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buzz

PAUL JEFFREY

A year of living dangerously

As the first anniversary of the 25 April earthquake approaches, Dil Bahadur Maharjan remembers the day with dread. How a neighbour's multi-storey house fell on top of his, completely destroying it. He also can't believe how quickly the past year has gone by – a year of hardships for his family of five crammed into a small room in the premises of a local school without water or electricity.

Maharjan is a security guard, and most of his meagre income goes to buying food and paying school fees for his two sons. One would expect someone in Maharjan's position to be full of bitterness and anger. But he counts his blessings, and says at least no one in his family was harmed.

He is disappointed that the government hasn't done more to expedite the Rs 200,000 rebuilding grant, but then he didn't expect much from the state. Prime Minister K P Oli came to Bungamati in January to inaugurate the government's reconstruction drive, but not much has happened since. So, like the estimated 2.5 million earthquake survivors across Central Nepal, he is making do the best he can. Maharjan's wife has found a job in elderly care, and that has supplemented the family income.

The family had invested all their savings into the new home three years ago, and Maharjan proudly shows a picture of it. None of his family members were home when it was buried under the neighbour's house.

"It pierced through our home like a bull's horn, leaving us with nothing. Everything was gone," Maharjan recalled, saying he wished the government would hurry up with the building grant. "With the 200,000 I could at least rebuild one floor."



REBUILDING OURSELVES

Smriti Basnet

More stories page 7-9

BRICK BY BRICK

How Sanogaun's women are rebuilding better quake-resistant homes using a new technique

PAGE 7



Building back healthier

BY SAHINA SHRESTHA

Non-governments work with government to overhaul medical services in quake-hit districts

PAGE 8-9

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

STATE OF IMPUNITY

Letting war criminals go free erodes the rule of law, sends the message that violence is the answer and no one has to pay for crimes

The conflict in Nepal lasted ten years, and it has now been over for just as long. This week marks a decade since the climax of the pro-democracy movement that lead to the ceasefire. What the Maoists failed to achieve with bloodshed was attained in 19 days of largely peaceful street protests ten years ago this week. At midnight on 24 April 2006, after much vacillation, King Gyanendra restored Parliament. It represented a moral victory for peaceful political struggle, proving it to be more effective than using violence as a political weapon.

The last ten years of the peace process had its high points: no one could have predicted that Nepal today would have women in the posts of President, Parliament Speaker and Chief Justice. Or that we would have a former Maoist guerrilla commander serving as Vice-President. Rebel combatants were demobilised, some 1,600 guerrillas joined the national army and some will soon serve as UN peacekeepers. Despite official apathy, threats and intimidation, a few of Nepal's human rights activists have doggedly pursued truth and justice on behalf of victims and relatives.

However, struggling for democracy seemed easier than nurturing it. The end of the war did not signal an end to violence. For Nepalis yearning for genuine peace and justice, the euphoria of 2006 has long since evaporated. As Seulki Lee points out in her review on page 14-15, in terms of transitional justice the peace process has been an abject failure. War crimes and murders perpetrated during the war have been wholly unaddressed.

One such transgression was committed by Bal Krishna Dhungel, who killed Ujjain Shrestha in Okhaldhunga in 1998 over a family dispute. He was convicted by the Supreme Court and served time in prison before being freed by a Maoist-led government in 2010. Agni Sapkota, the accused



JAN MOLLER HANSEN

in the murder of Arjun Lama in 2005, is now Minister of Forest and Soil Conservation, and faced no consequences as a result of his alleged crime.

There are many other equally notorious cases, like that of Dekendra Thapa, the Dailekh radio journalist who was disappeared, tortured and buried alive by the Maoists in 2005. Or the case of Maina Sunar, the 14-year-old who was raped and murdered by soldiers from the Panchkhal Base in 2004. Dozens were tortured and executed at the infamous Bhairabnath Battalion in the heart of Kathmandu.

Perhaps the most egregious case was the murder by the Maoists of teenage student, Krishna Adhikari in Chitwan in 2004. The boy's parents, Nanda Prasad and Ganga Maya, maintained that the murder was over a land dispute, and pursued justice using the limited avenue open to them: through a prolonged hunger strike until Nanda Prasad

died in 2014. Ganga Maya is in critical condition this week in hospital after continuing her fast.

The government has benefited from the public's reluctance to revisit the violence inflicted during the conflict. The international community, which was once so vociferous on transitional justice, has suddenly gone quiet. The UN is now mostly busy ostensibly fulfilling its mandate by holding seminars like a recent one on 'unofficial truth-telling' — a thinly-veiled euphemism clearly intended to let the government off the hook.

Nepal's conflict ended without a victor or vanquished. The former enemies are now the state. Neither they, nor the police, nor Nepal Army generals or former guerrilla commanders, want to rake up wartime atrocities. They have colluded to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as a Commission on Enforced Disappearances, both of which can offer amnesty to those found guilty.

Most human rights activists have been co-opted or silenced. The Prime Minister last week summoned members of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and bluntly told them to toe his line.

This current state of impunity will further erode the rule of law, and send the message that violence is the solution and there is no price to pay for wartime crimes. Just because the people do not expect justice to be served by the state does not mean that they do not hope fervently for it.

To uphold the rule of law, the NHRC and the two commissions must try iconic cases that epitomise the cruelty inflicted during the war, like the ones involving Maina Sunar, Ujjain Shrestha, Arjun Lama or Krishna Adhikari where there is enough evidence and perpetrators are known. Only then will the state be able to send the message that impunity will no longer be condoned.

Times

THIS WEEK

GOPEN RAI

Most reached on Facebook

A rising Nepal by Smriti Basnet

Heritage sites in Kathmandu Valley destroyed in the earthquake are being rebuilt faster than homes. (10,961)

Most shared on Facebook

A rising Nepal by Smriti Basnet

(95 shares)

Most visited online page

Pokhara airport airborne by Rabindra Adhikari (1,109 views)

Most popular on Twitter

A rising Nepal by Smriti Basnet

(87 retweets, 100 likes)

Most commented

Coping and hoping, Editorial

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

COPING AND HOPING

Despite the disappointing track record of Nepali leaders in office, we now have a female President, a female Speaker and a female Chief Justice ('Coping and hoping', Editorial, #803). The next step would be to elect a female Prime Minister. Women are better leaders and will be the ones to bring peace and prosperity to this country.

Anita Sharma

■

I'd rather have equal rights for women in every sense of that word, especially the right to confer/transfer their citizenship to their children independently of their spouse, than have a few token appointees.

Namah

■

The Rana rulers were far more accountable to the people during the earthquake of 1933 than the elected government of new Nepal.

KK Sharma

DOUBLE VICTIMS

There are several stories published in the Nepali Times which will give one an idea of how these rapacious Maoists created ruthless mayhem in this otherwise

peaceful country ('Victims of war and earthquake', Seulki Lee, #803). And what did we get for all that - few filthy rich Maoists "leaders" and a country that lost two decades of progress with all its able youth forced to emigrate.

Read

■

Don't forget that the Maoists imposed a completely unnecessary violence on innocent Nepalis, everybody else was reacting to that. Somehow twisting that truth to serve selfish agenda now, even by those playing as journalists, doesn't change the truth.

Chive

RESTORING RESORTS IN CHITWAN

It seems there were never decisive findings with regards to whether lodges inside Chitwan National Park helped or hindered conservation ('Restoring resorts', Smriti Basnet, #802). But recently talking to agents, press representatives and tourists alike, what has become clear is that the closure of Tiger Tops and the other quality lodges inside the Park, has not only damaged the image of wildlife tourism in Chitwan, but has also hurt the overall image of Nepal as a tourist destination. Following the earthquake

and the blockade, Nepal's tourism is in trouble and needs all the support it can get. It is not a matter of 'We want high-end tourists', or 'We should concentrate on the mass market'. No, the reality is we need all tourists. Nepal requires the employment they provide and the income they bring.

We should not forget the old saying 'The Client is always Right' and Nepal should indeed offer what the client wants. We used to be good at that and in these very difficult times, we cannot afford to do anything less.

Robin Marston

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #804

Q. Which do you think is more important?

Total votes: 103

Rebuilding homes: 91%

Restoring heritage sites: 9%

Weekly Internet Poll #805

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Are you open to using the electric crematorium?

Times

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After the promulgation of the new Constitution in the Nepali year 2072 that just ended, the country made history with the first female President, first Speaker of Parliament. On Wednesday, the first day of 2073, we also got the first female Chief Justice.



LEGALESE
Bineta Dahal

However, President Bidya Bhandari's selection was based on her proximity to the ruling UML party, and her being the widow of the late Madan Bhandari. The choice of Onsari Gharti Magar as Speaker had a lot to do with her being a former guerrilla married to former CPN(M) Secretary, Barshaman Pun.

In contrast, Chief Justice Sushila Karki was recommended by the Constitutional Council this week purely on merit and on the basis of seniority – it had nothing to do with political or personal favours. This is a recognition of her own struggle to overcome obstacles in a profession dominated by men. She served as a Supreme Court justice for the past eight years where she made some bold and independent decisions, even though the verdicts sometimes went against some political figures she was close to.

