Yam between rocks

Taking his oath of office as Nepal’s 39th prime minister for the second time on Thursday, Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal refused to swear in the name of God.

He does not have the same charisma and swagger he demonstrated in 2008, when he went from being a guerrilla commander to a prime minister elected in a landslide victory. In the last ten years since the end of the conflict, he has been trying to remake himself as a pragmatic politician, but has come across as a flip-flopper.

This time, Dahal has only nine months to show that he is a leader to be reckoned with in future elections, as he has to give up his position to Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress next year. It will be an uneasy alliance with the NC, and Dahal will also have to get the economy back on its feet after the devastation of the earthquake and the Indian Blockade.

Equally challenging will be maintaining an equilibrium in relations with China and India. It is an indication of the importance both neighbours attach to relations with the buffer state that they raced to greet Dahal on Wednesday.

First off the mark was Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who called Dahal to congratulate him immediately after the vote in Parliament. Chinese Ambassador Wu Chunjai drove up to Lazimpat to offer Dahal flowers and, not to be outdone, Indian ambassador Ranjit Rae followed soon after, with a bouquet of his own (pictured above).

Dahal will find it difficult to live down the perception that his partnership with the NC was designed to New Delhi. KP Oli, whom Dahal helped install as PM last year and then deposed last month, is already playing the nationalist card by intimating that India was not happy with his overtures to China during the Blockade.

“...the first pillar of our diplomacy is to maintain a balance between India and China,” says Madhu Raman Acharya, Nepal’s former permanent representative to the UN. “Dahal’s diplomatic success or failure will be measured by whether he demonstrates mature understanding of this sensitivity.”

Acharya says Beijing will show the same degree of proximity with Dahal as with Oli, but Dahal will have to be careful not to irritate India by delaying a resolution of the Madhes issue.

Along with Dahal, five ministers — two from the NC and three from the Maoists — were sworn in by President Bhandari on Thursday. Dahal has agreed to keep eight ministries for his party and allot 13 berths for the NC.

Dahal will face difficulties over the coming weeks to choose ministers from his secondarily unified party as well as the Madhes and fringe parties. He has just 10 ministerial positions to dol out, and too many aspirants. *Asthik Rai*
I n a functioning democracy, elections are a process by which citizens choose the party and politicians they trust most to manage the state machinery efficiently and honestly for the public good. This mandate is time-bound, and representatives thus chosen have a chance to prove that they are dedicated to serving, and worthy of being re-elected. The electorate has the chance to cast them aside when they are dedicated to serving, and worthy of being re-elected. and representatives thus chosen have a chance to prove that they are dedicated to serving, and worthy of being re-elected.

That is how it is supposed to work. Nepalis have struggled to restore democracy multiple times after authoritarian missteps since 1959. They have seen the close correlation between representation, participation and development. We have seen — after the first democratic elections 56 years ago, again for the first few years after 1990, and then following the first post-conflict election — that the people have held on strongly to their belief in the democratic process, as evidenced by heavy turnouts in elections.

Indeed, the country has seen better governance and more accountable leadership after each democratic exercise. The first try with democracy was cruelly cut short by King Mahendra in 1960, leading to three decades of authoritarianism with a Nepali face, called the Panchayat System. The interregnum after the 1990 Democracy Movement lasted only six years before the country plunged into war.

In every case, the euphoria of freedom and the hope that it would improve livelihoods has been dashed. As Chaitanya Mishra argues in an interview with our sister publication Hinar Khubapati, this week, the reason is that once in power, Nepal’s elected leaders have always treated ‘party’ as being synonymous with ‘government’. The role of a party is to employ legislators to uphold the rule of law by following regulations passed by elected representatives. Political parties are custodians of the public good, and they achieve this by strengthening state mechanisms and institutions.

However, Nepali politics today is run by a cartel of top leaders who lord over their own parties, and collectively over the country. They shuffle the deck every year or so, with the same King, Queen, Jack and Joker coming out on top. A politician who lost miserably in the 2013 election, and whose party dropped to third position, became Prime Minister this week through backroom wheeling and dealing, secret ‘gentlemen’s agreements’ and hush-hush handshake.

A political syndicate of four political coteries (it would be inaccurate to call them ‘parties’ any longer) today infinites just about every facet of national life, not just government, education, health, business, community forestry user groups, school management committees — all are under the direct tutelage of rent-seeking political patrons.

Their may seem like they are fighting tooth and nail, but the cartel’s standard operating procedure is to divide up the spoils, and loot while the looting is good. How else does one explain the ongoing coalition of KP Oli arbitrarily distributing Rs 24 billion to political cronies and hangerson — including Rs 10 million to a so-called child prodigy from Jhaa who is apparently a fortune-teller?

Even more serious is the misuse of Parliament’s provision to make the legislature more inclusive by a process of proportional representation (PR). The Constituent Assembly set aside 60 per cent of seats to PR members, who are selected according to the ratio of votes the parties received at the ballot box. This rule has been cynically twisted by all political parties to pad up their numbers in the House with business cronies. The recent Health Bill, for instance, was drafted by MPs who are owners of private medical colleges. Tycoons who own private schools and colleges recently pushed through amendments to the Education Act. Both have provisions that are detrimental to accessible and affordable education and health for all Nepalis. The Banking Act was drawn up by PR members who also happen to be bankers, but was so controversial it was withdrawn.

The cartel has rigged the system so that the public good takes a back seat. To make matters worse, the institution charged with cleaning all this up has itself become a parallel government, with its own patronage network. No foreign investor wants to come into a country where payoffs and kickbacks are the norm. And, without investments, new jobs are created, imports go up, and Nepalis migrate for work in ever larger numbers.

The country is in a quagmire. And there is a groundswell of discontent. Street demonstrations this week were against this politics of syndicated corruption that makes rules it can profit from, and against the culture of fear and silence.

