



**HERITAGE
LIVE!**



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.

In 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 next vote.

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 tryst 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 have been dashed. As Chaitanya Mishra argues in an interview with our sister publication *Himal Khabarpatrika* 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 handshakes.

A political syndicate of four political coteries (it would be inaccurate to call them ‘parties’ any longer) today infests just about every facet of national life, not just government.

Education, health, business, community forestry user groups, school management committees — all are under the control of political syndicates. The bureaucracy functions under the direct tutelage of rent-seeking political patrons.

They 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 outgoing coalition of KP Oli arbitrarily distributing Rs 240 million to political cronies and hangers-on — including Rs 10 million to a so-called child prodigy from Jhapa 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 health and education 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, no new jobs are created, imports go up, and Nepalis migrate for work in ever larger numbers.

The people are aware, 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.

Times

THIS WEEK

Most reached on Facebook

Wide open spaces by *Smriti Basnet* (11,566 people reached)
Kathmandu desperately needs more breathing space amidst urban congestion

Most shared on Facebook

Wide open spaces by *Smriti Basnet* (24 shares)

Most visited online page

No hard feelings by *Om Astha Rai*

Most popular on Twitter

22 governments in 26 years by *Manish Jha* (57 retweets, 67 likes)

Most commented

Wide open spaces by *Smriti Basnet*

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

OPEN SPACES

Building a public park and creating open spaces should be on the agenda – agreed. But what about its management and sustainability ('Wide open spaces', Smriti Basnet, #819)? Look at Tundikhel. Of course, the encroachment has made it small, but what about what is left? Plastic and paper are strewn all over the place. The policymakers definitely need to be woken up from their never-ending slumber but so do the public, who are the ones who need to use it. They should be the ones careful not to pollute it, to encourage people to petition for such spaces.

Rita Magar

VICIOUS CYCLE

If Nepalis know or knew this and that, then why didn't they write a constitution that would prevent such an unstable political environment (22 governments in 26 years', Manish Jha, #819)? One suggestion: Executive President?

Namah

"Our political leaders are incapable of teamwork in the national interest". Some are pawns of India and others are of CIA. So no wonder there are conflicts in the national interest. But my question is: from 1990 to 2016, during 26 years of a political mess, where were the Nepali people? How did and do the Nepali people channel their frustrations and anger? Does it all just dissipate and disappear into thin air, or is it all bottled up, ready to burst? I bet it is the former.

Hurray

INTO THE CAVES

Never knew that such places existed in Nepal. NTB, instead of spending money on advertisements for CNN and BBC, should promote this within Nepal and work towards upgrading it.

Shakuntala Ghimire

Mona Bomgaars@monabomgaars

Interesting. Amp pipal, Barpak and hundreds of Gorkha villages thrived without electricity in the past.

Nepali Times@nepalitimes

Now that the electricity is back Barpak's businesses are getting ready to rebuild <http://bit.ly/2azckEL> @manistan

bhrikuti rai@bbhrikuti

too bad didn't get a taste of that golden era :(I hope the golden era returns soon.

Nepali Times@nepalitimes

Nepalis still believe that 1992 to 1994 was the golden era of Nepal's economic development. <http://bit.ly/2apd8ZP>

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #820

Q. Will the new government be better than the KP Oli government?

Total votes: 433

Yes 18.24%

No 65.82%

Maybe 15.94%

Weekly Internet Poll #821

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How would you describe the new Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal?

