



GOPEN RAI



BATTLE OF BENI

Returning to Thomas Bell's photograph of the mother and daughter that brought home the horror of war.

BY GHANSHYAM KHADKA
PAGES 14-15

20/10 CONFLICT ANNIVERSARY 1996-2006-2016

2016 marks the 20th year since the Nepal conflict started, and 10 years since it ended. In a series commemorating the two anniversaries, *Nepali Times* returns to talk to people who were caught in the middle.

We trace the tragedies that struck their lives, the trauma of bereavement, and the healing process as families affected by both sides come together to seek truth and justice.

We will revisit the stories of Purnimaya Lama and Devi Sunar (pictured, left), both from Kavre. Purnimaya's husband, Arjun, was abducted, tortured and killed by the Maoists in 2005. Devi's daughter, Maina, was 14 when she was raped and killed by soldiers in 2004.

More than a decade later, Purnimaya and Devi have joined hands to pursue justice for their loved ones, who had been killed by opposing sides. On Thursday, they came together to tell their stories at the Peace Column, a telephone pole riddled by several bullets during the Battle of Beni (see story on pages 14-15), and which has become a war memorial.

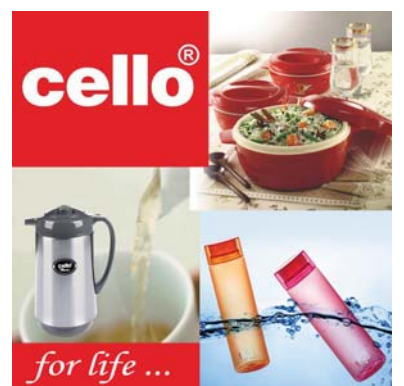
Neither of them has faith in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which they believe is designed to protect perpetrators of war crimes.

"I am fighting, endlessly and sometimes hopelessly," said Devi, 45. "I am fighting because I do not want other girls to suffer like my daughter." Purnimaya, 52, said with fiery determination: "You cannot kill anyone for political reasons, and that is what I want to tell those who killed my husband."

Purnimaya and Devi are fighting against powerful men. One of the six Maoists against whom Purnimaya filed a case at the Supreme Court is former Forest Minister Agni Sapkota. Devi has lodged a case against high-ranking army officers Niranjana Basnet, Babi Khatri, Amit Pun and Sunil Adhikari.

After the 2006 ceasefire, Purnimaya met Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who promised to find out the truth about her husband. Nothing happened. Now, Dahal is PM once more, and Purnimaya fears he will try to get conflict-era cases dismissed.

Both know it is going to be a long struggle. "With the Maoists in power again, we will have to go back to the streets," Purnimaya said. Devi nods, and adds: "I am prepared to be thrashed by police again." **Om Astha Rai**



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ORDER! ORDER!

The problem is not the democratic system, but the people who abuse it.

In dictatorships, it is the standard operating procedure to detain civil society activists and dissidents. But it is when a nominally democratic state that is supposed to be governed by its professed core values starts incarcerating journalists and trying to muzzle the media, that the situation turns ominous.

Recent events prove that you do not need a dictator to roll back democracy and try to exert control over the free press. Parallel power centres can easily commandeer the system, and we are threatened by the rise of elected demagogues.

Nepal's political transition is in a prolonged interregnum between two constitutions, and it is in this adjustment period that there is the danger of a return to authoritarianism.

In its recent history, Nepal has been through various forms of totalitarian rule: a century of the feudal Rana regime, 30 years of an absolute Panchayat monarchy, and the authoritarian streak of King Gyanendra who staged a military coup in 2005. In between, we have seen two pro-democracy uprisings, only to witness the hard-won freedoms frittered away by power-greedy politicians.

When the initial exhilaration of democracy has evaporated, cynicism replaces hope, and the people lose their trust and faith in the public officials they elected to power. That is when there is a creeping nostalgia for strongman rule. In Nepal, we see this mindset manifested in support for an executive presidency in the new constitution, and the public's admiration for centralised control as in China, or for leaders like Lee Kuan Yew to steer the country towards prosperity.

But we have tried dictatorships before, and ended up wrestling against them because they were unrepresentative and turned out not to be an effective form of governance. They centralised corruption, reduced participation and oppressed the people, giving them no say in how they wanted to be ruled. We hoped for benevolent dictators, but ended up with malevolent ones.

Whenever democracy is in disarray, there is a hankering for strongman rule. And as we saw in the Indian Emergency,



a strongman need not be a man at all. Indira Gandhi's experiment with autocracy may not have lasted long because the roots of democracy and press freedom in India went too deep, but there are still intellectual adherents to Indira's 'disciplinism'.

And across the world today, we see a similar ideological tilt towards authoritarianism even in apparently open societies. The rise of the racist right in Europe, the terrifying prospect of Donald Trump being elected to the White House, the self-confessed head of a death squad being chosen as president of the Philippines, the UK Independent Party's vision of an independent UK during the Brexit vote, and in our own neighbourhood an increasingly intolerant ruling party that resorts to religious revivalism as the mantra of power.

Western democracies have a design defect: they permit the untrammelled freedom to express even the most extreme

and despicable views. Populist politicians use this to stoke xenophobic fears about migration, crime, and terrorism, and the mass media can be manipulated to whip up the electorate. Democracy thus ends up bringing to power demagogues who capitalise on nationalism, bigotry and identity politics, especially during times of turmoil.

Jochen Bittner of the German newspaper *Die Zeit* calls this global anti-democratic wave 'Orderism' — it is based on fear and offers stability over freedom, and could also be called 'Putinism'. Bittner compares Orderism to the promises of utopia under Communism, and says 'it is merely a fig leaf for tyranny'. The enemy is liberal democracy, and in this Putin, Trump, Duterte, and others have a mutual admiration society.

In Nepal, the yearning for strongman rule stems from 25 years of political instability, reckless and unaccountable leadership, and democratic decay. There is a romantic notion that the Malaysian model of limited democracy would usher in economic growth, but it is all too easy to forget that Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is today facing a US Department of Justice investigation into one of history's biggest corruption scandals.

Absolute power corrupts absolutely, and we see a glaring example of that in Nepal today. Our own anti-corruption watchdog is now more powerful and dominant than the elected government of the day. It is fashionable to say in hoity-toity circles in Kathmandu that Nepalis are too immature, ignorant and poor to deserve democracy. That perception is natural, because the status quo benefits the privileged few, and genuine democracy would shake things up. The problem is not the system, it is the people who abuse it for personal enrichment and power. Corrupt party apparatchiks, political brokers, and patronage are the real reasons for the state we are (still) in.

The answer is to keep strengthening the pillars of democracy, and fortifying the institutions that pose a critical check and balance to a failed Executive and illegitimate centres of power: civil society, mass media, the Judiciary and the Legislature.