**PARTY TIME**

*Nepali politics today is run by a cartel of top leaders who shuffle the deck every once in a while so the same King, Queen, Jack and Joker land on top.*

**Your Say**

*We are getting ready to rebuild [link](http://bit.ly/2azckEL).*

*Now that the electricity is back Barpak’s businesses are doing well. [link]*

*We are getting ready to rebuild [link](http://bit.ly/2azckEL).*

*Hurray*
Awesome again

Let’s see if Comrade Prachanda has learnt lessons for his second term as prime minister

KUNDA DIXIT

The return of Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal to parliament, and his alliance with Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress this week, prove right two adages in politics: no matter how ignominious the fall, a politician always lives to see another day, and there are no permanent enemies in politics. Dahal’s transition from Comrade Prachanda to his first swearing in as prime minister in 2008, his resignation in 2009 following an unsuccessful attempt to sack the Army chief, his humiliating defeat in the 2013 election, the years in the wilderness, and his final comeback this week mark the man as a survivor.

For a long time after the conflict started in 1996, many in Kathmandu were convinced Comrade Prachanda did not exist. People had heard of Subrahman Bhattarai from his activist days. Krishna Bahadur Mahara was even a Member of Parliament. But who was this Prachanda fellow? Dahal was born in a hardscrabble family from Tanahau which was among many thousands that were part of King Mahendra’s transmigration policy to relocate hill families to Chitwan. His father was a frontiersman, farming and raising a family at the edge of the jungle. It was not easy to survive in the plains, neither — the family had to battle wild beasts, repulsive moneylenders and a government in Kathmandu that abandoned resettled farmers to feed for themselves.

In college, Dahal was strongly influenced by communist ideology. He had seen Nepal’s yawning economic gulf at first hand while growing up in Chitwan. “I never really understood why we had to struggle so hard to survive from day to day while our neighbours had all the luxuries,” Dahal once told an interviewer.

In 1980, at 25, Dahal became a member of the Communist Party, which was in the throes of a split, reflecting fissures in the international communist movement. Nepal’s senior communists made a strong impression on him, but he later disagreed with them about his conviction that only an armed struggle would bring Nepal out of feudalism. Dahal enrolled at the Agriculture Campus in Rampur, Chitwan, which had been established with American aid and had ironically become a booby for leftist politics. After graduating in 1976 Dahal spent two years in a teaching job in Gorakhpur, where colleagues remember he kept banned communist literature in a tin trunk under his bed.

Dahal subsequently did a brief stint at the US-funded Rapli Project and discovered just how wasteful foreign aid was, and how it makes people even more dependent. He was also riled by the segregation between Nepalis and Americans in the project office. By the mid-1980s Suyam, Rolpa, Jajarkot and Pyuthan were as underdeveloped as ever. He has said that it was his experience in the Rapli Project that primed him for armed struggle.

In an imitation of Communist party cells elsewhere, the chairman named Nepal’s brand of Maoism after himself: Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-Prachanda Path. This played on the word path, meaning way in both English and Sanskrit. But more importantly, it had resonance with the ‘Shining Path’ of the Maoist insurgents in Peru. Prachanda itself means ‘awesome’ or ‘fearsome’.

In an interview with Revolutionary Worker in 2000, Prachanda gave a hint of what was to come: “Right now, subjectively, the proletarian forces are weak, after Mao’s death and the counter-revolution in China. Nepal is a small country, we are a small party, but we have a big perspective. Our People’s War may be a spark, but a spark for a fire — the People’s War in Nepal is contributing to making and accelerating this new wave of world revolution.”

Dahal has had many interviews since then, where he has contradicted himself over and over again, earning the reputation for telling audiences what they want to hear. Re-reading Prachanda’s interviews from the past two decades gives an indication of the kind of political pendulum that he is.

For example, in 2000 Prachanda said: “I hate revisionism. I seriously hate revisionism. I never compromise with revisionism. I fought and fought again with revisionism. And the party’s correct line is based on the process of fighting revisionism.” What a difference 16 years makes.

He has also made major gaffes, like boasting on camera that he had hoodwinked the United Nations by inflating the number of guerrillas so his party could get bigger compensation. After a visit to Beijing in 2011, in a puzzling admission, he told reporters at the airport that top Chinese leaders had told him to stop irritating India. And after returning from New Delhi last year he announced that he was ready to drop secession from the preamble of the constitution.

For someone who is supposed to be an atheist, he has had no hesitation in seeking blessings from mysterious Godmen, consulting astrologers, and taking part in religious rituals. As he becomes prime minister a second time, the questions that were asked the first time will be asked again: Why was it necessary for you to start a needless war that killed 1500 Nepalis and left Nepal in ruins?

For Prachanda, the end justified the means. Many committed social workers, popular teachers and enlightened farmers were killed by his cadre. When asked about this in a meeting with editors in 2008, Dahal said: “I never ordered our forces to torture anyone. If anyone had to be exterminated, I told them they should do it quickly, with a bullet to the temple.”

After his 2008 election landslide, Dahal demonstrated a brief period of statesmanship. Emerging heavily garlanded from his office he said: “This isn’t my victory, this isn’t my party’s victory. This is a victory of the Nepali people.” Also, within a month of being in office he was letting his militant unions extort businesses and intimidate the media.

Since resigning in 2009, Dahal has learnt some important lessons: Don’t try to play India off against China, don’t treat people like sheep, and don’t ever lie. But it also shored him another anachronism of democracy: even losers can be winners. By being a player of the political cartel that runs this country, he has ensured his role as a kingmaker and a power broker.
Preparing for the Big Flood

Last month’s transboundary flash flood on the Bhote Kosi alarms Nepal’s hydropower developers

OM ASTHA RAI

The Bhote Kosi has been hit twice by disasters in the last two years. The June landslide of August 2014 brought down a whole mountainside and blocked the river. A year later, the earthquakes struck. And last month a landslide dam burst in Tibet, causing much destruction downstream in Nepal.

The 45 MW Bhote Kosi private power project was closed for six months after the June landslide because the transmission lines were swept away. It had just started generating electricity. When the earthquake damaged the penstock pipe and caused the power house to subside it was being repaired and was supposed to resume operation in September, but the 22 July flash flood damaged the intake and powerhouse.

The multiple disasters on the Bhote Kosi have been a wake-up call for other large infrastructure projects along Himalayan rivers, and mean that Nepal’s ambitious goal of generating 10,000 MW of electricity by 2028 may have to be re-evaluated.

