



GOPEN R

A culture of silence

Regime change seemed

Oli seems determined to prevent Speaker Onsari Gharti Magar from bringing the no-confidence motion up for discussion, at least until the three budget bills are passed. Dahal aims to revive his party by winning more seats in the upcoming

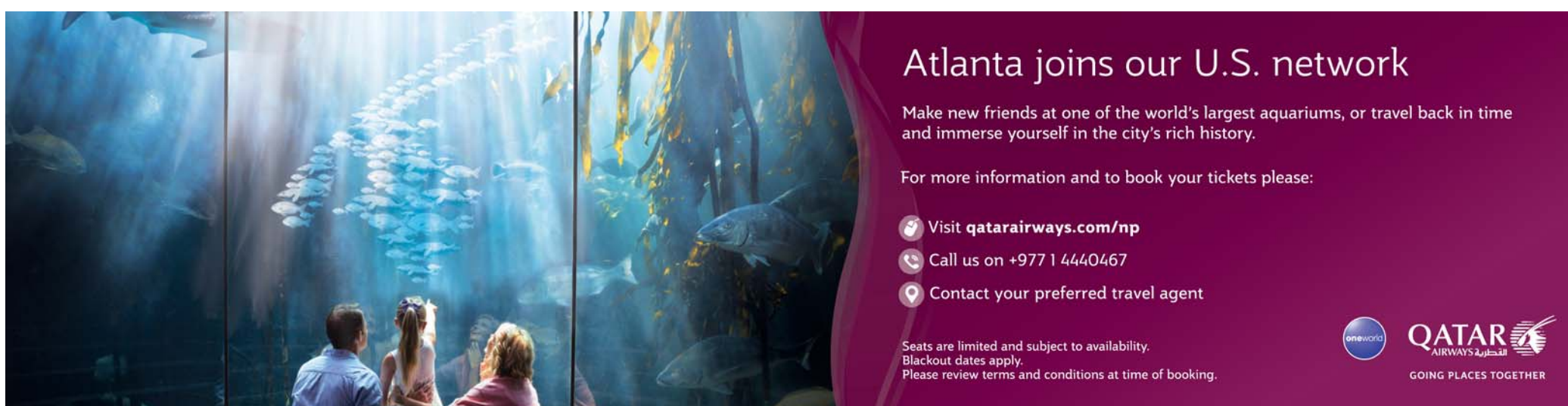
Meanwhile, across town Govinda KC continues his hunger strike for reforms in the lucrative medical education sector. But the silence is being broken — NC MP Gagan Thapa on Thursday registered a motion of urgent public importance in Parliament to hear KC's demands.



KILAGAL

BY **ASTHA JOSHI**

PAGE 11



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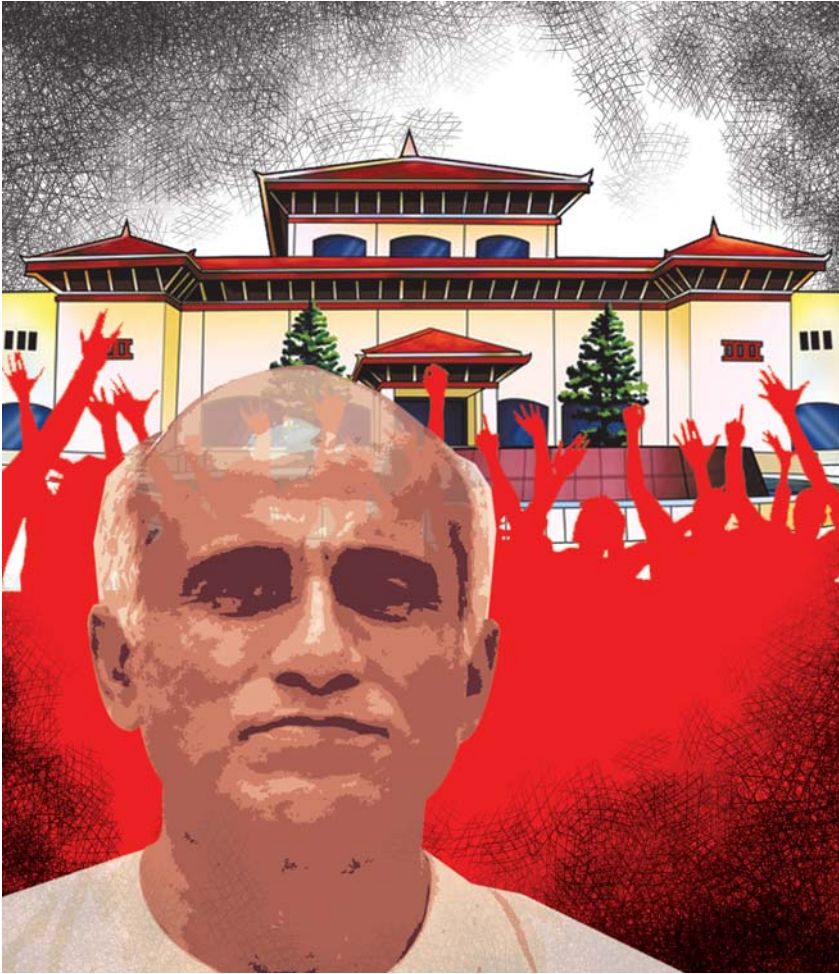
The lethal politics of an ailing nation.

The health of a nation is often judged by the quality and reach of its health service. Healthcare in Nepal has become a political hot potato because, as with every arena of public life, the fox is guarding the chicken coop. Health is such a lucrative business that businessmen and their political patrons in government and the legislature have investments in private hospitals and the profitable medical education sector. Naturally, they are against any attempt to regulate private healthcare.

The rot is so ingrained that the Minister of Health and the State Minister of Health and Population — who are both from Tarai districts with abysmal statistics for the physical wellbeing of citizens — have been blatantly demanding kickbacks from the poor. With the clock ticking on their time in office, last week they openly asked for kickbacks of up to 50 per cent in return for approval of annual government grants that 23 community hospitals across rural Nepal are entitled to (*see page 13*).

Corruption has corroded every facet of governance, but it is when it afflicts healthcare that kleptocracy kills. Stealing money from hospitals is akin to murder. Outraged by all this, Nepal’s Gandhian physician, Govinda KC, has been on a lifelong crusade to make healthcare affordable and accessible to Nepal’s 30 million people. On Friday he is on the thirteenth day of his eighth hunger strike, with a list of longstanding demands that have either been ignored or only partially fulfilled after previous satyagrahas.

Needless to say, the medical mafia and its political comrades-in-crime have been trying their best to discredit him and obstruct his fast at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, and have even gone as far as to try to deprive the frail KC of medical attention. It is ironic that top political leaders who have visited the Federal Alliance ‘hunger’ strikers at Tundikhel do not have the intestinal fortitude to call on KC, to show concern for a doctor who is risking his life for the people.



Unfortunately, this time KC’s fast coincides with a power struggle that threatens to bring down the coalition of Prime Minister KP Oli of the UML. And since UML politicians and cronies have the biggest investments in the private medical industry, Oli has an excuse not to do anything, because he is ostensibly a lame duck. Even without KC’s hunger strike, the ongoing regime change drama has serious consequences

for the budget, the constitution and the inclusion of Madhesi and Janajati concerns, as well as for Nepal’s geopolitical equilibrium. Our only hope was in the legislature, but parliamentarians are behaving like flailing tentacles of the political cartel sucking the blood of Nepalis.

It is clear that the deathly silence of the politicians is due not just to their business interests in the medical sector, but also the fear of reprisals from Lokman Singh Karki, the dreaded head of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), which has itself become the biggest abuser of authority in the land. Even during his fifth fast two years ago, KC had demanded that Karki and another Commissioner be removed for obstructing reforms in the medical sector because of their vested interests.

The CIAA is still at it: it has overstepped its mandate in order to protect the family-business ties of its commissioners in the medical sector, it brazenly interfered with the Kathmandu University School of Medicine, and it has tried to influence the licensing of new medical colleges, forcing out functionaries of the Institute of Medicine who stood in the way.

Nepal is run by a syndicate of tainted politicians who are in cahoots with cartels in health, education, transportation, food supply, tourism — you name it. They are not here to serve the people but to steal from them. The tragedy is that they have infiltrated Parliament through nominees in the proportional representation quota, perpetuating their profiteering by passing laws that benefit them.

The Health Bill passed last week does not even begin to address the demands of Govinda KC and other advocates of a rights-based approach to health care over the past years. Members of the Social Justice and Human Rights Committee of parliament finally visited KC in hospital on Tuesday, but UML members were conspicuous by their absence.

YOUR SAY

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MIGRATION, MENTAL HEALTH

This story could certainly raise a few eyebrows (‘Down and out’, Smriti Basnet, #817). But we need more research and accurate data to find out if there is really a correlation between migration, mental health and an increase in suicide rates. Simply saying ‘maybe’ or ‘seems to’ will not take us anywhere unless we are able to pinpoint the root causes.

