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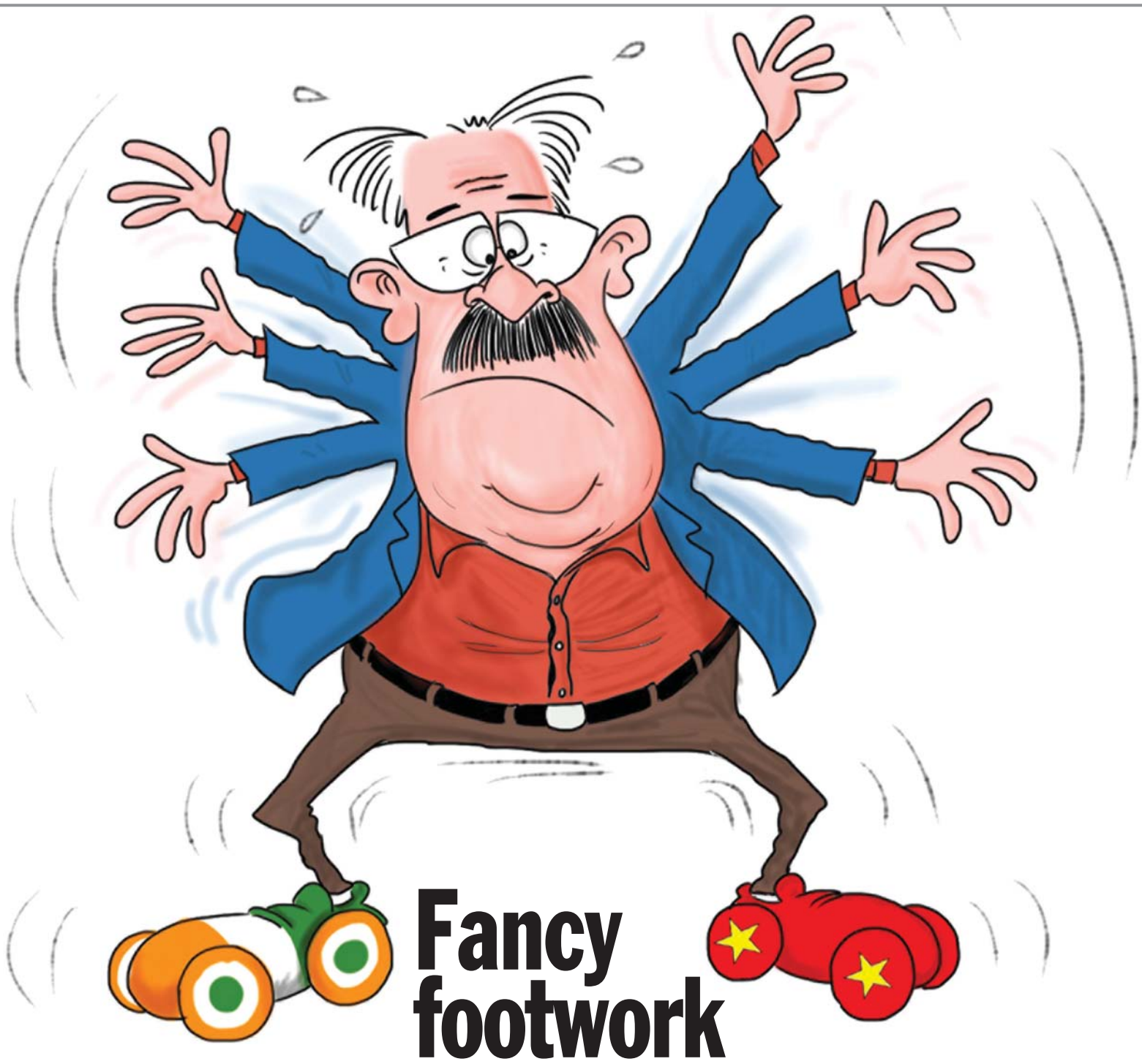
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DIMAKAR CHETTRI

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has deployed his two deputies on twin errands to the north and south to forge equidistance between Nepal's two big neighbours. But his diplomatic dealings are fraught with uncertainty, and could further strain Kathmandu's relations with New Delhi and Beijing.

A day before Deputy PM and Finance Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara's return from Beijing, Deputy PM and Home Minister Bimalendra Nidhi jettied off to New Delhi on Thursday. While Mahara was in Beijing to invite Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit Kathmandu, Nidhi is inviting Indian President Pranab Mukherjee to do the same.

Dahal is only too aware — from his first tenure in 2008 — that playing India off against China comes at a political cost. This time, he is trying to be more careful, but foreign affairs experts say the strategy may be a liability.

"Dahal talks of equidistance, but he does not know what it actually means," says Rajan Bhattarai of the Nepal-India Eminent Persons Group tasked with reviewing the 1950 treaty. "Maintaining equidistance is to manage the dynamics of ties with India and China, not increasing their influence in Nepal."

Leaders in Dahal's coalition partner, the Nepali Congress, are also critical of sending Mahara north and Nidhi south. Asks the NC's Narayan Khadka: "Is it to

show that the NC is closer to India and the Maoists are closer to China?"

Nidhi is indeed being seen to be doing New Delhi's bidding, particularly after overtly backing an Indian company to build the Kathmandu-Tarai fast-track highway. Mahara, for his part, was caught in a telephone tap asking the Chinese for money to buy off CA members in 2010.

Says Khadka: "Instead of sending an NC leader to India and a Maoist leader to China, he should have sent his Foreign Affairs Minister to the two countries. Dahal is trying to please New Delhi and Beijing, but he might end up irritating both."
Om Astha Rai

Home they bring the workers dead


BY UPASANA KHADKA



The cycle of migration

BY OM ASTHA RAI

PAGES 14-15



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POLITICALLY CORRECT

While the Big Four parties can paralyse the polity, they are also the only ones who can bring the country to a safe landing.

The first (and foremost) hurdle to cross on the route to restoring stable politics in Nepal is to make operational the Constitution that was passed last year by an elected Constituent Assembly. The promulgation was followed by an eruption of violence in western Nepal and Tarai, and led to a border blockade that ruined the economy and silently wrecked countless lives.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s opening order of business in his timebound nine-month tenure ought to be to recognise what caused that violence and hostility, and address the root grievances. Some of these were popular dissatisfaction in the plains with the way Nepal’s governance and decision-making has been centralised and monopolised by Kathmandu. But he will also have to look at the geopolitical ramifications of why the Madhesi parties were backed by India, as well as try to understand New Delhi’s concerns and allay them.

It will be tricky and ill-advised for him to move ahead without looking at the domestic and cross-border antecedents to the Tarai violence and the blockade, because they hold important lessons about the amendments that need to be agreed to before the Constitution is finally a working (and workable) document. There is a deadline of mid-January 2018 for local, provincial and parliamentary elections in order for the Constitution to be in full force.

The initial step is to get the Madhesi parties on board in government. Cynics will say that Madhesi leaders are only interested in plum posts, and this may be true. But it is also undeniable that including them will be politically expedient — elections would not be possible without addressing their demands for modifications to reform the constitution.

The second step, and this may be even more onerous, is for Dahal to win the trust of KP Oli of the UML, a person whom he just ousted. The UML and the RPP-N (the second



BHANU BHATTARAI

and fourth-largest parties in parliament, respectively) command an important swing vote even from the opposition bench, in pushing through amendments. This means the future of the country is in the hands of the four main parties — whether they be in government or out. The past decade of post-war transition has proven that just as the four parties can paralyse the polity, they are also the only ones who can bring the country to a safe landing, if they act collectively.

By supplanting Oli and forging an unwritten agreement with the Nepali Congress for rotational prime ministership, Dahal has also inherited the task of ensuring that the three elections are held. Inability to hold elections will throw the Constitution into limbo, and could have unpredictable and unimaginable consequences. In that period, if ethnic, religious or nationalist factors that simmer under the surface are added to the volatile political mix, it will only allow dangerous rightist or fascist forces to take hold. Such an outcome would not benefit anyone in Nepal, nor will it be in

the interest of Nepal’s big neighbours, which ostensibly prefer stability and predictable politics in Nepal.

If elections are not held by January 2018, the country will be without a parliament, which could invite a similar outcome as the appointment of Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi as prime minister in 2013. It is the responsibility of the current political leadership in both the government and the opposition to prevent such a perilous eventuality.