Himalayan rivers have always been prone to floods and landslides but climate change has added another level of danger, with glacial lakes filling up because of melting ice fields. The past two years could well be rehearsals for bigger disasters to come.

Khadga Bahadur Bista, President of the Independent Power Producers’ Association, says the Bhote Kosi is a reminder of the threat of floods caused by...
glacial lake and landslide dam outbursts on hydropower projects.

“The Jure landslide and the earthquakes were eye openers, but the recent floods have alarmed us even more,” he said.

The Bhote Kosi flood is reckoned to have been triggered by a massive landslide in Tibet that blocked the river. This impounded lake subsequently burst, causing the flood. A similar disaster knocked out the Sun Kosi power house and 29 km of the Kodari Highway in 1981 when the Zhangzangbo glacial lake in Tibet burst. In 1985, the Narnie hydropower project was badly damaged when the Di Tsho glacial lake in Khumbu burst.

Floods triggered by the landslide dam outbursts have damaged hydropower plants on Nepal’s three Bhote Kosi, which flow down from Tibet as well as other glacier-fed rivers. The Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has identified 22 glacial lakes — 12 on the Nepal and 10 on the Tibetan side of the Himalaya — that could burst. A World Bank-funded report published by the Nepal Hydropower Association after last year’s earthquake says a significant glacial lake outburst flood could sweep away all hydropower plants built in cascades along trans-Himalayan rivers like the ones on the Rasuwa Bhote Kosi.

Nepal has taken several policy measures to protect the hydropower sector from glacial lake and landslide dam outbursts on hydropower projects.

THREE HIT: The Bhote Kosi hydropower dam last month after it was damaged by a flash flood caused by a landslide dam that burst in Tibet (left). The Bhote Kosi power plant was restarted and was connected to the grid 11 months after last year’s earthquakes (left, top). The Jure landslide that triggered the Bhote Kosi plant out of operation for six months in 2014 (left, bottom).

In Nepal: One of the largest manufacturers of plastic products in India, Cello offers a wide range of lifestyle products.

NIC on credit: NIC Asia Bank launched its Visa credit card recently, with the aim of providing convenient banking facilities to its customers. The bank provides an easy-to-pay option when the full credit limit is reached: customers can pay within 15 to 45 working days through its internet banking system or eSewa portal.

Convenience banking: Prabhu Bank inaugurated its extension counter in the Tihagiri Eye

In this week: 29 students and their colleges were selected for the finals, with Prakash Maharjan of Puchwak Campus bagging the first prize of Rs 70,000.

Tickets and treats: Qatar Airways has rolled out a promotional sale in Nepal, during which passengers can enjoy benefits and save up to 50 per cent. The promotion will run until 5 August 2016, and is valid for travel between 1 August 2016 and 31 March 2017. It also offers double Qmiles and Qpoints as part of the Privilege Club program.
Breaking the commercial break

From next year, Nepalis can watch foreign television programs without advertisements

TUFAN NEUPANE

If commercial breaks irritate you, here is some good news: viewers in Nepal will be able to watch non-Nepali television programs without advertisements from next year.

With the passing of the Clean Feed Policy 2015 two weeks ago, the aim of making television viewing more enjoyable and uninterrupted in Nepal has been achieved. The Ministry of Information and Communications has set a timeframe (see box) to implement the policy, with the aim of ushering in a new era of uninterrupted television viewing.

“We have tried to achieve two goals,” says Kashi Raj Dahal, who headed the panel that drafted the policy. “We want to ensure that viewers do not have to endure commercial breaks while watching programs on paid channels. And we want to help the Nepali advertising industry to grow.”

As many as 147 foreign channels have been allowed to broadcast television programs in Nepal, more than 100 of which are paid channels. But even these paid channels broadcast content with several commercial breaks. Viewers pay for the content, and end up having to watch the advertisements too.

The new policy for the broadcasting of television programs on foreign television channels came into effect on mid-September, and is expected to generate additional revenue for the Nepali advertising market.

Regulation of paid and unpaid television channels is not a new practice, even in South Asia. Pakistan does not allow foreign television channels to charge their viewers money. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh regulate advertisement broadcasts on foreign television channels. When the new policies come into effect, even local cable operators cannot embed advertisements into content that is broadcast by foreign channels.

Televison broadcasters and cable operators will have to sort out technical difficulties to implement these policies. AAN President Bhaskar Rai Koirala says: “All we needed was a clear policy. Implementing it will not be difficult technically.”

Clean feed timeframe

- Consult with stakeholders, by mid-September
- Review the National Broadcasting Regulation 1995 in accordance with the Clean Feed Policy 2015, by mid-October
- Introduce regulation on television broadcasters and cable operators, by mid-February 2017
- Introduce specific laws and mechanism to regulate production and broadcasting of advertisements, by mid April 2017
- Implement the Clean Feed Policy 2015, from 16 July 2017

Imitating nature

Nepal’s most modern printing facility, Jaspandha Press, now makes natural colours come alive with its state-of-the-art equipment.
Tracing three generations pressed into one profession

**SMRITI BASNET**

"Never in his wildest dreams had Man Bahadur Thapa Magar — then in his twenties — imagined that there would be a day when he would write a book, or even participate in the printing business. The only work he knew was operating the letterpress printing machine.

Teamwork was the key. Ganesh, Thapa’s workmate, would choose the individual letters from the neatly arranged storage compartments, meticulously place them on the composing stick, and pass that on to Thapa. Thapa in turn would bring the machine to life with his feet, and insert the paper with one hand while the other remained fixed on the handle. By tuning his body movements with those of the machine, he also became attuned to finding balance in his life.

"We had to work for hours while standing," said Thapa, fondly recalling stories of yesteryears. Like the time they stayed up all night to print tickets for the Dha Yatra or when he failed to finish the job even after working the machine. "Back then, I never felt it was difficult or tedious. It is only now, when I am in this condition, that I find myself wondering how I did it," said Thapa, who is now wheelchair-bound after he sustained a fall.

After leaving his job at the palace in 1966, Thapa devoted his entire life to the press and finally retired a decade ago. But, his legacy is being carried on by his son and grandson.