Dipshikha Thapa Gurung

■ The failure of government policy to ensure proper schooling, medical assistance, standard infrastructure for the masses, in addition to misspent foreign aid, have only ensured the growth sustainability of expensive but lucrative private school and health care sector businesses. This has kept the poor out of the ‘advancement’ or development curve, leading to a guaranteed and massive pool of cheap ‘slave’ labour for export and exploitation. There is also pollution, corruption, high living costs, a non-representative caste system, gender inequality and more. So, the sad but the true fact is that suicide becomes a way out for many.

David Durkan

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Suman

■ A perpetual struggle in Nepali politics: the ‘merry-go-round’ or ‘musical chairs’ while the state goes ‘hungry’. It is sad that the government has to go soon after it has been assigned. There is always a time bomb ticking under its chair. This very political culture is the menace that has bogged down a nation of sad achievers.

Steve Sada



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Some come back in coffins, n many who come back alive choose death. We need 2 talk abt #mentalhealth of migrant wrkers

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

Absence of proper diagnosis & treatment of mental health has led to an epidemic of suicides <http://bit.ly/29LlcCG>



Mark Pickett @DrMarkPickett
Corruption highlighted in Nepal's health sector by fasting doctor

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

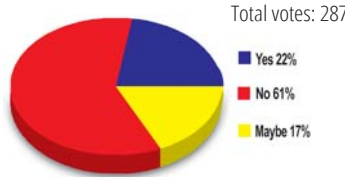
Lethal politics of a sick nation bit.ly/29PheFT @kundadixit



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Q. Will the new government be able to implement the Constitution?



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Q. Should PM KP Oli cling on to power after the withdrawal of support by his major coalition partner?



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Health should not be for wealth

Parliament needs to take a new look at the Health Bill and form a committee to investigate the abuse of authority

The putative putsch by the Nepali Congress this week to get the Maoists to abandon their alliance with the UML in the governing coalition has had far-reaching consequences.

It has brought fresh uncertainty about the new government, final fate of the Constitution, inclusion of dissatisfied Madhesi and Janajati elements into mainstream



LEGALESE
Binita Dahal

politics, endorsement of budget-related bills, long-delayed appointment of Supreme Court justices, ratification of ambassadorial appointees and, most urgently, meeting the demands of Govinda KC, the physician who has now been on a hunger strike for 13 days.

While the ruling and opposition parties are at loggerheads over whether to form a new government, the parties who are willing to do so are halting the process of the parliamentary hearing of the 11 justices nominated for Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court will be a critical arena for writ petitions in the coming days since the rival parties are consulting legal experts about the constitutional crisis and the no-confidence motion in parliament. The Maoists and Nepali Congress do not want to start the hearing process of the 11 justices, since many of them are closer to the UML.

This delay also impacts on one of Govinda KC's demands, which calls for the impeachment of Lokman Singh Karki, Chief of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Another contempt of court case against Karki is also *sub judice* in the Supreme Court, which has summoned him. If found guilty in the contempt case, Karki could even be suspended from his CIAA post.

Although assorted politicians, Speaker Onsari Gharti Magar and some members of Parliament's



RSS

Social Justice and Human Rights Committee visited the fasting doctor this week, the government has not bothered. Some of KC's current demands persist from past hunger strikes, and include those that had been either ignored or only partially implemented.

On this eighth fast, some of KC's demands are more serious and zero in directly on the source of interference and corruption in the medical education sector. KC has long known that Karki has a conflict of interest in medical education because of the involvement of his immediate family members in this lucrative sector. KC also knows full well that top politicians own or benefit monetarily from medical colleges, and they are beholden to Karki.

Hence, among his demands for health sector reform, KC is also asking for Karki's impeachment. It is probably for this reason that parliament members and the government are not responding, because conceding to the impeachment process would invite Karki's wrath. They also probably feel – rightly so – that cobbling together a two-thirds majority for impeachment is impossible in the current fractious climate.

Which is why the government finally formed a dialogue committee to mediate with KC on the eleventh day of his hunger

strike. Headed by a bureaucrat, however, the committee has no power to address KC's demands.

The popular young NC leader Gagan Thapa on Thursday filed a motion of urgent public importance to discuss KC's demands in parliament. Nevertheless, his party has already decided to abstain from debating KC's grievances. This is an indication of just how long a shadow Karki casts in the party.

Speaker Magar assured KC on Wednesday that she would take the initiative in parliament to address his demands. It is interesting that she had

stopped by to meet Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal and President Bidya Bhandari before seeing KC.

Govinda KC commands tremendous public respect and support for his selfless and lifelong devotion to healthcare for Nepal's poor. The CIAA has used a pliant section of the media to publicise a counter-campaign by private hospital owners against KC's demands, but the attempt to discredit him has come to naught.

As KC's health deteriorates, a Health Bill that does not address any of his demands is awaiting ratification by parliament after

the Cabinet passed it last week. Parliament needs to take a new look at the Bill and form a committee to investigate the abuse of authority by the CIAA Chief, in order to satisfy KC.

The new Constitution has a provision that one-fourth of the House of Representatives may table a motion to impeach the head of the CIAA for a serious violation of the Constitution, incompetence, misbehaviour or failure to discharge duties. According to provision 101(3), a committee of 11 members can be formed in the House of Representatives to recommend charges of impeachment. For now, such a committee could easily be established.

KC's past fasts have put pressure on stakeholders, but this time the government is wholly preoccupied with the formation of a new government. Public pressure on parliament is therefore important. We cannot afford to lose someone like Govinda KC, who has devoted his life to the health of the nation with no regard for his own.

Government officials and parliamentarians blame KC for getting the timing of his hunger strike wrong.

What is the right time to make healthcare affordable and accessible to all Nepalis, or to clean up the medical education sector? 🇳🇵

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HAPPY PARENTS: Israeli couple Ariel and Liat Svartsman with their surrogate baby in September 2015 before leaving for Israel.

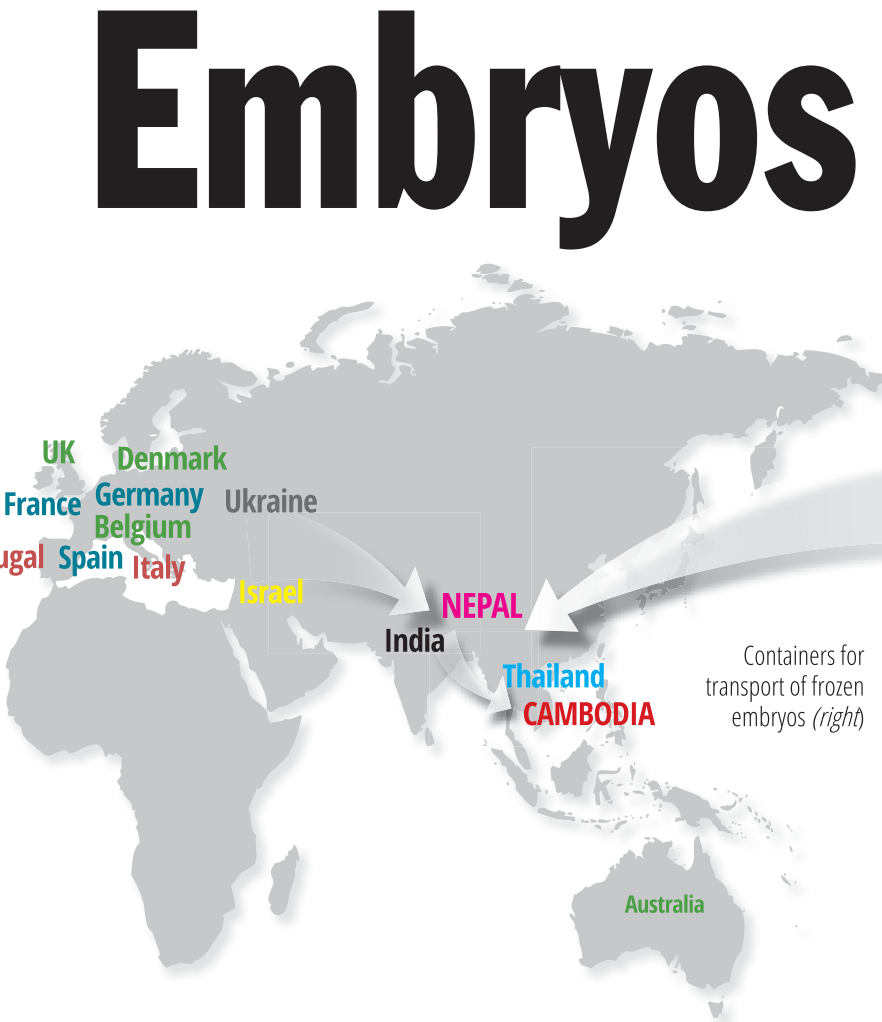
Foreign parents take their embryos to Cambodia or elsewhere after Nepal banned surrogacy last year

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

There was some unusual hand-carried cabin luggage on a recent flight from Kathmandu to Phnom Penh with a stopover in Bangkok: refrigerated human embryos. After India partially banned surrogate parenthood in 2013 the fertility clinics operating there moved to Kathmandu’s private hospitals. But then Nepal also prohibited surrogacy last September because of legal complications, and since then Cambodia has emerged as a new destination for commercial

surrogacy. Some of the embryos stored in Kathmandu hospitals and host mothers have also moved with their Indian fertility centres to Phnom Penh, a *Nepali Times* investigation has revealed. The Grande City Clinic (GCC) in Kathmandu alone had more than 200 embryos waiting to be implanted when the Nepal ban went into effect. Many intended parents — mainly from Israel, Australia and the US — took back their embryos from hospitals in Kathmandu, to keep in storage in their home countries. But some have couriered them on from Kathmandu to Phnom Penh.