Alas, the inter- and intra-party feuds within the Maoist Centre, NC and the Madhesi Front in the past two weeks do not bode well for stability. It seems no lessons have been learnt, and short-term power games still prevail, with scant attention being paid to averting the political cliffhanger we will face in a little over a year. Already, the politicians and wannabes seem oblivious to the fact that there is a high-handed parallel government running in this country that has the police, bureaucracy, politicians, media and even parliament in its vice-like grip.

The Maoist-NC partnership was touted as a way to bring the Madhesi and fringe parties into the mainstream to activate the Constitution. That premise is already looking like wishful thinking. By now there should have been serious negotiations about amendments to the Constitution, but all we have is backroom haggling over the doling out of ministerial posts.

Just about the only decisive option Dahal has been able to take was to send his two Deputy Prime Ministers, one north and the other south, to assuage our nervous neighbours. The Prime Minister should know that Nepal’s problems are located within the country, not without. But his action is proof — if indeed proof were still needed — that Nepal’s domestic politics is a mere plaything in the hands of outsiders.

Times

THIS WEEK

THOMAS BELL

Most reached on Facebook
Remembering the Battle of Beni by *Ghanshyam Khadka*
Returning to the photograph of the mother and daughter that brought home the horror of war (9,367 people reached)

Most shared on Facebook
An Olympian moment by *Rabi Rajkarnikar*

Most popular on Twitter
Lorry laureates by *Upasana Khadka*

Most commented
20/10 Anniversary by *Om Astha Rai*

Most visited online page
Keverters comes to Kathmandu by *Smriti Basnet*

YOUR SAY

www.nepalitimes.com

OF WAR AND PEACE

It has been 20 years since the Nepal conflict started and 10 years since it ended. Isn't it ironical that the person who started it all is the Prime Minister of the country ('20/10 Anniversary', Om Astha Rai, #821)? And all that the victims can do is fight a futile battle that they know they'll never win. When you see and hear everything that has gone on in this country, you wonder if justice exists.

Amrita Maharjan

■

Your battle represents that of hundreds of other women who are also fighting for justice. Seems like transitional justice is not for those who are in need. Is Prime Minister Dahal listening?

whereas around 40 officials accompanied them to Rio this time ('An Olympian moment', Rabi Rajkarnikar, #821). Does the ministry of sports in Nepal have a special budget set aside for that purpose?

Gyanendra Banks

■

Most competitors from other countries don't even have their coaches travel with them. The Nepalese 'officials' are greedy and wasting public money: for 7 competitors you should only need 3 or 4 officials, for different events at different locations. Stop wasting public money, which could have helped re-build new homes for earthquake victims.

Sue Chamberlain

DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIPS

The mere existence of political parties and the fact that elections are held and governments formed doesn't at all mean that any sort of improvement has occurred ('Order! Order!', Editorial, #821). As long as the parties are run by corrupt people the situation will remain hopeless. The propaganda that parliamentary democracy is better than the monarchy has been shown to be utterly false, but is being repeated as undeniable.

Danny Birch

NEPAL IN OLYMPICS

I heard that there were 7 competitors,

Total votes: 515

■

Yes 68.13%

■

No 20%

■

Maybe/Don't know 10.87%

Weekly Internet Poll #823

To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you agree with the government's decision to give Rs 1 million each to the families of the 52 persons killed during the Madhes unrest?

Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll #822

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

Times

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After backing Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal's prime ministerial bid, Madhesi dissidents are now considering to join the ruling coalition. Dahal (and the NC strategists who installed him as the new PM) sees no point in keeping Madhesi parties out of Singha Darbar after they joined hands to topple the KP Oli



COMMENT

Chandra Kishor



BIKRAM RAI

The Madhes message

government. Indian lobbyists have also apparently prodded top Madhesi leaders to join the Maoist-NC government.

So will Madhesi parties go in with the government? They find it hard to resist the temptation, but the possibility is low. There is fear of a backlash from their constituencies down in the plains, where things may look calm after last year's eruption of violence, but there is a lot of resentment about the way Kathmandu continues to treat them. Madhesi leaders themselves say their agitation is not over yet — only its form has changed. However, by vowing to vote for Dahal and against Oli in Parliament, they have sent a message: the Madhes wants to be

The people in the plains want to be a part of Nepal, but they feel alienated by Kathmandu

seen to be part of Nepal, and with Kathmandu.

Madhesi parties had signalled this message even when the Tarai was burning last year. They voted against Oli even though they knew they would not be able to stop him from being Prime Minister. There were dark rumours that they were acting at India's behest, but that was an indication to the international community that they had no intention to deviate from mainstream politics, unlike Mohan Baidya, Netra Bikram Chand and CK Raut.

The Madhes does not want separatism; if anything it wants to be connected to Kathmandu even

more. It is up to Kathmandu to make that happen. The Madhes feels alienated, and Madhesis are angry about not being treated with respect, as Nepalis. The distance that grew between Kathmandu and Madhes in the wake of the Constitution promulgation last year needs to be bridged in three phases.

First, the demands that can be met by a cabinet meeting must be addressed immediately. Second, the government needs to announce special development plans for the Madhesi people. Third, and most importantly, the Constitution needs to be amended so that the Madhesi people feel

ownership of it.

But the UML, which is a key to amending the Constitution, still views Madhesi grievances negatively. If a broader consensus were required to write the Constitution, the same is needed to amend it. And the UML commands the swing vote.

The Madhesi parties are also divided, and the Front that led last year's agitation is not the representative voice of all the Madhesis. The Front has realised that street protests alone will not help, and wants to move forward by forging deals with the Maoist-NC coalition. But there is another political force in the Madhes that

aims to discredit the Front, and create a political vacuum in the plains: the hardliners who are just waiting for the right time to strike.

There is a danger that if the Madhesi parties join the government, the hardliners will expose them as being lackeys of Kathmandu. Public opinion in the plains will turn against the leaders, and be swayed by the radical rhetoric of the hardliners. But if the Front is kept out, it will also harden the hardliners, and efforts to bridge the Kathmandu-Madhes gap could fail. Either way, the situation is thorny.

Madhesis are fighting for the recognition of their identity, but it is also a fight to be recognised as Nepalis — that was what they were trying to say — mostly peacefully, sometimes violently. Those who claim to be nationalists in Kathmandu need to understand this sentiment.

Oli has time and again demonstrated disdain for the Madhesis, and contemptuously ignored their voices. The way he conducted himself in negotiations with Madhesi leaders made it difficult to find a compromise. But the Madhav Kumar Nepal camp of the UML is now challenging Oli's way, which offers a silver lining. Nepal and other UML leaders can contribute to creating a conducive environment to resolve the Madhes crisis.

But the onus lies on Prime Minister Dahal, who has already made some symbolic moves but needs to do more to get Madhesis on board. 🇳🇵

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AMRIT GURUNG



GOPEN RAI

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: Aman Nath and Hemanta Bista were six years old when singer Amrit Gurung took his symbolic picture of them among the ruins of a police station in Motipur of Kailali in 2005. Even a decade after the ceasefire, the legacy of the violence still haunts child survivors of the conflict. Bista (above) is now a 20-year-old business student, and says the Maoists should help rebuild what they destroyed.

A battered future

Amrit Gurung's striking photograph of two Kailali boys has come to represent the kind of Nepal we are handing over to the next generation

SMRITI BASNET

Children in Motipur of Kailali used to avoid going near the ruins of a police station near their school. Six policemen had been killed in a raid on the post, and the students thought the place was haunted. One day in 2005, a van stopped on the highway and a

familiar-looking person with a camera slung over his shoulder stepped out, taking pictures as he entered the police post. Curiosity overcame fear, and six-year-old Hemanta Bista and his classmate Aman Nath followed the man cautiously inside. Well-known folk-rock singer Amrit Gurung was on a peace concert tour of western Nepal headed towards Dhangadi, and had stopped with his crew in



Motipur. An avid photographer, Gurung was snapping pictures of the ruined building with his Nikon which was loaded with a roll of Kodachrome slides. Just then, he saw the two boys looking out through a hole in the wall of the police station made by a mortar bomb explosion, and he took a few shots. It used to take weeks to get the film rolls developed, and when he finally held the slides up to the light, Gurung remembers being emotionally moved. "That image of Hemanta and Aman reminded me what our generation had done to this country," Gurung said, "we have left our children a ruined land." The photograph was chosen

as the cover image of *A People War*, a picture book of the conflict curated by Kunda Dixit and published in 2007 — and came to be symbolic of the waste of war. Twenty years since the start of the conflict in 1996 and 10 years after it ended in 2006, Amrit Gurung's photograph is still a haunting representation of the legacy of a brutal war on the next generation of Nepalis. Eleven years after the photograph was taken, Bista, now 20, still remembers the day he followed Amrit Gurung into the

destroyed police station. He also remembers the night the post was attacked by the Maoists: the terrifying gunfire and explosions, helicopters landing the next morning, and the bodies of the dead. "We were really afraid, even at the mention of the word 'Maoists'," Bista recalls. His father was a policeman stationed in Motipur, and had to crawl through paddy fields to escape after hearing that the Maoists were coming after him. The wrecked police station

Amrit Gurung presenting a copy of the book *A People War* to Hemanta Bista in Motipur of Kailali in 2008, at the same spot where he had taken the photograph four years previously.