Although both operate the modern printing presses, they are familiar with the workings of the old letterpress equipment. "We used to visit our father during school holidays, and he taught us how to compose the words," said Prabhat Thapa Magar.

Even the 39-year-old is surprised by how fast the world of printing has evolved. "I can take an hour or two for his father to accomplish now takes him merely five or ten minutes. Influenced by his father, and encouraged by how easily he managed to learn the ropes, Prabhat abandoned his dream of enlisting in the army, and joined the press. To see one’s work come out in great quality — with fine colours and the eye-catching print — is what keeps me going," said Prabhat.

The newest family member on the block is Bimal Thapa Magar, Thapa’s grandson and Prabhat’s nephew. Observing the workers running around, he was fascinated by the process of making paper, and decided to learn the art. He is currently working on a project to create a line of handmade paper using cotton and silk threads, which he plans to sell at local markets.

The trio — Thapa, his son, and grandson — continue to work together, passing down their skills and knowledge to the next generation. Despite the challenges they face, they remain dedicated to preserving this ancient art form, and ensuring its survival for future generations.

**THE TRIO:** Senior Thapa Magar with Bimal and Prabhat Thapa Magar (left).
UGYEN LAMA

Krishna Gaire has studied abroad for four years now; two years in the United Kingdom as an IB student and two years at New York University in Abu Dhabi. He was also a student in Shanghai and is now planning to do a year in New York.

Throughout this period, Gaire has strived to return to Nepal after his education. He says it gives him the best combination of work that is fulfilling and being with family.

"With the skills I have learnt abroad I can make a real impact in Nepal, more so than anywhere else in the world," Gaire said. He wants to work in education and has already started a website (www.collegesouthpuch.com) with friends, which will help connect aspiring Nepali university students to those who are currently enrolled or have completed their education.

Many other students share the same sentiment. Some want to return to their family and give back to their community and country a measure of what they had received. They also feel more comfortable using their skills to work among Nepalis because of the shared language and culture. Like Gaire, they believe Nepal is undergoing an immense transformation, and want to be

Women in technology

"The chance (right, bottom), who took a Java and C++ programming course in her gap year in the US, claims she represents a minority in a field dominated by men. Asked to help connect with women in the technology field in Nepal, she replied, "Women? They are all men!"

Although there are now more Nepali software engineers and programmers than before, it is still mostly men who work and run information technology (IT) companies. Many young women interviewed for this article said they were afraid of being discriminated against if they asked to join the field.

Kathmandu University and Women Leaders in Technology (WLT) are working to change this. They are lobbying to eliminate the perception that it is a difficult field suitable only for men.

The two institutions held an annual conference to help increase visibility, fire up resources and help the community of women in technology.

These initiatives are important because although their numbers are increasing in Nepal, many women are still not confident about their skills and believe their field is "a boys' club."
able to contribute positively to its future.

Pryya Joshi graduated from Vassar College in the United States, and made the decision to return to Nepal while the Maoist conflict was still ongoing. She felt a sense of responsibility for the Nepalis suffering from the violence and deprivation, and wanted to make a difference.

Joshi had studied wildlife research and conservation, and three days after her graduation she returned to Nepal with her degree and determination, and started her work in earnest. She was involved in introducing wildlife genetics to Nepal, revolutionising research in this new subject.

She worked in a wildlife genetics research project and is now the founder and manager of #MakeKT, which works to spark a maker culture among Nepali women.

"True, there is not much in Nepal, but the flip side is that there is so much to be done," Joshi says, adding that those intending to stay on in Nepal need "grit and perseverance".

Many Nepalis have been away for so long that they have lost their contacts, and some even experience culture shock when they come back. Both Gaire and Joshi say it is important to maintain a connection with people in respective fields, and mentors.

Shrisir Khanal, CEO of Teach for Nepal, always wanted to work in Nepal, with a focus on education. Khanal completed his Master’s degree in International Public Affairs (MIPA) in 2005 at University of Wisconsin-Madison. In recent years, he has noticed that more Nepalis youth with education and/or experience abroad are choosing to return to Nepal.

In Teach for Nepal itself, there are several young graduates from universities in Bangladesh, Germany, India, United Kingdom and the United States, who are serving as fellows in high-need rural communities in Sindulpokh, Lalitpur and Dhanusa for two years. Khanal says: "Before you return, you must know why you are coming back. If you know your reason and are open to taking on the challenges, Nepal can be a very rewarding place."

The journey to make things better in Nepal is tough, and has always been. Many have given up after a few years of trying, unable to bear the hardships for everyday lives, like water and electricity, as well as the weak work culture and corruption.

Asks Joshi: "You can imagine how demotivating the ugly politics and corruption are these days, so if everyone leaves, how will things ever get better?"
Poetry live, Attend a tapas-spurred poetry show featuring known India poets Emily Westman, Bipha Sumanta, Brendan Dennis, Sampat Dhungri, Sanini Shrestha, Pramod KC and Ujjwala Maharjan. 5 August, 5.30 to 6.30 pm, Club 25 Years, Ghasa Sherpani Marg. Tickets: Rs. 300 (regular) and Rs. 250 (students with valid student ID).

Innovation in Education, A fun-packed activity organised by Sauraha’s Cave, Suryakala and Kakani that aims to encourage and support innovative educational techniques. 5 to 7 August, 10 am to 7 pm or 2 to 5 pm, Tangerine Hotel, Narayani. (01) 5516974, 9864379125 / 9801227710, 9930377310 laltechinnovation@gmail.com

#photoNepal, Mark your calendars for Nepal Tourism Board’s photo exhibition on the mansion as part of its #photoNepal series. 5 to 7 August, 10 am to 5 pm. Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap. (01) 4540899

Write a play, Participate in the National Play Writing Competition and get a chance to stage your play in a theatre. The top ten applicants can also attend a workshop facilitated by Narendra Satthi. 27 July to 26 August, playwriting@nepal.com.np. Rs. 400 (Late competition), Rs. 300 (Long competition), Rs. 100 (Short programmes). Jobst Food Products. 01 4873171

Sound of Music, Re-menstruation of the musical ‘Sound of Music’ by Shivasree School students. 5 August, Nepal Academy, Kamanki, Pashupatinath. Rs. 200 for 12 pm, Rs. 300 (for 4 pm) students, Rs. 500 and 1,000 for 5 pm general admission.