A gay Australian couple who had 10 embryos stored at the GCC since last year and wished to ship them to a fertility centre in Australia decided to divert them to Cambodia instead. “I collected my biological materials from Kathmandu and sent them to Cambodia because I want to use the same embryos to have babies there,” one of them told us on condition his identity is not revealed. IVF Couriers, a worldwide logistics service for frozen germplasm, has been used to ship the embryos out of Kathmandu to the home countries of intended parents, India and Cambodia. Since the cost of keeping



the embryos frozen is so high, surrogacy companies prefer to move them if the procedure is outlawed, and take them to a country where it is still allowed. Indian fertility centres also prefer Cambodia because Indian host mothers can obtain visas on arrival at Phnom Penh airport. “Parents are taking back the embryos as they want to use them to have babies in Cambodia or somewhere else,” explained Nepali national Preeti Bista of My Fertility Angel, Cambodia. She

says that following the ban some of her clients who already had surrogate babies in Nepal last year donated their remaining embryos to other parents. Intended parents have multiple embryos stored in Nepal in case a pregnancy fails, so they can use the extra embryos, thus saving time and cost involved in fertilisation. After surrogacy was forbidden in Nepal, Bista has been providing fertility-related medical tourism services to foreigners in Cambodia. Nepal emerged as a hub for

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Lucky three

Etihad Airways received three prestigious awards at this year's Skytrax World Airline Awards. It won in the World's Best First Class Airline, World's Best First Class Onboard

Uniting the world

Qatar Airways has renewed its partnership with FC Barcelona for another season. FCB's first team will sport the name of the carrier on its jerseys until 30 June 2017. Since entering a strategic three-year partnership in July 2013, the airlines has featured the team in its safety video and launched successful campaigns building on the concept of 'a team that unites the world'.

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Turkish back to US

Turkish Airlines has resumed its flights to the US from 19 July. The decision came after the FAA withdrew the recent order to ban carriers – regardless of country of registry – to fly to the US from Turkey either directly or via a third country. With the prohibition lifted, Turkish Airlines has resumed its 6.45 am Istanbul to New York flight.

Daily to Doha

Himalayan Airlines has commenced daily direct flights to Doha, Qatar, with the existing flight departure time of

11 pm from Kathmandu, and arrival at 1.30 am in Doha. The return flight leaves Doha at 2.30 am and lands at 10.15 am in Kathmandu.

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on the move



- **Mexico and US:** Only these two countries allow commercial surrogacy for same-sex couples
- **Italy and Portugal:** Commercial surrogacy banned
- **France, Germany and Spain:** Commercial surrogacy banned, except foreign surrogacy
- **Israel:** Surrogacy banned for same-sex couples
- **Ukraine:** Surrogacy for heterosexual couples only
- **Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, and UK:** Only altruistic surrogacy allowed
- **India:** Surrogacy for same-sex couples and couples married for less than 2 years banned in 2013
- **Thailand:** Surrogacy banned for foreigners in 2015
- **Nepal:** Emerged as a commercial surrogacy destination for foreigners, but surrogacy banned in September 2015
- **Cambodia:** Now replacing Nepal as the new destination for commercial surrogacy. Embryos from Nepal are shipped to Cambodia as Indian fertility centres move to Phnom Penh



commercial surrogacy after India prevented gay men and couples who had been married for less than two years from opting for surrogacy in 2013, and Thailand barred the practice for foreigners in 2015.

Couples — mostly gay — from Israel came to Nepal for surrogacy services after the Indian prohibition for same-sex couples. Israel itself does not sanction surrogacy for gay couples; only the US and Mexico do.

The average cost of surrogacy was only \$40,000 in Nepal while it can cost up to \$150,000 in the US. The cost in Cambodia, where there are legal loopholes that take

advantage of the ambiguous laws, is said to be around \$50,000.

The Nepal government permitted foreign couples to seek surrogacy services in Nepal in 2014 without first passing a law to allow it. Legal complications led to the 2015 ban, and private hospitals in Kathmandu were left with hundreds of frozen embryos in storage.

Nepal's surrogacy issue was spotlighted when Israel sent planes to airlift stranded parents and babies

born to surrogate mothers after the April earthquake last year. Altogether 250 surrogate babies born to Indian mothers have been taken out of Nepal since 2014,

according to the Department of Immigration.

Prashant Subedi of Tammuz International Surrogacy in Kathmandu says the procedures could have been a major boon for Nepal's fledgling medical tourism industry and would have benefited the economy.

He told us: "Surrogacy is the last resort for infertile couples, and in Kathmandu it used to cost less than one-third of the price in developed countries. Instead of banning it outright, with proper regulation Nepal could have reaped benefits."

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Listen to audio



A baby born in Nepal to an Indian mother who was a surrogate for a gay couple from Ireland has been stuck in legal limbo in Kathmandu for more than a year.

The Irish Embassy in New Delhi, which also handles Nepal, refused to issue the baby a passport as she was born in Nepal, contravening Ireland's own law banning surrogacy for its nationals.

The gay couple, Sean Munsanje and Chris Doyle (pictured above), opted for surrogacy in Nepal last year, and Simone Esther Munsanje Doyle is now exactly a year old. But they cannot take their baby girl home.

The Irish Embassy has finally written to Nepal's Department of Immigration (DoI) to issue the baby a temporary travel document.

"The Irish Embassy didn't issue a passport to the surrogate baby as it is

illegal for its citizens to get surrogacy services within or outside Ireland," Kedar Neupane of DoI told *Nepali Times*. "We have issued the baby a travel document and the couple needs to get an entry visa on it from the Embassy, in order to exit Nepal."

The baby girl was born on 17 July 2015 and has been living in Budhanilkantha with her Irish parents since then. The Irish baby is one of many who have fallen between the cracks because the surrogacy laws of various countries are ambiguous, or contradict each other.

"It becomes our duty to give an exit permit to the baby on humanitarian grounds even if the baby was born against Irish laws," Neupane explained. "The baby was born in Nepal before the deadline given by the Supreme Court to take the surrogate babies home."



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Hungry for reform

Nearly two weeks into Govinda KC's hunger strike, political parties are still unwilling to listen to his demands

TUFAN NEUPANE
and **RAMU SAKPOTA**

It took the government 11 days to set up a committee to initiate dialogue with Govinda KC, a Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH) doctor who has been on an indefinite hunger strike since 10 July, demanding reforms in the medical education sector.

But the three-member committee, led by Health Secretary Senendra Raj Upreti, does not have the mandate to address KC's major demands: impeachment of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Chief Lokman Singh Karki, and cancellation of a bill that would allow Manmohan Hospital to open a new medical college in Kathmandu.

On Tuesday, the main opposition NC — which is gearing up to form a new government with the Maoists — came up with an official stand on KC's grievances: these are political issues, and it does not want to dwell on them. On the same day, after a meeting to discuss a no-confidence vote against Prime Minister KP Oli, the ruling UML issued a press statement that was silent on KC's demands.

The bureaucrat-led government panel failed to reach a deal with KC on Thursday evening, and is unlikely to address his demands regardless of the number of attempts at negotiation.

Former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai's Naya Shakti Party has joined an alliance to express solidarity with KC, but unless the major parties wake up, it appears difficult to save KC's life; his health is deteriorating rapidly. Except President Bidya Bhandari, Speaker Onsari Gharti Magar and a few legislators, the leaders who could actually make a difference have remained quiet. Education expert Kedar Bhakta Mathema — whose panel submitted a report that KC seeks to have as the blueprint for the proposed Medical Education Bill — says the 'culture of silence' seen in the face of the fasting doctor's 'satyagraha' has once again exposed the shaky foundation of democracy in Nepal.

The demand to impeach CIAA Chief Karki aside, most of the points KC has raised this time are not new. Addressing them would not be as difficult as the top leaders think. The impeachment process has to go through parliament and the goal may thus be difficult



BHANU BHATTARAI

for the government to achieve immediately, but it can at least conduct a parliamentary investigation into the accusations.

KC's basis for demanding Karki's impeachment is the latter's blatant interference in the postgraduate medical science exams of Kathmandu University (KU), for personal gain. A day before the exams, the CIAA dispatched a 'panel of experts' who cancelled the

question paper, saying that it had been leaked, and prepared a new one. KU Associate Dean Bhagwat Nepal helped prepare the new questions, and his son scored top marks in the exams. CCTV cameras in the exam hall had been disabled to erase evidence of the incident.

But this is not the first time the CIAA has interfered in KU. The role played by Karki when KU granted affiliation to Birat Medical College also seems suspicious. The university's 60th senate had decided not to grant affiliation to new medical colleges, saying it was difficult to handle and regulate new private medical colleges.