RAJESH KC

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Amrit Gurung's cover image being displayed amidst the ruins of the Sindhupalchok District Hospital in 2007 (above). Baburam Bhattarai at A People War photo exhibition tour in 2008 in Gorkha (below).

has long been rebuilt, and Bista moved to Kathmandu six years ago for higher studies. His friend Nath was taken away to India by his father, when his mother died. The horrors of war seem like a fading memory, but for Bista the

scars remain. "Maybe I would have done better in studies if the Maoists had not shut our schools in Kailali," Bista said. He had to change schools after the Maoists ordered all English-medium

schools in the district closed. Bista only realised how far behind he was academically when he struggled with the subjects taught in English while enrolled in college in Kathmandu.

But Bista is determined to move on. He feels strongly that he should do something for his hometown, where he says little has changed for the better since the war. There are more schools in Motipur because of remittance money, and the community installed a drinking water supply recently, but there are no jobs and most young men are leaving for overseas jobs or to the cities for education.

"The Maoists are now in government again, they fought a war and have seen the difficulties in the villages with their own eyes, they should at least help rebuild what they destroyed," he said.

Bista's father is now retired, and works as a bank security guard in Motipur, struggling to pay for his two sons' education. "It has been a challenge," said Bista, who walks with a limp because of a rare bone disease that the family cannot afford medical treatment for.

Now in the eighth semester of his BBA program, Bista hopes to get an MBA degree and dreams of someday running a business of his own to support his family. 🇳🇵



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Watch video clip of Amrit Gurung



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1 Tunnelling works for the Melamchi drinking water project have resumed after the earthquake disruption.
2 A collapsed tourist lodge on the trail to Gosainkunda.
3 Gosainkunda in the rain.
4 The historic Nuwakot Darbar is one of the very few old buildings on the route to have survived ...
5 ... but many neighbouring structures were ruined.

Second monsoon in the earthquake zone

Survivors have received little help, but no one seems surprised



6 Ploughing in Nuwakot.
7 A ruined house in Dhading.
8 The Ankhu Khola in Dhading where all villages have been reduced to tin shacks.
9 A small hut where a house once stood, by an ancient *chautara* in western Dhading.
10 Near Arughat in Gorkha.
11 Near the epicentre, Gorkha Bazar survived almost unscathed. Like in Chautara and Bidur, local hotels are occupied by earthquake relief workers.

ALL PICS: THOMAS BELL

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by Kutumba

21 August, Sunday
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DIDGERIDOO
by Salil Trio

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5:00 - 6:00
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THOMAS BELL

Walking in the monsoon across the earthquake-affected districts north of Kathmandu, it is evident that the region has been turned into one huge tin shanty.

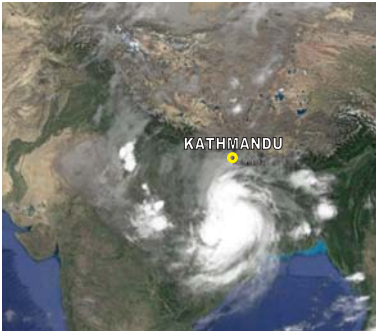
This is the old heartland of Nepal, historically prosperous. But where there used to be handsome old villages with houses in varied styles, the texture of village architecture now consists of shacks and tin sheets where villagers squat in the ruins of their homes.

All along the walk from Chautara of Sindhupalchok across Nuwakot, Rasuwa and Dhading to Gorkha, families are surviving their second monsoon out in the open. There is almost no rebuilding to be seen. Visible everywhere are village council meetings about how people will qualify for the Rs 200,000 rebuilding grant per family. Everyone agrees the policy makes no sense, for all sorts of reasons. For example, the money is not nearly enough to build any of the approved designs, so many people only hope to get the first payment of Rs 50,000, and to do with it whatever they think makes the most sense.

An exception to this general picture is on the trail to Gosainkunda, where people make money by operating their houses as lodges, and have rebuilt immediately without waiting for help. Alas, the government is preparing to punish them. A new Langtang National Park regulation means that people who always lived there will have to bid for the right to run a lodge. In exchange for payment, the National Park proposes to give them nothing besides a licence to earn a living.

It is not true that people have received no help so far. They have been given tin sheets. But the perception that those who survived the earthquake have been abandoned by the government is universal, and if you ask whether they expect any different, then the answer is usually the same: "What will they ever do for us?"

Nothing we saw surprised us, nor did anyone we met seem surprised. ■



The monsoon is now approaching a mature middle age, as it were, and we are getting battered from both sides. The Arabian Sea arm of the southwest monsoon is drenching western Nepal, while the Bay of Bengal arm is still pushing relentlessly into central and eastern Nepal. This time of year is when the two monsoons converge and bring copious rain. Two large low pressure systems are just off Nepal's western and eastern borders, which means the weekend will be wet, with bright mornings giving way to afternoon and evening storms.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 19°	26° 20°	28° 19°

oneworld

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RAISA PANDE

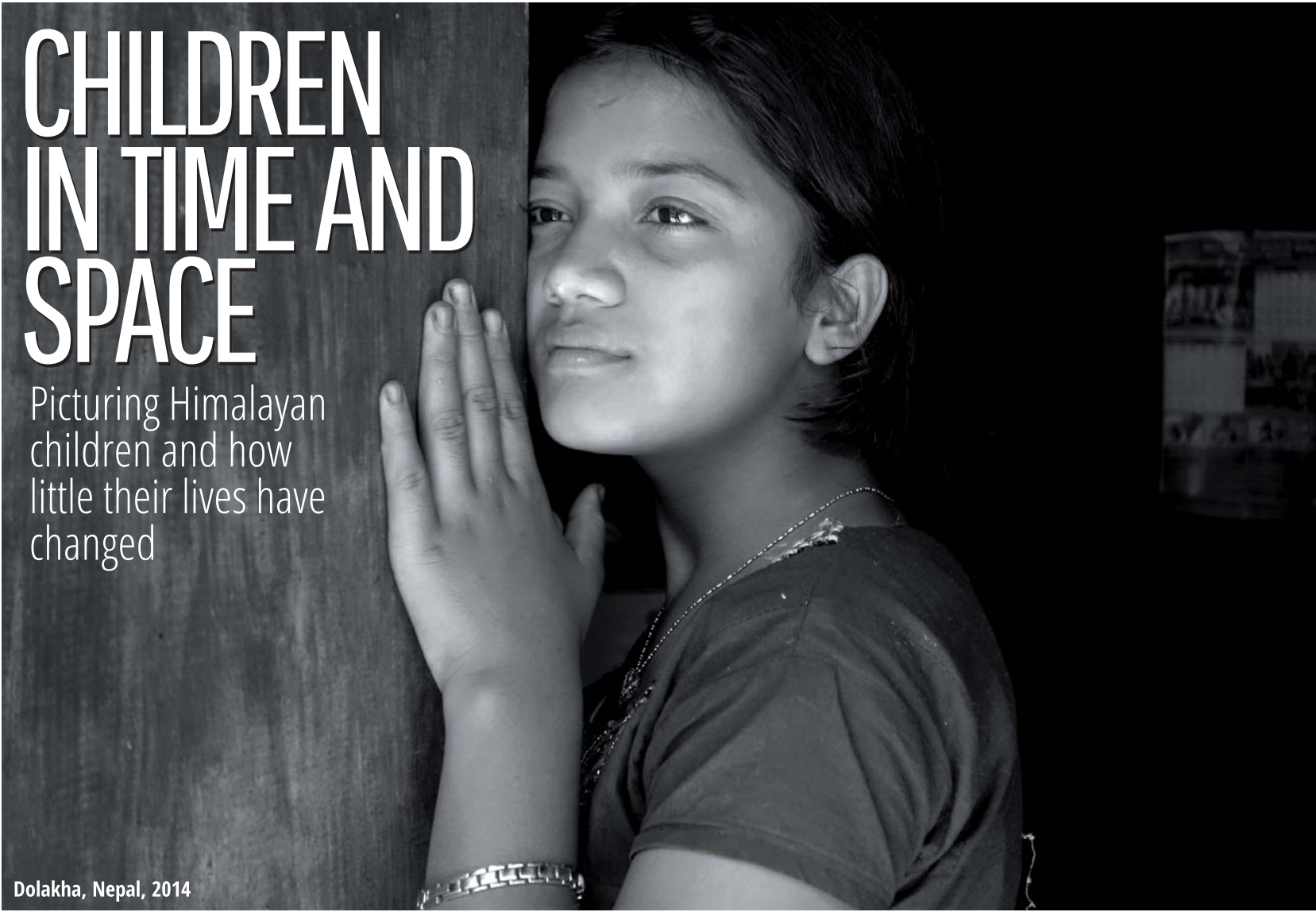
At a time when the availability of wi-fi determines the quality of communication we have with people near and far, it is difficult to fathom what life would have been like in the isolated regions of the Himalaya where the closest motorable road was as far as a week's walk away.