Krama turns 3, Celebrate the third anniversary of Nepali rock band Krama Nepal as they belt out songs from their upcoming album and cover songs of legendary bands. 6 August, 7.30 to 11 pm, Adiva Space, Jomolu. Tickets: Rs. 800/545/269

Korea Pyongyang Arirang, The only restaurant in Kathmandu offering fusion Korean and Nepali cuisine. Darbar Marg, (01) 4222424

The well will not last forever, Over pumping will deplete ground water, but rainwater harvesting is sustainable

Start being environment positive, Choose smart way of life, choose rainwater harvesting

Dining

Alfresco, For home-made pastas and other lip-smacking Italian delights. Sohothe Chine, Plaza, (01) 6773999

Piano B, If I fall in love to you. Offers limited live entertainment. Bhavani Pokhara, Kirtipur, (01) 5000641

Open mic night, Grab the mic and sing your heart out at House of Music every Thursday. House of Music, Thamel, (01) 5159777

Fun pop, Spend a musical evening with Hajju Lama Mangal, as they perform some of their hits. 6 August, 6 pm onwards, Foxes Lounge, Thamel, (01) 5154898

Bold is beautiful, A one-day event filled with performances by some of Nepal’s well-known female artists. 5 August, 10 am to 5 pm. AS Mills, Narayani. omomolnaya@gmail.com. Tickets: Rs. 250 (admission sales), Rs. 250 (door sales)

Shivapuri Village, Eco-tourism place in the Shivapuri National Park replete with a charm from bygone days. Pichhwan, Shivapuri National Park, (01) 441725, 9861504141, info@shivapuri.com

EVENTS

Hit the trails, Ride along the trails of Shivapuri with fellow bikers. 11 August, 7 am onwards. Starting point: Paint Gole, Kirtipur. (01) 4060125, 9861502951, 9861503983. Ticket: Rs. 350 (Nepali without bike), Rs. 500 (foreigners without bike), Rs. 250 (Nepali or foreigners with bike)

Street art, Don’t miss out on the International Street Art Festival organised by Art Life, featuring a host of events: mural making, art talks, workshops, installations, exhibitions, street art jams and more. 1 August to 23 September. Multiple venues: 9811867106 / 9841881645, artlife-kathmandu@gmail.com, artlife-kathmandu.com

Grand Ngoring Hotel, Countrywide weekend package offers suite room, swimming, gym, massage, and discounts on other facilities. Gokarna. (01) 4910133

RECORDER, A monastic and guest house, Neydo is home to many significant religious sites of the great siddhas. Leave your troubles behind and book a room. Pharping, Kathmandu, (01) 6504866, www.neydohotel.com

getaway

Rupakot Resort, The perfect getaway spot, pampering guests in the lap of nature amidst stunning views of the Annapurna. www.rupakotresort.com, (01) 625680 / 9856538543

Neydo Monastery, A monastic and guest house, Neydo is home to many significant religious sites of the great siddhas. Leave your troubles behind and book a room. Pharping, Kathmandu, (01) 6504866, www.neydohotel.com

DHULIKHEL LODGE RESORT

Located on a hillock, the resort offers a magnificent view of valleys, foothills, and mountains to the norm. Dhulikhel, (01) 4910164, dhulikhelresort.com

Button to return to top of page
A close encounter with the Bagmati

Cultural historians attribute the Bagmati Civilisation of Kathmandu Valley to that of the Indus and Nile. Having had to cross the Bagmati twice a day for most of my life, I have come to know the river intimately. But it also saw its decline and decay, and with my colleagues Rajni and Sunreta decided to photograph the important but forgotten heritage sites along a 2.5 km stretch of the Bagmati’s north bank from Teku Down to Thapathali.

Some of these sites were built as early as the 7th century CE, and are hidden from public view by tall new buildings of Tripureshwar and Teku. The terrain between the ‘link’ road along the southern bank of the Bagmati and the river is soggy and overgrown with tall, thick bushes. There is garbage everywhere and the swampy,inky waters evaporating in the midday sun made the stench unbearable.

We set up the tripod on the no man’s land of a muddy embankment just before the clouds parted and gave a bright blue backdrop to the panoramas. Its reflection turned the muddy river into a lapis-coloured lake, making it impossible to come to terms with reality.

The riverbank is dotted with underground springs that provide potable water right next to the thick toxic flow of the river. Not long ago, the Bagmati’s water must have been as clean as what flows from these springs.

Our goal must be to bring the river back to its pristine, holy state.

Alok Tuladhara

When it comes to water

River pollution is changing how we perform our rituals

When Nausika Shrestha’s mother passed away nine years ago, her father was adamant that she would not be cremated at Ayungyal beside the Bagmati River. The reason was simple: the holy river was just too polluted. So the family drove the hearse to Deoghat in Tanahun to perform the last rites. Now in his 80s, he has given strict instructions: when he dies, he is also to be taken to Deoghat, where the water is cleaner.

For Kathmandu Valley dwellers, various life cycle rituals and cultural festivals have always been associated with rivers. From fetching river water in a basket to invoke the gods during the feeding ceremonies, to crowning the dead on river banks, the recently concluded Kha Machhasthami, and the religious month of Ganta that has begun, people’s lives are inherently connected to river waters.

But contamination of the holy rivers is adversely affecting cultural and spiritual practices, altering how rituals are carried out and festivals are celebrated.

“With the increase in river pollution, many don’t see rivers as holy and sacred anymore. They don’t believe that shamans reside inside their rivers,” says Rajni Maharjan, an environmental anthropologist who completed her graduate thesis on the effects of river pollution on cultural and physical health. “This has brought a change in how people celebrate festivals,” she adds.

Residents have started using water from other sources, and many now carry out rituals inside their homes. 60-year-old Bagmati resident we go on to larger to Bagmati River for shraddha (annual death ritual), instead he performs it at home and then leads the prayer offering it dressed consecrated to cows and birds. “The river,” he says, “is too dirty to flow to heaven.” Even during Janai Purnima, the festival has started taking a holy dip in Bagmati river, and watches at 11.45. Not having to change the way I do things, but I had to choose,” he adds.