KC launched his crusade for reform of the medical education sector at that time. The government even agreed to his demands and stopped KU from granting affiliations to newer colleges. But the pressure to grant affiliation to Birat Medical College, run by Karki's nephew Gyanendra Man Singh Karki, and Devdaha Medical College, run by Nilkantha Kafle and Himlal Gyawali, both of whom are close to then-Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, were such that Vice Chancellor Suresh Raj Sharma resigned.

Likewise, KIST Medical College, owned by Karki's

brother Balman Singh Karki, had permission to enroll 75 students in the 2013/14 academic session. On 12 September 2014, the Nepal Medical Council increased the seats to 135 under instructions from the CIAA Secretariat. Jyoti Baniya, who was then a member of the Council and had raised concerns over the decision, was subsequently hounded by the CIAA.

KC's other demands include the cancellation of the Manmohan Memorial Institute of Health Sciences bill tabled in parliament, and implementation of the Mathema Report for Reform in the Medical Education Act. Addressing them is doable, if the Big Three parties muster the courage to do so. But the UML leaders have invested their money in the Manmohan hospital, and are trying their best to foil KC's strike. The government decided early this week to forward the Medical Education Bill to parliament without incorporating the suggestions of the Mathema Report, signalling that it is still not ready to listen to KC.

By turning a deaf ear to what KC is saying from inside a narrow room in the TUTH, the political parties are now pushing the crusader-doctor, admired for his simplicity and selflessness, to the brink of death. 🇳🇵

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रु ५०० देखि शतप्रतिशत
नगद छुट।

सफिदु गौघर

स्मार्ट फोन

ल्यापटप

३२" एल.ई.डी. टि.भि.

फ्रिज

वार्षिक ग्राहक दर रु ३,८००/- पुराना ग्राहकहरूले पनि नवीकरण गरी यस योजनामा सहभागी हुन सक्नुहुनेछ।
Bumper Prize मा २०७२ माघ १ गतेदेखि २०७३ पुस मसान्तसम्मका वार्षिक ग्राहकहरूलाई सहभागी गराइनेछ।



This has been a robust monsoon – by the third week of July Kathmandu has received the average monthly rainfall for this month. And there is more in store over the weekend, as another low pressure front is sweeping up from the Bay of Bengal. This will bring downpours across Central Nepal, mainly at night and at times torrential in Kathmandu Valley. By midweek there will be a brief respite before another circulation brewing in the Bay brings more heavy rain.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
25° 19°	25° 19°	26° 19°



OUR OWN LIVES

Manjushree Thapa’s new novel delves into how a country’s politics has a profound impact on individual citizens

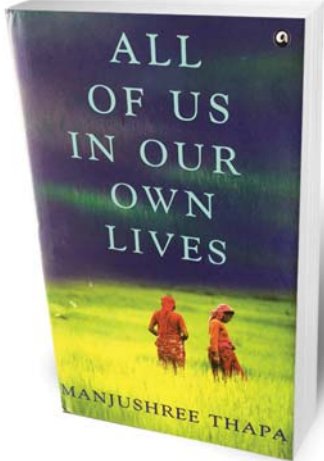


both personally and professionally, and Gyanu is moving towards stability. With all of them absorbed in their own lives, the only one ‘left behind’ is the youngest of the four, Sapana, whose dreams of making it big are clouded by abandonment, loss, and memories of those who have moved on without her.

All of Us builds on the familiar, with something for each of us to relate to, reflect on and take with us right through the book. It is a novel where each flashback, conversation, and person mentioned in passing, add depth and character, making it in many ways a personal saga for readers.

While themes of struggle, change, emancipation, growth and movement against political backdrops are present in all of her novels, in recent interviews Thapa has denied that the book is overtly political. “It is a philosophical exploration of the Buddhist concept of interdependence and interconnectedness,” she explained to one newspaper recently.

That may be true, but the inherent politics that shape the plotline cannot be ignored. For, as Thomas Mann would say: “Everything is politics.” 🇳🇵



All of Us in Our Own Lives
By Manjushree Thapa
211pp, Aleph, INR 399

RAISA PANDEY

Chandra is all set to leave. She is heading to Ghaziabad in India to follow the footsteps of her elder sister Surya, who serves as a housemaid to rich Indians. The evening before her departure, Chandra, in all her anxiety and despair of having to leave behind her community, family, and her dear friend Sapana, quotes a poet, a national awardee:

*What grows in these still villages
but death. To stay is to die.
To leave is to die too.
Mother, save me.
I'm fading!*

In a country that has suffered outmigration throughout its history, these words would have deep meaning at any time, but stumbling across it in Manjushree Thapa’s *All of Us in Our Own Lives*, after the 20 June bomb attack in Kabul that killed 13 Nepali guards, made them that much more poignant. It is a tragic reflection of the fates of the millions of Nepalis forced to leave their homeland, and those they leave behind.

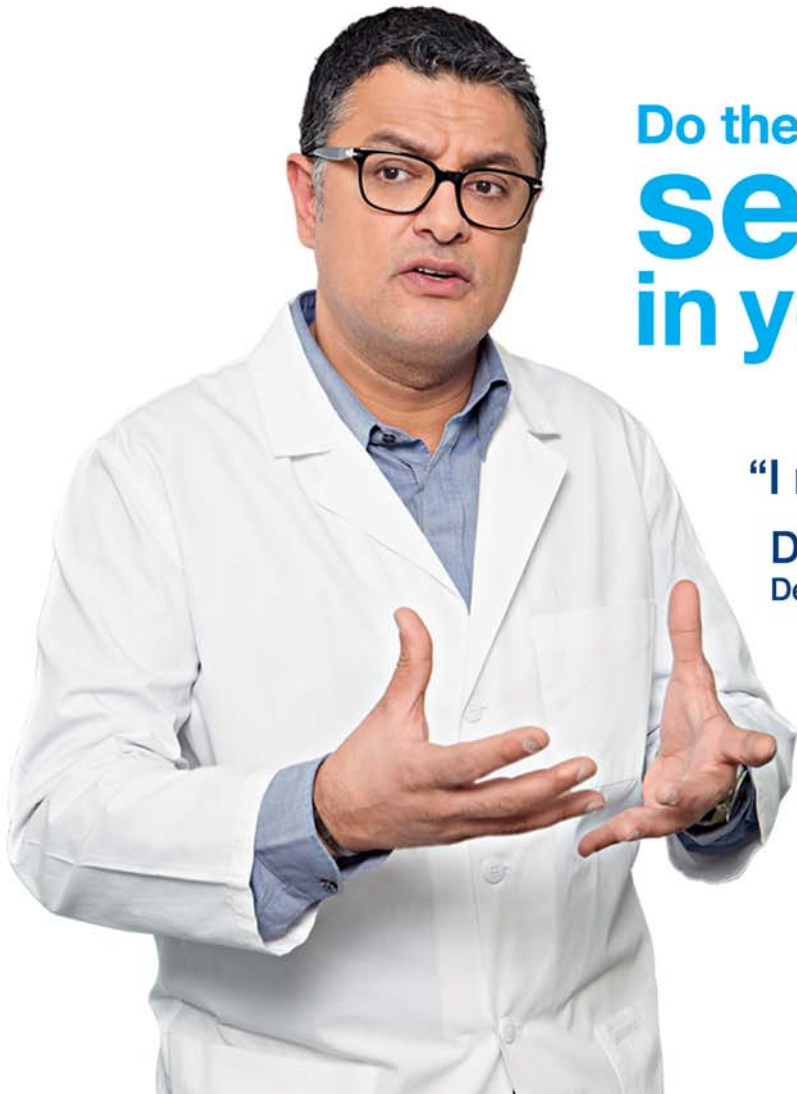
Right from her first novel, *The Tutor of History*, set at election time in Tanahun, to *Seasons of Flight*, the story of a young woman who moves away from her current life in search of stability, Thapa draws for her readers a chronological picture of happenings in Nepal and how years of

turmoil have shaped the lives of Nepalis, both within and outside the country. Her latest books also follow the trajectory of how a country’s politics, governance, and quality of leadership have a profound impact on the lives of individual citizens.

All of Us in Our Own Lives is a book of journeys — physical, emotional, professional and personal. Its fluid narrative courses through the lives of four characters, who at the start of the novel live in different time zones, social structures and spaces. But as we turn the pages, they become increasingly interconnected and are codependently influential by the end.

Ava, a Canadian lawyer, quits her job and moves to her country of origin as an international aid worker to get away from her estranged husband, and in search of familiarity. Indira Sharma, a working woman in a metropolis, is seen struggling to find her footing in largely patriarchal personal and professional spaces. Sapana, an innocent village teen, now an orphan, is witness to unforeseen changes that come with the death of her father, her brief interaction with her brother and her bitter parting with her friend, Chandra. And Gyanu, a chef in Dubai, is an only son.

While all four characters — and their journeys, struggles, conflicts and resolutions — grow on the reader, it is Sapana who draws us in to dwell on the novel well past its final page. Ava comes from a place of privilege, a refuge to turn to when things get rough, Chandra is ‘not unhappy’ in India, Indira finds her niche



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UPROOTED

Photo project depicts costs and benefits of migration for Nepali workers and families

SMRITI BASNET

In 2000, a transit in Doha transformed Belgian-born photographer Frédéric Lecloux's perspective towards migrant issues in Nepal. It was then that he understood the seriousness of the matter, when he saw the airport bustling with Nepali migrants hard at work: sweeping floors, cleaning toilets, minding lines.

