade will change into more traditional forms of protest: torch rallies, demonstrations and gherais. In this interim period, the Madhesi parties also need to patch up differences between them and create a broader alliance. The differences are mainly personality driven, and lately the disagreements between Upendra Yadav and Rajendra Mahato have boild over.

The present mood in the plains is of blockade fatigue and economic discontentment. What the past five months has done is raise the awareness among the public about their rights, and there is anger against Kathmandu for the excessive use of force to put down demonstrations.

In the next few months, the wise thing for the Ol administration to do is to start confidence building measures with the Madhesi leaders and the public, and be proactive in meeting the rest of their demands. Otherwise there is a real danger that as this bitter winter sets, temperatures will rise again in the Tari and tempers will fray.
POKHARA'S HIDDEN SECRETS

There is much more to Pokhara than just Pokhara

SMRITI BASNET
IN KASKI

Nestled in the verdant hills overlooking the Begnas and Rupa Lake, away from the bustle of Pokhara city, is Rupakot Resort. The tranquility and panoramic view of the Annapurna sets the hotel apart from the other tourist places here.

Executive Director Sudhan Acharya says the fuel crisis led to the fall in numbers - number of visitors is down by 70 per cent. But, the blockade might have just exposed an existing problem that had been lying dormant for some time.

With the exception of Pokhara, the Kaski region has failed to grow as a popular tourist destination despite its vast potential. Home to The Royal Trek - named after Prince Charles for his 1983 hike - the region offers bird watching, cultural walks and just last week, nine more lakes in the region were promoted on the illustrious Ramar list.

“We have potential, but not much effort has been made by the government to make people aware of this place,” says Arjun Parajuli, General Manager of the Begnas Lake Resort and Villas.

Ironically, the official neglect and isolation has protected the pristine beauty of Kaski’s periphery.

Biplab Paudel, proprietor of Saral Hotel in Pokhara, agrees that better infrastructure would help boost tourism here.

“What is the government’s responsibility? To make roads. But look at Phulhari Resort, Rupakot Resort and the road access. Why would others invest in places with no infrastructure?” laments Paudel, Chief District Officer of Kaski, Hari Prasad Parajuli says efforts are being made:

“There is road access to Rupakot. It has just not been asphalted yet.”

In 2014, the towns of Lekehath in Kaski introduced tax incentives to attract hotel investors. “If we had invested the same amount of money in building a hotel in the city, it would have been a 5-star property,” says Parajuli.

Now that the blockade is over, there is hope that visitor numbers will pick up. Shangri-La Resort had signed on to bring its business to the area, but plans came to a halt due to the fuel crisis. The project is slated to commence soon.

Tripathi is hopeful that the region will become more investor friendly in the future. He says with the end of the blockade and improving road conditions, the region can still make up for its losses. “If more hotels are to come up, the future looks bright for the region,” he says.

Tripathi has also been working to improve the conditions of home stays in the region under his firm’s ‘Ek Jila. Ek Upadan’ initiative. It hopes to rehabilitate ten houses this year in Sundari Dada and Puchhrai, on top of the seven from last year, to attract tourists.

Still, the region needs a bigger push to make it more tourist-friendly, and is looking for help from state funds. “For any place to come up as a tourist destination it should be attractive, have amenities and be accessible,” says Paudel. “The government should take responsibility for it and allocate accordingly.”

Paudel knows that the development of Kaski will take time, but he is patient. “It took almost 60 years for us to get this far,” says Paudel. “Pokhara was not built in a day.”
SURVIVING THE FALL

SMRITI BASNET

When Kathmandu’s iconic tower, Dharara, fell during last April’s earthquake, dozens were on the stairwell or in the viewing balcony perished. But a young couple out on a secret date lived to tell the tale. Sanjib Shrestha and Ramila Shrestha were on a Saturday outing and decided to go up to see the city from above. They had just got to the balcony when they felt the 6.2m tall tower shaking, a loud explosion from below and a sense of falling.

"I don’t remember feeling anything while it was happening," recalls Sanjib. "The next thing I remember we were on the ground and people were running to help us. I asked them what had happened. They told me there was an earthquake and Dharara had fallen down. I then lost consciousness."

When Sanjib regained his consciousness, he was on the cement pavement outside Sir Hospital, surrounded by wounded patients. Kneeling from a cut on his forehead and unable to open his eyes, his first thoughts were of Ramila. Inside the National Trauma Center in Sir Hospital, injured but in good condition, Ramila was also looking for Sanjib.

