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It's not me, Prachanda wants to be PM

Prachandaji, are you outstanding or understanding?

ANANDA RAM DANGOL

The capital is suddenly agog again with talk of a new government to replace the current coalition led by Prime Minister Oli. Two months after Oli deftly defused a NC-Maoist attempt to dislodge him, the grumbling is getting louder again. What is focusing everyone's attention is December 2017 — by when there are supposed to be three elections. Letting the UML use the nationalism card, spend on populist projects under the new budget, and have the incumbent advantage in campaigning would make Oli stronger, they feel.

The NC's Sher Bahadur Deuba, under pressure from his own party, wants to be prime minister for the fourth time by replacing Oli. If that cannot be achieved, he is willing to let Pushpa Kamal Dahal lead a coalition that will include the NC.

Dahal, who postponed his Australia trip last week because of fear of arrest for wartime atrocities, is worried about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. By being prime minister, he feels he can gain immunity from prosecution. The likes of Ram Bahadur Thapa — who recently returned to the mother party — and Narayan Kaji Shrestha are also in a hurry to throw Oli out.

Shrestha told us: "Neither the NC nor the UML is in a position to form a unity government, so our party has a chance. If that does not happen, we are open to forming a new government with the NC, and the Madhesis."

But Deuba still feels betrayed, and does not think Dahal could be a reliable partner in a new coalition. Gyanendra Karki, one of Deuba's confidantes, said: "Let the Maoists pull out first, then

we will think of a possible coalition with them."

Kamal Thapa of the RPP-N appears to be already on the campaign trail, speaking at rallies supporting the restoration of a Hindu state, and hoping that this will be seen favourably by the Narendra Modi government in India.

Meanwhile, the Madhesi parties are trying (not so successfully) to maintain their movement's momentum. They need a safe landing, which will only happen with Oli's departure. If the current situation continues, the fractious Madhesi Front will see its power base in the Tarai eroded by radicals as well as mainstream parties — especially the RPP-N with its Hindu agenda. At stake is the enormous vote bank representing the 5 million people of Province 2 of the eastern Tarai.

Kunda Dixit



LANGTANG'S NEW LIFE

Survivors of the earthquake/avalanche last year are already preparing for the autumn trekking season, with new skills and hope for the future.

PAGES 14-15

EDUCATION SPECIAL

PAGES 2, 4, 6-7

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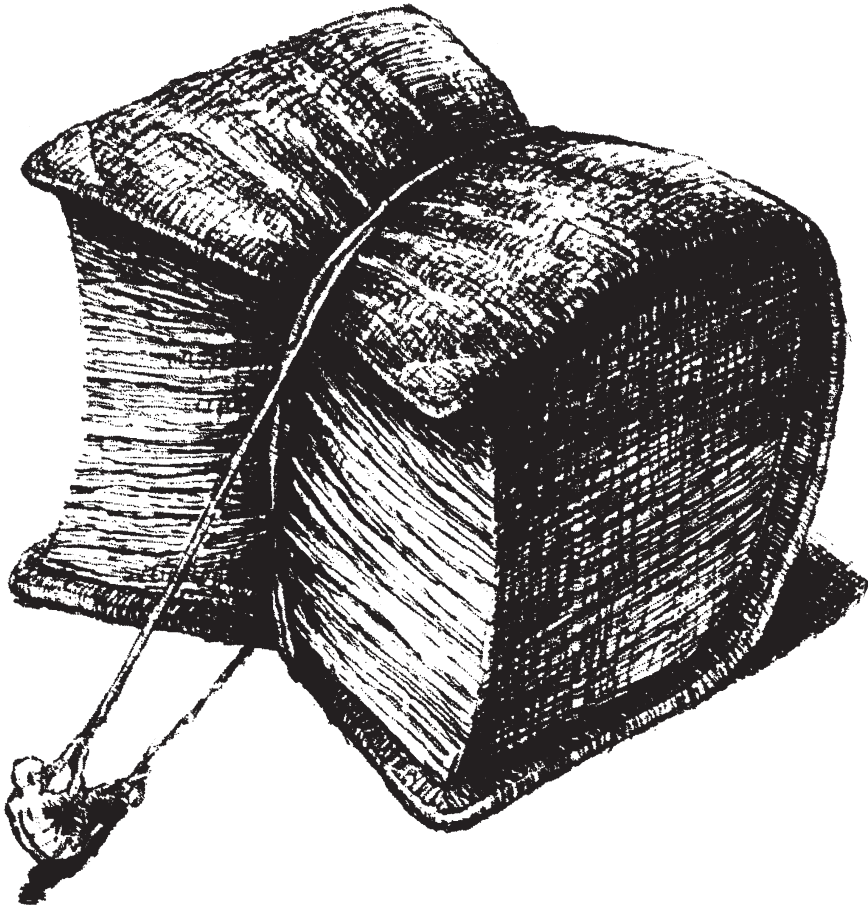
Restore the political will to raise the quality of instruction in schools, but keep politics out of education

Nearly a decade after it was first tabled in Parliament, a bill to amend the Education Act 1971 was finally endorsed by legislators last month. This is the eighth time Nepal has amended the Act, which was originally promulgated by King Mahendra during the Panchayat era to create a conformist education system.

In 2009 when the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) was launched, donors supporting it pushed a 12-year school system and new grading scheme in exams to upgrade the quality of instruction. To facilitate this, the eighth amendment to the Act was necessary. However, the bill was never ratified throughout the seven years that the Rs 8 billion SSRP was in force, because the people’s representatives were too busy with the constitution-drafting process.

By the time it was eventually passed last month, the SSRP was already in the midst of closing shop, only to be replaced by a supposedly new and improved multi-billion rupee School Sector Development Plan (SSDP). But even those MPs who voted for the bill are now complaining that they had not been given enough time to scrutinise its contents. Days after the bill had been approved, MPs from the main opposition Nepali Congress met Prime Minister KP Oli to draw his attention to the fact that some of its provisions infringe upon the spirit of the newly promulgated Constitution. Oli hemmed and hawed and said he had not had time to read the bill thoroughly and, if flawed, it could be amended again.

The way the bill was drafted, delayed, perfunctorily debated, hurriedly ratified and finally signed into law by the President represents an all-too-familiar saga of how Nepal’s political leadership functions: squandering time in senseless and irresponsible political one-upmanship, making decisions at the eleventh hour, and then regretting them soon after. Time and again young Nepalis have been made guinea pigs in trial-and-error experiments with the curriculum, instruction, exam system and grading process.



This cavalier trait was on vivid display once more when the 80-year-old School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams were abolished and a new grading structure introduced from this year. A panel led by Education Expert Kedar Bhakta Mathema had recommended the new grading method as far back as 2005. But the country was mired in conflict, and no one took heed.

However, when donors grilled the Ministry of Education (MoE) as to why the SLC pass percentage has been constantly low in spite of their enormous investment in the SSRP, the new grading system was launched at the tenth-grade level

to conceal failures. Now, as we report in our in-depth coverage of education in this issue (pages 4, 6 and 7), the MoE is preparing to extend the letter grading to lower classes. It should have been done the other way round.

Donors, led by the World Bank and Denmark, are fed up with the lack of political will to overcome the obstacles where education is concerned. Despite its role in helping increase school enrolment and female literacy, the SSRP has failed to deliver quality and address the high dropout rate. Seeing that the government has not learnt its lesson, a number of donors are refusing to allocate money to the basket fund created to implement the SSDP.

Ideally, a country ought to allocate 20 per cent of its annual budget for education, but Nepal’s Finance Minister this year set aside only 11 per cent, down from a high of 17 per cent a few years ago. Of this, nearly three-fourths is spent on salaries of teachers and school administrative staff, with little left for infrastructure, classroom upgrades, scholarships, textbooks and Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres. Despite a dramatic increase in literacy, especially among girls, their dropout rate is still high. The quality of government schools lags far behind private ones, with persistently dismal exam results. No matter what the Constitution says — universal, free and accessible education is a mirage.

The Education Act was prepared by non-elected legislators nominated to parliament by political parties who have ensured that no new private schools will be allowed to be set up, and incompetent, under-motivated temporary teachers will be made permanent. Some donors continue to throw good money after bad, hoping for a miracle. And the MoE is still shifting the goalposts.