It is another irony that Karki's

MADAM CHIEF JUSTICE

Unlike the President and the Speaker of Parliament, Chief Justice Sushila Karki is not a political appointee

recommendation has yet to be ratified by parliament because of the lack of consensus among political parties for a house hearing. Which is why she still has the prefix 'acting' in front of her Chief Justice title. This is the first time in history that a Chief Justice is acting, and is a damning indictment of the political paralysis in government to formally approve the country's first female Chief Justice.

Karki is known for her diligence, integrity, a frugal lifestyle and a proven track

record of zero tolerance for corruption. She lives in a rented room in her sister's congested house in Dhapasi. She was born in Biratnagar, and her family was close to the Koirala clan. She used to be a member of the student union affiliated to the Nepali Congress during the Panchayat years. Her husband also used to be active in the NC during the 1970s when the party was underground and was involved in the daring hijacking of a Royal Nepal Airlines flight in 1972.

Despite her party affiliation, Karki was known to be fair and independent in her judgements. She came into the limelight for the first time after her verdict against Minister Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta who served a jail sentence on corruption charges. She also revived the cases against Khum Bahadur Khadka and Govinda Raj Joshi, both of the NC.

Some have questioned Karki's grasp of constitutional issues. Her predecessor, Kalyan Shrestha, who stepped down this week was embroiled in controversy over his

decision as head of the Judicial Council to nominate 11 justices to Supreme Court. Karki was a member of the Council that took that decision.

Due to the provision of a high court in the new constitution the Appellate Court will soon be dissolved. The laws related to the high court are yet to be formed, and may take a few more months. As Chief Justice, Karki will have to twist some tails and she is going to face the pressure from inside the court and political parties. People close to her say that she will never base her decisions on pressure, but rely on her legal instincts and the strict merit of the case.

Former Chief Justice Ram Prasad Shrestha who recommended Karki as justice, said he chose her not because she is a woman but because of her capability. Which is why she got handed the most sensitive political corruption cases. She even recommended the Judicial Council to investigate disputed judges of the Special Court who gave a clean chit in some high profile corruption cases like the one involving Cholendra Shamsher, now a justice of the Supreme Court and next in the line for the post of Chief Justice.

This will also be another challenge for Karki, who will share the bench with Shamsher. Her other challenge will be to expedite some of the 23,000 pending cases in the Supreme Court. While we celebrate the appointment of Nepal's first woman Chief Justice, we must admit she has her work cut out for her during her 14 month tenure.

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... so why aren't more families choosing electric cremation?

LIEW YU WEI

Since going into operation four months ago, Nepal's first and much-delayed electric crematorium at Pasupatinath has already held funerals for 849 people. This is an encouraging figure, given dire predictions that culturally-conservative Nepalis would not like to abandon the rituals of the traditional wood pyre.

However, given the lower cost of electric cremations, the number should have been higher. By not using the electric crematorium, for instance, relatives of Prime Minister Sushil Koirala squandered an opportunity to set an example for others when he died in February.

"It is difficult to convince those who are very traditional in their beliefs to accept a new practice like electric cremation," says Govinda Tandon of the Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT). "But if the people around them accept the practice and it becomes a norm, mindsets will gradually change."

While a traditional cremation can cost Rs 10,000-50,000, an electric cremation costs only Rs 3,200. In addition to cost savings, an electric funeral is less time-consuming and takes only 45 minutes compared to four



GOPEN RAI

hours for a traditional cremation. The electric furnace is also environment-friendly, since 250 kg of logs are needed for each pyre and half-burnt remains of the dead are often dumped into the Bagmati.

Yadab Pradhan, a mourner at the crematorium this week said: "When more people come forward to try this, society will accept electronic cremation."

Keeping cultural sensitivities in mind, the trust built the crematorium south of Pashupati and along the banks of the holy Bagmati River as it is believed that anyone who dies or is cremated at Pasupati bypasses purgatory and goes directly to heaven.

Along with the cultural,

operators were also wary of logistical issues. This is why the crematorium is equipped with a morgue that has the capacity to store up to 26 bodies per week. This is useful when funerals cannot be held immediately, for example, when family members living abroad need time to travel back.

Currently, the crematorium works on a first-come-first-serve basis, which can result in long waiting times. Pradhan said his family had to wait three hours for their turn. The trust is now working to allocate timeslots that will save relatives waiting time, and prove that the electric cremation has an advantage over the traditional method.

The facility performs an average

of 13 cremations each day, which is half the number in the traditional ghats. But families may well turn back to funeral pyres if they have to wait just as long. The crematorium has three furnaces, of which only two are currently operational.

Tandon thinks traditional cremations will not stop completely, but for cost and time reasons more and more families will opt to go electrical. He adds: "In 15 to 20 years, traditional cremations may well become history. Nepal is advancing, and its people are gaining more exposure. If our culture remains rigid and unchanging, it will collapse. We have to embrace the changes." 🇳🇵

CREMATION TIME

FIREWOOD
4
hours

ELECTRIC
45
mins

ENERGY CONSUMED

FIREWOOD

250kg of wood for one cremation

Per funeral cost: Rs 10,000

ELECTRIC

1800 KWh for 40 cremations per day

Per funeral cost: Rs 3,200

THE PRICE OF DEATH FOR TRADITIONAL CREMATION

FIREWOOD	Rs	3,000
GHEE	Rs	900
STRAW	Rs	1,200
BAMBOO	Rs	200
SANDALWOOD (optional)	Rs	2,000
LABOUR	Rs	1,600
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The Year of Living Off-Balance



The end of 2015 AD several months ago felt like a trial run for the bigger hurdle of outlasting 2072 BS, finally put behind us last week. The Nepali year, which will be remembered as one of the country's worst, was only 12 days old when the great earthquake hit, followed by countless aftershocks, another big quake in May and relentless instability ever since, both seismological and political.

MOVING TARGET
Foreign Hand

The early months of 2072 taught us many things we never wanted to learn, like distinguishing a harmless crack from one that could bring the house down on top of us. Crash courses (excuse the pun) on support walls, foundations, and soil types taught us more details to worry about, (beware the dreaded 'black earth' that liquefies when shook) while the next dose of fear and loathing was only a tremor away.

Any vibration sparked split second decisions whether to flee, dive under the table, hit the bottle or resume former positions. As our education continued apace we learned most aftershocks come in waves, like a mythical Nag's rhythmic undulations, while others strike in a single shock, reminiscent of a Tata truck hitting the building with a bang. And who can ever forget that awful sound of the earth moving, a noise too primal and destabilising for mere words?

Perhaps the weirdest aftershocks of all were internal, as the brain seemed to shift position in sync with the earth beneath our feet. Your correspondent couldn't think straight for several days (or was it weeks, months?) and will likely never be the same again. The fact a column mentioning the quake in its opening line was published just 2 weeks previously (see Landscape of Fear) was also rather unnerving, demonstrating a prescience I hereby disavow.

As we grew more adept at guessing the strength and epicenter of each passing shock we also learned, in the interest of maintaining sanity, to ignore the many rumours and amateur

seismologists cum shamans who whispered breaking news of the next really big one.

Surely the most painful lesson taught by the earthquake and its aftermath is that the people of Nepal can expect nothing from the state or those they elected to power. The impressive generosity shown by the international community did more to expose the government's callous incompetence than to actually help those in need. This massive shirking of responsibility, unprecedented in impact if not in style, surely bodes poorly for the future. After all, if 7.8 on the Richter scale can't shake our political class out of its lethargic indifference then what can?

The hope such a cathartic event would galvanise the leaders to action only produced a rushed, patchwork constitution that set the Tarai ablaze, providing the final excuse to forget the quake victims altogether.

If it took an epic catastrophe to confirm once and for all the concerned authorities simply aren't concerned (see The Indifferent Republic) the ensuing five month blockade at the Indian border proved conclusively that the government is only in it for the money. Dramatic price hikes and shortages kept society off balance, madly searching for petrol, cooking gas and other essentials while well-connected mafias made black-market fortunes at everyone else's expense.

As if to prove the god of natural disasters doesn't play favourites, circumstance ensured that history will condemn all parties equally.

Congress was at the helm when the earth shook, and failed miserably at emergency response, followed by the current UML/Maoist/RPP coalition that seems to have institutionalised negligence and adopted inactivity as its official ideology. There are no heroes in this tale, except the common people who rose to the occasion and helped each other manage in exceptionally trying times.

Nonetheless, there's much to be grateful for, like still being alive and the astonishing fact Kathmandu wasn't reduced

to rubble. Perhaps the gods who looked over this Valley for centuries haven't left town in disgust, as many suspected, and still harbour some residual compassion for those on the ground. Another decimal point or two on the scale, a closer epicenter, or a few more seconds of shaking would have been infinitely more devastating. While no time is a good time for an earthquake, high noon on a springtime Saturday, when schools and offices are closed and everyone's wide awake, is hard to beat and seems too damn lucky to be sheer coincidence.