Times THIS WEEK



GOPEN RAI



Most reached on Facebook

Paper trail by *Smriti Basnet*
Tracing three generations pressed into one profession (6,170 people reached)



Most shared on Facebook

When it comes to water by *Sahina Shrestha*



Most visited online page

Homecoming by *Ugyen Lama*
(1,153 views)



Most popular on Twitter

Awesome again by *Kunda Dixit*
(37 retweets, 75 likes)



Most commented

Awesome again by *Kunda Dixit*

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

THE BAGMATI

It is sad to see many public places in Kathmandu in a tragic condition ('A close encounter with the Bagmati', Alok Tuladhar, #820). The city lacks every basic need we can think of. People are waiting for a miracle, hoping that the government will do something. But the government is just busy having a makeover every nine months, like electing a new PM. Yet there is patience among those who live there.

Gyurme Dondup

■ Yes, the people of Kathmandu have not lost their patience so far, even though the government remains indifferent to their plight. But patience is not a virtue in this context. It is very sad that they are turning a deaf ear and a blind eye to this grave situation. They need to wake up.

Manjima Sharma

■ Some of the rituals we perform also contribute to pollution of the rivers ('When it comes to water', Sahina Shrestha, #820). Materials used in the pujas have changed in the last few decades. We no longer use degradable materials like leaves, but use plastics instead. This is not a wise idea. We should definitely preserve our culture, but we should also be careful

about how that affects our environment.

Alisha Shakya

■ The use of non-biodegradable materials like plastics in the pujas amazed me at Pashupatinath. Even as a Muslim I was saddened.

Syed A Husaini

STORE DRUGS

Pharmacies have always been selling medicines without prescriptions, and people have been abusing this ('Store drugs lead addicts to street drugs', Shreejana Shrestha, #820). The monitoring is lax and happens only once in a blue moon.

Ananta

AWESOME AGAIN

Even if the new PM Dahal genuinely tries to improve the condition of Nepalis, he will not be able to do much ('Awesome again', Kunda Dixit, #820). What can he do in merely nine months? I do not think there is sufficient time for him to do anything except amass more property. We have become a victim of parliamentary democracy. It is time for us to go for an executive PM.

Biswas Pradhan



manjeet mishra @manjeetmishra82
really sir?unfortunately u were part of the same govt that supports such crooks and businessmen.

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

"Now I know Nepal is run by a cartel of crooks and businessmen."
-Chitra Bahadur KC
<http://bit.ly/2aXXR2s>



Sweta Gyanu Baniya @Sunkesharee
When will our sky travel be safe?

Nepali Times @nepalitimes

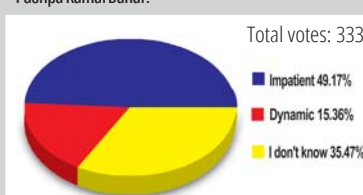
A Fishtail Air helicopter crashed in Nuwakot district on Monday, killing all six on board. <http://bit.ly/2aOfbXd>



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #821

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



Weekly Internet Poll #822
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should aspiring journalists be required to sit for and pass a test to join the profession?



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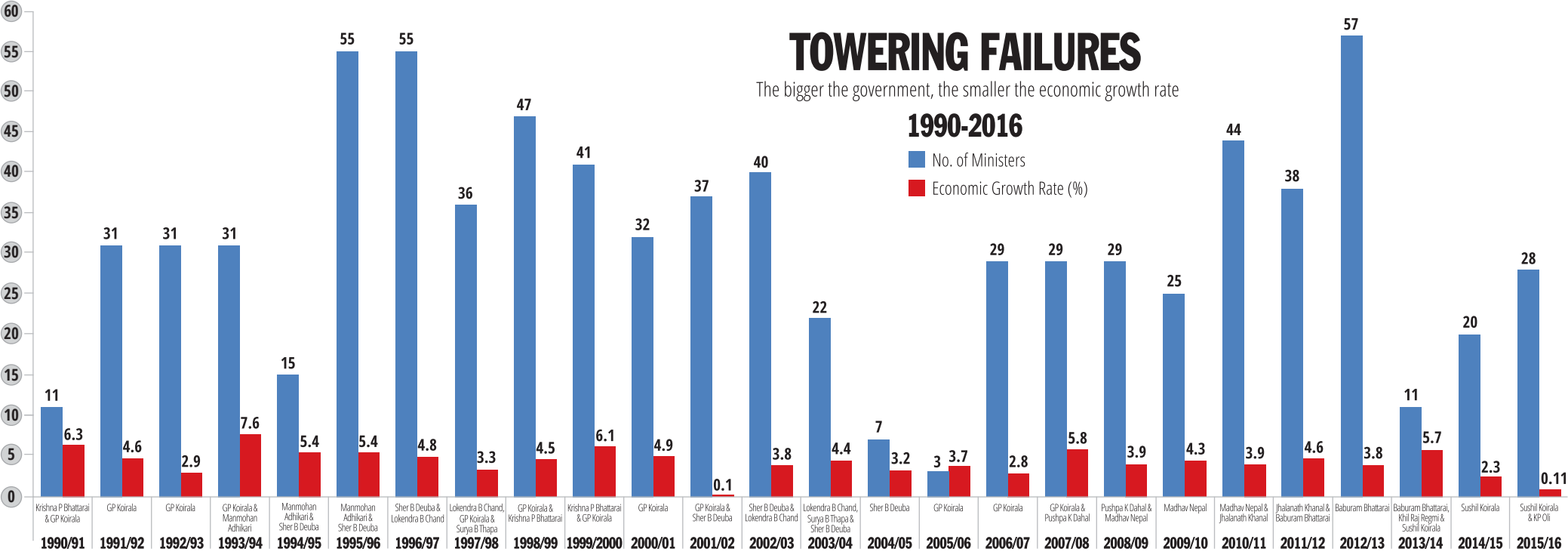
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Government vs GDP

Big cabinets create a big mess, and perpetuate an ad hoc system

When newly-appointed Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal was taking his oath of office at Shital Niwas last week, the question on everyone’s mind was how big his cabinet would be.

ECONOMIC CLASS
Manish Jha

Would he, like his predecessor KP Oli, also have six deputy prime ministers and 40 ministers? Oli justified his jumbo government on grounds that he faced clear and imminent danger from the Nepali Congress. It is such cynical justification for the politics of survival at the taxpayer’s expense that has kept this country from developing. Prolonged political transitions may benefit politicians, but the people bear the cost. We have now already paid for expensive governments for 20 years. Big cabinets create a big mess, and perpetuate an ad hoc system. Not all transitions

need big cabinets. Take the case of the first post-1990 government led by KP Bhattarai, it had only 11 ministers, yet it successfully organised elections and quickly drafted a new constitution, spurring economic growth. These days, it is all about ministerial berths in governments that last no more than nine months. Such frequent government change and big councils of ministers raise the operational cost of government. The clash of partisan and personal interests also makes teamwork difficult. Statistics show that bigger cabinets hinder economic growth. Data from the past 26-year timeline of 23 councils of ministers allows us to correlate GDP growth with cabinet size (*see graph*). The biggest-ever government after 1990 belonged to Baburam Bhattarai in 2012, and the GDP growth rate during his tenure was a mere 3.8 per cent, with the level of corruption rising to historical levels. When Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi replaced him in an election government,

he had just 11 ministers, and GDP growth rose to 5.7 per cent. This correlation can be seen throughout the last 26 years. The focus of ministers in a big cabinet goes to government survival and maintaining ministerial portfolios. If the team is bigger, coordination becomes weak, thus impairing governance. Prime Minister Oli, for instance, had a run-in with Home Minister Shakti Basnet that strained his relations with Dahal. Oli also announced a free dialysis service for all kidney patients, but Health Minister Ram Janam Chaudhary was oblivious to the plan. The new constitution has tried to address this problem by stipulating that ministerial councils should be no bigger than 25, however the rule was already broken by Oli and will probably soon be ignored by Dahal, and Deuba after him. As we have seen in recent history, it is a chicken-or-egg question: the size of the council of ministers in turn leads directly to weak governments and more instability.