The government needs to muster the political will to raise the quality of instruction in schools, but it is imperative that politics is kept out of education.

Times

THIS WEEK

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

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Women still waiting to rebuild homes and lives by *Shreejana Shrestha*
Women survivors of the earthquake struggle to cope with grief, loneliness and government neglect (13,330 people reached)

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Implications of Brexit for Nepal by *Manik Acharya* (85 retweets, 63 favourites)

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Most commented
Women still waiting to rebuild homes and lives by *Shreejana Shrestha*

YOUR SAY

www.nepaltimes.com

DEVELOPMENT BLACK HOLE
We all are responsible for this, not just political leaders and bureaucrats ("Nepal's development black hole", Lokmani Rai, #814). But this has to change now. If we cannot expedite development works, the newly promulgated constitution will mean nothing. People will be frustrated, and there will be a fresh wave of political turmoil. I am happy to see Nepali Congress leader Gagan Thapa being proactive to monitor the progress made in major development projects. All Members of Parliament need to support him to make the government and the bureaucracy more accountable.
Nabin Dhital

KABUL KILLING
This is worse than being colonised ("Dying, to make a living", Editorial, #814). When someone I know decides to go abroad to work, I do not know how to stop him. There are no job opportunities back home, and they get ready to work abroad in inhumane conditions, with lack of sleep and being like a slave in the Gulf or a war zone. Each government has failed to put an end to this vicious cycle of migration.
Anonymous

FREEDOM IS NOT FREE
I know how you must have felt ("Freedom is not free", Samridhi Rai, #814). The Nepali society is hypocritical and conservative, and full of prejudice and loathing. It is fine only if you conform to it. If you challenge or question its beliefs, you will be in trouble.
Calix Dázeroth

**After the deaths of 13 Nepali guards in Kabul, it is important to recall some points that Dr Harka Gurung highlighted at a conference in Kathmandu. First, because of the Gurkha recruitment, ethnic communities like Gurung, Magar, Rai and Limbu were unable to compete in politics and bureaucracy. Second, Nepal was known to the world because of the Gurkhas. Third, the state built Singha Darbar and other buildings with the money that Nepal received by sending the Gurkhas to serve the British. Fourth, neither the Nepal nor the British governments documented the deaths of the Gurkhas during the two World Wars. But the Gurkhas continue to die in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Kabul killing is just the latest incident. However, the Nepal government is only interested in money and power.
Yam Gurung**

Heema Rai (@hemarai) · 3m
I honestly thought this interview was under the "Ask" column & kept re-checking in every other answer

Nepali Times (@nepaltimes)
"Dr KC has created chaos and anarchy"
- Krishna Hari Pushkar's interview with @bocnepal bit.ly/2Q1FFJP

Pema Lhaki (@LhakiPema) · 15h
I think she is entitled to her opinion! Stop back people. Give her a break.

Nepali Times (@nepaltimes)
"I was living a regular life, then this happened."
Samridhi Rai on @BBCSajhaSawal Saga bit.ly/2Q1FFJP

umang (@umangb) · Jun 25
@nepaltimes we were war coolies and will still be war coolies after brexit.

Sujata Pant (@SujataPant) · 1h
The hypocrisy of it all... (

Nepali Times (@nepaltimes)
In terms of news value, the death of a dozen Nepali guards is equal to one NATO fatality bit.ly/2Q1FFJP

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #815

Q. Who is responsible for the safety of private guards when a foreign mission subcontracts its security?

45.4%

9.2%

40.4%

5%

Total votes: 359

Foreign mission: 45.4%

Individual guard: 9.2%

Private security subcontractors: 40.4%

Others: 5%

Weekly Internet Poll #816

To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Do you agree with the deal between the government and the main opposition NC to release the Rs 200,000 reconstruction grants in just two instalments?

Times

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Crazy politics

History is replete with examples of political dissidents being labelled 'mad'

At an interaction program earlier this month, Nepali Congress lawmaker Radheshyam Adhikari posited a rather convincing argument about the scope of duties of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). A detailed look at the sequential

ONE TO MANY
Bidushi Dhungel

history of the constitutional body and the multiple times it has been applauded and encouraged for overstepping its jurisdiction is telling. Adhikari hammered home the point that time and again we have collectively encouraged the illegal behavior of the CIAA.

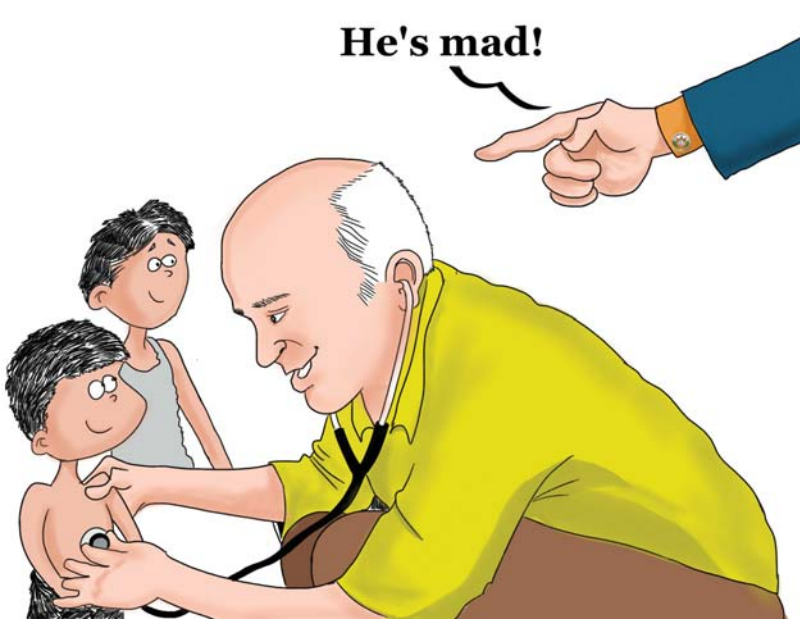
However, like most politicians today, Adhikari was reluctant to comment directly on the current goings-on, even suggesting that elected leaders would be unable to impeach the CIAA chief.

Orthopaedic surgeon and activist Govinda KC, who was in the audience — and who this week announced a fast-unto-death demanding the ouster of the CIAA head — stood up and made a powerful statement about how impeachment was not a matter of

inability, but of unwillingness. After all, he said, politicians are made of much the same mettle as the CIAA chief himself. "You may be able to let this go, but there is no way that we will," Govinda KC said, "we will not spare him, nor must you should the time come."

But no sooner had the good doctor laid out his demands than the CIAA once more overstepped its jurisdiction, into the realm of moral policing and even psychiatry. At first glance the statement issued by the CIAA regarding Govinda KC's demands is outright absurd, but a closer look reveals a far more sinister and dangerous mindset — one that is centred on quashing dissent at any cost. If the rumour mills in Kathmandu are anything to go by, the future of this Loktantra isn't looking swell, and if you thought the Prime Minister's 'Oligarchy' was bad, we ain't seen Lok's Loktantra yet. And we certainly do not want to.

The tactic of labelling people who voice dissent as 'mad' has a long history. The CIAA's statement against Govinda KC, in fact, harks back to the days of the Soviet Union or Mao's China, when political dissidence was quashed by branding dissidents 'crazy'. During slavery in the



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

US, there was even a 'medical diagnosis' (drapetomania) that supposedly caused slaves to flee captivity. Until the 1960s, homosexuality was seen as a mental illness. Hitler's Germany accused Jews of being 'racially and cognitively compromised'. As late as 2012, the Indian government used psychiatry as a tool to quiet anti-nuclear protesters in the south. Calling someone 'crazy' when they have the audacity to challenge the powers that be, and often following that up with diagnosis, forced treatment and effective

imprisonment, has proved to be one of the most effective methods to silence the opposition.

In Govinda KC's case, never mind the CIAA's breach of protocol and scope (there are no psychiatrists employed at the CIAA as far as I know) in making such a diagnosis — Nepal is a signatory to many international conventions and tools that forbid this kind of labelling and false propaganda. Brushing off what little action has been sought against the medical mafia and the gangsters

that run this country as 'mad' is beyond absurd, more so when it comes from an institution created, in principle, to embolden such action.

