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 KP Oli came to Bhungamati 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 an elderly care home, 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.”

Shanti Bhattarai
STATE OF IMPUNITY

The conflict in Nepal lasted ten years, and it has now been over for just as long. This week marks the last ten years of the peace process, and it has now been over a decade since the climax of the pro-democracy movement that led to the Rose Revolution. 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 Sushila 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 gone wholly unaddressed.

There are many other equally notorious cases, like that of Dekendra Thapa, the Daliakhel 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 Biharnabath 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 in 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 take 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.

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.

COPING AND HOPEING

Despite the disappointing track record of Nepal 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 1934 than the elected government of new Nepal.

JK Sharma

DOUBLE VICTIMS

There are several stories published in the Nepal 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’, Sushil Lee, #801). And what did we do 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 complete communication blockade 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.

Chhie

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 Banerje #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 Marshon

Your Say

Which do you think is more important?

If you were in the government, what would you do to change the rule?

Total votes: 103

Weekly Internet Poll #804

To view the result of this poll, please visit www.nepalitimes.com

Gopi Shakya

Your Say
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. 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 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.

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

Get Fiberized with Vianet

Boost your Business with UNLIMITED PLANS

This New Year Enjoy

Corporate Internet minus Corporate Prices

1Mbp 5Mbp

End-to-end 100% Fiber Optics internet For Small/Medium Enterprises

Why Choose Vianet?

100% End to End Fiber Optics Internet Service
Uninterrupted Service during LOAD SHEDDING
Dedicated Speed (No Sharing Ratio)
Dedicated Support team 24x7
Compatible with CCTV
Unlimited Speeds for YouTube HD Video Streaming, Google, Akamai and Local contents
Data Top up feature

1st FTH (Fiber To The Home) service in Nepal.

4217555
www.vianet.com.np
sales@vianet.com.np
It’s cheaper, faster, cleaner ... so why aren’t more families choosing electric cremation?

Since going into operation four months ago, Nepal’s first and much-delayed electric crematorium at Pashupatinath has already held funerals for 449 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 Pashupatinath 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 50,000-90,000, an electric cremation costs only Rs 3,300. In addition to cost savings, an electric funeral is less time-consuming and takes only 45 minutes compared to four 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.

Yadah 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 everyone who dies is or is cremated at Pashupati 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 20 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 timetables 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 ghatas. 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 unchanged, it will collapse. We have to embrace the changes.”
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 2073 BS, finally put behind us last week. The Nepali year, which is remembered as one of the country’s worst, was only 12 days old when the great earthquake hit, followed by countless after shocks, another big quake in May, and relentless instability ever since, has been beset by political and social unrest.

MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

The early months of 2072 taught us many things we never wanted to learn. As a distinguishing hallmark of 2073 BS, the Nepal Earthquake, let us now take a look at the reasons why.

Crash course (execute the plans) on support walls, foundations, and soil type taught us to consider every detail. To worry about, beware the ‘black earth’ that liquefies when shock, 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 space was perceived like no more last aftershocks came in waves, like a mythical Nag’s rhythmic undulations, while others strike in a single shock, reminiscent of a Tatra truck hitting the building with a bang. And who can ever forget that awful sound of the earth moving, a noise too primal and devastating for more words? Perhaps the worstest aftermaths of all were internal, as the brain seemed to shift slightly as well, to boldly go where the earth beneath our feet, Your correspondent couldn’t think straight—think, speak or sit (for what it was worth, months-old) and 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 unsurprising, demonstrating a presence I hereby disavow.

As we grew more adept at guessing the strength and epizodic of each passing shock we also came to the interest of maintaining sanity, to ignore the many romances 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 little to expose the government’s callous inattention to the actual needs or those in need. To achieve this massive shifting of responsibility, unprecedented in impact if not in scale, surely best for its future. After all, if the Richter scale can’t shake our political class, why is it let us know. That is the lesson.