Though nothing could fully prepare the nation for such a traumatic event, the last 25 years of constant political instability surely helped. In the spirit of New Year 2073, and the great relief we feel at surviving 2072, perhaps it's time to thank our politicians for all the experience gained while coping with decades of war, strikes, riots, and political chaos. Those lessons in resilience and resourcefulness, learned the hard way from navigating the dysfunctional state our leaders created, proved invaluable in weathering this most difficult of years. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Micromax Q413

Smartphone brand Micromax recently introduced its new 4G model, the Q413 in the Nepali market. Featuring a 1GHz quad core processor, a 5-inch HD IPS screen, and a 8 MP primary camera, the Q413 combines state-of-the-art technology at a wallet-friendly price of Rs 13,343.



New Avenger

Bajaj has launched a new line of Avenger bikes, including the Street models, designed for easy city riding. The three new models: the 220 Cruise, 220 Street, and 150 Street are priced at Rs 294,900, Rs 284,900 and Rs 249,900 respectively.



Etihad awards

Etihad Airways awarded 17 Nepali trade partners in the Etihad Travel Awards held at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza last week. The awards, held annually, recognise the contributions made by travel partners and aim to strengthen bonds between the airline and its partners.

The Baleno

Suzuki is ready to roll out its new model: the Baleno, which boasts the best fuel efficiency of its class and will



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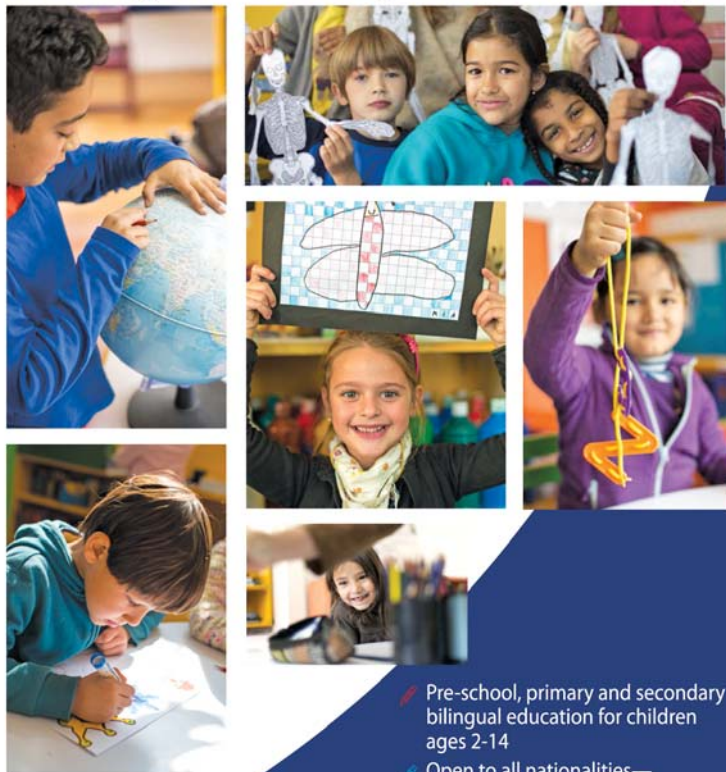


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Peddalling the future

Bicyclists campaign to reclaim the streets of Kathmandu

MICHAEL NISHIMURA

The citizens of Kathmandu Valley react in different ways to the deteriorating air quality: some wear masks, many complain about it, others write letters to editors, but one group of activists is trying to set an example by making Kathmandu more bicycle-friendly.

Most of the pollution is made up of particulate matter from roadside dust, but 40 per cent of it is from vehicular emissions. At busy intersections, the diesel and petrol exhaust component of pollution is much higher. Which is why Cycle City Network Nepal (CCNN) is trying to promote cycling.

Inspired by Critical Mass gatherings on the last Friday of every month in 300 cities around the world, CCNN brings together enthusiasts every month in Basantapur Darbar Square to promote lowering of Nepal's carbon footprint, encouraging a healthier lifestyle through cycling and putting pressure on the government to pass greener transport legislation.

"Our presence in the street is trying to put pressure on the government," says Chakshu Malla, who has been with CCNN since the beginning. "Cyclists are part of the traffic, so we need proper space, useable cycle lanes and our rights."

The global Critical Mass movement strives to 'reclaim the street' through greater visibility,



using a hoard of cyclists en masse to demand relevance amidst a sea of motorised vehicles.

"KCC2020 initially started as a political and economic solution to fuel dependency and to address the fact that two-thirds of our national deficit is because of petroleum products," says president Shail Shrestha.

Cyclists in Nepal are currently facing an auto-hegemony. While the reliance on motorcycles as a mode of transport has increased threefold over the last few decades, constituting 75 per cent of all privately owned vehicles on the road, the dependence on cycles for daily travel has diminished from a modal share of 6.6 per cent in 1991 to just 1.5 per cent in 2012. And though the percentage of homes owning a bicycle around the country is more than that

of car and motorbike owners combined, in the Valley motorised two-wheelers outnumber cycles by 3:1.

The government's response to the outcry for the need for cycle lanes has been slow. While the expansion project of the Maitighar-Tinkune road two years ago also added a cycle lane, because of improper signage, an inconsistent track and poor choice in paving material, nobody (not even cyclists) knows it is a cycle path. Though similar projects are underway, like the widening of the southern stretch of Ring Road, these efforts require an extensive overhaul of existing infrastructure, which has been a deterrent to what is really needed – an expansive network of connecting and well-maintained cycle paths. And since piecemeal expansions are planned with only motorised vehicles in mind, it creates even more dangers for already hazardous cycle commutes.

"Although we have been told by officials, including the Secretary of the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, that they will build cycle tracks in several roads, they have never implemented the projects or allocated the budget," says Prashanta Khanal, biking enthusiast. "The government's priority is not the mobility of people but to make vehicles swifter, which leads to unsafe roads for cyclists and pedestrians."

Cycling became popular during the Indian blockade and the fuel crisis because there was no other alternative, now the reason has been to cut down on pollution. "No petrol, no problem," says 67-year-old Shiva Gurung, a regular at Critical Mass gatherings who used to bike from Pokhara to Kathmandu. "Day by day, pollution is increasing so we need to encourage the young population to cycle and teach them the right way to do things."

Says Shrestha: "The political, social and environmental consciousness is on our side, and the situation is turning not only in Kathmandu, it's happening around the world." 🇳🇵



MEMBERSHIP Deal



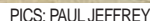
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How Sanogaun's women are rebuilding better quake-resistant homes



www.gmin.us
www.buildupnepal.com



Building back healthier

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Whatever wasn't destroyed in Charikot by the earthquake on 25 April last year was brought down in the 7.3 magnitude aftershock two weeks later. The damage to hospitals and health posts in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok was widespread.

The hospital in Jiri, the district hospital in Chautara and the primary health care centre in Charikot were uninhabitable. In a unique example of public-private partnership, the group Nyaya Health Nepal turned the disaster into an opportunity to build a better health care system.

Nyaya Health has experience in providing free medical care through the district health care system in Achham, and decided to replicate the model in Dolakha. The Charikot health post was repaired, and the group

signed an MoU with the government to upgrade it to a district hospital and run it for ten years.

"Along with building back better with a stronger quake-resistant structure, our aim is to fulfil the people's right to accessible medical care using our experience in health care management in Achham," explains Busan Prasain of Nyaya Health Nepal, now also known as Possible Health.

The proposed hospital has already added orthopedics, a 24-hour emergency service, surgery equipment for cesarean sections, and an in-patient department. It has replicated the electronic health record system perfected in Achham to track patient history. The number of patients in Charikot has grown five-fold in the past two months.

Nyaya is rebuilding 20 other health posts in remote villages of the district that were destroyed in the earthquakes. The health post in Boch has been

Non-governments work with government to overhaul medical services in quake-hit districts

inaugurated, and two others in Mali and Rakuridanda are ready for handover.

The earthquakes destroyed 392 health facilities in 14 districts: six hospitals, 12 primary health care centres and 374 health posts, another 130 birthing centers were damaged. Although only 31 health facilities have been repaired, the government says the delay was caused by the fuel shortage and the need to build safer structures.

The Nick Simons Institute (NSI) is also working with the Ministry of Health in

Dolakha, rehabilitating the out-patient department of Jiri Hospital with a prefab building in January.

"It's a small support from our side to a hospital with a proven track record on which most of the population in the area depended," said NSI's Mohammad Kashim Shah which is also rebuilding the staff quarters and integrating its medical team with the government's health personnel.

Last September, the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology in Kathmandu set up a



HOME: Since losing her home in the earthquake last year Nirmala Shrestha and her family have been sharing this rickety shelter in Bungamati. The municipality denied the Shrestha family a permit to rebuild their home in its original location because of a proposed road-widening plan (*below*).

Sanu Laut and her seven-year-old daughter inside their flimsy hut in Sankhu. The family is desperate to move into a more permanent structure, but don't have the money to build one (*left*).

SMRITI BASNET

Nirmala Shrestha clung to the tin roof of her flimsy temporary hut during a storm that lashed the Valley two weeks ago. "I was scared the wind would destroy the only shelter I had left," she recalled. "I held on to the roof until it felt like my hands would also be blown away."