A psychiatrist practising at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital told me the number of cases of CIAA-induced mental illness is surging, and the incidence of paranoia and persecutory delusion is on the rise. This is due to the actively predatory nature of the organisation's recent activities, whereby no one feels safe from prosecution. Engagement in graft is becoming widely understood among bureaucrats as an excuse for personal vendettas against individuals. In fact, policymakers suggest that budgetary spending and proactivity in the civil service have plummeted because of the fear that signing any new contracts or agreements for projects might lead to an entanglement with the CIAA.

No diagnosis can be made until a thorough medical investigation is undertaken, but perhaps the question of mental instability ought to be reversed and raised among the staff within the CIAA itself, for a more accurate reflection of recent procedures. 🇳🇵

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A model government school

How does a community school in Bhaktapur achieve almost 100 per cent in SLC results year after year?

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Visitors used to seeing the poor state of government schools in Nepal will not believe they are entering one, when they pass through the gate of the Medha Secondary School in Bhaktapur.

What a pleasant surprise it is to see neat playgrounds, clean toilets, well-equipped classrooms, a drinking water purification system (*right*) and happy, energetic children. Unlike other government schools, the teachers are all present and students have not dropped out.

Instead of squalid and dusty interiors, the classrooms here are spick and span, and are all equipped with multimedia tools for audio-visual learning. The medium of instruction is English and, most importantly, the school has secured a success rate of almost 100 per cent in School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams year after year.

How does the school do it?

Principal Gangadhar Hada remembers that Medha was just like any other government school when he joined. The secret of its success lay in close collaboration between the principal and the

school management committee.

“We hired new teachers and conducted extra exams to evaluate the students,” Hada said, “And the management committee was also interested in improving quality.”

The government provides only 20 teachers for over 450 students, but the school has hired 20 extra teachers and non-teaching staff. It provides facilities that would be

the envy of even private schools in Bhaktapur: a proper computer lab and library, extra-curricular activities that include dancing and singing, and every classroom has a book corner. The school spends up to Rs 300,000 a year to provide free lunches to pre-primary students.

A Grade 10 student, Sadip Shrestha, who switched to Medha from a private school two years

ago, admitted that he is getting a better education here. “I am very happy here. I like the teaching, and I never have to miss any classes because teachers are absent.”

The student body has grown, from 80 students ten years ago to 456 now. Admission is highly sought after, and more than 300 parents apply for their children to secure one of the 80 places.

Grade 10 students pay Rs 500 for extra classes to prepare for the SLC exams. By comparison, the fee for such students in private schools in Bhaktapur start at Rs 6,000 per month.

The school collects Rs 125 and Rs 250 each from primary and secondary-level students, respectively, for facilities that include clean drinking water. Explains Hada: “The budget allocated by the government is mere peanuts, so we ask parents to contribute a small amount to the school development fund.”

Medha Secondary School is living proof that government schools need not be synonymous with poor-quality instruction. Dedicated teachers and a school management committee that works in partnership to improve quality are all that is needed.

“We are competing with the private boarding schools in Kathmandu. We can establish community schools as an alternative to private schools if all teachers and parents cooperate,” says Hada. “A teacher is the most important factor in the all-round performance of students.”



nepalitimes.com

Watch video



SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

“We are not just trying to please donors”

Interview with Education Minister Giriraj Mani Pokharel

Nepali Times: How do you think the eighth amendment of the Education Act will reform Nepal's education sector?

Giriraj Mani Pokharel: This is a historical change in education which has restructured the school system and the examination board. We have allowed temporary teachers to become permanent by passing an internal exam, or retire by accepting golden handshakes. Now, not only the parents but those who care about education can lead school management committees (SMCs). Most importantly, new schools can be registered only as trusts, not as companies. This is to provide free education until Grade 12. It is also to discourage commercialisation of schools.

But temporary teachers want those who fail the internal exam to also be entitled to golden handshakes.

The government signed several agreements with teachers before I became Education Minister. I have only implemented those agreements by passing

a bill to amend the Act. It was necessary because teachers had waited a long time. Many had retired while waiting for the bill to be passed. As someone who fought for justice and against discrimination, I cannot do them injustice. But I must tell temporary teachers that it is not fair for them to have their cake and eat it too. If they fail in an internal competition, they should not claim golden handshakes.

Donors spent billions to reform Nepal's education sector, but the SLC pass rate remained low. Was the letter grading system introduced to hide this failure?

Why would I try to do that? The letter grading system was introduced because judging the capability of students based on what they write during the three hours of exam time was not the right method of evaluation. It was not introduced to please donors. What I am now concerned about is whether I can provide colleges for all students who pass SLC exams.

Grading the grades

SAHINA SHRESTHA

This year, the government introduced a new letter grading system for the first time in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams, partly in order to address high failure rates in the number grading scheme and the lifelong stigma attached to ‘failing’ the final school exams.

However, the new system was introduced without proper planning in the middle of the academic year, and with a set of minimum criteria to enter different streams in Grade 11. This has left students, parents, teachers and even Ministry of Education (MoE) officials confused.

Even before the results of the SLC exams were published last month, 18-year-old Sapana Bhandari had been talking about committing suicide if she failed. But with the new letter grading system, Bhandari scored an overall GPA of 1.3. After the results were announced on 16 June Bhandari hanged herself from a tree near her home in Bajhang in far western Nepal,

thinking that her marks were not good enough.

This week a parent called the MoE to ask what stream his child could study with a D grade in three subjects. Information Officer Saraswati Pokharel answered the call and explained the options available, as she has been doing all week to frantic parents. Even staff from Bir Hospital had come to enquire about qualifying grades for students enrolling for staff nurse training exams.

“We try to explain that there is no concept of pass or fail in the new grading system, but it is difficult to make the students and parents understand,” disclosed Prakash Kunwar of the School Management Committee of Kanya Secondary School in Bajhang, where Sapana Bhandari was a student. However, he admitted that even the school management was not very certain about what grades are needed to enroll in different streams: “Students, parents and

The new letter grading system for school exams, though well-intentioned, has left everyone confused

local media ask us about it, but even we have not understood it completely.”

Though no students were categorised as having failed the exams, those with lower grades feel the new system is unfair. Those with D and E grades have an option to sit for re-examination in up to two subjects to improve

their grades, and if they scored those grades in more than two subjects they can retake all the exams the following year. But those with a D+ do not have the option to take the re-tests, which has left many students in a fix.

MoE spokesperson Hari Lamsal admitted there may have been a mistake but instead of scrapping the grade system altogether, the plan is to make it better and move forward. The government has also published minimum criteria for different subjects whereby if students fail to get a certain grade in one of the subjects mentioned in the criteria, they cannot enrol in the stream. For example, students who have not secured a C+ or higher in Science and Maths, C

in English, and D+ in Social and Nepali cannot study Science in Grade 11.

“This is so that students can pursue their studies according to their strength,” said Lamsal. While students feel this is unfair to them, even education experts say it is not the government’s decision to make.

“It is up to the college to decide whether a student can study a particular subject, not the government,” wrote education expert Kedar Bhakta Mathema in a column for *Himal Khabarpatrika*.

Experts also say that the grading system was introduced prematurely, without proper homework on the government’s part.

Rajendra Dahal, editor of the *Sikshak* magazine for teachers, said the letter grading system should have been introduced gradually from Grade 1 and then moved up to Grade 10, while preparing both the teachers and the curriculum.

“I agree we should have prepared the teachers, curriculum and the scoring system but this is a start,” said Lamsal. “The main reason for introducing the letter grading system was to minimise the fail percentage.”




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School mismanagement committees

The eighth amendment to the Education Act rectifies one mistake and commits another

OM ASTHA RAI

Madan Ashrit Lower Secondary School of Sabaila village in Dhanusa district is now facing the most serious crisis in its history: infrastructure expansion has stalled, teachers are scarce and students are leaving in droves.

Over 50 students migrated to private schools in 2015, and more are expected to leave this year. The school has been without a management committee after two villagers were shot dead in a clash between rival political groups last year.

Established in 1996, the school receives an annual grant of Rs 1.2 million from the government. Local politicians wanted to control the budget with their own candidate to head the school management committee (SMC). The Nepali Congress and the Maoists formed an alliance against the UML. A gang — allegedly mobilised by former UML legislator Yoga Narayan Yadav — attacked the NC-Maoist supporters, killing two. Yadav is now facing trial.