The hope such a catastrophic event would galvanise the leaders to action only produced a rushed, patchwork constitution that set the Tarai abseve, providing the final excuse to ignore the quake victim altogether. If it took an epic catastrophe to confirm once and for all the concerned authorities simply aren’t concerned (see The Independent 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, mostly searching for petrol, cooking gas and other essentials while well-connected mafia 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 continue unapologetically.

Congress was at the helm when the earth shook, and straight-facedly mired to achieve a major response. The case of the UML-Maoist/RPF 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.

Regardless, there’s much to be grateful for, like still being alive and the astonishing fact Kathmandhans weren’t reduced to rubble. Perhaps the gods who looked over this Valley for centuries haven’t left town in disguise, as many suspected, and still harbour some residual compassion for those on the ground.

Another less visible 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 24 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 leaders 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.

Micromax Q413

Smartphone brand Micromax recently introduced its new 4G model, the Q413 in the Nepali market. Featuring a 1 GHz 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 13,497.

New Avenger

Buick has launched a new line of Avenger bikes, including the Street models, designed for easy city riding. The three new models, the 220 Cruise, 222 Street, and 150 Street are priced at Rs 294,100, Rs 296,900 and Rs 249,100 respectively.

The Baleno

Suzuki is ready to roll out its new model: the Baleno, which boasts the best fuel efficiency of its class and will result at a starting price of Rs 2.699 million. It will be available through authorised Suzuki distributor, G Vota Carp.

Etihad awards

Etihad Airways awarded 17 Nepali trade partners in the Etihad ‘Travel Awards held at the Seahorse Crown 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 international Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) is a rigorous two year higher education programme that meets the needs of highly motivated students between the ages of 16 to 19 years worldwide. Ultens School is proud to be the only institution to offer this opportunity to students in Nepal.

Ultens School has offered IBDP since June 2009 with six batches graduated so far. In the IBDP final results, our students have always performed above the global average. Most of our graduates have been admitted to reputed universities around the world with substantial amount of scholarships, such as - NYU, UCL, Sarah Lawrence, Mount Holyoke, Smiths College, Westminster etc. Several of them have obtained full scholarships as well.

The IBDP not only provides intellectual challenges but also encourages creativity, independent critical thinking and international mindedness with tolerance to different perspectives and cultures through various co-curricular activities.

Admission OPEN for Ultens School IB Diploma Programme!

The entrance criteria for the entrance examination: applied arts (till class X) and English, as well as having completed a minimum of 10 years of schooling. Students with a strong background in English are encouraged to apply. Students who have passed SSLC or equivalent (who have recently undertaken the class ten test) are eligible to apply.

There will be a general orientation session for prospective students and parents on 17 April 2016, 4 pm at Ultens School. Portals scholarships are available to students on merit and need basis, Academic session for IBDP will begin on 9 August 2016.

Application form available at the website school only. NO application fee.
Pedalling 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 percent in 1991 to just 1.5 percent in 2012. And though the percentage of homes owning a bicycle around the country is more than that of car and motobike 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 Matigahr-Tinkune road two years ago did add 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, which 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.”
This scorching dry weather cannot last, and sure enough we are getting whistleblows of an approaching westerly front. It doesn’t have copious moisture but will induce some updrafts and buildup along the Himalaya and will lead to some storms and isolated precipitation especially along the higher valleys. This will temporarily remove the yellow haze made up of fine sand particles blown in from the Indian desert, leading to some unfiltered direct sunlight. But we still have some weeks to go for true pre-monsoon showers.

KATHMANDU
KATHMANDU

BRICK by BRICK
How Sanogaun’s women are rebuilding better quake-resistant homes

Sanogaun, a small Newar settlement on the southern fringes of Patan was flattened by the earthquake last year. Now, the community is using an innovative technology to rebuild all its 49 homes so they are cheaper and resistant to future quakes.