Until the 1970s, the lives of the people of the Himalaya remained distant and isolated from the mainland. In *Himalayan Children*, Swiss development worker and photographer Fritz Berger has documented children growing up in Sikkim, Nepal and Pakistan from the 1970s until 2014, and in doing so helps bring us closer in time and space to their realities. The images transport us back to the innocence of an era before roads and smartphones.

'I photographed my own children too, but photographing local children has turned out to be a more interesting passion for me. These children appeared very new, unusual and colorful to me,' writes Berger in the introduction to his recent release, a collection of black-and-white images ranging over four decades.

Much like his previous book, *In the Shadow of Gaurishanker* (2014), a pictorial comparison of Dolakha from 1973 to 2011, *Himalayan Children* is a photographic flashback, and is informative and endearing. As photographer and documentary filmmaker Robert Frank would have put it, Berger's work 'contains the humanity of the moment'.

The book is neatly chalked out into sections and comes to resemble a visual journey of children across borders, right from their birth to their advancement



Dolakha, Nepal, 2014

PICS: FRITZ BERGER



Gorkha, Nepal, 1996

into adolescence. In addition to reflecting on the lives of the children and their assimilation into their surroundings, his pictures highlight the inherent cultural and social practices that are prevalent in the region. Where women from Nepal and Sikkim are photographed alongside their children, all but one photograph

of children in Pakistan depict them with their fathers. Fathers play an important role in the lives of their children, especially in public.

It is not difficult to tell the photographs apart: despite the similarity in terrain and lifestyle, the clothes, facial features and social settings make them easily distinguishable. However,

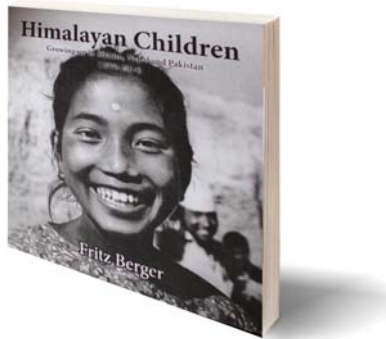
despite their apparent differences the pictures fit seamlessly into Berger's pictorial narrative. The photographed children look content in their plain, minimalistic surroundings, and are often seen helping out with chores. The images help convey the message more eloquently, adding personality to the pictures and reinforcing the lives portrayed, without the distraction of colour.

Flipping through the pages, trying to let the reality of close and distant lands and times sink in, what grows on you is the realisation that the children photographed in the 1970s are in their mid-fifties today. And how little their lives have changed in the last forty years.

This is a picture book, so the text is sparse. Even the captions only have the name of the area

with the year, nothing closer. Words, where they do appear, are used to introduce each section and provide readers with a run-through of the writer's experiences.

Berger has once again taken us back in time. Unlike his portraits of Dolakha, there are no before-and-after images here, just photographic documentation of what lives were like and how little things have changed for the children of the mountains even as they arrive at the cusp of change. 🇳🇵



Himalayan Children
Growing up in Sikkim, Nepal and Pakistan (1970-2014)
by Fritz Berger
196pp, Vajra Books (2016)

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Times

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www.nepalitimes.com

200 YEARS OF BOTANICAL ART

Britain and Nepal mark a bicentennial of cooperation in documenting our country's biodiversity

Britain and Nepal are marking the bicentenary of diplomatic relations this year, and the start of the recruitment of Nepali soldiers in the British Army in 1816 is garnering a lot of attention. But less well-known and even older than the establishment of bilateral ties is the involvement of British botanists in documenting Himalayan flora.

It was in 1802 that Scottish naturalist Francis Buchanan-Hamilton of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) made the first expedition to Nepal to collect plant samples. Buchanan-Hamilton's work was way ahead of its time, and yielded samples and exquisite drawings of plants

found along the southern slopes of the Himalaya in Nepal.

It's no wonder that Buchanan-Hamilton is called the 'father of Nepali botany', and the tradition started by his expedition 214 years ago has continued with a collaboration between British and Nepali botanists and artists. The ongoing 'Flora of Nepal' exhibition at the RBGE has on display dried herbarium pressed samples, and drawings from Buchanan-Hamilton's expedition as well as more contemporary ones by botanical artists, including Nepal's own Neera Joshi (*see sidebar*).

During his year in Nepal in 1802, Buchanan-Hamilton collected and documented over 1,100 plant varieties, most of them new species at the time. Some of them were meticulously rendered by a Bengali expedition artist in coloured drawings, and selected ones are on display in Edinburgh.

Nepal's topographical extremes — stretching from tropical plains situated 80 m about sea level to elevations of nearly 8,900 m — give the country an exceptional floral range. There are more than 7,000 species of vascular plants here, many of them found nowhere else: 2,000 of them have medicinal properties, and 600 are edible. Nepal is classified as a Global Biodiversity Hotspot because some of these species are endangered due to habitat loss.

The 'Flora of Nepal' project spearheaded by the RBGE is a continuation of the research of scientists like Buchanan-Hamilton, and puts together the first comprehensive listing of Nepal's plants. With more than 100 botanical experts from Britain, Nepal and Japan on board, the project illustrates, collects and studies the plants, hoping that the knowledge can be used for biodiversity conservation. www.floraofnepal.org

The botanical art exhibition titled 'Flora of Nepal, a 200-year Connection' (pictured, left) runs until 6 November at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Scotland.



Flower power

Last March, seven botanical artists from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) trekked across Nepal to study its rich flora and conduct botanical painting workshops for Nepali students. A number of their detailed botanical drawings are on display at an exhibition at the RBGE to commemorate the bicentennial of Britain-Nepal diplomatic ties. The artists also collected information about local names and the traditional uses of the plants.

Botanists prefer drawings of plants to photographs because the illustrations can depict significantly more information about the life cycle of the plant, represent cross-sections, and magnify interesting parts. Colours, textures and the structure of the plants can also be conveyed with greater accuracy.

The drawings build on techniques perfected by Scottish naturalist Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, who visited Nepal and recorded its plants in 1802. His team collected samples and produced drawings while walking through the mountains. These specimens and drawings are in the Buchanan-Hamilton archives at the Linnean Society of London, and some of them have been taken out for display at the 'Flora of Nepal' exhibition at the RBGE for the next two months.



GOPEN RAI

Planting paintings

Botanical artists Neera Joshi mixes science with art

SMRITI BASNET

When Neera Joshi (*pictured, above*) published her first book *Flora from Kathmandu Valley* in 1999, she had hardly any idea or experience of botanical art. Even without any formal training, however, the recent graduate of botany was able to bridge the gap between science and art by rendering drawings that were botanically accurate while at the same time showing artistic merit.