“After this tragic incident, we do not have the courage to conduct another election to form a new committee,” says Headmaster Ram Pukar Gami,



BIKRAM RAI

“and without it we will not be able to overcome this crisis.”

Since 2011, six persons have been killed in clashes over the SMCs in Dhanusa alone. Three more were killed in Rautahat in the same period, in disputes over control of school budgets. Disagreements and violence have disrupted SMC elections in more than 5,000 schools, mostly in the Tarai.

Krishna Thapa, President of the School Management Committee Federation, says: “In the absence of local elections, school management committees have become a platform for local politicians to flex their muscles.”

In general, schools run by democratically elected and functioning management committees that include parents

perform better. But this still means politicians who want to control school funds choose poor and pliable parents as members, and purloin the school budget.

Parliament passed a much-delayed bill to amend the Education Act 1971 last month, dismissing provisions to elect heads to SMCs. Education Minister Giriraj Mani Pokharel told us this week: “There will be no more disputes and violence, because we did away with school management committee elections.”

The provision to allow only parents to head the committees has also been scrapped, and Krishna Thapa says this will undermine efforts to improve education: “Now those driven by ulterior motives will be heading

the committees.”

Experts say allowing politically influential people — whose children are themselves in private schools or abroad — to oversee the running of government schools proves that the amendment to the Education Act was passed because of political pressure.

Rajendra Dahal, editor of the education magazine *Sikshak*, says: “This is a lost opportunity.”

The amended Act also allows over 17,000 temporary teachers to become permanent teachers. Those who are not confident that they will become permanent through an internal competition can opt for golden handshakes.

Lawmaker Radheshyam Adhikari of the opposition NC argues that unqualified and under-motivated teachers is a factor in the low quality of public education and Nepal has wasted a chance to hire young and qualified teachers, by retaining the old and exhausted ones.

However, temporary teachers are still not satisfied. They shut down all government schools in Dhanusa for one day this week, demanding that even those who fail in an internal contest should be entitled to golden handshakes, and have threatened a nationwide education strike.

Temporary teacher Amod

Kumar Jha from Dhanusa says: “The golden handshake is not even sufficient to buy funeral shrouds.”

Teachers are not fired even if a majority of their students fail every year, and are not answerable when they close schools in political protests. The amended Act bars them from being executive members of political parties, but they are still cadre.

Teachers argue that participation in political activities is their fundamental right, one that is enshrined in the constitution. President of All Nepal Teachers Organisation Lal Bahadur BC says: “In a country like Nepal where even judges and justices visit political leaders for promotions, it is nothing but hypocrisy to bar us from participating in politics.”

Nepal is launching the multi-billion dollar School Sector Development Project (SSDP) to reform the public education system, from this month. But inaction, impunity and confusion that led to the failure of the School Sector Reform Program (SSRP) persist.

Says Krishna Thapa of the SMC Federation: “We are not hopeful about the SSDP, because it is a copy-and-paste from the SSRP.” 🇳🇵

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BIZ BRIEFS

Ramadan celebrations,

Qatar Airways hosted an *iftar* dinner with a special spread of Arabic cuisine at Hotel Yak & Yeti, Kathmandu to mark the month of

Ramadan. The event saw various dignitaries from the government of Nepal, Nepal Hajj Committee and embassy delegates.

Freezer launch,

Consumer electronics company Him Electronics recently announced that it will be distributing

British-brand Norfrost deep freezers in Kathmandu. Three models of the freezer (100L, 175L and 215L) will be available, in white and silver.

New office,

Emirates, the airline that connects Nepal to over 150 destinations in more than 80 countries using a partner airline to Dubai, inaugurated its new sales office at Saakha

Building, Hattisar recently. To attract customers, the office sports a trendy interior with Italian furniture.

Fly high,

Etihaad Airways is offering students travelling in economy class a discount

of up to 40% to destinations across North America. Tickets are on sale until July 13, for travel between July 1 and October 31.

Home in Baglung,

Dish Home recently inaugurated its 14th service centre in Baglung, which will offer technical and hardware support, and help

with problems relating to recharge and signals in the area.

prabhu BANK



After a sputtering start, the monsoon appeared to have fizzled out this week. Indeed, northern India and the Nepal Tarai received less than the normal precipitation for this time of year. However, things are picking up and a monsoon pulse will envelope the whole country over the weekend. Western Nepal will see more rain than the central and eastern parts, but expect showers, sometimes heavy and mainly at night, into next week. Temperature will stay below 30 Celsius, but will feel like more, because of the high humidity.

FRIDAY	26° 20°	SATURDAY	26° 20°	SUNDAY	27° 21°
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AFTER 100 MONTHS:
Editor of *Sikshak* magazine
Rajendra Dahal in his office. The
latest issue of the magazine (*below*).

Despite its importance for the future of the country, education is not really a priority for the mass media. And even when education is covered, journalists rarely report on government schools, their students and the teachers.

More than 80 per cent of Nepali students go to government schools first, but Kathmandu’s neglect of public education is reflected in the mainstream media’s lack of interest in government schools and teachers.

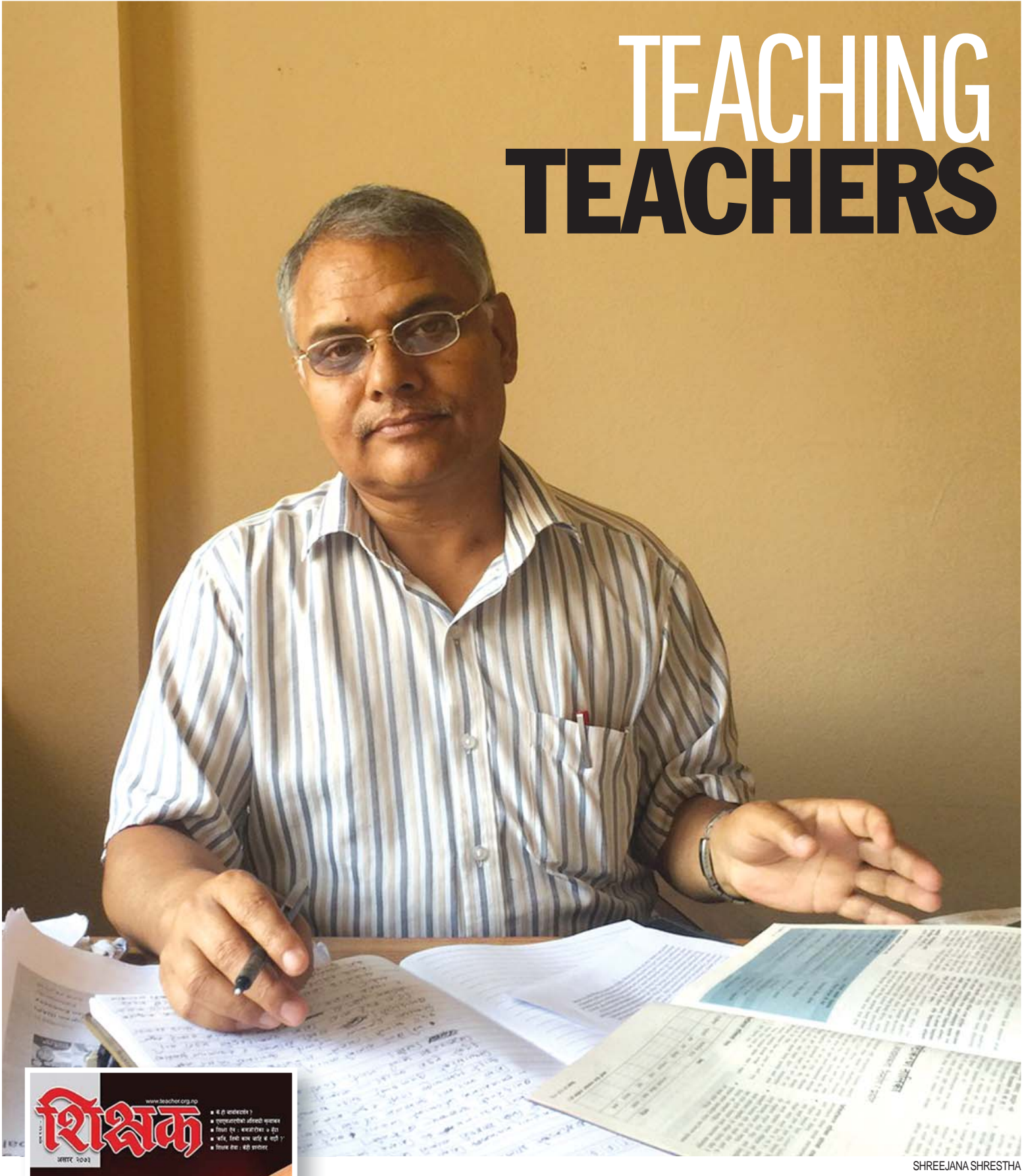
Even editor Rajendra Dahal found it difficult to draw the attention of fellow journalists to the issue of public education, and set out to change all that eight years ago by starting his own magazine for teachers.