In his more than 40 years as a priest, Rajesh Rajopadhya has seen many a thing change. “Most religious rituals performed along the river banks have died to other sources of water or are no longer concluded,” he says. “These rituals have religious significance, and are a part of our identity. Losing them is like losing who we are.”

But Maharjan believes it may not be too late to save our heritage. The answer, she says, is saving the rivers. “Rivers are resilient and can be brought back to their original state if the biocultural flora and fauna come back. So our festivals and rituals can come back too,” she adds. With the recent festival of clearing water sources at the start of the monsoon, this...
In 2016, Netflix, the company that started in 1997 by emailing DVDs to their initially sceptical customers via the efficient United States postal system, expanded in 190 different countries, declaring an astonishing $330 million subscribers worldwide. Netflix identified a demand, and an extremely rewarding niche, by supplying films to people who had no time to go to the video store. It evolved rapidly to develop a wide archive that people often turned to for hard-to-find foreign and independent films that they could not afford to buy; a remastered Criterion special of the 1982 Ingmar Bergman classic “Fanny & Alexander” has five discs and can cost $50 or more.

Netflix developed an additional streaming service in 2007, and in 2013 it delved into the uncertain territory of creating original material, hoping to catch the ‘House of Cards’ golden bullet: the series is a remake of a British series of the same name — an extremely popular political television series with high production values. It opened credits featuring scenes of Washington, D.C., like nothing I’ve ever seen that will release its fifth season in 2017. With Netflix now available in Nepal to anyone with a credit card and decent Internet connection, viewers can now use their free one-month trial to watch the just-released riveting eight-part miniseries “Stranger Things” — a clever, charming, scary, and thrilling homage to Spielberg’s “E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial” (1982) and to many other classic icons that shaped the sci-fi/horror/fantasy ethos of the 1980s, including giants like Stephen King and George Lucas.

Written by the Duffer Brothers, who also wrote the not-quite-as-amazing television series “Wayward Pines” (2015), “Stranger Things” is an instant classic that is hard to define, evoking a kind of nostalgia for the 1980s even if you were not brought up during that decade. Starring Winona Ryder and a bunch of adorable savant-like child actors, this series, about which I refuse to reveal very much, is a delightful confection, totally sincere in its deeply geeky attempt of making you want to shrug, laugh, and know more about science, all at the same time. There are many wonderful things about this strange series, namely the perfectly calibrated humour, the encroaching creepiness, a few interesting mysteries beyond the initial premise of a missing child, and an extremely strong ensemble cast that are, aside from Ryder, fairly unknown. A friend of mine whom I recommended it to scolded me for scaring her, but then proceeded to binge-watch all eight episodes in one night. Yes, that’s how good it is and, if we are lucky, Netflix the now cool so dark horse might just bring us what is sorely lacking, the crucial generation for original material in a wonderfully histrionic world.

nepalimes.com

From Baluwatar to Balkot: Supporters of former Prime Minister KP Oli following him as he leaves the official residence after nine months in power.

Justice League: The newly appointed Justices of the Supreme Court with President Bidya Devi Bhandari (center) after the swearing-in ceremony at Shegaon Nivas on Monday.

Against Corruption: Youth join Geemdi KC in the “Walk with Dr KC” campaign in Kathmandu on Saturday to raise a stand against corruption.

Burning Demons: Shakupur Balsi prepare an effigy of the mythical demon Chamunakura to symbolise the destruction of evil, at the Gaushahi Jatra on Monday.
Dahal’s 6 challenges

Dahal’s 6 challenges

1. Constitutional amendment

The ruling NC-Maoist coalition has reached a three-point deal with the Madhesi Front to amend the constitution, which could be Dahal’s biggest challenge. Political analyst Puranjan Acharya says: “Without the UML, it will be difficult to address Madhesi issues by amending the constitution. And securing the UML’s consent will be very difficult.”

2. Constitution implementation

The Constitution stipulates categorically that local, federal and parliamentary elections will have to be held before December 2017. But without revising a number of laws in tune with the Constitution, it will not be possible to hold any elections.

3. Peace process

Even in 2008 when he became Prime Minister for the first time, Dahal could not use his power to nullify 5,000 legal cases pending against him, other Maoist leaders and cadres. He faced tremendous pressure from within his party to act on this critical issue, and needs to protect himself against the intimidation by various international norms of transitional justice.

4. Alliance with the NC

Dahal is the Chair of the third-largest party, and he has become Prime Minister with the backing of the largest party, the NC. Ministers representing the NC in the government might not obey him, and it will be difficult for him to retain NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba’s trust.

5. Reconstruction

Dahal’s predecessors, Sushil Koirala and KP Oli, were criticized for not acting swiftly to help the post-earthquake recovery. Now, Dahal will have to prove that he is different, and cares for poor earthquake survivors while ensuring good governance.

6. Balanced diplomacy

Former PM Oli signed the trade and transit treaty with China, and Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to Kathmandu appeared possible. If there is no progress in implementing the transit deal or China’s road to Kathmandu does not come to Nepal, it will be considered Dahal’s failure. He has to balance this with India’s sensitivity about closeness with China. It will be an uphill task for him to maintain equidistance with Beijing and New Delhi.

The butterfly artist

Begging instead. Over time, he moved to Pashupati.

The pats and sattals gave him a roof over his head, but the older boys always stole the money he earned. Tired of being robbed, for the next 25 years he took to wrapping the money in plastic bags and hiding them under a tree in Bunkali. In 2007, with the help of the police he recovered Rs 50,000 from his hiding place. The police helped him to exchange the damaged and damp paper notes for new ones. Never having imagined that he had saved such a huge amount of money, Karki fainted when he heard the sum. At the hospital, he remembered everything he had been through, including his failed suicide attempt to break free from the psychological suffocating. “At that moment I decided to use the money to help children who, like me, have suffered in life,” said Karki.