The two had met at a mutual

BETWEEN SYRIA AND NEPAL

Bassel Shreiqi and Sangita Lama find that love is more powerful than war

MICHAEL NISHIMURA

Kathmandu native Sangita Lama fell in love with Syrian Bassel Shreiqi while working at the clothing store H&M in Dubai five years ago. He was an administrative manager and she was a sales associate.

They had been dating only a few months before they decided to get married and move to Nepal.

"I just teased him and said ‘Let’s get married’. So, I was actually the one that proposed to him," Lama recalls. After a week mulling over the decision, Shreiqi replied with a resonating ‘yes’.

Lama was raised in a children’s home in Old Baneshwor because her parents (father is a Thanglai painter and mother a factory worker) did not have the means to look after her. She couldn’t find a job in Nepal, heard about work prospects in Dubai, and decided to take a gamble.

"Sometimes you have to take a risk – only then you can know a better life," she says.

Shreiqi similarly went to Dubai in the hope of a better future after graduating from the Commercial Institute in now embattled Aleppo. The couple married in 2010 in Dubai, with a state officer and two friends as witnesses because they couldn’t afford a wedding ceremony, or to fly relatives in. The initial disapproval of their families did not stop the young couple from being together.

When she told her family she was marrying a Muslim man, Lama said they were not ready to accept it.

“Although I am Muslim and she is Buddhist, we decided that we can form our own religion,” adds Shreiqi.

In 2013, Lama gave birth to their daughter, Naya. But because of the strict citizenship laws in Syria and Nepal, the three-year-old is stateless.

A mother or father in Dubai can apply for a passport through their embassies, but by law a Syrian national cannot marry a foreigner abroad without the permission of the Minister of the Interior himself. I was not able to register my marriage there. So in Syria, I’m still officially single," says Shreiqi who has been in the painstaking and costly process of applying for his daughter’s naturalisation since she was born, but approval has not come yet.

Lama is doing the same for Naya here in Nepal, but Nepali law also makes it difficult for women married to foreigners from getting citizenship for their offspring. According to Article 11.7 in Nepal’s new constitution, naturalisation is approved by the discretion of the state rather than given as an inherent right.

"It’s not so clear in the new constitution, I don’t know how to get a passport for her," says Lama. The couple was incurring fines
friend’s wedding in Ramnagar two years ago and immediately hit it off. They tried to see each other as much as possible since then, but the distance made it tricky. “Her house is 6-9 hours away from where I live. It was difficult to meet back home,” says Sangib.

On the evening of April 2, when Ramila and Sangib’s families were contacted about what had happened, their secret was finally out. “We had no idea about their relationship until the earthquake. But both survived the fall, it seems they are destined to stay together,” says Ramila’s brother-in-law, Rajan Shrestha.

Although the two feel they have been blessed with a new life, they are still recovering from the injuries they sustained during the fall. Ramila is still in crutches and unable to walk for long, she stopped attending school.

“My wish is to recover from this as soon as possible. Only then will I start thinking about what I want to do in life,” says Ramila. Sangib had a fractured left hand, and cannot lift heavy objects so he has lost his job as a waiter.

Despite all this, the two find comfort in each other and still cannot believe the miracle that saved both their lives. “We often talk about that day, and it helps that we have each other,” says Sangib, “earthquake or no earthquake, we will always love each other.”

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A flower-less Valentine’s

Think twice before you buy those ‘freshly picked’ armfuls of tomb at your loved one’s doorstep. Fresh flowers in a house affected by an earthquake are heavy imprints of ugly flowers during the winter season. Menstrum, consider the carnage of those preservatives that have journeyed for far away. And let’s not forget, after a rainstorm, logs, trees uprooted, bowls of flowers wrapped in plastic is going to be buried into the ‘high river swamps’.

It is unwise. The turf from agronomical use for flowers are deadly consistent to wide measures, air, and soil. Last year’s Montrexpilin Floral has outshone a deadline to produce safe, safe, and safe, a chemical widely used in agriculture, due to its deadly effects on the same layer, especially in developing countries. Additionally, the excessive use of water to sustain the industry is running our fresh waters dry.

So instead of spending at a flower shop at any minute gift, grow your own jets they’re special with these directions.