"A whole generation in Nepal has only one goal in mind when growing up: going abroad," said Lecloux. Hoping to gain insights into the migration phenomenon, Lecloux set out a year ago to trace the lives of migrant workers in Qatar, their daily realities in a foreign land and those of their families back in Nepal.

Nani Maya's youngest son Ujjwal, 19, works in Qatar. His two brothers also work abroad: the elder one, a father of two, has been working in India for the last ten years, and the other sibling recently went to Saudi Arabia. Ujjwal is a cleaner, working seven days a week from 7 am to 6 pm, with an hour-long break for lunch. The family currently lives on government-owned land, and



ALL PICS: FRÉDÉRIC LECLOUX

depends on the income of their sons.

Ram, a former migrant worker in Saudi Arabia, and his brothers are each building a house with the money their sons sent from working abroad. For this, Ram's son Raghu toils in Qatar and lives in a camp with 9,200 others, sharing his room with seven Nepalis. During his off-days Raghu mostly spends time in his room, taking the opportunity to connect with his family and friends through Facebook and WhatsApp. Apart from cooking, washing clothes and using the Internet, there is nothing much else for them to do on such days, he told Lecloux.

Lecloux brought back many



SEEING HOPE: Saraswoti's husband works in Qatar and hopes that his remittances can fund their children's education.

personal stories of migrant workers — like Ujjwal and Raghu — and their families from the most affected districts in Nepal, for his ongoing photo project 'Nepal and Qatar: The Void and the Fullness', supported by the Paris Center of Fine Arts. "I wanted to highlight the cost of migration, the supposed 30% GDP of the country that comes from these remittances. What is the human cost and the social cost of that money?"

As young men leave Nepal in hordes every day to work in foreign destinations like Qatar, the country is being emptied of its able-bodied labour force. Marital relations become strained, and



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LIVES



BUILDING LIVES: Ram's son Raghu, a migrant worker in Doha, lives in a camp with 9,200 others and shares his room with seven Nepali workers. His family has built a house with the money he sent back home.

Raghu's social life revolves around his mobile, as he stays in touch with friends and families through Facebook and WhatsApp.



family members are scattered. Despite being aware of the unfavourable working conditions, families send their sons off in the hope they will earn well and contribute to a better present-day life for those at home. "Most migrant workers told me they don't have a choice," said Lecloux at a talk program organised by photo.circle in Yala Maya Kendra last week, adding that most mothers hope their sons can work abroad.

Recording intimate and up-close details, Lecloux's photographs portray little details such as the cellophane tape used to kill bed bugs in apartments, self-

made toothbrush holders taped on camp walls, and clothes and personal belongings spilling over in cramped spaces — all pointing towards the sparse and difficult living conditions.

In stark contrast are photographs set in Nepal, of houses being built and new material possessions such as televisions — now affordable with the money received from abroad. Only a few migrants Lecloux spoke to, such as Saraswoti's husband, want to use the money to fund their children's education.

Extending beyond these portraits, Lecloux also skilfully uses landscapes of Nepal

and Qatar to bring out the contradictions in the two divergent worlds. He juxtaposes dilapidated and empty unfinished structures back home against towering sky scrapers and perfectly sculpted gardens in Qatar, providing viewers with a visual depiction of the world that the migrants abandoned, in order to go to the world that they helped build but will never be able to reap the benefits of.

With the migration issue garnering international attention, especially after an investigative piece in *The Guardian* about the exploitation of workers in Qatar, Lecloux believes that the

time is right to put pressure on the relevant agencies to act. "Photography serves as documentation of my experience with reality. It allows me to produce the vision of the world that I see," said Lecloux, who is determined to raise awareness about Nepal and its people.

He hopes to extend his work beyond Qatar, to additional places like Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, and reaching out to female workers as well. In October he will spend the *Dasain* festival with migrants in Qatar, in pursuit of answers to the question, "How do you create a part of Nepal in Qatar?" 🇳🇵



Frederic Lecloux's ongoing project 'Nepal-Qatar: The Void and the Fullness' is part of a series dealing with loss. His work is published by Le Bec en l'air in Marseilles. He currently lives in France.



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EVENTS



Critical mass,

Join hundreds of cyclists to reclaim the streets of Kathmandu and encourage a biking culture in the city.
29 July, 5.30 pm onwards, Basantapur Darbar Square

Women lead,

Get a chance to learn, share and network with fellow women entrepreneurs at the Young Entrepreneurs' Summit Women.
29 to 30 July, 9 am to 5 pm, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, Register at bit.ly/yesw.2016, Fee: Rs 2,500 per person (Rs 2,000 for students)

Slam poetry,

Watch Interstate's poet and performer Deborah Emmanuel perform live, along with Nepali slam-poetry group Word Warriors.
30 July, 2 to 4 pm, Swarnam Theatre, Kalikasthan, www.sarwanam.org.np



Immersive Bootcamp,

Sing up for this short course organised by Quixote's Cove and taught by Niranjana Kunwar, to learn about various pedagogical ideas, theories and methodologies to help facilitate literacy and arts workshops.
10 August onwards, 11.30 am to 1 pm (Saturdays) 7 to 9 am (Wednesdays), Quixote's Cove, Jawalakhel, Fee: Rs 5,000 28 July (orientation session), 6 to 7 pm

Coffee, cake and wine,

Good conversations coupled with food, wine and music at Kar.Ma Coffee, featuring a live performance by Simma Rai.
22 July, 4 to 7.30 pm, Kar.Ma Coffee, Jhamsikhel, 9843767232

Otaku next,

Dress up as your favourite anime characters in the third edition of the Otaku Next Nepal Comic and Cosplay Convention.
30 July, 9.30 am to 5.30 pm, Alliance Française, Teku, www.otakunext.com, Tickets: Rs 300 (entrance free for cosplayers), Rs 350 (on the day of the event)



Sound of Music,

Mark your calendars for the re-enactment of the classic Broadway musical *Sound of Music* by the students of Shuvatara School.
5 August, Nepal Academy, Kamaladi, Price: Rs 200 for 12 pm (students show), Rs 500 and 1,000 for 5 pm (general admission)

KJC for kids,

Choir group, movie time, wall climbing, music, games, dance and more for kids at the KJC Summer Camp for Kids.
25 July to 12 August, 10 am to 2 pm, Monday through Friday, Ages: 5 to 11 years, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, (01) 5013554

Tedx Thamel,

Get a chance to hear from eminent personalities like Bandana Rana, Bhumika Shrestha, Ishaan and Joseph Silvanus at the independently organised Ted event, TedxThamel.
23 July, 11 am to 1 pm, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Darbar Marg, Tickets: Rs 500 (early bird), Rs 750 (regular)

DINING



Embers,

A large, cosy place serving a blend of continental and Nepali favourites.
Krishna Galli, Pulchowk, (01) 5555306

Hyatt Regency,

Mouthwatering kebabs and curries at The Café, prepared by Chef Bhanu Aryal and his team of Indian chefs.
22 to 31 July, 6.30 to 10.30 pm, The Café, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Rs 2,000 plus taxes per person, (01) 4491234



Embassy,

Away from the street hustle and bustle, enjoy varied cuisines at a place ideal for business meets and casual rendezvous.
Embassy Restaurant and Bar, Panipokhari, Kathmandu, (01) 4424040

Wunjala Moskva,

Treat your palette to Newari and Russian dishes in a lush garden with ancient trees and trickling streams.
Naxal, (01) 4415236



Chez Caroline,

Authentic ambience, exquisite French food, glorious sunshine and more.
9 am to 10 pm, Baber Mahal Revisited, (01) 4263070

MUSIC

Music mania,

Hear the Chahana timi mero pop sensation Naren Limbu live, as part of the Live Musical Era 2016 hosted by Fem Nepal.
30 July, 7 pm to 4 am, The Victory Lounge, Darbar Marg, 9801031277/9802961570, Tickets: Rs 1,000



Acoustic evening,

Listen and sway along to tunes of cover songs of bands like The Tallest Man on Earth, The National, Alt+J, Arctic Monkeys, Tame Impala, Absynthe Minded, Chet Faker and more this Friday.
22 July, 6.30 to 10 pm, Rato Mato Organics BBQ and Bistro, Lajimpat, (01) 4428576

Reggae sundown,

Tap to the beat of reggae music with the Nepali bands Cultivation and The Himalion as they belt out tunes of Cultivation's debut album *Plains, Hills and Mountains*.
23 July, 10 pm onwards, Club 25 Hours, Gahana Pokhari Marg, Tickets: Rs 500 (advance sale), Rs 1,000 (door sale)



Ciney Gurung live,

Unwind at Hotel Shangri-La and enjoy a live performance by Ciney Gurung every Friday.
7 pm onwards, Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat, (01) 4412999 ext 7520/7508, Rs 2,000 per person

Food and music,

Enjoy live music accompanied by a sumptuous spread of Korean food at Beautiful Coffee Nepal. For those interested there is also a coffee workshop.
4 August, 5 to 8 pm, Beautiful Coffee Nepal, Sanepa, (01) 5529308

GETAWAY



Famous Farm,

Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze wafting in through the aankhijhyal.
Nuwakot, (01)4700426, info@rural-heritage.com



Temple Tree Resort and Spa,

A peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour, and sauna – hard to leave once you arrive.
Gaurighat, Lakeside, Pokhara, (61) 465819

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Balthali, Kavre, 9851075818



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BIKRAM RAI

Footsteps of our past

How to reconstruct historic buildings in Kathmandu after the earthquake

ASTHA JOSHI

Kilagal was one of the neighbourhoods in the historic core of Kathmandu knocked down in last year's earthquake but, in rebuilding, the municipality may be destroying the community once again — this time its precious cultural heritage.