Six of her drawings are being exhibited at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh alongside botanical art made during the expedition of Scottish surgeon-naturalist Francis Buchanan-Hamilton to Nepal in 1802. The exhibition marks the bicentenary of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Britain, and features five other botanical artists and illustrators.

"Nobody told me to pursue this. I got into it not by weighing my prospects for the future but simply because of my love for nature and art," said Neera Joshi.

Twenty years later, she is the most acclaimed botanical artist in Nepal.

The fine realistic drawings depict plant specimens much more accurately than even pressed samples. At the same time, they are also aesthetically pleasing and are works of art in their own right.

"The beauty of botanical art is that your studio can be anywhere in nature," said Joshi, pointing out that her priority is to paint plants live — as they are in their natural habitats, rather than in herbariums or based on photographs. This means Joshi is constantly travelling to pick plants in the wild to draw; she has been from Gosaikunda to Jomsom, and many places in between.

Joshi's only formal training was the

three-month long course she undertook in Marie Selby Botanical Gardens in Florida, USA. But she inherited most of her talent from her father, the famous artist Ramananda Joshi, founder of Park Gallery. Under his tutelage, she learned the basics of drawing and painting, and this early exposure to painting gradually steered her towards an art career.

"You don't necessarily need a background in science. All you need is the patience and passion for art," said Joshi, for whom the art form is both educational and a pleasure. Experimenting with water colour and gouache, it typically takes Joshi up to three weeks to complete one drawing.

While the free hand botanical paintings do not require any tedious planning, the scientific illustrations have their own rules. They must be painted on a white background and with precision, using tools such as proportional dividers and microscopes. Even more difficult is learning and applying the techniques to give the plants in the drawings a 3D effect.

"It is a powerful visual communication which helps document biodiversity," said Joshi. From culturally significant plants like pipal and tulsi to rhododendron, Nepal is a floral paradise, and Joshi is determined to make full use of the natural studio of her homeland.

Today, besides managing her father's gallery in Pulchok, Joshi also runs Studio Petals in Khumaltar, mixing science with art, hoping to inspire young minds. She says: "I really want more people taking on botanical illustrations, especially young artists who are the future of this country." 🇳🇵



nepalitimes.com

Watch video



EVENTS



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

National Poetry Slam,

Spoken Word Nepal is organising the first-ever national poetry slam, with eight teams from Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Surkhet, Dhangadi, Pokhara, Chitwan, Illam and Kavre.
3 September, 1:30 to 5 pm, City Hall (Rastriya Sabha Griha), Kathmandu, Tickets: Rs 200 (Rs 100 for students)



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

Fragments exhibition,

Save the date for Kabi Raj Lama's 'Fragments' lithography prints exhibition.
29 August (inauguration at 5:30 pm) to 9 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu

Female authors,

Join a discussion on female writers in contemporary Nepali literature and what they are coming up with.
20 August, 3 to 4:30 pm, Nepal Mayur House, Baluwatar, Kathmandu

Ride to Khokana,

Contribute to restoring Nepal's cultural heritage by participating in a cycle ride program from Kasthamandap to Khokana, organised by Khokana Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Committee.
20 September, 7 am onwards, Price: Rs 600

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

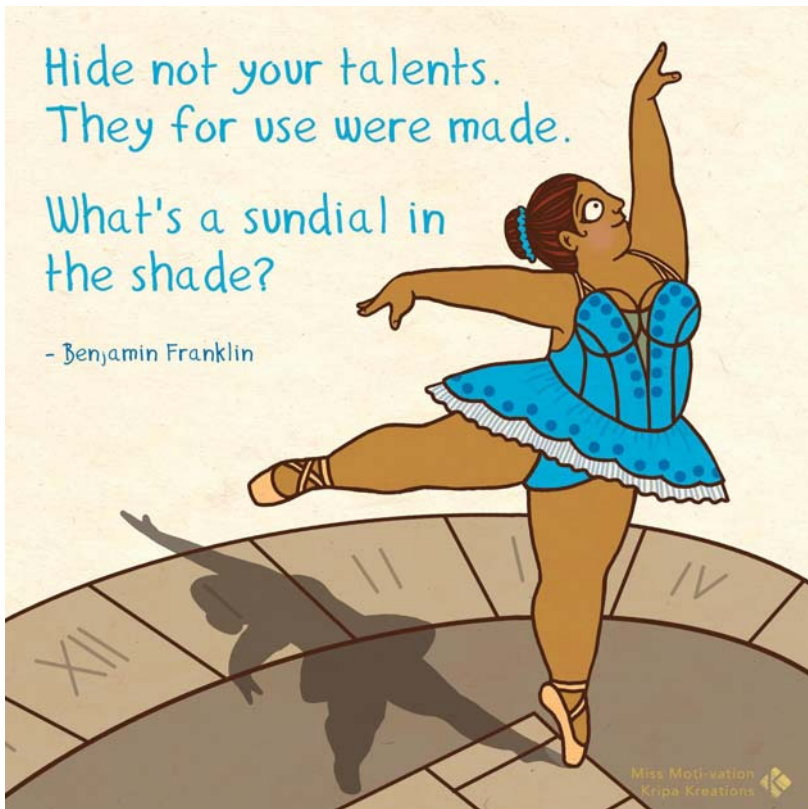


Cycle Rally,

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

MISS MOTI-VATION

KRIPA JOSHI



DINING



Uttar Dakshin Food Festival

Give your taste buds a treat at the Uttarakhand Food Festival with an exciting range of cuisines from Punjab, Chandigarh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
15 to 31 August, 7 pm onwards, Soaltee Crown Plaza, Kathmandu

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



Hello Café,

Relish a wide range of Korean and Italian dishes this weekend. Don't forget to try the Valley's best Chef's Special Salad.
Boudha, (01) 4916218

Wunjala Moskva,

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

Dan Ran,

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



Le Trio

The best momochas (soup momos) in town.
Narayanhiti Path and Jhamsikhel, (01) 4435440 / 5521647

MUSIC

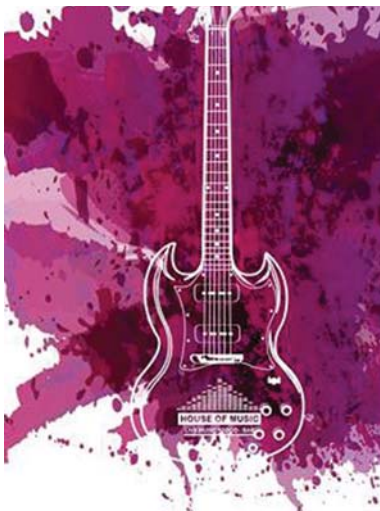


Rock and Roll,

Gear up for loud live music by the celebrated Mukti and Revival.
20 August, 7 pm to 1 am, Karma Bar and Lounge, UWTC, Tripureswor, Kathmandu

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 to 4 am, The Victory Lounge, Darbar Marg, Ticket: Rs 1,000, 9801031277 / 9802961570 / 9801362313 / 9801444055



Celebration time,

Join House of Music's 7th anniversary celebration, with performances by Chandresha, Albertina, Erika, Preetica and Ranzen.
19 August, 7 pm onwards, House of Music, Thamel, Free entry



Album launch,

Debut album from Mental Radio, a Nepali pop/rock band.
19 August, 7 pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur

GETAWAY



Landmark Forest Park,

Eco-friendly resort that offers safari packages. Bed and breakfast at Rs 4000 plus taxes per person.
Chitwan, (056) 580311, 9851059096

Mango Tree Lodge,

Culture walks, rafting in the Karnali, wildlife exploration, and jungle safari at the Bardia National Park.
Bhetani, Bardia, info@mangotreelodge.com



Summit River Lodge,

For a refreshing weekend escapade and hiking experience. Organic breakfast and dinner choices available at Rs 6,500 (excluding taxes) per room on a twin-sharing basis.
Kurintar, 9841562056, 9801151170



Chhaimale Resort,

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Dakshinkali, (01) 4628121, 9851181409

Club Himalaya,

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Nagarkot, (01) 6680080

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The beginning of history

A debate between purists and pragmatists is delaying reconstruction of earthquake-damaged heritage sites



Restoring two ways

The 55-windowed palace (*left*) and the Chyasilin Mandap sit near each other in the same square in Bhaktapur. Both are exquisite specimens of Malla-era architecture, and add to the outstanding universal appeal of the palace square. And both monuments highlight a distinct conservation approach.