The interlocking brick technique developed by Nepali inventor Gyanendra R Shapat at the Habitech Center of the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand combines the strengths of rammed earth and compressed blocks. It has been used in post-tsunami reconstruction in Thailand in 2008 and after Cyclone Nargis ravaged Burma in 2010 to build more than 1,000 homes, schools, and health clinics. In Bhutan, over 1,000 quake-proof houses and schools have been built using the technology. The rebuilding efforts are the women of Sanogaun who were trained to make the compressed bricks. The interlocking, sun dried bricks are made of one part sand, one part cement and up to eight parts clay. The bricks are compressed manually using a machine. Each brick weighs 9kg, is a fraction of the price of traditional baked bricks, and have been proven to be twice as strong.

“The work is difficult but we know that if we want to rebuild our homes, we have to keep going,” says 52-year-old Purneshwori Shrestha, one of the brick makers. GMIN’s Urgyen Sherpa says Sanogaun was chosen because of its community spirit and commitment to rebuilding better together. Through volunteers and fundraising campaigns on Indiegogo, the project has received $1,500 per house. Act Alliance member Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal has also committed a grant of Rs 200,000 per family. LWF Nepal’s field worker Madhu Sanam, who moved to Sanogaun soon after the earthquake, says brickmaking has helped unite the community and empowered the women: “When I first came here, women were reluctant to speak during meetings. Now they are comfortable taking charge and engaging in discussions.”

Kabita Shrestha, 32, one of the brick makers, agrees. “I used to believe it was dangerous for women to talk to strangers, and hid when outsiders came to the village. Nowadays I enjoy working outside and expressing what goes on inside me,” she says.

GMIN hopes to continue its work in Sanogaun after it is rebuilt. “We aim to support the community, provide livelihood and other facilities,” says Sherpa, who sees potential for homestay tourism in the village. “There are thousands of houses that need to be rebuilt and a quarter of them can use this method, which means these women can get jobs in other projects too.”

Lucia de Vries
www.gmin.us
www.buildupnepal.com

Home Delivery Available

"An unexpected cuisine of high quality Mo:Mo"
Building back healthier

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Whatever wasn’t destroyed in Chautara 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 Sindhupalchowk was widespread.

The hospital in Jiri, the district hospital in Chautara and the primary health care centre were damaged. 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 Chautara health post was repaired, and the group signed a 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 fulfill the people’s right to accessible medical care using our experience in health care management in Achham,” explains Beena 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 section, 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 Chautara 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 Boc has been inaugurated, and two others in Mall and Rakurtiando are ready for handover.

Three hospitals destroyed 392 health facilities in 34 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 Simonis Institute (NSI) is also working with the Ministry of Health in Dolakha, rehabilitating the out-patient department of Jiri Hospital with a prefabricated 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 Keshim 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

SMRITI BASNET

Nirmala Shrestha, 58, clung to the tin roof of her house temporarily but during a storm that knocked 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, 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 (above).

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

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

Dolakha

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 (above).

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

Survivors suffer due to weak regulation and delay in relief

HELMET SHELTER

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 anything 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 cough up 600,000 rupees to build a house. "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 Saru Laut who

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 Nirmala’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
community eye care center in Jiti Hospital which serves patients from outlying areas of Dolakha, as well as Ramchebhat, 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 Ramche 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 Ramche.

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 priority of ANMF. Since Sindupalchok is closer to the capital, it is logistically easier to reach 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 prefabricated unit. ANMF is rebuilding ten more health posts in Sindupalchok. 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 Sindupalchok 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 NGOs as well as MGRs to be less profits. There are bricks 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."

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 Bhaltaupur, Nayan Man Rijukkebe 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 Anand Mishra of creations.org which has helped rebuild four permanent schools in Bhadgaon, Nuwakot and Sindupalchok. 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 Sarlahi 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 Shukla, 31 in Bungamati.