Times

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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 Baluwatar, 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 Baburam 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 Tanahu 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 easier to survive in the plains, either — the family had to battle wild beasts, rapacious moneylenders and a government

in Kathmandu that abandoned resettled farmers to fend 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 itself. 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 hotbed for leftist politics. After graduating in 1976 Dahal spent two years in a teaching job in Gorkha's Arughat, 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 Rapti 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-1990s Salyan, Rolpa, Jajarkot and Pyuthan were as underdeveloped as ever. He has

EVOLUTION OF A REVOLUTIONARY

When the war started in 1996, no one had heard of Prachanda. There was only a rare faded photograph of him from the 1970s while he was a young teacher in Gorkha (1). By 2000, a drawing of a man in a turtleneck sweater started appearing in pamphlets and newspapers. Based on various images, *Nepali Times* cartoonist Subhas Rai even made a likeness of the man from an artistic imagination (2). Then the army got hold of a group photo from a captured Maoist in 2001 that had a bearded Prachanda (3). In later photographs he is seen looking a bit like Omar Sharif (4). Pushpa Kamal Dahal after winning in the 2008 elections (5). And on Wednesday after winning the vote in parliament to be prime minister for the second time (6).

said that it was his experience in the Rapti Project that primed him for armed struggle.

In an imitation of Communist personality cults elsewhere, the chairman named Nepal's brand of Maoism after himself: Marxism-Leninism-Maoism-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 senderistas in Peru. Prachanda itself means 'awesome' or 'fierce'.

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 prairie 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 secularism 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 17,000 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." Alas, 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 showed 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. 🇳🇵

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GOPEN RAI

OM ASTHA RAI

The Bhote Kosi has been hit thrice by disasters in the last two years. The Jure 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 Jure 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 2026 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 floods and landslides of 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



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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 20 km of the Kodari Highway in 1981 when the Zhangzangbo glacial lake in Tibet burst. In 1985, the Namche hydropower project was badly damaged when the Dig Tsho glacial lake in Khumbu burst.

Floods triggered by the landslide dam outbursts have damaged hydropower plants on

Nepal’s three Bhote Kosis, 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 Nepali 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

THRICE 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 (*far left*).

The Bhote Kosi powerhouse subsided and was covered with debris for months after last year’s earthquakes (*left, top*).

The Jure landslide that threw the Bhote Kosi plant out of operation for six months in 2014 (*left, bottom*).

glacial lake and landslide dam outbursts. The Department of Electricity Development guidelines require hydropower developers to factor in flood risk from the design phase onwards. Banks now require hydropower projects to address the dangers.

However, the scale of future floods on Himalayan rivers could be so catastrophic that no mitigation measures will be adequate. The worst case scenario is a mega-quake hitting the Nepal-China border region in which the shaking will first damage the projects, and then expose them to risks of tsunami-scale floods barreling down the rivers as lakes burst upstream.

Arun Rajouriya of the Hydroelectricity Investment and Development Company says small hydropower projects could do more to be prepared for floods. “We do not invest money in projects that are not designed to withstand glacial or landslide floods, private investors must do the same,” he says.

Hari Pandit, an Institute of Engineering professor involved in the design of several hydropower projects, including the 400 MW Kaligandaki Koban, says a flood *per se* is not a threat to a mega-hydropower project — it is the sediment and debris they bring down that damage equipment and structures.

Pandit says techniques like centrifugal separators could replace the current gravity method for sedimentation. He adds: “To be better prepared for glacial lake and landslide dam outburst floods, we need to focus on advanced designs.”

prabhu Bank BIZ BRIEFS

Cello in Nepal

Infinite Enterprises was recently appointed as the authorised distributor of Cello products



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 Tilganga Eye

Hospital premises recently. Hospital visitors can utilise the services of the counter from 8 am to 5 pm. The bank also hopes that the counter will cater to the banking needs of the doctors and other employees of the hospital.

Talent unleashed

Asian Paints Nepal concluded the All Nepal Architectural Student Design



Competition with an award ceremony this week. 29 students and seven colleges were selected for the finals, with Prakash Maharjan of Pulchowk 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.



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Breaking the commercial break

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



BIKRAM RAI

TUFAN NEUPANE

If television 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 way Nepalis have been watching foreign television programs for years will undoubtedly change. 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 advertisement 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.

Only some paid channels, such as HBO and Cinemax, have been broadcasting television shows free of advertisements. Most Indian channels — including Star Plus, Zee TV, Sony, Star Gold, Setmax, Zee Cinema and Star Sports — charge

Clean feed timeframe

- Consult with stakeholders, by mid-September
- Revise 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

Nepali viewers, but also feature advertisements.