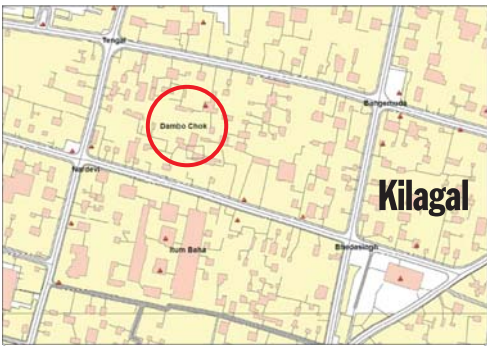
Many of the ancient houses and courtyards of Kilagal (or Kilagha) suffered serious damage and were declared unfit to live in. The brick buildings with carved wooden windows — set in a warren of narrow alleys — were home to Jyapu and Vaidya families who had been living here for generations.

One such neighbourhood, Dambo Chok, has now been singled out by the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) for house pooling: rebuilding safer houses while concurrently addressing the problem of high urban density. KMC has approved a Rs 50 million plan, and 54 houses in Dambo Chok have presented a joint application for land acquisition to the Kathmandu Valley Development Project (KVDP) for approval.

After last year's earthquake there was a call to "build back better", and the KMC proposed an urban regeneration initiative for inner-city Kathmandu, with residential blocks, wider roads and open spaces. The idea was that areas such as Kilagal would be better prepared for future earthquakes, and the plan would solve the problem of property fragmentation due to inheritance.

In Kathmandu Valley's old towns, historic homes are often torn down, to be divided up among brothers and then re-divided among their children and grandchildren. The average land area of a home in Kilagal is now only 9 sq m, tiny rooms in thin concrete towers that rise 13 stories high. KMC — in collaboration with the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) — therefore planned to redesign entire neighbourhoods, not just one house at a time.

"Given the fragmentation of property and cramped living conditions, especially after the earthquake, house pooling was the best solution," explained Bau Raja Maharjan of a committee overseeing reconstruction at Dambo Chok. He denies the plan would desecrate the physical and cultural heritage, since the temples and the *bahals* would be



integrated in the plan.

While most Kilagal families are happy that their homes will be made of stronger concrete structures, some say the KMC's house pooling plan will destroy the original architecture of the neighbourhood as well as its fragile culture and heritage.

"We tried to explain to the residents why it is important to use traditional building techniques and materials like brick and mud mortar, but we failed," Kilagal resident Chandra Maharjan told us. "These neighbourhoods have immense heritage value but when you build the houses with concrete, it will all be worthless."

The debate goes to the heart of how preservation of the heritage of cultural towns must go hand-in-hand with their modernisation and commercial usage, says Padma Sundar Joshi of the United Nations

Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat).

He says: "A *pati* might have traditional value but if you look at it commercially, it might just be a waste of space. It's important to understand the links between tangible space and intangible space in traditional architecture. If you cannot protect space, traditional footprints are destroyed."

Kathmandu's breakneck urbanisation is already eroding the substrate of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation, and public pressure for modern concrete housing, especially after the earthquake, has made it more difficult to argue for heritage preservation.

"For an outsider, a courtyard is just another courtyard but to those living there, each nook and cranny has an important meaning," Joshi explains, "a part of it could be the space for Mahadev, or might have a specific function during festivals like Gunla. Even the lanes carry significance: the wider ones were for auspicious ceremonies, while narrower alleys were used for death rituals."

House pooling would alter not just the design of buildings but also how these traditional practices and rituals are carried out, and questions their continuity. Josh says house pooling need not be bad as long as the buildings are designed "horizontally" and respect traditional spaces.

There are also legal issues. Nepal's property law states that a landowner is entitled to the plot on which the house stands. Since there are no laws that prohibit vertical property division, there may be a problem if people who have their houses pooled do not want to live in them anymore.

KMC says the Dambo Chok plan is a 'pilot' project and, depending on how it goes, the formula will be replicated in other courtyards in Kathmandu Valley. Preliminary plans for Vaidya Chok have already been drafted and eight families have handed over their land ownership certificates as approval for the project. The challenge will be to simultaneously balance the needs of residents, the necessity for the structures to be seismic-resistant, and to address urban density and property fragmentation. 🇳🇵



SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Joshi Complex

A decade ago, nine families of Khichapokhari's Joshi clan got together to pool their houses. The reason: to accommodate an ever-growing kin. A private construction company was hired to erect a large apartment block called the Joshi Complex, which was built over what used to be nine courtyards with traditional and cultural significance.

The residential block was leased to a company for ten years, and when the lease ran out a dispute arose among family members who all wanted their slice of property back. The land was cut up into little pieces, resulting in vertical fragmentation of the property. The Joshi Complex, which was an experiment in house pooling, has disappeared, replaced by individual concrete houses standing on what used to be a precious legacy of Kathmandu Valley's unique architectural and cultural heritage.



ALOK TULADHAR

Kilagal

Historically, Kilagal has played an important role in Kathmandu's many colourful festivals, especially Indra Jatra. The name comes from the words *kisi* (elephant) and *ghar* (house). Kilagal is where the traditional *pulukishi* for Indra Jatra is constructed, and the men from Kilagal enact the wild elephant dance on the street. The neighbourhood also has a figure of a red elephant looking down (*above*) on the busy main street from the second floor of one of the houses.



House Pooling

The Kathmandu Metropolitan City has approved a budget of Rs 50 million for Kilagal's pilot house pooling project (*pictured above*), under which residents will be given concessional loans for rebuilding their section of the complex. This means that the residents will give up their houses and pool resources to build a large housing area, where they will be provided with living spaces nearly the same in size as their previous homes. However, they will have to share the cost of building the internal and external infrastructure, such as the foundation, walls, beams, staircases and plumbing.

To date, plans to compensate families whose homes lie within the project area but are unaffected, are unclear.



HAIL, CAESAR!

The Coen Brothers, Joel and Ethan, have, for the last three decades, made numerous films — good ones, decent ones and brilliant ones — spanning a number of genres, but always excelling in the particularly tricky field that is black comedy.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

With classics like *Blood Simple* (1984), *Barton Fink* (1991), *Fargo* (1996), *The Big Lebowski* (1998), *No Country For Old Men* (2007), and my personal favourite, *Miller's Crossing* (1990) under their belt, the prolific brothers often go on palate-cleansing sprees, churning out pleasant dummies like *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003) and *Burn after Reading* (2008).
With their latest, *Hail, Caesar!*,

the brothers embark on yet another tongue-in-cheek vintage Coen product, picking the bygone era of the Hollywood Studio system to poke fun at.
The result is a pretty hilarious escapade involving a lost actor — the famous, feckless Baird Whitlock (George Clooney) — who is kidnapped by privileged communists (the film is set in 1951, during the Cold War), just as the studio system is about to cede its monopoly in Hollywood.
Eddie Mannix (Josh Brolin), the head of all productions at Capital Pictures, stars as the ultimate fixer as he tries to locate the whereabouts of Whitlock, who is famous for his simultaneous womanising and going on days-long benders. We witness firsthand, through a wry comic lens, the struggles of Mannix, the pivot on which the studio runs, as he finagles his recalcitrant stars, confesses his ethical

quandary to his priest as he lies to his wife about his smoking, spins juicy stories about the aforementioned stars to cover up their sordid messes, and does the manhandling required to keep famous people and multiple productions on track.
To add to the mostly inane fun, there are cameos by Tilda Swinton playing two identical twins, the bloody-minded tabloid journalists Thora and Thessally Thacker, Channing Tatum as Burt Gurney, a tap-dancing star with a nefarious agenda, and the likes of Jonah Hill, Ralph Fiennes, and Frances McDormand (the wife of Joel Coen) in roles that are as slyly mischievous as it gets with the Coens at the helm.
Over the course of this funny, beautifully shot, often delightful film there are often moments of puzzling loopholes — wild goose chases, even — that are characteristic of the Coens' idiosyncrasies. There is an entire plot involving Scarlett Johansson as a flighty film star that really does not fit, but is remarkably entertaining nonetheless.
For the lovers of *Miller's Crossing*, there is no bittersweet love story for you here, but if you revelled in the goofiness of *O Brother, Where Art Thou* (2000), well, *Hail, Caesar!* will probably crack you up just as much, as you nostalgically remember Clooney's more memorable turn as a convict-turned-blues star in that other Coen classic. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com
■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



RSS

SHOWING SOLIDARITY: House Speaker Onsari Gharti Magar on Wednesday visits Govinda KC on the eleventh day of his hunger strike. KC is demanding reforms in the medical education sector and impeachment of CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki.