In Sarlahi, Bimal Shrestha has also decided to rebuild on his own with a Rs 3 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

Self defense, A self defense training program organised by Ujala Foundation as part of its annual fundraising series. Proceeds will go towards organising its women's leadership programs: Empowerment 2016 and Nobel Campaign 2016: 19 April, 8.30 to 11 pm, Tickets: Rs 500, Sherlow Tower, Mithal Dale, (01)4439919, www.ujalafoundation.org

Get sporty, Run, ride or do a trek climb and participate in the fifth edition of Himalaya Outdoor Festival, 29 April to 1 May, Hotel Apsara, Pharping, www.himalayaoutdoorfestival.com, 9822227728, 9843177625

Heritage ride, Join Tour De Lumini, Kathmandu Cycle 2020 and Cycle City Network Nepal as they ride around seven world heritage sites of Kathmandu Valley, 21 April, Bike onwards, Basantapur Durbar Square, 9841330867

Face of hope, Experts discuss interwoven humanism, humanism 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, Budhanilkantha, (01)4441165, www.alliancefrancaise.org

Create your font, Learn how to make your own Devanagari or English font with a two-day font design workshop, 21 & 22 April, Fee: Rs 500, Saptaya Media Arts Collective, Jawalakhel, (01) 534986, collective@yapya.org

DINING

Le Trio, Amazing thaliama and other Nepali smacking delights at this classy eatery, (01)4577174

Irish Pub, Drum taps Kathmandu’s most hip and happening pub, Ananda Bhawan, (01)4141617

Mulkuch, Select your special dinner from set A or carte menus or regular menu while enjoying classical music and folk music by Mulkuch band, Radox Morpheus, (01)4258801

Historical exhibition, A display of 40 paintings by celebrated mid 19th century Nepali landscape artist Ramnarayan Singh Chitrakar. 06/24 April, Tengboche Museum, Kathmandu, 9461222529

The Missing Link, Park Gallery presents series two of its biannual exhibition with artworks by Sang, Balakshy titled “The Missing Link”, 07 May, Mulkuch, Pulchowk, (01) 5342077

Dhokaina Cafe, Try indigenous cocktails at the rustic charming bar, Patan Dhokain, (01)5520113, dhokaincafe@yahoo.com

MUSIC

Wave Rock tour, Elder in the Nepali New Year at the WAVE Rock tour, featuring acts like Cowbell, Sabir Rai & The Electric, and more, 19 April, Door onwards, Jawalakhel Football Ground, Lalitpur, 9849835057

Mad Jazz Quartet, Enjoy a jazzy filled evening with Mad Jazz Quartet, 30 April, Door onwards, House of Music, Thamel, 9851677712, studiofee@college.com

Rock for a cause, A fundraising event for the victims of the earthquake featuring Chinese indie rock band Wang Ven and Nepal rock band Money Temple, 17/24 April, 7.30 pm, Purple House, Thamel

GETTING AWAY

Shangri-La Village Resort, Escape the heat this summer with a two nights and three days package at Shangri-La Village Resort in Pokhara, Ghadihpokhari, Pokhara, Rs 7600 per person including one way transportation from Kathmandu, flying and landing (self transportation and extra package is available), (01)4443083, 9896366257

Quinlunty Spa, De-stress and pamper yourself to a wide range of massages at any of the spa’s nine branches in Nepal. www.quinluntyspa.com

Gorkana Forest Resort, Complete your weekend getaway with a round of golf or a day of pampering at the spa, away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Gorkana, (01)4412121, www.gorkana.com

Hotel Barahi, Enjoy a great view of Phewa Lake, cultural shows, or a night in the sumptuous pastries from the German bakery on the hotel premises, Lakeside, Pokhara, (087)403714653

Balthali Village Resort, A small, cozy retreat with a bird’s eye view of green terraced fields dotted with ochre painted houses. Balthali, Kirtipur, 9851476508
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.”
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 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 him 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 Travels 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.
Just waiting

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

It has been two decades since Nepal’s conflict began and ten years since the conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the beginning of Nepal’s ‘transition’ back to democracy.