Multinational companies have thus never felt the need to use local television channels as a medium to reach out to Nepali consumers. However, with the imminent ban on insertion of advertisements into foreign television content, Nepal’s own advertisement industry is sure to enjoy a boom.

Nepal’s burgeoning advertising industry earns Rs five billion per year. 70 per cent of the total advertising revenue comes from multinational companies. “For such companies, there is now no other option but to market their products in Nepal through Nepalis,” says Santosh Shrestha, President of the Advertising Association of Nepal (AAN).

The new Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, might face pressure from Indian lobbyists to scuttle the policy endorsed by his predecessor, KP Oli. But it would not be easy for him to do so, given that Nepali advertising entrepreneurs have lobbied for this approach for years. “We have always advocated this policy, and we want to see it implemented,” says Shrestha.

The government had last month also endorsed the National Mass Communications Policy 2015, which will have positive implications for Nepal’s advertising industry as well. It aims to stop the broadcasting of television advertisements dubbed in Nepali. Once this is put in place, it will create job opportunities for Nepali actors, models, artistes and technicians.

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



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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 one day be a machine in Nepal that could print more than a thousand pages in less than one-and-a-half hours. These speed-of-light machines existed only in Kolkata, or so he had heard.

“It is much easier today. Before, we had to use both our hands and feet to operate the machine,” said the now 81-year-old printer, recalling his days at Jagadamba Press. Thapa was, for the longest time, the only person who knew how to operate the letterpress printing machine.

Teamwork was the lynchpin. 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 foot, 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 Sajha Yatayat or when he injured his left thumb while 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 1958, 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 his grandson.

Although both operate the modern printing press machines, they are familiar with the workings of the old letterpress



LIFE’S DEVOTION: Man Bahadur Thapa Magar operating the classic letterpress printing machine at Jagadamba Press, Hattiban.

PAPER TRAIL

PICS: GOPEN RAI



THE TRIO: Senior Thapa (*centre*) with his son, Prahlad Thapa Magar (*right*), and grandson, Bimal Thapa Magar (*left*).

equipment. “We used to visit our father during school holidays, and he taught us how to compose the words,” said Prahlad Thapa Magar.

Even the 39-year-old is surprised by how fast the world of printing has evolved. What used to 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, Prahlad 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 Prahlad.

The newest family member on the block is Bimal Thapa Magar, Thapa’s grandson and Prahlad’s nephew. Observing the workers running around frantically

to adjust the colour, match the ink, set the paper and get everything just right, transformed into his love of working at the press. “This is what I wish to do until late in life,” said Bimal who confided that the only time he gets frustrated is when his shifts are mostly in the night or when the hours stretch too long.

The senior-most Thapa could not be happier, with three generations finding fulfilment at the press. He admits getting nostalgic at times, but does not shy away from acknowledging the technical shortcomings and inferior quality of the letterpress apparatus compared to large modern machines. “I feel sad to see the machine being abandoned,” said Thapa, “but things have changed for the better.”

The press used to seek his expertise on rare occasions when there were special commissions. During those precious moments, Thapa could relive his earlier days and relish the pleasure of operating the letterpress machine again. Such demands have petered out, and he has retired for good without any trace of regret. Said Thapa: “I never felt like switching jobs, I started with this and it is fitting that I end with it.” 🇳🇵



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MAKING SPARKS:
A participant at one of the workshops organised by Priya Joshi's #MakerKT.

Shisir Khanal, a Master's graduate in International Public Affairs from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the US, is the CEO of Teach for Nepal (*below*).

HOMECOMING

Why Nepalis who studied abroad are choosing to come home in growing numbers

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 held strong to his intent

of returning 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.collegesodhpuch.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

Tseki Lhamo (*right, bottom*), who took a Java and C++ programming course in her gap year in the US, knows 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 female 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 either too afraid or intimidated to join the field. Google Developers Group (GFG) Kathmandu as well as Women Leaders in Technology (WLIT) are working to change that. 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, line 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 'boy's thing'. "This fear only hinders the career growth of women," says Irina Sthapit, who has a Bachelor's degree in electronics and communication engineering from Kathmandu Engineering College and currently works as a research assistant with the group Karkhana. "Women need to be brave and fight stereotypes about technology jobs being only for men."