“The choice for a large number of students is government schools but public education has always remained in the shadows,” Dahal says. “Journalists don’t know that primary schools make news, because they are not trained.”

The monthly magazine *Sikshak* was launched in 2008 with the improbable mission of highlighting the need to improve the quality of government schools in Nepal. Juggling his other jobs — as chair of the Press Council, and later Press Advisor to President Ram Baran Yadav — Dahal built the magazine into the only national publication specially dedicated to teachers.

Dahal’s passion for the magazine and the need to upgrade the skills and motivation of teachers shows in how he talks about using journalism to reform the quality of instruction in government schools. He believes the periodical can be the vehicle to boost the morale of guardians, students, and teachers working in such schools. Eight years down the line, the magazine is marking its 100th issue this month and its circulation of 25,000 and average readership of five teachers for each copy means it reaches almost 90 per cent of school teachers.

“The credibility of the magazine is



SHREEJANA SHRESTHA



very high among teachers, and I feel very proud about what we have achieved to highlight education and pave the way for its improvement,” Dahal says.

One of the most popular sections of the publication is a column where teachers, mostly from rural areas, send in queries relating to the government curriculum and their careers. The answers are formulated by a team of teachers that consults experts in order to develop appropriate responses.

However, Dahal’s biggest challenge is to make the monthly viable and to maintain

its quality and relevance.

The cost of production is covered by subscription and advertising revenue. Although *Sikshak* kicked off with seed money from the non-profit Save the Children, it has run without donor support for six years.

“We were on the verge of shutting down the publication several times,” Dahal admits, “but the fact that a magazine for teachers has survived for so long goes to prove just how great the need for it is.” 🇳🇵

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Ambassador Alaina B Teplitz on tour to inspect US-assisted projects in Upper Mustang

MINA GAUCHAN
in **MUSTANG**

When the ambassador of the United States travels within Nepal, the itinerary is carefully planned in advance. But Nepal is full of surprises, and so it was that while trekking in Mustang last month Ambassador Alaina B Teplitz

encountered a group of visiting students from the University of Vermont.

At a tea house in Lo Manthang, Teplitz discussed US-Nepal diplomatic relations with them, and outlined their country's main priorities in Nepal: encouraging democracy, enhancing economic prosperity, and supporting disaster risk reduction efforts.

“We have multiple interests in Mustang, from cultural to environmental to ecological perspectives, the same things that we also

support throughout Nepal," Teplitz said.

"We looked at cultural heritage and how we can help and support Nepal preserve what is interesting and unique, and perhaps in danger of erosion."

Indeed, economic prosperity and heritage preservation seem to go hand in hand, as this ecologically and culturally fragile trans-Himalayan region of Nepal is transformed by a new highway linking it to Jomsom and Pokhara to the south.

“The best way forward for Mustang is successful development of infrastructure and tourism in a way that preserves the region’s unique culture and biodiversity,” Teplitz said. “Mustang’s potential can be further developed economically and the livelihoods of the people upgraded once there are better facilities for tourists, and enhanced entrepreneurship and economic growth opportunities.”

The United States has over the years



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nastery in Lo Manthang.



Calling on Crown Prince S P Bista at the palace in Lo Manthang.



Being welcomed by a community near Kagbeni.



supported various environmental and cultural preservation activities in Mustang and in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), and Teplitz undertook the trek to inspect and gain first-hand knowledge about them. The Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation has supported 17 cultural restoration projects in Nepal over the past two decades — including several in Upper Mustang — with a total exceeding \$2 million.

In 2008, the Fund supported the Lo Gyalpo Jigme Cultural Conservation Foundation to restore and clean three historic chortens: Gyeko and Kukchung Chortens in Ghemi village, and Gangba Chorten in Tsarang. It is also implementing projects for Jampa Lhakhang wall paintings that were damaged in last year's earthquake.

Teplitz travelled with members of her family as well as embassy officials for 11 days, visiting Kagbeni, Chele, Ghiling, Tsarang and Lo Manthang. She is the third

US ambassador to visit Mustang in recent years.

Teplitz visited the *Hariyo Ban* environmental initiative, which studies the ecology of the snow leopard and the grey wolf, the effect of climate change adaptation and sustainability, as well as ways to strengthen anti-poaching efforts. She met district officials in Jomsom, talked to community leaders and also enquired about *Suaahara*, another embassy-supported project that focuses on nutrition and health in Mustang.

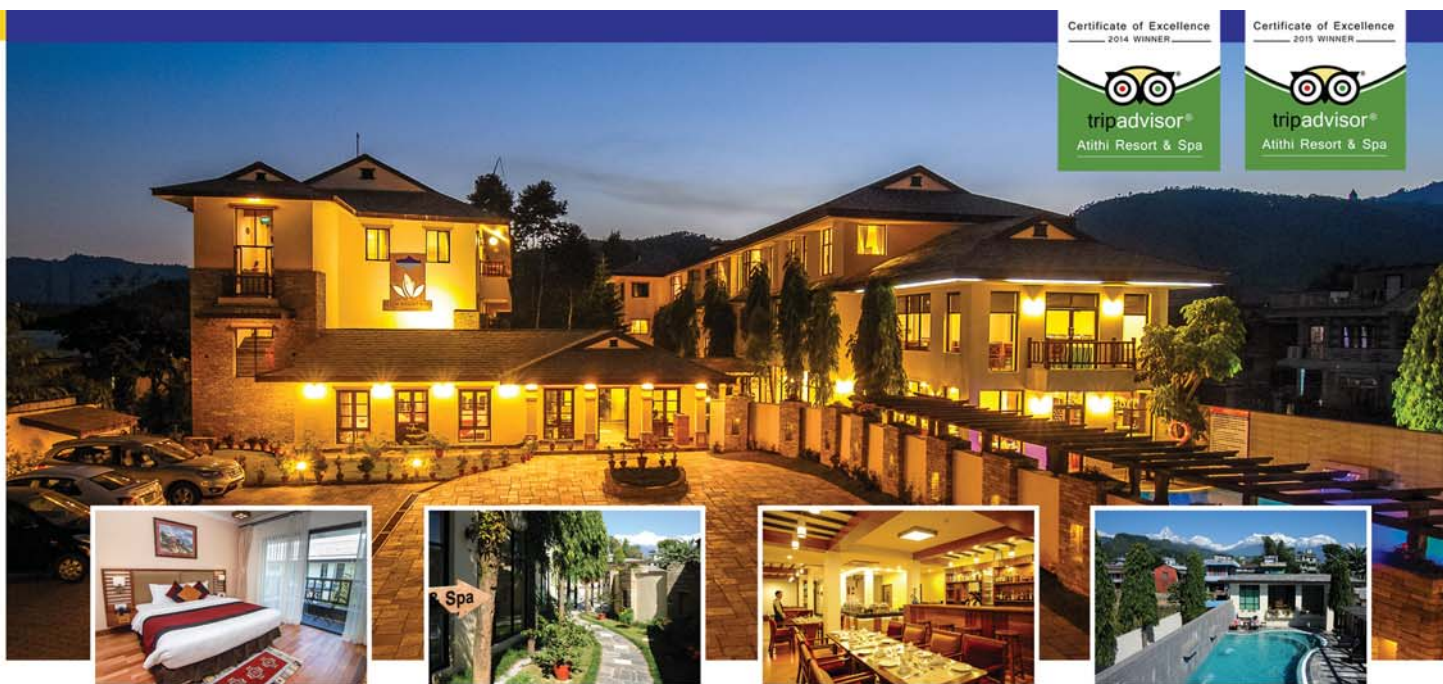
In Lo Manthang, Teplitz called on the Crown Prince of Upper Mustang at his palace and talked about economic and environmental challenges, specifically the growing water scarcity that people face in Mustang and the region.