- Spread the love further by donating to support children or assisting earthquake survivors
- Invest in a child’s future and support your community
- Give to those who cannot access the local shops in your neighborhood
- Save your flowers and originality with a hardcover card made from locally-sourced lable paper
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**Shangri-La Hotel**, Enjoy a special Valentine’s evening with music from Ciney Gurung and Tawa Band, performances by various international artists and a lavish candle light dinner. 6.00 pm onwards, 14 February, Shangri-La Hotel, Lagankirt. For tickets: (01)4412999, www.hotelshangrila.com

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**Vesper Cafe**, Enjoy a romantic dinner and special cocktails with your loved one. Book in advance and get 50% off on special drinks. 14 February, The Vesper Cafe and Restaurant, for reservations: 9843600948, online@vespercafe.com

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**Balthali Eco Hill Resort**, A romantic break for two, away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu. Balthali-5, Sauru, (01)4871112, Rs 4999 per couple.

**Mozie by Roadhouse**, A special Valentine’s Day menu along with music from Mozie’s in-house DJ. 14 February, Mozie by Roadhouse, Durbar Marg, (01)4233307.

**Balthali Eco Hill Resort**, A romantic break for two, away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu. Balthali-5, Sauru, (01)4871112, Rs 4999 per couple.

**V’S & DAY at Hyatt** The Hyatt Regency Kathmandu is rolling out a special menu to celebrate the day of love. On 13 February, diners can relish a five-course meal, specially prepared by the Executive Chef. Couples and families can enjoy the same five-course meal, as well as order a-la-carte at the Ritz Restaurant and Bar on 14 February. 13-14 February, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01)4491234

**Himalayan Rush**, Gear up for the fifth edition of the Himalayan Rush triathlon series and experience the thrill of trail running, cycling and fresh water swimming. 26 March, Besisahar, Pokhara, (01)5205779, mahesh@maheshkailas.co.np

**Miniature Composite**, Learn how to plan, shoot and edit miniature composites with Satya Media Arts Collective. 27 February to 14 March. 11am to 3pm, Satya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel. Course Fee: Rs 1700

**The Vagina Monologues 2016**, Hear out a collection of experiences and female voices on sex, relationships and violence against women. 2 to 14 February. 5 to 7pm. Tickets: Rs 200 (valid student ID), Rs 300 and Rs 500 (phone booking preferred), Monothea Theatre, Anamnagar

**Divas Gurung Live**, Acclaimed song writer and guitarist Divas Gurung is back in K-town. 04 February, 6pm onwards, Mohale, Rs 300

**Joss Stone in Nepal**, English soul star Joss Stone performs for the first time in Kathmandu. Tickets available at House of Music, Malish, Sound Factory and Jazz Upstairs. 18 February, 6.30 pm onwards, Hyatt Regency Ball Room, Kathmandu, Rs 4990 (including dinner), for bookings: (01)2290758, 864809809 or 9810755123.

**Famous Farm**, Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze walking through the sunlit yard. Nawadad, (01)4780426, info@famous-heritage.com

**Haatihan Resort**, Climb up Chandragiri in the morning for a royal view of Kathmandu Valley and jog down to the hotel for a relaxed evening. Pharping, Kathmandu, (01)4971327-56

**Shivapuri Village**, Eco-tourism close to the Shivapuri National Park replete with a charm of bygone days. Patanwara, Shivapuri National Park, (01)4172725, 9865108141, info@shivapuri.com

**Grand Norling Hotel**, Countryside weekend package offering suitar room, swimming, gym, massage, and discounts on other facilities. Gokarna, (01)4970193

**Temple Tree Resort and Spa**, A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour, and sauna, it’ll be hard to leave once you go in. Govindghat, Lakeside, (01)4465019

**Shangri La Hotel**, Celebrate Valentine’s Day with a romantic candle lit dinner for two at the Sunrise Restaurant, 14 February, 6.30 pm onwards, for reservations: (01)4412999, www.hotelshangrila.com

**Kripa Joshi**

**A musical Valentine** Walk down memory lane with renowned seventies rock and roll Nepali band, Prism. Musician Dev Rana, Sushama Limbo, Dhumak Thapa and just Shimmer will be performing 70’s love songs, Nepali pop songs, R&B, and rock and roll numbers. 14 February, 6.30 pm onwards, for reservations: (01)42348980, Room 2004 + per person

**Miss Moti-Vation**

**Kripa Joshi**

**Miss Moti-Vation** She currently lives near London. Miss Moti-vation is a weekly series.

**Krisha Chhahari**

**Event 8**

**REMO** (Research for Monitoring System) REWO’s Research and Monitoring System that can capture, analyze and visualize data together. Thence, we are thinking of an effective, REMO opens, a new front in how to manage landscapes. A company, turn data into actionable intelligence. REMO can be used in a fly and read fed on the go. Data collected get filters, seemingly aggregated on the system allowing with最少 access that dynamically and meaningful importance in real time, strong console algorithms, data is instantly converted to intelligence.