prabhu BANK

BIZ BRIEFS

Honda BR-V in town

Syakar Trading Company recently unveiled Honda’s Bold Runabout Vehicle (BR-V). Nepal’s first seven-seater SUV boasts a 1.5L i-VTEC petrol engine, ground clearance of 210 mm, heat-absorbing windshield, CVT with paddle shifter and eco lamp. The vehicle comes in six colours, at a starting price of Rs 3.99 million.



Award night

Standard Chartered Nepal bagged the ‘Asia Best Employer Brand Awards 2016’ accolade last week. Earlier this year it had received

Euromoney’s ‘Awards for Excellence 2016’, and Global Finance’s ‘Best Digital Bank Awards 2016’.

No.1 for Qatar

Qatar Airways has been ranked world number one by AirHelp, an independent airline consumer rights organisation. The airline topped the survey of 50 global airlines and achieved a full score in the quality and service category.



Connecting cities

Turkish Airlines began roundtrip flights from Gaziantep Airport to Erbil in Iraq on 5 August. The flights will operate on Mondays and Fridays in both directions.





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An Olympian moment

Nepalis need to really believe that sports can make a positive contribution to the development of youth and the quality of life

RABI RAJKARNIKAR

The Games of the XXXI Olympiad are underway in Rio de Janeiro, and nations eagerly await the moment when they can savour the pride that comes with seeing their athletes sparkle, shine and carve their names in the history books.

Some go on to become legends, inspiring whole new generations of youth to one day realise their own dreams to compete at the ultimate sports platform on earth.

Sport is a unique and indispensable tool for a country's development, as well as a means to promote peace, culture and education. In particular, it provides young people with hope.

Nepal's legitimacy in the Olympic Movement depends on it upholding the highest standards of ethical behaviour and good governance. All members of the Nepal Olympic Committee (NOC) must adopt, as their minimum standard, the Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic Movement. Otherwise, we will continue to be exposed to public criticism when the NOC sends more officials than athletes to the games. Such behaviour seriously undermines any NOC-defined mission, and the selection of the athletes is also



NEPAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

compromised.

So why is it that we in Nepal have thus far not been able to foster this shared vision that the world has so positively embraced? Is it because most Nepalis do not really believe that sports can make a positive contribution to the development of youth and the quality of life?

Sports is never neutral. It can teach values and ethical behavior, or not. It can help people develop a positive self-image and respect for others, or not. It can strengthen community life, or not.

Millions of people around the world practice sports as a healthy pastime, or for the sheer fun of it. Sports can bring people together, foster friendship, reinforce healthy lifestyles, and build civic pride and community

participation. Or it can be about violence, drugs, cheating, match fixing, and winning at any cost.

This is why it is essential — more so now than ever before — to actively support positive values in sports, in simple and powerful ways. This is everyone's responsibility, especially those associated with colleges, sports clubs, National Federations, National Sports Council and, most importantly, the NOC.

Modern Olympism places 'sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity', as stated in the Olympic Charter.

This week in Brazil, seven Nepali athletes — three men

and four women, including the youngest athlete participating in the Rio Olympic Games — are representing our country, making us proud. We stand equal with all participating nations from the five continents, symbolised by the five interlaced rings of the Games.

The intangible benefit of being part of this Olympic Movement is that it inculcates a way of life based on the joy of effort, the value of good example, and social responsibility. It also fosters respect for mutual understanding, and the spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.

The Olympic Movement's three core values are Excellence, Friendship and Respect.

Excellence refers to giving one's best, either on the playing field or in life. It is not only about winning, but also participating, making progress in personal goals and striving to do our best.

Friendship encourages links and mutual understanding between people, and building a peaceful and better world through solidarity, team spirit, joy and optimism. The Olympic Games inspire people to overcome political, economic, gender, racial or religious differences, and to forge friendships in spite of those differences.

Respect includes respect for oneself and one's body, respect for one another, for the rules as well as for the environment. It

refers to the attitude of fair play that athletes should have, and to a commitment to avoid doping.

The following principles of Olympism amplify the core values and allow them to be expressed in a way that drives far-reaching social change, which is where Nepal needs to focus:

- Non-discrimination: The Olympic Movement strives to ensure that sports is practised without any form of discrimination.
- Sustainability: The Olympic Movement organises and delivers programs in a way that promotes sustainable economic, social and environmental development.
- Humanism: The Olympic Movement places human beings at the centre, ensuring that sports remains a human right.
- Universality: Sports belongs to everyone, and the Olympic Movement takes into account the universal impact it can have on individuals and society.
- Solidarity: Developing programs that create a meaningful and comprehensive social response to issues within the Olympic Movement's sphere of influence.
- Alliance between sport, education and culture: Commitment to promoting the spirit of Olympism at the convergence of sport, culture and education.



Rabi Rajkarnikar is a MEMOSIAN (Master Exécutif en Management des Organisations Sportives).

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The rains seem to have got their second wind, with a wide swathe of Northern India and Nepal under the influence of a broad front representing the convergence of both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal arms of the monsoon. Expect the squalls to continue into the weekend, with afternoon build-ups of clouds and some thunder activity. There are no signs of a respite, since a large low pressure circulation is heading up from Bangladesh that will bring us more torrential rains early next week.

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GOPEN RAI

BREAK FOR SHAKE: Keventers kiosk at the recently opened Labim Mall (*right*). Keventers in Darjeeling, India (*left*).

SMRITI BASNET

Set against a backdrop of Kanchenjunga, the hill station of Darjeeling is popular for its teeming, steep streets, and infectiously friendly locals. And one of the places where the young and old of Darjeeling have always congregated is Keventers, the colonial dairy and pastry shop.

Rabi Rajkarnikar fondly recalls spending time at this cosy café in his school days. Overlooking the town, the balcony made an ideal spot to while away time and socialise with fellow schoolmates over sumptuous hotdogs cold glasses of the famous Keventers milkshake.

“It was affordable and a cool place to hang out in. It was our go-to place before movies and for outings,” said Rajkarnikar, who studied at North Point. Other Nepali students who studied in renowned schools like Mount Hermon and St Paul’s also have fond memories of hanging out at Keventers.

Now, the students can live out the nostalgia of “Darj days” when Keventers opens its outlet at Labim Mall in Pulchok — the first outlet in its international



KEVENTERS COMES TO KATHMANDU

British-era brand now serving its finest milkshakes in Kathmandu

expansion. The kiosk on the promenade of the mall will be selling from 15 August what it is best known for: frothy, flavoured milkshakes.