VIRTUAL CONNECTION:

Krishna Gaire founded a website to connect aspiring Nepali university students with current students and graduates.

able to contribute positively to its future.

Priya 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 co-founder and manager of #MakerKT, 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.

Shisir 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 Nepali 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 Sindhupalchok, Lalitpur and Dhanusa for two years. Khanal says: "Before you return, you must know why you are coming back. If you know your reasons 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 take the hardships for everyday givens 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?" 🇳🇵

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Lhamo is going to Mount Holyoke College in the US as a Computer Science major, but is fully aware of the challenges ahead. She wants to find an environment where young women can pursue STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and is seeking female role models in the field.

At 24, Rojina Bajracharya (*left, top*) is already a role model. Bajracharya was the first winner of the Toptal Scholarship for Female Developers. Toptal is a US-based company that connects businesses with freelance developers, designers, and software engineers.

Bajracharya understands that girls who wish to study in the IT field often have not been given the same opportunities and exposure as men. She co-founded Girls in Technology, to give women in the field a chance to break the glass ceiling, and allow a younger generation to say: "If she can do it, why can't I?"

EVENTS



Hit the trails,

Ride along the ridges of Shivapuri with fellow bikers.

13 August, 7 am onwards, Starting point: Point Cycle Café, Jamal, (01) 4020025, 9851222031 / 9860898592, Tickets: Rs 2,000 (Nepalis without bike), Rs 3,000 (foreigners without bike), Rs 500 (Nepalis or foreigners with bike)

Poetry live,

Attend a live spoken word poetry show featuring known slam poets Emily Weitzman, Illya Sumanto, Brendan Dennis, Samip Dhungel, Sanket Shrestha, Pramod KC and Ujjwala Maharjan. 5 August, 5.30 to 6.30 pm, Club 25 Hours, Gahana Pokhari Marg, Tickets: Rs 300 (regular) and Rs 250 (students with valid student IDs)

Innovation in Education,

A fair jointly organised by Quixote's Cove, Srijanalaya and Karkhana that aims to encourage and support innovative educational techniques. 5 to 7 August, 10 am to 1 pm or 2 to 5 pm, Tangelwood, Naxal, (01) 5536974, 9843781325 / 9807227110, bookbusnepal@gmail.com

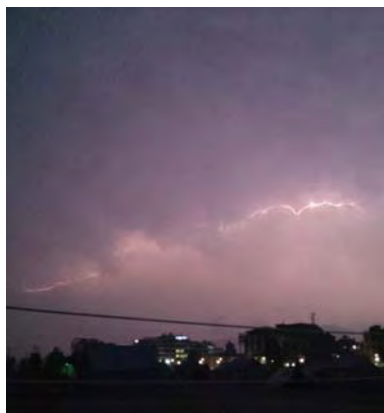


All about literature,

Organised by the Drama and Debating Club of Budhanilkantha School, the Nepal Youth Literature Festival features talk programs, interviews of Nepali writers, workshops and literature-related competitions. 18 to 22 August, Budhanilkantha School, Kathmandu, Registration: Rs 400 (short competition), Rs 300 (long competition), Rs 100 (talk program), biken116@gmail.com, 9861381571

Street art,

Don't miss out on the International Street Art Festival organised by ArtLab Life, featuring a host of art events: mural making, art talk shows, documentaries, exhibitions, street art jams and more. 1 August to 23 September, Multiple venues, 9813462106 / 9841807005, artlab.ktm@gmail.com, artlablife.com



#photoNepal,

Mark your calendars for Nepal Tourism Board's photo exhibition on the monsoon as part of its #photoNepal series. 5 to 7 August, 10 am to 5 pm, Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap, (01) 4256909