**Grand Norling Hotel**, Countryside weekend package offering suitar room, swimming, gym, massage, and discounts on other facilities. Gokarna, (01)4970193

**Balthali Eco Hill Resort**, A romantic break for two, away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu. Balthali-5, Sauru, (01)4871112, Rs 4999 per couple.

**Mezo by Roadhouse**, A special Valentine’s Day menu along with music from Mozie’s in-house DJ. 14 February, Mozie by Roadhouse, Durbar Marg, (01)4233307.

**Balthali Eco Hill Resort**, A romantic break for two, away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu. Balthali-5, Sauru, (01)4871112, Rs 4999 per couple.

**V’S & DAY at Hyatt** The Hyatt Regency Kathmandu is rolling out a special menu to celebrate the day of love. On 13 February, diners can relish a five-course meal, specially prepared by the Executive Chef. Couples and families can enjoy the same five-course meal, as well as order a-la-carte at the Ritz Restaurant and Bar on 14 February. 13-14 February, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha, (01)4491234

**Himalayan Rush**, Gear up for the fifth edition of the Himalayan Rush triathlon series and experience the thrill of trail running, cycling and fresh water swimming. 26 March, Besisahar, Pokhara, (01)5205779, mahesh@maheshkailas.co.np

**Miniature Composite**, Learn how to plan, shoot and edit miniature composites with Satya Media Arts Collective. 27 February to 14 March. 11am to 3pm, Satya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel. Course Fee: Rs 1700

**The Vagina Monologues 2016**, Hear out a collection of experiences and female voices on sex, relationships and violence against women. 2 to 14 February. 5 to 7pm. Tickets: Rs 200 (valid student ID), Rs 300 and Rs 500 (phone booking preferred), Monothea Theatre, Anamnagar

**Divas Gurung Live**, Acclaimed song writer and guitarist Divas Gurung is back in K-town. 04 February, 6pm onwards, Mohale, Rs 300

**Joss Stone in Nepal**, English soul star Joss Stone performs for the first time in Kathmandu. Tickets available at House of Music, Malish, Sound Factory and Jazz Upstairs. 18 February, 6.30 pm onwards, Hyatt Regency Ball Room, Kathmandu, Rs 4990 (including dinner), for bookings: (01)2290758, 864809809 or 9810755123.

**Famous Farm**, Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze walking through the sunlit yard. Nawadad, (01)4780426, info@famous-heritage.com

**Haatihan Resort**, Climb up Chandragiri in the morning for a royal view of Kathmandu Valley and jog down to the hotel for a relaxed evening. Pharping, Kathmandu, (01)4971327-56

**Shivapuri Village**, Eco-tourism close to the Shivapuri National Park replete with a charm of bygone days. Patanwara, Shivapuri National Park, (01)4172725, 9865108141, info@shivapuri.com

**Grand Norling Hotel**, Countryside weekend package offering suitar room, swimming, gym, massage, and discounts on other facilities. Gokarna, (01)4970193

**Temple Tree Resort and Spa**, A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour, and sauna, it’ll be hard to leave once you go in. Govindghat, Lakeside, (01)4465019

**Shangri La Hotel**, Celebrate Valentine’s Day with a romantic candle lit dinner for two at the Sunrise Restaurant, 14 February, 6.30 pm onwards, for reservations: (01)4412999, www.hotelshangrila.com

**Kripa Joshi**

**A musical Valentine** Walk down memory lane with renowned seventies rock and roll Nepali band, Prism. Musician Dev Rana, Sushama Limbo, Dhumak Thapa and just Shimmer will be performing 70’s love songs, Nepali pop songs, R&B, and rock and roll numbers. 14 February, 6.30 pm onwards, for reservations: (01)42348980, Room 2004 + per person

**Miss Moti-Vation** She currently lives near London. Miss Moti-vation is a weekly series.

**Krisha Chhahari**

**Event 8**

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The Mithila avatar

In ‘Kalpavriksha’, S C Suman implores us to imagine a more harmonious future for Nepal

create variegated constellations, there is no limit to Suman’s imaginative spirit.

Unquestionably, the famed wish-granting tree is the star of the gallery. Works like ‘Kalpavriksha IV’ display the complementary triad of roots, trunk and branches that mirror the three realms of the underworld, human consciousness and the heavens. The people communing on the ground are in harmony both with the fish beneath them and the peacocks perched above – evoking a sense of ecological symbiosis. Through his depiction of indigenous communities in Southern Nepal, Suman pays reverence to a way of life that doesn’t simply value an elementary respect for nature, but seeks pure cohabitation with it.