“Milkshakes are a better alternative to soda or alcohol. The idea is to not make this an expensive product, so that everybody can enjoy it,” said Bhaskar Koirala, who is bringing Keventers to

Kathmandu. The kiosk will offer up to 20 different flavours, with classics like vanilla, mango, chocolate and the well-known Tutti Frutti flavour.

The company was founded by Danish dairy entrepreneur Edward Keventers in 1925 with four factories: in Darjeeling, Delhi, Calcutta and Aligarh. Ram Krishna Dalmia took ownership after

Independence, expanding the business to other cities in India, like Delhi and Benaras.

The arrival of Keventers in Kathmandu is a pleasant surprise for people like Rajkarnikar, who grew up knowing and consuming its milkshakes. “I would love to enjoy the Keventers experience again in Kathmandu. Hope it brings back old memories of Darjeeling,” said Saugat Shrestha, who also spent two years as a student in Darjeeling.

To support and encourage Nepal’s business climate, the franchise will source milk and ice-cream for its milkshakes from local vendors in Kathmandu. “It is important to promote local products. If the products are good, there might be possibilities of exporting them, which is beneficial for local businesses here,” said Koirala.

The localisation approach will not be limited to milkshakes, but also the Keventers packaging. A signature product of the franchise — its distinctive glass bottles — will be given a Nepali touch with *lali guras*, the national flower of Nepal, printed on it. Says Koirala: “Over the years, the bottles have become an iconic product of the franchise and adds to the brand’s aesthetic quality.” 🇳🇵

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ALL PICS: UPASANA KHADKA

LORRY LAUREATES

A visit to the truck studios of Banepa where poets and artists let their creative juices flow

UPASANA KHADKA
in KAVRE

The automobile workshops of Banepa have traditionally specialised in building bodies on truck chassis, but less well known is the town’s reputation for gaudy truck art and the flowery poetry on vehicles.

The messages are hard to miss while driving along Nepal’s highways: some are witty, others profound. They range from the common ‘Ama Babu Ko Ashirbad’ (Parent’s Blessings), and ‘See You Again’ to the more complex *shayari* verses about lost love and patriotism.

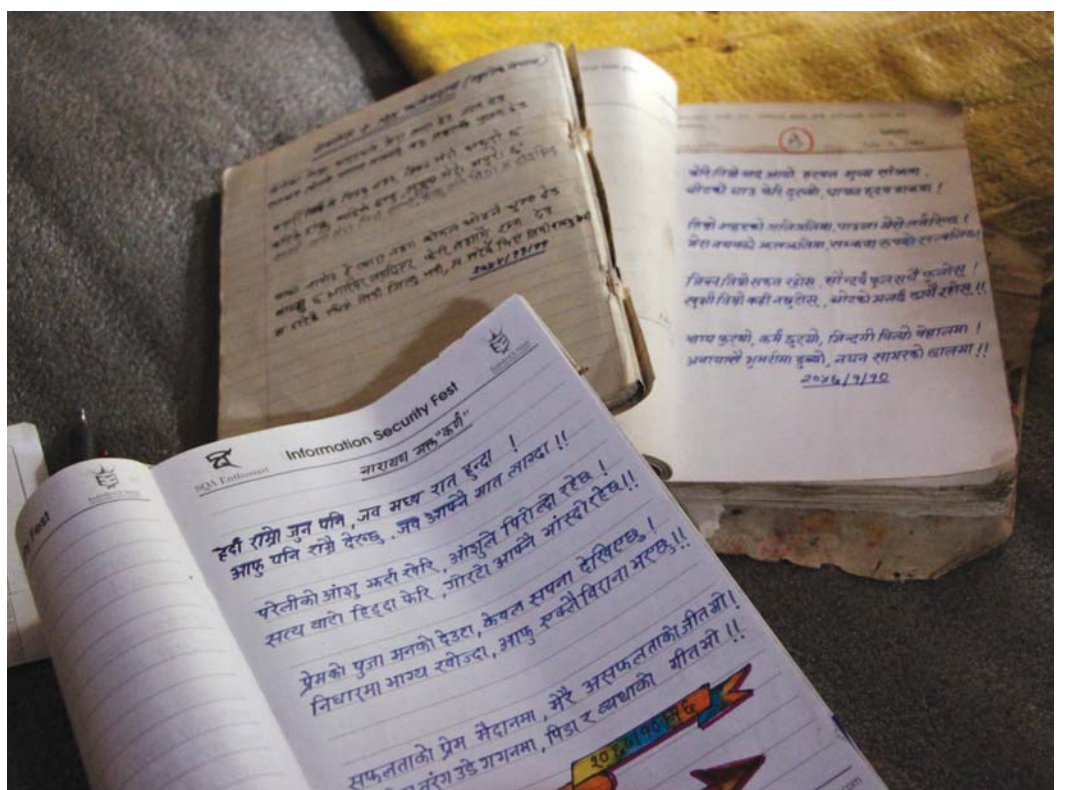
“When drivers came with requests for *shayari*, I used to

scribble down about three on the spot and ask them to choose their favourite,” says Narayan Bhakta Karna, Banepa’s legendary lorry laureate who is now retired.

Karna is well known for his hit song *Biteka Timra Yad Harule*, but stopped writing poetry for trucks five years ago. Hundreds of his verses can still be seen on vehicles all over Nepal, but many others disappeared after the vehicles were abandoned or painted over.

“Most of my songs have been flops, except *Biteka Timra Yad Harule*,” Karna said, “but because many of the lines were written on the spot for the trucks, I don’t remember most of them.”

Rendering the poetry onto the sides of trucks is the job of painter and poet Kanil Kumar Choudhary,





POETRY IN MOTION: (far left, top) Truck driver Bikash Tamang (right) and painter Jivan Choudhary (left).

Jivan Choudhary paints the flag of Nepal on the side of a truck (left).

(far left, bottom) Banepa's legendary lorry laureate Narayan Bhakta Karna (left), and his notebooks of verses (right).

Kanil Kumar Choudhary is a 2-in-1 artist, sought after for his painting and poetry (below).

who is much sought-after in Kavre. Originally from Sunsari, he has been painting trucks in Banepa for over two decades in his Kala Sona Art shop, which charges up to Rs 12,000 to paint a whole truck.

"Our drivers are very influenced by western culture, and they want logos of Adidas, Playboy, Barcelona and Manchester United," he said, displaying a sample Barcelona logo that he was working on.

Choudhary is a two-in-one expert: he composes a poem on

the spot, which he then paints on the side of a customer's truck. He tries not to repeat his poems, so each driver gets an exclusive. Sometimes customers reject the poem he proposes, and ask him to write them another one.

"Some drivers come with their own poems, others want me to write them so I ask for a theme, it is usually about love, longing, separation," Choudhary says, adding that a common subject is the fragility of life, which could be due to the danger of being a driver on Nepal's treacherous



highways.