Unlike the Mandap, the palace was restored in 2006 largely employing traditional methods. Though it did introduce an additional timber element as structural reinforcing, it follows the ways our craftsmen and artisans have always employed through centuries of trial and error. “We had to show that our methods work too,” says Prem Nath Maskey, a structural engineer and a member of the team that oversaw the palace renovation.

The Chyasilin Mandap (*below, left*) introduced a steel frame for structural support.

The jury is out on which approach is better when reconstruction begins.

RISHI AMATYA

Central Nepal and Kathmandu Valley are going through their second monsoon after the April 2015 earthquake. The pace of reconstruction of homes, monuments and heritage sites has been frustratingly slow. In six out of seven World Heritage Sites in the Valley that saw extensive damage, rebuilding has not even started. In this third edition of the *Nepali Times* Heritage Live! Series, we try to find out why.

One of the reasons is so fundamental that the process will not pick up speed until it is addressed: it has to do with how authentic we want the reconstructed sites to be. Authenticity is tricky because over the years heritage conservationists have employed different methods in reconstruction, taking into account the architectural idiom of Kathmandu Valley and conservation methods employed in past decades.

Conservation architect Sudarshan Tiwari describes Kathmandu Valley’s unique architectural form as “distinctive construction and craftsmanship in the brick and wood of the tiered temples”. Exquisitely carved they may have been, but they had to face two destructive forces: earthquakes and monsoons. Kathmandu’s private and public buildings were designed to safeguard against them.

For instance, the deep overhang of the pagoda structure was a



PICS: RISHI AMATYA

conscious design choice to keep out the rain from the brick-mud mortar walls of tiered temples. Our forebears also developed ingenious methods to protect the monuments from earthquakes, with wedged joints between wooden members and brickwork to add structural integrity. Kathmandu’s early builders adapted building technology to contextual challenges, but recent reconstruction disregarded these in renovation and conservation efforts.

Such restoration in past decades

introduced a host of new material to our monuments. The reconstruction of the Chyasilin Mandap — carried out in 1989/90 with German technical and financial assistance — introduced a steel frame for structural support, and steel trusses were also used in the restoration of the Patan Darbar and Museum (*below, left*). Similarly, reinforced concrete also found its way into our traditional structures.

These architectural methods opened the floodgates of debate. Reaction from heritage conservationists to such additions ranged from the mild “not really needed” to an outraged “grave mistake”. Rabindra Puri, the heritage conservationist who has struggled to save the traditional architectural fabric of Bhaktapur, falls somewhere in between, but even he thinks modern materials should not be allowed in the reconstruction of public heritage structures.

“The use of such materials isn’t justified,” he says. “You cannot just look at a few fallen structures and point out that our traditional methods failed, when other equally older monuments are still standing like Nyatapoli in Bhaktapur and Indreswor in Panauti.” He adds that a blanket conservation approach should not be applied to all monuments based on one example of a damaged heritage site.

It gets trickier still, because international conservation charters can be interpreted

Approach vs style

The post-1934 reconstruction of temples and monuments hold many lessons for rebuilding after last year’s earthquake. Many historical structures were simply left in ruins, and some that were rebuilt employed styles that were not traditional.

Numerous tiered temples of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur were restored with Mughal-influenced stucco domes like the Krishna temple in Swotha of Patan. The Bhai Dega temple in Mangal Bazar used to be an elegant pagoda temple before it was destroyed in 1934, but it was rebuilt to look like the Taj Mahal. It is now being restored along its pre-1934 lines.

While it is likely that reconstruction will take time to get off the ground, it appears that this time Nepal has enough architects and urban planners who understand heritage conservation. The world is watching us, and local communities are enlightened enough not to allow architectural travesties to occur this time.

to justify the use of modern materials in the reconstruction of Malla-era buildings. For example, it can be argued that the use of steel truss supports in the east wing of the Patan Museum is justified because of the adaptive re-use of the building as a museum. The newly opened building has to be structurally strong enough to accommodate additional visitor footfall, which would not be necessary if it were just a renovated palace complex.

The debate is focused on authenticity of materials, and not form or other intangible aspects of our heritage. And, while it is easy to get all worked up about this, it is important that we agree that both sides are advocating the same thing: better reconstruction of heritage sites, and efficient conservation policies.

What we need is a system that respects our traditional conservation ethos, and allows space for modern materials to strengthen the structures without altering the spirit of our architectural heritage. Learning from the past, this time around, the Department of Archaeology has tried to do so. They have introduced reconstruction guidelines that favour a traditional approach but do not give modern methods the cold shoulder. These methods can be introduced during reconstruction, provided they are scientifically warranted and approved by the department.





Growing up watching *The X-Files* was one of the weirdest, most wonderful, defining moments of my adolescent life, when international television providers had just entered the mainstream in Nepal, and Mulder and Scully's antics could be watched from our suddenly-more-connected living rooms.



MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

What had started in 1993 was resurrected this year — nine full seasons and two feature films later — with a six-part series that came back to life because fans just could not let go of the aforementioned beloved duo, who have become as much a part of popular culture as they have contributed to changing gender stereotypes in

terms of how men and women in law enforcement are depicted on television. The enduring charm of *The X-Files* — in addition to the very special dynamic between the lead characters Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) — is the wry, almost kooky humour that often accompanies the most chilling, creepy, outlandish story arcs that the series creator, Chris Carter, delights in. This has served the series so well by carving out a niche in a television landscape that had never seen a show with an outrageous, unapologetic science fiction ethic before the Mulder-Scully duo captured our imaginations in 1993, co-opting generations of viewers who never dreamed they might like this kind of geeky immersion. If you have never watched *The X-Files*, you are in for an interesting time: the series is an

odd hybrid of police procedural, murder mystery, screwball comedy, sci-fi/fantasy, and sometimes just plain tongue-in-cheek slapstick that is so well written that re-watching the series as an adult is disconcerting: in these days where well-written shows abound, *The X-Files*, which first aired more than two dozen years ago holds its own, sometimes surpassing the quality and originality of the best series around today. The newest six-part instalment, Series 10 released in January, which is set in the now, is therefore a welcome return for this iconic cult hit that brings back Mulder and Scully with their usual odd couple chemistry that, I am happy to say, continues to work through the decades. Their finely tuned, intricately wrought character and relationship dynamic — Mulder with his specific brand of brainiac nerdiness, he is an Oxford-educated psychological profiler and was a star at the FBI until his obsession with his sister's abduction by aliens turned his job into a personal crusade, and Scully, a precise medical doctor whose skill in forensic detection and practical mindset will win over your heart and mind — complement already very strong episodes, which are thrilling, engaging, cheeky, and terrifying, all at once. If you have not followed these two and their fight against massive government conspiracies over the years, you will become a fan at least, if not, as Mulder insists, a believer. 🇳🇵

 nepalitimes.com
■ Trailer 

HAPPENINGS



RSS

EXTENDING INVITATION: Deputy Prime Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara meets with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday, to invite Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit Nepal later this year.



GOPEN RAI

FOR JUSTICE: Rights activists stage a sit-in outside Bir Hospital, Kathmandu on Tuesday demanding justice for Ganga Maya Adhikari, who has been on a prolonged hunger strike to put pressure on the government to arrest her son's murderers.



BIKRAM RAI

UNFULFILLED PROMISES: Crusader Govinda KC urges Prime Minister Dahal to address the agreements reached with the government before he ended his eighth hunger strike, during a press meet on Wednesday.



NEPAL ARMY

SAVING LIVES: Nepal Army personnel carry a Kavre bus accident victim to an ambulance on Monday. 27 people were killed and 43 injured when an overcrowded bus veered off the road in Birta Deurali VDC, Kavre.



GOPEN RAI

SACRED THREAD: A Hindu priest ties *jana* (sacred thread) around a devotee's wrist on the occasion of Janai Purnima at Pashupati on Thursday.

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The game changer

Rameshwar Bohara in
Himal Khabarpatrika (14-20 August)

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

Three months ago, Nepali Congress (NC) President Sher Bahadur Deuba was ridiculed by some of his own party leaders for having been taken for a ride by Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Deuba had proposed an alliance with Dahal to topple the KP Oli government, and Dahal had agreed to form a new ruling coalition with the NC. But Dahal backed off at the last minute, prompting political pundits to conclude that an NC-Maoist partnership was not likely.