The second floor offers more explicitly religious themes, with works of Shakti slaying a demon, and Krishna riding a serpent naag and playing his seductive flute. Still, these are melded with depictions of mortal life, as pieces like ‘Village Story’ highlight the human experience of giving and receiving nature’s bounty. In his other work, Suman bemoans the exploitation of nature in order to accommodate the trappings of the modern world, and instead encourages us to opt for a relationship of unconditional love.

The final floor parallels the others in its brilliance of colour, striking contrasts and stunning symmetries, but the exhibit reaches its apogee with the poignant series entitled ‘Rebuilding Nepal’. The first account shows buildings and pagodas crumbling to the ground during the earthquake. In the subsequent work, people of all creeds are helping however they can, as arms are stretched out of windows, looking for a hand to grasp onto, and doves circle the scene from above. The last of the series depicts survivors amidst the rubble and people coming together with wheelbarrows and hammers to help in the reconstruction of the building, brick by brick.

The recent turmoil in Nepal is a focal point for Suman. “From 2013 until now, we’ve faced many problems. The constitution has come, but solutions have not,” he explains. “Rebuilding Nepal does not seem very possible these days. But all over the nation we’re trying to go forward the best we can.” ‘Kalpavriksha’ urges viewers to get lost in the beauty of its meticulous simplicity, that when appreciated in its full form, reveals itself to be exceedingly complex. Suman’s work demands the questioning of our existential journey, using the wish-granting tree as a metaphor for life, in exploring our roots and extending upwards to the branches of our possibility.

Suman says: “The wish-granting tree represents the wishes of all Nepali people. My wish is that my exhibition will help our country in a positive way.”

Mithila Cosmos IV – Kalpavriksha

By S C Suman

Until 2 March

Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal

Sunday to Friday: 11am to 5pm; Saturday: Noon to 5pm

The mysteries of the universe may never be understood scientifically, but that doesn’t stop artist S C Suman from exploring the brilliance of our boundless cosmos through his Mithila-styled works. The fourth installment of his art series ‘Kalpavriksha’ is an ode to discovery through community-inspired storytelling.

As a follow-up to his previous exhibits at Siddhartha Art Gallery, ‘Kalpavriksha’ pays homage to the iconic wish-fulfilling tree revered in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain mythology. When asked why Suman has been invited time and again, Siddhartha’s curator Sangeeta Thapa said: “It’s his eye for detail, the subtlety of his colours and the beauty of his composition. He’s outstanding himself this time.”

Suman works in the tradition of Mithila or Madhubani painting, born out of the rich Mithila speaking regions of Nepal and India. The art form’s signature style is exemplified by the spellbinding intricacies of geometric patterns, leaving little space untouched. The paintings are organic, using twigs, leaves and fingers with natural dyes.

Originally, Mithila painting was solely done by women who bestowed their skills to their daughters. Nowadays it is a popularised form, celebrated for its synthesis of religious motif, folk tradition and human story.

In each of the 32 works on display Suman’s scrupulous attention to detail is evident. The first floor of the exhibit provides an introduction to the breadth of the artist’s deft hand at various mediums including acrylic, natural pigment and mixed media. With mandalas nested among the leaves of tree branches, tessellated fish swimming in celestial ponds and the use of short brush strokes to

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Doomed as a top health food across the globe, honey is a wonderful creation. The health properties of this thick golden liquid have been valued since ages. For anyone who wishes to lead a healthy lifestyle, honey must become an important component of their diet.

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Stay Fit Feel Young.

Goodness of Honey

Doomed as a top health food across the globe, honey is a wondrous creation. The health properties of this thick golden liquid have been valued since ages. For anyone who wishes to lead a healthy lifestyle, honey must become an important component of their diet. The most convenient way to do that is starting your day with a warm glass of water and mixing honey in it. As poet laureate, honey is known to increase metabolism and if consumed with lemon in the morning before breakfast it helps to manage weight. Honey is also known to be a natural remedy for colds and flu, and aids tissue healing. It is also known for its anti-inflammatory and soothing. If you’re feeling stressed, or you’re feeling a bit tense, honey with warm milk and have it before sleeping. It is known to make you feel relaxed and rested, and get you a good night’s sleep. It’s just not just the adults who benefit from these golden drops. If your kids seem to feel restless throughout the day, or lack energy, then give them treats with honey.
CRIMSON PEAK

At the beginning of this millennium, three extraordinarily different, very talented film makers from Mexico made quite an impact in Hollywood. Alejandro Gonzalez Inárritu blew everyone away with his visceral, brilliant, frankly

hard to watch, Amores Perros, featuring dogfighting among other crazy things in 2000, followed by Alejandro Gonzalez Inárritu’s raw, tender coming of age 3 Tu Mamee Tambin in 2001, and Guillermo del Toro’s sublime, excellent horror flick, The Devil’s Backbone, the same year.