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 Mahesh Dattani. 28 July to 28 August, ngsamuha@gmail.com, 9849024252 / 9823691301

Sound of Music,

Re-enactment of the musical *Sound of Music*, by Shuvataru School students. 5 August, Nepal Academy, Kamaladi, Price: Rs 200 for 12 pm (students show), Rs 500 and 1,000 for 5 pm (general admission)



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KRIPA JOSHI

DINING



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Embers,

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Alice Restaurant,

Step in for scrumptious Thakali, Chinese, Continental and Japanese cuisine. Gairidhara, (01) 4429207



Korea Pyongyang Arirang,

The only restaurant in Kathmandu offering North Korean delicacies. Darbar Marg, (01) 4233243

MUSIC



Album launch,

Gear up for the fourth album launch by the celebrated band Abhaya and the Steam Injuns. 6 August, 7.30 pm, Karma Bar & Lounge, UWTC, Tripureshwor

Open mic night,

Grab the mic and sing your heart out at House of Music every Tuesday. House of Music, Thamel, 9851075172



Fun pop,

Spend a musical evening with Raju Lama-Mongolian Heart as they perform some of their hits. 6 August, 6 pm onwards, Faces Lounge, Thamel, 9843144638

Bold is beautiful,

A one-day event filled with performances by some of Nepal's well-known female artistes. 5 August, 5 to 10 pm, RS Moto, Naxal, rsmotonepal@gmail.com, Tickets: Rs 250 (advance sales), Rs 350 (door sales)



Kramasha turns 3,

Celebrate the third anniversary of Nepali rock band Kramasha-Nepal as they belt out songs from their upcoming album and cover songs of legendary bands. 9 August, 7.30 to 11 pm, Wicked Spoon, Jhamsikhel, 9802043649

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Grand Norling Hotel,

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Shivapuri Village,

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Dhulikhel Lodge Resort,

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Pachali Ghat, Teku Past

PICS: ALOK TULADHAR



Pachali Ghat, Teku Present



Pachali Ghat, Teku Future







A close encounter with the Bagmati



ALOK TULADHAR

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 I also saw its decline and decay, and with my colleagues Rajni and Suneeta decided to photograph the important but forgotten heritage sites along a 2.5 km stretch of the Bagmati's north bank from Teku Dovan 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 Tripureshor 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 Tuladhar is a visual documentarian specialising in the preservation of culture and heritage. alokstuladhar@gmail.com



Bagmati Heritage Walkway

The Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) and Department of Archaeology have started work on creating a promenade along the north bank of the Bagmati from Teku to Thapathali. The plan is to revive the rich cultural heritage along the bank and create a green promenade for the people of Kathmandu and Patan.



nepalitimes.com
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YUWEI LIEW

SAHINA SHRESTHA

When Nausicaa Shrestha's mother passed away nine years ago, her father was adamant that she would not be cremated at Aryaghat beside the Bagmati River. The reason was simple: the




holy river was just too polluted. So the family drove five hours to Devghat in Tanahun to perform the last rites. Now in his 70s, he has given strict instructions: when he dies, he is also to be taken to Devghat, where the water is cleaner. For Kathmandu Valley denizens, various life cycle rituals and cultural festivals have

When it comes to water

River pollution is changing how we perform our rituals

always been associated with rivers. From fetching river water in a *kalash* to invoke the gods during rice-feeding ceremonies, to cremating the dead along river banks, the recently concluded Rato Machindranath *jatra*, and the religious month of Gunla that has begun, people's lives are inherently linked 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 observed. "With the increase in river pollution, many don't see rivers as holy and sacred any more. They don't believe that divinities reside in unclean rivers," says Rajani 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. 69-year-old Jagannath Pokharel no longer goes to Bagmati River for *shraddha* (annual death ritual), instead he performs it at home and then feeds the *pinda* (offering to deceased ancestors) to cows or birds. "The river," he says, "is too dirty to flow to heaven." Even during Janai Purnima, Pokharel has stopped taking a holy dip in Bagmati River, and washes at a tap near his house. "I didn't want to change the way I do things, but I had no choice," he adds.