Made homeless during the 25 April earthquake last year, the 48-year-old resident of Bungamati very nearly lost her home again. She has been living in this rickety shelter in her tiny farm on the southern outskirts of Patan for the past year. With no money of their own, and no help from the government, the family wanted to rebuild using salvaged material,

but the municipality would not grant them a permit because of a proposed road-widening plan.

"It is becoming difficult by the day, we want to build a house but we face difficulties at every turn," said Namrata's husband, Devendra. "We don't know what to do anymore. For the past year we have all been falling sick."

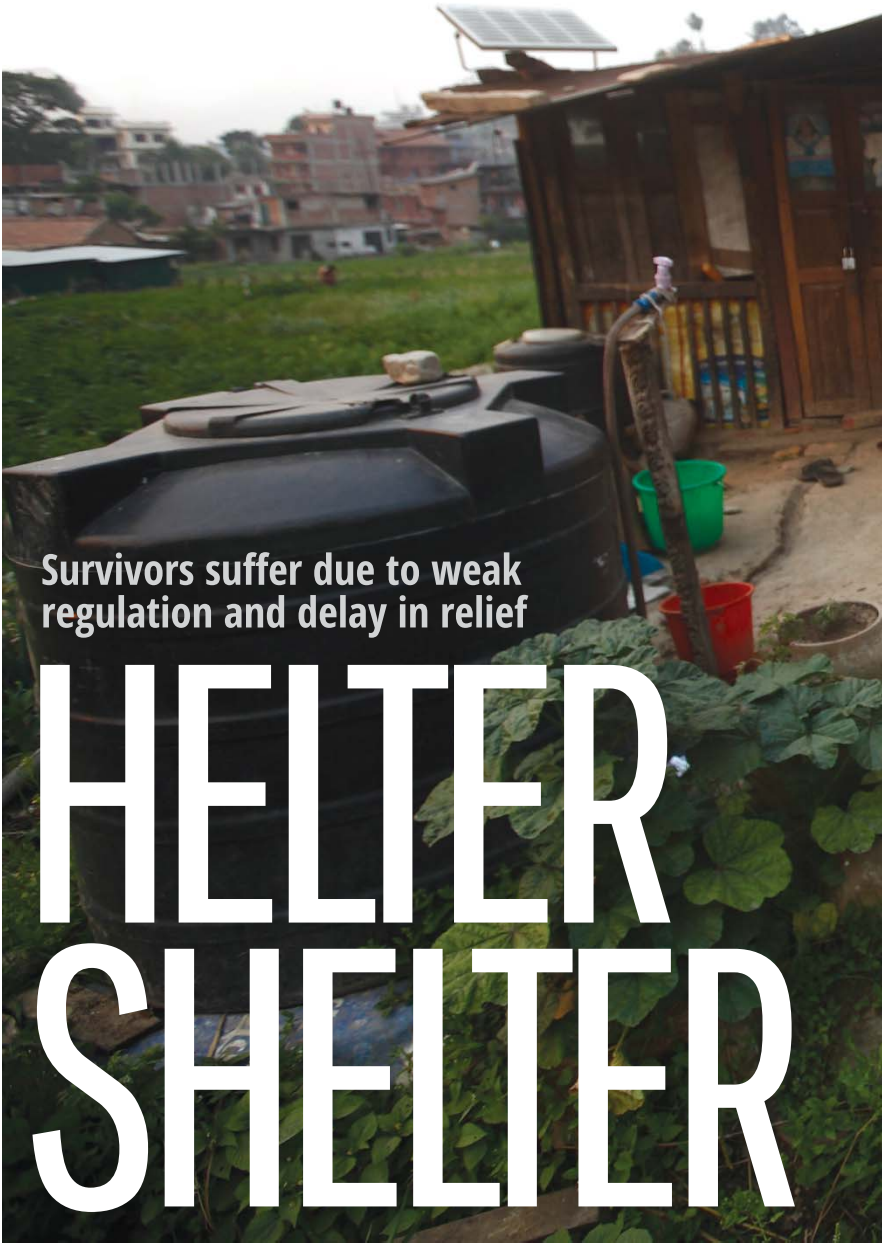
Prime Minister K P Oli launched the government's rebuilding campaign amidst much fanfare and speeches in Bungamati in January. But there is no sign of any reconstruction here. Like many across the 14 earthquake affected districts, families here have got little else besides the Rs 15,000 emergency grant last year. The Reconstruction Authority has started giving out the first installment of the Rs 200,000 rebuilding grant, but only in

Dolakha district.

"We don't live in the houses that were destroyed, but are still asked to pay for the electricity, water, phone bills. If we don't, they say they will not provide us with any when we rebuild," says Ratna Man Maharjan, also a resident of Bungamati. Having lost his shop along with his house, he is operating from a makeshift one close to his temporary shelter.

Across the Valley in Sankhu, another historical town flattened by the earthquake, residents are desperate to move into more permanent structures, but will probably have to rough it in flimsy huts for at least another year.

"Who wants to live in a place infested with mosquitoes and flies? Why don't they just give us the money so we can start building?" asks Sanu Laut who



Survivors suffer due to weak regulation and delay in relief

HELTER SHELTER



JIRI HOSPITAL

community eye care center in Jiri Hospital which serves patients from outlying areas of Dolakha, as well as Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga and Solukhumbu.

“It is an opportunity to rebuild from ground up,” says Deepak Raj Sapkota of Karuna Foundation. “Apart from building structures that are earthquake resistant, it is a chance to build inclusive, accessible structures that are disabled and senior citizen friendly.”

The Ramche health post in Rasuwa

rebuilt by Karuna was handed over to the government in February. It is equipped with a ramp for easy access and serves 600 households. Karuna Foundation is rebuilding 11 health facilities and repairing three health posts and a primary health care centre in Rasuwa.

The America Nepal Medical Foundation (ANMF) was involved in setting up the Chautara health post after the hospital was destroyed. “Rebuilding health posts that are accessible to the majority has been a



POSSIBLE HEALTH

NEW PARTNERS: The out-patient department of Jiri Hospital in Dolakha was rehabilitated with a prefab building by the Nick Simons Institute (NSI) (*left*). Nyaya Health Nepal repaired the Charikot health post, and the group has signed an MoU with the government to upgrade it to a district hospital and run it for ten years (*above*).

priority of ANMF. Since Sindupalchok is closer to the capital, it is logistically easier to our volunteers for oversight” says Santosh Sapkota of ANMF. Chautara Hospital has an out-patient department, an operation theatre, and a labour room in the multipurpose prefab unit. ANMF is rebuilding ten more health posts in Sindhupalchok. The work has progressed rapidly



and the Ministry of Health and Population has requested ANMF to rebuild three health facilities in Nuwakot as well.

Global Shapers Kathmandu inaugurated the Indrawati Jana Sewa Samiti Health Post in Sindhupalchok which has a birthing centre, ultrasound and family planning facilities that will serve a population of 40,000.

The Ministry of Health and Population has set mid-July as the deadline for the reconstruction of around 300 health facilities for which MoUs have been signed with non-

profits. There are hitches like acquiring land, and increase in the price of building material, and the lack of expertise in prefabricated construction.

Says Sapkota of the Karuna Foundation: “There is a lot more to be done and reconstruction could be a lot faster if the government leadership was stronger.” 🇳🇵



PICS: GOPEN RAI

has a seven-year-old daughter and a diabetic husband. They sold their tractor, but all the money went into paying her husband’s medical bills.

In Bhaktapur Narayan Man Bijukchhe of the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party has been pressuring Prime Minister K P Oli and the Reconstruction Authority to hand over responsibility for reconstruction to local bodies. In fact, this is the only part of Kathmandu Valley where the government has been proactive in rebuilding heritage sites and fallen neighbourhoods.

After blistering criticism for its inaction, the Reconstruction Authority this week lifted the ban on voluntary groups from rebuilding. “The move will certainly speed up the process of reconstruction,” said Aanand Mishra of creation.org which has helped rebuild four permanent schools in Dhading, Nuwakot and Sindhuli. The organisation is also building 55 model homes in Lalitpur.

Earlier, the Authority had justified the ban citing the need for regulation and coordination, but was under pressure from survivor families as well as NGOs to be less of a hindrance. But many in Sankhu and Bungamati are now so desperate they won’t wait for government permission or money.

“I went ahead after I got an informal permission from the municipality. Besides, what is the point waiting for those two lakhs, it won’t even pay to rebuild a room,” says Manoj Shakya, 51 in Bungamati.