Today, these three directors are some of the biggest players in the mainstream film industry, with Inárritu winning an Oscar for Birdman last year and up again this year with a nomination for the Leonardo Dicaprio vehicle The Revenant. Cuaron made an incredible impact with Gravity, for which he won the Best Director Oscar in 2013. But my favourite of the three is del Toro, whose critical best, in my humble opinion, has been Pan’s Labyrinth (2006) but who continues to make over-the-top films in the horror, fantasy, and sci-fi genres with a verve and glee that makes each film a hit-full of fun. A case in point being Hellboy (2004), and the most recent extravaganza Pacific Rim (2013) – which was patchy but jaw-droppingly riveting.

Crimson Peak, a gothic horror romance, is del Toro’s latest endeavour. While it is entirely predictable, it is absolutely worth watching, mainly for the unbelievable sets, costumes, and the performances of Mia Wasikowska as the naive but plucky Edith Cushing, supported by the wonderful Tom Hiddleston and Jessica Chastain as two scheming but charming English aristocrats, Sir Thomas and Lady Lucille Sharpe.

Set in the 19th Century, Crimson Peak follows all of the tropes of the classic gothic horror film – a little bit too much by the book unfortunately to be truly interesting – in a script co-written by del Toro. Fortunately, the machinations by the Sharps are so deliciously devious; Edith is clever enough not to elicit disgust on the part of the viewer (a sentiment all too frequent in horror movies) and Hiddleston’s charm, as the troubled handsome Sir Thomas, is such that one is compelled to keep watching.

By the time we shift locations from America (Edith is the daughter of a wealthy self-made businessman there) to the remote Allensdale Hall in England, the setting of quite the scene of horrors, the atmosphere is thick with foreboding. There are secrets in every corner, and although we can guess most of them, some will still shock even the most sangi of viewers.

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande
nepalitimes.com

STATE HONOURS: Prime Minister KP Oli Sharma UI drops the national flag over the body of former Prime Minister Sushil Koirala at the Dasharath Stadium on Tuesday.

FINAL GOODBYE: President Bidhya Bhandari pays her respect to former Prime Minister Sushil Koirala who passed away on Monday.

LAST RESPECT: Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj pays final respect to former Prime Minister and Nepal Congress President Sushil Koirala at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

NEW YEAR: People from the Tamang community celebrate Tsum Lhosar on Tuesday. The Sherpa and Tibetan communities marked Gyalo Losar on the same day.

QUACK DOCS: Nepal Police reveal the twelve doctors arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation for possessing fake academic credentials in Maharajgunj on Saturday.
A golden girl
Bishal Pandey in Kathmandu, 9 February

Sixteen-year-old Nima Gharti Magar defeated Sweden’s Julia Andersson in women’s 50m freestyle heats to become the first – and so far only – gold medalist for Nepal in the 12th South Asian Games (SAGs).

After the win, Nima commented, “Girls are not weaker than boys.”

Nima’s father, Mansur Gharti Magar, was queuing up for petrol in Lalitpur when a friend asked him up to break the good news. He rushed home to find that the neighbors had already gathered to celebrate Nima’s success. “My daughter was different from other girls,” said Mansur. “She always wanted to do something new, and I am very proud of her.”

Currently a tenth-grader at Nepal Trust School of Siddharth, Nima started practicing焊接 four years ago. She missed the recent SLC test because she was busy preparing for the SAG, but she is hopeful she will get to sit in the main exams.

Nima’s family is originally from Rolpa and she lives with her mother Churung Magar and brother Bashu Man Pan. They lived in Mansur’s house in Kathmandu, Rolpa during the war. But now, Mansur does not need to boast about his family’s contribution the local Pan couple; his daughter has earned a name for him, too.

EXPERIENCE LOVE THIS VALENTINE’S!

Let us be the medium for exploring love with your special one this Valentine’s. Enjoy an unforgettable setting at Ros Restaurant & Bar. Capture the romance and experience the flavors of love with our exclusive five-course meal.