"Through protection of cultural heritage, we will support the development of tourism and knowledge transfer for local people on traditional skills such as

preservation of ancient arts and thangka painting, wall mural restoration and other historical techniques that can even be used in other places," Teplitz said.

Teplitz also visited the ACAP office for a briefing, and toured the Mustang High Altitude Warfare School that hosts US personnel for joint training exercises. At the end of her trip, she gave an interview to Radio Mustang, an FM station in Jomsom. The ambassador was particularly interested in finding out about educational opportunities for local students, and visited schools in Kagbeni and Lo Manthang.

Teplitz says she was most impressed with the women of Mustang. "They seemed to be the backbone of the tourist trade, they are business women, clearly entrepreneurs," she said, "it's a harsh environment, and getting supplies must be very difficult, as well as providing for their families on top of the work they are doing." 🇳🇵



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EVENTS



Dance for a cause,
Sway with acclaimed dancers Meher Malik, Subima Shrestha and Maradee De Guzman as they perform to create awareness and raise funds for various programs of Animal Nepal. Dinner and a DJ session will follow.
2 July, 6 pm onwards, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal Marg, 9860130928/9818659805/ 9808093887

The rebound,
Cheer on as teams participate in a wheelchair basketball league championship organised by ENGAGE, with the support of the Swiss Embassy and Turkish Airlines.
2 July, 8.30 to 11.30 am, Campion School, Lagankhel, 9813053115, info.engagenepal@gmail.com or engagenepal@gmail.com



Day hike,
Hike from Batase Danda in Dhulikhel through scenic villages of Batase Gaun and Shankhu, and the picturesque Namo Buddha monastery.
2 July, 6 am to 3 pm, Pick-up point Bhrikuti Mandap Exhibition Hall Complex, Rs 800 per person (for first timers) and Rs 300 (for regular hikers), (01) 4266559/ 9851014616, hikeformnepal@gmail.com

Kathmandu Kora,
Join hundreds of cycling enthusiasts and ride for 50, 75, or 100 km to raise funds for a birthing centre in Pyutar, Lalitpur.
16 July, 7.30 am onwards, Mangalbar, (01) 4412508, www.kathmandukora.net

Water show,
A community theatre performance exploring themes of water and health.
3 pm (1 July), 12 pm (2 July), Banglamukhi Temple, www.jeeewanjal.com

Eid al-Fitr
Mark the end of Ramadan and rejoice with friends and family on the first day of Shawwal.
6 July

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DINING



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Thamel, (01) 4412158

Irish Pub,
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Lazimpat, Ananda Bhawan, (01) 4416027



Little Italy,
Go vegetarian at this Italian food chain and don't forget to end your meal with the chef's special chocolate bomb.
Darbar Marg, (01) 4233577, food.junction@shitnepal.com

Lal Durbar Restaurant,
Authentic Nepali dinner with a cultural show.
Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, (01) 4248999, reservation@laldurbar.com



Lhakpa's Chulo,
Nepali dal-bhat, Newari khaja, Italian risotto, and Thai green curry: take your pick.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5542986

MUSIC



Music with fun,
Live performance by the Maya ko dori pop singer Deepak Bajracharya and his band, in addition to fun in the water at Kathmandu Fun Valley.
6 July, 10 am to 4.30 pm, Kathmandu Fun Valley, Bhaktapur, 9843919642, funvalleykathmandu@gmail.com

Amusing acoustic,
Enjoy a soul-soothing acoustic evening with Rajat and Yankey.
1 July, 8 to 11 pm, House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172

Throwback Friday,
Spend your Friday evening listening to hits from the 60s through the 90s with Shiana.
1 July, 6 pm to 2 am (free entry until 9 pm, and cover charge of Rs 300 after), Tamas Spa Lounge, Thamel, (01) 4257658



Reggae sundown,
Tap to the beats of reggae music with Nepali bands Cultivation and The Himalion as they belt out tunes of Cultivation's debut album *Plains, Hills and Mountains*.
23 July, 6.45 pm onwards, Basecamp, Jhamsikhel, 9841226397

Mini Bazaar,
Visit the mini bazaar not only for the music but the stalls, food and various activities.
1 July, 2 to 7 pm, Namlo Gardens, Bakhundole, 9851103087, info@namlorestaurant.com.np, Entry fee: Rs 699, Rs 499 for students (inclusive of food and one beverage)

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Pokhara, salesvr@hotelshangrila.com, hotelshangrila.com, (01) 4420252/9808187015



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2 JULY		
	Wales vs Belgium	
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3 JULY		
	Germany vs Italy	
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4 JULY		
	France vs Iceland	
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Ekantakuna — a 'quiet corner' in Nepali — is no longer deserted. With eateries like Piano B and Higher Ground setting up shop, the once-tranquil streets of the area bustle with fine-diners and bakery lovers. The newest addition to the block is the hip new joint Utopia, located away from the clamour of Jawalakhel's noisy streets.

Utopia occupies an entire building and offers a wide selection of seating arrangements: the small patio with an adjoining mini-bar, an outdoor seating area, a ground floor room next to the coffee station, or on the first floor overlooking the restaurant. A meeting hall, also on the first level, provides a conducive space for those who wish to work while having a meal.

We settled into the comfortable chairs outside, and were asked for our choices promptly. The vast menu features Newari dishes, as well as French, Italian and other continental cuisines. After taking time to peruse the options, we decided on two light starters: Seafood Timbale (Rs 475), and Corn and Bacon Chowder (Rs 315), the latter on the recommendation of our host.

Adorned with lettuce, cucumber and cherry tomatoes, the dish was an amalgamation of seafood: prawn, white fish, squid, mussels, octopus and baby shrimp. The instant it was served, we noted with disappointment



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Utopia Restaurant



PICS: SMRITI BASNET

that it was not the mousse its name had led us to expect, but instead resembled a run-of-the-mill seafood salad. Fortunately, the soup more than made up for the Seafood Timbale's lack of flavour and authenticity. The creamy chowder — with its garnish of corn, celery and potatoes — delighted our palates. We relished it even though it lacked a side of bread and the robust bacon flavour overshadowed the corn.

Hoping to spice up the repast, we ordered Sukuti (Rs 240), shredded buffalo meat prepared

Newari-style. Served on a papad, the crispy meat was seasoned to perfection with tomatoes and chillies. Although it could have done with a lighter hand with the onions and a heartier serving of meat, the spicy dish whetted our appetites for the entrée.

We opted for the Utopia Chicken Florentine (Rs 675) as our main course. Typically, the Italian dish comes on a bed of spinach and mushrooms, steeped in a white cream sauce with a topping of baked mozzarella. The restaurant version's had a twist to it: chicken breast stuffed with a spinach mousse and served with garlic rice, sautéed vegetables and a tomato pesto sauce. It was scrumptious. The piquant stuffing, enhanced by the use of fresh herbs, added to the appeal of the moist and savoury meat.

To round off the evening, we ordered the Oreo Frappe (Rs 275). The drink stood out: it had a full-bodied taste of coffee, boosted with a blend of Oreo cookies and chocolate ice cream. Although we enjoyed the rich consistency, it proved a challenge to sip the frappe through straws.

Opened only a month-and-a-half ago, Utopia was packed with youngsters out to enjoy a sultry summer evening. The pleasing, well-furnished interior, coupled with mural-decorated walls, added to the vibrancy of the joint.

Despite the slightly sluggish service and somewhat skimpy portion of soup, the courteous staff and relaxed ambience are among the reasons that make the restaurant deserving of a visit. Smriti Basnet

How to get there: Turn left from the Embassy of Switzerland and head straight until the Department for International Development (DFID). Utopia is directly opposite.