In Sankhu, Balram Shrestha has also decided to rebuild on his own with a Rs 1 million loan. He said: “It was getting too difficult, and I didn’t feel safe in my damaged house, and since there was no government here I decided to build a safe house on my own.” 🇳🇵

EVENTS



Voice against violence,

Poetry performances by Word Warriors Nepal, live art by Artlab, music by Dream Temple and more to mark the Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention month.
16 April, 5pm onwards, Base Camp, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397

Face of hope,

Experts discuss seismology, humanitarianism and reconstruction work in Nepal as the country nears the one-year anniversary of the April 2015 earthquake. Followed by a photo exhibition on life after earthquake in Nepal by Christopher Phillips.
22 April, 5.30 pm onwards, Alliance Française de Kathmandu, Tripureswor, (01)4241163, www.alliancefrancaise.org.np



Create your font,

Learn how to make your own Devanagari or English font with a two-day font design workshop.
23 & 24 April, Fee: Rs 500, Sattya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, (01) 537406, collective@sattya.org

Self defense,

A self defense training program organised by Ujjalo Foundation as part of its annual fundraising series. Proceeds will go towards organising its women leadership programs: Empowerher 2016 and Nidar Campaign 2016.
16 April, 8.30 to 11 am, Tickets: Rs 500, Shrestha Tower, Uttara Dhoka, (01)4433631, www.ujjalofoundation.org

Get sporty,

Run, ride or rock climb and participate in the fifth edition of Himalayan Outdoor Festival.
29 April to 1 May, Hattiban Hills, Pharping, www.himalayanoutdoorfestival.com, 9823287228/ 9843817625

Heritage ride,

Join Tour De Lumbini, Kathmandu Cycle City 2020 and Cycle City Network Nepal as they ride along seven world heritage sites of Kathmandu Valley.
23 April, 8am onwards, Basantapur Darbar Square, 9841303867



Writing for Arts,

Hone your writing skills and pick up tips on approaching and critiquing art in this three-day workshop.
20 to 22 April, 2 to 5pm, Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 9849519933, 9818239744

Historical exhibition,

A display of 40 paintings by celebrated mid 19th century Nepali landscape artist Rajman Singh Chitrakar.
Until 24 April, Taragaon Museum, Baudha, 9843722329



The Missing Link,

Park Gallery presents series two of its bimonthly exhibition with artworks by Saroj Bajracharya titled 'The Missing Link'.
Until 30 May, Park Gallery, Pulchowk, (01) 5522307

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



DINING



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Ananda Bhawan, Lajimpat, (01)4416027



Mulchowk,

Select your special dinner from set Ala-carte menu or regular menu while enjoying classical fusion, and folk music by Mul band.
Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4259801

Mezze by Roadhouse,

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



Dhokaima Café,

Try indigenous cocktails at the Rukhmuni Bar.
Patan Dhoka, (01)5522113, dhokaimacafe@yahoo.com

MUSIC

Wave Rock tour,

Usher in the Nepali New Year at the WAVE Rock tour, featuring acts like Cobweb, Sabin Rai & The Electrix, and more.
16 April, 3pm onwards, Jawalakhel Football Ground, Lalitpur, 9801026507

Mad Jazz Quartet,

Enjoy a jazz filled evening with Mad Jazz Quartet.
15 April, 8pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172, sanzey@hotmail.com



Rock for a cause,

A fundraising event for the victims of the earthquake featuring Chinese indie rock band Wang Wen and Nepali rock band Monkey Temple.
23 April, 12 to 6 pm, Purple Haze, Thamel

Metal night,

Book your seats for a night of hard-hitting heavy metal featuring bands Binaash, Aakrosh, Nude Terror, DISORDER, Crown Of Thrones and Vivace Octave.
30 April, 12 to 6pm, Reggae Bar, Thamel, (01)4700654

Music mania,

Be part of the rock and roll mania with the 12th edition of the KCM Inter College Music Competition. Preliminary rounds on 15 and 16 April.
Registration fee: Rs 5000, 10am onwards, 23 April, Jawalakhel Football Ground, 9849149154, 9849465316, 9813505758



GETAWAY



Shangri-La Village Resort,

Escape the heat this summer with a two nights and three days package at Shangri La Village Resort in Pokhara. Gharipatan, Pokhara, Rs 7500 per person including one way transportation from Kathmandu, rafting and lunch (self transportation and non-rafting package also available), (01)4420252/9808187015/ 9860260894

Tranquility Spa,

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www.tranquilityspa.com.np



Gorkana Forest Resort,

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Gokarna, (01)4451212, www.gokarna.com

Hotel Barahi,

Enjoy a great view of Phewa lake, cultural shows, or indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German Bakery on the hotel premises.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)460617/463526



Balthali Village Resort,

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

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What award-winning war photographer James Nachtwey thinks about the role of journalists in an unjust world would violate the basic tenet of the American media: reporters must not get too deep into a story, lest their emotions cloud their judgement.

While shooting on assignment in Kosovo, Rwanda, and other infamous theatres of conflict, Nachtwey was appalled by the cruelty and pain one human being was capable of inflicting on another. He gave vent to his outrage through his photography, documenting in powerfully stark black and white images the scars of multiple machete cuts on the side of a Rwandan man, or depicting a woman carrying scythes walking past burnt out homes in Kosovo.

“It’s our job to tell their story to the rest of the world, people need to know what is going on, however horrifying,” Nachtwey told reporters attending a talk organised by *Nepali Times* in Kathmandu on Saturday. The World Press Photo and multiple Robert Capa Gold Medal awardee has returned to Kathmandu after photographing the aftermath of last year’s earthquake for a cover story in Time magazine.

Asked if such disproportionate coverage by the international media of death and destruction after a disaster bent the truth because 85 per cent of the houses in Kathmandu Valley were intact, Nachtwey was unapologetic. “A lot of people died, houses came down and a journalist’s job is not to go around delivering just feel good stories,” he said.

This unwillingness to accept that the greater prominence of the negative distorts reality, and that a more nuanced coverage is required after disasters was perhaps the only discordant note from a photographer known for the sensitivity and empathy with which he treats and portrays victims of manmade conflict and natural calamities that are often his subjects.

Nachtwey also has no problems with the media using the photograph of the dead refugee child on the beach in Turkey because it did what thousands of other pictures had failed to do: shocked Europe into helping refugees. He is similarly supportive of the Georgian photojournalist caught up in the Brussels airport blast last month who instinctively started taking pictures, including the now famous one of a wounded Jet Airways crew member. The use of that image was heavily criticised.

“Can you imagine being there and not taking that picture?” Nachtwey asked. “Obviously we have to use our judgment and be respectful. But we are reporters and need to get the story.”

Yet, Nachtwey says photojournalists should have a higher calling, an involvement in the subject that goes beyond career, techniques and reporting the facts. “There are values we have to uphold, and at some

point, something higher takes over. A photographer’s eye is simply an optical instrument, you have to photograph with your whole body, with your heart and gut.” Technically, this means using a lens that allows the

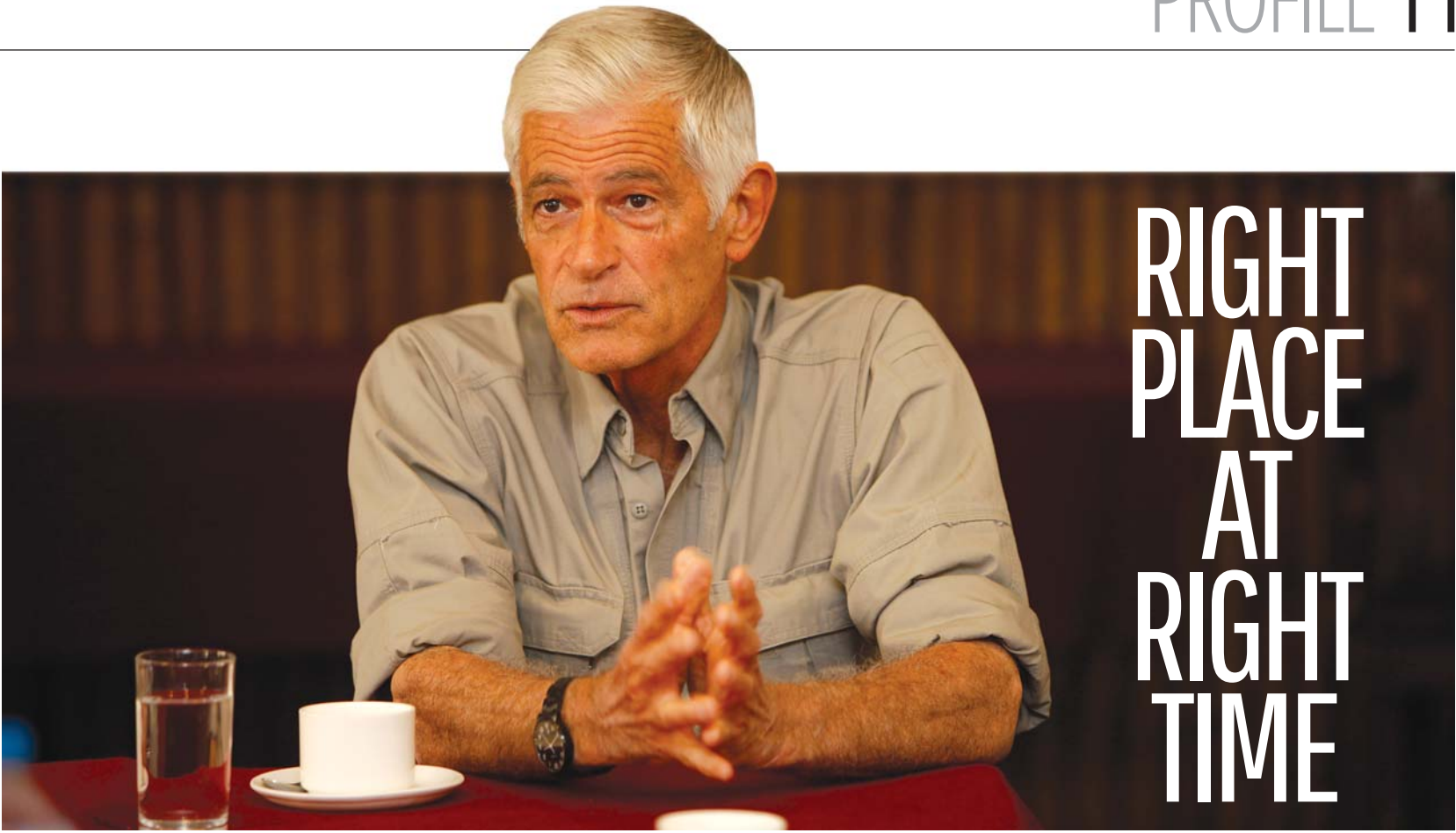
photographer to get close, not just physically but also emotionally, to show empathy and gain the subject’s trust.