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<td>Valentine’s Eve Dinner</td>
<td>14th Feb 2016</td>
<td>6:30pm onwards</td>
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<td>Valentine’s Day Lunch</td>
<td>14th Feb 2016</td>
<td>11:00 am – 8pm</td>
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*Room activities are available for children on 14 Feb.
*Free flow of Coca-Cola products

Happy Valentine’s Day

Thursday, 11 February
Hyatt Regency Kathmandu
NPR 4,999 (inclusive dinner)
Doors open at 6 pm (Closing until 8:20 pm)

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What the people think about

Two decades on, there is mostly disappointment in the cradle of the Maoist revolution

SEULKI LEE
IN ROLPA

G
de a student Taman
Khadka of Gauri Shankar
School in Thulo
Nuni village was not even born
when the Maoist war started near
here in February 1996. He
only knows the date 13
February 1996 from memorising
it for his school’s general
knowledge quiz.

“My parents sometimes talk
about the battles, but I can’t
follow their conversation,”
Khadka, now 16, tells us. His
classmate, Bhasani Gharti Magar,
pips in: “I don’t want to know
about the war, I am afraid of
dying.

Both are now
preparing for their
SLC exams, which
were delayed due to
the earthquake. The
students don’t seem to
be very curious about
the conflict, and know
about the Maoists from
their history books only
as a political party, and not their
violent past.

Rolpa was the cradle
of the Maoist revolution in the
mid-1990s, and became their
base for the next decade
where they experimented with
setting up communes, farming
and providing primary
education in some schools.

The barren hills have long
been removed from the district
capital of Libang, and the
barbaric violence with activity,
especially around the IMS office
where families come to receive
cash from migrant workers in
the Gulf. Remittances have
now replaced agriculture as the
mainstay of the economy here.

Shiva Prasad KC was
a student of Maoist leader
Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who
introduced him to the books of
Nepali communist founder
Mohan Birendra Singh
in school in Libang. He was
arrested and tortured by the
police several times.

They abolished the
monarchy, but they failed to deliver
development,” Shiva Prasad said.

“The victims of Maoist
violence, however, say that the
use of violence was wrong and
counter-productive. Gausmati
Gharti Magar’s husband was a
construction worker who was
shot and killed a few months after
the start of the conflict in August
1996. Her daughter Sunita was
also injured in the incident and
didn’t have enough to complete her
education.

“They killed a lot of people,
but didn’t change anything in Rolpa,” Magar said in her rented room in Libang.

Some NC supporters who
were targeted by the Maoists
formed a resistance movement,
and Srikumar Roka Magar was
a member. Her father was killed
by the Maoists when she was 15,
and said: “The Maoist slogans for
equality were good, but killing
people was wrong. Their words
and action didn’t match.”

Peace Building

The Maoist raid
on Holi in 13
February 1996
marked the
beginning of the
decade-long war

It was a cold dark night
in the forest on 13 February
1996, at 35 hand-picked
guerrillas gathered their gear to
climb down the hill and raid the
police station at Holi in Rolpa
district — launching the Maoist
insurgency that would last ten
years and result in the death of
17,000 Nepalis.

In the attacking Maoist unit
were four women, among
them Gaumati Gharti Magar, now
Speaker of Parliament, and
Jayapuri Chhetri, former minister.
Also in the group was Dipendra
Pun (nic, above), who was 25 at
the time.

“It was the first attack of
our armed revolution, the
party entrusted us with the
responsibility and we were highly
disciplined,” Pan recounted, “but
we were so nervous we initially
lost our way in the forest.”

Twenty years later, Pun is
a central committee member
of the CPN-M and remembers
the idealism of young guerrillas
like him who were proud to be
selected for the mission. They had
just one rifle, 15 home-made guns
and some explosives.

The attackers had camped in
the forest of Galdikhand for three
days before D-Day. They had been
trained and selected on the basis
of physical fitness and courage
by Ram Babusha Thapa (below),
who was then Maoist chief of
western Nepal and went on to
become Defence Minister in the
first elected Maoist government
in 2008.

Dipendra Pun and the 34
attackers encircled the police
station just before midnight,
and offered themselves of
Prachanda’s instruction not to
kill any police, just capture their
‘victims’

The Maoists first seized all
the radios and then locked up
the police station. There was firefight,
and the police soon ran out of
bullets for their 300 rifles. But
contrary to reports at the time, no
one was killed, and they could
not capture any of the rifles.

By 4AM they had retreated
back to their forest camp at
Galdikhand, and from there to their
bases in Rolpa, Dang, and Bardia.
That night the Maoists made
simultaneous raids on police
stations in Gorkha, Kavre, Rukum
and Sindhuli. Holli had been
chosen because of its strategic
location connecting Dang to the
Maoist base area of Rolpa.