Jivan Choudhary is an accomplished painter in Kavre, and Kanil's nephew and protege. He does not write poetry, but paints what the drivers want on the sides of their vehicles. Most popular these days are the words 'Blind Love', or even 'SMS' and 'Facebook' on the backs of tipper trucks.

Bikash Tamang is a truck driver and is having a verse he had himself written painted on the back of his truck: '*Bhoko pet, khali goji ra jhuto prem le manislai dherai kura sikayera jancha*' ('A man learns a lot from an empty stomach and false love'). Explained Tamang: "It is based on my real life experience."

Jivan is busy painting the flag of Nepal on the side of another truck and trying to get driver Tamju Ramtel to hurry up and decide on the *shayari* he wants on his vehicle.

"I am not sure about the words yet, maybe we will sit down with friends over drinks and come up with something by tomorrow," he tells Jivan. "Whatever it is, it should capture the attention of the vehicles behind me on the road." 🇳🇵

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EVENTS



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

Last Tape,
Save the date for Eklavya's *Last Tape* directed by Shankar Rijal, with acting by Sudam KC, inspired by Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*.
5 to 16 August, 5.30 pm, Theatre Mall, Sundhara, Tickets: Rs 200, 300 and 500, 9851200052 / 9841595956



Coding for girls,
Learn the ropes of Android app development using JSON/Javascript in a two-day coding workshop for girls.
13 and 14 August, 11 am to 3 pm (Day 1), 11 am to 4 pm (Day 2), Innovation Hub (Library), Teku, Up to 30 seats available (limited to girls only)

Innovation challenge,
Youths throughout the Asia-Pacific can send innovative ideas to UNICEF, and vie to attend a 3-day boot camp in Malaysia to further develop their projects.
Deadline: 5 September, For more details: www.hlm3challenge.com

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

Cycle Rally,
Join the Cycle Rally to show your solidarity for International Youth Day 2016. The rally is jointly organised by Collective Campaign for Peace and Cycle City Network Nepal.
20 August, Starting Point: Bhrikuti Mandap, Kathmandu, (01) 4265143 / 4260498, 9851196107

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



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 without bike)

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Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30 to 4 pm, The Café, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Rs 2,300 plus taxes and service charge (including swimming), 50% discount for children between 6 and 12 years of age, free of charge for children below 6



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

Falcha,
Give in to the twin pleasures of lemon jeera chicken and mutton handi kabab.
Jhamsikhel, 9851013475

Barista Lavazza,
The Valley's best European-inspired coffee culture café serves excellent mochas and lattes. Don't forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich.
Jawalakhel, (01) 5548597, barista.nepal@gmail.com



Dan Ran,
The best authentic Japanese food in this part of town.
Jhamsikhel, (01) 5521027

MUSIC



Rock n Roll,
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20 August, 7 pm onwards, Karma Bar and Lounge, UWTC, Tripureshwar, Kathmandu

Music for Choice,
Rock band Robin and the New Revolution takes to the stage with some of their hits at the 'Music For Choice' concert organised by Marie Stopes Nepal.
13 August, 4 pm onwards, Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu



Yomari sessions,
Spend a musical evening with guitarist Abhyu Ghimire and contemporary Nepali folk band Sakchhyam.
13 August, 6 pm onwards, SKY-Bar & Grill, Dillibazar, 9818204874



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

Live Music Era,
Watch this space for updates on FEM's next artist and the 7th season of Live Music Era.
27 August, 4 pm onwards, The Victory Lounge, Darbar Marg, Ticket: Rs 1,000, 9801031277 / 9802961570

GETAWAY



Waterfront Resort,
Beat the heat in Pokhara with Waterfront's summer package: bed and breakfast at Rs 4,900 plus taxes per room per night on a twin-sharing basis.
Pokhara, (01) 466304, 9801133378 / 9841961268, Rates applicable to Nepalis only

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Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotreelodge.com



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Lakeside, Pokhara, (061) 460617 / 463526

Club Himalaya,
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Nagarkot, (01) 6680080



Shangri-La Village Resort,
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Gharipatan, Pokhara, Rs 5,999 per person on twin-sharing basis, Package with adventure sports Rs 8,599, (01) 4420252, 9808187015 / 9860260894

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BRYAN RAI

Long before there were highways to Kathmandu from the plains, there was only one way in and the same way out: the Chitlang Trail. Everyone and everything from India to Kathmandu passed through this steep staircase trail that started in Bhimphedi, crossed an old iron bridge over the Kulekhani river and descended steeply down to Thankot.

The trail has seen them all: Indian pilgrims visiting Pashupati at Shivaratri, or herds of water buffaloes for the Dasain slaughter. And in the other direction would go Nepali students headed for school in Benares, or royalty in palanquins headed to the plains. The Mercedes Benz gifted by Adolf Hitler to King Tribhuvan, and other automobiles were physically carried up this trail from the plains.

Nepal's rulers wanted to keep Kathmandu militarily impregnable from the south, and were therefore not in a hurry

to build a motorable road. Today, ruins of Rana-era rest houses and disused stone stairs overgrown with vegetation are the only relics of this historic trail. The iron bridge and much of the trail have been submerged by the Kulekhani dam.

There are two roads that lead to Hetauda via Chitlang: the first is the Tribhuvan Highway, built in 1959 to finally link Kathmandu to India, and the newer road via Dakshinkali.



SAMRIDDI RAI



BRYAN RAI

The final dive

The trail from right up the Chandragiri Pass to Kulekhani Lake (32 km) is ideal for mountain biking. Riding through villages, with views of green paddy terraces, waterfalls and pine forests, is an exhilarating experience. After a day of biking, the banks of Kulekhani Reservoir offer scenic camping sites. There is no better way to spend the weekend than to sleep under a starlit sky, with the scent of pine wafting through the air, blanketed in nature's bounty. Because of the Kulekhani hydropower project, Chitlang Valley has 24-hour power — a matter of envy (and some hope) for visitors from Kathmandu.

But there is a third — adventurous and shorter — route that follows the old trail from Godam in Thankot over Chandragiri Pass to Chitlang Valley.

The steep switchbacks from Thankot to the pass are not for the faint-hearted driver or passenger, and the route is nearly impassable in the monsoon. A four-wheel drive is a must, and it will test every off-road skill a driver possesses. It is quite literally an uphill task.

But for a real weekend adventure getaway, forget the SUV, hop on your mountain bikes and go up and over Chandragiri to Chitlang. You can stop and admire the old trail, and remember our forebears who walked this route.

Chitlang itself is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic settlement, with a mosaic of Newari, Tamang and Brahmin-Chhetri settlements. This was the old trade artery to Kathmandu, and relics of that era can be found everywhere. 🇳🇵

Getting there

Taking an off-road jeep from Godam (on the way to Thankot) all the way to Chitlang will cost about Rs 150 per person. You can also hire a jeep from Godam stop for Rs 4,000, depending on your bargaining skills. It's a hair-raising ride, so you may prefer to just ride your mountain bike, or even hike.