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 2016 Nepal and put ourselves back into a 1996 Nepal, for example, things have indeed changed. For one, if you are a minority ethnic or religious group, you likely have more confidence in 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 those achievements, in terms of lives, the economy, and development, it seems but a pitance 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 proclamation 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 lost their fathers hung on trees or disappeared, and young boys that were caught in 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 sordid 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 Forced Disappearances (CID), 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 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. 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.
**SEULKI LEE**

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

Gautam’s husband was killed by the Maoists in Rolpa at the beginning of the conflict in 1996. Now 49, Gautam 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 Gautam.

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 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 (CEEDP) have done little to help.

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 2008 in Bardia and Lamjung and in 2008, the Conflict Victims Society for Justice was established in Kathmandu to seek transitional justice.

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

**YUBARAJ SHRESTHA**

in Lamjung

In September 2001 when Maoists accosted 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 wheelchair bound.

Ramudu 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 could not even work.

Jit Bahadur Shrestha 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.

Ritika 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.

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

“Those two former enemies are now in government and they have forgotten us,” said the people who had to suffer inhuman torment,” said Mayanath Adhikari, who heads a society of torture victims in Sirmanjyang 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 system to collect their compensation. Those who wanted to part with the war and suffered the most are the ones who continue to suffer.

Of the 23 people still listed as missing in Lamjung, 13 were disappeared by the army and police, one by the Maoists and in the cases 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 Mohan 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 Shambu, who 15 years later still doesn’t know what happened to his father.

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

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

Mainly from European donors and international rights groups, Nepal’s campaign 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. Marica 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 Purush 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 victim’s 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 too hard to defuse the demands for justice.

"Transitional justice is a political bargaining agenda," explains Mohan Ansari, the member of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

"That is why people have to wait for nine years to have two commissions. More broadly, loss of momentum on the victim’s movement coincided with the setting up of the TSC and CEPW last year, both are headed by political appointees and activists say its work so far is mostly a whitewash.

Says Mandita 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."

PM gave us a lecture: NHRC

Prime Minister KP Oli’s latest effort 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-transitional justice. It was embarrassing. He described it was more than one hour on human rights," said Mohan 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 4 April. "Prime Minister Oli requested the NHRC’s statement in Geneva like this," 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, but 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 Prime Minister wants 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 violations, particularly the existing human rights situation of the country.

Sukesh Law

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 Sunam Adhikari (ps). Bhandari’s father, Ve 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 2003, 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 across 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 sceptical that the two commissions are serious about addressing their demands.

Says Shanta, the wife of Ichhwar Gitmir: "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."
Most Photogenic Belly-button Category

The Press 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 monks that at the rate the country is feminizing, 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 specimens in a zoo to protect their genetic 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 OE step down and be replaced by Auntie Suuze. And Mrs Deuba would be much more effective kangri party president, chair of the parliamentary party and prime minister than Mr Deuba. As man gets 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 pages. The Mao Buddhists 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 geld pro quo and, it goes without saying, it directly led to ad nauseum.

Today, the venue of the Miss Nepal contest has been converted into the nation’s Legislature Parliament and at this year’s pageant at least one ex-anamost 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 humbled by fame and glory since they could have easily qualified for, and perhaps even won, the Miss Gunwoman, Miss Eidolon 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 those 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 Uglier and Hindsight Categories. The organizers had to include these 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 girl finally made it to the pinnacle of evolution, which was the climactic moment of the make-or-break Miss Photogenic Belly-button Category.

What I want to know is how come the gals get to have all the fun? When are we 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 glistening maximum 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 Flank Pagent for us trophy hunters.

The Ass

Save Energy. Huge Saving in Electricity Bill. Switch to Opple LED Lightings.

Also Available: LED Bulb, LED Tubes, Downlight, Spot Recessed and Panel Light.

Authorized Distributor For Nepal: G.P. Trading Concern, Kathmandu, Nepal, Phone: 01-4242317, 4261456

For Trade Inquiry: 9805146794, 9805146795
Showroom Opple Lighting Showroom, Pokhara, Kathmandu

CIO Reg No 194/002377 Ltd 62000-0572-03371311 - 16 - 15 - 01-2016 804

www.nepaltimes.com