“At that time we were not very
sure we would win the war, and
we didn’t know how long would
last, but we wanted to win,” Pun
told us in an interview this week.

School teacher Dipha
Babusha Khadka, 66, has nothing
but horrifying memories of that
first attack. His house is just 100m
away from the old Holi police
post, and remembers thinking
neighbours were shooting to scare
away wild animals.

When the gunfire stopped
after 20 minutes, he went out
to see what was happening and
saw the police station on fire.

Hiding inside his house, he heard
the guerrilla shouting victory
slogans: “Long live the Maoist
revolution.”

Throughout the next 10
years of conflict, Khadka and his
neighbours fed Maoist guerrillas
and gave them shelter. “Today,
there is peace but we are upset
and disappointed about the
Maoists,” Khadka said.
the ‘People’s War’

Manish activist Shiva Prasad KC of Numa village in Rolpa was 18 when he joined the Maoist party one month before the Holeri attack. He remembers being giddy and happy when he heard about the attack over the radio. But KC withdrew his party membership in 2008 after feeling let down by the leadership.

Karna Bahadur Magar of the RPF was the elected VDC chairman of Galighat in Rolpa in 1999. He had been working to develop his village for three years when the conflict started, and believes the revolution set the country back.

“They didn’t allow us to go to office; they stopped all development activities and established their own government,” recalls Magar, who won the 1994 local election in Libang.

Magar now heads a community-based organisation and left politics for good, but says he is still working to lift the living standards of the people of Rolpa.

Tulsik BK was just 13 and had got married when the Holeri attack happened. But it marked the beginning of a decade-long conflict that claimed the life of his husband. He had just come back from working in India when police shot him dead for shading the hand of a local Maoist.

BK feels abandoned, and feels the sacrifice of people like his wife have been in vain. He says ruefully, “I don’t believe anyone. All the parties are selfish and working for their own sake.”

The Holeri police station has now been rebuilt, and inspector Ramesh Pant, 50, says the Maoists had legitimate demands, and they could have achieved them peacefully. “There was no need to kill so many people,” said Pant, “the real reason for the revolution was the lack of education and jobs.”

Soukad Lee

LIFE IN LIBANG: Six out of 10 students of Gauri Shankar Secondary School of Thora Numa village in Rolpa knew about the Massacres from their history books only as a political party, and not the violent past.

Shiva Prasad KC was a student of Maoist leader Khem Bahadur Mahara. He was arrested and tortured by the police several times during the war.

Geumblal Gill Magar’s husband was killed by the Maoists few months after the start of the conflict. Her daughter also sustained injuries in the incident and couldn’t complete her education.

Turning 20

Abhishek Mishra is 20, and was born on 11 February 1996, two days before the Maoists launched their war in Rolpa. Although he grew up in Kathmandu, Mishra (pic) clearly witnessed the violence first hand during a trip to the Tara. He was eight at the time, and on a bus to Mahisthan that came to a screeching halt on the highway. They found a landmine, and the bus in front of them turned into a fireball.

“I knew the Maoists did bad things but seeing violence first hand was different,” Mishra recalls, “After that I was suspicious of everyone.”

Ten years since the end of the conflict, Mishra and his friends still talk about the war and remember it as a dark time in Nepal’s history. Mishra sympathises with the need for social justice, but strongly opposes the use of violence by the rebels.

Now that the party that championed the people’s cause has fallen into factions, led by discredited former revolutionaries, Mishra asks: “All those dead and for what?” A first-year student of Media Studies at Kathmandu University, Mishra wants to become a journalist and report on foreign affairs and diplomacy.

Management student Binod Dang (pic top) was born a month after the war began in Rolpa’s farms. He remembers a different Rolpa while growing up: barbed wire, security checks, and curfews at night.

His family worried about playing with strange objects and staying out too late. “Back then, the atmosphere was different. No one came out of the house early in the morning and no one stayed out once it was dark,” recalls Dang, who wore his student ID all the time so he wouldn’t be mistaken for a guerrilla.

Dang’s mother had to walk all the way to Sualkuchi to buy bat and rice after the Maoists bloomed. His father, a teacher, was abducted by the Maoists on suspicions of being a spy, and later freed.

One day, when Dang was in Grade 1 and walking home from school, some of his classmates came across a metal object wrapped in white cloth. Dang suspected it might be a booby trap bomb, and pulled his friend away. It went off a minute later. Sunita Shrestha
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