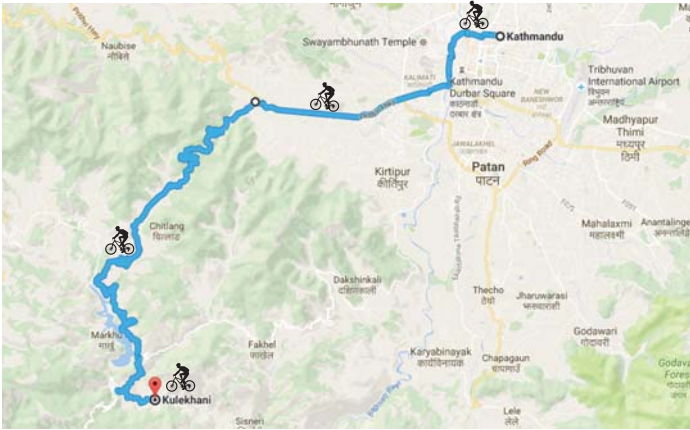
What to eat

Chitlang's famous goat cheese is not to be missed, nor is the Himalayan Plantations olive farm started by Hartmut Bauder. The area takes immense pride in its organic produce, which you may want to try on the spot or pack up for home. Shops and restaurants around Kulekhani Lake serve fresh fish delicacies.



Chasing the cheese

Ashok Kumar Singh Thakuri went to France to learn the fine art of making goat cheese 13 years ago, and came back to Nepal to produce goat cheese like it were going out of fashion. Thakuri buys goat milk from surrounding villages, and has set up the Chitlang Chandragiri Cheese Production Society, raising the cash incomes of hundreds of families. Thakuri's cheese plant is testimony to what can be achieved in Nepal if people put their minds to it. Thakuri now supplies goat cheese to Kathmandu's upmarket hotels.





THE JUNGLE BOOK

Having myself missed this year's *The Jungle Book* on the big screen, I will immediately underline that this is not a film to watch on a plane, or on your computer. The newest Walt Disney production is a live action film augmented with



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

glorious computer-generated images, creating a stunning, if somewhat overly Disney-fied jungle world that pulls the viewer in, leaving us rapt in the wonders that have captivated children and adults alike since Rudyard Kipling's stories of the Indian jungle were first animated in 1967 — also, of course, by Disney. I have oft-bemoaned the lack of original source material

that has necessitated the recent slew of remakes and spin-offs in mainstream cinema; in light of these intellectual property constraints, *The Jungle Book's* new iteration has done incredibly well for its investors, grossing an astonishing \$941 million (to date) to its already very high \$175 million budget — an indicator that will undoubtedly have most studio executives casting around wildly in their archives for the next big remake. While the visuals are exquisite, Jon Favreau's *The Jungle Book* hews just a bit too closely to its charming predecessor, but without the same amount of verve. Adaptations and remakes of old classics are tricky, most can never shake off the shadow of the original, with film-makers hesitating to change that which worked so well the first time. Unfortunately, erring on the side of caution also results

in boring, predictable repetition that is anathema to the pickier viewer, and I will warn those with lower thresholds that you will find yourself feeling slightly irritable every time this overly cutesie Mowgli (played by Neel Sethi) gleefully crows and preens over the long-suffering Bagheera (voiced wonderfully by the immensely versatile, always great Ben Kingsley). While the new *The Jungle Book* is far from being a total loss, it is a shame that a film with so much talent could not have at least equalled its predecessor. With Bill Murray voicing Baloo, Scarlett Johansson as Kaa, Christopher Walken as King Louie, Lupita Nyong'o as Raksha (Mowgli's wolf mother), and Idris Elba as Shere Khan, the film has moments of transcendent beauty, hilarity, and a sense of wonder. It manages to portray the real tenderness between human and animal that made *The Jungle Book* so special in the first place. Unfortunately there is always an awareness that something is missing, something new. Perhaps the better way to introduce your children to this classic is to go back first to Kipling's volume of short stories, which include treasures such as *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, and only then turn towards this remake, after having introduced the older animated version which, at least in my mind, is so much sweeter than this new shiny, expensive, slightly empty beast. 

 nepalitimes.com
■ Trailer 

HAPPENINGS



BIKRAM RAI

DRUM ROLL: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Nepali Congress Leader Ram Chandra Paudel try their hand at traditional drums during a program to mark the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



KESHAB THOKER

CHOPPER CRASH: Bodies of victims of the Nuwakot helicopter crash arrive at Tribhuvan International Airport on Monday. Seven persons including a newborn baby were killed in the mishap.



GOPEN RAI

FIRE AND WATER: The Armed Police Force attempts to douse a fire at poet and lyricist Durga Lal Shrestha's cloth godown in Thamel on Wednesday.



BIKRAM RAI

STUDENT ELECTIONS: Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba inaugurates the 11th General Convention of Nepal Students' Union, the party's student wing, in Kathmandu on Sunday.



BIKRAM RAI

BOLD NEW RIDE: Syakar Trading's Saurabh Jyoti unveils the new Honda BR-V in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

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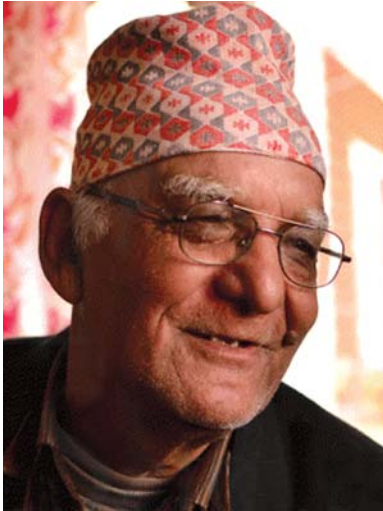
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Crooks and middlemen



Rohit Khatiwada in *www.setopati.com* (8 August)

सेतोपाटी

After serving as one of the six Deputy Prime Ministers in the KP Oli government for nine months, Chitra Bahadur KC has returned to his narrow rented room in Ghattekulo. He has been living in this old, congested and somewhat squalid room with his wife ever since being elected as a Member of Parliament (MP) from the Baglung-2 constituency in 1999.

KC, a lifelong Communist admired for his simplicity and folksy bluntness, always used public transport, and never tried to become a minister. But his Rashtriya Jan Morcha (RJM) joined the Oli coalition for the first time last year. “We felt the need for national unity at a time when India was determined to foil our Constitution,” he explained.

KC’s experience as a minister was not pleasant. He says it was a nightmare from which he has just woken up. He was the Minister of Poverty Alleviation and Cooperatives, a post the big parties shunned. When he shifted to the ministers’ quarters in Pulchok, hangers-on and those who needed favours started thronging to him.

“It was only when I became a minister that I realised ministers are always surrounded by crooks, even bureaucrats just want to serve their personal interests by influencing the ministers they are working with.”

KC knew he was in Singha Darbar for only a brief period, and wanted to use the occasion to regulate unscrupulous cooperatives and stop them from swindling the poor. He drafted a law within three months and sent it to the Cabinet. But the ministers were all opposed to it because they all owned or had interests in cooperatives.