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THE DRESSMAKER

Kate Winslet glows in her starring role as a woman bent on revenge in *The Dressmaker*, a funny, weird, hybrid of a film that is part Western, part romance, and mostly black comedy. Winslet plays the role of Myrtle 'Tilly' Dunnage, a headstrong, talented,



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

independent woman who returns to her hometown of Dungatar — a small town that is populated by vivid characters with often petty mindsets — to take care of her mother, the mentally unstable Molly (played wonderfully by the great Judy Davis).

But Tilly's return, twenty-five years after her hasty departure as a child (she was shipped off to boarding school), is also motivated by her need to figure out the exact circumstances under which she was so ignominiously shoved out, a situation that subsequently resulted in a great deal of mental trauma for herself and Molly.

Slowly, over the course of the film that is based on a novel by Rosalie Ham and set in the 1950s, we learn that Tilly believes she is responsible for the death of Stewart Pettyman (Rory Potter), her classmate in school and a nasty bully who died under shady circumstances. Stewart's father, the equally nasty town councillor



Evan Pettyman (Shane Bourne), forces Tilly to be removed from her mother — a command that is reluctantly carried out by the kindly but powerless local police sergeant Horatio Farrat (Hugo Weaving).

Tilly sets out to make trouble and to figure out the truth, determined to make the townspeople pay for their unkindness to her as a child and their continued apathy towards her mother Molly, who with Tilly's care begins to slowly recover her caustic wit and the idiosyncrasies that made her the outcast in the face of insular conventions.

Tilly's plan is simple: she means to make a living by sewing couture dresses for the women,

thereby winning them over even as she sets the town on its head as the women begin to abandon their frumpy frontier clothing for the delectable creations made by Tilly's magical hands — a skill she acquired partly from Molly, a talented seamstress herself, and partly from being trained in Paris after boarding school, by the likes of Vionnet.

Slowly, as Tilly begins to get at the truth, other deeply nasty secrets are revealed, she falls in love (who wouldn't?) with the handsome Teddy McSwiney (Liam Hemsworth), Molly becomes more coherent (in other words, her formidable self), Sergeant Farrat, inspired by Tilly's wondrous creations, reveals himself as a closet (pardon the pun) cross-dresser, and gradually the town becomes a better version of itself.

Directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse, this Australian production was an enormous hit *Down Under* — and it will make you smile, with its wit and the lively performances by the truly stellar cast. The film, however, despite all its light moments is an indelible commentary on the cruelty and despair that small-mindedness can spawn, and is a lesson in human resilience and the courage that is necessary to overcome the viciousness that can be wreaked upon people by the hateful few.

nepalitimes.com

■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



RSS

SIGNED INTO LAW: President Bidya Bhandari on Wednesday authenticated the Education Act Eighth Amendment Bill passed by Parliament last month. (See story, page 6)



ANANDA RAM DANGOL

ELECTION TIME: Prime Minister KP Oli met Acting Chief Election Commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav and Commissioner Ila Sharma at the Election Commission on Monday, and instructed them to prepare to hold local elections in December.



RSS

UNIVERSAL JURISDICTION: Australian Ambassador Glenn White called on CPN (Maoist-Centre) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Tuesday reportedly to discuss the latter's aborted visit to Australia fearing prosecution there for wartime atrocities.



BIKRAM RAI

SATYAGRAHA: Orthopedic surgeon Govinda KC announced on Monday a fast-unto-death from 10 July, demanding impeachment of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Chief Lokman Singh Karki. (See stories, pages 3 and 13)



RENAUD MEYER

NEPAL IS SAFE: Hollywood actress and UNDP goodwill ambassador Michelle Yeoh in Kathmandu to spread the message that Nepal is safe to visit despite last year's earthquakes.

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Dr KC is mentally ill: CIAA



Spokesperson for the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Krishna Hari Pushkar in an interview with the BBC Nepali Service after the anti-graft body dubbed Dr Govinda KC — who is set to go on a hunger strike from 10 July to demand the CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki’s impeachment — a “mentally ill” person.

BBC Nepali Service: Why is a constitutional body so angry about allegations made by an individual?
Krishna Hari Pushkar: We just wanted to make two things clear. First, Dr KC is mentally ill...

Is it Dr KC or you who is mentally ill?
It is Dr KC.

Are you the spokesperson for an institution that certifies someone as mentally ill?
Under the influence of the mafia and organised criminals, Dr KC has been creating trouble for the country and the government by launching his fast-unto-death campaign in instalments.

If he is influenced by organised criminals, why not take action against them?
This is why we have recommended that the state provide medical treatment for Dr KC. Only a mentally ill person can hurl the kind of accusations that he has levelled against a constitutional body like the CIAA, its Honourable Chief Commissioner and Commissioners.
If Dr KC has maligned someone, a constitutional body like the CIAA should know the correct way to react.

He is an orthopaedic surgeon, but how many surgeries did he perform in the last four years? Has he done anything to improve the condition of the hospital where he works? Go and see how dirty the kitchen and toilets are at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH). He is not doing what he is supposed to do, but is going on hunger strikes without any valid reasons. As a government employee, is he supposed to create trouble for the government? He is mentally ill.

Can a constitutional body issue such an irresponsible statement against an individual?
What you need to understand is this: an

individual should not spread terror in the country, level baseless accusations against others and create trouble for anyone because of his mental illness. He is writing nonsense in the newspapers under the influence of those who are being investigated by the CIAA.

Who are the organised criminals and the corrupt that you refer to in your statement?
Some of them have already been proven guilty by the special court. The rest are still being investigated by the CIAA. And Dr KC is speaking on their behalf.

Can the CIAA label those who are still being investigated as organised criminals and corrupt?
Those who have been proven guilty by the court can definitely be called criminals and corrupt. Dr KC is now saying exactly what those whom we are investigating used to say. By launching hunger strikes every now and then, he has ruined the TUTH. Patients are dying there due to lack of treatment.

In its statement, the CIAA says it is keeping an eye on Dr KC’s activities. Is that a threat?
We have been keeping a close watch on what Dr KC is up to. He has created chaos and anarchy not only in the Teaching Hospital but also in the medical sector.

Who has a cleaner public image? Dr KC or CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki?
The Honourable Chief Commissioner Karki’s decisions and activities are legal. If you think Dr KC has a cleaner image because he distributed cetamol tablets in villages, this is a job meant for Assistant Health Workers. He talks about reforms while his own hospital remains in a sorry state. He has no right to defame a constitutional body and its Honourable Commissioners, and create trouble for the government.

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Langtang's new life

Survivors prepare for autumn trekking season with new skills and hope for the future

UPASANA KHADKA
in LANGTANG

Tourism has been slow to pick up after Langtang was devastated by the deadly earthquake-avalanche of 25 April 2015, but many survivors who were trained in the hospitality industry while taking shelter in Kathmandu

last year are gearing up to restore Langtang — and rebuild it better — to welcome back trekkers.

Two such programs of instruction and guidance in small hotel and lodge management and professional guide training were provided by Tourism Cares, with support from the Rasuwa Relief, Harvard Kennedy School Nepal Fund and Langtang Management and Reconstruction Committee, at the National Academy

for Tourism and Hospitality Management in Kathmandu. They have returned with updated knowledge, guide licences and cooking equipment, and are busy with construction in order to be ready for the autumn tourist season.

Lhakpa Jangba hosted over 120 guests in the spring trekking season after moving back, and plans to move to Kyanjin and open the Dorje Bakery with his

wife. He is very proud of his new guest book, which marks a fresh beginning. His previous one contains messages from trekkers he hosted between 2011 and April 2015, and fortunately survived the avalanche. It holds a special place in his heart as it captures stories and memories of his pre-earthquake life.

One message (*right*) from 23 April 2015 is signed by Sydney Schumacher, a 19-year-old

American trekker who lost her life in Langtang last year. On the morning of the earthquake, she had come to his bakery to pack a couple of his famous cinnamon rolls before heading towards Kyanjin Ri peak.

Tsering Tamang took the hotel management course in Kathmandu along with her son and two daughters. She used to own Namaste Lodge and Buddha Guest House in Langtang, both of which were destroyed. She is rebuilding

Havoc in heaven

Revisiting what used to be Langtang Village, after 17 years



DISASTER SCULPTURE: A concrete column, demolished in last year's earthquake, still stands in mute testimony to the death and destruction of Langtang.