But sure enough, Dahal did end up pulling the rug out from under the Oli government, forming a new government with the NC last month — surprising many sceptics. Central to this marriage of convenience was NC leader Bimalendra Nidhi, who held several



BIKRAM RAI

secret meetings with domestic and outside figures to make regime change happen. Nidhi, it is now known, played a pivotal role in breaking the Maoist-UML communist alliance, unseating a 'nationalist' Oli government, catapulting the NC to power, and

facilitating the entry of Madhesi dissidents into Singha Darbar.

"Nidhi turned out to be a game changer," says political analyst Puranjan Acharya. "He was behind every political move that eventually resulted in the NC-Maoist partnership, and it has allowed him to take a great leap in his political career." Deuba honoured Nidhi's contribution by making him Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister in the new government led by Dahal.

However, as often happens in Nepali politics, senior NC leaders are now feeling insecure because of Nidhi's sudden rise and influence. Sources say Deuba is also thinking of appointing Nidhi as the NC Vice President, further fuelling consternation in Congress circles.

But those who understand the recent history and dynamics of the NC say that while Nidhi's rise is dramatic, it is not unexpected. Nidhi was always by Deuba's side when he emerged as the leader of the

anti-establishment camp in the NC. Narayan Khadka, Minendra Rijal, Bal Bahadur KC and Prakash Man Singh later defected from the Deuba camp, but Nidhi's support has never wavered.

The Koiralas once saw Nidhi as the ultimate leader of the Deuba camp, and Nidhi has now demonstrated what they meant. Nidhi's father, Mahendra Narayan Nidhi, was close to Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. When Bhattarai chose Deuba as his protégé, the junior Nidhi also joined the Deuba camp instead of the Koiralas.

After Ram Baran Yadav became President and Mahant Thakur and Bijaya Gachhadar broke off to form their own Madhes-based parties, Nidhi became the senior-most Madhesi leader in the NC.

Nidhi's biggest drawback is that he is seen as an Indian stooge, and merely acting at New Delhi's behest to persuade Dahal to topple the UML government. He has also been embroiled in controversy for overtly backing an Indian company to build the Kathmandu-Tarai fast-track highway.

"Watch the watchdog"

Translated excerpts of interview with Stanford University political scientist Larry Diamond in *Kantipur*, 16 August

कान्तिपुर

Kantipur: Why is it so difficult for democracy to work in Least Developed Countries like Nepal?

Larry Diamond: Democracy often fails to take root, and gives way to instability, polarisation, secession, military coups, dictatorships and violence in countries where corruption is rampant. Corruption weakens laws, erodes the people's faith in government institutions, divides society, and increases nepotism. As a result, democracy becomes ineffective, and eventually fails. To strengthen democracy, we need to have good governance, the judiciary and bureaucracy must function properly, and strong measures must be taken to curb corruption.

But in Nepal the anti-corruption watchdog has been accused of being the source of corruption, with its Chief Commissioner accused of abusing his constitutional authority.

Who appointed him? Countries that have good governance do not just set up an anti-graft body but also an independent agency to watch the watchdog. If the head of the anti-corruption body is appointed by political parties, curbing corruption cannot be effective, because a political appointee is usually not accountable to the people. Only someone whose career is not tainted and who cannot be tempted deserves to head an anti-corruption agency. And the head of such a body should not be beyond being investigated and monitored himself. If he is given unlimited authority, there is always a chance that he can abuse it.

I think this is what must be happening in Nepal. If the chief of the anti-graft body is accused of abusing his authority, he must

be investigated, and punished if found guilty. Civil society, NGOs and the media must play a role to put pressure on the government to do that.

But the civil society that played a crucial role in the 2006 Democracy Movement is now polarised and ineffective.

Civil society must always be active to ensure accountability. Its role is even more important when it comes to curbing corruption. It may not always be influential, but its leaders must not lose hope. They must be persistent.

India imposed a blockade against Nepal for five months to express its dissatisfaction over our constitution. Is it natural for a country's constitution to be shaped by geopolitics?

One democratic country cannot do this to another democratic country. Nepal can listen to India's concerns. But neither should forget that they are both



independent and sovereign nations, free to make their own decisions.

How should Nepal conduct itself, being in such a sensitive geopolitical situation between India and China?

Nepal needs to learn from Mongolia, which is in an even more sensitive geopolitical situation. Mongolia is surrounded by China and Russia. But it has protected its independence wisely. Nepal needs to be smart and maintain equidistance

between India and China.

Is it true that the US views South Asia through an Indian lens?

The US's foreign affairs policy is guided by its hard (security and strategy) and soft (economy and democracy) interests. US-India relations are important, and I do not think the US gives Nepal importance in terms of strategic and economic interests. But it always shows goodwill for democratic countries like Nepal, which has to have its own strategy to protect its sovereignty.



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Home they bring the workers

The grim task of delivering bodies of deceased migrant workers from Kathmandu airport to their homes falls on these men

UPASANA KHADKA

It is just before midnight at Kathmandu airport. Hira Dhakal is waiting for a coffin to arrive on the flight from Kuala Lumpur. Dhakal is one of the delivery men for bodies of deceased migrant workers, and this is the 73rd casket this month.

Tonight, it is a young man from Bara who had an easy desk job in Malaysia, but died in his sleep like hundreds of other Nepalis who die of 'natural' causes there.

Some forlorn family members are at the airport parking lot to receive the body. Dhakal loads the coffin silently with a practiced hand on top of the van that one of his employees will drive down to Bara overnight. He does not linger, and does not talk to the relatives.

Dhakal owns R K Dhuwani, one of the four coffin delivery services contracted by the Foreign Employment Promotion Board (FEPB) to transport migrant



PICS: UPASANA KHADKA

workers to their homes free of charge. The four companies have divided up Nepal's 72 districts among themselves.

Dhakal has lost count of the number of coffins he has received at the airport in the past few years since his company was hired. Malaysia had the highest number of fatalities of Nepali migrant workers, with 425 dying from July 2014 to July 2015. Most died of sudden death syndrome in their sleep. Qatar, which also has about 550,000 Nepalis workers, registered 175 deaths in the same period.

In contrast to the eerie silence

in which the body is loaded at Kathmandu airport, Dhakal knows that when it arrives in Bara there will be wailing and commotion.

"In the Tarai people from surrounding villages all gather to receive the bodies, and that is what will happen tomorrow morning in Bara," says Dhakal, as the van drives off. He says the intensity of mourning varies depending on whether it is the hills or the Tarai, or on how much time has elapsed since the death.

"Sometimes the coffins arrive soon after death, and the families are still dealing with the shock,"



The cycle of migration

OM ASTHA RAI

What perpetuates it, and why it is important to break it

Man Bahadur Limbu went to Malaysia in 2002, hoping to escape poverty and war. He worked in a factory for four years and was allowed to visit his family only once, in 2004.

He endured the burden of a loan, inhuman working conditions and separation from family. Man Bahadur, a fifth-grade dropout, ploughed his savings into education for his children so that they would never have to suffer what he did as a migrant worker.

However, his 20-year-old son Prakash Limbu (pictured) also dropped out of school in Grade 9, and went to Malaysia last year. Like his father, he is now working in a factory on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.

"My father worked abroad for years, but he could not earn enough," says Prakash. "I decided to leave home so my little brothers could study."

With his savings, Man Bahadur built a stone and mud house in Nangin village of Panchthar district in the eastern



OM ASTHA RAI

mountains. With no more money left, he migrated again in 2008, this time to Saudi Arabia as a cleaner.

Most of the money he sent home was spent on food and clothes for his family, and paying children's school fees. When he returned after five years, he had

only Rs 50,000 saved up.

When Prakash decided to go abroad, Man Bahadur did not even have the money to pay for his visa and ticket for Malaysia. They took a loan of Rs 155,000, but even though the recruiting agency had promised Prakash a monthly salary of Rs 38,000, he is

earning merely Rs 29,000.

Prakash sends home money every four months for his parents, his wife who lives with her parents, and their two-year-old daughter. Now, his younger brother, 17-year-old Khagendra, who also dropped out of school, is applying for a passport so he

FOLLOWING FATHER: After his father Man Bahadur Limbu returned from Malaysia, 20-year-old Prakash Limbu (left) went there as a migrant worker.

can also leave.

Man Bahadur is now 40, and is himself planning to work overseas for the third time. "This time, I will try to save more money," he said.