In his more than 30 years as a priest, Bikash Rajupadhyay has seen many a thing change. "Most religious rituals performed along the river banks have shifted to other sources of water or are no longer conducted," 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 biological flora and fauna come back. So our festivals and rituals can come back too, just as *sithi nakha*, the Newar festival of cleaning water sources at the start of the monsoon, has."   



STRANGER THINGS

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 to 190 different countries, declaring an astonishing 83



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

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, hitting the jackpot with *House of Cards* (admittedly, the show is a remake of a British series from 1990 of the same name) — an extremely popular political television series with high production values (the opening credits featuring scenes of Washington D.C. are 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 concoction, totally sincere in its deeply geeky attempt of making you want to shriek, 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 not-so-dark horse, might just bring us what is sorely lacking, the crucial generation for original material in a woefully hackneyed world. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com

■ Trailer

HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

ROUND TWO: CPN (Maoist-Centre) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal waves to his supporters after being elected as the new Prime Minister on Wednesday.



ANANDA RAM DANGOL

FROM BALUWATAR TO BALKOT: Supporters of former Prime Minister KP Oli follow him as he leaves the official residence after nine months in power.



BIKRAM RAI

JUSTICE LEAGUE: The newly appointed Justices of the Supreme Court with President Bidya Devi Bhandari (centre) after the swearing-in ceremony at Shital Niwas on Monday.



GOPEN RAI

AGAINST CORRUPTION: Youth join Govinda KC in the 'Walk with Dr KC' campaign in Kathmandu on Saturday to make a stand against corruption.



BIKRAM RAI

BURNING DEMONS: Bhaktapur locals prepare to burn an effigy of the mythical demon Ghantakarna to symbolise the destruction of evil, at the Gathamuga festival on Monday.

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Dahal's 6 challenges

Chandra Lal Giri in
www.nepalkhabar.com, 3 August



Whether CPN (Maoist-Centre) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal will succeed as Prime Minister this time depends largely on how he will deal with the following 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."



BIKRAM RAI

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.

Determining the number and size of local administrative areas within federal provinces is also tricky. Madhesi parties have refused to take part in any elections unless their political demands are met.

3. Peace process

Even in 2008 when he became Prime Minister for the first time, Dahal could not use his power to nullify 6,000 legal cases pending against him, other Maoist leaders and cadre. He faces tremendous pressure from within his party to act on this critical issue, and needs to protect his comrades while respecting 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 criticised 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 President Xi 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



Girish Giri in www.setopati.com, 29 July

सेतोपाटी

The Maitighar-Baneswor road was littered with placards 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 Baneswor, 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 Thursday, 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 Maitighar and burn it to awaken the Kathmandu residents from their apathy. After dawn, the sweepers from Kathmandu Metropolitan City came and took away the pile 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.

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

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

Rai, a school dropout from Dharan 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. White 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 realising 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 toilets and a school in Sindhupalchok district. The international media gave him some coverage, and he was invited by Harvard University to deliver a lecture about his work only two months ago.

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

The beggar *buwa*

Santa Gaha Magar in
Himal Khabarpatrika, 17-23 July



44-year-old Tilbahadur Karki's life sounds like nothing short of a movie script. Born in Sarlang of Panchthar, without the use of both his feet, Karki was ridiculed by his peers and his mother had to endure insults from their relatives. At the age of nine, unable to bear his mother's silent cries brought by his disability, he hitched a ride on the roof of a bus and made his way to Kathmandu.

In the capital, he washed dishes at a hotel in Baneswor to eke out a living. One day, a customer suggested that Karki go to a childcare centre, and provided the address of Khagendra Nawajeevan Kendra in Jorpati. There, the gatekeeper refused to let him in, so he went to Boudha and resorted to



SANTA GAHA MAGAR

begging instead. Over time, he moved to Pashupati.

The *patis* 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 Bankali.