“They ministers were just serving the interests of the crooks, some owned cooperatives, and they did not want this law to come into effect,” KC said. He finally persuaded the Cabinet to forward the draft Cooperative Act to a parliamentary committee, where it is now languishing. He is not hopeful that the Act he drafted will be implemented.

“Those who swindle people through their cooperatives are lawmakers, and they will not pass a law that will hurt their business interests,” he said, adding that MPs with business interests draft laws in health, education, banking and other sectors.

At least five people who had been swindled by cooperatives visited KC, seeking justice. He

estimates that cooperatives, mostly run by leaders and lawmakers, have swindled about Rs 15 billion from people so far, functioning as commercial banks with exorbitant interest rates.

“Even the PM was influenced by these businessmen legislators, he did not help me at all,” KC said, “there are only a handful of public servants who want to serve the people. Most just want to get rich quick, and go for kickbacks.”

He says he knew the system was corrupt, but he had no idea how deep-rooted it was. “I saw it with my own eyes — it was shocking for me,” he said. “Now I know Nepal is run by a cartel of crooks and businessmen.”

He says things will not change unless people wake up. “These crooked politicians are unfortunately elected by the people,” he said as he showed us out of his room, “make sure you note this down: anyone who has money and muscle can win elections in Nepal. It is the people who must stop them from ruining the country and their lives.”

First decisions

www.onlinekhabar.com (4 August)

onlinekhabar

Hours after being sworn in as PM for the second time, Pushpa Kamal Dahal made four decisions: to carry out ‘the government for the people’ program, provide the first instalment of the reconstruction grants to 533,000 earthquake-affected families within the next 45 days, mobilise doctors in all Primary Health Care Centres, and encourage registration of births by offering allowances to the Dalits.

Will PM Dahal’s first decisions be implemented? To find out the answer, let us review the first decisions made by his predecessors.

When he became PM for the first time in 2008, Dahal’s first decision was to get the new constitution promulgated by the first Constituent Assembly (CA) itself. But the first CA was dissolved four years later without a constitution in place.

Madhav Kumar Nepal, who became PM after Dahal stepped down, decided to build a memorial in Ratna Park to honour those killed during the struggle for republicanism. But the project was a non-starter.

Jhalnath Khanal became PM after Nepal, and his first



decision was to build a tunnel road connecting the Thankot depot of Nepal Oil Corporation with the East West Highway at Jhyaple Khola of Dhading. But he had to resign in just seven months, and the successors did not follow up on his decision.

The first decision of Baburam Bhattarai, who succeeded Khanal, was to implement the United Nations Convention against Corruption. But no progress was made after his resignation.

Khila Raj Regmi — who headed an interim government to hold the second CA elections — decided to prepare guidelines to distribute financial assistance. His successors, however, did not adhere to them.

Sushil Koirala, who became PM after the CA elections, decided to upload receipts for bills amounting to more than Rs 5,000 each, on the websites of the ministries concerned. This is the only decision that is being implemented even now.

The first decision of KP Oli, who became PM after the promulgation of the new constitution, was to replace all the 171 twin-rope crossings across the country with suspension bridges. But only three were replaced during his nine-month tenure.



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Remembering the

Returning to the photograph of the mother and daughter that brought home the horror of war

GHANSHYAM KHADKA
in MYAGDI



The photograph

I arrived in Beni the day after the battle. Bodies of Maoist attackers were still lying in the streets, the police and army were carrying their casualties down to the helipad, and the townspeople were standing around, staring.

I had been there for several hours doing interviews, and was being hurried along to meet someone or see something, when this scene caught my eye. It was such a striking image. I snapped the picture without even stopping. I was still walking so it is lucky the picture isn't blurry.

The two of them saw me taking their picture and I realised that they must have been thinking: "Oh, there is some strange tourist."

Thomas Bell, author of 'Kathmandu'

THOMAS BELL

Jamila Khatun and her three-year-old daughter, Sajita, were preparing to sleep in a room above their bangle shop on Beni's market street. Her husband was not home.

It was 20 March 2004, and at about 10 pm she heard the sound of many running footsteps outside. Soon after, there was a deafening explosion from the direction of the Army base, followed by gunfire, more big bangs, and people shouting commands and screaming.

The firing continued throughout the night. Their house shuddered and the window panes rattled with every explosion. Jamila had to muffle her daughter's cries as they cowered under the bed. She did not have the courage to peep outside, and

stayed awake all night, praying for their lives, and for daylight.

The next morning, hours after the firing had stopped, there was a sound of helicopters overhead. Jamila was still hiding in the room, her daughter fast asleep, when someone hammered on the door. Soldiers were asking the residents to come out of their houses. The Maoists had already fled.

Jamila stepped outside, blinking in the sunlight, her eyes swollen and red. She still remembers vividly the scene that greeted her that morning: blood, bullets and bodies. The District Administrative Office building had been reduced to rubble, and was still smouldering. The streets were strewn with spent ammunition and unexploded bombs.

The steps outside Jamila's



GHANSHYAM KHADKA



20/10
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shop had fresh blood from a dead female guerrilla, and she got a bucket of water to scrub it clean. Her daughter was standing nearby watching her, when journalist Thomas Bell walked by.

"I thought he was a tourist," Jamila recalls, and ironically that is exactly what Bell remembers thinking: "She must think I am some strange tourist."

Bell — then with the *Daily Telegraph* in Kathmandu — was one of the first outside journalists on the scene (*see box*) and what



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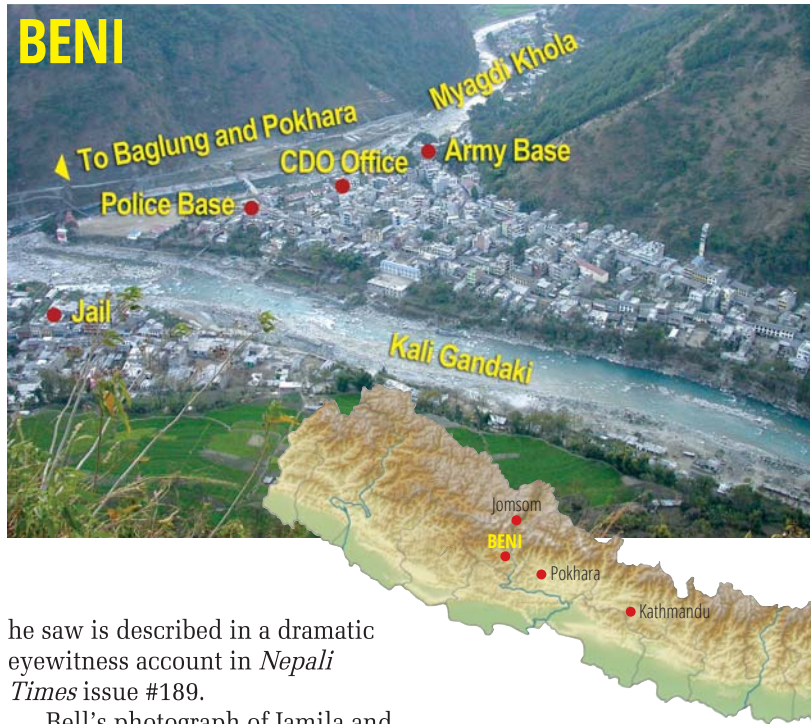
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Battle of Beni



GHANSHYAM KHADKA



he saw is described in a dramatic eyewitness account in *Nepali Times* issue #189. Bell's photograph of Jamila and her daughter, and blood flowing into the dusty street, is one of the iconic images of the conflict that lasted ten years and had claimed 17,000 lives by the time it ended in April 2006. The photograph was included in Kunda Dixit's *A People War*

book, and was part of a travelling photo exhibition that visited 45 of Nepal's 75 districts from 2008 to 2009. When the exhibition arrived in Beni in 2008, Jamila and her daughter were there to see their own photographs for the first time.