His wife Phul Maya is not happy, she is trying to persuade her husband and sons to stay back and help with farming. "Neither my husband nor my son listens to me," she says. "If they both leave I will not be able to work the fields by myself."

Like Man Bahadur, most migrant workers who experience the hardships of overseas work do not want their children to suffer the same fate.

Sociologist Ganesh Gurung says there are two factors that perpetuate this cycle of migration. The biggest chunk of remittance is spent for daily consumption such as food and clothes, and

dead

DELIVERY OF THE DEAD: Hira Dhakal's employees load the casket of a deceased migrant worker onto a van at Kathmandu airport (*left*).

Hira Dhakal in his delivery van (*below*).

he explains, “but at other times there are long delays in bringing the bodies home and the families have usually made peace with their loss.”

Dhakal recently delivered to a village in Mahottari the remains of a migrant worker who had died nearly two years ago, and says the mourning was much more subdued.

Whether at midnight or in the early morning, employees of the four delivery companies are always on call at the airport. Occasionally several coffins arrive on the same flight from the Gulf or Malaysia, and they have to scramble to arrange vehicles and drivers. On average, three to four coffins arrive every day at Kathmandu airport.

“After a while, they just become boxes to deliver,” says a matter-of-fact Purna Bahadur Jung, owner of Seti Gandesh Dhuwani. The drivers and their helpers try not to get too attached to the families, because the job then becomes too stressful and emotionally fraught.

Every plywood box with ‘Fragile’ and ‘This Side Up’ stickers bears the tale of a tragic reality of shattered dreams, personal sacrifice, grieving families, and the desperation back home that drove the workers overseas.

Invariably, there are family members who find solace in talking about their loved ones. But Jung says he and his colleagues have little to offer in return, except a few words of consolation as they transport the bodies.

“Sometimes, we have to be a bit stern in dealing with grieving family members, they get very emotional and this can distract me from concentrating on mountain roads at night,” says Jung. He remembers a widow who wept continuously all the way from Kathmandu to Saptari, and fainted en route. After ensuring that she was all right, he had to ask her to either keep her composure or transfer to another vehicle as a safety precaution, after which she calmed down.

Sunil Bhandari of Mani Lekh Supplies, another coffin delivery company, says there is a story of one deceased migrant worker that he will never forget. Family members, including the widow, travelled in a separate vehicle from his coffin van and reached Udayapur before him.

“When I reached their house, the wife was lying unconscious on the floor after having consumed poison,” Bhandari recalls. He rushed her to hospital, but she did not live.

Death keeps no calendar. While missing festivals and family events is routine for the delivery companies, it is the strikes in Nepal that make the job difficult. Bhandari says the worst time was during the Indian blockade. Once, he had to deliver a body to Jhapa by buying fuel in the black market, and his vehicle carrying a coffin got smashed in Saptari.

Says Bhandari: “This is an essential service, we have to get the bodies home, and cannot let such events deter us.” 🇳🇵

most migrant workers fail to invest their money or start their own businesses. Second, family dynamics change when the head of the household leaves home to work abroad for years: the children drop out of school and follow their father's footsteps, as in the case of the Limbu family.

In 2010, Nepal Rastra Bank began issuing foreign employment bonds to encourage migrant workers to invest their money in development projects in Nepal. But few workers have taken up this opportunity.

Last year, the government set up Remit Hydro Limited (RHL) to encourage migrant workers to invest their savings in two mid-sized hydropower projects. However, migrant workers may not trust a government-owned company.

“I am not hopeful, as migrant workers prefer to invest their money in land that they can own and sell,” says Gurung. Foreign employment bonds and RHL are great concepts, but they will take years to show results, he adds.

Despite being a potentially useful idea, the proposal to set up a Labour Bank to provide business start-up loans for migrant workers has hit a snag

due to lack of a clear policy.

“We are preparing guidelines so returning migrant workers can turn entrepreneurs, and invest their savings,” says Labour Ministry spokesman, Govinda Mani Bhurtel.

Surveys have shown that nearly 80 per cent of the remittance is used in buying foods, clothes, home appliances and electronic items. Given the slow economic growth, the \$6 billion in annual remittances plays an important role in propping up the national economy and reducing Nepal’s poverty rate, but does not contribute to development and job creation.

“Remittance alone cannot develop any country,” says economist Bhubanesh Pant, “we need to have a strategy to use remittance for development.”

Pant has three suggestions: promote remittance through legal channels, encourage migrant workers to hold savings in assets in Nepal itself, and to become entrepreneurs.

He warns: “If migrant workers continue like this and if the remittance economy suddenly collapses, Nepal will face a huge financial crisis.” 🇳🇵

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Journalism exam paper leaked

As we all know, the mass media plays an important public service role in a democracy — to present the news without fear or favour, and let the potato chips fall where they may. We take our adversarial role very seriously indeed: to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, to hold government to account, to tell truth to power, and publish all the hearsay that is fit to print.

We should not take for granted the new Constitution, which gives us the freedom to publicly lynch anyone who disagrees with us even slightly. We don't have to think twice about saying what a terrific guy Comrade Fierceness is. We only have to think once.

There is a malicious rumour going around town that we in the Fourth Estate aren't free to be as sycophantic, hypocritical and unscrupulous as we want to anymore. There is freedom of press in Nepal, it's just that we don't have freedom after press.

As you can see for yourself in the pages of our newspapers, our aforementioned freedoms are perfectly intact. We journos have never been freer to lick ass, kiss ass, or be kicked in the Ass.

Nevertheless, we mustn't rest on our laurels and let complacency get the better of us as we go out of our way to kowtow even when we are only asked to bow. We

have eager reporters more than willing to print handouts in exchange for handouts. But let me assure you in no uncertain terms that, unlike some of our peers, we are not the type to take the money and run. Our journalistic code of ethics requires us to be true to our salt and committed to toe the party line, but only once adequately compensated. We intend to keep our end of the bargain and print any official announcement, press release or notice in its 'as is' condition.

There are absolutely no curbs on vowel movements in the new Constitution, and state-controlled media is free to report at great length on all official pronunciations. As part of the government's laudable efforts to help the media industry become more self-reliant, self-important, self-righteous and self-censored, the Ministry of Misinformation and Newspeak has decided to require all those desirous of pursuing a journalism career to first get a license by passing a test to be conducted by the Nepal Press Counsellors. It is a tough exam, but once through we can confidently tell everyone: "Forgive us our press passes."

As a service to Nepali media and to help aspiring journalists, we reproduce below the leaked question paper in which examinees can answer objective questions subjectively.

JOURNALISM LICENSE EXAMINATIONS

(Tickle one)

- OBJECTIVE QUESTIONS**
- What is the world's second-oldest profession?
- ☐ Hunting-gathering
 - ☐ Smuggling
 - ☐ Adultery
 - ☐ Prostitution
- In which media does propaganda masquerade as news?
- ☐ State media
 - ☐ Non-state media
 - ☐ Lapdog media
 - ☐ All of the above

- If a politician offers you an envelope, do you:
- ☐ Take envelope and run
 - ☐ Ask for another envelope and run
 - ☐ Take cash, return envelope and run
 - ☐ Deduct VAT and give receipt
- 'Off the record' means:**
- ☐ Something to do with the Guinness Book
 - ☐ Copying music from vinyl discs
 - ☐ Agreeing not to reveal source, but doing it anyway
 - ☐ Using an imaginary quote

- What kind of event qualifies as 'Breaking News'?
- ☐ Talking heads breaking each others' skulls
 - ☐ Broadcasting a headline live on deadline with byline
 - ☐ A lead that bleeds
 - ☐ Topplement of the gobblement
- A source takes you out to lunch, and a waiter brings the bill. Do you:
- ☐ Slip off to the loo
 - ☐ Pretend to talk on the phone
 - ☐ Reach for back pocket and say "Shoot, forgot wallet at home"
 - ☐ Shout "Aftershock!" and run

- NOT-SO-OBJECTIVE QUESTIONS**
- Write an essay on three of the following subjects:
- Press freedom means singing hosannas to those in power.
 - We shouldn't blame the messengers, we should lock them up.
 - Good thing more than 45 per cent of Nepalis can't read or write, otherwise the public may actually believe what the media is saying.
 - How does press freedom in Nepal compare with, say, DPRK?



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