In 2007, with the help of the police he recovered Rs 551,000 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 suffering. "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 number grew. After five years, the initial fund ran out, and Karki had to go from door to door in the alleyways of Kathmandu asking for help.

Today there are forty children living in the centre, many of whose parents are in prison or disabled, while others are victims of war and earthquake, or orphans. The centre takes care of their housing, meals, education, and medical bills.

Funding all the expenses without a steady income and a donor is not easy, admits Karki. "Three eighth-graders are still waiting for their mark-sheets 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 all the children. 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 Gokarneswor 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 pushes everyone to work harder," he said.

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 fulfil 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 Opidol, Nitrokaf and Tramadol to get a high. Soon, she was hopelessly addicted. “Most of my friends were buying those 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 21. “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 Jorpati after having being arrested and admitted into rehab five times. Analysing her own childhood, Laxmi reckons the conflict between her parents when she was young drove her to using pharmaceutical drugs. Other reasons include the migration of her father, her broken family, and peer pressure from classmates.



to street drugs



FRESH START: (clockwise from left) The youth who agreed to be photographed for this story say they regret their past and want to start life anew.

One of the commonly misused pharmaceutical drugs.

Laxmi Gurung, 27, is recovering at a rehabilitation centre in Kathmandu.

A drug user injects a pharmaceutical drug.

ALL PICS: SHREEJANA SHRESTHA

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 Sorakhutte Police Station one recent morning, the detention cells were crammed with 12 youngsters charged with drug offences — seven of whom were street children caught using drugs in nearby Thamel.

Ashish 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 sniffed glue from a tube of Dendrite. “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 Birganj who could obtain whatever he wanted from across the border.

Policemen at Sorakhutte 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 Somendra Singh Rathor, who had to release 10 students who were using stimulants bought from a drug store to boost their confidence in the SLC exams.

Tshering Wangdo 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 18 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 Opidol, Spasmo, Traflash 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 conduct raids,” says DIG Jay Bahadur Chand of the NCB.

The NCB can take action against those found using codeine, dextropropoxyphene, ethylmorphine, etorphine, fentanyl, methadone, morphine, pethidine and pholcodine, which the DDA has classified as narcotic drugs.

Chand says that due to lack of proper monitoring, pharmaceutical drugs — like Tramadol, Diazepam, Clobazam, Phentermine, Paracetamol, Opidol and Nitrokaf — and other painkillers are being illegally imported from India and are easily available in pharmacies without prescriptions. He says pharmacies cannot be controlled unless all drugs require prescriptions.

The DDA conducts 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

Bibek Pun Magar (pictured) was forced to be a pusher of medical drugs for addicts in 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.

“I visited hospitals and pharmacies to buy Tramadol, Opidol and other tablets,” recalls Bibek, 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, Bibek is in rehab, and is sweaty and nervous as he speaks to us. But he realises that he is lucky not to have progressed to hard drugs.

Tshering Wangdo of the Sober Recovery Treatment and Rehabilitation Center in Jorpati says prevention is the best cure, which can only be achieved through greater awareness in schools about pharmaceutical drugs.





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Let us bray

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

At times these pieces 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 Balls. Sit down. 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 braying.

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 hardy and god-fearing lot who are used to being kicked around by our overlords.

Every government in recent years has come with an expiry limit nine months 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 Formidable 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 outside 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 Kangresis and the Baddies as you might think, but between Comrade Terrifico 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 He will still be allowed to rain thrunderbolts down from heaven when he gets 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 Baba and other Godmen, the Omnipotent One should not panic just yet about being unceremoniously deposed.

Nepal has always been rescued by Shri Pashupati Nath when it gets itself into trouble, although once it had to be rescued by Minister Shri Kamal Nath. When

normal methods of statecraft fail, we have always turned to the paranormal. If there are important decisions to be made, we time them to precise calculations of the position and movements of the moon and planets vis-à-vis 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 Awesomeness is still stuck on cabinet composition next week, a quick trip to Manakamana to decapitate two castrated goats should be sufficient to overcome the voodoo curse the Kangresis 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. PKD 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.



The Ass

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