He then established a centre focusing on helping children in need. Initially, the centre housed three children, all of whom were war victims. Over the years, the centre evolved. After five years, the initial fund ran out, and Karki had to go from door to door in the byeways of Kathmandu asking for help.

Today there are forty children living in the centre, many of whom are orphans. A few are prisoners, while others are victims of war and earthquake, or orphans. The centre takes care of their housing, meals, education, and medical bills.

The beggar buwa

The beggar buwa

Funding all the expenses without a steady income and a donor is not easy, admits Karki. “Three nights-guards are still waiting for their meagre fees because I haven’t been able to pay the tuition fees,” he said. “But I haven’t given up.”

The costs of school uniforms, books and stationery and school bags at the beginning of each academic year alone come up to a total of Rs 200,000 for each child. Karki’s struggle is further exacerbated when any of the children falls sick. Karki himself is bedridden for three months during winter due to arthritis.

The centre recently moved to Gokarneshwor where a house for the children is being built on a rented plot of land. Karki has employed three staff to look after the kids, at nominal pay. “Looking after the children is difficult. But the smiles of the children at the end of the day push everyone to work harder,” he said.

Girish Giri in www.setopati.com, 29 July

Santa Gaba Magar in Himal Khabar Patrika, 17-23 July

The Matighar Baneshwor road was littered with picnics and water bottles discarded by the supporters of CIAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki after a rally last Wednesday. None of the participants of the rally had the civic sense to dispose of the trash appropriately.

Milan Rai, a young artist who lives in a rented room in Baneshwor, saw motorists and pedestrians trampling on the waste generated by the rally participants. He asked himself: “Are they sleepwalkers? Can they not see the trash on the road?”

In the wee hours of Tuesday, Rai started collecting the trash. It was not just a cleaning campaign. He wanted to collect the refuse, create a pyre out of it at Matighar and burn it to awaken the Kathmandu residents from their apathy. After dawn, the sweepers from Kathmandu Metropolitan City came and took away the piles of garbage that he had collected.

But the photos of him picking up the garbage went viral on social media, with even politicians, activists and celebrities sharing them on their Facebook timelines.

Acharya says: “Without the UML, it will be difficult to address Madhesi issues by amending the constitution. And securing the UML’s consent will be very difficult.”

The act was seen by some people as being against CIAA Chief Karki, or in favour of Satyagrahi Gwinda KC, who has demanded Karki’s impeachment.

"I was neither supporting nor protesting anything, he says, "I just wanted to rekindle Kathmandu’s lost civic sense.”

Rai, a school dropout from Dhankuta in eastern Nepal, is still not well known in Nepal. But his creative work has already made its presence felt among a circle of artists around the world. His ‘white butterfly campaign’ has spread beyond Nepal, and reached Europe and Africa.

After a recent terrorist attack in Brussels, the Brussels Stock Exchange building was decorated with his white butterflies to spread the message of peace. While butterflies have been used in as many as 40 countries so far — mostly for peace, and sometimes to express political discontent.

Rai is a painter, but is now more popularly known as the white butterfly campaigner. Four years ago, after realizing that his paintings were being confined to either exhibition halls or the drawing rooms of the affluent, he started installing white butterflies in public spaces to spread a positive vibe.

After last year’s earthquake, Rai used his creativity to raise funds that he used to build houses in Sindhupalchok district. The international media gave him some coverage, and he was invited by Harvard University to lecture about his work only two months ago.

A school dropout from Nepal delivered a lecture, he says. "Nothing is impossible; we just need a strong will.”

The pickpocket’s artistry

Begging instead. Over time, he moved to Pashupati.

The pats and sattals gave him a roof over his head, but the older boys always stole the money he earned. Tired of being robbed, for the next 25 years he took to wrapping the money in plastic bags and hiding them under a tree in Bunkali. In 2007, with the help of the police he recovered Rs 50,000 from his hiding place. The police helped him to exchange the damaged and damp paper notes for new ones. Never having trusted the UML, it will be difficult to address Madhesi issues by amending the constitution. And securing the UML’s consent will be very difficult.”
Store drugs lead addicts

For addicts, the line is blurring between pharmaceutical drugs and hard drugs

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

Laxmi Gurung (pictured bottom, centre) was just 14 when she bought her first drug to fulfill her addiction. She did not buy it from a street pusher, but from the friendly neighbourhood pharmacist.

Gurung was in Grade 7 then, and faced peer pressure from classmates who introduced her to pharmaceutical painkillers such as Opioids, Nitrazep and Tramadol to get a high. Soon, she was hopelessly addicted.

"Most of my friends were buying these drugs from the pharmacy, and I had to take them too, to be accepted into the group," Laxmi, now 27, recalls.

The pharmacist noticed her frequenting the shop to buy the painkillers, but readily sold them to her even though she was too young to buy prescription drugs like Tramadol. Her visits to the pharmacy became more and more regular, and she moved on to injecting hard drugs before she turned 11.

"I have realised that I would never have used hard drugs if I hadn’t experimented with pharmaceutical drugs, and it is now very difficult to get over the addiction," says Laxmi, who is at the Sober Recovery Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre in Jumla after having been arrested and admitted into rehab five times.

Analysing her own childhood, Laxmi reckons the conflict between her parents when she was young drew her to using pharmaceutical drugs. Other reasons include the migration of her father, her broken family, and peer pressure from classmates.
to street drugs

Over the years, abuse of pharmaceutical drugs has emerged as an epidemic across towns in Nepal, but activists working on addiction say neither the Department of Drugs Administration nor the Narcotics Control Bureau has understood its longterm impact.

During a visit to the Sorkhad Police Station one recent morning, the detention cells were crammed with 12 youngsters charged with drug offenses — seven of whom were street children caught using drugs in nearby Thamel.

Anish Shrestha, 18, was one of the detainees. He landed up in the streets at the age of 10 after his mother abandoned him, and he was previously arrested for using and selling drugs. He vividly remembers the day he first snuffed glue from a tube of Deodara. “It was like being in heaven,” he says, and it was that sense of bliss that led him to use other kinds of drugs, and injecting drugs.

He could just walk into the Bir Hospital pharmacy and buy syringes and the prescription drug Avil over the counter. For more exotic drugs, he had a supplier in Birgunj who could obtain whatever he wanted from across the border.