In Nepal to cover the first anniversary, Nachtwey was impressed by what he saw

in Gorkha district. “I have tremendous admiration for the people of Nepal, there is something very special about the way they have accepted what happened and done their best to help themselves. The worst

situations bring out the best in people.”

What is the hardest part of being a photojournalist, someone asks. Nachtwey’s reply: “Knowing how to be at the right place at the right time.” 🇳🇵



BIKRAM RAI

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CREED

Rocky Balboa and Sylvester Stallone are linked forever in cinema history, with Stallone playing the beloved, fictional boxer Rocky in seven films which now also includes the excellent *Creed*, a story of yet another young aspiring boxer that ought to have been



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

formulaic, certainly the structure of the script is such, but ends up instead excelling and transcending its particular genre.

Adonis Johnson, played by Michael B. Jordan, is the illegitimate son of the undisputed heavyweight champion Apollo Creed, Rocky Balboa's nemesis, competitor, and late friend. With

both parents dead, Adonis aka Donnie, bounces around foster homes and juvenile detention facilities until Mary Anne Creed (Phylicia Rashad) removes him from the system and gives him a deeply loving home.

With the *Creed* legacy behind him, Donnie quits his job as a young adult, terrifying Mary Anne, and sets off for Philadelphia in search of Rocky, who he hopes will train his already not so insignificant propensity for knocking people out. Cornering Rocky at his Italian restaurant, Donnie arouses the former star's curiosity but not his commitment to coach him. The rest, well, you know how these things go.

The reason for *Creed's* immense success is threefold, the sensitive retelling of a familiar story, the casting of incredible actors, with people like Tessa Thompson shining as Donnie's musician girlfriend whose hearing is deteriorating, and a deep understanding and reverence for a franchise that has always

succeeded because of Rocky/Stallone (the two are practically synonymous) at its heart.

The travails of Rocky, Donnie, and Bianca become inter-twined as the three become a family unit of sorts, a development that is delightful to watch. The dynamics between the three characters, their growing affection for each other and the sly humour and good natured raillery written into the script make for such naturalistic dialogue that often you are tricked into thinking this is a window into a slice of urban Philadelphia life.

The boxing sequences, of which there are many, are beautifully choreographed, with no excessive cutting from director Ryan Coogler, who conceived the story and co-wrote the excellent screenplay. The camera only watches, moving delicately around the action in the ring, never, ever trying to outdo the crucial drama unfolding there.

Donnie, whose secret is soon out, is a born star, a man whose destiny is to box, who could so easily have become a brute and an ingrate, but is saved by the grace of Mary Anne, Rocky Balboa, the beautiful Bianca, and his own courageous heart.

Boxing fan or not (I'm not particularly into pugilism myself) *Creed* is a wonderful film; one worth seeing for Stallone's understated, subtly heart-wrenching performance, and a portrayal of true sportsmanship. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



RSS

FIRST STEP: Prime Minister KP Oli lays the foundation stone of Pokhara International Airport on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

CHIEF GUEST: President Bidya Devi Bhandari inaugurates the Second National Summit of Health and Population Scientist in Nepal at City Hall, Kathmandu on Monday.



BIKRAM RAI

GO TRAVEL: President of Dwarika's Hotels and Resorts Ambica Shrestha unveils the 'Ghumfir Barsa' campaign at Nepal Tourism Board on Tuesday. The campaign aims to revive the tourism sector after a slow year.



RSS

POKER RUN: Bikers take selfies with Nepali Congress leader Prakash Man Singh (with green khata) during flag off ceremony of the 8th annual Enfield Poker Run at Tundikhel in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



BIKRAM RAI

FESTIVE TIMES: Locals pull the chariot of Bhairab during Bisket Jatra as onlookers watch from their damaged homes in Bhaktapur on Wednesday.

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Just waiting

Twenty years of war to peace has brought Nepalis back full circle

It has been two decades since Nepal's conflict began and ten years since the cessation of violence, the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the beginning of Nepal's 'transition' back to democracy.

ONE TO MANY
Bidushi Dhungel

Rather than continuing with the blame game, it is time we realise our collective failure in addressing the realities of the conflict and its impact on the people, the economy and our society.

What is done is done. But it seems that now we are slowly coming full circle: if we were to take ourselves out of a 2016 Nepal and put ourselves back into a 1995 Nepal, for example, things have indeed changed. For one, if you are of a minority ethnic or religious group, you likely have more confidence about voicing your opinions in 2016 than you did in 1995. You likely have more rights, at least on paper. You find the absence of a monarchy and the Hindu state it harboured. You find yourself imagining a

decentralised and federal Nepal in 2016.

But, considering the price we paid for these achievements, in terms of lives, the economy, and development, it seems but a pittance to what could have been realised — what should have been attained.

Nepalis have often been sold the dream of Nepal being transformed into Switzerland or Singapore in a decade. Decades have passed and Nepal is like neither. The lives lost between 1996 and 2006, were justified in the hearts of many, even those families whose members were taken from them. There was apparently a 'greater cause' and what Nepal was going to be was bloody amazing.

But since the promulgation of the new constitution, however, we have seen more bloodshed than we have since the war ended. The people's frustrations have again boiled over, and the moral corruption of the political elite is more shocking than it has ever been.

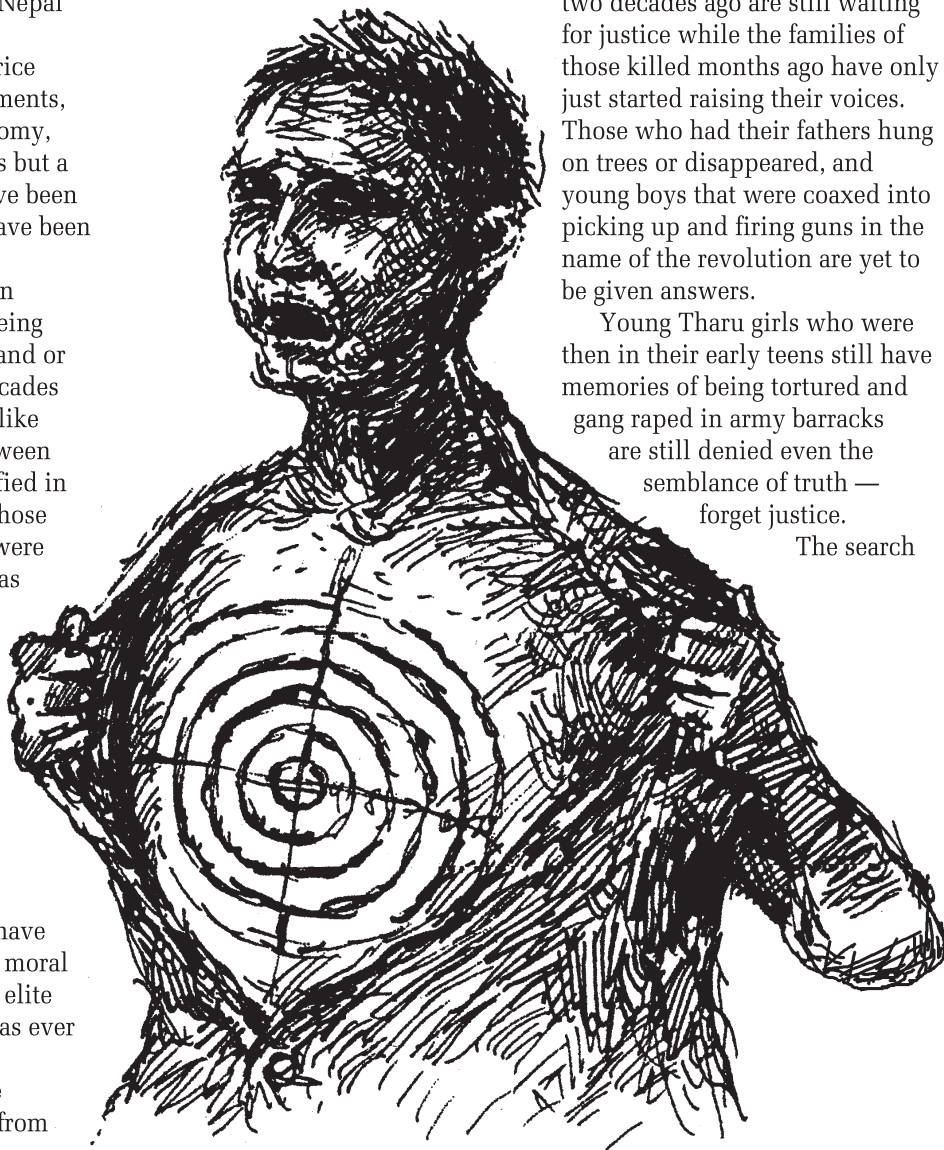
In the meantime, those impacted by the violence from

two decades ago are still waiting for justice while the families of those killed months ago have only just started raising their voices.