LIVES AFTER WAR: Thomas Bell's photograph of Jamila Khatun washing blood from her shopfront while her three-year-old daughter Sajita watched, became an iconic image of the conflict (*far left*).

Sajita Khatun, 15, looks on from her mother's shop at the same spot where they had been photographed in 2004 (*left*).

Jamila and Sajita Khatun visited the *A People War* Travelling Photo Exhibition when it arrived in Beni in 2008 (*left, below*).

The famous bullet-ridden telephone pole that survived the Battle of Beni is now a peace monument at Yala Maya Kendra in Patan (*box, right*).

Sajita is now 15 and in Grade 9 at a local government school. Her memories of that night and the day after are derived mostly from what she has heard from her mother and neighbours. But she does remember seeing blood and bodies, and being scolded by an army soldier. She understood later from her mother that the soldier had snatched away an unexploded pipe bomb from her friend, shouting angrily at her. She is now thankful to that soldier who saved her life.

Not much has changed in the lives of the Khatuns since then. They now live in a small house in a landless squatter settlement near Beni. Jamila still sells bangles in the same shop where she had hidden during the Beni battle. The country has gone from war to peace, from monarchy to republic, and there is a new constitution, but none of this seems to have made a difference to the Khatun family or others like them in Beni.

"None of the leaders really cares about us," she said. "We just have to fend for ourselves."

Night of terror

In 2004, the war was at its height and the Maoists had been attacking one district headquarters after another. The tactic was to lay siege to the town at night, destroy the district administration buildings and attack the army and police bases, to inflict maximum damage and injury. The attacking force conscripted villagers and often used them as human shields in order to compel the defenders to expend all their bullets. Even though the Maoists would suffer heavy casualties, the battles would expose the government's vulnerability and be a propaganda victory.

An estimated 5,000 Maoists and villagers were involved in the Beni attack, most of them women. The clash lasted from 10:30 pm on 20 March 2004 until 6 am the following morning, after which the Maoists retreated with Army helicopters in hot pursuit. In all, 19 civilians, 17 police and 14 soldiers were killed, but hundreds of Maoists were also slain, many buried by the rivers when helicopters strafed guerrilla columns as they marched back to the mountain passes of Rukum.



GOPEN RAI

The Battle of Beni also marked a turning point in the conflict, as the Army bolstered the defence of its garrisons in district towns, and the Maoists shifted to ambushing security convoys along the highways.

This is the first part of the 20/10 Conflict Anniversary series examining what has become of the persons whose photographs were included in the book 'A People War', published in 2007.

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Amb-ass-adors at large

Just as your favourite neighbourhood Ass-trologer predicted in this space last week, the tug-o-war over ambassadorships has begun, as the new regime dumps a list drawn up by the old regime.

The UML's appointees have all been scrapped, and we are now going to get a mish-mash of left-handed candidates. The Kangresis and the Baddies are dividing up the world into spheres of influence, with the Maoists gunning for posts in Germany, France and Denmark, while the Kangresis want London, Washington and New Delhi. The ones without political clout or are unable to afford the prepaid deposit will have to settle (sorry, lads) for Myanmar or Sri Lanka.

But, being a chronic optimist, the donkey always looks on the bright side: see how much money we have saved the national exchequer by keeping 16 of our embassies amb-ass-odourless for a year or more. It's not without reason we call them ambassadors-at-large. Besides the monetary savings, potential gaffes and

indiscretions of plenipotentiaries have also been obviated since our dips are historically prone to shoplifting, human trafficking, facilitating the informal trade in contraband items between Nepal and the country of their posting, and even trying to sell off historical embassy property in return for handsome rewards from the Mittals.

But even when the envoys are finally nominated, we could see a repeat of 2008 when the Maoists' chosen Excellencies for Delhi and Paris (Comrade Partha and Comrade Pampha respectfully) were not accepted by host governments. Nominated by our Supremos, they never got their Agremos. At this rate, we're not going to have new ambassadors any time soon, which is great news for the aforementioned exchequer because the country is going to save wads of dough.

The money saved can go to pay for the 41 officials who chaperoned seven Nepali athletes to Rio. If there is one Olympics

Govt warned against taking significant decisions

A day after filing the no-confidence motion in the Parliament, Nepali Congress and CPN-Maoist Centre today warned the KP Sharma Oli-led government against taking decisions of national significance with long-term effects, as it had already been transformed into a caretaker government.

Issuing a joint statement signed by chief secretaries Krishna Prasad Paudel of NC and Pralhad Budhatoki of CPN-MC, the two parties

said NC leader Balkrishna Khand.

The government should not take any policy-level decision or make any political appointment or reach any agreement going against the parliamentary norms after being reduced to a minority government, said Khand.

Meanwhile, NC and CPN-MC have intensified talks on sharing ministerial portfolios, according to sources in the two parties.

A five-point gentlemen's agreement reached between the NC and the CPN-MC, along with the seven-point pact inked

Gold Medal that Nepal can win hands-down it will be in the athlete-to-hangers-on ratio, beating even some notoriously junketeering Olympic Committees of nations like Guinea Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe. Oh, by the way, just so we have our geostrategic priorities right, do we have diplomatic relations with those two countries? If not, better tie the knot so we can share ideas on how to beat the international

record on freeloading sports bureaucrats.

Speaking of sports, Baddie ministers don't seem to be getting as much exercise as they used to during their underground years, as can be gleaned from their ample girths. Awesomeji's tummy is now becoming hazardous to his health, and the entire politburo looks like it needs a workout. This is a matter of serious national concern.

It's a pity he has decided not to partake of ribbon-cutting and badge-wearing ceremonies because that would have been good exercise. However, we are glad to see that The Fearsome One is off to a flying start to burn off kilo calories by doing a zumba-like folk dance on the occasion of International World's Indigenous Peoples Day.

And if he keeps on having to carry 20kg of marigold garlands from party cadre, it may mean he will have lost enough weight in nine months to be finally fit for the job by the time he will

have to step down from his job.

One thing we are no longer worried about is Prime Minister Comrade Terrifying being at a loss for words when he goes to the United Nations to deliver his address in English at the General Assembly next month. Given



the number of dictionaries he has stacked up on his desk, and provided he uses his spare time in Baluwatar to memorise at least *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, his vocabulary will be so vast that the international community will finally be convinced that he has indeed made a smooth transition from bomb maker to bombastic speaker.



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