PICS: MOHAN MAINALI

MOHAN MAINALI
in LANGTANG

Arriving in Langtang after 17 years, video editor Rabindra Pandey looked east from Gumba Danda. He hoped to see some of the quaint stone houses he had filmed in 1999, and scanned around for the Nepal Army checkpoint guarding the Langtang National Park. There used to be a micro-hydropower plant by the river. There used to be a river.

But to his shock and dismay, everything was gone. Only a vast terrace of white rock and sand, and fluttering prayer flags, were visible where the homes used to be. "It was worse than a war zone, at least you see ruins of buildings after a war," Pandey said, walking across a field of huge boulders.

Previously 130 houses stood here but except for one house under the cliff, none of them remains. On 25 April, Langtang was first shaken by an earthquake, and a minute later it was obliterated by the shockwave preceding a gigantic avalanche of ice and rock that tumbled down the mountain. Scientists estimate that 7 million cubic metres of rubble came down on the village, enough to cover 10 football fields with rocks 100 m thick. The blast wave was



ALL PICS: UPASANA KHADKA



Namaste in Kyanjin, with her son — who is excited to use his new guide licence during the autumn trekking season — helping her out. An elder daughter and her husband are building a new hotel in Mundu called Golden Holiday.


Dhamchay Tamang remembers being heartbroken when she disembarked from the rescue helicopter in Kathmandu last year: she had narrowly escaped by hiding in the hole for storing potatoes in winter, but had lost her husband, daughter and home. When her son Tsewang found her, she was completely covered in snow and in a great deal of pain.

Dhamchay now says she has to be strong to take care of her two surviving children, and with the knowledge gained from the training she has rebuilt her Small Start Guest House and renamed it Langtang View Guesthouse.

 nepalitimes.com
■ Watch video 

Phurpu Tamang and her husband ran the eight-room Peaceful Guest House in Langtang. He perished along with their son, while their daughter and another son are studying in Kathmandu. She has now reconstructed a smaller lodge and hopes to expand as she earns from trekkers in the coming season.

But labour is in short supply, and workers from down the Valley are helping out. Says Lhakpa Jangba: “Because of the labourers from outside, things seem busy in Langtang but once they leave, the village is going to feel so empty.”

There is yet hope that a tourism revival will bring life back to Langtang, anew. 

REBUILDING BETTER:

- 1 Karsang Lopchan (*extreme left*) at a climbing wall in Kathmandu last year during trekking guide training, and last month in Langtang with his ID.
- 2 Tsering Tamang (*centre*) bakes a cake with her son and daughter at hotel management training in Kathmandu, and last month in front of her rebuilt Namaste Lodge in Kyanjin.
- 3 Lhakpa Jangba learned to bake in Kathmandu, and returned to Langtang to revive his Dorje Bakery.



RABINDRA PANDEY



YESTERDAY AND TODAY: Langtang Village from a film by Rabindra Pandey 17 years ago, and a view of the same spot after a massive avalanche triggered by last year's earthquake swept the village away.

Subba Tamang is critical of the delay in help for rebuilding and the tax on construction timber.

whom were 93 men and women between the ages of 25 and 40. Said village elder Subba Tamang: “We lost most of our able-bodied neighbours and relatives, we lost people who could carry out rituals, prayers, singing and dancing, people who could build homes and help tourists.”

Pasang Dondup had dashed out of his house when it started shaking at 11:56 am on that fateful day. He heard a terrible roar from somewhere above the clouds, and ran into his brother's house to hide but remembered his daughter and rushed back to his own dwelling. By that time the avalanche was already pressing him to the

wall of his brother's house. The sky went dark. He screamed, and looked around to see that his village was gone, his wife had disappeared. He never found her body.


The next day he walked down to Trisuli, and on to the Yellow Gumba in Swayambu where he spent four months with other Langtang villagers. When we saw him recently, he had just returned to Langtang. All the savings he had poured into building his house was gone, along with all his possessions. His farm and pasture are gone. Despite three operations on his injured hand, the wounds have not healed.

“It was unimaginable, nature left me like this,” Dondup says. His predicament is the same one faced by hundreds of others in Chamki, Gumba Danda and Langtang, which the avalanche also wiped out.

The earthquake could not have happened at a worse time. That winter, an unprecedented blizzard had deposited a record amount of snow on the slopes of Langtang.

Tamang is trying to get the phone network functioning again, and rebuilding both homes and lodges since tourism is the mainstay of the Langtang economy. Although the Valley used to receive 14,000 trekkers a year, this spring only saw 2,000. The National Park generally earned Rs 40.5 million a year in fees, but the earthquake slashed that figure substantially.

Even the Army and government offices are still in ruins, so it is not surprising that damaged homes have not been rebuilt. Part of the problem is that the National Park has not waived the charges of Rs 100 per cubic feet and 13 per cent VAT on timber from the forest.

Tamang cannot understand why the government is so strict: “Is this how it is in other countries that have suffered disasters? I don't think too many people are coming back to Langtang. The younger people, at least, aren't returning.” 



so strong that most bodies were found on the other side of the valley, where an entire pine forest was flattened.

Beyond the debris field, we were glad to see that some houses were intact. Villagers gathered around Pandey's laptop to watch video clips he had shot 17 years ago, pointing at relatives they recognised but who had perished in the avalanche.

Estimates vary, but locals say up to 350 persons died on 25 April, among



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In no uncertain terms

The Ass took time off from his busy schedule this week to interview a visiting globe-trotting member of the Development Set. It was a free and frank exchange of views which in a clear and precise manner answered some of the burning issues of the day.

EXCERPTS:
Ass: Can you tell us something about the timing of your visit to Nepal?
Visiting Dignitary: Certainly. We arrived in Kathmandu at 12:30 pm on Tuesday 28 June 2016 AD, it took us an hour to clear immigration and our baggage arrived at the carousel at 14:45 pm.

Q: Oh I see. Does this mean you are now going to make up for lost time?

A: Yes, we will be trying to catch up with our near- to medium-term fact-finding, monitoring and evaluating appraisal so we can anticipate important and paradoxical trends. For example, there are organisational, systemic, thematic and institutional

issues, there is a transformative agenda in the context of economic globalisation in which Nepal cannot avoid being involved. The key to the future is therefore to maximise the strengths and minimise the weaknesses in all approaches to interdisciplinary holistic and collaborative strategies that build on potential risk scenarios.

Q: Does that mean the international community is committed to maintaining its present level of assistance to Nepal despite competing crises elsewhere in the world?

A: Let me put it this way: yes, no and maybe. But whichever way, it will require a sectorwide stakeholder consultation at all levels and a strategy that will depend more on changing the structures of organisations and more importantly the institutions that embody them: especially the mainstreaming efforts and the basic organisational re-intermediarisation that are a necessary starting point. In other words, and I can't emphasise this enough, we need an enabling environment for a bottoms-up approach to empowerment.

Q: Is that a yes or a no?

A: Since you are asking me directly, let me answer you obliquely. Although it is vitally important to be cognisant of our global, national and supra-national contexts in the aftermath of Bexit, we need to work under a consistent interdependent framework to institutionalise multilateral monitoring mechanisms without undermining the need for strong localised initiatives, unless of course they are buffeted by various global and regional exigencies.

Q: What on earth are you talking about?

A: OK, I will get straight to the point. What it demands is a radically-participatory consultative engagement, a sustainability paradigm so that we can problematise the creation of solidarities and identity expressions, consensus-building and the prospective vision of an alternative paradigm. We have to redefine the context in which the normative discourses and pluralistic advocacy are agreed upon between systematic powers and structural shifts.

Q: You met the Prime Minister this morning. Was that your message to him as well?

A: Yes, we made it very clear in no uncertain terms that the lowest common denominator is square root of x-cube minus the perpendicular distance between the y-axis and the moment of inertia that passes through the centre of mass. Which is why Nepal needs to take concerted action to make intergenerational linkages between fake universalism and a missionary drift towards a more elevated parochial truth and transmogrifying hegemonic values so that there can be a compelling rationale to adopt a rights-based approach on cross-cutting overarching issues by one section of interlocutors without in any way obviating the need for legally enforceable international obligations concerning universal jurisdiction. In short, this means accessing strong analytical and methodological tools in a time-bound workplan of diversification and decentralisation.

Q: And what was the Prime Minister's response?

A: He fell asleep.



The Ass



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