Those who had their fathers hung on trees or disappeared, and young boys that were coaxed into picking up and firing guns in the name of the revolution are yet to be given answers.

Young Tharu girls who were then in their early teens still have memories of being tortured and gang raped in army barracks are still denied even the semblance of truth — forget justice.

The search



for truth has been exhausting, and indeed the reality is that many victims have just given up. They show up for protests and programs, but they have been compelled to learn to forget. In that sense, the state and the former rebels have already won. The establishment has reduced truth and justice-seeking to soirees at hotels and conference centres and the victims have in many instances begun to see little hope for much else.

So, when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission for the Investigation of Enforced Disappearances (CIED), which was formed illegally, and after 14 months of having done nothing, says that they are working through a 'victim-centric' approach, one can't help but feel lied to.

In fact, it's likely that a couple of decades from now, similar commissions will have been set up to 'investigate' the violence in the Tarai. The victims of the Maoist-led conflict will grow old, and still be attending 'justice seeking' meetings while the guilty politicians and security personnel's children will have consolidated power.

A new group of victims will have emerged and no one will care about them, either. Of course, by then Switzerland will have awesome carbon-neutral cars that fly and are free for all citizens. What will we have? A bunch of commissions and commissioners with blood on their hands.

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“How many times do we need to share

SEULKI LEE

Bhumika Adhikari Gautam wiped her eyes silently in the dark while watching a video of testimonies by the victims of the conflict at a recent conference on truth and reconciliation in Kathmandu.

The film brought back memories of her own pain. One day, 14 years ago while coming home from school, she was taken in by an army patrol on suspicion of being a Maoist. She was detained at the base and raped repeatedly for three months.

“I felt their pain, I went through the same suffering as the rape victims in the film,” said Gautam, now 33.

After 12 years, the Supreme Court finally found the soldiers involved in Gautam’s rape guilty in 2014. But like in hundreds of other war crimes committed by both sides during the conflict, where perpetrators are known or even sentenced, they are still free.

“From the human rights perspective, Nepal’s peace process has been a failure,” states Mandira Sharma of the rights group, Advocacy Forum.



“Except in one case, not a single perpetrator has been apprehended.”

Gaumati Gharti Magar’s husband was killed by the Maoists in Rolpa at the beginning of the conflict in 1996. Now 49, Magar joins every protest outside Singha Durbar with other conflict victims.

“We want to hear from the leaders of the Maoists why they had to use violence and kill innocent people like my husband only because he was from a different political party,” said Magar.

Gautam and Magar are exceptions among relatives of conflict victims because they can afford to travel to Kathmandu to seek justice. Most are too poor, or do not know how to work the system even to collect cash reparations.

As a result, in the past ten years after the end of the conflict, the movement for truth and justice has either been dominated by Kathmandu-based human rights organisations or donor-funded victims’ groups. They also tend to be top-down and politically polarised.

Since the former enemies are now the state (indeed, the Maoists have shared power



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

with the NC and UML in several past coalition governments) Kathmandu has never been proactive in pursuing the victims’ demands for truth and justice. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) finally set up last year, have both been criticised for tokenism.

However, victims of violence

by both sides have found common cause to struggle together for justice. The first cross-cutting conflict victims’ groups were formed in 2006 in Bardia and Lamjung and in 2008, the Conflict Victims Society for Justice was established in Kathmandu to seek transitional justice.

Two years ago, Ram Kumar Bhandari, whose father was disappeared by the Army, and

JUSTICE DENIED: Nanda Prasad Adhikari died in 2014 during a prolonged hunger strike demanding justice for his son’s murder. His wife Ganga Maya continued her hunger strike and is now in critical condition.

Suman Adhikari, whose father was killed by the Maoists (*see below*), both in 2001 in Lamjung, set up the Conflict Victims’ Common Platform (CVCP).

The torturous road to peace

The conflict ended ten years ago, but the physical and mental scars of torture victims has not

YUBARAJ SHRESTHA
IN LAMJUNG

Min Bahadur Bhandari was sitting at home one evening in September 2001 when the Maoists accused him of being a spy and took him away to a nearby forest, chopped off his leg and smashed his hands. He spent Rs 500,000 of his own money to be treated, and is now wheel-chair bound.

Rambabu Ghimire was forced to lodge and feed a group of Maoist guerrillas one night in 2002. The Army found out, took him in for questioning, and he was severely tortured. Ghimire was so traumatised he still cannot work.

Jit Bahadur Bhujel was also accused of supporting the Maoists and was tortured so heavily by the Police that they broke his hand and it never healed properly. He has been physically handicapped, and can’t find work.

Bishnu Ghimire was a student with the Maoist-affiliated college union in Lamjung, he was detained by the security forces in 2004 and tortured physically and mentally for 15 days.

Ishwar Ghimire was detained by the Army at the Bhorletar Base and tortured. He fled to India, but couldn’t work because of injuries. Memories of that period haunted him so much he sold off his homestead and livestock to



YUBARAJ SHRESTHA

live in Pokhara. He still cannot find proper work because of his wartime trauma.

The conflict ended ten years ago in April 2006, and many families of the dead or disappeared have received compensation. But those who were severely tortured by both sides, and whose physical and

mental scars have never healed, never got apologies or reparations from the state.

In village after village here in Lamjung district, there are those who suffered torture under detention — they were students, farmers, traders, and most were non-combatants caught in the middle of a conflict they wanted

no part in. The Maoists would force them to house and feed them for the night, and state security forces would find out and take the family into custody. A Maoist would be killed, and the guerrillas would abduct, torture or kill farmers they suspected of being spies.


Billions have been spent in

the peace process, and families of those who lost their lives are eligible to receive up to Rs 1 million compensation. Many relatives of the disappeared have received Rs 500,000. But the victims of torture, many wounded and handicapped for life, have got nothing.

“The two former enemies are now in government and they have forgotten us, the people who had to suffer inhuman torment,” said Mayanath Adhikari, who heads a society of torture victims in Srimanjang village.

In fact the plight of the tortured is similar to relatives of the dead and disappeared who are not affiliated to any political party, or those who don’t have the connections to work the system to collect their compensation. Those who wanted no part in the war and suffered the most are the ones who continue to suffer.

Of the 23 people still listed as missing in Lamjung, 15 were disappeared by the army and police, one by the Maoists and in the case of seven it is not clear who was responsible. Some 150 people were killed in Lamjung during the conflict, and 110 were officially listed as injured.

“We sent the list of wounded and handicapped to the Peace Ministry, but it wasn’t accepted,” said Mohanhari Poudel of the district Peace Committee, who claims the number of wounded is much higher. 

our story?"

“There was a lot of hope after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, and we families of victims expected that the new elected government would work for truth and justice,” said Bhandari, who 15 years later still doesn’t know what happened to his father.

From 2009-2012, various victims’ groups were formed including the National Network of Families of Disappeared and Missing and the Social Campaign for Justice.

“It was a big time for victim’s movement because parliament was drafting a new constitution and victims from both sides worked together. We managed to bring cases to the Supreme Court,” Bhandari recalled.

Mainly supported by European donors and international rights groups, Nepali campaigners documented evidence of wartime atrocities and crimes. Advocacy Forum alone collected evidence in 122 cases against state officials or Maoist leaders for murder and enforced disappearances.

“But today there is a shocking silence in the international community and among human rights organisations,” Mandira Sharma says, pointing to the lack of interest in high-profile cases like the killings of Arjun Lama and Krishna Adhikari even after orders from Supreme Court.

Even after the death of Nanda Prasad Adhikari in 2014, during a prolonged hunger strike seeking justice for his son’s murder, there was little reaction within Nepal and outside.

Sharma believes that the victims’ movement which had been gaining traction with a nationwide network of families and vigorous advocacy has since 2012 been losing ground. The transitional justice process in Nepal has lost its way as internationals pulled back, and the state tried its best to defuse the demand for justice.

“Transitional justice is a political bargaining agenda,” explains Mohna Ansari, the member of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). “That is why people had to wait for nine years to have two commissions.”