Policemen at Sorkhad say they cannot file cases against anyone for using painkillers or pharmaceutical drugs. “The drugs are not classified as narcotics, so we can’t arrest them,” says Samrundu Singh Radhak, who had to release 10 students who were using stimulants bought from a drug store to boost their confidence in the SLC exams.

Tsering Wangpo of Sober Recovery Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre says three-fourths of youngsters who start out with pharmaceutical addiction move on to hard drugs, adding: “Medical drugs are cheaper, and pharmacies just want to boost sales, they don’t really care who buys them.”

Blame game

On 13 July, a team from the Nepal Police’s Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) arrested owners of several pharmacies in Kathmandu found selling prescription drugs such as Opioid, Spathun, Tramadol and Tramadol to teenagers.

The NCB has sent the pharmacy owners to the Department of Drug Administration (DDA) for further investigation because it does not have the mandate to punish them. “Despite knowing that teenagers are abusing pharmaceutical drugs, we just don’t have enough people to carry out tests,” says DIG Bishal Chand of the NCB.

The NCB can take action against those found using codeine, dextropropoxyphene, ethylmorphine, ephedrine, fentanyl, methadone, morphine, pethidine and phendimetrazine, which the WHO has classified as narco drugs.

Chand says that due to lack of proper monitoring, pharmaceutical drugs — like tramadols, fentanyl, phentermine, percosetms, oxycod and nikidam — and other painkillers are being illegally imported from India and are easily available in pharmacies without prescriptions. He says pharmacies cannot be chartered unless all drugs require prescriptions.

The DDA contends raids, but has never prosecuted anyone for selling prescription drugs. The Department’s Bhupendra Thapa says: “We can scrap licences of pharmacies or suspend them for up to six months but we can’t punish the drug users, as the police say that prescription drugs are not classified as narcotics.”

The DDA claims that more than a quarter of pharmacies in the country are selling restricted medicines without prescriptions.

Recovery hopes

Dhram Pun Magar (picture) was forced to be a pusher of medical drugs for addicts. On his school when he was in Grade 6, and he soon started using them himself.

He stole mobile phones from friends and money from his father’s wallet to pay for the drugs.

“Hooked on alcohol and drugs to buy Tramadols, Oxideres and other tablets,” recalls Bilu, who dropped out of school in Grade 9. He tried to give up his addiction, but could not sleep and longed for each morning so he could go to the drug store to buy another injection.

At 17, Bilu is in rehab, and is sober and serene as he speaks to us. But he realises that he is lucky not to have progressed to hard drugs.

Tsering Wangpo of the Sober Recovery Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre in J erhatt says prevention is the best cure, which can only be achieved through greater awareness in schools about pharmaceutical drugs.
Let us pray

The ass is just a horse with big ears. This is what gives this particular donkey an acute sense of hearing and wisdom, even and beyond his rugged looks. That is just by way of introduction to this, the 500th column on the backside of this illustrious paper.

At times these please have fallen between the cracks, as it were, but the Ass is thankful to all faithful (and unfaithful) readers for their time and support over the past 10 years, as well as for the tomatoes and other rotten vegetables thrown my way.

More, throw me more. Yum yum. So, if I can now have your full attention, please, we can begin this week’s sermon. And that means you with the handset near the gym chasing Poké Buls.

Sitting, the Ass has been diagnosed with acute laryngitis and advised by doctors not to say anything for a week, but it is in the public interest and to uphold the values of press freedom and constitutional anarchy that he has to keep praying.

In any other country they would have thrown their hands up in the air and given up by now. But not here in Nepal, because we are a truly hard-luck lot who are used to being kicked around by our overlords.

Every government in recent years has come with an empty limit nine mensa from the date of manufacture. And so it was that the oligarchy had to step down, in nine months, just as his predecessors before him had done. Comrade Módsdálaa also has a gestation period to do what he has to do, which is probably not much. After that, Brave Lion also has nine months from conception to delivery.

In the next few weeks it may appear to the casual observer that there are intense behind-the-scenes negotiations going on about the composition of the cabinet. Hectic talks are indeed going on, not between Kangtrong and the Babildes as you might think, but between Comrade Terrific and God.

The matter had to be referred to a neutral higher-up authority because negotiations between the parties over portfolios are deadlocked, over who will get to be the powerful Minister of Superstition and Black Magic. In ongoing consultations with the Almighty, a breakthrough is expected in the next few months (provided the planets are properly aligned) and once that happens, God willing, it will be smooth sailing.

God Himself is understandably worried about His status in the new constitution and whether His well will still be allowed to run thunderbolts down from heaven when He gets up the urge, as He has been in the habit of doing from time to time. He may also be perturbed by the spread of atheists, agnostics and secularists amongst his congregation, but we would like to reassure God on that score. As a country ruled by folks pledging allegiance to Co-pilot Baha and other Godsman, the Omniscient One should not panic just yet about being unceremoniously deposed.

Nepal has always been rescued by Shri Pushpali Nauth when it gets itself into trouble, although once it had to be rescued by Minister Shi Kamal Nauth. When normal methods of statecraft fail, we have always turned to the paranormal. If there are important decisions to be made, we turn them to precise calculations of the position and movements of the moon and planets via-à-via Intelsat 5-B in geostationary orbit over the Indian Ocean.

When the going gets tough, the prime minister sacrifices a black goat, and when it is a question of survival Nepal’s rulers just neutralise their rivals by decapitating five species of livestock and domestic fowl to propitiate the wrath of the Goddesses. If Comrade Aweamannana is still stuck on cabinet consultation next week, a quick trip to Manakamana to decapitate two watertapped goats should be sufficient to overcome the voodoo curse the Kangtress are using against him by sticking pins into stuffed dolls.

So, it is heartening to see that the government has got its priorities right and has set aside non-urgent matters like nominating a full cabinet, FRD and SBD are attending to more urgent matters, such as leaving no stone unturned in overturning all decisions of the previous regime. Political appointees rewarded for their loyalty by the previous regime with ambassadorships will now be replaced by political appointees rewarded for their loyalty by the present regime with ambassadorships.