RSS

GOING STRONG: Foreign Affairs Minister Kamal Thapa viewing photographs during an event organised by the Russian Centre of Science and Culture on Wednesday to mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Russia.



RSS

UP AND ABOUT: General Secretary of Nepali Congress Shashank Koirala was discharged on Wednesday from Om hospital where he had been admitted two weeks ago following complaints of 'abdominal discomfort' and 'cough with shortness of breath'.



SAHINA SHRESTHA

100 DAYS: President of SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry Suraj Vaidya addressing the audience on Thursday on developments and progress made in the 100 days since he assumed office.



NEPAL ECONOMIC FORUM

REPORT LAUNCH: Nepal Economic Forum Chair Sujeev Shakya, Head of DFID Nepal Gail Marzetti, Country Director of Millennium Challenge Corporation Himesh Dhungel, Former Member of National Planning Commission Swarnim Wagle, and Finance Professional Yanki Ukyab (from left to right) launch a report on Nepal's economy at an event in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

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Kickbacks from the poor

Bhagwati Timilsina in
Nepal Samacharpatra, 15 July

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Even as a no-confidence motion was being registered against the government led by Prime Minister KP Oli, his Health Minister Ram Janam Chaudhari (*pictured, above*) and State Minister of Health and Population (MoHP) Mohammad Mustak Alam (*pictured, below*) have been trying to extort kickbacks from hospitals serving the rural poor.

Some 23 community hospitals are supposed to get government grants of up to Rs 500 million each after presenting proposals to the Planning Division of the MoHP. However, sources say Health Minister Chaudhari and State Minister Alam are demanding up to 50 per cent in personal kickbacks, in return for approving the grants.

One community hospital representative said: “How can we keep up the quality of health in our district if the ministers take nearly half the money away?”

The representatives of other hospitals, who reached the ministry on Wednesday to sign their agreements, requested Acting Secretary Padam



Bahadur Chand and State Minister Alam to make the procedure clean and short. Before the formulation of the directive to provide such grants to community hospitals, the ministry used to arbitrarily distribute grants to political cronies. However, the 23 hospitals outside Kathmandu were meant to receive their budgetary support after the provision was clearly stipulated in the Community Hospital Grants Directive 2016. A high-level ministry official stated that Rs 10 million has already been released to Tikapur Hospital in Kailali — the hometown of Health Minister Chaudhari — but other hospitals are facing delays. Some of the hospitals that have received their grants are said to be

close to the chief of the Planning Division, former secretary at the ministry Shanta Bahadur Shrestha and incumbent ministers.

Hospital representatives have been given the runaround for an entire week, and their expenses are rising while they go to the Ministry every day to obtain the grants they are entitled to. Officials tell them the money has not been transferred, or to wait fruitlessly until 4 pm each day. The ministers could not be reached for comments.



LAXMI GAUTAM

Citizens in seventies

Laxmi Gautam in
Himal Khabarpatrika (17-23 July)

हिमाल खबरपत्रिका

Two blind and deaf brothers in their mid-70s, who have no family to look after them, have received citizenship certificates.

77-year-old Harka Sambahamphe had a citizenship certificate, but with an inaccurate date of birth, which meant he was not entitled to social security

allowances intended for elderly citizens. His 75-year-old brother Lattey Sambahamphe had never obtained a citizenship certificate, and was thus also deprived of the benefit.

Harka is deaf and has poor eyesight, and Lattey is both deaf and blind. Harka used to bring fuel wood from the forest to sell in the nearby market. Lattey used to make *namlo* (woven rope used to carry loads) and exchange it

for food grains from neighbours. Although they have sufficient land, they are physically too weak and lack the necessary support to cultivate it.

In Ranigaun village of Panchthar district in the far-eastern hills, the Sambahamphe brothers were struggling hard to make ends meet. After *Himal Khabarpatrika* — *Nepali Times*’s sister publication — published a story about their everyday struggle in its 3-10 July issue, Panchathar’s Chief District Officer Kiran Thapa reached their village and gave them not only the citizenship certificates but also identity cards to receive the allowances.

The government had declared Ranigaun as a drought-hit village a few years ago, but the Sambahamphe brothers had nowhere to go. Harka used to walk three hours to fetch a pot of water, which they would ration for a whole week.

Siddhapokhari Sewa Sadan, a social organisation in Panchthar, has also arranged a house for the Sambahamphe brothers. After receiving his citizenship certificate, Harka said: “I had heard that there was a government in Nepal, and now I understand what it means.”

Diverting danger

BBC Nepali Service, 20 July

BBC नेपाली

Situated in Solukhumbu’s Everest region, the fast-growing Imja Tso glacial lake is considered to be the second-most dangerous glacial lake. To curb the possible threat of a glacial lake outburst flood, the Nepal Army has been implementing a project to reduce the lake’s water level.

Perched at a height of over 4,800 metres, the lake is spread over one kilometre, is 150 metres deep and carries over 70 million litres of water.

With the support of the Nepal Department of Hydrology and Meteorology and UNDP, the Army is building a canal to transport the lake water and reduce its level by three metres. Experts believe that the risk of the lake bursting will be minimised once the water is transferred.



NEPAL ARMY

The 50 m-long canal will divert the lake’s water to merge with the Dudh Koshi river through the Imja river. This risk-minimisation initiative — which is being carried out at an altitude surpassing all previous efforts — is estimated to cost up to \$3 million.

The work to carve out the canal started in April this year and will soon be completed, with assistance from the Nepal Army and locals in the area.

Culprits free, innocents charged

Krishna Gyawali in *Kantipur*, 20 July

कान्तिपुर

The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has been interfering incessantly in medical colleges for the past three years. It has filed cases even in trivial matters that should fall under the purview of departmental action, and overlooked gross violations of procedures. CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki has blatantly protected relatives with involvement in medical education, while persecuting rivals.

CASE 1

The CIAA sent a letter to the Nepal Medical Council (NMC) on 26 July 2014. Shortly after, the medical education regulatory body hastily allocated the number of seats for each medical college. An investigation by the Health Ministry later found that the basis and procedure for determining the allocation were not in accordance with the rules, and recommended action against the regulator. It even pronounced that the NMC’s decision to set aside 135 seats for Kist Medical College in Gwarko — which is partly owned by Balman Singh Karki, the CIAA Chief’s brother — was wrong. None of the NMC members involved in the decision has been prosecuted.



GOPEN RAI

CASE 2

Jyoti Baniya, an NMC member who protested the seat allocation to medical colleges, had a corruption case filed against him by the CIAA. Baniya went on to monitor Devdaha Medical College in Nawalparasi and suggested reforms. “The CIAA filed a corruption case against me because I protested the seat allocation,” Baniya said. The court later found the accused not guilty, as the CIAA could not furnish proof to back up its allegation.

CASE 3

A team of private medical colleges held a secret meeting in Dhulikhel three years ago after a panel of experts submitted a report to the government regarding irregularities in medical colleges. The owners of private medical colleges were in trouble after the formula of one student for six beds was introduced, including a ban on fake faculty members.

Soon after, NMC proposed an amendment, through the Health Ministry, to its regulation, which was immediately passed by the cabinet. Six months later, a new provision was introduced that allowed one student for five beds, and even permitted teachers affiliated to one medical college to work in other medical colleges as well.

CASE 4

Former Dean of Tribhuvan University (TU)’s Institute of Medicine (IoM) Rakesh Shrivastav resigned from his post earlier this year due to immense pressure from the CIAA not to implement the government’s decision regarding the tuition fee for admission to the IoM’s MBBS programme. Shrivastav had been appointed Dean after Govinda KC’s hunger strike in 2014 demanding reforms.

The TU has been unable to appoint a new Dean for months. A TU source said: “The vice chancellor couldn’t make up his mind about filling the post, after receiving phone calls from the CIAA and getting instructions not to do anything for now.” The CIAA had plans to punish some senior officials at the IoM before appointing a new dean, the source said. The controversial Karabi Nath Yogi is likely to be in the Dean’s seat after receiving the green light from the CIAA.

BACK TO SCHOOL: Rihan Kunwar, Disant Prasain and Nitesh Tamang (from left to right) entertain their Grade 3 classmates on their first day back in school after the 1 July tragedy.

The prefab classroom (below, left) that was destroyed.

Principal Puhami Kanti Bajracharya (below, right).



POST-MORTEM OF A TRAGEDY

The confluence of offences and lapses that resulted in the death of two bright young students

OM ASTHA RAI

Grade 3 students of Pushpanjali School in Godavari, who survived a recent deadly wall collapse that crushed two classmates to death, returned to school on Monday. It is an indication of how children can recover from traumatic events, that there is almost no hint of the calamity that befell them that rainy morning of 1 July.

The students, smiling and happy, gathered around to watch seven-year-old Rihan Kunwar enthrall everyone with a Nepali folk dance. He was joined by his friends Disant Prasain and Nitesh Tamang, and when the two failed to synchronise their footwork, the whole classroom burst into laughter.