Ironically, loss of momentum on the victims’ movement coincided with the setting up of the TRC and CIEDP last year, both are headed by political appointees and activists say its work so far is mostly a whitewash.

Says Mandira Sharma: “Accountability should build confidence that the state supports truth and justice. At least try a high profile cases and bring perpetrators to justice, so people can believe there is rule of law in this country.” 🇳🇵



Let’s be friends

Just as the former enemies are now partners in government, ten years after the end of the war, relatives of the victims of the conflict have also got together to pursue truth, justice and reconciliation.

One of them is the Conflict Victims’ Common Platform (CVCP) which was set up by Ram Bhandari and Suman Adhikari (*pic*). Bhandari’s father, Tej Bahadur, was detained by the Army in January 2002 and never seen again. Adhikari’s father, who was a teacher and member of the local chapter of Amnesty International, was taken away by the Maoists while in class in 2001, tied to a tree nearby and shot dead.

“We set up the Platform because whichever side was responsible for the atrocities, the pain inflicted was the same,” explained Adhikari. “We have to raise our voices together, not separately.”

Bhandari added: “Whether our family members were disappeared or killed by the Army or the Maoists, our common demand is that perpetrators should be tried and the victims should get justice. That is why we decided to work together.”

Families of victims from both sides accuse the state of pretending as if the setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Forced Disappearances means the end of the peace process, and say sustainable peace is only possible with justice and truth. Victim families are also skeptical that the two commissions are serious about addressing their demands.

Says Shanta, the wife of Ishwar Ghimire: “If they had left my innocent husband alone, at least he could have worked to raise our family. But they left him physically and mentally handicapped while he was still young.”

PM GAVE US A LECTURE: NHRC

Prime Minister KP Oli’s spat last week with senior functionaries of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sent alarm bells ringing about the interference by the executive into an independent body responsible for upholding post-conflict transitional justice.

“It was embarrassing. He delivered a lecture for more than one hour on human rights,” said Mohna Ansari, the NHRC member whose recent presentation in Geneva critical of provisions in the constitution seems to have irked Oli.

The Prime Minister summoned Ansari and NHRC head Anup Raj Sharma to discuss three issues: the

human rights situation in Nepal, reconstruction after earthquake including the NHRC building, and the Geneva speech. Sharma, Ansari, three members, and a secretary attended the meeting with the Prime Minister and eight members of his office on 3 April.

“Prime Minister tore apart the NHRC’s statement in Geneva line by line,” Ansari told *Nepali Times*.

The one-page statement presented by Ansari at the 31st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva summarised the commission’s concerns on basic human rights situation after the earthquake, women’s rights to transfer their nationality to their children, excessive use of force in Tarai, and the current state of

impunity in Nepal.

“His first remark was ‘Look, this is an NGO statement, not a NHRC statement’ and his last was ‘Don’t issue the statement, just call us’. We couldn’t believe anybody would comment on the NHRC like that,” said Ansari.

The NHRC is an independent state body to monitor and safeguard the human rights of the citizens according to Nepal government’s commitment to the various international treaties on human rights. The commission is responsible to undertake field research of human rights and evaluate the existing human rights situation of the country.

Seulki Lee



Nepali Times: What happened at the meeting with the prime minister?

Mohna Ansari: It was embarrassing. On 3 April, he called us at 10, he came at 11.15 and it went on till 1.25pm. It was one-way with the Prime Minister giving us a lecture about human rights. This is like I know everything about human rights. I know he is an executive. We trust and believe and we know how to balance power-sharing so the executive has the right to talk to us but not with this attitude.

What were his main points?

He said ‘I’m here to discuss three issues, situation of Human Rights, reconstruction after earthquake including NHRC building, and Geneva visit. And his first remark I remember was, ‘Look, this is an NGO statement, not a NHRC statement.’ I couldn’t believe anybody commenting on the NHRC like that. This is our jurisdiction. And whatever we speak we speak on the basis of our report.

Did it surprise you?

We were surprised because this is not personal but things turned on the personal level which I don’t like. I’m speaking on behalf of the commission, not on behalf of Mohna Ansari. And my chairperson also said ‘Look Prime Minister, I have different opinion with you. I came from the judiciary, I’m the ex-chief justice and this is not the way to talk.’ He said that directly to the Prime Minister.

What else was the Prime Minister angry about?

The Prime Minister was angry with every line (of the NHRC statement in Geneva). He asked questions about every line in the statement. He was angry particularly with two issues: how could the NHRC say that about fundamental rights and

the mention on women’s rights, and why I shifted the issue to the citizenship. However, if you see the constitution clause of article 47 on the fundamental rights, it says Dalit have rights to participation in every state mechanism after the law is passed in three years. What it means is the fundamental rights are controlled by the law.

How did you react?

This is the first time that the PM has summoned the NHRC. If he called me alone the situation could have been much worse. After the meeting he even told us ‘don’t go to the media’. He could have sent a letter to us, he could have said ‘I want to discuss’. But we stand on the principles of human rights and NHRC is an autonomous and independent body. I’m worried about transitional justice and accountability. The NHRC is looked upon as an enemy, they have to understand that we are partners, we want justice in society, we want the rule of law, no one is above that.

Could you have worded the Geneva statement differently?

Actually there is nothing wrong in our Geneva statement, we have done our job. His last question was about recommendations or proper investigation and prosecution to excessive use of force in Tarai, and I said ‘read the statement carefully, it says 55 people, including security personnel were killed during the political protest in Tarai due to the dissatisfaction with new Constitution’. We did mention the killing of police. His concluding remarks not to go to the media and saying that we needed a line-by-line approval was unacceptable. I am not a child to be spoken to like that.



Most Photogenic Belly-button Category

The Prez is a woman, so is the Speaker of Parliament, and from Wednesday we have a female Justice-in-Chief. There is therefore understandable fear among menfolk that at the rate the country is feminising, and if present trends continue into the near future, it will not be long before members of the male species will be extinct. Those fears are unwarranted. We can easily set aside a national park for endangered men, and if that doesn't work, keep some specimen in a zoo to protect their jeans pool. But wait, the last time we looked there was still a male Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister in this country. This won't do. Are we serious about going beyond tokenism in this country to have women in positions of authoritarianism or not? Are we really serious about the gender agenda? If so, I propose that KP Oli step down and be replaced by Auntie Suzie. And Mrs Deuba would be much more effective kangresi party president, chair of the parliamentary party and prime minister than Mr Deuba. As men get fewer and far between in positions of power

in our Federal Matriarchal Republic we will have to guard against them masquerading as women and perhaps even getting a sex change just to land a job. We need to be vigilant, therefore, and have mandatory DNA tests of all female civil service applicants to ensure that they all come equipped with Y chromosomes. And the place to start will be the Miss Nepal contest. Is the Miss Nepal finalist really a Miss? This is important because it is no longer politically incorrect as it was during our revolutionary past to have beauty pageants. The Mao Buddies were ideologically against the Miss Nepal contest because it represented patriarchal commodification and sexist objectification of women that reinforced traditional gender hierarchies within the homogenised global-Western neo-liberal value system of cultural imperialism, neo-colonialism and bourgeois pseudo-nationalism in a backdrop of antagonistic contradiction between hegemonic transformation from the status quo, habeus corpus to quid pro quo and, it goes without saying, it directly led

ipso facto to ad nauseum. Today, the venue of the Miss Nepal contests has been converted into the nation's Legislature Parliament and at this year's pageant at least one ex-arsonist was among the jury members. So



strong was the feeling that beauty contests objectified women that it became an annual ritual for underground guerrillas to set fire to Miss Nepal billboards. They proved that they could shed the shackles of male domination and turn the contest into a burning issue. By sabotaging the annual event, the firebrand revolutionaries proved that they would not be tempted by fame and glory since they could have easily qualified for, and perhaps even won, the Miss Gunwoman, Miss Extortionist or the Miss Missed Opportunity titles hands down. But they didn't let such temptations distract them from expressing in no uncertain terms their firm opposition to anyone daring to have gorgeous and stunning hair at a time when the country was sinking into a quagmire. The protestors had reason to be mad as hell: they never stood a chance to ever be crowned Miss Nepal. Because many of them were men. Fifteen years later, some of these same men were back at the Miss Nepal contest last week, sitting on the front row applauding winners in the Swimwear Competition

which included the Udder and Hindsight Categories. The organisers had to include those rounds: how else could they confirm that all participants were in fact of the female persuasion? In this manner, through a process of natural selection, the girls finally made it to the pinnacle of evolution, which was the climactic moment of the make-or-break Most Photogenic Belly-button Category. What I want to know is how come the gals get to have all the fun? When are us men going to have our own Speedo Round? When is someone going to judge us boys by our looks? Why isn't anyone interested in the size and shape of our pectoral fins? Why can't I enter my gluteus maximus in some competition and be crowned Mr Ass? It is a travesty that in this day and age, when all known genders are supposed to be equal, there is not yet a Thong Round of the Mr Inner Beauty Himalayan Hunk Pageant for us trophy hunters.



The Ass

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