"This is how we are trying to move forward. We no longer



GOPEN RAI

talk about that day, we do not want them to dwell on it," said Principal Puhami Kanti Bajracharya.

The new classroom is in a rented house near the prefab structure that was smothered by the wall. The temporary classroom — where children's

drawings are still littered among the debris of rock and mud — was being used after the main school building was itself destroyed in last year's earthquake.

Although the children seem to have moved on, the catastrophe still reverberates for the school and faculty, guardians, property



developers who built an illegal retaining wall, municipality and police. The families of 10-year-old Anjana Pun and 9-year-old Kripa Rai, who died in the tragedy, have not received compensation. And some of the 26 students who were injured are still recovering.

Naresh Bajracharya, one of the

developers (and owners) of the housing colony, is still at large, while his partner Karma Lama is in B&B Hospital suffering from hypertension and too ill to be taken into custody. On Tuesday, Pushpanjali School filed a written complaint against Lama and Bajracharya at the Satdobato



PICS: BIKRAM RAI

Lives cut short



Anjana Pun (*pictured, left*), 10, lost her father when she was just five. Her mother found it difficult to raise her, so she sent Anjana to Ama Ghar, a children's shelter in Lalitpur, last year.

At Grade 3 in Pushpanjali School along with four other Ama Ghar children, Anjana was smart, friendly and popular. She was one of the children taken in by the shelter after the earthquake last year.

On the morning of 1 July, she left for school with her bag and umbrella. Her classes were being held in a temporary classroom after the school building collapsed last year in the earthquake. Suddenly, a retaining wall of an adjoining housing colony collapsed and buried part of the classroom. Of the 30 children inside, 26 were injured, while Anjana and her classmate, Kripa Rai (*pictured, right*) did not survive.

"These little children came to us after the earthquake, seeking a safe place to live in," said Ama Ghar's Bonnie Ellison. "I feel sorry that they were not safe in the school."

Teachers remember Kripa Rai as a very polite girl who always greeted them with a smile. As always, she had been dropped off



at the school that morning by her father, Rajendra Rai, who still has not come to terms with the loss.

"I sometimes feel my daughter is still alive," he told us, eyes brimming with tears, "but she is gone. I urge the government to ensure that all school buildings are safe so no one else will have to lose their child like I did."

The National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) estimates that about 20 per cent of the school buildings across the country need to be rebuilt or retrofitted to withstand earthquakes. More children did not die in last year's earthquake only because it occurred on a Saturday, and although 33,000 classrooms were destroyed most of the students were safe. Next time we may not be so lucky.

In the wake of the 1 July tragedy, the Ministry of Education has formed a committee, led by Joint Secretary Dilli Rimal, to assess the vulnerability of school buildings nationwide.

"This tragedy should be an eye-opener not just for the government but also for private school owners," said ministry spokesman Hari Lamsal. "They must ensure that children are in safe buildings."

Police Circle in Lalitpur. Ama Ghar, the shelter where Anjana Pun was staying, has also lodged a written grievance against them.

Inspector Shyamal Subba, who is investigating this case, says Lama is under police watch and a search for Bajracharya is ongoing. "He is not home, and his phone is off, but we will find him," Subba said.

Lama and Bajracharya had bought the 3,000 sq m rice terrace above the school at a discount, levelled it using an excavator, and built a 2.5 m-high rock and mud retaining wall right next to the prefabricated classroom.

Principal Bajracharya says she repeatedly told Lama that the wall was dangerous, but Lama's reply was that it had been designed by an engineer. However, *Nepali Times* has learnt that he had neither obtained permission from the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority (KVDA) to level the land, nor from the Godavari municipality office to build the wall.

Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) guidelines state that the landscape of the three districts of the Valley cannot be altered without permission from KVDA. From his hospital bed, Lama told us he did not get the permit because ownership

of the land had not been fully transferred, as the partners had only paid Rs 5 million and were trying to secure loans. The Godavari Municipality office is barely 500 m from Pushpanjali School, yet appears to have been clueless about the unauthorised wall coming up.

"It would be illegal to build any physical structure without design approval, but we cannot stop it just because it is illegal," said Rom Bahadur Mahat, Chief Executive of the Godavari Municipality. "It is like asking the police to stop every single murder because killing someone is illegal."

Property speculators often buy cheap farmland on the outskirts of the Valley and sell them at a profit, flouting housing colony guidelines and without KVDA permission. Some bribe their way through, particularly when they have to sell the plots.

Suresh Kumar Regmi of KVDA Lalitpur shrugs his shoulders as he says: "Even if they do not come to us to seek permission, we do not have a mechanism to go after them."

With lax monitoring, it was easy for Lama and Bajracharya to get away with an unlawful and weak retaining wall

that could not withstand the weight of the rain-saturated soil behind it. A committee formed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) to investigate this case has held Lama and Bajracharya guilty for 'not following engineering standards' and 'not seeking permission'. The committee also blames Pushpanjali School for not having filed a written objection.

Bonnie Ellison of Ama Ghar says all three parties are responsible for the tragedy: "The school failed to file a written complaint, and the municipality was ignorant of what was going on in its own neighbourhood, but the major share of the blame falls on the developers because they intentionally built a retaining wall that was not sufficient by any engineering criteria."

Following written complaints by Ama Ghar and Pushpanjali School, police are preparing to take Lama and Bajracharya to court. Even if convicted, they will have to pay no more than Rs 500 fine or face a maximum of two years in jail, or both. 🇳🇵



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Counting proverbial chickens before they hatch

Of all the animals in our republic, the chicken gets the worst rap. We are rude to them in public, we defame them, and in the end, to rub salt into their wounds, we chop their heads off and eat them. Given all the bad press they get, domestic fowl should hire themselves a public relations consultant for a rebranding exercise.

We think chicken are cowards, not very strong in the brain department, have short attention spans, and are afflicted with a bad case of Attention Deficit Disorder. This is unfair. The Impeyan pheasant also has a fairly low IQ, and yet it has been declared our National Bird. Peacocks strut about as if they own the world, yet we hear nothing but praise for them. Ducks are daft too, but have a relatively better standing in the public arena.

To give chickens a complete makeover, we have to start with the negative proverbs about them that are derogatory and violent. From the proverbial Chicken Neck to calling the flight deck a cockpit, let's face it: belittling Chicken Little comes naturally to us.

In the era of political correctness and now that we are Federal Secular Republicans,

we must rewrite proverbs about chickens and other creatures great and small:

'Chicken have come home to roost'
Ever since Geoffrey Chaucer invented this adage in 1390, we have lived with the typo and have taken the proverb to mean that bad deeds come back to haunt those who commit them. Actually, what Chaucer meant to convey in his bad handwriting was this proverb: 'Every chicken at some point in its life comes home to be roast.'

'Don't count your chickens before they are hatched'
This proverb was invented by Chairman Mao, who also concocted that other adverb: 'You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs.' Our own Baddies put those two adages together, and updated it to suit the objective conditions for revolution in Nepal with: 'You cannot make an omelette without first decapitating the chicken'.

'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?'
This is not exactly a proverb, but



BIBI FUNYAL

a scientific conundrum that has befuddled humankind ever since the Mini Ice Age. Finally, with advances in genetic engineering and with DNA analysis of fowl feathers preserved in amber in Sichuan, the truth can finally be revealed: it was neither the chicken nor the egg that came first, it was a hen.

'Finding oneself between Scylla and Charybdis'
I have done a Google search and can find no one named either

Scylla or Charybdis. Who on earth are they, and why should anyone be ensconced between these two ladies, if indeed they are ladies? Before it spreads any confusion, this proverb urgently needs to be altered to 'Find oneself between India and China' which means, basically, that we Nepalis of the male persuasion are having our gonads squeezed royally.

'Beggars can't be choosers'
Oh yeah? Since when? Ever since this country overthrew the Rana Yoke and replaced it with Loktantra Yolk, we have been beggars and we never gave up our fundamental human right so that the Prime Minister's Discretionary Fund can purloin 1.25 Corrodes of taxpayer's moolah and hand it over to a 6-year-old fortune teller from Jhapa. We could have chosen to make this country great, but being beggars, we chose to ride horses instead. This proverb should therefore be altered to read: 'Too

many beggars spoil the broth'. **'Barking dogs seldom bite'**
I know from past experience when walking at night past the Great Krishna Galli Garbage Stockpile, that this is 100% not true, and I have a gash in my shin to prove it. The really dangerous canines these days are in the Corruption Watchdog. Therefore, unless I hear a voice of dissent, this proverb shall henceforth be amended to read: 'Let sleeping dogs keep telling lies, and have their day continuing to pretend they are man's best friends'.

'Every ass loves to hear himself bray'
I have met a lot of asses in my life, but present company excluded, not one has been what you might call garrulous. Nary a syllable escaped their lips. This proverb is completely erroneous, misleading, and an insult to assdom. It should, without any hemming and hawing, be changed to: 'An empty vessel is the devil's workshop, and a Prime Minister can be led to the water but he can refuse to step down even if there is a No-Confidence Vote in parliament'.



The Ass



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